Madam Director

A Short Play (approximately 15 minutes)

by Gary A. Davis

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SYNOPSIS

30 years in the future the world is falling apart. The overworked director of FEMA tries to take a brief moment of refuge in her home before returning to battle.

SETTING

Scene takes place in the home of the director of FEMA.

CHARACTERS

JORDAN	Woman 50s to 60s, director of FEMA
RORY	Jordan's husband roughly the same age
HARPER	woman in her late 30s
CHARLIE	woman in her late 30s on security detail, offstage voice only (actor who plays Harper can voice Charlie)

SCENE ONE OPENS

(Lights are down. From offstage we hear Charlie and Jordan.)

CHARLIE

Will you be OK from here Madam Director? Do you need me to come in?

JORDAN

I don't think that'll be necessary, the security system is on. But thanks for asking.

CHARLIE

We'll be outside if you need us.

JORDAN

(sighs)

Thank you, Charlie.

(enters the living room stage and turns on the lights to reveal a rather elegant living room; Rory is sitting on a sofa or easy chair)

You're still up?

RORY

Another late night?

JORDAN

It's all late nights these days ... probably for the foreseeable future. I … OH MY GOD, what's that I smell?

RORY

You're not taking proper care of yourself, so that's my job. I'm working on a lamb rogan josh with rice and a mango lassi. I thought this time I would add some golden raisins and chopped up cashews to the sauce. It's still got a little while to simmer, let the flavors all blend. I'm about to add cauliflower and broccoli.

JORDAN

(interrupts with a kiss)

You take such good care of me. No wonder I love you.

RORY

(mocks lovingly)

Sometimes I think you only love me for my cooking.

(gives her a quick return kiss)

JORDAN

Well, the way to a woman's heart is through her stomach. But don't be silly. I also love your hands. Speaking of which

(talks with a seductive pout)

I've had a really rough day at work. Got all sorts of kinks and knots which need to be worked out. Can you help me? Please?

RORY

(gives a smirk)

If you insist Madam Director.

JORDAN

I do.

RORY

Have a seat then. Give me a couple minutes to stir the josh and I'll be right with you.

(exits to the kitchen; Jordan crosses to the sofa, takes off her shoes, untucks her blouse and unbuttons the top two or three buttons to prepare for the massage, sits on the floor in front of the sofa; Rory returns, sits on the sofa behind her and starts to massage her shoulders)

The raisins and cashews are blending nicely. I've added the cauliflower and broccoli. It's on a low simmer so it'll be about 15 minutes or so.

JORDAN

(sighs with her eyes closed)

That's nice.

RORY

So, tell me about your day, dear.

JORDAN

Do I have to?

(suddenly grimaces)

Oooooh! Oh! That's a spot. That is most definitely a spot!

RORY

Yes, I can feel the knot. And yes, you do have to. When you tell me about your day, it helps me find the knots. Let's get the knots out of your brain so we can get the knots out of your back.

JORDAN

If you insist. Well, President Cortez has ordered more FEMA resources into Florida. There are still so many refugees to deal with.

RORY

That seems so strange to hear Florida residents, US citizens, called refugees.

JORDAN

So true. The relocations continue but we still have millions to go. Meanwhile they're living in these camps, and nobody likes that. Fights break out and – OOOOOH! That is most definitely a spot! Don't stop!

RORY

That's how it works. Unknot the brain, unknot the back. Please continue.

JORDAN

But the big problem right now is the religious nuts.

RORY

Now, now, that's not polite.

JORDAN

Ummmm, can I say 'zealots?'

RORY

Still a bit of a negative connotation.

JORDAN

How about ‘faithfully challenged?’

RORY

That’s a bit more polite, although polite like when a true southerner says, ‘bless your heart’ with the unspoken subtext ‘you f-ing idiot.’

JORDAN

HA! Anyway, we have at least two ‘faithfully challenged’ factions. One proclaims that all this will pass because God promised he would never flood the world again, so there’s no need for an evacuation and they refuse to leave. Never mind that the sea water is already up to their knees and rising!

RORY

Well … ‘bless their hearts.’ Do you think it will ever recede?

JORDAN

It’s hard to say. But one thing’s for sure. It took decades to get to this point. Even if we manage to reverse this climate catastrophe, it’ll take a lot longer for things to go back to the way they were. And that’s a damn big ‘if.’

RORY

And the other faction.

JORDAN

These are the true zealots. Screw politeness. These people are dangerous. According to them, all of this is God’s punishment. And they don’t want anyone to escape God’s punishment. These people are the ‘end timers.’

RORY

And in which group do your cousins fall?

JORDAN

Hopefully neither, but I honestly don’t know. It’s almost impossible to contact anyone down

there.

RORY

Damn. I thought we had gotten past this after the plague.

