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Acting Edition

Tomorrow Game

by Brandy N. Carie

SAMUEL FRENCH

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Use of the excerpt from *Deep Survival*, by Laurence Gonzales has been reproduced by kind permission of the author.

The author is indebted to a production of *TOMORROW GAME*'s initial scene during Houston's 2017 Future is Female Festival, without which the full-length script could not have come to be. This production was directed by Dana Bowman. The cast was as follows:

BELL.....Shunté Lofton
ROE.....Jasmine Thomas

TOMORROW GAME was supported in its development by a 2017 Edward Albee Foundation Fellowship. In conjunction with a 2018 KCACTF Steinberg Award, an excerpt of the play received a 2019 staged reading at the Kennedy Center, directed by Laley Lippard. The cast was as follows:

BELL.....Regina Aquino
ROE.....Moriamo Temidayo Akibu

TOMORROW GAME was further developed in Barter Theatre's 2020 Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights and presented in a digital staged reading directed by Nicholas Piper. The cast was as follows:

BELL.....Kim Morgan Dean
ROE.....Paris Bradstreet

CHARACTERS

BELL – Female. Small. Whip smart but careful not to show it off. Gifted is not a thing anymore. Calculating but also sometimes impulsive. Tough but not that strong. A good liar. Lonesome.

ROE – Female. Physically imposing. Not chatty but she is paying attention. Instinctive, careful. Athletes are not a thing anymore. Strong but only sometimes tough. A bad liar. Lonesome.

SETTING

The former continental United States.
Somewhere with trees that used to look different.

TIME

After.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

THE EARTH

This is a world of profound solitude and constant danger. The dangerous things are also beautiful. Infrastructure is gone, order is mythic, no one believes that help is coming. Most people can't imagine a world where help just *comes*. There is no cure for the sickly earth, no place of refuge to quest toward. Just death, and not-death, not yet, not today.

ON LANGUAGE & SONG

The women in this play have been mostly alone. They speak in the shorthand of familiarity they learned when the only people around them were familiar. They say nothing that doesn't need to be said. People who speak to fill the void are not the kind of people who survive. Bell's song is also not sung to fill the void; it is a mnemonic device that helps map her surroundings.

ON PUNCTUATION

A slash /in the text indicates an overlap where the next line begins.
A question that ends with a period indicates no upward inflection. (Do you think the speaker already knows the answer.)
A sentence without concluding punctuation is one where the speaker has more to say.

ON CASTING

Both performers may be any age between twenty and fifty. Both performers may be any race. However, anything that might impose a sense of inequality between them (i.e. a major age disparity, or casting one white and one Black performer) should be avoided. The biggest differences between them are: Bell is small and Roe is big; Bell is analytic and Roe is emotional; Bell reads books and plays games and lives for tomorrow while Roe watches, listens, and remembers.

STORIES AND BIBLE VERSES

The text read by Bell on page 32 is selected lines from the book of Job, in the New King James Version of the Bible. The stories in Roe's book are my own, to whatever extent that's possible.

"Each man must do his own surviving. He may do it by rescuing someone else, by not being a victim, but just as only he can live his life, so too his survival cannot be shared. No one can do it for him. Privacy is important for strength in that lonely work."
– *Deep Survival*, by Laurence Gonzales

Yesterday

(The setting sun glares blindingly through a large metal door as it is slammed shut by **ROE** *in a gas mask. She locks the door with three heavy locks, one, two, three.)*

(After the sun the room is dim: a cave. A bunker. Large, round-ish. A straw mattress in a corner. Guns on one wall. One whole wall is just stacks of rusty food cans.)

*(***ROE** *is carrying a twisted metal trap. She drops it with a crash.)*

(There are candles lit. A fire in the center of the room, smoldering. Two wooden stools.)

(She takes off the gas mask. She hangs it up next to two other masks. She straightens the other two masks.)

*(***ROE** *looks around the empty room.)*

*(***ROE** *stokes the fire. She sets meat on a spit over the fire.)*

*(***ROE** *takes off a few layers of clothing and hangs them up. Underneath is something comfortable and worn.)*

*(***ROE** *collects the trap and sits by the fire. She studies the trap. A broken hinge?)*

(She gets a toolbox full of tools and random metal doodads. She fiddles.)

