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# afterlife: a ghost story

by Steve Yockey

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

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*AFTERLIFE: A GHOST STORY* was presented in workshop as a part of Southern Rep’s New Play Bacchanal, January 21 – 24, 2010. It then opened in full production with support from the National New Play Network’s Continued Life program on October 23, 2010 at Southern Rep in New Orleans, LA. The Artistic Director was Aimee Hayes and the Managing Director was Marieke Gaboury. The performance was directed by Aimee Hayes, with sets by Martin Andrew, costumes by Laura Sirkin-Brown, lights by Joan Long, sound by Mike Harkins, and puppets by Pandora Gastelum. The cast was as follows:

**DANIELLE** . . . . . Lucy Faust  
**CONNOR** . . . . . Michael Aaron Santos  
**YOUNG MAN** . . . . . Andrew Farrier  
**POSTMAN/BLACKBIRD** . . . . . John Neisler  
**SEAMSTRESS** . . . . . Lisa Picone  
**PROPRIETRESS** . . . . . Troi Bechet

*AFTERLIFE: A GHOST STORY* opened with support from the National New Play Network’s Continued Life program on January 17, 2011 at the Arsenal Center for the Arts’ Charles Mosesian Theater in Watertown, MA. It was produced by New Repertory Theatre with Artistic Director Kate Warner and Managing Director Harriet Sheets. The performance was directed by Kate Warner, with sets by Cristina Todesco, costumes by Frances McSherry, lights by Karen Parsons, sound by David Remedios, and puppets by Pandora Gastelum. The cast was as follows:

**DANIELLE** . . . . . Marianna Bassham  
**CONNOR** . . . . . Thomas Piper  
**YOUNG MAN** . . . . . Karl Baker Olson  
**POSTMAN/BLACKBIRD** . . . . . Dale Place  
**SEAMSTRESS** . . . . . Georgia Lyman  
**PROPRIETRESS** . . . . . Adrienne Krstansky

## CHARACTERS

**DANIELLE** - a woman, thirties, a wife, with a sharp wit and wounded heart, unrecovered and angry but putting up a front, holding a grudge epic in both scale and focus

**CONNOR** - a man, thirties, a husband, attractive, affable, even charming; doing his best under the circumstances, but sorely mistaken in the belief that things are getting better

**YOUNG MAN** - a young man, late teens, optimistic, hopeful and brave, fueled by half-memories and things collected along the way; his clothes are worse for wear

**THE PROPRIETRESS** - a woman, effortlessly assured, precise, very neat and put together, hospitable running her teahouse, she is the ocean and means business

**THE SEAMSTRESS** - a woman, a raw nerve, taunting, mocking, a guest long past her welcome and unwilling to leave; rage, regret and laughter while wasting away

**BLACK BIRD** - a large, articulate bird, black feathers, warm and gentle in demeanor, seemingly playful but only as a means to an end; a functionary, a messenger

*The BLACK BIRD is a puppet operated by the actor playing the POSTMAN. See staging notes.*

**POSTMAN** - a letter carrier, someone who lives at sea, brusque but humane, in layers, a jacket & wool cap with a satchel; a functionary, a messenger

## SETTING

### ACT I

Takes place in and around a modern beach house in the shadow of an impending storm; it has warmth to it, somewhere people live. Home.

### ACT II

The stage is radically altered into 3 spare playing areas demarcated by light and markings on the ground: the inside of a small cabin, a clearing among bare birch trees and a simply appointed teahouse.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

[ ] indicates overlapping dialogue.

The Black Bird is a large puppet. Although loosely inspired by Bunraku puppetry and operated by Postman, it will ideally be more of a Visible Means puppet and no effort should be made to disguise the operator. Closest to a giant crane in stature with black feathers, the head, elongated neck and one wing (or some representation of body) serve as the central expressive elements.



