

**CRASHED**

A Monodrama in One Act

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Sole Character

Tristan Wanless:

74-year-old homeless man

Place

A city park

Time

Present

**ACT I**

Scene 1

Setting: A park bench flanked by a large round trashcan and a shopping cart filled with disheveled belongings. It's night time.

At Rise: Spotlight fades in on the park bench showing Tristan Wanless asleep covered with newspapers. After a few seconds, the spotlight fades out to a blackout. Some five seconds later, the loud sound of a car crash is followed by tormented screaming as Tristan jolts to a sit up position at the same time the lights up the stage.

Aaaargh!

*(Huffs and puffs looking toward the audience with hand over his mouth)*

Oh my God! I just had another one of those dreadful nightmares!

*(Breathing heavily)*

I hate these nightmares! They haunt me like fiends coming out of the dark shadows of my mind. And they've been recurring every night in the last couple of weeks.

*(Pauses long with a preoccupied expression)*

I wonder if it's an omen; a sign that I'm about to crash out of life.

*(Pauses)*

But the truth is that I've had many nightmares in my life; more than I care to remember.

Oh, who am I kidding? My whole life has been a living nightmare! From the moment I was born my life has been shrouded in darkness and despair.

But these nightmares that I've been experiencing whenever I manage to get some sleep, these are real in-

your-face torments that harass me to the bone marrow of my being.

It happens every night; like a clockwork partition dividing my miserable daytime homeless existence and the terrifying car crash nightmares I endure in my fleeting hours of slumber.

*(Pauses)*

Sometimes a single event in a man's life can turn his existence into a perpetual nightmare.

*(Stands up and paces about)*

Ah, why do I bother talking out loud anyway? There is never anyone around to listen to me.

*(Halts pacing and pauses pensively)*

Or is there?

*(Pauses)*

Yes..., yes, of course there are plenty of other beings all around me!

*(Points out toward the audience from R to L)*

Yes, look at you, and you, and you; you're all there listening to me. Who do you think you're fooling? I can't see you, but I know you're all out there in the unseen world.

I first heard about the unseen world from the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats who said that "the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream."

*(Pauses)*

Now my wretched loneliness has proven to me the existence of the unseen world.

I know there are all sorts of invisible beings in the roundabouts; always eavesdropping trying to learn another

peccadillo about us; yes, all of us, me (*points to the audience from L to R*), you, and you, and you.

*(Pauses sneering at the audience)*

Yeah, I can tell you think I'm crazy, don't you? You probably think that my forlorn existence demands that I concoct imaginative beings I can relate to in order to assuage my aloneness.

But even if that is the case, so what?

Everyone needs to relate to someone. And for those of us who have become the human waste of society, the need for any kind of companionship, even if it's invisible to the naked eye, it's a necessity for psychological survival.

The experts in the medical community assert that homeless people suffer from "mental health issues." But the truth is that everyone, to some degree or another, suffers from mental health issues. But of course, no one likes to admit it.

Me, I couldn't hide my psychological and emotional disability even if I tried. And why would I want to anyway? Madness is the medication for my decrepit state of being.

*(Pauses sneering at the audience)*

Yeah, I know you think I'm a real basket case, don't you?

And maybe you're right. But you know what? If you lived on the streets without any money, friends, or anyone who cares about you, you'd go crazy, too.

If you lived like I do, you'd learn quickly how to turn insanity into a survival mechanism.

But sometimes it works the other way around; I mean, when homelessness becomes the survival mechanism with which to endure insanity.

It sounds like a crazy contradiction, doesn't it? Well, that happens to be my case. Shortly after I went mad with grief, I became homeless as a means to cope.

The unbearable suffering led the way to black-pitch hopelessness in a future I could not bear to contemplate.

And once my life turned into an unforgiving existence, a subtle kind of madness developed within to assuage my pain.

Soon, disillusionment creeps in and the next thing you know you've forsaken the will to live without even noticing.

But don't let my particular case hoodwinked you into believing that homelessness is but a byproduct of untreated mental health issues alone.

Oh hell no! There's much more to it.

The vast majority of street dwellers I've encountered in my own journey through homelessness were cast into it by extreme poverty.

Their original anguish was not emotional disturbance; it was economic despair.

And since madness is arguably the brain's best defense mechanism to escape from a tormented self, a desperate human being goes mad just to be able to endure intolerable hardships.

Of course the dim-witted pundits blame mental health as the underlying cause of the growing homeless population crisis.

Idiots! In most cases it's the other way around. First you become homeless, and then you go crazy as a means to cope with social isolation in abject poverty.

*(Pauses pensively)*

Yeah, I'm crazy all right. But it's not because I can feel you out there watching me and listening to every word I say. Don't assume I'm crazy because I know you're out there following me like a haunting shadow of my ill-kismet.

I can feel all of you (*points at the audience from R to L*), and you, and you. I do know for a fact that you are

around me all the time lurking in the darkness of the ethereal world my eyes cannot see.

*(Pauses long then addresses the audience)*

What did you say?

