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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Going To A Place Where You Already Are

by Bekah Brunstetter

SAMUEL FRENCH

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GOING TO A PLACE WHERE YOU ALREADY ARE premiered at South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa, CA in March 2016. The performance was directed by Marc Masterson, with sets by Michael B. Raiford, costumes by Christina Wright, and lighting design by Tom Ontiveros. The Stage Manager was Jennifer Ellen Butler. The cast was as follows:

ROBERTA . . . . . .Linda Gehringer
JOE . . . . . .Hal Landon
ELLIE. . . . . .Rebecca Lynn Mozo
JONAS . . . . . Christopher Thorton
AN ANGEL. . . . . .Stephen Ellis

CHARACTERS

ROBERTA – sixty-six

JOE – seventy, her husband

ELLIE – thirties, Joe's granddaughter

JONAS – thirties, a stand-up in a wheelchair, and the irony is not lost on him

ANGEL/MAN/DOCTOR/CHECKOUT BOY – an ageless quality

SETTING

Heaven / Earth

TIME

Now

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Though one actor plays the **ANGEL**, the **MAN**, the **DOCTOR**, and the **CHECKOUT BOY**, they are meant to be played as fully formed, different characters. Treat it as a quadruple casting, with the similarity between the characters just being that the same human is inhabiting each of them.

Punctuation note: / indicates overlapping dialogue

For my Grandparents: living, dying, and already there:

Roberta Brunstetter
Richard Brunstetter
Jeannine Brunstetter
Beverly Bray
Joe Bray

A Funeral

*(***ROBERTA** *and* **JOE** *sit in a pew in the back of a large church.)*

(They are tired, stiff, bored, but are feigning interest.)

(A nearly indecipherable voice speaks from the front: a voice of an old man through a microphone.)

VOICE OF PASTOR. "God be in my head and in my understanding; God be in my eyes, and in my looking; God be in my mouth and in my speaking; / God be in my heart, and in my thinking; God be at my end, and at my departing." Amen.

JOE. Really, "God be in my *mouth*"?

ROBERTA. I don't think he'd fit.

JOE. But he can fit anywhere, he's God.

ROBERTA. "God be in my sandwich."

JOE. "God: won't you please join me in my sock."

*(***ROBERTA** *laughs.)*

He has no mass, he has no *form*. He is an idea.

ROBERTA. *Shhhh.*

(A chorus of Amens. They mumble theirs, nearly apologetically, unaccustomed to saying it, as if called out.)

JOE & ROBERTA. Amen.

*(***ROBERTA** *shifts in her seat, uncomfortably.)*

(Concerned.) Your back bothering you?

*(***ROBERTA** *nods.)*

ROBERTA. Last time I bend down to pull up dandelions, I tell you *what*.

JOE. I bet you pinched / a nerve.

ROBERTA. I just tweaked it.

(But she shifts again.)

JOE. Well then sit *still*, for Chrissakes.

ROBERTA. It's the pews. They make them so awful so you can't even fall asleep.

I remember slouching down in them. Drifting off till my mother pinched me awake.

(She remembers this, fully. It's a far-away feeling; happy, sad.)

Church gives me feelings I can't stand.

Like I want to at the same time vomit and cry.

(Beat.)

I want a cigarette.

JOE. You haven't had one in years.

ROBERTA. Church makes me want to smoke.

(**ROBERTA** *shifts again in the pew, uncomfortable.)*

JOE. You shoulda brought the pillow.

ROBERTA. I don't need the pillow.

(Beat.)

Whose funeral is this?

JOE. Hazel, from the office. Hazel.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. Didn't she already die?

JOE. To my knowledge, this is her first death.

VOICE OF PASTOR. And now a few words from Hazel's great-grandson, Jason.

(Sounds of **JASON** *fumbling up toward the microphone, and fumbling with it just in general.)*

(He breathes through teen tears and the spit from his braces.)

VOICE OF JASON. Hi. Whoa. This is like crazy right now. My voice sounds so big.

JOE. Ahh, the eloquence of the youth.

VOICE OF JASON. Yeah, uh. Hazel was pretty cool. When I was little she was always touching my face and trying to hug me and give me bologna sandwiches. But then I like got old and started to see that she's pretty cool 'cause like, she's seen a lot of sh – stuff because to live to like ninety-three is like crazy like that's some cyborg shiz. But I'm glad I got to know her at all and stuff because you know like it's important to talk to your elders and get wisdom and learn from them and stuff and also now I get her accordion. And I bet she's up in heaven right now walking that weird little dog she had up and down Main Street, and he's just peeing everywhere and they're both like so happy.

JOE. So all dogs *do* go to heaven.

*(***ROBERTA** *swats him, but also, she's laughing.)*

(The **VOICE OF JASON** *continues to drone on.)*

VOICE OF JASON. I'm gonna miss her a lot. And all the stuff she baked.

