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On the cover:
Eric Pargac photographed by Shawn Lee.
Cover design by Eric Pargac.

An Impending Rupture of the Belly

By Matt Pelfrey

CHARACTERS

CLAY STILTS, 33

TERRI STILTS , 29, Clay's wife

RAY STILTS, 40, Clay's brother

EUGENE, 30, Clay's co-worker

DOUG, 30-40

ADAM

THE PRISONER

TIME

Now.

PLACE

Various locations suggested in the most minimal way.

Action should be continuous.

Act break is optional.

An Impending Rupture of the Belly received its World Premiere on April 7, 2007 by Furious Theatre Company, artists-in-residence at the Pasadena Playhouse. Directed by Dámaso Rodríguez.

The cast was as follows:

CLAY STILTS: Eric Pargac

TERRI STILTS: Aubrey Saverino

RAY STILTS: Shawn Lee

EUGENE/ADAM: Doug Newell

DOUG/THE PRISONER: Troy Metcalf

Dan Jenkins designed the sets, Christy M. Hauptman the costumes, Christie Wright the lights, and Cricket S. Meyers the sound. Fight choreography was by Brian Danner.

ACT I

SCENE 1: SOMEWHERE

CLAY in a chair, isolated by a cold spear of light. A deep, aggressive VOICE speaks to him from the darkness.

MAN'S VOICE: Here's the thing: Out there, right outside, all the people driving by, stumbling to their lunch dates, plugged into their little phone gizmos -- they're blind. They're ants. Not a clue. They read the paper and get teary about two-hundred-thousand just got wiped out by some horrific natural disaster. But they don't make the connection. The link. To their own lives. They don't honestly think it could happen to them. It's sad, screaming television people. Not anyone they know. They live in a fantasy land where the nightmares on TV stay on TV. But if it happens, they will crumble. They will be cut down in the street because living means standing your ground. And most can't.

(beat)

So I guess my only real question for you, Clay, is: Do You Have What It Takes?

CLAY: Do I...?

THE MAN appears, ominous, lurking on edge of the light.

MAN: Can you do what has to be done?

CLAY: I think so.

MAN: Not good enough.

CLAY: I'm prepared to defend my family.

MAN: You're in a Ralph's. Looters've stripped the shelves bare 'cept for a lone loaf of wonder bread. An old woman grabs it before you. Respond.

CLAY: I...I guess I'd--

MAN: Guessing doesn't cut it. Your children haven't eaten for days! Respond.

CLAY: I take it.

MAN: She fights.

CLAY: I overpower her. She's just an--

MAN: She pulls a gun.

CLAY: Exactly how old is this woman? I mean--

MAN: Respond! I'm not playing games here. She pulls a gun.

CLAY: I...pull my gun?

MAN: And?

CLAY: I, uh, shoot her?

MAN: Do you?

CLAY: Yes.

MAN: An old woman?

CLAY: Yes.

MAN: Looks like your grandmother.

CLAY: I shoot her. Right between the eyes. I put her down.

Beat.

MAN: And a cop?

(off Clay's silence)

Think the Police will be your friend when it happens? Huh? You think the pigs will think clearly when the shit hits the fan?

CLAY: I don't--

MAN: Look, when it happens, the sheep will scatter. They will panic. The predators will come out from underneath their slippery, moss-covered rocks and start to feed. The police won't be able to

handle the situation. They're frightened enough as it is. You honestly think they'll distinguish between a law abiding citizen using a fire arm to defend property and family and a crack smoking marauder with an Uzi and a blowtorch?

CLAY: Probably not.

A VOICE shouts from off stage.

VOICE (O.S.): Grande Soy Latte for Eugene. Tall no foam capp for Clay.

MAN: Hold that thought. I'll grab 'em.

The Man EXITS.

Lights widen, soften... We're now in the reality of a gourmet coffee house.

Clay takes a deep, shaking breath.

The Man RE-ENTERS. He is no longer remotely ominous. He holds two coffee drinks. His name is EUGENE.

