

BOHEMIAN RAT CITY

Sample Packet

By Maggie Smith

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SYNOPSIS: As punishment for their sins, God has banished Their offending humans to the Bohemian Rat City, where they live their sentences out as human-rat hybrids. Unsure of their past crimes and even more unsure of how to redeem themselves, Madden, Charlie, Sage, and Ara are resigned to their new rodent-like lives. But what if there was a way out?

CHARACTERS

MADDEN — accepting of the situation they've been put in, but not happy about it

SAGE — bitter, no room for optimism anymore, tired of existence, melodramatic, logical, angry, and not alone

ARA — young and naive, devoted to what can't be seen, wants others to have hope; severely pure of heart but doesn't view themselves as deserving of any kind of love, divine or otherwise

CHARLIE — a conspiracy theorist and a coward; borderline genius with a wrench

SNITCH — an officer of the law, loyal to a God they've never seen or heard from

SCAB — an officer of the law, thoughtless

GOD — this, of course, looks like God; a puppet, voiced by actors playing Scab and Snitch

SETTING

Bohemian Rat City, a City of Human-Rat Hybrids; Who Cares Where and When

ACT ONE
SCENE EIGHT
THE RATS MAKE THE CALL

[CHARLIE, MADDEN, and SAGE meet one by the machine. ARA slowly slinks into view, making eye contact with SAGE and looking away. They look at the phone on the machine. CHARLIE is sweating over this.]

MADDEN

Are you gonna do it or what?

SAGE

Give them a minute.

MADDEN

We don't have all day.

SAGE

Shut up.

MADDEN

I'm just saying—

SAGE

Shut up.

MADDEN

I'm not going to.

SAGE

No one asked you to.

MADDEN

I don't even have anyone to call.

SAGE

Would you—

MADDEN

So Charlie has to otherwise no one will—

SAGE
Madden—

MADDEN
I don't see you volunteering—

SAGE
Madden—

MADDEN
And what about Ara—

SAGE
Stop!

[A beat.]

MADDEN
Charlie, are you gonna do it or what?

CHARLIE
Give me a minute.

MADDEN
What could you possibly need to prepare?

CHARLIE
We only have power for one call at a time. We can't afford to make a mistake, the machine will need time to recharge before making another outgoing call.

MADDEN
So? Make the call, then. Do it fast.

CHARLIE
What do I say?

MADDEN
“Help us.”

No. To her.

To who?

My mom.

Oh. Uh... Shit, I don't—

It's not important.

Well, don't say that.

As few words as possible.

They deserve a minute to talk to her.

They can do all the talking they need when we're safe.

Or they could take five seconds to tell their mom they're okay!

But what do I say?

Tell her that you're alive.

[The three look to ARA.]

CHARLIE

SAGE

CHARLIE

SAGE

MADDEN

SAGE

MADDEN

SAGE

MADDEN

SAGE

CHARLIE

ARA

ARA

That's what matters most.

MADDEN

Looks like you aren't too good for our plan now, huh?

SAGE

Shh.

CHARLIE

What else?

ARA

There's nothing she needs to hear more than that.

Tell her her only child's not a ghost

Despite trapped in a cell shaped like a rat.

CHARLIE

What else do I tell her?

ARA

Everything that you need her to know—

Where you have been, how we have treated you.

What it's been like being alone to grow

Without a mother. She completed you.

[CHARLIE nods. A beat. They go to the phone. SAGE, MADDEN, and ARA watch as CHARLIE picks up the phone and dials a number. The dial tone rings. And rings. And rings. A long beep.]

CHARLIE

No one answered.

MADDEN

Leave a message!

[CHARLIE composes herself.]

CHARLIE

Mom? I... Uh... It's me. It's, uh— I don't know if you remember me. It's Charlie. Your kid? I just wanted you to know I'm okay— I'm alive. I'm sorry it's taken me so long to tell you. I wish I could have talked to you years ago. But I did it. I figured it out. I spent all these years trying to find a way to talk with you again and here I am. Well, for now. And I guess I'm not talking with you, more to you, but... I miss you. I hope you miss me, too. Not too much, though, I wouldn't want you to be sad. I wish you were here with me. Or, I guess I wish I were there with you. But... Without you I'm scared. Sorry, this wasn't supposed to worry you. This was supposed to make you feel better.

MADDEN

This was supposed to tell her to come rescue us.

