

Kind Thing; Nice Thing
a new play

by Megan Rivkin



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CHARACTERS

- ALEX A person who is around thirty, married to Bennett and/but dating Sam. They are employed in a 9-5, they read books for fun, they were always in accelerated classes growing up.
- BENNETT A person who is around thirty, married to Alex. The kind of person who thinks everyone should take an Enneagram test. They write for blog-like publications from home.
- SAM A college student or recent grad, dating Alex. They make art. They are also generally kind to people. They possess a quality that Alex hasn't had access to in the past (a world view, life experiences, an identity, etc).

SETTING: A hip suburb-plus, like Evanston, IL. Various locations, but primarily a coffee shop and two homes. Descriptions of setting throughout the play refer to mood and aesthetic, but do not necessarily call for realistic scenic design.

NOTE ON WORLD: This play is a non-linear series of moments strung together, without complete scenic/costume changes. The moments move one into the next without significant pause or room to breathe (generally). One can make the decision to have some props only indicated, not actually used. It may make sense to have a theatrical through line throughout (recurring music/movement, painting a giant canvas between moments, etc). Also, when Lake Michigan freezes, it forms these beautiful crystal-like formations that then get covered with snow.

NOTE ON CASTING: Every body on the stage is political. Regardless of how the actors identify and what the text indicates, the audience of this play will see gender, and it will become part of the story for them. Practice both gender-conscious and race-conscious casting. Please use the inclusive nature of the characters to offer opportunities to actors, such as trans and non-binary actors, as well as to tell thoughtful versions of this story. Do not cast the play in such a way that it privileges only straight, cisgender, white voices.

NOTE ON CONTENT: Brief mention of suicidal ideation.

NOTE ON PUNCTUATION:

If a line ends in punctuation, it is done.

If a line doesn't, it just drifts off, unfinished, lingering in air
("This is what I'm thinking, not saying")

(What I'm doing, unspoken.)

(Spoken aloud)

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ACT 1

ONCE UPON A TIME
THE SON'S BEDROOM/OUTSIDE THE COFFEE SHOP

Split stage. Lights up on BENNETT, who kneels by their child's bed on one side of the stage, telling him a bedtime story. Their son is not a character. The bedroom is cozy — well lit and neat.

BENNETT

Kill the workers!

Lights up on SAM and ALEX on the other side of the stage. SAM and ALEX face each other, close. They're a little giddy. The two stand outside a coffee shop in the suburb's downtown, in a little snow, with the lights of the street lamps illuminating them.

BENNETT

Oh, that's funny. I should keep that. So. Here's the story:

SAM

You are good.

BENNETT

Once upon a time there was a mermaid who was very kind, and, not that attractiveness is quantifiable, beautiful.

ALEX shakes their head. SAM laughs, stabilizes Alex's head in their (Sam's) hands.

BENNETT

The mermaid was stubborn, in a way that was 50/50. Meaning half of her onlookers read into her as tenacious and bold, and the other half saw selfishness and small-mindedness. The mermaid would argue that they, themselves, were small-minded.

SAM

I think I get you.

ALEX

I hope you do. I think I know you do. Maybe I hope I know you do. Ah. Words.

SAM (Nodding knowingly)

Words.

BENNETT

The mermaid knew she would only live once - that was true of mermaids as well as humans - and at a certain point, she needed to go after what she wanted. The key word here being "needed," not "wanted."

ALEX sneezes. SAM laughs.

BENNETT

"The love justifies the means," she thought.

ALEX

You're right. You're right ("for me").

BENNETT

The mermaid butted heads, figuratively, with her merparents, or, "parents." She was in love with a human, and would do what it took to be with him. She deserved love. She knew that much - she deserved to have love in her life. Keyword: "to."

SAM

Yes. I'm here. I.

ALEX

Love you.

SAM

Yes.

ALEX

I'm shivering.

SAM

Well, it's cold.

ALEX

I don't think that's it.

SAM

You could try holding me.

ALEX and SAM huddle together.

BENNETT

But there was a catch, as there always is to true love — to be with the fisher meant to leave behind her aquatic, which is to say her only, family. Should she leave the sea, the ecosystem - you know what that is, right? - the ecosystem would, to be dramatic, collapse. To not be dramatic, it would slowly deteriorate. The quality of life would be worse at sea. The days would be longer, the commutes would be uphill, and the water quality would be adequate at best. And “adequate” these days means next to nothing.

ALEX

I'm a big fan of you.

SAM

It goes both ways.

ALEX

Fantastic.

SAM

But you know.

ALEX

Oh, the sheer ecstasy of hearing that aloud.

BENNETT

But the mermaid knew she had to go after love, no matter the cost. Love was the strongest thing. Love was worth fighting for, even if it seemed wrong. Or if her family couldn't understand the way she wanted, or, some (she) would argue *needed* to be loved, she had to follow her..... I lost my train of thought.

SAM

I thought you knew. You know... everything?

ALEX

No, no, no, no. Just most things.

ALEX gives SAM a little kiss, or hug, or knowing look.

BENNETT

When did my hands get so dry?

SAM and ALEX exit, and BENNETT notices their son is asleep. BENNETT sits on the ground, playing absentmindedly with a fake-gold necklace chain, and thinking loudly. BLACKOUT.

THE OTHER INTRODUCTION
THE SON'S BEDROOM

ALEX and BENNETT now kneel together at their son's bed, telling him a bedtime story as he falls asleep. When ALEX and BENNETT tell stories they become quite animated.

BENNETT

Kill the workers!

ALEX

What?

BENNETT

It's, oh, it's a joke. I've got one of my own today.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

The work lights are in the theatre- they're the- they go off for the show. And we call them the "workers." So sometimes lighting people say, "kill the workers," and you know, it's just-

ALEX

I see why that's funny.

Pause.

Here's the story:

BENNETT

There once was a fisher in love with a mermaid, who was fairly certain she shared his affections.

ALEX (Coming alive)

Every night, around eight p.m.-

BENNETT

So as to have properly digested.

ALEX

He would go down to the water and they would rub elbows and converse.

BENNETT

“Fisher Price,” the mermaid would exclaim.

ALEX (Explaining)

That was his name.

BENNETT

“How I would love to live with you, on the land, in your arms, betwixt your sheets.”

ALEX

Fisher Price’s eyes grew misty.

BENNETT

He wanted nothing more than to (painlessly) transform the mermaid’s tail into legs and to eat a Big Mac with her on the beach.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

He was very hungry.

ALEX

Maybe he should’ve gotten to the grocery store this afternoon.

Beat.

The mermaid longed to be with her love, Fisher Price, lighting a scented candle and cuddling up to watch something that wouldn’t age well.

BENNETT

So Fisher Price brought her to Mount Olympics-

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

Yes, Mount Olympics. And there he met with Queen Zeus. And Queen Zeus said, “I will make your dear mermaid into a legged person if you are able to solve seven multiplication tables.”

ALEX

“And demonstrate substantial improvement in long division.”

BENNETT

And Fisher Price was able to, because he had been practicing for twenty minutes every night before watching a television show that wouldn’t age well.

ALEX

And Queen Zeus said, “Alright. When next you see her, the mermaid will have at least two legs and definitely no tail.”

BENNETT

Grinning from ear to ear, Fisher Price took off bounding down the mountain, and when he arrived at the beach, he found the mermaid waiting for him, her eyes lighting up at his entrance.

ALEX (To Bennett)

I think he’s asleep.

BENNETT

He’s asleep.

Long pause.

Well.

BENNETT stares at ALEX for a long time. ALEX moves towards them, maybe like it’s going to be a hug. ALEX picks a piece of fluff off of BENNETT’s sweater. It won’t come off. ALEX tries and tries. Disgruntled, ALEX leaves the room. BENNETT, remembering, pulls out their wallet and lays down two dollars in front of them (what would be their kid’s bed). BENNETT appears to retrieve a

*tooth and put in their pocket.
BENNETT smiles down at their
sleeping son and leaves the room.*

SAM'S HANDS
THE COFFEE SHOP

*SAM is onstage at an art expo
night at the coffee shop. Their art
is the kind of beautiful that is
tough to argue with. Much like
Sam, the piece is striking.*

SAM (To an imaginary audience)

Hello, so, so, so, so. I know about four percent of things, I've realized. And I'm not talking about, uh, in general. Like every fact on every subject in every culture. That's not what I mean. So don't think that I, yeah. I mean on a daily basis — should I compliment people's clothing if I like it, or is that a violation of privacy? Should I give money to homeless people on the street or donate to an organization? Or just say to myself, "you should donate at some point." And then briefly toil with myself about "how much am I giving if I do give?" That's me okay, I'm bad. Alright. I'm bad! But, uh. Should I fight my grandma when she says racist things? Or let it go because I also know she's lived a lifetime of abuse and is cripplingly lonely save for me and a few others. And I desperately do not want to make her feel bad. I don't like feeling bad. I'm sure you don't want to hear me talk about things like this, and you probably just want me to. Yeah, okay. I've sort of realized – no, I've *totally* realized- no one has any idea what the hell is going on or what they're supposed to be doing and what morality in (or out of) practice looks like. And the ones who think they do tend to be insufferable, so. You know who you are! But. I'm getting to the point with my life or with my art... maybe with both... that I sort of am resigned about how little I know. Everything seems to make someone unhappy. I think I'm in a place where I'm trying to trust myself to know best... with the knowledge that I'm, uh, wrong. And so this is a piece I did, um, it's sort of, well, not sort of, it *is* my very very chapped hands, much to the frustration of my mother. Next to all the soaps and lotions and whatever were in my house. Every single one of them - I Googled - every one relates to a person or an animal suffering. Every product has a dark past, right? Somewhere along the line of their corporation-creation. And now I'm part of causing all this harm for my own "health, wellness, and beauty," and I have the audacity to let my hands look this bad. So. That's what this is. I'm going to get off the stage now, because, as my clammy hands might be giving away, I'm anxious! Thank you. Sorry for talking so long. No, actually. You're welcome. No. Thank you for your patience. Great, good, okay, bye.