EUGENE: Here you go, buddy. Where was I...?

CLAY: That I'm dead meat.

EUGENE: I'm just asking questions. Pushing buttons. Probing you. That's what friends are for. And these are important questions. You're gonna have a kid. On one hand: a beautiful thing. On the other - leaves you with your soft spots hanging out for anyone to grab.

CLAY: Soft spots. My kid will be a soft spot?

EUGENE: Think about it. Something goes down, no kids, you can escape without an extra thought. You got a rugrat on your hands, you're slowed down in a big way. I mean, what happens if you're in some major traffic snarl trying to evacuate the city and you got a kid, needs medicine, screaming, crying, shitting, you got no diapers...it's a nightmare. Or bullets start to fly? You think you're gonna be combat ready worrying about Junior hanging off your woman's teat? Please. Let's deal with reality. Let's be adults about this.

Clay takes a tentative sip of his drink. Too hot. Ouch.

Eugene studies Clay in the silence.

Beat.

EUGENE: So that's all I'm saying. No big deal.

Eugene pushes back from the table.

CLAY: *(soft)* What do I do?

EUGENE: Let's get back.

CLAY: What the heck am I s'posed to do?

EUGENE: I'm heading back to the veal stall, man. You ready to stroll?

CLAY: Eugene!

That was loud. Eugene looks around, a tad uncomfortable.

EUGENE: Um, what?

CLAY: What'm I supposed to do?

EUGENE: Cover your soft spots.

Eugene EXITS.

Clay sits there.

SOUNDS of rioting, screaming and chaos RISE as LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 2: CLAY'S HOUSE

Living room. CLAY watches as TERRI looks over some pamphlets, catalogs and floor plans.

TERRI: I don't... I... I'm not understanding this.

CLAY: It's what you wanted.

TERRI: Uh, okay...

CLAY: What you asked me to do.

TERRI: This?

CLAY: That's right.

TERRI: Um, "no," it's not.

CLAY: It is, Ter.

TERRI: Child-proof. "Child-proof," Clay.

CLAY: No, your words were "make the house safe for baby."

TERRI: Yes, exactly.

CLAY: And that's what this is.

TERRI: You're serious?

CLAY: Yeah.

TERRI: You can't be.

CLAY: Ter, why're you...?

TERRI: (*overlap with "why're you"*) Because this is...this is---

CLAY: It's exactly what we've discussed. Okay? That's what I'm doing.

TERRI: When I say baby-proof the house, I mean things like, oh, outlet plugs. New shelving to keep detergent and toxic stuff out of arms reach. I don't mean order a bunch of bizarre catalogs and plans to, to... (*grabs pamphlet*) Look at this shit. This is insanity, Clay. Everything in here.

CLAY: How can you possibly think that?

TERRI: (*grabs floor plans*) Bullet-proofed windows? "Convert upstairs study into bio-safe room." That's my office you're talking about.

CLAY: I thought you'd appreciate the gesture.

TERRI: And this here -- a gun slot in the front door?

CLAY: Yeah, that's right. Big enough to stick a shotgun out.

TERRI: A shotgun!?

CLAY: Perfect weapon for hallway combat and crowd control.

TERRI: This is Pasadena not Rwanda.

CLAY: Not yet.

Pause.

TERRI: You really think this's what I was talking about? Be honest.

CLAY: It's...an opportunity.

TERRI: For...?

CLAY: A chance for us to... take steps...to make us safe. You, me, and the baby.

TERRI: This is Eugene talking.

CLAY: Hon--

TERRI: Him with his paranoid theories and doomsday scenarios.

CLAY: Jesus, give me some credit.

TERRI: It's not credit I'm handing out.

CLAY: I know you've got this "Disney" vision of the world, but that's not how things are going. That's not what's out there. And when it comes, it'll be in our neighborhood too.

TERRI: What's gonna be in our neighborhood?

CLAY: It.

TERRI: Which "it"?

CLAY: Take your pick.

(beat)

Terrorism.

