

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic FULL Contact Theatre. Happy New year, and welcome to Season 5 of The Half Hour Audio Hour.

Every month, we'll be featuring a different playwright, allowing you to not only hear their work, but to find out a little more about them and their process. If you enjoy what you hear, please remember to like, follow, and subscribe to our podcast. And feel free to leave a review! You can help us out in continuing this work by heading over to tinyurl.com/EFCTHHAH, where you can sponsor us through a one-time or recurring donation and become our partner in highlighting the voices and stories of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ artists.

This month's production is "Someone To Love Me", written by Straton Rushing, directed by Sophie Flack, and starring Rose Meehan, Patricia Tinley, Andy Buel, and Geoff Isaac

Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Straton Rushing After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Straton for more insight into the play and this process.

Straton Rushing is a Dallas-Fort Worth-based playwright and theatremaker originally from Sonora, Texas. Playwriting honors include the Bela Kiralyfalvi Playwriting Award, the Hear Me Out Monologues Golden Ear Award, Chameleon Theatre Circle's New Play Award, Runner-Up for the McNerney Playwriting Prize and finalist for the ATHE Judith Royer Award. His works have been featured at numerous professional theatres, colleges and schools around the USA, Canada and India. He holds degrees in Theatre and Philosophy from the UT Arlington. He received his MFA in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University where he was recognized as an Outstanding Graduate for Excellence and

Innovation in Creative Practice. By day, he works as
Administrative Coordinator for Kitchen Dog Theater.

StratonThePlaywright.com

And now, Someone To Love Me

We hear the sounds of a
brutal snowstorm blowing.
We see Dollie, trudging through the
snowstorm She slips and almost falls
on the ice. She enters. She
has some fire wood in her arms, she drops it on the floor.
Rubbing her hands together.
She flips the switch to turn the lights on, they don't go.
She goes to the breaker and toggles it... Nothing.

DOLLIE

Oh, no...

She keeps trying.

DOLLIE

Ain't no way -

She goes to the stove, which does not light.

She turns the faucet but - no water.

DOLLIE

No - no - no - no -

She bundles back up, and goes outside to the pickup.
She turns the key, it rattles a little, but definitively can't start.

DOLLIE

N-n-n-no-

She tries again, it doesn't start.

DOLLIE

Oh my god -

She tries again - it is even worse this time.

She pops the hood, gets out - tinkers with some stuff

Goes back to the driver's
seat. Still won't start.

She screams into her hands.

From the back seat. Pops out "Rick" a man of similar age wearing a cowboy hat. A bit like a living corpse. He has a Texas twang to his voice.

"RICK"

Well that ain't a good sign.

Dollie screams and recoils. She realizes who it is.

DOLLIE

... What the hell are you doing here? ... How'd you get here?

"RICK"

Have you checked your phone yet?

DOLLIE

What?

"RICK"

Your cell, you left it in the desk drawer - Sure, its been in there for upwards of a month but you did turn it off - it could turn on - not like you have much else in the way of options -

DOLLIE

How do you know any of that an-... Rick. What. The. Hell. Why are you doing in my pickup? I told you not to come back around here... And why do you... look like that?

"RICK"

Like what?

DOLLIE

Cold, like... What the hell happened to you? You look like a ghost...

"RICK"

Maybe I am.

DOLLIE

You gotta be dead to be a ghost.

"RICK"

You did say I was dead to you.

Dollie exits the pickup and makes her way into the house.

Dollie reenters the house, locking the door behind her. She takes off her mittens and rubs her hands together.

"Rick" reenters, from the closet - pushing past hanging coats.

"RICK"

You might not want to talk to me - but you're gonna have to figure out a way out of here -

DOLLIE

The door is locked how did you... Oh my God... I'm going crazy...

"RICK"

No.... I mean maybe a little, but its to be expected, you walked in the freezing snow for five miles trying to get help - only to find your closest neighbors must have skipped

town before the roads got so bad - only to return to your generator had given out... You probably do need water Dollie.

Dollie goes to the pantry. Pulls out a bottle of water.

DOLLIE

Just my luck. I move all the way out into the mountains, all to get away from you - and now somehow you still follow me out here -

“RICK”

Well if being nasty, you're the one who didn't listen when radio said there was gonna be a

week-long snowstorm. You were the one who didn't prepare... Who's hardly spoken to anyone in weeks -

DOLLIE

You trying to scare me?

“RICK”

You're already scared Dollie. I'm just trying to help steer you straight... You know same as I do that Rick sure as hell ain't the only reason you've been staying up here... I mean what you figured you'd quit your job - leave everything - live off the land like it's the 1800s -

DOLLIE

You know maybe you are the real Rick... You sure like to say “I told you so”...