SAM exits offstage.

ICE CREAM
THE ICE CREAM SHOP

*ALEX and BENNETT enter.
ALEX and BENNETT stand
outside a boutique ice cream shop.
ALEX has their hands over
BENNETT's eyes. Then they pull
them away. ALEX is trying.*

BENNETT

Ice cream?

ALEX (Telling them, not asking)

Surprised.

BENNETT

Thank you. I see this is a treat.

ALEX

Who doesn't love ice cream?

BENNETT

I don't know.

ALEX

I think it's good to get out of the house.

BENNETT

Yes, I've heard people say that.

ALEX

And a treat is often a nice thing

BENNETT

By its very definition

ALEX

Yes, that's why it's spelled "treat."

Pause.

So.

BENNETT

Thank you. This was nice. I guess it is nice. I guess this is happening to me right now. This is nice. Sorry, I don't say those words a lot. Not because I'm ungrateful, but. Okay. This is nice.

Pause.

Just for the sake of being nice?

ALEX

I'm just playing my cards right.

BENNETT

So everything's transactional.

ALEX

Not "every" "thing." But "many" "things," yes.

BENNETT

All of the ice cream here tastes like soap.

ALEX

You eat soap?

BENNETT

Like "honey lavender" why put that in your mouth.

ALEX

(Has nothing to say.)

BENNETT

Do you remember that shampoo, "no more tears?"

ALEX

It, uh, sounds familiar.

BENNETT

(Waits...)

ALEX

Please tell me about it.

BENNETT

I always thought it was “no more tears,” like you won’t cry if it gets in your eyes, but really it was “no more tears” like you won’t tear your hair out.

ALEX

Crying and tearing your hair out go hand in hand.

Beat.

Did this make you happy?

BENNETT

Banter? Bantering? Or is it, that doesn’t sound right, banter?

ALEX

No, I mean-

BENNETT

We haven’t even ordered an ice cream soap yet. How am I supposed to assess-

ALEX

Does the idea of going to the soap shop with me make you happy?

BENNETT

(Thinks. Waits for Alex to say more.)

ALEX

(Waits.)

BENNETT

(“I’ll wait.”)

ALEX

(“I want to die.”)

BENNETT

This isn't a game. You can't win me back over.

ALEX

That means I won't try.

Beat.

Sorry, *doesn't* mean I won't try. I misspoke. Want me to drive home? Are you staying at home tonight?

CARDIGAN
THE SON'S BEDROOM

BENNETT has exited and only ALEX remains on stage. ALEX is now back in their sleeping son's room, and they sit on the ground, cutting up a cardigan. ALEX is recording themselves speaking on their phone. A little manic, very sad.

ALEX

Is it appropriation when it's your spouse? No, no, I don't think so. That's not how that word is used. This is just stealing. And I've done worse. I'm saying it, now, I've done worse. I'll say it. Okay. I came into this world like everyone else - someone thought they wanted me, or, at the very least, I was worth following through on creating. But as I was making my way into the world – it was all regret. The emotional, and, well, physical labor wasn't worth it. It was too painful. *I* was too painful. If she could, in that moment, go back, she would have made me never happen. And once I was born it would fade, of course, but I think - I just think – maybe I never got over that. Trauma. Of being created? Of the pain I caused in order to be born? I'm sure you couldn't understand. You can't — they can't — we can't — change the rules once you've started. You can't decide you don't like a situation the second it starts happening. And I can't let go now. You can't agree that something is necessary and then shut it down the second it hurts you. I sound bad. I'm not bad, I'm not. I give to every single homeless person. That I notice. There's no hard and fast rule about truth because there are a million truths and I'm just an underpaid H.R. representative.

Alex shuts off the recorder.

Hey, buddy. Hey, my little ducky. Sweet dreams. I hope you never go on to do anything wrong. What is wrong? You're doing great, kiddo. I love, I. You're just good. You're so dumb. Your skin is so soft. Sweet dreams. Or bitter dreams if it's going to toughen you up. No, that's gendered. Goodnight now.

BENNETT THE INVENTOR
BENNETT AND ALEX'S COUCH

*BENNETT enters and joins ALEX
on their couch, now during the
day. They work separately on their
laptops, and ALEX also has a
book.*

BENNETT

Alright, I'll be the what- fifth?- to say it. We should get an air conditioner.

ALEX

It's 30 degrees out.

BENNETT

It wasn't a time-sensitive statement.

Pause.

I had this idea for wearable fashion-

ALEX

That's just fashion.

BENNETT

Right, yeah.

ALEX

I didn't mean to-

BENNETT

I also had this idea for a new ride-share app, you don't have to call the car ahead on the app, they just have a bunch of drivers in cars waiting around busy places, like the airport, and you can just grab one and tell them where you want to go.

ALEX

...Yes. That's a good idea.

Pause.

BENNETT

You know, I really enjoy volunteering at Helping Homes on Thursdays.

ALEX

That's great.

BENNETT

We're pretty well known.

ALEX

We're pretty well known?

BENNETT

Well, we are.

ALEX

Like, in the neighborhood? Ohhh, are we local celebrities and didn't know?

BENNETT

Helping Homes. I'm talking about Helping Homes, don't be weird.

ALEX

Oh.

BENNETT

It's pretty well known. They've won awards.

ALEX

Cool. Very cool.

BENNETT

We've won awards.

ALEX (Joking)

We have? For what? Steamiest house on the block?

BENNETT

I think it's fair to say "we." I'd say I'm definitely an official part of it by now.

ALEX

Yeah. It's your main thing.

BENNETT

It's one thing.

ALEX

Right.

BENNETT

Writing's probably my main thing. Well, art is the real thing.

ALEX

...Are you writing a lot lately?

BENNETT (Defensive)

Yes.

ALEX

Cool.

BENNETT

There's a few things I'm just letting marinate. It's good to leave things for a while and come back.

ALEX

Sure.

BENNETT

No, it is.

ALEX

I believe you. It's just not my area of expertise.

BENNETT

Yeah, that's a big thing. Maybe part of my process is playing with duration.

ALEX

How about something like fast duration? What if you tried sometimes writing really slow or other times really fast?

BENNETT

Not - that's not what duration means. And I don't think you could even know what I'm talking about. Also, yeah, that's tempo. Honoring something by sitting with it.

ALEX

Maybe I should try writing, then I'd get it.

BENNETT

Yeah, maybe, I don't know.

ALEX

I see a lot of things at work, and I think, "wow. That could be a movie were it written down and then dramatized."

BENNETT

Yeah, me too.
("Idiot.")

ALEX

Huh.

BENNETT

I mean, not at work, but. Maybe you're born an artist. I don't know.

ALEX

Yeah, maybe.
("Idiot.")

BENNETT

You're weird.

ALEX

Oh, man, after seven years, you... you noticed me. You, you finally see me!

BENNETT

You're acting weird right now.

ALEX

No, I'm just chilly.

BENNETT

Are you maybe resenting me again just a little bit?

ALEX

.....Not more than you resent me....haha. And I thought we weren't... until Wednesday at four.

BENNETT

There are other ways to-

ALEX

Save us. I know.

BENNETT

I wouldn't have used "save."

ALEX

No, no, no, I know, I know.

BENNETT

Reinvigorate.

ALEX

(Snorts.)

BENNETT

(Daggers.)

ALEX

Sorry.

BENNETT

What do you have to be sorry for?

ALEX

No, I don't. What

BENNETT

You can't be mad at me because I couldn't handle-

ALEX

I'm not mad, I've never been mad.

BENNETT

I can't handle seeing-

ALEX

You shouldn't have had to. I messed up.

BENNETT

You messed up?

ALEX

Then. I didn't want to hurt you.

BENNETT

So, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry if you resent me. Or if I'm being, or if I'm resentable. But I can't — I thought I could — I don't like the concept. It's unnatural. We should just take some fucking pottery instead.

ALEX

You want to go steal some pottery together? That's very romantic, let's.

BENNETT

Stop looking at me like that. I'm not bad.

ALEX

No, you're not. I never said-

BENNETT

I gave it a try, okay?

ALEX

But... did you?

Pause, pause, pause, pause.

BENNETT (Referring to Alex)

That sweater has a hole. That's why you're cold right now. It has nothing to do with outside.

Pause.

ALEX

Thanks for sharing. I have a book.

LET ME LOVE YOU
OUTSIDE ALEX'S HOUSE

BENNETT gets up from the couch and exits, and ALEX stands. SAM enters and the two of them kiss in the entryway to Alex's house. SAM pulls away.

SAM

Do you hear something?

ALEX

I hear that sound in my head from old big brass band songs from the 1950's that sounds like twinkling stars between verses.

SAM

No, not in my head. Sorry. I'm just distracted.

ALEX

Hey. Look at me. Focus your eyes on mine. For just a minute. Life is not long. Typically. The conventions holding us to daily routines are so arbitrary. Trying to regulate love is nonsensical. And by that I mean... it just... it makes no sense. I don't think we have a finite amount of love to give! And you told me you don't think there's a right way to love. Right? Which I agree with. I agree with that fully. Because you're brilliant. There is not a right way to love. And, and. And if you think about it, you know I'm right. Or, at least trust me on this. You're smarter than me, I know, okay, don't challenge me on that, but I have a few life experiences on you. So I know this, definitively. And, hey, I know you feel the same way, or something close to it. I am stunned by how much I love you. I could never have expected this at this point in my life or at any. I've never come across someone who opens their heart to the world like you. A wildly empathetic and creative and thoughtful heart. And shares their vision out for everyone to see. I've never met anyone who hates organized improv performances with the same fire that I do. And I'm not being kind to anyone - not you, not myself, not my family - if I didn't let myself love fully. I love you. Let me. Let me in. There's a hole in you. And I mean that in the most romantic possible way. But you have this empty cavity, with how little you love yourself, I. And I know you can't see it, but I think at some point you will. And maybe I can help with that. By maybe just being in your presence and letting you know, all the time. I want to be all over your presence. I love you. This is murky but it isn't wrong. And I don't want to stand here

and think about it anymore. I mean, more, I won't. We just have to make a decision and act. Like you said, just like you said.

