

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPEL

By Aditi Brennan Kapil

Commissioned by *The Workshop Theater* in 2021

All rights, including but not limited to professional, amateur, recording, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio and television broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are expressly reserved. Permission for which must be secured from the author's representative:

United States

Kevin Lin | CAA
kevin.lin@caa.com
(212) 277-9000

International

Antje Oegel | AO International
aoegel@aoiagency.com
(917) 521-6640

CAST OF CHARACTERS

LON and TIN are survivors in an apocalypse.

They can be any gender, race, or ethnicity.

Tin is over 36. Lon is over 20. Beyond that, they can be any age.

READING COPY

1.

Empty space. Empty space. Empty space.

SOUND OF FAST FORWARDING.

Empty Space.

LON scuttles in. Looks around.
Safe. Empty. Breathing. Terrified.
But it's safe here. Breathing
gradually eases.

Lon touches walls, floor... solid,
safe. Lon takes a deep breath of
shaky relief...

SOUND OF FAST FORWARDING – Lon
moves jaggedly in fast-forward
around the space, takes off a
sweater, huddles in a corner, waits
in stillness (yes, this will
probably look a bit like unnatural
horror movie movement, that's fine)
– END OF FAST FORWARDING...
real time.

Lon lies in the fetal position,
sings quietly. All of a sudden a
CLANKING for somewhere.

Lon follows the sound to the
obvious places... the door, the
windows, the walls... then a vent.
Lon listens into the vent.

LON

Hello?

The CLANKING stops.

IF POSSIBLE, lights up on a narrow
metal space where TIN is trapped,
barely able to move.

IF NOT POSSIBLE, Tin can remain a voice only, throughout.

LON

Hello...?

TIN

HI! HI! CAN YOU HEAR ME??? CAN YOU HEAR ME??? HELLO!!!

LON

Yes! Yes, I can hear you! Yes! Where are you? I'm... hi! Hi!

TIN

Hi! Ok! Hi! Oh god! I thought I was hearing things!

LON

No... no... hey... it's ah... it's good to hear a voice...

TIN

Yeah... yeah! Really! Really really good. Hey so, where are you? I mean... are you like...? I'm in a duct.

LON

Like *in* the duct?

TIN

Yeah. Yeah, they're... they're out there, so I'm kinda... in here.

LON

Yeah, me too. But I'm in this apartment, it's abandoned. They're outside the door, I'm inside the door, so... I guess I'm waiting.

TIN

Me too. Ha.

LON

So... I mean this vent is... can you, like, come over?

TIN

No, I'm stuck.

LON

Stuck?

TIN

Well not exactly stuck, I can go back, but not, you know...

LON

Yeah

TIN

It narrows, where I'm at it narrows, like not even 'hey maybe if I lose some weight' narrow, it's like not... yeah, I'm gonna have to wait them out.

LON

Yeah... wait'em out...

TIN

It's ok, I have water.

LON

Ok. Can you see them...?

TIN

Yeah. On the other side of the grate, I've got like... I don't know, 30 feet of duct I can, you know, navigate. I'm trying to stay away, hopefully they catch the scent of something more interesting than me and abandon post. But yeah, not so far. How much room you got?

LON

Me? Uh. I've got... I don't know, I guess it's a, I mean, nothing crazy, it's like maybe 800 square feet.

TIN

Nice.

LON

Yeah, yeah it's nice. I'm on the 17th floor, you?

TIN

Same.

LON

Ok. Ok.

TIN

I'm in the corner place, the one with the stickers on the door?

LON

Yeah, I don't know, I was trying to get away from them and I ran in here, so... I thought if I could get high, but... and then this door was unlocked. Nice thick door, steel, safe. I guess the residents had the opposite idea and took off. They left some food. You got food?

TIN

No. I have water.

LON

Ok. They'll go away.

TIN

Yeah.

Silence.

FAST FORWARD SOUND – Lon moves jaggedly around, removes the vent cover, sits with a bottle of water – END FAST FORWARD.

