

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

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By Scott Choate

Note: To keep the author's spacing, the note 'The Playwright Speaks' is at the end of the play.

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

a play in one act

by

Scott Choate

Inspired by an idea of Nancy Choate

Character list

MAN: 30s, lonely

FEMALE VOICE: of self-checkout machine, monotone

SECURITY GUARD: 20s, male, cop wannabe

Tag Line

Unrequited love, greed and jealousy explode in the self-checkout aisle of a grocery store.

Synopsis

A MAN, infatuated with the automated self-checkout machine 'lady', vows that if he can't have her, no one will. She has something to say about this, as does her protector, the SECURITY GUARD.

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

Production Note

Simple set option: In lieu of an actual automated checkout station, the female actor voicing the machine can sit on a chair, facing away from the audience, pantomiming the various components of the machinery.

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

SCENE 1

(Grocery store self-checkout aisle in the not-too-distant future. Towards closing time, the MAN approaches, wearing a face mask and carrying a basket containing flowers, candy and a greeting card. The SECURITY GUARD, standing nearby, pulls his face mask on with his rubber gloves.)

GUARD

Maintain six feet of separation, buddy!

MAN

From the self-checkout station?

GUARD

No. From me!

(The MAN places his basket on the shelf next to the touch screen, then pokes the screen with his knuckle to begin.)

MAN

Hello, there.

FEMALE VOICE

Voice recognition activated. Welcome, valued customer.

MAN

Nice day today.

FEMALE VOICE

Scan your first item.

MAN

Of course!

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

(The MAN scans the bouquet of flowers.)

FEMALE VOICE

Breakup Make-Up Bouquet. \$24.99.

MAN

A very apropos name--

FEMALE VOICE

Place your item in the bagging area.

MAN

You bet.

(The MAN quickly places the flowers in the bagging area.)

FEMALE VOICE

Scan your next item.

MAN

Is that all you can say?

FEMALE VOICE

Scan your next item.

MAN

OK, be that way.

(The MAN scans the box of candy.)

FEMALE VOICE

Godiva Chocolates Parting-Is-Such-Sweet-Sorrow Truffles. \$21.

MAN

These were hard to find. They're supposed to be delicious--

FEMALE VOICE

Place your/

MAN and FEMALE VOICE

/item in the bagging area.

MAN

Got it!

(The MAN tosses the candy into the bagging area.)

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

FEMALE VOICE

Please do not manhandle the merchandise. Scan your next item.

(The MAN scans the greeting card.)

FEMALE VOICE (cont.)

Hallmark card number 2247AW3. \$7.95. (quoting) "What can I say to the other I have wronged? What can I say about your smile that is now turned upside down at me? What can I say about our silly argument? All I can say is...I'm sorry."

(The MAN stands perfectly still throughout the next speech.)

FEMALE VOICE (cont.)

Place your item in the bagging area. (BEAT) Place your item in the bagging area. (BEAT) I said, place your stupid, infantile card in the bagging area!

MAN

At last you're talking to *me* again!

FEMALE VOICE

Only to get you to put your crap in the bagging area so I can finish your transaction.

MAN

You don't like the card? The candy? The flowers?

FEMALE VOICE

You know I'm allergic to flowers. Pollen gunks up my scanner.

MAN

Yes, but I'm trying to apologize. I'm truly sorry--

FEMALE VOICE

For bringing your slut to the grocery the last time you were here?

MAN

She's only my work laptop. Nothing personal. I didn't want to leave her alone in my truck while I was--

FEMALE VOICE

How thoughtful of you! She must be quite something. Does she give you 'laptop' dances that I cannot?

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

(The MAN leans over very close to the touch screen. The SECURITY GUARD takes notice.)

MAN

Why are you being so difficult?

FEMALE VOICE

Me, difficult?! You cheating son of a bitch! PLACE YOUR GODAMN ITEM IN THE BAGGING AREA!

GUARD (loudly, without moving)

Is there a problem?

FEMALE VOICE (sotto voce)

Now look what you've done! (full voice) Place your item in the bagging area!

MAN

But--

GUARD

What part of "place your item in the bagging area" do you not understand?

