

DEAD JOBS

By Danielle Littman

THE PEOPLE

TOM & SADIE

Own a used bookstore. Both 61-- been married 41 of those. Talk with their hands a whole lot.

LIBBY

Makes mix CDs. 18. Swayed by the slightest sound.

IRIS

A travel agent. 33. Pregnant. Can't/won't stop moving.

PETE

An employee at a video store. 47. Fidgets with a bat.

JILL & OLIVIA

Work at a department store together. Both 26. Forward pulse.

BENJAMIN

A postal worker. 75. Slow and graceful; takes time with words.

THE PLACE

The kind of place you sit down and have a real conversation.

THE TIME

Now.

No but really,

Now.

Things to Note

1. It should feel like home. I don't mean a house. I mean the feeling of home:
2. The space is intimate.
3. The space is communal.
4. It's the thing you easily forget in the rush of the everyday.
5. It should/will be a little different each time you return
6. Things can overlap (movement, text, music). In fact they should.
7. Music is important. The conversation between acoustic and electronic.
8. I can't stress this enough — the entire experience should feel like a conversation.

Things that touch me at my deepest core — pieces of music most of all, which I have always taken as direct soul-to-soul messages — might be effectively produced by mechanisms thousands if not millions of times simpler than the intricate biological machinery that gives rise to a human soul.

-David Cope, inventor of the Artificially Intelligent Composer

All scenes occur at the same time-- intertwining, layered, nothing too clean

TOM AND SADIE:

The shelves are half-empty.

Tom is putting books in boxes.

LIBBY

Libby is unpacking in her new dorm room, talking to her new roommate, grounded but giddy.

She's currently unpacking CDs, of which there are many.

She sits with her phone under her thigh, on vibrate.

IRIS

Iris is talking to a customer who is complaining about the price of travel.

She is pregnant and touches her stomach a lot.

There are many maps covering her desk—she has a marker to track travel paths.

PETE

Pete paces with a bat in hand.

He's used to passing the time by talking to himself.

There are multiple old television sets playing videos silently. It's a diverse assortment of videos.

JILL AND OLIVIA

Jill and Olivia are surrounded by clothes racks. Racks packed.

This whole thing, it's a dance.

By the end of the dance, no clothes are on racks.

These motions are relevant:

-multitasking

-profile (the many iterations of that word)

-multitasking

-trying on clothes to see how they fit (too tight, what do you say?)

-a vacuum cleaner; tangled cords

-multitasking

-polishing hanger racks

-comparing bodies

-multitasking

BENJAMIN

There is a large mailtruck-shaped piece of paper next to Benjamin. It's named Franklin.

He addresses Franklin as he speaks

Whenever he talks, things slow down

Sadie walks in to help Tom with boxes

SADIE

Where are we bringing all these books, hon? We haven't had a big delivery like this in a while. I was beginning to think we'd never have one again. I mean I knew that'd never happen, things always have a way of working out. Right, Tom?

Silence

Right. Well. This reminds me of that time we had to move out of our apartment because of the mold on our ceilings. Where was that place again?

Silence.

Addison. Long time ago.

TOM

Corner of Hermitage and Addison, but the address was on Hermitage.

SADIE

Oh, semantics.

TOM

Word people.

SADIE

The best kind of people. Oh, and my mother, she *hated* that Addison — sorry, *Hermitage* apartment. She said right off the bat that we were gonna regret that cheap rent, and sure enough that mold starting flaking off the ceiling — who knew mold could *flake*?

Pause.

That's funny by now, right?

Libby pulls several CDs out of her duffel.

LIBBY

I make mix CDs
Yeah no like on CDs, discs
Yeah I do have an iPod but I like these
I just like music.
Um
I like music
Like a whole lot more than a person should
Probably

LIBBY

Well it's part of my blood
 I mean I've always been super aware of my relationship with music
 Which is that I have one

Libby pulls more CDs out of her duffel—there must be fifty.

Iris circles the US on a map of the world.

IRIS

People like you are just like, 'price price price.' Everybody kind of second guesses that they're getting the best price.

We travel agents know what we're talking about, even if you don't wanna believe that at first. People don't wanna just trust blindly here—maybe that's the thing. You make sure you're covering all their bases, which is great, it's just... I don't know. There's a trust for human-to-human conversation that's missing.

She circles an "other" place

Pete paces with a bat in hand.

PETE

Reasons I want to quit my job at the video store:

1. Because I'm bored.
2. Because I'm bored at work
3. Because I'm bored not at work
4. Because nobody comes in here.
5. It's quiet here
6. I'm the only one here and things wouldn't change much if I left.

Jill and Olivia straighten clothing on racks.

JILL

Listen
 Learn
 Speak this language
 It's a language
 If a customer comes in
 Listen hard
 You pay attention to how she walks in, what she's wearing, what she's holding.
 It is your responsibility to make her look good; happy.

OLIVIA

Ok so if I were a customer

OLIVIA

What would you say?

JILL

First I'd think
You look like a mom
A mom on the move

OLIVIA

Check me with the cuffs down

JILL

Cuffs down you look like less of a mom
More of a lady
Moms have like on the move clothes
Young moms do

OLIVIA

Old moms?

JILL

Old moms have
Well
Worn down on the move clothes

OLIVIA

Everyone is different

JILL

But everyone likes to look good

OLIVIA

What if a customer comes in this second?

Benjamin addresses his mailtruck:

BEJAMIN

Sir, we've had a good run...
Fifty-two years.

SADIE

Tom?

TOM

Hm?

SADIE

What do we want for lunch today?

TOM

Mm.

