
STRANDED

Views from Quarantine

(a monologue play)

BY
STAGE PARTNERS
PLAYWRITERS



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## **Introducing a brand new kind of play.**

In response to the rapidly changing school theater environment, this monologue play project was created on the fly by our amazing playwrights. *We are so excited to share it with you!* The collection was written specifically so your students can perform remotely (especially those graduating Seniors!), and it has all the flexibility you need.

### **Best of all you can download, rehearse, perform, record, and share it *TOTALLY FOR FREE.***

It's our way of staying creative and saying "thank you and hang in there" to all of you who have performed so many of our plays over the years.

Here are some guidelines we gave our playwrights. Bonus: Feel to use this or adapt it as a playwriting exercise. And, if you want, include them as part of the play.

—All monologues are delivered from passengers of a quarantined cruise ship.

—In the spirit of a bake-off, we've offered the ingredients below. We challenge you to include one of these (or more) in your monologue.

1. A missing watch
2. A nurse with an empty stomach
3. An expired prescription
4. A marriage proposal
5. A reformed thief
6. An exit strategy
7. An unusual smell
8. A plea for forgiveness

—Monologue should be 2-3 minutes in length. As you'll see some playwrights took liberties with length, perspective, character, and form—which is part of the fun!

## **How do you use / perform this monologue play?**

We've put together some ideas in our latest blog:

[Distance Learning: Ideas and Techniques for Performing Online](#)

Ideally, students perform and record the monologues and then share them online for other schools to see. Feel free to rearrange them, perform some or all. Have fun! We'd love to see what you come up with. You're welcome to send them to us and we'll post them, maybe even our YouTube channel. Reach us anytime at [info@yourstagepartners.com](mailto:info@yourstagepartners.com)

Finally, please use best efforts to make sure every monologue is given author credit, and if you enjoyed them read the authors' plays!

Thanks for doing everything you do to make theatre happen.

Stay safe and creative!

*Jason and Morgan*

Jason Pizzarello and Morgan Gould  
Co-Founders  
Stage Partners

**“Mine”** by Adam Szymkowicz

*(I opens pocket watch, checks time.)*

**J:**

Meh. I stole this. I’m trying not to steal everything right now. I’m changed. I am. I just feel like a little depressed and I think to myself, “Maybe I would feel a little better if I had your ring.” Don’t worry. I’m washing my hands. Everything is fine. It wasn’t even a real diamond. I wonder if she knows. Maybe I should tell her. Look. I’m having a hard time right now. Just leave me my little vices. You don’t need that coat. Or that leather handbag. Or that chair. My wardrobe has doubled in size. You can see people about to say something when they see me in their clothes and then they don’t. Don’t want to get too close maybe. Or maybe they don’t need it as much as I need it. I need it all. Give me all your everything. Who knows what tomorrow brings?

I was doing really well too. I was calm. I was not stealing things. I had a program. I was sticking to it too, and then... Well, you know, life likes to throw curveballs. And I was never good at baseball. I stole home once but they asked for it back. Sorry. Bad joke.

Look, we all lose people. I just want something in return. Like lots of stuff and yeah overall, in bulk maybe it won’t make me feel any better really, but also it makes me feel a little good at first. That’s the problem isn’t it? Because I hate myself for taking it but also, look at that. That’s pretty. And tomorrow, I won’t like it as much as today maybe but I can find something else pretty. Look at you. You got all kinds of things don’t you? Just don’t look away too long, okay because I’m gonna take some of those things. Don’t say I didn’t warn you. Oh look how scared you look. You’re hilarious. Relax. You don’t need any of this stuff. I do. I need it all. *(Scary voice:)* All of it.

~

## **"The Magnificent Mysterio"** by Carrie McCrossen

*(The Magnificent Mysterio sits alone in their stateroom, addresses the computer.)*

### **THE MAGNIFICENT MYSTERIO:**

It's me again. The Magnificent Mysterio. Day four at sea and they've canceled all the public gatherings. You don't know what this means to me. I am a cruise magician. I should be doing MAGIC. But I can't do MAGIC without an AUDIENCE.

*(Mysterio throws up their hands and shakes their head.)*

Ten minutes ago I made the ace of spades appear in my stateroom's minifridge. But was that MAGIC? NO! Because no one saw it. Except me. And I know how I did it! There was no one to be impressed, no one to shout, "Ooh!" or "Ahh!" or "Mysterio, here's my phone number! I'm in love with you!" Which used to happen all the time. I mean, I'm the Magnificent Mysterio!

*(A flourish. If Mysterio had a cape or wand or top hat, well that would be fun. Something they could whip around like a magician.)*

I was so excited to be here. Six months of cruising around the Caribbean performing magic for all the different types of passengers, (from the retirees, to the elderly, to the grandparents.) I never imagined I'd be quarantined in my room with Coronavirus. I thought we'd be like every other cruise and just get NOROVIRUS!

*(Mysterio sighs.)*

I just made this *[insert household object]* appear in my hand. If anyone were here to see it, they'd be amazed. They'd be awestruck. But I know that I KEEP THIS *[same household object]* UP MY SLEEVE AT ALL TIMES AND THEN WHEN I NEED TO IMPRESS SOMEONE I ROLL IT INTO THE PALM OF MY HAND AND PRESENT IT. That's all it is. No magic. No electricity. Nothing amazing. Just practice, a shuttle pass and long sleeves. *(Beat.)* It's got me thinking. If I can't do magic, am I still a magician? Am I still "Magnificent?" Am I still MYSTERIO?

*(Beat. Mysterio brings over a lamp or potted plant or stuffed animal.)*

Hello, sir or madam. Do you like magic? I want you to think of a card. Any card. Got one? Good.

*(Mysterio pulls the queen of hearts from literally anywhere.)*

Was THIS your card? *(Beat. Silence.)* No answer. Can you believe this? When I strolled around the Lido deck doing this for people, they would ERUPT IN APPLAUSE!

I GIVE UP! I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE! Stop calling me Mysterio. My real name is Beth.\* *[\*Or Ned, based on gender.]* I'm 28 and single and I still have student debt from going to theater school! I started doing magic because I had a hard time connecting with people. Magic gave me this persona, this confident alter-ego that I could use to face the world. But inside...I was never that confident. I was...looking for validation. *(Beat.)* Boy. It feels good

to just be honest like that. This is me, world, warts and all! *(Beat.)* Wait a second...I think I just made my EGO disappear. *(Beat.)* That's got to be the most impressive thing I've ever made disappear. And I never saw it coming! I might be the GREATEST MAGICIAN OF ALL TIME! I'M BACK BABY! MYSTERIO OUT!

*(Drop mic. End.)*

~

**“Re: The Pact”** by Will Quam

*(Eleanor sits in front of her computer recording a message.)*

**ELEANOR:**

This video is for Tommy.

Tommy, hello.

Mrs. Montgomery, hello too. I don't know if you're still monitoring Tommy's email, but if you are:

Hello. This is Eleanor. You know me. From childhood and stuff.

. . .

I'm still on the cruise ship, but we're not moving anymore. And my room smells like potatoes, but that's my fault because I spilled mashed potatoes on the floor.

They said they can't spare anyone to come clean it up, which is understandable. But I still wish it didn't smell like potatoes.

I don't smell like potatoes, just the room does.

*(She looks back at the room, then at the camera. She takes a preparatory breath.)*

Sooooo the real reason I'm sending you a video is to tell you that I will obviously not be returning from the boat in time for prom.

So we cannot attend prom together.

And I wanted to give you permission to ask Jessica to prom.

Because it really seems like you want to go with her.

Mrs. Montgomery, don't worry, your son is not a cheater, Tommy and I are not dating, there are no romantic feelings between us.

None. Seriously. Um.

But yeah I can't go anymore. And you should still go. And with someone you want to go with, even if that person is Jessica.

