SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

Completeness

Itamar Moses

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK

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ISBN 978-0-573-70146-7

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COMPLETENESS had its New York City premeire produced Off Broadway by Playwrights Horizons on September 13th, 2011 with Artistic Director, Tim Sanford and Managing Director Leslie Marcus. The performance was directed by Pam MacKinnon, with scenic and costume designs by David Zinn, lighting by Russell Champa, and sound by Bray Poor. The Production Stage Manager was Charles M Turner III. The cast was as follows:

ELLIOT . . . . . Karl Miller
MOLLY . . . . . Aubrey Dollar
LAUREN/KATIE/NELL . . . . . Meredith Forlenza
DON/CLARK/FRANKLIN . . . . . Brian Avers

COMPLETENESS was originally produced by South Coast Repertory in Costa Meza, CA on April 17th, 2011 with Artistic Director, Marc Masterson; Founding Directors, David Emmes and Martin Benson; and Managing Director, Paula Tomei. The production was directed by Pam Mackinnon, with set design by Christopher Barreca, lighting by Russell. H. Champa, and sound by Bray Poor. The Production Stage Manager was Jennifer Ellen Butler. The cast was as follows:

ELLIOT . . . . . Karl Miller
MOLLY . . . . . Mandy Siegfried
LAUREN/KATIE/NELL . . . . . Brooke Bloom
DON/CLARK/FRANKLIN . . . . . Johnathan McClain

Originally commissioned by the Manhattan Theatre Club, Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer; Paige Evans, Director of New Play Development, with funds provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

CHARACTERS

ELLIOT

MOLLY

LAUREN/KATIE/NELL

DON/CLARK/FRANKLIN

A NOTE ABOUT PROJECTIONS

The script calls for projections at one key moment in scene eight. If your production is using projections, however, it's not necessary to limit their use to that one moment, they can be used in various creative ways in transitions throughout the show, or even during the entrance of Clark and Katie in scene seven, to help bring out some of the metaphorical resonances of the science discussed in the script. On the other hand, if your production is unable to use projections for whatever reason, this doesn't mean you can't produce the play: other elements, lights, set, and especially sound (perhaps the text to be projected is instead recorded in the voices of the actors?) can also be used.

A NOTE ABOUT THE BREAKDOWN

The simulated "breakdown" of the play at the end of scene eight is something every production is going to have to solve in its own way, and any specific stage directions there in the script are just a basic guideline. It seems desirable, however, to genuinely trick the audience at first, and then somehow, by the end of the "improvisatory" dialogue that follows, to bring about a dawning (or even sudden) awareness that this, too, might be scripted. In any case, be prepared for a lot of people to tell you that this is their least favorite part of the play and that the play would be better without it. This is how you will know you did it right.

1.

(the public computer cluster)

(Rows of tables with computers, or at least the suggestion of this. Ugly fluorescent lighting. **ELLIOT** *sits at a computer, working. He types for a while. Then clicks the mouse button to run something – a program of some kind? Then stares at the screen and waits.)*

(He waits for a while. He shifts, annoyed. He clicks the mouse again. Then a few more times. Is the thing frozen? Frustrated, **ELLIOT** *sighs. And restarts the computer. He gets up. He puts on his jacket, which is hanging on the back of the chair, picks up his backpack from where it is on the floor, and has just turned to go when…)*

*(…***MOLLY** *enters and sits down at a different computer, nearby.* **ELLIOT** *hesitates. Then he pretends he has just arrived: puts his backpack down on the floor, puts his jacket over the back of the chair, sits at the computer, and pretends to start doing something, too.)*

*(***ELLIOT** *and* **MOLLY** *both work in silence for a while.* **MOLLY** *is intent on her screen, reading, and then typing.* **ELLIOT** *is less intent on his screen and keeps sneaking glances at* **MOLLY**. *Then* **MOLLY** *sends an email. Her computer makes a "send" noise.)*

ELLIOT. Email.

MOLLY. Excuse me?

ELLIOT. Sending, uhhh…

(Then, **ELLIOT** *just looks down, lapsing back into awkward silence, and pretending to work some more.* **MOLLY** *rereads something on her screen and then sits back, annoyed.)*

MOLLY. *(quietly)* Not *again*.

ELLIOT. Is there a problem?

MOLLY. What?

ELLIOT. Is there a problem with the computer? Because I'm a C.A. I mean, I'm a grad student? In Computer Science? But I also work as a… So if there's –

MOLLY. There's no problem with the computer.

ELLIOT. Oh okay. *(beat)* I'm Elliot.

MOLLY. What?

ELLIOT. Sorry, just, I totally ambushed you without even… I'm Elliot?

MOLLY. There's not a problem with the computer, Elliot. Thanks.

ELLIOT. Okay.

MOLLY. Okay.

(A moment. **MOLLY** *gets back to work.* **ELLIOT**, *internally kicking himself, starts to get back to pretend work, but then just shakes his head, gets up, grabs his jacket, and is reaching for his backpack, when:)*

MOLLY. I'm Molly.

ELLIOT. What? Oh –

MOLLY. Sorry, I can be…that was rude. I'm Molly.

ELLIOT. Oh, no. I mean: it's nice to meet you, Molly.

MOLLY. It's nice to meet you too, Elliot.

(A moment. **MOLLY** *offers her hand for a handshake.* **ELLIOT** *shakes* **MOLLY***'s hand.)*

ELLIOT. All right. *(beat)* So, all right, um…

(A moment. **ELLIOT** *walks away. A few moments pass.* **MOLLY** *types some more.* **ELLIOT** *comes back.)*

I just…forgot my…

*(***ELLIOT** *goes to get his backpack, which he left on the floor by his chair. Then he nods one more time, at nothing in particular, and has turned to go, when:)*

MOLLY. Hey, Elliot, let me ask you something.

ELLIOT. What? Yeah, okay.

MOLLY. Do you know what a two-hybrid screen is?

(beat)

ELLIOT. Um –

MOLLY. Actually it doesn't matter.

ELLIOT. No, it's, you know, some kind of…method… whereby – ?

MOLLY. No that's not actually my question.

ELLIOT. Oh thank god.

MOLLY. Let's say you've accumulated a ton of data from an experiment. But the data is so sort of noisy and full of crap that it is very very difficult to know what it means. Don't you guys have ways of mitigating that?