SAM

Is Ducky asleep?

ALEX TALKS MELATONIN
THE SON'S BEDROOM

*SAM exits and ALEX stands at
the foot of their son's bed.*

ALEX

Once upon a time there was a fisher who wanted to be caught. The fisher even, one time, in an act of desperation, snarled himself up in his own net. Just to see how it felt. It did not feel good. And he felt bad for all the little fishies he had been catching over time. But for a minute the fisher could pretend someone else had wrapped them up in the mesh and seaweed. Oh, god, I'm nauseating myself. Are you asleep? Did you take a melatonin? They really do help, actually.

SAM THE FORMER CHILD
THE COFFEE SHOP

SAM enters. SAM stands onstage at another art-expo night in the coffee shop. A striking piece of art is displayed — a new one. It's mesmerizing. ALEX is watching SAM speak.

SAM

This is just um... bear with me... I wrote this on the, uh, phone keyboard. Ope. It died. It's just - yep it died. Okay well. Well, well. Okay, give me a sec to just recalibrate. This is, basically, um, I was a kind of emotional kid. I know everyone has emotional regulation issues but I'm pretty, um. But I would cry all the time over these stupid little fictional, fixable things. The biggest one was when, in Lilo and Stitch, the guy kept having his ice cream knocked over. Made me cry. Or this one book we had to read for school where this kid got a bad haircut. Made me cry. Like what is that, right? What? And my parents were big on like helping me with test anxiety or avoiding gluten, and those kinds of solutions, but I think I just had a big, breakable heart. Maybe they should have just hugged me and spent less energy... elsewhere. I don't even. Sorry, sorry. Okay, art. It's— well, you see it. I'm done.

I CAN'T HELP YOU IF YOU DON'T TELL ME
OUTSIDE THE SON'S BEDROOM

*SAM exits the stage and ALEX
gets up. BENNETT enters.
BENNETT and ALEX whisper
outside their son's bedroom.*

BENNETT
Just stop, stop.

ALEX
Stop what?

BENNETT
Just the way you're being.

ALEX
Stop the way I'm being?

BENNETT
(Thinks.)
Yes.

ALEX
I can't help you if you don't tell me.

BENNETT
(Says nothing.)

ALEX
Is dinner ready for us? Tonight was the first time I've ever gotten jealous of his fish sticks.

BENNETT
No, I didn't make it.

ALEX
What?

BENNETT

I had a hard time-

ALEX

Yeah? Today?

BENNETT (at the same time)

This month.

ALEX

I...can't help you if you don't tell me.

BENNETT

I'm sorry.

ALEX

Why?

BENNETT

I don't know!

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

I know I'm acting crazy right now but don't say it out loud. *I* can say it, *you* can't, Okay? I can say I'm being crazy, but you need to know that the only acceptable response from your lips is, "of course you're not crazy." I feel like, I feel like, I'm not commenting on objective truth here, but I feel like I can't talk because you will inevitably make me feel stupid for everything I say. And that fear, anticipation of you making me feel stupid without you saying anything makes me say stupid things.

ALEX

Are you serious?

BENNETT

Well... I... you know what - yes... Yes, I am!

ALEX

You're blaming me for doing nothing which makes you stupid?

BENNETT

When did this start being the way you talked to me?

ALEX

What are you talking about?

BENNETT

Not... being... nice.

ALEX

I'm not being "nice?"

BENNETT

Do you think you're being nice?

ALEX

What am I supposed to say to that? I'm the one who decides if I'm being nice?
Apparently that's you.

BENNETT

Just.

ALEX

How can I be nicer?

BENNETT

How am I supposed to answer that question?

ALEX

I can't help you if you don't tell me.

WE'RE OUT OF SHAMPOO
THE SON'S BEDROOM

*BENNETT and ALEX move to
their son's bedroom for another
installment of the story.*

ALEX

Once upon a time-

BENNETT

In the same land as before-

ALEX

Where they all take place.

BENNETT

I never thought about that...

ALEX

I mean, probably.

BENNETT

Yeah.

ALEX

The fisher awoke to find the mermaid at his side.

BENNETT

Snuggled into the crease of his armpit.

ALEX

Blonde hair splayed out across the bed.

BENNETT

I never envisioned it blonde.

ALEX

Does it matter?

BENNETT searches for a word.

BENNETT

No.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

Fisher Price awoke, blinking in the dusty morning sun-

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

Not blinking in the dust, but-

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

And he looked over to find his mermaid, still fast asleep-

ALEX

A little drool on the pillow.

BENNETT

A little of her hair on his face.

ALEX

He rubbed her back in circles, and murmured, "good morning, my love."

BENNETT

She yawned. And outstretched her arms.

ALEX

And then brought them back in.

BENNETT

And kissed him on the cheek, with a "good morning" as she pushed herself up off of the bed and made her way to the bathroom.

ALEX

To urinate.

BENNETT

She was, after all, only human.

ALEX

Right.

BENNETT

(Inhales.)

ALEX (cutting them off)

And as he watched her make her way across the room, wiping the yellow sleep out of her eyes, he noticed-

BENNETT

He couldn't help but notice-

ALEX

That her hair was not as silky and golden as it was in the water.

BENNETT

Now it was frizzy on the ends and dull and greasy at the top.

ALEX

As if someone had just slept in it.

BENNETT

"And her breath," he thought.

ALEX

When he visited her in the pond-

BENNETT

Lake-

ALEX

Sea-

BENNETT

(Inhales.)

ALEX (Cutting them off again)

He had pressed his face up close to hers, and never had her breath been anything other than wintergreen.

BENNETT

He leaned back in bed, and just thinking about his day made him want to fall back to sleep.

ALEX

Back at the bog, they'd had unlimited things to talk about.

BENNETT

Their big dreams, wishes, wants.

ALEX

Together.

BENNETT

But now they'd inventoried all of those. And it was becoming strained.

ALEX

"Another day of pretending to be surprised by the changing of the seasons or the passage of time, or discussing the likability of figures we've never met," he thought.

BENNETT

And buried his face under the pillow.

ALEX

"We're out of shampoo!" She yelled from the bathroom.

I FIDDLED WITH IT AND IT BROKE
SAM'S HOUSE

*BENNETT exits and SAM enters.
SAM and ALEX sit down on the
bed.*

SAM

My niece was having a tough day, so I took her for ice cream.

ALEX

I've been there.

SAM

(Waits.)

ALEX

What happened?

SAM

She's upset because this girl in her class sent her a letter.

ALEX

She's upset?

SAM

Oh, they have to send letters to overnight camp - they don't have their phones. So she sent her a letter where she drew herself and Annie. Annie's my niece. I think you know that-

ALEX (has been sitting on this one for a minute)

I thought you meant she hated the postal system, ha-

SAM

I think I said that. It's stick figure arms and then their faces and hair and the rest — The drawings — Kind of their clothes. So she drew them both and then labeled different things on them like “straight hair, painted nails, cute skirt” on hers, and “curly hair, bug bites, messy shirt,” on Annie's, and Annie was pretty upset.

ALEX

Curly hair's not an insult.

SAM

She feels like this girl thinks she's better than her, but, seriously, this girl drew a picture of herself and then labeled all the things *she* was doing *right*. I think *that's* the more embarrassing position to be in.

ALEX

Yes.

SAM

What are you trying to prove, I mean. Actually I guess she mapped out exactly what she was trying to prove.

ALEX

I was at an overnight camp when I was maybe thirteen, which is a clever way for my parents to send me away under the guise of me learning woodland trombone. Maybe that's not fair to my parents, but, well, as it were, my parents were not so fair to me.

SAM

Thanks for sharing.

ALEX (Self conscious)

You are welcome.

SAM

This feels weird. Now. Different, or, no, not different. But. Not the same.

ALEX

(Sneezes.)

SAM

Are you good?

ALEX

I'm thinking.

SAM

Oh no. About what?

ALEX

I am... nervous.

Sounds like me, all the time. SAM

(Waits.) ALEX

Go on, I won't interrupt. SAM

I'm anxious that- ALEX

(Smiles knowingly) SAM

Different kind of anxious. ALEX

SAM (Slightly taken aback)

Yeah.

ALEX

Just, concerned that my son's spending all day every day with a bad influence.

SAM

Who, Bennett?

ALEX

No, my friend Stephanie from work.

SAM

(Says nothing...)

ALEX

Yes, Bennett.

SAM

Is this new?

ALEX

I don't know. Maybe I just notice it more now that he's older. I don't want him to turn out bratty.

SAM

...Because Bennett's bratty?

ALEX

Well, it's more complicated than that. But yes.

SAM

Hm.

ALEX (Changing the subject)

I think you're just the fucking best.

SAM (playfully)

Just the fucking best? Not anything else?

ALEX

Uh huh.

SAM

What?

ALEX

I don't know what Bennett does.

SAM

Uh huh.

ALEX

Sorry, sorry. Just thinking. But I really don't know what Bennett does.

SAM

What do you mean?

ALEX

They have free time all the time but they never cook. And they're always, I don't know, restless? And self conscious? That they're not-

SAM

I mean they have their-

ALEX

Yeah, yeah, but it's a side project. With no, uh, what is it called, front project?

SAM

Job?

