

5 LB. TEST PRODUCTIONS

The Good Work



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DARKNESS. The SOUND OF ROLLING THUNDER. Now a STEADY RAIN.

FADE UP.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM – EVENING

CARL, 20's-30's, propped up, asleep in a single bed. He wears hospital garment. Assorted monitors and medical equipment scatter the room. A suppressed anger fueled by resentment and unrealized potential lies just beneath his amiable surface. A frustrated soul of sorts belonging to perhaps a Prince in exile.

BETH, in a nurses uniform, early to mid- 30's, enters with an over worked, indifferent and distant gaze. She keeps a professional distance with patients but is very good at what she does. A clock on the wall behind and above Carl reads 7:19pm. A vase of fresh daisies sits on a nearby window sill. Beth drops out of sight and begins fussing with an uncooperative machine. Carl slowly awakens.

BETH
Come on ... come on ... Come -

CARL
-Try unplugging it-

BETH
-ON!

Beth pops up startled but in control.

BETH
(avoiding eye contact)
And how are we feeling today?

CARL
Fine.

BETH
Good.

Beth ducks out of sight again and fusses with the machine.

CARL
But I'm going to need a little help...

Beth pops back up with a nurse-ready focus still avoiding eye contact.

... answering your question. CARL (cont'd)

And what question was that? BETH

How we were feeling. CARL

And you said fine. BETH

And you said we. CARL

I did. BETH

So how do you feel? CARL

Not we, just you. How I feel is not your concern. BETH

Beth resumes her spot out of sight and continues fussing with the machine.

You did ask we did you not? CARL

It was merely a figure of speech. BETH

Meaning what? CARL

Meaning nothing more than what I asked. BETH

So you were just being polite. CARL

Politely professional, yes. BETH

All right. Ask me again. CARL

BETH

Excuse me?

CARL

Ask me. Ask me again how I feel.

BETH

You already said that you felt fine.

CARL

I was just being polite.

Beth pops up unamused and still manages to avoid eye contact.

CARL

Go ahead. Ask.

BETH

(Dropping out of sight)

I really don't have time for this, sir.

CARL

No but you have all the time in the world to make yourself come across as some polite, curt professional.

BETH

I am not curt!

CARL

Then ask me like you mean it!

Beth pauses at the obvious challenge but decides otherwise and ducks out of sight.

CARL

Go ahead, hide, fine by me. And even though you don't want to but just so you know, WE feel terrible!

BETH

I apologize if I confused you.

CARL

A bit "fed up" too.

Beth pops up without making eye contact still tending to the uncooperative machine.

BETH

It won't happen again.

CARL
Maybe even a little burnt out!?

BETH
Ah ...

CARL
Frustrated even.

BETH
Sir?

CARL
Bordering on becoming a real bitch-!

BETH
-I apologize if I confused you! Now ...

CARL
I'm not confused.

BETH
If you don't mind ...

CARL
I don't mind.

BETH
I've work to do.

CARL
Why would I mind?

BETH
Thank you.

CARL
Not at all and thank you.

BETH
You're welcome.

Beth pauses confused then goes back to work.

CARL
Do ah, sorry, do you know what time it is?

BETH
(Glancing at a clock on the wall above Carl)

Twenty past.

Carl cranes his neck back to look for himself.

BETH
Seven.

CARL
Thanks.

Beth approaches and inflates a BP cuff around Carl's arm.

CARL
Boy today went by quick didn't it? Feels like I just woke up. That ever happen to you, having time just slip by? Wow. This is the last day I expected to go by so fast. It just ... vanished.

BETH
Wish I could say the same.

CARL
Yeah? Why's that?

BETH
I just started my shift twenty minutes ago.

Beth releases the BP cuff with a HISS and logs the results on a chart.

CARL
Boy I'd hate to have to work at this hour.

BETH
Then that makes two of us.

CARL
Second shift. Rather rise early with the rest of em' and get it over with, you know?

BETH
Not much of a morning person myself.

CARL
You know the type of people who usually work this, the second shift, don't you?

BETH
Type?

CARL

Single, unmarried, fly by the seat of their pants types you know?

Beth RIPS the BP cuff off Carl's arm with a snap.

CARL

I didn't mean that to sound so ...

BETH

No, you're right. And on top of that little truism, I'm exhausted and I look like crap.

Beth tries to hold back a smile before dropping behind the head of Carl's bed to adjust something.

CARL

You have a nice smile.

The bed shakes a little.

CARL

Did you know that it takes ten times as many muscles to frown than it does to smile?

The bed shakes a little harder.

CARL

Everything all right back there?

BETH

(Still out of sight)

Fine.

Beth gives the bed one more good shove before popping back up.

CARL

What time did you say it was?

BETH

Hmm?

CARL

The time?

Beth drifts off for a beat.

BETH

Uh ... seven. Twenty past seven.

CARL

Right. Thanks. Wow, how did it get so late?

BETH

That's time for you.

Beth slips a thermometer under Carl's tongue, sits and stares at the clock on the wall.

BETH

It's non-stop.

CARL

I had a fever once of one hundred and four. Gave me nightmares.

BETH

High fever will do that.

CARL

I was being sucked down into this black hole in the middle of the floor and everything around me was just spinning and melting away. Do you ever get sick?

BETH

Do hangovers count?

CARL

No.

BETH

Then no, never.

Beth reads Carl's temperature and logs it grabbing 2 aspirins and water on her way back.

CARL

Oh no thanks.

BETH

It'll help bring down the fever.

CARL

I feel fine, really.

BETH

It's just aspirin.

CARL

I know. I'm allergic.

Beth moves to Carl's chart. She reads it then moves about the room re-checking her work.

CARL

To eggs too. And cotton. I have an uncle who's allergic to soap. And he's afraid of water too so you can imagine.

Beth knocks a glass of water to the floor and freezes. Pause.

CARL

Do you think it would be all right if I used the phone? I couldn't get through before and they said if it doesn't get too late then maybe it would be all right.

Beth turns and looks at the clock on the wall then begins cleaning up the water.

BETH

I'm afraid it's not allowed.

CARL

Huh. Well maybe they'll call me back.

BETH

Maybe.

CARL

But no calls huh?

BETH

They have their rules.

CARL

Kind of a "home-made" rule don't you think? Whoever made that one up doesn't have a whole lot of sense if you ask me.

BETH

Well that's administration for you. They never do.

CARL

(Craning his neck)

Did you see my flowers? They're Spring Daisies I think. To tell you the truth I don't even know if they're for me.

Beth crosses and moves the flowers to where Carl can see them.

CARL

Oh that's nice. Much, much better, thank you.

BETH

You're welcome.

Beth continues her duties. Carl drifts off eyeing the flowers.

CARL

... I wonder what it's like ...

Beth freezes for a beat with her back to Carl then quickly resumes her work.

BETH

I have a sister who used to work in a greenhouse and she said that the most difficult part about raising flowers indoors was ...

CARL

Outside ...

Pause.

BETH

Oh?

CARL

The weather.

BETH

Outside, the weather, rain, it's raining.

CARL

Rain.

BETH

Third day in a row, actually.

CARL

Huh.

BETH

Yup.

CARL

And what was it like before that?

BETH

Sunny, gorgeous, seventy - five degrees.

CARL

And now?

BETH

Rain.

Rain. CARL

It's miserable out. BETH

Miserable. On the count of the rain. CARL

It's wet. BETH

It's water. CARL

I know. BETH

So if the sun is out it's a perfect day? CARL

I don't know about perfect. BETH

It's just a figure of speech. CARL

What can I tell you, people like the Sun. BETH

Ah but the Sun also burns. CARL

And that is why they have sunscreen. BETH

Sunscreen and umbrellas. CARL

Problem solved. BETH

CARL
Back when I lived in the city, it rained for five straight days once. By day two the water in my building turned brown and my landlord at the time, Charlie, thought if he waited long enough, you know for the rain to stop then it would eventually clear up on its own.

