

**THE RHINO**  
*By Ben Anderson*

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## **CHARACTERS**

ERICK - 20s-30s, Visiting his friend on his day off.

BERT - 20s, Awaiting the arrival of his friend.

MORGAN - 20s-30s, A maid.

## **SETTING**

San Ysidro, CA, USA

## **AUTHORS NOTES**

It's hard to write these. Mainly because I've always believed that this section at the beginning of the play is a device for the playwright to hold on to their play as long as possible. It's important to accept that people will do things differently. Inflections will not be carried out the way I wanted, the stage will look different, everything will be somewhat different. All I can really do is give some suggestions.

'The Rhino' draws inspiration from multiple mediums. Songs, albums, and movies are put into the play. Tarantino's 'Jackie Brown' and music from Sharon Jones & The Dap Kings, The Black Keys, Little Simz, and Black Pumas are the engine behind this weird vehicle. I see the two songs at the beginning and the end of the play as suggestions. If you have any ideas that could provide a better beginning and ending that fits your interpretation, feel free to add them in!

Furthermore, the three characters may have male pronouns, and present male in the play, but this can be changed. It doesn't really matter, and never really will. What's important is the difference between the characters. Making sure that your company accurately depicts how each of these characters feel about the Rhino.

In terms of setting, this play has no set time. Now technically, with the inclusion of Little Simz' music, it would then have to take place after September 2021. But that doesn't matter. You can change the song if it bothers you that much. The issues brought up in the place have been commonplace in San Diego for a long time, so setting it in the 90's and using a Salt 'N Pepa song would work too. Feel free to use whatever time frame fits your image. Whatever you do, I'm sure it'll be kickass awesome.

Cheers,

- Ben

*P.S. This play is for Pops Bob Anderson, and an homage to his beautiful music taste.*

**SCENE ONE**

*(Lights up. 'How Long Do I Have To Wait For You' by Sharon Jones & The Dap Kings plays as we are introduced to the apartment. There is a chair and couch. Upstage, there is a kitchen. This does not need to be shown. BERT stands in his living room, he has a drink in his hand)*

**BERT:** I learn a whole lot. If you wanna know *one* thing about me, it's that I am a learner. I learn all the time. But I don't mean it conventionally. I don't read *much*, I don't study much... I learn in a way that I can guarantee you don't learn. I learn when I listen. I've always listened to everything around me, and I *always* take it in. And I can guarantee something else, I learn *more* than you. Think about how you are- where you've been- who you see. They are not the same people I've seen, it's not the same places I've been... and you're not who I am. They paint a good picture on this San Diego canvas. The city looks how they want it to look because they turned off the light in the places they didn't want shining. Like Rio. Brazil. The favelas get covered by a wall- and that wall only becomes transparent when they show you the new, state of the art. But Rio has the Olympics, San Diego has jack. San Diego and Rio only share in common, the rhino. Think about the favelas. Everyone knows about it, everyone sees it, but they do nothing about it. But they're on their way. The people of San Diego have a rhino. A big, grey rhino. I help people in this city, I help the people covered by walls, I help those who are in the dark. I'm the rhino. I'm a threat. They may see me, they may acknowledge me, but they do nothing about me. I'm heading straight for you. So be prepared. And if it surprises you, then know that you're gods left you to die-

*(There is a knock on the door. BERT turns the music down. He sets his drink down. There's a series of knocks. BERT pulls a gun from behind him, and walks towards the door)*

**ERICK (O.S):** Bert! You home?

*(Beat. BERT chuckles, and puts the gun away)*

**BERT:** One second.

*(He opens the door, to reveal ERICK. He is holding a newspaper and a bag of food. He walks in)*

**ERICK:** The man of the hour!

**BERT:** Erick. How you doing, buddy?

**ERICK:** Been hell of a lot worse.

*(ERICK goes to take a seat on the couch. He puts his bag of food on the floor)*

**ERICK:** You hungry?

**BERT:** I could eat. What do you got there?

**ERICK:** Wendy's. Had some on the way over. Long shift, I couldn't wait any longer. There's a frosty in here somewhere if you'd like.