ELLIOT. What guys? You mean in C.S.?

MOLLY. *(overlapping)* I, computer guys, yeah.

ELLIOT. Um, maybe. What's your project?

MOLLY. I work with yeast cultures, primarily? I –

ELLIOT. *Yeast* cultures? Seriously?

MOLLY. What.

ELLIOT. No, just, okay.

MOLLY. It's how we study protein-protein interactions. Which are responsible for more or less every process in your body.

ELLIOT. *(catching up)* This is Molecular Biology.

MOLLY. Yeah. Yeast is just a hospitable environment in which to perform *screens*. Of proteins we *know* against proteins we *don't*. Bait and prey.

ELLIOT. Huh. I like that. "Bait and pray." Kind of mystical for science, but –

MOLLY. No, *prey*. Like, *prey*. Like –

ELLIOT. *(overlapping)* Oh, oh, *prey*.

MOLLY. *(miming one creature pouncing on another)* Bait and prey.

ELLIOT. Gotcha.

MOLLY. Yeah. You use yeast as your host and plate a bunch of lines of a known protein, that's your bait, and then you *criss*-cross that with *unknown* protein strains, that's your prey, to make a grid. And then you add a reporter gene that causes a phenotype change? *Only where the proteins bind.* So at most of the intersections nothing happens, but… *(She begins rummaging in her bag.)* where two of the little guys *do* interact…when there's a *pathway* there…hold on… Ah.

ELLIOT. Ah!

(Because **MOLLY** *has suddenly pulled a Petri dish out of her bag and, because* **ELLIOT** *was leaning in, she has held it up a little bit too near his face for comfort.)*

MOLLY. Oh god, sorry!

ELLIOT. Yeah, is that – ?

MOLLY. Yeah, no, don't worry, it's totally sterile, it's just… Here. Look.

(Tentatively, **ELLIOT** *looks.)*

ELLIOT. It's blue.

MOLLY. Well it *turns* blue. Or it does whatever the reporter gene you chose tells it to do. I like blue.

ELLIOT. And then you know which proteins interact.

MOLLY. Well that's the problem because maybe not. My advisor keeps saying –

ELLIOT. Noisy and full of crap.

MOLLY. Exactly.

ELLIOT. Yeah. What you need is a data mining algorithm.

MOLLY. Okay. Say more.

ELLIOT. Where a computer looks at your data and then tells you the most likely interpretation of it.

MOLLY. I *do* need that. *Thank* you. *(writing it down)* "Data… mining…algorithm."

ELLIOT. *(overlapping)* I mean, I'd of course need actually to look at your data to figure out what specific kind you *need*, but, generally speaking –

MOLLY. What?

ELLIOT. Oh, well, just, I'd, um –

MOLLY. I, oh, no, sorry, I didn't, uh… *(beat)* I didn't mean *you.*

ELLIOT. Oh. *(beat)* Yeah, no, just, if –

MOLLY. Yeah I didn't mean you *personally.* Or, I mean, I should probably, like, go through the department, or –

ELLIOT. Oh, no, yeah.

MOLLY. Or through both of our departments in, like, some official *way.*

ELLIOT. Yeah, no, of course.

MOLLY. Yeah so… *(beat)* Why, would you *do* that for me?

ELLIOT. Uh, yeah. I mean, yeah, sure. If you want.

(beat)

MOLLY. Okay.

ELLIOT. Okay, great, um, how can I get in touch with you?

MOLLY. What?

ELLIOT. What's the best way to get in touch with you?

MOLLY. I'm sitting right here. Like, now, in front of you, so –

ELLIOT. No, I know, I mean, later, to set up, like, a –

MOLLY. Oh, yeah, no, right, of course, here, let me…this is my cell.

*(***MOLLY** *tears off a corner of one page of her notebook and jots down her phone number. She slides it across the table to* **ELLIOT**.*)*

ELLIOT. Great. *(beat)* Actually could I have your email address?

*(***ELLIOT** *slides the paper back.)*

MOLLY. Oh. Um. Okay.

ELLIOT. Sorry, just, I'm more likely to actually…I'm a little more comfortable –

MOLLY. That's…fine. Here.

*(***MOLLY** *writes down her email address and slides the paper back.)*

ELLIOT. Great. Thanks.

*(***ELLIOT** *looks at the paper. Then he leans forward and types something into his computer. Then he clicks with the mouse and there is a "send" noise. A moment.* **ELLIOT** *nods and half-smiles awkwardly at* **MOLLY** *who half-smiles back perplexed. Then the email arrives at the computer in front of* **MOLLY** *with an "arrival" noise.)*

MOLLY. Oh!

ELLIOT. Yeah, that's, um. That's me

(…transition…all the transitions cast the space into a dark blue light…)

2.

*(***ELLIOT***'s place)*

(The whole apartment is really one space: front door, kitchen area, sleeping area, work area with desk and computer. Another door presumably leads to the bathroom. Also, there is a white board on the wall with a to-do list written on it. **LAUREN** *is in bed, in pajamas of some kind, working on her laptop.* **ELLIOT** *is at his desk, at the computer, in a t-shirt and boxers maybe, or otherwise dressed for bed. He is on his cell phone.)*

ELLIOT. Uh-huh…uh-huh…well yeah I mean, nobody wants to feel that way…

*(***ELLIOT** *smiles at* **LAUREN***, rolling his eyes. She smiles, understanding.)*

Uh-huh…uh-huh…oh, I'm sure that's not true, I'm sure you both want it to work. I mean, you're not the easiest guy to… No, I know, I just mean she's *been* there, through all your…uh-huh.

*(***ELLIOT** *shakes his head at* **LAUREN** *apologetically. She shrugs: "No problem.")*

Uh-huh…. *(then, a little exasperated)* Well then why don't you guys just get *divorced* then? …*(relenting)* I, no, I didn't, I'm just…uh-huh…uh-huh, I, oh, uh, Lauren just came over…

*(***LAUREN** *smirks and nods: "Great. Use me."* **ELLIOT** *shrugs: "Sorry!")*

Yeah, so I should…okay…okay…I will…okay…bye.

*(***ELLIOT** *hangs up the phone. Then:)*

My Dad says hi.

*(***LAUREN** *nods. Then:)*

LAUREN. Does it ever *bother* your Mom?

