

Visitations



a play
by
Isidro Ulises



LA HOSTIA, INC.

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We are made for art, we are made for memory, we are made for poetry, or perhaps we are made for oblivion. But something remains, and that something is history or poetry, which are not essentially different.

— Jorge Luis Borges



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for
ISABEL and DOLT



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Introduction

Page Six of *Wayward Herder Magazine's* June 1994 Arts Edition boasts *Visitations'* earliest in-print mention: "Local Weirdos Act Out What They're Living" by Donald Crous. In it, he details what he considers "a family's backstory as acted out by an actual family of the most unlikely unions," but only mentions the play itself once: "I don't get it. I left at the first intermission. Don't believe the hype" (Crous, 1994, p. 7).

Two months later, *On Kilter Almanac* published the first criticism of *Visitations*, entitled "The Hem and Haw of Nü-Drama," by Howley Dowlan. It opens with a demand: "Seriously, who really wrote this?" then builds to the writer's pioneering concept: "A father, a mother, their son, and what else?" you flip to the next page: "The answer, for now," he writes, "is 'Nothing'" (Dowlan, 1994, pp. 17–18).

But that's not accurate. The "what else" is the reason that the reader should care: The stories and the details, how they came to life on page just as much as in the theater.

As Jamson noted, the play evolved over the years:

"Somehow, a play about itself, which charts the success and backstory of the play, evolved. I'm at a loss for words as to how. How can a play this self-referential even begin to take form? And what does this say about art, if every part of the process is forcefully manufactured? What's next, voyeuristic television shows featuring ordinary, even uninteresting, people living banal lives? Afraid not, won't ever happen. Mark my words: The 2000s will be good for art, especially television and stage." (Jamson, 1996, p. 201).

Of course, much of the disdain directed at the play is a result of its not really being a play at all. It's hard to say *what* it is. I've seen it performed, many times, and each time the performance was different, although the animating idea always remains: Life is problematic, often devastating, but the good outweighs the bad.

While little is known about Isidro Ulises' life, myth about the man has taken on a life of its own. Entire PhD dissertations have pondered the elusiveness of the man himself in relation to *Visitations*, his only published artwork of any kind.

Debuting in Madrid, shortly after the fall of General Francisco Franco, the play had none of the preachy dramatics that often follow such liberation. Instead, it was a work of science fiction, capturing an American future that proved to be devastatingly accurate, although, it's been rewritten so many times that it's often hard to tell what the script originally looked like. There are obvious exceptions, e.g. the inclusions of ESPN and HIV, to name a few, not to mention a nearly-laughable Ulises' obvious ignorance of the most basic facts about HIV, which could just as easily be the result of 1980s hysteria surrounding the disease. Which is to say that the play is riddled with baffling contradictions and vacuums of logic.

As I see it, the play demands its audience to succumb to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's view of imagination in *Biographia Literaria*:

"It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."

(1817, Ch. XIV)

The maddening appeal of *Visitations* is its evasiveness, both as a piece of literature and as a phenomenon of the stage, especially with regard to the mysteries surrounding the subject matter itself, right down to whether or not any of the folklore is true, the uncertainty regarding who involved actually exists, and the coy satire at work, which I argue aims to disprove the Nihilism of defeatism and pomposity and nihilism found in the dramatic words of Pirandello and Sartre, and the intentional absurdity of Beckett. Strikingly, the style of Isidro Ulises, a native of Spain, has the markings of an American playwright. Which is not to say that *Visitations* can be studied alongside the work of, say, Eugene O’Neil. For all the play’s hyper-realism, there’s as much irreality and play, as if Ulises had no choice but to use all the postmodern bells and whistles.

From the opening scene, we’re left scratching our heads. The play begins with an explanation of how the play became well-known. How is that even possible? The meta-levels are dizzying. Is it a joke, presumably on us, the readers and viewers? I have argued that the play’s greatest strength is perhaps the bizarre humor that undergirds nearly every scene, every word, and which most critics and experts, unfortunately, have overlooked. I’ll let you decide for yourself.