## **ACT I “OCEANIC MISFORTUNE”**



## i. the return

*(Lights up on the living room of a house, well-appointed, simple and clean. It sits on the beach and belongs there. A couch, an end table with a lamp, a coffee table, a small bookshelf. A small group of assorted picture frames sits on top of the bookshelf. They are all empty.)*

*(Early evening. The sounds of the ocean waves are heard from outside.)*

*(DANIELLE stands in the open doorway, taking in the room. She is in jeans and an oversized sweater with a darker t-shirt underneath. She drops her small travel bag onto the ground; really, it just falls from her hand.)*

**CONNOR.** How is it? Danielle?

*(CONNOR enters with a duffle bag, pressing past her into the room. He's in khakis and some kind of polo shirt; dressed comfortably.)*

**DANIELLE.** It looks fine.

**CONNOR.** Seems like everything's okay.

*(He crosses into the back of the house. From offstage...)*

Doesn't even feel like we were gone.

**DANIELLE.** No, it doesn't.

*(DANIELLE takes a cautious step into the room. After a moment, CONNOR returns from deeper in the house. The bag is gone.)*

**CONNOR.** I opened the windows in the bedroom to let some air in.

**DANIELLE.** Huh, until it starts raining.

**CONNOR.** It'll be okay.

**DANIELLE.** The furniture actually looks cleaner.

CONNOR. You think?

DANIELLE. I don't know, maybe. Are you going to check out back?

CONNOR. Yep, I'll do it now.

*(He exits out to the beach. DANIELLE moves to follow him, but looks out towards the ocean, sees it, then stops and moves back to the same place. CONNOR returns, looking over his shoulder...)*

The weather reports aren't wrong; the water is really churning. Looks like this storm is going to be a big one.

DANIELLE. Please, they always sound the alarms on the local weather; you know that. It's never as bad as they predict. We probably made the trip out here for nothing.

CONNOR. We needed to come back anyway, check [on things.]

DANIELLE. [It's when the] weather reports don't say anything, that's when it's the worst.

CONNOR. This time it looks like they're right.

DANIELLE. *(waving him off with a smirk...)* We'll see.

CONNOR. And, huh, there's, um...there's something else.

DANIELLE. Why are you making that face?

CONNOR. Okay, so, I don't know, but there are dead fish all over the beach.

DANIELLE. What are you talking about?

CONNOR. I don't, I'm not making it up, there are dead fish washed up on the beach, all different sizes. Look for yourself.

DANIELLE. I don't want to see that, why would I want to see that?

CONNOR. It's bizarre.

DANIELLE. Maybe they were trying to beat the storm too.

CONNOR. And there are these really big birds out [there too.]

**DANIELLE.** [Jesus,] Connor, do you work for *National Geographic* now? Enough with the nature reports; can we just focus on what we're here to do?

**CONNOR.** Very nice.

**DANIELLE.** I'm just, I'm ready to push up my sleeves and get to work.

**CONNOR.** So pick up your bag and come in already.

**DANIELLE.** Right. I don't even, let's get started.

*(She shakes any remnants of hesitation off and enters the house.)*

**CONNOR.** I'll go get the storm shutters out of storage if you wanna' unpack, but I'll need your help actually putting them up.

**DANIELLE.** I can do that. I think.

**CONNOR.** Never having done it, let's just both pretend it's gonna' be as easy as to get them up as I think.

**DANIELLE.** And I should check the kitchen.

**CONNOR.** What's wrong with the kitchen?

**DANIELLE.** No, check for food. For something to eat. We'll need to eat.

**CONNOR.** I'll run to that little market, what's [it called?]

**DANIELLE.** [I'm sure the] stores have been wiped out by now. Storm panic, everyone stocks up, everyone that's not leaving.

**CONNOR.** They'll still have something.

**DANIELLE.** Connor, I'm not going to battle for scraps at the store if we have perfectly good food in the kitchen.

**CONNOR.** Battle who? Did you even see anyone else?

**DANIELLE.** A few people, here and there when we were driving in.

**CONNOR.** Everyone's busy.

**DANIELLE.** Busy evacuating.

**CONNOR.** Point taken, we won't be here long.

**DANIELLE.** It's fine, I'll just make some soup or something.

**CONNOR.** Soup?

DANIELLE. That's what I said.

CONNOR. What kind of soup?

DANIELLE. Whatever kind of, who cares, do you care? Soup, just soup.

CONNOR. Hey, listen, soup sounds great.

DANIELLE. Good.

CONNOR. (*motioning towards the beach*) And maybe some fish too?

DANIELLE. Ugh. How long do you think this is all going to take?

CONNOR. Okay, well, we probably won't have much time tonight, but we'll get a lot done by tomorrow I think. Tomorrow afternoon at the latest. I mean, we have to finish before the storm rolls in or what's the point?

