

Zero State

a play in two acts

by

Allison Moon

allison.moon@gmail.com

310-694-4895

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Setting

A city. Near Future.

Characters

RENEE 41. Neuroscientist
LEE 47. Former movie star. Renee's husband
GREG 40. Lab Tech
ALMA 35. Sex surrogate
HELEN 46. Lee's friend
KIM 37. Helen's wife. Uses a wheelchair

Casting note

This play exists in a large city in the near future. Every effort should be made to create a racially-diverse cast. Kim should be played by a disabled actor. No character, save Renee and Lee, need be played by a cis actor.

Movement notes

Renee and Lee should develop a symbiosis of movement such that the audience might forget who is "driving" at any moment. They may at times move together in subtle impressionistic movements evoking the other. Their moves should be intimate and deliberate but not overly dancerly. A little expressionism goes a long way.

Frequently throughout, Renee inhabits Lee's body. The character names and pronouns refer to the actor playing the character. When Renee's consciousness is inhabiting Lee's body, Lee's name appears with an asterisk (Lee*). When Lee is himself in flashbacks and reveries, his name appears without an asterisk. Lee-as-Renee can and should adopt Renee's mannerisms, though not for comic effect. Any effeminence in his voice and movement must be authentic and sincere.

Design notes

When budget allows, a pane of (plexi)glass on casters can be used as mirrors and windows, and as a projection surface. Lighting can create reflections and Pepper's Ghost effects. When one character is dominant (Lee or Renee) the other will sometimes partially or completely disappear. Maybe a reflection from a set piece illuminates their face here and there. Otherwise, the set can be as minimal or maximal as desired.

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP. A man, LEE, lies dead on a slab, beneath a sheet. There is another slab, empty, next to it.

GREG
You need to decide soon.

RENEE
Who knows so far?

GREG
Just you and me.

RENEE
No one else.

GREG
No one.

RENEE
Because if the media gets their hands on--

GREG
Renee. No one. We're lucky it happened here.

RENEE
We should all be so lucky to die at work.

GREG
I didn't mean--

RENEE
That wasn't sarcasm.

GREG
Right. So?

RENEE
So?

GREG
Lee's been in a zero state for four days. Upload integrity is going to get dicey. We're past the legal window for outside beneficiaries.

RENEE
I know.

GREG
Then it's a no go.

RENEE
We're still in the viable research window.

GREG
You don't want to donate Lee's body to research.

RENEE
He signed the paperwork.

GREG
He probably expected us to be out of beta by the time he--

RENEE
He would've stipulated his body be reserved for a Nobel laureate if he could, the egotist.

GREG
It's actually one of the most generous things you can do.

RENEE
Shut up I know. I wrote the sales copy.

She contemplates his body.

RENEE
I found divorce papers in his briefcase.

GREG
Oh?

RENEE
We hadn't had sex in years.

GREG
I'm sorry.

RENEE
You knew that.

GREG
You clearly had affection for each other...

RENEE
But?

GREG
Didn't you two have an
arrangement?

RENEE
Did we?

GREG
Well, you don't come off as a
particularly sexual person.

RENEE
I suppose that's true. I never
cared. But right now. Am I
supposed to care?

GREG
Grief is odd.

RENEE
I flinch when he touches me. Did
he tell you that? His touch always
felt like a thousand tiny electric
shocks.

GREG
He loved you.

RENEE
I know. I mean. Sure. I can't lose
him.

GREG
I'm so sorry--

RENEE
His next two weeks were full of
investor meetings. Public approval
is slipping. The bioethics
lobbyists are breathing down my
neck. This is a really shitty time
for him to clock out.

GREG
Jesus, Renee.

RENEE
My physical is current, right?

GREG
What?

RENEE
My vitals are perfect.

GREG

Whoa. Whoa...

RENEE

It makes sense. We've been married for twelve years. I've seen him sell a hundred times. I hate it but I could probably figure it out.

GREG

No. No way.

RENEE

Fifteen days. Upload me into Lee's body. I secure the next round of funding. Then wake my body and we'll go through with the whole death piece.

GREG

I'll lose my job. You'll lose yours.

RENEE

Fuck the board.

GREG

You're the board chair.

RENEE

Yeah well fuck me. Come on, for science.

GREG

You're not making me trust you.

RENEE

We need this, Greg. You're running out of money—

GREG

You approve the budget.

RENEE

We are running out of money. We need more test subjects.

GREG

Who'd've thought?

RENEE

Not Cold Craft.

GREG

Are we really going with that name?

RENEE

Simple majority. Not my call. I see the numbers. The board's been talking about this for weeks. We need more data before we can go public. And we just happen to have a fresh corpse ripe for the taking.

GREG

He's your husband.

RENEE

He's just meat.

GREG

Wow.

RENEE

You've been doing this work long enough to know that this isn't Lee. It stopped being Lee as soon as the final neuron fired in his brain at four forty-nine last Thursday. Probably long before that, neurologically speaking. He-- it-- is a donor body. One that I need to keep viable for just a tiny bit longer.

GREG

The ethics of this are--

RENEE

Complicated.

GREG

Awful! It's lying. It's identity theft. There are probably a dozen laws we'd be breaking.

RENEE

The law doesn't even know what this is yet.

GREG

Bylaws! *Our* bylaws. We don't do healthy beneficiaries. We don't do cross gender. We don't do tourism. They're the bylaws that you wrote!

RENEE
I'm rewriting them.

GREG
You can't do that.

RENEE
I already did.

GREG
Bullshit.

RENEE
The board met over the weekend.
It's done. They'd rather have Lee
than me.

GREG
They said that?

RENEE
I know.

GREG
You invented the tech.

RENEE
But Lee sells it. With this
arrangement, they get us both. My
brains and his...presence.

GREG
Do you really think you can fake
your way through investor
meetings?

RENEE
It's not magic, Greg. It's sales.
Two weeks. In and out. I use Lee's
body to tie up loose ends and
secure Cold Craft's future. Then I
transfer back. Lee "dies," we deal
with that mess, and no one's the
wiser.

GREG
Goddammit.

RENEE
Can you please just engage with
this logically with me?

GREG

I'd love to, but not when you're threatening my job.

RENEE

I'm sorry. I've been upset.

GREG

Have you? Because you sound freakishly dispassionate.

RENEE

Have you ever known me to be anything but?

GREG

Maybe this decision could use a little more emotion.

RENEE

I don't owe you a display of grief. I couldn't if I wanted to. Is it not enough to tell you that I loved him and I miss him but there are more important things than sitting still and feeling sad? Like making sure the technology I've spent my entire life building has a fighting chance? That the mission you and three hundred other scientists opted into will actually come to fruition? That the thousands and potentially millions of people who are desperate for a chance to live their lives unencumbered by disease and pain and disability-- and are waiting for this technology to happen-- have a chance to actually experience it? I will have time to grieve and probably cry, or at least try to. But that's not what comes first. First is Lee saving this company.

GREG

Maybe you can sell. But first, you need to take some time and reflect. So do I. Lee was my friend, too.

RENEE

Well the man who was once your friend is going to start turning into a pile of goo soon. And his contacts, all his Hollywood cachet and shareholder fanboys will go with him. This is not the time to reflect. This is the right choice.

GREG

I just-- As your friend and colleague. I don't agree.

RENEE

Your displeasure has been noted. I will do my best to protect you from any ramifications. Now get me on the slab.

SCENE 2

The lab, later. Renee wears a hospital smock.

GREG

(Helping her onto the slab:)
You'll feel cold, then you'll fall asleep.

RENEE

I know.

GREG

Please don't do that. When you wake up you'll be shaky, so don't try to move or anything. I'll be right here. Any questions?

RENEE

Did I bring a belt for him?

GREG

I don't know. Do you want me to check?

RENEE

It's fine.

GREG

Remember, this body, this Renee, is going into a medical coma. From the point you wake up onward, any new memories you make won't return to your body. No people you meet, no insights you have.

GREG
No new neurological conduits
formed at all. So buy a journal or
something.

RENEE
Right.

Greg places the EEG cap on her head. She stops him.

RENEE
Let me. I don't like the feeling
of cold things on my head.

GREG
I have bad news about where your
body will be stored for the next
two weeks.

RENEE
May I?

Greg hands her the cap. She slips it on and Greg adjusts.

GREG
Ready?

She nods. Greg exits to the control booth. Slow atmospheric shift into a dream-like mood. Renee gently rises from her slab and moves to Lee's. She contemplates him tenderly, then slips next to him as though getting into bed for the night. She cuddles up against him. Slow shift of light back to reality and she is gone; Lee is alone on the slab.

GREG
(on intercom)
Alright, Lee. Lee?... Renee?

Lee*'s eyes open and he struggles to rise. He's naked but for underwear. Greg rushes to Lee*'s side.

GREG
Easy, Renee. Easy.

LEE*
It worked right?

He notices his voice, his body. He's finding awe through fatigue.

GREG
It worked. We have to run a few
more tests, collect some motor
data--

LEE*
No shit. He really was colorblind.

GREG
You didn't believe him?

LEE*
Just far moreso that I thought.
Everything is... beige.

GREG
He's also been dead for four days.
Give his optic nerve time to come
back online.

LEE*
Can I have his cell phone?

GREG
I want to keep you overnight for
observation.

LEE*
Just the phone, Greg.

Greg retrieves the phone and clothes while Lee* stands and
adjusts.

LEE*
Wow, I'm so far from the ground.

GREG
Renee, easy! Your muscles are--

Lee* wobbles and falls back.

LEE*
Right. Okay. But you should be
calling me Lee.

GREG
Of course. Lee.

LEE*
It's cool huh?

Greg runs some basic tests.

GREG
It's... weird.

LEE*
What number does this make?
Fifteen?

GREG
Successes? I think you're
thirteen.

LEE*
Nice.

GREG
So, what's first on the agenda?

LEE*
(flipping through the phone:)
Meeting with "Alma" tomorrow.
Don't know them. Maybe an
investment firm? Then dinner with
"H" and "K" which might be
(scrolls) yeah, Helen and Kim. He
really didn't like details on his
calendar.

GREG
You may want to cancel that one.

LEE*
Why?

GREG
Dinner with Lee's best friend?

LEE*
It'll be fine.

GREG
I think you should take a beat.

LEE*
I'm fine! It worked! Let me just
enjoy this for a second.

GREG
Ren-- Lee. I love you, but I also
know you. If shit gets weird. If
you feel any symptoms of stroke,
psychosis, proprioception issues--
anything. You are calling me right
away. You understand?

LEE*
I'll be fine.

GREG
Say it.

LEE*
I'll call you.

GREG
 Nine a.m. Friday your ass is right
 back here for more tests,
 understood?

LEE*
 Oh my god you're such a hard ass.
 Is this how men talk to each
 other?

GREG
 This is how I'm talking to you.
 Since you're kind of no longer my
 boss. When?

LEE*
 Friday nine a.m.

Greg helps Lee stand.

GREG
 Atta boy. Get home safe.

SCENE 3

Lee* enters his home and drops his bag. He loosens his clothes; they're too stiff and constricting. He moves his limbs in odd ways, tentatively at first, then gaining enthusiasm-- wiggling and stretching and contemplating size and scale.

Renee is behind the mirror, subtly evoking his movements. She's still the one driving, after all.

He examines himself in the mirror, playing with facial expressions, stripping off his shirt and poring over his body, elated by his (i.e. Renee's) stunning accomplishment.