(After a moment, **ROE** *peeks at the meat again. Pokes it. Considers, shakes her head. Not yet.)*

*(***ROE** *cocks her head, as if listening.)*

*(***ROE** *shakes her head, smiling.)*

*(***ROE** *fiddles with the trap. She puts a little grease on a rag, and oils it.)*

*(***ROE** *looks at the meat again. Now.)*

*(***ROE** *eats the meat.)*

ROE. Traps: one set, two set, three set, four set, five set, six broke,

*(***ROE** *whacks the broken trap.)*

seven set, eight set, nine set.

Meat: ...one large animal.

Cans: plenty.

Guns: oiled.

Wood: three trees.

Bucket: empty.

Water: clean.

Patrol: nothing.

Roe: whole.

Winston:

*(**ROE**'s face screws up. She is overwhelmed. We do not cry here. **ROE** gets her shit together.)*

And the evening and the morning were the third day.

(Lights out.)

Yesterday (Again)

(Door closed, candles and fire lit, meat on the spit.)

*(***ROE** *does pullups. Drops off the pullup bar. Smiles a little.)*

ROE. Fifty.

(She frowns.)

*(***ROE** *takes the meat off the spit. Looks at it.)*

Eat. Eat of my body.

(She looks at the meat.)

EAT!!

Do this in remembrance of me.

*(***ROE** *looks at the meat.)*

*(***ROE** *eats.)*

Traps: one set, two set, three set, four set, five set, six broke,

*(***ROE** *whacks the broken trap.)*

seven set, eight set, nine set.

Meat: ...

*(***ROE** *suddenly stands and picks up the nearest object: the trap.)*

(She uses the full force of her body to hurl the trap against a wall.)

(It breaks into many pieces.)

(She blows out the candles.)

And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

(Lights out.)

Yesterday (Again)

*(**ROE** eats meat by the fire.)*

*(**ROE** finishes the meat.)*

*(**ROE** tinkers with the trap.)*

(There! It's fixed.)

*(**ROE** sets the fixed trap by the door.)*

*(**ROE** picks up the trap and looks at it again.)*

*(**ROE** sets it down.)*

*(**ROE** does pullups. One, Two… **ROE** drops down.)*

*(**ROE** walks in a circle around the whole cave.)*

(Then again. Again, faster.)

*(**ROE** stops in front of the fire and stares at it.)*

ROE. And he said unto them:

A broken trap's a useless trap.

Double check, then check again.

Red sky at night, door stays closed.

Meat first, then cans.

Bored is alive.

Bored is alive.

"Oh that you would appoint me a set time…

And remember me."

*(**ROE** picks up the nearest thing: a wooden stool.)*

(She smashes it on the ground, over and over, until it is splinters.)

(She breathes deeply and feeds the splinters into the fire.)

And the evening and the morning were the thirty-fourth day.

(Lights.)

Today

*(**BELL** walks along a grassy path, wearing a gas mask, humming cheerfully. The countryside, but the hint of a small city not too far off. If there are clouds they're tinged with unnatural colors. If we can see details of the city, it is largely a ruin.)*

BELL. *(Singing/humming. Upbeat.)*
SINGING DANDY WHERE DID YOU GO,
WHERE WILL WE GO ...
HMM HMM HMM ...
TOGETHER IN A CITY WITH PURPLE CLOUDS ...

(She suddenly stoops to look at a patch of tiny yellow flowers on the side of the road.)

What's this? Safe or not safe...

*(**BELL** examines the flowers closely, then lifts the mask. A moment where she checks – am I dead from breathing the air? Not dead. She leans down toward a flower. She sniffs it. She sticks out her tongue & gives the flower a tiny lick.)*

Not dead yet...
... SINGING DANDY WHERE DID YOU GO,
HMMM HMMM FLOWERS OF GOLD
... HMM HMM FLOWERS OF -

*(**BELL** plucks the flowers and drops them in her satchel. **ROE** enters, wearing a gas mask, carrying a gun.)*

ROE. What you got there.

BELL. *(Careful.)* Little yellow flowers, looks like.

ROE. That so.

BELL. –

ROE. What you planning to do with 'em.

BELL. Eat them. With greens. To add sweetness.

ROE. *(Extremely surprised.) Greens?*

BELL. Yes.

ROE. You got vegetables.

BELL. Yes.

