

# The Before Times and The After Times

A Socially Distant Minor Comedic Odyssey

By

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

A.T.....Any age, any gender  
B. T...Any age, any gender  
Newbie....Any age, any gender  
Dee....Any age, female  
Bird\*....Any age, male  
Sargent Quarantini....Any age, male  
Bee....Any age, any gender

\*Casting Note: Bird can be double-cast as Sargent Quarantini or Bee

## LOCATION

A large outdoor location which allows for social distancing for audience, cast, and crew

## TECHNICAL NOTES

All characters wear masks. They can be full face (akin to masks used in ancient Greek productions) or modern lower face masks.

Masks must be worn at all times and always cover both nose and mouth.

Combining mask usage and the challenge of acoustics when performing outdoors could make projection more difficult so some amplification might be needed.

If individual microphones are used, each performer must have equipment designated for their use only.

ACT ONE

*There is a stack of large hoops, similar to hula hoops, on stage. It is a tall, neat tower. As the audience is sitting, A.T. casually walks on stage. They are wearing ornate, beautifully designed mask and large, comfortable sweatpants. They begin picking up bits of dirt off the stage, pattering around, comfortable and at home.*

A.T.

Hello. Hi. *(Waves for their attention)* Hi. Yeah. I know. We're starting a little early. Or is it later. I dunno. Anyway, it's started. Didn't mean to catch ya by surprise. So. Hi. I'm the After Times. You can call me A.T. "The After Times" is kinda ponderous. You're probably thinking, "no kidding," right?

Yeah. So. Hi. Welcome. I was created, I guess you would say, yeah, created even before any of us knew there was going to be a Before Times and an After Times. I started incrementally, just like when I walked out here. Not all of you noticed me. Well, some of you did, because of my mask. It is an amazing mask, isn't it? I mean, come on, we all started out just dreadfully freaked out by them, but now?

*Strikes a pose with their mask.*

Anyway, like I said, I'm After Times. A.T. Nice to meet you. Yeah, so here I am. I actually arrived a while ago. When you were just living your life. Just bouncing along, worried about, oh, whatever you, well, worried about.

*A.T. sees someone offstage. If this is outside, the actor can be placed behind the audience or they can be backstage.*

And right on cue. Here's the Before Times.

*A.T. waves for someone to come on.*

*(Whispering to audience)* Be patient with BT. They're kinda clueless. No. Not clueless. Just, oh, really in denial. But, oh, you'll see. *(Loudly, offstage)* Come on. I need some help. *(To audience)* They could have helped me out a lot a while back, but noooo. But we'll get to that.

*B.T. enters. Their mask is simple. They also wear a jacket which can accommodate inner pockets.*

Come on. You can do it.

B.T.

Don't talk down to me.

A.T.

I wasn't talking down to you.

B.T.

*(To A.T.)*

I don't belong here. *(To audience)* None of us belong here.

A.T.

Yes, you do. We all do.

B.T.

I really just want to go back.

A.T.

I know. You've mentioned that a few thousand times.

B.T.

But this is just impossible. Doing this. It just can't be done. It can't. I bet they can't even hear me with this ridiculous mask on. *(To audience)* You can't even hear me, right? *(Not waiting for a response)* See? They can't. It's impossible to live like this.

A.T.

It's not impossible. You're being dramatic. *(To audience)* Remember that? Being pissy like this? Thinking stuff was little stuff and you could do whatever you wanted just because you wanted to? Good times. *(Back to B.T.)* I just need for you to work with me a little bit, okay.

*A.T. crosses to the stack of large hula hoop rings.*

Okay, B.T. we're just going to take this apart.

B.T.

What's that?

A.T.

Hoops. Social distancing hoops.

*B.T. groans dramatically.*

A.T.

Stop it. Just help a little bit. It's really easy. Step by step. You take the first one and I take the second one, and we spread them out and so on and so on. Until we've got everything set up so-

B.T.

-No! There're too many rules! I don't wanna.

A.T.

No one cares what you want. Think they care? *(Points to audience)* They don't care. They just don't want all your shouting and sputtering to kill them. *(To audience and B.T.)* Oh yeah. I said it. I went there. That's what we're doing. We're "going there"! Cuz I'm the After Times and that's what I do. In fact, you'll never know what I'm gonna do because I'm the "after" in After Times. We all know the "before." *(Points to B.T.)* Grumbly. Simple. Not a whole lotta fun but predictable. *(B.T. flips an obscene gesture to A.T.)* But the "after"? Me? You never know what I'm gonna do.

*A.T. does a dramatic jump and inadvertently knocks over the stack of hoops. As the stack teeters and falls, it reveals that someone has been curled up in the middle.*

Shoot! Oh! Um.... hey?

*NEWBIE sits up, clearly waking up.*

NEWBIE

Hey.

A.T.

Hey.

NEWBIE  
*(To B.T.)*

Hey.

B.T.

Hey.

*Newbie looks at the scattered hoops.*

NEWBIE  
*(To A.T.)*

Did you do that?

A.T.

Yeah. Sorry. Who are you exactly?

NEWBIE

They weren't meant to be all...messed up like this?

A.T.

No. We're all going to have them around each of us, so we don't get in each other's space. The hoops are three feet across. That's the diameter. Or is that the radius?