DANIELLE. What's the point of any of it?

CONNOR. We just got here.

DANIELLE. Uh huh.

CONNOR. Let's not, okay?

DANIELLE. I'm not. But...maybe we should have waited.

CONNOR. Don't do that, you said you were worried about the house, too. And you were going nuts in my parents' guest room.

DANIELLE. I think a hotel would have been fine, if we needed to leave your parents' house.

CONNOR. Okay, first off, you hate hotels.

DANIELLE. I hate...aspects of hotels.

CONNOR. You've never enjoyed a hotel we've stayed at, ever, not once. Uh uh, not once. And we shouldn't be living in a hotel anyway. Or in a tiny guest room. And that's what we were starting to do, live there. But we have a house right here. We've been [away...]

DANIELLE. (*victoriously*) [Ha! I knew] you wanted to come back. Not just because of [the storm.]

CONNOR. [We decided] to come back. Second off, what if the storm turns out to be as awful as they're saying and we didn't close everything up? Do you want to replace

every window? Besides you were as anxious to get back here as I was, so change your mind if you want but at least acknowledge that's what you're doing.

**DANIELLE.** All right, fine. But I didn't want to get back here, just away from there. I couldn't take any more of your family. Or my family, my family too. Any family. The funeral happened and then time just passed and passed and [passed.]

**CONNOR.** [Got it.]

**DANIELLE.** The storm is just a convenient excuse.

**CONNOR.** We'll see how convenient it turns out to be once [it's over.]

**DANIELLE.** [Oh, you] know what [I mean.]

**CONNOR.** [Look, I know] it's not, all of those people, they love us. And maybe, and I'm saying maybe, all right, maybe I needed to get away as much as you did, but they're just trying to help.

**DANIELLE.** Well, they can't help.

**CONNOR.** They don't know what to do.

**DANIELLE.** Huh, neither do we. (*She catches herself and shakes it off.*) But I'm fine, this is fine.

**CONNOR.** There's not a road map for any of this, right? I just, I put away all of the pictures before we left, packed up his things, so let's just try not to dwell on it.

(*DANIELLE laughs, but it's not funny, while somehow signaling for him to stop.*)

**DANIELLE.** Listen to you.

**CONNOR.** I don't know what to tell you, Danielle, we had to come back eventually.

**DANIELLE.** Did we?

(*pause*)

**CONNOR.** So...you're gonna' make soup?

**DANIELLE.** I don't even know.

**CONNOR.** Well I'm gonna' go and, go get the storm shutters.

DANIELLE. Right.

CONNOR. Will you call your folks and let them know we're here?

DANIELLE. Ugh, I know how this sounds, but I really, really don't want to.

CONNOR. Danielle.

DANIELLE. My mom's going to ask, "How was the drive?" But that's not what she means, she means, "How are you feeling?" Because everything she says to me now means, "How are you feeling?"

CONNOR. It doesn't have to be a long call.

DANIELLE. Fine.

*(He begins to exit as she picks up the phone.)*

No dial tone.

CONNOR. Ah fuck, I forgot, I shut it off.

DANIELLE. Why?

CONNOR. I didn't know how long we'd be gone.

DANIELLE. Long. So it looks like I can't call them. Too bad.

*(She very deliberately places the receiver back down on the phone.)*

CONNOR. You don't seem disappointed.

DANIELLE. Ya' know, I'd call them if I could.

CONNOR. Fine, I'll take care of it.

DANIELLE. No doubt.

CONNOR. After the weather passes.

DANIELLE. Yep, post-evacuation.

CONNOR. Sure.

DANIELLE. You'll take care of everything.

CONNOR. Jesus, are you trying to pick a fight? That's a stupid question, it's pretty clear that's what you're doing, just tell me what the fight's about so we can get to it.

*(She lets out a quick laugh, it's a sharp thing, an exhalation.)*

**DANIELLE.** We're not going to fight, Connor; we don't fight anymore.

**CONNOR.** What does that even mean?

**DANIELLE.** It means that you'll back down rather than push me because you're so fucking chipper and I'm so fucking fragile that everyone has to walk on tiptoe all the time. And then they try to pretend that they're not walking on tiptoe and don't make that face at me because you know damn well that's what you do, and that's why we don't fight anymore, and that's why we're not in this house anymore.