Jessica is fine. Sorta.

Sorry, I don't know why I said that. I'll edit that part out.

Yes! Go to prom with Jessica. She's great! And you two obviously have the hots for each other!

Haha... Um.

I see you guys together, like all the time, especially after band. You guys seem to have really...connected...since you switched to bassoon.

Haha.

Um... Yea, but seriously she's super nice. We sat next to each other in chem last year and she had a good...vibe.

Oh my gosh, funny story super quick, one time during a test she totally fell asleep! It was so funny. I've seriously never seen anyone do that before.

And like during a test? At least it wasn't an AP test.

She had, like, a little bit of drool too.

So, you can ask Jessica to prom, if you want to. And I will release you from our prom pact.

Oh, Mrs. Montgomery, Tommy and I made a pact in 6th grade (when we were both losers) that we would go to prom together if we weren't in a relationship with other people. Or in a relationship with each other, which I know you've teased us about before, Mrs. Montgomery. You kinda bring it up a lot, haha.

Can you imagine? Barf...

*(Quietly:)* I'll edit that.

...

So, prom.

Sorry, I feel like I'm saying "prom" a lot?

Do you ever say a word a ton and it just like doesn't feel like a word anymore?

"Prom"

"Prom"

"Tommy Prom"

Sorry. I guess the boat is getting to me. Boat brain!

Anyway, I should go soon. But real quick, uh, if you *don't* go to the prom with Jessica? Or if prom doesn't happen at all?

We could do, like, our own prom in in my dad's basement or something. Remember when we used to rollerblade down there? We could do that too!

But actually he got it carpeted... You know what, I'll talk to him.

There's a dance instructor on the boat leading video lessons and I've been following along and learning.

*(She does a brief little seated dance making her own music.)*

So there's that.

Think about! No pressure! Just think about it! I think it could be a fun thing to do when I get out of my potato room and off the boat.

Lemme know, Buddy Ol' Pal.

Bye Tommy! Bye Mrs. Montgomery! Bye Tommy!

Sorry I already—

I'm gonna start over. 3, 2, 1

*(She clicks. The screen goes black.)*

~

## **“Sock Talk”** by Sonya Sobieski

*(Note: this is a monologue. One actor plays both PUPPET and PERSON. Do not attempt ventriloquism. And don't try to hide the actor's mouth behind the puppet. Once the person "enters," the person's face should remain fully visible.)*

*(Setting: A small cabin on a cruise ship, although all we see is a wall in the background. It might have a piece of boring hotel art on it. We are watching a message videotaped on a stationary camera. Onscreen, a handmade sock puppet appears.)*

**PUPPET:** Heyyyy. Hey everyone! Miss me back home? “Miss you, we barely recognize you!” Heh. Yeah, the sea’s been rough on me. My eyes have gotten googly. I’ve sprouted... fuzz. I seem to be made primarily of textiles. You wouldn’t think life on the ocean would turn a person to textiles but *look at me!* *(The puppet shakes in horror.)* I’m your worst dirty laundry nightmare! I’m your laundry *come alive.* *(A person’s head rises up slowly behind the puppet.)* Hey. Hey, who’s behind me?

**PERSON:** I’m your handler. *(Person laughs hysterically while puppet watches, unamused.)* Get it, “handler?”

**PUPPET:** Yeah, you’re a comic genius. Do you mind? I was telling the folks back home about my transformation.

**PERSON:** Nice. Becoming single was the best thing that ever happened to you. If you were still a pair, I’d be wearing you! *(Person looks to the puppet for a laugh, but the puppet does nothing.)* If you were a pair of socks, you’d be on my feet. Get it? *(Puppet remains unamused.)* You know, you really should laugh at my jokes, because I own you. I literally bought you. To wear. I can do whatever I want with you. I can throw you out this porthole.

**PUPPET:** No you can’t. It doesn’t open.

**PERSON:** It doesn’t open? Seriously?

**PUPPET:** You know that. You know everything that I do.

**PERSON:** Yeah, I do. *(Person is sad.)*

**PUPPET:** Aw, don’t be sad. *(Puppet tries to cheer up the person.)* I’m your laundry *come alive!*

**PERSON:** That was a nice bit. I appreciate your efforts. But. We’re trapped here.

**PUPPET:** Not forever.

**PERSON:** Feels like forever. *(Moment of sadness.)*

**PUPPET:** *(Trying to cheer up the person:)* I’m a talking sock!

**PERSON:** And I’m *talking* to a *sock!*

**PUPPET:** Yeah, well, who else you got? Makes complete sense.

**PERSON:** What if we never get out of here? What if they never let us leave?

**PUPPET:** Viruses have lifespans, too. We just gotta outlive the sickness. Make sure we do our pushups. (*Puppet tries to do push-ups, but can't really figure out how, due to not having a body and all.*)

**PERSON:** You look ridiculous. (*Puppet keeps trying to do pushups. Person sighs. Not trying to convince the puppet of anything, just remembering:)* This was supposed to be a really fun cruise. I was supposed to meet new people. (*Puppet stops and watches the person, listening.*) People I was not going to be able to run away from. Because. I have this problem. I meet someone I want to know better and I suddenly can't say one thing to them. It's like I know I'm going to make an idiot of myself so I just clam up. Clam. Ha. But. But I thought, if I had to see these same new people every day, and they couldn't run away any more than I could, I might be able to...relax. Without always worrying about acing first impressions, or second impressions even, I could maybe...not be such an awkward kook.

**PUPPET:** You? An awkward kook?

**PERSON:** Now I'm not meeting anyone. I can't leave this room. I'm trapped with my awkward kook self. And don't tell me this is an opportunity, that I should make lemonade out of lemons, because there are no lemons! There is no redeeming fruit in all of this, at all!

**PUPPET:** I agree. I guess... We just gotta roll with it. Roll with the waves. Feel 'em?

**PERSON:** Feel the waves? (*Person thinks about this.*) Beneath us. Rolling. (*They feel the waves rolling beneath them.*) They just keep going, don't they? (*Person answers their own question:)* Yeah.

~

**“By the Dock”** by Jon Jory

*(The speaker is on the dock looking up at the stranded cruise ship)*

What you think they doin’ up there in that big ship thing, Chloe? How long they been in there now, two weeks or three? I disremember. You know what there’s some folks up there getting’ to know what it’s like doin’ time. Halfway anyway. But they got swimmin’ pools right? Ping pong tables? You think they’re still swimmin’ around? Betcha somebody’s peed in the pool, huh? Playin’ ping pong. I played ping pong a couple of times. That stuff is so boring they should use it for a sleep aid. Man, that boat’s like the perfect old age home for rich people. Betcha they don’t want to get off. Bet they hittin’ people with their canes tryin’ to stay on there. Get off me, get offa me! You know what? They should kick their asses off and let on the homeless. Shoot they’d sleep right on those ping pong tables All those deck chair thingies. See my idea is the rich people don’t take care about the poor people ‘cause they never met one. How many cabins they got on that there boat? Mix and mingle. Oughta mix things up for once. Put one of the homeless folks in each cabin with the rich dude. How many beds they got in each room? Two doubles maybe? Two homeless, two rich. Let em’ stay in quarantine a month or two. No, two rich, one homeless, one filmmaker. Oh yeah! Put that stuff out there! Man there would be some changes made, right? Mix and match, baby! Change, brother! Let it all start right on that cruise ship. Shoot if I knew who to get a hold of, I’d put that idea out. Whoa. Whoa, is that somebody leanin’ on the rail up there wavin’ at us?

*(He or she waves back and yells.)*

Hello there rich person, how you doin’? Invite me on, dude. I got seventeen years of stuff to lay on you, brother! Hey, I’ll come on over there an you can throw me down some steak. Let’s get this thing on!

