

OHRDRUF
-a short play-
by Kevin Brofsky-

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Cast of Characters

VAL ZIMMER, 60s
JOSH ZIMMER, 60s
KITTY MORTEZ, 40s

Time: The present, early September

Place: New Bethlehem, Connecticut

(The suburban living room of a middle-class home in New Bethlehem, Connecticut. September.

(Needed: a sofa, armchair, coffee or end tables.

(Mid morning. JOSH ZIMMER enters tired. HE is in his early 60s. HE wears a shirt, open at the neck and jeans.

(HE kicks off his shoes and throws himself on the sofa face-up. HE lets out a large sigh, throws an arm over his eyes.

(VAL (VALERIE) ZIMMER enters, about the same age. SHE wears a tracksuit and carries a mug of coffee. SHE crosses to sit on the sofa. Feeling someone in the room, JOSH removes his arm to see VAL's behind about the sit on him. HE screams. SHE bolts, the coffee flying out of the cup.)

JOSH

Jesus H! What are you doing!?

VAL

What are you doing!? Why aren't you on the train? Did you take Isabel to school?

JOSH

Of course I drove her to school. Then, I drove to the train station. I was parking the car when I said to myself "What in hell am I doing?" I watched the 8:32 come and go and then drove home.

VAL

Did you call David?

JOSH

I was about to.

VAL

Make some noise when you're in a room.

JOSH

I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd be up now.

VAL

I couldn't sleep after you left. How did it go?

JOSH

Quiet. I had this whole scene planned out with Isabel. I was going to give a her big hug and remind her that you would be here all day in case she needed you, but she opened the car door and made a beeline for the school.

VAL

Good.

JOSH

Good?

VAL

Yes, "good." We've been telling her all summer how awesome school is. She obviously believed us.

JOSH

I didn't even get to see her through security.

VAL

"Good" again. She's going to think it's as normal as blueberry pie.

JOSH

I guess you're right.

VAL

I'll get some towels and blot up the coffee.

(SHE exits.)

JOSH

I wouldn't mind a cup.

VAL

(Off)

What?

JOSH

I wouldn't say "no" to coffee.

VAL
(Off)

Never known that to happen in thirty-two years.

JOSH

I saw Kitty Morteza coming out. I guess Casey didn't run into the school like a fox after a rabbit. I ducked down in the car. The last thing I needed was her this morning. I hope she didn't see me ... Actually, I'm glad Isabel saved me from entering the school ... All those people.

(VAL returns with two cups of coffee and paper towels tucked under his arm. SHE gives him the mug.)

Thank you.

(HE takes the cup. SHE puts his on the table and starts blotting up the coffee spots on sofa and rug.)

VAL

Why didn't you want to see Kitty?

JOSH

She's so intense. Always bringing it up. She doesn't seem to realize that people don't want to be reminded of it anymore. It's been five years. Kenny and Holly would want us to move on.

VAL

We all handle tragedies differently. On 9/11, my office mate Jean ran towards the Trade Center when everybody else was running uptown. She said she wanted to witness history.

JOSH

Most of history, I don't want to see.

VAL

So you didn't get to see the mural. You said ...

JOSH

I know I did. It's all right.

VAL

... you were going to at least glance at it. It's actually quite lovely.

JOSH

This morning wasn't the right time. No matter how much you prepare, you never know how you're going to feel about stuff like that.

VAL

(Grinning)

Like our wedding night.

JOSH

As I remember, there were no surprises on our wedding night.

VAL

No, all the surprises came afterward.

JOSH

Good and bad.

(THEY share a smile. This is an old and successful joke between the two of them.)

(HE sits up, takes his cell out of his pocket to make a call.)

Hello, David, it's Josh Zimmer ... Yeah, that Josh ... Listen, I'm going to do some work from home today ... ahum ... ahum ... well, I thought coming in would keep my mind off things, but ... Thanks, Dave. I'll see you tomorrow ... Sure.

