

ABSTRACT

The Ghosts We Knew

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Stories are the fastest way to communicate with a person. As a society, we respond much better to stories than simple facts. As I studied theatre, I came to learn this more and more and wanted to be deeply involved in the story crafting process, so I decided to write a play for my thesis. It is a story about a young woman, Anna, who struggles with the loss of both her parents and cannot move forward out of her grief. This grief turns her bitter, insane, and ultimately costs her a job and relationships. Drawing on my studies of great books, films, and plays, I wrote a story that hopefully helps those grieving realize that, while the pain is very real, there is hope to be found.

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THE GHOSTS WE KNEW

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INTRODUCTION

The lights dim and a hush falls over the audience. Everyone anxiously awaits the story they are about to see. Backstage there is a buzz of excitement before the curtain rises and that excitement spreads throughout the room. It's the buzz of potential. The stage is alive with it. Magic could happen here, and we could all participate in it. A story is about to unfold. To me, these kinds of moments represent the pinnacle of what it means to be alive — and that reason played a large role in my deciding to write a creative thesis.

By Kindergarten, I was a reader. In first grade, we were awarded points based on how many books we read. The goal was to get enough points to “land on the moon.” The teachers had to keep extending the scale for me and I finally reached Pluto (back when it was still a planet). To a certain degree, all my major life experiences have been marked by a counterpart in literature. (For example, my first crush was on Tolkien's Aragorn son of Arathorn, when I was in third grade.) Throughout my daily routine, I longed to escape into a book and enter an entirely new world. That longing has stayed with me my whole life.

I started my undergraduate studies thinking I would emphasize in music. I've had a love of musicals since seventh grade. I saw that they had a power to change lives in a powerful way that I needed to be part of. I didn't have any training in theatre, but believed that if I couldn't be on the stage, I could be under it as a flautist. I was later encouraged by the music faculty that if my dream was the stage, I should follow my passion. So I switched my emphasis within University Scholars to theatre, and it fit perfectly with my love of storytelling.

Once in the department, I asked several people about the kinds of theses that had been done before. I was encouraged to pursue dramatic theory and theatre history for a time. When I learned writing a play was allowed, but the prospect terrified me: I didn't think I could write anything comparable to the amazing pieces that had changed my life. Over the past two years, I have come to understand and embrace that the point is not to rise to soaring heights and change lives right away: It's to put in hard, sustained work and carry projects to term. To be a writer demands that one write, consistently, every day and over a sustained period of time. The challenge of completing the senior thesis instilled in me the importance of sticking with my passion and finishing the draft, no matter how hard it got.

By the fall of my junior year, I ended up in Dr. Murray's Great Texts in Stories capstone course. We explored great texts in literature, film and drama not only from an analytical perspective but also as creatives. As we discussed C.S.

Lewis's *On Stories*, I recognized the internal gut feeling I had carried around with me for so many years: stories have great power to change people's lives and capture a side of reality that might otherwise go unseen. Dr. Murray was exactly the type of professor I had been looking for someone who has a passion for stories, yet also has a love of academia. Until then, I thought I needed to choose.

The term before, I was enrolled in Oxford Christians with Dr. Wood and fell in love with Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*. Orual's character spoke to me. After reading *Till We Have Faces* I knew I wanted to attempt to bring Orual to life on the stage and, for Dr. Murray's course, I adapted Lewis's book into a stage play. It was my first foray into such detailed and sustained creative work. I remember several conversations with her after class worrying that I wouldn't be able to write creatively. I wanted to write a creative thesis but didn't think I was capable of carrying such a project to term. And yet, when I took the plunge and started working on my play, I found myself wanting to write more and more. This work excited me in a way nothing ever had. I had always enjoyed taking classes and learning, but for the first time I found myself inhaling as much information as I

could on the subject. Though it was exceedingly hard work, it was work I loved and I pushed myself to excel. I summed up the courage to ask Dr. Murray to advise me on a creative project. I let my fears go. Rather than worry about whether or not my honors thesis would be useful for graduate school applications, it became an end in itself. Along the way, I came to understand that writing a play would in fact bolster and enable me to become a better dramaturge or director (if I decide to pursue either) for it has helped me acquire both a theoretical and practical understanding of story structure.

Influences

Some of my biggest influences in writing have been those that captured my imagination as a child, such as C.S. Lewis. As I mentioned before, C.S. Lewis has greatly shaped my writing. Orual was one of the first characters I fell in love with as I explored ideas for my thesis. She captured my heart and revealed the depth of influence a hero can have on an audience. Lewis created a character that wasn't necessarily likeable but entirely relatable as a human and particularly a woman. The fact that words can create something so beautiful was appealing to me. I have endeavored to create a similar character.

In my play, *The Ghosts We Knew*, Anna starts out much more likeable than Orual. As the play progresses, she responds to the stressors in her environment in such a way that we continue to have empathy for her while recognizing the limitations of her decisions and difficult personality. (This is an area of character development to which I plan on returning during the next revision.) In so many ways, Orual inspired Anna and their journeys follow a similar course. In *Till We Have Faces*, Orual experiences the loss of her sister. The audience watches Orual's grief turn to bitterness and slowly destroy her life. Anna sets out upon a similar downward spiral.

Lewis's other work that profoundly affected me was *On Stories*. In this work, Lewis outlines the effects of a good story, and why they are important. I have used this work as a measurement to see where my play succeeds and falls short. In this essay, Lewis writes how stories can imitate reality in a unique way and therefore helps us see our lives in a new way. This is exactly what I hope my play can do, and what he wrote has been a constant inspiration I have gone back to repeatedly, a phenomenon he references in the work.

Shakespeare also continues to be an important creative influence. I have read almost every play he's given credit for. Each story is so intricately woven that they are fascinating to analyze. I've spent the most time with *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. I'm less inclined towards his histories although there's a special place in my heart for *Richard III*. King Richard

was known as a bloody and evil king, but the characterization that Shakespeare gives him is fascinating. Richard is absolutely despicable with no redeeming qualities, for even the moments that he seems redeemable are founded on pretense. Nonetheless, this character is enthralling and interesting to watch. This is a complex man with many layers, rather than a one-dimensional character easily written off by the audience. Though my play doesn't have any inherently evil characters, the complexity of Richard has been an inspiration to me. After seeing that complexity in a character so completely different from the way most people's brains work, it was much easier to attempt translating that complete roundedness into people I liked and felt I knew.

In a similar vein, *Macbeth* is a dark character. Though the characterization in *Macbeth* is very good (I particularly enjoy Lady Macbeth), the structure of the tragedy was most inspiring to me. Shakespeare weaves a complex web throughout the plot with clear markers and events to enable the audience to follow along. The opening image is one of the best I've ever read. It is an icon for a reason. The witches on the heath give just enough intrigue and foreshadowing of what's to come that the audience is suspicious and incredibly curious.

Most impressively to me, Shakespeare was able to keep all of what made his darker works so fascinating alive within his comedies. As noted above, my two favorite are *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Shakespeare proves he is a master of language in his comedies more than any other genre, and his word

bending abilities have been an inspiration to me since I could understand what he was saying. Not only does he make you laugh, but he is able to create characters that on the surface seem very shallow because they are comic (such as Olivia in *Twelfth Night*), but have a great depth to them once fully explored. This is why actors yearn to play these characters, because they are so rich and deep. To learn to write well, it seems, the old adage is true: One must read Shakespeare!

Contemporary playwrights have influenced me as well. In recent years, due to the failing economy, there has been a shift in theatre to become simpler, with limited sets and restricted budgets. The best contemporary playwrights have learned to craft stories that seem very simple: There may not appear to be a lot of actions or events at first glance. Characters react in subtle ways to show an overall arch that grows very naturally. Some of my personal favorites are Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, Terrence McNally's *Lip's Together*, *Teeth Apart*, Will Eno's *The Realistic Joneses* and David Hare's *Skylight*. Each of these masterfully weaves a tale that is very subtle but exerts lasting impact on its audience. They reflect life so well because it doesn't seem like a grand adventure that only the chosen get to go

on. There isn't an obvious choice in a dilemma that we make to therefore cross the threshold, we just suddenly find ourselves there — trapped in the midst of a post-modern world. Audiences can relate to these protagonists and their lives because they feel so much like their own. Such plays are much harder to analyze for structure because they seem so low key; and yet, in analyzing, I was able to truly appreciate the work that goes into each line of every scene and the inherent dramatic structure that undergirds them. While I'm still very new at playwriting, I recognize that I cannot achieve such a level of sophistication in my first play.

However, these modern playwrights have been so influential throughout the process that they have given me a standard I hope to someday achieve. They show how much care must be put into every moment, and that as a writer, you have to be able to climb inside each character's head for each scene to know how they would react and for what they are searching. For all of the above reasons, I have been inspired to work harder and become as detail-oriented as possible. When it comes to crafting a great play, the devil truly is in the details.

Creative Process

I initially set off to write *Till We Have Faces* as a stage play. Very quickly into the process I realized this would be far more difficult than I thought, particularly because the story requires so much inner dialogue to convey the character that it just cannot be done onstage and seem genuine. (I also discovered the novel had recently been adapted for stage and hadn't done well). I then considered modernizing Lewis's story. As I worked, my own tale slowly took on a life of its own, with Lewis lingering constantly in the background, informing my decisions.

Ghosts That We Knew is a story about Anna Thompson, a newly engaged young woman, who struggles to confront the sudden death of her mother. Her father died several years prior, and she finds herself orphaned. This grief consumes her and turns her bitter. Because she can't let go of the past that can no longer be, she gradually loses the future and all she has left. Though funny at times, it is very much a drama that explores the deep pain of grieving and how that changes relationships — for better, or for worse.

Though not the story I initially set out to tell, this story is very important to me. On October 15, 2014 my paternal grandfather died, leaving my father an orphan one year, one month, and one day after losing his mother. It's a common story: a spouse cannot live long without the other. While it sounds very sweet, it leaves their families flying from one crippling loss to another. My dad is the

strongest man I know, but that year devastated him. In his pain, we watched him lash out at those closest to him, not because he was angry with them, but because he was hurting so much that he didn't know how else to respond. While my dad never got to the point Anna does in my play, we were all worried for him and at a loss to see how to help him. Words of comfort became white noise and words of loving truth were met with anger. While I had never experienced this before, the more people I talked to, the more I discovered a common theme. I'd heard of the five stages of grief, but this was so much more. As I looked at Orual's story, I realized it was the truth in her pain that resonated within me. It showed that there isn't always an easy answer. Pain like that takes a deep toll and cannot be pushed under the rug. Rather than making a cliché of the pain so many have felt, it honored that time not as something to be praised, but as something deeply human. It honors relationships. It honors love. But it isn't pretty. As I watched my dad battle this grief, it felt like a presence that always surrounded him. In a way, I understood that. While he wasn't my dad, I loved my grandfather dearly and carried a small portion of him with me — I still do. I recognized grief was a distraction from pursuing the wonderful future before me. I also felt that moving on from the distraction would somehow dishonor my grandfather and belittle the relationship we had. I knew that he would want me to move forward, but felt as though moving to the future meant I had to forget the past, and I couldn't do that. I wanted this play to show the pain of loss and the anguish of trying to move forward in as real and honoring a light as possible.

I also very specifically left major consequences for Anna's actions in the play. Though her actions were out of grief and understandable, I didn't want to portray life as easily wrapped up with a bow. In life, you don't get to pretend nothing happened, and you don't get free passes to behave however you'd like when you're in pain. Choosing to grieve badly has consequences and I felt that ignoring those would undo all the work I did in the rest of the play trying to portray and honor true life. Those that have experienced pain know a happy ending doesn't magically appear. While I want this play to be accessible to all people and believe it will because all have experienced some form of pain, I felt that ending everything nicely would turn away those that had suffered deep losses because they would recognize that's not the way the world truly works. I know that not all stories have to completely reflect reality, in fact some of the best don't, but I think it is important to give those that feel alone in their pain proof that they are not. Sometimes people respond to character and fiction in a way they cannot respond to their own reality. When someone comes to see a play, they are opening themselves to see the story and life of the people onstage. In life, we tend to be selfish and see everything through the lens of our own pain and selfishness so we don't always recognize when someone can identify with us. I want my story to be something that can give someone a lifeline to grab onto. No one is alone. Even when Anna believes she is and forces herself into a place of loneliness, all she has to do is reach out in humility and someone is there for her. If one person would

read or see this play and realize that, I believe it would be worth all the blood, sweat, and tears I have shed over it.