*(pause)*

**CONNOR.** Okay.

**DANIELLE.** Like that, you're doing it right now.

**CONNOR.** Doing what?

**DANIELLE.** Pacifying.

**CONNOR.** No, I'm not. And look, it's not easy for me coming back here either.

**DANIELLE.** I know.

**CONNOR.** Do you?

**DANIELLE.** Yes, I just...I'm sorry.

**CONNOR.** You don't have to apologize. And I'm not tiptoeing, or I'm not trying to tiptoe, or however it won't sound patronizing. Because I'm not. Let's just get everything done that needs to get done and we can leave.

**DANIELLE.** Right.

**CONNOR.** We'll be gone before the storm gets too bad and then we'll just wait and see.

**DANIELLE.** That's...a plan.

**CONNOR.** That's a good plan.

**DANIELLE.** Sure.

**CONNOR.** Just give me tonight and tomorrow. We're figuring out how to do this thing, we're each figuring it out. But we have to let ourselves, right?

**DANIELLE.** It's just being here. That's all it is. I didn't think it would be, not all, like it's hanging in the air.

**CONNOR.** It's still home.

**DANIELLE.** I'm fine. Really.

**CONNOR.** It's okay, you don't have to keep saying [it.]

**DANIELLE.** [You] should get started.

**CONNOR.** I'll come and grab you in a little bit when I need your help.

**DANIELLE.** Mm hm, and then I'll help.

*(He kisses her on the cheek and exits. She begins to cry, or just lose control, but just as quickly she stops herself.)*

**END SCENE**

## ii. the beach again

*(On the beach. The next morning. Almost dawn, the sound of waves, soft and dull. More present now.)*

*(DANIELLE sits with the same large sweater pulled over her knees. She is barefoot.)*

*(Next to her, a trail of smoke snakes from the remnants of a driftwood bonfire.)*

*(She stares out at the ocean. The sun rises. For a moment the brilliance of the dawning light brightens DANIELLE's eyes, lifting her a bit. It is a beautiful moment. Just as quickly the moment passes.)*

*(CONNOR enters, yawning. He is barefoot, in pajama pants and a t-shirt. He has a mug.)*

CONNOR. Hey.

DANIELLE. You missed the sunrise, the pretty part.

CONNOR. Have you been out here all night?

DANIELLE. Most of the night.

CONNOR. I saw you started packing up some things.

DANIELLE. I tried a little, but I couldn't really focus. We're just going back to your parents' house, right? I don't know what to "save" from the big scary storm.

CONNOR. Anything you can't live without, just in case.

DANIELLE. Not much to pack.

CONNOR. I love how cavalier you're being about this entire, ugh, okay, what is that smell?

DANIELLE. And I cleared away a bunch of the fish.

CONNOR. *(looking around)* Huh.

DANIELLE. They were starting to rot and I didn't want to look at them. So I burned them.

CONNOR. What?

DANIELLE. I collected them up and I burned them in the bonfire. Don't make that face, what was I supposed to do, throw them back in the ocean?

**CONNOR.** So you burned them, no, that makes perfect sense.

**DANIELLE.** Well, that's what I did.

**CONNOR.** No one could ever build a bonfire like you. And I'm betting no one's ever built one like that, huh, dead fish bonfire.

**DANIELLE.** It was dark out here and quiet, except for the waves. Then I heard some kind of, I heard, I don't know, I just needed to do something; I couldn't sleep.

**CONNOR.** Me either.

**DANIELLE.** I thought you were out cold.

**CONNOR.** Eh, for a while, kind of, but then it was more up and down, you know? All these things in my, all the things we need to get done before we head out, just things.

**DANIELLE.** We should do the storm shutters this morning, you think? Just go ahead and get it out of the way.

**CONNOR.** We can do that, sure. Anyway, last night I ended up walking the beach a little.

**DANIELLE.** You were out here? Did you, did you see the fire?

**CONNOR.** Well I was farther down the beach, but I saw it. Saw you. I just thought maybe you wanted some time to yourself out here.

