



# NATURAL SHOCKS

BY

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DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



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The world premiere of NATURAL SHOCKS was presented in October 2018 by WP Theater (Lisa McNulty, Producing Artistic Director; Michael Sag, Managing Director). It was directed by May Adrales, the set design was by Lee Savage, the costume design was by Jennifer Caprio, the lighting design was by Amith Chandrashaker, the sound design and original music were by Charles Coes and Nathan A. Roberts, and the production stage manager was Ralph Stan Lee. The cast was as follows:

ANGELA ..... Pascale Armand

## THANKS

Thank you to Christina Wallace who had the idea to launch this play across the country with a series of free readings to raise funds and awareness for gun violence prevention; to the team of producers—including Leah Hamos, Corinne Hayoun, Erica Rotstein, Audible and WP Theatre—who pulled it off and brought it to New York; to Kathy Najimy who first read it with such heart and humor; and to all the women and men behind the more than 100 readings in 48 states that raised money for gun violence prevention and domestic violence prevention in April of 2018.

## CHARACTER

ANGELA—a woman. Probably 40 years old, maybe younger, maybe older. She's funny, she is smart, she thinks fast, she rambles, she is self-deprecating. She is feeling everything as it happens. She is trying not to lie but she always does. She is trying to survive. Resilient, hopeful, optimistic, not sorry for herself. She can be any race, from any region, with any accent. She might wear things that would make your local audience pre-judge her (a frumpy sweatshirt with a big sports logo, or gaudy earrings, or too much eyeliner, or no makeup and camo shorts). They should come to empathize with her even if they first assume they wouldn't.

## SETTING

A half-finished basement in a normal house in America right now.

## NOTES

The wind will grow as the play goes on.  
It's a comedy... until it's not.

# NATURAL SHOCKS

*Angela runs into her basement, locks the door.*

ANGELA. Shit. I think this is real. This might be really happening. God it happens so quickly. Turns so quickly. Shit.

OK. The things you need to know are: This is the basement. This is where you're supposed to be. It's way safer down here. I think? Right? Right. What else. The door is locked. It's a good lock. Of course what's a lock really gonna do against a natural disaster heading this way at two hundred miles an hour? That's why we're underground. We'll be fine.

Jesus I can't believe this is happening. How is this happening?

But everyone always says that don't they. "How is this happening? Not here! Not me!" Well it seems it's here and it's me and it's getting very windy out there.

Or maybe it's a dream? No. *I want only fun and sexy dreams please, fun and/or sexy and* basements are neither.

*Wind outside.*

OK. You have questions, good for you, we're gonna answer everything. So! The tiny little window will tell you it's dusk, which it is. It's a beautiful sunset actually, but that's a lie because there's bad weather coming and it's coming fast. Like real fast, like—shit. Wifi's out. Does anyone have a signal down here? By the window you can usually get one.

Actually don't. You can't get help until *after* things like this. You're just gonna get more people hurt if you call for help now.

Did I mention this is a tornado?

Yeah. Sorry. I do that. I rush ahead. You're like: "You said disaster but didn't specify. What is the dress code?"

Tornado is the dress code. Tornado, like *right out there*. I want to run. Don't run. Stay here. Shit.

You know my mom saw one when she was a kid. She grew up a county over. She was 5 or 6 when it touched down across the street, and *man* does that burn a vision into your tiny kid brain. You believe in fairies and monsters at that age and then you wake up and see a mammoth storm outside your window, like the kind from *Wizard of Oz*. You know what she did? She named it. She stared at that funnel and her little mind went... "Oliver." Because of course Oliver is a man, a woman would never make that much of a mess— and Oliver is drilling the ground, grinding the earth below and he is coming for you.

Yeah. Her bedtime stories used to scare the shit out of me. Obviously they still do.

My mom. Poor woman. She did not deserve the bullshit she got handed in her life.

And yet the song she sang while washing dishes every day?

That song by Judy Garland where she's singing about being so happy and having no cares and hallelujah and suddenly she's all like, "And here comes Judgment Day."

And if I was anywhere nearby she'd kinda side-eye me on "Judgment Day... *Angela*."

We were not friends. But I still make her black-walnut pound cake. I don't eat it because it's so crumbly and dry and it what *is* a black walnut? I can't make it right, or it just *can't* be made right. But I still make it. But that recipe is the only thing I have in her handwriting.

I wish I knew more of her secrets. I wish she knew mine.

(*Listening outside...*) Wind's down. Even looks clear out there, like every other sunset. Nature is such a liar.

Actually I have no problem with lying. Sometimes it makes things easier. What am I saying, it *always makes things easier*.

Sometimes I'll just say something—very confidently, very factual you know—and then a second later I'll realize, "No, Angela, that is

absolutely not true what you just said, You did not go to high school with the guy who plays the cowboy on that HBO show.” I don’t know why I do it. Little lies. Harmless.

So yeah, OK: door locked, window closed, stay away from the window, bunch of blankets down here, bottled water for sure, gun in the closet, I’m rereading *Sense and Sensibility* so that’s in here in case I get bored (bored in a tornado, Jesus), there’s a—what’s this? Oh of course: a really old copy of *Field & Stream* because he won’t throw anything away because we’re definitely going to need to reference an article about duck calls from 2001.