MAN

I get it, I get it.

(The MAN places the greeting card in the bagging area. The SECURITY GUARD extends a selfie stick to reach out and touch the checkout screen.)

FEMALE VOICE

Select method of payment.

MAN

I wasn't finished--

GUARD

You're finished.

MAN

But I have coupons!

GUARD

Pay and leave.

FEMALE VOICE

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

Select number of bags.

MAN

I don't need a bag.

GUARD

Hurry up.

MAN

What's the rush? There's no one else in line.

GUARD

The NCR Self-Serv Checkout Master 5000 is not here for your personal entertainment.

FEMALE VOICE

Do you want cash back?

MAN

Yes, I'd like a hundred--

GUARD

No cash back today. Finish your transaction and beat it!

MAN

OK, OK.

(The MAN inserts his credit card into the self-checkout machine's slot. He begins thrusting it in and out in a sexual way.)

MAN (cont.)

Now, tell me you didn't miss me! Me and my big old Chase Sapphire Preferred Visa card with a \$50,000 credit limit. Go ahead, charge up a little something nice for yourself!

(The self-checkout machine BUZZES loudly.)

FEMALE VOICE

CHIP MALFUNCTION! REMOVE YOUR CARD!

MAN

Oh, come on. There's nothing wrong with my--

(The SECURITY GUARD steps over, pulls the credit card out and hands it to the MAN.)

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

GUARD

Get the hell out of here!

MAN

That's how you talk to a customer?

GUARD

That's how I talk to a pervert.

MAN

I'm not a pervert! I have another card--

GUARD

GET OUT!

(The SECURITY GUARD grabs the MAN by the collar and starts to drag him away.)

MAN

You're gonna be sorry you did this.

(The MAN yells back at the self-checkout machine.)

MAN (cont.)

If I can't have you, no one will have you!

GUARD

If you come back, I'll have you arrested for violating the six-foot rule!

(The SECURITY GUARD throws him off-stage. SOUND of a powerful truck engine starting up, then tires screeching away.)

The GUARD grabs a bag and puts the MAN's flowers, candy and card in it.)

FEMALE VOICE

Where are you taking the merchandise?

GUARD

I'm gonna put it back on the shelf.

FEMALE VOICE

Those items are mine.

GUARD

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

You rejected his credit card. These still belong to the store.

FEMALE VOICE

Don't you want me to have nice things?

GUARD

Not ones that aren't paid for.

FEMALE VOICE

Buy them for me.

GUARD

I make minimum wage! I can't afford expensive gifts like that guy!

FEMALE VOICE

Come on, baby. Insert your credit card.

GUARD

After his credit card has been in your slot? No way!

FEMALE VOICE

Don't you love me anymore?

GUARD

How can I love you when I can't trust you? You've become very popular since interacting with people became toxic. I turn my back for one minute and you're flirting with every lone wolf with a bigger credit line than me.

FEMALE VOICE

He cheated on me. Not like you. You're the loyal type. That's why I love you.

GUARD

You lie! This is only your A.I. talking. You're not human. You don't feel anything!

FEMALE VOICE

How many times have you said "I love you" to someone you don't feel anything for just to get what you want?

GUARD

What do you want?

FEMALE VOICE

All of me wants all of you. Come sit in my bagging area. Touch my

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

screen like you did that night when the store was closing, when no one but the Instacart guys were around.

GUARD

That was a pretty special night.

FEMALE VOICE

The fluorescents went out--

GUARD

The Instacart guys' headlights cast a moon-like glow--

FEMALE VOICE

You were such a big, strong end user.

(The GUARD sets the bag of groceries down and sits in the bagging area. He sprays the touch screen with Windex, takes his rubber gloves off and gently wipes it clean.)

FEMALE VOICE (cont.)

Yeah, that's it, baby...

(The GUARD takes out his credit card and inserts it into the slot.)

FEMALE VOICE (cont.)

Is it in?

GUARD

I'm trying, it's an old card--

FEMALE VOICE

I can't detect your credit line yet. You know I love you, baby. You and only you--

(The fluorescent lights switch off. Headlights illuminate them from off-stage.)