ELLIOT. What.

LAUREN. That he has these conversations with you.

ELLIOT. Should it?

LAUREN. It would bother me.

ELLIOT. Huh. *(beat)* Yeah I don't know.

*(***ELLIOT** *gets back to work.* **LAUREN** *works. A silence. Then:)*

LAUREN. What are you working on?

ELLIOT. An algorithm.

LAUREN. For the TSP?

ELLIOT. No, not for me, it's a data mining algorithm. For an experiment.

LAUREN. What experiment?

ELLIOT. On yeast?

LAUREN. *Yeast?* Who's working on yeast?

ELLIOT. I know, right? Just some grad student, just this grad student, in bio.

LAUREN. Do I know him?

ELLIOT. Uhh… *(beat)* No, I don't think you do. *(beat)* I mean, it's pretty standard, pretty basic heuristics, so I can just…adapt existing code? But it's a nice change of *pace*, to, you know, work on something *else*.

LAUREN. *And* it might be good, for the department, which *funds* you, to see you branch out a little, yeah. *(pause)* Hey.

ELLIOT. What.

*(***LAUREN** *closes her laptop and puts it away.)*

LAUREN. Come here.

*(***ELLIOT** *looks over.* **LAUREN** *is looking at him suggestively.)*

ELLIOT. In, yeah, in just a second.

LAUREN. Uhh –

ELLIOT. No, I just, I'm almost…hey, no…

(Because **LAUREN***, feeling rejected, puts her laptop away, flicks off a light, and pretends to go to sleep, while in fact sulking. A moment.)*

ELLIOT. Seriously. Just one second.

(No answer. **ELLIOT** *looks back at the computer. Then back at* **LAUREN**. **ELLIOT** *leaves the computer still working, crosses to the bed, and slips under the covers.)*

ELLIOT. Hey.

LAUREN. *(muffled)* No.

ELLIOT. No? Just no?

LAUREN. No.

ELLIOT. "No" in reference to what, exactly?

LAUREN. No don't come over here.

(A moment. **ELLIOT** *gets out of bed and heads back to the computer.)*

LAUREN. Oh my god! Elliot!

ELLIOT. What? You pushed me away!

LAUREN. *So?*

ELLIOT. So you're mad that I'm not in bed and then you're mad that I am in bed and now you're mad that I got out of bed?

LAUREN. No! I'm mad that you didn't *stay* in bed and try to make me *feel* better!

(A moment. **ELLIOT** *starts to move back towards the bed.)*

LAUREN. Oh my god what's *wrong* with you?

ELLIOT. *What?* You *just said – !*

LAUREN. Yes so don't come back when I *tell* you to! Come back when you *want* to!

ELLIOT. But..! I…! *(pause)* I do want to.

LAUREN. No you *don't.*

ELLIOT. Okay so let me get this. Now that you've told me to come back to bed, my decision to return is thus rendered, *a priori*, meaningless.

LAUREN. Well –

ELLIOT. Because you do realize that, by *that* logic, once you've expressed a preference, I can never actually *do* what you prefer without my motives being suspect.

LAUREN. Well, okay, but –

ELLIOT. On top of which, the fact that my return to bed was *preceded* by you telling me you *want* me to does not necessarily mean that your *telling* me was the *cause*. Correlation is not causation.

LAUREN. I know that, Elliot. I'm just telling you how it *feels*.

ELLIOT. And, and! In *any* case: what's *wrong* with me just wanting to give you what you *want?* Don't you *want* me to…want to give you what you want?

LAUREN. I…guess, but –

ELLIOT. So okay then.

LAUREN. So, wait, so then which is it?

ELLIOT. Which is what.

LAUREN. Is it that you really want to come to bed or that you're trying to give me what I want by coming to bed?

(beat)

ELLIOT. My point is that either way there's nothing for you to get upset about.

LAUREN. But I *am* upset.

ELLIOT. Okay.

LAUREN. Is the flaw in your theory.

ELLIOT. Well –

LAUREN. Because, you know what? Because it doesn't *feel* like you trying to do *either* of those things. It *feels* like you just trying to *prevent* me from getting *mad*.

ELLIOT. Well maybe that's because you're always on the *brink* of getting mad at me and so sometimes *preventing* that feels like the absolute best that I can do.

LAUREN. But it isn't! You can make me happy!

ELLIOT. *How!?*

LAUREN. I don't want to have to *tell* you!

ELLIOT. Right because you *want* me to just *guess!*

LAUREN. No. I *want* you. To just. *Know.*

(pause)

ELLIOT. Well…

(A moment. **ELLIOT** *shuts his eyes, rubs his forehead, something like that.)*

LAUREN. What. What is it.

ELLIOT. No, just…I feel a little nauseous.

LAUREN. Elliot. What is it.

(A moment. **ELLIOT** *is not looking at* **LAUREN**. *Then his computer starts to make a little noise, a gentle ticking, as though its hard drive is straining a little, or as though its a fan has turned on to cool it. Something like that. For a moment or two,* **ELLIOT**, *lost in thought, doesn't notice. But then it jars him out of his reverie. He hits whatever buttons are necessary to stop the computer from doing whatever it's doing, and, with that:)*

ELLIOT. All right, look. I've just, um. I've just been… thinking? About what kind of, like, situation, or relationship, you seem to want to be in.

LAUREN. What? What does that mean.

ELLIOT. Well, and, just that, if *I* don't know if that's the same kind of situation that *I* want to be in, necessarily, then it doesn't, like, seem exactly *fair*. To you. To not let you, like, go, and *find* that kind of relationship. Or situation.

LAUREN. Um –

ELLIOT. You know?

LAUREN. Well, not…I mean, look, Elliot, I don't know what you mean exactly, I mean, I don't have some, like, abstract *kind* of relationship that I wish to *be* in, if, you know, if something about the way…I want to, this is, so if, like, if the parameters… If something is making you uncomfortable then we can, you know, I can try to…or, I mean, I'm sorry I, it's not a big deal, we don't have to even…I have this stupid *cold* that's been… don't think you have to like set me *free* to find, like, some guy I haven't even *met* yet who'll, like, I don't even know what. *(beat)* What are you saying?