She made the best pound cake. Biscuits. Cobbler. Buttermilk cornbread. / Cheddar cornbread. Regular cornbread, apple pie, cherry apple pie – uh – yeah. That's all I can remember right now.

VOICE OF PASTOR. Thank you so much Jason. Thank you for those kind words.

ROBERTA. Well, now I want pie.

JOE. Mmmm, tell me about the pie.

ROBERTA. Warm peach, buttery crust, brown sugar, a la mode.

(They sit there, imagining this pie.)

JOE. We could stop at the diner on the way home.

ROBERTA. Well I can't actually *eat* that.

JOE. Says who?

ROBERTA. Says my girlish figure. Says my digestive system.

*(***JOE** *smiles, chuckles.)*

*(***ROBERTA** *fidgets again.)*

(The **VOICE OF PASTOR** *drones.)*

She was still working? At ninety-*three*?

JOE. Part time. She used to answer the phones until her hearing went. Then she did the filing till her eyes started to go. She'd been working there for – seventy-three years?

ROBERTA. Well, Jesus, somebody should have just given her a retirement cake and sent her home.

(Beat.)

Now I want cake –

JOE. We tried. She wouldn't listen.

ROBERTA. Or maybe she couldn't *hear*.

VOICE OF PASTOR. It's never easy, letting someone go. No matter how old. When we depart this earth, it is often sudden. Rarely do we get to say goodbye.

(Without looking at her, **JOE** *takes* **ROBERTA***'s hand.)*

ROBERTA. Was she a nice lady?

JOE. She was pleasant enough. She always took my pickles. Passing through the break room with my sandwich, she'd always take it. *I'll take that pickle off of you.* I really didn't know her all that well.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. Well wait a damn minute, what're we doing here if you didn't know her all that well?!

JOE. We are paying our respects.

The whole department is here. It's a required, ah. It's a social. You know. Expectation.

ROBERTA. "I didn't know you all that well, but you died, and so here I am."

(Beat.)

I hate this.

JOE. Just try and sit still.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. *(Realizing.)* Oh God. We're old.

JOE. No we're not!

ROBERTA. We are! The old ones are dying so now *we* are the old ones.

JOE. We are medium-ish old, darling.

ROBERTA. Everyone is dying.

JOE. Well, yes, plants pass on, milk expires –

ROBERTA. I am not *milk*.

(Quieter.)

I am not milk.

JOE. Okay, okay, you're not milk.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. This is what it is now, isn't it.

Funerals.

Remember when it was weddings? Birthday parties?

Swell reason to make friends.

I'll come to your funeral if you come to mine.

JOE. Well, if you go to someone's funeral they can't come to yours.

ROBERTA. I know. That's what we're going to do, now that we're old. We'll accumulate friends, so that when we look down at our bodies…

JOE. Look down from where?

ROBERTA. From wherever we are!

JOE. We're nowhere.

ROBERTA. I *know*, but if we *were* to be, just – let me finish, if we *were* to be somewhere –

JOE. Where?

ROBERTA. Somewhere –

JOE. We're here, and then we aren't, and that's that. Pulverem Pulvis.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. If you're so sure then what was the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* doing on your nightstand for months?

JOE. I must understand what I do not believe so that I can more thoroughly not believe it. And if I'm being honest, the book was dry, it was unfinishable.

(Beat. They listen.)

I had a patient who swore he could become invisible / if he willed it so.

ROBERTA. You've told me this.

JOE. And I understood the emotion behind the impulse, yes, but of course it was not true.

It's a matter of physics. A human cannot lose their mass. / This is why we have *science*, so that people cannot go around saying they can make themselves transparent, just because the idea amuses them. I am not wrong.

ROBERTA. You've told me this!

You are wrong about / mustard, for one –

JOE. Roberta I do not like mustard, I will never like mustard.

ROBERTA. You're a goddamn idiot you are.

(Of church.)

…Sorry.

JOE. Alright, where were we? When we look down at our bodies from God's massive lap, where we're perched, having assumed the body of a seven-year-old, ice cream in one hand, harp in the other, go on –

ROBERTA. We look down at our bodies.

And we see people crying –

Or moved to cry because all of the crying –

And you see all of the tears – and then it feels like it was worth it.

That it meant something.

JOE. What did?

ROBERTA. Being alive. For however many years. Doing what we did.

It was – worth it.

JOE. But what does it matter? Dust to dust. From flesh to food for the stars. And that is *that.*

*(***ROBERTA** *thinks. The thought troubles her.)*

ROBERTA. But –

JOE. But *what?*

(She wonders if that answer is enough for her.)

(It's a large question that settles around her like dust.)

(It's the sort of question that church brings.)

VOICE OF PASTOR. …We take comfort in the knowledge that our lives here are temporary. On earth, we have fleeting moments of a surface sort of joy, then we are taken up to You, where we forever belong.

*(***ROBERTA** *starts to listen. To really listen.)*

ROBERTA. *Forever* forever?

