



WARM UP THE ICE CREAM

A One Act Play

ABSTRACT

Inside a warehouse rehearsal space, an ACTOR and a WRITER attempt to create a play while the world outside drifts through pandemics, media spectacle, political anxiety, and cultural exhaustion.

As rehearsals collapse into improvisation, memory, interruption, and performance begin bleeding into one another.

Warm Up The Ice Cream is a dark meta theatrical comedy about artistic survival, fast food culture, and the unstable line between reality and rehearsal.

Donald Morin

Playwright

WARM UP THE ICE CREAM

Premise:

A one-act existential dark comedy about everything and nothing taking place inside a partially converted warehouse rehearsal space where actors, writers, interruptions, unfinished ideas, and reality itself begin colliding in real time.

Style and Performance Notes:

The pacing throughout the play should feel urgent, unstable, improvisational, and emotionally unpredictable. At times the performers move with manic desperation as ideas collapse, scenes fracture, interruptions occur, and reality slowly bleeds into rehearsal.

Though chaotic on the surface, the actors must always remain grounded in timing, rhythm, and control beneath the disorder.

Scene:

A partially converted warehouse rehearsal space filled with fragments of abandoned productions, folding tables, coffee cups, cables, microphones, projection equipment, unfinished props, old film reels, and theatrical debris.

Parts of the warehouse feel alive; other parts abandoned.

At CENTRE STAGE sits a single chair.

DOWN STAGE RIGHT, an old couch.

An ACTOR enters STAGE LEFT carrying a chair.

Moments later, FRED enters slowly behind him, distracted by his smartphone and carrying a coffee.

Silence.

WARM UP THE ICE CREAM

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

ACTOR — JOHN SALVATION

WRITER — FRED FINIKY

SANDY CARDINAL

DIRECTOR — JAMES NICHOLAS

HOMELESS MAN — HARRY WHISKEY RACK

WOMAN #1

MAN #1

WOMAN #2

STAGEHAND

LADY NEAR STAGE

MAN NEAR STAGE

DONALD MORIN

(A caricature of himself)

JANITOR

WARM UP THE ICE CREAM

A partially converted warehouse rehearsal space. A small black stage sits almost empty in the middle of the room. Around it: folding tables, coffee cups, cables, old props, masks, projection equipment, scraps of former productions, and the tired evidence of people trying to make art without enough money. ACTOR enters STAGE RIGHT. He looks around.

ACTOR: It's practically empty! What's going on here? No audience, no support, no harassment
what's all the trouble?

FRED (OFF-STAGE): This post says cooperation with management is now on your behalf!

ACTOR: Whatever that means.

FRED enters STAGE RIGHT, looking at his smartphone and carrying coffee.

FRED: It says here labour, government, and corporate partners will give us something to say.

ACTOR: I want to appeal.

FRED: To who?

ACTOR: Society. The public. The people who still know how to sit in a room without checking
their phone every eight seconds.

FRED: That's a small demographic.

ACTOR: We can have a hundred Aboriginals here to watch, protest, walk about, join us even.

FRED: A hundred? In this economy?

ACTOR: Don't start.

FRED: The Canadian Armed Forces are still looking for stolen submachine guns.

ACTOR: Has it gone public?

FRED: Everything's public now. Some guy sets up the Crown, publicizes the crisis, uploads it, tags the Prime Minister, and three bots call it fake by supper.

ACTOR: Moments of disconcert! That's what I want to bring up. For the last two weeks it's been a hot box outside. My brain's all heated up. You are hired to write it all down!

FRED: What are you babbling about? You want to act and me watch you?

ACTOR: There are bound to be some of your attributes in any play.

FRED: That's libel.

ACTOR: What about that play with the characters with no names?

FRED: What? Six Characters in Search of an Author?

ACTOR: Yes!

FRED: Never heard of it.

ACTOR: Yes you have.

FRED: No I haven't.

ACTOR: Don't mess with me.

FRED: There wasn't anything worthwhile to write or say.

ACTOR: Yes there was!

FRED: No there wasssn't.

ACTOR: I was born to be a star.

FRED: You were born to be late for rehearsal.

ACTOR: I know great lines. To be! To be! Oh, I see Queen Mab hath been with you! You foul leech of a gnat!

FRED: Forget it. I can't work with you. Tell your agent we'll get back to you.

ACTOR: My agent is dead.

FRED: Then he's probably easier to reach.

ACTOR: I am not working for amateur hour.

FRED: I bet twenty bucks you would.

ACTOR: Fuck off. Maybe for two thousand.

FRED: I haven't seen you in one show yet.

ACTOR: You were out of town.

FRED: For twenty years?

ACTOR: All those extra gigs add up.

FRED: Right. We'll cut all your bit parts together and make a collage of your career. This
was his Life: North Hollywood at Five Bucks an Hour.

ACTOR: That's not funny.

FRED: It's not supposed to be. It's Canadian theatre.

SANDY CARDINAL (IN AUDIENCE): When is this damn play starting?

ACTOR: What? Who? What's going on here? Who said that?

SANDY CARDINAL (IN AUDIENCE): Sandy Cardinal. Anishinaabe kwe. University
educated by your fine colonial institutions, and this is already the worst piece
of theatre I've seen in years.

FRED: And who are you to coitus interrupt us?

SANDY: I get paid for my work. What about you?

ACTOR: Interesting. Why don't you come down here?

FRED: What are you doing? She can't come down here.

ACTOR: Why not?

FRED: She's human. Maybe even a feminist. It's just you and me up here.

ACTOR: And what are we? Cyborgs?

FRED: Some days.

ACTOR: Relax. Go with the flow.

FRED: Hold on, Lady. You can't just walk onstage in the middle of rehearsal.

SANDY slowly rises from the audience darkness.

She walks toward the stage carrying a backpack and winter coat.

SANDY: Watch me. (She climbs onto the stage.)

ACTOR: I like her already.

SANDY: Don't.

ACTOR: Fair enough.

SANDY studies FRED carefully.

SANDY: Fred? Fred Finiky?

FRED: How do you know my name?

SANDY: Fred, it's me. Sandra Cardinal. Remember? You came out to the rez years ago
and gave that literacy workshop. (Pause.)

FRED stares at her.

FRED: Literacy?

SANDY: Yes literacy. Books. Words. Sentences. Community. Ringing any bells?

FRED: You kind of remind me of this girl from junior high school. I snapped her
bra strap in the cafeteria line-up once.

SANDY: Wasn't me. (To ACTOR) And don't even think about trying anything. You'll
get slapped with a sexual assault charge so fast your spirit guide will need legal aid.

ACTOR: No no no, never, never. I just wanted to introduce myself. John Salvation.

You can call me Johnny.

SANDY: That's unfortunate.

ACTOR: We could go get a coffee after rehearsal?

FRED: Johnny.

ACTOR: What?

FRED: Stop auditioning.

ACTOR: I'm building character.

SANDY: Build silence. That'd be refreshing. (Pause SANDY looks around the warehouse space.

The projections, the junk, the empty black stage.) So what exactly is this supposed to be?

ACTOR: Experimental theatre.

FRED: Late-stage cultural exhaustion.

ACTOR: Same thing.

SANDY: People paid money for this?

