**NEAR-CASUALTIES AT THE CROSSWALK**

A Short Play

By Ella Moss

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Cast of Characters

NICOLAS BLUDD: 10-year-old boy, obsessed with video games, troublemaker and adventurous. Took a sick day to walk around the city while his parents were at work.

KALLUM LITTLE: 40-year-old man, telemarketer. Overall awkward, but prideful. Would very much like to preserve the rest of his dignity, and wishes to be more than he is.

VY SEQUOYA: 22-year-old woman, Native American, journalist at the San Francisco Chronicle. Opinionated, friendly, punk-rock expression, has an extraneous obsession with teeth.

HOANG (H-wang) KHAI

HOA (H-aa): 63-year-old woman, Vietnamese, uses a cane. Stand-offish, perilously wants to be younger, and more useful again. Owns a flower shop.

Place

San Francisco, California

Time

Fall, 2021

ACT 1

Scene 1

Setting: A busy street in the city of San Francisco. The crosswalk sign across the street shows not the red or white symbols that should be there, but faded out lights, no help to pedestrians trying to cross the street.

At Rise: KALLUM approaches the crosswalk, shoulders straight. He presses the push-to-cross button once, and then an extra time for good measure. He looks up at the crosswalk sign and frowns.

KALLUM

Well, that’s no good!

*(KALLUM presses the crosswalk button again. He bends down to be eyelevel with it, and*

*peers at his own reflection in the metal.)*

*(Enter NICOLAS. KALLUM doesn’t notice.)*

Is this thing broken?

NICOLAS

No shit, mister. The light’s gone dark.

*(KALLUM startles and stands up quickly to look down at the child.)*

KALLUM

Oh! Right. Of course.

*(NICOLAS steps up to stand beside KALLUM at the curb. The two stand in silence for an uncomfortable moment. KALLUM fidgets.)*

So, how do we get across?

NICOLAS

*(NICOLAS contemplates)* Hmm, I think I’ll run for it.

*(Before KALLUM can comprehend what’s happening, NICOLAS rushes into the street. He stops and stares down oncoming traffic before KALLUM gathers his wits and yanks him back to the safety of the sidewalk.)*

KALLUM

Oh my god, what was that? Are you suicidal! *(To himself, worriedly)* Am I dealing with a suicidal child right now?

NICOLAS

Hey! I’m not a child, and I was gonna make it!

KALLUM

Well, you didn’t! You stopped and stared down a taxi! Where are your parents? Shouldn’t you be in school?

*(Enter VY.)*

NICOLAS

*(Sassily)* I didn’t *go* to school today. I wanted to explore so I stayed home “sick.”

VY

Ey, you skippin’?

NICOLAS

Yeah, that’s what I said.

VY

Nice, kid.

*(VY scrunches her face at NICOLAS, sizing him up.)*

How old are ya?

NICOLAS

Thirteen.

VY

There’s no way.

NICOLAS

Fine. I’m ten.

VY

Hah, that sounds more like it. What’s going on here?

KALLUM

The crosswalk sign’s broken, and the traffic is too busy to cross safely, this one already tried and almost killed himself.

VY

No shit? What’s your name, kid?

NICOLAS

Nicolas.

VY

And you?

*(VY nods at KALLUM.)*

KALLUM

Kallum.

VY

Nice to meet you both. I’m Vy. It’s busy, huh? I guess we just wait for a break in traffic?

*(KALLUM scoffs dejectedly.)*

*(The three walk back to the edge of the sidewalk, heads all turned in the direction of the oncoming cars. A beat.)*

*(Enter HOA behind them, unnoticed. She pushes her cane in-between VY and KALLUM’s legs.)*

HOA

Excuse me, getting through.

*(HOA proceeds to start to walk out into the street, disregarding passing cars entirely.)*

VY/KALLUM

No!

*(KALLUM lunges out to bring HOA back to the sidewalk. She makes a kind of gargled noise in protest.)*

HOA

Oy vey! Get your hands off me!

*(KALLUM steps back, offended.)*

KALLUM

I just saved your life!

HOA

I didn’t ask you to do that!

KALLUM

*(Spluttering)* Well—what? What was I—

HOA

Oh, whatever. What’s the matter with you? Why are a bunch of you standing here like buffoons?

NICOLAS

Buffoons?

VY

Excuse me—

KALLUM

I, for one, was just trying to get across the street when you all showed up, and all of a sudden, I have to play hero. Saving lives. Twice!