B.T.

Diameter.

A.T.

You sure? Really?

B.T.

Yes. Really. I'm sure.

A.T.

Okay. *(To Newbie)* They're three feet. Across. Not around.

NEWBIE

Okay? So?

B.T.

So?! Everybody is supposed to stand six feet or more apart. My hoop is three feet, A.T.'s hoop is three feet. We have to hold the hoop like this, so it sticks out in front of us.

*Both B.T. and A.T. hold their hoops so an inner edge bumps up against their back. Then they walk towards each other until their hoops are about a foot apart. B.T. indicates the distance between them and A.T.*

See? That distance now? Totals six feet. Everybody knows this. And by the way, it totally blows. I'm just saying.

NEWBIE

Why does it totally blow?

B.T.

What?

NEWBIE

Why does it totally blow? I think my mask makes it hard to hear me. (*Loudly*) Can you hear me?

A.T.

Yes. We can hear you. For safety. Who are you again? You didn't quite-

NEWBIE

-Yeah, for safety. Course! But why does that totally blow? I don't get it.

B.T.

(*To A.T.*)

I think you addled them when you kicked the hoops. (*To Newbie*) You? You're bonkers.

A.T.

(*To B.T.*)

Why are you mean to everyone? (*To Newbie*) I'm the After Times, call me A.T. They're the Before Times, extrapolating from A.T. being for the After Times, that would make the Before Times, B.T., of course. -

B.T.

-Oh, stop showing off.

A.T.

Stop pretending you're better than me.

B.T.

I am better than you.

A.T.

No, you're just OLD. Old does not translate into better. It just translates into being around for a very long time, bothering everybody by pretending to be "all that" when you're just old. You're negative and bossy. (*To audience*) I know you just met them, but they are. Trust me. (*Spins back to B.T.*) And your crummy ideas messed everything up, but you still keep blaming ME when it was YOU.

B.T.

(*Dramatically to audience, pointing to A.T.*)

Don't trust them. They're trying to oppress you!

A.T.

Oh my god, you are such a drama queen. I am not trying to oppress them! I'm trying to keep them alive. *(To audience)* I'm trying to keep you alive. *(To B.T.)* You. You're the germy, lazy, messy, you know.... THING, that got us all here in the first place.

NEWBIE

Newbie.

*A.T. and B.T. have forgotten about Newbie. They stop and look at Newbie.*

B.T.

Newbie?

NEWBIE

Yeah. "Extrapolate."

*B.T. and A.T. look at each other.*

A.T.

What do you mean?

NEWBIE

It's a nickname. Too. Like yours. Newbie's a nickname. Guess what for?

*A.T. shakes their head and looks at B.T.*

B.T.

Maybe-

*B.T. casually begins crossing closer to Newbie. Both Newbie and A.T. scream. B.T. jumps back.*

Sorry! Sorry! God, I hate this!

NEWBIE

Who raised you? Wolves?

*Newbie grabs a hoop and rolls it over to B.T.  
B.T. reluctantly and awkwardly grabs it.*

NEWBIE

And one for you.

*Newbie rolls a hoop to A.T.*

A.T.

Thanks.

NEWBIE

New Times.

A.T.

What?

NEWBIE

Me. I'm-

B.T.

NEW TIMES! You're the New Times. That's what it stands for, the nickname. Newbie. I was going to say that!

A.T.

You were so not going to say that.

B.T.

I was.

A.T.

*(To audience)*

Another example of B.T.'s many, profound flaws which are now wrapped in a haze of sweet, candy-coated memory.

B.T.

And here we go.

A.T.

In the Before Times? Cheating? Fudging? Lying? Rewarded. Now. It can mean death.

B.T.

Who's being the drama queen now?

NEWBIE

Why are you two fighting?

*B.T. and A.T. glance at each other and wait for the other one to speak. After a moment, Newbie carefully places a hoop center stage, sits in the middle of it and proceeds to wait.*

B.T.

I guess, well, I'm having a little trouble, well, I think a lot of us (*gestures to include audience*) are having a little trouble with this entire new...um.... well, A.T. here-

A.T.

-You want me to die.

*DEE wanders onstage. Simple mask, plain, elegant clothing, a tape measure in hand. She nudges some of the scattered hoops aside with her foot, and crosses downstage. With tape measure extended about 8 feet, Dee begins slowly walking the downstage perimeter. She is making sure the front row of the audience is far enough away from the action on stage.*

B.T.

No! No, I well.... no.

A.T.

Okay, but go away forever. Right?

*B.T. nods.*

I'm not that bad. (*To audience*) I'm not. I'm not! Sure, I'm unique. I'm not everyone's cup of tea, shall we say. I get that.

B.T.

You just remind everyone that everything is dangerous.

NEWBIE

But everything was always dangerous.

B.T.

Yeah.

A.T.

Yeah! So why.... don't you like me?

B.T.

You're just so WEIRD. And I had a plan. And I know, I know, I know, you can't count on anything, blah, blah, blah. But everybody before and before and before, well, did stuff. And I thought then it would be my turn to do the stuff.

A.T.

So, you feel cheated. By me. I just want to say-

B.T.

-I know. It's all my fault.

A.T.

