

The Croissant!

A Comedy

By Nate Sheehan

Cast of Characters:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>
CHER	A barista, she's chill and warm	60s	Woman
BRYCE	A regular, Caffeine addict, 'A bit' neurotic	30s	Man
BRANDINE	A barista, shy but funny as fuck when out their shell late teens		Enby
BILLY	A customer, a conspiracy theorist, having three existential crises		Man
ALLISON	A regular, new mom, needs sleep		Woman
KATE	A regular, a narrow lens on the world, means well		Woman
JOHN	A customer, A big baby in a very corporate Middle-Aged man way		Man
UNNAMED WOMAN	Doesn't seem to notice much		

AT RISE:

SCENE ONE

BILLY waits in line at a New England coffee shop. Already at a table is BRYCE and UNNAMED WOMAN. BRYCE accompanies a shocking number of coffee cups, the full ones set at his table and a few empty ones on the floor. He visibly jitters while drinking. UNNAMED WOMAN has earbuds in and types on her computer. An untouched croissant next to her.

Every person in line takes a dramatic step forward, putting BILLY at the front. It's his turn to order. Greeting him is CHER with a name tag pinned to her chest reading the same name.

CHER

What can I get for you?

BRYCE drains another cup. He throws it dramatically before starting to nurse another.

BILLY

Your nametag. Are you the actual—

CHER

What? Oh no—

BILLY

Oh. Sorry about that.

CHER

Sorry about what?

BILLY

I don't know, it's not even 8 AM and the rain is freezing out there – well actually when I got out the car it was turning snow.

CHER

Sure. Your order?

BILLY

I'll get a half-caf half-decaf Americano grande extra hot with an extra shot and leave some room at the top.

CHER

What's the name?

BILLY

Billy.

CHER grabs a cup and speedily notates the order. CHER turns away from the counter to prepare BILLY's order. BILLY departs from the line to find that awkward place where people stand while waiting for their coffee, while the line takes a step forward. At the front of it, we now find ALLISON, holding a baby in one arm and an enormous diaper bag in the other. A stroller floats in her general vicinity. BRANDINE, another barista who's much younger (teenager), meets ALLISON at the counter, who appears exhausted enough to be participating in a lab on sleep deprivation.

BRANDINE

Morning, what can I get for you–

ALLISON

Could I have... uhhh, um

BRANDINE

The usual?

ALLISON

Um wait – that's not– Something strong. anything. strong

BRANDINE

I'll get you the usual.

ALLISON

yes, that

*ALLISON finds a way to move herself with all her items to a table. She places her child in the stroller before promptly putting her head down to sleep. BRANDINE turns away to make ALLISON's coffee.
But then CHER steps in.*

CHER

I got it.

CHER takes the cup from ALLISON. KATE steps up to order. As she does so, JOHN, slick and in a suit, rushes into the shop and makes a beeline for the counter.

KATE

Hi, could I get–

JOHN

I'll have a spice pumpkin latte.

KATE

Sir, I was about to order.

BRANDINE

Um. I'm sorry, we don't actually serve pumpkin spice this time of year. But I believe she actually was in line ahead—

JOHN

I'm sure you have the ingredients.

KATE

Excuse me, I was here before you—

JOHN

Just a second, I'm talking to the barista.

BRYCE finishes another cup and tosses it aside. CHER, who's now served BILLY and ALLISON, notices.

BRANDINE

Sir, you're welcome to try our current winter special, the Mexican chocolate mocha. Personally, I adore it, but again—

CHER

Again. Bryce.

Good to see ya! How are you?

The exchange between BRANDINE, KATE and JOHN becomes visibly more heated behind them.

BRYCE

I'm I'm I'm I'm great. I'm good. Relaxed.

CHER

That's great—

BRYCE

(pointing at UNNAMED WOMAN)

That woman over there, you know her?

CHER

With the earbuds? I haven't seen her before—

BRYCE

She hasn't touched her croissant. It's at least half an hour.

CHER

Oh. I'm sure she'll get to it

BRYCE

She took it out the bag. *She took it out the bag.* Hasn't touched it. Not a little weird. Isn't it?

CHER

(amused)

I understand the severity of the situation.

BRYCE

(not picking up on it)

Yes.

CHER

The gay guy almost blew my cover.

BRYCE

He thought you were the actual Cher?

CHER

Don't say it too loudly.

BRYCE

I'm starting to think you think you're Cher.

CHER

.Oh–

BRYCE

How'd you know he's gay?

CHER

Echolocation.

BRYCE

What

CHER

I don't miss a beat. My gaydar. Ever since Garrett turned out – you know–

UNNAMED WOMAN touches the pastry as if to pick it up only for her hand to flutter back to the keyboard.

BRYCE

Gahh!!

CHER

(ignoring him)

Yes, Garrett. Since Garrett, it's like a little buzzer goes off in my head whenever I meet a man who's oriented. *Differently*.

BRYCE

Differently. You mean gay?

CHER

What?

BRYCE

Ok, what's *with* the woman over there with the Dell laptop?

CHER

The one with the earbuds?

BRYCE

Mm.

CHER

I don't know. It doesn't work on girls.

BRYCE

No, not that, the— (*croissant*)

CHER

The what?

BRYCE

You don't get it.

BRYCE has finished at least his third cup. He throws it behind him. CHER rises to pick up the cups off the floor and dispose of them. During that time, BRYCE drains another cup and tosses it, inadvertently hitting CHER.

As CHER comes back to the table, she either has put on a face or genuinely hasn't been frustrated by BRYCE's antics. She's too good a deceiver for us to know.

UNNAMED WOMAN reaches her hand out in the direction of her plate.

BRYCE

(stuttering)

The Croissant!!

Only for it to instead grab her coffee cup, which she shakes and finds empty. BRYCE has yelled loud enough that he's jolted ALLISON from her daze. BILLY, close by, seems to make some sort of commentary.

CHER

You're a little more agitated today.

BRYCE

Well – maybe – wait, I need to post my update.

CHER

For what?

BRYCE

My stats.

CHER

What do you mean?

BRYCE

For this trend. Twitter.

CHER

You can post to Twitter from your watch?

BRYCE looks at CHER blankly.

