

TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE LONELY...

WALTER - a quiet man; a single father

ANNA - Walter's 7-year-old daughter

CHRISSY - a grocery store cashier; a kind woman

GARRISON - an environmental lobbyist

NATE - an editor

MAX - a writer

TESSA - a writing student; a stage manager

MICHAEL - an *invisible* man

ARIEL - a hugger

CHORUS:

- **NARRATOR** (break this up among chorus actors as needed)
- **SCHOOL KID(S)**
- **NED** - a clerk at the DMV
- **ADULT ANNA**
- **CUSTOMER(S)** at the grocery store
- **THERAPIST** - Walter's therapist
- **CARL** - Walter's neighbor
- **A LITTLE BOY** at the DMV
- **LARA** - a girl from Walter's childhood
- **A WOMAN** at the DMV
- **A SERVER**
- **NIGERIAN SPAMMER**
- **MISS TIPTON** - Walter's elementary school teacher
- **MEGAN JONES** - Walter's manager
- **LOLA** - Walter's sister
- **JACK** - a young house manager

WALTER AND ANNA - THE CRYING

Lights up on WALTER staring at himself in the bathroom mirror. He stands motionless, lifeless, holding a hairbrush. HE sighs. Another moment passes.

NARRATOR

Walter was a man of science. He knew how to repair space modules and calculate the speeds of solar winds. But terrestrial conundrums were alien to him. Still, he believed that if he could learn the reasons for crying he might eventually find a moment of actual peace. But today was not that day.

ANNA walks huffily into the bathroom with her hair half-done. SHE yanks the hairbrush away from WALTER and hands him a different hairbrush. WALTER takes a deep breath and begins again. ANNA scowls at WALTER in the mirror, wincing in pain as he tries to brush her hair.

ANNA

You don't do it right, what are you doing?!

WALTER

I--

ANNA pushes his hands away, hastily fixes it herself and then stomps away, leaving WALTER once again face to face with his own reflection.

NARRATOR

Walter noticed that the powder room mirror was only a fraction larger than the ones on the new telescope, except this one was dusty and everyone knows there's no dust in space.

ANNA stomps through the living with her backpack and out the door without saying goodbye.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He heard the front door slam.

DOOR SLAM.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Then quiet. And then a most *extraordinary* idea. That one day a woman would see him. And not cry. Or maybe only at happy things like babies and puppies. And that she would stay... the staying part was *key*, he thought.

WALTER AND ANNA - THE WAVE

WALTER walks to the window of the living room and watches ANNA join her friends on the corner to wait for the school bus.

NARRATOR

Walter stood at the window of his unfurnished living room and watched his daughter saunter off toward the grouping on the corner. Each day he kept count. Would she turn and wave this time? It depended on her mood, he had deduced. Except that sometimes between the time she bounded down the stairs and reached her crowd of adoring fans on the corner, her mood would somehow miraculously lift.

ANNA is seen laughing and joking with her FRIENDS near the bus stop. We can see she's telling a story about her hair. SHE occasionally motions in the direction of the house.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He chose to accept this as a random occurrence vs. growing indifference and was determined to not take it personally. He knew that she knew that it comforted him when she made a point to look back over her shoulder. She knew he would be standing there because he was always standing there and no matter the importance of other things or distractions that might threaten this ritual, until the bus rolled out of site, he would still be standing there because he never wanted her to make the point of looking back only to see him not standing there. It was a strange paradox and the logic tripped him up at times. In order to see her disappointment, he'd have to be standing there to witness it. And if he were standing there to witness it, then the disappointment of him not being there would be a non-issue. And so it was his overly-active imagination about things involving the breaking points of a 7-year-old girl that kept him awake at night.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The thing he knew for sure, was that if one of them were to have a broken heart, it should be him, because -- and not to insult her experience level, definitely not -- when it came to broken hearts, he'd simply had way more practice at it.

During the following, ANNA and her FRIENDS board the school bus. WALTER watches on, hopeful.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

So, he had decided that it didn't even matter if she smiled or stared plainly at him from the corner or even from the bus window: so long as there was *something*, it would be enough. And if, by some measure of good fortune, she were to also wave at him in the process... he would sail all the way through lunch.

The bus arrives. ANNA boards the bus with her friends. The bus departs.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In fact...when he really sat and thought about it... it was *remarkable* how little he would settle for. These days.

GARRISON AND NATE - CLEVELAND CALLING

SETTING

A loft apartment. Southeast DC.

A crash. Sound of broken glass.
Lights up on Garrison and Nate in
their DC loft apartment on the day
of the 2015 SCOTUS decision.
Garrison looks down at the glass
and back up at Nate.

GARRISON

Are you being a little dramatic? It's not like I'm moving to
the North Pole, or Jupiter, or some place that's like, really
fucking far away, like, fucking...

NATE

Africa.

GARRISON

Like Africa. I'm not moving to Africa.

NATE

Why didn't you tell me?

GARRISON

This. Because this.

(Beat.)

They do important work, OK? And it's... it's a lot to
process, I have to keep my emotions out of it.

NATE

How's that working out?

GARRISON

(An obvious lie.)

Good.

NATE

Such control.

NATE begins to sweep up the glass.
GARRISON attempts to help Nate pick
up some of the bigger pieces of
glass.

Leave it.

Silence.

It's cold in here. GARRISON

Yep. NATE

There's something else. GARRISON

Oh, good. NATE

I won't be asking you to come with me. GARRISON

NATE
(Childlike.)
There's glass everywhere...

Did you hear me? GARRISON

No barefoot... NATE

Two weeks. GARRISON

Excellent. NATE

They're lobbying for a big environmental bill in August. GARRISON

Oh? NATE

GARRISON

Yeah. I need to get out there.

NATE

They'll love you.

GARRISON gets a text message.

NATE CONT'D

(Sing-songy "Avon calling.")

Cleveland calling.

GARRISON

It's Jack.

NATE

Where is he?

GARRISON

(Reading the text message.)

He's waiting for us at the steps with Ben and Lisa. They're making up drag queen names for Scalia.

NATE

We should make a new sign for today. Oh I know... Gay Marriage Leads to Gay Divorce. And then our ripped-in-half Fire Island picture, ya know, underneath.

(Beat.)

Get it?

GARRISON

I guess it's a good thing we never got married, then.

NATE

I know, right?

GARRISON

You're such a bitch.

NATE

(Looking at the furniture.)

Hmn. Well, this won't work. You change one thing and it all goes to shit.

GARRISON

It's way too early for this.

NATE

You can't leave your things here. I'll go senile.

GARRISON

Seriously?

NATE

Duh.

GARRISON

Nate...

NATE

The coffee table only works in that one direction, you know this, and the console is a nightmare, there's no decent light on this side of the room.

GARRISON

It's good for the ficus-- Don't. Move. The ficus.

NATE

Oh. I'm moving it.

GARRISON

No, you're not.

NATE

It's going on the porch.

GARRISON

NO. It's not.

NATE

Wait, I'm sorry, do I care what you think?

GARRISON

It'll die on the porch.

NATE

It's dead already! Every time I come home, it's sadder than before. I get stressed out just looking at it.

GARRISON

The ficus is stressed, Nate. You're not stressed; you're just annoyed from sweeping up after it, something I told you I would take care of, but you'd rather do it yourself and complain. And the reason the ficus is stressed is because you KEEP MOVING IT!

NATE

You brought that thing home from Eastern Market, you never water it.

GARRISON

I water it.

NATE

How can that be?

GARRISON

The tree can't breathe, Nate. You hover! Just like you hover over me and everything else that we're about. It's like a slow poison. There's no air left in the room.

NATE

I'm moving it.

GARRISON

Leave it alone.

NATE

It's going on the porch.

GARRISON

No.

NATE

Tell me why not.

GARRISON

You know why not.

NATE

I don't!

GARRISON

Because it's been our Christmas tree for ten straight years.

NATE

I know and every goddamn year I want to shove it back up the fucking chimney.

GARRISON

WE DON'T HAVE A CHIMNEY!

NATE

(To ALEXA)

Alexa. You awake?

GARRISON

What are you doing?

ALEXA

Yes, I'm here.

NATE

You're up late. Hey, listen... long shot, but can you tell me one good thing about Cleveland?

GARRISON

Really, Nate? Really?

ALEXA

Let me think... Nope, can't think of one.

WALTER AND ANNA - THE ROOM

WALTER is busily decorating,
arranging garments on hangers.

NARRATOR

Later that day, Walter began moving Anna's things into the master bedroom. He transferred her clothes from the smaller room down the hall. It was right to give her this space, he thought, with the enormous windows and the private bath. He wanted her to feel at home here. He wanted her to feel special. And he didn't mind the small room anyway. It was easier to think in there. He carefully arranged her stuffed animals along the hope chest and hung her clothes in the enormous walk-in closet. This made him happy. It made him sad too, to think he'd missed so much of her life. He remembered mountains and mountains of tiny white things in the days before Anna's arrival. Diapers and onesies, paper thin nightgowns and marshmallow rows of cotton socks. Her clothes now, he thought -- now that she was old enough to have some opinions on the matter -- seemed like an act of defiance. He carefully matched each garment with the appropriate hanger. Boldly patterned sundresses, a purple trench coat, zebra printed leggings, red overalls, green velvet pants, and a bright yellow slicker. With every item being its own unique size and length, he could find no logical way of sorting them -- a discovery that vexed him to no end -- and so he decided to go with the only rational solution. He arranged them by hue. This seemed right. And for a moment, her things were hanging up right beside his own, which, curatorially speaking, ran the entire spectrum...a staggeringly comprehensive and formidably inert study... of the color brown. The juxtaposition of his clothes against hers summed up his entire world, he thought, most notably as it pertained to women. His standing objective, after all, was of course to attain the slightest thread count known to man in the most highly forgettable tint. The combined strength of such an assemblage, at least in nearly all of his preliminary tests, rendered him utterly invisible to most women, asshole children, and door to door canvassers.

