

BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY

Written by

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BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY  
A Ten-Minute Play

CHARACTERS

WILL       Recovering artist, in touch with his sensitive side  
TERESA    Charismatic Divorcee, in touch with her sensibilities

SETTING

A dingy apartment somewhere in Arizona. Enya music plays. There are two mismatched chairs and a ghastly side table, all piled with art supplies, magazines and stacks of books.

TIME

2000, Spring, in the afternoon

LIGHTS UP on WILL, wearing a shower cap, at an easel upstage, with a paintbrush in one hand and a palette in the other. There is a rapid knock at the door.

WILL

Aw, who is it?

TERESA (V.O.)

It's me, Teresa.

WILL

Oh, Teresa? Hold on a sec - be right there. I'm a... painting! On my way! Hold on.

TERESA (V.O.)

Okay. I thought I'd just stop by. Sorry I didn't call first -

He contemplates removing the shower cap.  
Deciding to keep it on, he swings open the door.

WILL

Hello beautiful!

TERESA

Oh hi!

WILL

Hi! I wasn't expecting anyone to come by.

They kiss a polite hello. He turns off music and clumsily moves books off the chairs.

TERESA

Apparently. I didn't think anyone used those anymore. Nice color, by the way.

WILL

Thanks, got time to sit?

TERESA

Look, I can't stay. I'm on a quick break. Will. We need to talk.

WILL

(Amused) Sounds serious, should I sit down?

TERESA

Aww... did I interrupt your shower?

WILL

Oh no. No. I'm doing a treatment. Positive ions.

TERESA

Ions?

WILL

Yeah, from the Ivory soap. The shower cap keeps the bars on my head.

TERESA

Soap bars?

WILL

Yeah. I figured they worked in the bed for leg cramps - so I thought - what the heck? Maybe it might work on my head.

TERESA

Are you having cramps in your head?

WILL

No, not really, but I have been feeling kind of tense lately. Care to give it a try? I've got a few more bars left from the 8-pack...

TERESA

Ha! No thanks, that's all you.

WILL

You seem a little tense.

TERESA

Will. You're wearing soap. On your head.

WILL

I tried taping it to my head at first. Turns out tape doesn't really stick to soap. The shower cap is to keep it on there. You like the pink?

TERESA

How long? Do you wear it, I mean?

WILL

I have about two more hours. I started about 7 this morning. Thought I'd do a full eight. See how I feel.

TERESA

Huh. Can't say I've ever heard of that. I would think it would get hot after a while.

WILL

Ivory soap is full of positive ions you know.

TERESA

You're saying there's positive electricity in soap?

WILL

Ivory soap specifically. Polar molecules. It works best with water so I got my hair wet first. Along with the music to raise my dopamine and serotonin levels.

TERESA

Interesting...

WILL

Better living through chemistry!

TERESA

Wow. That is... cool, I guess. Look, Will, I'm really sorry to tell you like this, but... it's over.

WILL

What's over?

TERESA

Us. We're over. Sorry. I don't know how else to tell you.

WILL

Us? Teresa - can we at least talk about this?

TERESA

There's nothing left to say really.

WILL

I'm just very surprised, it seemed like everything was going so well.

TERESA

I know, it *has* been an incredible nine months.

WILL

Yes. And I was just warming up to the idea of moving in together .

TERESA

Moving in?

WILL

I know I was hesitant when you first brought it up. But now that Mom has met you...

TERESA

Your mom is great.

WILL

...and she loves you by the way. And I'm not getting any younger.

TERESA

That's true, neither of us are.

WILL

And you just landed your dream job at the animal rescue...

TERESA

I know, I'm finally happy with my work.

WILL

And because of you, I'm excited about my art again. Look, you are my muse.

TERESA

Ah, that's so sweet, Will.

WILL

Well you are. See all this new work.

TERESA

This is all pretty incredible, really.

WILL

Let me show you this series of cloud sketches in pastels... oh here, I really got on a roll with these cumulonimbus clouds, see the -

TERESA

Will.

WILL

Ah, and here's a set of waves. Look. After we took that trip up the coast and I could just look out the window -

TERESA

Will.

WILL

And the pelicans we saw that day -

TERESA

Will!

WILL

What?

TERESA

Just stop! Okay?

WILL

But without you, I would never have done all this.

TERESA

Honestly - you're just making this harder. Nothing you're going to say will change my mind. We. Us. We. are. done.

WILL

Well this sucks.

He slumps on a chair, slowly pulling the shower cap off. Bars of soap hit the ground.

TERESA

Something happened last night, and it made me realize we are on different paths. I am so sorry, Will.

WILL

What happened last night? I made you dinner, you drove me home, the stars were out. Perfect... is there someone else?

TERESA

No nothing like that. Not really.

WILL

Alright. So, there is someone else?

TERESA

No. There's no one else... except my mother. She came to visit me last night and...

WILL

Whoa, wait. Your mother? Didn't she die, like five years ago?

TERESA

Yes, I know, she did. But late last night, I got up for a glass of water and went into the kitchen, like half asleep. And I was at the sink running the water, you know like you do before you drink it, to get it really cold? And I happened to look up, and I saw her outside the window, just standing there looking in.

WILL

Outside of your house?

TERESA

Yes. I know when I say it out loud it sounds crazy -

WILL

Hey, this is me you're talking to.

TERESA

Yeah, well, she was standing there in the yard, clear as day, wearing this flowery long dress, like from the seventies you know, and this adorable floppy hat. Now that I think of it, she looked exactly like she did the day of my wedding.

WILL

Okay... what did she say?

TERESA

She didn't say anything - she was just staring at me. And then really slowly she pulls her hand out from behind her back, and she holds up two fingers.

WILL

Like this? (holding up two fingers)



TERESA

Yeah, exactly. And then I look down at my water glass cuz it's almost full and I look up again, and she's gone. Just like that. And it all comes flooding back to me this random conversation we had the day before she had her heart attack.

WILL

About what?

TERESA

I was talking about my marriage to Randy and she said this funny thing about being married... She said, the first time you marry for love, the second time you marry for money, and the third time for companionship. That simple. Now I know that's what she was trying to tell me - to remind me about the number two rule.

WILL

Wow. Let me get this straight. Your mother visits you in some random sleep walking dream, holds up a peace sign and you interpret that as some deep, twisted message about not staying with me because I am not some rich dude?

TERESA

God, Will, you make it sound so negative.

WILL

Well, last week you claimed Mr. Wheezers was kneading the pillow by your head, sooo...

TERESA

That happened!

WILL

But your cat has also been dead for a few years...

TERESA

Look. If you plan to continue being an artist... and I know it makes you happy... you have to do it. But we both know there is no money in... art.

WILL

Your mother couldn't possibly have meant something else - like peace and love? Or two of something? Two people maybe?

TERESA

Really, this is such a hard conversation to have -

WILL

I'd do anything for you Terese. Seriously I would. Except drive, you know I don't drive.

TERESA

Come on, we have to be reasonable. Love is a luxury. When you marry for love, it generally means you have your basic needs met, like food, a home, the electricity is on. But if you don't have financial security, then that love gets chipped away pretty quickly. With all the worry and bickering - you end up with this ugly piece of hard concrete. Then what do you have? Two people who despise each other and a mound of debt. I can't go through that again.

WILL

You know, *I've* never been married. I still need *my* turn at marrying for love.

TERESA

Of course I want to be married for love... but the reality is, even though I have my dream career, I don't have dream wages. Women have to consider these things.

WILL

You do know that sounds rather antiquated for a woman of the twenty-first century.

TERESA

The reality is I'm not in a super secure financial situation and you aren't either. That's what my mother was trying to tell me. I have to be smart.

WILL

You are smart. You are the only woman I ever met who knows that Monet and Manet are like... two different guys. You got it all - love and brains. See! Everything in balance.

TERESA

Balance? Like wearing flippin' soap on your head to balance out the *E*-ons? Kind of looney-tunes, don't ya think?

WILL

Ouch.

TERESA

Whatever. I know it doesn't seem fair, but bottom line is our relationship will eventually be just one sad piece of rock.

WILL

(beat) You might be right Terese. Being a pathetic piece of rock doesn't sound like the kind of relationship I'd want either.

TERESA

Thank you. I knew you'd understand.

WILL

Unless... unless that rock is pink Himalayan rock salt, which even though it gives out negative *I*-ons - has tons of healing properties. I'd want that.

TERESA

That's a nice metaphor and all, but *I*-ons don't pay the bills.

WILL

Or perhaps if that rock is a diamond in the rough, and the value increases over time. Have you ever held a diamond in the sun just right? The prism of light that radiates from a diamond is breath taking. I'd take that rock too.

TERESA

Well, I'm glad we had this talk. I have to get back to the kennel, one of our donors said she might come by -

WILL

You see, my mother, who *doesn't* stalk me in my sleep by the way, told *me* last night she's prepared all the paperwork to sign over my late father's trust account from his Motorola stock portfolio, which as of yesterday afternoon, was valued at about 4.8 million dollars.

TERESA

Wait, what?

WILL

Yep, and when she passes on, that old house in Scottsdale that's up on Camelback Mountain, that's mine too. She estimates it's worth over a million, but she's pretty healthy, so, that's a ways off.

TERESA

Wow! I can't believe this!

WILL

And I almost forgot. My father also left me fifteen acres in Pinto Valley that has one of the world's largest copper reserves on it.

TERESA

AND you own a copper mine?

WILL

My dad invested in it over 40 years ago on a fluke.

TERESA

You mean you're... you're...

WILL

That's right. I'm rich as fuck.

TERESA

This... is... fantastic! You know, I bet my mother was trying to tell me that I had *found* number two. That was the message! She was telling me I was going to have love, money *and* companionship all in one - and that's you Will!

WILL

Yep, too bad you didn't understand the message the first time.

TERESA

Will, I was wrong... we have amazing chemistry... I can still be your muse... I love you.

WILL

No, you were right. I am a worthless rock. Until I'm held in the sun just right, then I can radiate some pretty awesome light.

TERESA

That's foolish. You need me.

WILL

Hmm. I *did* need you, but you don't need me. I am glad we had this talk Teresa. I was picking up on some negative tension, and you made me realize where it was coming from. (opening the door) Now if you'll excuse me, I have some painting to do.

TERESA

Well then, it's all for the best really. I could never marry a man who believes in all this chemistry mumbo jumbo crap and listens to An-ya music. (She exits)

WILL

It's Enya.

LIGHTS DOWN

CRABS(DOT)COM

A Play

By Rachael Carnes

A friend tries to help Cheryl rethink her life choices.