JOE. So they say, kid.

ROBERTA. But what does that *mean?*

VOICE OF PASTOR. We take comfort in the knowledge that she was with us for a little while.

ROBERTA. Comfort…

VOICE OF PASTOR. But now she's with you. Forever.

JOE. And all of the unicorns.

And some sort of buffet.

With all of your favorites! Unlimited peel-and-eat shrimp.

ROBERTA. SHHHH!

VOICE OF PASTOR. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

ROBERTA. *(Softly, to herself.)* …No more…

VOICE OF PASTOR. Now if you would please join me in singing Hazel's favorite hymn.

(Everyone stands, so **ROBERTA** *and* **JOE** *do too, in unison.)*

(Fumbling, they reach for hymnals underneath their seats.)

(Fumble through the pages. Awkwardly, they sing.)

SONG.

COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING,
TUNE MY HEART TO SING THY GRACE,
STREAMS OF MERCY, NEVER CEASING,
CALL FOR SONGS OF LOUDEST PRAISE.

ROBERTA. I used to know this song – I used to sing this song –

(A **MAN** *appears behind* **ROBERTA.** *He is distant. Soft. But there. He watches her.)*

SONG.

PRONE TO WANDER, LORD, I FEEL IT,
PRONE TO LEAVE THE GOD I LOVE.
HERE'S MY HEART, OH, TAKE AND SEAL IT,
SEAL IT FOR THY COURTS ABOVE.

(Suddenly, **ROBERTA** *starts to sob and sob, as if the sobs were ripped from her.)*

*(***JOE** *has no idea what to do.)*

(His wife is not the kind to make a scene, or make a scene in public. He puts an arm around her.)

(The **MAN** *watches her with sympathy and understanding.)*

JOE. Hey, Bobs –

*(***JOE** *tries to comfort her.)*

ROBERTA. Where is she going?
Where is she going to go?

(Suddenly, we see an **ANGEL***, glowing, watching, eyes focused on* **ROBERTA**.*)*

(Longing to speak so he could give her an answer.)

JOE. The cemetery off Kirklees.

ROBERTA. But really.
Where are we going?
Where are we going to go?

A Connection

*(***ELLIE** *is on her bed, lying on* **JONAS***.)*

(It's dusk.)

(They've been in bed for hours, kissing and exploring each other for the first time.)

(They both wear **ELLIE***'s comforter and not much else.)*

(They're watching a video on **JONAS***' phone in which a famous comedian does stand-up about whether or not there is a God.)*

*(***JONAS** *laughs.)*

(He notices that **ELLIE** *isn't.)*

JONAS. C'mon, you said you love Louie!

ELLIE. I do!

JONAS. Then what's wrong?

ELLIE. I just.

I don't like to laugh at God.

JONAS. Why not?

ELLIE. Because he can part oceans and bring down planes.

JONAS. Oh, I didn't realize that was him.

ELLIE. Yep. I'm pretty sure he actually feeds off of my fear and indecision, it makes him even more powerful.

JONAS. Oh, well that's a healthy presumption.

ELLIE. Thanks, I invented it myself.

(Beat.)

No but really. Don't you ever worry: what if He's real, and you don't believe in Him, and you're making jokes about Him, and one day He'll say *okay well fuck you, here, have all the cancer*?

JONAS. …Nope.

ELLIE. I just don't trust strangers. Including God.

JONAS. And yet, you have one in your bed right now.

ELLIE. You're not a stranger.

JONAS. Not anymore.

(Beat.)

ELLIE. I just don't like to laugh at it. Him.

JONAS. No, you're right. It's not funny at all that there is a great man in the sky who thinks he's our dad and one day we get to go and live with our Cloud Dad.

ELLIE. I don't know if I believe in Cloud Dad. I haven't decided yet.

JONAS. You haven't *decided?*

ELLIE. Have you?

JONAS. Not definitively.

ELLIE. Well yes or no?

JONAS. I don't know. I don't know everything, I'm not God.

ELLIE. You're not?!

JONAS. Nope.

ELLIE. I like the way words leave your mouth.

(He kisses her, deep like they're both unlocking the safes around their secrets and thoughts. She pulls back. Lays her head on his chest.)

JONAS. You are incredible.

(This freaks her out.)

ELLIE. Sandwich!

JONAS. Hmm?

ELLIE. I want a sandwich.

JONAS. Tell me about the sandwich.

ELLIE. Rye bread, sharp cheddar cheese, fresh tomatoes, all shoved together and fried to death.

JONAS. Mmmmm.

ELLIE. Have we not eaten since last night?!

JONAS. We had that cereal?

*(***ELLIE** *nods, remembering.)*

I still can't believe you bought me dinner.

ELLIE. Uh, you forced me to. It was moral blackmail.

JONAS. I delicately suggested it and you were all, *ABSOLUTELY, here's a giant grassfed steak.*

ELLIE. I felt bad!

