

Night Creatures
By Justice Hehir

CHARACTERS

Alex, 26. Non-native Spanish speaker. He speaks a little Spanish.

Paul, 31. Non-native Spanish speaker. He doesn't speak Spanish.

Lara, 34. Native Spanish speaker. Bilingual.

Leanne, 28. Maybe she speaks Spanish.

This play takes place in one act, in real time.

Representation:
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Lights up on a Montclair municipal animal shelter, winter. The audience views the shelter from back to front. There are two desks, side by side, the interiors of which face the audience. They are filled with clutter of the administrative variety, as well as a small hamster cage. The floor and the environment is sterile but still hopelessly dingy. At extreme stage right, there is a swinging door that connects to the barely visible lobby. At extreme upstage right, there is a glass door to the outside. On stage left, there is a door leading to the shelter's main staircase. Downstage from the desks are multiple file cabinets, a printer, and several cages of cats. There are also multiple bags of towels and bedding, some packed into a gaudy, large gift wrapped box. There are several posters encouraging people to spay and neuter their pets, including one of a cat wearing a snorkel that says, "Beat the Heat, Spay/Neuter Your Cat" and one with a dog dressed as a leprechaun that says, "Don't Worry, He Won't Miss His Lucky Charms." ALEX, 26, sits behind a large reception desk. As he speaks on the phone, PAUL, 31, enters from the staircase and starts taking off various layers of clothing. They are both wearing the same "Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter" polos in an awful teal color, maybe with a sweater or fleece on top. PAUL begins to unwrap a tuna sandwich and eat it on the desk, then getting up and poking his fingers in the cat cages as he eats.

Note: "/" indicates a pause while another person is "speaking" on the other end of the telephone, used heavily in this play. "/" indicates overlapping voices.

ALEX

How old is the dog? // Ok. Well if you had to guess // And what breed? // Yeah, no we can take him. // Yeah. No, it's very. // No, take your time. // We close at 7:00. // 7:00. // Bye.

He turns to look at PAUL.

ALEX

Hey man!

PAUL

Alexander.

ALEX

Long time no see.

PAUL
Too fuckin' long.

ALEX
Did you walk?

PAUL
No, I got an Uber.

ALEX
I walked.

PAUL
Did people shovel yet?

ALEX
No. My pants are soaked.

PAUL
Use the uh, use the hand dryer thing.

ALEX
Oh I'm good. I'm not like cold now. My leg heat sort of neutralized the wetness.

Beat.

PAUL
How was your Christmas?

ALEX
...Oh, I don't, I don't celebrate that?

PAUL
Oh. Sorry/

ALEX

/No, um, how was your Christmas?

PAUL

It was ok. I don't know, I feel like I always think it's gonna be this big exciting thing and it's like, Not. And then today is just depressing, because Christmas is over. So like fuck that. It's all downhill after you stop believing in santa, you know? Just like a major drop-off in terms of like, relative happiness. Like, you hit 18, drops again. I dunno, I dunno. My nephew is a little shit. It was ok.

A small pause.

ALEX

Wait um, so are you working today?

PAUL

You didn't hear?

ALEX

What?

PAUL

Ellen's having the baby.

ALEX

What?

PAUL

Yeah. Lori called me this morning and was like, can you cover first shift? And at first I was pissed, but then she said, "Ellen's having the baby" so I kind of had to come in.

ALEX

Oh my god. Should I call her?

PAUL
Now?

ALEX
Yeah.

PAUL
She's having a baby, man. I don't think she's gonna pick up the phone.

ALEX
Should I text her?

PAUL
I don't even know if you're allowed to have a cell phone in the delivery room.

ALEX
She's not in a delivery room, she's having a homebirth.

PAUL
Woah. Like with a kiddie pool?

ALEX
Yeah. Or I mean, not like a, I think it's a medical like/ inflatable thing.

PAUL
/Well yeah I just/

ALEX
/She was all hyped about it.

He pulls out his phone.

ALEX

I just feel like it's a big moment, you know? Like I should call, or something. To like, acknowledge it?

PAUL

I don't know man. My sister was in labor for 18 hours with my nephew, and it was rough.

ALEX

18 hours?

PAUL

Oh yeah. Especially if it's your first baby? 18 hours, easy. And she was a fucking mess. Like from the second her water broke till the second that baby popped out.

ALEX

That's like, a whole day.

PAUL

Oh yeah. My dad and I were in there with her for a while but then my mom told us to get out when the shit hit the fan. Does she have a doula?

ALEX

Distracted, looking at his phone. Um, yes. I remember her saying that. Word.

PAUL

Good. That's, yeah. My sister had one and she was the only fucking sane person there. I mean she was, she was weird, she just kept drinking all this bone broth, but like my brother-in-law was compulsively like nervous vomiting and then my mom was like Too Involved? So.

ALEX *pulls up her number.*

PAUL

There's no way she's picking up/

ALEX

/I'm just gonna leave her a message.

PAUL
That's. Ok.

ALEX
Is that weird?

PAUL
Um, it's a little weird. I think. I mean/

ALEX
/Yeah/

PAUL
/But if you're, I don't know, if you're like/

ALEX
/We talk like every day.

PAUL
Yeah, then, I don't know. That's like, your call/ I feel like?

ALEX
/Yeah no. Yeah. I'll just leave a message. And she can just listen to it later. Or tomorrow.

He dials her number. He waits. She picks up.

ALEX
Oh my god, hi! // Yeah, I wasn't // I'm here with Paul //

PAUL
She picked up? Hey Ellen!

ALEX

We just wanted to say congrats and like, good luck, and stuff. // Yeah, yeah. // Six centimeters?
// Holy shit. Holy shit. // Oh wow. No yeah I remember. //Yeah, well, we'll talk to you later then. //
Yeah. // Ok, bye.

PAUL

She picked up the phone?

ALEX

Yeah. I was kind of like, wait, what?

PAUL

How'd she sound?

ALEX

Actually really happy.

PAUL

Woah.

ALEX

Yeah. She uh, she told me like last week that her birth plan was just to like watch The Office for
as long as possible and she's on like Season Four now. And she's um, she's six centimeters.

PAUL

What do you have to be at to start like, having the baby?

ALEX

Um...

He googles this.

ALEX

10.

PAUL
10?

ALEX
The vagina has to be 10 centimeters?

PAUL
No, the cervix. It's like, all the way up there?

ALEX
No, I know. Yeah.

PAUL
It's like mini golf when there's like Two Holes, you know. Like a hole inside a hole. *Beat*. But I mean I guess the vagina has to get to like, about the same size? Because it has to come out there?

ALEX
Yeah. I mean it has to/

PAUL
/Physically it would have to, yeah.

ALEX
Here, this is like what she was doing.

ALEX starts playing a home video of a homebirth. We can hear it faintly. PAUL watches, standing behind him.

PAUL
I swear to God I had that pool when I was little.

ALEX

No you didn't. That pool?

PAUL

Yeah man, I totally got that at Target.

They both watch for a minute. The phone rings, PAUL answers as ALEX pauses the video.

PAUL

Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter this is Paul speaking, how can I help you? // Yeah, we take small animals. // It's a hamster? // Yeah, no, that's fine. // 7:00. // No worries.

He hangs up and ALEX immediately starts playing the video again. There's a Pearl Jam song playing in the background, but we can also hear moans. They both watch intently.

PAUL

I heard in a movie that in order for a man to experience the same level of pain a woman does in childbirth, he'd have to pull his scrotum over his head.

A pause while they contemplate this.

PAUL

I think Robin Williams was in it.

//

ALEX

I don't think that's possible.

PAUL

If a vagina can stretch enough to have a nine pound baby/

ALEX

/Nine pounds?

PAUL

Yeah.

ALEX

I don't think babies are born at nine pounds.

PAUL

No some are. Some definitely are. Or like eight pounds. I was eight pounds. Eight fuckin' pounds! I think that's proof that the human body is, like, amazingly adaptable. I mean have you seen a baby recently? They have giant heads.

ALEX

Well, giant *baby* heads, but yeah.

PAUL

Their heads are literally half their body weight at birth. That's like, extreme adaptation.

ALEX

I mean it doesn't always, like it tears sometimes though. Like it can only stretch so much like for some people/

PAUL

/Yeah but it still comes out. Like tearing is adapting.

ALEX

Yeah I guess.

ALEX *presses play. They continue watching the video.*

PAUL

They don't change the water?

ALEX

I don't think so.

PAUL

So all the blood and everything is just in there?

ALEX
I guess.

PAUL
Because my sister was like, shitting, when she gave birth. So that would/

ALEX
/I'm sure they wouldn't just leave that in there if that happened.

PAUL
What do they use, like the thing you use to clean leaves out of a pool? Like a skimmer thing?

ALEX
I mean maybe it doesn't gross you out so much because you're just so focused on like, having a baby.

PAUL
Uh-uh. I don't care how much pain I'm in, I would not sit in a pool of my own shit water.

They pause the video.

ALEX
Did you have tuna?

PAUL
Yeah.

ALEX
Oh, I just got like, a whiff of it/

PAUL
/Sorry man, I'm a pescatarian now.

ALEX

Is that- so you don't eat fish? No that/

PAUL

/So, so I don't eat meat, but I do eat fish.

ALEX

Oh. Gotcha.

PAUL

I had this moment, last month, when I really- I mean my body just felt poisoned. Like I was in a bad place, I wasn't paying attention to my diet, and I was climbing up the stairs at my mom's place and I really thought I was gonna have a heart attack. Like right there. I just laid on the hallway floor for twenty minutes, and I was like, something's gotta change. You ever have a moment like that? Like I cannot keep doing this thing to myself. So my therapist told me I should take that energy, that push, and find some physical way to make it manifest, so I became a pescatarian.

ALEX

Good for you.

PAUL

Thanks. Yeah, thanks. It's been a little crazy like transitional period but.

ALEX

Do you eat dairy?