#### CHARACTERS

CHERYL — Woman, 20's-30's

MARTY — Gender-neutral, 20's-30's

#### SETTING

Cheryl's apartment.

#### TIME

Hard to say anymore.

Rachael Carnes, member:



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*Lights up on CHERYL, holding a clear vial.*

MARTY

(*Entering.*) It's a beautiful day outside.

CHERYL

Do you believe in love at first sight?

MARTY

Oh no —

CHERYL

Oh yes!

MARTY

You can't keep those.

CHERYL

I don't want to keep them. I want to use them.

MARTY

Cheryl, please —

CHERYL

I paid for rush shipping.

MARTY

I can't believe you actually did it.

CHERYL

Easy-peasy! They got here in three days.

MARTY

I thought you were just joking the other night. You're joking now, right?

CHERYL

The internet is a boundless place of wonder!

MARTY

Good one! That's funny — Haha?

CHERYL

Nothing funny about pubic lice, Marty.

MARTY  
Oh my god, get them out of here!

CHERYL  
That's not in my plan.

MARTY  
You've been in the same pair of pajamas for a week — Is that in your plan?

CHERYL  
Look at them — They're adorable!

MARTY  
Stay over there! Don't come near me!

CHERYL  
(*To the lice.*) Marty doesn't understand us.

MARTY  
Please just tell me you didn't boil a rabbit on the stove —

CHERYL  
They're so tiny and helpless.

MARTY  
I've indulged whatever this is, but it's time to get over it.

CHERYL  
I don't want to get over it.

MARTY  
You've gone down a deep, dark place.

CHERYL  
Well my *new* friends get me.

MARTY  
You need a shower, a change of clothes — some kind of real food.

CHERYL  
What I need is to make my ex itch.

MARTY  
Why don't I make you a sandwich? How about a nice glass of milk?

CHERYL  
I THINK I'M HANDLING THE BREAK UP REALLY WELL!

MARTY  
Let's just maybe think about a change of scenery.

CHERYL  
It's like laser beams are coming out of my brain!

MARTY  
Let's go to the park. Or the museum —

CHERYL  
You're the worst friend ever.

MARTY  
You're holding a vial of pubic lice and I'm still here. That makes me a good friend.

CHERYL  
*Premium* pubic lice.

MARTY  
Oh, excuse me. *Premium* pubic lice.

CHERYL  
I just wish you'd show an interest.

MARTY  
Get them away from me!

CHERYL  
(*To the lice.*) Marty never supports me.

MARTY  
I don't think they can hear you —

CHERYL  
You leave me all day to suffer alone.

MARTY  
You quit your job! You dropped out of school!

CHERYL  
I'm having a hard time and I think you should send me more emojis.



MARTY  
I texted you three emojis today! The painting nails, the wine and the “I dunno” lady.

CHERYL  
Only my pubic lice really see me.

MARTY  
I don’t think they have eyeballs —

CHERYL  
A good friend would ask to hold them. Like when you’re meeting a new baby.

MARTY  
Okay! — Let me see the vial.

CHERYL  
Not when you ask like that.

MARTY  
Cheryl. Could I *please* hold your vial of pubic lice that you bought off the internet?

CHERYL  
Why yes, Marty! Here you go —

MARTY  
Have you thought anymore about therapy?

CHERYL  
Careful!

MARTY  
I won’t drop them.

CHERYL  
Those cost me \$187!

MARTY  
You’re late on the rent but you bought pubic lice.

CHERYL  
No shampoo can kill them.

MARTY  
You ordered black dots. These are just black dots.

CHERYL  
*Specks.* We're all just insignificant specks.

MARTY  
But they're not moving.

CHERYL  
They're not *motivated*. But let them out of there — They know what to do!

MARTY  
I think you got taken.

CHERYL  
It's a real website — Crabs.com. I paid real money —

MARTY  
For a bunch of specks.

CHERYL  
They're sleeping.

MARTY  
I don't think pubic lice sleep.

CHERYL  
Everything sleeps!

MARTY  
Are you sleeping anymore?

CHERYL  
I'M DOING AWESOME!

MARTY  
Your eyes are kind of wild right now — And you reek.

CHERYL  
I just got them out of the fridge to show them to you, but now I regret it!

MARTY  
You are not a well person.

CHERYL  
I am totally fine! Give them back. You don't deserve them.

Do we have any Purl?  
MARTY

(*To the lice.*) Marty doesn't understand us.  
CHERYL

You really need to let it go. Move on —  
MARTY

I can't.  
CHERYL

You could if you just tried.  
MARTY

I tried and then I just decided to quit trying.  
CHERYL

You need to create some space —  
MARTY

I *need* to create some pain and discomfort.  
CHERYL

But your ex filed a restraining order —  
MARTY

These guys came to *work*.  
CHERYL

When was the last time you showered?  
MARTY

Showering is overrated.  
CHERYL

You're giving off a kind of tidepool vibe right now.  
MARTY

I feel *great*! And I'll feel better when these blood-thirsty parasites are latched to my ex's crotch.  
CHERYL

You could go to jail.  
MARTY

CHERYL

All I have to do is put them in some khakis at the Gap.

MARTY

You're going to put pubic lice in pants at the Gap.

CHERYL

I know which one my ex shops at.

MARTY

I cannot let you do this.

CHERYL

I read *way* down on a Reddit board. I found *lots* of good advice there.

MARTY

No one ever found good advice on a Reddit board —

CHERYL

You have to go to the Gap with me — Cause a distraction.

MARTY

I'm not going to help you release pubic lice at the Gap.

CHERYL

I'll let them go! You just have to ask for a sweater in your size.

MARTY

Let's figure out how to return them — Where's the packaging?

CHERYL

No! — I have my pubic lice from the internet and I have a plan.

MARTY

If it involves pubic lice, I don't think it's a "plan".

CHERYL

You think you're so perfect, Marty!

MARTY

I'm just saying —

CHERYL

Oh, I'm Marty and oh — *I* eat vegetables. I go *running*. I'm Marty — I read *books*.

MARTY

You're in a low patch.

CHERYL

My friend Cheryl will die alone in a ditch, but I'm *Marty* and I'm saving for retirement!

MARTY

Everyone goes through low patches sometimes —

CHERYL

Marty has a great job and a great life partner and Marty flosses regularly — I see you do it! — And Marty's hair looks perfect and amazing and Marty is all height-weight proportional and Marty's nana sends a card and birthday money and my nana is *dead*. My nana wasn't even a nice person, Marty — And now she's dead! My tub is backed up and none of my pants fit and I and I'll always be alone and no one will ever love me — So, yeah, Marty, while you were busy instagramming your avo toast and living your best life, I sent my last two hundred dollars to an online pubic lice breeder and no — I am not fully able to take in the complete and total breakdown of my own personal hygiene in the last two weeks. I'm sad and lonely and wishing somebody, anybody — would say to me, "I hear you, and I'm so sorry you're hurting."

MARTY

I hear you, and I'm so sorry you're hurting.

CHERYL

Don't say that!

MARTY

Maybe we could take a yoga class.

CHERYL

I hate yoga.

MARTY

What about one of those places where you drink wine and you all paint the same picture?

CHERYL

I want my ex to itch.

MARTY

That's just not healthy.

CHERYL

I want my ex to itch in meetings and not be able to scratch.

MARTY

But they say living well is the best revenge?

CHERYL  
Living well is not for me, Marty!

MARTY  
You need help.

CHERYL  
And pubic lice need a moist environment — Flat front khakis. Dark denim. Boot cut —

MARTY  
Don't put your coat on. Please — You don't have to do this!

CHERYL  
If you won't go to the Gap with me, I'll do it myself.

MARTY  
You can't hurt innocent people!

CHERYL  
My mind is made up!

MARTY  
You just need a hobby — You could collect acorns!

CHERYL  
I'm not a fucking squirrel, Marty.

MARTY  
What are you doing?

CHERYL  
I'm taking the cap off.

MARTY  
No, no, no —

CHERYL  
You're right. This will help me to keep my boundaries next time.

MARTY  
Cheryl! Don't do it!

CHERYL  
I need to be open to life's lessons. Look away if you must.

I can't let you give yourself pubic lice!

MARTY

I'm not worthy of love.

CHERYL

You have so much life ahead of you —

MARTY

At least this is one relationship I can't screw up!

CHERYL

There's no reason to do this! We'll have a nice Caprese salad!

MARTY

I can't be dissuaded by Caprese salad.

CHERYL

You can totally give yourself pubic lice, but first smell this basil.

MARTY

Did you get the fresh mozzarella?

CHERYL

I went to three stores to find it.

MARTY

What about the tomatoes?

CHERYL

Vine-ripened. Why don't you put the cap on our friends and hand it over —

MARTY

Them. Hand *them* over.

CHERYL

Easy. That's it. Nice and slow.

MARTY

Nice and slow.

CHERYL

*Lights out. End of play.*

Going in Blind

A Ten-Minute Play

by

Tamar Shai Bolkvadze

Cast of Characters

Jesalyn: A woman in her mid-twenties, any ethnicity

Arthur: A man in his mid-forties, any ethnicity

Setting

A chain bookstore in Anchorage, Alaska. We see the café, as well as a portion of the ladies room, with the separate playing areas implied by lighting.

Time

The present





*Arthur sits at the café with a large cup of coffee, pretending to read a copy of the Alaska Dispatch News. ARTHUR sees a woman approach his table, and admiringly he stands halfway up, when she walk past his table. ARTHUR goes back to "reading" his paper. In the bathroom JESALYN approaches an unseen mirror, adjusts her bra strap, and checks her teeth for any stuck food. She then starts talking directly to the mirror.*

JESALYN

Excuse me... Arthur?

(After a moment, JESALYN moves her hand up to her hair.)

JESALYN

Thank you. I love her movies.

(Beat)

JESALYN

Oh, no thank you, I don't want anything... Me? I'm not sure where to begin. I've been at Charter for the last year... Pardon?... Oh, Business Administration... Hmm. I've been thinking a lot about that lately. Eventually, I'd like to work for a non-profit, maybe helping people who experience disabilities... Oh, thank you. I don't think of myself as particularly good or anything like that, I think most people want to help where they can. What do you do?... Really?... Something we have in common... Questions?... That's right, I almost forgot. Let's see.

(JESALYN takes a notebook out of her bag and gives a self-conscious look to the mirror)

JESALYN

Some of these are – well, anyway... Have you read *Wuthering Heights*?... Oh, good.., (laughing)

No, that wasn't the question – the question is Heathcliff or Linton?... Right?! I never understood the attraction. Okay, next. What do you think about breakfast for dinner?... Me, too... Um, if I'm out, then poached, 'cause I never got the hang of making poached eggs, but an omelet I'm good at... Oh, sure... anytime. Do you - ?