~

## **“Wilding in Idaho”** by Diana Burbano

*(Lu can be male or female.)*

**LU:**

No one tells you how SMALL these state rooms are. I can just turn around without bumping into the bed, and the toilet doubles as a shower. Which is good because we ran out of TP days ago. I don't even know what time it is anymore. I used to have an intense, pressing, OCD need to know the time all the time 'cause of my Apple watch but I dropped it out the porthole. And it got eaten by a shark. There are lots of sharks out there. The sharks keep circling. It's like they KNOW we don't have long. Someone said they were nurse sharks and that even when their stomachs are empty, nurse sharks are harmless. But I don't know who to believe anymore. The tour group from Idaho took the Mouse hostage yesterday. The costume, not the kid who plays him. At least I hope they let the kid go. 'Cause I think they are planning on burning the Mouse in effigy. I'm sure they are going to set the ship on fire, but we're surrounded by water, so we should be all right, right? I'm spending my time meditating. There's no TV and I've read all of the People Magazines I stole from the store. I feel a little bad that I cut them out with my cuticle scissors and pasted them on the wall with toothpaste. These are my friends now. Megan Markle, Billy Eilish, that one serial killer, Cher. I feel really close to them. I wrote them a song last night after I ate old mushroom pizza and got high from food poisoning:

*(Make up a silly tune:)*

*It's a tragedy,  
Not to have an exit strategy  
Just a menagerie  
Of people magazine celeeeeeebbbbriiittiies—*

No one ever let me sing before. Probably a good thing.

*(A loud sound.)*

Oh. It's happening. The nightly wilding. See, I'm sheltering in place. But the Idaho group. They went feral fast. Grabbed the finger paints outta the daycare, got down to their skivvies and painted each other wild colors, then danced on the Captains table on the sun deck. From the howling I think they just discovered that finger pain doesn't have any SPF in it. I'd offer my prescription kind but it's expired. It made me look like I was wearing Vanilla frosting so I never used it. Maybe I'll leave it out for those crazy Idaho-ans. Maybe if I do that, they won't make me walk the plank like they did to the group from Florida.

~

## **"20,000 Steps"** by Chris Barlow

*(The Passenger can be any gender. The actor can use their own first name.)*

### **PASSENGER:**

Hey. Have you seen my watch?

It's one of those fitness ones that counts your steps. Real chunky. Bright blue band. And I know you're going to say it's probably in my room somewhere—I mean it has to be in my room somewhere, doesn't it? It's not like we've *been ashore* recently! *(They force a laugh at this bleak joke.)* But, the uh, the watch band gets a little itchy sometimes. And so I take it off places and I uh, I do like to walk. Around the ship. I mean at home I like to run. I'm actually training for a marathon. Half marathon. Cancelled now. But did you know you can't run here? Like anywhere on the boat. Even before the quarantine. Did you know that? You can't run on boats. It's like a law or something. So what are you going to do if you can't run? You're going to WALK that's what.

And, and anyway, the ship staff, the captain or whoever, they say it's okay to walk as long as you don't touch— as long as you don't *interact with* anybody. Or anything. Six feet, right? But most people are too afraid to go out of their cabin, so I can walk pretty much anywhere and it's fine.

You know how most people just do ten thousand steps a day? Do you know what I do? I do twenty. Twenty *thousand*. Every. Single. Day. And do you know how long it's been since I missed a day? FOUR. YEARS. I—I could actually tell you the exact number of days.

*(They fumble with their cell phone: Taking it out, finding the app. Nervous energy builds as they realize the stakes of the situation. They continue speaking throughout:)*

Uh, there's an app that—this app keeps track of it. And it says— Oh. Whoa. It says one thousand, four hundred, and *ninety-nine* days. That's my streak. And if I don't find my watch it's going to break. It's going to break the streak. Because there's no, there's no other way to put your steps in there. And, and I know fifteen-hundred is just a number but it's *fifteen-hundred*. And if I don't have my watch it won't count my steps and if it doesn't count my steps I won't get my streak and if I don't get my streak then what am I even doing out here?! Huh? Just wandering around? What am I supposed to be then? The official cruise ship ghost? Haunting the halls like some third-rate Harry Potter character?!

Sorry, I'm just a bit. The streak, you know?

*(They put their phone away. Beat.)*

This place does feel haunted sometimes. Do you ever feel that? Like when I'm walking on the deck I can hear these...voices. People with balconies below me talking or crying or...sometimes singing! But I can never see them. I can never make out exactly *what* they're saying. Why they're crying...

Ah, this ship is spooky! This whole—I don't know what to call it—this *situation* is spooky. Very “Act 1 of the Zombie Movie.” And I don't like zombie movies.

But my watch. My streak. My twenty thousand steps. I know it's dumb but it's normal. And I need normal. I need my watch. It's chunky. And blue.

~

**“Not it!”** by Jacqueline Goldfinger

*(A person in handcuffs.)*

But you don't understand. I am not one of Them. One of the, you know, the, unwashed, uncared for, the, weak of immune system, and, overall, gross. The unlimited buffet hogs. The, UGH!! What's not to understand? I'm going to be absolutely fine. Absolutely. Fine. I got every vaccine on-time. I go to the Doctor once a year on precisely the same day for an annual check-up. I eat an apple a day, slurp clear broth once a week, and squeeze my own oranges for juice every morning. I exercise three times a week using a regime personally tailored to my body's unique needs by a trainer from the School of Physical Perfection at an Ivy League University. So this quarantine, it is just, ridiculous. It is not meant for people like me. People who take health Seriously, with a capital S. People who treat their bodies with the care and and and and and even over care, too much care, I probably care too much for my body. Think too much about...and, the point is, I Don't Belong Here. I am not a quarantine-type-of-person. I'm above the need for a quarantine. And I was not, stealing, anything. Those little rubber escape boats, those are for everyone. For general use. Like a water foundation at a public park. I mean, but of course, I would never actually use a water fountain at a public park because, germs. And who know if the water has been sterilized appropriately. No. I only drink The. Best. Perrier all the way, baby. None of that LeCroix knock off water or that Britta filter stuff. Perrier all the way, all the time, all of the how, all of the—

*(Suppresses a cough, catches herself.)*

Oh, that? That was, nothing. That way, an aberration. Just a small ab—

*(Suppresses a bigger cough.)*

No, no. No cough here. Just something stuck in my throat. Probably the remains of a raw carrot. I only eat my veggies raw, to preserve all of the vitamin, and health, you know, benefits of—

*(The biggest cough, one she can not suppress.)*

*(A huge flimsy gross cough.)*

Well, as I was saying...any chance there's an extra bed in the nurse's office?

~

## **“Clarice, the Friendly Ghost”** by Jane Best

### **PASSENGER:**

Hello?

Hello? Are you there?

I keep seeing glimpses of you out of the corner of my eye. A flash, or a flicker. A sense of something nearby. A friendly presence. At least, I hope you're friendly. I've been cooped up in this tiny room for twelve days and you haven't been unfriendly yet, so I'm going to be optimistic. The other day—was it yesterday? Two days ago? What is time, anymore?—my watch went missing. It was on my bedside table. And then this morning it was on top of the closet. Was that you? Are you playing games with me?

I noticed you the second night of quarantine. The WiFi was out, and I was freaking out. I have nobody to contact here, and nobody was telling me anything. My chest got all tight, and I couldn't breathe, and I couldn't think, and everything was spiraling out of control and I was so alone. But then I felt a presence. I looked up, and I couldn't see anybody, but I felt you. And I knew I wasn't alone, that at least somebody would be here for me. I've been too nervous to talk to you. What if you float away and I never get to feel your presence again?

I think I'll call you Clarice. My friendly little ghost companion, Clarice. It's nice to meet you. I wonder how you got here. Oh, God. Did you die in this room? In this bed? People die on cruise ships—they just toss them overboard. Did they toss you overboard, Clarice? Will they toss me overboard? Am I going to die on this cruise ship? Is that why you're here, Clarice? To let me know that?

