

Perigee

written by

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CAST LIST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

LANCE

ABBEY

JOSH

STUDENTS

NEWSCASTER

WEATHER MAN

WEATHER ENSEMBLE

TICKET VENDOR

CONDUCTOR (VOICE OVER)

DARREN WILMER

ASSISTANT

DIANA

FLIGHT ATTENDANTS

HEAVENLY MESSENGER/LYNN

ASSORTED ENSEMBLE ACTORS

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ACT 1

SCENE 1

EXT- Oyster Dome, Washington

CURTAIN/FADE IN

A tall cliff with a steep face overlooking an ocean and forest scene. A few hikers roam the stage. LANCE (early 20's), enters and climbs the mountain, humming and coughing. He settles at the top. The stage is momentarily clear.

LANCE

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE FEET IN
THE SKY, SEAGULLS FLY AND DIP AND
DIVE, RARE SUN BEAMS ON THE OCEAN
BREEZE, BUT SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT.
SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT. THE TREES
ARE THE SAME, THEY STRETCH AND
FALL, BUT THEY TOWER LIKE STRANGERS
THAT I DON'T KNOW AT ALL. THE SKY
IS SO BIG IT COULD SWALLOW ME
WHOLE, BLUE AND GRAY AND FOREIGN
AND SMALL... BUT THE WILD'S
UNTAMED, THIS FEELING UNNAMED AND
EVERYTHING SHOULD MAKE SENSE BUT IT
JUST... DOESN'T. THERE'S THE
RUNNING STREAM, THE BITING BREEZE,
OH IT'S COLD HERE AT THE TOP.
LONELY AT THE TOP.

Lance peers over the side of the cliff. He inches closer. ABBEY and JOSH (both early 20's) enter subtly. They disguise themselves among the foliage.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I'M ON THE BRINK. MORE THAN JUST SO
TO SPEAK. IF I TOOK JUST ONE STEP,
IT MIGHT CLEAR MY HEAD, AND I WOULD
FINALLY BE ABLE TO THINK. SHOULD I
JUST SINK? WOULD THERE BE ANYTHING
TO CATCH ME, IF I JUST RELENTED TO
THE TUG OF THE WIND. OH TO THE
THINGS THAT BURN, THE HEART ACHE I
YEARN FOR TO STOP AND JUST LET ME
GO. TELL ME SOMETHING I WISH I
COULD KNOW. NOTHING CAN COMPARE TO
A HEART THAT'S ON THE BRINK.

Birds circle overhead. A couple of hikers enter, milling about, enjoying the scenery.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)
 I FOLLOWED THE TRAIL TO THE TOP OF
 THE CLIFF, I TREKKED ON FOR MILES
 BUT COULDN'T FIND IT. THERE'S A
 SONG IN MY MIND, A WORD ON MY
 TONGUE, IT CHOKES ME BECAUSE I
 CAN'T FIGURE WHAT'S WRONG,

The hikers can no longer be seen (offstage, or behind foliage.) They exit. The lights dim. Shadows begin to grow on stage, reaching like claws. Lance inches away.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 BUT THERE'S A SHADOW WATCHING OVER
 ME, TRUTHS THAT KEEP EVADING ME,
 THIS FEELING THAT FOLLOW ME, BUT I
 TURN AROUND AND IT'S GONE.

Lance throws his arms up and searches desperately, spinning forwards and backwards. The shadows rapidly dissipate.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 WHERE HAS IT GONE. WHERE HAS IT
 GONE, WHERE HAVE YOU GONE? THE
 SANITY I SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN.
 AND I STAND ON THE BRINK AND WONDER
 WHAT'S THERE, WHERE THE ICE THAT
 TRICKLES EVERY NERVE, EVERY HAIR.
 I'M ON THE BRINK. INCOMPLETE. IF I
 TOOK JUST ONE STEP, IT MIGHT CLEAR
 MY HEAD, AND I WOULD FINALLY BE
 ABLE TO THINK. SHOULD I JUST SINK?
 WOULD THERE BE ANYTHING TO CATCH
 ME, IF I JUST RELENTED TO THE TUG
 OF THE WIND. OH TO THE THINGS THAT
 BURN, THE HEART ACHE I YEARN FOR TO
 STOP AND JUST LET ME GO. NOTHING
 CAN MEND MY, HEART, MY HEART ON THE
 BRINK.

His energy becomes less sporadic, more hopeless. He stabilized himself against the set. Clouds slowly begin to cover the sky.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 THERE'S A GRIEF, A MOURNING, AN
 EMPTINESS BUT I CAN'T PUT MY FINGER
 ON HOW? I NEED TO SLOW DOWN. TAKE A
 BREAK AND FIGURE IT OUT. BUT I
 CAN'T TAKE A REST WHEN I HAVEN'T
 MADE YOU PROUD? BUT WHO AM I CRYING
 TO? WHAT AM I DYING TO KNOW, HOW
 LONG CAN I GO ON WITH THE FINGER OF
 THE UNKNOWN ON THE SMALL OF MY
 BACK.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)

I'M ON THE BRINK. INCOMPLETE. IF I TOOK JUST ONE STEP, IT MIGHT CLEAR MY HEAD, AND I WOULD FINALLY BE ABLE TO THINK. SHOULD I JUST SINK? WOULD THERE BE ANYTHING TO CATCH ME, IF I JUST RELENTED TO THE TUG OF THE WIND. OH TO THE THINGS THAT BURN, THE HEART ACHE I YEARN FOR TO STOP AND JUST LET ME GO. NOTHING CAN APPEASE A HEART THAT'S ON THE BRINK.

(coughs)

Ow!

Lance stumbles and falls, coughing. Abbey and Josh emerge, disguised as hikers, from the scenery on stage. They rush to his aid. Abbey kneels beside him.

LANCE (CONT'D)

(coughing)

Abbey? Josh? What are you guys doing here?

ABBEY

We figured you would try to come here, Lance, and we knew if we couldn't stop you-

JOSH

We would just have to make sure you didn't die.

LANCE

You've been following me? Like a couple of stalkers?

JOSH

Stalkers with your best interest at heart.

Abbey ushers Lance to his feet, but he shrugs her off. He stands shakily on his own.

LANCE

Well I appreciate the sentiment, but I'm fine. I don't need any help, I was just hiking, like normal. That's all-

(coughs)

Josh stabilizes him. Lance reluctantly leans against his friend.

JOSH
Dude, you've been sick for days.

LANCE
I'm fine, let me go.

JOSH
Anyone in their right mind can see that you're one strong breeze away from keeling right over the edge of the cliff.

Abbey throws him a glare of disdain. Lance turns his head, in a daze.

ABBEY
What were you even thinking, you know better than to hike alone. Did you even bring your emergency preparedness kit? Especially with all of the wind and lightning storms happening lately, you could have gotten trapped or lost.

JOSH
Yeah, the atmosphere is going berserk. Those clouds are looking a little ominous. I can't believe it's not raining or hailing today.

The clouds rumble. A few droplets of rain begin to fall. Josh groans.

JOSH (CONT'D)
I spoke too soon.

LANCE
I wanted the fresh air. Besides, maybe I like to be alone.

ABBEY
Don't say that, we all know it's not true.

LANCE
Abbey, I'm fine. I promise. I'm alright, I just-
(coughs)

JOSH
Hey, pal...
YOU'RE ON THE BRINK
ABOUT TO SINK

ABBEY
HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?
HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU?

JUST REACH OUT YOUR HAND, I
UNDERSTAND, WE'LL HELP YOU
RETURN FROM THE EDGE.

REACH OUT YOUR HAND, WE'LL
HELP YOU RETURN FROM THE
EDGE.

LANCE
I swear I feel fine!

ABBEY
YOUR MIND MAY FEEL TURNED AGAINST
YOU. I KNOW THAT YOU'RE LOST AND
CONFUSED. BUT YOU HAVE US STANDING
BESIDE YOU. IS OUR HELP SOMETHING
YOU CAN REFUSE?

Lance is silent for a moment. He seems to almost give in to their insistence, but grits his teeth and exhales.

LANCE
Really. I'm fine. Thanks for
coming out, but you can leave now.

Abbey and Josh trade concerned and frustrated looks. Suddenly, a crack of lightning splits the sky.

ABBEY
We really have to go. The top of a
mountain isn't where I want to be
during a lightning storm,
especially with how intense the
weather has been recently.

JOSH
Lance, come on.

He puts an arm on Lance's back, but he shrugs him away. They lock eyes for a tense moment.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Lance, it's time to leave.

LANCE
I'll catch up.

ABBEY
Come on, Lance.

JOSH
We're going. You're coming with us.
Now.

LANCE
I'll. Catch. Up.

Josh grabs his arm again. Lance's nostrils and eyes flair. They both take a step forward. Josh exhales shakily.

JOSH
Come on, Abbey, we're done here.

Abbey throws a backwards glance at Lance.

ABBEY
We'll see you tomorrow, okay?

LANCE
Yeah. Sure. I'll see you later.

They exit, Josh whispering to Abbey and throwing backwards glances. Lance is left alone at the bottom of the peak. He lifts his head, eyes closed, letting rain drip down his face. He takes a quiet moment, then climbs.

LANCE (CONT'D)
I'M ON THE BRINK. MAYBE I'LL SINK.
BUT THE ANSWERS, THEY KEEP ME
AFLOAT. SO I'LL SEARCH IN THE SKY,
AND BEG TO KNOW WHY, UNTIL THIS
GRIEF INSIDE ME IS NO... MORE...
I'LL BACK OFF THE EDGE FOR NOW...
THE EDGE OF THE BRINK.

He looks out, down and away from the stage. He toys with something in his pocket, something he doesn't remove and refuses to look at. The lights dim as he sighs.

FADE OUT

SCENE 2

INT- Student Lounge

FADE IN

A boisterous student lounge, filled with chairs, tables, and socializing STUDENTS. Josh sits alone at a table onstage. He scratches at a notepad, deep in concentration.

JOSH
No, no, no!

He crumples a paper and throws it dramatically over his shoulder.

JOSH (CONT'D)
The battery life alone would be
just humiliating.
(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

Not to mention making it
waterproof... I thought a business
degree was supposed to be easy!
Darn you, Introduction to
Industrial Design!

Abbey enters, disheveled, soaked and grumpy.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Abbey! I'm so glad you're here! I
need to brainstorm.

ABBEY

(absentmindedly)

Yeah, that's nice, have you seen
him today?

JOSH

Lance? I usually don't, this early.
You?

ABBEY

No, I missed the bus this morning.
I had to walk ten blocks in the
storm. Why did I ever move to
Seattle?!

JOSH

That must have been really hard for
you.

ABBEY

It's obnoxious.

Josh clasps his arms together and stands, the picture of a
businessman, without the charm or skill.

JOSH

You know, walking in the rain is so
twentieth century.

ABBEY

Is it.

JOSH

Did you know-

ABBEY

Oh here we go.

JOSH

Trust me, you want to hear this, that you could help kick start the next biggest thing in personal transportation, for only fifteen dollars a month? And the best part- this brand new invention will be waterproof! Think about it, Abbey, you could be an investor!

ABBEY

Oh yeah? What's the product?

JOSH

Good question, it's a work in progress. But you could be an investor in the next biggest thing in-

ABBEY

Look, I usually appreciate your talent for roping me into things, but your "salesman" tactics aren't going to work on me.

JOSH

Oh yeah? I have a few other tactics that might just work on you...

Josh strikes a sweet, endearing pose.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Please?

ABBEY

Hah. You're a dork.

JOSH

Ah. But I'm your dork.

Abbey ruffles his hair slightly, her mood elevated. She settles into her chair and fixes a cautious smile on him.

ABBEY

Really. How are you doing.

JOSH

Not as bad as Lance, apparently, but... I mean, you know I'm not always good at-

He gestures to his heart and his head.

JOSH (CONT'D)

This.

Abbey reaches for his hand. Josh stares at their joined hands and smiles, then looks up at her.

ABBEY

I know. But I can see you trying.
And being patient with him. Thank
you.

Lance enters. Abbey drops Josh's hand and waves to Lance.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Lance! Over here!

Lance sits on the edge of the seat, slightly giddy. Josh, annoyed, turns back to his work.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

How was class?

LANCE

Oh, I didn't go.

ABBEY

Wh- Why not?

LANCE

I had an idea.

ABBEY

That's great!

JOSH

Not if it meant he's missing class.

LANCE

I was thinking that, when
everything has calmed down with the
weather and everything, we could
take the semester off, get out of
the rain, and go travel to-

Josh slaps his notebook closed.

JOSH

Hold on, hold on, hold on. Is this
an actual plan of yours? Like, with
steps and everything? Or another
crazy idea that we'll get all
excited about until you give up on
it.

LANCE

Well, I was thinking that, when the timing is right, we could take the semester off and... well...

JOSH

Take the semester off and go where? You've never stepped foot outside of the state, and frankly, I'm not sure you ever will.

LANCE

I-

JOSH

You keep waiting around for the perfect plan and the right circumstance to fall out of the sky. It doesn't exist.

Abbey puts a hand on Josh's shoulder in frustration and slight alarm. She smiles apologetically at surrounding students, who have been sending curious looks. She snaps back to Josh.

ABBEY

Chill out, Josh, jeez. It's okay, Lance. We couldn't really travel anyway, the freak storms happening around the coast have shut down most air travel. Why don't we go hammock up at Oyster Dome? It's supposed to be clear skies. Front row seats to the entire horizon, two thousand feet up. How beautiful would that be?

JOSH

Codon's comet will be brightest in our area this weekend. They do call it the Lover's Comet.

Abbey rolls her eyes at the mention of the comet.

ABBEY

In poor taste, they would. Let's go camping instead. I know a great place about an hour north. Lots of trees.

LANCE

Can I just-

JOSH

That's a great idea. I can bring stuff for a fire, Abbey can bring food, and Lance can bring his old cheery self. Maybe we'll get lucky, and the storm will break.

ABBEY

Perfect. Lance, are you in?

LANCE

I... sure. Yeah, let's do it.

JOSH

Goody.

Abbey kicks him under the table.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Oh! I mean, this is going to be great. Yay.

He tucks his legs quickly under his seat to avoid further assault. Lance isn't aware of this interaction, as he has resigned to staring out to nowhere.

ABBEY

Great. I can't remember, were you saying something earlier?

Lance sighs.

LANCE

Nope. Not that I can remember.

STUDENT

Hey, turn it up!

A large TV frame is wheeled on stage. A charming NEWSCASTER stands inside of the frame, gesturing silently to the screen behind him. A student hurries to turn up the television.

NEWSCASTER

With just seven seconds left on the clock, the *improvised sports team* are neck and neck with the *improvised opposing sports team*. This point could win it all. Coach makes the risky choice to put *improvised player or play* on the field. That's the whistle- Oh! Would you look at that play! The ball is thrown, and-

The Newscaster is shoved out of screen, and WEATHER MAN takes his place.

WEATHER MAN

We'd like to interrupt this program for a spontaneous weather report.

He fixes the audience with a serious stare.

ON THIS DAY, MARCH THE FIFTH, WE CAN EXPECT TO FIND, A DOWNPOUR OF RAIN AND A VERY HIGH TIDE. YES, THE BREEZE MAY WHIP YOUR HAIR ABOUT, A RAIN JACKET YOU SHOULDN'T DO WITHOUT. WHEN ALL IS SAID AND ALL IS DONE, THE QUESTION ON THE TIP OF ALL OF OUR TONGUES...

Switch to a lighter, swinging tone. The WEATHER ENSEMBLE enter the stage through the television frame.

WEATHER ENSEMBLE

MR. WEATHER MAN, WHERE CAN I SEE THAT COMET?

WEATHER MAN

EVERY NIGHT AND EVERY DAY, FLOCKS OF PEOPLE WILL COME MY WAY, ASKING, MR. WEATHER MAN WHAT DO YOU SAY, WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FOR THE WEATHER TODAY? OH, I GET WORKIN' ON GETTING MY INTERNS TO WORKIN', SEE IF WE CAN GET THE WEATHER CLOSE TO CERTAIN, CHURN OUT THE DATA TO GET BRILLIANT VIEWS, DISREGARD THE FACT THE FORECAST IS A BIT SKEWED. RAIN, RAIN, RAIN, IS THE FORECAST FOR, TO, DAY.

The ensemble ushers the students to their feet.