WALTER stands back to admire his handiwork.

WALTER

Yes.

ANNA enters the house.

WALTER CONT'D

(Calling.)

Anna?

WALTER enters the living room to greet ANNA.

WALTER

Hi.

ANNA

...

WALTER

How was school?

ANNA

Fine.

WALTER

Did you have fun today?

ANNA

I'm hungry.

WALTER

Oh, okay, I made some soup, you want some soup?

ANNA

Fine.

ANNA sits at the table. WALTER prepares dinner.

Any homework?
WALTER

...
ANNA

Anna?
WALTER

Huh?
ANNA

Any homework?
WALTER

Daddy, I just wanna not talk, okay?
ANNA

...
WALTER

...
ANNA

Okay.
WALTER

Silence.

WALTER sits at the table. THEY eat in silence. A pang of grief... of loneliness... washes over WALTER. ANNA notices but does not let on.

WALTER (CONT'D)
(Pushing through.)
Hamburgers? For tomorrow?

ANNA
(Flatly.)
Sure.

WALTER

Good.

More eating. More silence.

WALTER shakes a bit of pepper into his soup.

WALTER CONT'D

Needs pepper.

ANNA nods. SHE takes the pepper shaker and sprinkles some on her soup.

WALTER breaks open a pitiful package of saltine crackers and pours a few of them out onto a sad paper plate.

ANNA takes a tiny bite from one of the crackers. WALTER takes three crackers and crushes them all at once into his soup. ANNA finds this humorous but does not let on. ANNA takes her cracker and crushes it up in a similar manner but WALTER does not notice. SHE takes another cracker and crushes it into her soup, and again WALTER does not notice.

THEY eat. More silence.

WALTER pours ANNA a glass of juice.

ANNA

Thanks.

WALTER CONT'D

Welcome.

WALTER pours himself a glass of juice.

Pause.

WALTER
We could watch TV later. Dancing With the Stars?

ANNA shrugs.

The CLOCK CHIMES in the hallway. It is 4PM.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Four O'clock.

A bit more silence.

WALTER (CONT'D)
I was thinking we could go to the pet store this weekend. See if we can find a friend for Bumpkin?

ANNA nods.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Would you like that?

ANNA nods.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Okay. Then, we'll go.

ANNA finishes her juice and pushes her food away.

WALTER (CONT'D)
All done?

ANNA nods.

WALTER CONT'D
(Tidying up. Ad lib.)
Done with your crackers, there?

ANNA nods.

WALTER

So... I have a surprise for you.

ANNA stares blankly at WALTER.

WALTER CONT'D

Can you guess what it is?

WALTER motions for ANNA to follow him to her bedroom. HE opens the door and SHE enters the room. ANNA looks all around.

ANNA

You did this?

WALTER

...

ANNA

Leave my stuff alone!

ANNA pushes WALTER out of the room and slams the door in his face. WALTER stumbles back, shoulders slumped. ANNA begins crying and throwing things around the room. WALTER walks out onto the porch and pours himself a shot of whiskey.

NARRATOR

Out on the porch, he could breathe. He opened his journal, the one he bought when ANNA arrived. It was meant to help him remember the important things. And it felt good for a while, the notion that for the first time in his life, he actually had something worth writing about. But the pages had somehow filled with all of the ways he had failed her. And these were not words he needed to read twice. He felt himself in that state of numbness...

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

when the life is mostly drained out and in its place are fragments and torn off pieces of answer-less questions, compressed into every crack and pocket of his body.

WALTER AND NARRATOR

This is how I will die,

NARRATOR

...he thought.

WALTER

(A realization.)

I will never be any happier than I am in this moment...

WALTER takes another shot of whiskey. HE stabs at the journal with his pen until the pages come loose and then takes them over to the grill. HE lights the pages on fire, sending them off into the night.

WALTER AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC - THE DMV

Lights up on the interior of the DMV waiting room. A LITTLE BOY and a WOMAN (the boy's mother) sit across from WALTER in ugly folding metal chairs. SHE is staring at WALTER but not really staring, more lost in thought. The boredom has reached *critical mass*.

NARRATOR

Walter sat at the DMV tapping his expired driver's license against the side of his seat. He thought back to four years ago when he was here last to have his license renewed. It was at this moment he realized he was wearing the exact same regrettable tan-colored button down as the one from before. He looked up to see a young woman staring at him. Had she read his mind? Was it that obvious?

WALTER *imagines* what the WOMAN might be thinking:

WOMAN

(speaking the imagined words aloud - robotically)

That shirt? Again? Really?

WALTER smiles at the WOMAN but her *far off* expression doesn't change.

NARRATOR

He smiled at her, weakly, but her expression did not change, and he understood that she was not, in fact, staring, but simply lost in thought. He tried to reconcile the opposing logic. At once, the confusing idea that a woman would chose his face for any activity at all, passive or otherwise, and the all-affirming observation that she had chosen his face as the stopping off point for a daydream about something so flatly uninteresting that she'd forgotten she was staring in the first place. His life. In a nutshell.

WALTER clears his throat. The WOMAN rouses and looks off in the direction of the overhead display.

SHE looks down again at her ticket, sighs heavily and then closes her eyes.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He may as well be wallpaper.

NED, a clerk, calls out a number.

NED

(Calling.)

Thirty-Nine.

WALTER follows NED to the picture-taking area.

NARRATOR

Walter went and sat in front of the white wall. He handed the clerk his old license and paperwork. He straightened his back and raised his chin as instructed.

WALTER

(To NED. Perplexed by his lifeless demeanor.)

Do you see me?

NARRATOR

The clerk focused the camera and clicked twice.

Now the SLO-MO SOUND OF 2 CAMERA CLICKS accompanied by two flashes of bright light. Time slows to a crawl.

WALTER moves in real time, but NED and everything else (including the customers) now move in slow motion.

WE hear the loud SOUNDS OF CLICKS AND TAPS of various office tools (e.g., a stapler, a rubber stamp) hitting the paper and desktop as NED preps the photographs. WALTER looks around the room. HE sees the WOMAN who is now asleep and SNORING LOUDLY in slow motion. THE LITTLE BOY scissors his legs and makes FARTING SOUNDS from his arm pit.

NED

(In slow-mo. Pointing.)

Over there.

WALTER

(Returning his attention to the NED.)

What?

NED

(In slow-mo.)

Over *there!*

WALTER

(To NED. Not hearing.)

What??

Time returns to normal.

NED

(Back to regular speed.
Coldly -all business.)

Over there; we'll call you when it's ready.

Pause.

WALTER stares at the NED who has now moved on to laminating the license from the previous customer.

WALTER

(Reading from NED's name tag.)

Thank you. *Ned*. Is that short for something? *Ned*?

NED

(Flatly.)

Just Ned.

WALTER

(Softly.)

Okay.

NED does not look up but continues his tasks.

WALTER CONT'D

You're very good with people.

WALTER moves to a nearby area to wait for his card.

NARRATOR

To feel utterly insignificant, Walter knew of no place better than the Department of Motor Vehicles. Here you could be ignored in all sorts of ways, with new ones being invented all the time. He looked around at all the sad empty faces. Not a single person was happy here. Except... for one.

THE LITTLE BOY, who is now sucking on a lollipop, smiles at WALTER.

WALTER

(To the little boy.)

Do you see me?

LITTLE BOY

I see you! You look like the UPS man!

WOMAN

(To the little boy.)

Let's go.

The LITTLE BOY hops off with his
MOTHER, shouting.

LITTLE BOY

(Exiting.)

UPS! UPS! UPS! UPS!

WOMAN

(Exiting - overlapping.)

Shh, hush, stop jumping.

Transition: WALTER in the driver's
seat of his parked car, DMV parking
lot.

NARRATOR

Walter sat slumped in the driver's seat, staring at his new license and its impressive anti-counterfeit detail. Polycarbonate card body. Laser engraving. Tactile text. The previous color headshot now replaced with black and white, somehow rendering him, if possible, even more invisible than four years prior. He imagined the long queue of people standing in line to steal his identity, only to politely "pass" upon further scrutiny.

WALTER runs his finger over the
photograph...

WALTER

Vanishing...

WALTER slips the card into his
wallet and looks up at his
reflection in the rear-view mirror.

NARRATOR

Was there ever a time when he wanted to be seen? Third grade, he thought. Ms. Tipton.

WALTER day-dreamily stares in the
direction of "Ms. Tipton".

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

How pretty she was in her long linen skirts and cardigan sweaters. He never knew the scent she wore, but he'd decided it was roses. He would raise his hand for any reason and sometimes for no reason at all. And she would look at him and smile.

MISS TIPTON

Yes, Walter?

WALTER

Nothing. I forgot the question.

WALTER AND ANNA - THE KITCHEN

WALTER and ANNA at the kitchen table. Once again, they eat in near silence.

WALTER

Is your food ok?

ANNA nods.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Good.

Silence.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Something on your mind?

ANNA

...

WALTER CONT'D

You can talk to me. Ya know?

ANNA

...

WALTER CONT'D

...

ANNA

It's just...

WALTER CONT'D

...

ANNA

You're sad a lot.

WALTER nods. HE tries to hold in his emotions, but it's no use. ANNA reaches her hand out and puts it on WALTER's hand.

WALTER AND CHRISSY - EXPRESS LANE THREE

A grocery store. Early afternoon.
WALTER enters hesitantly with a shopping cart (or shopping basket).
CHRISSY is helping CUSTOMERS in the express lane. SHE notices WALTER.
HE averts his eyes and continues shopping.