ALEX

They are always saying they're going to get back into it. And I suppose, well, he's in first grade now, so that's more time, because they're there a lot of the day.

SAM

Was it always like this?

ALEX

I remember first grade being longer than kindergarten, but I'm not totally sure.

SAM

Was it always like this with Bennett?

ALEX

I don't know.

SAM

Is it possible you didn't see it?

ALEX

I suppose. I got blue light filtering lenses about a year into living together.

SAM

That'll do it.

ALEX

Sure, sure.

Pause.

Does it bother you when I-

SAM (noticing on their face)

Oh, ew, I have a zit.

ALEX

Oh. Ew.

SAM

...That's what I just said.

ALEX

Go, go fix that.

SAM (Playful)

It won't bite.

ALEX (Unamused)

Yeah.

SAM (Taken aback)

Okay.

ALEX

Aren't you a little old for acne?

SAM (What is this side of Alex?)

Aren't you a little old for-

ALEX

What?

SAM

I don't know. Not my day. Bye.

SAM leaves the room to go to the bathroom. ALEX fiddles with SAM's necklace that they took off and left on the bed. They accidentally break it. Embarrassed, they put it back down. Then they feel bad. They go to leave the room to get hot glue.

NOT TALKING DOESN'T MEAN MAD
BENNETT AND ALEX'S KITCHEN

ALEX stands and BENNETT enters. They stir together in their kitchen, making dinner.

ALEX

Not talking doesn't mean "mad."

BENNETT

I'm not mad.

ALEX

I meant me.

BENNETT

You're not mad.

ALEX

No.

BENNETT

No?

ALEX

No, I'm not.

BENNETT

Yeah, okay.

ALEX

I meant "no" as in, "no, I'm not mad," not, "no, I'm not not mad."

BENNETT

Right, right, got it.

ALEX

(Stirs in silence.)

I can help stir.

BENNETT

I'm good.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

Thank you.

ALEX

Long pause.

Being quiet doesn't mean-

Sometimes "please" and "thank you" actually make things sound less nice.

BENNETT

I'm sorry.

ALEX

For what.

BENNETT

(Thinks. Can't come up with anything. Shrugs.)

ALEX

"Can you hand me the water?" vs "Can you hand me the water, please?" The "please" makes it sound like I think it should have already been handed.

BENNETT

No, it doesn't.

ALEX

Are you in a mood?

BENNETT

Yyyeeeeesssss.

ALEX

BENNETT

(Waits.)

ALEX

A good one. The lint tray was already cleaned out when I went to use the dryer today.

BENNETT

Good. Fires are so terrible.

ALEX

(Stirs.)

BENNETT

I'm not mad at you or anything.

ALEX

Right.

BENNETT

Well, I am anything at you, haha. But I'm not mad at you or anything *like that*.

ALEX

Yes.

Long pause.

I'm not mad.

BENNETT

I know.

ALEX

You know?

BENNETT

You vocalized it.

ALEX

I vocal- what... I- Can you stir, please?

ALEX steps away from the pot to look at a text on their phone and smiles.

BENNETT

You know what?

ALEX (Not looking up)

No, I don't. You haven't said anything yet.

BENNETT

I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

Pause.

Sorry.

ALEX

Aren't you going to be hungry?

BENNETT (leaving the room)

I took him for ice cream like an hour ago. We probably also got burgers.

ALEX

What?

ALEX looks back down at the phone.

FEEDBACK
THE COFFEE SHOP

SAM enters. SAM and ALEX sit at a table in the coffee shop at night, once it is closed. They're both drinking something — I could never decide what, so you can choose.

ALEX

I like it. I don't get it.

SAM

So you don't like it.

ALEX

No. I just don't relate to it like the other ones.

SAM

We have different life experiences.

ALEX

I mean the other ones-

SAM

Or life trajectories.

ALEX

It doesn't mean I like it at all. If everyone- What?

SAM

(Waits.)

ALEX

It doesn't mean I *don't* like it at all. Sorry, I misspoke. If every person who saw a piece of art had the exact same reaction, you would not want that, right? Are you trying to be palatable?

SAM

You're very smart and I very much value your opinion.

ALEX

And I like it and also don't get it. Is that so terrible?

SAM

No, it's not.

ALEX

Trust me, that's not the worst feedback you're going to get.

SAM (Dry)

Thank you.

ALEX

Oh I, you know what I mean.

SAM

That you don't like it.

ALEX

No, no. I guess you don't know what I mean, okay. Just that people will always disagree with your work. Some people. There will always be at least one person who takes issue, even if the masses love it. You can't worry about that one person. You have to have skin that's a little bit thicker.

SAM

Thank you for explaining artistic feedback to me.

ALEX

Whatever. I love it, okay? Even if you being here makes me-

SAM

No, no no no.

ALEX

Just during the day, not at night.

SAM

This is my spot. This is where I do work. I get free coffee which I need. I can't work at school, I get distracted. I feel watched. I like creating art in the space where I demonstrate it.

ALEX

That's a luxury you won't always have with your art. Unless you're planning on staying here forever.

SAM

Just ask them to start going somewhere else. Tell them there's something unethical about here. Say the plates are made of pencil led, they'll eat that up.

ALEX

No, I'm not going to lie.

SAM

Well, I can't move.

ALEX

You can't or you won't?

SAM

I'm going to clean up. Thanks for coming tonight.

ALEX

I wouldn't miss it for a world.

*ALEX sneezes as SAM gets up.
SAM walks off to go clean up
behind the counter, ALEX drums
their fingers on the table and then
exits.*

BENNETT TALKS MELATONIN
THE SON'S BEDROOM

*BENNETT enters and kneels at
their son's bed.*

BENNETT

Once upon a time there was a beautiful mermaid who was only ever noticed for her personality. By people who loved to criticize it. She found that extremely irritating and she wasn't sure what to do about it. Okay. That's enough. Take a melatonin. Goodnight.

MARSHMALLOW EATERS
BENNETT AND ALEX'S KITCHEN

BENNETT stands and ALEX joins them. BENNETT and ALEX do dishes in the kitchen.

BENNETT

So, I'm not trying to be dramatic.

ALEX

Hey now, I never said you were.

BENNETT

But a lot of times at work, I um, actively want to die. Like when I do stuff wrong. I feel like I always seem incompetent or, worse, awkward. And in my head I'm thinking, "I wish I were dead, I want to die, I want to die."

ALEX

You... you really shouldn't say that lightly. People shouldn't do that.

BENNETT

Have you ever seen a Twitter?

ALEX

I.

BENNETT

Have you talked to a person.

ALEX

In what capacity?

BENNETT

It's important to be able to talk... lightly... about pain. Or else everything is pain, and (laughs) oh maybe it is. No, no it's not. Where would we go from there? So, I think we have to talk about how painful every minute is sometimes.

ALEX

I really don't think that's okay. Do you need-

BENNETT

You don't get it.

ALEX

I think you're right, yes. Help me?

BENNETT

There are these experiments where they put marshmallows in front of children.

ALEX

Yes, I'm sure.

BENNETT

They put marshmallows in front of these toddlers - I think toddlers - definitely not over nine.

ALEX

You think eight is a toddler?

BENNETT

The idea with the study is that if the kids ate the marshmallow, then they're done. But if they wait and don't eat it, just twiddle their thumbs or what have you for twenty minutes - I don't know if twenty necessarily but that seems right.

ALEX (in response to if *they* were a kid in the experiment, not in a malicious tone.)
I have an extremely low tolerance for boredom.

BENNETT (thinks Alex meant about them, right now.)

(Says nothing.)

ALEX

Just talking.

BENNETT

(Touches their hair.)

ALEX

Keep going.

BENNETT

They're promised that if they wait, they'll receive another marshmallow. And what the study showed - well, I didn't actually read it, I heard it so I don't know actually.

ALEX

(Nothing.)

BENNETT

Was that kids who were able to hold off and wait went on to do better in life, financially, sexually.... And, I suppose, romantically.

ALEX

(...Says nothing.)

BENNETT

And the moment I first learned about that study, my throat got all tight like a clementine.

ALEX

(Waits for an explanation.)

BENNETT

I'm allergic to clementines-

ALEX

("Fuck.")

BENNETT

Because I knew that the results of the study made sense, and that I was an instant gratification marshmallow type of toddler.

ALEX

(Nods.)

BENNETT (In response to their fucking spouse forgetting about their allergy)
And you should know that...

ALEX

Yes.

BENNETT

And I knew that if I was cursed to be like that - the worst kind of person-

ALEX

Bennett.

BENNETT

And if you're born to be a person like that you can either work and work to compensate or accept inevitable daily, yearly, or even weekly failures - which is not an option for me given my terrible work ethic and paper thin skin-

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

I should explain...

ALEX (Impatient)

(Still says nothing.)

BENNETT

Just-

I have the kind of skin that's so paper thin that trying to callous it just makes it tear and bleed, painful for the skin-wearer, but even more painful for others to look at. And with that kind of skin, and being a marshmallow eater, my only real option is to be radically aware of my own human failure and grow extremely skilled at being funny about it. Because I can do that, I can perform, I can stay "on" all the time.

Pause. ALEX nods.

Because if I didn't, life would be a series of gut-wrenching humiliations for being incompetent, a spiral of guilt for feeling so terrible over something so small, a look of pity in their eyes as mine well up, and a cyanide tablet if they still make those.

ALEX stops themselves from saying something.

But suicide would be the most humiliating of all. Especially if it's over accidentally spilling a Razzmatazz smoothie on a drawing my boss's kid made for her. So I have to be very, very funny. You understand.

ALEX

I do.

BENNETT

Because if you're built this way you have to make embarrassment productive.

ALEX

Okay.

*ALEX drops a kitchen item.
BENNETT bends down to pick it
up.*

BENNETT

You know, I would say I'm an artist.

