

# Delusional

Foster Douglas

(Draft 03, edited May 2024)

## Characters

CLAIRE,

late 30's, waitress, single mother of twins. Loves animals. Emotionally disillusioned, hides it well.

CLIFFORD,

late 30's, Claire's twin brother. Guitarist, unemployed, has undiagnosed hypomania. Falls in love easily.

LILLET (LILY),

late 20's, nomad off a boat from France. Writes poetry. Supremely sharp, emotionally fierce—like Janis Joplin meets Barbara Streisand.

WILLIAM WESLEY (WESLEY),

early 40's, bus mechanic and writer. Quiet, acquiescent, loving. He brings his typewriter everywhere with him.

## Setting

A sleepy seaside town called Outskirts. Population: not many. Foggy, damp, salty. Surreal and uncomfortably ordinary.

On the main road, the only road, in front of Nicky's Diner, a conspicuous bus stop waits. It's a rusty weather-worn metal and glass structure protecting an unkempt wooden bench tucked inside. A pay phone sits on one side, a large maple tree on the opposite side, and a streetlamp nearby.

The bus stop is centered on a long patch of grass along a crumbly curb. It was quaint, once.

## Time

Today, or perhaps in the recent past, before cell phones and internet.

## Notes

In the script, the // symbol is used to indicate the start of overlapping dialogue.

French translations are given in [brackets] for context.

# Delusional

## Autumn

*End of autumn. The air is electric, a few weeks before the first frost—almost jacket weather. A maple tree is lush with bright red and yellow leaves, and the ground is covered with them.*

### Scene 1 (Midnight)

*Starlight. A man, CLIFFORD DeWITT, rests under a maple tree. He is barely visible, and plucks quietly at a bluegrass hymn on a white guitar.*

*The streetlight flicks on. A woman, CLAIRE DeWITT, stands casually at the pay phone with a newspaper open. She sips coffee out of a classic white porcelain Victor mug. After a time, she notices the audience and speaks directly.*

CLAIRE. *(Playful, flippant.)* Were you waiting for me?

*(Sips coffee.)* Mmmh, dark roast. Charred to shit, city's best sludge at Nicky's.

I hate the taste of coffee.

*(Lifts newspaper and unfolds it.)* I don't read this—I just hold it up. Drift away. No one knows.

*She sets her coffee and paper on the ground, takes off her apron and folds it. She sits on the ground.*

I used to play soccer in the summers, as a kid. I was pretty damn good. Dad said so anyway. He got me a brand new soccer ball for my tenth birthday. I took it everywhere—to school, to sleep, the shower . . .

On our team was The Outskirts Otters. *(Makes otter noise.)* This girl Beth—the star player. Ugh. She wasn't even good. But, she was cute. One day after practice, she snatched my soccer ball. So I chase after her, and she sprints down the hill to the West River. I yell after her as she lifts the ball over her head and then . . . throws it straight into the river. Splash.

I'm in total shock. She laughs and laughs—cackles, actually. I can hear it still. Can you hear it? It's like a deranged clown or something.

I watch the ball float away. Nothing I can do now.

I start to panic, I can't breathe. Her laugh, louder and louder. I can't take it! I go over to her and push her to the ground as hard as I can. Still, she laughs and laughs. Like it's even funnier the more upset I am.

I look down at her with so much . . . rage. Disgust. Hatred. All in slow motion—I lift my leg, and, hard as I can, I kick her straight in the mouth. Metal cleat.

I collapse next to her, thick red blood all over her face, all over my cleat, all over the grass. It reminds me of those paintings from history class of some great battle, blood-stained earth.

I cry and I cry and—I think she . . . I don't remember now. But that night, our parents split. Dad left. And mom left too, in her own way.

I made light of the split. Mostly. In my own ways. But Cliffy took it hard.

A few months ago, I got on the bus, and in the back, there she was. Beth. She sat quietly. Like, a hollow shell of her adolescent demon form. All the way from the front of the bus I could see that deep, old scar on her left cheek. I don't think she noticed me.

I changed her forever, maybe. Me too, maybe.

*She stands, and puts her apron on again. She shifts.*

It's "cursed" they say. Yeah. The bus stop! You'd never know. There's been something strange about it lately.

Maybe it's in my head. The real curse?—love. It's a curse to love, ain't it? When you're cursed to lose it.

*She looks back at the bus stop and laughs.*

When my husband left, I disintegrated. I think of him still, most nights. Mind reeling, I lay there in bed. I feel a ghost, an unreal warmth, a "body" there next to me. Maybe not his. Maybe. Where is he? Does he think of me? Is he dead? Does he still hate mustard? Incessant questions lull me into unrest.

I just want peace. Calm. Freedom. One good night's rest.

Summer's gone by quick this year—I'm exhausted. Or bored. What's the difference?

School starts this week. It'll be chaos now that Cliffy's in the house. I can't focus when he's around. I'm four minutes younger than him, but I've always felt years older.

*She sips her coffee, shifts, then chugs the rest of it instead.*

I've got something like forty of these stupid mugs at home, a whole cupboard full. Nicky's don't care.

Where's that damn bus?

*Light fades to dawn.*

## Scene 2 (Dawn)

*Foggy. CLIFFORD plucks on his guitar a gentle bluegrass arrangement of the hymn "Will The Circle Be Unbroken?" He hums the melody softly.*

CLAIRE. Fuck. I'm late. Some of us work, right? Remember the girls this afternoon, Cliffy? Okay? Please, please don't forget again. Unlike you, they actually need to eat.

*She kisses him on the forehead and leaves. A young woman, LILLET (LILY) COULIET, enters. CLAIRE and LILY collide. LILY drops a stuffed elephant.*

LILY. *Excusez-moi!* [Excuse me!]-my mistake. I don't look where // I'm going.

CLAIRE. No, no, no, my fault—I wasn't . . . (*Picks up the elephant.*) Oooh, this is beautiful. Look at you! (*Makes elephant noise.*) You. Are. So. Cute! My girls love elephants.

LILY. My mama gave it to me, when I was four. I've had it forever! We went to see a traveling circus. I counted the minutes that day until the show. I was excited, and nervous too for some reason. We watched the ferocious lions and the flying acrobats and I tasted fluffy sweet cotton candy for the first time.

