

THE MAN WHO STOPPED a one-act play by Ruben Carbajal  
(Sample: First Three Scenes)  
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*Lights up on PAUL (22), reclined on a second-hand couch, facing a television. He is surrounded by a semi-circled pile of miscellaneous garbage: a half-empty box of donuts, old newspapers, tattered novels, soda cans, an ashtray full of butts, TV dinners, etc... Just slightly in front of the pile, a remote control. PAUL watches the television in a trance. (Just shortly before PAUL can be seen, the VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN should be audible)*

SCENE ONE: REACHING

VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN

Once again, you're watching the Weather Channel, the only station that brings you accurate forecasts and weather conditions twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. I'm Chip Waterloo, bringing you...you guessed it...the weather.

*Enter MOTHER, who appears behind the couch, slightly above PAUL. She holds a letter in her hands, and reads from it.*

MOTHER

The weather here in L.A. is absolutely fabulous. I mean, if you discount the floods, fires, and earthquakes. You must be cold in Wisconsin, Paul. Are you cold in Wisconsin? We haven't seen or heard from you in so long, Paul. We worry about you.

VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN

Now, you may ask yourself, "Why a channel that brings you nothing but weather?" It's simple: weather is always happening. There is always some sort of weather going on isn't there?

MOTHER

What do you do in Wisconsin? We wish you'd move back now that you are done with school. Are you still working for that office supply store? Your father and I wondered what office supplies have to do with East Asian Literature. That's what you went to school for, isn't it? Are many of the office supplies made in East Asia? I suppose they are. Does your knowledge of East Asian Literature help you with your job at all? We hope so, Paul.

*PAUL begins to search for the remote control.*

VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN

I mean, you've never had a day without weather, have you? Of course not! Every place, every day, no matter what the time, is having some sort of weather. Why doesn't your poor weather man ever get a day off? Because weather is a constant and relentless thing...like life.

MOTHER

(Sounds of gunfire) Your father just finished installing a shooting range out back. He's been at it all morning. The riots really shook him up, Paul. It's not the best time in the world to be a police officer around here. I try to convince him to get a desk job, but he won't even discuss it.

*PAUL can see the remote, but it lies millimeters out of his reach. Without getting off of the couch, he tries, unsuccessfully, to obtain the controller. PAUL continues with added desperation to reach the remote as the scene progresses.*

VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN

I've had a reoccurring dream for many years now. Every night I dream of a giant map of the United States, much like the one you see on your screen right now. But the map I dream of is different. The map of my dreams is completely blank. No clouds, no rain, no sun, no nothing. A day without weather.

MOTHER

Your father and I have gotten into a little disagreement over you. Do you collect flags, Paul? Your father claims you have a passionate interest in them. He swears that since you were a boy, you have acquired a vast collection of flags, from all over the world. I think he is confusing you with another boy he must have conceived with somebody else. By your father's account, you are something of a flag-enthusiast. Possibly even flag-crazed. Are you flag-crazed, Paul?

VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN

Every morning, when I wake up, I run to my window, thinking of that empty map of my dreams...but then, when I look outside, I am always greatly disappointed...there's always something going on out there: a little precipitation, a cumulus cloud, an icicle. You see, there is never a day without some sort of weather going on.

MOTHER

We are coming to visit you Paul. We want to make sure you still exist. We also want to settle this flag debate once and for all. Your father has purchased a flag for you, and can't wait for you to see it. He desperately needs a rest from work. After church this Sunday, we will leave for Wisconsin. The trip should take three days. See you soon. Love, Mother.

VOICE OF THE WEATHER MAN

So if you were wondering what your weatherman, what Chip Waterloo of the Weather Channel dreams of...what he hopes and prays for every day of his life...you now know that it is a day devoid of weather. (Clears his throat. Resumes his normal attitude.) But now, it's time for Glen Nuberman to keep us up to date on the barometric pressures across the Eastern Coast...Glen?

*PAUL is still reaching until lights out.*

SCENE TWO: PITCH

*Living room. PAUL is still on the couch, with his pile of garbage in front of him. He stares blankly at the television.*

VOICE OF WEATHER MAN #2

We'll be right back with Pollen Counts Across the Nation, just after these messages...

COMMERCIAL VOICE

How many times has this happened to you? The Beach, the Sun, the Waves, the Women...Hey! Wouldn't you like a closer look at her? This guy is out of luck. But not him...he's got the Vis-Tech 3000...the binocular of the future! How'd you like a view like that? Why, now she's practically sitting on your lap!