No. I wasn't going to say that. *(To Dee)* Excuse me, what are you doing here?

DEE

I'm making sure everyone is following the protocols.

B.T.

But who are you?

A.T.

*(To Dee)*

*(Referring to the question whether they are following protocols)* We are, Dee. *(To Newbie and B.T. and audience)* This is Dee.

NEWBIE

Can we extrapolate? Me and B.T.?

*A.T. and Dee glance at each other.*

DEE

Sure. Go for it.

A.T.

*(To B.T.)*

No cheating.

B.T.

*(To Dee)*

Give us a hint.

A.T.

Do not give them a hint.

DEE

I'm sort of like an Uber driver.

A.T.

I didn't want you to give them a hint but even I gotta say, that is not a good hint.

DEE

Okay. Um....moderator.

NEWBIE

Director! Dee stands for director.

DEE

Nope.

B.T.

Desire?

DEE

Nope.

NEWBIE

Disaster.

*Dee shakes their head "no."*

B.T.

Denial.

DEE

Warmer. But no.

NEWBIE

Oh. OH. I know.

B.T.

Divination?

NEWBIE

You're Death.

*Dee puts their finger on their nose and goes "Ding, ding, ding."*

*B.T. backs far away.*

B.T.

Oh no! No, no, no, no, no! You? (*Pointing to Dee*) You? You've ruined everything!

A.T.

B.T., be nice.

B.T.

Be NICE?! She's DEATH.

A.T.

I know. But she might not be here for you. (*To Dee*) Are you....um...here for anybody....um.... in particular?

NEWBIE

Yeah. (*To Dee*) I mean, I'm very new here. I'm the New Times. I just got here. I just wanted you to know that.

DEE

Nice to meet you.

NEWBIE

It's...um...nice to....um...hi. What A.T. said.

DEE

Excuse me?

NEWBIE

Are you here for any of us around...here....in this place, right now?

B.T.

Will everyone stop acting like they are not completely freaked out? (*To Dee*) We are all dealing with you, every day, okay honey. So? Why are you HERE?

DEE

First, I want to say, "Sorry." I know I'm not the most popular one here. When I show up, plans get messed up. I so get it. I'm here because I hope to help all of us, and I mean ALL OF US (*includes audience in her gesture*), me included, sort things out.

A.T.

What things?

DEE

Really?

A.T.

Yes?

DEE

Okay. (*Deep breath. Points to A.T.*) You? You are a train wreck.

A.T.

I am not.

DEE

Oh really? How many naps did you take this week? What's up with the sweatpants? Could you perhaps be eating your feelings a little bit? And as much as you bicker with B.T. over there, you're actually jealous.

*B.T. snorts. Dee turns to B.T.*

B.T.

*(Quickly abashed)*

Sorry.

DEE

And you? If you had just paid a little more attention, would we even be having this conversation? You got lazy. You thought you could just skate by. Keep on keeping on. Sure, things are awful but hey, it's an awful I know. Humanity? Sure, messed up but nothing really bad is going to happen.

*Newbie has begun to try to quietly slip offstage.*

DEE

Hey. Where're you going?

NEWBIE

Just, over there.

*Newbie points somewhere offstage.*

DEE

New Times. Newbie, right? Come on. Come back.

*Newbie returns.*

DEE

So? What's up?

NEWBIE

I don't understand.

DEE

Exactly. I'm here to help you understand all of this. So? What are you working on right now?

NEWBIE

Oh. Okay. Hummm. What am I working on? Oh! I know! Okay. Them? (*Points to B.T. and A.T.*) They are awful. B.T. is depressing and super negative. And A.T. is so wired up. They are both just a ton of work. And they don't listen. You two? I think you could actually learn from each other. If you took half a second to listen. It would really help. And by the way (*To A.T.*) without "before" there is no "after." So, maybe think about that? And...and...well....

DEE

Come on. Get it all out.

NEWBIE

This is my life. And you both are living it like...well...

DEE

Like how?

NEWBIE

Like they're always comparing each other. Like it's this big competition.

B.T.

I'm sorry, kid. I am. But if I stop fighting with A.T., I'm out. Gone. No more Before Times. Like you said, I guess. I'm sort of defined by being the Before to their After. I mean, without After, I might as well grab Dee over there, give her a big fat kiss and call it a day.

*Dee takes a small step back.*

NEWBIE

But can't stuff, all this, all of us, just be new? Not before. Not after. Just now. Oh, you can still be here. Dee, don't you, you know, take them...um..."out."-

DEE

-Oh, I wasn't going to.

*A.T. and B.T. relax just a tiny bit.*

DEE (CONT'D)

Yet.

*A.T. and B.T. stiffen a little as Newbie barrels on.*

NEWBIE

But could we try to sort of work together? B.T., for example. What are you good at? Not the obvious stuff but, something that could be helpful for A.T.

B.T.

*(Slowly)*

I think that I'm really good at denial. Don't laugh! I think denial sometimes is actually okay. If there was no denial, there would be no auto industry. Or fashion magazines. And a bunch of relationships would be...um....not.