VY

*(Scoffs)* I’d say hero is an overstatement…

KALLUM

What did you say?

*(NICOLAS looks at the street. Seeing it’s clear, he nags on VY’s sleeve, trying to get her attention.)*

VY

I *said,* you’re hardly a hero, for guiding two people out of the street. Anyone could have done it.

NICOLAS

*(Softly)* Vy…

KALLUM

And yet, I didn’t see *you* running out into the pavement, into the *dangers* that are fast drivers in these parts.

VY

Oh, please, you were just a step ahead of me acting like you had something to prove. Do you have something to prove, Kallum? Huh? You have some—God, what is it?

NICOLAS

The street! It’s clear!

*(The four look at each other, wide-eyed, then back at the street. A second later an ambulance siren wails.)*

KALLUM

Goddamnit!

*(The sound of the siren grows louder as it comes closer, causing the four to put their hands over their ears, their faces screwed up.)*

HOA

And now the traffic’s back! Why didn’t you listen to the child!

NICOLAS

*(Whining)* I’m nota child!

VY

I was trying to listen, but *he (pointing at KALLUM)* has his face up his ass.

KALLUM

I have my what?

NICOLAS

*(Looking at VY, speaking between giggles)* I like you, you’re funny.

KALLUM

*(To anyone that will listen)* I’ll have you know, I’m the most respected man in my workplace.

VY

Oh yeah? What do you do for work, Kallum?

*(KALLUM looks down and around, at his hands, anywhere except at his three new acquaintances.)*

KALLUM

I... I um. *(Gaining confidence)* I work with patients to ensure their hardest accommodated needs are tended to and cared for by promoting products developed to help them.

VY

What?

NICOLAS

Are you a therapist?

KALLUM

No, I’m—well… It’s not exactly in the same field, but I would consider telemarketing to have very therapeutic qualities—

VY

A telemarketer! *(To herself)* Oh my god, it should’ve been obvious…

*(VY begins to laugh, but tries to cover it with her hand.)*

KALLUM

Telemarketing is an extremely respected position! I’ve helped thousands of people by now and—What’s so funny?

VY

Oh, nothing. It’s nothing. *(Obviously ingenuine)* I’m so sorry.

*(VY still tries to conceal her laugh, looking around, aloof.)*

KALLUM

Why are you doing that?

VY

Doing what?

KALLUM

Fine. What do *you* do then, huh? I can’t imagine you’re much more interesting. What, with your band tee… *(trailing off)* and combat boots… and— *(Incredulous)* are those—are those teeth?

*(KALLUM points to VY’s neck, and sure enough, her necklace is made from an assortment of human teeth.)*

NICOLAS

*(Softly)* Woah….

VY

Oh yeah, aren’t they cool? I’m working on my collection if anyone is willing…

*(Silence.)*

Kidding.

*(A beat.)*

Okay. *(Seems to gather her thoughts and turns back to KALLUM)* Anyways, I work for the San Francisco Chronicle, thanks very much. I’m doing an internship with them, suggested to me by my college professor. Graduated at the top of my class. I’d consider that more *interesting* than telemarketing.

KALLUM

Well—Okay—now you’re just being rude, so—

VY

Oh, you want to talk about niceties, Kallum?

HOA

Oy vey! I can’t stand it. Shut up! No one wants to hear you bicker!

KALLUM/VY

I am not—

*(Realizing they were about to say the same thing, KALLUM and VY stop abruptly and glare at each other.)*

VY

*(Gathering composure)* Fine. What do you do then? Miss…

HOA

It’s Hoa.

NICOLAS

*(Innocently)* What kind of a name that?

HOA

It’s Vietnamese.

VY

Really! I had a friend in college who was Vietnamese. They were always so nice and *really* smart. *(To herself)* I wouldn’t’ve passed Calc. II without them. *(To HOA)* Have you always lived here?

HOA

Since I was very young, yes. I own a flower shop a few blocks away.

VY

Oh, that’s funny actually, I need some flowers for my girlfriend and I’s anniversary next week. Do you have a card?

*(HOA rummages around in her bag and after a moment she brings out 3 cards and gives one to each of them.)*

HOA

Tell your friends! Business has been slow. It’s lonely over there. No one wants authentic flowers anymore, they only want the *(spitting)* poisoned ones from the supermarkets.

NICOLAS

Poisoned?

HOA

Preservatives. Neon dyes, *(to herself)* the retched things.