A ten-point-nine earthquake.

Riots.

Economic collapse.

Dirty bombs.

Briefcase nukes.

Small Pox crop dusters flying over Dodger Stadium.

(beat)

There are hairline fractures everywhere. And for reasons I don't get, you think there's something wrong because I see them. You should thank me.

TERRI: For living in fear?

CLAY: For having vision. Taking action for all the right reasons. When you've got a family, that's called being responsible.

Pause.

TERRI: How are the headaches?

Clay laughs.

TERRI: What?

CLAY: That's what you think this's about?

TERRI: Well, have you?

CLAY: Yes. So?

TERRI: Forget it.

CLAY: No, I wanna know. You think this's about 9-11?

TERRI: Don't call it that.

CLAY: Why not?

TERRI: Just, please...don't.

CLAY: It was my 9-11.

TERRI: Clay, there is only, and will only ever be, one 9-11. A very big event.

CLAY: Mine was big enough for me. September 11, 2006.

TERRI: It's a perversion to equate the two and really, especially in front of other people, I wish you wouldn't.

CLAY: Was I almost killed?

TERRI: Clay...

CLAY: Was I? Did I make it up? Did I make up this scar?

TERRI: You can barely see it.

CLAY: And so, what's that's s'posed to mean?

TERRI: Nothing. Forget it.

CLAY: Terri--

TERRI: You had a fucked-up thing happen. I know that, but--

CLAY: There are threats out there. Dangerous threats. From Mad Cow to mega-droughts--

TERRI: Jesus, please!

CLAY: Yeah, laugh. That's the correct response. Laugh all you want. But our son is gonna have a very different world to live in than the one we've had most of our lives. So chuckle, go ahead.

TERRI: You know, maybe...just maybe...I'd take these concerns of yours more seriously, but...

CLAY: But what? *(beat)* Tell me: But what?

TERRI: You can't even stop that jerk from letting his dog crap on our lawn.

Beat.

CLAY: What d'you mean?

TERRI: I think you know.

Pause.

Clay tries to keep the sound of dread from showing in his voice.

CLAY: It...happened again?

TERRI: Every morning. Every morning I go out to get the paper, there it is...a little brown stack just...steaming there.

CLAY: But I put a sign up.

TERRI: Yes, well, apparently "please curb your dog" is not an effective deterrent.

(beat)

So! Why don't we start with the dog poop, and if you handle that, we can work our way up to dirty bombs, killer asteroids and the end of civilization. Okay? Do we have a deal?

Clay goes to the window. Stares out at his lawn.

TERRI (cont'd): I'm sorry. I know...I know how I get. It's just... We need to stay focused. We both have to be better...better than we've been in the past. It's not about just us anymore. Or our fear. Bad things happen. You get into a fender-bender and some prick attacks you. That's not an indictment of who you are.

(beat)

Hey. Look at me. We're gonna be good parents.

(beat)

Can we just...try...try our best to...keep things in perspective?

Clay doesn't answer.

A few long moments.

The phone rings.

Clay doesn't move from the window.

Terri grabs the phone off the cradle.

TERRI: Hello? Who is...Ray? Is this...Ray? Yeah...Just...hold on...

CLAY: I'll call back tomorrow.

TERRI: *(cover receiver)* No. You need to take this. Now.

A SEPARATE POOL OF LIGHT rises on Clay's brother, RAY, 38. He's at a pay phone on some dark street corner. Ray has no pants on. He's wearing cowboy boots, a KISS T-shirt, and a pair of filthy bun-huggers. He talks between choking sobs, clutches the receiver like it's the only thing keeping him afloat.

RAY: *(through his tears)* Little B?

CLAY: Ray?

RAY: Hey...

CLAY: Ray, what--

RAY: It's me.

CLAY: What's going--

RAY: They did it.

CLAY: Where are you?

RAY: Fucking assholes.

CLAY: You alright?

RAY: It was a fuckin' uprising, man. They turned on me!

CLAY: Who did?

