screen, touch, cut

a meditation on being untouched but not unmoved

by isaac gómez

a micro-commission courtesy of northlight theatre

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characters
be, a human, any age, any race, any gender
must be quarantining without other humans. pets & ancestral spirits are okay

em, a human, any age, any race, any gender
must be quarantining without other humans. pets & ancestral spirits are okay

place
between two screens

expiration date
this play not play has an expiration date:
once
...
this
...
is all over

note on performance
this is not a play, but a calling
to meet someone where they are, how they are
about feeling like someone is there even when they're not
...
in being distanced but not distant
...
to be performed once and only once
unrehearsed
in real time
on facetime, google hangout, skype (poor skype), webex (i know me neither)
preferably not zoom but if you must then i guess
but definitely not bluejeans. anything. but blue jeans
...
this is a calling
that is part scripted
part what's to come
you'll see what i mean when you get there
...
oh one last thing
...
...
you'll need a pair of scissors
A video pops up.

Two vertical screens.

Video quality isn’t too bad, huh?

It's nice when video quality isn’t too bad. It’s probably not... great, but who cares?

Little buttons on the bottom of these two vertical screens tell us we’re on FaceTime or Google Hangout or something like that.

Two big faces looking how they look. Each of them where they are and how they are.

**Em and Be.** They’ve been talking for awhile now.

**EM**
I'm almost done.

**BE**
Better be good.

**EM**
Oh it’s better than good.

**BE**
You look -

*(Be describes how Em looks)*

**EM**
I am -

*(How Be describe Em)*

**BE**
Me too.
EM
You don’t look it.

BE
Yeah, well.
Yeah.

Beat. A moment.

BE (CONT’D)
Are you done yet?

EM
Almost. I said I’m *almost* done.

BE
Well what’s almost cause I gotta pee.

EM
Go pee.

Beat.

EM
I’m not rushing this cause you got a small bladder.

BE
I didn’t know you knew the size of my bladder.

EM
You’ve peed like /twelve times in the last thirty minutes.

BE
You’re the one who told me to drink more water.

EM
I didn’t mean, like. *now*.

Beat. A moment.
BE
So can I go/pee, or?

EM
Go, go, go.

(We see Be leave the screen. Be has a cute apartment. It's a little messy. That's okay, though. Mine is too.)

(We might hear the sound of Be peeing. Em might respond how they would if they heard Be peeing. There's a flush. Be walks back into the camera frame.)

EM
Wash your hands.

BE
I did.

EM
Liar.

Beat. A moment.

(Beat. A moment. Be walks back out of frame, to their bathroom or kitchen and washes their hands for 20 seconds.)

(Beat. A moment. Be walks back out of frame, to their bathroom or kitchen and washes their hands for 20 seconds.)

(Em says what Be was singing.)
BE
Yeah.

EM
Wow.

BE
?

EM
Didn't picture you to be a
Kind of person.

BE
Yeah, well.
Yeah.

(Em says what Be was singing.)

Beat. A moment.

(Be starts doing something with what's around them. Passing the
time, waiting for Em to finish
what they were doing. It's not
weird or tense, though. The kind
of comforting quiet.)

Then:

EM
Okay, I'm done.

BE
You're/ done?

EM
I'm done.

BE
Alright then. Let's see em.
(Em shows Be what they have been working on for like an hour or two probably. Maybe it was painting their nails. Maybe it was a sketch of something. Maybe it was crocheting a scarf.)

BE
Wow that's -

EM
What?

BE
It's -

EM
What?

Beat.

BE
I like it.

Beat.

EM
You do? / Really?

BE
Uh huh. Seriously, it came out really, really nice. How long that take you?

EM
How long we been talking?

BE
Uh, I dunno.
What time is it now?
(Em checks the time on their screen, their watch, their microwave clock, their sun dial. Whatever works.)

EM
It's -

(Em says what time it really is.)

BE
And what day is it again?

EM
I think it's

(Em says what day it is.)

BE
So that means we've been talking for... what, /now?

EM
Um, well you called me at...
and then I had to...
Fifty six days.

BE
WE'VE BEEN TALKING FOR FIFTY SIX DAYS?!

Beat. A moment.

EM
Give or take a few hours.

Beat.

BE
That's impossible.

EM
Nothing's impossible anymore.
BE
You’re impossible.

EM
Sometimes.

BE
It’s okay. Me too.

EM
Impossible burger.