RENEE
 Hey friend. It's nice to see you.

Renee strokes her cheek. Lee* mirrors it. This tender moment is interrupted by the BUZZ of Lee's cellphone.

PROJECTION: I'm looking forward to tomorrow night.

Lee* contemplates for a moment. Then he types.

SUPERTEXT: Me too!!

He has second thoughts and erases the exclamation points, replacing them with a period, then erases the whole thing. Lee* is fixated on the phone but in the background Renee may pace.

He puts down the phone, looks to the floor. He does pushups. A lot of pushups. He continues tumbling/dancing/enthusiastic athleticism. Awe spreads across his face as he realizes his capacity for movement.

LEE*
Unbelievable.

He stops, grabs his phone, and types.

PROJECTION: Sounds good. See you then.

He tosses the phone aside and for a moment looks at home in his body. He rests. Then, a curious feeling demands his attention. He looks at his crotch. He's conflicted, that maybe this biological demand is just too much too soon. But then...

SCENE 4

Lee* stands at a threshold, carrying a briefcase. He is sharply dressed though clearly uncomfortable in the clothes. ALMA answers.

ALMA
Hi.

LEE*
Hello, Alma. Nice to see you.

He extends his hand to shake. She takes it, perplexed.

ALMA
You look sharp.

LEE*
Thanks. Sorry, I thought we'd be meeting at a restaurant.

ALMA
A restaurant?

LEE*
Most of my meetings happen in restaurants. Sorry.

ALMA
Is that what this is?

LEE*
Sorry, is it not?

ALMA
You apologize a lot.

LEE*

That's... a valid point. I will stop doing that.

ALMA

Not on my account. But y'know.

LEE*

Sure.

ALMA

Come in.

He does.

LEE*

I'm sor-- I was under the impression this was a business meeting.

ALMA

I must have misunderstood. I was hoping this was a social call but then the tone of your messages... just felt a little stiff. So you wanted a session instead?

LEE*

A session?

ALMA

Which I'm fine with.

LEE*

No. I don't want-- Wait. I don't want anything from you.

ALMA

That... actually hurts my feelings a little.

LEE*

No, I mean. I'd be happy to get to know you. Better than I do. Which is, I'm sorry to admit, not very well.

ALMA

Well sure. We just met last week.

LEE*

Right. So, let's talk. As new acquaintances. Not as a business thing.

ALMA
 Okay. Good. I thought my judgement
 was getting rusty.

LEE*
 I promise, that's all me.

ALMA
 Do you want something? Tea or
 water?

LEE*
 Wine?

ALMA
 I thought you didn't drink?

LEE*
 Right. No. Rarely. Water is great.
 So tell me about you. How was your
 week?

ALMA
 Ah. It was. Busy. I had a fun--
 Are you still okay with me talking
 about work?

LEE*
 Of course.

ALMA
 Never hurts to double check. One
 of my clients is ah-- he had-- ah
 crap I always forget the name.
 It's a degenerative motor illness.

LEE*
 ALS?

ALMA
 It's like a name? Like a
 person's--

LEE*
 Lou Gehrig's?

ALMA
 No...

LEE*
 Kennedy's Disease?

ALMA
No, it's like two names with a
hyphen...

LEE*
Werdnig-Hoffman... Brown-
Sequard... Guillain-Barré...

ALMA
That one! GBS. Wow. How do you
know all that?

LEE*
I'm married to a neurologist.

ALMA
Oh.

LEE*
Did I not mention that?

ALMA
You don't remember?

LEE*
I'm afraid I don't. My memory is--
What did we talk about?

ALMA
Oh just work. My work. Your work
in biotech. I mean, I admit, I
recognized you from, you know...

LEE*
Any one in particular?

ALMA
The Complex was my high school
boyfriend's favorite movie. We
watched it, like, a dozen times.
(movie villain voice:) "I know
what your weakness is..."

ALMA
"Death."

LEE*
"Death."

LEE*
That line.

ALMA
My boyfriend quoted it, like, all
the time.

LEE*
So did-- Yeah, it's... What a dumb movie.

ALMA
You were really cute though. Still are. Why did you stop acting?

LEE*
I uh, went to rehab.

ALMA
Oh.

LEE*
It was big tabloid fodder at the time, or so they tell me.

ALMA
Yeah, sorry, I guess I knew that.

LEE*
I've grown used to strangers knowing more about my life than I do.

ALMA
Oh right, that's when you were-- ooh, nevermind.

LEE*
What?

ALMA
Outed. ...Right?

LEE*
As?

ALMA
Sorry.

LEE*
Oh, as bisexual? Yeah, I guess that was then.

ALMA
I thought it was so weird how many people cared. I always just assumed all actors were bi. Is that why you quit? Acting I mean, not drugs.

LEE*

I thought about going back. Some people were upset when I walked.

ALMA

Why?

LEE*

When people make a lot of money off of you, they tend to have opinions about how you live your life.

ALMA

That sounds awful.

LEE*

That's the business. At first it feels like you're getting away with something. Then you realize it's getting away with you. Anyway, I met my wife and I like my job. But enough of that. You were telling a story.

ALMA

Right, so my client had GBS. And he's autistic. Easily overwhelmed by sensory information, all that. He just got a tracheotomy because respiratory therapy hasn't really done the trick. It was our first session since it's healed and he's all nervous about it but... Well... We figured out that he can basically be smothered and still breathe. Obviously, because of-- but y'know news to him. So he discovered that he loves for me to just sit on his face, fully dressed, for literal hours, and he can just chill and like, space out, block out the world and be in bliss. We spent our entire last session that way. Me in my leggings and a flowy skirt draped over him like a shroud, just up there hanging out, answering texts and reading articles. I told him that I met you and he said next time we should put on one of your movies while we...

Long, awkward silence. Alma is embarrassed. Lee* is perplexed.

LEE*

...What business are you in,
exactly?

ALMA

Oh my gosh.

LEE*

I'm sorry, did we talk about--

ALMA

We definitely did. We *definitely*
did. You were fascinated. You
asked great questions. Which is
rare. You seemed cool about it.
And now I've offended you or
horrified you and-- I should have
known better.

LEE*

Hold on. That story just went in a
direction I was not expecting. I
hang out with scientists all day.
And when I'm not with them, I'm
with the stuffiest businessmen you
can't even imagine.

ALMA

I can imagine.

LEE*

I am now realizing that yes you
can.

ALMA

What do you remember from when we
met?

LEE*

This is not a referendum on your
charms, but, nothing. Literally
nothing. It's hard to explain.

With little warning Alma kisses Lee*.

ALMA

Did we do that before?

LEE*

There is no correct way for me to
answer that question.

ALMA
You really don't remember.

LEE*
Alma, let me just come clean for a second. I'm not the man you met.

ALMA
I'm sure--

LEE*
That's not a euphemism. I legally cannot explain the details to you, but I am an entirely different person than the one you met at...

ALMA
The museum fundraiser.

LEE*
The museum fundraiser.

ALMA
But you're physically...

LEE*
Yeah,
(gestures from cheek down)
Same.
(gestures from cheek up)
Different.

ALMA
Huh. Honestly, I like this one better. That other guy was a little too smooth. You're charmingly hapless.

LEE*
...I accept that.

ALMA
Okay.

Another, sweeter, silence.

LEE*
I also do have to acknowledge, mostly because it's notable, personally. You smell really nice.

ALMA
Okay.

LEE*

Sorry, it's just... unexpected.
Smells are usually hard for me
to-- Are you... wearing something,
or ovulating or...

ALMA

Wow. Um. No, it's just. Me.

LEE*

Fascinating.

ALMA

Since we're coming clean. You know
that I'm trying to flirt with you,
right?

LEE*

I did not know that.

ALMA

I am.

LEE*

I'm not great with subtle cues. In
general. Or right now.

ALMA

I can be less subtle.

LEE*

Alright.

ALMA

Okay...

LEE*

Are you expecting me to...

ALMA

I want you to kiss me.

LEE*

Oh. Okay. Um.

ALMA

But you don't have to.

LEE*

No. I-- sure. Okay.

They kiss. It is clear that this is Renee's first time kissing
a woman. It is... a lot. Lee* pulls away.

LEE*

Also, different from the other
guy-- I'm a bit more naive than
you might think.

ALMA

That was great.

LEE*

Are you mocking me?

ALMA

Absolutely not. This is genuinely
great.

LEE*

Alright. Okay.

ALMA

We're good. If it's okay with you,
I'd like to do it again.

LEE*

(Sincere contemplation, then)
...Yes. Yes, I would like that.

ALMA

Great.

They kiss again. Lee* pulls away.

LEE*

I want to just make it clear that
this is all I'm comfortable with.

ALMA

Alright.

LEE*

Kissing is fine but anything
else...

ALMA

Got it.

They keep kissing. Lee* pulls away.

LEE*

Are you doing something?

ALMA

Doing...?

LEE*

Escalating.

ALMA
I am doing nothing other than
enjoying you.

LEE*
Because I feel like this-- drive.

ALMA
(amused)
Alright.

LEE*
Like kissing isn't enough. And if
it's not enough for you I need you
to tell me.

ALMA
I am having a nice time.

LEE*
Then why do I feel this...

ALMA
I'm not doing anything, Lee.

LEE*
You know what. I don't think I
should be here. You're lovely.
Very lovely. But this is just too
much too fast. You're great. I'm
sorry. Genuinely. I need to go.
I'm going to go.

ALMA
But you could stay. For the
record.

LEE*
I'm going to go. I'll call you
or-- Unless you want to call me.
Is that-? I'll-- Sorry. I'll be in
touch.

Lee* runs from the apartment. He is having a panic attack. In
the hallway, Lee* assumes a stress position. Renee emerges from
the same position, continuing the scene.

RENEE
(struggling to breathe:)
I am not. I am not. I am not in
control.
(She practices breathing.)
Too-- too much. I just-- I
shouldn't feel--

RENEE
 (another gasp. She's
 pressed.)
 Jesus. I can still-- smell her.
 And taste-- Oh Christ, Lee. Is
 this how you lived?

She tries to calm but is spinning out. She wipes her arms with her hands, grasps her neck, covers her eyes. She works to steady her breath. Finally, she begins to regain control and there is the briefest serene moment before--

Lee moves to Renee. We're in a FLASHBACK.

LEE
 You smell really nice. What is
 that, gardenia?

RENEE
 ...Shampoo.

LEE
 Gotta love a gal who washes her
 hair.

RENEE
 I hate to disappoint but it
 doesn't happen often.

LEE
 Got dressed up for this shindig
 then?

RENEE
 This one, yeah. I have a code.

LEE
 Go on.

RENEE
 Sparkling wine gets you lip gloss.
 Sushi of any kind, I wash my hair.
 Oyster shooters, I put on a bra.

LEE
 Wow, they must've pulled out all
 the stops.

RENEE
 They'd better. They're funding my
 project. It's a bad sign if a
 biotech company scrimps on the
 spread.

LEE
Your project?

RENEE
Simulated consciousness thing.

LEE
Simulated consciousness... thing.

RENEE
(with LEE)
...thing, yeah.

LEE
Am I even allowed to know about this? Sounds like a pretty big deal.

RENEE
I should've read my NDA, huh?

LEE
It's probably in there if the penalty was like--

RENEE
Death or--

LEE
Something yeah.