BRYCE

Do you think she's satisfied with her pastry? Go check on that lady.

CHER looks at BRYCE blankly. A beat.

CHER

You know I was reading – There's a new virus going around. Called Sneezy Birkenstock. It's a Latin name, I think. And it's spreading real fast. It started in some Indonesian villages before it got to Jakarta– and now – Epicenter. It's on its way all over the globe. It's spread to at least 50% the population–

BRYCE

(taken aback)

I haven't heard of– Is this recently?--

CHER

Those poor Small-Clawed Otters.

BRYCE

Oh I thought you were talking about– (*people*) Horrible.

CHER

I know. Those poor–

BRYCE
Do you know any of these odders?

CHER
Do I know odd hers? What?

BRYCE
No. Otders.

It's like they're speaking in code.

CHER
Why would I know an otter?

BRYCE
I met one.

CHER
No you didn't.

BRYCE
Don't believe me?

CHER
What type of question is that?

ALLISON and BILLY. They sip their coffee.

BILLY
So does he cry a lot? He's absolutely adorable.

ALLISON
Yes he is. Do you know what he's not? Sleeping through the night.

BILLY
So you didn't get much sleep either?

ALLISON stares at BILLY blankly.

BILLY
Well for what it's worth, you seemed to have gotten a little just now.

ALLISON.
I wasn't sleeping. I wouldn't do something so ridiculous. I was praying.

For what?

BILLY

For my baby to lose his vocal chords.

ALLISON

To whom??

BILLY

Whatever god deals with that sort of thing. Are you religious?

ALLISON

Me? No.

BILLY

Good. I didn't want to offend.

ALLISON

I think we're all religious to something though.

BILLY

What am I religious to?

ALLISON

You're pragmatic. 'Whoever deals with that sort of thing'

BILLY

So like an agnostic?

ALLISON

No, that's too straightforward.

BILLY

I'm too sleepy for anything else.

ALLISON

You're doing remarkably.

BILLY

Thanks I guess. This isn't mascara by the way, just this is what my eyes look like now. I don't wear that much— I didn't want you to think I was some sort of grunge parent. Or slut parent. Or grunge slut parent— I'm sorry, I know I'm acting strange. I'm really tired—

ALLISON

There'd be nothing wrong if you are.

BILLY

ALLISON
I don't want to be a grunge slut parent. What's your name?

BILLY
Billy. You?

ALLISON
Allison.

BILLY
Oh.

ALLISON
What?--

BILLY
I don't know.

ALLISON
I am a grunge slut parent.

BILLY
Yes, own it! Wait--

ALLISON
I'm such a failure-- I'm sorry, I shouldn't be dropping this on you like this--

BILLY
It's alright. You seem like a great Mom. What's his name?

ALLISON
(pointing to the baby)
Him?

BILLY
Most likely.

ALLISON
Gerald.

BILLY
Um. Cute!--

ALLISON
It was my husband's idea.

BILLY

(aside)

Oh thank god.

(to ALLISON)

He looks to me he'll do wonderfully as Gerald.

ALLISON

He knows how to make himself heard.

JOHN and KATE do too. BRANDINE less so.

JOHN

This. This is honestly shocking.

KATE

(sputtering)

Do you have any sense of – at all!! – any integrity!

(to BRANDINE)

And what've you been doing?? He's been speaking to me like this and you've been no help!--

JOHN

This type of indifference to your customer is not to be tolerated! I've got places to be. I've–

Back to ALLISON and BILLY.

ALLISON

I've just got so much on my plate. I'm going back to work soon. He's not sleeping. Speaking of plates, do you know if their pastries are any good?

BILLY

Uh–

Before BILLY can say more, ALLISON, in process of picking up her baby, knocks her scalding coffee into her lap.

ALLISON

Gahh I shoulda never had children!!

The baby also starts screaming.

BRANDINE

(to KATE and JOHN)

Uhh I should go take care of that.

BRANDINE scrambles to grab paper towels and springs over to ALLISON's table.

JOHN
Get back here you coward!

KATE
Hey, Brandine, we still got a problem here!!

They have eluded them.

Fucking cunt.

JOHN

Little bitch.

KATE
(to JOHN)

BRANDINE meets ALLISON. Tears a large section of the role and hands it to BILLY. CHER rushes over to help as well.

Is your baby ok??

BRANDINE

He's fine. He's unharmed.

ALLISSON

I'll get you another coffee. Do you need anything else?

BRANDINE

With a baby confirmed safe and most of the coffee cleaned up, CHER finds the situation handled enough to return back to BRYCE's table. As she approaches the- (table)

Do you know what else about that woman? The one who hasn't touched her croissant?

BRYCE

The one with the earbuds? What about her?

CHER

She hasn't looked up. She hasn't looked up. Once.

BRYCE

From her computer?

CHER

Hm.

BRYCE

Bryce, I think you should just leave this alone.

CHER

BRYCE

You should be working.

CHER looks about the coffee shop.

CHER

I'm sure Brandine's got it covered. They is a capable young person.

JOHN

Alright!

EVERYONE turns to JOHN.

JOHN

Somebody. Needs. To. Make Me A Spice Pumpkin Latte. Now.

CHER

I'm so sorry, we don't offer the pumpkin spice latte this time of year. That's in October. However, you're welcome to try our current winter special, the Mexican chocolate mocha. Personally, I adore it—

JOHN

(pointing at BRANDINE)

That's exactly what she said—

CHER

Well it's a very good coffee—

JOHN

Don't interrupt me.

JOHN walks over to BRYCE and CHER's table. As he talks, he unthinkingly picks up one of BRYCE's cups, whose eyes bulge in response.

JOHN

I'm in your shop for the same fucking reason as everybody else— to drink a cup of goddamn coffee. So I expect to be treated like everyone else and be able to get a goddamn cup of coffee, which tastes—

JOHN takes a sip out of BRYCE's cup.

JOHN

Like shit. What are you even doing—

BRYCE

Don't drink my latte!!

BRYCE leaps to his feet and tackles JOHN. They begin to tussle.

JOHN

Christ!!

BRYCE

Don't drunk my latte!!

JOHN falls back into the counter, BRYCE on top of him.

