

PERUSAL SCRIPT

Knocks And How To Answer

A one-act play

by

Ron Kanecke



Newport, Maine

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KNOCKS AND HOW TO ANSWER

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KNOCKS AND HOW TO ANSWER

CHARACTERS

Ilene Libby -- Attractive in a plain way. 40 Female

A bit on the nervous side. An outdated sense about her, as if living in an older decade.

Miles -- Middle age is catching up. 50 Male

A bit of a ponch. Shoulders slightly rounded.

SETTING: living room of house in New Iberia, Louisiana.

TIME: current

KNOCKS AND HOW TO ANSWER by Ron Kanecke. 1m 1f. 1 interior. About 25 minutes. In hurricane-swept Louisiana, an anxious but determined Ilene decides to face a lifetime of fears by refusing to evacuate her home, even when entreated by reluctant volunteer worker Miles. As they confess the “knocks” each has taken in life, their elusive quest to find happiness draws them closer together despite the uncertainty and danger that surrounds them. Winner of the Peoples Choice Award in the 2018 Maine Playwrights Festival.

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PREMIERED in the 2018 Maine Playwrights Festival and winner of the People’s Choice Award.

Staged reading at Mechanics Hall in Portland, Maine.

Ron Kanecke -- For the last fourteen years, Ron has divided time between NYC and Europe where he worked as a screenwriter, script doctor, and playwright. His play SOMETHING, ANYTHING debuted in Richmond, Virginia followed by staged readings and productions in Minneapolis, Minnesota where he studied at the world-renowned Guthrie Theater. More recently, his play MIRACLES was featured in the 2017 Maine Playwrights Festival. 2018 marked the second consecutive year that he has had a production at the celebrated festival. He lives with his wife Beth-Anne and two-year-old son Ryan.

Knocks And How To Answer

SCENE -- *BLACK. SFX of a fierce hurricane throughout. LIGHTS UP. A small but immaculate living room in a modest house. ILENE LIBBY sits stiffly and anxiously on an outdated flower print couch, her hand clutching a bottle of prescription pills, a cup of tea on a side table. The rest of the trappings seem just as dated, giving it the air of a much older woman's house. A record player sits in the corner atop a console full of vinyl records, tchotchkes adorn the shelves. Ilene stares straight ahead without moving. With sudden urgency she jumps up and throws the bottle in a nearby waste can before quickly resuming her stiff, anxious position on the couch. A long beat then - A KNOCK. ILENE startles, her head snapping towards the front door.*

MILES: *(offstage)* Hello!
(A harder knock.)

Anyone in there?

(ILENE hesitates while motioning to get up.)

MILES: *(offstage)* Hello?!

(A decisive moment then Ilene quickly moves to answer. She struggles to control the open door, MILES behind, his hand anchoring the hood of his raincoat, his body swaying with each gust. Miles turns slightly, shielding himself from the driving rain as he fumbles to hoist an ID hanging from around his neck.

MILES: Official...crap...official community action volunteer.

(A laminated ID pops out from under his raincoat. He holds it out, his expression a mix of vigilance and indifference. Ilene steps back to stay dry, too distracted by the blowing door to look at the ID.)

ILENE: *(Confused, unable to hear well, a southern accent)* What?

MILES: This is a voluntary evacuation zone!

(He motions towards the street wagging his hand back and forth.)

I'm walking through the neighborhood notifying...your light was on so I stopped to make sure you knew.

ILENE: Yes, I heard. I'm staying.

(She begins to shut the door, the wind making it impossible to close.)

Thank you.

MILES: *(Surprised by her reluctance)* I've been up and down twenty blocks, they're all gone. Everybody's gone. You really need to leave.

(Turning, looking at the blowing trees.)

It's going to get a lot worse than this.

ILENE: You did say "voluntary", didn't you?

MILES: That's right.

ILENE: Then I'm volunteering to stay. Now...thank you again.

(She leans into the door harder to close it but another invisible gust still keeps it open.)

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MILES: Look, I don't even want to be out here, I just wanna go to a shelter or get inside somewhere. So if you just...leave, I can go do that.

(ILENE looks at him a moment, MILES sure he's convinced her.)

ILENE: No.

(ILENE leans against the door with her entire body weight in an attempt to close it and get rid of Miles. A gust pulls the door shut sending her flying forward, the door slamming hard on Miles. A moment to recover from the incident then she hastily starts back to her secure place on the couch. A KNOCK. She quickly pivots and heads back to the door. MILES, worse for wear on the other side.)