RAY: Ziggy! Deak! Doctor Figg! Back-stabbing scumbagfuckers!

CLAY: Slow down. Where are you?

RAY: God, I dunno...doesn't matter...
(shouts at passing cars/pedestrians)
SOMEBODY KILL ME, PLEASE!

CLAY: Stop that!

RAY: SHOOT ME IN THE HEAD!!!

CLAY: Ray!

RAY: *(back into phone)* I think...

CLAY: What's happ...?

RAY: ...think I'm drunk...

CLAY: Ray, pull yourself...

RAY: ...and my head hurts...

CLAY: Pull yourself together...

RAY: ...somebody punched me...and I may've ingested some narcotics...

CLAY: Ray! Take a breath, communicate to me...

RAY: *(takes a long shaking breath)* They're afraid of what I got hanging between the legs. They fear the size, shape and girth of my artistic cock! That's what it's really fucking about! They can't drop Scrotus from the label! We were this close to breaking out!...SCROTUS LIVES!

Ray lets the phone drop and starts ranting at unseen passing cars and perhaps a pedestrian or two.

RAY: *(to the street)* SCROTUS LIVES, MOTHERFUCKERS!

CLAY: Ray??

RAY: YAAAAAARRRRRRRGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGUH!

CLAY: Ray!! *(to Terri)* He's being attacked!

Ray staggers back to the phone.

RAY: Little B?

CLAY: What was that?

RAY: Just venting. Feel better now. Kinda.

CLAY: Y'gotta stop with the booze...

RAY: Remember that movie? That Japanese flick with the two giant monsters? Big giant hairy monster guys. One was green, other was brown. On, like, every Saturday afternoon.

CLAY: War of the Gargantuas.

RAY: *(still tearful)* I'm the Green Gargantua. The one nobody likes. The evil one. The bad boy. You're the Brown Gargantua. The one everyone loves. The one that saves the day.
(makes loud, weird, beastly cry, ala the Gargantuas:)
"Chur!" "Chur!"

CLAY: Don't do that in my ear!

RAY: It's the cry of the gargantua. Their plaintive wail. Remember? When they fight, they make that noise. Cuz they're mad as hell.

CLAY: I'm coming to get you. Figure out where you are.

RAY: Hold on.
(looks around)
I think I'm near Fifth and Spring.

CLAY: Okay. Um. I'll meet you at the Taco House on Hill Street. You know it?

RAY: Yeah. Across from Angel's Flight. That works. Great carnitas.

CLAY: Half hour.

RAY: Okay. Wait!

CLAY: What?

RAY: Better make it an hour. It'll take me that long to find some pants.

Clay hangs up. Ray DISAPPEARS. Terri looks concerned.

CLAY: Ray's outta sorts.

TERRI: Again.

CLAY: Yap.

TERRI: Gonna ask for money.

CLAY: He got dropped from the label.

TERRI: What label? They were handing out CDs on Melrose. Selling crap from their trunk.

CLAY: Be cool.

TERRI: Maybe this'll make him clean his act up. Get his life together.

CLAY: He's feeling like shit.

TERRI: Listen: Don't loan him any money.

CLAY: Do I give you this kind of grief about Lucy?

TERRI: My sis doesn't treat me like a human ATM. She's a responsible adult with a house and--

CLAY: Whatever.

TERRI: And he can't stay here.

CLAY: Did I ask if he could?

TERRI: I'm saying after last time? The "brown towel" incident?

CLAY: Never proven.

TERRI: Because you won't let me confront him on it!

CLAY: That band, literally, was his whole life.

TERRI: Yes. "Scrotus". Like just having KISS in the world isn't enough, we need a KISS tribute band.

CLAY: They're not a tribute band. Where's my jacket?

TERRI: Give him some brotherly counseling.

CLAY: You've made your point: my brother's a fuck-up and he needs to keep away.

TERRI: That wasn't my point.

Clay stops and gives her a look.

TERRI: Alright, alright. It is my point. Close enough, at least. Whatever.