**BERT:** A frosty?

**ERICK:** Have you ever had one?

**BERT:** *(beat)* Never had the opportunity.

*(ERICK pulls a frosty out of the bag)*

**ERICK:** It'll change your life.

*(He hands BERT the frosty, who takes a bite. He tosses it around in his mouth, before smiling)*

**BERT:** Mm! That's *damn* good!

**ERICK:** Ain't it?

**BERT:** Yeah... *damn* good... how much I owe ya?

**ERICK:** *(Scoffs)* Oh, please-

**BERT:** No man- I got you! Prices *crazy* these days.

**ERICK:** I don't need it.

**BERT:** It is the right thing to. How much was it?

**ERICK:** *(Laughs, sighs)* Ninety-nine cents.

*(Bert's eyes widen)*

**BERT:** Ninety-nine?

**ERICK:** Cents, yes.

**BERT:** So a dollar?

**ERICK:** It's marketed at ninety nine cents.

**BERT:** Right, so a dollar. It's probably taxed.

**ERICK:** I really don't need-

**BERT:** Chill man, just chill- I got you

*(He pulls out his wallet, it's fat and filled with paper bills. He shuffles through and pulls out a one dollar bill.. Beat. ERICK stares at it)*

**ERICK:** I couldn't.

**BERT:** Ahhhh! C'mon!

**ERICK:** I'm serious- I couldn't! It's not worth anything, really. It was a friendly gesture. Besides, I wouldn't like to think about where your dollars have been.

*(Beat. BERT chuckles)*

**BERT:** You're damn right about that. Well, anyway- I appreciate the gesture.

**ERICK:** You're welcome.

**BERT:** How's the force?

**ERICK:** Same old.

**BERT:** Hah! Same old?

**ERICK:** Yeah.

**BERT:** That's funny.

**ERICK:** *(Beat)* How is that funny?

**BERT:** Well... what *is* same old?

**ERICK:** Uhm... you know, cruising... giving out tickets, arresting.

**BERT:** Hmm.

**ERICK:** What's that?

**BERT:** It's just interesting. Interesting how *that's* your same old

*(Beat. BERT has finished the frosty by now, and stands up to put it in the trash)*

**BERT:** D'you want something to drink?

**ERICK:** What do you have?

**BERT:** Water... Corona-

**ERICK:** *Not* that.

**BERT:** I got coke...

**ERICK:** To *drink*?

**BERT:** Well, yea- it's a little sugary, but it's not bad.

*(Beat. ERICK chuckles)*

**BERT:** What'd you say?

**ERICK:** Nothing, I got a story for you. Pour me a coke and get over here.

*(BERT pours ERICK and coke and gets himself a drink)*

**BERT:** Do you mind if I put some music on?

**ERICK:** Have at her.

*(BERT moves to his phone, shuffling through a playlist, he grunts in disagreement as he scrolls, until landing on 'Two Worlds Apart' by Little Simz)*

**ERICK:** Who's this?

**BERT:** You don't know Little Simz?

**ERICK:** *(shrugs)* Never had the opportunity.

**BERT:** Don't worry man, I'll put you on.

*(BERT starts dancing to the beat, and joins in when the lyrics start)*

**BERT (SINGING):** Lady, lady, lady, lady, lady, lady, lady.

I Know you see the confidence, believe me I am wavy-

*(BERT laughs, ERICK laughs, music underscores the rest of the scene)*

**ERICK:** Nice pipes.

**BERT:** Hey- man, my voice is being workshopped, don't worry about it!

*(BERT sits down and hands ERICK his drink. Beat)*

**BERT:** So what was that story?

**ERICK:** Story... Shit- right! Right, right. So a couple days I was cruising, Logan Heights area.

**BERT:** Yeesh.

**ERICK:** Right? Shitty area, like this area.

**BERT:** I live in this area.

**ERICK:** I know that... So, anyway- I'm on some smaller road, when I hear this kid screaming. Loud screaming. Pull the car over, walk a few steps... I find a boy in a yard and some older guy- probably his dad. I get a little startled, I ask them what's wrong... D'you wanna know what the kid says?