“RICK”

So you gonna freeze to death, or go and get your phone?

DOLLIE

Could just wait it out you know...

“RICK”

... No you cain't... Even if you somehow manage to stay warm - you're low on food ... This storm could last another week, easy...

Dollie goes to the desk and gets her cellphone.

She tries to turn it on. She sighs.

DOLLIE

Dead as a doornail. Happy?

“RICK”

You got the charger?

DOLLIE

Yeah...

“RICK”

You get some juice in it, it could still be your ticket out of here.

DOLLIE

If this storm cut off our power, it almost definitely cut off the cell service... You think of that?

She sets the phone down.

DOLLIE

I'll figure it out.

"RICK"

What? You gonna dig into your memories of working at a lube pit way back in high school to get that clunker of a pickup running? She's frozen solid. You keep trying to start it you'll just kill the the battery... Even if you got it running, the roads are a different death sentence... You need to call for help.

DOLLIE

I don't need to do shit you tell me to do Rick ! Not no more -

"RICK"

I'm not Rick, Dollie... I dunno what I am. I'm something else ... At best I'm-Doing air quotes. "Rick"... But you want to know something... If the guy I'm based on was here. If he

knew you were in danger - resentful or not - I can't imagine he'd want you to die...

"RICK"

Yeah... exactly...

"Rick" crosses closer to Dollie - in doing so stubs his toe on something sticking out from under the couch.

"RICK"

OW! ... What is this?

He grabs a small record player in a case from under the couch.

Dollie takes it from him.

DOLLIE

Don't worry about it -

"RICK"

Well what is it?

DOLLIE

The real Rick never knew and never asked - so you don't need to know either -

"RICK"

When's the last time you talked to this guy?

DOLLIE

I'm not sure... He kept calling ...

"RICK"

Hence why the phone was off -

DOLLIE

Yup... I picked up a month or so ago, I think... Last time I saw him in person was when I told him he could keep the house and - I'd come here -

"RICK"

I'll guess it wasn't amicable?

DOLLIE

Is it ever really?

"RICK"

So this place... y'all got it together?

DOLLIE

3 years ago... He's a salesman for an oil company... He got a promotion and all of a sudden things were way better than... well than they'd ever been...

"RICK"

So y'all were looking at getting someplace to vacation?

The sound of the
snowstorm fades away.

DOLLIE

I'm from up here - Wyoming. He's from Texas originally - we already lived in his state -
a

place close to my hometown sounded nice -

"RICK"

And in Wyoming "close" means upwards of an hour drive ...
the snowstorm has disappeared.

DOLLIE

I dunno - I mean its not the cheapest one we've looked at -

"RICK"

Sure, but it's a good deal counting the 12 or so acres around it -

DOLLIE

I guess so -

"RICK"

Is it the one you want?

DOLLIE

I think... Maybe yeah it -

"RICK"

Yes or no? ...

"RICK"

When we break off for a little while a few times a year and head north, stop and see
your

family - then spend a week camping ... - is this the place for us to do it ?

DOLLIE

...Yes.

"RICK"

Then that settles it. Ma'am - you got yourself a genuine vacation home.

He kisses her hand.

DOLLIE

Never thought I'd have something like this -

“RICK”

I guess I always pictured a bungalow on the beach if I could ever afford something like this... ‘Course that’s what I get for falling for a girl from the mountains...

The pair kiss.

DOLLIE

What?

He points.

“RICK”

The view from this window ...

“RICK”

Our baby’s gonna grow up seeing that view every time we come here... Ever year -

Yeah...

You picked the right place darling, you sure did ...

The wind of the snowstorm returns

“RICK”

... So...

“RICK”

Guess an awful lot must have happened between then and now.

DOLLIE

... He’s not a bad guy... he’s apathetic... Takes whatever life gives him and just deals with

it and - ...

“RICK”

Slowly but surely... after y’all lost the baby - just didn’t fit together the same way did it?

DOLLIE

Yeah...

“RICK”

But you were the one that finally left Dollie...

DOLLIE

Yeah...

“RICK”

Why?

DOLLIE

I dunno -

“RICK”

Yeah you do... Why?

DOLLIE

... ‘Cause maybe that’s all you can do when a dream dies... You run from everything it was made from...

DOLLIE

What?

DOLLIE

What?

DOLLIE

What's ...

"RICK"

Little dot up there... you see?

DOLLIE

Yeah... Is that a helicopter ?

"RICK"

Top of a cellphone tower... You get that phone working... I imagine you'll get service...

DOLLIE

I'm so sorry Rick... Maybe not for leaving but ... I wasn't always good to you-... And I know that - ...

"RICK"

If you really mean that. You'll have to tell that to the real guy when you see him...

