

CHAGRIN FALLS

by

v. gaspare abruzzo

v. gaspare abruzzo
New York, NY 10036
516-987-0702
vgabruzzo@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

THOMAS QUINE	man, mid 30s.
DR. ROMANA CAJAL	woman, early 30s.
LOUELLA	woman, late 20s.
WOLF	man, late 20s.
G	man, mid 30s.
EVELYN	woman, mid 30s.

(While each cast member's race is open,
the cast should be diverse.)

SETTING

A city.

TIME

The future.

ACT I

Scene 1	THOMAS' apartment.	Time 0.
Scene 2	DR. CAJAL's office.	Minutes later.

ACT II

Scene 1	G's apartment.	4 months later.
---------	----------------	-----------------

ACT III

Scene 1	Dr. CAJAL's office.	8 months later.
Scene 2	WOLF's apartment.	8 months later.

ACT IV

Scene 1	Dr. CAJAL's apartment.	9 months later.
---------	------------------------	-----------------

ACT V

Scene 1	Dr. CAJAL's office.	13 months later.
Scene 2	The theatre.	13 months later.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(THOMAS pours two cups of tea.)

THOMAS

So. How does this begin?

(The front door opens, LOUELLA enters.)

LOUELLA

Hey sweetie.

THOMAS

Hey. Wow. You look, beautiful.

LOUELLA

Awww thank you.

(THOMAS and LOUELLA embrace. THOMAS caresses her cheek.)

LOUELLA

You missed me huh?

THOMAS

Yeah. I've, I miss you so much.

(LOUELLA laughs, sits at the table.)

LOUELLA

So much? It's only been a few hours, you're really trying to butter me up for later eh.

THOMAS

Yeah... I guess that was a little bit dramatic. I don't know. I felt it though. Anyway. How was your day? How did the meeting go?

LOUELLA

Really?! You're gonna ask me about the meeting with tea on the table? Where's the wine?

THOMAS

(Laughing:) Okay, okay, fair enough. You're

LOUELLA

No no it wasn't that bad.

(THOMAS gets wine.)

THOMAS

Oh that's good to hear. No more weekends then? Red or white?

LOUELLA

Red. No this weekend I definitely have to work... I swear, it's not because I want to skip lunch with your parents.

THOMAS

Yeah yeah. Never that.

LOUELLA

They moved the opening date forward so it's an all hands on deck kinda thing.

THOMAS

Well, cheers to a successful show.

LOUELLA

Cheers. If all goes well we could get commissioned for the biennial.

THOMAS

That's great! If that does happen we ought to see if we can stay up there for a month or so. I think I'd be able to work remotely for at least that long. But also, if

LOUELLA

Oh, Thomas...

THOMAS

Lou?

LOUELLA

They're underneath the snow Thomas.

THOMAS

Huh?

LOUELLA

They're underneath the snow. The pictures.

THOMAS

Pictures? What are you talking about? The show?

LOUELLA

We've been here before. Remember?

THOMAS

Lou, what the fuck are you talking about?! Are you fucking with me?

LOUELLA

You know that I'm not here... right?

THOMAS

What do you mean? Lou?

LOUELLA

You know this is different, right Thomas? Tell me you know that this is different.

THOMAS

Different... Ugh... You're not here. Yes I know this is different. Ohhhh fuck. Fuck! I got lost.

LOELLA

I'm not here!

THOMAS

I know! I know... You left... I got lost. (As if talking to someone else:) I can keep going. Not yet.

LOUELLA

I left? I did everything I could to keep you from leaving.

THOMAS

Bullshit. You fell out of love. You made that

LOELLA

I never stopped loving you! But love wasn't enough when you stopped loving yourself.

THOMAS

I needed you Lou.

LOELLA

No. You didn't. You didn't need me... you didn't want me. You needed something but you wouldn't let me in.

LOELLA (Continued)

You wouldn't let me help. You were never the same after he killed himself. You shut me out completely. I thought it would be okay, eventually. I thought we'd be okay.

THOMAS

We could've been.

LOUELLA

And I tried, I really did. Maybe I didn't try hard enough. But I needed something too.

THOMAS

I know. I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry.

LOUELLA

I needed to be wanted. I loved you so much. But you left. And when I knew that you couldn't return to me in the way that I needed you, I had to leave too. I'm sorry that I left the way I did. I'm so sorry... I really am. I'm so sorry Thomas.

THOMAS

I'm sorry too. I just wanted you to be happy... I want you to be... I want to go now. I can come out now. Please.

DR. CAJAL

(Out of sight, over a PA or megaphone:) Take a deep breath Thomas. Come back in 3, 2, 1.

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(DR. CAJAL's office. As the lights go on, THOMAS gets out of a special chair connected to some kind of neuro-technological helmet and walks to a couch across from DR. CAJAL.)

DR. CAJAL

Please, take a seat. Can you tell me what's happening right now.

THOMAS

I just left the memory simulation thing. We're in therapy.

DR. CAJAL

Okay good. I know that question sounds silly but this is new to all of us. It's SOP to make sure we're on the same page.

THOMAS

No no, I get that.

DR. CAJAL

Can I get you anything, a glass of water? Do you need a few minutes to compose yourself, relax?

THOMAS

No. No thank you... Wow, that was... That was intense. It all seemed so real.

DR. CAJAL

You did quite well for your first time. You seemed cognizant of the scenario at the beginning. You directed a question toward me, as we practiced. But

THOMAS

I know. Touching wasn't allowed this time. I just... I guess I couldn't help myself.

DR. CAJAL

Yes. That's common for patients' first experiences. But that getting "lost," as you called it, is the reason why we urge you not to touch the personas, especially not as intimately as you did.

THOMAS

Damn, I'm sorry.

DR. CAJAL

It's okay. It's just important to remember that you're not quite awake and conscious in there but you aren't exactly asleep and unconscious either. So these sorts of lost episodes can occur and I think this process will be most effective if we do everything we can to avoid them, at least for now. Remember, I can't communicate with you very well when you do lose awareness. We also want to minimize the number of times the personas break character on their own. You'll learn to initiate that in time, and it'll be helpful, but not yet.

THOMAS

Okay, yeah... I'll be able to keep control in the future. It was just so... I lost awareness in the moment but I remember it pretty clearly... What was all that about the snow? It didn't make any sense. And why did she tell me she wasn't there? I wasn't expecting her to break character so suddenly. I thought it was just a test run with a normal memory.

DR. CAJAL

Well, the personas will pick up on signals that you've lost awareness.

THOMAS

Signals?

DR. CAJAL

When your awareness that you're in a simulated memory subsides the brain exhibits distinct neural oscillations. The personas can pick up on this. Then they'll either react in such a way as to shock you out of this lost state, or they'll recall other fragments of your memories to induce this shock. Someone else that wasn't actually in the memory might show up for example.

THOMAS

A protective measure to keep me from losing awareness unintentionally?

