

4000 Miles
by Amy Herzog

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Cast of Characters

Leo Joseph-Connell.....	Twenty-one
Vera Joseph.....	Ninety-one
Amanda.....	Nineteen, Chinese
Bec.....	Twenty-one

Time and Place

September of a recent year – maybe 2007. A spacious rent-controlled apartment in Greenwich Village that hasn't been redecorated since approximately 1968. The key decorative element is books.

Notes:

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

Development History:

4000 Miles was written for the SoHo Rep Writer/Director Lab, 2009/2010.

World Premiere: LCT3, June 20th, 2010.

Scene one

The middle of the night: the light has the quality of being surprising and too bright.

Leo, 21, lanky, fit, and dirty, stands just inside the apartment, his laden bike next to him. He is smiling broadly. Vera, 91, tiny and frail but not without fortitude, is in her nightgown. She covers her mouth because she hasn't put her teeth in. Her speech is altered for the same reason. She is quite disoriented.

A pause in which he grins and she is uncomprehending.

LEO

You haven't changed the name. On the buzzer.

VERA

What?

LEO

The buzzer! It still says Joe Joseph!

VERA

So?

LEO

So you should change it. Put your name on there.

VERA

That is my name.

LEO

Your name isn't *Joe* Joseph.

VERA

...well...

LEO

Just seems like it's time.

(pause)

I can help you with that, if you want. I'm pretty handy.

VERA

(slurred)

You need a place to stay, is that it?

LEO

Sorry, what?

VERA

(still covering her mouth, still slurred)

You need a place to stay?

LEO

I can't understand you when you –

(he reaches to move her hand away from her mouth; startled, she draws back, almost losing her balance).

Sorry.

VERA

Will you – wait here.

(She exits, still covering her mouth. He leans the bike against a bookcase and takes off one of the panniers – this takes some effort – it is extremely heavy. He puts it down on the floor noisily. Vera reenters, less disoriented, with teeth, and putting her hearing aid in)

Are you high?

LEO

What? No.

VERA

Well it's three o'clock in the morning so I'm just asking. Have you eaten anything in a while?

LEO

I'm cool.

VERA

That's not what I asked you. You've lost weight.

LEO

It's been a long road, but a good one.

VERA

You biked all the way here?

LEO

Pretty much.

VERA

From Minnesota?

LEO

Actually we started in Seattle.

(brief pause)

VERA

There are some mountains in the middle, aren't there, whichever way you go?

LEO

There are. There are.

VERA

I'll get you a banana.

LEO

A – no! Whoa, jet fuel.

VERA

What?

LEO

NO SUCH THING AS A LOCAL BANANA!

VERA

You don't have to yell, it's only when you speak very low or very fast that I can't hear you.

LEO

I'm just concerned about you, I was leaning on that buzzer for quite a while.

VERA

Yes, well, I was asleep, and I didn't have my, whadayacallit, hearing aid in, and I wasn't expecting you.

LEO

Would you hear a fire alarm?

VERA

What?

LEO

WOULD YOU HEAR / A –

VERA

I heard you, listen, it's – it's the way you're acting I don't understand, actually, not your...the whole family's been very worried, I guess you know that. Your mother and father –

LEO

I'm sorry people worried, I am, but that's not something I can take responsibility for?

VERA

You should have called. You should have called your mother. She's been...she's really been...

(He picks up his pannier, goes to reattach it)

LEO

(warmly, apparently sincerely)

Grandma Vera. It was awesome to see you.

VERA

What? – You're –

LEO

It's cool, I don't think either of us has to feel bad about the fact that the timing isn't right for me to be here.

VERA

You're going to – where will you go?

LEO

I have a tent and a camping stove and a love for the outdoors, I'll be all right.

VERA

You're in Manhattan!

LEO

Maybe you can give me a tip, somewhere out of the way?

VERA

There's no place like that! Listen, you're being – put that back down. Put it down.

(he hesitates)

You can leave tomorrow, I won't stop you. Just – sleep here for a few hours, and take a shower, and eat some breakfast. I can wash those – you smell terrible and I wouldn't be surprised if you had lice.

LEO

I don't have lice.

VERA

And you don't seem all right to me, you don't...seem all right.

LEO

(still smiling)

It's just, if this is gonna be about calling Jane, and a last minute hellaciously overpriced plane flight for which she has to take a valium because she's a phobic freak, and I wake up in the morning and she's here with a valium hangover –

VERA

I'm not a reporter.

LEO

Meaning?

VERA

Meaning I'm not a news reporter and I won't call your mother if that's what you're asking me.

But the way you're talking about her, it's really not fair, a lot of people don't like flying.

LEO

Jane and I are at a juncture where more talking is not better than less talking. If that's not something you can understand, I'm saying it's probably best I go set up camp somewhere else.

VERA

I don't agree with it, but I understand.

(pause)

I know what she feels like is...if you're not talking to her, she just hopes you're talking to / someone.

LEO

Oh, that is bullshit, and you know her, and you know that is passive aggressive *bullshit!* *She* wants to talk about it! *She!* I am fine!

VERA

(with genuine feeling)

Well. I did want to say how sorry I am. That must have been –

LEO

Thank you.

(silence. This has gotten to him, and she sees it.)

VERA

You what, came over the GW?

LEO

The -- ?

VERA

The George Washington Bridge?

LEO

I guess, yeah.

VERA

Was it pretty? At night?

LEO

...yeah, actually. Yeah. I'm not much of a city guy, but. It was all right.

VERA

I'm – I must say I'm surprised, and this is not a complaint, that you came here, instead of your – I've lost track whether she's your girlfriend or not, the chubby one, isn't she up at/whadayacallit –

LEO

She's not chubby.

VERA

She's – well she's not *thin*.

LEO

She's healthy, she's / strong.

VERA

I don't see what that has to do with it.

LEO

She's not *chubby*.

VERA

All *right*. I thought if you ended up in New York you might have gone there.

LEO

I stopped by.

(brief pause)

VERA

She had another fella with her, is that / it?

LEO

No, Vera, she didn't have – it's just not good timing. It turns out. Which I respect. She said she needed to do some *thinking*. Thinking is good.

VERA

Well it's been a lousy coupla months for you then, between one thing and another.

(pause)

Would you take a shower before you get in bed?
Leo?

LEO

What? Yeah. Shower sounds great.

VERA

You all right?

LEO

Yeah! Yeah.

(he picks up the pack and begins to head offstage. She stops him.)

VERA

Where are you going?

LEO

Guest room.

VERA

No, that one's my room now.

LEO

I thought that – I thought that was yours.

VERA

Not since Joe was sick. We moved in there for the, whaddayacallit, single beds and I stayed. Has it been that long since you've been here?

LEO

I was here for the funeral. I guess I forgot.

VERA

That was a long time ago.

(he hesitates)

You need anything else?

LEO

No, I –
Grandma –

VERA

Yes?

(his uncertainty dissolves into a big smile)

LEO

...good night.

(he exits.)

Scene Two

The next day, late morning.

Vera enters through the front door with a laundry cart. She has some trouble maneuvering it through the door and into the apartment. She is taking care to be quiet. Once she has gotten the cart in and closed the door, she goes offstage to Leo's bedroom. A pause. She comes back, satisfied that he is still asleep.

She takes the laundry from the cart, piece by piece, and folds it. Bike jerseys and shorts. Those wicking pieces of athletic clothing. Tiny cycling socks. She regards them all with some suspicion.

The phone rings. At the first ring, she tenses, listens to see if she heard right. At the second ring, she looks anxiously toward the bedroom where Leo is sleeping and moves as quickly as she can to the old rotary phone.

VERA

Hello.
Hold on.

(she takes her whining hearing aid out)

Hello.

(mild irritation verging on imperiousness)

Yes, darling, what?

I'm not done with it.

I'm not done with it yet.

I know what time it is, but as a matter of fact my grandson is here so I've been busy.

Yes, well, it was a surprise, he came and surprised me, so.

Well that's – listen –

Hello?

(she looks at the phone)

Hello?

(She shakes her head and hangs up.)

Pain in the ass.

(she goes back to the laundry and continues to fold, still periodically shaking her head. After a few moments, Leo enters, disheveled but clean.)

LEO

Hey.

(she continues to fold)

Vera.

(she looks up with the startled look of half deaf people who aren't sure whether they heard something, and want to cover if they did, and sees Leo)

VERA

Oh!

(she fumbles in her pockets for her hearing aid and puts it back in)

The phone woke you?

LEO

No.

VERA

It was Ginny across the hall. I give her the arts section when I'm done with it and I'm late today. Never mind she's never given me a nickel for it, that's what I get for being nice. She says she's just checking in to see if I'm all right but you know she's really sitting there, stewing, resenting me, she's...well, no good deed goes unpunished, right? Did you sleep all right?

LEO

Mm-hm.

VERA

And then she just hung up! I told her you were here and she said "oh I'm terribly sorry" in this – like she was interrupting a big meeting or something and she just hung up without even saying – why it gets to me so much I don't know. She's just...

(she looks for the word, doesn't find it)

She's really a character.