NARRATOR

Walter understood about lonely. It was a constant, more reliable than anything else in his life, and as a matter of precaution, he managed elaborate risk assessments in his head, which allowed him to head off potentially dangerous social interactions before they became problematic. He knew for example, that the attractive cashier ("Chrissy M.," as her name tag suggested) who had once laughed at something he said--some unintentional joke--asked his name, and then wanted to know what he did for a living, was on duty at the nearby Safeway fairly reliably every Thursday at 4 pm. The prospect of further entanglement with Chrissy made him so nervous that he began taking deep calming breaths before entering the store and then he made a point of always standing in a different lane with his 9-12 items. This helped to avoid Express Lane 3 most days, but there was little he could do to predict the days that Chrissy might catch him standing in the longer line and direct him to her lane instead. He even took great pains to add 5-8 items, putting him well above the margin of allowance for express service, but on at least one occasion, Chrissy had instead ushered him through her lane with a wink and a nod, despite his protestations. Her personal attention to him... her sweet, endearing ways, this was not something Walter would ever get used to--would ever 'allow' himself to get used to. And it was a private thing never shared with anyone, a shame so deep, he could barely think on it much himself, but he knew that the reason had to do with self-preservation. No woman who had ever sought out his affection had stuck around for more than a month or two.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

She would find some reason to put him in the friend zone or quietly drift from his life in order to avoid hurt feelings.

WALTER is now in the cereal aisle.

WALTER

(to himself - in a pointed attempt to focus on anything other than CHRISSY)

Do we need cereal?

NARRATOR

Walter preferred binary rejection.

WALTER

(to himself)

Fruity Pebbles.

NARRATOR

Something concrete that he could measure. Because in his mind, a woman was either there or she wasn't, after all, and the varying and unpredictable styles of retreat left him puzzled. It was as if women were in sync with the technological age, becoming more and more efficient with the art of the exit. Their maneuvers were stealth, leaving him always in a fog of bewilderment, like the feeling one gets when losing five dollars. Which is a very specific feeling. It's enough of a loss to notice, but not enough of one to cause alarm. And of course, no matter how deftly these women drifted out of his life, it did not go unnoticed. And there was nothing--nothing--that Walter did not notice. In recent years, he began taking what he knew were elaborate precautions to safeguard his own heart.

CHRISSY is seen laughing with a customer in the express lane. SHE smiles and waves at WALTER.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He chose instead, as an example, to enjoy from a safe distance, the ineffable sound of Chrissy's laughter. A sensation that he had decided felt like champagne, or like delicate finger taps on a leather drum.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It filled the air with sparkly things, causing him to close his eyes and smile as if bathing in the new sunlight of spring. It was positively heartbreaking the way he avoided her, busily distracting himself with his receipt while passing by Express Lane 3, so as not to appear rude, but simply preoccupied with his financial affairs. He could feel her eyes upon him. And sometimes she would call his name...

CHRISSY

(calling sweetly)

Walter!

WALTER freezes for a moment at the sound of her voice. HE does not look up. HE exhales sharply and exits the store.

WALTER AND THERAPIST - INVISIBLE

THERAPIST

Have you tried writing about it? Keeping a journal maybe?

WALTER

I just don't think it will do much good.

THERAPIST

Who else do you talk to?

WALTER shrugs.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

You said you feel invisible?

WALTER

...

THERAPIST

How so?

WALTER

Not like as a disease, more like a strategy.

THERAPIST

I see.

WALTER

It's worked so far.

THERAPIST

Has it?

Pause.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

And Chrissy?

WALTER

...

WALTER AND ANNA - FRUITY PEBBLES

WALTER and ANNA at the kitchen table eating Fruity Pebbles. ANNA is unusually talkative this evening.

ANNA

I have a science project. And Zephyr thinks it's stupid but it's not stupid.

WALTER

Zephyr?

ANNA

That's his name, Zephyr. I think *he's* stupid.

WALTER

(amused)

Sounds serious.

ANNA

He's gross. He farts in class.

WALTER

Oh no...

ANNA

And he gave a cupcake and a milk box to Ms. Ledbetter when everyone knows she is lactose intolerant.

WALTER

How does everyone know that?

ANNA

She told us, she said she can't have dairy or gluten or peanuts and she's always blowing her nose and she sounds like a trombone.

THEY laugh. WALTER pours ANNA a bit more cereal.

WALTER

So tell me about your science project.

ANNA

I'm building a habitat for Bumpkin.

WALTER

(charmed)

A habitat?

ANNA

Yeah.

WALTER

What kind of habitat?

ANNA

Daddy! You know what a habitat is!

WALTER

Does it have gorillas?

ANNA

(laughing)

DADDY! It's not a zoo!

(beat)

No, the way it goes is this. First you have to get some wood...

NARRATOR

WALTER watches in awe as ANNA describes the habitat. Her plan is evidently so big she must stand from the table to demonstrate. This goes on for a bit.

WALTER AND CARL - NO TRASH ON MONDAY

NARRATOR

WALTER walks out onto the porch with a small mason jar of whiskey. HE opens a brand new journal and starts writing. *You can be still for a second. You can exhale and close the heavy door behind you, wrestle it shut if you have to. You can lean against the inside of it and even click the lock, it's up to you. After all, you're in here, behind the safe door, and you can make up any rule you want--*

CARL

(peeking over the backyard fence)

Hi Walter!

WALTER

(startled - annoyed at the intrusion)

Fuck!

(pause)

Hi Carl.

CARL

Lawn's looking good.

WALTER

(not looking up - trying not to engage)

Thanks.

CARL disappears.

Pause.

WALTER breathes. HE returns to his writing. Moments later this phone beeps. HE checks the message. It is spam. He reads along...

NIGERIAN SPAMMER

Greetings, I am Greg Berman, am 59-years-old widower. Am diagnosed with laryngeal Cancer, I have decided to DONATE US\$8,000,000 to you to promote charity works, children in need, the poor and to help the homeless. Let this be my last offering. Respond with this Ref: SOULWINNING2020 so I will know you got this. God bless you abundantly.

WALTER puts his phone away.

NARRATOR

You can decide that you've done your best. For today. For the week. For the lifetime you've spent trying to solve it--

CARL

(peeking over the fence again)

No trash on Monday.

WALTER

(trying to stay calm)

Yep.

CARL

Holiday.

WALTER

Yep.

CARL disappears.

Pause.

WALTER breathes. HE returns to his writing.

NARRATOR

You can believe that it's ...

WALTER pauses to make sure CARL is not planning on returning. HE resumes his writing.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

*You can believe that it's possible to be happy, truly happy.
You can leave it alone, or pick it up again. Behind the door,
it's easier to see--*

CARL

(peeking over the fence
again)

That's a nice new trash can, by the way.

WALTER

(seriously agitated)

Ya think so?

CARL

Oh yeah, that's a keeper.

WALTER

...

CARL

I try to keep mine locked up back there, you know those kids.

WALTER

(shutting it down)

'Sgood talkin to you Carl.

Beat.

CARL

Night.

The NARRATOR presses on...

NARRATOR

Behind the door, it's easier to see--

WALTER

(to the NARRATOR)

It's fine.

The NARRATOR smiles politely and stops. WALTER finishes up the whiskey.

WALTER AND ANNA - SCIENCE PROJECT

The living room. WALTER and ANNA sit on the floor working on a habitat for Bumpkin.

WALTER

So what kind of project is Zephyr doing?

ANNA

Prolly a fart machine.

THEY laugh.

Long pause. THEY work in silence for a bit.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Daddy?

WALTER

Yes, Anna?

ANNA

Where's mommy?

Pause.

WALTER

She's sick.

ANNA

What kinda sick?

WALTER

She... she needs medicine for her feelings.

ANNA

Her feelings?

WALTER

Yeah.

ANNA

For when she has too many feelings and she's crying?

WALTER

Yeah...

ANNA

For when she has too many feelings and she's sleeping all the time?

WALTER

Right.

WALTER helps ANNA glue a piece of wood onto the habitat.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Is that enough glue?

ANNA

Yeah.

WALTER AND ANNA

(ad lib - regarding the habitat)

Perfect. Yeah. Wait, yep. Okay.

WALTER

You wanna do the back part now?

ANNA

Yeah.

WALTER AND ANNA

(ad lib - regarding the habitat)

Turn it. Yeah, that way. Okay. Got it.

WALTER

This is looking really good.

THEY work in silence for a bit.

ANNA

Do you need medicine for your feelings?

WALTER

Sometimes.

ANNA

Like sometimes when you were crying this morning and you had too many feelings in the kitchen?

WALTER

I...

ANNA

Remember, you were eating your Fruity Pebbles and looking out the window?

WALTER

I was?

ANNA

Yeah.

WALTER

...

ANNA

Why were you crying?

WALTER

You really wanna know?

ANNA

Yeah.

WALTER

I get lonely.

ANNA

You get lonely?

WALTER

Sometimes.

ANNA

And when you get lonely and crying you need medicine for your feelings like mommy does?

WALTER

Something like that. Do you ever get lonely?

ANNA

Only sometimes if Bumpkin doesn't talk to me. He does talk to me, though.

(thinking)

I don't know where he is...

WALTER

Did you leave him in your room?

ANNA

Yeah. I probably left him in my room.

WALTER

Should we go look?

ANNA

Yeah. Let's go look!

WALTER

OK.

ANNA

Daddy?

WALTER

Anna.

ANNA

Are you going away?

WALTER

What do you mean?

ANNA

Like how mommy went away when she had the bad day?

WALTER

No. No, Anna...

ANNA

OK.

WALTER

I'm staying right here.

ANNA

Forever?

WALTER

Forever.

ANNA

OK.

MAX AND TESSA - CRAB BALLS AND MISERY

MAX JONES sits slumped in the dressing room of the historic Fillmore Theater. TESSA - the STAGE MANAGER - enters.

TESSA

Mr. Jones, I am so sorry to bother you...

MAX JONES

(overlapping)

Tessa.

TESSA

We're now running 45 minutes behind and we've tried stalling but we are running out of crab balls. I can hold curtain maybe 10 more minutes?

MAX JONES

Do I look old to you, Tessa?

TESSA

No sir. You look... you look great.

(beat)

Umn. Your sister is here. Oh, and your editor, Ms. Chase, she's much shorter in person than I thought she would be, also much angrier.

