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Love and Loss and Cake for Breakfast

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Love and Loss and *Cake for Breakfast*

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Sydnee Nicole Kenny

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2022

The midnight moon, it glows
This letter don't say it all, it's too much to enclose
Life is so easy now
Everything is working out

-The Walkmen

Acknowledgments

To my advisor, Daaimah Mubashshir:

Thank you for all the guidance, laughter, and suggestions.

To Miriam Felton-Dansky:

Thank you for the encouragement and care in my earlier years at Bard.

To Nilaja Sun:

Thank you for reminding me to take up space and breathe out loud.

To Jen Lown and Jack Ferver:

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To Nick, Maya, Azalea, Audrey, and Allie:

Thank you for lending me your generosity and your brilliance.

To my loved ones back home:

Thank you for helping me grow.

To my loved ones here:

Thank you for helping me change.

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Introduction

In the name of honesty, an academic lens does not feel fitting for this reflection. I didn't find it suitable for my project, either. But I will do my best.

It is no secret that tragedy has befallen the world at a global scale, and does so continuously, but I didn't want to dwell on the overlying hardships of the current moment. Writing about a pandemic and the heartbreak that comes with it did not sound appealing, and honestly was not on my mind when I considered grief as a topic. Thereby ruling out absolute, true devastation as my inspiration, I turned the scope to the informal world of personal life. Since our everyday lives exist in the wake of Great Loss, Small Loss felt more palatable. When dreaming of this play, I initially imagined using scientific literature (psychology journals, to be specific), to inform the portrayal of grief, but a clinical representation felt too sterile, given the highly personal and emotional tone of the story. So, I opted against using these kinds of resources.

Looking back to the earlier years of my education at Bard, before and regardless of the pandemic, I realized that every moment was steeped in grief. Preexisting mental health issues reared their ugly heads. Demise loomed like a hard deadline; no pun intended. However, it wasn't until last year, when I lost my grandfather and a friend lost their mother, that I was able to acknowledge this truth. I wrote a play in Intermediate Playwriting, under the tutelage of Nilaja Sun, about a spirit who discovered that he had been gone from the world longer than he initially believed, and couldn't bear the thought of being forgotten. This occurred as he realized that he could feel his understanding of his own personhood slipping away. Loss of identity, of the self, is still loss, but it isn't mourned; it may consume every conscious moment, but it isn't talked about. While the largest grief may only manifest in the smallest of ways, that doesn't make it any less

severe. With these sentiments in mind, I decided to follow the Five Stages of Grief structure with both criticism and reflection.

Thought Process

In the panic of accepting that I had to complete two completely separate, completely different senior projects, I was afraid of the daunting workload ahead of me. I wanted to collaborate with a peer so that I wouldn't feel so isolated in the experience, but it wasn't meant to be. Since I had no particular interest in directing or acting, Miriam's suggestion of just writing a longer piece felt the most compelling. As the due date for project-idea submissions approached, I realized that I could finally give time to something I had been putting off for the sake of academic endeavors. The characters already lived in my head and were dying to breathe their first breaths, so I figured there's no time like the present.

The Five Stages of Grief, proposed by the now-famous psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, were originally meant to describe the process that terminally ill patients go through when considering their mortality. This has since been adopted by colloquial thought and popular culture to reflect upon any kind of grief, such as the termination of a relationship or (most commonly) the death of a loved one, and is almost always thought to progress linearly in the order of Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Even without the intended circumstance, anyone who has undergone a process of mourning would recognize that linear progression is not befitting. However, I wanted to follow the classic DABDA timeline in a way that recognizes the faults in this strict form of the model. While the central character, Greene Sapp, may technically be in the "anger" stage according to the model, she can also be denying or depressive—they don't have to be mutually exclusive, and often are not. Additionally, the

second act serves as a mirror image of the first, moving through the stages in opposite order (starting with Acceptance, and ending in Denial); I chose to do so because I believe that regression is also normal when in mourning. And, since the play ends as it began, it can also be implied that grief is cyclical.

Greene clearly experiences the Five Stages, even though her grief remains unnamed. I wanted to align her process with the model's original intent, meaning that she is in some way facing her own mortality, *not* projecting the terminality of someone else's condition onto her own mental state. In other words, she's not grieving the death of anyone, but rather mourning her sense of self. In the world of the play, it is heavily implied that she ended up killing herself, but in my mind's eye, it's more symbolic than literal suicide. She states her case of weariness about the monotony that has become her, showing a strong desire to do—or be—something else. Since the latter two acts are shown out of chronological order, the audience's understanding of the situation might be subverted. Ultimately, in the play's last moments, we see her return to her customary spot on the sofa; there is specifically no depiction of self-harm or destructive behavior, allowing for the exact circumstances of Greene's "leaving" to be open-ended. The second act shows Greene's friends in the aftermath of act three's events, adopting the more colloquial use of the Five Stages, where loved ones process a loss. I wanted to capture the reality of grief's effect on the people around me more authentically, so while it is most obvious that Zinnia, Greene's closest friend, is experiencing the stages, it is important to note that Arthur and Casey are also along for the ride; it doesn't look the same for each of them because everyone grieves differently.

Writing Process

The original concept of this project looked quite different, structurally. In the first stages of ideation, pre-proposal, what is now the third act was going to be the second act, preceding an intermission. What excited me about this format was the vision of a main character just walking off the stage, directly after gushing all of this extremely saddening and personal information, and never returning. Another way in which my initial thoughts diverged from the final product was that I wanted to literally have the second (or, then, third) act be a reflection of the first, subsequently without the main character. To me this meant that the same lines would be repeated, by the same characters, in reverse order while also leaving gaps where Greene originally spoke, resulting in an absolute jumble of a dialogue. A scrambled egg of a conversation felt suitable for a play about grief, since it isn't rational and oftentimes doesn't make sense. I did play with this dialogue structure a little bit, but eventually I found myself too fond of the characters' rapport to continue with it. It also felt too messy for a script of this length.

After I scrapped that "draft," I considered another alternative where the stages would appear out of order in the second large act, and in this iteration, there would be six characters: Greene (or this version of her) and then five friends who each brought with them a new stage; as they left, they would take their representative stage with them. This rendition was ruled out much more quickly than the previous one, as I realized that that wasn't particularly appealing to me for depicting grief. It would be like using people to explicitly represent each of the seven deadly sins—cliche and uninteresting. And, as I stated before, the characters that I ultimately kept in the script were already formed and dear to me. Adding more into the mix felt disingenuous. I also have a tendency to keep my casts small, as in two to three people, so just keeping the characters I

wanted to write instead of creating superfluous representations for the sake of a “complete set” was an easy choice to make.

After weeding out all of those preliminary ideas from the garden of creativity, the current structure of the piece felt incredibly natural and I was surprised that it hadn’t occurred to me first. That being said, I did mention a simplified version of the original structure (where the current third act would be in the middle instead of the end) to Daaimah; this simplified version did not include the reversed dialogue aspect. Together we decided that the current form was the more exciting option of the two. From there, everything else seemed to fall into place.

Stylistically, I wanted to create a piece that felt conversational without sacrificing some theatrical devices—I don’t know about you, but I don’t exactly deliver monologues while addressing my friends. Sometimes people use the not-quite-right word for something. Sometimes close groups of people meld their vernacular together, resulting in the overuse of words or topics. Finding the balance between the two approaches actually felt really exciting instead of being a tremendous challenge. My main concern overall, actually, was having the humorous moments fall flat.

The dialogue reflects the way I interact with close companions, shifting from serious tones to witty remarks and back again within thirty seconds. I think there is room for sadness in humor, just as I think there can be humor in sadness. Of course, I might think something is funny, but it’s hard to know if that will translate for others; that was a point of anxiety for me. However, I have been fortunate enough to work with several kind, brilliant actors to hear the dialogue spoken as it’s written, and I found that most of the jokes land when/how I intended, as do the emotional beats, even with little-to-no direction on my part. I must say, this was a relief. It

suggests to me that the writing, as it currently exists, can stand on its own without needing the playwright's specific input, which is really all we can hope for sometimes.

It is important to note that, while in the process of writing this script, I was assigned some readings by Daaimah: *Good Grief* by Ngozi Anyanwu; *generations* by debbie tucker green; and *Heart's Desire* by Caryl Churchill. While I don't think I deliberately wrote my play as a response to any of these works, the conversation between them exists. For example, the first idea that I mentioned was done away with long before I read any of these other plays, but the dialogue structure would have paired nicely with both tucker green and Churchill's approaches to the topic of grieving/missing someone; overlapping and repeating dialogue that continues without key figures, altering the message or the feeling in some way. I have been exposed to Churchill's work for many years, and though she is not typically who I am most drawn to as a playwright, I imagine that her characteristic voice influenced my thoughts subconsciously. In Anyanwu's character descriptions, she notes that N's brother (BRO) is a wannabe philosopher, something that comes up in my play when discussing Arthur. Again, I didn't intend to create the parallel because I had created and written for Arthur before reading this script, but I find it fascinating that we both were intent on forming masculine characters who were drawn to this discipline somehow. And I'd like to think that mine is a "best friend play," too.

Characters and Their Development

With something as intimate as the grief I wanted to portray, it may come as no surprise that I drew inspiration for the characters' personalities and mannerisms from myself as much as I drew from my loved ones. This is not to say that any one character is based on any one of my friends, they are amalgamations made up of traits I recognize within myself paired with some

external influences. There were times when characters wanted to speak with their own voices, so in those moments, the roles would flip and I became them. Not everything everyone says is something I personally believe, but they do, and it wouldn't be a work of fiction if there weren't times like these. There is an obvious need for keeping the distinction between the writer and the writing clear, but regardless, sometimes it felt wrong to write these things anyway.

In a lot of ways, Casey was the hardest character for me to write. She is crucial to the story, but she also reflects parts of myself (and my loved ones) that I don't necessarily want to align with. *I* was the friend who moved away, and when something big and terrible happened back home during my first semester here, I blamed myself for it. That feeling is not one that I care to tap into very often, it was painful and still catches me off guard on occasion. She also has faults that I have seen and been hurt by. For example, ignoring someone who was once a huge part of her life while not extending the same treatment to the others. Of course, Greene touches on the point of contention very briefly, and audiences are able to infer that Casey is not entirely to blame; there was already some tension bubbling under the surface of their relationship, even before she severed the lines of communication. Casey is physically and emotionally the most distant of the four. She is a manifestation of guilt, but not the *embodiment* of guilt. I don't think of her as the villain of the story, nor even a true antagonist. She has justified anger and heartache, but we don't get to know her innermost thoughts like some of the other characters. Her time is cut short. I found it difficult to not over-explain where she is coming from, mentally.