LEO

Huh.

VERA

But we have an arrangement where she calls me one night and I call her the next, and that way if one of us turns up our toes it won't take until we start smelling to figure it out. Which isn't really a problem for me, because I have the family, but she doesn't have anyone, so I guess I have guilt feelings about that is what it is. And we have a lot in common in terms of the political – we both, in terms of Cuba, and the pro-peace whaddayacallit, and being progressives, we see eye to eye, but in everything else she just drives me nuts.

LEO

You're giving her too much power.

VERA

What?

LEO

That power. You gotta take it back.

(she considers this)

VERA

Well.

If you stay longer, and I'm not saying you will, I'll show you how to, whaddayacallit.

Disconnect the phone in that room, because I do get a lot of calls sometimes.

You look better. What?

LEO

Good morning, Vera.

VERA

Actually it's after two—

(He interrupts her with a big bear hug. Surprised, she gives in to the totally unexpected physical affection. The embrace goes on for a little while. She closes her eyes and tries to remember it. They separate. She smiles widely at him)

You smell better, too. What did you think of that bed?

LEO

It was great, great bed.

VERA

That's what I think! You know your uncle Ben and Mel, they want me to get a new mattress. Which they do not offer to pay for. Every time they stay here they complain, and complain.

LEO

I slept like a rock.

VERA

I may quote you on that. I'll end up doing it, though, anyway, or else they'll have an excuse not to visit. You drink coffee?

LEO

Yeah, I'd love some.

(she exits. He surveys the neat little piles she's made of his stuff. He stoops and picks up a box of condoms that's seen wear and tear in his bag. He had forgotten he brought it. She reenters with coffee and a plate with a few breakfast pastries on it, maybe a couple hard boiled eggs.)

VERA

I was glad to see you carry those and surprised they weren't opened. I thought you probably take it black.

LEO

I do.

VERA

Me too, that's how I like it.

(he bites into a pastry)

Tell me if that's completely thawed.

(he gives her the thumbs up)

I got a few of those free a month or two ago at the Senior Center, some event, they had a buffet table and at the end they were going to throw it all away, which I did not approve of. It was lucky I thought to freeze them because otherwise I would have had to go out and get you something and I wasn't feeling completely up to it. Some days I'm myself, and some days my head really isn't right, and my balance. It's really disgusting.

LEO

Have you had it checked out?

VERA

What? Oh sure, they're all useless, they just tell me I'm old and I knew that already. I knew you were sleeping well because you didn't wake up when I brought your whadayacallit out of your room. Moaning and groaning – that thing must weigh a hundred pounds!

LEO

Nah. About twenty.

VERA

Is that all?

LEO

Well that's one of four bags. Total weight's about fifty.

VERA

Fifty *pounds*?

LEO
More when I have food and water.

VERA
And you keep all that on your *bicycle*?

LEO
Yup.

(she can't quite believe this but has no alternative)

VERA
Doesn't that make it a lot harder?

(he laughs, for the first time)

LEO
Yeah, yup, that's a yes.

VERA
And you camped at night, is that it?

LEO
Usually. Sometimes I'd meet someone and be invited to crash.

VERA
You ever meet anyone really peculiar?

LEO
What do you mean?

VERA
I don't know, like some crackpot who wanted something weird from you, in exchange for...a place to stay or whatever.

LEO
Like...?

VERA
Like a – whaddayacallit, something sexual, or –

LEO
What?

VERA

I would think on the road like that, by yourself, you'd meet all kinds of people.

LEO

I did meet all kinds of people. None of them required sexual favors from me, no.

VERA

If you were a woman it would probably have been different; you probably would have run into all kinds of things like that.

LEO

I know a lot of women who travel alone, Bec has done a lot of traveling / alone –

VERA

Rebecca – well, all right, if you're built like *that*, but I mean a smaller / woman.

LEO

I find if you approach people with love and trust you can count on getting the same things back from them.

(brief pause)

VERA

What is that, Confucius, or...?

LEO

It's Leo Joseph-Connell. It's me.

VERA

I'm teasing you.

LEO

Okay.

VERA

I guess it's a sensitive subject.

LEO

Nope.

VERA

Well.

(pause)

LEO

You know anything about a climbing wall?

A what? VERA

A climbing gym! LEO

What's a climbing gym? VERA

It's a – a gym. Where you climb. They have these walls / with – LEO

Oh, with the funny, and you're in one of those whadayacallit – VERA

Harnesses. LEO

Right, I've seen that. Where have I seen that? I saw that and I thought what the hell is that for? VERA

(she gets the yellow pages)

You want to go today, is that it?

I was thinking about it. Get the old upper body back to work. LEO

(now with the yellow pages, she asks this studiously casually, without looking at him)

So you think you might stay a little longer, is that it? VERA
Would it be under...what would it be under?

(he takes the yellow pages from her, gently, and looks)

Yellow pages. Man. LEO

What? VERA

LEO

Do you have a computer?

VERA

No, I -- well yes, I have one, Ben and Mel got it for me, but I'm not, whaddayacallit. They were very happy with themselves for getting it for me but they didn't really show me what to do with it.

LEO

Mac or PC?

VERA

What?

LEO

We'll look at it later.

VERA

You know a lot about computers?

LEO

I don't like them. But I can use them.

VERA

I thought everyone your age liked them.

LEO

Micah never sent an email. His whole life. Which was stubborn as shit, but you have to admire it.

VERA

Did he use the telephone?

LEO

Yeah, but he didn't have a cell phone. I don't have one either.

VERA

I know you don't, I've been hearing about that a lot lately.

(brief pause)

I guess what they say is all this, whatsit, technology is good for...from the standpoint of the people, or the -- that you can get the propaganda to the people, the Marxist -- I can't find the words, but in terms of Africa, and South America, and places where -- that from the standpoint of being progressive and so on and so forth it can be a good thing.

(brief pause)

You know, there are a lot of bad things about getting old, but the worst one is not being able to find my words. I just hate not being able to find my words, I feel like an idiot half the time.

LEO
That it's democratizing.

VERA
What?

LEO
That with the internet, information is free to everyone, it um...de-commodifies knowledge. Which is power.

(he returns to his yellow page search)

VERA
When you put it that way I think I should learn how to use the computer.

LEO
Marx is cool.

VERA
You think so?

LEO
He's all right.

VERA
Well I think so too.

LEO
When I did that semester at Evergreen I took a class on Marx. Best class I took.

VERA
What did your mother think of that?

LEO
About me studying Marx?

VERA
Yeah.

LEO
Uh, I think she was like, "how is that going to be useful to you, in the future?"

VERA
Oh, dear.

LEO

And I was like, first of all, who knows, and second, I think it's important to understand where I come from, which is where you come from, too, so I'm surprised you aren't more supportive.

VERA

(delighted)

You said that?

LEO

I did.

VERA

And what did she say?

LEO

You know, as long as I was in college, she was happy, so I think she just shut up.

VERA

She and I don't talk about politics anymore. I always end up telling her how disappointing she was to her father, I don't mean to, somehow or other I just wind up saying it, and I only mean in terms of the political – not *generally*, but then she starts crying and going on about how she always votes democrat, as if that's...it's better we just don't talk about it.

LEO

I find that to be true about a lot of subjects with Jane.

VERA

Well, between you and me. I guess I do too.

(a small moment of enjoying each other.)

But she was always my favorite because she was the littlest, you know she was only two when Joe and I started carrying on together. And she's been very devoted to me, so.

LEO

Is 23rd street pretty near here?

VERA

Matter of fact you can walk there. I guess I should get you Joe's keys.

LEO

Um –

(she doesn't hear him and exits. He prepares himself to ask for something. She reenters with keys)

VERA

I better show you which one does what, and you'll get it wrong the first few times anyway but you'll eventually learn.

LEO

Okay – I was wondering if you could spot me a few bucks? For climbing?

VERA

Oh. You're out of money, is that it?

LEO

At the moment the flow is low.

VERA

How much do you need?

LEO

I don't know what prices are like around here... I have to rent all the stuff, so like, fifty?

VERA

Fifty *dollars*?

LEO

That's what it would be in Seattle, so I guess... maybe a little more?

VERA

More than *fifty* dollars? To climb up a wall?

LEO

I'm expecting an influx in a couple days so I could pay / you back.

VERA

A what?

LEO

An influx! Of cash, into my account!

VERA

From where?

From your mother? She's still giving you money?

Well...

LEO

Forget it.

VERA

No, / listen –

LEO

Forget it! It's no big deal!

VERA

I'm going to show you where I keep the money, and then when you need some you can just take it and leave a note, all right? So I know how much you took and I won't worry about it.

All right?

LEO

All right.

VERA

And then maybe you can do some shopping, and get the things around the house you like to have for breakfast and so on and so forth.

LEO

Vera, I want to be really clear that I can't stay more than a couple days.

VERA

I understand.

LEO

It's great to rest up, but I need to make it back to Washington before it gets too cold, so.

VERA

You mean, on the bike?

LEO

Yup.

VERA

You're going to go all the way back west on that bike?

LEO

That's the plan.