2.

Tin reports on what he's seeing through the grate.

TIN

There's like this older guy in a collared shirt, looks like somebody's grandpa, ketchup stain down his pants, it just makes me so sad. And a lady, she's got like half her make up on, half her clothes on, it's not ok. It's not ok seeing people like this, you know? It's not dignified.

LON

Dignified is overrated.

TIN

It's really not. I'm losing it.

LON

Yeah... yeah, ok, don't freak out, it's all good.

TIN

Tell me about outside.

LON

Outside? I mean it's... hang on...

Lon cracks open a window.

LON

Sun... it's sunny, daytime.

TIN

Are they out there?

LON

Yeah. Yeah, they're out there, but that's just... You know, things pass. This is fine, this is good, I'll be the lookout. We're gonna be able to leave soon.

TIN

I'll settle for getting out of this vent.

LON

They'll leave, I'll keep a lookout, they'll get bored.

TIN

I think they follow heat.

LON

Heat?

TIN

Yeah. Body heat. They're just... they're just plastered against the grate, they know I'm in here, I don't think I'm ever getting out.

LON

They'll come get us.

TIN

Who?

LON

They'll come get us, they'll blast through here with super weapons and just... burn them all up and we'll get out, and then we'll go to like the country.

TIN

The country?

LON

Yeah. I don't know. Someplace. But not here.

TIN

If there's anyone left to save us.

LON

They'll blast through.

TIN

You know you should probably hang a flag or something out the window, living human in here, don't blow me up please.

LON

That's a really good point.

TIN

I mean it's maybe a bit like hanging a sign says fresh meat, please come eat me, but I don't think they can read.

LON

I think that might be our only advantage.

TIN

It's a shitty advantage.

LON

Come on now, all they've got is numbers.

TIN

Yeah, numbers beat reading. Numbers and a simple, singular goal. Focused. They're focused. We're distractible. Complicated.

Figures a simpler organism would take our place at the top of the food chain.

LON

Ok you're not helping yourself, or me... positivity, ok?

TIN

Sure.

BANGING from the duct.

LON

Tin?

TIN

Sorry. I'm just really... really...

LON

They're gonna come! Don't ask who... They! They are gonna come. Superman. Or like all the Avengers. Or like Winnie the Pooh. Those Narnia kids with their really weird weapons. Dragons. Tony Soprano's gonna come. Little green aliens. All those dinosaurs from Jurassic park are gonna graze their way right through, clear the brush for you and me to get out and, I don't know, till the land, or whatever, I don't know what people did. But they did. People. I think you need to keep your like, mental... eyeball... on that. People happened. They, like, became... I mean can you imagine the odds? Scrawny ass skin sacks, and somehow we become the dominant life form? I mean what are the odds? It's somewhere in there, in our DNA. We'll come up with something.

TIN

Lon?

LON

Yeah?

TIN

That sounds good.

LON

Ok, good. That's a plan then.

TIN

They're going.

LON

What?

TIN

They're going!! They're going!!!

LON

Where? What?

TIN

Look outside! Look outside, are yours going??

Lon looks out the peephole on the door, probably offstage.

LON

They're... they're moving, they're... they're going downstairs, come on come on come on!!!!

TIN

Ok! Ok, I'm going to run for it!

LON

I'll unlock, you come here first!

TIN

Ok, going through the grate...!

LON

Go go go go come on come on!!!

CLANGING as Tin starts pushing through the grate.

LON

Wait! Wait! Tin, they're turning!! They're turning, go back go back go back!!! Tin!!!! Tin!!! They're SHIT SHIT SHIT SHIT!!! TIN!!!! TIN!!!! TIIINNNNNNNN!!!!!!!

Silence...

TIN

I'm here.

LON

Oh my god, thank god!

TIN

They came back as soon as I... I had to crawl back in... I had my legs out for like a... and then they...

LON

Tin?

TIN

I'm ok. I'm ok, I'm just... I was out for like a second. And now I'm here again. SHIT! AAAAHHHGGGGHHH!!!! Fuck.