Most of all, I couldn't believe the elephants!—*Inouï*. [Incredible.] Every night afterward, at bedtime I'd ask mama to make up a story about the big elephants we saw. The baby ones too. *Éléphanteau*. [Baby elephant.] She came home one night with this. Miette, I call her. It's like . . . crumb. All the little crumbs the elephants eat with their long trunks. "*Bonne nuit petite Miette! Je rêverai de toi, Miette . . .*" ["Good night little Crumb! I'll dream of you, Crumb . . ."] And I dream of her, still.

CLAIRE. Hello Petite Miette.

LILY. She slept beside me every night since. (*Pause.*) But, not lately . . . here. Have her. For your girls—how old are they?

CLAIRE. (*Speechless.*) I . . . twins. Stella and Selene, they just turned five // last week.

LILY. Then it's a birthday gift! Tell them she came here all the way from France. *Petite Miette de France* [Little Crumb from France]—across the ocean. *Joyeux anniversaire!* [Happy birthday!]

CLAIRE. (*Fixated on the elephant.*) Miette—she's beautiful. I don't // know what to say.

*The pay phone rings.*

CLAIRE. Shit! I'm really late. That's probably Nicky! Don't answer it—I have to go!

LILY. Take care of her! *Vous l'aimerez.* [You will love her.]

CLAIRE. Thank you!

*CLAIRE leaves. LILY picks up the pay phone.*

LILY. *Allô? Qui est-ce? English? Non. Je ne parle pas English. Je. Ne. Parle. Pas. English. Non. Non. Adieu!* [Hello? Who is this? English? No. I do not speak English. I. Do. Not. Speak. English. No. No. Bye!] Americans, so demanding.

*She hangs up. She takes a fresh lily from her bag and places it behind her ear. She notices CLIFFORD and she hums along in harmony quietly.*

CLIFFORD. (*Sings.*)

WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?

BY AND BY, BY AND BY  
THERE'S A BETTER HOME AWAITING  
IN THE SKY, IN THE SKY

*[Verse 1 lyrics here.]*

LILY. I didn't expect . . . you.

CLIFFORD. I've been waitin' for you.

LILY. *C'est curieux* [That's curious]—the first words we say the first time we meet someone. It's curious. It only happens once. The last words, too—the last time we see someone. We don't know when, but it's never “good-bye.” Rarely is there a “good-bye.” We never get to say good-bye, not really. *Nous ne lâchons jamais*. [We never let go.]

CLIFFORD. All “hello”—no “good-bye?”

LILY. Plenty of endings, still.

CLIFFORD. Do you know this?

LILY. *(Sings.)*

*[Verse 2 lyrics here, in French.]*

CLIFFORD. Is that singin' in French? I never heard it like that. What's a voice like that doin' out in the fringe, here in Outskirts?

LILY. *(Playful.)* What's her voice got to do with where a woman goes in this world?

CLIFFORD. Somethin'! She should go where she's heard. A voice meant'a be listened to. A voice like yours meant'a be heard.

LILY & CLIFFORD. *(Sing together casually, in English and French.)*

*[Verse 3 lyrics here.]*

CLIFFORD. *(Stops playing.)* Clifford—I'm Cliff. And // you?

LILY. Pleasure. I'm on my way-out to California. Heard of it, Clifford? Fields of golden poppies and golden sunsets and golden ores and . . . and . . . golden dreams! I'm drawn out, to meet the ocean. The other ocean. The great Pacific of the west. Where's this bus take me?



CLIFFORD. Not really "west." Not that way. Anyway it's just a bunch'a hippies in California.

*The wind stirs, hundreds of small leaves blow across in front of them and the fog clears.*

LILY. The winds. *Les vents.* [The winds.] I always follow the wind.

CLIFFORD. Winds always changin'. I don't bet much on them. This bus here don't show up most the time, lately—just so you know. It just don't show up. You might be stuck. Stuck with me.

LILY. What good's a bus stop if no bus stops at it? Clifford?

CLIFFORD. Who knows. We just sit here, now. And hope for the bus, hope for a friend, hope for some shelterin' from the world. Hope for love. 'Least I do.

LILY. Hope's a fragile thing—I prefer faith.

CLIFFORD. Well I got faith, too. I come out here sometimes, real early. I sit down quiet by the tree here, and I think. I watch up over there for the moon rise. It's gonna be there, I know it—I got faith in it. The moon. I got it there at least.

LILY. *Je suis comme la lune.* [I am like the moon.] Play again—once more, Clifford. *Joue pour moi!* [Play for me!]

*He plays again. She stands, sways, dances, and sings.*

LILY. *(Sings.)*

WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?  
BY AND BY, BY AND BY  
THERE'S A BETTER HOME AWAITING, IN

LILY. The sky! The sun! It's coming up! Look, look.

*She stands up, and pulls him up with her.*

LILY. *(To the sun.)* I know her! And her, I. She never needs from me—she wants nothing I have. Only that I be here, for her, and I can have her. *Je la connais bien.* [I know her well.] Her warmth on my skin. Her life. I have faith in her. *(Pause.)* "*Lis et le soleil.*" ["Lily and the sun."] It's going to be a beautiful day, Clifford. This is breath-taking!

CLIFFORD. (*Watches her.*) Breath-taking. // Wow.

LILY. *Ouah.* [Wow.]

*She sees him stare at her. They have a moment.*

LILY. (*Overwhelmed.*) I should . . . I think I need to go. For a walk! *Ça alors.* [My goodness.] I'll . . . catch the next bus. Maybe. Or the one after that . . .

*LILY moves quickly to leave.*

CLIFFORD. (*Calls after her.*) Tonight?!—have a little faith in the moon! Together, you and me.

*She returns, and hands her lily to him.*

LILY. Lillet—Lily. Tonight.

*She looks back, smiles, and leaves.*

*Light fades to morning.*

### Scene 3 (Morning)

*CLIFFORD stands under the tree. He carries an open umbrella, despite the clear weather. CLAIRE enters.*

CLAIRE. You heard me before? I need you to watch the girls this afternoon. Okay, Cliff? Can you // hear me?

CLIFFORD. Claire, I . . . met someone.