PAUL

Oh yeah. No milk though.

ALEX

No milk?

PAUL
Nope.

ALEX
But do you eat other dairy? Because isn't most dairy like, made out of milk?

PAUL
Yeah, yeah, but it's different. Like yogurt is so different than milk. Because it has all the probiotics, and stuff. It's fermented.

ALEX
It's fermented?

PAUL
No, not, it's a c-word. It's not fermented. It's like/

ALEX
/Cultures? Right?

PAUL
Cultured. Yeah.

ALEX
And you eat tuna for breakfast?

PAUL
Not always. But yeah. It's good protein. Better than cereal or that crap. Best thing you can eat for breakfast is anything except breakfast food. All that sugar and crap? It'll kill you. It's toxic. It's like Actually Poison.

He eats the remaining bit of his sandwich and stretches.

PAUL
Diane's been keeping me on track. My therapist.

ALEX
That's cool.

PAUL
Yeah, she's great. She kind of reminds me of my mom? But like way more chill?

ALEX
Yeah, that's/

PAUL
/And then my mom is always like, if she's so much like me, why don't you just talk to me for free, and I'm like, you're not a therapist!

ALEX
I've never been to a therapist.

PAUL
Really?

ALEX
Yeah, never.

PAUL
Well, like good for you, I guess?

ALEX
Oh, no I didn't mean it like/

PAUL
/It's cool/

ALEX
/I just meant, like, I don't have that experience, so I just don't know what it's like?

PAUL

Yeah. No I get that/

ALEX

/That's all. I like, should probably go. Sort like, my head out.

A slightly anxious pause.

PAUL

What's with all the cats?

ALEX

I don't know.

PAUL

When did they get here?

ALEX

Last night, I heard, I wasn't here when transport brought them in. Well, actually, I mean it was the SPCA, really.

PAUL

They had people working yesterday?

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

That's so depressing.

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL
They took away somebody's cats on Christmas?

ALEX
I guess.

PAUL
That sucks.

ALEX
I think they came from a hoarder, there were a couple that didn't- I mean I think they found a couple dead ones.

PAUL
Oh.

ALEX
Yeah.

Beat.

PAUL
I don't GET hoarding.

ALEX nods. A pause. The phone rings.

PAUL
Hello, Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter, this is Paul, how can I help you?// Hi Leanne.

He makes pointed eye contact with ALEX.

PAUL
Right.// I'm listening.

More eye contact.

PAUL

Yes, we have a few// Yes// Yes// Leanne, I need to get off the phone// I know// But we need to keep the lines open so we can help animals, that's// I mean you want that, right?// Ok// Nope, we don't need you today// I'm// I'm hanging up.

He hangs up.

PAUL

Oh my god.

ALEX

Her neighbor? With the um, the pitbulls/

PAUL

/Yes. And some other person, like two blocks away from her, I couldn't understand. Something about a cat? Like under a car?

ALEX

Ellen called somebody about her, like that she might need help.

Some quiet.

PAUL

I don't know who you call about that.

ALEX

Yeah/

PAUL

/Like not the police, or anything/

ALEX

/Yeah no like/

PAUL

/Or an ambulance, because it's not like an emergency/

ALEX

/I don't know. I'm, I'm not sure who she called.

PAUL

Like she's not hurt, she's not like, dangerous, she's just like fuckin' crazy.

Another pause.

PAUL

She came in the other day with a dead squirrel.

ALEX

She brought me a dead pigeon. And then before that it was a raccoon that got hit by a car.

PAUL

I don't get how she finds all of them.

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

Like how many dead animals do you see on a daily basis?

ALEX

Like including here/

PAUL

/No, in this scenario we're just normal people.

ALEX

I don't know. Like, maybe one a month?

PAUL

Yeah, exactly. Not like, five a week. Like where is she finding all these mangled dead animals?

ALEX

Yeah, I don't know.

PAUL

Part of me is like, does she kill them?

ALEX

I don't think so.

PAUL

I'm just saying.

ALEX

I can't see her doing that.

PAUL

Yeah. Just like, it's a lot.

He wanders over to the cats.

PAUL

Why aren't they up in exam already?

ALEX

No idea. No one from exam has come down yet, so.

PAUL

I kinda like it. We never get to keep anything down here.

ALEX

That's not true. We have Bam Bam.

PAUL'S *attention is directed to the hamster cage on the desk.*

PAUL

Oh god is he still in there?

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

What? I thought he died and this was a different one.

ALEX

Are you serious?

PAUL

Yes! Or that we kept his cage as like, some kind of shrine or memorial thing/

ALEX

/No! No, it's Bam Bam, he's like, a total trooper.

PAUL

Who feeds him?

ALEX

I do. Ellen does. People on second shift do too.

PAUL

No shit.

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

Damn. Hamsters are not my thing. Strictly a dog and cat person.

ALEX

You don't think hamsters are cute?

PAUL

I mean yeah? But I just feel like- like I don't think anyone ever really wants a hamster. I think they want a dog or a cat, but they can't have one, so they get this little thing that they put all these expectations on, you know? Which is wrong, because a hamster can't be a dog. I think that's probably why we get so many hamsters.

ALEX

I had hamsters growing up, I dunno, I liked them.

PAUL

Laughing. Oh my god, I can totally see that. You with hamsters. Like feeding a hamster a little like, fucking pellet or something.

ALEX

Yeah, well.

PAUL

But you can't cuddle with a hamster/

ALEX

/You can kind of, like hold them to your chest/

PAUL

/They're more for watching. And stores just breed the shit out of them so sociopath kids can microwave them to see if they run faster.

ALEX

Ah! Ah ah ah ah ah.

He covers his face, his ears.

PAUL

Are you ok?

ALEX

I get, I get the images stuck in my head.

PAUL

Of hamsters?

ALEX

Of the microwaving the hamsters. Of like, disturbing things. It really bothers me.

PAUL

It really bothers me too which is why I'm saying, people should stop getting hamsters for their creepy ass kids.

ALEX

No like, the image, it gets stuck, like under my eyelids. Like once you say it it's just stuck there.

PAUL

Sorry, that sounds/

ALEX

/It's ok. It sucks but it's. Yeah.

PAUL

Did you like choose to get a hamster? Or were you like only allowed to get a hamster?

ALEX

I was, like technically only allowed to have a hamster/

PAUL

/Ok/

ALEX

/but like that was fine with me, at the time, because I really liked them. I do like them. I don't know, I like everything. I work here.

PAUL

I don't like everything and I work here. Reptiles? Are you into reptiles?

ALEX

Um, not like very much/ but like.

PAUL

/Last week someone brought in like seven leopard geckos? And people in exam were all like, excited? Like it was so cool we got geckos? But it's like, having reptiles is like having a glorified fish tank. I feel like people who have snakes and crap always think it's so different? But it's like, man, that thing wants nothing to do with you. Like it's probably just pissed that it's in your stupid house. Like maybe it doesn't even really think you exist. Maybe it thinks just your hand exists, like just this thing that drops the crickets in. Like if you have to put a special lamp on to keep something at the right temperature, or whatever, like it probably just shouldn't be living in your fucking house.

A silence.

ALEX

Iguanas are cool.

PAUL

Yeah? But like, do you really wanna hold an iguana?

ALEX

Kind of.

PAUL

Ok, but do you want an iguana on your couch? In your bed?

ALEX

No...

PAUL

It's the same thing with ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, rats, it's just like, get a dog. Get a cat. Like get a real pet.

ALEX

I don't know, rabbit people really like rabbits.

PAUL

Have you ever met a normal person who owns a rabbit?

ALEX *thinks about this.*

ALEX

I don't know/

PAUL

/My cousin had a rabbit, he ended up on some kind of FBI watchlist.

ALEX

What?

PAUL

Yeah. I think he was looking at ISIS shit online.

ALEX

That's crazy.

PAUL

I'm telling you, rabbit owners are not normal people.

ALEX

What did they do to your cousin?

PAUL

Nothing. I mean, I think someone came to the house, I don't know. Still has the same rabbit from when he was like, fifteen.

He pulls a water bottle out of his backpack, takes a few big gulps. He looks at the cats intently. PAUL walks over to the cages and speaks softly to the cats.

PAUL

Hi. Yeah, hi. You're a sweetheart, aren't you? Yeah. I know. I know.

ALEX

Don't put your hands near the gray one.

PAUL

Which gray one?

ALEX

The all gray one. He's not friendly.

He walks back.

PAUL

People are such fucking shitheads.

They both sit quietly.

ALEX

We have to sort the holiday drive stuff today too.

PAUL
How'd we do?

ALEX picks through the bags.

ALEX
Eh. I mean ok. It's mostly like, cans of dog food people's dogs didn't like. But there's some towels and blankets and stuff.

PAUL
Don't we have enough towels?

ALEX
I don't know/

PAUL
/I mean have you been up to adoptions recently? Because half the supply closet is just towels. And then they don't even put them in the cages because of fleas.

ALEX
I mean, I think they should, I think the animals would like it.

PAUL
Yeah, no, I know they should, they just don't. And every year, the chain email they send out with the "wish list" or whatever always has towels on it. And it's like, who, like, what are we doing?

He reluctantly puts the cat away and starts picking through a bag. He picks up some towels, folds them. Then he finds one and holds it up.

PAUL
Look!

ALEX *looks. He doesn't see what he's supposed to.*

ALEX
What?

PAUL
This was totally someone's jizz towel.

He tosses it aside and continues searching through the donation bags.

PAUL
These are so cute.

He pulls out three very clearly handmade baby blankets.

ALEX
Yeah. This one lady makes them every year for us.

PAUL
What?

ALEX
Yeah, she's like kind of old? She normally comes during the day and drops them off and talks to everybody. I think she's Hungarian, or something.

PAUL
I've never seen her.

ALEX
Are you sure? She like hangs out? Her hair is dyed red and she's always wearing like a Christmas Vest?