ALEX

I never said you aren't.

BENNETT

Why would you even say that?

ALEX

I-

BENNETT

I have a system. I speak my thoughts out loud into a voice recorder and then transcribe them. I know I'm an artist because I've made it formulaic.

ALEX

Yes. I know.

BENNETT

Everything is a system.

ALEX

Sure.

BENNETT

Sure, sure, sure.

IT'S SUCH A CRUTCH TO BE COLD
SAM'S HOUSE

*BENNETT exits, SAM enters, and
SAM and ALEX sit down. SAM
and ALEX are sitting on SAM's
couch drinking wine.*

ALEX

I was actually wrong. About the day got lost at the fair. I was nine, not five.

SAM

That's a big difference.

ALEX

Yeah, probably.

SAM

No, it is.

ALEX

I just remembered it as, "when I was a kid...." It was saved in that folder. "Kid folder"
in my mind, I guess.
(Sneezes.)

SAM

I think you have a terrible memory.

ALEX

Yeah.

SAM

I take it back. It's not that bad.

ALEX

Yeah.

SAM

Yeah?

ALEX

...Yeah.

SAM

Why don't you challenge me on anything?

ALEX

Character development. Enneagrams.

SAM

What?

ALEX

Okay, yeah. Well. If someone was just watching us talk, and you're challenging me on this, they'd be probably think or say, "wow, I bet that person really needs to learn how to speak up." And with a lot of people I think that is probably the case, yeah? But if you knew me, or well, you know me-

SAM

Yeah, I really do.

ALEX

It's actually a sign of huge growth that I'm not saying much.

SAM

Well-

ALEX

I'm listening, right?

SAM

Isn't B- Aren't people always mad at you for not saying anything?

ALEX

Yeah.

SAM

And that's not listening, you can't claim "listening" just because you're not contributing-

ALEX

(Says nothing. Tries to listen.)

SAM

It's too late in the game to cry "introvert."

ALEX

You're kind of callous, you know that? Actually? Sometimes you really put up a barrier like "I'm sensitive be nice to me" and then really think it's okay to be kind of-

SAM

Bitchy?

ALEX

Combative.

SAM

Yeah, uh huh, sure.

ALEX

That was your word.

SAM

Are we good?

ALEX

I don't think I've ever even said the word "bitchy."

SAM

Are we good.

ALEX

Besides just now. And what?

SAM

Are we good? Like right now?

ALEX

Sure.

SAM

I feel like we can preempt this whole conflict. We're usually pretty resilient.

ALEX

I thought we were just playing.

SAM

Yeah, exactly.

ALEX

We have different styles of conflict resolution.

SAM

Sure. In that I have a style of conflict resolution.

ALEX (Suddenly nervous)

What if Ducky recognizes you somewhere?

SAM

He'd recognize me as the person who comes in to fix the fridge-

ALEX

But-

SAM

That's what you said, right? Fridge?

ALEX

But, okay, if he's with Bennett, and you run into him and Bennett, and he goes, "Sam! Sam from the fridge!"

SAM

What?

ALEX

Can you-

SAM

What.

ALEX
Will you be able to-

SAM
Can I what?

ALEX
In front of Bennett. Not. Like not, slip?

SAM
Yes.

ALEX
Or just keep it, you know, fully together?

SAM (Frustrated)
I don't know.

Long long pause.

ALEX
Cool.

SPECIAL BOY
THE SON'S BEDROOM

*SAM exits. ALEX kneels at their
son's bed.*

ALEX

Hey, sweet sleeping boy. You are special, okay? Want to make sure that you know that. Want to make sure I'm doing my job. I mean not for my sake, I just. You're special, okay? You are. Know it. You deserve to be treated accordingly. You are special. You are special. You are special. You are special.

Pause.

Yeah, you're special.

BLACKOUT.

YOU WEAR GLASSES
THE COFFEE SHOP

*LIGHTS UP on BENNETT
standing at the door of the coffee
shop, SAM seated at a table.
BENNETT walks into the coffee
shop. SAM sees BENNETT. SAM
keeps writing/sketching.
BENNETT approaches SAM.
BENNETT stares at SAM. Note:
Take your time with this moment.*

SAM (Although Bennett is the one staring)

Hi, sorry for staring

BENNETT

What

SAM

Sorry

BENNETT

What

SAM

I don't know

BENNETT

Sorry, you just look like someone

SAM

Don't we all?

BENNETT

It's just funny because you look a lot like someone who took something very important to me. For their own personal gain.

SAM

What a coincidence.

BENNETT

But you seem lovely.

SAM

You seem lovely. This was lovely. But I'm going

BENNETT

I'm sure you are lovely

SAM

Thank you

BENNETT

In heart

SAM

Thank you

BENNETT

I am sure you're very true

SAM

Oh, I fib

BENNETT

Lying and being true are not mutually exclusive

SAM

Well I'm going if you want this seat

BENNETT

You look just like them

SAM

(Breathes.)

BENNETT

But you have glasses

SAM

I am wearing glasses

Not even to make love

BENNETT

(Nothing.)

SAM

Or do both

BENNETT

I wouldn't be able to see what I was working on

SAM

Because these glasses are glued to your face, right?

BENNETT

(Nothing.)

SAM

Your lovely face

BENNETT

(Nothing.)

SAM

(Nothing.)

BENNETT

Thank you.

SAM

You are not them

BENNETT

(Is still.)

SAM

Because you wear glasses

BENNETT

(Frozen.)

SAM

YOU WEAR GLASSES
BENNETT

(Nothing.)
SAM

YOU WEAR GLASSES
BENNETT

(Nothing.)
SAM

YOU WEAR GLASSES
BENNETT

(Nothing.)
SAM

YOU WEAR GLASSES ALRIGHT
BENNETT

(Nothing.)
SAM

YOU WEAR GLASSES
BENNETT

("This is not my fault.")
SAM

("THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT.")
YOU WEAR GLASSES
BENNETT

Stop crying
SAM

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT 2

ALL THREE THE COFFEE SHOP

LIGHTS UP on the coffee shop. SAM is working at the coffee shop for a little while, their stuff all spread out at the table where they're sitting. ALEX and BENNETT enter the coffee shop, and, upon seeing them, SAM scrambles to tidy everything up. ALEX and BENNETT get in line. ALEX does not see SAM.

ALEX

But how are you feeling about it?

BENNETT

I don't know if it's helpful to be back at it again. I don't know. I need some duration in order to know.

ALEX

I'm asking you if you like it. That's what I asked.

BENNETT

No. No, I don't actually *like* it. But I don't think you should ever really enjoy doing something that makes you money.

ALEX

But, like, it's a fine place? I knew the-

BENNETT

Yeah, yeah! It's weird, though. Haha.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

(Smiles)

ALEX

Why's it weird?

BENNETT (Ordering)

Hi, yeah. We'll get one cold brew, uh, just a klein please, and one um half-iced coffee half chocolate milk please? And that can be, um, you know, a petit.

ALEX

Thank you.

BENNETT (To Alex, for paying)

Thank *you*.

ALEX

What's weird?

BENNETT

Well, they have these beautiful women just lounging all over the office. The most beautiful people you've ever seen. Like you just know just from looking at them and their outfits and their eyebrows that they're rarely, if ever, paying for their own coffee. And it sort of occurred to me, well, not sort of, it totally occurred to me that they didn't seem to really be doing anything. They were sort of around. Sometimes holding things.

ALEX

(Waits.)

...What were they holding?

BENNETT

Like coffee. Or a manila file folder. Yeah.

ALEX

Huh.

BENNETT

So I asked my one friend at work about, I have a friend by the way, and Casper told me that they're called "mermaids." And I said, uh, something like, "what do they do, swim haha?" And Casper said they're seriously just hired to sit around and look pretty. As some sort of a branding thing. Like if you buy one of our watches you're buying yourself part of a lifestyle where beautiful women follow you around and you pay them to contribute nothing.

ALEX (Not paying attention, noticing Sam.)

That's really. Wow.

*SAM spills a little coffee on
themselves.*

BENNETT (Testing Alex)

I think it has something to do with all the hormones they put in our milk.

ALEX

Yeah probably.

BENNETT

Why aren't you listening?

ALEX

Mermaids. Watches.

BENNETT

Oh!

ALEX

(Waits.)

Yes?

BENNETT

I forgot. I had a question for you. Earlier when I was thinking about the mermaids I was thinking about our bedtime story, yeah? And then I was thinking, "I had a flashback." But then I was thinking, wait, are flashbacks real? Do we actually get flashbacks in our brains, or is that just the name for what they do in movies?

ALEX

Yes, of course flashbacks are real. What.

BENNETT

But, I mean, is what we're experiencing just a memory? What makes it a flashback? Is that only for people with PTSD or trauma? I mean we all have trauma, but you know. I have trauma, but mine wasn't a traumatic flashback, so, or maybe it was, I mean who's to say

*ALEX awkwardly turns
BENNETT around and, flustered,
turns it into a hug.*

What was that for.

ALEX

You drive me crazy.

BENNETT (Grabbing their coffees, to the imaginary barista)

Thank you!

(To Alex) Drink this, you're being weird.

ALEX

Sorry.

BENNETT

And I hate it, okay? Is that what you wanted to hear?

ALEX

Then you don't have to do it. No one's making you do anything.

*ALEX and BENNETT exit. After
they're gone, SAM exhales. They
pull out their stuff that they swept
into their bag, annoyed that they
crumpled some of their papers in
the process.*

SO SAD
BENNETT AND ALEX'S HOUSE

*SAM exits and BENNETT and
ALEX enter. BENNETT and
ALEX sit on their couch, reading
or working on their laptops.*

BENNETT (Describing Sam's necklace, a test)

I like those necklaces, the ones with the clasp, you know. With the little gold chain.

