

Oatmeal in My Bathtub, or
How I Learned to Remodel the Kitchen and
Survive the Pandemic

A mostly true story

by
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CHARACTERS

LISA	Old enough to be a mom of college age kids. Any ethnicity.	Female
BUILDING PERMIT GUY/ CONSTRUCTION WORKER	Preferably burly, a bit rugged. Any age, any ethnicity	Male
TAYLOR/ CONSTRUCTION WORKER	Basically a badass. Any age, any ethnicity.	Female

SCENE ONE

A mostly blank stage. Cheap kitchen throw rugs are scattered around somewhat haphazardly. A somewhat broken down kitchen island on wheels is down right.

Lisa walks onto the stage wearing something tidy and business casual. She is barefoot and talking on the phone using her corded earbuds.

LISA

No. No... no. Just tell Skip no, you're not going to change the entire documentation set three days before the release. Nope...

She listens and picks some bits of flooring off her feet.

LISA (cont'd)

Yup. Yup. I hear ya. But you hear what I'm saying, right? If he had gotten the requirements into us in time, we could do it. He didn't so we can't. I'm on my way... I'll call you from the car.

She hangs up using the earbud cord and takes the earbuds out.

She looks out to the audience.

LISA (cont'd)

Oh hi. Good morning! Ready for another great Monday?! God, I love my job.

(she laughs darkly and maniacally)

But... that's not why we're here today. We're here today because of...

She picks a bit of something off her other foot.

LISA (cont'd)

...this. See this?

She holds it up.

LISA (cont'd)

This is my floor. Or, bits of my floor. My kitchen floor. I have...

She goes about straightening up the throw rugs.

LISA (cont'd)

...these... rugs...see? They're here to cover up the places where the vinyl tiling is pulling up. I mean... it's workable but... really? That's not the only thing going on with this kitchen. There's this...

She pantomimes turning on a light switch and a light flickers on and off.

LISA (cont'd)

So the electricity is shot. The back door is so warped it doesn't really close any more, there's a hole in the counter by the sink that's been covered with duct tape for at least 16 years... the ceiling up there is peeling... I mean... oh yeah. And it's a terrible layout. Like, really.... there's a counter right here... and then another little counter right here. That's it. You have to edge around like... this... to get to the fridge, and then you have to turn around to get into the only shelving available for food... and that's always dark and full of stuff that no one can see from, well, at least 16 years ago.

It's a small house to begin with... less than 1000 square feet, but we've been able to cram into it. As everyone gets older, there's more stuff... but my oldest son moved up to Santa Cruz a few years ago, and that's let me expand my office into his room. So... it's tight. And the kitchen is a mess.

Which is why... we're going to fix it.

(Lighting changes to be warm and cheerful, as flowers float down from the rafters.)

LISA (cont'd)

It's going to be great. I'll get new appliances, a new floor... everything. I'm going to do it inexpensively, too. I have a handyman who's helped us out with other projects before and he says he can do it for, like, \$17,000 which everyone says is an amazing price for a full kitchen remodel.

She takes out a piggy bank and puts it on top of the island.

LISA (cont'd)

See! It'll be just like that. We'll throw a little money at it and, before you know it, we'll have a beautiful new kitchen!

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO

Lisa walks around the stage talking on her cell phone.

LISA

No. Really. Rogelio... we originally were going to shoot for Easter. I know. I get it. OK... but done by Memorial Day for sure. OK... OK... Great.

BLACKOUT.

Lisa still on the phone.

LISA (cont'd)

Labor Day? Really?

BLACKOUT.

Lisa still on the phone.

LISA (cont'd)

OK great! I mean, that's the day before Christmas Eve, but if that's the only day you can demo it. (Pause) Yeah. Yeah I know. My son will have to sleep in the office while I work. And we won't have Christmas. But if that's the only chance... great. Let's do it. December 23.

BLACKOUT.

Lisa dialing the phone.

LISA (cont'd)

Hey! Merry Christmas. We all good to go for tomorrow, right? Great. And... how much are we looking at now? (pause) Oh. (pause) Uh huh. (pause) Like is that including ... oh. OK. Floor tile, no? Fixtures... no? Appliances, doors, windows. No. OK. Got it. So that 30 thousand is labor, electrical, plumbing.. everything... except the stuff that I'm buying. Okayyyy.

(She finds two more piggy banks and puts them next to the first one on top of the island)

LISA (cont'd)

OK. Let's do it. (pause) Terrific. (pause) Oh wait. One question. You're insured, right? We went over that when I got the permits... you said...