WEATHER ENSEMBLE

BUT IT HARDLY MATTERS WHEN SOMETHING MORE INTERESTING, MUCH MORE EXCITING, IS HAPPENING JUST OUTSIDE, OF EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE, A COMET, NOT TO FEAR, PASSING IN JUST A FORTNIGHT.

WEATHER MAN

DISCOVERED JUST TWO WEEKS AGO, BELIEVE US CUZ WE TOLD YOU SO, CODON'S COMET MAKES ITS REPRISE.

WEATHER ENSEMBLE
 EVERY THIRTY YEARS, THE COMET
 REAPPEARS, AND TRACES ITS PATH
 THROUGH OUR SKY. WE OOH AND WE AWE,
 AGAPE AT THE COS-MOS, AND WATCH AS
 THE COMET FLIES BY.

Dance break. At the end, ominous spacey music plays. The comet hangs down from the top of the set. All onstage pivot to stare at it, completely still. A silent moment passes. Lance gasps, and the action begins immediately.

WEATHER ENSEMBLE (CONT'D)
 SO DON'T YOU WAIT, DELAY, HESITATE.

WEATHER MAN
 OR APATHETICALLY STAND BY.

WEATHER ENSEMBLE
 FOR CODON ONLY PASSES ONCE EVERY
 THIRTY YEARS SO IT'S HIGH TIME YOU
 GET OUTSIDE. THOUGH WE WON'T SEE IT
 FROM HERE, THE RAIN CLOUDS HIDE THE
 ATMOSPHERE, CODON WON'T BE SEEN FOR
 THIRTY YEARS SO IT'S HIGH TIME YOU
 GET OUTSIDE.

WEATHER MAN
 And now, back to sports.

The screen is rolled offstage. The Weather Man and his ensemble exit.

JOSH
 I don't remember the weather
 forecast ever being that...
 interactive.

ABBEY
 Me neither... Lance? What's wrong?

LANCE
 (dazed)
 I... it feels so familiar.

He toys with the object in his pocket, still refusing to pull it out.

JOSH
 What?

LANCE
 The comet.

ABBEY

The comet?

LANCE

I don't know.

JOSH

You can't be serious. How can a comet feel familiar.

LANCE

You tell me, Josh, I have no idea. But that comet... have we seen it before?

Josh leans back in his seat and replies snarkily.

JOSH

Unless you've been lying and you're secretly more than thirty years old? No. No, we haven't.

ABBEY

Lance, maybe you should go home. You've been out of it for days now, and you look exhausted. Go get some rest, you really need it. You'll feel better soon.

LANCE

Yeah... okay...

Lance exits, dazed. Josh scoffs in his direction once he has left the room.

JOSH

Something is wrong with him.

ABBEY

Absolutely.

JOSH

Good. I'm glad you recognize that.

ABBEY

What's that supposed to mean?

Josh sighs. He packs up his belongings and throws his backpack over his shoulder.

JOSH

I'm just saying, you tend to coddle him more than you should. Lance is an adult, remember?

ABBEY

I know, but he needs us. We need to give him all of the support we can. Besides, my late aunt was a psychologist. I never met her, but therapy runs in my blood. It's practically my civic duty.

Abbey winks, then packs up as well.

JOSH

I'm not sure that's how it works.

ABBEY

Just do what you can. He's our friend, remember? We look out for each other.

JOSH

Yeah. Whatever you say. I'll see you after class?

Abbey nods as she exits. Josh is left at the table, looking after her.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I GUESS THAT'S MY NEW PLAN. HAH. SMILE. GRIN. DO WHATEVER I CAN. BE A HELPER, A FRIEND, PRETEND I DON'T PRETEND, JUST BOOST UP THE HUSK OF A MAN I SEE BEFORE ME. THE MAN I ONCE COULD TRUST WITH MY LIFE. MY BEST FRIEND SINCE JUNIOR HIGH... ANGRY. SCARED. I'M NOT UNAWARE OF THE PAIN THAT CLOUDS HIS EYES. THE SAME THINGS I FEEL COULD BLIND MINE..

Josh clutches his head angrily. The stage goes dark except for the light he stands under.

JOSH (CONT'D)

GET OUT OF MY HEAD, THESE FEELINGS I DREAD, I CAN'T LET MYSELF GO THERE RIGHT NOW. I MUST BE RIGHT THERE, RELIABLE AND SQUARE, THESE WALLS FORGED OF ICE AND STONE. A FORTRESS CAN'T FALL WHEN THE GHOSTS COME TO CALL, THE RAMPARTS CAN'T BREAK WHEN THE SKY STARTS TO SHAKE, FOUNDATIONS DON'T BEND JUST BECAUSE OF UPENDED POTENTIAL AND PLANS GO AWRY. HOW WOULD IT FEEL TO JUST LET GO?

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)
 CONFIDENT SOMEONE WOULD CATCH ME,
 HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE SO SECURE IN
 THE CHAOS IN ONE'S OWN MIND?

The students on screen, cloaked in darkness to look like shadows, creep closer.

JOSH (CONT'D)
 THESE WALLS CAN RESIST THE WIND FOR
 SO LONG, THE HAIL AND THE STORM
 THAT SURROUNDS ME, FIND SHELTER IN
 AN EMPTY KEEP, BUT STILL I MUST
 KEEP UP THE FIGHT. WHEN THE PEOPLE
 SEEK SHELTER IN BRAVE STURDY HALLS,
 I'LL BE THERE TO GUIDE THEM AND NOT
 FLINCH AT ALL.

The shadowy ensemble tugs softly at his clothing. Only their arms are visible. He begins to stumble, but fends them off.

JOSH (CONT'D)
 I KNOW IT'S NOT FAIR TO ABANDON
 DESPAIR, BETRAY THE EMOTION INSIDE
 OF MY HEAD, BUT IT'S FAR OUT OF
 REACH AND I COULDN'T COMPLETELY
 BEGIN TO DEFINE IT WHEN THOSE ANGRY
 HOWLS COME TO CALL. WHERE OTHERS
 CAN TUMBLE, I KNOW I CAN'T FUMBLE,
 WHEN I KNOW ALL THEIR EYES ARE ON
 ME. SO I'M NOT QUITE AT LIBERTY.

Josh throws his arms out in a wide gesture. The shadowy ensemble withdraws, back to the darkness. Abbey, or Josh's imagination of her, enters, also in a spotlight.

JOSH (CONT'D)
 TO FIND AN OBSESSION AND LOSE MY
 DARN MIND, GET THE GIRL, THE PITY,
 THE WORLD ON MY SIDE, I DO NOT KNOW
 WHY I MUST STAND PETRIFIED, BUT I
 CAN'T STOOP TO LEVELS SO LOW.

They reach for each other, before she is swallowed back into darkness.

JOSH (CONT'D)
 WHEN THE WALLS START TO CRUMBLE,
 YOU CAN'T JUST LET GO... I'LL DO WHAT
 I CAN, WHICH IS WHAT I DO BEST.
 THOUGH DEEP IN MY MIND, I KNOW I
 NEED REST. THIS FORTRESS CAN'T
 AFFORD TO CONDONE. THE TORRENTS CAN
 SLASH AT MY STONE. I'LL DEFEND
 THESE HALLS ALL ALONE.

Josh exits, back straight, with his head hung low. He fastens his backpack straps around himself. The students watch him leave, their heads moving as one.

FADE OUT

SCENE 3

INT- Lance's Room

FADE IN

Lance restlessly sleeps in his bed on a dark stage. He sits up suddenly, breathing hard.

LANCE

THREE FOURTEEN A.M. EVERY MORNING
AT THREE FOURTEEN A.M. FOR DAYS AND
DAYS AND NIGHTS. I'M DISTURBED FROM
THE NIGHTMARES THAT HAUNT IN MY
MIND, A DARKNESS THAT SEEPS AND
LEAVES NO LIGHT BEHIND, THE NIGHT
IS TURNED OFF AND THE WALLS FEEL
ALIVE...
Ugh.

He shakes his head. He gets out of the bed sits down on the side, with his feet on the floor.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I COWER FROM THIS DARKNESS INSIDE
OF MY MIND. UNTIL...

A silvery, ethereal light dances across the floor and in the air of the stage. The HEAVENLY MESSENGER enters. She wears a floaty, sparkly dress, and a light mask that covers her face.

LANCE (CONT'D)

THREE FIFTEEN... THREE FIFTEEN...
HEAVENLY SPIRIT, HEAVENLY LIGHT,
RAIN DOWN FROM THE STARS AND THE
SKY. AM I DREAMING? I HAVE NO WAY
OF KNOWING. THOUGH I CANNOT GUESS
WHY YOU VISIT ME, I DO NOT YET DARE
ASK WHY. FOR JUST A FEW MOMENTS,
THE COSMOS ALIGNS, I NO LONGER LIE
HERE AND BEG FOR A SIGN, THE CLOUDS
LIFT FOR JUST A SMALL MOMENT, AND I
FIND, THOUGH I KNOW NOT YOUR NAME.

The Messenger approaches him and takes his hand gently. She pulls him to the top of the stage.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)
 THIS LIGHT FEELS THE SAME, TO THE
 LIGHT I LOST, THOUGH I DON'T QUITE
 KNOW WHY... THREE FIFTEEN A.M., SHE
 GENTLY MOVES MY HAND. HOW COULD I
 NOT BE SWEEPED UP IN A STARSTRUCK
 SYMPHONY OF A LIGHT THAT HAS
 FORSAKEN ME.

Lance and the Heavenly Messenger dance across the stage in a light, fluttery, spacey ballet of a waltz.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 SHE NEVER SPEAKS... NOT EVEN A
 WORD, BUT I KNOW WHAT SHE SAYS AND
 WHAT SHE IMPLORES. SHE BEGS ME TO
 FIND HER, HEAVENLY REMINDER, THAT
 SOMETHING HERE JUST ISN'T RIGHT.
 SHE MAKES MY SOUL IGNITE.
 HEAVENLY SPIRIT, HEAVENLY LIGHT,
 RAIN DOWN FROM THE STARS AND THE
 SKY. AM I DREAMING? I HAVE NO WAY
 OF KNOWING. THOUGH I CANNOT GUESS
 WHY YOU VISIT ME, I DO NOT YET DARE
 ASK WHY.

The Heavenly Messenger twirls away. Lance watches her in wonder. She beckons to him and he follows after her, across the starlit stage.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 FOR JUST A FEW MOMENTS, THE COSMOS
 ALIGNS, I NO LONGER LIE HERE AND
 BEG FOR A SIGN, THE CLOUDS LIFT FOR
 JUST A SMALL MOMENT, AND I FIND,
 THOUGH I KNOW NOT YOUR NAME, THIS
 LIGHT FEELS THE SAME, TO THE LIGHT
 I HAVE LOST.**

A loud scratching sound appears, like an abrasive white noise, and Lance falls to his knees. The Heavenly Messenger falls too, and casts him a hurt look.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND THE
 COST... SHE TRIES TO REMIND ME WHAT
 I TRY TO FORGET, SHE INSISTS THAT I
 FOLLOW WHERE I DARE NOT TREAD. AND
 THOUGH I KNOW SHE CARRIES ANSWERS
 AND TRUTH, THIS PAIN IS MY ANCHOR,
 LEST I COME UNLOOSED.

Lance helps her to her feet. Defeated. He sends her softly away.

The Heavenly Messenger stands near the edge of the stage. She reaches out a hand, disappointed and hurt. Then, she is gone.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 AND JUST AS SHE COMES, SHE IS GONE.
 LEAVING THE AIR, THE WORDS IN ME
 WRONG. I CANNOT STAND ONE MORE
 NIGHT, DISOBEYING THIS MESSENGER OF
 LIGHT. I CANNOT STAND ONE MORE
 NIGHT, APART FROM THIS MESSENGER OF
 LIGHT.

Lance falls back onto the bed.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 She needs me to meet her, but how?
 How does one hunt down a dream?

After a moment of silence, the small radio in the corner flickers on suddenly. Lance starts.

WEATHER MAN (VOICE)
 We have just received an update
 that Codon's Comet will be passing
 directly above Alaska on March
 20th! That's just over a week and a
 half away-

The radio scratches to a new broadcast.

NEWSCASTER 1 (VOICE)
 The northern lights are stunning
 tonight, but they'll only be
 visible for the next two weeks.
 Tourists hoping to see the lights
 should-

Then, to another.

DARREN WILMER (VOICE)
 I've studied this comet for years.
 The "Lover's Comet," it's been
 called.

LANCE
 Darren?

The radio skips broadcasts, staccato. A tense note plays, crescendoing to a shrill whirring hum.

WEATHER MAN
 Codon's Comet-

The lights flicker. Lance backs away, eyes wide.

NEWSCASTER 1
Northern lights-

DARREN WILMER
Hurtling through space at one
hundred and fifteen thousand miles
an hour-

WEATHER MAN
Come see for yourself!

NEWSCASTER
Fairbanks, Alaska!

WEATHER MAN
Only once every thirty years!

NEWSCASTER
Come see for yourself!

The radio dies. The hum stops as well. After a horrified moment, Lance rushes to the small device and picks it up. It's smoking slightly. The dials are broken. Lance stares at it incredulously for a moment before tossing it down.

LANCE
I'm running out of time.

FADE OUT

SCENE 4

INT- Storage Center

FADE IN

Josh and Abbey enter a cluttered storage center, phone in hand. Josh shakes furiously. One unit is open, with a broken radio on the floor, and boxes scattered inside.

JOSH
What are we doing here, Abbey.

ABBEY
We're here to find Lance. Remember?
Our friend?

JOSH
Our friend? Our friend? The guy who
was gone yesterday, who skipped the
funeral of his own... of my... No.
No, right now, he is absolutely not
my "friend."

Josh brushes past her, and Abbey grabs his arm. She spins him to face her.

ABBEY

But he has been for years. I'm not happy with him either, but he has nobody else right now. If we aren't here for him, who will be?

JOSH

(seething)

Fine. But I'm doing this for you. Not him. Got it?

ABBEY

Thank you.

Josh brushes her arm away, a little softer.

JOSH

Where are we, anyway?

ABBEY

Quick Pick Storage Facilities.

JOSH

(sarcastically)

Classy. Are you planning on moving any time soon?

ABBEY

This is where the tracker is leading.

JOSH

A tracker? I get that Lance is going crazy, but how on earth did you convince yourself that this was ethical?

Abbey swipes on her phone, her head swiveling around.

ABBEY

Oh, this isn't new. I've had a tracker on him for years.

JOSH

I- What?

ABBEY

(nonchalant)

He shared his location with me way back in high school.

(MORE)

ABBEY (CONT'D)

I figured if he didn't want me to know where he was at all times, he would have said something about it by now.

JOSH

Or maybe he just completely forgot about it.

ABBEY

Hmm. Maybe.

Lance kicks his foot awkwardly.

JOSH

So... Do you want my location?

ABBEY

No? Why would I?

JOSH

No reason.

Lance enters, disheveled, holding a box.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Look, there he is.

Josh and Abbey approach. Lance nearly drops the box in surprise. He looks a little cornered.

LANCE

Josh? Abbey? What are you guys doing here? How did you find me?

JOSH

Well, Abbey has-

ABBEY

Don't worry about it. What are you doing here? We've been worried sick. We haven't seen you in three days.

Lance sets down his box and sighs.

LANCE

Yeah, that's kind of been the point.

JOSH

What's that supposed to mean?

LANCE
I'm leaving.

ABBEY
What?!

LANCE
I'm going to find the comet.

JOSH
Lance, you do understand that you can't "find" a comet, right? It's a rock, thousands of miles away.

LANCE
But listen to me, it only passes every thirty years, and we can't see it because of the storm. So I need to find somewhere that I can.

Josh and Abbey trade incredulous looks.

ABBEY
Lance, you don't know what you're saying, you're sick. You need us to take care of you right now, not to go on some trip to-

JOSH
Oh here we go again, another half-baked plan with, frankly, pathetic follow through. Is this the reason you ditched the-

LANCE
Would you guys just listen to me!

Josh and Abbey fall quiet. Josh shakes angrily and Abbey's mouth moves in silent confusion.

LANCE (CONT'D)
Let me finish. Please. I cancelled my lease, I've dropped every single class, no, let me finish! I'm done here. I've sold everything I possibly could. There's nothing left for me here. Especially not after... Look, I just have to get out of here.