BETH

Did it?

CARL

Not exactly. By day three, Charlie's roundabout answer to the tenants that usually came in the form of a holler was that it was some act of God and that it was completely out of his hands.

BETH

Sounds like Charlie was in denial.

CARL

Charlie was too poor to be in denial about anything.

BETH

All right then a patient and frugal man.

CARL

Being that poor gives you all the time in the world to be patient. Frugal? I'll call him the cheapest son of a bitch I ever knew.

BETH

So what does being rich give you again?

CARL

Denial. And it can take you a long, long way if you have a good enough relationship with it.

BETH

So if I have money I have no patience?

CARL

Absolutely not. People with money have no patience and when things get even slightly out of whack or look like they might be headed that way, they lose it. For them, patience got up and walked before the Lypo surgeon could finish giving them one more collective scar to complain about. Water? It's the most abundant yet fragile thing next to oxygen and everyone thinks it should always be there in some undisturbed, pristine state. "I can't drink this! Look at it!" Well if you want to live you damn well better.

BETH

So how far did poor Charlie's poor-bought patience get him?

Beth moves about checking her work and periodically checks in with a courteous smile and quick glance.

CARL

Charlie was doing fine. It was the tenants whining about their God given right to shower and flush their toilets that did it. Eventually Charlie had to call the city in. They came,

declared the water unsafe, closed off the feeder valves from the street and said they'd be back later to find and fix the problem. Charlie's patience carried him all the way to about five a.m. the next morning. The city never came back like they said they would so Charlie's out there on a big red backhoe with a bottle of Ten High Whiskey in him tearing up the street like he's fixing to put in a swimming pool. People from the building are out there in their bathrobes, jam jams and slippers yelling and waving at Charlie but Charlie just keeps on digging. One guy, the kind of semi successful, good looking, valiant type gets in touch with whatever man hood he thinks he's got up under that robe of his and hops up on the backhoe with Charlie like he's about to do a heroes work. He goes for the ignition key but good ole' Charlie was one step ahead of the curve and had broken it off being this a one way, all or nothing Kamikaze kind of mission and shaping up to be Charlie's finest moment ever. So now our would be hero decides that his spring into action was not as thoroughly thought out as it could have been and where he's standing now is probably not the best course of action jumps off that big red backhoe like he's stunt doubling for Burt Reynolds and brakes his leg violently in three different places. Charlie continues his run and ends up ripping a huge gash in a city water main so the city decides to act like a city and shuts off both water and electricity within a five block radius of ground zero. They hop back in their trucks and say they'll be back later to fix it which translates into a day or two but it's going to be more like five or six days because they're really pissed off at Charlie for taking things into his own hands. The worst part about this whole debacle is that when the rain does finally stop in the next day or two, now we're looking down the barrel of the longest heat wave on record. It's now ninety seven degrees in the shade at seven o'clock in the morning on day one with the sweet, thick smell of piling, city, summer time trash literally choking and owning the air and with every passing hour and every passing degree, people are just getting that much closer to killing one another. By day three and four, we were all silently praying for the rain to come again, showers and flush toilets be damned. In the city, summer's the season of wither, the season of suffering with no place to hide and complaining about it does not a drop of good. That's something reserved for the high-rise, air conditioned, corporate guy who's planning his next big hostile takeover. One of these guys forgot that a power outage hits the rich the same way it does the poor, without prejudice. He lets impatience get the better of him and wanders down to the Chanel 6 News Room with a hand gun to shoot the weatherman. The bus he rode down there had air conditioning so by the time he got all the way down town he cooled off and settled down. It was such a relief that he decided to stay on the bus until it reached its final stop at Coney Island. He stepped off the bus, noticed it was a few degrees cooler down there by the water, tossed his gun off the boardwalk and into the drink and rode the Cyclone ride for the rest of the day. A few days later, the storm clouds start to roll into the city from the west. Biggest, darkest, scariest things you ever saw hanging up there low in the sky creeping closer and closer by the minute. You think you know thunder? You don't know thunder. Chop top convertibles racing through Queens trying to beat the storm, leaves on the trees showing off their pale undersides to the updraft trying to make like real trees you might see out in the countryside and everyone is outside waiting on the rain and that sweet, thick smell in the air is giving way and just crackling with energy and anticipation. There's even laughter coming from some old folks out on the sidewalk huddled under a tree. The winds are picking up now and they're literally holding onto one another to keep from getting blown away. They don't venture out of doors a lot but with the god damned heat and their limited capacity to

deal with it this was a special occasion for them. It was like there little victory dance saying you served up one long lasting and mean son of a bitch this time around but hey guess what, we're still standing, so there! The nine-to-fiver Wall Street types scurry this way and that under a sea of black umbrellas that closely match their black pin striped suits and patent black leather shoes. The men all have that cropped, short haired, chiseled look you might see in a soap opera or cologne ad and their women, all tall, petite, blonde and beautiful and they're holding onto Bally's built forearms for dear life before the wind can pick them up and blows them all the way back to Long Island. People like that have no idea. They got the good looking genes and that's their golden ticket that's going to carry them all the way. Life for them is a breeze and their kids are going to be good looking, well-educated, carbon copies always aware of and afraid of what they've been "taught" are the "bad" neighborhoods when what they really meant are the "black" neighborhoods and to them it's the part of town that really never needs to or deserves to be more than the distant fact that they know it exists. Life for them is good. Biggest worry they got is deciding on ski slopes or tropical beaches come their two week paid vacation away from the family business they've nearly squandered into bankruptcy on the count of being part of the Generation Y whose enslavement to whatever flavor pop culture has chosen for the week and all they have to have hand held technology that will continue to distract and dumb down the already astronomically stupid. Simple slaves to luxury and nothing more. When the clouds do open up, it's a non-stop downpour for an hour. The trash in the streets gets swept up and starts to clog the storm grates and the water level starts rising faster than anyone knows how to deal with it. I head down the block to unclog one of the bigger grates and some waterlogged kids playing their inner city street version of Force Ten from Navarone start yelling things like, "Hey asshole, leave our friggin' damn alone, we wanna go swimming in the street!" I yell back that it's not their street to flood and if we don't unclog all the grates on the block soon then they won't be swimming for pleasure but treading water to literally save their lives. One kid who must have been hard of hearing or just a little asshole outright tells me that if I do unclog the grate then he's going to run across the street and get his big brother to beat my ass. I tell the little hearing impaired shit that I know his big brother and I know how he likes to prance around town with other not so masculine guys with names like Carlos and Lance and that I'd be more than happy to kick the living shit out of all three of them if the occasion should present itself. Now these punks are merely getting off on the fact that there's a real life confrontation kicking up here so they start to circle around me like in a fight scene from one of those really bad ninja movies. I'm clearly outnumbered like five to one and I realize that with all the bickering going on back and forth that the water was now up past my knee and rising fast so I point and yell something like "Cops" or "Naked Women" and when they turn to look I dive over and unclog the drain with both hands. They see the awesome power the water has as it's being sucked down the storm grate, I mean it literally came alive swallowing hundreds of gallons per second and those little bastards start running for their lives through waist deep water as best as they can and I yell out, "What about your friggin' dam?" and the one with the older brother yells back, "Dams are for little kids and fairies who got nothing better to do with their time." So I yell back, "Then maybe you, your older brother and Carlos might want to have a go at it then?!" And that's when I saw the first one. It didn't really register at first but when it did, WHAM! That's a \$20 bill floating by. A few seconds later, a 50! And then another and another and another and I'm scooping them up as fast as I can and all I can do is laugh out loud

as I picture Mr. Soap Opera Cologne Ad Guy in his patent leather shoes hopping gingerly over a puddle as this huge wad of crisp bills falls out of his pocket and into the street. No big loss for him but a hell of a gain for me. So it's a cold, wet and miserable rainy day and I'm up \$400 bucks! Only thing one of your gorgeous perfect, sunny days ever got me was a bad sunburn and that handful of spring daisies. And you know, to tell you the truth, I don't even know if they're for me. So for me? I'll take the rain any day ...