JOHN

Jesus!! That's what you call coffee!!

BRANDINE

Someone call the cops!!

CHER

No Cops!!

BRYCE is a little slow taking another swing. JOHN uses the opportunity to turn BRYCE around against the counter. After a little struggle, BRYCE pushes JOHN off him.

BRYCE

It's called pumpkin spice. Not spice pumpkin.

BRANDINE

Why no police?? I'm following the digitless trend, does anyone else have–

CHER

What the hell is this trend you've all been talking about?

BRYCE

(panting)

It's a Twitter thing, I think Tiktok too. People are sharing their screentime stats on their phones, trying to boast the lowest– but the thing is there's some way you can manipulate the settings so your score is much lower than it should be. I haven't fully figured it out–

CHER

So people are going places without their phones?

BRYCE

I'm not.

CHER

And you're doing this to get likes on the app on your phone?

Yeah.

BRYCE

And you're doing this thing, Brandine?

CHER

Yeah.

BRANDINE

Why?

CHER

I'm doing it too.

KATE

CHER

Is that practical? How did that start existing? Like if the trend is not to be on it, who's posting about it?

BRANDINE

Oh– I've been keeping up with my Applewatch and posting with my iPad.

BILLY

I actually read Apple's pushing it because it's not aesthetically pleasing to make more than 10 iPhones and they think that'll affect profit.

CHER

Well, ok – whatever– We don't need to call the police. Everything's fine. Everything's settled.

KATE

I'm still waiting for my order.

JOHN

And my spice pumpkin–

BRYCE

Pumpkin spice–

CHER

Brandine, can you look in the back if we have the ingredients for pumpkin spice?

BRANDINE

Where is that?

CHER

It's– I can't explain it. I'll just do it.

CHER huffs off, exits.

BRANDINE

Alright, if you still need to order or if something happened to your order, please come to the counter— form a line.

BRANDINE walks briskly back behind the counter. KATE, BRYCE and ALLISON form a line. JOHN finds himself in that awkward space where he waits for his coffee. Then, his phone rings. He goes off to a corner, but we see his face grow increasingly concerned as he listens. In a little bit he hangs up. Then, he rushes out of the coffee shop.

UNNAMED WOMAN keeps doing whatever she's been doing. Customers in the coffee shop begin to look out the window worryingly. But both lights and our attention is on BILLY, who takes out a blue bouncy ball and begins fidgeting with it. Then maybe he stops. Or he doesn't. He looks at us.

BILLY

(to Gerald)

Oh my god. You look just like Billy Eichner... No, you're not Billy Eichner? -- Ok, but wow the resemblance is uncanny.

I really want to meet someone famous. It'd be nice, you know?

Oh right. You can't be Billy Eichner at all. Your Daddy named you Gerald. Yes, he did! That's what your mom said! It was probably very stupid of him unless trends among which names are popular change dramatically over the next few years! Yes, he was! He was, wasn't he?

You're a very lucky young man that you didn't get any coffee on you.

I would've loved to be a comedian. Maybe with your funny name, you can make my dreams come true for me. Be a famous comedian for the two of us Gerald. Between you and me, Gerald, after all this commotion, I could really use a smoke. But instead I'm watching you. My god, look outside—

Oh here comes your Mom.

ALLISON

How is he?

BILLY

I think he likes my voice.

ALLISON

Does he? That's sweet.

BILLY

Look outside...

ALLISON

Oh god, it's getting really bad out there.

BILLY

Can't see five feet past the window.

KATE talks to BRANDINE as they make her coffee.

KATE

How am I going to get to work?

BRANDINE

I think it'll be better to be late. Can't imagine anyone getting around—

KATE

No, this is actually perfect.

BRANDINE

How's that?

KATE glances over to JOHN, observing that he's glaring at her while waiting for his drink.

KATE

Ugh, he just made me feel so— I'm just sick of feeling stepped on all the time, you know what I mean?

BRANDINE

M-hm.

KATE

Some people are just so out of touch with the world around them.

BRANDINE

M-hm.

BRANDINE sets KATE's cup on the counter for her.

KATE

Is the John guy a regular?

BRANDINE gives KATE a look. It says "no".

KATE

Sorry about the commotion earlier. Just he really was being awful. I just can't believe that someone that — My blood's boiling. My blood's boiling, Brandine. Feel my pulse. Here, no — feel my pulse.

KATE pushes her wrist into BRANDINE's hand.

BRANDINE

I'm bad at finding it, sorry.

KATE

It's here... it's right there – Whatever. Oh my god, did they know it was going to get this bad today? Who's agreeing to tell people to go anywhere on a day like today?

BRANDINE

Cher.

KATE

Cher?

BRANDINE

My boss. The one who went to look for some pumpkin spice. She said,

(Cher voice)

'Be careful with the roads today cus the water started turning to ice last night.'

So obviously that meant I had to come in. And someone else, probably Randy, probably told Cher to come in. And a while back, I told Cher I'd come in today. Before I knew anything about today's weather. And the weather, well, the weather didn't tell anybody anything. It sprung on us like, uh, a spring.

Anyway, your coffee's on the counter if you didn't catch me setting it down for ya.

KATE

Your boss's name is Cher?

BILLY exchanges goodbyes with ALLISON and strides to the exit of the coffee shop. Once Outside, he pulls out a cigarette and a lighter. He shivers and smokes.

BRANDINE

I guess.

KATE

I've never really talked to her.

BRANDINE

She's always talking with Bryce this time o' morning.

KATE

Are they close?

BRANDINE

She says she's amused by him.

KATE

Hm.

I like him. He's very singular.

BRANDINE

What does that mean?

KATE

I have no idea.

BRANDINE

What about the women over there with the Dell laptop?

KATE

The one with the earbuds?

BRANDINE

With the earbuds. Does she go here?

KATE

Never seen her.

BRANDINE

She's been working there for a while, hasn't she?

KATE

Maybe, I don't really pay that much attent—

BRANDINE

She hasn't touched her croissant.

KATE

I guess.

BRANDINE

There's something about that... I don't know

KATE

What do you mean?

BRANDINE

Are the pastries here any good?

KATE

I guess.