But I'm in denial a little, yes. But it's helping me hang in. For example, now, hanging out with After Times all the time, I don't feel really that useful. It's as if I'm this big old weight, dragging everybody down. And, well, yes, I really screwed up in a lot of huge ways. But if I just keep hugging that anchor of all that I messed up, all that I want to go back to, but it is all at the bottom of the ocean, well, I have to still move ahead but...

DEE

I'm not quite following.

B.T.

I know. Sorry. I just feel really lost. Can someone else take a turn and you come back to me?

*Newbie looks at A.T.*

NEWBIE

After Times? What are you good at? I mean, how can you be helpful?

A.T.

*(To B.T.)*

Well, first, Before Times, I hear you and I'm sorry. I think sometimes all my crazy, weird stuff bothers you. And I'm sorry about that.

B.T.

Thank you.

A.T.

I think I can be helpful for both you, B.T. and you, Newbie, because B.T., you and I have been arguing for a while, so I understand your issues. And your strengths! And Newbie, I think I can

A.T. (CONT'D)

help you see that Before Times, even though, yes, they screwed up, they also have some really quite useful strategies.

DEE

See?! This is so good! Y'all are working together.

B.T.

I think that maybe, not to offend, but I think we could have gotten to this point without you hovering around us.

DEE

You think so?

A.T.

Maybe. I mean, Dee, face it. You're A LOT.

NEWBIE

You kind of are. You're sort of unpredictable.

B.T.

Arbitrary.

A.T.

Yeah. Sometimes you just show up. Then you're supposed to show up and you don't. And then you show up way too early for somebody else. A phone call would be nice. Speaking of protocols, you sort of suck at them.

DEE

But, bear with just for a second, but you? All of you? You all are way too judgy. "Dee is never on time." I'm either too early, too late, I take too long, I'm too fast, I'm too slow. "Why is SHE here?! We didn't invite her."

Maybe if you actually took the time to get to know me, you might find out I'm not so bad. I have some helpful qualities. I make boo-boos stop hurting. And yes, by boo-boos, I mean mind-bending pain and suffering. I'm also sort of an alarm clock. You see, if I pick up somebody close to you up, well, then I wake you up, get you to open your eyes, and check the existential to-do list. Am I right? Yes, I am! And I make room for new stuff.

*Dee points to Newbie.*

Also, now that I have you here, I just want to let you know, when I finally DO pick someone up, once they're with me, and we're hanging out, then? They're okay. They're FINE.

DEE (CONT'D)

You? When I get somebody, you're a mess. Scared, mad, freaked out, all that. But I'm good to my people. I am. I'm not a jerk. I'm not Pain. *(To A.T., Newbie and B.T.)* Is Pain coming?

*They all shrug.*

Folks confuse me and Pain all the time. And I get why. I mean, we drive similar model cars, shall we say. But totally different destinations! Because Pee, I call them Pee. They HATE that. It's fabulous. Anyway. Pee can be a bitch. Truly.

Where was I going with this? Sometimes, I do get lost a little. And, yes, I will admit it. Sometimes I'm unpredictable. That's never going to change. It's woven into my DNA.

B.T.

Just keep it right there, Dee.

DEE

You're kidding, right?

B.T.

No.

DEE

Geez. *(Deep breath)* Let me lay it out for you. I'm everywhere. All the time.

*BIRD wanders in. He has a large set of wings to create a six-foot perimeter and is carrying a lit sparkler.*

When you stepped back, away from me? You stepped on a little tiny bug. He's dead now.

*B.T. looks down at their foot.*

Hey, Bird.

*Bird sees Dee. Dee steps back. Bird comes over, puts their sparkler in the ground where Dee was standing and then keeps wandering around. Dee steps forward and places Bird's sparkler within the circle of her hoop.*

This is Bird, everybody. Oh, and A.T.

A.T.

What? Yeah?

DEE

You had yogurt before we started, right?

A.T.

Yeah! How did you know? Chobani. Key lime. Did you know it's only 80 calories? But get the Greek yogurt, not the other kind.

NEWBIE

I think the black cherry is better.

A.T.

That's good too. Have you tried adding granola to-

B.T.

-Will you two stop?

DEE

Thank you.

A.T.

Sorry.

B.T.

Dee was making a point. And you were just a little bit rude. *(To Bird, who has been wandering the stage)* Will you please stop too?

*Bird stops but continues to look around by turning in slow circles.*

DEE

The yogurt you ate? It had active yeast cultures. Pretty much right away, your stomach acid? Took those cultures right out. Dead. And remember when I was talking about Pee, Pain, being a bit of a bitch? Bird right here, say hi, Bird.

*Bird waves.*

Bird fell out of a tree. Well, he fell out of a nest that was in a tree.

*Bird points off to where the tree was.*

DEE (CONT'D)

So, Bird died. But the interesting thing is. Yes! This is where I was going before. The destination is-

NEWBIE

-I know the answer to this! I know it, I know it, I know it. Me. New stuff. New times.

DEE

Basil.

NEWBIE

Then I was wrong.

B.T.

Basil? The herb?

DEE

*(Dee nods to B.T.)*

Bird?

*Bird looks at Dee.*

Do you remember your tree? Where you fell? When I tell you, you are going to back and be dead under the tree. And a rodent is going to come and have dinner. Bird is going to be dinner.

B.T.

Oh, gross.

