

Six Days till Sunday

a one act comedy

by: Sarah Mayo Tighe

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Six Days till Sunday – One Act Play

4 actors (3 x male 1 x female)

SCENE 1

A room, bare except for a table and four chairs and old leaves/twigs on the ground. Next to the table are the 'dead' bodies of Susan and Neil, in their twenties, slumped together on the ground against the wall. There is an open notebook next to Susan. Neil wears a polka dot beanie. A couple of big backpacks are placed nearby, but not within reaching distance.

Enter Jo and Lou, both in hiking gear. Jo is limping slightly. They are midway through an argument. The table conceals the bodies of Susan and Neil from Jo and Lou (for now).

JO: You were supposed to bring the band aids. The only thing I asked you to bring was the Band-Aids. This blister is killing me.

LOU: I'm sorry.

JO: What kind of person goes on a weekend hiking trip and packs three bottles of Chardonnay and no Band-Aids?

Jo sits down and rips off shoe.

LOU: We're in the middle of nowhere, hundreds of kilometres from a bottle shop...

JO: So?

LOU: So I couldn't pack any less than three bottles. If I'd packed one bottle of Chardonnay and it got broken – no Chardonnay. If I'd packed two bottles of Chardonnay and one got broken –

JO: You'd still have one bottle.

LOU: But it would be my *only* bottle. I'd have to ration it. With three bottles, I can lose one and be comforted by the knowledge that I still have two to spare.

JO: What if you break two bottles, did you think of that?

LOU: I certainly did – which is why I actually packed *four* bottles of Chardonnay.

JO: Four bottles of Chardonnay and no Band-Aids. Geeze Lou, this is a hiking trip in the harsh wilderness, not a Sunday picnic at jazz in the domain. We're alone out here. If anything goes wrong a well stocked first aid kit is the difference between life and an agonising death. (*A pause*). You did bring the rest of the first aid kit, didn't you?

LOU: Of course I did.

JO: (*calmly*) Of course you did.

Both men dive for Lou's backpack. After a brief struggle, Jo manages to rip it away from Lou. He pulls out the first aid kit (a box with a red cross on it) and opens it. It is empty except for a bottle of Chardonnay inside.

LOU: That one is just for emergencies.

JO: (*despairing*) Oh god. No antibiotics. No surgical tape. No butterfly clips. No antiseptic wipe. No cotton buds. No cotton swabs. No painkillers –

LOU: (*hopefully*) Is this an emergency?

JO: It's a disaster.

LOU: Close enough (*Lou opens 'emergency' bottle of chardonnay and taking a swig*)

JO: (*putting shoe back on*) We have to go home now. We can't be here without a medical kit. It's too risky. We're medicinally-naked. Pharmaceutically-challenged.

Lou has wandered across the room (past the bodies) and to a window on stage right.

LOU: Relax. I bet the only people who die in the wilderness are the ones who actually go out in it. What could possibly hurt us if we spend the night in this ridiculously quaint cabin?

(Lou peers out window)

This is actually a pretty nice view. Someone should really do something about all the trees, though. I like trees, but only in moderation.

JO: *(sighing)* I'm not going to forgive you for this Lou. I was looking forward to camping outside under the stars. *(Whimsically)* The sky my roof. The dirt my mattress. The campfire my reverse cycle heating system. No fast food joints. No traffic jams. No -

(Lou has seen bodies of Susan and Neil)

LOU: *(shocked)* dead people...

JO: Yep, it's really pleasant to have a couple of days break from the funeral home. Yes, I love my job, but it can be hard spending time with so many -

LOU: Dead people...

JO: The living ones can be painful too...

LOU: *(slowly)* There are dead people in this cabin.

Jo jumps up and stands with Lou. Both stare at bodies for a tense moment or two.

LOU: I'm really, really hungry. What did we bring to eat?

JO: *(appalled)* Is that all you can say?

LOU: Skeletons aren't really my thing. I prefer dogs.

JO: I'm going to call the police. *(He tries to call, then looks disappointed)* damn - No reception.

Lou is rummaging in Jo's backpack looking for something to eat. He eventually pulls out a bread roll.

LOU: *(mouth full)* Those skeletons look antique. For all we know, they could be ten thousand years old.

JO: They're wearing Reeboks.

