

Those

Who

a one-act play by M. H. Lillie

Believe



Those Who Believe

by M. H. Lillie



“For those who believe, no proof is necessary.
For those who don't believe, no proof is possible.”
Stuart Chase

Introduction



Danger, safety, freedom, responsibility—we may hear the same words, yet think of different things. Some may believe a gun is a symbol of danger, of violence. Others may believe it's a promise of safety. We can think of freedom as what we are free to do, or what worries we are freed from. Responsibility can be personal or collective, and we may not agree on how much responsibility we owe to one another. How much risk we are willing to tolerate depends on what we believe: What is the danger? How dangerous is it? What is at stake? The questions may seem trivial, but the answers guide our thoughts, feelings, actions—outcomes with very real consequences.

CHARACTERS

EMMA
Young teenager

MOM
Voice from stage left

DAD
Voice from stage right

NEWSCAST AUDIO
Anchor voice(s) from above

PREACHER
Voice(s) from above

SET

Plain stage, invisible in blacklight

PROPS

Backpack (able to glow under blacklight) to be packed with candy packet, face mask, paper, pen, and other assorted items.

SOUND AND LIGHTING

Blacklight needed; audio needed from stage left, stage right, and above



House lights and stage lights are dark as the show begins. Then a backpack is visible at centre stage, glowing in blacklight. Lights come up on EMMA, centre stage, packing some items into the backpack.

EMMA

It broke us. Not that we were whole before, but our brokenness had worked for us. No one was happy, exactly, but we had our habits, our routines, our systems. We thought that they were enough.

MOM *(voice from stage left)*

Emma, did you pack your laptop charger this time?

EMMA

(to stage left) Don't worry, Mom. Dad got me one for his place. *(To audience)* You get used to living in two worlds. After a while, you forget how different they really are. *(Her backpack is packed and zipped shut. EMMA puts it on her back.)* It all becomes normal. Supper on the couch in front of *Jeopardy!* with Mom. Elbows off the table with Dad. Different, sure, but both are supper—both are the usual routine. Were the usual routine.

NEWSCAST AUDIO *(voice from above)*

The World Health Organization has defined the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern. As of March 11, 2020, it has reached 115 countries, with 119,239 cases and 4287 deaths.

EMMA

(to stage right) Dad, what do they mean by emergency? Is this happening here?



DAD *(voice from stage right)*

Don't worry, kiddo. Our town is too small for that. It's a big-city problem.

EMMA

(to audience) But the next day, we were told our schools would be closing. Even here, in middle-of-the-woods nowhere. So I guess it was our problem, too.

MOM *(voice from stage left)*

Are you getting your schoolwork done?

EMMA

(to stage left) Of course, Mom. Don't come in, I'm in a meeting. *(To audience)* Don't worry—she won't check. *(EMMA takes off her backpack, kneels down, begins pulling things out and setting them down around her.)* It was weird, but I had it pretty easy. Even with the lockdown, both my parents still had money coming in. Mom had her disability money because of her brain-mood thing. Dad could just work from the dining room table. So things were alright in both my homes. *(EMMA finally pulls a packet of candy from the backpack, sits among the mess of things to eat the candies.)* I know it wasn't that easy for everyone. My teacher taught us hand signals to use if things weren't okay—if people were hurting us or we wanted to hurt ourselves. I don't know if anyone ever used them, though. I gave up on the class meetings pretty quick. Mom didn't mind as long as I turned in my written work. Dad didn't notice at all. *(To stage left)* Mom, where are we going? Isn't everything closed?

MOM *(voice from stage left)*

It's Sunday, and Sunday still means church. Hurry—we'll be late.

EMMA

(to audience) Church. Of course. *(EMMA begins to hurriedly repack the backpack.)* Church came along when my dad left. For Mom, it was something steady, dependable. Church was always there for her, whatever her mood. My dad. . . wasn't. Not that I blame him. Honestly, she can be a bit much. But church helps. She smiles differently there—like she belongs. And me? Well, the music isn't awful, and the games room downstairs is actually kind of awesome. And there are worse things than having something to believe in. It would take more than a global pandemic to interrupt that. *(Her backpack is packed and zipped shut. EMMA puts it on her back.)* If anything, as the world shut down, we started going to church more. What else was there to do, really? On our weeks together, we could go for the Monday morning coffee hour, the Wednesday night service. We could even stay between the morning and evening services on Sunday just to help clean up and prepare snacks. Having the games room to myself was pretty great. When it was done, Mom would drop me off at Dad's place. I would never really talk about the church stuff with him, though. He thought it was all a little flaky. *(to stage right)* Dad, I'm home.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

Leave your shoes outside, and go straight to the shower. There's a box of masks in the bathroom and clean clothes in your room. Put your other things straight in the wash on the hottest setting. Understand?

