

The Healing in the Air

A Play in Four Acts

written by  
Ethan Warren

### Characters

#### (in order of appearance)

SIGI: Ages ranging from 18 to 26. An eager young woman with cutthroat ambitions. She struggles to balance her youthful energy with her desire to be taken seriously, and her very short temper with anyone who disrespects her or attempts to thwart her goals.

BRIDGET: Ages ranging from 21 to 29. A wounded, intellectual woman whose cynicism masks the traumas of her past and her fears of losing her sanity.

NORMAN: Ages ranging from 28 to 36. An academic man who has come to grips with the fact that he isn't extraordinary, and is comfortable settling for proximity to greatness. Outwardly charming, but inwardly selfish and vain.

DR. OXENDINE: Ages ranging from 61 to 70. A woman capable of playing many roles, from warm and inviting to cold and withholding, but at her core she is deeply committed to her own success and willing to do anything to anyone so long as it contributes to the success of her research.

### Setting

The private study of Dr. Oxendine's mountaintop institute in rural Colorado.

#### Act One

Morning, early summer 1971

#### Act Two

Midday, midsummer 1973

#### Act Three

Afternoon, late summer 1976

#### Act Four

Late night, winter 1979

### Synopsis

Bridget, a skeptical recent college graduate, travels to the remote Colorado institute of mysterious scientist Dr. Emilia Oxendine to confront the doctor over unanswered questions in the recent suicide of Bridget's father. But Bridget is surprised to find herself lured into Oxendine's inner circle, and over the ensuing decade, she and Oxendine lose themselves in a destructive cycle of emotional and mental manipulation, wrestling with the upper hand as Bridget's sanity frays and Oxendine's controversial research threatens to ruin her reputation and legacy, leading to a final confrontation in which Bridget repays in kind the anguish Oxendine has caused her.

### About the Playwright

Ethan Warren is the writer and director of the independent film 'West of Her,' winner of five Best Narrative Feature awards over the course of its 2016 festival tour, and hailed by critics as "enchanting," "mesmerizingly beautiful," and "full of mystery." 'West of Her' is set for worldwide distribution through Gravitas Ventures in September 2017. His first full-length play, 'Why Are You Nowhere?' is the recipient of the 2016 Inkslinger award, and the Playwright's Award for Staged Readings at the Summer 2016 Midtown International Theatre Festival in Manhattan, and had its first full production at Southeastern Louisiana University in February 2017. His short play 'Ode on a Donut Shop' was produced by the Center for the Arts in Bonita Springs, FL at the Stage It! 10-Minute Play Festival in February 2017, and was published in a collection alongside the other winners. His one-act play 'Bag of Nails' will be workshopped in June 2017 at the Last Frontier Theatre Conference in Valdez, AK.

## ACT ONE

*Morning, early summer, 1971. Light streams in through the tall windows of Oxendine's study. There is a door, stage right, leading in from a hall, and another, stage left, leading in from a further-back room. A sofa and armchair sit downstage, a desk and desk chair upstage. The study is orderly, organized, warm and comfortable. In the corner sits the condenser, a four-foot metal post with a gleaming, spheroid object perched on top, vaguely resembling a large trophy.*

*At rise, we hear soft outdoor sounds—birds, some wind, maybe a few muffled voices. Slowly, a buzzing hum rises from the direction of the condenser. It grows in intensity for a few long moments quickly reaching a frenzy.*

*And then the stage right door opens and the sound goes abruptly silent as Sigi (currently 18) enters, leading Bridget (currently 21).*

SIGI

And this is where the magic happens!

BRIDGET

The magic.

SIGI

The great work!

*Bridget nods, and tries to take a deep breath. She's having trouble breathing.*

SIGI

Not many people get to see her private study. You must be –

*Bridget wobbles on unsteady feet.*

SIGI

Whoa, better sit down!

BRIDGET

I'm fine. I just –

*She gestures that she's OK, but she's struggling. Sigi grabs the desk chair and rushes to Bridget, who sits down heavily.*

SIGI

You all right there?

*Bridget nods, getting her wind back.*

BRIDGET

Fine. All the stairs...

SIGI

It's the oxygen! It's thin up here. We're almost two miles above sea level. Only a couple hours from Denver but up twice as high! That'll shock your system pretty good. Don't worry, you get used to it after a while.

BRIDGET

I'm not staying long.

SIGI

That's what they all say!

BRIDGET

Who all?

SIGI

Employees. Assistants. Disciples.  
*(small laugh, shrug)*  
Call us what you like!

BRIDGET

What do YOU like?