LON

Tin.

TIN

I just, um.... I need a...

LON

Tin, we had a shot, ok? There was a moment, they were going somewhere, I don't know where, but... we just need another window, a bigger window. We'll figure it out, ok? Tin? Tin?

Silence...

TIN

Ok.

Silence.

FAST FORWARD -- time passes, Lon moves in rapid staccato, on and off stage, eats, talks to Tin, clothes come off - END FAST FORWARD

3.

No one is on stage. Sound of BASHING and BREAKING off stage. It goes on and on. Then a final CRACK, and—

LON (OFFSTAGE)

AAAHHHHH!!!! I did it! I did it, Tin, I did it! We're through! Ok... ok... here we go... jesus, carpeting, who has carpeting anymore...? Come on come on come on... Ah jesus. Food. We have food. Oh my god these people were hoarders, canned goods, we've got canned goods! Tin? Tin! We're gonna do it, we're gonna outlast those fuckers, you hear me? You hear me?

Lon enters covered in dust, goes to the vent.

LON

Tin?

TIN

What?

LON

You ok? You asleep?

TIN

I'm, yeah, what happened?

LON

I made it through the wall, I'm through, there's food, there's supplies, I mean I think I'm getting the hang of it, I could just keep breaking through walls, scavenge through apartment after apartment, long as they're stuck in the hallway and I don't accidentally open the portal to hell...

Hey, pass down the sack. Tin? Pass down the sack, come on.

TIN

I'm not hungry.

LON

You're hungry, come on pass down the sack.

TIN

I can't find it.

LON

Tin! Come on! Come on, let's go, you need to focus ok? I need you to... get a good grip and slide it down, I'll take care of the rest, you just have to pull it back up. You need nutrition.

TIN

I don't want to.

LON

You have to. You have to.

TIN

I mean you have to be able to smell me. You can smell me from there, I know you can.

I don't want to.

I'm finished, I can't...

Beat.

Lon reaches an arm into the vent...
as far as possible, up to the
shoulder -- it's hard...

LON

Tin? Tin, put your hand down the vent.

TIN

What?

LON

Reach your hand down.

TIN

Why?

LON

Just do it, come on, you've given up anyway, why not stick your arm in a hole and see where it goes, come on. Come on.

Shuffling.

TIN

Ok... Ok...

Tin reaches, OW, it's painful, but...

Their hands touch -- TIN GASPS...

TIN

Is that...?

LON

Hey there.

TIN

Hey there.

Lon?

LON

Yeah.

TIN

I...

Beat.

LON

I wasn't sure it would work, I'm...

I mean it almost didn't, I've got my shoulder in as far as it'll go.

Hi. Tin?

Tin? Are you crying?

TIN

I'm ok.

LON

Tin.

TIN

I'm ok... I'm ok... I just...

LON

I know. Me too.

TIN

It's been a really long time.

LON

Me too.

TIN

A really, really...

LON

I know.

Beat.

TIN

Will you stay?

LON

Yeah.

They sit, touching fingers. For a longish time.

LON

This one time I saw the Sistine chapel.

TIN

I used to think it was called the sixteenth chapel.

LON

Yeah?

TIN

Yeah, and I wanted to know where the other 15 were. Lon laughs.

LON

How old were you?

TIN

36.

LON

It was cool, though. I feel like that right now.

TIN

Which one of us is god?

LON

You, because you're up higher?

TIN

You, because I'm inanimate flesh that needs to be brought to life.

LON

You're not inanimate.

TIN

Haven't felt my legs in a bit.

LON

Really?

TIN

Don't worry about it.

LON

Tin...

TIN

Don't worry about it, keep talking.

LON

I don't... I don't know, creation... the first human...

I guess I was wondering if maybe there was more to it? Like maybe god's like, 'here's the point I'm making...' he was pointing. Technically, you know, pointing.

TIN

Yeah. Are you religious?