CLAIRE. What? Oh, no. No no no. (*Pause.*) Really? No. When? No . . .

*A rain cloud opens directly above CLAIRE. She does not move as it pours down onto her.*

CLAIRE. (*To both CLIFFORD and to the rain.*) Really?!

CLIFFORD. Yes. Yes yes yes!

*CLIFFORD dances about, drunk in love, between the bus stop, the pay phone, and the tree.*

CLAIRE. No!

*CLIFFORD offers his umbrella to her.*

CLIFFORD. This morning! It ain't never felt like this, Clairey! Ain't never been so alive! It's all I think

about, daydream about, talk about, every word I'm feelin' I want to say // it's all about . . .

CLAIRE. Please, // stop . . .

CLIFFORD. . . . Lily. Listen how it sounds! Lily, Lily, Lily . . . a thousand perfectly blooming flowers- an endless . . . field of them! Such color . . . like a rainbow. Like a . . . flowery rainbow field of // love and dreams!

CLAIRE. You're joking. You must be? (*Looks up at the rain.*) Will this let up?

CLIFFORD. It ain't a joke. I love her. (*Sincerely.*) Claire, I love her.

CLAIRE. I might // throw up . . .

CLIFFORD. (*Aloof.*) But I . . . I haven't yet told her.

CLAIRE. Oh. You haven't told Lily-the stranger you met just this morning-you haven't yet told her that you love her?

CLIFFORD. Right.

CLAIRE. Right . . .

CLIFFORD. Right! And // I should!

CLAIRE. One day, when you really do, you know Cliff, "love" her-then you can! Perhaps then! (*Unhinged.*) You can tell her! THEN!? And all about the flowery rainbow field of love and // dreams!?

CLIFFORD. (*Proud.*) I came up with that!

CLAIRE. I know. You should write it down.

CLIFFORD. // I should!

CLAIRE. No. You shouldn't. Cliff, listen. You just met her. You can't love her. You can't just suddenly love somebody. That's not how // it works . . .

CLIFFORD. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT LOVE, CLAIRE?!

*The rain intensifies. A thick silence between them with just the sound of the rain on the umbrella.*

CLAIRE. & CLIFFORD. You must be joking, Cliff. // I didn't mean that, Claire.

*CLIFFORD reaches through the rain to touch  
CLAIRE.*

CLAIRE. That's right you didn't.

CLIFFORD. (*Aloof again.*) It feels different. This time it's different! It's like . . . a warm bath—how it covers all of you, and afterward, your skin radiates heat, and life feels good and everything is okay? (*He struggles to articulate himself.*) Like a dream! The sound of a distant piano, notes ascend up into the sky—and I stand on a pink cloud of cotton candy, and then I eat a big ol' hole through the cloud, and I shout down to the world with all the love my heart // has for her . . .

CLAIRE. Okay! Cliff. Okay. I get it. I'm late for work.

*CLAIRE walks out from the rain, and looks up  
bewildered.*

CLAIRE. Cleared up quick. (*Looks down the road.*) Damn bus! I'll walk. You'll be okay?

CLIFFORD. (*Delusional.*) Lily . . .

CLAIRE. Right. Totally okay. Be careful Cliffy.

*CLAIRE leaves. CLIFFORD sits down under the tree.  
The pay phone rings, and startles him out of a  
daze. He runs to answer it.*

CLIFFORD. Yeah? Lily! Where are you? Tonight? Yeah! Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. (*Long pause.*) The what? Oh! Okay! The sunset. Can't wait.

*He hangs up. WILLIAM WESLEY JR enters, typewriter  
under arm and papers in hand. CLIFFORD leaves and  
they collide. The papers drop.*

WESLEY. Pardon me.

CLIFFORD. No, no, no—my fault! (*Gathers the papers  
frantically.*) Is this a book?

WESLEY. Oh, kind of! Paper. Words. Lots of pages. All books begin as pages, I suppose.

CLIFFORD. I've got a date tonight!

WESLEY. Uh . . . congratulations.

CLIFFORD. What should I wear? What should I say? I have to tell her how I feel! What if I'm late, and she

leaves and I never see her again. I'd die. I can't be late! I have to go get ready—I can't be late!

*CLIFFORD leaves. WESLEY sits at the bus stop, and begins to type on his typewriter.*

WESLEY. Just . . . be yourself.

*Light fades to afternoon.*

#### Scene 4 (Afternoon)

*WESLEY types deliberately. The margin bell gives a \*ding\* each time he finishes a sheet. He adds it to a stack, and feeds a new sheet. CLAIRE is at the pay phone nearby, with a mug of coffee.*

CLAIRE. Tell him—no, honey—okay. Just give the phone to your sister. Yeah. Sweetie, Ella, where is uncle // Cliff?—

*\*Ding.\**

CLAIRE. The shower is leaking, I know. I told him not to . . . okay! Tell him—no it's okay, I'm not mad at you. Listen to me carefully Stella, tell him, tell uncle / Cliff to—

*\*Ding.\**

CLAIRE. —call me back at the stop, when he's out. It's very important, okay sweetie? Unh huh, tonight. Late—I'll tuck you in good. Unh huh. And Lee-Lee. Kisses, sweetie, kisses La-La.

*CLAIRE hangs up. \*Ding.\* She notices WESLEY. He does not look up. He speaks as he types each syllable.*

WESLEY. “ . . . Care, Pro-active Main-te-nance, and Re-pair . . . for Lon-ge-vi-ty and Con-nec-tion // of Rural—”

CLAIRE. (*Massive sneeze.*) Achoo!

*WESLEY produces an ornate handkerchief and hands it to her without a look.*

CLAIRE. Sorry // I was just—

WESLEY. (*Still typing.*) Bless'd be thy heart!—with great health, well-being, and a life “without death.” Sneeze, and you shall live!

CLAIRE. Oh! That's // so sweet—

WESLEY. (*Continues.*) “Here, thusly, I aim to elucidate an . . . in-tu-i-tive and su-ppor-tive i-de-ol-o-gy—(*Pause.*)—for the re-con-struc-tion and fu-ture sta-bil-i-ty of fun-da-men-tal . . .”