(beat)

ELLIOT. What I'm *saying* is. I feel like if I don't know if I'm going to be a certain kind of guy for you. Like if I know that I'm *not* going to be that guy. It seems like I should say that. Like. As soon as possible.

LAUREN. *(quietly)* Yeah but what does that mean, though, "be that guy for me."

ELLIOT. Who'll want to turn this into…something permanent. *(beat)* Because, if –

LAUREN. Oh my god, what am I doing in your *bed?*

*(***LAUREN** *gets out of bed and moves as far away from* **ELLIOT** *as she can get.)*

ELLIOT. Hey –

LAUREN. Uh, no, I think I've, I think I got it, sorry, it took me –

ELLIOT. *(moving toward her)* No, listen to me.

LAUREN . Oh my god, get away from me.

*(***ELLIOT** *stops where he is.)*

LAUREN. What.

(beat)

ELLIOT. You're amazing, okay? I think you're great.

LAUREN. Oh my god – !

ELLIOT. But, okay, but would you please just listen?

LAUREN. I…! Get away from me!

(Because **ELLIOT** *is moving towards her again, so she shoves past him, and backs away to the other side of the room.)*

ELLIOT. Okay! Okay. I just, look, I just want to –

LAUREN. No! Don't tell me how great I am, okay? Don't do that.

ELLIOT. Okay.

LAUREN. Okay.

(beat)

ELLIOT. Okay so then –

LAUREN. So wait so are you saying that you're not the kind of guy who will want something to be permanent, like, *ever* with *anyone*, like, that's just not something you're going to want to *do*, or are you saying it's not something you can see yourself doing with *me* because of something that you think isn't *right* for you *about* me.

(beat)

ELLIOT. Well, that's, you know, that's not really a question that's possible to answer, is it.

LAUREN. It's not?

ELLIOT. Well, what, you want me to stand here and tell you that I will never want to stay with anyone, ever, because – ?

LAUREN. No, of course not –

ELLIOT. *(overlapping)* Because I mean, obviously, every relationship I've been in up to now has, you know, *ended*, I mean, mani*fest*ly, so –

LAUREN. *(overlapping)* Right, of course, but –

ELLIOT. But does that mean they *all* will, *always*, how should *I* know?

LAUREN. No, of course not, Elliot, I am not asking you to *predict* the *future!* I'm asking you if…! *(Pause. Maybe she starts to cry.)* What did I do *wrong?*

ELLIOT. You didn't do anything wrong.

LAUREN. No, I must have done something, I must have done something wrong, tell me what I did wrong.

ELLIOT. You didn't do anything wrong, it's, you know… timing.

LAUREN. Timing?

ELLIOT. Yeah.

LAUREN. How is it *timing?*

ELLIOT. Well you knew that I was coming off a really bad break-up.

LAUREN. Right. I mean, so was I.

ELLIOT. And well right but –

LAUREN. I mean, we *talked* about it, we were like, hey, isn't it surprising and unexpected to be able to get into something with someone new, we *talked* about it –

ELLIOT. Yeah, it was, it is.

LAUREN. So, right, so then what the fuck is your point exactly?

ELLIOT. That maybe…

LAUREN. What.

ELLIOT. I mean don't you ever feel…

LAUREN. *What. Tell* me.

ELLIOT. Don't you ever feel like there are certain feelings inside you, that are curled up inside you, like a potential, and can stretch out and attach to another person. And when those feelings get bruised or hurt they curl back up again until they heal. And until that happens they aren't available. But maybe a *different* kind of feeling is, one that isn't bruised, and you attach in that way, but meanwhile, the other part of you, the bruised part, is healing, and then eventually, it's healed. And you feel that potential again.

(beat)

LAUREN. Oh my god –

ELLIOT. No, just, because, listen –

LAUREN. I'm, you're saying I'm, get *away* from me –

*(***ELLIOT** *reaches for* **LAUREN***'s hand but she pulls away and heads for the bathroom.)*

ELLIOT. But don't you feel that?

LAUREN. You're saying I'm a *rebound?*

ELLIOT. No, just, first of all, I don't really like that word?

LAUREN. Oh my god!

ELLIOT. I don't, I think that it's reductive!

LAUREN. Oh my god you fucking asshole!

*(***LAUREN** *disappears into the bathroom and slams the door. A moment.)*

ELLIOT. Come out of there. *(pause)* Hey. Hello? *(He knocks gently.)* Hey, come out of there and talk to me.

LAUREN. *(off)* I don't want to.

ELLIOT. You have to come out of there eventually.

LAUREN. *(off)* No I don't.

ELLIOT. You're going to live in my bathroom?

LAUREN. *(off)* I hate you.

ELLIOT. Okay. *(pause)* Or, look, you said it yourself. It was one of the first things you said to me, when we got together, that maybe we're too similar. We, you know, we do exactly the same thing, we're in the same department, we know all the same people –

*(***LAUREN** *opens the door.)*

LAUREN. Oh god, and I'm going to have to see you around the fucking *department* all the time, that's right, *fuck!*

*(***LAUREN** *slams the door again. A moment.)*

ELLIOT. *And*, so maybe it's too, you know…maybe we'd each be better off with someone…complementary.

(A silence. **LAUREN** *opens the door. A moment.)*

ELLIOT. I mean, right?

LAUREN. Who is she?

(beat)

ELLIOT. What?

LAUREN. Who is she that's complementary that you feel that potential again with. It's that chick *Nell*, isn't it. That undergrad?

ELLIOT. I have no idea what you're talking about.

LAUREN. There isn't somebody else.

ELLIOT. No, Jesus, I would never…

LAUREN. Well then…well then what if I hadn't gotten mad at you.

ELLIOT. What?

LAUREN. What if we hadn't had that stupid fight? Would we still be breaking up?

ELLIOT. I, what? I don't know –

LAUREN. What if instead I hadn't pushed you away before? Instead of breaking up, would we be having sex right now?

ELLIOT. I don't know. *(beat)* I guess. Probably.

LAUREN. Well then maybe we don't have to break up.

ELLIOT. Well, maybe we wouldn't have broken up *tonight*, but you were, I mean, you're right, you were mad at me because whatever I was or wasn't *doing*, you were sensing that *underneath* that I –

LAUREN. But, no, but listen, because it's, you feel these feelings that weren't available before because of your break-up with your ex-girlfriend from college have now healed and are available again.

