

# BUFO

---

2015 - 2016



*The Literary Magazine  
of Western Reserve Academy*

# BUFO

---

*The Literary Magazine of Western Reserve Academy*

2015 - 2016



# BUFO

2015 - 2016

## EDITORS

Wren Zandee  
Taryn Washburn

## FACULTY ADVISOR

Todd Gilbert

## STAFF

Kristina Nazarova	Sarah Zimmerman
Sandra Spurlock	Harlequin Fisher
Sergi Franquesa	Duncan Ostrom
Grant Foskett	Yin Ka Leung
Noah Kontur	Ann McArn
Alice Wu	Lee Onysko
Ladan Jaballas	Sasha Davis

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

The Dads' Club  
The Pioneer Women  
The Green Key Society



Dear Friends,

For four years now I've watched for the arrival of BUFO in the spring. I often dreamily looked forward to the day when I would be an editor, and would organize the packets. However, as I've culled the accepted submissions from the rejected, I have realized that BUFO doesn't truly celebrate pure merit; it celebrates the raw emotions and thoughts of people in a tumultuous stage of life. As you read the latest edition of BUFO, I hope you recognize and appreciate the talents of your peers.

Best,  
Wren Zandee

Communication comes in all kinds of forms. Words, gestures, images, sounds, shapes, colors, touches, sensations; it's unfortunate that our literature and arts magazine can't explore all of these as a truly in-depth study of how and what we wish to communicate as a species. After all, that's the whole point of storytelling: somebody with something to say *says it*, and it's left up to the reader to decide exactly what *it is*. And *it* can be radically different from reader to reader. The communicated thought or central idea varies through culture, orientation, or personal experience. It's a beautiful thing to explore.

I've been lucky enough to do so through Bufo this year. For four years I've looked up to the editors of Bufo, and now I have been honored enough to join them. Despite the hassle of having to reformat and copy-paste every single piece from a Google Doc into the magazine (I'm looking at you, one-act plays), I've loved every minute of it. The pleasure of seeing a story or a poem formatted on the page gives me a sense of extreme satisfaction and professionalism - after all, it just looks *so pretty* that way. And I hope that when you read the magazine, you find the same satisfaction in it alongside those peers of yours whom have had their works published. Whatever their pieces communicate to you, I hope it's meaningful; in fact, I have no doubt it will be.

Lick and Enjoy!  
Taryn Washburn

*Bufo*, a journal of young creative writing, is distributed annually by students at Western Reserve Academy, and was published in 2016 by Western Reserve Printing of Hudson, Ohio. This edition was printed using the Gentium Basic and Palatino Linotype typeface. Editors can be reached through Bufo Advisor Todd Gilbert c/o Western Reserve Academy, 115 College St., Hudson, OH, 44236.

# CONTENTS

---

2015 - 2016

## POETRY

Erin Dockery, <i>Blue Eyes, Grey World</i>	10
Wren Zandee, <i>Starbucks Gospel</i>	12
Harlequin Fisher, <i>The Maddening Passage of Time</i>	13
Taryn Washburn, <i>Please, God, Don't Wake Him</i>	14
Sandra Spurlock, <i>Empty Warmth</i>	16
Wren Zandee, <i>Dear Diary, Today I Visited A Cave</i>	17
Erin Dockery, <i>Him and Me</i>	18
Taryn Washburn, <i>The Modern Nymphet</i>	19
Ladan Jaballas, <i>Vision Back</i>	20
Wren Zandee, <i>Are You There, Jah? It's Me</i>	21
Connie Wang, <i>Just Another Van Gogh</i>	22
Erin Dockery, <i>"How Are You Doing?"</i>	23
Alice Wu, <i>The Class Menagerie</i>	24
Wren Zandee, <i>Traffic Lights</i>	26

## ART

Lee Onysko	28
Harlequin Fisher	29
Caleigh Tiley	30
Taryn Washburn	31
Lee Onysko	32

## FICTION

Erin Dockery, <i>Unrelated</i>	34
Connor Meehan, <i>Car Crash</i>	35
Taryn Washburn, <i>The Result of Saying, "Fuck It"</i>	36
Hanley Jefferis, <i>Farewell Seattle</i>	37
Sarah Zimmerman, <i>Incandescent</i>	38
Erin Dockery, <i>How "it" Happened Again</i>	40
Lee Onysko, <i>Of Flying Bears and Potted Petunias</i>	41
Taryn Washburn, <i>Bionic Man</i>	43
Noah Kontur, <i>The Litanous Letters</i>	50

## ONE-ACT PLAYS

Alana King, <i>The Thing About Change</i>	56
Erin Dockery, <i>Alexithymia</i>	64
Madison Clark-Bruno, <i>On Different Sides of the Mountain</i>	72
Taryn Washburn, <i>Ten Miles Behind</i>	83

Cover art by Kai Stewart '17



# POETRY

---

ERIN DOCKERY

---

*Blue Eyes, Grey World*

I dream of not waking up tired  
of being brave, happy, successful,  
But today is a day and I am me.

The sun is dead.  
because I accidentally woke up in gray,  
another world,  
where the clouds make fists,  
not cotton candy wisps,  
and where the trees and bloody autumn leaves are armies,  
not inanimate things.

This world has me upside down,  
down because the dirt is air,  
and the clouds,  
ridges,  
breaking everything considered right.

Maybe across the trees,  
a journey through the dark,  
there is someone,  
who doesn't let this world get to them,  
who can stay sane in the gray.

My mind is an A,  
my body a Z,  
and me,  
well, I'm somewhere in between,  
I guess I'm letters,  
Words.  
Those scribbles on a page.

And maybe across the trees,  
a journey through the dark,  
there is someone,  
who doesn't let this world get to them,  
who can stay sane in the gray.

I'm talking about the story of humanity,  
because everyday we get up

ERIN DOCKERY

to see more  
be more.

It's fear,  
that keeps us going  
back  
wondering if the past  
Is beautiful?

WREN ZANDEE

---

*Starbucks Gospel*

Pedal to the metal

We would speed into the Starbucks parking lot  
Nerve endings perking up at caffeine's touch  
The sun above us, charging  
The plants and the trees  
Plugged into the beginning and the end  
In no rush to to arrive at church  
Where we'd stumble through the rows  
Of pious adults reaching to the sky for spiritual nourishment  
Careful not to spill our coffee  
It was just a different gospel:  
AC/DC on the radio  
Orange leaves falling to the cement  
To remind us of autumn menu options

HARLEQUIN FISHER

---

*The Maddening Passage of Time*

**T**here was a time  
When I'd ask myself,  
"How did the universe  
Come up with you."  
But the only question  
I ask myself now,  
Is lost  
In the passage of time.

Tick, Tock.  
Tick, Tock.  
The thump of my pulse  
And a tormented clock,  
Is synchronized.  
Yet I  
Can't tell you  
The ticks  
It'll take  
To stop.

How many pulses  
Of blood to my brain,  
Have passed me by?  
I count in vain,  
For my heartache has grown  
In its fondness for me  
In the maddening passage of Time.

I am lost in a passage of Time.  
It's holding me captive  
And breaking my mind.  
The bird in my chest  
Is chipping away  
At this cavity heartache of mine.  
Tenacity seems  
To descend from my eyes  
As whispers of love  
Reveal that they're lies  
And screaming does nothing  
But scratch at my throat  
As I cry for the Time you were Mine.

TARYN WASHBURN

---

*Please, God, Don't Wake Him*

**P**lease, God, don't wake him;  
    please,  
let him rest  
upon my shoulder for all  
eternity; because he is the only  
thing holding me  
to this blood,  
this breath,  
this body;  
    this boy,  
the only  
thing keeping me from being hoisted  
up by the power  
lines that rule  
me so certainly, winding  
my muscles into ropes  
relieved only by the lead-  
    like weight  
of his lungs  
pressing into me  
their air,  
    the same air  
that shakes  
my very foundations,  
but when coming from him  
brings the density  
I so need to plant  
my feet without drifting  
away; he rivets  
me, filling out  
    my shallow skin,  
firming up  
    my brittle bones,  
fixing still  
    my nervous fingertips,  
making me solid,  
    waking me  
from the formless gas  
I once was.  
And he could read this  
if he were to only

TARYN WASHBURN

open his eyes  
to the day;  
but I can't  
let him see, lose him  
to fear, so,  
please God,  
I pray,  
please, God,  
please  
don't wake him.

SANDRA SPURLOCK

---

*Empty Warmth*

A pretty face and wide blue eyes  
Made my heart swim,  
For a time.  
But shallow love evaporates quickly,  
And my arid eyes soon saw the desert of our future together.  
My dear,  
If our love was ever an ocean  
your thirsty ambition drained it to a puddle.

WREN ZANDEE

---

*Dear Diary, Today I Visited A Cave*

A moment of silence takes me by surprise

And I am suddenly pulled into myself  
Like a woman pulled into a dark alley, arms flailing  
It's dark here, and I feel myself slipping  
Down into a new self, a new face  
My words warping into monstrosities  
Because they are all that I have  
"Hello," I say  
And that is all it takes to recognize  
I have once again become a stranger.  
In these caverns there is no light  
And every silence and peaceful moment  
Is a forced venture of spelunking for selves  
"Welcome home," I say  
"I have no choice but to welcome you.  
And you have nowhere else to go."

ERIN DOCKERY

---

*Him and Me*

He said he only loved the idea of me,  
of having someone to hold,  
nights cold,  
of being 82  
and having someone to tie his shoe  
that's all I had to do.

I gave him a son,  
it wasn't good enough,  
two daughters in tutus,  
they made him blue,  
I gave him my life,  
he went away at night.

He and me,  
a pair yes were we  
I the fool,  
the pretty wife,  
no life, no fight,  
And for my needs,  
he made me bleed.  
A pair yes were we.

I was sad,  
for most my life,  
days of pain,  
demons don't go away.

I am dead but that's ok,  
he only loved the idea of me.

TARYN WASHBURN

---

*The Modern Nymphet*

**T**his is the new age  
of discovery, of exploration;  
young girls exposed  
so much sooner now,  
their ideal bodies  
broadcasted across endless  
airwaves  
- advertising  
television  
*the internet* -  
saying,  
“You must be perfect  
by age sixteen,”  
(because that is the legal age  
after all), and they don’t have  
much time to get there.

*Vision Back*

**T**he little toddler,  
pigtails and big eyes,  
a vision to the past,  
when I was the innocent one,  
and barely noticed anyone,  
how different it is today.  
Playing with crayons and scribbling on walls,  
a time when all was so simple.  
I sat in my bed,  
reading in my head,  
and watching Barney on TV,  
no worries he'd turn  
against me like people today.  
Though I was ignorant,  
and just a bit arrogant,  
I knew what love is versus hate.  
For now the line is blurred,  
between bad and good,  
for I wish the little girl'd come back.  
Who knew nothing about the world,  
but just watched with big eyes,  
and pigtails swaying side to side,  
always mumbling on and on...

WREN ZANDEE

---

*Are You There, Jah? It's Me*

I had a dream that I wanted to sleep next to plastic

I came to you for guidance  
And found there was no altar  
But only moths and gnats that spread  
Trails of your teaching through the streets  
Maggots rolling lovingly  
in the dank cadence of acceptance

And I said, please, Jah, bless me

I looked for writings  
And found only the space behind the mammalian tongue  
The emptiness pulled me by my tendons  
To the jutting 3-D images of buildings and  
The eightfold path of a simple sidewalk  
The full promise of reality, blinking on and off  
Like the light of a firefly in the dusk  
Just please, Jah  
Bless me

CONNIE WANG

---

*Just Another Van Gogh*

**S**taring into the void,  
Contemplating.  
“About what?”  
One may ask.  
“Nothing.”  
He may answer.  
The strenuous sunflowers slip  
Away from his eyes.  
The sparkling starlights faint  
With rust of emptiness.  
The glorious masks of  
Curving stripes were taken off.  
The man is  
Only Van Gogh, with  
His desolate grey  
Eyes, and a plain wall.

ERIN DOCKERY

---

*“How Are You Doing?”*  
*A Reflection on Mental Illness*

The silence started in my left ear,

leaked down my spine,  
and dipped into my shoes,  
until the puddle of sound  
like ivory wound,  
chains

paralyzed my body  
locked me in the middle of my mind,  
bound by sound.

It started in that chair  
when a blonde-haired lady  
told me I was

crazy  
for burning the skyline into my skin,  
for wanting to see if it hurt to be something beyond this,  
and maybe her degrees

psychology,  
didn't let her see the act all people do  
to get beyond  
crazy.

Because by age three,  
I had ADD  
bipolar

and  
insanity,  
a mixed drink of mind and body,  
lulled to the world by tiny blue boats,  
drunk to humanity.

She asks, “How are you doing?”  
I say

“Surrender to the mind.”  
Because the thoughts started in my left ear  
leaked down my spine,  
and

dripped into my shoes.  
I didn't feel like being analyzed,  
so I surrendered to the Mind.

*The Class Menagerie*

“**A**nimals often travel in groups”

*A school*

*Of fish*

“for protection in numbers and—“

The bright brrringggg! of the bell

interrupted the teacher’s croaking. Without dismissal the

buzzing swarm of eighth graders clawed over each other to escape the stale monotony for  
a breath of fresh air

*He* lingered behind to ask about—

But found himself, a shadow of doubt, addressing an empty classroom:

*What about the lone wolf?*

Outside, beneath the beating noon sun

he peeked over

a sea of ponytails at

*The gangs*

*Of buffalo*

A throng of boys, cleaved in two: “Not fair! It’s not even!”

Growled the seven

“Take him!” snarled the eight, directing dooming fingers into

the spectators, at *him*, uncamouflaged

They dragged their protesting prey to the sweaty grass

A snap of the football. A stampede. He ran

away from the grunting dust storm

But vigilant sentries, a few obtruding feet

*An unkindness*

*Of ravens*

sent him sprawling, writhing on the ground

crimson tears trickling from his nose

Jeering, hissing predators

Lured by scent of blood

*A shiver*

*Of sharks*

Engulfed him

Laughing

Mocking

*The cackle*

*Of hyenas*

ringing in his ears

Alone, surrounded, trampled

down with taunts so boys could masquerade as men

ALICE WU

They spat into his face, crowing, “LOSER, running away you—  
—scaredy cat, you little CUR—”

*The cowardice*

*Of curs*

A bludgeon of fists  
cracked thunder through his head while

*An audience*

*Of squid*

a gaggle of girls, a glimpsing teacher or two  
watched  
doing nothing.

