

The Fourth Ward

By

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ACT I

Scene 1

Three people sit on the floor, their backs support the wall. On both sides are shelves filled with variety of products. There's a loud RUMBLE and the shelves shake. One of the people jumps up and hides his head in his arms. The other two remain on the floor, bored.

GEMMA
Mike, for Christs' sake, can you calm down. Lisa, how many more do you think?

LISA
The last one lasted four hours. We've only been here thirty minutes.

GEMMA
I don't wanna...

MIKE
You sure we'll be okay?

LISA
Of course, why wouldn't we?

Another loud RUMBLE. Mike hides behind Gemma. His head pops out from behind her back when the sound and shaking stop.

MIKE
Oh I don't know, Lisa, maybe because it's a bloody earthquake!

LISA
Chill. We'll be fine.

MIKE
How can you possibly know that?

LISA
Sure I can.

MIKE
What, are you a clairvoyant now?

LISA
Nah. Just look there.

She points at the audience. Mike follows her hand and frowns.

(CONTINUED)

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2.

MIKE

The meat section?

GEMMA

No, look closely, idiot.

Mike squints and gasps. He jumps to his feet again, rushes to the edge of the scene and squats, fascinated.

MIKE

Wow. Why are people with such amazingly vacant expressions staring at us in the supermarket?

LISA

We're not in a supermarket. We're in a theatre.

GEMMA

It's just a play, moron.

They both join Mike and stand at his sides. He straightens up and gazes into the distance.

MIKE

So you're saying...

LISA

Yeah. We can't fail. We're the main characters. Of course we'll be fine.

MIKE

Unless the writer decides to make it a tragedy?

Gemma's smile disappears. She looks at Lisa, betrayed.

GEMMA

Lisa! You've never mentioned that this was a possibility!

LISA

Just... Chill, okay? It's not a tragedy, it's a comedy.

MIKE

Then why isn't anyone laughing?

GEMMA

You're just not funny.

LISA

Shush, Gem. They are. You just can't hear them. They would be too distracting for us, so they're behind a sound-proof wall. See?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

3.

Lisa KNOCKS twice on the air in front of her.

MIKE

But how can they hear us?

LISA

There are small microphones in the ceiling. They catch our voices. Obviously.

MIKE

Oh... That makes sense.

GEMMA

It does?

Lisa sends her a patronising look.

GEMMA (CONT'D)

Okay, okay. Of course it does.

Another RUMBLE. Mike falls over.

MIKE

Are you sure they would be so intense if we were in a play?

LISA

They have to make it realistic, of course.

Gemma approaches the shelves. She tries to take something.

GEMMA

The shelves are not even real, Mike. It's cardboard.
(pause) Oh!

She manages to take something round and red.

GEMMA (CONT'D)

It's an apple!

She examines it closely.

GEMMA (CONT'D)

It's a cardboard apple.

She chucks it over to Mike. He sniffs it.

MIKE

So, we're not in a supermarket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

4.

LISA
Of course we're not. And have you ever heard of earthquakes this strong in England?

MIKE
No.

LISA
No.

MIKE
I still don't think we're funny.

GEMMA
I swear, Lisa, if this is a tragedy...

LISA
It's not.

Her expression belies against her confident tone.

LISA (CONT'D)
Maybe it's a play for children?

GEMMA
About an earthquake? Are you stupid?

LISA
No, and don't call me that. It was just a guess.

GEMMA
What next, an opera? I don't know about you two but I don't feel like bursting into a song...

MIKE
With a character like Gemma I think it's a satire.

GEMMA
Oh, look who joined us at last!

MIKE
I'm not saying I did! Just an observation...

LISA
It was a very good observation, well spotted.

GEMMA
Gee, thanks mum.

LISA
Attitude!

Gemma crosses her arms and sighs exasperatedly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

5.

LISA (CONT'D)

Anyway. It could also be a fantasy play. Maybe the earthquake is just our dream and we're from a mystical kingdom?

GEMMA

Oh my, I hope I will wake up in another company...

MIKE

Maybe it's a pantomime?

GEMMA

Why won't you shut up, then?

LISA

That's actually a mistake, see pantomimes are usually very vocal and the actors interact with the audience...

MIKE

Have you tried that?

LISA

No...?

GEMMA

It won't hurt to try then, huh?

Gemma BANGS at the wall again.

GEMMA (CONT'D)

Oi! OI! You there. Can you hear me? OI! Nut-heads! Answer me! CAN-YOU-HEAR-ME?

She puts her hand to her ear. Listens.

GEMMA (CONT'D)

Nothing.

LISA

So I think we can assume it's not a pantomime.

MIKE

Why don't I know I'm in a play? I mean, I should've remembered learning lines, shouldn't I?

LISA

Well, maybe you're just breaking your character. You shouldn't do that, you know...