(There is the sound of a toilet flushing. JESALYN freezes for half a second, and then picks up her bag and fast walks out of the bathroom. JESALYN enters from the café door. After looking around, she hesitantly walks toward ARTHUR'S table.)

JESALYN

Arthur?

(ARTHUR slowly stands up, and then reluctantly holds out his hand.)

ARTHUR

You don't look like your picture.

(JESALYN snatches back her hand, and quickly sits down.  
ARTHUR glances around the café, and then sits down across from her.)

ARTHUR

You have some questions for me?

JESALYN

Oh, right.

(JESALYN opens the notebook.)

JESALYN

I know I put one in here...

(JESALYN retrieves a pen from her bag.)

JESALYN

Okay, have you –

ARTHUR

You're left-handed.

JESALYN

Yeah. Yes... are you?

ARTHUR

No, my daughter is.

(Beat)

JESALYN

How old is your daughter?

ARTHUR

Twenty-one.

JESALYN

Oh.

ARTHUR

Her sister's twenty-five.

(Beat)

ARTHUR

This is my sunshine, though, right here. This is my granddaughter.

(ARTHUR reaches into his shirt pocket, pulls out his phone, and shows JESALYN his screensaver.)

JESALYN

She's beautiful. What's her name?

ARTHUR

Abigail.

JESALYN

Are they in Anchorage?

ARTHUR

Yeah, we're all in Anchorage. Beth went to John Hopkins, but her husband Tim got a job with BP, so she came back after graduation, which we're obviously happy about.

JESALYN

I bet.

ARTHUR

Beth is in grad school, getting her Masters in Environmental Studies. So, Jill and I get a lot of time with our grandbaby.

JESALYN

That must be nice.

ARTHUR

More than nice.

(Silence, as JESALYN tries to think of something to say.)

ARTHUR

Kids are always chomping at the bit to leave Alaska, but once they have kids of their own they appreciate having family around. I think they'll stay in Anchorage – at least until Abbie's in school.

JESALYN

Is your other daughter in school?

ARTHUR

No, Katie is... she's working some things out. But we think she'll be back in school soon.

(ARTHUR nods toward the notebook.)

ARTHUR

Your question?

JESALYN

Oh.

(reading from the notebook)

Have you or anybody in your family had diabetes?

ARTHUR

My grandfather had diabetes.

(JESALYN writes down the information.)

JESALYN

Which side.

ARTHUR

Mother's. I don't – I don't know the medical history for my dad's side.

(Beat)

JESALYN

What was your grandfather's name?

ARTHUR

Bernie... but the kids called him Bunny.

JESALYN

Bunny?

ARTHUR

...When he was born his older sister couldn't pronounce the "r" in Bernie, so it was always Bunny in the family... What's next?

JESALYN

Any heart disease? Hypertension?

ARTHUR

My mother has high blood pressure, is that the same thing?

JESALYN

I don't know – I'll just let the doctor know.

(JESALYN records the information.)

JESALYN

So, your mother's still alive?

(With her focus still on the notebook, JESALYN misses the look on ARTHUR'S face at the mention of his mother.)

ARTHUR

... Yeah, but she's... fragile. I wouldn't want to do anything to upset her.

JESALYN

... No, of course, right... Any allergies?

ARTHUR

Mmm, my mom's allergic to strawberries and Katie's allergic to tree nuts. She has to carry an epipen on her.

(JESALYN writes down the information.)

JESALYN

Autoimmune disorders?... Kidney?... Seizure disorders?

(ARTHUR does not respond.)

JESALYN

Any psychiatric disorders?... Hepatitis?... Depression?

(ARTHUR slowly shakes his head.)

JESALYN

Any chromosomal abnormalities, like down syndrome?

ARTHUR

Let me make this easy on both of us. My grandfather had diabetes and prostate cancer, which he died from. That's it.

(JESALYN puts the pen down, and looks at ARTHUR for a few silent moments.)

ARTHUR

How far along are you?

JESALYN

It'll be twenty-one weeks on Wednesday.

ARTHUR

Well... you're in for a ride, I can tell you that. There's nothing like worrying about your child, and it doesn't get any easier as they get older.

JESALYN

No?

ARTHUR

No. When they're little you worry about them, but you can do something about it, protect them. But the older they get, the less you can do. They're like a walking target, and there's nothing you can do about it.

(Beat)

JESALYN

Do they know about me?

ARTHUR

... My wife knew from the beginning. But... it's not something that we talk about, so the girls just found out – after you called.

JESALYN

Do they want to meet me?

(Beat)

ARTHUR

The girls are very close, protective of each other. Protective of their mom – especially Beth. They feel betrayed – not betrayed, maybe – hurt. They don't like the idea of opening up the family.

JESALYN

No, I understand.

ARTHUR

I was surprised when I heard from you – well, not surprised that you contacted me, I guess - but that your last name is Koenig. I thought your mother would have given you her last name.

JESALYN

She didn't.

(Beat)

ARTHUR

I guess that was her prerogative... And what about the baby? Will you give it the father's last name?

JESALYN

No, the father's not... My son will have my name.

(Beat)

ARTHUR

... You know that a boy needs his father?

(JESALYN doesn't say anything.)

ARTHUR

Is there anything else?

(JESALYN looks through the list of questions in her notebook, and then closes it.)

JESALYN

No, that's it.

ARTHUR

Look, I – I don't know if I can do anything, but...

(ARTHUR reaches into his back pocket and takes out his wallet.)

ARTHUR

... Let me give you my card.

(ARTHUR takes a pen out of his shirt pocket and crosses out one of the numbers.)

ARTHUR

Probably best not to call me on my home number – the cell's fine, though.

(ARTHUR hands the card to JESALYN, and after looking at it, she gives a short laugh.)

ARTHUR

What?

JESALYN

Insurance Adjustor?

ARTHUR  
Yeah, so?

JESALYN  
...Nothing.

ARTHUR  
I should get back to work.

JESALYN  
Of course.

(ARTHUR stands up. JESALYN makes a move to stand up, but he waves her down.)

ARTHUR  
It was nice meeting you.

JESALYN  
You, too.

(ARTHUR exits the café. Once he's gone, JESALYN exits the café, and then reenters through the bathroom. She quickly checks to see if there are any pairs of feet in any of the stalls. Then she goes to the same mirror, and getting out her notebook, starts reading, as if she were reading entries from the phone book.)

JESALYN  
Does getting left ever get easier?... Do you wear socks to bed or do they make you feel like your feet can't breathe?... Can you roll your "r"s? Curl your tongue?... Are we related to Sarah Koenig from *This American Life*?... Would you have named me Jesalyn?  
(JESALYN looks up from the notebook.)  
I'm Beth Koenig. Elizabeth, but call me Beth... I'm Jesalyn Koenig.

[End of Play]



# MONSTERS BEYOND THE MIDNIGHT ZONE

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A 10-Minute Play by Lindsay Partain

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROMY – Scientist. Parent. 25-40.

LEO/LEAH – Scientist. 25-40.

## SYNOPSIS

Miles beneath the ocean's surface in the depths of the Mariana Trench. Romy and Leo are in complete darkness as the lights on their deep-water submersible have been taken out by a massive animal.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Written to take place in complete and total darkness. Written to take place in complete and total darkness. The beginning lines were added for an audio performance; if preferred, you may choose to begin the script from this point:

*(The whirring sounds of the submersible are heard with the deafening silence of the deepest parts of the ocean. Then. A bump—ROMY's notepad flies out of their hands.)*

Hey—

ROMY

Woah—what was that?

LEO

*It's quiet, ROMY and LEO are manning the controls of their deep-ocean submersible.*

ROMY

Thank you for joining me on submersible-Marianas. If you look to your left you'll see a delightful foot-long octopus with cartoonish ears, and the most horrific shark you could possibly imagine. No wait... it's worse.

LEO

\$5,000 Dumbo-pus could squish his way in here?

ROMY

I'd take that bet.

LEO

You'd lose that bet.

ROMY

That adorable bastard gets in here and we both lose. He's built to withstand over 5,600 PSI at nearly 4,000 meters. I can barely take a compliment.

LEO

Did you know that they swallow their food whole? They don't grind it with their beak like other octopuses.

ROMY

I too took marine biology in undergrad.

LEO

*(With a laugh)* Alright, smart-ass. Can it. It's starting to get dark. We're going to be creeping up on the Midnight Zone pretty quickly.

ROMY

I'll grab the checklist. It's by the oxygen, yea?

LEO

Should be. Hey, I think I left a Snickers bar back there somewhere—if you find it would you hand it up?

ROMY

A Snickers, you say?

*(Everything goes dark except for their high beams.)*

LEO

I think I stashed it somewhere between the emergency condensation bag and the scrubbers?

*(A wrapper crinkles. Something that could be mistaken for whale sounds echoes out but it's too far away to tell.)*

LEO

Anything?

ROMY

*(Mouth half-full)* Nope, nothing back here.

LEO

Alright, at least give me the other half.

ROMY

It's a little squished.

LEO

Not surprising. There's barely room to turn around in here let alone stowaway snacks. Where we at? Any records broken yet?

ROMY

Mmmm, not yet.... Well?

LEO

No. Romy, what're we at?

ROMY

Leo. *(Pause)* We've officially hit 10,500 meters.

LEO

*(In awe)* Incredible. I mean, can you even believe it? Look at all of this!

ROMY

It's a beautiful day to make history!

*(LEO flips a few switches, checks their watch, and digs around behind their seats while ROMY takes down a few notes in a notepad. The whirring sounds of the submersible are heard with the deafening silence of the deepest parts of the ocean. Then. A bump—ROMY's notepad flies out of their hands.)*

ROMY

What the—

LEO

Woah—what was that? You felt that, right?

ROMY

Of course I felt that! Lee— Leo—? (*Beat*) Oh my god, what—? What *is* that?!

*(They are hit, hard and everything goes completely pitch black. There's a whirring noise as something massive crashes against their metal, deep-ocean submersible. ROMY and LEO cry out. Whatever just hit them has taken out their lights entirely. The engine/the propellers hum and there is a bubbling of oxygen leaving the tank.)*

ROMY (*breathing heavily*)

Did. Did you see it? Did you see that *thing*?

LEO

No. I, I didn't catch it. I was checking levels—it happened too fast.

ROMY

Where are the lights?