— Kevin Ryan

VISITATIONS

ORIGINAL CAST
AUGUST 23, 1979
MADRID

THE GHOST	.....	<i>Isidro Ulises</i>
THE BOY	.....	<i>Dolt Cameron</i>
THE FATHER	.....	<i>Jawad Ulises</i>
THE MOTHER	.....	<i>Isabel Paloma</i>
ROOMATES	.....	<i>Offstage</i>
FATHER 2	.....	<i>Tarl Paloma</i>
MOTHER 2	.....	<i>Katter Wallh Proude</i>
FATHER 3	.....	<i>Ashran Proude</i>
MOTHER 3	.....	<i>Marianne Paloma</i>
DOCTOR	.....	<i>Radi Paloma</i>
DAUGHTER	.....	<i>Katter Ulises</i>
BOYFRIEND	.....	<i>Butch Proude</i>
THE MAN	.....	<i>Isidro Ulises</i>

ACT ONE

[That day had nothing to it. People needed stuff to do! The city around them, the city that they never much amounted to — their city — shook with boredom. This was New York. Consider how unbearable the power-outages made being indoors. Something to do with blizzards. Rooms stank with humidity, the heat of constant yawn, the shrug of nervous collars. People wandered the streets. They noticed the girl. She stood out as she strode beneath the canopy, wondering how a thing like silence can break, can even ever happen. Which is how a few stragglers wound up in the theater that night, and became The Play's first ever crowd. Now they're always there. A mob of them! The earliest, most un-camcordered performances were curbside, park-benched, or, sometimes, glimpsed from barn-rafter. Always with that same threadbare rostrum and its peasantried décor: An arena of ornaments the penniless family had, over the course of a lame decade, accumulated from the discards of backroom and dumpster in order to heap-tall this wye-daven playhouse, this last auditorium, this stammered glass-jar. How, in their penury and stagecraft, they platformed a deck out of sewn-together bedspreads held down by cinderblock. They erected a many-roomed, alterable scenery from rigid, smellsomeless bathtowels and nightly-wefted cardboard. Photocopied jewelry shone atop inflatable dresser. A sunset roiled outside the thatchwork of window on the corkboard backdrop Lurksome theatergoers that rise from padded chairs, a sparrowlike assemblage, who clap when spotlight radishes in and boo when the power winnows, lanterning deciduous — an unsyllabled people — turning faceward, unable to pull themselves away as the curtain opens to a boy on a junk-tangled stage.]

Nothing came of the boy, alone in his room, until Friday at dawn. He woke up early and waited, slumped on his trash-covered bed until the mother came in. The floor was so littered with junk and clothing she had to crawl to get to him.

“It's time to go,” she said.

The boy said nothing.

“What if we stop by the toy store on the way home?”

To this, he howled and sped off, leaving his mother alone.

She looked at the boy's mess as daylight sank into the room.

In the kitchen, the boy stared at the side of the toaster, giggling at his warped reflection.

Who knew what the boy was chapleted by — daydreamness, maybe. It was “any-old guess,” the mother would say, whether he was ever even a listening type.

He mostly just collected toy police cars.

All throughout his churlish gnat of a bunkspace, these rubberized, engineless vehiculations made furnishment atop unbooked shelving, disengagedly like a shodless backwater reliquary or old-timey pawnshop.

He had it in his head that what you were meant to do at toys is stare.

*

By age seven, he began the mistook notion that real-life police cars were themselves also playthings. Bumper-cars roofed with candy-strobic lights.

If one came into view, unmanned or mid-highway, the boy would squeal. On occasion, the boy's delight caught cops' attention.

For the father, this was bad. It could reveal his own "legal shortcomings" — expired tags, faulty plating, shoddy brakelights, unpaid tax-forms: the stuff that adds up.

*

One such time, after the vacant routine of "registration and license, please," the officer, a highwayman with many-buckled leather boots up to his thighs and a cowboy hat and a mouth full of tobacco, ordered the father to "step the fuck up out of the car."