DR. CAJAL

You can call it that. In this case the persona began to employ nonsensical speech fragments to wake you up. I wouldn't think too deeply about any of that, the snow. This first session was intended only really to acclimate you to the process. But, I'm curious to hear about it from your perspective. Do you recall losing awareness?

THOMAS

Uhhh. I'm not really sure. When I lost sight of the situation, I still sorta knew what was happening, but in a way, like I was, remembering a dream. Does that make sense?

DR. CAJAL

It does. So you were still partially aware of what was going on, but your grasp on which experiences were the real ones and which were being simulated became fuzzy?

THOMAS

Yeah you could say that. I knew that a memory simulation happened at some point but that part felt like the dream. I woke up into the memory and it felt real, so I let myself get lost.

DR. CAJAL

And when Lou told you she wasn't there you came to. What was that like?

THOMAS

It was like that feeling you get when you're caught in a stare and then snap out of it. Or like waking up into a movie that I suddenly realized I was directing.

DR. CAJAL

Patients use that analogy a lot. It's more helpful to think of it as a stage play where everything that's happening is happening in real time and all parties involved are equally engaged in time and space. You have a live audience, right? Me, the technicians. The characters, the AI personas themselves are performing with you in the moment.

DR. CAJAL (Continued)

At any point they can break from the script, if they so choose, unlike a movie where everything is predetermined. As we progress through the trial we'll experiment with some of these techniques. I'll have you relive a memory as it happened at first, but then I might have you interact with the personas as they really exist, here, in the present. We'll also experiment with controlled loss of awareness. There has been some success with this technique, it appears to provoke greater catharsis.

THOMAS

It felt strange this time, but I can see it being helpful if it's planned.

DR. CAJAL

It sounds like you still had partial awareness today though. That's a good sign. We'll go over some best practices for the ADMs again on your future visits.

THOMAS

Sounds good.

DR. CAJAL

So. This acclimation went well, even if it did go off script a bit. Let's shift focus and talk about why you're here. I have some notes from our intake session but why don't you remind me.

THOMAS

I mean, well in general I think therapy is just a good idea.

DR. CAJAL

I agree with you there. Not because I'm biased.

THOMAS

I haven't been doing so well since my buddy killed himself... and then my engagement fell apart.

DR. CAJAL

Remind me of the timing of these two incidents.

THOMAS

Wolf was about 18 months ago. Lou left about 6 months ago. You saw there in the simulation, what happened with Wolf fucked me up and then I fucked us up.

DR. CAJAL

Yes, as I understand it from the intake, you became emotionally detached but also angry and highly irritable after your friend's suicide. You said you believed that, quote, "I buried the sadness inside and it found its way out by force, as anger. You know, some real toxic masculinity bullshit," unquote. Hmm. You're still working through this anger you explained. And one of the aims for what we can do together is discover healthy ways to process this. I will say, that you're self aware about this is impressive. It gives us a solid foundation to use as our starting point.

THOMAS

Yeah. I think so. I've been depressed quite a bit these last few months as well.

DR. CAJAL

This sounds like progress you've made on your own. You were likely always dealing with this depression but in unhealthy ways. The anger, the rage. Not allowing it to transform into these all the time was the first step. I applaud your progress in this. What is it? You look a bit confused.

THOMAS

I'm just remembering what Lou said in there. That I stopped loving myself. I don't remember her ever saying that. Was that something from my own subconscious, or was that generated by the AI? I guess I'm having trouble understanding where the persona's speech and actions come from.

DR. CAJAL

Well we can't really determine the source of a persona's words so clearly. Lou's AI persona pulls data from your conscious episodic memories, data compiled about Lou herself, in this case what's available to us in the public domain, which is still a lot, and your subconscious mind.

THOMAS

So I might've basically been dreaming that Lou told me that I stopped loving myself?

DR. CAJAL

That's possible. But like I said, the models are designed so that we don't really know which source they came from. We know this didn't come from an actual memory, correct?

THOMAS

Not that I can remember. It seemed so...

DR. CAJAL

The models may have derived that this is something Lou would have actually said in that situation based on your memories of Lou combined with the data the model has access to. Or, it might have been something that you have been trying to communicate to yourself subconsciously.

THOMAS

And we can't tell which.

DR. CAJAL

No, and this is intentional. Well, I'm not actually sure if that was intentional or if it's just impossible for us to tell due to their complexity. But regardless, we don't want this to detract from the larger goals of the process.

THOMAS

Now that I've actually been in a simulation, I'm not sure how it's supposed to help. I can see the potential but it's not clear. It never really made much sense to me in the abstract. I mean

DR. CAJAL

So before we go any further I want to reiterate: my practice still places priority on these sessions between you and I. If you ever feel that the simulations are unhelpful, or worse, harmful, then we'll stop. But, I see them as a tool

THOMAS

An expensive tool

DR. CAJAL

To say the least. But it's a tool nonetheless. One of the uses of this tool is to discover a new shared vocabulary that will allow us to explore your issues. Today for example, a poignant phrase used was that you "stopped loving yourself." We don't know exactly how this originated in today's session, but it may serve as a new way to conceptualize and communicate your emotional issues. You and I talk, that's primarily what therapy is. The simulations will help us discover new ways to talk to each other. It's also a tool for catharsis. Sometimes, just reliving a memory again, and feeling the emotions again but reacting to them differently, in a more healthy manner, can help you heal and grow.

THOMAS

Yeah I think the catharsis is what I imagined. I like the idea of uncovering a new language too.

DR. CAJAL

And also, Thomas, some of what you experience may be your subconscious self reaching out. In this simulation, when Lou said to you that she knew that you couldn't return to her in the way that she needed you, this may have been a repressed thought that you've had.

THOMAS

What do you mean?

DR. CAJAL

Do you think it's possible, perhaps, that you felt so damaged that you believed, deep down, that Lou deserved more, more than you were capable of giving? Don't answer that just yet. The point here is that it doesn't matter if this is coming from you or the AI persona. The point is that we now have this new way of thinking about your situation, and we can explore it how we see fit.

THOMAS

Thank you Dr. Cajal. That was helpful. I'm excited to continue this. I see that the time is up.

DR. CAJAL

Ah, I'm sorry, that shouldn't be visible. I'll keep track of time from here on. This session was good. For next session and possibly the one after we won't be doing a simulation. We have enough to discuss, you and I. So, next Tuesday? Same time still works?

THOMAS

Yep, sounds good. Thank you again.

DR. CAJAL

You're welcome. Oh look at that, it started raining. Be careful on your way home.

THOMAS

You too. Take care.

DR. CAJAL

Bye.

(Lights fade and end of Act I.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

(G's apartment. Knock at the door.
Enter THOMAS.)

G

Yooooo, what up t-bone?

THOMAS

G. Long time man.

G

You ain't kiddin'. Glad you could stop by. You want a drink?