LEO

Whatever it was, it took out them out when it swooped through—

ROMY

It must have shaken something loose in the ship; the emergency lights *should* have come on... Leo. How are we supposed to get back to the surface if we can't see the control board? Do you think we've lost contact?

LEO

Don't do that.

ROMY

Sorry, I'm just— Jesus, I can't stop shaking.

LEIO

We've taken this dive a dozen times—

ROMY

Okay, but we've never been this far under!

LEO

Take a breath—we can do this. We can remember the controls. It's just a few switches and, and the lever. We've been doing this for years— it's muscle memory. It is. I know it is.

ROMY

Muscle memory. Yea. We'll just, feel around until we—

*(Their submersible siren wails out into the black abyss.)*

LEO

Ro—

ROMY

Oh god— stop— why won't you—?

*(ROMY starts pressing buttons and turning knobs trying to make it stop.)*

LEO *(Calmly)*

Romy you need to turn that off—

ROMY

I'm, I'm trying—

LEO *(with rising anxiety)*

Romy. Romy— turn it off. We don't want to— you need to turn it off before it hears—

*(ROMY finds the right button and the siren turns cuts out.)*

ROMY

Oh, oh thank god. It stopped, it's, Leo. We're going to be fine—

*(Somewhere in the darkness a horrifying wail answers their siren. There is a pause. Romy whispers, terrified.)*

ROMY

Do you think it—?

*(Whatever is out there wails again, angrily, hungrily— and much closer.)*

LEO

I think it did... Have you found the right lever yet? It was somewhere over here. Dammit, we need to get to the surface, *now*.

ROMY

I'm sorry, I'm trying—

LEO

Try harder!

ROMY

I can't see in the dark, Leo! I need your help!

LEO

*SHhh!!*

ROMY

Don't *shh* m— *oww*! Don't grab— you're hurting me—!

LEO

*Quiet!! (Pause)* Can't you hear that? It's out there. Sounds like slithering almost...

ROMY

Leo?

LEO

We need to find the right controls. There's gotta be a a a torch or or a lighter— *something*—

*(Tanks, straps, helmets/items varying in size  
crash to the metal floor.)*

ROMY

There's no way there's a lighter in here. Just, relax, okay? The more we panic, the more oxygen we burn through. Do you remember where the dial was at before that monster took out the—

LEO

It wasn't a monster, Romy. You're a scientist, where's your sense? Monsters aren't real.

ROMY

I don't know what else to call something that massive living *this far underwater*! You had to have seen it— those giant tentacles? I mean, what if we?

LEO

Don't—

ROMY

It's a possibility! What if it's a live colossal squid? Could be a whole shole of them? May as well be Cthulhu itself this far under... What if that's what's—?

*(Rustling again)*

LEO

A headlamp maybe... we couldn't be so stupid that we forgot a headlamp?

ROMY

Just focus! Breathe. Where's the lever?

*(Something nudges their cruiser; it's gigantic and it sends more items crashing to the floor.)*

ROMY *(overlapping)*

Oh god— oh god—oh god—*ohgodohgod—*

LEO *(overlapping)*

*Holy- jesus!*

ROMY

We gotta get out of here— I have to get back—

LEO

*Wait!* Wait, I think I found it!

*(A whirring is heard- they're moving.)*

ROMY

Are we moving? ...We're moving! Oh, thank god, thank god!

LEO *(with a laugh)*

Thank me, I'm the one who found it!

*(They share a small terrified laugh. A brief pause.)*

ROMY

I was getting all of these horrible flashes of things I'd never done. Places I would never see? I yelled at my daughter before I left...

LEO

When we get back up you can buy me breakfast and give her a call to tell her you're sorry. *Woo!* Can you hear my heart beating? I feel like a cartoon character, like my heart is outside my chest.

ROMY

What do you want for breakfast?

LEO

Do they serve pancakes in Guam? Because I could really go for a stack-

*(There is another thud and then an ear-piercing wail.)*

ROMY

Bloody—is it ramming us?

LEO

It must be following the ship back to the surface.



ROMY

Does it think we're food?

LEO

Maybe—

*(There is a crunch- a cracking of glass.)*

LEO

Shh-shh-shh.....What was that? Romy, what was that sound?

*(There is a growing crack in the fishbowl of their submersible.)*

ROMY

No.

LEO

What is it?

ROMY

The glass is breaking. Leo—

LEO

No—

ROMY

Leo, the glass is breaking!

LEO

That's imposs—!

ROMY

There's a huge crack—!

LEO

Do you have any idea how thick that window is? *Do you have any idea—?*

ROMY

We need to get to the surface— we need to go faster!

LEO

We can't go any faster! This is as fast as it goes!

ROMY

Are you prepared to swim out? Because that's the only way—!

LEO

We would never make it. The pressure will kill us if that thing doesn't get us first.

ROMY

It's quickly becoming our only option. I'm grabbing the masks.

LEO

Everything is piled on the floor; you won't find them!

ROMY

We are going to get out of this. We're going to make it.

LEO

That *thing* is ramming into the submersible. Romy, it knows we're here and it's following us. At this rate it's going to shatter the window before we even make it back out of the midnight zone.

ROMY

If we were close, we'd be seeing blue. Do you see a light? I think I might see something—

LEO

Your brain is tricking you. We've already been in the dark too long.

ROMY

Come on, you stupid fucking machine—!

*(The familiar animal wail rings out again, and then another one, and another one. They are in the midst of a shoal of colossal squid.)*

LEO

*(Calm, maybe a little sad)* What're you having for breakfast, Romy?

ROMY

What?

LEO

What are you going to order?

ROMY

I— I don't know, I.

LEO

I'm going to have pancakes.

*(Something crashes into the submersible.)*

LEO

With sausages.

*(A heavy thump; settling. The whirring stops.)*

ROMY

Leo? Leo, why aren't we moving? Why did we stop?

LEO

I, I think I must've pulled the lever the wrong way...

ROMY

What are you saying? What, did we just— are we—?

LEO

At the very bottom of the Mariana Trench. Yea.

*(A crack, a hiss. Water begins to spray in.  
There is a collective moment of peace.)*

ROMY

I'm. I'm going to get crepes.

LEO

Crepes huh?

ROMY

With extra strawberries. My daughter loves them. They're her favorite...

LEO

Considering the situation, I think breakfast is on me, okay?

ROMY

Okay.

*(A series of crackles)*

LEO

Romy—Romy hold my hand—please, hold my—

*(The window finally breaks in with a horrible  
crash and the submersible fills with water. A  
vicious wail sounds.)*

*(End Of Play)*

**MOVING ON**

By Cameron Jackson

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Cast of Characters

JAMES

Father to Chloe. Slightly disheveled from moving.

CHLOE

Daughter of James. College age. In work clothes.

EMILY

Mother of Chloe and Wife of James. A bit more put-together.

Place

A home, in the last stages of moving out.

Time

As the Director wishes.

Director's Note

This work features a character revealed to have passed. Endeavor to make this reveal impactful by staging interaction such that it is not immediately obvious to the audience. After entering, the character of EMILY should remain on stage at all times.

Setting: There are a few scattered boxes labeled in bold letters (DAD'S STUFF, CHLOE'S STUFF – one box, under a couple others center-stage MOM'S STUFF), a few items remain unboxed. One dining chair sits stage left, with a paint bucket and paint brush)

*(Sounds of a truck and car braking outside. Two doors opening and closing. Enter EMILY, SR. She takes in the space, moving SL.)*

CHLOE *(After a moment, offstage right)*

Last load, right?

JAMES *(Also offstage)*

It better be, need to get the truck back! Head on inside while I get this open.

*(Sounds of door handle)*

CHLOE *(Offstage)*

Dad, it's locked!

EMILY

Jiggle the handle, Chloe...

JAMES *(Offstage, following quickly)*

You gotta jiggle it, Chloe!

*(Before EMILY can get to the door, CHLOE enters SR, brushing past EMILY)*

CHLOE

Yeah yeah yeah... *(louder)* What do you want first?

JAMES *(entering)*

Oh, whatever at this point.

EMILY

Should put the heavier stuff in first...

CHLOE *(Lifting box)*

Ooof... this one's heavy!

JAMES

Well, heavier first is probably smart, right?

EMILY

Who'd've thought, right?

*(CHLOE and JAMES are on and offstage moving boxes over the following)*

CHLOE

You know, I should probably leave most of my stuff in boxes. I can't imagine I'll be there too much longer.

EMILY *(sarcastically)*

Oh, you're off to your summer home by the coast, right?

JAMES

Yeah, don't want to let the vacation property go wasted, m'lady?

CHLOE

Ugh, you sound like mom!

EMILY

Take the compliment, dear...

JAMES

Thank you kindly!

CHLOE

Yeah, that's not SUCH a bad thing, I guess.

JAMES

But hey, you know you can stay at the new place as long as you want, right?

CHLOE

Yeah, I know, but if I get that job on-campus it would just be easier to be closer.

JAMES

Yeah, and have all those wild college parties I've heard so much about, right?

CHLOE

Blegh, no!

JAMES (*feigning dramatic disappointment*)

But however are you to find a partner of ill-repute!? Are the collegiate traditions to be completely IGNORED?!

EMILY (*hiding laughter*)

Don't embarrass her Jimmy, she's-

JAMES (*cutting EMILY off*)

OH WOE IS ME! To have a daughter so diminished from the ways of the world and all its cultured beauty! (*faints dramatically on to CHLOE*)

CHLOE

That's some fancy talk from a guy who never went to college.

JAMES

Hey now! I went to college every day to hit on your mother.

EMILY

Oh Lord...

JAMES

And then I married said mother, so by the transitive property, I have a degree as well, so there.

CHLOE

...and as your spawn, does that mean I'm already degreed as well?

EMILY

See? She gets it from you!

JAMES

You know? That's a good point! And it'd save me a ton of money too! Shall we go be white-collar workers together in some cramped cubicle? I call dibs on lawyer! (*comically runs offstage*)

CHLOE

Yeah, but where would we put all these boxes?

JAMES (*entering*)

...good point. And shame on you for distracting us from the work!

CHLOE



Dork... (*after a beat*) The paint going too?

JAMES

Oh! Thanks for reminding me! Nah, we need to paint the doorframe before we go (*with hesitation*), where your mom marked your height growing up.

CHOLE

Oh. -yeah, I guess that makes sense. Would be weird to have some random kid's height already marked out.

JAMES

Or hey, if they already have kids, they could make it aspirational! "If you're not up to HERE by the time you're 15, then you're not eating enough broccoli!"

CHLOE

(*slightly awkward laugh*) Yeah – pretty sure 15 isn't up there...