While I've been focusing on her cons, Casey does have many redeeming qualities that should not be discounted. She calls people out on their bullshit and advocates for herself, things I wish I could do more often. She is also convivial and has a big heart, even if she doesn't always wear it on her sleeve—that shouldn't paint her as the bad guy, though it would be so easy to see

her that way. I always want to treat my femme characters with kindness, and Casey is no exception. In the earlier days of development, Casey was preceded by a non-binary character, Juno, who would have served the same kind of divisive role. I realized as I worked on the second act that I had been writing Juno as a woman, not a non-binary person. It felt wrong and inauthentic to keep the same name and identity merely for ease. Thus, Casey was born. However, as noted in my script, this doesn't mean that a non-binary actor could not portray her, and equity should be kept in mind when casting for every role.

Arthur was, for lack of a better word, the most fun character to write for. When writing masculine characters, I tend to make them less than empathetic, creepy, or just downright unpleasant. I didn't want to do this with him. I wanted someone three-dimensional and sweet and amusing without relying on misogyny as his source material; mainly because I don't believe Greene, Zinnia, and Casey would hang out with someone who acts so grossly, but also because I didn't feel like marinating in that kind of creation. Men should be able to have roles that don't revolve around them being conniving bastards or rugged heroes; there should be soft options for them as well, and I wanted to write someone softer. He gets to be emotionally supported *and* supportive, he can admit when he's wrong, and he doesn't feel othered by his femme companions. He is both silly and protective, two characteristics I don't feel are paired together very often. Additionally, there is not really an air of romantic attraction on his part, he isn't pursuing any of his friends nor are they pursuing him. I don't think platonic relationships between men and women get represented enough in media, even though they exist quite commonly in real life. In my mind, he and Zinnia were actually the first of the group to be friends, pre-adolescence.

While I don't think his part in the story is nearly as complex as Casey's, Arthur doesn't lack importance or inner depth. He knows his role in the group is often one of comedic relief, or perhaps he inserts himself into that niche—either way, he accepts this title with gusto. He has a sarcastic yet dopey air about him, despite the clear emotional intelligence he exhibits throughout the play; he cares deeply for the women around him even when, admittedly, they aren't very close. I have a lot of respect for this character: an homage to my brothers in some ways, and a reflection of my own masculinity in others. Perhaps that is why he was so fun to write.

While it was not a conscious decision, I think my preference (or, rather, affinity) for Zinnia is a prominent part of the piece. Greene is obviously the central character of the plot, but Zinnia simply refused to be overshadowed. She is often passive and gentle, which may be a source of my favoritism—I always gravitate to the tenderhearted. She is so thoughtful in the way she speaks; she has the voice I wish I could use. Initially, her character was heavily based on a couple of my friends, who are more tough-love types, but she quickly became someone else entirely. In her character description, I chose the words “chameleon, empath” very easily. Zinnia could be friends with anyone, see the good in everyone. Even in the second act, after the most important person in her life decided to leave in a despairing way, Zinnia defends her with all she has. She doesn't blame Greene; she doesn't want to mar the love she has for her. She doesn't want to see Greene, someone who was very obviously suffering, in a negative light. Casey calls Greene selfish, and Zinnia shuts her down immediately. It isn't always easy to defend the person who shakes your world with their absence, but Zinnia is so fiercely loyal that she doesn't skip a beat. She is the support we all wish we had, and for the lucky few, the companion we fear to lose.

Though religious trauma is not an intended theme of the play, nor a theme from my own life, something felt so profoundly spiritual about Zinnia. I have known many people who grew up in strict religious environments and have done so much work to build themselves outside of that. It is something so alien to me, but I wanted to incorporate the pride I hold for those who have done so, even if it's just brought to the foreground for a moment. Removing oneself from the religion of childhood upbringing almost always comes with estrangement in some form, yet the individuals who do so come out the other side with undeniable altruism and strength, on their own terms. That being said, I didn't want to make Zinnia's grocery store outburst an anti-religion statement; they are all very complicated systems that provide support to some and harm to others. At that moment of calamity, when she is feeling lonely and devastated, it isn't a positive or negative point that she reflects on the comfort once provided by faith. Speaking of spirituality, and not just in a lame attempt to segue, even her name has specific significance. I was bemoaning the lack of diversity in flower-themed names, as one does, and thought the word zinnia sounded like a perfect name. In fact, there was no question in my mind that her name was Zinnia. Later, out of curiosity, I looked into the language of flowers to see if zinnias meant anything. Turns out that in Victorian floriography, zinnias symbolize thoughts of an absent friend and/or lasting affection. It was as though the stars aligned because she was just meant to be a Zinnia. Or I am a genius. Who's to say?

At last, we have Greene. I think I have placed a lot of her cards on the table already. Maybe they're my cards, too. So much of her lives in me, so much of me lives in her. She's a darker truth that I have been able to stave off, but I don't really want to divulge the more intimate specifics. This is not a psychology paper, I am not a psychologist, and this is not a case study examining my own mental wellbeing. That being said, I do not wish to alarm anyone, I am doing

alright. Greene is just a fictional character, not an autobiographical one. As stated previously, the grief Greene feels is for her lost sense of self. This lost self is dying, and she is in mourning. Whatever, or whoever, she “kills” is sacrificed to make room for someone new. There are shadows of how she used to be lurking behind her apathetic facade. Her home used to be the hangout spot, she felt central and crucial in the group’s ecosystem. Despite that, however, Greene never considered herself to be the keystone in the group dynamic. She has been close with Zinnia for a long time, and thus friends with Arthur by default. She was obviously close with Casey at one point but, for a long time, felt as though Casey shut her out unjustly. However, from an outside perspective, you could see that some of her isolation is self-inflicted. She doesn’t leave the house, she doesn’t always allow herself to let her friends know how she feels, and she doesn’t exactly reach out either. Maybe she felt rejected at some point in the past, and this is how she overcorrects, but it’s a bit of a Chicken or the Egg kind of situation: does she act like this because she feels like her friends don’t want to interact with her, or do her friends act the way they do because they think that she doesn’t want to interact with them? I don’t think there’s a clearcut answer to this question, but they’re both probably a little truthful.

Greene was the first to exist. The name Greene Sapp haunted me for a while. I knew she would be weirdly obsessed with the distinction between “sofa” and “couch,” it was actually one of the first things I knew about her. Then she lived with me for months. I didn’t know where to put her, but she became a lot of things. A poet. A musician. A vegetarian. These facets of her eventually dwelled underneath the surface, I think, but before then I knew she had to become a person beyond them. Once I found Zinnia, however, I knew exactly who Greene needed to be. Their dynamic as a duo was so clear to me, the rest just filled in around them. I wrote the play for the characters, not the other way around.

Because the plot and dialogue are so character-driven, I didn't want to write conversations that were "older" than the people having them. By this I mean that each of them are in their early twenties, they are still very young and have generally lived comfortable lives. There might be anguish and rage residing within them, but not the kind that is consequential of injustice and tragedy that more established adults may have faced at one point. Of course, I am still very young and am chock full of anguish and rage, but it is youthful and spritely. It is not the anguish of my grandmother, it is not the rage of my mother...I am not privy to that yet.

The Reading

I was extremely hesitant about, and almost resistant to, the idea of hosting a reading. I did not want to make a big fuss about my project, let alone have an entire event dedicated to it where I would have to be the center of attention. As ironic as it may sound coming from someone who would love to pursue playwriting, I absolutely cannot stand having other people reading my writing, or at least being confronted with the fact that they are. The playwriting courses I have taken during my time here have been some of my favorites, but when I am the one under the microscope, it is very uncomfortable for me. I fear that everyone is judging me as a person based on my abilities. I recognize that this isn't rational, mostly because I don't find myself thinking that way when others are presenting their work. My first instinct is always to be as supportive and kind as possible, so I don't know why I would expect cruelty from the minds of my peers. Of course, this is not a novelty. Artists are an insecure bunch, most of the time. We put so much of ourselves into our work that we're afraid separation is impossible, for better and for worse. With the power of faculty suggestion, I was ultimately persuaded to share my work publicly with the

department. It is a harsh reality, but I understand that readings are just a part of the playwriting process.

Since it wasn't meant to be a formal performance, I opted out of a formal audition process. I wanted to work with individuals I already knew and trusted, so I asked the first peers that came to mind: Nicholas Miaoulis, Maya Lavender, Azalea Hudson, Audrey Salgado, and Allie Sahargun. Having pre-established relationships with the readers made the process much easier for me and my anxiety. They had sweet words of encouragement and fun attitudes, which helped me know I had made the right choice. I wanted to allow them to get comfortable with the content, so we ended up meeting twice before the actual event; two people were missing from the first read-through, which is why we ended up having a second one. They were all very enthusiastic and lenient when it came to scheduling meetings and the event. I am very grateful for their generosity with their time and cheer. In terms of casting, I did have a specific role for each person in mind, but wanted to ask if there were any preferences among them anyway—my instincts were spot on, and the roles aligned perfectly with their desires.

It was extremely nerve wracking to hear the words spoken aloud for the first time, but I think it was extremely beneficial for my understanding of the play's flow and pacing. I was able to catch moments that didn't work and moments that did. As Daaimah and I have discussed, theatre is meant to be heard (and seen), so I think I would have decided to meet with a group to read the script privately, even if the event itself wasn't going to happen. I would also like to highlight the contributions of Lukina Andreyev, Emily Kaufman-Bell, and Gavin McKenzie, who agreed to read the first pages of the script back in December for the midway showing. I am extremely grateful to them, in addition to my eventual cast, for rolling with the punches and being brilliant performers.

The reading itself went well. It was not worth the anxiety and dread that I had built up in my head. I credit the experience to the performers; I feel that each of them brought life to the characters that I had not imagined. While I had internally read Greene's later scenes in the first act to be deadpan and barely respondent, Allie gave her softness and smiles. Maya brought severity to Zinnia in the second act where I originally saw passivity or gentleness. Nick was the perfect Arthur. Audrey made Casey extremely empathetic, and honestly more likable than I thought the character might be received. While Azalea was not technically a character, I found her "narration" to provide the right tempo and mood for the piece. While we had all met and read the script together before, as I mentioned, each of them really brought their A-game and I found myself captivated by their portrayals. Having an audience really enhanced this as well. It was encouraging to have new vocal (and some physical) responses to the humorous parts, especially since I wasn't entirely sure if they would translate well. The more emotional reactions that came up from the later moments made me feel successful, for lack of a better word. While Allie was reading Greene's letter and talking about her favorite flower, the two people sitting in the back row kind of huddled together, and one rested their head on the other's shoulder. It was a quiet moment that probably didn't mean as much to them as it did to me. To me, it meant there was love and resonance in my writing, and I guess I had never seen that before. It was incredibly validating, especially since this play comes from such an intimate part of myself.