The best part of the play though, is that it doesn't end there. There is more hope than just that someone out there understands you. Understanding is often what we seek when we are in pain, but it doesn't move us forward, it keeps us stuck in the same place. Though Anna doesn't get her perfect ending, she does end with hope for the future, even if it is a vague one. This is the most important part of storytelling in my opinion. As writers, we have a duty to leave our audience with truth. As a Christian, truth always includes hope. While I don't want my play to be seen as an evangelical play, I want to point towards the truth of the Gospel. As a Christian, I always have hope of a better tomorrow, whether that is actualized or not, because Christ has promised His return. Since I am reaching out to those in pain, I cannot remind them of their pain and leave them there. I want to offer a branch of hope. I have purposefully left the end very open to interpretation, I don't want to give a specific vision of what that hope looks like, because in reality it will look different for every member of the audience, and I want to encourage that. I want them to see themselves in the play and interpret the end in the way most applicable to their lives. In doing so, I believe it opens a door for Christ to move in their heart, and there can be no better opportunity.

What I Learned About Writing

The process of learning to write a creative thesis was incredibly demanding and took almost twice as much time and energy as actually writing the play. Because I started with almost no knowledge of story structure, starting from the bottom took a lot of work and a lot of analysis. It was also incredibly worth it.

The most valuable information came from Dr. Murray. Having direct access to her class helped immensely, and her book *Three Act What* was almost like being able to carry her around with me. In it, she outlines the basics of the three act structure and the electronic formats allows for the inclusion of video tutorials. I was also privileged to work with two of her other students, Megan Legband and Kathryn Sommers, as part of her newly founded “thesis pod.” We each had information we had absorbed from her and from other books and stories we were reading. Thanks to all of these resources and opportunities for learning, I now know the three act-structure like the back of my hand. This was incredibly important because, as Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*, plot is the most important thing in stories, followed closely by character. Dr. Murray gave me the materials to quickly master creating a plot that functions to support and provoke the transformations that undergird all insanely great stories.

As part of this process, I created a “beat sheet” that forms the skeletal structure of the play (and from there, developed the beats into a professional step

outline — a scene by scene map of the entire work from which I was free to deviate as much as I deemed necessary). The point was not to be formulaic, but to ensure that all the necessary ingredients were in place for my story to succeed. Below, I have included my final beat sheet for *The Ghosts We Knew*:

Opening Image:

This is the opening of the play and should give an insight into the themes and characters. I chose to have Michael propose to Anna. This was difficult because I wanted to show a theme of the play and establish characters without blatantly giving away what was going to come.

Ordinary World:

This should be a few scenes that establish the world your protagonist lives in at the beginning of the play and it definitely shouldn't be perfect. I chose to use: Pam and Anna at work for the non-profit, Anna working as a wedding event planner, and Anna getting ready for a date with Michael while Pam is a little controlling. I wanted to give a variety of scenes that displayed the world Anna was comfortable in, but it still needed to have flaws, so I included some tension between Pam and Anna.

Storm is Brewing:

This is the moment in your ordinary world that shows something is coming to change the world of the protagonist, but the protagonist definitely doesn't recognize it and your audience might not either. I chose to have Pam not feel well at work. I looked up signs of a heart attack and tried to incorporate them in a normal day. This would show that Pam works very hard and is dedicated to her job (so that Anna would want to take the job later on) and she would act like this wasn't a big deal.

Inciting Incident:

This is the moment that everything changes for the protagonist whether they know it or not. I chose to have this be the moment Pam dies. This was a difficult decision because that feels like it could be a dilemma moment, but I wanted this to be something that happens to Anna and afterwards she must make a choice. This doesn't follow the optional "whether they know it or not" but the shock of it would be interesting to the audience.

Dilemma:

The stick of dynamite that was lit in the inciting incident explodes and the protagonist must make a choice. This could also be called the "should I stay or should I go" moment. I chose to have Anna offered her mom's old job. This forces

Anna to make a choice that is interesting, and just when she thinks things couldn't be worse, she has something new explode she must deal with.

Crossing the Threshold:

This is the moment the protagonist commits to the quest and new world. I had Anna accept the job. This was very difficult for me. I didn't want a scene that only showed her accepting the job, but I knew this was a major moment for her. She is half shoved across the threshold because, a major part of the new world is her living without her mom, but I needed her to make an active choice. There wasn't a way for Anna to commit to the new world of being without her mom, which was really the world I wanted to create, but I could make a new world with her having a new job.

Adventure Sequence:

This establishes the extraordinary world, much like the ordinary world sequence. This involves many scenes including the gaining support. I had Anna speaking at Pam's funeral in which Pam appears. This establishes that Anna will see a hallucination of her mom in this new world.

Gaining Support:

There is a new influence for the protagonist in the new world. I had Anna go to a therapy group. This was tricky because I needed to introduce a new character to help her get through the change, but Pam as a hallucination is the character that really has the most influence on her in the extraordinary world. But I also wanted to bring someone new that was helpful, so I used a support group so that she could have potential help for getting rid of the hallucination. I almost didn't include this because Pam could be considered a new character in this world, but I felt these people were important.

Adventure Sequence Continues:

I used: Anna at work in her mom's job, Anna packing up her mom's old things, and Michael finding out about her hallucination. This was a very difficult section for me. Normally things start going south for your hero after the midpoint, but I needed to establish that Anna wasn't handling grief well in this section so that her brick wall (a beat that is to come) would be believable. I needed to find settings for her that would showcase not only Pam in her life, but also show the stress of trying to move on after a death.

Midpoint:

This is the point in which the protagonist goes from passive to active. They have been going along with the new world, but here they make a choice that

changes everything. I had Anna choose to take medicine to make the hallucination go away. This would make everything spiral for the downhill to come, and also speaks to one of the main tensions in the play.

All Downhill

This is a sequence of events in which things go from bad to worse. There is an ever-increasing amount of setbacks for the protagonist. I had: Michael and Anna in a huge fight, and Anna getting fired. This was difficult because this is the usual place stories go to die. You have to keep it interesting and engaging while not being cliché. Also, being a stage play, I was limited in scene changes so I needed to keep things as simple as possible with long scenes. I had to make sure my character development was exactly right. I also wanted the main source of setbacks to come from Anna's choices, but I really wanted to highlight that the way she handled grief was the reason her life became worse.

Brick Wall:

This is the moment where all is lost for the protagonist. But instead of breaking down and giving up, they recommit to the quest made when they crossed the threshold into the new world. This should also be directly connected to what happened at the midpoint. I had Pam reappear and, because of that, Michael leaves Anna. As Anna doesn't know what to do, she talks to her mom and decides

to take the medication consistently and commits to taking care of herself and to try and move forward to fix the mess she created. I really enjoyed this moment because I think it is the moment the audience relates to the protagonist the most. I wanted to create a moment that everyone recognized, because everyone has at one point asked themselves “how do I go on from here?”

Final Face-off:

This should be a three-fold plan that the protagonist comes up with. Part one, they enact their plan. Part two, it seems to go well, but falls into a trap. Part three, they push through and succeed with the mission. These were mine:

1. Anna tries to get her job back
2. Anna runs into Michael on a date and tells him she has her job back while it's still unknown.
3. Pam reappears and Michael sees Anna talking to her. As she and Michael work things out, the stress that brought her mom back goes away and Pam disappears. Michael and Anna begin to patch things up.

This was the hardest part of the journey for me and changed the most often. I knew I wanted Anna to end up with the consequence of losing her job, but have a glimmer of hope between her and Michael. It was incredibly difficult to find ways to keep the tension high enough to be interesting while spiraling out of control (as

it should be). It was also difficult because instead of three distinct scenes that contains each part, I had to put part two of the plan into the beginning of my third scene.

Closing Image:

This is the final moment of the play in which we see how the ordinary world has changed as a result of the journey. There is a new world and new equilibrium. Anna finishes packing her mom's things and she leaves with Michael as Pam looks on unseen. This was hard for me, because the ordinary world I established was lost forever and Anna would never have her mom again. I chose to try to show a new equilibrium, and I definitely wanted that to include hope. It was also very hard because I wanted it to be fairly open to interpretation so that it could speak to each person where they needed the most hope. I wanted to create a moment that incorporated the journey Anna made but didn't force anything on anyone. And while not forcing, I wanted everyone to leave with hope while not trivializing the pain that is definitely still there.

The outlining process was so helpful for all of us as we began our theses and forced us to make sure we knew story structure incredibly well. While this took a significant portion of our time, it made the rest of the process go much faster.

Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* also provided valuable guidance to me as I explored my new-found passion for writing. In that book, Vogler explores the three-act structure looking mainly at the hero's journey, but breaks everything down even further. With his guidance, I dug into specific character types and what types of characters are needed at important junctures of the story. Through Dr. Murray, I learned that I needed at least one new supporting character at the beginning of the second act, and in Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* I was able to learn about specific tropes and types. One I particularly found interesting was his "shadow" character. Most simply call this the antagonist, but Vogler goes deeper. The shadow can take on many forms, but always represents the energy of the dark side. These characters rarely see themselves as villains, but rather heroes of their own myths. This was particularly useful to me as I didn't write the usual "evil" antagonist character, but one that brought out darkness in Anna while believing it was best for her. What I found most interesting was the darkness already inside Anna that was so easy to bring out, just as there is darkness in all of us that can come to the surface under the opportune circumstances. The flexibility he described of the shadow character, rather than just being the "bad guy" gave me the freedom to be more creative and ultimately had a profound impact on the story I told.

One of the most important things I learned about writing came about through the process. I'd heard it a million times and read thousands of interviews

that said it: The only way to get better at writing is to write. When I found it most difficult to keep writing was when I needed to the most. Dr. Murray initially made me fill in an outline of my story, and I had to go through and edit this outline several times. Each time I did it, it came easier to me. The same happened as I wrote scenes in my play. As I learned what worked and what didn't, I was able to apply it faster, therefore getting better results quicker.

One of the ways I got better by doing was in the crafting of dialogue. In a stage play, there is very little setting and direction given in comparison to dialogue. This was very intimidating at first, because I felt dialogue was very difficult. And truth be told, I was really bad at writing it (as many novice writers are). My characters would say exactly what they felt with very little prompting and therefore the scenes were too easy. It also meant they were saying a lot more than they needed to say. I learned the best dialogue comes out of the setting and the tension therein. Characters must be backed into a corner and react. The audience must feel the tension and the dialogue simply adds or subtracts from it. Characters don't have to say exactly what they are thinking and feeling, in fact it can be much more interesting to have them talk about something meaningless when everyone understands they are thinking about something else. Subtext like that must come out of the natural tension within the scene and not from other dialogue. This goes to the famous phrase "show, don't tell." That line was a constant mantra for me as I wrote, and it was especially tempting to "tell" because I was writing a stage play.

For stage, there is essentially only dialogue. Big things can be added for direction, but small glances are lost. It's not even the writer's place to block the scene, so there shouldn't be much stage direction given, leaving nearly everything to dialogue. I needed good subtext, but somehow had to convey everything I wanted to. I had to learn to trust that my audience was intelligent enough to read between the lines I was creating, and that they didn't need to know every thought I wanted to communicate. Sometimes the most powerful plays affect different people in different ways because of how they interpret the subtext. I had to let go and trust that the situation would speak for itself, assuming I had crafted a setting that worked well enough.

A New Perspective

Writing this thesis has given me a new perspective on many of my favorite books, including many of the amazing works I read during my time as an undergraduate at Baylor. As a freshman, I studied great texts of the classical and medieval traditions from a literary standpoint. As part of the goals of such classes, I learned to recognize the language used, the historical setting, and unpack themes. All of this laid a solid engagement with the ongoing creative conversation and prepared me to write my play. Throughout that creative process, I gained an even greater appreciation for the works I already loved.

Aesthetically, anyone can appreciate the work of a story. Most can understand that each story comes with a great deal of work. True appreciation for the work that goes into it, however, can only be found after attempting yourself. If you attempt to write something worthwhile rather than just simple fiction, it will force you to study those works that are considered classics for something entirely different. As C.S. Lewis explains in *On Stories*, it forces us to look for that something extra that makes these stories so special, worth re-reading over and over again to gain something new. Rather than reading these works as dead documents to parse through and analyze, they became alive to me in a completely different way. And in revisiting them, I learned not only something new about each book, but about myself — and even more importantly, about the techniques authors employ to engage their audiences and make them care. (As Andrew Stanton points out in his much-viewed TED talk, the main point of storytelling is to make us care.)

There is no more solid foundation for writing than reading. Engaging with tradition gave me some idea of what to aim for. I also learned to extend some grace to myself. As Ira Glass points out, “your taste is why your work disappoints you.” I’ve found this rings true as a young writer. Reading the Classics established and honed my taste. While I’ve had to learn to temper my enthusiasm and hone patience as I develop my skills and aim to improve my voice, without all the books

that have guided me on this journey, I might have missed the spark of what makes stories magical and vital to us as human beings.

