



THE TRICK IS TO SPILL YOUR GUTS FASTER THAN THE SNOW FALLS

BY

JUSTIN KARCHER

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes... A great title is one that rolls trippingly off the tongue. Maybe it gets a little cheeky, but ultimately it must encapsulate in totality the piece that is forth coming. The Trick Is To Spill Your Guts Faster Than The Snow Falls by Justin Karcher begins with a suspiciously innocent snowman doused in wine and two “Bohemians” chattering away on the streets of Buffalo, NY. As various oddities and quirky townspeople make their way through the streets and interact with our two clowns, what unveils is a unique love letter to a city and its people. Justin Karcher guides us on a tour of Buffalo, NY,*

through a glistening display of woes over climate change, the hatred of the Buffalo Bills, and even how subscribing to OnlyFans.com is a true act of community service. I may have never been to Buffalo, NY, but after reading Justin Karcher's piece I can imagine myself skating on the ice a little smoother. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

The Trick Is to Spill Your Guts Faster Than the Snow Falls

Buffalonians take to the streets and try to get their lives together after the Blizzard of '22.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PERSON #1.....Any gender/ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #2.....Any gender/ethnicity/race/age

CARL.....Male/any ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #3.....Any gender/ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #4.....Male/any ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #5.....Female/any ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #6..... Any gender/ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #7.....Female/any ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #8..... Any gender/ethnicity/race/age

PERSON #9..... Any gender/ethnicity/race/age

SNOWMAN

TIME: December 2022.

SETTING: A street in Buffalo, NY.

(As the lights come up, there is a lopsided snowman in the center of the stage. Wearing a scarf that's really just tinsel, two bottlecaps for eyes & clutching an empty bottle of red... the snowman looks as if he's covered in blood, but it's probably just the wine. There are two bohemian-looking people sitting on chairs next to him. They're smoking up, some beer at their feet. They are talking to CARL.)

PERSON #1

No Carl, I'm not giving you \$5 to eat the snow. *(beat)* And no, it's not gonna give you superpowers.

CARL

I think it might. Now hear me out. It was a once-in-a-generation storm, right?

PERSON #2

Sure... so you're saying that there might be something magical going on?

CARL

The snow is special. Doesn't it look different?

PERSON #1

From what? Other blizzards? If you stare at anything long enough, it starts glitching—

PERSON #2

And while you eating the snow and getting superpowers is a badass origin story, especially here. But no, you shouldn't eat it – especially that mud-covered pile you keep pointing to.

CARL

Someone will give me the money and then I will eat it and when I do, I'm gonna fly straight to you two. And you'll see.

(CARL exits. PERSON #1 and PERSON #2 quietly look off into the distance until PERSON #1 holds up a DVD.)

PERSON #1

I didn't need to buy this, but I gave into temptation *(laughs)*.

PERSON #2

Gimme a break. When Jesus was in the desert, the devil tried turning his chest cavity into a sauna. Now that's temptation.

PERSON #1

Fuck's sake, it's been a terrible week. Cut me some slack.

PERSON #2

You just couldn't resist the tantalizing assortment of DVDs by the register. Also, who even buys those things anymore? They gross me out.

PERSON #1

I already told you: I lost WIFI, but still have power, so I dusted off my old DVD player. Makes perfect sense to me. And also! What's the harm in throwing some extra money at an essential local establishment? The only place in this neighborhood, might I add, that's been open.

PERSON #2

We Never Close will outlive us all. That additional \$3 isn't gonna make or break them.

PERSON #1

Then maybe I just like the way it feels when I buy stuff that doesn't kill me.

PERSON #2

Fair enough but why this? (*grabs the DVD out of their hand, declares emphatically*) AIR BUD: SPIKES BACK. You gotta be kidding me? This is what you decided to buy? Over any of the other titles that were there. I mean, there was *Little Miss Sunshine*. (*beat*) Kinda insulting when you think about it... how they had that right on top. Like a big ole fuck you to everyone walking into that place. Look at us – we're a shivering sorry sunless lot (*beat*) but yeah, you should've gone with the indie movie. If I remember correctly, it's a good soundtrack and Michael Scott is in it (*hands back the DVD*).

PERSON #1

You mean Steve Carrell. (*beat*) And I wasn't feeling it. What can I say? This (*holds up DVD*) spoke to me. You just never know what you need until you see it.

(Suddenly the sound of music, PERSON #3 enters loudly listening to music on AirPods. They stop, take out only one AirPod.)

