

# ***Footprint***

a play about loss and mystery and moving forward and leaving one's mark  
by Jennie Webb

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## **Footprint**

### **Characters:**

**ANNA**, 40s/early 50s, isn't aware that she's lost, even if others are. A city planner.

**ZENITH**, early/mid 30s, gives the impression she knows all that, even if she doesn't. An alt-death entrepreneur.

**RICK**, late 30s/40s, doesn't usually manage to do or say the right thing, even if he thinks he has. A mortician.

**BODY**, male, any age.

### **Setting:**

Various locations in Los Angeles.

### **Time:**

The recent past or present. Ish.

### *Casting:*

*Multi-racial casting is encouraged. Zenith is likely to be mixed race; Anna, Latina. Or perhaps Asian. Both women should be of color. In any case, they share "otherness." Rick is probably white but not necessarily blindingly white. The body can be any race, but should not bear any physical resemblance to any of the other actors.*

### *Staging:*

*Footprint can be staged with minimal properties and the following set pieces: a table, two chairs and a small bench. Sound design should play a prominent role in production.*

### *Dialogue:*

*— Indicates a character's dialogue is interrupted, by another character speaking, an event or a character abruptly shifting gears within a line of dialogue.*

*... Indicates a character is searching for words, does not complete a thought or leaves a line of dialogue open.*

*Characters talking over one another is indicated by columns within the script, with some suggested staggering of overlap and emphasis.*

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### **SYNOPSIS**

Anna is suddenly having difficulties navigating her life in LA—is it being without a car or being stalled by a “Denver Boot of Sorrow?” And then there’s that body following her around, in a new reality where death gets up close and virtual in ways we might not expect. *Footprint* is a play about loss, mystery and leaving one’s mark.

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

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## **Footprint**

*We hear faint sounds of traffic along with the distant chatter of an aggressive bird or two, and see a woman, Anna, moving onto the platform at an outdoor Metro station in Northeast Los Angeles. It's late morning and she's outfitted for the outdoors. In LA, that is. She's wearing a light coat and carries a large bag. She's probably also wearing what she hopes is an opaque smile—her default. Yet something about her tells us she's not at all at home, here. She almost appears as if she's lost. Which she never is. Or that's what she tells herself, anyway.*

*Once on the platform, Anna takes out a Metro Map and begins to anchor herself in it.*

*Suddenly, she looks up, as if she's aware of another presence. We see that there's a body standing not far from her. It wasn't there before, but now appears to be calmly waiting for the train. The body smiles at her. She quickly returns the smile before turning away. Should she be interacting with a stranger at a train station? She studies her map again. And reconsiders. Why not?*

*She decides to turn back to the body. Then,*

ZENITH:

My family runs into things.

*Zenith has appeared and catches Anna off guard. She's younger than Anna. Perhaps she's got a small bag, or backpack. She seems to be comfortable in—in command of—this transitory environment.*

ANNA:

I'm sorry?

ZENITH:

No need for that; I'm certainly not. For me, it ended up being very beneficial!

*Anna looks for the body, which is now gone.*

What I mean is that I'm not sorry. I know that sounds strange, and I've certainly seen the downside—believe you me!—but it is why I'm here, after all.

*Short pause, then Anna turns back to Zenith. She can't help herself.*

ANNA:

What is?

ZENITH:

Our collective bent toward collisions. Ha ha ha. That's why I take the train. I've been in LA almost seven years, pretty much car-free the entire time. It used to be much harder but now it's hardly even a challenge—you can totally get around without a car; public transit is completely do-able.

ANNA:

That's... good.

ZENITH:

And for me, way preferable. And when—and where—it's not, there's Lyft. And Uber. But I prefer Lyft. More socially responsible.

ANNA:

Sure.

ZENITH:

I am. I've done my research. That, in itself, almost put them out of business during the last administration—if you can call it that. Lyft's progressive platform.

ANNA:

I believe you.

ZENITH:

So you got a Tap Card? From the machine?

ANNA:

Yes. For the train. I did.

ZENITH:

Good, because sometimes people think they're like busses, that you can pay cash. So many dedicated drivers who are transit newbies just *assume*...

ANNA:

It's that obvious? I should really be ashamed.

ZENITH:

No! Not at all! But the map gave you away.

ANNA:

Ah.

*She puts the map back in her bag.*

ZENITH:

One convert at a time, ha ha.

ANNA:

This is actually just temporary. Where we live, we're up a hill, at the top of the—Public transportation is not all that realistic.

ZENITH:

Must be quite the hill.

ANNA:

My husband got into an accident. That's why I'm here. Totaled my car.

ZENITH:

You and me!

*Short pause.*

ANNA:

I don't...

ZENITH:

I mean, not really. My car wasn't totaled. And certainly not by my husband, ha ha. For me it was more of a precautionary measure.

*Very short pause.*

Because we run into things. My family.

ANNA:

*(putting it together)* Yes! You said: your family.

ZENITH:

It's ridiculous, really. Because it's not only cars. We all just—

*She moves forward and violently stops herself, as if she's walked into a wall.*

Holiday dinners, we sit around and compare bruises and broken bones.

ANNA:

Ha ha ha— Oh! I didn't mean—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* No! It's totally fine! It's actually pretty hilarious. Except for when someone, well... I try not to laugh in the face of tragedy. But it's hard not to, these days.

ANNA:

Uh huh.

ZENITH:

I, myself, am not a *bad* driver. I've never even gotten into an accident. With another driver, I mean. Or another car to any measurable degree. For me, it was stationary objects, mostly. Posts. Trash cans. Walls where they shouldn't be.

ANNA:

Yeah.

ZENITH:

Bicycles and outdoor furniture. Children's toys. I once took out a small swingset in the Valley.

ANNA:

Really?

ZENITH:

It was plastic. But so, here I am. And happily so.

ANNA:

Ha ha.

ZENITH:

Why aren't you driving his car?

ANNA:

I'm sorry?

ZENITH:

Your husband's. If he totaled yours...

ANNA:

Oh. I can't really drive his car. It's a stick.

ZENITH:

So you're a driver, but you're not really a *driver*?

ANNA:

Our cars were always automatic; I never learned.

ZENITH:

Do you like to drive?

ANNA:

I guess. You do what you have to do, right?

ZENITH:

What you *think* you have to do.

ANNA:

Well, I do miss my car. I'm used to having my car.

ZENITH:

Around you. Like armor, protecting you. Without it, you feel a little naked?

ANNA:

I—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Don't worry, you're safe. But what I'm talking about is driving. Physically driving. Having to consciously drive everywhere you go? Is that what you liked? Is that what you'll miss?

*Short pause.*

ANNA:

I guess maybe not.

ZENITH:

Right?

ANNA:

That's funny.

ZENITH:

It is! When you stop to think about it, huh? But I tell you: There's a thing that happens, when you stop driving. A release. I grew up driving country roads—country by comparison, I mean. And there's something almost addictive about being behind the wheel, negotiating the routes, keeping track of the short cuts and then having to find new ones.

ANNA:

Right. I'm a big map person.

ZENITH:

I got that! Isn't it amazing how things connect? And how fast they change. Especially in LA.

ANNA:

Some of the ways my phone tells me to go, now, even I'm surprised.

ZENITH:

Yes! I used to love it—trusting her in traffic? She was so much more than an app to me. I still have her on my phone; one of my most fulfilling relationships, ha ha ha.

ANNA:

Okay!

ZENITH:

It's like, within the transit system there are options, but they're all basically set, right? So some little secret pockets you found in the car when you let her take charge, you just never get to. Never again. Then you wonder: Did I just make that up? Was that really even there?

ANNA:

Where are you from?



ZENITH:  
Bay Area. By way of Seattle. I went backwards.

*Very short pause.*

Everyone else migrated the other way.

ANNA:  
Ah!

ZENITH:  
And you?

ANNA:  
Here. LA.

ZENITH:  
Really! A native!

ANNA:  
Born at Queen of Angels.

ZENITH:  
I'm impressed!

ANNA:  
Thank you, but it's not like I—

ZENITH:  
*(interrupting)* Then that means you've lived here since before the Metro was even built and you've never ridden it? Not once?

ANNA:  
Yeah, you know something? You're right. It's kind of horrible.

ZENITH:  
Honestly, I'd say it's predictable. For LA.

ANNA:  
I don't know whether I should take offense at that.

ZENITH:  
You shouldn't. So. Work?

ANNA:  
I...

*Short pause, then Zenith gestures toward the tracks and Anna makes the connection.*

ANNA:

Yes! I have a meeting. For work.

ZENITH:

Me, too. Well, sort of. Do you want to share a Lyft?

ANNA:

Oh. Where's your meeting?

ZENITH:

It's pretty flexible. You're headed Downtown? What do you do?

ANNA:

I'm... in Planning.

ZENITH:

Planning?

ANNA:

City Planning.

ZENITH:

This City?

ANNA:

Yes. The Department of City Planning.

ZENITH:

Doesn't planning involve planning public transpor—?

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Yes.

ZENITH:

And you've never been on a—?

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Yes! No. I know! It's what I do. It's positively, absolutely horrible!

*Pause. We hear the sound of a car rushing past them.*

Not that this is an excuse—I'm a City Planner; so there is no excuse—but I've been... waylaid by things.

ZENITH:

For a while now, huh?

ANNA:

Yes, actually.

ZENITH:  
Things or people?

ANNA:  
Well...

ZENITH:  
People you've lost?

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:  
Yes. Both my parents. And my brother.

ZENITH:  
I thought so. And now *you're* feeling a bit lost?

ANNA:  
I— No.

ZENITH:  
No? You look a little—

ANNA:  
*(interrupting)* No! I'm not— I know exactly where I am. I mean, it was terrible. My parents. Like nothing I could have ever imagined. I was devastated. But I did what I needed to do.

ZENITH:  
The business of death can be all consuming.

ANNA:  
It can. No one tells you that.

ZENITH:  
And you can't go through it alone.

ANNA:  
Except you are alone, when it comes right down to it.

ZENITH:  
What about your husband?

ANNA:  
My— He does his best.

ZENITH:  
Some people don't really *get* death.

ANNA:

If anyone should, he should.

ZENITH:

Oh?

ANNA:

But you know something, maybe you're right. I don't think he does get it. He tries, but not in any way that's helpful.

ZENITH:

It's hard to tell what's what, sometimes.

ANNA:

What did help? Was my brother. Our parents died and my brother was there—we were there, together—and so I figured it out.

ZENITH:

Really.

ANNA:

Yes! It took a while but I figured it out and I put it in a place—a constructive place—and kept taking care of things. Things that needed to be taken care of. I mean, life can't stay on hold because everyone and everything else keeps moving and one day you look back and you see where you stopped and then you look ahead, and just decide, okay. That's it. My mother is always with me, now. I can feel her with me, every day. And my dad, I know he's proud. And that he loved me in the only way he could. And I loved him. And I thought... I thought my brother had figured it out, too. But I guess... I guess he didn't.

ZENITH:

Maybe he did.

ANNA:

No. He didn't. Why am I telling you this?

*She takes out her phone.*

ZENITH:

It happens to me all the time.

ANNA:

What does?

ZENITH:

I mean you—this—it's different. Sometimes there's a special connection, right? But then you put things together, and... I have a business.

ANNA:

What sort of business?

ZENITH:

Other Side Outreach. O-So. I provide Digital Death and Online Afterlife Services.

*Short pause.*

When you lose a loved one, it's essential to have something to hang onto, virtually, while you navigate the path of the living. Which can get all too real, in a material sense. So a big part of our work is Posthumous Social Media Management and Maintenance. But also Interactive E-Estate and Goodbye Tools.

