

## Where I am Perfectly Content

**By Bradley Sonnenberg**

I have two nights under my belt now; the third show of Rent begins in ten. I need a place to think, to collect myself. The backstage door is ajar. I step across the peeling strike tape that serves as the dividing line between the outside world and the stage. I retreat behind the curtains to the place in the world I feel most content. That place is offstage during the few moments before the curtain rises and the spotlight is on me. The cast is there; I realize the ensemble is accompanying me at the meridian of our creative process. I am not alone in this moment of hesitancy.

The door separating the stage from the backstage closes from a gust of wind conjured up from the wings, separating us from the stage. The cast members look up. Some gasp. Some laugh nervously. The tension has been broken. They match my gaze. I smile, realizing we all chose the same retreat to marshal our strength.

This narrow hallway serves as a buffer from the audience and settles us all. Mementos of the production process adorn the ledge above my head. Riccola cough drops I brought for everyone lie on the table. Scripts lie open on the folding chairs highlighted with a panoply of colors. There are photos of the cast on the set of New York; each photo a postcard sent expressly to our offstage quarters. This night is not for me; this night is for everyone who has sacrificed countless hours to create a world that will emerge in ten minutes and vanish a mere two hours later.

I look into the eyes of each of my cast mates, acknowledging their anxiety, but also giving credence to the anticipation. I embrace the younger actors who are not yet as comfortable in this space as are the "veterans," and express my admiration for their unfaltering determination.

The Bolex 16mm camera, my character's prize possession, leans against a mirror filled with the reflections of excited faces of cast members' voluminous excitement. I nod to each friend one last time and jump up to knock the motivational poster above the doorframe that reads, "find the moments." I have given our team this slogan. We do not play sports. We are a different kind of team, on and off the stage.

The seconds begin to align themselves with my heartbeat as I step onto the platform that demarks where I am opening the show. Positioning my camera outwards towards the audience currently masked with darkness, I close my eyes. When I do, I think of all that has transpired in the past two months, all of the sacrifice, and know that I am ready.

This place is the way station between the world of preparation, trial and error, work, sweat, insecurity and strength-and the world that is the culmination of this preparation. I am comfortable not only because this is a place of camaraderie and peace, but also

because I have made it so by investing myself so completely. I am totally prepared for the moments to follow.

It is time to emerge from this place of comfort and safety. A checklist runs past my retina like credits scrolling down a screen, scarf over plaid undershirt, glasses on, camera stocked and rolling, mike tape secure- am cut off from my preparation as the lights seem to suck the dark veil that just recently cloaked the audience. Hundreds of apertures directed at me from the audience, my camera's aperture returning the gesture, aslant.

I notice the butterflies have managed to escape from my belly. It must be a good night. No time, show time, camera focus left. Spot light on me "We begin on Christmas eve, with me, Mark..." But it is also me, Brad, ready to take the stage.