FRED: Some did. Some clicked attending online and disappeared spiritually.

ACTOR: It's a new work.

SANDY: Clearly.

FRED: We're still figuring it out.

SANDY: In public?

FRED: Cheapest place to fail.

ACTOR: We tried private collapse already.

SANDY: Well you both better work faster. Audiences aren't patient anymore.

FRED: Audiences scroll now.

ACTOR: He didn't mean that. He hasn't had a hit for a while.

FRED: Indian time and boy that's long.

SANDY: You shouldn't insult the audience.

FRED: Why not? Everybody says audiences are intelligent beings.

SANDY: They are.

FRED: Oh really? Nice beings. Nice educated little theatre beings. Sit. Clap.

Consume suffering. Drive home.

SANDY: Enough. (Pause. FRED suddenly softens.)

FRED: Okay. Sorry.

ACTOR: Look buddy. Fred. I'm here for you.

FRED: That's what scares me.

MAN (Crosses from STAGE LEFT toward CENTRE STAGE): Excuse me. Excuse me!

Is this part of the program? I drove all the way from Southern Alberta. Blackfoot
Country. Scary place if you're Cree.

FRED: You can leave now. You only have one line.

MAN: What?

ACTOR: Don't mind him. He's threatened by visitors and criticism.

FRED: I'm threatened by actors.

MAN: I'm looking for the director. James Nicholas? Somebody said there was a
rehearsal tonight.

DIRECTOR JAMES NICHOLAS enters from the warehouse shadows laughing loudly, carrying a headset, scarf, and clipboard. Tansi! Tansi! Great, great work everybody. Total confusion. Excellent beginning.

ACTOR: James!

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Fred, be more egotistical. You're the playwright. Don't forget it.

FRED: I try every morning.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: No no no — spiritually egotistical. Colonialism wounded your narcissism.

FRED: That sounds expensive.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Everything's expensive now except trauma. (SANDY laughs despite herself. DIRECTOR/JAMES notices her.) Sandy! Miigweech for interrupting earlier. I liked what you did.

SANDY: I wasn't acting.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: That's why it worked.

ACTOR: How did I do?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: You? (Pause.) Too much actor.

ACTOR: What does that mean?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: You're pushing. Presenting. Selling emotion. Stop performing the role and start collapsing inside it.

ACTOR: That's very encouraging.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Johnny Salvation.

ACTOR: What?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: That's your character now.

ACTOR: Johnny Salvation?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Yes.

ACTOR: Sounds biblical.

FRED: Sounds unemployed.

ACTOR: No no, wait... Johnny Salvation...(He tries it out physically.) Johnny Salvation.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: You see? Already the ego likes it.

ACTOR/JOHNNY: Johnny Salvation...

FRED: Careful. Roles go to actors' heads fast.

JOHNNY: I was born for lead roles.

FRED: You were born for community theatre and emotional confusion.

JOHNNY: Every hero suffers.

SANDY: Most actors just need attention.

JOHNNY: Attention is sacred.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: No. Attention is currency now. (A pause DIRECTOR/JAMES studies the room.) The warehouse looks good. End-of-the-world chic. Very grant-friendly.

FRED: We added industrial despair.

SANDY: Nice touch.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: But something's missing.

JOHNNY: My monologue?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Humility.

FRED: Impossible rewrite.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: No, something else. (He walks slowly toward the empty black stage.

Looks at it carefully. The space still feels asleep. (Silence. Then—A faint metallic

Continues

DIRECTOR/JAMES (CONTINUES): rattling sound somewhere deep in the warehouse.

Nobody reacts immediately.) What was that?

FRED: Probably another artist losing housing. (A loud metallic CRASH somewhere deep in the warehouse. Everyone freezes.)

JOHNNY: Okay, that wasn't acting.

FRED: Probably the heating system dying.

SANDY: This place has heat?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Spirit heat.

JOHNNY: That's not covered by Equity.

MAN: I knew I should've stayed in Lethbridge.

FRED: Nobody should stay in Lethbridge.

MAN: Fair. (Another rattling SOUND. Like a shopping cart hitting concrete. Closer now.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Did anybody lock the loading door?

FRED: This is theatre. Nothing locks properly.

JOHNNY: Maybe it's another actor.

SANDY: Or another crisis.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Same thing now. (Pause.)

JOHNNY suddenly steps CENTRE STAGE dramatically. Listen! Maybe this is the play.

FRED: Please sit down.

JOHNNY: No no no, hear me out. A group of emotionally damaged artists trapped inside a collapsing warehouse while society burns outside—

SANDY: That's every fringe festival in Canada.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: He's not wrong.

JOHNNY: —and then suddenly— (The shopping cart SOUND gets louder. Everybody turns.)

See? Timing.

FRED: If this is immersive theatre I'm leaving.

MAN: I paid twenty-two dollars online.

SANDY: You paid?

MAN: There was a service fee.

FRED: That's the real tragedy. Paywalls too.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Quiet. (The SOUND stops. Silence. Warehouse hum. Distant traffic outside the dirty industrial windows. Then—A voice from the darkness.)

HARRY (O.S.): Anybody here know where the washroom is or is this one of them symbolic plays? (Pause.)

JOHNNY: That's definitely theatre. (HARRY WHISKEY RACK enters slowly from the warehouse shadows carrying a worn medicine bundle and pushing an overloaded shopping cart filled with blankets, bottles, books, wires, and impossible objects. He stops. Looks at everybody. Then at the empty black stage. Long silence.)

HARRY: Huh. (Beat.) Looks exactly like Canada.

JOHNNY: What are we supposed to do now?

FRED: Act.

JOHNNY: We are acting.

FRED: No, you're panicking theatrically.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Big difference.

SANDY: Barely. (HARRY remains silent. Watching. Holding the bundle. JOHNNY circles him carefully like an insecure game-show host trying to regain control of live television.)

JOHNNY: Okay Chief. Harry. Mr. Whiskey Rack. Let's work together here.

FRED: Dangerous sentence in Canadian history.

JOHNNY: You got a story? Everybody's got a story now. Trauma sells. Streaming platforms
love trauma.

SANDY: Johnny—

JOHNNY: What? I'm trying to build character.

FRED: You already built several. None survived.

MAN: Maybe he's method acting.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: No no no. Method acting requires discipline and emotional research.

Johnny just sweats and points a lot. Chief Points-a-Lot, we'll call him.

JOHNNY: I carry the emotional centre of this production.

SANDY: You carry hair product and insecurity. (FRED laughs.)

JOHNNY: Fine. Laugh. But when the reviews come out—

FRED: What reviews? Newspapers are collapsing faster than theatre.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Don't worry Johnny. If this fails badly enough the CBC
might interview us.

JOHNNY: You think so?

SANDY: That's the joke. (Another long rattling sound from HARRY'S shopping cart.)

JOHNNY: (Jumps slightly.) What the hell does he have in there anyway?

FRED: Probably better material than us.

JOHNNY: (Slowly approaches the bundle. HARRY watches him carefully.)

Continues,

JOHNNY: What is that exactly? Ceremony stuff? Prop work? Performance art?

FRED: Johnny—

JOHNNY: What? I'm curious.

SANDY: You're colonizing curiosity.