(beat)

I saw what happened at the book-signing table, I'm so sorry.

MAX JONES

You agree with his assessment?

TESSA

Absolutely not, sir, that guy, he's on the spectrum and he's also a subscriber.

MAX JONES

The "spectrum."

TESSA

The spectrum, no filters, he's just a chronic asshole, he called David Sedaris a "use case for euthanasia."

MAX JONES

Sorry I missed that.

TESSA

Your new book, sir, *Hardball & Misery*, it's a masterpiece, and who am I, I know, I know, but you're not irrelevant sir, and that was a horrible thing for him to say, he's been banned from the building.

MAX JONES

So you're a writer.

TESSA

Yes sir, how did you... second year, MFA. Fiction. We've been studying your work.

MAX JONES

Condolences. Which program?

TESSA

Syracuse?

MAX JONES

George Saunders. That's not nothing. So you floated to the top among hundreds of hopefuls...

TESSA

Two thousand, sir.

MAX JONES

And you're one of...

TESSA

Six.

MAX JONES

Well, George will teach you to edit. Might even teach to care.

TESSA

To care, sir? But do you think writers care too much and that's part of the pathology, like, I wonder what I would write about if I didn't need love. Or to be loved, I mean.

(beat)
(MORE)

TESSA (CONT'D)

What I like about your work, sir, is...is the smallness of it. Ordinary people. The ache. You strip away all the noise so we can feel it, I'm talking too much, I can find a hole and fall into it.

MAX JONES

Because old men exhaust easily of praise from beautiful young women.

(beat)

Who is that house manager, what's his name?

TESSA

Umn. Jack Taylor, sir?

MAX JONES

Ah. Jack. Jack likes you.

(beat)

He was looking at you from the box office.

TESSA

(blushing)

You really don't miss anything do you?

(beat)

We went out once, but... I think he's more interested in getting me to join his church, actually. He's really nice, he's just...

MAX JONES

Blind? Preoccupied with your imperiled soul. Well. Religion isn't everything, except for when it is.

TESSA

Yes, sir.

MAX JONES

Max.

(beat)

My wife is leaving me for her tango instructor. And I'm more upset about the years I lost than the fact that she's leaving. I was a terrible lover.

(beat)

Every writer is a cheat, Tessa, remember that. And the harsh light of morning always comes. The faces, with their questioning eyes: Where do you go in the dark?

TESSA

Where do you go in the dark?

Pause.

MAX JONES

(changing the subject)

Second time in six weeks I've held up a show.

TESSA

Umn, actually, it's your fifth time, Ms. Chase told me, and by the way, she's just outside that door. I should let her in. Sorry.

MAX JONES

(overlapping)

To the wolves!?! You are a terrible stage manager!

TESSA smiles, turns to exit.

WALTER AND ANNA - DOWN THE HALL

WALTER's bedroom, late evening,
WALTER staring up at the ceiling.

NARRATOR

Later that evening. Walter lay on the twin bed in his new room at the end of the hall, watching the ceiling fan wobble back and forth. For all his knowledge of scientific facts and figures and his impressive engineering degrees, he could not seem to grasp the basics of household repairs. So, he let the ceiling fan tick on and on, the two pull chains swinging wildly back and forth with every rotation, in a kind of Earth/Venus solar tango. This is a useful hypnosis charm, he thought, as he followed the pull knobs with his eyes. He focused hard, measuring his breaths and his oxygen exchange rate, until his pulse slowed to 55 beats per minute. He could turn the fan off, he thought. He could buy a noise machine instead. Walter was good with solutions.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

WALTER bolts from his bed and
rushes to open the door to see ANNA
standing there with Bumpkin.

ANNA

I can't sleep.

WALTER

You can't sleep.

ANNA shakes her head.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Do you want some hot chocolate?

ANNA shakes her head.

WALTER (CONT'D)

A peanut butter sandwich?

ANNA shakes her head, eyes welling
up with tears.

NARRATOR

Anna wrapped her arms around Walter's neck and sobbed her
aching heart out. Now they were both crying, rocking back and
forth. They sunk to the floor in a heap, the three of them...
Anna, Walter, Bumpkin... and emptied out all of the tears.

WALTER

Hey. Guess how much I love you?

ANNA

To the--

WALTER

(overlapping)

Nope, more than that.

ANNA

Umm... as much as the--

WALTER

(overlapping)

Nope, more than that.

ANNA

(through peels of laughter)

As big as some --

WALTER

(overlapping)

Nope, more than that.

Pause.

NARRATOR

And then there was quiet. And then, the ticking of the
ceiling fan lulled them off to dreamland, right there in the
hallway. And that is where they slept. Soundly. For 5 whole
hours.

WALTER AND CHRISSY - DRINKS

A restaurant. WALTER and CHRISSY sit across from each other. HE drinks a beer. SHE drinks a cocktail. THEY are both very, very nervous. A SERVER breezes by.

SERVER

Everything ok?

CHRISSY

Yes, thank you.

WALTER

Could I just get a glass of water please?

SERVER

Still, bottled, or sparkling?

WALTER

Just... regular? Can that be a thing?

The SERVER forces a smile and exits.

Pause.

CHRISSY

(regarding her drink)

It's very *fruity*.

WALTER

Is it?

CHRISSY nods.

CHRISSY

Do you like the music?

WALTER

It's just ok. No, not really.

CHRISSY

You don't like country music?

WALTER shrugs.

CHRISSY (CONT'D)

What do you like?

WALTER

Tom Waits?

CHRISSY

...

WALTER

It's got a bite, but you listen anyway. Harder, even.

CHRISSY

Like drinking a Guinness.

WALTER

(pleasantly surprised)

Exactly. It's exactly like / drinking a Guinness.

CHRISSY

(overlapping)

Like drinking a Guinness, yep.

Pause.

CHRISSY (CONT'D)

Are you having a good time?

WALTER

I am.

CHRISSY

This is a lot for you isn't it?

WALTER

...

CHRISSEY

...

WALTER

...

CHRISSEY

I'm really not that scary.

WALTER

It's not you.

CHRISSEY

What is it then?

WALTER

...

CHRISSEY

...

WALTER

I, uh... I just don't have a lot of practice.

CHRISSEY

Good.

WALTER

Not good.

CHRISSEY

But it's ok, ya know. It's ok to be scared.

WALTER

...

CHRISSEY

...

WALTER

I... I see you at the store.

CHRISSEY

You avoid me at the store.

WALTER

I avoid you at the store.

CHRISSEY

Yes.

WALTER

It's... uh... it's not because I want to.

CHRISSEY

...

WALTER

I really, really don't want to.

CHRISSEY

...

WALTER

You're--

Pause.

WALTER (CONT'D)

My... uh... Anna's mother... she's...

CHRISSEY

Oh.

WALTER

What, oh?

CHRISSEY

You're married.

WALTER

No, no, no. No.

CHRISSEY
Seeing someone.

WALTER
No.

CHRISSEY
...

WALTER
No, it's not that.

CHRISSEY
...

WALTER
She... she never loved me.

CHRISSEY
Oh.

WALTER
It was... uh... I just, I have a lot of...

CHRISSEY
Where is she now?

WALTER
I don't know. Colorado? I don't know.

CHRISSEY
You don't know?

WALTER
She took off about a year ago. She's, uh, she's got a lot of mental problems, and, uh, there's drugs involved.

CHRISSEY
Oh no.

WALTER
...

CHRISSEY

...

WALTER

How do you tell a child their mother's never coming home?

CHRISSEY

I'm so sorry.

WALTER

This is a great date.

CHRISSEY

No, stop.

WALTER

(standing to leave)

I should go.

CHRISSEY

You will sit here.

WALTER

(submissively)

Okay.

CHRISSEY

You will sit here if you want to, do you want to, do you want to sit here... with me?

WALTER

Desperately.

CHRISSEY

Okay.

(beat)

Sit.

WALTER sits.

Pause.

WALTER

Look. You have to understand something.

CHRISSEY

Tell me.

WALTER

I don't know what I'm doing.

CHRISSEY

Neither do I.

WALTER

Yeah, but look at you.

CHRISSEY

What do you mean, look at me?

WALTER

You're... *gorgeous*.

CHRISSEY

Walter.

WALTER

...

CHRISSEY

You think I want you in the *friend zone*?

WALTER

I don't know, yeah, I guess.

CHRISSEY

Do I look like I'm dressed for the friend zone?

WALTER

("I don't know, maybe?")

Some kinda zone.

CHRISSEY

There's a reason I asked you here, Walter. I like you.

(pointedly)

I *like* you.

A very long pause.

WALTER

(down-playing)

That's cool.

WALTER AND CARL - SHOT OF WHISKEY

Later that evening. WALTER walks out onto the porch with a small mason jar of whiskey. HE opens his journal and starts writing.

NARRATOR

Behind the door, it's easier to see. Even in the dark room, the world is clearer. You can stand here and be still. Or you can walk a few steps toward the center. You can collapse from exhaustion or you can take a moment and remove the whole day from your body, except for the parts that were amazing--

CARL

(peeking over the fence)

Hi Walter.

WALTER

(startled)

Jesus.

(beat)

Hi Carl.

CARL

Man, I love this weather.

WALTER

Yep.

CARL disappears. WALTER breathes.
He resumes writing.

NARRATOR

Maybe there's someone there waiting for the garments, someone who knows every secret wish and desire, someone who never thinks you're too much or too small--

CARL

(peeking over the fence
again)

My trash can went missing last week.

WALTER

Oh?

CARL

Keep an eye out.

WALTER

Yep.

CARL disappears. WALTER resumes
writing.

NARRATOR

Or maybe you're alone and--

WALTER pauses to make sure CARL
isn't coming back. HE resumes
writing.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

*... alone and waiting or not waiting and happy for the
solitude, for the freedom. The freedom... of nothing.*

WALTER pulls all the papers out of
the journal and rips them apart.