DOLLIE

... I'm not sure that's gonna happen - ...

"RICK"

You'll have to make peace one way or another... Alone or not ...

He exits out the front door.

She makes her way to the record player. She opens it. It is crank operated.

She goes to the vinyl collection on her shelf, pulls one and puts it on the player.

The song begins to play as she cranks it.

MUSIC

Oh, I wish I had some-one to love me

Some-one to call me their own

Oh, I wish I had some-one to live with

'Cause I'm ti-red of liv-in' a-lone

"Ms. Valeria" enters from the closet. A woman in her 60s distinctly 'ghost like' in the way "Rick"

was.

"MS. VALERIA"

"Prisoner's Song" - Vernon Dalhart - beautiful little arrangement -

DOLLIE

"Ms. Valeria"?

"MS. VALERIA"

You should know the drill by now kid... I'm somethin akin to her - ... Something like that ... Heard your ride broke down.

DOLLIE

I really have lost my mind.

“MS. VALERIA”

You forgot everything I taught you or what?

DOLLIE

Pickup’s frozen solid -

“MS. VALERIA”

So you know the problem. God forbid we use that to deduce a solution when sitting, moping and cranking a record player is such fun.

DOLLIE

It doesn’t start -

“MS. VALERIA”

You got a spare battery?

DOLLIE

It ain’t the battery, the starter itself is frozen solid -

“MS. VALERIA”

Well gee...

“Ms. Valeria” motions to the fire wood Dollie brought in.

“MS. VALERIA”

If only we had something to start a fire!

She crosses and pulls a box of matches out of the drawer.

“MS. VALERIA”

Man - if only we had the necessary equipment!

She slaps them down on the counter.

DOLLIE

... Can I be honest?

“MS. VALERIA”

If you can’t be honest with yourself - I don’t see how you’re gonna make it very far.

DOLLIE

The ghost - memory - whatever of my ex showing up made sense but... You?

“MS. VALERIA”

What - you don’t think of me often enough?

DOLLIE

No, I - well I guess I don’t- ... Look, if I’m naming off people who deeply influenced me in my life, my boss from the lube pit back in high school isn’t on the same level as my former spouse - I’m sorry you’re just not.

“MS. VALERIA”

Well clearly I am... ‘Cause like -I’m here and all.

DOLLIE

Here in a sort of - metaphorical way I guess ... Okay, so if I wanted to heat up the car -

“MS. VALERIA”

You already got firewood -

DOLLIE

Even still - roads are frozen over ...

“MS. VALERIA”

... You really did forget everything I taught you ... You know what. That’s it - I’m done -

“Ms. Valeria” leaves out the front door.

DOLLIE

Seriously!?

DOLLIE

... What do you want? I’m sorry I implied you weren’t a core figure in my life? ... Was that the issue -

“Ms. Valeria” pops her head out of the closet.

“MS. VALERIA”

The issue is you don’t listen! You think you got it all figured out, but you’re not seeing what’s really going on...

she enters the room and crosses to her.

“MS. VALERIA”

You were the best employee I ever had - didn’t know squat when I hired you - but it sure

seemed like you were listening back then - ...

DOLLIE

This is ... this is insane - holy shit -

Dollie starts to cry.

DOLLIE

I’m really gonna die up here...

The storm disappears Dollie is still crying. “

“MS. VALERIA”

Hey ... kid... You alright? Where are your parents?

DOLLIE

...

“MS. VALERIA”

Kid, either you’re gonna tell me or I’m gonna have to call the law -

DOLLIE

I was mad ‘cause my dad was yelling at me - I -... It’s fine - I’m fine can you just leave me be please ma’am...

“Ms. Valeria” hesitantly starts to go - she turns around.

“MS. VALERIA”

What’s your name young lady?

DOLLIE

Dollie McCutchen

“MS. VALERIA”

... You're PJ's kid then... Yeah, I met you once... You probably don't remember, you were real tiny...

“MS. VALERIA”

You want a job?

DOLLIE

What?

“MS. VALERIA”

Summer just started - you're out of school for two months - what else you gonna do?

...

Employment, work, all that -

DOLLIE

For you?

“MS. VALERIA”

I run the quick lube pit round the corner - I could use someone to do all the top-side stuff

this summer -

DOLLIE

...

“MS. VALERIA”

What?

DOLLIE

You own an auto shop?

“MS. VALERIA”

Sweetheart - I probably know more about cars than all of the men in your family put together... And no I don't own a full fledged auto shop because I prefer not to have multiple knuckle heads working under me. I prefer one or two part timers, tops - hence I

kept it simple and opened my oil change place - So I'll ask again you want to work or what?

DOLLIE

I don't know - ...

“MS. VALERIA”

Do you know anything about cars?