The boy clapped from the passenger seat.

"What is this all about," asked the father, "I haven't done a thing."

"Sir, you haven't registered with the county as a sex offender."

"I'm not a sex offender," he shouted, then lowered his brow.

"My info doesn't lie," said the officer, "You've also got a small boy with you, and that's a violation of your parole."

The father pled with the son: "Tell him, son! Tell him I'm your father."

For months after his release, the father waited for an apology by mail. When it arrived, he felt better, even put it in a frame and hanged it:

Dear Valued Citizen,

As your mayor I apologize for the misdeeds of one of our town's law enforcement officials. Know that the guilty individual will be punished justly.

Regards,

Mayor Luton Olish

Mayor Olish was never re-elected, had some legal shortcomings of his own; and eventually the letter fell behind something, what exactly the father would never care to guess.

*

Call the father's approach to life "half-tried."

His job as head nurse at the clinic fooled most everyone, as did the coaching job at a local Salvation Army, but in real-time he got sloppy as soon as he got home from work. A caparison of vine in lieu of perfect satin.

It's no crime to sit and wait, he (at the start of each pallor of day) would remind the mirror's drab reminder, winking as he uniformed himself (usually in egg-pink scrubs and oversized nonslip-sneakers), bristling, secretly, with the dens of a mind that fell constantly outbid.

Looking sharp, he told his reflection, go out and get it.

He imagined hallways of empty space inside himself, libarily-muted hollows that life fissured into his plentitude.

Then, from 8:30, when he started his car, to 18:00, when he returned home, he put these thoughts away, exchanged them for smiles, and wit, and well-rehearsed laughter.

People loved the man he was in these hours.

*

Limp-spined and poorly ribbed, he, each night, relied on the mother to strip him bare by the mirror then lower him into a grey bathtub so she could scrub the scales away, could brush that day's wig, could loosen the dentures and the unexcitability of gaze — for, though only thirty-nine years-old, the father had a habit of imitating the patients he oversaw at Meriwether Alzheimer's Clinic on Tallyosh Rd. near the gated lakeside mansions owned by lawyers, surgeons, and top-dollar criminals.

He drove past these houses as he made his way home from work and said, "Someday," or "Perfect." The moment he got inside his own home, it happened.

It was a condition only the mother could reverse. He assumed she always would.

*

Imagine his grief the February evening he snailed into the master bedroom to find an empty, fornicatorily-mussed bed-sty. He bolted up from his crouched mosey, eyes transformed from burnished coals to hurled yarn. The mother had no right to leave, he told himself.

There was lipstick all over the pillows and a cufflink and some dress socks on the floor. The father dressed himself that evening.

His breasts heaved as he drug on the affectless, tadpoling child.

*

In quick marionetted steps the father paced the neighborhood, calling her name. There was no point making signs, she had done this before. Each time she returned a little more active, the way sleep does good to the body.

He was distraught the entire three days she was gone.

*

"Where have you been," wheezing as he saw her in line at the crowded market.

“None of your business,” she replied.

To him, at that moment, her face was like the once-poignant photo ruined because some idiot added mustaches with a Sharpie.

Then he said the only thing left to say: “What are we going to do?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know”

“Why not,” asked the father.

In reply, the mother confessed a series of adulteries. She counted aloud the men she’d slept with, each time attaching some identifier: “Twenty was the gas station guy, twenty-one was his buddy, twenty-two was the guy with the tow truck” and so on, until the father slapped her hand as she was holding a gallon of whole-milk. For an instant, the cascades of bubbled-white seemed more dramatic than the lashing of the father’s volley.

By the time the mother finally cleared all the milk from her eyes, the father was gabbing over the intercom.

*

Theirs was one of those cozen, fidgety small-towns, where everyone awaits news of who’s life is on decline. The father’s meltdown and the mother’s infidelity and the son’s mental drool all brought the town entertainment, so the family often found themselves darting off as a crowd streeted behind them like unallayed starvers.

