

# **WAYS TO BE HAPPY**

(Formerly “Real True Crime”)

By  
David Lee White

# WAYS TO BE HAPPY

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WAYS TO BE HAPPY

*For the good folks at Vivid Stage.  
And, as always, for Allison & Nick.*

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

*Ways to Be Happy* was originally produced as an audio play in March, 2020 by Vivid Stage with the following cast.

Harry Patrick Christian\*† as Peter Penguin & Barry

Noreen Farley\* as Doreen

Becca McLarty† as Maddie

Scott McGowan\*† as Longhofer

Jason Szamreta\*† as Charly

Emaline Williams\* as Claire

Director: Laura Ekstrand\*†

Sound Designer: Jeff Knapp

\* Member of the Vivid Stage ensemble

† Member of the Actors' Equity Association

CAST. 3 Men, 3 Women

All roles can be played by actors of any race or ethnicity.

**PETER PENGUIN** M 50s-70s. Popular children's icon. Actor also plays Barry.

**MADDIE** F 40s. Works at a Run 'n Go. Never finished her thesis.

**DOREEN** F 70s. Doesn't smoke anymore so get off her back.

**CHARLY** M 30s-40s. A writer, but not really. Robs places.

**LONGHOFER** M 50s. Media Studies professor. Dates his students.

**CLAIRE** F 20s. College student. Musician. Totally loves death.

**BARRY** M 50s Former child actor. Actor also plays Peter Penguin.

Time: Ten years from now. Or maybe five. Or one. Or it might take place right now.

Place: A convenience store, Peter Penguin Land, a college campus, a cabin.

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# WAYS TO BE HAPPY

ACT I  
SCENE 1

*Lights come up n Peter Penguin – a man in a giant Penguin costume. He carries a portable amplifier and a microphone. He addresses the audience.*

**PETER.** Hello, kids! I'm Peter Penguin! How swell to see all of you here, at Peter Penguin Playland! While you're waiting for the park to open, Peter Penguin – that's me – is gonna lead you in a sing-along. So, if you know how it goes, you know what to do! (*Sings.*)

*“Oh, what makes the sunshine in the sky?  
What makes that tear of joy in my eye?  
What makes the blackbird take wing and fly?  
It's magic, it's magic, it's magic.*

*What makes the leaves change color in fall?  
What makes a baby so precious and small?  
What makes the toddler learn how to crawl?  
It's magic, it's magic, it's magic.*

*Bees buzz  
Birds sing  
Summer gives way  
To Spring  
What's possible?  
Anything!  
It's magic, it's magic, it's magic!”*

The park is about to open, kids. A land of joy and fun awaits. Run, play, obey your parents, and have fun. Remember, this place is magic.

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### SCENE 2

*The Run 'n Go – a 24-hour convenience store. MADDIE is behind the counter looking at her laptop. DOREEN enters in a rush.*

**MADDIE.** Finally.

**DOREEN.** I'm here...I'm here...

**MADDIE.** I didn't think you were gonna make it.

**DOREEN.** Sorry.

**MADDIE.** This is no fun without you.

**DOREEN.** I said I was sorry. Jesus. Both my hips are plastic. It takes me awhile. (*Maddie clicks on the television. They both dig lottery tickets out of their pockets. We hear the television.*)

**ANNOUNCER.** And that's today's news! Corruption, sexual deviance, and nihilism! It's so insane, it almost feels fictional! But let's move on to tonight's pick 5 jackpot which is now up to an unbelievable 80 million dollars!

**DOREEN.** You know after taxes it comes out to something like 30 million.

**MADDIE.** Because that would suck only having 30 million.

**ANNOUNCER.** And here are tonight's numbers!

**DOREEN.** Come on, baby. Mama needs health coverage.

**ANNOUNCER.** And the first number is (*Pause.*) FIVE!

**DOREEN.** Well, crap.

**MADDIE.** Shoot! (*Maddie turns off the TV.*) And I was so close last week! I had four...FOUR...out of the five. I'm getting close.

**DOREEN.** Let's not get carried away.

**MADDIE.** I'm 40 years old and I work at Run 'n Go. If I want to get carried away, I'll get carried away!

**DOREEN.** So, it's safe to say you're in a bad mood.

**MADDIE.** Why am I still here, Doreen? This was just supposed to be a temporary job while I finished my thesis.

**DOREEN.** Which was called...

**MADDIE.** "The Effect of Systemic Inequalities on Individuals in Institutional Environments Dependent on Consumer Interaction."

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**DOREEN.** Wow. I fell asleep and woke up three times while you were telling me the title.

**MADDIE.** And then I figured I'd stay here while did some meaningful advocacy and volunteer work. Then the world went to hell and everything changed. And I thought "Eventually everything will get back to normal." But it didn't. Things just kept getting worse. I still haven't finished my thesis. It's on a CD-ROM. I'd have to hire someone just to print it.

**DOREEN.** You know what you need to do?

**MADDIE.** Don't say "Think outside the box." I hate that.

**DOREEN.** I was gonna say "Hand me a cigarette."

**MADDIE.** You don't smoke.

**DOREEN.** I just want to hold it! Don't judge. I know grown women that still have teddy bears. You know what your problem is?

**MADDIE.** (*Handing her a cigarette.*) Tell me.

**DOREEN.** You think too much.

**MADDIE.** When did being thoughtful become a character flaw?

**DOREEN.** I don't know. Why don't you spend a year or two wondering about it?

**MADDIE.** Look at the people running the country! You know how much money they have? Billions! I make minimum wage. They're criminals that spend all their money on yachts, hotels, and porn stars!

**DOREEN.** So, what are you gonna do about it? Not that I have anything against whining. Hell, I'm a pro. But where does it get you? We fought. We lost. The fire went out.