The biggest change I've noticed in regards to great texts through writing my thesis is the broadening of my definition. Though Baylor has great texts courses that cover a wide range of topics, the term still implies Classics, in a very traditional and narrow sense of the word. Most students at Baylor who are required to take Great Texts take Ancient and Medieval and it stops there. Though the students who take these classes are intelligent enough to realize those aren't the only two categories great texts fall under, the courses and title imply the term only includes traditional giants. Even when choosing books for their exit interview, University Scholars must choose books that are considered "great" in the classic sense. While these are very important to read and I uphold that University Scholars should read them and analyze them, wrestling with a creative thesis has widened my view of the term. Greatness can take on many different forms, and Dr. Murray specifically has helped show that with her courses that look closely at story — how it evolves over time, and how human beings are continuing to strive to make sense of their place in the world. Not only does your view of greatness broaden, but so does your view of the word "text" paired with it. Baylor very specifically calls these courses great texts, not books, which opens doors to include scripts and essays and the like. While essays tend to hark back to the classic definition of text, it doesn't have to mean just famous theological or

philosophical essays. While I have been drawn to those that look at stories, there are fantastic essays that passionately explore every field man could think of. All these are great texts. We don't only have to think of Shakespeare, but we can think of *The Matrix*, which was completely groundbreaking when it came out. While it doesn't have the luxury of time to uphold it as a giant, that doesn't make it less so. Though this seems a trivial realization, it makes a huge difference. Once as an academic I can stop looking down on what pleases the masses, not only do I then help create better works for the masses, but I become a better person. The pride that I used to associate with the ability to read and understand greatness that others couldn't is stripped away when the term greatness is adapted.

As Neo learns in the *Matrix*, writers are constantly seeking to answer "the question that drives them." From what began as a senior thesis intended to fulfill a requirement for graduation, I have learned that I am indeed a writer and that story is one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal, as human beings, to point toward truth and inspire others to live better and more productive lives.

The Ghosts We Knew

By

Kate LeTourneau

Cast of Characters

<u>Anna Thompson</u> :	A 24 year old wedding planner
<u>Pam Thompson</u> :	Anna's mom. 50.
<u>Michael Miller</u> :	Anna's fiance.
<u>Janet</u> :	Head of the Board of Directors
<u>Susan</u> :	Board member
<u>Bill</u> :	Board member
<u>Randy</u> :	Board member
<u>Mary</u> :	Grief counselor
<u>Amanda</u> :	Support group member
<u>James</u> :	Support group member
<u>Miles</u> :	Support group member
<u>Hannah</u> :	Coworker with Anna
<u>Heather</u> :	Anna and Hannah's boss
<u>Haley</u> :	A girl Michael goes on a date with.
<u>Clayton</u> :	Friend in video
<u>Megan</u> :	Friend in video
<u>Kathryn</u> :	Friend in video
<u>Carol</u> :	Michael's mom in video

ACT I

Scene 1

A park, early evening. Golden hour. A blanket is spread out on the grass with rose petals and soft candles all around. A make-shift screen made out of a sheet hangs behind the blanket. Michael, a 25 year old accountant, enters.

ANNA

(offstage)

What if I run into something?

MICHAEL

Follow me.

Anna, a 24 year old event planner, enters blindfolded. Her arms are outstretched. She stumbles about blindly. Michael guides her onto the blanket by the sound of his voice.

ANNA

Michael, what is--

MICHAEL

Almost there. A little to the left. Too much. Now forward. Come on, a little bit more-- Ok perfect!

Michael pulls off her blindfold. Michael motions for her to sit down. Michael goes to the projector. It plays on the screen.

People appear on screen. Video and pictures of Anna and Michael's lives together unfold. During the video, Michael sits by Anna and holds her hand as they watch it. "Chasing Cars" by Snow Patrol plays in the background.

ANDREW

Anna! I'm so glad Michael is making this video. I just wanted to tell you, in all the 16 years we've been friends, I have never seen you happier than you are with Michael. When he walks into the room, you light up, and it makes my heart melt.

KATHRYN

Is this really happening? Oh my gosh I love it! You guys are just wonderful, and I love that you found each other.

CLAYTON

Hey there Anna. Well, I guess Michael picked a pretty good one. He would never tell you this, but the moment he met you he wouldn't shut up about you. We seriously all got annoyed with him, but hey-

CAROL

Rick and I have loved getting to know you these past few years. And what a great fit it's been! I never thought Michael would find someone even more competitive at board games than me!

PAM

Here we are. I am so proud of who you've become. My baby girl is all grown up and ready to start her own family. I love you and your father would have loved Michael too.

MICHAEL

I love you Anna Christine Thompson.

The video ends. Michael stands Anna up to face each other.

MICHAEL

I had planned and rehearsed a really long speech, but I can't remember most of it now.

Pulls out a ring and gets on one knee.

Anna Thompson, I love you, will you marry me?

ANNA

Yes.

Anna pulls him up and hugs him.

CLAYTON

(beat)

Kiss her!

Michael puts the ring on her finger. They kiss. People from the video and more flood onstage to congratulate them. After general greetings are exchanged and lots of congratulations, people clump off and form conversations. Pam pulls Anna aside.

PAM

You like it?

ANNA

It's beautiful! Same cut as yours. He listened well.

PAM

Well, it would have been hard to ignore given the number of people you told.

ANNA

It's better for both of us. Imagine how awkward it would have been to not like it and have to return it.

PAM

He did get something in the ring you didn't ask for. Michael came to me before he bought it and asked if he could use some of the silver from my necklace as the metal for the band. He wanted something from your father and our marriage to be a part of it.

ANNA

What?

PAM

He knows how much the necklace means to me. He felt it would be like getting your dad's blessing. He's a good man. Be good to each other.

ANNA

And you were ok with him taking part of it?

PAM

For you? Absolutely. Your dad would have wanted it too.

(beat)

You are ENGAGED! And it all went so well!

Michael walks over

ANNA

It was perfect.

MICHAEL

I did work pretty hard on it. I'm assuming your mom told you?

ANNA

Thank you. I love it.

MICHAEL

You're welcome.

ANNA

And I love you more.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Anna and Pam's home. Anna puts shoes on, dressed nicely. Pam is in the kitchen, offstage.

PAM

I've been there and know exactly how exciting tonight is, but I still say you need to be back by midnight.

ANNA

I know I live here, but I am an adult you know.

PAM

And I'm still your mother. I'll be up late worrying about where you are and won't be able to sleep.

ANNA

Thought that phase would've been beaten out of you when I was in college.

PAM

(entering with her dinner)
Only made worse when I can hear you come home. And like I've always said- nothing

ANNA AND PAM TOGETHER

Good happens after midnight.

PAM

You've learned. Now, let me see you.

Anna gets up and spins slowly to show off her outfit.

PAM

Are you sure that's nice enough?

ANNA

Seeing as I'm the one that's actually been to this restaurant before, I think I have a good idea how I'm supposed to be dressed.

PAM

I'm just saying- it's a nice place! And it's your first evening as an engaged couple.

ANNA

And I look nice, don't I.

PAM

Always.

Pam kisses her forehead.

PAM
My necklace.

ANNA
Yeah. You'd taken it off for the day, and it goes so well with the outfit-

PAM
Asking is always a nice thing.

ANNA
I'm sorry. Mom, may I please borrow the necklace that you are done wearing today?

PAM
I'm not sure.

ANNA
You're not wearing it. And it shows that I appreciate Michael's gesture.

PAM
I wouldn't want you to be responsible if something happened to it.

ANNA
It's just as likely that something will happen to it while you're wearing it as I am.

PAM
But it's mine and therefore my responsibility.

ANNA
Nothing's going to happen to it.

PAM
I've tried saying no nicely. Please don't make me be rude.

ANNA
Little late for that.

Anna takes it off and gives it to her mom. She exits to her room to find a new necklace. Pam puts the necklace on herself and eats her meal. Beat. Michael knocks at the door and pokes his head in.

MICHAEL
Everyone decent?

PAM
Yes! Come in. Anna's just finishing getting ready.

MICHAEL

Par for the course.

PAM

For the rest of your life.

MICHAEL

She's worth the wait.

Anna enters.

ANNA

Sorry, babe, I had to change something last minute. I swear, I was ready on time.

MICHAEL

You are beautiful.

ANNA

Thanks.

PAM

I told Anna I think she should be back by midnight. Think you can do that?

MICHAEL

We can try. We're catching a pretty late movie, but I promise I'll get her back to you in one piece. And as early as possible.

PAM

Midnight will be early enough.

MICHAEL

I know- nothing good happens after midnight.

Blackout.

Scene 3

Pam's office, early evening. There are lots of pictures and papers scattered around the office about a carnival from last year. Anna and Pam organize them. Pam looks at a picture.

PAM

I did love the opening display this year. It was the best it's ever been. I'll have to keep that.

ANNA

Do you have the dates set?

PAM

Not yet. I try to ask the donors what works best for them and plan accordingly. That way it shows that they are really a part of the process.

They continue to organize. Pam is visibly unwell.

ANNA

I've got this. You've been feeling off all day.

PAM

Nonsense. You wouldn't know where to begin.

ANNA

Mom. I've helped you every year. I've got this. I won't take no for an answer.

PAM

You did inherit your father's temperament. God knows you didn't get it from me.

ANNA

Not another word. Go home. Now.

PAM

Maybe just this once. Thank you, darling.

Anna looks worried.

ANNA

Maybe I should call it a night. I'll come with you.

PAM

It's just a stomach ache. I should know better than to eat all that pad thai. Besides, I have the board meeting on Monday.

ANNA

Rest. Michael and I are going to look at a couple of venues this weekend but I can help you after that.

PAM

Look at you. My little girl, all grown up. Soon you won't need your old mom anymore. I'll be fine.

ANNA

I'll always need you, mom. And my kids will too.

PAM

What? Are you saying--

ANNA

No! I'm speaking hypothetically. Unless we are witnessing a second immaculate conception, you'll be waiting at least nine months after the wedding.

PAM

How did I raise such an old fashioned daughter? Mercy me. Your father and I--

ANNA

That's enough.

PAM

He was so handsome in his seersucker suit, I couldn't contain myself.

ANNA

Mom!

(beat)

I just wish-- I wish--

PAM

I know dear. I wish he were here too.

(beat)

I think I had best sit down.

ANNA

Mom, what is it?

PAM

Maybe there was something off with that chicken.

Pam sits and massages her left arm. Blackout.

Scene 4

Inside a church, mid-morning. Anna and Hannah frantically work on decorations.

HANNAH

Scissors?

ANNA

By the bench.

Hannah finishes her project. She looks at the to-do list.

HANNAH

Finish the flowers and we're done.

ANNA

I can't believe anyone actually goes for this stuff.

Heather, their French-Canadian boss, enters.

HEATHER

How long will the lanterns and petals take? And yes, Anna, they do. Our job is to make the customer happy! You'll have your own special day soon enough. Now, where are those lanterns.

HANNAH

What?

HEATHER

The lanterns- we ordered them to be hung- and the petals, to line the aisle.

HANNAH

There aren't any.

Heather pulls out a piece of paper and points to the design showing lanterns and petals.

HANNAH

The delivery must be late.

HEATHER

I brought them over yesterday. Behind the choir pit.

HANNAH

I didn't see them. We'll get it taken care of right away.

HEATHER

Two hours, ladies. Two hours. The countdown begins now.

Anna and Hannah mouth "the countdown begins now" with her. Heather exits. Hannah and Anna retrieve the petals and lanterns. Anna's phone rings. She ignores it.

ANNA

Random.

HANNAH

Let's do the lanterns first.

Both string up lanterns. Anna's phone rings again. She ignores it. It immediately rings again. She turns it off.

HANNAH

They sound persistent.

ANNA

I never answer unknown callers. Besides, anyone who would need me knows I'm at work and can't talk. You heard Heather. The countdown has begun.

HANNAH

Lanterns and petals, coming up. Not my style, but

TOGETHER

"Les gouts et les couleurs ne se disputent pas."

They laugh, then continue to work in silence. As they lay petals down, Michael enters.

MICHAEL

Anna.

ANNA

(never looking up)

Sorry babe, we're swamped here. Dinner tonight?

MICHAEL

Anna, we need to talk.

ANNA

I'd love to. At dinner. We're crazy stressed here right now.

MICHAEL

It can't wait.

ANNA

Well then tell me quickly.

MICHAEL

In private.

ANNA

Tell me now, while I work, or wait till dinner.

MICHAEL

Anna, sweetheart, it's your mom.

Blackout.

Scene 5

The board room of the non-profit Pam worked for, afternoon. The board is in the room: Janet, Bill, Susan, and Randy.

JANET

She said she'd still come.

SUSAN

Does she know enough about it?

JANET

She worked on it with her. She knows more than anyone else.

BILL

But today? Two days is hardly a sufficient mourning period.

RANDY

Yes, but we can't postpone on our end. Since she's the only one who can decide, we'll let her.

SUSAN

Well, if she's not here in another fifteen, I'd say that's our answer.

JANET

Let's not jump to judgment over grace. When your world is rocked like this, organization goes out the window.

BILL

Poor girl. Both parents in 4 years- and so young.

A knock at the door. Anna opens it slowly, dressed professionally, though without makeup and hair skewed.