SIGI

*(smile)*  
I like to call us the lucky few.

*Bridget nods, but she's distracted when she notices the condenser.*

BRIDGET

Is that one of those...device things?

*Sigi looks over, then smiles, blissful.*

SIGI

A condenser! We're expecting to have one of these babies in every home in America soon. Every home in the WORLD, we hope!

BRIDGET

And...what does it DO, exactly?

SIGI

*(suddenly anxious)*

I'm really not qualified to go into it! That's a little bit above my pay grade!

*(forced laugh)*

BRIDGET

But basically – it's a medical device, right? It helps treat injuries somehow?

SIGI

*(forced, a bit manic)*

I really can't go into that! Sorry! Really not my area! I apologize!

BRIDGET

All right! OK. Fine.

*Sigi relaxes a bit.*

BRIDGET

So do I get to talk to the doctor, or –

SIGI

She'll be in soon. First you'll do a brief orientation and evaluation with Mr. Dunwich.

BRIDGET

What type of evaluation?

SIGI

Mr. Dunwich will explain everything.

BRIDGET

And who's Mr. Dunwich?

SIGI

He'll explain everything.

BRIDGET

Listen, I don't know what you think I came here for, but I just need to ask Oxendine –

SIGI

The doctor!

BRIDGET

What?

SIGI

Please. You need to ask THE DOCTOR –

BRIDGET

Fine. Sorry.

SIGI

*(rote)*

We prize respect at the institute. The work we do here is unusual and sacred, and honoring one another and our roles here is an essential line of defense against the vulgarity of the outside world, whose denizens are –

BRIDGET

Yeah, I get the gist.

SIGI

*(starting over)*

Honoring one another and our roles here is an essential line of defense against the vulgarity of the outside world, whose denizens are prone to misinterpret and pervert our work based on their own prurient and restrictive biases.

BRIDGET

Is that something you have to memorize, or –

SIGI

*(getting anxious)*

There are just – we follow procedures, because it's important, and because it's the rules.

BRIDGET

I get it. You can relax, y'know. I'm not gonna –

SIGI

Once you understand everything, it'll all make much more sense.

BRIDGET

And you can't even give me a *hint* about what I'm gonna understand?

SIGI

Could I get you a glass of water? You must still be kinda lightheaded.

BRIDGET

Are you – what, an intern or something?

SIGI

*(petulant)*

No! I have a lot of responsibility!

BRIDGET

Just the way you –

SIGI

I'm in charge of proofreading the pamphlets and the reprints of the doctor's books. I'm mediator with the town when they get antsy about what we're doing up here. They're so small-minded, it's such a one-horse little nothing town. Someone has to put the fires out, if ya know what I mean.

BRIDGET

That's a big job for – what are you, sixteen?

SIGI

I'm eighteen years old! But I grew up here, I know these people. I understand them, I understand their little brains. I used to look up at this mountain and see the institute – it was like a fairytale kingdom. And I'd say to my mom, *I'm gonna get there some day*. And she'd say, *No! Sigi, that is a place of SIN!* Of course that just made me wanna go even more.

BRIDGET

*(interest piqued)*

This is a place of sin?

SIGI

My parents are morons! I mean – they have small minds, and they aren't interested in expanding them

BRIDGET

But you've got a nice expansive mind?

SIGI

At least I'm working on it! Making really good progress, thanks to the doctor. It's amazing, the things she can do.

*Bridget looks at Sigi, and shifts her bearing slightly, experimenting with taking more control of the room.*

BRIDGET

*(slightly rote)*

So you don't have much of a relationship with your parents these days?

*Sigi is uneasy with personal questions.*

SIGI

I'm happy with where I'm at in life.

BRIDGET

Of course. But do you have regrets as to the conflicts that arose as a result of your decisions?

SIGI

I'm happy with where I'm at in life!

BRIDGET

It must be very difficult, Sigi. Leaving behind everything you know. I wonder if –

SIGI

Why are you asking me these questions?

BRIDGET

You seem anxious when I ask about your personal life. Why do you think that is?

SIGI

Because I don't know you! I don't know anything about you!

*Bridget shifts back into her normal bearing.*

BRIDGET

My name is Bridget Dorn. I came from Rhode Island to discuss some personal issues with Doctor Oxendine.

SIGI

Personal issues? Who did you make this appointment with anyway?

*Bridget tries to stand, but her knees are weak and she collapses back into her chair. She takes a deep breath.*

SIGI

I'm gonna get you that water. If you pass out, it's really gonna screw up my whole day.