...

He sat cross-legged under the white ash tree

*I am not a coward. I am not a cur. I am the Big Bad WOLF and I will hunt every one of them down.*

His dad's old colt pressed cool against his palms, heated with rage

*No pitying*

*Of doves*

Wings fluttered in alarm  
escaping the rustling leaves  
leaving the shattered carnage of fifteen  
flocking into the distant horizon

*The murder*

*Of crows*

A solitary black feather drifted down into his lap.

WREN ZANDEE

---

*Traffic Lights*

**T**raffic lights change from green to red

Because in this world yellow is forgotten

I bump through the sunset at 5:30 PM

Like an uncoordinated burglar tripping over furniture

I don't need pantyhose over my head

Because the city has already forgotten my features

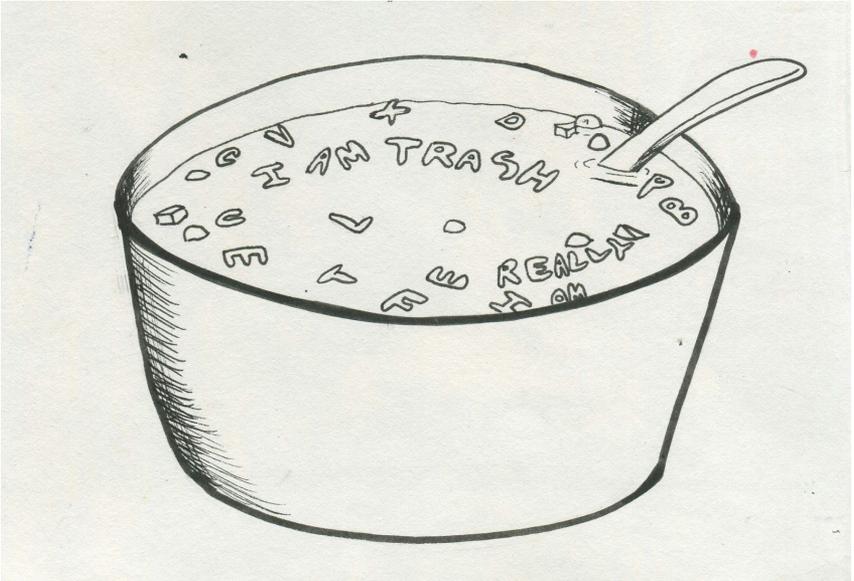
They way they forget to notice yield signs and trash bins

When the cop tickets me for running a red

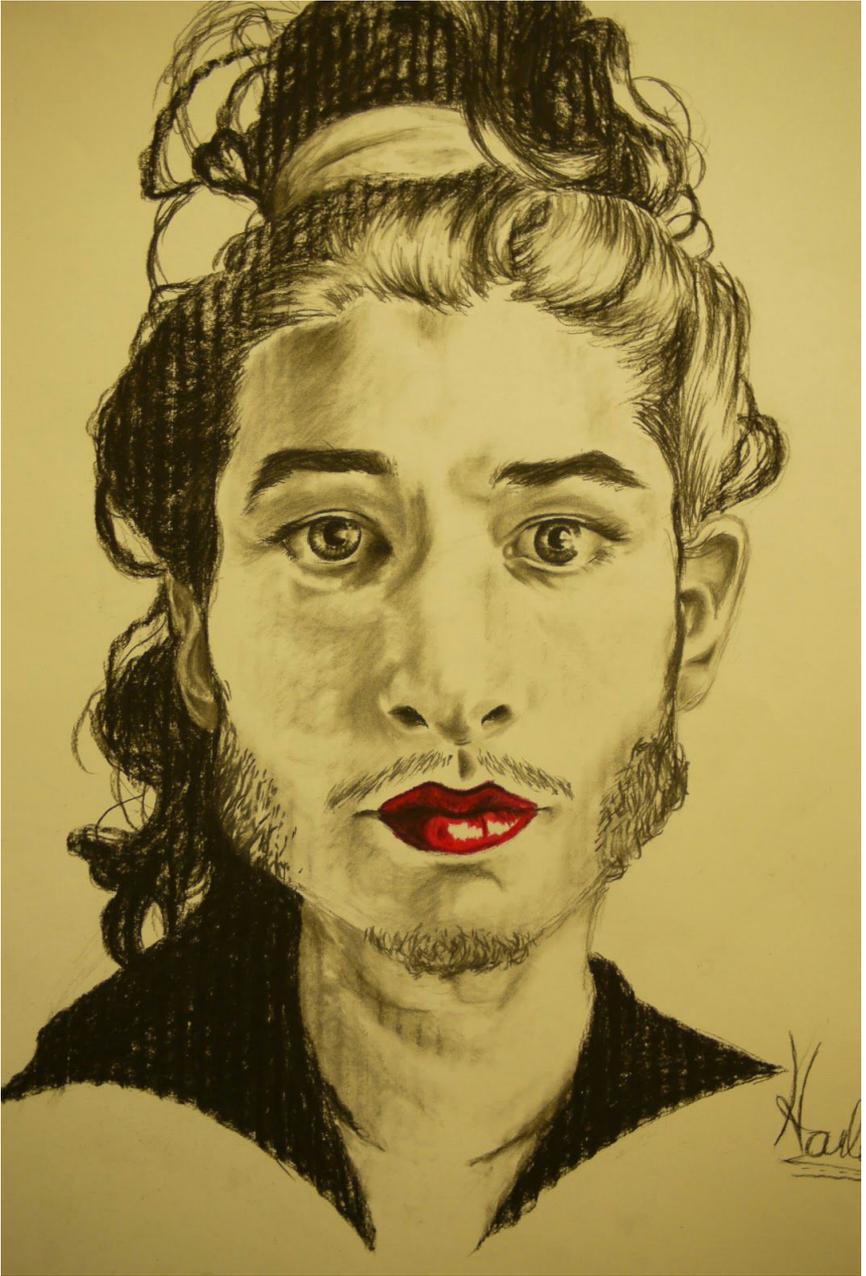
I am happy

# ART

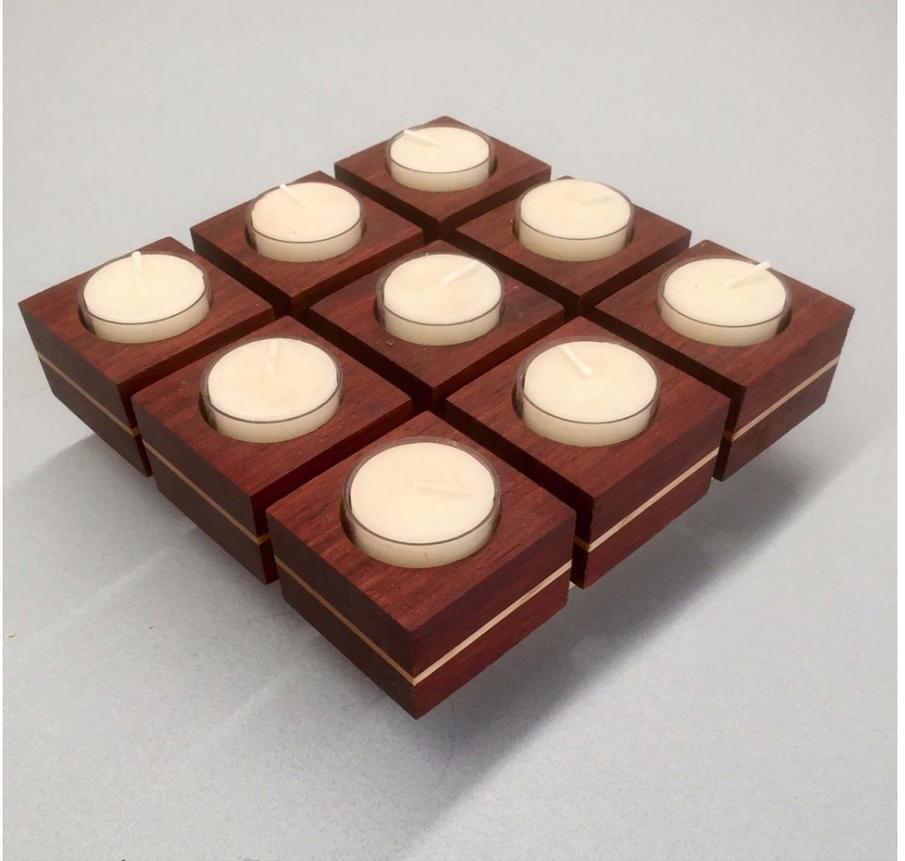
---



Lee Onysko



Harlequin Fisher



Caleigh Tiley



Taryn Washburn

Winter in Ohio



Lee Onysko

# FICTION

---

ERIN DOCKERY

---

*Unrelated*

People often take trips for answers. A select few finding themselves atop Everest with black bitten fingers. Most discovering the colon crannies at the corner of Micky and Dunkin' D's. Filling the emptiness with saturated satisfaction. Fueling the tank so to say. And on these juxtaposed roads there are always clues. A lit steeple, God. A thunder clap, the devil. But did they reach the same destination? If both achieved what they wanted: a sandwich, a mountain conquered. Maybe. One is more difficult, yes. But if one would be miserable eating doughnuts and the other died climbing, then happiness must be a balance. A Dunkin' Doughnuts crooked in the side of Everest.

*Car Crash*

**E**cstasy. Bright flashing lights. Hard liquor. Claustrophobia. Duncan stumbles his way through the entrancing crowd, traveling throughout the intense party. How ironic. Duncan gets fucked up and messes with people he shouldn't have. The blood that streams down his head onto his pretty white shirt represents pure hatred flowing through and infecting Duncan's pure being. Duncan is an immoral man. Many a times he's dreamed of the unspeakable. But he wants to fit in. He can't, but he wants to. Through his terrible high, he finds this all quite humorous. He picks himself up from the floor and stumbles towards the door and enters the terribly wide world that waits for him beyond this place, beyond this party. The bright lights of the district blind him on his way out of the frying pan. The fire of the town is still alive at this time. It only dies once the city restarts and everyone is reminded of their futile mortality. Duncan is stumbling his way down 5th street onto 6th and right through 7th. He can't think straight let alone walk it. He falls. A lot. The pedestrians who pass him feel a bit sadder as they look at the wreck. Where is he going? To his car. He starts his car, pulls it out of the parking spot, and shows the world a wonder, a moving car crash. He swerves and plays chicken with the other cars approaching him. He enters the highway on the wrong side and just drives. He won't stop. He'll keep driving until he finds what he's looking for. He doesn't exactly know what it is he is looking for, but he knows that he wants something more. Something more than the dead end job and the lonely Saturday nights where he sits in his single room apartment, thinking that he could fly if he tried hard enough. This was his final journey. And then it hits him.

TARYN WASHBURN

---

*The Result of Saying, "Fuck It"*

It took her four of her allotted seventy-two hours to scrounge around the house to find enough cash so that the charge of forty-five dollars and sixty-eight cents didn't show up on their shared debit card. She knew she probably didn't need it and that he didn't agree with it, but this was the only way to be sure, and as long as she had the cash, he never had to know.

She had never had a quicker trip to the store; partly because she was on a mission, partly because she was avoiding familiar eyes, and partly because she was seeking the comfort of her purchase in as timely a manner as possible.

And it could have been quicker, too, if she hadn't gone to the self-checkout line in an effort to save even more time. The item needed store approval, and the wait for a clerk to come and swipe his card would have been excruciating had the item not already been in the bag, claimed by the cash she had inserted into the eagerly awaiting slot.

The clerk spared both of them the embarrassment of checking to make sure the item was there (he wouldn't question something like this), but instead of worrying over the extra time his approval cost her of her precious seventy-two hours, she calmly watched the other registers on the opposite end of the store swelling with traffic, and she wondered why husbands who were ashamed of buying their wives' tampons didn't just use the self-checkout line.

## HANLEY JEFFERIS

---

### *Farewell Seattle*

**I** *f a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?*

The ancient riddle haunts me as I pack up the last of my belongings. One suitcase and a backpack contains every memory, every item, everything that I own. When you move as many times as I have, you become accustomed to packing light. This move is my twelfth in the past year. I guess that's how life is when your dad is a life coach, who travels across the country. He lets me stay in whatever city is closest, as long as he can be in a fifty-mile radius. My mom is probably somewhere doing something. She just hasn't been doing something somewhere with my dad or me in a while.

I guess I have a lot more freedom than most people my age, but I don't feel free. A month in each city is not nearly enough time to build relationships and actually do the "getting a proper education" thing, so my academic life basically consists of finding whatever courses are free online. My social life is composed of keeping my head down in public and watching Netflix alone. Oh, the joys of being in your late teens.

As I glance around the loft apartment that has been my home for the last month in Seattle, I wish I could say I felt something. But that would be a lie. The small four rooms don't feel like home; they just feel like a house. Maybe not even my house. I grab my meager possessions and leave the apartment forever. I don't look back before closing the door.

Walking out of the complex, I pass dozens of shops I've never been to and a few I have. I attempt to think of a time that I genuinely made an impact in someone's life here, or anywhere, and come up blank. I don't believe I've given anyone my phone number in at least a year. The city of Seattle, Washington and every other city I've ever been to, will not feel my absence. There will not be an empty seat anywhere. There will not be people searching for my face in the crowds. I will not have missed calls when people notice I'm gone. I'm invisible, unimportant, and forgettable. Sometimes I think the world's too busy to take notice of me. Other times I think I'm too empty to take notice of the world.

*If a person leaves, and nobody notices, is that person really gone?*

SARAH ZIMMERMAN

---

*Incandescent*

Lights rush under the bridge beneath our feet. Fast lights racing by in one lane, slower ones barely inching forward, jammed by traffic, in another. Green lights, blue lights, red, and yellow. They tear up the road. Motors rev and hum, chanting along to the chorus of the city. Droning mechanical sounds made by workers in buildings, train cars, merchants on the sides of the grimy streets. The chorus does not quiet at night. It is always alive. Nelly and I do not make a sound from our sliver of space on the bridge. We are the silent observers. The insignificant listeners.