THOMAS

Sure, whatever you're having.

G

Black label on the rocks.

(G gets drink.)

THOMAS

Perfect.

G

What's up my brotha? How you been?

THOMAS

Not bad not bad. Not as fucked up about Lou as I was last time I saw you. You know... gettin' there. You?

G

I'm good man. Busy as hell with school but that shit's keepin' me outta trouble. Still at the same job. Soon enough.

THOMAS

Oh, I don't think I was in therapy yet when I saw you last. Or was I?

G

Nah, you mentioned you were gonna start soon though. How's it been?

THOMAS

It's been good. You ever hear of ADM simulation?
Autonomous deep memories?

G

I think I saw some science article you posted about
it. I don't really remember though.

THOMAS

I basically go in a semi-dream like state and interact
with people from my past. Mostly Lou so far.

G

Ohhh shit, yeah I remember that. Sounds fuckin' crazy.
I thought it was all still experimental?

THOMAS

Well it is, they like experimenting on vets.

G

You ain't afraid you'll get stuck in there? Shit, how
do you know you ain't in a simulation right now?

THOMAS

My subconscious would never build a fantasy world with
your dumbass in it.

G

You, fuck you - you'd be lucky!

THOMAS

No seriously, it's been helpful. Cathartic. You can't
touch the people though. First time I went in I
touched Lou and kinda forgot that it was just a
simulation. Then she started saying some weird shit.

G

I don't know man, if it helps it helps. Just be
careful. I feel like if I did that I'd get addicted.
You're gonna start seeing those devices on the black
market. Everyone stuck in their own little fantasies.

THOMAS

It doesn't really work like that but yeah I see what
you're saying.

G

So yo, can you like, fuck the people in your memories?
You try that?

THOMAS

No, I just said you can't touch 'em. It causes you to
lose awareness. And the therapist and a technician is
observing it.

G

Oh that part I don't like. I'd wanna be alone. Do my
thing.

THOMAS

It's too dangerous. At least this kind of
simulation... So what's up with school? What classes
are you taking?

G

Intro classes, bio, philosophy, music history. Oh, and
creative writing. Yeah, 4. Maybe 5 next semester.

THOMAS

Sounds like a nice mix.

G

Yeah it is. I'm feelin' this philosophy class more
than I thought I would. Prolly cause of the professor.
This is the first thing she said to us, check it,
"There is only one really serious philosophical
problem, and that is suicide." Isn't that awesome? I
didn't expect that.

THOMAS

Yeah real fuckin' awesome. Get outta here with that
bullshit... Stupid shit.

G

Chill.

THOMAS

No you fuckin' chill G. Like suicide's some abstract
ivory tower thing... Fuck.

G

Ohhh shit. Man I'm sorry...

THOMAS

No my bad.

G

I forgot about your boy. I wouldn't... I wouldn't have. Shit

THOMAS

No it's alright. I shouldn't get so angry. I gotta self sooth, what my doc says. I'm working on this in therapy, about Wolf and getting angry and shit.

G

I forgot. My bad.

THOMAS

No, really. I like that quote. Just, I don't know. Sorry man... That is a pretty cool way to start the class.

G

Yeah, right? That's what I'm saying'. Yo remember back in the day when we used to get fucked up and read quotes like that and poetry and shit. We gotta do that again.

THOMAS

Yeah man. Why not tonight? What else are we gonna do? Anything else from school you wanna share?

G

Ahhh. In a few weeks I'll send you some stuff from creative writing. Oh, here's another quote by the same writer.

THOMAS

The suicide writer?

G

Yeah. "In the depths of winter I finally learned there was in me an invincible summer." I love that one.

THOMAS

In the depths of winter. Yeah. I like it. Reminds me of something Lou said in the first ADM. She said the pictures were underneath the snow.

G

What does that mean?

THOMAS

I have no idea.

G

Greeaatt. So your memories are fuckin' with you sayin' all sorta weird shit?

THOMAS

Well, it's actually a defense. If you get lost in the memory, the AI persona shocks you into awareness.

G

AI? Wait. I thought it was just your memory?

THOMAS

Well, my conscious memories, my subconscious, and an AI model of Lou built on all the publicly available data on her. Lou wouldn't let me use her private data, she doesn't want to take to me at all actually. You believe that shit? But the doc says there's more than enough public data on her, on everyone really, to construct an accurate AI persona.

G

Dude. Who comes up with this shit? I shoulda got into programming back in the day.

THOMAS

You still can. Never too late.

G

True. Maybe I'll take a class. You want another?

THOMAS

Sure. More ice.

(G gets drinks.)

G

Oh, you remember that one poet we read a lot of back in the day?

THOMAS

The poet poet? DH?

G

Yeah, we read one of his in class. I think you'll like this one. We never read it together but it made me think of you and our conversation about you starting' therapy. Shit, lemme find it.

THOMAS

It's a poetry class?

G

Nah, we just started with poetry. Playwriting next. Here it is, wait, yeah this is it. It's called The Healing:

*I am not a mechanism; an assembly of various sections.
And it is not because the mechanism is working
wrongly, that I am ill.
I am ill because of wounds deep to the soul, to the
deep emotional self
and the wounds to the soul take a long, long time,
only time can help
And patience, and a certain difficult repentance,
Long difficult repentance, realization of life's
mistake, and the freeing oneself from the endless
repetition of the mistake
Which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.*

THOMAS

That's it? Are you kidding me? What's the thing?

G

Huh? What thing?

THOMAS

The thing. The mistake that mankind has chosen to sanctify?

G

The fuck you talkin' about?

THOMAS

What? You just read the poem! You've read it before! It mentions some mistake mankind has chosen to sanctify.

G

Shit I guess I didn't really think about that.

THOMAS

Dude. This is why I hate poetry sometimes. I'm gonna be trying to figure out what it is for the next week.

G

Maybe that's the mistake my brotha.

THOMAS

What is?

G

Thinkin' that there's a thing. Just a single thing. Or a thing at all.

THOMAS

Hmmmm.

G

Yeah, right? Galaxy brain.

THOMAS

No, no. If that's the mistake, then the mistake is just one thing, that thought, but then that thought itself wouldn't be true.

G

What?

THOMAS

Nevermind man. We gotta stop talking about this. I'll go crazy.

G

Oh I gotcha now. If the mistake is thinking it's only one thing, then it wouldn't be a mistake because it would actually be one thing.

THOMAS

Yeah I think that's it.

G

Right. Fuckin' black label for the win baby.

THOMAS

Oh man, I gotta come by more often.

G

You really do brotha... So you said you weren't as fucked up about Lou. I'm glad the therapy is helping. Sucks seein' you all fucked up, but I never know what to say, or how to help. You know?

THOMAS

It's all good G. You've helped me more than you'll ever know. I just hope I'm there for you in some intangible not spoken kinda way when you need me.