*Bridget nods, experimenting with her breath. Sigi leaves. Bridget looks at the condenser, then pushes herself up and walks towards it on weak legs. She's reaching out to touch it when Sigi reenters with a glass of water.*

SIGI

NOPE!

*Bridget turns, surprised by Sigi's volume.*

BRIDGET

Sorry. Just curious.

*Sigi has the bearing of a hostage negotiator.*

SIGI

Then please just take a few large steps away from the condenser. It's extremely delicate.

*Bridget walks comically slowly to Sigi and  
accepts the water.*

BRIDGET

You don't have to hover, y'know. I'm fine.

*She drinks the water.*

SIGI

I'm sure Mr. Dunwich will be in very shortly.

BRIDGET

I can take care of myself.

SIGI

I know you can. I'll just – it's my pleasure.

*Bridget nods and takes a deep breath, trying  
to get her wind back.*

BRIDGET

So why, exactly, did the doctor have to build her institute in the highest, remotest possible corner of the world?

SIGI

That's not an exaggeration, y'know. We really are at the highest elevation in the contiguous United States.

BRIDGET

I believe it. So why put yourselves up here where guests are liable to drop dead of asphyxiation?

SIGI

Aurora borealis.

BRIDGET

*(ironic)*

Of course, I should have known.

SIGI

*(finally snapping)*

Well I'd be happy to explain if you'd stop being such a little snot!

*(claps hand over mouth)*

I'm sorry. I do apologize. I'm so sorry.

BRIDGET

It's fine. So she likes the northern lights?

*Sigi purses her lips, unsure how to deal with  
this woman.*

BRIDGET

Sorry. I don't mean to be a snot.

SIGI

*(rote)*

The aurora borealis has certain elemental qualities that are significant to the great work, so this elevation is essential to –

BRIDGET

Is everything you say memorized?

SIGI

The aurora borealis is important to what we do! All right? I'm still learning. The great work we do here is a ginormous leap forward in human consciousness. You can't expect me to understand it all at once when I only just finished high school! I'm doing well. I'm doing really well, and if you can't –

BRIDGET

It's fine, Sigi.

SIGI

Maybe I'll just give you a pamphlet to read, since it seems like you really don't know ANYTHING about the great work.

BRIDGET

No, thanks.

SIGI

An introduction, to get you up to speed! It can be a souvenir! Since you said you aren't staying very long.

BRIDGET

I'm not much of a pamphlet girl.

*Sigi is at odds and ends, no idea how to deal  
with this woman, getting close to panic*

SIGI

*(sputtering, growing manic)*

Then I just – how about – I'm gonna –

*The stage right door opens, and Norman (currently 28) enters, holding a clipboard. Sigi is palpably relieved, but she straightens to military attention.*

SIGI

Good morning, Mr. Dunwich.

NORMAN

Hi Sigi.

*(facetious)*

At ease. Is this our guest?

SIGI

Yes, sir, that's correct. Are you going to be needing anything from me, or should I get back to my work?

NORMAN

We're fine. Thank you.

SIGI

Of course. Any time. Don't mention it.

NORMAN

All right, Sigi.

*Sigi is all at odds and ends, but she turns and exits.*

*Norman offers Bridget his hand to shake.*

NORMAN

Good morning, welcome to the Oxendine Institute. I'm Norman Dunwich.

*Bridget shakes his hand.*

BRIDGET

Bridget Dorn.

NORMAN

And it is a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Dorn. I hope Sigi didn't cause too much trouble.

BRIDGET

She was an absolute delight.

NORMAN

Was she? I guess that's one way of describing her.

*He sits in the armchair, gesturing to the sofa.*

NORMAN

Please, have a seat.

*Bridget sits.*

BRIDGET

So what kind of evaluation are we talking about here?

NORMAN

I gather you've made an appointment with Dr. Oxendine.

BRIDGET

Yup, that's right.

NORMAN

Interesting. And who, exactly, did you set this appointment up with?

BRIDGET

Oh. I called a couple days ago, I talked to...was it Mr. Smith? I could be misremembering.

NORMAN

You called on the phone?

BRIDGET

Yup.

NORMAN

That's pretty remarkable. We actually don't have a phone up here, so I'm impressed with your abilities.

BRIDGET

What? Oh, that's – well, I called –

NORMAN

It's all right, Ms. Dorn. You don't have to keep bluffing. The doctor's very interested in chatting with you.

BRIDGET

Who said I was bluffing?

*Norman gives her an indulgent smile, and then looks at his clipboard.*

NORMAN

All right, let's get started. Sooner we get through, sooner you can talk to Dr. Oxendine.