PERSON #3

You're like the first people I've seen since everything just sort of stopped. (*beat*) Cool snowman.

PERSON #1

It's not ours. We like him though.

PERSON #2

So we're just hanging out around him. Catching up. Talking to anyone who walks by. (*beat*) What are you up to?

PERSON #3

Getting out of my place, getting out of my brain. Vibing—

PERSON #1

Yeah, totally. Cheers to that. *(raises beer)*

PERSON #3

And I'm also tweeting in my head trying to come up with different ways to describe snow.

PERSON #2

Like the Eskimos.

PERSON #1

I don't think you can say that anymore.

PERSON #2

Oh. *(beat)* Well, what you got so far?

PERSON #3 *(thinks)*

Now think about this... how snow is like a dive bar you don't wanna be at and the quiet in-betweens from one song to the next, the milliseconds when you imagine unzipping all the cold around you and walking barefoot into memory when wow suddenly the roof is gone, and the hypothermic hand of a giant appears out of nowhere. He reaches down to pluck out the jukebox from its bluesy roots. How he holds it like a first-generation iPod and when he starts dancing through Buffalo, dandruff falls from his hair and covers everything we know and love.

PERSON #1

Fuck man. Imagine how noisy that would be. *(beat)* Ah, like the wind. I see what you did there.

PERSON #2

Y'all remember your first iPod? I felt like God, how I would just walk everywhere, and the weather didn't matter because I had thousands of songs at my fingertips. I don't know what happened. Maybe we all got spoiled and it's like I don't like music as much anymore.

PERSON #3

That's probably not true but might wanna take a hard look in the mirror. *(beat)* Thanks for listening.

(PERSON #3 exits.)

PERSON #1

Hmmm they were cool.

PERSON #2

Yeah, but I hate when that happens though. Someone dropping hard knowledge then leaving like they didn't just shove a knife in you. I guess that's Buffalo for ya, always something to think about that you shouldn't bury deep inside but you do anyway. *(pause)* So I can understand impulse buying the first *Air Bud*. The nostalgia factor, it's probably the better movie and it's a dog playing basketball... which is a little more interesting than volleyball.

PERSON #1

Look, maybe if they had the first *Air Bud*, I would've bought it. But they didn't. It's not like there was a lot to choose from. We Never Close isn't really known for their movie selection. *(laughs)* When corner stores actually have DVDs for sale, it's always like a stack of five and the oddest mix of titles. Sequels without origins. Some bizarro kids' movie and then something apocalyptic.

PERSON #2

What's funny is that they didn't have any DVDs the other night and that actually makes me happy.

PERSON #1

Why's that?

PERSON #2

Because everything else is closed, which means there are no deliveries. So the only reasonable explanation is that there's some saintly DVD deliveryman wandering this winter wasteland and randomly dropping terrible movies off at stubborn corner stores. I guess we can take solace in that, right? When everything falls apart, the grid is grounded, there will always be at least someone out there making sure there are shitty movies for us to watch while we're dying.

PERSON #1

Can't you just let me be pleasantly surprised? That I found something that made me chuckle? Yes, maybe the thought of watching an adorable dog play volleyball seems like a dream away from it all. A fairytale on the beach.

PERSON #2 *(gets really close)*

Don't be fooled by this winter storm. In fifty years, Buffalo might have the best beaches in America. There'll be thousands of superpowered dogs playing volleyball along our lakeshores and everyone will forget what the crunching of ice sounds like or what's worthwhile anymore—

(Suddenly there's some commotion off stage and two people enter, a couple)

PERSON #5

Gimme some space!

PERSON #4 *(following behind)*

C'mon, how many times do I have to say I'm sorry?

PERSON #5

I didn't ask for sorries, I asked for some fuckin' space. Which means a walk. By myself. In the cold.

PERSON #4

It's too dangerous out here... I don't want you walking by yourself in the street because no one has shoveled.

PERSON #5

I can take care of myself. What's so dangerous about out here? Everyone's just trying to have a good time. *(stops dead in their tracks)* Like these two. *(beat)* Hey, throw me a beer.

(Beer is thrown, PERSON #5 sits down)

PERSON #4

Oh great. Now you're gonna start drinking. On top of being upset with me. This is gonna be a long—

PERSON #2

Hey now, not to stick my nose where it doesn't belong, but you should probably stop talking and let them have a beer.

PERSON #1

You should probably have one too. (*throws beer*)

PERSON #2

So um been a long week for you two or what?

PERSON #4 (*ignoring*)

Weird-looking snowman. You build him?