JONAS. Well, you should've! Hey do you steal people's social security checks, too?

ELLIE. No!

JONAS. Oh, so, parking in handicapped spots is your *main* form of asshole?

ELLIE. I told you! I didn't see the thing.

JONAS. The aggressively giant all-blue sign thing.

ELLIE. THREE MINUTES. I was in there for THREE MINUTES. Are we gonna keep doing this?

JONAS. Yep. Forever.

*(***JONAS** *smiles, wryly.)*

ELLIE. Okay, fine, if we're doing this, do you *always* lurk outside of grocery stores and wait for people to accidentally park in handicapped spots so you can yell at them?

JONAS. Nope. First time.

(Beat.)

Meant to be.

(He smiles at her.)

*(***ELLIE** *gets weirded out. Oh, hell no.)*

ELLIE. What time did we – when did we even get back here?

JONAS. Time is an illusion.

ELLIE. Okay that's – no. There is definitely such a thing as time.

I gotta get up.

I have work to do in the now part of time.

JONAS. No you don't.

ELLIE. Yes. I do.

(He pulls her back to bed.)

(Kisses her, deep. She releases herself into it. But pulls back.)

This is. Um.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry if I'm. Being weird.

JONAS. I'm Jonas.

ELLIE. I remember your *name.*

(He pulls her toward him.)

(He burrows into her.)

(Her phones buzzes with a phone call.)

JONAS. You can get it.

ELLIE. No it's okay. It's my grandma. She can leave a message.

(She declines the call, starts to scroll through emails.)

(She reads, annoyed.)

JONAS. What tragedy beholds the world now?

ELLIE. My boss. I just got like ten emails from her.

Sorry – it's just –

(She reads the email, annoyed.)

I really have to –

Okay. The cuddle part is done. I really have work to do, you've gotta go.

JONAS. On a Saturday?

ELLIE. Yep, I've got to edit two articles and pretend I have five hundred words to say about "almond shaming."

JONAS. I could go get us some food while you work.

ELLIE. You really / don't have to –

JONAS. Stop talking. Start working. I'll get us dinner. Could you grab me my chair?

(Beat.)

ELLIE. …Sure.

*(***ELLIE** *is suddenly deeply uncomfortable.)*

(She's never "grabbed anyone's chair" before.)

(She reaches for clothes. Slips something on.)

(From the side of the bed wheels out **JONAS***' wheelchair.)*

Do I just bring it to you?

JONAS. If you could do a little dance with it first, that'd be awesome.

(Then, off her look:)

Bringing it to me would be great.

(And she does.)

Thanks.

*(***JONAS** *gets dressed, moves himself into his chair with ease.)*

So what's almond shaming?

ELLIE. You don't wanna know and I don't wanna tell you.

JONAS. So you're a – what'd you say you are? An online society person?

ELLIE. Social media coordinator.

JONAS. It sounds like you just picked three words and put them together.

ELLIE. I do content, analysis, I generate and regurgitate layouts, posts –

JONAS. Ah. Cool.

*(***ELLIE** *wants him gone. But he is still there, just smiling at her. Taking her in.)*

ELLIE. And you – transcribe –?

JONAS. Interviews, yep. Pays the bills.

I'm not proud.

Wait, yes I am.

ELLIE. …It's cool, I shame almonds.

JONAS. And sometimes I do stand-up.

ELLIE. Comedy?

JONAS. Yep.

And no, the irony is not lost on me.

What're your feelings on Thai food?

ELLIE. You're so sweet, but.

I don't really wanna do the dinner and sleepover thing. If that's okay.

JONAS. I already slept over.

ELLIE. Well I don't want to do it again. This was a really nice, um. Series of moments but right now they have to end.

(Beat.)

JONAS. That's cool. I get it.

What're you up to tomorrow night?

ELLIE. …Working. It's going to be a busy week, um.

JONAS. Ah.

ELLIE. But thanks for – thanks.

JONAS. Hey: Thank *you*.

(He heads for the door.)

ELLIE. It's not about the – it's not because –

JONAS. It never is.

*(***ELLIE** *reaches again for her phone to distract herself.)*

Good luck with your existential quandary.

ELLIE. Hmm?

*(***JONAS** *points up.)*

Oh. Yeah. Thanks.

JONAS. See you.

ELLIE. Do you need me to get the / door?

JONAS. Nope, I'm good.

ELLIE. Oh. Okay. Sorry.

Bye!

(He goes.)

*(***JONAS** *goes to the door. Opens it. Guides himself through. Then, he's gone.)*

(The moment the door shuts, **ELLIE***, as if without oxygen, bursts across the room to her purse, violently rummages through it. Searching.)*

(She finds a pack of cigarettes, pulls one out, puts it on the bed next to her, as she looks for a light. But she can't find her fucking lighter.)

(Rummages. Rummages.)

(Searches through pants pockets. Jacket pockets.)