Oh, you want to know how I can possibly be sure that you are out there if I cannot see you.

Hah, you invisible idiots. The fact that I can't see you doesn't mean I cannot sense your presence.

*(Pauses then addresses the audience)*

What? Oh please, don't be silly.

Now you want an explanation and evidence to back up my assertion that I can sense the invisible world. Is that what it is? Alright..., I'll explain it to you.

*(Pauses while pacing about)*

Let me start by asking you a question: have you ever seen an x-ray shooting out of a radiography machine that produces images of your bones?

Well, the answer is self-evident: no, of course you haven't; and yet, the image proves the x-ray exists. So there you have it. Not everything that exists is visible to the naked eye.

*(Halts pacing suddenly then turns toward the audience)*

What? You're telling me that you're not convinced yet! Seriously? O.K... then let me ask you another question that shall clear your doubts.

*(Resumes pacing about)*

What do you think happens when you turn on the radio? The sounds of music, news, and obnoxious advertisement don't suddenly fill the airspace out of nowhere.

It's not like it's a magical trick intended to baffle your imagination.

And if you keep rotating the radio knob, different radio stations come up as airwaves frequencies change.

There is nothing paranormal about it. German physicist Heinrich Rudolf Hertz conclusively proved the existence of electromagnetic radio waves in 1886. It's physics 101.

Now, back to my question: have you ever seen a radio wave wiggling around anywhere? No, of course you haven't, even though they are the longest of all electromagnetic waves and they dance around us all the time. And yet, you've never seen a single one.

So, there you have it.

I've proven beyond a reasonable doubt that you, all of you invisible beings around me, you exist just as x-rays, sound waves, and numerous other examples I haven't bothered to take the time to mention.

You've never fooled me for a minute. I know you are all out there watching me and listening to my words all the time, whether I can see you or not.

*(Pauses then speaks reverentially)*

I rest my case your honor.

And now that I've proven my argument with scientific evidence, let me continue addressing all of you, my invisible audience, since nobody else will listen to me anyway.

*(Pauses introspectively)*

Oh yes, my nightmares; I was telling you about the horrors I've been experiencing in my sleep of late.

These weird terrifying dreams always seem to follow the same pattern: first there is the anticipatory anguish of watching the fast approaching headlights speeding up in my direction.

After being blinded by the incoming bright headlights, I'm deafened by the terrorizing clatter of crushing metals.

Then, I feel the sharp shards of broken glass slicing through my flesh; like shrapnel of a grenade thrown in the trenches of my life.

*(Pauses)*

Not sure how it happens, but the broken glass that slashes through my body feels more like brutal blades ripping my guilt-ridden soul asunder.

It's a really odd nightmare. Not only I experience physical pain and heart-searing angst, but also overwhelming vertigo when the car flips over multiple times. By the time it lands on its roof, my head spins faster than the wheels gyrate in the empty space above.

*(Pauses retrospectively then sighs)*

By golly, it's a terrifying sensation! It feels like twirling inside an ominous time tunnel leading to a hellish destination in a bleak future.

And when the haunting silence settles in the darkness of my world; my world that like the car has been turned upside down, the rancid stench of death windstorms through the tragic nightmarish scene. That's when I wake up huffing and puffing consumed by utter desolation.

*(Pauses)*

It's such a ghastly experience; and it's so vivid!

I wish I could find a way to get rid of these nightmares; or at least have different ones for a change.

I don't even care about having pleasant dreams or no dreams at all for that matter.

Oh no, I've reached a point in which all I long for are different kinds of nightmares; any kind that's not a car crash.

I'd welcome nightmares of being chased by a ferocious grizzly bear in an open meadow; or drowning in the ocean encircled by famished sharks; or even better yet, standing

in front of a firing squad dreadfully anticipating the blast that would put me out of my misery for good.

But nope, not a chance in hell! It's always the same blinding headlights swerving off in my direction in a high speed collision course.

I start perspiring; my facial muscles tense up; and my sweaty hands lose the grip of the steering wheel.

As the looming head-on car crash is about to reach the moment of impact, in a split second the newsreel of my entire life plays in my mind's eye; right before the car cartwheels into a thunderous blast. Then, the silent darkness settles in and it remains for years to come.

*(Pauses and then addresses the audience)*

You've certainly had some dreadful nightmares, too, haven't you? Of course you have! Isn't it an awful experience?

Even after waking up and aware that it was just a nightmare, the harrowing experience lingers on all day long; or in my case, for years.

And if that were not bad enough, I always have a hard time falling asleep again no matter how exhausted I am.

Man, it's a real drag!

And by the time the Sun rises, all sort of people and creatures start coming by: joggers, walkers talking on their phones, screaming children, barking dogs, squealing squirrels, cawing crows... How can a homeless man sleep?

And to add madness to the cacophony of auditory distress, the city traffic noise gets louder than the horn section of an out-of-tune high school marching band.

Oh well, in spite of all these untoward circumstances, I still have to find a way to give my achy old body some rest. I've got to survive another rough day of lonely homelessness.

