

Snowstorm

by Benjamin Crowder

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The lobby of a motel in a small town in the middle of nowhere along I-70 in Colorado. Present time. A blizzard rages outside. Conditions are so bad that a number of travelers have stopped at this motel to wait out the storm. On the floor up against the wall stage left sits a radio. In the middle of the stage a book- and magazine-laden coffee table is surrounded by three cozy chairs. At the back of the stage, an unlit fireplace flanked by two flimsy chairs. The main entrance is a door stage right. Next to it stands a coat rack already carrying some coats. There's a side entrance stage left.

Lights up.

Roscoe, a twenty-something out-of-work overdramatic actor from New York, is kneeling on the ground next to the radio, fiddling with the knobs and dials. It emits nothing but static, however. Neil, the impossible forty-something bachelor older brother of the manager, is sitting in one of the chairs next to the fireplace. Kirstie, a beautiful young nurse who has just been dumped by her fiancé, is sitting in the left cozy chair.

Roscoe: *(In a British accent.)* Blimey, I think I've got it.

Neil: It won't work. It's never worked. The government won't let it.

The door to the entrance opens and in walk Spencer and Ophelia, who proceed to take off their coats and put them on the rack. Both are in their early thirties; Spencer is an attorney and is quite sane. Ophie, on the other hand, has never had a child, and yet she thinks she's pregnant. She's also a little unbalanced.

Ophelia: This cold isn't good for the baby. Do you think she's alright?

Spencer: As good as ever, dear. *(Looks around.)* I'm glad something's open.

Neil: We're actually closed.

Ophelia: Oh dear.

Spencer: Closed? Then why...?

Roscoe: Don't listen to the old chap, it's quite open. I've been here for weeks. The storm got you, too?

Spencer: It's crazy out there.

Roscoe stands up and walks across the room to shake Spencer's and Ophie's hands.

Roscoe: Roscoe. *(To Ophie:)* And you are a *very* beautiful woman. *(To Spencer:)* She's your sister, right?

Spencer: *(Territorially.)* My wife.

Roscoe: My apologies. Do be a good bloke and overlook the gaffe, won't you? Customs are...you know...*different* across the pond.

Spencer: *(Ignores Roscoe and turns to Neil.)* How much for a night here?

Neil: More than you can pay.

Spencer: Do you *not* want customers?

Kirstie: He's not the manager. I don't know who he is.

Roscoe: *(Gets back down on his knees to tinker around with the radio.)* He's the devil.

Ophelia: *(Sitting down in the cozy chair next to Kirstie.)* Oh, hi, my name's Ophelia. But you can call me Ophie.

Spencer: *(Steps closer to Neil.)* Look, I don't care who—

Neil: Careful there. I've got the plague. It's catching.

Spencer: The plague. Right. *(Turns around in frustration.)*

Kirstie: I'm Kirstie. So you're pregnant?

Ophie nods excitedly. Spencer shakes his head.

Kirstie: How far along?

Ophelia: Eight months.

Kirstie: (*Slowly nods.*) I can tell.

Roscoe: I've got something! (*The radio still gives off nothing but static. Roscoe puts his ear right up to the speaker.*) It's from Grand Junction.

Spencer: (*Gets down on his knees.*) I can't hear anything.

Roscoe: You have to listen closely. It's very faint. See, they just said "blizzard."

Spencer: (*Stands up.*) You're crazy.

Roscoe: Wait, listen to this! A killer—no, make that a *serial* killer—is...on the loose. Escaped earlier today. Hold on, it's fading. Think they've spotted him heading eastward on...goodness. What highway is that outside? Out there? (*Points finger.*)

Kirstie: I-70.

Roscoe: Oh no. That's...that's it. Are we east from Grand Junction?

Neil: It isn't safe here. You'd all better go.

Spencer: Go? Where? If you didn't notice, there's a blizzard outside.

Neil: (*Looks past Spencer to window in entrance door.*) Oh. That explains the frostbite. (*Sighs.*)

Roscoe: If he broke out earlier today, he could be here already. (*Looks around room suspiciously. Pauses on Kirstie.*) That's assuming he's a he.

Ophelia: You mean he might have...changed? (*Look of innocent disgust.*)

Roscoe: They didn't say. But wait! What's that?

Neil: I didn't hear anything.

Roscoe: Steps. Or knocking. Or tapping.

Ophelia: Oh, that? It's just the baby kicking.

Roscoe: (*Loses interest. Look at Neil.*) My plague-ridden friend, I haven't asked your name yet.

Spencer: He's been here for weeks?

Kirstie: No, he got here after me.

Neil: (*Yawns.*) Neil.

Roscoe: Such a tragically boring name. You could change it, you know, to something better. Like Augustus. Or Reginald.