DOLLIE

No

“MS. VALERIA”

C'mon -

mimes opening a car hood.

“MS. VALERIA”

F-150 here is mine -

Dollie hesitantly goes and looks.

“MS. VALERIA”

I know it looks like a lot. All the stuff working under here - or not working under here...

But ain't nothing in this vehicle that wasn't made by people - people same as you and I.

If they made it, we can figure out what to do with it...

“MS. VALERIA”

Alright - there's your engine block - that's where pistons - all of that actually works to move the pickup forward.

DOLLIE

What's that?

“MS. VALERIA”

That's for the windshield - squirts water on it -

DOLLIE

The big one?

“MS. VALERIA”

Air filter... catches all the bugs and other junk that passes through...

“MS. VALERIA”

... Look kid I - ... I'm sorry about your mom... My grandma raised me and - well, she got sick and I lost her when I was a teenager too - and I really used to absolutely hate when

people said they were “sorry” about it... But now I guess I've realized they said that cause there's nothing else to say -... On behalf of the universe, chance - whatever - I am

sorry ... 'Cause it's just a lot of shit... Believe me, I know it.

DOLLIE

... So what does this one do?

“MS. VALERIA”

That's your alternator -

DOLLIE

What's that?

“MS. VALERIA”

Makes the electricity - for the headlights, radio - all the other “ins and outs” of the vehicle.

DOLLIE

Makes electricity?

“MS. VALERIA”

Well - it converts the car's movement into power - kind of - something to do with magnets - can't say I understand every last bit of the physics behind it, but yeah. If the car's running - the alternator's working - and if it's working - you got power...

A beat.

“MS. VALERIA”

I'll start you tomorrow morning... Deal?

The sound brings the storm back in.

DOLLIE

... You weren't telling me none of that so I could drive off - ... You think really if I start a small fire under the car, I can warm it up enough for the starter to work?

“MS. VALERIA”

... Generator's not gonna come back on any time soon, its probably your only bet... I always liked you kid -

DOLLIE

If I make it out of here - I'll stop by the old shop... tell her hi... Hope she's still there - ...

Ms. Valeria I'm real scared...

“MS. VALERIA”

You probably should be... I'd be scared shitless if I was you... But that shouldn't make a

difference -

“MS. VALERIA”

I'm pulling for you young lady.

She turns and exits.

Dollie goes to gather the fire wood in her hands. She crosses over to the drawer where

“Ms. Valeria” left the matchbox.

As she turns her back to the door, “Pa” enters, quietly.

Dollie lights a match to be sure it will work, it does. She puts it out.

She turns and sees her father. She jumps in fright and

drops the firewood on the ground.

DOLLIE

You know, I was worried Mom was gonna show up here... I wasn't sure what I'd do if I saw her... But I guess the trend holds - being haunted by folks who ain't even dead.

“Pa” says nothing.

DOLLIE

You don't got nothing to say to me?

Pa” says nothing.

DOLLIE

Yeah... Same ‘ol ...

Dollie gathers the fire wood.

DOLLIE

Not sure I have much to say to you anyhow.

He finally moves. Makes a beeline for the record player.

Sits down on the couch with it on his lap.

Dollie watches him. A beat. She starts to exit toward her pickup.

Just before she makes it out, he begins to play the record, picking up where Dollie left off.

MUSIC

Oh, please meet me to-night in the moon-light

Please meet me to-night all a-lone

For I have a sad sto-ry to tell you

It's a sto-ry that's nev-er been told

This verse sucks Dollie back into a memory, instantly.

She sets the firewood down.

Halfway through this verse, a heart monitor is heard, keeping time with the music.

Beep - Beep - Beep -

MUSIC

I'll be car-ried to the new jail to-mor-row

Leav-ing my poor dar-ling all a-lone

Dollie crosses over and sits down next to her father.

MUSIC

With the cold pris-on bars all a-round me

And my head on a pil-low of stone

Dollie puts her hand on her father's hand to stop him from cranking.

The music and the heart monitor stop.

DOLLIE

Pa... Are you okay? ... You been sitting there for a couple of hours... You alright?

“PA”

Your mama loved this song Dollie... She loved the oldies...
Dollie ... Go to your room...

She scoots away from her dad,
DOLLIE

... Pa I'm scared for y-
"PA"

I said now goddamn it! Get your ass out of here!

Dollie gets up and crosses to the door.
She stops at it.
DOLLIE
... You sorry bastard...

The sounds of the ice storm slowly comes back in and the memory fades.
DOLLIE
... You know its bad enough... loosing one parent but...I guess you could be dead... I probably wouldn't have heard about it... Its been - what -

He gets up and crosses to her.

