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The Grungus (Among Us)

[LIGHTS UP. SPOTLIGHT.

BRUCE *is standing in the spotlight facing the audience in his hazmat suit with the mask down hanging around his neck. The word "INTERN" is printed on the front of his suit in big black letters split down the middle by the zipper. He's in what appears to be a morgue. Behind him there is one of those old timey wooden coffins like they used to bury cowboys in. On top of the coffin is a box labeled "personal effects of the deceased." Hanging from the ceiling there should be a gray box with a big red button somewhere in the room. Behind him is his sister LAYLA, also in a Hazmat suit. She's looking down fondly at the coffin.]*

BRUCE: In what was once the nation's purest town
An awful deadly new disease was born
That after bringing all the people down
Left only bodies bloodied and deformed.
The Grungus, dreadful cancer of the brain
Whose symptoms to their full degree unknown
Will banish reason leaving only pain
Till all your nerves and synapses are blown
A thousand men by Grungus have been struck
A thousand more shall soon be tainted ill.
If you are caught then you are out of luck.
So you'd do well to write yourself a will.
Should you find men who in its cruel hands lie
Run far away or be prepared to die.

[The spotlight dies and the stage lights come on. Bruce puts on his mask and hood and joins his sister next to the coffin.]

LAYLA: He's late again, go figure. I swear, sometimes I just wanna punch him in the nards until he cries then freeze his tears and put them on a necklace and make him wear it as a reminder of the day he started walking with a limp.

BRUCE: Wow.

LAYLA: Too violent?

BRUCE: Just a little.

LAYLA: They say that's a symptom. That is before you feel it, it drives you

mad, makes you violent and impulsive. I heard this one lady beat up three guys in a buffet line over the last crab cake. Woke up next morning with Grungus. She was a school teacher before that. [*Melodramatic. Shifting focus to coffin.*] This awful disease. [*Suddenly cheery.*] All right, let's get down to cremating this thing before it stinks up the place.

[*Enter RIVERS. He's wearing dark slacks, a v-neck sweater and some leather driving gloves. Not really standard protocol for handling hazardous materials.*]

RIVERS: God, can you believe the drivers in this town? Some dick cut in front me on the highway. Had to follow him and let him know what an awful driver he is.

BRUCE [*Hesitant concern.*]: What did you do?

RIVERS: [*Violent indifference.*]: Nothing drastic. Just broke his nose a little. Real little, barely even noticeable.

LAYLA: What a reasonable response to – where the hell is your suit?

RIVERS: Oh right, about that. Well the good news is that I don't need it. And the bad news is well... uh... here. [*Rivers removes his gloves revealing his tainted green hands.*]

BRUCE: Grungus.

RIVERS: The Grungus. You gotta say the whole thing like the Gout.

BRUCE: Who calls it the Gout?

LAYLA: You've got to be shitting me. Really, Rivers this isn't funny.

RIVERS: It's kind of funny. I mean look, my hands are green! How absurd! [*Laughs.*]

LAYLA: So what you're telling me here is that pretty soon I'm going to have to cremate your body?

RIVERS: I guess. If you really want to think about burning your boyfriend...

LAYLA: And you're expecting me to be okay with that?

BRUCE: This is turning into another one of your fights so I'm just gonna go... over... there.

[*RIVERS and LAYLA keep arguing as BRUCE retreats to the coffin. In an effort to ignore the fighting, he takes the box off the coffin, places it on the ground and rummages through it. He finds a bunch of spiral bound notebooks and begins flipping through them.*]

RIVERS: What do you want me to do? I'm dy-ing.

LAYLA: You are the world's most irresponsible jackass.

RIVERS: You're talking to me like it's my fault. People get the Grungus, Layla. It's just what they do. That'd be like me getting mad at you for being born a humorless witch.

[*LAYLA's face is scarred by shock and insult. She starts hitting RIVERS. He blocks and backs away but she keeps charging.*]

RIVERS [*Between hits.*]: Ah! Layla! It was a joke! Quit it! Damn!

LAYLA [*On hits.*]: You jerk! Stupid! Selfish! Obnoxious! Jerk!

LAYLA [*gets tired and slows down. Rivers drops his guard as she hunches over*

putting her hands on her knees. Rivers regains himself before speaking.

RIVERS: Your actions only prove my point. *[Beat. He takes note of her fatigue.]*
Are you okay? Maybe you should sit down.