Neil: Go fetch the bone, *Roscoe*.

Roscoe: Look, chap, where's the kitchen?

Neil: The kitchen?

Roscoe: You know, the cafeteria. The mess hall. The refectory. The *food place*.

Neil: The mold and fungus took over. It's gone.

Roscoe: No kitchen! What kind of a hotel is this?

Neil: This is a *motel*. Not hotel.

Roscoe: Cheap Americans.

Ophelia: So, Kirstie, do you live here, too?

Spencer: It's a motel, dear, not a house. They don't live here.

Ophelia: Oh.

Kirstie: I'm just here for the night. Long story.

Roscoe has casually made his way over to the edge of the room. Suddenly he turns the lights off.

Ophelia: The baby's scared of the dark, sweetie.

Spencer: Where's the light switch?

Neil: Looks like a power line went down. You'll all have to leave.

Roscoe yells and falls to the floor.

Spencer: It's over here somewhere. Oomph. *Why* is the coat rack in front of the light switch?

The lights come on. Roscoe is lying motionless on the floor in between the radio and the cozy chairs.

Ophelia: Oh dear.

Kirstie: (*Gets up and rushes over to Roscoe.*) It's okay, I'm a nurse.

Spencer is already kneeling by Roscoe's side. Kirstie kneels on the other side and begins to examine the body. Seeing the ketchup Roscoe has smeared across his neck, she promptly faints, landing next to him, not on top of him.

Spencer: Did...did she just faint? She just fainted. But...she's a *nurse!*

Neil: The plague. I told you it's catching.

Spencer: (*Stands up, spinning round.*) You did this?

Neil: (*Laughs.*) Me? In case you haven't noticed, I haven't left my chair. Polio. Age twelve. Haven't walked since.

Spencer: This man—Roscoe—is lying here in a puddle of blood, and you have the gall to—

Roscoe sits up.

Roscoe: (*In a Spanish-Italian accent.*) The woman has fainted? Fear not, I am in certified in what they call the CPR. (*Begins to bend over Kirstie.*)

Spencer: Whoa, whoa, hold on a second there. (*Kneels down and pushed Roscoe away from Kirstie.*) You're alive?

Roscoe: Of course I'm alive. The dead don't look half as good as this. But the woman's life hangs in the balance! Delay me not.

Spencer: Mouth-to-mouth doesn't work on someone who's fainted.

Roscoe: And you know this...how? (*Bends down again.*)

Spencer: Stop it! (*Pats Kirstie's face.*) I thought you were British.

Roscoe: (*Switches to a Brooklyn accent.*) Nah, I'm from New York.

Spencer: What are you, an actor or something? (*Continues patting Kirstie's face. Ophie looks over his shoulder.*)

Roscoe: Yeah. What are you, a prosecutor or something?

Ophelia: You guessed it! I think the baby's clapping.

Spencer: Yes. I am. And playing dead isn't funny.

Roscoe: Easy for you to say. *(Bends down again.)*

Neil: I think Roscoe's the serial killer.

Roscoe: *(Straightens up again and switches to a French accent.)* Excusez-moi? I am no killer. Except *(and he looks down at Kirstie)* a lady-killer.

Spencer: That's not funny either.

Roscoe: *(Back to a Spanish-Italian accent.)* True love's kiss will set her free from these bonds that oppress. *(Bends down again.)*

Ophelia: Oh, Spencer, let him kiss her.

Spencer: Ophie! What if she's married? *(Pulls Roscoe back up.)*

Neil: She's not. Her fiancé dumped her yesterday.

Roscoe: See! *(Bends down again.)*

Spencer: And how do you know? *(Pulls Roscoe back up.)*

Neil: She told me.

Roscoe bends down again. Kirstie comes to, though, just as Roscoe's about to kiss her. She slaps him and quickly crawls to her feet, backing into one of the cozy chairs.

Kirstie: *What* do you think you were *doing*?

Roscoe: *(Kneels.)* I cannot help myself. I love you with every passionate fiber of my being. Your beauty is beyond a shadow of a doubt. Come with me and—

Ophelia: Isn't he romantic, dear?

Kirstie: *Creepy*, actually.

Roscoe: *(Shrugs and then stands up.)* Your loss.

Neil: *(Starts coughing and hacking and wheezing.)*

Spencer: *(To Kirstie.)* Are you okay? Have you eaten?

Ophelia: *(To Neil.)* Can you get her some water?

Neil: Quadriplegics usually can't go *anywhere*. Sorry.

Kirstie: I'm...I'm fine. I just...blood does it...to me. I'm fine now.

Spencer: You can't stand the sight of blood?

Roscoe: Wouldn't make a very good vampire, would she.

Ophelia: (*Glares at him.*)

Kirstie: Not really.