"PA"
Twelve years... You know its been twelve years - ... Here you are, pretending to yourself like you don't know that... You think of me - all the time... And you know what... you always will too...

You gonna die up here... It's your own fault too ...

Its too late for you Dollie ...

A long tense beat.

Dollie crosses to the record player.

"PA"

You get your hands off my record! -

DOLLIE

It's been mine for over a decade! ... The real you don't even know where it is...

Suppose

we should finish it, huh? ...

Cranks the record - the final verse plays. The heart monitor is mixed in again.

MUSIC

Now I have a grand ship on the o-ccean

All mount-ed with sil-ver and gold

And be-fore my poor dar-lin' would suf-fer

Oh! that ship would be an-chored and sold

“Pa” sits next to her.

MUSIC

Now if I had wings like an an-gel
O-ver these pri-son walls I would fly
And I'd fly to the arms of my poor dar-lin'
And there I'd be wil-ling to die...

The heart monitor continues.

DOLLIE

When I watched her go... I remember ... Just seeing her eyes go empty, relaxed... A kid ain't supposed to see that... I needed answers... Or maybe a little comfort... I dunno, nothing could have fixed it but... You, the way you were after ...

The heart monitor flatlines.

DOLLIE

I didn't need that... I needed -

“Pa” leaps at her and begins to choke her on the ground. She kicks him, knocking him off.

She stands. They fight. They exchange blows back and forth. Evenly matched.

Eventually “Pa” grabs Dollie by her hair. He puts her in a headlock.

She elbows him in the ribs. Turns and knocks the hell out of him. Again. Again. She knocks him to his knees. She

\ stands over him.

DOLLIE

I'm gonna do better than you did... For me... I deserve that much...

Dollie goes to the front door. She opens it. “Pa” slowly gets up, and leaves.

For a brief moment after he leaves, she cries. She takes some deep breaths.

She puts on her gloves. Grabs her phone, charger, fire wood, matches - she makes her way outside.

She lays a few logs under the pickup. She lights a match, looks at it, and starts a small fire.

Gets into the pickup. She goes to start it.

It doesn't go but it goes further than before.

She stops, takes a breath.

She turns the key again. It works. The truck runs.

She plugs her phone into the charger.

She goes outside and puts her little fire out.
She gets back into the pickup, she turns her phone on.
She dials 911.

DOLLIE

My name is Dollie McCutchen. I'm trapped up in here - I need help - ... Yeah I can tell you how to get here... Yeah I'm good I can wait 'til then I ... Yes ma'am yeah... I'm gonna be okay...

A heart monitor plays faintly in the background.

End of play.

Andrew

Thank you for listening to Someone To Love Me, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Straton Rushing after the recording of this show.

[Andrew]

Okay. And so first off, Straton, I want to say thank you for being part of this and allowing us to be part of your show. Really appreciate it.

[Straton]

Well, thank you guys for patting me. I mean, I've been a fan of Eclectic for a long time. I've been a fan of Half Hour Radio Hour for a while.

I think you guys are awesome. Or Half Hour Audio Hour, right? I always say it wrong.

[Andrew]

Yeah.

[Straton]

But yeah, I mean, I'm just really happy to have finally got to work with you guys on something after being a longtime fan. Excellent.

[Andrew]

That's what I like. It's always nice to hear that people other than me are listening to this. So the first question that I have for you is how long have you been writing?

[Straton]

Yeah, I you know, it's funny, I think a lot of people decide they want to write plays in their 30s or 40s. So I'm in my late 20s. But I've been doing this for 10 years.

I started writing when I was a teenager. And I guess I just kind of stuck with it for better or for worse. It's kind of hard to pinpoint when I quote unquote started writing because, you know, I did creative writing and people in the audience that know what a creepypasta is.

I actually wrote one that went slightly viral when I was like 13. So I mean, I've always kind of been a writer, right? But I think I finished my first full-length play when I was 18.

So I guess you could say I kind of stuck my flag in the ground then and became a full playwright. So that makes it about 10 years now. And yeah, yeah, that's that's it.

And, you know, I think that it's one of those things where I just I kind of can't help it. I get ideas and then they bother me if I don't write them down. So it's like, I think that some of us that are predisposed to being obsessive about creative writing, we just we just kind of, you know, if you left me in a jail cell alone, I'd probably just start scribbling on the walls.

You know, I don't know what it is, but it's kind of how I am.

[Andrew]

That that is a very that's a very common trait that I've discovered among writers. It's like I have to do this. So what inspired someone to love me?

[Straton]

Yeah, this is very much like the type of play I would write, if that makes sense. Like, you know, ghosts and it's like it's got some very dry humor in it and it's really

about grief. Like these are themes that are very much like a part of like just stuff that I end up writing about a lot.