Nelly looks out at all of it. Her eyes are focused on the city enveloped with light before her. A vision of sound, aflame. Same as every night. In the distance, I hear a shriek from far away and many more follow. I know they are not sounds of pain. They scream with elation, happiness. Drunken love.

Nelly's eyes flicker over and she catches my gaze. She pats the segment of railing next to her, beckoning me forward. My feet move without my thinking first. Automatic response from years of reading her signals.

She says to me, "I'm sorry about this."

"I know."

"You know why I have to do this, though, right?"

I have no words, so I repeat, "I know."

She sighs and her shoulders relax. She looks away and out at the city—but just for a moment—before slowly closing her eyes. She breathes deeply and if she wasn't standing up, I would have thought her to be sleeping. The breeze caresses her soft buttery curls and pushes them from her face, like a light fan would do for a model. I place my hand on her upturned arm, feeling her pulse in her wrist. Her heart beats with the hum of the passing cars.

We stay like that for seconds, minutes, hours. Eternity. Time slows to nearly a stop. We do not move, or speak, or think. We listen to the city that is ours for only a few short hours more.

I want to break what feels like an infinite silence. I open my mouth and draw in a breath before she catches me by surprise, speaking before I can formulate my muted thoughts into words, "I think I should go now."

I do not know what to say. I do not know what to say.

"Gray?" she looks at me with concern in her brow. I am stuck.

I do not know what to say. I do not know what to say.

Her face softens and she looks back down at the street below the bridge.

I look down as well and I think about words, but they do not come.

I think about how to tell her all the things I have felt for the last three years. This isn't the first time she has left, but I am still no better at saying what I need to say. I am sick of regretting what I have not told her before she leaves. I am lucky that she has always come back. I can feel this time is different. I can feel it is final. There is a definite change in the air. A certain warm sadness that wasn't there before.

She turns back to me and hugs me, pulling me tight against her. She rests her head in my neck. "I'm sorry," she says again.

## SARAH ZIMMERMAN

I hold her in my arms and I think about what I am losing and what I have lost already. How vacant her eyes have seemed these past few months. How thin her wrists have gotten.

I feel her start to pull away.

A car horn beeps below us.

I am sick of regretting what I have not told her when she leaves.

I hold her tighter, "Nelly, I love you."

She pulls away again and this time I let her. Her eyes glisten with tears about to overflow, "I love you, too."

A car shoots past us under the bridge. I see the white reflection streak across her eyes. A sky of green.

I turn away from her for the last time and smile sadly as my steps join the cities chorus once again to tell them we have lost a member.

ERIN DOCKERY

---

*How “it” Happened Again*

**10:34** was icy. Impregnated with angst. A man in a business suit sat two tables away, sipping dark roast labeled with liberty. I regret nothing. Eyes between the lines of Moby-Dick until Frappuccino jitters sent ice up the straw of curiosity. Me, 23, oversized bell bottoms and too tight tank top. He had no ring. 50/50 chance. So I asked, “How about sex?”

---

*Of Flying Bears and Potted Petunias*

Lois Grier was quick to defend Janie and Joseph, her children, from anything she perceived as injurious to their pride or forms, but she was not quick enough to catch the potted petunias that fell on poor Janie's head from the second story window of their neighbors half of the duplex. Janie became a vegetable and sweet, adoring Lois was left to wade through piles of medical bills and care for an incontinent daughter who required fresh diaper pads in her bed each night.

In the 3 years since Lois had divorced her husband, Joseph had turned 7, Janie, 8, and she, 28: still young enough for her emerging gray hairs to be a source of gossip for the neighborhood. Unfortunately for Lois, her silvery locks were not the only subject discussed at social gatherings. Recently, she had found solace in the company a lovely woman, Charity Chase. Charity offered a shoulder to cry on when the stress of rent and Janie's expenses were too much to bear, a babysitter for the children when her work ran past the time that school let out, and, on occasion, an outlet for those desires that her husband had just never seemed to be able to fulfill. As Lois's visits to Charity's house grew more frequent, so did the disapproving stares of her neighbors. Lois didn't mind. Charity was the only pleasure in her life, and so she would walk with her head held high, one hand pushing Janie's wheelchair, the other clasped tightly by Joseph, past her neighbors petunias, out the gate, and in front of duplex after duplex of family dinners before settling comfortably at Charity's plentiful table for her own family dinner.

Family dinners of course lead to talk, and, in the households of her neighbors, it was often at Lois's expense. Lois could bear this talk, but what she couldn't stand was when the gossip reached the ears of young schoolchildren, who took it upon themselves to inquire of innocent little Joseph which wealthy dyke their whore-mother was fucking for this months rent. Lois stumbled through an explanation to Joseph of the meaning of the foul words uttered by children whom she thought couldn't even button their own pants, let alone understand the meaning of the word "dyke" or the connotation of "fuck". Joseph's response to these new discoveries was one of indifference, and his only further query was to ask his mother to make him a superhero cape. Lois, being unable to deny Joseph this simple desire, dutifully took one of Janie's baby blue diaper pads and scrawled an "S" on its back. She made a matching cape for his small and tattered teddy bear, as she had done many times before.

Joseph ran off to play with Janie while Lois lowered herself onto the cracked plastic covering of their kitchen chairs to balance her checkbook. She glanced at the imbalance between her withdrawals and her deposits before raising her head to stare out the window. She miserably admired the lush, green grass, and rows of petunias that seemed to end abruptly where her side of the lawn started. Her thoughts drifted to dinner preparations. Charity was coming over. As Lois recalled Charity's favorite dishes, Joseph's teddy bear whizzed out of the hallway behind her, past her ear, knocked a vase off the table, flew out the window, and landed just shy of the petunia beds. Lois whipped around to see Joseph precariously balanced on a stool with a fan running full force in front of him.

Joseph stood on one foot, the other in mid-air behind him, with his left hand in a fist at his side, the right outstretched in front of him, and his diaper pad cape flapping in the artificial breeze of the electric fan. He was the definition of heroic for all but one feature: his

## LEE ONYSKO

face. Joseph's mouth was agape and his eyes were wide and tearful at his imagined punishment for the fallen vase, but Lois's attention was on Janie giggling in the background. Maybe it was the joyous tinkle of Janie's laugh, or the ridiculous contrast of Joseph's face and pose, but Lois became a lot happier. The contrast between her and her neighbor's yard seemed a little less harsh, Janie's condition seemed more manageable, and when Charity arrived with the caped crusader she had retrieved from the yard and a playfully raised eyebrow, Lois laughed for what seemed like the first time in many many years.

*Bionic Man*

“**W**here are we going again?”

“You tell me, Dad.”

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m asking.”

“You’re the one who called me *while I was in a meeting* telling me you had to go to the emergency room.”

“Well, I couldn’t have that black girl take me.”

“Her name’s Sophia, she’s your caretaker, and she’s a wonderful lady, Dad.”

“Well, I couldn’t have her take me. This could be serious. I might have to have surgery this time.” Linda thought she saw a glint come into his eye at the thought of surgeons and nurses fawning over him. He happily patted the overnight bag he had packed “just in case.”

“Dad, it’s a *hair*.”

“No,” he said, “it’s a wire. I have *wires* coming out of my stomach.”

“How in the world would you have wires coming out of your stomach?” Linda asked. “It’s a hair.”

“It’s not a hair! My hair is white, and this is *grey*. And it’s *hard*.”

“It’s a coarse hair, then. It happens, Dad.”

“How would you know? *You’ve* never had a wire coming out of your stomach.”

Linda grit her teeth and kept her eyes out for the turn into the doctor’s office.

“Whatever you say, Charlie.” He “hmped” confidently, and looked out the window. A few moments later, his face spasmed and he winced, reaching down to feebly touch his left knee. It was strapped in a black knee brace.

“You alright, Dad?” Linda asked.

“Yeah, yeah; it’s just this damned knee again. I’m not what I used to be, you know.”

Linda rolled her eyes and pulled into the parking lot, passing the large *Miller Cardiology* sign. Beside the words there was an image a stethoscope bent in the shape of a heart.

“Why are we here, anyway?” Charlie asked. “I said the *emergency room*.”

“We’re here because I didn’t want to *wait* in the emergency room all afternoon.

Miller was the only one of your doctors with an appointment on such short notice,” Linda said, heading toward a parking spot on the other side of the lot. “Alright, get your cane ready, we’re here.” She stopped the car and turned off the engine. Pulling her purse from the back seat, she watched as Charlie started to fumble around, too arthritic to bend his arm far enough to pull his door handle.

“Hold on, Dad, let me help you,” she said, and got out to run around to his side. She opened his door and held his arm as he took two false starts of rocking back and forth in his chair before finally gaining his feet on the pavement. He held onto the door for a moment, reeling from the sudden movement, before regaining his balance and shuffling forward.

“You alright?” Linda asked, swinging his door shut as he hobbled away. He seemed to move his head up and down, but Linda couldn’t be sure if it was a nod or just his tremor. “Alright.” She followed, taking his arm and ushering him toward the door. She had to guide him over the ledge of the pavement outside the door because he couldn’t see it, and then again across the doorframe so he didn’t trip. Once inside, she saw that the elevator was on

## TARYN WASHBURN

the opposite side of the lobby, and sighed as they made the slow trek across the floor. She waited patiently as Charlie tested every step for pain, inching forward.

Linda thought to herself, as she always did over these long, laborious journeys between Points A and B, that his clothes seemed to be getting bigger on him, hanging low and loose; though he was by no means *skinny*. There was plenty of fat there; it was the muscle that had disappeared as he sat in his armchair day and night, watching *Living in Alaska*. Hunched, frail, and ill-tailored, yes. Thin and healthy, no. Maybe he just needed a better belt.

The elevator dinged when they were still ten feet away. Linda winced and ushered Charlie more quickly, but to no avail. The elevator emptied and its former occupants scattered across the lobby, leaving only a young lady holding the door.

"Thank you, but you don't need to wait. We can just push the button," Linda said, desperately trying to save the embarrassment of Charlie's sluggish movement.

"No, let me hold it. No use having to wait for it to come back down again," she said, all smiles. Linda tried to return the friendliness genuinely, but the exchange of smiles lasted too long, still waiting on Charlie, to retain its effect. It was another thirty seconds before he was entirely in the elevator. Flashing one last, weak smile at the woman holding the door, Linda thanked her and pressed the button corresponding to the cardiologist's floor.

Leaning back against the wall, she exhaled in relief and looked back at Charlie. He was wheezing through his nose, already out of breath from the voyage across the lobby.

"Let's take a break once we get off, Dad," she suggested, and he nodded, hardly lifting his head to acknowledge her. She readjusted her purse, the door dinged, and she guided him out. She looked down the hallway before her and spotted the sign that announced their destination four doors down; it looked like a mile away from where she was. She sighed. "You take a break and come when you're ready, Dad," she said. "I'm going to go get you checked in so we aren't waiting as long."

"Alright," he said, and waved her off with his tremoring hand. She strode down the hallway, free of some great weight, went into the empty waiting room, and approached the check-in window. The glass slid open and a nurse in purple scrubs smiled up from her paperwork.

"Charlie Ward for Dr. Miller," Linda said. The nurse checked her computer records and nodded.

"Here he is. I'll let Dr. Miller know he's here. Just have a seat and we'll call your name," she said. Linda thanked her and turned back to the door to find Charlie just entering the room.

"Here, Dad, have a seat," Linda said, and guided him to the nearest chair. He squared himself in front of it and then plunged stiffly back into it with a wince.

"Don't I have to check in?" he asked, squinting over at the nurse's window.

"No, I already did it, just relax," Linda said, and threw the keys that were still in her hand down on the table and started digging in her purse for her phone, which had started ringing three rings ago. She caught it just as it silenced to voicemail, but upon seeing that the caller ID was her manager, she let it go. He probably wanted to discuss how the morning's meeting had gone - badly - and inquire as to why she wasn't in her cubicle - because she was here with Charlie and his stomach wire. She dropped the phone back into her purse and leaned her head against the wall.

## TARYN WASHBURN

“Oh, that looks good,” Charlie suddenly said, having caught his breath and perked up, remembering that he was in the doctor’s office.

“What does?” Linda opened her eyes and found the silent television across the room. The screen showed a cooking program, and the chef - dressed in a spotless white collared shirt and dress pants, as all chefs naturally are - was preparing triple fudge brownies. “Oh, I guess it does.”

“Let’s stop for ice cream on the way home,” Charlie continued, practically licking his lips.

“No, Dad. I have to get back to work if I can, and you said your sugars were already too high this morning. This is why you’re diabetic. You *always* have to stop for ice cream.” Linda readjusted her purse on her lap but continued to passively watch the television. Charlie fell silent, too engrossed in the brownies to reply. After a moment, he winced and touched his leg.

“You alright, Dad?” Linda asked obediently.

“Yeah, just this damned knee...”

Just as the brownies were coming out of the oven, brown and shiny on the top, a nurse poked her head out of the door next to the check-in window. “Ward?” she asked, scanning the empty room.

“That’s me!” he said, and started his rocking routine. Linda stood up and lifted his arm to pull him up. He started to shuffle forward, and Linda realized that she was, yet again, in another door-holding scenario. She sighed and followed behind, resigning to the fact that she wasn’t going to make it back to work that afternoon.

The width of the waiting room and another hallway later, Linda and the nurse had Charlie up on the evaluation table, holding his bag tightly and knocking his cane to the floor with a clatter. Linda picked it up and tucked it under her arm, thanked the nurse, who assured them the doctor would be right in, and sat down in the chair across from the table. She pulled out her phone and lost herself in a game of solitaire.

After a moment of surveying the room, Charlie spoke up again. “How’s Hailey?”

“What?” Linda turned off her phone, wondering if she would get a moment to herself this entire appointment.

“Hailey, what’s she up to?”

“She’s doing an overnight weekend at a college in Chicago.”

“Is Mark with her?” Charlie leaned forward with this, a new attempt at dominance surfacing in his voice.

“Yes. I had to stay because *I had to be at the meeting this morning*, but that didn’t really work out, either.” Linda didn’t know if she was more frustrated with her own fumbling attempt at a presentation or with Charlie for interrupting said fumbling attempt.