BE
Me too. Now I’m hungry.

EM
Cook something.

BE
I ran out of food.

EM
Go get groceries.

BE
I can’t. My phone’s charging. I’ve been talking to you for fifty six days. If I leave now, my phone will die.

EM
Okay, well, order something then.

BE
You already ate.

EM
And?

BE
I don’t wanna eat alone.

EM
I’ll watch you eat.
BE
That's weird.

EM
I watched you install that -

(Em describes something in Be’s screen that we can see.)

BE
Not the same.

EM
...

BE
How was your -

(Be describes what Em had for their most recent meal.)

EM
It was good.

BE
Looked good.

EM
Just order food.

BE
Fine.

(Be checks their phone.)

BE
It’s on it’s way.

EM
That was fast.

BE
You ordered it for me.
EM
I did.

BE
Why?

EM
Because you're hungry.

BE
Oh. Right.
Thank you.

EM
No problem.

Beat. A moment.

BE
My cat is more self conscious than I am.

EM
?

BE
Anytime he catches me watching him play with his tail he, like, shuts down or something. I dunno.

EM
Been there.

BE
Me too.

Beat. A moment.

(Be reaches their hand to touch the camera.)

(Em meets Be's reach with theirs.)
(There is a limit, here, on how much touch they can feel by doing this. Meaning: they cannot. But somehow... they feel each other’s energy. As if it were passing from one screen onto the other. Something beyond human touch. Something deeper.)

BE
How’d that feel?

EM
It felt...

(Em describes how that felt for them. How it really, really felt. Doesn’t have to be elaborate or thoroughly detailed. But should be honest.)

EM
What about you?

BE
Um...

(Be describes how that felt for them, too.)

EM
Yeah I hear that.
I felt that way too.

(Be stars playing with their hair. It’s long. Maybe like Rapunzel at this point.)

EM
Your hair is long.

BE
It is, huh?
EM
When you gonna cut it?

BE
When this is over.

EM
Might be heavier than peanut butter cups by then.

BE
Already feels like it.

Beat.

BE
I hate it.
It bothers me when it sits over my ears like this.

(Be shows Em their hair over their ears like this.)

BE
On the back of my neck?

(Be shows Em their hair on the back of their neck.)

BE
Over my eyes...

(Be shows Em their hair over their eyes.)

EM
I can cut it for you if you want?

Beat.

(Be considers this.)

BE
You can't do that.
EM
Yes I can.

BE
How?

(Em shrugs.)

EM
Ask nicely and maybe you'll see.

(Be chuckles. Thinks on this. Sighs.)

BE
I dunno.

EM
What're you afraid of?

BE
I'm, um...

(Be shares with Em what they're afraid of.)

EM
I was afraid of that too. But look at me now.

Beat.

EM
It's cute, right?

BE
It's cute.

EM
But you know what else?

BE
Hm?
EM
You’re carrying a lot of weight on top of that head. Maybe it’s time to let it go.

(Be considers this.)

Beat. A moment.

EM
Would you like me to help you let it go?

(Be nods.)

EM
Okay then.
Sit up straight.

(Be sits up straight.)

EM
Close your eyes.

(Be closes their eyes.)

EM
Now reach deep, deep below...

(Be reaches deep, deep below...) 

EM
You’ll know when you get there.

Beat. A moment.

Then:

(Be pulls out from deep, deep below... a pair of scissors. Or clippers. Something that cuts hair.)

BE
How’d I get this?
EM
From deep, deep below.

Beat.

EM
It’s mine.
Be gentle, I just bought it.

BE
...

EM
Now reach for that big, heavy head of yours...

(Be reaches for that big, heavy head.)

EM
And take what I gave you...

(Be takes what Em gave them from deep, deep below.)

EM
And free yourself.

Beat. A moment.

(Be frees themself from the heavy burden that’s been placed on top of their head. That’s been growing and growing and growing and won’t stop.)

(A cut. A shave. Maybe two. Maybe more. Be should go however far they are willing to go. Maybe it’s just a lock. Maybe it’s their whole head, who’s to say? You’re the one doing it.)

Then:
(Be stops. Looks at Em.)

They sit here for a moment.

Actually twenty seconds.

(That’s right, I changed my mind. Twenty real seconds here. Looking into each other’s eyes through their screens. Taking this moment in.)

EM
How’d that feel?

BE
That felt -

(Screens turn black. We don’t get to see that part. That’s between them.)

(end of play.)