LIBBY

Like

Some families pass down stories

And mine passed down song

At least my dad did

Yeah

These CDs are his

Well mine now I guess

He gave them to me when he said bye at the car

Libby continues to unpack CD's — there must be hundreds.

SADIE

Greek deli or subs?

No response.

SADIE

Tom. Do you have an opinion? Lunch?

TOM

Sorry, sorry. I don't know. Whatever you want.

SADIE

I hate it when you don't have an opinion.

TOM

Sorry. I just don't.

SADIE

Fine, I'm feeling Greek. That okay?

TOM

Right-o.

SADIE

Right-o.

LIBBY

Dad thinks putting songs in order is all about gut
 I, like, half disagree.
 I mean gut is a huge part of it
 Probably 88 percent is gut
 Which can't be learned
 But 12 percent is math
 I mean in high school I hated math
 Well I hate how hard I worked for math
 Hence the art history major
 But I've always kind of thought math was poetic
 Like
 Holy shit
 That it all works out
 You know?
 You get there different ways
 But it all works out
 Like
 The math of
 Do the last note of a song and the first note of the next
 Like one another
 Or are they two negative magnets?
 Because the pause in between songs
 Has to be an inhale
 Not an exhale that blows paper off tables
 It has to be a this plus this is
 Yes

Listen to this

*A flow of epic proportions.
 She un packs more CDs—there must be five hundred*

TOM

We're need more boxes.

SADIE

Where are we going with all this?

TOM

A lot more boxes.

SADIE

What, are you trying to pack up the whole store?

She laughs.

*He doesn't.
Linger here.*

SADIE

You're packing up the store. Do we need the floors redone? They look fine to me, you fixer-upper, you. What's going on?

TOM

It's done.

Iris talks even faster:

IRIS

I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude. Really. I just think it's... interesting... how people get overwhelmed by too much research and too many sources and automated things telling you what to do, how you just wanna go somewhere to do something, whether it be deep or unwinding, you just wanna get away and why the heck should it take so much work to do that?

Sometimes you just have to go somewhere where you can just go and escape and you don't want to think about anything.

*She slows down her speech
She circles an "escape" place*

IRIS

No, no, I know you're a very mindful traveler. That's why you're here. It's just...I've worked in a lot of divisions internationally, I'm new here still, and every customer somehow still surprises me. The way that people travel here is just so different. Or maybe the way they think about travel is what it is. How often they travel. I know that things really have changed in terms of money in the last six years—I mean, when I started you could get a round trip to London for 200, 300 dollars, and now if you can get one for 800 you're getting a *deal*.

BENJAMIN

Fifty-two years
Of paper sealed by lick-able glue
Will I ever taste it again?
The best taste in the world.
Like,

BENJAMIN

Cherries and salt.

Iris circles a "money" place

IRIS

In the US people think of travel as an extra thing, almost like a treat, like *I'm going to treat myself to this vacation*, whereas in a lot of other places—it's more of a thing for your own personal education, it's to enhance you. In other countries they think of travel as education. And it's kind of weird to negotiate that. Living in the US but having this mentality. I don't know.

I don't know.

PETE

7.—

Actually, I don't like lists. Too blah. So I'm going to stop using one. But for all intents and purposes, this is a list so it should be treated as such. With undivided, ordered respect.

Pete holds up his bat to command respect

The rest of my list is as follows:

He resumes pacing

I'm 47

I was an art major

I am a photographer. I like photos, not movies

I have never wanted to make films

Okay I was a cinema minor but still I don't like working here

Okay I've made a few short—well, whatever

Okay. I would say I am interested in the subject to a certain extent

But

THIS ISN'T A CAREER

He twirls his bat.

This is a minimum wage job with no benefits

I've been riding this economic train: downhill fast

The last two years, working here, have sucked

Sucked sucked suck suck sucked

Pete twirls his bat

Okay so it's been much better than not having a job

But still

One has to get creative to stay alive in a place like this

OLIVIA

I guess it goes without saying

OLIVIA

But everyone likes to look good

JILL

Goes without saying

OLIVIA

I like to look good

JILL

You look good-- too good for this job

OLIVIA

What do you mean?

JILL

People like retail workers with an edge.
Makes the shopping process more adventurous.

OLIVIA

How about a hat?

JILL

Are you a size medium?

OLIVIA

I'm a real person
A scarf?

JILL

Scarves are too soft, you already seem kind.

Olivia tries to look edgy

OLIVIA

I wear soft things because I like to move

JILL

I'm going to have to certify you in body type and denim

OLIVIA

That's a thing?

JILL

You have to look at people and know what they want

OLIVIA

I'm just a person

JILL

And doing your job is:

OLIVIA

Learning our merchandise

JILL

Touching our merchandise

OLIVIA

Memorizing our merchandise

JILL

You have to keep moving

And

The second someone walks in you start to listen

How loud the feet tap

OLIVIA

What kind of shoes

JILL

How fast the mouth opens

BENJAMIN

I'm sorry I can't keep you.

There's just no place for you in this paperless world,

Where bills are e-mails,

And e-mails are easy,

And nobody writes letters anymore anyway.

So here we are.

Where letters are dead.

OLIVIA

Start to share your story

Benjamin takes a pen from his pocket

SADIE

Oh my god I'm nauseous. Done? We aren't that old. We aren't old.

Beat.

TOM

People walk past our store outside, looking down at their intelligent phones and don't even notice the stores. They're reading epics of limited character messages on their intelligent phone device things. They walk right by and barely look up to cross the street. We haven't had a customer in seven days.

SADIE

And that's a reason to pack up the store? I've spent a week in pajamas before! A week is enough time to eat a leftover pot roast, not close a store.

TOM

A week is a long time in store language. When money is involved.

SADIE

I hate money.

TOM

I hate it when you say that.