**DANIELLE.** Did you?

**CONNOR.** It's windier, huh?

**DANIELLE.** No rain yet, but I think maybe you can see it in the clouds.

**CONNOR.** It's coming.

**DANIELLE.** Or so the ominous weather report tells us.

**CONNOR.** You just said you could see it in the clouds.

**DANIELLE.** I did say that.

**CONNOR.** You won't be disappointed, Danielle, there's gonna' be a storm.

**DANIELLE.** Right here, it looks different now, doesn't it? The shape of the beach; the water seems closer. That sounds so strange, I guess.

**CONNOR.** It's something, how the shore line changes. I don't even feel like we've been gone that long, but when you're not looking at it every day it's like it all of the sudden shifts or moves, [or just...]

**DANIELLE.** [It's] washing away.

**CONNOR.** But there's something else, right? Something about looking at what's left.

*(He waits. She gives nothing.)*

Chilly this morning, you want a blanket?

**DANIELLE.** The sweater's warm.

**CONNOR.** You could probably get the fire started again. It wouldn't [take long.]

**DANIELLE.** [The sun's] up, it'll be fine. You're still trying to take care of me.

**CONNOR.** I'm not doing it on purpose. Let's, we'll talk about something else. Oh, I saw another one of those big black birds. It was just standing in the surf.

**DANIELLE.** Where the hell did they even come from?

**CONNOR.** It looked almost like a statue. They'd be beautiful, maybe, if they weren't so loud.

**DANIELLE.** You can definitely hear them.

**CONNOR.** I think they're here because of all the dead fish.

**DANIELLE.** Great.

**CONNOR.** It's not something I would have even thought about. Dead fish.

*(She chuckles.)*

**DANIELLE.** Why would you, it's disgusting.

**CONNOR.** There's a little smile.

**DANIELLE.** Ugh. Let's just sit here and enjoy this not so terrible morning.

**CONNOR.** It's even a little nice.

**DANIELLE.** Something like nice.

**CONNOR.** While you stare down the ocean.

**DANIELLE.** I'm, I'm not staring down the ocean.

CONNOR. Uh huh, out here all night. It's only water,  
[Danielle.]

DANIELLE. [That's not] what I'm [doing.]

CONNOR. [You don't] want to own up to it, that's fine by  
me.

DANIELLE. I'm just having a, one of those déjà vu things. I  
don't know.

CONNOR. Sure. We used to spend so much time out here,  
huh?

DANIELLE. We did.

CONNOR. It instantly feels, it always felt so familiar.

DANIELLE. We practically lived out here.

CONNOR. That's why people move to the beach, right?

DANIELLE. To be at the beach.

CONNOR. To be at the beach.

DANIELLE. I loved living here.

CONNOR. It's a great place.

DANIELLE. Making bonfires at night, clear nights. And you  
bought those crazy blue mosquito lamps that were so  
complicated.

CONNOR. They were supposed to come with instructions.

DANIELLE. And they didn't even work.

CONNOR. Nope.

DANIELLE. Not at all.

CONNOR. And we took those walks, collecting little shells,  
rocks and building sandcastle after sandcastle [in  
the...]

DANIELLE. [Oh, with] all of his little plastic tools and that  
little bucket.

*(Pause. They both look out at the water.)*

Everything tiny, little shovel, smaller to fit his hands.

CONNOR. Hadn't thought about that in a while.

DANIELLE. Me either.

CONNOR. He was a good little guy.

DANIELLE. So little.

CONNOR. And it's so big out there.

DANIELLE. And we get dead fish.

CONNOR. I'd rather think about the sandcastles.

*(She shakes it off and looks at him. He continues to look out at the water.)*

DANIELLE. We did spend a lot of time out here.

CONNOR. I love you.

DANIELLE. I'm trying really hard to not let all of this...

*(He looks at her. After a moment, she kisses him gently on the cheek with all of the tenderness that two people can share. He tears up but smiles at her.)*

CONNOR. It's okay that it's hard.

DANIELLE. I love you too.

CONNOR. You want some of this?

DANIELLE. What is it?

CONNOR. Coffee. And some whiskey.

DANIELLE. *(laughing)* Perfect.

CONNOR. I know, it's early. But I [thought...]

DANIELLE. [I don't want] any.

CONNOR. Suit yourself.

*(He takes a drink, places his arm around DANIELLE and looks out into the sun.)*

Shame about the sunrise, I bet it was beautiful.