JOSH
That's it. You're just done.

Lance nods. Josh clenches and releases his fists.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Alright. Fine. Let's hear your plan. You don't have a car.
(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

I've seen your finances, man,
you're broke. You don't have a
home, a job, any friends anywhere
else, so where are you going.

ABBEY

That's enough.

JOSH

Not to class, obviously. Not to the
funeral yesterday, apparently. So
where on earth could you be going.

ABBEY

(horrified)

Josh!

JOSH

I want to hear this!

LANCE

I'm taking a train-

JOSH

A train? You've never been on a
train. That'll take almost two
days. Why not a plane?

Abbey gasps in horror. Lance shakes his head, suddenly very
upset.

LANCE

No! No. Not a plane. Never a plane,
I could never-

JOSH

Okay, jeez, not a plane. I get it.
I guess it would freak me out too.
But a train?

LANCE

Yes. To the University of Phoenix.
I leave tomorrow morning.

JOSH

Other than sunlight, what on earth
could Phoenix have that we don't?

Lance retrieves another box from just offstage and sets it
inside of the unit. His face is flushed. He stifles a cough.

LANCE

He won't return my calls, but I think I need to go and talk to an astronomer. I think if I can just talk to him in person, he'll know where I need to go, and he'll help me get there. I know I have to get somewhere with northern lights, but-

JOSH

An astronomer. You mean, Darren Wilmer? Abbey's uncle? Who was at the funeral yesterday? Who can't understand why you, of all people, weren't there? Trust me, pal, he wants nothing to do with you.

LANCE

I have to try. I have to. There's something I need to find up in Alaska, I just need to find out what! If he can't help me get there, at least he can help me find out *what it is!*

Abbey scoffs, tears in her eyes and hurt etched in every part of her face. Josh crosses to her side. Lance stays where he is.

ABBEY

Is it really that easy for you to decide to completely discard us?

LANCE

It's not that simple, Abbey.

ABBEY

Yes, it is. That's how you're going to leave. We're just not good enough for you anymore. And now you're just done.

LANCE

Can't you at least try to understand? Until I find what I'm missing, until I find the answer I need, nothing else matters.

ABBEY

Nothing? Or no one?

A meaningful moment of silence passes. Lance has crossed the threshold.

LANCE

I'm sorry.

JOSH

No. No, that isn't good enough. You're upset, but so am I! You have to face what happened, Lance! She's ** dead! And she's never coming back. Lynn is gone forever, and throwing your life away won't change that.

The same loud scratching sound covers what Josh says. Lance covers his ears, but it's obvious that he's the only one who can hear it.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Say her name.

Lance groans, his hands over his ears.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Say her name. Now, Lance.

LANCE

What name?

JOSH

Say her name! You know it as well as I do!

LANCE

I don't know what you're talking about.

He coughs and attempts to stabilize himself. Neither Abbey nor Josh rush to his aid.

JOSH

I can't do this anymore. You're sick.

ABBEY

Josh, don't leave, we need him, and he needs us-

JOSH

If he wants to go and throw his entire life away, that's fine by me. But I have a grieving family to take care of.

He spits at Josh.

Let us know when you can force yourself to stomach reality, just like the rest of us.

LANCE

Was I not once a part of that family? Can you not even try to cut me some slack here?

JOSH

No. No, I can't. Good luck on your trip. Don't bother coming back. Come on, Abbey.

He reaches for her hand. She looks at him, then Lance, and signals for him to leave. Josh's mouth drops in dismay, but he exits.

LANCE

I don't have time for this.

Lance turns back to his work, seething. Abbey stands her ground.

ABBEY

Lance, come on. We've been friends, for years. We owe each other so much. You aren't going to abandon us, and we aren't going to abandon you.

LANCE

No, but sometimes I wish you would.

ABBEY

I don't think you mean that. I don't think you know what you're talking about.

LANCE

Yeah? Maybe you would know what I was talking about if you ever let me finish a sentence, Abbey.

ABBEY

(quietly)

Was it something we did? Was it something I said? That made you think you no longer needed us? No longer needed me?

LANCE

(shortly)

Maybe you just decided that I did.

Lance glances meaningfully offstage. Abbey silently makes to exit. She reaches the edge of the stage and turns back.

ABBEY

When you realize you're wrong, I'll
be here. I always will be.

Lance places his box down in silence. Abbey exits. Lance locks up his storage locker, alone.

LANCE

I WILL FIND YOU. EVEN IF NO ONE
UNDERSTANDS. THESE WHISPERS IN MY
MIND BETRAY THE LIFE I'VE ALWAYS
LEAD. MY FRIENDS THINK I'M CRAZY...
AND HECK, MAYBE I AM, BUT MY MEMORY
IS HAZY AND THE MESSENGER PRESENTS
ME WITH A PLAN. I'M ALONE, THAT'S
FOR CERTAIN, BUT I CANNOT BE
RESTRAINED, THE ANSWERS I'M
SEARCHING FOR, THEY MUST FIND A
WAY. MAYBE I'LL FIND THE RELIEF
WHEN I'VE FINALLY LEAPT FROM THE
BRINK?

(coughs)

FADE OUT

SCENE 5

INT- Train Station

FADE IN

A bustling train station. Lance enters, nervous, alone, and confused, carrying a heavy backpack.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER

Welcome to King Street Station.
Please, mind the gap.

Lance, overwhelmed, staggers up to the ticket booth. A TICKET VENDOR sits inside, flipping through a magazine.

LANCE

Uh, hi.

TICKET VENDOR

(sarcastic)

Hi?

LANCE

Uh... hi... I'd like to buy a ticket.

TICKET VENDOR

Well, you've come to the right place.

LANCE

Oh, great, I've never been on a train so I didn't know where to-

TICKET VENDOR

That's nice, kid. Where are ya headed?

LANCE

Uh, the University of Phoenix. I-

The ticket vendor pointedly flips her magazine.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I know a man there, um, I mean, I knew him through my-

TICKET VENDOR

I don't need to know your whole life story, man, what *train station* are you heading to.

LANCE

Oh. Uh... I don't really know.

TICKET VENDOR

You don't know?

She slaps her magazine on the counter.

TICKET VENDOR (CONT'D)

What, did you just assume you'd show up at a train station and magically just appear at your destination? There's a route system, man!

Abbey enters, wearing a fully packed hiking bag and holding a wallet.

ABBEY

Maricopa Station in Phoenix, Arizona.

LANCE

Abbey?

TICKET VENDOR

Finally, someone who knows what's up. Two tickets?

ABBEY

Yes.

LANCE

No!

Abbey glares. Lance takes a step back, eyes questioning, his head swiveling back and forth between the vendor and his friend.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Two tickets.

TICKET VENDOR

Ooh, a strong young woman. I like that. You tell 'em, Hun.

She preps the tickets. Lance turns to Abbey. She stands defiantly.

LANCE

Abbey, what are you doing here?

ABBEY

Codon's Comet makes people do really crazy things. I'm here to make sure you don't get yourself in trouble. Besides. You've never been outside of the state before. You've never been on a train. In case you've forgotten, you're a little lost when it comes to the real world. So here I am. Your oh-so-faithful friend.

Abbey swipes a debit card and snatches her ticket.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

(snarls)

Who hasn't abandoned you.

She stalks to a bench. Lance quickly does the same, and cautiously settles beside her. They sit for an awkward moment. Other patrons filter on and offstage, rushing to their locations, or sit and wait for a train.

LANCE

I'm... I'm sorry about yesterday, I-

ABBEY

Save it for another time.

Another moment of silence. Lance kicks anxiously at his backpack, now sitting at his feet.

LANCE
Where's Josh?

ABBEY
(curtly)
He's not coming.

LANCE
Why not?

ABBEY
Because you're an insufferable jerk
sometimes, you know that?

LANCE
Then why are you helping me?

ABBEY
Because that's what friends do.
Even when they're angry, or hurt,
or feeling utterly rejected. It's
what friends do.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER
Now boarding: Seattle to Phoenix.

ABBEY
I'm getting on the train. Are you
coming?

Abbey boards the train without hesitation. Lance looks around and deeply exhales.

LANCE
I can do this. I have to do this.
For myself. For the messenger. For
the answers.

With determination, he steps onto the train.

FADE OUT

SCENE 6

FADE IN

This scene takes place on the apron. The rest of the stage is dark. Josh enters. All of his anger is dissipated; he stands, exhausted. Alone.

JOSH

I know, Mom. I don't know what we're going to do, either.

He's silent for a moment. Listens.

JOSH (CONT'D)

He's off searching for a comet. No, he won't listen to reason! And he's going to track down Darren Wilmer, as if he wasn't just in Seattle two days ago!

Listens. Paces angrily.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'm not going with him. Not a chance. Not after what he's done... yes, Abbey's going with him. I don't know, I can't read her mind, but he's no good, and we never should have let him get close to our family!

Listens. He scoffs, and rolls his eyes.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Fine. That was harsh. But I can't believe he missed the funeral, Mom... I can't believe we had a funeral. I can't believe that she's...

Momentary silence. Josh sits down. He rubs his temple. He tries to give off a nonchalant tone.

JOSH (CONT'D)

How's Dad. Is he... is he drinking again?

His face falls. He buries his face in his hands.

JOSH (CONT'D)

No, I'm still here. Okay. I'll be home soon. No, I can't worry about Lance anymore, Mom! Our family is falling apart! I need to be there!

Faint yelling can be heard over the phone. Josh pulls his head away.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I didn't abandon him, Mom, he abandoned us!

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

He's not even an official part of this family, he never actually mar-

There's a click. He puts the phone back to his ear.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Mom? Hello? Did she just-

He stares at the phone. In a burst of anger he throws it at the ground. His face falls to immediate regret.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'M ON THE BRINK. WATCHING MY FAMILY SINK. SEEING EVERYTHING COLLAPSE BEFORE ME. AND STILL EVERY CRISIS REVOLVES AROUND HIM... SHE'D RATHER I LET MYSELF SINK SO HE'LL SWIM... I'LL DEFEND THESE HALLS ALL ALONE. BUT... ABBEY... SWEEPED UP IN HIS MESS BY GUILT OR BY CHOICE, TENDER AND CARING, SHE'LL TRAMPLE HER OWN SWEET VOICE...

Josh nods to himself, pieces of a plan falling together.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'LL MAKE HIM SEE REASON THAT HE CANNOT DENY. THROUGH HARDSHIP AND PAIN HE MUST FACE THIS LIFE JUST LIKE THE REST OF US. AND WHEN HE DOES... I'LL BE THERE. NOT AS A FRIEND, OR, FOE, JUST THE DELIVERER OF REALISM AND JUSTICE. IF I MUST HANDLE MYSELF IN A CRISIS... HE WON'T MAKE ME DO IT ALONE.

Josh picks up the pieces of his shattered phone.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Great.
MAYBE WHEN ALL IS OVER. WHEN ALL IS DONE AND SAID. IT'LL BE ME WHO GETS SOME PEACE AND RIDES INTO THE SUNSET. WHEN WE FINALLY ALL CAN CLEAR OUR HEADS. WHEN ALL IS DONE. AND ALL IS SAID.

Josh exits.

FADE OUT

SCENE 7**INT- Train**

CURTAIN/FADE IN

Abbey and Lance sit in their seats on the train. Lance stares out the window, earbuds in his ears, while Abbey fidgets. She throws him furtive glances.

LANCE

EVERY TICKING SECOND, I'M CHASING
DOWN THE SUN, EVERY MINUTE PASSING
FORWARD, WITH A THUNDERING ABOVE,
THE RUSHES OF THE COAST BESIDES ME
FILLS ME WITH A BURST OF ENERGY,
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN WHAT FEELS
LIKE WEEKS I CAN CONQUER THE WORLD.
IS THIS WHAT IT FEELS TO BE ALIVE?
A FEELING THAT I'VE BEEN DEPRIVED
OF SINCE THE NIGHTMARES OVERTOOK MY
MIND.

Lance presses his hand against the window. The shore rushes past.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I FEEL THE TUGGING OF THE WIND,
BECKONING ME, LEADS THE WAY TO
REMEDY, MY SOUL, ON FIRE, IN
RHAPSODY, FREE FROM GRIEF AND
CHAINS. THE MESSENGER OF LIGHT,
THOUGH FAR FROM MY SIGHT, MUST SEE
THE WAY THAT I AM RUSHING TO MEET
MY FATE.

LANCE (CONT'D)

SO PULL ME CLOSER, AGAINST A
SETTING SUN, YES, PULL ME
CLOSER, TELL ME IT'S NOT
OVER, MY HOPE IS GETTING
STRONGER, I CAN FEEL THE
BORDER OF THE WORLD GROW
SMALL. AS I PUSH FORWARD,
REACHING TOWARDS YOUR CALL.

ABBEY

PULL ME CLOSER, AGAINST A
SETTING SUN, YES, PULL ME
CLOSER, TELL ME IT'S ALL
OVER, MY HOPE IS GETTING
STRONGER, I CAN FEEL THE
BORDER OF THE WORLD GROW
SMALL. AS I PUSH CLOSER.
REACHING TOWARDS YOUR CALL.

Lance removes a single earbud.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Did you say something?

ABBEY

What? Me? No? Did you?

LANCE

No...

They share a guilty, suspicious glance. Lance returns his gaze to the window.

ABBEY

EVERY INCH OF ME'S ON FIRE, BUT I DON'T FEEL WARM. IT'S EVERYTHING I COULD DESIRE, BUT EVERYTHING FEELS WRONG. HE'S SO CLOSE TO ME, BUT STILL SO FAR. I COULD ALMOST REACH HIM, BUT HIS HEART'S UP IN THE STARS.

She throws her head back in frustration.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

WHAT AM I SAYING? HOW COULD I FEEL THIS? BUT HOW CAN I NOT WHEN IT'S ALL I'VE EVER KNOWN? FOR FOUR LONG YEARS I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR A MOMENT, TO TELL HIM HOW I FEEL, BUT I'VE MISSED IT, EVERY ONE. MY LOVE, REACH OUT A HAND OUT, BUT DON'T, KILL THIS DREAM, THIS NIGHTMARE, OH, DRAIN ALL THE HOPE IN ME. THROW IT TO THE COAST, LET IT SINK INTO THE TIDE. ALONG WITH ALL MY HESITATION, MY RESOLVE, MY PRIDE.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

HE'S SO CLOSE TO ME, BUT HE'S SO FAR AWAY. IN MY MIND HE CALLS FOR ME, A COMICAL CLICHE.

LANCE

I DON'T FEEL SO FAR AWAY. EVERY INCH I'M CLOSER, I CAN HEAR A RISING CALL, THERE'S NO PRICE I WOULDN'T PAY.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

(fidgets)

Lance, I think we should talk about this.

The train lurches. Lance casts her a distracted look.

LANCE

Talk about what?

ABBEY

Don't pretend you don't understand me. We need to talk about ** Lynn.

The same scratching noise appears. Lance winces. Abbey, who can't hear the scratch, notices his expression.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Why do you do that? Pretend you can't hear me?

JOSH

I don't know what you're talking about.

ABBEY

Oh my gosh. Josh is right. You're in total denial! Do you even understand what's happened?!

LANCE

(deflective)

I think there are more important things to worry about. Cheer up, Abbey! The sun is setting, and we're almost to the border of Oregon!

He tugs her towards the window, eyes ablaze. Abbey tenses.

ABBEY

DON'T PULL ME CLOSER, AGAINST A SETTING SUN, NO, DON'T PULL ME CLOSER, TELL ME THAT IT'S OVER, MY HOPE IS GETTING STRONGER, CAN I REALLY DRAW AWAY WHEN HE SO DESPERATELY NEEDS ME?

LANCE (CONT'D)

PULL ME CLOSER, LOOK AT THIS SETTING SUN, YES, PULL ME CLOSER, TELL ME IT'S NOT OVER, MY HOPE IS GETTING STRONGER, I CAN FEEL THE BORDER OF THE WORLD GROW SMALL.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER

Now entering: Oregon.

Lance rises from his chair. The ocean outside slowly gives way to thick forest and mountains. Lance presses his hand against the window. He inhales.

LANCE

A NEW SORT OF FEELING. BUT WHAT, I CAN'T TELL. INTO THE DARKNESS LIKE, I'VE WOKEN FROM A SPELL. WHAT IS THIS NEWNESS?? I'VE NEVER KNOWN IT WELL. I MEAN HOW COULD I? FROM THE COMFORT OF A SHELL.