SADIE

We're not in this for the money. You know we're not in this for the money.

TOM

You know, I heard about this man who is saving all the books in the world—

SADIE

You're changing the subject

TOM

--one volume each, in these giant forty-foot shipping containers in a warehouse in Northern California. They're saving them all so that whatever happens, we will have all the books.

SADIE

In a storage unit? So, you can't see or touch them because of inches of plastic? Same as the plastic or whatever of computer screens.

TOM

You're not getting the point honey—

SADIE

Don't "honey" me right now.

TOM

Sadiebird—

SADIE

You've got to be kidding!

TOM

Nobody has been here in a *week*. And before that, six days. We love this place because we get to share it with others. Books are things for sharing—it's a fact. It's been thirty-five good years, Sadiebird. Good years.

SADIE

Thirty-six.

TOM

Thirty-five.

SADIE

Look at the calendar.

Tom looks at the calendar on the wall. A moment.

Thirty-six years. Today.

A moment.

SADIE

Happy Anniversary.

They stand and look at one another for a while.

TOM

Sadiebird.

He walks towards her, reaches out to her.

SADIE

Please don't touch me Tom.

LIBBY

You can't force it
Plug and chug
It's more like how an imaginary number
Is a letter
And not a number at all
And that it's imaginary
And yet mathematicians form careers about it
And write books
And yeah

SADIE

We started this store because we knew it would be difficult. If we wanted *easy* you could have gone for your dad's grocery store, or the bank down the street, or the teaching job at the University. But you said, you always said, you liked the *hunt* of it all. Because of your degree in anthropology, you said. The idea of hunting things down, collecting things. Having things in your hand, heavy things. Fleeting, flippable pages of word things.

TOM

Book things.

SADIE

I didn't even know much about books back then. I mean, I liked books growing up, you know, with a lamp under the covers, but I didn't go to fancy school like you did. I liked you and I liked recycling and I said *sure let's do this* because I liked knowing where I'd spend my days.

I just thought, *let's just make enough money to live on, and enjoy it, and you know every day is a surprise*. I didn't ever imagine this kind of surprise.

TOM

Things change

SADIE

I can't breathe.

Libby unpacks more CDs — there must be five hundred

LIBBY

I think everyone thinks these things
 But doesn't think about thinking about them
 Like I'm sure you do in some part of you
 I'm sorry I think a LOT
 But maybe that's what college is for
 I can stop talking
 I mean I don't know
 I just like got here so I don't know what this whole
 College thing
 Is

*Libby is finally done unpacking CDs
 She begins to put them in chronological order*

Iris circles Singapore

IRIS

I was born in Japan, went to school in Singapore and with school we travelled to a bunch of different parts of Asia. It was just part of my life, traveling. I'm not discounting the US here, I just think it's interesting that we don't talk about this sort of thing.

We talk about how countries are different and yeah, yeah but we don't talk about how different countries value one another. As it gets easier to, like, read about anywhere in virtually seconds, we are getting smarter in some regards.

She circles countries getting smarter

We can understand a wider range of experiences on a factual level.

Iris circles the following places as she describes them:

IRIS

This place is hotter than this place. This place is more crowded. Here I would smell mud. But we—especially as the United States—we don't go as many places. We just act like we know.

LIBBY

It's

Loving the process of putting music in a sequence

Very simply

And more complex-ly

Loving the

Like

Very tedious detail work that entails

It's a thousand piece puzzle and all the pieces are different shades of gray

It's horrifying

Satisfying

And you know

Really *doing this*

Means knowing the utter despair of cutting a great song out

It's about story

I think you have to be a poet in some ways to do this.

I'm not a poet

I just think that if I were maybe things would be

Easier

Maybe I am a poet but I think if you call yourself one

Then you're

Like

Not one

You know

I don't know

Mindfuck

IRIS

I came to Chicago a few months ago because I wanted something different. I don't settle, never have. I'd been in New York enough years—two's about my limit for anywhere. But, um. As you can see, I'm going to need to settle for at least a little bit.

LIBBY

What's your major again?

Ah

Practical

Sorry I don't mean that like it's a bad thing.

I just don't tend to do practical things I guess

My family is really practical

Mom's a lawyer

Dad's another lawyer

Charlie will be one too

Iris procures a Chicago map and traces angular streets

IRIS

Some of my friends in New York were like, you're just going to move somewhere you've never been before? And I was just like, yeah that's what I've done all my life. Chicago is... I don't know. It's still new here. Cold here. More angular streets, not numbered blocks. Streets seem longer. Um.

I don't know if I'm ready to settle.

She circles the location of her new apartment

It's a decision you make, I guess. To make your home nice or travel a lot. Maybe it's not that black and white, because people have different definitions of 'nice.' Mine includes old, or you know like, really *whatever* furniture and little to no frill, so I guess I'm in luck. But if you are the kind of person where 'nice' means, you know, glass pitchers and silk sheets, then, yeah. I mean I don't think I've ever slept in silk sheets and I don't really want to. Sounds slippery.

Pete turns the bat into a bike:

PETE

When nobody's here I bike around the aisles

This place is a fucking *maze* of movies

I can almost do it without hitting anything

I practice every day

Iris begins to draw on her stomach like it's a map

IRIS

And what if silk sheets are what *he* needs? For some reason in my head he's a he, but I don't even know that for sure. I mean, I know it's not going to be silk sheets, but it might be something else that I just don't factor into my life at all right now. Like constant pulp-free orange juice. I don't know.

Her lines become twists

I feel like everything I think about these days gets twisted back into my belly, thinking about him and how someone, God or someone, or maybe just the in vitro nurse, ha, someone has given me this horrifying gift of molding someone. And I don't feel ready. I want *places* to mold him, not just me and our little apartment world and the screens, and... It's easier to put a kid in front of a TV or laptop than take him to the park.