PAUL
Christmas Vest?

ALEX

Like a Christmas-themed vest. With different pins and stuff.

PAUL

Huh.

ALEX

We use the blankets for like, pictures for the website. Like the animals' profiles or whatever.

PAUL

Ohhhh. Cool.

They keep looking through the bags.

ALEX

Ugh.

PAUL

What?

ALEX

Somebody just gave us a bag full of latex gloves.

PAUL

Those are good.

ALEX

No, like not in a box, just a bag full of loose latex gloves. How is that sanitary? Why wouldn't you just keep them in the box?

PAUL

We could use them for cleaning or something.

ALEX tosses him the bag, which he stuffs in a drawer in one of the cabinets. He then continues pulling items out of the bags, examining them.

PAUL

We're actually really good on latex gloves right now.

ALEX

Ellen did that. She got her sister who's a nurse to steal her a bunch from the hospital supply closet. They have tons.

PAUL

Well we technically have tons too, but exams and adoptions just hog them all. I asked one guy in exams for a box, like one box, and he was like, "you're intake, why do you need gloves?" And I'm like, I don't know, because intake is where people drop off their dirty, diseased animals? And then he didn't give me one because they were "low."

ALEX

Which guy?

PAUL

The gangly kid. *Beat.* With the, uh, his face is weird.

ALEX

Nick.

PAUL

Nick.

ALEX

I think his face is um, I think that's like a birth defect/ actually.

PAUL

/What? I don't think that's a birth/ defect

ALEX

/Um I think he's just like really sensitive about it/

PAUL

/I'm not like making fun of his face I'm just pissed he was a dickhole about sharing the gloves and then I like used his face to identify him.

ALEX

No I know. But like we probably shouldn't like call it weird. /I don't know.

PAUL

/Ok Nick is a dickhole. Can I say that? Nick is a glove-hoarding dickhole.

Pause.

ALEX

I'm putting the food in this box.

They stack all the food they've pulled out so far into a large cardboard box.

PAUL

I um, I hear you with the face thing.

ALEX

Yeah, um. I just felt, yeah/

PAUL

/No yeah, yeah.

They stack more food.

PAUL

So what's new Alexander?

ALEX

Nothing, really. My brother's getting engaged.

PAUL

Woah, no shit!

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

That's big.

ALEX

Yeah. I mean, I would say don't tell anyone, but like, you probably don't know his girlfriend, or anyone, like, close to her, so/

PAUL

/Older brother?

ALEX

No, um, 2 years younger.

PAUL

Oh, cool. What's he do?

ALEX

He's a lawyer. Or like, he's in law school. So my parents are like, sort of permanently thrilled with him.

PAUL

I don't get society's like, collective hard-on for lawyers. Like why is that such a cool thing to do?

ALEX

Money?

PAUL

Lots of jobs make a lot of money.

ALEX

I guess because you can kind of feel righteous about it, depending on what you do.

PAUL

Does he do something righteous?

ALEX

He's in school, so. And I don't think, I don't think he'll do anything like that after he's done though. *A pause.* His girlfriend is really into dancing. So he wants to do one of those flash mobs proposals/

PAUL

/Like on youtube?

ALEX

Yeah, like he wants everyone they know to like, be there dancing. And like, they're, him and his girlfriend, they're like the kind of people that know a lot of people? And it's gonna be in Central Park.

PAUL

What?

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

That's like, super ambitious.

ALEX

Yeah. I don't really believe in public proposals. Which I told him. But he hired this guy to teach me and like, my whole extended family this dumb dance.

PAUL

You have to dance?

ALEX

Yeah. I gotta practice.

PAUL

When is it?

ALEX

Sunday.

PAUL

Shit.

ALEX gets up and starts performing the dance.

ALEX

It's like, step, step, step, step, twirl and clap, twirl and clap, arm pump, arm pump, monkey, monkey, monkey, then we run in place for a while, and then it's the same thing again.

PAUL

Woah. That's kind of a lot to remember.

ALEX

Yeah. And my grandma's supposed to be doing it? Which is like, not a good idea, she's got dementia, she has no idea what's going on, but my brother wants to include her?

PAUL

I mean, I guess that's nice of him.

ALEX

I don't know. I think it's more about him than my grandma, you know? Like it feels- I don't know. Like she called everyone Sluts at Thanksgiving, she's not like, There. Yeah. But two weeks ago he took us out to dinner, to like, announce he was gonna propose and show us the ring and stuff. And originally he was like, "she really likes mason jars so I'm going to put the ring in the mason jar" and then I said that sounded terrible, what else did she like, so then he was like, "dancing", and then it kind of clicked for him.

PAUL

So you gave him the idea. You are the creator, like, you are the architect of your own hell.

ALEX

Yeah, I guess.

Beat.

PAUL

Is she a dancer?

ALEX

No. Not like, professionally.

PAUL

No yeah, but she likes/

ALEX

/Yeah. She does like community theater.

PAUL

Is she a lawyer?

ALEX

No. She teaches third grade.

PAUL
You like her?

ALEX
Um, I dunno/

PAUL
/Yeah, that's a no.

ALEX
She's ok.

Beat.

ALEX
I feel like I don't really know her. She like doesn't have opinions. Ever. I just think that's weird.

PAUL
She doesn't have opinions?

ALEX
No. She like barely talks. She like just agrees with anything my parents say. Which is weird. Because my dad says a lot of dumb shit that like, no one should be agreeing with.

PAUL
Yeah. I mean but it is like, hard, with other people's parents.

ALEX
Yeah. I don't know. She like, is just so happy to like come to dinner and stuff, she's like so happy to go to my uncle's stupid parties. I don't know. She's so desperate to be a part of our crappy family it's weird.

PAUL
Is that bad?

ALEX

I don't know. It's like, uncomfortable.

PAUL

You're gonna be the best man though, right?

ALEX

Yeah. *Beat.* He still thinks the theme of the wedding is going to be like "mason jars." Like she really feels like mason jars are like a defining thing for her, apparently, which is like, I mean I really don't get how that's a theme, but.

PAUL

Yeah, I don't know how you do a mason jar wedding.

ALEX

I mean, they'll use them as glasses, and to hold flowers and candles and stuff, but it's like, what, is everything just going to be in a mason jar? Or like, mason jar shaped?

PAUL

I like the idea to use them for glasses, that's cool.

ALEX

But it's like, trying to be all "country", kind of? And I'm like, we're from New Jersey? So I don't really get that.

Beat.

PAUL

Do your parents like her?

ALEX

...Yeah. I dunno. She's just like okay. Like aggressively okay.

PAUL

She's into him though.

ALEX

Yeah.

Beat.

ALEX

My thing... It's just like why are you gonna marry someone if they're not awesome.

PAUL

Yeah. No I, like I feel that.

ALEX

I mean I could, like you could maybe Date someone not awesome but like why would you marry them/ you know?

PAUL

/Yeah no.

ALEX

Honestly it would be- I mean no it would be sad and stuff like it's sad but like it would be kind of amazing if he's like, will you marry me, and my grandma's just yelling like, SLUTS!

PAUL

She calls women sluts or/

ALEX

/No, no like everybody.

PAUL

That's cool. Like not sexist, at least.

ALEX

Yeah, I mean it's not sexist but it's deranged, you know? Like it's, I don't know.

There is a sound at the door. LEANNE, 28, enters. She is bundled in several layers. We can barely see her face. She is pushing a cart with a large box balanced on top. PAUL and ALEX tense a little.

ALEX

Hi Leanne.

LEANNE *slowly starts taking off a couple of layers.*

ALEX

Is there an animal, in that box?

She picks up the box, brings it to the counter.

LEANNE

Good morning.

ALEX

Good morning.

LEANNE

I have a lot of bags.

She hands him the box. It is full of plastic bags.

LEANNE

Retrieving the cart, pushing it to the counter, hauling out reams of grocery store plastic bags. It's for the holiday drive. The flier said you needed plastic bags so I took all my mom's plastic bags and then I took a bunch from the grocery store because they have a lot. The manager gave me these.

ALEX
Great.

LEANNE
I work at the supermarket.

ALEX
Oh. Cool.

Beat.

LEANNE
Will you use the bags?

ALEX
Yeah. Definitely.

LEANNE
I didn't have towels. I wanted to donate towels because they're cozy.

ALEX
We actually got a lot of towels already, so. This is/ great

LEANNE
/Did you get a lot of plastic bags?

ALEX
No. Just uh, just these. So thank you.

LEANNE
Do you need more?

ALEX
No, I think these are/

LEANNE

/I could probably get more.

ALEX

No I think, these are great.

LEANNE

Well you can just let me know if you need more though.

ALEX

Yeah.

LEANNE

Because Steve's really nice, he'd give me more. He has a dog. I told him I was taking these for the shelter.

Beat.

LEANNE

I called earlier because there's a dog in the backyard of a house a block down from me and the dog seemed sad kind of so I went in the yard to see the dog and then the owner came out and was made and told me to leave but the dog was sad so I said I was going to call the ASPCA and then the lady called the cops so I left.

PAUL

You can't go into people's backyards.

LEANNE

I know I wasn't supposed to but the dog just looked so sad. And now I'm gonna get evicted from my apartment because I heard scratching in the roof and I realized there are squirrels up there and I know I wasn't supposed to but I got up on the roof and I sort of broke it to let the squirrels out and now my landlady is telling me I need to leave.

ALEX

Yeah, that's/

LEANNE

/But I was doing the right thing.

She starts to put her layers back on.

LEANNE

Beaming. I was a hero to those squirrels.

ALEX

Where are you gonna live?

PAUL *makes a face at ALEX signaling, "stop engaging with her." But LEANNE barely turns.*

LEANNE

I don't know.

ALEX

Oh, that's/

LEANNE

/Do you take people?

A split second pause before she begins to laugh. She starts to leave.

LEANNE

Bye.

