

THEATRE GHOSTS:

SHOOTER

a play

by

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THEATRE GHOSTS is a collection of plays for ‘after-hours’ theatre. With so much theatre being created for 90 minutes or less presentations, theatre houses often close their doors by ten at night. Leaving venues dark, yet presumably available to create additional revenue and/or bring in a new audience; one that doesn’t even consider night life starting till after 9:00 pm.

Each *THEATRE GHOST* piece is a stand-alone one act play, roughly forty-five to seventy-five minutes in length, intended to be performed on a stage already in place for another production, regardless whether that production be *Noises off*, *Music Man*, *As You Like It* or *Raisin in the Sun*. The *Theatre Ghosts* plays utilize each venue as a theatre space—generally the same theatre space itself that the audience is attending...any dialogue pertaining to location or venue may and should be adjusted to match the venue.

CHARACTERS

EMILY SIMMS	30s	<i>Interviewer, married, 1 son</i>	
BRAD HELMOND	age open	<i>Camera Operator, married, 3 children</i>	} CREW
MAUREEN NG	age open	<i>Boom Operator, divorced, 2 children</i>	
CAROLINE ROSNER	49	<i>Interviewee, recent widow, 1 son (deceased)</i>	

THE SETTING

The theatre space itself as is.

THE TIME

Tuesday afternoon, six weeks before the fifteenth anniversary of a hometown mass shooting.

SYNOPSIS

Caroline Rosner, the parent of a high-school shooter, now that her husband has passed on, opens up to reporter Emily Simms, 15 years after the incident; in an effort to end the constant requests for interviews, excise her own demons, and move on with her life.

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

SCENE 1

(At rise:

The lights awkwardly come up as EMILY SIMMS, 30s, photo ready in her appearance, enters the theatre from the lobby with BRAD, the CAMERA OPERATOR, [age open] in tow.

They both observe the stage as well as the rest of the theatre. Onstage itself is the set for whatever current show is on the Venue's calendar. Amongst the set—without displacing any item—are two comfortable chairs, key lights, back lights, reflective screens. There are cable channels temporarily set running offstage to supply power to the lamps. BRAD carries his camera at all times.

They look over the room to reanalyze their positioning.)

MAUREEN (OFFSTAGE)

That's the best they got. Unless you want me to bring in something from the truck.

EMILY

No. This—this'll do. Right?

BRAD

Whatever you want.

EMILY

Maybe we can... Maybe you can set up over there.

BRAD

No, we're where they gave us. I'm not sure—

EMILY

It'll be fine.

(MAUREEN, the BOOM OPERATOR [age open] enters from the TECH BOOTH location, making her way on to the stage—if not entering from one of the wings—picks up her boom mic from the set, she checks her readings and settings. The three of them set up through the following:)

EMILY

You can just—move / that—

MAUREEN

Nope.

EMILY

You didn't even hear what / I—

MAUREEN

We're not moving anything.

EMILY

..It's not *union*, it's / in the—

MAUREEN

It's not a matter of the union.

EMILY

[What?]

BRAD

It's in the rental agr—it's what they agreed on; we can't move anything. It's a Hot set.

EMILY

We'll put it back. Give me a / break.

BRAD

It's not a matter of putting it back, it's a matter of filming it out of place.

EMILY

That is the stupidest thing I ever—...

(EMILY stops talking and turns to see what the CREW have already recognized—and BRAD is already filming: In the southmost theatre entrance stands CAROLINE ROSNER, 50s, conservatively dressed, taking in the room, before stepping inside. Her eyes scan every wall and row of seats, the exits signs, a plaque on the wall. Finally, her eyes fall back to one particular seat. EMILY checks peripherally to be sure her CREW is getting all this. There is no rush. MAUREEN waits a respectful moment before re-positioning the boom—checks readings—all equipment is properly operating. CREW signal small nods to EMILY, who continues to wait on

CAROLINE to make the first move. Nobody is rushing anything. Somehow they manage to continue both filming and set up—EMILY remains focused on Caroline and providing her both time and space.

CAROLINE composes herself then addresses Emily quietly:)

CAROLINE

Hello.

EMILY

(Purposely matching Caroline's cadence:)

Hello. Mrs. Rosner. Thank you for..

(But CAROLINE is waving her off:)

CAROLINE

No need

(stops herself—starts again:)

I'm sorry. You were saying.

EMILY

My name..is..Emily Simms—

CAROLINE

I know who you are. I uhm I watch you every night—well, not every night but uhm..

I know who you are.

(To the CREW:)

I don't know your names.