They were a fly like that, a wall like that, they were a thorn like that, like vines heathered to gable, too high up to shear away, and taunting. They were a worm like that, they were a bird like that, squawking at themselves as dinner.

*

Most of all, the locals enjoyed the mother, with her cleavage and her short dresses, and the coils of her golden blonde hair. Men drooled over her as she walked down the pharmacy aisles, and women found allure and counsel in the way she handled bullshit. These women admired how rebellious the mother became. They could tell when the ladylike trance of her kind became a fulltime hassle: all that plucking, the ousted coarse helixes of a well-manicured groin, which heaped in a clump near her toes in the shower but never went drainwardly, so that he, the father, wielding a frumped-blue pair off-brand toilet gloves, coiled a hose down along, down.

The mother peered over his shoulder, “Keep pushing — now pull — okay push again.” He stopped to glare at her for a moment, then shoved the metal plumbing-snake deeper into the house’s tracts, as if to prove he could thrust when he had to.

When he grunted the hose stopped. This meant you were to pull the load out.

“What is it?”

“It’s your hair.”

*

The mother remedied her discontent by hunting out in slumly places, oblique at first, then, full-bore, like a dart indiscriminately flung.

What she heard from the son: "I need to stay home."

What she heard from the father: "I'm starting to notice jewelry is missing."

*

A new game began: the mother, feasted on by slurs and bellows, would late at night call the father when she needed a ride.

She would spit out the address, words that yanked the sleepless man up from under a duvet-cover themed on cartoon racecars. From then on, he left his car keys bedside, his loafers by door, and his disbelief elsewhere.

*

This became the normality all three reconciled with. None could say where she would sleep on any given night. She was becoming known by her phonecall catchphrase, "It's me," any time she could only make the one call.

But even this took a dive.

The boy's hand rattled as he listened into the phone, as he lowered the phone into the phone's cradle: "It's her."

[*Fade*]

ACT TWO

This was when her street-accrued-debt-collectors kidnapped and filmed her — for a week, during May — to a soundtrack of ESPN and spates of deep laughter, as she shrank and whistled, gobbled over frantically, by each of the unfeeding roommates, packed into their motel shanty.

“You get a discount if you buy the room early,” said one of the men.

“Might lose the deposit, though,” said one of the others.

“Sounds like a shit deal,” she said.

*

Eight days later, the mother high-neckedly returned to what she could remember, less womanly than before. She was hoarse, and groinely lumpish. With black bruises that clung to her hips, and heatless trails along her back, neck, and thighs — caused, the father presumed, by the barbed-wire of unclipped fingernails. Most disconcerting, her arms had become a graveyard of injection sights, some of which appeared infected.

To the son, she would say, “It looks far worse than the hiccup it was.” As the father looked on, he wondered, “What did you do? What have you seen done to you — worst of all from yourself?”

*

By the time the flulike symptoms appeared and led to a diagnosis, she had given the virus to three fellow junkies and one married man. A doctor told her, “You most likely got it from the needles, not the sex.”

Her son took to leaving the room in grimace — the boy dreaded even the chirpiest kiss — until, with the same disregard a mutt has for a flea, he shook her to the pavement.

She — cast and shun from trough and fold-out couch-bed — wandered off alone: Life was branded into her.

*

The father lawyered out the parental ownership, gained control of house, car, upper hand. The day she left, she told him: “You’re worse than me even though we’re the same awful. Because I don’t pretend to be the better. Street angel, house devil.”

He reminded her that he, as a matter of fact, still couldn’t step into the market.

The reality? He knew she had it right: his worst self hid behind doors.

*

Once a week, he re-stained the tanline on his ring finger.

There are many ways for man of his ilk to get laid.

Also, he took up racquetball, but quit before the gym membership expired after six months. He never claimed the pile in his locker.