Looking Ahead

While going through the final editing process before the due date, these past few weeks have been shrouded in dispassion and dejection. I have to remind myself that I am pleased

overall with what I have created. Spending a lot of time with one thing can often bring about less than kind thoughts, and I'm still actively working through those feelings.

I think moving forward with this play looks something like submitting it to various companies and festivals, then waiting to see if it lands anywhere. With that in mind, I am not entirely sure where to start. For example, most guidelines that I have seen for submission require non-represented artists to select 10- or 15-page samples, and I have no idea how to make those selections. I understand that they should reflect the piece as a whole, but I feel that my opinion on what best represents the play might not be what others perceive the most relevant pages to be. I fear I'm too close to the situation, so any feedback on such a selection would be greatly appreciated.

Looking beyond the immediate future, I think I would like to continue my educational track after taking a gap year. At this time, playwriting—among other things—sounds like a viable option for an advanced degree, but I would like to receive some grounded feedback from artists who I already know and respect before I open my work up to strangers' scrutiny at an academic level. Academia has been my life for the past sixteen years, give or take, so it is difficult to separate my worth as a person from the grades I receive: I don't know who I am outside of schooling, or what I am other than a student. I am fully aware that I am highly sensitive to criticism and prone to disappointment. I do not feel comfortable just yet broadening my audience beyond the confines of the Bard Theater and Performance department. Even that was a stretch. I would love advice on how to become more secure and comfortable with sharing my work.

Closing Thoughts

At the end of the day, I wrote something. It has painful moments, but I like to think it has loveful (according to Wiktionary, that is a word) ones too. I have a lot of love for the people I wrote, the people who read, the people who heard. I fear that I won't be able to write something like this ever again, but I think that's also kind of the point. Now I get to reinvent myself as an artist.

Into the unknown I march.

Works Consulted

Anyanwu, Ngozi. *Good Grief*. 2020.

Churchill, Caryl. *Heart's Desire*. 2017.

Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth. *On Death and Dying*. 1969.

tucker green, debbie. *generations*. 2005.

Cake for Breakfast
a play by Sydnee Kenny

Character List

GREENE SAPP

Writer of unspecified employment. Former funny friend, current buzzkill. Kind of short. 22.

ZINNIA BINNS

Chameleon, empath. Greene's closest friend. Hates cursing. Tall. 23.

ARTHUR BURNHAM

Literally just some guy. Mild-mannered. Obsessed with music. Smarter than he lets on. 21.

CASEY LANE

The friend who made it out. Sweet in the right circumstances. Emotionally unsure. An older 23.

While characters' genders are specific, all of these roles can be portrayed by performers of any gender identity. Casting should always keep diversity and equity in mind, including performers of any race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, so long as they are comfortable portraying the role.

Author's Notes

The play in its entirety takes place in Greene's apartment, in the group's hometown.

It is always summertime.

No specific year, though smartphones have been invented and are used.

/ indicates overlapping dialogue

— indicates interruption, or someone else finishing a thought

... indicates a pause of considerable length

..... indicates a pause of awkward length

^{Superscript} indicates talking to oneself

The pace is meant to feel conversational; it should change from bouncy and energetic to slower at moments, where more thought is required for response. This shift will not always be noted, and when not indicated either way, it is up to the actors to discover what feels most natural.

Act I: In the Time Before

Sometime in the afternoon on a Tuesday. Or maybe it's a Sunday? Who knows. There is a door upstage left. From center stage left to right are the following set pieces: a boxy television tilted toward the couch, which sits in the center, a side table, and a large beanbag. The only source of light is the static emanating from the TV. GREENE is slumped over on the couch, completely zoned out as she stares vacantly at the television. All is still. After a few moments, keys are heard rattling, and ZINNIA enters through the door, wielding a large metal water bottle. The sound of ZINNIA setting her things down on the table stirs GREENE from her trance.

GREENE

(Mumbling.)

It's itchy.

Pause.

ZINNIA

(Without looking at GREENE.)

What's itchy?

GREENE

The couch.

ZINNIA studies the couch for a moment, then runs a hand along the fabric.

ZINNIA

It doesn't seem itchy to me.

GREENE

Well, it is.

ZINNIA

Why don't you get off, if it's so uncomfortable? Were you waiting for me, just to complain?

GREENE

It's the only place I can sleep.

ZINNIA

Did you try your *bed*?

GREENE
Gee. It didn't occur to me.

ZINNIA motions to the beanbag.

ZINNIA
Did you try that?

GREENE
I haven't moved since I sat down here.

ZINNIA
You can't just mope around all day. It isn't good for you.

GREENE
I happen to like moping around.

*ZINNIA moves intending to turn off the TV.
She doesn't.*

ZINNIA
Were you at least watching something?

GREENE
Something was on. I don't really remember.
(Adjusting.)
Why are you here, exactly?

ZINNIA
Just to check in. Casey was worried about you.

GREENE
Why?

ZINNIA
Do I really need to answer that?

GREENE
I'm fine. You can tell her I'm fine.

ZINNIA

She didn't buy that last time, and I doubt she'll buy it now.

GREENE

Would it kill her to come and ask me personally, then?

*There is a noticeable discomfort in the air, accompanied by a long pause.
Tentatively, ZINNIA finally sits down on the couch next to GREENE.*

ZINNIA

You know she can't.

GREENE

(Scoffing.)
You always say that.

ZINNIA

It's always true.

GREENE

You don't have to defend her. Besides, I'm fine with it. I mean, why would she come? There's not much to see here.

ZINNIA

It hasn't been easy for her either. Or me. We're just doing our best.

GREENE

You make it sound like I'm not.

ZINNIA

Everyone goes at their own pace.

GREENE

Right.

ZINNIA avoids GREENE's intense gaze, and begins fanning herself.

ZINNIA

Are you hot? It feels really warm in here.

GREENE

I'm fully capable of paying for air conditioning, if that's what you're implying.

ZINNIA

I wasn't implying that at all. I was only pointing it out.

GREENE

I know it's hot, Zinnia. There's a reason summer's my least-fucking-favorite season of the year.

ZINNIA

(Standing up.)

Maybe I'll just get a drink of water.

GREENE

You don't have to tell me what you're doing.

ZINNIA

Do you want me to leave?

GREENE

I didn't ask you to come.

ZINNIA

I thought you would need me. Let me help you.

GREENE

Can't you stop trying to help me, and just be here? No motives? Am I not allowed to feel "bummed out" without someone trying to fix it?

ZINNIA

I'm not trying to fix you.

GREENE

You don't even come over unless *Casey* asks you to. And she only asks you to so she doesn't have to feel bad about not doing it.

ZINNIA

She thinks you don't want to hear from her.

GREENE stands up.

She walks away from ZINNIA, and stares blankly at the television.

GREENE

My arms still itch.

ZINNIA

I'm sorry.

GREENE

It's not your fault. I should've slept in the bed, I just never seem to doze off in there.

ZINNIA

Were you out here all night?

GREENE

No. Stayed in there until the sun came up. Came out here when I had had enough.

ZINNIA

Why didn't you come out here sooner, if you can't sleep in your room?

GREENE

(Shrugging.)

Maybe I was feeling optimistic.

ZINNIA

Optimism doesn't seem too common for you.

GREENE

There's not much to be optimistic about. Especially in the summertime.

ZINNIA snorts.

This catches GREENE's attention, and she turns around.

GREENE

What?

ZINNIA

I don't know. You're cute when you're cranky.

I'm not cranky.

GREENE

Oh, my mistake.

ZINNIA

But I *am* cute.

GREENE

*ZINNIA slowly approaches GREENE, gently taking her friend into her arms.
GREENE resists at first, but relaxes into the embrace.
They don't say anything for a moment or two.*

Am I itchy?

ZINNIA

No.

GREENE

How many times do you think we've said that word since I got here?

ZINNIA

Too many. But what else am I supposed to say? "Scratchy"?

GREENE

Please don't.

ZINNIA

I won't.

GREENE

Good.

ZINNIA

...

Are you hungry?

No.

GREENE

ZINNIA

Can I make you something anyway?

GREENE

There isn't much in the fridge.

ZINNIA

Then we should go to the grocery store. You can't just run out of food and be left with nothing.

GREENE

Why buy food when it'll just rot and go to waste?

ZINNIA

(Almost challenging GREENE.)

Why avoid eating and blame it on the food you never even purchased?

GREENE

What are you, my mother?

ZINNIA

I could be.

GREENE

It's not like I'm avoiding food, I just haven't been hungry. I don't know. Everything feels wrong. You know?

ZINNIA

But your body needs sustenance, whether you like it or not.

GREENE

I've been drinking lots of water!

ZINNIA

You know that's not a substitute. And you always drink lots of water.

GREENE

A hydrated bitch is a healthy bitch.

ZINNIA

You should get that printed on a t-shirt or something.

GREENE

Maybe I will.

ZINNIA's cell phone dings.

She reaches into her pocket to investigate.

*GREENE is obviously discontent with the loss of her friend's attention,
and sinks back into her seat.*

ZINNIA

Is it alright if Arthur comes over?

GREENE

Sure. He can finally witness the downfall of the Once-Great Greene Sapp.

ZINNIA

Psh. You're still great, honey.

The conversation lulls.

GREENE looks down at her clothes and dusts some crumbs from her lap.

ZINNIA pretends not to notice.

GREENE

I haven't always looked like this, have I?

ZINNIA

Like what?

GREENE

Homely.

ZINNIA

I think it's pronounced "homey."

GREENE

The L makes a difference.

ZINNIA

(Sigh)

I know, I was trying to be nice.

GREENE

Oh.

ZINNIA

Why don't you go change? Arthur doesn't have to know how *homey* you are.

GREENE gives a half smile.

She stands up and stretches out her arms and legs.

GREENE

I think I'm okay. Who cares, right?

ZINNIA

Ah, denial. My old friend.

GREENE

Oh, hush.

It's not like Arthur has much room to talk.

ZINNIA

He is a bit of a homebody.

GREENE

Right. And I'm obviously more of a shut-in.

ZINNIA

(Scoffing.)

Obviously.

GREENE

The distinction is important.

ZINNIA

Naturally.

GREENE

And what are you?

ZINNIA shrugs.

ZINNIA

Nothing special.

The lights finally come up. They are warm. The TV is off. It is unclear if this is later the same day, or just another time down the road. GREENE and ZINNIA remain unchanged. ARTHUR is now nestled in the beanbag chair. His presence is sunny and bold, despite the homebody reputation that precedes him. GREENE seems a little on edge; her tone should sound disinterested until she very clearly isn't. ZINNIA and ARTHUR have been engrossed in a heated debate. All in good fun..?

ZINNIA

I can't believe you!