**MADDIE.** I know, I know, you're right.

**DOREEN.** Thank God. That was our worst fight. I'm out of here.

**MADDIE.** That wasn't much of a visit.

**DOREEN.** Are you kidding? This was my big outing for the day. You exhaust me.

**MADDIE.** Love you.

**DOREEN.** Suck it.

**MADDIE.** Bye.

**DOREEN.** Bye. (*Doreen exits. Maddie picks up her book and begins reading again. After a few moments, CHARLY runs in brandishing a gun.*)

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*He is wearing a Peter Penguin head over his own head, although he is NOT the same actor from Scene 1.)*

**CHARLY.** Get behind the counter!

**MADDIE.** Jesus Christ! *(Maddie raises her hands.)*

**CHARLY.** Behind the counter!

**MADDIE.** I am behind the counter.

**CHARLY.** Shut up! *(Pause.)* Now I forgot what I was going to say.

**MADDIE.** You want the money from the register.

**CHARLY.** Thank you! *(Maddie opens the register.)* And put all the cash in a bag!

**MADDIE.** Paper or plastic?

**CHARLY.** Put a paper bag inside a plastic one!

**MADDIE.** Okay! *(Maddie reaches for a bag but her hand lingers under the counter for a moment.)*

**CHARLY.** Did you just press that button?

**MADDIE.** What button?

**CHARLY.** That button that I know is under the counter that calls the police! Did you just press the under the counter police caller button? *(Suddenly, Maddie flings the bag of cash in Charly's face. Bills fly everywhere. While Charly is disoriented, Maddie leaps over the counter and throws herself at Charly while screaming like a mad woman. She leaps on his bag and tries to wrestle the gun out of his hand. In the scuffle, Charly's penguin head comes off. Maddie tosses it to the ground and falls down. As he gets up, Charly is unmasked and holding the gun on her. They stare at one another for a few moments, clearly struck by one another in some primal way.)*

**MADDIE.** Hey.

**CHARLY.** Hey.

**MADDIE.** I didn't press the button.

**CHARLY.** You're beautiful.

**MADDIE.** Thank you. *(Charly gathers himself and puts the penguin head back on.)*

**CHARLY.** Don't make a sound. After I leave, count to ten. Then you can scream for help. Got it? *(Maddie nods. Charly exits. Very long pause as Maddie, frozen in place, stares after Charly. After silently counting to ten, she says – in a very weak voice...)*



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**MADDIE.** Help.

### **SCENE 3**

*The Run 'n Go, one day later. Same time. Doreen and Maddie are standing at the counter.*

**MADDIE.** He was wearing a Peter Penguin head.

**DOREEN.** Like... the cartoon character?

**MADDIE.** Yes!

**DOREEN.** Jesus. That's some low-budget horror movie shit.

**MADDIE.** I love Peter Penguin.

**DOREEN.** Who doesn't?

**MADDIE.** It made him seem...I don't know...whimsical.

**DOREEN.** Because what you really want in an armed burglar is whimsy.

**MADDIE.** He wasn't constrained by anything. He had it all figured out.

**DOREEN.** Had what figured out?

**MADDIE.** How to be happy. Maybe we have to be selfish. If you can't beat them, join them.

**DOREEN.** He said this?

**MADDIE.** No. We just looked at one another. Then he told me I was beautiful.

**DOREEN.** This reminds me of that college kid in Oklahoma that ran off with his high school girlfriend and they started robbing banks.

**MADDIE.** Exactly! They're poor, they're miserable, they have no opportunities, so they totally go rogue. It's romantic.

**DOREEN.** Uh-huh. And then they found out the guy had a face collection.

**MADDIE.** What?

**DOREEN.** The police caught up with them and they raided the guy's barn and he had jars full of faces.

**MADDIE.** Clown faces?

**DOREEN.** What does that even mean? No, human faces. He's a serial killer. He kills people and cuts off their faces.

**MADDIE.** How do you cut off a face?

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**DOREEN.** I don't know. He takes a knife and just works at it for a while. He's got a system.

**MADDIE.** I'm not gonna cut off faces. All I'm saying is that maybe I've been going about my life all wrong. Remember that night when it all went down? The whole country changed. None of us could believe it was happening.

**DOREEN.** Oh, I remember. It was a goddamn travesty. I got that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

**MADDIE.** Suddenly the most horrible people in the country were in charge of everything. I figured if I just hung in there and stayed true to my values, I'd eventually be happy. But maybe that's not true. Maybe I really do have to think outside the box.

**DOREEN.** And wind up in jail.

**MADDIE.** The people in charge never wind up in jail.

**DOREEN.** That's because they're important. You're not important. You would go to jail.

**MADDIE.** Would that be any worse than where I am now?

**DOREEN.** So, you're feeling restless. You'll get over it.

**MADDIE.** I don't want to get over it. I want to be happy. *(Suddenly, Charly runs in. He is brandishing a gun and wearing the penguin head.)*

**MADDIE.** Oh my God.

**DOREEN.** Holy Shit.

**CHARLY.** Hi.

**MADDIE.** Hi.

**CHARLY.** Um...hi.

**MADDIE.** I'm Maddie.

**CHARLY.** Hi. Charly.

**MADDIE.** This is Doreen.

**CHARLY.** Hi.

**DOREEN.** Take that goddamn, horrifying thing off your head.

**CHARLY.** Look here -

**MADDIE.** Doreen's okay. She won't turn you in.

**DOREEN.** I won't?

**CHARLY.** I can't stop thinking about you. Come with me.

**MADDIE.** That's insane.

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**CHARLY.** I know. Fuck.

