

THE STORM
written by Michael Merriam

Michael Merriam

He/Him

Hopkins, MN

BIO: Actor, author, poet, playwright, and spoken-word performer living in the frozen north. Blind. Owned by Cats.

What's Keeping You Positive: My local artists and writing community.

Yes.

CHARACTERS

SIRI - A young performer trying to claim her great-uncle's now empty theater

HARITA - Siri's wife. She works on a space freighter. She is currently far away, traveling home.

THE THEATER GHOST - Haunts the theater. It is the spirit of the place and can exert control over the building if it wishes.

ADMINISTRATOR COLLINS - Chief administrator of the colony.

RICHARD ZELWEISS - A local banker, businessman, and developer.

TIME

The Future.

PLACE

An empty theater on a distant colony world.

NOTES

There is a storm outside. Play requires A/V although this could be skipped by SIRI watching the dance on her electronic device.

SCENE I

Open on an empty theater's proscenium stage. On the back of the proscenium stage wall is a large A/V projection of HARITA dancing and calling out time and steps. On the stage is SIRI following along. On one side of the stage is an electronic tablet on the floor. Near the tablet is a small duffel bag and sleeping bag. HARITA stops dancing and grabs a nearby towel.

HARITA

Okay. That's enough choreography for tonight.

SIRI stops dancing, walks around the stage to cool off

SIRI

If you say so. I just - this is all I have right now. How long until you're home?

HARITA

Soon. Siri. Just a few more days, and this cargo run will be over.

Siri settles on the floor in front of the tablet, touches it and the projection on the wall vanishes. SIRI is illuminated by the tablet and a handful of lights.

HARITA (cont'd) (v.o.)

Are you staying there tonight?

SIRI

And save file. Yeah. I brought my kit just in case. I'll crash in the green room for the night and head back to the apartment in the morning.

HARITA (v.o.)

Really? You're going to sleep on that moldy old couch?

SIRI

It's softer than the floor.

HARITA (v.o.)

And smellier. And what about...

HARITA (v.o.) & SIRI

The ghost?

SIRI

Better the ghost than what's outside tonight.

HARITA (v.o.)

Storming again?

SIRI

Isn't it always storming come spring?

HARITA (v.o.)

Stay safe, love.

SIRI

Nobody comes here and you know that. But I've got the theater locked down tight, just in case. One more week, and we can claim title to the building.

HARITA (v.o.)

I've got to log off. I've used up my transmission time for the day. We'll be pull into orbit in four days. I love you.

SIRI

I love you too.

Siri kisses her fingers and touches the screen

HARITA (v.o.)

Siri!

Siri laughs and draws a bottle of hand sanitizer and a bottle of window cleaner from the duffle bag, shows them to HARITA

SIRI

I'll wash up, promise.

HARITA (v.o.)

Goodnight, love.

SIRI

Good night, Harita.

Siri turns off the tablet, stands and walks toward one of the wings. She pauses and looks around the theater

SIRI (cont'd)

Good night.

Siri exits. The lights go dark. At the back of the stage a single bulb on a stand, the theater ghost light, illuminates

BLACK OUT

SCENE II

SIRI walks around the stage with a small device in her hands. She is not speaking aloud, but gestures as if rehearsing. She turns and starts back toward center stage. At center stage is a chair and small folding table. On the table is a drink and the tablet. On the chair is a fresh flower. SIRI pauses her rehearsal to retrieve the flower.

SIRI

Thank you, but I've seen the musical and I'm not anyone's ingenue.

Lights in theater cycle red, green, yellow.

SIRI (cont'd)

Cute. If you want to play ghost-tech, let's talk about a lighting plot.

Lights return to normal.

SIRI (cont'd)

Thought so.

There is a chime. SIRI checks the tablet and frowns. SIRI touches the tablet and leans toward it.

SIRI (cont'd)

One moment, please.

SIRI touches the tablet. There is a loud off-stage click and a whoosh of air. For a few seconds the sound of the storm outside fills the building before a second click mutes the storm. SIRI straightens her clothes as two men approach. Administrator Collins, who is the chief officer of the colony, and a local banker and businessman, Richard Zelweiss.

SIRI (cont'd)

Gentlemen. How may I help you?

COLLINS

Mrs. Chadha-Morris, I wanted to come in person to--um--I must inform you there is another claimant for the title of this property.

SIRI

Another claimant?

ZELWEISS

Richard Zelweiss of Dunn Holdings. We've made an offer to the colony administration on this property.

SIRI

So, you're not an heir to the building title?

ZELWEISS

Well, no, we--

SIRI

to Collins

My understanding is my wife and I could claim title if we showed we were using the space for its original purpose. We've filed the proper paperwork and videos of our works created in this space.

COLLINS

Yes. Yes. But you haven't given any public performances of those works, Mrs. Chadha-Morris. This is supposed to be a theater, after all. What's a theater without an audience?