EMMA

(*to stage right*) Sure, Dad. Missed you too. (*to audience*) He's not normally this tense, but nothing's really normal, is it? (*EMMA takes off her backpack, sets it down.*) Once he decided that this wasn't just a big-city problem, it became the only problem—all he ever thinks about.

NEWSCAST AUDIO (*voice from above*)

The Canadian government says over one million people lost their jobs last month, and current projections say between 4,440 to 44,000 Canadians could die as case numbers continue to rise.

EMMA

(*to audience*) But we were still okay, still the lucky ones. Dad kept working at the dining room table—longer and longer it seemed—so I started taking my supper to the couch, started watching *Jeopardy!* It was almost like being at Mom's house, but not really. I liked how Mom would blurt out the wrong answers with so much confidence. Dad wasn't like that. He wasn't even in the room.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

Do you have your mask on, Emma?

EMMA

(*to stage right*) It's just me in here, Dad. I don't need it if I'm alone.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

We both have to breathe the same air in this house. Put on your mask!

EMMA

(*to audience*) I'm not sure why we even bother to have our weeks together. (*EMMA unzips her backpack, digs through it.*) It's not like we see each other anymore. (*EMMA pulls out a mask, puts it on. Then she zips her backpack and puts it on her back.*)

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Emma? Emma, is that you?

EMMA

(*waves to stage left, pulls off mask*) Hi, Mom! Yeah, it's me. I'm ready! (*to audience*) One week was a little different. Mom and I went on a trip with our church group. A protest.

PREACHER (*voice from above*)

It's time that Canadians took a stand for their rights and freedoms. It has never been the plan of God for our governments to lock us down, lock us up, and take our rights. Doctors all over the world are standing up and declaring that this virus is not what our governments say it is. These restrictions are not about the virus at all—they're about control. It is time for Canadians to take back control in their lives!

EMMA

(*to audience*) I hadn't been to the city since I was a little kid. We have photos of going all together as a family, my mom and dad smiling as we posed at the tourist sites. This wasn't going to be like that, though. Not at all.

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Well, there's lots of parking. Maybe these lockdowns are good for something after all. I'll grab the signs. Do you have the snacks?

EMMA

(*to stage left, indicating backpack*) Got them, Mom. (*to audience*) It was fun to be out of the boonies. To be honest, I had expected more cars. Local protesters had already arrived and were marching around city hall with their signs: No More Lockdowns, Maskless and Fearless, My Body My Choice, Faith Over Fear. Our pastor even brought his megaphone—not that he needs it. His voice is big enough for any crowd. (*to stage left*) Um, Mom? Is that a news camera?

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Looks like it. You better stay out of sight, sweetie. We wouldn't want your father to see you here.

EMMA

(*to audience*) No souvenir photos from that trip. Seeing the news cameras kind of ruined the whole road trip for me. All I could think of was how pissed off Dad would be. Would he even let me back in the house? As much as he frustrates me sometimes, I couldn't handle losing him. Turns out I had nothing to worry about. The protest was so small, it barely got mentioned in the news. Still, it left me with a secret. (*to stage left*) Mom, when you and Dad divorced, we had all promised not to keep secrets. Is . . . Is this okay? (*beat*) Mom?

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Emma, those promises made sense back then. Now it's . . . different.

EMMA

(*to audience*) Different. Everything was different. Even time seemed to move differently. The days went slowly, but the weeks went fast. Back and forth, back and forth. (*faces stage right*) Dad, I'm home! (*puts down backpack centre stage, goes through the motions of handwashing, addresses audience*) Sing Happy

Birthday twice—that’s how long you should wash your hands. My not-so-happy birthday came and went. Mom had tried to arrange a birthday party in the games room at our church, but the church was already getting fined for breaking protocol, so we didn’t risk it. Dad had left out a cupcake and birthday present for me, sang me Happy Birthday from another room. But I was already sick of that song. Then, closer to Christmas, the big news came.

NEWSCAST AUDIO (*voice from above*)

Health Canada announces today that a vaccine has been authorized for use to protect against the global pandemic virus that has already claimed the lives of over 12,000 Canadians.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

Hey, kiddo! Have you heard? They’ll be starting vaccinations soon!

EMMA

(*to stage right*) Wow, Dad—that’s great! (*to audience*) I hadn’t heard him so happy in a long time. It was nice to hear him excited—he almost sounded like himself again. Not everyone was happy, though.

PREACHER (*voice from above*)

Don’t be fooled, brothers and sisters. God’s word is a lamp to our feet, and His word tells us to stand firm in our faith. Do not give in to fear, do not take the mark of the Beast, do not give up your eternal salvation for the sake of scientists and governments who would lead you astray. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?

EMMA

(*to stage left*) Do you think that’s really true, Mom? Can a needle make someone go to Hell?

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

I don’t really know, sweetie. I don’t think God is like that, but I don’t trust the needle. It’s too soon, you know? How can they know what it does? I would rather get a cold than be a science experiment. Maybe God’s just warning us to stay away from danger.