ROE. *Safe* ones? Not contaminated?

BELL. Well I'm still here.

ROE. How you know *those*'re safe?

BELL. Smell, mostly. The color. I can't be sure, of course.

ROE. *(This woman is insane.)* But you'll… you'll eat them just the same.

BELL. I will. With radishes. And dandelion. And vinegar.

ROE. You got *radishes*.

BELL. I do.

ROE. Where. *How*.

BELL. I grew them.

ROE. In the earth.

BELL. In dirt.

(Pause.)

ROE. This is my area.

BELL. *(She's been waiting for this.)* I'm sorry I saw no sign.

ROE. Don't gotta put one up for it to be mine.

BELL. Of course. I simply mean that I couldn't have known it was yours when I first entered it.

ROE. Now you know.

BELL. Yes.

ROE. You're still on it.

BELL. Shall I go?

ROE. You're on my area.

BELL. You said.

ROE. So I can do what I want.

BELL. You can.

ROE. So

BELL. What is it you want to do?

*(***ROE** *raises the gun.)*

ROE. I'm hungry.

BELL. As am I. Quite hungry. Perhaps I'll just go eat.

ROE. Meat's running low.

BELL. I'm very sorry to hear that.

ROE. How'd you grow them vegetables though.

BELL. ...Maybe that's something we could discuss if you put down the gun.

ROE. *(Surprised.)* This is my area.

BELL. Yes.

ROE. I can do what I want.

BELL. *(A bit irritated at this point.) Yes.* But so can I. And I don't want to talk about vegetables when you are pointing a gun at me.

ROE. *This is my* –

BELL. Yes I *know* it is your area and if you are going to shoot then shoot. I will not tell you about my radishes with you pointing a gun at me and I am bored of this repetitive talk!

ROE. I wanna know about them vegetables.

BELL. You surely can't be this stupid. Were you left outside without a mask as a child?

*(***ROE** *lowers the gun.)*

ROE. I'm not stupid.

BELL. No?

ROE. –

BELL. Are you going to shoot me or do you want to hear about the radishes?

ROE. Tell me about the radishes. Then I'll shoot you.

BELL. No.

*(***BELL** *begins to walk away.* **ROE** *shoots in the air.* **BELL** *jumps but continues walking away.)*

ROE. Hey! *HEY!* Not shooting.

*(***BELL** *slowly turns.)*

BELL. You're not?

ROE. I'm putting the gun down.

BELL. Over there.

ROE. ...Over there.

BELL. Good.

ROE. So.

BELL. I dug the earth from high ground after a clean rain and I put it in a wooden box. I grow the radishes in the

box and I cover the box when the rain is bad. I catch clean rain in a barrel and I use it to water the radishes. And the carrots. And beans.

ROE. Beans!

BELL. Yes.

ROE. But – the little flowers.

BELL. Yes?

ROE. They're…on the ground. They get all the rain. The bad rain, too.

BELL. Yes

ROE. But you eat it anyway.

BELL. It hasn't rained in a week.

ROE. –

BELL. I'm taking a risk.

ROE. You wanna die?

BELL. No.

ROE. Then –

BELL. It's just a risk. It's just a risky game I play. Each day I try a new thing and I say, safe or not safe? And I guess. And If I guess right, then I live. And I eat sweet yellow flowers with my greens. And if I guess wrong, I get sick and I probably die. It's a game. And so far, I'm winning. Perfect score.

ROE. A game?

BELL. *(Sadly.)* Yes, a game. Like Scrabble. I used to be very good at Scrabble.

ROE. Scrabble.

(This makes **BELL** *extremely sad, but we don't cry here.)*

BELL. I have no one to play with anymore. My mother went out in the bad rains. My sister lost her game.

ROE. I –

BELL. I'm going to go now.

(Turns to leave.)

ROE. I want to play a game.

BELL. What?

ROE. I want to play a game.

BELL. You do.

ROE. Yes.

BELL. It could be risky.

ROE. OK.

BELL. ...OK. Take off your mask.

ROE. *(Fearful.)* Is this the game?

BELL. It's how the game begins. *(Beat.)* Take off your mask.

ROE. I'm afraid.

BELL. It's a scary game.

ROE. Are you going to play, too?

BELL. I will.

ROE. ...OK.