Let alone on an *airplane*.

Pete isn't playful anymore:

PETE

I see the same people every day
I see the *same people*. *Every day*

He twirls his bat in the direction of televisions but deliberately misses.

There are, you know, about 7 customers in all
Not every day, in *all*
All of them broke, addicts, over 75, or crazy
Broke so they don't have computers
Addicts so they don't have homes
Old so they don't have computes
Crazy so they don't have homes

Twirls bat

Maybe the crazy is more likely on my part

Beat

Yeah
This place makes me crazy
You can psychoanalyze people by their customer history
Emmy Walton's movie taste
Non-gory, non-sadistic, violent horror films
Pan's Labyrinth
Emmy Walton's shiny hair
Shiny nights

PETE

My three date problem, which entails women dumping me after three dates

I'd say that problem has something to do with this shithole

The low rate at which I produce art, *my art*, which turns out shitty anyway?

That problem definitely has something to do with this shithole

After all, Hollywood commercial releases have nothing to do with my art

I'm lonely

Pete twirls his bat in the direction of televisions but deliberately misses.

Emmy Walton said she liked Pan's Labyrinth

But Emmy Walton didn't really *get* Guillermo del Toro

She said Ofelia was *cute*

Cute should not be in the same sentence as *labyrinth*

In a maze you are lost; in a labyrinth you are found

So no more Emmy Walton

Twirls the bat

I don't mean I killed her, I mean I dumped her after three dates

I'm not violent

OLIVIA/LIBBY

You share your story

JILL

She'll share her story

BENJAMIN

First,

I have something for you.

This here

Is the last letter you will ever deliver.

Conveniently, it's addressed to you,

So you don't have to go too far.

You don't run too well anymore anyway.

Sorry.

This is from me to you, old buddy.

Benjamin takes a deep breath.

He rips a large piece of paper off of Franklin.

He takes a pen from his front shirt pocket.

He waves the pen in the air like it's a surrender flag.

BENJAMIN

A tiny corpse.

He begins to write on the piece of paper, and dictates the bold lettering as he writes.

JILL

You're supposed to keep moving

OLIVIA

So you try and learn as much about a person as you can

JILL

As fast as you can, keep moving

OLIVIA

I'm not ready

JILL

You're a real person

OLIVIA

It all sounds fake

JILL

There is an energy you have to portray that is less than genuine

OLIVIA/LIBBY/IRIS

I'm a real person

JILL

Why I hired you!
The small town attention

OLIVIA

Here's the small town attention

JILL

I would tell someone if she didn't look good

OLIVIA

But it's so much about the sell

JILL

I'll say "you can do better"
If you can do better

OLIVIA

I have a body!

JILL

It's nice to feel like a human being when you shop

OLIVIA

Nobody's coming in

JILL

You have to keep moving
Dust the hanger racks
I'll straighten jewelry

OLIVIA

Who am I doing this for?

JILL

No dust no tangles

OLIVIA

Who am I doing this for?

JILL

When people look good, they feel better.
Feel better, act better

OLIVIA

A world of well-dressed good people

JILL

It's all about *really talking to people*

TOM

We are in a green beans situation.

SADIE

What?

TOM

Green beans.

SADIE

Green beans?

TOM

Thirty-six years ago today, you told me that if we ever decided to close this store down, it better well be for a damn good, no-brainer reason. Like green beans in a casserole, you said.

SADIE

And you think a *week of no customers*, after thirty-six years, is a *green beans* situation?

TOM

It just takes a tremendous amount of commitment. And energy. And for what?

SADIE

For what we set out to do.

TOM

Things change. People change.

SADIE

This is the first moment in forty years I've disliked you.

TOM

I'm getting tired. Yesterday went to go find a book and halfway there I forgot what I wanted, so I just sat back down. And it didn't matter. Nobody knew but me, nobody cared but me. Looked up to see people walking by, people looking down.

SADIE

I care. I care enough to keep this going. Forever. Past the end of the world. I will die in this store.

TOM

You sound ridiculous.

SADIE

You know that there's something different about reading a book in your hand and a book on a screen.

TOM

What, though?

SADIE

There just is.

TOM

What, exactly, though?

SADIE

Doesn't it feel different in your brain?

TOM

But how?

SADIE

Why are you interrogating me?

TOM

Just tell me what you mean, Sadie. Tell me what you mean.

SADIE

You have devoted your life to something that you're just going to throw away.

TOM

Technology is a different kind of intelligence that we'll never have, and maybe those walking-by people won't have our booktelligence. Touchtelligence. It's a trade-off. Those walkers are doing incredible things—curing things, making futures. Are the future. And we aren't

Beat.

TOM

I love you.

SADIE

Saying I love you doesn't fix things.

Beat.

TOM

Let's play that game you made up, Sadiebird. Remember your game?

Pause.

SADIE

We are in the middle of a fight and you want to play a game.

TOM

THE game. YOUR game.

SADIE

You're gonna have to unpack some boxes to play the game.

TOM

Absolutely.

SADIE

You're gonna mess up all your hard work.

TOM

I know.

SADIE

Okay.

TOM

I'll go first.

Sadie smiles inside and closes her eyes.

Tom rifles through books in the box to find The Right One.

SADIE

Hurry up.

He places it in her hand.

She touches it and immediately relaxes.

SADIE

Okay. Okay. With this binding it's at least forty-five years old. Hardcover but quite worn.

She opens the book and rubs her hand over the pages.

SADIE

It's been written in with a pen. Underlines and margin notes. It's noteworthy.