She leaves. ALEX and PAUL are used to this, there isn't much to say.

PAUL

Maybe we should toss those bags.

ALEX
Well/

PAUL
/We don't need like that many bags/

ALEX
/Yeah.

The phone rings. ALEX answers.

ALEX
Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter, this is Alex speaking, how can I help you? // Oh, um, un minuto, por favor.

He holds phone to his chest.

ALEX
Do you speak Spanish?

PAUL
No.

ALEX
Mine is just so bad.

PAUL
Where's Lara?

ALEX
I don't know.

PAUL

Lara speaks Spanish.

ALEX

I don't know if she's working today.

PAUL *picks up his phone and calls exams.*

ALEX

Lo siento, un uh mas minuto.

PAUL

Hey, this is Paul from Intake. // Paul, from Intake. // No I normally work second // *Rolling his eyes at ALEX.* Well do you wanna come down here and check my ID, or like // Thanks. Is Lara there? // Could you send her down? // Yeah, ok. Thank you.

He hangs up the phone.

PAUL

She's coming down.

ALEX

Uh, perdoname, Senora, alguien um hable Espanol esta venir.

LARA, 34, *enters. She is in winter clothes and a long white lab coat.*

LARA

Hey.

PAUL

'Sup.

LARA

Which phone?

ALEX *passes her his phone.*

LARA

Hola. // Si. // No, no toque. // No, hay que llamar la controla, uh, animal control. // Si // *She shuffles papers, looking for a number.* Es... 534-667-9836. // Hay que decir cual tipo de animal es- // Una zarigueya // Ok, ok // Si, quedate en el bano, no te acercas // No se // Adios.

She hangs up the phone.

ALEX

What happened?

LARA

Lady has a possum in her apartment.

ALEX

Shit.

LARA

She locked herself in her bathroom. I told her to call animal control. But yeah, hi, hello, good morning.

PAUL/ALEX

Good morning/Hi.

PAUL

You think it's rabid?

LARA

Probably not. They don't get rabies easily.

PAUL

Why?

LARA

Low body temperature. Gives them like, natural immunity.

ALEX

That's awesome.

LARA

I was a possum keeper for like a year at this wildlife sanctuary. I raised like 30 possums.

PAUL

30?

LARA *goes over to the cats, petting them through the cage.*

LARA

Yeah. None of their volunteers wanted to work with the baby possums, so they called the university and were like, do any of your animal science people wanna feed baby possums? So I did it. And then I just got kept on possum duty. Because no one wanted them.

ALEX

I don't get that. Like if you're a volunteer at a Wildlife Sanctuary/

PAUL

/Like isn't that literally what you signed up for.

LARA

Yeah, I know. And the babies are fucking adorable, by the way. But everyone wanted to do squirrels.

PAUL

Weird.

LARA

Baby squirrels are not as cute as baby possums, just like, they look like those anti-abortion signs. Like at marches? Like that's what they look like.

LARA *keeps petting the cats, checking the tags on the crates.*

ALEX

Those guys have been here since last night. Why isn't exam taking them yet?

LARA

It's crazy up there. Somebody dropped off a pregnant pitbull and it started having puppies.

ALEX

Woah. That's so weird. Ellen's in labor.

LARA

What?

ALEX

Yeah.

LARA

She didn't even look *that* pregnant.

ALEX

Yeah. That's just so weird.

LARA

She was *nine* months pregnant?

ALEX

Yeah. She told me when she was- I think three months pregnant? You couldn't tell at all. She's always just been kind of small, I think.

LARA

Fuck meeee.

PAUL

Hey how long do we get to keep the cats?

LARA *checks her phone.*

LARA

I don't know when we're gonna take these guys up. They're cute though.

ALEX

Don't touch the gray one.

LARA

Which gray one?

ALEX

The all gray one.

LARA *takes a closer look at the cages.*

LARA

Do you guys have food?

PAUL

Yeah, whaddya want?

LARA

Like a bar. A bar of some kind I don't care I didn't eat breakfast.

PAUL *pulls out three bars from his bag.*

LARA

Woah.

PAUL
So, you pick.

LARA
I mean I don't wanna take your favorite/

PAUL
/No, I like, I like 'em all/so

LARA
/Ok.

LARA picks one up, reads the ingredients.

LARA
Thanks.

PAUL
Yeah noproglem. Sorry. *Overly enunciating.* No problem.

She goes back over to the cages.

LARA
I think most of them are under a year.

Beat.

PAUL
They're changing the adoption procedure, did you hear that?

ALEX
No.

PAUL

Gotta adopt two cats at a time now.

LARA

What?

PAUL

Yeah, decided at the supervisors meeting last week. To prevent feline loneliness.

LARA

That's so stupid. People aren't gonna adopt two cats. We're lucky when somebody takes one fucking cat. Who even let them do that?

PAUL

I don't know, this lady in adoptions was really adamant about it. And she said other shelters did it and it's helped clear the cats out, so. And most people who have a cat have at least two cats. Like I feel like very few people have just one cat. So yeah, Jen agreed.

LARA

Did Lori agree?

PAUL

I guess.

LARA

She's losing it, I swear to god, I love her, but that's so dumb.

PAUL

Woah, wait, Lori's losing it?

LARA

I can't even talk about that right now. Like it's been a nightmare upstairs.

PAUL

She didn't sound good on the phone today.

LARA

I think she has cancer or something. Or maybe her husband's sick? I don't know. Like something is definitely wrong.

PAUL

Oh man.

LARA

Like if you ask her how she is she like can't answer. She just like looks past you.

ALEX

I hope she's ok.

LARA

I wonder if she can retire. But I think she's only like 60. Like she could but it wouldn't, I don't know.

PAUL

What does her husband do?

LARA

Construction? I'm like ninety percent sure it's like something in construction. I don't know. It's sad too because like she's been, she's been the director for like 20 years and like mostly has done an amazing job and it sucks that like it's ending this way. Like with her just so like, out of it. I don't know.

ALEX

Didn't she help with the other cat hoarding situation? Like two weeks ago?

LARA

Yeah. No she did.

PAUL

These were the airline/ containers?

LARA

/Cats in the airline carriers, yeah.

PAUL

Did they all make it?

LARA

We put four down. And then we had a local rescue take eleven of them, and then we have thirteen upstairs that we're still trying to get adopted, so.

ALEX

Yeah I ended up kind of helping with the baths. It was just like too much.

LARA

It was terrible. That whole, that afternoon was literally hell.

PAUL

Did you give them *all* baths?

LARA

All of them/ yeah.

ALEX

/They were covered in shit.

LARA

I mean they were literally all covered in their own shit.

ALEX

Well and it was like, it was layers, like dried on layers/

LARA

/They didn't, they didn't have litter boxes. I don't even, they like were so dehydrated and I think they just like threw kibble in through the air holes. And they all had like fifty live fleas each.

ALEX

Lori was good that day though.

LARA

No yeah she just kind of jumped in and like, facilitated it? It was, like cool to see her be on it like that.

Brief pause.

LARA

I'm gonna talk to her about the cat thing though. Like why do you think I have six cats? My mom has three, my dad even took two, and I have three dogs.

PAUL

You have six cats and three dogs?

LARA

Yeah. They were all gonna get put down because they'd been here like three years. I wouldn't put them down though because there wasn't actually anything wrong with them so yeah. That's like, all the cats I have, all the cats my parents have, they're all cats I wouldn't put down.

ALEX

Six is a lot.

LARA

Oh it's way too many. It's disgusting. I have four litterboxes. I should not have six cats/ nobody should.

PAUL

/Woah and three dogs, that's like just sinking in for me/

LARA

/Yeah. But it was kind of like, I can make my life like slightly more inconvenient and gross or they can like, die, so.

PAUL

Mm.

ALEX

What are their names?

LARA

Counting on her fingers. Carla, Minnie, Pippy, Jamie... mm, Marcus, Rosie, Star Wars, Millie, and Frank.

PAUL

Star Wars?

LARA

It was an owner surrender. She's like 13, totally blind, and she only responds to "Star Wars" so I felt like I couldn't change it.

ALEX

It's a dog?

LARA

Yeah. Chihuahua mix. Star Wars, Millie, and Frank are dogs, the rest are cats.

Beat.

ALEX

When do you think they'll go upstairs?

LARA

I have no idea. The pitbull had complications, it's a whole thing.

PAUL

What kind of complications?

LARA

The last few puppies couldn't get out, so we had to do an emergency c-section.

PAUL

Did you do it or/

LARA

/Grant.

ALEX

Can that happen to people?

LARA

Emergency c-sections?

ALEX

Yeah.

LARA

Yeah.

A pause.

PAUL

What's Grant like?

LARA

He's a good vet. He's kind of, I don't know, just quiet. He's good with the animals though. He does this whispering thing.

ALEX

That's cool.

PAUL

I tried to talk to him one time in the break room and he was not engaging. Also he was just eating a donut, which I thought was weird.

LARA

How is that weird?

PAUL

Like nothing else. It was after dinner, but he hadn't just had dinner, he was sitting there he pulled out a plastic baggie with a donut in it and was just eating that. Like it wasn't dessert.

LARA

I don't think that's that weird.

ALEX

I did that on second shift. I would bring something with sugar, like a treat, and eat it with three hours to go to stay awake.

PAUL

Is he like, totally loaded?

LARA

Well, he works here, so, I'm gonna go with no.

PAUL

Have you ever met a poor person named "Grant?" I feel like that's just a name that's like, trust fund personified.

Another pause.

LARA

I should probably get back upstairs.

PAUL

Thanks, Lara.

LARA heads for the door, then pauses, with some difficulty.

LARA

Actually, um- I'm sorry, this is awkward, um, I should have probably started, with this? I need you guys to stop calling me when you get a call in Spanish.

PAUL

Oh. Ok.

LARA

Yeah. I feel kind of like an asshole right now, but like, I'm a vet, um, I can't be answering phones.