(an uncomprehending pause)

VERA

Maybe if you called Rebecca today, she – since it was the middle of the night, she may not / have –

LEO

It's not / about –

VERA

Seeing as you came all this way to be with her –

LEO

I didn't.

I didn't come all this way to be with her.

VERA

Well I know it wasn't to be with *me*.

LEO

It was to finish something I started. Micah and I started something. I finished it. That's it. People want to make it really complicated but it's not.

(he gives her a big smile)

VERA

If you stayed more than a couple days I wouldn't know what to say to your mother. I don't know what to say to her as it is. So we're in agreement.

I keep the money in Joe's study.

(she tries to stand, doesn't quite make it up, winds up and stands again. She makes her way out slowly. Leo stays seated. He is fending off a wave of nausea or vertigo.)

VERA (OS)

You comin' or what?

Scene 3

A few days later.

Leo is lying down, eating something and reading a book.

The sound of a key in the lock.

It takes a long time for Vera to get the door open.

She enters slowly, more off-balance than usual. She is wearing dark clothing.

She sees Leo, who waves and goes back to reading.

VERA
Did you lock the top lock?

LEO
No.

VERA
Are you sure?

LEO
Yup.

(she turns and looks at the door, perplexed)

VERA
Well I think you must have and then forgotten.

LEO
I haven't touched the door today, Vera.

VERA
Maybe you did it without really thinking about it.

LEO
Uh, okay, sure, I for no reason / and without thinking –

VERA
You have to speak louder if you want me to hear you.

LEO
I didn't lock the top lock!

VERA
Well...
(flustered)
all right.

LEO

Does it really matter?

VERA

I made sure I didn't lock it when I left, because it's getting harder for me to hold the, whadayacallit, the – *key*, because my hand shakes, which is disgusting, but then it was locked anyway so either you did it or I'm going crazy, which I must admit is very possible.

(she exits toward the bedroom, upset. He sits up. He thinks of going after her, then lies back down and continues reading. She reenters.)

I don't mind if you break something, accidents happen, but nothing drives me crazier than when somebody breaks something and doesn't tell me.

(she exits again)

LEO

What did I break? Vera?

(he puts the book down and begins to follow her but she reenters on her way to the kitchen)

What did I break?

VERA

Never mind, just tell me next time, all right?

LEO

Dude, I have no idea what you're talking about.

VERA

Now you're really making me mad.

LEO

Tell me what I did!

(she looks at him with disbelief)

VERA

The faucet! In your bathroom?

(he thinks hard)

LEO

The faucet...

VERA

Oh, gimme a break!

LEO

You gotta help me out here, grandma.

VERA

The whaddayacallit, the...

LEO

The whaddayacallit.

VERA

Don't make fun of me!

LEO

I'm not!

VERA

The...handle, that you turn. It's completely off.

LEO

I thought it was always like that.

(she shoots him an accusing look)

I did!

VERA

No, it wasn't "always like that." I went in there to clean this morning while you were still asleep because it was filthy, because you obviously haven't cleaned since you've been here, and that was the first time I ever saw it like that.

LEO

It came right off in my hand, I swear I thought –

VERA

Well, just tell me, is all I'm asking, I don't think that's an unreasonable request, do you?

(she exits into the kitchen. Pause.)

LEO

(he calls off)

Sorry!

(loud noises come from the kitchen. Leo decides not to take this on. He lies back down and keeps reading. After a few moments she reenters, still in a state)

VERA

In case you're interested, I just came from a funeral, so that's where I've been all morning.

LEO

Okay.

VERA

It was for the last of the octogenarians.

LEO

The what?

VERA

There were seven of us, octogenarians, and we had dinner once a month for a lot of years and we were all lefties and there were a lot of memories and laughs and the last one just died, besides me.

LEO

Sorry.

VERA

Yeah, he was a rat, very aggressive, he used to make passes at me with his wife sitting right there. She had Alzheimers so she didn't mind, but I did. Even so, he was the last one and I don't feel very happy about it.

LEO

You want a hug from a hippie?

VERA

No, I'm all right.

(she goes back into the kitchen. A moment later she reenters. Leo goes to her and hugs her.)

VERA

And I spoke to your mother this morning, too. And I did not tell her you're here, even though you were all she talked about, and she's really, whadayacallit, in distress, and I'm not feeling terribly proud of myself.

(he separates)

LEO

You can't take all that on. You have to let her find her own way.

VERA

Well see, that's not how I think about things. Because I believe in a...a society where...here I go with my words. The point is you help people, it's about the community, it's not about I do what's best for me and you do what's best for you, because...you know the one thing I wasn't thinking when Joe was dying was I better pay attention to what he says, about politics, because I always relied on him to, to make the arguments, and explain the...

(she shakes her head, lost, disgusted with herself)

LEO

(gently)

I've been reading this book he edited, about Cuba?

VERA

Oh, yeah?

LEO

It's really interesting. I didn't know this stuff, about their healthcare system –

VERA

Oh, their healthcare is wonderful. And literacy, too.

LEO

Grandpa's introduction is really...I don't remember him that well? You know? But I remember his voice, he had / that –

VERA

Yes.

LEO

Yeah, so I've been imagining his voice reading this, and it's like...so sure?

VERA

Indeed.

LEO

The way he writes, it's...it almost reads as a little hokey, now, because it's so – but I think it must have been cool, to be so, um. Uncynical. Like I think I'm really uncynical, and Micah was definitely totally uncynical, but *you* guys. That's like a whole other level of...I'm definitely learning about grandpa. It's definitely cool.

(pause)

VERA

Your mother told me something very upsetting about you this morning that I have been debating bringing up with you at all. Do you want to know what it is?

LEO

Not really.

VERA

She said in the beginning of the summer, when you were home for a little while in St. / Paul --

LEO

Oh my *god*, she's / still --

VERA

That you tried to kiss your sister.

LEO

I cannot *believe* she is still fixated on that!

VERA

Well that was pretty disturbing for Lily, I would think.

LEO

It was -- we were all -- it was so *not* disturbing, she was not disturbed, and *tried* is not really the -- I mean, we kissed, lots of people were kissing, it was like a spontaneous kissing convention, and we kissed, and it was so not a big deal except for in our totally taboo / laden --

VERA

Well she's in therapy about it now is all I'm saying.

LEO

I cannot -- ! Okay. Okay. Fine. She's in therapy, because we were both fucked on peyote and we kissed, *once*, with totally minimal tongue, and *not* because our parents are obsessed with the fact that they *don't treat her differently* just because she's adopted and never fail to mention that to her for a single day in her life. *Obviously* it was the totally harmless and even I would say pleasant smooch that sent her reeling into identity confusion. I mean, it's not like I fucked / her.

VERA

She's your sister!

LEO

Yeah! And she's awesome! And I wish she would get the fuck out of that house!

VERA

You need to learn how to take some responsibility, you know that? You're right, I've seen the way they are about the – the fact is, they didn't think they would be able to have you, when they adopted her, and – there's a guilt there, and a nervousness, but – you're a sensitive young man and you should be able to understand that and not be so angry about it. And you should be able to understand that she's vulnerable, she always has been, and kissing her wasn't the best idea. That's all. That's all.

LEO

It's just...it's hard to think of something more emblematic of our society, that a kiss expressing real mutual love between two people is considered destructive.

VERA

You know better than that.

LEO

I don't, grandma, and I don't want to.

(pause)

VERA

Rebecca found out about it, is that it? And that's why she's so mad?

LEO

Bec knows about it, because she was there, and she *also* kissed Lily, incidentally, which was really beautiful, and no, she is not mad, because she's way more open-minded than that.

VERA

And I'm old and closed-minded, is that?

LEO

You're old, but you could choose not to be closed-minded.

(he goes back to his book)

VERA

You didn't say anything about the buzzer.

LEO

The what?

VERA

I had the super change the name on the buzzer, since you didn't seem to be getting around to it. It has my name now. Only took me ten years, but it has my name now.

LEO

Uh...congratulations? Sorry, is that – what am I supposed to say?

(pause. He goes back to his book.)

VERA

Well.

(she stands slowly to go. She exits into the kitchen.)

Scene 4

Lights up on Bec. She is not chubby. She is in fact strong and beautiful and hale, though she is also somewhat strung out. She may wear a puffy vest over a sweater. She may wear hiking boots. She may have a Nalgene bottle. She stands uncomfortably for a long time. Vera enters, walking slowly with a cup of tea. She sees Bec is still standing.

VERA

Take a load off.

(Bec sits. Vera very gingerly, shakily, places the tea in front of her. She thinks of something.)

You take sugar?

BEC

(she does)

Oh – no –

(Vera sees through this and frowningly exits for sugar. Bec drops her head in her hands. Silence. Vera returns, slowly, with a sugar bowl and a few packets of sweet and low)

VERA

My neighbor across the hall is a diabetic, so I keep this stuff around. In case you watch that sort of thing.

BEC

Thank you.

(Bec helps herself to two heaping spoonfuls of sugar while Vera watches disapprovingly)

You don't have to – if you have something else you need to do –

VERA

You want me to leave you alone, is that it?