(WOMAN'S VOICE: Hey good lookin', see anything you like?)

COMMERCIAL VOICE (CONT'D)

The Vis-Tech 3000 is like no other binocular, it uses the latest in optical technology...so you'll be able to see things like you've never seen them before! The Vis-Tech 3000 is perfect for getting a sharper view of sporting events, scenery, birds, the night sky, why it's so advanced, you can practically see into the future! (Sound of a magical harp) Don't delay, get yours now!

(A DEEPER VOICE: The Vis-Tech 3000 is available at these fine stores...)

(LIGHTS OUT)

SCENE THREE: WORRIED ABOUT PAUL

Same living room. PAUL is staring out the back "window" (Located upstage left, facing the audience) with a pair of binoculars, which hang around his neck. He should be doing this intently, for about five seconds, then enter RAY (23) from behind, stage right.

RAY

(Sifting through the mail, not noticing PAUL.) Coupons, bills, coupons, bills, coupons...it's a viscous circle. You get a coupon, buy something with it, they send you the bill. Then they give you more coupons, then you go out and buy something...

RAY sits on the edge of the couch

RAY

(Yelling to BOB, offstage right) Hey, Bob! You got a shit load of long distance again! Who the hell are you calling? Martians?

BOB

(Offstage) What?

RAY

I said, who are you calling? Martians?

BOB

(Long Pause) No.

RAY

How are you going to pay for this?

BOB  
I will.

RAY  
Did you look for a job today?  
(No answer)

RAY (cont'd)  
Or did you just lay up there and get stoned?

*No answer.*

RAY  
(To himself) Christ, it's like living with a child. (To BOB) You know rent is coming up soon. Paul and I are not going to cover you another month, man.

BOB  
(After a pause) I know.

RAY  
(Starts flipping through the mail again. To himself:) Who the hell am I? Mother Theresa? (He notices PAUL for the first time) Jesus! Paul! What the hell are you doing over there? (Looks at the couch in surprise) Hey, we're off the couch now, are we? Christ, I was beginning to think you were turning into a vegetable like our friend Bob.

BOB  
(Singing) Fuck youuuuuuuuu.

RAY  
(Ignoring BOB) Paul? Paul? What the hell are you looking at? Is it more interesting than the Weather Channel?  
(Pause) Is it more interesting than office supplies? I'll bet it is. (Taking a step closer to PAUL) You know, you might have a better view out the front window...there isn't a brick wall facing that end. (Walks closely to PAUL) Are you okay Paul? (Waves his hands in front of the binoculars. He snaps his fingers about PAUL's head.) Come on, Paul, you trying to be funny? Pauuuullllll. (Walks to the edge of the room to talk to BOB:) Bob. Bob? (Yells:) BOB!

BOB  
(Offstage until indicated) What?

RAY  
Did you see this?

BOB  
What?

RAY  
(Points to PAUL) This.

BOB  
(Yells, slightly annoyed) What this?

RAY  
Paul. What did you do to Paul?

BOB  
Who?

RAY  
Paul. What did you do to him?

BOB  
Nothin'.

RAY  
You didn't share any of your stash with him?

BOB  
No.

RAY  
You're sure.

BOB  
(Annoyed) Yeah!

*RAY walks back to PAUL, studies him for a few moments. He walks back to the edge of the room. Stops. He moves back to PAUL.*

RAY  
Paul...hey buddy...come on...

*RAY moves back to the edge of the stage.*

RAY  
Did you see this?

BOB  
What?

RAY

What? What do you mean, what? Paul. Did you see Paul?

BOB

Paul...

RAY

Yes, Paul...Our room mate Paul. I'm worried about him.

BOB

You're worried about him?

RAY

He's got a pair of binoculars.

BOB

That's nothing to be worried about.

RAY

He's staring out the back window with them, Bob.

BOB

That's what you do with binoculars, Ray.

RAY

(Looking at PAUL) Our back window faces a brick wall, Bob. He's staring at a brick wall, with a pair of god-damned binoculars...he isn't moving.

BOB

Where'd he get the money for a pair of binoculars?

RAY

I dunno. But don't you find that a little out of the ordinary?

BOB

Binoculars are not cheap, man. Less he got a cheap pair...He don't have the money for a good pair, I don't think.