ABBEY

I SEE HIM ALIGHT. EXCITED. THERE'S A BRIGHT NEW WORLD HE SEES. BUT IT SHATTERS MY SOUL TO KNOW THERE'S SOMEONE HE ACHES FOR, KNOWING IT'S NOT ME. KNOWING IT'S NOT ME.

LANCE

This is incredible! Look, the trees on this coast look so different! Why haven't I done this before?!

ABBEY

Done what?

LANCE

Left! Stopped fumbling around for the perfect plan, just packed up my bags and gone! Started living my life!

Abbey throws her hands up. She almost hits a woman, moving back from the bathroom, but narrowly misses. The woman grumbles.

ABBEY

Because you already had a life. Friends. Responsibilities. Big life events to plan for. You can't just pack up your entire everything and ditch.

LANCE

(unconvinced)

I mean, I guess, but was I really even living? Sure, I've been existing, but I'd never even stepped foot outside of the state! And now, I have!

ABBEY

I don't think sitting inside of a train as you pass through really counts. Do you really think that the places you've gone determine how much of a life you've lived?

Lance scrunches up his face.

LANCE

Well-

ABBEY

Do you not remember at all who you used to be? Sure, you were timid in high school, but you've opened up so much. You've lived so much life without leaving the state, with us! The people who care about you!

(MORE)

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Standing on the deck of ferries
during rain storms, chasing sunsets
and ** young love, graduating,
getting into college-

The scratching noise plays like a steady thrum in the background, but does not cover Abbey's words. Lance, agitated, puts up a hand.

LANCE

Stop, please.

ABBEY

No, you need to remember. Hikes up
to Oyster Dome, camping, meeting
new people, getting ** engaged-

LANCE

Abbey, I said, stop!

Abbey rolls her eyes. She settles back into her chair, unsatisfied.

ABBEY

Okay. I give up, for now. But I'll
make you remember, Lance. Your life
isn't just beginning. You've been
living it all along.

Abbey crosses her arms and closes her eyes. The lights in the train have steadily dimmed, until just their two lights are on. Lance coughs.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

I'm doing this for you. But I'll be
patient. Believe me. I've had lots
of practice. Good night.

Lance watches her for a moment, then sighs. He stares back out the window, a smile squirming on his face.

LANCE

(whispers)
Oregon!

ENSEMBLE CHARACTER

Turn that light off, will you?

Lance flicks off the light and settles. The stage is dark, until an ethereal light shines over the stage. The Heavenly Messenger appears, stealthily, and smiles, then disappears in a flourish of soft, spacey music.

CURTAIN CLOSES/ FADE OUT

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2**SCENE 8****INT- Train**

FADE IN

Lance and Abbey wake in their seats, looking very disheveled. It's early morning.

LANCE

Ugh. What time is it?

ABBEY

Early. As in, it's a sin to be awake this early, early.

A voice chimes over the speaker system.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER

Now arriving at our final destination. Please, prepare to disembark.

LANCE

This our last stop? Phoenix, right? No more transfers?

ABBEY

I sure hope so, we've been on this stupid train for more than forty hours. If I spend one more minute on any sort of public transportation, I may lose it.

The train stops, and all passengers begin to gather their belongings.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER

Now arrived in: Maricopa, Arizona.

ABBEY

What?!

LANCE

That's half an hour away!

ENSEMBLE CHARACTER

Sorry to interrupt, are you guys headed to Phoenix?

Abbey and Lance turn in their seats to see an Ensemble Character, leaning towards them with a helpful smile.

LANCE

Yes, aren't you? Is this not the train to Phoenix?

ENSEMBLE CHARACTER

Sort of, this railroad ends in Maricopa. There's a transfer that's supposed to take us the rest of the way to Phoenix.

LANCE

To the train station there. No transfers after, right?

ENSEMBLE CHARACTER

No transfers, but it's not exactly by train.

The voice over the speakers chimes in again.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER

The bus to Phoenix has just arrived. Please, disembark.

Abbey and Lance turn to each other, their mouths agape, in varying levels of horror and disgust. Abbey frantically shakes her head as passengers begin to exit the train.

ABBEY

A bus? Oh no. No way. There's no way that I'm getting off of this gosh darn train and getting onto a cramped little bus. Did you see that one lady just board? I'm pretty sure she was hiding a chicken in her purse!

LANCE

Oh, come on, it's just thirty minutes. If it really bothers you, go back home, you don't need to be here.

ABBEY

It's an extra thirty minutes-

She stops mid gripe and does a small double take.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Excuse you, I don't need to be here? Really?

(MORE)

ABBEY (CONT'D)

After a miserable two-day train ride, that's what you have to say to me?

He shrugs, unbothered. He checks under his seat to make sure nothing is underneath.

LANCE

You never had to be here. This was your choice.

ABBEY

There's no way you aren't joking right now.

LANCE

I'm just saying. You're choosing to be here. Might as well make the best of it.

Lance exits the bus. Abbey glares in his direction, then storms after him, grumbling. After a quick scene change, they sit back down on the bus. The sound of a chicken can be heard subtly behind them. Abbey casts a disdainful eye his way.

ABBEY

You know, the least you could do is be grateful.

LANCE

(coughs)
For what?

Abbey gestures wildly, almost knocking into the same passenger that almost got hit earlier. He grumbles and shuffles to his seat.

ABBEY

For me! For me being here! Helping you! Doing everything I can to support you, even if I think you're crazy!

LANCE

I mean, isn't that what you always tell us? We should just help each other willingly, no matter what? By your own logic, even though I never asked for it, aren't I entitled to your help?

ABBEY

(beat)
Do you even hear yourself?
(MORE)

ABBEY (CONT'D)

This is not the Lance that I know.
This is not the Lance that ** Lynn
knew-

The scratching noise appears, and Lance groans and shrinks, but Abbey is persistent.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

No! Don't turn away from me! You need to hear this. You are not yourself anymore. I know you're grieving, but so am I. Lynn was my friend too.

Lance sits, stunned. He blinks hard a couple of times.

LANCE

Lynn?

ABBEY

(horrified)

I don't know. I don't know what you did to brainwash yourself into forgetting, into ignoring, into not caring, I don't know. But there is something seriously wrong with you.

CONDUCTOR VOICE OVER

Now arrived at: Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. Please depart.

Lance and Abbey depart. They stand, fuming, right in front of an airport. Passengers cross in front of them, bustling to their destinations.

LANCE

Then why don't you leave.

ABBEY

Really? Just like that. You want me gone.

LANCE

I didn't want you here in the first place! I didn't ask for you to come with me! You decided, as you always do, that I need to be taken care of, that the only person who can do that is you, and that nothing I say matters!

Abbey tries to interrupt multiple times, her jaw agape and her stance defensive and angry.

LANCE (CONT'D)

You've been making decisions for me since the day we met! Can't you trust that I can stand on my own two feet for once?

ABBEY

Lance, we're in Phoenix! To talk to my uncle, an astronomy professor who hates you right now, to chase a comet! A dirty flying snowball-

LANCE

Don't you dare say that!

ABBEY

- rocketing through the air away from you! But I did this! I came with you, I followed you, I've been patiently waiting all of these years, because I loved you!

Lance's jaw drops. Abbey fumes. He speaks in a clipped, tense tone.

LANCE

No, you don't.

She throws her bag at her feet.

ABBEY

You heard me. For four years, I've waited. I've cried. I've ached. And I did it silently-

LANCE

Abbey-

ABBEY

Because I was satisfied with just being a part of your life. That was enough for me. Then, I made the big mistake of introducing you to one of my classmates. One of my best friends.

LANCE

Who are you talking about? Why does this matter-

ABBEY

And you fell for her instead. And now she's... She's... And I feel like a monster. A monster.

(MORE)

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Because the entire time, I was hoping you would come to your senses, and love me instead. Screw everything she once meant to me, I didn't care, because as long as I couldn't have you, she had betrayed me. But that never happened. You never saw the light. And now, she's dead. And I'll never get a chance. Ever.

Abbey sinks onto her bag, relief and frustration flooding her face. Lance, unable to interrupt, shakes his head. He sets down his bag, cautiously. He sits.

LANCE

Abbey, what am I supposed to say? That's not fair. You can't throw that at me like it's an assault, like it's my fault. I didn't know.

ABBEY

Even now. Even now, you're the victim.

LANCE

Even know, you're trying to guilt me.

ABBEY

And maybe I am! So what? If I can't be the one guilt tripping you into reality, away from you spending the rest of your life chasing delusions, then who will? Because it won't be her!

She gasps. Lance's face blanches. Abbey's hands fly to her mouth, but the damage is apparent in Lance's eyes.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry. I don't know why I said that. Lance, I-

LANCE

You know, maybe if your parents had loved you more, you wouldn't be such a clingy mess.

Abbey gasps. Regret immediately flashes in Lance's eyes, but he squares his shoulders.

LANCE (CONT'D)

That's it. No more. This has to be over.

ABBEY

Lance! You can't! We need each other!

LANCE

Goodbye, Abbey.

Lance grabs his bag, stands, and storms off. Abbey sits by herself in the middle of the stage, suddenly small among the throng of travelers.

ABBEY

WHY DID I SAY THAT? HOW COULD I NOT? WHY DO I FEEL THIS? HOW DO I MAKE IT STOP? THE BLOOD OF HIS TEARS WILL FOREVER STAIN MY HANDS. WHY CAN'T I JUST BE DONE, I DON'T UNDERSTAND. JUST LET GO. RELENT TO THE TUGGING WIND. OH I'M ON THE BRINK, AND THE MONSTER'S CREEPING IN.

Abbey hugs herself tightly. She rocks on her bag.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

HOWLING AT THE WIND AND RAIN, MY HEART HAS DRIVEN ME INSANE, KEEP ME HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS, GUILTY, SEND ME TO THE GALLOWS. OH HOW THE BEAST WILL RAGE, OH, GET BACK TO YOUR CAGE, THESE WHITE HOT RAMBLINGS OF THE HEART, LET ME FINISH, DON'T GET ME STARTED, TAKE THE BREATH IN ME. TURN IT INTO FLAME. LET MY BODY WILT. IT MIGHT BE BETTER THIS WAY.

Abbey rises shakily.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

THIS TUG OF WAR INSIDE OF ME KNOCKS ME OUT OF LINE, LIKE A CERTAIN DR. JEKYLL, AND A TORMENTED MR. HYDE.

Subtle blue lights of the Heavenly Messenger tinge the stage, but Abbey doesn't notice.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

JEALOUS OF A DEAD GIRL, HAH, WHAT A TRAGEDY.

(MORE)

ABBEY (CONT'D)

BUT HOW I WISH, SOMETIMES, THAT SHE
WOULD TRADE WITH ME. THESE AWFUL
WORDS THAT FORM INSIDE MY MIND, HOW
I'VE STAMPED THEM OUT, JUST FOR
THEM TO REIGNITE. MY GUILT SHOULD
DRAIN ME DRY, BUT I FIND THEY'RE
STILL ALIVE. A CAGED UP CREATURE
WHO WILL NOT BE LEFT INSIDE.
HOWLING AT THE WIND AND RAIN, MY
HEART HAS DRIVEN ME INSANE, KEEP ME
HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS, GUILTY, SEND
ME TO THE GALLOWES.

The travelers bump her around, agitated and angry as they
knock her to her feet. Abbey reaches out, but they don't
stop, instead casting scrutinizing looks.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

OH HOW THE BEAST WILL RAGE, OH, GET
BACK TO YOUR CAGE, THESE WHITE HOT
RAMBLINGS OF THE HEART, LET ME
FINISH, DON'T GET ME STARTED, TAKE
THE BREATH IN ME. TURN IT INTO
FLAME. LET MY BODY WILT. IT MIGHT
BE BETTER THIS WAY.
OH... MAYBE SOME DAY SOON. HE'LL
LOOK BACK AND THINK OF ME, OF THE
TIMES WE SHARED. OF HOW WE USED TO
BE, AND HE'LL FORGET THIS DAY. WHEN
THE VILLAIN FLASHED RED EYES, WHEN
SHE FORGOT TO LEASH, THE BEAST
LOCKED UP INSIDE.

Abbey's voice turns soft, as if speaking to a wounded and
cornered animal.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

UNTHOUGHTFUL AND CRUEL. THE MASTER
MY HEART SERVES... I CAN'T HELP BUT
TO THINK ITS JUST WHAT I DESERVE.
GET BACK TO YOUR CAGE, I'VE HEARD
THE WORDS BEFORE, EVERY DAY FROM
SUCH AN EARLY AGE. ALL IS FAIR IN
LOVE AND WAR.
TAKE THE BREATH IN ME. TURN IT INTO
FLAME. LET MY BODY WILT. IT WOULD
BE BETTER THIS WAY.

Josh enters with a rolling suitcase. He sees her on the
ground.

JOSH

Abbey?

ABBEY

Josh?

Josh rushes forward and scoops Abbey into a hug. She sobs into his arms.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

JOSH

I flew in to try to meet you guys. Someone here needs to be the voice of reason, and it's not going to be space boy. Where is he?

Abbey snuffles angrily.

ABBEY

You should have saved yourself the trouble. He's gone.

JOSH

Gone? Gone where? He just left you here?

ABBEY

No. No, we got into a fight. A bad one. We said some horrible things to each other. Things that can never be taken back. I deserve to be left alone.

JOSH

Did he tell you that?

ABBEY

He should have.

JOSH

No. No, no, no, no, you never do. I'm here now, Abbey. I'm here for you.

Abbey stares at him, as if in a new light. She burrows into his protective hold. He throws his bag down and holds her tightly.

FADE OUT

SCENE 9**INT- Museum**

FADE ON

Lance enters a spacious room with a desk in the corner and a massive globe in the center. Tourists and students meander through the room. DARREN WILMER and his ASSISTANT enter, leading a small group of elementary students.

DARREN WILMER

Can anyone tell me how long it's been since we've seen Codon's comet?

YOUNG ENSEMBLE ACTOR

Thirty years.

DARREN WILMER

Excellent! A sticker for you!

He hands the student a sticker. The child accepts it with a squeal.

And who can tell me which impressive, quite intimidating and intelligent astrologist rediscovered this comet, just a few weeks ago?

Another child bounces in excitement.

YOUNG ENSEMBLE ACTOR

You did!

DARREN WILMER

(chuckles grandfatherly)

Oh, you flatter me, a sticker for you as well. Yes, just a few weeks ago, I was looking through my telescope...

Dr. Wilmer makes a show of looking through a mimed telescope to the children's amusement.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

And I was searching the stars. You know, those twinkling balls of gas, way up high in the sky? I was searching for something incredible, something special, when I saw...

Dr. Wilmer sees Lance. Lance, coughing again, takes a step forward.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 Something that didn't belong.

He claps his hands and talks with false cheer, ignoring Lance completely.

Children, my assistant will
 continue the rest of this tour.
 Thank you for joining me, make sure
 to grab a sticker on your way out.

The elementary group moves on, and eventually, out of sight, leaving the room empty. Dr. Wilmer strides to his desk and deposits a stack of stickers, then takes a seat. Lance starts forward.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 My office hours are over, young
 man, you must set up an
 appointment.

LANCE
 Dr. Wilmer, I'm not sure if you
 remember me, I'm-

DARREN WILMER
 My niece, Miss Abigail, sent me a
 message this morning letting me
 know that you would show up. I
 told her I hoped you wouldn't be so
 bold. Or so stupid.

LANCE
 (squirming)
 Um... I came to ask you about
 Codon's comet. It's supposed to be
 right overhead in Alaska-

DARREN WILMER
 Oh, yes, Abigail told me. "Obsessed
 with a comet," she said.
 "Absolutely delusional," she said.
 In complete and utter denial.

Lance pales. He examines the floor in shame.

LANCE
 She said all of that?

DARREN WILMER
 She didn't need to, I could smell
 it on you the moment I walked
 through those doors.

LANCE

I- uh-

DARREN WILMER

But I'd love to hear it. I'd love to hear what you have to say, what ponderings about the infinite universe you'd love to run my way. But first, riddle me this, young man.

He removes his glasses and leans forward menacingly.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

Where were you on Friday.