**DOREEN.** Don't do it.

**MADDIE.** I can't just... I can't just...

**CHARLY.** Why not?

**MADDIE.** Because... I don't know. Maybe I can.

**DOREEN.** Maddie, I want you to think about what you're doing right now. This is a guy in a cartoon penguin head.

**MADDIE.** Doreen, I think this is something I have to do. *(Pause.)*

**DOREEN.** *(To Charly.)* Take off the mask.

**CHARLY.** No.

**DOREEN.** Do it.

**MADDIE.** *(To Charly.)* It's okay. *(Charly pulls off the penguin head and looks at Doreen.)*

**DOREEN.** And you're not gonna cut off her face?

**CHARLY.** No.

**DOREEN.** Good. Because if you do –

**MADDIE.** Doreen.

**DOREEN.** If you do, I will hunt you down and cut off *your* face, put it in a wok with some fucking Mrs. Dash then slap it on a piece of whole grain bread and top it off with some melted gruyere. GOT IT?

**CHARLY.** I'm not gonna hurt her.

**MADDIE.** Doreen -

**DOREEN.** Go.

**MADDIE.** But –

**DOREEN.** If you gotta do a thing, you gotta do a thing. I'll cover for you. Now go. *(Maddie rushes to her purse and pulls out her lottery ticket.)*

**MADDIE.** Here. *(She hands the ticket to Doreen.)* Good luck. *(Charly puts his mask back on and takes Maddie by the hand. Maddie takes off her Run 'n Go apron and tosses it to Doreen. Maddie and Charly run out the door. Doreen watches them go, then puts on the apron and saunters behind the counter. After a moment, she pulls out the lottery ticket and uses the remote to turn on the TV.)*

**ANNOUNCER.** And here are tonight's numbers! Ten! Thirty-two! Seven! Seventy-Five! Forty-nine! *(Doreen stares at Maddie's ticket for a moment.)*

**DOREEN.** Well, I'll be goddamned.

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### SCENE 4

*Charly and Maddie are in a car. It is night.*

**MADDIE.** So, do you do crime a lot?

**CHARLY.** Just started.

**MADDIE.** Why? If you don't mind my asking.

**CHARLY.** Because you can't write about life unless you actually have a life!

**MADDIE.** So, you're a writer.

**CHARLY.** I've been working on a novel. But I also write websites.

**MADDIE.** What kind of websites?

**CHARLY.** You know when you go on those websites that are really just rewritten articles from other websites?

**MADDIE.** Sure.

**CHARLY.** Well, that was my job. And I knew that a lot of the articles I was rewriting weren't really true. But I kept doing it anyway because I felt like no one really knows what's true so what's the point? You know?

**MADDIE.** I totally know.

**CHARLY.** Plus, it was taking away time I could have spent writing my novel.

**MADDIE.** What's your novel about?

**CHARLY.** It's complicated. But basically, it's about how no one in America is ever able to achieve what they've been promised.

**MADDIE.** Can I read it?

**CHARLY.** It's not done. I have writer's block.

**MADDIE.** Can I read what you have so far?

**CHARLY.** It's really just a couple of paragraphs. I've been working on it for years, but I can't finish it. I just stare at my computer. Then one night, I was watching TV and there was another one of these horrible shootings that keep happening.

**MADDIE.** So, you figured you'd turn into one of those guys that shoots everyone?

**CHARLY.** What? No!

**MADDIE.** That's good.

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**CHARLY.** But let's face it. Guns are everywhere. Everyone I know has one now. I figured maybe it's just time to go with the flow. Then once I had one, I figured maybe I could use it to get out of this rut I'm in.

**MADDIE.** So, you bought a Peter Penguin mask.

**CHARLY.** When Peter Penguin wants to do something, he's not constrained by the rules. If he's being chased by cops and needs to go through a giant mountain, he doesn't say "I'll never get through that mountain!" He gets a can of black paint and paints a hole through the mountain.

**MADDIE.** But that wouldn't work in real life. It's not a real hole.

**CHARLY.** You're missing the point. It's a new world. Being rational doesn't get you anywhere. You have to paint holes through mountains.

**MADDIE.** *(Sings.)*

*"Bees buzz*

*Birds sing*

*Summer gives way*

*To Spring"*

**CHARLY.** *(Sings.)*

*"What's possible?*

*Anything!"*

**MADDIE. & CHARLY.**

*"It's magic, it's magic, it's magic!"*

**MADDIE.** Let's go there.

**CHARLY.** Where?

**MADDIE.** Peter Penguin Playland. Have you ever been there?

**CHARLY.** When I was a kid.

**MADDIE.** Have you ever been that happy since then?

**CHARLY.** I don't know. Maybe not.

**MADDIE.** So, let's go.

**CHARLY.** Um...

**MADDIE.** What's wrong?

**CHARLY.** I was going to go on a crime spree. You know, for my personal empowerment.

**MADDIE.** We'll go on a crime spree until we get to Peter Penguin Land. You know, where everything is just like it used to be.

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**CHARLY.** Yeah. We can do both things! I mean why not?

**MADDIE.** Why settle for half a life, Charly? We can have everything!

**CHARLY.** You're so beautiful.

**MADDIE.** Thank you.

**CHARLY.** How long will it take to drive there?

**MADDIE.** A few days at least.

**CHARLY.** Where should we go tonight?

**MADDIE.** Do you have a lair?

**CHARLY.** A what?

**MADDIE.** A lair. Like a criminal lair.

**CHARLY.** Yes. Yes, I do. I have a lair.

**MADDIE.** Let's go there, then.

**CHARLY.** Good idea. We'll go to my lair.

### SCENE 5

*Prof LONGHOFER. 'S office. He is pacing nervously while BARRY watches.*

**LONGHOFER.** It's over, Barry. I'm going to lose my job and no one will hire me.

**BARRY.** Take it easy, Mitch. Deep breath.

**LONGHOFER.** There goes everything. Tenure, pension... I thought this whole campus-witch hunt stuff was over. Maybe I should just give up.