RENEE
I should hire lawyer.

LEE
Bodyguard at least.
...
So you're a scientist.

RENEE
Aren't we all?

LEE
Not all of us, no.

RENEE
Really? I was thinking like... psychologist.

LEE
You consider that a science?

RENEE
Ah, so not a psychologist.

LEE
God no. Poking at brains.

LEE
That's my idea of hell. What about you?

RENEE
Neuroscientist.

LEE
Right. Sorry.

RENEE
You're at a party celebrating the multi-million dollar acquisition of my research so it's safe to say I'm having the last laugh.

LEE
Fair. So, neuroscientist, how are we doing on the big questions?

RENEE
How are "we" doing on the "big" questions?

LEE
Like the scientific community. And...

RENEE
And?

LEE
God, time, sex.

RENEE
Well, firstly, it's very charitable for you to consider us a community.

LEE
More like a featureless mass.

RENEE
Like a culture.

LEE
A bacterial culture?

RENEE
Mm. As for the big questions, nothing to report. Though you may want to consult a physicist. There are two over by the cocktails. I can see if they're free.

LEE

I'm good here with you. What are your thoughts, professionally?

RENEE

On god, time and...?

LEE

Correct.

RENEE

Not a huge fan on the whole. I'm open to other people's differing views but I'm happy abstaining.

LEE

From time?

RENEE

Yeah, the whole thing is a conspiracy.

LEE

The scheme is admittedly hard to clock.

RENEE

That's what they want you to sync.

LEE

At the moment at least.

RENEE

All backed by big quartz.

LEE

That part actually feels possible. Speaking of, my big quartz is saying it's time for me to go.

RENEE

Ah, that's too bad.

LEE

Is it?

RENEE

Sure, yeah. I mean. I'm a nerd. We're all nerds. You're cool. Don't get a lot of your kind 'round these parts.

LEE

It may make me the biggest nerd.

RENEE

How so?

LEE

The only cool kid at a nerd party?
Who's not nerdy enough to carry on
a conversation with anyone?

RENEE

You're doing just fine with me.

Long pause.

LEE

Am I picking up on something?

RENEE

See? You're cool.

LEE

Because...?

RENEE

You're pointing to the thing.
Anyone else here might feel the
thing. Maybe even see the thing.
But you said the thing. Which is
cool.

LEE

So...?

RENEE

Yeah go for it.

LEE

Here?

RENEE

It's my party.

LEE

Which is why I ask.

RENEE

What are they going to do? Fire
me?

LEE

Maybe? I told you I have no idea
what's going on.

RENEE

Alright, come on.

LEE

Okay.

He kisses her. He pulls away. She is smiling cryptically.

LEE

Okay?

RENEE

Yeah that was pretty good.

LEE

Pretty good.

RENEE

Sure.

LEE

You're inscrutable.

RENEE

What don't you understand?

LEE

You. Any of you.

They kiss again.

LEE

For example.

RENEE

You are very bold.

LEE

I think of it as insecure.

RENEE

I like it.

LEE

Kissing me?

RENEE

No, that you're insecure. Yes, kissing you. I like it.

LEE

Yeah?

RENEE

Yeah.

He takes her in his arms, kissing her passionately. Then:

LEE

Because I feel like that's not true.

RENEE

You need me to react in a specific way.

LEE

I don't know if I need that. I guess I just expect it.

RENEE

Why?

LEE

When I kiss people there is usually a reaction, that's all.

RENEE

You need me to react.

LEE

I don't need you to do anything. Maybe just feel.

RENEE

I feel.

LEE

What do you feel?

RENEE

Warm. Moist. Pressure and friction.

LEE

You just described the physical sensation of pressing mouths together.

RENEE

Correct.

LEE

Anything else?

RENEE

An experience of warmth, emotionally. Being awash in an unfamiliar, pleasant scent is intense, but intriguing. I find that I prefer being closer to you rather than further from you.

RENEE

And the next time I'm at a party like this I'm going to look around and hope you're here. And I'll be happy if you are and disappointed if you're not. And I'm curious if that could extend to increasingly long spans of time.

LEE

God. You're like a sexy computer.

RENEE

Thank you.

LEE

When can I see you again?

RENEE

What are you up to now?

LEE

Now?

RENEE

Want to come to my lab to see my chemistry set?

LEE

I can't tell if you're flirting or literal.

RENEE

I'm literally flirting. Can I take you to my lab and show you what I'm working on? The chemistry set exists, but it's just a bunch of chemicals.

LEE

They don't come in sets for grownups.

RENEE

Not the kinds I play with.

LEE

Me and chemicals don't get along too well.

RENEE

Well I have bad news about literally everything you touch, eat, and breathe.

LEE

Oh no. Maybe you can save me
through science.

They move to exit. Lee continues off into the dark, Renee is left alone with her memory.

SCENE 5

Dinner at Kim and Helen's. They're done eating and are finishing a bottle of wine. Lee* is drinking water.

HELEN

So Lee throws the guy out. He's on the sidewalk weaving and swearing and just being a drunk idiot. Lee's trying to deescalate and redirect the guy's aggro energy away from the club. Finally the guy realizes he's bleeding. The other guy had knocked his tooth loose before Lee could break it up. So the guy wipes his lip, sees blood and realizes his front tooth is all skewed. It's got one of those gold--erm--

KIM

Crowns?

HELEN

Right, a crown. And it's just dangling there. And he reaches in his mouth with his thumb and--
(mimics)
--pops it back into place.

KIM

Eww!

HELEN

Yeah but then Lee here says---

She waits for his reply.

LEE*

(off guard)
It's more fun to hear you tell it.

HELEN

Lee says, "Do you bite your thumb at us sir?"

KIM

For real?

HELEN

He was playing Tybalt at the time.
It's not like he quoted
Shakespeare as a regular thing.

KIM

What'd the guy say?

Helen waits a beat. Lee* doesn't answer.

HELEN

The guy says, I kid you not,
(drunken slur:)
"I don't bite my thumb at you." He
left off the sir because that
would be just too much. And then
Lee says...

LEE*

...

KIM

"Do you quarrel sir?"

HELEN

Yes! And what does the guy say?

KIM

(amused)

No!

HELEN

"Quarrel? No." And he just weaves
away into the night.

KIM

Amazing.

HELEN

I've never seen such an erudite
exchange with a drunk at a strip
club.

KIM

I can't imagine you two at twenty.

HELEN

He got paid to be clever, and I
got paid to be sexy. My how the
tables have turned.

KIM

Who'd've thought.

LEE*

Not me.

KIM

How long did you work at the club?

LEE*

Me? Oh, um. Like, what, a year?

HELEN

It was barely six months. You got cast in *Restless* and then poof, outta there. And you forgot all about me.

LEE*

I took you to the premiere.

HELEN

(deeply cynical)

And what a night it was.

LEE*

(oblivious)

Didn't we have a good time?

KIM

How have I never heard this story before?

HELEN

You know Renee doesn't like to hear about our sordid college days.

LEE*

I don't think--

HELEN

It's just a conversation style thing. Renee would rather have a point than have fun.

LEE*

That's not fair.

HELEN

If she were here, she'd agree with me. I love the woman, but her style is more lecture than hijinks.

KIM

Where is she, anyway?

LEE*

Bern.

HELEN

Switzerland?

LEE*

Some biotech conference.

Helen's point is made.

KIM

Oh gosh, thanks for reminding me!

Kim rushes to gather her things.

LEE*

About what?

HELEN

Kim's going to a lecture at the university.

LEE*

Lecture?

KIM

Oh, well. It's a little awkward. It's about the Cold Craft tech.

HELEN

Are they really going with that name? It sounds like something you get at a deli.

LEE*

It was a market-driven decision.

KIM

Poor Renee.

HELEN

Poor Renee? Lee's the one who has to say it with a straight face on the BBC.

LEE*

Who's speaking?

Kim starts clearing the dishes.

KIM

Just a biomedical ethicist.

KIM
Talking about the moral
implications, yada yada. I'm
giving my students credit for
attending.

LEE*
What do dance majors care about
biotech?

KIM
(wry)
Yeah it's not like bodies and
brains are connected or anything.

HELEN
(Re: the dishes)
Leave them. Lee will take care of
it.

LEE*
Moral implications?

KIM
Is that a surprise?

LEE*
I just don't know if they warrant
a public debate.

KIM
Lecture. And of course it warrants
discussion. Transferring a living
consciousness to a deceased donor?
I mean, come on.

LEE*
Cold Craft saves lives.

KIM
And creates complications. Do the
donors have any rights?

LEE*
Of course, and they sign a long
contract that--

KIM
Absolves Cold Craft of any
liability.

LEE*
No.

HELEN

Kim.

KIM

These people had lives. They had families and friends. And you just prop them up and send them back into the world.

LEE*

That's a deeply cynical--

KIM

And the recipients. I mean, how much counseling are you prepared to do? How are you going to keep the ultra rich from bogarting the process for themselves as a fountain of youth?

LEE*

We have strict bylaws. Protocols--

HELEN

Okay you two. Kim, love, I'm sure you'll have plenty to chew on at the lecture. Give Lee a break. He's just a spokesman.

LEE*

I feel like I should have known about this. Should I get my PR team there?

HELEN

Renee probably knows all about it.

KIM

It's been on the university website for months.

HELEN

(To Lee*:)

You're just going to say whatever Renee tells you to say anyway.

Kim rushes to give Lee* a hug goodbye.

KIM

It was so nice seeing you. Let's do this again when Renee's back in town.

She kisses Helen goodbye.

KIM
Have fun you two.

Kim exits.

LEE*
Did I do something to offend her?

HELEN
You two are always like that. If anything you held back. Are you okay? You don't seem like--

LEE*
I have my own mind.

HELEN
Sorry?

LEE*
I don't just parrot what other people tell me to. I have input into the public face of the technology.

HELEN
Alright.

LEE*
I'm the spokesman for the world's largest biotech company.

HELEN
You're cute when you defend your masculinity.

LEE*
Renee would tell you herself. Of course I had pull because of my career as an actor but--

HELEN
Your "career" as an "actor?" Perhaps you mean your reputation as a celebrity.

LEE*
I went to Tisch too, you know.

HELEN
For a year. And then it was straight to pretty boy with a surfboard. Pretty boy with a suitcase. Pretty boy with a gun.

HELEN

Come on. Renee didn't hire you as the head of strategic development...

...

And since you're not fighting back, am I to assume... you're feeling a little soft tonight?

LEE*

I guess. I just need a little. Rebalancing.

HELEN

Clear the table. You can do the dishes after.

She levels a look. He does as he's told.

HELEN

You do have your own mind, but... well. You never have been one to contribute more than smile and a quip. You're a shell of a man in a nice suit.

LEE*

Helen. Jesus. I thought we were friends.

Helen begins to loosen Lee*'s clothes. In small ways, such that he barely notices at first, but more manhandling as things go. More to humiliate than arouse.

HELEN

We're friends. Like a remora is friends with a great white. You're along for the ride. Grateful for the scraps I leave you.

LEE*

I am not--

HELEN

Spare me. You think being tall is a virtue and being handsome is a talent and we should all be thrilled to have a past-prime B-movie star in our midst. You're married to a goddamn brain surgeon developing world-changing technology. Do you really think you're the compelling one in your marriage?