Beth stops and stares at him in a daze.

CARL

So what kind of day would you say today is?

Beth snaps out of it.

BETH

It's not the most uplifting weather I can think of but for \$400 I'll call it anything you like.

CARL

It's what actually happens that makes a day what it is.

BETH

Right.

CARL

I mean why set yourself up on the account of the weather?

BETH

Here's to a rainy tomorrow.

Beth raises an IV bag up in a toast, hangs it on a bag rack and goes back to work.

CARL

So how do you like it here so far?

BETH

I like it all right.

CARL

But you're not wild about it are you?

BETH

I haven't been here long enough to say.

CARL

But it's safe to say you don't really like it so far.

BETH

It has its moments.

CARL

But you don't really care for it as you might some other job.

BETH

Another nursing job?

CARL

Well this, what you do here, is hardly nursing.

BETH

This is-I am-what I-this is absolutely nursing!

CARL

How do you figure?

Beth looks at herself questionably in a nearby mirror and straightens her name tag.

CARL

But it's so hypocritical don't you think?

Beth quickly goes back to work.

BETH

Certain things are done before certain procedures and I make sure that they are done to the best of my ability. It's my job.

CARL

But you don't even like your job.

BETH

I don't hate it if that's what you mean. There are a few aspects about it that I could certainly do without, sure, but over all ...

CARL

But you don't love it.

BETH

You didn't ask me if I loved it, only if I liked it, big difference. And like I said, it's okay.

CARL

I don't know if I'd work a job I thought was just okay.

BETH

It pays the bills.

CARL

What else?

That's it. BETH

That's not very much. CARL

It's enough. BETH

But losing all that time and giving up all of that – CARL

-I haven't lost anything and if it were up to me and it certainly is, I prefer to keep work as work. BETH

Meaning what? CARL

Meaning exactly what I just said. BETH

Fine. CARL

Fine. BETH

Keep up the good work. CARL

I plan on it. BETH

I'm sure you have. CARL

I can get my Marsh Brady meaningful, feel good, lasting memories elsewhere. BETH

Like where? CARL

The usual when not at work kind of places. BETH

CARL

Like a health club.

BETH

Too expensive.

CARL

Maybe a book club then.

BETH

Please.

CARL

Any hobbies?

BETH

I enjoy riding my bike.

CARL

Perfect!

BETH

But it was stolen.

CARL

So buy a new one.

BETH
(aside)

That ... was stolen too.

CARL

How's that?

BETH

Nothing, you're right, I should and I will when I find the time.

CARL

What about on your day off?

BETH

Sundays.

CARL

Why not?

BETH

Sundays are my quiet time.

CARL
So how about church?

BETH
I usually sleep in.

Beth resumes her duties.

CARL
You don't want to talk about it do you?

BETH
About?

CARL
The fact that besides this job, which you don't really like anyway, there's really not much you look forward to.

BETH
There's not much more to say about it really.

CARL
There's always something more to say.

BETH
For some more than others.

CARL
So that's it?

BETH
That's it.

Beth shrugs it off and continues her duties.

CARL
(To himself)
Like a lost and lonely tourist in a far off foreign land, she came into his life with but a few words to offer in his native tongue. He was entranced by her just the same. Inspired. Mesmerized even. The air was thick as bricks with possibility. Anticipation. He kept things simple. He asked, she gave him the time. The connection. The coincidence. The chemistry.

BETH
I think someone enjoys hearing the sound of his own voice.

CARL

It's either that or complete silence.

BETH

Silence is very underrated.

CARL

I'll bet you're the type of woman who knows a lot of big fancy words but you just don't prefer or appreciate the art of conversation.

BETH

They're calling it an art form now are they?

CARL

You figure why bother? He'll be gone soon and some other guy with a lot to say will literally take his place and so on and so on.

BETH

I think I've been rather courteous. I've answered your question and I've listened...

CARL

You weren't listening.

BETH

To your stories ...

CARL

Then what color was the backhoe?

BETH

All of them ...

CARL

Well?

BETH

I listen just fine.

CARL

Bologna!

BETH

I most certainly do.

CARL

Then what color was the backhoe?

BETH

How am I supposed to know the exact color of something you mentioned in the middle of some long, drawn out story about the weather?

CARL

Because you said you were listening.

BETH

I was listening.

CARL

Really.

BETH

Like I had a choice?

CARL

Then what color was the backhoe?

BETH

What does it matter?

CARL

Because your answer, when in the form of another question, tells me that you weren't listening at all!

BETH

This is crazy.

CARL

What color was the backhoe?

BETH

I'm not going to do this.

CARL

What color was the backhoe?

BETH

What do you want from me?

CARL

The color!

BETH

Purple!

CARL

Wrong!

BETH

Fusia!

CARL

Wrong again!

BETH

Red! The god damn backhoe was red!

CARL

Bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, tell her what she's won Bob! Well Carl it's a do-it-yourself Home Enema Kit by Ron Co.! It's a cinch in a pinch with Ron Co.! Ron Co.! Guaranteed for the rest of what's left of your so called life!

Carl pulls his sheets up over his head. Pause. Beth crosses and primps the spring daises up a bit.

BETH

You're right. I don't like certain things about my job. Every job has its non-likeable parts. There. I said it. Are you happy now?

CARL

Yes.

BETH

Good. So would you like to make some art now?

Carl pulls the sheets off his head but looks away from Beth with a slight pout.

CARL

Fine.

BETH

Great! Why not right? I love art.

Carl sees an opening.

CARL

People nowadays forget that it only takes a simple-

BETH

-Oh no please, rest, please, allow me to start.

CARL

Okay.

BETH

Thank you. Where oh where do I start ...?

CARL

How about at the beginning.

BETH

All right. The beginning. My father was a doctor, my mother a nurse so I guess you could say that it runs in the family.

CARL

Is that why you're here?

Beth lets this sink in then continues her duties.

BETH

Do you know what it's like to lose something you worked your whole life for? I used to love the idea of helping people. I mean, really helping people. It's a nice way to feel good about yourself, about how you choose to spend your time and they actually will pay you to do it, to just be human. I miss that. I do. I want to get that back. And I spend a great deal of time wondering if that's possible. To get that back. My god, I sound just like my mother. "Put your faith in yourself and things will always work out for the best."

CARL

But you do. You do good work.

BETH

No complaints yet.

CARL

I don't think that's possible.

Beth turns away and crosses to a window. She looks outside. The SOUND OF THUNDER.

CARL

So ... are you married?

BETH

Please don't take this the wrong way but I'm a bit uncomfortable talking about my personal life.

CARL

We've already gotten personal.

BETH

I know and I apologize for that, damn it, and now, now I'd prefer to just keep things on a professional level.

Professional. CARL

Yes, thank you. BETH

Beth takes out a thermometer.

Open please? BETH

Didn't we already do this? CARL

Beth pops the thermometer in Carl's mouth and wraps a BP cuff around his arm.

Make a fist please. BETH

Gladly. CARL

Beth begins pumping the BP cuff.

You know something? Maybe you shouldn't be a nurse. CARL

Hold still please. BETH

Is that supposed to be some kind of joke? CARL

Sir please remain calm or I won't get an accurate reading. BETH

Fuck accurate! CARL

Beth makes a notation on her clipboard.

What are you doing? CARL

(aside) BETH
Patient unruly, refused to have blood pressure taken. Time? 7:38p.m.