(HE clicks off.)

He said they were just talking about me coming in or not.

VAL

He's a good egg.

JOSH

Well, his daughter is right behind Isabel. I know it's not the same thing ...

VAL

No it isn't.

JOSH

It's on the mind of every parent in America these days.

VAL

I turned on *Good Morning America* after you and Isabel left. This moron in Texas shot his neighbor last night because his car was blocking his driveway.

JOSH

At least it didn't happen at a school.

VAL

I had the same thought.

(SHE sighs.)

How are we going to survive the next six hours, Joshie?

JOSH

I'm going to work on the Vixon account like its just another day.

VAL

Did you see security guards?

JOSH

(A thought)

No ... no, I didn't. Did they have security guards the past five years?

VAL

I would assume.

JOSH

And they chose this year not to have any?

VAL

You don't know that ... There has to be a time to stop.

JOSH

I know, but ...

VAL

It can't be an armed camp. Maybe they decided it's not good for kids to see people walking around school in bullet-proof vests and guns on their hips.

JOSH

Now you're talking like Sophie.

VAL

Sophie had a point. She didn't want Isabel to grow up afraid of things.

JOSH

I know she didn't, but the problem hasn't gotten any better. It has gotten worse. Does the school tell the kids about it?

VAL

Some of them must know. Kids talk to each other. We shouldn't be afraid to tell anything to kids. They can take it. I learned about my mother's cancer when I was seven. I survived.

JOSH

I guess we're going to eventually talk to Isabel.

VAL

Yes. I think she's ready.

JOSH

I'm not sure I am though.

VAL

She's going to be six in November. We'll do it then. She may know a lot already.

JOSH

I won't be able to get through it without breaking down ... And suppose she starts to cry? You'll have two crying babies on your hands.

VAL

Takes me back to 1982 when I came home to both you and Kenny crying like it was the end of the world.

JOSH

That only happened when Kenny fell down the stairs. Stop making it sound like it happened constantly.

VAL

(Laughing)

I remember trying to keep Kenny quiet so you would stop crying.

JOSH

Women: You complain if we're not sensitive and make fun of us when we are.

VAL

I'm glad you're sensitive, Joshie. My father wouldn't have shown emotion if he was in a train crash.

JOSH

Men were taught to keep things inside. That generation went through World War Two.

VAL

And how it is any different than this?

(Silence)

Isabel's birthday is the 7th? We'll tell her on the 8th. I'll put it on the calender.

JOSH

I promise not to cry.

(Silence)

What does it look like? The mural?

VAL

Seven doves over water. Looks like Bantam Lake. Beautiful deep blue sky.

JOSH

It's not religious, isn't it?

VAL

Not really. Just peaceful.

JOSH

Of course it's religious. We live in a town they called New Bethlehem, for God's sake.

VAL

I liked it.

JOSH

Are the names there?

VAL

Lightly. Against the sky. Seven names in a light gold. Ken is last of course. The curse of being a Zimmer.

(Silence)

JOSH

I'll go see it on the 8th. While you're telling Isabel.

VAL

Deal. It will make you feel better, Joshie. It really will.

JOSH

I doubt it. Those things don't work on me.

VAL

You can glance at it and walk out of there fast.

JOSH

You looked at it long enough to see that Kenny's name was last.

VAL

Alright. I took it all in ... I wanted to take it all in. It's our son.

JOSH

Well, his name.

(Doorbell rings)

What the ... ? Are you expecting a delivery?

JOSH

I'll go.

(HE puts his coffee down, rises and exits.)

(SHE checks her phone.)

VAL

(To the phone)

And now you're going to spend the remainder of life in prison because your neighbor blocked your driveway ... Moron.

JOSH

(Off)

Kitty! Good morning.

KITTY

(A younger woman's voice)

Good morning, Mr. Zimmer. I'm sorry for the intrusion, but I wanted to talk to you and Valerie. I missed see her dropping Isabel off at school.