ALEX

Do you want me to get you one?

BENNETT

Why would your spouse mention a necklace.

ALEX

Haha.

BENNETT

But no, I don't want it. It's kind of tacky.

ALEX

Yeah.

BENNETT

(Waits.)

ALEX

I-

BENNETT

I was walking past the children's hospital today

ALEX

When did they start letting children run a hospital?

BENNETT

You and jokes...

ALEX

Hands in their gloves.

BENNETT

I was walking past the children's hospital today.

ALEX

So you said.

BENNETT

And I passed by this woman. That's an assumption. But probably a correct one. And she was wearing a hot pink work out tank top that said "The Struggle Is Real" in swirly letters, with hearts and stars all around. And she was crying. Crying really hard. Into a Kleenex that wasn't enough. That was an assumption on brand. But probably a correct one.

ALEX

Wow.

BENNETT

And it was right by where that children's librarian was killed the other week. Hit by an ambulance that was going too fast.

ALEX

That's really sad.

BENNETT (Excited)

Yeah!

ALEX

I-

BENNETT

Isn't it interesting that geriatrics both eat and look like prunes?

ALEX

What's happening right now? Are you trying to make me feel bad?

BENNETT

No, no, I wasn't trying.

ALEX

Why do you get so excited about sad things?

BENNETT

It fuels art.

ALEX

Whose art?

BENNETT

Leads to a good story.

ALEX

A story's only as good as what happens in it.

BENNETT

I won't challenge you on that.

ALEX

Come up with any good articles lately?

BENNETT

Yes, actually. Glad you asked. Ready? Okay. "Jewish couple, bonding over shared love of dancing animatronic bear graphic interchange format, travels to rural Nebraska to meet the responsible graphic designer, who in turn confronts their own antisemitism and is ultimately written into the couple's will."

ALEX

Wow. That's an incredible story. How did you find that?

BENNETT

Oh, no, I just came up with the title. The tricky part's going to be finding content to fill it.

ALEX

A story's only as good as what happens in it.

BENNETT

Some people stick around for a whole lot of nothing if they feel really bad for one of the people.

NECKLACE
BENNETT AND ALEX'S HOUSE

BENNETT holds Sam's little gold chain necklace gingerly in their hands, considers, and hangs it up neatly on the key rack at the front of the house.

POMPEII
BENNETT AND ALEX'S HOUSE

*ALEX and BENNETT sit on their
couch.*

BENNETT
What are you reading?

ALEX
It's about Costa Rica.

BENNETT
Always good to know.

ALEX
A lot of people move their family there for a few months and send their kids to the quakers.

BENNETT
What's a lot of people?

ALEX
It's just a very neat experience.

BENNETT
For if a family has a crisis?

ALEX
No, it's just. No. Why would you-

BENNETT
Is this because of your call with Ken? Is Ken in Costa Rica?

ALEX
No, but it gave me an idea.

BENNETT
To read about Costa Rica?

ALEX
Ken's studying in Bombay for a year.

BENNETT
I don't... I don't think so.

ALEX

Did I get that wrong?

BENNETT

Well, Bombay's not a place you can go to study.

ALEX

Why?

BENNETT

It's that fictional city from that myth about the volcano that erupted and covered all the people with chalk.

ALEX

No.

BENNETT

Am I wrong?

ALEX

I just think it would be a fun sort of escape.

Pause.

BENNETT

What do you want to escape from?

ALEX

There are groups of artists there.

BENNETT

Sweetie, I think that happens everywhere.

ALEX

Forget it. Never mind.

BENNETT

I'd be more open to you doing your "necessary exploring" around Evanston, Illinois <or you can insert somewhere else, whatever> than moving us across the world.

ALEX

.... well, Costa Rica's not really "across the world-"

BENNETT

Isn't it so interesting that if people saw a giant turtle right on the steps of our house here they would say, "oh, wow," and probably even "holy shit," but if they saw one at a zoo they wouldn't think anything of it?

ALEX

(Waits.)

BENNETT

(Waits.)

ALEX

Oh because of the-

BENNETT

Yeah, there's a picture of the turtle in the book. I think he would like that actually. I should cut it out for him.

ALEX

...Out of the book?

BENNETT

You know, or maybe we should just take him to Costa Rica. See some real turtles. Meet some fake quakers. Escape.

ALEX

I actually just think it would be really cool. For you especially.

BENNETT

It's just a weird thing to bring up when we JUST bought our new dryer.

BENNETT exits.

ALL THESE POSTCARDS
SAM'S HOUSE

*SAM enters. ALEX assesses SAM's
bedroom. It's covered in post cards.
And it's messy.*

ALEX

All these postcards.

SAM

Yeah, I try to get one whenever I go to an art museum.

ALEX

You go to an art museum and you look at the art and you see how grand and majestic it is and why it's so important it's displayed like this and then you pay what, two dollars, for a flimsy little print of something you saw?

SAM

It's often around five. The proceeds go to the museum.

Beat.

ALEX

But why not three nice, framed pieces of art? Like an adult. I mean, you are a number of years old. This looks a little... straight out of that one movie.

SAM (Sassy, defensive, funny)

I love that movie so there.

ALEX

It seems like you never get embarrassed. I find that so interesting about you.

SAM

Ha. Don't worry.

ALEX

(Waits.)

SAM

(Says nothing.)

ALEX

I'm sorry, am I embarrassing you?

SAM

(Says nothing. Fiddles with their necklace.)

ALEX

I'm just teasing.

SAM

It's alright.

ALEX

I'm just teasing you. I know, I know. You're sensitive. It's sweet.

SAM

("Sweet?")

ALEX

But I'm just teasing. You're making me look bad when you can't take a joke. It seems like I'm mean to you.

SAM

Who am I making you look bad to?

ALEX

I'm just joking.

SAM

You know you really can't... please don't... you can't treat me like garbage and label it funny. I don't want that anymore okay.

ALEX

(Laughs.)

SAM

(Waits.)

ALEX

No, are you serious?

SAM

You can't be cruel and then get in my face telling me to laugh.

ALEX

You can sit there with a straight face and call me cruel?

SAM

You called me gross during sex...

ALEX

Are you with someone else?

SAM (flatly)

No, I'm not that kind of person.

ALEX

(Scoffs.)

SAM

It was you.

ALEX (With actual love)

I did not, I did not-

SAM

I was self conscious and making a joke about not having showered for a few days. And you confirmed. You made me feel really, you know what, really bad. I'm not going to apologize about having feelings that got hurt. That should be the other way around.

ALEX

I was joking along with you, and you know you knew you were kind of gross. And that's okay. Artist, artist, working artist, no sleep, whatever. I don't care. I'm actually a person who doesn't care. Do you get that?

SAM

See, that's the issue. Joking along with me when I call myself gross is joking, agreeing with my joke to remind me that you think I'm not enough, or incomplete, or not doing life right, is not.

ALEX

I called you "gross," not "incomplete."

SAM

Apparently my interior decorating is incomplete.

ALEX

Would it really be nicer to lie to you? I thought you had thicker skin than that.

SAM

Of course it's nicer to lie.

ALEX

I thought you liked yourself.

SAM

Sure, sure, I do, but I also hate myself. I hate myself the totally normal amount. Everyone hates themselves. You hate yourself.

ALEX

(Thinks.)

SAM

I'm not straight out of an Ulta Salon free blowout day-looking like Bennett.

ALEX

Stop.

SAM

And I won't be. Because you know why Bennett looks so damn great? Because all they do, all day, is work out, drink green juices, drive him around, and read the beginnings of Liane Moriarty novels. I don't have the whole block set aside for me in my day they do to concentrate on Being In Shape and Having Good Eyebrows because! Because because because I am working my ass off, giving back, making art, reading, and thinking for myself. And you said this is what you wanted, you didn't want superficial. So what you get is someone more than superficial whose house is messy and sometimes their shirt has an unidentifiable stain on it.

ALEX

You have never sounded more superficial.

SAM

I think maybe you should leave my house right now because the person you once found intoxicating and have since gotten bored of is about to say some things you

probably won't like hearing. But who's to say. You know yourself best. Do the best that you can do for you today.

ALEX

You sound like a child.

SAM

No, I don't.

ALEX

Every little thing is a personal attack. And I love you and I know you're bigger than that. So I'm going to suggest you frame a piece of art. Or look presentable. Because I care about you. I'm sorry you haven't gotten enough of it in your life for it to be recognizable, but that's love.

SAM

I didn't ask you to break the rules for me.

ALEX

No... you didn't "ask." Love isn't asking. I made a lot of sacrifices because I'm in love with you.

SAM

Maybe, and here's some feedback, you're in love with the idea of being with an artist because you accidentally married a piece of artwork.

THE FLICKER OF LOVE
BENNETT AND ALEX'S HOUSE

*SAM and ALEX exit and
BENNETT enters. BENNETT sits
on their couch, drunk, drinking
wine. ALEX enters and sits down
with them. They say nothing.
ALEX drinks as well. Note: They
are drunk. Like drunk people.*

ALEX
We fell in love once

BENNETT
Yeah, everyone does

ALEX
You really have our son's nose

BENNETT
...I don't know about that.

ALEX
You think you know everything

BENNETT
You think I think I know everything

ALEX
Yeah

BENNETT
(Drinks.)

ALEX
Has anyone ever broken your heart-

BENNETT
Yes

ALEX

Before me?

BENNETT

Yes

ALEX

I bet your literal heart is pretty. I bet everything about you looks nice.

BENNETT

I'm not one to bet.

ALEX

Your heart was broken?

BENNETT

They were in a band.

ALEX

No good can come from organized music-making.

BENNETT

I'd challenge you on that but

They were great. They told me all kinds of amazing stories I don't remember. And we'd do things like drive all night through some drive-over state and stay at a B and B

ALEX

Huh

BENNETT

A Bumble and Bumble, if you will

ALEX

I will.