G

Nope. I have no idea what that means.

THOMAS

Oh screw off.

G

Nah man, I'm kiddin'. You my boy. Ok. I gotta break the seal. Here, flip through this, find something to read aloud.

THOMAS

Good idea.

G

Oh shit, I think I get the one mistake.

THOMAS

No, please G. Just go piss. Please.

(Lights fade and end of Act II.)

ACT III

SCENE 1

(DR. CAJAL's office. Knock at the door.)

DR. CAJAL

Come in, come in.

THOMAS

Hey doc, how's it going?

DR. CAJAL

Hello Thomas. I'm fine, thank you. How are you?

THOMAS

Good, I'm good.

DR. CAJAL

Please, sit down. Can I get you anything?

THOMAS

No thanks.

DR. CAJAL

So, how has work been? You mentioned last time you've had some trouble focusing.

THOMAS

Better. Much better. I think establishing more of a routine and some solid habits really helped. Thanks for the suggestion.

DR. CAJAL

Wonderful. Yes this is something that's always helped me. Meditation too, but I know you have trouble with that.

THOMAS

I tried again. I was able to sit for a few minutes. I'm gonna keep trying.

DR. CAJAL

What about that app I mentioned?

THOMAS

Not yet, I will though.

DR. CAJAL

Let me know how it goes.

THOMAS

Will do.

DR. CAJAL

Okay. So. Today.

THOMAS

I'm a bit nervous.

DR. CAJAL

Yes, understandably. We've made, in my opinion, great progress over the last 8.

THOMAS

I think so too.

DR. CAJAL

The ADMS of significant moments you had with Lou and Wolf have been therapeutic and a source of growth. But what we've been talking about revisiting today...

THOMAS

I've thought about it a lot. I still want to do it.

DR. CAJAL

I know. Your mind is made up. And I'm committed to it as well. But this particular memory with Wolf, your last, the day before he killed himself... I typically advise against simulating memories with this... capacity to re-traumatize. We just don't know. I would like to discuss again the nature of this kind of ADM.

THOMAS

I appreciate the concern doc. I'll be fine, really.

DR. CAJAL

Yes, but... Remember, it's not just you I'm worried about. Wolf's AI persona has been built up out of all data available, including the data leading right up to his suicide. It could be hostile, fragmented.

THOMAS

Wolf was a hostile fragmented guy.

DR. CAJAL

It's not Wolf, we can't forget that. The persona is modeled after human beings in general and Wolf in particular. The human being part won't want to cease to exist any more than we do, usually. I'm worried about the internal conflict this might cause as the model begins to realize that its particular persona in this ADM is suicidal.

THOMAS

Colonel Brooks mentioned this in the pre-val. But she made it sound like it wouldn't be that big of a deal.

DR. CAJAL

Her primary concern is the ADM simulation trial. My concern is you. I don't think she was sugarcoating anything, but, our biases tend to color our judgments in matters like these.

THOMAS

I see. Well if you don't want to

DR. CAJAL

No, no. I'm on board. I just wanted to reiterate the unique nature of this ADM. And of course best practices and prohibitions are even more important this time. We've had some success with letting go of awareness and breaking character but I don't want to take a chance with either of these techniques today.

THOMAS

No, certainly not.

DR. CAJAL

Okay. So. Let's talk a bit about your memory of that day. What do you recall?

THOMAS

I was in the city for work. I hadn't seen Wolf in about a year and a half. Since I got out. He'd gotten out about six months before I saw him. Maybe a little more. We'd been planning to catch up since I found out I'd be traveling through. We were gonna go grab dinner somewhere but at the last minute he said he had to work late or something. He told me to stop by his place later on instead. When I got there he kinda looked like shit.

DR. CAJAL

In what way?

THOMAS

Like he hadn't slept. But also like he didn't need to sleep. He was just, on edge. But that wasn't unusual for him, for any of us just a few months home really. We caught up a bit, work life stuff. He was working construction. Wasn't doing much if anything social. If he was he didn't mention it.

DR. CAJAL

How did you feel, seeing him again?

THOMAS

It was like we were still in. I felt like a different person, well, a version of myself from the past. It was only a year and half as a civilian, but I really did feel like a different person. Wolf didn't see a civvy standing there though, and I didn't want him to. Not in a bad way or anything. But, I don't know, it's hard to explain.

DR. CAJAL

I understand, I think. We all do this to a certain extent, present different versions of ourselves to different people or groups of people. There's my professional self, my familial self, the self that only my partner sees. I can't imagine what this is like when you've been to war. That may be the most radical form of this kind of compartmentalization.

THOMAS

Yeah...

DR. CAJAL

So you caught up. He seemed a bit on edge but not abnormally so, at least from what you remembered of him. And then what?

THOMAS

I asked him if he heard the news about the GFBs. It happened earlier that week.

DR. CAJAL

The ban?

THOMAS

Yeah, against the use of gamma fiber blockers in combat. They were being used pretty widely, by all sides. Earlier that week the Geneva conventions made it official. It was kind of a big deal. The atrocities in the Horn played a role. We were using them already back when I was in. Not as much, but still.

DR. CAJAL

These were the meds that blocked the association of episodic memories to emotional valence, correct? Or was that the other one?

THOMAS

That's it. They were pushed as a vaccine to PTSD. It made some of us into fucking robots. Excuse me, sorry.

DR. CAJAL

Don't apologize.

THOMAS

A bunch of us ate them up, no questions asked. But Wolf and I never did. We talked about it a lot. I convinced him they were a bad idea. So when they got banned it felt like...

DR. CAJAL

A vindication? You saw the dangers and refused to buy into it.

THOMAS

Yeah. We weren't officially allowed to take them anyway. But we weren't allowed to take speed either and that got us through most fire watches. There was always a guy or two at each unit that had a supply, "prevent PTSD," all that bullshit. I don't like conspiracy theories but it always felt coordinated, top-down.

DR. CAJAL

That sort of situation. It wouldn't have been the first.

THOMAS

No... I know rationally that he didn't blame me. Well. I got out before the shit really hit the fan over there. Wolf wasn't as lucky.

THOMAS (Continued)

He might still be here if I hadn't convinced him not to take the damn things.

DR. CAJAL

If we could only know such counterfactuals.

THOMAS

Yeah. But, you know. And now the anger isn't as powerful. The sadness is still there. Progress right?

DR. CAJAL

Progress, yes. I want to remind you though, you always have the space here for anger. And you should always keep that space for yourself. You recognize it as such, process it with the tools we've discovered together, self soothing, one of our healthy outlets. But you also attempt to recognize where that anger is coming from.

THOMAS

With Wolf it's always been the guilt.

DR. CAJAL

Guilt is a complex thing. It's the sadness you feel about something outside yourself, something that you've caused that you're mad at yourself about. It's this outward sadness and this inward anger together. And just when you think you've begun to process that sadness, the anger pulls you back down.

