

2020: The year that wasn't

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The play has four sets of characters; scenes from each group alternate – all actors participate for the initial scene and song; the post-intermission “dance” number and the final song. Cast can expand or shrink to fit participants – actors of all ages can participate.

Character names are neutral; all parts can be played by actors of any gender. Where directions or dialog reference gender, an asterisk () may be a reminder that there is flexibility.*

Group One – grandparent [Pat] and grandchild [Lee]. Pat has just moved into a retirement home, and Lee moved to a new school shortly before the start of quarantine.

Group Two – teachers (grades 4 and up) and students. Teacher Robin had decided this would be the last year of teaching when online learning is mandated. The students, (who are mixed from grades 4 to 6) are working through the logistics of distance learning while managing younger siblings, who also appear. One student, Chris, has learning challenges and is especially concerned about his passing the class.

Group Three - Morgan, a healthcare worker parent or custodial relative and Francis, a 9th or 10th grader. Morgan is working around the clock shifts caring for Covid patients and must live at the hospital per infection protocols. Francis is at home without any adult supervision for the first time; the other parent, Sal, is deployed on a Navy ship.

Group Four – Randy and Jamie are coworkers who had their first social “date” just before lockdown. Their fellow office workers are now doing meetings on Zoom and are not familiar with the technology. In between meetings where the other workers share their quirks and coping strategies Randy and Jamie are deciding whether they should pursue a relationship.

The characters in these four groups are connected: Pat has met Kelly at the retirement home. He is the grandparent of one of the students in Group Two and the parent of one of the coworkers in Group Four (one of the Group Four coworkers is also the parent of a student in Group Two). When he contracts Covid he is cared for by Morgan from Group Three; he was also Francis’ guitar teacher.

The subject matter of this work is quite serious but there are many light moments to counterbalance – at its heart this work is about courage, resilience and rising to the challenges of life. Understanding the ages of the actors and of the audience, none of the main characters die but the pandemic is treated with respect. No actor needs to understand all the things which happened during the Covid years, but everyone can relate to how important it is to be a part of a national challenge (just as children did their part during World War II). The end of the play shows the groups’ victory at having made it through.

About the music: All of the songs with the exception of “Growing Up Fast” are lyrics written to the tunes of copyright free songs. Some guidance on note sequences will be needed, particularly for songs with introductory verses such as “Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning.” “Growing Up Fast,” written for Group Two’s student characters, is an original work copyrighted with the script.

Characters

Pat, a grandparent	Lee, a grandchild
Robin, a teacher	Chris, a middle school student
Randy, an office worker	Jamie, an office worker
Morgan, hospital nurse	Francis, 9 th or 10 th grade student

Additional students for distance learning sessions

Additional workers for Zoom sessions

teachers, principals, parents, etc.

Younger actors as Zoom disruptors, street scenes, aisle runners, etc.

Announcer/laptop operator

Kelly, Guitar player

Sal, Morgan's spouse currently deployed

S.G.O., a Stuffy Government Official

Eleanor Roosevelt

Precovid: Scene One

Set is blank; large screen in background hanging upstage; ANNOUNCER/laptop operator sits at a desk to load screen content. ANNOUNCER will react and interact with characters throughout the play, helping with breaks in tension.

Stage lighting is bright; actors brightly clothed and upbeat; music plays (upbeat tune "And the Band Played On" sung by some of the children; some will have tambourines and rhythm instruments)

Woman with baby carriage crosses stage; two neighbors stop to admire baby

Kids with hula hoops play; another comes to join

Parent is braiding child's hair on a doorstep

Older kid is reading aloud to a group sitting

Deaf friends are signing and making jokes

Older lovers stroll arm in arm

Person handing out balloons

As the action continues, screen starts showing headlines:

“January 9: Mysterious Virus Surfaces in Wuhan, China”

“January 20: US Airports Begin Screening for Coronavirus”

“January 21: First Covid Case Confirmed in U.S.”

“January 31: WHO Confirms Global Health Emergency”

“February 2: Worldwide Travel Restrictions Go into Effect”

“February 3: US Declares Public Health Emergency”

Suddenly the sound of a phonograph needle scratching across an album signals the abrupt end of the song. News Announcer’s voice is heard.

ANNOUNCER

Home quarantine until further notice is in effect for vulnerable persons. A nationwide closing of businesses and in person schooling has begun – we will announce details as they develop.

Lighting changes to deep shadows; the actors pull masks out of their pockets and back away from one another, distancing. Silently and with downcast expressions, they leave the stage in different directions, with backward glances and sad waves goodbye. ANNOUNCER dons mask.

First reset break

The first round of “Four Little Rules” played to the tune of public domain song “Happy Birthday” plays. Masked cast members walk the aisles with pocket size hand sanitizers, squirting the hands of audience members. [As the show continues, this music can play – at director’s discretion - at times when the cast needs to have time for a scene change, and each time the cast members come up and down the aisles, the sanitizer bottles get larger until by the last time, they’re wheeling wagons up and down the aisle with kegs of sanitizer.]

Four little rules

Sung to “Happy Birthday to You” – sing song style

[sung like a public service announcement with sing song delivery]

Wear your mask and stay safe

Wash your hands every hour

Use lots of sanitizer!

Lock your doors and stay home.

Precovid: Scene Two

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Speaking into an old fashioned microphone for her 12/7/41 radio broadcast

You cannot escape anxiety. You cannot escape a clutch of fear at your heart and yet I hope that the certainty of what we have to meet will make you rise above these fears. We must go about our daily business more determined than ever to do the ordinary things as well as we can and when we find a way to do anything more in our communities to help others, to build morale, to give a feeling of security, we must do it. Whatever is asked of us, I am sure we can accomplish it. We are the free and unconquerable people of the United States of America.

ANNOUNCER

So why did Eleanor Roosevelt suddenly show up in 2020? Heck if I know. Mrs. Roosevelt spoke those words on the radio on December 7, 1941, right after Pearl Harbor. She talked about a time when no one knew what the future would bring and when our only chance was to come together in big ways and small.

(taking a beat)

Here we go again.

The Lockdown March

Sung to the tune of "Over There", the song involves the entire cast spreading out with the social distancing gesture of spreading out arms and stepping apart, going down the aisles. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT is leading the song, encouraging everyone.

Quarantine, set the scene

For six months we will all use our screens

Because COVID's coming

We're not welcoming

These awful germs from overseas

No time to plan

Do what you can

Everyone do your bit to a man

All the stores are closing

There's no time for dozing

Can't even go out to get a tan

Someone sets up tanning mirror but then stops when someone wags their finger.

Stream for fun

Couch Life has come!

Download the extended cut of Top Gun

Order the toilet paper

Get a new ice scraper

Cozy up to the guy from Amazon!

Actors dance with Amazon boxes alternating with actors carrying toilet paper on sticks.

Pull as one

We'll get it done

One day soon, we'll be back having fun

But for now every visit

There's a ten friend limit

Someone comes up but once they hear that line, they slink off with their head low.

Sorry friend, but if you join us, you're plus one

Get online, it's Facebook time

Just learn to Twitter and not whine

It won't be forever

But for now endeavor

Little kid tries to get grown-ups attention.

What is social distance? I'm just nine.

(tune changes for final march finale while entire cast sings while marching)

Let's all make history

We'll all share victory

We gotta believe we'll get out of quarantine

The cast disperses. The stage has been set during the last part of the song to divide the space into quadrants. Group One – PAT and LEE – is downstage right. Group Two – Robin and Chris with classmates – is upstage left. Group Three – Randy and Jamie with co-workers – is downstage left. Group Four – Morgan and Francis with Sal and a patient bed - is upstage right. Lighting draws audience focus to the action. Throughout the play ANNOUNCER has a workdesk with laptop upstage center.

PAT /LEE, Scene One

Pat and Lee are on opposite sides of their quadrant of the stage. The screen has a photo of Shady Acres Adult Retirement Home, and the Covid policy of the facility: "Like all retirement and nursing homes, we have instituted a no visitor policy. Residents will be remaining in their individual rooms with meals and needed medical care delivered to them by staff wearing masks and Personal Protective Equipment."

They are holding up phones for video call. They face the audience and do not make eye contact with one another.

LEE

(Wearing typical kid gear and in an obvious bad mood)

I can't believe my birthday party was cancelled. It was my chance to make friends; the new school is big, and I know about 3 people.
How are you doing there? What does your place look like?

PAT

(Wearing ex-hippie colorful clothing)

Like an overpriced Courtyard Marriott with bad tempered staff. I would remember their faces except they are all wearing masks – it's like being fed and medicated by bank robbers.

You know, after Grandpa* Jo died, I wanted to move somewhere I could make friends; work in a little garden; make silly things in a class. Instead, I'm confined to a 600 square foot space planting the seeds from salad tomatoes in plastic cups.

LEE

Okay... How are the tomatoes doing?

PAT

They died.

LEE

(Obviously feeling awkward)

Well, it's been great talking to you.

PAT sighs. They both turn off phones and return them to pockets.

The Lockdown Lament *sung to the tune of "Swanee River"*

PAT sings the lines which match the particulars of the character; other lines can be sung by other Shady Acres residents or chorus dressed as retirees

Stuck in a room at Shady Acres
Time to start the day
Soon breakfast will be delivered
With a dozen pills on my tray

Tried some YouTube session yoga
It did not go well
Got stuck doing Balasana
And couldn't reach the call bell

When I toured this place back in September
Some fellas caught my glance
I hadn't planned on high adventure
But maybe a last romance

Haven't been outside in ages
I'm longing for a friend
My standards are not outrageous (does a dance step)
- It would be nice if their knees still bend

Wi-Fi is the outside world connection
I do lots of tech-support chats (*ANNOUNCER puts on headset and silently mouths a conversation*)
Pretending that my new laptops broken
To talk to someone besides my *cat* (*PAT and ANNOUNCER both hold up pet cats – using puppets*)

All the day I'm bored and weary
Here on my own
This was not what I'd imagined
Help! I'm trapped in an old folks' home

PAT/LEE, Scene Two

PAT and LEE are texting; they are sitting to type on their phones. As they type the texts, they speak the words for the audience.

LEE

Hi, Grandma. I'm so bored. Can't go outdoors unless a grownup is home and it's been raining anyway. My gaming time is up for the week – and YES, they check.

PAT

Try reading a book. Around your age, my favorite was Little Women. Remember when we went to the Alcott House in Massachusetts?

LEE

Not really. Isn't that the one where Beth gets sick and never gets better?

PAT

Okay – how about the Little House books?

LEE

Where Mary gets measles and goes blind – isn't that what happened to Helen Keller too?

PAT

Wow, why are you so obsessed with characters getting sick in these books?

ANNOUNCER points to screen, which displays a news story about nursing home infection rates.

LEE

So, what do you do for fun?

PAT

(With irony)

I play solitaire.

LEE

Oh.

ROBIN/CHRIS, Scene One

On the screen, photos or video displays school board meeting with angry parents.

ANNOUNCER (*using news reporter microphone*)

Thanks for tuning into News at Five. This week, the School Board has voted to require students to learn at home for the remainder of the school year. Parents are up in arms at the short notice – they are scrambling to make work arrangements and don't know how they will supervise kids at home.

Video conference between PRINCIPAL and TEACHERS.

PRINCIPAL

(shown on overhead screen; teachers line up on stage to join in the meeting)

Greetings, faculty. Sorry for the short notice – we gave you the info as soon as the schools received it from Admin HQ. As of Monday, we are fully online. Schools close tomorrow, so we have 3 days to get tablets to students and to – make a plan.

TEACHER 1

Make a plan – are the schools providing lesson plans for remote learning?

PRINCIPAL

There isn't time. We are counting on your ingenuity and flexibility to find the best way for your individual classes.