LOU: See – I was right. No one wears Reeboks anymore.

Lou is taking a closer look at bodies. Jo starts looking through their belongings and picks up the diary on the floor.

LOU: You know something? That that polka dot beanie looks exactly like one I saw in a telemovie once. It was about a couple of friends who went missing in mysterious circumstances. There was one SOS call and then....nothing. Craig MacLauchlan played the guy. I think it was Kate Ritchie who played the woman. She got nominated for a Logie for it. She was called Cindy or Sandy....

JO: *(reading)* Susan?

LOU: That was her name! *(Thinking)* The man's name was the kind of name that reminds me of Bruce but wasn't Bruce...

JO: Neil.

LOU: Yeah! Neil. *(Doubtfully)* But these two can't be them. Neil and Susan in the telemovie went missing on the other side of the country - in the outback. Not here in the Blue Mountains.

JO: It's got to be them – I mean, what are the chances? Its not like Susan and Neil are common names.

LOU: No wonder they never found them – everyone was looking in the wrong state.

JO: (*excited*) I remember them now -it was the biggest news story of 2001. There were loads of conspiracy theories about what happened to them. He'd gone mad and murdered her. She'd gone mad and murdered him. They'd both been murdered by someone else who'd gone mad...

LOU: I think they were abducted by aliens in the telemovie.

JO: Incredible - If I hadn't gotten that blister....We wouldn't have broken in here looking for Band-Aids and stumbled across one of the biggest mysteries in recent Australian history.

LOU: There might be reward money!

JO: We might win a good citizenship award!

LOU: We could get interviewed on television!

They jump around in excitement for a moment. Jo stops first. He looks worried.

JO: How do you think they died?

LOU: Who?

JO: (*annoyed*) Susan and Neil – the dead people in the corner. They're not lost in the desert. They're here – in a safe log cabin. (*Jo rummages briefly through their bags.*) They've got food in here and water. They both have sleeping bags and plenty of warm clothes.

LOU (*Getting worried*) Maybe they were taken here and murdered by a serial killer.

JO: I don't think so – there's no sign of any blood on the floor. No broken windows or signs of struggle.

LOU: They might have poisoned each other.

JO: (*Looking around*) There's no sign of poison around here either.

(*A pause*)

LOU: Maybe they caught some sort of disease...

JO: A disease?

LOU: A deadly airborne infectious disease...

Jo and Lou back away slightly from the bodies

LOU: The kind of deadly virus they have in movies. I saw a movie once and Sylvester Stallone was a brilliant molecular biologist and he looked into a microscope one day and saw a deadly virus and he just said "oh shit. There goes the human race".

They have now moved to far stage left to be as far away from the bodies as possible.

JO: (*checking watch*) It's too late to walk back down the mountain. We could get lost in the dark.

LOU: I'm not sleeping in here with those two. We're going outside to pitch the tent.

JO: We can't camp outside without our first aid kit. It's too risky.

LOU: Risky? It could be suicide staying another second with these two. If you watched a little more television, you'd appreciate the terror I'm feeling at the moment. If we go to sleep near those two, we could wake up with an alien ripping its way out of our intestines.

JO: And if we get bitten by a tick from sleeping outside, we have absolutely no cortisol cream to soothe the bite.

LOU: (*Sitting down*) I feel nauseous. Faint. Do I have a temperature? I think I have a temperature. Do something Jo. (*He starts to shake Jo*) For god sakes do something.

JO: (*unsure*) I'll read the diary. It might tell us what happened to them.

Lou grabs the half-finished bottle of Chardonnay from the table, takes an urgent swig and offers it to Jo.

LOU: Have a swig – it'll make it easier to palate the horrors that are likely to befall us tonight.

JO: I'm allergic to Chardonnay. Fatally allergic.

LOU: Really?

JO: You knew that already.

LOU: Did I?

JO: We had this exact conversation an hour ago. You asked me if I liked Chardonnay and I told you that even a sip of it will make my throat swell up like the gut of an irritable bowel sufferer after a meal of vindaloo. If I drink it, I'll suffocate to death in minutes.

LOU: See – the way you told that story made me think you were allergic to curry.

JO (*exasperated, Jo starts reading diary*) Monday the first of August 2001. Every part of my being is being challenged psychologically and physically with excruciating intensity.