LAYLA: I'm fine, it's just these gloves. Feels like my hands are on fire.
[She takes off her gloves. Oh shit. Her hands are green. Slowly, she and RIVERS realize what this means. Flipping out, she tears off her hood and mask.]

LAYLA: Ohmygod ohmygod ohmygod! I'm not even thirty yet and I'm going to die. There's so much left I haven't done! I'm still a fucking intern! Oh god, oh god, what am I going to do?

[RIVERS offers LAYLA a hug. She accepts. Something in the notebooks catches Bruce's attention. He saves his page and starts rummaging through the box again, taking out all of the notebooks and throwing them on the floor. He doesn't find what he's looking for. He looks at the coffin.]

RIVERS *[Sweetly.]*: Layla, Layla *[Beat. Still sweet.]* Shut up. Everything's going to be fine.

LAYLA: How can it be? There's no cure.
[Their moment of tenderness is interrupted when BRUCE picks up a crowbar and jams it into the coffin. RIVERS rushes over to confront him.]

RIVERS: Woah, what are you doing, man?!

[BRUCE doesn't respond. He successfully pries open the coffin and looks inside. RIVERS gags at the smell. BRUCE struggles to pry something out of the unseen corpse's hands.]

SOUND: *Bones breaking.*

BRUCE *[Struggling.]*: Let go!

LAYLA: Brucie dear, may I ask why the hell you're defiling that poor woman's corpse?

[BRUCE yanks as hard as he can. Finally he manages to remove a long brown vile... with a green hand still attached.]

SOUND: *Old meat ripping.*

LAYLA (CON'T): What is that?

[BRUCE removes the hand from the vial and tosses it back into the coffin. As he examines the vial, he walks back to the pile of notebooks.]

BRUCE *[While walking.]*: This lady was head geneticist of Medcorp Technologies. It was her job to develop a cure for Grungus and I think this is it.
[He arrives at the pile and picks up the last notebook he had before opening the coffin.]

RIVERS: What was it doing in there?

BRUCE: She left this note: "The only thing more sinister than the disease is the cure I've developed. I tried going to the banks but it was not enough. I required an entire body's worth to make one vial. And so, for the benefit of science and with a severe lapse in judgment, I've allowed these hands of mind to taste death. I cannot allow the atrocities I've committed to be repeated. And so I've infected myself and shall take this cure with

me to hell, where we both belong. So many wasted.”
[Brief moment of silence for the deceased.]
 RIVERS and LAYLA: We’re saved!
[They jump for joy. BRUCE picks up a different notebook and glances at it.]
 BRUCE: Actually, it seems there’s only enough for one of you.
 RIVERS and LAYLA: I’m saved!
[Silence. Confusion. Aggression? You betcha. BRUCE gulps. RIVERS and LAYLA tear into each other.]
 RIVERS: Like hell you are! Look, Layla I love you and all that but tough break. There’s no way I’m losing my life over you. Nope, nuh-uh. Not happening.
 LAYLA: Whatever happened to chivalry?
 RIVERS: It was murdered by the Grungus. Plus, I had it first.
 LAYLA: Oh that’s very kind of you, Rivers. Maybe if you were half as brave now as you were in bed we’d have something to talk about right now.
 RIVERS: Hey, you said you like that thing I do!
 LAYLA: I was being nice! You know, thinking of you! Maybe you should take this opportunity to return the sentiment.
 RIVERS: No way! I’m not sacrificing myself for a liar.
 LAYLA: Fine then. We’ll let Brucie decide.
 RIVERS: Sounds good to me. Go ahead Bruce, hand me the cure.
[BRUCE stiffens. He thrusts his nose back into the notebooks. LAYLA and RIVERS approach him from both sides like the tiny devils in cartoon consciences.]
 RIVERS: Hey, you remember when you were still in fifth grade? Those gerbils you had? *[Beat.]* She killed them.
 LAYLA: Liar!
 RIVERS *[To LAYLA.]*: Says the woman who lies about what she likes sexually. *[Back to BRUCE.]* That’s the worst kind of lie there is, friend.
 BRUCE: Really as much as fun as this is, there’s probably something else you should know about the cure.
 LAYLA: He steals money from your wallet when you’re not looking.
 RIVERS: Only to take you out to all those expensive places you want to go to. Like the crab place I took you to last week that you loved. Or were you just being nice then too?
 LAYLA *[Enunciating every word with a spiteful clarity.]*: I hate seafood.
 RIVERS: Well then maybe next time you can feed yourself.
 LAYLA: Maybe next time you can fuck yourself.
 BRUCE: It’s made from blood!
[RIVERS and LAYLA stop.]
 RIVERS: You mean... human blood?
 BRUCE: Seems so. And I guess she wasn’t too nice about getting it. That must have been what she was talking about in her note.
 RIVERS *[With faux sincerity]*: You know what? You can have it, Layla.