JOHNNY: I'm trying to participate.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: You participate like a Labrador in a butcher shop.

JOHNNY: Everybody attacks the actor.

FRED: Because actors think every silence belongs to them.

JOHNNY: Silence fears me.

SANDY: That's the first honest thing you've said tonight. (Johnny pauses, crouches beside

HARRY now, trying charm, trying authority and trying performance. Nothing works.)

JOHNNY: You know... if you said something... anything really... we could

probably shape the whole play around you.

FRED: That's exploitation.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: That's dramaturgy.

MAN: Same thing now.

SANDY: Pretty much. And also there's that pretend Indianism crap?

JOHNNY: Look, buddy, help me out here. I got range. I can do Shakespeare.

Classical. Musical theatre. Trauma. Apocalypse. Dead dad scenes.

FRED: Your dead dad scene was terrible.

JOHNNY: I got applause.

FRED: You fell off a chair.

Continues,

DIRECTOR/JAMES: People love commitment. (The audience area suddenly lights briefly from a passing industrial glare outside. For a split second: everyone looks exhausted. Older. Damaged. Then the light passes.)

JOHNNY: You know what my problem is?

FRED: Where do we start?

JOHNNY: No no seriously. (Beat.) Nobody listens anymore. (Silence. That lands unexpectedly hard. Even HARRY watches him differently now.) Everybody's broadcasting. Nobody's listening. (Pause.) I mean... I know I'm a lot... but still... (FRED softens slightly.) I swear to God I need a Valium right now. Five milligrams. Ten. Anything.

FRED: Welcome to theatre. (A beat.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Method acting finally meets Canadian healthcare.

MAN: Public system or premium subscription?

FRED: In Alberta now you need a waiting list just to collapse emotionally.

SANDY: Don't joke. They'll privatize nervous breakdowns next.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Depends who owns the clinic.

MAN: Or the politician.

LADY NEAR STAGE: Excuse me dear... did somebody say Valium earlier? (Johnny continues trying to speak. Nothing. He points violently at his throat.)

FRED: What? Interpretive suffering?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Actually... physically this is much better work for him.

SANDY: Way less ego in the face.

LADY NEAR STAGE: Wait... I still have them here somewhere—(She begins digging through an enormous purse. Receipts. Coupons. Travel tissues. Loose batteries. An orange. Tiny flashlight. Half a sandwich. The search continues far too long. Finally—) Ah ha! (She proudly hands JOHNNY the pills.)

JOHNNY: (looks) ...these are Viagra. (Long silence.)

LADY NEAR STAGE: Oh dear. (Sheepish glance toward audience.)

FRED: Wrong kind of performance support.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Depends on the production. (JOHNNY flips them off.)

MAN: He still communicates emotionally.

FRED: Like a raccoon in traffic. (JOHNNY grabs a nearby notebook and marker. Writes furiously. He holds it up: “THIS IS ASSAULT” HARRY shrugs.) Technically it’s editing.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Best rehearsal we’ve had in years. (JOHNNY writes again. “I HAVE RIGHTS”)

SANDY: You’re an actor. Barely. (JOHNNY throws the notebook. Paces wildly.

DIRECTOR/JAMES watches him carefully now.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: No no no... keep this energy.

FRED: James—

DIRECTOR/JAMES: I’m serious. (to JOHNNY) You’ve stopped performing lines and started reacting truthfully. JOHNNY glares at him.) There! That! Stay there emotionally!

FRED: You’re directing his breakdown.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: That’s theatre. (The LADY near stage suddenly stands again.)

LADY: I also have gummies.

SANDY: Please sit down.

LADY: Just trying to help.

MAN: What kind of gummies?

FRED: No.

MAN: Fair. (JOHNNY suddenly points accusingly at HARRY.)

FRED: What now? (JOHNNY scribbles furiously again.) “He’s sabotaging the production.”

HARRY: Maybe the production was already sabotaged. (Silence. That lands.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Good.

FRED: Stop saying good to everything.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Chaos means we’re close.

SANDY: Close to what? (DIRECTOR/JAMES looks toward the empty black stage.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Something real. (A long pause. The warehouse hum deepens. Outside:
sirens, traffic, industrial noise. JOHNNY slowly regains a little voice.)

JOHNNY: ...you...(beat)...you...(HARRY watches him carefully. ...did...(beat)
...something...

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Push through it Johnny. Beautiful vulnerability.

JOHNNY: Fuck...(beat) ...you.

FRED: And the artist returns. (SANDY laughs.)

JOHNNY: What is this? (pointing at HARRY) Who even is this guy?!

HARRY: Harry Whiskey Rack.

JOHNNY: No no no, I mean spiritually.

FRED: Dangerous question.

JOHNNY: What's in the bundle? (Silence. HARRY looks down at it. Then at JOHNNY.)

HARRY: Memory. (The room shifts slightly. Even the jokes slow for a second.)

JOHNNY: Okay but like... metaphorically memory or actual—

HARRY: Both. (Pause.)

FRED: You know what's weird?

SANDY: Everything?

FRED: Good point. (beat) No seriously. (to HARRY) You walk in here and suddenly this whole stupid play feels different. (DIRECTOR/JAMES quietly)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: That's because the centre finally arrived. (Silence.)

JOHNNY: I thought I was the centre. (Everybody looks at him. Even HARRY. Then—

The entire room bursts into overlapping laughter. Too loud. Too long. Too honest.)

Oh screw all of you. (The laughter slowly dies. JOHNNY sits on the edge of the black stage sulking theatrically.)

FRED: Careful Johnny. Self-pity's very slippery.

JOHNNY: I carried this production.

SANDY: You carried monologues and unresolved childhood needs.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Same backpack sometimes. I carried a pot pack 95 miles

Over The Athabasca Pass. Boat Encampment BC to Jasper Alberta.

MAN: I still don't understand what this play is about.

FRED: Neither do we. That's why it's contemporary. (The LADY near stage begins knitting calmly.)

LADY: I thought there'd be dancing.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: There might be later.

LADY: Good. I don't trust theatre without movement. (HARRY quietly watches all of them. Still holding the bundle. Still silent. The silence starts bothering everybody more than the talking.

JOHNNY: Okay. I can't handle this anymore.

FRED: Handle what?

JOHNNY: His silence.

SANDY: That's because you fill silence like corporations fill wetlands.

JOHNNY: I'm serious. (to HARRY) You come in here looking all mysterious and ceremonial and everybody suddenly acts like you're carrying the final truth of the universe. (HARRY says nothing.) See?! That! That right there!

DIRECTOR/JAMES: He's winning.

JOHNNY: There's no winning in theatre!

FRED: That's the first intelligent thing you've said tonight. (JOHNNY stands again. Overheated now. Fast. Restless.)

JOHNNY: No seriously — what do people even want anymore? (rapidly) You want politics? Trauma? Indigenous apocalypse? Climate grief? Sexy vampires? Pandemic monologues? Shakespeare with laptops? What?

FRED: Don't yell at the audience.

JOHNNY: I'm not yelling at the audience, I'm yelling at civilization!

MAN: Fair enough.

SANDY: That's usually how civilizations begin ending.

JOHNNY: Everybody wants authenticity now!

FRED: No. They want the appearance of authenticity.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Packaged pain. Marketable wounds.

