

EXCERPT ONLY

**Acts of God**

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**Acts of God**

**(A dangerous swirl of activity in one extended act)**

**Cast Requirements:**

Seven Women

Five Men

Intended for teenage actors, all of whom portray, at rise, sophomores and juniors in high school.

**Running Time:**

Ninety Minutes

**Setting:**

The negative space of an empty, flexible stage.

**Time:**

The present, spring.

CAST / CHARACTER LIST (in alphabetical order):

AMANDA SPRINGER	Female, openly religious (Christian).
CHRIS KIELHORN	Male, football player, keenly intelligent (if not always wise).
HAZEL DANDENEAU	Female, bound for an exclusive college.
HEATH CAPRINI	Male, private, keeps ferrets.
JARED SEIFERT	Male, rocks out to Led Zeppelin.
KELSEY GERLING	Female, grieving for her mother.
KIM PACKARD	Female, quiet and growing quieter.
MARIA FRAZIER	Female, the play's primary narrator and a budding writer.
PILAR ARROYO	Female, growing up faster than she likes; the play's assistant narrator.
TONI STRADER	Female, impoverished, a dog-lover.
TYLER WADE	Male, devoted to the yearbook and all things web.
ZACH MENCHERIAN	Male, a happenstance hero devoted to blending in.
(STEVE BURNS	Pre-recorded voice; a TV weatherman.)

**Opening Notes:**

The race of most characters has been left intentionally ambiguous.

**"HOUSING DEVELOPMENT" KIDS:**

Amanda, Chris, Hazel, Maria, Pilar, Tyler.

**"TRAILER TRASH" KIDS:**

Heath, Jared, Kelsey, Kim, Toni, Zach.

## LIGHTS UP:

*To the carefully metered strains of an elegant waltz (Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty Waltz," perhaps), the cast whirls onto the stage. Gray and white scarves or ribbons adorn their arms, creating a dizzying effect of constant rotation, always counter-clockwise. After a minute or two, a tornado siren overwhelms the waltz, and the dancers scatter. The siren—loud in its own right—gives way to a rising roar, reminiscent of an approaching subway train. As if struggling against a fierce wind, two of the cast members push an old-fashioned classroom blackboard, wheeled and reversible, downstage so it faces the audience.*

*Having abandoned their scarves, the entire cast (AMANDA, CHRIS, HAZEL, HEATH, KELSEY, KIM, JARED, MARIA, PILAR, TONI, TYLER and ZACH) assembles around the blackboard, standing as if rooted to the ground with steel bolts. Hazel wears a bicycle helmet, Tyler holds a digital camera, and Zach clutches a rake. Others may have totems of their own as needed; all are high school students.*

*The torrent of sound abruptly ceases, giving way to:*

## MARIA

This is not a blackboard. It's a window. The supports (*indicating the posts holding the blackboard*) are the studs holding the window in place. Normally you can't see them. You see the wall, and the studs are inside. The window gets anchored to the studs—and also to a top plate up here (*she indicates the top of the board*) and a sole plate down here (*she indicates the bottom of the board*). My dad taught me. He's a contractor. Thing is, see, 'cos the window's anchored all the way 'round, it can't do...this.

*Maria rotates the board to a horizontal position.*

## MARIA (cont'd)

I took a writing class, college credit. The instructor kept saying, "Show, don't tell." As if that's the way it ever really works. But okay. We'll save the telling. First, let's show.

*Like a human tornado, KELSEY crosses to AMANDA and attacks her.*

## KELSEY

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!

*Stricken, Amanda hardly resists at all; she collapses to the ground and rolls into a ball rather than attempting to ward off the blows. No one else moves a muscle. Kelsey finally relents, her breathing ragged.*

KELSEY (cont'd)

Don't ever say that again. Don't...ever...

*Unable to continue, Kelsey exits.*

MARIA

That didn't actually happen. Not quite. But I know a lot of people *wanted* it to happen. Maybe even Amanda. Anyway: Imagine this window. Up on the wall in my living room where it belongs one minute. The next, the glass blows outward—and it's night time out there, I can't see it, it's gone. Then the whole window goes with it, I mean the whole thing, horizontal. Half the wall disappears, and then—this is the real scary part—the window comes flying back in. I'm on the couch, kinda half-trying to write a story but really I'm watching re-runs, except the power just went out, and now here comes the window—the entire complete window frame—it's zooming right at my head. And that's the image I keep getting stuck on, so to tell this story properly, I'm gonna ask for help. And if I *can* tell this story—and tell it well—I think maybe if I can do that, I can move on.

JARED

It was quiet.

CHRIS

The noise was incredible.

JARED

No. It was quiet.

CHRIS

Not at my place.

ZACH

No rain at all.

HEATH

Dead silent, but something coming...

TONI

It was real windy. Hard rain.

TYLER

I was busy, right? Uploading my new vids to the web, 'phones over my ears...I had no idea.

CHRIS

I remember hail.