LEE*

What does Renee have to do with---

HELEN

She may not be as charming, but she's brilliant and interesting which are two things you'd dream of being if you had the intelligence to realize how badly you lacked them.

LEE*

Helen! What the hell is wrong with you?

HELEN

You come to me for what you want. It's always about what you want.

She may pull back her hair, remove her glasses, other "costume change" type things.

LEE*

How could this be what I want?!

HELEN

God only knows. Your own wife invented an entire technology to avoid you. Why do you think she keeps you around at all? You're just arm candy and a stiff cock.

LEE*

You know we haven't had sex in--

HELEN

Why would you? She has better things to do than suffer under the grunting, sweaty weight of you.

LEE*

Then why the hell did she marry me?!

Helen grips Lee* by the chin. She slaps his face. He is stunned. It hurts-- but there's something else.

HELEN

Okay?

Without fully understanding, Lee* nods.

HELEN

On the ground.

LEE*
What?

HELEN
You know I don't like to repeat myself.

LEE*
How? Wh--

HELEN
On your knees, forehead to the floor.

LEE*
I--

HELEN
Are you really gunning for punishment this soon?

LEE*
(to himself:)
You've got to be kidding me, Lee.

Lee* does as he's told.

HELEN
Ass up. Higher.

He does. Helen calmly removes cheese remainders from the cheeseboard, brushes it off.

HELEN
You asked me a question. Ask it again.

LEE*
(head still on the ground)
...why did she marry me?

Helen spansks him with the cheeseboard.

HELEN
Again.

LEE*
Why did she marry me?

Helen spansks him again.

HELEN
What do you think?

LEE*
 ...I don't know.

She spansks him.

LEE*
 I don't know.

She spansks him.

LEE*
 I don't know.

A long pause as Lee* holds the pose. He may cry. Helen watches, sipping her wine, letting him have his moment.

HELEN
 Up. Come on.

Lee* sits back on his heels, chastened. Helen's demeanor shifts. Now she's tender and gentle.

HELEN
 Come here.

Helen wraps her arms around him, pulling him to her chest like a child.

HELEN
 There you go. That's my boy.
 That's my sweet boy.

She cradles him, perhaps even rocking him, kissing his forehead, etc.

LEE*
 I don't understand what just happened.

HELEN
 What do you need right now, love?

LEE*
 (Almost childlike:)
 I really want a piece of chocolate.

HELEN
 Well I just happen to have some right here.

Lee* steadies himself. He has a bite of chocolate and downs the last of Kim's wine.

LEE*

I feel like I finally understand chocolate. Like I've gone my entire life wondering what the fuss was about and right now, it's all making sense.

HELEN

Oh please. You've always loved chocolate. How do you feel?

LEE*

...Can you answer my question?

HELEN

Why Renee married you? I don't know if I have an answer that will satisfy you.

LEE*

I don't want satisfaction, I want the truth.

HELEN

God you sound like Renee. (long pause) She was in a tough spot when you met. She needed your confidence. Your charm and wit. Your experience navigating the spotlight. Supporting her made you feel strong at a time when you really needed that. What, you were just out of rehab. You and Caleb had broken up. Your dad just died. You had those two big flops back-to-back. Renee was this brilliant, challenging woman who didn't know you from Adam. You were just a person who made her feel cozy and loved, and had dinner waiting for her when she got home after a long day at the lab. She was your ray of light. But that light isn't a miracle. It's just what the world looks like when you find your way out of the cellar. When you met, you each thought you were seeing the love of your life. But you were just seeing... life.

LEE*

Christ.

HELEN

You asked.

LEE*

I didn't realize you'd thought so much about it.

HELEN

You've been my best friend for almost thirty years. Of course I've thought about it. I've thought about why this still happens. Why you still ask for things from me that... (sigh) You and Renee have a really lovely friendship.

LEE*

She's my wife.

HELEN

Do you really feel like her husband? Do you feel like she even wanted a husband?

LEE*

...

HELEN

I love Renee. I'm so happy you brought her into our lives. But you have fundamental value differences.

LEE*

Like what?

Helen levels a look.

LEE*

What, like sex?

HELEN

Yes like sex. And everything that that means. I hate that you and Renee don't have a sex life. Not because she's withholding but because you just don't agree on the value of sex in your marriage. And so I watch you flirt and cheat.

LEE*

I cheat?

HELEN

What would Renee think?

LEE*

I think she finds it all to be a waste of time.

HELEN

Which is fine. For her. But not for you. You've diminished yourself to fit into the very small container she's set aside for you.

LEE*

She didn't make me.

HELEN

But she didn't mind it. Renee knew exactly who you were when she married you. You've always wanted more, more, more. And she said "I'm in."

But as soon as you got married it became all about her work and she cut you out of everything that didn't go in that box. And you never talked about it. And that really pisses me off.

LEE*

We tried. We went to therapy.

HELEN

And how did that go?

LEE*

She believes that therapy is for people who have no curiosities beyond the workings of their own boring minds.

Her point is made.

HELEN

I'm just surprised you haven't fallen in love with someone else yet.

Lee* pinches himself.

HELEN

Uh oh.

LEE*
What?

HELEN
What were you just thinking about?

LEE*
What?

HELEN
You pinched yourself.

LEE*
No I didn't. I did? No, I couldn't have.

HELEN
There's a mark.

LEE*
That is...

HELEN
You only pinch yourself when--

LEE*
--Yeah, I know.

HELEN
So, what is it?

LEE*
There is a woman.

HELEN
Oh really?

LEE*
Someone I just met.

HELEN
Did you sleep with her?

LEE*
No. But I fear I may want to.

HELEN
Are you worried I'm going to judge you?

LEE*
No. I'm judging myself.

HELEN
Oh Lee. You and your conscience.

LEE*

You say that like it's a bad thing.

HELEN

With Renee you feel invisible. It's okay to want to be seen.

LEE*

I need to think my way through this.

HELEN

When have you ever thought your way through anything? You're a feeler, baby. Not a thinker. I want you to be happy, to have a future that thrills you. But you're not going to find that with cool, distant logic. What do you *feel* you should do?

LEE*

I feel like I should tell you something really hard. But I feel like I'm not ready to.

HELEN

Well when you're ready, I'm here.

SCENE 6

Lee* enters his home, deflated, lost. He looks in the mirror. Renee looks back. She reaches to touch him. Her hand strokes the glass. Lee presses his hands against it.

RENEE

Oh Lee.

Slowly, Renee's hand turns into a fist. She punches the glass.

Lee holds the glass still, protecting himself. Protecting her.

RENEE

You should have told me. You should have said... something.

Light dims. Something has shifted. Someone else is present. Renee searches the space, trying to find the interloper. Lee does, too. They slightly mirror movements, obscured by shadow. They contemplate their arm, the place where Lee pinched himself. They look past one another, like trying to track a ghost. They move through the space tentatively, reaching, evoking the feeling of being lost in a vast cave.

They reach out fumbling blind for something they recognize. They work their way to the center. They may risk a touch of the other, but they can never get a firm hold.

LEE

(barely audible, slowly
becoming so)

Am I dreaming? Is this a nightmare? Should I try a light switch or look at a clock? Am I dreaming? Can anyone hear me? I can't hear myself. Am I lost?

RENEE

Lee?

LEE

(slightly louder)

I remember you.

RENEE

(incredulous)

Lee, is that you?

LEE

When we met it was raining but it stopped just in time for the walk.

RENEE

Yes.

They reach and hold onto one another, still blind. Slow fade in of BEACH SOUNDS. Calm surf, seagulls in the distance, wind through palms, etc.

LEE

You put your hand on my shoulder.

They slip through each other's grasp.

RENEE

What? No I--

Lee places a heavy hand Renee's shoulder. He is his own father. Renee is young Lee. Renee shakes off his hand.

LEE

Lee, son. I made certain choices.

RENEE

This doesn't make any--

LEE

Your mother and I... well.

LEE

God, look at this beach. Such a mess. That hurricane really did a number on these trees huh?

RENEE

What you're not even going to look at me?

LEE

I'm moving. Renting a room from a friend down in Louisiana. Maybe in a few years you can visit if you want.

RENEE

A few years?

LEE

(gesturing off)

See if you can get your mom to quit smoking. The last thing we need is her dying of cancer.

RENEE

Jesus, Dad.

LEE

Why don't you call me Robert? You're a big guy now. Too old for the "dad" stuff.

RENEE

"The dad stuff?" Like, having one?

LEE

You know what I mean. It's time for you to grow up.

RENEE

I'm fifteen!

LEE

When I was fifteen I was already working two jobs. When your mom was fifteen--

RENEE

Stop. I don't want to hear any of your bullshit. Ever again!

LEE

...Okay then.

He holds out his hand for a shake.

RENEE
What is this?

Lee is frozen, hand outstretched. Renee tries to make sense of it all.

RENEE
I don't understand.
This isn't real.

In the distance a CAR HORN HONKS. It shakes both Lee and Renee out of their stupor.

RENEE
Is this a nightmare? Am I awake?
Lee?

She turns back but Lee is gone.

RENEE
Lee? Where did you go?

SCENE 7

A sidewalk cafe. Lee* is seated. Kim enters.

LEE*
Thanks for meeting me here.

KIM
Thanks for suggesting a place
without stairs. You're learning.

LEE*
It's only been eight years.

KIM
So are we planning a surprise
party for Renee?

LEE*
Sorry?

KIM
We never spend one-on-one time
together unless we're waiting for
our wives to arrive.

LEE*
Right. It is about that, in a way.
It's not easy to say, but--- have
I ever told you about my dad?

KIM
What?

LEE*

Do you know anything about him?

KIM

I mean sure. You've told us about him.

LEE*

Because I've been trying to remember him and I'm coming up blank.

KIM

Oh.

LEE*

I'm just wondering if you could tell me anything...

KIM

This is really Helen's territory.

LEE*

I'm not ready to talk to her about it.

KIM

Why not?

LEE*

It's complicated.

KIM

You two are always complicated.

LEE*

So?

KIM

Is that why you called me here?

LEE*

...No. Listen I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this but... I've been having an affair with Helen.

KIM

What?

LEE*

I don't know how long it's been going on, but we have an-- agreement I guess, and as your friend I just needed you to know.

KIM
Is there a punchline?

LEE*
Sorry?

KIM
I'm so confused. What are you saying?

LEE*
Helen and I have been having sexual encounters. Perhaps with some interruptions here and there, since college.

KIM
Since college when you two dated.

LEE*
Right.

KIM
I feel like you're practicing on me.

LEE*
What?

KIM
Are you trying to get this handled so you can tell Renee?

LEE*
I wanted you to know.

KIM
...I know.

LEE*
You do?

KIM
I've been present. On multiple occasions.

LEE*
Oh.

KIM
What's going on?

LEE*

I guess I shouldn't be surprised anymore. Maybe I am practicing. But not for Renee. For... I need to tell you something. It's not an easy thing to say. I should've told you from the start. And frankly I feel terrible that...

(Long, painful pause.)

Lee is dead. I'm Renee. My reasons are complicated. But-- that's the main thing.

KIM

Lee's dead?

LEE*

Heart attack.

KIM

What?

LEE*

Last week.

KIM

But you're...

LEE*

I used the Cold Craft tech. My tech. To transfer.

Kim grasps Lee's face, scrutinizing it.

KIM

How is this legal?

LEE*

It's complicated. I was planning on saying something. But I had to tie up some loose ends first. Things just got--

She SLAPS him, hard. A stunned beat, then:

LEE*

Ow!