BRANDINE

KATE

Maybe that's it, but she hasn't even taken a bite. It's untouched, it's perfect, in its purest form. It's free.

BRANDINE

I think that'd actually be dough.

KATE

What type of croissant did she order?

BRANDINE

I don't remember.

KATE

What type of croissant did she order??

BRANDINE

Maybe butter?

KATE

Maybe butter.

BRANDINE

Would you want a maybe butter croissant?

KATE

I couldn't. Dairy ruins me – Absolutely tears my body apart.

BRANDINE

Are you lactose intolerant?

KATE

Sometimes, but not always – You know, I feel so bad for that mom over there – With the punk makeup.

BRANDINE

It was pretty dramatic. But she seems to be—

KATE

I should make sure she's ok, shouldn't I?

BRANDINE shrugs – not quite sure what to say.

KATE

I bet she'd appreciate it.

KATE picks up her coffee and strides over to ALLISON. BILLY wanders into our attention.

BILLY

Is this – is this my set?

The wind hollers and heckles at him.

BILLY

You're the worst crowd I've ever had! I've never seen a *sorrier* spectacle.

What to say? What to say!? I've never had this type of opportunity before.

So I get out of bed, 3 am, in my boxers, put on flip flops because it's 10 degrees out, I gotta have something on my feet and bring the bins to the curb.

That analogy more or less explains how I get anything done in my life– I don't have the first part of that one.

When I go on a plane, I always like to choose the window seat because I find planes very romantic— I really love looking at the clouds and sky and shit. And when I go on a plane, someone about my age – who's probably about a 6, but in this context, is an 8 – sits next to me. And I always wait until about the last ten minutes of the flight to talk to them, cus it's like, bitch, I just spent the last half hour at the gate downloading this music— you can wait. I have priorities. I mean, of course he wants me.

They probably don't. But when I do talk to him, they're always, every time, so painfully awkward. And at a certain point, I'm like, am I doing this? Am I making people awkward?

Do you know who else understood the passion of flying?

Al-qaeda.

This isn't a part of the set, but I actually read somewhere from an academic that no one reads that 9/11 was the most artistic act of terrorism literally ever. It had nuance and layers. It's a fucked up thing to say, but it's true. Where's the spectacle in a bombing? There is none. But flying a plane into the towering emblem for American and Western capitalism. The World Trade Center. It's fucked up. I know. I know. I know. I won't deny you that for a second.

It's just – when I read that, it was so crazy to be jolted into such different shoes. If they weren't radicalized by American Imperialism, they would've been wonderful artists.

This might be a good time for BILLY to take another drag of that cig. JOHN walks by.

JOHN

My car won't fucking start!

BILLY

Ok?

JOHN

Do you have a car?

BILLY

What for?

To borrow. JOHN

I don't drive. BILLY

Then why the fuck did you say 'what for?' JOHN

BILLY takes another drag of that cig. A sheepish look. JOHN shakes his head, heads back into the coffee shop.

BILLY
Where was I... Right... I'm Jewish so my Dad and I use to joke at the dinner table that it's special that the aliens chose our people to lazerbeam the Earth. Chosen people – we're all chosen for something. But I don't think we're chosen, I think there's just something special to the dedication of maintaining a history between empires and across continents for thousands of years. I guess Moses gave a hell of a pre-game speech for us for the next two thousand years for all the moxy to peter out when it reached me cus with any pressure I would've said "fuck it, I'm pagan". ... I love Christianity. There's so many versions. So many funny hats. There's so much creativity involved. But I'm not into any of that shit–

(looking up)

what was that.

What the Fuck is that?!?! What the Fuck–

BILLY dashes back into the coffee shop, cigarette in hand.

Where the fuck is my goddamn— JOHN

Aliens Outside!!! BILLY

The coffee shop pauses. JOHN and BILLY stare each other down, maybe more in confusion than anything else.

I– JOHN

No. BILLY

What? JOHN

BILLY

Outside! ... I–

What are KATE and ALLISON up to?

KATE

Outside? I really just can't have anything to do with outside today. I just got an email– my work actually just been canceled and by the way, I know you probably get this oppressively too much so I was trying to hold my tongue – but your baby is absolutely adorable – I'm sorry.

ALLISON

Yes he is. Do you know what he's not? Sleeping through the night.

KATE

I'm so sorry to hear that! That's really unkind, but I'm sure they'll get better–

ALLISON

I don't know. Do you have kids?

KATE

Noo, I could neve– No, no kids at the moment

ALLISON

At the moment?

KATE

I mean I don't have any plans for any either right now... But you never know!

ALLISON

That's alright. There's more to life than Gerald.

KATE

Gerald?

ALLISON

(pointing/gesturing to Gerald)

Him.

KATE

Oh, I see– um, Cute!

ALLISON

Is it? It was my husband's idea.

KATE

Um yeah, it's a nice name!

(aside)

This kid's not going places.

ALLISON

It's growing on me. I feel like he's making Gerald his own, you know what I mean?

KATE

Mmm, that's so beautiful. What makes him a Gerald?

ALLISON

Well, he's very aware of the world around him. I never feel like he's zoned out. He's an observer looking. Outward. That feels very Gerald to me.

KATE

You can already tell who he's becoming! Oh and you're sure you're ok after the coffee spill. You don't need anything? I can buy you a pastry. I heard they're... alright.

ALLISON

Oh no, I'm good. I really couldn't.

KATE

No, I insist. You deserve it.

ALLISON

I really can't.

KATE

So many troubles of the world can be fixed with good food.

ALLISON

Well, if you insist- Gerald needs a change.

KATE

Oh!

ALLISON

I'll be right back.

KATE

Wait, what do you want?!

ALLISON is off to the bathrooms. KATE sits with herself for a moment, but can't seem to sit still. She then rises to head towards the counter. She cuts between JOHN and BILLY, who still are. just. kinda. staring at each other?

Oh and by the way, BRYCE probably has gone full circle with his caffeine consumption and fallen asleep by now.

KATE

Brandine!

BRANDINE

How can I help you?

KATE

I need a recommendation for a pastry.

BRANDINE

Do you like Danishes?

KATE

No clue.

BRANDINE

You've never had a Danish? Ok, then you have to try our—

KATE

No, it's not for me.