MILES: Please leave.

ILENE: Thank you, but no thank you.

(ILENE pushes the door shut once again before hurrying back to the couch to resume her stiff, anxious position. A hard swallow, a deep breath and she resumes waiting. She looks over at the door, perhaps ever so slightly hoping to hear another knock. An extra long beat - A KNOCK. ILENE continues looking at the door, unsure what to do. A HARDER SUSTAINED KNOCK. She jumps up to answer. An even wetter more pathetic Miles on the other side.)

MILES: *(frustrated)* Listen...I...

(ILENE again struggles to hold the door, the wind pulling her this way and that.)

ILENE: Holding this door is like riding a mechanical bull. Would you please step inside before I get whiplash.

(MILES steps inside, relieved to be out of the storm. He catches his breath while taking stock of himself.)

MILES: It's brutal out there.

ILENE: So tell me mister community volunteer...

MILES: Miles...

(Water dripping from his hat.)

...official community action volunteer.

ILENE: You're dripping all over.

MILES: I just stepped out of a hurricane.

(ILENE scans the room. A box of tissues on a shelf. She yanks out one after another.)

ILENE: Well...here...at least dry off.

(She quickly hands the fistful over to Miles. He takes the tissues and dabs his face, he'll need about a thousand of them.)

So Mister...Miles, if you don't mind me asking, why is it you seem so dead set on making me leave?

MILES: Long story. I can't let you stay, that's all.

ILENE: Well why in the world not? If it's what I want. You have no authority...

MILES: Look, I'd like to say I'm out here strictly for altruistic reasons. I would. Truth is, I was roped into this by a guy at work...he opted out last minute and asked me...it's not even my name on the ID.

ILENE: So you just waltz around in hurricanes...not to help anybody mind you, and for no real reason.

(MILES looks at her.)

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MILES: It sounded like a job I could be good at, okay? The start of a winning streak, who knows. How hard could it be? Knock on a few doors.

(Holding a two-way conversation with himself)

Storm coming. Gotta leave. Oh, okay. Good job Miles. I accomplish something for once, go home, feel semi-good about myself.

(ILENE looks at him a bit taken-aback, her resistance softening.)

Then...I get to the last house, on the last block...

ILENE: Is that true or just some kinda reverse psychology you're using to get me to leave? A ploy to get me to feel sorry for you.

MILES: I just admitted to not accomplishing anything. If it were a ploy, believe me, I'd pick one that wasn't so devastating to my ego.

ILENE: Well...either way, I'm not leaving.

MILES: *(Tucking the ID back into his coat.)* So much for my winning streak.

ILENE: At least you're out of the rain.

(ILENE looks him up and down, then heads back to her couch.)

You should really take your coat off, it's dripping all over the floor.

(She glances back to see how Miles responds to her comment before resuming her place on the couch. He begins taking his coat off.)

MILES: I can't promise I won't try to convince you to go.

ILENE: You can't let me stay, I can't leave. Sounds like a stalemate.

(MILES looks at some tchotchkes on the way to a chair opposite the couch.)

MILES: To use your own phrase, why in the world not?

ILENE: That's personal. We're not all so loosey-goosey with our tongues. Tea?

MILES: Why not, I'm soaked to the bone.

(ILENE crosses the room and pours a cup of tea near the kitchen. Another dab and MILES tosses the wadded up tissues into the waste can near the chair. He spots the pills. A quick, curious look then he places them back, ILENE returning with the tea.)

ILENE: Because I chose today.

(MILES takes the cup.)

MILES: Chose today?

ILENE: Well you asked. That's why I can't leave.

(Miles looks at her with concern.)

MILES: *(hesitantly)* You weren't...thinking about...I mean...?

ILENE: The pills?

(MILES chokes on his tea. ILENE motions with her head to a wall mirror near the tea pot.)

Mirror.

(MILES only now catching sight.)

Oh god, no, I'm not gonna do myself in if that's what you're asking. Just something to settle the nerves.

(ILENE sits down and again plucks up her courage.)

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Guess I've always been a little on the jumpy side. Has something to do with my Daddy dying too early and my Mama dying too late. In any case, I've been afraid of one thing or another all my life; raccoons, thunder, every illness under the sun.