*Very short pause.*

Give me your phone.

*Anna offers it, almost involuntarily. At the same time, the body moves back on near the women. The body and Anna look at one another.*

ANNA:

I'm sorry, I—

*She's interrupted by the return of her phone containing new information.*

ZENITH:

Don't be. Text me.

*We hear the train rapidly approaching and Zenith and the body move off. We hear a man's voice from offstage. It's Rick's. Anna is at her home in the hills, a bit discombobulated.*

RICK:

*(offstage)* I could have given you a ride.

ANNA:

No, it was fine. Where did the—?

*She's looking for somewhere to set down her bag.*

RICK:

*(offstage, interrupting)* It wouldn't have been a problem.

ANNA:

I know; you said. It was fine.

*Rick comes in carrying a small table.*

RICK:

Sure, but I feel bad. I don't like to think of my wife having to—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* What are you doing with that table?

RICK:

I got it from the porch. I put that little cabinet that was in here, in the dining room.

ANNA:

That cabinet's always been in here. It's where we put our bags. Our keys.

RICK:

Remember, I've got your keys? *(setting the table down)* So now we'll use this!

ANNA:

It was my grandparents'.

RICK:

The table?

ANNA:

The key cabinet.

RICK:

If you want, I can move it back. The room just seems much more open, now, don't you think?

*Short pause, then Anna tentatively sets her bag and coat on the table.*

I'm sorry. But I had a crazy day and when I got home, you weren't here; I looked around and I felt like I wanted to... do something. To... I don't know. I was all by myself. Why didn't you call when you got off the train?

ANNA:

I wanted to walk.

RICK:

All the way up here?

ANNA:

It's not that bad. I like walking. We should walk, more.

RICK:

When it gets warmer. It's too cold, out, now.

ANNA:

It's not. And if you're walking—

RICK:

*(interrupting, at a window)* Brrrrrr. It sure looks cold. I'm taking you in tomorrow.

ANNA:

No, the train's fine. It was good. It kind of gave me a different... perspective.

RICK:

You trying to be mysterious? Perspective of what?

ANNA:

LA?

RICK:

We've lived here all our lives.

ANNA:

I know, but it's changed.

RICK:

What hasn't? The whole country's a joke, now.

ANNA:

Half the people in the Department take the Metro. The City even helps pay for it; I don't know why I never did, before.

RICK:

We're on top of a hill. Have you thought about dinner?

ANNA:

Oh. No...

RICK:

What about that eggplant thing you make?

ANNA:

Do we have any eggplants?

RICK:

Do we?

ANNA:

I don't— What did they say about the car?

RICK:

I didn't get a chance to check.

*He leaves the room.*

ANNA:  
Rick...

RICK:  
*(off)* I'm sorry. I told you, it was a crazy day.

ANNA:  
I hope it's not too late to call.

*She moves to her bag as Rick comes back in with two chairs, sets them down next to the table.*

RICK:  
What do you think?

ANNA:  
Why are you moving all the furniture?

RICK:  
I'm not— I'm not allowed to move furniture?

ANNA:  
No. That's not—

RICK:  
*(interrupting)* Honey. It's a table and chairs we weren't even using before. If we can't buy anything new we can at least make the house feel like it's ours. A new perspective? That's what you said, isn't it?

ANNA:  
I guess I did.

*She takes her phone from her bag.*

RICK:  
Aren't you hungry, though? I'm starving. *(glancing out the window)* If it was nicer, we could go out.

ANNA:  
Please! You have to stop that!

RICK:  
I'm sorry! You don't feel the cold, but I do.

ANNA:  
*(looking at her phone)* It is 65 degrees.

RICK:  
I suppose I could bundle up.



ANNA:

What I meant was, even though I'm back at work full time we can't be going to restaurants like we used to. That's part of what got us into trouble.

*She makes a call.*

RICK:

Of course. I know that. Except I can't remember the last time we did go out.

ANNA:

*(listening to her phone)* You could pick up burritos.

RICK:

Ahh, I really don't feel like getting back in the car. Not for burritos.

ANNA:

*(putting down her phone)* They're closed. Why do mechanics always close before you get out of work?

*She taps her phone and looks at the screen. Then she starts to compose a text message. She isn't an expert texter.*

RICK:

You're not going to ask me about my day?

ANNA:

*(texting)* Sorry. How was your day?

RICK:

I told you, it was— It was just me and my sister, and everyone showed up at the same time, like minutes apart. Got pretty wild; had to call Manuel in to help out.

ANNA:

*(still texting)* Yeah?

RICK:

Yeah. What are you doing? Texting? Who are you texting?

ANNA:

This woman I met.

RICK:

A woman? Where?

ANNA:

At the train station this morning. We were talking, and—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Should you be talking to a woman you met at the—?

ANNA:  
(*interrupting*) Her name is Zenith.

RICK:  
Zenith? That's not a name.

ANNA:  
What would you think about giving up one car?

RICK:  
What?

ANNA:  
We have no idea what we're looking at in terms of my car; from what they said it's basically totaled...

RICK:  
I'm so sorry...

ANNA:  
I know. I wasn't—

RICK:  
(*interrupting*) But it really wasn't my fault. I'm not used to your car.

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:  
Anyway. I don't know what that means in terms of insurance.

RICK:  
Oh! They called.

ANNA:  
The insurance?

RICK:  
Yeah. Just before you got home.

ANNA:  
What did they say?

RICK:  
I told them to call back.

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

Okay. But if we're looking at something where it doesn't make sense to fix it, what would you think about just having one car?

RICK:

You can't drive my car.

ANNA:

No, we could sell it.

RICK:

Sell my car? That leaves no car.

ANNA:

We could buy one we could share.

RICK:

Who's going to give us a loan?

ANNA:

If we take the insurance money and whatever we get for yours, we could pay cash. Something small. One of the older smart cars?

RICK:

Are you serious?

ANNA:

Or something electric. You can find them used, now, and they're building more charging stations. Think of how much money we'd be saving.

RICK:

Uhh, I'm supposed to show up to work in what's essentially a golf cart? That would go over well.

ANNA:

But wouldn't you feel better, in terms of the environment?

RICK:

I don't know if one of those would even make it up the driveway.

ANNA:

Realistically, do we need two cars? Parking is a big chunk out of my paycheck.

RICK:

I have to stop you right there. Here's the reality: I love my car, and it's in great condition—for a 15-year-old car. But I'm not going to get anything if I sell it, or nowhere near what it's worth. And for a mid-size it gets decent mileage.

ANNA:

Not when you compare it to—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* It certainly gets better mileage than yours!

ANNA:

Now it does, that's certain!

*Short pause.*

RICK:

Ha ha ha. Let's just go out. We can just go for falafel. How does falafel sound? We may be bankrupt, but don't tell me we can't afford fucking falafel.

ANNA:

Fine.

*They both move to get their coats; Rick also grabs a scarf and hat.*

RICK:

And I can tell you about who came in today.

ANNA:

Oh, yeah. Crazy day?

RICK:

I bet it's a record; they were lucky I was there. Like I said, we got the calls all at once: First, brain cancer—that was the easy one; straight from hospice. Then a rock-climbing accident, pretty damn messy but most of the big hits were on parts that didn't show, and I was able to do facial reconstruction so that was good. Surprisingly good. But this poor girl who'd drowned... They got her out pretty quick so that minimized the damage; covering it was still a challenge, though.

ANNA:

I'll bet.

*She checks the cash in her wallet.*

RICK:

Plus a suicide that— Oh. Sorry. But this was a gun shot and I was very proud of the work.

ANNA:

It's okay.

*She puts her bag over her shoulder.*

All open casket?

RICK:

Old school all the way, thank you very much. I'll drive.

*Is this a joke?*

*Rick moves off ahead of her, carrying her coat, as we hear a siren or sirens. Zenith moves on carrying two small ceramic cups without handles; she gives one to Anna.*

ZENITH:

No. Not at all. It's not just for dead people. Or dying people. Although we're all dying, all the time: In order to die we have to live, right? And vice-versa. The only way to approach it is to be death-positive.

ANNA:

Did you say "death-positive?"

ZENITH:

Absolutely. Death is the culmination of life. And in this day and age, what's the most vital evidence that we've lived, and lived well? All of the photos and files and posts and accounts and activities and interactions that we've had online: our digital legacy. Did you know that right now, on Facebook, there are more dead people than there are alive?

ANNA:

Are you serious?

ZENITH:

Dead serious. Ha ha ha ha. Isn't this the best coffee you've ever had?

ANNA:

It's— You should let me pay you for this.

ZENITH:

I'll take it as a business expense.

ANNA:

Oh. No. I didn't mean for—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* You can get me next time.

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

Okay.

*They sit at the table.*

ZENITH:

Okay! Think about it: What's the new norm for learning about someone's else's death? Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Even Shapchat. That's how we find out who, when, why and what to do next: We go to a page. But flip the script. What if it's you? You're the one who got hit by a bus. Do you really want your last update to be "Best cup of coffee ever!"? That's what you leave to your loved ones? No. You do not. So we need to have an active influence on our online legacies while we're still alive. Take more ownership of our digital footprint, what's out there and who sees it. I mean, don't you want to have control of your social afterlife?

ANNA:

It's not something we really think about, is it?

ZENITH:

Exactly. And that's just one aspect of O-So. My company.

ANNA:

Right.

ZENITH:

But it is kind of our niche. We're way ahead of our competition in terms of social media; pretty much cornered posthumous posts, tweets from the grave and after-death Insta.

ANNA:

That's... impressive.

ZENITH:

Thanks! And if you're more concerned with storing memories or info—passwords; that's a big one—outside of your online accounts, we can do that, too. Create a virtual data vault with our proprietary goodbye tools. Then when the time comes, automatic death switch delivery to anyone in your circles. Or deletion: always an option for what shouldn't be "shared" post mortem. If you know what I mean.

ANNA:

Um, I probably should have made something clear when I called you.

ZENITH:

Texted me.

ANNA:

Right. The truth is that I'm not in a position to— I'm interested in what you do, but I'm not *personally* interested. In your services. I mean I was curious! Personally.

ZENITH:

That's fantastic. I love that.

ANNA:

And like I said, there may be something in terms of my husband and his family, their business, somewhere down the line. But it's not like I have any say.

ZENITH:

Oh, I get that! And I know I can be a little intimidating. I didn't mean for this to be like some tacky sales pitch, or anything. Like I trapped you in an elevator. Or a casket. Hah!

ANNA:

Oh, no, I didn't—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Good. Because for me, this is so much more than that. After I got your text I did some research. I don't want to scare you, but it was destiny, meeting you at the station. Running into you. Ha ha.

ANNA:

Ha ha, you think so?

ZENITH:

No doubt in my mind; our lives were meant to converge, in just this way. And here's the thing about me: I believe in things. 100%. That's true of everything I do, or I don't do it. I mean, what would be the point? So. How're the plans coming along?

*Short pause.*

ANNA:

The plans?

ZENITH:

For the City. Approving any new landfills?

ANNA:

Oh. We don't actually approve things, that's—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Ha ha ha. I was actually kidding. What are you working on?

ANNA:

I took some time off for a while, so I'm back up at the public counter: forms, applications, complaints...

ZENITH:

Now *that* sounds fascinating.

ANNA:

It's... fine right now. All about the rules. That someone else has made. I find it strangely comforting.

ZENITH:

And your car?