**BERT:** What he say?

**ERICK:** (*Chuckling*) Kid goes... "Daddy is keeping *SO MUCH SUGAR* from me!"

*(Beat. ERICK begins to laugh, and BERT laughs as well. There's a moment of silence after)*

**BERT:** What happened?

**ERICK:** Well I had to contain myself. The dad's look sealed it for me.

**BERT:** His look?

**ERICK:** Yeah. I mean- not his *look* look... but his eyes, the way his eyes looked.

**BERT:** Like... bug eyes?

**ERICK:** Like 'I just got caught' eyes.

**BERT:** I don't really follow.

**ERICK:** Oh come on, of course you follow! That guy has probably been in the game for a while, so much so he forgot about the risk.

**BERT:** Risk?

**ERICK:** Well, think about it like speeding. Or music being too loud in the car. *Everyone* is careful right at the beginning, but they forget that there's a punishment. The reason they forget is because the punishment always feels so far away. Until they hear them sirens, they'll be going eighty in a cul-de-sac! These people forget that a cop isn't so far away. And those who don't forget probably couldn't lift a glass of water.

**BERT:** I guess you're right.

**ERICK:** Besides, I see those eyes all the time. I'm a pig, after all.

*(Beat)*

**ERICK:** Then I just searched the house.

**BERT:** What'd you find?

**ERICK:** I found the signals.

**BERT:** What signals?

**ERICK:** Jesus, Bert. You live in Ysidro, those signals are *all* around. You've got your external ones... poor lawn hasn't seen a trim in years, couple of boards on the windows... but the house is a whole different story. I mean- the scale was on the *counter*. Probably didn't even need to check the drawers.

**BERT:** Sugar?

**ERICK:** *Whole lot* of sugar.

*(Beat. ERICK looks around)*

**BERT:** Must like baking.

**ERICK:** Must like *cooking*.

*(BERT nods. Beat. ERICK picks up the newspaper, flips through it, before...)*

**ERICK:** I lied to you.

**BERT:** Huh?

**ERICK:** I lied to you, just now.

**BERT:** Did you create the story to make your job sound cool?

**ERICK:** Well, it's not that I lied, I just forgot to add something *(he flips the newspaper)* This stuffs the same old.

*(BERT picks up the newspaper, reading the title aloud)*

**BERT:** 'The Rhino Strikes Again: San Diego's New Symbol Spotted at The Scene... Nancy Wallace, a member of San Diego's city council was found dead in her home in Solana Beach. When police investigated the house, officers found a rhinoceros spray painted onto the ceiling'

*(Beat. BERT hands the paper back to ERICK)*

**BERT:** Huh.

**ERICK:** That damn Rhino. It's following me around, I tell ya. It was at the junkyard as well, and I bet you a second look through Logan Heights- and I'd be finding it there too.

**BERT:** What's it mean?

**ERICK:** Who knows? Detective agency tried their luck, but it's cold trails all 'round.

**BERT:** Could just be a symbol.

**ERICK:** Well... yeah- it *is* a symbol. Hard to know what it's symbolizing.

**BERT:** Could just take it at face value, no?

*(ERICK sighs, he grabs a packet of cigarettes from his pocket)*

**ERICK:** D'you mind?

**BERT:** Knock yourself out.

*(Beat. ERICK lights himself a cigarette, gives it a few puffs)*

**ERICK:** What's a Rhino at face value, Bert?

**BERT:** Big... scary, fat animal in the middle of Africa, slowly going extinct.

**ERICK:** Stop dancing around the question. You know what I'm asking- what's it mean in the context of this situation- why would a *rhinoceros* be at the scene of the murder of a city council member?

*(Beat. BERT sips his drink)*

**BERT:** Well, think about the savannah for a second. There's a lot of animals we get told about as kids. The lion, the hyena, the cheetah. The fast animals, the strong ones, the ones with the longnecks and the crazy feathers.

**ERICK:** Well what about the rhino-

**BERT:** What *about* the rhino? Who gives a damn about the rhino? Hell yeah- they're strong! Big, strong, powerful. They're not too far off from all these lions, these giraffes, these hyenas... but they don't get brought up like they do, they're *right* there but it's not the same. They don't have the nice fur to glorify the violence of their life. It's just right there in your face.