*CLAIRE tip-toes around the bus stop, to the rhythm of the syllables as he types, and waves her new handkerchief around.*

WESLEY. “. . . us-ing gen-tle care, a-tten-tion . . .”

CLAIRE. (*Sensually.*) Ohhh.

WESLEY. “. . . and . . . love.”

*\*Ding.\**

CLAIRE. (*Mesmerized.*) Wow.

*CLAIRE sits, and slowly moves closer until her face is inches from the side of his.*

WESLEY. It's still a work in progress.

CLAIRE. Aren't we all . . .

WESLEY. (*He turns to face her.*) Oh my—oh! Claire??

CLAIRE. Hi—well, hi there!

WESLEY. Ah!

*They are extremely close, face-to-face.*

CLAIRE. William. Wesley. Junior.—I thought that was you! I thought it was! // Willie!

*The pay phone rings. CLAIRE startles, rushes to pick it up.*

CLAIRE. Not now, Cliff.

*She slams it down and hurries back to the bench.*

WESLEY. Wesley, I go by that now. Wesley. Hi, Claire. (*A warm smile.*) It's been a little while.

CLAIRE. Has it?

WESLEY. You came back to Outskirts? Looks like you did, seeing as you're sitting right here and all.

CLAIRE. No, no. Didn't come back, I was dragged back. For someone. Now, my girls—I've got two girls, twins, you know—it's just us. We // get by.

WESLEY. Oh, // Claire—

CLAIRE. (*Stressed.*) It's okay. First year of school this week, actually. Been running around, here and there, this and that, excitement and all. Got them each matching tie-dye backpacks. Really adorable. I work nights at the mill, a few miles down the way, remember it there? Been exhausted, feet been killing me on that concrete. And the noise. That noise, that hum. Hummmmmmm. I can hear it now. (*Closes eyes.*) Can you? Hear it?

WESLEY. I don't really . . . // hear it.

CLAIRE. The mornings will be chaos. It's off to Nicky's right away, he's always putting me on the rooster shift, all the folks there cranky for their eggs and coffee: "Cream and two sugars, Claire, thanks. Cream. Sugar, Claire. Thanks. *THANKS.*" Like I've not done this every morning for my whole-entire life? Fuck. *Practically.* Then he asks me to take a double shift, so those days I go straight to the mill from there—then back home real late. Girls, school, Nicky's—cream, sugar, thanks—mill, hum, feet.

*The pay phone rings and she lunges at it, picks it up and slams it down and laughs sheepishly.*

CLAIRE. And Cliff! My brother. He's—I keep an eye on him—well, I take care of him. Entirely. I *want* to help him, of course I do. I try to. (*Calms.*) After I put the girls in bed, I just collapse. Completely. Straight onto the bed. Alone, finally. Or again. Then . . . I drift away—into a night too short, filled with daydreams.

*WESLEY hugs CLAIRE and she holds onto it tightly.*

CLAIRE. After all that—the rest of life, the little moments leftover between the daydreams, I just wait around—usually for this damn bus. (*Pause.*) But listen to me going on about my troubles! What about you! (*Notices the typewriter and pages.*) What this you're doing, here—there?

WESLEY. I'm writing. Helping. These places. (*Gestures to the bus stop.*) They need lots of maintenance. Ongoing. To rebuild—or you know, fix stuff. So, I'm writing a sort of . . . *Bus Stop Bible* . . .

*Inspired, he types: 'Bus Stop Bible' on a sheet.  
\*Ding.\* He adds it to the stack.*

WESLEY. Back at my office, in the city, folks talk—and folks say *this* stop is haunted—or cursed, right? Something like that. Right? The drivers, they just skip by it now. Afraid, I guess. Probably you noticed.

CLAIRE. Cowards. Same old story. “Cursed Bus Stop Brings Heartbreak Back To Outskirts.” Silliest newspaper headline I’ve // ever seen.

WESLEY. Silly! “Cursed”—or is it just a little *broken*? A little unloved, a little neglected. That’s what I’m thinking! Nothing can’t be fixed, without a little bit of // gentle care . . .

CLAIRE. (*Mimes his typing.*) “Gen-tle care, a-tten-tion, and love.” It’s been so long since I’ve had any of that.

WESLEY. (*Long pause.*) Claire, I . . .

*Thick silence. Instead, he types something, swiftly. \*Ding.\* He hands it to her.*

WESLEY. “You deserve to be loved.”

CLAIRE. (*She cries almost.*) Thank you—Willie.

*He types again, \*ding\*, and hands it to her.*

CLAIRE. “It’s Wesley, now.” Of course!—sorry. *Wesley*. Quite distinguished, that name is. I’ll say. Respectable. Honest. Intelligent. And it’s . . . sexy.

*WESLEY types one last time. \*Ding.\* He hands it to her.*

CLAIRE. (*A giggle.*) Coffee? Okay. Yeah. Now? (*He smiles.*) Yeah. Okay, that’d be . . . nice.

*WESLEY stands and offers his hand, and she joins him.*

WESLEY. “Cream and two sugars, Claire, thanks.”

*They leave together.*



*Light fades to dusk.*

## Scene 5 (Dusk)

*CLIFFORD sets up a picnic blanket underneath the maple tree. He sets out various objects that do and do not belong at a picnic. He arranges them perfectly and straightens himself.*

CLIFFORD. (*Sings.*) "Cal'fornia gal, won't you come out tonight, come out tonight, come out tonight . . ."

*He sits, lounges, and re-adjusts to find the perfect pose.*

*He drags the picnic blanket across, in front of the bus stop. Items fall off and sprawl out in a mess. He sets up the blanket near the pay phone, and repeats the set up, organized perfectly again. He is increasingly manic.*

CLIFFORD. (*Sings.*) "Cal'fornia gal . . ."

*The pay phone rings. He lunges for it.*

CLIFFORD. Not now Claire!

*He slams down the phone. Frustrated at the pay phone, he drags the blanket away, back to the tree, and sets everything a third time. He talks to himself, as he tries to prepare for the date. LILY enters.*

LILY. Uh, Hello! *Je suis là . . . pour toi.* [I am here . . . for you.]

CLIFFORD. *Bonjour!* [Hello!]

LILY. Impressive.

CLIFFORD. I practiced that all day.

LILY. Sounds like it. Nice place to meet?—is this common in America?