ANNA:

My car. Yeah, well, we got a bit of cash, but after the deductible...

ZENITH:

So it really was totaled!

ANNA:

It really was.

ZENITH:

I know you people say that...

ANNA:

Us people?

ZENITH:

Car people. You say that but then you've got your fancy body shops and work-arounds. You can play the system, am I right?

ANNA:

Ha ha ha. Yeah, no. There is no more car. I watched it being towed away.

ZENITH:

What? I'm so sorry! You should have said something earlier! And after all you've been through the last few years, learning the details... Wow. There are no words. *(leaning toward Anna)* Can I?

ANNA:

Can you...?

*Zenith gives her a very sincere hug, which wasn't at all what Anna expected.*

ANNA:

Oh!

ZENITH:

Oooooohhhhh. I have to tell you, that brings back some powerful memories. I was 19 when my first car was towed away. An '83 Chrysler, as big as my apartment. I'm sooooo sorry; I should have recognized the signs earlier.

ANNA:

Of what?



ZENITH:

You're obviously in vehicular mourning.

ANNA:

Ha ha!

ZENITH:

That wasn't a joke. Losing a car is significant, even if you're not allowing yourself to feel it, yet. People contact me all the time. Lots of online memorials. Interactive road trips in cars that have moved on. You've no idea how many pivotal, digital memories are connected to cars.

ANNA:

I... I'm okay.

ZENITH:

Glad to hear it.

*The body comes to the table and re-fills their coffees. Zenith takes no notice.*

But—and this is everywhere, not only LA—automobiles are so ingrained in our psyches that even in our dreams they have significance: if you're a passenger, not the driver; or if you're driving out of control, on a road you don't know, or know and now it's different... So. Especially before you get a new one; all sorts of issues may come up. And I'm here for you. If. Just if.

ANNA:

I... Thank you.

ZENITH:

*(making the sign with her hand)* Thumbs up!

*Anna is somewhat touched by this but also a bit wary, and distracted by the body, now moving away.*

ANNA:

Um, Zenith?

ZENITH:

Yes.

ANNA:

What details? What did you mean, learning the details?

ZENITH:

What?

ANNA:

Before, you said, what I've been through the last few years.

ZENITH:

Oh. I looked things up.

ANNA:

You— About me?

ZENITH:

I told you. After I got your text. It's what I do. You've had what we call a rapid and tremendous succession of familial loss. Your mother's cancer, relatively quick, oncologically speaking; nine months later, your father: heart failure in the end, not Alzheimer's. Somewhat merciful. And your brother...

ANNA:

He waited a year, then he killed himself.

ZENITH:

Death by suicide. That's the preferred term.

ANNA:

Preferred by whom?

ZENITH:

Right. Suicide is always especially loaded for survivors.

ANNA:

Yeah. Well. I really need to get back to work.

*The women stand.*

ZENITH:

Your office is on Figueroa; a bus is your best bet. You can catch the—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Yes, I took it here. I know LA. I know these streets. I know the routes and the lines. This may surprise you, but I'm fine being car-less.

ZENITH:

Car-free.

ANNA:

What?

ZENITH:

That's what we call ourselves: car-free. It makes the absence, active. So are you taking the 94? I'll go with you.

ANNA:

I'll walk. It's not that far.

ZENITH:

Want to hear something funny? The older you get, the more likely you are to be hit by a car while walking.

ANNA:

What?

ZENITH:

Older people are twice as likely to get plowed down as pedestrians. Not kids, but people over 50. Don't worry, though. Over half of those are men. Ha ha ha.

ANNA:

Where did you—?

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Look. This might be difficult, talking about death like this. But it's important that we do talk. All of us. About death, and everything else it means to be human, to be mortal on this planet. We're fed this line that we should be afraid of dying—it's something we can't possibly understand. But all that does is keep us from asking questions: about life and what we're doing here. Our fear is the thing that keeps us from truly living. Right? So you and I can have a huge, positive impact on the culture of death by saying "fuck fear!" and embracing death. Not only in the physical world, but in the digital universe—where we can still exist, and tangibly reverberate, without burdens or limitations.

*Perhaps Anna wonders what such an embrace would feel like.*

I'm sorry if that makes you uncomfortable. But working in the alt death industry has made me very aware that we're living in an augmented reality. What I'm doing is trying to—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* It's okay. I'm not uncomfortable.

ZENITH:

I have to say you look very—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* This is the way I look. You've done your research, you should know: I get death. I really do.

*She sits back down and we hear the sound of a car horn honking—horns from a few cars. Zenith moves from the table just as Rick moves on and sits, with a partially consumed platter of all-you-can-eat sushi.*

RICK:

Because it sounds like bullshit, that's why.

ANNA:

That's the way it struck me, too. At first.

RICK:

And then your new girlfriend waved some virtual Wiccan wand?

ANNA:

No. She's not— What happened is that I got to thinking about it: the kind of decisions we have to make, now. We have wills that cover all of our physical and financial property. Why not digital wills, for online accounts, virtual assets? We should know what's going to happen after we're gone.

RICK:

Have you already talked to Ralph about this?

ANNA:

Why would I talk to—?

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Because that's what you do. I only find out about things after you've already talked to the lawyer.

ANNA:

That's not true.

RICK:

Uhh, the bankruptcy? First I hear of it, you two have already drawn up the papers and it's a done deal.

ANNA:

No. No, we didn't— To find out if it was even feasible I did some research, that's all.

RICK:

With Ralph.

ANNA:

He's our lawyer.

RICK:

He has a crush on you.

ANNA:

Oh, for Chrissake. He's your family's lawyer, honey. He's harmless.

RICK:

Not the first quality I'd look for in a lawyer.

ANNA:  
Talk to your parents about that.

RICK:  
*(holding up a ceramic cup)* Can we get more sake?

ANNA:  
Why are you asking me?

RICK:  
I shouldn't ask you? You're the one with the keys to the bank account.

ANNA:  
Rick...

RICK:  
*(pointing toward the platter)* So are you going to eat that? We get charged if we don't finish it.

ANNA:  
Go ahead.

*He does.*

You do know we went over everything and we agreed before we went ahead with the bankruptcy. We just got into such a terrible position after I cut my hours to take care of my parents.

RICK:  
I could have helped out more.

ANNA:  
I know; it wouldn't have mattered—there were too many expenses for too long. It was the most responsible thing we could do. We're both working full time, now. We'll keep tightening our belts—

RICK:  
*(interrupting)* Tightening our belts. Pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. You've been talking to my parents?

ANNA:  
We'll be finished making the payments in three more years—

RICK:  
*(interrupting)* Almost four.

ANNA:  
And we'll be debt free. We'll still have the house.

RICK:  
Your family's house.

ANNA:  
It's our house!

RICK:  
So you say.

ANNA:  
*(interrupting)* What other family do I have, anymore? You are my family, now. My only family.

*Maybe she starts to tear up, which catches her off guard. Rick reaches out to her. It's a genuine gesture even if he doesn't make contact.*

RICK:  
Hey. I'm sorry. I just... It's very hard on me, that's all. Being bankrupt.

*Short pause.*

ANNA:  
*(pulling herself together)* Right. I know. I do know. It's hard on me, too.

RICK:  
Maybe we should just think of it as a badge of honor, ha ha ha. Everyone who is anyone has filed Chapter 13.

ANNA:  
Stop that right now, please.

RICK:  
It's different for you, is all I'm saying. I don't have any retirement. So if you leave me...

ANNA:  
I'm not going to leave you!

RICK:  
No?

ANNA:  
No! Where is this coming from?

RICK:  
You, tidying up your affairs, taking me to dinner...

ANNA:  
Rick...

RICK:  
What else am I supposed to think?

ANNA:  
That we could spend a nice night out, together?

RICK:  
But when I suggest that, I'm pillaging your savings.

ANNA:  
Okay! More sake would be good, huh?!

RICK:  
Better than good!

*He signals a server. She switches the subject.*

ANNA:  
Listen: I wasn't really talking about us, before. Our online assets.

RICK:  
Do we even have any?

ANNA:  
What I meant was people in general. I think you should talk to this woman.

RICK:  
Right. What's her name, again?

ANNA:  
Zenith. I think you'd like her. She's very unexpected.

RICK:  
And I'm supposed to talk to her because...

ANNA:  
I think she's got something to offer. That can help us all get our heads around our... new augmented reality.

RICK:  
You know something? I think she's the one who needs help. You're looking for someone else to take care of, that's what's going on here.

ANNA:  
No! I'm trying to— I'm trying to help *you*!

RICK:  
Me?

ANNA:

Yes! She's got some ideas that make sense. Or as much sense as anything makes, anymore. Why shouldn't funeral homes introduce digital estate management, in terms of pre-need packages? It's a new idea you can bring in; could be good for you and your business.

RICK:

Except it's not my business.

ANNA:

Stop! You know it's only temporary; your mom and dad will put your name back on the papers in three years or as soon as we get out of the bankruptcy.

RICK:

That's what they say, anyway. But you know my siblings.

ANNA:

I do. They would never do anything to hurt you.

RICK:

Uh huh.

*He stands with an empty cup.*

Where is that guy?

ANNA:

So will you meet her? Who knows, your parents might—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Finally be proud of their errant son? I doubt that. *(too loudly, holding up his cup)* Excuse me!

ANNA:

*(under her breath)* Sweetie! Sit down!

*He turns to her as if he is going to do just that, but he can't—it's as if his legs have frozen.*

Please? I'm sure he'll be right here.

RICK:

I...

ANNA:

What?

RICK:

I'm...



*The body enters, holding a small ceramic bottle.*

ANNA:

Are you okay?

RICK:

I don't know.

ANNA:

Rick?

RICK:

I... can't... My legs!

*Still holding the bottle, the body takes in Rick, then Anna. She meets the body's gaze.*

Honey? Honey, help me!

*We hear what sounds like quickly moving, slightly squeaky wheels—like from a cart or dolly. Followed by electronic pings.*

*Rick unfreezes and moves off, taking the two chairs with him; the body takes the table and its contents and follows Rick. Anna manages to grab her bag and move away; she takes her phone out as Zenith moves on, also with her phone.*

*During the following text conversation we hear the women's voices coming from a different source. Zenith texts much faster and more proficiently than Anna.*

ZENITH:

Soooooooo sorry. Yeah. Saw you left a message last night but was running around—was actually on my way back from visiting fam so on plane then airport & shuttle bleah late at night and Lyft took forever then got home and crashed and forgot to respond.

Embarrassed Face.

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

O K.

*Very short pause.*

ZENITH:

So?

ANNA:

I was just hoping... to talk. Sorry... to bother you.

ZENITH:

No! No bother at all! Had to get away from all my peeps we can totally talk. I'm here for you anytime. Any. TIME! What's going on is everything okay?

ANNA:

Yes. Like I said in... my message it was... weird.

ZENITH:

Oh man! I didn't actually listen.

Scary Scream Face.

Where are you now? Can we meet? I don't really talk on my phone.

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

I'm at work. It's Rick. He had this thing... where he couldn't—  
*(speaking directly, having pre-maturely sent text)* Ach.

ZENITH:

Will listen to VM. I'll find you. Take you to lunch.

ANNA:

O K.

ZENITH:

CU soon.

Hey—R we still on for Friday Happy Hour? With Rick?

My treat. Great of you to make the intro. Hope I don't scare him away. Or shake up his whole... funereal cortège so much he'll never recover Big Fat Red Question Mark?

ANNA:

Thank.

*(speaking directly, having sent the wrong word)* Wait. No, that's not...