JAMES

Oh? Oh, yeah. Guess not.

CHLOE

We should probably eat before it gets too late, right? I feel like we've had fast food for like, a week straight...

JAMES

Fast food it isn't, then! Take-out? Dim sum?

EMILY

There's Pepe's around the corner still, right?

CHLOE (*quieter*)

...we COULD have Pepe's for old time's sake.

JAMES (*sensing the change in tone*)

Yeah – I mean, we haven't been for... for a while now. (*beat*) Honey - how are you doing with the move, and - all of this?

CHLOE (*shaking it off*)

Yeah, it's okay. You'd get in to too much trouble with all this space. Too much room. I'd come back to you installing a slide into the kitchen or something! Mom would never – (*trails off, back to sadness*)

EMILY (*Moving to comfort*)

Oh, honey. (*Stops short*)

JAMES

Okay honey. Just – I mean, you grew up here. I know I don't talk about it much still, but that doesn't mean – (*beat, reflection. Then, with a chuckle-*) You know, when your mom and I put an offer down on this place we didn't-

CHLOE (*cutting off JAMES*)

So do you want me to go grab the food? My car's on the street, easier than the truck.

JAMES

No, I can get it. Usuals all around, I assume?

CHLOE & EMILY (*unison*)

No sour cream, please!

JAMES

...you are your mother's daughter. (*smiles*) Keys?

CHLOE

Here.

(*JAMES leaves. After a beat, EMILY returns to looking around the room, and CHLOE returns to moving boxes, revealing MOM'S STUFF. CHLOE slowly carries it to the chair to open*)

CHLOE

(*long beat, looking out*) Hey, mom?

EMILY

Yes honey?

CHLOE

I hope you're okay with us moving. (*beat*) Dad tells me the same story every fall. How the first thing, the FIRST thing you did when coming to look at this place was stick your head in the fireplace, to make sure it was real.

EMILY (*laughing softly*)

I never had one growing up-

CHLOE

You wanted a fire for holidays. Thought it was romantic. I remember dad trying once, ONCE to suggest we put in an electric one. How much money we'd save. He never asked again.

EMILY

Gave him the ol' Medusa eye!

CHLOE (*chuckling*)

The Medusa eye. I think we're the last working chimney on the block now. Only one I still see with smoke coming out, anyhow. He never changed it out.

EMILY

I know. He could've, now. If he wanted.

CHLOE (*hesitantly*)

Mom? Seems a little weird to ask, but – should I move out? Out of the new place, I mean.

(*breaking*) It's just – I know dad's good. He's doing well. But-

(*beat*)

Mom... I miss you so much.

EMILY

Sweetheart...

(*EMILY crosses in a rush to embrace CHLOE, stopping just short. She stands over her daughter, holding herself instead*)

CHLOE

This is just bringing all of it up again. You hear people say that it feels like it "just happened yesterday" or whatever, but that's not really it. It's like – It's kind of like someone made a crappy video of the day you died? Just followed me around with a camera, and something like this move comes along and hits play. Like how I got pulled out of class, and I was excited because I thought we were going on a surprise trip or something. How I sat in the office for a while, and everyone just kept... looking at me. But only when I wasn't looking at them.

I was less excited when your friend came to pick me up. Mrs. Cassidy?, I think? I tried to tell the lady in the office that I was only supposed to go home with my parents. She was crying, and I asked her why.

(*beat*)

Mrs. Cassidy didn't talk the whole way home. I just kept telling her about my day. We were learning about tadpoles turning in to frogs - metamorphosis. I never had to take a quiz on that section, the teacher I think just gave me a passing grade on everything for the rest of the school year, but I can still see the page with that colorful circle graph on it. I can probably draw that

picture from memory. How the tadpoles grow their back legs first. I remember wondering if the tadpoles thought that was weird, you know? To have legs when they already could swim just fine?

I asked Mrs. Cassidy that. Still nothing. That's when I saw the house – this house. Uncle Kenny was taking out the garbage, and I only ever saw him around Christmas. Mr. Cassidy was up on the roof, patching ...something, I guess. When people don't know what to say, they try to find something to keep themselves busy.

When I got inside, dad was sitting at the table here, just... hollow. I called out for him, and he was instantly across the room to me, picking me up. He held on to me so tightly. I can hear the sounds he made like I can see that tadpole chart. Just noise, noise when there's nothing else you can do. I cried like that too, and I didn't even know you were gone yet.

*(a beat)*

Dad hasn't told me, but I know he's dating. Which is good! I think it's good. A part of me feels weird about that, still. It started a year ago? Maybe? He cried after the first couple. But he's been out with the same woman a few times now. She had short red hair – and smiled at him when he laughed. He seemed happy. Seems happy.

And then he comes home, and he looks at that fireplace. Or where you used to mark my height over there on the door frame. It looks like I just stopped growing, now.

*(After a beat, CHLOE collects herself, and begins packing the remaining loose items in a large box labeled "MISC.")*

EMILY

Oh honey... You have been- you ARE amazing. You have become so strong. *(small beat)* He still talks to me too. Less now. But every time it's always about how proud of you he is. How you carried him through those first few years. I've watched you pick him up without realizing, and get him to where he is today. I'm glad he's finding happiness. But it's your turn, honey. He'll always need you. But he also needs you to be okay.

JAMES

*(offstage)* Soup's on! *(entering)* What, not done yet?

CHLOE

Well, if we didn't have so much STUFF...

JAMES

Hey, speaking of stuff, here's your mom's! Looking through it?

CHLOE

Not really.

JAMES

Well, you're welcome to. Welcome to take some stuff with you when you- when you head to campus.

CHLOE

Eh, I might stick around home for another semester or two.

JAMES

Oh yeah? That campus gig fall through?

CHLOE

Nah, just – Just thought you could use the help setting up the new bachelor pad.

*(James takes a moment before setting down the food, and going over to CHLOE)*

JAMES

Honey, brace yourself, because I'm about to do some parenting. Ready?

CHLOE

Bit dramatic, but okay.

JAMES

Two things, hun. First? You will always, ALWAYS have a home with me. Forever. Full stop. Walk in at 2 a.m., drink straight from the milk carton like a dairy gremlin.

CHLOE *(with soft laughter)*

Okay, I got it dad.

JAMES

Second! As you so expertly pointed out earlier, I didn't go to college, but your mom did. Got away from your grandparents for the first time in her life. Lovely people, sure, but your pop-pop does that thing where he hiccup-burps right after his last bite?

CHLOE

Gross.

JAMES

Respect your elders. The point is, your mother- Emily. My Emily. She got to experience life on her terms. She wanted that for you, too. Two weeks before you were born, she sent me out for peanut butter pickles, and to open a college savings for you. She said – she said that you should

have the opportunity to miss a lecture over something important. And I don't want your very cool father getting in the way of that.

CHLOE

Hey dad?

JAMES

Yeah honey?

CHLOE

Do you still miss her?

JAMES

Only when she's not here, honey. (*after a beat*) Hey, did I ever tell you about your mother sticking her entire head in that fireplace when we came to look at this place?

CHLOE

Only a hundred times...

JAMES

Like, no hesitation, b-line straight for the doors, whole head in. (*beat*) You are SO like her, you know.

CHLOE

Yeah?

JAMES

Yeah. (*beat*) Welp, do we wanna eat on the floor, or...?

CHLOE

Maybe let's take it on the road?

JAMES

Sounds good, let's just— Crap! The doorframe!

CHLOE

Oh, here, let me slap some paint on it.

JAMES

Actually, wait. Come here.

*(JAMES exits SL, followed after a beat by CHLOE. Their voices can be heard offstage, as EMILY looks on, smiling)*

JAMES

Now, back to it, stand up straight, or whatever you're supposed to do...

CHLOE

Really? We're doing this?

JAMES

Yeah, let's let the next people in this place figure out why you rocketed up so quickly. Hold still... There!

EMILY

Don't forget the heart!

CHLOE

Mom always put my age next to the line with a heart around it.

JAMES

So she did... There. Hey, grab the food on the way out. I'll grab the last couple boxes.

*(CHLOE enters SL and crosses, looking around as she grabs the food. She is smiling. After a beat, JAMES enters, gathering the remaining boxes, leaving the chair and paint. He stops just before the SR exit, sets down the boxes, and turns to look at the empty room with EMILY in it)*

JAMES

I love you, Emily.

*(After a beat, JAMES exits with boxes. Fade out)*

STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY

by

Matthew Weaver

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### Cast of Characters

BROOMHILDA                      A witch

STRAW                              A pig

STICK                              A pig

### Synopsis

Two contractors give an update to their client.

### Setting

A forest

### Time

Once upon ...

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The stage should suggest a construction site for a future house.

STRAW, a pig, stares at BLUEPRINTS.

STRAW

Why is the oven so oinkin' big?

(Enter STICK, also a pig, in a hurry.)

STICK

Look sharp. Client's here.

(Both pigs are very hard workers. But they straighten up all the more as BROOMHILDA, a witch, enters with a flourish.)

BROOMHILDA

What is the meaning of this delay?

STRAW AND STICK

Material's on back order.

BROOMHILDA

How is that possible?

STRAW

That's a whole lot of flour and molasses.

STICK

It ain't like making a cake.

Well, it is.

Just, like, a really, really big one.

BROOMHILDA

How long?

STRAW

Hard to say.

STICK

We got a guy. He's crushing sugar beets as fast as he can. It's just ...

BROOMHILDA

A lot of them. I hear you.

I was promised Hay maker, Stickleton & Brick are the best contractors in the forest.

STRAW

Yes ma'am.

BROOMHILDA

Everything I could possibly request.

STICK

It's still a weird request. Even for us.

STRAW

Unusual. We say "unusual." Unique.

Are you sure about this building material?

BROOMHILDA

We've been over this.

STRAW

We're concerned about its ...

STICK

Porousness.

STRAW

What happens if it rains? It'll soak it all up.

STICK

Or dries out?

BROOMHILDA

What do you suggest?

STRAW

Straw.

STICK

Sticks.

(Both glare at each other.)

BROOMHILDA

Uh huh. And if I ask your brother, what will he say?  
Where is he?

STRAW

(sigh)  
I am legally obligated to tell you he is currently, and I mean right this second, in court  
defending our firm against a possible liability claim.

STICK

That egg was pushed.

STRAW

And even if he wasn't, there's no evidence our bricks were the thing that cracked him.

STICK

Probably he lost his balance.

STRAW

If you want gingerbread, we'll make gingerbread work.

BROOMHILDA

I want gingerbread.

STICK

Why all the way out here? In the middle of nowhere.