BEC

No, just, I don't want you to feel you have to, like –

VERA

What?

BEC

I don't want to be in your way!

VERA

Well, you're not. Particularly.

(Vera sits as well. They don't know what to say to each other.)

So you're having second thoughts, is that it?

BEC

What?

No, I...no.

(another silence)

VERA

When I was first married. Not to Joe, to my first husband, Arthur. It was a week or two we had been married and a woman showed up at our apartment with luggage. Arthur said to me, 'oh I forgot to tell you, before we were married I promised I would take her away for the weekend and I didn't want to fink on a promise.'

(Bec horrified, Vera laughing)

So I said all right, and they went away, and I left my key on the piano and went home to my parents.

BEC

And you divorced him?

VERA

Oh no. He came to my parents at the end of the weekend begging and pleading and I thought it was funny that he had been so stupid so I went home with him. It wasn't the last time he cheated.

BEC

Of course not!

VERA

When we had been married six months he went out to Hollywood with a woman...oh god, what was her name. She was rich, and neurotic. *Muriel*. He and Muriel went out there to write a screenplay and her father bankrolled them and Arthur never sent me a penny. And I guess they were having an affair because when he tried to end it she threatened to kill herself, and that was a terrible mess. One time we were all at Café Society...

I guess they were back from California...?

And she followed me into a cab and said, can't we be friends? It eats away at me that you're angry at me and so forth. And I said listen, Muriel, there are people you like and people you don't, and I don't like you, and I want you out of this cab. And she cried and carried on, this woman who had been sleeping with my husband for two years...

(long pause. Bec drinks her tea)

Then there was the waitress he met in Arkansas. And he came home and confessed he was in love with her, and I said listen, she's a hick, you have nothing in common, I'm sure the sex is terrific and whatnot but why don't you go back there and spend a few weeks with her and see if there's really enough there for you to leave our marriage. And he did. And sure enough he came back and said you're right, we ran out of things to talk about. And that was that.

He was a cheater and a drunk, but I liked him till the day he died.

BEC

(blurting it out)

I'm not sure what you're trying to tell me.

VERA

What?

BEC

I don't know what you want me to – why are you telling me this?

VERA

I was just making conversation. I wasn't getting much help from you.

BEC

But you're going on and on about these – like, parables of tolerance and forgiveness – you should have left him!

VERA

I did, eventually.

BEC

But you put up with like – and you tell these stories like you're proud of them.

VERA

(seeing that Bec is truly upset)

Okay, listen –

BEC

This woman, who you tried to push out of a cab, you should have pushed *him* out of a cab, she was coming to you / for understanding –

VERA

I see I've struck a / nerve.

BEC

I'm not going to forgive him!

VERA

All right. All right.

(Bec struggling to get control, Vera totally unsure what to do)

BEC

I'm sorry, I've been really...
And I can't believe he's fucking late, I can't *believe*...

VERA

Listen, I wasn't trying to say forgive him or don't forgive him. I don't know what you should do, that's your affair.
I was trying to say...men sometimes do things that can be very...but you have to remember that it's more out of stupidity than anything else. It's not, whaddayacallit. Malicious. It's just stupid and childish.

BEC

I guess, um...

(searching for the inoffensive way to stay this)

I don't make those kinds of allowances, based on gender? I wouldn't want anyone to make those kinds of allowances for me, so...

VERA

I suppose you think I'm very backward.

BEC

No –

(the sound of a key in the lock. Bec hears it immediately and prepares herself, Vera looks around suspiciously to see what she heard. Leo enters, his pants covered in dirt. Both women look at him. He grins)

LEO

I found a community garden.

(Vera winds up and stands)

VERA

Excuse me.

(she exits into her bedroom slowly. Leo heads in for a kiss,
Bec dodges him)

BEC

I told you I have class at two.

LEO

Am I late?

BEC

I can't miss any more class.

LEO

I said I'd come up to you.

BEC

And I said I didn't want you in my apartment.

(he grins)

LEO

I brought you something.

(he produces a small, sad, dirty pumpkin from his hoodie
pocket. He approaches her very slowly and extends it to
her. She takes it.)

BEC

What do you want me to do with this, Leo?

LEO

Love it. Nurture it. Teach it what you know.
Make a pie.

(she throws it back at him. He catches it. It is unclear
whether some of the tension is broken or if she is angrier
than ever)

I miss you all the time. I think of you in *college*. I think about whether they have left-
handed desks for you.

BEC

They do.

LEO

That's good.

BEC

Sometimes right-handed people sit at the left-handed desks and I get really pissed.

LEO

Bastards.

BEC

Yeah. I'm like, you're not just hurting me, you're hurting yourself.

(they smile. This is their thing.)

LEO

You like it?

BEC

I don't want to talk about college with you, Leo.

LEO

Why not?

BEC

Because you're just gonna be, like, disdainful.

LEO

I'm not!
I wanna hear.

BEC

It's...I don't know, everyone's so much younger than me, I mean just two years, but it seems like...so it's lonely. But I'm taking this class on global health that I think is really...I met with the professor a couple times and I might help her with some research next summer in Mumbai, if the money works out.

LEO

Man, you work fast.

BEC

I walked into her office and I was like, I've built houses in Ecuador and taught English in Mali and installed solar panels in Kathmandu and I want to know how I can work with you.

And she was like, "wow, it's so refreshing to meet a female undergraduate who doesn't end every sentence in a question mark."

So...

LEO

You always wanted to go to India.

BEC

It'll be so nice to travel somewhere not on my parents' dime, you know?

LEO

I could come.

BEC

...to Mumbai?

LEO

Why not?

(pause. The next two lines are simultaneous)

BEC

/I want to break up.

LEO

I'm so happy to see you.
Whoa. Oh. Okay.

(pause)

Okay.

(he grins at her)

BEC

The other night when I said I needed some time to think, that wasn't true, I want to break up. Sorry, I know the timing is shitty. I was gonna do it no matter what when you finished the bike trip, it's not...it's not about you going AWOL this summer, even though I'm really fucking pissed about that.

LEO

So you – huh. You were planning this for a while.

BEC

Yeah. Yes.

LEO

That's why you backed out of the bike trip.

BEC

Ummmmm...no, I backed out of the bike trip because I – I didn't *back out* of the bike trip, I was never definitely coming on the bike trip.

LEO

Uh, okay, I remember it differently but it really doesn't matter now, so.

BEC

You knew I was applying for internships, you knew that.

LEO

Yeah, and I knew you were buying gear and training and, like, telling me you loved me and it was important we got to spend this time together before you left for school. That's all.

BEC

Well when Allison backed out –

LEO

Allison tore her ACL, dude, that's / totally –

BEC

Fine, but it wasn't gonna be the trip we'd planned, it wasn't gonna be the four of us.

LEO

But you admit that we had *planned* a trip, you *planned* to come with us, that was the *plan*. But I guess you were already planning to break up with me, you just didn't let me in on that.

BEC

I'm sorry I didn't come on the bike trip, okay?

LEO

No, it was good, it was amazing, actually, to have that time with Micah, so. I wouldn't trade that for anything.

BEC

Well good.

(brief pause)

LEO

I mean, it would have been nice to have you there when he was killed, it would have been nice to not be alone for that.

BEC

Yeah, it would have been nice if you'd showed up at the funeral, I really needed you then. Do you know how hurtful that was, and humiliating, that everyone was like "where the fuck is Leo?" and I was like I don't know, he hasn't even *called me*.

LEO

But you were already planning to break up with me.

(off her look)

What? I'm just, I'm trying to master this time line, Bec, it's a little confusing.

BEC

You're laying this all on me, but we had problems. We never had the kind of relationship Micah and Allison had, I think we should just face that.

LEO

We -- ? I don't even know what that means.

BEC

They were like actual grown-ups in love, like really in love.

I'm not saying we didn't love each other –

LEO

No, you're saying I'm not a grown up.

BEC

I'm saying – even my mom still talks about it, what a mature, and, like, evenly-balanced-

LEO

Oh, well, if *Ellen* / thought so –

BEC

Don't be an asshole, you know what I mean, they just had this serenity that we –

LEO

I actually thought it was the other way around, that we were the ones with the real deal because I thought about you basically all the time when you weren't there and talked about you like some kind of pathetic lovesick idiot whereas Micah never thought about Ally at all.

BEC

That's because he didn't have to.

(brief pause)

LEO

I think you have some very weird very idealized picture of their relationship, because it might interest you to know that he cheated on her, actually.

BEC

Okay.

LEO

Like several times. With some extremely questionable specimens.

BEC

It's not cheating when it's an open relationship and it's really none of my business and I don't think it's cool at all to talk about him that way.

LEO

I just think it's interesting that your idea of a perfect relationship involves your boyfriend getting a BJ from the fifteen-year-old girl whose uncle owns the campground.

BEC

My idea of the perfect relationship involves feeling like I don't have to justify myself all the fucking time to someone who claims that they love me but is constantly disappointed in me. I am so tired of disappointing you, Leo.

And fuck you for telling me that about Micah, I did not want to know that.