This is very much my style. It's not a horror play, but it's got some scary elements, which is also sort of a stereotypical me thing to do. I had had this idea for this woman doing this almost like three ghosts Charles Dickens type thing to work through.

You know, fundamentally to me, this is a play about a woman who learned how to grieve and correctly and is now learning a new version in a dire situation. So I'd had this idea for Dolly as a character for a long time, and I kind of knew how I wanted to handle it. But I was like, I don't think it's long enough to be a full length.

I just don't think there's enough of a story there. And, you know, sometimes as a playwright, whenever you have a project that you like, but you haven't made time for, you just kind of have to force yourself to have a deadline. So theater off the square, which is a community theater here in like the North Texas area where I live.

I live in Arlington, but there in Weatherford, which I'll just greater Dallas Fort Worth suburbs. They put out a call for one act and they wanted stuff. I believe the theme was like ice cold or something like that.

And I was like, Oh, interesting. What if the Dolly character was caught in a snowstorm? So I kind of use the deadline for that competition as like a force me to finish this thing I've been toying with.

And so that's how the ice storm became a part of it, which I think works perfectly. I really like it. I think it's a good metaphor for isolation.

So that forced me to finish a draft in June of last year, submitted it to the Mid America Theater Conference, wasn't able to go because a storm hit as I was supposed to fly to wherever they were doing it that year. Oh, Madison, Wisconsin. Yeah, so I actually missed the first reading of this because of a storm, which is apt.

And then they did a reading of it at the Tyler Civic Center, the Tyler Civic Theater in Tyler, Texas. I wasn't able to make it down for that because I was getting married like two weeks. I got married this past year.

So thank you. Thank you. So there've been two readings and I didn't make it to either of them for you know, because life happens.

Yeah, so that's basically kind of the trajectory and story of this. I've had some really lovely notes sent from the folks in Madison and the folks in Tyler who were a part of those readings and that kind of helped it, you know, ebb and flow. But really, the onus was I just had this character who I was like, Oh, that's interesting, right?

Like what situations might force her to learn grief in a more reasonable way. So it's, it's a theme that I've played with a lot in my work. But it's one that I think I'm visiting a little differently here, which I really enjoyed writing.

[Andrew]

Cool. No, it's a very, very interesting way of going about it very. And you're absolutely right.

The ice storm really makes a lot of sense for why she's forced to do this. It So yeah, oh, sorry.

[Straton]

Go ahead. Go ahead. Well, no, yeah, like I think I think that you know, I love the sort of I don't remember where I learned this like way of putting it.

It might just be like some term I adopted. But I think that like, very often you always have a nice engine to your story when you put your character in a situation that forces them to make some sort of change that they needed. And I just I like that.

And this feels like this is very much in line with that. I don't know that this play uses like hero's journey, or, you know, maybe you could try to get it to fit into certain plot devices. But I think that this is a play that for me is very much in line

with if you know, I really recommend the book Story Genius by Lisa Cron to a lot of people.

This feels like I was kind of using that as the mold for this. It's just very much based on what is this character's past? Who were they?

Why did they develop these misbeliefs about the way the world works? And what situation can you put them in that forces them to change? That's kind of how I think this play was modeled when I was starting at for sure.

And I think that like the ice storm that that's that forces her right? Like that's a that's a situation she has no control over.

[Andrew]

Right. Absolutely. So now you when we were talking earlier, you said you really like audio drama.

Has you written for that medium before?

[Straton]

Yeah, I've had a lot of my I read a lot of short plays. There wasn't even something I set out to do. I think it's just when you're a younger playwright, a lot of the opportunities that are available to us are 10 minutes one acts.

So I don't know all of them off the top of my head. I've worked with gather by the ghost light. I've had plays produced by a few now defunct radio play companies.

But really, my big audio project was a self produced audio drama was a full length. And that was my thesis project for my MFA, which that project is about two years old now, now that I'm realizing it's going to be two years old in a few months. But yeah, that that play ichro Texas was written for audio.

And I really love audio drama. Like you said, we were talking about this before the interview started. And I think that it's interesting to me that we are in sort of this golden era of podcasts and audio books.

And yet I think there's a real thirst for this kind of content. And that's one of the reasons why I love the work you guys are doing with this program and with your other radio stuff. And the reason why I love, you know, groups like ghost light.

And also on the air being a big one, like there's a lot of really great. There's a lot of really great content being made. But I think that there's a real thirst for this space.

And I think that, you know, it's really exciting to get to work with people that are making cool stuff, you know, that's awesome.

[Andrew]

So what is it that you like about writing for audio?

[Straton]

When you write enough plays, eventually constraints become fun. You know what I mean? They stop being a burden and it's like, well, can I write a play with no visuals?

