

Commissioned by The Production Company (2006)
To be produced by The Committee in 2007

SAMPLE PAGES FROM

MUSHROOM

A Short Play about Annihilation and Australia
By Ken Urban

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CHARACTERS

ANDREW, late 20s.

LAURA, 30s.

THE MAN IN THE SUIT, 30s.

Disaffected urban people, all in mourning.

SETTING

Two chairs in a white white space, littered with cultural detritus: cassettes, VHS tapes, letters, shoeboxes, shopping bags, paperbacks, bits of one's life. A door with light spilling from its cracks.

TEXT NOTES:

All punctuation and spacing is intentional and gives a sense of the line's delivery.

An asterisk [*] indicates that the following line or speech begins to overlap at that point.

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

Sound is very important to the play. There should be a steady diet of sound to establish location and mood. Snippets of songs should also be used, but they must sound ghosted-out, coming from a far off place and time. Suggestions for ghosted-out songs: The Jesus and Mary Chain, "Mushroom" • The Editors, "Distance" • Philip Jeck, "Wholesome" • Galaxie 500, "When Will You Come Home" • Jan Jelinek, "Lithiummelodie 1." For the Depeche Mode megamix, the author recommends a mashup of "Master and Servant," "New Let Me Down," "Everything Counts," and "Stripped." The song for the SADNESS DANCE is Tim Hecker, "Sundown6093" from the compilation *Idol Tryouts Two: Ghostly International Vol. Two*.

THE MAN IN THE SUIT is omnipotently impotent. He is there, but he is not there. Except for the SCENE V: THE SADNESS DANCE. Then ghost becomes flesh.

LAURA and THE MAN are the same age. ANDREW is younger.

The actress playing LAURA plays KOKO YOKO in the final moments of the play.

Thanks to Paula Vogel, Judson Kniffen and Mark Armstrong.
For Matthew. As always.

“When I saw the sky was red, I was born and I was dead
When I saw the mushroom head, I was born and I was dead
When I saw the mushroom head, I was born and
I was dead.”

– “Mushroom,” The Jesus and Mary Chain (cover of a Can song)

I. PROLOGUE

(Two chairs. Cassettes, VHS tapes, letters, shoeboxes, and other cultural detritus litter the floor. Whatever.)

(One dim fluorescent light flickers on. Flick. Flick. Glow.)

(Three people. Andrew and Laura sit together. The pair looks like they've been through the proverbial ringer. Their clothes looked slept in, chosen more out of necessity than design. The man in the suit stands apart. He looks impeccable.)

(The low buzz of fluorescents. Elevators, medical equipment, and the chatter of nurses join the buzz. By the end of the man's speech, these sounds grow loud and cacophonous.)

THE MAN

There's a hum. Barely perceptible. Harsh fluorescents. Above their heads. They make skin, almost translucent. Fluorescents. They make what's underneath, almost visible. Almost.

The way people look, in that light. Reminds me of my Grow-A-Frog. Third grade. Just tadpoles, really. Developed in a lab somewhere, I guess. Their innards, visible, their skin, see-through. They were supposed to teach us something about life and biology and how things work.

Mine died. Impaled itself on a plastic nub meant for a plastic plant. I cried.

We are in a hospital waiting room. The waiting room is empty save for the chairs. And for them. And here they wait. Andrew and Laura.

Laura.

Andrew.

Here they wait. Here because of Mark. Mark who is not here.

Here, in the waiting room. Empty save for the chairs. And the door.

(The door makes its presence known.)

THE MAN

The door.

84 inches by 36 inches maybe, maybe six and a half feet by three and three-quarters, or maybe larger, or smaller maybe.

Its measurements don't give you a full picture. For it's not about the size of the door. Or the incessant light the door emits, a glow that makes it appear like some

radioactive element, hitherto undiscovered by any physicist, German or otherwise.
No. That is not what makes this door a memorable door.

This door, it begs to be opened

This door begs to be opened

This door begs to be opened

This door begs to be opened

This door

This door

This door

This—

(Silence.)

(Illuminate. Full fluorescent glow.)