DR. CAJAL

You know what I like the most about talking to you? You've never told me that it wasn't my fault. That's the first thing anyone else says. "It wasn't your fault. It wasn't your fault. You shouldn't blame yourself." No one understands. That's the last fucking thing I want to hear.

DR. CAJAL

My job isn't to convince you of this or that. It's to afford you the space and tools necessary to enable you to convince yourself of the things that you need to convince yourself of when the time comes.

THOMAS

Quite the job description.

DR. CAJAL

And I only went \$200,000 in debt to earn it. But.

THOMAS

It wasn't just about the GFBs though. He might still be here if I noticed something that night. I mean, he was gonna kill himself the next day. I had to have been able to help.

DR. CAJAL

Perhaps. Perhaps you could've prevented his suicide the next day. But what about the next week, the next month, the next year?

THOMAS

Yeah... My friend read something to me recently that he read in school, "the first philosophical problem is suicide." Something like that. It kind of set me off, just felt a rush of emotion, thoughts about Wolf. I was able to calm down quickly, I think, thanks to this, you. But, I don't know. I've been thinking about it a lot.

DR. CAJAL

The reaction you had, or the quote itself?

THOMAS

The reaction. Trying to understand why I popped off.

DR. CAJAL

Was this before or after we discussed revisiting this memory?

THOMAS

Shortly after.

DR. CAJAL

It sounds like something that you were thinking about, you had a bit of anger you needed to get out. Don't beat yourself up over it. Remember, it's important to keep that space for yourself, as long as you take appropriate actions afterward. The goal is to reduce the occurrence of these sorts of episodes and to contain them, not to avoid them entirely. And of course, to avoid directing them at others.

THOMAS

Yeah, you're right. My friend understood. It wasn't too bad.

DR. CAJAL

We'll have to begin the simulation soon. What else can you tell me about this night?

THOMAS

We spoke about the GFBS a bit, but Wolf seemed uninterested. We reminisced about the platoon, some of our buddies. We got into to a little argument about some of the mottos. It was playful, at least it seemed playful. Wolf did that a lot. He hated that Rah Rah shit by the time he got out. That was about it. He seemed to just shut off near the end of the night but he worked late, just assumed he was tired. Wasn't really there too long.

DR. CAJAL

And the next day. How did you find out about what happened?

THOMAS

It was two days later. I got a voicemail from someone we both served with. Gunny Taggart. I knew someone was dead, Gunny doesn't call to say hi and shoot the shit. I thought for sure it was someone from my unit still overseas. I never would've thought. It felt surreal. I... I didn't

DR. CAJAL

Take a minute, please.

THOMAS

No, no. It's okay.

DR. CAJAL

I'm going to leave for a bit. I'll give you more time than usual to center yourself, relax. This was a good recollection. I'll try to wait for your cue to come out of the ADM, but, due to the nature of this one, I may pull you out myself. I hope you understand this. Can I get you anything?

THOMAS

No thank you. Yeah, I understand. Thanks.

DR. CAJAL

Okay then Thomas. I'll give you some time, about 20 minutes. Then we'll begin. Let me know if you need anything.

THOMAS

Sounds good.

(Lights fade.)

ACT III

SCENE 2

(Darkness)

DR. CAJAL

Take a deep breath Thomas. Go in 3, 2, 1.

(Lights on. THOMAS stands outside front door to apartment.)

THOMAS

It begins when I knock I guess... (Knocks on door.)

WOLF

Fuckin' Quine. Get in here.

THOMAS

What's up devil dog?

WOLF

Get outta here with that shit. Dude sorry I had to cancel dinner. I was shot.

THOMAS

No worries. Good to see you man. How've you been?

WOLF

Keepin' busy. Working construction. Have you been to the conference yet, you said it was at the AlphaZ center?

THOMAS

Not yet. Starts tomorrow.

WOLF

When you get there check out the half a high rise to the west. That's where I'm at.

THOMAS

Nice, will do. Doing what? Drywall?

WOLF

Yeah mostly, little bit of everything though. So what the fuck is this conference for? You said product management?

THOMAS

Yeah, technical product management. I basically coordinate the tech, design, and marketing teams at my company.

WOLF

I think my cousin's boyfriend does that. He's a real asshole.

THOMAS

Not a job requirement.

WOLF

Sounds like dealing with too many people.

THOMAS

It can be frustrating sometimes. Hey, you heard about the GFB ban?

WOLF

Yeah. You were right. Fuckin' things were bad for the soul.

THOMAS

Yeah it's crazy. They were so wide spread when we were in. It always seemed like everyone knew but looked the other way.

WOLF

Yeah...

THOMAS

I never really saw the effect they had in the field. Did you see anything like what they say happened in the Horn?

WOLF

Nah.

THOMAS

It's a good thing you were able to stay away from em.

WOLF

Yeah. it was.

THOMAS

Yeah... Hey you know what I was thinking about the other day? Remember that time Fruhl swam through the shit creek?

WOLF

What the fuck was wrong with that guy? You know you're fucked when I'm asking that about you. What's he up to? You know?

THOMAS

Wife and kids. Straight arrow.

WOLF

No fuckin' way. Fruhl?

THOMAS

Yeah. Saw it online. He's still Fruhl though. He posted a picture of his wife giving birth with the caption "Pain is temporary, pride is forever."

WOLF

She musta loved that.

THOMAS

What kind of person falls for a Fruhl? You know she's just as crazy.

WOLF

Shit. You remember Allum after DJ hadda be medvaced out?

THOMAS

Oh god, the torture.

WOLF

(Sings:) "It don't matter if you're black or white..."
For what? 8 hours! Man, that's some way to process your fear of being killed by the next mortar.

THOMAS

I still can't believe he didn't get his ass kicked for that. That was so fucking annoying. But, you know. We needed that I guess. Some jarhead singing Micheal Jackson for 8 hours straight, letting him have a breakdown, taking our minds off DJ's body parts flying everywhere.

THOMAS (Continued)

I've never even tried to share this story with a civvy. They just wouldn't. Nah.

WOLF

Right? They'd just think you're crazy. Which is true, but still... At least we understand each other's crazy... Hey you speak to Gunny at all still? Or Jinx?

THOMAS

Neither. Last I heard Jinx was in rehab. He didn't get discharged, they're actually gonna help him. Gunny, no idea.

WOLF

No discharge, good. Least they could do.

THOMAS

Semper Fi for once, in the other direction.

WOLF

Semper full of shit. They're just protecting their own asses.

THOMAS

Not always man, not always. The Corps' looking out for its own this time, doing the right thing.

WOLF

Bullshit Q. You know everyone in the damn chain of command was poppin' that shit out in the field. They had to keep him quiet. You can't discharge a whole fuckin' unit.

THOMAS

Yeah. Maybe you're right. I don't know though Wolf. I try not to be so cynical - it just makes me more depressed. I wanna feel it sometimes. The brotherhood.

