

Hot Mic

by Christina Telesca
(formerly Gorman)

Audience members for this theatre piece will watch from their own computers. The audience “enters the space” by joining a Zoom online meeting. Upon doing so, the audience sees a black screen and on it the words “Waiting for host to join the meeting”.

The audience waits for the show to begin, just as if they would in an actual theatre space. The audience cannot see one another via video, but they can see one another’s names on the screens, so they know they are watching collectively. If they would like to interact with one another while they wait, well that would be lovely. Turn on your cameras. Socialize. Have at it.

When the piece begins, the onscreen print changes to “Host has joined the meeting.” [At this time, audience members are automatically put on mute and their cameras are turned off.]

We hear a clatter. The screen, however, remains black, as the host has not turned on the camera. In effect, this makes this piece a radio play or, more accurately, a Zoom audio play.

We hear the host’s voice. She is not speaking at/into her computer; rather, she is speaking to someone else in the room. Sometimes she sounds like she is standing close to the computer, and other times far away, as she moves around her personal space. [Dialogue should sound ad-libbed, throwaway.]

The audience should feel like they are eavesdropping, because they are.

WOMAN’S VOICE

Oh dammit. Dammit dammit dammit.

We hear a scraping sound (as she picks her laptop off wood flooring).

WOMAN'S VOICE

Well at least it didn't land in your yogurt goo.

(now noticing)

Which you squeezed all over the floor.

Nice pattern. Very Jackson Pollock.

Look, Little Miss Cutieface, I know your fine motor skills aren't up to par just yet, but let's try not to gesticulate so wildly next time, okay? This is my work laptop and if it breaks, Mommy can't do her job.

No no no Mommy will clean it up. It's okay. Don't use your sock to—

(too late)

—mop the yogurt off the floor.

She sighs. Then notices:

WOMAN'S VOICE

Sock out of your mouth. Sock out of your mouth! Don't suck the yogurt off your sock—
Oh okay. You know what? That actually works.

Kudos, kiddo. Very outside the box. If only my staff were as imaginative as you are.

You don't have to feed the cat. I already fed Happy this morning. Happy doesn't want yogurt; Happy doesn't want yogurt. I know you're sharing, sweetheart, and good for you, but—

Put Happy *down*.

We hear a cat squeal.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Ooh, did Happy scratch you? Come 'ere, let Mommy look it. Ohhh dear. All right. Leave him alone; he's just still pissed because you named him Happy. Let's get a band-aid for the boo-boo. Do you want an Elsa band-aid or an Anna band-aid? No, we're all out of Olafs. Well, when I can get a delivery window, it'll be at the top of Mommy's Instacart list!

Okay. Is that better? Good girl.

While I have you here, honey, while we have a moment to reflect, let me just say: if we're going to get through this shelter-in-place thing, you are going to have to stop doing stupid things. Well like picking up the cat by the tail, for instance. We can't have you getting hurt, because there's no way in hell Mommy is taking you into a hospital right now. So suck it up. This isn't freaking Mommy & Me class at the Sky Zone Trampoline Park.

You know what Mommy has learned from all this? Mommy has learned that her favorite part of the day was actually my commute. It's the buffer; the hot shower; the stinky, smelly crowded break room. And I miss it. Because now? No break! Noooo break. It's like life before unions. Which reminds me I have a meeting with the union steward of Local 452 at three p.m.

(under her breath)

Ugh. Kill me now.

(to her child)

No no I'm fine Mommy's fine. Oh I don't want a sip of your apple juice, thank you, honey. What, what are you pointing at? Hands down; hands down! What did I say about wildly—

(understanding what her child is trying to communicate)

Ohhhh, I see. Thank you, sweetheart, but it's too early for Mommy to have *her* grape juice, I'm afraid. You know, you're very observant for a preschooler. If you could put your keen powers of observation to use when it comes to pet care, we'd all be better off, that's all I'm saying.

What? Nooo. Mommy loves you. Mommy loves you so much. Mommy just...

Look, I know I said I will always love you, and I do, I will. It's just that when I said it, originally, I didn't think I'd have to operate in active mode twenty-four/seven for sixty-six days straight with no end in sight. I mean, how long did you love Happy before you started getting tired of him? A week? Two? See my point?

Well I want Daddy too. But Daddy can't be with us right now. Because Daddy is in quarantine for another—eight days. Which frankly is unnecessary because your father has been socially distant for so long you'd think he'd been training for this pandemic like it's his job.

So. You be a good girl, be quiet while Mommy works, and later we will finish building The Sofa Fort Castle. You can have the top of the castle back as soon as I'm done with it. Because Mommy has a meeting and I need to wear it. This my "Of course I have all the answers" blazer.

But you know what? Secret: I have no answers. Who has answers? Were you around for the 1918 Spanish flu? No, me neither. So here we all are, hangin' on by a thread!

Okay, watch and learn as Mommy does that thing where she totally fakes it in order to project civil calm and competence. Sit over there, eat your organic cheese puffs, and try not to touch anything.

Wait, first, hand me my lipstick.

We hear the woman clear her throat, as if preparing to speak. We hear her deep inhale, exhale.

A woman appears on-screen. We see her pulling her hand back from the keyboard: she has turned on the camera.

She is in her early 40s, well-dressed, wearing an excellent power blazer, hair coiffed, lipstick applied. Camera-ready. Her appearance communicates she has got it all well in-hand.

Just within camera range we can see a child's sippy cup, a child's sock, and a tube of lipstick.

The woman presses a key, thinking she's unmuting herself.

She speaks, but there is no sound. [She's on mute.]

She stops, realizing she's not being heard. She presses a key, unmuting herself. She begins again:

WOMAN

Good afternoon, my fellow citizens. I'm glad to be with you again today. I am Micheala Jean Lovejoy, Governor of our Great State of—

(to herself)

Oh. Was this on?

She is still. Has her screen frozen? Nope. She's just paralyzed by the thought. Her smile grows as her dawning embarrassment does.

With all the dignity she can, she swipes her hand, slowly brushing the sock, sippy cup, and lipstick out of camera range (as if that will solve everything).

Still desperately clinging onto her smile, she reaches out to her keyboard and clicks a single key.

The screen goes black. We see:

“Participant has left the meeting.”

END OF PLAY.