ARTHUR

It wouldn't hurt for them to be a little more accurate with their language!

ZINNIA

But how else is she supposed to answer the question?

GREENE

I mean, it's just BuzzFeed...

ARTHUR

All I'm saying is water isn't a beverage, by *definition*.

ZINNIA

Oh bravo, Encyclopedia Brown.

ARTHUR

Don't you mean Merriam-Webster?

ZINNIA

I was commending your sleuthing skills, since you always know how to *find* the most useless information.

ARTHUR

Clever.

GREENE

You're both *very* clever.

ZINNIA

Why thank you.

ARTHUR

You know you don't have to placate her, right?

GREENE

There's really no reason to be all up in arms over a personality quiz.

ARTHUR

Then how else are you supposed to get an accurate idea for what kind of office supply you are?

GREENE

It already gave me three-hole punch, I'm pretty satisfied.

ZINNIA

He's just jealous since he's a binder clip.

ARTHUR

Well, maybe I could've been a stapler or a notebook if I chose water instead of orange juice.

ZINNIA

Too bad, the BuzzFeed gods have already spoken. No take-backs.

GREENE

Yes, all results are final. No returns or exchanges.

ARTHUR

(Smiling.)

I missed you.

GREENE

(Cold.)

Sorry.

ARTHUR

No! That's not what I meant.

GREENE

Yeah, I know, but still.

Long pause.

ZINNIA hesitates to speak, but she hates the tension.

ZINNIA

I'm a stapler, in case anyone was curious.

ARTHUR

Bully for you.

GREENE

(Wryly.)

Does that inform your sense of self?

ZINNIA

If anything, it reinforces it.

ARTHUR

Since you're so piercing? ...Grabby?

ZINNIA

Ha ha. I think you're the only one who would describe me in such a way.

GREENE grows visibly more irritated as the conversation continues.

She holds her tongue as long as she can.

ARTHUR

Maybe. But staplers gotta staple.

ZINNIA

What does that even mean?

ARTHUR

(With a shrug.)

Open to interpretation.

ZINNIA

You should have been a philosopher.

ARTHUR

Too bad I dropped out of college/

ZINNIA

/Not once, but thrice/

ARTHUR

/Sometimes that's just how it goes.

ZINNIA

Spoken like a true binder clip.

ARTHUR

Shouldn't binder clips be organized? Like, keeping it together? Isn't that, like, their whole function?

GREENE

(Snapping.)

Oh my god, who cares?

ZINNIA

Is everything okay—

GREENE

Are the two of you incapable of talking about anything real? Whenever you're both in the same space, it's like there's no room for honest conversation. It's all jokes and snide comments and *BuzzFeed*. You even lose your entire fucking personality, Zinnia. You change and conform to the dynamic.

Can't you just *be*???

ZINNIA

There's no need to—

ARTHUR

You don't have to be nasty about it, Sapp. Snapp? Like, Greene Snapp?

GREENE

That's exactly what I'm talking about.

ARTHUR

Well, this is kinda coming out of left field. You were totally into it like five minutes ago.

GREENE

I can let the moment *pass*.

You don't have to regurgitate old things just to keep a conversation going.

ZINNIA

I'm sorry.

ARTHUR

You don't have to be.

(To Greene.)

What's wrong with being lighthearted? What do *you* want to talk about, then?

You never tell us! And then you're angry when we don't know.

...

Am I not allowed to search for validation through the opinion of strangers on the internet?

ZINNIA

Arthur, you don't have to / engage.

ARTHUR

/Maybe I do. Nobody challenges you, Greene. You get stuck in your head, in your ways, and you expect the rest of us to just go with it.

Guess what! I have my own head!

Doesn't mean I get all hostile about it.

GREENE

Also doesn't mean you get to raise your voice at me.

ARTHUR

You're right, and I apologize. But I won't apologize for enjoying trivial things like office supplies, or conversations regarding office supplies.

Capiche?

GREENE

Fine. I still reserve my right to change the subject.

ARTHUR

Okay.

GREENE

Okay.

Okay.

ZINNIA

GREENE turns to ZINNIA.

I didn't mean what I said about you.

GREENE

Yes, you did. But I don't mind, I'm sure it's frustrating.

ZINNIA

(All matter-of-fact.)

Judgment is recognition of the self.

ARTHUR

Oh boy.

ZINNIA

And what do you mean by that?

GREENE

Oh boy.

ZINNIA

ARTHUR

You say she has no idea of the self, which means you can identify that quality. Ergo, you recognize it, given your familiarity with the concept.

GREENE

(Laughing.)

You really should have been a philosopher.

ZINNIA

He puts Pythagoras to shame!

ARTHUR

I like the sound of Arthurian Theorem.

GREENE

I'm not sure Pythagoras came up with the Pythagorean Theorem.

ZINNIA

But Arthurian Theorem sounds like a cool band name.

GREENE

Fair enough.

ARTHUR

And you two could be my groupies.

GREENE and ZINNIA share a knowing look.

ARTHUR

...I meant roadies...

GREENE

More like the bassist and the lead singer.

ARTHUR

As the *Arthur* in *Arthurian*, wouldn't I be the lead singer?

ZINNIA

Sweetheart, you cannot carry a tune.

GREENE

Or even a beat.

He ponders this news.

ARTHUR

So, I guess that rules out tambourine?

ZINNIA

I'm afraid so.

GREENE

If we were the Partridges, you couldn't even be Tracy.

ZINNIA

No. But maybe Danny?

ARTHUR

Ouch.

GREENE

He's better than Reuben.

ARTHUR

You don't have to insult Mister Kincaid like that.

GREENE

Reuben sucks! He's named after a sandwich.

ARTHUR

I don't think that's true.

ZINNIA

The sandwich was probably named after someone named Reuben, and then the Partridge Family had a character with the same name, like, yeeeeeeaaaaaarrrrrrs later.

GREENE

Well, the sandwich sucks, too. If I were a sandwich, I'd like to be a grilled cheese.

ARTHUR

There's a quiz for that!

They all pull out their phones. The moment melts away and the lights change. They remain lit, but are now almost greyish. It's nighttime, sometime. Wearing fresh loungewear, GREENE lays on the couch, staring at the ceiling. ARTHUR is asleep on the beanbag chair, his limbs draped over the sides like a resting marionette. The air is filled with his arrhythmic snores and sighs. The scene sits, unchanged, for a while. GREENE shifts in her spot, restless. This continues for a little too long. It doesn't disturb ARTHUR's slumber, but ZINNIA eventually comes plodding down the hallway, seemingly awoken by GREENE's rustling. She is also dressed in fresh attire, but not pajamas — she is ready for the day. The lights instantly change, becoming bright, signaling daylight's return. It is mid-morning.

GREENE

I didn't mean to wake you.

ZINNIA

Did you sleep?

What do you think?
GREENE

GREENE gestures to ARTHUR.

Did that really make a difference?
ZINNIA

What do you think?
GREENE

Hmm. Perhaps not.
ZINNIA

The sun was late this morning.
GREENE

The days are getting shorter.
ZINNIA

(Shaking her head.)
She didn't come on time.
GREENE

Were you waiting?
ZINNIA

I like to greet her every day. And the moon in the evening.
GREENE

I wasn't aware you were the celestial welcoming committee.
ZINNIA

Someone's gotta do it.
GREENE

There's no one better.
ZINNIA

They share a smile, timidly.

Your bed is quite comfy.

ZINNIA

I'm glad. You slept well?

GREENE

Well enough. Better than you.

ZINNIA

Better than me.

GREENE

Pause.

What would you like to do today?

ZINNIA

You're looking at it.

GREENE

Can I get you out of the house?

ZINNIA

I'm sooooo comfortable right here.

GREENE

It isn't itchy today?

ZINNIA

I'm working through it.

GREENE

How brave of you.

ZINNIA

I thought so, too.

GREENE

Do you have any work to do?

ZINNIA

GREENE

Nah. They haven't assigned me anything new yet.

ZINNIA

Have you written anything for *fun*?

GREENE

What do you think?

ZINNIA

(Muttering.)

Seems to be the question of the day.

GREENE

Maybe I just really care what you think.

ZINNIA

You shouldn't.

GREENE

But I do.

They quieten as ARTHUR stirs; he doesn't open his eyes.

ARTHUR

Huh?

They don't say anything, and he settles down again.

GREENE

(Impressed.)

How can he sleep so much?

ZINNIA

He hasn't over-thought a day in his life.

GREENE

Lucky bastard.

He's a simple creature.

ZINNIA

(*Muffled, unbothered.*)

I heard that.

ARTHUR

You were meant to.

ZINNIA

I can take a hint.

ARTHUR

He starts to get up.

You don't have to—

GREENE

Oh, but I do.

ARTHUR

He stretches his arms and legs.

ARTHUR

(*Groggy and aware of his word choices.*)

Do you have a shower I could borrow?

Nope.

GREENE

Hmm. Bummer.

ARTHUR

You're a *morning* shower person?

GREENE

I'm an opportunistic shower person.

ARTHUR

ZINNIA

I'd say you are barely a shower person at all.

GREENE

Hey now, no need to insult the man.

ZINNIA

(Laughing.)

I can grab you a towel, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Much appreciated.

They exit off into the unseen hallway, offstage left.

GREENE sighs and falls into the sofa cushions.

She closes her eyes for a moment before ZINNIA reappears

She flops next to GREENE.

ZINNIA

Are you alright sweetie?

GREENE

I'm fine. Just tired, is all.

ZINNIA

If you say so.

GREENE

What?

ZINNIA

What?

GREENE

Is there something you'd like to share with the class?

ZINNIA

Oh, no.

If you say so.

GREENE

*The shower squeaks on, heard from offstage.
They sit without speaking for a hot second.*

Do you want to go somewhere?

GREENE

You want to leave the house?!!

ZINNIA

I mean, you drive a hard bargain.

GREENE

I didn't even do anything.

ZINNIA

You didn't have to.

GREENE

They sit without speaking for a cool instant.

Well, I'm sure Arthur won't be too long in the shower. He has short hair.

ZINNIA

Oh.

GREENE

Oh?

ZINNIA

Oh. Nothing.

GREENE

They sit without speaking.

We could all go grab breakfast?

ZINNIA

I'm not hungry.

GREENE

We could all go for a walk?

ZINNIA

Sounds overstimulating.

GREENE

We...could...go...

ZINNIA

I think I'm okay, actually.

GREENE

What? But—

ZINNIA

You two could go do something if you want.

GREENE

But we want to do something with you!

ZINNIA

I changed my mind, I'm good right here.

GREENE

ZINNIA is clearly frustrated by this.

Did I say something to change your mind? Or maybe change it back...?

ZINNIA

(Almost curtly.)

Nope. I can change it all on my own.

GREENE

Please work with me.

