

FOUR HORSEMEN AND A FUNERAL
(a eulogy in less than ten minutes)

Anka Chiorini and James Still, co-authors

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NOTE ON CASTING: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which we wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever ways the play is cast, it will tell the story of a teenager and four horsemen and a funeral.

FOUR HORSEMEN AND A FUNERAL

Characters:

ANNIE..... a teenager

FOUR HORSEMEN..... four friends of Annie's who also happen to be theater nerds

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The writers suggest songs by the band AJR -- but please note: permission to include AJR's music or any other music not in the Public Domain needs to be secured in advance of any performance. However, don't assume AJR wouldn't give you permission -- it never hurts to ask!

And a note about performance: The Four Horsemen are written to be irreverent, silly, playful, and fun. The writers have purposefully left room for actor invention in terms of how they might participate in Annie's stories. Please lean into that spirit.

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FROM A PHONE:

MUSIC: the band AJR's song "OK Overture" or the pandemic-inspired "Bummerland" or maybe the chorus of "100 Bad Days" -- something upbeat, catchy, witty... something that makes you want to dance even if you don't want to dance. Not a dirge. Tone is everything.

FOUR HORSEMEN (teenagers) playfully dance onto the scene. Maybe they're in the audience, maybe they're on stage, maybe they're on a video. They are dressed strangely, elaborately, inventively. They are all wearing masks -- the pandemic kind.

A YOUNG WOMAN (ANNIE) appears.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN try to get ANNIE to dance with them but she waves them away. She's not feeling it. Yet.

THE MUSIC SNAPS OFF.

The dancing reluctantly stops.

The FOUR HORSEMEN take their seats.

ANNIE

...so... yeah... um... hello. I guess we should do this.

FIRST HORSEMAN

C'mon, Annie!

SECOND HORSEMAN

Woo woo woo woo!

THIRD HORSEMAN

Let her talk.

FOURTH HORSEMAN

Go ahead, Annie!

ANNIE

Right. Thanks. So. I've never done this, anything like this -- I've never hosted a -- a funeral before. Hosted? That makes it sound like I'm on Saturday Night Live or something.

SECOND HORSEMAN

"LIVE FROM NEW YORK! It's Saturday Night!!!!!"

THIRD HORSEMAN

And now here's your host!

FOURTH HORSEMAN

Give it up for...

ALL FOUR HORSEMEN

ANNIE!

THE FOUR HORSEMEN all applaud and cheer wildly.

ANNIE just looks at the FOUR HORSEMEN.

ANNIE

I'm not really the hosting type.

FIRST HORSEMAN

Right on. How about "thrown" -- "I've never thrown a funeral before."

SECOND HORSEMAN

I like it.

THIRD HORSEMAN

Take it back a few lines.

ANNIE

(regrouping)

Right. Thanks. So. I've never done this, anything like this -- I've never thrown a funeral before...

(breaks)

Hold on. Whoever heard of throwing a funeral?

FIRST HORSEMAN

What's wrong with throwing a funeral?

ANNIE

You throw a party -- not a funeral.

SECOND HORSEMAN

I thought this WAS a party.

THIRD HORSEMAN

It's a funeral, man.

FOURTH HORSEMAN

Who died?

SECOND HORSEMAN

I'm so confused.

FIRST HORSEMAN

Shhhh! Pay attention.

ANNIE

Maybe I should just forget the whole thing.

FOURTH HORSEMAN

C'mon, Annie. You just need something to break the ice, like a joke, you know, something like: "So a teenager and Four Horsemen walk into a pandemic --"

ANNIE

It's a funeral not a comedy club.

FOURTH HORSEMAN

Right.

FIRST HORSEMAN

I know I know! "A funny thing happened on the way to the pandemic..."

SECOND HORSEMAN

Wait wait! I've got it -- this is the one, this is it: "Hello. My name is Annie and I am an--"

ANNIE

Woah woah woah! How about just "Thanks for coming to the funeral."

FIRST HORSEMAN

Lame!

SECOND HORSEMAN

I like my idea better.

ANNIE

Whatever! I asked you here today so that we could mourn the loss of my Freshman and Sophomore years of high school. That's where the funeral part comes in, that's what this funeral is about -- that's who died, or that's WHAT died -- and that's why we're here...

FOURTH HORSEMAN

I feel ya.

SECOND HORSEMAN

I don't get it.

THIRD HORSEMAN

It's a metaphor.

SECOND HORSEMAN

I still don't get it.

FIRST HORSEMAN

Let her do her thing.

ANNIE

Welcome to the funeral for my Freshman and Sophomore years of high school.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN start cheering etc

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Maybe I should introduce my -- cheering section --

MORE CHEERING FROM THE FOUR
HORSEMEN.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

AKA The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse --

EVEN MORE CHEERING FROM THE FOUR
HORSEMEN

ANNIE (CONT'D)

And if you've never heard of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse you can Google it after the funeral.

FIRST HORSEMAN

Basically we're just four dudes who bring danger and dread to the world.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN STRIKE A
MENACING (AND FUNNY) POSE as if ready
for some kind of battle.

ANNIE

It was March 2020. The Four Horsemen were on their way -- I just didn't know it yet.

NOTE: THE FOUR HORSEMEN might act
out this story as it happens: Olympic TP fight,
Hazmat Lady, sound effects, etc. Be inventive!