LON

No... my parents... but I just wanted to see it because when in Rome, you know?

TIN

Do you think Rome still exists?

LON

No. I don't. I don't think... I think the world's kind of over, Tin. I do. I'm sorry, that's an asshole thing to say. I don't know...

TIN

Why do you think that?

LON

I don't know, I look out the window, and there's...

There's nothing there. No humans I mean.

Which, hey, the world goes on without us, so I guess it just means maybe *we're* over. God animated the next guy, earth levels up. Without us.

TIN

You can see what, a couple of blocks? There's a lot more to earth than a couple of blocks. There's Rome, you can't see Rome.

LON

No.

TIN

So what was the point?

LON

What?

TIN

God's point, you said he made a point.

LON

Oh. Yeah. Just, that connecting with another human is what it's all about. Just, you know, reach out and touch someone. Sappy point, sorry.

TIN

God is AT&T?

LON

Oh shit, I knew it was from somewhere...

TIN

Yeah, At&T commercial from like the 80's.

LON

Well, I'd kill for some phone service right about now, so sure.

TIN

Yeah. No, that's a nice thought. I buy that.

LON

Yeah. Too bad we're dinosaurs now, if only we'd figured it out sooner.

TIN

Or we're just in time.

LON

Yeah, maybe.

TIN

Nick of time. Rome could still be there.

LON

Yeah. But air travel...?

TIN

Fair point. Maybe we set our sights somewhere nearer.

LON
Like where?

TIN
I don't know. Uptown?

Beat.

TIN
You know if someone painted us...

LON
Sure.

TIN
... if someone painted us... it'd be like this... post modern reflection on the sixteenth chapel...

LON
Sistine.

TIN
Right.

LON
How do you mean?

TIN
Well, like back then, there was god animating man. That's in the good old days.

LON
Uh-huh.

TIN
And now we only have each other. We have to do it for each other.

Silence.

TIN
Hey, Lon?

LON
Yeah.

TIN

I've been thinking.

LON

Ok?

TIN

When they run for the hallway, we can't get out, right?

LON

No... they're blocking the stairway. Soon as we make a move, they turn back. It's like those moving obstacles on like a putt-putt course, except there's no actual way through. They're just so many...

TIN

Yeah. But if they run for apartment 1703, you've got a clear shot.

LON

Why would they do that?

Beat.

TIN

I think I'm done, Lon.

LON

No.

TIN

My arm hurts... I can't feel most of my body... I'm done.

LON

No, Tin.

TIN

I am. So here's what I'm thinking... I think I can wiggle down and shove the grate off...

LON

No!

TIN

Just with my body weight, I don't think there's much to it, I think it'll give.

LON

Tin...

TIN

And they'll swarm, ok? They'll swarm in here, and leave a clear path.

You have to go.

LON

Why? What's the point?

Tell you what, I'll come get you, we'll either beat them off together, or we'll go down together, either way...

TIN

No! No, you go! I want to accomplish something other than rotting in this fucking tube, ok? When I break through the grate, you run for it! And keep going. I'm sorry it's no Garden of Eden, I'm sorry that it's basically hell, and it's lonely, but if humans made it out of Eden, you can make it out of hell.

I want to do this for you.

LON

So you're god?

TIN

In this scenario, I'm god, yes. Go forth. Survive. Reach out and touch someone. More people. Live long and prosper. Ok?

LON

Tin.

TIN

Ok?

Long Beat.

LON

Ok.

TIN

Ok. It's been really... you know.

LON
Yeah. Yeah.

TIN
Hey, you know what I just realized?

LON
What?

TIN
We're on the 17th floor.

LON
Yeah?

TIN
We're the seventeenth chapel.

This hits them as really, really funny. They laugh. They laugh for a while. Then...

TIN
Ok... 3, 2, 1.

They let go of each other.
Shuffling. Banging. Banging. A
CRACK.

Lon breathes hard.

Lon is terrified, scared, sad...

Lon tears open the door and RUNS!

END OF PLAY