**ERICK:** So what, criminals leave the sign to show they're big and powerful?

**BERT:** People leave the Rhino to show that they *know* you're not paying attention. You got sandy beaches, fancy houses, you don't dare venture where the AC doesn't work. Neither does the government. Think about the guy with the crack you arrested in Logan Heights, he was wearing a tanktop, right?

**ERICK:** Yeah.

**BERT:** Beard unkempt like the bushes in the front yard?

**ERICK:** More or less.

**BERT:** But that wouldn't have mattered if he had a coat on, huh? If had a sweater, or some Jordans... he didn't have any fur to hide himself with.

**ERICK:** So in this... San Diego zoo, people wanna look at the sandy beaches.

**BERT:** The people are big and powerful, but you'd rather look at your lions.

**ERICK:** But criminals aren't *rhinos*! Criminals are... rodents. They're everywhere. They're *elusive*. And like a rodent, people don't want to notice criminals. People are gonna notice a rhino whether they like it or not.

**BERT:** Maybe the rhino isn't meant to symbolize the criminal. Maybe it's something bigger.

**ERICK:** (*chuckles*) You're good at this. Criminals are small, anyway.

**BERT:** And a rhino is the size of a bunch of rodents, but it depends which rodent you're talking.

(*Beat*)

**ERICK:** What if the rhino's a *person*?

*(Beat. BERT thinks on that one for a moment, then smiles)*

**BERT:** That's one big person, then.

*(The two laugh, BERT walks over to the bathroom)*

**BERT:** I'm gonna take a piss, just give me a minute.

**ERICK:** Be safe out there.

*(BERT exits offstage, heading to the bathroom. Beat. ERICK looks around for a moment. He walks over to where BERT was sitting, and picks up the empty frosty cup. While over there, he notices BERT's gun, tucked in the chair. He picks it up and examines it, cautiously. Then, his phone rings, which makes him drop the gun. He kicks it underneath the chair, and picks up his phone)*

**ERICK:** Hello?... Morgan... Right- yeah, hey, Morgan- he's... he's in the bathroom. Are you here?... About time... okay- it's an apartment building, so- well no... no there's no window in the bathroom... I think. Just- just wait a sec, okay? He'll come out, I'll give you a signal... I don't know! A signal! *(beat)* There's a window.... There is? Are you sure? Okay... well, find a way in... and you could just... kill him from there... okay? Okay! Great! Great. *(beat)* Wait, what? You're inside? I don't hear anything... I don't hear- are you- are you at the wrong house?! Morgan!

*(BERT walks back onstage, ERICK hangs up as BERT starts talking)*

**BERT:** Did you hear that?

**ERICK:** *(breathing heavily)* Hear what?

**BERT:** Had the window open for some air, I heard a gunshot down the street!

**ERICK:** Oh... Did you?

**BERT:** Yeah. Sketchy area, I tell ya. Who were you talking to?

**ERICK:** Huh?

**BERT:** *(beat)* You were on the phone- who were you talking to on the phone? With Morgan, right?

**ERICK:** Right, right. *(beat)* Co-worker.

**BERT:** Awfully late, must be a nightmare, huh?

**ERICK:** Sure is a handful.

*(Beat. ERICK gets a text on his phone. He looks at his phone, then back to BERT)*

**ERICK:** Sorry- he's breathing down my neck.

**BERT:** All good, man. Take care of business.

**ERICK:** Do you mind if I use the bathroom?

**BERT:** Go for it.

*(ERICK rushes off. BERT walks back to his chair, and sits down. He notices the gun missing. He furrows his brow, stands up and begins to search the chair. While he's doing that, he hears a gunshot from the bathroom. He freezes. After a moment, MORGAN enters from the bathroom. He is smartly dressed, but there are drops of blood on his shirt. He has gloves on. He gives BERT a stern look. Beat. Then, MORGAN gives a thumbs up)*

**MORGAN:** Job's done.

*(BERT stays frozen, he doesn't know what to do)*

**MORGAN:** I'm gonna clean up.

*(MORGAN exits back towards the bathroom, leaving BERT alone. He begins to freak out, and is slowly piecing it together. He had been set up. He searches for his gun some more, before sitting down. He's going to have to find another way out of this. MORGAN re-enters)*