**END SCENE**

### iii. in the waves

*(The living room. Later the same day. The sound of the ocean waves can be heard, perhaps wind. The storm is getting closer.)*

*(DANIELLE is still wearing the oversized sweater. She has one sealed packing box nearby and is placing books from a shelf into another open box.)*

*(Quietly, a sigh rises out of the waves, breathy, choppy, almost inaudible. DANIELLE stops and goes to the window to look out at the water. She listens, but there is only the sound of waves. She shakes it off.)*

*(DANIELLE returns to the packing box, but another sound rises out of the waves, a higher pitch this time, more of a voice and a bit more audible but still just an idea of a noise buried in the rhythmic sounds of the ocean. She freezes and turns to look out at the water again. She suddenly looks at the books in her hands, examines the room, looks at the empty picture frames and then violently hurls the books to the floor.)*

*(She examines this, moves over to the couch, takes one of the pillows and tosses it to the ground. Suddenly in a burst, she knocks all of the pillows and cushions to the ground. She then knocks over another chair and tips over the coffee table rather violently.)*

*(Breathing heavy and undone, she examines this.)*

*(CONNOR enters from the back of the house, now dressed, with his duffle bag and one or two other bags or suitcases.)*

CONNOR. What the fuck?

DANIELLE. Oh, I was just, I was trying to, to...

CONNOR. What?

DANIELLE. Move the couch. But it's too heavy.

CONNOR. Why?

DANIELLE. Just to see if, Jesus, it's no big deal. I just thought it might look better over...I don't know.

CONNOR. *(laughing it off)* Well, ask for help or something.

DANIELLE. I called out for you.

CONNOR. Uh huh, you never ask for help. Where do you want to move it?

DANIELLE. No, no it's fine. I changed my mind.

CONNOR. Okay.

DANIELLE. I was just cleaning this up.

*(CONNOR begins to restore the living room. DANIELLE watches the room return to order as he speaks.)*

CONNOR. So I walked through town this morning. Pretty quiet. Bought some coffee at that little place over on Oceanside. It was practically empty.

DANIELLE. That place is always crowded.

CONNOR. Not today.

DANIELLE. No, not today.

CONNOR. I guess people are probably off doing what we're doing, packing and closing up. Or already gone. Not the best time to have a chat or... *(He stops.)* Are you gonna' help?

DANIELLE. Oh, oh yes.

*(She helps him set the coffee table upright.)*

CONNOR. That's the point of evacuating I guess.

DANIELLE. Except for us. We charge right into the middle of it.

CONNOR. We'll be out of here soon.

DANIELLE. I don't think I've ever liked these pillows. I don't think I ever really even looked at these pillows.

CONNOR. They're fine.

DANIELLE. They go with the couch anyway.

CONNOR. You picked out everything in this place.

DANIELLE. I'm just making an observation Connor, I'm just saying out loud that they fit with everything but I'm not sure I particularly like them.

*(The room is restored.)*

CONNOR. There, exactly as before.

DANIELLE. Thanks.

CONNOR. Exactly as it was before whatever happened in here while I was back there.

DANIELLE. What does that [mean?]

CONNOR. [Hey, hey, hey,] I wasn't trying to start anything. I too was just, ya' know, making an observation. I'm sorry.

DANIELLE. Okay.

CONNOR. Everything's so tense.

DANIELLE. You mean I'm so tense.

CONNOR. No, I mean everything.

DANIELLE. Huh.

CONNOR. Isn't it?

DANIELLE. Yes.

CONNOR. I keep catching myself grinding my teeth.

DANIELLE. You do it in your sleep too. I can hear it.

CONNOR. You can?

DANIELLE. Like someone rubbing rocks together.

CONNOR. For how long?

DANIELLE. A while.

CONNOR. My jaw is starting to ache.

DANIELLE. Well, we've never faced down a natural disaster.

CONNOR. That's fair.

DANIELLE. And...we weren't really talking that much before the storm. It's hard to start talking again when you get used to not talking.

CONNOR. That's...fair.

*(long pause)*

DANIELLE. Is there, ugh, I have no idea why this is so hard, why is this so hard? Is there anything you want to say to me? I know how that, but just, is there [anything?]

CONNOR. [Yes.]

DANIELLE. Okay?

CONNOR. But you don't want to hear it.

DANIELLE. Yes I do. I think.