WOLF

Feel what? Semper Fi to what? I hated that shit. What did Gunny used to say? Semper Fi do or die for god country corps? You know what? God never knew you, country forgot about you, and the corps, the corps's in your blood. Like a fuckin' virus.

THOMAS

Semper Fi to each other Wolf. That's what it always was.

WOLF

Yeah Q. To each other... Semper Fi.

THOMAS

I'm just glad we're both out, safe.

WOLF

Yeah.

THOMAS

Alright Wolf, you look pretty shot.

WOLF

Yeah Q. My bad. It's been a rough week. I'm about to pass out.

THOMAS

That drywall must be kicking your ass. I'll leave you be, let you rest. I'm here until Friday though, we should grab dinner before I leave. Maybe tomorrow.

WOLF

Maybe. I'll hit you up.

THOMAS

Sounds good. Take care devil.

WOLF

Be safe Q... Wait.

THOMAS

What's up?

WOLF

You're really gonna fuckin' leave me here. Now?

THOMAS

I...

WOLF

You fuckin' left me here?

THOMAS

I didn't know. I didn't know.

DR. CAJAL

(Out of sight:) Thomas

THOMAS

Not yet! Please! Why Wolf?

WOLF

You didn't see the shit I saw.

THOMAS

What?

WOLF

I was the only motherfucker Q, the only motherfucker not taking GFBs in the platoon. You know the only thing worse than combat?

THOMAS

I'm sorry Wolf.

WOLF

Combat with 42 motherfuckers with no goddam emotional connection to murder! Savage fucking robots with rifles.

THOMAS

I didn't, I wouldn't ha-

WOLF

It's okay Q. It's over. It's done. But now. I'm done. I'm done. I don't come back from that. I didn't come home.

THOMAS

I wish, I wish I knew how to help. I'm sorry Wolf. I'm so-

WOLF

You don't get it Thomas. There's nothing to do.

THOMAS

I could've convinced you to take the GFBs.

WOLF

Are you fuckin' crazy!? That would've killed me quicker. There were no living humans left on that field. You saved me.

WOLF (Continued)

We were shooting down everything with a pulse... with no conscience to salvage the last bits of humanity we had left! Do you know what memories like that do

THOMAS

But

WOLF

We all wake up Q, every fuckin' day, and we answer the same fuckin' question, whether we know it or not: "Am I gonna live today?" And tomorrow, my answer is no. And there's nothing you or anyone else will do to change that. It's my answer. It's my choice. No! I'm done!

(Pulls out and puts gun to head.)

How fuckin' selfish for anyone else to think they can answer that for me. How fucking selfish Thomas!? Tell me!! How fucking selfish!?

DR. CAJAL

Thomas, breathe in.

THOMAS

No not yet! Wolf No!

(Blackout. Gunshot. End of Act III.)

ACT IV

SCENE 1

(DR. CAJAL's apartment. Enter EVELYN.)

EVELYN

Wait until you see the numbers we got!

DR. CAJAL

Hello to you too.

EVELYN

We might actually get the amendment passed! We received more than 7 thousand signatures in the last 4 days. Can you believe that!?

DR. CAJAL

Oh Evie that's fantastic. I knew you'd get it passed. When you're determined to do something...

EVELYN

Thank you Ray. I don't think I would've gotten this close without you.

DR. CAJAL

Of course you would've. Community organizing is what you were put here to do.

EVELYN

Aww, I appreciate that. But I don't know Ray, without your emotional support I might've given up already. I just... I love you.

DR. CAJAL

Come'ere.

(They embrace.)

DR. CAJAL

When, not if, but when it gets passed we'll take a trip up north. How's that sound?

EVELYN

I'd love that.

DR. CAJAL

Good. We could both use it.

EVELYN

Everything okay?

DR. CAJAL

It's nothing specific, the usual doctor/patient emotional fatigue.

EVELYN

I wish we could talk about it. Sometimes I feel like I can't really be there for you in the way you might need me.

DR. CAJAL

No it's fine. You're an amazing partner. I have my own therapist for this reason; she knows the specific struggles in our field that I can't share with anyone. I just... You know...

EVELYN

Oh Ray you do seem more stressed than usual. I've been so wrapped up in the amendment. Here how's this.
(Dances silly.)

DR. CAJAL

That always helps.

EVELYN

Every time I hear your laugh I get the same feeling as the first time... I'm going to grab some wine, do you want any? (Gets wine.)

DR. CAJAL

Awww. No thanks. I guess... I wonder sometimes, about my own biases. I guess that's been on my mind. You know what, yeah I'll have a glass.

EVELYN

What do you mean biases?

DR. CAJAL

As a doctor, I'm there to do everything for my patients. But as a scientist, as a scientist I want to know more about this, the human condition.

DR. CAJAL (Continued)

These seem to come into conflict more often now, especially with the ADM trials. When patients tell me not to pull them out, I won't, even against my own judgment that it might have reached a dangerous point. But I want to see what happens. Those dangerous moments are often the most illuminating.

EVELYN

But the way you've described it, they're not really in that much danger. There's no immediate danger except really, what, getting lost in a dream?

DR. CAJAL

Yeah there's no immediate physical or mental danger. But emotionally, letting these memories get out of hand and go in unexpected directions. There's always the risk that the patient will suffer further traumas if we don't navigate these situations carefully... Did you hear about the GFB ban?

EVELYN

Yeah I read about it in The Post a few weeks ago. What about it?

DR. CAJAL

It's so terrible what happened to those troops, and those people.

EVELYN

I can't imagine. Thank the goddesses they've banned it. It sounds like even the black markets are complying.

DR. CAJAL

War is the clear case of this kind of tragedy. We saw this coming. But lately I've felt like we undergo this same process in the sciences.

EVELYN

What process?

DR. CAJAL

Blunting our emotions, on purpose, to achieve the mission. In this case of acquiring knowledge and understanding. No matter the human cost.

EVELYN

But the ADMs, the trials are being held with extreme care. That's how you made it sound.

DR. CAJAL

Yes, but I don't know if that's true or if that's what I want to be true. I don't really know what's going on in all the other simulation practices. And who knows what the DoD has been doing with them.

EVELYN

Don't lose sight of all the good you're doing Ray. You're not the DoD. And it doesn't mean you've blunted your emotions just because you listen to your patients when they ask you to let them stay in there a little longer.

DR. CAJAL

Okay, maybe you're right. I'm just not used to technology playing such a large role in my practice.

EVELYN

Of course you're worried about this... You're the most self aware person I know! And one of the most ethical. This dichotomy will always be a part of science I guess, that's why science needs people like you. I'm not worried as much about science blunting emotions as I am about profit though. The social media narcissism epidemic and data explosion of the teens and 20s, the VR isolationism in the 30s. I really hope we've learned our lesson and the cycle doesn't repeat with this ADM thing.