GEMMA

Or maybe he's just exactly what he should be. Maybe we're just shit 'cause we broke our goddamn characters.

(CONTINUED)

LISA
Chill.

GEMMA
Stop telling everyone to chill, damn it!

LISA
What's your problem?

GEMMA
I'm getting bored. What is the ending anyway?

MIKE
Yeah, I'd like to know that.

LISA
Honestly, you two. It's the ending. Of course we wouldn't know the end!

MIKE
How can actors not know the end? It's silly.

GEMMA
Yeah... Yeah Lisa?

She moves slightly towards Mike.

LISA
I... Okay. Mike, you're getting on my nerves. Stop questioning everything. Gemma. Just trust me, okay?

MIKE
What about we write our own ending?

GEMMA
Oh, wow. Calm down everyone, we have a writer in the room to save the day...

LISA
Please, Gem. You're not helping. That's an interesting idea, Mike. What do you suggest we write?

MIKE
The ending.

Gemma laughs. Lisa is not amused. Gemma pats Mike on the shoulder.

GEMMA
I'm starting to like this one.

CONTINUED:

7.

MIKE

Well, she asked a question. I only answered...

GEMMA

Ah, you ruined it...

LISA

What should our ending be?

MIKE

We save the day and get out of here quickly?

GEMMA

Just please don't make me sing about it...

LISA

Gem!

GEMMA

Okay, okay. I can sing if it's important.

MIKE

Okay, so what do you say the ending should be?

GEMMA

I say we get out of here.

LISA

No, Gem, for God's sake. You can't get out. And you're fine, this is just a play.

MIKE

So what if our next scene is outside the supermarket?

LISA

How would you know that, you said that you don't remember reading the script.

Gemma goes to the side of the stage.

LISA

Gem...

She turns back and storms past Lisa and Mike to the other edge of the scene.

LISA (CONT'D)

Gem, what are you...?

Gemma comes back to the middle of the stage.

(CONTINUED)

GEMMA
No backstage.

LISA
What are you on about?

GEMMA
No backstage. How can this be a play if there's no backstage? No curtains?

MIKE
Maybe that's still the part of set?

GEMMA
I checked. Nothing.

LISA
I'm sure it's there. You just weren't looking hard enough. Or didn't really want to find it.

GEMMA
It feels like a box. The cardboard shelves are not even realistic. Where the hell are we? I don't like it.

MIKE
Maybe we're in a play that is about us thinking we're in a play?

LISA
Don't be silly, that would be just stupid.

MIKE
Just a thought...

RUMBLE.

GEMMA
Okay, I'm getting tired of this. Can they stop the rumbling if it's not even real?

LISA
They have to make it believable.

MIKE
How did we get here in a first place?

Gemma and Lisa exchange blank stares.

LISA
We've just sort of... Always been here, I think.

(CONTINUED)

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9.

GEMMA

I'm telling you, this is too messed up. I don't like it. Can we go?

LISA

No!

MIKE

So shall we just wait here and do nothing?

LISA

We need to follow the script.

GEMMA

But we don't have a bloody script!

MIKE

Maybe we already are following it... I'm just saying.

GEMMA

Of course we're not, stop being ridiculous!

LISA

This whole situation is ridiculous!

GEMMA

You're the only ridiculous here with your theories.../

MIKE

/Girls.../

LISA

/You watch out with that attitude!//

MIKE

/Please, stop.../

GEMMA

/I'm done with your bossiness, you don't even know what you're doing!//

MIKE

Can you please just stop! This is getting us nowhere!

Girls look at him briefly, then continue to bicker despite his words. The lights dim slightly, while the left side of the scene lights up to reveal a doctor, sitting in a chair, observing the three bickering people. It's JOE, 21. He has a notepad and is vigorously writing something. He is soon joined by another doctor, SHEILA, 40. She leans over his shoulder to read his notes. He jumps when he notices her. The notepad nearly falls out of his hands. The sound of bickering mutes.

(CONTINUED)

SHEILA

What is it today?

JOE

They seem to think they're in a play. Well, Lisa does.

SHEILA

Oh God. Not that again. How long had it been until they started fighting?

JOE

Exactly 9 minutes and 34 seconds, ma'am.

Sheila looks at the still unintelligibly arguing patients and frowns.

SHEILA

So, quicker than the last time. I don't think this is working.

JOE

Well, they're forgetting about the accident, aren't they, ma'am?

SHEILA

Yes, we might heal them, but it won't do them any good if they kill each other in the process, will it?

JOE

Certainly not, ma'am.

Sheila sighs and turns to leave. Stops after a few steps and looks back at Joe.

SHEILA

Start the lullaby in a minute. That's enough for today. I think we've done more damage than good so I think you should...

JOE

Wipe their memory again, yes. Set a possible scenario for tomorrow?

SHEILA

No. Let them improvise. They seem happier that way. (pause) At least for a while.

She leaves.