CARL

Is that supposed to piss me off? Well guess what. It aint' gonna work! I'm already pissed off!

Carl pulls the thermometer from his mouth and throws it. Beth rips the BP cuff off Carl's arm.

BETH

Good!

CARL

Good!

BETH

Great!

CARL

Great! So now it is personal.

BETH

So it is.

Beth goes to retrieve the thermometer off the floor.

CARL

" I have a chance to get a lot off my chest by talking to someone who will actually listen but I'd rather keep it all bottled up deep inside where it will most likely manifest someday into a life threatening disease."

BETH

Simple ...

CARL

" I come to my job every day and I don't even like my job."

BETH

A simple game by a simple man.

CARL

" I'm angry and confused because my husband left me and I don't have the time or patience to-

BETH

-I told you I do not discuss my personal life with strangers and you don't know if I was ever married or not!

CARL

Your ring.

BETH
My what?

CARL
Your ring.

BETH
I don't wear a ring!

CARL
I know ... But you used to The fade mark ... You can still see it ... Ever so slightly ...

Beth steps away caressing her ring finger.

BETH
Would you believe I was one of those girls who couldn't wait to get married? All I wanted since a very young age, all I could ever think about, was my wedding day. A small, beautiful church with soft organ music playing on a perfect spring day. My girlfriends watch as I walk down the aisle with the one they all wanted to marry but could never get. My dad relieved and smiling so proud. Mom's parents, so sweet. An ex-boyfriend who's still close to the family wishing us all the luck in the world knowing it could have or maybe even should have been him up there. My dress? Strapless but tasteful and not too revealing. That was it. That was all. That was the fantasy. And then came reality. When I was little, every little girls dream imaginable floated around in my head. From wanting to be a ballerina to the Queen of France. My mother, a very encouraging woman, made sure of it. The imagined world of a six year old created by a woman whose dreams for her daughter were the only thing she had." To be the Queen of France, you must marry into royalty. To be a ballerina you must learn to float on air, to fly. For a doctor, only the very best and most reputable university. Do you know what it's like to live with those kind of expectations hanging over you? When I was little I simply wanted to run and play and dress up my dolls and maybe get a card from cutest boy on Valentine's Day. I wasn't looking to conquer the world. All I wanted to do was live in it like any other six year old. Well look at me now Mother. Are you proud? I'm no one's royal mistress and I'm not a dancing whore. Poor as a church mouse yes but not a whore. Well here she is. Here I am Mother in all my glory. Forcing myself up and out of bed each day drifting through life with a pasted on smile and a cheap pair of knock off Gucci's shoes and all because you said I could.

Beth breaks down. After a moment she recovers.

BETH
Mr. Denison. Is it Mr. Denison? I have to apologize to you.

CARL
Yes it is and no you don't.

BETH
It wasn't very professional of me to be so ...

CARL
I accept.

BETH
Unprofessional. It won't happen again.

CARL
Then I don't accept.

BETH
Excuse me?

CARL
I don't accept.

BETH
What don't you accept? You have to accept.

CARL
I most certainly do not.

BETH
But you already did.

CARL
The apology yes but that it won't happen again, no.

BETH
(aside)
I must be out of my mind.

CARL
I wouldn't say that.

BETH
You don't know me well enough to disagree.

CARL
Do you realize how close we just came?

BETH
I'm way ahead of you.

CARL
No. Close to breaking through.

BETH

Through to what?

CARL

And I don't even know your name.

Beth points to her name tag.

CARL

Give me a break. I know that's not you.

BETH

Why would you doubt that this is my name?

CARL

I'm not stupid you know.

BETH

I didn't say that you were.

CARL

No but you're implying that I might be rounding the corner. Fine.

Carl peers at her name tag.

CARL

Claire. Claire? Ms. Claire from Delaware I do declare. Any last name Ms. Claire?

BETH

Johnson.

CARL

Johnson?!

BETH

That's right!

CARL

Oh I think you could have been a little bit more creative than Johnson. What did you pull that one out of a hat next to Smith, Clark and Jones? Do you have a middle name Ms. Claire Johnson?

BETH

Beth.

CARL

Wow! I had a girlfriend named Beth once.

BETH

Good for you.

CARL

Beth Smith.

BETH

I like the name Smith. It's very non-complicated.

CARL

Almost as common and uncomplicated as Johnson.

BETH

So what are you saying?

CARL

I'm not saying anything you haven't said already.

BETH

Meaning?

CARL

Meaning I cannot believe that you're going to let something as simple as your name stop us from having a meaningful conversation!

BETH

What makes you think that any conversation we ever have is going to be meaningful?

CARL

You know I'm leaving here soon, right?

BETH

Right.

CARL

So I thought we'd at least try to go out on a more positive note.

BETH

Meaningful does not necessarily mean positive.

CARL

My god!

BETH

What?!

CARL

It's all about attitude with you isn't it?

BETH

And this, this here is supposed to be meaningful conversation? What makes you such an authority on me anyway?

CARL

You dislike your job, you're lonely and the starry eyed, big dreaming, people person your mother saw in you is coming out to play sooner or later.

BETH

I wouldn't hold your breath.

Carl inhales deeply and holds his breath.

BETH

Come out to play-And what makes you so sure?

CARL

Because she's out right now and she doesn't even know it yet and that's what makes it so sad. She's playing a game she used to play a long time ago. It's a game of chance really. On one hand she's aggressive. Competitive to the point of being downright selfish. She plays to win because it's in her nature. But it's risky because no one ever taught her the rules. She may unintentionally offend the one she was not meant to offend and that person may step out of the game and out of her life forever. She now blames herself of course for this but it is by no means her fault. It never was. She doesn't realize this and this ignorance and innocence keeps her angry. Upstairs in her bedroom after school she plays dolls with a new friend. She got the dolls for her birthday and that makes them hers. She explains the house rules of play to her new friend as best she can and that any deviation from these rules means that playtime is over. The new friend cannot help but break the rules because there are far too many for even a grown adult to keep track of. The new friend walks home by herself alone and in tears. This is where unfair competition was born. And it survives to this day. On the other hand she is still young at heart and passive nevertheless. She still wants and needs for someone to listen. It's now past her bed time. Upstairs in her room huddled under Raggedy Anne and Andy Sheets, harsh hushed words downstairs quickly give way to yelling. A loud crash breaks a momentary lull shattering something once made of glass. And then silence. Before long, the arguing starts all over again. She begins talking quietly to a one-eyes teddy bear named Chicklet. Everything is going to be all right now because this was where passive denial was born. And it too survived. On both hands, she is like the potential mother. Cautious and caring to the point of loving things outside of herself but not yet ready or wise enough to be.

Pause.

CARL

All I asked you was your name.

BETH

Why?

CARL

We don't know any strangers once we've got a name. You wouldn't share your life with a complete stranger and neither would I.

BETH

And if I tell you my name, my real name, then we'd no longer be ...

CARL/BETH

Strangers.

BETH

Sounds too simple to be true.

CARL

Friendship is a simple thing.

BETH

How do I know that I can trust you?

CARL

You don't. You're going to have to trust yourself.

BETH

And you? What about you? Do you trust me?

CARL

I don't think I have a choice.

BETH

(removing her nametag)
I could be suspended.

CARL

What are you doing?

BETH

What does it look like I'm doing?

CARL

Consider it a long overdue vacation.

BETH

I wonder if they could actually fire me for something like this?

CARL

A blessing in disguise.

Beth pins her nametag to Carl's shirt.

BETH
Let me ask you something.

CARL
Shoot.

BETH
How did you know?

CARL
I didn't. I was bluffing.

BETH
Why am I not surprised to hear that. So now what Mr. Carl Lloyd Dennison?

CARL
Now Mary Beth Lord we try and figure out why you and this Claire Johnson woman have the same middle name.

