

WHAT CAN WE DO?

A TEN-MINUTE PLAY BY NATHAN CLIFT

Concept and Development by:

Nathan Clift
Colin Gallaher
Liv Heaton
David Jonikas

Trigger Warnings include: Graphic descriptions of violence, mentions of suicide

(203) 258-9150
nathanclift55@gmail.com

Script by Nathan Clift

(Conceptualized and Developed by Colin Gallaher, Liv Heaton, and David Jonikas)

Summary: Four teenagers are caught between the afterlife and the mortal world. Why? When hate is the cause of your death, your soul doesn't exactly rest easily.

Characters:

Kurt Kelly/ Lady Anonymous: Male. Twenty-five. Kurt was a drag performer (under the name Lady Anonymous) at the Vil A Vee gay nightclub. Specific, observant, hopeful.

Jared Smith: Male. Twenty-two. Sensitive, caring, and confused.

Sophie Hall: Female. Twenty. Intelligent, slightly abrasive, and mature.

Anson Tucker: Male. Eighteen. Quiet, scared, frustrated.

***Casting Notice:** It is encouraged for non-binary, transgender, and genderfluid performers to be cast in this piece. This piece should represent as much of the LGBTQ community as possible*

Costumes: The original production had the cast in neutral colors with a possible accent of red.

Set: The script dictates that the characters are leaving a memorial service. They are basically spirits stuck between the real world and the afterlife. The original stage production used a park bench.

Props: Up to the director. The first productions used prayer cards and/or flowers.

****Alternate dialogue is on the last page of the script. It should be used depending on the needs of the director****

LIGHTS UP:

(We see the JUNE FOUR: SOPHIE, KURT, JARED, and ANSON. They are dressed in white clothing and watching a memorial end. They are the exact opposite of spirits at peace.)

SOPHIE

That memorial service was truly something.

KURT

Bullshit. You can say it was bullshit.

JARED

They did their best.

ANSON

Without all the facts.

SOPHIE

Well, how could they get all the facts? The dead can't tell the truth, now can they?

KURT

You have to admit, "The June Four" is a cute name for us. I'm not sure what else you'd call four people murdered around the same time around the same area.

JARED

Can we try to stay on subject?

ANSON

What subject? We're dead, and there's nothing we can do about it, so let's move on.

SOPHIE

You're one to talk.

ANSON

You think you know me? Heck, I don't know anything about any of you. We laugh at the living and complain that they don't know the truth, but we can't bring up what happened to each other.

SOPHIE

The kid's right.

ANSON

I'm not a kid.

SOPHIE

If we are stuck with each other for the next eternity or whatever, shouldn't we at least try to talk to each other?

JARED

You want to relive traumatic experiences with a bunch of people that you barely know? Why?

SOPHIE

Maybe it won't feel like we haven't lost everything.

(SOPHIE takes a beat. She looks around. Everyone is quiet. Finally SOPHIE steps forward.)

My girlfriend Harper and I went camping with our families last summer. As everyone was getting ready to roast marshmallows, she kissed me for first time. It was absolutely perfect. *(Beat)* Her brother asked me to get firewood with him, which I thought would be a great bonding moment for us. Instead, he gave me a lecture about how I was "ruining" his sister. He preached incorrect bible verses before pleading that he could fix me. As I told him off, he beat me until I could barely stand. Everything happened so fast that I didn't see my swiss army knife fall out of my coat. When our families came looking for us, he stabbed me with my own knife and pushed me down a hill. The last thing I saw was Harper holding me in her arms, mortified. I think she knew. Part of me still hopes she knew, or that she'd figure it out. Someone should. *(Beat)* Anyway, I guess there was no trial because no one dared to question whatever the freaking Eagle Scout said. "An accident" my ass.

(Everyone is in shock. It takes a moment to settle in, but then KURT comes in to comfort SOPHIE)

KURT

Sophie, I had no idea that was you.

SOPHIE

You heard about it?

ANSON

It was on the evening news for weeks.

JARED

Why did you tell us that? Wasn't talking about it traumatic?

SOPHIE

It was, but I wanted to talk about it. People like him shouldn't silence people like us.

KURT

I get it. You feel silenced when you feel unsafe. After I came out, I left home because I didn't feel safe, and I had to quit my day job because I didn't feel safe. One night, I wandered into Vil a Vee. You know, the gay nightclub down the street? Well, the employees took care of me. They invited me into their homes and gave me a somewhere to work. For the first time, I was safe. *(Beat)* Have any of you heard of Lady Anonymous?

