

Acting Edition

To Tell a Story About the Earth

by Miranda Rose Hall

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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TO TELL A STORY ABOUT THE EARTH was commissioned by Concord Theatricals and developed by LubDub Theatre Co (Caitlin Nasema Cassidy and Geoff Kanick, Co-Artistic Directors; Miranda Rose Hall, Founding Playwright; Robert Duffley, Founding Dramaturg). The play received a developmental workshop at Georgetown University’s Theater & Performance Studies Program in the Department of Performing Arts in October 2024. The Faculty Host was Professor Maya E. Roth. The production was co-directed by Caitlin Nasema Cassidy and Geoff Kanick with dramaturgy by Robert Duffley. The cast and creatives were as follows:

STUDENT COMPANY Sophia Alexandrou, Daisy Casemore,
Tai Remus Elliot, Winnie Ho, Anna Kummelstedt,
Gabriela Martinez, Martin Neisuler, Julia Toloczko,
Nelly Amairany Hernández Valdez,
Alex Wang, Heran Zhang

Special Thanks

Dr. Peter P. Marra and the Earth Commons, Georgetown University’s Institute for Environment & Sustainability

TO TELL A STORY ABOUT THE EARTH was subsequently produced by Franklin Performing Arts Company (Raye Lynn Mercer, Executive/Artistic Director) in February 2025. The produciton was directed by Eliza Palter. The cast and creatives were as follows:

COMPANY Heather Cohen, Aiden Day, Aida DiChiara,
Mike Hulbig, Liam Nolan-Hayun, Debra Packard,
Nathaniel Packard, Matthew Packard, Nick Paone,
Kylie Parsons, Catherine Rhodes, Kellie Stamp

CHARACTERS

THE LIBRARIAN – A Librarian, a generation or two above the others

TAYLOR – A Leader

JO – A Skeptic

SAM – A Visionary

CJ – A Romantic

RILEY – A Wise Fool

DEVISING CHORUS – An optional chorus, as big or small as you please, that helps with the creation and performance of an original ten-minute play

SETTING

A rehearsal space.

TIME

The ever-present now.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A note on casting

When casting this play, think of these characters as archetypes. The roles are open in terms of race, gender, and other identities.

Some notes about this play

This is a play about devising. It's about what happens when a small ensemble tries to make a play from scratch. I think of it as a fairly traditional play that I have written in a fairly traditional way, but with one big twist: it's also a MadLib! There are prompts throughout the script for you to fill in as you see fit (but don't feel that you have to limit your writing based off of the size of the blank provided. If you have more to say – say it!) That means that the play will be different every time it's produced. My hope is that these blanks help the play be of you and of the place where you perform it in a more personal and immediate way than I could ever write on my own.

I come from a devising tradition with my own small theater company, LubDub Theatre Co. We have developed this play together, modeled after our own practices of devising and making work within climate crisis. We have found that talking about climate crisis is a very personal matter, and

that talking about the entire Earth gets very overwhelming very quickly. The arc of this play reflects the arc that we have experienced creatively over the past five years: what is personal is emotionally resonant; what is emotionally resonant makes for good theater; and we need good theater to help us make sense of our rapidly-changing world.

And why do I think we need theater to help us make sense of our rapidly changing world? Because theater is made in community and shared in community. And community is our best defense against the anxieties, grief, and emergencies of our times.

In the sections that are yours to write, don't feel that you need to imitate my voice. I recommend experimenting with what these characters would say, workshopping things as a company, codifying a final draft, memorizing it, and then delivering it as if it were spontaneous material. Remember: the audience probably won't know that you're filling in blanks unless you tell them.

The biggest blank to fill in is the ten-minute play that you will create about a Subject of your choosing. Find a part of the natural world that everyone in your ensemble has a personal story about, and let that be your guide. These stories, and this Subject can be fairly simple, and even fairly ordinary. I have found that simplicity ultimately makes things all the more profound. (And if you'd like some guidance on a developmental process for all of this, please refer to the Note on Process in the Appendix of this Acting Edition.)

At the end of the day, what I care about the most is that each collaborator on this project might bring something of themselves that is specific, energizing, and personally meaningful. It is my assignment to you: bring something to life that you care about.

And I acknowledge that making something you care about may involve some emotional vulnerability. I hope that you may build a trusting and courageous space for all of the people making the play. It is a story about people who learn to hold each other. I hope that becomes true for your process as well.

And most importantly, please enjoy yourselves. It's called a play for a reason.

Scene One

The Pitch

(**THE LIBRARIAN** *makes a phone call.*)

(*There need not be a literal phone, or any business of dialing.*)

THE LIBRARIAN. Hi.

This is the Librarian.

I'm just coming out of your show!

I'm standing in the parking lot.