Beth crosses and smells Carl's spring daisies.

CARL
Do you like flowers Ms. Lord?

BETH
Please ... Beth. I do. I see them around in passing. At a shop, in the park or a neighbor's yard maybe. They're everywhere if you take the time and look. I just don't care so much to get them, you know, as a gift. Does that make sense?

CARL
No, not really.

BETH
I just don't care for them as a gift as say other girls might.

CARL
Still not getting' it.

BETH
Stop.

CARL
You're not like the other girls.

BETH

I don't know whether to hug you or hit you.

CARL

You have a hard time with that don't you?

BETH

A hard time with what?

CARL

Accepting things.

BETH

Flowers as a gift maybe but otherwise, no not really.

CARL

I meant compliments.

BETH

I take compliments very well thank you very much. I mean in today's fast, cold, impersonal-

CARL

-Miserable.

BETH

Yes and miserable stuff your face in a book (Smart phone), turn the other cheek kind of world who wouldn't?

CARL

But they're flowers.

BETH

And like I said, I like them but to receive them as a gift, well, that's something I really don't care for.

CARL

No sir-ree, not like the other girls at all.

BETH

Guess not.

CARL

You can't be allergic with the way you've got them up under your nose like that.

BETH

Let's just say they leave a bad taste in my mouth.

CARL

Well you're supposed to admire them not eat them.

BETH

Really?!

Beth feigns eating some of the spring daises with a smirk.

CARL

Yeah. I think it's on the warning label somewhere. That's what I've heard anyway.

BETH

You're calling me stupid.

CARL

No.

BETH

But you're implying that I might be.

CARL

Not at all.

Beth crosses to a nearby window and crosses her arms.

BETH

My ex used to give me flowers. On the second Tuesday of every month since the day we met. It was one of those things he did.

CARL

And flowers remind you of him.

BETH

Of a time yes. They would come to the door on every second Tuesday of the month. It was always the same terribly shy, young delivery guy with the red hair and really nice dimples. Same light blue van would pull up the driveway with the big smiling flower and dancing bumblebee painted on the side. What was the name? But something was different this time. It was so subtle. Like a déjà vu but with your eyes closed. And then it hit me. Why was I cleaning out the fish tank on a Tuesday? I always clean the fish tank on Thursday but here were my once a month flowers coming up the driveway and always on a Tuesday. So now things start jumping out at me as if something was trying to tell me something about something and so I start listening. I do. For the first time in a long time I began to listen. It was like this level of clarity crept up and smacked me right upside the head for the first time snapping me out of whatever suburban induced trance I was mired in. The date on the morning paper, the fact we had pizza the night before because we have pizza every Wednesday for dinner and the call that came from my sister that morning, always on Thursday morning. And then I saw the calendar on the wall. First time I ever "really" noticed it. My husband's two o'clock dentist appointment

today with the date circled in red. It was Thursday and I wasn't crazy after all. He always had his dentist appointment on a Thursday. The flowers came on a Thursday and not on a Tuesday as they should have. His dentist appointment on the calendar circled in red. It's a dentist appointment! Get over it! And then the strangest thing happened. A fish, one of his fish jumped right out of the fish tank and onto the floor. It was one of the bigger fish, one of his favorites, one he actually named. Oscar I think it was. Who gives a fish a name besides children of divorce and old maids? So this poor fish, this fish named Oscar is flopping around on the floor and I remember standing there just watching him. I was watching him bounce around flipping this way and that like the floor underneath him was on fire as if even a moments' pause meant life or death. He eventually tired and finally stopped moving and I remember still watching him as he just laid there on his side struggling for air, trying to breathe with his tiny pursed lips going in and out and in and out...and it's actually calming me down. I don't remember how long I just stood there...watching him ... but I eventually moved and scooped him up and plopped him back into the tank. He hit the water and I remember there was this pause. It was a small piece of a crucial moment where he was caught between knowing and not knowing that he was back in the water and in a safe place that was literally going to keep him alive. The knowing part took over and he darted off and hid behind a plant realizing how close to the end he just came. I went into the kitchen to grab a towel for whatever Oscar's little dance had left behind there on the floor and that was when something told me to go back into the living room and look at the little greeting card that came with my flowers. It had little bubble blowing tropical fish on it. My husband Alex knew how fond I was of seagulls so the little greeting card that came with my flowers usually had something to that effect but never tropical fish which was something he was fond of. When I pulled the card from within the flowers I didn't even need to open the tiny envelope the card came in. The name written on it by perhaps by the shy, young red headed boy with the dimples or maybe someone else at the flower shop taking orders from over the phone told me everything I began to fear since the moment that light blue van pulled up in my driveway on a Thursday. And then the dentist appointments on the calendar made the moment that much more so. The envelope gave me her name. That was only a small part of it, a name. But now the calendar was there and it was going back a year showing me in big red circles, telling me how often little Oscar felt like jumping out of his fish tank in a fitted panic! When I called the dentist they said Alex didn't have a two o'clock appointment today and that they hadn't seen him in over a year. When I thanked the woman and hung up I went over to the calendar there on the wall. It was a sport fishing calendar I'd gotten for Alex the previous Christmas. I started flipping back through the months and began counting as those little red circles jumped out at me. I counted fourteen in all. A couple of the months had more than one little red circle. They were all listed as dentist appointments and all circled in red and all on a Thursday. So there are two things I'm not really looking all that much forward too. Flowers at my funeral and dying on a Thursday...

Pause.

CARL

Do me a favor? In my nightstand there's an envelope.

Beth opens the drawer and pulls out a shiny, metallic envelope.

CARL
That's it.

BETH
What is it?

CARL
An envelope.

BETH
Where did you get it?

CARL
In the mail.

Beth gives him a tired look.

CARL
China.

BETH
You know people in China?

CARL
I have a step-sister who was there during the Tiananmen Square protests.

BETH
The massacre.

CARL
She's a photographer.

BETH
My god, I forgot all about that. When was that?

CARL
June 4th, 1989. The military detained most of the students who survived the massacre. They ended up settling on the cages at the city zoo. It was the only available and large enough holding facility to hold that many people.

BETH
So many people died that day.

CARL
The wounded were put in with the Timberwolves.

BETH

What?!

CARL

Timberwolves prefer to eat prey that they actually kill themselves. The dead were put in with the hyenas. Hyenas aren't so picky. They pack hunt if they have to but they'll pretty much eat anything dead or alive. One boy refused to bow to an officer so they shot him dead right where he was standing and tossed him in with the lions.

BETH

Please, stop.

CARL

Sorry. My step-sister saw most of it firsthand and said a lot of what really happened that day was all right there in the letter.

Beth puts the letter aside.

BETH

Nobody deserves to die like that.

CARL

Does anyone deserve to die before their time?

BETH

How did your step-sister witness all of this?

CARL

All good photo journalists rely on tips. After finding out that this was where the protesters were being held she also found out that a small stream that winds through the zoo's grounds was the only way in. She waded her way quietly upstream from the entrance of the zoo under the cover of darkness. She could hear whistles blowing and people screaming off in the distance ahead. Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed something was moving with her along one of the river banks. When she turned to look she could see the silhouette of a soldier with his helmet strapped tight and his weapon held at the ready. She froze in her tracks and that's when she saw the glow of his cigarette slowly and gently light up his face. Her instincts kicked in and told her that under water was probably the safest and only place to go so with a big breath under she went. She said that the first few seconds underwater were the most terrifying and most exhilarating moments of her life waiting for the bullets. But they never came. When she finally had to surface she decided that a big entrance was the way to go and might surprise whoever might be waiting on the bank long enough for her to plead for him not to shoot or at least startle him long enough for her to run off into the night. So crashing back to the surface and at the top of whatever air she had left in her lungs she screams out SAN YUT FI LOK!