BELL. *(Slowly, like a poem.)* Take off your mask. Slowly. Feel the wind ruffle the hairs around your face that are damp from sweat. Feel the breeze dry the sweat on your forehead, your upper lip.

*(***ROE** *is nervous at first, and averts her eyes, but slowly she begins to enjoy the game. She takes off her mask.* **BELL** *moves with*

deliberation and joy. She is unafraid. She has played this game many times before.)

Look up. The sun is bright. See the clouds. Feel the warmth and the breeze and the clear sky. Take a deep breath. Taste the air. There is perfume. There are yellow flowers. There is green. Somewhere, you can hear a bird. Listen. Look. This is the world without a mask. It is beautiful. It might kill you. How long will you stay?

(They stand, still, open, breathing, listening. **ROE** *is full of a rapt wild terrified joy, like jumping off a cliff into the water far below, bracing for the impact, hoping it never comes. Birds chirp. A cloud passes over. They wait.)*

Tomorrow

*(**BELL** is walking along the same path, singing, watching. Her gas mask is handy but not on.)*

BELL.

FOUR LEGS OR THREE, NEVER GET OLD,
FEATHERS OF GREEN, FLOWERS OF GOLD,
SINGING DANDY, WHERE DID YOU GO?
WHERE WILL WE –

(A gunshot. Not far off.)

*(**BELL** crouches in the grass, almost hidden.)*

*(**ROE** enters. Gun over her shoulder. Her gas mask and clothes are smeared with blood. Mostly it seems to be her own blood from a big gash on her arm.)*

*(**BELL** comes out from hiding.)*

ROE. You're back in my area.

BELL. Hello

ROE. You sing too loud.

BELL. I like to sing.

*(**ROE** snorts.)*

ROE. What do you want? You wanna get killed?

BELL. No thank you.

Who'd you shoot?

ROE. ...Just an animal.

BELL. Food.

*(***ROE** *shrugs.)*

ROE. You're back. In my area.

BELL. You're hurt.

ROE. *You're back. In my –*

BELL. This again?!

ROE. It's still mine

BELL. I thought we… understood each other

ROE. What's there to understand.

BELL. We played a game together

ROE. And.

BELL. So it was… amicable –

ROE. – So that doesn't mean you get to come in my area any time.

BELL. OK. I just…thought. You might have more little yellow flowers.

ROE. My area. My flowers.

BELL. I brought radishes. To trade.

ROE. Radishes!

BELL. But I don't see any flowers.

ROE. …I ate 'em all.

BELL. Then I guess I will have to keep the radishes.

*(***ROE** *raises her gun.)*

ROE. No.

BELL. Oh for rot's sake.

ROE. You're on my area.

BELL. I thought we discussed how I feel about having a gun pointed at me.

ROE. You took flowers *last* time.

(Pause. **BELL** *considers.)*

BELL. ...OK. You're right.

ROE. I know.

BELL. Put that thing down. And you can have...four radishes.

ROE. How many you got?

BELL. ...Four.

*(***ROE** *suspiciously puts the gun down.)*

Over there –

ROE. Over there, over there, fine.

*(***ROE** *puts the gun over there.* **BELL** *gives* **ROE** *four radishes.)*

BELL. I can bring you beans, too –

ROE. Beans!

BELL. But only if you have something to trade.

ROE. Flowers

BELL. No

ROE. There'll be more flowers soon.

BELL. I don't want flowers.

ROE. Why not.

BELL. Flowers don't fill up my belly.

ROE. What then.

BELL. A gun.

(Pause.)

ROE. ...Only got one gun.

BELL. Meat, then.

ROE. ...Meat's better than beans.

BELL. I'll bring carrots, too.

*(**ROE** thinks. She takes a stick, or her fingers, and draws two circles in the dirt, one about half the size of the other. She points to the smaller circle.)*

ROE. This much meat.

(She points to the bigger circle.)

For this much beans.

*(**BELL** re-draws the meat circle to make it bigger.)*

BELL. This much meat.

ROE. No.

BELL. I'll bring the beans and...

Three carrots.

ROE. ...OK.

Tomorrow.

BELL. There might be a storm tomorrow.

ROE. Might eat your meat tomorrow.

*(**BELL** nods at **ROE**'s bleeding cut.)*

BELL. You might die of that tomorrow.

ROE. No.

BELL. –