Other than that, there were distractions — or “hobbies,” as the boy liked to say — which harrowed a man’s “better impulse,” like football with beer or outbursts for no reason. Activities which emboldened that ancient, inborn masculine code the father kept expecting to bubble-up from the son, nervous it wouldn’t and positive it never could.

Because the boy had yet to, as the father put it (to his buddies at the club), “grow a pair.” The truth of it: He was never a gifted anything.

The real problem wasn’t a lack of trophies or certificates — the boy brought home trophies and badges — but that it was never clear what he did to get them.

If he was a chess champion on Monday morning, he was first chair trumpet by the time he got home, or varsity ball starter, debate mastermind, Romeo, head writer.

“Ms. Davies said I’m her favorite,” he told the father.

Blame the fractured tibia or his not having a mother, but somehow he became an inclined talker. He was sodden, he was brimless, he was trench beneath branches, he was potholes hid by sand bags, he was tar-pits veiled by rose.

The boy was a liar.

*

At first, adults would say: “Don’t fib me, child.”

But it never did any good, so they took an approach long mastered by the father, whose job requires that he try to communicate with dementia patients. They never remember what you say, so you can say whatever you want, but it’s nothing like the boyhood event of making fart sound during church.

Because the father had long seen what happens when life gets the rest of you.

It was, he told himself, a matter of looking through a plentiful thing as if it were a hallway, without the beauty of what matters most in life, without the mind for visitation.

*

As if he had heard the father's thoughts and came running, an old friend — bachelor by choice and lover of recourse, lover of words — arrived at the front door one evening with two rackets, and, before they stomped off to some netless unfenced tennis greenness, said: "I moved, I live a ten minute walk from you."

He anticipated much walking.

Neither man could remember if their friendship began in college or after, but agreed on a general timeline. The friend had done well, went for a jog every morning, ate well. His new home had more rooms than the man could deal with, and the father took to sleepovers and movie-nights.

The friend would fix dinner one night, usually a healthy noodle-based dish with veggies, and the father would take them out somewhere the next.

Weeks spread over this new thing.

The friend's laugh could flush a room, hearty. He encouraged the father to dress himself, to buy cologne ("Don't be afraid to spend a little on a thing that's worth it," the man was known to say.)

He sat through hours of mopey conversation as his ease spread through to the father. Whose unspoken, businesslike retreat into timid extinction was each day less his custom. He renewed memberships, subscriptions, loyalties — bought a wardrobe that cost two month's salary, frequented new bars and clubs and church. At work, the father became the muscle and the object of many winks and pinches.

The friend stayed around until the two men could finally match one another, chuckling to themselves as they crossed the tides of grass which lead to the tennis court's stagey, penetrative wideness, couched amid all of those arches and scaffolding.

*

One of the nurses under the father's supervision — a lady whose eyebrows looked like frightened caterpillars, and who was freshly Honduran or Chilean or perhaps from Brazil — became a doter of him.

In the empty breakroom, half-lit by autumn noon, on a day workers everywhere call "slow," the lady traced each canyon of his palm under pretense of native rituals.

"What does it say?" asked the father.

"Be patient for the girl," she said.

Both took this to this “girl” to be her (the lady), as she was twelve years his junior and three-feet shorter. In reality, the difference in height only left them both achy in back and fearful of contortion, two greaseless, unoiled mechanisms of a pretzelled coital gymnasticism.

“That sort of thing,” he said to a dancer, boys’ night out at Sparkle, “leave that for the young, or that guy from the band who can do that Asian ying yang shit.”

The father and the nurse kept at it, though, but his heart was hardly in there.

He watched amusedly as the over-waxed, fully-woofered speedo of a car became the lady’s new transport to work or late-night unlit nightclub — the trophy of its snotty driver, of her. She announced things about this score in a voice practiced and meant for not just the person she was talking at but the entirety of living things that scurried her green and blue and brown homelike idea of Earth.

He could never remember if she got fired for some major violation or just stopped showing up, bitter or happy.