And so I think that's what first drew me to it. But even in my other work, you know, a lot of my work contains like music, and I'm very heavy on sound effects. I do work as a sound designer occasionally.

And so I really like, I really just like what sound brings. And you know, I'm the son of a musician, my dad's a singer. And so I think singer and songwriter.

And so I think that that's definitely some of it for me. But I love also how audio drama has this unique power to kind of meet the audience halfway. It's not quite like a book, but you know, they're doing half the work in their head.

And so I hate to say that that makes it more customized. But I think that is kind of what it comes down to. Like when we watch a play, not very much is left up to the imagination, right?

We're all seeing the same set design, seeing the same stuff. But like with an audio drama, we can have vastly different experiences depending on who we

are. And in that respect, it is sort of this marriage between acting and writing and you know what it's like to read a novel or whatever.

So that's what I think I love about it is that you get to use your own imagination in a way that isn't quite like anything else. Yeah, I think that's what I like most about it for sure.

[Andrew]

Yeah, no, absolutely. That's one of the that's one of the things I hear a lot both from people who write for audio, but also people who listen to it and really enjoy the medium is because of the fact that it feels very individualized. It feels very intimate as opposed to, you know, I go to a theater and I'm in a crowd of people.

This is now coming directly to me. Yeah. And it does.

You get to you get to create the entire world in your head, just like when you read. So it is it is very interesting that, you know, now here we are on the cusp of 2025. And we're we're back to really sitting around a campfire and telling stories.

[Straton]

Yeah, yeah. And it shows how timeless it is, right? Like, this is such a human impulse.

You just want to listen to someone tell you a story. And I also and like it's timeless, but also like I think that modern technology and the fact that like things that were really difficult to do from an audio editing standpoint just 20 years ago now are a lot more accessible on the average person's laptop because like a good audio designer like like you guys, I mean, you guys have great quality audio design in your podcast. A good audio designer can really like create a movie for your ears, right?

And that that's another part of it that I love about this craft is that as someone who has edited a full length audio drama, it is a lot of work. It's a lot harder than it seems when you're done with it, right? So that's a part of the craft that I love to is just how beautiful and vivid of a picture you can paint with just sound effects.

It's a really cool part of this art.

[Andrew]

No, absolutely. The the the usability and the ease of a lot of the the programs and the apps and everything nowadays and how easy it is to, you know, just get interfaced into, you know, you don't need thousands of dollars of equipment to be able to to record anything. You know, the fact that I that we can get people from all over the country, all over the world together onto one website and record them all together live at the same time.

And, you know, so many of these so many of these sites now also just do all the processing for you. We don't do that. But, you know, for people who are just trying to start out or anything, there's so many ways of being able to just automate so much of this to make it a lot easier for people.

And just the the operation, even if you're doing it, quote, unquote, manually, is so much easier nowadays than, I mean, even when we started doing this on a regular basis, you know, six, seven years ago, the the the difference is amazing between then and now.

[Straton]

It makes sense. It makes a lot of sense. And up and down, right?

The mics that are high quality are more affordable and like the software is more accessible. Like there's so many little things that I think make it easier than just a few years ago.

[Andrew]

Yeah, it's it's really, really wonderful. So do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to promote?

[Straton]

Yeah, so I, if you like this work, and you want to read a similar play of mine, I play mutability, which is one of my full lengths is going to be published by Next Stage Press, I believe it should be available through Next Stage around the time that this drops. I know early 2025 is when it's supposed to be purchasable on their

website. If you like, you know, ghosts and grief and tragic comedy, it's this, you know, it's, it's funny, because the way I pitched that play to people is, is a play about, you know, how every horror movie there's like that creepy old hillbilly at the gas station, that's like there's monsters out in them woods.

It's imagine if the hillbilly at the gas station had his own play. And that play is actually really about his relationship with his daughter, which is really complicated. So anyway, that's the play.

It's very Yeah, it's fun. It's one of my favorite things I've ever written. I'm happy to have it published.

And then if you're not interested in ghosts and tragic comedy, and my style of writing in that respect, I wrote something very different, which is ichiro, Texas. That was my MFA thesis. It is a full length audio drama that's free on YouTube, Spotify.

And you can follow my work and stream ichiro at Straton, the playwright.com s t r a t o n the playwright.com. If you go there, you can see more info about my work, but also on the landing page, I have a link to watch ichiro on YouTube. So you can watch it there, or watch it, listen to it, I should say.

Yeah, those are the two projects that I think makes sense to plug anywhere in the world, right? I'm here in North Texas, I work for kitchen dog theater company. And I'm also a frequent collaborator with scene shop, which is a Fort Worth based theater collective.