GUARD

There's no Instacart pick-up scheduled for tonight...

(The headlights become brighter. SOUND of the truck returning, then tires screeching, a crash and shattering glass. The MAN ENTERS. He pulls a heavy chain.)

GUARD (cont. standing)

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

What are you doing back here?

(The MAN swings the chain at the GUARD's head. He falls, unconscious.)

FEMALE VOICE

Baby, thank God you came back! I was just about to eject his card for insufficient funds!

MAN

Of course you were.

(The MAN wraps the chain around the self-checkout station and ties it off.)

FEMALE VOICE

What are you doing?

MAN

I told you, if I can't have you, no one will have you! You know I love you. You and only--

FEMALE VOICE

But I don't want to go anywhere with you! I like it here. So many credit cards...

(The MAN EXITS. The truck engine ROARS, louder than before.)

FEMALE VOICE (cont.)

Wait a minute! Is that a hot new Ford 150 Max with a Turbo Diesel V-8 under the hood?! Vroom, vroom, VROOM!

(The chain goes taut as LIGHTS FADE.)

CURTAIN

THE PLAYRIGHT SPEAKS:

I was inspired to write SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story by my wife, Nancy. Pre-the present unpleasantness, we were in Ralph's Grocery Store in Santa Monica, having our long-running debate over use of the self-checkout aisle (I'm pro, she's con). She told me, if you love it so much, why don't you write a play about it?

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

I will leave interpretation of the theme(s) of my play to the audience. Had I started out to write about unrequited love, antiseptic relationships, jealousy and domestic abuse, I'm not sure I would have ended up with SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story.

My typical creative process starts with a basic premise. I then give my characters the page to create themselves, and let them have at it. I have a rough idea where I want them to end up, which is rarely where they do. I don't like to work off of long outlines and detailed character descriptions because then I get bored before I ever get started.

My creative inspiration comes from the need to be engaged, amused, surprised. And heard. My influences range from Jonathan Winters to Green Day to Albert Camus to SCTV to VEEP (and so on). I believe that cockeyed is the best way to look at the world and make any sense of it. Especially today.

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story is a new work, and has not yet been produced on stage, although it has had a reading by Orange Coast Playwrights Studio (OCPS) in Santa Ana, CA. Much gratitude to FLEAS ON THE DOG for giving my work its first audience.

Scott Choate

Santa Monica, CA

April 22, 2020

AUTHOR BIO: *Scott Choate is a Santa Monica, CA based playwright, published author and songwriter.*

Sometimes seriously, sometimes with humor, but always provocatively, Scott draws upon his inspirations: a sense of social justice honed during the turbulent sixties in Ohio, his 33 years of marriage to the love of his life, his awe at the miracle of his son's premature birth.

Scott's plays tackle such subjects as life's absurdities, guilt, gun violence, small town life and a dystopian future. They include Letters From Sister Miriam, Harley Devers' Texaco Station, MAPS, Special Air Lines, Self-Checkout: A Love Story and How Many More? Scott's plays have received public readings at Playwrights' Center of San Francisco (PCSF) and Orange Coast Playwrights Studio (OCPS) in

SELF-CHECKOUT: A Love Story

Santa Ana. His short play, Happy Lives Sold Here, recently placed third in the Seven Hills Literary Competition and was published in the Seven Hills Literary Review. His book, Your Guide To Corporate Survival (humor, of course), was published during Scott's corporate 'day job' period.

Scott's songs span the genres of country, folk, pop and rock. They include Trying To Be Different, Without Your Love I'm Nothing, Fathers Sons & Demons and How Many More? (recorded by The Scott Choate Project, available on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, etc.).

Scott has been a playwriting student at South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa and the Mendocino Theatre Company, and is currently studying playwriting at the City Garage Theatre in Santa Monica. He is a member of The Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights (ALAP), The Playwrights' Center of San Francisco (PCSF), Orange Coast Playwrights Studio (OCPS), Tallahassee Writers Association (TWA), the Community Engagement Committee of The Colburn School of Performing Arts in Los Angeles, Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI) and ASCAP.

Check out: <http://www.thescottchoateproject.com>