I don't want to die on this cruise ship, spending my last hours in this 20-square foot room with crappy meals delivered to my door and talking to a ghost. This room is basically a coffin, isn't it? So much for a nice solo trip to the Bahamas. I can't believe I spent my credit card points on this.

No, you're right, Clarice, it's fine. I'll be fine. I'm young, and healthy, and don't have to worry about this. No worries. Just boredom. Boredom and talking to ghosts. I think I like you, Clarice. I hope you stick around. Keep hiding my watch and I'll keep finding it, and when I finally get to leave this stupid room, I hope you'll come with me back to the real world.

The real world. What even is that, anymore.

Is this real?

Are you real?

Am I real?

~

## **“Time to Disappear”** by Jason Pizzarello

*(Danny, a teenager [any gender], in front of a camera. They hold up a prescription bottle. Shakes it. Just a couple left. Opens it and finishes them.)*

### **DANNY:**

Those were Flintstone Vitamins. Really. And they were expired but you can't tell the difference. Why I am taking vitamins at the end of the world? Because they're multi-purpose. Many unknown purposes. And I may need their magical properties on the other side like the coins the Ancient Greeks would place on a dead person's eyes so they can pay the ferry tollman to cross the river. Styx. Coins on the eyes of the dead. It's grim but I like it because it's a plan. Plans are good. It's like the Ancient Egyptians mummifying their dead so their bodies could be preserved for the next world. That's really smart. Actually that's what I'm going to do. Except instead of the cloth I'm going to use the rarest and most-valuable commodity in our society. *(Holding up a roll.)* TP. The chosen paper of the Porcelain Gods.

*(Danny wraps the toilet paper around their body [we only have to see them from waist up.] They continue to wrap while delivering the rest of the monologue, building until the end when it's just their face that is uncovered.)*

Consider this my last message. My last dialogue with the world. Although for a dialogue you'd need more than one person. And it's just me. So I don't know what you'd call this. A monologue? No that doesn't seem right. Someone is receiving this right? There's someone out there, right? I know you can't respond. But I know you're there and that's comforting on some level. Yeah. Totally comforting.

At the very least someone will find this recording and know I existed. A digital time capsule if you will. But what's left to say? I already texted every single person in my contacts. I sent them a very simple message: "Thank you." Nothing specific. Just "Thank you." It took me seventy-eight minutes. Most people were confused. Some didn't respond—understandable. Others took it as an opportunity to engage. But a lot people got it. They responded back "I love you, too." Thanking people is important. It may be the most important thing we can do. It might be the only gift we can leave behind. A simple gesture of kindness and gratitude.

So to anyone out there and anyone who finds this: *Thank you.* And if you need a wipe, feel free to unwrap me. *(Beat.)* Now it's time to disappear. Completely. Time to say goodbye.

*(They now have wrapped toilet paper around everything but their mouth and eyes.)*

See you on the other side of the river.

*(They wrap around their eyes.)*

I am gone.

*(They wrap around their mouth. Now completely covered. Sits quietly, and perfectly still, staring at the camera for several moments before the signal finally cuts out.)*

~

## **“Towel’s It Hangin’?”** by Emily McClain

*(Alex, an overworked cruise ship cabin porter, enters the cramped and messy office of the Head of Housekeeping.)*

**ALEX:**

Hi, Mrs. Anderson? I got a note that you wanted to see me? Oh. Is that... Oh. *(There is a towel rabbit with a belt wrapped around its neck on the desk.)* I...okay, so, right. Listen, Mrs. Anderson, I know that I’ve, um...strayed? A little? From the Approved Towel Sculpture list. I took a little creative license and—no, no, you’re absolutely right. It was out of line and—okay, but in my defense, it wasn’t supposed to be seen by any actual passengers, see, normally Maggie comes in after I change the linens and vacuums and we have this little joke where I make a towel sculpture that is, um...not regulation? And then she takes it apart and makes it into something more appropriate and we have a big laugh about it later. But I guess—either she didn’t notice that or maybe she’s mad at me or wanted to get me in trouble but in any case—it was a joke! Please, it wasn’t ever meant to be taken that way—okay, no, I mean, it IS a towel rabbit hanging himself with a passenger’s belt. Okay. That’s definitely what it is—like, I’ve got to just own that one. Of course I know suicide isn’t something to joke about, I get that. And I could see how, looking at it from your perspective, from the perspective of the passenger who came back from dinner to find—sorry? Passenger and their kids? Yikes. Um, okay. *(Nervous laughter.)* Man... What a day for Maggie to decide to knock off early, that slacker! She’s the one who should be in here, right? I mean, okay, yes, I should be in here, I’m not saying I shouldn’t, but if you saw some of the things she spelled out in dirty socks on people’s beds— No, you’re right, that’s not the point. Look, this suicidal-towel-bunny is not indicative of the type of employee that I am! I swear I’m very dedicated to this job! Do you have any idea how long it took me to get the belt to even stay around his little neck?

*(Alex attempts to demonstrate but then thinks better of it seeing Mrs. Anderson’s horrified response.)*

Right, right, sorry. All I’m saying is we’ve all been under a lot of stress, I mean, you said as much at the team meeting yesterday, and now that it’s come out that we’ll be quarantined another MONTH and there’s no days off, no relief, no breaks, and these passengers just keep demanding more and more insane— Did you know everyone in Cabin 2211 insists a staff member sing “Macarena” while they wash their hands? Yes, with the dance! The say it’s not the same without the—the point is that it’s insane and we can’t ever get away and today I felt like if I had to fold one more towel frog or swan *(Alex grabs the towel rabbit, shaking it)* I was going to LITERALLY LOSE MY MIND.

*(Alex realizes what they’re doing and sets the rabbit back on the desk.)*

Sorry! Sorry!

*(Pause, takes a deep breath.)*

Everyone is on edge right now. People are scared and when people get scared they do stupid, thoughtless things like fold towels into inappropriate shapes so...I'm very sorry, Mrs. Anderson. I can see by your face that you're...well, you're clearly under an extraordinary amount of strain yourself. Ah...have you tried folding some towels? I could show you how to make a monkey? Okay, no, I'll see myself out.

~

## **“Reform”** by Emily Hageman

*(Alex, either gender, kleptomaniac. Formerly, at least.)*

### **ALEX:**

So I’m a kleptomaniac. Like, a for real one—not like, oops, I stole a pen one time from Sandy’s desk, lol, I’m such a klepto, nope, I have a legit diagnosis and everything. I steal stuff. It’s just sort of what I do. Why? Ha ha, I have no idea. It’s not because I get any kind of a rush from it or because I can’t afford what I’m stealing, it’s just because I...want to. Nope, scratch that, because I *need* to. So. Yeah.

My therapist was not super excited for me to go on this cruise, but I was all like WHATEVER WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MY LIFE, MAN and he was like “literally everything” and I was like “good point,” but I decided to go on the cruise anyways because I thought I could handle it. And then, the first night here, I stole thirteen forks, three spoons, a bottle of sunscreen, and this crummy watch that’s either super expensive or it’s from Walmart, I can’t tell and I don’t really care. Did it make me feel better? Nope. Stop asking dumb questions, you’re clearly missing the entire point of mental health.

And then, we heard about the quarantine. Like, the announcement over the loudspeakers. The meeting we all had to go to. It was weird, like—we were hearing about this super contagious disease while we’re packed in together like sardines? Dumb. I stole some lady’s magazine out of her purse while she was talking to her husband about their kids. I guess they have like four and they were worried about them.

And I guess I thought it wasn’t a big deal until we all got masks and gloves. And we weren’t allowed to leave our rooms. And people are like crying and calling their families and stuff. And then I was just like...well. Crap.