KIM

Did that hurt?

LEE*

Jesus, yes of course!

KIM
Good.

LEE*
But...

KIM
But what?

LEE*
I'm not going to say.

KIM
You're disgusting.

LEE*
Who are you talking to?

KIM
I don't know! Both of you!

LEE*
I have a feeling that part was
Lee.

KIM
No shit. So at dinner...

LEE*
Yeah, that was me. Renee me.

KIM
Oh my god. Oh my god.

LEE*
I'm so sorry.

KIM
He's our friend! You're puppeting
his corpse!

LEE*
That's not really what's
happening. But I understand why
you might--

KIM
I'm not an idiot. I've read your
materials.

LEE*
I know. That's why I needed to
tell you first. I need your help.

KIM

Wow.

LEE*

The tech works, remarkably well.
But--

KIM

Wait, first? Helen doesn't know?

LEE*

No.

KIM

Oh Renee. That is not good. This
is--

LEE*

I know.

KIM

Do you? Because you sound way more
worried about your technology than
you do about your dead husband's
friends.

LEE*

I've been having flashbacks.
Memories, some of which don't
belong to me.

KIM

Who am I talking to?

LEE*

I, Renee, have been having what I
think are memories that belonged
to Lee. Things that I, Renee,
didn't experience.

KIM

I'm not going to talk about this
with you!

LEE*

Kim, I need your help. I'm not
okay.

KIM

Clearly.

LEE*

I'm sorry. I really am.

KIM
It's so fucking weird looking you
in the eyes knowing that there's
someone else behind them.

LEE*
I get that.

KIM
It's morbid and strange. And I
don't like it. I don't like you.

LEE*
That's fair.

KIM
Which is weird because I always
preferred Renee.

LEE*
Thanks.

They sit in silence. Kim can't look at him. Then she reaches
for his hand. They sit that way for a few moments.

KIM
So the memories.

LEE*
Yeah.

KIM
How would I know? You're the
neurologist.

LEE*
This feels-- out of my wheelhouse.

KIM
Is this the dad thing?

LEE*
I had a-- vision, I guess? Or a
memory or... I don't know if it
was real. But it felt real. Like a
memory, not a hallucination. We
were on the beach, after a
hurricane. It was the last time
I-- er-- Lee, saw his dad.

KIM
You know that story.

LEE*
I do?

KIM

That day the four of us went to Ptown. It was like a week after the tropical storm and the beach was covered in driftwood and schmutz. Lee said it reminded him of the last time he saw his dad, and he told us all the story.

LEE*

I don't remember that.

KIM

You were probably only half-listening, as is your way. Don't you have colleagues you could talk to about this?

LEE*

It complicates things.

KIM

You mean it threatens things.

LEE*

I need to understand it first. Because it might just be me. We could've made a mistake in the transfer, or because we knew each other in ways the other recipients never did. I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier. I thought I could handle it but clearly I was wrong about that. I need to know what you think.

KIM

About?

LEE*

Anything I've said.

KIM

Do you really want my opinion?

LEE*

Of course.

KIM

I think your tech will help a lot of people. And I suspect it will harm more than a few, too.

KIM

I worry about coercion and further condemnation of people like myself who can't or will choose not to transfer. But, overall I don't think you've fully explored the implications of introducing a new consciousness to an existing body.

LEE*

No?

KIM

Or maybe you have. I'm sure you have plenty of meetings and documents.

LEE*

There's always more to learn.

KIM

Have you interviewed any of your successful patients?

LEE*

Of course.

KIM

And is it as clean as running a hard drive on a new computer?

LEE*

More or less.

KIM

More or less?

LEE*

There are adjustments, of course. Motor coordination is an issue. One subject, a C Seven quad, did have regrets. They were wiped and awakened from cryo within the safety window.

KIM

No other side effects?

LEE*

Like what?

KIM

Ghosts.

LEE*

Ghosts?

KIM

For months after my accident, I would wake up with horrible leg cramps. Excruciating. Like Charlie horses on steroids. My toes would be curled tight and my calves would be hard as rocks. There was only one problem: I don't have toes or calves anymore.

LEE*

Sure. Phantom Limb Syndrome. Common for amputees and paraplegics.

KIM

Don't you think it's possible to have phantom consciousness syndrome?

LEE*

Phantom pain originates in the spinal cord. When there's an interruption in the nerve to brain circuit, the brain registers that like pain. It's not really pain, though, it's just the brain throwing up an error code.

KIM

As far as we know.

LEE*

It's the theory clinicians favor.

KIM

And what's the treatment?

LEE*

You treat the limb like it's still there. And give it what it needs.

KIM

The visions you've been having, would you consider them painful?

LEE*

...Okay I see your point.

KIM

They should have sent a poet.

LEE*

What?

KIM

You're a science nerd and you've never seen *Contact*? Good thing it didn't come up at dinner because it would have outed you right away.

It's a movie from the 90s. Jodie Foster is an astronaut and she goes through a black hole and is trying to describe what she sees and says, "They should've sent a poet."

Or in this case, maybe you should be consulting a philosopher.

LEE*

What would a philosopher say?

KIM

Depends. The way I've always thought of it-- your body is you. All of it. Not just the brain. I know that's not what you want me to say. But it's true. I admit, it's attractive to think you could just cut out my brain and--

LEE*

That's not how it works.

KIM

I know. I just mean-- it'd be nice to "port my consciousness" or whatever and pretend that I'm still Kim in a body with working legs. But that wouldn't be me. At this point in my life, changing my legs would be like making me straight. Yeah, it might make my life easier. But it wouldn't be my life.

LEE*

I knew you before the accident. You're the same person.

KIM

Then you don't know me as well as I thought.

LEE*

Ouch.

KIM

The feeling is mutual.
Have you ever been to a trauma
meeting?

LEE*

Can't say that I have.

KIM

Figures. After my accident there
were so many meetings. Physical
therapy, occupational therapy,
couples therapy. But the group
meetings? Sheesh. We'd bitch about
our shitty, inaccessible world, of
course. But that was just venting.
The real shit was the trauma. I
mean, none of us woke up in a cold
sweat from nightmares about
staircases, you know? It was all
shattered glass, paramedics,
screams and blood. Port my
consciousness into a new body,
that's all coming along too. (Taps
head) Working legs won't fix
what's busted up here.
I'm a different person. There's no
going back.
This Renee. This "you in Lee"
Renee-- can you say that you're
the same person you were before?

LEE*

I honestly don't know.

KIM

Maybe it's the weird illusion of
it all, but I don't feel like
you're the same Renee I knew.
Maybe that's a me thing. But maybe
it's not. Maybe this is the side
effect you didn't intend.

LEE*

You sound sad.

KIM

I am sad. You just told me my
friend died, while I'm looking
right at him. Lee was-- God it's
so weird saying this to you. I
feel like I'm gossiping.

LEE*

Keep going.

KIM

I didn't like the effect he had on Helen. Their history. I would be a fool to try to get in between those two. And I still only know a fraction of their relationship. He was a dirtbag to her for a lot of their early life together. And even though he grew up and sobered up, I still don't know if he ever apologized to her.

LEE*

She forgave him.

KIM

Of course she did. My lady puts up with no shit from anyone, except him.

LEE*

That's somewhat refreshing to hear. I never did understand those two.

KIM

Oh no, let's be clear: My wife is amazing. Your husband is a bit of a mess. But he was loyal, in his weird way. And I did learn to love him. And I'm sorry he's dead. But you need to tell Helen if you want to preserve any sort of friendship the two of you have.

LEE*

Is there anything you want to say to him, directly?

KIM

Well I'd slap you again. But it's clear you liked it.

LEE*

Yeah what was that about?

KIM

Oh girl.

SCENE 8

Back in Lee's home. Lee* sets down a paper bag.

He presses a button on his cell phone. It starts recording.

LEE*
 Day four. Motor reflexes normal.
 Vitals normal. Everything, normal.
 Except.
 Lee?
 Are you there? Here?
 Alright. Lee remains at zero
 state. Now for the seance.

He removes vials and packets from the bag, laying them in a tidy row.

LEE*
 DMT. THC. GHB. Three MEO. LSD.
 Psilocybin and... a bottle of
 vodka for good measure. Where
 shall we begin? Alphabetical feels
 doable.

Lee* uses a syringe to measure 60 milligrams from the DMT bottle, and squirts it into his mouth.

Super slow light change over the next bit:

LEE*
 Four fourteen pm. Twelve minutes
 after dosage. Slight uptick in
 heart rate. No noticeable
 psychological affects.

Lights shift. Lee* paces and checks the time. Renee mirrors his movements behind the glass.

LEE*
 Four twenty six pm. Adding one
 point five milliliter GHB and two
 milligrams Three MEO.

He checks the time again. Renee mirrors.

LEE*
 May add one gram of psilocybin
 if...

Dramatic light shift. Lee* looks around as though someone entered the room. Renee doesn't mirror.

LEE
 Oh.
 ...
 Is someone there? Renee?

Renee is stuck, watching mutely from behind the glass.

LEE

Am I home? How did I get here? I
was just at the office. Right?
Day... what day is it?

He checks his phone. He can't read it. He tosses it away.

LEE

What the hell?
Someone is watching me. I can feel
you. Who are you? What do you
want?
Renee? Are you here? Where are
you? I can't... I can't see or...
Renee? Renee?! What's going on?
Is this one of your experiments?
You're freaking me out.
Who's watching me? Stop it! I
don't want to be-- Leave me alone.
No... wait. Don't. Stay. Tell me
what's happening. Something is
wrong. My body is wrong. I don't
fit. Is this a nightmare? Renee?
RENEE! Help me. Did you do this?
Please. Let me go. Leave me alone.
Wait. No. Come find me. Please.

Lee collapses in a desperate heap. Long, anguished beat.
Finally, Lee* reemerges, sobered up. Relief. Exhaustion. Guilt.
Then, he rushes from the room.

END ACT 1

SCENE 9

In the lab. Lee* is dressing. Greg reads results.

GREG
Your fMRI looks normal. GABA levels normal. Dopamine within your normal range... Sorry Ren, I don't see any signs that Lee's consciousness is still online.

LEE*
Look for more hormone markers.

GREG
You mean other than the fact you just blitzed your brain with serotonin?

LEE*
There's something else going on.

GREG
You got high, Ren. You got really fucking high.

LEE*
He's still in here.

GREG
It's impossible.

LEE*
I know it's impossible! So help me figure out why it's happening!

GREG
Okay. What were you doing before the first episode?

LEE*
I came home from dinner at Helen's.

GREG
Jesus. And?

LEE*
And?

GREG
What happened at the dinner?

LEE*
I had-- an intense corporeal
experience.

GREG
You mean you fucked.

LEE*
No. We did not. She hit me... on
the backside.

GREG
She spanked you.

LEE*
Sure, she spanked me.

GREG
And you had a dissociative
episode.

LEE*
It's not funny.

GREG
It's not *not* funny. I'm assuming
it was consensual.

LEE*
I'm assuming Lee was assuming it
was, yeah.

GREG
Okay but you.

LEE*
It took me off guard. That's all.

GREG
You're not like--

LEE*
I don't have spanking trauma if
that's what you're asking.

GREG
But did you like it?

LEE*
I could handle it.

GREG
That's not the same thing.