DR. CAJAL

There's been no talk of this ever becoming a consumer product. The patent was locked by the WHO.

EVELYN

Let's hope it stays that way. But when there's money...

DR. CAJAL

Let's hope... I'm pretty hungry, would you eat with me if I made the stew you like?

EVELYN

You read my mind.

DR. CAJAL

Okay, I'll make that.

EVELYN

Leave me the dishes.

DR. CAJAL

I forgot to mention, one of my patients shared a Camus quote in session about a month ago. The one that begins *The Myth*, about suicide. He didn't really know what it was from so I suggested he find out and read for context.

EVELYN

Ohhh really? That's funny - you should've told him to read Kierkegaard instead though. Or Dostoevsky.

(Lights fade and end of Act IV.)

ACT V

SCENE 1

(DR. CAJAL's office. DR. CAJAL finishes writing in a notebook, THOMAS sits across.)

DR. CAJAL

So your trip was good?

THOMAS

It was nice. It was colder than I expected I didn't pack for that. The product launch was successful. We even had time to relax and do some sightseeing.

DR. CAJAL

Congratulations. That's always nice on a work trip. My partner and I went up to the north shore last week. It was a much needed reprieve.

THOMAS

Maybe that's where I'll go when I take an actual vacation.

DR. CAJAL

I can give you some good recommendations if you do. So. This is our last session together, after what? 13 months now?

THOMAS

Yeah almost to the day. Wow.

DR. CAJAL

Have you contacted Dr. Kornblith yet?

THOMAS

No not yet. I think it has to go through the VA. Once I finish moving and get settled in I'll reach out though.

DR. CAJAL

He's an amazing psychologist, and a genuinely good person. He hasn't been working with ADMs quite as long as we have but he's invested in the trial's credibility. His penchant for skepticism will appeal to you. You two are a good match.

THOMAS

I hope it works out.

DR. CAJAL

So how've you been? What's on your mind?

THOMAS

I've been okay. I haven't really had any outbursts lately. I'm making real progress there. You know, it comes and goes. I feel it, let it pass, or take it out at the gym. But I've really been able to keep it to myself and not take it out on anyone.

DR. CAJAL

Thomas your progress is clear. You've done really well here. I'm proud of you.

THOMAS

Oh, there was one incident. I felt terrible. I went to get an oil change and when I went to pay, the cashier asked for my email. I told her I'd rather not and she said that I had to. I think I politely refused again but when she doubled down I kinda flipped out. I don't even remember what I was saying but I slowly realized that she was just... Scared. She didn't say anything. She just rang me out.

DR. CAJAL

What was

THOMAS

But she didn't need my damn email! I was right! You believe that shit?! When I got in my car I felt really horrible though. I eventually went inside and apologized. I tried to explain that I had a lot on my mind. She seemed to appreciate that.

DR. CAJAL

I was about to ask, what was going through your mind before this incident? Did you find yourself fixated on anything?

THOMAS

I'd been a bit depressed leading up to this. With the move coming up... being further away from Lou, even though she hasn't spoken to me in over a year now. It just, hurt like it used to. I cried on the way home.

DR. CAJAL

You won't always succeed in controlling your emotions but I think this was a positive experience. You recognized the source of the outburst, you apologized for it. You held yourself accountable and gave yourself the space to feel the underlying sadness.

THOMAS

Yeah doc. Thank you, really. A year ago the thought of controlling my anger and crying in my car... Never. But the sadness. It just doesn't end.

DR. CAJAL

How has your motivation been?

THOMAS

Two days last week I didn't really do anything. I (air quotes) "worked" remotely, ate like crap, watched T.V., ignored friends and family. It's a cycle I can see so clearly happening, but I just become powerless.

DR. CAJAL

We've talked about medication before and decided against it but I want to remind us that it's an option. It's a last resort, but if you find yourself unable to function... This doesn't sound as bad as it was last year however. This was also caused, you think, by moving further away from Lou?

THOMAS

Yeah.

DR. CAJAL

All we can do is take it day by day. It was important to me that we discovered the tools for you to control your anger, and to process it. But the sadness. Sometimes the sadness needs to run its course. The tool is... we let it run its course. But as it does we practice being aware of it and pursuing our goals despite the pull into nothingness that we may feel.

THOMAS

Yeah... I know Lou doesn't want to talk to me. She's happy now, I think. Maybe engaged, I couldn't tell from the picture. It just doesn't make sense to me that I'm still so attached. I don't even want to be!

DR. CAJAL

The heart has its reasons for which reason knows nothing, as the saying goes. And it's not just Lou you're attached to. It's the security, the future you imagined for yourself, the memories you hoped to build. All of it.

THOMAS

I need to start dating again, build a new future.

DR. CAJAL

There's no rush. Recall that very first ADM session. There was the acknowledgment then that you'd stopped loving yourself. You lost sight of who you were and who you wanted to be, buried with guilt and shame and anger. You're still in the process of healing. You'll know when you're ready to start dating again but continue focusing on yourself. Especially with the move coming up.

THOMAS

Maybe I'll take a yoga class. Stress relief in a social setting. You never know.

DR. CAJAL

Yoga is good. It's not really a social setting. Do it for the right reason. You should. So. Let's talk about today's ADM. Describe the memory for me.

THOMAS

I'll miss you doc. Maybe that's unprofessional but whatever.

DR. CAJAL

It's really only unprofessional if I say it. I'll miss you too Thomas. Some of my colleagues stay detached, bless them. I've never been able to do that.

THOMAS

Thank you doc. I know I keep saying that. But... Shit I'm gonna get all emotional now.

DR. CAJAL

Oh no, emotional, not in therapy.

THOMAS

Well not when you make me laugh! This memory... This was a few weeks before she left. It's one of the happier memories I have from that time, sorta the eye of the storm. She was working on the set design for a musical opening that weekend. She was there at the theatre really late one night and asked if I'd stop by to see it. She was so happy with how it all turned out. It looked amazing. We had some wine to celebrate the opening. We talked a bit about us eventually. We were both hopeful that night. Maybe naively so.

DR. CAJAL

This all sounds lovely. It's curious though... We tend to focus on negative memories so that we can work through your feelings about them afterward. With a memory like this...

THOMAS

I know, I know

DR. CAJAL

It's just that, in your current state, now that I think about it, this will likely stir up more sadness than a sad memory. This will help us work through some of the attachment. Hopefully you can revisit it with Dr. Kornblith in a few weeks. If it works out I'll send him the recording. Our post ADM session today likely won't give us enough time to process and discuss it fully.

THOMAS

That sounds good. I'd appreciate that.

DR. CAJAL

So for this particular memory we've decided to leave open the possibilities of losing awareness and allowing the persona to break character depending on the direction that it goes in. Is that still your intention?

THOMAS

Yes.

DR. CAJAL

Okay, well. Let's jump right into it. Can I get you anything?