LANCE

(stammers)

DARREN WILMER

Do you not remember? I just returned myself. There was a funeral this weekend, Lance, and do you know who it was for?

LANCE

I... no...

DARREN WILMER

Do you remember her name? Lynn? My former student? Abigail's classmate? ** Your fiance, your soon-to-be wife?

Lance sits, stunned and ashamed, coughing, with the scratching as quiet as it has ever been in his ears.

LANCE

I... um... I don't know what you're talking about, but the comet passes directly overhead in three days, in Alaska and I need to know how to-

Dr. Wilmer slams his hand. Lance jumps.

DARREN WILMER

You were supposed to be there! You were supposed to speak at the funeral! Her entire family was there! Your entire family was there! All of her friends, her coworkers, every teacher that had ever cared about that young woman, everyone was there. But not you.

(MORE)

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
The so-called great love of her
life.

LANCE
I don't... I can't think about...
No, no I don't understand what
you're talking about. I can't hear
you.

DARREN WILMER
Don't you *dare* try to-

Lance raises his hands as the professor jumps to his feet.

LANCE
No, sir, please, I literally,
truly, cannot hear you. There's
a... a noise, it's loud and grating
and sounds almost like... like...

DARREN WILMER
A scratching.

He examines Lance in a new light. He rubs his temples and
exhales.

You truly don't remember what's
happened, do you.

Lance shakes his head. Dr. Wilmer sighs, and pulls up a seat
for him.

LANCE
No. No, and for weeks, my mind has
just torn itself apart looking for
the thing I'm missing. I don't know
where to start. I feel so far gone
already, I don't know if I'll be
able to find myself again.

He buries his face in his hands and sinks to his knees.

DARREN WILMER
But you can feel it. Can't you.
Just on the creeping edge of your
subconscious. Damming up your
memory. Do you feel it? The truth
that is seeping in between the
cracks?

Lance nods.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

Lance. You have hidden behind a wall of comforting lies for too long. It's time for you to come into the light.

LANCE

I don't... I don't know how to do that.

Dr. Wilmer is silent for a moment. He kneels beside the shaking young man.

DARREN WILMER

Begin with the smallest inkling you have. Latch onto something you know. Follow that to the truth. Start at the beginning.

LANCE

Where to start? I saw a weather forecast, and I packed up everything I've ever owned, and-

DARREN WILMER

From the beginning. The real beginning. As far back as you can comprehend. Let it come. Let it flow. Let it breathe in through your mind, and out through your mouth. Let yourself be free.

Lance takes a deep breath. He stands shakily, and coughs a few times. He begins to sing.

LANCE

I'M ON THE BRINK. I CAN'T RECALL...
HOW TO THINK. WITH THIS AGONY
RISING INSIDE OF MY MIND, A
BARRICADE MADE OF OUT OF THORNS.

The lights begin to fade to a dark red, then to blue. Dr. Wilmer's eyes widen, as he can see these changes.

LANCE (CONT'D)

THREE FOURTEEN A.M. EVERY MORNING
AT THREE FOURTEEN A.M. FOR DAYS AND
DAYS AND DAYS. I'M DISTURBED FROM
THE NIGHTMARES THAT HAUNT IN MY
MIND, A DARKNESS THAT SEEPS AND
LEAVES NO LIGHT BEHIND, THE NIGHT
IS TURNED OFF AND THE WALLS FEEL
ALIVE. AND I COWER FROM THIS
DARKNESS INSIDE.

The stage has turned largely dark. Something creeps in the shadows, just behind the massive globe. Only it's legs and hands can be seen.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 IT LURKS IN THE CORNER, IT WATCHES
 ME. IT BEGS TO DRAW NEARER,
 STALKING ME. AND WHEN IT
 APPROACHES, RIGHT UP TO THE LIGHT,
 I SCRATCH IT ALL OUT, AND SQUEEZE
 MY HEART TIGHT...

The Messenger emerges from behind the globe. She dances softly. Dr. Wilmer watches her, mouth agape.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 THERE'S A HEAVENLY MESSENGER, WHO
 FEARS NO PAIN. A HEAVENLY
 MESSENGER, I KNOW SHE FEELS THE
 SAME, TO THE LOVE I HAVE LOST,
 THOUGH I DON'T QUITE KNOW HOW. A
 HEAVENLY LIGHT SHINES FROM THE
 STARS IN HER BROW. FOR A MOMENT I'M
 SAFE... BUT JUST WHEN SHE HAS GONE.
 THERE ARE FLASHES IN MY MIND OF A
 NIGHT THAT'S GONE HORRIBLY WRONG.

Lance chokes up. The professor kneels to comfort him, but his eyes stay on the Messenger.

DARREN WILMER
 It's okay, son. Keep going.

LANCE
 I FOLLOWED THE TRAIL TO THE TOP OF
 THE CLIFF, I TREKKED ON FOR MILES
 UNTIL I FOUND IT. THE PLACE I WOULD
 SEE HER AT LAST. RIDING IN ON A
 PLANE FROM THE WEST. WE'D PLANNED
 THIS DAY FOR WEEKS. SHE'D MEET ME
 AT THE TOP. AFTER FOUR LONG WEEKS
 OF RESEARCH ABROAD. WHEN AT LAST
 SHE'D COME HOME TO ME.
 WITH A RING AND THE REST OF OUR
 LIVES IN OUR HANDS, I HIKED TO THE
 TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN WITH NOT A CLUE
 AS TO WHAT WOULD THEN HAPPEN.
 SHE TAUGHT ME TO LOVE EVERY MOMENT
 I CAME ACROSS, THE MOUNTAINS, THE
 BREEZE, EVERY MEMORY WE MADE OF US
 THE SKY SHONE MUCH BRIGHTER WITH
 HER HAND IN MINE. OH HOW I ACHE FOR
 OUR FINGERS TO INTERTWINE.

Lance rises to his feet as he sings. The professor listens in rapture.

LANCE (CONT'D)

A VEIL. A WHITE DRESS. A SMILE ON HER FACE. WE PROMISED WE'D WED. DURING SUNSET, THAT DAY. I'D FALL TO MY KNEE, AND PROMISE MY LIFE. I'D CRY AND I'D ASK HER TO BE MY LOVELY WIFE. WE'D TUMBLE DOWN THE MOUNTAIN TO THE CITY HALL, BE MARRIED JUST BEFORE THE SUN FINISHED ITS FALL, AND NEVER ALLOW OURSELVES TO PART AGAIN. MY LOVER, MY WIFE, MY EVER BEST FRIEND.

The Messenger glides up to Lance. She puts her hand almost on his face, but his expression is lost. He faces the audience.

LANCE (CONT'D)

BUT THE STORM WAS TOO STRONG. THEY WERE TOO SMALL TO FIGHT. I WATCHED AS THE ENGINE BEGAN TO IGNITE. LIGHTNING AND THUNDER AND HAIL SET THE PLANE ALIGHT. I WATCHED WITH MY OWN TWO HORRIFIED EYES. THE SMOKE, LIKE A VEIL, THAT WOULD NEVER COVER HER FACE. THE WHITE OF THE PLANE, A DRESS MADE OF LACE. FOR A MOMENT I SWEAR I SAW HER FACE IN MY EYES. FALLING AND REACHING TO ME IN THE SKY.

Lance procures a ring from his pocket. He holds it up and strokes it gently.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I STOOD THERE WITH THE RING IN MY HANDS. LEFT BEHIND SO IT WOULD NOT BE LOST. HOW COULD I, HOW CAN I, TRY TO UNDERSTAND? I STOOD ON THE BRINK AND WATCHED MY EVERYTHING COME AT IT'S COST. IN A FLASH, THROUGH THE FLAME, THERE RESOUNDED A CRASH. THE WOMAN I LOVED, RESIGNED TO THE ASH.

Dr. Wilmer stands. Leans against his desk.

LANCE (CONT'D)

BUT I SWEAR I SAW, FOR JUST A SPLIT SECOND, A BURST OF COLORED LIGHT RUSH UP TOWARDS THE HEAVENS.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)
 THAT NIGHT I SAW HER, A MESSENGER
 OF LIGHT, SHE FLOWED IN MY DREAMS
 AND BROKE MY FRAGILE MIND.
 I'M LOST WITHOUT HER. MY LIFE AND
 MY LIGHT. I'M SO... ANGRY AT MYSELF
 HOW COULD I LEAVE HER BEHIND?

The Messenger beckons to Lance. He reaches out a hand, unable to follow, and she leaves the stage alone. Dr. Wilmer reaches out too, just a little.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 SO HERE I SIT. ON THE BRINK. I
 DON'T KNOW WHY. WITH A WHISPER I
 CAN'T RESIST CALLING ME TO MY LOVE
 IN THE SKY.
 CALLING ME TO JOIN HER... MY LOVE
 IN THE SKY.

A moment passes in silence. The astronomer, with tears in his eyes, gently pats Lance's back.

DARREN WILMER
 (tenderly)
 I'm sorry.

LANCE
 Not as sorry as I am.

DARREN WILMER
 Thank you for telling me.

Lance paces the room. His sadness slowly gives way to his agitation. He turns back to the professor.

LANCE
 How could I have forgotten this.
 How could I have forgotten her?

Dr. Wilmer crosses to the bookshelf next to his desk. He pulls out a psychology book.

DARREN WILMER
 Our minds do strange things when we
 find the world around us stops
 making sense. If your brain
 subconsciously decided that the
 memory of Lynn was simply too
 painful, too traumatic, there's not
 much you could have done to combat
 that.

He hands the book to Lance, who takes it cautiously.

LANCE

My mind did all of this? All of this... has just been a lie? A delusional psychosis that I ruined my entire life for?

DARREN WILMER

I don't think it's that black and white. There's always a little room for color.

LANCE

So what now. Do I just go home? Pretend none of this ever happened? Ignore the Messenger, telling me I need to follow that comet, even when she may not be real? Even when it doesn't mean anything?

DARREN WILMER

If this has meant something to you, then it has meant something. How exhausting would this life be if the only things that mattered happened on an astronomical scale?

LANCE

But I can't ignore the dreams I've been having, the whispers and the shadows. I've seen this spirit with my own two eyes... Could- Could it be Lynn?

Lance smiles slowly. Hope slowly crosses back into his expression.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Is she telling me how I can see her? How we could be together again?

DARREN WILMER

I don't know that I can tell you what any of this is or isn't, but I can tell you one thing. Humans are extremely instinctual creatures. The only thing that comes more naturally to us than love is hope.

LANCE

Hope, and not fear? Or hate, or anger?

DARREN WILMER

Follies of the human condition, but not conditions of the eternal spirit, my friend.

LANCE

I don't understand. Shouldn't you be telling me that I'm crazy right now?

DARREN WILMER

Not crazy... but maybe a little improperly guided, and in desperate need of a shower.

Dr. Wilmer straightens his tie and glasses.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

I'm a man of science. I always have been, and always will be. But even I can understand that in the grand scheme of the infinite universe, I know absolutely nothing.

He thinks to himself for a silent moment, then rifles through his desk.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

Some of our most unorthodox instincts are meant to be followed. Our greatest adventure in life is to distinguish which ones.

He pulls out an envelope.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

I was meant to go on a little research trip, tomorrow, to a certain Fairbanks, Alaska. Because of the massive storms out west, it's one of the only flights headed in that direction. You're not the only one who wants to chase that comet.

He hands it to Lance. Lance takes it.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

But I figure an old man like me could forfeit his seat to someone who needs it more.

LANCE

What is this?

DARREN WILMER

Everything you need to succeed in your little quest. Directions, ticket information, it's all in here. There's also a little sticker in there. I find them quite endearing.

LANCE

Sir, I can't take this-

DARREN WILMER

And you can't afford not to.

LANCE

How I could ever repay you.

DARREN WILMER

Just go. Find what you're looking for, get the closure you need, then finish that chapter of your life. Let it go. Be free.

LANCE

(coughs)

I don't know how.

DARREN WILMER

Stop saying that. When it's time to know how, you will. Now, go! Your plane takes off early, and you smell horrific. I'll set something up for you at the hotel next to the airport. Take a shower, you desperately need one. Good luck, my friend.

Lance exits, coughing up a storm. The astronomer stands alone in an empty room, with only the massive globe for company. He sighs to himself. His bespectacled assistant enters holding a massive binder.

ASSISTANT

Professor Wilmer, who was that guy? He looked like a zombie.

(gags)

Smells like one, too. And look, he left a trail of dirt! Should I get the broom?

DARREN WILMER

Oh, be polite. I thought you were in a much similar state when you started working for me.

His assistant looks at him in playful affront.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 He's... an old friend. And it's
 Darren, please. You've been working
 for me for weeks now.

ASSISTANT
 Sir, I'm just trying to keep it
 professional.

DARREN WILMER
 Professional? Hah! Anything for
 that recommendation letter, eh?

ASSISTANT
 Can't get to grad school without
 it. Are you ready for your trip
 tomorrow?

DARREN WILMER
 (sighs)
 Negative.

ASSISTANT
 Negative? Did I forget to book
 something? Are you missing your
 ticket? I was so certain that I had
 double-checked everything, but I
 had a nagging suspicion that I-

The assistant begins to rummage through her binder for an error.

DARREN WILMER
 No, no, everything is perfectly in
 order, but I'm afraid that I will
 not be going on this expedition.
 Not this time.

ASSISTANT
 (spluttering)
 What do you mean? You've been
 preparing for this trip for years!

DARREN WILMER
 Yes, I know-

ASSISTANT
 You've had this marked on the
 calendar since before anyone here
 could remember!

DARREN WILMER

Indeed, I have.

ASSISTANT

Weren't you the one who discovered that this comet was approaching Earth's orbit again?

DARREN WILMER

Yes, I was, now are we done here?

ASSISTANT

And were you not the one who fought the entire faculty department, tooth and nail, for a seat on that flight?

DARREN WILMER

Somehow, I am quite aware that I've been anxiously awaiting the return of Codon for almost thirty years.

ASSISTANT

Then what on earth could possibly be keeping you from going?

Dr. Wilmer stands and sighs. He rifles through a little pile of stickers from his pocket.

DARREN WILMER

There are things more important than chasing stars.

ASSISTANT

Not to an astronomer, there isn't!

She gestures in accusation.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

You didn't give up your spot on the plane for the scruffy guy, did you?!

DARREN WILMER

And what would make that your business? Hm?

He smiles, and slaps a sticker in the palm of his assistant.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

Take the rest of the week off.

ASSISTANT

Sir? It's Monday.

DARREN WILMER

Yeah, well, all of my classes have been cancelled for the rest of the week anyway. Go be a college student for a few days.

ASSISTANT

(incredulously)

Go be a college student?

Dr. Wilmer waves as he rifled through a few papers.

DARREN WILMER

Sure, sure. Go... go to a party. Get a drink, go dancing, go do something of little regard. I don't know, what do the kids like to do these days?

The assistant disguises a scoff as a cough. She slides her glasses on her nose.

ASSISTANT

If I may be so bold, sir, some of us have grad school and doctorate programs to be preparing for. Any party that doesn't involve Chex Mix, flashcards, and board games, probably won't fit in my schedule.

DARREN WILMER

That's a right shame. You get the rest of the week off anyway. I'll write the first draft of your recommendation letter this week.

ASSISTANT

Really? Thank you, sir! I-

DARREN WILMER

On one condition.

ASSISTANT

Anything.

DARREN WILMER

Go do something reckless this week. Something dumb, immature, or even just out of the ordinary. Report back to me what you find.

ASSISTANT

But-

DARREN WILMER

I expect a two-page paper, double spaced, about your observations. Due next week.

ASSISTANT

Citation format?

DARREN WILMER

Go crazy.

His assistant raises an eyebrow.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

Fine, fine. APA. Now scram.

The assistant smiles slowly, then nods.

ASSISTANT

Will do, Dr. Wilmer. Thank you.

DARREN WILMER

It's Darren!

The assistant makes for the exit. Dr. Wilmer sits and returns to his paperwork. The assistant turns.

ASSISTANT

Are you sure you're fine missing your research trip?

Dr. Wilmer says nothing. He just nods and leans back in his chair. His assistant nods her head and waves with the sticker. She then exits, as if slightly embarrassed by her farewell.