TEACHER 2

Does all this use of ingenuity come with extra pay? It's going to double my planning time...

TEACHER 3

At least double!

TEACHER 2

... to take my lessons and turn them into something the kids do remote.

TEACHER 1

What am I supposed to do for Science labs?

TEACHER 3

I have an entire Art Room – are my kids supposed to use for supplies?

PRINCIPAL

For Art and Science, you can come up with lessons or experiments so the kids can use things most will have at home. It's time to improvise.

And no – there is no plan for extra compensation at this point. We are as sorry as you are.

ANNOUNCER

Holds up sign: "SURE – WE BELIEVE THAT"

TEACHER 2

Half my kids don't have high speed internet. How can they connect to a Zoom session on dialup?

PRINCIPAL

Yeah, that's a work in progress. We know that some students don't have access. For those students, packets of work are going to the homes; copies are being made by school office staff. When you have graded the packets, you can call the student to review areas which need more focus or you can talk to the students from your car and work problems on a white board – please maintain social distance.

Chorus of groans from TEACHERS.

ROBIN

Will my students be provided with the books we are covering in Lit? I have 3 reading groups: how am I covering these 3 groups in one online chat?

TEACHER 3

I've got 3 Math groups in each class. I have the same problems as Robin.

PRINCIPAL

Well, we prefer “challenges” to “problems” [making finger gesture for “quotes”]

TEACHERS turn from screen; face the audience.

TEACHER 2

(also making the “quote” gesture)

I have some “comments” to share about these “challenges”.

The other teachers and ROBIN mouth their comments while making the “quote” gesture. They are joined by the ANNOUNCER.

TEACHER 1

Over half of my students count on the school for lunch AND breakfast – how can they learn if they aren't fed?

PRINCIPAL

We are keeping the bus drivers on payroll – they will deliver meals and work packets to students. We are working on a schedule for box meals.

(Teachers are making faces and more “quotes” to the audience for “meals”.)

ROBIN

What about our special needs kids? How can we accommodate individual plans if we are teaching all the kids at one time? In a class of 20 I have 8 kids with separate strategies – my para works with them during seatwork.

TEACHER 3

I've got 6.

TEACHER 1

I have a kid who is two grade levels below on spoken English – what if she doesn't have Wi-Fi for her translator software?

TEACHER 3

Heaven help my kids with socialization issues – this will set them back a year or more!

PRINCIPAL

And one more thing ...

(more groans from Teachers)

PRINCIPAL

We have reliable Internet at all schools, so you should plan to do your streaming sessions from here. Your regular classrooms will be kept open for you.

TEACHER 2

Daycares are closed and my parents are on lockdown. What do I do with my toddler? Are you keeping PreK 3 and 4 open?

TEACHER 3

And who is supervising my twins while they are learning at home and I am teaching at school? They are 7.

PRINCIPAL

It's a developing situation. We'll work on it.

Teachers finger "quote" "developing situation" and "work on it" ANNOUNCER throws up a sheaf of papers in frustration.

ROBIN

(to herself)

This is my final year of teaching. What a way to end!

ROBIN/CHRIS, Scene Two

ROBIN has an online meeting with CHRIS and family. The session is in progress.

PARENT is holding up a tablet to be on camera. An anxious CHRIS is standing next to PARENT, fidgeting.

ROBIN

... and I took the individual plan with me. I'm looking it over as I do the lesson plans. My suggestion is that Chris get extended time on all work deadlines. Say, 50% more?

CHRIS takes the tablet from PARENT.

CHRIS

Great, so I spend all day trying to stay online to do all my subjects, and all my free time trying to get the work done?

PARENT

Can the aides – uh, paras - lend a hand with this?

ROBIN

Well, the aides have been reassigned to other work so - no.

CHRIS

(to PARENT)

Let me talk to my own teacher, please.

PARENT agrees and leaves stage.

CHRIS and ROBIN speak at the same time.

Well, this is gonna be a mess.

CHRIS

If I don't do well, will I have to repeat?

ROBIN

That's not going to happen. Look, this is my last year. I don't care if I do not teach in the
(*air quotes again*) "approved way." You are going to handle this material if I have to
teach it with my hair on fire.

CHRIS

Well, at least it won't be boring.

RANDY /JAMIE, Scene One

Screen shows a picture of a large office building. The voiceover displays the wording across the screen.

ANNOUNCER reads it aloud in a pompous voice – wearing a bow tie for the role.

Manuals for Morons: making it make sense. Our response to the Coronavirus situation combines our concern for the health of our employees and a strategy to secure jobs – or most of them. For the current fiscal quarter, operations are transitioned to your home workspace. Team members will be available throughout the workday for collaborative work, and daily online staff meetings will keep you up to date on projects and company goals.

While the voiceover is going, another cast member holds up a smaller sign that simply reads, “Blah, blah, blah”.

RANDY is at small desk with a tablet on a stand, wearing a Godzilla T-shirt.

JAMIE’s desk is almost invisible behind a huge potted plant. Wearing yoga pants and hoodie; instead of a desk chair there is a large exercise ball.

RANDY

Don’t worry, we’ll get through this, somehow.

JAMIE

Thanks. It’s good to know I got you around.

RANDY

You got your setup finished?

JAMIE

Feels good to be in my own space with no negative vibes. I’m going to sage it later to dispel any negative energy from the office cutthroats

RANDY

You really believe in that stuff?

JAMIE

I believe that office working isn't always healthy. There's a lot of shouting, people taking too long for coffee, can't fit plants in the cramped cubicles...I could go on and on, but I think you get the idea.

RANDY

Yeah. I got it.

JAMIE

Maybe that's why I like that movie *Office Space* so much.

RANDY

Stinks though. The company created all these jobs just over a year ago and we've been seeing each other a lot more.

JAMIE

Yeah, about that, I want to apologize for picking the corn maze as our first date. I should've listened to you when you said turning uphill all the time wasn't a strategy.

RANDY

Oh, that's all forgotten now. How's your ankle doing?

JAMIE holds up a very heavily wrapped ankle.

JAMIE

The Teladoc appointment said the swelling should go down in about another week.

RANDY

Sorry to hear about that.

JAMIE

I'd still like to keep seeing you though.

RANDY

Me too.

JAMIE

Got any ideas to occupy yourself when you're not working?

RANDY

My mom used to be an avid baker in her day, and I found a lot of baking videos online. I was thinking of taking that up as a hobby.

JAMIE

You, bake? Didn't our health plan limit coverage based on those organic muffins you baked and brought to the office?

RANDY

I admit I'm a bit rusty around the edges with it, but I think I can pick it back up quickly. I already got a batch of sourdough starter going.

JAMIE

You'll have to send me a picture of your first loaf. Don't go "loafing" around now?

RANDY

But don't you first "knead" the dough in order to loaf?

ANNOUNCER holds up a sign saying "GROAN"

JAMIE

Think you could be a better loafer than your mom?

RANDY

Won't know until I start loafing?

JAMIE

Okay, I think that's enough of the jokes.

While the jokes are going, the same cast member who held up the sign holds up a sign banner with the words "knead" and "need" on it and reverses the sign so it reads, "These are jokes, laugh now". Once the audience reacts, the sign flips over to read "hey, we don't write the stuff!"

RANDY

Yeah. You prefer sitting on a yoga ball?

JAMIE

One of my college classes had the option of sitting on yoga balls instead of chairs, so I tried it and I honestly prefer this. It's easier on your back too.

RANDY

That I believe, although that wasn't really my thing.

JAMIE

Well, I better get going. These manuals won't translate themselves. Someone whose native language was Italian tried to write this manual in English and now it just sounds like a pasta recipe.

RANDY

What's the manual about?

JAMIE

How to properly check your carburetor. By the way, what's sourdough starter?

RANDY

You mix flour and water and leave it on your counter. Wild yeast in the air joins the flour and water and it ferments.

JAMIE

So, you're basically making garbage?

RANDY

No, the garbage was always there. I just fed it, but then I put that garbage into flour, and it makes bread dough. See? Here's my starter ready to use.

He holds up a jar of beige goo.

JAMIE

Charming.

ANNOUNCER makes gaging gesture

RANDY

Right. I better get back to work too. Talk to you later.

They both sign off.

Second reset break

ANNOUNCER is holding the reporter microphone and speaking in a newscaster voice.

ANNOUNCER

The public is urged to be aware of quack cures which are being promoted as pandemic cures. Please avoid the company of anyone who wants you to try these methods:

- Rum extract and fabric softener on your skin
- Equine de-worming cream (unless your horse has worms – in which case give it to your horse)
- And if anyone tries to sell you Dihydrogenmonoxide as a Covid prevention or cure, save your money: dihydrogenmonoxide means “water.”

Instead, remember:

Cast members – ANNOUNCER joins in - chant in a sing-song voice while sanitizer squirts are offered to audience members in aisle seats

Four Little Rules

Hey don't be a jerk

These quack cures don't work

Use lots of sanitizer!

Lock your doors and stay home.

RANDY/JAMIE Scene Two

JAMIE is disheveled; there is a towel draping over the shoulders and the hair is rumpled and wet.

RANDY speaks as an aside, not wanting to call attention to their conversation.

RANDY

You look very wet. Is it raining in your neighborhood?

JAMIE

No. My sage smudge set off the smoke alarm and activated the sprinklers in the whole building.

RANDY

Does this mean you need to get rid of it?

JAMIE

Superintendent says so. I was just feeling the positive vibes too.

RANDY

So what does it mean now?

(joking)

Are evil demons from another dimension gonna come and take your soul?

(chuckles)

JAMIE

It's just that I've always preferred smudge sticks. I'll need to try something that's less likely to make such a big flame.

RANDY

You could try something else. Have you considered windchimes?

JAMIE

No, I haven't.

RANDY

They're soothing, they're relaxing, and they don't set off smoke alarms.

JAMIE

That's the best part. How'd your first attempt at sourdough go?

RANDY

I think I put in too much yeast.

JAMIE

What makes you think that?

RANDY

This is what happened.

RANDY holds up an overflowed and over puffed pan of sourdough. JAMIE is trying not to laugh.

RANDY

I know, it looks terrible.

JAMIE

You could enter a photo of it for *Ripley's Believe it or Not* to show how not to bake sourdough, or maybe even do it as a fake how-to video.

RANDY

I'm trying to give it another go right now. I used only 1 yeast packet this time. about another hour until I have to check it.

JAMIE

You still working on translating the new manual?

RANDY

Yeah, but it's hard translating from Russian to English. I enjoy the Japanese translations a lot more. Started when I was a kid watching Godzilla movies.

JAMIE

I know a website you can access a lot of translating dictionaries for technical terms. I'll send you the link after I get dried off and my place cleaned up.

RANDY

You go do that. Want to see my Japanese Godzilla movie imitation?

JAMIE

Sure.

RANDY

(doing bad Japanese accent)

“This dough is not some monster trying to evade you. Just flour and water. If you find what it wants, then it will rise for you.”

(keeping his lips moving after finishing quote, then goes back to regular voice)

That's from the awful 1998 American version – “Julia Child Bakes Tokyo.”

JAMIE

(laughing)

Yeah, pretty bad.

Did you get the notice for the Zoom meeting?

RANDY

I'm trying to decide what I want my background to look like. Just anything but what my place usually looks like.

JAMIE

Well, you downloaded a lot of fun backgrounds already.

(laughing while talking)

I really like the one where Godzilla smashes the city of Osaka – with the Olympic village.

RANDY

(laughing along)

Yeah, me too. I think I'll do either that one or the one that makes it look like I'm in SpongeBob's pineapple.

JAMIE

I like that one, as long as the pineapple is organically grown.

RANDY

Okay, so I'll test out my backgrounds to see which one I like best.

JAMIE

I'll give the windchimes a try.

BOTH

(in unison)

Catch you later.