(SFX of the wind picking up outside grabs their attention. They fall silent, nervously listening while looking towards the door. ILENE swallows hard, then with a nervous tone.)

Well I've come to the point where I'm just plain tired of it. So like I said, I chose today, to face my fears you could say. I'm gonna sit right here...until this storm is over. No pills, no anything.

(Miles leans back looking at her a bit astounded.)

So there, you told your story, and now I told mine.

MILES: I didn't expect that.

ILENE: Oh? What exactly were you expecting? Some crazy lady with a hundred cats, living in a fantasy world, unable to recognize danger when she sees it?

MILES: More like fifty cats.

(They both chuckle.)

ILENE: Well happy to surprise you, Mr. Miles.

MILES: Given the options, happy to be surprised, Miss...?

ILENE: Ilene...Ilene Libby. Pleased.

(SFX: Another loud blast of wind snatches their attention. Their eyes click around the house as they listen closely.)

MILES: *(still looking around)* Honestly? I thought you'd be one of those stubborn, 5-generation types. That's how I always imagined people down here.

ILENE: That would be my mother. God rest her soul. Sometimes I think she's still living in this place.

(The tea pot shakes a bit. The wind? Her mother? They look at each other.)

I was so convinced, I had a psychic in here once. A soon as he stepped inside, he said he sensed a cold, oppressive force. I immediately thought, yep, mama's still here.

(They sit there both sipping their tea, a slight lull in conversation.)

So exactly where are you from if not "down here" with us "5-generation types"?

MILES: Huh? Oh, Baltimore, I'm from Baltimore. Then Cleveland, then Fort Wayne, then Minneapolis...and most recently Chicago.

ILENE: All the way from Chicago. My goodness, sounds like someone has itchy feet.

MILES: No, a reappearing ex-wife. Got tired of running into her and the new boyfriend. Three million people and no matter where I went there she was, at the grocery store, Dunkin' Donuts, Radio Shack. So I quit the wedding band I was in, packed up my things, and drove south until I couldn't drive any further.

ILENE: So what finally stopped you?

MILES: The ocean. If there were a bridge I would've kept going.

ILENE: And all those other places?

MILES: Cleveland, first ex-wife. Fort Wayne, terminated middle school music teaching job due to terminated middle school. Minneapolis...

(He pauses to think)

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I don't think anything happened actually, it was just really cold. Chicago, the Radio Shack thing...and now...

(A sigh)

Here I am. In New Iberia, Louisiana tending bar...just like I did...in...college.

(Hanging his head)

There you have it, my new beginning a little closer to the end.

ILENE: I'm envious.

(MILES looks up, surprised)

MILES: Of what? That? Were you listening?

ILENE: I guess because I never traveled anywhere. Spent my whole life right here in New Iberia. Most of it within the confines of these old walls. Mama wasn't one to venture outside much and since I took care of her.

(A slight dreamy smile emerges)

I read a lot of magazines though. I'd look at those pictures and dream I was walking along the Seine in Paris or driving one of those old convertibles along the California coast. You know the ones?

MILES: I think so, yeah.

ILENE: *(she reflects, her mood dropping)* I guess you could say I've been on the world's perfect treadmill. Moving from living room to kitchen to bedroom but not ever really going anywhere.

(SFX: Another loud blast of wind snatches their attention. This time followed by a nearby crash. ILENE jumps to attention. MILES also sitting up taking notice. Anxiety starts to creep up on ILENE.)

ILENE: I 'm not so sure I can do this.

(She motions to get up)

I should get my pills.

MILES: It's okay...it's okay...

ILENE: *(an anxious tone)* Are you...sure?

MILES: I think so. It sounded...hard to tell if it was this house or not.

(His words seem to comfort her enough to quell her oncoming panic attack. ILENE sits back leaving the pills in the waste can, MILES scanning the ceiling for cracks.)

Can I throw out the idea of leaving again?

(She obstinately resumes her stiff anxious position. A deep breath.)

ILENE: I'm staying until it's over.

(A pause)

The way I see it, it's now or never.

MILES: I get it, I get it. But couldn't you have started with one of your smaller fears first, say raccoons?

Did you have to jump right into hurricanes?

ILENE: I'm not going to end up a miserable, sick old woman like mama. I want to live.

MILES: *(still looking around)* Yeah, so do I.

(ILENE tries to get herself under control, her voice still quick with fear. Desperate to distract herself.)

FIVE MORE PAGES TO END