[LAYLA doesn't answer. Instead, she slowly backs away from the others.]

RIVERS: Layla?

[LAYLA stops. Coughing, she falls to her knees. RIVERS and BRUCE run to her side. RIVERS kneels and scoops her into his arms.]

BRUCE: It's advancing faster than normal. She's losing it, Rivers. She's dying. We have to do something.

RIVERS: Ah, damn it.

[RIVERS snatches the cure from BRUCE's hands. He opens the vial and pours it down her throat. She has a small seizure then faints in his arms. BRUCE kneels down to their level. He and RIVERS look at each other quizzically for a moment before returning their attention to LAYLA.]

BRUCE: Layla?

RIVERS: She's not breathing. It – It didn't work. Bruce what the fuck? Why didn't it work?!

BRUCE: I don't know, I'm not a scientist. [He shakes her in RIVERS' arms.] Layla! Layla! Wake up!

[RIVERS nudges BRUCE away. He clears his throat.]

RIVERS [Shouting.]: Layla, you bitch! If you don't wake up this instant I'm dumping you, walking out the door and fucking the first thing with an orifice. Wake up God damn it!

[She stirs.]

LAYLA [Softly.]: Rivers?

[RIVERS and BRUCE look at each other. The sudden relief paints a smile on their faces.]

RIVERS [Sweetly.]: Yeah, Lay it's me. I'm right here.

LAYLA: My mouth tastes like blood.

RIVERS: Don't worry about that, you just made science happen is all.

LAYLA: That's right, the Grungus. [Beat.] You're going to die, aren't you?

[Brief silence. Pondering.]

RIVERS: What? No! I took it too don't you remember? [Beat.] Anyway, I'm thinking we have a strong case to sue for workman's comp. We're gonna be rich, right Bruce?

BRUCE: Yeah.

[RIVERS and BRUCE help LAYLA up. As they prepare to leave, they all take a look back at the open coffin.]

RIVERS: Should we tell anyone? Maybe some other doctors can use her notes to find something other than blood to cure the Grungus with.

BRUCE: No, if we let that cure get out we'll have a massacre on our hands. Blood'll become more precious than oil and no one will give a damn where it comes from. [Beat.] This woman has done horrible things but those same things have saved my sister. The least we can do is let her sin die with her.

RIVERS: Whatever you say man. I'm gonna take her home. You can finish

up here right?

BRUCE: Yeah. [*Beat.*] Thanks, Rivers. Really.

RIVERS: Ah... shut up.

[RIVERS helps LAYLA offstage. BRUCE gathers all of the notebooks and puts them in the coffin then presses the red button hanging from the ceiling. An orange glow comes from stage left. The coffin is slowly pulled towards the light.

BRUCE takes off his mask and hood.

SOUND: *A mechanical chamber opening and a conveyor belt starting.*

SOUND: *An intense fire.*

Stage lights dim. Spotlight on BRUCE.]

BRUCE: In what was once the nation's purest town

An awful deadly serum was designed.

That after healing only three small frowns

Must now be banished from our very minds.

The Grungus, awful cancer of the brain

Whose only cure is found through taking life

Has not completed its villainous reign

Yet still is better than a town in strife.

A thousand men by Grungus have been struck

But thousands more may very well be spared

Through the destruction of the healing muck

Of which no more shall ever be aware.

[*As the coffin leaves the stage the spotlight dims and the orange light from off stage brightens.*

SOUND: *Fire eating wood.*

SOUND: *Dead weight collapsing on floor.*

LAYLA (OFFSTAGE.) [*Distraught.*]: Rivers!

BRUCE: I knew a man who in its cruel hands lied

And for my sister he was nobly fried.

[*The lights slowly fade as the fire finishes devouring the coffin.*]

END.