MAX, JACK, AND THE WOMEN - MORE TALKING, LESS JESUS

ANGRY CROWD SOUNDS can be heard as
Max's editor MEGAN CHASE enters in
a fury.

MEGAN CHASE

I have a carpool, Max -- AKA asshole, AKA PR Disaster -- I
have three kids and a life. you are my only client, my ONLY
one, you do know why that is, right?

MAX JONES

I will GLADLY share you, Megan / please know that.

MEGAN CHASE

(overlapping)

It is because you are TOO MUCH WORK! I'm your editor, not
your manager, not your hostage, I am done with whatever this
is -- this mid-life bullshit -- they're out for blood, Max,
do you hear that, I cannot / keep covering for you!

A KNOCK on the door. JACK the HOUSE
MANAGER peeks his head in. the door.

JACK

So sorry to interrupt Ms. Chase, we are now out of crab balls
-- uh... all passarounds, actually -- and most giveaways.
Also... check Twitter?

MEGAN CHASE

(frantically searching for
her phone)

Oh, god.

MAX JONES

Jack, the blind boy! Come in, come in!

JACK

Max Jones! Welcome to the Fillmore, sir. Hardball & Misery,
it's a -- I mean, I am a big fan, sir, big fan, I can't tell
you.

MAX JONES
Why?

JACK
Sir?

MAX JONES
Why can't you tell me, I'm curious, actually, Jack, what do you think of young Tessa?

MEGAN CHASE
(to Max)
Could you focus! Please?
(searching her phone for
Twitter)
While I have a fucking stroke?

JACK
(confused - attention divided
- to Max)
I... like Tessa / she's--

MEGAN CHASE
Oh, God.
(reading from Twitter)
@maxjonesheadroom: "CRAB BALLS AND MISERY - Bloodbath at the Fillmore."

JACK
(hesitantly)
Hashtag...

MEGAN CHASE
(reading the hashtag)
Hashtag "NoShowJones." No show Jones, great.

MAX JONES
(seriously turned off -
overlapping)
No Show Jones?

MEGAN CHASE
Oh, look! We're trending.

MAX JONES
George Jones was an alcoholic.

MEGAN CHASE

You are also an alcoholic.

MAX JONES

Well.

JACK

(overlapping)

Umn, I'm gonna go check on the t-shirt cannons...

MEGAN CHASE

Can we get grenades?

MAX JONES

(overlapping)

Come sit here, Jack, I have / something for you.

MEGAN CHASE

(overlapping)

There are 1200 people out there waiting for you to read from a fucking book Max -- your ground-breaking book, I might add, the one you wrote -- how / hard can that be?

MAX JONES

(overlapping - to Jack)

It's shit and you know it. Right here, son, sit here.

MEGAN CHASE

Your "shit" has sold 2 million copies -- OK, I'm sending in your sister, you have lost / your mind.

MAX JONES

(overlapping)

I do love you, Megan.

MEGAN CHASE

(exiting)

Have I ever told you Max, when I climb into bed each night, I dream up elaborate and extreme pain scenarios for you, they go on for hours, and this is when I'm happiest?

TESSA exits.

MAX JONES
(calling - to MEGAN)

Let's do lunch!

MEGAN CHASE
(from off)

FUCK YOU!

MAX JONES
(to JACK)

Now, Jack. Blind Jack. Tell me about you and Tessa.

JACK

Sir?

MAX JONES

What's going on there?

JACK

I don't...

MAX JONES

You like her.

JACK

Uh... yes, sir, I do. Like her.

MAX JONES

And she likes you.

JACK

I-

MAX JONES

Wasn't a question, she likes you.

JACK

OK...

MAX JONES

So. What's happening here? You need to think about your approach, son.

JACK

My ap-proach...

MAX JONES

(overlapping)

What I see is a slight correction, do you have something to write with? Some advice. Man to man?

JACK

Absolutely!

JACK fumbles for a pen and a pad or a scrap of paper.

MAX JONES

Now, I want you to write down everything I'm about to tell you.

JACK

Yes, sir.

MAX JONES

Everything. You cannot leave this to chance, every syllable, do you understand? Every. Syllable.

JACK nods and readies his pen...

OK. More kissing....

JACK

(writing)

More kissing....

MAX JONES

Less Jesus.

JACK

(writing)

Less... Jesus.

(beat)

MAX JONES

That's it, that's the whole thing.

JACK
 (hesitant - reading from his
 paper)
 More kissing, less Jesus-

MAX JONES
 (overlapping)
 More kissing. Less Jesus.

JACK
 OK. OK...

()

JACK (CONT'D)
 So what you're saying is--more kissing, less Jesus.

MAX JONES
 Exactly what it sounds like.

()
 Pause.

JACK
 If I-

MAX JONES
 More kissing. Less Jesus.

JACK
 Yes, sir.

MAX JONES
 Now get the fuck outta my dressing room.

JACK
 (exiting)
 Got it. Got it. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

MAX JONES
 (calling)
 More kissing, less Jesus!

JACK
 (overlapping - from off)
 More kissing, less Jesus!

Max's sister LOLA appears in the
 doorway.

LOLA
Mental terrorist. You got that from Dad.

MAX JONES
The boy is confused.

LOLA
About what?

MAX JONES
About on which side his bagel is smeared.

LOLA
And you, the wise Yoda- I brought you a drink.

MAX JONES
He has nothing to lose- I'm not thirsty.

LOLA
Johnny Walker Black.

MAX JONES
(perking up)
Hello, friend...
(taking the drink)
The book is a hit, did you hear?
(off Lola's look)
Ten minutes?

LOLA
You have Five. Existential crisis and all, I get it, but could you not drag us all down with you? Just what the fuck did that guy say to you?

MAX JONES
Let's see, oh, yes: "a first date with obscurity."

LOLA
That's not--ok, that's funny.

Pause.

MAX JONES
She left his morning.

LOLA

Yeah. She wasn't sure you would notice.

MAX JONES

I'm your actual family, you know that, right?

LOLA

I'm not picking sides, Max, but where have you been, really? Because it hasn't been with her, she might as well be a stranger. Do you even know what your wife of 15 years does at night after she tucks you into your study? After she cooks your dinner and fills your highball glass and sends you off into the abyss? Can you name one thing?

MAX JONES

She can fill her time however she likes, I would support anything, I've told her this.

LOLA

(overlapping)

Magnanimous.

MAX JONES

How the hell would I know what she does all day, I'm working!

(beat)

Ya know, Lola, I've been faithful! Which counts for shit, by the way, unless it's not happening. You know how many nights I've reached for her, did you guys talk about that, ask her sometime, you should do that, I really wish you would. A guy cheats, they drag him through the square by his BALLS, but a woman cheats and it's somehow (air quotes) subversive?

LOLA

Oh my god, do you know how infuriating you are, you want everything and no one. There's a world out here, Max, or haven't you noticed, all of us waiting around for you to surface, so we can take turns drowning you.

(beat)

(MORE)

LOLA (CONT'D)

I'm really, really worried this time. Please, please, come to therapy.

MAX JONES

Therapy? I'll sprint off the goddamn roof, there's no pill for this, Lola, I'm RACKED OUT, there's nothing left of me to burn.

(beat)

LOLA

And I'm the dramatist.

(exiting)

minutes.

LOLA exits as TESSA enters. MAX
throws his book across the room.

MAX JONES

FUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!!!!!

TESSA retrieves the book and sits
next to Max.

WALTER AND CHRISSY - I LIKE YOU

CHRISSEY
You don't have to like me.

WALTER
I like you.

CHRISSEY
Any my life is a mess too.

WALTER
I'd win, in a cage match, I'd win.

CHRISSEY
I really, really doubt that, Walter.

WALTER
I'm telling you.

CHRISSEY
(overlapping)
Please, just...

WALTER
...

Pause.

CHRISSEY
Can I tell you something?

WALTER
Sure.

CHRISSEY
(conspiratorially)
This is going to sound revolutionary. Because it is.

WALTER
(leaning in)

Okay...

CHRISSEY
What if it's possible -- like in a world that's fraught, just
fucking *fraught* with bullshit and like, we don't know
anything about anything, I mean, not for sure, right -- but
what if it's possible that there's still good in the world.
That people are decent. Like as a concept, they talk to each
other *face to face* like adults, like decent people, and they
call it like it is so you don't have to wonder how they
really feel -- even if it hurts, even if it's awkward as hell
-- they tell you how they *feel* and that's where you start.

(beat)

Right there. Right there where it's most alive. And raw. And
heartbreakingly real.

WALTER
You're right, that's revolutionary.

CHRISSEY
I know!

WALTER
(looking around the room)
Have you told anybody about this?

CHRISSEY
(a whisper)
Shhh-noooooo...

WALTER
Okay, good, good.

THEY smile and sip from their
drinks.

Pause.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Sounds a little scary.

CHRISSY

It is. It absolutely is.

Long pause.

WALTER stares at CHRISSY. All the
feels. Now, the words...

WALTER

I like the sound of your laughter.

CHRISSY

...

WALTER

I avoid you because your light is so big.

CHRISSY

...

WALTER

And I'm terrified.

A very, very long pause.

ANNA reaches to put her hand on
WALTER's but he stands and exits
abruptly.

WALTER AND ANNA - BUMPKIN

Lights up on ANNA, in a panic, sitting on the bathroom floor holding her hedgehog Bumpkin who is now swaddled in a small pink hand towel. (The NARRATOR is already seated as the lights come up).

ANNA

Bumpkin is sick.

WALTER

Oh no!

ANNA pulls a thermometer out from under the pink hand towel and reads the temperature. WALTER is half-grossed out at the communal use of the thermometer and half-seriously concerned for Bumpkin.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Is that our thermometer?

ANNA

I'm checking his temperature every 90 seconds.

WALTER

(seriously grossed out)

OK. Rectally?

ANNA

Yeah.

WALTER

OK.

Pause.

WALTER (CONT'D)

How do you know he's sick?

ANNA

He won't wake up. He's very lethargic.