(The **MAN** *from the church appears. She doesn't seem to fully see or notice him.)*

(He is more of a presence, that of mortality.)

(He goes to her. Takes the cigarette. Breaks it in half.)

(Puts it back where it was.)

*(***ELLIE** *finds her matches. Reaches for the cigarette.)*

(Sees it's broken.)

(She reaches for another, lights it. Smokes.)

(Rushes to the window, shoves it open.)

(Lights the cigarette.)

(Breathes in deep.)

(Finally calms, as if just given a sedative, or air.)

(The **MAN** *watches. Disapproving.)*

*(***ELLIE** *leans against the window, smoking.)*

(In… Out. In… Out.)

(Release.)

A Routine Procedure

*(***ROBERTA** *lays on a hospital bed, nervous, waiting.* **JOE** *sits in a chair nearby, also waiting.)*

JOE. Stop thinking about it.

ROBERTA. I'm not!

(Beat.)

JOE. STOP.

ROBERTA. Well what else is there to think about? They're gonna put me in a tube like a goddamn science experiment!

JOE. It's just an MRI, it's routine.

ROBERTA. I can't remember if I'm claustrophobic and I'm worried I'll find out when I'm in there.

JOE. You'll be *fine*. But don't fidget. You have to lie perfectly still.

ROBERTA. Well if you tell me not to fidget all I want to do is fidget.

What if I panic?

JOE. There's a panic button, should you panic.

ROBERTA. Am I going to?!

JOE. *No.*

ROBERTA. And you'll be here? The whole time?

JOE. I'll be right here.

(Beat.)

(A **NURSE** *enters, pops the wheels on her bed, starts to wheel her out.* **ROBERTA***'s eyes grow wide with fear, but she tries to stay strong.)*

Be good, now.

ROBERTA. I will.

JOE. *(A joke.)* Don't die on me, now.

ROBERTA. Not yet.

JOE. *(An old routine.)* We're going to die simultaneously.

ROBERTA. They'll bury us in the same box.

(He waves goodbye.)

(He sits in a chair.)

(She is gone.)

(Time passes.)

(He falls asleep.)

(A heart rate monitor starts, beeping steadily.)

(And then, it flatlines.)

(Suddenly: the most glorious light you have ever seen. It overwhelms the space, blinding, pulsing, hugging, consuming. Then:)

Welcome

(Heaven.)

*(***ROBERTA** *leaves her bed. She moves through time and space, through glory.)*

(Soft light. Every color ever.)

(The **MAN***, who is now an* **ANGEL***, greets her.)*

(He is overjoyed.)

ANGEL. …Hi.

ROBERTA. Hi.

*(***ROBERTA** *looks at him.)*

(She can't place him. She can't remember what words are. What are words?)

(She moves toward the **ANGEL***, searching for words, for recognition.)*

ANGEL. Wow. It's you. I, uh. OhmyGod. We say that here. Colloquially. It's totally fine. So.
Hi.

ROBERTA. I can't find my room. Or my house.
Or my. Anything.

ANGEL. This is in fact your room and house and also now your everything.

ROBERTA. …What?

ANGEL. I can't believe you're here.
We've been waiting a very long time for you.

ROBERTA. Where am I?

ANGEL. *(With wonder and authority.)* Heaven.

(With his announcement, clouds swell with beautiful music, then softly recede.)

Pretty cool, right?

ROBERTA. I'm sorry, I think there's been some sort of mistake.

ANGEL. …Hmmm?

ROBERTA. My husband and I don't believe in heaven.

ANGEL. And yet, here you are! So WELCOME ROBERTA!

Sorry. That was too much.

I know it's a lot to process. Take your time, take it all in. I'm going to show you around, I'll be your guide until you get situated.

First and foremost, could you try and find words to describe how you feel, now that you're here? It's a survey thing we do. It's kind of my favorite thing, and I'm kind of in charge of it.

ROBERTA. I –?

ANGEL. Here's a few favorites.

"Being told you can smoke all the cigarettes you want and you'll never die."

"Like when you jump onto the Mario cloud but then you decide to live there."

Heh. Kids.

"That Camembert from Trader Joe's that's got a little bit of blue cheese inside of it."

"Salad of Color."

ROBERTA. *(Trying.)* …Frosting pillow fight.

ANGEL. There you go!

ROBERTA. Is there someone I could speak to – about –

ANGEL. You can speak to me.

ROBERTA. I don't understand why I'm here.

ANGEL. You will.

ROBERTA. What – what is that smell –

ANGEL. You know, little bit of this, little bit of that, fried chicken, waffles, childhood, just in general, lemon poppyseed muffins, your grandma's perfume, dryer sheets, homemade caramels –

ROBERTA. Is that – do I smell tater tots?

ANGEL. *(Proud.)* Yup! That was my suggestion. They've got parmesan cheese inside of them.