PERSON #1

We don't really build much of anything.

PERSON #2

We're, um, tailgating.

(A Bills fan enters and is walking behind everyone but listening closely.)

PERSON #5

Tailgating for what? There's no Bills game.

(The Bills fans rudely enters the conversation.)

PERSON #6

Go Bills! There's always a game to think about if you're a real fan.

PERSON #4

Like don't get me wrong, I bleed Bills blue, but—

PERSON #1

You don't end every conversation with "Go Bills", right? Then you're one of the okay ones. Like you're not wrapping up at the dentist and your teeth are still ringing with Novocain, but you still slobber your way through fandemonium as you walk out the door somewhere in the Southtowns.

PERSON #5 (*to PERSON #6*)

So where you going?

PERSON #6

Thirsty Buffalo! I think they're back open. I mean I hope so... meeting up with some friends. We're gonna celebrate because the blizzard is over, and we can go back to talking about what matters: Josh

Allen. This is our year! *(beat)* Don't tell my friends *(leans in closer)* but I'm nervous about Josh's elbow. Something's still wrong with it and you know the elbow is important to throw. It connects everything. Imagine if the Skyway or the Scajauada disappears during rush hour and all these cars fall into the earth. Scary shit right? *(beat)* Can't think that way or they'll kick me out. *(notices the Air Bud DVD)* Woah, I love those movies! Josh Allen is like Buffalo's Air Bud... our feisty golden retriever, no weather is gonna keep him indoors, he gotta run around the backyard then save the day in the end. Mmm all that snow in his fur. *(beat)* Go Bills!

(PERSON #6 exits.)

PERSON #2

They're like cockroaches you can't get away from. When Buffalo is vaporized off the face of the Earth, when all the storms converge as one over Niagara Square, when the dust finally settles, there will still be the Bills Mafia, maybe a little hollow-eyed, maybe a little more radioactive, partying in the doppler debris of where the stadium used to be. *(laughs)*

(Pause)

PERSON #5

Lemme say this, give me a dude that talks about the Bills nonstop rather than some horn ball every time the sky gets gray. *(beats)* I don't know how people get so horny whenever there are winter warnings.

PERSON #4

We're having a nice conversation with our new friends and here you are going down that road again.

PERSON #2

What road is that? No secrets here.

PERSON #5

So you know what he was doing when the whole city shut down?

PERSON #1

What?

PERSON #5

He's been spending a lot of money on OnlyFans.

PERSON #4

It's not how it sounds. I was only subscribing to people living in Western New York. You know, Bills Mafia babes with big backyards and plenty of room to play. Josh Allen jerseys slipping off their shoulders and the best mood lighting for upgrading anyone's vibe. \$20 for some dildo play and I'm doing my civic duty. It's the least I can do for my beaten down neighbors who, despite being snowed in, are still putting out great content. They need the money. This is what it means to be a good citizen.

PERSON #5

You are so full of yourself. You're not being a good anything. You're just horny for your neighbors. You get off on thinking you may run into them in real life, like the Wegmans sub line or maybe

they're your server at Jack Rabbit. I know your filthy mind... how someone will bring you a Mimosa one morning and you'll recognize their face or the way their ass shimmies as they walk back to the bar. And you'll look around the table and know that everyone you're with is living in the dark, living in ignorance, that this waitress has a whole other life, the truer life, and you're somehow part of this club. A club of secrets and you're all ears.

PERSON #4

Hey now I was also subscribing to people I'm not sexually attracted to. *(beat)* If more people were like me maybe the world wouldn't be going down the shitter.

PERSON #5

Oh my hero. *(beat)* Shut the fuck up.

PERSON #1

Let's cool it everyone, for at least a second. I think that's how we prevail.

PERSON #2

You know it's interesting because Buffalo doesn't have a lot of people in comparison to like New York or Chicago. So there may not be a lot of OnlyFans competition. If you can get to the top of the 716, you're likely to stay there for as long as you want. I mean, until—

PERSON #1

Until what?

PERSON #2

Like what happened this week, what's happening right now, this is just gonna be more and more common. These storms, right? So like, there'll be more of us here. In Buffalo. A helluva a lot more desperate people in our tiny streets, our tiny sheets, and like what the hell did our dumbass mayor say. *(beat)* Ah, that we'll be a sanctuary of climate refugees. I don't know what that ultimately means, but I do know for sure that that means more OnlyFans accounts.

PERSON #1

Obviously, you've given this much thought.

PERSON #5

What a future to look forward to.

(Suddenly a voice offstage.)