(Andrew lays his head in Laura's lap. She strokes his head.)

LAURA

You are driving in a car.

Compact.

American.

The headlights coming at you light the freeway. The cars in front, red demon eyes moving backwards into dark.

The heat is on and the force of the blower is blowing your hair out of your face.

Because it's not me driving the car. It's not me driving.

It's you.

I'm sitting beside you.

I love your hair when it's like that. You look like a boy. Hair tossed asunder.

And we're driving. And it happens. White blast. Turns the whole sky to day. That familiar mushroom cloud.

But it doesn't look like that, y'know? It doesn't look like what you'd expect.

More of a light and a wash of clouds smeared across the sky. But I know.

It's the end.

Mass annihilation.

The end of life as we know it.

Except it's not.

Though the earth's burnt and scarred, we keep driving down the remains of the freeway. You take me home, like you've done hundreds of times, and in the remains of my apartment, I find some bread, a tub of margarine, something resembling cheese.

Bits of our skin, our face, fall off as we eat sandwiches, and—

(Andrew sits up with a bolt.)

II. DRIVING

(Streetlamps and passing cars replace fluorescents.)

(The sound of cars passing in the night.)

(The interior of a small compact American car.
Andrew drives. Laura fidgets in the passenger seat.
The man watches.)

ANDREW

You hot?

LAURA

Just need some air.

ANDREW

That window. Fff. Uh. Doesn't work. Roll the one in the back—

LAURA

No, it's fine.
Thanks for driving me home.

ANDREW

Laura?

LAURA

Yea?

ANDREW

Can I stay at your place tonight?

LAURA

Yes. Course.

ANDREW

Don't wanna be alone.

LAURA

Andrew, it's. It's going to be OK, Andrew.

ANDREW

We fought tonight.

THE MAN

The line between a disagreement and a fight

ANDREW

He went to bed early.

THE MAN

Is nebulous at best.

ANDREW

Stupid stupid fight. I don't know why I—
When I came to bed, I could tell something was wrong. And I said, Mark? Mark?
And he wouldn't wake up, he wouldn't—

LAURA

Andrew, he'll be all right.

ANDREW

All right? Laura? All right? What are, what are you saying?

LAURA

He'll be all right.

ANDREW

Laura. He's not going to be all right.

(Silence.)

ANDREW

Tomorrow, I'll start. Pack up his things, his clothes, go to Good Will—

LAURA

What are you talking about?

ANDREW

Will you help me?

LAURA

No.

No.

No one's packing up Mark's things, no one, OK? No one.

(Tense pause.)

LAURA

It's too soon.

(Watching the road, Andrew grabs a cassette off the car floor.)

ANDREW

Here. He wanted you, to have, this.

LAURA

What is it?

THE MAN

A purposeful mis-remembrance.

ANDREW

A cassette.

LAURA

People have cassettes?

ANDREW

He saved all his. In shoeboxes, in the closet. He wanted you to have it.

LAURA

The Jesus and Mary Chain.

ANDREW

Yea.

THE MAN

(singing)

When I saw the sky was red/ I was born and I was dead

LAURA

He really say that?

THE MAN

A purposeful mis-remembering on Andrew's part.

ANDREW

What?

LAURA

He wanted me to have this? Mark. He said that?

ANDREW

*Yea.

THE MAN

No. Mark never said that.

LAURA

I remember this. He'd play it.

ANDREW

Yea?

LAURA

Always go on about this one song. Was a cover of some German band. And.

(Pause.)

ANDREW

Go on. I like hearing this.

LAURA

Mark didn't tell you to give this to me. I mean it's not like. It's not like. Not like you sat around talking about who gets what when. But Mark said, this cassette goes to. He wanted me. Me. This cassette. He wanted me to have. This. No. Did he? Did he say that? Did. Did. *Did. Did he

(Laura begins to hyperventilate.)

ANDREW

Shit. We missed the exit. Always miss the exit. Why? Cause the exit's not properly marked.
Hey, Laura? Laura? You OK?

LAURA

Fuck me fuck me *fuck me fuck me fuck me fuck me fuck...