ROBERTA. It's beautiful –

ANGEL. Right? And you never get tired of smelling it, it's just like –

(He sucks in air, hard.)

And then it's like:

(He exhales, deep.)

But then again it's like:

(He inhales, so deeply.)

But then it's like –

ROBERTA. It's wonderful.

ANGEL. It is. Now, if you will just follow me –

ROBERTA. To where?

ANGEL. To begin.

ROBERTA. Begin what?

ANGEL. Forever.

*(***ROBERTA** *looks around her.)*

(The **ANGEL** *just sort of – looks at her. In awe.)*

(She breathes in.)

ROBERTA. But –

Is Joe here, too?

ANGEL. No. He's not.

ROBERTA. Will he be here?

ANGEL. …I don't know.

*(***ROBERTA** *feels a sudden pull to him, as his shape starts to form in her heart, pulling her back toward earth.)*

ROBERTA. Where is he?

(Beat.)

Where is he going to go?

*(***ROBERTA** *looks back toward her Life.)*

(She spots her hospital bed, empty, **JOE** *waiting beside it.)*

(She moves back toward it.)

(For now.)

A Return

(Back in **ROBERTA***'s room. She is lying in her bed, unconscious.)*

*(***JOE** *waits by her side. He looks a wreck, like he's been crying.)*

(Finally, she wakes. He is overcome with joy and relief.)

JOE. Oh, thank God –

ROBERTA. What –

JOE. It's okay. It's all fine now.

(He kisses her forehead.)

ROBERTA. Where –

JOE. It all went fine. There were some – complications, but you're fine.

ROBERTA. Did I die?

JOE. No, sweetheart, you're right here.
You scared us for a minute, there. Welcome back.

ROBERTA. Welcome…

JOE. You want some water?

*(***ROBERTA** *looks around, confused.)*

ROBERTA. What –?

JOE. You got the MRI, but you had an allergic reaction to the dye, sweetheart, you went into shock – they gave you a sedative, you just took a nap.

ROBERTA. Where am I?

JOE. You're at the hospital.

*(***ROBERTA** *nods, processing.)*

ROBERTA. Am I here?

JOE. You're here.

(She looks at **JOE**. *He chokes back a sob.* **ROBERTA** *sees this.)*

I'll get the – where is the doctor –

(He stands up to head out. **ROBERTA** *reaches for his arm, stopping him.)*

ROBERTA. I went to heaven.

(Beat.)

JOE. What?

ROBERTA. …Heaven.

(A moment as he processes.)

JOE. Okay –

ROBERTA. I was weightless, I was floating up, closer and closer to a light, a light that doesn't shine *on* but shines *through* –

JOE. Where is the nurse –

I – I don't – where is the button, where is the –

(Shouting, to hallway.)

NURSE!

ROBERTA. – up toward the bulb that was also the sun that was also a street light outside of a shopping mall? Up and up and up –

JOE. Okay, sweetheart –

(Pressing buttons, calling.)

Nurse!

Are you hungry? Do you want a yogurt?

ROBERTA. *(Declaring, a discovery.)* I want tater tots.

With parmesan cheese in the middle.

(The **ANGEL**, *who is now a* **DOCTOR**, *enters. He is cheerful, calm.)*

*(***ROBERTA** *looks at him. He is vaguely familiar.)*

DOCTOR. I see we are awake.

ROBERTA. *(Searching.)* You –

JOE. She's awake, but she's tired, she's a bit confused. Is it alright to take her home to rest?

DOCTOR. Of course, of course. Nothing beats the glory of your own bed. But first:

(He stops. He clears this throat.)

I would like to first and foremost say that I am with you every step of the way. You are not alone.

JOE. What's this about?

DOCTOR. The results of Roberta's MRI.

(The **DOCTOR** *sits on a chair and slides himself closer to them.)*

(He powers on a computer by the bed. Types on a small keyboard. Pulls up an image, which overwhelms the space. **ROBERTA***'s lungs. With a pen, he points to a large mass, the size of a baked potato.)*

JOE. …What's that?

DOCTOR. A tumor. Well, a series of tumors.

ROBERTA. It looks like a baked potato.

JOE. But – that's – she just had a pain in her back.

DOCTOR. Yes, well, that's where the tumors began, and then they seemed to have spread across multiple organs. Now of course I will need to do a biopsy, but based on their locations, I am fairly certain they are not benign.

JOE. *(Flummoxed.)* Well, we'd like to get a second opinion.

DOCTOR. Of course. But I will share with you: there are few things I am certain about, really truly certain. This is one of them.

*(***ROBERTA** *keeps her eyes fixed on the fluorescent light above them, which seems to pulse.* **JOE** *reaches for her hand.)*

What we're looking at, here, are mediastinal tumors. They've formed in the cavity between your lungs. You see that this section here is pressing on the heart, and could eventually also cause pressure on the spine. Now I would like to go ahead and schedule a bronchoscopy, barium swallow and endoscopy to get a closer look, as well as a chest scan and additional MRIs.