They both sign off.

MORGAN/FRANCIS Scene One

FRANCIS' space is filled with posters, books, sports equipment. A guitar leans against a stool. It backs up to MORGAN's space. FRANCIS sits on the floor holding up a phone. MORGAN is at a high patient bedside table in front of an antiseptic aqua wall.

FRANCIS

How long are you gonna be gone?

MORGAN

We don't know right now. The hospital is insisting all health care workers sleep here because no one understands how contagious this virus is. You've been on your own for a couple of days before, when we went to visit your sister after she had the baby.

FRANCIS

What about – I don't know- **food**?

MORGAN

We have a grocery delivery account. Order whatever you need and it'll be delivered at the door. They'll just knock and walk away. At least we won't have to worry about school because you'll be online every weekday from 8:30 until 3:00.

FRANCIS

What about after 3:00? What am I gonna do then?

MORGAN

Just do what you always do. Watch TV, game, shoot hoops in the driveway.

FRANCIS

Can I invite people over?

MORGAN

Absolutely not. You know we have to distance. You can video chat and talk on the phone. You could try Tweeter or TokTik.

FRANCIS
Those aren't real things.

MORGAN
Whatever.

FRANCIS
How old do you think I look?

MORGAN
Why?

FRANCIS
I bet no one would know I'm not old enough to drive yet. I've been practicing in the driveway. I could shop or get PPE.

MORGAN
Don't you dare. If you wreck the car, you pay and you won't get your license until you're 30.

FRANCIS
What about guitar? Shady Acres is too far to walk, but if I bike over maybe Kelly could teach me out the window.

MORGAN
I'll think about it.

FRANCIS
Aw, come on. When's the next time we can talk?

MORGAN
I'm setting up ship to shore Skype – it has to be scheduled.

MORGAN /FRANCIS Scene Two

MORGAN and FRANCIS are Skyping with SAL. SAL is in fatigues – facing away from the others to indicate distance.

ANNOUNCER stands and solemnly salutes in SAL's direction.

SAL

Hello to you both. Sorry we only have 5 minutes. The connection isn't always great on the open sea. Lots of other people want to get calls in.

FRANCIS

How much longer are you gonna be deployed?

SAL

Cap's decided we're away from all ports until this virus is under control. Thankfully, we got enough supplies for months. A "no human hands" supply system is being worked out for resupplies. I know how hard this is for you both.

MORGAN

I know. It's hard for you too. Wish we could be together.

FRANCIS

I don't need this speech about how the family also serves.

MORGAN

You don't need the speech. You know that.

MORGAN

(just to SAL)

Well, you and your 6000 fellow jarheads take care.

FRANCIS

Semper fi, I guess.

SAL
Semper fi.

SAL sighs and signs off.

MORGAN
I'm so sorry, Fran. I didn't realize neither one of us could come home for...we just don't know. Are you okay with that?

FRANCIS
(disappointed)
What choice do I have?
(changing subject)
I've been thinking of making a series of signs for the mailman to see, like with "hang in there" messages and stuff.

MORGAN
As long as you don't reveal you're there by yourself.

FRANCIS
I won't.

MORGAN
You'll also need to keep them brief. He has a lot more deliveries on his route besides us.

FRANCIS
Right.

FRANCIS signs off and sighs.

PAT/LEE, Scene Three

Both reading their emails like letter correspondence.

PAT

Dear Lee,

(that's how we began real letters when we mailed them by riding our dinosaurs to the post office)

I am sending you a macrame kit. I used to enjoy doing this a lot, but when you get older, things like arthritis happen so you can't do a lot of things you used to do.

Looks at the audience, breaking the Fourth Wall.

A LOT of things.

Pat resumes the email.

So, I thought you would try macrame. I remember we used to do paracord bracelets together – this is sort of a large paracord project. I miss you.

Lee reads aloud the reply to be sent.

LEE

Dear Grandma,

This is a weird way to start an email. Don't you know I am writing it to you? Anyway, thanks for the string. I remember when I was little we would play that you called Cat's Cradle. Grandpa* Jay had to cut the string off with a razor knife before my finger died and dropped off. That was kinda fun. Here is a picture of what I made with the macrame kit.

The screen shows a photo of LEE holding up what looks like a fishing net having a very bad day with a pot suspended upside down.

I didn't know what to hang with it, but the dog ate some of it and after that I put it outside for the birds to use in nests. So I spent a day making extra string for birds. At least it was useful for something. I am starting to miss you more than I thought. Anyway, see you.

A pause
Sometime.

PAT/LEE, Scene Four

PAT is trying TIKTOK; the screen shows the video while PAT provides the dialog.

PAT

Hi! I tried TIKTOK like you suggested. Here is a shot of my apartment. And here are my friends!

She shows a line of pill and vitamin bottles and holds them up to the camera.

This one helps me sleep. This one wakes me up. This one helps with the arthritis. This one does something about my blood pressure, but it makes me tired so this one gives me energy. This one does something that helps in the bathroom – and the rest is none of your business.

PAT is obviously upset now.

PAT

So, that's my circle of friends. Be sure to take your friends with plenty of water and avoid grapefruit juice – grapefruit juice is not your friend.

PAT turns off the phone and sits down heavily, no longer able to keep the act going – and covers face with hands.

ANNOUNCER, saddened by this, slides over a box of tissues, unable to go closer.

LEE posts his own TIKTOK in response.

LEE

Hi, I'm Lee! I made this TIKTOK so you can know about me – and until we can meet you'll – know about me.

LEE takes the phone away from face and slaps forehead.

LEE

I like gaming, which is good because I don't have to be near anyone to do it. So if we are chatting in the game and you are from my school, HI! If we are chatting and are actually really far away, it doesn't matter because we will never meet anyway so we –

LEE gives up and shuts off the phone.

Never mind.

Third reset break

ANNOUNCER is once again broadcasting, now wearing a stethoscope and white coat.

ANNOUNCER

Doctor Ganjay Supja reporting on a dangerous Covid cure scam. Gatherings of people drinking yak – uh – byproduct – and using it as a lotion are following online rumors that this will protect against the Coronavirus. This claim is false and the practice offers no protection against Covid.

He looks directly at the audience

And it makes you very, very smelly.

This is Supja, signing off after this public service announcement.

Again cast members are joined by the ANNOUNCER in the song while cast members go down the aisles offering sanitizer – this time in a larger pump bottle

Four little rules

Wear a mask, wash your hands

It won't be forever, you'll see

Just use sanitizer

And don't drink yak (*last word of song is interrupted by orchestra blowing a horn to drown it out*)

CHRIS/ROBIN, Scene Three

A Zoom session with the students. Session is shown on the screen while the actors face the audience. During the session, the following take place at random moments:

- *Younger siblings wander through the background as the student attempts to supervise them.*
- *One kid is always eating*
- *One kid is sleeping, head on arms*
- *One kid is doing a floss dance move*
- *One kid has several stuffed animals who he is holding as security items*
- *One kid has a younger sibling trying to interest older sibling in their paper bag puppet*

ROBIN sighs and pulls together to do the session – not expecting it to go well.

ROBIN

(speaking to self)

Let's see how we are going to mess this up.

All right, class. Let's focus our attention on your screens now.

Sami, put down the sandwich.

SAMI

Speaking with mouth full

Sorry!

(hastily puts it down after taking one more giant bite)

ROBIN

We are going to begin by discussing the books you will be reading in your designated Literature Groups. Eagles: you will be reading Gabriel Garcia Marquez' book "Chronicle of a Death Foretold."

NINA

What's it about?

TAYLOR

The title pretty much gives it away – I’ve already read it. And it is a BOREFEST. By the time the main character dies, you are glad because IT IS FINALLY OVER.

ROBIN

Well, everyone is entitled to their opinion.
Peregrins, you will be reading Gary Paulsen’s book “Hatchet.”

CHRIS

I started that book over the Summer. It was hard.

ROBIN

Most stories start out hard, but they get better over time.

FINN

What’s it about, Chris?

CHRIS

Well, apparently unlike Chronology of a Dead Guy, the death is at the front of the book.
And according to our teacher, it’s all unicorns and rainbows from there.

ANNOYING KINDERGARTEN SIBLING

Who made the pandas sick?

ROBIN

I’m sorry? What?

KINDERGARTEN SIBLING

My teacher said that Cornvirus started in China – and I think the pandas got it so now it is a pandademic. How did the pandas get sick? Will they be okay?

PRESCHOOL SIBLING

Please don't let the pandadas die!

ROBIN

(trying not to laugh)

The pandas are all going to be fine. Can I talk to Nick now?

KINDERGARTEN SIBLING

(screaming across the room)

Nick! The teacher wants you and she says the pandas are all going to be okay!

NICK

(very embarrassed)

Great news. Will you go do something else now. Please. And NO you cannot use my tablet. I am in school.

KINDERGARTEN SIBLING

This doesn't look like school.

NICK

I'm really sorry. My parents are at work, so I have to watch her*.

ROBIN

MOVING ON to our discussion. For our Pigeons –

DANI

I move we change the name of that group. Pigeons are rats with wings. We are the Peacocks now!

ROBIN

Fine, Peacocks.

FINN

I object. I think we should vote.

ROBIN

I think we should get on with the class.

Our THIRD group will be reading the first TWO books of a series called The Boxcar Children. These books are short so you can easily read two of them.

NICK

Aren't those books about orphan siblings who hide out in an abandoned freight car and have to watch the younger kids ALL THE TIME???

ROBIN

Well, they have great adventures.

NICK

Yeah, I'm having a great adventure right now.

(to KINDERGARTEN SIBLING)

Much like I have to do with you all day. And I have already told you: you may NOT use my tablet!

TAYLOR

So, what books didn't make the cut?

ROBIN

I thought we would do something different this year. Usually, one group reads "Lord of the Flies."

DANI

It's middle school. Every day is Lord of the Flies.

CHRIS

But not "Diary of a Wimpy Kid".

NOEL

Or "Captain Underpants".

SAMI

(Eating again)

I like the Nate the Great Books. There's a pancake recipe in it.

ROBIN

(just wanting it be over and trying not to explode)

Okay. So, you'll all get a message in our Discussion Group when your books are available online.

(With dread)

Questions?

CHRIS

Can we talk in private?

CHRIS

Please?

Everyone else leaves the Zoom – actors walk off stage left or stage right; KINDERGARTEN and PRESCHOOL siblings leave, but not willingly. NICK takes lollipop from his pocket and holds it up like a dog treat. KINDERGARTEN SIBLING follows, reaching for the candy with NICK one step ahead.

CHRIS

I'm not sure I can do this without help from the aide. What if I look dumb and everyone laughs?

ROBIN

What makes you think that?

CHRIS

Because I am dumb. I can't really do this.

ROBIN

You are absolutely not dumb – but you do have to be inventive now. Imagine you are Brian in Hatchet. Do you think Brian thought he would be able to find food, make fire, or take care of himself after his plane crashed?

CHRIS

Well, at least Brian had that hatchet.

ROBIN

(really starting to like Chris)

You are going to survive. Brian had a teacher who told him “you are your most valuable asset.”

CHRIS (*doubtfully*)

Maybe this is one of those things I'll understand later.

ROBIN/CHRIS, Scene Four

Another video session for the class. ROBIN is on screen. The other students face the audience, either standing while holding devices or seated with devices.

SAMI is still eating.

NICK's SIBLING sits on the floor nearby; a bandana across his face; NICK, also wearing bandana, pulls his bandana down to talk

NICK

(in a stage whisper to SIBLING)

Remember, we are bank robbers so you can't talk, or the Sheriff will catch us.

SIBLING vigorously nods.

ROBIN

(tired and faking a bright attitude)

Hello everyone!

Any of you spending your time at home in an interesting way?