ZENITH:

Laughing Cat Heart Exploding. Bye!

*She quickly puts her phone away.*

ANNA:

*(speaking directly, frustrated with her phone)* No, I didn't...

*We start to hear and feel the beat of music and the energy of a happy hour crowd. Anna moves off with her phone and Rick moves on, holding two margarita glasses, one of which he gives to Zenith. They both turn out front with their drinks.*

ZENITH:

I'd apologize, but I don't see why it's a sensitive subject. There's nothing abnormal about it!

Almost everyone I know has had at least one.

Of course, there's different manifestations and degrees but it's a terrifying thing in any circumstance!

RICK:

It's not like it was a big deal! I don't know why she even mentioned it to you; it wasn't her—

She shouldn't have said anything. That's all.

Look, it happened, then it was over. I felt fine afterwards. And I feel perfectly fine, now. More than fine!

ZENITH:

And you know what? You are fine because it's a completely appropriate response to the times we're living in. A few years back, I was having panic attacks all the time.

RICK:

Yeah, well, a woman like you could probably get away with it.

*Is he flirting?*

ZENITH:

Of course, I was driving, then.

RICK:

I'll bet you were.

ZENITH:

A lot of people have panic attacks in their cars. You were lucky you were in a restaurant. Behind the wheel can be very dangerous. I mean, that's a general statement, but as a trigger for panic attacks... Bam! Doesn't end well.

RICK:

Ha ha. Apparently for me, the trigger's all-you-can-eat sushi.

ZENITH:

It's too bad Anna can't drive your car. I mean, in case of an emergency. But I do love how she's dived into public transit so gracefully.

RICK:

That's one way to put it. I have to say, you've made quite an impact on my wife.

ZENITH:

Ooooooh, I totally feel connected to her in a way that I've never— Well, I don't know if I've never. But I really love your wife.

RICK:  
So do I. But she talks too much.

ZENITH:  
You think so?

RICK:  
To you, she does.

ZENITH:  
What's wrong with talking?

RICK:  
Nothing! But she doesn't usually... It's not like she's a *talker*. Or not for awhile.  
Not with anyone but you, apparently.

*He raises his glass and it's clear that they're both a lot looser than maybe they realize.*

ZENITH:  
Really?!

RICK:  
Lord knows she doesn't tell *me* anything. It used to be her friends. Her girlfriends.  
They'd go out all the time. I mean, I didn't mind. I love women! But then the past  
few years—all about her family. Which has been tough. For both of us. I mean,  
they're gone, now. Her family.

ZENITH:  
I know.

RICK:  
See? Of course you do! Did she tell you we handled all of the arrangements?

ZENITH:  
Your family. Yes.

RICK:  
And that I took care of the bodies. Personally?

ZENITH:  
That was very sweet of you.

RICK:  
I'm a sweet guy. I do fantastic work with bodies. And I'm great with families—  
easy to talk to, everyone says so. So wouldn't you think *that* would be the time  
she'd open up to me? I know what to do, what to say. I have a lifetime of on-the-  
job compassion training, for Chrissake. But she just... She lost her parents. One  
after the other. So I gave her her space.

ZENITH:

She probably—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* And then we're living in the house, trying to settle everything and it's her brother—which threw us all for a loop, but I have handled more than my share of suicides, so I could've— I don't know. Something! But no. She goes right back to work. Like almost right after. I mean, sure, she was all out of comp time, but there are things that are more important than money! And now when she comes home it's like... all that's left is space. Like she's not really there. Like she disappeared into it.

ZENITH:

The City and its plans, ha ha?

RICK:

Well. She certainly is a planner! Did she tell you about her and maps?

ZENITH:

Her— No. Wait. Yes! She did!

RICK:

I'll bet she did! You know, I might be getting a little bit jealous of you!

ZENITH:

Ohhhh! I love that!

RICK:

So should I be? Ha ha ha.

ZENITH:

Who's to say, ha ha? I mean, I knew there was something there the minute we met. Like, potential for something. But I felt like she still had kind of a wall up, you know?

RICK:

I do know. I definitely know.

ZENITH:

Like it was keeping me from seeing something huge and deep and maybe even... impenetrable. Even for me! And I could tell she'd been less active, socially, but I really didn't get that I— That she— What did she say about me?

RICK:

Did you really used to have panic attacks?

ZENITH:

What? Oh. Yes. Absolutely. It happens to more people than you'd imagine.

RICK:

It was very scary. The other night it was like I was... frozen, or something. Or my legs were.

ZENITH:

All of the sudden.

RICK:

For no reason.

ZENITH:

And you felt... *panicked?* Like you were *attacked?* Ha ha ha ha.

RICK:

Ha ha.

*Anna joins them with three more margaritas; she wears a very flattering sweater.*

ANNA:

Hey! Who's ready?

RICK:

I am.

ZENITH:

Hey, I told you this was on—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* You got the first couple. Thank you!

ZENITH:

Thank you!

RICK:

*(to Anna)* Thank you above and beyond! Could you be any hotter, my gorgeous goddess of a wife?!

*He pulls her close to him and plants a somewhat too-enthusiastic kiss before starting to work on his new drink.*

ANNA:

So! You two: Have you been having a happy, productive, death-positive conversation? Ha ha ha ha.

*She's also been enjoying her maggies.*

RICK:

Actually, we were talking about panic attacks.

ANNA:

Oh! *(to Zenith)* I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't have said—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* It's okay!

RICK:

*(to Anna)* Why are you apologizing to *her*?

ZENITH:

*(to Anna)* Can I tell you how grateful I am to have you in my life, and how happy I am that you've chosen me?

ANNA:

Huh?

RICK:

I mean, I don't really mind, in retrospect. You were right: I do like her!

ZENITH:

Yaaaay!

ANNA:

*(to Rick)* Good. And I didn't mean to—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Don't worry about it! So. Your husband thinks you talk too much, and I say you don't talk enough. What do *you* think?

RICK:

I didn't say—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* You most certainly did!

RICK:

But I didn't mean—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* You think I talk too much?

RICK:

No!

ANNA:

Then why did you—?

RICK:

*(interrupting)* You are someone to watch out for, Miss Zenith! All right: I'm gonna grab one more round, before Happy Hour's over.

ANNA:

Rick...

*Holding his two glasses, Rick manages to grab Zenith's empty glass*

RICK:

*(to Zenith)* Yes?

ZENITH:

*(surrendering it, and taking the new drink from Anna)* Yes, please!

ANNA:

No, I—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Uhh, honey? It's not like you're *driving*! Ha ha ha ha!

*Zenith joins in the laughter as Rick leaves them.*

ZENITH:

Another perk to being car-free! You can get shitfaced whenever you want!

ANNA:

Ha ha. That's a good thing?

ZENITH:

*(re Rick)* He's cute. Pretty much straight, huh?

ANNA:

Um...

ZENITH:

Like straight, square. Straight shooter. Ha ha. Even straighter than you. And he's younger!

ANNA:

Oh. Yeah.

ZENITH:

But he seems older.

ANNA:

Yes! He does. Because he's so *straight*, ha ha ha.



ZENITH:  
Yes!

ANNA:  
I couldn't believe he agreed to take the train tonight. He had a very trying day. Who knew corpses could be so demanding?!

ZENITH:  
You'll want to Uber home, though. I mean, Lyft. Lyft lyft lyft. I hate that Uber just sounds better, doesn't it?

ANNA:  
More authoritative, anyway.

ZENITH:  
Exactly! Fuck that. Salud!

*They drink.*

Okay. So you know what I was saying before?

ANNA:  
What?

ZENITH:  
It really means soooo much to me! You have no idea!

ANNA:  
What does?

ZENITH:  
You! Taking a chance on me, when all you've been doing is retreating into yourself and your job and clamming up about everything!

ANNA:  
I have?

ZENITH:  
Yes! So I did not at all realize what a gift you'd given me—and yourself—by opening up! Is that what tonight's about? There's something you're ready to share?

ANNA:  
What? No. I wanted to—

ZENITH:  
*(interrupting)* Introduce me to your hubby so he could hook me up with his ancestors' Great White Funeral Home, yah yah yah.

ANNA:

Ha ha ha.

ZENITH:

Well, that will happen, because it just has to. In the face of corporate take-overs, none of those family-owned formaldehyde factories can survive without me, and that's a fact. I am the future of death!

ANNA:

I cannot wait for his parents to meet you. His whole family and all their happy Facebook pages.

ZENITH:

But like I said: That's not what this is about.

ANNA:

This?

ZENITH:

Tonight! You! Me! Here!

ANNA:

*(looking after Rick)* Where did he...?

ZENITH:

I want you to tell me. Don't be afraid. What is it you want to tell me? To get off of your chest. Your very attractive, not quite bare chest.

ANNA:

Ahhhhh...

ZENITH:

You can trust me.

*Zenith maybe trips, or somehow bumps unexpectedly into Anna. It's not subtle even if it's not intentional.*

Whoops! There I go. Running into things!

ANNA:

Right. Your family.

ZENITH:

Not that you're a thing, or anything. Ha ha ha, I didn't— You know.

ANNA:

Yeah.

ZENITH:

But it's like everyone in my family—and there are a ton of us; I have three brothers and five sisters, not to mention aunts and uncles and I'm the youngest, so... Well. But it's like we all have this strange relationship to the world: like we think we don't take up as much room as we do? Or know how we fit in? If we even belong. Or something. I'm trying to figure it out.

ANNA:

You know what? I think it's my brother.

ZENITH:

Your brother?

ANNA:

He's why. I think he's why.

*Very short pause.*

You. Me.

ZENITH:

Here!

ANNA:

Yeah.

ZENITH:

What about your brother?

ANNA:

I want you to erase him.

ZENITH:

To—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* His online... presence. Social Media. All of it.

ZENITH:

That's not what I—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* I know. I know that. But if you can maintain it, you can delete it. He's actually the one who did the dead memorial thing with my mom's Facebook page, and my dad's. But my brother didn't want to be memorialized. He wanted to be gone.

ZENITH:

Why do you—?

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Because that's what he wanted! He was done. He might as well have said it. And every day, now, I go online and there he is. He pops up. His profile, his pictures, his likes, all sorts of accounts I have no idea how to access. And I feel like every trace of him here still pulls him, still hurts him, still means that he's not...

ZENITH:

Free?

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

Maybe.

*Rick comes in, carrying three fancier-looking drinks, and the music picks back up.*

RICK:

Okay, ladies, hold onto your panties, I've got—

*Suddenly, the drinks fall from his hands which have frozen in place, but the body appears and deftly catches them all. The body smiles proudly at Anna.*

*(looking at his empty hands)* What the fuck?! Noooooooooo!

*The music and crowd noises suddenly increase in volume as Anna quickly moves to Rick, giving her glass to Zenith. Anna is the only one who seems to notice the body, who sips from one of the glasses and observes Anna and Rick as Zenith moves off.*

*Then the body moves off and the music fades to a lower level, as if it's coming from a distance. We hear street noises and traffic and Rick moves away from Anna, who follows him.*

RICK:

No! I do not think that's a good idea. What I think is that you're taking this far too seriously. I just had one too many tonight, that's all.

ANNA:

That's not what it looked like to me.

RICK:

Well, that's just it, isn't it?

ANNA:

What is?

RICK:

*(pointing)* You were, there, looking. And I was here...

*He stretches out his arms and catches sight of his hands, now quite obedient. What really happened in there? We hear the laughter of a couple walking past them.*

RICK:

Never mind. I'm messed up. I didn't eat, today. *(looking for a car on the street)*  
Why didn't you let me drive?