EMILY

Maureen and uh Brad, I'm sorry, I know you wanted—I had—uh Sarah Givens came down with--.. she's sick and..Brad was all I could get on this short of notice—If you want to reschedule I..

CAROLINE

No. No, let's just..get this over with, shall we?

EMILY

Right.

CAROLINE

Uhhh...

(CAROLINE looks for the way onto the stage....)

EMILY

..I wa—we were *hoping* to get a moment of you outside, coming in for the first time.

CAROLINE

(Finding her way up unassisted...)

Well, I'm already here—wouldn't be uh genuine moment, would it?

EMILY

(Finally steps in to help CAROLINE up as needed)

No. I suppose not. We were just setting up.

CAROLINE

Where do you want me to sit?

EMILY

(Indicating the more upstage of the two preset chairs.)

Anywhere you like.

(MAUREEN looks over to EMILY “not *anywhere* she likes”:))

EMILY

Either of these.

(Guiding her to the most upstage chair:)

This would be good.

Would you like—would you like some water?

CAROLINE

No.

Thank you, though.

Brad, I have nothing against you, I just felt it would be easier with—are you a parent?

BRAD

Three.

CAROLINE

They're all...?

BRAD

All at home. Still in school.

(CAROLINE looks to Maureen:)

MAUREEN

Ten. And eight.

CAROLINE

Thank you, Marie.

MAUREEN

(Maureen)

CAROLINE

I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I'm sorry.

(BRAD hands EMILY an open box of Kleenex, who then offers them to CAROLINE, who takes a single tissue.)

Aahh, the waterworks already, Geez..

(Corrects herself:)

Jesus.

(realizes:)

Can I say, "Jesus"?

EMILY

You can say whatever you want.

(Everyone is in place: The camera is rolling:)

EMILY

I'm here with—I'm here with Mrs. Caroline Rosner. In (NAME OF TOWN, STATE).¹ Where fifteen years ago, her son, Matthew Rosner, at 17, ended his own life and the lives of seven other patrons in this theatre (NAME OF THEATRE),² on October 27th, 2008³.

This is her first—

¹ City and State (or Provence) the play is actually being presented in.

² The name of the actual Theatre the play is being presented in.

³ The date should be adjusted to reflect the play's production to align approximately 6 weeks before the 15th year anniversary of the date given.

EMILY (Continued:)

(switches focus:)

This is your first time speaking about this—about this moment uh... We would have to ask:

Why? Why now? After all this time?

CAROLINE

These years, you mean.

EMILY

Yes.

CAROLINE

(fuck)

I'm sorry. I can't—I can't say that..I know that much.

EMILY

We will edit. You say whatever you want, however you want. You just be yourself.

CAROLINE

(right)

EMILY

So, why now?

CAROLINE

Because his Dad died.

EMILY

Your husband?

CAROLINE

Yeah.

(Again, corrects herself:)

Yes. Not that we were—had any kind of a marriage anymore since... We started out strong. We—held onto each other after it happened. All you—all you reporters, like sharks and Ben said, “no comment” and and we were gonna keep to *that* but *you* didn't—that didn't stop you. Not you in particular but.. your world. And then after he [Ben] died, it uhm...

(Switching times: referring again to 15 years ago:)

You didn't stop. It started out daily and then. We couldn't even sleep—all hours. There were news trucks outside our home. Months for our lawn to grow back.

CAROLINE (Continued:)

And you were still there but there were less of you. And finally [it settled down to] a few times a week. Then every week. Then every month and that's still [monthly, what with all the] phone calls. "Chance" meetings at stores and.. Book offers. You know, we had no less than twelve people wanting to write our book. But every year when October⁴ hits we... For that week it is back to day one. So, to answer your question: my husband died. I want this to stop and...hopefully this is how. Right here where it happened.

EMILY

Get ahead of it.

CAROLINE

Way [way ahead of it].

EMILY

Is this the first / ti—

CAROLINE

No.

(Slight beat: EMILY takes the moment to consider whether to address the new issue at hand—she carefully does:)

EMILY

(I'm sorry, but if you would let me get the full question out before you answer.)

(A beat.)

CAROLINE

[of course.]

EMILY

Thank you. / Is this—

CAROLINE

(Unintentionally interrupting—assuming EMILY had completed her thought with "thank you":)

Sorry.

⁴ Ibid (adjust date as needed.)

EMILY

..Don't be.

Is this the—This isn't your first time returning to the theatre, I understand.

CAROLINE

No.

(Slightest of beats—hoping for elaboration...)

EMILY

Could you tell us about that.

CAROLINE

They [everyone] were showing pictures [of the theatre here], after it happened. At every funeral. At every—.. And I..I knew I would eventually be caught off guard so I came here on my own and..And I slept here overnight.