SAMI

(chewing)

I'm inventing a new sandwich for every day –

(holds up the food)

This is peanut butter cup, mayo, and baloney.

A chorus of disgusted groans from fellow students.

SAMI

(confused)

What – mayo is good with baloney.

DANI

I joined TikTok – look.

(does a very poor job of dancing – flossing)

NICK

I've been reading to my little brother – he likes *The Boxcar Children* - it's a book where the kids live on their own in the woods because all the grownups are gone.

ROBIN

(eager for control before this gets out of hand)

Thanks for sharing, everyone.

On to our discussion of "Hatchet." If you've read to the Chapter of the book I asked, you'll know Brian tried to signal for rescue. Anyone – what was our assignment?

TAYLOR

(making air quotes)

"Our" assignment was to make a sign of what we would write on the beach if a plane flew overhead.

ROBIN

Wonderful. Hold up your signs, everyone.

Students all pull out small posters or cardboard.

SAMI holds up a sign "send food"

FINN, playing class clown, holds up a sign "save me from this book"

DANI's sign reads "save me from NICK's little brother"

NICK puts down sign, hastily scribbles a new sign: "DANI is a jerk"

The class takes sides, with students scribbling new signs and holding them up:

"FINN has B.O."

"SAMI is a fatty"

"DANI can't dance"

"NICK is a jerk"

"CHRIS can't read"

“TAYLOR isn’t funny”

ANNOUNCER’s sign reads “This is boring”

TAYLOR

I thought we weren’t doing Lord of the Flies.

Chris has not held up a sign or participated, sitting staring ahead.

ROBIN

(recognizing control will not come back)

Well, that’s enough for today.

Chris, stay on, please.

Classmates exit stages left and right. PRESCHOOL SIBLING is walking and doing the floss dance at the same time.

Chris knows nothing good is coming.

CHRIS

I tried to read it. I couldn’t get through it.

ROBIN

Chris, this is my last year teaching. I don’t want to end on a failure. We can think of something.

CHRIS

It won’t be YOUR failure – it’s mine.

ROBIN

Would you like to set up a meeting with you, me and your mother or dad to see what we can work out?

CHRIS

They are not here. My Aunt got Covid and my parents went to see her. She lives in Wyoming and they had to drive.

ROBIN
No flights?

CHRIS
They didn't want to take a chance of getting sick. But in some places, it is even hard to find a hotel where people from out of town can stay.

ROBIN
Why do people in the same town need a hotel?

CHRIS
(glad for a reason to smile)
Yeah, I wondered about that one. Turns out you need to prove you are not coming from a place with a high Covid rate in order to check in. Everything's more complicated now – even the rest areas don't let people into the bathrooms. Don't worry, my cousin is here every day to make sure I have what I need. She's a firefighter and I've learned a lot of cooking from her. Plus I've learned how to put the fire out when the cooking doesn't go so great.
On my reading and stuff, we don't need to have a grownup here. If something needs to be done, I'm the one who has to do it. I can do my own talking.

ROBIN
That's a brave attitude.

CHRIS
Everyone is having to make a lot of changes.
Why are you quitting teaching?

ROBIN
Nothing I am doing this year is making a difference – I can't find a way to reach the students and no one is learning by sitting at a screen. It's like pulling the wings off flies.

CHRIS
I guess I'll have to get around to reading Lord of the Flies. It keeps coming up.

ROBIN and CHRIS share a laugh.

CHRIS

Can I decide to quit, too? I can't learn sitting at a screen, either.

ROBIN

You don't have that choice. I couldn't let you quit even if I wanted to.

CHRIS

I will find a way to learn the book. Can't you try to find a way to teach us too?

ROBIN

Shall we make a deal to both try? I'd like to check in with you every day anyway until your parents are back, and we can talk about what you are trying.

CHRIS

Well, it's either try or read *Lord of the Flies*, I guess.

SONG: *Growing up fast*

Students and the younger SIBLINGS take turns singing – it is plaintive, angry, frustrated and hopeful

I'm growing up fast
And learning to deal

I'm learning new tasks
'Cause these problems are real

My birthday party was cancelled
Halloween's tricks but no treats

When I finish my lessons
Can't play with friends on my street

The grownups are busy
Mine are working from home

unison

If we are all in the same house
Why do I feel so alone?

When news stories are playing
I must walk away
I'm finding it tough
To be scared every day

But there are things I can help with
There's a lot we can do
We can care for the small kids

SIBLINGS sing

we can do hard things too

We can try hard to listen
And help with the work
Even though my big brother/sister*
Can act like a jerk

older siblings chase young ones around for an instrumental - end up tickling

Now when the news is playing
I try hard to stay

unison

I'm still frightened to listen
But we can't run away

My mask's hard to breathe through

Everyone looks up, pleading and sings in unison
Come on - how long can this last!

But we've learned to do tough things

KINDERGARTEN SIBLING puts a masked teddy bear at feet of PRESCHOOL SIBLING - they cannot touch – and sings softly but with poignant courage.

I'm growing up fast

ANNOUNCER loudly blows his nose, overcome with emotion

RANDY/JAMIE Scene Three

RANDY is in living room folding laundry – a 50 pound bag of flour supports the laundry basket.. JAMIE is trying to work something out on computer and has a black eye – an ice pack is applied from time to time. JAMIE mouths words, but RANDY can't hear anything.

RANDY

(confused)

Hello? Jamie?

JAMIE is still mouthing words, but RANDY still can't hear.

RANDY

(even more confused)

What are you trying to say?

(growing agitated)

Check your microphone. You must be muted.

Jamie finally understands and hits the right button.

JAMIE

There we go. Sorry about that, my computer's been acting wonky lately.

RANDY

Can't you take it in to Best Buy or something?

JAMIE

I keep checking. Their Geek Squad counter is still closed until further notice.

RANDY

You can't have it fixed remotely? Like call somebody?

JAMIE

They've been working on our phone lines all day today.

RANDY

Ah!

(seeing the black eye and looking concerned)

What happened to you?

JAMIE

I tried windchimes like you suggested. Unfortunately, it was quite windy when I did it, so they hit me in the eye quite hard. And when I was going to get ice I fell over my yoga ball.

RANDY

Sorry to hear about that. How painful is it?

JAMIE

Not as bad as it was an hour ago. Been keeping ice on it to keep the swelling down.

RANDY

Keep putting ice on it if you want it to end sooner.

JAMIE

I will. So, how did your second sourdough attempt go?

RANDY

This time I put in too little yeast, it barely made it halfway up the pan. I am using it for a doorstop.

JAMIE

Man, you cannot catch a break with that stuff, can you? Why are you folding your laundry right now?

RANDY

I figured I might as well do a load. My hamper was past the point of overflowing. Helps pass the time anyway.

JAMIE

Makes sense. I –

Jamie mutes out again. Randy gestures to hit the unmute button.

JAMIE

Yeah, I need to make an appointment for this thing.

There's a mew sound from under the laundry. A cat wanders in front of Randy's computer screen. [The cat is done as a puppet].

JAMIE

You got a cat?

RANDY

Last month. Her name's Mothra – that's Godzilla's love interest. Figured he'd help fight off any feelings of isolation. I don't want to end up like Jack Torrance from *The Shining*, do I? "All work and no play" and all that.

JAMIE

If you do, don't axe me how my day was.

ANNOUNCER holds sign again saying "Regrettably, these are the jokes".

RANDY

Ok, well, you'd better call someone to look at your computer.

JAMIE

Yeah, I'd better go before it gets any worse. Talk to you later.

(waving to cat)

Bye, Mothra. Nice meeting you.

Cat mews.

They both sign off.

RANDY/JAMIE, Scene Four

RANDY and JAMIE both sign on. ALEX and CASEY, coworkers of theirs, sign on as well. Both of their workspaces are crowded with stuff. RYAN, their boss, signs on. Only RYAN is dressed in a company shirt; the other staffers are scruffy in sweats and rumpled T shirts. CASEY's work station is all but obscured by packages of toilet paper.

RYAN

Afternoon, everybody.

EVERYONE

(in unison – a sarcastic middle school class)

Hi, Ryan.

RYAN

How's everyone doing with working from home so far?

JAMIE

I'm doing okay, all things considered.

CASEY

Give me a minute.

(calls offstage)

Guys, I'm on the zoom call now – please put on your headphones.

(muffled responses are heard)

RANDY

(shaking his foot)

Dang it, Mothra! – Sorry, just stepped in the litter box.

Mothra appears larger than life on the camera – looking straight into the lens

SONG: *Oh how I hate to log onto the Zoom call* *To the tune of old Irving Berlin song “oh how I hate to get up in the morning”*

Tune’s opening notes are different sequence

Our company set us all up to work online from home
They gave us screens and cameras and high speed on our phones
So now I have to pause my gaming and join my project team
So I can earn my paycheck while stuck in quarantine

Main tune begins

Oh, how I hate to log onto the zoom call
I’d rather work from my cozy bed
The hardest thing to face is you all can see my place
So I gotta clean up - I gotta get dressed
And consider doing some laundry [nah]

Somebody help - I’ve forgotten my password
Tried my secret hint but it still won’t work
Had to change it twice you see ‘cause I got hacked on QVC
[holding up the stack of purchases]
- their prices are great’ they ship free to my state
But I can’t reach customer service!

Someday I’m going to fix the sound feed
And scrape the Cheeto dust from the keys
Get a private space to do my job
Untroubled by my homeschooled mob
And reboot the modem whenever I please!

JAMIE

My computer’s all fixed, and I updated my screensaver so I can always look at someone I really like.

Randy is starting to get a romantic feeling from Jamie and starts realizing the same feelings toward Jamie – we see that their screensavers are both pictures of each other .

RYAN

And now, our “Manuals for Morons” crew, who’s up for a round of “what the heck were they thinking?”

ALL

(in unison)

Me.

RYAN

Alex, let's start with you.

ALEX

I have no idea what language it was in, but it ultimately translated to "a donkey trims your skirt to order".

Everyone cracks up.

CASEY

(trying to keep it together)

Oh, jeez. What the heck was that?

ALEX

I wish I knew. I'm still trying to figure it out.

RYAN

Casey, how about you.

CASEY

Mine translated to, "you are my love, my angle,

(people start laughing)

Don't treat me like potato".

Everyone starts laughing.

JAMIE

Now who would say that in a relationship? That's beyond ridiculous. And this is just a manual for a countertop composter.

CASEY

Gotta really love compost!

Casey hears some roughhousing elsewhere in the house.

ALEX

Judging by the amount of toilet paper you have there, compost comments are just begging to be the next jokes.

CASEY

Excuse me a second, guys.

Casey walks offstage.

(offstage)

Nick, you and your brother need to stay quiet right now. I'm on a Zoom call for work.

CASEY comes back onstage.

Sorry about that. They've been doing their schooling from home ever since lockdown started.

RYAN

That's all right, Casey. I know tons of people who had to keep an eye on their kids while they had to work, too. Jamie, you found any weird translations.

JAMIE

I found one for an electric knife sharpener that said "lamp" meat. I only hope the lamp was unplugged.

Everyone laughs louder.

ALEX

(laughing while talking)

Anyone for lamp chops tonight?

CASEY

How about lamp stew?

RANDY

Leg of lamp anybody? Maybe to celebrate a major award ...

RYAN

Okay, lastly Randy, how about you?

RANDY

It also revolves around food. I found one for an air fryer that translated to “chicken of your mother”.

Alex laughs to the point of falling out of chair. Everyone laughs in reaction.

RANDY

I have no idea what that was even supposed to mean.

RYAN

All right everybody. You’ve each given me your latest translations earlier, so I think we can sign off until tomorrow. Randy and Jamie, you two stay on, please. I want to talk with both of you.

Alex and Casey both sign off.

RANDY

Idly playing with his Godzilla action figure

Something wrong, Ryan?