SIRI

I wasn't aware that was a requirement to claim title.

ZELWEISS

Come now, Miss--

SIRI

Mrs. Chadha-Morris.

ZELWEISS

This property should be put to better use for the benefit of the colony. No one attends live theater anymore. Why should they? They have holo-vids and immersive virtual reality chips. There's no need to something so--archaic. Honestly, it's vacant because it failed.

SIRI

It didn't fail. My great-uncle...died.

ZELWEISS

Better to replace it with something useful and modern.

SIRI

Oh? Such as?

ZELWEISS

Dunn Holdings envisions a multi-purpose building with a recognizable food franchise anchoring on the ground floor and sleeping cubes for sale or rent above.

SIRI

to Collins

So, you've changed the rules in the middle of my claim? This is unfair. I will file a protest.

COLLINS

As is your right. I'm sorry. If your great-uncle had left a will, this wouldn't be an issue, but the colony council must consider the needs of the entire colony, I'm afraid. The council intends to claim the property and transfer the title to Mr. Zelweiss, unless you show a community need for this theater as a performance venue.

SIRI

sighs

I can still claim the theater if we run performances?

COLLINS

Yes, Mrs. Chadha-Morris. I've talked the other council members into giving you a week. If you can't put together a performance and show your project is viable...
(shrugs)

ZELWEISS

Be reasonable, Miss...

SIRI

Mrs. Chadha-Morris.

ZELWEISS

Dunn Holdings is prepared to offer you a substantial sum of credits--

COLLINS

And the council is offering full voting shares in the colony for you and your wife.

ZELWEISS

If you quit your claim.

SIRI

No. No. I'm not selling out. There will be a show. Here. In less than a week. Good-day, gentlemen.

The two men exit. SIRI uses the tablet to let them back out. The sound of the storm raging outside fills the theater. She touches the tablet to lock the building and takes a deep breath.

SIRI (cont'd)

Shit. Now what am I going to do?

SIRI powers down the tablet and walks off stage. The lights go down and the ghost light illuminates. The ghost light pulses twice, and the tablet turns back on. The video of HARITA dancing is projected on the back wall. SIRI dashes back onto the stage.

SIRI (cont'd)

Of course. Now I just need an audience.

BLACK OUT

SCENE III

SIRI sits on the floor of the stage, poking at her tablet. A few basic lights are up.

SIRI

Okay. We can afford some basic marketing for sure, and if Harita's cargo bonus comes through, we can hire someone to sell concessions. I still need to find someone to run the board...

The tablet beeps. SIRI reaches out and touches the screen.

SIRI

Hey, Harita. I was just going over the numbers and I think we have enough to cover...

HARITA (v.o.)

panicked

Siri! Siri are you at the theater?

SIRI

Yes. What wrong?

HARITA (v.o.)

And you've got the place locked down?

SIRI

You're scaring me, Harita. What's happening?

HARITA (v.o.)

The storm over the colony. It's intensified. All the news feeds are covering it.

SIRI touches her tablet screen. The sounds of a terrible storm and emergency sirens, and the panicked screams of people now without shelter fill the theater. She turns it off.

SIRI

Some of the buildings are just--gone. All those people out in the storm.

HARITA (v.o.)

Siri. The theater?

SIRI

I didn't even know what's happening outside. This place is built like a bunker.

HARITA (v.o.)

Stay inside. You'll be okay.

The lights in the building flash twice.

SIRI

I have to help them.

HARITA (v.o.)

Siri...

SIRI

I can't leave the rest of the colony to fend for itself. I won't.

SIRI stands and runs off stage.

HARITA (v.o.)

Siri! Siri!

The sounds of the building unlocking and a violent storm fill the theater.

HARITA (v.o.) (cont'd)

Siri!

BLACK OUT

SCENE IV

Backstage of the theater. Siri, sporting an adhesive bandage above one eye, and her right hand partially wrapped, stands dressed in costume, next to the ghost light.

SIRI

soft

I can do this. I can do this.

Harita enters, dressed like Siri.

HARITA

Ready for our official opening, wife?

SIRI

Did anyone even come?

HARITA

Why wouldn't they come?

SIRI

I mean, this is basically the same show I did the night of the storm. Why would they come?

HARITA

Because you gave them a safe place. Because you distracted them, entertained them, took them on a journey when everything around them was out of control and chaos.

SIRI

That was different. I--what else could I do but give them shelter and a bit of joy?

HARITA

Exactly. So, ready?

SIRI

(nods yes)

I can do this.

SIRI takes HARITA's hand and they face toward the house. SIRI looks over her shoulder at the ghost light.

SARI

Curtain, please.

The curtains part and light spills around the two women. SIRI and HARITA step forward as the audience applauds. The curtain shuts behind them. In the darkness, the ghost light illuminates for a moment.

BLACK OUT

END OF PLAY