WALTER

How do you know the word lethargic?

(beat)

You mean sleepy?

ANNA

No, lifeless.

WALTER

Oh.

ANNA

But he's not dead.

WALTER

Got it.

WALTER sits next to ANNA on the bathroom floor. HE touches Bumpkin's little ears and feels the unmistakable coldness.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You love Bumpkin, don't you?

ANNA pulls Bumpkin closer.

WALTER AND ANNA - A HEDGEHOG FUNERAL

Late afternoon. A grave site. ANNA and WALTER arrange leaves and pebbles and a few feathers on top of Bumpkin's grave. ANNA reads her prepared remarks from a piece of notebook paper...

ANNA

Oh, Bumpkin. You made the world a brighter place to be. You kept us warm and happy and smiling. I know I can never be a hedgehog. But I will miss you every day and I will miss giving you baths and brushing your fur and reading you bedtime stories. I regret not buying you a hedgehog companion.

ANNA lowers the shoebox coffin into its shallow hole near the sycamore tree and covers Bumpkin with dark earth. WALTER helps her place the stones and the little grave marker made of popsicle sticks...

WALTER

Here lies Bumpkin, *friend to all*.

Long pause.

ANNA

Mommy's never coming back is she?

WALTER

...

ANNA

You don't have to answer...

WALTER

She's so sick.

ANNA

She could be sick and still be here but she's not.

WALTER

I think... uh... when people are a certain kinda sick they don't want anybody to see them.

ANNA

That's horrible.

WALTER

It is. Yeah.

ANNA

What did I do?

WALTER

Nothing.

ANNA

What did I do?

WALTER

You didn't do anything, listen, you didn't do anything, you're perfect. She's just very, very sick and she's lost. And she has to find-- she has figure some things out.

ANNA

Until when?

WALTER

I don't know.

ANNA

Forever?

WALTER

I don't know.

ANNA

Just tell me.

I don't know.

WALTER

JUST TELL ME!

ANNA

I don't know!

WALTER

ANNA runs off.

Silence.

Sorry, Bumpkin.

WALTER (CONT'D)

WALTER AND THERAPIST - GET MAD

WALTER

(distraught)

There's just all this pain and I don't have anything to tell her, and I stand around like an idiot and she sees it, she sees *I got nothin*. I don't wanna spend my whole life wrecked because of some ghost. Some horrible, *horrible* woman who is utterly incapable of love or empathy or nurturing / of any kind.

THERAPIST

(overlapping)

Then you won't.

WALTER

Who leaves their kid like that?

(beat)

I'm a walking disaster.

THERAPIST

Have you been writing?

WALTER

I don't know, I guess, I sound like Oprah Winfrey.

THERAPIST

In a bad way?

WALTER

Is there some other way?

THERAPIST

So, why are you writing?

WALTER

You told me to.

THERAPIST

Walter...

WALTER

I'm trying.

THERAPIST

If it's not working, then stop.

WALTER

And then what?

THERAPIST

It seems to me you've spent a very long time pushing down your emotions, pretending to not feel anything. Have you thought about the obvious?

WALTER

What?

Beat.

THERAPIST

Get mad.

GARRISON AND NATE - GROWN-UPS

GARRISON

We're grown-ups, right?

NATE

I don't think so, I'm breaking dishes and you're running off to Cleveland to find yourself, so it's not looking good.

GARRISON

(Overlapping.)

Find myself?! What are you, twelve?

NATE

What is this really about?

GARRISON

(Furious.)

I can't talk to you!

NATE

You tell me you can't breathe? You're a ficus..

GARRISON

(Overlapping.)

You have to stop.

NATE

(Overlapping.)

...there's no air to breathe -

GARRISON

I'M DYING HERE!! Are you blind? It's been two YEARS! Two years of a slow death, can't you see that?

NATE

Let me think, oh, yeah, that rings a bell.

(Beat.)

GARRISON

I don't know who I am anymore...

NATE

Well, give it some thought, will ya?

GARRISON

You want an easy answer? There isn't one. It's ALL fucked. ALL of it. You're trying to make this about you, but you're not hearing me!!! One day I'm practically saving the rain forest, next day I'm serving "late lunch" cocktails to whiny little D.O.S. hacks with half my experience. Apple-fucking-tinis? Nate? Is that what you want for me?

NATE

That was your choice. You don't have to wait tables -

GARRISON

(Overlapping.)

Choice? There was no choice -

NATE

(Overlapping.)

I make enough for both of us. You know that.

GARRISON

Fuck. You.

NATE

What?

GARRISON

Ten years of my life went down with that firm. Everything I was fighting for.

(Beat.)

I get up every day and want to blow my goddamn brains out, like anything I am makes a fucking bit of difference. You think I want to go to Cleveland?! Fuck Cleveland. It's all the same, here, there, nothing matters anymore, don't you get that, we're disposable! A decent job, Nate... a good one... don't you remember when it meant something? It was earned. It was kept. It was that epic DNA shit, our fathers and grandfathers and everything they worked for, like their fucking souls, their fucking lives depended on it. All gone. The world we live in now... it's fucking Vegas. All flash - ALL IN - and then you lose, you fucking lose, and then you ride your sensibly-priced commuter bike home in the pouring down rain with a fucking pink slip stuffed down your throat.

(Defeated.)

(MORE)

GARRISON (CONT'D)

Appletinis? If I'm going to die for a job, Nate, I want it to matter...

NATE

(As if to say... "I love you.")

Shit.

GARRISON

I'm so tired.

NATE

I know you are. I wish I could...

GARRISON

What?

NATE

You just seem so empty. So lifeless. When you're washing dishes. Or like last Friday, game night, Settlers of Catan, you rolled a seven and you didn't move the robber. You didn't rob anyone. You just sat there building little sculptures with your game pieces and staring into space.

GARRISON

I did?

NATE

Yeah. Like the mashed potatoes, you know, Close Encounters...

GARRISON

(Softly.)

I love that movie...

WALTER AND THE TWO ANNA'S - THE BEACH

A beach. The SOUND of seagulls and crashing waves can be heard. ANNA enters the scene, bounding through the theater as if on a beach. WALTER follows, meandering after. He pauses on the "jetty."

NARRATOR

Just past the jetty, southward along the shore, WALTER could see the shrimpers returning. What was it that Walter knew about love? He walked along the water's edge, digging for stones with his toes. Up ahead, little Anna was hopping between the waves, her chestnut hair dancing after in the purple cast of twilight. But god, Walter thought... she looks like her mother... He couldn't say it. He chose his words, instead:

WALTER

(calling to ANNA)

I think your mom might have liked this. It's too bad she's not here to see it.

NARRATOR

These were true statements. They were absolutely true. But surface words only. If Anna were to ask him plainly -- and he knew that she would one day - why it was he looked at her a certain way on some days and some days not - well then he'd have to say the words. And he wondered if the best course was to have an answer prepared or to just react in the moment. But all the words now, watching her kick the foam with her tiny bare feet... were stuck hard in back of his throat. And so it was a grown-up girl in the not far off, perhaps in her graduation gown, looking at him with one last exasperated plea...

ADULT ANNA

Daddy, what IS it???

NARRATOR

...that gave him the out. This is the part that Walter loved about the open water. One could do just about anything, one could even scream and the ocean would keep the secret, soaking up the sounds like a formidable sponge. How is it more people don't drown, he thought? No one can hear the cries. They just keep walking, maybe only a few hundred yards ahead, as the whole world ends. He could come clean now, he could totally do it. Without the fear of hurting her, he could be his cruelest self, he could just blurt the words out, as he might to a therapist. Or maybe even to Anna's mother directly, if he could ever summon the nerve.

WALTER

You look like someone I want to forget, like someone who broke me, I hate your fucking guts!!!

WALTER freezes, appalled with his own behavior.

WALTER (CONT'D)

No one should have such hate. No one...

NARRATOR

The boats were clanging their arrival. In tandem, as if answering the dinner bell.

ANNA

(calling - from far off)

Look daddy! The boats!

ANNA turns and smiles at her father.

WALTER

(calling - smiling brightly)

I see! And did you hear me cursing your mother?!

ANNA (not hearing) waves at her father and skips ahead. His moist eyes scan the horizon now, the years swirl like a rip tide all around him.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Oh, Anna...

NARRATOR

Walter imagined the life of a fisherman. Hands gnarled and hardened into serviceable stumps. There was always some rope to maneuver. He marveled at their mechanized rituals. Their "economy." These are the smartest of men, he thought. But somewhere along the way, before leathered skin and far off coordinates, a boy learned to hook the eye of a fish. He learned a pin fish from a crappie. And how to walk in the boots of another, yipping for a hand with the line or a nod of approval. Now the line is a Friday night with the missus. Or half the propane bill. Or the promise of freedom. And the ocean takes all bets.

MICHAEL AND ARIEL - UP ON A ROOF

(Present Day. MICHAEL and ARIEL stand on the ledge of a very tall building, unaware of each other's presence. They speak directly to the audience.)

MICHAEL

I'd say from the time I was about six or seven I've had this urge to punch my old man in the face. He had a switch, it was one I got from the forsythia bush, and he trapped me in the bathroom for an hour just whaling on my ass. Our relationship was kinda strained after that.

ARIEL

Nobody cares about real human connections anymore. Ya notice that?

MICHAEL

I really, really wanna punch him in the face.

ARIEL

That guy in Times Square, giving out free hugs? I asked him, he said he got 3 hugs yesterday. Three. In Times Square? That's not a good number.

MICHAEL

I've thought about all the ways I'd do it too. Coldcock. Right across the nose.

ARIEL

Hugs are awesome.

MICHAEL

Pow...

ARIEL

I love giving hugs.

MICHAEL

Asshole.

ARIEL

The problem is you can't just go around groping people. They get anxious.

MICHAEL

It was a protractor. And I put it back. I put it back as soon as pop caught me with it, and I apologized to the manager and he gave it to me anyway. Here kid, here's your protractor, grow up and be somebody.