BETH

San what?

CARL

San yut fi lok! San yut fi lok! Happy birthday!

BETH

Happy birthday?!

CARL

It's the only Chinese she knows!

BETH

Happy Birthday!

CARL

And the real gift of it was that whoever was there on the river bank was gone.

BETH

What happened to the soldier?

CARL

Gone.

BETH

That cigarette saved her life.

CARL

First time for everything ...

BETH

My god ...

CARL

Once she felt that it was okay to do so she continued upstream. There were sirens going off up ahead and this made for pretty good cover. She approached an open, well-lit area up ahead and exited the water to move in for a closer look. She could hear voices now. The students were praying. She crawled up as quietly and slowly as she could until she had a clear view of the open area ahead. The students were corralled inside of what looked like a holding area for chimpanzees. Two armed guards were stationed outside of the cage. One shouted at the students to be quiet and to stop praying. They didn't stop. There was a quick exchange of what sounded like heated words between the two guards and that's when the first guard dropped his head and the second guard raised his rifle and fired a single shot into the crowd. Everyone dropped to the ground except for this one girl. She paused and reached up to touch the back of her head but began to pitch forward realizing that most of it had been blown clear off. She was dead before she hit the ground. That was when the praying stopped and there was this brief moment of silence interrupted only by the far off howl of some nocturnal exhibit off at the other end of the zoo. Off in the distance there came more sirens and the echo of gunfire. That's when the guards responded to a call over a radio, shouted something at the students then quickly turned and ran off down a foot path. As far as I know my step-

sister still has the nightmare. The two guards return as before and it's no longer the Chinese student protesters but my step-sister and every one she's ever known locked up in the cage. Everyone starts praying and that's when the two guards open fire. When the firing stops the girl who was shot from before rushes forward and takes a picture of a body lying on the ground and hands the photo to my step-sister. As the picture starts to develop and come into focus my step-sister sees that it's her lying there on the ground and that's when she wakes up screaming. After the two guards had run off in the direction of the gunfire a young woman no older than nineteen or twenty made her way through the huddling and terrified crowd with this air of confidence about her as if she had accepted this unimaginable fate. She calmly approached the fence, pulled something out from under her tattered and bloodied shirt, slowly handed it through the fence to my step-sister and disappeared back into the crowd. Then there was shouting and sirens and more gunfire coming back up the path toward the caged area and that's when my step-sister turned and ran. She had just made it back into the underbrush for cover when gunfire erupted from behind back at the fence where she was just standing not ten seconds ago. As far as she knows no one survived.

BETH

The girl, what did she hand to your step-sister?

CARL

You're holding it.

Beth looks to the envelope.

CARL

Go ahead, open it.

Beth looks inside the envelope but it's empty.

CARL

You have to unfold it.

Beth looks at him confused.

CARL

Into a letter.

Beth understands and begins unfolding the envelope until it's a flat sheet

CARL

I imagine it's a letter to her family, a sort of goodbye. My sister tried to mail it for her but there was no address. Maybe she didn't have the heart to pain whoever it was written to.

BETH

Carl, this is incredible.

CARL

Smell it.

Beth smells the letter softly and smiles.

CARL
Remind you of anything?

BETH
Easter... when I was a little girl.

CARL
It's a candy bar wrapper.

BETH
It's absolutely priceless.

CARL
Can I ask you for one more favor?

BETH
Sure.

CARL
Read it to me?

BETH
Well the last time I checked I couldn't speak let alone read Chinese.

CARL
No. I meant read it. Read it how you'd want to.

BETH
How I'd want to?

CARL
Whatever you feel it might say.

BETH
I'm not sure I understand what you're asking of me.

CARL
For you.

BETH
For me.

CARL

Have you ever made a choice and said to yourself after the fact, “ I should have done this instead of that or I would give anything to be able to go back and do this instead of that?

BETH

Are you asking me if I have any regrets?

CARL

Do you?

BETH

I think we all have regrets but ...

CARL

Well here’s a chance to stop one before it becomes one.

BETH

I’m not sure I follow.

CARL

We both know what the letter says right?

BETH

I think I have a pretty good idea.

CARL

So what if you read it as if it were something you wrote.

BETH

Something I wrote, to whom?

CARL

Whoever you feel might need writing too.

BETH

Okay, about what exactly?

CARL

It could be about anything. Someone you’ve always wanted to tell something too but for whatever reason you didn’t.

BETH

Or couldn’t.

CARL

Like to a bully back in grade school.

BETH

Tommy Johnson.

CARL

Or a best friend who let a boy come between you.

BETH

Jenny Olson.

CARL

A family member who betrayed.

Beth looks to Carl losing interest. She drops the letter and goes back to her duties.

CARL

The letter, it's just an opportunity Beth and nothing more. You know what to say to him.

BETH

I know what to say to whom?

CARL

To Alex.

BETH

To Al ... I don't have anything to say.

CARL

Not to his face you don't' but that's only because you can't. If he were standing here, here in this room, right here in front of you, you wouldn't confront him.

BETH

I most certainly would.

CARL

So you do have something to say to him.

BETH

No.

CARL

But you would confront him if he were here.

BETH

I might.

CARL

You might because you know you need to but you're not able.

BETH

I'm not able.

CARL

No you're not. But see that's what this letter is. It's a key that unlocks that door and lets you walk right up to him and finally tell him how you feel.

BETH

Tell him how I feel.

CARL

Tell him exactly how you feel without holding back.

BETH

Without holding back.

CARL

Without holding back not for one more second, not one more minute.

BETH

Right.

CARL

Right?!

BETH

All right.

CARL

All right?!

BETH

All right!

CARL

All right!

BETH

... but only on one condition.

Carl pauses suspiciously.

BETH

It's only fair.

Oh no. CARL

It's only fair. BETH

Forget it. CARL

How can you lie there and say that? BETH

No way. CARL

This was your idea. BETH

I was just trying to make conversation. CARL

And we did and I was listening. BETH

You were and thank you. CARL

And I still am Carl, please. BETH

Look this isn't what I had in mind so forget about what I said. CARL

Forget about ... Are you sure? BETH

Positive. CARL

Fine, we'll forget the whole thing. But let me ask you, do you think it would have helped? BETH

Absolutely! CARL

And that I'd be in a better place for at least giving it a try. BETH

CARL

Without a doubt!

BETH

So how can you not want the same thing for yourself?!

CARL

What's the point?!

BETH

I think the point is fairly obvious! Forget about me! Make it count for you. I don't care about keeping score anymore. Do it for you, Carl. Do it for yourself.

Pause.

CARL

Let me ask you something.

Beth moves close to Carl.

CARL

Do you trust me?

BETH

I do.

CARL

And you'll listen to what I say?

BETH

I've been doing all right so far.

CARL

But why bother now? Why should you or anyone believe me now? No one believed me before and that was six years ago.

BETH

It's not for me or for them, Carl. It's too late for that. This? This is for you.

CARL

For me.

BETH

For you, Carl. Before this moment slips away, do it for you.

Carl looks over to his spring daisies.

CARL

All right. But I have one condition of my own.

BETH

And what's that?

CARL

It's that you believe me.

Beth begins to wander the room reading from the letter.