ANNA:

Rick...

RICK:

I'm fine! Okay, I'm drunk, but I'm fine. Look at me, now!

*He juggles nothing to demonstrate properly working body parts.*

ANNA:

We should see a doctor. What if it's something serious. Did it feel like just panic?

RICK:

I only panicked when the cocktails hit the floor.

ANNA:

But they didn't. Didn't you see—?

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Almost thirty dollars worth of hooch, wasted! Now that is serious!  
Where'd Zenith go?

ANNA:

She went home!

RICK:

Our home?

ANNA:

No! Her home! You told her to—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Of course I did! I knew that.

ANNA:

What else don't you remember? Maybe it's a stroke. Strokes. Little strokes.  
They're called something else.

RICK:

Where's your phone? You called a car? That's how it works? They'll just pick us  
up, anywhere? Was I wearing a coat?

ANNA:

I don't— So this is what happened before? At the restaurant last week? Or was it—?

RICK:

*(interrupting)* No. But yes. Different but the same. When it happens, it's always like I go to do something but I physically... can't.

*We hear cars whizzing past, and more people around them.*

ANNA:

Always?

RICK:

What?

ANNA:

You said always. Has—?

RICK:

*(interrupting)* You know what it is? It's stress. Financial stress, that's what it is, and it's manifesting itself in some whacked out scenario where by body is refusing to cooperate. Refusing to pretend everything's okay. You don't have any idea of what I have to go through, every day, working at the "Home" where I was practically raised and they treat me like some... employee.

ANNA:

I'm sure they—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* You're not there. You don't see. The way they look at me, it's like this is what they were waiting for: an excuse to cut me out. And I'm not buying into your story that it's all going to be all fine and dandy after however many years of bankruptcy payments. Do you want to know what happens now, when we get a new case? They don't even want me out front; I'm in back with Manuel, cleaning up. They even had me do a removal the other day because our little apprentice left early. In the middle of the afternoon, while my siblings are chatting it up with mom and dad. It's a fucking family reunion and I'm out fetching someone else's dead grandmother. Oh! And guess who's going to the cremation conference next week? Not me, and I'm the one with the contact at UCLA. I'm the one who introduced them to goddamn bio-cremation in the first place! You know that!

ANNA:

I do know.

RICK:

Where's that fucking Uber?

ANNA:

It's not a— Has this happened at work? Is that what's going on?

RICK:

What are you talking about?

ANNA:

You. This... Whatever it is. It's happened at work? In front of your family?

RICK:

In front of them, no.

ANNA:

Rick! For how long? When did this start? Why didn't you tell me?

RICK:

I did tell you. Earlier this year, before your brother— You've been grieving.

ANNA:

I don't remember you saying anything.

RICK:

I'm not complaining. But I did.

ANNA:

The car accident! That's why you crashed the—!

RICK:

*(interrupting)* I— No!

ANNA:

Then what was it?

RICK:

I told you! I hate driving your car!

ANNA:

So you run it off the side of the road? You could have been—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* Okay! I'm going with panic attacks. 'Cause you know why? I should be panicking. From the moment I wake up, everyday, when I can tell that everything is turning to crap. You. Me. Everything I thought I'd have, everything I thought we'd...

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

What?

RICK:

Never mind.

*We hear a car pull up, and a voice:*

BODY:

Did you need a Lyft?

*Rick quickly moves off with the body before Anna can make a positive identification. But she has a feeling.*

*We hear the sound of a Metro train pulling up, and she's joined by Zenith who brings on a small bench and Anna's bag. They both sit, riding the sounds of the train in motion.*

ZENITH:

And he never said anything before? That's not good.

ANNA:

I don't— Maybe he did. Maybe we're both going a little crazy. But if it's just stress, then—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* "Just stress?" Stress can be one of the most impactful variables in our lives. I mean, stress kills.

ANNA:

Is that you being death positive?

ZENITH:

Is that a joke?

ANNA:

I'm not sure, anymore.

ZENITH:

If he won't go to a medical doctor, what about a shrink?

ANNA:

Not something his family does.

ZENITH:

How exactly did he describe it?

ANNA:

He didn't. But from what I put together the next morning it's as if... his mind and his body are disconnected, aren't communicating. If that makes sense.



ZENITH:

It makes perfect sense. The mind-body disconnect is a real phenomenon: Depersonalization is the sense that you're not in your body, or separated from your sense of self.

ANNA:

So you think it's just psychological?

ZENITH:

There is no "just." If a disease or condition has psychological causes, it's not any less real.

ANNA:

I know he's having a hard time, right now.

ZENITH:

Right now, who isn't?

ANNA:

But you saw him the other night. All of the sudden his hands weren't working. Like they didn't know what they were for.

ZENITH:

It could be a lot of things. Depending upon the degree, depersonalization can be classified as a dissociative disorder, especially if it's caused by past trauma.

ANNA:

My husband had a perfectly normal, uneventful childhood.

ZENITH:

He grew up in a mortuary. There is a stigma.

ANNA:

Not for his family. His grandparents passed down a very successful business; his parents are great...

ZENITH:

They're not Republicans, are they?

ANNA:

Maybe once; not anymore.

ZENITH:

You'd be surprised how the right wing flocks to the funeral industry.

ANNA:

They're lovely people. Loving and supportive and... living! Mom, dad, brothers and sister all incredibly healthy; even his extended family is unremarkable: not one untimely death, no tragedies to dig up, anywhere.

ZENITH:

But he's having a hard time.

ANNA:

With what?

ZENITH:

That's what you said. That he's having a hard time. Are you two...?

ANNA:

We're dealing with financial issues.

ZENITH:

Bankruptcy's what: four more years?

ANNA:

Did I tell you about—?

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Public records.

ANNA:

Shit. It's all credit card debt. We're paying it back and we'll be done in less than four. But it's like he's taking it personally. Like he's been wounded and stripped of his... something.

ZENITH:

Men and money. Pretty loaded.

ANNA:

He feels like his family's judging him.

ZENITH:

Are they?

ANNA:

Probably. Does stress count as trauma?

*We hear a pre-recorded station announcement: "The next stop is Highland Arroyo Station."*

ZENITH:

It depends. But you're lucky the City kept your health insurance.

*"La próxima parada es la estación Highland Arroyo."*

There's always a possibility of localized cerebral dysfunction, something having to do with the brain stem and motor functions. A tumor, abscess, injury—he could be having mini strokes?

ANNA:

Yes! Mini strokes. Christ.

ZENITH:

But there would be signs after. Or it could be a neurological movement disorder. Dystonia. Or Parkinson's, early onset—how old is he?

*We hear bells and the train slowing.*

ANNA:

Oh, god. None of this seems real.

ZENITH:

Derealization. The feeling you're living in a dream. Can also reach clinical levels, often associated with states of heightened anxiety.

ANNA:

Right.

*We hear the train stop and the doors open, along with an announcement: "Stand clear—the doors are opening. Las puertas se abren."*

*The women move away from the bench; they're at the outdoor station from the start of the play.*

When did it start to rain?

ZENITH:

That's not rain. It's moisture in the air. *(indicating herself)* Seattle. I know rain.

ANNA:

Jesus. What do we do when it rains?

ZENITH:

You really are from LA, aren't you?

ANNA:

No, I mean, you have a car, you get in your car. I know how to drive in the rain.

ZENITH:

You don't know how to walk in the rain?

ANNA:

No one walks in the—!

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* It's not rain; it's only mist!

ANNA:

Look! There's a puddle! Puddles are not made of mist!

ZENITH:

Really! This is—! We'll stay here, under the awning, until it stops.

ANNA:

It won't! It won't stop. It'll just get wetter and wetter, and look: the puddle is getting bigger and bigger. That's mud! There's mud!

ZENITH:

In the planter? That's mulch! Look at those new little plants—how happy they are. They love the rain!

ANNA:

Because it is rain!

ZENITH:

What's wrong?

ANNA:

Everything's wrong. The question is, what's right?

*With a sharp intake of breath, Anna suddenly turns, as if she sees something out of the corner of her eye.*

ZENITH:

Anna?

ANNA:

I thought I—

*She looks around; there's nothing.*

ZENITH:

What?

ANNA:

I think there's someone following me.

ZENITH:

*(looking around)* Where?

ANNA:

No, I don't— The other night at Happy Hour? And other times before that...

ZENITH:

Who is it?

ANNA:

It's not anyone I know. Actually... I'm not sure it's anyone, at all.

ZENITH:

What do you mean?

ANNA:

It's more like it's just this... body. This body that—

*She turns again. Nothing.*

ZENITH:

Anna?

ANNA:

This body that I don't recognize. But it can certainly come in handy. You were there! When Rick had his last— You didn't see it? With the drinks?

ZENITH:

I don't know what you're talking about!

ANNA:

Wait. The day we met—right here—that was the first time.

ZENITH:

First time for what?

ANNA:

The body!

*Anna looks around again, as if she's determined to summon it.*

ZENITH:

What is going on?

ANNA:

I have no idea except it's raining and it's wet and I'm being stalked by some—  
Ahhh!

*She steps in the puddle—it is a puddle—and slips. She falls into Zenith.*

ZENITH:

Whoa!

*Both women fall into the mud—it is mud. And also a bit of mulch. The contents of Anna's bag spill out everywhere: phone, notebook, pens, lipstick, housekeys and a few maps. Anna starts to cry.*

Anna, it's okay! You're okay!

*She holds her.*

ANNA:

I'm not. I'm really not.

*She tries to get up and slips again.*

ZENITH:

Oooooooh, honestly. I fall all the time. It'll be okay. We'll just sit here for a while.

ANNA:

*(re the contents of her purse)* But my shit's all over the place.

ZENITH:

Yeah. You ran into me, ha ha ha.

ANNA:

This is true. Blame it on the body.

ZENITH:

Yeah? Ha ha. Whose?

*They are very close and it's kind of nice. For both of them.*

ANNA:

I told you, it's— I'm not sure.

ZENITH:

Hey! Maybe it's a—for lack of a better word—spirit. Energy. That happens.

ANNA:

No. It's absolutely physical. It's there. It has this very solid presence.

ZENITH:

Energy can manifest in a physical form. It could be... your brother?

ANNA:

No!

ZENITH:

Really. Bodies have energy and when we die, it has to go somewhere. Maybe it's one of your parents? Or both? You might not recognize them, but—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* No! It's just— The other night, you really didn't see anything.

ZENITH:

No. Nothing. Sorry. And I'm definitely the one who would, if it was—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Oh, my god. I am—I'm going crazy.

ZENITH:

No! You're not. You'd be hearing things, not seeing them.

ANNA:

Is my husband going to die?

ZENITH:

Of course he is!

*Anna suddenly starts sobbing.*

Ohhhhhhhh, noooooo! I mean, not right now. Or maybe right now. You never know.

*A particularly loud sob.*

Ohhhhh. Whatever happens, it's going to be okay! You'll be okay!

ANNA:

I will not be okay. Nothing will be okay. That rain is not stopping. I'm covered in mud. And this is my favorite sweater.

ZENITH:

It's a beautiful sweater!

ANNA:

It was! Now it's—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Still beautiful. You're beautiful.

ANNA:

I'm not. I'm a mess. I'm completely—

*Zenith interrupts her with a soft, sincere and heartfelt kiss. Somehow that helps.*

Okay.

ZENITH:

Okay.

*The two women sit for a moment and watch what may or may not qualify as rain. Then,*

Did you wear your favorite sweater for me?