ARIEL

They might even scream or runaway like you're a sociopath or something...

MICHAEL

Pop just stood there.

ARIEL

...I would imagine.

MICHAEL

Stupid smirk on his face.

ARIEL

But you're probably not a sociopath.

MICHAEL

And right then, I realized the shit going down. I felt closer to a perfect stranger than my own fucking father.

ARIEL

You're just needing, right?

MICHAEL

You believe that shit?

ARIEL

You're just needing, just like always.

MICHAEL

When you're a kid you don't know that you know things.

ARIEL

And what's so wrong with that?

MICHAEL

But you do. Waaaaay more than grownups.

ARIEL

It's not a crime or anything.

MICHAEL

I've thought about it.

ARIEL

All the ways we fail each other...

MICHAEL

If someone could just pay attention, ya know, just the slightest bit of attention, they might notice things.

ARIEL

Whatever.

MICHAEL

Like how your heart is broken. Or like that thing where you pretend to be all cocky, skipping class that day but you really just shit yourself on the playground from diarrhea and you gotta hide in the bathroom stall with that fat kid who eats three lunches and cries all the time.

ARIEL

When we fall and crack open and the life drains out...

MICHAEL

Nobody gives a shit.

ARIEL

I've used up all my chances.

MICHAEL

Not a single shit.

ARIEL

All gone.

MICHAEL

Fuck it.

HE steps closer to the edge.

ARIEL

I'm fine with that.

SHE steps closer to the edge.

Silence...

HE prepares to jump.

MICHAEL

FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!!!!!!!!!!!

(ARIEL is startled. She
stares over at Michael. HE
notices her for the first
time.)

Oh... hey.

(long pause)

ARIEL

Are you gonna kill yourself?

(beat)

MICHAEL

Yeah. You?

ARIEL

Yeah.

(beat)

MICHAEL

Right on.

(long pause)

WALTER - LIQUITEX

NARRATOR

It occurred to Walter, that if he would simply write his house number on the side of his trash can -- along with a few choice expletives -- it would render the can far less desirable to poachers. And it was this thinking that had him standing outside in his bathrobe at 2 AM with a can of orange Liquitex.

WALTER

Five. Two. Seven. Maple.

NARRATOR

He counted aloud as he sprayed the uneven coats on the fresh new surface, the "seven" looking 10 times angrier than the "five." He had not guessed just how gratifying this angry painting would feel. He smiled, flipping the can with his slipper and painting the numbers again, this time calling down the street to whatever opportunist might be lurking in the bushes.

WALTER

Five. Two. SEVEN. MAPLE. Is this my trash can? IS THIS MY TRASH CAN?! If you steal my can, YOU'RE A DICK!

WALTER paints the word "dick"
(initially, this wording is unseen
by the audience) on the side of the
can with an arrow, as if pointing
to whatever homeowner might decide
to steal it.

NARRATOR

ANNA appeared in the window of her bedroom, looking down at the scene below. SHE smacked at the glass, but WALTER did not hear. He pressed on, his left slipper now dusted orange from the overflow spray. He turned the can over to see side 1, which was now badly smeared into something like an 80s nightmare font, and side two, its bloody rivulets dribbling down into the freshly cut Bermuda grass.

The audience can now see what he had written on the other side of the can: "dick." Walter falters, he slumps to the grass and cradles the trash can in such a way that the arrow above the word "dick" is pointing in the direction of Walter's face.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Walter slumped into the grass.

Moments later this phone beeps. HE checks the message. He reads along...

NIGERIAN SPAMMER

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE-STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL I am Dr. Bakare Tunde, the cousin of Nigerian Astronaut, Air Force Major Abacha Tunde. He was the first African in space when he made a secret flight to the Salyut 6 space station in 1979. He was on a later Soviet spaceflight, Soyuz T-16Z to the secret Soviet military space station Salyut 8T in 1989. He was stranded there in 1990 when the Soviet Union was dissolved. His other Soviet crew members returned to earth on the Soyuz T-16Z, but his place was taken up by return cargo. There have been occasional Progrez supply flights to keep him going since that time. He is in good humor, but wants to come home.

WALTER AND LARA

He lay there a long while, spooning with the trash can and thinking about his lonely life. He thought about the man he had intended to be. About that pretty girl named Lara from Ms. Walsh's homeroom class in third grade, the one with the long braids, who was always nice to him, maybe nicer to him than anyone since in his whole life, if he was being honest about it.

LARA

I like your backpack!

WALTER

I like yours, yours is pretty great.

LARA

Do you live in Cloverdale, we just moved here from Amarillo.

WALTER

Amarillo?

LARA

It's in Texas.

WALTER

Texas?!

LARA

Howdy partner.

WALTER

Howdy partner...

LARA

Where do you live?

WALTER

In Somerset.

LARA

Oh. I don't know where that is.

WALTER

It's not far. It's nothing, it's not far.

LARA

Nothing, how do you mean nothing?

WALTER

Nothing, I don't know.

LARA

Are you shy?

WALTER

I think so.

LARA

We have science together.

WALTER

Yes, I know.

LARA

I like to sit in the back.

WALTER

Yes.

LARA

But I think you like science, Miss Yancy is always calling on you.

WALTER

I like science.

LARA

What do you want to be when you grow up?

WALTER

An astronaut.

LARA

Oh. You have to be really smart for that.

WALTER

I am really smart. But maybe I'll be too tall, you're not allowed to be too tall.

LARA

Oh. How come?

WALTER

Well, the rockets are small inside. So.

LARA

Ooooh. I don't know what I wanna be. Something with people, I like people. Do you like people?

WALTER

No.

LARA

Why not?

WALTER

They're just always around.

LARA

Oh. Do you like me?

WALTER

...

LARA

Do you wanna be my best friend?

WALTER

What?

LARA

Yeah, we could be best friends if you want.

WALTER

...

LARA

...

WALTER

Okay.

LARA

Yeah?

WALTER

Sure.

NARRATOR

The street lamp flickered on and off. A common occurrence in the early hours of twilight.

WALTER has the realization that ANNA is staring down at him from her bedroom window. They lock eyes for a moment. ANNA shakes her head and walks away from the window. WALTER cradles the trash can. HE falls to pieces in the Bermuda grass.

WALTER AND CHRISSY - GROCERY STORE EXTERIOR

Later that night. WALTER and CHRISSY stand out in front of the supermarket. THEY stare at each other in silence for a long moment. WALTER is emotional but he does his best to keep it all in. CHRISSY notices that WALTER's shoes and pajama pants and bath robe are covered in orange paint.

CHRISSY

(flatly)

You look like a traffic cone.

WALTER

I'm in love with you.

CHRISSY

...

WALTER

(falling apart)

I painted my trash can. And then fell asleep with it. On the front lawn. Of my house.

CHRISSY

When?

WALTER

About an hour ago.

CHRISSY

Okay.

WALTER

And things are changing and I don't know my life anymore and I'm scared to death you'll wake up and realize I'm just *some* guy...

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

or that I'll fuck up and lose you before we even start and end up just *some guy you used to know* and those are my two choices.

(faltering)

My two choices...

WALTER's emotions finally let go.
CHRISSEY pulls him in.

CHRISSEY

Shhh shh shh....

THEY rock back and forth with each.

Silence.

GARRISON AND NATE - I SHOULD HAVE SAID YES

GARRISON gets a text message, reads
it.

So... they're issuing opinions in
twenty minutes.

NATE
(Numb.)

Ironic, huh?

GARRISON

What's that?

NATE

Today of all days.

GARRISON
(Softly.)

We should walk over.

NATE
(Faltering.)

I can't...

GARRISON

Nate?

NATE

I killed the ficus.

GARRISON

Don't do that.

NATE

Why not?

GARRISON
It's a ficus. They die, that's what they do.
(Beat.)

NATE

You have to take the bed.

GARRISON

What?

NATE

That ... sleep-number-bullshit, I won't be able to sleep in it when you're gone.

GARRISON

Nate...

NATE

I mean it. I mean it, I won't. I've mapped that whole bed. I know every snore. Every kick in the dark. Every nightmare. When you wake in the night and you sit on the edge of the bed staring at the wall ... and you think I'm asleep, I'm not sleeping. There's nothing in my life I've ever done that has mattered more to me than learning how to love you. I should have said yes.

GARRISON

To what?

NATE

I wanted to, Garrison. All the times you asked me... year after year, and I took it as a joke, because, like that's ever gonna happen. And Jack said, just humor the man. But I couldn't. Because it felt like lying. What would be the point of even dreaming about something that I could never have? And then when DC finally got the vote, I thought... there goes my last excuse. He'll ask me again, like he does every year, but this time he'll have a ring. Mr. & Mr.

(Pause.)

And then you lost your job... and it made sense that you didn't ask me. But then another year passed... and we lost something, I don't know... and it came time for you to ask me but you didn't ask me. And I know now that you never will.

GARRISON

(A whisper.)

Fuck.

NATE

You're a gifted lawyer, Garrison. I just want you happy, it's all I've ever wanted.

GARRISON

Nate.

NATE

I don't blame you for wanting to leave me.

GARRISON

That's not how it is.

NATE

Are there really jobs in Cleveland? That's amazing.

GARRISON

Smartass.

NATE

I can't even think of a decent joke about Cleveland.

GARRISON

There's plenty.

NATE

Name one.

GARRISON

Believe me.

NATE

One good joke about Cleveland.

GARRISON

Like you need more ammunition.

NATE

You don't know any, do you?

GARRISON

(Begrudgingly - deadpan.)

Why do geese fly upside down over Cleveland?

NATE

Why?

GARRISON

Because there's nothing there worth shitting on.

NATE

You're right, that's a good one.

GARRISON

You're the love of my life.

NATE

Fuck you.

(Beat.)

I'm not planning your going-away party.

GARRISON

I don't want one.

NATE

Liar.

GARRISON envelops Nate. They close
their eyes. They breathe.