BROOMHILDA

I like my privacy.

STICK

You'll certainly have it.

BROOMHILDA

Neighbors?

STRAW

A day away. Woodcutter and his wife. Nice family. Two kids.

BROOMHILDA

Children? Boys? Girls?

STICK

One of each.

BROOMHILDA

What about ... noise?

STRAW

Shouldn't be a problem. The gingerbread will be pretty thick.

You won't hear them, though. Too far away.

They'd have to get absolutely lost to find their way here.

BROOMHILDA

I was thinking more like ... could anyone pass by and hear ... screaming, for example?

STICK

What kind of screaming?

BROOMHILDA

...

I do Shrieking Yoga.

STICK

...

STRAW

...

BROOMHILDA

How long, do you think? Before I'm in?

STRAW

With the delays ... Five months.

BROOMHILDA

Unacceptable.

STICK

Any other company, it'd take twice that long.

STRAW

You know our concerns. No one builds like this.

STICK

We've just about got the walls to the right thickness.  
You gotta have, you know, structural integrity.  
Too light, they crumble.

STRAW

Too heavy, they come down.

BROOMHILDA

All right.  
(pause)  
No raisins!

(The pigs reassure her.)

STRAW

Yes ma'am.

STICK

No raisins here.

BROOMHILDA

It's not a fruitcake.

STICK

Our brother apologizes, ma'am.  
He mis-spoke.

STRAW

They're similar, though.

(BROOMHILDA gives him a Look.)

STICK

But different!

STRAW

So different.

BROOMHILDA

Who in their right minds would live in a house made of fruitcake???  
Do I look crazy to you?

(Slight pause.)

STICK

Hey, the gum drops are in!  
(to STRAW)  
Should I -

STRAW

Yeah. Show her.

BROOMHILDA

Yes, I would like to see.

(STICK rummages around, brings up a large  
GUMDROP.)

STICK

We finally got the frosting just the right consistency to hold it up.

BROOMHILDA

And the windows made of pure sugar?

(Pause.)

BROOMHILDA

(sigh)  
Now what?

STRAW

They're out of the windows you wanted.

STICK

Quit makin' 'em.

BROOMHILDA

Nooo!

STRAW

We can try to replicate 'em, but they're gonna be double the price.

BROOMHILDA

Double?!

STICK

Or we can go with something else.

BROOMHILDA

You can't find them anywhere? One of your guys, maybe?

STRAW

No, ma'am. Discontinued.

STICK

We got a guy. We got a lot of guys, but ... This is beyond even them.

STRAW

Your call.

BROOMHILDA

...

All right. Double the price, damn you.

STRAW

You're the boss.

Need you to sign off on it, though.

BROOMHILDA

All right.

STRAW

Get her the -

(STICK is already handing over the paperwork.)

(She tries to read it, but her vision is going. She holds it at arm's length, then up close.)



BROOMHILDA

These old eyes aren't what they used to be.

STRAW

Just authorizing the change in windows, and the higher price.

BROOMHILDA

Got a pen?

(STICK has that too.)

(She prepares to sign.)

(STICK and STRAW exchange a look.)

(STICK motions to STRAW. STRAW waves him off.)

BROOMHILDA

What?

(STICK motions to STRAW again.)

STRAW

...

What's with the cages?

BROOMHILDA

...

I intend to keep small livestock. For food. Chicken for eggs. Maybe some porrrrr - lamb.  
For wool. For meat. That's all.

STRAW

I told you there was a reasonable explanation.

STICK

Can't exactly order pizza delivery all the way out here.

BROOMHILDA

Exactly.

(she signs the paperwork)

There!

(looks around)  
Five more months.

STICK

Hey, it'll be worth the wait.

STRAW

Exactly.  
We aren't building you a gingerbread house.  
We're building you a gingerbread home.

BROOMHILDA

...  
I like that.

(She walks around the space, picturing it.)

BROOMHILDA

I'll wake up...

STICK

The air smelling of freshly baked gingerbread...

BROOMHILDA

Yes!  
I'll run downstairs and start a fire in the oven ...

STRAW

The unusually large oven ...

BROOMHILDA

Maybe have leftover stew.  
I'll throw open the door and listen to the sweet sounds of a quiet forest.

STICK

No one around for miles.

BROOMHILDA

I'll sit, I'll read, I'll knit.  
Whip up an incantation or two ...  
Maybe I'll finally get started on that novel.

I'll live off the land. Smoke my own meat.  
Stay up all hours of the night.

STICK

Like any respectable witch.

BROOMHILDA

And take a good lick off the candy cane columns.

(The pigs wince.)

STICK

Oooh.

STRAW

We forgot to mention ...

(BROOMHILDA pauses, frustrated.)

BROOMHILDA

Delayed?

(Pause.)

STRAW

Don't worry about it.

STICK

We got a guy.

(They grin.)

(After a moment, she grins too.)

BROOMHILDA

Home. I like the sound of that.

End of Play

The Appointment

The Appointment

---

a play in one act

by

Hannah Teryn

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Cast of Characters

Charlotte: a woman, mid to late twenties

Oliver: a man, mid to late twenties

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Setting

A bus stop.

Time

The present.

Scene 1

SETTING: We are under a small, covered area at a bus stop with a single bench. It's raining.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE sits on the end of the bench, wearing a dress appropriate for a nightclub, high heels sitting next to her. She chews gum and talks into a phone.

CHARLOTTE

(talking into her phone)

I'll be at the club in like twenty-five minutes. I'd be there sooner, but the bus is always ten minutes late. It's reliable like that.

(leans down)

There are thirteen pieces of gum under the bench.

(pause)

Yes, I'm sure. I counted twice. Don't forget to check for bobby pins in their bathroom. Yeah, look under all the sinks and around the toilets.

(pause)

Seventeen? That's a good haul. Put them in a baggie, I'll sterilize them at home.

(OLIVER enters wearing a nice suit, a poorly tied tie, and a raincoat. His hair is wet, and he's covering his head with his arms as he enters the covered area. He starts to sit, stands, sits again then stands at the opposite side of the bench. He starts muttering to himself)

Gotta go, Stacy. I'll text you when I'm on route.

(looks toward OLIVER)

Hey. You here for the bus too?

OLIVER

(startles)

Hi. Yeah. I am here. For the bus. I am here for the bus.

CHARLOTTE

You don't look like the type who takes the bus.

OLIVER

What type is that?

CHARLOTTE

I dunno. A gum chewer? There are thirteen pieces under the bench, in case you were wondering.

OLIVER

(bends down and counts)

Yep. Thirteen.

CHARLOTTE

So...are you a gum chewer? I can give you a stick if you are.

OLIVER

I like mints...and I don't usually take the bus. Not that there's anything wrong with taking the bus. The bus is great. I mean, it's alright. My car wouldn't start, and I have an important appointment at eight. I can't miss it.

CHARLOTTE

I'm meeting some friends at The Blue Cactus. It's that new-ish nightclub downtown. I'll have to Uber home though. The buses don't run past ten.

OLIVER

Uber. Right. I should've gotten an Uber. I just didn't expect my car not to start, you know? I promised my parents I'd stop by their place before I went to my appointment so they could give me their notecards. But I couldn't because—

CHARLOTTE

—your car wouldn't start. Do you want to rehearse what you're going to say with me?

OLIVER

No. No. That would be...uncomfortable. I think I'll just practice on myself.

CHARLOTTE

If it makes you feel any better, you certainly look the part. Well-dressed. Handsome. I'd hire you.

OLIVER

You'd hire me?

CHARLOTTE

For the job.

OLIVER

(fidgeting with his tie)

Are you hiring for a job?

CHARLOTTE

No. I'm going to a nightclub. I want to end my singleness streak before I hit thirty. I'm starting now so I'm not scrambling when I'm twenty-nine.

OLIVER

(stops fidgeting for a moment)

Oh. Well, you seem nice and you're very pretty. I'm sure someone will snatch you up...not, not like in a kidnapping way. That sounded...I just meant...

(sighs and goes back to his tie)

I'm not applying for a job, by the way. It's a different kind of appointment.

CHARLOTTE

You look nervous.

OLIVER

I am nervous. I hope that goes away. My parents said the nerves would go away. I don't really believe them. Do your parents ever lie to you?

CHARLOTTE

My mom does.

OLIVER

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

Do you want help with your tie?

OLIVER

Yeah. That would, it would, I would appreciate it. Thanks.

CHARLOTTE

(walks over to him and starts retying his tie)

So. This appointment is pretty important, huh?

OLIVER

It's mandatory. My parents said so.

CHARLOTTE

You and your parents must be close.



OLIVER

No, they live twenty minutes from my apartment.

CHARLOTTE

You're funny.

OLIVER

Am I? My parents don't think so.

CHARLOTTE

(finishes retying tie)

There. Now you're officially ready to wow whoever you're meeting at whatever appointment you're going to.

OLIVER

Wow? You really think so?

CHARLOTTE

Most definitely.

(There's a pause where they lock eyes and Charlotte leans in and kisses him. After a moment, he reciprocates, but breaks away several moments later looking on the verge of a panic attack)

I'm so sorry. That was stupid. It won't happen again. Are you okay? Can I get you anything?

OLIVER

(breathing heavily)

Why'd you do that? Why'd I do that?

CHARLOTTE

You're cute. And you're funny. And you're awkward enough to not be a creep, but not so awkward that you're creepy. I don't know. I'm feeling a lot of pressure to get a boyfriend, and I'd rather tell my mom I met someone at a bus stop than at a nightclub. Not that I want you to be my boyfriend...

OLIVER

(slumps onto the bench)

I can't be your boyfriend. I mean, you're attractive, and I liked making you laugh and the kiss was very nice, but—

CHARLOTTE

—we can just sit in silence until the bus comes—

OLIVER

—but I have to propose tonight.

CHARLOTTE

You what?

OLIVER

I promised my parents I'd propose tonight.

CHARLOTTE

Propose...like marriage?

OLIVER

Yeah. They said two years is enough time to get to know someone, and I need to propose.

CHARLOTTE

(sinking down next to him)

You have a girlfriend. I'm an idiot.

OLIVER

You're not an idiot. I didn't mention her.

CHARLOTTE

This must be what pathetic feels like.

OLIVER

I really should have mentioned her.

CHARLOTTE

Why did I think Mom would like a guy I met at a bus stop better than a guy I met at a nightclub?

OLIVER

I would have mentioned her, but I've been distracted today what with the appointment and my car not starting.

CHARLOTTE

Mom'd hate that. She'd think he can't afford a car because I can't afford a car. People with cars take the bus, Mom.