*(NICOLAS knits his eyebrows, but doesn’t press on.)*

*(A beat.)*

*(KALLUM glances over his shoulder at the road and sees the traffic is still a steady rush. He turns back to NICOLAS.)*

KALLUM

*(More interested in moving the conversation along than Nick’s past times)* So, what do you like to do, Nick?

NICOLAS

Don’t call me that.

KALLUM

What—Nick?

NICOLAS

Yes.

KALLUM

Why?

NICOLAS

Nicolas sounds more grown up.

KALLUM

Ahh, I see.

*(VY chuckles, her hand over her mouth again.)*

NICOLAS

What do I like to do for fun?

KALLUM

Yeah, sure.

NICOLAS

I play videogames. *(Proudly)* All the bloody, gutsy ones.

HOA

*(Speaking to KALLUM in an audible whisper)* The internet is a deathtrap, this child’s been corrupted already!

NICOLAS

*(Glaring, but with the unfrightening gaze of his 10-year-old self)* Don’t call me a fuckin’ child. See? Fuck. There.

VY

*(Patting NICOLAS’s head)* Shh, shh, shh.

KALLUM

*(Politely choosing to ignore NICOLAS, and speaking to HOA)* Ah—yes, in most instances, of course. Although…. I do let myself indulge in a little Red Dead Redemption every once in a while….

*(HOA makes an incredulous noise.)*

VY

Oh my god, I’m *obsessed* with Animal Crossing right now.

KALLUM

Oh, one of my co-workers recommended that to me.

VY

Me too! The soundtrack is so catchy, it’s literally become my music taste.

NICOLAS

That game is boring, you just complete simple tasks the whole time, there’s not even a boss to defeat.

VY

Okay, Mr. bloody gutsy, sometimes people need something that’s calming at the end of the day.

NICOLAS

*(Softly mocking)* Mehmehmehmehmehmehmeh!

VY

Oh, shut up, my office at the Chronicle is so *loud* sometimes, it’s unbearable.

KALLUM

How do you like it there?

VY

Oh, I love it. If I can get past the noise, it’s a dream. Spotify and headphones help. *(To HOA)* But I’m interested, how long have you had the flower shop, Hoa? I’ve never heard of it.

HOA

It’s pretty small, but I grew up in it, and it’s been mine since my parents died.

VY

Wow, I love that.

KALLUM

You know, now I’m thinking about it, I don’t think I’ve ever bought anyone flowers before.

HOA

You *haven’t?*

KALLUM

Hey—I don’t know, it’s just never been a thing I do, I’m more of a chocolates guy, I guess.

VY

*(Mumbling to herself)* Of course you are— *(Looking at KALLUM)* Well you better get started now, buddy. Everyone likes flowers. Dare I ask, do you have a girlfriend?

KALLUM

I’m going on a second date this Thursday.

VY

God bless her heart. Take her flowers. Don’t get roses, though.

KALLUM

Why?

VY

They’re cliché, unoriginal, don’t like ‘em. What’s she like?

KALLUM

Uh—She’s really pretty, blonde wavy hair. She likes cats and told me she wants to move to the European countryside, which really scared me act—

VY

Buy her daisies.

KALLUM

Oh—uh, alright—

HOA

*(Looking at VY, impressed)* I should hire you yet.

*(VY laughs.)*

*(NICOLAS looks up at VY and nags on her sleeve again.)*

VY

What is it?

NICOLAS

I’m hungry. *(Longingly looking at someone offstage and pointing)* Look at that guys’ ice cream!

VY

Oh, you’re right, it’s about time we cross this street. The traffic’s not slowing down.Any ideas?

HOA

If I had an idea don’t you think I would’ve said it by now?

*(VY rolls her eyes.)*

VY

Kallum?

*(KALLUM shrugs, eyebrows raised. Radiating, don’t pick me!)*

VY

*(Sighing)* Alright, fine. *(Thinks for a moment, then confidently takes charge.)* Here’s the plan. Kallum, you’re going to play your goddam hero part and start waving into the street, trying to get cars to slow down. Don’t do anything stupid, I don’t want to indirectly cause a homicide.

*(KALLUM stares dumbly for a moment.)*

KALLUM

Are you sure—

VY

Go on! Go!

*(VY shoos KALLUM to the curb where he tentatively reaches out, beginning to wave at oncoming traffic.)*

Now, Hoa, as soon as he manages to flag down a car, I want you to—now I can see you’re lively enough but I want you to play the part—just go and pretend like you have a hard time crossing the street.