HAZEL

The cats went nuts.

PILAR

Then the house...can houses groan?

CHRIS

The dogs are barkin', going totally crazy.

TYLER

And then—then I heard it.

ZACH

One minute I'm sitting in bed, doing all this S.A.T. prep-stuff, and the next thing you know, the roof's gone and I'm doing flip-flops through the air.

MARIA

We have a huge living room. So I had time to think, with the window flying right toward my head, "How can it *do* that? And where'd the wall go?"

KIM

An F-3 tornado.

PILAR

Early April, one o'clock in the morning.

CHRIS

Only an F-3. Not so bad, right?

HAZEL

The Fujita Scale goes up to six.

TONI

Story problem: The funnel cloud touches down in [*insert town*].

ZACH

It travels at forty miles an hour.

KIM

It stays on the ground for twelve minutes.

JARED

So—hold up—how many miles is that?

HAZEL

How many miles of complete and total destruction?

HEATH

I don't care. One minute I had a home. The next...

AMANDA

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."<sup>1</sup>

HEATH

Oh, give it up.

*Half of the group exits: Those who remain are Toni, Zach, Heath, Kim, and Jared. Kelsey re-enters and joins them.*

TONI

So, check us. We're the trailer trash.

JARED

Ex-residents of the Prairie Sunset Trailer Park.

HEATH

I hate trailer parks.

TONI

Tornadoes love them.

HEATH

I used to live in a real house.

TONI

Yeah, and now you *used* to live in a trailer park.

KELSEY

One hundred sixty-three units, total.

ZACH

Seventy-eight completely gone.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 23 (All cited biblical text originates in the 1611 (Authorized) King James version.)

HEATH

Another fifty-eight bulldozed.

JARED

Leaving...wait. I'm confused.

ZACH

Twenty-seven. There are twenty-seven trailer homes left.

HEATH

F3. That means that when the funnel touched down, it had wind speeds of between one hundred fifty-eight and two hundred and six miles per hour.

TONI

Two hundred and six. Why not two-0-seven point four? I mean, who comes up with this stuff?

HEATH

Officially, ours topped out at two hundred even.

KIM

Wayne and I had tickets to the Kenny Chesney concert.

HEATH

Which wasn't until the next night.

TONI

Wait, who's Wayne?

KIM

No one you'd know.

JARED

Different school?

KIM

Something like that.

ZACH

I was thinking of going. To see Kenny Chesney. 'Course, I wasn't gonna tell anyone.

TONI

You couldn't get me in the door of no country music show for any money.



JARED

Me, either.

*Maria leads the rest of the cast back on. As she opens her mouth to speak, Pilar beats her to it.*

PILAR

Can we keep this on track, please? (To Maria) Sorry. Did I just step on your toes?

MARIA

No. I asked for help. I meant it.

PILAR

Cool. 'Cos I'm good with, you know: Snappy. Kicking things into gear.

CHRIS

iAndale! iAndale!

MARIA

(To Pilar) Can you get our group introduced?

PILAR

Are you kidding? Toni, can we clear some space?

TONI

You got it. Trailer trash—and I use the term with affection and love—over here.

*The groups divide: The "housing development" kids are Maria, Amanda, Chris, Tyler, Hazel, Pilar. Those just entering hand out brooms and/or hoes, shovels, buckets, scrub-brushes; the group at large morphs into a clean-up army standing at attention, striking a decidedly "American Gothic" pose.*

MARIA

We're the rich kids. Nice big houses.

PILAR

Not me. House, yeah. Nice? Never.

HAZEL

And now, you don't even have that.

TYLER

Mine's still standing.

PILAR

Yeah, keep smiling, Holmes. This time next week, the county's gonna have your ass condemned.

TYLER

That's not what the inspector says.

CHRIS

The point is, despite some obvious internal divisions, it's really *them* we ain't s'posed to get along with.

HAZEL

But we mostly do.

AMANDA

I know I do. I like everybody.

KELSEY

Liar.

*Kelsey moves to attack Amanda again, but the group at large intercepts her. Amid ad-libs of "whoa," "hey," "cut that," etc., Kelsey retreats. Zach takes over and the rest get to work, miming each job as dictated by the tools they carry.*

ZACH

See this? This is my armor. (*He hoists the rake.*) I mean, I hate housework. *Trailer* work. Yard work. Whatever. But I can't put it down. It's been three days now, and I've got it with me at school. I'm walking down the hall, heading for home room, and I suddenly realize I'm carrying this rake. Here comes Brent, my friend. He goes, "Dude, lose the rake." I try, I want to...I can't.

HAZEL

Just like I can't lose this helmet. And yes, my classmates are calling me paranoid...

TONI

Paranoid!

PILAR

Very paranoid, Hazel!

CHRIS

Our very own Chicken Little.

END EXCERPT

FOR A COMPLETE COPY OF THIS SCRIPT, PLEASE CONTACT MARK RIGNEY

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