CLIFFORD. Bus stops? 'Course, we got 'em all over.

LILY. Ohhh, it's a picnic! Just like in the movies.

CLIFFORD. I been makin' it perfect. For you.

*They are awkward, he doesn't know what to talk about.*

LILY & CLIFFORD. So . . . // Um . . .

CLIFFORD. Where'd you come from? I mean, today. How'd you get here! This mornin'.

LILY. How does anyone get anywhere, Clifford?

CLIFFORD. Yeah—'course. It's just . . . Outskirts ain't a place people just show up. Born and die sorta place.

LILY. I took a boat. Or, is it a ship? *Navire*. [Ship.] Have you ever? Taken one? You can't imagine the vastness out on the ocean.

CLIFFORD. Show me!

*She removes a blue silk scarf, and waves it to create ripples.*

LILY. It is bigger than the elephants. It is bigger than the trees. It is more vast than any land and more tremendous than any mountain. The ocean is my love. *L'océan est à moi*. [The ocean is mine.] I am always drawn to her. I know her, too! And she, I. She needs naught from me, the ocean—she wants nothing I can give. I need only be there with her, and I can have her. *Je la connais bien*. [I know her well.] I have faith in her.

*He stares. They sit, awkwardly.*

LILY. I'm going to read your future.

CLIFFORD. What?

LILY. Yeah.

CLIFFORD. Okay.

*She removes a deck of cards—tarot, oracle, or something entirely invented.*

LILY. Well. Maybe. Or—your past. But! In *these*, we will find a window into your divine path, your existence in this universe.

CLIFFORD. I ain't good at card games Lily. Not really. Actually, // one time . . .

LILY. This is different. Watch.

*She shuffles the cards, and draws three.*

LILY. (*Horrified at each draw.*) Oh. Oooh. Ooooooooooh.

CLIFFORD. What? Did I win? I won! I knew it, gosh dang! I'm lucky.

LILY. (*Nervous.*) Let's try again. Let me shuffle it better. *Mélanger, mélanger, mélanger.* [Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle.] Okay. Ready?

CLIFFORD. Uhh . . .

*She draws three. The exact same.*

LILY. Oh, No . . .

CLIFFORD. What! // How do I win?

LILY. Despair. Delusion. Death.

CLIFFORD. Is that . . . good?

LILY. No? Okay, one more time. We have to. (*She shuffles the cards again.*) Okay?

*She draws three. Again, the exact same.*

CLIFFORD. I don't like // this game.

LILY. *Putain de merde!* [Fucking hell!]

CLIFFORD. Poo-ttan' duh murd!

LILY. *Pu-tain. De Mer-de.*

CLIFFORD. Pooooh-ttan'. Duuh. Muur-duuh.

LILY. (*Laughs.*) Close enough. It's a bad word, in French. My *papa* [dad] said it all the time. (*Mimics her dad.*) *Putain de merde, Lily!* [Fucking hell, Lily!]

CLIFFORD. That ain't sound nice.

LILY. I still use it though. In his memory. I like it now.

CLIFFORD. My dad left us, eight years old.

LILY. Why?

CLIFFORD. It's why anyone does anythin'. I don't know, still. Just gone away from us one day. Poo-ttin' duh murd!

*They laugh.*

LILY. Who's "us?"

CLIFFORD. My twin sis' Claire, and our ma. The three of us. We did okay, anyway.

LILY. That was your sister this morning. Claire?

CLIFFORD. I love her. More than anythin'. Well, 'cept chocolate puddin'. I loooove chocolate puddin'.

LILY. We didn't have that growing up. But we had mousse.

CLIFFORD. Moose?

LILY. Yeah, mousse. *Maman* [Mom] would serve a big bowl of it to me, and I'd eat it all in one sitting.

CLIFFORD. That's so strange. Moose. French people are strange. OH! Wait! I almost forgot—Lily!

*He runs behind the bus stop and returns with a basket filled with dozens of lily flowers. Too many flowers. She is overwhelmed.*

LILY. Oh, that . . . is . . . a lot! You're sweet, Clifford. Lilies. You're really // sweet, but . . .

CLIFFORD. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin."

*He hands the basket to her.*

LILY. "And so clothed is the grass of the fields, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

CLIFFORD. You know it. I ain't read books much, but I remember some verses from church—went with dad. I remember he would get real upset in the evenins' sometimes after, and ma would calm him down and say . . . "Sufficient to the day is the worry of it." Don't understand that still.

LILY. (*Plays with the lilies.*) Well, I think it means there's no reason to add to the troubles of each day. Each day comes with its own worry enough. We mustn't bring more to it.

*He thinks on it. They watch the sun set. The moon arrives.*

CLIFFORD. Look. "Faith in the moon."

*He leans in close to kiss her. The pay phone rings, interrupts. He stops, and she continues. They kiss deeply, and much more.*

*The tree above sheds its leaves on top of them.*

*Blackout.*

## Winter

*The bus stop waits menacingly and reflects in the winter-cold moonlight. Around it, vegetation is heavily overgrown, uncared for. It's frigid, the ground is snowy, and the tree is leaf-less and dead.*

### Scene 6 (Midnight)

*Starlight again. The streetlight flicks on and snow falls. CLIFFORD sits by the tree, with a tall stack of paper near him, the stuffed elephant sits on top. WESLEY sits at the bus stop and types rhythmically, musically, on his typewriter.*

CLIFFORD. Poof! All the sudden, up in smoke. Unbelievable!—a magic trick. A vanishing act. She was gone. Lily. Maybe *she* didn't even expect it. Did anyone ever accidentally disappear? Maybe Houdini could.

Claire told me a fact she read . . . the names said aloud most in the world are Jesus, Sherlock Holmes, and *Houdini*. I was thinkin' it'd be Elvis. Marilyn Monroe. Some king. But Houdini?

We went to Chicago, as kids. Ma took us on "vacation" after dad left. We were eight or nine, probably. A magician was there, on the sidewalk—I was mesmerized by all the tricks. The finale, he pulled a deck of cards out of thin air, showed it to me . . . then, in a blink, it transformed! It went up in the air, into fifty-two butterflies. Right there on the street! I watched 'em all fly away, out and over Lake Michigan.