SANDY: Trauma with sponsorship logos.

LADY: I saw that on Netflix.

JOHNNY: Exactly! Everybody performing suffering like it's a talent competition.

FRED: I entered a few talent shows. Everybody got five minutes. Five minutes Indian time.

(Beat.) We never did finish the program.

JOHNNY: No no no — listen —(pointing around wildly) — people don't even know how to sit together anymore! Nobody listens! Nobody shuts up! Everybody's branding themselves like damaged breakfast cereal! (Pause. Even JOHNNY surprises himself slightly.)

FRED: That... was actually good.

JOHNNY: I know.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Don't become self-aware now. You'll ruin your process.

JOHNNY: (Suddenly turns back toward HARRY again.) Okay. (beat) Your turn. (Long silence.

HARRY slowly looks out toward the audience. Then toward the dirty warehouse windows. Then back to JOHNNY.

HARRY: You really want to know what I think? (The room stills. Fast energy suddenly tightening inward.

JOHNNY: Yes.

HARRY: That's your first mistake. (Silence.) Broken treaty if you insist.

JOHNNY: I must honour every word on this piece of paper! I act what the writer wants! I prepare! I can walk off this stage right now and take

Continues,

JOHNNY (CONTINUES): up farming, mining, forestry, whatever. We don't need a theatre for your concerns, so beat it!

HARRY: I have an oral suppository here for you! Five hundred and some years worth, you got a minute! (HARRY flicks his hand again. FRED and JOHNNY begin squirming on the stage, struggling with each other, trying to breathe, stand up, sit down, constantly moving. At one point both are scratching their butts while HARRY talks.) From a simple observation, we just learned and learned and then forgot. Wasn't that a nice show dear? What show dear? Someone should produce a nuclear dirt bomb about that one. Create an agi-prop film, talk mega bucks, government bucks, tax bucks, all for the big dogs while the masses go home and cook supper. We scrounge every dollar we can find because nobody believes anything unless it gets branded, marketed, streamed or funded. Everybody performing now. Politicians performing concern. Actors performing trauma. Governments performing reconciliation while people still disappear into poverty, prisons, emergency wards and cold apartments with broken heating. You want apocalypse? Some people already survived apocalypse. Residential schools. Foster homes. Streets. Addiction. Families broken apart for paperwork and profit margins. But middle class people feel scared for five minutes and suddenly the whole world discovers anxiety. (FRED and JOHNNY slow slightly now. Listening.) Theatre used to frighten people. Ceremony used to frighten people. Truth used to frighten people. Now everything gets packaged. Sponsored. "Tonight's existential collapse brought to you by Bell Mobility." (A few uneasy laughs.) Everybody branding themselves now like damaged breakfast cereal. "Authentic pain." "Organic suffering." "Locally sourced identity crisis." Jesus

Continues

HARRY (CONTINUES): Christ. (Looks toward the empty black stage.) Peter Brook called it The Empty Space. But nobody told us the emptiness follows you home afterwards. I seen actors chase applause like starving dogs. I seen directors confuse manipulation for vision. I seen audiences clap because they were relieved something finally ended. And outside? Sirens. Traffic. Viruses crawling through buildings. Politicians screaming separation. Billionaires building bunkers while artists apply for grants trying to explain why everybody feels spiritually poisoned. (Security lights flicker somewhere outside.) But you know what keeps human beings alive? Not algorithms. Not branding. Not followers. People. Somebody bringing you soup when you're sick. Somebody sitting beside you when your mind goes dark. Somebody laughing at the exact moment life almost crushes you. That's ceremony too. (Looks directly at JOHNNY.) And that's why your generation scares me. Everybody talking all the time. Nobody listening. Everybody broadcasting pain into the void hoping somebody validates it before the battery dies. You don't need a bigger spotlight boy. You need silence long enough to hear your own spirit breathing. (Long pause.) And maybe that's why theatre still matters. Not because it saves the world. Because once in awhile, in the middle of all this noise, somebody accidentally tells the truth. (Beat.) Back in my youth I remember sitting there listening to Elder George Clutesi during a tour on Vancouver Island. I fell asleep because he just went on and on and on like the endless day Joshua prayed for when the sun stood still. At the time I thought stories were supposed to move faster. But later I realized something. He wasn't performing. He was carrying memory. (Long silence.) NO more ears to listen. Just the

Continues,

HARRY (CONTINUES): echelon machines breaking down. Our language thrust over wireless waves and optical lanes of propaganda. Hollywood icons dancing with the stars! So A, B, C, 'DIE, fall down that social ladder and become just like me. Yes sir, I owe four planes, two boats, sixty cars, and half of Cree territory in this city! Hey, you got three dollars for a cup of coffee? Earth Mother, can I have a bigger allowance of grace please? Mom, what's a devil? Oh I don't know dear, ask your father. Holy father I guess. Dammit. Why didn't the nuns give me a straight answer? Foster homes and residential schools almost did us in, but we never left, we never completely died and people still lie behind everybody's back! Sorry, she and he are better than you, so head back to the rez or hang out over here where you are out of sight and out of mind! Tee hee. Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop those planes in mid-air. Reach for the stars and spread the great spirit and dreams of Kitchi Manitou. Your disease shall be no more. Make it so! (Long silence.)

FRED: Who does your writing?

HARRY: No-one. The Great Spirit.

JOHNNY: It wasn't necessary to go on and on. Who the hell do you think you are? Allah? Buddha? Jesus Christ?

HARRY: Tell the director I quit. As an oral storyteller, I switched to Verizon. It's faster and cheaper. (HARRY exits slowly, leaving the bundle behind.) I leave the bundle for our clan mother. You find her. It is a national issue for us all.

FRED: Don't know why he was here and why he was there and everywhere.

JOHNNY: See you Harry! I'll drop by the reserve someday. (to FRED) Not. (A strange pause.)

(DONALD MORIN — or perhaps a caricature of him — suddenly enters STAGE RIGHT carrying loose papers, notebooks, old photographs, maybe an aging cassette recorder hanging from his shoulder. Half creator. Half disruption. Half witness. He studies everybody like they escaped from his own unfinished thoughts.)

DONALD MORIN: Excuse me. Excuse me. I created you people. I think you boys missed my point entirely. (He wanders through the performance space examining props, audience members, lights.) You see... first I create the audience... then I pick people out one by one... then I take them away. Tee hee. You guys are living inside my own little reserve now.

FRED: Jesus Christ.

JOHNNY: Oh no.

DONALD MORIN: Oh yes. (Points directly at JOHNNY.) Especially you.

JOHNNY: Me?

DONALD MORIN: You're the insecure actor archetype. Every theatre school from here to Toronto manufactures six of you every semester.

JOHNNY: That's insulting.

DONALD MORIN: It's economical.

SANDY CARDINAL: Mr. Morin? Mr. Morin? What about me? What about James, the director?

I am totally lost here.

DONALD MORIN: Good.

SANDY CARDINAL: Good?

DONALD MORIN: Theatre should disturb orientation occasionally. Otherwise it's just expensive furniture with grant applications.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Excuse me... are we still inside the play?

DONALD MORIN: That depends.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: On what?