JORDAN

Well, most of it had subsided, but there's always a few who demand the world reflect their view even if it requires terrorism to make it so. "Love thy neighbor" means nothing to them. It's "the ends justify the means."

RORY

Well, I can see why you have all these knots. My poor baby.

(kisses her lightly on the neck, she laughs)

JORDAN

You know that tickles.

RORY

Do I? Yes, I guess I do. If you don't mind a change to a brighter subject, I got a call from Halley and Hannah today.

JORDAN

(excitedly turns to look at him)

You did? What did they say? Is everything going OK at school?

RORY

It depends on who you ask. Hannah is looking forward to the mid-terms, or to be more precise, she's looking forward to getting them out of the way and celebrating. Halley is all gloom and doom, dreading mid-terms.

JORDAN

I don't understand that girl. She always aces her exams. Why does she stress over it?

RORY

Maybe it's the "stressing" that makes her put in the work she needs to ace those exams.

JORDAN

But she doesn't need to ace the exams. I'd be happy with … an occasional 'B' if it made her life a little happier.

RORY

"Occasional?"

JORDAN

Yes, "occasional." We don't want to go overboard. She doesn't have to be a perfect 4.0 student. She knows I'd be delighted with a … a 3.95.

(both pause and then laugh)

RORY

Yes, dear, 3.95 would be perfectly acceptable. I'll impress that upon her next time we talk.

JORDAN

Don't you dare. Anyway, I'm proud of my girls. "Our" girls, I'm proud of our girls. I should be able to take a short break in the next few weeks. Maybe we can go visit them.

RORY

That would be nice. We can give them a call tomorrow and plan it.

(Rory returns to the massage, Jordan is quiet and thoughtful, long pause, gets a sad look on her face and looks down)

You're thinking of Kai, aren't you.

JORDAN

(sighs)

He would have graduated college by now. His whole life would have been ahead of him. Maybe he'd have started a new family. Maybe I'd be a grandmother. Maybe –

(can't finish that sentence)

I can't believe we lost them all. Ow! That hurts! And not the good kind. Careful. Ow!

(Rory pulls his hands away from her, they're shaking violently)

RORY

Something … something's wrong … wrong … something's wrong.

(Jordan stands up quickly and turns to him grabbing his hands)

JORDAN

Rory, what it is? What's wrong? Tell me what's happening.

RORY

I … I … it's

(tremors increase then suddenly stop, his hands drop to his lap; although eyes are still open, he becomes totally non-responsive)

JORDAN

Rory!? RORY!!!

(looks to the front door, screams)

CHARLIE, I NEED YOU!!!!

(lights fade to black)

SCENE TWO OPENS

(Lights come up. Jordan is extremely agitated and is pacing back and forth. Harper is there, but whereas we might have expected medical personnel, she is clearly a technician.)

JORDAN

GODDAMNIT! You should have been here half an hour ago! Every second counts!

HARPER

I do understand, ma'am and I sincerely apologize. Physically I could not have gotten here any sooner than I did. But this discussion is slowing down our response. What's it's name?

JORDAN

Rory.

HARPER

OK, Rory, let's see what the issue is.

(Harper takes a screwdriver out of her toolkit, goes behind Rory and starts working on the back of his head, removes a plate; gets an iPad or similar device from her toolkit and a USB cable; plugs one end of the cable into the pad and the other into the back of Rory's head)

How long have you had this model?

JORDAN

Ten years.

(said matter-of-factly, but then with emotion as she's remembering it as an anniversary)

It was ten years just last month.

HARPER

When was the last time you had it upgraded?

JORDAN

I … I haven't.

HARPER

Wha – um. I understand. Some clients are apprehensive. They're afraid of what the changes might be, that if they don't like a change, they might not be able to go back. But rest assured, if anything, it makes them more real.

JORDAN

Don't talk to me like he's a fucking toaster oven! Don't you have a husband, too?

HARPER

No, no ma'am I don't. I have a wife … a real flesh and blood wife.

JORDAN

You think I wouldn't want that? You think I don't want real human contact? You're a lesbian. God bless you and welcome to lesbian paradise. But I'm not. I loved my husband. But the plague took him … took my son, my father, my brothers. All of them.

HARPER

(with sympathy)

I lost my father, too. We all did. He was good man. I miss him terribly.

(pause)

I have to admit that for the longest time I didn't get it. I couldn't understand women being married to … sophisticated "Ken" dolls. But recently we had a scare. We were expecting a child, our first. But something went wrong with Jenny's pregnancy. We lost the child. And I was this close to losing Jenny, too. It made me wonder what I'd do if I had lost her.

JORDAN

I'm sorry to hear that. I'm glad that Jenny's OK

(iPad beeps. Harper looks at it)

HARPER

OK, I see here that Rory isn't connected to the wi-fi.