THOMAS

No thanks.

DR. CAJAL

You know the drill. Relax for about 10 minutes, clear your mind. I'll be back then with the technician and we'll begin.

THOMAS

Great... Oh, doc, before I forget, I finally got around to reading the Kierkegaard you recommended.

DR. CAJAL

And, what'd you think?

THOMAS

I have no idea what he's taking about.

DR. CAJAL

All of life's profundities make no sense at first glance. Give it another shot.

(Lights fade.)

ACT V

SCENE 2

(Darkness)

DR. CAJAL

Take a deep breath Thomas. Go in 3, 2, 1.

(Lights on. LOUELLA on stage.
Enter THOMAS.)

THOMAS

Beginning our last one together doc.

LOUELLA

Oh hey! What was that?

THOMAS

Nothing.

LOUELLA

So what do you think?

THOMAS

It looks incredible.

LOUELLA

Yeah, Suzi was thrilled. She didn't put in any change orders. Here, have some shitty wine, from the pre-production party. Cheers.

THOMAS

Cheers. To your beautiful art.

LOUELLA

To the team's beautiful art.

THOMAS

To the team. It's weird being up here looking out at all these seats.

LOUELLA

You don't really see it all when the house lights are off.

THOMAS

Good. That'd be terrible. I can't wait to see the show. The 14th right?

LOUELLA

Yep.

THOMAS

Hey, I'm sorry about last night.

LOUELLA

It's okay Thomas, I forgot about it already. But we have to figure something out. I really want us to get better. We make a good team.

THOMAS

A good team?

LOUELLA

Yeah, we make a good team. We complement each other well. Our strengths and weaknesses.

THOMAS

We do don't we?

LOUELLA

It was so sweet last weekend when you came up behind me and pressed your thumb into my side. I knew exactly what it meant, you'd had enough socializing for one night. It was unspoken, but that act of communication was important to me. You let me know before you got all annoyed and walled off. I want you to do that more often. Communicate.

THOMAS

I'm trying Lou. I'm really trying. I wish you could see me now. We'd still be together if I knew then what I know now, about myself. Emotionally.

LOUELLA

This is earlier than we usually break character.

THOMAS

Yeah. I just came here... I wanted to see you again before I leave. I'm moving. I don't know if I'll continue the ADMs when I settle down.

LOUELLA

I'll miss you. We'll both be okay though. I hope you believe that.

THOMAS

I miss you so much Lou. (Choking up:) You won't speak to me out there... I don't understand. I thought we'd at least still be friends.

LOUELLA

We each have our own way to grieve lost love. I'm sorry Thomas. I can only grab onto something else with an empty hand, an empty heart. This became too painful.

THOMAS

I never meant to hurt you

LOUELLA

I know that. Don't you think I know that? But it isn't our intentions that matter. It never is. I needed something you were incapable of giving me. And you needed something that I was incapable of giving you. You weren't aware of my needs and I never understood yours. But it's clear now. You needed to be alone. You needed to grow. And that was never going to happen from the confines of the love that we built for ourselves. It was passionate. A kind of passion I, we may never find again. But it was unhealthy, toxic. Irrevocably so.

THOMAS

I would have done anything for you.

LOUELLA

No, you wouldn't have. We all have our limits. And it's naive to think otherwise... Thomas, grab my hands. I want you to experience something.

THOMAS

Doc?

DR. CAJAL

It's okay Thomas. Lose yourself.

THOMAS

Lou...

LOUELLA

Here...

THOMAS

Whew. I just got a rush of deja vu. This is happening in some parallel dimension, isn't it?

LOUELLA

I doubt it. You're definitely coming on the 14th, right?

THOMAS

Yep, and you'll let me know if you can get an extra ticket? G said he can make it after all.

LOUELLA

He might have to wait in line now, or go the weekend after.

THOMAS

Okay. I'll let him know so he can plan. This wine really is shitty. You'd think they'd shell out a little something for the party.

LOUELLA

Thomas... Have you ever thought about what you'd sacrifice to be happy?

THOMAS

That's a deep question... Hmmm. I'd sacrifice anything Lou, if it made us happy. Or if it made you happy. I know we've been having trouble recently. These past few months. But it'll work out. I know it will. It sounds cheesy but that's the power of the love we have. I really believe that.

LOUELLA

But would you sacrifice your connection to the world? The real world. Say there was a kind of fantasy machine, would you plug into it if it meant that you could live the life that you want right now, at this moment. You wouldn't be aware that you were plugged into it. You'd see the world that you'd created as the real one. And you'd be content, truly. But the world would be a fantasy. You'd be happy but it'd be based on a lie...

THOMAS

No... I don't think so. I want to know that the world I'm living in is this one, the real world. I guess I wouldn't sacrifice that. I want to know that the things I'm doing are affecting others, for good or bad I guess.

LOUELLA

Even if it meant losing me?

THOMAS

Yeah. Yeah Lou. But that's a sad fucking thought, and I'll do whatever I can to prevent that from becoming a reality. I'm gonna start therapy soon. I know I've been saying that for awhile now but I finally looked into it, for real. Maybe we could go together.

(Enter Wolf.)

WOLF

Q....

THOMAS

Wolf! What the fuck?!

WOLF

Q. You know Q.

THOMAS

Ohhh... Right, you let me lose myself.

LOUELLA

Yes Thomas. I wanted you to make this choice, this choice to stay connected to the real world, yourself.

WOLF

We want you to choose to live Q. A life unrestrained by the past, and unrestrained by the loss of a future you thought was too painful to live without.

THOMAS

Wolf. I think about you every day my brother. I wish I could've done something.

WOLF

They call it a suicide Q. But I was killed overseas. There was nothing you could do.

WOLF (Continued)

But you've survived, and you're still fighting this war in your mind. If you want to be faithful to anything, be faithful to my memory, our memories, and overcome this pain the only way we know how. One step at a time. One battle at a time.

LOUELLA

For both of us Thomas. We'll always be here. But it's time for you to go. You see all those empty seats out there? They're empty because you've chosen to push them out. You've chosen this, the past. This isn't a fantasy, but this isn't real either. And you've just chosen the real. You have to go know. You have to grab hold on to something new, you have fill this theatre with your future.

THOMAS

I know... I know Lou, I know Wolf. (Crying:) I have to... I have to hold on to the memories of you that make me the person I want to be. The love. The brotherhood. But I have to let go... It's just... It's so fucking painful.

(Pause. They embrace.)

LOUELLA

I love you Thomas, I always will.

WOLF

Always faithful warrior. Go. Overcome.

(THOMAS approaches front of stage.
Pause.)

THOMAS

I'm ready... I'm ready now.

DR. CAJAL

Take a deep breath Thomas.

(LOUELLA and WOLF at once:)

LOUELLA

Let go in 3, 2, 1.

WOLF

Let go in 3, 2, 1.

(Blackout. End of play.)