And I opened my dresser drawer and saw all this stolen junk I had. And I was like, what am I doing. So I texted my therapist and I was like, “I’m in a weird situation, I’m gonna return stuff to people.” And he was like, “That’s really good, Alex” and I was like...I don’t know. For a moment, I felt this sense of...relief. I guess. Because I steal stuff as a compulsion and it never makes me feel any better, but the prospect of returning it made me...I dunno. Happy’s not the right word. Calm is better. And I never feel calm.

So I returned everything, but nobody knows I did it. So I like—reverse stole it. And probably nobody cares, but...I do. And if I can make things a little better by returning all that random junk, then...I guess I did something good. Maybe. I don’t know. I’m gonna talk to my therapist about this. Provided I don’t have the coronavirus and keel over and die in like three minutes. Ha ha. Just kidding. Except not. I’m not kidding at all. So. Yeah. That’s it.

~

*Author Note: Dedicated with incredible love and respect to the class of 2020, full of some of the best people I’ve known, with a special shoutout to MY class of 2020—Riley, Kaylie, Sarah, Sterling, Anabelle, Allison, Tommy, Eric, Erin. You all deserve so much more than this, and the way you are handling it shows me more about you than I ever could have known.*

## **"I think...I do"** by Ian McWethy

**JOSH:**

Hey Janie, It's Josh. Juuuuust....calling you back after our last...convo. Cause...I figured you wanted an answer. So...yeah... *(Beat.)* Uh...sorry that was awkward...I'm just...uh...

*(Josh paces around. Wondering if he should proceed.)*

And, just so you know. I'm still fine. Healthy. Not infected. Hopefully they'll let us off this ship in the next week. That's the rumor anyway, but who knows. And you were right. Cruises are terrible. I'm having a terrible time. And I...understand now why you didn't want to come. Because you could be held on one for weeks...with no end in sight. During a pandemic. Which is terrifying. So, uh...

*(Josh paces...)*

Well, I feel like I should address the elephant in the room. The...you know, the reason I'm calling. Cause I know you're waiting for an answer. So here we go... The answer is... I think so. And I know that's not romantic. I know that, when someone proposes to you, you're supposed to say "Yes!" or "yes! Yes! A thousand times yes!" And I know that we've been dating for 10 years and this has been on your mind...our minds...for a while. And I know that, in some ways, now would be a great time to get married. It's the end of the world! Why not! And if we have to be in isolation, we should do it together! As a unified front! Love is a battlefield! And I will always love you! Etc. These are all great reasons to get married now, and I do love you. I want you to know that. I just...want to explain why I hesitated. Or why I needed a day before I answered you. So I'll try to explain. *(Beat.)* Okay, first of all, this isn't really the end of the world. This is just...a very hard time. And no one should do anything too rash just because the world is...scary and different right now. If you told me you always wanted to go skydiving, and that you felt like you had to do it NOW because you didn't know if the world would be around in a year...well I'd advise against that. Because who's flying you? How well trained is the pilot? Are parachutes even being tested properly right now? And furthermore, does your skydiving instructor have Covid! Because, in all likely hood, you'd strapped together, like...way closer than six feet apart! And I just read a tweet that said there's a whole aviation school in Alabama where EVERYONE WAS INFECTED! Okay! So...clearly, if you said "I want to go skydiving" I would say no. Even though it might be the last time you we will ever be able to skydive for a while. No! Because I did the research! And I know the risks! And I think the question you asked me, "should we get married?" deserves...you know, research. And thought. *(Beat.)* And I realize that comparison doesn't really work. I mean...both require a leap of faith. One literal. One a metaphor. They both require a parachute. So...

*(Josh paces.)*

I guess marriage doesn't really require a parachute. Nevermind. I'm...

*(Takes a deep breath.)*

I'm just scared. I'm scared right now. I'm more scared than I've ever been. I know that marrying you should've been a no-brainer, but I just...I'm letting fear control me right now. And I'm trying to not let it. But I am sometimes. So...I'm sorry. I'm sorry for the delay. I'm sorry I didn't just say yes. The answer is yes. I'll marry you. I love you. As soon as I get back let's find an online minister and... (He looks at his phone.) oh. You're calling me. I...well nevermind.

*(He switches to Janie's call.)*

**JOSH:** Hello.

**JANIE:** Hey, I...don't mean to put on more pressure on you. I know you're really stressed and that you tend to think and overthink things when you're stressed. And this is obviously like the most stressful time so I'm sorry I'm putting this on you and if you need more time—

**JOSH:** The answer is yes! I do. Of course I do.

**JANIE:** Oh. Wow. That's so...you seem so sure of yourself. I expected a long explanation and hand-ringing and—

**JOSH:** Not this time. I love you Janie. Let's get married.

*(We hear Janie tearing up.)*

**JANIE:** Okay! Well...great! I love you too.

*(They both choke up. Laugh. giggle. Ad lib about how happy they are. Then...)*

**JOSH:** Hey, I left you a message. Would you mind deleting it.

*(Camera out.)*

~

**“A Plea”** by Patty MacMullen

*(Ava is a 17-year-old on a spring break cruise with her father (who is divorced from her mother) and his family. She stands alone on the balcony of her cabin looking out to the sea, speaking to her mother whom she left behind at home several days before.)*

**AVA:**

Never...never would you believe you'd ever hear the words I'm about to say. But it's so easy to say them now that I can't actually see you. *(Pause as she makes this discovery.)* I wonder why?...I... Anyway, since I can't talk to you right now, that means I'll have to try to telepathically send you what I'm feeling and hope *(Partly joking and partly hopeful:)* that mother-daughter connection comes through. Not that we're usually connected. I've been too busy for that. Too distracted with other things I thought were more important. Too *(Realization:)* selfish... But every time I've needed you, you've always been there, so here goes my best try. The day I departed for this cruise, I pushed the pause button and escaped from my captives—my AP courses, finishing my senior year when everyone should know that we've all checked out by spring break; *(Beat.)* and...you—and I was looking forward to freedom. So why is it that these things I was happy to temporarily leave behind are the things I want the most now? And I'm now held captive on a ship with a lot of people I don't know. So here are those words, Mama, and I hope you can feel them. What I want is you. I want to be home. I'd gladly accept you kicking me out of the kitchen because I'm in the way more than I'm helping. And I would give you a personal invitation to embarrass me by joining in with my friends like you usually do when we start to spontaneously sing and dance to our favorite songs. I want to laugh with you even though what you think is funny is actually corny. Like when you told me about the ever-pretentious Mrs. Goff trying to introduce Mr. Peabody, a guest pianist, who was about to play for a crowd in church, and instead she said, “And now, Mr. Playbody will pee for us.” I was too cool to laugh with you. But then you started laughing, and I couldn't hold back, as much as I tried. I miss your laugh. *(Pause.)* When I get home, I want you to repeat every annoying cliché you've ever said to me because they're all replaying in my head right now: “Worrying will never change the outcome”; “Put your positive pants on”; “Will this matter a year from now?”. I never admitted it to you, but I kind of like those clichés. I even find myself repeating them to my friends. But for some reason, I can't tell you that. Sometimes, when I want to say the right thing, I don't. There's this stubborn thing inside me that...I just can't always say what I mean. But right now, while you're not here...I want to say this, and I hope wherever you are right now, you can feel it. I'm sorry I've never told you before just how proud I am to have you as my mother. I. love. you.

~

## **“On Board the Rebecca”** by Peter Royston

*(X enters at a rush, clothes torn, face dirty, looking for anyone following.)*

**X:**

Oh hello. I only have a few minutes to talk, I'm afraid. I've got to keep moving.