(Vera has entered with a laundry cart)

VERA

Excuse me.

I was going to the basement to do some laundry, I wondered if you have anything that needs to be washed.

LEO

No.

VERA

Are you sure? I haven't washed your sheets since you've / been here.

LEO

No!

Thanks.

(Vera exits slowly, with dignity)

BEC

You know Micah's parents are back together, right?

LEO

...what?

BEC

I know.

LEO

Oh, no.

BEC

I actually tried to talk to them about it, I was like, you know I love you both, but is this really a good idea? For you guys, and for Ethan? It was so weird, I felt like such an adult.

LEO

What did they say?

BEC

He cried, and told me how proud he is of me, and how lucky Micah was to have me in his life, and she got super huffy and passive aggressive and they both assured me that it's what Micah would have wanted. Which seems to me both patently false and completely irrelevant.

LEO

They're gonna destroy that poor kid.

BEC

And he's such a / sweet kid.

LEO

He's a good kid. He / really is.

BEC

It's a shit show, I give up.

(pause)

I gotta get back uptown.

LEO

Hold on, I want to read you something.

BEC

Leo, I'm already late.

LEO

It's short.

(he exits, then returns with a book of Rumi poetry. He takes a few moments to find the page.)

“There is a field.”
That's the title.

Leo – BEC

LEO
You have to promise to listen with an open heart.

I – BEC

LEO
Please.

(she breathes, tries impatiently but earnestly to listen with an open heart.)

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing there is a field.

(he swallows. This is hard for him.)

I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass
The world is too full to talk about.

(pause. She sees he is almost overcome, puts a hand on him. He takes the opportunity to grab her and kiss her. She pushes him away.)

I have to go. BEC

LEO
Let me touch you.

BEC
No.

LEO
You're forgetting how our bodies are together.

BEC
No I'm not.

(She gently disentangles and moves away.)

When I'm not furious at you I'm really worried about you. I don't want you to become someone who makes me sad every time I think about you.

LEO

Okay, Bec, I'll go to *college*.

BEC

Fuck you.

LEO

One of us has turned our back on everything the four of us used to believe and it isn't me.

(Vera reenters from the hall, without the cart but carrying detergent. Bec gathers her stuff angrily, tearfully, while Leo looks at the ground.)

Hey.

(Leo extends the pumpkin toward Bec, smiling idiotically. Bec ignores him and walks past Vera out the door without speaking. A silence)

VERA

Well.
Are you all right?

LEO

Yeah, I'm good.

VERA

She's lost weight.

(pause)

She could lose / some more –

LEO

(quietly)

Shut up.

VERA

What?

LEO

(with his grin, loudly)

It makes me sick to hear you talk about her body so just fucking stop, okay? Did you hear that?

(she is stunned. He exits into the bedroom.)

Scene Five

Several days later, around dusk. Leo and Vera sit, staring out into space. Something is different, though we don't know right away what it is. A silence.

VERA

Weren't you on a sailboat for a while?

LEO

Yeah. Yeah. In Mexico.

(pause)

VERA

And he was there? What's-his-name.

(pause)

Micah.

LEO

Yeah. He was there.

(pause)

And Ally was there too, for a while, but she got hepatitis and had to be evac-ed back to St. Paul.

VERA

Hepatitis? What were you eating?

LEO

Fish, mostly. Rice.

VERA

You caught the fish?

LEO

Yeah, with a, like. Harpoon kinda thing. You shoot them with this spear thing.

VERA

Aren't they fast?

LEO

Yeah.

VERA

Isn't it hard to hit them?

LEO

Yeah. They're fast. Micah was good at it.

(pause)

And the spear has a flotation device so after they're speared they rise to the surface.

(pause)

VERA

What does?

LEO

What?

VERA

I forget what we were talking about.

(pause. Pause.)

LEO

Me too.

(more staring)

VERA

You know your father never did anything for me in bed.

(pause)

LEO

What? My father?

VERA

Yeah. Joe.

LEO

Joe was my grandfather.

VERA

Oh. Right.

(Leo giggles)

Well he never did anything for me in bed. Neither of my husbands did. There was only one man who ever did anything for me in bed and it wasn't one of the ones I married.

LEO

Who was it?

VERA

My lips are sealed.

LEO

I won't tell.

VERA

Nope. Taking it with me to the grave.

(pause)

LEO

I've been incredibly horny since Micah died.

(pause)

VERA

Sure.

(pause)

LEO

Bec has kind of a weird pussy. But I like it.

Did you hear me?

VERA

Yes, but I don't want to discuss it.

(pause)

(Leo picks up a bowl and lighter that we haven't noticed from the table)

LEO

You want some more?

VERA

No thank you, I didn't like the way it made my throat...
Whaddayacallit.

(he lights and pulls)

And I don't think it's really doing anything for me, besides.

LEO

(holding the smoke in his lungs)
Were my parents ever in love?
(he exhales)

VERA
Which ones are your parents? Oh right.
(she thinks)
I never really understood your father. He's not very. Whaddayacallit.
(she thinks)
Forthcoming. He doesn't...

LEO
Come forth?

(they both laugh)
VERA
You know, your mother was always nervous. About...stupid things. She always thought she had offended someone, and then when she thinks that she starts acting peculiar and she does offend people.
What was the question?

LEO
Were my parents ever in love?

VERA
I think at first he made her stop worrying, and now he makes her worry more. But that's just what I think, and that and a dollar fifty will get me on the subway.

(pause)
LEO
Biggest regret?

VERA
Maybe I would have liked to have one of my own children. I didn't know I wanted one until I married Joe and his kids were around and then I thought, that would have been nice, to have one from the very beginning instead of coming in late like that.
(pause)

LEO
Thank you for celebrating the autumnal equinox with me this way.
(she nods. End scene.)

Scene Six

In blackness, the sound of a key in the lock. Sound of a young woman giggling.

The door opens and light spills into the apartment from the hall. The giggling gets louder. Leo enters with a drunk Amanda leaning on him. He turns on a light. Amanda is young-looking for nineteen – a pretty and petite Chinese-American woman in fabulous vintage clothing, pigtails, and a lot of eyeliner. She alternately giggles and says “shhhhhh!”

LEO

It's okay, she's deaf.

AMANDA

Really? That's so sad!

LEO

You want a drink?

AMANDA

Yeah, what do you have?

LEO

(with the liquor cabinet)

Uh...Campari?

AMANDA

This view is amaaaaaaaazing!

LEO

Uh, something that the label is too old to read...

AMANDA

I can't believe you live here. Do you just wake up every morning and think I can't believe I live here?

LEO

Not really.

AMANDA

What does she pay?

LEO

I dunno, I think she said like around twelve hundred.

(Amanda screams)

Shhhhh!

AMANDA

(whispering)

Are you *serious*? Do you know how much my apartment costs?

LEO

I don't.

AMANDA

Eighteen hundred! It's about the size of this room! How long has she been here?

LEO

I don't know.

AMANDA

(back with the view)

This is south, right?

LEO

Uh....

AMANDA

Did she watch the towers fall?

LEO

I have no idea.

AMANDA

You don't ask her nearly enough questions. If she was my grandma I'd know everything. I'm like obsessed with family history. If you want to know the names of all my great grandmothers siblings in Chural Rina I'll...

(she cracks up)

Rural. China. I'm drunk. Are you drunk?

(Leo pours two Camparis)

LEO

I wasn't drinking.

AMANDA

You *weren't*? Are you gonna like date rape me?

LEO

(nervous)

Uh...

AMANDA

I'm just kidding, I'll totally sleep with you. I mean probably. I like you. You're like a mountain man. Like a real live mountain man. Of the mountains. You live outside of society's, like...

(She can't think of how to finish the sentence. He hands her a Campari)

LEO

I don't really know what this is, but it matches your bandaid.

AMANDA

Oh, yeah!

(she lifts a pinky finger, revealing a bright pink/orange bandaid)

Did I tell you how I got this?

LEO

No.

AMANDA

I totally shut my finger in a cab door! If I showed you you wouldn't believe it, it's like nine colors. I might not have a pinky fingernail ever again!

LEO

That's good, it's like your signature. Like your original thing.

AMANDA

But I'm already like a total freak, I mean look at me.

LEO

I don't think you're a freak.

AMANDA

(disappointed)

You don't?

LEO

(backtracking)

I mean –

AMANDA

I'm just teasing you, I'm just kidding. You're adorable, you're so cute.

LEO

I wanna see under it.

AMANDA

Under what? My bandaid?

LEO

Yeah, I wanna see the colors.

AMANDA

Ew! Gross! No! I mean, not *yet*.

(she drinks some of the Campari.)

Wow, this is nasty.

LEO

Sorry, I can –

AMANDA

No, in a good way.

(a flirtatious pause. He leans in for the kiss. She ducks coquettishly away and goes back to the window)

So what's your deal, mountain man?

LEO

My - ?