DEE

And then Rodent is going to start digesting Bird. But then Rodent is going to get hit by a car. *(Points to someone in the audience)* Yours, actually. When you're driving to work. Don't feel bad. You won't even know it happened. Anyway, Rodent? Dead. Crow comes. Crow EATS Rodent. Are you all beginning to figure this out?

A.T.

I'm lost.

B.T.

I'm getting it. I think.

DEE

Crow flies. Crow poops on your garden. *(Points to another audience member)*. It rains, the poop nutrients, including Bird nutrients, go into soil. Next spring, you plant...wait for it...basil.

A.T.  
*(Getting it)*

Oh!

DEE

Dead Bird feeds basil. You *(points to same audience member)* eat basil on a wonderful Pasta Primavera you make on a Friday night. You eat it and it is so flavorful and you say, "God this is so good, I just love being alive." All thanks to dead Bird! See, we're all either fueling basil or eating basil.

*Bird awkwardly applauds with his wings.*

*(To Bird)* Okay, you go now.

*Still happily applauding, Bird looks at Dee.*

Tree. Go back to under the tree.

*Bird nods but doesn't move. Bird is not too bright. Dee sighs, picks up their hoop and begins nudging Bird in the direction which he came. After a moment, Bird figures it out and exits, waving as he exits.*

DEE

So. To summarize: Once you get in my car, you're fine. That's what the sparkler was. Bird in my car. Very pretty. Very nice. No pain. Sparkly.

A.T.

Okay. So. I've got it so far. But how about ghosts? Afterlife? That stuff.

DEE

Yes and yes. Ghosts, some like to drive around for a while before I drop them off. So yes. But I cut folks off after couple of blocks, no exceptions. Well, there was one. This wee little pharmacist from Vietnam. I just forgot she was in the back. Very quiet. Very serene. Anyway. Afterlife. Nothing dies. Afterlife really just means the next life. I drop you off to go on to the next thing. Side note, will you all stop embalming people? Doesn't help!

A.T.

Um, Dee, I do have to ask something.

DEE

Yes. That's why I'm here. Ask away.

A.T.

I'm putting a great deal of energy into, well-

DEE

-Not getting picked up?

A.T.

Yeah.

DEE

And I appreciate that. I like things to be orderly. I really do. Beginning, middle, end really is optimal. Reduces stressors on the system. And pain, as I said, is a bitch. And I see through the window when I'm slowing down to pick someone up, I see, you know-

NEWBIE

What?

DEE

The before. The jolting, really unexpected pick-ups? Surrounded by doctors and pumps and drugs. Or guns. War. People hitting other people. That all takes so much energy. Out of everybody. So, then it takes much more energy to repurpose that energy. Everybody's. Doctors. Everybody way back in the queue. Brain cells die from the stress. I gotta deal with those. It just adds more steps for me. Not efficient. Another side note: What is this obsession with fried food? Try a little fresh fruit occasionally. Maybe some fish. The Blue Zones? I keep forgetting how to get there. And they're barely in their seat for a second. In and out. Very efficient. Lovely.

So, A.T., yes. Absolutely. Choose life.

NEWBIE

How about reincarnation?

DEE

No clue.

B.T.

That's where you draw the line? Ghosts and afterlife, you're fine with, but-

DEE

-Hey. Once I drop someone off, it's outta my hands. And technically, reincarnation is actually in the birth lane.

B.T.

*(Sarcastically)*

Oh. So, different permits?

DEE

Pretty much.

NEWBIE

Can Bird or Rodent become a ghost?

DEE

Yes! *(Holding up two fingers close together)* A little, tiny one. Just for a second, though. But super-cute.

*B.T. crosses to Dee, close enough so their hoops just very slightly cross over.*

B.T.

All those dead yogurt cultures must be adorable.

*A piercing whistle can be heard from offstage. SARGENT QUARANTINI strides on stage, bearing a long "distancing" pole over his shoulder like a rifle. He is dressed in military fatigues and has on a backpack.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Freeze! Nobody....move....a....muscle.

*Everyone freezes.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

*(To B.T. and Dee)*

You two. Slowly back away from each other.

*They do, B.T. moving more quickly.*

NOT SO FAST, recruit! Situational awareness. You don't know who might be behind you! *(Points to Newbie)* That one over there could be right here. Right behind YOU. What if they had just coughed? Huh? HUH? What are you gonna do then, eh? Take a vitamin? Maybe pop a couple of Advil? Huh? It would be too late to wash those hands of yours. Way too late!

*Sargent Quarantini addresses cast and audience.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Y'all are getting tired. I can see it in your eyes. Tired. Lazy. Weary to the bone of the battle. But let me tell you. You know who doesn't care about tired? You know who doesn't care about weary?

*He points to Dee.*

She doesn't!

DEE

-Well, actually, I do. I just-

SARGENT QUARANTINI

-She doesn't give a good god darn about how you FEEL! She just wants to snatch you up. Well, I'm here to be a fly in her ointment. Put a wrinkle in her dastardly plans. We're gonna take this battle back and we're gonna win! 'Cuz you know what I see, when I look at all of you? I see the makings of the best fighting force ever put on God's green earth.

*Pointing to two audience members sitting together.*

You two. Same unit? Better be. Same unit?