JORDAN

No, I didn't want him upgraded without my permission. I didn't want him upgraded, period. I … I like him the way he is. Are you suggesting that this is my fault? That I kept him from getting necessary patches or whatever?

HARPER

There's something else going on here, something I don't quite understand. The iPad is telling me Rory has a virus, a pretty nasty one.

JORDAN

What? But how?

HARPER

That's what I don't understand. If he doesn't have wi-fi connectivity, any connectivity, what's

the delivery method? When was the last time you had him backed up?

JORDAN

I do it at least once a week, sometimes more frequently.

HARPER

Is the back-up drive here?

JORDAN

Yes, but is that absolutely necessary? Wouldn't he lose the last week?

HARPER

I understand. We'll only use it as a last resort. Could you please get that now?

(Jordan exits opposite the front door entrance. Harper pauses and pulls out a cell phone.)

This is Jankowski. I'm in the home of the FEMA director. I've got a level one gamma delta situation here. The director's husband was targeted.

JORDAN

(returns with back-up drive which is a small box)

Did you just say targeted? What do you mean targeted?

HARPER

I need a top-level security tech out here ASAP.

JORDAN

You're scaring me.

HARPER

Thanks.

(puts phone away)

I'm sorry, ma'am. I don't mean to frighten you. But this isn't an ordinary virus. Viruses released on the internet act like an explosive device with shrapnel going everywhere. But this is more like a sniper shot. This virus was made specifically for Rory. He was targeted. YOU were targeted. Given your position I had to contact the techs at the NSA. Someone will be here in about 15

minutes. They'll also scan everything in your house trying to find the delivery method. May I see that?

(Jordan hands her the back-up drive. Harper pulls out a second iPad from her equipment bag and plugs it into the back-up drive. After a moment the iPad beeps.)

What the hell?

JORDAN

What is it? What's happening?

HARPER

The back-up drive is corrupted. It looks like the same virus.

JORDAN

Damn it! How is that possible? I keep this locked in a safe!

HARPER

From what I can see, between electronic security and live guards your house is pretty damn secure. It doesn't seem possible that someone broke into your house and your safe. I hate to say it, but it's possible that you're the delivery system.

JORDAN

That's insane! Why would I do such a thing?

HARPER

You wouldn't ma'am. I can't be certain, the NSA techs will have much better diagnostics, but I'd bet the delivery method involves nanites. You're constantly in the public. Someone or some organization could have infected you without you knowing it. And you unwittingly passed the nanites on to both Rory and the back-up drive. And if that's the case, you may have just passed it along to me. We may both have to get a thorough cleansing from the NSA techs. Both of my iPads will have to be destroyed.

JORDAN

Oh, God! That sounds like science fiction!

HARPER

Not too long ago it was. Ma'am, I can't tell you what's going to happen, whether or not the NSA

techs will be able to get rid of the virus without any permanent damage. They'll probably treat this as a crime scene. They may even treat it as a terrorist attack.

JORDAN

Who would do that? I'm just trying to help people. Be honest with me, what are the chances he's coming out of this OK?

HARPER

I'd say a lot of it depends on the intent of the perpetrators. But the lengths they went to do this were pretty extraordinary. The worst-case scenario is that … Rory will have to be wiped clean, basically restored to the original factory default settings.

JORDAN

(long pause)

But that would be like killing him. The person I know would no longer exist.

HARPER

I don't have a permanent fix, ma'am, but I've got a few tricks up my sleeve. I might be able to get him back to normal for just a few minutes, give you a little time with him before the NSA gets here.

JORDAN

Do it. Please do it.

(Harper works for a while on the iPad.)

HARPER

I think I've got it.

RORY

(Rory gasps, he can speak, but is not mobile)

Jordan, I'm back! But I can't move.

HARPER

I'll step outside and give you a moment. I'll let you know when the NSA techs arrive.

(exits)

JORDAN

Rory! Did you hear all of that? Were you conscious the whole time?

RORY

(Although very human sounding before, Rory has lost some of that and sounds a little like HAL 9000.)

I was. I was afraid, I am afraid. I'm afraid I'm going to leave you. I don't want to leave you.

JORDAN

I don't know what will happen.

RORY

If I don't come back, please tell the girls that I love them.

JORDAN

I will. And I love you. I don't think I really understood that until this moment. I love you, Rory.

RORY

And I love you, too, Jordan.

JORDAN

(a nervous laugh)

I know you're programmed to say that. But it feels good to hear you say it anyway.

RORY

Of course you're right. I am programmed to say it. But I'm not programmed to feel it. So please believe me when I tell you that deep within whatever passes for my heart, I feel it profoundly. And I can honestly say that I have loved you for the longest time. Jordan … I love you. I love you … I love you … I … I … I love you.

(Rory continues to repeat this as he is relapsing. Jordan holds his face in her hands and kisses him amidst tears. Fade to black.)

The End