CONNOR. Just, look, can we take ten minutes to go for a walk, just around the [block or...?]

DANIELLE. [That's what] I don't want to hear?

CONNOR. Because you've only been in here, in the house, mostly in this room.

DANIELLE. I'm supposed to be packing things from in here.

CONNOR. It's two boxes of stuff Danielle, we're not taking everything. And I think maybe you're going a little stir crazy.

DANIELLE. I've been outside; I went to the beach.

CONNOR. I can't get you into town, you haven't talked to anyone.

DANIELLE. There's no one left around to [talk to.]

CONNOR. [Yes there] is and that's not the point.

DANIELLE. This isn't a social visit, get in and get out, you said that.

CONNOR. But I thought once we were here that you [would...]

DANIELLE. [What?]

CONNOR. Somehow, kind of...re-engage.

DANIELLE. You thought boarding up the house so it doesn't get washed away by a huge storm was a healthy way for me to re-enter our life?

CONNOR. Not when you say it like that. But this is home, this is where we lived and if it doesn't get washed away then this is where we'll be living again.

DANIELLE. All right, I'm starting to, the distance between our purpose here now, our task, and your expectations of me is unfathomable, isn't it? Do you feel that at all?

CONNOR. Look, I'll just, you say you're doing better, handling things, you "act" like you're doing better, but you're bad at it. I don't know if you think you're good

at it, but you're not. Then I have to act like you are, and I was doing okay with that, but then we walk in this house and I can't act like I think you're okay anymore because you're clearly not.

**DANIELLE.** Well I thought I would be fine and I'm dealing with it so just let me deal with it.

**CONNOR.** I think that, I don't know, I was out on the beach alone [and...]

**DANIELLE.** [I thought] you were in town?

**CONNOR.** And then I went to the beach.

**DANIELLE.** Why?

**CONNOR.** It doesn't matter why. And the waves are really high, the wind's picking up. I think we should just go.

**DANIELLE.** You went to the beach and now you want to leave?

**CONNOR.** You asked me to tell you what I'm thinking, if I had anything [to...]

**DANIELLE.** [What] about closing up the house?

**CONNOR.** Okay, let's take some time to get things settled up and then [we can...]

**DANIELLE.** [Now you] want to stay?

**CONNOR.** I don't know, I don't know, Danielle. I don't want to flip over furniture and burn dead fish, I know that much; what do you think we should do?

**DANIELLE.** I don't want you to be angry with me.

**CONNOR.** I'm not angry. I'm just frustrated.

**DANIELLE.** No, when I say this, I don't want you to be angry with me.

**CONNOR.** What?

**DANIELLE.** Don't get angry.

**CONNOR.** Look, I know it must seem [like I'm...]

**DANIELLE.** (*in a sudden burst*) [I just, I] keep seeing it, he's there one second and then just gone, smiling, waving, showing off with those bright orange water wings [and then...]

CONNOR. [Why would] you, we said we wouldn't talk about it.

DANIELLE. We agreed to not talk about everything. Everything.

CONNOR. Stop it.

DANIELLE. This is what you wanted, right? I'm engaging you.

CONNOR. Okay, I'll stop it.

DANIELLE. We can't really get better if we just skim over things, it would look like we were touching them if someone was looking from far away, but we're not far away, we're right here and that's why we don't talk. We didn't even talk about it at his funeral. That's how much we haven't talked [about it.]

CONNOR. [Because it's] too hard to be back here when you're clearly not ready to come back here, even though you said you were, and I'm not even sure I'm ready, to have to look at the water every day.

DANIELLE. I know.

CONNOR. We said we wouldn't talk about it because we each needed to do our own thing, because we can't do it together, for whatever reason, and I've respected that.

DANIELLE. I know.

CONNOR. So you should respect it too.

DANIELLE. I know.

CONNOR. Stop saying "I know." Stop saying that. And don't cry.

DANIELLE. No, I'm not.

*(She's not. He's close.)*

CONNOR. I'm not going to, so you can't.

*(She's stone.)*

DANIELLE. All right. But it hasn't been that long. Not that long at all, not in the, and how long is long enough anyway? You can't just make something the past by

saying we're getting past it, no matter how many times you say it. And when something like this happens, when that ocean gets hungry again and comes back for more, how [can we...]