(The **DOCTOR** *prattles on with medical terms.* **JOE** *tries to pay attention as* **ROBERTA** *just floats away.)*

The Arguments

*(**ROBERTA**, at home, on the couch. That evening.)*

(She goes through a folder given to her by her doctor – pamphlets about chemo and alternative therapies.)

(She sets them down. She is still processing the news.)

ROBERTA. I remember the first cigarette I smoked.

I was – thirteen?

(Beat.)

I was back behind the church with my older brother, Gregory, and a few of his friends, and they were talking, they were talking about something that I didn't understand and I felt a hole. I felt a hole in the moment.

And I wanted to fill it and so I reached for one.

I'll take one a those.

Gregory lit it.

(Beat.)

There were other things I could've reached for.

(Beat.)

I did this to myself.

(The thought kills her, nauseates her.)

*(**JOE** enters from the kitchen, teapot in hand.)*

JOE. I've called into the office.

They've found me a replacement for tomorrow.

I've made some calls to some specialists, and Linda is also going to make some calls.

ROBERTA. Joe –

JOE. And I put a call into Dr. Dougherty. My colleague I was telling you about. He specializes in this sort of. He's just over in Fredrick. He's very busy, as the best are, but. I've left word for him, where's the mustard?

I can't find anything anywhere.

ROBERTA. Refrigerator door.

JOE. I already looked there.

ROBERTA. Well, that's the only place it is, it's mustard, where else would it be?

JOE. Well I don't know, I'm not usually in charge of the sandwiches!

ROBERTA. *(Standing.)* Well let me –

JOE. *(Firm.)* NO.

(Beat.)

No. I'll find it.

(He starts to head back into the kitchen.)

ROBERTA. Will you just sit here with me for a minute? You've been running around like a goddamn maniac.

JOE. I'm just trying to get your dinner.

ROBERTA. You won't even look at me.

JOE. *(Giving in, sitting with her.)* Fine.

See?

I'm sitting.

See? I'm looking at you.

(He sits and looks at her. Tears start to come.)

The water's boiling –

ROBERTA. No it's not.

(She points to the kettle in his hand.)

Do you not believe me? About heaven.

JOE. I don't not *believe* you, I just –

ROBERTA. Well then tell me what you think.

JOE. I don't want to get into this right now. You've had a long day.

ROBERTA. Come on. Give me your best shot. Therapy me.

(Beat.)

JOE. *(Gently.)* …There are studies.

I don't mean to belittle your, ah, but when the brain is deprived of oxygen, as yours was, ever so briefly – things shift.

ROBERTA. I wasn't high if that's what you're saying. "Oxygen."

JOE. Sweetheart. Listen to me. When there is trauma in the body, the mind sees what it wants. We are taken elsewhere. You remember when I had that young patient who was frightened of water? Nearly drowned, in Lake Michigan? He felt as if he'd been trapped under the boat for some five minutes. But when I asked his mother – not ten seconds he'd been under, she said, not ten. And what is the explanation?

ROBERTA. Don't talk to me like one of your students.

JOE. I am just trying to help you see.

The mind slows when it is processing trauma, creating an illusion of travel, of timelessness. You see? Time stretches out. Your heart stopped briefly, yes, but most likely your brain did not. And even if it did, just for a moment, the brain stem stays active. It's a primitive function, remnants of mammal behavior, of playing dead.

ROBERTA. I'm talking about a nice place where our souls go, is that so absurd?

JOE. It's a wonderful idea. But that's what it is. An *idea.*

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. But what if there's something up there?

JOE. Well of course there is. There is the *cosmos,* there is apparently *Pluto* –

ROBERTA. And maybe, also, there is a nice place that smells of waffle cones, where –

*(***JOE** *doesn't know what to do. He laughs. This is absurd.)*

I don't think it's funny. I mean yes of course it is.

But it's *not.*

JOE. …I am just asking you to consider that perhaps, maybe, what you saw was a dream.

You went into shock, darling and you had a beautiful dream.

ROBERTA. …You're probably right.

(He kisses her forehead.)

JOE. Now.

We're going to schedule your first appointment, get ahead of this. Now if you'll just tell me where your mustard is, I will see to your sandwich.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. Look again. Where condiments live. Refrigerator door.

*(***JOE** *heads back into the kitchen.)*

*(***ROBERTA** *sits alone.)*

(The phone rings.)

Hello?

ELLIE. Roberta?

ROBERTA. Ellie! Ellie, I love you!

*(***ELLIE** *exhales smoke.)*

ELLIE. *(Thrown.)* Oh – okay –

I was just gonna leave a message. I only have a minute. Lots of work.

Just calling you back.

Is now okay, or?

ROBERTA. Now is perfect. There is no better time than now.

ELLIE. Okay so. Now it is. Hi!

ROBERTA. Isn't it amazing, how there is right now, and there is then, and there is forever?