ANNA:

I... I guess I did. I mean, I wore it to work, but I knew we were... You like it?

ZENITH:

I do. I like it a lot.

ANNA:

I don't know what's going on. With me, or with anything.

ZENITH:

I know. I mean, not that I do, either, but I'm glad I'm here. I'm glad I can be here. I'm glad we have each other, you know.

ANNA:

We... Thanks. I'm glad, too. Because I don't know if I can deal with any of this. And with Rick, whatever's going on with him? Right now, I cannot take care of him. I don't know if I even want to. I mean, I want to...

ZENITH:

You want to want to?

ANNA:

That sounds terrible, doesn't it? I love my husband.

ZENITH:

I know. And I didn't mean for— before...

ANNA:

Oh! No, I didn't think that—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* Because, I mean, I love you but I would never—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* That's not what I thought.

ZENITH:

Good! Not that I wouldn't want to, if you wanted to. If things were different.

ANNA:

Right.

*Pause. The almost rain continues.*

Can I ask you something?

ZENITH:

Of course! Anything!



ANNA:

Did you ever read the Nancy Drew books? When you were a kid?

*Short pause.*

ZENITH:

What?

ANNA:

The Nancy Drew Mysteries. Or is that before your time?

ZENITH:

Kind of.

ANNA:

I read them all. I collected them. There was always a mystery, there were always clues, and it was always solvable. There was always someone to blame. Or a band of criminals, who could be caught. By Nancy and her friends Bess and George. And everything was set right.

ZENITH:

Doesn't sound like the world I live in.

ANNA:

Me neither, but god, I wanted to! I drew maps of River Heights, and the surrounding counties in a made-up Midwestern state where everything was fair and everyone got what they deserved.

ZENITH:

And everyone was white?

ANNA:

You know what? Probably. I never thought about it, then. But I totally sold my brother on it, too. We'd play detective. We sleuthed and sorted out whatever we were up against, and that's the way it was supposed to always work. For both of us. I thought we did everything we were supposed to do. I thought I understood things. I thought I understood him.

*Very short pause.*

I don't want to be solving any more mysteries in my life, right now.

ZENITH:

Trying to solve.

ANNA:

Shit. Where's my phone?

ZENITH:  
It's here.

*With Zenith's help, Anna begins to collect the contents of her bag, cleaning off items as necessary with her already messed up sweater.*

ANNA:  
I used to have friends, you know. Girlfriends. A lot of them. Good, good friends.

ZENITH:  
I know you did. Me, I've always been more of a one-on-one person.

ANNA:  
Yeah, no. I had lots of "best" friends. I was very lucky that way. I mean, I am. They're still there, I think. Somewhere.

ZENITH:  
But sometimes our needs change. During different periods of our lives. We have different needs. And so wham! We run into each other!

ANNA:  
Hang on. You know. How did you know?

ZENITH:  
About what?

ANNA:  
I had lots of friends, and you knew.

ZENITH:  
Yes. Rick told me.

ANNA:  
He did?

ZENITH:  
Yes.

*Very short pause.*

And I could also track your social media history. Your activity tapered off very quickly when your mother first got sick and never really picked back up again.

ANNA:  
Right. Well. Look: It's stopped raining.

*She's re-claimed all of her belongings and re-assembled her bag, but doesn't move.*

ZENITH:

Sure. I have to catch a bus from here. So...

*Anna remains where she is.*

There is a sort of clarity in mystery, a strength in accepting the unfathomable. There's so much we can never know, or understand, in terms of logical processing. But still, we keep moving.

ANNA:

What if you're suddenly paralyzed. By everything in life, everything that's happened and everything that could happen—like you're wearing a Denver Boot of Sorrow, stuck at the curb and can't move.

ZENITH:

What's a Denver—?

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Those yellow wheel clamps? They put on for parking tickets?

ZENITH:

Ah. They're illegal in Seattle.

ANNA:

Of course they are.

*She takes a step and her shoe stays put. Her foot comes out of the shoe, and she reaches down to retrieve it. A Metro Map falls back out of her bag.*

Ahhhhhhh!

ZENITH:

*(moving to help)* Here, let me—

ANNA:

*(interrupting, shoe in hand)* No! This is ridiculous! I'm a City Planner! That's who I am, or who I used to be! I should be the one out there, ahead of things. Planning things! But everything and everyone's moving on without me!

ZENITH:

You've been living your life and dealing with death. That's huge.

ANNA:

It is huge! And it's getting huger all the time! And now I'm going to lose my husband, too?

ZENITH:

It could be the other way around.

ANNA:

This is your idea of comforting?

ZENITH:

Hey! You don't know what's going on, or what to do about it. But there are some problems we can't fix with our heads. We have to feel the emotions that are attached, process our feelings and connect to our bodies to find answers. Reach out in a different way, by reaching in.

ANNA:

Where do you get all of this? Do you just make this shit up?

*She puts on her shoe and picks up the map.*

ZENITH:

What? No! I—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Oh! And I've been meaning to tell you: My brother reached out to a friend of ours the other day. She got a message on their Friend-aversary.

ZENITH:

Ooooookay. So here's the thing: Even if I was to take his profile down, it'd take a lot longer to get him out of all the algorithms.

ANNA:

You have to tell me how much I owe you.

ZENITH:

Nothing. I never said I was actually going to "erase"—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* You said you found his passwords.

ZENITH:

Because I wanted to look into things, is all.

ANNA:

My money's not good enough for you?

ZENITH:

What? No. That's not—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* And I'm going to pay you back for dinner.

ZENITH:

It was noodles.

ANNA:

It's your business.

ZENITH:

You're my friend! This isn't— I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I crossed any lines, before, or said something? I am here for you in whatever way you need me to be. But if I... I'm very sorry if you thought I agreed to something that I'm not at all sure I can do. I mean, I can do it. I completely can. But I don't know how I feel about it. When it comes to perma-wiping personal data, normally someone tells me what they want gone once they're gone, before they're gone. You can set it up yourself on a lot of platforms, actually, if you want me to tell you how.

ANNA:

I don't.

ZENITH:

Okay, but it's kind of cool, stuff I'm finding. Did you know your brother's on the Church's novena page? Which seemed funny to me, given the circumstances. Apparently those Catholics like to hang onto people.

ANNA:

Yeah, pretty funny.

ZENITH:

And lots of Yelp and product reviews. He was a very helpful shopper. I wish I could have known him, but in a way, now I do, right?

ANNA:

What time is it?

*She digs through her bag for her phone.*

ZENITH:

If you want me to go through your brother's email account, I could totally play Nancy Drew, there. Find some clues? About what he might have wanted us to do? Or who else in his life might have a stake in this?

ANNA:

No.

ZENITH:

Didn't you say his boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend, said his landlord said something about a note?

ANNA:

No. There was no note. Can we not—

*She's interrupted by her phone ringing.*

ANNA:  
It's Rick.

ZENITH:  
I thought he was working tonight.

ANNA:  
He is.

*She collects herself, then answers the call.*

*(into the phone)* Is everything okay?

*We see Rick talking into his phone; it may be on speaker.*

RICK:  
*(into the phone)* Hi. Yeah...

ZENITH:  
*(to Anna)* He doesn't text?

ANNA:  
*(into the phone)* Okay...

RICK:  
*(into the phone)* I just wanted to... say hi.

ANNA:  
*(into the phone)* Are you— Did it happen again?

RICK:  
*(into the phone)* No...

ZENITH:  
*(to Anna)* Oh! Did it?

ANNA:  
*(into the phone)* No?

RICK:  
*(into the phone)* Not really.

*He moves to sit on the bench.*

ANNA:  
*(into the phone)* What does that mean?

ZENITH:  
*(to Anna)* What does what, mean?

RICK:

*(into the phone)* Who's—? Oh, that's right: You two had dinner. Hi from me.

ANNA:

*(to Zenith)* He says hi.

ZENITH:

*(loudly, into the phone)* Hi.

ANNA:

*(into the phone)* What's going on?

RICK:

*(into the phone)* Well, this time it was strange. Different.

ANNA:

*(into the phone)* Different how?

ZENITH:

*(to Anna)* Put him on speaker.

*Anna shakes her head.*

RICK:

*(into the phone)* Earlier tonight, we got in a new case. Fairly cut and dried: decedent was an older woman, heart attack. Did the standard prep and, not even half-hour ago, I hooked everything up, the drains for the blood and the arterial tubes for the embalming chemicals. And then I thought, before I start I'm going to get a little snack. I'm a little hungry, right?

ANNA:

*(into the phone)* You didn't have dinner?

ZENITH:

*(to Anna)* Should we pick something up?

RICK:

*(into the phone)* I told you, I was busy. So I went to go to the kitchen, to grab some cereal.

ANNA:

*(to Zenith)* He had cereal.

RICK:

*(into the phone)* No! I didn't. That's the thing! I went to go—I decided to go get some—but I didn't. I couldn't.

ANNA:

*(into the phone)* Why couldn't you?

ZENITH:

*(to Anna)* We can bring him some.

RICK:

*(into the phone)* I couldn't do anything but stand there. But at some point before that, without realizing it, I must have turned everything on because as I stood there, I watched this woman's face turn from grey blue to this shade of... kind of a lovely, pale terracotta. And as I was watching, I thought to myself: How long has it been since I've really noticed that transformation, that amazing moment that makes you look at being human in an entirely different way? That's what it was that made me really understand why I do what I do. I've told you that.

ANNA:

*(into the phone)* You have.

ZENITH:

*(to Anna)* Has what?

*Anna turns on her phone's speaker; we hear Rick speaking from two sources.*

RICK:

*(into the phone)* I mean, sure, there's the whole anti-embalming, we-love-decomposition, it's-not-natural-chemicals-poison-the-ground movement... but tonight made me remember that there is something extraordinary about this process—even being “artificial”—and what comes after. And I'm really good at it. So as much as I know that the industry is changing, moving away from traditional burials, I'm also grateful that there will always be people who need what I can give them. To see not just a body, but the person they lost. One last time.

*We start to hear street noises around the women; it's gotten dark.*

Honey?

ANNA:

Yeah. I'm here. So what happened with the cereal.

*The body moves on and stands near Rick, eating a bowl.*

RICK:

*(into the phone)* Am I on speaker?

ANNA:

Oh. Sorry.

ZENITH:

*(to Rick)* Do you need us to bring you some cereal?

RICK:

*(into the phone)* No. I'm headed home, soon. And... I'm not really hungry anymore.



*We hear Metro announcements: A train is going out of service. A change in routes. Also nighttime LA sounds which are a bit disconcerting: A motorcycle. Shouting. A police helicopter.*

*Rick moves off; the body moves the bench into a different position and sits on it. The women—Anna without her bag or favorite sweater—bring on two chairs and two wine glasses. We hear Rick's voice from offstage.*

RICK:

*(offstage)* No! Of course I'm glad to see you. I just didn't expect you!

ZENITH:

*(to Rick)* I was worried. We both were!

RICK:

*(offstage)* And thirsty?

ZENITH:

That, too, ha ha.

RICK:

*(offstage)* Red or white?

ANNA:

*(loudly, to Rick)* You don't have to—

RICK:

*(offstage, interrupting)* I want to.

*Anna is drawn to sit on the bench, next to the body whom she, alone, acknowledges.*

ZENITH:

*(loudly, to Rick)* We're drinking white. There was only half a bottle.

RICK:

*(offstage)* Yep. This one's dead. *(to Anna)* Do we have any more white, honey?

ANNA:

*(loudly, to Rick)* I think so. Check the fridge.