**BARRY.** Mitch, we've made great strides in your therapy and I'm not going to let you go backwards.

**LONGHOFER.** It was a stupid mistake! Ever since Catherine died, I just can't seem to get myself together!

**BARRY.** Halt! Deep breaths. *(Longhofer takes deep breaths.)*

**BARRY.** Turn around. Platonic backrub. *(Longhofer turns around. Barry begins massaging his shoulders.)* Let me ask you a question, Mitch. If you jumped out of an airplane wearing a parachute and then got halfway down and decided you weren't any good at skydiving, would you just take off the parachute?

**LONGHOFER.** Well, no.

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**BARRY.** That's right. Because you would die. We are mid-jump, Mitch. Turning back is not an option. You know, when I was fourteen years old and the star of "The Crazy McGillicuddys," one of the biggest shows on television about America's luckiest family, I thought it was going to last forever. But it didn't. Then, I thought I was never going to be on another television show for the rest of my life. But I was wrong.

**LONGHOFER.** But I thought you were never able to get back into television again.

**BARRY.** That is correct.

**LONGHOFER.** And then you started doing drugs and then you went to jail...

**BARRY.** Yes.

**LONGHOFER.** - and that's when you quit acting and wrote that book -

**BARRY.** The point is my life isn't over yet and neither is yours. Who cares if you get fired from your job? They don't appreciate you. You hate working here.

**LONGHOFER.** I love working here.

**BARRY.** You only think you do. This is a gift.

**LONGHOFER.** This is not a gift! Gifts are fun! This is not fun! This is the opposite of a gift!

**BARRY.** Relax!

**LONGHOFER.** Everyone around here is looking at me judging me.

**BARRY.** I'm free this weekend. Would you like some company? I think you could use it.

**LONGHOFER.** I promised Claire we'd spend some time together.

**BARRY.** Come on, Mitch. Give me a chance to help you turn this around.

**LONGHOFER.** Yes. Okay.

**BARRY.** Great! Where?

**LONGHOFER.** It doesn't feel safe here. I want to go to my man-cave.

**BARRY.** Fab. I'll meet you there in the morning.

**CLAIRE.** (*From offstage.*) Professor!

**LONGHOFER.** That's her. (*CLAIRE enters.*)

**CLAIRE.** We need to talk. (*Sees Barry.*) Who's this?

**LONGHOFER.** Barry, this is Claire. Claire, Barry.

**CLAIRE.** Hi.

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**BARRY.** Hello.

**LONGHOFER.** Barry is doing my transmutation therapy.

**CLAIRE.** Transmutation?

**BARRY.** I help people remember who they really are.

**CLAIRE.** And you call it “transmutation?” Isn’t that when someone turns into a werewolf?

**LONGHOFER.** Barry wrote this. (*Longhofer hands Claire a book.*)

**CLAIRE.** “Releasing the Hidden Power of Your Inner.” (*Turns book over.*)  
My inner what?

**BARRY.** That’s it. Your “inner.”

**LONGHOFER.** Your inner is a childhood thing that’s inside you.

**CLAIRE.** Can you turn a word into a noun even though it’s not a noun?  
Can you just do that?

**LONGHOFER.** Barry is one of the great minds of our age.

**BARRY.** Oh, stop.

**CLAIRE.** Wait... you look familiar.

**LONGHOFER.** Barry was on television.

**BARRY.** I don’t like to talk about it.

**CLAIRE.** You were on “Those Crazy McGillicuddys.”

**BARRY.** America’s luckiest family. Were you a fan?

**CLAIRE.** I never saw it. I think my parents watched it.

**BARRY.** (*To Longhofer.*) She’s sweet. I’ll see you later, Mitch. (*Barry starts to exit.*)

**LONGHOFER.** Oh! Barry... (*Barry turns around. Longhofer pulls a package out of his desk and hands it to Barry.*)

**BARRY.** Ah, yes. *Merci.* Come here, big guy. Platonic hug. (*Barry gives Longhofer a hug, then exits.*)

**CLAIRE.** What’s wrong?

**LONGHOFER.** Why do you think something’s wrong?

**CLAIRE.** When you get upset you get these weird lines on your forehead.

**LONGHOFER.** Wrinkles.

**CLAIRE.** Okay. So, what’s wrong?

**LONGHOFER.** The chairman of the department found out I’ve been sleeping with one of my students.

**CLAIRE.** Who?



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**LONGHOFER.** You, Claire.

**CLAIRE.** But who besides me?

**LONGHOFER.** There doesn't have to be anyone else!

**CLAIRE.** Don't fucking yell at me! I will totally kill myself!

**LONGHOFER.** I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

**CLAIRE.** How did he find out?

**LONGHOFER.** I told him.

**CLAIRE.** Why did you tell him?

**LONGHOFER.** He asked me.

**CLAIRE.** Why didn't you lie?

**LONGHOFER.** Because I have integrity, Claire!

**CLAIRE.** I am never sleeping with you again. You hear me? Never again. Goddamn it! Give me a knife so I can cut myself!

**LONGHOFER.** What? No!

**CLAIRE.** (*Going through drawers.*) There's got to be a knife or razor or something in here.

**LONGHOFER.** I don't keep knives in my office.

**CLAIRE.** (*Grabbing a stapler.*) Gimme this!

**LONGHOFER.** You can't cut yourself with a stapler. (*Claire staples herself on the arm.*)

**CLAIRE.** Ow! Mother fucker!

**LONGHOFER.** Claire!

**CLAIRE.** Jesus, that hurt!

**LONGHOFER.** Claire, I'm sorry about everything. Come away with me for the weekend.

**CLAIRE.** I can't miss anymore rehearsals. They're gonna kick me out of *Puke Tooth*.

**LONGHOFER.** Your punk band.

**CLAIRE.** Yes.

**LONGHOFER.** Forget about them. They're so angry and loud. Come with me.

**CLAIRE.** If I come with you this weekend, it's not just a trip for sex and fun and stuff. I'm going through some stuff I need to talk to you about.