DARREN WILMER

Kids these days... always rushing about. So focused on the future, they forget that their feet are squarely planted in the present. Ah... but to be young again.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)

THE PLIGHTS OF MAN ARE MANY, NONE OF US LEAVE ALIVE, SO WHAT GOOD A TIME AS ANY TO FIND WHAT IT TRULY MEANS TO THRIVE. WE ARE NOT MEANT TO LIVE THIS LIFE UNTOUCHED. SCARS TELL OUR BRAVE STORIES, THE NEW AND OLD. TALES OF WONDER, TALES OF LOSS, TALES OF THE MEEK AND BOLD.

(MORE)

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 WHAT WOULD LIFE BE WITHOUT A DOSE
 OF TRAGEDY? AND THE STRENGTH TO
 OVERCOME?

He chuckles to himself and spins in his swivel chair.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 YOUTH. CLUTCHED TO OUR CHESTS SO
 FONDLY. SOUGHT OUT SO DESPERATELY.
 THE MACGUFFIN OF A MILLION QUESTS,
 THE ETERNAL TRUTH THAT ALWAYS ENDS.
 OH, YOUTH. THE SPOILS FALL AT THE
 FEET OF THE YOUNG, WITH TRIUMPHANT
 MELODIES TO BE WRITTEN, TO BE SUNG.

Dr. Wilmer stands with a fervorous light in his eyes.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 I ONCE WAS LIGHT. NEARLY FORTY
 YEARS AGO. STRONG AND STRAPPING,
 DAUNTLESS AND BOLD. THE STARS IN MY
 HANDS, MY MIND, MY EYES, THE
 MORNING SUN WOULD HARMONIZE, I USED
 TO RISE. WITH STRENGTH AND POWER IN
 MY GRASP, THROUGH THE WORLD I
 BLAZED MY PATH. RELENTLESSLY I
 SOUGHT THE LIGHT, THE UNIVERSE MY
 ONLY SIGHT, UNTIL I MET. TIL I MET.
 MY NEW SHINING LIGHT.

The lights tint with blue. The Messenger enters again, more cautiously this time. She seems less familiar, but purposeful.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 HEAVENLY SPIRIT, HEAVENLY LIGHT,
 RAIN DOWN FROM THE STARS AND THE
 SKY. SUDDENLY MY AMBITIOUS TRAIL
 DID NOT SET MY SOUL ALIGHT. THOUGH
 I CANNOT GUESS WHY SHE CAME TO ME,
 I NEVER DARED TO ASK WHY. THIS
 DARLING STUDENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,
 FOUND ON A COLD WINTER'S DAY, IN
 THIS VERY MUSEUM, ON A CAMPUS TOUR.
 HER WIDELY BRIMMED SPECTACLES AND
 AN OVERSIZED PENCIL, AND A BEAUTY I
 COULD NOT IGNORE.

The Messenger approaches. She smiles sadly at Dr. Wilmer. He outstretches his arms. She glides to him, like a child to her grandfather.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 FOR TEN TOO SHORT YEARS, I HELD HER
 TIGHTLY, CLUTCHED HER TO MY CHEST,
 EVERY NIGHT. NEVER TO MISS HER,
 NEVER TO PART, NEVER TO TELL HER
 GOODBYE...
 AS AN AUTUMN SUN SET, IN OUR
 ELEVENTH YEAR. MY DARLING'S ENDING
 DAYS BEGAN TO DRAW NEAR. HER
 FINGERS, ONCE SOFT, ENTWINED WITHIN
 MINE. I WATCHED AS THE ILLNESS LEFT
 NOTHING BEHIND... NOTHING LEFT BUT
 THE LOSS OF MY WIFE...
 SHE HELD MY HAND, HER FINGERS
 BRITTLE, MINE ROUGH, I FELT HER
 LAST FIGHT, HER DEMEANOR SO TOUGH,
 AND IT KILLED ME INSIDE, WHEN I HAD
 TO BEG HER TO GIVE UP. I BEGGED MY
 BEST FRIEND TO FINALLY LET GO.

He strokes the air just above the hair of the Messenger. She smiles up at him, softly and innocently. There is familiarity, but not the same familiarity as between the Messenger and Lance; this feels much more paternal.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 HER VERY LAST WORDS TO ME. SEEK OUT
 THE STARS. DREAM OF ME. I WON'T
 ALWAYS BE SO FAR. SEEK OUT CODON'S
 ONE COMET, JUST OVERHEAD. SEE ME
 OFF, AND SOON I'LL BE HOME.
 HEAVENLY SPIRIT, HEAVENLY LIGHT,
 DANCE THROUGH THE STARS AND THE
 SKY. PAINLESS AND FREE FROM THE WOE
 AND AGONY IN HER APOGEE OF THIS
 SMALL LITTLE LIFE NEXT TO MINE.

He turns to face the audience. He reaches upward, toward the light.

DARREN WILMER (CONT'D)
 OH... THIS TIME I'LL MISS YOU. MY
 DARLING STARLIT DEAR. BUT SOON,
 I'LL BE STARDUST, AND YOU WILL BE
 NEAR. WE'LL SPIRAL OUR WAY THROUGH
 THE NEBULAE AND SUNS.
 ETERNALLY, ENTIRELY, IRREVOCABLY,
 IN LOVE. EXQUISITE, CELESTIAL,
 NEVER ENDING... YOUNG.

He coughs softly as the lights begin to fade.

FADE OUT

SCENE 10**INT- Hotel Room**

Lance sits in a hotel room. He coughs on the bed, exhausted. A notebook sits in front of him, with torn and crumpled pieces of paper around him.

LANCE
 DEAR ABBEY AND JOSH,
 I'M WRITING THIS LETTER, THIS
 STUPID, SILLY LETTER, TO TRY TO FIX
 THE CRACKS THAT HAVE DRIVEN US
 APART, BUT... WHATEVER...

Lance groans and throws away the paper.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 I don't- how on earth to start
 this... I mean, jeez. How do you
 beg forgiveness from the friends
 that probably hate you?
 DEAR JOSH, AND ABBEY-
 No, no, no, Abbey has to go first,
 otherwise she'll get cranky and
 sad... let me start over.
 DEAR ABBEY AND JOSH,
 I'VE BEEN KIND OF A JERK...

His tone becomes snarky. He writes with sarcastic flourishes.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 BUT I MEAN, I GUESS SO HAVE YOU, I
 KNOW I WENT BERSERK BUT IF OUR
 FRIENDSHIP WAS TRUE YOU WOULD HAVE
 BEEN THERE TO HELP ME SEE IT
 THROUGH-

Lance throws his notebook across the bed and coughs.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 No, no, no... I don't even know if
 I believe that... Oh jeez, it's
 cold in here. Okay. Start from the
 first thing I know. Trace it from
 there.

He dons a heavy jacket, then picks up the paper and takes a breath.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 I MISS YOU. I MISS THE EASY
 FRIENDSHIP WE ALL ONCE SHARED.
 (MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)

I MISS THE TRIPS TO THE BEACH, THE
WAY I COULD BREATHE, IN THE DAYS I
WASN'T SO IMPAIRED. YES MY GRIEF
DRIVES ME TO THE BRINK EVERY DAY.
BUT YOU, MY LOVING FRIENDS, CARED
FOR ME ANYWAY...

The Heavenly Messenger can be seen glowing faintly in the background. She is almost invisible.

LANCE (CONT'D)

DEAR ABBEY AND JOSH. HOW DID THINGS
GO SO WRONG? WHERE I THREW AWAY MY
SANITY TO FOLLOW A STRANGE SIREN'S
SONG, WHERE I SHIRKED YOUR SUPPORT
AND YOUR CARE. ALONE NOW, WITHOUT
IT, I FEEL KIND OF SCARED.
DEAR ABBEY AND JOSH, THERE'S
NOWHERE TO HIDE. WE ALL HAVE
IMPERFECTIONS, IDIOSYNCRASIES BEST
LOCKED INSIDE. WE FORGOT TO GIVE
EACH OTHER OUR BEST. BUT I HOPE
I'LL BE ABLE TO... ONCE I FIND SOME
REST.
LOVE, LANCE... ONCE YOUR GOOD
FRIEND. A FRIEND, SO LOST, COME TO
MAKE AMENDS, AND EVEN THOUGH HE
FELL SHORT, BY A MILE OR SO, HE'LL
SEE YOU SOON.

The music fades out around him, except for the steady rhythm of a heartbeat. It slows considerably, then flat lines. The lights fade to red. After a moment, the Messenger silently slips offstage. Lance sleeps on.

CURTAIN CLOSES/ FADE OUT

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3**SCENE 11****INT- Hotel Room**

CURTAIN OPENS/ FADE IN

Lights rise. Morning. Lance lies on the bed, still in his jacket, dead to the world. An alarm sounds. Lance jumps to his feet.

LANCE

Oh, no, I set the wrong alarm! I had to leave twenty minutes ago!

Lance grabs for his phone, still on the desk, but his fingers are shaking too hard to pick it up. He misses it entirely, multiple times. He groans in anticipation.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Fine! You stay here!

Scene change. This scene change can be as elaborate or simplistic as desired. As the background moves around him, Lance dashes, panting, to the departure desk of an airport.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I'm here! I'm here! Hah! Oh my, I'm here, don't take off without me!

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

You're just in time, sir, the gate to Fairbanks, Alaska closes in five minutes.

LANCE

Thank goodness!

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

But because this is a very small plane, we don't do baggage checks- where is your luggage?

LANCE

Oh no, I left it at my hotel room!

He starts offstage.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I can go and grab it really quickly-

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 Sir, we're about to take off,
 there's no way we'll be able to
 wait for you!

LANCE
 Okay... okay fine. I don't need it.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 Do you have your ticket?

LANCE
 (panics)
 Yes, I... maybe not, actually, let
 me-

Lance presses his pocket. The envelope is securely inside of
 his pocket. He pulls it out.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 I swear I left this at the hotel...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 Sir, we have more passengers who
 need to board the plane.

Lance presents the ticket. It's golden and shiny.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
 Is this it?

LANCE
 I think so?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 May I?

The Flight Attendant takes the ticket. She eyes it
 skeptically, then her eyes widen in understanding. She nods
 and smiles softly, then scans the ticket.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
 Everything seems to be in order.
 Enjoy your flight, Lance. Safe
 passage. I hope you find what
 you're looking for.

LANCE
 Yeah, you too- I mean, thank you.

He cringes as he walks away.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 Why... why would I say that.

SCENE 12**INT- Plane**

Lance takes his seat on the plane. This can be as high or low maintenance as required for stage productions. He stares out the window. It's still early. DIANA, an older woman in winged glasses, sits next to him, flipping through a book.

LANCE

That was weird... My name wasn't on the ticket...

(starts)

Josh! Abbey! I need to tell them I got-

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (VOICE OVER)

Please be seated, and turn all electronic devices to airplane mode.

LANCE

Oh, they'll be fine. I left my phone at the hotel, anyway.

Lance takes a moment. He looks at his surroundings, then, as if suddenly remembering his phobia, his body tenses up. He drums his fingers restlessly, eyes darting back and forth. Passengers move around him, complaining and settling down.

LANCE (CONT'D)

HAHAHAHA... SAFE AND SECURE ON THIS TINY DINKY PLANE, NOT A WORRY IN THE WORLD, AS THE PASSENGERS COMPLAIN. I AM FINE, YEAH, JUST FINE, SO COLLECTED, CALM, AND COOL, I COULDN'T BE MORE THRILLED.

Everyone jolts forward as the plane starts to move.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (VOICE OVER)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to welcome you aboard Flight 33C with service to Fairbanks, Alaska. We ask that you please fasten your seat belts at this time and secure all baggage underneath your seat or in the overhead compartments.

Lance squeaks and scrambles for his seat belt. The other passengers throw him weird looks, then return to their conversations and reading.

LANCE

SEE I'M ALL STRAPPED IN, AND MY
BAGS NEEDN'T BE PACKED, SO I'LL
BREATH REAL DEEP AND IGNORE THIS
HEART ATTACK, I HAVE NEVER IN MY
LIFE BEEN SO GRATEFUL FOR THE DIRT,
COULD THIS SWEAT BE MORE OVERT? I
MEAN, WHAT COULD GO WRONG? THE
PROBABILITY IS LOW, ONE IN NINE
EIGHT TWO ONE, SO WHY DOES MY PANIC
GROW?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

We are second in line, and will
take off in approximately eight
minutes.

A crash of lightning flashes through the windows and shakes
the plane slightly.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Make that fifteen.

Lance throws a horrified look at the attendant, then to the
audience. His voice comes quickly, staccato, and tense.

LANCE

SO I'M GONNA STRAIGHT UP DIE,
THAT'S NOT A MYSTERY, THIS BLOOD
RED SUN RISE IS THE LAST I'LL EVER
SEE, I'D TRANSCRIBE MY WILL, IF I
HAD STUFF TO BEQUEATH, I'VE MADE A
MISTAKE TO DISCARD MY SAFETY, CAN'T
I JUST GO HOME, EVERY SHUDDER I CAN
FEEL DEEP INSIDE MY BONES, AND IT
ALL COMES CRASHING DOWN-

DIANA

Woah, woah, woah, woah, stop, stop!
Calm down!

LANCE

(whimpers)
Hm?

DIANA

Is everything alright?

LANCE

Yep, yep I'm fine, I'm just about
to die on this rusty piece of sky
metal.

Diana laughs. She flips mindlessly through her book, revealed to be a psychology journal.

DIANA

Kid, you'll be just fine. Planes hardly ever go down. Besides, that winter jacket of yours will surely provide some padding. What are the chances we actually crash?

LANCE

One in nine thousand, eight hundred, and twenty-one.

DIANA

Impressive. I'm Diana.

LANCE

Thanks, I'm- oohohohoh!

The plane starts to move down the tarmac. The passengers shake to reflect this movement. Lance clutches at his seat.

DIANA

Do you get nervous like this every time you fly, "Oohohohoh"?

LANCE

(tensely)
Never flown before.

DIANA

Ever?

LANCE

I've never really needed or wanted to.

DIANA

Ah, you're in for a treat. I remember my first trip. I was about a decade older than you were. Don't worry, I've done this a million times. You'll be just fine.

LANCE

Great. That makes me feel so much better.

DIANA

Don't mention it. They'll be going over safety procedures any second now, that should cheer you right up. Here they are! Just watch.

Two flight attendants stand and begin their presentation. Lance removes his jacket and folds it beneath his seat. One reads, while the other acts out the script.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Welcome aboard, passengers! On behalf of the crew I ask that you please direct your attention to the monitors above as we review the emergency procedures. As this is a very small plane, there is only one exit. Life rafts are located directly below your seats.

DIANA

See! We'll be just fine.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

As we are heading north-west towards the heart of the most turbulent areas, we ask that passengers remain in their seats as often as possible. In case of lightning striking the plane-

LANCE

What?!

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Please remain seated and buckled. Thanks for flying with us today! We'll be taking off in two minutes.

The flight attendants busy themselves with their tasks, talking with passengers and checking buckles.

LANCE

Oh no. Oh, no, no, no, there is NO way I can do this, I have to leave right now-

Diana swats motherly at him with her psychology journal.

DIANA

Oh stop this nonsense. Flying can be scary at first, but do you know why you're really frightened right now? Do you understand the psychology behind it?

LANCE

Because my fiancée was killed in a plane crash and I had to watch?

Diana makes a face.

DIANA

That certainly is a factor. You've never once had a positive experience with an airplane. You've only had experiences that have caused you fear or pain or uncertainty. Correct?

The plane starts to move again. Lance grabs the seat handles tighter.

LANCE

Correct.

DIANA

The part of your brain that processes fear is called the amygdala. When you see something you fear, or a fear stimulus, your amygdala starts to sound the alarms. It sends stress hormones such as epinephrine into your bloodstream, and activates your sympathetic nervous system- sorry. Let me start over.

Lance, who has been giving her distressed look, nods his head frantically.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Fear is a natural thing. Everyone feels it, sometimes every day, sometimes all day. Learning to accept and understand that fear could be the difference between overcoming it, or bowing to it.

A flight attendant approaches. She talks to a few of the patrons.

DIANA (CONT'D)

WHEN THE WORLD SEEMS QUITE
FRIGHTENING AND THE AIR IN YOUR
LUNGS GO AWRY, YOUR NEURONS SEND
OUT FRANTIC LIGHTNING, YOUR LIFE
FLASHES RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES, IT
CAN BE SO EASY TO JUST LET GO, STEP
OFF THE EDGE OF THE BRINK, BUT THE
WINDS AND THE RAINS OF THIS
TREACHEROUS WORLD ARE NOT AS TOUGH
AS YOU MIGHT THINK.