HOA

I am not—

VY

I *know* you’re not, but it’s just so that this will work. If cars see an *(Carefully) older* woman crossing the street, they’ll all stop. Use your cane, be convincing. And I’ll be there to help, alright?

*(HOA inaudibly grumbles to herself as she makes her way over to KALLUM.)*

*(Speaking to NICOLAS)* That leaves you to cross safely. *(She shoots him a quick wink.)* C’mon.

*(VY and NICOLAS join the other two at the curb. After a moment, KALLUM’s now frantic waving slows down a car and he jumps out into the road, shouting. He gestures to the rest of the group to move out.)*

KALLUM

*GO! GO! GO!*

*(HOA proceeds, to her credit, to bend over with a hunch back, and slowly waddle into the next lane. Horns blare and brakes screech, and VY stumbles out in front of HOA waving her hands in the air and screaming.)*

VY

NICOLAS! GO!

*(NICOLAS runs across the street, but stops in fear ¾ of the way across. One lane of traffic hasn’t stopped yet and NICOLAS faces the speeding cars head-on, his face painted white.)*

KALLUM

NICOLAS!!

*(Everyone has crossed the first lane by now, and KALLUM sees NICOLAS and sprints towards him. When he reaches him, he scoops him up bridal style and carries him across the lane. They find safety in the other side, as cars continue to pass by, but VY and HOA are still in the center lane, the cars stopped for them are beginning to get aggravated through the use of their horns.)*

NICOLAS

C’mon, c’mon, c’mon!

VY

Okay, screw the old lady façade, run on 3.

*(VY looks at the road counting down, while KALLUM and NICOLAS shout words of encouragement from the other side.)*

VY

1… 2… 3!

*(HOA stands up straight and the two women run across the remaining lane. KALLUM catches HOA by the shoulders and NICOLAS slams into VY in a hug.)*

NICOLAS

We made it!!

KALLUM

*(Whispering as though he thought he should keep it to himself, although he wants everyone to hear)* Did you see that? The way I scooped him up? I saved him… I’m a hero…

VY

*(Laughing)* You know? I’ll give you this one because that *was* pretty heroic.

KALLUM

*(Almost incredulous)* You really think so?

VY

I do.

NICOLAS

*(Beyond excitement)* Vy! Vy! That was *so* cool! Your plan worked perfectly, and Hoa you *totally* tricked them that you were super old, and Kallum when you swooped down and saved me I felt like I was being picked up by Spiderman! I feel like I just killed a bunch of zombies in Call of Duty, the adrenaline! Man…

*(They all smile at him proudly.)*

VY

Hah! I’m glad, kid. *(VY ruffles his hair despite NICOLAS squirming underneath her.)* Quit putting yourself in near death situations!

NICOLAS

*(Grinning)* Nahh, it’s fun.

KALLUM

I’m a hero!

*(KALLUM whoops and throws his arms in the air.)*

This kid called me Spiderman!

HOA

Oh, get over yourself.

*(A beat, and then HOA’s taut expression softens into a smile again, and they all laugh knowing that this time, it’s a joke.)*

KALLUM

Well, I’d better get my lunch before I’m expected back at work. So, uh, thanks guys, for this. That was…. *(with finality)* weirdly fun.

HOA

Yes uh— it’s been a while since I had some fun… And this wasn’t—you all should come visit me. I wasn’t kidding when I said it’s lonely over there.

VY

Yes! Kallum needs to get those flowers. *(Grinning)* Make it a weekly thing.

KALLUM

I can’t buy flowers every week—

HOA

I’ll give you a discount.

VY

There you go! They’ll go to the office. Be a model telemarketer, Kallum.

KALLUM

Oh, you just shut your—

HOA

Stop! You’re a bunch of idiots. I’m leaving. Bye!

KALLUM

Me too.

*(KALLUM makes a face at VY, winks at NICOLAS, and then exits.)*

*(HOA exits.)*

*(VY has her hand raised in a half-hearted. VY and NICOLAS look at each other.)*

NICOLAS

*(Shaking his head, solemnly)* He’s so immature.

VY

God, I know right? Well, what are you up to? I guess nothing cause you’re skippin’.

*(NICOLAS shrugs.)*

Well, me neither. I was just ambling. Still hungry?

NICOLAS

Starving.

VY

Wanna get DQ?

NICOLAS

I’ve never wanted anything more.

CURTAIN