

c h r o n i c

by Katelynn Kenney

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Characters

The Roles

Lo – A Filipina American woman with ME/CFS, though she doesn't know it for a long while. A horror and folklore fan. Wishes magic was real. A bit of a push over. Believes she's dying.

Actor 2 – V, Dr. Deadpan, Dr. Knows-a-Doc, Uber/Lyft Driver, Voice 3 (The Executioner, The Brain Foglings)

Actor 3 – Mom, Dr. Lube?, Dr. Psychic, The PT Magician, Regular Person 1, Voice 2 (The Batibat, St. Elmo's Fire, The World Flipper)

Actor 4 – Cath, Dr. Eager, Dr. Just Happens, Dr. Shove-n-Cut, Regular Person 2, Voice 1 (The Imp, The Snow Queen, The Puppeteer)

Actor 5 – Jackie, Dr. Both-Ends, Dr. House, Voice 4, Concerned Parent (The Beeman, The Wax Mothman)

The Next of Kin

V – Lo's spouse. Calm, consistent, observant, and thoughtful. They're not good at navigating others' emotions and will opt for silence or distance. Busy with work but dreams of having hobbies, someday. Believes in Lo.

Mom – Lo's mom. Caring, spiritual, practical, and solution-oriented. There's a remedy for everything. Believes Lo should rest, and that art might be stressing her out too much so she can't heal.

Cath – Lo's older sister. Serious, type-A, sharp, and a little (passive) aggressive. Has a husband and three young kids. The more "put-together" of the siblings. Loves her sister but believes Lo has a wild imagination and isn't a serious person.

Jackie – Lo's best friend. Outgoing and bubbly; her positivity is infectious. Loves really hard and is not good with change. Loves Lo but believes that the way Lo has changed is unsustainable for their friendship.

The Doctors

Dr. Eager – Primary Care Physician

Dr. Both-Ends – Gastroenterologist

Dr. Just Happens – Immunologist

Dr. Deadpan – Neurologist 1

Dr. Knows-a-Doc – Rheumatologist

Dr. Lube? – Gynecologist

The PT Magician – Physical Therapy

Dr. Shove-n-Cut – ENT (Ears Nose Throat doc)

Dr. House – Neurologist 2

Dr. Psychic – ME/CFS specialist

The Symptomons

The Batibat – Sleep Paralysis, Night Terrors, and Fatigue

The Beeman – Tinnitus and Hives

The Wax Mothman – Anaphylaxis

The Executioner – Chronic Pain, Spasms/Tremors

The Imp – Gastrointestinal Shit, a weird little poop scientist

The Snow Queen and St. Elmo’s Fire – Temperature dysregulation

The Brain Foglings – The dastardly, grabby hands of Brain Fog

The Puppeteer – Gait abnormality/Possible Sensory Ataxia

The World Flipper – Vertigo

The Shadow Figure – Before Lo, Depression?

On Setting

I imagine minimal – no full apartment sets. Suggestions of the places that Lo goes to. It’d be cool if the set looked, in perhaps obscure ways, like a human body. For example, the Idea Corkboard is labeled “Lo’s Brain,” her blood hangs in vials around the set like décor. Perhaps there could be things like throw pillows that look like organs or a tall lamp that has the vague bend of a spine.

I imagine Lo’s skin could be represented by the walls or a decorative tapestry/painting on the walls that covers in “hives” as Lo does or becomes reddish in hue when she’s experiencing a hot flash or blueish when her limbs have gone cold.

Time is in the years leading up to the Covid-19 Pandemic. And then in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

On Puppetry

Yes.

On Sound

This play, this experience, is, in large part, communicated through sound cues for the audience. Cues that allow them to recognize something internal happening in Lo. This manifests as hearing her literal heartbeat, but it can also extend to having a specific sound for each Symptommonster. Is there a trill when her temperature goes up, like a hissing tea kettle? Or the sounds of ice breaking when she's chilled?

On Text

/ indicates the next line or action should occur.

(text) in parentheticals should not be spoken but felt.

A gap in text is a distance.

Lines from different characters (or actions) that are lined up are, likely, simultaneous.

The hospital sounds/breath scoring should continue beneath the Dance of the Medical Macabre. Perhaps there will an actual breath score throughout someday?

Social Media lines should be divided by the ensemble.

Notes

This play is not all about Lo's trauma. It is surely traumatic and horrifying. But I think for that very reason, you should search for the everything else in this and highlight those moments most.

There's time for deathly seriousness and there's time for silly jokes and maybe sometimes there's that in between space.

This is a horror play, but for some it is also not a horror play.

The first reading of this was done as a part of the '23 Clubbed Thumb Early Career Writers' Group Reading Series at the wild project. Directed by Daniella Caggiano. Featuring Dani Martineck, Teresa Attridge, Joyce Lao, Miranda Poett, and Katelynn Kenney.

Big Genre Moment: The Opening

*Lo walks through the audience to the stage.
She moves slowly, maybe a little wobbly or jerky.
She may or may not have a cane or a walker.
She takes her time with sitting on the stage.
She may have a binder of the script with her, or it's already on the stage.
She may glance down at it when her memory fails her.*

Lo

How do you make someone understand something they've never experienced?

...

Do you just tell them?

Do you describe every little facet in brutal detail?

...

Do you show it?

Do you show every little specific moment, from eyes open to eyes shut?

...

I thought I was an empathetic person.

Not an empath.

NOT an empath.

But.

I thought I could hear someone's story—watch someone's story—and understand...

...

What is understanding?

Is it the same as knowing? Like r e a l l y knowing?

...

When I think about stories, and how people identify with the characters in them, like supernatural stories or fantasies—something that is, generally, outside the realm of what most people know or have experienced... It just seems like... people can really identify with those folks—can identify with girls who are cursed by creepy dolls or hobbits who are tempted by an evil ring.

...

Have you ever heard of myalgic encephalomyelitis?

Don't try to pronounce it, just... think of it like a curse.

Like one placed on a pretty princess, that puts her to sleep for 100s of years.

It's a dark spell— (*say it like a dark spell*) my al g i c e n c e p h a l o m y e l i t i s.

Those are the magic words.

The cursed words—the common name—here in the US is

chronic fatigue syndrome.

...

That you can say.

That, you might even recognize.

...

Were you with me until I said it?

Before, did you feel something in your chest rise up, as if to say, "I'm with her, I get it, what she's saying."

And after, did you feel something in your stomach drop down, as if to say, "Oh, *that*."?

...

That thing that makes people tired and lazy.
People who get sick and then decide they never want to work again, so they
malinger... or maybe they're hypochondriacs.

...

You're not the only one to think that,
if you did think that.

Even some doctors think that.
For decades, maybe longer, this disease has been scoffed at. Waved—magicked—away.
“Just get more exercise. Just go to therapy.”
That's been the standard “treatment.”
But do you know what exercise does to a person with ME (“em ee” abbrv.)?

...

*Lo tries to get an answer from an audience member. Even carefully hopping off the stage to get it
whispered to her.*

Lo

(if no one responds)

No? No one?

(if someone responds with the right answer)

Wow. Yes. That's right.

(if someone responds with the wrong answer)

No. You'd think, maybe, but no.

It makes you sick.

...

Really.

I know it seem counterintuitive, but... yeah.

A curse—A blessing, you might joke.

Until you understand.

Until you know.

...

Is that what I want?

For you to identify, with me?

Why do I *need* you to understand?

Why do I *need* you to know?

...

I'm not sure yet.

Maybe by the end though... (I'll know)

Lo stands.

I just got sick.

Being here.

At a show.

This is the moment.

I won't know it's the moment.

You won't know it's the moment.
But it is.
I just got sick.
With something that will become

Lo pauses.

Lo
chronic

Voices in the Dark

C h r o n i c

Chronic chronic chronic chronic chronic
C h r o n i c
Chronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronicchronic
Cccccccccccccchhhhhhhrrrrroooooooooooooooooonnnnniiiiiccccccc

Lo turns away from the audience, facing the dark.

Lo
I'll think it's just a cold.
But it'll be one from which I'll never recover.
Can you imagine that?
The next time you get sick... close your eyes
And imagine...
There's something inside you now.
A corruption.
A curse.
That's spreading,
Gripping at your insides,
Into your flesh and organs and cells even,
Transmuting your body
And its mechanics
To something unrecognizable.
Or perhaps you imagine them outside of you
Because it's too much to think of it
Changing the very fabric of your being.
So, you imagine there are things around you now
That prod at your flesh
That make it sprout welts like wings on your back.
A creature that sticks you in a coffin of pins.
Little willow-wisps that slither through your ear and
tunnel their way to your brain
Where they distort your speech, your motion, your senses.
You will be sensitive
to heat,
to sun,
to touch.

Voices in the Dark (whispered)
Cold cold cold cold cold cold cold
Never never never never never
You you you you
sick sick sick sick sick
imagine imagine imagine
Inside
corrupt
curse
spreads
grips
flesh organs cells
booooooooddddyyyyyy
mech—manic
unreal
out of you
Fabric ric riiiiiiiip
Welts like wings
Coffin coffin coffin coffin
slither
into your brain
Distort distrust your senses
senses sensitive
hh hh hh hh
suuuunnnnnnn
touchtouchtouchtouch

Through their haunting you, too, will become a monster.

Mooooooooonnssteeerrr

*Lo takes a breath.
She rubs her temples.
The voices cease.*

Lo

I wanted to live in a fantasy. If I could pick any genre, that would be it. But. This is a different genre. Life has a way of imitating art.

So.

I'm going to try to tell, to show, to make you know this, in the way that I know best.

In the structure of a horror film.

And I'll be playing me, and I am sick, so, sometimes, I may need certain things, like this (*referencing the binder*) or this (*referencing captions that appear on the wall*) or this (*referencing her cane or walker*) or for someone else to do something physical that, I, the character would have been doing but I, the actor, should not...

...

Are you ready?

Am I ready?

...

Darkness.

Light.

Lo is surrounded by monsters—

Lo

...

No—

And she is consumed by them.

Blackout.

Living with the Character

An apartment has come together in the dark.

*There is a large corkboard in the center of the wall,
filled with notecards and post-its of cryptid theories
and pictures of monsters and dark forests.
It is labeled "Lo's Brain."*

*On the left side of the corkboard is a dining room table
that's mainly functioning as the desk of a very messy creative.*

*On the right side is a small couch.
The couch is facing the audience, presumably pointed toward
an imaginary TV on the fourth wall.*

*Lo is on the phone and moving quickly through the apartment,
getting ready for the day:*

Putting on clothes

Brushing hair

Making and packing lunch

Watching the news

Drinking her coffee

Sending off emails

*Her spouse, V, is also moving about their day but at a much slower and steadier pace.
V puts on their coat and picks up a bag.*

V

You should rest.

Lo

(on phone)

Uh huh, uh huh.

(whispering to V)

When I'm dead.

V

Famous last words.

Lo (to V)

Oh, don't forget—

They kiss.

Lo smiles.

V

Bye.

Lo

Oh! Don't forget again—

V leans in for another kiss, but Lo is already gone.

She hurries into the kitchen (off stage right) and brings back a packed lunch.

Lo

It's gonna be stinky when you heat it up, so open a window or something. Love you!

V

Love you. Thank you for the stinky lunch.

V leaves.

Lo

(on phone again)

No, not you. Well, yeah, you too.

Yes, YES, I love you too, Cath, okay? god.

I'm gonna—I'm putting you on speaker, okay?

Yeah, I have to finish getting—

Lo pulls the phone away from her face, groans, and turns on the speaker.

Cath

—you hear me? CAN YOU—

Lo

Yes! Cath, maybe try not to wake my / neighbors, alright?

Cath

/Who's still asleep at this time?

Lo

It's 7 in the morning.

Cath

Well, I've been up for hours, but that's the / life when you have kids.

/Lo mouths "when you have kids" along with her sister.

She coughs a couple times after—shakes it off.

Lo

Sure. You were saying,
about the cute little dress?

Cath

Oh, right, uh, Deegan's baptism is in a few months, / and I want you—

Lo

/A few months? Isn't that sposed to happen, like, now—

Cath

Well, Father Simon says that we should hold off til after Lent and then Parker's parents are / going on that month long Mediterranean cruise—

Lo

(joking)

/But, I mean, what if the Deegster dies, then won't he go to little baby limbo—? (excited) how freaky would a bunch of babies floating in a sort of hell-adjacent space be?

Lo starts to write a sticky with BABY LIMBO and add it to the corkboard.

Cath

...

What. Is. Wrong with you.

I was trying to ask you if you'd be his godmother and you're getting off on "little baby / limbo"?

Lo

/I mean, little baby limbo is (fascinating)—

...

Wait, are you for real?

Cath

What do you mean am I for real? I'm asking you, aren't I? You know I'm not like you, I'm not a "joker."

Lo

I dunno... I mean after you didn't ask me for the first two, I just figured it wasn't gonna happen...

Cath

Well, this one is yours if you want it.

Lo pauses, sitting on or leaning against wherever she's stopped.

Cath

...

...

...

Unless he dies.

Lo (amused shock)

Was that a (joke)—

Cath

I'm very uncomfortable right now.

Lo laughs. Hard.

Cath

So, what, are you going to do it, or no?

Lo's laugh becomes a cough.

Cath

Seriously?

Lo tries hard to work up enough saliva to swallow.

Cath

The old cough to avoid answering trick?

Lo (*croaks*)

That's a trick? I have never, in my life, done that, ever.
I'm just getting over being sick. Can't get rid of this cough.

Cath

Well?

Lo

Uh. Yeah. Yeah, I'm... I'm honored.
Thanks.

Cath

What?

Lo

What what?

Cath

Why did you say it like that.

Lo

I... didn't say it like anything. I just—
I mean...
I mean, c'mon,
what changed? Did you run out of friends to give your kids to?

Cath

...

Lo

That was a joke, Cath.

Cath

I don't want to get into all THIS right now, Lorelei.

—Ope, Sammy just went into the bathroom, and I've got to be there to cheer him / on if he poops.

Lo

/Okay, but, uh. No. No, no, no, sorry, no. You can't say something like that and expect me to go about my day not thinking about it.

Cath

You should work on your anxiety more.

Lo (making a rage-y face)

Uh huh, uh huh, sure, and you should work on your passive aggression.

Cath

...

...

(*off phone*)

GOOD JOB, BIG BOY! GOOOOOD JOOOOB!

Lo

What, he pooped?

Congratulations. What a treat.

Cath

Lo, I have to go. I'll talk to you later, okay?

Congrats on the job.

Lo

Been there for almost two months now,

But thank you.

Cath

Bye, Lo. Talk to you later.

Lo

Bye. Love you!

Cath

Love y—yes, mama's coming, honey—

The call ends.

Lo starts to cough again.

This time, she searches for water to guzzle.

She moves slower, more tired than she's expecting, but

she eventually finds her coffee mug amongst the desk mess and downs the remnants.

There's a face of disgust.

Lo (“gross” sounds)
Cold

Now, where was she?

She sits down at her computer and starts to send off some last-minute emails.

Lo
“Hey Tory,
I’ll...see...you...later...at 6p...at Benny’s. ...Looking...forward...to it!Can’t... wait to... collaborate
together—”
...just “collaborate”? Cuz together would be...
“Can’t wait to collaborate!” ...Exclamation point... How many is that? One, two...

Lo grimaces.
She looks at the CLOCK on the wall; she’s running behind.

Lo
Fuck, okay, “I’ll see you later at 6p at Benny’s. Looking...forward...to...collaborating... on
this...spooky...installation!” Exclamation point. Just the one, aaaaaaaaaand send.

She waits a moment.

Lo
Was that too forward? Like we’re *definitely* going to be collaborating instead of—Aw, fuck, whatever,
it’s done. Okay, okay, okay, focus—

The phone rings.
Lo debates letting it go to voicemail.
She sees who’s calling and finally picks it up.
She puts the phone on speaker and carries it with her as she puts her backpack together.

Lo
Hey Mom, what’s up?

Mom
Oh, just thought I’d try to call you right now.
Your sister said you called her.

Lo
Yeah, she texted me that she had something she had to ask so...
what? What’s goin’ on?

Mom
Nothing, I just wish you’d call me / sometimes.

Lo

/What are you talking about? Mom, I call you.

Mom

You call back if I've called YOU, but I'd like you to call ME.

Lo

I'll call you more, I promise. I've just been really busy.

Mom

Oooh, you're always soooo busy, even when you didn't have a job you were soooo busy.

Lo pauses, sitting on or leaning against wherever she's stopped.

Lo

...

I had a job, Mom. I was building an—
Art. Art was my job. IS my job too.

Mom

It's good that you've got something more again. I'm sure V appreciates it.

Lo

V was actually very supportive of me taking some time to create—
and apply for grants and commissions—

Mom

—But now you have no savings and no (grants or commissions) ...

Lo

...

I'll have savings again soon enough.

Mom

So it's a good job, well paying?

Lo

It's fine.

Mom

Okay.

Are you alright, baby, you sound down?

Lo (*a face that reads, sarcastically, "not at all because of this conversation"*)

I'm fine, Mom.

I just... I was sick all last week and I'm trying to kick the last of it.

Mom

Hay naku, I knew it. You should call me when you're sick.

Lo

It was just a cold or something—

Mom

—my psychic, Marianna, she said you've got a heavy energy around you right now.

Lo

And that means I have a cold?

Mom

It means you need some change in your life. Like this job.

Lo

What if the job IS the bad change?

Mom

... No.

No, it's good.

You need to let go of the conflict that's inside you and allow yourself to find what you really want and what will serve you.

Lo

Uh huh. And I'm guessing that's not art, right?

Mom

I didn't say that.

Lo

... I've gotta go, Mom, okay? I've got to finish getting ready for work.

But I'll call you. Later. Okay? I promise.

Mom

Okay, baby. I love you. / I love you so much. Have some ginger tea. Call me.

Lo

/I love you too, Mom. I will—Okay, bye.

Lo hangs up.

She coughs some more.

She's short of breath.

She feels her forehead, heads into the kitchen.

She comes back with an icepack pressed against her forehead, and she continues to pack up.

Is something else moving in the apartment too?

A strange shadow across the wall?

A flickering light?

Lo pauses, looking dizzy and tired.

Another call. She picks up and puts it on speaker without looking.

Lo

Mom, I love you, I'll call you back, okay, but I've just really gotta go—

Lo coughs.

Jackie

Awwww, I love you too, baby.

And her cough becomes a laugh.

Jackie

Ooo, that cough sounds rough. Still under the weather or are these the last gasps of this virus?

Lo's posture softens, clearly happy to hear this voice.

Lo

Yeah, I dunno. I'm really feeling pretty crappy still, but...

Jackie (*earnest*)

Aw man, I hope you feel better soon.

Lo

Thank you. Hoping my immune system is just, like, murdering this virus, even if it doesn't feel like it.

Jackie

Ooo, killer immune system, like Osmosis Jones but if Osmosis Jones was Jack the Ripper—

Lo

Dexter, please, my immune system should at least be likened to a "good" serial killer, right?

Lo is thinking...

She goes back to her desk and writes OSMOSIS DEXTER on a post it.

Jackie

Yeah, definitely. Hey, do serial killers fit the profile for your monster project or is it all supposed to be non-human folkloric-urban-legend-cryptid / situation—?

Lo pins the note on the corkboard.

Lo

/Already on it. I think it's more "non-human folkloric-urban-legend-cryptid," but I'm intrigued... All the ideas today.

Jackie

What was the other?

Lo

Baby limbo

Jackie

Oh man, like just a bunch of little babies floating—like imagine, ohmygod, like Rugrats—/ like Rugrats in Limbo!

Lo

/Like Rugrats in Limbo!

They laugh.

Lo's laugh becomes a cough.

Jackie

Oh, buddy. Well, this doesn't have to be long. Just wanted to check in on you, make sure you're still kickin'.

Lo

I'm good, I'll be good, / thank you.

Jackie

/So we're still on for tonight? 6:30?

Lo

Oh, shit.

Jackie

What?

Lo

I... um... Can you do 5 instead?

Jackie

... my shift starts at 8...

But I'm cool with having more time to hang out with you.

Lo

Oh, uh... Actually, I... I'm sorry, I kinda double booked on accident. I've got a meeting at 6 at Benny's with this composer I'm courting.

But... I could try to move it / back?

Jackie

/No, don't. It's fine. We can do 5 to 6, and that way I'll get to see you at least.

Lo

Sounds good. Thank you. Seriously, thank you so much. You're the best! I'll see you tonight.

Jackie

See you later, and take it easy at work, okay?

Lo

Okay. Love you, bye.

Jackie

Love ya!

Lo ends the call.

She sinks into the couch and sighs, crisis averted.

Lo

Thank you, Jackie.

And now airplane mode before the rest of the world gets any ideas.

There's another flash of shadow,

Or flickering of lights,

Or shifting of clothes in the open closet.

Lo tries to lean forward, like maybe she's seen something, but her body is so heavy.

She closes her eyes.

Darkness.

Knock 1: The Batibat

Hours later. The Clock winds forward.

Darkness

And stillness in the apartment...

Just the sounds of sleeping breath.

There is a large figure on the couch.

Sitting up on the couch.

Sitting on a sleeping Lo, who's still on the couch.

Its teeth glow as it smiles wide.

And then something moves through the apartment, slowly, carefully,

Crossing from the bedroom to the kitchen.

Lo stirs,

And the large figure on top of her... the BATIBAT... rises, floats toward the ceiling.

Lo's breathing shifts from sleeping breaths to awake breaths.

Frightened breaths.

The other figure has come out of the kitchen and now faces Lo.

There's a knife in its hand.

A tension builds.

V

You awake? Good if I turn on the light?

Lo

What?

*The light flips on and V is standing in their pajamas,
holding a butter knife and a jar of peanut butter.*

The Batibat is gone.

Lo

Why are you home? What time is it?

V

It's 8. I got home from work and you were asleep, so I just figured I'd let you keep on until you woke up.

Lo

8? 8 PM? Fuck... Fuuuuuuuck.

Lo checks her phone and it's blown up with calls from work and Jackie and the composer.

V

I'm guessing you didn't take my advice to rest then...

Lo *(on the verge of tears)*

Noooo, I just fell asleep... I just... I can't believe I just fell asleep. Oh my god...

V

It's alright. You're sick. You should be asleep.

Lo

I missed work and my meeting, and Jackie changed her schedule for me... Fuck.

Lo is fully crying now.

She coughs between sobs.

V puts down their snack and pulls Lo into an embrace on the couch.

V feels Lo's forehead, frowns.

V

Hey. Hey, look at me. You're alright. It's going to be fine. I want you to go to the bathroom and take a nice relaxing shower, and then you'll see some pjs on the bed, and you can get in those. And then I want you to go back to sleep, / okay?

Lo

/But I have to call them—call them all— / before—

V

/I've got it. Okay? I've got it.

(smiling) You'll just sound like a little croaky, drooly monster on the phone anyway.

Lo playfully shoves V and then sobers again.

Lo

I don't know what happened. I don't... I just fell asleep. I don't even remember... I'm so sorry.

V

Tst, no more of that. Okay, up, up, and to the bathroom with you.

Lo gets up slowly and shuffles toward the bathroom.

There's a whisper of a sound coming from the closet, which is ajar.

A hand MADE OF BEES reaches out of the closet as she passes by, and then it retreats.

Lo hears the sound and stops, looking around.

V is on Lo's phone, dealing with things—no other source of sound.

Lo shakes her head, closes the closet door, and disappears into the bathroom.

V

Hi, Ms. Lee. I'm sorry for the late call; this is Lorelei's spouse, V. I just wanted to let you know that Lo's been out sick all day, couldn't even get to the phone. Mhm... I should have called you before I left for work to let you know. Okay... okay, I'll pass that on to her. When will she be back? Soon, hopefully soon. Mokay, I'm going to go— uh huh, oh yeah, I hear that's, uh huh, mmm mhm...

*V walks into the bedroom, turning off the living room lights.
The Batibat is back in the corner of the ceiling...*

*And the closet door creaks open...
But this creature will remain hidden... for now.*

Darkness.

Knock 2: The Beeman

Days later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

V and Lo are on the couch.

V is giving Lo a back rub.

Lo

Really get in there please. Like, right in the shoulder blades. I think this office job is fucking up my back.

V

Like this?

Lo

Yeah. Yup, that's great thank you.

She sinks into the massage.

Lo

But you were saying—?

V

How was work?

Lo

Oh, uh, it was chill. Lee keeps bringing up what a nice voice you have. Otherwise, it's just doing payroll-y things and sending emails. How 'bout you?

V

Mostly an admin day, but I got to hire a new teaching artist for after-school who seems like a good fit so...

Lo (*good spot*)

Mmmmmmm

V (*joking*)

Yes, that is nice isn't it.

Oh... uh, actually, some news. Do you remember Rachel, taught the coding class and tutored? So, she got Lasik recently and she's been off for a little.

Lo

Uh huh

V

Well, she extended her leave because it was taking more time than she was expecting, to recover, but I guess now it's looking pretty bad—maybe permanent vision loss. Doesn't happen often, but she's going to take some time off work to hopefully recover fully.

Lo

Wow. Holy shit.
There go my dreams of getting Lasik.

V (this is not a time to joke)

Lo (*off V*)

... But seriously, that's really terrible. To have your life get flipped upside down like that. Just... Wow.

V

Mm. I'm going to give her a call sometime and check in.

Lo

That's... nice.

V

...You wouldn't?

Lo itches at her shoulder. Wiggles a bit under V's hands, uncomfortable.

Lo

No, no, I would. I just... was thinking maybe check ins would be the last thing I would want if I was going through something like that. Yeah, I don't know.

V

Why?

Lo

Probably just thinking too much of my mom and sister's version of check ins. Which are really just to find out what's going on with me, like, did I finally get a job or did I give up art or whatever.

V

Also, "how are you? Are you well? Do you want to be a godmother?" You said, yes, right? Or did you / change your—

Lo

/Yes! Of course. I'll be little Deegan's godmother.

V

And when's the thing?

Lo

Uh... couple months, I think. I don't... slipped my mind. I'll figure it out.

V

Meaning you'll call Cath to ask?

Lo

No! She'd never let me hear the end of it. I'll snoop on social media or call Mom or something.

Lo scratches at her back.

Lo

Yeah, I need to call mom—is it hot in here?

V stops rubbing.

V

No. Are you—

Lo

—It's just... my ears are really warm and my back is...

Lo scratches more aggressively.

There's that small sound... coming from the closet.

Lo

Sorry, I just...

Lo stands up and starts scratching her back, her chest.

The sound from the closet grows... It's a buzzing.

Lo

Do you hear that?

V

What? Are you okay?

Lo starts patting her right ear. It's not stopping the buzzing.

Lo

There's a-a-ugh (ringing) and this itching is...

Lo starts to take off her shirt to get to her exposed chest, stomach, back.

*THE BEEMAN emerges from the closet
and stalks toward her.*

*The Beeman embraces her, and Lo squirms in its embrace,
trying to break free. She doesn't SEE it.*

She's breathing heavily, scared.

The buzzing is so loud, she can't hear V who's standing and moving toward her.

*The Beeman finally releases her and steps back toward the closet.
It watches her from the open closet door.*

*Lo is now covered in BIG RED HIVES,
On her back, where V rubbed, they look like wings of welts.
Her scratch marks are also welts along her back, along her chest, along her stomach, wherever she
scratched.*

V (muffled through the buzzing)

*Oh...kay. Um, I'm going to go wash my hands, maybe I had something on them that... and then... ice
packs... you should... I'll see if we have Benadryl, okay?... Lo... Lo...?*

Lo looks down at herself and all around—

She still does not see The Beeman, even though he is right in front of her.

And the buzzing grows and grows and grows

As the face of bees shifts so that there's something of a smile.

Darkness.

Knock 3: The Imp

A week later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

*Lo stands in front of her corkboard, working through a new idea for the installation.
She's munching on a piece of toast and moving post-its into different orders,
stepping back to assess.
It's not coming together the way she wants...*

So she distracts herself by looking at a portion of the board labeled "To Do."

*She finishes the toast, washing it down with some milk.
She takes down the post-it marked "eat please" (written by V), and then "Call Jackie about show," which
is next to "Meeting with Composer."*

She calls and gets Jackie's voice mail.

Lo

Heeeeeey, lady, this is Lo. Just wanted to say break a leg!!! I saw you, uh, posted on Instagram and thought I'd give you a ring... a ling...ling. Boy, I am not good at leaving voicemails. Welp, hokay, so, anyway, sorry for not texting you back, I've been, my head's still like (gone), anyway yooooooooo are amazing and (*starting to get sing-songy*) I loooove yooou, you are a star, yes, you are, and I cannot wait to have you record some of these monster voices and and aaaaand (*catching on that she's starting to get sing-songy*) to be done with this message. I love you, I'll talk to you later, okay? Okay. Goodbye.

*Lo's feeling a little winded just after that call.
She sits down and breathes, breathes.*

*Something growls...
And Lo clutches at her stomach.*

*And then there's another ACTUAL growl. What the hell?
She grips it tighter— cramp.*

Lo

Oooooowch, ouch, ouch, ouch ouch.

*Her stomach growls again.
She exits to the bathroom, quickly.*

*And THE IMP comes out from under the dining room table/desk,
where Lo was just sitting.*

*It follows after her, cackling. Its barbed tail flicks back and forth,
dripping with some dark liquid... a poison?*

It disappears into the bathroom with Lo.

A moment.

And Lo moans, in lots of pain.

Lo

C'mon, c'mon... Gaaaawwwd....uuuugh.

What the hell is wrong with me?

There's a ferocious growl, and Lo whimpers.

A moment.

Lo

Maybe I should call my sister and have her congratulate me.

... Mm, well, not much to congratulate... Jesus.

My nephew is shitting better than me.

Lo flushes, washes her hands, and leaves the bathroom.

The imp follows swiftly after.

*Lo stands at her corkboard, trying to get back into it,
and the Imp stabs her stomach with its barbed tail...*

Lo stops... the creature right behind her.

*She whips around quickly—
not to catch the creature—
but to run back to the bathroom.*

The imp cackles as Lo moans, deep and low.

Darkness.

The Big Scare: The Executioner

Weeks later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

Lo is alone in the apartment. Just her and her SHADOW, cast against the wall.

Lo starts moving through a dance class video.

It's meant to be slow paced, but she's breaking a sweat already.

This movement is quickly taken over by the SHADOW FIGURE, who peels away from her place on the wall. The actor playing Lo continues to act the breathwork.

Lo's breathing heavily.

We hear the clock tick tick tick tick and that becomes her HEARTBEAT—thump thump, thump thump.

But she keeps going, keeps pushing.

It's just a dance—like, literally just stepping forward and back with some arm swaying.

She shouldn't be this tired, this out of breath.

A shadow moves near the bedroom.

The clothes in the closet shift.

A barbed tail flicks out from the bathroom.

Lo has her back to all of this—focused on the video on the screen.

Intent on finishing. She. Will. Finish.

The shadow from the bedroom filters into the living room, and the Batibat floats along the ceiling, eventually hovering over Lo.

The actor Lo drops to the floor—Lo's legs have given out.

And the Shadow Figure pulls away—the dancing is done.

Her breathing is heavier—slowing down—out of pace with the video.

Thump, thump Thumpthump thumpthump thumpthump

The Beeman enters with his buzzing, and he strokes Lo and hives blossom across her bare skin.

The Imp scampers along the floor and its tail shoots out, stabbing Lo in the stomach.

Lo curls in on herself and groans.

She's on all fours and starts to heave as the monsters draw closer and closer.

The Shadow Figure watches from the wall, standing tall, not bent as Lo is.

Lo releases

and pukes all over her work-out mat.

She heaves and heaves until the Batibat is sitting on her back, pressing her down.

Lo is prone on the floor, in her vomit, with these monsters surrounding her.

*And then...
There's the sound of*

*slow,
heavy
footfalls.*

*A large, masked individual enters the apartment.
They're in medieval torture garb, and they drag a large trunk attached to a chain.*

Lo is breathing but it's erratic and wheezy.

thumpthumpthumpthumpthump

*THE EXECUTIONER approaches her and the other creatures back away,
just enough for the Executioner to do their work.*

*They pull a number of clamp-like devices out of their trunk,
and they start to fasten these on to Lo's joints, one by one—
A wrist,
Both knees,
An ankle.*

*Lo flinches as they're applied and groans with pain.
She tries to get up, but she buckles on the side with the clamped wrist.*

She tries to drag herself along the floor, but the monsters hold her in place.

*The Executioner takes a chest plate out of the wooden trunk next.
There are a bunch of wooden knobs on the inside if it—not spikes to stab—
but things to put your body out of its usual shape.*

*The other creatures lift her up so the Executioner can apply this device.
Once it's strapped on, they place her, leaden, on the ground.*

The monsters stand around her. Unmoving. Smiling.

She. Finally. Sees. Them.

Lo
What... is... happening... to... me?

*She starts to drag herself, torture devices and all, to the couch.
She pulls herself onto it and covers herself with a blanket.*

The monsters haven't gone anywhere.

Darkness.

Conversation with Dr. Eager – The First Doctor

Weeks later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

Lo sits in the Dr.'s office, waiting.

She is

so

Tired.

The Batibat floats along the ceiling.

She gets up

and we see the Imp under her chair.

She starts to stretch. It hurts. And we notice that she's still wearing the chest plate under her coat.

She reads the signs—"Understanding Stroke," "Heart Disease," "The Human Body" – pictures of hearts and bodies without skin and skeletons.

"The Human Body" is on a cabinet.

Lo

Shall we see what's inside?

Lo opens the cabinet, and an arm of bees reaches out of it—

—when a knock sounds at the door.

She immediately slams the cabinet shut and sits back down and tries to look like she's been sitting all along.

The doctor enters.

Dr. Eager

Hi, there! Sorry for the wait! Miss Tan?

Lo

That's me. Hi.

Dr. Eager

So happy to meet you and see what's going! I'm Dr.

Lo(*an aside, filling in the name*)

Eager

Dr. Eager

How are you?

Lo

Um...

Dr. Eager (*understanding*)

What brings you in today?

Lo

Not sure exactly, but some gut... some gut problems. My um...
defecation kind of...

it's been failing. Or like,
is not like it was before.

I don't know why I said failing, it's not like a competition of poops or anything, but like I'd have—before I mean—I'd have this one kind of poop that was, you know, fairly firm and long and sausage like, and I wouldn't have to wipe too much after, like didn't leave much of a residue or have that, you know, ache? But now that ache kinda stays and I'm really constipated. Or I have diarrhea. Sometimes in between, which is weird. But, yeah, I never poop in the best way. Anymore. Not like this is an emergency exactly on its own or whatever, but I just um...

I'm also really tired. Like, really tired. I don't know how to explain but I just feel always tired, like tired on a... cellular level, and...

My cells are just moaning.

All the time.

The cabinet is pushed open by the hand of bees and the Beeman's buzzing starts up.

Lo

Like I actually hear a low moan—which I'm thinking, now right this second, may actually be tinnitus, which I've had occasionally in the past, but now it's like. Like my head's being shoved with cotton or something and then I hear that kind of static moan or drone and yeah.

Lo pats her ear, and the Beeman lets the cabinet door fall shut.

The buzzing is now muffled.

Dr. Eager

Okay, okay. I'm sorry you're going through all that.

Dr. Eager starts conducting a basic medical exam – checking eyes, ears, heart.

Dr. Eager

Any other symptoms?

Lo

Um... I guess, the kinda heartbreaker one... I can't have wheat or milk anymore without my stomach... and my skin just gets all rashy, at least that's what I think it is... I just—not to go into my whole lore or anything—but I never had these problems before. Food problems. I could eat and would eat everything. I love food. So yeah. Heartbreaker. Um....

Dr. Eager

And have you tried Lactaid? Or buying lactose free milk?

Lo

Oh! Oh, yeah, I mean that's why...

Yeah, I tried them, hoping they'd cure my whole stomach-feeling-like-it's-eating-itself thing but, uh, no.

There's a cackling and commotion under Lo's seat.

The Imp is dripping some of its tail poison into a vial and spitting into it.

This new concoction is making a horrible gurgling sound.

Lo

No that's why I felt... maybe I should see someone about this?

You know, when you get to the point where you're curled up on the bathroom floor over something you ate or because you were dancing, you know, that just seems like... "I'm not healthy..."

But then I'm thinking, like, "oh no I'm just being weak," or you know, maybe I'm entering some kind of WebMD spiral thing, but I don't...

Dr. Eager takes a seat post-exam. All seems good.

Dr. Eager waits for Lo, but Lo is waiting for Dr. Eager.

Dr. Eager

Well, I definitely think we should check these things out.

And maybe stay off WebMD—

Lo

Oh, I haven't / been, I just meant—

Dr. Eager

/Not good for anyone to be wandering down paths that can make them feel inconsolable or enter some kind of, ah you know, late-night frenzy after watching a few terrifying YouTube video. (*laughs*) I've had a couple patients do that—more than a couple now—and normally it's nothing severe or nothing that will severely affect them, it's just

gas or depression

or something like that.

So no need to worry right now, okay?

The lights of the room seem to flicker, a darkness cloaking the doctor, their glasses glinting—hiding their eyes.

Is there some kind of creeping music, slipping into the scene?

Lo reacts to this and takes a breath—

—the lights return to normal. There is no music. Just the sound of the fluorescents above.

Lo

...

Right.

Just gas.

Just depression...

Doesn't feel like, like I should, should just be saying "just." I mean, that seems serious to me. I've never, I don't think I've actually been depressed.

Yet.

I've, uh, been sad, like really sad, um... but the way people describe it, I don't know that it's the same. Like that numbness or... At least, it's not like clustered or in clusters of time or anything it's just—"oh this thing happened, I'm really sad." And...anyway, that's not a problem.

I guess I am sad, but it's because I can't eat what I want and I feel too tired to do what I normally want to do and—

Dr. Eager

—Depression can actually make you tired. Did you know that?

Lo

Um... I guess, sure.

Dr. Eager

Not to say it's anything before we've run some tests, but it's a possibility. Just want to put out the most likely scenarios. You know, horse, zebra, and all. But I hear you, and we're going to figure this out, okay?

Lo

Sure.

...Sure.

Dr. Eager

We'll take a bunch of tests, just to be sure. This sounds like it's causing you a lot of pain, and we'll figure out what it is, quick as we can.

Uh, but first, I think we should start with a stool test...

Lo

Okay.

Dr. Eager

...and, uh,

I'll need to take a sample.

Lo

... right.

The Imp's concoction explodes, and it looks absolutely delighted.

*Lo looks nervously down at the Imp,
but to the doctor, it looks like she's looking at her stomach.*

Darkness.

The Brain Foglings

Days later. The Clock winds forward and forward.

*The sound of the printer printing.
A FOG filters into the apartment, low and slow.*

*Lo is home in front of her corkboard. She is alone, for now.
She starts taking a section down—clearing a space on the board.*

She's on the phone with her mom.

Lo

Mmhm... That's nice. Cath'll really like that as a, a, what—baptismal gift?, I guess.

Mom

That's what I thought, but I don't know with her sometimes.

Lo

Yeah.

...

So, I... I went...

Ghostly, tendril-like hands reach up from the fog and pin up cards on the board that have what Lo is going to say written on them. "So, I... I went..." and so on.

Mom

What's wrong?

Lo

Nothing has to be wrong all the time, okay? ...

But, yeah, kinda things are
a little wrong
right now.

Mom

...

Do you need money?

The tendril-like hands pin up cards that say, "No. No, Mom, geez, I just... I went to the doctor today."

Lo

No. No, Mom, geez, I just... I went to the d—do—d—d
That's... weird. I um... I went to the...

*She opens her mouth to say the word... but it isn't coming out.
A tendril-hand creeps up around her throat.*

Lo

I went to the _____ cl-clinic.

That worked... strange. The hand descends back into the fog.

Lo

I, uh, yeah.

Mom

Are you okay? Still sick? You should make some bulalo.

Lo

Yeah, yeah. I just... I think there's other stuff happening too. Like, it's not the same cold...

Mom

You never used to get sick when you were a kid, you know?

Lo

I did have mono my / senior year and that wasn't great—

Mom

/That was the fluke. And then you were fine after a week, when your friend she was /gone two weeks—

Lo

/I know, Mom, yeah, you're right, you're right. So, anyway... just wanted to keep you up-to-date.

Mom

I'm sorry you're not feeling well, baby. Make that bulalo, or have V make it for you. And have that ginger tea. You should be resting more too. You do too much.

Lo

... It's just... I'm at a place in my career where I really can't let up, you know.

Mom

... Your health is your wealth. Remember that. You don't have that, you don't have anything.

Lo

Okay, sure.

Mom, I'm a, I gotta go, I've, uh, got a meeting.

Mom

Oh, okay, baby.

She sees a sticky with "Ask Mom about B"

Lo

Oh! Mom? What day is the baptism?

Mom

I don't know. Why don't you ask your sister?

Lo

I just didn't want to call... (*a breath, a stop*)

The tendril-like hands pin up cards that say, "I just didn't want to call" and ONE OTHER CARD that falls to the floor, unspoken.

Lo pauses. Something is wrong.

Mom

What?

Lo

... I forgot... she... she, uh... she... would just make me feel bad for forgetting... the day...

Mom

Well then you better remember.

Lo (*quick*)

I gotta go. Bye, mom. Love you.

Mom

Love you—

Lo ends the call. She stares at the cork board...

She picks up the fallen card...

It says "Cath." She forgot her sister's name.

SHE FORGOT HER SISTER'S NAME.

Lo

Cath.

Cath, Cath, Cath, Cath, Cath, cathcathcathcathcathcathcath.

She frantically pins the printouts one after the other, after the other, until the board is filled.

Thump thump, thumpthumpthumpthump

She sits down in front of the board and assesses her work, all medical documents:

WebMD pages, medical research papers, documents on MS, Lupus, Cervical Cancer, Lyme Disease —

All of these new documents are surrounded by the remaining pictures of monsters from her installation research.

And her own monsters—the Symptomons—begin to creep into the edges of the room.

Darkness.

Act 2

The Rattle

Weeks later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

*A bright white light. Clean. Sterile.
Another doctor's office.*

*Lo is seated across from Dr. Just Happens.
The Imp and the Batibat are with her.
Lo also has torture contraptions on her knees and wrists.
The doctor does not see any of this.*

Dr. Just Happens

Sometimes these things just happen.

Lo

Sure.
But like
all of them?

*Lo shows her arm to the doctor—
Her forearm is covered in bees—*

*These are angry pin marks to the doctor:
The remnants of an allergy test.*

Dr. Just Happens

Adult-onset allergies happen. But also, we can run another test, a blood test, since you've got those pressure induced hives, to see—not all of these will be real, I'm sure.

Lo

Okay... Um... I guess, what do I do? To take care of this?

Dr. Just Happens

I'll get you a prescription for epinephrin and some Symbicort for the breathing thing you were talking about, and then I recommend taking a 24-hour antihistamine every day. Zyrtec works well for people or Allegra. You'll find your favorite.

Lo

So one of those a day? That / seems like a lot

Dr. Just Happens

/Could take up to three or four if you need to. They're low enough doses that it's not really a problem.

Lo

... Okay.

Lo is trying to assess if the Dr. thinks any of this is strange at all.

Lo

Anything else?

Dr. Just Happens

Here's the form for that blood test, take it to any Quest. You can tell the front desk your pharmacy of choice and we'll get the prescriptions sent there. And, if you'd like, I think we could get you started on immunotherapy.

Lo (*joking*)

Therapy for my allergies? I don't even have therapy for me.

Dr. Just Happens

...

Lo

Uh. Yeah, I mean,
sorry, what does that entail?

Dr. Just Happens

Coming in for an injection—or in your case, something like three injections, we'll mix cat and dog, do the tree allergies together, and a separate dose for ragweed—once a week for several months, and then once you're less reactive, we'll move to every two weeks, and eventually into maintenance, which is once a month.

Lo

And that goes on for how long?

Dr. Just Happens

Sorry?

Lo

How long does maintenance last?

Dr. Just Happens (*frowning*)

Until you want to stop.

Lo

I mean, when does it make you better?

Dr. Just Happens

Most people have to stay on maintenance to continue to have the benefit.

Lo

... Oh.

Dr. Just Happens

They'll get you all set at the front. Can I answer any other questions?

Lo

Um... I mean, why? Why does something like this... happen? Like, is there anything... underlying?

Dr. Just Happens

... We can test for some other things like celiac or some autoimmune conditions. But mostly, It just happens.

Darkness.

The Slam: peanut butter surprise

A day later. The Clock winds forward.

Lo and V are on the couch, getting intimate, under the throw blanket.

Lo is breathing heavier, heavier.

The Batibat is hanging in the corner.

It's good, but also Lo is looking like she's running a marathon...

The Batibat drifts down, closer and closer to Lo.

The Executioner starts to approach too.

Thumpthump thumpthump thumpthumpthumpthump

V reaches for a dildo and some lube nearby, applies the lube to the dildo, and brings it under the blanket.

V non-verbally checks in with Lo. Lo nods, "I'm good."

The Executioner follows V's movement and sticks something long and sharp under the blanket with them.

Lo winces.

V

You okay?

Lo

Yeah, yeah, keep going—

The Executioner stabs again. Lo winces again.

V

You sure...?

Lo

Yeah, no, I dunno, it just really hurts...

V

Let's stop then

Lo (not happy)

V (off Lo)

and we'll have a little cuddle instead.

Lo (disappointed)

Okay

V

What, you don't want a cuddle?

Lo

No, I do, I do! I swear I doooooo!!

They laugh and cuddle up.

Both of them are now on their phones: Lo pulling up Wordle, V reading.

The Brain Foglings slither out and put up some Wordle blocks on "Lo's Brain," but she can't think of what to start with. No words come. She hates this.

Lo abruptly un-entwines and looks for something in the kitchen, washes hands.

V feels the swiftness of the cuddle and watches Lo... is something up? After a moment, they get up and go to the bathroom, wash hands. V heads back to the couch once they're done, goes back to reading.

Lo

—Hey, do we have any of your peanut butter cluster balls left?

V

Ah, no, I brought them in to work for Rachel. Sorry, darling.

Lo (*teasing*)

It's fine. I guess I'll just have to eat peanut butter out of the jar. Again.

V

You poor / dear.

Lo

/—Wait, who's Rachel?

V

My coworker, in sales?

Lo

...

V

...the one who got Las/ik?

Lo

/Oh my god, right. Right! I totally forgot about her.

Lo types in LASIK. The Brain Foglings put it up on the Wordle blocks on the board. NOT IN WORD LIST.

V

... Mm.

Well. It's looking like her vision loss might be more of a long-term situation, so she put in her notice.

Lo
Oh.

V
Yeah.

Lo types in SIGHT. Nope. Lo types in BELCH. Nope. Lo types in HELPS. Nope. Lo types in HEAPS. Nope.

Lo
I'm sure it'll get better soon.

V
Yeah.
...I'm not so sure.

*Lo is back, juggling a jar of peanut butter, a spoon, and her phone.
She doesn't know what to say so she shoves a spoon of peanut butter in her mouth.
Lo types in HEATS. Nope.*

Lo
Mwone gruess leff.
(a smack, a swallow)
I hate this game.
You play it.

Lo puts down the peanut butter, leaving the spoon in, and hands off her phone to V.

V
You've got 4 letters already; you can finish it.

Lo *(harder than she means)*
No, I don't want to, I don't wanna get it wrong, I just wanna be done and I want to have guessed it right.

*The closet door opens and the Beeman emerges.
The Imp comes out of the bathroom, watching, waiting.*

V
I think it's supposed to be *fun*, you know.

Lo
No, fun is binging the Lord of the Rings trilogy and going on haunted walking tours with you. This is painful. This is horrifying.

V
Mhm, yes, so painful, my ghostling. Speaking of, how's the project going?

V nods toward the board—which very clearly has been taken over with medical info.

Lo

Just guess for me please!

V

...

Lo

What is it? What was it? Tell me, was it HEARS?

V

HEALS

The Brain Foglings put up HEELS.

Lo

Heels? H-e-e-l-s, / but the A

V

H-e-A-L-s

Lo

HEALS.

H e a l s.

...Yeah.

Damn.

Next time...

*V hands the phone back and takes the spoon out of the peanut butter.
They get up and take the spoon and jar to the kitchen.*

Lo stares at the phone screen, at HEALS.

*After a lingering moment, she lets the phone drop away.
The Symptomsters creep closer.*

*Lo watches them a moment,
and then turns from them.*

Lo

He said it's probably depression.

V

Who? ...The / allergist?

Lo

/And it's not. I don't think (it is).

No, the first one, the primary care... It's just still (here, this thought) ...
Do I seem depressed to you?

V

No, you don't seem depressed to me.

Lo

Right, so. Anyway, got the results from those first tests he did when I went and... everything seems normal. Which is
(*bad*) good.

V

Why is it bothering you?

Lo

Well,
what if he doesn't do anything now? Like, he said he'd get me some referrals and email me but what if instead he's just like, "oh okay it must be allergies and depression" —

*Lo continues to actively avoid the Beeman and the Imp, who are so close right now.
But RED EYES glow from the open closet. And the Imp watches these eyes and then attacks Lo.*

Lo

Uuuuuuuugh, my stomach is fucked again.

V

Did you have milk or wheat today?

Lo

...No.

Okay, yes, I had a little of Lee's dessert, but that was nothing, just a little flan, and I paid for that area—I have to live, you know!

V

Oo, flan does sound good. Maybe I'll order that with the tacos.

Lo

Villain.

V settles back into the couch. They cuddle up.

V

Sorry, darling.

Lo

It's fine. You shouldn't have to suffer too. I'll live vicariously through you. Curled up next to you on the couch, eyes large, quivering lip.

V

Pawing hand

Lo

Nah! I wouldn't go that far. Just make you feel guilty without touching you.

V

Don't guilt trip me.

Lo

Why not?

V

I'll cry into my flan. And then it'll taste like my tears instead of flan. And then we'll both be inconsolable.

Lo

And if we're both inconsolable who could possibly console us??? Who??? WHOOO???

V

Careful, you're sounding hysterical!

Lo finally looks at the two Symptomons right next to them.

Thump thump, thumpthump, thumpthump

Lo

...

V

What?

Lo

I know you were joking but... I'm feeling... like severely in my chest, like it just whacked me in the chest.

V

What did?

Lo

You saying I was hysterical

V

I didn't

Lo

I know you didn't – don't – I know... it still, after what that doctor said, it made me feel...

An email notification from Lo's phone. She checks it quickly, to see if it's news from the doctor.

V

Your primary care doc?

Lo

... No.

V

...

Hey. Wanna go on an adventure?

Lo

Yes please

V

Okay.

*V gears up the TV with *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.*

Lo

Oh good, yes, yes.

And we should order the tacos now so we can have them before Bilbo's freaky eyes!

V

"Do not take me for some conjurer of cheap tricks."

Lo and V (*Lo in Gandalf voice*)

"I am not trying to rob you.

I'm trying to help you."

V smiles and turns to their phone to order tacos, nods at Lo to go ahead.

Lo starts up the movie.

The Beeman and the Imp step back for a moment.

Lo thinks maybe they're easing up...

But they are waiting for something, making space for it.

The Beeman and the Imp step aside as a new Symptommonster emerges from the Hive of the Closet:

THE WAX MOTHMAN.

The creature with the bright RED EYES looms, and its wings spread wide as it steps out into the room.

Lo (*with the movie*)

"The world is changed.

I feel it in the water.

The Wax Mothman gestures toward Lo

and a stream of moths fly from it toward her, scattering a dust around her.

She doesn't see this Symptomonster yet.

Lo

(clears throat) I feel it in the earth.

I smell it in the air. *(hard breath)*

Much that once was *(clears throat)* is lost.

The Wax Mothman steps forward and grips her neck in its hands.

Lo

For n—none now live *(wheeze)*

Lo

who remember it.”

(gravely/breathy) Daaa daaaa du du du du du duuuu duuuuuuuuh

The Wax Mothman's head comes over hers and covers her face in a strange kiss.

It pulls away from her, and Lo swallows hard.

Did it just deposit something inside of her?

V

That's an interpretation, I guess.

Lo is feeling around at the base of her throat.

Lo

I think.... my throat is closing?

V looks up from their phone.

V

You think?

Lo

No, I mean it. I-I-I, huh, mean it feels like a ball *(clears throat)* or a, a, a cocoon or— is growing in my throat right now.

V

Okay, well, you picked up the EpiPens from the pharmacy yesterday, right?

Lo

Should I stab myself with the—? Is that what I'm supposed to do right now??? Or do you think it'll pass?

V

I don't know. In the movies it always happens so fast...

Lo

How do I stab myself? I've never stabbed myself???

V

Most people haven't.

Lo

But if I stab myself, they said I have to go to the ER, and I don't wanna have to pay for the ER, do you think they know? Will they know? I mean, / I literally just got these, aren't they sposed to last—

V

/I think it'd still be safest if you go, if that's what they recommend.

Lo

But—but I don't know, I don't know what to do right now, I'm kinda losing it. Am I having anaphylaxis or not?? Like I didn't think this would be hard to tell.

V

Is the ball getting bigger?

Lo

... yes. It's growing.

V

Then I think you're having anaphylaxis, darling.

Lo

Fuuuuuuuuuuuck, this is so inconvenient.

An email notification. Lo looks down at her phone.

V

I'd say it's more than that. Lo.

She's still reading the email.

Lo

Will you stab me?

V

Because you're scared to stab yourself or because you're busy with this email? Is it the docto—

Lo (*excited*)

It's that producer—Harry Sharp—with the warehouse space in Gowanus... He (*clears throat*) he wants to meet—he wants to—

V

Lo, are you still / feeling—

Lo

/Yes! But also, I'm trying to pretend it's not happening by just living in this goddamn good moment, will you just live in this good / moment with me—

V

/Two seconds ago, you were asking me to stab you with an EpiPen—

The cocoon is growing, and Lo can't ignore it. A long hard wheeze.

Lo

Gaaaaaawwwwd—I should wait—this pen cost a lot. It cost nearly \$200 bucks, just this little pen. Maybe I won't need to use it. Maybe I should just go to the emergency room and eat the copay.

V

Whatever you want to do. Just don't worry about money right now, I'll cover the copay with my credit card if I have to. /It's \$150? That should be fine

/Lo laughs—it's not right, it's that weird nervous laugh.

An email notification. Lo checks it—

V

Seriously???

Lo *(oh my god elated)*

Aaaah, it's Dr. Eager... He... he's getting me *(clears throat)*, he's *(clears throat)* a referral, referrals. I'm *(clears throat)* getting re *(clears throat)* ferred.

V

Okaaaaay. Let's go. C'mon, right now. C'mon. Just breath, just breath. We're going.

Lo breaths and breaths.

Thumpthump, thumpthumpthumpthump

V rushes around to grab things—shoes, wallets, jackets.

Lo faces the Wax Mothman with its red eyes.

They stare at each other until Lo defiantly looks away and settles back into the couch.

She stabs herself with the EpiPen with a SMILE on her face.

She's got referrals.

She's gonna get rid of these fuckers.

Darkness.

The Hunt for a Diagnosis OR Lo's Lament

Weeks later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

Lo sits in a doctor's office.

She's going through her symptoms to a chorus line of doctors.

The chorus line of doctors moves from regular doctors to, well, more like an actual chorus line.

Is there kicking, dancing? Do arms reach over shoulders? Are there props?

It all feels like some show that Lo really wants to end.

Both Ends

Hi

Deadpan

Hello

Shove-n-Cut

Hey there

Lube?

I'm Dr.

Lo (*filling in their names*)

Both Ends

Deadpan

Shove-n-Cut

Lube?

Both Ends

Tell me

Deadpan

What's going on?

Shove-n-Cut

What's bringing you in today?

Lube?

Go ahead.

Lo

There's something... wrong... all over. And I haven't been able to figure out what it is with my primary care doctor or my allergist... So, they sent me to you to get some tests done.

Both Ends

Hm... They haven't found anything—

Shove-n-Cut

In the blood tests—

Deadpan

Nothing?

Lube?

And how often do you experience these symptoms?

Lo

All the time. I mean, certain ones come and go, or get worse. Then I'll get whole new—

Both Ends

And how are things at work?

Shove-n-Cut

Home?

Lube?

In the bedroom?

Deadpan

Are you stressed?

Lo

No, I mean, yeah. I'm stressed, but like, the normal level of stressed. I've definitely been *more* stressed, I remember / in college –

Drs.

Mhmmmmmm

Lo

—what I mean is this is different, and I just need the—my doctor referred me to get these tests.

Lube?

Hmmm

Both Ends

Well

Shove-n-Cut

Alright

Deadpan

I guess

Lo

... thank you. So, what—

Both Ends

We could do a colonoscopy and endoscopy.

Deadpan

A head MRI, maybe of the brain and cervical spine.

Shove-n-Cut

A nasal endoscopy and a salivary gland biopsy.

Lube?

A transvaginal ultrasound.

Lo

What does that mean?

Both Ends

It means we'd put you asleep and go in both ends to see what's happening.

Deadpan

Stick you in a big machine that sounds like WOOMP, WOOMP, WOOMP, for 45 minutes and you can't move.

Shove-n-Cut

Shove a thick tube up your nose to take a look around, and then cut open your lip and take out one of the little balls in there – and you'll be awake the whole time and able to smell your own burning flesh.

Lube?

Stuff a cold wand up your pussy until it hurts and let you watch the monitor but not tell you what any of it means.

Lo

Sounds.../
Great.

Drs.

/Perfect. Let's begin.

Through the following, Lo starts building SCULPTURES out of chicken wire, human-like forms in motion. The Shadow Figure assists her with this.

Lo	Drs.	Both Ends	Deadpan	Shove-n-Cut	Lube?
		Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
tired		Negative			

Lo	Drs.	Both Ends	Deadpan	Shove-n-Cut	Lube?
tired			Negative		
so tired				Negative	
beyond tired					Negative
I wake up and I haven't slept in days		Negative			
weeks			Negative		
months				Negative	
there are ice picks in my knees					Negative
there are weights on my back		Negative			
there's a tightening tightening tightening			Negative		
in my shoulders, in my neck, in my legs, in my chest				Inflammation	
I throw up because I'm now allergic to					Negative
12 different foods		Negative			
10 different environmental allergens			Some inflammation		
I now know there's a grass called Timothy				Negative	

Lo **Drs.** **Both Ends** **Deadpan** **Shove-n-Cut** **Lube?**
I'm getting shots for him, filled with him

Negative

because he makes my eyes swell and my body itch itch itch

Negative

because he makes it hard to breathe

Negative

I hate Timothy Grass

Negative

I don't know if I'm throwing up because I'm having a reaction

A little inflammation

or because I did tai chi for twenty minutes

Negative

or because this migraine is a million needles and then a pressure in my brain

Negative

it feels like I have the flu

Inflammation

it feels like I have the flu all the time

Negative

it feels like I'm running on 5%

Negative

3%

Negative

1%

Negative

I try to jog—okay sprint

Negative

Lo	Drs.	Both Ends	Deadpan	Shove-n-Cut	Lube?
to go on a walk					
		Negative			
and my legs are lead			Negative		
like they're encased in concrete				Negative	
and my breath is stolen over and over					Negative
I get home and I throw up		Negative			
Now I feel sick after standing too long			Negative		
I stand for a couple hours				Inflammation	
I'm down for days					Negative
my sheets are yellow with my sweat		Negative			
an ocean of sweat			Negative		
I wake up like I'm coming out of water, gasping for				Negative	
Grasping for, the memories are slipping					Negative
they're slippery		Negative			

...a lead?

Several weeks later. The Clock winds forward and forward and forward.

Lo is in a doctor's office, sitting across from Dr. Knows-a-Doc.

The Batibat hovers over Lo.

Much of her body is shackled with the Executioner's devices.

The Executioner stands nearby and shocks Lo from time to time with a cattle prod.

This appears as a tremor to the doctor.

A fog is rolling in around them.

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

So, we tested for Lupus, and your ANA came back negative. I know that was tested before, but I wanted to test it again, just in case. Um. Dr.

Lo *(filling in the name)*

Shove-n-Cut

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

let me know that your salivary gland biopsy came back negative for Sjogren's, so that's good.

(Off of Lo's look of pain)

Though I can imagine that's not what you want to hear right now...

A Brain Fogling hand reaches around Lo's throat.

Lo

Yeah, no, I should be h-happy—happy I don't h-h-have those things.

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

I did get a positive test back for the Epstein Barr Virus.

Lo

What's—

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

It's more often known as the virus that causes mono.

Lo

Oh, yeah, I h-h-had that when I was / _____. Do you mean I h-have it now?

/A brain fogling grabs the word "younger."

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

Based on these results, you don't have it *now*. But it is still heavily in your system. Normal range is no more than 18 U/mL and you're at 200-450 with some of the IGG levels.

Lo

What?? That seems, uh, h-h-huge? I mean, is that (something)?

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

I might think reactivated Epstein Barr virus, but... the rest of the test indicates that this is from a past infection and not something that's currently active.

Lo

So... back to square /___, uh, the... first square?

/A brain fogling grabs the word "one."

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

...

I'm sorry I don't have better news.

Lo (*hope crushed*)

Thanks, doctor. For trying.

Dr. Knows-a-Doc turns back to her desk. She's writing something.

Lo takes this as her cue to leave. She starts to stand and exit with her Symptomons.

Then the doctor turns around and holds out a card.

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

I'm... I'm not sure if this is it, but... I think you might try seeing this doctor. She's a specialist in her field, truly the best in the city.

Lo

What field?

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

She specializes in ME/CFS.

Lo

Oh... okay...

Lo takes the card. The rest of the world fades away.

Darkness.

Dr. Knows-a-Doc

Good luck.

don't talk sick to me

Days later. The Clock winds forward.

Lo and Jackie are at the apartment, having tea and snacks Lo can eat.

There are new Symptomons... that aren't Symptomons...

They're the wire Sculptures now covered in fur, feathers, hair. They stand ominously near, watching.

Lo

And after that, after that, I was visiting with a gastroenterologist to figure out these stomach problems I've been having, that, well, some are definitely allergies, but my stomach's still like, inflamed, or my intestines —

Jackie

Oof, that / sounds rough—

Lo

/And so I got a colonoscopy and endoscopy but all they found was some inflammation and they diagnosed me with GERD, which is like acid reflux, I guess.

Jackie

Yeah, I have an uncle / who—

Lo

/Oh, and maybe TMI, but I saw this gynecologist because there's been like this exhaustion, like I'm dead weight after we've been, and and pain during sex, penetrative in particular, and she was just like, "Uh, have you tried lube?" and I was like, "Uh, no, doctor, we didn't try the most obvious thing, even though I'm wet, I'm really wet, but it still hurts, so fuck you." Except I didn't really say any of that, I just nodded and said, "Yes, doctor, we tried, but maybe we should use more?" Like, I don't know why I said that, why I... Anyway...

Jackie (joking)

Sounds like you're really collecting docs here.

Lo

Oh. I mean.

Yeah, I guess.

But really, I'm collecting symptoms. I call them my "Symptomons," and I get more and more each day. They're not always on at the same time or they don't have the same strength, but yeah. I honestly feel kind of crazy, like, no one should, COULD, possibly have all these symptoms, right? And every doctor, they're like, "it's negative, okay bye, see you never!" Did I tell you about the neurologist?

Jackie

Uh, no, but what / do you think about switching ge(ars)—

Lo

/Dr. Deadpan... Yeah, anyway, it was bad. He was kind of prickish and spent like 10 minutes with me. It's, like, I could feel he was calling me crazy, you know? "Oh, look at this crazy woman, who's just imagining things" — Anyway, I'm looking into something now called mya—myal—

Lo finally clocks Jackie's silence.

Lo

What?

Jackie

... Nothing.

Lo

No, I wanna hear it. I've been talking a lot, sorry. What's up?

Jackie

I just think... if you were hearing someone else say all of this... that, you know, with your logic brain, you'd be wondering if all these experts... were wrong... you know?

Lo

Like...?

Jackie

I mean that mental health is super important too, and what you think and stress can definitely affect your physical body. It feels like you're kind of... discrediting that. I mean, I know you're not the biggest fan of therapy, but my therapist / has actually been great with my

Lo

/Okay, I don't mean that... I'm not meaning to say that mental illness is... bad, or that I should be wishing this is anything but that... I mean, I know your anxiety's been, your depression's been...

It's just, I feel this in my bones, Jackie.

I feel it deep in my body, tucked in my, I mean, the fatigue will literally force—I have allergic reactions—

Jackie

—I'm not saying that's not real! I'm just saying that maybe you have allergies and GERD... and anxiety or something that's driving you into...

You're an obsessor – you can't deny it, so don't even! You obsess. Don't hate me, I love you and I'm just saying this because I want to help... but

is this, uh (*a figuring how to say noise*), fuck I'm just gonna say it, is this just your next obsession?

Lo

...

Jackie

I mean, your winning pitch to that producer was Osmosis Dexter, right? Like, the monsters in your body, not the OG cryptid thing. Maybe you're getting so into this cuz you've got to dive all in, for the project?

Lo

... I did pitch it that way, but... It's not... I'm not obsessed.

Jackie looks over at the corkboard.

Jackie

Maybe... just let yourself rest or be and don't Google or (*points at the board*), do your little conspiracy thread connecting and just BE... maybe that'll help.

With SOME of the symptoms, at least.

Then you can really narrow it down. You know?

Lo

...

Yeah. I'll I'll think about that.

The Brain Foglings are starting to roll in.

The Beeman's buzz cuts through the air,

Jackie

Are you excited to be a godmother soon?

Lo

What?

Jackie

Deegan's baptism's coming up right? I brought a card for you to give to Cath, figured you've been busy with all the health stuff and I could at least take that off your plate. I know you hate picking out cards.

Lo (*tearing up at the thoughtful gesture and the forgetting*)

It's just so hard—do you go funny or sentimental? Do you go for the cartoon-y illustration or the beautiful, embossed kind?

Jackie

Yeah. I figured Cath might like sentimental embossed, so...

Jackie hands over the card. It's beautiful. Just what Cath would want.

Jackie

I even pitched a couple personal messages in there. —they're on post-its, so don't worry, I haven't committed you to anything yet—

Lo hugs Jackie.

There's surprise, and then a softening.

The Executioner tightens the devices on Lo's wrists.

Lo watches it happen, but Jackie sees nothing.

Darkness.

Doom Scroll/Doom Stroll

Days later. The Clock winds forward and forward.

The apartment is frosted—a new Symptommonster, the SNOW QUEEN, sits atop the dining room table.

Lo posts some new pages to “Lo’s Brain” – they’re on ME/CFS.

She puts them off to the side—not a main investigative thread but something to look into.

Her breathing starts to shorten just standing this long.

She sits on the couch, wraps herself in the blanket, and scrolls through social media.

Social Media

Hey

Hello Spoonies

Hi fellow ME-ers

Hi hi #pwME

Welcome to MEAction

Just wondering

What fun things do you do?

Walk my dogs – I know no one asked but pics!!!!

OMG

So cute

Our fur babies make life worth living after everyone else has left

...

I play video games

Yeah!

That’s fun—

I love the farm ones because I always wanted a farm, but I could never get one and now I could NEVER really get one and work it so—

Solitaire

I make sure to go to one concert a year and that’s like my big event WOOO!

Oh my god, so jealous

Have to bring my Loops and shades, but I just got documentation from my doc for a wheelchair so this year I can / travel in style

/I used to go to concerts, but now I’m severe

Sorry!

Me too

Yup

What fun things do you do when you can’t leave your bed?

Comfort shows – All. The. Way.

Can’t watch TV, it’s too much stimulation for my brain, so I just listen to—

I just lie—

Nothing

I draw until my hand is too tired

No, that’s too much for me. I just meditate.

I daydream of all the places I wanted to travel to when I was—

Knit or crochet—gotta keep warm

Yeah, can't knit, my hands have been locking up, but love that for you!
So boooooored
I'm stuck at home and no one visits
I'm at a loss
Loss
I'm losing it
Okay, what are all y'all's best brain fog stories????
Totally put my phone in the fridge and a block of cheese on the charger, like what?
I moved dirty clothes into the dryer and then the washer—oops
Once I forgot where I lived and I totally got caught trying to get my key to fit in my neighbors lock – they must of thought I was CRAZY
Thought this heat flash was menopause but remembered I was only 28 lol
Forgot my daughters name on her birthday when singing the birthday song
...

Lo gets up and starts to PACE around the apartment. She gets a text from Jackie. Ignores it.

Thump Thump, ThumpThump, thumpthump, thumpthump

Social Media

Let's talk meds!
What dosages does everyone—
ADMIN: Stop
Valtrex
CoQ10
Vitamin B12
D
C
LDN
Low Dose Naltrexone
WEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEED
ADHD meds and ME meds mixing? Cool?
Thinning hair? Rogaine? Biotin?
Which antihistamine is your fav for those who have allergies? MCAS?
Med sensitivity – start at 0.5 mg
They're losing effect
Anti-virals working?
Are your meds working?
For you?
Working?
Had to stop working
I'm moving from full to part time
From part time to disability
I didn't get disability
3rd disability application
Can you be married—
Disability's not enough to live on
How are you supposed to live?

How?
I know
Exactly
How?
Husband wants out
My wife is divorcing me
Can't play with my kids
I'm alone
My house is being—
We're being evicted
I had to drop out of school
Out of work
Out of life
Isolated
Alone
Help me
I need help
Please can you—
Help

*Strings descend from the ceiling, out of some portal to another plane perhaps?
Lo doesn't see this, but she's about to be introduced to a new Symptommonster.
THE PUPPETEER's strings connect to Lo's legs.*

*The other Symptommonsters watch as the strings jerk Lo's legs upward. Once.
She pauses but keeps reading, keeps pacing.*

Social Media

When you're too tired to
Hang out
Take a shower
Talk
Sleep
Eat
Cry
Lift your hand
Don't push
Pace
You have to—
You can't—
Push.
Because you could move—
I was mild and now I'm moderate
I went from moderate to severe and haven't left the bed in months
If you push –

*The Puppeteer jerks again. And again. And again.
Lo is stuck in the spiral though; she keeps reading and pacing.*

Social Media

Best chance of getting better is in the first two years

First 6 months

First 3 months

If you push

There's no going back

No going back

Alone

I'm dying

It feels like I'm dying

Crashing

Don't know – what does this mean?

Help

Do I go to the emergency room?

NO NO NO

They won't know how to take care of you

Could worsen your crash

Don't know what I did

Sometimes I wonder,

CW: Depression, Suicide

Losing hope

Don't know what to live for

Everyones left me

I have to give up everything even though I don't want to

I'm in a living death

Waiting to die

Sometimes I wish

Please just let me die

I don't know what I did

But this crash has made me

SEVERE SEVERE SEVERE

Waiting to die

I'm living but not

I'm alive but I'm not

I'm the living dead

Lo has finally noticed that her walk has become some strange DRUNKEN DANCE.

She tries to walk normally, but she can't. Her legs jerk up and jerk out and just keep going.

The phone rings, surprising her. Lo throws her phone at the couch, and she sits on the floor.

The Beeman's buzzing is SO LOUD. It drowns out the ringing of the phone.

A ball of fire streaks through the apartment scaring off the Snow Queen—ST. ELMO'S FIRE. Lo is on fire.

Lo

I can't

I can't have this.

Darkness.

I need you to help me help you

Days later. The Clock winds forward and forward.

V and Lo are eating dinner, surrounded by Sculpture Monsters and some Symptomonsters. It's quiet. Lo reaches over to grab something.

V

That's got wheat

Lo

I know.

V

...it's pretty breaded.

Lo

Do you not want me to eat your food? Since when did you stop sharing?

V

I just wanted you to know.

Lo

I know, I know—

Lo eats the breaded thing.

V

Good?

Lo

Mmmhmmm, so so good.

V

Well, at least there's that.

Lo

You know what else is good?

V

What?

Lo

My project, or the prospects for my project.

V

Oh?

Lo

I sent some more notes to Harry, the producer, and he really liked them. So, we're gonna meet at the space, after I go to the printer and also figure out how to haul the stuff from here, and I'm going to bring some of the pieces I've been working on and talk through it. And it seems like he wants to put up enough money that I can actually, like, do it the way I want.

V

That's great, Lo, that's really great. And Jackie—

Lo

—Yeah...Yeah, I've gotta...

V

She texted me and asked if you were okay. She called, I guess, a couple / days ago?

Lo

/Totally. Texting's just been...hard because my brain's been... and I. But, yeah, I've gotta get her in to record the different Symptommonster bios.

V

... Should I / tell her

Lo

/I've got it.

V

...

Lo

...

V

I also wanted to talk about—

Lo

Oh, I forgot to ask, how's your work? How's Rachel?

V

What?

Lo

Rachel.

V

... Uh. Yeah, I'm not sure. No one's heard from her in a while.

Lo

Have any of you reached out?

V

I thought you... No, yeah, I should.

Lo

Yeah, she shouldn't feel like she's just been abandoned, you know? Like you worked together for...?

V

Years.

Lo

Yeah. Right.

And then all those years... just gone.

*The Imp jabs Lo in the stomach,
and she curls over.*

Lo (to V, slightly teasing, slightly not)

Uuuuuughh, why, why did you let me eat that?

V (just a little hard)

I didn't let you. You chose to. In fact, I warned you not to.

Lo

...

Yeah. Yeah / I know

V

/I warned you, but you didn't want to hear that

Lo

... okay.

I'm sorry.

V

Will it make you stop next time?

Lo

Sorry, what's wrong?

V

...

I'm just... I'm just a little confused.

Lo

About what?

V

How you're going to do all that?

Lo

All what?

V

What you just said—with that meeting—that’s a lot and you’ve been mostly home or at the doctors or... sometimes at work... these past several (weeks, months?), and that already gets you tired.

Lo

...Okay.

V

Do you have a plan on how to get everything there without pushing yourself?

Lo

I was just going to, I dunno, pack the sample in a suitcase and take it on the train—

V

That’s not—

Lo

I’ve done it before, you’re acting like I’ve never done this—

V

You’re right, you’ve done this before. When you weren’t sick, Lo.

Lo

...

I need this. If I don’t go, if I don’t show up and show him I’m committed, he might go fund some other artist. I already told him—

V

—And maybe you shouldn’t have.

I’m sorry.

I’m just... a little frust/rated

Lo

/I’m frustrated we’re having this conversation.

Lo gets up and starts taking the plates to the kitchen.

The Puppeteer’s strings jerk her legs up and she stops herself from tripping.

Thump thump, thumpthumpthumpthump

She takes a breath, and she keeps going, but very slowly, hoping V won’t see the “weird walk.”

V

You need to sit.

Lo

No, I need to put these in the sink and do the dishes.

V

I can do that. Can you please sit?

Lo

Yeah, /after I'm done.

V

/Before you collapse, preferably.

Lo is still slowly, slowly moving toward the kitchen.

V

Why won't you let me help you

Lo

I mean, I let you help me and then you get mad that I asked for / your help

V

/no, no, you don't want to be helped. If I give you a suggestion you think that I'm scolding you or making you out to be weak and I'm not doing that, I'm not trying to do that, I just want to make sure you're okay

Lo

You want to make sure I'm okay? Then you would go back in time and make it so I would never get this goddamn disease in the first place! If you wanted me to be okay then you would find the cure—drop everything, and then just find it and fix me! / If you wanted me to be okay—

V

/Am I supposed to be taking this seriously? —I can't travel back in time, Lo... I can't go back to undergrad and choose med school for you and go into a research field that basically doesn't exist to find a cure that no one has found yet. I can't do that.

But I can—

Lo

Then what good are you!

...

...

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, / I'm sorry

V

/I don't know that I can be what you need me to be right now because I don't know what it is you need.

Lo

I don't know what I need either...

V

So, are you,

V

I mean, that's the crux of it isn't it?

Lo

What's the crux of what?

V

Are you going to figure out what you need?

Lo (*lots of freakin' emotions*)

...

V

Please don't...

I don't want you to get upset, I don't want this to trigger—to make your symptoms worse.

I just—

Lo

What? WHAT? Say it, say it, say it already!

All of the shadows of the room pull together into

The Shadow Figure. She has grown again.

Lo

You don't wanna be with a fucking sick person, you don't wanna be with a person who can never be who I was, a person who can never be whole, you don't want to be with that person? Because I would understand that.

I would understand that more than the s-s-support
more than the

V

Why? Why is that? Why do you think / that way?

Lo

/Because I'm BROKEN!

Because I'm broken now and there's nothing that can fix me.

The Shadow Figure dances across the wall, taunting Lo.

V

In this moment, you see yourself as broken.

I think I KNOW you are whole—

Lo

I don't CARE what you think about this, you're not going through it!

V

I can't

V

...

You need help, Lo.

And you might not want to admit it.

But you need help.

And I want to be there to help you... but I cannot be there to help you if you are not willing to put in the work, because I will not

I will not watch you let your life slip away because of this. I will not let you—

...

Grieve. Do what you need to in order to move through this, but move through it, Lo, because because I'm not going to just sit in this pit / with you

But I will help pull you up when you're ready.

/The Shadow Figure is growing larger, almost becoming a black pit.

It's all Lo can see.

The Symptomons collect around Lo.

Lo

There is no pulling me up.

There is no pulling me up because I am locked down here with THEM. And they will not let me go.

V

Maybe you should see that ME/CFS / specialist.

Lo

/No.

No because if...

V

... You're... afraid?

Lo

...This is the last person, V.

I'm afraid of another negative, of her turning me away and saying, "Sorry, nothing we can do."

And I'm afraid of going to her and having her tell me that this is all real.

That this is all real and this fucking incurable disease that nobody knows about except for her is my whole life now.

V

It is a big part of your life—

Lo

No, it's my whole life, V, it's my whole life.

V

I'm a part of your life. Your family, they're a part of your life, your friends—

Lo

—yeah, yeah, no. JUST. (Let me be angry!)

V

...

Okay. You can be angry.

...

I... do not want to be here while you are processing your anger.

Lo

What does that mean?

V

It means that I feel like dinner is done and I should give you the space to process this.

Lo

And what you're gonna hang out with friends, a night on the town, do all the things you can't do because of me.

...

Oh my god.

V

... That is true. I might go out, and that might be something you can't do. And I might eat breaded things and that might be something you can't eat.

And we have to be okay with that.

We have to be okay with that, Lo, because that is our life from here on out.

...

Do you want me to live exactly the same way you do?

Do you want that for me—?

Lo

No!

It's just...

It's not fair...

Silence. The Shadow Figure pit-edition grows.

Lo (done)

Well? Go.

V

I (*breath*) tried to say earlier, I need to bring up work things / first.

Lo

/See you get me riled up and then you want to talk about work things, like we're just having some kind of casual, diplomatic discussion. We're not doing that right now, I am trying to walk myself / off an edge.

V

/I need to talk with you about this right now because I need to be making a decision very soon and you've not been ready to talk these past several weeks and now there's no time. Now is the time.

Lo

It's not that I haven't been ready to talk—

V

I know, I know. But it's your job.

...

They've been calling me, since you won't pick up and... they're thinking of letting you go if you don't come back soon.

Lo

What?

V

That's what happens when you don't call in to your job, Lo. You lose your job.

Lo

I've been sick! I've been telling them I've been sick! I've been taking my sick days and now there are no sick days—

V

I know, I'm not saying it's fair, I'm just saying this is what's happening. You might be losing your job and your job is what's providing your health insurance to— to see all these doctors and do all these tests. I think you should see this ME/CFS doc now while you still have this insurance because You know my current job doesn't have insurance like your job has and You know how much I worked for this position and...

Lo

You don't want to give it up.

V

No.

Just like I wouldn't ask you to give up your dream. I'm asking that you don't let me give up mine.

Lo

I never—I would never—

V

I know... I'm just saying we're at a critical point here where we have to be making these decisions—

The Shadow Figure pit-edition grows and grows and grows.

It's starting to consume the whole apartment. Lo is afraid. For herself, for V.

Lo

Get out! PLEEEASSSE just go! I can't be talking with you about this right now because my immune system is attacking me and my brain is static and on fire and you can't see any of this and I am sick and I feel like I'm gonna throw up.

V

...

...

Okay.

...

Okay.

Do you need me to sit—

Lo

No! Don't (touch me), I don't need your help!

V

... Okay.

Um... I think that I'm going to... stay with, um, Kai tonight, okay? I think that'd just be best, alright.

Lo

Fine, whatever, do what you want.

V

... I love you, Lo.

Lo

But.

V

...

There wasn't one until you added it.

Good night.

I'll be back in the morning.

Lo

I'll be here.

V leaves.

The Shadow Figure finally consumes the rest of everything, including Lo.

Darkness.

The Smash: Doom Stroll 2

*Lo walks, dragging a suitcase, and the Puppeteer connects to her, jerking her legs to and fro.
The Shadow Figure rides the suitcase.*

Her phone rings; she ignores it.

*She walks past The Beeman, and the tinnitus overcomes the phone ringing.
She silences the phone.*

*She starts to slow her pace,
To breathe.*

Thumpthumpthumpthump Thump Thump Thump Thump

*Slow Motion.
Lo sways on her feet.*

*And then the world
Tick, Tick, Tick
turns
and flips
all the way over.*

Thumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthump

*Lo starts to breathe erratically
And falls backward,
Into the arms of two of her Symptomons.*

*Their monster masks are removed though, and they are people,
Just regular people.*

Regular Person 1 (*distorted, slow mo*)
Aaaareee yooouuu oooh-kaaaaay?

*Lo watches with horror as a menacing face smiles down from above –
The WORLD FLIPPER leers at Lo from the street that is now the sky.*

*The Executioner pulls out a cattle rod...
Lo watches as it comes down on her arm,
Her chest,
And she starts to spasm.*

Regular Person 2 (*distorted, slow mo*)
Heeeey, lli'mmm goooonnaa caaall 9 1 1

*Lo bats away the Executioner
And the two Regular People.*

Lo Inner Thoughts (Voice Over)

I'm dying

I can't, can't, can't don't have the money for that

I'm dying

I just walked by a hospital, I could just walk, I could just walk

I'm dying

Let me just breathe

Dying

And then I'll walk

Lo

L-l-leaaave me a-a-a-allooooooooooone

A-a-alooooooooooooooooone

*The word becomes a howl,
And Time Resumes.*

The two Regular People look at each other and move away from the woman howling, swatting at them.

One leaves, the other watches from a distance.

Lo lies on her side and slowly rolls up.

The World Flipper

Tick, Tick, Tick

Shifts the world

Right

Side

Up.

Lo is now sitting up. The person across the way nods at her and then leaves.

Lo Inner Thoughts (Voice Over)

I'm not dying.

I'm not dying.

I'm not dying.

Even though it feels like I'm dying.

This is just a new monster.

Just a new monster.

Thumpthump, thumpthump, Thump Thump

Lo's phone rings again.

She answers on speaker – she can't hold the phone up.

Lo

H-h-hey. Sssorry, I, uh. I k-n-n-now I'm running llllate.

Cath

Yeah, as in, you missed it—are you fucking drunk right now?

Lo

Wha-a-at? Th-th-thissss is-s-sn't Haaaarry?

Cath

Harry? I'm your sister, Lo, I'm your fucking sister, who's fucking kid you were supposed to god-parent, but now Sylvie gets to be the godmother, Lo, because you missed the whole goddamn white dress baptism ceremony, you have given my kid away to my most annoying sister-in-law and you're off day drinking, are you serious, what is wrong with you? Seriously, what is wrong with you—

Lo drops the phone.

The call has ended.

Lo

Sssshhit, Cath, Cath, I'm, I'm ssssorry.

The Shadow Figure emerges from the crowd of monsters.

Shadow Figure

Meeting.

The Symptomons

Meeting.

Shadow Figure

Money.

The Symptomons

Money.

Shadow Figure

Dream.

The Symptomons

Dream.

Lo holds the phone and calls, not on speaker.

Lo

H-haaaarry? Haaaarry? H-hiii. I'm (*breath*) close. I'm, I'm, I'll be th-there soon.

...

Y-yeah, not f-feeling too great, but, but liii'm excited to—

Lo

...

Oh, oh-kay, oh-kay, you've got a-a-another meeting to—

...

Y-yeah...

A-a-nother time... H-h-how about—

...

I will, I-I'll r-rest, but I c-can find a tiiiime to resched—

...

Oh-oh-kay. I'll wait-wait for your c-call.

Thanks, thanks—

Harry has hung up.

Lo looks down at her phone.

The Executioner cattle prods her hands and she spasms, dropping her phone.

Lo

A-are you fucking k-k-kidding me?

She shoots it a glare.

Then the Shadow Figure steps in front of her.

Shadow Figure

Dream.

The Symptomons

Dream.

Lo is trying to really recognize this creature.

There's something familiar.

Shadow Figure

Goodbye.

The Shadow Figure slips away, but the darkness lingers, like it's stretched across her world.

Lo laughs until she cries until she laughs.

Lo does something on her phone.

Then she holds it up to her ear, but she can't hold her hand up.

The Executioner keeps zapping it and triggering spasms.

She puts it in her lap and turns on speaker.

V (Voicemail)

Hey, this is V. Please leave a message, and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

Lo looks like she wishes she could be squeezing V so so so tight.

Instead, she hangs up before she can leave a message.

Lo

I'm a-a-alone.

She looks at all her monsters.

Lo

... I'm never a-a-alone.

The phone rings.

She answers.

Lo

H-h-hello?

Uber/Lyft Driver

Hello! This is your driver. I'm here. I don't see you.

Lo

Y-yeah, no, I'm h-here. I'm sssitting on the ground, over h-here. R-ready for you to take me h-home.

The sounds of a car pulling up.

Darkness.

Social Media 2 – This Problem is Bigger Than Me

Lo is on the couch, scrolling through an ME/CFS forum...

“Lo’s Brain” now has more ME/CFS materials on it. All project pictures have been replaced by them.

The Batibat sits on Lo’s chest.

Social Media

My poor wife

Husband

Caregiver

Daughter

Child

Son

Aunt

A question for those who’s caregiver is also their partner

Married 5 years. She doesn’t want to go on vacation with me... Is it really too hard to travel with a disabled person?

He’s been frustrated with me and I don’t know how to deal with it while also being too sick to think

Just moved from moderate to severe and afraid he wants to move me to a care facility

Is she getting out enough—she’s with me 24/7—should I be sending her away?

They are having a tough time keeping up with everything... I’m afraid that they’re going to leave me but I’m also afraid they won’t leave me and they’ll / burn out

/TMI. My husband doesn’t want to have sex / with me anymore.

/He doesn’t find me sexually attractive since I’ve been really sick and / bed bound.

/Would prefer advice to save the marriage instead of end it. / I can’t live without her.

/Husband just got laid off. Both of us are unemployed now. What do / we do?

/I’ve been nagging my spouse about using their inhaler, and they got annoyed with me. They said, “Well you get annoyed with me, / when I nag you about your stuff.”

/For richer, for poorer. In sickness and in health. Well, he got in sickness and poorer! / Won the lottery!

/What gift should I get my spouse? They’ve been such a good caretaker and partner and parent and I just want to show that I am so thankful / to have them in my life.

/My wife is my biggest supporter and a filmmaker and wants to do a series on people with ME/CFS – anyone interested in talking with her and being / in the film?

/Partner planned a road trip for me and made the passenger seat as cozy as possible and even created a little nest in the back seat in case I need to go into a cocoon from the light

I miss

Miss

Miss

Her

Him

Them

Me

Us

The Batibat grows and grows and grows until Lo can’t read the words anymore.

Lo (*croaking*)

Nnnnnnnooooooo

Get up

GET. UP. GET UP, GET UP, GET UP

*Lo tries to shove the Batibat off of her, but the creature is heavy.
She thrashes against it.*

Lo

I WILL KILL YOU

I WILL KILL YOU IF YOU DON'T

GET. UP!

*Lo now has enough adrenaline pumping through her that she forces herself to sit up.
The Batibat drifts from her, up toward the ceiling.*

Lo feels triumphant for a moment,

Thump thump, thumpthump, thumpthump

*The Batibat's mouth splits into a wide smile of light, a crescent moon on its side,
As the other Symptomonsers gather around her.*

Lo quickly grabs a throw pillow to fight the oncoming Symptomonsers.

Lo (*a war cry*)

Time slows.

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

*And the world flips
upside
down.*

Lo collapses back on the couch; the room unflips itself.

The Symptomonsers approach.

And Lo tries to quickly slow her breath, to immediately aggressively rest.

Thumpthump, Thump Thump, Thump Thump

But,

they keep coming forward anyway.

Too little, too late.

Lo swallows a breath before

Darkness.

Dr. Psychic

Lo sits in a cramped and comfy doctor's office/psychic's room, nervous as hell. Dr. Psychic sits patiently.

Dr. Psychic

Hi, I'm Dr.

Lo (filling in the name)

Psychic

Dr. Psychic

Can you tell me what brings you in today?

Lo

Um... s-s-ssure.

The Shadow Figure unrolls a large sheet of paper – It has 20+ symptoms listed.

Lo points out the worst ones and the Shadow Figure checks off the symptoms as each Symptommonster presents itself by doing a gesture that reflects its respective symptoms—a Symptom Gesture, if you will— Then, Lo stops. This is usually when doctors jump in.

Dr. Psychic nods sympathetically.

Dr. Psychic

Are there any other symptoms you'd like to share.

Lo

... Um, yeah... There's also...

The Shadow Figure unravels a new sheet of paper with 10 more symptoms. Lo points them out.

Dr. Psychic nods knowingly.

Dr. Psychic

Any others?

Lo (nods)

The Shadow Figure unravels a new sheet of paper with 5 more symptoms. Lo points them out.

Dr. Psychic nods encouragingly.

Dr. Psychic

Anything else you'd like to share?

Lo

I... I don't know. I haven't... Everyone else has just moved on to tests at this point. Before this point.

Dr. Psychic

I like to make sure my patients feel comfortable sharing everything they'd like to. This affects many different systems. Inflammation runs rampant. It takes time to go over all these different symptoms.

Lo

Oh... Okay.

Dr. Psychic

You mentioned that it's been harder to do things like walk upstairs. When you exert yourself, how do you feel after?

Lo

Uh, I feel like I have the flu or I'm having an allergic reaction to, I dunno, moving, I guess. And sometimes even thinking. And sometimes even (feeling). Sometimes it's right away, sometimes hours later.

Dr. Psychic

Mhm. Okay.

If anything else comes up, please feel free to tell me, but right now I'd like to run some tests.

Lo

So I, I should go out and schedule those now or...?

Dr. Psychic

No, we'll do those here, right now. I want to draw some blood to test for some things. There aren't any biomarkers for ME/CFS yet, but there are certain viruses I look for.

Lo

Okay...

Dr. Psychic

ME/CFS is often talked about as a diagnosis of exclusion, but there are some clear markers, and from your symptoms and what has been ruled out, I'd diagnose you with a moderate case of ME.

The world stops.

Lo

...What? I'm sorry—I—

Dr. Psychic

It seems to me that you have a case of moderate ME/CFS.

Thumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthump

Lo starts to cry.

Dr. Psychic looks like she's seen this every day.

Dr. Psychic

What you described? That feeling after exertion, that's called PEM, or Post-Exertional Malaise. It's the hallmark sign of ME. Controlling that will be one of the best ways for you to treat this illness.

Lo

There's treatment? I thought—

Dr. Psychic

There's no sure-fire medicine or specific treatment that will heal you, and there's no cure. But, there are ways we can target symptoms, and there are medications we can try. There's something called "pacing."

Lo

What does that—um

Dr. Psychic

You can get a device that measures your heart rate. Many with ME feel that if you keep your heart rate under a certain threshold, specific to the individual, you can keep from having these crashes. There's some materials at the front desk you can take home with you. As far as meds, once we get your blood tests back, we can see if an anti-viral might be helpful or LDN—

Dr. Psychic continues to talk,

but Lo has left this plane—full-on astral projected out of her body (literally or figuratively).

The Symptomonsers gather around her, but she tries to ignore them and just focus on Dr. Psychic.

Dr. Psychic

I can see them.

Lo

...What?

Dr. Psychic

I can see you're in pain.

I'm sorry.

Lo

Oh. Yeah. Always.

Dr. Psychic

Let's see if we can change that.

Lo is hopeful for the first time in forever.

Darkness.

Figuring Shit Out Installation OR FUCK OFF MONSTERS

*Lo plays an upbeat song on the speaker. The bass is her heartbeat.
The Symptomsters are the band (they don't actually have to be a band, but they can be a band – blow up instruments are fun). Perhaps some of the Symptomsters who aren't in the band are the dance team, doing small dance numbers while Lo is adjusting the frozen Symptomsters.*

The stage is covered in a smoky red haze.

Lo *(aside)*

This is the part in the horror film, where the protagonist is FIGURING SHIT OUT.

Symptomsters

STEP ONE – THE PACING

Lo

Give me the thing!

*A Fitbit, or some other device that can monitor heartrate, is dropped from the sky.
Lo puts it on, and when she puts it on, we can see her heart rate projected (or otherwise) on stage.*

*Lo stands and walks about the space, slowly, her leg jerking up now and again by the Puppeteer.
A cane drops too, and she uses that as she needs to.*

Her heartbeat jumps up from resting of around 55-60 to 80 to 90 to 110 to 120

Thump Thump, ThumpThump, thumpthump

Lo

Oh, c'mon, I was j-j-just waaaaalking.

She sits. The Symptomsters all sit too.

Thump Thump, Thump Thump, Thump Thump

She starts to box breath.

In – 2 – 3 – 4 Hold – 2 – 3 – 4

Out – 2 – 3 – 4 Hold – 2 – 3 – 4

The heartrate drops back down to 110 to 90 to 80 to resting.

Lo

Oh-oh-k-k-ay. Waaalking is... tough right now.

Symptomsters

And so she rested.

Days turned into nights turned into days turned into nights.

Lo

She p-p-paced and the sssstuttering stopped.
She paced and the leg jerked every 8th step
instead of every step.
She paced and the dense fog that had filled her
brain eased into something she could see through.
She paced and the world flipped less often.

Symptomons

Inflamed
Inflamed
Inflamed
Inflamed
Inflamed

Lo

She was finally
A little less
inflamed.

*The Symptomons blow some of the smoke away.
Lo takes a breath.*

Symptomons

STEP 2 – THE PROTOCOL

*Lo claps her hands – ready.
The giant paper Symptom List is flipped and is now The Allergy Test.
Lo circles things on the list.*

Lo

Avoid, avoid, avoid, avoid.

*The Imp, which has been skittering around her, poking and prodding her belly with a pitchfork,
and then standing and watching her ass to see what comes out
STOPS.*

*It looks confused... and then backs away and FREEZES.
Lo moves the Imp's limbs into the Symptom Gesture for Gastro Shit.*

Lo

Next!

*Lo sticks her hand out and some giant pills fall from the sky—one, two... and three 24-hour Zyrtec.
She swallows them down dry,
And then sits down as a NURSE swoops in and stands next to her, hovering. Waiting.
She pulls her sleeves up to expose her arms.*

Lo

Shoot me full of timothy grass and birch and dog and cat dander and dust mites and cockroach, please!

The doctor pulls out four giant needles and injects the substance into her arms.

*The Beeman, which has been buzzing loudly in Lo's ear and wrapping its arms around her, making her
scratch, STOPS.*

Lo

And that extra one for the pressure hives!

The doctor takes out another bigger needle and injects that.

Lo scratches at her arms, but the Beeman backs off.

He buzzes softly and then FREEZES.

Lo moves the Beeman's limbs into the Symptom Gesture for Hives and Tinnitus.

Lo

Next!

The light's dim; it's nighttime.

Lo puts in earplugs and an eyemask. She pops some more pills—Low Dose Naltrexone.

Lo drops down and sleeps.

The Batibat joins her.

The sounds of a vivid dream enter the space—

There's running and fighting and Nazgul and "YOU SHALL NOT PASS"!

Lo takes a sharp breath but does not move. She is experiencing sleep paralysis, her breathing erratic...

The Batibat leers at her from its perch on her chest.

But Lo moves her pinky, again and again. Her breathing starts to even out,

And the Batibat begins to float up to the ceiling.

Lo sits up and the Batibat drops down on her, crushing her.

Lo continues to breath through it—

Lo

Play it now!

A morning body scanning meditation starts to play.

Lo starts to breath into her limbs and stretch, little by little, until she can get up.

As her stretching goes on, the Batibat FREEZES,

Lo stretches and ties a line to the Batibat's foot, so she's like a frightening balloon.

She shapes the Batibat into the Symptom Gesture of Unrefreshing Sleep, Sleep Paralysis, and Fatigue.

She releases the Batibat into the air where it keeps the gesture.

Lo

Next!

The Executioner stands before her now.

They start to pull out the Chest Trap, but Lo wraps herself in HEATING PADS.

The Executioner tries to put it around her now, but it won't fit.

*The Executioner pulls out the cattle prod and attempts to shock Lo,
But Lo now has a MASSAGE ROLLER and is using it to keep the Executioner at bay.*

*Lo grabs a bag of EPSOM SALT and makes a circle with it.
The Executioner cannot pass.
Lo dumps the bag and sits in a “bath” with Epsom salt.*

The Executioner STOPS as Lo exhales a relaxed breath.

Lo takes her time in getting up and repositioning the Executioner into the Symptom Gesture of Pain and Shocks and Tremors.

Lo

Next!

*Lo whips around and the world starts to flip—
Tick, Tick
Lo stops the flip by slowly turning and closing her eyes.*

She looks sick to her stomach.

A PT Magician comes by. Lo lies on her side

Lo

What are you going to do exactly? My doctor gave me a prescription for vestibular rehab which just feels like... what? Rehab for your ears, you know?

PT Magician

I do know.

Lo

She says it might be what’s causing the vertigo, and maybe also the leg thing, that it’s a balance thing.

PT Magician

Let’s find out.

Lo

Okay. Let’s.

PT Magician

I’m going to hold your head in my hands and then quickly turn it, okay? It’s called the Epley maneuver and it’s going to move any stray crystals back where they belong.

Lo

Every time I hear about crystals in my ears, it sounds so woo, woo, you know—

PT Magician

I do hear that one too. And three—

PT Magician performs the Epley maneuver on Lo and... nothing.

PT MAGICIAN

How was that?

Lo

Yeah, nothing. Sure this isn't—

PT MAGICIAN

Other side—

*Lo shifts. The Epley maneuver on the other side and
THE WORLD FLIPS.*

Lo

Woah. Oh my god.

PT Magician

Alright, that should help a bit. Slowly sit up and then we'll run you through some balance exercises—

Lo

Right, right, okay. Okay, yeah.

*Lo looks up as she sits up. She flinches, waiting for the world to flip.
But it doesn't. And the face of the World Flipper has receded into nothing.*

PT Magician

Good work. You'll want to keep up on these and practi—

Lo

STEP THREE – THE PRACTICE

The Symptomonsers remain frozen in their Installation form.

Lo

Pills,
Pace,
Coffee,
Pace,
Shots,
Pace,
Body Scan,
Pace,
Sit,
Pace,
Aggressive Rest,
Pace,

Lo
Pills,
Pace,
Sleep,
Pace

Lo meanders through the Garden of Symptommonster Statues with her cane or walker.

Lo
I'm not dying. I'm. Not. Dying.
They're not killing me.
...
They're
listening to me.
They listen.
...
They listen.

Lo sits and calls her Mom.

Mom
Hi, baby! You're calling me!

Lo
Mom...

Mom
Yeah, baby?

Lo
...

Mom (*seriously*)
What's up? What's going on?

Lo
I'm wondering... could you just...
I have to... I want to tell you what's going on with me...
But I just need
I just need you to listen.
...Can you do that for me, please?

Mom
...
Whatever you need, baby.
Tell me what's going on. I'm all ears.

Darkness.

Jackie's Not-So-Irish Goodbye

*Lo is in the apartment, lying on the couch, watching tv.
Some Symptomons are in the room, but they're at a distance.*

A knock at the door.

*Lo jumps—
She's not expecting anyone.*

*She shakes and has visible tremors as she stands.
The SNOW QUEEN moves along the wall near Lo, frost following after.*

Lo looks through the peephole.

Lo

...

Jackie?

Jackie (*through the door*)

Yeah, I uh.

Yeah, it's me.

*Lo takes a settling breath, one of preparation for social engagement when you were not expecting social engagement. Then,
She opens the door.*

Jackie

I brought—

Lo

—you come bearing food things, that's really sweet.

Thanks.

Lo steps aside for Jackie to enter.

Lo kind of goes in for a hug, but it's awkward with the food bag.

Maybe Jackie was glad to have the food bag as buffer.

Jackie moves past to the table and sets it down, busying herself with trying to open the food bag.

Jackie

Sure. How are you feeling?

I haven't heard from you in a bit.

Lo sits and watches Jackie work...

Lo

Yeah, I've been dealing with this wild vertigo and uh
And had to realign the crystals in my ears.

Jackie feels her friend's gaze and finally looks at her.

Jackie *(a little laugh)*

...

Is that... real?

*Jackie sits down,
And Lo can breathe again.*

Lo

Oh, totally, they just twisted my head really quick and... but...

Knowing she should switch gears away from health stuff.

Lo

I—

have you watched the latest episode of *Tiny House Loving*?

Jackie

Oh my god, I can't believe Georgia wanted to make the loft an office, like you'd have to sit cross legged for everything, just... And when Trey / fell asleep, it was just—

Lo

/fell asleep! Right, c'mon??? / Like wake up, Trey! She's trying to tell you she's pregnant!

Jackie

/Seriously, WAKE UP! She's telling you she's pregnant!

They both laugh.

*Lo reaches out and touches Jackie's face.
Her hand shakes.*

Lo

Eye lash.

Make a wish.

*Jackie blows it off Lo's finger nearly automatically.
A deep stare, a breath.*

Jackie

I love you.

Lo

Aw, I love you too.

*Then Jackie looks away.
Lo misses her gaze.*

Jackie

I've missed you.

Lo

Same. Like, so much. Thanks for coming to visit me.

Jackie (*automatically*)

Of course.

(*a moment to think*)

I mean...

I'm—I've been wanting to talk to you and it's been—

Lo

—harder than usual, I know, I'm so sorry, I've just been sick.

Jackie

Yeah.

Yeah, you're sick a lot.

Lo

Well, I guess being chronically ill will do that to you.

They sit in silence a moment.

Jackie

...

So... I...

...

Do you want (to eat)—I can open up the—

Lo

—what is it?

Jackie (*smiling*)

Your favorite.

Lo (*smile breaks*)

Oh.

Jackie

What?

Lo

Nothing, it's

Nothing.

Jackie

Is hot and sour soup... not your favorite anymore?

Lo

... I'm allergic to soy now, so...

Jackie

Oh.

Lo

But, thank you. That was really sweet.
You should eat it! I really like watching.
But not, like, in a creepy way. Just
In a, sorta, like, living vicariously—yuuuup.

Jackie

That's alright.

Lo

Seriously, take it with you at least. / Please.

Jackie

(hard)

/I don't like hot and sour soup.

...

I got it for you.

...

I didn't know.

I didn't know.

Lo

I'm sorry.

I... You just,

Don't like it when I (talk about that), so

There wasn't really a time to bring it up, I guess.

A moment.

The air shifts.

Jackie

Hey, can I talk to you about something?

Lo

Sure, anything.

Jackie

Okay...

...

Jackie

Okay. I've been thinking and
You know I've been going to therapy and that's been going really great, and I've been doing these, um,
these wellness check-in circles, or pie chart things, where I draw a circle of different aspects of my life
and see how full they are, and I do a circle with how much time I spend on the thing, and I um... I'm just
a kind of person who—
I have a very full life
right now.

Lo (*smiling*)

Yeah. That's great.

Jackie

Like,
I've got a really tight schedule to fit in all the things I want in my life, you know, my partner, my family,
my job, my art, my fitness and wellness, and my... / friends.

Lo

/Totally.

Jackie

And because my schedule is so... there's just not much
I can
change
in my life...
Because I *love* the way my life is right now—I mean I have a great balance right now—and, and you
know, the ways *we* would

Lo finally clocks the "we" of it all... and is starting to wonder where this is going.

Jackie

The ways *we* would hang out were, you know, going on long walks through the parks on the weekends
and going to yoga and doing art together and now you don't have weekends out and you can't go to
yoga—even if it's the soft, easy kind—and you haven't wanted to work on the installation project—

Lo

It's dead.

Jackie

Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't know, I –

Lo

I haven't told anyone yet. I've been... grieving it... I guess.

Jackie

I'm sorry...

Lo

Thanks.

*They sit in silence a moment...
Jackie is wondering if she should leave it there.
Should she just pack up and go
And try this another day?
Lo wishes she would.
But Jackie centers herself and continues.*

Jackie

I'm sorry about the project... and I'm
I'm sorry
But
I'm not sure how to...
I've been talking with my therapist and with my other...
I know this is going to sound so bad, and I'm sorry but
These changes have been really... really disruptive to my—it's been so helpful to have a routine, for me,
and to have regular communication with you, and now I've just kind of been waiting and waiting by the
phone and that's been (painful) hard, for me... these changes...
And I don't think I want to change my life
I really, really love how the rest of it is right now and— what *you* need right now is something I don't
think I can give you because I need a *friend*, in my friendships, I need someone who can respond to texts
and go out with me to these things and can be *all in* with me, like *we* were all in with each other, and... I
don't think you're able to make that investment in me anymore.

Lo (*heart is deflating*)

I'm not... choosing this, Jackie—

Jackie

—No, I know, I know you're going through all of this, and I'm sorry you're suffering and confused, but I
just... I have to also think about my own / wellbeing and—

Lo

/—but what if, I mean, I don't... I don't think I need
what you need. Like,
you don't have to call me everyday or
text me right away or, or, or we don't have to hang out that often, but like,
...if I'm feeling good and am *able* to... like,
then we can hang out... Right?
We can still... if you're free and I'm good, we can still...

*Jackie is clearly holding back her own emotions – wanting to be able to say all that she wants to say and
not bend to her friend's pain.*

*The monsters are creeping out.
They breath out Lo's heartbeat... It is steadily increasing in speed.
The Snow Queen's frost is replaced by St. Elmo's Fire.*

Jackie

I don't think

...

No.

I *can't* do that.

Because, for me, if I have you in my life, I'm going to want to make those accommodations for you and those changes for you, and when I'm not around you,

when I have time to think

and not feel guilty, I know...

I don't want to change my life.

...

I love you.

But if I try to keep you, I don't think I can live this life that's made me

Happy.

Lo

...

...

...

I would

Hate

To be the reason for your

unhappiness.

Jackie

I'm sorry, Lo, I'm—

Lo can't muster to say anything else.

The monsters are closer.

They breath her heartbeat... it is now racing.

Jackie has to leave now or she'll cave.

She leaves Lo, sitting still.

She pauses at the door to say something.

Some last thing.

But there are no more words.

Jackie leaves.

Lo is left alone with her monsters, and they breathe her heartrate, and it is beyond racing.

She stands up abruptly and throws the soup at the corkboard.

It covers all of her papers... a hot and sour mess.

She screams into her arm and starts to run around the apartment – the Shadow Figure takes over the physical activity while Lo vocalizes.

The monsters have backed away from her, allowing her this moment of adrenaline-filled exertion.

The Shadow Figure stops running and joins Lo at the corkboard.

Lo rips or rather peels the things off the corkboard, wet and tofu-ed as they are.

The two start to bundle the wet papers up into a ball—

Is Lo shaping some new kind of monster? It looks vaguely human shaped.

Then, she starts bashing the soggy ball monster with a fury.

Lo

Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!

Fuck you! Fuck you! FUCK YOU!!!!!!

She lets it all out in a pain-ful, rage-ful, sorrow-ful wail/howl.

And then she expels what remains of her breath.

And with that, the fight is gone.

She switches immediately into Cleaning Mode and starts to aggressively clean the hot and sour mess.

Once again, the Shadow Figure takes over the physical act of cleaning. Lo breathes faster and faster.

As she does this,

the monsters move toward her now

With a hunger we have not seen in some time.

They breathe her heartbeat.

And it is still So Fast.

She needs to bring her heartrate down...

Or else...

The creatures begin to descend upon her—

Voice 1

C-c-c-c

Voice 2

C-c-c-c

Voice 3

C-c-c-c

Voice 4

C-c-c-crr

Voice 5

C-c-c-crr

Crrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

Crrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

Crrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

Crrraaaa

Crrraaaa

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

Crash

Crash

Voice 1	Voice 2	Voice 3	Voice 4	Voice 5
		Crash		
			Crash	
				Crash

*(erratic breathing –
continue until last is done)*

*(erratic breathing –
continue until last is done)*

*(erratic breathing –
continue until last is done)*

*(erratic breathing –
continue until last is done)*

*(erratic breathing –
For 5 seconds)*

CRAshhhh CRAshhhh CRAshhhh CRAshhhh CRAshhhh CRAshhhh

The Executioner throws a bag over her head.

Darkness.

The sound of the door opening.

V

...

Lo?

Lo, you asleep?

Oh, hey, let's move you to the couch here—Lo?

Lo?

Can you—

Can you move?

A soft moan in response.

V

Can you talk—

tell me what's happening.

A catching on sound. No words are formed. Just small grunts of effort.

V

Oh my god.

It's okay,

It's okay,

It'll be—

The Hospital

*It's all white light.
Painful white light.
White forms move through the room.
Angels?*

Then there is darkness again.

There is movement in the dark.

Voice 1	Voice 2	Voice 3	Voice 4	Voice 5
<i>One Beep Then a Low Hum</i>	<i>3 quick breaths And a long Exhaaaale</i>	<i>Long inhale Through the nose Short burst Exhale</i>	<i>Quick intake Quick outake Pause</i>	<i>A quiet Low moan Or groan</i>

Dance of the Medical Macabre

This is a dance piece, very fantastically done, with Lo in a medical gown that's also a ballgown.

She dances briefly—perhaps something waltz-like—before she collapses, and the rest of the Symptomonsers continue in circles.

The Symptomonsers move in and around her, the feeling is frenetic and frightening and disjointed... Are these all individual dances? Or are they three different? Two different? It's hard to tell.

Doctors, in their beautiful white coats, enter the dance floor and pull a single Symptomonser into a dance.

Lo eagerly searches for them.

Occasionally, a Doctor uses a stethoscope to draw the Symptommonster off the dancefloor with them...

*But then, nearly as quick as they enter, each Doctor and their light are gone.
They pass across the stage like shooting stars or like the light of an angler fish.*

*All the Symptommonsters, except one or two, will come back.
More Symptommonsters enter the dancefloor.*

*The Symptommonsters do seem to be dancing together now though.
Lo, with time, is able to see that and to track the patterns of movement for each Symptommonster.*

*In turn, each Symptommonster is highlighted by a spotlight.
Lo speaks their choreography or maybe does some of the steps showing she knows their dance now and can keep their pace and movements in her mind.*

We hear the sounds and voices of the hospital room, but we see the dance.

Voice 1 (kid doc)

Hello... Ms... Tan?
Can you tell me what brought you in today?

Voice 2 (nurse)

Food.

Voice 3 (V)

Let's just try getting up. Do you need help getting up to go to the bathroom?

Voice 2 (nurse)

Walk.

Voice 3 (V)

The EEG will take a couple days, but then we should know—

Voice 1 (kid doc)

So you collapsed And you couldn't speak
And whatever was coming out was coming out slurred? That's right?

Voice 2 (nurse)

Here. Sit up.

Voice 3 (V)

I love you.

Voice 1 (kid doc)

I'm going to have some folks come by to visit with you.

Voice 4 (psych)

Hi there, Ms. Tan. We're from psychiatry.

Voice 2 (nurse)

Food.

Voice 4 (psych)

We just wanted to ask you some questions.

Voice 1 (kid doc)

We're running some blood tests but

Voice 4 (psych)

How have you been feeling recently?

Voice 1 (kid doc)

So far most of our tests have been—

Voice 2 (nurse)

Food.

Voice 4 (psych)

Have you been depressed? Suffered from depression in the past?

Voice 1 (kid doc)

Um... Sure we can do a couple more of the standard ones, but

Voice 4 (psych)

Thanks for speaking with us. Seems like you've got a pretty good handle on—

Voice 3 (V)

I love you. I'm sorry, it's been busy at work and I don't have PTO anymore—Here's your—

Mom (phone)

Hey baby, I'm going to fly to you—I'm going to—You know I would though—

Cath (phone)

Hey, day drinker. Seriously, though, V said—just get out of there. Hospitals are—

Voice 1 (kid doc)

No, we still can't explain the walk.

And the EEG hasn't turned up any seizure activity.

So far, everything's

Voice 1

Negative

Voice 2

Negative

Voice 3

Negative

Voice 4

Negative

The dance swirls around her and the darkness deepens until only the doctors' light is breaking through.

With each "Negative" said, the doctors become less like our contemporary view of angels and more like the many winged, many eyed versions of themselves.

They are powerful and horrifying, and Lo seeks to surround herself in the Symptomons... the devils she knows, the dance she understands.

Lo

Nnnnnnnn---

Voices in the Dark (all low, and as if in some kind of fluctuating vortex)

NEEEEEEEEEEGAAAAATIIIIIIIIIIIVE

Light.

Sudden and hard.

Lo is in a hospital room.

And there is someone else in the room.

Plain clothes – seemingly not a doctor, but some stranger hanging out in her room.

The other woman just stares at her for a moment.

Dr. House

You feeling okay?

Lo (*croaking*)

Um,

N—no.

Dr. House (dry)

I'm sorry to hear that.

Lo

Yeah. Thanks.

Sorry, who are...?

Dr. House

I'm your doctor.

Lo

But... there's been some other guy to see me?

Dr. House

And I'm his boss.

Your neurologist. Dr.

Lo (*filling in the name*)

House.

(*back in the moment*)

Sorry, it's just this is the first time I'm seeing you.

Dr. House

Can you stand for me?

Lo

Uh... okay.

Lo tries to stand up and it's wobbly and slow.

Dr. House looks impatient.

Dr. House

You said you're having some trouble walking?

In addition to the other symptoms?

Lo

Yeah. It just... it just like kicks up or stomps or is kind of... like I'm drunk.

Dr. House

Mhm. Okay. Walk.

Lo is annoyed by the tone, but she doesn't say anything. Maybe this person will help.

She takes a couple steps. There's a small stomp/hop.

Dr. House

Mhm. You can sit now.

Lo

Okay... You sure you don't want—

Dr. House

You can sit.

Lo

Do you know what's... what's causing it. Why this is...

Dr. House

You talked with Dr. Farroway?

Lo

The psychiatrist? Yeah, the other day. He said I checked out.

Dr. House

Mhm. Well, I know that you went through some... Do you know that when someone suffers a trauma or is under a lot of stress, they can have physical symptoms manifest? Things like gait abnormalities and fatigue. Did you know that?

Lo

... Yeah. Conversion Dis—

Dr. House

That's one name, another is Functional Neurological Disorder. It can make you experience these symptoms even though we're not finding anything physically—

Lo

But this is physical.

Dr. House

... It is manifesting real physical symptoms for you, but there's nothing we're finding that's pointing to a disease—

Lo

I have ME/CFS.

Dr. House

Gesundheit.

Lo

I have myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Dr. House

...CFS... chronic fatigue syndrome, right.

Right.

And why didn't you tell us you have this?

Lo

Because I thought maybe this would get me a second opinion

One that was... I just thought you might find out more and...

Dr. House

You want my answer,

it's FND.

Lo is starting to curl in on herself; it's all this shit all over again.

Dr. House

...

...

So, anyway, there's not much else we can do for you here, so we'll be discharging / you—

Lo decides she's not going to curl in anymore.

Lo

/... You're wrong.

Dr. House

Excuse me?

Lo

You're wrong.

Dr. House

Hey, if you want to go with the chronic fatigue syndrome because it suits a narrative you've constructed by all means. But I've made my / diagnosis.

Lo

/You've done like one test on me—that EEG—and the normal blood tests, that's it. You had me walk for two seconds and decided what you decided, instead of asking me anything, like when this started, what it feels like, when it gets worse. In fact, I haven't seen you until this second and I've been here for almost 3 days, so, really, it doesn't feel like you can be making any clear diagnosis of me at all.

And, honestly, it kinda feels like you ruled me out right away.

So you can write your diagnosis, but I'd also like you to record that you spent a grand total of 5 minutes with me to make that conclusion. I'd like you to record that I've been diagnosed with ME/CFS from the one specialist in this whole city, and I'd like you to record that I disagree and am unhappy with your sad attempts at patient care and diagnostics and counsel.

I would like to be discharged right now.

Dr. House faces Lo and stands and spreads wings—the wings of the medical emblem—wide and threatening.

And Lo stands facing her, with her army of monsters.

The Shadow Figure looms behind them all.

Then, Dr. House simply makes a dismissive noise, And turns away, becoming a doctor once again.

Lo watches her leave, And then V is next to her and guiding her to take a seat at home.

Home

V helps Lo onto the couch and Lo just curls up.

V moves through their daily routine quickly and days are passing quickly but Lo is just lying on the couch.

The Symptomonsters are gathered close at first – and then as time passes, they move farther away. The movements are reminiscent of the sped-up hovering in Paranormal Activity.

The Shadow Figure leaps around the space, matching pace with V, but moving around and about them.

Shadow Figure

Ffffffffffffffffaaaaaaaaaakkkkkkkkkkkeeeee

Lo reaches for the throw pillow to cover her ears.

The Symptomonsters move closer.

Lo stops moving... they stop.

She starts to reach again, slower. But still, they come forward.

She stops and is unable to block out the sound of the Shadow Figure.

Shadow Figure

What a

waaaaasssssstttttee

Don't you wisshhh you were...

Don't you wisshhh you could...

And the Shadow Figure answers 10 emails in 2 seconds and runs around the apartment and builds a sculpture. The Shadow Figure is incredible.

The Shadow Figure moves with a flourish that Lo yearns for.

She moves her whole body with vigor and rigor and joy and exuberance.

She dances.

Lo starts to sing to comfort herself.

Lo (softly)

(Parody of The Edge of Night from The Lord of the Rings)

Home iss my life

The world my bed

And all new pathsss they lead to dread

Through s-s-stutters

To the s-s-sweats of night

Until the day is far too too bright

(louder)

Limpsss and tremorsss

Brain fog and pain

My life delayed

My life delayed

Shadow Figure

Yeeeeessssssssssssss

The Shadow Figure looms over Lo and grows larger and larger.

Shadow Figure (*booming, echoing, all-consuming*)

“You cannot hide.

I see you.

There is no life in the void.

Only death.”

A New Dance For Us

Lo gasps.

V finally stops by her.

Time has resumed after much has passed.

V

You awake? How are you feeling?

Lo

Oh-kay. Okay.

B-better, maybe.

V

You were talking in your sleep.

Lo

Mm, what was I saying?

V

You’ve been talking about dancing. At the hospital too.

Lo

Mm.

V

...

Want to dance?

Lo

...

...

(weepy nod)

(nods vigorously)

Really bad, like,

Really badly.

V

So let's dance.

Lo

I can't, I'm too tired, I'm too—

Lo looks around the room at her Symptomons. All waiting.

V

...You want to try?

Lo starts to sit up. The Symptomons step forward.

Lo starts to try to stand. The Symptomons start to rush toward her.

Lo collapses back on the couch. Afraid.

The Shadow Figure laughs.

Lo

I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't anymore

I can't, but *she*, sssshhhheee

V

Lo-o-o-o?

V's voice echoes off – and the Shadow Figure tugs at V, pulls V into a dance, pulling Lo and V apart.

The Shadow Figure grows and grows and grows, preparing to swallow V.

Voices in the Dark *(like waves crashing)*

You used to be

able to

You used to be

capable

You used to be

strong

You used to be

energy

You used to be

movement

You used to be

life

You used to be

living

You used to be

living

You used to be

Lo

I'm

I'm alive

I'm

*The Shadow Figure
starts to shrink*

living	the one who's alive	
You used to be	I'm the one who's alive!	<i>And shrink</i>
Living	I said	
You used to be	I'M THE ONE WHO'S	
Living	GODDAMN ALIVE!!!!	<i>And shrink</i>

The Shadow Figure is now the size of Lo. Her foil of darkness.

Lo

You're the ghost.

The Shadow Figure peels off its shadow-y form and is revealed to be...

Lo. But a healthier, stronger, happier version of herself. The Before Lo. Before all this.

When she could run and work late and be emotional.

When she could do all the things she wanted to do.

When she was healthy.

Before Lo smiles at Lo.

And Lo rages.

She screams. And the monsters scream with her.

She has become the monster.

Before Lo just stands there. Smiling.

Lo

Fuck. You. Lo.

Then Lo launches at Before Lo...

But she's not attacking her...

she's trying to put herself back

back into that body.

She's trying to meld herself with Before Lo.

They have to become one.

This has to be some nightmare that she'll wake up from once she just

Does The Right Thing.

Lo

Let me in, let me in! LET ME IN! LET ME IN! LET ME IN!

Pleassse, pleassse I beg you

I can't

I can't be in this

Thissss anymore.

I can't.

I can't be in thisss

Forever.

*Lo is now the ghost attempting possession...
But she does not absorb into Before Lo.*

*Lo slides to the floor; Before Lo still standing strong,
still smiling.*

Lo

You have to let me in...
If you don't... what even am I?

Before Lo is a wall of smile.

*There is a murmuring...
It grows...*

V (softly)

Lo, Lo, Lo

Voices in the Dark

Lo
 Lo
 Lo
Lo
 Lo
 Lo
 Lo
Lo

*Lo hears the voices of the people in her life calling her name.
The voices come from her monsters.*

Lo

I'm Lo and you
are not.
You USSSED to be.
But now, you're dead.
And I've been... clinging to you...
living in this between
between death and life, in a a a
limbo,
But I'm ALIVE.
And now...
I can't exert as much, or exercise... but...
I CAN EXORCISSE YOU, BITCH!

*Now Lo is smiling.
And Before Lo steps back, afraid.*

The Symptomonsers encircle Before Lo.

Lo
First, sssome holy water –

*Lo flings some GINGER TEA at Before Lo.
Before Lo flinches away.*

Lo
And then how about sssome sssage or incense –

Lo takes out her INHALERS and sprays them at Before Lo.

Lo
Ssssalt!

EPSOM SALT rains from the sky.

Before Lo is still standing.

Lo
Okay, how about sssome prayerss?

Lo pulls out her NOTEBOOK OF AFFIRMATIONS.

Lo
“I am capable.”

Before Lo twitches violently. Her head snaps toward Lo, like freaky Exorcist style.

Before Lo
You aren’t even half of what I am.

Lo
“I am
creative,
strong,
resilient.”

Before Lo
You are
dull,
weak,
fragile.

*Before Lo's body starts to contort and tries to reach for Lo.
She is held back by the Symptomons, but it's taking all of them to keep her in the circle.*

Lo *(louder now)*

"My dreams
are still my own;
they are adaptable,
just like I am."

Before Lo

Your "dreams" can only be
Echoes of what they once were.
Changing your dream is WEAKNESS.
Changing your dream is FAILURE.
You
Are
A
F A I L U R E

*Before Lo's head extends out toward Lo, wholly unnatural.
The smile is feral and frothing.*

*Lo is afraid.
Lo is afraid Before Lo is right.*

*Before Lo cackles and it reverberates through time.
It shakes the room.*

thumpthumpthumpthumpthump

*It shakes Lo, and the Symptomons start to turn toward her... move toward her.
Lo has to get herself under control.*

*Before Lo leers at her and expands her massive frightening wings—they're made of all Lo's past
accomplishments and pictures of her sweaty and happy and of all the negative tests and and and.*

Lo closes her eyes.

Inhale

2

3

4

Some of the Symptomons stop.

Hold

2

3

4

The rest of the Symptomons stop.

Exhale

2

3

4

They gather back around Before Lo.

Hold

2

3

4

They all hold Before Lo down.

Lo opens her eyes and

Lo *(slowly, carefully)*

“I am

enough

as I am

right now.

And I LET GO

OF WHAT NO LONGER

SERVES

MEEEEEEEE.”

*That freaky horror wind from
nowhere whips around them.*

Lo is in full-on priest mode now, hand outstretched – or is it full on Gandalf, YOU SHALL NOT PASS!

*The ground splits open like the deep caverns of the Mines of Moria, and Before Lo—Lo’s Balrog—falls
Down*

Down

Down

A massive VOID remains.

Lo *(slow and steady)*

You are past. You have come to pass.

Now

Rest.

Lo lies back.

And the WORLD SUCKS BACK INTO FOCUS.

V is holding Lo up.

V

Lo? Lo?

Her very own Samwise.

V

Are you alright? How can I help?

They sit together and Lo just takes a moment to settle.

The Void is still very much present.

Lo

Hold me. Tell me you love me,
even like this.

V shifts so that they are behind Lo and Lo is cradled against their chest.

V

I loved you before, I love you more now, I'll love you even more / tomorrow.

Lo

/Is there something missing? Do you feel something missing?

V

... No.

Things have changed, but nothing's missing.

You're not missing.

Lo is watching the Void.

Lo

But there's a a a hole. There's this empty space that my past me left behind.

V

...

Maybe... you fill the void with something
something new.

V starts to sway back and forth.

They hum something soft and slow.

V laces their fingers with Lo's.

They start by moving their arms together,

Testing out some moves. A new dance.

V doing the moving; Lo just resting against them.

V wraps their arms around their torsos and sways to the music.

*The sway becomes kind of campy and jokey (does the humming become “dance magic dance”?)
And they both laugh.*

Lo sees the Void again.

Lo

Could you do something with me?

V

Name it.

*Lo pulls out her phone, slowly, carefully.
She pulls up Twitter.*

Lo

Read this with me.

V nods. And they settle in.

Social Media 3 – #NEISVoid

Social Media

Hashtag

N

E

I

S

Void

No

End

In

Sight

Void

Help!

Call for Help!

#MillionsMissing

#pwME

Here’s my Go Fund Me for my surgery!

#Fibro

Help me pay my rent – every little bit helps!

#EDSawareness

#ChronicPain

Went out for a walk today and it was GLORIOUS! You all get the simple joys!

#StillSickStillFighting

Applying for disability –

Still waiting
Got it!
YEEEEESSS!
Congrats!
It's not enough, but I'm glad you've got that support at least!
My support systems helped me to _____
I entered _____ after—
Don't get lost in the pain, those who get better aren't here anymore so we never here about
Remission Remission Remission
It's not forever
It's just for now
It IS forever
But even if it's forever for now

*V kisses the back of Lo's head and leaves the couch.
Time moves forward quickly again. V moves through their routine quickly,
But now, in addition to checking in with Lo, they are bringing Lo things...
Art supplies.*

Social Media

For us,
The chronically ill,
There may be
No End in Sight.
And that endless is a void – a loss of what's past, a fear for what's future –
But now

Lo is constructing something, building something new out of her former project.

Social Media

WE are the Void
Shout into us
When you are unable to shout
When you are unable to open your mouth
When you are unable to muster a thought
Shout into us
When your world is crumbling around you
Because
We are the Void
We will hold you and your pain
We will hold you and your grief
We will hold you and your inappropriate humor
We will hold you
Because we know what it's like to need to be held
To need to be wrapped in the comfort of
Community
And to be cold for want of it.
We are that blanket for you.

We are the Void.
We can't promise you more spoons or spell slots.
We can't promise you treatments or cures.
But we can promise you
More than others can...
We can promise you
that we will never leave you.
Because the Void is vast
And all-consuming.
Because the Void is everywhere.
Because there is
No End in Sight.
No end to our pain
To our sickness
To our search
To our battle
No end to our support
To our care
To our listening ear
To our proverbial shoulder
To our love
For you.
As you are.
As we are.
We are the Void.

*By the end of this, she has a collage of these messages and pictures on brightly colored cards.
She takes the materials of her monster sculptures and uses the wire and black fabric to create a black
hole—a void— and she hangs all of these bright spots inside of it.*

*She does all this slowly, patiently.
And now she has her own little installation.*

Lo smiles. V stops and sees Lo smiling and smiles too.

Tick.

Darkness.

Tick.

The phone screen lights up.

Tick.

The clock moves forward.

Social Media

What's happening with
What's the deal with this
new
virus virus virus?
Trying to get masks—

Which do you like—
Hearing about—
I don't think they're taking post-viral illnesses seriously
This could be a
Mass
Mass
Mass Disabling Event
This could be
Why aren't they paying more attention—
Millions missing, remember?
Maybe they'll pay more attention now that
Hearing more about this
Long
Long
L o n g L o n g L o n g
C o v i d C o v i d C o v i d
I have Long Covid and need help, where should I—
What should I—
Could this be like—
Help

The Long Haulers

*Stark, crisp, sterile light.
Lo now sits in her allergist's office waiting room.
Lo and her monsters.*

THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP

*Lo glances down at her Fitbit. Good rate.
The Symptomons sit still around her, a statue garden of the grotesque.
Lo closes her eyes and smiles.*

*Then,
she hears a conversation from one of the offices.*

*Dr. Just Happens is talking with a new young patient and their parent.
We do not see this but eavesdrop with Lo.*

Dr. Just Happens

Alright, if you'll just go with her, she'll get you a breath test, okay? And I'll be right, back—

Concerned Parent

Dr! Um, sorry, can I talk with you a second.

Dr. Just Happens

Uh—of course. What can I do for you?

Concerned Parent

He hasn't been feeling well lately, and—

Dr. Just Happens

I'm sorry to hear that.

Concerned Parent

Thank you. He, uh, he's been having a lot of trouble with his allergies and stomach problems—

*In the other room,
Lo leans forward in her seat.*

Dr. Just Happens

Yeah, we see that a lot. Allergies can have an impact on your gastrointestinal health—

Concerned Parent

—Sure, definitely. But also, he's been so tired. Like, just from doing school work over Zoom, he'll... pass out, for the rest of the night. I know I shouldn't be complaining about a pre-teen passing out early, but it's like 6pm to 8am, he sleeps, and he still looks... Like he hasn't slept, and. He had Covid months ago, and I think he's just not gotten better... since then. Like it could be Long Covid?

*Lo is fully alert,
waiting for Dr. Just Happens's response.*

Thumpthumpthumpthump thumpthumpthumpthump

Dr. Just Happens

... That could be a possibility. It seems like some of the symptoms might fit.
But I will say, the allergy season right now is really / bad.

Concerned Parent

/He's been telling me he can't think. Like, he says there's just a mist that comes over everything,
Like a static in his brain.

Some hands of the Brian Foglings reach toward Lo,

Thumpthumpthumpthump thumpthumpthumpthump

But she takes several deep breaths

Thumpthump thump thump Thump Thump

And the Foglings fade into the background again.

Dr. Just Happens

It does sound like it could be Long Covid.

*Lo is amazed that a doctor is listening to the patient in this way.
That this parent's advocacy might be working.
That a doctor is aware of Long Covid.*

Concerned Parent

If it is, um—
What should I do? Who do I go to—how do you fix it?

*Lo is leaning so hard.
Is she listening for herself? Does she believe the Dr. will have the answer?*

Dr. Just Happens

I wouldn't worry too much, until you really have to.

The lights in the waiting room flicker.

Dr. Just Happens

Just keep doing what you're doing—come in to treat his allergies,
and I'm sure that helping to alleviate those symptoms will help his overall wellness.

*Lo has sharpened, the energy around her PRICKLY AS FUCK.
The Symptomonsters react to it and draw menacingly near to her.*

Dr. Just Happens

I've actually been hearing that it's likely to go away on its own after a few months.
That it's
(the voice morphs into something grotesque and all-consuming)
temporary.

*The word reverberates off the walls.
Lo shudders and the Symptomonsers shudder or laugh?*

*Lo looks like she's about to speak—
To get up and say something—
But she doesn't know what this kid actually has. She's not a doctor.*

Thumpthump thumpthump thumpthump

She breathes, breathes, breathes.

Concerned Parent

Oh, okay—

Dr. Just Happens

All done with the breath test already?
Alright, well, why don't you two have a seat in the waiting room, and I'll come and get you in a bit.

Concerned Parent

Okay. ...Thank you, Dr.
Come on, honey.
You're gonna feel better soon,
I promise.

*Lo keeps breathing.
The monsters ease back around her.*

*And before the child and parent come through the door,
Several little Symptomonsers spill out of the doorway.*

Lo wishes she saw anything but this.

Lo
No.

*The Symptomonsers all take a deep, shuddering breath and
No exhale, just
Darkness.*

End of Play.

The Epilogue (A Curtain Call of Sorts)

House lights up.

The Symptomonsers each bow and make their Symptom Gesture.

After bowing, each Symptomonsers strips out of their costume/blacks. The others continue to bow as this happens. They now look like regular people.

Lo sits and watches this.

Then, Lo stands and bows.

They all bow together.

Then the Symptomonsers run out, in their regular people forms, and surround the audience.

Lo steps forward to address the audience as she did at the beginning of the play; she sits on the edge of the stage and leans in like she's telling a scary story by the fire.

Lo

And that's the play. Thank you so much for coming, for watching. For learning...?

Some of you here today likely have Symptomonsers of your own that you keep mostly hidden from those around you. It's not hard to do when they're invisible. To my fellow spoonies, I encourage you to share your Symptomonsers with those you love. Tell them exactly what they look like. Tell them when they're close... when they're looming...

Like they may be now.

Lo gestures to her Uncloaked Symptomonsers. Each un-monstered actor makes their Symptom Gesture.

Lo

For those who are not chronically ill... Do you still see them? Even without all the (*gestures costume/mask/etc.*)—

Because that's

That's what I need...

I need you to still see them because

they've altered my world. Because now, I live in a constant haunting.

And someone else—someone you love—does too.

...

And that someone might even,

someday,

be

you.

The Uncloaked Symptomonsers all step forward, toward the audience.

And then, casually,

disperse.