BENNETT

And you have.

ALEX

What happened

BENNETT

I gave them my heart and they were like what is this I don't want this

ALEX

You know how everyone hates that grey area, that fuzzy space, that get off the airplane at 6pm and drive 45 minutes home and now it's too early to go to sleep but there's no fresh produce in the house and my stomach hurts feeling

At the end of a documentary where it doesn't wrap up as neatly as it should. There are all those loose bits that are too complicated for a filmmaker to get into in full

So you're left kind of fuzzy

That's how I feel when I come home to you

That fuzzy 6pm stomach ache

I just want to go to sleep. But it's too early and I'll have to masturbate to make that happen.

BENNETT

Sometimes I really don't like it when you talk

ALEX

I don't think that's entirely fair.

BENNETT

Sometimes you don't like it when I talk

ALEX

That's not why I think it's unfair. I think it's unfair because you always take my silence as me being mad at you.

BENNETT

I'm not mad at you

I've never been mad at you

I've never ever dipped my toe in

But maybe I've been a type of frightened of you

ALEX

That's mean

BENNETT

Oh, go lick a doorknob

They stare at each other for a long time.

ALEX

Our son will get nothing but love and support from us.

BENNETT

He's probably going to want *something* besides love and support from us

*BENNETT reaches over and
massages something into ALEX's
hands.*

ALEX

What is this I don't want this

BENNETT

It's a hand cream, I made it myself, rub it in

ALEX

Thank you, my hands feel so much softer

BENNETT

Stop wiping it off, let it absorb.

ALEX

It's absorbed as much as it can.

BENNETT

Have you heard of "semi-permeable?"

ALEX

Yes, I heard them play live one summer.

BENNETT

Me too!

ALEX

Really

BENNETT

Really!

BENNETT

June 12th, that year?

ALEX

It might have been... is that something

BENNETT

What

ALEX

Isn't that something

BENNETT

What

ALEX

I knew the flicker of love was still burning between us

BENNETT

You broke the one quiet rule. You said it aloud.

ALEX

What

This soap smells like rubbing alcohol

BENNETT

It's lotion, you monster

ALEX (Pulling Bennett in close)

We need to commit to being better at love.

BENNETT

Oh?

ALEX

For him.

BENNETT (Understanding)

Oh.

ALEX

(Stirs.)

BENNETT

(Considers.)

They stare at each other and then they start the process of having sex. BLACKOUT.

ON THE STOOP OF YOUR HOUSE
OUTSIDE SAM'S HOUSE

*LIGHTS UP. ALEX shows up at
SAM's stoop.*

SAM
Oh. Hi.

ALEX
Fancy seeing me on your stoop, huh?

SAM
I'm not, like, I mean, I just woke up, I'm kind of gross

ALEX
You're lovely.

SAM shudders. That word stings.

SAM
What's, uh, what's that you're holding?

ALEX
It's a funny story.

SAM
(Says nothing.)

ALEX
Want to hear it?

SAM
Yeah. It's cold.

ALEX
Yeah, it is. Can I come in?

SAM
No, it's messy, you won't like it. I was just noticing. What are those?

ALEX

Flowers!

SAM

No.

ALEX

Made of fruit!

SAM

...You brought me an edible arrangement?

ALEX

Oh, yeah, I guess. But I made it myself.

SAM

Why?

ALEX

So it's funny.

I had written down "Get Sam flowers of something." I had meant to type "or something," I think. But I looked down and saw flowers of something, and thought well, okay-

SAM

Did you write it or type it get your story straight.

ALEX

Wrote it with the phone keyboard. But yeah! Flowers of fruit!

SAM

But why?

ALEX

I'm sorry for being such a grump lately. I really care about you.

SAM

Okay. I mean. Yeah, okay, I love you. Or whatever. Go sober up.

ALEX

Oh, I'm not drunk. It's just CBD oil.

PAINTING

BENNETT'S WORLD/SAM'S WORLD

BENNETT finger paints (probably with their son). SAM paints on the other side of the stage. BENNETT makes words with the paint. Maybe on themselves. BENNETT ends up with some paint on their face. Sam packs up their stuff and exits.

I'M SORRY
THE SON'S BEDROOM

ALEX enters. In the bedroom, but the kid isn't there. BENNETT sits on the bed. BENNETT has the little bit of paint on their face. ALEX stands.

ALEX

I'm sorry. Not even as much for doing it, but for telling you. I'm saying sorry for me. Now, in this moment, it's for me. I shouldn't have been with them anymore, but I can justify that in my own head. It's been done. It's been swallowed. At night I sleep. The first day after you told me no, I had bought a cardigan from a kiosk earlier in the day, because I was chilly and because I felt ugly, and I thought adding something might make that better. So, when I got home that night, I cut that sweater into a thousand pieces, or maybe around sixteen, and then that didn't feel sufficient, so I grabbed the lighter from the kitchen and decided to set it on fire. But then I didn't want to. That was calling too much attention to it. So instead I lit a candle, put the pieces into a garbage bag and flung it into the dumpster, put our son to sleep, and made love to you, who knew. I could feel in the way that your thighs hugged my body that you knew. But I shouldn't be telling you. I thought the nicer thing to do would be telling you, but I know you know or you know something like it or you know as much and you don't want to hear from me. But yes, I was in love — it wasn't just bodies. But they didn't love me back so (trying to make a joke)... so maybe it shouldn't even count.

BENNETT

(Says absolutely nothing.)

ALEX

I'm sorry for telling you.

The longest possible pause. It's painful.

I-

BENNETT

The nicest - no - the best thing you could possibly do for me is to never speak.

ALEX says nothing. But it's a pained nothing.

BENNETT

Of this- Sam- yes, I know- and never say that name in this house or on earth. Don't squeal it, don't moan it, don't say it out loud in your dreams. But I never want you to say a thing, nothing else. Don't pretend to know how to raise the son. Don't tell me I'm attractive if there's pity in it. Don't tell me I'm pretty. But you may make sound. Here's what you may say:

1. I went grocery shopping. I don't resent you.
2. I put the groceries away. I don't resent you.
3. I got him from school. I don't resent you.
4. I made dinner. I don't resent you.
5. Here's \$100. I don't resent you.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

BENNETT

I laid out my needs so clearly. I tried to protect myself. I told you what I needed in order for you to not hurt me. I hate that. I hate that that didn't matter enough to you. I hate the kind of influence you are. I really do not like it. How did you grow up to be like this.

THIRTEEN MERMAIDS DEEP
THE SON'S BEDROOM

*ALEX and BENNETT are in their
son's room, once more putting him
to sleep.*

ALEX

Once upon that time.

BENNETT

In the magic land where things happen.

ALEX

Let's call it "Cleveland."

BENNETT

The fisher rubbed his temples, and assessed his situation.

ALEX

The thirteenth mermaid had just left.

BENNETT

Packed up her toothbrush and bristle protector and gone.

ALEX

Never to be seen by the fisher again.

BENNETT

Except for three months later, when she would be lonely and invite him over, not remembering how - the way - he was.

ALEX

Until he got there, said something about a female politician or LadyBird.

BENNETT

And was asked to leave again, in a fantastic mermaid blast of glory.

ALEX

That was also pretty rude.

BENNETT

It was okay.

ALEX

She hadn't needed to attack his taste in music like that.

BENNETT

It just hadn't worked out.

ALEX

Despite the twelve mermaids before her-

BENNETT

He wasn't really looking for a relationship right now.

ALEX

Or they weren't compatible.

BENNETT

Or "whatever."

ALEX

"Could it be me?" He thought.

BENNETT

Probably not.

ALEX

Yeah, probably not.

BENNETT

He deserved something great.

ALEX

He deserved someone kind and thoughtful and challenging.

BENNETT

And, frankly-

ALEX

A fantastic sex life.

ALEX looks down at their
sleeping son.

I mean a really cool art easel.

BENNETT

It couldn't be that he had grown up believing that he was special and deserved something special, and, carrying that belief with him, discarded the women-

ALEX

Mermaids-

BENNETT

He was with without a shred of remorse.

ALEX

No.

BENNETT

Because he would know if he was doing that.

ALEX

And that would be really bad.

BENNETT

So.

ALEX

So he wouldn't do that.

WE DON'T WORK
SAM'S HOUSE

*BENNETT exits and SAM enters.
ALEX stands in SAM's kitchen.*

SAM (is very sad)

I'm not going to comfort you.

ALEX

No, I know-

SAM

I have things to do.

ALEX

I know, I. Yeah, I know.

SAM

I have a tuna salad to prepare.

ALEX

Yeah, I know.

SAM

How did you know that?

ALEX

I love you.

SAM (At the same time)

I've been feeling like it's time

ALEX

Oh.

Beat.

You go first.

SAM

Yeah, I will.

Long pause. SAM tries and fails to get a bit of sleep out of their eyes.

I'm going.

ALEX

Okay.

SAM

I felt this coming. And I'm not worth leaving for and I think that would be the only way.

ALEX

This is about you right now-

SAM

Don't talk.

I- No...

I was going to say, "I don't think we work," but that's not right.

ALEX

No, that's not right.

SAM

No.

I don't think *you* work. I think something got off. And now you can't love. At least not in a way that has any weight behind it. I would say you should try and fix it, but I don't know if you are, that that can be your priority right now. You may have run up to the end of the window in your life when it could be the priority. There's someone you're able to love, because apparently *this* type of love doesn't sit well with you over time. So, that's okay. Do your thing now. You'll know what to work on if you're reincarnated.

ALEX

Oh, I don't believe in that stuff.

SAM

No, of course you fucking don't.