(SOPHIE and JARED nod.)

That's me. Always will be. *(Beat)* I wanted to host a giant drag show on June 25th to celebrate the legalization of gay marriage. The staff and I decided that a large percentage of the funds would go to a variety of queer non-profits, so we can help our community. I asked drag performers from around the state to come and perform, and the event was ready to go. On the day of the show, I went down into the basement dressing room to get ready. Everything happened so fast that I didn't notice the door locking behind me. The handle was hot, and smoke was filling the room. The staff couldn't break down the door or pull me out the window that was ten feet off the floor. I was dead before the firemen showed up. The club got threats every day for a month leading up to this day, and I wanted to keep going because I knew how important this event was. I still feel responsible. That place—that beautiful palace—is gone because of me.

SOPHIE

It's not your fault.

JARED

Did the police know anything about the threats?

KURT

They did. They just didn't care about us enough to look into it.

*(Once again, silence from everyone.
No one knows what to say. Jared
tries to break the silence)*

JARED

My boyfriend shot me.

SOPHIE

What?

JARED

Well, my boyfriend and I were dating for a while in secret. We were always so careful in public about holding hands or even looking at each other for too long. After we graduated, I told him that I wanted to tell just one person. He got mad and told me not to tell anyone—"Not a single soul,"—but I did. It somehow made its way to social media, and Fred kept screaming at me over the phone. He broke up with me and told me I'd regret it. I began connecting dots, and realized that while he was a control freak and never seemed to actually care about me, I still loved him. I thought we could get back on the same page. So, I swung by his apartment. I knocked on the door, and that's when I saw him high as a kite. Before I could speak, he pointed a gun at my head. He might've been a druggie and he may have been controlling, but he never in a million years would have bought a gun. Next thing I know, he pulled the trigger.

SOPHIE

Jared...

JARED

We talked about adopting and starting a family. I know we weren't good, but I could have fixed him. If we had more time, we could've been back on the same page. We... we were never on the same page... were we?

(Everyone takes a beat)

KURT

According to the memorial service, we all died in June about a week apart. (to SOPHIE) June 4th. (to JARED) June 11th. (to ANSON) June 18th. (To himself) June 25th.

(ANSON sniffs. Everyone looks at him)

SOPHIE

What's wrong, kid?

ANSON

I don't want to talk about it.

KURT

That means you should talk about it.

ANSON

You guys have gone through so much, but I didn't.

KURT

You can still tell us what happened.

ANSON

When people know you don't like playing sports but you can quote theatre, they assume that you're gay. I was pushed into lockers, and punched after school, and even though the GSA tried protecting me, things got worse. When I stopped getting bullied at school, my emails and social media became a flood of prayers that I would stop showing up to school. I expected nothing less from my conservative town. My parents eventually "found out", and they told me they loved me. Everyone labeled me before I even could figure it for myself. I couldn't take it. I was tired of being beaten after gym class and mocked on the bus and stalked everywhere I went. I made a choice, for once in my life, and I did something that I am not proud of.

JARED

You killed yourself?

KURT

Why would you do that? It's the 21st Century. You should know that it gets better.

ANSON

Does it? Is that why Sophie is going to speak at her graduation in May? Is that why you are performing again? Is that why Jared and Fred, was it, are going to adopt? (*Beat*) It doesn't get better for everyone.

SOPHIE

(*Beat*) That memorial service was bullshit. We aren't just "The June Four." We are four of the many others that were murdered because we didn't follow a failed society's perfect image.

ANSON

Like Harvey Milk in 1978.

KURT

Like Steven Charles in 1979.

SOPHIE

Like Rebecca Wright in 1988.

JARED

Like Officer Allen Schindler in 1992.

SOPHIE

Like those injured in the 1997 bombing at the Otherside Lounge.

JARED

Like Matthew Shepard in 1998.

ALL

Like those murdered in the Pulse Nightclub in 2016.

KURT

Like Ashanti Carmon and Dana Martin in 2019.

ANSON

Like Channing Smith in 2019.

*(The group comes to a realization.
They stare at the audience, who is
the “memorial service”, and deliver
these lines to them)*

SOPHIE

We were ordinary people.