RAY

I mean, if he was staring at say...a beautiful landscape, or trying to sneak a peak in some woman's apartment, well, that's different. But a brick wall, Bob.

BOB

You say he's staring at a brick wall?

RAY  
With a pair of binoculars.

BOB (26) enters.

BOB  
A brick wall?

RAY  
Yes. I think he's lost it.

BOB  
(Walks up to PAUL, studies him) Woah. This ain't right, man.

RAY  
No, it's not.

BOB  
Yooohoooo...Paul...This is fucked up.

RAY  
Have you ever seen anything like this?

BOB  
Well, last week, my friend Shiela dosed on...

RAY  
I don't mean a drug story. I don't think he even drank, did he?

BOB  
No, he was pretty straight. Now he's real straight. As a fuckin' arrow.

RAY  
Well, you saw him last week, didn't you? (Pronounced like the title of a book:) Paul and The Couch?

BOB  
The Couch?

RAY  
Yes, you didn't see him? He spent all last week on the Couch, watching television...

BOB  
So?

RAY

Not everyone sleeps their god-damned life away. Paul's not like that...but last week, he didn't move once from that couch.

BOB

Where was I?

RAY

I don't know.

BOB

(Thoughtfully, looking out the window) Maybe he likes the patterns on the wall. Maybe up close, they look real interesting.

RAY

I don't think so, Bob.

BOB

(Studies Paul) Man...

RAY

This isn't like him.

BOB

Paul.

RAY

It's no use.

BOB

Huh.

RAY

Do you see why I'm worried? I mean, you don't spend an entire week on a couch, without moving, watching the same channel because you are a sane and rational person.

BOB

(Looking at PAUL) Whaddya mean the same channel?

RAY

He watched the same channel, without changing it, all week...didn't you see him?

BOB

One channel?

RAY

The same channel.

BOB

(Tiny crescendo:) The same channel? All week? Without moving?

RAY

Where were you? I would get up for work, and there he was...Paul and The Couch and the TV on the Same Channel. Then, after I'd been to work, met with Leslie, had a drink at the Landmark...I'd open up the door...and there he was. Just like I left him in the morning.

BOB

Where the hell was I?

RAY

How do I know?

(Slight Pause)

BOB

(Quieter:) What channel was he watching?

RAY

See, that's the worst of it...he was watching the Weather Channel.

BOB

(Looks to RAY with disbelief:) Get out.

RAY

The damned Weather Channel. An entire week of non-stop cloud formations, wind-chill factors, low pressure fronts, I mean, what the hell does he care if it's sunny and sixty-three in Madrid?

BOB

(Distant:) I dunno.

RAY

And there's this pile around him. A semicircle of shit, all within reaching distance of the his spot on the couch. It's all the crap he's been living on all week: cigarettes, donuts, newspapers, sci-fi novels, crossword books...

BOB

Paul likes crossword puzzles.

RAY

...soda cans left and right. All kinds of shit in this pile in front of the couch.

BOB

Watching the same channel.

RAY

Watching the god-damned Weather Channel.

BOB

Maybe he has a cold.

RAY

This isn't a cold, Bob.

*Pause.*

BOB

Did you say anything to him? (Looks at Paul) I mean, last week?

RAY

You're damned right I did. I said, "Paul, I know this isn't any of my god-damned business, but I have noticed that you have been on that god-damned couch the whole god-damned week, watching the god-damned Weather Channel the whole god-damned time. Why don't you at least inject a little variety in your life and change the god-damned channel?"

*Pause. They both stare at him.*

BOB

Well, what did he say?

RAY

He couldn't reach the remote control.

BOB

He couldn't reach what?

RAY

He couldn't reach the remote control. He pointed to the floor, and low and behold, the controller was just a few inches in front of the pile of shit. He wasn't lying. It was out of his reach.

BOB  
(Looking at PAUL) That crazy bastard.

RAY  
Yeah, well, no shit.

BOB  
This is not normal behavior.

RAY  
Well, thanks for your help.

BOB  
(Softly:) Paul...

RAY  
(Softly:) Paul...

BOB  
(Louder:) Paul...

RAY  
(Louder:) Paul...

RAY and BOB  
(Chanting, pleading:) Paul...Paul...Paul...

*Lights out.*

**FOR PRODUCTION INQUIRIES OR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE MAN  
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