(Lisa stops and addresses the audience.
Lighting changes to include house lights up.)

LISA (cont'd)

Hang on. Permits. How many of you have done a remodel? Uh huh. And... how many of you used a contractor? Ah, good. Smart. So here's a question. For those of you who didn't use a contractor... who pulled their own permits? Don't be shy. I won't turn you in. And... right. Nobody, right? Because... why? Because pulling your own permits is a living hell that NO ONE wants to EVER go through. Especially if it's your first time. And ESPECIALLY if you're a GIRL.

Building Permit Guy walks in with about three stubby pencils stuck behind his ears, glasses down on the bridge

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

Next?

LISA

I think that's me.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

And you're applying for a permit?

Lisa hands him a clipped stack of pages.

LISA

Yes sir. Here's the paperwork.... It's got the existing site map, a proposed site map, it's all to scale ...

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

You're the owner builder.

LISA

Yes.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

Doing it yourself?

LISA

We have a trusted handy man. He's worked with us before.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

Uh huh. Bonded and insured?

LISA

Yes, I think so. I'll double check.

He flips through the papers briefly.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

You have any drawings?

LISA

Um. Yeah. Right there. That's a drawing.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

Uh huh.

LISA

I drew that. It all meets the requirements on your web site.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

Do you have any real drawings?

LISA

Real drawings.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

Like from your contractor? Architect?

LISA

I didn't know I needed an architect for a kitchen remodel.

Building Permit Guy looks over his glasses at her and shakes his head.

BUILDING PERMIT GUY

OK, so you'll need an asbestos survey done, including an inspection. And then I need the footings, the anchors, the joists, and the load bearing walls all noted. Plus locations of all electrical outlets, fixtures. Plumbing and gas hookups. Real drawings. Maybe your husband could help?

(Lights change. Lisa remembers she's on the phone.)

LISA

Oh. Sorry... what? What's going on, Rogelio? Calm ... calm down! No... no... of course I think you can do it. I thought we had talked... yeah, we're ready to go. What?! We haven't been shopping around for anyone else. Of course not! I was just asking if you had insur -- Rogelio? Rogelio?

BLACKOUT.

SCENE THREE

LISA

(She finds and adds two more piggy banks to lineup)

We'd bought the expensive appliances, the expensive door and windows, the tile... we were deep into this thing. So at this point, we decided to grow up and get a real contractor.

Taylor the contractor enters.

TAYLOR

Hi. I'm Taylor.

LISA

You're a... you're a...

TAYLOR

Yes. I'm a woman. As are you. Do you want your kitchen done, or not?

(Lisa grins and stretches out her hands to show Taylor the room)

Taylor looks around, makes some notes on a notepad, and then hands Lisa a quote.

LISA

Oh.... OH.

Lisa looks at the quote. She reaches inside the cupboard of the island, finds three more piggy banks, adds them to the row, then sweeps them off the top, shattering all of them.

She holds out her hand to Taylor and they shake.

LISA (cont'd)

Let's do this thing.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE FOUR

The two other actors, wearing toolbelts, clear the stage using push brooms. Offstage, the sound of crashing and breaking wood.

LISA

In mid February, Taylor and her crew demolished everything. Within two hours of the first sledge hammer blow, the tile was gone, the cupboards that didn't close were gone, the drawers that broke when you opened them too fast were gone.

(While Lisa speaks, a table is brought in and set up beside the island on one side of the stage; and a bathtub is set up on the other side of the stage.)

We had moved everything into our dining and office area -- the appliances, utensils, paper plates, ceramic plates for special occasions... everything. We had about two feet of space reserved for eating. We had about three feet for everything else. It took a weekend to move everything out, and another weekend to move everything in. It was just like moving a house, except the moment between upheaval and getting resettled was going to be measured in months instead of days.

It was exciting and scary. I had used up all my savings, but I knew I'd have plenty of time to make it up. Life would be back to normal as soon as the kitchen was done. Sure, there were a few stories about a new flu or something in China, but really, I had way more important things on my mind.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE FIVE

Lisa is talking on the phone as she moves back and forth carrying dishes from the eating area to the bathtub.

LISA

That's been cancelled too? And the trip to Taiwan is obviously out... Ugh. I'm so sorry, sweetie.

(To audience)

My oldest son. Up in Santa Cruz, about six hours north. Just got his masters in theatre design. Super talented. Absolutely out of work.

LISA (cont'd)

And the back up plan? Oh good! Good. They'll hire you back in a heartbeat. That's great.