OLIVER

Plus, I don't have the notecards my parents wrote for me, so I have no idea what to say once I get there.

CHARLOTTE

I'd have to hear the "Now remember, you can't afford to marry poor" speech. Why can't she just butt out?

OLIVER

I've been trying to workshop what to say, but I don't know how to propose to someone.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean you don't know how to propose to someone?

OLIVER

Wiki-How was informative, but the drawings were disturbing. I think I blocked everything out.

CHARLOTTE

Why don't you try: I love you, would you marry me?

OLIVER

No, that doesn't sound right. And I really need to figure out what to say. My parents are throwing an engagement party tomorrow, and it'll be really embarrassing for them if I'm not engaged.

CHARLOTTE

They're pretty confident she'll say yes.

OLIVER

But she can't say yes if I don't propose. Do you think the bus will be here soon? I can't miss my appointment.

CHARLOTTE

The bus is always ten minutes late...and you keep calling your proposal an appointment. That sounds so clinical.

OLIVER

I mean, my parents were the ones who coordinated with her. They told me where to go and what time they made the restaurant reservation for. So, it's like an appointment.

CHARLOTTE

You didn't make the date with her yourself?

OLIVER

My parents set up all my appointments.

CHARLOTTE

You mean dates.

OLIVER

I guess most people call them that.

CHARLOTTE

So, it's an arranged marriage?

OLIVER

Yes and no. My parents arranged it, but it's not cultural. They just did it because I needed their help.

CHARLOTTE

Why? You're young and likeable and you seemed mostly normal...until you started talking about the stuff with your parents.

OLIVER

That's very nice of you to say. My parents set me up with her because I wasn't dating much, and all the dates I picked myself didn't pan out.

CHARLOTTE

It sounds like this person panned out if you're proposing. I guess it doesn't really matter how you met her as long as you're happy.

OLIVER

Yeah, my parents are really happy.

CHARLOTTE

Your parents are happy that you're happy? Or you're only happy because your parents are happy? Because in one of those scenarios you should not be proposing.

OLIVER

But they've always wanted a daughter.

CHARLOTTE

No sisters?

OLIVER

No siblings.

CHARLOTTE

Me neither.

OLIVER

You don't strike me as an only child.

CHARLOTTE

You do. Homeschooled?

OLIVER

Yup. Public school?

CHARLOTTE

Private.

OLIVER

My parents say that's a lot like being homeschooled.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, your parents lie to you.

(there's an awkward silence)

So, are you just proposing because your parents like her?

OLIVER

There are other reasons.

CHARLOTTE

Are they on the notecards your parents wrote for you?

OLIVER

I haven't read them yet, but my parents say she's a good fit for me. They say she rounds me out. They say she's very sociable, that I won't have to worry about large gatherings anymore, that she can do most of the talking for me.

CHARLOTTE

You're talking to me just fine.

OLIVER

You're not a large gathering.

CHARLOTTE

I'm large gathering adjacent. My mom says I have a big personality.

OLIVER

You're easy to talk to.

CHARLOTTE

The lack of eye contact suggests otherwise.

OLIVER

Why do you need to end your singleness streak by thirty anyhow?

CHARLOTTE

It just feels like I'll fail this big social test if I don't, you know?

OLIVER

That sounds like a lot of pressure.

CHARLOTTE

It is. My mom says I need to be proactive. Put myself out there. Don't wait for the guy in my head. But I don't feel like the guy in my head is that unrealistic.

OLIVER

I think my girlfriend likes my parents more than me. She just doesn't look at me the same way as she looks at them.

CHARLOTTE

Are your parents rich?

OLIVER

Middle class.

CHARLOTTE

She genuinely likes your parents? That's wild.

OLIVER

You should date someone who's excited to see you.

CHARLOTTE

Or maybe I'll get a dog. A dog would be excited to see me.

OLIVER

I think that's the bus.

CHARLOTTE

Hey, if I promise not to steal it, can I see the ring? I love princess cut, but solitaire is very sophisticated.

OLIVER

It's not the real ring. I got it for ten dollars at Target.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean it's not the real ring?

OLIVER

(shows her the ring)

My parents want us all to go ring shopping together after she says yes. This is just a stand in so I can propose.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah...that's not worth ten bucks. You should've sprung for a ring pop.

(picks up her heels)

So. Is this your bus?

OLIVER

It was. I think I'm going to head home.

CHARLOTTE

You should let her know you're not coming.

OLIVER

After I practice what to say.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe write your own notecards.

(sticks out her hand)

It was nice to meet you...

OLIVER

Oliver.

CHARLOTTE

I'm Charlotte. Good luck at your engagement party tomorrow.

OLIVER

Right. I need to call my parents.

CHARLOTTE

(takes out her gum and sticks it under the bench)

Fourteen pieces.

OLIVER

For what it's worth, I think you'll pass that social test no problem.

CHARLOTTE

Actually, I'm leaning toward getting a dog.

(CHARLOTTE waves and exits stage right. OLIVER waves back and exits stage left)

(BLACK OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

# **Wings of Change**

by Isabelle Rogers

## **Characters:**

ALEX, 18-20. Any gender. Colombian-American. A brainy procrastinator with a fiery, cynical streak.

HEIDI, 18-20. Any gender. A spotted owl? Unceasingly enthusiastic, completely genuine, empathetic with a core vulnerability.

PAULIE B, late 30s-early 50s. White, male. A manager of people who doesn't sweat the details, and is slowly losing his belief in the words coming out of his mouth.

## **Time and place:**

Present day. Move-In Day to November at small, "elite" Ponderosa University.





## Wings of Change, 1

*A small dorm room, with 2 beds as far apart as possible. There's a partially unpacked suitcase on one bed. At the doorway, Alex shouts down the hall:*

**ALEX**

Yeah, yeah, you've gotta hook me up with the party scene here! ...Totally! Happy move-in day or whatever!

*Alex laughs big, awkwardly, then walks back in alone. She sits down on the bed, stares at her phone, and tries hard not to bite her nails. Eventually, she fails.*

*Heidi, Ponderosa University's mascot, practically knocks down Alex's door, rushing in to greet her. The costume is goofy, loose-fitting, and cheap. The giant owl head reveals almost nothing of the wearer's face.*

**HEIDI**

Alex? Is that you? *The* Alex Santos? Well-known for your opinionated music review channel, "CallMeASaint"?

**ALEX**

Hey, Hootie! Hootie the Owl knows about my YouTube channel?

**HEIDI**

Well, we're imminently going to be *lifelong* friends, so call me Heidi. Hootie's my professional name, you know? Oh, and you should know, I'm not just an owl, I'm a spotted owl! It's only right for Ponderosa to pay tribute to the endangered spotted owl who inspired so much meaningful legislation! Though I don't want to hoot my own horn there! I don't want to sound like my natural predator, the barred owl. You know, they're Southern Oregon's mascot...Shakespeare? Barred? Funny at all?

**ALEX**

-Are you here to take a promo video? Sorry my mom couldn't be here. It was too far- and expensive- for both of us to travel. We're from the East Coast—

**HEIDI**

Atlanta, I know! I just kinda thought you'd remember me from all our text conversations?

**ALEX**

Our text— Sorry, I think I'd recall texting with a school spokesperson in a giant owl costume.

**HEIDI**

Oh, Alex! I should have expected your unique sense of humor, typical of the innovative

## Wings of Change, 2

Ponderosa student! Is that absurdist comedy? I mean, where's this giant owl costume?

**ALEX**

Heh. Eeh. Right. How do I know you, actually?

**HEIDI**

We've been chatting ever since that fateful day when our spama - that's the whimsical name for the "mother figure" in our peer sponsor group - emailed us to let us know we'd be paired together! Today I sent you a gif of a baby shaking its fist and screaming in joy?

*Heidi demonstrates. Alex gapes in silent horror.*

**ALEX**

*That* Heidi. You're my roommate.

**HEIDI**

Just right! Now, do I have your permission to swoop in for a hug? Ponderosa's official bystander intervention trainings have reminded me of the importance of enthusiastic consent!

**ALEX**

Yes- yeah. I just- are you gonna take off some feathers first?

**HEIDI**

Well, it's not molting season, if that's what you're wondering! I've got a couple months left until you have to experience that. Hoo, living together will be fascinating!

**ALEX**

I-It will!

*Heidi hugs Alex. During the hug, Alex visibly considers unzipping the zipper at the back of the costume. But she just can't do it.*

*Lights fade to evening, with a beam of light through the window. Alex sits on the bed and contemplates her phone. Heidi stacks heavy books on the bed and puts bits of newspaper around them.*

**HEIDI**

No, I think- I think Ponderosa was always at the very top of the list for me! I mean, exceptional students? A meaningful and actionable sustainability plan that's deeply connected to the coursework? Three different dining halls?

### Wings of Change, 3

**ALEX**

Well, I'm not actually on the meal plan but the sustainability mission is cool. If they're actually committed to it and it's not just a marketing thing.

**HEIDI**

A... Hoo. A marketing thing? Ponderosa holds zero-waste commencement ceremonies! There are compost bins in many high-traffic areas! They have *never* used plastic straws!

**ALEX**

Yeah, but what about their CO2 emissions?

**HEIDI**

(putting a wing over her mouth)

Alex!

**ALEX**

Hey, I'm not trying to say they're *awful*, but I am totally cynical about institutions /at this point and I'm sorry about that-

**HEIDI**

No, in the next three years they will decrease their CO2 emissions by 76%! You mean you didn't read the latest Ponderosa Emissions Report and 30-Year Action Plan? It's a slim 80 pages! It's a mere amuse bouche compared to the IPCC report, which is also an engaging read—

**ALEX**

I read articles on the IPCC report- specifically one about how the reporter read it so I didn't have to...

*Alex's phone rings, to a very chill song.*

**ALEX**

Hey! ... This is her, yes. I really appreciate you calling me back so late at night ... Just give me a moment.

*Alex heads towards the doorway, relieved. Heidi flaps over to Alex.*

**HEIDI**

(stage whispering)

Hey, Alex!! Hoo! Hoo you gonna call?

**ALEX**

Uh, not Ghostbusters. It's— just our boy Paulie B!

## Wings of Change, 4

### HEIDI

Why, Paul Boynton, our esteemed Assistant Dean of Residence Life? What are you calling him about?