KURT

We had ordinary lives.

JARED

We had dreams.

ANSON

We were keeping to ourselves.

SOPHIE

But we didn't fit into your world.

KURT

We didn't follow “the norm”

JARED

We were living our best lives.

ANSON

And because we couldn't stand up for ourselves-

ALL

You decided that we were less deserving of a life than you.

SOPHIE

I hope you remember us when you read your scripture.

KURT

I hope you remember us when you chug their lemonade.

JARED

Or fight for your subpar chicken sandwich.

ANSON

Or when you chill in certain hotels.

ALL

Because at least someone should learn from what happened to us!

SOPHIE

It is only a matter of time until the next "June Four."

KURT

And then they will be forgotten.

JARED

And the cycle will keep going.

*(The group takes a break. Everyone
but ANSON loses hope)*

ANSON

They can change. We have to hope they can break the cycle.

SOPHIE

They can't if they don't remember.

KURT

They can't if they stop paying attention.

ANSON

They'll pay attention!

JARED

Will they even remember we're gone?

(SOPHIE changes sides)

SOPHIE

They have to.

KURT

But they'll forget! They always do.

SOPHIE

They have to.

ANSON

They have to.

(KURT changes sides)

KURT

They have to.

(JARED joins everyone too)

JARED

They have to.

ALL

(To the Audience)

You have to.

BLACKOUT

ALTERNATE DIALOUGE

Should the director feel it necessary to use these lines instead, they can. Regardless, the cast should know exactly what happened on each and every infamous date in the “Epitaph” section.

SOPHIE

(Beat) That memorial service was bullshit. We aren’t just “The June Four.” We are four of the many others that were murdered because we didn’t follow a failed society’s perfect image. .

KURT

Like Harvey Milk. November 27th, 1978. Assassinated.

ANSON.

Like Steven Charles. October 7th, 1979. Beaten and left for dead.

SOPHIE

Like Rebecca Wright. May 13th, 1988. Shot.

JARED

Like U.S. Navy Officer Allen Schindler. October 27th, 1992. Stomped to death.

SOPHIE

Like those in The Otherside Lounge. February 21st, 1997. Bombing.

JARED

Like Matthew Shepard. October 7th, 1998. Beaten and left for dead.

ALL

Like those in The Pulse Nightclub. June 12th, 2016. Mass Shooting.

KURT

Like Dana Martin. January 6th, 2019. Shot.

JARED

Like Ashanti Carmon. March 30th, 2019. Shot.

ANSON

Like Channing Smith. September 23rd, 2019. Bullied to the point of suicide.

[The play continues as written]

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In my Devised Theatre class at Western Connecticut State University, Sal Trapani—the professor— assigned groups to focus on a piece that will deal with a social issue. My group decided on violence against the LGBTQIA+ community. I was asked to write the script based on characters we would create together. Each character was inspired by a tragedy against the gay community. The first performance occurred in May 2019 at Western Connecticut State University. The four of us directed and performed the piece with Liv Heaton as Sophie, Colin Gallaher as Kurt, David Jonikas as Jared, and myself as Anson.

The play was again performed in November 2019 as a part of Western Connecticut State University’s one act festival. I updated the play and revised the piece into a ten-minute play. This production was directed by David Jonikas (the original Jared) and had the following cast:

Maya Daley as Sophie

Beckett Pais as Kurt

Alex Ratkovits as Jared

Hunter Chicoine as Anson

When the play is produced:

1. You must credit the work as I do on page 2:
“**Script by:** Nathan Clift
(Conceptualized and Developed by Colin Gallaher, Liv Heaton, and David Jonikas)”
2. I last updated the script prior to being produced at Western Connecticut State University’s night of ten-minute plays in November 2019. I understand that in January 2020, there were already several reports of members of the queer community murdered. If you are producing this play, you may add a few more “obituaries” to the “epitaph” section. The only condition is that it fits the mold of the script. So many people believe that these attacks aren’t relevant anymore, and that’s not true. They’re still happening.
3. This play was originally written in May 2019 and performed as a class project. This was before Devon Robinson murdered three members of the LGBT community in June 2019. I did not include them in the “epitaph” section because I did not realize that event occurred until recently. In addition, there is no connection to the characters in the play with those three real-life victims.

Thank you for reading “What Can We Do?” and if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

~Nathan Clift