EMILY

..You slept here.

CAROLINE

Yeah. Yes. In a sleeping bag. Just over there. Confronting your demons.

(Presuming EMILY's next question:)

Ben. Ben wasn't with me. Didn't join me here. I don't know if he ever stepped in here again.

That was in uh May 2009⁵.

EMILY

Six--seven months after / your son—

CAROLINE

Yeah.

Sorry: I did it again, didn't I?

EMILY

This can't be easy for you.

And that, in May 2009, was / the—

CAROLINE

No.

^{5 5} Ibid (adjust date as needed.)

CAROLINE (Continued;)

I keep [interrupting you, don't I]—I'm sorry.

(A beat.)

CAROLINE

You wanted to film outside?

EMILY

(Too risky... she could flee:

We can do that—we can do that later. When we leave. We'll make it about leaving. Leaving it behind you. Wouldn't be genuine [otherwise].

So, if you could just let me get my questions out in full.

CAROLINE

Then, maybe, ask your questions faster. I've been living with this for fifteen years. I—we tried to move away. We tried. No one would sell to us. No one would buy. Uhhh. We worked from home finally.

EMILY

Did you know?

CAROLINE

(She's been ready for that question:)

Do you have children?

EMILY

One. He's seven.

CAROLINE

So, you had him...at thirty?

EMILY

Twenty-eight.

CAROLINE

We had Matthew when I was nineteen. I wasn't ready. He certainly wasn't ready. I turned fifty this year and I have outlived my son and my husband. And I—No, I didn't know. He didn't know. There were no "signs". Matt never harmed animals or was abused or lit fires or any of the things they write about... kids like him. He was disturbed. Clearly. And we didn't know it.

EMILY

So, why are you telling your story now?

CAROLINE

Why are you reporting on it? Because it'll make a buck. It's not going to change legislation. It's not going to clear up mental health issues in this country but it may put a stop to people like you. Sometimes you give the bully what he wants and he goes away.

EMILY

You see me as a bully?

CAROLINE

Don't you?

(A half a beat.)

BRAD

You want me to—

EMILY

No. No.

(To Caroline:)

No, I don't see myself as a bully. I report the news. And we need to know how this happened, to keep it from happening again.

CAROLINE

(bullshit)

(You can just edit that out.)

EMILY

(Remaining emotionally lateral:)

What just happened here? When did I become the enemy? What did what did I... What did I personally do?

CAROLINE

You film a seal, a young pup, who has fallen down a ravine and can't climb out. Her mother is at the top of the ravine trying to get to her baby and you can help—you know you can help—you know you can make a difference in these lives and you don't: you just film it. As the pup dies; three days later. And the mother weeps. But..you..filmed it.

EMILY

So, you're blaming the schools? It's the school's job to raise your kid?

CAROLINE

..Wow. You really ... [don't get it; don't see your own culpability]...

EMILY

Explain it to me.

(CAROLINE considers her options and then reaches into her purse. EMILY and her CREW each stiffen slightly. CAROLINE stops.)

CAROLINE

Oh my god.

Oh my god.

(She dumps her purse out on the floor to prove her point.)

What did you [think I was going to do?]

(She pulls her phone off the floor. She starts looking through the images on her phone...)

This is—this is the...

(Instead, she stands up. Assumes the position.)

You want to frisk me?

I think it would be better. If..

(to Maureen or Emily:)

Either of you. Go ahead. I would prefer it.

(To Brad:)

Keep filming, please. I'm—

(Pulling up her shirt enough to show she is NOT wearing an explosive device.)

--not armed in any way. But please.

For my piece of mind.

MAUREEN

Do you want...?

EMILY

I think [it's time to pack it up.]

CAROLINE

No. Frisk me. Or you force me to strip.

EMILY

W-we're done here.

CAROLINE

Are you filming this?

EMILY

(To Brad:)

Shut off / the—

CAROLINE

Film. It's been fifteen years. You people have been hounding me for fifteen years. I could not be more naked.

(To Maureen:)

Please.

(A beat: MAUREEN hands the boom mic to EMILY and silently pads down CAROLINE.)

CAROLINE

I did not come here to kill myself. Or kill you. Or anyone.

(MAUREEN finishes her task. CAROLINE seems satisfied that her point has been made. She sits back down and again picks up her phone.)

EMILY

That was entirely unnecessary.

CAROLINE

Make for ratings, won't it?

EMILY

No one'll ever see it.

CAROLINE

(Showing them her phone:)

This. This is Matthew.

(EMILY acknowledges the picture, doing her best to display some empathy for Caroline. CAROLINE then shows the image to each MAUREEN and BRAD.)