### ALEX

(to Paulie)

Yes, yes I totally understand, I'll make it quick because you're about to put on your nightcap- oh, no, *have* a nightcap, ok! I don't wanna interfere with that—

### HEIDI

Well I hope he answers every one of your questions and eases your mind! He's known for advice even wiser than the Elder Owls, advice that can soothe even the most troubled owlet—

*Alex nods at Heidi and mouths "Thanks." As Alex exits the room and closes the door, Paulie B appears on the other side of the stage (or in the audience) with his nightcap.*

*In the background, Heidi, secretive and paranoid, pulls a bunch of papers from under her bed and turns on her reading light. She studies these like they're CIA intelligence papers.*

### PAULIE B

Alex! Good to hear from you, I'm glad to hear that you've made it through Move-In Day. Well, technically there's an hour left. Now, you said your roommate was- a giant bird? Beyond being insulting, what does that— mean exactly?

### ALEX

You know our mascot? Hootie the Owl? Lazy name, by the way. Well, my roommate wears the Hootie costume all the time! She was getting ready to go to sleep early so that we could get up for the time management class — “Hoo, it would sure be embarrassing if we were late for the time management class! No worries, I'll wake you up at 6 AM, Alex!” — and I was like “You gonna get in your pajamas, Heid’?” And she was like “Owls don't wear clothes, silly!”

### PAULIE B

Hmm. So she's very invested in her on-campus job. I do think the talented professionals at our Ombuds office can resolve any conflict /you may be experiencing-

### ALEX

There's no conflict! I've been very nice to her, but- you're not getting it! She's troubled! I'm worried about her! She literally thinks she's a bird!

*Alex is suddenly self-conscious and wonders if Heidi heard that. At the*

## Wings of Change, 5

*same time, Heidi looks towards the door and tries to make her reading even more secretive.*

**PAULIE B**

Ok, Alex. I want you to think about something. This school was founded on the principles of diversity and inclusion—

**ALEX**

Actually it was founded on white supremacy, like slaves built everything, but go on.

**PAULIE B**

Well. We're now working hard to turn diversity and inclusion into... the motor of Ponderosa. The very air we breathe.

**ALEX**

Right... *I'm* here, I'm Colombian, I'm, er, "low income"—

**PAULIE B**

Absolutely, you get it! The importance of inclusion! And so, in keeping with these principles, would you ever judge someone for how they look? For what they choose to wear? How they choose to present?

**ALEX**

Ahhh, I see what you're doing. No, I wouldn't judge someone for that...

**PAULIE B**

Your roommate is just being herself! Clearly Ponderosa is very important to her identity, and from what I heard she's a positive, enthusiastic presence, so—

**ALEX**

Yeah! I see what you're doing. Bullshit! You know what *inclusion* would be? Getting my roommate some high-quality mental health services, and getting her off the path of, like, turning her bed into a nest! Did I mention she's doing that? Inclusion is providing support for people who need it because they're working through some trauma, not opening up the floodgates and then kicking them out when their diversity gets inconvenient! Oh and covering the meal plan and books and shit as part of your financial aid package, that would be great for inclusion too! Because I'm currently kinda stressed about paying for food and cooking!

**PAULIE B**

Uh, I don't work for the Office of Financial Aid, but I'm writing down your points. While I relay

## Wings of Change, 6

them...why don't we slam the brakes on diagnosing your roommate, hmm? I mean, neither of us are licensed psychiatrists. In my book, Alex, if you haven't had a screaming match or injured each other, it's been a good first night.

**ALEX**

Uh-huh. OK. "It could be worse." That's what my mom told me, too.

**PAULIE B**

Right, and mothers are wise. Get some rest, Alex. We'll be in touch.

*Paulie B hangs up and takes a big swig of his nightcap. Lights go down on him. Alex, exhausted, re-enters the dorm room and sees Heidi leaning over those papers suspiciously.*

**HEIDI**

Hey-hi!! Trusted roommate hand-picked for harmony and lifelong friendship- I perhaps was considering not telling you but I did something bad. I- I realized we register for classes so soon. And hoo, I'd always regret it if I somehow chose courses that weren't the tippety-top of the pine tree! So, I- uh, I found upperclassmen sources who were happy to slip me the syllabi ahead of time. Without the professors' permission. I paid them in Ponderosa themed mints and surplus stuffed animals of myself. Isn't that awful?

**ALEX**

Yeah, you're a stinker, Heidi', it's— that's really helpful! Huh. Can I see some of those?

**HEIDI**

I shouldn't, but Look, these ones are so great!! *Geocaching? Un-molding Gender in Contemporary Sculpture? Environmental Dilemmas in Latin America?* I thought I'd chosen my courses, hoo, but then these syllabi came along and *changed my life!*

**ALEX**

Well, I'm glad you broke your moral code because these will seriously help me make my decisions. Wow! You're such a nerd! Thank you!

*Lights shift back to daytime. As Heidi moves from the bed to a spotlight, she holds up a paper to the audience which reads "2 months later. Midterms." Alex rolls around the bed at 1pm, talking to Heidi.*

**ALEX**

So, you're gonna analyze how the author uses bread as an— objective correlative?

## Wings of Change, 7

### HEIDI

Well, I think that bread carries a lot of emotional meaning! It's homey and nostalgic but also a survival food, and then there's the desperate complexity of breadcrumbs—

### ALEX

Ooh man I'm feeling more like an Engineering major every day. I'm so glad I'm taking this class with you. 'Course, now I can't steal your idea. That's annoy- oh shit, I'm getting another call.

*Alex's phone rings and she stands up. Heidi's spotlight disappears and Paulie B appears, standing this time, hopped up on coffee.*

### PAULIE B

Alex! We've found the solution to your... Hootie concern!

### ALEX

...You have? This quickly? I-I mean, it's only been a couple months, she's- So you, like, you examined her state of mind and you're connecting her with counseling?

### PAULIE B

N- You know, we've put our heads together, and we've come up with a much more permanent solution. One that will address the issue immediately. And I'll be honest with you, also addresses Ponderosa's unique needs. ... We have...completed a complete rebrand. It's rolling out now, but I wanted you to hear it from me first. It would have made more sense before the start of the school year, but...your roommate isn't the only one in some state of crisis. Ponderosa's rate of attrition has been scary for years. We've never had to worry about running out of student housing!

*Alex laughs mirthlessly.*

### PAULIE B

Anyway! The concern has been that Hootie the Spotted Owl makes Ponderosa look like it's still stuck in those timber-wars, endangered-species days. Like we're not open to- a wide range of students with diverse opinions on forestry. I- happen to think the spotted owl inspired incredibly important legislation, but- there continue to be concerns about our business and computer science programs, and for our sports teams, Hootie is simply not intimidating enough.

### ALEX

Yeah? That fits our sports teams, though.

### PAULIE B

Ha. So, let me get to the solution. Conrad/Connie is an integrated circuit, aka a silicon microchip. They have a friendly face that can turn savage when they're challenged, and sharp edges!

## Wings of Change, 8

**ALEX**

What?!

**PAULIE B**

It's... innovative, right?

**ALEX**

It's- desperate? How does that solve Heidi's "problem" at all?

**PAULIE B**

You're doing the scare quotes again. Do you not think your roommate has a problem anymore? You talked our office into that interpretation...

**ALEX**

I think- I guess you were right! She's unique and more positive and enthusiastic than anyone else here, and yeah she's got issues, we all do! Anyway your solution is worthless! She'll just switch to wearing the— microchip costume.

**PAULIE B**

Ah but her *identity* is wrapped up in Hootie, you see? Poor, defunct Hootie. Even if she was to switch to Connie, she'd need to admit to herself that she never was Hootie. That she was always lying to herself. She'd find the true Heidi again.

**ALEX**

...That would be traumatic.

**PAULIE B**

Also we haven't made any costumes for the new guy yet. They're ludicrously expensive. So. It's not a concern. And- Alex, I did hear this from *my* therapist, trauma is the first step to healing! If you have any concerns, I'm just a call aw-

*Alex hangs up on him.*

**ALEX**

FUCK healing!! She's fun and charming and helpful and ridiculous, and who cares if she's a bird anyway?! Diversity!! Inclusion!!

*Alex marches into the dorm and frantically confiscates student newspapers, brochures, anything that could contain info on the rebrand. Then she closes Heidi's laptop, but—*



## Wings of Change, 9

*Heidi walks in.*

**ALEX**

You're back early!

**HEIDI**

I had to get some shorts. For Geocaching. Alright I'm lying I don't wear shorts. \*sniff\* Owls also don't cry. We have tear ducts and high levels of protein in our tears but, as far as current research goes, we don't cry out of emotion.

**ALEX**

That's a shame. But you're an innovative Ponderosa student. I bet you could break barriers and cry.

*Heidi slumps down on the floor. After a moment, Alex joins her.*

**HEIDI**

Maybe. I don't know what an innovative Ponderosa student is anymore. I guess I feel betrayed. I- and like a fraud.

**ALEX**

—You're not a fraud. You're a friend. ...Jesus, that was cheesy. Forget I said that. Why would you feel like a fraud?

**HEIDI**

Well, because-

*Heidi reaches for the head of her costume, trying to pull it off.*

**ALEX**

No! No, you don't need to do that!

**HEIDI**

It's a costume!

**ALEX**

I know, but— did *you* know?

**HEIDI**

It wasn't — it was never real, but it- felt like home. It was a purpose. Now I- can you help me?

*Alex nods, scared. She helps pry the owl head off of Heidi and reveals —*

## Wings of Change, 10

*a student who looks about Alex's age. They stare at each other.*

**HEIDI**

N- Not very exciting. Not a big reveal.

**ALEX**

I'm so glad it's not. I-I mean, I didn't know. I hoped you were, like, a real student, but I also wondered if our spama would just go up to me someday like— "Alex, we placed you in a single this whole time."

**HEIDI**

Like I was— haunting you?

**ALEX**

No, like you were my imaginary friend!

**HEIDI**

You thought *you* had mental health issues? I- broke down. I got in here, this legendary school, and I was going to be so shy and so boring and so scared. I'd never have my research in the school magazine, or get invited back as an esteemed alumna, or throw enough money around so my name's on a building. People here are *exceptional*. Or just wealthy. I was gonna be a trail of breadcrumbs that got eaten by birds and disappeared. So, so, my brain turned me into Hootie. Some best, worst version of myself. Who never doubted herself or the people around her. And Ponderosa needed me! Or at least I thought it did.

**ALEX**

I needed you. You were larger than life and an ideal student and you united everybody around your silliness. You made our experience into more than financial fears, throwing up at parties, confused fumbblings with identity, and occasional attempts to learn things. I guess you made us spotted owls.

**HEIDI**

I'd rather be a spotted owl than a microchip.

**ALEX**

We're gonna be the last spotted owls in this habitat. An endangered species.

*They hug, tensely. THE END*