ANNA

Sorry I'm late.

JANET

Come on in, dear.

Anna sits.

BILL

First of all, we're sorry we had to bring you in.

ANNA

Deadlines are deadlines. It's good to be busy.

SUSAN

I'm sure. I'm so sorry, darling.

ANNA

I assume this is about the carnival.

JANET

It's our understanding that you were working on it with your mom.

ANNA

Sparingly.

RANDY

We obviously don't expect you to know the ins and outs of it all, but we were hoping you could answer a few questions.

ANNA

Anything I can do to help. It was so important to her.

BILL

The children of our community look forward to every year. Something we would hate to lose. Unfortunately, as a board we divided projects amongst ourselves, and this was your mom's alone. Since we all have our own projects, none of us feel that we can take this on and do it well. Rather than scrap the event altogether, we hope you might be able to help us.

ANNA

I'm not sure how much help I could be. My job keeps me pretty busy. And, to be honest, I don't think this was a part time event for her.

JANET

Not at all. Which is why we would like to offer you a full time job.

RANDY

We don't expect an answer right now, but due to our deadlines, we can't wait longer than a week.

JANET

If it's too short a time considering funeral preparations, we understand, we just wanted to give you the opportunity to say no.

BILL

And if you need any help on that front, we are all willing to help.

Uncomfortable silence as Anna doesn't answer.

BILL

(insensitive)

We of course want to be sensitive to your schedule. Do you have any questions for us?

ANNA

At the moment, no. I'll call you if I do.

JANET

Anna, I know this is what your mom would have wanted, dear. But it's important that you think about what you want too.

ANNA

I'm not sure what that is anymore.

Blackout.

Scene 6

Inside a church, early evening.

ANNA

I still say it might be a little big.

MICHAEL

Better too big than too small.

ANNA

We should have the guest list, or at least a close estimate before we decide.

MICHAEL

Thankfully this place doesn't require a deposit so we can change our minds later.

ANNA

We could reserve the space at First Baptist and it would be much cheaper.

MICHAEL

You get what you pay for.

ANNA

I know, it's my career.

MICHAEL

Not anymore.

ANNA

I can't even think about that right now.

MICHAEL

Let's just deal with what's in front of us. Our dream venue. We need to reserve the date.

ANNA

Our dream venue.

MICHAEL

Yes. It's beautiful.

ANNA

That doesn't make it perfect.

MICHAEL

(beat)

I'll bite. What's wrong with it?

ANNA

It's not First Baptist.

MICHAEL

You're right. It's prettier. It's nicer. It's more convenient.

ANNA

And we have absolutely no connection to it.

MICHAEL

People get married at venues they have no connection to all the time. You watch it happen everyday.

ANNA

Exactly. I watch it everyday. I'm not gonna be one of those people, and if you can't understand then maybe--

Anna cries and sits down. Michael sits next to her.

MICHAEL

Honey, what-- why-- talk to me.

ANNA

I don't get to be any of those people.

MICHAEL

And you don't want to be. Maybe that's a good thing.

ANNA

They can have the wedding wherever they want because they'll have whoever they want. I've spent years getting used to the fact that my dad will never walk me down the aisle. Now I am supposed to do this without my mom? You know I'd love this place, it's beautiful. But

ANNA

I need my parents. And if I can't have that, I'd like to get married in the church where they raised me.

MICHAEL

I get that.

ANNA

No, you don't. You have no idea what this feels like.

MICHAEL

You're right. You're right, I don't. I do understand what this means to you. We'll call First Baptist. Ok?

ANNA

Michael, I don't even know if it's a good time to-

MICHAEL

You're feeling emotional, that's all.

ANNA

That's all. It could be a disaster. You might wake up one day and realize you don't love me anymore. What if I can't make you happy? What if--

MICHAEL

Christmas comes on a Sunday this year?

ANNA

Stop it.

MICHAEL

(looking at the calendar on his phone)

What do you know? It does. It must be an omen. What are we going to do.

(They laugh)

Beat. Michael stands and partner dances by himself.

ANNA

What are you doing.

MICHAEL

Dancing.

ANNA

Clearly. Why.

MICHAEL

Our song is on. You don't hear it.

He softly sings "Chasing Cars" by Snow Patrol. He pulls her to her feet to dance with him.

MICHAEL

Anna, I can't promise you life will be easy. I can't make you any guarantees. No one can. That's the thing about life. But I can promise to love you until there's no breath in my lungs as long as you don't leave me at the altar.

ANNA

I suppose I have to make peace with it.

MICHAEL

You'll see her in heaven. But I don't intend to give you up too soon.

Fade to black.

ACT IIScene 1

A church. Pews downstage with various people for the funeral. Anna faces the audience behind a pulpit. She speaks in a lifeless voice as she reads her notes.

ANNA

Thank you for being here today. I am sure my mother would have been so pleased to see the number of people she touched.

Pam enters, a hallucination. She sits in the back pew in the corner. She is neither seen nor heard by anyone.

PAM

Good crowd.

ANNA

She was an amazing woman. A pinnacle of our community. She always sought to put others before herself and succeeded. She loved everyone around her perfectly and knew how to put their needs above her own.

PAM

And so we bestow upon her the title of saint. It's just like everyone imagines. All the positives about you and none of the negatives. So strange.

ANNA

She was a loving mother, friend, and wife. She was also a diligent employee.

PAM

That's it?

ANNA

Her annual carnival has become something cherished by our town and-

Anna looks up from her notes, sets them down, and speaks from the heart.

ANNA

I can't do this. My mother was so much more than words on a page, and pre-planned words cannot and will not do her justice. I'm not sure if any words could. But she was incredible. I've never met anyone who loved as sacrificially as she did, laughed as easily, or just genuinely made you feel comfortable in your own skin. I

ANNA

don't mean to use a cheesy phrase, but she truly was my inspiration to be a better person. When people would say I reminded them of her, it was the highest compliment I ever received. And if I could ever become the woman she was, I would consider it a life well lived.

Pam stands and applauds. Only Anna sees her. She freezes, shocked.

PAM

You can see me?

Anna tries to continue and ignores her.

ANNA

Umm, she was my best friend--

PAM

Anna, do you see me?

Pam runs forward. Anna, frightened, runs out. A choir comes up and sings "How Great Thou Art."

PAM

I'll take that as a yes.

Pam stands in front of choir and conducts.

Scene 2

A few days later. An empty room, save a circle of chairs. Several people sit for group therapy, all except Anna are in their late 40s or 50s.

JAMES

And because of that, it just feels like I could never allow myself to trust my heart again. Jeanine would want me to. She was so young. And good. And not just to me, to everyone. How am I supposed to let go?

MARY

We know it's hard James. Allowing yourself to grapple with that fear shows that you are growing and moving forward. I think we all identify with you.

(nods and murmurs of agreement around the room, save Anna)

We all lost someone far too early in life. With that comes the rational fear that you will lose others just as easily. You can't allow that fear to define you.

MILES

It sounds cliché, but give it time. I went through the same phase, and though I still battle those thoughts, it's gotten much easier.

AMANDA

We're all here to be that support for you.

MARY

Absolutely. We're in this together.

(beat)

Anna, how are you doing?

ANNA

Fine.

AMANDA

People don't come to this group because they are fine.

MARY

Anna, I know it's hard to open up. We haven't pressured you the last few times, but it is an important step. Please, talk to us.

AMANDA

(jokingly)

You're paying for this. You ought to at least get something for your money.

JAMES

(playfully as well)

Because that's why we are all here, sure. To pay for other people to listen to our problems.

AMANDA

Hey, I'm just saying.

MARY

Trust me. It gets so much better once you say it out loud.

ANNA

I have said it out loud. I spoke at her funeral. Really, it's helpful just to listen to you guys and realize I'm not alone.

MILES

You're not alone. And you'll feel even less alone once you tell us what you're going through.

MARY

(comforting, but insistent)

Anna, I know that you can do this.

ANNA

(beat)

My dad died 5 years ago. He was hit by a drunk driver that ran a stop sign. I didn't really go to a group then for it. I had my mom. And I had school, so I could just try to ignore it a lot. But I really think I came to terms with that. And I'm sure I'll get there again. I'm really here because my fiance wanted me to come talk to people who understand.

AMANDA

Five years is a long time to hold it all in. It's good to get it out.

Pam enters. Anna tenses.

ANNA

I'm also afraid I might sound crazy.

MARY

We all have.

ANNA

Certifiably insane.

AMANDA

You won't scare us.

MARY

Maybe we can help with that.

Anna looks at her mom.

PAM

You **can** see me.

ANNA

Ummm--my mom died of a heart attack. Three weeks ago. Well, 24 days ago. She was at work and hadn't felt well that day, but we both assumed it was just a stomach ache and no big deal.

PAM

I did, you were worried.

ANNA

And I know she wouldn't hold it against me, but I'm afraid I'm holding onto guilt about it.

PAM

You didn't do anything wrong. Do you hear me. Anna, this was not your fault.

ANNA

I know it wasn't my fault, but I think subconsciously I must think it was, because--

(deep breath)

I've been having hallucinations.

PAM

Of what?

MARY

No one thinks your crazy. That's actually fairly common in grief, particularly if you were very close.

PAM

Wait, me?

ANNA

But it's like she's here and talking to me. I'm insane.

PAM

Because I am talking to you.

JAMES

An insane person wouldn't question their sanity.

MARY

Do you see her all the time?

PAM

What kind of question is that.

ANNA

Occasionally. And she talks to me.

MARY

What does she say?

PAM

Whatever I feel like saying.

ANNA

She says whatever she wants. And that she's not a hallucination.

PAM

I'm not.

MILES

Naturally.

PAM

And what is that supposed to mean?

ANNA

And I really want to believe she's real, but she's dead. She can't be. I must just think it's really my fault that she's dead. If only I'd seen the signs she'd still be alive. That's why I can't let go of her.

PAM

It's not your fault. That's not why I'm here.

MARY

She tells you it's your fault.

ANNA AND PAM

No.

MARY

That's good.

ANNA

I need to know how to get rid of it.

PAM

It? Since when is the woman that gave birth to you an "it?"

MARY

Sleep. That should help with a lot of it.

PAM

Again- it?

MARY

But I'll write you a prescription for a drug that helps with hallucinations. Until then, let her speak to you. If she's not shaming you, she could be helpful in figuring out the best way to move on. When was the last time you saw her?

ANNA

Right now.

PAM

(waving)
Hi. I'm "it."

Blackout.

Scene 3

Anna's office. Anna works at the computer. Pam spins in a chair nearby. Anna is on the phone.

ANNA

You see, we've received several donations from you in the past... I understand that... I understand that... What difference does it make who's running it now... Well, I'm her daughter, so it's not as if some stranger has taken this in a totally different direction... If you've decided that you don't want to serve the children in your community anymore, say that. Please don't disrespect my dead mother by trying to make this about her. Not only does it disrespect her, it disrespects me... Thank you... Goodbye.

Anna hangs up.

PAM

That was harsh.

Anna resumes computer work. Beat.

PAM

This office is a ton more fun when you don't have to actually work in it.

Anna continues as if she cannot hear her.

PAM

You should try it- it's fun!

(beat)

Come on, Anna. Have some fun! Get out of the mopiness.

Pam scoots her chair to Anna and spins around right next to her.

PAM

Earth to Anna- come in Anna.

Pam pokes her. Anna swats her away.

PAM

Ah, hah!

ANNA

Well, if you wouldn't be such a child I could actually get some work done.

PAM

If you weren't ignoring me I wouldn't have to be a child.

ANNA

Or you could accept that I'm trying to live a healthy life by not giving into my psychotic break downs.

PAM

Sure.

Pam scoots her chair back and spins again.

ANNA

What's that supposed to mean?

PAM

I'm giving you the space you asked for.

ANNA

And what does that mean?

PAM

Nothing. Just doing what you asked.

ANNA

Could you be less cryptic.

PAM

Not trying to be.

ANNA

Why are you here.

PAM

Good question. Why are **you** here.

ANNA

Is this a lesson I'm supposed to be learning?

PAM

I have no idea. I'm just as stuck as you are.

ANNA

Fine.

Anna turns back to her work. Beat as Pam continues goofing around. Knock on the door.

ANNA AND PAM

Come in!

Janet enters.

JANET

You have a second.

ANNA

Sure. Trying to find new donors.

JANET

Yes, I got a call from Cynthia.

ANNA

Oh.

JANET

She had just spoken to you.

ANNA

Yes.

JANET

(beat)

It sounded like it didn't go all too well.

ANNA

She insisted that without my mom, it wasn't going to go well and she wasn't sure she could "waste her materials" that way. I didn't really appreciate that.

JANET

I'm sure. Cynthia's not known for her tact. But still, she is a good relationship for us.

ANNA

And she clearly wants to sever ties.

JANET

Your mother was her main contact.

ANNA

So we were going to lose her no matter what.