RYAN

Jamie, was it specifically Randy you were talking about earlier when you mentioned switching your screensaver to someone else?

JAMIE

I didn't say it was.

RYAN

I'm sorry, but part of our policy is workers can't date each other. That runs the risk of employee favoritism.

JAMIE

(dismayed)

Oh.

RANDY

(Dismayed as well)

Oh.

RYAN

I know you both have gotten on more friendly terms with each other, but this could end up being bad for the company. Soon, you could be recommending the other for promotions over a more suitable candidate.

RANDY

Ryan, please.

RYAN

I'm sorry, but those are my final words. If you want this relationship to continue, one or both of you are going to have to leave this company.

Everyone is silent for a while.

RYAN

Good-bye now.

He signs off. Randy and Jamie are stunned.

JAMIE

What are we gonna do now?

RANDY

I don't know. I want to keep seeing you, but I want to keep my job too.

JAMIE

Me too.

There's a soft mew off the stage. Another cat done by a puppet enters from Jamie's side.

RANDY

You got a cat too?

JAMIE

Yeah. I was used to being self-sufficient for so long, but I did get a bit lonely having no other real close friends. I figured Jasmine would help.

RANDY

Named after another spice, huh?

JAMIE

No, after the princess from Aladdin. She was already named when I got her from the shelter.

RANDY

Ah. Maybe a friend for Mothra when they can meet.

JAMIE

Nervous, she is doing a pose with her yoga ball

I'd better go. I need to think if staying here is worth it for both our sakes.

RANDY

Me too.

BOTH

(in unison, each wishing there was more to say)

Bye.

They both sign off.

MORGAN/FRANCIS SCENE THREE

Francis is very hyper and fidgety. His hair is a mess of red, orange, and green. He's gained some weight and his clothes are very dirty with food stains. Morgan is appalled.

MORGAN

(using the parenting voice)

Francis Marion Watson, what have you been doing? You look a mess, your clothes are so stained that I can't tell what color they are anymore, and I got a notice from your teacher that you've been wearing the same clothes all week during online schooling. Did you throw a wild party? You know we can't do that in these circumstances.

FRANCIS

(talking very fast)

I didn't throw a party. I've been experimenting with hair dye while trying to make Jell-O. Did you know that's a shortcut for dying your hair?

MORGAN

I've been trying to call you for over half an hour too. Did you turn your phone off so I couldn't do that?

FRANCIS

(still talking very fast)

Oh, my battery died. I just plugged it in to charge. I've also been trying to see how many days I could go without showering and-

MORGAN

What? What were you thinking, not keeping yourself clean and hygienic? And why are you so jumpy right now?

FRANCIS

Must be from all that soda I've been drinking for the past three days. I've gone through like a whole 6-pack before dinner.

MORGAN

sternly

That's enough.

Francis calms down, seeing Morgan isn't happy.

MORGAN

I may have been away from home for the past three weeks, but you're still living under our rules. One soda per day, you need to shower and wear clean clothes daily, and no hair dye without our say so. Jell-O is also only for eating now. Also, for the rest of this week and all next week, you'll only be using your laptop for school-related stuff, no TV, no music, and you'll be going to bed an hour early. Do I make myself clear?

FRANCIS

(embarrassed)

Yes.

MORGAN

Good. Now get yourself and our house cleaned up.

Fourth reset scene

ANNOUNCER is playing the role of newscaster

ANNOUNCER

Once again, our Cautious Consumer segment focuses on how people are wasting their money on quack covid cures and preventative products. We urge listeners and viewers to NOT purchase the following – they won't cure Covid and won't increase your protection.

These include

(he reads quickly while the screen displays the list)

Colorful crystals

Magnetized anything

Copper bracelets, socks or clothing

Relics

Fossilized Bones

Delta or Gamma Ray blockers – especially those worn on the head

Please, folks – remember the best advice

The cast, wearing masks, patrols the aisles offering squirts of hand sanitizer they pull from hip holsters, working with both hands while cast members sing

Four little rules

Cures seen on TV

Are worthless – you'll see

Use lots of sanitizer

Wash your hands and stay safe

MORGAN/FRANCIS, Scene Four

Francis has cleaned up and lost some weight. Morgan looks much happier.

MORGAN

You definitely look like an improvement the last several calls.

FRANCIS

I have no idea what happened. I guess I got so bored I was desperate for anything to pass the time.

MORGAN

Well, now you know there are right and wrong ways to do that.

FRANCIS

(still a little embarrassed about it)

Yes.

MORGAN

I hear you and your friends have taken to playing D&D online now.

FRANCIS

Yeah, it was pretty much the only way to keep going since we can't leave our own houses much now. But Bobby seems to have disappeared.

MORGAN

I can answer that.

FRANCIS

Huh?

MORGAN

Bobby was taken into the hospital three days ago. We needed to run some tests. It turns out Bobby's got COVID now.

FRANCIS

(in shock)

What? What's gonna happen?

MORGAN

The good news is we caught it early so it should go away soon, we hope.

FRANCIS

I don't get it. The guy seemed just fine last week, except that it sounded like he had a bit of a cold.

MORGAN

That's the deceiving part of COVID, Fran. It looks like a cold, but soon it gets worse.

Francis is silent, unsure of what to say.

MORGAN

(trying to break the silence and change the subject)

I've heard laughter is often the best medicine. You wanna try some really bad jokes?

FRANCIS

(unsure)

Okay.

MORGAN

Why did Dracula need to go to the doctor?

FRANCIS

Why?

MORGAN

He was coffin too much.

It's a bit of gallows humor to break the tension around here.

Francis chuckles a little bit.

FRANCIS

Okay, you got me there. Let me see if I can find one.

(pulls out cell phone and does a search)

Okay, corny jokes.

(stops on one)

Okay, here's one. What has four wheels and flies?

MORGAN

I don't know.

FRANCIS

A garbage truck.

Morgan chuckles.

MORGAN

What did the burger chef name his daughter?

FRANCIS

What?

MORGAN

Patty.

FRANCIS

The jokes are nice, but I want to get back to Bobby. What's it like being among so many patients with COVID?

MORGAN

(stops before responding)

It's not easy, but I try to brighten their day, despite how tough that is.

FRANCIS

When did you last see Bobby?

MORGAN

Right before I called. Should be doing fine sometime in the next two weeks, then he should be cleared to go home. No visitors but he can read emails – send one.

FRANCIS

Okay. Did anyone new come in today?

MORGAN

Someone named Kelly from the retirement home across town came in about two hours ago. Knows how to play guitar, so he wanted to bring it with him. He says playing it helps soothe him.

FRANCIS

Kelly Keating? That's my guitar teacher. I met his* grandkid Sami during lessons. Cool – for a youngster.

MORGAN

So that was the Sami you talked about once? I always thought it was a new kid at school.

FRANCIS

No, Sami goes to a different school than me. Would you at least tell Kelly I said hi the next time you see him?

MORGAN

Hang in there for me, honey.

Francis signs off.

MORGAN sits next to a patient's bed – the patient has an oxygen mask and is revealed to be Kelly. She sings gently, while Kelly lies with eyes closed but with a hand clutching a guitar.

The Caregiver's Ballad: to the tune of "Scarborough Faire"

Feel your pillow, so cool and so soft
 Sleep and rest – trust all will be fine
 Hear my voice - an anchor to hope

You can heal but must take your time

Comfort waits in dreams of the past
 And the chance of more days long and mild
 I'll be what you need - you'll know we are here
 Your parent, friend, your loved one, your child

Next verse is pensively sung

My own child is home on their own
 I don't share everything that I see
 When all this is past he* may understand
 Why, for weeks, he* lived without me

[instrumental break while MORGAN does the job of caregiving - putting a cool cloth on a head, taking a pulse, helping Kelly sip through a straw. MORGAN holds up a phone for a videochat - we see family members holding up their phones. Dani shows the guitar to Kelly; Kelly smiles then closes his eyes to sleep - still smiling. MORGAN holds his* hand and softly sings final verse]*

If Creation has other plans
 And your race has run to its end
 They'll sing their love and I'll hold your hand
 I'll wish you joy in Memory's sweet lands
(soft reprise)
 I'll wish you joy in Memory's sweet lands

Lights fade out to

INTERMISSION

AFTER INTERMISSION

Cast reassembles, enthusiastically filling the stage and aisles; breaking the sad note of the pre-intermission mood with a “ready for fun” vibe. STUFFY GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL makes a point of measuring their distance; cast members hold out their arms to space out, forming two rows if needed.

The Social Distance Rap

[a rhythm beat continues even during spoken dialog; unless a specific actor is named, cast takes turns with the lines]

Cast members, unless they need to be in costume for the next scene, can perform this in t-shirts and pajama pants; they wear masks but can hang masks around their necks if they have spoken lines. There is no tune, but one of the musicians can keep up a rap beat.

Put on your mask and your pajama pants
It’s time to do the social distance dance

ANNOUNCER

(speaking)

It’s more of a rap, really. I’m not sure that the term dance is truly applicable.

Cast member looks over at him and silences him with a glare.

CAST MEMBER

Do you mind?

Sure, it’s in poor taste, but we’re really bored.

KINDERGARTEN STUDENT

I spent all day on my cardboard sword.

ART TEACHER

(Wearing a smock, and with brushes sticking out of the pockets of her apron.)

Hey, we did our best. They didn’t give us time for lesson plans!

STUFFY GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL (S.G.O.)

(Holding clipboard.)

Try to think of it as a long staycation.

GROWNUP or OLDER TEEN
(Wearing a Thomas the Tank Engine T-shirt or hat.)
 I've rediscovered Shining Time Station.

S.G.O.
(Convinced this means they are winning the argument.)
 There's plenty to do for this indoor stay.

PARENT
(Obviously exasperated)
 How much Dungeons and Dragons can one guy play?

TEEN or ADULT
(Wearing a D&D T-shirt.)
 This is going to make me such a babe magnet!
 [*Other cast members look at him in disbelief.*]

S.G.O.
 Do your best to have fun at home.

RANDOM SPEAKER
 I'm streaming all the seasons of Game of Thrones.
 For the remainder of the lockdown, please address me as Tyrian Lannister.

[*Kid who made the cardboard sword kneels near the speakers' feet and offers his sword on upturned palms.*]

ANNOUNCER
 There's no need for calendars, no need for clocks.

FAKE SCOT
(Who has obviously made his own kilt and speaks in a Scottish accent.)
 It's like falling through those Outlander rocks.

FEMALE
(With long curly hair.)
 I'm changing my name to Sassenach.

[*They exchange a smoldering glance she hold of her fingers in cell phone gesture, and mimes “call me”.*]

S.G.O.

Fight against boredom - just ignore your fear.

ANY AGE CAST MEMBER

I still wish Mr. Rogers were here.

ANNOUNCER

Fred Rogers was the creator of the popular public television show Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood, which ran 34 years, from 1968 to 2001. One of the things which made Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood groundbreaking in children’s entertainment was the separation of the fantasy and reality segments by the device of a model trolley, which took viewers back-and-forth to the Neighborhood of Make Believe.

CAST MEMBER

Who are you, Wikipedia?

ANNOUNCER

No, I’m just somebody with very few lines - look.

[*Holding up script.*]

I don’t even have a name in the script.

CAST MEMBER

Actually, I think it’s been very helpful for you to tell us about Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood.

MANY VOICES

Because everybody here feels like we’re in the Neighborhood of Make Believe!

How did it get started? It came from Wuhan.

I don’t care where it came from. I just want it gone.

PREACHY VOICE

Mr. Rogers would say that it doesn’t matter how it happened - now we all need to be kind neighbors and help each other.

[Cast stops to think about this looks at the person to the right and the person to the left and all say in unison.]

NAHH!

It's not so bad when it's cold outside.