ELLIOT. I guess.

LAUREN. And there isn't somebody else.

ELLIOT. No.

LAUREN. But so then…so then could they be available to me?

*(***LAUREN** *tries to take* **ELLIOT***'s hand but he pulls slightly away.)*

ELLIOT. I don't think that's how it works.

LAUREN. What?

ELLIOT. I don't think that that's how it works.

LAUREN. So there *is* someone else.

ELLIOT. *No.* What do you – ?

LAUREN. Well, there is or there *will* be, right? Maybe you know who it is already or maybe you don't but one way or another you're going to take all that *potential* that you built up while you were with me and you're going to give it to her, and that makes me *sick*, but you know what? It's not real. It's gonna feel real at first just

because she'll be new but that will run out and you'll check out again, you'll check out again, *inside*, because that's what you do, and she'll feel it, and all this will just happen again.

(beat)

ELLIOT. Well. If we're broken up. Then that really isn't any of your business. Is it.

(A moment. **LAUREN** *goes back into the bathroom and slams the door. She can be heard sobbing, off.* **ELLIOT** *sighs, crosses to his computer, sits down. He starts to type, which itself perhaps almost seems to trigger the transition to…)*

3.

*(***ELLIOT***'s place)*

*(***ELLIOT** *sits at his computer, as before. A cell phone rings somewhere in the room.* **ELLIOT** *looks around. It rings again. The bathroom door opens.* **MOLLY** *comes out.)*

MOLLY. Hey, sorry.

ELLIOT. It's fine, I think, um –

MOLLY. No, I totally didn't need to pee when I left my place, and then as soon as I got here I suddenly needed to…pee. Sorry, I'll stop talking about pee now.

ELLIOT. It's fine. I think your phone is ringing.

MOLLY. What?

ELLIOT. Your phone.

MOLLY. Oh!

*(***MOLLY** *heads for her bag, which is on the floor, behind something. She takes her phone, which is still ringing, out of her bag. Looks at it. Rejects the call.)*

ELLIOT. So –

MOLLY. Oh, I brought you something.

ELLIOT. What? Oh –

*(***MOLLY** *puts the phone away and pulls a loaf of bread out of her bag.)*

MOLLY. As a thank you. For helping me with this. Um. Here.

ELLIOT. That's for me?

MOLLY. Yeah.

ELLIOT. That's, thanks, I really appreciate it. *(beat)* Is this a loaf of bread?

MOLLY. Yes, yeah. *(beat)* Oh I *made* it.

ELLIOT. Oh!

MOLLY. Yeah no because –

ELLIOT. That's really sweet.

MOLLY. No but it requires yeast. *(beat)* To rise, it –

ELLIOT. Oh!

MOLLY. Yeah it's a joke.

ELLIOT. Oh I get it.

MOLLY. Yeah. *(beat)* I mean you can also…eat it, I, it's *good*, I can –

ELLIOT. Yeah I, um, I will. *(beat)* Do you want me to show you how this works?

MOLLY. Please do yes.

*(***ELLIOT** *goes to his desk and sits at his computer awkwardly putting the bread down to one side.* **MOLLY** *follows him. During which:)*

ELLIOT. Just yell if it gets confusing.

MOLLY. That won't be a problem.

ELLIOT. So, basically, I designed a genetic algorithm, which, I know that you're not *breeding* anything, just, all that means is that it uses the *principles* of natural selection to arrive at better and better *answers* the same way that evolution gradually produces improvements in the species, or, you know, "so fashionable theory has it," uh, but, so, yeah, *first* the algorithm randomly generates interpretations of your data and treats each as a "parent" in an initial population. And then it computes a *fitness* value for each, based on…criteria that you can set yourself, I didn't know exactly –

MOLLY. Right.

ELLIOT. And, yeah, then it sort of…"mates" them, with, um, with of course only the "fittest" getting selected, and *those* produce…"offspring" interpretations, which are then assigned fitness values of their own, and so on, generation after generation, selection, mating, offspring, periodically introducing all-important random mutation, until, after many, *many* iterations, or, you know, about two hours, it will eventually *plateau* at the most likely interpretation of your data, so, here, if you were gonna…I just labeled your unknown protein "M"? For Molly?

MOLLY. Aw.

ELLIOT. And, yeah, based on whatever factors, it will tell you how much you can trust the bonds, or *lack* thereof, between Protein M and, for now, they're labeled A, B, C –

MOLLY. *(starting to be really impressed)* Yeah, okay.

ELLIOT. And you can just keep adding more, it's…when it runs out of letters it'll just go Double-A, Double-B, Double-C, or you could just put in the protein's real… names…

(beat)

MOLLY. *Thank* you.

ELLIOT. It's no problem.

MOLLY. No, seriously, thank you, you're a lifesaver. Could I – ?

ELLIOT. Oh, of course.

*(***ELLIOT** *gets up.* **MOLLY** *sits at the computer to play with the algorithm.* **ELLIOT** *watches her work for a moment. Then he goes to his kitchen area.)*

ELLIOT. Do you want something to drink?

MOLLY. Like what.

ELLIOT. Uh. *(beat)* Like, tea, or –

MOLLY. Tea?

ELLIOT. Or…whiskey?

MOLLY. Whiskey.

(The phone in **MOLLY***'s bag rings again.)*

ELLIOT. Great. *(pause)* I think your phone is –

MOLLY. Yeah.

*(***ELLIOT** *prepares two whiskeys.* **MOLLY** *tries to ignore her phone and focus on the computer but then, after another ring, goes to her bag again, rejects the call again, and this time puts the phone in her pocket as she goes back to the computer. During which:)*

MOLLY. I like your place.

ELLIOT. Really? I don't.

MOLLY. What? Why not?

ELLIOT. I don't know, I kind of hate how it's set up, and, like –

MOLLY. How long have you had it like this?

ELLIOT. Basically since I started grad school.

MOLLY. And how long is that?

ELLIOT. Uh, longer than I care to think about?

MOLLY. And you hate it.

ELLIOT. Yeah what I like to do is get things a certain way that I don't actually like and, instead of fixing it, just complain about it forever. It's this trick I learned from my father.

MOLLY. Yeah? He should meet my mom.

ELLIOT. Oh, does she do that?

MOLLY. No she loves *everything*. For ten minutes. You should see the emails.