LEE*

It is to me. My brain didn't overload. His body lets me do things I couldn't imagine enjoying before. That part I like.

GREG

Okay, so you went to Lee's ex's house, she spanked you, and you had a dissociative episode.

LEE*

Correct.

GREG

Alright. So in the absence of physiological markers of any kind-- because again I have not found markers of any kind-- how could you prove Lee's still around?

LEE*

I imagine I'd have to remember something that I couldn't possibly know. Or act in a way I wouldn't act.

GREG

Well aren't we playing fast and loose with empiricism.

LEE*

The alternative is to believe that we've subjected thirteen donors to a new, more gruesome form of Locked In Syndrome.

GREG

No, the alternative is to presume that you're struggling. That's the simplest answer. That's the answer that the data supports.

LEE*

We can't keep doing this if the donor consciousnesses are still online.

GREG

They aren't, Ren. There's just no way. You can't overwrite consciousness.

GREG

For the plasticity required to rewire the connections, you have to start from a zero state. Otherwise it's seizure city. You saw the animal trials. You know this.

LEE*

I could be wrong.

GREG

As refreshing as it is to hear that from you, not in this case. Lee and every single one of our donors is completely brain dead at the time of transfer.

LEE*

How can we be sure?

GREG

By all medical standards.

LEE*

You say that like medicine is never wrong.

GREG

Drug interactions? Sure medicine's been wrong. Fucked up racist shit? Yeah of course. Electricity? Nah. We've had that one on lock for a long time.

LEE*

I'm canceling the investor meetings.

Greg groans.

LEE*

Something is wrong with the tech.

GREG

You. You are what's wrong. Why are you so unwilling to consider the most obvious answer?!

LEE*

I need to see what's going on here.

GREG

You need to end this sordid little project. Do the investor meetings as yourself. Get us to the next round and you'll have all the money and time you need to conduct whatever research you want.

LEE*

No. I'm canceling the meetings and I'm staying. Just for a little while longer. I'm the only one who can do this. I knew Lee.

GREG

Can you not see how that's a liability?!

LEE*

It means something.

GREG

It means you're too close to have any sense of what's what.

LEE*

Close.

GREG

Yeah.

LEE*

That's it. I need to get closer. Run towards the knife.

GREG

What the hell does that mean?

LEE*

When Lee studied stage combat, his teacher said that in a street fight, a trained fighter will run towards the knife. Because then you know where it is, and you can control it. But only if you close the distance. Run towards.

SCENE 10

Lee* stands outside Alma's door. He knocks. Alma answers.

ALMA
You're back.

LEE*
I'm back.

ALMA
You're full of surprises.

LEE*
Even to myself.

ALMA
Come in.

LEE*
I don't know why I'm here.

ALMA
But you're here.

LEE*
I feel like there's something I
should say. (Pause) But I don't
know what it is yet.

ALMA
Then don't say anything.

They stand in silence.

Lee* takes Alma's hand. A long, heavy moment. Then she presses his hand to her cheek. He pulls her into a kiss.

Transition to...

Lee* and Alma are in bed, having sex. Lee* is on top. Renee slips out from the bed. She speaks while the bed action continues:

RENEE
Okay. Alright. Okay. Right. Okay.
Okay. I'm going to stop. Stop
saying that.

Deep breath. Then something feels good and she loses herself in the sensation. She's feeling it all as she speaks.

RENEE
Oh oh okkkkaaaaaay.

RENEE

This is unexpected. This is warm... and soft. And-- fuucccck. (deep breath) I don't know how this is possible. I feel. My skin. Nerves. Good. Just... her touch. Doesn't-- she's lovely. Is it always this lovely?

LEE*

(to Alma)
You're lovely.

RENEE

She didn't say anything! Was that the wrong thing to say?

Alma kisses Lee. They flip over.

RENEE

Okay, well that's alright. She's beautiful. The way she moves, the way she catches my--- my eye. (Realizing) She's enjoying this too much. I don't know enough to be making her feel this way. Oh. Oh no. This isn't me. This is-- I'm cheating on myself. Oh Christ. Lee? Are you here? What are you doing? Don't. Don't. Lee. No. This isn't what I wanted. Don't do this to me. Is this you? Doing this? This can't be me. It feels too good. It can't be. It can't. I won't let you. Take this from me.

She slips back into bed.

ALMA

Hey, where did you go?

LEE*

I'm right here.

Slow transition: Alma is sleeping. Lee* sits on the edge of the bed, deep in thought. Renee emerges from behind him, stands, and walks across the room. She may pace or fidget. Her face moves through distress to elation and settles on angst. All while Lee watches.

LEE

You feel good.

Renee nods, distracted. Then she's startled, realizing that Lee is speaking to her.

RENEE
(re: Alma)
You like her.

LEE
(indifferent)
She's sweet.

RENEE
And?

LEE
What? She's nice. I just don't think I would've come back a second time.

RENEE
But you did.

LEE
No I didn't.

RENEE
You just fucked her.

LEE
No I didn't.

RENEE
Dammit Lee. You did. I'm not--

LEE
--What? Into women? A man?

RENEE
What she wants! She wants you. She has you.

LEE
What makes you say that?

RENEE
It wasn't my cock that was just inside of her.

LEE
Wasn't it? (Beat) Ren. I took my hands off the wheel a week ago. This body isn't mine anymore. I'm somewhere else. I'm something else. You're the one driving. You've *been* the one driving.

RENEE

I see you, what you're doing.

LEE

I'm not doing anything. I'm not even here. It's you Renee. It's all you.

RENEE

Bullshit. You're here. Just taking it all for yourself again. You in the spotlight, again.

LEE

Do you really think I'm here at all? Your data, your machines, every bit of high tech whatnot in the world will tell you the same thing. I'm not here. I'm not a person. I'm a memory.

RENEE

Don't lie to me!

LEE

I never have. You just never listened. If I had lived, yeah maybe would have slept with Alma a couple times. Maybe just once. But you, you got her to love you.

Long pause as Renee contemplates Alma.

RENEE

Even if that were true.

LEE

It is.

RENEE

Even if it were, she doesn't want me. Not really.

LEE

Got any data to support that hypothesis, Doctor?

RENEE

Really?

LEE

I paid attention in meetings sometimes.

RENEE
What if I stay?

LEE
For the night? Probably a good
call. Women like it when you do
that.

RENEE
No. What if I stay?

LEE
Like this?

She nods.

RENEE
And I wake up and I'm you. And I
fall asleep and I'm you. And we
make love and I'm you. And I grow
old and I'm you. And I know it and
she knows it and even if you don't
think it's true it will become
true.

LEE
Or?

RENEE
I leave. Everything goes back to
what it was. But you're not there.
And I don't remember this. I lose
everything. You. Her. Everything.

SCENE 11

The morning after. Alma's apartment.

ALMA
So your body. The body that your
brain belongs in...

LEE*
Not brain, per se. But go on.

ALMA
That's in a medical coma in your
lab. And that's... a woman.

LEE*
Correct.

ALMA
What about your consciousness?

LEE*

I don't think it cares. Being in this body is strange, but not because it's a man's body. Just like being in my normal body is strange, but not because it's a woman's. I think I just don't enjoy much about being.

ALMA

Being what?

LEE*

Just being. Embodied. I'd love to be a brain in a jar somewhere. That's being. But it's a pure being. Not all the detritus of a body.

ALMA

Detritus.

LEE*

It's just-- The body detracts and distracts.

ALMA

(flirty)

I didn't feel detracted from last night.

LEE*

Well, thank you. But... When I was a kid I spent the summers with my grandparents in Florida. Just a house in a subdivision, nothing fancy. But they had a pool, which I loved. I'd spend all day, every day out there. My favorite thing was holding my breath longer and longer. I used to pretend I was one of those Japanese pearl divers who can hold their breath for long minutes. I'd sink to the bottom of the deep end and let the tiny currents of the pool guide me. Like a jellyfish. I'd close my eyes and drift. The world would disappear. I would disappear. And become a disembodied consciousness at the bottom of the sea or in a jar on a shelf in a forgotten storeroom.

LEE*

Or an alien consciousness in a ship set adrift into space light years ago, just waiting to be intercepted but hoping I wouldn't be.

ALMA

(taking this all in)
Hm... I can work with that.

LEE*

I don't-- what?

ALMA

I've got like, a half dozen scenarios going through my head right now.

LEE*

I don't think you understand.

ALMA

I think I do. It's not the dealbreaker you think it is. This is kind of my bread and butter.

LEE*

Seriously?

ALMA

Hot sex and I don't have to shower before or after? Count me in.

LEE*

Okay that does sound nice. But...I worry that my desire for you is a memory.

ALMA

I have no history with you.

LEE*

You and pre-Lee did nothing?

ALMA

I told you everything. We spoke. We flirted a little. We exchanged numbers. And then you showed up at my door. Different, wonderful you.

LEE*

Different, wonderful you. Maybe it's a symptom. This body...

LEE*

I want you. Which is a thing I've said to literally no one in my life.

ALMA

No one? Not even--

LEE*

It's not a thing I do. What about you? If I showed up at your door, a woman. Would you want me?

ALMA

The woman part isn't an issue. I like everybody. But I guess there is the issue of the spark. I feel a heat from you. I don't know why, but whatever this is, feels good.

LEE*

It really does.
Lee wanted everyone. He just saw the desirable part of each person. I never met anyone he wasn't attracted to in some way, and who wasn't attracted to him.

ALMA

That didn't bug you?

LEE*

It didn't register for me. It was like a color on the spectrum I knew was there but never saw so, who cares, you know?
But Lee. He saw every color. Colors beyond the visible spectrum. Which is ironic, because he's color blind.

ALMA

Really? How does it look?

LEE*

Kind of...

He looks around, comparing.

LEE*

Huh. Well, less so than I thought. Maybe I was wrong about that or... maybe I can't remember what the world is supposed to look like.

LEE*

My point is, he noticed things I didn't. Like you. And because he did, I got the gift of noticing you too. And I'm really grateful for that.
But I'm afraid if I go back-- the color of you will just fade.

ALMA

You think if we met and you were Renee-you, you wouldn't care about me?

LEE*

I think any desire for you wouldn't register. Like... walking by an empty newspaper box.

ALMA

That's harsh.

LEE*

No, not-- Do you like spicy food?

ALMA

What?

LEE*

It's a metaphor I'm working out.

ALMA

Okay. Sure, yeah.

LEE*

How spicy?

ALMA

Like...

LEE*

If you're at a restaurant and you see that little chili pepper icon next to an item.

ALMA

Yeah, I'm a yes.

LEE*

Great. Meanwhile I cannot handle spicy food. At all. I'm an embarrassment to my family and friends. Even black pepper can be too much.

ALMA

Wow.

LEE*

The spice just takes over. It just becomes dull, painful heat.

ALMA

You're missing out.

LEE*

I never used to think so. But now I understand. In my original body, everything is too much. Light touch tickles and firm touch feels suffocating. Lights are too bright, noises are too loud. Everything forms this static of blaring white noise.

ALMA

Okay...

LEE*

And if I go back, there is no guarantee, and really a slim chance, that I'll feel the same way about you. And even less of a chance that you'll feel the same about me. I won't smell the same. I certainly won't look the same--

ALMA

But you'll be the same.

LEE*

A week ago I would have assured you that that was the case. But I can't do that anymore. When I go back, I won't take any of these memories. That Renee will never have met you.