EMMA

(*to audience*) Danger. That’s just it: everyone was afraid, but no one agreed what the danger was.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

Those idiots will be the death of us all. We would have been out of this a long time ago if they could just wear a mask and keep to themselves. That vaccine can’t come fast enough.

EMMA

(*to stage right*) Dad . . . are you sure the vaccine is a good idea? What if they got it wrong?

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

You have to believe the science, kiddo. A lot of brilliant people have been working hard on this. They know what they're doing. We'll get you your vaccine as soon as we can.

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Not me—not us. Not in this family.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

Think of what we'll be able to do once we get the vaccine. Soon—very soon.

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Never. Better safe than sorry, believe me.

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

As soon as we can. Better safe than sorry, believe me.

EMMA

(*to audience*) Believe? Everyone has something to say, but no one has time to listen.

PREACHER (*voice from above*)

Believe me, brothers and sisters, the Bible tells us plainly that the Beast will force all people, great and small, to receive a mark so that they cannot buy or sell without it.

NEWSCAST AUDIO (*voice from above*)

The possibility of vaccine mandates has been a contentious issue as Canadians await access to the recently-approved vaccines.

PREACHER (*voice from above*)

Anyone who receives his mark shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone. Stand firm against the forces of evil!

NEWSCAST AUDIO (*voice from above*)

The Prime Minister announced today that the armed forces will assist in coordinating the deployment of millions of vaccine doses over the coming months.

PREACHER (*voice from above*)

Stand up for what you believe, brothers and sisters!

EMMA

(to audience) What if I *don't* believe? Irreconcilable differences—my mom had used those words once when I had asked her about their divorce. I hadn't understood back then. I think I do now. *(to stage right)* Dad . . . I don't know if I can. I don't think Mom will be okay with that.

DAD *(voice from stage right)*

Oh, kiddo, it'll be fine. This is what we've been waiting for, right? Once this is done, then things can get back to normal. I've missed all the fun we had before.

EMMA

(to stage right) I miss it too, Dad. I really do.

DAD *(voice from stage right)*

Listen, your mom's a smart lady. She might be a little nervous now, but she'll come around and realize it's for the best. She doesn't need to know—not right away. It can be our secret for now, kiddo.

EMMA

(to stage right) Our secret? *(to audience)* There was a time when we never kept secrets. Now, all we had were secrets. Secrets that tore us apart.

In the lines that follow, the voices of MOM and DAD get louder and louder. EMMA gradually crouches down beside her backpack at centre stage, covering her ears.

MOM *(voice from stage left)*

What do you think you're doing?! Did you think I wouldn't find out? I'm her mother!

DAD *(voice from stage right)*

And I'm her father, and I want her to be safe!

MOM *(voice from stage left)*

Safe? What's safe about being a guinea pig?

DAD *(voice from stage right)*

Safer than being with you, marching her around with your nutjob friends!

MOM *(voice from stage left)*

You would rather her be injected with poison than have friends?

DAD *(voice from stage right)*

I would rather her be safe!

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

Safe? You want her locked up and masked and experimented on!

DAD (*voice from stage right*)

I can't believe that you don't want her safe!

MOM (*voice from stage left*)

I can't believe you would do this!

Suddenly the house lights and stage lights go dark and all is silent. The blacklight comes on, and the backpack is visible at centre stage. Lights come up on EMMA, centre stage, packing items into the backpack.

EMMA

(to audience) There are those who believe the science, the doctors, the news, the governments. Then there are those who believe the Bible, the internet, the protestors, the doubts that tell them something isn't right. And then there are some of us who don't know what to believe. Some of us who just want to leave.

EMMA looks at her now-packed bag for a moment, then pulls out some paper and a pen. She sits beside her backpack as she begins to write.

EMMA

(reading aloud as she writes her letter) Dear Mom and Dad, I love you both so much. I can't choose between you. I won't choose between you. If one day you're both ready to talk—no *(scratching out text)* both ready to *listen*—come find me. Love, Emma.

EMMA folds the letter, drops it downstage centre. Standing upstage centre, she puts on her backpack and turns her back to the audience. House lights and stage lights darken. Only her backpack and the letter are visible, glowing in blacklight.

END

About the Author



M. H. Lillie grew up in a spiritual battlefield between the forces of good and evil. As a young prayer warrior living among the small towns of Northern Ontario, Canada, she was confident in her spiritual giftings and negligent in her flossing, believing that she would be raptured before tooth decay became a practical concern. A few years and dental fillings later, she found herself writing stories and poems that explore her traumas, beliefs, and identities through a creative lens. Living for a time in Stratford, Ontario, she also developed an appreciation for theatre as a way of sharing stories and experiences. She has since returned to Northern Ontario, where she writes, prays, and flosses (almost) daily.