ALEX

When I was seven, my parents had forcibly made me get bangs, and I hated them. I hated them so much. I thought I looked terrible, but my mom assured me they were very cute and I looked very lovely. And I tried to feel that, I tried to own that. And then the first day of second grade, this child told me I looked better without bangs. In a completely matter-of-fact way. "You looked better without bangs." It would have hurt more if it had been a direct insult, I think. That was a bad year. I won't get into why, but I know you know why. And I spent the whole year trying to grow my bangs out, and, when I finally had, I was taken for a haircut once again. And the woman cutting my hair asked, "Do you want to cut your bangs short again?" And in that very moment I sneezed. I sneezed in such a way that it had apparently sounded like a, "yes." And just like that, I had bangs all over again.

Long pause.

SAM

It's a good thing you aren't good at getting other people to feel sorry for you you'd be very dangerous if you were.

ALEX

I think some people feel bad for me.

SAM

Maybe if they were introduced to you in the right way.

ALEX

With a handshake?

SAM

You're not funny. Don't ever for a second think you're funny. You don't deserve that.

ALEX

You are meaner than me.
Do you know that?

SAM

I never called you mean.

ALEX

I hope you find-

Long pause.

SAM

What?

ALEX

Yeah, I don't know, actually. Not my area of expertise.

WEDDING
SOMEWHERE "UP NORTH"

There's a change. SAM has exited. ALEX and BENNETT melt into each other's arms. The kind of melting that happens when you've just kissed in front of all eight of your collective grandparents and stomped on some glass. We see BENNETT and ALEX, nine years before, at their wedding.

ALEX

And I'll be standing next to the most beautiful-

BENNETT

Aw.

ALEX

I'm the luckiest-

BENNETT

I said, "aw," what more are you trying to get out of me-

ALEX

I've gotten everything I need out of you.

BENNETT

Weird.

They kiss.

ALEX

I'm your person.

BENNETT

Right, that's what we signed earlier. There's something at the tip of your tongue?

ALEX

Slave. I was going to say I'm your slave but then I thought that was wrong. Sorry.

*ALEX goes in for a cheek kiss,
sneezes, and grabs on to
BENNETT for support.*

BENNETT

People are looking...

ALEX

I'm sorry.

BENNETT

It wasn't a value judgement. We're just the only ones in white.

ALEX

I love you.

BENNETT

Right, I love you. And you know.

ALEX

Oh, but the sheer ecstasy of hearing it out loud.

BENNETT

You're funny.

ALEX

You crack me up.

BENNETT

I know, I've heard it.

ALEX

I love you.

BENNETT

I love you.

ALEX

God, am I lucky-

BENNETT

He says yes.

They crack up and kiss.

Are you eyeing the shrimp?

ALEX

A little, sorry. Do I seem distracted?

BENNETT

YOU SURE DO.

ALEX

Well, I could eat.

BENNETT

Sorry, I don't know why it came out like that.

ALEX

Maybe you're hungry.

BENNETT

I DON'T THINK SO.

Beat.

Sorry. I don't know why it came out like that.

ALEX

Maybe you're hungry.

BENNETT

I don't think so. I have felt so many good things today - I don't think I have room to feel hungry.

ALEX

I'm hungry for you.

BENNETT (flatly)

Is that supposed to be romance?

Long pause.

ALEX

Yes.

BENNETT

Yeah, I'm hungry for you too.

ALEX

I love you.

BENNETT

And by hungry for you too, I meant "you, too," not "you two," as if there were two people.

ALEX (Playfully)

Is there anyone else?

BENNETT (lightly)

Is this the place for rhetorical?

ALEX looks around.

I would kill for a bacon wrapped date.

ALEX

I'll get you one.

BENNETT

Don't bother. I'm not hungry.

ALEX

But you will eat the cake.

BENNETT

The optics wouldn't be good if we didn't force feed each other.

*They crack up. They kiss.
BENNETT just wants a peck.
ALEX is really going in for an
"open mouth kiss" as some would
say. It's a tough recovery from that
one.*

ALEX

Did you invite anyone from work?

BENNETT

Yes, they're mingling.

ALEX

I don't see them anywhere...

BENNETT

That's how eyes work, baby.

ALEX

I love-

BENNETT

Me. Me too.

BENNETT IS A FILM THEORIST
BENNETT AND ALEX'S KITCHEN

There is a big change. BENNETT and ALEX are in their kitchen, in the future. BENNETT sits on the counter while Alex opens and closes cabinets, looking for something they want to eat.

BENNETT

I learned this in a film studies class and it might be completely inaccurate because humans are terrible at listening. Well, I've heard that, it might be completely inaccurate, and because the professor may have gone rogue that day but okay here is the information I was prefacing. Wait, did I tell you, before I forget about what David said – no. Focusing. Okay. When we watch TV or a movie or, I don't know, I think people still go to plays, we just buy into whoever is introduced to us first as a good guy. And we root for them, generally, even if they suck. Or if two people are looking at each other shyly - boom - love! We're sold! Doesn't matter if they're actually good together, but we're convinced that they are meant to be. We are so weird, you know?

ALEX

Well. I don't think we're weirder than anyone else.

BENNETT

I mean people.

ALEX

Is this romance?

BENNETT

No, I don't think so.

ALEX

I think we're-

BENNETT

I think maybe we're too old for that.

ALEX

Right, yeah.

BENNETT

Finish the bread, I can't have gluten.

ALEX

You're gluten intolerant?

BENNETT

No, I don't have problems with any major allergens. I just don't eat them in solidarity.

BLACKOUT. BENNETT exits.

SAM AND ALEX MEET
THE COFFEE SHOP

Lights up on the coffee shop. ALEX notices SAM, scribbling furiously, occasionally elbowing their backpack, with small contents falling onto the floor. ALEX wiggles off their wedding ring against their side, and subtly pockets it. ALEX and BENNETT are in an open relationship during this moment. ALEX picks up a small pamphlet or card, out of the little pile of things that have accumulated on the ground.

ALEX (Holding a pamphlet or card, thinking they're funny)
You dropped this.

SAM turns to face Alex, and their stare is piercing.

Yeah, how do you know? SAM

I...don't. ALEX

Huh. SAM

I deduced. ALEX

Well, I did drop it. SAM

:) ALEX

(Waits.) SAM

ALEX

Yeah, you did. You dropped it.

SAM

So thank you. (*Leaning in to Alex.*) But you can keep it.

ALEX

Oh. Oh, wow, okay.

SAM (Laughs)

It's for, it's my-

ALEX

Oh, yeah I see, you gifted me promotional material.

SAM

And they say romance is dead.

ALEX

Do they? Do they say that?

SAM

Yeah, they do.

ALEX

I guess I haven't been listening

SAM

Is that supposed to be-

ALEX

Hmm?

SAM

Never mind.

ALEX

(Says nothing.)

It's, uh-

SAM

(Sneezes.)

ALEX

I'm in a band, Semi-Permeable.

SAM

A bunch of science guys?

ALEX

A bunch of guys who are really into absorption.

SAM

Right, right, I know the type.

ALEX

SAM (Tapping their pen on their paper, still staring at Alex)
(Waits.)

ALEX

What do you play?

SAM

Trumpet when the song calls for it, and I'm not the one listening to the song close enough to know what it's asking for. So mostly I'm in charge of putting lotion on their hands an hour before they go on, to make sure it really seeps in.

ALEX

Since skin is semi-permeable
Haha.

SAM

I don't get it.

ALEX

(Sneezes.)

SAM (Referring to the sneeze)

What?

ALEX (Explaining)

I'm embarrassed.

SAM

Hey, it's okay. I think you're good.

ALEX

Alex.

SAM

Sam.

ALEX

Well, uh. I'm intimidated. Thanks for that.

SAM

Do you have a phone number?

ALEX

I do.

SAM

I'll take that promotional material back then, I guess.

ALEX

Oh, uh, okay, here-

SAM

I mean-

ALEX

What?

SAM

I mean write your... and then give it-

ALEX

Oh, oh right. Oh. Yeah. Oh, okay. Writing. Here. Do you have a pen?

SAM

("Really?")

Sorry. ALEX

*SAM hands Alex a pen and smiles.
ALEX writes, drops the pen, picks
it up, finishes writing, then hands
it back.*

Thanks. SAM

No- ALEX

Beat.

What? SAM

No problem. Sorry. Had trouble finishing that sentence. ALEX

I under- SAM

(Smiles.) ALEX

Is this a landline? Because I saw you slip that wedding ring into your pocket. SAM

I, um. ALEX

I'm not, you know, I don't know what your situation is. SAM

Who really knows anything? ALEX

God. SAM (dead fucking serious)

(Doesn't know what to say.) ALEX

Just kidding! SAM

Oh, oh, good, because I was gonna say- ALEX

Call me. If you can. SAM

I can. ALEX

If you may. SAM

I may. ALEX

I April. SAM

What? ALEX

See ya. SAM

SAM takes off. ALEX stands there for a moment. Then ALEX does a tiny jump, touches the table where SAM was sitting, and then exits. BLACKOUT. Water sounds mixed with the musical theme if there has been one.

BENNETT SAYS GOODNIGHT
THE COFFEE SHOP

LIGHTS UP. BENNETT stands on stage at the coffeehouse/open mic, at night in the coffee shop. They approach the mic, take a deep breath, and begin.

BENNETT

Once upon a time there was a mermaid who was very kind, and, not that attractiveness is quantifiable, beautiful. Every day the mermaid felt more and more trapped. Every day. But in a way, being trapped was sort of beautiful. Like snow. Beautiful in light, or dark, of how horrible it felt. And how cracked her hands became. And the mermaid, having powers, as mermaids do, used all her force to summon a great snowstorm to snow down into the lake, forming beautiful, mesmerizing crystals in a water that was quickly congealing into ice around her. As her skin turned blueish and her vision grew foggy, she couldn't help but notice how much she was glittering within the aquatic frost. How beautiful.

End of play.