(From where she is sitting, Susan starts speaking in unison with Jo as Neil sits on chair and starts cutting his finger nails with nail clippers.

JO/SUSAN: I'm not really sure how much longer I can go on, or how much longer I can take it. At this point, this diary is my only solace from the unrelenting horrors I have faced every day for the last fortnight. This living nightmare. For example, this morning, I caught Neil using one of my favourite earrings as a toothpick. I'm cracking up. I don't know how much longer I can take it.

NEIL: What?

SUSAN: You – cutting your nails like that.

NEIL: I like my nails to look nice.

SUSAN: You're just letting the nail slivers flick across the room. It's disgusting.

Neil ignores her

SUSAN: You shouldn't be cutting your nails anyway.

NEIL: no one is going to be paying attention to my nails.

SUSAN: If even one journalist notices your freshly cut nails, it'll be all over. We could go to prison for this.

NEIL: *(putting down nail clippers and getting up)* Fine. I'll read my book *(grabs a novel from his bag, Susan snatches it away)*

NEIL: Hey!

SUSAN: We should be practising for the interviews.

NEIL: I'm sick of practising for interviews. It's all we've been doing for the few weeks.

SUSAN *(annoyed)* We're going to be under intense public scrutiny. Our story has to be absolutely straight. If we are – we'll get the television shows, the paid interviews, the telemovie, the Readers Digest articles, our own line of survival clothing and most importantly, the money.

NEIL: Relax. I've got our story memorised by heart.

SUSAN: prove it.

She pulls two chairs from the table (the ones that are not being sat on by Jon and Lou) and places them next to each other in an interview facing the audience. She then sits in one.

SUSAN: Ladies and Gentlemen, Please put your hands together for my next guest, Neil Solomon. Neil and his gorgeous companion Susan Smith survived for three weeks against all odds in the harsh Australian desert.

Somewhat reluctantly, Neil wanders over and sits next to Susan

SUSAN: Would you call yourself a hero, Neil?

NEIL: That's a tough question.

SUSAN: Yes or no?

NEIL: Yes.

SUSAN: For those members of the audience, who have not already heard your epic tale of courage, adventure and terror, please summarise it in the next thirty seconds.

NEIL Susan and I were driving across the Nullarbor when our car broke down and exploded with all our food and water inside. We were hundreds of miles from help and it was over fifty degrees. As the scorching sun beat down on us, and Susan and I passed out from dehydration. We should have died. *(A pause)* But the next thing I knew, cool water was running over my face, soothing my parched lips and skin. I woke up to see us surrounded by a herd of wild camels, and one was urinating on my face.

SUSAN: *(astonished)* Were you afraid?

NEIL: At first. But the camels were only trying to help us. Over the next week, we were accepted into their society and learned to live as even-toed ungulates. The dominant male even taught me to chew the cud and store excess water in my testicles.

SUSAN: Remarkable.

NEIL: It was a beautiful period of my life. *(Neil he chokes up slightly)* But it came to tragic end.

On the other side of the room, Jo and Lou are open mouthed.

LOU: Why'd you stop reading?

JO: I can't believe that Susan and Neil intended to fake an extreme survival story.

LOU: I think its genius. The motivational speech circuit alone would have made them both rich people.

Popping open another bottle of Chardonnay

JO: Have you finished a whole bottle of Chardonnay already?

LOU: No – just the liquid part of it.

Back to Susan and Neil

NEIL: The herd was halfway through a seasonal mating ritual when we heard gun shots. In the distance, a car of drug runners was heading our way. The police told us later they'd probably picked up a load of heroin in Darwin and were driving across the desert to Perth. To this day, I don't know why, but they had decided to kill us all.

SUSAN: I am literally and figuratively on the edge of my seat right now.

NEIL: The drug runners were closing in. At the last moment, Kinjo, the dominant male, charged at the car and caused it to drive over a cliff. (*Choking up*) But Kinjo was injured in his attack and he died in my arms.

SUSAN: And you buried him?

NEIL: We ate him. It made things awkward with the rest of the herd, and it we knew it was time to leave. Over the next weeks, we battled killer sandstorms, feral kangaroos, searing heat, deadly snakes, dehydration, starvation and exposure. It'll all be detailed in our book '*We Just Wanted to Taste Grandmas Cooking One More Time*', due to be released next week.

