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Ashlyn Inman  
July 21, 2020  
She/Her/Hers

### Entering the Show at Intermission

My parents had always encouraged me to have a “Plan B” just in case my work in the arts didn’t pan out the way I expected it to. In February, I obtained my certification to substitute teach in NYC schools. When the schools shut down, New York opened Regional Enrichment Centers (RECs) for the children of healthcare and front line workers to have a place to do their online learning. The city called on subs to teach in these facilities; and before I knew it, theaters were shutting down and Plan B appeared to be the only option. All I could think about was how to pay the bills. Art went out the window as I threw myself into lesson planning and pre-school curriculum as if my degree was in teaching instead of musical theatre.

Since the RECs were open to the families from 8:00 AM - 6:00 PM, I started working 11 hour shifts so the kids would have a sense of normalcy throughout their day. I stopped thinking of what I needed and focused on what they needed because focusing on myself in a world without theater seemed pointless. At the (usual) end of the school year, I was offered the opportunity to work as an au pair for a family with one seven-year-old girl. My hours would drop down to 8 hours five days a week, and I would be less stressed and have more time on my hands. I took the job even though it meant taking a pay cut because I was so burnt out. I felt like I didn’t deserve to feel that way because I was one of the few people with a steady income, so I didn’t complain.

It’s amazing how much of an impact an extra three hours to yourself can make. I was able to reflect on the three months I had spent at the REC and I began to ask myself what I wanted my life to look like in the new normal. I know I am not alone in wanting “intermission” to end, but I believe something has altered in me by being forced to wait. It may be intermission for the world, but I am also at an intermission in my life. What will change when Act II begins?

I do not want to go back to the person I was before the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, I would walk in to audition rooms apologetically, as if I didn’t deserve to be there. I wouldn’t allow myself to consider a career in dramaturgy because I didn’t think I had the skills to pursue it. I would stay at home instead of going out in fear that people would either not take me seriously or think I was stupid. It’s as if I was already quarantined in my own mind—a box I put myself in because I was too afraid to peek outside. My irrational thoughts became my rational truths. The pause around the world forced me to examine why I didn’t feel like much had changed in my life before and after COVID.



I was lucky enough to have work that continued through the pandemic and I convinced myself that I was dependent on my non-artistic work as a result of the pandemic. In the time I had to reflect, I realized that my non-artistic work had been prioritized for much longer than COVID has been around.

I would skip out on auditions if I had a substitute opportunity the same day. I would look into new non-artistic jobs instead of exploring other artistic outlets that interested me. I would take myself out of the game instead of stepping up to the plate in the fear of failure. I knew I could be a good teacher or a good babysitter even if it didn't make me super happy. I got into the pattern of passing the door to Plan A in order to walk through the door to Plan B. Once the door to Plan A disappeared, I realized how desperately I wanted it back.

I was ashamed that I had let my creativity get so far away from me. I tried to figure out why it had. All I could come up with was that a part of me was too afraid to ask for the help I needed to grow as an artist. That I felt as if I were not worthy enough to be allowed into the room at all, so I should be quiet and stay out of the way and stick to what I know I can do. There are people in my life and resources I have access to that I can use to learn, grow, and promote myself. I know I can't waltz into an audition room at the moment, so I turned my focus on something that has captivated me for a long time: acts of dramaturgy. I know I need to develop writing samples in order to get an internship, and the idea of asking someone to read my work terrifies me because of the little voice in the back of my head asking "What if it sucks?"

That same voice is the one that has pushed me towards Plan B my whole life. The voice that has an altered perception of the definition of "success." I'm positive I'm not the only one with that voice trying to call the shots, and I asked myself if it just sounded louder because I was stepping out of my comfort zone. I made a list of all the questions I had, and I found a person to answer them with their experience. I realized that there were others like me who felt called to dramaturgy and who took a leap of faith. I had to decide whether to jump or to continue contemplating jumping.

I'm filled with restlessness. I feel as if I'm already late, that I've wasted too much time, that there's no point in trying to get in now and I need to try again when I can start from the beginning. I get myself into the room but have no idea what's going on because I've missed the first half of the show and am not sure I'll be able to figure out the plot. If I ask questions of the people around me, will they laugh at me for being ignorant? Will they tell me to leave because I'm not prepared? I stand around quietly attempting to catch fragments of conversations to fill myself in. Intermission is extended. And extended. And extended. And it feels as if we are all trapped in this purgatorial loop of waiting.



With so much being unknown, the opportunity arises to make a choice: to accept a life of Plan Bs or to realize that Plan A isn't written in black and white and can have many footnotes or different interpretations. Instead of keeping my nose to the ground and just trudging through my days, I've decided to lift my head and raise my voice. In Act II, Plan B will no longer take precedence over Plan A. A new era is about to begin. An era where I stop taking art for granted, stop pigeonholing myself, and get out of the damn box I put myself in. I don't have to be one singular thing; I can be as multifaceted as the rays of the sun. Art does not belong in a box and neither do I.

I'm in the lobby surrounded by others anxiously waiting for intermission to end. I take a deep breath and ask what I need to know for when the show commences. I am not told that I am late, I am told that I have arrived right when I needed to arrive. I take the time to listen. I learn. I grow. I know that whenever the doors open and the show resumes, I will be prepared to face it head-on.