JANET

Maybe. Perhaps next time someone has an issue, direct them to us rather than take the heat yourself. It's not a fair position to put either of you in.

ANNA

I can handle it.

JANET

I'm sure. But it could be difficult to respond well in a situation where you feel personally attacked.

ANNA

And I don't want to push battles onto you guys.

JANET

If you think you can respond gracefully-

ANNA

I'm sure of it.

JANET

Well then. I won't keep you any longer. Have a good day.

ANNA

You too.

Janet exits.

PAM

Oh, Janet.

ANNA

Oh, people.

Anna continues to work for a moment. She closes the laptop suddenly.

ANNA

Wanna have some fun?

Blackout.

Scene 4

Anna and Pam are at home, boxes everywhere. Anna goes through and divides up what she should keep and get rid of. Pam watches.

ANNA

(holding up a photo)

Look how happy you were.

PAM

My god- my hair. Why any of us thought we could pull off a perm, I'll never know.

ANNA

But look at dad.

PAM

You're right- his clothes too. Yeesh. Makes me look good.

ANNA

No, the way he's looking at you.

PAM
Wondering why he would marry a woman with hair like that.

ANNA
Come on.

PAM
Yes. He looks very sweet. Now put that horrific thing away. It's only looking back on your life that you realize you were actually a hoarder.

ANNA
So that's why you're here. To show me the horrors that will befall my children if I follow in your footsteps.

PAM
Of course. That's why all parents come back as a ghost.

ANNA
Yeah. A ghost.

PAM
You have a better word for it.

ANNA
Hallucination.

PAM
I resent that.

ANNA
No, you resemble it.

PAM
You don't actually believe that lady.

ANNA
The licensed therapist specializing in grief. Yes, I do. Reality isn't "Blithe Spirit." Ghosts don't wander around in our lives.

PAM
Or we're just lucky.

ANNA
Lucky.

PAM
Yes. We don't have to say goodbye.

ANNA

No we're insane- I'm insane. I'm talking to myself.

Anna has gotten to Pam's jewelery and holds up her mom's necklace

PAM

You should wear it. To keep both of us near your heart.

ANNA

I don't need you near my heart, I have you following me around.

PAM

For now.

ANNA

Going somewhere?

PAM

Apparently, if you take those meds.

ANNA

So you admit you're not real.

PAM

No. But I would bet it takes you away from me.

ANNA

Only if you're not real.

PAM

Does something stop being real just because you can take it away.

Beat. Anna puts on the necklace.

ANNA

Just in case.

PAM

It looks beautiful on you.

ANNA

Thanks.

As Anna continues, Michael opens the door and comes in, unheard or noticed by Anna or Pam.
So, what else of your crazy hoarder nest should I hold onto? And don't say all of it because there is way too much for me to keep. Also, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but some of it is kind of tacky now.

MICHAEL

Sorry, I didn't realize you had company.

ANNA

Michael.

MICHAEL

I thought I would come help you sort through stuff.
Glad to see I wasn't the only one with that idea.

ANNA

No one's here. It's just me.

MICHAEL

You were talking to someone about what to keep.

ANNA

Umm-- Well--

Anna looks at Pam, unsure.

PAM

Let me try--

*Pam gets very close to Michael and starts jumping
up and down to get his attention*

Hello. Can you see me? I'm right here. Hellooooooooooooo.
Hi. It's Pam. Look at me.

She gives up and Anna laughs.

Sorry.

MICHAEL

Did I miss something?

ANNA

Yes. But no.

MICHAEL

What.

*Michael starts to walk to the kitchen to see who
is here, Anna stops him.*

ANNA

It's no one. No one is here.

MICHAEL

You're just talking to yourself.

ANNA

Doesn't everyone.

PAM

Good save.

MICHAEL

Not at all. But it's alright. I love you even though you're crazy.

Michael pulls out boxes to start helping.

ANNA

(beat)

What if I really go crazy someday?

PAM

Anna.

MICHAEL

Then I'll be the guy that's married to a crazy lady. Just no cats, ok?

ANNA

No cats. But what if I started seeing things?

PAM

Which you're not.

MICHAEL

It's not gonna change how I feel about you. It's not like you've been perfect from the start. Why? Meet some crazy people at counseling?

ANNA

Not crazy. Just grieving.

MICHAEL

Oh?

ANNA

They see the person they lost and can talk to them.

MICHAEL

That's different.

ANNA

They say it's not that uncommon.

MICHAEL

Just odd.

PAM

This'll be good.

ANNA

How odd?

MICHAEL

I don't know what you mean.

ANNA

Like terrifyingly odd, or just "hmmm, that's odd."

MICHAEL

I must be missing something.

PAM

No. He's not ready to hear this.

ANNA

Yes.

MICHAEL

Keep going.

ANNA

I'm talking about myself.

MICHAEL

You're not making any sense.

PAM

Told you.

ANNA

I mean, the person I was talking to was my mom.

MICHAEL

In an abstract sense.

ANNA

I don't know.

PAM

(same time as Anna)

No.

MICHAEL

What do you mean you don't know?

ANNA

I mean, I see her, she talks to me, but I know she's dead. It's a hallucination.

PAM

If I hear that word one more time--

MICHAEL

Is she here now?

ANNA

Yes. But I'm getting medication for it. Mary said that sleep and time will help it pass, but temporarily it should help.

PAM

Because I'm a problem.

ANNA

They'll be ready any minute.

MICHAEL

Alright. That's ok. You're grieving. I can understand that. And you understand no one else is actually in this room right now.

ANNA

Yes.

PAM

(same time as Anna)

No.

MICHAEL

Is the medicine at Walgreens?

ANNA

Yes.

MICHAEL

I'll go get it right now. We are gonna get through this.

ANNA

Thanks.

Michael kisses her forehead and leaves. Pam stares at Anna.

ANNA

What.

PAM

You don't believe that.

ANNA

That you're a hallucination.

PAM
You don't want me here.

ANNA
I didn't say that.

PAM
Well you're getting rid of me.

ANNA
What else am I supposed to do?

PAM
Not be in such a hurry to kill off your mother.

ANNA
I wasn't. You did that yourself.

PAM
But now you want to kill me again.

ANNA
You're already dead.

PAM
But I'm here, and you could accept that, and want to cherish that I can still be here and be your mother. Had this happened with your father, I would have-

ANNA
How can you know what you would have done? You're here and making me look crazy and I can't act normal in public because there's this person no one else can see that I want to talk to and hang out with, but if I did I'd be put in an asylum. You can't say you would have acted like that was normal with dad.

PAM
You're right, I can't, but I can say I wouldn't have gotten rid of him as fast as I could've.

ANNA
I'm not getting rid of you.

PAM
Then what do you call it.

ANNA
Moving on.

PAM
(beat)
I don't want to move on.

ANNA

I don't either, but--

PAM

Then don't. This is your choice. The heart attack wasn't your choice, but this is. This is killing me. Willfully.

ANNA

You're already dead.

PAM

Do I look dead? Do I sound dead? And what happens to me when you take that? I'm here alone. Don't do that to me. Please.

Anna picks up another picture and looks at her mom.

ANNA

Alright.

PAM

(beat)

I miss the taste of chocolate. Maybe if I smell it, I can almost taste it.

Pam exits to the kitchen.

ANNA

(to the photo)

I miss you, mom.

Blackout.

Scene 5

A few mornings later. Michael and Anna in Anna's house with stacks and stacks of papers from the office. They reorganize. Anna on the floor in the middle of it all, completely lost. Pam stands in the corner.

ANNA

Hording is such an attractive quality in a person. Who holds onto popcorn prices from ELEVEN years ago.

MICHAEL

Sometimes things surprise you with their usefulness.

PAM

I knew I liked him.

ANNA

A normal person would save it to the computer.

PAM

Always my area of expertise.

ANNA

And even if they didn't know how to use one, they would learn how to deal with modern technologies. And especially feel bad if their daughter was then stuck doing a lot of work at her expense.

MICHAEL

You have no idea how she feels about this.

ANNA

Oh, I have a pretty good idea.

Continues through papers. Anna throws one away.

PAM

That one's important.

ANNA

No- it's five years old and irrelevant.

MICHAEL

Are you talking to me?

ANNA

Just the irrelevant, argumentative, and unorganized voice in my head that won't shut up.

MICHAEL

Don't listen to them for too long or I'll have to send you to a shrink.

ANNA

Trying not to.

Michael moves to sit with Anna.

MICHAEL

So when does Sunday actually start being a day of rest for us?

ANNA

Once I can get through all of this junk.

PAM

Language, please. It has feelings.

MICHAEL

Well, I for one would like to start enjoying my time off.

Michael kisses her neck. Anna ignores him, but he continues, more intimately. Pam coughs.

ANNA

I really need to work, hon. Help?

Michael picks up the picture of last year's opening display.

MICHAEL

What about this?

ANNA

Trash it.

PAM

You have it memorized or something.

ANNA

(to Michael)

I think it's a little cheesy.

PAM

Cheesy?

MICHAEL

A little. You can definitely come up with something better. For all that she was, your mom wasn't an artist.

PAM

I take it back. I never liked him. Blessing revoked.

ANNA

Nope. And poor thing thought she was.

They continue working in silence. Once Michael finishes his pile, he kisses Anna again. Anna pushes him away.

ANNA

I'm serious.

MICHAEL

I'm serious too, pumpkin.

He kisses her again.

PAM

Did he just call you pumpkin?

MICHAEL

We need this. It's the weekend. We're alone.

He kisses her.

PAM

I wish you were.

ANNA

(under her breath)

You don't have to be here, you know.

MICHAEL

(pulling away)

You invited me.

ANNA

Sorry. Not you. I meant my paperwork.

MICHAEL

That's the spirit.

Anna kisses him back.

PAM

Nope. No way am I gonna stand here and watch this happen. Separate. Excuse me! Get off her! She has work to do.

ANNA

Excuse me.

Anna stands up and trashes most of the documents around her.

PAM

What does this solve?

Beat as Anna trashes things.

You're going to ignore all of my work.

Anna ignores her.

Seriously, Anna, I've been joking around, but this was my life's work. I did it well, you can't trash it.

MICHAEL

Were all of those old?

ANNA

Some of them. I just think it'll be easier to do a better job if I don't use her method.

PAM

The one that's worked for 27 years. Anna, stop.

MICHAEL

Ok, I'll trash all of it.

ANNA

Yeah, everything except lists of previous donors.

PAM

Anna, I'm not kidding. Stop. Now.

After they finish, they pick up where they left off.

PAM

Anna- I'm done kidding around. Stop. This is disrespectful. On so many levels.

ANNA

(to Pam)

Who's gonna stop me?

MICHAEL

I didn't try to.

PAM

Anna, out of love for me, please don't do this.

ANNA

I did love you! That's why I took this job, so that you're dream didn't die.

MICHAEL

Anna?

ANNA

You died. You left me here to do all of this, except for some reason you're still here bugging me about it and I can't even have a minute alone with my fiance!

MICHAEL

Anna, where's your medicine?

Michael goes to her purse and finds it.

PAM

So you'd rather me not be here?

ANNA

Of course! Look at me! Look at Michael- I now look certifiably insane, and maybe I am! Maybe you've made me insane! Whatever this is you are and whatever it is you're doing, it isn't love. It's ruining my life.

MICHAEL

When did you last take it?

ANNA

(to Michael)

I haven't.

MICHAEL

What?

ANNA

She told me not to. That it would be killing her.

PAM

Because it would be.

MICHAEL

She's already dead!

ANNA

I tried to say that-

MICHAEL

Anna, she's not real. She's dead. Do you understand that? She's actually making you crazy. Don't let it.

Michael offers her the pills. Anna takes it dry.

ANNA

I'm sorry. I don't mean to scare you.

MICHAEL

Let's get you to bed.

They exit. Pam follows, but Anna shuts the door on her. Beat. Lights focus on Pam for a beat. Suddenly, the lights snap off and Pam is no longer seen, leaving a black and empty stage.

Scene 6

Anna's home, evening. The living room is still covered with cardboard boxes and piles of Pam's things.

Michael goes through clothes and looks at sizes to see what would fit Anna and separates it into

appropriate piles. Anna goes through this and organizes objects based on an unknown categorization. She gets up to put a pile of unwanted objects in a box. She moves very quickly between projects, an unspoken effort to keep her from thinking about the task she is doing. She sits down to go through the pile of clothes Michael has stacked for her. She goes through a couple of things deciding whether or not she wants it and gets to a larger shirt.

ANNA

You put this in the wrong pile.

MICHAEL

No I didn't.

ANNA

Really?

MICHAEL

Really. I thought you might want it.

ANNA

Thought I might want it, as in I could fit in it?

MICHAEL

Sometimes you like loose tops. I thought you might like to keep this one.

ANNA

I like to wear shirts that fit me that are meant to be loose occasionally. Not wear oversized t-shirts like some sorority girl.