“Good. But she shouldn’t even be in Chicago. It has the highest murder rate in the country, you know.” Charlie pointed a trembling, accusing finger at Linda.

“Yes, Dad, you told me that last week when you asked about what college she wants to go to.”

“Does she know which one she’s going to yet?”

“No, Dad, she won’t know until the spring.”

“Oh. Well, she can do better than Chicago.”

“It’s a very good school, Dad.” Linda knew she wasn’t going to win this battle, either, and considered returning to her solitaire game.

## TARYN WASHBURN

“Well, you have Will give her a good talking to about being *safe* in that city, you hear?”

“Will? Why would *Will* do that?” She looked up from unlocking her phone, hoping the solitaire game hadn’t reset.

“Because he’s the man of your family, that’s why!” Charlie gave her an indignant look.

Linda blinked at him. “My husband’s name is Mark, Dad. Will is my brother. Your son.”

Charlie’s eyebrows scrunched together for a moment before his mind returned to the present and his dominant expression dissolved away. He slouched back against the wall, relinquishing his defensive position, and murmured, “Oh, right, right...”

Before Linda could follow up on this, her gut wrenching at such an imperative mix-up, the door opened and a tall man with greying hair stepped in. He had a manilla folder in his hand.

“Afternoon, Chuck!” he said genially, flashing Charlie a smile and looking down at his papers. “How we doing today?”

“I don’t know, Doc,” Charlie said. “I think this could be serious.”

Miller looked up at Linda from his papers with a knowing smirk. “How are you, Linda?”

“Oh, I’m just fine, as always,” she said, giving him as much of a smile as she could, still concerned with Charlie’s momentary memory loss. Miller nodded and turned back to Charlie.

“It says here you have wires coming out of your stomach, Chuck,” he said, and put down the manilla folder on the sink counter. He reached for a pair of gloves from the dispenser. “Why don’t you tell me about it?”

“Oh, yes,” Charlie said, pitifully folding his trembling hands in his lap. “Well, I started getting severe pain in this area two days ago.” He gingerly touched the left side of his abdomen.

“Two days? If it was that severe, why did you wait so long to come see me?” Miller pulled on his second glove and took a step back.

“Oh, well...” Charlie paused and fumbled. “I guess it wasn’t *severe*...” Miller glanced back at Linda. She shrugged in return. “Anyway, this morning I looked down and there was a wire comin’ outta me!”

Miller sighed and nodded. “Alright, well let’s have a look. You mind lifting up your shirt there for me?”

Charlie obeyed, but Miller stayed right where he was at the sight that greeted him. There, protruding from Charlie’s stomach, was a mass of tangled masking tape wrapped around something - it was impossible to see what it was due to the sheer amount of tape. Linda dropped her face into her hands, too embarrassed to watch.

“What’s this for, Charlie?” Miller asked, and Linda could hear him suppressing a laugh.

“Well, I didn’t want it to go back *in*.”

There was a pause of silence, and then another sigh as Miller came to terms with Charlie’s solution. Masking tape.

“Well, let’s take it off. I don’t think it’s going to go back in, Charlie.”

“You sure?”

## TARYN WASHBURN

“Yes, I’m sure.”

Linda listened as Miller unwound the layers upon layers of tape around whatever minuscule thing was poking out of Charlie’s stomach. When the noise finally stopped, Linda couldn’t help but look up to see if there was actually anything there.

Miller stepped back and dropped the ball of tape into the trash. He took one look at the small, grey cord protruding from Charlie’s stomach and nodded.

“Alright, Charlie, let me tell you what this is. Back when you had your bypass surgery, you had a temporary pacemaker attached to your heart to keep your heart pumping while we worked on it. When we’re done, we can’t pull them off, or else they’ll rip the tissue of your heart and you would have bled out; so, we leave them in. It’s a routine thing. Sometimes they detach themselves over time and migrate to the surface, like this one now.” Miller gestured to Charlie’s stomach. “But most of the time they just stay right where they are.”

“So there are more than one?” Charlie asked, gripping his shirt tighter, still lifting it comically. Linda just sat and took it all in.

“There are two. But I can remove this one right now, and you can head on home. The second one is probably still attached. If not, it might surface eventually, but I doubt it.” Miller checked his gloves again.

“Do you need to sedate me?” Linda wasn’t sure if Charlie was upset or elated at the thought of sedation. Sedatives meant attention and more time here - possibly an overnight stay, his dream vacation. But it would also mean missing out on the action when the wire was actually removed.

Miller laughed lightly. “No, Charlie, just lay down and keep your shirt up. This’ll take two seconds.”

Charlie obeyed gingerly and set his overnight bag to the side. Miller probed Charlie’s stomach for a moment, took hold of the wire with two fingers, told Charlie to sit still, and pulled. The wire whipped up and out, and before Linda could blink it was gone and disposed of and Miller was removing his gloves.

“Is that it?” Charlie asked, almost shakily.

“That’s it!” Miller beamed cheerfully. “Sit on up!”

“I don’t need to shower or anything?” Charlie carefully pushed himself back into a sitting position and hunched over to look down at his unblemished stomach.

“No, Charlie,” Miller chuckled, and picked up his manilla folder. “You’re all set and ready to go, unless you have anything else you need to talk about.”

Charlie didn’t reply. He just kept gazing at the spot where the wire had been. Linda seized the moment.

“No, Dr. Miller, thank you. We’re fine.” She stood up and shook his hand.

“Wonderful!” he said. “Well, safe travels home!” He reached to open the door for them, but Charlie was barely beginning to make his way to his feet.

“Thanks, Dr. Miller. He’ll be a minute, so you go on.” Linda flashed him a polite smile.

“Alright, no rush,” Miller said, and let go of the door handle. “Take care. Always good to see you, Chuck.”

“You too, Doc,” Charlie replied sulkily, sliding to his feet and reaching for his cane. Linda steadied him as Miller disappeared down the hall. Charlie just stared dejectedly at the floor and then turned to retrieve his overnight bag.

## TARYN WASHBURN

"Alright, Dad, let's get out of here," Linda said. Charlie nodded and began to shuffle toward the door. Linda followed, once again noting his paper-like, vein-ridden skin and watching his loose clothing hang on him as he hobbled in front of her. She wondered if a day would finally come when his knees really did give out.

In the lobby, she thanked the nurse and ushered Charlie out into the hall. By this time, he had perked up considerably, having found his angle on the whole ordeal. As Linda took his arm to guide him to the elevator, he huffed out a small chuckle. "Well," he said, "would you imagine that? I'm a bionic man!"

Linda almost stopped, saddened even further by the comment and his new confidence in his collapsing body. "Sure you are, Dad," she said softly, and nudged him forward. "Come on, let's go."

And so they made their way to the elevator, to the lobby, across the lobby, over the curb, and across the parking lot. Linda parked Charlie in front of his door, let go of his arm, and reached for her keys. She rummaged around her bag aimlessly for a moment before her attention caught and she stopped to pull the purse off her shoulder so that she could peer inside. No keys. She patted her pockets. No keys. She turned around and looked across the wide expanse of parking lot behind her. No keys.

Panic set in for only a moment before she remembered throwing them down on top of *Health Magazine* in the waiting room. She sighed and turned to Charlie, who was watching her silently. She realized the last thing her sanity and pity could take would be dragging him back in and back out again.

"I forgot the keys in the doctor's office. Can you wait here for me?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine here," he said.

"Alright. I'll be right back." Linda broke into a jog and made her way to the entrance in what seemed to be a record time. Inside, she strode across the tile floor and hit the elevator button. It was a moment before it arrived, and when it did, her heart dropped. It had occupants - an elderly lady with a walker and the nurse who was helping her. Linda found herself holding the door as the woman made her way out. One of the tennis-ball feet became lodged between the door and the floor of the lobby, and Linda had to free it. She found herself giving a smile that lasted several moments too long at the nurse as she waited for the lady to pass by, watching her frail movements and feeling embarrassment for her. Finally free, she stepped in the elevator and rammed the "close door" button, hoping never to encounter the slowness of age again. She thought it had been painful as a companion to the elderly; now she knew it was worse to be a bystander. Blame falls on those one knows personally, but one can sympathize with the innocence of a frail stranger. Linda realized this was due to personal history.

The door dinged open and she pushed the thought behind her, briskly making her way down the hall and into the office. She waved at the reception nurse, grabbed the keys, and apologized. The nurse smiled, expressed her thankfulness that Linda had found the keys, and waved her on her way. Linda returned to the hall, the elevator, the lobby, and the exit in moments, and she was halfway across the parking lot before she looked up from her wonderfully quick footsteps to unlock the car. She stopped, and then spun around. No Charlie. No keys, and now no Charlie.

"Dad!" she called, wondering if he had gotten tired and found a nearby bench. She started jogging back toward the car, looking around to find any possible resting areas, but he was nowhere to be found.

## TARYN WASHBURN

“Charlie!” she called again, and then when there was no response sprinted around the car, slid in, started the engine, rolled the windows down, and backed out. She drove to the other end of the parking lot and back again. No Charlie. She pulled out of the lot, turning right onto the busy street, and scanned the sidewalks on either side. Gas station, CVS, a small office building. No Charlie. She followed the road for two blocks and then turned around. He couldn’t possibly have gone that far.

Passing the Miller’s office again, she searched the road from a coffee shop to a fast food place only to find nothing in this direction, either. Her stomach dropping, she had resolved to turn back and check the lot again - maybe he had gone in to use the restroom? - when she pulled into a side street to find a hunched man in baggy clothes shuffling along the sidewalk, looking around uncertainly. At the car’s approach, he stopped and gazed at it helplessly, leaning on his cane, his tremor wobbling it back and forth.

Linda was out of the car before it even stopped moving. “Dad, what are you doing?” she asked, jogging across the road and taking his arm. He gazed at her blankly. It was a moment before she realized it was the same look he had given her in Miller’s office. “Dad, it’s me,” she said. “Linda.” His expression didn’t change. She swallowed. “Your daughter.”

He blinked and she watched as he rushed back to the present. Looking away in embarrassment, he murmured the same “Oh, right, right...” and shook his head.

“It’s alright, Dad. Come on, let’s go home. You’ve had a big day. I shouldn’t have left you alone in the parking lot.” Linda hooked her arm more tightly in his and guided him back to the car.

“Alright,” he said, still hazy. She went around the front, got in, and sat back to take a breath. Charlie did the same, though less smoothly.

“You alright, Dad?” Linda asked, looking over at him.

He paused, as if considering whether to answer, and then shook his head. “I was all alone... I didn’t know where I was.” He stared down at his trembling hands.

“I know, Dad. I’m sorry. I left my keys in the waiting room, and I had to go back to get them. I should have taken you with me.” Linda reached over and grasped his arm comfortingly.

He nodded slightly again and softly said, “Right, right...”

Linda patted his arm and turned back to the wheel. “Let’s get you home.”

“Alright.”

She turned the car back around and pulled onto the main street once again. A few minutes down the road, Charlie looked over at her and said, “You know, I feel much better without those wires in me anymore.” There was a slight smile of wonder on his face. “Wouldn’t you believe it? I never thought I would live to see the day where I became a bionic man!”

Linda let out a sigh, but with it came a soft chuckle. “Nor did I, Dad,” she said.

Charlie cackled and turned to the window, slapping his knee lightly at the thought of being invincible. He winced at the impact.

“You okay, Dad?” Linda asked.

“Yeah, yeah, just this damned knee... I ain’t what I used to be, you know.”

“Yeah Dad.”

Charlie paused and then looked back at Linda. “Where are we going again?”

## NOAH KONTUR

---

### *The Litanous Letters*

Tyler was bored. He glanced dismayed at his wristwatch - the hands were moving slower than molasses in January. His dismay soon turned to disbelief as the watch quite literally *stopped ticking*. “Hmmmmmm,” he said to himself, downright bamboozled. “I know that the speed at which we experience time is inversely proportional to the amount of boredom we feel, but I’ve never heard of time actually *stopping* like that before.” Tyler proceeded to groan in resignation.

What Tyler didn’t know is that his wristwatch had run out of batteries. But contrary to popular belief, Tyler *did* know a few things. He knew, for instance, that he attended Boring Boarding School in Smalltown, Minnesota. He also knew that he was late for a Giving Meeting, in which the faculty would extort money from the students like wolves on the hunt. Tyler wasn’t opposed to giving his money away, of course: he was a law-abiding student just like anyone else. But the drone of the speakers’ voices, maudlin exhortations cliches on an assembly line of verbosity, was just too much for him to bear and so he nodded off...

“...And that’s why you should garner support from our rich donors!” the demagogue concluded, pointing emphatically towards a set of lavish pipe organs. The student body gave a standing ovation - sans applause - and finally started clapping at the demagogue’s signal.

The student body triumphed to their respective cells to write the letters.

Like platelets on a wound, Tyler’s group gathered in a cold, sterile room. The place was like a museum. It was very beautiful and very cold, and you weren’t allowed to touch anything. Except for the letters, of course. Those had to be written. If the students didn’t write them, then the branch of faculty responsible for such duties would have to do so: God forbid. Having finally overcome sleep inertia, Tyler observed his more sentient surroundings.

The first of the three was Despereaux, a short young woman with a slight physique. Fraught with sadness and insecurity, she was never one to voice her opinions. As a matter of fact, Despereaux was so introspective that she hardly seemed to have opinions of her own. She was a sad, sad kid. Or perhaps there rested some hidden Elysium in that nebulous, onion-layer mind of hers. How could Tyler know? She never said anything.

Next up was Ender. Pale and thin, Ender spent most of his time reading and most of his money on books. He had an answer for every problem, a correction for every mistake. Like any academic, Ender’s opinions were often complicated. Yet if Ender lacked concision, he certainly had *precision*. Tyler cherished his little Ender like a captain protects his compass.

And then there was Ludus, handsome and muscular. Ludus was like one of those fields where people grow cranberries: he had so much substance on the surface, but only shallowness below. He was always one for a joke; he was such a comedian, in fact, that he would claim to make jokes about his jokes, and jokes about his jokes about his jokes, and so on. Tyler tried to explain to him that an infinite regress was impossible. Ludus, sensing a philosophical storm on the horizon, changed tack. Tyler, realizing that all hope of enlightening his friend was lost, resigned himself to frivolity.