*He does "52-card pickup" above his head with the tarot deck from LILY. The cards float down like butterflies.*

Magic. Ain't no idea how that trick worked.

It's obvious, why she vanished. To her. To Lily. 'Course—a real good magician won't never reveal her tricks. *Magie secrète*. [Secret magic.] The secret, the magic, the absence, the empty—all that follows me

around now. Can't shake it. Like a puppy, a stupid lil' puppy dog, like a stupid lil' cursed lil' puppy dog.

Still, I love her the same—a thousand times more than she knows. I never could say it. I got to tell her. I got to say it. Somehow, I just got to.

*He holds the stuffed elephant. He shells some peanuts and feeds them to her.*

I borrowed her from the girls. Kinda borrowed, kinda stole. I ain't givin' her back. It's all that's left. Sometimes we talk—Miette, that's her name. Peanuts are her favorite food.

*(Stands.)* I'm not sad. But. She's not here. She's . . . not here. She's not . . . *here*. Anymore. I been abandoned to my freedom. Abandoned. *Putain de merde* [Fucking hell]—this place. I hate it. I WANT TO GO.

*He takes off his coat.*

I'm not broken am I? I'm not *mechanical*—I can't "fail." Not any more than a tree can. *(To the tree.)* This lifeless dormant shell—leafless, flowerless, fruitless.

Fruitless, for now. Ain't dead, ain't broken, ain't mechanical. You ain't dead. Right?

*He hugs the tree, fully, and holds it. He slides down slowly with it. The cold reaches his bones and he shivers.*

Aren't we strong! Together, the trunk, bones, skin, bark—tall, and proud, and stable.

Aren't we? Wide, grounded like your roots. Absorbing.

We aren't? Thin and tangled, broken branches. Cracked.

We aren't strong! Tiny lil' leaves. Fragile lil' . . . delicate, frail dispensable lil' . . .

I'm not strong. I'm not.

*His head drops, he shivers, and falls into a deep sleep.*

*Light fades to dawn.*

## Scene 7 (Dawn)

*CLIFFORD is slumped down against the tree, head down. He is severely underdressed for the weather and shivers. CLAIRE paces in front of the bus stop, and removes her apron.*

CLAIRE. (*Kicks at him.*) Wake up.

CLIFFORD. Fuhhh . . . oooh, Clairey . . . ?  
*Bonjouuuuuur.* [Helloooooooo.]

CLAIRE. Get up, let's go. You're drinking, now? Shit.

CLIFFORD. (*Slurs, very drunk.*) I'm NOT . . .  
"drinking." I'm sitting. I am sleeping. I *was* . . .  
drinking.

CLAIRE. You're freezing Cliffy!

CLIFFORD. Nooo . . . I'm drinking. // Sitting.

CLAIRE. Okay. And now // we're going.

CLIFFORD. Sleeping!

*He falls asleep. She kicks him again.*

CLIFFORD. Ah! When did you . . . uhhnn . . . where is  
the bus?

CLAIRE. Bus? That damn bus doesn't stop anymore.

CLIFFORD. You are . . . my sister! Here you are—here! I  
. . . I'm . . . I'm so so so so . . . so so happy to //  
seeeeeee you . . .

CLAIRE. I would love to say the same. Let's go, get up,  
I'll help you. I've got to get to work Cliff!

CLIFFORD. No . . . she will come back here . . . we met  
here! Or, here? Here.

CLAIRE. Oh my . . . Clifford. Really? You mean Lily?

CLIFFORD. Lily!!!

CLAIRE. No. No no no, darling. That's over. Get up. You  
know she's gone.

*She gets him to his feet, and places her coat  
around him. She helps him walk.*

CLIFFORD. No . . . I need to *be* here! If—if she . . .

CLAIRE. It's okay. Don't think about that. It's all  
past now. (*Sings.*) "Gentle waves . . . in // the harbor  
. . ."



CLIFFORD. NO . . . Claire! I'm not a . . . a baby . . .

*He rips off the coat.*

CLAIRE. Come on.

CLIFFORD. I . . . am not GOING. (*He reaches to the paper stack.*) I wrote her. I wrote something . . .

CLAIRE. Okay, Cliffy, sweetie. (*Kisses him on the forehead.*) Okay. Let's get you back. I'll take you home.

CLIFFORD. Home . . .

*Exhausted, he gives in. They leave together.*

*Light fades to morning.*

### Scene 8 (Morning)

*The snow intensifies. WESLEY enters, and begins to fix something on the bus stop with a screwdriver. He can't quite do it. CLAIRE enters, out of breath, dressed in absurd layers of too many winter coats.*

CLAIRE. Gosh I'M HOT! So sweaty! *Putain de merde!* [Fucking hell.] Oh! My darling.

WESLEY. What's that mean?

CLAIRE. It's French. Cliff says it—I think it means "darn it." *Putain de merde.* [Fucking hell.]

WESLEY. It sounds made up.

*She takes off one coat, and hands it to him.*

CLAIRE. All language is made up. (*Pause.*) Wes?

WESLEY. *Oui?* [Yes?]

CLAIRE. Do you love me?

WESLEY. Oh. (*Long pause.*) Well—yes. I do. Love you. Claire, why wouldn't I love you? There is so much to love about you.

*She takes off another coat and hands it to him.*

CLAIRE. I knew it! Since when?

WESLEY. Uhm. (*Long pause.*) Right now? I suppose.

CLAIRE. That's a coincidence—right? How weird! Since right now, when I asked you? Not before that? Just now?

*She takes off another coat and he grabs it.*

WESLEY. No, // well I . . .

CLAIRE. It's okay Wes, darling. I love you too. Wesley.

WESLEY. Oh—wow. Really? Why? Claire.

CLAIRE. Why!? *Pourquoi!* [Why!]

*She laughs, takes off her sweater, and hands it to him. He puts on one of the coats.*

CLAIRE. Why!!! You're so funny, Wesley. (Pause.) We should get married.

WESLEY. What!? // Married . . .

*The pay phone rings.*

CLAIRE. Great idea! I am just absolutely burning up right now. Are you hot? Is it hot out here? I'm hot.

WESLEY. It's winter.