BRANDINE

Oh.

KATE

It's for Allison.

BRANDINE

Oh that's sweet. Um, the butter croissant is probably safe.

KATE

One butter croissant.

BRANDINE

One butter croissant is 5.95.

JOHN and BILLY, while still facing each other and maintaining eye contact, start stepping sideways in a circle. They travel a 180 before relaxing their movements and posture back into however they were before.

KATE

Really?

At the counter, KATE buys a croissant for ALLISON before sitting back down.

JOHN

Aliens. Really?

BILLY

If I wasn't clear, I saw something strange outside.

JOHN

What makes you say that?

BILLY

That I saw something and it was strange. What else do you need me to explain! I need a cig-fuck!

JOHN

What?

BILLY

My lighter and my pack – they must've fallen out of my pockets somehow. God fucking damn't.

JOHN

What did it look like?

BILLY

They were Newports and the lighter's skinny and red–

JOHN

No– the something strange that you say looked like an alien.

BILLY

I– thinking about it is making my head pound–

JOHN

Do you want to sit down?

BILLY

No // I just need a minute.

JOHN

Well don't think about it then. Where's that barista?

BILLY

Getting your coffee!

BILLY heads for the counter.

BILLY

Could I have a pail or something like that?

BRANDINE

Sure, what do you need it for?

BILLY

I'm feeling a little nauseous.

BRANDINE grabs something pale-like from behind the counter and gives it to BILLY, who finds a seat by BRYCE, who's still sleeping. JOHN doesn't follow. Instead, he irritably taps his foot. He checks his watch. Maybe BILLY puts his head in the pail.

JOHN

(a little too loudly)

Now where's that barista!

KATE

I'm sure she'll be back any minute now, your majesty.

JOHN

I don't need to hear from you again—

(notices)

Is that a croissant?

KATE

As it so happens.

JOHN

I always heard the pastries here were kinda crap.

KATE

Well I've. Heard. Differently .

JOHN

Ok—

KATE

What is it, John?

JOHN

Nothing that concerns you.

KATE

No, what is it?

ALLISON returns from the bathrooms with a cleaned up baby.

JOHN

Trying to pass off stale pastries as good croissants. Why do you gotta spin everything for your little activism? If you lie about the pastries, oh you're now "*supporting* a liberal business." Or you're supporting the they/thems by praising the coffee shop that he (*gesturing to Brandine*) works at and probably doesn't even care about. I'm sick of hearing it all the time. I just came here for some coffee and you somehow want to make that your problem.

KATE

My problem?! You being an asshole isn't my problem until you make it my problem!

JOHN

You're so pathetic.

KATE

You're a bigoted inbred and by the way, if their pronouns are they/them, You refer to *Them* as *They*. How do you let Brandine tolerate this?!? Brandine, how do you tolerate this?

BRANDINE

(shyly, intimidated)

I mean it's new to a lot of people. It happens all the time. As long as you're making the effort to get it right.

KATE

What! This is your identity. Your identity is sacred—

CHER enters from the back.

JOHN

Cherrrrr!! Where's my pumpkin spice latte?!?!?

BRYCE jolts awake. BILLY makes some commentary.

CHER

Pumpkin spice latte coming right up! Just give me a few minutes.

JOHN

Oh.

CHER gets to work making the coffee. KATE approaches BRANDINE.

KATE

Oh Brandine, poor sweet Brandine, you're too kind to people. Let me explain to you what that normalizes in the process—

BRANDINE

I'd really rather you wouldn't.

KATE

What?

BRANDINE

If I get angry every time someone messed up my pronouns or passed on some sort of microaggression like that lunatic (*gesturing to John*), I'd have no energy left to try and live my life. You have to pick and choose your battles. Work isn't usually a good place to choose.

KATE

Doesn't it make you angry regardless??

BRANDINE

Of course. It hurts—

KATE

Well—

BRANDINE

Uh—

ALLISON

Hey, don't mean to interrupt, but I was wondering about your pastry selection.

KATE

Oh I got you a pastry! It's the croissant there on the table.

ALLISON

Oh, where?

KATE

It was— it was just over there.

KATE goes over to investigate.

KATE

I swear I just set it on your table. How do you misplace an entire croissant?

ALLISON

It's alright. I can just get something myself.

KATE

No! I insist.

ALLISON

Really, it's quite—

KATE and ALLISON keep trying for an agreement while BILLY and BRYCE familiarize themselves with one another.

BRYCE

Alright. Aliens?

BILLY

I don't know how else to describe it.

BRYCE

It was bound to happen.

BILLY

I'm not crazy!! Like I feel like I'm going crazy. I don't know what I saw—

BRYCE

Please don't talk so loud. I'm having a bit of a hangover.

BILLY

Hangover?

BRYCE

Caffeine hangover. I probably should get another order.

BILLY looks at BRYCE tiredly, considering the prospect of him consuming more coffee.

BILLY

You believe me, don't you?

BRYCE

If there's one thing I've learned in life it's to believe nothing.

BILLY

Do you have any cigs?

BRYCE

No. I don't smoke.

BILLY

Yeah, you don't seem the type.

BRYCE

There's no such thing as 'types'.

I don't know. BILLY

Silence.

What do you mean you believe nothing? BILLY

I don't know. BRYCE

And do you believe that? BILLY

Maybe. BRYCE

You got a post-Watergate condition. You just said "hell with this" and checked out. BILLY

What? No. BRYCE

No, you did. When those tapes were released, you decided there was nothing worth investing in— BILLY

I wasn't alive yet. BRYCE

... Well yes, what I mean is you were conditioned to think that way by your parents and teachers and now we're just stuck in this void of nothingness – And even the trends are now just subversions on a subversion. You think you're fighting it but you're not. Forever asylum-ed. BILLY

Silence.

Yeah. What did the alien look like? BRYCE

John! Pumpkin Spice Latte For John!! CHER

Took you long enough. Thank you. JOHN

BILLY
(sighs)

I guess it looked like it needed coffee.

JOHN finds a seat by UNNAMED WOMAN typing away on her Dell laptop. He sips his drink.

BRYCE

What does that mean?

BILLY

It looked groggy, but maybe that's just what its face naturally looks like—

BRYCE

What color was it?