ELLIE. …Yes?

*(***ELLIE** *smokes.)*

ROBERTA. Are you smoking?

ELLIE. No.

(She starts to aimlessly pace.)

So what's new? Why'd you call, or? I mean you can call whenever. But.

ROBERTA. I just wanted to say hi. See how you are.

ELLIE. Hi! I'm good.

(Beat.)

ROBERTA. But well. Since then.

I went for an MRI.

*(***ELLIE** *smokes.)*

It was just for a pain in my back.

*(***ROBERTA** *finds her words.)*

And it turns out that I have a lot of tumors. All of the sudden.

Well they were probably growing for quite some time given their size but for me it's sudden because I didn't feel them growing at all.

(Beat.)

ELLIE. Wait, so – *what?*

ROBERTA. They're in my lungs and a whole baked potato around my heart.

And well. It's not looking good.

(She takes a breath. Fights back tears.)

*(***ELLIE** *smokes.)*

(Her heart leaps to her throat. She has no idea what to say.)

ELLIE. Oh. Bummer.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry. I have no idea why I just said "bummer," I never say that.

ROBERTA. No, you're right. It's a huge bummer.

Your granddad is calling specialists. Every doctor in a three hundred mile radius. I'm pretty sure he called a few veterinarians, too.

ELLIE. I'm so sorry – I don't know what to –

ROBERTA. Me neither.

ELLIE. Well are you going to – I mean –

ROBERTA. I don't know.

I've got to go now sweetie, there's another call coming in, bye bye.

ELLIE. Bye –

(Quickly, she hangs up.)

*(***ROBERTA** *closes her eyes, trying to quiet the earthly noise, the worry.)*

(She tries to go back. To summon every inch of what she remembers from being Up There.)

(The feel, the smell.)

(Softly the living room starts to pulse and glow.)

(Then:)

*(***ELLIE** *is smoking out the window, still processing the news.)*

(A knock at her door.)

(She puts out the cigarette. Answers the door.)

*(***JONAS** *is there with a bag of food.)*

…What're you doing here?

JONAS. *(With a cinematic voice.)* "Rye bread. Sharp cheddar cheese. Fresh tomatoes. Shoved together and fried to death."

ELLIE. …What?

JONAS. "This summer – sandwiches will never be the same –"

ELLIE. ?

JONAS. I brought you a sandwich.

From this great spot right across the street from my place. It's called Sandwich.

Technically I brought one for both of us. Remember the –?

(Beat.)

ELLIE. I'm working right now, so –

JONAS. I know, but I'm a terrible listener and also incredibly persistent, so you're shit outta luck.

(He smells the air.)

Do you smoke?

ELLIE. *(An old excuse.)* Nope! It's from the apartment upstairs.

JONAS. Ah.

I just thought maybe you might want a break. From the work.

ELLIE. I can't take a break.

JONAS. From shaming almonds? Yeah you can.

ELLIE. I am never not doing anything. I don't ever not have plans. I do not have the luxury of free time. I work from home, so I am always working. If I am not doing something it's because I am not doing anything on *purpose*. And if I don't have plans to go anywhere or do anything, it's probably because I planned to not do anything and to stay in and work, which means I do have plans, which is to *work*.

JONAS. *(Amused.)* Got it.

ELLIE. I know I sound insane but I juggle a lot and it's the only way I can get it all done.

JONAS. I'll get *you* all done.

ELLIE. *(A small eruption.)* What is wrong with you?! Why do you like me, I am being so mean to you!

JONAS. …I just / do.

ELLIE. I'm not gonna date you, I am not your girlfriend, I am not gonna be your wife!

JONAS. Okay, Jesus!

(Beat.)

ELLIE. I just don't know how – this – could ever. Um.

JONAS. You had a lot of sex with me for a person that you do not "know how this could ever, um."

ELLIE. That doesn't mean –

(Beat.)

You don't want me. I promise you.

I have no moral code.

I barely like dogs.

My grandma just told me she's dying and I felt nothing.

Except the feeling of not feeling what I was supposed to feel.

JONAS. The one who called the other night?

ELLIE. Yeah.

JONAS. Oh man. I'm so sorry.

ELLIE. See? That was great, how'd you do that?

JONAS. Do what?

ELLIE. Say that with such sincerity.

I can't even do that.

See? I' m telling you. Shitty person.

JONAS. No. You're not.

You have this like kindness that's –

ELLIE. What is this "kindness"? That I've never lit anyone's house on fire, is that what is now called "kindness," what're you *talking* about?

JONAS. You went out in the rain and got us Cinnamon Toast Crunch because I said my mom used to give it to me when I was sick.

ELLIE. *(Erupting.)* Because I needed a cigarette!!

JONAS. I thought you said you didn't smoke.

ELLIE. I LIED. I am a liar and I am violently addicted to nicotine!

JONAS. You think that makes you a shitty person?

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