JOSH

(Off)

I actually dropped off Isabel this morning.

(At hearing her voice, VAL sighs and downs the remainder of her coffee. SHE wants to run and hide.)

Come in. Would you like some coffee?

KITTY

Oh, that's sounds good. Thank you.

(VAL stands. JOSH enters with KITTY MORTEZ, in her 40s, attractive, well dressed. SHE carries a clipboard with pen and folded pamphlets.)

Good morning, Val.

VAL

Kitty.

KITTY

I looked for you at drop-off this morning.

JOSH

I dropped Isabel off on King's Road. I didn't think she wanted the kids to see her being dropped off by her stuffy old grandpa.

KITTY

Oh, she's gotten to *that* stage already. I think Casey will be there by Christmas.

VAL

All the things we do for them and they don't even want to be seen with us.

KITTY

One of the ironies the Good Lord throws in our pass.

*(JOSH can't help but rolls her eyes.
VAL slaps at his hand.)*

JOSH

I think you have a few years to go with Casey.

KITTY

I hope so ... I've forgotten what a hassle the first day of school is. Holly had endless energy, but she was always wiped out on the first day.

JOSH

How about that coffee? Milk? Sugar? Oat milk?

KITTY

Black. Maybe a little sweetener.

JOSH

Coming right up.

(To VAL)

Val? Coffee?

VAL

I think I've had enough.

(JOSH takes his coffee mug and exits.)

Please ... Sit.

KITTY

Thank you.

(SHE sits on the sofa.)

I guess Isabel was excited about her first day of school.

VAL

Oh, yes. She has so much energy. I can't imagine having that much energy.

KITTY

Casey too. Can't seem to stay in one place for a second.

VAL

I don't remember Kenny having that much energy. He was a bookworm ... I'm sorry. I know you've told me, but Casey is Holly's child?

KITTY

Yes, I married a woman with a one-year old. I'm not known for doing things the easy way.

VAL

Most of us don't get to do it the easy way. We thought our child rearing days were way behind us ... I was just telling Josh about the mural.

KITTY

Oh, he hasn't seen it yet?

JOSH

No.

KITTY

We're very proud of it. The artist also did one in Parkland and Emanuel Church.

VAL

He must be kept busy.

KITTY

She.

VAL

Oh.

KITTY

She lost her son at Columbine.

VAL

Oh, God, we're becoming a sad little club, aren't we?

KITTY

A sad little club that's growing too fast.

(VAL looks away from her.)

(JOSH re-enters with a coffee mug and puts it to the table.)

KITTY

Oh, thank you.

(Reaches for the coffee)

JOSH

Now ... What can we do for you?

KITTY

Well ... I came here because ... Well, I need you to sign a permission paper.

JOSH

A permission paper?

KITTY

Yes ... My latest project. I've decided to ... I want to produce a short documentary with ... With the insurance Holly left me. She loved film and I think this would be how she would want me to ... You remember Holly. She was always trying to make a difference. She would drag me to see any independent little film playing in some art house in Westport or New Haven, especially if it was about women ... or written by a woman ... or directed by a woman ... I contacted a producer she knew in New York who told me she could help me, but I need certain ... certain legal things ... This is hard to talk about, but after all these years with nothing being done about the situation, I wanted to light a fire under some asses, so to speak ...

JOSH

Kenny admired that in Holly very much.

VAL

Holly even found time to take Sophie for her treatments. I don't know how she found time to do it all.

KITTY

I know. It's exhausting. Just taking care of Casey, some nights, I'm too tired to get into my pajamas.

JOSH

Kenny was always talking about Holly taking on some stupid policy at school. And the New Bethlehem School District had a lot of stupid policies.

KITTY

Oh, yes, when she first started there, woman couldn't wear slacks. Holly made a lot of differences in that school. She got them to put Maya Angelou on the curriculum.