BILLY

Ah fuck, my head—

BRYCE

Caffeine hangover?

BILLY

No, any time I start thinking about it, I get this splitting headache. I knew this was the right spot — This is where the signals led me. My car got stuck and I had to sprint here.

BRYCE

Signals?

BILLY

Radio waves.

BRYCE

Would coffee help?

BILLY

Yeah, maybe.

The two rise and head over to the counter.

CHER

Gentlemen! Back for another round?

BRYCE

Appears that way.

Are you really not the actual Cher?
BILLY

No, of course not.
CHER

It's just it's uncanny— aw fuckk, my head, my head, *my head, my head*
BILLY

What's wrong with him?
CHER

He says he saw an alien but I think he's just hungover.
BRYCE

The bottle or the mug?
CHER

If anything, I'm addicted to cigs.
BILLY

The weather's really getting worse out there. Brandine told me a few customer's work have been delayed.
CHER

No one's going anywhere.
BILLY

It's a whiteout. I actually think that's easier than when it's all ice.
BRYCE

Sure, but a whiteout with a layer of ice underneath?
CHER

Fair point. I need my coffee.
BRYCE

How many orders?
CHER

Let's make it deux.
BRYCE

All the usual?
CHER

BRYCE

Let's make two the usual, the third the Mexican Mocha special and the fourth <insert long complex coffee order>

CHER

And for you?

BILLY

Half-calf, half decaf Americano grande extra hot with an extra shot and leave some room at the top. For me, Billy.

CHER's marker is furious, copying down both orders onto their cups. She turns to BRANDINE and holds out one of the cups.

CHER

Brandine, could you get started on this order.

BRANDINE

Actually, I was about to step outside for a sec. Two customers were arguing about me and it's getting into my head.

CHER

You can also go to the back room. It's freezing out there. Dangerous.

BRANDINE

No, I'd rather get fresh air.

CHER

Ok, but be back in 5? We got a few orders to fulfill. And if anyone can get around in this weather, our 9 o'clock rush would be coming in – I hope we don't lose power...

BRANDINE

Yeah, I'll be right back.

CHER

Don't freeze your toes and fingers off!

BRANDINE grabs a large jacket and exits the coffee shop.

BILLY

You know, you really have a feel for the ebbs and flow of this place. Most managers wouldn't let someone under them just do that.

CHER

If you don't give a place a personality, you're gonna hate it. But today? Today's been–

KATE and ALLISON arrive at the counter.

KATE

Did you see what happened to a butter croissant at the table over there?

CHER

Sorry?

KATE

I ordered a butter croissant for Allison and it's disappeared. I was wondering if it was accidentally picked up or if you saw anything.

CHER

Um, I have no knowledge of it. Maybe ask Brandine. They'll be right back.

KATE

Where is Brandine?

CHER

They'll be right back.

ALLISON

Hi, could I get a raspberry Danish?

CHER

Sure—

KATE

And that should be on the shop until the croissant is found.

ALLISON

Uh—

CHER

Excuse me?

KATE

We paid for a croissant. The croissant has not had the opportunity to be eaten.

CHER

You're really going to have to refer to my co-worker on this. I don't know what's going on. Are you able to wait until they're back?

ALLISON

Sure, in the meantime, can I just pay for the Danish?

CHER

Yeah, that's fine. Raspberry?

ALLISON

Raspberry

CHER fetches a raspberry Danish for ALLISON. KATE seems a bit uncomfortable with how this has played out.

KATE

She shouldn't have to pay for it.

ALLISON

It's only a few bucks, it's fine.

KATE

It's principle. I can't watch as you belittle her like this.

ALLISON

You've been great. But I want a raspberry Danish now.

CHER

That's 6.45.

ALLISON's jaw drops.

ALLISON

It's principle.

CHER

Hm?

ALLISON

About the croissant!

BRYCE

(overhearing)

The croissant?

KATE

Yes, exactly. The croissant.

ALLISON

This woman here generously paid for a croissant for me. Where did that pastry go?

CHER

Uh– I need to prepare some orders for some other customers. I’ll look to see if I can find // this croissant.

JOHN

(to UNNAMED WOMAN)

This croissant. What–

JOHN looks up at UNNAMED WOMAN and realizes she has her earbuds in. He gets a furrowed look across his face and sips his pumpkin spice latte. He takes out a book from his bag and flips to a page. Who is he speaking to?

JOHN

So much depends. upon
a red wheel barrow. glazed with rain water. beside the white
Chickens – a poem by William Carlos–

BILLY overhears.

BILLY

I fucking depended on you and you left the fucking wheelbarrow out and its fucking raining and now the white chickens are filthy.

JOHN

Is that a response poem?

BILLY

Yeah. Mary Reufle.

JOHN

I’m not sure what I think.

BILLY

You don’t like it?

JOHN

No, I’m just not sure what I think.

BILLY

You know William Carlos Williams originally published that poem as a section in a larger series of poetry and prose but the prose bit didn’t quite fit the modernist narrative that poetry historians wanted to sculpt using Elliot’s work as a–

JOHN

Can hot coffee taste old?

BILLY
I – I’m not really sure.

JOHN
Well that’s how this pumpkin patch of a latte tastes.

BILLY
Well, it’s February

JOHN
I know it’s February!

BILLY
Ah, sorry. You read poetry?

JOHN
Sometimes I speak it. It’s good for me.

BILLY
Well – seems so. I don’t really catch you as much of a literature guy – how did you get into William Carlos Williams?

JOHN
You know, I’m not exactly sure how that happened. It just did.

BILLY
Have you read for a while or–

JOHN
No, started a few years ago. I just... got bored. I realized I wasn’t thinking right.
(picking up the book.)
This helped.

BILLY
For me, it was my quarter-life crisis.

JOHN
Turned 30?

BILLY
No, worse. I turned 29.

JOHN
They say this woman hasn’t touched this croissant, right? – I keep overhearing that.

BILLY

I guess so.

JOHN

I don't think this woman exists.

BILLY

What the hell does that mean?

JOHN

Sure, the computer is there and the earbuds. I don't see a woman there. It's just space. I work in finance though. I'm inherently even more faceless. Gotta a name for me?