(beat)

It's been a long night. I'm sorry. Just...everything.

She manages a conciliatory smile. He walks over, gives her a quick kiss.

CLAY: Back soon.

Clay EXITS as LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE 3: TACO HOUSE

Night. Clay and Ray sit at an outdoor food table. Ray's managed to procure a grubby pair of pants.

RAY: Just like a job with a title. An important title that kinda says to people, "Hey, this guy's human." An office would be cool too. But the title is key.

CLAY: So, okay, that's a good starting off point. You want a job. A normal, nine-to-five job. Great.

RAY: 'Cept I got no skills. I can't do anything. I feel like totally useless. Like why didn't mom or The Bob ever make us learn some-

thing worthwhile? Force us to go to college and major in something that could earn a solid income. All this "follow your dreams" hippy shit. Lot a good that's done me. It's all clear to me now: follow your dreams and end up in downtown Los Angeles with no pants. Not fun. I shoulda stayed in the military. The Marines take care of their own. But see, the weird corrupt thing is times like right now I feel this way. But talk to me in an hour and the last thing I'll want is a joe-normal job like you and Terri got. I mean, you guys, both of you, you're office equipment. Sure, you're made of flesh, blood, bone...but you're both just human appliances. Some day computers will do what you do. Microsoft will never make a computer that can churn out an authentic, testical-vibrating drum solo. Big business will never out source songs about fucking nubile eighteen year olds. It just won't happen, Clay. It won't. I'm tellin' ya.

CLAY: I believe you, Ray.

RAY: So what's the answer. What the fuck do I do?

CLAY: Well, you need to find something you can stick with.

RAY: Maybe I can get my security job back. Still got the uniform.

CLAY: Try that.

RAY: Only problem, Constantine said he'd have my legs broken if I ever showed up at the home office.

CLAY: So...work for a different company.

Ray nods vaguely.

RAY: Think you can float me some green?

CLAY: I just bought you dinner man.

RAY: Are you serious?

Clay pulls out his wallet, gives Ray ten bucks.

RAY: Kinda hoping for a little more economic assistance than this.

CLAY: I can't.

RAY: Because Terri?

CLAY: No.

RAY: Yes.

Pause.

CLAY: Things are tight. Saving for the baby. Lots of expenses.

(beat)

Where you gonna sleep tonight? What's the game plan?

RAY: You tell me.

Ray looks at his brother, waiting for him to make an offer...

Silence.

RAY: Got a storage unit. Guess I'll crash there.

Beat. Ray looks away, still expecting Clay to intervene in some way.

CLAY: Where is it?

RAY: Couple blocks east of Staples Center.

CLAY: I'll drive you.

RAY: Ten bucks. Two tacos. Ride to my storage unit-slash-shelter.
Great.

CLAY: Don't pull your shit.

RAY: I'm not. When I pull shit, you'll know it.

CLAY: Only thing Terri or I wanna see is you happy. To find your
place in the world.

RAY: My place in the world is being the red pulsating heart beat of
SCROTUS!!

CLAY: You're not the Green Gargantua.

RAY: Whatever, man, whatever.

Ray gets up.

CLAY: I'm driving you.

RAY: Nah, man. Don't sweat it. Best to Terri.
(He moves to go. Stops. Turns to Clay, speaks as if this were revered poetry:)
"Here I go again on my own.
Walking down the only road I've ever known.
Like a drifter...
I was born to walk alone."
(with significance)
Whitesnake.

Ray EXITS dramatically.

Clay stares after his brother, somehow haunted by the encounter.

SCENE 4: SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF CLAY'S HOUSE AND LAWN

DOUG holds an empty leash as he watches his dog off stage. Clay STROLLS UP holding a rolled up morning paper and a Venti drip.

CLAY: Good morning.

DOUG: Mornin'.

Pause.

CLAY: Gonna be a nice day.

DOUG: Hope so.

Pause.

CLAY: That your dog?

DOUG: Uh-huh.

CLAY: Kind is that?