You don't need to be all cooped up every day.

ZINNIA

GREENE
I'm fine with it.

ZINNIA
C'mon, meet me halfway here!

The shower squeaks off, snapping the women out of their tense moment.

GREENE
You guys should go get something to eat, if you want to.

ZINNIA
I'm not really hungry either.

GREENE
Oh.

ZINNIA
Yeah.

Pause.

ZINNIA
But maybe Arthur could go get himself something.

GREENE
He's been known to be competent.

ARTHUR
(Offstage.)
I heard that!

GREENE
You *weren't* meant to!

ZINNIA
What a Nosy Nellie.

GREENE
Hey, he's *your* friend.

ZINNIA

Hey, he's yours *too*.

GREENE

Ish.

ZINNIA

"Ish" nothing. You're just gonna have to live with it.

GREENE

Okay.

They now sit on opposite sides of the couch. Time ticks on, blurred. The lights may appear hazy, like a fog has settled in. Maybe it's spilling in from the shower, though that might have happened days or even weeks ago. Regardless, the setting has a distorted appearance. Eventually, ZINNIA and ARTHUR move around as though someone has pressed fast-forward on a TV remote. GREENE remains on the couch, completely still. The atmosphere is warm yet insincere. ZINNIA finally slows down to ask:

ZINNIA

Where does the cheese grater go?

GREENE

Second drawer, on the right.

ZINNIA exits to the kitchen, opposite the hallway.

ARTHUR

She can be a real busybody, eh?

He takes a seat on the beanbag.

ARTHUR

Does she always unload the dishwasher when she's here?

GREENE

I guess someone has to.

ARTHUR

That's probably true. Better her than me. I hate doing it.

GREENE
 Yep.

ARTHUR
 I'm starving. Are you starving?

GREENE
 Eh.

ARTHUR
 Am I talking too much?

GREENE doesn't even acknowledge the question.

ARTHUR
 Sorry.
 I just get antsy when people are moving around too much and I've got nothing to do.
 Good thing I'm in here with you, huh?

GREENE
 Yeah. Good thing.

ZINNIA
(From the kitchen.)
 I could give you something to do—

ARTHUR
 Nah, that's okay. I'll get over it.

GREENE
(Sarcastically.)
 Praise be.

ARTHUR does not care to address her tone.

ARTHUR
 So, how are we doin' today?

GREENE
 Just fine.

ARTHUR

Good, good. I'm pretty alright myself.

GREENE

Funny, that's how I'd describe you too.

ARTHUR

Pretty alright? Gee, tell me how you really feel.

(He laughs before considering it.)

Actually, please don't.

GREENE

You know I don't hate you, right?

ARTHUR

Oh, uh, thanks.

GREENE

No! I mean. I joke a lot, but it's just jokes.

ARTHUR

I never considered the hatred you harbor for me to actually be malicious.

It's endearing, almost.

GREENE

But I'm saying I *don't* hate you.

ARTHUR

That certainly changes our dynamic.

Uncomfortable pause.

ARTHUR

I'm glad, though.

GREENE

I'm glad you're glad.

ARTHUR

Well, I'm glad you're glad I'm glad.

GREENE

I'm gonna stop it right there.

ARTHUR

Good call.

*ZINNIA returns from the kitchen.
She does not sit for the rest of the scene.*

ZINNIA

Okay, dishes are done.

GREENE

Thank you.

ZINNIA

You're welcome, but in all honesty, I was just doing it for myself. It was driving me crazy.

GREENE

Okay.

ZINNIA

Can I open a window? It's feeling a little cramped.

GREENE

Sure.

ZINNIA

Air flow is good, yeah? Gets the mind going, the body moving.

ARTHUR

Does it?

ZINNIA

I think so. It helps something.

GREENE

Ah.

Who doesn't like a little help?

ZINNIA

Well, for starters, *you*.

GREENE

That's because I don't need it.

ZINNIA

Honey, you know that's not true. And we want to do what we can.
Right, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Oh god, leave me out of this.

GREENE

What can you do?

ZINNIA

What do you need? Or want, maybe?

GREENE

I don't know/

ZINNIA

/Okay, I'm not sure what we/

GREENE

/But I want to.

ZINNIA

Oh.

ARTHUR

To what?

GREENE

To know. I mean, that's the problem. I don't know anymore. Y'know?

ARTHUR

No, I really don't.

ZINNIA
How can I fix it?

GREENE
Tell me something.

ZINNIA
Anything. What?

GREENE
What am I now?

ZINNIA
I'm not sure what you...?
(Thinking about it.)
You're smart. You're funny.

GREENE
Okay, sure, I guess so, but, like, *what am I?*

ZINNIA
A writer/

ARTHUR
/My friend/

ZINNIA
/You're just. I don't know. You?

GREENE
...am I? I can't tell anymore.

Long pause, perhaps longer than it should be.

GREENE
It's just.
It's stupid.
...
I was someone's princess once.

ZINNIA

What?

GREENE

Someone held me up on a pedestal. I never really believed it, but to them, I was a princess. I was limitless and bright. Unburdened, maybe unknowingly so. And what am I now? Who am I now? I don't fucking think I'm a princess anymore.

ZINNIA

You don't need to be!

(Pause for consideration.)

I was a toad.

ARTHUR

You were never ugly/

ZINNIA

(Ignoring him.)

/I had warts on my knees as a child. For years.

I don't even remember where they came from, why they were there, but some kids said I was a toad, so I became a toad.

And I liked it, you know?

I got to be something. It was me, but it was me *as* something. Not like a character to perform, but, like, a form to take. Maybe like a shirt to put on or a new haircut or something.

I don't know.

I don't know if I'm making sense?

GREENE

Just 'cause someone calls you a toad doesn't mean you are one. They were bullying you.

ZINNIA

And yet, I took it to heart in a different way.

I *am* a toad.

You can be a princess, if you want, but someone saying you're something doesn't mean you consent to that being your identity. It's yours. You can pick and choose. So, what do you want to be? I can speak it into existence for you, if that's really what you need.

GREENE

I don't want to be something.

ZINNIA

But you want to be someone.

GREENE

Maybe I don't. Maybe I'm done.

ZINNIA

With what?

GREENE

There's nothing left here for me. I think I'm just done.

ZINNIA

What do you mean???? There's so much to do and see and feel.

GREENE

I don't see the point. There isn't one.

ZINNIA

(Tearful.)

What are you saying?

GREENE doesn't meet her gaze.

ARTHUR knows he is missing something here.

He gets up awkwardly from his seat.

ARTHUR

Jeepers, it's depressing in here.

GREENE and ZINNIA don't say anything.

ARTHUR

I guess I'm gonna go...

Still no response. He waits for someone to say something, anything. Nothing. He takes his leave, exiting through the apartment door. ZINNIA starts buzzing around again, not wanting to leave, but not wanting to stand there indefinitely. GREENE stays right where she's been stationed; it's as good a place as any. Neither of them speak. This vignette soon evaporates, and everything changes again. It's evening, some other time. GREENE is alone onstage. She is tidying up, humming to "It's Been a Long, Long Time." ZINNIA comes in from the unseen hallway. She

quietly watches GREENE. When GREENE notices her, she stops in her tracks. GREENE's inflections should be monotonous throughout the rest of the act.

ZINNIA

Look at you!

GREENE

Yes, look at me.

ZINNIA

Are you expecting company or something?

GREENE

Do I need to be?

I mean, you are company...

ZINNIA

No. And I hardly count.

GREENE

Okay.

ZINNIA leaves her post in the entryway.

GREENE

I just felt like doing something.

ZINNIA

I'm happy to hear it. It looks nice.

GREENE

That's what I'm going for.

ZINNIA

Nailed it!

GREENE

Calm down.

ZINNIA
But I want to celebrate with you.

GREENE
Celebrate what?

ZINNIA
This! You!

GREENE
Ha ha. You're too kind.

ZINNIA
You know, you really had me worried for a while—

GREENE
(Emotionless.)
Sorry to hear that. Can I get you anything?

ZINNIA
I've been here all day.

GREENE
Okay. But can I get you something?

ZINNIA
Looks like we've got a hostess with the mostest in our midst.

She is looking for a response.

GREENE
Okay.

Not that response.

ZINNIA
I don't need anything

GREENE
Okay.

ZINNIA

Can I help you?

GREENE

Sure. You can probably reach some shelves I can't.

*She leads ZINNIA across the stage to the kitchen area.
Coincidentally, there's a knock on the door at this moment.
GREENE and ZINNIA exchange looks.*

GREENE

I can get that. Can you just dust off the shelf that I set my rag on?

ZINNIA

On it!

*ZINNIA exits to the kitchen.
GREENE saunters through the room.
The knocking continues.*

GREENE

I'm comin', I'm comin'.

*She opens the door.
ARTHUR and CASEY stand on the other side.
CASEY holds a cake box.*

ARTHUR

Hi!

CASEY

Hi!

GREENE

...hi.

ARTHUR

May we come in?

GREENE
You may.

They do.

CASEY
Hi.

GREENE
Hi, Casey.

*They embrace.
It is hollow and awkward.*

GREENE
What brings you to this neck of the woods?

CASEY
Arthur drove.

GREENE
Right.

ARTHUR
It's true!

CASEY
I wanted to see you guys. It's been so long.

GREENE
It always is. Uh. Long, I mean. Between seeing you?

CASEY
Yeah.

GREENE
Yeah.

CASEY
I brought some dessert.

She holds up the pink box.

GREENE

Yum.

CASEY

Is Zinnia here?

GREENE

Yeah, she's in the kitchen.

CASEY

Cool cool. I should go put this in there anyway...

ARTHUR

Or you could just leave it on the table.

That way we can pick at it while sitting, instead of getting *all the way* up, and then going *all the way* to the kitchen.

CASEY

Good point.

GREENE

He's a lazing genius.

ARTHUR

Maybe I should get that tattooed on my forehead.

GREENE

Yeah...you do that, bud.

She pats him on the back before coming back to the living space.

ARTHUR and CASEY follow suit.

CASEY then puts her box on the side table.

GREENE

Make yourselves at home.

ARTHUR assumes his position on the beanbag.

CASEY hovers, unsure where to sit.

ZINNIA

(Offstage, from the kitchen)

Who was it?

ARTHUR

(Loudly.)

Me! And Casey!

GREENE

(More quietly.)

Can I get you anything? Water? Toast?

CASEY shakes her head.

CASEY

I'm good.

(With strange intensity.)

Are you good?

GREENE

I'm also good.

ZINNIA reemerges from the kitchen.

CASEY looks relieved to see her, ARTHUR remains seated.

ZINNIA

Oh my goodness!