DONALD MORIN: Funding. (Long silence. FRED laughs accidentally.)

FRED: Okay... okay that's actually funny.

DONALD MORIN: Of course it's funny. Civilization is collapsing and people are arguing over branding strategies and streaming analytics. (He suddenly notices the audience.) Oh dear... You people stayed. (He studies them carefully.) Interesting.

JOHNNY: Who are you supposed to be exactly?

DONALD MORIN: Depends who's applying for the grant.

JOHNNY: No seriously.

DONALD MORIN: Sometimes I'm the playwright. Sometimes the failed actor. Sometimes the dangerous Indigenous intellectual. Sometimes the community outreach requirement. A spy agency even approached me Tee hee.

SANDY CARDINAL: That's horrible.

DONALD MORIN: That's Canada. (Beat.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES slowly walks toward the abandoned bundle HARRY left behind.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: What do we do with this? (Long silence.) Nobody answers. The building hums softly. Somewhere outside: A distant siren. Traffic. Maybe wind. (DONALD MORIN watches them all carefully now. Less clown. More tired.)

DONALD MORIN: You know the strange thing?

FRED: What?

DONALD MORIN: I don't know how this ends either. (Long silence.)

JOHNNY: That's reassuring.

DONALD MORIN: Welcome to theatre. (Blackout. Darkness. A low electrical hum. Then—

One bare work light flickers back on. Nobody has moved. The abandoned bundle remains
centre stage.)

FRED: We still here?

JOHNNY: Apparently.

SANDY CARDINAL: Are we supposed to continue?

DIRECTOR/JAMES: I honestly don't know anymore. (DONALD MORIN sits quietly now at
the edge of the stage flipping through loose pages. Half the papers are blank. One page
falls. Nobody picks it up.)

FRED: You know... this is exactly why normal people watch hockey.

JOHNNY: Normal people are terrified too.

FRED: Yeah but they got snacks.(Long pause. SANDY slowly approaches the bundle.)

SANDY CARDINAL: What if he was serious?

FRED: About what?

SANDY CARDINAL: The clan mother.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Don't start.

SANDY CARDINAL: No really. What if this whole stupid play was actually about trying to
hand something over before it disappears? (Long silence. Even JOHNNY softens
slightly.)

JOHNNY: That's... actually not bad.

FRED: Damn it.

JOHNNY: What?

FRED: Now the play's getting meaningful again.

DONALD MORIN: Careful. Audiences can only tolerate so much sincerity before demanding irony. (FRED nods seriously.)

FRED: True. (SANDY finally picks up the bundle carefully. Not performative now, gentle. Deep In thought, prayer, eventually looking up when Johnny talks about Ann Bilan.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: What's inside it?

DONALD MORIN: If I tell you, the metaphor dies.

JOHNNY: I hate theatre people.

DONALD MORIN: You ARE theatre people. (A beat.) Somewhere outside—a helicopter sound passes faintly overhead. Everyone instinctively looks up. Old reflex. Old fear. HARRY'S voice suddenly echoes faintly from somewhere unseen 😊

HARRY (O.S.): Stop. Stop those planes in mid-air...(Silence. The group stands completely still. Then—)Spiritual Medicine through his son...connect to the bones of our ancestors.

FRED: Okay. That genuinely scared me. (Blackout. (Blackness. Longer this time. The audience begins wondering if the play is over. Then—A fluorescent light BUZZES back to life.

JOHNNY is now sitting alone centre stage. The others gone. Or hidden. Or abandoned. He looks exhausted.)This what this is, Everyman a friggen morality play , figures.

JOHNNY: Hello? (No answer.) Hello? (Beat.) Okay...this isn't funny anymore. (He notices the audience again.) Oh. Right. You're still here too. (Long silence.) you ever notice nobody really leaves theatre properly? You clap. You put your coat on. You pretend you understood something. Then you drive home quietly wondering why you suddenly feel sad in the parking lot. (He laughs awkwardly.) Maybe Harry was right. Maybe everybody

Continues,

JOHNNY (CONTINUES): talks too much. Maybe that's all acting is. Professional interruption.

(Long silence.) When I was younger, my foster mother would go to the theatre in town every Sunday. Ann Bilan at the Citadel, some theatre shack off Jasper Avenue in Fort Edmonton. I thought it was some film. I thought actors were only on TV. It was larger than life. Now? I'd settle for becoming honest for thirty seconds. (He looks toward the darkness where HARRY exited.) You know the weird part? I think he actually scared me. Not because of the politics. Not because of the spiritual stuff. Not even because of the old stories. Because he didn't seem embarrassed. That's dangerous now. Nobody's allowed sincerity anymore unless it's ironic or sponsored. (A soft sound somewhere backstage. JOHNNY freezes.) Hello?

DONALD MORIN'S voice drifts from the darkness: DONALD MORIN (O.S.): Keep going.

SANDY: What's in it? James? Could be SACRED relics for the Ancient of Days. Returning.

DONALD MORIN (O.S.): Good. (Long silence. JOHNNY slowly stands now. Not performing.

Just standing. Breathing. SANDY EXITS STAGE RIGHT, leaves BUNDLE. Finally—)

JOHNNY: Maybe that's enough then. (Beat.) Maybe human beings standing in the same room together without killing each other for two hours...is already kind of a miracle. (A small laugh from somewhere in the darkness. Maybe HARRY. Maybe the playwright. Maybe nobody. The light flickers. DIRECTOR/JAMES Exists SL. Blackout. No movement. No music. Just the sound of the building itself breathing. Then— small flashlight clicks on somewhere in the audience. DONALD MORIN walks slowly through the spectators now instead of the stage. Looking at faces. Studying people quietly. Like searching for somebody he lost years ago. Or never found.)

DONALD MORIN: You know... when I was younger I thought theatre was supposed to change the world. (Beat.) Then I thought maybe film would. (Another beat.) Then music. Then politics. Then spirituality. Then love. Tee hee. (He shrugs.) Turns out human beings are much harder to fix than art school promised. (Audience lights dim slightly lower.) Still... we keep trying. (He notices somebody in the audience.) You remind me of somebody. (Long silence.) Maybe that's all memory is. People leaking into each other over time. (Back onstage, barely visible now, FRED quietly enters carrying two folding chairs. He places them centre stage. Nothing theatrical about it. Just practical. A moment later JOHNNY enters. They sit. Quietly. Like two workers after a long shift. No jokes. No performance. Just breathing.

FRED: Think he's coming back?

JOHNNY: Harry?

FRED: Yeah.

JOHNNY: No. (Beat.) Maybe that's the point. FRED nods slowly. DONALD MORIN watches them from the audience now instead of controlling them. Less creator now. More witness. SANDY enters carrying coffee in paper cups. Hands one to each of them. She sits, they sit on the floor. Nobody speaks. The silence stretches. But this time Far away: a train horn. A dog barking somewhere outside. Winter wind. Life continuing. (DONALD MORIN finally smiles faintly.) There. (Beat.) There he is. (Blackout. Complete darkness. Then slowly—Morning light begins bleeding through the warehouse windows. Grey-blue. Cold Alberta dawn. The stage now looks ordinary again. Cheap chairs. Coffee cups. Loose papers. Extension cords. Dust. The magic gone.