(to audience)

Barista work.

LISA (cont'd)

Yeah, exactly. Uh huh. OK. Good plan. You've got this sweetie, I'm proud of you.

(Hangs up. To audience as she carries a bin full of dishes from the island to the bathtub. She puts a rug on the edge of the bathtub and uses it to cushion herself as she leans over and does the dishes.)

LISA (cont'd)

So proud of him. He's been on his own and living with his girlfriend for a few years. Thank god for the coffee gig. I mean, if people couldn't can't hang out over a latte, I think civilization would implode.

You may be wondering how the kitchen is going. Actually... so am I. It's been three days since anyone has been here. It's all cleared out... and... I think there's half a floor installed. I haven't really heard from Taylor or her crew in... awhile? So... there's that.

And then there's this virus. It's kind of getting bad over in Italy. If we had an administration... don't let's go there, OK? Let's not. But... but... I'm kind of wondering what's gong on and when the shit is going to hit the fan.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE SIX

While Lisa talks, the island is moved and the table is reconfigured to a desk with a laptop. Jan sits down and puts on headsets, staring intently at the screen.

The workers start crisscrossing the stage behind her, carrying wood, drills, saws, and other assorted tools. Offstage, the sounds of hammering, a buzz saw, things being moved.

Something drops heavily.

MALE VOICE

(off stage)

Shit!

LISA

Sorry. I'll put myself on mute. Yeah. Go ahead.

As she talks, one worker enters and waves to get her attention.

LISA (cont'd)

Wait... hang on. Hang --

(to worker)

Yeah... whatcha need?

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

It OK if we bring this stuff in? We need to get into the closet?

LISA

Crap. I don't have time to move it myself.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

It's OK. We'll bring it in.

LISA

OK, thanks.

(back to phone)

Sorry. Go on. Are you sure the release is going out on time? (beat) Really?

The workers start bringing in boxes and sleeping bags and bicycles and a whole ton of assorted junk. They pile it up around her.

LISA (cont'd)

Yeah, it's not like we'll be behind, but usually it's development who slips. Yes... OK... sure, Skip Tell me what the deal is.

(to audience)

Mandatory working from home. (making a "blah blah blah" gesture with her hand)

(to phone)

Yeah... uh huh.... Sure.

(to audience)

Don't get me wrong. I'm super grateful. People are losing their jobs. Businesses are closing....

Workers finish piling up the boxes around her. The offstage noise continues.

LISA (cont'd)

(to phone)

OK. Thanks. I'll get the team on it. No problem. What? Oh... I said no problem!

BLACKOUT.

Lights up to show Lisa pacing back and forth in tiny steps, listening on the headset.

BLACKOUT.

Lights up to show Lisa is asleep at her desk while the pounding continues.

Her cell phone rings. She jolts upright.

LISA (cont'd)

Hello? Oh hi sweetie. Hi. What's going on?

She listens and starts shaking her head.

LISA (cont'd)

Oh god. Of course they have to lay everyone off. What else are they going to do? And... is there anything you can do to make money without people involved? (beat) Ha. Yes. I'm sure you'd love a career in software documentation. No, I'm kind of not being totally sarcastic. But seriously, what're you going to do? You're welcome to come home, of course. It's a little bit um, tight. But ... yes. Of course. We'll figure something out. We will.

SCENE SEVEN

Lisa sits at her desk. The backstage noises are quiet. She looks up at the audience.

LISA

We're about a week into this. On lockdown, although they don't call it that. Life has... shrunk. And not in a completely terrible way.

I am now working entirely from home. I am one of the lucky ones. There are many others, with much more meaningful jobs, who are now completely and totally fucked. The federal government is doing everything in its power to make things worse.

The kitchen will be finished in a week, as long as no one gets sick. This work is essential work and I am grateful for that. I don't take much for granted any more.

My son is coming home. He will run out of money in a month without income. His girlfriend may come with, or not. These kids are not old enough to deal with issues this big. Actually, none of us are.

If the kitchen is done, they can stay in there. We have gotten by for so long without a kitchen, it doesn't seem strange at all to convert it into a living space. We all are being taught some deep lessons. Most of them, I hope, are good.

I walk outside as often as possible. The simple things are becoming incredibly meaningful. Taking a walk. Seeing all the dogs, the happy happy dogs. The kids on scooters. The families together. We say hi to each other as we pass. And we mean it. We are oddly happy with those momentary glances of connection.

The world is suddenly and inexplicably beautiful.

End