Survival is the key element. For a man my age; any age, really, not having a home, a family, friends, or financial resources is a life not worth living.

(Pauses)

There was a time when I could go to the library to take a nap in the reading room.

Oh, those good old respite days...

At that time, even the friendly librarian greeted me by name whenever I showed up: "Good morning Mr. Wanless," she welcomed me with a smile in her face.

And after getting much needed rest from grueling sleepless nights, she'd bid me farewell with the same affability she welcomed me in: "Have a good rest of your day, sir."

But in recent years they've gotten very stringent with library use regulations.

I suspect they were implemented in order to shun off smelly people like me away from their clean-cut patrons.

Now they no longer let homeless people hang out in their cozy reading lounge. It was a great perk that I took for granted.

Alas, like everything else, change happened.

Last time they showed me the way out, a new library employee approached me, very cordially mind you, to let me know that the library was not meant to be a homeless napping center.

"Excuse me sir, but you've been napping for hours on this couch, and you've been doing this for weeks in a roll," he said gently nudging me awake.

"Yes," I replied, "And that's because this is the only place and time that I can get some sleep."

But the young fellow was unfazed by my subtle attempt to elicit sympathy as he remained true to his professional

duty: "I'm very sorry, sir, but these are the new library rules."

I looked at him in the eye with a timid smile, and then I picked up my two plastic bags lying on the burgundy carpeted floor before walking out of the building into the cold street.

As I stepped out I wondered whether a person who becomes homeless is no longer an official member of the public or calling a library "public library" is a misnomer.

*(Pauses then sighs)*

Oh well, I shouldn't grumble like an ungrateful fuddy-duddy. After all, I still can sneak in to use the restroom; and that's a much needed perk for an old homeless man.

*(Pauses while gathering the newspapers that fell on the ground and places them on the bench)*

I think I'm going to try to fall asleep again.

I wonder what time it is. I don't want to be awake for hours until the first rays of daylight chase me away from my bench bed. Even a quick catnap would do me good.

*(Lies down and covers himself with the newspaper. After tossing and turning for awhile he sits up abruptly)*

Nah, there is no point in trying. I've been through this many times before to no avail. You can't force yourself to sleep, especially on a hard surface.

*(Pauses then speaks wistfully)*

Oh boy, do I ever miss the days when I slept in a nice and comfy king size bed with clean white cotton sheets under a fluffy comforter.

In those days I used to sleep like a baby in a rocking cradle; every night, for seven, eight, and sometimes even nine hours; and I had good dreams, too.

Now, whenever I manage to get a couple of hours of sleep, all I have are the damn nightmares that haunt me like wicked stalkers.

But those days of restful night sleep happened a long time ago; so long ago I'm amazed I can even remember them.

*(Pauses)*

I have to say that in spite of my old age and regular lack of sleep, I still have a pretty darn good memory.

Really, I can remember way back when I was a child; and more vividly yet, when I was an ambitious young man.

*(Stands up and speaks with bravado)*

Back in the day of my youth, I had plenty of stamina and the bravado of a...; a daring Spanish matador, like that one I saw in Madrid many years ago.

I felt like I could take life's bull by the horns and ride the beast as if it were a domesticated pony.

I kid you not, in my younger years I had some serious "cojones de acero"; balls of steel, that is.

Yeah, I lived my life as if I were a most daring bullfighter showing off my skills in the bullring daring the beast to charge at me as I wielded my "muleta."

*(Moves about imitating a toreador wielding his cape)*

In my head I could see and hear the cheering spectators yelling "olé" every time I made an elegant bold move in the packed arena.

*(Pauses)*

But not all in attendance were my fans. Many came with the expectation of witnessing the possibility that I might get gored by the bull.

Well, of course you know that I am speaking metaphorically.

Mine was a different kind of arena. It was the field of academia where I was an alpha intellectual matador to be reckoned with; and I didn't take any bull from some of my pretentious academic colleagues.

I was a studious man dedicated to my scholarly work and destined to make something out of my life; or as the popular cultural saying goes, "to become someone."

Yes, I was determined to conquer the world with acute intellectual prowess and sheer willpower.

There was no "Toro Bravo" that was going to intimidate me in the bullring of academia.

Oh hell no! I held a mighty sword in one hand and I masterfully wielded a defying red cape in the other with flawless dexterity.

*(Pauses while pantomiming a bullfighting act)*

Never had I any doubt that I was born to succeed.

I knew I'd achieve my goals and overcome all the challenges in my life...; well..., most of them anyway. Some overwhelmed me to the core of my being, especially...

*(Pauses abruptly at the sound of approaching footsteps, then looks toward the audience)*

Did you hear that?

Who could be walking around here at this time?

*(Pauses looking apprehensively as the footsteps get louder)*

It must be the cops coming to shoo me away again.

Damn! Why can't they behave like traditional cops and go get a midnight doughnut snack instead?

*(Starts shoving the newspaper in the shopping cart)*

I'd better skedaddle before they get here.

*(Pushes the shopping cart toward UR as lights fade out)*