BILLY

Billy.

JOHN

John. Think you could drive in this weather, Billy?

BILLY

It's gotten worse instead of better.

JOHN

You're smarter than my uncle. When I was growing up, he killed himself by trying to drive in snow like this. He was better off gone though. He was always rambling about extra-terrestrials, total nutcase.

BILLY

Geez... then why were you trying to drive?

JOHN

Something came up. It's probably better I'm here.

BILLY

I've never been one for conspiracies... aliens.

JOHN

That's what my aunt thinks he was looking for that day.

The two men stare out the window to the outdoors.

BILLY

And it killed him.

JOHN

It's foolish to accept the world beyond what we know.

BILLY

Sure. There's a lot out there. It can seem overwhelming. But there it is. How do we protect ourselves?

JOHN

I would call my work. Tell them I'm gonna be late, maybe not make it, but—

JOHN pulls out his phone.

BILLY

I don't think you need to.

JOHN

Annd there's the email. 'Don't fucking dare come in today. Weather much worse than anticipated— Yada-yada-yada—' – You know I dropped in here a little earlier for my coffee and I was wondering what I'd do with the extra time – If I have to do that conference call online...

BILLY

It's dangerous out there. You said yourself. You know, in a Russian fairytale, a woman sends her step-daughter into the winter woods to die. She meets Father Frost there and she's kind to him, so he gives her gold and jewels. When the mother's husband goes to pick up the step-daughter for burial, she comes back fine. So the mom, angry, sends her daughter out into the woods—

CHER

Half-calf-half-decaf Billy!

BILLY

That's my coffee.

JOHN

You know if you ask, you can get a spice—

CHER

Bryce!

BILLY

She's fast.

BRYCE, with five cups in a tray and one in his hand, lumbers over to BILLY and JOHN. Three of these cups are his, one of them Billy's. He's already made good progress on the one in his hand.

BRYCE

How's the pumpkin spice this time of year?

JOHN

Well worth it.

BRYCE

(turning to BILLY)

The one on the right is yours – No, not that one – no, your other right – There you go.

BILLY

Thank you for bringing it over.

BRYCE

No problem.

(to JOHN)

So. You were saying about the pumpkin spice.

JOHN

It's a good drink.

BRYCE

Good, good, I'm glad. That's fantastic. There's a time and a place though, isn't there?

JOHN

What do you mean?

BRYCE

There's a time and place for a pumpkin spice coffee.

JOHN

And when would that be?

BRYCE has drained one cup. He's now onto the next.

BRYCE

I don't know– how could I be sure– these are things that are a mystery to us all– maybe OCTOBER! It's offensive to this shop–

BRYCE throws the second cup onto the ground.

BILLY

Bryce, you spilled!

BRYCE

Are you gay?

BILLY

What does that have to do with anything.

BRYCE

Cher was convinced you were and it was getting on my nerve tendons

BILLY

Well–

He notices he's in close proximity to...

BRYCE

THE CROISSANT.

KATE

You've found it!?

BRYCE

No, no, no, no, no, no! I've not found any Croissant you Dumb Lady, IN FACT– It seems some of you believe that croissants Should Remain Untouched!

CHER

Bryce!!

BRYCE

What is it Madonna!!

CHER

You've spilled on yourself!

BRYCE

So I have. Oh no, oh geez louise. There was something specific itching my mid back.
(to JOHN)

YOUR COFFEE!!

JOHN

My “seasonal” drink, my spice pumpkin–

BRYCE

PUMPKIN SPICE.

Another cup shot down to the floor. BRYCE strides up real close to JOHN. JOHN gets up quickly. They're in each other's faces now, a tray of coffee cups in between them. BRANDINE, freezing in their coat, comes to meet us. Any level of chaos can ensue behind them as they speak.

BRANDINE

(to someone off stage)

Oh, hey.

(looking through the window)

You know I was gonna go back inside about now, but I think they could all use a few more minutes. Get it out of their system I guess.

The wind seems to oscillate between whispering and screaming.

BRANDINE

No, sorry, I don't smoke. ...

Where are you from? I don't recognize your accent. ...

Oh. ok? I'm from here. I go to school here. ...

Yeah, I'm 17. I've been told I look old for my age but I don't really think I do. ...

It's been a little bit hectic today. ...

Kinda like the snow, yeah, that's funny. It's just – people are needy. ...

I like history more than my other subjects. I don't know, I don't really have time to really be that passionate about anything. ...

I don't really think much about getting older. ...

Oh, no, it's fine asking. At least for me, I feel like most people, idk everybody's got different boundaries about that stuff. I'm transfem which means I was born a boy and transitioned to a feminine presenting person. ...

I don't know if I'm a girl or not. I usually go by they pronouns but I also don't really mind 'she' but don't really like saying I don't mind it. I don't know. ...

(laughing)

No, oh my god, not so I can be mad at people. I guess I just feel like it's wrong somehow. That doesn't really make sense, it's just some personal problem. I'm figuring it out. ...

Thanks ...

The wind picks up.

BRANDINE

Oh, brrr. I need to go in soon. ...

I'd love to be the expert of something. Like Greta Thunberg or Malala Yousafzai. That girl that wrote Frankenstein, Bobby Fischer, Richie Valens. Joan of Arc! ...

Yeah, I guess I am an expert on young experts. I got that going for me. ...

I know the weather's crazy. Was shocked when I was asked to come in. The way things have ended up going today, I probably would've been fine if I just told Cher I couldn't make it. Cher's the head barista – she organizes and trains all of us.

Yeah, I guess we very loosely have a hierarchy. But that's the whole of it. She's not my boss, no one really thinks of it that way, but. ...

Yeah. Can I actually get a cig? ...

BRANDINE takes a cig and a lighter into their hands.

BRANDINE

Thanks.

...

Whoever it is walks away.

BRANDINE

It's all white out there, I can't see past the first few rows of seats. I can't even really make out the parking lot.