*Doesn't necessarily wait for an affirmative response.*

Your mission? Stick together. Because, if you don't, you know what happens, don't you? *(Not waiting for a response)* THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS!

*Points to another audience member on other side.*

THEY DIE!

*Pointing to Dee.*

That demon, that devil, will snatch that poor slob up like a scoop of ice cream off a 31 Flavors cake cone.

DEE

Dude, that's really not how I work.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

That's Sargent Quarantini to you, demon!

B.T.

Oh! I get it. You're like the enforcer. And you're wearing fatigues to represent-

A.T.

-Quarantine fatigue! That is good!

NEWBIE

Excuse me? Um...everybody?

SARGENT QUARANTINI

What is it, solider?

NEWBIE

*(Clearly uncomfortable)*

I think...well....I think I'm going to sneeze.

*Dee, A.T. and B.T. all lift their elbows to cover their mouths, as if showing Newbie what to do when they sneeze.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

NOOOOOOO!!!! Incoming! Take cover, people!!!!

*Sargent rips his backpack off, digs through it and pulls out a small parachute, which he hurls over Newbie's entire body. Then he gestures for everybody to slowly back away, as they hold their hoops. They all do. And then they wait. Finally, a small "Achoo" can be heard under the tarp. Sargent hits the ground like it's a gunshot.*

B.T.

*(To A.T.)*

Geez. And I thought you were weird.

*Newbie pulls off the tarp.*

NEWBIE

Okay. That's enough.

*Newbie tosses the tarp to the side and points to Sargent.*

We gotta talk. Everybody else, take a break.

*Dee, A.T., and B.T. back up upstage and either sit or just relax but sit listen.*

NEWBIE (CONT'D)

You? *(Points to Sargent)*. Come here.

*Newbie picks up their hoop and crosses downstage.*

Come on!

*Sargent cautiously follows.*

Come on. It's okay. It's okay.

*Sargent inches closer. Then he starts digging in his various pockets.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Hold on. Just one sec.

*Newbie waits patiently. Sargent triumphantly holds up a small bottle of hand sanitizer.*

Yes!

*He furiously bathes his hands in it. As he waves his hands to air dry, he also extends the bottle to Newbie.*

Want some?

*Newbie reaches out to take it. Sargent snatches it back.*

NO! Have I taught you nothing? No person to item to person contact! Dear god in heaven. One slip up like that and we all could be dead! You have to have the other person put the item down, then get a cleanser, preferably one with-

NEWBIE

*(Loudly and firmly)*

-Okay, Quarantini, just stop. Stop it.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

I'm trying to save you-

NEWBIE

-I know. And you're doing a wonderful job. *(To audience and cast)* Right everybody? *(Dee shrugs)*  
Come on, Dee. Right?

*Newbie begins clapping and A.T., B.T. and Dee (and perhaps the audience) clap for Sargent.*

There. *( To Sargent)* See? We all are very appreciative.

SERGANT QUARANTINI

Good! But just so you know, if you are inside and begin clapping, the air can be-

NEWBIE

But this! What you're doing right now? It's not working.

SERGANT QUARANTINI

I'm trying to save-

NEWBIE

-Save us. We know. But you're making us nuts. You're making everybody nuts.  
Sargent...what's your first name?

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Stan.

*B.T. laughs.*

A.T.

What's so funny?

B.T.

Stan Quarantini. *(Slowly, to make it sound like "Stay in quarantine")*. Stan Quarantini.

*A.T. and Dee laugh.*

NEWBIE

Be nice.

DEE

He wasn't nice to me.

NEWBIE

Oh, go pick up a mosquito or something. *(To Sargent Quarantini)* Stan, have you heard of “fight or flight”?

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Of course. It’s covered in basic. It means, in battle, when the adrenaline is really pumping, your body will tell you to either fight or flee. And I’m training you all to fight! To survive this battle.

NEWBIE

And, boy, you’re doing a great job. One question, if I may.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Proceed.

NEWBIE

Can a person live in a permanent state of fight or flight?

*Sargent stands motionless for a moment.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Um...that’s what shore leave is for!

NEWBIE

In this particular battle, does anyone get shore leave?

*A long pause.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

*(To audience)*

After this, I’ll be giving a demonstration on how to disinfect your children after they-

NEWBIE

-Stan. Come on. Look at me.

*He does.*

Take a deep breath. Everybody, just take a deep breath. Your battle plan, your, um, survival techniques are very sound. But your method of communication? To ensure adherence? A little bit not...long term practical. Trust me.

*Sargent starts to say something.*

No.

*Sargent again tries to interrupt.*

NEWBIE (CONT'D)

No!

*They look at each other in a conversational standoff. The Sargent finally steps back.*

Thank you.

*Newbie looks around.*

Okay, what's between fight and flight? Staying put.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

-But-

NEWBIE

-NO! We take all your wonderful, helpful knowledge and strategies, and they are lovely. And we, well, do them. Like the distant thing. And the hand sanitizer. And who doesn't like those cute little bottles? But all this drama? Not workable. It's just not sustainable.

B.T.

Yes! Can we please get back to normal?

NEWBIE

Really, B.T.?

B.T.

Don't give me that look. You just got here!

NEWBIE

Oh, you think I'm new here?

B.T.