LIBBY

I do

Think I'm pretty attuned

As a person

To what I need right now

Like I always know when I'm hungry and exactly what I need to eat

That doesn't sound like a skill but it is

I mean

So many people are fat

Sorry that gets into socioeconomic issues

Never mind never mind

Aha um

TOM

Three guesses!

SADIE

Shoot. Okay. Well it's pretty thin. Definitely not a children's' book, but something that isn't too hefty. You know, language-wise. Okay. Shoot. Okay. Guess one is...

TOM

Spit it out, Sadie.

SADIE

Okay okay! Guess one is... *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

TOM

Nope. You like it better than that. You like it a lot. I would venture to say you—

Libby is chronologically ordering her CDs

LIBBY

But I really do think I'm attuned to the body's needs
 And what goes along with that
 Is other people's needs
 And
 I look outside and kind of do what the weather's doing
 And try to get the emotional
 Temperature of what's happening
 And the pulse of what's happening my community and my people around me

I mean snow-cold wind makes you tense up
 Your shoulders are sore after a day of walking outside in winter
 And that calls for throbbing raw vocals
 In a way that bikinis and sand are itchy and need loud girl voice

Some people put music on to
 Run
 Kiss
 Read
 Fuck
 And I just couldn't do that
 I get distracted by voices too a lot of the time
 And by people that just chew really loudly
 Um

Maybe sometimes that's music too

Sometimes silence distracts me

Silence

I'm getting distracted.

SADIE

OH OH! Oh, is it *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

TOM

"I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." Scout Finch.

SADIE

Are you trying to get extra points for quoting?

Tom nods, laughs.

Sadie sits with the book for a minute before realizing they're in the middle of a game.

SADIE

Okay, it's your turn. Close your eyes.

Sadie takes a good long while to find the perfect book.

She places it in Tom's hand.

LIBBY

Dad always made fun of me for like
Getting so lost in my head that I'd start to make weird faces
He'd have to shake me back to reality
Ha don't worry I've gotten better!

I think when I was like eight or so
Or somewhere around there
Somewhere around that age when I can remember things that happened
Dad and I had this thing
In the car on the way to school.
Where he'd play a song from the CD player in the car
And walk me through
The history
Discography
Vibe
Everything
Then the next day he'd play a related song
And we'd discuss why it was related
This plus this is yes

LIBBY

The basis for mix making

She can't even order CDs anymore because she's so concentrated on what she's saying

At first

I couldn't tell the difference between the Chili Peppers

The Red Hot Chili Peppers that is

And Santana

And that's just like

I mean

I'm really embarrassed to admit that

But now I know all fourteen Santana albums

And all ten Chili Peppers

And that By the Way and Blood Sugar Sex Magik

Are both the best Chili Peppers album

I mean

Under the Bridge?

By the Way?

Yeah

Yeah

Oh man I remember the first time I heard

Joni Mitchell

Like

Fuck

Like

Creedence Clearwater Revival

ALL

Does this mean anything to you?

TOM

Let's see... it's a paperback. It's got a shiny cover but it's not too shiny because someone's hands have been all over. Sweaty still. It's dog-eared, but not underlined which means it's probably got big long chunks of good words and not just, you know, intermittent lines. It's probably 300 or so pages, thin pages. Substantial.

SADIE

Three guesses.

TOM

The Unbearable Lightness of Being.

SADIE

Did you peek? You peeker!

TOM

I just *felt* it. That whole book is about weight. I could feel that.

SADIE

That's beautiful but it's bullhockey. You peeked.

TOM

"The heaviest of burdens crushes us, we sink beneath it, it pins us to the ground. But in love poetry of every age, the woman longs to be weighed down by the man's body--"

Tom is inching towards her.

BENJAMIN

Dear Franklin,
I never thought this day would come.
I am so,
So,
Sorry this day has come.
Why use paper?
It's a waste of trees,
They say
It's a waste of time,
They say
To keep making paper.

SADIE

Peeker!

LIBBY

We'd talk for the whole car ride about one song
Describing the sound quality
Why the song belongs in the world
What comes next
He taught me
Words like gravely and echoic and tingly
Dad gave me a whole language

TOM

"The heaviest of burdens is therefore simultaneously an image of life's most *intense fulfillment*"

Sadie nudges Tom.

Tom nudges Sadie, harder.

SADIE

Shhhh!

*Tom leans over to Sadie.
At the angle Tom leans over, he slips and rips the book in half.*

Benjamin rips Franklin.

BENJAMIN

Making paper
We don't value.

Rip.

For catalogs
We throw away,

Rip.

Magazines
Read in a day,

Rip.

Thankless notes,

Rip.

Absentee votes,

Rip.

But this
I will keep this letter forever.

He waves the letter in the air violently.

Because this
This is the last letter in the world.
Hey! Everyone! LOOK AT THIS!
THIS IS THE LAST LETTER ANY MAIL TRUCK WILL EVER
DELIVER!
THIS IS THE LAST LETTER IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD!

LIBBY

He told me
That music will never die

LIBBY

Because it really responds to what we are
 It always has
 When it was clangs and foot taps
 Before it was even called music
 It's a surge
 Society's momentum
 It's a way for us to be in the same place together
 While simultaneously being
 Gangly Senior Prom
 Road trip 1982
 First kiss
 Eating oatmeal at five thirty am
 Last kiss

She goes back to ordering CDs

A week after my sixteenth birthday
 I got my license
 And didn't need him in the car anymore
 And
 I got busy
 Or that was my excuse

These are all the CDs we ever played together
 I wish we hadn't stopped

I'm the kind of person that misses things I think
 I have this weird nostalgia for like

SADIE + LIBBY

Touching things
 Real things
 And not just pressing screens
 Dragging fingers

LIBBY

I mean
 This is my — our generation

She texts someone

By the way I should get your number

She checks to see if someone texts back

I get mad when people take too long to respond.