**MORGAN:** Mess was minimal. The garbage bag is a bit wet. Oh well, right?

**BERT:** *(beat)* Well- I'd assume so.

**MORGAN:** Yeah, yeah... You still want the body, right?

**BERT:** Yup. I do want the body... Morgan.

**MORGAN:** Okay, great. Shouldn't be too heavy. Lighter than I expected.

**BERT:** Scrawny guy.

**MORGAN:** Mhm.

*(Beat. ERICK's unfinished glass of Coca-Cola is still on the couch. MORGAN points at it)*

**MORGAN:** Can I have that? I'm *thirsty*.

**BERT:** Sure... go for it.

**MORGAN:** Thanks. I gotta tell ya, you owe me some extra after all this.

**BERT:** I don't see why they would.

**MORGAN:** Dude, are you kidding me? You gave me the wrong address! I entered through this guy's bathroom while he was shaving, and he threw his razor at me. Probably where this blood came from.

**BERT:** Not from the guy you just killed?

**MORGAN:** Oh... *oh-* maybe that too. But c'mon, you didn't think to check the information you sent me? I only knew it was this house because it was the only other window with a light on!

**BERT:** I've never needed a hitman before, to be fair.

**MORGAN:** Clearly *(beat)*. So, how are you paying?

**BERT:** What's that?

**MORGAN:** How are you *paying* me? I usually do it up front, and *please* don't pay me in chunks. We both know you'll forget the last few payments.

*(beat)*

**BERT:** Yeah, I'll do it upfront.

**MORGAN:** Perfect.

**BERT:** I have a question, first.

**MORGAN:** What's up?

**BERT:** Bert, the guy you killed... Do you know who he was?

**MORGAN:** I mean, you didn't really give me much... You're a cop- so is he just some criminal?

*(BERT smiles)*

**BERT:** I never told you what he did? I never told you why I hired you?

**MORGAN:** Stop with the bushwacking, man. No! I was just called in for a job.

*(Beat. BERT smiles, and stands up)*

**BERT:** You just killed the *Rhino*.

*(Beat. MORGAN takes a step back)*

**MORGAN:** What?!

**BERT:** You know crime in San Diego?

**MORGAN:** I'm *a part* of crime in San Diego...

**BERT:** Those symbols you see around?

**MORGAN:** *That* guy's been killing the business owners?

**BERT:** City officials, too.

**MORGAN:** The Rhino is *one* guy?!

**BERT:** That's right!

**MORGAN:** And I killed him?



**BERT:** Yeah, *you* killed him.

*(Beat. MORGAN isn't sure what he thinks of himself, then he starts to smile)*

**MORGAN:** Holy shit- I just killed the *Rhino!*

*(BERT starts to laugh, MORGAN joins in)*

**BERT:** Go get his jacket- he's got a pack of cigs in there. I'll pour us some drinks.

**MORGAN:** Drinks?

**BERT:** When's the next time you're gonna be in a king of crimes' house? Might as well bask in it while we can!

**MORGAN:** That... that makes *damn* good sense. I'll be back.

*(Before he leaves, he reaches into his pocket and grabs his gun. Beat. BERT is slightly apprehensive)*

**MORGAN:** I want this *framed*, you hear me? Framed!

*(MORGAN hands BERT the gun and exits, once again. BERT chuckles, then walks over to the kitchen and pours two drinks. He takes the gun and hides it. MORGAN enters with the jacket)*

**BERT:** Perfect. It's in the right pocket.

*(MORGAN pulls out the pack of cigarettes. He tosses the jacket on the couch and sits down. BERT hands him a drink, MORGAN hands BERT a cigarette)*

**MORGAN:** Hey man, cheers.

**BERT:** Cheers.

**MORGAN:** To the Rhino.

*(They both raise their cups. BERT pulls out a lighter, and lights his cigarette. He also lights MORGAN'S. They sit and enjoy a moment of silence)*

**MORGAN:** Can I tell you something?

**BERT:** What's up?

*(Beat. MORGAN has never told anyone this)*

**MORGAN:** I'm such a bad hitman, dude.

*(Beat. BERT laughs his ass off)*

**MORGAN:** What?

**BERT:** Why? Why are you a bad hitman?

*(Throughout MORGAN'S next speech, BERT is still laughing)*

**MORGAN:** I've never had a job go this well. Like this is almost *too* good. I'm serious, man! I've had extra people die, extra witnesses, I've slipped and broken bones... one time in Tijuana I stepped on a cat, and my target then knew I was there. I mean sure, I went to the wrong house, but I just killed the Rhino! None of that stuff matters now! This is like... the *best* day of my life!