PAUL

No, I know. I'm sorry. The lady just called, and we didn't know what to do/

ALEX

/Yeah, I'm, like I apologize if we offended you.

LARA

You didn't offend me, it's just not my job? Like people on second shift keep doing that too.

PAUL

Which nights?

LARA

What?

PAUL

Which nights do people from second shift call you? Because the Monday/Wednesday/Friday people are assholes. Like genuinely terrible people.

LARA

I don't remember.

PAUL

The one guy on that shift, Leo, hit a kid with his car.

ALEX

What?

PAUL

Oh yeah. Last year.

ALEX

You know, normally, when Ellen's here- Ellen speaks Spanish, so I just give her the call. But since she's out/

LARA

/No, I get it. I just wanted to put that out there. So if you could maybe tell the other intake people/

PAUL

/Yeah, sure.

LARA

Ok, thanks. I'll see you later.

ALEX

Bye.

PAUL

Bye.

LARA *leaves.*

ALEX
I feel so shitty.

PAUL
Yeah.

A long pause. After a moment ALEX goes over to the cats.

PAUL
I can't believe the cops haven't showed up yet.

ALEX
I know.

PAUL
I think it's the snow. *Beat.* Did you hear about the one pitbull that was tied to the pole?

ALEX
We get a lot of pitbulls tied to poles.

PAUL
No, I mean this one was clearly like, a breeder dog. Like gorgeous female, crazy markings, maybe a year old- some guy tied her to a pole. By the university.

ALEX
No, I didn't.

PAUL
She's in adoptions now. I was thinking about adopting her.

ALEX

That's awesome.

PAUL

Yeah, I don't know, I think I would really like that.

ALEX

Then, yeah, you should go for it.

PAUL

Yeah. I mean my mom isn't into the idea, but.

ALEX

Do you live with her?

PAUL

Not really. I mean, I'm in the basement, and I have my own entrance, so it's really not like, going to affect her?

A beat.

PAUL

I just can't go when Jen is there.

ALEX

Why?

PAUL

We dated. Briefly.

ALEX

You dated Jen? When?

PAUL

Ha. Rhyming. I love when that happens, when people accidentally rhyme. *He thinks*. I guess two months ago? Yeah.

ALEX

I didn't know that.

PAUL

Yeah she was always kind of saying we shouldn't tell people? Which I probably should have seen as a red flag.

The phone rings. PAUL picks up.

PAUL

Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter this is Paul how can I help you? // Yeah. // No, you'd have to drop the cat off here. // Hello?

He hangs up.

PAUL

I maintain my position that humans are pieces of flaming shit.

ALEX

She wanted to know if we do pick-up?

PAUL

Yep.

A pause.

PAUL

Yeah, I just don't want to adopt her while Jen's there. Because she would definitely not let me take her.

ALEX

Why? I feel like that shouldn't- like she can't not adopt a dog to you because you broke up.

PAUL

She thinks I'm irresponsible.

ALEX

But it's not just up to her.

PAUL

She's a supervisor now.

ALEX

Really?

PAUL

Oh yeah. And she's really- I mean, she really cares, which I really respect and admire about her, you know. Like she really takes time to feel people out. Because some of the adoption counselors don't give a shit. But she'd say I'm not ready, or say my references weren't valid, she'd do something to make sure I didn't get the dog. Because that's what she does when she gets a bad vibe from someone. She like, makes up reasons why they can't adopt.

ALEX

Isn't that- I mean is that legal? Is she allowed to do that?

PAUL

I don't know. But like in her defense, like, there have been people that I think she was totally right to do that to. When we dated, I was waiting for her upstairs in adoptions, and it was like, 6:55, and this guy walks in, and he just reeks of pot. And he said he wanted to adopt a dog. So Jen gave him an application and said to bring it back tomorrow. Well, she didn't think he was gonna come back, right? But he did. And she said there was something just really off about this guy, and I think she was totally right.

ALEX

Because of the pot?

PAUL

No, not just because of the pot. Well, *kind* of because of the pot?

ALEX *gives him a look.*

PAUL

What? I don't go to an animal shelter stoned, like five minutes before it closes, to adopt a dog. I dunno, just not good vibes.

ALEX

So he didn't adopt a dog?

PAUL

No. Jen called the vet he put down on the form, and the guy said he wasn't great at bringing his cat in. So she used that. Said she couldn't adopt to him.

ALEX

Is that normally, like, a dealbreaker?

PAUL

Sometimes. Depends on the rest of the application too. Most of the time. But she'll- like she'll do stuff like that, like kind of sabotage an adoption, but I think it's probably really good that she does it. I always thought that was kind of hot. Like her vigilante adoption sabotaging.

A thoughtful pause.

ALEX

Did you break up on like, are you on bad terms?

PAUL

No. No, like, I mean we're still, like I don't hate her she doesn't hate me, it's not like anybody *did* anything. But yeah I mean, I just don't think she thinks I'm responsible.

Pause.

ALEX

I think I'm gonna text Ellen.

PAUL

What are you gonna text her?

ALEX

Like, thinking of you. Or I don't know. I don't know what you text someone in labor.

He takes out his phone, starts typing.

PAUL

She's probably not checking her phone.

ALEX

She picked up before.

PAUL

What do you text someone in labor?

A pause. ALEX types this into google.

ALEX

"You're doing so well... You're amazing... Trust yourself."

Pause.

ALEX

I think these are for when you're there with them.

He modifies the question, searches.

ALEX

“Congrats and good luck... Best of luck... Congratulations you’ll be the best mom.”

PAUL

That’s nice.

ALEX

Which one?

PAUL

The you’ll be the best mom one.

A pause. ALEX starts typing a text message.

ALEX

We have this thing where we text each other whenever a really cute animal is brought in? Like we take a picture and send it with like, “cuteness alert!” and then she always sends these bitmojis, and it’s weird, because they actually really look like her. Like not everyone’s do. I’ll show you one.

He scrolls and finds one. He shows is to PAUL.

PAUL

Yeah.

ALEX

Because some peoples’ just don’t look like them at all, but her’s is perfect. Wait, look at this one, this was for Thanksgiving.

He holds up the phone again. PAUL looks, barely suppressing a smile.

ALEX

It took me a second, but like, she *is* the turkey!

PAUL
You like her.

ALEX shoots him a look that says, "Come on."

PAUL
You do.

ALEX
No, I don't.

PAUL
I call it like I see it, man. Wow.

ALEX is silent. PAUL begins picking the skin off a mandarin orange he pulls out of his lunchbag. The phone rings, ALEX answers.

ALEX
Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter intake desk, this is Alex, how can I help you? // Hi // Yes, I remember. // Yes ma'am, unfortunately // Not as many as people think, actually, we work with a lot of other organizations-// Right.// And you said your dog was-// Right, 5. // Yeah, they wouldn't do that. // I know. // Yes, until 7:00. // Ok, bye.

He hangs up the phone.

ALEX
Second time that lady's called today.

PAUL
What type of dog is she bringing in?

ALEX
A pomeranian.

PAUL
Nice.

A pause.

ALEX
I swear to god, all these rich people who buy these purebred dogs, or whatever, they just get bored of them. Like I'm convinced that's what it is. Everyone says, like, "I just don't have time for them, it isn't fair", or "I'm moving to a place that doesn't take dogs", but that's all bullshit. They're just bored. They tried having a dog, because they're so fucking empty, to like, stimulate themselves, but they don't really want to take care of a dog. I actually don't think they want to take care of anything. Did you know Jeff?

PAUL
No. Before my time.

ALEX
Jeff got fired because this rich lady came in to drop off her dog, like completely unphased, and said she was moving into an apartment that didn't take dogs. And he just went off on her, like, "What if the apartment didn't allow kids? Would you just drop your kids off at a fire station?"

PAUL
Woah. That's amazing.

ALEX
Yeah.

PAUL
Go Jeff.

ALEX
I mean, he got fired.

A long pause.

PAUL

So. What are you gonna do about this whole Ellen thing?

ALEX

It's not a "whole thing."

PAUL

But what are you gonna do?

ALEX

Nothing.

PAUL

Why? Wait, is it because she's married? Because I just had a whole talk about this with Razia about this the other day and she was saying that it's wrong to treat married women differently than single women when you feel a connection because you're basically negating their agency, or something. And Razia's like, super feminist, so if she says it it's definitely legit.

ALEX

She loves her husband. She's really happy. It's not like, some tragic relationship. I mean I bet a million people have crushes on her. She's just the nicest person, like why wouldn't you like her, you know?

PAUL

Yeah, no, she's really nice.

ALEX

She's happy. I'm not gonna, like, interfere with that. So, that's kind of it.

A pause.

PAUL

I mean you're not, like, interfering, you're just being honest.

ALEX

No, it's just like, selfish. Because, because there's nothing for her to like say, or do, and then we can't even be friends, so. It's just stupid.

PAUL

But you don't know that. I mean you're imagining a very specific outcome. Like what if she felt the same way?

ALEX

She doesn't.

PAUL

But how do you *know* that?

ALEX

Because I *know* her. She's like my best friend.

A long pause.

PAUL

But what if she and her husband- what's his name?

ALEX

Steven.

PAUL

What if one day, just randomly, they got divorced?

ALEX

Come on.

PAUL

People get divorced all the time.

ALEX
Not Ellen.

PAUL
I'm serious! What if that happened?

ALEX
It's not gonna happen.

PAUL
But if it did/

ALEX
/It's not gonna happen, ok?

PAUL
Ok. *Pause*. Can I just say like one more thing?

ALEX
Why are you asking that now/

PAUL
/How are you gonna like live your life and like date people if you're like this?

ALEX
I don't know.

PAUL
Because you don't... like Diane made me do this intentions thing? Where, like she had me map my whole day and write don everything I did and for how long, and then she had me write down all the things like I want? And like, what I would have to do to get them? And she like went through my day and was like you're letting Call of Duty take up space that you should be using

on achieving goals. You're substituting that false sense of achievement for real progress, and like, you can't do both.