## NOAH KONTUR

"Hey Tyler, my main man!" Ludus exclaimed, slapping his back with feigned familiarity.

"Hi."

"Hey, dude, you excited to write those letters?" His excessive optimism was a cruel reminder that the world was not as it should be.

"Yes."

"Well, Tyler, ya-ready?" The last two words squashed together like badly flipped pancakes.

"Yes." Ludus was never good at social cues. In any case, Tyler resigned to his fate and watched in veiled horror as Ludus began:

*Dear most esteemed and beloved benefactor:*

*My name is Ludus and I am a Senior from honolulu alaska. My favorite class is geography and I also like to learn about syntax in english so that i can be a better writer. Along with what I've learned in those 2 classes I've also learned so much practical knowledge. I know for instance that the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. I've also learned that a p orbital is a thing in an atom where the smaller things go in circles. For sports, I play track and run field, and I also play cross country. I hope you can contribute more \$ to this school so that the future people will have the opportunity to give money to this school as well. Thank you so much for your contributions.*

*Love Ludus*

Ender fell into a silent reverie. He remained that way for a while. Finally, like a fax machine printing out a message, he expectorated his answer:

"By reducing the sophistication of your vocabulary and inserting the occasional malapropism into your facetious letter, you have managed to create a rather subtle and touching critique on the demands which the establishment places on us to write these letters in general. Bravo."

Tyler, not understanding what Ender had just said, thought it safe to agree. He did so promptly. Then, with a slight cringe, Tyler realized something crucial: *He had nothing to say!*

Language is a tool through which people express their thoughts - or at least that's what some people claim. Tyler's bullshit detector was far too advanced to believe something of *that* caliber, however. A tool to express thoughts? No. A weapon to conquer minds. In a dog-eat-dog world, the worst thing to be is toothless; in a world of verbal spartans, there is nothing worse than to be bereft of that sword, the tongue. And so he stood there, silently exposed, feeling the event slipping from his grasp, condemned to watch the condemningly vacuous stares of his peers. In such a desperate situation, Tyler had only one course of action: logorrhea.

"Hey Ludus, do you know what Ludus means in Latin it means "game" or "school" sort of like a *double entendre* do you know what that is- " he gasps for breath- "it's left purposely ambiguous so as to concoct two simultaneous images within that pathetic little head of yours..." Tyler knows this was a *faux pas*, but it was far too late to stop now. "...And if I may conclude I hate everything! All of you! All of *this!* Every expectation, imposition!" One Freudian slip too many, he puts his head in his hands.

"You done?" Ludus asked, nonchalant.

"Just leave me be." Tyler mumbled, knowing that someone so different from him couldn't possibly understand his problems.

Ludus glanced at the clock on the wall. Black and white, through and through. Precisely twenty minutes to go. If only the world were so simple as this clock. If only.

## NOAH KONTUR

“Well I’m glad we’re being all repressed and emotional and all, but how about we get to writing those letters,” Ludus suggested, offering the pen imploringly. “Any takers?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

Except the answer he thought he knew was wrong. Despereaux, that romantic onion, raised her hand timidly. Ludus had his doubts: she looked so pale and frail— and certainly not hale—that she might not even be able to lift the pen at all. But delegating is never an easy task, even to one surrounded by geniuses. Cajoled by reason and coerced by fate, he handed her the utensil.

“Here... goes nothing.” She intoned *sotte voce*, pulling out what looked like a diary.

*August 27th: My parents are gone, and I’m stranded with my luggage. Judging by the look of this place—the boring buildings and their irresponsible inhabitants—the only thing I will want to chat with is my chattel. How suiting. Life is a whirlwind doldrum.*

*September 18th: The grind is really getting to me, whittling me down ‘til I am nothing but shavings. I can never sleep at night for fear of the next morning. Day rears its mighty head, signalling the worst truth in the kindest way: life must go on.*

*September 25th: I saw a girl today, lithe and alive. It wasn’t that I didn’t like men—their masculinity was impressive, their musculature attractive—It’s just that there was something about her, the grace with which she moved, that eternal happiness which propelled her forward. In short: she represented everything I loved and lacked.*

*October 20th: We talked for a while, and sat silent for a while more. I gazed into her smiling eyes for a moment—a sad truth crept up from their depths. Happiness knows no complexity and no sadness, no depth or real meaning. How could I tell her how I felt, how could I shatter her pristine crystal world?*

*November 5th: I went to a dance yesterday. It was a pinwheel of hues, a slew of superficial men, a spectroscopic arrangement of strobes. And then... I remember nothing.*

*December 3rd: It was my birthday today. I turned seventeen. Perhaps I would be happy, if only she would love me. But she will never know. She must never know.*

*January 1st: I’m on break back in Ohio, so I climbed the pine tree today. Sometimes I ascend when I feel transcendental; other times when I want a view... most of the time I just feel nothing. Every now and then, gazing from atop to the earth below, I wonder what would happen if I jumped. Would people remember my name? Or would I suffer a murderer’s legacy, lambasted for a “crime” that wasn’t my fault?*

*February 20th: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” What if my light uncovers truths the world does not want to see? What if my light blinds the very God He lauds?*

*February 21st: I told her today. She was taken aback for a second, adjusting her eyes to a new person she had once called Despereaux. Now she called her a slut. An “immoral soul.” Now I really know about happiness: though it recognizes the truth, it excoriates it like a weed.*

*February 22nd: I am Atlas, bearing the burden of discovery—Or so I would say if I were dishonest. My symptoms—lethargy, depression, pure sadness and desperation—have no significance. I do not bear a burden. I am doing nobody a favor. The easy way out would be to spurn the world and become a bitter cynic. Yet I love everyone and everything. I realize the weight of my loss. Why can’t I be oblivious like her? Or perhaps I can sleep, perchance to dream...*

*March 14th: Perhaps if I write... Not alone, but that others may see. Maybe then I won’t be so alone. Being alone in a sea of people is a little like Tantalus: the water’s right there, but I can never seem to drink it.*

## NOAH KONTUR

*Upon this world I love,  
Better than stars above,  
The loud-mouthed leaders turn the earth  
And punch and push and shove.  
Yet the best of the race,  
They humbly 'cline their face,  
They genuflect on hands and knees,  
They die without a trace.*

A single tear emanated from her ovaline eye, and everyone else leaned in to read.

Not even Ender had an explanation for what he had just seen. His words, for once in his life, begged description.

It was beyond what Tyler had imagined. She was more than just a layered onion or a hidden truth-trove; rather, she was a voice of pure depression, a critique of the world from someone who was just... too tired to care. And yet the voice still peeled true, a sad condemnation of the world order. Though amazed, Tyler felt as if he were in on a secret he had no right to know.

“Is it... real?” he asked cautiously.

She inhaled deeply: “Is anything real?” Exhale. “All I know is that I’m unhappy and that I want to go home.”

Ender, hardly one to console, nevertheless smiled at her and offered up some sympathy. “Que sera sera. But I can assure you that there are a few things we can change. The end of this meeting, for instance, is going to happen in five minutes. Who knows what will happen? We all feel sadness. It pervades our world, whether that world lie in books, diaries, cranberry fields or... Whatever Tyler does. Let’s take some advice from Ludus: let’s learn to laugh.”

Ludus, never one for contemplation, didn’t really catch on to the gyst of what Ender was saying until much, much later. But he did like laughing, so he was just going to make a joke when Tyler interjected rather simply:

“I think I want to write a letter”

Crickets chirped. Ludus gazed aghast. But then, like a bridge arching under the weight of an excessive load, Ludus’ amazed expression curved into a distinct Cheshire grin.

“Go ahead, my friend.”

Tyler briefly closed his eyes, as if imploring that the Muses grant him song. He sardonically smiled.

*Dear Donor:*

*I regret to inform you that your bank account has been liquidated and your assets seized. It turns out that your money has literally been laundered through a machine; the Internal Revenue Service is now the Irate Revenue Service. A criminal has no recourse. Best of luck! Sayonara!*

If the crickets were noticeable before, they were overpoweringly loud now. But then Ludus, who until now had been watching as the pen moved itself across the page, began to laugh so hard that Tyler’s ears hurt. As if to fend off the stentorian guffaws, Tyler

## NOAH KONTUR

laughed even harder. Like some untreatable pandemic, the hilarity spread throughout the room until even Despereaux chuckled, if only a tiny bit.

It was a wave of irony, a crest of excess, a roll of sarcasm, a crash of wit. Not even the threat of expulsion could stem their unfettered freedom; they were only human, yet they dared defy the gods.

# ONE-ACT PLAYS

---

ALANA KING

---

*The Thing About Change*

Cast of Characters

Lizzie : A 15 year old girl, Thomas's sister  
Thomas : A 20 year old boy, not quite yet a man, Lizzie's brother

ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: A small apartment in Chicago, which is cluttered but well maintained. There is only one window in the kitchen and only one in the cramped sitting room, both are facing a brick wall. There are two doors leading off to separate bedrooms, and one door which leads to the hallway of the apartment building outside.

AT RISE: It's morning and LIZZIE is getting ready for picture day at school. THOMAS is in the small kitchen making breakfast. On the kitchen counter there is a picture of THOMAS and LIZZIE's parents next to a pile of news magazines. There is an envelope sitting on the table waiting to be mailed. THOMAS has tried to hide it under other documents and letters so that LIZZIE won't notice it.

THOMAS

Lizzie, hurry up or you'll be late for school!

(There's some shuffling noises from the other room and LIZZIE comes running into the kitchen wearing a Captain America shirt, her hair in two braids.)

LIZZIE

Did you make me eggs?

THOMAS

I always make you...

(A pause as THOMAS takes in LIZZIE's appearance.)

What are you wearing?

ALANA KING

LIZZIE

Captain America shirt. What's wrong with it?

THOMAS

It's picture day.

LIZZIE

Yeah, so?

THOMAS

So don't you want to wear something a little more... I don't know, dressy?

LIZZIE

Dressy? I don't care if I'm dressy or not.

THOMAS

Well yeah but isn't this picture going in the yearbook?

LIZZIE

Hell yeah it is.

THOMAS

And you really want your sophomore year photo to be you, wearing a Captain America shirt?

LIZZIE

Yup.

(LIZZIE shoves a pile of eggs into her mouth stubbornly. It's clear that THOMAS won't win this argument.)

THOMAS

Fine. But when you're thirty and you look back on it, just know that I tried to talk you out of it.

LIZZIE

When I'm thirty I'll have two sons, and their names will be Steve and Bucky. Maybe they'll appreciate my shirt even if you don't.

THOMAS

I'm sure they'll appreciate being named after two fictional characters. Finish your breakfast and go brush your teeth, we need to leave in five minutes.

(LIZZIE finishes shoving the eggs into her mouth and pulls the newspaper out from the stack of mail THOMAS tried to hide the envelope in.)

ALANA KING

LIZZIE

I want to read the comics first.

(LIZZIE notices the envelope.)

What's this?

(She slides the envelope out from underneath the other papers and mail to read the address.)

The army...?

(LIZZIE looks up at THOMAS with alarm)

You're not seriously thinking about joining are you?

(THOMAS looks guilty, he sighs and reaches out to take the packet back from LIZZIE.)

THOMAS

Lizzie... Come on, give it back.

(LIZZIE jerks away from him, steps back to keep the packet from his reach.)

LIZZIE

No, why the hell are you mailing things to the army? What are you sending them?!

(A pause.)

THOMAS

That's my personal information. Copy of my birth certificate, transcripts from school, medical history... I've been talking to a recruiter, he's helping me put everything together.

LIZZIE

You've been- Why?

THOMAS

Because I feel like I need to *do* something, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Do something? About what? Their deaths? Because I swear, Thomas you can't-

THOMAS

I know, Lizzie. I can't bring them back. But I can help solve the problem that caused their deaths in the first place.

LIZZIE

And you didn't think to have a conversation with me about this before you started talking with a fucking recruiter?

THOMAS

Watch it, Elizabeth.

ALANA KING

LIZZIE

Don't talk to me like you're my parent. You're not.

THOMAS

No, I'm not.

(There's a pause, awkward silence fills the room before THOMAS speaks.)

THOMAS

Look, I didn't want to talk with you about it because I knew you would react like this.

LIZZIE

That's a shitty excuse.

THOMAS

You're closed minded about change, Lizzie. It's just the way you are.

LIZZIE

You're acting as if we're talking about something as simple as a change in the food we buy. This is about you *leaving* and putting yourself in danger!

THOMAS

You just don't want to go and live with our aunt and uncle.

LIZZIE

You're right, I don't. I want to stay with you.

THOMAS

You know the deal. I got the court to allow you to finish out the school year here, and then you have to go live with them anyway.

LIZZIE

You told me you were going to go back to court and get them to let me stay!

THOMAS

Do you really think they're going to allow that? Especially with the income that I have?

LIZZIE

We still have money from mom and dad-

THOMAS

But it's not enough! Mom and dad left us all they had but it's running out and living in this city is expensive.

ALANA KING

LIZZIE

I don't care. I'd rather be on the streets than living without you.

THOMAS

Lizzie, come on-

LIZZIE

No! If you join the army... You're going to leave me just like they did.

THOMAS

No, I won't. I promise.

LIZZIE

You can't make promises if you're going off to an active war zone! *They* promised us they'd come back, and they didn't.

THOMAS

Mom and dad were civilians. They weren't trained to handle war and what comes with it.

LIZZIE

And they went anyway. To cover a story that their own magazine never even bothered publishing afterwards.

THOMAS

I know.

LIZZIE

And now you want to go to the same place.

THOMAS

Look, I don't know where I'll end up. I can't control where the army will station me. I could end up staying in the States. And even then at least I'd still be doing something.

LIZZIE

If you want to do something so bad, why don't you just go to college? Then you'd still be able to come home every day.

THOMAS

You think we actually have the money to afford college for you let alone me? Mom and dad started college funds for us, but obviously they never got the chance to finish them. I combined both accounts and I'm saving that money *for you*. If I join the army, they'll cover a lot of my expenses for me. I won't have to work at that shit hole of a restaurant anymore and you'll be able to pursue whatever career path you want.

ALANA KING

LIZZIE

Don't you understand that I don't give a fuck if I go to college or not as long as you don't put yourself in danger?