ALMA

So don't go back.

LEE*

...
...
...Okay.

SCENE 12

Greg's Apartment

GREG
Absolutely not.

LEE*
I feel really good, Greg. I've never felt this good in my life. I move through the world with an ease and strength I've never felt before.

GREG
Yeah it's called patriarchy.

LEE*
It's not that. It's-- this body feels really good.

GREG
You can't stay.

LEE*
I don't see why not.

GREG
Lee was famous, for one.

LEE*
Not everywhere. We'll go somewhere else.

GREG
Excuse me? *We*?

LEE*
I don't want to get into it.

GREG
Oh we're getting into it.

LEE*
Fine. You want to get into it? Why the fuck did you have a ten p.m. meeting scheduled with my husband tonight?

GREG
I knew you'd skip your checkup so I added it to Lee's agenda while you were transferring.

LEE*
Is that true?

GREG
No.

LEE*
You were having an affair.

GREG
That's a very old-fashioned word
for it.

LEE*
Don't condescend to me.

GREG
The details are boring.

LEE*
I guess it shouldn't come as a
surprise.

GREG
Do you feel betrayed?

LEE*
Yes!
...
I don't know. Everyone else, they
were his people, his friends. But
you were my friend.

GREG
I'm still your friend.

LEE*
Then why were you sleeping with my
husband?

GREG
Because someone had to!

LEE*
You're kidding right? Have you
seen his calendar? I have yet to
have a meeting with someone he
wasn't fucking.

GREG
He was committed to his job.

LEE*
Don't.

GREG
You saw how much he needed you.

LEE*
I didn't. I swear I didn't.

GREG

That man was so shut out and shut down by you. He was lonely. Practically invisible. And when the project kept you at the lab for longer and longer hours...

LEE*

We could have negotiated an open relationship.

GREG

You already had one. You were married to your work. He was just your little dalliance on the side.

LEE*

Don't shame me for loving my work.

GREG

Ren, you're the most brilliant person I've ever met. I wouldn't have stuck with you all these years if I didn't believe you are going to change the world. But you can't expect Lee to stay up knitting by the fire each night waiting for you to come home.

LEE*

We don't have a fireplace.

GREG

You want details? Fine. The first night we hooked up he came to me bereft. You had forgotten your ten year anniversary. He cooked a four course meal. You were at the lab. When he finally reached you after trying for hours, you said, "Put it in the freezer. I'm turning off my phone."

LEE*

I don't remember that.

GREG

Why would you? For you it was just another Friday night. He brought the meal over to my place in containers. It was incredible by the way.

LEE*

What was it?

GREG

Peking duck. Do you know how hard that is to get right? Just melted in your mouth.

LEE*

He was a good cook.

GREG

We drank a ridiculous bottle of wine.

LEE*

He relapsed?

GREG

No he did not relapse. He drank a bottle of wine with a friend because he was sad. And yeah we got a little frisky and things happened.

LEE*

He knew who I was when he married me. He loved that he wasn't the center of my universe. He loved what I was doing.

GREG

We all love what you're doing. But you can't blame him, or me, or anyone for being there for him.

LEE*

I don't. I'm sorry. The sex, the whatever. I don't actually care. But I care that I hurt him.

GREG

You had a good thing.

LEE*

I think I have a good thing.

GREG

With who?

LEE*

A woman. We slept together.

GREG

How can such a smart person be so stupid?

LEE*

She was going to be one of his lovers before... But I like her. A lot. And she likes me. So I want to stay.

GREG

I will quit before I let that happen.

LEE*

Isn't this why we invented the tech? To give people a new chance?

GREG

You invented it to help people with debilitating disability and chronic illness, not weird "flinch" feelings and sexual ambivalence.

LEE*

I've never wanted anyone like I want her.

GREG

Testosterone is a hell of a drug.

LEE*

This isn't just hormones.

GREG

Then why not go back and woo her all over again, as the real you?

LEE*

I don't know who the real me is.

GREG

Well, friend, it's not this. I'm going to say it once, because I know you can handle it: You're thinking with your dick, bro. I get that it's new for you, but welcome to manhood.

LEE*

Do you think that's why...?

GREG

What?

LEE*

Why he's still--

GREG
He's not "still." Ren tread
carefully here. I don't want you
to end up--

LEE*
What? On antipsychotics? Put away
and stripped of everything?

GREG
Yes.

LEE*
He feels so real.

GREG
Of course it does. It's your
brain. It's all there is. But it's
your brain, and it's *all* there is.

LEE*
There has to be an explanation.

GREG
There are a number of them. And
they all start with
"dissassociative."

LEE*
I wasn't abused as a child. I
wasn't broken by war or
malnutrition.

GREG
Perhaps you've experienced
another, milder form of trauma
recently?

LEE*
What are you hinting at?

GREG
You're so worried about what
you'll lose if you transfer back.
What about what you've already
lost?

LEE*
This wasn't-- I didn't suffer.
Everyone loses people. I'm not...
It's not...

Lee* begins to cry.

GREG
Hey. It's okay.

LEE*
We didn't really know each other.
I have no right to be upset.

GREG
You were married for twelve years.
You were in love. You have a right
to hurt.

LEE*
If you know he's not real, and I
accept that you're right. Why am I
keeping him around?

GREG
Maybe for the same reason you kept
him around in life. He sees things
you don't, and does the things you
can't.

LEE*
Then I guess I should put him to
work.

SCENE 13

Helen's house. Renee is present in the shadows.

LEE*
Thanks for letting me come over.

HELEN
Sure, babe. But make it quick. I
have an appointment downtown.

LEE*
Quick. Right.

HELEN
Lee, spit it out.

LEE*
I-- can't.

HELEN
Okay then, it's been great. See
you next week.

She moves to exit.

LEE*
Lee is dead.

HELEN

What?

LEE*

Lee is dead. I'm Renee. I used my tech to transfer.

HELEN

Is this some new scene idea you're working out? Because I don't think I'm on board, babe.

LEE*

It's the truth.

HELEN

Bullshit.

LEE*

He had a heart attack at four-forty nine a week ago Thursday. My body-- Renee's actual body is lying in my lab right now.

HELEN

Why. What? Why are you here? What are you doing here?

LEE*

Please don't hit me. Kim already--

HELEN

You told *Kim*?

LEE*

I wasn't going to tell anyone. I wanted your last memory of Lee to be tender. But then dinner took that turn and I realized you deserved the truth.

HELEN

This?! This is what I deserve?!

LEE*

I'm sorry, I-- (beat) Hit me.

HELEN

What?

LEE*

Do it. Hit me. It's what we do, right?

HELEN
How do you know wh-- oh god.

LEE*
Just do it. Please.

Helen starts hitting Lee*. She cries. Lee* drops to his knees.

LEE*
I'm sorry.

She keeps hitting him.

LEE
Helen! Stop! Sputnik!

Helen stops. Big lighting shift. Renee fades into darkness.

Lee is Lee, crumpled on the ground. He has aphasia. (Dashes indicate frustrated silences as he struggles to find the words.)

HELEN
Why did you say that?

LEE
--What?

HELEN
You don't know our word. Lee would never. Why would you say that?

LEE
I--invented it.

HELEN
You're fucking with me.

LEE
I'm--- no.

HELEN
Are you using again?

Lee shakes his head.

HELEN
What is happening?

LEE
... I... I'm--- go. Goodbye.

HELEN
Who am I talking to?

LEE

I'm-- Lee. The-- the now.

HELEN

This is a nightmare.

LEE

-- a dream. I look-- a ---and it
is-- not. I touch-- but--

HELEN

Lee?

LEE

Hels?

HELEN

You're really dead?

LEE

--I--it-- (nods)

HELEN

How much time do we have?

LEE

---Now--.

HELEN

Is there something you want to
say?

LEE

I nnn --- you-- anything.

HELEN

I can't. This is too...

LEE

Please.

HELEN

I feel like I've had a thousand
conversations with you in my mind.
I've talked you off so many
ledges.
But right now, looking at you. I
don't know what to say. I've loved
you. I've hated you. I've watched
you die a half-dozen times. I've
been steeling myself to find you
cold since I was eighteen. Do you
know what that's like?

HELEN

Walking into your apartment, I used to hold my breath, every time. I should be used to it by now.

I just didn't think it'd be you delivering the news.

LEE

I ssss-sorry.

HELEN

What?

LEE

I-- love -- (small grunt)

He reaches out. They hold each other. Slow lighting shift as Renee reappears and retakes control. S/he gently pulls away. They are both crying.

HELEN

Is he?

LEE*

Yeah, he's... gone.

Long silence.

HELEN

I don't understand what just happened.

LEE*

I don't either, to be honest.

HELEN

Your tech's a piece of shit, Renee.

LEE*

No, that's just me.

Helen turns away, unable to look at him.

HELEN

You know the first time his heart stopped I gave him CPR for eight minutes. You should time that out someday. It's not easy.

LEE*

The first time?

HELEN

There were a few. He of course hated to be reminded of it. But sometimes he'd say I was the one who forced him to stay alive. People thought he was being artful. But he was actually surprisingly literal sometimes.

LEE*

I know.

HELEN

Yeah you do. I often wished you'd-- he'd be a different person. I spent twenty-five years wishing for that. That someday he'd grow into the man I wanted him to be. You may have been one of the few people in his life that never wished for him to be anything other than who he was.

LEE*

I'm sorry, Helen. This was cruel.

HELEN

Yep. But kind. Shocked you mastered that so quickly. That's kind of my wheelhouse.

She turns back to him. She strokes his face, savoring. She starts to break down.

HELEN

I'm going to need you to fuck off now, and for a while.

LEE*

Yeah, okay.

He begins to leave.

HELEN

And Renee? Fuck you. And thank you.

SCENE 14

Lee* enters his home. He clocks his reflection.

LEE*

Lee? Are you here? Lee? Please
tell me you're real. Please tell
me I'm not crazy.

Renee walks from behind the mirror, wiping her eyes.

RENEE

I can hear you breathing.

They don't look at each other, but speak into the darkness.

LEE

No you can't.

RENEE

Maybe that's just my heartbeat.

LEE

Do you see me?

RENEE

...No. Can you--

LEE

No.

They pause to feel each other's presence.

RENEE

I suspect we can try.

LEE

To?

RENEE

In grad school I knew this couple.
Did I tell you about them? One of
those sickening couples that
always has to mark their love as
"special." They would say that
every night they dreamed together.
The guy would say as they were
getting into bed, "Darling, do you
want to dream together tonight?"
And she'd say, "Yes, my love" and
they'd dream together. They were
full of shit, of course. But they
believed it.

LEE
Is that what's happening?

RENEE
Dreaming occupies the visual
cortex. So it's possible, I
suppose.

LEE
Okay. So dream with me. What do
you see?

They continue to look straight ahead.

RENEE
I see you.

LEE
Be more specific.

RENEE.
Your hair is a little shaggy.
You're due for a cut. You're
softer around the middle than when
I married you-- but I prefer it
that way. Your eyes are just as
bright and sharp as ever, and I
love the way their corners wrinkle
when you tell a lively story.

LEE
(flirty)
What am I wearing?

RENEE
The blue button down you wore the
first day you came to work on my
project.

LEE
I like that shirt.

RENEE
What am I wearing?

LEE
That red sundress. From that day.

RENEE
What day?