But I'd like to grab my sled and go for a ride.

Or hit the ski slopes even on the bunny hill.

How many more months will it be until?

We can shop at the mall, go for pizza, catch a flick.

Hug all my family without worrying I'll get sick.

[Relatives on the other side of the stage hold up signs. 'Miss you. Love you.']

My kids will be stir crazy when the weather turns hot.

MANY VOICES

Who ever would have thought we'd be eager for a shot?

The rap beat ends. Actors scatter to set for next scene.

PAT/LEE, SCENE FIVE

Pat and Lee are on video chat; they hold up their phones and talk. On the screen, a watercolor of a scene – which they have both tried to paint – is displayed.

LEE

The online painting class was a great idea! I had a blast. How about you?

PAT

(obviously in a good mood)

Damn it felt good to be creative for a change. Do you mind that I just said damn?

LEE

Let's assume I know what that means. It's all good.

PAT

Ready for the big reveal?

LEE

Okay. Got your big thick granny glasses on?

PAT

(enjoying the banter)

Watch it, kid.

We'll hold them up at the same time: One, two – three!

Lee and Pat hold up two very bad paintings of what is supposed to be of the same scene. They look across the stage to “see” each other's work and collapse in laughter.

PAT

(with as much sincerity as possible)

It's great – Lee, it's great.

LEE

Nobody but you would say that Grandma.* Nobody but you.

PAT and LEE *together*
(*softly; suddenly realizing how much they mean to one another*)
Nobody but you.

PAT
Lee, do something for me.
Drop the “Grandma”* – just Pat. So few people call me Pat now. Can you do that?

LEE
Of course. Like a friend.

PAT
Like a friend.

PAT and LEE smile, end the call. They each hug their painting.

PAT/LEE, SCENE SIX

Another day. Pat and Lee are video chatting.

PAT

(obviously down; wearing a black armband)

Lee, hi. What's going on with you?

Lee picks up on Pat's vibe.

LEE

Black armband – what's going on? Who's dead?

PAT

You mean today?

Jo's buddy TJ. Funeral is today. 5 person limit. Even if I was allowed out of here I didn't make the cut – plenty of relatives didn't either. So I am just thinking about him.

LEE

I'm really sorry. Wish I could hug you right now.

PAT and LEE

(speaking together, in frustration)

This feels like forever!

PAT

(looking offstage in private thought)

Will I die before I see you again?

LEE

(looking offstage in private thought)

Will you die before I can see you to say how much you mean to me now?

PAT and LEE

(they look up, shout in unison)

It's not fair!

SONG- I Just Never Knew (sung to "It Had to be You")

Sung with a happy upbeat pace

LEE

I just never knew so much about you

The stories you told made you sound old

But there's more to you

You like Beatles' songs

And though it was wrong

Once you climbed on the stage to watch Ringo play

And you sang along

(spoken aside) I don't know who the Beatles were but this still sounds like a cool thing to do

PAT

I just never knew this much about you

You're named for Stan Lee and like karate

Do you like comic books too?

LEE

I like the art of Stan Lee, Marvel stuff, not DC

My favorite is Hulk, 'cause he doesn't sulk

I wish that were me

PAT and LEE *together*

We both like Stephen King

and like to be scared

You'd better prepare for next Halloween

notes change

We're more alike than I never knew

PAT

Now you're my friend

LEE

And you're my friend too

PAT and LEE *together*

We just never knew, we just never knew

I was so much like you

ROBIN/CHRIS, SCENE FIVE

Chris emails the students, who reply with thought – obviously growing older, if not wiser.

CHRIS

Hello to the class. As you know our teacher has decided to make this the year before retiring, and it is probably our fault. I hate this lockdown as much as anyone, but we still get grades. So, I have an idea so we can get through our book and maybe let our teacher know that we learned something. Open the file and tell me what you want to do. Keep the replies NICE please, because everyone can see them.

TAYLOR

Chris, as long as this doesn't interfere with my gaming, I'm in. Since my parents are online all day themselves, they stopped limiting my game time, and I am up to 16 hours a day on World of Warcraft.

(yawns)

DANI

(with a leg wrapped up and propped on a chair)

Chris, I can do some. My TikTok isn't going so well. I sprained my ankle doing The Floss. Maybe I'll game with Taylor instead. I also should try reading the book. Maybe.

NICK

Yes, I want to a whole lot. It's great you even found a way to include my little brother.

(looking offstage to SIBLING)

Hey, put that down! We are NOT going to play with Granpa's hatchet.

SAMI

Hey, guys. Yeah, I'll do it. And I need a favor.

Don't make jokes about me right now. My grandmom* Kelly was teaching me guitar when we went to the retirement home – teaches the other people who live there too. Remember when I played Red River Valley in the talent show? She* taught me that.

(takes a deep breath)

She*'s in the hospital because she* got the virus. We can't go see her* – the nurse holds up a tablet so we can wave to her. She*'s really sick.

The students put down their devices and slowly leave the stage.

ROBIN/CHRIS, SCENE SIX

A change of shirts (most easily done with open shirts over T's from prior scene) lets us know it is another day.

DANI

Finn, thanks for suggesting we get together for a few minutes every day just to take care of each other. How's it going everyone

TAYLOR

Well, we are dedicating our project to SAMI's Grandmom* –

SAMI

She*'s a little better. I played the guitar when the nurse had her on the tablet. Opened her* eyes and smiled.

NICK

I've been reading The Boxcar Children aloud.

KINDERGARTEN SIBLING

Did their parents get Covid?

PRESCHOOL SIBLING

Are there any pandas in that story?

FINN

No, the story is in a town, not a jungle. BUT if you can sit quiet for TEN WHOLE MINUTES, I will read some of the book to you.

PRESCHOOL SIBLING

AND get a lollipop?

FINN looks to ANNOUNCER for help – ANNOUNCER slides a bag of lollipops to him with a thumbs up gesture.

FINN

(in frustration)

Fine.

DANI

Well, if no one wants to share anything else –

Chris, you are awfully quiet.

CHRIS

I can't think of anything to say right now. I want to get on with our project. It's helping me to not feel so alone and maybe I will understand the book after all.

DANI

Hey, you can call any of us anytime. So, until next time –

TAYLOR

Take care of yourselves, everybody.

FINN

And remember we are all in this together.

CHRIS/SAMI/NICK/DANI

That really means something.

CHRIS

Something real.

RANDY/JAMIE SCENE FIVE

Randy signs on still in pajamas. He looks very frantic, clutching a Godzilla stuffed toy, squished and looking like it's a sleeping comfort companion.. Jamie comes in, also wearing pajamas and looking very groggy.*

JAMIE

What's going on?

RANDY

I have something I need to tell you.

JAMIE

Can't it wait? It's...

(looks at clock)

2:30 in the morning. I gotta get back to bed.

RANDY

This couldn't wait.

JAMIE

Okay. What's going on?

RANDY

You remember me telling you about my mom/dad* Kelly?

JAMIE

The guitar teacher? Sure. What about him/her*?

RANDY

She/he* got diagnosed with COVID. In the hospital. And I'm emergency contact, so I had to give consent for the intubation – just don't know what will happen next.

JAMIE

What? Oh, I'm so sorry.

RANDY

Sorry to have to wake you up in the middle of the night, but I just really wanted to talk to somebody about it.

JAMIE

Not that I don't appreciate this connection, but you also have close to 500 friends on Facebook. You couldn't have just told any of them?

RANDY

I don't even know a lot of them personally, and the ones I do contact often are largely extended family members and people I knew when I was in school. But I really just wanted to talk with you. Turns out – you're my person.

JAMIE

(stunned)

Oh. Well, I'm sorry to hear about Kelly.

RANDY

Me too. Have you given any more thought about what Ryan said?

JAMIE

Yeah. That's one thing about working there I really don't like. Who says two people dating can't work at the same company? That's so unfair.

RANDY

I know, but you know how stubborn Ryan can be. I do think he has a point, though. It could lead to us having some unfair advantages.

JAMIE

Oh my gosh Randy!

RANDY

Sorry.

JAMIE

I don't want to have to part ways with you because of this. I've always liked working with you and seeing you every week.

RANDY

Yeah. Me too.

JAMIE

(laughing slightly while reminiscing)

Remember when we first met at the community college?

RANDY

Yeah. We were both taking multiple foreign language classes. You were taking French, Italian, Russian, Latin, and Korean.

JAMIE

You were taking Spanish, Japanese, Russian. We never could decide where to go eat.

RANDY

I was thinking.

JAMIE

Yeah?

RANDY

I actually kind of prefer working from home now.

JAMIE

Really?

RANDY

Yeah. It gives me more time to clean my place, make sure Mothra is taken care of. When this lockdown is over, I'll get to socialize with my neighbors a lot more – work on my social skills, maybe. I don't have timed lunch or coffee breaks. It's a good fit for me.

JAMIE

Yeah. I've kind of been doing everything you said you were doing. I prefer this too.

RANDY

I'm sure we're not the only ones either. Alex and Casey both have kids, and they'd probably like to spend more time with the

JAMIE

I think we should have a Zoom meeting just between us and them. We'll have to tell Ryan later.

RANDY

Right. Well, I know it's early, so I'll let you get back to sleep.

RANDY AND JAMIE

Good night.

They both sign off.

Fifth reset scene

ANNOUNCER continues his newscaster role.

ANNOUNCER

Time once again for an installment in our Covid Quack Cures series. We are bringing you this report for two reasons: one, silly cures continue to sap the funds of citizens. Two, I've had nothing to do for a while now and I deserve some lines.

Masked cast members are now going down the aisles with kegs of sanitizer in wagons.

ANNOUNCER

Viewers are warned against the cures which are advertising online, and containing the following words:

Cleanse

Ointment

Spirit

Aura

And, most importantly,

(ANNOUNCER shudders)

Drilling into the skill.

Not only are these cures a waste of money – but they are really icky.

While hand sanitizer is offered from kegs, song is sung

Four little rules

Don't drill holes in your head

Your aura will not turn red

Just use hand sanitizer

Wash your hands and stay home

RANDY/JAMIE SCENE SIX

Randy, Jamie, Alex, and Casey are in front of their screens. Casey is wearing a ball cap and is holding a large package of toilet paper. Alex just an undershirt and PJ pants and looks like he just got out of bed.

ALEX

It's 8:15, guys. Normally, I'm still asleep at that hour on a Saturday.

JAMIE

Sorry, Alex, I wanted us to get an early start.

CASEY

I've been up since 6 -- finding more places to stash my toilet paper.

JAMIE

Shall we?

ALEX

Yeah, let's get started.

JAMIE

So, earlier this week, Randy and I came up with the idea of having all of us be working from home from now on.

Everyone is silent for a bit.

CASEY

You serious about this?

JAMIE

Yeah. There are some great benefits to working from home when you get down to it.

RANDY

It saves a lot of gas money from constant commuting...

JAMIE

You can take the extra time to do other work around your place...

RANDY

You two can spend more time with your families...

ALEX

I got a feeling I'll be making pancakes for the kids more often...

RANDY

It won't be cramped like being in a cubicle for 8 or 9 hours...

CASEY

I never really liked those anyway...

Alex holds up his hands. Everyone stops talking.

ALEX

Wait, what about Ryan? Does he know about this?

JAMIE

We were thinking of telling him later today.

ALEX

What do you think he'll say? He may not like the idea.

RANDY

I don't think we gave that much thought.

JAMIE

I did – and I'm running the financials to prove that it will save the company money – we will have to develop a good pitch.

CASEY

We should talk to him about this and see what he thinks – if he says yes I know what all of you are getting for Christmas.

(holding up rolls of toilet paper)

ALEX

Only one way to see. But I personally really like the idea. I think the way desk work is done will never be the same after the lockdown.

EVERYONE

Nothing will.