MICHAEL

I just thought it would be better to let you decide about it. I don't want to discard something you might actually want.

ANNA

I'm not too sentimental about her casual clothes, so don't worry about it. Just the stuff that fits me.

MICHAEL

Will do.

They continue working. Michael finishes going through the clothes.

MICHAEL

I'm ready for the next project, honey.

ANNA

(getting up and handing him a box)
Cna you go through this box and separate out the junk
from non-junk? It'll be pretty clear.

MICHAEL

Sure thing.

*Anna continues her bouncing around rapid fire
tasks as Michael sits and goes through the box,
separating out what seems to be trash from
everything else.*

MICHAEL

It looks like a lot of this is just trash, so that's
what I'll call junk and leave the rest for you to
decide what you want to do with.

ANNA

(waving him off)
Fine, fine.

*Michael finishes the box and takes the trash to
the kitchen to throw away. He comes back.*

MICHAEL

Got another I can do?

*Anna gets him another box and proceeds to start
going through what he left her.*

ANNA

You only threw away trash, right?

MICHAEL

Right.

ANNA

Where are the tickets?

MICHAEL

To musicals?

ANNA

Were there any other tickets in the box?

MICHAEL

I threw them away, they're pieces of paper.

ANNA

Pieces of paper she saved from a lifetime of one of her
favorite activities. If she knew you--

MICHAEL

I didn't know, let me go get them.

Michael rushes into the kitchen and brings back a large pile of ticket stubs. Anna frantically goes through the rest of the box, checking to see if he threw away something else.

MICHAEL

Here. I didn't realize they were imp--

ANNA

I can't believe you didn't know those were important to her. She collected them since she was 15. Every show she ever saw.

MICHAEL

I'm so sorry. At least this process is helping me know her a little better.

ANNA

I'm glad you feel that way. Go get that box and go through it, but please if you have a question, ask.

Michael has no response, so he goes and slowly picks through the box, occasionally holding up something and asking "keep or toss?" to which Anna answers shortly. After a while, Anna has had enough.

ANNA

Seriously- could you move any faster? I've gone through about 4 different things and you're still on that box.

MICHAEL

I don't want to miss anything.

ANNA

I don't want you to either, but that doesn't mean you can't have some urgency behind it. This needs to get done, and if you're just gonna be slow, I might as well do it without you.

MICHAEL

You asked me to come because you didn't want to do it alone.

ANNA

And I thought you would be a help so that it would be done faster and I wouldn't have to keep looking at it. Instead, you keep asking me a question about every little thing, and I don't have time for that.

MICHAEL

I get that this is a hard task, but please don't take out your anger on me.

ANNA

This isn't anger from grief, this is frustration with you not being able to help me.

MICHAEL

I refuse to talk to you like this. I want to help and be supportive, but you can't just unleash everything on me.

ANNA

I'm not unleashing anything. I'm still having to do this all myself.

MICHAEL

I'm not talking about this one--

ANNA

Well I am and it's my emotions. Don't make this something bigger. You are being deliberately unhelpful--

MICHAEL

Deliberately unhelpful.

ANNA

Yes, deliberately. you want this to take longer for God knows why--

MICHAEL

Anna, this is ridiculous. I wouldn't have come at all if--

ANNA

If you want to go--

MICHAEL

Let me finish.

Anna starts to fight back, but Michael gives her a stern look to say it's his turn to talk.

Pam enters, unseen by all.

MICHAEL

I wouldn't have come at all if I didn't think you needed support. That is all I have tried to be to you. And I know that those we are most comfortable with are those we act out against when we are hurt, but it's not healthy. You're holding all of this pain inside and it

MICHAEL

has to come out in violent ways at times. You're imagining that you're seeing your dead mother! And while I love you and know this is a difficult time, it's hard being the person that has to take it all the time. And it's not fair to me.
(beat)

PAM

Honey.

ANNA

Can I talk now.

PAM

Sweetheart--

MICHAEL

Please.

ANNA

This isn't about you. This isn't about my holding something inside or when it comes out. This is who I am right now. I'm on edge. My emotions are out on my sleeve. I'm not hiding it for anyone. And the fact that you think you can lecture me about how to handle this when you have two perfectly wonderful, living parents is laughable. I don't need a lecture. I don't need your self-centered view on my hurting and how I grieve. Right now I don't even really need the support you think you're giving me by being here. I just need to get through this crap so that it's out of the house. And if you don't think you can help with that, you can leave.

PAM

He's just helping honey.

MICHAEL

I can help and have been trying to help, but I can't read your mind and know what you do and don't want.

ANNA

Well I can't handle your continuous twenty questions either, so you should leave.

MICHAEL

I don't want to leave when you're upset--

ANNA

I'm not upset! This is a perfectly normal and non-emotional day for me so far. I haven't cried, I haven't seen my mom, I haven't wanted to hide under the

ANNA

covers and never come out, so all in all, I'm having a really good day emotionally. This is my normal. I have a ton on my plate and need to get it done. I don't have time for this conversation, so please leave so that I can keep working.

Anna goes to the door and opens it.

MICHAEL

(tenderly)

Anna, I didn't want to make you upset.

ANNA

I already addressed that. I need you to leave.

MICHAEL

Anna--

ANNA

Now.

Michael grabs his keys and starts for the door.

MICHAEL

I love you.

ANNA

Leave.

MICHAEL

See you tomorrow.

Michael walks out and Anna shuts the door. She continues working, this time while crying. Pam sits next to her.

PAM

Anna, I'm so sorry. I didn't know you were hurting so much or I would have come back sooner.

(beat)

You can talk to me. I'm here. You're not alone anymore to deal with this. I'm not gone.

Anna starts a new pile right on top of Pam, unaware she is there.

You don't see me.

Anna, please hear me. I'm here. Talk to me. Don't leave me alone too.

Anna picks up her mom's photo.

ANNA
I miss you so much mom. So much.

PAM
(broken)
No.

Blackout.

Scene 7

Pam's office, midday. Anna is alone. She's on the computer. Pam sits and watches. Anna works on several things at once and very flustered. After a moment, there is a knock.

ANNA
Come in!

Door opens and Janet enters. Anna sees her.

ANNA
What do you need.

JANET
I was hoping we could talk for a few minutes.

ANNA
Now isn't a good time. I'm trying to finalize things for the carnival. Come back tomorrow.

JANET
It needs to be now.

Anna continues to work, but listens to Janet.

JANET
Looks like you've been getting lots done.

ANNA
Yup. Working hard.

JANET
(beat)
I haven't seen Michael around much. What's he been up to?

ANNA
He's busy. And I haven't needed him to be productive. Did you just want to shoot the breeze or is there something specific you need? Because if so, I really-

JANET

No. There's something specific.
(Janet pauses, hopefully Anna will stop)
Anna.

ANNA

(short)
What?

JANET

I'd love to talk to you without having to fight for
your attention with work.

ANNA

Ok. But I really don't have much time.

JANET

Then I'll get to it quickly. We had a board meeting
about the carnival yesterday.

ANNA

I never heard anything about that.

JANET

I know. I'm not upset about that. We didn't tell you
about it.

ANNA

I should definitely be involved in any conversations.

JANET

We met, because we needed to talk about you. We've
gotten several calls of complaints about the way you've
treated people. Anna, these are people we have had
great relationships with and need them to continue.

ANNA

Alright, so you have a list of people I need to call
and say sorry to or something? It's not a big deal.

JANET

That's the problem. It is a big deal. It's something we
absolutely cannot allow to continue.

ANNA

So I need to bend over and give these people whatever
they want.

JANET

No. I'm not saying that.

ANNA

Well I don't really see you giving me another option.

JANET

Anna, we aren't sure anymore that working on the carnival is a good fit for you.

ANNA

(beat)

Well, there's not another project I'm interested in doing-

JANET

I'm sorry. You misunderstood. We no longer believe that this organization is a good fit for you.

ANNA

(beat)

You must be joking.

JANET

We can't have an employee that constantly burn bridges. We rely on the generosity of others, and can't afford to have you continually putting that in jeopardy.

ANNA

I think a warning before you fire me might have given me a chance to correct-

JANET

We did give you a warning. I told you that you needed to change things. That these are important people to us.

ANNA

I'm sorry. I should have clarified- a non-passive aggressive warning that I actually understood.

JANET

And it's the very fact that you don't understand tact that put us here. I'm sorry, Anna, but it was unanimous. And, to be frank, we all feel your mother would have voted the same.

ANNA

(hard)

What.

JANET

This is an organization she worked hard to build and she herself built these relationships.

ANNA

No. Don't you dare. Don't you dare say my own mother wouldn't be proud of me. That she would fire me. What gives you the right to speak for her? In case you haven't noticed, she's dead so we can't really ask her, can we. How can you possibly have the nerve to bring her up to me right now.

PAM

Oh, Anna.

JANET

We are sorry, but we're definitely confident in our decision.

ANNA

So long as you're confident. That makes it all better.

JANET

I know you've been trying to honor your mother's memory. We are too. We strongly disagree about the way to do it. Because of that, we believe it's better if we don't work together.

ANNA

While that might be a nice and easy solution for you, it leaves me with nothing. I'm her daughter. How can you possibly think you know her better than I do.

JANET

It's not a matter of knowing better, but trying to follow the spirit she lead with while she was here.

ANNA

Get out.

JANET

Anna, you can't stay here and pretend this didn't happen.

ANNA

I'll be out by 5:00. Get out.

JANET

We don't want to end it this way.

ANNA

But it did. You chose to say that I'm dishonoring my mother. And you fire me. So please, can you at least do something today in which you treat me like a human being, and get. Out.

JANET

Alright. We are sorry, Anna.

ANNA

Oh yes. I can definitely tell.

JANET

Whether you see it or not, we are. Goodbye.

Janet leaves.

ANNA

And good riddance.

Anna throws her coffee cup at the door as it closes. Blackout.

Scene 8

Anna's house. Same day. Michael works packing and labeling the boxes that are full. Anna enters. Pam follows.

MICHAEL

Hey beautiful. How's the carnival coming?

ANNA

Not.

MICHAEL

I'm sure it's better than you think.

ANNA

No. I mean it's not coming. I'm done.

MICHAEL

You quit.

ANNA

Janet fired me.

MICHAEL

Fired you. Why?

ANNA

She said I've gotten lots of complaints with how I'm treating people. People can't handle a firm personality anymore.

MICHAEL

You're sure you were merely firm?

ANNA

Excuse me.

MICHAEL

You're going through a lot right now. And like I said, you've been quick to lash out- and everyone that knows you understands that. But these people don't. Maybe you've been in a hard place and taken it out on strangers and it's not gone well.

ANNA

So I'm incompetent and can't do my job and she was right to fire me.

MICHAEL

I didn't say incompetent.

ANNA

I'm completely ruled by my emotions and can't do my job.

MICHAEL

Those words never came out of my mouth.

ANNA

But it's what you meant.

MICHAEL

Stop doing that. You don't know what I meant. Hear what I'm saying. It's exactly what I mean.

Anna sees Pam, briefly.

ANNA

Mom.

Pam turns and sees that Anna can see her- she mouths words thinking Anna can hear her. There is no sound.

ANNA

I can't hear you.

Pam disappears to Anna.

ANNA

Mom.

MICHAEL

I thought you were taking your medicine.

ANNA

I have been, but in the midst of getting fired I forgot to take it this afternoon.

MICHAEL

Then take it now.

ANNA

She's gone.

MICHAEL

More reason to take it again. Anna, don't do this to yourself.

ANNA

Have my mom die, get fired, and then have the audacity to want to hold onto her.

MICHAEL

Putting yourself through the pain of thinking she's here. She's not real.

ANNA

Of course. And you know that with certainty.

MICHAEL

Because when you take the medicine, she's not there anymore.

ANNA

Just because you can take something away, it doesn't mean it's not real.

Beat. Michael has no response. He gathers his things.

ANNA

So because I'm right you're going to leave.

MICHAEL

No, Anna. Because you won't help yourself I'm going to leave. I love you more than I ever thought I could love anyone in my entire life. I want to take care of you and support you, but how can I do that when you make no effort on your end.

ANNA

So I'm not trying. It's only been a few weeks, I'm not going to get over this quickly--

MICHAEL

I know that. But you're spiraling out of control. And I've been here. I've been supportive. I've been

MICHAEL

understanding. But when I try to speak truth into your life you lash out. I can't sit on the sidelines and support you while you are running in the wrong direction. I can't bear to watch it.

ANNA

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

I mean, take care of yourself. I love you. But the girl I proposed to wouldn't recognize this bitter and angry girl in front of me. She wouldn't destroy her life piece by piece. And I won't stand by waiting till you destroy mine.

ANNA

You're coming back.

MICHAEL

That's up to you.

Michael leaves. Anna runs after him and calls out the door to him.

ANNA

What is that supposed to mean? What is that supposed to mean?