**LONGHOFER.** I promise there will be no fun. Please?

**CLAIRE.** Okay. Do you have a bandage and a staple remover?

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### SCENE 6

*Lights up on the cabin. It is a fairly modest affair, and this is the living room. The front door is visible, as is a dining room table, and a window leading to the outside. Charly and Maddie are standing in the doorway.*

**MADDIE.** So, this is your lair?

**CHARLY.** Yes.

**MADDIE.** It's...nice. Should we go in?

**CHARLY.** Uh...sure. *(Maddie spots a large box on the other side of the room and enters.)*

**MADDIE.** What's in here?

**CHARLY.** Wait! It's just...it's a box.

**MADDIE.** What's in it?

**CHARLY.** I don't – *(Maddie opens the box and looks inside.)*

**MADDIE.** Oh, wow! There must be hundreds of old comic books in here!

**CHARLY.** I know!

**MADDIE.** *(Reading.)* “Barney Floogle the Laughing Turtle,” “Little Lucy and Friendly Fat Boy...” You must love this stuff!

**CHARLY.** I do! I collect them! I like to come here to my lair and read.

**MADDIE.** You don't sit around here and write manifestos, do you?

**CHARLY.** No way. Those guys were crazy! *(Maddie rushes forward and kisses Charly, forcefully and awkwardly. After a few moments, he backs out of the kiss.)*

**CHARLY.** Sorry. I just...

**MADDIE.** Let me hold your gun.

**CHARLY.** Whoa! Hold on. It's a dangerous weapon, okay? You have to know what you're doing.

**MADDIE.** Okay. *(Charly hands Maddie his gun.)* Wow. It is dangerous, isn't it?

**CHARLY.** Very. *(Charly holds Maddie and holds the gun with her.)* We could do anything with this. Be whoever we want. Get whatever we want. *(Maddie kisses Charly.)*

**CHARLY.** I don't know what to do now.

**MADDIE.** Kiss me again. *(They kiss as lights fade to black.)*

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### SCENE 7

*Lights come up on the Run 'n Go area of the stage where we see Doreen being interviewed by an offstage voice.*

**ANNOUNCER.** ...and while the administration's new policy will make life a horrific nightmare for most people, a handful of them may reap some serious financial rewards! And speaking of finances, we're talking to Maddie Simmons, an employee at Run 'n Go who just won eighty million dollars in the Mega-Jackpot lottery.

**DOREEN.** Damnedest thing! You try and try and try and nothing happens. Then right when you're about to give up...Blammo!

**ANNOUNCER.** Do you have any words of wisdom for young people out there who think the world isn't fair?

**DOREEN.** You just gotta have perseverance. Don't be such pussies. Can I say pussies?

**ANNOUNCER.** Of course.

**DOREEN.** What I mean is hang in there, don't quit, life can beautiful, there's no place like home, blah, blah, blah. If the first lottery ticket doesn't do it for you, go out and buy another one. Say, you still got the same weatherman on the "Action News?"

**ANNOUNCER.** Bob McMann?

**DOREEN.** That's the one. You tell that Bob McMann I'll give him one million dollars for a date, a cuddle, and a little drinkie-drinkie.

**ANNOUNCER.** Ha, ha! You're very charming, Maddie!

**DOREEN.** I'm goddamn serious. I'm a wealthy woman and he's on my bucket list.

**ANNOUNCER.** Thanks for talking to us, Maddie.

**DOREEN.** I'm great in the sack. I grew up in the circus. Carnies know stuff. Tell him.

**ANNOUNCER.** Uh...will do! We gotta go, Maddie.

**DOREEN.** Later, Gator.

**ANNOUNCER.** Back to you, Tanya.

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

### SCENE 8

*The middle of the night. Maddie walks out of the bedroom. She looks out the window, gets a glass of water, etc. Charly enters and gently puts his arms around her. She turns around and they kiss.*

**CHARLY.** Maddie... That was amazing... I never thought that I could...

**MADDIE.** Shhhhhh... *(They kiss again.)*

**CHARLY.** You're so incredibly beautiful.

**MADDIE.** So are you.

**CHARLY.** I've never felt this way before. I don't even know what it means.

**MADDIE.** It means we're doing the right thing. We're happy.

**CHARLY.** Yeah. *(Maddie kisses Charly.)* You want to come back to bed?

**MADDIE.** In a minute. I'm gonna sit up for a bit. That okay?

**CHARLY.** Of course.

**MADDIE.** I'll be in soon. I promise. *(Charly exits. Maddie finds herself looking on shelves and rummaging through boxes, finding things like old movie posters, comic books, vintage paperback novels, etc. Eventually she makes her way to a DVD player and television. She finds the remote and presses play. She sits and watches. We hear the opening theme of "Those Crazy McGillicuddys.")*

**SOUND OF TV.**

*"They're the crazy McGillicuddys!*

*And they all have jobs*

*They're lucky, lucky, lucky,*

*And they hate all the snobs!"*

*(Maddie hears the sound of the door unlocking behind her. She shuts off the TV and runs out of the room. Longhofer and Claire enter through the front door.)*

**CLAIRE.** How did you meet that Barry guy?

**LONGHOFER.** We grew up together. We used to talk about going to Hollywood to be in movies. But he's the one that actually did it. Now he helps other people realize their dreams. *(Maddie re-enters the room with her gun drawn.)*

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**MADDIE.** Okay! Freeze, you two! Who are you? What are you doing here?  
*(Suddenly, Claire begins screaming like a madwoman and runs at full speed toward Maddie like she's going to attack.)*

**MADDIE.** Jesus Christ! *(Maddie flings the gun away from her and raises her arms in the air. Claire stops directly in front of her. Longhofer picks up the gun and aims it at Maddie.)* I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!