Well....yeah? I mean, your name is-

*Newbie looks around*

NEWBIE

-You all think I'm new here. "Oh, look at Newbie, doesn't know anything about living through a plague." Well, FYI, this is NOT my first rodeo, as they say. Oh, no, no, no. So, a heads-up. Things will never return to normal (*glances at B.T.*) because things were never normal, okay? Normal doesn't exist. Sure, we learn stuff. Good stuff. But then we tend to forget most of it. What tends to happen is that the concrete things, like hygiene? Science-y stuff? Generally, that tends to stick. "Generally," that is...well, no I'm not unpacking that right now. Nope.

But the empathy, embracing the bigger picture, anticipating possible disaster before it actually happens and inconveniencing oneself and others to prepare for it, stuff? That ship will sail again in probably three to five years. Give or take.

*Dee nods throughout the above.*

Folks, we're never going back. And it's okay.

*Sargent Quarantini turns to Dee.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

You did this! Ruined everything. You...you...I'm going to take you out!

*Sargent raises to his pole to strike Dee. Dee stands, casually watching. Then, when the pole is at the apex, ready to fall on to Dee, he freezes.*

DEE

Yup. You're thinking about it now, aren't ya? Kill me? Just gives me another passenger, eh? Oh, it's a pickle. What's a fella to do?

*Sargent lowers the pole.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

I just value life above all else.

DEE

Birth, right? Birth is better than death?

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Always! Absolutely!

DEE

Okay. Hold that thought. (*Calling offstage*) Hey. Bee. You around?

BEE  
(Offstage)

I'm always around!

*Bee races onstage. Bee is dressed in a concoction of items which only connection is their lack of cohesion. Some examples: Dutch clogs, tutu, football jersey, Hawaiian lei, crown, baseball cap, sari, grass skirt, etc. Items include things from Eastern, Western, and indigenous cultures, and both typical female and male references.*

Oh my god, this place is great! HI! Look at everything! What are those? (*Races to scattered hoops. Proceeds to toss them around*) These are awesome!

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Please don't touch them and then throw-

BEE  
(To Newbie)

HI! Remember me? You look great!

*Crossing to Sargent.*

Who are you?

*Sargent raises his pole to waist high, to keep Bee at a safe distance. Bee grabs the pole.*

Wow! Thanks! I love sticks. I love everything! (*To audience*) Hi. You are all great, you know that? (*Points to an audience member*) Look at your ankles. Aren't those the best ankles EVER? Look at mine! I LOVE ankles. Did you see my stick? Ouch. Wait a second. Everything hurts. God, I'm tired.

*Bee splays flat on the stage. Everyone leans it slightly to look closer. Bee pops back up.*

That was great! I saw a bird and the sky and that tree and that tree and that tree and that cloud and it was awesome.

DEE

Hey Bee.

BEE

DEE! You look GREAT! We never get to talk.

DEE

We talk all the time

BEE

I know but it's never enough!

DEE

It may feel that way to you. Okay. Sargent Quarantini there? He really wanted to meet you.

BEE

*(To Sargent)*

I love your stick. And your face. And your ankles. I love everything!

*Bee resumes racing around the stage. During the following, they may tumble over a hoop, but pop right back up.*

There's a bug. I know that bug. You just live your life, bug! I love you so much. OUCH! Something hurt. No. Wait. I'm better *(To B.T.)* HI! I love your ankles. And your index finger. And your sparkling personality. Are we all friends? We better be! I feel great! *(To audience)* Do you feel great? Look at your ankles. I better you feel great now.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

HALT!

*Bee stops. Sargent crosses to Bee.*

This reckless, chaotic, unorganized behavior is unacceptable during these troubling times. I order you to behave.

*Bee pauses. Bee throws a large handful of glitter on Sargent.*

BEE

*(To Sargent)* I love you! You are so brave and strong and have such crazy ideas.

DEE

*(To Sargent)*

Who's messing with your plan now, Sarge? Eh? Oh, yeah. "Bee is so much better than Dee."

BEE

*(To Dee)*

Who said that? You are FABULOUS! I love you!

And I love you. DEE

Really? That feels awesome. BEE

Oh. I'm getting it. A.T.

You got something? That's amazing! You are so smart. Tell me. BEE

*Bee plops down in front of A.T.*

You are all about boundaries. Bee? Has absolutely none. A.T.  
*(Pointing to Dee)*

*Bee writhes on the ground in delight.*

That is so true. You are so smart. You all are so lucky to live with...um...who are you? BEE

A.T. A.T.

You are all so lucky to live with- BEE

-Do they ever stop talking?- B.T.

-A.T. and Dee and Newbie and that guy with the stick. *(To audience)* And all of them. This is so great! BEE

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Dee?

Yes, Sarge. DEE

That's your name? Sarge? That's a great name! BEE

DEE

You want me to make her stop?

BEE

Stop what? I can't stop! Whatever it is, I can't stop it.

DEE

I know. *(To Bee)* Somewhere in the vicinity of all the human people here *(gestures to the audience)-*

BEE

-who are all amazing.

DEE

Aren't they all?

BEE

YES! So amazing!

DEE

One of these people is pregnant but they don't know it yet.

*Dee, Bee, Sargent, A.T., Newbie, and B.T. all look at the audience.*

B.T.