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I'm in a grocery store and the shelves are completely empty except for decorative bottles of olive oil and a half-eaten package of sugar-free sugar cookies. It's a weird vibe -- like I've wandered into some kind of strange parallel universe. I mean, if a grocery store has no groceries -- is it still a grocery store? Seriously. That's what I'm thinking when I go down another aisle where two grownups are fighting over the last roll of toilet paper -- they're going at it like it's some kind of weird Olympic sport. Then a woman wearing a Do-It-Yourself hazmat suit made out of trash bags tries to get the two Toilet Paper Olympians to wear masks. Of course they refuse so Hazmat Lady gives me a mask instead which I put on because I don't want her to see that I'm laughing at her trash bag fashion. Besides: I figure I'll toss the mask as soon as I leave the store anyway. The entire episode is ridiculous. But when I put that mask on -- something happens, a weird chill goes through my body. It was like I got a glimpse of the future. And that future was the arrival of the First Horseman of a New Apocalypse -- one that I didn't see coming.

FIRST HORSEMAN

(very dramatic)

Masks. The first sign of danger.

NOTE: ONE OF THE FOUR HORSEMEN
might play Mom and act out this story as it
happens.

ANNIE

The next day my mom made me take a little container of hand sanitizer with me to school. It was apple scented but really just smelled like chemicals. Mom also told me to

ANNIE & THE FOUR HORSEMEN

(together)

“Wash your hands for 20 seconds as often as possible!!!”

ANNIE

That was the Second Horseman of the New Apocalypse:

SECOND HORSEMAN

(very dramatic)

Extreme Hygiene. The second sign of danger.

ANNIE

But just to be clear, even though two of the Horsemen of the New Apocalypse had already shown up, I have too much going on to believe that Armageddon is upon us. I mean, it's my Freshman year, I'm finally in high school, I'm finally beginning to understand geometric proofs, and I've just been cast in a play that one of my friends wrote. I mean, seriously: for one hot minute everything was coming up Annie. Besides - - this "virus thing" -- it won't happen to me. I'm a teenager. Domsday Cults are for old people.

SOUNDS OF PHONE CALLS / TEXTS /
DINGS ETC.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Within days, not one but TWO parties are cancelled. Then the fundraiser for my Book Club is also cancelled -- which was a fundraiser meant to raise money for a trip even though that same trip had ALSO been cancelled. Etcetera, etcetera. And that was the arrival of the Third Horseman of the New Apocalypse:

THIRD HORSEMAN

(very dramatic)

Cancelled Plans. The third sign of danger.

ANNIE

At least school wasn't cancelled.

SECOND HORSEMAN

Uh oh. I know what happens next.

ANNIE

And then came the news that all in-person school was cancelled.

ALL THE HORSEMEN

(together)

Indefinitely.

SECOND HORSEMAN

What'd I tell you? I hate when that happens.

FIRST HORSEMAN

Shhh!

ANNIE

Instead of going to school like always, starting tomorrow all my classes would be on Zoom. Actually my entire life would be on Zoom -- for months and months. And that would be the Fourth Horseman of the New Apocalypse:

FOURTH HORSEMAN

(moves mouth but no sound)

< moving mouth but no sound comes out >

SECOND HORSEMAN

Dude! You're muted!

ANNIE

(again:)

And that would be the Fourth Horseman of the New Apocalypse:

FOURTH HORSEMAN

(very dramatic)

Remote Learning. The fourth sign of danger.

ANNIE

That's what they called it: remote learning. I didn't really mind that part -- but not actually GOING to school was weird, not being in the building, not hanging out with friends -- it was -- it was like a death, OK? And when there's a death, a lot of people look for rituals to help them make sense of what's been lost. That's why I decided to do this funeral. So I invited all of you plus the four destroyers of my freshman and sophomore years of high school... the Four Horsemen of the New Apocalypse:

FIRST HORSEMAN

Masks!

SECOND HORSEMAN

Extreme Hygiene!

THIRD HORSEMAN

Cancelled Plans!

FOURTH HORSEMAN

Remote Learning!

ANNIE

The four of you rode in overnight and conquered the news by the next morning -- which meant I went from being a teenager to being a zombie in 24 hours flat.

SECOND HORSEMAN

Did she just say she's a...

ANNIE

ZOMBIE!!!!

ANNIE suddenly becomes the scariest, most powerful bad-ass superhero pretending to be a zombie that ever lived.

MUSIC: more upbeat AJR songs to underscore the crazy battle between ANNIE and the FOUR HORSEMEN.

The battle is funny and hokey -- which doesn't mean it isn't full of feeling. It's epic -- and most importantly it's a real release for ANNIE (and for the rest of us too).

Eventually ANNIE prevails -- the FOUR HORSEMEN slink away in defeat.

ANNIE

(to US)

Don't freak out. I'm not really a Zombie, this isn't that kind of play. And they aren't really the horsemen of the apocalypse. They're just theater friends of mine goofing around. It's been a long time since we could all just goof around. But all that other stuff about masks, and extreme hygiene, and cancelled plans, and remote learning -- all that really happened. And yes, I know: lots of other people had it worse -- but this is how it was for me, this is what happened back in March 2020 when everything changed overnight. It all happened so fast. I think I changed too -- and maybe not all for the bad.

(...)

It's just that I never got to say goodbye to how I thought things were going to be... it kinda felt like a death.

(...)

That one hot minute when everything was coming up Annie? It turned out to be exactly that: one hot minute. It took 18 months to kill off my freshman and sophomore years -- and only ten minutes to throw this funeral. But there it is and here we are. To my freshman and sophomore years in high school: see ya.

MUSIC PLAYS: AJR song... maybe “Way Less Sad”?

They all dance.
Even ANNIE dances -- finally.
The audience can dance too.

Keep dancing.

Everything feels a little more hopeful when
you’re dancing.

The play is over.