PERSON #7 *(voice)*

Hello? Excuse me but wondering if any of you would like to buy some flowers. Maybe for your girlfriend or boyfriend.

(Young girl enters holding a bunch of flowers.)

PERSON #5 *(to PERSON #4)*

Hey Good Samaritan Moneybags, you want to buy some flowers from this girl? Because I know how much you want to help those in need. Or does she have to show more skin?

PERSON #4

An unlucky time not to have any cash on me.

PERSON #1

Those flowers like splashes of color with all this white. Like they don't belong.

PERSON #2

Unnatural. *(takes a closer look at the flowers)* Hey, so they all have price tags on 'em.

PERSON #7

Um—

PERSON #5

Did you... steal them?

PERSON #4

I don't recall any florists being looted.

PERSON #1

Are they even around anymore? There was one down the street, but they closed.

PERSON #2

Maybe no one wants to be florists anymore, like not dedicate their entire lives to just one thing... something you depend on consistent weather for and if everything is erratic then what hope is there left for beauty or things that smell nice.

(Pause)

PERSON #7

I stole these, okay? One of the looters but before you judge me harshly, know that I have a good reason.

PERSON #5

Why steal flowers though? *(beat)* Is there even a secondhand market for it? No one's really out and about and flowers die if you don't move them fast.

PERSON #4

I can think of a million other things I'd steal before flowers. No offense.

PERSON #7

Because they deserve to be out in the world and not imprisoned in a tiny shop. Or at least that's what my dad told me. *(in gruffer "dad" voice)*. *Sometimes you have to steal sweetness when no one's looking. The only chance we get and is it really looting when everything's already been taken away from us one way or another?*

PERSON #1

She's got a point. I think I'm in love.

PERSON #2

Who exactly? Her or her dad? *(laughs)*

PERSON #7

Not to mention he's trapped in a wheelchair attached to an oxygen tank. COPD. And all he does is look out the window counting each snowflake... I was pretty sure he wouldn't make it because the power kept flickering on and off and there were all these reports of people with breathing problems having to be rushed to the hospital or else it's a death sentence—

(Suddenly a voice offstage.)

PERSON #8 *(voice)*

Hey! Are those flowers? *(PERSON #8 enters)* Thank God. I thought so. I live way at the tippy top floor of that apartment building over there *(points)* and I was leaning out the window smoking a cigarette when I saw you walking down the street. Looked like you were holding flowers, but I wasn't sure, so I grabbed binoculars to get a closer look—

PERSON #5

Binoculars?

PERSON #8

I know that might sound bad, but I'm a birdwatcher. You'd be surprised at all the different types in the city.

PERSON #4

And you need flowers because?

PERSON #8

Yeah, ah, about that. Not sure how to say this, but I just had sex for the first time in a while. And it was with someone I actually like. A good friend and we finally connected after all these years. I guess the storm broke our loneliness to pieces and we helped each other pick 'em up. And I just want something romantic to commemorate the evening. So the flowers, are they for sale?

PERSON #7

Um yes.

PERSON #8

Thank you, thank you! *(PERSON #8 buys some flowers)* If it weren't for this storm, I may have died alone.

(PERSON #8 exits.)

PERSON #1

That was a weird thing to say.

PERSON #2

Kind of a hot take because of you know, the people who HAVE died. And then to fly off like a bird.

PERSON #5

Give 'em a break. They're in love. I thought it was cute.

PERSON #4

Hm.

PERSON #7

So where was I? Eventually my dad dozes off and it's a relief not hearing him mutter numbers under his half-breath anymore (*PERSON #4 runs off but no one seems to notice because of the story*) and after wrapping him in a dozen blankets, I go outside and the whole world seems like a fist aimed at me... and I start running but can't get away fast enough. I don't know where I am but see a flower

PERSON #7 (*CONT'D*)

shop and something comes over me, but no alarm goes off. Now I'm here. Maybe I can get my dad something nice.

PERSON #1

I'm sorry about your dad.

PERSON #2

I'll help you steal more flowers.

(PERSON #4 returns and is out of breath.)

PERSON #4

Sorry I went to the ATM. (*To PERSON #7*) Take all my money and gimme the rest. (*There's an exchange of money and flowers and PERSON #4 turns to PERSON #5 and hands them over.*) I, uh, felt compelled to get these for you.

(PERSON #4 and PERSON #5 hug and semi-Irish goodbye.)

PERSON #7

Um bye? Your friends just gonna take off like that?

PERSON #1

Oh. We just met them.