ALEX
Ok...

PAUL
Like how would you have a girlfriend if/

ALEX
/I don't want a girlfriend.

PAUL
Ok.

ALEX
I don't. Like right now.

PAUL
So what's your plan?

ALEX
I don't have a plan! I actually, I really, like I'm ok with my life.

PAUL
Yeah.

ALEX
I am. I just, it's great that you, I'm happy for you man with like your therapist and the fish, but like, she's not my therapist.

PAUL
Yeah. No. I hear you.

ALEX

And like I didn't, I'm not like looking for...

He puts his head in his arms on the desk. Long pause.

PAUL

Are you ok?

ALEX

Yeah. I'm just like, resting my eyes.

PAUL

Like I'm sorry, man/

ALEX

/It's ok. It's fine.

PAUL

Do you at least have like, someone to hookup with?

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

Good/

ALEX

/It's not, it's not a great situation. So.

PAUL

Oh.

ALEX

I think we need to like, not do that anymore. We went to the laundromat together. It was weird.

PAUL *pulls a yogurt out of his lunch bag and starts looking around the office for spoons. ALEX keeps his head down on his arms.*

PAUL

Do we have any spoons?

ALEX

I don't know.

PAUL

All those new Monday/Wednesday/Friday people get takeout all the time and no one has stock-piled any spoons? They keep ordering from that Lebanese place that they "just discovered." They didn't discover it, it's Just Okay so we don't order from there anymore.

A pause as he tries to squeeze a mouthful of yogurt out of the cup and eat it. He keeps looking over at ALEX, wanting to be sure he isn't watching him try to do this. He tries this a couple more times and gives up. Note: The next part can be any band/song that is mildly plausible as cool but actually kind of pathetic sounding; a band/song you wouldn't necessarily broadcast liking.

PAUL

Do you know Bleachers?

ALEX

Who?

PAUL

The band. Bleachers?

ALEX

No.

PAUL

You probably would if you heard it. Like you'd recognize it.

He goes on youtube and finds "Don't Take the Money." He's really into it. They listen for a little. He's still really into it.

PAUL

It's like such good lyrics.

ALEX

Yeah.

PAUL

So wait you've, have you heard that song?

ALEX

I think so? I think I have.

PAUL

You take the air out of my lungs. I love that. I've been listening to like all their stuff.

He turns it off. LARA enters with a box.

LARA

Hey.

ALEX

Snapping up to attention. Hey.

PAUL

'Sup.

ALEX

Are you taking these guys?

LARA

There's no room up there, I'm just gonna do their exams down here and bring them up to adoptions.

She begins setting up a small scale, her thermometer, and some forms. Throughout the next bit of dialogue, she weighs and exams the cats, making notes.

The phone rings. PAUL picks up.

PAUL

Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter, this is// Leanne, you can't// Ok// No, that's not// I'm hanging up, ok?

He hangs up.

LARA

What was it?

PAUL

She heard barking... It's probably not worth explaining?

Collective quiet moment. Then, at the same time:

LARA

I feel bad for her.

//

ALEX

Do they look ok?

LARA

Going with his thing. I won't know for sure until I examine them, but if I was gonna make a guess, I think all the internal organs are fine, just a little dehydrated.

PAUL

Hey Lara did you do the exam for the really cool looking pitbull? It came in two days ago?

LARA

Yeah, I think so.

PAUL

How'd she look?

LARA

Perfect. Her owners took great care of her until they left her tied to a stop sign. Fucking cuntbuckets.

PAUL

'Cause I'm thinking of adopting her.

LARA

Yeah?

PAUL

Yeah. I'm like, crowdsourcing if it's a good idea or not.

LARA

Crowdsourcing it?

PAUL

I mean like, I'm floating it.

LARA

You can't crowdsource something like that.

PAUL

Why not?

LARA

Because it's like so personal and I don't know your life.

PAUL

Do you think I'd be a good dog dad?

LARA

Yeah.

PAUL

Lara, be real with me here.

LARA

I am!

PAUL

You're not just blowing smoke up my ass?

LARA

I don't do that.

ALEX

He's freaking out because he thinks Jen won't let him adopt.

LARA

Why?

PAUL
We dated.

LARA
That shouldn't affect an adoption.

PAUL
I know. I know.

LARA
Wait, this is tall adoptions Jen?

PAUL
Yep.

LARA
With the birthmark?

PAUL
Yep.

LARA
She's so hot.

PAUL
I know.

LARA
You went out with her?

PAUL
Yep.

LARA
I thought she was gay.

PAUL
Nope.

LARA
How come I never hear about this shit upstairs?

PAUL
This is why you need to spend more time in Intake. It's where all the action happens.

ALEX
She's not working tomorrow, right? So just go then.

PAUL
Yeah. She's just gonna be pissed.

LARA
So, you're not together anymore.

PAUL
No.

LARA
What, like, what happened? If you don't mind me asking.

PAUL

Um. Is it ok if, I mean, I kind of don't wanna talk about it/

LARA

/Yeah, of course/

PAUL

/It's not like a good story/

LARA

/I totally get it, I shouldn't have asked.

A weird pause.

ALEX

Steven just posted a picture of the birthing tub on Instagram.

The others look at his screen, which he holds out.

LARA

Is that her husband?

ALEX

Yeah.

LARA

He's cute.

PAUL

Is that their apartment?

ALEX

Yeah, I think so.

An uncomfortable pause.

PAUL

Have you ever been to their apartment, or/

ALEX

/No.

LARA

I kind of feel bad that I don't know her that well.

PAUL

She's really nice.

LARA

No, I know, we just never really get to talk. I just think it would be nice to have more friends at work.

PAUL

We're friends.

LARA

No, I know. I just. I don't know. Like maybe more female friends?

PAUL

Aren't there a bunch of female, uh, vet techs?

LARA

Yeah.

PAUL
What's that face?

LARA
Nothing.

PAUL
No, you totally made a face.

LARA
That's just like its own clique. These two were talking in the break room, like, "why do the vets get to wear their normal clothes and we have to wear scrubs it's not fair" all this stuff and I'm like: bitch because I went to school for eight years! I will literally die in debt. And what do I even fucking wear to work? I'm gonna get covered in hair and blood and shit and I don't even know what else every day, it's not like I'm dressing up. And they're all so young.

PAUL
You're young.

LARA
No, like *young* young. Like just out of high school and went to community college for two years young. They're like, ridiculously skinny. Perfect makeup. Like every day, perfect makeup. I think they look at me and feel sad for me kind of.

ALEX
Why?

LARA

Because I'm single, I work a lot, I'm starting to get wrinkles, and I think they look at me like, I'm not gonna be like that. Like I'm so tragic because I'm not gonna put on fake eyelashes to express some dog's anal glands.

ALEX

People wear fake eyelashes here?

LARA

Oh yeah.

PAUL

That's crazy.

ALEX

Like with glue? How do you put them on?

LARA

With glue.

PAUL

Ugh.

LARA

I mean like the girl I'm thinking of like she pulls them off? You know? Like it's not like she looks bad it's just so extra for here. But yeah. Everybody has their foundation on like contouring or whatever and eyeliner and mascara and eyeshadow and I look at them while they weigh the animals and comb them for fleas, and then I go to the bathroom and my face doesn't even look real. Like it just looks washed out.

PAUL

They don't have to do the shit that you gotta do.

LARA
Yeah.

ALEX
What's washed out?

LARA
Like everything is all like, blended together, like nothing stands out. Except my wrinkles.

ALEX
Screw that.

PAUL
Yeah where do you even have wrinkles?

LARA
Don't even.

PAUL
I'm serious!

LARA
Suddenly a little earnest. Like my mouth, my eyes/

PAUL
/No/

LARA
/But like the thing is, I don't care! I don't need you to tell me, you know, to deny it? I guess? I mean Jake's older than me and they all loove him.

ALEX
Really? Jake?

LARA
I know.

PAUL
Is he considered good looking? To women?

A brief uncomfortable pause.

LARA
I mean not to me/

PAUL
/But in general?

LARA
Yeah, I guess. I mean he's tall, he's got that hair, and whatever, so he's like hot shit around here. He's like, the hottest guy here. *Catching herself.* Like in Exams. *A little pause.* I hate him, by the way.

PAUL
Yeah?

LARA
He asked me where the bathroom was his first day here- in Spanish- and told me we needed more paper towels in Exam 2.

ALEX

Ooh.

LARA

Evidently he was “Deeply Ashamed” and is “Working on Himself” and now is in a constant state of Proving How Woke He Is by Talking About Racism Constantly to Me. So that’s been fun.

PAUL

Woah.

LARA

Yeah. Also he has highlights. Like what grown man has highlights? I don’t trust that.

ALEX

What about Rebecca?

LARA

What about her?

ALEX

Doesn’t she work up there?

LARA

Princess quit, like, two months ago.

PAUL

Why?

LARA

I think she started her own practice, like, specifically for small and exotic pets. *Doing a “Rebecca” voice*: “It just makes me so *sad* that there’s no place for people to go with

their frogs, like it isn't fair, like I was the only one in my class to even care about *snakes*. What about the turtles?! *Another thought*: Oh, I'm not allergic to soy I'm just sensitive to it but please, don't accommodate me, I'll just be pissy at you if you don't!"

PAUL and ALEX *laugh, it's a really good imitation of this person we don't know.*

LARA

She has a friend at BuzzFeed who did this little stupid blurb about her and like snakes and she won't shut up about it.

PAUL

So she just does small animals?

LARA

And "exotic" ones. Yeah.

ALEX

He hates small animals.

PAUL

I don't hate them, I just think they're useless. In like a domestic context.

LARA

You hate Bam Bam?

PAUL

No, I don't hate Bam Bam, I don't hate any animal, I just don't think they should be pets.