Y’all got wigged out when I said there’s a gun in here didn’t you.

You’re not those kinda people are you. I get that. I respect that. I don’t really like guns myself, I just grew up around them and you gotta be able to protect yourself. This is a messed up world. I have a right to a gun, you have a right to think I’m nuts. That’s all we need to say about it.

*Pause.*

It’s in a safe under my snow boots. It’s not gonna bite you.

Though I should definitely make sure it’s not going to go off if a goddamned tornado hits this house. That’s all I need. A pistol in a tornado.

Anyway I’m sorry we had to meet like this. Not that I had a choice but just so you know I’d rather this have been a nice ice-cream social or a super boozy cocktail party. Not too late for that one actually. We could all wait this thing out by getting super drunk and honest. Actually I think we’re more honest when we’re facing the worst. Forget the niceties, show me your crisis management. The worst brings out our best.

Anyway. I’m Angela. This is my basement. My new year’s resolution to work out is going well, thanks for asking. How’s yours? Of course it’s totally OK if we’re all getting fatter and weirder. That’s actual physics. That’s real entropy. Get older, eat more chocolate, say weirder and weirder shit about death and technology—

Oh. Maybe if I switch out the walnuts for chocolate my mom’s pound



cake would be edible. I should try that.

See. This is when I wish I was more like my mom. She would have had a way better plan for this kinda thing than I obviously do. She would have had snacks. She would have had that radio with the hand crank that NPR always tries to give me during pledge week. She would have had a plan. She always had a plan.

But plans take planning and this just came out of the blue. I was just thinking, “Ooh. Maybe I’ll go to Chick-fil-A.” And then—“no, no I will not go to Chick-fil-A, tell those people to drop the chicken, there’s a tornado coming.”

But here? Things like this don’t really happen here. What are the chances?

Actually I know the chances.

Because I’m an insurance agent.

“Yay!” you’re thinking, “I’m stuck in a basement during a natural disaster with *an insurance agent, oh my god this just got serious GET HELP NOW!*”

Don’t worry, I’m sure you’re covered. And because this is not a professional setting I can be as glib and morbidly humorous as my dog knows I am.

I’m kidding, I don’t have a dog. If I had a dog he would be in here with me because what kind of monster leaves their dog loose in a tornado. I would love a dog. If I survive this I’m getting a dog. They’re supposed to make you happier right? Or stupider—do you know how much money Americans spend on Halloween costumes *for their pets?*

I can’t get a dog. I work too much. I don’t want to get a dog just to make it wait for me all day. My husband would hate it. Or maybe he’d finally be happier...or stupider. This is not the time to worry about a fictional pet, Angela.

But I love worrying. I’m a professional worrier.

As a Homeowners Insurance Specialist I spend pretty much every day thinking about various forms of peril, which is what we actually

call these scenarios because we take our shit *seriously*. Now there are basic covered perils which I'll run through rapidly right now just to make you realize how much shit can happen to a person. We've got: (*A well-memorized stream of perils.*) Fire, Lightning, Wind or hail, Explosion, Vehicle collision (including aircraft—yikes), Smoke, Vandalism, and lastly Riot or Civil commotion. That's basic coverage.

Then there are “named perils” designed to cover the most common forms of property damage. Those are aggravating and chilling but not usually mortal: Burglary, Falling objects, Freezing of plumbing, Accidental water damage, and Artificially generated electricity.

Then there's the really wild stuff. We call it the “special perils” and these bad boys are: Earthquake, Flood, Power failure, Neglect, War, Nuclear hazard, and Intentional acts. Now I'm not saying those last few perils are more necessary now than in the recent past but—you know—I can leave you some brochures.

My boss has this chestnut on a poster in his office: “Needing insurance is like needing a parachute. If it isn't there the first time, chances are you won't be needing it again.” This is one of the least groan-inducing jokes you'll hear at every conference of insurance agents. Every one. All of them.

But truly. What I find so thrilling about insurance is the math. I mean actuarial science? The math of the future? Come on! What a rush!

I know, we're so annoying. It's endless. Here's another terrible joke: God looked at His newly created world and saw that all its chaos needed order, so He created actuaries. Then the actuaries looked at God and His creation and all its chaos and said, “We think that You're the problem.”

HA.

It's not that funny. Especially if you're my mom. You *cannot* joke about God with my mom. Nope. I'm serious. Don't do it.

My mom never laughed at one of my jokes. That's not true. There was one.

# NATURAL SHOCKS

by Lauren Gunderson

1 woman

Angela is trapped in her basement, waiting out an approaching tornado. Though a self-proclaimed unreliable narrator, she begins to reflect on a lifetime of trauma, illuminating the truth behind her endangerment. Based on Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy, *NATURAL SHOCKS* is a damning condemnation of violence, abuse, and firearms in America.

*"...taut and lively... the writing...evinces great skill."*

—StageLeft.nyc

*"...a compelling play on important and topical themes."*

—TheaterScene.net

*"Gunderson's NATURAL SHOCKS raises important points about the need to take action in times of crises."*

—DCMetroTheaterArts.com

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