END OF PLAY

MAX AND TESSA - SWORDFISH TROMBONE

MAX JONES

Tessa...

TESSA

Yes?

MAX JONES

(lifeless)

Am I... attractive?

TESSA

(matter-of-factly)

Intensely so, sir. Max.

MAX JONES

(matter-of-factly)

You'd fuck me, right...

MAX empties his glass. TESSA helps as he straightens his tie and puts on his jacket.

TESSA

I wanted to tell you... I thought of something as I was passing out crab balls. My sister's new father-in-law... umn... he's... he's also having a midlife crisis.

MAX JONES

What gave it away?

TESSA

He disappeared for six days and came back with a Tom Waits tattoo.

MAX JONES

Dog With Umbrella?

TESSA

Swordfish Trombone.

MAX JONES

God, that's brilliant.

TESSA

Also, Jack just pulled me into the coat closet for no apparent reason.

MAX JONES

Oh?

TESSA

And then he kissed me.

MAX JONES

How was it?

TESSA

(heartfelt)

I really, really like him.

(beat)

Thank you.

MAX JONES

(staring at Tessa intently)

I have no idea what you're talking about.

TESSA

Ya know. Max. I've read your book seven times.

MAX JONES

Seven?

TESSA

Seven. After the first time I read it, I set it on fire, and threw it out the 9th floor window of my dormitory. And then I ran downstairs in a panic and fished it off the first floor awning, and then I stayed up all night and read it again and then I cried for three days.

(beat)

Every time I sit down with it, I find something new. Sometimes I cry. Sometimes I scr-- often, I scream. Sometimes -- always, actually -- I see myself in the story and I wonder how you knew. How you could know those things, someone I've never met. The way you describe life and how it "folds back onto itself... like a drunk census taker..."

Silence.

Hey...

MAX looks up at Tessa.

Your book isn't misunderstood because it's incomprehensible, Max. It's misunderstood because no one's ever written it before. You've completely ripped up the rules of the genre.

MAX JONES

(a joke)

How old are you?

(pause)

Ripped...

TESSA

Yeah, ya know? Like Dylan. I wonder if he knew that night in Newport, Rhode Island, that he was changing the course of history.

MAX JONES

I think he was just being an asshole.

TESSA

Uh huh...

TESSA turns to exit.

TESSA (CONT'D)

(matter-of-factly)

Oh. And for the record, I would fuck the shit out of you.

TESSA exits.

TESSA (CONT'D)

(from off)

Places!

MAX JONES
(almost a whisper)

Thank you, places...

MAX looks at himself in the mirror.

MAX JONES (CONT'D)
(calling)

Thank you, places.

END OF PLAY

MICHAEL AND ARIEL - COFFEE

ARIEL

What kind of coffee do you drink?

MICHAEL

What?

ARIEL

Cuz that could be like another funny coincidence.

(beat)

Well, not like "funny, haha..."

MICHAEL

I have a Keurig.

ARIEL

Oh, I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

Are you like a coffee snob or something?

ARIEL

No. It doesn't have to be Starbucks.

(beat)

But it does have to be coffee.

MICHAEL

(indicating the shrubbery
below)

Be careful on that side, I've scoped it out, there's a thing
and there's also a bush, like a monster bush or something.

ARIEL

A bush...

MICHAEL

Like a boxwood maybe. Fucking man-eating boxwood.

ARIEL

Oh.

MICHAEL

Hardcore.

ARIEL

(looking over the ledge)

Hardcore...

MICHAEL

That's--I mean... maybe you're into it.

ARIEL

I hadn't thought about it...

MICHAEL asks non-verbally if he can move a bit closer. Ariel allows it. He moves a few feet closer. He sits on the edge of the ledge.

MICHAEL

At least it's not raining.

ARIEL

Why do you care if it's raining, you're gonna kill yourself.

MICHAEL

Yeah, but like... rain would make it sad somehow, I dunno.

ARIEL

Sad..

MICHAEL

More sad...

ARIEL

Oh.

MICHAEL

For them.

ARIEL

Oh, right, for them.

ARIEL sits.

MICHAEL
Ya know?

ARIEL
But not for us...

MICHAEL
Fuck if I care.

ARIEL
I... I think I'm confused.

MICHAEL
My friend just committed suicide by jumping off a 12 story building. Plus it's raining. Kinda thing.

ARIEL
You have friends?
(beat)

MICHAEL
Unless it was like a deluge or something, like a quick storm, maybe no one would even notice.

ARIEL
The rain, you mean?

MICHAEL
Right...

ARIEL
(making a point)
You have blue eyes.
(beat)

MICHAEL
(really "seeing" her)
You have a red dress...

ARIEL
(blushing)
Thank you...

MICHAEL

You're welcome.

(long pause)

ARIEL looks around for her sweater.

What do you...

ARIEL

My sweater.

MICHAEL

Oh.

HE retrieves her sweater and
returns to sitting beside her.

ARIEL

Thanks.

MICHAEL

You wanna know what's weird?

ARIEL

What?

MICHAEL

Today's my birthday.

ARIEL

Oh. Happy birthday!

MICHAEL

January 16th.

ARIEL

Capricorn...

MICHAEL

Can you guess what January 16th is?

ARIEL

What?

MICHAEL

It's National Nothing Day.

ARIEL

National...

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

National Nothing Day. My birthday falls on National Nothing Day.

(long pause)

ARIEL

(looking down at the
shrubbery below)

I think a rose bush would be worse.

MICHAEL

What?

ARIEL

Yeah, like even more hardcore, ya know?

MICHAEL

Oh.

(imagining it)

Yeah.

(long pause)

ARIEL

My birthday is on Friday.

MICHAEL

Oh yeah?

ARIEL

Which is also Squirrel Appreciation Day.

MICHAEL

Squirrel Appreciation--

ARIEL
(overlapping)

You heard me.

(long pause)

And that's gotta be worse, right, than Nothing Day? At least on Nothing Day you can do nothing or even be a nothing but on Squirrel Appreciation Day you have to pretend to like... take a vested interest in squirrels, or whatever, when maybe you just don't give a shit. Or if you do, it probably feels a lot like work because we still have so much ground to cover in the area of human/squirrel relations. I mean we've barely scratched the surface.

MICHAEL

Hate squirrels.

ARIEL

Right?

MICHAEL

Fucking hate squirrels.

ARIEL

I aim at them on my bicycle.

MICHAEL

Harsh.

ARIEL

Don't tell anyone.

MICHAEL

No.

ARIEL

I'm not proud of it.

MICHAEL

Squirrel Appreciation Day...

ARIEL

If I'd only been born one day earlier.

MICHAEL

What's that?

ARIEL

Penguin Awareness.

MICHAEL

Penguin Awareness? That's a thing?

ARIEL

It's a fucking thing.

(long pause)

MICHAEL

(intently)

You have a name.

ARIEL

It's Karen. No it's not, it's Ariel. My name is Ariel.

MICHAEL

Hi, Ariel.

ARIEL

Hi.

(beat)

Come here often?

MICHAEL

I usually go to that sex doll warehouse over on 12th.

ARIEL

Oh?

MICHAEL

It has a nice view of the river. And there's a Fourbucks across the street. You could get a latte.

ARIEL

(amused.)

Fourbucks.

MICHAEL

Make a day of it.

I'll check it out. ARIEL

You're talking in the future. MICHAEL

I shouldn't be talking to you. ARIEL

Nope. MICHAEL
(beat)

I hate my parents. ARIEL

My dad's a sex offender. MICHAEL

I might be bipolar. ARIEL

I take 4 medications. MICHAEL

I am. I am bipolar. ARIEL

I take 8 medications. MICHAEL

I cut myself with razors and glass. ARIEL

I drink like a priest. MICHAEL

Nobody loves me. ARIEL

I have an irrational fear of croutons. MICHAEL

Weirdo. ARIEL

Michael. MICHAEL

ARIEL

Michael...

MICHAEL

Can we just... sit here?

They look at each other for a long
while. They look out at the city.
They breathe. They say it all
without saying a word.

Lights fade.

End of play.

WALTER AND ANNA - RAINBOW BRIDGE

ANNA's bedroom, early evening.
WALTER reads the last page or two
from THE RAINBOW BRIDGE.

WALTER

Rick could barely concentrate on his school work all day thinking about Koko. He raced home from the school bus, anxious to hear what the vet had said. Bursting into the kitchen, Rick froze in his tracks. The stinky basket was empty! He looked around the kitchen in a panic. "Where's Koko!?" he shouted. Mom and Dad were sitting at the kitchen table. It looked as if Mom had been crying...

ANNA puts her hand on the book,
gesturing for her dad to stop
reading. WALTER closes the book.

Silence.

ANNA

Daddy?

WALTER

...

ANNA

Why did Bumpkin have to die?

NARRATOR

Walter thought about the vastness of time and all the years he'd lived shuttered and alone. Dull plates of eggs and toast. Solo walks around the pond. TV trays and early nights. He knew the answer as sure as he knew anything.

WALTER

Is it... is it to remind us how to love?

ANNA
(thinking)

Yeah...

WALTER
Maybe that's it.

ANNA
Maybe...

WALTER
Are you happy with the grave we made for Bumpkin?

ANNA nods.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Good.

Pause.

WALTER (CONT'D)
You didn't eat much.

ANNA pulls WALTER closer. THEY
snuggle.

NARRATOR
The light from the hallway cut a swath across Anna's moonlit room. Walter looked up at the solar system mobile floating in the light. He knew that the Saturn sphere was unrealistically stylized as was the one for Earth -- its colors far too photorealistic for his tastes -- but he was nevertheless able to forgive the design flaw given that the sculpture was otherwise anatomically precise. Anna and her father watched the world go round and round and welcomed the chance to breathe as the ticking from a nearby fan lulled them off to sleep. In Walter's dreams, there was no pain. No sickness or death. Only the good kind of ache, sending signals into the void. And an answering light to warm a hopeful heart.

END OF PLAY