LIBBY + IRIS

We are a nation of distracted

Libby's done ordering CDs

She continues to unpack other things

She finds her iPod

IRIS

I've been to 28 countries. When I was growing up, I learned the most from getting up and going places. I can't sit still really, ha, I don't know if you can tell from how fast I talk, but um...

In high school, we'd go on these trips with, um, we'd go to the Phillipines for a week to help these people who lived in basically cardboard boxes and build houses for them, with them, I don't know. I've since been on more trips, realized that whole approach was kind of skewed because we didn't really get to *be* with people. More recently I was in India for two months, and uh, I don't know. It was different. I don't think, if I were to see the family I had worked with in the Phillipines, I would recognize them. On the street, I mean. I don't know. In India it was just... I mean it was hard, but...

Libby grabs all of her CD's that she has just ordered

LIBBY

I don't even need these.

She starts to read them off:

Week of January 1, 2002

Tom Petty's *Wildflowers*

Week of January 8, 2002

Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*

The only map left is India

IRIS

In India I was working with a group of women in a pretty rural village called Ardkiya about three buses from the city I was living in.

Reveal a map of Rajasthan.

I was there to do a social entrepreneurship project, which essentially means that we, the visitors, were there to facilitate the process of bringing a business venture from a seed of an idea to, like, actual money in hands.

I don't have any expertise in that area. I was just out of college at this point, this was like ten years ago. I mean it sounds pretty ludicrous as I'm explaining it to you. Why would anyone let me do this? I mean, we're all people and people should be able to associate with other people.

Reveal a map of a human being

But yeah. All these women spoke the local dialect—Mewari. I knew about eight words of Hindi, not even Mewari, so I was pretty, you know.

Ludicrous.

I don't know why these women didn't question my presence more but they were nice. Really really really nice.

A map of a face

There was this one girl in particular, Hema, whose face won't leave my head. I mean I don't want it to. She was a few years younger than I was at the time—probably eighteen. Her ankles each had anklets and wrists had bracelets—symmetry that shows she's married. But her husband worked in Bangalore and she lived with his family. I mean she didn't even really know him.

And there was something about her sari... seemed less proper than the other women. Like it was still okay to jump around. She was a girl.

A map of a mouth

In pictures, Indian people don't generally smile—but all the pictures I have of her are either teeth-bearing, guffaw-like smiles or a snide look like she's trying not to smile but her face just doesn't work like that. Hema and I never really talked—all the things I know about her life I know from other people—there's a lot inside of her that I don't know. But we smiled so so much. Like, giddy. I'm not a giddy person. I don't know. I actually like have trouble breathing when I look at pictures of her. But there's also so much about her that I don't know.

I don't know.

ALL

Why am I telling you this.

IRIS

Sorry.

I don't know, it's just.

Pete mimes the bat/bike again

PETE

That wasn't the first Emmy Walton
I don't mean I've dated multiple women named Emmy Walton
I mean that wasn't the first "Emmy Walton"
You know the economic term "vicious circle"—a complex series of events that
reinforces itself through a feedback loop?
I guess you could say it's that
The same shiny hair, same cute little smudge of lipstick on teeth
Same gory movie taste
Same little dog in a little black purse.
I thought this Emmy Walton was the one
She told me I talk like an artist
She brought me a scone once— honey almond scone.

But I was still me

Still broke
Still bitter
Still loud
Still
Here

She left

OLIVIA

Nobody's here but us
Dusted
Straightened
Who'll see?

JILL

They'll come

OLIVIA

I'm not ready

JILL

We can dress each other for practice

OLIVIA

So say I pretend to walk in, what would you think of me?

JILL

She's tall and likes tall shoes
She's a daily coffee drinker

OLIVIA

Four times daily!

Pete mimes the bat breaking his heart

PETE

MY LIFE IS A FUCKING MELODRAMA WITHOUT A GOOD
ENDING

But who likes those anyway?
People like the REAL
Right?

He waves the bat in the air and almost falls over

PETE

RIGHT?

Almost breaks plastic

This place is a fucking maze of plastic boxes that break easy

She goes to the middle of the stack

PETE + LIBBY

Week of July 20th, 2006
Billy Joel's *The Stranger*

Libby holds the iPod in one hand and keeps the stack of CDs in the other

LIBBY

I held out for a while
Didn't get an iPod for a while
But then I realized I was being silly
Like
I am still my generation
I can be many things at once

She falters, one falls, doesn't break.

She carefully sets down everything else and holds up the broken CD

LIBBY

Week of November 7, 2008
Charlie's birthday – Crosby Stills Nash and Young's *Deja Vu*
I still have this on my iPod

Pete walks around the televisions, swinging the bat. He pulls a DVD out of one television.

PETE

Idiots ask me, "don't you try to do fun things like watch every single movie in this place?"

But

I wouldn't eat spam if I worked in a grocery store

I'm a person

My stomach is fragile

My BRAIN is fragile

He bends the DVD so it almost cracks.

You have no idea how flimsy these things are

The get maybe two, three uses

This is a flawed system.