Hang on. If you're death, how do you know that?

DEE

A whole lot of sperm just died.

B.T.

Oh.

NEWBIE

Makes sense.

*Bee raises their hand and begins jumping around.*

BEE

I know. I know. I know who it is. Can I say? Please?

DEE

No.

But- BEE

-Nope. DEE

But I wanna. BEE

But they don't know. DEE

-but it's still BIRTH! Birth, a beginning of a- BEE

But you can't. DEE

Why exactly? A.T.

Because then, Bee, well, you explain. DEE

BEE  
(*Not happy*)  
Birth happens when it's supposed to happen. Like, you can't stop it.

DEE

And what else?

BEE  
You also can't push it. Can't hurry it up even if you KNOW SOMETHING GREAT AND WANT TO SHARE IT. You can't.

DEE  
Bee can't kill the idea. The moment of discovery.

BEE  
Sometimes, it sucks! You know what else? Someone else right here is going to have an AMAZING idea. And they are going to start writing a BOOK. Someone right HERE.

NEWBIE

But they haven't birthed the idea yet.

BEE

Yeah. Sometimes birth takes forever. I mean, just ages. And I can't do anything about it.

DEE

Yeah. Neither of us can, actually.

*Dee and Bee nod. Dee and Bee exchange a look. Then they both step back and look at B.T.*

B.T.

*(Confused)*

What?

*A.T., Newbie and Sargent don't know what is going on either.*

DEE

Your left pocket.

*Dee taps her chest to indicate the pocket.*

BEE

Go ahead.

*B.T. reaches into their inside coat pocket and pulls out a package of sparklers. Dee gestures for B.T. to check another pocket. B.T. does and pulls out a lighter.*

A.T.

Aw, shoot! Really?

*B.T. looks at the sparklers and lighter for a long moment.*

B.T.

You know, I'm not that bad.

BEE

You are not bad at all. You were wonderful. Well, yeah, you had a few issues, but we all loved you.

DEE

Bee's totally correct. You are not bad. You're also not good. You're just done.

A.T.

But...really?

B.T.

Will you all remember me?

NEWBIE

Absolutely.

A.T.

You are unforgettable.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

It's been an honor serving with you.

*B.T. shakes the box of sparklers.*

B.T.

*(To Dee)*

Why so many?

DEE

Back-ups.

B.T.

Okay.

*B.T. pulls out a sparkler, lights it, sticks it in the ground and steps back so Dee can put her hoop around it. As soon as her hoop is around the sparkler, B.T.'s posture straightens.*

B.T.

Hey! Wow. You were right! Okay everybody. I'm out!

*B.T. takes their hoop, carefully aims it down the aisle, rolls it offstage and then follows it out to exit.*

*(Exiting)* Don't do anything I wouldn't do, suckers!

A.T.

Wow. I did not see that coming.

NEWBIE

Really? Huh. I have seen it before.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

What?

NEWBIE

The death of the Before Times.

*Sargent slowing turns to face Dee.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI

You are a demon!

DEE

Oh, not this again.

A.T.

Really, dude?

*Bee starts bouncing around the stage, with their hand raised.*

NEWBIE

What is it, Bee?

BEE

*(Excitedly bouncing)*

Alright, I'm not supposed to tell.

DEE

*(Warning)*

Bee!

BEE

Oh, don't be a poop. *(Loudly whispering to everyone)* The Before Times? They'll be back! It'll be awhile and they'll look way different but, yeah, they're coming back. It's SO AWESOME!

DEE

*(To A.T.)*

You're absolutely right. No boundaries. Anyway, I gotta go.

BEE  
NO! We just started having fun!

DEE  
Bee, I love you, but you drive me bonkers.

BEE  
I know. But I can't stop.

DEE  
I know.

NEWBIE  
*(To Dee)*  
Any recommendations before you take off?

DEE  
*(After a moment)*  
Yeah. Whatever time you're in, take it.

A.T.  
Um....huh?

DEE  
Take your time. It's yours. Take your time and TAKE your time! It's all you got to work with anyway. Oh, and please, will you stay away from fried foods?

*Dee exits.*

BEE  
I miss her! Group hug.

*Bee flings their arms open.*

SARGENT QUARANTINI  
Oh no! This gathering has gone on too long anyway. I don't care if you're following protocols. Break it up. Time to get back to your barracks. All of ya! *(Sargent begins poking and prodding them offstage with his distancing pole)* March!

*Newbie and A.T. begin marching poorly. Bee starts exiting the other direction, tossing glitter as they go.*

NEWBIE

*(To Bee)*

Hey. We're going this way.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

*(Hushing Newbie)*

Um, let them go where they want to, um, go.

*Sargent glances at Bee to make sure they are going to opposite direction.*

Okay, soldiers. Step lively! This battle's only just begun. *(To audience)* No slacking!

*A.T., Newbie, and Sargent exit. As they exit, A.T. and Newbie begin chatting.*

A.T.

You know, I'm craving Pasta Primavera.

NEWBIE

Me too! But maybe just with oregano.

A.T.

Having basil might be a nice homage to Bird.

NEWBIE

I hadn't thought of that.

SARGENT QUARANTINI

Keep marching!

END OF PLAY