LEE
The epic day. In the park. You
were wearing that red sundress.

RENEE

What? No. It was yellow and it was more of an A-line thing.

LEE

It was a red sundress.

RENEE

I've never owned a red sundress.

LEE

The roses were in bloom.

RENEE

It was autumn.

LEE

All the blossoms.

RENEE

The leaves.

LEE

We held hands and speculated why my hand felt better on top.

RENEE

I think of it as in front, but go on.

LEE

We decided it was a height thing.

RENEE

Which was a relief. I was worried it was a gender thing.

LEE

Or a dominance thing.

RENEE

There were a lot of variables to control for. There was another one...

LEE

Hand size. How did we rule that one out?

RENEE

That guy you dated right out of rehab. Caleb.

LEE

He was shorter than me but had bigger hands, and it still felt better for mine to be in front.

RENEE

Right. Then what?

LEE

You don't remember? We stopped for lunch and you got drunk on Prosecco.

RENEE

Was that really that day? I thought that was later.

LEE

You were so apologetic.

RENEE

It was the first time I got drunk in front of you! You had just gotten your one year token.

LEE

Three year.

RENEE

You're sure you didn't mind?

LEE

You were adorable. Giggly and flirty. It was wonderful.

RENEE

Gosh. I've been holding on to that one for a while. Then there was that concert on the green.

LEE

So it had to be spring.

RENEE

Maybe it was summer? That doesn't sound right.

LEE

They were playing Bowie.

RENEE

Life on Mars.

LEE
You complained that the song was
overplayed.

RENEE
It is!

LEE
Loudly.

RENEE
Really?

LEE
You were still drunk. You shouted
"Queen Bitch!"

RENEE
Oh nooooo.

LEE
I dragged you out of there. People
were upset.

RENEE
I don't remember that at all.

LEE
But you must remember what
happened next.

RENEE
The guitar guy!

LEE
He started playing Queen Bitch.
And you immediately began--

RENEE
Singing along. Yep.

LEE
And we walked, leaves crunching
underfoot, and he followed,
serenading us the whole way.

RENEE
And those Israeli tourists sang
Rock 'n Roll Suicide with us.

RENEE
 "Oh no love, you're not
 alone!"

LEE
 "Oh no love, you're not
 alone!"

RENEE
 We must've sung four songs by the
 time we got back to our place. I
 hope you tipped him well.

LEE
 Very well. Plus an autograph.

RENEE
 What did you sign?

LEE
 Some crumpled up flier he had in
 his pocket. He probably lost it on
 the way home.

RENEE
 And then what?

LEE
 You must remember. I hope you
 remember.

RENEE
 We had sex.

LEE
 I was going to say "made love" but
 sure.

RENEE
 And it was... splendid.

LEE
 Career best, I'd say.

RENEE
 Afterwards I wanted a bubble bath
 so badly.

LEE
 But.

RENEE
 We didn't have any, so you took
 every half-full bottle of shampoo
 in the house and poured it under
 the tap.

LEE
 Didn't work.

RENEE

It did not. So you...

LEE

Called nearby hotels until I found one that had a big bathtub and provided bubble bath. And we hopped in a cab and spent the night at the hotel.

RENEE

I don't know why you didn't just go buy bubble bath.

LEE

A hotel genuinely felt like the easier answer.

RENEE

Did we have sex there, too?

LEE

I think so. But it was eclipsed by the earlier bout.

RENEE

And we ordered ice cream and watched movies in the hotel bathrobes.

LEE

And then the next morning we went home.

RENEE

And everything went back to normal.

LEE

Touch me.

RENEE

I can't.

LEE

Please.

RENEE

I literally can't. The visual cortex works but not--

LEE

Shut up, nerd.

RENEE

I used to hate it when people called me that but from you I loved it.

LEE

Touch me.

The are very still.

RENEE

Okay. (pause) I'm resting my hand on your shoulder.

LEE

How's it feel?

RENEE

It's your shoulder

...
Hard. Round. I like the way it fills my palm.

LEE

Good. Go on.

RENEE

I'm running my finger down the edge of your jaw from your earlobe to your chin.

LEE

And?

RENEE

It's rough. You haven't shaven in a few days. But your skin is warm.

LEE

Keep going.

RENEE

My hand moves down your neck, over your Adam's apple, clavicle, your chest, down your abdomen...

LEE

I like that.

RENEE

My hand rests on your crotch.

LEE

Am I hard?

RENEE

Not yet. But you're starting to be. What about you?

LEE

What about me?

RENEE

What are you doing?

LEE

Getting hard, apparently.

RENEE

What else?

LEE

Running my hands down your arms. Wrapping them around your waist. Pulling you closer to me. I can feel the heat from your body. The humidity of your breath on my neck. You smell alkaline, like salt and cocoa. I press my lips to your neck...

RENEE

My face is hot.

LEE

You okay?

RENEE

Yeah. Oh man this is embarrassing. Okay go on.

LEE

I'm kissing your neck, feeling your chest rise and fall with your quickening breath. Running my hand over your shoulder, down your upper arm, around your breast, tracing the curved line of your ribs from your back to your heart. You like that.

RENEE

Yes.

LEE

I'm drawing--

RENEE

Your hand down my belly to cup my sex. You press the pad of your middle finger against me.

LEE

You can feel that?

RENEE

Yes.

LEE

What am I doing now?

RENEE

You're pressing your finger inside me, gently and I bear down and take you in. I grab your wrist and hold you inside me, and rock against your hand.

LEE

Nice.

RENEE

You feel that?

LEE

Yeah.

RENEE

What do you want?

LEE

I'm doing great.

RENEE

I know, but what do you want?

LEE

I want... you to touch my cock.

RENEE

Okay.

LEE

Really?

RENEE

Sure.

LEE

Cool.

RENEE
This feels...

LEE
Yeah, I remember it too. I always
liked sex with you.

RENEE
I know.

LEE
I'm sorry that--

RENEE
No, I liked it too. But everything
got to be too much. Just too much.
And the bigger the sensation got,
the more I wanted to disappear.
Just diminish. Gravity turning me
inside out.

LEE
You wanted that?

RENEE
It was the only thing I could
think to do.

LEE
We could've done this.

Heavy, still pause.

LEE
So where were we?

RENEE
I was about to touch your cock.

LEE
Awesome.

RENEE
I wrap my hand around it and
squeeze. That's how you like it,
right?

LEE
I'm impressed with your memory.

RENEE
I paid attention sometimes too.

LEE
Can I be inside you now please?

RENEE

Ah! Oh, ow, I'm blushing so hard.

LEE

You look gorgeous.

RENEE

This is ridiculous.

LEE

Ridiculously hot!

RENEE

I'm so nervous.

LEE

You're doing great.

RENEE

Okay what position?

LEE

I was always partial to you on top.

RENEE

Okay... I hop on.

They laugh.

LEE

Come on.

RENEE

Alright, I hold your shoulders and ease down on you until our pelvises meet.

LEE

And I smile up at you.

RENEE

And you smile up at me.
My body feels alive but safe. Your breath smells sweet, your skin tastes delicious. I enjoy every molecule of you. Every... Nerve ending...
I am so, so sorry.

LEE

Me too.

RENEE

Do you forgive me?

LEE
I do.

RENEE
Me too.

LEE
Thank you.

Long, sorrowful beat.

RENEE
I feel like I really got the
villain cut in this.

LEE
The mad scientists always do.

RENEE
Mad.

LEE
More like gently perturbed. And
focused. And relentless.

RENEE
That's me.

LEE
And brilliant.

RENEE
Look how far that got me.

LEE
Don't let this die. You did good
work.

RENEE
It's not. It's broken. I--

LEE
You are going to figure it out.
You'll put it back in beta. You'll
figure it out, you always do. And
when you do, you will change the
flipping world. Okay?

RENEE
Okay.
You wanna keep going?

LEE
Let's just stay here for a while.
I like being still with you.

RENEE
I wish we had this.

LEE
We do.

RENEE
Before. I wish this was what we
could've done.

LEE
I would have.

RENEE
You wouldn't.

LEE
For you. I would have. You never
told me what you wanted.

RENEE
I didn't know to ask.

LEE
I would've done anything.

RENEE
It's too embarrassing.

LEE
We had so many options Ren.

RENEE
Why didn't you tell me you liked
being hurt?

LEE
I didn't want you to hurt me.

RENEE
But you let Helen...

LEE
Because in some ways I feel like I
deserve it. From her.
If you wanted other people or
sensory deprivation or nothing at
all, I would have given it to you.
But you never asked. You never
said, "This is what I need."

RENEE
Neither did you.

LEE

I thought I did. But you're probably right. There were other more important things. You convinced me of that.

RENEE

You say that like it's a bad thing.

LEE

I don't know what it is. But I know I missed you the most when you were around.

RENEE

Do you think I failed you? Weren't you supposed to fail me? Sleeping around, secret lives.

LEE

Let's just agree we failed each other.

RENEE

Am I allowed to say I miss you without ruining anything? That I want to try again?

LEE

You can try again, but not with me.

RENEE

I don't know where to begin.

LEE

Practice. With me, now.

RENEE

Okay.

They take a couple deep breaths together. Syncing up.

LEE

Do you feel that?

RENEE

Yes.

LEE

Wow.

RENEE

Yeah.

They continue this way for another few moments, wordless, still.

LEE

Thank you.

They breathe together. Slow blackout.

SCENE 15

Lee* wears a medical gown. Renee is lying unconscious on a slab, a mirror of the first scene. He walks gently over to the slab. He takes her hand and strokes it against his face, down his chest, tender and erotic.

He perches on the slab in a decidedly feminine pose, admiring. He leans down to kiss her. Then he slides in under the sheet like he's getting into bed. He looks down onto his own body, pressing his palm to his chest, and the other to his lower abdomen. He breathes there for a moment, almost like a prayer. Then he curls up against her. Slow transition of lights. Renee is alone on the slab.

Renee blinks awake. She rises, groggy.

GREG

Welcome back, Renee. How do you feel?

RENEE

Cold. Hungover.

Greg hands her a protein shake.

GREG

Here. Should take the edge off.

RENEE

How'd I do?

GREG

Wanna review your diary?

RENEE

Sure. Play it while I get dressed.
How long is it?

GREG

(checking the file:)
Seventy-six seconds. That can't be right. Did you lose some data?

RENEE

How would I know?

She dresses gingerly. Greg plays the file.

PROJECTION: Lee* speaking to the camera. He is teary, dressed the same as the last scene.

LEE*

(on screen)

Hello Renee. This is Renee. Or Lee. It's kind of hard to tell now. I was planning on giving you an update on what we learned over the past week or so. And what you can try to garner from all this. But I'll defer. Greg has all my notes and you can go through them together when you're ready. First, I want you to know that we're okay. You apologized and you did a good job of it. Lee felt seen. Loved. That probably doesn't make sense to you, but just take it on faith, okay? Which I know isn't your strength. But you can do it. I've seen it. You'll find a card in your jacket. It's got an address on it. You'll meet a woman named Alma. You won't understand what's going on at first. But trust her. She knows you better than you know yourself. I'm glad we got a few extra days to say goodbye. Or rather, hello, then goodbye. I love you, and I believe in you.

SCENE 16

Renee stands at a threshold. Alma answers. They stand in silence for a moment.

ALMA

Hi.

RENEE

Hello.

ALMA

It's nice to see you.

END OF PLAY