PERSON #2

Yeah, that just how these things go. (*beats*) At least you sold all your flowers.

PERSON #7

I wasn't expecting that. It's a pleasant surprise.

PERSON #1 (*to PERSON #2*)

See? It's nice being pleasantly surprised.

PERSON #2 (*to PERSON #7*)

Now for the most important question of the night, what are your thoughts about *Air Bud*?

PERSON #7

The movie about the dog that plays football?

PERSON #1

He plays a different sport in each film.

PERSON #7

I think he's cute... I don't remember much about the film though.

PERSON #2

Nor should you. It's just *(beat)* so post-apocalyptic. It scares me.

PERSON #1

Jesus, you serious? How?

PERSON #2

Because you know how when weird weather events happen, animals know way beforehand, like they're clairvoyant or something and I imagine the more these events happen, the more powerful our pets are gonna get. And eventually, there'll be Air Buds everywhere but that's not a cute or a good thing because it means the world is ending.

PERSON #7

You know... my cat was freaking out before the first snowfall. Like he went and hid under the old recliner.

PERSON #1

See what I mean?

PERSON #2

That doesn't prove anything! It's not like her cat is hitting home runs now.

PERSON #7

I suppose I could get him a little cat nip bat and we'll see what he can do.

(Suddenly a voice offstage.)

PERSON #9 *(voice)*

Rufus! Rufus! C'mon boy. Where are you? *(PERSON #9 enters)* Have you seen my dog? I'm always so good about not letting him outside but I got so excited tonight because a plow actually came down my street. It was like, I don't know, seeing a dinosaur come up your driveway. I was in awe and left the door open for too long and Rufus, who is senile by the way... waltzed right out and like I knew it was happening but couldn't do anything about it. He couldn't have gotten very far... would you please help me look for him?

PERSON #7

Oh my God, of course!

PERSON #1

All we got is each other, so what are we waiting for? Let's go find *(beat)* Air Bud.

PERSON #9

Air Bud?

PERSON #2

It's a long story. *(beat)* Is that someone flying in the sky?

(They all exit as the wind begins to howl and as the light shines on the snowman who begins to move. Man or snow, we don't know. He speaks.)

SNOWMAN

I had the strangest dream the other night... so I was floating above Buffalo, maybe I was flying but I don't remember any wings... and Buffalo was just this giant ice rink, like there were no buildings or houses. Then suddenly a whole bunch of people appeared, and they were skating and wherever they went on the ice, they would leave like a streak of color. Some left blue streaks. Others, red streaks... green streaks... and the dream version of me knew what this was all about. You know how they say that every person has a different colored aura? Well, it was like that. But their auras were filtering through the ice skates... like paint ball guns but for your feet. Eventually there were so many streaks that the whole ice rink started resembling something... I can't remember what, but I know I found it beautiful.

(Lights go out.) _

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I was approached by Alleyway Theatre to be a part of their annual Quickies. Usually the festival involves ten-minute plays that playwrights have already written. But 2023 would be different. I would only have one week to write a short play and they wanted me to incorporate all ten actors with a focus on the theme of climate change. A big undertaking in such a short amount of time! But I knew exactly what I wanted to do. Something I've wanted to do my whole playwrighting career. That is, accurately translating my experience of walking Buffalo at night. All the beautiful dialogues you drift into. How oftentimes you get to the epiphany-filled meat of something so quickly and then it just ends. And you move on. But what about climate change? "The Trick Is to Spill Your Guts Faster Than the Snow Falls" was heartbreakingly inspired by the Blizzard of 2022 and, in particular, my nights walking the streets just after the storm when the snow removal crews were able to get to work, and we as a city started picking up the pieces and reconnecting with an idea of community. I talked to so many people on these walks, every one of them leaving an impression on my soul. I also overheard*

conversations. I saw poems happening in real time. What it means to be a good neighbor coming to terms with desperation, abandonment and depression. I experienced strength, hope and resiliency. The best parts of my city in the worst of times. It is, in the end, a love letter starting from the bottom.

AUTHOR BIO: Justin Karcher (Twitter: @justin_karcher, Bluesky: justinkarcher.bsky.social) is a Best of the Net- and Pushcart-nominated poet and playwright born and raised in Buffalo, NY. He is the author of several books, including *Tailgating at the Gates of Hell* (Ghost City Press, 2015). Recent playwriting credits include *The Birth of Santa* (American Repertory Theater of WNY) and “The Trick Is to Spill Your Guts Faster Than the Snow Falls” (Alleyway Theatre).