She extends her arms out to CASEY. Their hug is more natural than the one CASEY shared with GREENE. Maybe it's because there's no longer a box in CASEY's arms. Maybe not. GREENE sits at the end of the couch farthest from the kitchen.

CASEY

It's so good to see you.

ZINNIA

I can't believe you're here!

She looks tentatively at GREENE, who appears to be unbothered.

I brought some dessert/

CASEY

/Yum!/
/From work.

ZINNIA

CASEY

ZINNIA

Sounds good. Were we gonna have dinner first?

*Again, she looks to GREENE.
GREENE shrugs.*

We'll probably get around to it.

CASEY

Are you hungry?

GREENE

Meh.

CASEY

I'm not.

ZINNIA

What?

ARTHUR

Then maybe not.

GREENE

We could just forgo the meal and skip to the good stuff.

ZINNIA

How do you know it's good?

CASEY

ZINNIA

Why wouldn't it be?

GREENE

It is what it is. We can eat it or not. Thanks, Casey.

CASEY

You're welcome.

ARTHUR

Do I not get a vote?

GREENE

For what?

ARTHUR

I don't know.

GREENE

Okay.

ZINNIA

(Surprised that GREENE isn't annoyed.)

Okay?

GREENE

Hmm?

ZINNIA

Nothing.

CASEY finally takes a seat next to GREENE. She pats on the last couch cushion, beckoning ZINNIA. ZINNIA is almost reluctant, shifting her gaze between CASEY and GREENE, whose faces reveal nothing. At long last, she perches.

GREENE

So.

How was the drive?

ARTHUR
Mine was brief.

CASEY
I took the train in.

GREENE
Oh, nice. The train.

CASEY
Better than a plane.

ARTHUR
Those drive me insane.

CASEY
You just like to complain.

ARTHUR
I've got a reputation to maintain.

GREENE
It'd be a shame for it to go down the drain.

ARTHUR
Ain't that just the way...n?

*GREENE and CASEY laugh with ARTHUR.
ZINNIA is dumbfounded.*

ARTHUR
What? It's funny.

ZINNIA
Not really.

CASEY
Oh, c'mon.

ZINNIA

I'd hardly say that passes for humor.

ARTHUR

Oh yeah, like you're a regular Lucille Ball.

ZINNIA

(Partially joking.)

Don't say her name in vain!

GREENE

Just accept it, Zinnia. You don't understand high comedy.

ZINNIA looks at her with skepticism.

ZINNIA

Guess not.

The lights become hazier as the sounds of laughter grow more echoey. CASEY and ARTHUR appear to be having a good time. ZINNIA is more mellowed as the raucous continues. GREENE gets up to check on something, then stands behind the couch with her hands resting on the backrest. The dessert is untouched. Everyone freezes: CASEY and ARTHUR are mid-laugh; ZINNIA is looking at GREENE; GREENE is looking at ZINNIA. Blackout.

END OF ACT.

Act II: In the Time After

Lights slowly phase in on ZINNIA, ARTHUR, and CASEY. They sit frozen in the same spots that they were in at the end of Act I. There are some cardboard boxes laying about, but, for the most part, the stage is unchanged. One side of the couch is notably empty. The pink dessert parcel is gone. It's probably a Saturday. As the lights come in, ARTHUR and CASEY's conversation picks up, and they thaw. ZINNIA isn't frozen anymore, but she might as well be.

CASEY

You have to admit that “Dick” is ephemeral.

ARTHUR

I don't know if you can apply temporal qualities to it, though...

CASEY

More so than “Bitch,” like, it's something that you're *being* versus something you *are*. Labels don't all work the same. A guy's just written off for *being* a dick, but once a woman's called a bitch, she *is* a bitch.

ARTHUR

I don't know about that.

CASEY

You don't have to. Misogyny exists whether you, Arthur Burnham, know it or not.

ARTHUR

No, I get that part. I'm just not sure I agree with the notion of an “ephemeral” slur.

CASEY

Oh get over yourself! Dick is not a slur. Some people willingly name their *children* that.

ARTHUR

Yeah. The same people who name their children Arthur.

CASEY

Your mama named her child Arthur.

ARTHUR

She really did. You're a clever one.

CASEY

Your mama jokes are always clever.

ARTHUR

Zinnia, care to weigh in?

She would not.

ZINNIA

(Not a question, just a response to hearing her name.)

Hmm.

CASEY

Are your mama jokes clever?

ARTHUR

I meant the other thing.

CASEY

Oh.

Are Dicks more ephemeral than Bitches?

ZINNIA

I wasn't really listening.

ARTHUR

We can restate our arguments—

ZINNIA

I don't really care.

*It wouldn't take a genius to see that ZINNIA is forlorn.
Finally ARTHUR and CASEY get a clue.*

ARTHUR

Should we keep packing?

CASEY

It might help. You know, they say acceptance is the first step.

ARTHUR

I thought that was for admitting you have a problem with, like, gambling.

ZINNIA

Well, you don't have to worry about that.

CASEY

We weren't.

ZINNIA

Good.

CASEY

(Teasing.)

We might now.

ZINNIA

It's hard to gamble when you've got nothing.

ARTHUR

I think that's exactly when people start to gamble.

ZINNIA

I wasn't making a joke.

*CASEY takes initiative.
She gets up and starts moving the boxes around aimlessly.
Never-before-seen treasures lay inside.*

CASEY

See? Helpful.

ZINNIA

Be careful. Please.

CASEY

You can trust me.

ZINNIA

Right. Trust...

ARTHUR
Are you okay?

ZINNIA
Never better.

*ARTHUR gets up and takes a box.
He holds another out to ZINNIA.*

ARTHUR
Wanna make yourself useful?

*He breaks into a saccharine smile.
ZINNIA accepts his offer, then sets the box on the couch next to her.*

CASEY
It can be cathartic. Putting things away? Cleaning up, clearing out.

ZINNIA does not appear to be listening. Instead, she is fixated on a tiny snowglobe that she pulls out from the box beside her. The lights seem to soften a little as she is entranced with the bauble. CASEY drops a box, bringing ZINNIA back to the present. The lights return to normal. ARTHUR and CASEY look panicked, awaiting ZINNIA's reaction.

ARTHUR
Did it break?

ZINNIA
Did *what* break?

CASEY
Nothing—I'm sure nothing *shattered!*

ZINNIA
Shattered?!

CASEY
It's okay, it's okay. We can move on.

ZINNIA
Why are you rushing this?

I'm not rushing.

CASEY

I asked you to be careful.

ZINNIA

I was! Nothing broke!

CASEY

*She pulls out all the contents of the box she dropped:
a stuffed animal that once resembled a penguin
four empty CD cases
a dog-eared copy of A Room of One's Own
two unused matchboxes
and several pairs of fuzzy socks*

Nothing breakable, see?

CASEY

(*Coolly.*)
I see.

ZINNIA

*CASEY gently places each of the items back.
She does not dare pick up another box.*

We can finish later.

ARTHUR

Thanks.

(*Beat.*)
I might just need to get through it.

ZINNIA

You don't *have* to.
Take your time.

ARTHUR

I don't know how long that'll take.

ZINNIA

I don't mind.

ARTHUR

She seems hesitant.

Scout's honor.

ARTHUR

*He makes the hand gesture.
CASEY copies (or mimics) him.*

It's all so much.

ZINNIA

ARTHUR
We know.

CASEY
I know.

I never thought it would come to this.

ZINNIA

...

I can't take it back.

Not your / fault

ARTHUR

/It might be my fault.

ZINNIA

CASEY
How? How could it possibly be your fault?

CASEY

I mean—

ZINNIA

CASEY
Don't answer that. If you want to point fingers and place blame, put it where it's due.

ARTHUR

OR

CASEY

OR nothing! It was selfish.
We all know it, so call it as you see it, Zinnia.

ZINNIA

Please don't say that.

CASEY

She was selfish.

ZINNIA

No, she wasn't. Isn't.

CASEY

She was and is. Why are we cleaning up her mess now, hmm? She left! She's gone!

ARTHUR

I don't think that—

ZINNIA

You're right, she left, but I could've been better...or *done* better...

ARTHUR

No, that's not true. You always do the best you can.

CASEY

You can't help people that don't want to be helped.

ARTHUR gives CASEY a stern look.

ZINNIA

Why couldn't I?

...

I've been wracking my brain, looking to see what could have made this turn out differently, and I've got nothing. It's so depressing.

Doesn't it bother you?

ARTHUR

I haven't let it bother me.

ZINNIA

Oh, 'cause it's just that fucking *easy* for you?

ARTHUR

No. What's the point? If it bothers me, I lose.

ZINNIA

What?

ARTHUR

I lose. If I don't think about it, I can live with myself. But if it gets to me, what am I supposed to do? Wallow in self-pity?

CASEY

(Muttering.)

That's what Greene would do...

ZINNIA and ARTHUR stare at her.

CASEY

It was a joke.

ARTHUR

That wasn't funny. Jokes are funny.

CASEY

We've all got to cope somehow.

Fair point.

They all take a breath, let the situation de-escalate.

ZINNIA

So.

...

.....

It's meaningless.

.....

...

There's no meaning. Her absence has no meaning?

ARTHUR

Presence means more than absence.

CASEY

(Teasing.)

Boo! Bullshit!

ARTHUR

You haven't heard?

I'm a philosopher.

*ZINNIA actually kind of laughs.
She hasn't done that in a while.*

CASEY

Oh yeah? Says who?

ARTHUR

It was just kind of generally agreed upon.

My raw charisma plays into it, I'm sure.

ZINNIA

Mm, you're practically *dripping* with charisma.

ARTHUR

I'd say it's one of my top five features.

CASEY

What are the other four?

ARTHUR

(Feigning arrogance.)

Hair. Obviously...

A winning smile...dazzling eyes...beautiful singing voice...

All qualities you might find in a charming frontman. I mean, I'm the quintessential prettyboy.

ZINNIA

Sweetheart, you cannot carry a tune.

CASEY

Or even a beat.

He ponders this news.

ARTHUR

So, I guess that rules out tambourine?

ZINNIA

I'm afraid so.

ZINNIA and ARTHUR have a realization, simultaneously.

ARTHUR

Haven't we had this conversation before?

Beat.

ZINNIA

We have, haven't we?

Beat.

CASEY

I don't think so?

ARTHUR

I could've sworn you were there? Or maybe it was someone else?

ZINNIA

Yeah...weird.

I'm having some serious déjà vu.

CASEY

Huh. Weird.

A lull settles into the conversation.

ZINNIA

It's weird, right? Déjà vu? Like, we all get it sometimes, but like, we don't talk about it?

ZINNIA (cont.)

(Maybe there's a break in her voice.)

I want to talk about it.

ARTHUR

Talk about it, then.

ZINNIA

(A little hesitant at first, speaking slowly like she's trying to find her footing.)