**LONGHOFER.** Who are you?

**MADDIE.** What?

**CLAIRE.** He said who are you bitch this is his fucking house and I am raging at you!

**LONGHOFER.** Oh, my God. You're so loud sometimes. *(Charly enters in his underwear.)*

**CHARLY.** What the hell is going on? *(Longhofer, startled, fires the gun.)*

**MADDIE.** Ah!

**CLAIRE.** Fuck!

**LONGHOFER.** I'm sorry!

**CHARLY.** What the hell?

**MADDIE.** Am I shot?

**LONGHOFER.** I don't think you're shot!

**CLAIRE.** You're not shot!

**CHARLY.** Am I shot?

**CLAIRE.** You're not shot either!

**MADDIE.** Are you sure I'm not shot?

**CLAIRE.** I'm sure!

**CHARLY.** Thank God.

**LONGHOFER.** That was lucky.

**CLAIRE.** Ow! *(Claire slaps her arm. Everyone jumps, then turns and looks.)* Sorry. Mosquito.

**LONGHOFER.** Charly?

**CHARLY.** Hi, Professor.

**CLAIRE.** You know this guy?

**LONGHOFER.** He was one of my graduate students...what...five years ago?

**CHARLY.** Yeah.

**CLAIRE.** *(To Maddie.)* Who are you?

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**MADDIE.** I'm Maddie.

**CLAIRE.** What are you doing here?

**MADDIE.** This is his lair!

**CLAIRE.** This is Professor Longhofer's cabin.

**MADDIE.** Who is Professor Longhofer?

**LONGHOFER.** I'm Professor Longhofer!

**CLAIRE.** I'm calling the police. *(She pulls out her cell phone.)*

**LONGHOFER.** You can't get a signal out here.

**MADDIE.** I'll ask again! What the hell is going on here? *(Eventually, all eyes turn to Charly.)*

**CHARLY.** Okay...well...um... *(To Maddie.)* I'm sorry.

**MADDIE.** You told me this was your master criminal lair.

**LONGHOFER.** A criminal lair? Charly was one of my best students.

**CLAIRE.** And now you're a thief?

**CHARLY.** Sometimes.

**MADDIE.** *(To Charly.)* Where, exactly, are we?

**CHARLY.** Professor Longhofer and his wife used to come here on the weekends.

**MADDIE.** And you would break in?

**CHARLY.** They'd invite me!

**LONGHOFER.** And now it's my man cave.

**MADDIE.** What is a man cave?

**LONGHOFER.** It's where I come to surround myself with my passions. As you know, traditional manhood is under fire. It's been driven underground.

**CLAIRE.** Really? Because men kind of control everything.

**LONGHOFER.** *(To Maddie.)* She doesn't understand.

**CHARLY.** I spent some of the best weekends of my life here, Professor

**LONGHOFER.** Really?

**CHARLY.** I loved spending time with you and Catherine. You always gave the best notes on my work.

**MADDIE.** Honestly, we're so sorry about this. We'll just be going.

**CHARLY.** How is Catherine?

**LONGHOFER.** Catherine is dead.

**CHARLY.** Oh my God. I'm so sorry. I didn't know.

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**LONGHOFER.** It's okay. I'm doing much better these days.

**CHARLY.** And now you're a single father.

**CLAIRE.** I'm his girlfriend.

**CHARLY.** Oh, crap.

**LONGHOFER.** This is Claire.

**MADDIE.** Charly, let's go. We'll find a hotel.

**LONGHOFER.** So, Charly, not to be too finger-pointy, but why exactly have you broken into my house?

**CHARLY.** I was in a rut writing fake stories on the internet. So, I bought a gun. Peter Penguin just takes what he wants and then I met Maddie and she asked me where my lair was and I remembered how much I enjoyed coming here and I knew where you kept the spare key and I didn't think you'd be here this weekend. If you want to call the police, I totally understand.

**CLAIRE.** How about we don't call the police and you leave right now?

**LONGHOFER.** Charly, I had no idea those weekends meant so much to you and I admire your initiative. I'd like you and Maddie to stay for the weekend.

**CLAIRE.** Oh my God!

**LONGHOFER.** What do you say, Charly?

**MADDIE.** Charly, can I talk to you? (*Maddie pulls Charly aside.*)

**CHARLY.** What?

**MADDIE.** We were going to Peter Penguin Land.

**CHARLY.** Maybe we should stay put for a bit.

**MADDIE.** What about the crimes? You wanted to commit crimes.

**CHARLY.** We already committed a crime.

**MADDIE.** Crime *spree*, Charly. We are going on a crime *spree* then going to Peter Penguin Land.

**CHARLY.** What's the rush? We'll leave on Monday. That place is a nightmare on weekends anyway. Let's hang out in the man cave.

**LONGHOFER.** (*To Claire.*) You look upset.

**CLAIRE.** Because I am upset.

**LONGHOFER.** He was a brilliant student. Catherine loved him. Now look at him. The boy clearly needs help.

**CLAIRE.** I'm suicidal! I need help!

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**LONGHOFER.** You're not suicidal. You just want me to think you're suicidal.

**CLAIRE.** I hate that you know me so well.

**LONGHOFER.** *(To Charly.)* Charly, I'm so sorry that we lost touch. You showed such promise. I assumed you'd have written a bestseller by now.