ALEX

You think anyone's ever gonna adopt him?

LARA

I would take him home if I didn't have Frank. He would kill him.

PAUL

He's in a cage.

LARA

No, he'd find a way. He's done it before, I was watching my sister's rat and Frank got it.

PAUL

Why don't you take him?

ALEX

I don't know/

PAUL

/I thought you liked hamsters.

ALEX

I do, I just. I don't know. I don't know if it's the right time.

PAUL

It's a hamster.

ALEX

Yeah, you have to like, clean the cage once a week. You could take him.

PAUL

Are you kidding me?

ALEX

You said you liked Bam Bam.

LARA

You did say that.

PAUL

Yeah/

ALEX

/Less time than a dog.

PAUL

I'm gonna adopt a dog!

LARA

Wait, now you're definitely adopting the dog?

PAUL

Yeah.

ALEX

Wow.

PAUL

So. My hands are gonna be full. *A small pause.* You're not saying anything/

ALEX

/I think it's a good idea.

LARA

I already said that.

PAUL

But that's when I was thinking of getting a dog, now I'm saying, like, I am definitely going to do it.

ALEX

We think it's a good idea.

The sound of the door. LEANNE enters once again. She might be holding a McDonald's coffee, or something. Maybe a 7/11 breakfast sandwich?

LARA

Hey Leanne.

LEANNE *examines her surroundings. She locks in on LARA.*

LEANNE

Are you a vet?

LARA

Yeah.

LEANNE

I was going to be a vet.

LARA

Oh yeah?

LEANNE

Yeah. But I had to drop out because something happened to me and I got real bad anxiety.

ALEX

Leanne, it's kind of a cold day to be out, you know/

LEANNE

/I like the snow I like walking in it but I miss the birds, because I love birds/

ALEX

/Is there anyone we should call, for you/ so you don't have to walk home?

LEANNE

/I found a macaw in a dumpster behind my apartment. I was just walking by and I heard this screaming and she was inside a garbage bag evidently her name was Stacy because it said that on her clip but somebody had cut off two of her toes and her whole body was burned and then they put her in a garbage bag.

ALEX

That's horrible.

LEANNE

So I rescued her I brought her to my apartment and she wouldn't stop screaming and I wrapped her in a towel and I brought her to the animal rescue and she got adopted to a boy named Ben whose parents said he could have her. I saved her life.

She walks into the restroom in the lobby.

PAUL

Am I a horrible person for really, really, like not at all wanting to listen to her? Or like, engage with her, at all?

LARA

Sympathetically. There's something off with her.

PAUL

No I know, I just, she like actually drives me nuts.

LARA

I don't know.

ALEX

It just makes me like, nervous, I guess, because I'm like, am I supposed to help this person?

PAUL

Yeah, because she's just So Off.

ALEX

But I guess she does live with her dad, right? Didn't she say that? So someone at least is kind of making sure she's ok.

LARA

I think she just likes it here.

LEANNE walks out of the bathroom. She sits down next to her things and starts eating again.

ALEX checks his phone.

ALEX

Oh my god.

PAUL

What?

ALEX

She had the baby!

PAUL

What? She was at like/

ALEX

/Look.

He shows a picture of the baby on his phone to the two of them. ALEX is very deeply moved at this moment. His voice might be a little wobbly.

PAUL

Woah.

LARA

Boy or girl?

ALEX

It's a girl. I mean technically she wrote "human baby with vagina" because she's very, she has her stuff with gender/

LARA

/Aww.

PAUL

What's her name?

ALEX

Um, it's Winifred Rose Sanchez-Ryan.

ALEX stands there with his phone, looking at a baby that is not his very much like it is his. Because he loves Ellen, not because of paternity.

ALEX

Isn't that a great name?

PAUL

Yeah.

ALEX

She has her chin.

ALEX puts his phone away.

ALEX

I'm gonna go- I'm gonna go take a walk. Like um stretch/ is that ok?

PAUL

/Yeah. Yeah, take your time.

ALEX leaves. PAUL goes through his lunchbag some more. LARA continues examining cats. LEANNE is eating her sandwich throughout, maybe muttering to herself on occasion.

PAUL

Hey, you want some seaweed?

LARA

No thanks.

PAUL

It's really good for you.

LARA

No thanks.

PAUL

It's like, a trendy thing right now. "Of the moment."

LARA

Oh I know. I can't get into it.

LEANNE

Can I have some seaweed?

PAUL

Um, sure.

She walks up to the counter, takes a piece he offers her, eats it silently, and returns to her seat. A silence.

PAUL

What do you eat? Normally?

LARA

I don't know. Not seaweed. Like I'll eat it with sushi, but I'm not gonna/

PAUL

/Because I recently became a pescatarian, so I'm just curious about people's diets.

LARA

What's pescatarian? Do you only/

PAUL

/I eat fish, but no meat.

LARA

Oh, ok/

PAUL

/I actually- well I was telling Alex earlier, I had a moment, a month ago. I was going up my stairs, at my mom's place, and I just collapsed, I just laid on the floor. I had really been feeling poisoned, lately, just really disrespecting my body, my diet was crap, all that. So my therapist, she said that I needed to use the psychic energy of that moment and manifest that desire for change. So I became a pescatarian.

LARA

Good for you.

PAUL

Thank you. Yeah. Totally worth it. I feel great. I think it's the fish. And I cut out all refined sugars, I'm on a very low carb diet, and I don't drink milk.

LARA

Nice.

PAUL

Are you a vegetarian?

LARA

Vegan.

PAUL

A little dismayed her diet is more complicated than his. Woah. That's intense.

LARA

I guess. They have vegan everything now, so. It's not that hard.

LEANNE

I don't drink milk.

LARA/PAUL

Huh, yeah?

LEANNE

They rape the cows.

LARA

Yeah, that's true.

She pulls out a pack of cigarettes, pulls on her jacket, and walks out to smoke.

They settle into silence.

PAUL

Wait are possums vegetarians?

LARA

No.

PAUL

They eat meat?

LARA
Sometimes.

PAUL
Like what?

LARA
Mice or rats. And they scavenge, they'll eat like, animals that are already dead.

PAUL
That's so upsetting. Like them eating mice. Like a possum hunting is like, a weird image, I feel like?

LARA
They mostly eat bugs. They eat, they eat a TON of ticks.

PAUL
Ticks?

LARA
Oh yeah. They can like decimate deer tick populations, it's awesome.

PAUL
Huh.

LARA
Which is why I don't get why people hate them so much. Because they eat so many bugs and crap that people hate, and they do it at night, like no one sees it, nobody even has to like actually interact with them. But like they're eating ticks, they're eating this

thing that you hate, they're doing this thing for you, I mean not for you, but it doesn't even like matter because it helps you. Like they're providing a fucking service, actually.

The phone rings. PAUL answers.

PAUL

Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter, this is Paul, how can I help you? // No, you have to call animal control for that. // Yeah- how big is it? // Yeah, I would call. // Yep. It's 534-667-9836. // Bye.

A long pause.

PAUL

Yeah. To, like, about what you were saying.

LARA

I'm um, I'm very defensive of them. I feel like I have thirty babies out there eating everybody's ticks and getting hit by cars.

Beat.

PAUL

How do they not get Lyme disease?

LARA

Hmm?

PAUL

If the possums eat ticks, like why don't they get Lyme disease?

LARA

Because it's not transmitted like that. It's transmitted through the blood.

PAUL

Yeah, but like, if they eat a tick, then they're eating the blood that's in the tick/

LARA

/But it's in their stomach. Like it dies in their stomach.

PAUL

But couldn't they still, like, absorb it?

LARA

I don't think so.

LARA checks her phone, responds to a message.

LARA

You mind if I take my break down here?

PAUL

Not at all.

LARA

Great. The new tech, Sasha, just got engaged and I can't.

She takes a seat, leaning back and closing her eyes. A pause.

PAUL

Are you napping?

LARA

I'm resting my eyes.

Another pause.

PAUL

Because if you want we have a travel pillow. It's like, clean/

LARA

/Oh, no, it's ok.

Beat.

LARA

Why do you have a travel pillow?

PAUL

Um, I don't remember, actually.

LARA

So how would you know if it's clean?

PAUL

I don't know. It smells clean.

A silence.

LARA

Her eyes still closed. I didn't say Merry Christmas.

PAUL

Oh, yeah/

LARA
/So Merry Christmas.

PAUL
Merry Christmas.

Another pause.

PAUL
How was it?

LARA
Uh, it was good. It was small. I ate a lot, like a lot of food. My mom's girlfriend is Filipina, and she did most of the cooking, so Christmas dinner was a little different. I mostly just bread, because everything else was like meat, and then I went to see my dad.

PAUL
Where do they live?

LARA
My mom lives in Jersey City, my dad lives in East Brunswick.

PAUL
I have cousins in Jersey City.

LARA
Yeah, it's like, becoming Hoboken.

PAUL
Never been.

LARA
To Hoboken?

PAUL
Yeah.

LARA
It's like an adult playground. Basically.

A pause.

LARA
Where's Alex?

PAUL
He'll be back soon. I think he wanted to congratulate Ellen. They're really close.

LARA
Yeah?

PAUL
Yeah, well she's his usual shift partner. So.

LARA
I didn't know she was married.

PAUL
Oh yeah. Steven.

LARA

Which is weird, because she was pregnant, and normally I would just like assume, like she was? Which is bad? But I just didn't think of that with her.

PAUL does a couple spins in his chair.

PAUL
How are the cats?

LARA
Good. Really nothing wrong with them.

PAUL
You know I bet the lady they them from really misses them. They're friendly, you know, she must have interacted with them a lot.

LARA
Why'd they take them?

PAUL
Alex said they found a couple dead ones too. It was like a hoarding situation.

LARA
Well, at least they're young.

PAUL
You're not gonna put any of them down, right?

LARA
I don't think so.

A long pause.

PAUL

My mom was telling me to go to vet tech school?