THOMAS

I told you to watch your language!

LIZZIE

Stop treating me like I'm some kid!

THOMAS

You're fifteen years old Lizzie, you *are* a kid.

LIZZIE

Ok, sure. I'm a kid. Which means I still need you.

(THOMAS sighs, looks at the clock before he reaches forward and pulls the envelope out of LIZZIE's hands)

THOMAS

You need to get your stuff for school. You're going to be late.

LIZZIE

No. We're not done with this conversation.

THOMAS

We can talk more later. Just go get your backpack.

LIZZIE

This isn't something we can just shove under the rug, I'm not going to leave this room until you tell me you're staying.

(THOMAS explodes in anger.)

THOMAS

You don't get to decide what I -Don't you understand? I need to do this! I can't just sit here knowing the people who *killed* my mom and dad are still out there!

LIZZIE

Your mom and dad?

THOMAS

Lizzie, I-

LIZZIE

Just stop.

ALANA KING

(A pause. Lizzie looks at the clock that hangs on the wall in the kitchen.)  
I'm going to be late for school.

(LIZZIE walks into her room angrily, leaving THOMAS in the kitchen staring at the envelope. LIZZIE returns a few moments later with her backpack. She has changed out of her Captain America shirt. A brief moment of silence occurs before Thomas clears his throat awkwardly.)

THOMAS

Why'd you change?

LIZZIE

You didn't like my shirt.

THOMAS

I never said that. I just said maybe you shouldn't wear it for picture day.

LIZZIE

Yeah, well, I changed anyway. Happy now?

(THOMAS sighs, sets the envelope on the counter.)

THOMAS

It wasn't about my happiness. Come on.

(They walk to the door. THOMAS opens it but before LIZZIE walks through it, she stops and glares at her brother.)

LIZZIE

You know, I won't forgive you - if you join the army. If you leave. Just remember that.

(LIZZIE pushes past THOMAS and walks into the hallway without waiting for a reply. THOMAS closes the door behind him without saying a word. A few moments pass.)

THOMAS (O.S.)

Hold on one second I forgot something.

(THOMAS walks back into the apartment, grabs his wallet off the counter and moves to leave again before he stops and stares at the envelope on the counter. He contemplates it for a second, his eyes shift over to the picture of their parents on the other side of the counter. After a moment, he takes the envelope and opens one of the magazines sitting beside the picture. He shoves the envelope into the magazine, closes it, and then places the magazine in a kitchen drawer. THOMAS stares at the magazine sitting in the open drawer.)

ALANA KING

THOMAS

I'm still going. I promise.

(THOMAS closes the drawer, heads to the door and exits the stage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ERIN DOCKERY

---

*Alexithymia*

Cast of Characters

August: 16; best friends with Stormi  
Stormi: 16; best friends with August  
Peter: 35; graying hair, beer belly, August's father  
Jim: Waiter, wears a red apron

Scene

Suburb of Cleveland in the winter.

Time

The present.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: We are at Al's Diner. The air is smoky. We enter a private room, one designed to host large parties, with a single wooden table in the middle. The lights are dim. Twelve chairs surround the rectangular table. A picture of a boat in a storm hangs on the wall.

AT RISE: JIM walks into the party room followed by PETER. Both appear preoccupied with life beyond the room.

JIM

So, I guess you're early then.  
(enters the room and places his hands on the back of an empty chair)

PETER

What?  
(stops at the doorway to observe the room)

JIM

(He turns and looks at PETER)  
The room was reserved for ten.

ERIN DOCKERY

PETER

Right. I suppose they're late.

JIM

Would you like me to call anyone for you?

PETER

(walks to the head of the table and takes a seat)

No that won't be necessary. They'll be here.

JIM

You know what they say, "Early bird catches the worm."... Um. How about I get you something to drink?

PETER

Coffee, please. Black.

JIM

Great. Al just made some fresh.  
(exists the stage)

PETER

(flips through the menu, then massages his temples)

Burgers and fries. That's all life is... burgers and fries.

JIM

(enters carrying a white mug and places it in front of JIM )

Do you want something to eat while you wait?

PETER

(gets up and investigates the painting)

No. Coffee's good. May I ask you a favor?

JIM

Sure.

PETER

(with his back toward Jim and his face inches from the painting)

You see, I just went through a messy divorce and could use some alone time. We had our engagement party in this room... so I thought it would be a great place to think some things over.

JIM

I'm sorry to hear that. Women are a hard business. Are you sure I can't get you anything else?

## ERIN DOCKERY

PETER

Just some alone time.

(steps away from the painting and returns to his seat)

JIM

Right. I'll leave you to it. Don't worry about the coffee, it's on me.

PETER

Thanks.

JIM

(turning to leave)

So...no one else is coming then?

PETER

Right. Sorry. I just really needed this room.

JIM

(mumbles as he exits)

Damn, that woman sure did break him.

PETER

(slips the menu out of its clear casing, takes a pen from his jacket pocket, stares at the picture of the sailboat for 30 seconds, then writes in the margins of the menu. He speaks aloud each word that he writes.)

To those left behind. I must confess. This letter contains no comfort, no closure. I die a bitter man. Pitiful, Hell bound. Mind tortured flesh, physical. Cocaine tortured mind, logical. Poetic, right? They tell you one thing in those damn, psychiatric hospitals, that when you finally blow your brains out, your wife must identify what's left. She never recovers. So, for you dear, I shot myself in the heart. You're welcome. My love, not my addiction. They say rats in a lonely cage always return to coke laced bottles, but rats contained in cages with slides and sex only try the drug once. Live a life of fresh water, holy water. It's a question of hope. Not that God can't save me, I simply don't believe He should. Because somewhere the spirit of that whore wishes for my body. Lucia, darling, jewel of my infidelity, a shot to the heart. It's a good way to go, right? Ha. And to my son, an innocent baby, listen. A dead dad is better than one who pretends to be. Trust me. We are filthy rags, Humanity. It's not the drugs, this is me. Never forgive me for this great act of evil. And for you still looking for something good, redeeming. I quote Thomas. "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Unquote. Bullshit.

(folds the menu and places it into his back pocket as the stage darkens)

(END OF SCENE)

# ERIN DOCKERY

## ACT I

### Scene 2

SETTING: We are in the basement of AUGUST'S house. Cement floors. Limited lighting. A photograph of a sailboat illuminated by a sunset hangs on the wall. The same wooden table from Scene 1 stands in the middle of the room with two metal stools. A rat cage sits in the middle of the table.

AT RISE: STORMI walks into the room followed by AUGUST. They sit on the stools and stare into the rat cage.

Could've been worse. AUGUST

How? STORMI

He didn't explode? Fuck. AUGUST

Are you sure he's dead? STORMI

Touch him. AUGUST

No. STORMI

AUGUST  
(reaches into the cage and pokes the rat)  
He's dead. Living things aren't that cold. Well, maybe except for Mr. Green. Icy bastard.

STORMI  
Whatever, be serious. What should we do?

AUGUST  
(taking a garbage bag out from underneath the table)  
Put him in this bag for now.

STORMI  
I think we should bury him.

ERIN DOCKERY

AUGUST

Right. Dig through four feet of snow, then dig another foot into the frozen ground. Good plan.

STORMI

Fine. But I'm not throwing it into the trash.

AUGUST

(opens the cage, puts the rat into the bag, ties the bag, and puts it between them)  
Deader than a door nail.

STORMI

Yea, but he was alive.

AUGUST

Hey, this is not my fault.

STORMI

Your idea. Your fault.

AUGUST

You didn't stop me. Hell, you helped.

STORMI

Because *you* said it would help him. This whole thing was stupid.

AUGUST

It was a good idea.

STORMI

Really? What did you think would happen? That some science journal would publish your *great* experiment?

AUGUST

Why not? It was a really good idea.

STORMI

Attention ladies and gentlemen of the science community. Two high school boys made a world shattering, scientific breakthrough. They rescued a rat from the squalor of a pet store cage, lovingly named him Newton, and fed him weed for a solid week. By the second day, Newton showed remarkable improvement in mental and physical health and completed an obstacle course in eight seconds! A world record! But wait, there's more! He's dead.

AUGUST

OK. Enough, I get it. Maybe I didn't think this all the way through.

## ERIN DOCKERY

STORMI

Exactly.

AUGUST

I never meant to hurt him. Medical marijuana helps a lot of people. I just feel so bad for all those animals at *Pete's Pets*. Their cages are filthy and no one cares about them. At least someone loved Newton.

STORMI

August, face it. We killed him.

AUGUST

Fine. You're right. I always told you I was gonna turn into my father.

STORMI

Damn it August. Don't start that. I'm sorry, OK? You were joking about it too. Be happy like that picture of the sailboat.

(points to the picture)

AUGUST

That picture was photoshopped. And it's fine. I'm just saying there seems to be a history of prematurely ending lives in my family. He left without a goodbye, not that I would remember anyway. My mom swears there wasn't a note. Just a dead man on a table.

STORMI

You're nothing like your father. We've had this conversation a million times. He's dead, you're alive. He was an evil man, you're not. Besides... this is a rat, not a *human*. All you were trying to do was give the rat a better life. Don't bring him into this.

AUGUST

Right. I'll just drain my blood of all his DNA. Hell, why don't I do it now. Hand me that knife.

STORMI

Stop it, August. Don't be like that. We made a mistake. OK. We were just trying to help.

AUGUST

Yea. Maybe my intentions were good, but I still bought weed and fed it to a rat. And the worst part was... I thought it was a good idea! Fucking idiot. I experimented on a living thing. I killed Newton!

STORMI

Hey on the bright side, it's kinda funny. We killed a rat with weed.

AUGUST

Not funny. I'm a horrible person. Just like my father.

## ERIN DOCKERY

STORMI

August! You're not your father. You didn't leave a young mother and baby to starve. You're a good person. You care about people.

AUGUST

Stop with the pep talk, Stormi. I have a shrink for that.

STORMI

Sorry, I just don't like to see you so down on yourself. Hey, maybe we should smoke some of the *rat's food*. It might make you feel better.

AUGUST

Shut up. That stuff just killed Newton. I bet Tim sold us a bad batch, asshole. Let's just get rid of the rat and pretend this never happened.

STORMI

(hits AUGUST gently)

Wait... You know that poem Mrs. Lynn gave us for homework?

AUGUST

The one about the good night something. Why are you bringing that up now? This is not exactly an ideal time to talk about homework. Exhibit A: the dead rat on the table.

STORMI

(pulls the poem out of his back pocket)

Whatever. Listen.

AUGUST

Shit. This day can't get weirder. You have a D in English. Now you're walking around with poems in your back pocket?

STORMI

Whatever... I brought the poem over, because I was hoping you could explain it. You know, so I don't fail another quiz. But I think Newton helped me figure it out.

AUGUST

Great. A dead rat helped you solve the mystery of life. Keep talkin'

STORMI

OK. The first stanza says,

"Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

ERIN DOCKERY

AUGUST

So?

STORMI

So, maybe the good night is Heaven. And we have to rage and fight against evil before "the dying of the light" which is death. See? That's what we were *trying* to do. Make life better for others before we die. Get it?

AUGUST

*Deep.* But it doesn't matter. The rat's dead. We killed Newton. Now that's tragic.

STORMI

"And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

Your father's on a sad height, but you must rage against "dying of the light." And how do you do that? By trying to make someone's life better. Like the rat's. It makes perfect sense.

AUGUST

We can stop talking about my father now, and I bet you got that off Wikipedia. Even a dead rat can't give you that much inspiration. I've read that poem a thousand times. Thomas was writing about his dying father, but it's stupid because it's not really about his father at all.

STORMI

"Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

AUGUST

Bullshit.

(tosses rat into the trash)

(END OF SCENE)

# MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

---

## *On Different Sides of the Mountain*

### Cast of Characters

- Female: Aged 21-23, Black leggings and black shirt.
- Male A: Aged 21-23, White tee shirt and black Jeans.
- Male B: Aged 30-35, White Button up and black pants.

### Scene

Male A in his Bedroom.  
Male B in a Coffee shop.

### Time

The Present.

### ACT I

#### Scene 1

- SETTING: The left side of the stage has a nightstand, chair, book, and a bed (no sheets). The Right side of the stage has a small table, two chairs, a newspaper, and two coffee mugs. One chair faces the audience, while the other chair's back is against the audience. There is at least 3 feet between the two sets.
- AT RISE: The lights come up. Male A enters from the back of the audience, walks onto the left side of the stage, and sits on the bed. (The men need to seem like they are like the audience, so walking up from the back will remind the audience that these actors could be them.) Male A slouches as he looks up, with no expression, creating direct eye contact with the audience. After the actor is settled, Male B walks through the audience to the left side of the stage, and sits on the chair that is faced frontward towards the audience. The actor sits straight up as he looks up, with no expression, creating direct eye contact with the audience. A chime is heard, projecting on the stage and in the audience.

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

The actors react to it by putting them into “live mode” (Male A reads a book, Male B drinks his coffee and reads the newspaper, looking at his watch on occasion). “Hey I’m coming in” is heard from the back of the audience. After that is said, the Female runs up from the audience to the left side of the stage.

Female

Hi! I let myself in.

(Female walks towards Male A and goes in for a kiss. Male A rejects.)

Ohhkay

(She sits down on bed next to him)

(High energy, but not friendly)

What’s up?

Male A

(Not looking at her)

Why are you here?

Female

What?

Male A

Why are you here?

Female

Cause I wanted to see you?

Male A

(Gets up, sets book down on the bed and walks over and faces the wall.)

Well I don’t want to see you. I told you I was done.

Female

Are we really going into this again, I thought this little fight was over.

Male A

It is over.

Female

Okay...? So let’s not talk about it then.

Male A

Well we’re not talking about it, because we’re not talking anymore. And since we’re not talking, there is no reason for you to be here. (Pause) And just to confirm, what we had would not be classified as a fight.

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Female

How was it not a fight?

Male A

You-

Female

It was a fight, what we had was a fight, couples have fights.

Male A

You burnt me with your fucking cigarette! You.. fucking burnt me. Normal people don't do that. Girlfriends don't do that. (Pause) And these couples you're referring to, things like that don't happen. When they "fight" there is an end, a resolution. Not a-

Female

And I feel terrible about it.