**CHARLY.** I stopped submitting my work. Everyone wants something that responds to the world we're in right now and I just didn't have anything like that.

**LONGHOFER.** You're transmutating!

**CLAIRE.** That word makes no sense the way you're using it.

**LONGHOFER.** You should meet Barry. He's coming tomorrow.

**CLAIRE.** What? He's coming here? I am so killing myself.

**LONGHOFER.** Claire - *(Claire reaches into Longhofer's pocket and grabs his keys.)* What are you doing?

**CLAIRE.** You! Pretty girl! *(She gives the keys to Maddie.)* Go outside and start his car. I'm gonna put my head under the back wheel.

**MADDIE.** What?

**CLAIRE.** I want you to drive over my head and squash it! Do you understand me?

**MADDIE.** I'm not going to do that!

**CLAIRE.** Drive over my head!

**MADDIE.** No!

**CLAIRE.** *(Taking keys back.)* Everyone here is useless!

**LONGHOFER.** When Barry gets here tomorrow, he'll teach you all about the key to happiness.

**CHARLY.** We're going to Peter Penguin Land.

**LONGHOFER.** I love Peter Penguin!

**CLAIRE.** I hate Peter Penguin.

**LONGHOFER.** You just don't know Peter Penguin. Charly! Come here. You're going to want to see this. *(Longhofer gets up and walks to the other side of the room. Charly follows. During the following exchange, Longhofer takes a framed poster off the wall revealing a wall safe. He turns the combination and opens the safe. He then pulls a comic book, encased in plastic, out of the safe.)*

**CLAIRE.** *(To Maddie.)* I'm Claire.



## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**MADDIE.** Yeah...uh...Maddie.

**CLAIRE.** I'm a music major.

**MADDIE.** I volunteered for lots of grassroots advocacy groups. Now I work at Run 'n Go.

**CLAIRE.** I love Run 'n Go. I'm in a band called Puke Tooth.

**MADDIE.** Cool. I love my teeth.

**CLAIRE.** I write all the lyrics. I wrote a song that goes "The fire still burns, the fire still burns, watch the fire burn, see how it still burns."

**MADDIE.** Oh. What's the song about?

**CLAIRE.** Fire. Did you go to college?

**MADDIE.** Yes. But I never finished my thesis.

**CLAIRE.** What was it about?

**MADDIE.** "The Effect of Systemic Inequalities on Individuals in Institutional Environments Dependent on Consumer Interaction."

**CLAIRE.** That sounds interesting.

**MADDIE.** It does?

**CLAIRE.** Why don't you finish it?

**MADDIE.** I don't know if I believe the same things I used to believe. These are really personal questions.

**CLAIRE.** I can't figure out why I'm dating Professor Longhofer. It feels self-destructive. But being in a stable relationship is really important to me. My family was dysfunctional. Do you know what almost every serial killer has in common?

**MADDIE.** I don't.

**CLAIRE.** Dysfunctional families. Usually, their mothers were prostitutes. Sometimes I get so angry I wonder if I could become a serial killer.

**MADDIE.** Like that guy that cut off people's faces?

**CLAIRE.** What? Eiu, no. That's vile. Why did you put that image in my head?

**MADDIE.** Sorry.

**CLAIRE.** I'm just saying that maybe if my family had been more normal, I wouldn't be so angry. Maybe I can turn Professor Longhofer into a normal person and that will fix everything. What do you think?

**MADDIE.** I...uh...think you should be whoever makes you happy.

**CLAIRE.** You're no help. (*Longhofer and Charly return.*)

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**LONGHOFER.** Feast your eyes, my friends. The *piece de resistance* of my collection! The first issue of “The Amazing Adventures of Peter Penguin!”

**MADDIE.** Wow. That must be a serious collector’s item.

**LONGHOFER.** It is, indeed. There are very few copies still in existence. But this modest publication laid the groundwork for the entire Peter Penguin empire!

**CLAIRE.** You mean racism and gender and class inequality?

**MADDIE.** What? No. Haven’t you ever been to Peter Penguin Land on their annual “Magic Day?” It’s about as inclusive as you can get.

**CLAIRE.** One day a year out of 365, huh? How progressive. You know they haven’t raised their minimum wage since 1973? There’s nothing progressive about Peter Penguin.

**MADDIE.** How do you know all this?

**CLAIRE.** (*Yanking the comic out of Longhofer’s hand.*) Look.

**LONGHOFER.** Be careful!

**CLAIRE.** Half the characters are racial stereotypes.

**LONGHOFER.** Well, it was 1936, after all. The culture was different.

**CLAIRE.** Peter Penguin was a prick.

**LONGHOFER.** No. Just politically incorrect. But how can you build a happy, utopian world without breaking a few rules?

**CHARLY.** Right! That’s what my novel is about!

**LONGHOFER.** So, you have been writing!

**CHARLY.** A little. I’m kind of stuck.

**LONGHOFER.** Well, let’s hear it! Maybe I can help!

**CHARLY.** Really?

**LONGHOFER.** We’ll all sit here, you’ll read it out loud and we’ll open it up for discussion and critique. Just like we used to do!