LARA

Oh. Cool. You'd be good at that.

PAUL

Thanks. Yeah. But part of that, here, you know. I don't know if I could do the euthanasia.

LARA

Yeah. Well you wouldn't have to actually do the injection. Only vets can do that.

PAUL

No yeah but like helping with it. Like prepping and stuff.

Half-beat.

LARA

You could do it if you had to.

PAUL

I don't know.

LARA

You could. Everybody thinks they can't. And then, there's this animal in front of you, in so much pain, more pain than you can fix, you know, just like terrified. Dying just really slowly. And suddenly it's like: I need to stop this. The good thing to do would be to stop this. And your body just feels it. Like it feels, it senses this other body in pain, and I swear, it's like, you feel something, you feel something shift in your guts, and you know

what you need to do. Like your body will know first that it's gonna be, that you're gonna do it, and it's gonna be ok.

PAUL
Yeah.

Another long pause.

LARA
You could do it.

Beat.

PAUL roots around in his bag for a granola bar. He opens it, takes a bite. Just then, the door opens. A figure pushes in a cardboard box, turns, runs.

PAUL
Hey! Damn it!

PAUL runs to the door, opens it, looks outside, comes back in.

LARA runs after him, grabs the box, brings it back to the office area. She grabs her stethoscope, puts on rubber gloves. She bends over the box. Inside there is a puppy, lying still. LARA is deep in examination mode. She is listening with the stethoscope, feeling.

PAUL
He got in a car/

LARA
/Shhhh!

She's still listening. She removes the stethoscope.

PAUL

What do you need?

LARA

A towel and a heating pad.

PAUL moves surprisingly quickly, grabbing a towel out of a drawer of dingy looking used, donated towels. He throws it to LARA as he crumples an instant heating pad, brings it to her. LARA gently wraps the puppy in it. She picks the puppy up and holds it.

LARA

She's about to go.

She sits on the floor, holding the puppy, rocking, she takes off her gloves. PAUL kneels next to LARA and puts a hand on the puppy. LARA whispers indistinctly to the puppy, caressing it, while PAUL prays quickly and softly.

PAUL

Probably not audible. Hail mary, mother of god, the lord is with thee blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb jesus holy mary mother of god pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death amen hail mary, mother of god, the lord is with thee blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb jesus holy mary mother of god pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death amen.

LARA reaches for her stethoscope, listens, puts it back down.

LARA

She's gone.

She puts the puppy gently back into the box.

PAUL

No, look, she's...

He looks into the box, sees the puppy isn't breathing. But she looks like a sleeping puppy, and he doesn't want her to be dead. He touches her. They are both really still for a bit.

PAUL

Lara can you check?

LARA

She's dead/

PAUL

/Can you double check I think I see her chest moving just check please.

LARA crouches back down, listens to the puppy's chest. Nothing.

LARA

Gently. Here, do you wanna listen?

PAUL

No.

They both are still quiet, a little stunned. LARA is more used to this than PAUL and it shows. She pumps Purell onto her hands. PAUL walks back to his chair.

PAUL

What happened to it?

LARA

I'm not sure. I'll have to examine her to really know for sure.

PAUL

But what do you think?

Beat.

LARA

I think someone kicked her. Really hard.

The phone rings.

PAUL

Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter this is Paul// Um. Let me// Just- I'm gonna put you on hold for one minute//

He presses a hold button. He slumps down into his chair. He's really upset. He can't talk on the phone. Eventually LARA picks up the phone.

LARA

Hi. // 7:00. // Bye.

She hangs the phone back up. ALEX walks back inside, a little calmer. He sees the box. His face falls a little, when he sees the others. He knows the drill.

ALEX

Dog or cat?

LARA
Dog. Puppy.

A long pause. The phone rings.

ALEX
Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter.//

He listens for a moment, then:

YOU KNOW WHAT? SOMEONE LIKE YOU SHOULDN'T OWN A DOG, OK, THEY'RE FUCKING LOYAL, LIKE, AMAZING BEINGS AND YOU'RE CHOOSING SOME FUCKING GRANITE COUNTERTOPS OR WHATEVER IN A NEW STUPID FUCKING FANCY CONDO OVER YOUR BEST FRIEND, OK, SO GO TO HELL, BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE ALL YOU RICH FAKE FUCKS BELONG, IN HELL, BURNING AND DYING AND FEELING ALL FUCKING ALONE AND SCARED AND ABANDONED YOU PIECE OF SHIT.

He puts down the phone. A stunned silence. PAUL picks it up.

PAUL
This is Paul.// No, um, I'm sorry, it// Yes// Yes, I//

He hangs up.

ALEX
She was calling again about the pomeranian.

A silence.

ALEX

Oh God. Oh God oh God oh God.

He holds his head in his hands.

PAUL

It's ok. It's- you're just having an emotional, like... it'll be ok. You want water?

ALEX sits despondently. PAUL motions to LARA that he's got this. PAUL sits at the desk next to ALEX.

ALEX

Oh fuck. Oh oh fuckkkk.

PAUL

Hey, you know/

ALEX

What if she calls and complains?

PAUL

I don't think she'll do that.

ALEX

But what if she does? And Lori- like what if she/

PAUL

/She's not/

ALEX

/Because I wanna stay here/

PAUL
/Yeah/

ALEX
/I wanna stay with Ellen/

PAUL
/I know/

ALEX
/And everything makes me so fucking sad but I/

PAUL
/I know/

ALEX
/It's like I have to be here/

PAUL
/You're not going anywhere/

ALEX
/But Lori's gonna find out/

PAUL
/She won't/

ALEX
/Yes she will/

PAUL

/Come on, come on come on come on listen to me. Lara and I were here, and we didn't hear any yelling. Right?

LARA
Yeah.

A pause. ALEX nods his head. There's a little moment where they all sort of remember there's a dead puppy in the room. LARA picks up the box solemnly, gracefully, almost.

LARA
I'm going to bring her upstairs. Get her, um. Figure things out.

PAUL *nods*. LARA *leaves*.

ALEX
How'd it even get here?

PAUL
Some asshole sorta just threw the box in the front door.

ALEX
And why did it/

PAUL
/Kicked.

ALEX
...It was/

PAUL
/Somebody kicked her really hard.

ALEX
Probably somebody's Christmas present.

Beat.

PAUL
Why would somebody like...

They sit. For a while.

ALEX
I don't think you should try to make sense out of it.

They sit some more. LEANNE bursts in, breathing heavily.

LEANNE
G3Y9U9.

PAUL
What/

LEANNE
/G3Y9U9, G3Y9U9, write it write it G3Y9U9!

PAUL *does.*

PAUL
Ok, ok I got it.

ALEX

What is it?

LEANNE
It's the license plate.

ALEX
What?

PAUL
Wait, it's, the guy with the box?

LEANNE *nods her head.*

PAUL
How did you/

LEANNE
/My memory's good.

PAUL
Yeah.

LEANNE
You wrote it down?

PAUL
Yeah, that's, um... Alex, can you, I'm gonna/

ALEX
/Yeah.

PAUL *dials a number written on the desk somewhere for the ASPCA. He starts talking, somewhat audible, walking to the hallway.*

PAUL

Hi, I'm calling from the Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter, we had a puppy dumped in critical condition. Yeah.

LEANNE *slowly begins gathering her things.*

ALEX

It's really cool you can remember stuff like that.

LEANNE

Yeah.

A pause.

LEANNE

What was in the box?

ALEX

Um, a puppy.

LEANNE

Is she gonna make it?

ALEX

Um, yeah. I think she's gonna be ok.

LEANNE *is all packed.*

LEANNE

I saw a thing on the internet that was a picture of a dog licking a girl's face and it said "we don't deserve dogs" but I think I deserve dogs. I think you deserve dogs.

ALEX

Thanks.

LEANNE

Where's your girlfriend?

ALEX

Huh?

LEANNE

Your girlfriend, she's always there with you.

ALEX

Oh, she's not... she's not here today.

LEANNE

Ok. Bye.

She leaves.

ALEX

Bye.

A moment. PAUL returns.

PAUL

Where'd she go?

ALEX
She left.

PAUL
Well they're gonna find the guy. I mean, because of Leanne, which is/

ALEX
/Yeah.

They both sit. PAUL dials a number on the office phone.

PAUL
Hi, this is Paul, from intake? // No no, everything's fine. I actually was interested in adopting a dog from upstairs. // She's a pitbull, female, really like, distinctive- // Oh. Wow. // Yeah, I know. // Ok. // Thanks for letting me know. // Bye.

He hangs up the phone.

PAUL
She got adopted.

ALEX
I'm sorry.

PAUL
No, it's like, dogs like that go fast.

ALEX
Yeah.

PAUL

Which is good, you know.

PAUL starts straightening things up, trying to shake it off.

ALEX

Are you gonna stay on this shift?

PAUL

What?

ALEX

Are you gonna stay, I mean, until Ellen gets back.

PAUL

Oh, I don't know.

ALEX

That would be cool. If you did.

PAUL

Yeah.

PAUL cleans up some more. LARA appears in the door.

LARA

Hey.

PAUL

Hey.

LARA

I'm gonna bring the cats up.

PAUL

You're taking them?

LARA

Yeah, sorry.

She starts loading cats onto a rolling cart. ALEX and PAUL help her load it up.

LARA

I'll see ya later.

PAUL/ALEX

Bye/Bye cats.

She rolls the cats into the hallway. ALEX and PAUL sit back down.

ALEX

I don't want you to feel bad for me.

PAUL

I don't.

ALEX

Because, like, I just really love sitting next to her.

The phone rings.

ALEX

Montclair Municipal Animal Shelter, this is Alex, how can I // 7:00 // Bye.

He hangs up. A long pause.

PAUL

Nobody ever asks what time we open.

ALEX

Yeah.

They laugh.

ALEX

They never do.

Blackout. End of play.