*(When he's done talking, MORGAN looks at BERT)*

**MORGAN:** What's so funny?

**BERT:** Nothing... nothing man-

**MORGAN:** These are normal cigarettes, right?

**BERT:** *(laughing)* Nah- they're good- you're good.

**MORGAN:** Okay, good.

*(Beat. BERT goes from smiling to curious)*

**BERT:** What's your opinion on him?

**MORGAN:** On who?

**BERT:** On the Rhino. What'd you think of him?

*(Beat. MORGAN downs his drink)*

**MORGAN:** Well, he doesn't help me much.

**BERT:** What do you mean?

**MORGAN:** Well, he likes poor people, you know? And they're usually not my clients-

**BERT:** He helps those who are lost-

**MORGAN:** Right, right- He's doing good work, I guess... but those kind of people don't hire me, why would I care?

**BERT:** So it goes.

*(Beat)*

**BERT:** Did you grow up poor?

**MORGAN:** Huh?

**BERT:** You heard me.

**MORGAN:** Well... I didn't grow up rich. Middle kind of family, I sorta strayed down the 'wrong' path.

**BERT:** Wrong path?

**MORGAN:** Oh come on, man. I kill people. You can sugarcoat it whichever way you want, it's not something to glorify.

*(Beat)*

**BERT:** So you didn't grow up poor? You don't know what it's like to be in the dark?

**MORGAN:** Well, my line of work is pretty secretive, but I'm not the kind of guy the Rhino would've been killing for.

**BERT:** Well what was he killing for-

**MORGAN:** Relax, bud. He's a *crook*. Sorry. He *was* a crook. Just because he sat at the top with a fur coat on doesn't make him any different. He used his background and beliefs to justify his actions. It's not uncommon, I do it all the time. It was something for some people to believe in, but now his little cronies will probably just... oh, I don't know- scurry away! Like rodents.

*(Beat. BERT smiles. MORGAN gets himself another cigarette)*

**BERT:** Morgan, could you do me a favor?

**MORGAN:** Yes! Anything.

**BERT:** Check his pockets... for his wallet.

**MORGAN:** Okay... why?

**BERT:** I'm gonna pay you... In *Rhino* money.

**MORGAN:** Oh- right! Okay, great!

*(MORGAN grabs the jacket and pulls out a wallet and an police badge)*

**MORGAN:** That's weird.

**BERT:** What?

**MORGAN:** He had a police badge.

**BERT:** Huh, that's *strange!*

**MORGAN:** Yeah...

*(MORGAN opens up the wallet, and shuffles through the cash)*

**MORGAN:** This is the exact amount you were offering me...

**BERT:** Weird!

**MORGAN:** Did he just carry the badge around for cover?

**BERT:** I wonder! That would be a *really* smart guy.

*(MORGAN pulls out an ID)*

**MORGAN:** Wait... Hold on.

**BERT:** Hm? What was that?

**MORGAN:** The badge and the ID are the same. What was Rhino's real name again?

**BERT:** Ugh! God, I'm forgetting...

**MORGAN:** How would he have gotten...

**BERT:** Started with a B-

**MORGAN:** Unless, that wasn't-

*(MORGAN looks at the jacket, and then looks back towards the bathroom)*

**BERT:** Oh right! Now I remember!

**MORGAN:** Shit. Shit!

**BERT:** His name was Bert! The Rhino's name is Bert, and you know something? I'm Bert! And-

*(Beat)*

**BERT:** And *I'm* the 'Rhino.'

*(BERT smiles. '100 Days, 100 Nights' by Sharon Jones and The Dap Kings plays. MORGAN stands up, he's shaking. BERT stands up and walks towards him. MORGAN begins to run towards the door. BERT lifts up a cushion from the couch to reveal a shotgun. MORGAN sees this and runs offstage, BERT runs off in pursuit. Lights out)*

**THE END.**