**CHARLY.** That’s exactly what I need.

**CLAIRE.** Swell.

**MADDIE.** Charly –

**CHARLY.** This is what I need, Maddie! This can get me unstuck. Maybe it can get you unstuck too!

**MADDIE.** (*Sighs.*) Okay. (*They all sit down around the table.*)

**CLAIRE.** So, now we just listen to him read?

**MADDIE.** (*To Charly.*) Did you even bring your novel?

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**CHARLY.** Oh, yeah. I carry it around everywhere. (*Charly pulls a couple of folded pieces of paper out of his pocket.*)

**CLAIRE.** Is that all?

**CHARLY.** I've only actually written a couple of paragraphs. The rest is up here. (*Taps head.*)

**LONGHOFER.** The beginning is the hardest part. Once you've written the first page, you're halfway there.

**CLAIRE.** Assuming your novel is only two pages.

**CHARLY.** Okay...uh...I'll just start from the beginning. (*Begins reading.*)

“At 5:00 AM, the dew began to settle, and Carl finally saw what he had been waiting for. The girl from the bus stop stepped through the door of the brownstone and skipped absent-mindedly down the stoop. Carl's breath stopped as he squeezed himself back behind the tree. His heartbeat inside his chest. It was her. The woman he dreamed about. The woman that was his dreams his ambition and his world all wrapped up in a smart, pretty ball, ushered into reality by the coming dawn. Carl stepped from his perch - ”

**LONGHOFER.** Stop. Charly, this is so interesting.

**CHARLY.** Really?

**LONGHOFER.** I appreciate the imposition of Carl's dreams on the young woman, his fantasy made flesh...who among us wouldn't be able to relate to that?

**CLAIRE.** It makes him sound like a creeper.

**CHARLY.** What?

**CLAIRE.** Like he's gonna throw her in the back of his van.

**CHARLY.** He wouldn't do that.

**CLAIRE.** It's weird that he's standing behind a tree. Can't he be just on the street somewhere?

**LONGHOFER.** Claire! We don't make suggestions. We only give our reactions.

**CLAIRE.** I also have a problem with the line “His heart beat inside his chest.”

**LONGHOFER.** What's wrong with that?

**CLAIRE.** Where the hell else is his heart going to beat? And don't get me started on “smart, pretty ball.”

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**LONGHOFER.** These are easy fixes. But Charly, if I may, I think you can indulge in your personal experiences a bit more. Remember that the personal is also universal.

**CLAIRE.** I don't think that's true.

**CHARLY.** I just need someone to tell me it's good.

**LONGHOFER.** It shows promise. But you have more work to do.

**CHARLY.** I have to go.

**MADDIE.** What's wrong, Charly? You look sick.

**CLAIRE.** Are you gonna yak?

**CHARLY.** I need to go outside. (*Charly runs outside.*)

**MADDIE.** Wait a minute! Charly! (*Maddie follows him outside.*)

**CLAIRE.** What's wrong with him?

**LONGHOFER.** He's a troubled young man, Claire. It's horrible when the world is your oyster, but you find yourself unable to move forward. I'm worried about him.

**CLAIRE.** I'm worried too, Professor. I thought I knew who I was but now I'm worried that all my friends are normal and I'm the strange one. I'm worried that I'll never become a professional musician. I'm worried that I'll turn out like my parents. I'm worried that I'm never gonna be able to change you. I'm worried that sleeping with you has sent me down some strange, dark path that I'll never be able to find my way back.

**LONGHOFER.** What? I'm sorry. I wasn't listening.

**CLAIRE.** Never mind.

### SCENE 9

*Outside. Charly is sitting in the car with his head in his hands. Maddie gets in the car.*

**MADDIE.** Charly? What's going on?

**CHARLY.** Did I really think I could just buy a gun, go on a crime spree, and suddenly I'd be happy?

**MADDIE.** Charly, listen -

**CHARLY.** I'm going home. I'll go back to my apartment and just sit there for the rest of my fucking life.

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**MADDIE.** (*Singing.*)

*“Oh, what makes the sun shine in the sky?  
What makes that tear of joy in my eye?  
What makes the blackbird take wing and fly?  
It’s magic, it’s magic, it’s magic.”*

**CHARLY.** Maddie –

**MADDIE.** Sing with me, Charly.

*“What makes the leaves change color in fall?  
What makes a baby so precious and small?”*

**MADDIE. & CHARLY.**

*“What makes the toddler learn how to crawl?  
It’s magic, it’s magic, it’s magic.”*

**MADDIE.** We were meant to find one another, We’re gonna make sure that we don’t spend one more day regretting our boring, sad fucking lives. Let’s go. We’ll leave tonight for Peter Penguin Land.

**CHARLY.** I’m not giving up my crime spree. This is my hole through the mountain.

**MADDIE.** But Peter Penguin Land is my hole through the mountain.

**CHARLY.** So, we make two holes through the mountain.

**MADDIE.** What do you mean?

**CHARLY.** (*Staring at the gun.*) How much do you think that comic book is worth?

**MADDIE.** An original Peter Penguin #1? It’s priceless.

**CHARLY.** There’s an awful lot we could do with that money, Maddie. We could buy our way out of the world of Run ‘n Go and dirty garden apartments. We could turn our whole lives into one giant Peter Penguin Land.

**MADDIE.** He keeps it in the safe.

**CHARLY.** Let’s go back in there right now and take it!

**MADDIE.** No. Too risky. We need to snag the book and get out of here before they know it’s missing.

**CHARLY.** You’re so much smarter than me.

**MADDIE.** I know. I’ll figure out some way to get them out of the house in the morning. You’ll tackle the safe.

## WAYS TO BE HAPPY

**CHARLY.** He uses the same passwords over and over. I'm sure I can figure out the combination.

**MADDIE.** They think you're sick. Keep up the act. In the morning I'll go with them to make sure they stay outside.

**CHARLY.** When you're about to come back, you should make a bird noise or something to warn me.

**MADDIE.** Okay.

**CHARLY.** Like "Aahoo! Aahoo!" Like that.

**MADDIE.** Focus, Charly. You'll crack the safe and get the book. By the time he realizes it's missing, we'll be on our way to Peter Penguin Land.

**CHARLY.** And after that?

**MADDIE.** Anywhere we want, Charly. Wherever we can be happy.

### **END OF ACT I**

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –  
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