I get it--

We all have flaws

Fuck, *I have Netflix*

And it's great

JILL

She tears gum wrappers in a fist as she talks

OLIVIA

Gum for the coffee

JILL

She's a girl with habits

If you gave her a necklace she'd forget to wear it

She should try teal

Short dress, not tight

Olivia puts a short but not tight teal dress on over her clothes

JILL

Me now

OLIVIA

She struts

JILL

Be specific

OLIVIA

She clicks heels in flats

She's strong
All clean lines
Not big but strong
Cares with her arms

JILL

Be specific

OLIVIA

Her elbows
Soft elbows
She should try a fuchsia cap sleeve top
The right angles

Jill puts on a fuchsia cap sleeve top over her clothes

JILL

She should try thigh high black boots

Olivia puts on thigh high black boots

OLIVIA

A beret

Jill puts on a beret

JILL

Beaded belt

Olivia puts on a beaded belt

OLIVIA

Something green

Jill puts on something green

JILL

Something loud

Olivia puts on something loud

OLIVIA

Cruel

Jill puts on something cruel

JILL + LIBBY

Gravely

Olivia puts on something gravely

OLIVIA + LIBBY

Echoic

Jill puts on something echoic

JILL + LIBBY

Tingling

Olivia puts on something tingling

OLIVIA + SADIE

When will we stop?

They continue to put clothes on until the racks are empty

JILL

We're real people

BENJAMIN

Paper is gone.

Benjamin rips Franklin

OLIVIA

We're creating ourselves

Over the next section, Benjamin rips Franklin with increasing aggravation.

BENJAMIN

Smoked out

By

Nooks

Rip.

And crannies

Of

Kindles

Rip.

For kiddies

And
Macs

Rip.

And
Maniacs
And
PCs

Rip.

High speed, please
And
E-mail

Rip.

And
G-mail

Rip.

And
This mail

Rip.

In my hand
Is no mail

Rip.

For this land

*By this point, Franklin is no longer a mail truck but a pile of ripped memories.
He softens into this mountain.
Franklin is dead.*

TOM

Well, uh. I think we have some tape somewhere.

We'll get another copy.

SADIE

It's not the same. This copy is this copy.

TOM

I know, it's just...

SADIE

Everything's different

TOM

It was a rip

SADIE

I don't know how this is so easy for you, Tom. This is your life, here. What are you going to do all day once we close the store? Mop the kitchen floor? Get a dog? I don't know what this new life looks like to you. Are there still books? Is there still me?

TOM

You're not going anywhere. I hope.

SADIE

We were happy people.

Libby breaks a CD on purpose

LIBBY

I still have this on my iPod

Libby breaks a CD on purpose

I still have this on my iPod

Libby decides to stop

Oh God sorry I don't know what I'm doing sorry

I'm weird

We just met

TOM

We are happy people.

SADIE

We were happy people.

LIBBY

I'm happy to be here

But I

I kind of feel like I already want home

I don't know

I just like
 Know that things will never be the same at home now that I'm here

Libby cleans everything up — trying to hide evidence

I can just imagine in December
 The first Christmas going home
 Dad and I will go shopping for Mom and Charlie
 Sorry
 Charles
 Uh
 And we'll drive around
 And I'll grab my iPod and say
 Dad
 Give me a song
 So Dad will scroll through
 Keep missing the touch for the song he wants
 Howl at the screen
 Bumpy car
 He loves technology but he hates scrolling in bumpy cars
 Though cars are the best place for music
I'm touching the same place
For The Beatles
As
Lady Gaga
Libby
I'm missing the song- keeps falling from my finger
 He'll press "Genius" because he's tired of slipping
Libby
You missed the exit
 Genius will play what it thinks we wanted
Libby
I've missed you
 It will be perfect in a too perfect kind of way

ALL

Only those who love you
 Will ever come close
 To knowing what you want

IRIS

I remember coming back from India and being like, oh my God the toilet flushes. I don't have to pour water on my butt and then in a hole in the ground. And then I got to my parent's apartment and took a long, long shower.

It's easy to separate your life here from your life there. And maybe you change how you live but maybe you don't. And maybe it's the learning that's important,

IRIS

not the changing. Not forcing yourself to change. But knowing what it is that you're doing...

Knowing the choices you are making about how you live, so maybe someday you can know the *why*.

Each place teaches you something.

A map of a mouth turns into a map of a computer

I think it's really important to travel. You can read as much as you want, see as much as you want from a seated, finger clacking position, but you'll never...

You have to move.

Talk to people.

Trust people.

A map of a computer turns into a map of an airplane

Pete Frisbees the DVD somewhere

PETE

I have this recurring nightmare
 Where I wake up in white, alone, everything's clean white
 My whole room my pajamas everything
 And the second I get out of bed, the walls become projectors
 Every movie is a sequel to an already bad movie
 And when I touch my bed they are white again
 And so I don't get out of bed
 Ever

And then I wake up from that nightmare
 To come here
 Every day

You know what?
 Today's the day
 THE day

I QUIT

He holds up the bat like it's a drink

So CHEERS

PETE

To kids watching R-rated movies under covers
To dating and dumping and dating and dumping!
Secretly to Emmy Walton's dog, who is actually really cute but has too much hair

He pretends to take a swig

To plastic!
To downloads!
To porn!

He pretends to take a swig

To spam!
To burning!
To the general realm of digital debauchery!!

He's on a roll

To midnight
The lonely
And smoking
And scones

He's starting to have fun

To the next Emmy Walton, whoever that is!
To the next dreadful job, whatever *that* is!
To the new art that I WILL MAKE after I quit

Too much fun

SADIE + PETE

THIS IS FOR YOU
YOU
All the seven people who come in every day—

Putting on different voices for each of the following quotes:

PETE

"This didn't play in my machine."
"This didn't play in my machine."
"Your machine is broken."
"Machines aren't supposed to break."

Pete is starting to have too much fun

PETE
"EVERYTHING. CAN. BREAK."