*She answers the phone. She takes off her shirt, and then her pants. She is in her underwear and bra.*

CLAIRE. Hello? This is "Mrs. William Wesley." (Giggles.) Hello? Yes! Yes, it is. He just proposed, actually! Who? My fiancé! To me! *Oui!* [Yes!]

WESLEY. Claire, // we just . . .

CLAIRE. Tonight!? Great idea! I've got to go. (Hangs up.)

WESLEY. Shouldn't we talk // about this . . .

CLAIRE. I've got to tell Cliffy! I can't wait! And Stella, Selene, and my girlfriends! Do you have a quarter, darling? A quarter! Wesley?

*He searches all the coat pockets for a quarter.*

CLAIRE. Oh Wes! I'm so happy!

WESLEY. Me too. Me too, Claire.

*He finds a quarter. She snatches it, holds it up triumphantly.*

CLAIRE. So happy! (*Uses the pay phone.*) Oh, Cliffy! Hi. Did I wake you? I'm sorry, sweetie. Guess what!

*WESLEY kisses CLAIRE on the cheek and leaves.  
CLAIRE continues to call people.*

*Light fades to afternoon.*

### Scene 9 (Afternoon)

*CLAIRE is on the pay phone. CLIFFORD enters, barefoot and hungover, with an ice-cream pail full of quarters.*

CLIFFORD. I need to use the phone. Claire. Claire! I NEED TO USE THAT PHONE.

CLAIRE. Hold on, Cliff! (*Into phone.*) WHAT? Sorry, my brother is being *ridiculous*.

CLIFFORD. (*Mocking.*) "My brother is being ridiculous."

*He paces around. He is childish, throws quarters at her, and mimics her movements.*

CLAIRE. I'll NEED the dress before then. Yes. Today! I'll be over soon.

*She hangs up. They stare at one another for an extended time.*

CLAIRE. Cliff . . .

CLIFFORD. Claire . . .

CLAIRE. Oh, can you believe it!? I'm to be married Cliffy. Married! Nicky said he'd marry us, Wes and I. Right in the diner. Isn't that cute? He's ordained!!! He said we can do it tonight. Tonight!

CLIFFORD. What?

CLAIRE. Tonight!

CLIFFORD. Why?!

CLAIRE. What?

CLIFFORD. Tonight . . .

CLAIRE. Why?

*They stare again.*

CLAIRE. Aren't you happy for me, Cliff?

CLIFFORD. I need to use that phone.

*She blocks him from the pay phone.*

CLAIRE. Tell me why.

CLIFFORD. I need to call Lily.

THE WIND DIES?

CLAIRE. Lily!? What? You're kidding. Why? You don't even // know where she is.

CLIFFORD. I need to tell her somethin'!

CLAIRE. I can guarantee you, Clifford, she does not want to // hear it.

CLIFFORD. I DON'T CARE. MOVE. *(Pause.)* Please, Claire? Please. I can give you a quarter. *(Jingles the bucket of quarters.)*

CLAIRE. *(She moves.)* You can't change it. Anything. You can't *make* somebody love you.

CLIFFORD. I gotta try. *Putain de merde.* [Fucking hell.]

CLAIRE. No you don't. Grow up Cliff. Move on. Let go. There's a fine line between love and delusion.

CLIFFORD. If YOU can have it, why can't I? Why can't I have love, Claire? Is somethin' so *wrong* with me? Ain't I okay? Ain't I loved, too?

*CLIFFORD begins to systematically call all the C last names in the phone book. Quarter in, "Does Lily live there?" – "Okay, bye." Hang up. Repeat.*

CLAIRE. *I love you.*

*He doesn't hear her. He flips through the phone book.*

*CLAIRE leaves.*

CLIFFORD. I am—happy for you. Claire, I wanna be.

*Light fades to dusk.*

## Spring

*The snow has melted. It's crisp and clear and the grass shows through again, with new growth and flowers around. The stop looks maintained, somewhat fixed.*

### Scene 11 (Midnight)

*Starlight, once more. LILY stands in front of the bus stop. She is hopeful for a fresh start. She is visibly pregnant.*

*At the base of the tree, CLAIRE tends to a memorial she built for CLIFFORD—with his guitar, unlit candles, a stack of paper, other effects. A significant patch of lilies has grown around the base of the tree. She hums a hymn, and lights the candles slowly with matches.*

LILY. I've lived!—finally, among the trees! Oh California, my love. In the valley of the mosses and mists, *les pommes de pin géantes* [the giant pine cones], the towering redwood trees—still, I can't believe all I saw! An absolute dream.

Have you ever felt so alive that it seemed like a dream? Pinch me.

Three magnificent weeks. *Magnifique!* [Magnificent!] I found myself. Under these . . . California canopies, at the shores of the ocean and rocks and winds and the cliffs. The cliffs . . .

I wrote and slept and ate and wrote—and I cried and slept and wrote, and I laid upon the dense and cold earth, I felt it beneath my body, and the sky remade every morning in my breath. I didn't think of the chill. *Ju suis assez fort.* [I'm strong enough.] It was my journey.

*CLAIRE places the stuffed elephant at the memorial, then leaves.*

And alone—finally. *Un éléphant parmi les arbres.* [An elephant among the trees.] I've never been alone, not

really. But, maybe I'm not remembering—I've always been alone? The forest keeps my secrets.

Maybe you've noticed I look different. I noticed. Between the quiet moments, the breaths and the fog, my body changed—is changing. At first, I thought I was exhausted—maybe the excitement, the movement, the fresh air and the forest ocean *mélange*. [mixture.]

*LILY removes a container of chocolate pudding from her bag, opens it, and devours it slowly with her hands.*

*Une bouffée d'air frais.* [A breath of fresh air.] I began to crave . . . chocolate pudding? And cream-top whole milk. Grilled barbeque chicken. *Ridicule!* [Ridiculous!] I'm vegetarian.

I knew for sure the first morning I was sick. That day, time stopped. Alone, in the middle of nowhere, on the edge of some forest, looking out at the Pacific ocean. Not prepared at all. Yet, I am exactly what I need to be.

I cried and cried, the entire day. I don't know why. Joy, terror, confusion—something more complex. Gratitude for this *blessing*. And I knew her! Inside me. I knew her name like I must have always known it. And I spoke it out loud. *Océane*. [Ocean.]