All sign off except RANDY and JAMIE.

RANDY

Went better than I thought it would.

JAMIE

I'm giving Ryan credit with us for the idea – however it works out we are in this together.

RANDY

That was gutsy. Did you get the bread I sent?

JAMIE *(laughing)*

Yup – Jasmine loves her new scratching post.

RANDY

Ouch.

JAMIE

That's what I said when I bit into it.

MORGAN/FRANCIS SCENE FIVE

MORGAN is muffled under the mask.

FRANCIS

I can't hear you. Could you take the mask off?

Morgan takes off the mask, showing she has marks and bruises on her face from the mask.

FRANCIS

What happened to you? You got bruise marks all over your lower face.

MORGAN

The mask has to be worn tight. Admin is trying ones that are slightly looser so I can talk better with them on. The new rules are we can't take the mask off unless we're in our sleep quarters. Everyone at work looks like this right now.

FRANCIS

Does it hurt?

MORGAN

A little. At least we get fresh ones every day now – last week we were told to leave them in our cars for two days so they would be reusable.

FRANCIS

What sense did that make?

MORGAN

We never knew.

FRANCIS

I'm still kind of having trouble breathing when I need to wear one in public – like going to the library to pick up those books at the window.

MORGAN

I know it's hard having to wear a mask when you go out. Some politicians are even saying we don't need them at all.

FRANCIS (*shocked*)

What?

MORGAN

I know it sounds crazy, but it's true. They're saying we don't need them at all and this whole virus is just a hoax concocted by the politicians. Some are even saying that it's a plot from overseas.

FRANCIS

I don't even think the mayor from Jaws would've stooped to something that low. – Sorry, been watching some classic movies after school.

MORGAN

Now we are blaming bats instead of sharks.

One of my colleagues is a Chinese American, and he's starting to get death threats because people believe he and anyone even looking Chinese are responsible. His family came to the US in the 1880s.

FRANCIS

Can we change the subject please? This is making me feel uncomfortable right now.

MORGAN

I don't blame you a bit, honey.

I gotta go now. I'll talk to you again tonight.

FRANCIS

See you then.

(speaking thoughts aloud)

Time to grow up – maybe make a difference.

Grabs some laundry on the floor and starts folding

MORGAN/FRANCIS Scene Six

FRANCIS is skyping with SAL.

SAL

It's so hard being away. How are you two doing?

FRANCIS

I'm scared, and I'm worried.

SAL

About what?

FRANCIS

Our own world leaders don't know what's happening. Some are disagreeing with doctors. I've been hearing people saying if you drink bleach-

SAL

(shouting)

Don't do that.

FRANCIS

I know that. It's just that everything is so out of control now.

SAL

Well, if you're worried, imagine what it's like to be in the hospital day in and day out with all of this going on?

FRANCIS

I know. That's what I'm worried about. Every time I get an update, we talk about all the people. My friend Kelly who teaches guitar is there now. Bobby from my D&D group is there now. I heard about the woman who was a hospital volunteer and always brought cookies for the monthly birthdays, or the man who dresses as a clown and makes balloon animals in the kid's ward. Even a nurse got COVID and got really sick. I'm trying to stay strong but I can't even turn on the TV without hearing about it. It's everywhere.

(becoming more ramped up)

One of my teachers had a baby and the baby had a problem. No one could even go to the hospital to help or see her. She was all alone.

SAL

Remember when you were little, and we watched Mr. Rogers every weekend? What would he say whenever something bad happened?

FRANCIS

(sarcastically)

Look for the helpers.

SAL

And now that you're old enough, *you* are the helpers. Doing something will make you feel more in control. So what can you do to be that helper?

FRANCIS

Thinking about Kelly and how he* taught me to play, I've been thinking about organizing something the whole block could do.

SAL

Great, what were you thinking?

FRANCIS

A porch concert. I found a news story about a couple kids who did a cello concert for a quarantining neighbor and wanted to try something similar.

SAL

I think that's swell. You could play something on your guitar.

FRANCIS

I was thinking of having everyone play Ode to Joy – Beethoven's Ninth. It's pretty easy, it's written in C, and you can play it on anything. Both the Chang girls play violin, Devi Maisel plays the flute, Gab Patel is pretty good on the recorder. I could put out a flyer with my email to

see if anyone else wants to play. Shel from my D&D group offered to live stream it for anyone who feels they don't want to go outside.

SAL

That's an incredible idea but it's a long piece. You sure you can handle it?

FRANCIS

I've been practicing on my guitar when I wasn't doing school stuff online. I just have part of the last section to master.

SAL

That's one piece of good news for me today.

FRANCIS

What happened?

SAL

One of my shipmates lost a parent to COVID this week.

FRANCIS

That makes seven people we know so far.

SAL

I was hoping it would be the last.

FRANCIS

I've been keeping a record of the patients the hospital lost and people we know. Who was this one?

SAL

Carol Desmond. Her father was a young 73. He taught her everything she knows about sailing.

FRANCIS

That makes her, Jerry Sanders, Mel Chamberlain, Tim Peterson, Jenn Gilbert, Les O'Malley, and Bri Harrison. Didn't you know Bri?

SAL

Bri was a year behind me in college. We were in the same chemistry class with Professor Mercer. Funny, smarter than me.

FRANCIS

I'm so sorry. My friend Bobby should be cleared to go home either tomorrow or the next day.

SAL

Whew. Great.

FRANCIS

I know. It's gotta be no fun having COVID.
What's it like for you when you lose someone you know to it?

SAL

(trying to find a way to explain it)

Well, we have to notify their families about what happened, of course. We also gather to remember them. It's toughest on the captain because he has to break the news. Sometimes we can celebrate that someone made it home. Mostly it's about being here for each other right now. Sometimes I feel guilty for not being there with you two and then that's the time I need my mates the most. It used to be just something you said, that we were like family, but it's really true now.

FRANCIS

Captain has to do that for Carol.

SAL

Please send me an invite so I can join the concert on Zoom. I'll try to broadcast it on the ship if I can.

FRANCIS

Thanks. I'd give anything to see any of them right now.

SAL

Talk to you soon.

FRANCIS

Love you so much.

PAT/LEE, SCENE SEVEN

PAT

(reading an email to be sent)

Dear Lee,

I'm so sorry I upset you during our chat today. I hope the time we spend together is a break from the news, but I know today that didn't happen.

Obviously, one day it will be your turn to be old. I hope that you attack that time with the same humor and spirit you've always brought to your life.

This is a challenging time for everyone, and especially for people older or on their own. Every day, it seems, we get an announcement over the intercom reminding us to keep our doors shut. Then we hear the wheels of a gurney coming down the hall, and it means someone else is going to the hospital for COVID. I only met these people a couple times before quarantine started but I still want to know about them and don't want to keep my door shut. It feels like I'm ignoring what's happening. So I opened my door and saw Kelly on the stretcher, something in me changed.. Kelly saw me and I waved, and smiled back. We only met once at a beginner's guitar class. Just teaching anyone who wanted to learn, and we started with a favorite old song, "Red River Valley". So when I saw Kelly on the stretcher, I suddenly just started singing it, and I heard more people up and down the hall singing it too, and suddenly I didn't feel as lonely anymore. So I shouted "let's do that whenever someone goes by. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm not going to shut my door anymore. I'm going to sing 'Red River Valley!' Anyone who wants to sing along is free to do that too."

I hope this story isn't too depressing for you, but it did make me feel like I was doing something to take a stand in the name of life and hope. Thank you for being someone I can talk to about all of this. It really has been a gift because of how well I got to know you and I want to make sure you know I feel that. If COVID hadn't happened, we may have been too busy for each other. You really made this hard time into a good time, and I really love you for doing that for me.

Signed,

Pat

LEE

(reading an email to be sent as the reply, and having a hard time)

Dear Pat,

Don't you know there is a shortage of toilet paper AND tissues? So now you send me an email that makes me cry? Smooth.

Actually, I was going to send you kind of the same email you sent to me. It seems like I never saw you before we were both locked down. I knew you were there but only in a kind of “everybody’s got a grandma*” sort of a way. I feel very lucky I got to know you as Pat.

You are probably frightened that the next wheels in the hallway are going to be for you – I hope it doesn’t scare you to have me say that. It sure scares me. But if it does happen, it would have been a big problem if I had missed the chance to be friends the way we are now.

What you have given me is the chance to look at people for just people – not old or young, but for what’s inside and how we are the same. I don’t have to become a doctor or President to take what you taught me and change the world. Knowing you has already changed the world for me. Please, don’t go anywhere until we get the chance to spend some time together **IN THE SAME ROOM**. If you hear the wheels in the hallway coming to your room, just hide until they go by.

I’m glad to know what a trouble maker you are – that’s definitely something we have in common. And I love you a whole, whole lot.

ANNOUNCER takes out a large bandana and loudly blows nose, wipes eyes.

PAT/LEE, SCENE EIGHT

Headline on the screen – mask mandates relaxed; social contact starting to get back to normal.

Pat and Lee are on video chat, holding up their phones. They are interrupted in midsentence.

PAT

... YES, it is great to leave this space! And I have started to make a few friends. It's a new start for a lot of us.

Hang on – someone's knocking at my door.

PAT opens the door. LEE, still holding up the phone, stands there – holding a tomato plant in a macrame plant holder – obviously handmade.

LEE and PAT embrace.

LEE

I got here as soon as I could.

PAT

(joking)

Oh? What kept you?

LEE

(holding up the plant and the holder)

The plant holder took a while. Turns out it's easier when you have another set of hands to work the more complicated knots.

PAT

(very surprised)

You made that?

LEE

Dang no! Got it off Etsy. I didn't want the tomato plant to fall and break.

They hug again.

LEE

So, let me take you down to lunch – I want to meet some of your new friends.

PAT

And I want them to meet my BEST friend.

They walk offstage arm in arm. ANNOUNCER stands and silently pumps a victory gesture.

ROBIN/CHRIS, SCENE SEVEN

ROBIN

This certainly is unusual. Never had students schedule an extra lesson before.

DANI

We decided to do our final presentation as a group project. We figured this was the best way for you to see it.

ROBIN

Ok. Let's see what you all did as a class, probably the first thing you've done together all semester.

The students get everything together. KINDERGARTEN SIBLING gets paper bag puppet on one hand.

SAMI

And now, presented by the Peregrine reading group students of Robin Hayfer's English class at Townsend Middle School, the world premiere of the song *Hatchet*. We would also like to dedicate this song to my grandmother* Kelly, who is close to recovering from COVID and who also taught me to play the guitar, which I will be playing for this song.

While SAMI is playing, the KINDERGARTEN SIBLING is moving his paper bag puppet to the words of the song and other younger siblings are holding up cardboard hatchets.

SAMI starts, others take turns with lyrics

Brian Robeson went up in an airplane

Younger kids make airplane noises.

But the landing did not go as planned

Younger kids make crash noises.

All he had was his mind and a hatchet

Younger kids hold cardboard hatchets higher.

To survive in a wild and strange land

Younger kids hold up wild stuffed animals and make animal noises, not always appropriate.

So he learned how to fish and make fires

Kids make fish casting motions with arms.

How to hunt for small birds and big game

Kids make bow and arrow gestures and pretend to shoot.

And when finally Brian was rescued

Younger kids cheer.

He went home but was never the same

He had faced all his fears and had triumphed

For each setback he made a new plan

He crashed in the woods as a scared kid

But he ended the trip as a man

Kids make Superman poses.

Last lines are sung by all

When adventures turn into disasters

Or you crash land and can't fix the plane

Kids hold up foam gliders, missing a wing or tail.

Remember you are your best asset

Don't panic, stay brave, use your brain

Kids hold up "don't panic" signs.

SAMI plays the last note and everyone bows. ROBIN is in stunned silence for a little while.