I didn't want to interrupt your celebration. You must be having a party!

But I couldn't wait another moment.

I'm calling with a proposition.

I'm making an offer you can't refuse.

The library is having an event next month, and there's a theme: Earth.

We have some things planned.

But something is missing.

And you know what that something is?

Performance.

And as I watched your show this evening, I thought: these people make theater.

They should make something for us!

And what should you make?

Well I think that you should just try...to...tell a story about the Earth.

(A beat.)

Now, people think that librarians are all about rules!

We're not!

But that being said, there are some guidelines.

I'm afraid that we cannot have any of the following:

bad language, adult themes, excessively loud sound cues, fireworks, animals, literal fires or literal floods –

And let's keep it under ten minutes.

And if you mention a book, that's great.

And really – why not try something impossible, you know?

Because I once saw the playwright Paula Vogel give a talk.

And she said she always tries to put one impossible thing in each play.

And then she said that there was only one truly impossible thing in the theater:

for two people in the audience to have the exact same experience.

And now I know that this is unconventional in a voicemail,

but I'd like to say something personal:

sometimes I lie awake at night wondering what people one hundred years from now will say about us.

About our time on Earth.

They'll look at our art.

Our films.

Our free-to-the-public library events.

And they'll wonder – what were the people of

[thinking?]¹

Were they thinking about the future?

Were they thinking about the present?

Were they numb?

Were they dumb?

Couldn't one little theater troupe have thought of a story to tell?

1. The name of the town or city where this play is performed

Scene Two

Opening Night

(**CJ, JO, RILEY**, and **SAM** are onstage.)

(*The vibe is: Oh God.*)

RILEY. Did that really just happen?

SAM. What are we supposed to do?

RILEY. We're supposed to be having a party.

CJ. Should we – should there be music?

JO. Is there like – a funeral playlist?

RILEY. Seriously?

CJ. We could have a funeral for my clothes. Everything I'm wearing smells like dog poop.

RILEY. Same.

JO. Yup.

CJ. I mean – that was dog poop tracked all over the stage, right?

JO. No question.

SAM. How did it get there?

RILEY. The devil.

(**TAYLOR** enters.)

TAYLOR. OK! Happy Opening!

(**RILEY, CJ**, and **SAM** look at **TAYLOR** like, “are you kidding me?”)

What?

JO. Are you serious?

TAYLOR. Yes, come on – time for a toast –

JO. What are we toasting?

TAYLOR. Our play!

JO. Are you – delusional?

TAYLOR. We have to celebrate –

SAM. I made a cake –

CJ. It's lovely –

SAM. Thank you –

JO. OK well I'm sorry, I can't just – stand here and pretend like – that wasn't the most absolutely horrifying ninety minutes of our lives –

TAYLOR. Well, it can't always go as planned, but, all things considered –

JO. All things considered, it was a total catastrophe –

RILEY. I mean, no one died –

JO. No one died! What a consolation.

TAYLOR. Alright well, I think we can all agree that it didn't go as planned, but you know what? We wanted to make a play from scratch, and we made a play from scratch, and I think we deserve to celebrate the fact that we had a lot of good ideas –

JO. But were they good enough to show in public?

CJ. Look, if we're just going to argue, I think – I need to just leave to go see my family – they're waiting in the lobby –

JO. Yeah, and I need to go crawl in a hole –

TAYLOR. Well, wait. Listen. One person saw it. And really liked it.

RILEY. Who?

TAYLOR. The Librarian. Who somehow got my number.
And somehow already left an incredibly long voicemail
about commissioning a play –

RILEY. A commission!

SAM. What?

CJ. Do you know each other?

JO. Is it paid?

TAYLOR. No. But they're having some event at the library,
and the theme is Earth. And the Librarian went on
and on in this voicemail about – I don't know – the
future? And like – what will future people think? Like
what would they think if they looked back at us, and –
somehow – our library events?

CJ. Will future people care about our library events?

JO. Do present people care about our library events?

TAYLOR. Anyway, that's the pitch: to tell a story about the
Earth.

JO. So let me get this straight: we just experienced total
humiliation. Like straight up soul-crushing total
humiliation. For the sake of doing theater. And your
contribution to this gathering is to do more theater,
totally undefined theater, about the entire Earth, for
free, for fun.

TAYLOR. Yes.

CJ. And then what?

TAYLOR. And then – I don't know. We disband, we move
on. On our own terms. Having done something that we
believe in.

JO. Wasn't that the pitch last time?

TAYLOR. Look – we can do this whole – pageant of
grievances, we can complain and be jerks and whatever.

But we also need to acknowledge that we promised each other years ago that we were going to make something happen. And we spent so much time waiting for the moment to be right. And then
[

].²

And we couldn't make things. And we felt like this was our chance. And we needed to take it.