Welcome aboard The Rebecca, Galactic Cruiser serial number AK7-34 Alpha cosine Omega. Nearly two miles of pure tritanium alloy and solar sails, powered by fourteen jump-boost engines designed specifically to make the leap between galaxies that Einstein once thought was absolutely impossible. Moving slowly but steadily along the two-year path between Earth and Alpha Centauri, the Rebecca offers a pure power cruise for the System Elite, the 1% of the 1%. Swimming pools the size of lakes, casinos, racetracks, orchards with lasagna in the trees instead of apples. More, more, more! All for the utter pleasure of the richest fools in the Solar System: Tech Giants, Energy Kings and Queens, Ethernet Big Wigs, alien translators, online warriors, Politicians, Diplomats—and me, the biggest FOOL of all! Fool to think I could ever move on. Fool to think that things could change, even today in the bright future we all share.

Oh, forgive me, I forgot to introduce myself. That's on purpose, I guess. I'm not used to giving my name in public, and I won't be starting now. My real name wouldn't mean anything to you anyway. Just Call me X. You've probably never heard of me. That's on purpose, too. The authorities would never want to broadcast the fact that someone like me exists. Not these days. After all, I am the greatest thief in the galaxy.

After Corona 2020, they thought that jobs—and it IS a job, don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise—like mine were obsolete, old-fashioned, finished. After all, in the face of so much danger and so much trauma—and then after the changes that came after it was finished—the increases in health care, leaps in science, new ideas, new hope! Throwing out old ways of thinking, accepting the new, the useful, the beautiful. They called it the Great Awakening, a second Renaissance that shocked the world with its kindness and compassion. Who needed crime when everyone was looking after each other? Who needed to steal things when there was plenty for everyone?

Well, as it turned out, I did.

Don't get me wrong—I didn't NEED the things I stole, I wasn't starving, no one was back then. And I wasn't a Robin Hood, stealing from the wealthy to give to the not-so-wealthy. No, everything I took went right back to me. I just WANTED things! I LOVED things, I loved having them, I loved using them, I loved surrounding myself with them. I had to have gold and jewels on every finger, dressed in the finest cloth, driving the fastest cars (all powered by gas, none of this electric, biofuel for me. The dirtier the better!).

I was the last of a dying breed, those people who were happiest not by helping others, not by saving the world, but by helping themselves. Cicero said “Cui Bono?” or “Who Benefits?” and for me, the answer was always...me.

In an expanding galaxy of activists, do-gooders and self-righteous right-thinkers, I stood out like two sore thumbs. How could I not? My targets were the richest of the rich, the most powerful of the powerful, those who shaped this brand-new existence. If there was a trinket around the neck of the daughter of some president or king, if there was a ring on the second toe of the husband of a high-energy magnate, if there was anything, ANYWHERE, owned by someone who made decisions affecting you and me, I had it in my sites. It was already mine, it was just a matter of when. And they all knew it, they all knew me, although they would never acknowledge me. How could they? My existence was...a problem for them. I meant that not everyone was blissfully happy, not everyone was content. I was the irritant, the trickster, the sand in the oyster of this brave new world—if someone like me, someone who broke the rules just for the thrill of it, existed, then all bets were off. I could inspire others, the dominoes would fall and then we'd be right back where we started.

I could have continued having fun my whole very long life. That's what I wanted, that was the plan. But a famous boxer from the 20th century once said "Everyone has a plan...until they get hit in the face." And I got hit in the face—hard.

It was the perfect heist, even for me. I had been planning it for a more than a year. Everything was in place, everything was timed to the milli-second. A Prince of a thriving South American country, growing rich and fat in the tech sector, had given his wife a single ruby on the occasion of their first anniversary. And what a ruby! Forged in the heat of a pure red sun, it was as big as my heart and just as valuable. After more than a year of bribes and surveillance, I found myself in a place I knew all too well: suspended thousands of feet in the air, hanging upside down in front of a penthouse window.

With a steady hand my diamond tip laser carved a hole in the glass, just large enough for my hand to slip in and pull the lock. Dozens of alarms had been cut the night before—gaining the trust and paying off life-long servants was all part of the plan. I knew the schedule to the second—the apartment was empty and the 175-digit combination lock on the safe had been encrypted on my contact lenses. Nothing was going to stop me. As with so much else, the ruby was mine already, it was just a matter of when. I reached for the safe like a hungry child reaching for a plate of cookies when—

"Excuse me," a whispering voice said from across the room. I spun in place, my hand still out, reaching for those cookies, for the **THING I WANTED**.

There in the bed, which was supposed to be empty, which I had been told by numerous bribed servants, handmaids and butlers, was never ever used—was an old, old woman holding the bed curtains aside.

"Excuse me," she said again, "Can I—can I help you?" Her voice so sorry and so full of pain. Her hair was dirty grey like tarnished silver, matted with sweat to her forehead. Her eyes were filmed over white, covered with cataracts. She was blind, she couldn't see me. Even in my panic I recognized her as the Prince's mother. She had been very sick, reports were that she was near death.

"I'm sorry, I just was feeling so dizzy, I had to come in here to lie down. Do you work for my son?" she asked.

"Yes," I whispered, "Yes I do."

"Oh, I'm so sorry to bother you, please forgive me."

"Of—of course, ma'am," I stammered. What could I do? I couldn't leave through the door, there were at least a dozen guards in the hall.

"Before you go, can you come here for a moment?" she asked.

Again, what could I do? As I came over, she reached for me. The skin of her hand was like old paper, loose over her bones, but her fingers were strong and held my hand in a tight grip.

"Keep it safe," she whispered, so desperate. "Keep it safe."

"Keep what safe, ma'am?" I whispered back with one eye on the door.

"My heart. It's here."

I couldn't help asking—

"Your heart...ma'am?"

"My husband gave it to me."

The ruby! The son had passed it on—

"When I was very young. After—"

She stopped. Was she sleeping?

"After we lost our first child."

I stopped. I didn't see anything else, not the door to the hallway or my exit window. Just her now.

"It's too big, too beautiful, just too much, I told him."

I leaned forward, I couldn't help it.

"Not for you, he told me. Never...never too big for you."

Her grip loosened and she was asleep. I backed away the bed, keeping both eyes on her face. I don't remember how I left the apartment, how I got away. The alarms were never tripped, no one ever knew I was there. I heard she died a few days later.

And I—was done. I couldn't do it anymore. The fun, the thrill, the pure joy of it was gone. I left that part of me in the safe with the ruby and in that old woman's white eyes and never looked back. I booked myself a one-way ticket on a galactic cruiser named Rebecca headed for Alpha Centauri. As clichéd as it sounds, I was ready to make a new life, a new start.

But my grandmother used to say that people don't change. Although they kept my existence secret from the general public, too many of the rich and powerful knew me, knew what I had done. I was recognized the moment I came on board, tagged by a hundred hungry security camera and thousands of hungry eyes and minds, all hiding trinkets, jewelry and other goodies I would have been starving for myself only a few months ago.

It wasn't long before things started to go missing. Not by me. Probably a copycat hoping to cash in on the distraction of my presence on board. And this morning, I woke up to find a twelve-man security team marching down the hallway in my direction. Looking for me.

I've been dodging them ever since, but I can't do it forever. This is a big ship, but it's still two years to Alpha Centauri.

I could try to tell them, try to tell them about her white eyes and her heart locked in a safe. But they wouldn't listen. I mean, people don't change, do they?

~

**“Just Breathe”** by Maria McConville

**MOM:**

This started out as a vacation.

The first one since the twins were born. They are four now....so...you could imagine.

It was the get-away we were longing for and now we can't get away from it.

Having twins was a test for our marriage. Now lock yourself in cruise ship cabin with your spouse for longer than expected with no access to the tiki bar. That's a test.

*(Breath.)*

We FaceTime the kids every day. My mother has them.

Thank God. Imagine we had hired someone to watch them? But still. A long weekend is one thing...14 days is a whole other thing. My mother is 68. 4-year-olds are so much work. They wake up in the middle of the night to go potty or because of a bad dream or just to snuggle next to you.