Anna slams the door. Beat. She goes to the boxes and throws them open and across the room. All of it. Towards the end, she sees Pam again. Anna stops suddenly when she sees her.

ANNA

You.

PAM

You see me again.

ANNA

And hear you. Fat lot of good it's done me.

PAM

And you still don't see it.

ANNA

What.

PAM

Michael's right! As soon as he's gone you unleash on me.

ANNA

And maybe I should've unleashed on you a long time ago.
All this is your fault.

PAM

How?

ANNA

You died. If you hadn't died, I wouldn't have to go through this whole process again, but it's been twice as bad. I could have been promoted at work. Michael and I would be happily planning our wedding, and you would still have your job instead of my being fired from it.

PAM

And you deserved to be fired.

ANNA

Excuse me.

PAM

Janet was right. I would have voted to fire you too. You have been so bitter and angry and it's come out to everyone you come in contact with. You're toxic and the company can't afford it.

ANNA

You made me toxic.

PAM

I did not.

ANNA

You did. You went and died and then showed up on me again. You've driven me crazy which has made me angry all the time.

PAM

Your emotions are your own choice.

ANNA

Everyone around me has been manipulating them. You pulling on me, Michael pulling on me, the board expecting so much from me, I can't do it all.

PAM

Have we really pulled on you. I've just wanted to stay and have relationship with you. Michael has done everything in his power to support you when he's had no idea what you need. The board just needed you to act professionally. This is on you, Anna. Accept responsibility.

ANNA

I wouldn't be in this mess if you hadn't died. My life would be fine. It's your fault.

PAM

You don't even think I'm real.

ANNA

You were real. You were my best friend. You were all I had after dad died and then you left me too. And now Michael's left me. How am I supposed to not be angry. How is any of this fair. I'm 24. I should have both my parents with me. I should be starting my own family. It keeps being taken from me. And you and dad started it. And now you can't even let me be to try to put my life back together.

PAM

You're the one that stopped taking the medicine. And apparently I'm just a figment of your imagination. You keep pulling me back.

ANNA

Because I'm supposed to function without you. You've taken care of me my whole life. And I'm suddenly on my own.

PAM

You weren't alone.

ANNA

I'm an orphan. That's as alone as this world gets.

PAM

No. Michael was there. He was taking care of you. And even if I hadn't died, he was going to become the one that took care of you anyway. You were leaving me and becoming his.

ANNA

But he's not you.

PAM

You're right.

ANNA

I want you, mom.

PAM

And I wanted to be here. But you need Michael more than you need me.

ANNA

Michael left.

PAM

Not forever.

ANNA

I have no idea how to get him back.

PAM

Take care of yourself.

ANNA

I don't know how to let you go.

Pam hands Anna her medicine bottle.

PAM

It's time you started looking to your future instead of hanging onto the past.

Anna empties a few pills into her hand. Blackout.

ACT IIIScene 1

Board room. Anna is in front of the board, a presentation behind her with pictures to go along with.

ANNA

Each section could have a theme. The children's play area could have characters for them to take pictures with- almost feel like Disney. This could be something children look forward to every year.

JANET

What other sections?

ANNA

This is a family event, but we have always catered it towards children. If we add more for all ages, we could gain a larger crowd. For example, we can have a parenting section, particularly for our single parents that are looking for parenting tips, home care, any donations that would help those that can't afford it.

BILL

People won't give things away for free.

ANNA

No, but we can cover the costs. Most of our contractors are generous with their donations anyway. Easy marketing and a tax break. And if we make this a larger event, we can bring a crowd that does have money and would be willing to make donations during the carnival. This way, the entire community is helped. There is income for those that need it while those that need help can easily access it.

SUSAN

These are great ideas, but still no reason to put you in charge of it.

ANNA

While yes, you can use the idea without me, it's my brain and passion that will bring about the best results. Also, I have experience in event planning that would be very useful and make me an excellent candidate, which is the reason you hired me in the first place.

RANDY

That and your mother.

ANNA

Both of which are still true today.

BILL

As is the reason we fired you.

ANNA

Which I have tried to address. Accidentally, I kept a few files at home from taking work home with me. I had numbers of clients and personally called all of them to apologize for my behavior. I left messages for those that didn't answer.

JANET

You called them.

ANNA

To let them know I was sorry and that my behavior shouldn't reflect the company, nor really myself. I recognize that my grief twisted me to anger, and I wanted to make things right.

SUSAN

That's a sweet gesture, dear, but misguided.

RANDY

That could very well come across as you blaming them for being fired.

ANNA

None of them took it that way.

BILL

That they told you.

JANET

What Bill is trying to say is that sometimes people aren't comfortable with voicing their true opinions. And you said yourself you left several voicemails. You have no way to gauge their reactions.

ANNA

True, but I was kind and very apologetic. There was no way anyone could take it as blaming.

SUSAN

People read between lines that aren't there all the time in this business. We told them their complaints had been heard and would be addressed discreetly.

ANNA

Which they were.

BILL

Discretion is not giving you their phone numbers so that you may call and harrass them.

ANNA

I didn't harrass anyone.

JANET

I'm sure you didn't, but think about it from their point of view. Someone they know was let go because of a complaint against them winds up calling them. That doesn't reflect well on us.

ANNA

It wasn't your fault.

RANDY

We didn't check to make sure you didn't have anything at home.

ANNA

I could have lied and kept it.

SUSAN

Which doesn't reflect well on your character.

ANNA

I was trying to fix things.

SUSAN

Which we understand. The question is, will they.

ANNA

Surely anyone could see--

JANET

Not everyone knows you. Think about the interactions they had with you. You weren't the most pleasant person to deal with. It's not a far jump.

ANNA

They were talking to a girl who just lost her mother and was in over her head.

RANDY

And has any of that changed?

ANNA

Yes. It has. I've gotten help- consistent help- and am moving forward with my life. That's why I'm here.

JANET

We want to believe that. It might be hard for them to.

ANNA

Then you tell them.

BILL

How do you suggest we stand up for the woman we openly fired.

ANNA

By telling the truth. I deserved to be fired, but came back and proved I changed and made a great impression. You are excited about the ideas I brought in and understand everyone deserves a second chance.

BILL

Third chance.

ANNA

Fine. A third chance. I want this job. I can do it well. I will do whatever it takes to improve these relationships. I'm also very confident I've already taken huge steps forward in doing that.

JANET

Without having heard from them, we can't judge that.

ANNA

You would have heard by now if they were upset.

JANET

Possibly, but we can't rush that.

ANNA

I'm not asking for a quick decision. I know I'm asking a lot of you.

JANET

Thank you for that.

(to the board)

Do you all mind if I speak to Anna privately for a moment?

Susan, Bill, and Randy murmur general consent and leave.

JANET

Anna, I hope you know I've always been very fond of you.

ANNA

Thank you. And I've looked up to you.

JANET

I believe you are trying to do what's best for everyone here. I see a clear effort, and I know your heart.

ANNA

That's all I wanted you all to see.

JANET

Consider it accomplished. While I appreciate the effort you've gone to doing what you think is best for the board, I wanted to ask you a more personal question. This isn't a question from an interviewer, but from a friend. Do you think this job is what's best for you?

ANNA

Absolutely. It is great for the community and my skills fit it very well.

JANET

I'm not denying that. But is this what you want to do.

ANNA

I want to honor my mother's memory.

JANET

And you're doing a much better job at it from what I can tell. She'd be proud of your humility.

ANNA

I like to think so.

JANET

I also know she was very proud of your work event planning.

ANNA

Which I would continue to do with this job, but it would help the community rather than the individual.

JANET

The carnival isn't the sum total of the job.

ANNA

No, but it's the biggest part.

JANET

There's a lot of paperwork. A lot of number crunching. You would spend most of your time behind a desk. I don't see you being happy there.

ANNA

I could be.

JANET

But do you want to be?

ANNA

Yes. This was her life's work. I can't let it be thrown away.

JANET

I can personally guarantee it won't be. Your new ideas are wonderful and will only help create a better tradition the community will love. I'm not saying you shouldn't want this job. I'm not saying you're not going to get it. I'm saying that just as we have things to consider, I think you do as well.

ANNA

I'll try to. But I'm very confident I'm a great fit for this position, if you'll give me another chance.

JANET

We'll talk about it and see what we hear from our donors. We will give you a call within the next week or so.

ANNA

I appreciate that more than you know. Thank you.

JANET

Of course. As always, if there is ever something I can do for you, let me know.

Janet exits. Anna gathers her things and closes out the presentation.

ANNA

Well mom. How was that?

Fade to black.

Scene 2

A park, the same afternoon. Anna walks with an ice cream cone in her hand. She comes to a bench and sits. As she finishes the cone, she pulls out a journal and writes, trying to clear her head. After a beat, Michael enters with a hot dog. He starts to turn away just as Anna looks up.

ANNA
Michael?

Michael continues walking away.

ANNA
Michael Miller.

Michael turns around.

MICHAEL
Anna. What are you doing here?

ANNA
I just wanted to get out and write a little bit. How are you?

MICHAEL
Doing good. Just enjoying the day.

ANNA
The perfect day to hang outside.

MICHAEL
Yup.

Beat as Anna waits for him to say more.

ANNA
I was gonna call you today. To see if you'd want to meet and talk. What a coincidence.

MICHAEL
It's something.

ANNA
I've been on my medication for the past few weeks. And I just got my job back.

MICHAEL
That's it.

ANNA
I'm taking care of myself. Getting my life together.

MICHAEL
I'm glad.

Beat.

ANNA
So I was thinking we could get together and talk about what that could mean.

MICHAEL

Sounds like it means you're doing what's best for you.

ANNA

What's best for us.

A girl, Haley, enters with a hot dog and napkins.

HALEY

I brought napkins.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

ANNA

Hi, I'm Anna.

HALEY

Haley. Nice to meet you. Friend of Michael's?

ANNA

You could say that.

MICHAEL

We go way back. Friend doesn't seem like the right word for us sometimes.

HALEY

So did you grow up in Houston too?

ANNA

No, I'm from here. Born and raised. We met in college.

HALEY

So not too far back.

MICHAEL

Far enough.

HALEY

Well it was nice to meet you.

Haley goes to grab Michael's hand. Michael tries to smoothly reject it, but it just creates a more awkward moment.

HALEY

You ok?

MICHAEL

Totally. One hundred percent, buddy.

HALEY

Buddy?

ANNA

You're kidding me.

MICHAEL

No kidding. Just hanging out with my friends.

HALEY

Do we need to go talk?

ANNA

No. I can save you the hassle.

MICHAEL

You really can't.

ANNA

I didn't say I could save you hassle. I can save her.

MICHAEL

Anna, please don't. We can talk later.

ANNA

No I think this is the exact right moment for this conversation. Haley, how many dates have you two been on?

MICHAEL

Haley, we really should get going.

HALEY

This is our first.

ANNA

I should have known. We went to a park on our first date too.

MICHAEL

We're gonna miss the movie.

HALEY

You two dated?

ANNA

Oh yeah.

HALEY

How long?

ANNA

We just dated for two and a half years, but spent a few weeks as an engaged couple.

MICHAEL

Which isn't that long if you think about it.

ANNA

You're right. A couple weeks isn't that long, especially to get over the girl you dated for almost three years.

HALEY

When did you break up?

ANNA

A couple weeks ago. With my understanding that we were considering getting back together.

MICHAEL

That wasn't necessarily--

ANNA

Unless I misunderstood "that's up to you."

MICHAEL

You didn't.

ANNA

Yet here you are on a date with this gem.

HALEY

I can see why he broke up with you.

ANNA

No you don't. He broke up with me because I was having a hard time handling the death of my mother and he couldn't be around it.

MICHAEL

In what world is that what happened.

ANNA

The one I'm living in.

MICHAEL

The fact that you would even say that is exactly why we aren't together anymore.

HALEY

I'm going to go see the movie. Please, don't join me. I'll get a ride home.

Haley exits.

MICHAEL

And you continue to bring your joy and life to every situation.

ANNA

As opposed to the death that must surround me, right?

MICHAEL

And the word twisting continues.

ANNA

As if you didn't do the same. Calling her buddy and that we just go way back.

MICHAEL

We do.

ANNA

Don't try to act like this is my fault.

MICHAEL

If you hadn't shown up, we would have had a lovely time.

ANNA

And when would you have told her that you just got out of a very serious relationship?

MICHAEL

If it needed to come up, it would.

ANNA

That's something girls like to know, in case you were wondering.

MICHAEL

I'll take it into consideration for my next date.

ANNA

So you're not even going to listen to what I said about getting my life together.

MICHAEL

Why would I when you're ruining mine?

ANNA

I didn't ruin this.

MICHAEL

We were having a great time till you showed up.

ANNA

Because I'm not allowed to be in a public place enjoying the day.

MICHAEL

You didn't have to talk to me.

ANNA

I'm sorry that I wanted to continue relationship with you.