(MORE)

DIANA (CONT'D)

GRIT YOUR TEETH AND BALL YOUR FISTS
AND REPEAT AFTER ME.
YOU MUST STEP STRAIGHT INTO THE
STORM. FACE IT HEAD ON. SEIZE THE
DAY WITH BOTH HANDS BEFORE THE
MOMENT IS GONE. AND IF A LITTLE
VOICE INSIDE, THE LITTLE DEVIL BY
YOUR EAR, WHISPERS "YOU'LL NEVER
MAKE IT OUT ALIVE" TELL HIM, "GO
ON, GET OUT OF HERE!" THIS LIFE IS
INTENDED TO BE HARD. NONE OF US
LEAVE ALIVE, AND YET WE'RE NOT
ALONE. REACH OUT TO THOSE YOU KNOW.
IF THEY LOVE YOU, YOU WON'T BE
LEFT BEHIND.

Lance grips his buckle tightly.

LANCE

I'M ON A MISSION, TO SUCCEED I MUST
STAY STRONG, BUT I'M PETRIFIED, I
CAN'T PRETEND THAT NOTHING IS
WRONG.

Diana pats his arm tenderly.

DIANA

YOU DON'T NEED TO, MY FRIEND, YOUR
FEAR AIN'T NIGHT AND DAY, THERE'S A
LOT OF IN BETWEEN, A BIT OF LEEWAY.
YOU CAN BE SCARED AND STILL
SUCCESSFUL, YOU CAN BE STRONG AND
STILL FEEL WEAK. YOU CAN SMILE AND
LAUGH AND CRY WHEN THE WORLD FEELS
COLD AND BLEAK. BUT TO SUCCEED TAKE
THIS ADVICE FROM ME.
YOU MUST STEP STRAIGHT INTO THE
STORM. FACE IT HEAD ON.

She mimes holding a sword and shield. Lance smiles weakly.

SEIZE THE DAY WITH BOTH HANDS
BEFORE THE MOMENT IS GONE. AND IF A
LITTLE VOICE INSIDE, THE LITTLE
DEVIL BY YOUR EAR, WHISPERS "YOU'LL
NEVER MAKE IT OUT ALIVE" TELL HIM
TO DISAPPEAR. THIS LIFE IS INTENDED
TO BE HARD. NONE OF US LEAVE ALIVE,
AND YET WE'RE NOT ALONE. REACH OUT
TO THOSE YOU KNOW. THE STRENGTH OF
US TOGETHER HELPS THE STRENGTH OF
ONE TO GROW.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Get ready for lift off!

The passengers count down. The stage seems to rumble as the airplane shrieks through the air.

ENSEMBLE

5, 4, 3, 2, 1, lift off!

Lance breathes heavily and screws his eyes shut, until the rumbling stops, and the plane is level.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

We are now at cruising altitude.
You are free to roam about the
cabin.

Lance opens his eyes slowly. He looks around, as if preparing for something to jump out at him.

LANCE

Was that it? Are we in the air now?

DIANA

Yep. That's all there was to it.

Lance looks out the window, shocked. Clouds checker the horizon, and in the distance he can see a mountain range and a rising sun.

LANCE

I DON'T UNDERSTAND... A MAINLY
PAINLESS TRANSITION, I DON'T
UNDERSTAND THIS NEWFOUND
ACQUISITION... A LIFE LONG FEAR
CONQUERED IN A MATTER OF SECONDS? I
SIMPLY DON'T COMPREHEND... YEARS OF
ANXIETY, THEN THE HARDEST OF
TRAGEDIES HAVE DETERRED ME FROM THE
SKY... BUT NOW AS I FLY I CAN'T SEEM
TO RECALL WHY...

DIANA

WHEN YOU TELL YOUR MIND THAT YOU'RE
BRAVE ENOUGH TO TRY, WHEN YOU FORCE
YOURSELF TO GO, YOU PRESS ONWARD
AND SURVIVE, FIND WHAT YOU'VE
ALWAYS BEEN TOO SCARED TO KNOW.

LANCE AND DIANA (CONT'D)

YOU MUST STEP INTO THE STORM. FACE
IT HEAD ON.

They both mime fighting off invisible foes.

SEIZE THE DAY WITH BOTH HANDS
BEFORE THE MOMENT IS GONE.

(MORE)

LANCE AND DIANA (CONT'D)
 AND IF A LITTLE VOICE INSIDE, THE
 LITTLE DEVIL BY YOUR EAR, WHISPERS
 "YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT OUT ALIVE"
 TELL HIM NOT TO FEAR. THIS LIFE IS
 INTENDED TO BE HARD. NONE OF US
 LEAVE ALIVE, AND YET WE'RE NOT
 ALONE. REACH OUT TO THOSE YOU KNOW.
 THE STRENGTH OF US TOGETHER HELPS
 THE STRENGTH OF ONE TO GROW.

LANCE (CONT'D)
 (breathless)
 I can't believe it. I've been
 terrified to fly my entire life. I
 never knew something so hard to
 wrap my mind around could be so
 easy.

DIANA
 A lot of things in life seem a lot
 easier on the other side of them.

The flight attendants begin to bring drinks around to the
 passengers. The sky slowly begins to grow darker. Lance
 relaxes. Passengers begin to unbuckle.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 So, what are you doing aboard the
 old 33C? What adventure awaits in
 Fairbanks?

LANCE
 I'm going to see the northern
 lights.

DIANA
 Oh, how pretty. I've always been
 fond of them-

A flight attendant hands Diana a drink.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 Thank you, dear.

The attendant hands one to Lance, who declines.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 -but I can't imagine you'd get
 clearance to fly for something so
 trivial as tourism.

LANCE

I'm seeking Codon's comet. I know it sounds crazy, but I think that if I'm standing beneath the lights, right as the comet passes overhead, I'll... I'll be able to see my fiancée again.

Diana swirls her drink, then sips.

DIANA

I see. You know... I know someone who also chased after Codon's comet.

LANCE

You do?!

DIANA

Yes. Long, long ago. He was so desperate to be there when the comet flew overhead, determined that he would be reunited with his wife, just as long as he stood under the northern lights at the same time. It's not called "Lover's Comet" for nothing.

LANCE

What happened to him?

DIANA

(sighs)
His wish was granted.

Lance sits forward abruptly, his eyes going wide.

LANCE

It was?! That's amazing! I-

DIANA

You misunderstand me. He got to see his wife. But that doesn't mean they were reunited.

LANCE

Oh...

DIANA

He claims that his wife appeared to him, glittering in starlight, and for a moment, he felt joy again. Euphoria.

To the side, a young man and a young woman stand. Bathed in blue light, they enact Diana's words.

DIANA (CONT'D)

He rushed to her arms, determined to embrace her, but he could not touch her. He had been reunited with her spirit, but he was still alive. He couldn't truly be with her at all.

The spirit tries desperately to hold the hands of her lover, but they just can't touch. She falls to her knees and looks up at him. She smiles softly. She brushes his face with her fingertips- almost.

LANCE

But... but she was there! His wife was there and he got to see her, talk to her, again! Could that not be enough?

Diana laughs darkly.

DIANA

It was enough for a short time. But Codon moves quickly, and the Aurora Borealis is fickle. With her spirit tied to the comet, and her connection to earth tied to the lights, she was doomed to fade away.

The light above the spirit begins to fade. She reaches for him one last time before she is pulled back into darkness. The actor falls to his knees, hugging himself and reaching out for her. He sobs.

DIANA (CONT'D)

She had only minutes before the lights flickered out, and she was gone.

Lance is quiet. His anguish is apparent in his expression. He bows his head and quietly speaks.

LANCE

What happened to him?

DIANA

The man spent the rest of his life in shadow. How could he not? When his life had been swallowed up and stolen by the universe?

Bathed in blue light, the man works furiously in notebooks, doing calculations and shifting telescopes. A young man and a young woman approach him in turn and are rejected.

DIANA (CONT'D)

He spent the next thirty years thinking of nothing else. His dreams, his studies, his thoughts, filled with a vision of loveliness from the heavens. He searched the stars anxiously, obsessed in his grief, determined to find a way to keep her for longer. From that day on he lived a half-life. How could one truly be a part of this life with their head up in the stars?

LANCE

Is he still searching? Did he ever see her again?

DIANA

I haven't spoken to him in some time. But something tells me that he has finally learned to let go.

LANCE

Let go of his wife? How on earth could someone choose that? Did he ever love her at all?

DIANA

(slightly emotional)

Letting go doesn't mean leaving behind. I like to think that my old friend finally realized that he was still alive, whether he liked it or not. The least he could do was live like he was until he could be with her again.

The plane rumbles.

LANCE

What was that?

DIANA

I don't know.

Lightning flashes in the windows outside. The passengers exclaim in startled fright.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Sorry folks, we're hitting a little bit of turbulence. Please, fasten your seat belts.

LANCE

Oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh.

DIANA

Hey. It's okay. Just hold on tightly. It won't last long.

LANCE

But what if we crash? What if we go down and die?!

DIANA

Why would you care if we-

A look of sad understanding crosses her face.

DIANA (CONT'D)

This is your first flight on 33C, isn't it.

LANCE

Why on earth does that matter?

Diana gives Lance a sad look.

DIANA

I guess it doesn't. As long as you follow the directions of the crew, you have no need to fear.

The rumbling and flashing continues for another few moments, before the lights grow brighter and the clouds part. The passengers breathe sighs of relief.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Ladies and gentleman, we have cleared the storm. From here, it should be relatively smooth sailing to Fairbanks. Thank you for joining us, we should be landing in just a few minutes.

LANCE

Just a few minutes? It feels like we just took off!

DIANA

Time always seems to fly on 33C.
This truly is a special plane.

LANCE

Yeah... I guess you're right.

DIANA

Lance... can I offer you a small
piece of advice?

LANCE

Of course. Anything.

DIANA

Don't dwell on what you might find
under the lights. Remember that the
greatest loves can survive even the
thickest of veils and the longest
of distances.

The plane shudders. The passengers pitch forward.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Welcome to Fairbanks, Alaska!
Please be careful as you retrieve
your baggage. Thank you for flying
with us!

Lance glances around wildly as passengers begin to rise.

LANCE

Did we just land?

Diana quickly rises. She checks a small watch on her wrist
and nods.

DIANA

That's time for me. It was nice
meeting you, kid.

LANCE

Wait, Diana... what are you flying
here for?

She tightens her bag around her shoulders and secures her
glasses on her face.

DIANA

I came to see a very old friend,
though I'm afraid he may be late.
In fact, I doubt he's coming at
all.

LANCE

I'm sorry.

DIANA

I'm not. The old man has some things he needs to catch up on. He'll make the trip as soon as he's ready-

She stops, then suddenly stands up straighter. A small, almost hopeful smile passes her face.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Which may be sooner than I thought.

Lance, who has turned to pick up his winter jacket, does not see Diana exit; she practically disappears. He glances around to find her.

LANCE

What did you say?

She does not reappear. Their fellow passengers depart with their luggage, leaving only Lance and the flight attendants.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Sir? Is there anything we can do for you before you leave?

LANCE

No, no thank you.

He is left alone. Lance stands, looking quite lost.

LANCE (CONT'D)

STRAIGHT INTO THE STORM... FACE IT
HEAD ON... THE GREATEST OF
DISTANCES... THE GREATEST OF
LOVES...

Lance exits, his teeth grit in determination.

SCENE 13

INT- Museum

Abbey and Josh enter the museum room with the large globe. Dr. Wilmer's seat is empty. Abbey and Josh stand close- not too close, but close enough.

JOSH

Are you sure he'd even be here? If I sent eight calls and six messages to someone, and they didn't respond to a single one, I'd say it was safe to assume that they were unreachable.

ABBEY

I'm not sure where else he'd be, my parents say he's become quite the hermit since my aunt passed. I've only ever really seen him here. I don't know where else I'd check.

The assistant enters, sniffing and clutching papers like a life preserver. Josh approaches.

JOSH

Hi, do you happen to know if Dr. Wilmer is in today?

The assistant stares at him for a moment, then bursts into tears. She drops her papers, which go everywhere. Josh and Abbey hurry to assist her in picking them up.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry! Here, take it easy.

ABBEY

Are you okay? Aw, come here.

ASSISTANT

(sniffles)

I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry, I didn't mean to, I just- Oh I'm so embarrassed!

ABBEY

Hey, come sit over here.

Abbey leads her to a seat while Josh picks up the scattered papers.

ASSISTANT

I graded all of the paper work for the next month, I didn't know what else to do-

JOSH

About what?

ABBEY

Can you tell us what's wrong?

ASSISTANT

It's Dr. Wilmer. I walked in this morning to see him still at his desk. I had assumed he had rethought about missing his flight-

ABBEY

Missing his flight? That's impossible, he's always on time.

ASSISTANT

He gave away his ticket to someone yesterday.

ABBEY

Where was the flight going?

ASSISTANT

Fairbanks.

JOSH

Who did Dr. Wilmer give it to?

Josh hands the assistant the papers.

ASSISTANT

I didn't catch his name, but he was horribly dressed and looked like he hadn't showered in a week. But Dr. Wilmer is-

Josh turns to Abbey.

JOSH

That's our guy.

ABBEY

We should go, I think we can still catch him.

Abbey turns to the assistant, who is still crying ferociously and dabbing at her glasses.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

Would you happen to know where Dr. Wilmer is?

ASSISTANT

Dr. Wilmer is dead.

Silence.

ABBEY

What?

ASSISTANT

(frantic)

That's what I've been trying to
tell you since I walked in!

Abbey sits down, stunned. Josh helps her settle in her seat,
then turns to the assistant.

JOSH

What happened? We just talked to
him a couple of days ago!

ASSISTANT

(wails)

I don't know! Yesterday morning he
was totally fine! A little
distracted, I guess, but he always
is! He's an astronomer for crying
out loud! Then that guy came in,
and Dr. Wilmer got all... all moon
eyed! Saying I should go party
more! Hah!

The assistant throws up the papers in dismay and distress.
She grimaces apologetically, and Josh retrieves them. She
settles back into her chair, shaking.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

He gave me the rest of the week
off, saying he'd be off too, but I
left some of my paperwork on the
table. A stupid, irresponsible
mistake, so I came in as early as I
could to get them and apologize
when I... I saw him slumped over
his desk.

JOSH

In his office?

ASSISTANT

No! This one right here!

Abbey's eyes go wide, and she stares at the desk with a
newfound horror. She pushes away from it. Josh's expression
is panicked as he pats the assistant awkwardly.

JOSH

What could he have been doing at
his desk on his day off?

The assistant completely ignores him.

ASSISTANT

I ran to him and asked what was wrong, but all I saw was his all of his medication vials, with all of the lids screwed on tight! Without me to remind him, he must have forgotten!

JOSH

How many medications has he been on?

ASSISTANT

But do you know what's worse of all? Can you imagine what I saw in his hands?

JOSH

What?

ASSISTANT

(howling)

I saw him, cold and empty, hunched over my graduate school recommendation letter!

She rips it from her pocket with a vengeance and holds it up for all to see.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

His last action was to sign it! I practically killed him!

Josh takes the letter from her as she howls. His helpless attempts to console her only cause more tears.

JOSH

Okay, now hold on, this is insane. You didn't kill him! There's always another explanation. He must have forgotten to take his medication!

ASSISTANT

I make sure to check every day. But I guess he must have forgotten, or misread the labels, or...

ABBEY

Darren...

Josh and the assistant turn to look at her. Her voice is slow and careful. The assistant calms herself enough to listen.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

...is the smartest man I know. He has multiple PhD.s, and has been teaching longer than I've been alive. There's no way he forgot something as simple as his medicine.

ASSISTANT

But it was sitting right there, next to him!

ABBEY

You didn't know Darren like I did. There is no way he forgot to take his medicine... on accident.

The sentence hangs darkly on the air. The assistant's breath catches.

ASSISTANT

You don't think-

ABBEY

Nothing good happens when Codon is in the sky. If Darren taught me anything, it was that. We need to leave. Thank you for your help.

ASSISTANT

Where are you going?