RICK:

*(offstage)* Okay.

ANNA:

Okay.

ZENITH:

*(to Anna)* Okay. Are you okay?

ANNA:

Not remotely.

ZENITH:

At least he's home, now. This is such a great house. You said your dad build it?

ANNA:

My grandfather. It was the only house up this way, then.

ZENITH:

It's so quiet. For LA.

ANNA:

My dad mostly grew up in it. As did I.

ZENITH:

How'd you get used to the hike getting up here?

ANNA:

Didn't think about it when we were kids.

ZENITH:

Mostly grew up?

ANNA:

What?

ZENITH:

Before, you said "mostly grew up."

ANNA:

I meant my dad.

ZENITH:

I figured. I was joking, about you. "Mostly." Ha ha.

ANNA:

Okay.

ZENITH:

Because you're the most grown up person I've ever met!

ANNA:

That's the worst thing anyone's ever said to me.

ZENITH:

I'm... sorry. I meant I'm glad you're my friend!

RICK:

*(offstage)* Honey? I don't see it. Are you sure we have another bottle chilled?

ANNA:

*(softly)* No, I'm not sure of anything.

RICK:

*(offstage, to Anna)* What?

ZENITH:

*(starting toward Anna)* Ohhhhh...

ANNA:

*(loudly, to Rick)* Go look in the cupboard next to the garage. I think we have extra bottles in there.

RICK:

*(offstage)* We used to. Do we still?

ANNA:

*(loudly, to Rick)* I don't—I think so.

ZENITH:

*(gesturing offstage)* Do you want me to...?

ANNA:

Please.

ZENITH:

Anna: I love you. You know that, right?

ANNA:

Thank you.

*Short pause, then Zenith moves off.*

ZENITH:

*(loudly to Rick, starting toward him)* All right, then. I'm officially joining the search and rescue team. *(offstage)* I completely love this house. You must feel so lucky to have it!

RICK:

*(offstage)* It needs a lot of work.

ZENITH:

*(offstage)* Where's the garage? Whoops! Ran into you. Sorry!

RICK:

*(offstage)* Ha ha ha. Over here...

*Anna is alone with the body, who is still eating cereal. She sits in silence except for the sounds of the LA hills coming through a open window—maybe we hear a coyote. We also hear the sound of cereal crunching. Anna takes this in. The body notices her noticing and stops crunching.*

BODY:

Oh. Sorry.

ANNA:

Don't worry about it.

BODY:

Are you—? Hang on.

*The body moves quickly out of the room. Anna moves to touch the bowl of cereal: Is it real? Before she can find out the body comes back in with a bottle of white wine, and pours her a glass.*

ANNA:

Thank you.

BODY:

No problem. Chardonnay; hope it's not too chilled. Found it in the back of the fridge.

ANNA:

No, it's great.

*The body sits back down and picks up the bowl, again.*

What kind of cereal is that?

BODY:

Grape nuts. Want a bite?

ANNA:

No. Thank you. We used to eat it when we were kids. Our parents wouldn't let us have the sugary stuff.

BODY:

Huh.

ANNA:

It's very crunchy, isn't it?

BODY:

Very.

*Rick and Zenith come into the room, he's carrying a bottle of white wine and she, a glass for Rick.*

RICK:

All right. It's not cold, but...

ZENITH:

It'll do the job.

*Rick cracks open the bottle, then sees Anna sipping from her glass.*

RICK:

Oh! You already...?

ANNA:

Yeah.

RICK:

So what do you think of the furniture?

ZENITH:

It's new?

RICK:

No, I moved stuff around. *(to Anna)* Do you like it?

ANNA:

It's fine.

RICK:

Okay. Well. You know something? I think I'm going to go to bed. Leave you two ladies to it.

ZENITH:

No! You guys need some time together. I already told you, I'm leaving.

RICK:

No, I need to— I've had a very strange night.

ZENITH:

Right, which is exactly why you need this.

*She pours him a glass.*

RICK:

Please. You stay. I'm really beat.

*We hear a beep or electronic sound from Zenith's pocket or bag.*

ZENITH:

That's my ride.

RICK:

What? No, I could have—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* No. See you guys later. I'll check in tomorrow. You're not working?

RICK:

Not unless I have to.

ZENITH:

Don't.

*She leaves.*

RICK:

*(after Zenith)* Bye! And thank you!

*We hear a door slam.*

*(to Anna)* Where does she live?

ANNA:

Koreatown.

RICK:

Shouldn't be any traffic at this hour.

ANNA:

No.

*Perhaps we hear a car driving off, outside. Rick contemplates the wine, and his wife. She, the body who is finishing the cereal.*

RICK:

I'm serious, honey. You should not be worried about me.

*The body stands.*

I'm okay.

ANNA:

Okay.

*The body carries the bowl out of the room.*

RICK:  
You're awfully quiet. You wanna go to bed?

ANNA:  
No, I think I'll stay up for a while.

RICK:  
All right.

*Very short pause.*

Do you want me to stay out here with you?

ANNA:  
It's up to you.

RICK:  
I mean, I'm beyond tired but... it's been awhile, hasn't it?

ANNA:  
What has?

RICK:  
Just us. Like this.

*He sits in a chair as the body comes back in.*

ANNA:  
I guess.

*The body pours wine into the glass left by Zenith, then sits with it in the other chair.*

BODY:  
I put the bowl in the sink.

ANNA:  
Good.

RICK:  
Good. Because I do miss this, and right now there's a big part of me that wants nothing more than to just sit with you, like we used to—just sit, with a glass of wine. Even if it is room temp, ha ha ha.

*He sips from his glass as Anna and the body sip from theirs.*

But I'm also suddenly very aware of when me and my body are wanting the same things at the same time, and when they're not.

ANNA:

I'll bet.

RICK:

Man. Tonight was... I mean, before it was like the most frightening thing I could imagine. Looking at my legs or my feet or my hands and not being able to make them do what I wanted them to do. Not feeling like they belonged to me. But tonight... Something clicked. Like my body was telling me what I was here for. And I'm thinking maybe I'm on the other side of this, whatever it is. Or was.

ANNA:

That would be very, very good.

RICK:

So we can move past this, is what I'm saying. All of it. We'll be fine. But... I do have to go to bed.

ANNA:

Rick...

RICK:

Yeah?

ANNA:

Tell me what happened to his body.

RICK:

Whose body?

*Short pause.*

Oh. Your brother. Uhh... What exactly do you mean? You've never wanted to—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* My parents, I was there, with each of them, when they died.

RICK:

We were there.

ANNA:

What?

RICK:

I was there, with you.

ANNA:

That's right. You were. I...



RICK:

It's okay. It's a hard thing to go through.

ANNA:

It was hard. But it was also... It was not something I would have ever wanted to live without. Being there. Holding them. Seeing how crystal clear it was when life left their bodies, that all that was left was a body.

*She takes in the body, again.*

One moment they were there, and then they weren't. They were gone.

RICK:

That is kind of a gift. Dying at home, with family, is not what usually happens.

ANNA:

Anymore.

RICK:

Anymore.

ANNA:

And each time I watched Manuel wrap up and take away the bodies...

RICK:

Yeah, you know most people don't want to—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* And then you took care of them.

RICK:

I did.

ANNA:

But I wasn't there for my brother. So I don't—

RICK:

*(interrupting)* I took care of him, as well.

ANNA:

Really?

RICK:

Honey! Of course!

ANNA:

I should have gone to see him, after.

RICK:  
No. Like you said, he wasn't there, anymore.

ANNA:  
But his body. What did you do with it?

RICK:  
I... We didn't embalm him, if that's what you mean. I washed him.

ANNA:  
You did?

RICK:  
Yes. It was my privilege. I loved him, too.

ANNA:  
I... Thank you.

RICK:  
You're welcome.

*Short pause.*

ANNA:  
But wasn't he already— They found him in the bathtub. With his clothes on, in the bathtub.

RICK:  
There was no water in it.

ANNA:  
There wasn't?

RICK:  
No.

ANNA:  
I've been thinking the tub was full. I was imagining a tub full of water that had turned cold. Are you sure it wasn't?

RICK:  
No. He was just sitting there. No water.

ANNA:  
With a plastic bag over his head.

*Short pause.*

So why the bathtub?

RICK:  
They thought perhaps he was being... neat?

ANNA:  
Neat?

RICK:  
Yes. Everything was very tidy. His whole apartment. I mean, we didn't get there until after the police and the Coroner had signed off, but the place was immaculate. He'd gotten fresh flowers.

ANNA:  
What?

RICK:  
There was a vase of fresh flowers. Peonies, I think.

ANNA:  
Peonies don't grow here.

RICK:  
I might be wrong.

ANNA:  
What happened to them? The flowers?

RICK:  
I— A neighbor took them.

ANNA:  
Good. That's good. And how long before they picked him up. His body. From you. Was it that day?

RICK:  
Oh. UCLA? I took the body there the next day, to the research lab.

ANNA:  
For the suicide brain study.

RICK:  
A forensic examination of the blood-brain barrier in suicide.

ANNA:  
I shouldn't have done that, given him to them. I should have buried him with my parents.

RICK:  
No, you did the right thing. We talked about it. At least this way, he could help find some kind of answers.

ANNA:

Okay. So they took his brain. Did they find any other body parts of value? Sometimes I picture pieces of him, preserved in little laboratory jars.

RICK:

No, no, they— Actually, I'm not really sure. They only recently started accepting suicides, specifically for the study. Do you want me to ask my friend if he—

ANNA:

*(interrupting)* Not really.

RICK:

They don't usually release details about the disposition, to families. I mean, once a body gets there it's basically medical waste; that's why they could do bio-cremation. I don't think I told you much about it—the process—but it's terrific. Using water is much kinder on the environment than flame-based cremation. They can capture any metals or manufactured materials left in the body, even the mercury in fillings, so no toxins are released. And the metal? All recycled.

ANNA:

That's practical.

RICK:

It's beautiful. It's kind of perfect. That's why the cremains are even lighter than usual. They're pure. Remember how they floated when we sprinkled them into the ocean?

ANNA:

Like they didn't want to disappear.

BODY:

More wine?

*Anna had almost forgotten the body was there.*

ANNA:

Thank you.

*The body pours her more.*

RICK:

You're welcome. So... Honey, I... Is there anything else you want to know? You haven't wanted to talk about any of this. But I'm glad to. However I can help. If it helps. I would think it would. It's... It's what I do.

ANNA:

I know it is.

RICK:

All right... Then I'm really going to bed. Sure you don't want to come with?

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

Yeah.

RICK:

Should I leave the bottle?

ANNA:

Um... no. In the fridge, please?

RICK:

You got it.

*He moves to her and gives her a loving, gentle but very solid kiss.*

Good night.

*He leaves with his glass and the bottle.*

BODY:

That was nice.

ANNA:

It was nice.

*The body sits back down next to her.*

I suppose I should ask...

BODY:

Go ahead.

ANNA:

Who are you? Or what are you?

BODY:

No one. I'm just a body.

ANNA:

Are you someone's body?

BODY:

What difference does it make?

ANNA:

It... Maybe none. Maybe it doesn't. Why are you here?

BODY:

Why are any of us, here?

ANNA:

That is a trick question. Are you really here, or just in my head?

BODY:

I think I can ask the same of you.

ANNA:

Aha! If you're just a body, how can you think?

BODY:

And if you're just in your head, how can you feel?

ANNA:

I'm not just—

*Very short pause.*

That makes no sense. No sense at all.

BODY:

No?