*

The father returned to an empty home. Then sought the son, who’d wandered himself into an apartment of his own. The father joined him, without ever asking. The father quickly realized that the boy had become too complex to govern. The boy said things like, “What’s your opinion on the atrocities at Tiananmen Square?” or “Can you leave me alone for once?”

He no longer wore only the one outfit, had an eye for button-up shirts with natural tones and simple patterns, loafers and quality jeans — but also he wore band shirts, had their posters on his wall, walked around with headphones, nodding.

What could the boy do but wait, bristled by the thinness of their apartment’s walls — wait, and listen? In other words, the newlywed twenty-something’s in the apartment next-door, whose work-hours corresponded with the boy’s school hours, unknowingly gave the boy lessons on life — especially when it came to music. Which they never stopped listening to. Till the boy sold his toy-car collection for a stereo.

*

Meanwhile, the pariahed mother hid, devoted to a recovery that even she doubted possible. This meant finding a new home, away from warrens and sinkholes.

First, there was the pastor, the kind whose teeth outshine construction floodlights, a sugarish pastoring type, who housed the mother for a spell, but chose noble eviction after he thrice accused her of stealing from the lockless churchfloor vault. A month or so later, in the darks of the basement, he'd find a swaddled variety of paper money teathedly-stitched into all the other twigs and hairballs of the rats' nest.

More important, the mother accomplished what few of us could: She made it out of Hell alive.

[Fade]

ACT THREE

THE MOTHER. My thing was always to be worth remembering. I had it in my head that being remembered meant being worth the life you had been given. Well, the life I was given is gone now and I can't imagine I'm half-a-penny worth remembering, so there. [*Begins downstage. Spotlight close.*] But that's okay. I've come to realize that that's okay. It's better than okay. It means I became anonymous. And for once I didn't do this thing, the right thing, for myself. I did it for a son that won't speak to me, an ex that I blamed it all on for years then finally forgave, I did it for everything that's still waiting. [*Pause.*] What it is is a chance at life. A chance to do what I never used to or could. I wouldn't let myself forget a terrible thing. And it only ever made me worse. [*The stage gradually begins return to fully lighted, in unison with her soliloquy, by the end of which, the whole stage is lit.*] But that life is gone. I gave it up, just chucked it into the pile then chucked the whole pile. I have to do it all over again every single day, but I do it. Some days better than others. But I always remember that it's something I can do. Because you're only worth remembering, truly remembering, if you lived for the right reason, if you did a good thing well, at least with good intentions. And for me this means submitting myself to others, constantly. Escaping my head and getting out there. It's about being unafraid of who will turn you down or laugh at you or talk about you or say ugly things. Because you can never go so far wrong that you can't turn back around. [*A gathering of people, until now hid in the dark, starts clapping. Blackout.*]

[*Hospital room, bedside to the mother, who's sleeping.*]

THE FATHER. In communion of basements and storehouses, church stalls or backrooms or clinics with long names, she fleshed herself into a surrender she'd all her life flat-out denied, the miracle of life still afloat in her gasping, rousing, waking last flits among us. Then, one day, she showed up out of nowhere and said could I drive her to the hospital since something had just broken her water [*Blackout.*]

[Shabby operating room; DOCTOR #1, NURSE #1, the father, and the boy, huddled around the groaning mother. The baby is born. Sickly, the mother, delirious, puts the swaddled newborn into the son's hands.]

THE MOTHER. Please. Please call her your daughter.

The son nervously holds the umbilical-corded newborn till the father grips it.

THE FATHER. We will — .

[The son and the father exit right as a varying ensemble of doctors surrounds the mother, bedridden. She looks feverish more often, amid darkening wheezes and rapid breathing. The light shines on her weaker and weaker until there's only darkness. This holds for about ten seconds, then the lights return, revealing an empty bed on the empty stage. The father and the son enter, stand at each side of the hospital bed, carrying the girl.]

THE FATHER. Goodbye. [*Touching the sheets.*]

[Blackout the left half of the stage, light right half. Doctor's personal office. The father stands despite the room's overabundance of chairs. The father faints, the boy catches him then lowers him onto a cluttered desk.]