ELLIOT. What about you?

MOLLY. What about me what.

ELLIOT. How long have you been here?

MOLLY. Oh I just got here.

ELLIOT. Heh. No, I meant –

MOLLY. Oh, no, so did I. This is my first semester.

ELLIOT. Oh. I mean, yeah, that's what I figured.

MOLLY. What? Why?

ELLIOT. Oh just because I only recently…noticed…you, hey, cheers!

(Because by now **ELLIOT** *is standing by the desk with two glasses of whiskey.)*

MOLLY. Cheers.

(Clink. **ELLIOT** *almost drinks. But instead of drinking* **MOLLY** *turns back to the computer and points at the screen, so* **ELLIOT** *holds off drinking as well.)*

MOLLY. Can I run it?

ELLIOT. Oh, yeah, sure, I…here.

*(***ELLIOT** *clicks the mouse button to run the algorithm. A few moments go by.)*

MOLLY. It's not doing anything.

ELLIOT. Oh, no, it *is*, it's just it…here, if…you can watch the code run if you…

*(***ELLIOT** *clicks his mouse again to open up the code and takes a step back.* **MOLLY** *watches the code run. Perhaps we see a different light playing across her face.* **ELLIOT** *watches* **MOLLY** *watch the code. A moment.)*

Yeah it's a good way to make sure something's actually… happening…

(A few moments. Then:)

MOLLY. *(reading what's on the screen)* "Generating Init Pop. Init Pop Full."

ELLIOT. Yeah.

MOLLY. "If A greater than B then select dot crossover A else select dot crossover B. End If."

ELLIOT. Yeah it starts out slow but stick with it, it picks up.

MOLLY. I bet. Mm!

(Because now **MOLLY** *has tried her whiskey. So* **ELLIOT** *drinks his.)*

ELLIOT. Yeah, it's good, right?

MOLLY. Yeah, it's really good. *(long pause)* So.

ELLIOT. Yeah. What happens now?

MOLLY. Oh. Well *now* I take this data?

ELLIOT. *(this is not what he meant)* Oh, um –

MOLLY. *(continuous)* And, well, I don't think you realize how helpful you just were because, this protein…I mean, you remember what proteins *are*, right? They're made up of amino acids, which are transcribed directly from our DNA – ?

ELLIOT. Uh, that all rings an incredibly vague bell, yeah.

MOLLY. Yeah, so they're really basic building blocks, only one level or so up from our genetic code, and they *do* everything, like, if DNA is like the architect? Proteins are the, like, little workers that actually have hammers and nails and saws and things, so when we find a *new* one, like this, which always happens accidentally, we'll be looking for something else and something we've never seen before will just pop up on a gel, when that *happens*, we try to determine what it's *for*, which, okay, enthralling, yes, I know –

ELLIOT. *(trying to seem interested as possible in all this)* I, no, it's –

MOLLY. But, okay: were you *aware* that if a three-year old child's finger is severed and you don't seal up the wound that the *entire finger* will grow back?

(beat)

ELLIOT. What if my answer to that were "yes"? How creepy would that be?

MOLLY. Heh heh.

ELLIOT. "Of course! Did you not see my *necklace* made of child fingers?" No, I did not know that. Is that true?

MOLLY. If it's just the finger*tip* it can grow back on kids as old as *ten*.

ELLIOT. *Really*.

MOLLY. There's no fingerprint and the nail will for some reason be *square* but yes.

ELLIOT. *How?*

MOLLY. That is the wrong question. The *right* question is: why does it *stop?* Why does our capacity to regenerate diminish with age? And so *that's* what our lab is studying: tissue growth, wound healing, because once you understand how these things happen naturally, or *don't*, then the process can be *synthesized* to address damage that won't heal on its own, or, "so fashionable theory has it." New skin, or bones, or *organs* even, regrown with no scarring, no fibrosis, from *inside*

yourself, from your *own cells*, so no chance of rejection, the…same way you grew them all in the first place. Which would obviously be great.

ELLIOT. I, yeah, that would.

MOLLY. *But*, and this is where the yeast two-hybrid screen comes in, proteins don't actually perform their functions on their own, they all have a place as part of a larger interaction network of other proteins, a, what we call an interactome, which, if you want to visualize it, *(perhaps she draws this for him on a piece of paper)* think of the proteins as nodes, and the interactions as lines, and it all makes one big 3D map, together, in which they perform all their various functions cooperatively, so you can only find out so much about a protein in isolation before you sort of have to take her on a fishing expedition, and see if she can lead you to her friends.

ELLIOT. Bait and prey.

MOLLY. Exactly. But the problem is these screens are kind of…error prone? In that they can create conditions that never actually occur in, like, actual *nature*, like, two proteins may *bind* but never *really* appear in the same cell, or only express at different times in the life cycle, and so the bonding is meaningless, or vice-versa, a *failed* bond that's actually just dependent on some external condition I excluded from the screen, or, you know, certain proteins might just behave differently in yeast than they do in *us* –

ELLIOT. False positives and false negatives.

MOLLY. Correct, but thanks to *you*, my friend, I can now filter out the garbage, know which bonds are for real, make some predictions about the network, and then *test* them, wet, *in vivo*, by engineering an organism designed to reveal as much as possible about the function, or functions, of Protein M. Which, again, adorable.

(beat)

ELLIOT. *(genuinely fascinated by now)* And *then* what?

MOLLY. Um, *then*, depending on what I learn, I, probably give it a really literal minded-name based on its function, like integrin or versacan, and then go back, do more screens, get more data, make more predictions, do more experiments to test those, and so on, back and forth, like that, data, testing, data, testing, while other molecular biologists the world over do the same thing, gradually modeling the network more and more, until, I guess maybe, eventually, someday we'll have…mapped the whole damn thing.

ELLIOT. How close are we to *that?*

MOLLY. That depends on what you mean.

ELLIOT. By "close"?

MOLLY. By "that."

ELLIOT. Well how much of it have we mapped?