AMANDA

I'll tell you my deal first, that's only fair. I'm at Parsons, duh. I sort of have a boyfriend but mostly not right now. I grew up in San Francisco, my parents run like a dim sum empire, so I'm kinda rich and I don't really like to apologize for it. Um, my sister is five years older and she already has two kids which I think is so gross. Like I can't even stand to be in her house because of the smell. And I'm gonna be an international art star, that much is clear, though I don't know exactly what medium yet.

Your turn.

LEO

Um, I'm from St. Paul. And...now I'm here, by way of Seattle.

(brief pause)

AMANDA

Wow, you're really, like, milking this man of few words, romantic scruffy beard thing.

LEO

I just really want to kiss you, Amelia.

AMANDA

Am / anda.

LEO

Amanda! Sorry! I knew I was gonna do that.

AMANDA

Yeah, that just set you back, like, at least twenty minutes.

LEO

Amanda Amanda Amanda Amanda Amanda.

AMANDA

You should do that inside your head instead of out loud.

LEO

Sorry.

AMANDA

Your name is Leo, which means Lion. What's your astrological sign?

LEO

Not Leo. Virgo.

AMANDA

Mine's Libra.

(she mimes scales)

Balance.

LEO

You're really beautiful, Amanda.

AMANDA

That's good, keep practicing my name, soon you won't even have to think about it.

LEO

I'm sorry, I'm really not an asshole.

AMANDA

Who's Amelia. Ex-girlfriend?

LEO

No, I – don't take this the wrong way, but I think I did that because all night I was afraid I was gonna call you Lily? Which is my sister's name? You sorta remind me of her.

AMANDA

(a joke)

Is she Chinese?

LEO

Yeah.

AMANDA

Seriously?

LEO

Yeah, she's adopted.

AMANDA

And she's an amazing dresser? No, that's a joke. But seriously, is she?

LEO

No, she's much more, like...Banana Republic than you.

AMANDA

Ooh.

LEO

But it's just, something in the...

(he gestures vaguely toward his face)

I dunno.

AMANDA

That's sweet, mountain man. I think that's really sweet.
Where is she?

LEO

St. Paul. With my parents. She was in college, but then she took a semester off, and now it's like her third year off, and she's not really sure what she's doing. I'm kinda worried about her.

AMANDA

What's she good at?

LEO

She has the most amazing voice in the world. She sounds like a songbird, I know that's a fucking cliché, but if you were in the woods and you heard her singing, you would seriously think it was like the most talented bird you had ever heard.

AMANDA

You miss her.

LEO

Yeah.

AMANDA

Why are you here?

LEO

Well, my grandma's really old, and she doesn't really have anybody, so. I thought it would be cool to come spend some time with her.

AMANDA

That is *so sweet!*

LEO

I don't really see it that way, as, like, a favor? She's just a like a really good friend who I happen to be related to.

AMANDA

You might be too good to be true, new friend. You might be.

(he moves slowly toward her. She dodges him and goes to the bookshelf.)

I don't know why I'm feeling kind of shy, it's uncharacteristic, I'm usually pretty slutty.

(with a book)

Is your grandmother like a communist?

LEO

Card carrying.

AMANDA

(alarmed)

Seriously?!

LEO

Yeah. Why?

AMANDA

Oh my God. Oh my God. I'm sorry. I like, *hate*. Communists.

LEO

What? Why?

AMANDA

Duh! I'm Chinese! Why do you think my family left?

LEO

Oh.

AMANDA

Why do you think your *sister* was put up for *adoption*? Because the communists like fucked China up the ass!

LEO

Um, I'm not sure if / that's –

AMANDA

Oh it is. That is *literally* what happened.

LEO

Okay...sorry?

AMANDA

Are *you* a communist?

LEO

Um...no.

AMANDA

You had to think about that.

(he tries to kiss her again)

Dude! I'm not sure I can get it on in a communist's apartment, I'm really not.

LEO

A lot of people were communists back then – it was like, it was like...recycling, or whatever.

AMANDA

What?

LEO

Like it was cool, it was something you did to be, you know, responsible. To society. I'm not a communist, I swear, I'm not.

AMANDA

(seriously)

My family didn't do so well over there, okay? I know I'm like this funny weird girl in platform shoes, but I actually am not joking at all and would get really upset if I told you what happened.

(long pause)

LEO

My best friend died this summer.

(she looks at him)

We were biking across the country together and he died. That's why I'm here. Because I don't know where else to be.

Amanda.

(a long pause. She grabs his face. They kiss passionately. Vera enters, disoriented. She doesn't have her teeth in so her lips curl over her gums. They don't hear her and continue, with hands moving all over each other. She sees what's going on, startles slightly, and then realizes what she's looking at. She turns to go, but Amanda, in a moment of pulling away and opening her eyes (to take off his shirt?) sees her and screams. They separate)

AMANDA

Oh my God!

VERA

(holding up a hand)

Excuse me.

(she exits)

AMANDA

Oh my *God!* That scared the *shit* out of me! She looked like a ghost! She looked like a little white haired old lady ghost!

LEO

Here, come to my room.

AMANDA

Hold on, that really freaked me out!

LEO

Okay, okay.

(she goes to sit on the couch. He tentatively sits near her and rubs her back.)

It's cool. She doesn't care.

AMANDA

I don't want to get old and lose all my teeth, that shit is so *fucked*.

LEO

Shhhhhhh.

(he continues to rub her back. She begins to relax. He moves in a little closer.)

AMANDA

What was your friend's name?

(brief pause)

LEO

Micah.

AMANDA

How did he die?

(he stops rubbing her back)

Sorry.

LEO

No, you're right, the old lady kinda killed the mood.

(long pause)

AMANDA

God, is tomorrow Tuesday?

LEO

I'm not sure.

AMANDA

I actually have class really early, I totally forgot that. I know it sounds like a lame excuse, but it's actually true.

LEO

It's fine.

AMANDA

Are you gonna have blue balls or anything?

LEO

No.

AMANDA

I feel kinda bad.

LEO

Don't.

AMANDA

I could give you my number...?

(he doesn't respond)

Ohhhhhkay.

LEO

I just, I probably wouldn't use it? So...

(She stands. She's not sure what to do, so she just walks to the door. She has trouble with the lock. He goes to the door and unlocks it. She turns to him, angry, ashamed.)

AMANDA

I'm glad I didn't let you see under my bandaid.

(she exits)

Scene 7

The middle of the night. Leo is sitting in darkness. Vera enters in her nightgown and turns on a light. Seeing Leo, she turns it off. It's actually dark as opposed to "stage dark" so that we can only see their silhouettes against the window. She goes and sits near him. A silence.

LEO

So we were in Kansas, because – even though that was way out of the way we wanted to hit the center of the country, preferably around the fourth of July for maximum earnestness slash unacknowledged irony factor. The timing worked out so it was July 3rd and we were approaching Gypsum, our small town America of choice, one bar, one diner, seventeen churches or whatever. And we were going west to east, so, wind at our backs. The wind comes out of the south in the summer, but more like the southwest, so in a way going west to east was a pussy move on our parts, but we kind of wanted to do the opposite of the historical – like American is east to west, so we were going the opposite way, also we lived out west, so. It was more honest to start there.

Western Kansas is like ass flat, the cliché, so you're basically just riding the wind and if you pedal even a little bit in a low gear you hit fifteen mph no problem. Fifteen mph is a slow speed in a car, but on a bike it's pretty good, it's pretty good. So it's morning and the sun's pretty low; between the low sun and the flat ride and the good wind it's the perfect time to take shadow pictures. That means you take a picture of your own shadow while you're riding, totally a staple of the cross country bike trip, gotta have the shadow picture, and with our huge packs and panniers we were gonna have especially dope shadow pictures. Micah thinks he's a really good photographer, he thinks he has talent, so he's doing a lot of bullshit with shutter speed and framing and what have you and we're both taking shadow pictures and we hear a truck coming behind us, or I hear it, I assume Micah does, I think he does because we both hug the shoulder a little bit, still taking our shadow shots, and the truck gets louder and closer and passes us and I see it's a Tyson truck full of fucking crates of screaming chickens packed together and there are feathers flying out of the truck bed like some kind of I don't know what kind of metaphor, and I scream up to Micah who did I mention was in front of me, "look at that fucking slave poultry!" And he looks back at me, he has his left hand on his handlebar and his right hand still on his bullshit professional camera and he looks back at me and he's laughing and he starts to say something but the truck bed separates from the cab and flies backward and takes him off the road.

(silence, save for city sounds)

Before the ambulance came this PR lady from Tyson came. I didn't realize I was still holding my camera. She was like, "I'm sorry sir, but I have to confiscate your camera." She has to yell it for me to hear her over all these maimed and freaked out birds. I was like "my best friend is under three thousand chickens." She was like, "I understand you're upset, but this will be easier for both of us if you just give me your camera now." I was like, "I couldn't get to him, he's buried under there, where is the fucking

ambulance?" And she was like "I'm going to ask you one more time--" and I threw my camera on the ground.