JOSH

James Baldwin too. She and Kenny would combine American history and literature classes.

KITTY

The kids loved studying something in history with Kenny and then picking up a book which took place in the same time.

(Breathing carefully)

Have you ever heard of Ohrdruf?

VAL

Germany?

KITTY

Yes ... Pretty little town in central Germany. Typical German village. Very Teutonic ... Except it was the sight of a concentration camp during World War Two. It's famous ... or infamous because when American troops liberated the camp in April, 1945, General Eisenhower toured the camp. After seeing the ... the stacks of dead bodies, Eisenhower decided to force the people of nearby Ohrdruf to also tour the camp. Not only did he force them through the camp, but he had them bury the dead. He knew that the future governments would cover up the crimes. He knew that as time went by, it would all conveniently fade into history and forgotten.

VAL

Like so much of history.

KITTY

Yes. Eisenhower didn't want this to happen, so the people of Ohrdruf became witnesses. Later, this was repeated at other camps. Enough people were witnesses and because of that, eight decades later, we know what happened in those places.

*(VAL and JOSH have been looking
at each other.)*

VAL

Excuse me, Kitty, but this is a different era. There's probably not a person in this country who doesn't know what's been going on.

KITTY

I know. Thank the good Lord we have countless hours of video of people comforting each other, students walking with their arms in the air on the school campus, bouquets piled up against fences and street corners. Those are the "nice" pictures: People caring, people with empathy, people in tears ... but they all blend together. We don't see what these guns do to the victims.

VAL

No.

*(Her realism of what KITTY is saying
causes JOSH to sit next to her and
hold her hand.)*

KITTY

I need permission to show what that gun did to ... to Kenny.

(Silence)

VAL

Are you planning on showing the children too?

KITTY

We're pocketing those in case we need to do another documentary ... I know this is hard, but I do believe we have to shock people so they demand more action.

JOSH

Kitty ... Kenny lost his face.

KITTY

And Holly was incinerated ... I really don't think most people realize what these guns can do to the body. I have nothing of her to film. I need Kenny.

JOSH

You'll be making a horror film.

KITTY

Exactly. A true life horror film.

JOSH

Who's going to see this? You'll be preaching to the choir.

KITTY

I just need to change a few minds. We need to push some people not to vote for politicians who support gun rights. Nothing is going to happen until *that* happens. It was five years ago today and we're not one step closer.

JOSH

And you think you'll change that by showing the horror?

KITTY

Yes. I think General Eisenhower had the right idea.

JOSH

So, do I, but it isn't the same problem.

VAL

No one wants to talk about the real problem and it goes a lot deeper than our obsession with guns.

JOSH

I don't think the problem is guns ... I think the problem ... The real problem is that America doesn't love our children ... Oh, we might love our *own* children, but we don't love *all* children.

VAL

Josh ...

KITTY

That's not true. Casey isn't "mine," but I love her.

JOSH

That's because she *is* yours. Holly loved her, so you do too. You could've walked away and sent her back to Child Care.

KITTY

I wouldn't have dreamt ...

JOSH

Exactly, but a lot of people do. After Sophie died, we could've walked away from Isabel ... After all, we're not spring chickens. We never expected to be taking care of a child at our age.

KITTY

You knew before the shooting that Sophie was sick?

VAL

Yes. Kenny expected to be a single dad one day.

JOSH

Or so he thought.

VAL

I think he just accepted it. It was hard to tell with Kenny,

JOSH

He never opened up about much. Don't know how we got such a sphinx. We two howl and whimper if we get a hangnail.

VAL

But on the day Sophie passed ... we took Isabel in.

JOSH

We didn't even talk about it. We just did it.

VAL

It was part of our healing.

JOSH

Yes.

VAL

Because we loved her. She's ours, but more importantly, she's a child. She's the future.