ABBEY

(grimly)

To find that crazy, unshowered guy from yesterday.

JOSH

Where do we even start? He could be anywhere.

Abbey and Josh begin to make their way offstage. The assistant sits, blubbering slightly, then pushes her glasses up her nose and scrambles after them.

ABBEY

Let's start at the airport. If he's got a plane ticket, he had to have shown up at some point.

ASSISTANT

Wait! Dr. Wilmer set him up at the hotel, right next to the airport.

(MORE)

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

He has a room he uses regularly,
for university guests and travel.
He may have that information in his
desk...

The assistant lunges for the desk and begins to dig around,
shuffling papers and pulling out massive heaps of stickers.

LANCE

Hold on, isn't it way against the
rules to rifle through the desk of
a professor? Specifically a
recently passed one?

ASSISTANT

Way against the rules. If anyone
saw me, I could be fired and
expelled, with any hopes of
graduate school dashed for good.

ABBEY

So why are you helping us?

The assistant makes a small triumphant noise. She presents
them with a piece of paper and a key card.

ASSISTANT

Dr. Wilmer's last words to me were
to do something irresponsible and
dumb. Drinking, partying... I
figure I'd spare my liver. Good
luck.

Abbey and Josh exit. The assistant is alone. She takes a
breath and makes to leave, but after a few moments of
thought, she turns back to the desk. She peels a sticker and
hides it under the top surface.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

I'll have that paper on your desk
by the end of the week. Thank you,
Professor.

She stands by the globe and watches it spin for a heartfelt
moment. She turns to look back at the lonely desk.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

It's your turn now. Go see the
stars. Thanks... Darren.

She exits, humming the melody of the astronomer's final
soliloquy under her breath.

SCENE 14**EXT- Fairbanks, Alaska**

Stars glitter all around, and the moon illuminates the snowy trees. The comet, a large, glowing, spherical shape, hangs from the sky/top of the set, a little less than halfway across. It is slowly being moved.

LANCE

Alright... The man in town said that if I followed this trail, I should be able to find the part of the mountain with the highest point that touched the lights. Yeah. I think I got that right.

He gives the mountain a scrutinizing look.

LANCE (CONT'D)

But... Maybe I should have gone to the other mountain instead...

He glares at the map, before checking his watch.

LANCE (CONT'D)

No time! If I'm lucky, I should be able to see the lights right... now!

Nothing happens. Lance settles down at the foot of the mountain.

LANCE (CONT'D)

That's okay. I'm patient. The man in town told me it should be starting soon, anyway. I should have plenty of time.

Lance stares up at the sky. The comet continues to cross. The comet is now almost half-way across.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Any second now. Just... waiting on the lights now...

Nothing. Lance begins to ramble, panic creeping into his voice.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Not yet... If Josh were here, hah, he'd be cracking jokes and using his sales tactics on polar bears. Not that there are any around.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)

I don't think. And if Abbey were here, she'd tell me that everything is going to be alright. That I just need to be a little more patient. That I need two more jackets, too, even though I don't feel cold... Why don't I feel cold?

The comet is now inches away from halfway across the stage.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Any second now. It's right over head! Any second and I'll see her.

Nothing. The comet inches to the halfway point, and without stopping, continues on. Lance groans, a sick, animalistic sound.

LANCE (CONT'D)

No. No, I did not do all of this for nothing. Come on, please, where are you?!

Still. Nothing. Lance paces the stage, desperate.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Please! Please, where are the lights?!

Silence. He sinks to his knees. Broken. Hopeless. A few seconds pass as he sobs. Suddenly, a single colored light begins to glow. Then another, and another. The northern lights begin to light up the sky. Lance cries out.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I can't believe it! The lights! They're here! Lynn! Lynn! Where are you!

Silence. Lance paces. The comet continues, slowly etching a trail in the sky.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Lynn! Where are you!

Silence.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Lynn?

LYNN (OFFSTAGE)

Lance! Lance, I'm here!

The Heavenly Messenger is lowered from the top of the set. Her star scattered dress billows about. She touches down at the top of the mountain. A mask no longer covers her face. It's Lynn.

LANCE
(joyfully)
Lynn! It's you! It was always you!
I've been so confused without you,
so empty!

He begins to climb the mountain to her, but she calls out seriously.

LYNN
Lance, stay there.

He freezes.

LANCE
But- but you're here! Why... why
can't I come to you? I know I won't
be able to touch you, but I can at
least-

LYNN
But you will. You will be able to
touch me.

He starts up the mountain again, just a few steps at a time.

LANCE
I will? That's great! Oh, Lynn,
I've been lost without you-

LYNN
Lance, don't move! When I died, my
soul stopped being anchored to my
body. Instead, it found an anchor
in the comet, it being a celestial
being. If you touch me, you'll be
pulled in, too.

LANCE
But... I could touch you in my
dreams. And I still have a body.
I'm still anchored.

Lynn smiles sadly.

LYNN
Yes, but those were dreams. This...
this is different.

LANCE
 (pales)
 What?

LYNN
 I don't have much time. The lights
 are strong, but I can feel the
 comet pulling me away.

The comet is still inching slowly across the sky. Lynn's tone
 is urgent.

LANCE
 No, no, you just got here!

LYNN
 Lance, did you meet Diana?

LANCE
 The lady from the plane? Do you
 know her?

LYNN
 Yes, what did she tell you?

LANCE
 She told me not to dwell on what I
 found under the lights, but I don't
 see-

LYNN
 Did you talk to Darren? What did he
 say?

LANCE
 He told me I wasn't crazy! He told
 me to find you! Lynn, I'm so
 confused!

LYNN
 You need to understand what they
 told you. Every step you've taken
 since the moment I died. I need you
 to think about all of them. I'm
 about to present you with a choice.
 You'll need to make a decision, and
 you don't have long to do it.

Lance now stands at the top of the mountain with Lynn, mere
 feet length away. The comet is frighteningly close to the
 edge of the stage.

LANCE
 What is it?

LYNN
Will you join me?

LANCE
I can do that?

LYNN
Think about it carefully. Are you willing to die, to leave your life unfinished, to never feel again, to be tethered to this comet with me?

LANCE
You say it like it's a bad thing...

He pulls the engagement ring out of his pocket.

LANCE (CONT'D)
Lynn, I want to be with you for the rest of forever. Do you not want to be with me?

Lynn barely represses a sob.

LYNN
More than anything. But I cannot ask you to throw your time alive away. It was given to you for a reason. That's why it needs to be your choice.

LANCE
Lynn, I've never felt more empty, but I've never felt more alive than I have the past few days, but I miss you so desperately and I'm so, so, lost. What do I do? What do I-

He stops. He murmurs to himself.

LANCE (CONT'D)
The thickest veils...

Lance reaches back to her. He almost brushes her face with his hand. She almost sinks into his touch. Almost.

LANCE (CONT'D)
Are you happy?

LYNN
What?

LANCE

Are you happy? Are you at peace?
Are you in pain?

LYNN

I am so far from pain, my love. But
I am also so far from feeling
anything.

The comet begins to edge offstage. The lights begin to flicker around Lynn. She throws a frantic glance at the comet.

LYNN (CONT'D)

Lance, you need to choose! Now!

LANCE

Lynn! Don't leave, not yet! There's
so much I need to tell you!

Lynn takes a few tearful backwards steps in the direction of the comet.

LYNN

You are so exceptionally mine.

LANCE

And you are mine.

Lynn reaches out a hand.

LYNN

I love you.

Lance reaches out for her. He takes a step.

LANCE

I love you-

Before their hands meet, the lights abruptly shut off. The comet is still visible. It blazes for a few more moments before inching out of sight. A flash of blue light follows, leaving only darkness and the whistling of mountain winds.

FADE OUT

SCENE 15**INT- Hotel Room**

An alarm rings in the darkness. A door swings open, a voice exclaims, and the alarm is stopped.

FADE IN

Abbey and Josh stand, completely shell shocked, above Lance's hotel bed. Lance lays there, still in his jacket, dead to the world.

ABBEY

Is he...

JOSH

No. There's no way. Not on the same day as Darren. Check his pulse.

ABBEY

No, you check his pulse.

JOSH

This is outrageous, I'll check his pulse!

Josh checks his pulse. He checks again. And again. He shoots Abbey a panicked glance.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Abbey?

ABBEY

No! I refuse! I can't keep losing everyone! Why does everyone keep abandoning me?!

JOSH

Abbey! Snap out of it! I'm not going anywhere. We're gonna figure this out together, but we need to keep our heads.

They stand silently, looking into each other's eyes.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I think he's-

Lance sits up straight, gasping for air. Josh and Abbey scream. Josh pushes Lance back onto the bed in an act of frightened aggression.

LANCE

Ow!

JOSH

Lance?!

ABBEY

Lance! You're alive!

Abbey tackles him in a hug. Josh collapses against the wall. Lance fends Abbey off just enough to breathe.

LANCE

Abbey?

ABBEY

We thought you were dead! Your heart wasn't beating, and you were cold and clammy and you weren't breathing, and-

JOSH

Abbey, he needs space. Come here.

Abbey begins to fume, off on her own little tangent.

ABBEY

Why do they call Codon the Lover's Comet?! It's a cold-blooded killer!

Josh pulls her gently away, and she latches on to his hand.

JOSH

We thought you were gone, man.

LANCE

How did I... what am I doing here? What are you guys doing here?

ABBEY

We went to talk to Dr. Wilmer this morning, and got the key to this hotel room. He's... he's gone.

LANCE

He can't be, he gave me his ticket.

JOSH

He's gone, Lance. Gone.

LANCE

Gone? Like, no longer with us? What on earth happened?

ABBEY

We went to him, looking for you,
but he passed away early this
morning. We came here to find you,
and you were dead.

Lance's eyes widen, and he scrambles to sit up.

LANCE

Dead? I wasn't dead! I saw the
lights, I was there, the comet
passed overhead-

JOSH

It's still morning. You slept
through the plane. It took off
while you were asleep.

LANCE

No, it didn't. I was on that plane.
Flight 33C! I took it to Fairbanks,
I conquered my fear! See!

He lunges for the ticket in his pocket. It's no longer there.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I swear, it's here somewhere!

Abbey removes it from the table.

ABBEY

Is this the one?

LANCE

(astounded)

No, that's not right! I had it with
me, I gave it to the flight
attendant! It had a golden ticket,
I think it had my name on it.

Abbey pulls out a normal airline ticket and throws him a
quizzical look. Josh's face hardens.

JOSH

Lance, you're unwell. You have been
for a long time. You had a weird
dream. It's time to wake up now.

LANCE

But it wasn't a dream! It was real!
I was awake, Diana was there, I was
there!

ABBEY

Maybe you should listen to Josh. You've been sick for weeks, since, you know, the beginning of this whole mess. We just want what's best for you.

LANCE

No, no, no! It wasn't a dream! Ask Lynn, she'll tell you, she'll tell you everything- Where's Lynn? She was standing right... right there...

His finger, pointing at the spot Lynn once occupied beside him, wilts. Josh pales.

JOSH

What did you just say?

LANCE

Lynn. Your sister.

ABBEY

You said her name! You haven't done that since she died!

Josh grasps Lance firmly. He shakes him slightly.

ABBEY (CONT'D)

He was dead two seconds ago! Be gentle!

JOSH

You saw Lynn?

Lance sits up more fully. He looks rejuvenated. Strong. Young.

JOSH (CONT'D)

This had better not be one of your games, Lance.

LANCE

I saw the light, Josh. With my own two eyes.

JOSH

The light? What, like the ones that lead you to heaven?

LANCE

The brightest light I've ever seen. I walked right up to her.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)

I almost held her in my arms... I was so, so close. But I chose to let her go.

JOSH

Why. Why would you do that?

LANCE

She offered me a choice. And I chose to live.

JOSH

And you... you talked to her?

LANCE

(tearfully)
I did.

Josh's mouth moves, but no words come out. He coughs and tries again. He turns to face the wall, mumbling.

JOSH

She didn't... You didn't... I can't believe... I refuse to...

He stops. Turns to face his friends. His voice conveys a tone that can't quite let itself be hopeful.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Is she... is she okay?

Lance smiles, hopeful and sad, but no longer lost.

LANCE

She said that she was so far from any pain.

Josh begins to sniffle.

JOSH

How do I know that this is real.
How do I know you didn't just make this up to deal with your issues.
How can I ever trust you again,
after everything we've gone through.

LANCE

I don't know. I can't make you believe anything. But I saw her, Josh. I wouldn't make that up. She's safe, and she's free.

JOSH

I know that Mom... Mom's going to need to hear that. Dad, too.

Abbey holds onto Josh's arm as he turns to her. Her eyes meet Lance's. She sends him a shy, guilty smile. He rubs the back of his neck in the same manner.

ABBEY

I think I speak for all of us when I say that some regrettable words were said recently.

LANCE

Yeah. A lot of regrettable words. I lead you all on quite the adventure, huh. I must have seemed... you know. Insane.

JOSH

Oh, there's no doubt about it.

ABBEY

None at all.

JOSH

It's funny. I came here, looking to give you the biggest lecture of your life. Oh, I was ready to wring the crazy out of you with my bare hands. But you seem different.

ABBEY

You seem like you, again.

LANCE

I feel like me, again. And I think I'm finally brave enough to try being that without Lynn. I'm ready to be myself, for myself. There's a lot out there I haven't experienced yet.

ABBEY

Sounds like an adventure.

JOSH

Any chance you'd let a couple of old pals tag along?

LANCE

I wouldn't want it to be any other way.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)
 OUR TIME ALIVE IS SHORT, AND WE
 HAVE SO MUCH LEFT TO LEARN.

ABBEY
 WE LAUGH AND WEEP AND FIGHT THROUGH
 LIFE, EACH TRIAL IN ITS TURN.

JOSH
 BUT EVEN IN THE TIMES WE FIND WE'VE
 GOTTEN TURNED AROUND.

LANCE
 REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO LIGHT THE
 WAY AND HOLD YOU TO THE GROUND.

ABBEY
 YOU MUST STEP STRAIGHT INTO THE
 STORM.

JOSH
 FACE IT HEAD ON. LEARN TO LET GO OF
 THE PAST BEFORE YOUR PRESENT HAS
 ALL GONE.

ABBEY
 WE ARE NOT MEANT TO LIVE THIS LIFE
 UNTOUCHED. SCARS TELL OUR LIFE
 STORIES.

JOSH
 OUR BRAVE STORIES.

LANCE
 OUR LOVE STORIES... THIS WORLD CAN
 BE ENJOYED, AND NOT JUST OVERCOME.

ABBEY
 So? Are we ready to get out of
 here?

JOSH
 Please! Take me back to Washington.
 I can't bear the heat anymore.

ABBEY
 Not a fan of the sun?

JOSH
 Give me clouds any day. Much less
 drama.

Abbey giggles. Lance stands alone, staring into nothing.

ABBEY

Lance? Are you ready? If you like, we could stay tonight to try and see Codon. It's not Alaska, but it's something.

LANCE

I'm ready to go home. I have a lot of apologies to make, and a lot of things to set back in order. Codon will be back. I know it. You go on ahead. I'll catch up.

Abbey shoots him a doubtful look.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Really. I'll meet you guys in just a second.

Josh squeezes her hand, and nods at Lance. Abbey leads Josh offstage by the hand. Lance stands alone on stage. He smiles at his friends, then turns away. The lights turn down to a darker shade of blue.

LANCE (CONT'D)

THIS TIME I'LL MISS YOU. MY DARLING
STARLIT DEAR.

He pulls the ring out of his pocket.

LANCE (CONT'D)

BUT SOMEDAY SOON, WHEN MY TIME IS
UP, I'LL BE STARDUST, AND YOU'LL BE
NEAR.

Lynn, Dr. Wilmer, and Diana enter. They can be seen faintly in the background. Dr. Wilmer and Diana hold hands. Tears stream down Lynn's face. She joins Lance. He doesn't see her.

LYNN

WE'LL SPIRAL OUR WAY THROUGH THE
NEBULAE AND SUNS. ETERNALLY,
ENTIRELY, IRREVOCABLY, IN LOVE.

LANCE

EXQUISITE, CELESTIAL, NEVER
ENDING... YOUNG.

She softly slips her hand into his. Lance looks down at their intertwined hands. His eyes widen.

CURTAIN CLOSES/ FADE OUT

END OF ACT 3