MOLLY. Less and less every day. I mean, *not* close, not the way you mean, because we keep discovering new corners we didn't even know about, so, if we're talking total human interactome? One or two percent completeness, maybe, tops? And every network is embedded hierarchically inside another, larger one, cellular, systemic, organismic, going from molecule to creature, as it were, so…I mean, that's why so many of the things our bodies do are still mysterious, because they're less *functions* than they are just *emergent properties* of this dynamic multi-layered fucking mess. So, even when the *result* is right in front of you, you're nowhere if you can't explain how it was reached. We grow and change and get sick and recover and age and die and by and large from our perspective these things just *happen*. Our bodies just *know*. So it'll be a long long time from now, if ever, before we can know with our brains all the things our bodies just already know.

*(***MOLLY** *is looking at* **ELLIOT**. *A moment.)*

ELLIOT. What if I could help you *more?*

MOLLY. Oh, uhh –

ELLIOT. *(returning to his computer)* Or, I mean, what if I could write an algorithm that interpreted your data… better? Because *this*, all it will do is generate *probable* interpretations, *highly* probable, but, still, now that I know more what you… Before you rush off to test predictions based on *this?* What if I could write something that would give you…certainty, up front?

MOLLY. *(now it was she who was expecting something else)* Oh.

ELLIOT. I mean, I don't know *exactly* how it would work, but if you give me another few days, or more like a week? I could –

MOLLY. Right, but I'm already in your apartment. *(beat)* Right now, though. So…

ELLIOT. Oh. I mean, okay. *(pause)* Uhhh…

*(***MOLLY** *and* **ELLIOT** *start to make out. They make out for a little while. Then:)*

MOLLY. Okay, can I tell you something?

ELLIOT. Sure.

MOLLY. I wasn't sure that an algorithm would be useful to me? And actually I am pleasantly surprised by how incredibly useful it turns out in fact to be? But I sort of didn't care because I just wanted an excuse to hang out with you.

ELLIOT. Can *I* tell *you* something?

MOLLY. Please.

ELLIOT. When I said something came up this afternoon so we had to meet tonight, that was a total lie, and I figured either you'd say, oh, okay, then let's just meet up tomorrow, or you'd be like, okay, what time tonight? And you said the second one? And I was like, oh, okay. It's on.

*(***MOLLY** *and* **ELLIOT** *make out some more. Then:)*

MOLLY. That day, in the public cluster? I sat down at that computer because you were coming in.

ELLIOT. Actually I was leaving. I pretended to be coming in because you sat down.

(They make out some more. They move towards the bed. Then:)

MOLLY. I bought this outfit on the way here.

ELLIOT. It's so nice.

MOLLY. Thank you.

ELLIOT. "Uh, but it would blah blah blah crumpled up on my floor."

MOLLY. Heh. Heh. Mm.

*(***MOLLY***'s phone rings again. This time she rejects the call without even looking at it.)*

ELLIOT. Seriously, if it's an emergency or something, you can go ahead and –

MOLLY. It's really not.

ELLIOT. Okay.

(They make out some more. Some clothes start to come off. Then she stops him.)

MOLLY. I'm not staying over.

ELLIOT. Okay.

MOLLY. Just, I'm not going to stay over, or sleep here, or anything.

ELLIOT. Good. I'm glad.

(They make out some more. Then he stops her.)

But, wait, so you're not planning to leave until *after* the sex though, right?

*(***MOLLY** *just looks at* **ELLIOT***, blinking. A moment.)*

That looks like a yes.

*(***MOLLY** *rolls her eyes. Then* **ELLIOT** *touches her face. Her arms. Just touching her.)*

MOLLY. What are you doing?

ELLIOT. I don't know. I just love this moment when you're suddenly allowed to start…touching someone? Like, you've wanted to, but of course you can't just walk up to someone and touch them, but then, suddenly,

you've passed through the membrane, and you can. Like. I'd been thinking about touching you? More or less since the first time I saw you?

MOLLY. Sure. I mean, I'd…seen you too.

ELLIOT. Well, right, but for all I knew that was imaginary? Like, the idea that they might be thinking the same thing about you, you don't even let yourself entertain that possibility? And but then you're actually *here*. Like. This person I can't even believe I'm lucky enough to get to touch and she's here, she's…letting me touch her.

(beat)

MOLLY. I have to teach in the morning?

ELLIOT. Okay.

MOLLY. I have teach in the morning, undergrads, so, I'm saying, if I *do* stay? I'd need to, like, set an alarm clock for pretty early, like six thirty – ?

ELLIOT. That is not a problem.

MOLLY. Really?

ELLIOT. I don't intend for us to sleep at *all*.

MOLLY. Heh.

ELLIOT. Oh not because we'll be fooling around. Just because after we're done I'll keep you awake with long boring stories about my family because physical intimacy will have created the illusion of emotional intimacy. Come here.

MOLLY. No really if you could set it now.

ELLIOT. Oh –

MOLLY. I just don't want us to forget.

ELLIOT. No, yeah, okay.

*(***ELLIOT** *sets his alarm clock. During which:)*

MOLLY. Just, I co-teach, with this other grad student, and I'm *chronically* late, and it's important he not hate me, so –

ELLIOT. It's not a problem.

MOLLY. He gives genetic diseases to mice so there's no telling what he'd do to me.

ELLIOT. I teach in the morning too.

MOLLY. Oh okay.

ELLIOT. Yeah.

MOLLY. Kind of sucks, doesn't it.

*(***ELLIOT** *checks the alarm two or three more times before turning away from it.)*

ELLIOT. Uh, it can. When they're passive idiots. But once in a while…I've got this one *incredibly* sharp kid this semester, she –

MOLLY. Hey come here.

*(***ELLIOT** *goes there. More making out. Then* **ELLIOT** *struggles with whatever is keeping* **MOLLY***'s pants closed. He peers at her pants carefully.)*

ELLIOT. Huh.

MOLLY. It's, oh, you have to, if you… See?

ELLIOT. Oh yeah. It's, see real world objects…I can't…

*(***MOLLY** *does not struggle at all with* **ELLIOT***'s pants. Soon* **ELLIOT** *and* **MOLLY** *are both in their underwear. A moment.)*

Hold on.

MOLLY. What.

*(***ELLIOT** *goes around and starts turning off the various lights.)*

You don't want to see me?

ELLIOT. Oh, no, just. Mood lighting.

MOLLY. I want to see you.

(The only light remaining is the lamp next to the bed, which **ELLIOT** *was just reaching for. Instead, he leaves this on and reaches for* **MOLLY** *again.)*

MOLLY. I don't normally do this.