BETH

Dear Alex, I don't have a lot of time to explain everything so please ... I know how hard it was for you to remain perfect in such an imperfect world. I thought we had something special. I thought we became pretty good friends over the years and I always thought that friends treated one another as they themselves would want to be treated. But you my Alex, the man that I loved, you are not my friend and I'm beginning to suspect that you never really were. A part of me has been broken because our love meant so little or perhaps even nothing to you. All I want now is for the hurt to go away. I don't want it lying in wait anymore, hiding in shadow behind beautiful flowers or promising calendars. I'm telling you this now because I can, because I need to and because someone I trust told me as a friend that if I did then things would eventually be okay. I miss you, Alex. I know that sounds ridiculous but it's true, I do. I miss what I thought we had and I miss what we could have had and I'm angry for what we could have become together. I could see it in your eyes the day you left. Your eyes were telling me that you were sorry for what you had done but I wouldn't listen to them. I couldn't. What you saw that day was my anger and my sadness and not my heart. Like a delicate ornament held a little too tight, you broke my heart. Surprised at first perhaps because of your childish and selfish blunder and then waiting for the blood to rise to the surface of your thickening skin and the inevitable stinging pain that follows. Tiny slivers of painted glass embedded in the palm of your hand. Tiny slivers of my heart. Whether or not you ever decide to acknowledge the pain or if you're ever going to accept that responsibility is up to you. I couldn't fully see or understand where the pain was coming from back then but I do now Alex and I want it back. I want my heart back. I want you to stop and I want you to pick it up off the floor and hand it to me. Hand it to me ever so gently Alex and tell me that you're sorry. Tell me that Alex. You owe me at least as much.

Beth walks over to Carl and gives Carl a hug.

BETH

Thank you.

CARL

You should be thanking yourself. All I did was listen.

BETH

That was long overdue, thank you.

Beth crosses and checks herself in a mirror.

CARL

You're welcome.

BETH

My god, look at me. You did this you know.

CARL

You look great.

BETH

Now it's personal. Are you ready?

CARL

Uh ... I don't, I don't know if it's such a good idea for me to-

BETH

-Oh no Mr. No, no, no, no, no, we had a deal!

CARL

I know, I know, I know but it's getting late and I only have-

BETH

-Uh uh uh ...you can start whenever you're ready.

Beth crosses and sits in a chair.

BETH

And if it makes a difference I think you have more spirit, more personality and more kindness than he or anyone will ever know.

Carl gives her a look.

BETH

You're welcome.

CARL

For being so ...

BETH

I know. It's part of the job.

Carl smiles wide but then something overcomes him.

BETH

What?

CARL

Did you know that a body doesn't float in cold water?

BETH

Excuse me?

CARL

A body doesn't float very well in cold water.

BETH

Oh?

CARL

No. The water has to be warm. It's the bacteria in warmer water that generates enough gas to make a body float.

BETH

I, I didn't know that.

CARL

Not a lot of people do.

BETH

But I haven't gone swimming in the dead of winter either so ...

CARL

He had his whole life ahead of him.

BETH

Who did?

Carl drifts off.

BETH

Carl? Who did?

CARL

(In his father's voice)

" Look at you! Barely make it out of high school in one god damn piece. Army won't touch you on the count of your flat faggot feet and I'll be dipped in panther piss if you're gonna wait for me to send you off to some fancy college! You got your whole life ahead of you boy, your whole life n' you're not gonna amount to shit! That's a god damn guarantee ...

BETH

Carl?

The sound of THUNDER can be heard outside.

CARL

They die alone just like the rest of us.

BETH

Carl, who? Who had his whole life ahead of him?

CARL

Ronald.

BETH

Ronald, Ronald who?

CARL

Ronald Cory.

BETH

Who is Ronald Cory?

CARL

(aside)

I had to step up teach that silver spooned, collegiate motherfucker that all that glitters don't turn to gold.

BETH

Carl, what's wrong? What are you talking about?

CARL

(Back in his father's voice)

" College? You're too god damn much of yourself for college! That's something set aside for the rich kids who got something goin' on with their lives. College? That's a laugh and a half! (Carl starts to laugh in his own voice.) And he's laughing. Who's he laughing at? What the hell is so god damn funny? Is he laughing at me? Who knows but he's laughing at the world around him so I make a run at him as fast as I can and I don't even know what I was going to do once I got up to him. Maybe I was hoping that he would stop laughing for a split second to turn and see me coming and maybe charge himself and meet me halfway but no, that never happened. So I'm running at his as fast as I could and now ... now we're falling. We're falling through the air. We're actually falling down through the air and he's falling right there, right next to me. It's pitch black. There was light though. Above us, up on the pier they have those post lights every fifty yards or so but now were falling away from that and it's just black. I can hear the air moving fast, whipping past my face. I smell cologne. He's falling that close to me. It smells expensive, maybe even exclusive ...and sweet. I think I hear the sound of waves crashing below but it's too dark and too cold and we're moving faster and faster and the sound in my ears and the stinging on my face and then ... and then ... surrender. And then we hit the water ... and it burns almost immediately. It burns so fast and so deep and so cold that

the pain of it all just stops. The cold, it just leaves your body. I try to breathe but there's nothing there, nothing going in or out. So I try to swim, to move because I know I'm in the water but I can't. I can't move. Then my head and my face catch fire again. Cold fire. It's quick and it's deep and it's so cold. I can feel pain in my skull. It's a foreign, irrational level of pain. And I taste blood in my mouth. It's the only thing I feel and so I swallow. It's salty and wet and warm. I feel like it's keeping me alive somehow and I swallow again. I feel the tug and pull and the roll of a wave all around me and it just takes me wherever it wants. I'm being propped up now from behind. Somehow under my back there's something holding me up and another wave rolls in and sets me up and out of the water even higher. What just happened here? How did this get so out of control? This wasn't the plan. How did it come to this? It wasn't supposed to happen like this. My god, I can't feel my legs...and then I hear voices. I can't make out what their saying but they sound intense and hurried and then someone pulls me hard and fast by my collar and I'm out of the water. I'm being dragged by my collar up and over these huge rocks. It's getting lighter and lighter all around me as we go. We're moving away from the water. Thank god. Whoever is dragging me along finally reaches flat ground. Then there's a man over me and he's looking off and it looks like he's yelling. I can see his mouth moving but I can't hear what he's saying. He drops down and he's kneeling over me. I ask if the other guy is okay and I think he heard me because he smiled. His hat and coat are caked with frozen lake water and every time he moves little chips of ice crack off and fall on my face. I can't understand why these little chips of ice that are landing on my face feel like their burning me somehow. A woman appears over us and she's on a cell phone and she's moving very fast and pacing, looking this way and that and she keeps leaning in and pulling back and I think she's trying to help and she kept reaching out and clasping this guy by his shoulder like she was trying to make sure, almost reassuring herself that she wasn't dreaming and I'm kind of hoping that this is somehow all just a bad dream. And then it began to snow. Peach colored flakes of snow appear all at once above me crawling out of all that darkness up there falling in slow motion through the sodium light. Way up high, I find a single flake among them, a big one and I lock on it. Like a piece of ash it takes forever for it to drift down and finally hit the ground. I do this over and over again. It's the most relaxed I've ever felt and I know something terrible has just happened and I'm caught up right in the middle of it and all I want to do is stay right here where I'm lying watching these miraculous things of nature coming out of the mystery of all that darkness above because they make it, they make everything look and feel so ...easy. The man kneeling above me and the woman who's still pacing, their faces start to pulse in different colors. There's a lot of this fantastic blue mixed with a tense, almost panicked red and benign white. The lazy sodium lights are no match and my once easy and serene peach colored snowflakes start flashing in this fantastic blue and adrenalin red and simple white and they now look like little falling stars and stripes from an exploded American flag popping and falling in red white and blue. Like the falling flakes, I want to take it slow. I want to back up and re-wind and somehow land with both feet firmly on the ground. If I could do that, if I could stop the lights and stop the rush and even stop the gently falling flakes and feel something, anything besides the burning cold on my face then everything would be okay again. But I couldn't. And the burning didn't stop and the lights didn't stop and it didn't stop snowing for three days and all I could think was ... my god, how I hate winter time in Chicago ...

Pause.

CARL

It wasn't meant to be like this. I wasn't meant to be here.

BETH

What are you trying to tell me?

CARL

The truth!

BETH

About what?