ROBIN

Wow. That was amazing. Whose idea was it to do your project this way.

NICK

It was Chris's.

ROBIN

Chris?

CHRIS

Yeah, I tried to envision it as a movie in my mind and I found I got more into it that way.

ROBIN

Glad you found a way to complete the book and this assignment. As some of you know, I originally planned to retire after the end of this school year, but now I think I want to continue teaching. You've all clearly put a lot of work into it. I hope other students I teach do something as creative.

KINDERGARTEN SIBLING

So, I'll get to have you as my teacher when I'm older?

NICK

You should probably plan to retire before that happens.

RANDY/JAMIE SCENE SEVEN

Randy and Jamie sign onto the session. Ryan jumps in not long after.

RYAN

You wanted to talk to me about something?

RANDY

Yes. It's about something Jamie and I came up with and discussed with everybody else, but we would like your approval.

RYAN

Hit me. Whatcha got?

RANDY

We talked about it with everybody else, and we think it's in everyone's best interests if we make the switch to working from home permanent.

JAMIE

We're a pretty small company anyway and we think...

RYAN

You all agreed on this and didn't go to me first?

JAMIE

I ran the financials and I've sent them to upper management – quite a savings! I did it under your name and mine because I knew you would want to take credit for a great idea.

RYAN

Well, I'm speechless.

ANNOUNCER *holding up sign which reads*

That's a first.

RANDY/JAMIE, SCENE EIGHT

Both are wearing blazers, a change from their usual casual clothes

RANDY

You look swift! What's the occasion?

JAMIE

Had to take a selfie for the website – got promoted to Randy's job. Say hello to the new VP for translation services. And best news yet – because I shared credit with Ryan he got bumped upstairs too – Special Project Development.

RANDY

So Randy is the new Head of Manuals for Morons; does that mean Head Moron?

JAMIE

Assistant to the Head Moron; still needs some training.

You're looking pretty snazzy, too. How did the interview go?

RANDY

Offered me the job – I am now the translator for the Godzilla movie franchise! Or will be as soon as I file my union application tonight. Going to give Randy my notice in 4 languages. And that's not all ...

RANDY holds up a loaf of bread shaped like a dinosaur

The studio wants to sponsor my bread baking podcast – we are call it “Early Riser!” We'll be doing it in English AND Japanese – Japanese speaking cultures are really getting into bread baking!

JAMIE *(laughing)*

Oh gosh – the Bread That Ate Toyko!

RANDY

(doing his Japanese film-dubbing bit)

Join me for the magic of breadmaking – and watch your flower grow.

His lips move after his voice stops

JAMIE laughs so hard she falls off the yoga ball.

RANDY and JAMIE roll up their blazer sleeves, pop their collars and get ready for the song.

SONG: *Love in Translation*

Tune: “Let me call you sweetheart”

[ANNOUNCER is ready to hold up signs with language and English translation – with hats or props representing country of language where available]

JAMIE and RANDY take turns with lines

Our friendship had just started

When the lock down came

For months we saw each other

Just in tablet frames

When this strange time’s over

What will be the same?

Is it friendship – is more coming?

Does it need a name?

ANNOUNCER holds up sign

The remainder of this song is brought to you by Google Translate

Let me call you *liebbling*

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Tyrolean hat

German for “darling”

Or *mon cher ami*

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing beret

French for “my dear friend”

Who knows ojo iwaju

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Nigerian gele scarf

Youruba for “the future”

We must wait and see

We’ll spend some more time saman

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Viking horns

Icelandic for “together”

And what will be, will be

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing 60’s blonde flip hairstyle wig

Doris Day for “que sera, sera”

Are we meant to be forever?

Tal vez “no” o “si”

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing matador hat

Spanish for “maybe no or yes”

When temnaya noch frightens

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Russian kokoshnik hat

Russian for “dark night”

I whisper your name

The thought of you’s anesi

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Greek tapla hat

Greek for “comfort”

Yes, I feel the same

Is planning for ashita

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Japanese bamboo cone shaped hat

Japanese for “tomorrow”

Too risky a game?

Both friendship and love -- tesoro

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing Venetian boatman’s straw hat with dangling ribbons

The loss would be a shame

ANNOUNCER, overwhelmed and with props littering the area, holds up sign – no hat

Wrap it up you two!

[coda]

Happiness takes muzhnist

ANNOUNCER holds up sign – wearing traditional kubanka or folk dress hat

Ukranian for “courage”

And to dare to change

ANNOUNCER holds up sign

So the rhyme’s not perfect – get over it.

[unison]

Something great is waiting

I feel it just offstage ...

RANDY and JAMIE are looking at one another with anticipation; they reach but can’t touch.

RANDY

Starting Monday small groups are okay in restaurants. Want to celebrate over dinner?

JAMIE

Anything but sourdough.

MORGAN/FRANCIS SCENE SEVEN

FRANCIS has as guitar next to seat. SAL and MORGAN sign in. Morgan is overwhelmed and close to exhaustion.

MORGAN

I've heard so much about the concert you planned, hon. How did it go?

FRANCIS

Great. Almost the whole block came out on their porches for it. Even some people from the blocks next to us came out to see it – blankets or chairs on the sidewalk and lawns, and taking phone videos.

FRANCIS

We got the Chang sisters, the Maisels, Gab Patel, Billy Sanchez on cello, Eric Cohen on trombone, Lea Schmidt on trumpet, Josh Kupnitz on the bongos – bunch of kids on recorders.

(trying not to laugh)

We even got Eddie Norgay to play it on the theremin.

MORGAN

(surprised)

Where did he get a theremin?

FRANCIS

Second hand on Let Go. He wanted one ever since he saw Sheldon play it on The Big Bang Theory. The musicians spread out on the porch and six feet apart on the lawn and steps.

While he's talking, members of the orchestra pit come on to play and people from other scenes come on stage with folding chairs or blankets to be the audience, having to sit distanced. They softly play "Ode to Joy" while MORGAN and SAL watch. Those watching respond with the ASL gesture for applause.

SAL

Francis and I both have an internet link for it. One of us will send it to you to watch when you get the chance. Captain gave permission for me to live stream and for me to post the link on the ship's site. Your performance might be seen all around the world.

FRANCIS

(after a breath)

Wow. I...didn't think it would have this big an outreach.

MORGAN

I wanted to tell you two. Kelly got better and could go home tomorrow. But I want to hear more about the concert right now. This is the first time I've had to myself all day, so I never got to live stream it until just before the call.

FRANCIS

I've been working on one more thing and since I have you both on the call, I wanted to show you.

FRANCIS holds up a collage he made with pictures of their friends and neighbors and people Sal knows on the ship and everyone they know.

MORGAN

(in disbelief)

Wow. You made this yourself?

SAL

This is everyone we know?

FRANCIS

(pointing to each person as he describes who they are)

Yeah. Over here's Kelly with the guitar. Here's Bobby trying to see how many Cheetos he can fit in his mouth. Over here's the woman who always makes cookies for the hospital workers. Here's the clown at the children's ward. My teacher and her new baby. The Changs; the Maisels; the Patels; the Sanchezs; the Cohens; the Schmidts; the Kupnitzs; the Norgays; Dani. Here's Carol Desmond and her family. Jerry Sanders, Melissa Chamberlain, Tim Peterson, Jenn Gilbert, Rob O'Malley, Bridget Harrison.

SAL

Wow. You got everybody on here.

FRANCIS

I tried to. It was hard to find a piece of posterboard big enough to fit all of them.

MORGAN

You remembered all of them?

FRANCIS

Of course I did. They were important to all of us. They needed to be remembered.

There's a long moment of silence while SAL and MORGAN fight for self control.

SAL

I didn't know you could do something like that.

FRANCIS

Well, I did do one more thing if you have another minute.

SAL and FRANCIS

Sure.

FRANCIS picks up a guitar. If the actor does not play, orchestra member sits behind him and plays the tune while FRANCIS sings.

FRANCIS

I wrote this myself. It's for the hospital workers and people who can't be with their families right now.

SEEING A HERO

sung to the tune of Greensleeves

It's as though I've never seen you before
The mask has left your face bruised and sore
charging into this fight with all your might
Joining the ranks of the heroes

When we talk I just don't know what to say
 - still angry that you have to stay away
 Don't complain - and always say I'm okay
 You have hard work to do as a hero

Notes progression changes to bridge

scrubs as your armor, you fight without rest
 No break, little sleep - you give them your best
 You battle the darkness - your strength is their light
 Walking into their room as a hero

You make the time to know them well -
 The names of their loved ones, the stories they tell
 You open your heart - you're a listening ear
 That is the job of a hero

Progression change to bridge again

I want you to know how I see you now -
 I look for a way but I don't know
 So this my way to try to say
 I want you to know you're my hero

SAL and MORGAN are wiping tears from their eyes. ANNOUNCER stands and does the silent applause ASL gesture.

FRANCIS

I know I don't always show or say it, but I do love you guys.

(pause)

Does this mean I get a car on my 16th birthday?

SAL and FRANCIS

(shouting together)

No.

FINALE

The cast lines up onstage. We hear the ANNOUNCER as newscaster, and see the headline on the screen

EVERY NIGHT NEW YORKERS SAY THANKS TO HEALTH CARE WORKERS

ANNOUNCER

At 7pm every evening, New York residents open their windows, get on roofs and balconies, and make some noise to thank health care workers for fighting the pandemic. Babies everywhere in the city are off their nap schedules.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

With grateful hearts, we remember everyone who went about their daily business and found a way in our communities to help others. We are indeed the free and unconquerable people of the United States of America.

ANNOUNCER

So, take these noisemakers and – at the end of our final song – join us in this symbolic thank you.

Music swells – cast members hand out wooden spoons and aluminum pans.

This reprise of “Lockdown March” is the curtain call

Quarantine

You were mean

And the strangest of times ever seen

But now it’s all over

[kids call to friends] “hey come on over!”

[Adults calling] “Hope you’re better now!” “How’ve you been!”

TEACHERS: Back to school

And classroom rules

ROBIN: my kids gave me new teaching tools

[her students] It was weird and funny

SAMY: and I'm still hungry

NICK and KINDERGARTEN SIBLING and I discovered I love you!

[PRESCHOOL SIBLING – still using the puppet] me too!

MORGAN A few are gone

FRANCIS

(holding up his poster) Their dreams live on

SAL

(surprising MORGAN and FRANCIS by coming to them, returned from deployment)

I salute you both for all you've done

FRANCIS

(turns his poster sign to the back which reads "Semper Fi – Welcome Home!")

Here's to fighters in scrub caps

Who worked with no rest gaps

(pointing to orchestra pit to thank them)

And to all you who played that Beethoven

(pronounced as Bey toe vahn – ORCHESTRA MEMBERS shout out)

Hey, we had to make it rhyme!

JAMIE

We do not know
If romance will grow

RANDY (*finally offering a decent loaf of bread*)

But for now we can eat and see a show

ZOOM CO WORKERS

We threw out our PJs
But still Zoom on work days
(*one holds up several large Amazon boxes*)
I bought all this stuff I gotta stow!

PAT

Our doors flung wide we go outside

LEE We show off our vaccine scars with pride
ALL pull up sleeves to show bandaids on upper arms

PAT

When Kelly started singing
I heard church bells ringing

KELLY

And Red River Valley's now our song!

SAMI, *watching them hug*

That's gross!

[stage crew takes their bows]

We found new ways

To spend the days

[VERMONT CHILDREN'S THEATER line]

Didn't even use the barn to do our plays

(tempo slows to military march; cast sings in unison while Eleanor Roosevelt directs audience to use their spoons and pans; cast sings in unison while final words display on screen)

We claim the victory

And we made history

We all worked together to survive the quarantine!

Wooden spoons and aluminum pans are the noisemakers over applause

-END-