ELLIOT. Oh. Okay.

MOLLY. Just so you know.

ELLIOT. Okay. *(beat)* Why do girls always say that?

MOLLY. What?

ELLIOT. What.

MOLLY. "Girls"? "Always"?

ELLIOT. *(overlapping)* Oh, no, I just –

MOLLY. Cause invoking other girls right now isn't really, like…the best idea…

ELLIOT. *(overlapping)* No, please, I'm not, I don't mean… *(beat)* I just… Not that there have been…in my *extremely limited* experience. At a certain moment. Girls have a tendency to say. "I don't normally do this."

MOLLY. Okay.

ELLIOT. Which can only mean one of two things. That I'm just so *appealing* that I am an exception to the otherwise intractable courtship rules of the entire female population. Which let's table for the moment as unlikely. *Or.* They're lying. Which I would prefer also not to believe. So I was just wondering. As someone who has just now actually said it. If you had any insight into what it really means.

(beat)

MOLLY. I think that you've failed to consider a third possibility.

ELLIOT. What's that.

MOLLY. That, because not only do they normally not *sleep* with someone *right away*, but, with most people, they don't do it *ever*, that it's not a lie. It's just that, with someone where they know they're *going* to want to? They figure that they might as well start, like, immediately. So it's not that you're *in general* so appealing either. It just looks that way from your perspective because your sampling size self-selects for people who have *already decided* to sleep, specifically, with you.

(beat)

ELLIOT. You're right.

MOLLY. I know.

ELLIOT. I made a derivation error.

(The phone rings in the pocket of **MOLLY***'s discarded pants. A moment.)*

MOLLY. If that's what it's…called… I'm going to turn that off. *(She goes to her phone and turns it off. Then:)* Hold on a second.

ELLIOT. What.

*(***MOLLY** *heads for the bathroom)*

MOLLY. I, um. I have to pee again.

ELLIOT. It's the whisky.

MOLLY. No I think I'm just nervous.

*(***MOLLY** *exits.* **ELLIOT** *sits on the bed and waits. He grins and laughs slightly, basking in the awesomeness of this moment. Then he turns off the remaining light. Moves clothes off his bed. There is still light from his computer screen, so* **ELLIOT** *gets up and goes to turn it off. Light from the street through windows is all that's left. And* **ELLIOT** *is still in the middle of the room when* **MOLLY** *emerges from the bathroom, naked. Naked in streetlight and moonlight. A moment.)*

MOLLY. Hi.

ELLIOT. Hi.

MOLLY. Sorry, too much? Too soon?

ELLIOT. What? No. No no no. No, uh…

*(***ELLIOT** *removes his remaining clothing and tosses it aside. A moment.)*

MOLLY. I see what you mean.

ELLIOT. What.

MOLLY. About the light.

(They stand looking at each other, across the bed, for a moment. In the near dark, they look blue. Then they slip into the bed from opposite sides. **ELLIOT** *moves to*

MOLLY *but she stops him. She reaches down below the covers and peers after her hand. A moment.)*

ELLIOT. Uh, what are you doing?

MOLLY. Having sex without examining the genitals is like biting into a piece of fruit without looking at it. *(pause)* Okay.

ELLIOT. Okay?

MOLLY. Yeah. Just yell if it gets confusing.

*(***MOLLY** *and* **ELLIOT** *intertwine…transition…the sound of a ringing phone, as heard by the caller, takes us into…)*

4.

(the front steps of a university housing building)

*(***DON** *is here, holding a cell phone to his ear. He waits. Listens. Then, at last:)*

DON. Hey I don't know where you are. *(beat)* Which is, that's fine, in…principle, I'm not, you are a free… person. Just. I'm worried about you. So call me. *(beat)* I mean maybe your phone is just off. But it seems like it's ringing and you're not… I mean, if you're *angry* at me, or, if I did something *wrong*, I'd rather you just talked to me or told me instead of disappearing, but, which, I mean if your phone is just off, then ignore that part, it's not a big deal, I just meant, mainly I'm worried. Because you're also not home either, so, or, if you are, just, okay, I'm on the street in front of your place right now? Not in a creepy way, I'm just…telling you where I am. Or, that's not, look, I know that I've been busy lately, okay? So I'm sorry if… *(beat)* You know what? Just ignore this entire message. And call me whenever. If you want. Or don't, I'll just…see you in the department. *(beat)* This is Don. *(beat)* Bye.

*(***DON** *hangs up. He does not feel good about how that went. Sits on the steps. Thinks. Shudders. Takes out the phone again. Scrolls through some numbers. Dials again. A phone rings.)*

(Lights up on the Computer Science departmental office. The phone on the front desk is ringing, unattended. It rings again. **LAUREN** *walks by the desk. Stops and turns back when she hears the phone ring. Looks around for anyone. It rings again.)*

*(***DON** *is about to hang up.* **LAUREN** *answers the phone.)*

LAUREN. Computer Science.

DON. Hi, this is Professor Davis, from Molecular Biology?

LAUREN. Okay.

(beat)

DON. Uh, yeah, one of my grad students, my, uh, my advisee, had a meeting scheduled this evening? With one of *your* grad students? And I was just wondering whether she was still there.

LAUREN. There's…*no* one here.

DON. Well could you maybe check?

*(***LAUREN** *looks around for a second, perfunctorily.)*

LAUREN. There's no one here.

DON. Well, if the departmental secretary is still there, then maybe –

LAUREN. Um, I'm not a *secretary?* I'm a graduate student.

DON. Well, whoever you are, you're *there*, so –

LAUREN. Yeah but no one *else* is here because it's *night.*

DON. Okay but could you please just actually – ?

LAUREN. MB and B is one floor down, why don't you just come up here yourself?

(beat)

DON. I'm not there.

LAUREN. Yeah! *No* one is!

DON. Okay, okay, look, I'm sorry, just… Her name is Molly and she was supposedly meeting with this guy Elliot and I just want to know if they're still there. Please. *(long pause)* Hello?

LAUREN. Uh, no.

DON. What?

LAUREN. No. He's…not, there's… *(beat)* No one's here.

*(***LAUREN** *hangs up the phone. She sits down on the desk. She is shaking.)*

DON. Hello? *(pause)* Hello? *(pause)* Are you there?

(…transition…)

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