With that, suddenly, I missed him. Clifford. I said her name, and I wanted him. It wasn't *need*, but a deep wanting. The first time I've wanted someone—like this. Fiercely. Unquestionably. *Comme le feu et l'oxygène*. [Like fire and oxygen.] Magnetically.

I didn't think I'd ever be back here. *Tu m'as manqué* [I missed you]—my sweet, my darling Clifford. I've come back. I want to see you again.

*Light fades to dawn.*

## Scene 12 (Dawn)

*LILY sits on the bench and waits.*

*WESLEY enters, approaches the bus stop, and sits at the other end of the bench. LILY smiles at him.*

*WESLEY opens a book and flips through it to find his spot.*

*LILY looks around, vaguely, happily.*

*They sit together, in silence, for a stretch of time.*

*WESLEY coughs, once.*

*LILY laughs about something on her mind.*

*WESLEY looks at his watch, looks down the road for the bus, and sighs. He gets up and leaves.*

*Light fades to morning.*

### Scene 13 (Morning)

*CLAIRE enters, energetically. She carries a bundle of flowers. She stops abruptly and drops the flowers.*

CLAIRE. Lily?! You're . . . here? You're back.

LILY. I am back!

CLAIRE. Why?

LILY. What do you mean? For Clifford—I have something to tell him!

CLAIRE. *Putain de merde.* [Fucking hell.]

LILY. *Parles-tu français?* [You speak French?]

CLAIRE. I never was good with other languages. (*Studies her face.*) You look different. You're so beautiful.

LILY. Thank you!

*CLAIRE hugs her tightly, long. Then, she notices her stomach.*

CLAIRE. Oh // and you're . . .

LILY. It's a girl!

CLAIRE. Oh Lily, // that's lovely. A child is such a gift.

LILY. Almost six months!

CLAIRE. (*Does the math.*) Oh . . . but . . .

LILY. I've been waiting here all morning—do you know where Clifford is?

*The pay phone rings once and they both look. It does not ring again.*

CLAIRE. I . . .

*She moves to the tree, and sits.*

CLAIRE. He's gone, Lily. Over winter.

LILY. Gone? Gone where? *Disparu.* [Gone.] Where is he?

CLAIRE. Gone.

LILY. I don't understand.

*CLAIRE smiles sadly. LILY is overcome suddenly.*

CLAIRE. Me neither. He crumbled away, sort of, into nothing. Slowly. He was always close to it anyway. He always struggled. Always. He held on, just barely. Even when we were young, the world weighed on him so heavily. This winter, he couldn't . . . and I couldn't—I let him let go, I let him disappear. I didn't know he would . . . leave . . . I just wanted . . .

LILY. *(In shock.)* I don't . . . // understand.

CLAIRE. Look at all these lilies! They've grown up around the tree. It's beautiful here. He loved lilies. Lily. Miette keeps watch over them. She is tiny among the giant lilies. She plays around them, and she trumpets her trunk loudly, and she looks up and wonders at their enormity. She feels small. She watches the lilies.

LILY. "They toil not, neither do they spin."

CLAIRE. Then, Miette, she finds a fallen bloom, and she drinks the rainwater left in the bowl of the petals. She drinks all of it, fiercely, and she wants more of it. And more of it. She is parched. She wants all the water from all the lilies. She cannot sleep until she has it. She doesn't think of anything else but the lilies. She will stay awake, and she will not dream tonight.

*Light fades to afternoon.*

#### Scene 14 (Afternoon)

*LILY sits at the memorial under the tree, silently, next to the large stack of paper. She*



*flips through hundreds of pages, reads some to herself. She laughs, and cries a little.*

*WESLEY enters, with a metal toolbox. He stops.*

WESLEY. Oh. You're Lily.

LILY. *Oui.* [Yes.]

WESLEY. You're just as beautiful as he said.

*She laughs. He opens the toolbox, and begins to hammer, tighten, and fix broken pieces of the bus stop. After a time, he stops.*

LILY. *Suis-je une la femme de rêve fantaisiste et délurée?* [Am I a magic pixie dream girl?]

WESLEY. You should burn them.

LILY. Burn them?

WESLEY. Let him go.

LILY. But . . . it's all I have. I only just got here. I can't burn them. Why would I?

WESLEY. It's conservation of energy. Nothing is gone, really, ever. It's just one form or another. Paper, carbon, smoke. The pencil marks on the page, the lead, it will fade and smudge anyway. The paper will deteriorate in time. Why wait? In fire, we accelerate the inevitable. Memory, on the other hand—we can't conserve that. It's just neurons and synapses in the brain. When that's gone, the memory goes too. Those are precious. Keep those, desperately—until you can't. Love them, and burn the paper.

*She picks out one sheet. She lights a match and burns the sheet.*

*CLAIRE enters and sits next to LILY.*

*LILY lights the stack of papers on fire. They all watch it burn.*

*LILY and CLAIRE let out a loud sigh together.  
LILY stands.*

LILY. *(Eulogizes.)*

*C'est curieux,* [It's curious,] how it only happens once.

The last words, the last time we speak.

We never get to say good-bye, not really.

Rarely is it a “good” bye.

*C'est curieux*, [It's curious,] I didn't expect you.

*Adieu, pour toujours*. [Goodbye, forever.]

Goodbye, for now, *mon amour*. [my love.]

*Light fades to dusk.*

### Scene 15 (Dusk)

*CLAIRE stands at the pay phone with her coffee mug, but does not drink from it. WESLEY sits at the bus stop with his typewriter, and thinks. LILY is curled up by the tree, with her stuffed elephant.*

*The pay phone rings, rings, rings.*

*CLAIRE picks it up, and starts to speak.*

*Blackout.*

*End of play.*

## Production Notes

The absurdism is critical to the tone of this, and its balance with a sort of magic realism. The set and props should be entirely authentic. For example, when possible, use real sod grass, water, leaves, flash paper, matches, candles, a phone book, peanuts and fresh flowers. The pay phone ring should come from the unit itself.

The transitions between the scenes (time of day) should be fluid, driven by dramatic light changes to indicate the hours of time that pass. Set adjustments are only between seasons, before the “midnight” scenes.