CARL

I want you to believe me!

BETH

I do believe you.

CARL

Stop patronizing me! Jesus Christ! It was an accident!

BETH

You pushed that man in Carl! How is that an accident?!

CARL

Because he wasn't supposed to die! That wasn't supposed to happen!

BETH

Regardless! Whether you meant it or not it happened! He is dead!

CARL

I know what happened! I was there! Stop talking to me like I wasn't there! Please ... If I could take it back I would. Don't you think that I would? But I can't. I can't and there's nothing I can do to change that.

Beth crosses and pick up the letter.

CARL

That won't change anything.

BETH

So tell him that.

CARL

Tell him what?

BETH

You told me yourself it was an accident.

CARL

And you believe me?

BETH

You know I do. And he will to.

CARL

I've already been through this! A thousand times! From the cops to the lawyers to the reporters to the people who should have believed me!

BETH

I know. But it's too late for that, Carl. It's too late. Just believe in yourself. Believe in you.

Carl wants to submit but he chooses to turn away still defeated.

BETH

My, god ... Who on earth did this to you?

CARL

I did it to myself!

BETH

Someone ... family.

CARL

I have no family!

BETH

Your father.

CARL

My father is dead!

BETH

So he can't hurt you anymore can he?

CARL

What are you talking about?

BETH

I believe what you said Carl. I believe what you said about letting go. For me it was about Alex. You showed me it was okay to forgive. And I did. I forgave him. I had to. I had to and so do you whether it matters or not. I forgive you, Carl. And you have every right to forgive yourself. You told me that it was an accident and I believe you. You have to do it Carl. You have to let it go.

How. CARL

Tell me about your father. BETH

He was a hard worker. CARL

What else? BETH

He loved baseball. CARL

No Carl, tell me about "him". BETH

He was a normal guy like any other father. CARL

No such thing. BETH

He worked hard, supported his family and died dirt poor. Oh and he never missed an opportunity to express his love. CARL

Don't. BETH

You wanted to know so I told you. CARL

Don't make this another game Carl, please. You've told me nothing. BETH

He showed us love and protected us- CARL

-Carl- BETH

-when life- CARL

BETH
-forgive-

CARL
-got rough-

BETH
-Carl-

CARL
-and the rough-

BETH
-forgive-

CARL
-got going-

BETH
-FORGIVENESS!

Pause.

CARL
What do you want to hear?

BETH
It's not for me Carl. I don't need to hear anything.

CARL
So why are you asking me?

BETH
Because you, you need to.

CARL
I don't need to hear anything I haven't already heard.

BETH
It's your chance to make it right.

CARL
It was right. It was always all right!

BETH
In your heart Carl.

CARL

My father has nothing to do with my heart.

BETH

But you've always wanted him to.

CARL

I think it's a little too late for that.

BETH

Maybe not just yet but it soon will be.

CARL

It's not my problem.

BETH

Not anymore it doesn't have to be.

CARL

Why can't you see that it's not?!

BETH

Why can't you see that it's all right to at least try?!

CARL

IT'S NOT ALL RIGHT!

Pause.

CARL

IT HAS NEVER BEEN ALL RIGHT! NEVER! I hated him! I hated the fact that he ever existed! He was a drunk. He was a mean and thoughtless drunk. All the time, be it day or night. My mom worked sun up to sun down seven days a week. He liked a clean and orderly house. She didn't want to upset him. She wanted to please him. I came home late one night after my father had already gone out. I found her upstairs in her bedroom. She was putting on makeup and crying to herself, "If I maybe work a little harder, maybe he won't have to hurt me again." Everything changed after that. For some reason he started coming after me and like mom I tried to stop and figure out what I was doing wrong to make him the way he was. I figured it was my grades at school. They started to slip for the first time and they weren't what they used to be. I've always had really good grades but I never got all A's. I came close once. Three A's, two B's, and a D in math. I got a D in math? I, I always loved math and I always did very well in it and I could never, never figure out how I ended up with a D. The numbers, they don't play tricks on you like other subjects might.

BETH

And you got a D.

CARL

I did.

BETH

You were keeping yourself below average on purpose.

CARL

On purpose?

BETH

It gave you your excuse for why he beat you.

CARL

He had reasons to do what he did.

BETH

No.

CARL

Yes.

BETH

Carl, please.

CARL

Yes!

BETH

It was never your fault.

CARL

You don't know that.

BETH

You could have earned all A's and he still would have-

CARL

-No!

BETH

He was in pain.

CARL

Well so was I?

BETH

Yes and that's why he did what he did.

CARL

I made him do it.

BETH

No.

CARL

I did!

BETH

No Carl. He did.

CARL

Me!

BETH

For no reason.

CARL

HE DIDN'T NEED A REASON! He just did it! I loved him! That was my reason!

BETH

And you still do.

A CLOCK BEGINS TO STRIKE 12.

BETH

So let him go Carl. Let him go. Let him and Ronald and yourself go before it's too late.

CARL

Promise ... Promise me one thing?

Beth moves closer to him.

CARL

Promise that you'll come and visit me when I get out.

BETH

I promise.

BACKDROP. NEWSPAPER HEADLINE. State to execute Paraplegic. The SOUND OF PROTESTING MOB and SIRENS rise up. LIGHTS FADE and COME UP. We see Beth and Carl's silhouettes. Beth administers IV drip into Carl's arm. She steps back and reluctantly reaches for the valve. THE CLOCK STRIKES 12. A section of the audience is ILLUMINATED as witnesses.

VOICE (V.O)

Carl Lloyd Denison Jr. you have been found guilty of the charge of murder in the first degree by a jury of your peers within a court in good standing within the state of Illinois.

You have been sentenced to die by lethal injection. Do you have anything to say on your behalf before this sentence is carried out?

CARL

My flowers ... did you see them? They're spring daisies I think. To tell you the truth, I don't even know if they're for me ...

SOUND of a HEARTBEAT.

VOICE (V.O)

May god have mercy on your soul.

Beth opens the valve. The HEART BEAT quickens.

CARL

Today went by so fast ... didn't it?

The HEARTBEAT slows. Beth leans in close to Carl's ear.

BETH

(In a whisper)

I love you ...

Beth pauses for a beat then exits the stage. The HEARTBEAT GOES INTO FLATLINE. FLATLINE CONTINUES then STOPS ABRUPTLY.

BETH (V.O.)

Thank you Carl Lloyd Denison Jr.

CARL (V.O.)

No Mary Beth Lord Jones Claire Johnson Smith ... thank you.

FADE OUT

FADE UP

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM – FOLLOWING MORNING

SOUND OF MORNING BIRDS. Beth enters with fresh sheets. She stops and closes her eyes feeling the room. After a beat she places the sheets on the bed. She notices the vase that held Carl's spring daisies is empty. She takes a mental note and exits.

EXT. CEMETARY – LATER

A lone Headstone. The SOUND OF THUNDER. Beth in a raincoat approaches and stops. She carries an umbrella.

BETH

Well ... I kept my promise. You're finally out and so here I am. Moving forward. Moving on. Letting go. The things that happened, the things in your life maybe didn't turn out the way you wanted them to. Or perhaps the way they could have. I just wanted to say ... well ... you knew what I wanted to say to you all along ... didn't you? I'll miss you Carl ... more than you'll ever know ...

SOUND OF THUNDER CONTINUES. Now STEADY RAIN. Beth opens her umbrella and huddles under it for a moment then peers skyward holding out a hand to the rain. She closes the umbrella and places it against the headstone, turns her face up to the falling rain. She smiles and looks down to the headstone and then skyward again. MUSIC COMES UP SLOW THE BUILDS.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM – FOLLOWING DAY

Beth enters with a handful of fresh spring daisies. She places them in the vase on the windowsill and exits with a confidence, strength and new sense of things.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END