Continues,

Or hidden again.) FRED is asleep in one chair. JOHNNY awake now. Quiet. Changed slightly. SANDY wrapped in an old blanket near the edge of the stage. DIRECTOR JAMES enters carrying a mop bucket. Stops. Looks at everybody.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Well...(Long silence. Nobody says anything. We still rehearsing today or did civilization officially collapse overnight? FRED without opening his eyes—)

FRED: Both. (DIRECTOR/JAMES nods.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Fair answer. (He begins casually cleaning part of the stage. Not symbolic. Just necessary. The squeak of the mop echoes awkwardly through the theatre. JOHNNY watches him.)

JOHNNY: That's depressing.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: What?

JOHNNY: Watching theatre die under fluorescent lighting.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Theatre's been dying for four thousand years.

SANDY CARDINAL: So has humanity.

FRED: Yeah but humanity gets better funding. (A small laugh. Tiny. But real. JOHNNY notices the abandoned bundle again. Still centre stage. Untouched.)

JOHNNY: Somebody should probably open that. (Nobody moves.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Nope.

FRED: Absolutely not.

SANDY CARDINAL: Why's everybody scared of it?

FRED: Because this is Canadian theatre and that thing definitely contains emotional consequences. (DONALD MORIN suddenly appears again from somewhere unseen. Eating stale vending machine crackers.)

DONALD MORIN: Or bannock. (FRED nearly jumps.)

FRED: Jesus Christ!

DONALD MORIN: Wrong mythology. (He looks at the bundle.) You know...maybe it's empty.

JOHNNY: That would be annoying.

DONALD MORIN: Most sacred objects are disappointing in daylight. (Long silence.

DIRECTOR/JAMES finally sets the mop aside. Walks slowly toward the bundle.

Everybody watches. No music. No effects. Just a man walking across an old stage.

He kneels carefully. Touches it. Stops. Looks up at everybody.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: If this explodes I'm suing the playwright.

DONALD MORIN: Get in line. (DIRECTOR/JAMES slowly begins unwrapping the bundle—

Blackout Then immediately—A loud ancient cassette tape CLICK. Static. Reel hiss.

Voices half-audible. The stage remains dark.)

VOICE ON TAPE (O.S.): Testing... testing... one two... can you hear me now? (Another burst of static. Then laughter. Old laughter. Real laughter. Not theatrical. Lights slowly return.

DIRECTOR/JAMES is still kneeling beside the opened bundle. Inside: Old cassette tapes. Photographs. A child's mitten. Letters. A rusted toy truck. Loose pages. A broken pair of glasses. A feather. A fluorescent Cross of Jesus. Nobody speaks.)

FRED: That's it?

DONALD MORIN: Usually. (SANDY CARDINAL carefully picks up one photograph.)

SANDY CARDINAL: Who are these people?

DONALD MORIN: Depends who remembers them. (JOHNNY lifts one of the tapes. Reads the faded label.)

JOHNNY: "Winter... 1983." (Beat. These yours? DONALD MORIN shrugs.)

DONALD MORIN: Maybe. IF so It just contains words, that's all

VOICE ON TAPE (O.S.): If anybody finds this... don't throw it away. (Static crackles. The entire room changes slightly. Even FRED stops joking.) We thought somebody would remember us properly by now. Silence. SANDY CARDINAL quietly wipes tears she doesn't fully understand.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Okay...that's unfair.

FRED: Yeah. (Beat.) That's actually unfair. (DONALD MORIN sits now at the edge of the stage again. Smaller somehow. Older.)

DONALD MORIN: That's the problem with memory.

JOHNNY: What?

DONALD MORIN: It survives longer than people do. (Long silence Outside—morning traffic grows louder. People going to work. Normal life continuing.)

VOICE ON TAPE (O.S.): Are you still there? (Nobody answers. Hello? (The tape jams slightly. Repeats) Hello... hello... hello...(Then stops. Dead silence.)

FRED: Well. (Beat.) Now what? (DONALD MORIN looks out toward the audience. Not at the actors. At the audience.)

DONALD MORIN: Your turn. (Blackout. End. Blackness. But the audience does not move yet. A final work light slowly flickers on above the empty stage. The actors are gone. The bundle gone. Only dust. Chairs. Coffee cups. Tape hiss lingering faintly through the speakers. Then—Very quietly—HARRY'S voice. Not ghostly. Not supernatural. Just memory.)

HARRY (O.S.): Somebody still sings...(A pause.) Somebody still dances...(Another pause.)

Continues,

HARRY (O.S. CONTINUES): Somebody still tells a story in a dark room while strangers sit together breathing the same air...(Silence. Then—)

VOICE (O.S.): Don't erase that part. (Click. Tape stops. Silence.)

BLACKOUT. The blackout holds longer than expected. Several audience members begin wondering if the play is over. A work light flickers on. A JANITOR enters pushing a wide broom. Ordinary. Tired. Invisible. He looks around the empty theatre. Shakes his head. He wears hearing protection around his neck and carries the tired look of someone who has cleaned up after too many productions. Without acknowledging the audience, he begins slowly sweeping coffee cups, loose papers, tape, and theatrical debris toward STAGE LEFT. The theatre is quiet. The actors remain frozen. The JANITOR sweeps for awhile. He glances up. Stops. Looks around. The actors are still there. Beat.

JANITOR: Are you done yet? (Long pause. Nobody answers.) Theatre people. (He resumes sweeping. Shaking his head.) Every damn time. (He pushes a pile of papers toward the wings. Stops again. Looks at the actors. Not bad though. (He shrugs, continues sweeping. A strange energy begins returning to the room. The actors slowly begin moving again. A chair shifts. A work light flickers. Someone coughs. A drumbeat begins somewhere backstage. The JANITOR notices. Looks upward.) Oh no. (The drumbeat grows louder. Lights shift. The revolutionary sequence explodes back to life. Hams...theatre people. (He sweeps quietly for a moment. The work light hums softly overhead. Outside: morning traffic. A distant siren. A crow somewhere. Life continuing. The janitor stops at centre stage, looks outward. Not at the audience. Past them somehow.) You still here? (Long silence.) Well...that's your own fault. (He resumes sweeping. Shakes his head.)

continues,

JANITOR: (CONTIN'ED) Every time. Pretentious bastards (He pushes a pile of papers toward the wings. Stops again. Notices one loose page on the floor. Picks it up. Reads it carefully. Frowns. Turns it upside down. Still confused.) Huh. (Beat.) Not bad though. (He folds the page carefully and places it in his pocket instead of throwing it away. He continues sweeping. The work light hums softly overhead. Outside: morning traffic. A distant siren. A crow somewhere. Life continuing. The Janitor stops centre stage and looks outward. Not at the audience. Past them somehow.) Somebody worked hard on this. (Long silence. BLACKOUT. The blackout holds longer than comfortable. Nothing. No lights returning. No final music cue. No curtain call. Only the sound of someone quietly laughing somewhere deep in the building. Maybe HARRY. Maybe DONALD MORIN. Maybe a pipe in the wall. Then even that disappears. A beat. Suddenly—)

DONALD MORIN: (O.S.) Wait! Wait! Wait! We forgot the revolution! (A cheap revolutionary drumbeat begins somewhere backstage. A work light flickers back on. The JANITOR freezes. Looks upward. Closes his eyes.