So a lot of my work is here in North Texas, if you follow me on social media, you can follow my stuff that's happening live and in person, whether it's just everything we do at kitchen dog theater, or, you know, whatever projects I have going as a playwright. But yeah, that's a good way to follow me. And then if you want to follow me on socials, Straton rushing on Instagram is really probably the best way I don't know.

I don't use a lot of other social media, to be honest. Yeah, yeah, thank you for giving me the chance to plug stuff. I appreciate it.

[Andrew]

No, absolutely. That's one of the reasons that we started this podcast was to promote the playwright. So that's awesome.

Now this, of course, is the most important question of the entire interview, which is, you know, as we were talking, the the main character of your your play is in a cabin in an ice storm. But when it comes to camping, are you tent, cabin, or hotel?

[Straton]

I, so I'm trying to think because I, I don't know if I've actually ever stayed in a cabin, like in my life. And it sounds so fun. I, you know, my now wife, then, then girlfriend, I think I forget how many years ago we did this.

We stayed at, I think it was a trailer home though, we stayed in Colorado at like a getaway and a little place up in the Rockies. It was beautiful, but I don't think it qualified as a cabin quite. Once upon a time, because you know, I'm a country boy, I grew up out in the middle of nowhere.

I'm, that's very much my background. And I think it informs my work, but I just, you know, I think I'm getting to the age. I'm a little too spoiled to sleep in a tent anymore.

I did it all the time as a kid, but I just think I'm too disconnected to my roots now to to really sleep in a tent. So I think I'm a cabin guy now. I don't, that sounds a lot more fun than just a hotel, like any other trip.

But I think, I genuinely don't know if I've ever stayed in a cabin. I feel like I must have though. You know what I mean?

Like I just have been to too many things where, and I guess it depends on what qualifies as a cabin, but yeah, cabin for sure.

[Andrew]

But I think we all as children, even even I who grew up in the Midwest, we all at one point slept in a tent as kids, even even if it was pitched in the backyard. Because, you know, when you're a kid, the idea of sleeping in a tent is a really cool thing.

[Straton]

Yeah, your back can handle it. And you're not as afraid of bugs or whatever. You're just like, yeah, let's do it.

[Andrew]

Let's, let's sleep in a tent. It's awesome. I am with you.

I'm also at the point where it's like, no, no, no. I have stayed, I have stayed in a, in a cabin at one point while we were, I was on tour with a children's company in Florida. And they, one of the places that we were at put us up in a hunting cabin.

[Straton]

Oh, that's cool. Yeah.

[Andrew]

So that was real. Although that was a massive cabin. I mean, it had a giant satellite on the roof.

So it wasn't, there was no roughing it in any way, shape or form.

[Straton]

Yeah, like, and maybe this is just me, my perception being off, but like I, what, what makes a cabin and not a house? And I know that sounds dumb, but, but like, for me, like my childhood, this friend, I look back with like the house he had. And I'm like, I think that might have qualified as a cabin, like the way it was built.

I'm like, I think he might've just lived in a cabin, but I don't know. And if that's the case, oh yeah, dude, I stayed over there all the time as a kid. I've definitely slept in a cabin.

So I don't, yeah, I hadn't really thought about it until I heard the question just now. I'm like, where does a house end in a cabin begin? Is it more location-based?

[Andrew]

Is it the way the, like, I'm sure there's a technical definition and I'm just being pedantic, but, but, you know, those, that kind of, that kind of detail is, is important when you're a writer.

[Straton]

Oh yeah, true.

[Andrew]

Well, well Straton, uh, this was wonderful. Thank you once again for allowing us to be part of your show. It was a wonderful, thank you for sharing your time and your talent with us.

And on behalf of everybody at EFCT, I just want to say we're very, very grateful.

[Straton]

Well, thank you guys for having me. Like I said, I've been a big fan of you guys work for a long time. I've been a, I've been a semifinalist for crash box and a couple other things.

Actually fun facts. I'm happy to, uh, I'm happy to actually be in here working with y'all and thank you guys for providing awesome content. We talked about it quite a bit, but this medium is really exciting.

I think that it's a sort of underexplored space and yet it's also a space with a really rich history. Audio dramas, I think are really important, interesting human type of storytelling. And you guys are among the top, like few out there doing it, making it and keeping it alive.

So thank you guys for all the work you're doing. And I'm really excited to finally get to be a part of it.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed Someone To Love Me. Next month, we will be presenting Unrequited Love by Elena Naskova, And don't forget to head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about all our other shows and projects, like our fourth annual Patchwork Festival, running Feb 21-March 2nd at the Edge Theatre in Chicago. 9 amazing new plays featuring the theme of Redemption! More info at eclectic-theatre.com! On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening