

unfortunately people will die but that's okay because they might come back later if you believe in that sort of stuff personally I don't but you should do what you need to do even if it means leaving me behind

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A Litany for Survival

***For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;***

***For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.***

***And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid***



*love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid*

*So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.*

- AUDRE LORDE

Characters:

These characters can be doubled in different combinations. This combination was used for Clubbed Thumb Summerworks Reading 2024.

MILO/M/CM (Cabbage Milo)/MICHAEL/MILA/STEVE 1
VACLAV/V/CV (Cabbage Vaclav)/VEENA/SHEVANI/STEVE 2
LADY/THERAPIST
RECORDINGS/VOICEMAIL/INSTAGRAM

Scene 1

quiet
lights on an empty spot
an old style answering machine, invisible.

RECORDING

Hi. Hello? Is this voicemail?

I think it's-

It appears I've got your voicemail. I'll call back.

-

Sorry, I-

You're probably busy.

Are you at the dentist? It would be hard to answer if you were at the dentist. But you have good teeth. At least you did? Do you still have good teeth? Please go to the dentist-

I'll call you later.

-

Actually, that's not why I called. I forgot. But I'm calling again, so that when you call me - or when I call you - one of us will remember. It's a failsafe. Safe from failure. Fail Safes are very important. Make sure to update your emergency contact. Also, where are you again? Where am I? I like to say I'm at peace. It's more of a mental thing, but I like to think of it as a place too. I'm at peace. Like Disneyland, except much much nicer. Not like that's hard.

Where are you? Wait, I think- I think someone's at the door. Oh! It's dark.

night sounds emerge.
cicadas?
into:

Scene 2

A pitch dark night, somewhere
in what could be europe?
sometime that could be anytime

MILO

Halt!

Who's there?

Dramatic

a lone light springs to existence
MILO, a young-ish watchman stand n the castle walls,
Looking outwards.

Pause.

Another light flickers into existence revealing

*VACLAV, grizzled, a little older, a little crazy.
He peers over the battlements.*

VACLAV

I think.. that's just Steve.

MILO

What's he doing out there?

VACLAV

I 'unno, he's just doing Steve things, isn't he?

MILO

Hm.

VACLAV

What did you think it was?

MILO

Not sure?

VACLAV

Not sure? You just said – and I quote –

Halt!

It was very dramatic.

MILO

It was not dramatic. I just saw something. And I said something.

If you see something, you say something.

That was in the handbook.

VACLAV

But all you saw was Steve.

MILO

Don't matter if it's a Steve or not, I saw it and I said it. Besides, I didn't know it was Steve.

VACLAV

Then again, what did you think it was?

MILO

Something...dark, I don't know. A dark thing.

VACLAV

Like?

MILO

Like bad. Evil.

VACLAV

Ah.

Like a fox.

MILO

Not like a fox.

VACLAV

imitating fox fangs

You know, they have very sharp teeth. They look nice, but I think it's quite bad if they get a bite out of you.

MILO

Not a fox.

VACLAV

Badger?

MILO

Not wildlife related.

VACLAV

Just something bad.

MILO

Well, we're out here to look for bad things, aren't we? Part of the gig, isn't it?

VACLAV

I don't think we're here for bad things – just things per se. No need for a value judgement.

MILO

Why would we need to look out for regular things? Why does anyone need to look out for regular things?

VACLAV

I dunno. Maybe someone just wants to know. Like maybe someone's looking for Steve.

MILO

Nobody's looking for Steve.

VACLAV

Just the other day – someone was absolutely looking for Steve.

MILO

Who?

VACLAV

It was – It was –

I can't remember who it was.

MILO

Because they didn't exist.

VACLAV

They absolutely existed. It was someone down at the bar.

MILO

And let me guess, you were drunk.

VACLAV

Sir! How dare you, sir! Accuse me of such conduct. I would never be drunk. I am a man, a man of the city watch. Drunk! Well, I never.

MILO

You were drunk at that party a few days ago. I was there with you!

VACLAV

Lies and slander. I will not hear anymore of this. And if you want to keep your tongue, you'll say no more either.

MILO

Fine.

*Milo takes out a flask and takes a swig.
VACLAV clocks it eagerly.*

VACLAV

Well?

MILO

Well what?

VACLAV

Were you just going to hold out on me?

MILO

You just said you do not drink.

VACLAV

I said I do not get drunk. There is a difference. Come now, don't hold out on your good friend, Vaclav.

MILO

You're going to get drunk. And then when we see something, you won't remember it. And that's not going to end well for me or you.

VACLAV

And, AGAIN! What will we see? What is out there you are so terrified of? It is but Steve! Should we call them up here and have them do a little jig, so you can see there is nothing to fear, but Steve! Steve itself!

MILO

There are other things besides Steve!

VACLAV

Milo, you are paranoid.

MILO

And you could do with some more paranoia yourself.

VACLAV sidles up behind MILO, and grabs him tightly

VACLAV

Milo, you are so terrified of something out there. But let Vaclav tell you a secret. You are right to be terrified, old friend, and I know it. But it is not from the dark demons that hang just out of sight, under shadows of tree and stone. It is from the lack of such demons – and lack of everything else. Beyond our sight, the world just crumbles away. There is nothing there – not land, not sea, not sun nor stars. Only a field of absolute nothing. It is neither black nor white. It is a simple pure abyss. There is no love, no warmth, no touch, no dreams, no desire, no human or fox or badger, worm, rabbit, wolf, tree, stream, mountain. There is no feeling or memory. It is nothing. And you are right to be terrified of the great nothing. It crows watchmen and kings alike.

VACLAV yanks MILO's flask from his belt, and then scampers away.

MILO

Scoundrel!

VACLAV

Payment for the lesson, old friend.

MILO

A lesson in madness.

VACLAV

Madness? What do you think is out there then?

MILO

Why, I know it. There is the town I was born in, and grew up in. My sister married our neighbour and lives there still. They expect a child soon. My father sleeps in his grave under an elm tree, but my mother makes do as a tailor. It is less than a day's ride from here.

VACLAV

It was.

MILO

What?

VACLAV

It was less than a day's ride. But you have not seen that place since-

MILO

It's been not even a week.

VACLAV

It could have been only a few hours ago. The second that place left your sight, it could have disappeared. Raiders from across the sea. A surprise plague, a dancing madness, nobody expects an inquisition till it happens, or perhaps a hole appeared that swallowed the town, as holes are want to do.

MILO

Just because I can't see it doesn't mean it's not there.

VACLAV

And just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it's not not there.

MILO

You really think something could have happened?

VACLAV

Isn't something always happening? Didn't you just say it, only a few moments ago, that you saw something terrible, a hidden movement right by the tree line, a horrid object?

MILO

But that was clearly Steve.
Or a badger.

VACLAV

It could have been a foreign host. A wild cabbage. A rat struck with plague. Immigrants.

Or

someone wearing Steve's skin.

MILO

What was that last one?

VACLAV

Don't worry about it.

MILO

I am very worried about it!

VACLAV

Just forget I said anything.

MILO

Is that not Steve?

VACLAV

It's probably Steve. It looks like Steve, mostly.

MILO

Mostly?

VACLAV

It is quite dark. Between you and me, we haven't invented electricity yet. And who knows if what's inside Steve is still Steve. Sometimes, I feel like what is inside Vaclav is not Vaclav. Usually, before a bowel movement.

MILO

Where did he go?

VACLAV

The toilet.

MILO

No, Steve.

I don't see him.

He was right there.

VACLAV

He probably tripped and fell in the moat.

MILO

Why are you not worried?

VACLAV

It's not my job to be worried. It's my job to stand here and look out there, and sometimes I am a bad worker and I steal a glance upward at the moon, or across the way at you. But none of that entails worry. What could worrying do for me? What could I do, at all? I am here, at this wall, and here I will be till something stops me, like a sickness or death or worse. Budget cuts.

MILO

Why would you look at the moon?

VACLAV

It is very nice looking.

MILO

You've seen it before.

VACLAV

It changes, if you pay attention. But you really have to focus.

MILO

Why do you look at me?

VACLAV

It is also very nice looking.

MILO

Oh. Thank you.

VACLAV

You are not welcome. It is not a compliment. Just a fact. What is the point of life, if it were not for nice things to look at? The moon is one of them. And you are another. Your face is very round, like a boiled potato.

MILO

Variety?

VACLAV

Sweet.

MILO
I like those.

VACLAV
They are full of vitamins, which is something else we haven't discovered yet.

A low rumble.

MILO
What was that?

VACLAV
What?

MILO
Didn't you feel it?

VACLAV
I'm sure it was nothing.

A low rumble.

MILO
Again!

VACLAV
It was a burp. I was burping. See? BRAAP
I ate too many potatoes. They are my greatest weakness.

MILO
Stop kidding around, this is serious.

VACLAV
I am being extremely serious. My knees get weak the second a potato comes within a mile radius of myself.

A low rumble.

MILO
They're getting faster? Closer? I don't know.

VACLAV
Don't think about it too much. Would you like a carrot?

MILO
Why do you have a carrot?

VACLAV

It pays to have good vision when on night watch duty.

MILO

Is it an attack? An earthquake.

VACLAV

They have been known to happen.

MILO

Which?

VACLAV

Both.

MILO

What if it's happening back home?

VACLAV

We're hearing it here, so that can't be it.

MILO

How can you be so unbothered?

VACLAV

It's just a sound, Milo. We hear sounds all the time. I am hearing one right now. It is my own voice, and it's honestly not the best. But why discriminate between them?

MILO

We wouldn't have language if we didn't.

VACLAV

Language was a big mistake, in my opinion. We could have communicated by touch. Or even better, by licking. A missed opportunity. Dogs, they got it right. What are you doing?

MILO

Getting my things together.

VACLAV

For what reason?

MILO

I am going to ride home

VACLAV

We have hours left on watch.

MILO

I am aware.

VACLAV

You can't just go. The guards.

MILO

We are the guards.

VACLAV

We are the top guards. The bottom guards are much more serious than us, Milo. They won't let you go.

MILO

I'll sneak past.

VACLAV

You won't be able to. Unlike us, they are very good at their job - which is guarding things.

MILO

I am sure there is a way. We are all guards. They will understand.

VACLAV

They will not understand. They are beasts! All they care about is eating and fucking.

MILO

That is all you care about too, isn't it?

VACLAV

Hardly! I also like drinking and making jokes, and sometimes I-I-I-I like to do a little jig, like a funny little jig that will make people laugh. And I like the moon and talking to you and poetry.

MILO

You like poetry.

VACLAV

I mean-

If I knew how to read, I probably would.

It sounds quite nice, doesn't it? Fruity.

How about this? You and me, all night long, we learn how to read and then write some nice poetry, and we can forget all this nonsense about a rumble and the earth shivering under our feet-

MILO

So you can feel it!

VACLAV

Which is probably the result of my potato-based indigestion, is what I was going to say.

*The world shudders violently.
They both lose their footing
and fall down together.
A moment.
MILO gets up.*

VACLAV

Milo, you can't go.

MILO

I have to!

My family-

VACLAV

They might be fine.

MILO

You have been telling me, literally all night, that they could have been swallowed up by a hole, because that is something that just happens.

VACLAV

And it might also not happen!

MILO

Might! Maybe! Why is everything might or maybe!

VACLAV

Because that's how it is!

MILO

And it's going to drive me mad! I have to go. I have to know they're okay. It's eating me alive.

VACLAV

Better mad than dead. You leave now, and they'll shoot you full of arrows for deserting.

MILO

I can get permission to leave.

VACLAV

From who? Nobody cares about you Milo, nobody but me and maybe the thing wearing Steve's skin, I haven't asked it.

MILO

It's driving me crazy.

VACLAV

Look, they're probably fine.

MILO

How could you say that now?

Do you know what lies to the East of us? Barbarians!

And then there's the West! Slavers!

And don't get me started on the north and south, we don't even know. It could be anything.

Sharks. Spiders! Sharks riding giant spiders. The possibilities are crippling. I don't think I can ever sleep again. And don't get me started on what could lie beneath.

VACLAV

What could you do even if you go? If something terrible has happened, you are already too late. And if nothing has happened, then what's the point?

MILO

I could hold my family in my arms again.

VACLAV

And then you wouldn't have a job. You'd have to find work, when there is none. You'd watch them starve to death, together. And that's at best. You could all be executed for desertion, and being the family of a deserter.

MILO

We could run away, somewhere. The east-

VACLAV

Barbarians.

West, slavers.

North, South, Sharks, Spiders comma giant

MILO

A different direction that no one has ever thought about. Slightly East, but not completely. Nobody would know.

VACLAV

And then what? Never let them out of your sight for the rest of time. And even if you did that, there's no guarantee nothing bad would happen. You cannot avoid bad things. Bad things happen. It is part of life.

MILO

Shut up! Shut up! I know that, you dolt! I know that.

VACLAV

Then why are you panicking?

MILO

You made me panic!

VACLAV

I did no such thing.

MILO

Yes you did! With your talk of holes and foxes and unmentionable monstrosities that wear Steve's skin like a suit. And now I feel like I can't breathe. Oh shit. I can't breathe.

VACLAV

Hold on there. Slowly. Count. You're fine. One. Two. Three. Count.

MILO

One.

VACLAV

Two.

MILO

Three.

VACLAV

Better?

MILO

A little?

I thought I was dying for a moment.

VACLAV

A common occurrence for people who think too much. I call it a thinking-too-much attack. They aren't fatal. Yet.

MILO

It's your fault.

VACLAV

I was just philosophising, trying to pass the time. You just got too into it. I am sure your family is fine. Here, have a drink.

MILO

Thank you.

VACLAV

I am sorry that I panicked you. It wasn't my intent. Well, maybe it was a little bit my intent, but I'm only trying to chat a little here. The nights are long. Don't pay attention to me. All the words from my mouth, these are just sounds. Sounds can't hurt you. They are just sounds. You don't have to make sense of them if you don't want to. Better?

MILO

Better.

VACLAV

That's good. I am glad.

MILO

I felt my life flash before my eyes..

VACLAV

That has been known to happen.

MILO

It was really boring.

VACLAV

That's lucky.

MILO

But there was this bit, this strange bit. It didn't feel like me or here. But it felt real.

VACLAV

Most things feel real. It is very misleading.

MILO

I saw this great shining light. It is - or was - or will be - burning and gigantic, a pool of buttered flame, hanging in the air like a mote of crisped smoke. It was breathing and rumbling, growing large and small, a lung of, I want to say yellow-red but it wasn't a colour, it was just bright, like the brightness you see in your eye when someone punches you in the face.

VACLAV

I think you dreamt of the sun. I have heard of it.

MILO

I'm not talking about the sun.

VACLAV

Are you sure? It sounds like the sun. Don't worry. It is on a predictable schedule, and we will likely see it tomorrow.

MILO

And if we didn't?

VACLAV

Now who's the doomsayer?

MILO

You're right, a little bit.

VACLAV

About?

MILO

If something bad happened, I couldn't stop it. If the sun blinked out, what could I do? I could never be there, not when it really counts could I. We're all so far apart now. The distance grows ever larger. I feel we have become more separate than we were ever meant to be. The king talks about it often. Ruling the world, trading in rare jewels and spices. But doesn't that mean we must go everywhere? How far must we go? And what happens, when we're half a world away from our life here?

VACLAV

Does it matter?

MILO

Excuse me?

VACLAV

Wherever we go, no matter how far. When you're gone, you're gone. We are only ever allowed to take the skin on our backs and what little memories have made themselves permanent. Something bad might happen. It might not. But things change, the moment you're not looking at them. Everything lives at its own rate, and we cannot be there for anyone else's but our own. You are already gone, my friend. As am I. All there is, is what is here, right now, under this steely moonlight. And this moment, forever in one form, will be gone in the next. The night tomorrow will be different. The breaths we share together will be a little apart, little less who we were previously, little more something else. Perhaps it is the experience of eating and shitting. Perhaps it is simply touch, leaving behind a film of dead skin across the parapets. The surface of my fingers that touches your face right now, will survive perhaps an hour if I am lucky. Your cheek, will be different tomorrow. And though we perhaps cannot recognize, a moment will come where we have transformed completely into new things. And what will those things be? Will they be Vaclav and Milo? Or is Vaclav and Milo doomed to this fleeting moment alone, in all of eternity before and after the existence of our planet? I joke and dance, because to stop and think of your fading presence would be to weep till my body dries up into an ugly husk, and I would prefer to not be ugly as long as I can. Or at least, for the moments you look across at me on these parapets, no uglier than I am already. The world could be ending right now, Milo. But I am here, on this cold dark night. We could talk long into it, and have all the pleasure of being alive here, together.

MILO

And that is enough for you?

VACLAV

It could be. I have trouble imagining much more.

MILO

I have the opposite problem. I think I imagine too much.

VACLAV

I could hit you on the head. It might help.

MILO

There might be no helping this time.

*MILO gets up.
Long pause*

VACLAV

Then.

What about a quick handy?

MILO

Are you serious?

VACLAV
Terribly so.

MILO
I could make it back. You could see me as early as next week.

VACLAV
You doom me to a week of anxiety.

MILO
Maybe you'll forget about me the second I leave your sight.

VACLAV
I have never been blessed with a bad memory.

MILO
You could come with me.

VACLAV
And be killed immediately?

MILO
Right. That would be foolish. Well then.

VACLAV
Where will you go after?

MILO
We'll follow that star, as best as possible.

VACLAV
That's very silly.

MILO
Maybe we'll meet one day, somewhere around there.

VACLAV
Extremely silly.

MILO
This doesn't have to be goodbye.

VACLAV
Don't say it's a 'see you later'.

MILO
It's a 'see you later'.

VACLAV
How would you even know?

MILO
I don't.
See you.

VACLAV
Later.

MILO exits.

Quiet.

VACLAV

observes, seeing something in the distance.

He is excited.

The sound of an alarm, and then the shadows of many arrows.

VACLAV
Oof.
Oh! Oh. Oh no.
Ooh. Um.
Fuck. Milo!
Wait!
I'm coming.

VACLAV exits.

A moment.

More arrows.

A recording plays, somewhere.

RECORDING

I keep-

You know, voicemail is actually very annoying. Like I know they invented to be helpful-

Well, I assume, but I GUESS I don't but-

It seems I can never catch anyone ever-And it makes me wonder if they hear me now or later-

or ever- or is it the thing when you hear something alive and not alive at the same time-

Oh I don't know what I'm saying. Will I see you soon? No pressure. I've forgotten what you look

like. Are you the same person?

The moon grows larger and larger still

*It crashes down, swallowing the world.
into:*

Scene 3

*An international space station, somehow somewhere.
M is at his desk*

M

I had this terrible dream where I was sleeping in bed, but the bed was underwater and I couldn't breathe and there was an octopus and it was so so so big and it was kind of eating me but not like with its mouth- beak? They have beaks, I think, that's weird, but anyway - it was eating me by being so so so close to me that our flesh sunk into each other and merged, it was like being consumed by being in proximity. I told my partner about it and they broke up with me two weeks later. I think it's related, but I also have crabs.

V

You have crabs right now?

M

I had it treated before we left.

V

We left years ago.

M

Did we?

V

We've been here for nearly a decade.

M

That's a long time.

V

So this is an old dream.

M

I think it's recurring.

V

That doesn't happen to me.

M
It doesn't?

V
No.

M
You must be unique.
Do you think they think about me?

V
Who?

M
My partner. My, my, my ex-partner.

V
Realistically? Sometimes.

M
Scary.

V
You say they a lot.

M
Yes.

V
I thought she was a woman.

M
She was. But I don't know if she is anymore. How would I know?

V
Context clues.

M
Unreliable.

V
Do you think about anyone else?

M

No.

Well.

I should say, only when it's too late.

V

That's very unfortunate.

M

I think so too.

V

I think about other people all the time.

M

Your Ex's?

V

No, people I don't know. People down there, staring at us. It's creepy.

M

You...know they can't see us right?

V

As far as you know.

M

They really can't.

V

What if they have a really powerful telescope?

M

No, it's just not possible. I'm sorry, but everything you are saying is very dumb right now, and you should probably stop before someone finds out. You may be unqualified for space.

V

We've been here for years.

M

Exactly. Can you imagine how stupid they would feel if they realised they hired a stupid person to do the job for ten years? I would be mortified. I would just die!

V
I'm sorry to hear that.

M
Me too.

V
Will you tell them?

M
No, you don't need to worry about me. I'm selfish, so I will forget. Other people, they're not so selfish, they would remember, and that would be bad if you tried to get another job afterwards.

V
Why would I need another job?

M
No reason.

V
Am I getting fired? Did they say I was getting fired?

M
Who is they, we are alone.

V
The voices from the intercoms.

M
Oh those they, no, I don't know, it's really hard to listen to what they're saying, we keep getting interrupted, there's this transmission.

V
Transmission?

M plays something

RECORDING

Hi.....

I'm calling about the kids. Could you pick them up? I got so busy, I simply cannot.

V
Oh.

M
I know.

V
That's not the office.

M
I know.

V
They have the wrong number.

M
I tried calling them back.

V
You called them back? Why would you-

M
I tried, but I didn't get through.

V
Oh my god, this is terrible.

M
I didn' get through-

V
Yes but but but
The bill, that bill is going to be astronomical.
Literally.
The budget, you'll have blown through the budget, it's very important to stick to the budget.

M
I thought it was free.

V
That's only to the USA and Mexico. Was it a call from mexico?

M
I don't know. The numbers were weird.

V
How can numbers be weird? They are just numbers!

M

I dunno what to tell you.

V

How did they even reach us?

M

I don't know, but I think it's similar to the Octopus, we're just too close to something and we're being merged.

V

To what?

M

another world perhaps or something else even more foreboding. Perhaps we are not so alone out here anyway.

V

Oh, that's terrible, I have agoraphobia, that's why I took this job, and now now now you're telling there could be-
CROWDS.

M

I'm not sure. All options above are scary. I used to be able to sleep and forget, but you know-
The Octopus.

V

The octopus, right.

M

It's very traumatising.

V

Have you thought about a sleep study?

M

I have, but we're the only two people here and if you get fired-

V

So I am-

M

It's only if, and I don't know, they could fire me, maybe they found out I had crabs, I didn't put it down in my medical history, so it was a lie, I lied, an omission, but still-

V

I think it's fine.

M

The crabs, they might not be gone too.

V

Oh.

Are you saying-?

M

it is sometimes itchy down there.

V

Does this mean-?

M

I think-

V

I have crabs too. Probably.

M

Yes. Is that weird, to have crabs, in space? Does that make us Adam and Eve, birthing life out here, in this barren barren place.

V

I don't think so.

M

Oh. That's disappointing.

V

I didn't take you for a maternal figure.

M

I'm not. But I thought it would be exciting. to have life here, to continue. and-scary.

It is scary to think we could just continue forever. I think that's why the octopus. If it ate me, I would be dead. But if it became me, I could live forever. And that's just terrifying to me.

V

I don't think you'll live forever.

M

Thank you.

RECORDING

There is this diary I found...it was my grandmothers...She lived a really sad life. She was kidnapped, did you know that? Isn't that crazy? I should write this down. Remind me! Don't lose this voicemail.

M

Wow.

V

They sound crazy.

M

I want to go meet them.

V

Really?

You shouldn't

M

It sounds so familiar. Like the octopus, recurring.

V

They sound terrifying.

M

Are they out there? Could we find them? Perhaps I could visit, and help save grandma and maybe she would vice versa, the octopus.

V

Why do you always want to leave me alone?

M

What was that?

V

I said,

Why do you always want to leave me an acorn?

M
I have never left you an acorn.

V
I must have dreamed it.

M
That's a really silly dream.

V
I know. But I have it often.

M
Have you thought of doing a sleep study?

A rumble

What was that?

V
An earthquake. A moon-quake?

M
Scary. I don't like that. The land shouldn't move. It's too...realistic. It shakes and I shake, like we are one. That makes me uncomfortable.

V
Octopus?

M
Yes, again, like the octopus. I want to just be myself. I don't want to think about how I could be many things.

V
Are you going to leave me again?

M
Why do you keep saying that? it's been a decade, we've been together so long this time.

V
It's just a sensation. recurring.

M
I think you might be the one leaving. Fired.

V

Is it because I left the toilet seat up that one time?

M

We'll never know for sure, but also, I am absolutely sure that's the reason. There's a call.

Transmission sounds.

V takes the call

RECORDING

....

Hi...hello...it's me again...umm....so this is awkward but...do you have my casserole dish?

M

Who was that?

V

The head office.

M

Oh.

So then-

V

You've been fired.

M

Oh.

V

I don't know what to say.

M

I think-

I'm not sure-

This is a surprise.

V

Yeah.

M

Did they say why?

Was it the crabs?

V

Performance-related issues.

M
So it was the crabs.

V
There's a severance, I think.

M
How long do I have?

V
Very long.

M
How long?

V
As long as you need.

M
Really?

V
As long as all you need is till tomorrow.

M
That is long. And generous.

V
So generous.

M
I think I will not need that long. I've been waiting for this for a long time. I never wanted to work in space, it is very boring and lacking in living things and I need a little more and I am glad for it to be done. I am definitely not crying right now.

V
I am glad you're glad. I see a lot more for you, down there. I see you gardening. I see you baking. It is idyllic. You are not crying, you would never waste moisture like that.

M
I would never. Moisture is important to me.

V

And me.

M

Do you think we'll meet again?

V

Of course. I am one crab away from being fired as well.

M

We did think it was you.

V

We did.

M

But it's good that it's me. I am better at leaving first.

V

Very graceful at exiting, they say.

M

Very.

V

Very.

M

Hmmm.

Would you-

Could I have some time alone? Would that be weird?

V

No, of course not-

M

Not a long time.

V

Take as much as you need.

M

It won't be long, maybe five minutes.

V

More if you need to.

M
Five will do.

V
Okay.

M
And-
If there are any more transmissions-
Record them for me?

V
of course. I wouldn't want you to miss out.

M
I would like to know how it all ends. I'm stupid in that way.

V
I'll record it.

M
Okay.

V
Okay.
Goodbye.

M
See you.

*V exits.
a moment.
M exits through the airlock.
He floats away into the darkness.
V re-enters, and looks out the window*

V
Oh.
That-
That wasn't very nice.

A transmission comes through.

RECORDING

I saw your friends—
they came to visit me, isn't that nice? It was good to see them. I have the insurance paperwork.
call me. Don't forget. And...

V
Do you think we'll meet again?

RECORDING
Don't worry. We'll see each other soon.

V
That's what you always say.

*The earth rumbles.
The moon cracks open to reveal a verdant field.
Into:*

Scene 4 -

*A lady comes by and plucks two cabbages, and several other vegetables from the field.
She sets up a fire and begins to cook.
The following conversation is purely subtitled.*

CABBAGE MILO
She is going to eat us.

CABBAGE VACLAV
Unfortunately.

CM
Does that mean that we die? Or do we simply become a part of her?

CV
If she eats both of us, we can finally become one.

CM
I don't think she'll eat both of us.

CV
Why not?

CM
That stew looks very un-appetising. There's no salt.

CV
Salt is bad for you.

CM
Salt is bad for you!?!

CV
I read about it once.

CM
You can't read, you're a cabbage.

CV
It came to me, in a dream.

CM
Oh shut up.

CV
If she doesn't eat all of us, does it mean you'll leave me alone again?

CM
You make it sound like I have any choice in the matter.

CV
Don't you?
You could have stayed with me, at the wall.

CM
That was different.

CV
And in space-

CM
I lost my job.

CV
You didn't have to kill yourself.

CM
In that future, it was the best I could do. How do you even remember that? You're a cabbage.

CV

It appears I'm more connected to the totality of the universe as a cabbage than when I was a human.

CM

That's silly.

CV

You remember too.

CM

Actually, I have no idea what you're talking about. I'm focused on the now, the present and what's next. There's no use talking about the past. Also, we are about to be eaten.

CV

Aren't you scared?

CM

This is our life's purpose. Why be a cabbage if you're not being eaten?

CV

We could have grown further. Bloomed.

CM

And eventually be eaten. By a bear or jackal.

CV

Jackals wouldn't eat cabbages.

CM

How do you know that?

CV

I just have a sense about these things.

CM

Hm. Unreliable.

Oh. Do you hear that?

RECORDING

I sent some money through the bank. I hope I got the routing number right. I always get confused on what that is. There are so many numbers everywhere. It's a little much.

CV

That's impossible. They haven't even invented banks yet.

CM

I can hear it so clearly.

CV

She can't even speak english. We're somewhere in eastern europe. English hasn't been invented yet.

CM

How would you know, you're a cabbage.
Wait. Where are you going?

CABBAGE VACLAV rolls away a little.

CV

I'm not going to wait around till you leave me again. I don't want to do this alone anymore.

CM

We're being eaten together, stop being so dramatic.

*LADY grabs cabbage vaclav and hoists it away from the edge.
She takes it to the chopping board.*

CV

Oh. What is happening?

CM

I'd rescue you but...cabbage.

CV

At least I get to go first this time. Will you find me in the next life?

CM

No.

CV

You wouldn't?

CM

I mean, how would I?

CV

You have before.

CM

I didn't mean to. That was just a chance.

CV

You'd leave me?

CM

I just think perhaps, the way we're doing this isn't really smart.

I think-

I think I'd rather be like the octopus. Solitary.

CV

Really? Now?

CM

It's just how I feel. I think you're too attached to life. You have to let go.

CV

You think it's so so so so good to be the one remaining. But it's worse. Much much worse. I hope you remember how bad it is, the next time around.

CM

If there is one. Cabbage may be the end of the line.

CV

There always is a next time. Maybe not like this, but you can't escape it. You'll see. You will. And one more thing-

The lady drops Vaclav into the pot of stew.

CM

Always has to have the last word, that one.

Cabbage milo goes in next, cooked alive.

But they are vegetables so whatever.

She serves the meal in a casserole dish

And takes a bite

grimaces

Throws it out and leaves

The sun sets, the kitchen grows old and dirty and collapses

the farm evolves into a town then a city

bright office lights

Into:

Scene 5 -

A therapist's office.

VACLAV is seated alongside LADY, who is now a therapist.

VACLAV

And so now I'm just waiting to run into him again. If he is a him. Or a person.

LADY

Hm. Interesting.

VACLAV

You think I'm crazy.

LADY

Of course not.

I'm just wondering, is all.

VACLAV

About?

LADY

Well, all of it.

Like you're very sure.

VACLAV

I've thought about it too. Am I just crazy? But it feels real, these experiences.

LADY

Even on the moon?

VACLAV

Well, I thought maybe that was the future.

LADY

So you're experiencing prescience.

VACLAV

Yes. Maybe. I don't know.

LADY

And this octopus.

VACLAV

That was Milo's thing not mine.

LADY
So no octopus?

VACLAV
Not for me, really.

LADY
Scratch the octopus.
So again, I must ask.
What about me?

VACLAV
What about you?

LADY
Where am I in your story?

VACLAV
You're not in it.

LADY
Till now.

VACLAV
Well, of course not till now-

LADY
So I'll be in it
in the future

VACLAV
I don't know that.

LADY
But you saw the future.

VACLAV
That one life was in the future, probably. Or a past long long ago.

LADY
Say more.

VACLAV

Like it could be a past society, people are always talking about aliens and the pyramids and lost societies-
you're writing a lot.

LADY

Oh oh oh oh, don't mind me-

VACLAV

I'm not crazy.

LADY

What is crazy but a different set of experiences? What is experience but a flow of information, judged by evolving parameters? What is-

VACLAV

I get it.

LADY

Oh. You sure?

VACLAV

Absolutely.

LADY

Lovely.

Oppositional.

VACLAV

What was that?

LADY

Back to my question-

What about me?

VACLAV

I don't know. You're not there.

LADY

So you haven't met me before or will meet me in the future?

VACLAV

I can't be sure.

LADY

And this is what is interesting to me.

You're very attached to this idea of meeting this...Milo again. But we see a lot of people in our lives. You could easily be running into reincarnations of all those people, all the time. Is that not just as significant as this time with Milo?

VACLAV

We spent a lot of time together.

LADY

On a farm?

VACLAV

I think it was-

Or it was space

Or maybe a museum about space. And there was a city-

LADY

That's very specific.

Have you had any traumatic experiences in space museums or in cities?

VACLAV

All of my traumatic experiences are in cities. And there was this one time in the museum...but, I don't see how it's relevant?

LADY

You might be simply tying experiences together. Creating an imagined history to deal with past hurts. It happens all the time.

VACLAV

I just got a little lost, it wasn't that bad.

LADY

But being lost is scary, isn't it? Being alone is terrifying. Especially when we're young and in space museums, facing the potential of a vast universe for the very first time.

VACLAV

I was 15, I knew what space was already.

Phone buzzes.

RECORDING

Have you ever considered that we'll never know which moment will be the last moment we see each other? Like I could go out for groceries and we could never see each other again. Do you think about that? I do. It's real. Unless we're dying together and we know it, it's very real.

LADY
Vaclav?

VACLAV
That recording?

LADY
My ringtone?

VACLAV
That's your...

LADY
Yes? Is there a problem?

Phone buzzes again.

RECORDING
Have you ever considered that we'll never know which moment will be the last moment we see each other? Like I could go out for groceries and-
Unless we're dying together
Then we know it, it's very real.

VACLAV
It's just very...

RECORDING
Have you ever considered-

LADY
Sorry. Do you mind if I-? It could be an emergency.

VACLAV
No no no, of course.

*LADY leaves the room.
VACLAV walks around the space, and finds a small model universe.
She re-enters, and he drops it. It shatters.
Pause.*

LADY
Interesting.

VACLAV
Sorry.

LADY

No, I am.

I have to cut our session short. It seems there's been an outbreak, and I have to get home. You should hurry too.

VACLAV

An outbreak of what?

LADY

Sharks riding spiders of course. How bothersome.

Don't worry. If your insurance clears, we'll see each other soon.

VACLAV

That's what you always say.

LADY

Is it? Or are you confusing me for someone else again?

Ciao!

The earth rumbles.

RECORDING

Arrivderci!

That's what they say in Italy. I am going to visit a friend, they live in Florence. I don't know where that is but it sounds fancy. The food in Italy is amazing. I'll take you one day. That's a promise. You'll have to hold me to it. I forget things easily. But you can remember for me. Don't be afraid to say something. Oh, did you feel that? We had an earthquake. Did you? Probably too far. Isn't that fun though? Let me know if you felt it. It's good to know we're feeling the same things, under our feet.

*VACLAV looks lost.
The building crumbles.
End of Act 1*

Part II -

Scene 1

*A modern day office.
MICHAEL is sitting in a chair.
He is scrolling through instagram, sound on.*

INSTAGRAM

And what do we always say the key to big gains is?

DIET!

You can be doing the work, all the work, but if you haven't got the right diet, the right macros, the right protein, it doesn't matter. You are what you eat. every day, everything you put in you, replacing the bits of the old you with new you, or maybe new someone else, someone else who was better than you. Tap the link to subscribe to my personalised diet and fitness program, getting Jacked with Jack Jackson.

*Kind of annoying. MICHAEL gets up and explores.
He is examining stuff
VEENA enters and watches him.*

VEENA
Hello.

MICHAEL jumps.

MICHAEL
Oh! Shit, sorry.
I mean-uh
Hello.

VEENA
Michael.

MICHAEL
Veena.
You wanted to see me.

VEENA
Have a seat.

MICHAEL
I mean if it's quick, I'd rather stand.

Pause.

VEENA

How are the kids?

MICHAEL

Great. They're learning about farming.

VEENA

Farming?

MICHAEL

You know, ecological stuff. Like growing cabbages, beans.

VEENA

Beans?

MICHAEL

Beansprouts, like you know, alfalfa and-

VEENA

I know what beans are, Michael.

MICHAEL

Right, of course.

VEENA

Did you think I didn't?

MICHAEL

Of course not. I mean you went to Harvard, right?

VEENA

Yale.

MICHAEL

Right.

VEENA

Up there.

It was a great experience.

MICHAEL

Yeah, it's funny how many people who work here at the upper level went to Yale.

VEENA

I mean, it's the best right? And we want the best.

MICHAEL
Of course.

VEENA
Do you want the best, Michael?

MICHAEL
Ye-e-e-es? Am I supposed to say yes?

VEENA
Or do you want to be the best?

MICHAEL
like no one ever was.

VEENA
Was that a joke?

MICHAEL
Not if you didn't get it.
That is to say, it was absolutely not a joke.

VEENA
I don't like humour, Michael. And it's not because I don't understand it. I just don't think many things are naturally funny. Life is a very serious business. And we have to take it seriously.

MICHAEL
I agree. 100%.

VEENA
So, is it private?

MICHAEL
is...what?

VEENA
School, they're private?

MICHAEL
Oh! oh no, public, that would be-
well, expensive is an understatement.

VEENA

It pays off in the end. I went private.

MICHAEL
You have kids?

VEENA

CRACKING UP. THIS IS HILARIOUS TO HER.

Oh! Oh, god no! I mean, can you imagine?
I meant , for myself. Oh wow. Oh wow. That-
That was funny. Maybe I like funny after all. Oh, Michael. You have challenged me, in a good way. That's good.

MICHAEL
I am glad.

VEENA

INTENSE DEADPAN

Which saddens me greatly to say that you have also gravely disappointed me and I'm going to have to PIP you.

MICHAEL
PIP me?

VEENA

Don't argue. It's not fun for me. I don't like to PIP. Just be thankful that it's just a PIP and not a PIPI.

MICHAEL
What's a PIPI?

VEENA

It's in the handbook. Have you read the handbook? Actually let's not get into it, that'll definitely lead to a PIPI and I don't have time to PIPI on you all day.

MICHAEL
I completely understand. I think
But to clarify, you are still PIP-ing me?

VEENA

Yes.

Oh, don't look at me like that, like I just castrated you and threw your balls out the window. It's just a PIP, Michael.

MICHAEL

Um, you know, it's just that a PIP
That usually means other things down the road.

VEENA

The only thing a PIP means is that we care. We want to see you do better. Get the support you need.

MICHAEL

Is this about-?

VEENA

You left work early.

MICHAEL

There was the quake.

VEENA

It was barely a quake.

MICHAEL

And I couldn't get in touch with-

VEENA

Michael. We don't like excuses. We want you to take responsibility. Own it. Be in charge of yourself and your choices.

MICHAEL

I mean I am. I'm just not in charge of earthquakes and cellular reception.

VEENA

Have you tried moving to the company phone plan?

MICHAEL

it's more expensive-

VEENA

And quake, michael, a little overwrought, really? It was more of a -
More of -
groundshiver, I think. Barely a 7 on the Richter scale.

MICHAEL

isn't that a lot.

VEENA

Are you a geologist Michael?

MICHAEL

No.

VEENA

Neither am I. What I am though, is a people person. And you are a people, and as your person, I must insist on this PIP. Which is only there for your support and well-being.

MICHAEL

Right. So I'm not getting fired?

VEENA

If you don't make any more mistakes, then-
Well, you still might, but it is definitely less likely.

MICHAEL

How much less likely?

VEENA

I'm a people person, not a statistician.

MICHAEL

I don't think what I did was wrong?
What did it result in? We didn't lose anything, nothing broke, it's not like we made less money.

VEENA

Is it always about the money, Michael?

MICHAEL

Isn't it?

VEENA

You may be right there. Let me see.
Hmmm.

MICHAEL

What?

VEENA

You're right. We didn't lose anything.

MICHAEL

See?

VEENA

And if we didn't lose anything with you leaving early, that means if you left early every time, we'd still net the same.

MICHAEL

Exactly!

VEENA

Which means, we should cut your hours.

MICHAEL

Um, I'm not hourly?

VEENA

Right, fair point.

I guess then we're just paying the salary for not as much benefit.

MICHAEL

Wait, Veena.

VEENA

That doesn't seem like the best use of capital, does it?

MICHAEL

I think-

I think I will go review the terms of the PIP now.

VEENA

Michael.

MICHAEL

Thank you so much for your time, I'll get out of your hair.

VEENA

Answer the question.

MICHAEL

I think-

There's plenty I could have done with that missing hour, and I will gladly tack it on-

VEENA

I think we need to have a deeper question, Michael. An employee has recently pointed out a redundancy in our workflow.

MICHAEL

Is that employee me by any chance?

VEENA

I am not at liberty to discuss that.

MICHAEL

Is the redundancy also me?

VEENA

Yes, Michael.

MICHAEL

So.

VEENA

You could pack up your things by the end of the day.

MICHAEL

So I'm fired now? Gone, dead?

VEENA

Look on the bright side. You can apply for unemployment!

MICHAEL

Is that bright?

VEENA

Well, I could have stuck you in a cubicle and given you inane tasks till you voluntarily quit out of insanity, but unfortunately that is frowned upon, in a social capital kind of way, so we're not doing that yet. So brightside!

MICHAEL

What am I supposed to do?

VEENA

Your job, ideally. And I suppose now, another job.

MICHAEL

This was my life-

I worked so hard to get here and-

VEENA

Michael. Michael. Michael. Let me stop you there because your life story is probably very boring, and it's almost lunch and I have a bowl salad with my name on it waiting for me. It is southwest flavour day. They put a little cajun spice in it, it's really delightful and oh so fun, you should try it. All things come to an end. Maybe start a business. Or get therapy.

MICHAEL

I can stay on our insurance?

VEENA

Oh, oh no. Not at all. But the extra cost is worth it. Trust me. All right, toodles.

You're not leaving.

That's unusual.

MICHAEL

I don't think this is fair.

VEENA

Life isn't fair.

MICHAEL

I just. II-I-I-I-I-I worked so hard to get here, the long hours, skipping lunch, all the sacrifices, the funerals and weddings I've skipped, running away from guard duty and the octopus-

VEENA

Octopus?

MICHAEL

Sorry, I misspoke.

That one was a dream.

VEENA

Do you dream of octopuses often, Michael?

MICHAEL

I...

no.

VEENA

What about...arrows. Or space?

MICHAEL

Doesn't everyone dream about space?

VEENA

I don't dream about space.

MICHAEL
You don't?

VEENA
Is it that shocking? It's only space, Michael.

MICHAEL
I think it's sad not to dream.

VEENA
I sometimes have dreams too. But...

MICHAEL disappears.

RECORDING
It's important that if I forget, that you remind me.

VEENA
I can't always remember if they were important.

*MICHAEL jumps off the roof and falls to his death
We only see him falling past Veena's window.*

VEENA
Again???
Oh.
That-
That wasn't very nice.

A transmission comes through.

RECORDING
I saw your friends—
they came to visit me, isn't that nice? It was good to see them. I have the insurance paperwork.
Call me. Don't forget. And...

VEENA
I thought this was behind us.

RECORDING
Don't worry. We'll see each other soon.

VEENA
I didn't believe you.

*The sunsets, but till the very next day only
into:*

Scene 2

*The park.
Veena, seated.
She unpacks a small lunch.
She takes out a phone and plays a voicemail*

RECORDING

Just wanted to call and check in. Got your email this morning- yesterday night for you, we know. Just wanted to call and say that it's okay, and not to worry about it all. I'm sure the visa will come through and you will have time to say goodbye. Don't stress, don't stress! We are so proud of you! And don't forget, it is all as god wills, na? Okaaaaaay talk soon.

*MICHAEL appears with a hotdog
VEENA yelps*

VEENA
You!

MICHAEL
Sorry. Didn't mean to scare you.

VEENA
You're alive!

MICHAEL
...yes?

VEENA
I saw you fall!

MICHAEL
From...?

VEENA
The roof!

MICHAEL
I don't think that was me.

VEENA

I saw it!

MICHAEL
I took the elevator.

VEENA
I fired you, and then you killed yourself.

MICHAEL
Why would I kill myself?

VEENA
Because I fired you!

MICHAEL
That seems extreme. It was just a job.
Are you sure it wasn't someone else?

VEENA
It was...
well. It did happen very fast.

MICHAEL
And I'm sure it was scary.

VEENA
I wasn't scared.

MICHAEL
Of course not.

VEENA
So...you're alive.

MICHAEL
Very much so.

VEENA
Not quite how I thought it was going.

MICHAEL
You wanted me to kill myself?

VEENA

No. I just...It's sort of the thing that happens. People...fall.
It's not rare.

MICHAEL
Does that happen often?

VEENA
Yes. I mean, not really, but I dream of it sometimes. My therapist says it's stress.

MICHAEL
I also have dreams.

VEENA
The octopus?

MICHAEL
Didn't think you remembered.

VEENA
Of course I remembered. I'm a people person.

MICHAEL
Sometimes, it's not an octopus. Sometimes, I dream about vegetables.

VEENA
That sounds wonderful.

MICHAEL
Not quite.
How does your dream usually go?

VEENA
I'm with someone. An old friend, I think. And they die, and then eventually I die, sometimes immediately, sometimes after a long time. Then we see each other again. It's the same, yet different.

MICHAEL
Oh.
In my dream, I am a vegetable and I am being made into stew.
So, I wouldn't trust dreams.

VEENA
I agree, dreams are untrustworthy,

MICHAEL
Hotdog?

VEENA
Excuse me?

MICHAEL
You want one?

VEENA
I'm good.

MICHAEL
It's good.
It's from that stand over there.

VEENA
Lovely.

MICHAEL
I work there now.

VEENA
You're working at the hotdog stand.

MICHAEL
Yeah. Then I saw you, thought I'd say hi.

VEENA
The hot dog stand.

MICHAEL
Yeah, that's my new boss, Steve.

VEENA
I don't see anyone.

MICHAEL
He's right over there.

VEENA
It's just a blur. You're pointing at a blur.

MICHAEL

Maybe you need glasses.

VEENA

My vision is 20/20 and perfect just like me Michael so no I don't need glasses how dare you

MICHAEL

Well, I don't know what to tell you. He's right over there. You really can't see him?

VEENA

I see nothing.

MICHAEL

Maybe it's a Steve thing.

I'll call him over.

VEENA

No thanks.

MICHAEL

What?

VEENA

I don't like meeting strangers.

MICHAEL

It's just Steve.

VEENA

I don't like strangers.

MICHAEL

We were strangers once.

VEENA

What's that supposed to mean?

MICHAEL

You knew me, Michael, corporate Michael, but now I'm something different.

VEENA

...Hotdog Michael?

MICHAEL

Hotdog Michael.
Come on. Try it.

He attempts to hand her the hotdog

VEENA
I don't eat meat.

MICHAEL
You eat a caesar salad with grilled chicken everyday.

VEENA
I didn't finish, I was going to say I don't eat meat from stands operated by strange blurs who claim to be ordinary Steve's.

MICHAEL
That seems a little racist.

VEENA
Give me that.

She grabs the hotdog.

MICHAEL
Can I sit?

VEENA
Sure.
I'm not giving you your job back.

MICHAEL
I didn't ask.

VEENA
It's out of my hands.

MICHAEL
I don't even want it.

VEENA
It was a top-bottom decision.

MICHAEL
I'm perfectly happy.

VEENA

Don't lie to me.

MICHAEL
I'm not.
I'm happy.

VEENA
What about your kids? your wife?
You can't possibly support them like this.

MICHAEL
They'll survive.

VEENA
You've changed.

MICHAEL
Hotdog Michael doesn't worry about his progeny.

VEENA
Hotdog Michael is a reprobate.

She takes a bite.

MICHAEL
And what about Hotdog Veena?

VEENA

mouthful

Corporate Veena.

MICHAEL
You can't see the office from here, can you? It's a convenient spot. What would you do, if it wasn't there when you got back?

VEENA
What would happen to it?

MICHAEL
A hole.

VEENA
This is a very geologically stable area. Holes are rare. I've looked into it.

MICHAEL

What if you were fired?

VEENA

I don't get fired.

MICHAEL

What if your visa doesn't come through?

VEENA

spits out hotdog

How do you know about that?

You're stalking me.

MICHAEL

I'm not-

VEENA

What do you want?

MICHAEL

Nothing.

VEENA

Liar.

How do you know?

MICHAEL

Everyone knows. It's office gossip.

VEENA

I didn't tell anyone.

MICHAEL

People are good at listening.

VEENA

Maybe they should practise minding their own business.

MICHAEL

It's hard to do, when we're all connected.

VEENA

You lose your job and turn into the next dalai lama.

MICHAEL

What are you so afraid of?

VEENA

I am never afraid. There's no benefit to it. It's best to dwell on what's here and now, nothing more.

MICHAEL

You don't have to hide from me.

VEENA

As a disgruntled ex-employee, you are exactly who I should be hiding from.

MICHAEL

I'm only hotdog Michael. I'm inconsequential. I could be a leaf on the wind. The cabbage in your caesar salad.

VEENA

Caesar is a lettuce-based salad.

MICHAEL

I guess we don't have to talk about it.

VEENA

We never did. We're not friends. You know nothing about me.

MICHAEL

You could tell me something about you.

VEENA

Why? We're not going to see each other after today. We weren't even supposed to see each other right now. I thought you were dead. This was just a chance.

MICHAEL

What if you want another hot dog?

VEENA

I'm afraid I don't see that in my future.

MICHAEL

So that's it then.

VEENA

You sound hurt.

MICHAEL
I'm not hurt.

VEENA
Why do you even want to see me?

MICHAEL
We spent a lot of time together, at work.
Granted, most of it was you abusing me. But still. It was time. I was so scared of seeing you everyday. And now, maybe never again. Doesn't it make you sad?

VEENA
No. I can't weep over you anymore, Michael. I haven't the moisture to spare. and I don't think you do either.
You don't look like you moisturise.

MICHAEL
I don't.

VEENA
I know.
I'm going to finish this hotdog and leave. You should find another job.

MICHAEL
I have another job.

VEENA
Another other job.

MICHAEL
If we see each other again, do you think we can be friends?

VEENA
That won't happen.

MICHAEL
Humor me.

VEENA
Why would you even want to?

MICHAEL

If I see you again, a third time, that's a pattern. You shouldn't ignore patterns.

VEENA
That's all?

MICHAEL
That's all.

VEENA
If we see each other again...we can consider it.

*Michael's phone buzzes.
a low rumble.*

Are you going to answer that?

MICHAEL
No.

*They stare out onto the park together.
Eventually, the call goes to voicemail.*

RECORDING

Hi. Hi. First of, everything's fine. I am sorry that I panicked you. It wasn't my intent. Well, maybe it was a little bit my intent, but I'm only trying to chat a little here. The nights are long. Don't pay attention to me. All the words from my mouth, these are just sounds. Sounds can't hurt you. They are just sounds. You don't have to make sense of them if you don't want to. Better?

VEENA
Something about me.
I believe in patterns too.
Terrifying, how they go on forever. It becomes a blur, and I cannot parse the truth of it. In the end, I am left with sensation, quiet and endless, like the softness of a breeze against the back of my neck, constant, invisible, unforgettable. Like a small itch, I am always waiting for it to stop.

*A rumbling.
A hotdog cart rolls by and transforms into a VERY BIG IMPRESSIVE MACHINE
the light shifts to white electricals
Underground.
into:*

Scene 4

*a VERY BIG IMPRESSIVE MACHINE
SHEVANI is half hidden underneath, fixing something.
MILA is pacing around, reading from a small book.*

MILA

"I am always waiting for it to stop."
What do you think?

SHEVANI

About what?

MILA

The poem.

SHEVANI

It's very poetic.

MILA

Apparently she spent most of her life working on this collection.

SHEVANI

I thought she was corporate.

MILA

She had a change in heart, after the kidnapping. Then started writing poetry. Though I like to think the poet was always deep inside her. Maybe there's one in me too.

SHEVANI

Is that why you're reading poetry?

MILA

I am trying new things. My therapist said it would help me be less bitter and sad.

SHEVANI

Did she really say that?

MILA

No, but I can read between the lines.

SHEVANI

What did she really say?

MILA

That I may be depressed.

SHEVANI

You are always depressed.

MILA

I told her that. I told her that I feel like the world is ending.
She said that I suffer from grandiose thinking.

SHEVANI

You do suffer from grandiose thinking.

MILA

Whose side are you on?

SHEVANI

Yours.

MILA

I am being serious, you know. I do think the world may be ending.

SHEVANI

Don't worry about it.

MILA

Don't worry about it because it's not ending, or don't worry about it because it's pointless to worry about it.

SHEVANI

Sure.

MILA

I sometimes feel like you don't take my problems seriously.

SHEVANI

I take you very seriously.

MILA

I sometimes feel like you are lying to me.

SHEVANI

I would never lie.

MILA

To me?

SHEVANI

Sure.

Pause.

MILA
Do you love-

SHEVANI
Could you pass me that wrench?

MILA
Here.

It is not a wrench

SHEVANI
Thanks.
Could you-

MILA
Other wrench?

SHEVANI
Other wrench.
Thanks.

MILA
How's it going?

SHEVANI
Well-
It's going.

MILA
Do you think this will work?

SHEVANI
Do you? It's your maths.

MILA
I don't think it will work today.

SHEVANI
You told me you figured it out yesterday.
You said you were sure.

MILA
That was yesterday me. She doesn't exist anymore.

SHEVANI

What happened to her?

MILA

She had severe IBS from eating too much night cheese, and then she died.

SHEVANI

Who are you then?

MILA

Her doppelganger.

SHEVANI

Then it is lovely to make your acquaintance, Mila-doppelganger.

MILA

Charmed.

SHEVANI

Are we still dating?

MILA

If you'll have me.

SHEVANI

That depends. Is everything the same as Mila who died from IBS and cheese?

MILA

You'll have to find out.

SHEVANI

Interesting.

All right, I'm done.

MILA

Done, done?

SHEVANI

Well, as done as I can be. Should we run it?

MILA

Shouldn't we call everyone first?

SHEVANI

Why? We're authorised to hit the button

MILA

You know-
It could explode.

SHEVANI

Possibly.

MILA

And then we'd all die.

SHEVANI

Probably worse than that. I imagine our atoms would get scrambled. It's probably excruciating.
But there are failsafes.

MILA

How many?

SHEVANI

About ten.

MILA

and they work?

SHEVANI

Probably.

MILA

Shiv.

SHEVANI

What?

MILA

probably!?

SHEVANI

Anything can break. But we have ten of them. The odds of all ten breaking at the same time
are...small.

MILA

But not impossible.

SHEVANI

Sure. But I don't think we're in that timeline. You'd have to be really unlucky.

MILA

I can be unlucky.

SHEVANI

What's the unluckiest thing that's ever happened to you?

MILA

I got bangs one time.

SHEVANI

Oof.

Are you feeling lucky today?

MILA

I told you I was feeling depressed.

SHEVANI

In a way, aren't we lucky to feel depressed?

MILA

That's kind of a fucked up way to look at it.

SHEVANI

I know. I just want you to let me push the button.

MILA

Ah fuck it, I guess I don't really care all that much right now.

SHEVANI

Woop!

*She slams a switch.
Whirring sound then-
MILA takes cover.
Nothing happens.*

MILA

Nothing happened.

SHEVANI

You sound sad.

MILA

I wanted it to work.

SHEVANI

At least it didn't evaporate us.

MILA

Like I said, I wanted it to work.

SHEVANI

Dark.

MILA

I told you I was depressed.

SHEVANI

We can try again. We have time.

MILA

Do we?

SHEVANI

No one said we'd get nuclear fusion right in the first go.

MILA

I know.

Sometimes I wonder if it's pointless though.

SHEVANI

Unlimited clean power, pointless?

MILA

Like we're delaying the inevitable, always, trying to expand the world and our right to live in it, when we should really let go and let things happen the way it's supposed to.

SHEVANI

Like extinction?

MILA

Maybe.

SHEVANI

Oh, you are depressed!

MILA

I've said it like three times now!

SHEVANI

Sorry. ADHD.

MILA

Don't you ever feel like the desperate urge to survive is maybe a little bit misplaced?

SHEVANI

A core biological imperative across all species, human and non-human, ummmmm, I don't think so.

MILA

if it were so core, we wouldn't murder and suicide our way out of our biggest conflicts.

SHEVANI

Faulty wiring, biology isn't perfection, it's just a best statistical guess.

MILA

You know, I've always found murder-suicide a little romantic.

SHEVANI

You are deranged today.

MILA

The world could be ending! Let's do it, gay murder suicide!

SHEVANI

Ew, no.

MILA

Come onnnn, it would be so hooottttt.

SHEVANI

I'm not murder-suiciding you.

MILA

Um, I'm obviously the one that would be murder-suiciding you.

SHEVANI

Excuse me.

MILA

Everyone knows that I am the more dominant one in the relationship. The pants wearer. The man.

SHEVANI

You literally punched someone at dinner two nights ago, who asked who was the man in this relationship.

MILA

Because it is so obviously me!

SHEVANI

Stop being purposefully antagonistic.

MILA

I don't do it on purpose. I have an antagonistic genetic disorder. My mother's side was very corporate.

SHEVANI

That's not a thing.

MILA

Corporations absolutely existed.

SHEVANI

I was talking about Antagonistic genetic disorder.

MILA

You are so good at denying my lived experience.

SHEVANI

Which is exactly why I'd be the murder-suicide instigator.

MILA

Touche.

SHEVANI

Come on, let's finish up and get out of here.

MILA

You want to leave the lab?

SHEVANI

The run failed. I want a beer.

MILA

You love the lab.

SHEVANI

I hate the lab.

MILA

You love the lab.

SHEVANI

I love being a scientist. I hate the lab.

MILA

That's the majority of being a scientist.

SHEVANI

No it's not.

MILA

What are the parts you love then?

SHEVANI

The awards.

And telling men to shove it.

And being a hot lesbian.

MILA

The third one has nothing to do with being a scientist.

SHEVANI

In my lived experience, that has not been the case.

Come on, let's ditch.

Mila?

MILA

You know, I've started to have dreams.

SHEVANI

About? The afterwards?

MILA

No, literal ones. I've been dreaming about the reactor. It haunts me. All I see is this great shining light. It is burning and gigantic, a pool of buttered flame, hanging in the air like a willowisp. And then it goes out. Quietly, like nothing. And you'd think that's where the dream would end- but it just sort of continues. Pitch black, no sound no nothing. It should be like deep sleep, but it's not. I'm aware of it all somehow.

SHEVANI

Oh, those kinds of dreams. I get them too.

MILA

You do?

SHEVANI

Well-

less poetic, more explode-y

Like. Boom. Serious BOOM. I blame my flair for drama. And then I dreamed I was an octopus once. That was odd.

MILA

It's a little scary.

SHEVANI

Octopuses can't hurt you.

MILA

The reactor dreams.

SHEVANI

Oh. Try not to worry about it.

MILA

It's a lot of pressure.

SHEVANI

I like to think of it like this-

Even if it works perfectly, the sun will go out eventually, a billion years from now. This is a stopgap. A great one! But y'know, still a stopgap.

MILA

You don't think the reactor can go on for a billion years? Isn't that the point?

SHEVANI

If it can, if it can't - I certainly won't be around to see it. Not in this form at least.

MILA

Like a ghost?

SHEVANI

Maybe. I don't know if I believe in ghosts. I think I would like to be completely recycled and made into many different things.

MILA

How would I find you, if that happened?

SHEVANI

Do you want to be with me through eternity? Even if I end up a snail, a goat or-

MILA

or an octopus.

SHEVANI

Or even octopus.

MILA

Is that a bad thing to want?

SHEVANI

A little unrealistic.

MILA

Does it scare you? The idea of someone wanting to be around for truly forever.

SHEVANI

No.

I mean a little bit.

MILA

So I love you more than you love me.

SHEVANI

That's a little harsh.

MILA

Maybe you will come to love me just as much, after an eternity.

SHEVANI

Sounds like stockholm syndrome.

MILA

Is it really so awful, the idea that we may spend eternity together as opposed to alone? Are you that much of an introvert?

SHEVANI

It's just not going to be us, is it? It'll be different people, with some of our parts and probably the parts of some other people. Who are we really? Spirits? Our minds? Our ego, which is only a formulation based on experience? What really is there of us that can last?

MILA

I don't have an answer to that.

SHEVANI

Nobody does. We shouldn't think about it.

MILA

But on the off chance we should remain the same-

SHEVANI

Statistically unlikely-

MILA

but impossible?

Is it impossible?

SHEVANI

Technically.

No, it's not impossible.

MILA

And will you love me then, if it comes to pass.

SHEVANI

You know I don't like to think of the /future

MILA

The future is here. Whether you want to think about it or not. It's here, with us, in front of us, behind us. The present you love so much, it is just a reflection of every direction we've gone and will go.

SHEVANI

What do you want me to say, Mila? That I'll be with you forever, in the one-billion-billionths of a chance it comes to pass-In which we come again to life, but with no memory of who we were in the past? I can't promise that. Who knows what else will come in between us. There is much more to this existence than us two. I can't bet against that.

MILA

Then I am just chance for you?

SHEVANI

From the very beginning, that is what we all are.

MILA

I think you might be the actual depressed one.

SHEVANI

It is just the truth.

MILA

Depressing truth.

SHEVANI

I am a scientist.

MILA

You are so many, many, dumb things.

SHEVANI

I can't lie to you. I'm sorry, but I can't. It's just how I feel. How I think. I can't put aside reality for the idea of you forever. It's just...it's not what happens.

Are you mad at me?

MILA

I have never stopped being mad at you.

From the moment I met you, you exasperated me. But that's probably on me, my antagonistic personality disorder and my no-good, dirty, corporate great-great-great-something-grandmother.

SHEVANI

Can we go now?

MILA

Yeah. Steve's probably waiting for us at the bar.

SHEVANI

He's so weird.

MILA
Is he?

SHEVANI
Incredibly so.
I don't know how you don't see it.

MILA
Maybe once upon a time. But then, you know. Things changed. Or I did. It's unclear.

*A phone rings.
SHEVANI picks up*

RECORDING

Things change, the moment you're not looking at them. Everything lives at its own rate, and we cannot be there for anyone else's but our own. You are already gone, my friend. As am I. All there is, is what is here, right now, under this steely moonlight. And this moment, forever in one form, will be gone in the next. The night tomorrow will be different. And though we perhaps cannot recognize, a moment will come where we have transformed completely into new things. And what will those things be? Will they be ~~Vaclav and Mile~~? Or is ~~Vaclav and Mile~~ doomed to this fleeting moment alone, in all of eternity before and after the existence of our planet? The world could be ending right now, ~~Mile~~. But I am here, on this cold dark night. We could talk long into it, and have all the pleasure of being alive here, together.

The big red button begins to glow.

MILA
Oh. Is it supposed to glow?

SHEVANI
No.

MILA
What should we do?

SHEVANI
I don't know...we should call a technician.

MILA
Or maybe press it?

SHEVANI

That seems risky.

MILA
Isn't it all risky?

SHEVANI
It wouldn't be wise.

MILA's hand hovers over the button.

SHEVANI
Do you feel that lucky?

MILA
I have always been lucky. After all, I met you.

*She presses the button.
Silence.*

SHEVANI
Another fail-

Several clicking sounds, cicada-like.

MILA
What was that?

SHEVANI
The failsafes.

MILA
Oh. In a good way?

*Pause.
A rumble*

But there are ten, right?

*SHEVANI holds her gaze.
A greater rumble
Pause.*

Oh.

SHEVANI
Are you scared?

MILA
Very.

SHEVANI
Talk to me.

What do you think we'll be after this?

MILA
Cabbage.

SHEVANI
Cabbage?

MILA
I love cabbage. It's a very reliable vegetable.
What about you?

SHEVANI
I hate cabbage.

MILA
Oh.

SHEVANI
So maybe dirt.

MILA
What are those odds?

SHEVANI
Miniscule. So small the number cannot even be conceived.

MILA
Dirt.
I have always loved dirt.

SHEVANI
And I love cabbage.

*The rumble grows overwhelmingly with a constant ringing sound
The lights grow in intensity till
WHITE OUT
And then pitch darkness.
A recording sound playing.*

RECORDING
At the end of it all, as I lay here quietly, I cannot help but feel alone. I know what is to come, I know that we are all alone in more ways than one, that being alone is a daunting truth of life.

But I cannot help but feel the sadness of the creeping empty that surrounds me. But I do remember, I think, only a little bit, of everything I once was and everything I will be again.

*A soft light
MILA and SHEVANI stand apart
they melt away into
VEENA and MICHAEL and LADY and STEVE and CABBAGE
who melt away into
MILO and VACLAV who
melt away, every second they transform into the different things they once were
They cycle through their lives and characters, in order and out of order, always so close yet so
far
They become smoke, trees, water, other people, the same person, planets, fire, and smoke
again. everything collapses and reorganises itself, endlessly.*

*Into:
darkness
The sound of a forest, cicadas*

Scene 5

*A dark forest.
STEVE's 1 and 2
Do we see them? barely, shadowed, a faint outline and
perhaps only the red of their eyes.
They could be anything, anyone.*

STEVE 1
It's dark out here.

STEVE 2
No electricity. Yet.

STEVE 1
Do you have anything to eat?

STEVE 2
No. nothing.

STEVE 1
I am so hungry.

STEVE 2

Me too.

STEVE 1

It feels like I will never be full again.

STEVE 2

We might never be.

STEVE 1

Don't say stuff like that!

STEVE 2

You'll never know which moment of satisfaction will be your last.

STEVE 1

So we should live in the moment?

STEVE 2

I don't know if that's possible. It would mean letting everything happen to you, and never making a choice yourself.

STEVE 1

Do you want to make a choice, Steve?

STEVE 2

At the moment, I have chosen to be undecided, Steve.

STEVE 1

I have made a choice. I think I want to go to the castle.

STEVE 2

Dangerous.

STEVE 1

It's just a castle.

STEVE 2

Full of people.

STEVE 1

People like us!

STEVE 2

Are we like them?

STEVE 1
Aren't we?

STEVE 2
You don't know how they'll react.

STEVE 1
With cake? I hope it is with cake.

STEVE 2
I do not think it will be with cake.

STEVE 1
How do you know? Has cake also not been invented? Is that why you are depressed? I know how much you love cake.

STEVE 2
I'm just being realistic. Cake is expensive. I wouldn't give you cake if I didn't know you.

STEVE 1
But they do know me!

STEVE 2
They do?

STEVE 1
Yes, I met one of them, somewhere.

STEVE 2
Do they remember you?

STEVE 1
Of course they do. I am extremely memorable and unique. You wouldn't understand. It's the teeth.

STEVE 2
Why must you always rub your good looks in my face?

STEVE 1
I am simply stating a truth

STEVE 2
Truth is subjective.

STEVE 1

That is exactly something an ugly person would say.

STEVE 2

This is why no one likes you.

STEVE 1

Plenty of people like me.

STEVE 2

They're scared of you.

STEVE 1

Why would anyone be scared of me?

STEVE 2

It's the teeth.

STEVE 1

The teeth are my selling point. It makes for a great smile. Smiles are disarming. People like smiles.

STEVE 2

Says who?

STEVE 1

Says the book I read at the dentists.

STEVE 2

That's a clear bias. Their whole business model is based on teeth.

STEVE 1

That doesn't mean they're wrong.

STEVE 2

A secondary source is needed.

STEVE 1

I will ask my friend, who definitely remembers me. He is up there, on that wall. One moment-

STEVE 2

What do you think you're doing?

STEVE 1

You wanted a secondary source!

STEVE 2

They will shoot you down the second you reveal yourself.

STEVE 1

Nonsense, they are friends.

STEVE 2

Not all of them! Just one of them! And that's only if he even remembers you.

STEVE 1

I am unforgettable. And you worry too much.

STEVE 2

Step out of this forest, and I will never speak to you again.

STEVE 1

You are being dramatic.

STEVE 2

I am being real. You will be dead.

STEVE 1

And would that be so bad?

STEVE 2

It is the worst thing that could possibly happen.

STEVE 1

To die? Is that the worst? Truly?

STEVE 2

Yes!

STEVE 1

I don't think it would be so bad. Perhaps I would lose my memory and forget all things. And my body will sink into the earth and be recycled into different objects. I could be oil, or dust or a flower, suckled by a bee, eaten by a dog, killed by starvation, eaten by thirty carnivorous squirrels, stowed away on forty boats and three camels, fucking other squirrels in Asia, Asia Minor, Africa, and other places, processed as sperm and egg and new squirrels, approximately a hundred and ten, all killed and eaten by dogs or snakes or run over by people in cars and then pecked at by ants crushed under a child's foot, stuck to the bottom of their shoe which is too

small after one year and given to at least two other children down the street and now spread on many pavements and then donated and sent to a poor country, barely any sole left, foot now stepping on a mine and the sole and most of the leg blown to smithereens, some of which are caught in a gusty wind across the ocean and whipped up in a tornado that sweeps itself into the atmosphere, slowly spiraling outwards and outwards and outwards and suddenly one speck of me is on Mars with a billion untold specs of whoever or whatever they once belonged to. And that is just what would happen after. But there was a speck before as well. A speck of someone or something else, which led to my existence. And the source of that speck may have contributed another to your existence. And a third to my friend across the moat, on the parapets. And maybe a fourth to the guards and the gate. And perhaps, those specks will recognize each other and vibrate across a little bit of a shared source. I will not say those across the way are my brothers or parents or childrens or relations. But there is something between us, in the way we came to be, and in the way we will come to be, that is all the same. Perhaps there will come a moment when at long last, all the egos have ended, and our species and our planet has cooled and there is no longer in the involved sky a hot butter flame hanging, heating us up and cooling us down, a continual rise and fall like bread in an oven. And then, perhaps then, we can be free to be who we always were, together, a great exchange and interchange of raw material. After all, /what are we

RECORDING

/What are we, if not everything? What pleasure is there in life, but to know that we were or we will be in everything? It gives me peace. I like to say I'm at peace. It's more of a mental thing, but I like to think of it as a place too. Like Disneyland, except much much nicer. Not like that's hard. Where are you? I hope wherever it is, you find peace too. I know you don't like to hear it. But we'll find each other again. It's not goodbye. To me, I guess it always is a see you later.

*Darkness falls
A sound, from far away
a speck of light in the distance, shimmering*

MILO
Halt!
Who's there?

End of play