(silence)

So what I don't have is these pictures from Wyoming, we did these stupid corny timer shots at the top of the Continental Divide, in front of the sign that says the altitude and all that shit, there was still snow up there in June. He caught a fish in Yellowstone, with his bare hands, he stood really still and reached in and...I had a picture of him holding up this fish longer than his head and neck. Oh and we dipped our back tires in the Pacific, that's another corny thing you do, because then you're supposed to dip your front tires in the Atlantic when you get there. Which I have not done yet, incidentally, don't know why. And I got a little video of him dipping his back tire and pretending to fall off this rock into the sea because he was a fucking clown, you know, he was a gifted physical comedian, he could have done that for real.

And then there are all the pictures of him I don't remember taking, and maybe losing those is worse than losing the ones I do.

(silence)

It took them about forty five minutes to get him out, and the funny thing was he hadn't sustained any trauma to his head or anything but he had been face down in the mud with hundreds of pounds of weight on him and he had suffocated.

(silence)

So the part that everyone's pissed at me about is that after I filled out all the paperwork at the police station and called his mom and my mom I got back on my bike and kept riding.

(long silence)

VERA

I'm not wearing my hearing aid. So I could only hear parts of what you said. But I didn't want to interrupt.

(he lies down on the couch with his head in Vera's lap)

End scene.

Scene 8

Vera is on the phone, sitting with pen and paper in hand.

VERA

Are you sure that's it?
I don't think that sounds right.
I said I don't think that sounds right.

(a long pause, in which Vera becomes gradually more taken
aback.)

Is that what I said? I didn't say I don't appreciate your looking it up for me, I do
appreciate that. I just said I don't think that sounds right. And it's a cause I've been
giving to for a long time, so I would think I would recognize the address.

(brief pause)

Well it doesn't! If it doesn't sound right, I'm not supposed to say so? Just to be polite?

(brief pause)

How should I know? Maybe you picked up the wrong piece of paper, or it's from an old,
whaddayacallit.

No, I don't know what it is, if I did I wouldn't have called you, now that's really a stupid
question.

(moves the phone away from her ear, and perhaps we can
hear Ginny yelling, though we can't distinguish what she's
saying.)

Oh for crying out loud, just tell it to me again, I'll say that's wonderful, that sounds
exactly right, and I really owe you, Ginny, for taking two minutes out of your busy life to
give me the wrong goddamn address.

(she is poised to write)

Hello?
Ginny?

(Furious, Vera goes to the phone and hangs up. She thinks
about it for a moment, then picks up and dials Ginny's
number – it's a rotary phone, remember, so it takes a long
time. She waits. Maybe we can hear Ginny's phone
ringing distantly across the hall, and her answering
machine picking up. Vera speaks with utter, cool clarity.)

Hello, Ginny, I know you're there and you're not picking up because you're like a child.
Anyway, I wanted to let you know that there's no need to call me from now on because
with my grandson here I'm really very well taken care of and I don't need anyone else
checking in. And since it's obviously so difficult for you to be in touch with me I think
that's best.

(she hangs up. She is immediately remorseful. She brings her hand to her mouth. Leo enters. He touches her head on his way into the kitchen. Vera picks up the phone again, thinks, then hangs up. Leo reenters with orange juice.)

LEO

Ginny?

(she nods absently, and puts her hearing aid back in)

Don't you ever just go over there and knock on the door? You know she's like twenty yards away.

VERA

For some reason we've never done that. Some idea she has about privacy, or...

(she trails off)

LEO

You okay?

VERA

My files are such a mess. It's the time of the year I usually do all my donations and I can't find the list of charities I give to and I can't find my checkbook, so. That's the kind of morning I'm having.

LEO

I can help you look if you still haven't found it when I get back.

VERA

Where are you going?

LEO

Climbing wall, garden, interview.

VERA

Interview? For what?

LEO

For a job.

(brief pause)

VERA

Well I think that's pretty terrific. You're thinking about getting a part time job, is that it?

Full time. Very full time.

LEO

I never thought I'd see the day!

VERA

Hey, I have no aversion to work, it's just gotta be the right job.

LEO

Where is it?

VERA

Rockies.

LEO

What?

VERA

Rocky Mountains.

LEO

(Hiding her disappointment)

Oh.

VERA

They're looking for counselors, they have this program where they drop a bunch of rich kids in the mountains, they have to get from one point to another, rich kids have no idea what the fuck's what, they need leaders, so. It's actually a pretty cool program, I did it in high school. Gotta say I think I'm very qualified, I think I have a good shot.

LEO

So when would that start?

VERA

Not till next summer.

LEO

Oh.

VERA

(relieved)

But I'd go out early, spend the winter on the slopes, there's always work for people like me.

LEO

VERA
So when would you leave?

LEO
I don't know. Soon.

VERA
I see.

(pause)

You know, you really haven't given the city a chance, you haven't done any of the museums, or the theater –

LEO
Grandma, come on.

VERA
I'm not trying to convince you of anything, I'm just making an observation. It's a great place to live and you haven't had the experience of it, not really.

LEO
I'm like a caged bird here, Vera, it's nothing against your city, but for me it's like a concrete prison.

VERA
Oh that's just a lot of – whaddayacallit – new-age baloney and you should listen to yourself once in a while because you sound stupid, you really do.

(a silence. Leo exits into his bedroom. After a moment, he reenters with his backpack.)

LEO
So I'll be back in a few hours, and then if you still need help looking for your, uh...

VERA
You didn't take it, did you?

LEO
What?

VERA
My checkbook.
Listen, I'll be a lot less angry if you tell me now.

LEO

(smiling)

I didn't take it.

(pause)

VERA

Leo Joseph-Connell—

LEO

I didn't take it! I didn't take it I didn't take it I didn't take it. Yesterday you lost your keys, there were three days you couldn't find your hearing aid, there was the priceless morning your teeth went missing, you think I took those too? I didn't take your fucking checkbook. God.

(pause)

VERA

I hope you're telling the truth, I really do. Your records of how much money you've taken haven't exactly been...I wasn't going to say anything, but...

(pause)

LEO

Well let's hope this interview goes well, because it's clear you don't trust me and it would be better for both of us if I got out of here.

VERA

Maybe that's true.

LEO

Maybe.

VERA

If you're going to the garden before the -- you should bring a change of clothes because you always get filthy there.

LEO

I thought of that.

VERA

You did.
Well.

(she gazes off absently. He exits. The noise of the door closing startles her.)

Scene 9

Leo on Skype. It's late in the afternoon . He sits in front of an open laptop in a corner of the apartment.

LEO

Can you hear me? Lily?
Can you – oh, hey.

(He waves once, slowly, smiling.)

I can see that big smile but I can't hear you. Oh, hold up –
(he hits the volume key several times. We hear Lily's voice very faintly through the monitor)

LILY (OS)

...can just call me –

LEO

Hey! There / it is –

LILY (OS)

Hey!

LEO

Hey, sis, yeah.

(a pause. He smiles genuinely. Lily laughs through the monitor.)

LILY (OS)

Where's grandma?

LEO

She's out shopping.

LILY (OS)

What kind of computer does she have?

LEO

It's a...

(he looks)

It's a MacBook, it's pretty new, actually. She still had that plastic covering on the screen.

(Laughter from Lily through the computer)

She's so scared of it, she probably thought if she took it off the whole thing would fall apart.

(more laughter)

I've been trying to get her to use it so she'll have more...because I've been here three weeks now and I know there are some days if I wasn't here she wouldn't see anyone. What am I talking about how are you how are you how / are you.

LILY (OS)

--I'm okay --

LEO

I'm sorry I haven't been in touch --

LILY (OS)

Yeah, mom's really --

LEO

Can we not talk about mom?

LILY (OS)

...okay.

(A silence. He lifts the computer and angles it around the room, allowing her to see the apartment)

LEO

You remember this place?

LILY (OS)

...yeah.

(brief pause)

LEO

You remember singing at Grandpa's memorial service?

LILY (OS)

...vaguely.

LEO

Aunt Beth brought that shitty Casio and accompanied you, badly.

(Lily laughs)

You sang The Water is Wide. In English *and* in French.

LILY (OS)

I can't believe / you remember that.

LEO

I was proud of you. You brought some talented fucking genetic code with you into this family.

(a pause. Maybe we can hear Lily sigh.)

I was thinking you should maybe come out here for a while. Stay with grandma. They gotta have like the / best voice teachers in the world here –

LILY (OS)

Wait, you're cutting out.

/Leo, I can't hear you.

Can you hear me?

LEO

Can you hear me?

Lil, can you still not hear me?

Yeah, I can hear you.

LILY (OS)

Oh there you are.

LEO (OS)

You can hear me again?

LILY (OS)

Now I can, yeah.

LEO

Sorry, I'm jacking a neighbor's wifi, I'm only getting like / one bar.

LILY

It's okay.

(pause. He smiles at her, presumably getting a big, sad smile back)

LEO

So I, hey, I wanted to ask, um, are you...? In therapy?

I mean it's cool, obviously it's cool if you are.

I just. I wondered if, uh, and this is probably really stupid? If, and obviously it's not just one thing, but if, like, it had to do with...

When I was home, earlier this summer, and we had that party, and we were fucked up...?

LILY (OS)

Um...I...I don't know / if I...