And I just miss my babies.

I'm going crazy.

No. I am crazy.

They don't understand why we aren't back yet. Explain quarantine to a pair of 4-year-olds. Explain a virus or why we have to stay on this boat and not get off and that we aren't sick but we can't get off and that we might have it, but don't worry we don't have it....

*(Breath.)*

When we FaceTime, the kids cry.

Then I cry.

My husband cries.

My Mother cries.

And my poor Mother is left with them crying.

She has to answer all of their questions at bedtime. She has to tell them that we don't know when Mommy and Daddy are coming home and then deal with the fallout.

She tells me not to worry. That we are going to get through this. That I need to stay strong.

That the kids are alright.

My Mom is still being my Mom and a Grandma...

*(Breath. Breath.)*

I feel like I can't breathe.

The virus is making me feel this way.

And I don't even have it.

I don't think...

~

## **“Searching for Palaemon\*”** by Claudia Haas

*(\*Palaemon can be pronounced “Paleemon” or “Palayman.” Paleamon was a young god who protected anyone on a sea journey. He is depicted as a young boy riding a dolphin.)*

*(Izzy, 18 (female), rushes to the stern (the back) of a large cruise ship. She could have waterwings or a childish swimming tube around her.)*

### **IZZY:**

Palaemon? Are you there? Don’t make me yell. I’m not supposed to be here. I’m supposed to be quarantined in my stateroom. I’m ready to jump! I was a championship diver. Sort of. Third in the Mora, Minnesota league. There were four of us. But I can do this. Just swim by and I’ll catch you and I’ll hold on and I’ll feed you fish for the rest of your life. Or rather the rest of my life because you’re a god and will live forever and unfortunately, I won’t. Palaemon? I saw you in the tiny window—I saw you swim by—you and a whole bunch of your dolphin friends. It’s called a pod, right? When there’s a flock of dolphins—you’re in a dolphin pod? Well, I’m on this pod, see? This humongous pod—they call it a cruise ship—but really it’s just a virus ship. And I’d rather not stay any longer.

Palaemon? Please come back. Your sworn to protect anyone on a sea journey and I need protecting. I need to get off this pod! *(Beat.)* Oh come on! You can at least be impressed that I know my mythology and which god to seek. I bet you thought you were forgotten. I’m going to tell you a secret. I think you’re hot. Not just “cute” but blazing hot—like you could be on one of those “Firemen Calendars,” you know? If you come closer, I can tell you some more secrets!

*(Silence.)*

Fine! Betray all you stand for! If I am left here to die, I will make sure I bad-mouth you all over social media. Fake god! Imposter! *(Beat.)* I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that. I’m just scared and I need you come for me so I can get escape this death ship. *(Beat.)* I hear the crew. Palaemon? Come up for air! Palaemon? I think I see you. Yes!

I see you!

*(Izzy gets into diving position.)*

Ready or not/

*(Blackout.)*

~

## **“Clean Hands”** by Alan Haehnel

### **PASSAGENER:**

No, I didn't, I swear I didn't! Yes, you're right, I had no right to touch your possessions. I get that. Please don't—you don't need to call anyone, the captain or the purser or whoever. I can explain. Take a second to look in your purse. Please. Yeah, see? It's your wallet. With all the money in it, all the credit cards, identification...everything is there.

I get how you're confused. Yes, I know that you've been searching for it. I know because I took it. I stole your wallet out of your purse three days ago. You had no idea it was me because, well, I'm decent at my job. And cruise ships are pretty easy pickings. Crazy. The first time I get caught, just now, I was actually trying to give you your stuff back.

Okay, I get it. You have to call somebody. I won't try to run. Where am I going to go? Just for the record, I'm sorry. I know it really put a black mark on your vacation, when I stole it. I'm sure the theft, along with the quarantine, made this a really bad trip for you. Like I said, sorry.

Why? To tell you the truth, it's a living. I'm not proud of it, but it puts bread on the table. And like I said, people on cruise ships...

Oh, you mean, why was I trying to give it back? That's a tougher question. I hadn't planned on it, not before the quarantine. I mean, I've got kind of a system that I've developed—contacts at the ports, ways to fence the stuff so it doesn't hang around for long. It's a business, sad as it sounds. That doesn't answer your...

Look, why don't you just go ahead and call somebody? We don't need to stretch this out. No, I don't have any stuff on me anymore. I'm clean. You were the last one. I snuck everything else back.

It was because I began to feel like...*it*, you know? I couldn't keep taking stuff; I couldn't unload it. The quarantine made me stop. And sit. And look around. People are scared. You can see it in their eyes. This unseen thing, this virus—they don't know if it's going to get them, or if it already has. I mean, they thought they were coming to someplace sunny and, you know, carefree...safe! And now, all the sudden, this thing snuck up on them.

I couldn't shake feeling like... Look, I steal stuff for a living. I used to. And I figured out a way to be all right with that. Other people had more than me; they didn't really need what I took from them—I made it right in my head. But with this whole quarantine thing, actually having time to look at the people, I started feeling...I couldn't shake feeling like I was a sickness myself. And I couldn't live with that.

You're not going to call? I deserve it. Are you sure? All right, I will. Good-bye, thanks. I will. I'll keep my hands clean.

~

## **“Formal Night”** by Stephanie Buckley

*(March 2020. Lights on a modest cruise ship cabin. Elenore, a woman in her mid-twenties, sits on a double-bed neatly made with a gaudy bedspread and reads a women’s magazine—the kind with a slim woman on the front who claims to have lost 120 pounds. ELENORE is wearing an evening gown and fuzzy socks on her feet. For a moment, she glances over at the phone on her nightstand before returning to her magazine. She turns the page, looks at the phone again, and puts the magazine beside her. She picks up the phone.)*

### **ELENORE:**

*(As she dials:)* It can’t hurt to call one more time.

*(She puts the phone to her ear and picks a piece of lint off of her gown while the phone rings. After a moment, she speaks in a high and forced “phone voice.”)*

Hi. This is Elenore Acklin calling from room 9255. I’m sorry to be bothering you again, but I was just wondering if you had any updates. *(As the person on the other end speaks, Elenore nods.)* Yes, thank you. But I knew all about that. The captain was quite clear earlier, and I am up-to-date on the virus information and quarantine details. I was actually looking for a menu update. *(The person on the other end is obviously confused.)* Yes, the menu for dinner.

*(She reaches across the bed and grabs a cruise dossier from the other side of the mattress.)*

Well, according to the itinerary tonight is “formal night” and usually the quality of the meal reflects the quality of the attire. Let me tell you: I am wearing a lobster-worthy outfit. *(Excitedly as she looks at her gown.)* You see, I never go to Marshall’s because I hate waiting on lines, but something told me that if I went in there I would find... *(The person on the phone has cut her off.)* Of course. I absolutely understand the severity of the situation, and it is not my intention to waste your time. No, I appreciate everything the staff has done. I just wanted to check on the formal night menu. *(She listens.)* Okay, deliveries will start with the fifth floor at 5pm. *(She looks at her watch.)* I had selected late dining but... *(The person on the phone has cut her off again.)* No, I understand. By the time you get to the interior cabins on the ninth floor, it may be late dining anyway. *(She laughs at herself. The person on the phone, probably not amused, tries to hang up. Elenore stands up.)* Wait! Tell me what’s being served... No, no...let me guess? Prime Rib! No... I’m gonna go with my gut: lobster. Is it lobster? *(She listens excitedly and hears something that leaves her disappointed.)* Oh. I see. No, I get it. It’s a pandemic, and we are quarantined. And for our own safety and for the safety of others, we do not have access to the ship and must stay in our cabins. *(She looks around her room woefully.)* My mom said I should have sprung for the exterior cabin. *(In mom’s voice:)* “If you’re going to go on vacation by yourself like a crazy person, you should have a balcony...or at least a window.” *(She returns to her natural voice but begins gesturing wildly with the phone not caring if her voice is going into the receiver.)* I laughed at her when she said an inside cabin would make me crazy. “It’s just a week,” I said. “It’s

so much cheaper," I reasoned. But now I know my mom is right—and I hate when my mom is right: I *am* going crazy. Crazy without sunlight. Crazy without human companionship. Crazy without anything to look forward to. (*She speaks into the phone.*) So forgive me for clinging to the small joys of cruise life that I still have. (*Bellowing as she looks through the cruise dossier:*) Because I should be going to the New Collectors Thomas Kinkade Sale in the Art Gallery or playing bingo in The Sphinx Lounge or be getting a live acupuncture demonstration in the Royal Promenade, but instead I get to watch "The Life & Legacy of Thomas Kinkade" on the television, play online bingo on my phone, or perform acupuncture on myself using the safety pins I'm using to tack my evening gown to my bra.