CHARLIE

Oh, shit! Mom, wait, I'm sorry, I need you to listen closely, okay, every single word. We're stuck underground and we're not people anymore we're—

[The phone cuts off. CHARLIE looks sheepishly to the others. MADDEN launches herself at CHARLIE, but SAGE pulls them back. CHARLIE holds up their hands, placatingly.]

CHARLIE

She'll call back!

MADDEN

How? Does this phone even have a number?

CHARLIE

It has to. Doesn't it? All phones have a number!

MADDEN

You fucked us all over!

CHARLIE

Calm down!

MADDEN

This is calm, considering you just blew our one shot out of here!

CHARLIE

It's not our one shot!

MADDEN

Oh yeah? Name any other shot, then!

CHARLIE

I can make more machines!

[MADDEN attempts to tackle CHARLIE again, but SAGE once again intervenes.]

SAGE

Will the machine have enough energy to take the call?

CHARLIE

It'll be static-y, but it might work. It takes less energy to receive a call than make one.

SAGE

What if she calls in the daytime?

CHARLIE

I'll be here. Night and day. I'll watch until she calls back.

MADDEN

And if she doesn't?

SAGE

Then we're no worse off than when we started.

CHARLIE

A new plan. We'll come up with a new plan.

MADDEN

Or we give up?

SAGE

We'll cross that road when we—

[The phone rings. The four stare at it. They look at each other. MADDEN, SAGE, and ARA gesture to CHARLIE to get the phone. CHARLIE answers it.]

CHARLIE

Hello?

[Then: A siren sounds. Red and blue lights. SCAB and SNITCH enter. SNITCH is carrying a bat.]

SNITCH

Well, well, well, well, and what do we have here?
A plague of rats who want to break the law.

ARA

I wasn't—

SNITCH

You're here, aren't you? For you were found quite near
The scene of the crime. Me and Scab both saw.

MADDEN

It's "Scab and I."

SCAB

It seems you all worked to make a machine—

MADDEN

Just Charlie.

CHARLIE

And?

SCAB

A crime that will result in your downfall.
So, because of the crimes we both have seen,
To jail you go, a cell awaits you all.

[The rats watch as SNITCH raises the bat and swings. A crash. The phone beeps, off the hook, then dies. SNITCH has destroyed the machine. Transition into:]

ACT ONE
SCENE NINE
THE RATS BREAK DOWN THE SINS FOR YOU

[SCAB and SNITCH once again take center stage. They're sauntering.]

SNITCH

And now it's time to take a break from that,
A semi-pause from the story we're in,
You see us all, human now turned to rat,
As you ask us, "Officers, what is sin?"

SCAB

With the "how" covered, there is now the need
To outline a list of transgress-i-ons:
The obvious— Yes, pride, sloth, anger, greed,
Gluttony, wrath, lustful repress-i-ons,
Killing, tormenting, stealing, breathing wrong,
And staring, snarling, gaping, and gawking,

Talking loud on the phone—

SNITCH

And jaywalking.

Speeding, spilling, screaming, starving are some
Of the most common ones you'll hear these days,
And bragging, nagging, lying, spitting gum
On grounds instead of throwing it away.
Arriving late with coffee in your hand,
Not riding your bicycle in the street,
Leaving the beach and not checking for sand,
And not knowing when to admit defeat.

SCAB

Walking too slow when you're on the sidewalk,
Tracking mud in after walking in rain,
Scraping fingernails on boards made for chalk,
Watching videos too loud on the train.

SNITCH

Sleeping on benches in a public space,
 Refusing to pay taxes or be fined,
 By acting out and not learning your place
 Opening your mouth and speaking your mind.

SCAB

Feeding those who cannot afford to pay,
 Healing the sick who've shown they have no worth
 Showing mercy to those who do not pray,
 Allowing others to inherit Earth.

SNITCH

The poor in spirit, mourners, the meek, too,
 Are all but banned to witness Heaven's light.
 Killing the oppressed won't be hard to do,
 For we both know they won't put up a fight.

SCAB

Of course, the list is not at all complete,
 Just examples to keep your soul from rot.
 Since all acts done with malice, meant to cheat
 Will land you here without a second thought.

SNITCH

And the most egregious sin you must heed:
 Being who we do not want you to be.

[Somewhere, a gavel strikes. Transition into:]

[END OF EXCERPT]

For the Full Script, Please Contact: maggiesmithwrites@gmail.com