JANITOR: Oh no. (Beat.) They're starting again. (The drumbeat grows louder. Lights shift. Energy begins returning to the room. A chair moves. Somebody coughs. The theatre starts rebuilding itself before our eyes. The revolutionary sequence begins.)

VOICE (O.S.): Is this thing still on? (Static. Another voice laughing somewhere in the background.) Don't erase that part. (Click. Tape stops. Silence. DONALD MORIN — caricature, creator, disruption — still stands centre stage holding loose papers while the others stare at him in confusion.)

DONALD MORIN: You people take theatre far too seriously.

FRED: Says the man interrupting his own play.

DONALD MORIN: Exactly.

JOHNNY: I still don't understand who you're supposed to be.

DONALD MORIN: I'm the funding crisis.

SANDY CARDINAL: Oh God.

DONALD MORIN: I'm the rejected grant application. I'm the half-finished screenplay. I'm the community outreach requirement. I'm the Indigenous content advisor nobody listens to until opening night. Tee hee.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: This is getting out of hand.

DONALD MORIN: No. This is getting theatrical. (He suddenly claps loudly. Lights shift violently. A cheap revolutionary drumbeat begins somewhere. Red work lights flash badly. Almost embarrassing. Exciting.) DONALD MORIN: LADIES, GENTLEMEN!

FRED: Oh no.

DONALD MORIN: —THE INSTANT COFFEE THEATRE COMPANY proudly presents:

ALL: (confused, overlapping) What? Who? We do? No no no—What is happening?

DONALD MORIN: A revolutionary exploration of post-colonial anxiety and late capitalist spiritual exhaustion in two acts and several funding rejections! (SANDY CARDINAL suddenly grabs an old blanket and wraps it around herself like a political banner.)

SANDY CARDINAL: WE THE PEOPLE DEMAND—(Beat.) —better rehearsal conditions!
(FRED immediately joins.)

FRED: AND DENTAL!

DIRECTOR: Stop encouraging this. (JOHNNY steps forward. Energy returning. Dangerously.)

JOHNNY: NO! (Everyone stops. JOHNNY climbs onto a chair. Spotlight accidentally hits him. Perfectly. No more weak endings! No more tasteful silence! No more emotionally restrained Canadian theatre where everybody whispers trauma beside symbolic furniture!

FRED: Oh Jesus. He found his monologue.

JOHNNY: WE WILL SCREAM OUR MEANING INTO THE VOID!

SANDY CARDINAL: YES!

JOHNNY: WE WILL OVERACT!

FRED: Dear God.

JOHNNY: WE WILL APPLY FOR FUNDING WITH SUCH PASSION THE JURIES SHALL
TREMBLE!

DIRECTOR/JAMES: That's actually impossible. (DONALD MORIN watches carefully now.
Proud. Terrified.)

JOHNNY: WE SHALL CREATE MULTI-MEDIA REVOLUTIONARY INDIGENOUS
META-THEATRE WITH LIVE PROJECTIONS, SHADOW WORK, SPOKEN
WORD, DANCE INSTALLATION, ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE, DRONE SOUNDS, FOG
MACHINES AND AT LEAST ONE SCENE INVOLVING EMOTIONAL NUDITY!

FRED: There it is. (SANDY CARDINAL raises a coffee cup like a revolutionary fist.)

SANDY CARDINAL: DOWN WITH LINEAR NARRATIVE!

FRED: DOWN WITH TICKETMASTER!

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Please stop helping. (The revolutionary drumbeat grows more ridiculous
now. Off rhythm. Someone backstage missing cues. MORIN points toward the audience.)

DONALD MORIN: AND YOU—(Long silence. Everybody turns toward the audience.)

You're in it now too. No no no no —you don't get to sit there safely anymore.

(Pointing toward audience.) This isn't television. This isn't streaming. This isn't
some algorithm feeding you Indigenous despair between cat videos and car insurance
commercials.

FRED: Although honestly that does sound very CBC.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Careful. We still need grants. (SANDY CARDINAL suddenly grabs an old work light and swings it toward the audience like an interrogation lamp.)

SANDY CARDINAL: Who here thinks they're innocent? (Awkward silence.)

FRED: Jesus Christ. Now we're doing audience participation.

JOHNNY: GOOD. (He climbs fully onto the black stage now.) You want authenticity? HERE. You want collapse? HERE. You want reconciliation? Get in line.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: Johnny—

JOHNNY: NO. (Beat.) I carried this stupid production. I carried everybody's emotional weather. Every political argument. Every existential crisis. Every unfinished rewrite.

FRED: That part's true.

JOHNNY: I sang. I screamed. I suffered artistically. I degraded myself for experimental process.

SANDY: That's just theatre school.

JOHNNY: And for WHAT? (Long silence.) A review in a dying newspaper? Six audience members and a podcaster? A standing ovation from emotionally exhausted liberals?

JOHNNY: NO MORE SAFE ART. (The energy shifts again.) No more polite little trauma performances where everybody learns absolutely nothing and goes home feeling spiritually progressive!

SANDY CARDINAL: YES!

JOHNNY: NO MORE PANELS!

FRED: DOWN WITH TALKBACKS!

DIRECTOR/JAMES: DOWN WITH POST-SHOW Q&A's!

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I actually like those.

FRED: Traitor. (DONALD MORIN suddenly climbs onto a chair like a revolutionary leader watching his own coup go wrong.)

DONALD MORIN: THE INSTANT COFFEE THEATRE COMPANY hereby announces its new revolutionary season! (Cheap drumroll somewhere backstage. Probably somebody kicking a bucket. This year's productions include: ((Read from loose papers.) "Waiting for Funding." "Death of a Grant Writer." "Long Day's Journey Into Cultural Consultation." "Pretend Indians 101 How to be an Indian and score riches galore" plus "The Two-Spirit Menace." "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf's Land Acknowledgment.") (FRED collapses laughing. SANDY nearly spits coffee.)

DIRECTOR/JAMES: I would absolutely direct that. (JOHNNY now fully spiralling theatrically. Beautifully. Dangerously.)

JOHNNY: WE WILL TOUR COMMUNITY HALLS!

ALL: YES!

JOHNNY: WE WILL OCCUPY FRINGE FESTIVALS!

ALL: YES!

JOHNNY: WE WILL CREATE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY DECOLONIAL APOCALYPTIC CLOWN OPERA!

ALL: HUH (JOHNNY gives them a glare.) YES!

FRED: What does that even mean?!

JOHNNY: IT MEANS WE FINALLY STOP APOLOGIZING FOR TAKING UP SPACE!

(That lands. Hard. Even DONALD MORIN quiets slightly. Even HARRY, somewhere unseen in the darkness, seems present again. Long silence. Then—HARRY'S voice quietly from offstage.)

HARRY (O.S.): About damn time boy. (Stillness. JOHNNY freezes. Not joking now. Not acting. Hearing him. Really hearing him. HARRY (O.S.): Now shut up long enough to listen. (Silence. Then suddenly — The entire warehouse EXPLODES into overlapping noise: Drums. Actors shouting. Work lights swinging. Projection screens glitching. Audience lights flashing. Everybody talking at once. Human beings trying desperately to mean something before the lights go out. BLACKOUT. Lights SNAP back on. The stage is wrecked. Fog. Papers. Coffee cups. Broken projection equipment. Somebody's shoe. The revolution has clearly gone nowhere.)