Roscoe: Which is the perfect alibi. I bet she's the killer.

Ophelia: Roscoe!

Roscoe: (*Switches to a German accent.*) Ja, ja, I can see it already. Serial killers are always unshaven, frumpy old men. This woman throws the stereotype on its head. Young and beautiful. Nobody would ever suspect it.

Spencer: She's not a killer.

Roscoe: If *I* were a serial killer, I would be a gorgeous young lady.

Spencer: As if you get to choose.

Kirstie: You think I'm...a serial killer? (*Laughs.*) Right.

Roscoe: (*Walks around to other side of cozy chairs.*) But then again appearances can be deceiving. Take this couple, for example. The doting husband and the frail wife. Picture of innocence.

Neil silently gets up and leaves stage left.

Spencer: You're not saying—

Roscoe: And the wife is pregnant. Vulnerable. No possible way she could be a—

Spencer: She's not preg— (*Looks at Ophie.*) She's not that kind of a woman.

Roscoe: Ah, but is she? Maybe instead of a baby in there—(*points to Ophie's stomach*)—maybe she has a tommy gun.

Ophelia: (*Thoughtfully.*) Tommy. I like that name. What do you think, dear?

Roscoe: You see? Feigned naivete. And then when the victim least suspects it, bam!

Spencer: Stop it, Roscoe. For all we know, *you're* the killer. So intent on grilling everyone, doing everything you can to make sure we think you're on the good side. A brilliant ploy. But not brilliant enough. We can see through it, actor-boy. Where have you buried the bodies?

Roscoe: *(Switches to New York accent.)* Bodies? I'm not the— *(Looks over at Neil's chair.)* Look! He's gone!

Ophelia: Oh dear.

Kirstie: He's not paralyzed. Just paranoid.

Spencer: Where'd he go? Did anyone see him?

Roscoe: I told you! The person you least suspect. The butler.

Spencer: He's not a butler.

Roscoe: But he's related to the management, and that's practically the same thing.

Ophelia: He can't have gone outside—we would have noticed...wouldn't we?

Kirstie: Yeah. Cold air. There wasn't any.

Spencer: Through that door, then. *(Points to stage left entrance.)* Where does it go?

Kirstie: To the rooms. This is a motel, remember?

Spencer: Of course.

Neil walks in with a towel draped over something he's holding in his right hand.

Roscoe: He's got a gun! Duck! *(Dives for cover behind the cozy chairs.)*

Spencer: *(Lifts hands.)* Don't do anything drastic, Neil.

Ophelia: The baby!

Kirstie: Excuse me?

Neil stands there for a moment with a quizzical expression on his face. He then shrugs and sits down at his chair. Pulling off the towel, he reveals a banana.

Spencer: A gun, Roscoe.

Roscoe: It *looked* like one! Besides, why else would he hide it in a towel?

Neil: Germs. Keeps them off.

Spencer: (*Grabs coat off rack.*) Sweetie, I think we should head out.

Ophelia: But the storm—

Spencer: We'll be fine.

Neil: The roads are pretty clear now.

Spencer: They are?

Kirstie: That's what he's been saying since the storm started.

Roscoe: Watch out for the killer. Unless you're him.

Spencer: I'm *not* the—look, how do we know there's even a killer at all? You're the only one who heard the radio. And we've believed you like children. (*Looks around at everyone.*) This is just a game, isn't it. Something to "pass away the time"?

Ophelia: Honey...

Spencer: Which explains the lights going out. And the ketchup. And the interrogation—what do you think this is, a game of Mafia? I could—

Neil: No murders in the motel, please.

Roscoe: No harm done, right? We're all okay.

Spencer: *She* fainted. (*Points at Kirstie.*)

Kirstie: I'm fine.

Spencer: Don't *say* you're fine!

Roscoe: See, she's okay. It's not a big deal, man. Chill.

Spencer: Don't tell me to chill. We're locked up in some dingy motel in the middle of nowhere with some psychotic actor and some guy who has the plague, and you want me to chill?

Kirstie walks over to the radio and starts turning dials.

Roscoe: You forgot the nurse. (*Switches to Spanish/Italian accent.*) Love of my life. (*Back to New York accent.*)

Spencer: She's normal.

Roscoe: And you're not.

Spencer grabs Roscoe by the collar. Roscoe doesn't really react. And then the radio comes on.

Announcer: ...for another few hours at least. Again, convict Jack Connaway escaped from the state penitentiary earlier this afternoon. (*Spencer lets go of Roscoe.*) Connaway has apparently headed west on I-70, and police are hot on his tail.

Ophelia: Oh dear.

Roscoe: Told you so.

A knock sounds at the door stage right. Everyone looks at each other for a second. Lights down.

The end.