I mean. I'm not exactly a spiritual person.

I mean, I *am*, but not like. Religious? Anymore?

I was. Or raised to be, I guess. It never occurred to me to think any differently. And it was scary, but comforting to think about someone bigger than me, and stronger and smarter and whatever else they tell you He is.

Just sort of looking out for me.

(At this point, words keep spilling from her mouth. It feels like she can't, or won't, stop.)

And sometimes I wonder how different things could be if I still saw it that way. If maybe things could work out because I'd have someone to ask. Like, they say that things always have a way of working out, right? But like, how? When I was a kid, I could ask my mom for grape juice, and she'd pour it in a glass or buy it from the grocery store, and then bam. I'd have grape juice. But like, if I didn't have a mom to ask, then how would I get grape juice? Someone, me or whoever else, would have to provide it. You don't just get grape juice magically.

And like, déjà vu, I guess, is like divine intervention of some sort, right? So if we feel it, then maybe there's divinity involved.

So.

So like.

If I believed in something. Or maybe *someone*, rather, then I could have the things I want, or questions answered, or. I don't know. The people I need?

...

The person I need.

...

So, can I go back? To believing, so it wouldn't end up like this? Or maybe it wouldn't change the outcome, but the future might get to look different. I don't know.

(Trying to dismiss it.)

I don't know.

Long pause.

How do you respond to that?

.....

ARTHUR clears his throat.

ARTHUR

Are you asking to like, make a deal or something?

ZINNIA

I'm not sure.

Maybe?

...

(Laughing at herself through tears.)

Probably not. I don't have much to offer. Can't really bargain with The Almighty.

I'd just have to hope today was a grocery store kind of day.

Pause.

CASEY

What if you get red grape juice but you wanted white grape juice? Or...like...cranberry juice?

ZINNIA

I don't actually want juice.

CASEY

No. Yeah. I got that, but like, sometimes you get something kind of like what you wanted, or asked for, but the store is out of white, so you get stuck with Concord grape juice. You want to thank your mom, because you don't want to make her feel bad, but it's just not what you were looking forward to.

ARTHUR

But why would God's grocery store be out of white grape juice? Isn't omnipotence His whole shtick? White grape juice wouldn't be a finite resource.

ZINNIA

I think you're getting too hung up on the details. Greene's a person, not a bottle of Ocean Spray.

CASEY

You're the one who made the comparison first.

ZINNIA

Okay, and I guess I should've thought more about my audience when coming up with the metaphor. My bad.

CASEY

You don't have to be like that.

ZINNIA

Like what?

CASEY is clearly upset.

The next section has everyone clumsily tripping over each others' words:

CASEY

Pissy.

We were / trying to work with your vernacular.

ARTHUR

/Hey, whoa, don't / put words in my mouth.

ZINNIA

/But I wasn't saying it so you could make it into some punch line.

CASEY

You don't have ownership over / Greene.

ZINNIA

/I never said I have ownership over anyone!

CASEY

She wasn't just *yours*, you know.

ZINNIA

Oh? And makes you say that?

It's not like you're ever around.

You can't stake a claim if you can't even be bothered to pick up the goddamn phone. Send a text.

CASEY

Since when is a person a piece of real estate?

ZINNIA

Stop it!

You know what I mean and you're twisting it!

She's *not* a bottle of juice, and she's *not* a piece of land.

CASEY

Then stop saying she is! Was. Whatever.

ARTHUR

(Flabbergasted.)

Can you both stop?

I mean. Does it really have to be like this?

I've never heard the two of you fight before. What's changed?

They both glare at him.

ARTHUR should not have a hint of anger in his tone, but it is firm.

ARTHUR

I mean, jeeppers, I know what's changed, but like, why is it a problem between you guys? I don't think it's going to solve anything. Greene's gone and that fucking sucks. But we weren't that close, truthfully.

I don't think I have equal stock in this situation. I guess I don't have the right to argue about it. I never earned that.

It's about who knew her best. Or knows her.

We can't *all* miss her, right?

We can't *all* just support each other through this, right?

ZINNIA

...

I'm sorry.

ZINNIA starts reaching for a box.

CASEY

That's all?

ZINNIA

Um. I wasn't apologizing to you.

CASEY

Did you just sort of absorb all of her crazy?

ARTHUR

Don't start again / please.

CASEY

/No, I'm genuinely curious.

She held some anger for me and never said what it was.

I never mentioned it, but I'm not stupid. So I'm asking you, *Zinnia*, did you inherit some great fortune of her misery?

You've always been on my side, or I thought were.

ZINNIA

I never take sides.

CASEY

Sure feels like you are right now.

*This irritates ZINNIA.
She doesn't know what she's about to say, but she's gonna say it.*

ZINNIA

You know what her problem was?

CASEY

(Sardonically.)

I'm just dying to know.

ZINNIA

She was upset. And like. So fucking hurt that you stopped caring.

You only came around for the good times. And then you moved away.

You kept in touch with me, with him.

She wasn't a real part of your life anymore.

You brought your desserts in little pink boxes and then left the garbage behind.

CASEY

I didn't stop caring, though.

You can't—or she can't—just say that.

ZINNIA

But you never stay for the bad times.

You never even acknowledge the aftermath.

CASEY

She could've tried harder, too.

ZINNIA

But she's not here to do that anymore. She can't keep defending herself. And you haven't said a single nice thing about her.

CASEY

I'm hurting.

ZINNIA

So am I.

So is Arthur.

CASEY

So why can't I call her selfish? If the recoil is affecting all of us so much more?

...

Only a selfish *bitch* would—

ZINNIA

(Heartbroken.)

I think you need to go.

CASEY

(Dejected and in complete agreement.)

Yeah.

Yeah, I think so too.

*They face each other but don't make eye contact.
CASEY breaks the stalemate by walking to ZINNIA.
They embrace for a long moment.
ARTHUR shuffles his feet and ZINNIA lets go.*

ZINNIA

(Quietly, to him.)

Can you stay?

*He nods and gives CASEY a pat on the arm.
CASEY nods with understanding.*

CASEY

I'm gonna. Um. Take a walk? Yeah.

*ZINNIA and ARTHUR watch her exit through the apartment door.
CASEY leaves without another word.
ZINNIA curls up on the couch.*

ZINNIA

I'm really sorry.

ARTHUR

No. It's okay.

I mean, it's not okay, but not you.

You're fine.

ZINNIA

I don't know what happened.

When did I get so crazy?

ARTHUR

You're not crazy. You're feeling a little abandoned.

ZINNIA

I am.

ARTHUR

And Casey is a part of that, I think.

ZINNIA

(Kinda manic laugh.)

I've never had problems with her before.

And I actually never asked Greene what the problem was between them. Maybe I didn't want to see the resentment, or admit that I could.

But it just came out, like I've been holding it back for so long I forgot it was there. But I think I really *really* meant it.

ARTHUR

It gets under your skin. Or tucked in your brain or something.

ZINNIA

Ew.

I hate that visual, thanks.

ARTHUR

Sorry.

ZINNIA

We say that a lot, huh?
People, I mean.
Like everyone always says sorry.

ARTHUR

But I *am* always sorry.

ZINNIA

Me too. It sucks.

ARTHUR

Maybe we just want others to mean it more often. We are overcompensating for them by always meaning it.

ZINNIA

Like there's a deficit for sorryness?

ARTHUR

Exactly like a deficit!
You know, you could've been a business major.

ZINNIA gives a pitiful laugh.

ZINNIA

Worst business ever.

ARTHUR

(Saying it like a slogan on a radio ad:)
Sorry Corp.: We sell apologies.

ZINNIA

Stop it.

ARTHUR

I'll admit it wasn't my best work but—

ZINNIA
Stop making me smile.

ARTHUR
Why would I ever do that?

ZINNIA
I don't know. I've got an ugly smile?
...
She never hated you, you know.

ARTHUR
Yeah, I know. She told me once.
As it turns out, Greene's a big ol' sap.

Now, she gives a pitying laugh.

ZINNIA
I get it.

ARTHUR
I swear that wasn't even intentional! I'm just *that good*.

ZINNIA
Yes, you are, sweetie.
...
Thanks for staying with me.

ARTHUR
I wouldn't have left, you know.

ZINNIA
Yeah, I know. I appreciate you.

ARTHUR
At least someone does.

He joins her on the sofa.

ARTHUR

It's nice to talk to you.
I feel like we haven't done this in a while.

ZINNIA

I think it's safe to say we haven't done *this* ever.

She gestures to the boxes.

ARTHUR

I think you helped me move once?

ZINNIA

Not the same.

ARTHUR

(Shaking his head.)
No, not the same.

ZINNIA

You get it, right?

ARTHUR

Get what?

ZINNIA

Why I can't do this?

ARTHUR

I think so.

...

I've been dreaming about her a lot? Nothing weird, she's just. Always there.
But it's funny. I mean, not funny like ha ha funny, but. I feel like I'm getting to know her better right now. I've never seen any of this.
I didn't know she still used CDs or read Virginia Woolf. All I knew was that she was a good friend of a good friend of mine. She hated doing kitchen chores. She was kind of short, and would've been a kick-ass bassist in our band.
A cool lady.

ZINNIA

Eh, not much of a lady.

ARTHUR

No, maybe not. But one hell of a woman.

ZINNIA

I'm trying not to feel too guilty about it.

ARTHUR

Guilt would imply you did something wrong.

ZINNIA

Well, the jury's still out on that one

ARTHUR

There's no verdict here.

ZINNIA

(With a small smile.)

You sound just like her, sometimes.

...

It's a bummer you guys didn't hang out more.

It's weird to me that you guys didn't hang out more.

ARTHUR

Yeah. I mean, on paper, we were like BFFs.

ZINNIA

No.

ARTHUR

But we could've been!

ZINNIA

Should've been.

Settling pause.

ARTHUR turns his head to give ZINNIA privacy while she wipes her eyes.

He notices the snowglobe and gingerly picks it up.

ARTHUR

Pretty.

ZINNIA looks over at him.

ZINNIA

Oh, that.

...

You know, I stole it.

ARTHUR

Yeah? I didn't have you pegged for a kleptomaniac.

ZINNIA

It was an accident!

ARTHUR

Sure. That's what they *all* say.

ZINNIA

No! Seriously!

It was from some airport gift shop. I called Greene crying about it, actually. I was so worried they'd find me out or something. She offered to stash it for me.

ARTHUR

How thoughtful.

ZINNIA

I thought she would've thrown it out by now. It was in the early days, actually. We hadn't been friends that long, and for some reason she was the first person I thought to call.

ARTHUR

Seems like you made the right choice.

ZINNIA

I think so.

ARTHUR offers the snowglobe to her, but she doesn't accept it.

ZINNIA gets up.