FRED: (Entering STAGE LEFT through smoke.) What's going on here? That's no ending!

SANDY CARDINAL: (Running on carrying protest signs, extension cords and a megaphone.)

Help! Help! Artists are capitalizing on our missing women again!

FRED: Sandy, we're a little busy right now. We're having major dramaturgical problems.

JOHNNY: Sandy! I'll help you! Where's that overgrown bureaucrat? I'll throw him to the pigs!

FRED: There are no pigs.

JOHNNY: That's exactly what THEY want you to think! (HARRY suddenly re-enters wearing an absurdly formal suit jacket over his old clothes.)

HARRY: Good evening. Here goes nothing. (Beat.) We plan to serve the people but first we must create seventeen advisory committees, eight cultural review boards, four strategic vision documents and one ceremonial podcast.

FRED: Ah Christ. He became government.

HARRY: Our young people cannot remain warriors forever. Eventually they need to settle down, marry nice euro-Canadian people and create and produce beautifully confused mixed babies.

SANDY CARDINAL: Traditionalists will disagree, many tired of the blood quota losses

HARRY: All cultural protocols shall now become mandatory mission statements.

All artists must receive spiritual clearance before rehearsals. "All writers shall be retrained immediately because they are too assimilated and continue exposing how the country is secretly managed by corporate pig-dog war machines and American streaming services!!

JOHNNY: THE KA KA KA USA NADA!

FRED: Please stop yelling nations.

SANDY CARDINAL: We shall organize clan mothers in every major city! Paris! London!

Berlin! Greenland! Winnipeg!

FRED: Nobody ever says Winnipeg dramatically.

SANDY CARDINAL: Revolution fixes that.

DIRECTOR/JAMES: I still don't understand the plot anymore.

FRED: There is no plot. Only collapse.

JOHNNY: I NEED DIRECTION HERE!

SANDY CARDINAL: REVOLT! REVOLT! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! CLOSE THE SHOPS!

HIT THE STREETS! (FRED joins despite himself.)

FRED: DOWN WITH STATUS QUO!

DIRECTOR/JAMES: DOWN WITH BAD FUNDING MODELS!

HARRY: DOWN WITH EMPTY SPIRITUAL BRANDING!

ALL: REVOLT! REVOLT! REVOLT! (The entire stage erupts again. Noise. Drums. Feedback.

Lights. Overlapping slogans.) Finally — JOHNNY screams louder than everyone.)

JOHNNY: I CAN'T STAND THIS ANYMORE! (Everything STOPS. Dead silence.) I am an artist! Not a hostage for some crazy writer! Somebody keeps interrupting us! Changing us! Rewriting us! (Beat.) I hate politics. I hate theory. I hate pretending. I hate fake endings(Long silence.) You know... one time when I was a little kid at the orphanage I kicked my shoe into a slough before school. (Beat.) Spent the whole day hiding under the stairs with one shoe because I was scared they'd strap me. (Long silence.) RCMP ended up looking for me half the night.

FRED: Jesus.

JOHNNY: My brother still argues it was him kicked the shoe. (Beat.) But it was me. (He notices the abandoned shoe lying onstage.) Funny what stays behind. (Long silence.)

FRED: Okay... that was actually real. (Nobody laughs.)

JOHNNY: What have we even decided here? (DONALD MORIN suddenly reappears STAGE RIGHT frantically writing pages. He tears off fresh script pages and hands them directly to JOHNNY.)

DONALD MORIN: Here. Your new ending. (Then immediately exits again. Fast. Like he's escaping his own play. Long silence. JOHNNY looks down at the pages. Reads. Confused.

JOHNNY: "Warm Up the Ice Cream." (Beat.) Stupid title. (He looks out toward the audience now. No performance left. Just actor. Audience. Empty stage.)

JOHNNY: Anyone there?

BLACKOUT. CURTAIN.

PLAYWRIGHT NOTES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

1. Harry's Monologue

Harry's extended monologue remains intentionally open to further exploration. The speech was influenced by my long-standing interest in absurdist theatre, oral storytelling traditions, stand-up comedy rhythms, performance art, and the fragmented nature of contemporary media culture.

Future workshops may wish to explore pacing, physical movement, audience relationship, and the balance between humour, social commentary, and emotional revelation. The monologue should remain rooted in character rather than becoming a political speech or theatrical lecture.

2. Movement and Physical Theatre

Although written primarily as a text-based play, *Warm Up The Ice Cream* has always contained a strong physical dimension. My background in modern dance, performance art, and interdisciplinary practice informs many of the rhythms, interruptions, and visual images within the work.

Future productions may benefit from the involvement of a movement director or choreographer to further develop the physical vocabulary of the piece. The movement need not be formal dance, but may emerge from character, gesture, repetition, disruption, and theatrical play.

3. Audience Relationship

The play deliberately blurs distinctions between performers and audience members. Future productions may wish to experiment with different degrees of audience interaction, participation, proximity, and disruption.

The intention is not to embarrass audiences, but rather to invite them into a shared examination of storytelling, memory, performance, and community.

4. The Janitor

The Janitor emerged late in the development process and may warrant further exploration. The character functions as witness, observer, worker, and carrier of memory.

In some respects, the Janitor becomes a counterpart to the bundle itself—someone who quietly preserves what others overlook, discard, or leave behind. Future productions may discover additional possibilities within this role.

4A. Memory, Relationship, and the Bundle

The bundle appearing in the play should not be understood merely as a symbolic object or theatrical device.

Within many Indigenous traditions, bundles may carry teachings, responsibilities, memory, relationship, and spiritual connection. In *Warm Up The Ice Cream*, the bundle functions both literally and metaphorically as a reminder that memory is not simply personal recollection but a living relationship between people, ancestors, community, and the Creator.

The play does not attempt to reveal ceremonial knowledge or sacred teachings. Rather, it acknowledges the responsibilities that accompany what is carried forward between generations.

The bundle may be approached by directors, actors, and designers as a theatrical image of continuity, remembrance, responsibility, and good medicine. Its presence within the play invites reflection on what individuals, families, communities, and nations choose to carry, preserve, forget, or pass forward.

5. Meta-Theatrical Structure

The play intentionally shifts between realism, absurdism, direct address, memory, theatrical interruption, and self-reflection. These transitions should not necessarily be smoothed out. The instability of form is part of the play's design.

The work asks how contemporary Indigenous stories occupy theatrical space while simultaneously questioning the assumptions, structures, and conventions of theatre itself.

6. Workshop Questions

Future workshops may wish to explore:

- The balance between absurdity and emotional truth.
- The relationship between humour and trauma.
- The physical vocabulary of the production.
- The audience's role within the theatrical event.
- The relationship between memory, storytelling, and responsibility.
- The role of the Janitor as witness, caretaker, and carrier of memory.
- The significance of the bundle as a living relationship rather than simply a symbolic object.

These notes are offered as possibilities rather than prescriptions. The play remains open to discovery through rehearsal, collaboration, and performance.