(Pause)

I said I was sorry already.

(Male A grabs her shoulder, lifts her up, and moves her to the door)

(Female trying to turn around)

Get your hands off of me! Actually you know what, let me remind you, you left me with no ride home.

Male A

(Lets Female go)

Wait a second. You expected me to drive your drunk ass home last night?

Female

Well did you want me to risk my life and drive home with my non existent car?

(The chime is heard- Male A and Male B freeze while Female makes way towards the seat on the right side of the stage - the men become unfrozen when she enters the other half of the stage.)

(Male A remains in the same area as he was when Female left, although he is still in "live mode").

Female

Hi. Sorry I'm late,

(Male B gets up and goes to push F's chair in after she sits, but she does it herself before he can do it)

the bus broke down or some-

(Points at the cup that is in front of her seat)

what did you get me?

Male B

I told you I would pick you up.

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Female

(Drinks from the cup in front of her seat)

Is this Chai Tea?

Male B

Yeah, the lady said it's what all the college kids drink.

Female

Uh, well that's not for me.

Male B

Do you not like it? Here, drink my coffee. I know you don't like cream, but it's a strong brew anyway so you can't really taste it.

Female

Are you sure? I can just get one.

Male B

No it's fine. I don't really want it.

Female

Okay. Thanks.

Male B

What was wrong with the bus?

Female

I don't know. We, like, stopped and the driver got out and checked it or did something. I don't know.

Male B

Well I'm sorry. I'm at the firm during the day, so just let me pick you up next time. It's right on the way out of town.

Female

Well wouldn't that defeat the point?

Male B

Not if we were-

Female

Where would you even pick me up?

Male B

I don't kn-

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Female

I mean, I guess you can pick me up at my boyfriends house, and you know what, we should stop by your house and talk to your-

Male B

I'm just saying you could walk down the fucking street or something.

Female

Walk down the street? I shouldn't have to walk down the street to get in a car with you.

(The chime is heard- Male A and Male B freeze while Female makes way towards the the left side of the stage - the men become unfrozen when she enters the other half of the stage.)

Female

I mean, did you expect me to walk or something?

Female (Simultaneously)

You know I don't have a car or a license or any friends so I don't understand how-

Male A (Simultaneously)

He was your friend.

Female

Wait what did you just say?

Male A

Nothing.

Female

No. what did you just say. Because if you're going to bring it up again-

Male A

It never went away. You fuc-

Female

Yeah I know, I fucked up. I'm sorry, okay. You know how sorry I am.

Male A

Do you ever notice how often you say you're sorry?

Female

It's because you always bring up stuff from the past and use it against me. Like, what am I supposed to say?

Male A

I don't know know, Kid. Maybe try expanding your vocabulary.

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Female

Can you stop! This isn't a joke. If we ever want to get pass this and move on we need to have a *Serious* conversation about it. You need to start acting like an adult.

Male A

There is no need to have a conversation about it anymore because we're done.

Female

STOP SAYING THAT!

Male A

WE ARE DONE. GET IT THROUGH YOUR DERANGED HEAD.

Female

I love you-

Male A

All you do is treat me like shit then say sorry and every time I forgive you. I can't. I can only take so much.

Female

How do I treat you like shit? You are everything to me.

Male A

How can you say that? How can you say you love me but then go and mess around with-

Female

It was a mistake. It didn't mean anything.

Male A

Yet you are still seeing him aren't you.

Female

What?

Male A

I know you're still with him.

Female

What are you talking about? I'm not-

Male A

Stop lying to me. Don't you think I deserve the truth?

Female

How long have you been holding-

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Male A

Are you still seeing him?  
(Female just looks at him)  
Oh my God.. you are, oh-

Female

We don't do anything, we just talk. He just wants to talk-

Male A

FUCK YOU! Not only are you still seeing him, you're sitting here lying to my face when I know the truth.

(Pause)

I can't believe I turned into that tragic boyfriend.

Female

You're not-

Male A

I forgave you after you cheated on me, and I know you are still seeing him, but for some reason you have this fucked up control over me that makes me believe that you're going to change and and that under all this shit you actually care about me. Like Fuck, I still want to marry you and have a life with you.

Female

I want to marry you too. We *are* going to get married, we just need to start talking about stuff and-

Male A

You know that isn't true. As much as you and I want this to last, you know it can't. We'd ruin each other and ourselves trying to make this something it will never be. I want to love you and I want to be with you but-

Female

I just don't understand why we can't be together if you want me and I want you.

Male A

You say that. You keep saying stuff like that, but when are you going to start acting like that? When are you going to turn all those bullshit words into actions? I can't keep waiting for you to start treating me right. I won't let myself wait any longer.

(The chime is heard- Male A and Male B freeze while Female makes way towards the right side of the stage - the men become unfrozen when she enters the other half of the stage.)

Female

I won't walk down the street to get picked up.

MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Male B

Okay, Fine. It was a stupid thing to say. I shouldn't said have anything.

Female

This is not okay. What we're doing is not okay.

Male B

Why is it not okay? We are-

Female

We have to meet at a coffee shop a town down because you're so afraid that your damn wife will see us.

Male B

But you love me and I love you. There is nothing wrong doing what we're doing if that is what we both want.

Female

You're fucking crazy.

Male B

What?

Female

Did you just hear what you said?

Male B

Yes. And I believe that because when you love and want somebody-

Female

You don't love me.

Male B

What are you talking about? I just told you I love you.

Female

You love the idea of me. The idea of what you always wanted. This isn't love, we aren't in love, you're just infatuated with it all.

Male B

You can talk for yourself, but please don't sit there and try to tell me what I love or don't love. That's my choice.

Female

If you love me so much why haven't you left her? Huh? Why haven't you left her?

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Male B

Don't bring her into this.

Female

She is your wife! She isn't just something you can pretend doesn't exist whenever inconvenient.

Male B

(Stands up)

LEAVE HER OUT OF THIS!

Female

Sit down. Jesus, we're in a coffee shop and you're standing up and screaming.

Male B

This is so fucking tragic. This whole little story we have going on. Always meeting up with you to talk about what we have and how we feel when, in reality, all this is for you to string me along and find new excuses on why we can't be together, you just can't admit how much you love and miss me.

Female

I have a boyfriend who I'm in love with.

Male B

Then why do you keep calling me? If you love him so much, why do you keep asking to meet?

Female

Because you keep telling me you want to be with me and I want you to know that we can't be together. I want to be honest. You deserve honesty.

Male B

Yet you're lying right now, because it doesn't take 5 times to end something. It takes one time and you're done. All you have to do is look at me and say you're done.

Female

It isn't that simple. Things are never that simple.

Male B

Things like this should be. You either love me and want to be with me or you don't.

Female

You didn't want things to be like that in the past.

## MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Male B

What?

Female

Because you always said you were done, but then you'd come right back.

Male B

What are you talking about?

Female

You know exactly what I'm talking about.

Male B

No I don't.

Female

In college it took you 15, 20 times to be done with me.

Male B

That was college. We are adults now, and just because you look like you're still 21 doesn't mean you can act like it.

Female

Why does that change things?

Male B

Because we didn't know how to take care of ourselves then. We would just yell and get aggressive over everything. I mean you got upset because I told you to button up the top button of your shirt and you burned me with a cigarette.

Female

You called me a slut-

Male B

I did and that is why I'm saying it's different now. We fought over everything and let foolish things ruin our relationship. I never wanted to let go, because everything we fought about wasn't worth fighting about. What we're having a conversation about now is worth making the choice.

Female

You called me a slut because you were nervous I was going to cheat on you again. You loved me so much that you tried to move past it, but in the back of your head it killed you. Nothing has changed. Except we're fifteen years older and instead of you trying to be in love with me even though there is someone else, I'm the one doing that while trying to look past the fact you have a wife. We might not be kids, but we're sure as hell acting like ones.

MADISON CLARK-BRUNO

Male B

I should have never reached out to you.

Female

And I shouldn't have replied.

Male B

(Pause)

In college the only thing I knew I wanted was you, and it only took running into you once to remember that.

Female

We had something, those feeling were real. The moment I heard your voice it was like everything I felt for you came back. But again all I do now is think about the ways we can make this work.

Male B

So what now.

Female

We loved each other so much but it wasn't just wrong timing, it will always be wrong. I'm tired of waiting for things to get easier, because it's never going to be easy. I won't let myself wait any longer.

(They sit in silence. Female walks off the stage, and back through the audience. The men both turn and face the audience, staring blankly, as the the lights fade to BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

# TARYN WASHBURN

---

## *Ten Miles Behind*

### Cast of Characters

- Tom Beeman: A young hippie, TOM is an avid backpacker and has stopped for the night to eat and set up camp. Approx. 23 years old. Great appreciator of nature.
- Ellie Greene: Newlywed wife of SCOTT, frustrated with SCOTT's seeming camping incompetence on their honeymoon (but she isn't the best camper, either); obsessively spins wedding ring; Early 30s
- Scott Greene: Newlywed husband of ELLIE, terrible camper but loves his wife, slow to grow frustrated but slowly does so throughout the play; Early 30s

### Scene

A backpacking trail with a community fire pit SL. Empty space SR w/ rock where SCOTT and ELLIE attempt to set up their tent. There are tree stumps on one side of the fire for single sitting and a log on the other side to sit together. SR there is a small stream weaving out from the trees, spilling over edge of proscenium in a waterfall. After fire is started and time goes on, all light comes from the fire. The floor resembles a forest; there is a curved back wall lining the proscenium, darkly painted, and in front of the curve is an actual forest from and to which characters enter and exit. Actors dissolve into the forest when exiting.

### Time

Starting late afternoon/dusk and heading into night; the present.

### ACT 1

#### Scene 1

SETTING: We are in a Midwestern forest clearing near dusk. Back wall and forest is dark, but frontlit with vibrant autumn colors. The floor is scattered with leaves and moss; possibly even a layer of trampled dirt to give the true appearance of a forest floor. SL, back against the trees, is a trail map with a camp site sign.

## TARYN WASHBURN

AT RISE:

Lights fade in to reveal late afternoon light; stage is empty; after a few moments, we hear crunching in the trees and TOM appears RC in a do-rag, flannel, and distressed jeans. He has a fiber bar in his hand and is munching happily, holding his backpack with his free hand. He looks around and up at the sunlight peacefully and saunters over to the trail map, leaning in close as he munches and studies. After a moment he takes a glance at his watch and nods, turning around and sauntering back to the center of the clearing, looking around again. He catches sight of the fire pit and heads over, happy that it's available. He looks around some more for some wood to burn, but can't find any, so he unstraps his backpack, sets it by the fire pit, and rummages around inside for a moment before pulling out a hatchet and a small ziplock of joints. Looking it over, he nods and disappears back into the trees. We hear crunching and some distant thwacking, but nothing too distracting. Not long after, from a different direction, we soon hear loud crunching and huffing and puffing until finally SCOTT and ELLIE burst into the clearing, obviously flustered and exhausted.

ELLIE

I thought you said you knew where we were going!

(She sloughs off her backpack and collapses onto one of the rocks SR, flopping onto her back and staring up at the sky; after a moment she fumbles for her backpack and pulls out a canteen and begins chugging)

SCOTT

I'm sorry, I must've been turned around when I looked at the last trail map.

(He catches sight of the trail sign and takes his backpack off as well. He has already started to head toward the sign even before ELLIE speaks)

ELLIE

Where even *are* we?

SCOTT

Hold on, I think I know.

(He's studying the map, mumbling about campsites and miles)

ELLIE

That's what you said earlier.

(Doesn't move)

TARYN WASHBURN

SCOTT

No, I know where we are. We're here.  
(He points. ELLIE sighs, gets up, and goes over)

ELLIE

That's ten miles behind where we're supposed to be, and six miles from any town.

SCOTT

But at least we're back on the right trail-

ELLIE

Which we would have been anyway if you had listened to me when I said we should go left.

SCOTT

(Resigned)  
I know. I'm sorry. I had the trail map turned around, and I should have listened.

ELLIE

Well, we can't go any further tonight. We might as well try to set up camp.  
(She begins taking off her wedding band and slipping it on different fingers)

SCOTT

Why do you keep doing that? You're gonna lose it.

ELLIE

No, I am not. It just doesn't quite fit yet.

(SCOTT grunts and turns to look around clearing for first time. Notices backpack)

SCOTT

Hey, it looks like someone else was here.

(They go to take a look at it, but not wanting to touch it, they just kind of stand and stare at it dumbly)

ELLIE

I wonder where they went.

SCOTT

I don't know. Do you think it's been here for a long time?

ELLIE

I can't tell.

SCOTT

But who would just *leave* their backpack?

TARYN WASHBURN

ELLIE

Maybe they'll be back?

(Looks helplessly at SCOTT and then back at the backpack.)

SCOTT

I don't know.

(Sighs and drops the subject; turning away from backpack)

We should get something to eat.

ELLIE

We should start a fire then.

(They turn and stare equally as dumbly at the fire pit)

SCOTT

I forgot a hatchet-

ELLIE

I know.

(Pause)

Maybe there's one in the backpack?

SCOTT

(Looks at backpack)

I don't think we should -

ELLIE

Then what *should* we do, Scott? All we have is canned food, and I am *not* eating cold beans after the day I've had!

SCOTT

Just... let's go hike around and look for kindling for a while. I don't want to go through someone's backpack and have them come back to find us.

(Turns to woods)

ELLIE

We've been hiking all day! I'm exhausted and the last thing I want to do is traipse back off into the woods just to get lost again-

SCOTT

And you think I want to, Ellie? Jesus Christ, the last thing I need to do is go out and have to look for firewood while you follow me and complain -

(On cue "firewood" TOM appears back SR, his arms full of firewood and a ziplock of freshly picked berries in his hand. He's smoking a joint.)

TARYN WASHBURN

TOM

Hey! You guys stayin' the night here too?

(He heads over to the fire pit as SCOTT and ELLIE just stare at him blankly, realizing that he has brought the firewood they need but also shocked by the joint. He dumps the firewood neatly next to the sitting stumps and pulls his hatchet out of his belt loop and drops it next to his backpack.)

ELLIE

(Whispering to SCOTT)

I told you he had one.

(SCOTT just gives her a look and then turns back TOM)

SCOTT

Uh, yeah. Name's Scott Greene, and this is my wife, Ellie.