MICHAEL

This wasn't the time or place for that.

ANNA

And how was I supposed to know that.

MICHAEL

I don't know. You just-- you shouldn't have done that.

ANNA

That girl had a right to know that she was just a rebound.

MICHAEL

You have no idea what she was.

ANNA

What else could she have been? Don't act like you don't love me anymore. There's no way you could've gotten over this that quickly.

MICHAEL

What makes you think I didn't start getting over you a long time ago.

ANNA

Because you stayed. Because you cared. Because I know you and know we are meant to be together.

MICHAEL

That doesn't mean you own me. I'm not yours to claim. You can't decide to ruin something for me. Especially when you have no idea what's going on.

ANNA

You were on a date. With some rando. Hoping you could get over me. What else do I need to know.

MICHAEL

You have no idea what you're talking about. And I won't take this.

Michael exits. Anna kicks the bench she was sitting on. Blackout.

Scene 3

Anna's house, immediately after the park. Pam sits on the couch, counting ceiling tiles.

PAM

49, 50, 51, 52, 53-- Wait I might have already counted that one. Shoot. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12-- Forget it. It'll be 107 again. Just like the last three times.

Anna enters, crying.

PAM

Oh honey, I thought for sure it'd go well.

Anna, who hasn't seen Pam yet, tenses, knowing what she heard. The audience may or may not sense this. Anna does everything subtly enough that Pam doesn't realize she isn't seen, but Anna should intentionally never look where Pam is.

PAM

If Bill wasn't in a better mood and said rude things, I'll kill him. Then, he'll join me, and I'll kill him again.

Anna sits on the couch and turns on the TV to drown out the sound of Pam.

PAM

Finally some real entertainment. Though if I have to sit through "Doctor Who" again I might as well go back to counting tiles.

The Doctor Who theme song plays.

PAM

Seriously Anna. Did I leave none of my tastes to you.

Pam hums along the until the song ends.

PAM

We watched this one last week. How could you possibly want to rewatch it already. Maybe Michael's lucky he bailed. Wouldn't want to watch this the rest of my life either.

Anna snaps off the TV. She picks up a book.

PAM

Bored too, I see.

Pam goes to read over her shoulder.

PAM

You read too fast. How am I supposed to follow along when you turn the page before I'm halfway done. I shouldn't have raised you so well. It's my own fault.

Pam lays on the couch again, looking at the ceiling.

PAM

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7--

Anna slams the book shut.

PAM

Aren't we moody today. It was just an interview, honey. There will be plenty more. It was a long shot anyway. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9--

Anna coughs.

PAM

10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15--

Anna turns the TV back on- loudly.

PAM

I thought we decided no Doctor Who. Please give me a break. Michael got lucky.

ANNA

Say something like that again and you will wish you really were dead.

PAM

You can hear me.

ANNA

(finally looking at her)
And unfortunately see you.

PAM

But I watched you take your medicine this morning.

ANNA

Glad to know you're spying on me.

PAM
Watching over you carefully. Someone has to.

ANNA
Because I'm all alone in the world and have driven everyone else off.

PAM
No. Because- well- because you're alone and I'm worried about you.

ANNA
Same thing.

PAM
You didn't drive me off.

ANNA
No, I just took medication to make sure this didn't happen. Except it still is.

PAM
I've been telling you I'm not a hallucination.

ANNA
No you definitely still are. I need to call Mary and get my dosage upped.

PAM
And then up it more when this happens again.

ANNA
This won't happen again because you're not real. You're not here and I can control that. Give me that one thing.

*Anna goes to the kitchen. Pam sits in silence.
Anna returns with a glass of water.*

ANNA
I'm sorry. This isn't your fault.

PAM
What happened at the meeting.

ANNA
Nothing. It was fine. They said I probably shouldn't have called the donors--

PAM
Probably not.

ANNA

But I still think I got the job.

PAM

Then what's wrong?

ANNA

I went to the park.

PAM

(beat)

Ah. I understand now. Terrible place. Especially on a beautiful sunny day. Brings the worst out of everyone.

ANNA

Michael was there.

PAM

Did you talk?

ANNA

How do you define talk?

PAM

Exchanging words.

ANNA

We definitely did that.

PAM

More than just casual hellos?

ANNA

I can't talk about this to myself. I will not continue to be crazy.

*Anna turns away from Pam, holding back tears.
Beat.*

PAM

Even if I am a hallucination, if you can't talk to yourself, who are you gonna talk to.

ANNA

(beat)

We yelled. A lot.

PAM

That's gonna get him to come back to you.

ANNA

He's not interested in that anymore.

PAM

Did he say that?

ANNA

He didn't have to. He was on a date.

PAM

No.

ANNA

Yes. It was humiliating. And he got so mad. How could he be the one getting angry? I've been working so hard to get him back, and he's just moving on. He even implied he'd moved on when we were together.

PAM

No way that's true. That boy put up with a ton from you. He loved you.

ANNA

Not anymore.

PAM

I'm so sorry honey.

ANNA

And now I have nothing to work towards. My entire future is gone. What could I possibly move on towards in my life right now? No parents, no fiancée, no job, and almost no friends.

PAM

Megan and Kathryn love you.

ANNA

They're busy with their boyfriends just like I was with mine.

*A knock at the door. Anna gets up to answer it.
It's Michael.*

ANNA

What are you doing here?

MICHAEL

If you're busy I can come back later.

ANNA

I'm not. Come in.

MICHAEL

I heard you talking with someone.

ANNA

Just myself.

PAM

Because that worked last time.

MICHAEL

Really. You pause for response with yourself.

ANNA

What are you implying?

MICHAEL

You lied to me. You said you've been on your medication. You haven't. You're talking with your mom.

PAM

Don't lie.

ANNA

I wasn't lying.

MICHAEL

Look me in the eye and tell me you weren't talking with your mom.

ANNA

I wasn't lying.

MICHAEL

Then tell me.

ANNA

I have taken it. Every day. The exact dosage. But today she came back. I tried to ignore her, but couldn't. Not after today.

MICHAEL

I should've known. I came over to apologize and explain, but nothing's changed.

ANNA

Everything's changed. I'm trying. I promise.

PAM

You can tell him I've seen it.

ANNA

(to Pam)
That'll help.

MICHAEL

Not even hiding it. Wow.

ANNA

I was trying to get her to stop. She wanted me to tell you she's seen the change in me.

MICHAEL

I won't listen to any more of your lies.

ANNA

I haven't lied. Not once. Unlike you, with your date.

Anna's phone rings.

ANNA

I shouldn't have said that. Please. Come in. I need to take this, but I need to talk to you.

Michael reluctantly enters, but still stands just by the door, ready to leave if need be. Anna walks away for some privacy.

ANNA

Hello. Thank you so much for calling back so quickly... I didn't think anyone had called... No I understand... Could you not tell them my intentions... No I wouldn't want to put you in that position either... I understand... I'll keep thinking about it... Thank you Janet.

Anna hangs up.

MICHAEL

Need to go to work?

ANNA

Not at all.

PAM

You didn't get it.

ANNA

That was actually Janet calling to tell me I didn't get my job back.

MICHAEL

You told me you already got it back.

ANNA

I thought I had.

MICHAEL

That bit about not lying to me- say that again.

ANNA

I didn't intentionally. And I wasn't going to try and talk to you until I got the job back, to prove I was moving on. But I saw you and wanted you to know it was working.

MICHAEL

It was still a lie.

ANNA

Yes. It was. I'm sorry. But I just needed you to see the effort I was making.

MICHAEL

Clearly you're trying so hard- you're still hallucinating.

PAM

And she already said she doesn't know why she is right now.

ANNA

I already told you, I don't know why this is happening.

MICHAEL

And I'm supposed to believe what you're saying. How can I Anna? You've lied to me and I have no proof to see anything else.

(Pam talks over him)

If you'd just been honest with me and told me you were still struggling, maybe we could have a real conversation right now. But I don't know what I could possibly have to say to you, and I've been thinking about this for a long time. I want so badly for you to--

PAM

Why do you need proof? She's been trying. She clearly tried to get her job back because she just got the phone call. Is it so far fetched to believe she would do anything to get you back? You know how much she loves you, of course she would do this.

ANNA

Enough! Both of you- stop talking. I can't think straight. Yes, Michael, I am aware that one of the voices I'm talking to right now isn't real, but I can't help it. I didn't ask for this and I am trying to deal with it. I want to be better. I've been trying to get that way, whether you believe it or not. I need help.

ANNA

And I want to have this conversation with you, I really do, but I can't until I fix my meds. So either help me, or leave.

PAM

That's my girl.

Anna shoots her a look that stops her from talking. Michael says nothing.

ANNA

That's doing neither.

MICHAEL

I'm not sure what you want me to say.

ANNA

I think I said that already. Either stay and help me, or leave.

Michael doesn't do anything. Long beat.

ANNA

I won't sit here feeling guilty while you say nothing. I'm going to go get some water. When I get back, if you're still here, that's your answer. If you're unsure, just leave. You can come back if you change your mind.

Anna exits. Michael stays seated. Anna comes back.

ANNA

You're still here.

MICHAEL

That was one of my options wasn't it?

ANNA

I didn't think you'd take it.

PAM

He loves you.

MICHAEL

You know I want to help you. I care about you.

ANNA

That's why you left. And got a girlfriend so quickly.

MICHAEL

You didn't let me explain that.

PAM

Please do. Recover from that.

ANNA

I'm not sure what there is to explain.

MICHAEL

Well, first of all, I left because you needed help and I realized all I was doing was keeping you from realizing that. If you really have been taking your medication and tried to get the job back, then I was right.

ANNA

Are you willing to actually believe me.

MICHAEL

I want to.

ANNA

Will you?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

PAM

And this floozy?

ANNA

What about Haley?

MICHAEL

She's a friend of Clayton's. She's had a crush on me for a while apparently. Clayton told her to ask me out. I didn't want to say no. There wasn't going to be a second date.

PAM

So you happen to catch him on the only date he's planning to go on.

ANNA

I'm supposed to believe it was coincidence.

MICHAEL

I'm supposed to believe you've been taking your meds.

ANNA

Fair enough.

PAM

I'll be back in a minute. Give you two some privacy.

Pam exits. Beat.

ANNA

Why the park?

MICHAEL

What do you mean.

ANNA

That was our first date. Even the hot dogs.

MICHAEL

I missed you.

ANNA

You always do that.

MICHAEL

What?

ANNA

Say something sweet and make me want to stop arguing with you.

MICHAEL

It's true.

ANNA

That's why it works.

(beat)

So, I believe you about Haley.

MICHAEL

Good.

ANNA

What about you?

MICHAEL

I think I do. The girl sitting in front of me is the girl I fell in love with.

ANNA

And it hasn't been the whole time.

MICHAEL

No. Something changed. You were hard, when one of the things I've always loved about you was your openness.

ANNA

I feel more like myself.

MICHAEL

I wondered if you'd even noticed.

ANNA

I didn't at the time.

MICHAEL

It scared me, Anna. I don't know if I can be married to the type of woman who turns so sour when upset.

ANNA

You've seen me upset before and I've never gotten that bad.

MICHAEL

True. But life only get harder.

ANNA

I know.

(beat)

For what it's worth, I think I've learned a lot.

MICHAEL

Me too.

ANNA

As in you think I've learned a lot, or you learned something too?

MICHAEL

I guess both.

They kiss.

ANNA

My mom never came back.

MICHAEL

She's gone?

ANNA

She said she would be gone for just a minute, but she's gone.

MICHAEL

Does that worry you.

ANNA

Not really. I'm done holding onto my past.

Anna nestles in against Michael. Fade to black.

Scene 4

Anna's house. Early evening. Anna slowly and carefully puts the last things away. Pam sits and watches, unseen.

The objects Anna has saved for the end are the most precious, and are handled with care and affection. This should take time as we watch her move through this. As she handles them, each can take a different tone- laughter, sigh, heartache- but each has specific memories attached.

She puts the final objects away.

Beat.

She sits down and holds her mother's necklace. She should also be wearing her engagement ring again, whether the audience notices this or not. Pam sits by Anna, unnoticed.

ANNA

Well mom. I guess that's it. All packed away.

(beat)

It's gonna feel so empty without you.

Anna holds onto the moment, her last with her mom. She looks around the house lovingly, as if this is really her last time to be with her mother.

Beat.

She takes off her mom's necklace and looks at it.

Beat.

Offstage, a car honks. She gets up to leave, but settles back in for a moment, not ready to let go.

Michael opens the door and takes in the state of the house and her. He walks over to the couch with Anna and holds her. After a minute, he stands up and holds out his hand lovingly.

MICHAEL

Come on.

Anna sets her mother's necklace down on the end table. She takes his hand and they walk out the door.

Pam goes to the necklace and picks up it. She puts it on for a moment, but stops and sets it back down. She looks around one last time and walks out the opposite direction of Anna.

Blackout.

The End.

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