EMILY

It's not necessary—

CAROLINE

(Making a point to show Brad—*NOT* Brad's camera—the photo:)

It's entirely necessary. You're entirely necessary.

(to Maureen:)

You're necessary.

(To EMILY—though her eyes are saying, “you? you’re a dime a dozen” her mouth says:)

We're all necessary.

(A slight beat. She also looks again at the picture.)

That was the morning... That was *that* morning.

(She puts away the phone.)

I'll text it to you. Sorry it's not video.

(She returns the contents from off the floor back to into her purse.)

EMILY

Caroline.

(Corrects herself:)

Mrs. Rosner.

CAROLINE

Caroline's fine.

EMILY

Caroline./

CAROLINE

Or Carol.

EMILY

Carol.

CAROLINE

Either one's fine. Just don't call me Lynn timer.

(There is something unsettling ...very Frost/Nixon in the moment.)

EMILY

Your son, shot twenty-three people, seven died, with a semi-automatic weapon and then turned the rifle on himself.

CAROLINE

Yes. Yes, he did.

EMILY

Why?

CAROLINE

“Did I drop him on his head when he was a baby?”

EMILY

Did you?

CAROLINE

No.

EMILY

Did he play violent video games?

CAROLINE

Yes.

And so do millions of boys who never pick up a gun so... where's your connection there?

EMILY

Where did he get the gun?

CAROLINE

He built it. Off the internet.

EMILY

..You truly don't care, do you?

CAROLINE

I..am past caring. I care. And I have continued to care. But now I need to move on.

(Lights suddenly shift:)

(REWIND:

Immediately the lights alter and an orchestral rewind music⁶ overtakes our senses. The cast moves swiftly in reverse—'rewinding' their movements to the point of CAROLINE'S entrance⁷

Lights and movement resume forward:

CAROLINE stands at the doorway.)

EMILY

That is the stupidest thing I ever—...

(RESUME REWIND:

Lights and music immediately resume. All character movements again 'rewind' to the all but the very opening of the play.

Lights and movement resume forward:

EMILY and BRAD look over the room to reanalyze their positioning.)

MAUREEN (OFFSTAGE)

That's the best they got. Unless you want me to bring in something from the truck.

(RESUME REWIND:

Lights and music immediately resume. All character movements continue to rewind to before the opening of our play:

EMILY and BRAD exit stage.

Lights out momentarily. Lights then quickly run an array of positions.

BRAD and MAUREEN reverse enter and go about reversing their location set up—they seem to dance throughout the theatre--all the studio equipment ultimately being set into a cart—ending in the stage picture being returned to the original set for the venue's current show.

MAUREEN steps just offstage.

BRAD's eyes fall upon the plaque on the wall.)

Lights and movement resume forward:)

⁶ Examples of Orchestral Rewind Music include 45 seconds into Satisfied (Hamilton by Lin-Manuel Miranda); the last segment of A Day in The Life (the Beatles)

⁷ The contents of Carline's purse are NOT dumped out on floor—this can be achieved by having a double clutch opening to bag.

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE:

Part of the concept of THEATRE GHOSTS is to adapt the script to the actual venue of the given production.

Therefore, building descriptions, current production, dates, timelines should all be adjusted to fit the concept of here and now.

Details follow.

- pgs 1, 15** *(The **Tech Booth** location may be offstage, behind the audience etc. It is preferred that the area remain out of audience view for purposes of our play.)*
(the same adjustments should also be made on pages 15 and 23)
- pgs 2, 15** *(The southern **entrance for CAROLINE** is that audience entrance that would be closest to the stage—giving the audience best view..adjust for on stage entrance as/if needed.)*
(the same adjustments should also be made on page 15)
- pg 2, 15** *(The placement of the **plaque**, is up to production discretion.)*
(the same adjustments should also be made on pages 15-16, 19)
- pg 2** *(The ‘**one particular seat**’ that CAROLINE rests her gaze on should preferably be actually empty)*
- pg 5** *(**NAME OF TOWN, STATE and THEATRE** refers to the actual name of the town/city the producing theatre is located in as well as the Theatre Name itself)*
(the same adjustments should also be made on page 8)
- pgs 5, 7** *(**October 27, 2008** This date should be adjusted to reflect the play’s production to align approximately 6 weeks before the 15th year anniversary of the date given..)*
(the same adjustments should also be made on page 7)
- pg 8** *(**May, 2009** This date should be adjusted to align approximately 7 months after the shooting actual date of the shooting.)the play’s production to align approximately 6 weeks before the 15th year anniversary of the date given..)*