ZINNIA

Okay.

(Deep breath.)

Let's get some of this stuff out of here.

She goes for the box CASEY had dropped earlier.

She begins to unpack it.

ARTHUR

Uh, Zinn? Whatcha doin'?

ZINNIA

This stuff doesn't belong in here.

ARTHUR

We have to move it / somehow...

ZINNIA

/No. It belongs in her room.

She takes some of the items in hand and disappears down the hallway.

ARTHUR

We just took those out of there.

What are you doing?

He gets up to investigate, leaving the stage vacant for a moment.

Some rattling might be heard.

Some faint thuds.

ZINNIA returns looking triumphant, with ARTHUR in tow.

ARTHUR

Why are you unpacking her stuff?

ZINNIA

It's not right to take someone else's things.

She goes to take some other wares in her arms.

ARTHUR stands awkwardly still.

ARTHUR

I mean, yeah, but she made it pretty clear she won't be needing them.

ZINNIA

No, silly, we've got to leave everything where we found it or she'll know we were snooping.

ARTHUR

Um.

ZINNIA

Can you hand me whatever's in that box?

She gestures to another box.

ARTHUR

Um.

What's going on? Are you okay?

ZINNIA

Yeah. Yeah. I'm okay.

She repeats her gesture with impatience.

ZINNIA

Now are you going to help me or not?

ARTHUR

Zinnia.

We came here to pack everything up. This is gonna make our job much more difficult.

ZINNIA

We can't do that.

She'll come back. She always does.

*ZINNIA moves to stand behind the couch;
an effort to put distance between them.*

ARTHUR

(Gentle but firm.)

I don't think she will this time.

ZINNIA

You're wrong!

...

I want you to be wrong.

ARTHUR

I do too.

*ZINNIA runs a hand along the top of the sofa backrest.
She drops her defenses.*

ZINNIA

It's itchy.

ARTHUR

What's itchy?

ZINNIA

The couch.

ARTHUR

Ah. That's why I prefer the beanbag.

ZINNIA

Really?

...

You're actually the only one I've ever seen use it.

ARTHUR

It's my seat.

ZINNIA

(Shrugging.)

Can't deny that.

(Beat.)

You can keep it if you want.

ARTHUR

Yeah? I'd like that.

ZINNIA

She would too.

ARTHUR

I might have to clear some more space out of the back of the van.

ZINNIA

Okay.

ARTHUR

Give me like five minutes and I think we'll be set to load some stuff in.
Whatever stuff you want to load in.

ZINNIA

Okay.

ARTHUR

Be right back!

ZINNIA

I'll be right here.

ARTHUR exits through the apartment door. ZINNIA looks around, ignoring the boxes. She moves back around to the front of the sofa and perches on an armrest. It's like she's never been in the room alone before and she doesn't know what to do with herself. She searches for the TV remote and eventually finds it stuck between the cushions. After flipping through a few channels, ZINNIA settles on something unimportant and lets her attention fall elsewhere, grabbing the tiny snowglobe from before. She sits for a few peaceful moments, amused by the trinket. A loud noise is heard from outside. ZINNIA sets the snowglobe down and runs out the apartment door to see what the commotion is all about.

END OF ACT, but...

Act III: In the Time Between?

...Lights remain unchanged, as Act II transitions directly into Act III. I don't know what day it is. The television is still on, some atrocious laugh-track will be heard from time to time. The scene sits like this for a couple of minutes, the emptiness of the stage getting its full weight taken in. An unseen door is heard opening, and GREENE enters from the hallway. She doesn't say anything before she starts clearing out the boxes, breaking down the ones that have already been folded, and taking them all into the offstage kitchen. This might take a couple of trips, it might not. Once the stage is mostly reset to her satisfaction, GREENE scans the room with a sense of accomplishment. She leaves again to grab something from her bedroom, returning momentarily with some paper and a pen. She sits. As she begins to write, GREENE finally begins to speak; she should feel encouraged to take her time.

GREENE

To whoever finds this, give it to Zinnia.

It's for her.

...

Don't be alarmed.

I'm fine. Or will be soon enough.

I'm sorry to leave you in this way. We all have to leave for greener pastures at some point, right?

Or maybe just get to the other side of the road?

Whatever you want to call it, I'm trying to move on.

...

Sorry. That's some bullshit.

Sounds phony.

I don't think it's what I want to say.

She pauses.

She can scratch out what she wrote above, if the performer feels so moved.

...

I've sat here a lot, you know.

Don't even have to check the clock anymore, I know what time it is based on the shadows the sun casts through the blinds.

The hours don't blend together, it's more like they sort of. Layer on top of each other?

Like, right now is made up of a minute ago and last month, and next year is gonna be an addendum of every moment in between. I don't want to make up right now's moment, I don't want to be a part of the next one either. Maybe that's the loneliness talking.

I don't know what I'm even talking about anymore.

It's all so overwhelming. Nothing ever stops. And Nothing never stops. On and on and on it goes. The world's turning, the world's burning, and oh no, I'm fucking *sad* again.

*GREENE crumples up the paper out of frustration.
She throws it down the hallway.*

(To the audience? To herself? Someone else?)

Why can't I get this shit right?

Can I try again?

Let me start over.

I can do better this time. Promise.

...

(Continuing to write on a new sheet of paper.)

Okay...to whoever finds this...

*She scribbles her little introduction thing again.
She might be muttering.
Once she gets to the new beginning she wanted,
GREENE starts to speak again:*

Something has to change.

Maybe it should be me, maybe not.

But where do I even start? Look in the fucking mirror and suck in my cheeks, wishing for something that cannot be? Do I even want a fish face? Or is it just something new, not so plain, so boring as the natural plump silhouette I've grown all too accustomed to? Beyond the baby face, what is there to change?

I could start small.

Add a spring to my step.

Sing soprano for once.

Smoke some cloves...maybe not.

Any change can be good, even if it's not a positive one — I need reinvention. I just can't sit *here* anymore. It's so terribly itchy on this goddamn couch.

I don't know why I never got a new one.

It would've been worth it.

I guess I'm more sentimental than I let on.

...

You know, I've always preferred the word "sofa" over "couch." It sounds nicer, I think. This heap of junk is a *couch*, but maybe I should have treated it like a sofa. Maybe I should just be nicer. I could've been nicer to a lot of things, and a lot of people. To Arthur, Casey, you. Mostly you.

God, why couldn't I be nicer to you?! All you've ever done is love me. Was it so wrong of you to love me?

...

I know just about everything there is to know about you. The lines of your face, the weight you hold in your shoulders. But there's so much of me you haven't known. And I don't even know who I am.

I feel like I'm knitting with one needle and calling it crochet.

You know what I mean?

Fuck.

I used to be the person who went all out for friends' birthdays. So much money and time and thought spent on birthdays. But it was never returned, and it didn't bother me until I spent three of my own birthdays alone in a row. And then it hit me. And then I stopped.

I mean. It made me think. What the fuck kind of person gets so involved in other people's birthdays, anyway? It's just the day you're brought into the world. It's not like you had any say in the matter. It's not the cause for celebration we think it is. Everyone has one. And birthdays can be hard on some folks, they're like a standing appointment with an existential crisis. No one likes to be reminded of that. And gift-giving isn't even my love language, I don't think. I don't think I believe in that anyway...

But sometimes I do miss being that person. Hanging the streamers, lighting the candles, making the most thoughtful gift I could think of.

I miss that. I miss her. I miss me.

...

Tell Casey I'm sorry. She deserved to know so much. How can I expect an apology for something that I don't have the right to get jealous about?

Frankly, I resent the resentment that I let fester. It doesn't matter anymore, and I'm starting to think it never did to begin with.

I always thought I'd tell you about it eventually, but not like this. Maybe someday, in a better way.

...

I want to say I'm sorry to Arthur, too. He gave me so much kindness and nothing but understanding. I was never able to express it right, but I have a lot of admiration for him.

Don't tell him I said that. Or do. It probably means more to him than it does to me.

It was never his fault we weren't closer. We should've been.

I should have tried harder for him, and for everyone.

...

But most of all, to you, Zinnia, I am sorry.

You have held my hand, you have sung me to sleep. You love me more than I deserve. I wish there was a way for me to repay your affections. To show you *my* affections.

I always say that I can help myself, but I need you more than you know.

In this unnamed grief, I'm sorry. I lost myself, but you lost me too.

...

God.

I wish what I had to say was interesting.

I wish I were interesting.

...

What the fuck is wrong with me?

Why do I make everything about myself?

It's not like I'm all that and a bag of chips.

I'm not special. And I need to stop pretending that I am. People are just people, you know? I need to stop thinking there's something inherently interesting about me. I'm not the first person to be sad. Fuck, everyone is always at least a little sad. Maybe not about death or loss or whatever, but just like, what's happening.

Life, I mean. It's kind of sad.

But you, Zinnia, make the best of it. You find ways to see happiness because you can. I wish I could be more like you.

But shade can't see the sunshine.

And I'm tired of it. I want warmth.

...

Did I ever tell you zinnias are my favorite flower?

I can't remember if that was before or after meeting you.

Honestly, I can't even remember if it was true before just now. It feels like they've always been my favorite, but always has to start sometime.

GREENE stops writing. The laugh track from the television has become too distracting, almost taunting. She looks for the remote, and finds it on the other side of the couch. She begins pushing buttons, trying to turn down the volume, change the channel, turn off the TV, everything. Nothing works. She starts thumping the remote with her free hand. This approach seems to work, but it leaves static on the screen. GREENE shrugs as if to say "Good enough," before setting the remote down on the table. She notices the snowglobe and picks it up with great care. After giving it a shake, and watching the flakes inside settle, she returns to her writing with a newfound calmness.

Please don't think this has anything to do with you.

Please don't think my saying that is implying the exact opposite.

It's about me, and only me.

Classic Greene, I know. *Me me me...*

...

I hope I wasn't always this conceited.

I hope I leave you better than I found you.

I hope you remember me this time of day. It might be different where you are, but for me, right now, it's about ten in the morning. The sun leaves four stripes on the floor. And I've been awake all night.

I'm so tired.

...

I hate saying goodbyes. You know I fucking hate it. They're always tearful and false and full of sweetness. The bad kind of sweet, like love songs on a first date, or cake for breakfast.

So.

I love you.

Goodnight, or good morning.

She sets her pen down and carefully folds the letter before stuffing it between two couch cushions. She gets up to turn off the lights, leaving the room almost completely dark. She takes the snowglobe back into her room offstage. Upon her return, she takes a look around. The stage is exactly as she wants it. She comes back to her perch. The only source of light is the static emanating from the TV. GREENE is slumped over on the couch, completely zoned out as she stares vacantly at the television. All is still. Blackout.

END OF PLAY.