LEO

No, yeah, I get that. I mean, I guess that's why you go to therapy, right, so you *don't* have to talk about these things with your immediate...

But if it was that -- thing, (let me just say this,) I would like to apologize, and say I one hundred per cent feel like a dick if that was weird or awkward or made you feel less like my *actual* sister, which obviously you are. Because I think you're like the greatest sister known to human history and I would like to not have fucked at least that one thing up, okay? Lil?

LILY (OS)

...please come home...

LEO

Yeah, I just...I have to give some thought to whether that would be the best thing for everyone. And I don't just mean me, I mean mom, and you, and...everyone.

But I'll think about it. It would be good to see you.

Yeah, I'm gonna hang up now, sorry.

(He clicks to hang up the call. And abruptly closes the laptop. He takes a breath and regains control. The phone rings. Sure it is Lily calling back, he shakes it out, grins, and picks up)

Yeah, hey, sorry bout that.

Hello?

(he listens)

Hello? Who is this?

I'm sorry, I...I can't understand what you're saying.

(pause. Discomfited, he hangs up. He gets the laptop and begins to head toward Vera's room to put it back. He is stopped by the sound of a sickening thud (and maybe something breaking?) in the direction of Ginny's apartment. He stands still, listening. It's silent. He continues to Vera's room with the laptop. After a moment, he returns without the laptop. He sits on the couch, uneasy.)

(A long while passes. He listens, but there is no more sound. He makes a decision, stands, and goes to Ginny's door. He knocks.)

Scene 10

Mid-afternoon, a few days later.

Leo is wearing a suit that is too big and from an era long past – Joe’s.

Vera enters from her bedroom, also dressed up.

VERA

Five minutes?

LEO

Whenever you’re ready.

VERA

I just have to make peepee.

(She is about to exit, but sees something. She comes over to Leo to fix his tie. He lets her.)

I found my checkbook. You don’t need to say anything, I was wrong about that, and I’m sorry.

LEO

I do owe you some money. I didn’t write it down where you said but I know how much it is. I’ll pay you back.

VERA

Maybe you will, maybe you won’t. But I appreciate your saying so.

(she finishes his tie)

I wish I could say you look just like him, but you really don’t. You look more like your father’s side of the family.

LEO

Sorry.

VERA

But you look good.

(she does a Brooklyn-y accent)

You clean up real nice!

LEO

I feel like a clown.

VERA

You look a little bit like a clown, but you look good.

(she is about to exit)

LEO
Grandma.

VERA
Hm?

LEO
You can see your bra, through that shirt.

VERA
I know. This is the bra I wear with this shirt, because it goes.

(she exits into the bathroom. The buzzer sounds. He looks off, then decides to answer himself.)

LEO
Hello?

BEC
(through the intercom)
It's Bec.

(After a moment of uncertainty, he buzzes her in. He looks at himself, sorta freaks out, takes off his jacket, starts to unbutton his pants.)

LEO
Fuck it.

(he puts his jacket back on. He tousles his own hair. He tries to look casual. A knock at the door.)

It's open.
(Bec enters. She is wearing bike shorts and a long-sleeved jersey. She is carrying her helmet.)

BEC
Hey.

LEO
...hey.

BEC
Nice suit.

Thanks. Nice jersey. LEO

Thanks. BEC

(pause)

Uh... LEO

So this is really stupid, I should've called, I thought you might want to go on a bike ride, but you're obviously busy. BEC

Yeah. Yeah, I am kind of busy. LEO

Okay, so. Sorry. Never mind. BEC

(she goes to leave)

Uh. I would say we could go tomorrow, but I'm heading out. LEO

Where? BEC

Back to St. Paul for a couple days, face up to the family. Then to Colorado. LEO

What's in Colorado? BEC

Got a job. LEO

Congratulations. BEC

Yeah, I think it's gonna be cool. Clarifying. Mountain air and all that. LEO

BEC

That's great, I'm really happy for you.

LEO

Thanks. Yeah.

If you could wait maybe a couple hours -- ?

BEC

I have class.

LEO

Right. Class.

(pause)

BEC

It's just, I thought maybe you'd want to dip your front tire.

LEO

Ah.

BEC

Because you asked me to go with you that night you showed up at my dorm, and I was not in a frame of mind to...but you've probably already done it by now.

LEO

No, it's been kinda crazy around here, my grandma's needed me a lot. Her neighbor died. That's where we're –

BEC

I'm so sorry.

LEO

Not your fault.

BEC

I know.

Well. You probably won't have time, but, I printed a couple maps. Depending on where you want to do it. I know open ocean is ideal but around here I think you're gonna have to settle for bay.

LEO

I think as long as it's salty it counts.

BEC

I'm actually, one of the classes I'm taking, it's an anthropology class about ritual? Like in societies all over the world, and how it, on like a psychological and even neurological

basis, it...well we're not that far into the class yet, but basically every culture has them and that's because they work. I don't know, I think if you can fit it in, you should do it.

(she hands him the maps.)

LEO

Thanks.

The sound of a toilet flushing. Vera enters, putting pearls over her head. She sees Bec.

VERA

Oh.

BEC

Hi.

VERA

Hello.

(Vera looks to Leo, who doesn't explain)

LEO

You ready?

VERA

Just about.

LEO

I'm just gonna grab my speech.

(he exits. Vera is thoroughly mystified)

VERA

You're coming, is that it?

BEC

No. I was just...no.
I'm sorry about your neighbor.

VERA

You know Leo was the one who brought her to the hospital. He took care of everything, he stayed with her until they brought her into the, whadayacallit. He was really...he was very much a man. Oh I'm sorry, you don't like it when I put it that way.

BEC

No, I'm actually glad to hear it.

VERA

He's leaving tomorrow, I guess he told you. Which does not make me very happy.

BEC

I'm sorry.

VERA

You'd think at my age I'd know better than to get used to anything.

(off Bec's stricken look)

Oh don't look at me like that, I'll be all right, I've always been all right.

BEC

I know, I wasn't...*pitying* you, or –

VERA

Well you were, but never mind.

BEC

I wasn't, please don't think that.

VERA

All right, I always manage to upset you, let's forget I said anything.

BEC

You didn't upset me, I mean it's not you, I'm just irretrievably sad right now, and I know it's gonna pass, I know that, but it's very *convincing*, while it lasts, you know? It just feels very very real.

VERA

Well it is real. That's why. But you're right. It'll pass.

(Leo reenters, unaware of what he is interrupting)

LEO

Okay!
What?

(pause)

BEC

Bye, Leo.

(brief pause)

LEO

Bye.

(they hug deeply. Vera averts her eyes)

BEC

Bye Vera.

VERA

Take care of yourself.

(Bec exits. A long pause.)

VERA

What's this about a speech?

LEO

I wasn't sure if they were gonna open it up to people in the audience. But just in case. You said she doesn't have a lot of people.

VERA

But did you ever meet her? I mean, before -- ?

LEO

No. You're right, it's probably not a good idea.

VERA

I think it's a lovely idea, I'm just surprised. Do you want to practice? We have a few minutes.

LEO

Uh...

(he looks at the paper)

Nah.

VERA

You should always practice before public speaking. Joe would've told you that.

LEO

Okay, um...

I feel weird. Um.

Ginny was my grandmother's across / the hall

VERA

Loudly, please.

(brief pause)

LEO

Ginny was my grandmother's across the hall neighbor, and they used to call each other every night to check in. Which I know gave my mom and my uncles a lot of solace, that there was someone my grandma talked to every day. But I don't want to make it sound like that was Ginny's only purpose in life, because actually a google search revealed a varied and fascinating past. Ginny was an actress a long time ago, and she understudied for a play on Broadway called "Mary Had a Little."

(to Vera)

You didn't tell me that.

(Vera nods)

After that she started working for the William Morris Agency, as a secretary. So I guess she decided if she wasn't making it as an actor she wanted to help other actors make it, which I think is a pretty productive way of dealing with that kind of disappointment. Also she was married to a man who was killed in the Korean War. And after that I think she didn't get married again...?

(he looks to Vera, who nods)

So I don't know, but I bet that was really terrible, and I know she was a peace activist, like my grandma, so I guess she came at that from a pretty personal angle. That's all I could find on the internet but she was eighty-one years old so there was a lot of other stuff, too.

(pause)

I guess that's not such a good ending.

VERA

It needs maybe one more.../whaddayacallit.

LEO

Yeah.

(they think, for kind of a long time)

VERA

It's hard, because the truth is she was a pain in the ass.

(pause)

I guess you could say...you could say something about all her plants.

LEO

Oh yeah, I saw, in her apartment, there was like a / forest.

VERA

She would get a, whaddayacallit, that green slimy thing from California, with a stone / in it –

LEO

An avocado?

VERA

She would get an avocado at the supermarket, and put the stone in some water with those, uh, toothpicks, and next thing you know it's a tree.

What is that expression?

(she thinks)

Green thumb.

(she is relieved to have thought of this)

She was a pain in the ass, but god, she was like a magician. That woman could make anything grow.

(Leo listens, and then writes. Lights fade. End of play.)