ANDREW

Laura, Laura, calm down

LAURA

Pull over I need to get out, I need some air, I said pull over...

(Andrew and the man both see something in the sky.)

ANDREW

Wait. Laura. Laura. What is that?

LAURA

What?

ANDREW

In the sky.

What's?

In The Sky. Laura?

What's that, in the sky?

What?

THE MAN

Uh-oh.

(The sound of an atomic blast. Andrew and Laura are knocked from the car as it is vaporized.)

(An enormous white blast destroys everything and everybody everywhere forever.)

(Black.)

III. DEAD SPACE AUSTRALIA

(A dead light that glows grey and dusty.)

(The sound of radioactive wind.)

(Andrew and Laura stand amid the rubble. Dead earth. Laura stares at her hand. Andrew paces. The man watches.)

ANDREW

There's nothing. My skin, it's burning. We've walked miles. What do we do? We must be somewhere else. Got transported somewhere. Teleported. To somewhere horrible. Like, I don't know, Australia. A place where everything is grey and dead and washed out and everyone is horrible. And drunk. And horrible. And drunk. But where are they? There's no people, anywhere. There's just grey dust and burnt garbage. And nobody. Dead space. Worse than Texas, worse than Texas and Alabama combined, worse than Texas, Alabama and the Epcot Center all pureed into one fucked-up country. That's where we are. Dead space Australia and we just need to get home.

(Underneath the radioactive wind, the sound of a ghosted-out song has gotten louder.)

ANDREW

Do you hear something? Music? You hear that? Wait. Do you see that? Over there, over that pile of dust? What is it? A bear? Some kind of a bear or something. It's running away. Some kind of mutant koala or something. A big atomic koala, running through the dust. Do you see? I think it's coming toward us. Do you see it, Laura?

Laura

Laura, wait

Laura, you hand—

LAURA

Yes.

ANDREW

The cassette—

LAURA

Yes, I know, the cassette, the cassette, it's been seared into my hand. No, don't touch, don't touch—

ANDREW

Ow, fuck, ow, ow

LAURA

You shouldn't have touched, our hands

ANDREW

It can't

LAURA

Look. Our hands, now seared together.

(Andrew and Laura's hands have been seared together by the molten cassette.)

ANDREW

I hate this, I hate this, I hate you

LAURA

You don't mean that

ANDREW

I do, I mean it. I hate you.

LAURA

You can't hate me. I mean, we have to stick together.

ANDREW

Is that some kind of sick joke? Stick together. Is that supposed to make me laugh?
Our hands are fuckin welded together by a miasma of melted plastic and skin.
And you, you're making jokes.

LAURA

That appears to be true.
But it is. Um. Kinda funny.
Kinda.
Y'know, stick together.

ANDREW

No, it's not, it's not funny, Laura, it's not.

LAURA

Shit. What happens when one of us has to piss?

(Pause.)

(Andrew and Laura laugh.)

ANDREW

Fuck me. Has the world ended?

LAURA

It's not looking good, is it?

ANDREW

Need some water, something to stop the burning.

LAURA

Why did you say that?

ANDREW

What?

LAURA

That you hated me.

ANDREW

Sorry, didn't mean it.

LAURA

Yes, you did.

ANDREW

I didn't.

LAURA

Andrew, the world's imploded, our skin's burning off, our hands are stuck together with a melted Jesus and Mary Chain cassette. No reason to lie now.

ANDREW

He always liked you better. Told you things. Things he never told me. I can't compete with you. You had decades, we had years, and years aren't decades, and—

LAURA

Mark cared about me, but you, he loved you. You know that. Besides it's not me you hate.

ANDREW

What's that supposed to mean? You think I hate him?

LAURA

No.

ANDREW

Oh, you think I hate myself? That's what you think?

LAURA

Whatever.

(Silence.)

LAURA

(under her breath)

Shit.

ANDREW

What?

LAURA

Nothing.

ANDREW

No, what?

LAURA

I have to pee. Damnit. I should've never said that before. I fucking jinxed myself.

TO READ THE REST OF THE SCRIPT, CONTACT THE AUTHOR AT
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