JOSH

But I don't believe a lot of people feel the same way. They let children go off to fight wars and return without limbs. We let them grow up in poverty. We let them go hungry ... We'd rather make profits on gun sales than stop them from getting slaughtered ... Until we love all of our children as our own, no shocking photos in a documentary is going to end this nightmare ... I'm sorry, Kitty, it's just how I feel.

KITTY

Suppose I don't show his face?

JOSH

There's no face to show ... I'm sorry.

KITTY

(Stands)

I'm sorry. I think you're wrong.

VAL

They're other victims you can show.

KITTY

Not in New Bethlehem. I want this to be about New Bethlehem. How we are coping. What happened here: Two adults, five children. I don't want to show the children and one of the adults was incinerated. That's leaves Kenny.

JOSH

I'm sorry. We just can't.

KITTY

No one wants to deal with this. We just let it keep happening and nothing is ever done. You say we don't really love our children. Maybe you're right. Love is sacrifice. The people of Ohrdruf had to bury their dead so they could go into the future. I didn't even get a body to bury. I just want to make all of this stop. And now, my daughter and your granddaughter is entering the same school system, they're in the building next door and ... I apologize for coming here and talking of this.

(SHE puts down her coffee mug and starts to exit.)

JOSH

Don't go, Kitty. I'll sign.

(KITTY stops.)

I'll sign, but I may have something better for you to film than then Kenny ... When Sophie and I were cleaning out his things ...

VAL

Josh ...

JOSH

It's okay, Val. I want Kitty ...

(KITTY sits.)

Sophie and I found a box of index cards in his desk. We didn't think anything of it. Record keeping of some kind, recipes maybe, although Kenny could hardly make a cup of tea ...

(JOSH smiles and holds VAL's hand.)

Then we found another box and then another one. We had to open them ... At first, I couldn't figure out what they were; colored coded index cards. On the top, he wrote in dates. Under the date ...

VAL

It's okay, Joshie.

JOSH

Under the dates, the locations and numbers: November 14th, 2017- Rancho Tehama, California: 24; September 13, 2017- Rockford, Washington: 4; April 10th, 2017- San Bernadino, California: 4; September 28th, Townsville, South Carolina: 5 ... I had found the box which covered 2016 and 2017. Under this, he had written the names ... I figured out ... the dead children. The boxes went back in time to ...

VAL

April 20th, 1999- Columbine, Colorado: 12.

JOSH

He kept a record until ... His time came up. At first, I didn't know what I was looking at. I don't even remember discussing a school shooting with him.

VAL

And we certainly didn't want to bring it up.

JOSH

He just added another card to the collection ... It was his Ohrdruf.

VAL

Names of schools we didn't even know ... Even if just one student died ... One, like one isn't enough, like one doesn't deserve the same coverage: Sandy, Utah; West Liberty, Ohio; Mattoon, Illinois ... Lansing, Michigan ...

JOSH

So now, five years after it was *his* turn ... on the day his daughter ... who he only knew as an infant ... starts school in the place he died ... I think he would want us to do whatever it takes ... whatever we can do ... to make sure such pain is never felt by another parent.

KITTY

I will be happy to include Kenny's index cards ... And I will list the names of all the children on them in the film ... And all the children who have become victims since ... Under the banner ... WE LOVE ALL OUR CHILDREN.

(KITTY passes them the clipboard. THEY both sign the paper and gives her back the clipboard.)

VAL

Neighbors are not suppose to have to go through something like this, are they?

KITTY

I truly believe the Good Lord doesn't give us things we cannot handle.

JOSH

At least we're attempting to do something. *Something.*

KITTY

Something may not be enough. Everything is the only thing that will be enough.

VAL

Everything.

JOSH

(To KITTY)

I think we need more coffee.

(ALL just stare into space. KITTY nods. JOSH rises, retrieves her mug and starts to exit to the kitchen. HE turns and watches them as the

(Lights slowly fade to black.)