*(Exhausted, she sits on the end of the bed and listens to the obviously concerned person on the other end of the line. She calms down.)*

No, that's not a threat. I never went to the acupuncture demo so, with my luck, I'd probably paralyze myself, and when someone finally finds my immobilized body, my bra straps would be showing.

*(In a fit of self-pity, she lays down on the bed. Then she has sits up as she has a realization.)*

I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I'm being so selfish.

*(She stands.)*

I'm safe. I'm healthy. I have the unlimited movie package and free wifi! Can you forgive me? (*She listens.*) Thank you so much. And, again, I'm sorry.

*(Elenore hangs up the phone, but her hand lingers on it for a moment. She picks up the cruise dossier, crumples it and throws it on the floor. She sits up in the bed and resumes reading the magazine. Just as Elenore starts to turn a page, she is startled by a knock on the door. She puts the magazine aside, gets up and walks to the offstage cabin door. There is a sound of a door opening and, from off stage, she says:)*

Oh!

*(The door closes. Elenore reenters with a food tray; her meal is concealed by a plastic cover. She puts the tray on the end of the bed and considers it for a moment. Finally, Elenore dramatically removes the plate cover. It is...)*

Lobster!

*(Elenore excitedly takes off her fuzzy socks, grabs her fancy heels from under the bed, and puts them on. She sits on the bed and puts the tray with the lobster on her lap. Blissfully:)*

Formal night.

*(Elenore joyously picks up her fork and knife, dips a chunk of lobster in butter and takes her first bite as the lights fade to black.)*

~

## **“Class Cruise”** by Barry Weber

*(Written to be performed as a series of web videos. You could also perform the play live in front of an audience too. But probably not for a while.)*

### **VIDEO 1**

*(The Teacher is bright and cheerful. S/He is professionally dressed and recording the video from a cozy, well-organized living quarters.)*

**TEACHER:** Good morning, everyone! It’s me, Ms./Mr. Biedermier, and I’m here to give you an update on our big class trip. Now, as you know, the class cruise to the Grantucky Basin was supposed to happen in six days. And though the authorities have cancelled all classes this week, I’m here to tell you not to worry. Classes are only cancelled *this* week, and I just heard that there have been *no* traces of the virus in Grantucky. So pack your things, okay? Cause this trip will most *definitely* happen! Alright, everybody, I’ll see you next week!

### **VIDEO 2**

*(The quarters are slightly messier. Perhaps there are several old coffee mugs and piles of dishes. The Teacher is a bit more disheveled and shows some signs of fatigue.)*

**TEACHER:** Hello, everybody, it’s me, Ms./Mr. Biedermier. You’ve probably heard by now that the authorities have cancelled school for the next month, and that includes all class trips. Yeah, I know, this is really hard. I mean, a lot of you have waited for this all year. But there’s got to be something we can do. Come *heck* or high water, we’re still gonna have the best class trip ever, okay? Stay strong, everyone. I’ll see you soon.

### **VIDEO 3**

*(A multitude of stuffed animals, action figures, etc dominate the background of this next video. The Teacher is dressed like s/he is ready for travel.)*

**TEACHER:** Ahoy, matees! It’s me, *Captain* Biedermier, and I have good news! OUR CLASS CRUISE IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW! Yeah, I know we’re not allowed to leave our houses, but we can use the magic of the internet to have our own VIRTUAL CRUISE!

*(Teacher holds up a paper with a very crudely drawn boat on it.)*

Here’s our cruise ship. Isn’t it beautiful? And look at all the interesting and worldly passengers on this ship with us! *(Grabs one of the stuffed animals and speaks in an ‘animal voice’)* “Hello children, my name is Mr. Paws, and I’m from a nation with different customs than yours!” Wow, Mr. Paws! We just *love* your accent! *(Pause—looks out in awe.)* Oh my goodness, everyone, there it is: The Beautiful Grantucky Basin!

*(Teacher holds up a paper with very hastily drawn scenery.)*

The Basin looks even better in person! Hey, everyone, let’s get a selfie!

*(Teacher takes a selfie with the drawing, then yawns.)*

Boy am I tired. Let's all turn in for the night, everyone. Thanks for helping make this the best class trip EVER! See you soon!

#### VIDEO 4

*(TEACHER looks like s/he hasn't slept in days and is probably in pajamas. Stuffed animals are all gone. Living quarters are a mess.)*

**TEACHER:** Well everybody, I hope you're doing okay since our virtual ship was quarantined. Apparently, Mr. Paws was infected with the virus. So just to be safe, I rounded up all the other passengers and set them on fire. *(Pause.)* I know this is hard, but we're Americans, dammit. And we're going to be just fine. Before we know it, everything will be all back to normal again. I'll see you soon, okay? Adios, amigos!

#### VIDEO 5

*(The living quarters are an absolute disaster. The Teacher looks terrible and rather frightening. This next scene goes at breakneck speed.)*

**TEACHER:** *(Fiercely blowing at camera:)* Do you feel that beautiful ocean breeze?!?! *(Makes animal sound effects.)* Listen to those exotic walruses! *(Takes out a container of salt and begins pouring it everywhere.)* Can you smell that salty seawater!? *(Screams.)* Oh my GOSH! IT'S PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN! *(Holds up a bad drawing of Abe Lincoln.)* It's an honor to meet you, Mr. President! Hey, everyone, the President says it's okay if we all go for a swim! *(Sprays face with a spray bottle, or maybe even throws a whole bucket of water over head.)* COME ON IN, EVERYBODY! THE WATER'S FINE!!! EVERYTHING IS JUST FINE! THIS IS THE BEST CLASS TRIP EVER!!!!!!!!!!

#### VIDEO 6

*(We can see that the living quarters are virtually barren. If the wall had any pictures, those pictures have been removed. If there was a visible bookcase, all the books are gone. Etc.)*

*(The Teacher is back in somewhat professional attire, but something is clearly off.)*

*(The video starts, but the Teacher is looking away at first. After awhile, s/he begins, but is extremely subdued.)*

**TEACHER:** Hey everyone.

*(Long pause; Teacher can't look at the camera.)*

You know, I always wanted... *(Pause.)* Nevermind. *(Pause.)* See you.

*(Teacher looks away again. After a while, s/he realizes camera is still recording. S/he sighs heavily and clicks off the recording.)*

~

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## **About Stage Partners**

Stage Partners was founded in 2015 by two internationally-produced playwrights who wanted to serve young artists and audiences around the globe.

The two playwrights, Jason Pizzarello and Morgan Gould, felt that finding high quality material for school, community theater, or performance groups shouldn't have to be so complicated. Why should it be so difficult to search, select, and order plays to perform? And why should teachers, artistic directors, and group leaders spend time and money ordering and reading plays that they ultimately don't choose to produce? How can one decide to produce a play he or she hasn't read? How can anyone be sure that the play fits his or her community guidelines, artistic standards, and producing capabilities? Stage Partners removes that guesswork.