In one strong motion, he smashes a television

OLIVIA
This all feels so fake

JILL
You are creating yourself

TOM + OLIVIA
In real space
Real time
We are the most of ourselves

JILL
You can't be the most of yourself every second

ALL
You can only pay attention to so many things at once

Empty racks, everything on ground

BENJAMIN
In this afternoon light
I just see dust.
And in that dust,
The particles of Anne's ashes
That sometimes escape from the urn on our
--on my
Bookshelf.

He fingers the scraps of paper as he talks.

Flecks of finger skin cells.
The finger that once held her wedding ring,
That once had a fingerprint,
That once held a pen,

He holds up his pen.

That fifty years ago,
Wrote me fifty love letters a day,
Once the war plucked me straight from our breakfast table.

He tucks the letter in his front shirt pocket. He recites one of Anne's letters by heart.

SADIE + BENJAMIN

Dear Dear Benjamin,
 It's Wednesday.
 In just fifteen days you will be here.
 These days will feel endless but the days with you will be longer.
 I hope.
 For dinner I ate three heaping ladle-fuls of garlic-mashed potatoes;
 I felt quite sick after, that good kind of sticky smiley satisfied sick.
 I swear I've gained eight pounds since March.
 Will you still call me pretty when I'm heavy in your arms?
 Stay sweet for me.
 Anne

His warmest smile.

During the next chunk, Benjamin kneels to the ground and spells out the word "LOVE" with scraps of paper, big, as big as his own body. His handwriting is evident through this act.

BEJAMIN

I told myself
 That no matter what
 I'd become a mailman
 When I came back from the war.
 So I could deliver words
 From one mouth to another mouth
 When miles apart outweigh minutes together.
 Because that's how I knew Anne was the one.
 When Anne left me too early,
 Twenty years ago,
 I wrote a letter to everyone I knew
 To tell them to write.
 To write letters to those you love.
 I cradled her letters
 In my front shirt pocket.
 Next to my heart.

He points to the paper word "LOVE."

Love:
 A word I hated and hated and hated until I met Anne.

I thought everyone was lying
 About the weakness from your scalp to your toenails--
 The feeling that almost flung me to the linoleum floor
 When I held Anne's limp body in mine
 After she let out her last puff of air.

BENJAMIN

She wasn't ready for this.
 Could I save her?
 Could love save her?
 I ran and grabbed all of the letters we had written to each other.
 In my one hand, Anne,
 In the other, her letters.

He grabs a handful of the ripped paper and holds it in one hand, strong and high above his head.

I held them to her lips
 Shoving words back into her mouth.
 SPEAK, Anne, BREATHE, Anne SPEAK.

Beat.

TOM+BENJAMIN

But,
 You can't breathe paper

He lets go of the handful of paper and watches it slowly fall like snow.

BENJAMIN

Every letter
 That Anne wrote to me,
 And those from me to Anne,
 I set ablaze with her ashes.
 No longer any distance between her words and mine.
 Now there are no more letters in my possession,
 Besides this letter

Again, he pats his pocket/heart.

You know what?
 I think I know why we have decided to stop.
 Stop using paper.
 Because...
 Paper cuts hurt.
 And those little shits never stop bleeding.
 I wish paper didn't exist in the first place.
 I wouldn't feel this throbbing in my head.
 This throbbing mish-mosh of all of the words we ever wrote to one another in
 my head.

He takes the letter out of his pocket and tortures it 'til it's tiny tidbits.

BENJAMIN

I wouldn't be out of a job,
 A wife,
 And you,
 The one who smiled at me every morning,
 Snow or shine,
 And forced me to just keep driving.

He addresses this pile of leftover memories like he's giving a eulogy.

I look at the half-used ballpoint pens next to my telephone,
 And must fight the urge to chop off my offensively opposable thumbs.
 My dear friend,
 I wish I had never learned to write;
 Never learned the art of bleeding onto paper.

*As Benjamin utters the following bit, he spreads the paper bits about the stage to resemble snow.
 This inevitably destroys the word "LOVE."*

Anne once wrote me just to describe the smile on the mailman's face as he
 trudged through the snow to deliver my letters to her mailbox.
 Dear Dear Benjamin, she wrote,
 This man's smile is unspeakably warm, she wrote.
 He smiled because war is shitty and so is snow.
 He smiled because the letter was from me to her.
 He smiled because every ounce of his being wanted to replace every gun in the
 world with a pen.

One day,
 weeks later,
 The mailman didn't come.
 There was a snow storm.
 Anne waited, waited at the kitchen door for him to come,
 But he did not.
 He didn't come for a whole week.
 Anne thought he might never come again.
 She blamed it all on him,
 But really it was my fault
 I didn't send one letter that week.
 I didn't know how to tell her
 That I was ready to take her hand
 In marriage
 Anything I wrote sounded
 Small,
 Fake,
 Half-baked.
 I needed a whole week

BENJAMIN

To make this letter perfect.
Perfect isn't even the right word.
There is no word to describe those words.

Don't hate the mailman,
I said
And please don't hate me.

Today, nobody waits weeks.
We wait seconds.
Our words are too abrupt,
Too digital,
And
They are too easily used for hurt.
We need time between one hand and another.

IRIS + BENJAMIN

When we don't think
Before we speak,
Or wait
Before we listen

PETE + BENJAMIN

Our thoughts just get muddled
Into a big pile
Of cold utterances
On a winter's morning

OLIVIA + BENJAMIN

Without someone to remind you
To take your scarf outside.

He picks up one scrap of paper and stands looking at it for several seconds.

TOM + BENJAMIN

And you shut the door,
And it slams.

He starts to go offstage.

LIBBY + BENJAMIN

A little too loud,
And you never meant to make that bang.

He returns.

Benjamin lay on the ground in the snow of words and begins to make an angel.

BENJAMIN

A little too hard,
And dust flies everywhere.