DOCTOR. She's going to be fine. You have made the world. And it is huge and like a word which grows ripe in silence.

[Blackout stage right. lit only in back left corner, spot follows the mother and spreads as she crosses from left to right; dressed in ethereal white attire, as she has heretofore never been, talks differently.]

THE MOTHER. The boy and the father felt complete, forgettable yet memorized. *[Pause.]* And they earned it, their forgettability, just like I had. *[Pause.]* They could rest easy. *[Pause.]* Beyond that, they fade. *[Points toward the theater's light control consoles. As she points the light rises.]* A curt encounter angled the father back toward a husband routine. *[Pause.]* Without much ado, without much of anything, he enjoined with some woman as the son went off into travel without trace. Where had all of it gone, the family? What else remained? It felt like looking at a gathered mist as it lazily falls. *[Points to auditorium lights, slow rise. Now dim again. Then she looks directly to audience.]* How else am I to say it? This all leads to the girl. All of it, narrowly, with a pearl beneath its tongue. What less can you say? That she can't be a girl for so long? That when one past swarms there are more to be found, more on the way? *[She remains upstage center as a scene develops in front of her. Uniformed men carry in furniture, books, records, a T.V. as the girl arranges her things.]* At a house party she nearly fell down an elevator shaft. Her roommate caught her, he pulled her by the wrist until she footed her way back through the hatchway. At that same party, she met him, **THE BOYFRIEND** and he stayed over, and they went to the park when *they woke up.*

[The girl and the boyfriend, alongside uniformed movers, move objects from the girl's apartment set to offstage, until the stage is empty. MAN #4 enters, with

clipboard and headset, begins setting things. Workers help him reassemble the scenery to that at the start of the play. Workers exit as Man #4 takes a seat on the boy's bed, surrounded by cassette tapes.]

THE MAN. Again? From the top? [*He's surprised at the sight of THE BOYFRIEND.*] Where have you been?

THE BOYFRIEND. Traveling, my friend, everywhere. Till I cannot rest from travel.

THE MAN. Meanwhile, here I am, doing all your work. [*Smiles.*] Convenient.

THE BOYFRIEND. And for that, I am eternally grateful. [*Bows playfully.*]

THE MAN. You can't just strut in like that from months away at who knows where and not tell me about your travels.

THE BOYFRIEND. Brother, they were great. I feel brand new.

THE MAN. You found her?

THE MOTHER. Light begins to close around him.

THE BOYFRIEND. I did.

THE MAN. Where was she?

THE BOYFRIEND. Out there.

THE MAN. Where?

THE BOYFRIEND. Wherever there's a chance.

[Stage blackout except for spotlight on THE MAN, who approaches the edge of the stage, into the auditorium.]

THE MAN. A funny way to put it as the swelter of light fades, as spruces of curtain enclose the stage. [*Behind him, the usual post-performance pageantry. Tiraded roars fend with curtain-call as the cast, unhunched, resurfaces, no longer who they*

were, smiling toothily, mid-frantic bow or parade-wave with tresses.] See who you are?
[*Snaps fingers.*] Every night at this exact time, the auditorium's denized fixtures and
healy geographic fineness hove back into view as the overhead pale of light is slowly
brought up by a knob somewhere, in tandem with a bathe of music — then, out of the
warmth, tuxedoed people, with chatter or introspective, file out along the aisles until the
theater is bare. [*Curtains close once more.*] Every time, it's the same thing. Every
performance has the same audience. It's a nonstop routine, like a memory you forget
but never lose. Each time, we say I remember, then we take it from the top. So now
we'll go outside and try to get an audience. Today has nothing to it. People need stuff to
do. So here come a few stragglers into the theater. Each person who notices the girl
nods then goes into the theater. She stands out, with her placard beneath the stage
lights, wondering how each show can draw such crowds, how it can even ever happen.

[*Full lights*]



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