(Shakes hands)

TOM

Tom. Nice to meet you.

(He pulls out the ziplock and begins munching as he turns around to look around clearing again, extreme reverence for this beautiful afternoon in his eyes. After a moment he notices SCOTT and ELLIE watching him.)

Found these about fifteen minutes down the trail. Would you like some?

(Holds out bag)

ELLIE and SCOTT

Oh, no no, thank you.

SCOTT

So, uh, Tom - what brings you out here?

TOM

No real reason, I suppose. Usually come out this way with a few friends every fall to see the colors change, but they couldn't make it this year so I decided to do the trail alone.

(Sits on a log and continues munching)

And I must say, they're missing out. The trees this year, man-

ELLIE

Oh, so you're experienced!

(ELLIE scampers over and sits across from him.)

That's fantastic!

TOM

Well, it's just a hobby, you know, but you've got to stick with it if you want to stay in shape, and the trails around here are just so *beautiful* -

## TARYN WASHBURN

ELLIE

Oh I'm sure, I'm sure. Scott, dear, why don't you get the tent set up while Tom and I get the fire started so we can all eat together?

(She is a completely different person; even her voice has become higher and more feminine; She continues to fidget with her ring)

(SCOTT blinks at her for a moment, sighs, and retires to hauling the backpacks over SR).

(TOM gives SCOTT a smile as SCOTT passes him, and then gives the clearing one last happy once-over. Hand in bag of berries, still munching)

TOM

So, what brings you two out here?

(SCOTT drops the bags heavily by the rock and begins rummaging for the tent)

ELLIE

(Total attention whore)

Well, if you must know, Scott and I are on our honeymoon.

(She stretches out her left arm and gives her wedding band a loving glance)

TOM

(Raising his eyebrows)

Oh really?

ELLIE

(Unprompted, but just gushing to tell the story)

Yes, well, you know how couples go on these extravagant honeymoons, and they live the best lives they'll ever have, and then they have to spend the rest of their marriage trying to live up to it! Scott and I believe that if we go on a honeymoon that puts us at our lowest, we'll be able to stick together through *anything*. We're also in between jobs at the moment, so it's practical to not have to pay for all the hoopla when we can just do this; I found the idea online on this hiker's forum looking for inexpensive honeymoon ideas. All the girls at home think I'm absolutely crazy -

(She lovingly plays with the wedding band)

(SCOTT finally hauls out the tent package, it looks very heavy, and begins unzipping it. Inside, he looks for directions, but there are none, so he returns to rummaging around in the backpack)

(TOM nods)

TARYN WASHBURN

TOM

Not a bad philosophy. Any chance to get out on the trail, this time of year especially, I'd take too, I suppose.

(Takes a pull on the joint and then looks at it)

Last toke, you want it?

(ELLIE looks at the joint with apprehension; SCOTT slows his searching and begins to pay more attention to the conversation)

SCOTT

Sorry, Tom, she doesn't smoke-

ELLIE

(Whipping around to face SCOTT)

Well, maybe I want to try it!

(SCOTT stops, ticked off but unsure what to say, and then goes back to rummaging, more angrily this time. ELLIE turns back to TOM)

What is it like?

TOM

(Chuckles)

Just chill. Great for the longer hauls. Really gets you thinking about the world around you, you know?

(ELLIE glances at SCOTT, who she doesn't realize is still watching her)

ELLIE

Sure, why not? Live a little, right?

(Chuckles nervously and reaches for the joint)

SCOTT

(Jumping up)

Ellie!

ELLIE

(Defensively)

What?

SCOTT

(Pause; then resigns)

Did you pack the directions for the tent?

ELLIE

No, I thought you did.

## TARYN WASHBURN

SCOTT

(Looks back down at contents of both backpacks strewn across grass)

Fuck.

(Sighs)

I knew we should have gotten the Forest Plan for the week. Then we could have just looked up the directions online with the data -

TOM

(Pulling out cell phone and checking it)

Wait, you guys don't have service?

ELLIE

Well, we were going to get the long range plan for the week, but we decided it wasn't worth the cost. After all, why would we need our phones? We're camping.

TOM

I mean, but if something happens and you need help-?

(Realizing that they're just not getting it)

(Shakes his head and lets the subject drop)

Look, I can help if you if you want. I've put up a few tents in my day; could probably figure it out-

ELLIE

(Rushing)

No, no, thank you, Tom, but Scott can handle it,

(Turns to SCOTT; through clenched teeth)

can't you, honey?

(SCOTT grunts and goes back to tent)

(Pause)

(Having completely forgotten about the joint; TOM has already finished it anyway)

Sol Let's get a fire started!

TOM

Ah - sure. So what do you all do?

(TOM gets up and starts kicking ashes in fire pit to lay them out flat; nudges some of the stones around the edge back in place; then starts stacking kindling Lincoln-log style. ELLIE goes to her backpack, grabs a shitty cigarette lighter as if to help, and then watches dumbly)

ELLIE

Well, like I said, we're both in between jobs at the moment. Scott's working to transfer to the Chicago branch of his old firm, and I'm hoping to find a job somewhere in the city.

TOM

So you're moving?

TARYN WASHBURN

ELLIE

Yeah, we have our eyes on a few apartments. They're just so *expensive*.  
(Fidgets with wedding band)

TOM

Well, I wouldn't worry. Stuff like that usually works itself out. Hey, can you go grab the bag of dryer lint in the outside zipper of my backpack?

ELLIE

Yeah.  
(Jumping to action)  
Here.  
(Goes back to playing with wedding band)

TOM

(Arranging dryer lint near bottom of kindling tower)  
Thanks.

(Starts stacking large wood around kindling)  
Well, good luck with that. I hope you find something you like. I've heard the lights are beautiful in Chicago, but I'm not much of a city guy.

ELLIE

Thanks. We've always been from the city; it's just kind of home for us. So what do you do?  
  
(SCOTT has the tent half up by now, but often gets tangled in it and is slapping structure rods around and it's just a disaster and a spectacle)

TOM

I work odd jobs around the towns I hike; if I'm on a trail and stop at a town that I really like, sometimes I'll just relocate there. Landscaping, mostly. I'm a sucker for big trees and waterfalls.

ELLIE

Wow, that's crazy. There must be a big risk there.

TOM

(Shrugs)  
Naah. If there's no work in a town, I just keep moving.  
(Rummages in backpack, pulls out matches, and strikes one. Lights the lint underneath wood and it all goes up immediately.)  
I'm really just in it for the scenery.

(ELLIE glances down at her small lighter and then slides it into her pocket so TOM doesn't see.)

TOM

TARYN WASHBURN

(Stands up)

Well, while we let that heat up, I'm gonna get my tent all set.

(Grabs small bundle of plastic out of backpack and heads over in SCOTT's direction; looking around at clearing again, extreme reverence)

ELLIE

Alright, I'll get dinner started, I guess.

(She also goes over to the backpacks and pulls out two cans of beans. TOM, next to her, stops and looks at them.)

TOM

Just beans?

ELLIE

(Pausing)

Isn't... isn't that normal?

TOM

Well, usually you don't head out with canned goods at all. They're heavy and not worth the weight.

(ELLIE and SCOTT stop to just look at the beans, SCOTT out of breath and SR of the collapsing tent)

ELLIE

(Coming up with an excuse)

Well... we just love our beans and couldn't leave them behind!

(Scampers back over to fire before TOM can ask any more questions; realizes she needs a can opener, goes back and rummages through backpacks, can't find one, so sneakily trying to go through TOM's backpack after he pulls out his tent pack. Very sneaky, very embarrassed; eventually finds something she can use and goes about opening the cans and placing them in the fire)

TOM

How are you doing, man? Gorgeous place to stop, isn't it?

(Still looking around the clearing; unzips tent pack and carefully pulls out bundled up tent)

SCOTT

(Panting, sweaty, flustered)

(Whispers)

I need your help man. I can't get this tent up.

TARYN WASHBURN

TOM

(Smiling)

Sure man, just give me a second.

(He pulls a string tied around the tent bundle and kind of throws it, and it pops all the way up into a full tent in the blink of an eye.)

Popper shelters, man.

(Chuckles)

SCOTT

(Just staring at this beautiful popper tent)

I didn't know those existed.

TOM

They're pretty new, and they are the best thing *ever*. And they take up less space, so if you're in one place for a while they don't kill as much grass. Leaves everything looking great for the next hikers who come through!

(Sweeps arm across clearing; still looking it over lovingly)

SCOTT

(Nodding uncertainly)

Well, they sure seem handy.

TOM

Oh, you bet.

(Stops looking at pop up and turns to SCOTT)

So, whaddowe got here?

(Picks up a pole and starts measuring it against the tent)

SCOTT

I have no idea. I left the directions at home, and it's been years since I've set up a tent-

TOM

Well, your first problem is that this pole goes through the top loop, not the one you have. That one's too short - that's why it's so low.

SCOTT

(Just watching sadly as TOM pulls the pole out of the tent and it collapses back to the ground)

Oh.

TOM

Here we go.

(Slides long pole easily through top notches and then takes small pole and slips it around the outside. Tent is assembled. On the other side of the stage, ELLIE has been struggling with the cans and removing them from the fire, and in the process has

TARYN WASHBURN

knocked a log over and started some grass on fire. She's freaking out and trying to hide it and put it out, but she just makes it worse.)

That's a divorce tent if I've ever seen one!

(TOM laughs)

SCOTT

(Offended)

What?

TOM

(Realizing his mistake)

Oh, it's just a saying out here. Green couples go out with these tiny tents because they're lighter, and they don't realize how gross they'll be getting over the course of the next few days, and a cramped, damp, cold tent only makes it worse. It's only really bad if it's raining.

(Chuckles awkwardly)

It's all just part of the experience of being in nature, if you ask me!

SCOTT

Oh.

(ELLIE tries to put the log back on the fire, but it just rolls farther away and starts a shrub up in a blaze of flame)

SCOTT

Ellie!

(Runs over to fire)

ELLIE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I tried to put it out -

TOM

Look out!

(Has grabbed two canteens and is dumping them over the fire; it does not go out)

SCOTT

I'll get more!

(Grabs canteens and runs to water to fill them. Suddenly, behind him, the blaze has whooshed up into a tree and is taller than any of the characters on stage)

(ELLIE screams and runs away; kind of grabs another canteen in the process and goes to fill it)

TOM

I got it!

(Runs back SR and grabs the GREENES' open tent and drags it to river, pushes it under, fills it with water, and then lugs it back to dump it on fire. Fire goes out, and

## TARYN WASHBURN

all three stand around panting. TOM throws down tent on its side and looks testily at the GREENEs, then trudges over to his backpack, pulls out a joint, and lights it. He sits down on the rock CS and rubs his face, his chill totally gone)

ELLIE

I'm sorry, I -

(Goes to say more, but looks down to play with wedding band and realizes it's gone)

My ring!

SCOTT

What?

ELLIE

My ring! It's gone! I must have dropped it!

(Grabs SCOTT and drags him over to the river; they begin sloshing around in the water)

We have to find it!

(They slosh wildly for a moment; TOM doesn't move, but instead takes another pull on the joint and shakes his head. He looks around the clearing, and his eye catches on something in the grass. He lazily stands up, taking his sweet old time as the couple gets soaking wet, and he leans down and picks up a ring. He takes a breath, his eyebrow kind of twitches as he looks at it, then he turns to the couple in the river)

TOM

(Quietly)

Hey, guys.

(They don't respond; suddenly at full volume)

Hey!

(SCOTT and ELLIE freeze)

TOM

I've got your damn ring.

(He trudges over and slaps it down in ELLIE's weakly outstretched hand)

And might I suggest you guys try some easier trails upstate before coming back this way.

(He turns away and takes a pull on the joint. He heads for his backpack and kind of shakes it as he picks it up; doesn't realize a joint falls out of his pot bag)

Goodnight.

(Heads to tent and disappears inside; we see a lantern come on inside the tent and TOM's silhouette as he's setting up his sleeping bag and stuff; eventually the lantern goes out and the tent goes dark along with the rest of the stage)

## TARYN WASHBURN

(SCOTT, after a long pause, holds out his hand to ELLIE, and helps her out of the river. They stand on the grass for a moment, and then ELLIE looks over at the tent by the scorched grass, takes a few steps toward it so they are CS, and sighs)

ELLIE

Well, we can't stay in the tent tonight. It's soaked.

(Gives wedding ring one last turn and then drops her hand to her side in a somewhat passively frustrated gesture; looks at SCOTT for first time)

SCOTT

No, I guess not.

ELLIE

We could sleep on the grass. It's warm enough out.

(SCOTT nods)

(ELLIE sighs)

ELLIE

I'm sorry, Scott. This is my fault. I thought it would be easier than it was, and I expected you to do everything once we actually got out here. From here on out, I'll do my part.

SCOTT

(Nods softly and shrugs)

No, it's me too. We didn't do the research we should have, and I didn't know what we were getting into, either.

ELLIE

(Looking around clearing)

I mean, it's a beautiful spot. The fire pit should be dry by morning, but the tent will probably still need to dry before we pack it up. We could stay here for the day tomorrow to make sure it doesn't get musty.

SCOTT

(Somewhat timidly)

You don't mind being behind schedule?

ELLIE

(Shrugging)

I guess not. I mean, what rush are we in, after all? We'll get to a town on the next leg of the trip, and we can pick up some supplies there so we're better prepared. We've got nowhere else to be. Might as well admire it while we're here.

TARYN WASHBURN

SCOTT

(Nods and reaches out)

Sounds great.

(They kiss; after stepping back, SCOTT leans down and picks up the joint that fell out of TOM's backpack and holds it out; he smiles and raises an eyebrow)

Wanna smoke it?

ELLIE

(Smiling)

What better way to spend an evening under the stars?

(She hands the lighter that is still in her pocket to SCOTT and then turns and pulls the sleeping bags out of their packs. SCOTT helps her spread them out CS, and they crawl in and curl up together, gazing up at the sky. After a moment of shifting and getting comfortable with intermittent puffs of smoke, we hear ELLIE sigh)

The sky really is beautiful, isn't it?

(TOM's lantern goes out, and so do the rest of the stage lights; scene fades to black and only the sound of the stream is left)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