**CONNOR.** [That's not] what's [happening.]

**DANIELLE.** [That ocean,] that fucking ocean [is awful.]

**CONNOR.** [Now we're] talking about the [ocean?]

**DANIELLE.** [I heard] him crying last night.

**CONNOR.** Who?

**DANIELLE.** No. *(Pause. She turns to him.)* I wasn't going to tell [you.]

**CONNOR.** [Are you] talking about...?

*(pause)*

Okay, listen, I didn't want to tell you this, but I don't know how to not tell you if you're going to stand there and...

*(CONNOR takes DANIELLE by the hand and sits her on the couch.)*

**DANIELLE.** What are you [doing?]

**CONNOR.** [Listen, I] have to, I've made my peace with it. That he's gone, figured out how to keep going, maybe it's not what you want, maybe that's difficult, but it's the best I can do and I did it.

*(For a moment, DANIELLE is stunned in a terrible kind of awe.)*

**DANIELLE.** What?

**CONNOR.** It's done. I'm done with it enough to try [to get...]

**DANIELLE.** [How?]

**CONNOR.** I don't know, it just [happened.]

**DANIELLE.** [Tell me how. I] don't know how, look at me.

**CONNOR.** It's gonna' sound... I took everything I feel about, I took everything I had to say, to him, put it in a letter and threw it in the ocean. The same place where he was washed out, just out there, right on the beach.

DANIELLE. A letter?

CONNOR. Yes.

DANIELLE. A letter is how you got over the death of our son?

CONNOR. Don't do that.

DANIELLE. What did it say?

CONNOR. It's between him and me. I'm sorry, I can't tell you. I know that's not fair, but it's only for him, with him and he's gone.

DANIELLE. A letter?

CONNOR. A letter.

DANIELLE. A fucking letter?

CONNOR. Goddamn it, [Danielle.]

DANIELLE. [Well I'm,] I'm glad you can make it better like that, but I can't. I heard a little boy crying last night, on the beach, and I think, I thought it [was...]

CONNOR. [Don't say] his name.

DANIELLE. We won't even say his name!

CONNOR. I can't, not yet.

DANIELLE. But you're healed now; you threw a letter in the ocean.

CONNOR. Cut away at me all you need to Danielle, if that's what [you need.]

DANIELLE. [I'm fucking] angry!

CONNOR. At least you're not pretending you're fine [any more.]

DANIELLE. [You keep] saying pretending, I wasn't pretending to do [anything.]

CONNOR. [Oh no?]

DANIELLE. I was trying.

CONNOR. Try harder.

DANIELLE. We should be able to lean on each other and we found out we can't. Clearly that's a fucking disappointment, even still it doesn't mean I don't love you, but how can I talk to you when I actually see you

recovering, when you're standing here presenting me with these "facts" and even the idea of recovering is still so menacingly foreign to me.

CONNOR. I understand.

DANIELLE. No you don't.

CONNOR. Okay, I don't.

DANIELLE. And we're back here now and all I can do is think about that ocean, it's all I can hear, it's always there, right there, and then his little voice calling for help like he might be just behind the next [wave.]

CONNOR. [I know you] think I'm being cruel, no, I think I'm being cruel but I've tried being everything else so listen: I love you and I will not watch you drive yourself crazy here; he's dead. He's dead. And this is the worst kind of [wallowing in...]

DANIELLE. [You know what] I was doing? On the beach?

CONNOR. No, I don't [really want...]

DANIELLE. [You had your] letter story, this is what I did: I built that fire last night and sat in the dark and I heard him, even though that's impossible and I don't care how it sounds and then it seemed like everything bent around me and stopped and all I could see were dead fish, can you imagine that moment? By firelight, dead fish everywhere, that ocean and the sound of my son [crying?]

CONNOR. [Okay, I] have to get out of here.

*(He is up and heading for the door.)*

DANIELLE. Where are you going?

CONNOR. I don't know. The beach, I don't [know.]

DANIELLE. [I'm sorry.]

CONNOR. You heard the wind.

DANIELLE. No, you're not [listening...]

CONNOR. [The wind!] And rain. It's ridiculous, Danielle. Our boy wasn't even, he was three years old and he will never have to cry again; we don't get to make it better, to do a better job. It couldn't have been him because he never gets to cry now.

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