JO. You needed to take it.

CJ. You opted in, too, Jo.

TAYLOR. And maybe we can think of all of that as some truly terrible rough draft. But we can't just throw away everything – like we made a lot of beautiful stuff happen, too. We did our own rehearsals. We made our own costumes. We figured it all out on our own. And I'm really proud of that, actually.

SAM. Me too.

TAYLOR. And who knows. Maybe this is the last chance we have to make anything together.

And personally I'd rather go out on a high note than fall flat on our faces.

JO. We could very easily fall flat on our faces again.

CJ. Or we could not.

TAYLOR. Exactly. Or we could not.

RILEY. I think this time we need to make something more personal.

2. **TAYLOR** says some very real-life reasons why it wasn't possible for them to make a play.

SAM. Like we can be ourselves?

RILEY. I think we were trying too hard to be impressive.

JO. You want to be unimpressive?

RILEY. I want to be real.

SAM. I wouldn't mind having the chance to think about the Earth for the next few weeks.

JO. Do we know anything about the Earth?

RILEY. I know a lot about Uranus.

TAYLOR. Oh my God, Riley –

CJ. Well, whatever. You don't have to do it, Jo.

TAYLOR. Great point, CJ. You don't have to do it, Jo.

SAM. Yeah, if you want to go home, you can.

(A beat.)

JO. You seriously all want to do this?

(Yes.)

OK, but it has to be good. Like it has to be a tight ten. Like I'm not going to go out as the company that couldn't even do a really tight ten –

TAYLOR. So we're in?

SAM. I'm in.

CJ. I'm in.

RILEY. I'm in.

TAYLOR. I'm in.

(They look at JO.)

JO. Peer pressure is really messed up, you guys.

Scene Three

The First Rehearsal: Finding A Subject

(CJ is alone in the rehearsal room, preparing to practice something for an invisible audience.)

(At some point during CJ's monologue, SAM enters and listens. CJ doesn't notice.)

CJ. Uhm – OK. So my name is CJ. And I'm going to tell you – OK. So. I got into theater because when I was younger, I loved

[]³

I really did. I was like – obsessed. I would try to find
[]³ everywhere.

And, for whatever reason, my mom thought that we should go see

[]⁴

– Oh, I guess a cousin was working on it. So we went to see my cousin's play. And lo and behold, it had all of these
[]³

And I couldn't believe it. I think my eyes popped out of my head. It was all I could talk about for weeks. Suddenly all I wanted was to grow up and be old enough to do a play. And my mom had to tell me like, CJ, just to be clear, not every play has

[]³

But I didn't care. I grew up in such a tiny house. In such a massive, massive family. I'm the second youngest of seven. But there's a quality, I think, to watching someone onstage where they can become larger than life. And who wouldn't want the chance to try to be larger than life?

3. Something that **CJ** loved

4. The name of a popular show

(CJ suddenly becomes aware of not being alone.)

(CJ sees SAM.)

CJ. Oh my God –

SAM. Hi! Sorry –

CJ. How long have you been there?

SAM. I just walked in –

CJ. Did you hear all of that?

SAM. Are you practicing for something?

CJ. I have this really stupid audition – I mean, it's not stupid, I'm stupid –

SAM. You're not stupid –

CJ. Well whatever, I'm not ready. They want a spontaneous story – and so I'm like – I wrote out twenty spontaneous questions. And I try to do one every day to like –

SAM. Practice being spontaneous?

CJ. Oh no it's even worse when you say it out loud –

SAM. Like what?

CJ. Well today it was – why did you get into theater?

SAM. And what was yesterday?

CJ. Uhm,

[

]?⁵

SAM. And what'd you say?

CJ. Uh basically

[

].⁶

5. A spontaneous and totally extreme, potentially insane question

6. CJ's response

SAM. Huh –

(Is SAM impressed? Intrigued? Does CJ want to disappear?)

Well – uh – where's the gig?

CJ. I mean, it's not a gig yet. It's over in

[

].⁷

SAM. Oh. Cool. I know a couple of people out there.

CJ. Wait, you do?

SAM. Yeah, I did a summer festival. I helped on the crew.
Nice people –

CJ. God, I can't keep track of all of the like – gigs you've had –

SAM. I've been lucky.

(SAM isn't quite sure what to say.)

(Why is it sometimes so hard to keep talking?)

CJ. Oh! And – that cake you made for opening was like – really good –

SAM. Oh! Thanks –

CJ. You're like really good at making things –

(TAYLOR, JO, and RILEY enter.)

TAYLOR. Hey – sorry we're late –

[

].⁸

SAM. Again?

TAYLOR. Anyway – circle up?

JO. When is there not a circle.

7. Some place that is not quite close, not quite far

8. An excuse about local transportation

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