*The body holds Anna. At first she fights it, then she gives in. Perhaps to much more than she realizes or is ready for.*

*We begin to hear the sounds of a car driving on a deserted street. Anna and the body separate. Anna moves to a chair and sets it facing front; the body moves off with the other chair.*

*Anna sits and the sounds of the car become louder and more distinct. With a new awareness, Anna lifts her hands in front of her, takes the wheel and she is driving the car; wind may be blowing against her face and hair. We can hear and feel the car speeding up and as it does, she grips the wheel harder. She holds on until it becomes too much, then she lets go.*

*Suddenly, silence. It's almost as if Anna's suspended mid-air.*

*Then we begin to hear an electric buzzing, like the sounds of an old power line. The sounds pull Anna back down to earth. Zenith comes on with a table which holds Anna's bag and an open laptop; she sets it in front of Anna who is abruptly jolted into her new surroundings.*

*Zenith takes out her phone.*

*During the following online conversation, Anna is on her laptop and Zenith, texting—we hear Anna and Zenith’s voices coming from a different source.*

ZENITH:

Because that is bigger than huge. Massive. When did you do this?

ANNA:

I... It was this morning. Before I drove to work.

ZENITH:

Drove? You drove?

ANNA:

Oh. No. I couldn’t have...

ZENITH:

When I couldn’t find you, I knew something was weird then called Rick; woke him up—he didn’t even know about it! Said you didn’t come to bed last night? I kept looking and looking and finally there’s you in some firewalled archive!

ANNA:

I slept on the couch.

ZENITH:

But why? Why did you take down your Facebook?

*Very short pause.*

Very Sad Crying Cat.

ANNA:

I must have taken the train.

ZENITH:

Okay. Did you deactivate or delete?

ANNA:

My Facebook? It’s deleted.

ZENITH:

There’s a built-in failsafe so U got a few days, but after that you’re deleted deleted and even I can’t find you.  
What about Twitter?

ANNA:

I’m not on Twitter.

ZENITH:

You have an account through the City.

ANNA:

*(speaking directly)* Shit.

*(typing)* Sorry, I have to go.

ZENITH:

Did you get my texts earlier? Or were you at the counter?

ANNA:

I turned off my phone.

And I'm not...

*She deletes her partial message.*

I'm at my desk; you just popped up.

ZENITH:

On your computer!

Okay good.

What happened after I left last night? Did you guys have a fight?

ANNA:

No.

ZENITH:

Why are you at your desk?

ANNA:

They want to put me on a new project.

ZENITH:

That's great! Right?

ANNA:

I'm not sure.

I asked Rick to move out.

ZENITH:

I think it's great.

*(speaking directly)* Wait.

*(texting)* You what? When? He didn't say anything.

ANNA:

I haven't talked to him.

I left him a note.

ZENITH:

A note?



ANNA:

He probably hadn't seen it yet, when you called.

ZENITH:

You asked him to leave? In the note?

*Very short pause.*

What did you say?

*Very short pause.*

Anna?

*Very short pause.*

Hands Pressed Together?

ANNA:

*(typing)* I didn't sleep well last night. I think I'll head home; take a half day. I'm not ready to start any long range projects and I have to figure out how to tell them; strategically frame it, to keep my position. If there is a strategy. Maybe I'll switch Divisions. There's an opening in Historic Resources. Or maybe I'll ask for some more time off. Not that I have any more time. So maybe I'll—

*She's interrupted by a digital ringing sound coming from her computer screen. After a moment, she presses a button. Then,*

ZENITH:

*(holding her phone in front of her face and talking to it)* I am very worried about you.

*We hear the women speaking from two sources.*

ANNA:

How did you—?

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* You cannot hide from Face Time. Tell me what's happening.

ANNA:

*(checking who's in earshot)* I can't really—

ZENITH:

*(interrupting)* I know I don't know the whole story. But you need to reach out to Rick.

ANNA:

I don't know how, anymore.

ZENITH:

But you two— It's like he's part of you!

ANNA:

This isn't about Rick. I just need some space.

ZENITH:

If he moves out, where's he going to go?

ANNA:

He has family.

ZENITH:

Hang on. Is this about your brother?

ANNA:

No.

ZENITH:

Because if it keeps you from disappearing, I'll delete him from Facebook and everywhere else. But you better be sure because at a certain point there's no turning back. Do you understand that?

*Short pause.*

ANNA:

Leave no trace.

ZENITH:

What?

ANNA:

Didn't you ever go camping? We did. Good campers leave no trace.

ZENITH:

Is that what you think he wanted? For real?

ANNA:

To be honest, I don't think I even know what's real. Or whether I should even care, anymore.

ZENITH:

Hey! Hey! Okay, there are, totally, levels of reality, but what's absolutely certain is that your brother was here. Now he's gone and I know it hurts but even if I scrub him from the virtual universe he lived a life. He left his mark.

ANNA:

His mark?

ZENITH:

Yes. And so have you, Anna. Only you're not done leaving yours.

*Very short pause.*

ANNA:

I've been sitting here all morning. Staring at this screen. Wondering what it's like on the other side.

ZENITH:

You should get a standing desk. Or one of those balance balls. Whoops!

*She's run into something or someone.*

*(to an unseen traveler)* Sorry!

ANNA:

Where are you?

ZENITH:

The 780, on my way to Pasadena.

ANNA:

I have to go.

ZENITH:

Anna, I don't think you want to be alone with your grief.

ANNA:

You know, maybe that's exactly what I want.

ZENITH:

No!

ANNA:

Yes. And if Rick calls you, tell him... Tell him I hope he understands.

*Anna snaps shut her laptop. She takes a quick breath in and closes her eyes tight—perhaps she's looking for a map.*

*Then we hear the sounds of Downtown at lunch, lots of people quickly walking, talking, eating. Zenith moves off; Anna puts her laptop in her bag and moves off, as well.*

*The sounds shift to a quiet, hillside neighborhood in LA. Birds. The occasional dog barking, car passing. Rick brings back on the other chair and rearranges the furniture, with help from the body. They move off and the stage is empty for the first time. Still. We listen for a moment. Until we hear a door opening.*

ANNA:

*(offstage)* Hello?

*Anna comes in, carrying her bag and also a bag of groceries. She sees the body.*

Hey!

*The body carries a suitcase. It's an older suitcase, not one with wheels.*

BODY:

You're home, early.

ANNA:

Yeah, I didn't see you this morning and wanted to—

*She sets the bags down on the table, and registers the suitcase.*

Wait. Are you going somewhere?

BODY:

Yes. I am.

ANNA:

Why? I bought groceries. I was going to cook. Do you like eggplant?

BODY:

Who doesn't?

ANNA:

A lot of people, actually. I... I didn't know whether you'd be here. I mean, I kind of wanted you to be, but then I realized if you were, that means I'm definitely crazy! Ha ha ha.

*The body doesn't laugh, but starts toward the door.*

No! You can't go. You're not done.

BODY:

With what?

ANNA:

With whatever you were— No. This is not fair. You show up, you make yourself at home and all I've got now is questions!

BODY:

Yeah. That sucks, doesn't it.

ANNA:

It really sucks! So that's it? You're just going to leave me here, all alone?

BODY:

You really think you're all alone?

ANNA:

I don't know what to think.

BODY:

I'll leave you to it, then.

*The body turns to go.*

ANNA:

Can I at least ask what's in the suitcase? Or, wait. No: Is it... just baggage?

BODY:

That sounds about right.

ANNA:

Yeah.

*The body continues out.*

Hey! Before you leave, let me tell you about the dream I had, last night.

BODY:

Sure. Should I sit?

ANNA:

If you want to...

*The body doesn't.*

I dreamed I was driving. I don't know what car, but probably one we had when we were kids. And I was driving up Monterey Road, which I know like the back of my hand and always have. I don't think anyone was in the car with me, and I kept driving, and as I drove I kept going faster and faster and it was getting darker and I knew it was too fast for the curves and I went around one that was especially tight and not on Monterey Road or anywhere I'd ever been and all of the sudden I was flying off a cliff, in the car. And I was frightened but I was momentarily thrilled—it felt like complete freedom. And at that moment I was also thinking, in the dream, "Wait. This can't be real, can it? This can't be it. If so, what am I here, for?"

BODY:

That's quite the dream.

ANNA:

So. Are you gonna tell me?

BODY:

Tell you what?

ANNA:

What am I here, for?

*Short pause.*

BODY:

Maybe you shouldn't tread so lightly in this world. If you do, you may never find out.

*The body leaves; perhaps Anna considers following him. Then Rick comes in from another direction with a vase of flowers. They're not peonies.*

RICK:

Hi, honey! I thought I heard you.

ANNA:

Rick! Why are you...?

RICK:

I didn't go in today. You knew that.

ANNA:

I— I did. I forgot.

*Rick sets the flowers on the table and sees the groceries.*

RICK:

What's this? You gonna cook?

ANNA:

I was.

RICK:

That's great.

ANNA:

But... Did you ...?

RICK:

What?

*Short pause.*

ANNA:

This morning. I left you a note.

RICK:  
Where'd you leave it?

ANNA:  
*(indicating the table, maybe moving the bags to check)* It was right here.

RICK:  
Are you sure? What did it say?

*Very short pause, then he starts to look for the note.*

Maybe it fell. I pulled the table out a bit.

ANNA:  
Maybe...

*She starts to look with him. This is not the way this was supposed to unfold.*

RICK:  
Maybe you took it with you? It's not in your bag?

ANNA:  
No!

*Very short pause.*

It's not in *my* bag...

*She looks in the direction the body left, then turns back and notices the new furniture arrangement for the first time.*

Rick... What did you—?

RICK:  
*(interrupting)* Yeah, with the table, there, I moved the bookcase and some other stuff around. What do you think?

ANNA:  
I— Oh!

*She sees something she didn't at all expect.*

RICK:  
What?

ANNA:  
Man! Just like that. Ha ha ha.

*She starts to laugh, and also to cry.*

RICK:  
What's wrong?

ANNA:  
Nothing's wrong, it's— My brother. His mark. I'd forgotten.

RICK:  
I don't—

ANNA:  
*(interrupting, pointing)* On the baseboard?

RICK:  
Where?

ANNA:  
There. You can see it better, now. My mother always had something in front of it.

*Rick peers at the once-hidden baseboard as Anna moves toward it.*

He wrote his name. With his wood-carving tools in the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade. Impossible to sand down.

RICK:  
Oh, should I—?

ANNA:  
*(interrupting)* No. It's perfect.

RICK:  
You know, I could—

*He's interrupted by Anna rushing back to him; he holds her.*

RICK:  
Hey! Are you okay?

ANNA:  
Just tell me I will be. That everything will be.

RICK:  
Yes, yes. Honey, yes. It will be. You will be.

ANNA:  
Okay. And... don't leave.

RICK:  
I'm not going anywhere! Oh! And Zenith texted me that you were on a new project? Did she tell you I hooked her up at the Home? She's over there, now.



ANNA:

Um, no. But yes. That's good.

RICK:

Who knows. What's the project?

ANNA:

Ha ha. Well... They're re-instituting the LA mobility plan. With new projections on traffic, mass transit, bicyclists and pedestrians.

RICK:

Sounds like a lot of maps! That oughta make you happy!

ANNA:

Could be!

*They hold each other for another long moment. Maybe a bit too long.*

RICK:

Brrrr. It's a little...

*He looks in the direction the body left.*

Uh, honey? Can I ask why you left the door open?

ANNA:

Sure, sweetie. You can always ask.

*Is she playing with him?*

***End of Play***