There's something so disturbing about life. When I grew up, in like elementary school and all that, I thought I was a boy. And it was really a weight on me because I kept doing things that aren't boy things. And I knew they weren't boy things, but that's what I wanted to do. I played house with my LEGOS. Luke Skywalker would be Han Solo's wife. That made sense to me. No one else got it then when I tried to explain it. They didn't even know what to think. Maybe they thought I was gay. I just knew I should shut up about it and not mention it again. And maybe not make Luke Skywalker the wife.

I really started wearing makeup a year ago and oh my god, I'm 'some sort of FREAK'.

I learned the definition of nonbinary maybe when I was 14 and I mean *obviously* that's not me, which didn't really explain well why learning that term's meaning made me so happy. And I'm starting to wear dresses now and my friends are fewer and not the same and honestly not always the greatest. It wasn't anything dramatic. It was more of a, "You've changed. I don't know how to talk to you anymore." No one actually said that word for word to my face but everyone said it in their head.

And now they're arguing about me inside and I'm like can I just LIVE???

I don't want to go into politics. I don't want to be an activist. I don't want to be a political statement. I. Just. Want.

To. Make. You. Coffee.

And maybe please, please by the fifth try, get my name right. It's too much to ask? I want to be an expert in something, but I actually really don't want to be an expert in transitioning. I just don't—

Sorry.

Oh, you're gone. That motherfucker just Irish goodbye'd me.

BRANDINE looks at the lighter, still in their hand. They light it, but the flame quickly blows out. They try again, but no luck. A bit of silence. A bit of wind.

BRANDINE

Well, I guess goodbye to you too. I'll keep your—

BRANDINE sees something which must've made their tongue go numb. They are dumbfounded.

They drop the lighter and the cig. Then they run, and I mean RUN, back inside. where a few chairs are knocked over. Coffee cups litter the ground. JOHN has BRYCE under his arm. ALLISON wields a hair clip as a weapon—

KATE

YOU!!

BRYCE slips out of JOHN's hold.

KATE

Where is my pregnant friend's croissant?!?!

ALLISON

What did you just call me?

KATE

Pregnant – Not Pregnant, yes– oh god–

ALLISON

The baby's right there, it's quite clearly outside of me!

BRANDINE

You were asking about your croissant? Did I give you a chocolate or plain one by accident? I'm so sorry–

KATE

Yes, right – no, the croissant is gone!

BRANDINE

What do you mean?

KATE

I. Don't. Know. You tell me

BRANDINE

(half-jokingly)

Uhh maybe the aliens took it!

BILLY

You saw them too!

BRANDINE

Uhh.

KATE

Cher, your employee is crazy.

BRANDINE

No I'm not!

KATE

I bet she threw it out in a moment of delusion.

CHER

We don't need to be making accusations.

BRANDINE

(smally)

I don't go by that.

KATE

Which trashcan did you put it down?

BRANDINE

You want a croissant that's been put in a trashcan?

KATE

You admit it!

BRANDINE

No— That's not what I meant.

BRYCE

EVERYBODY SIT DOWN.

BRYCE has the room's attention.

BRYCE

This is a sacred space! You don't abuse it in this way—

UNNAMED WOMAN rises with her Dell laptop and hits BRYCE with it. He falls to the ground. She hisses, then runs out of the shop and into the cold. A voice echoes through the theater.

UNNAMED WOMAN (O.S.)

I'm trying to work, goddamnit!

The room is shocked in silence. BRYCE is slow to get up.

BRYCE

Do you think anyone is going to have her croissant?

BRYCE heads towards it, but in the process stumbles and then falls.

LIGHTS OUT.

We hear the ringing of a phone. Then, an automated voice.

VOICE

Hello, you've reached the city of Watertown, Massachusetts. To speak with a representative, press one—

We hear a button being pressed. 'You're on hold music' plays. It does this for long enough to generate a laugh. Then the phone starts ringing again.

CHER

Oh, hi. That was fast. I'm the head barista at the Sand Dollars' on Mt. Auburn. A few customers got caught here before the storm really picked up and we were wondering when the plows were coming through...

There's a loud crash. And many yelps.

LIGHTS UP:

SCENE TWO

The coffee shop is as it was at the end of Scene One. Except UNNAMED WOMAN has returned to her seat and is typing away as if nothing happened. BRANDINE and BILLY have acquired tinfoil hats. JOHN frowns at a computer which he has taken out of his bag. BRYCE lays face down on the floor, where he was struck. KATE nurses BILLY with a first kit of a few wounds on his left side. Scratches - nothing serious. Oh and a stop sign has come through a window which is now broken. CHER and BRANDINE are in the process of pushing it back outside. The wind fights against them. Duct tape and cardboard has been set on a table near the window that was struck. A broom and pan as well. The pan full of glass.

CHER

One, two, three!

BRANDINE and CHER push. The stop sign falls outside the shop. ALLISON cheers. BRANDINE grabs the cardboard and roll of duct tape.

CHER

And I think you should just talk to him.

BRANDINE

Cher, no you don't get it.

They begin patching up the window. CHER sprawls herself across one of the tables closeby. Then she jumps up.

CHER

Oh! We missed a little bit of glass on this one. Tell me what I don't get

BRANDINE

The problem is that I like him. The problem is I don't know – gahhh.

CHER

I see, attraction is a fickle thing. It's a crisis of its own. Take my ex-husband. His name is Garrett. He was a nice boy. A sweet boy. I met him in '82. He could tell me everything about himself all at once, but still somehow mysterious. He was a gentleman. A man's man too— very strong, athletic, confident, charming in more ways than one. And all that made him very attractive to me. I fell in love. He did too. We have one kid together. I never got the sense that he wanted to.
you know,

JOHN

(to his computer)

Fuck! This fucking thing!

CHER

practice making babies. He complimented me all the damn time. He made me feel so beautiful and sexy and he knew when to make me feel those ways. He could read me like a book. He was a bit of a puppy, especially when excited, but in a composed way like... Cary Grant. And he was gay too, wasn't he?

My mom had the biggest crush on Cary Grant as a teen, and as a young woman and an old woman. More loyal to him than my father. I never cheated. He did. I said some wicked things like 'You're going to bring AIDS into our home! You're going to kill us all. Since when were you a.

People still thought it could spread through clothes then. Our whole family got tested. It was humiliating. We stayed together for almost twenty more years. He convinced me and frankly himself that that incident was some slip up in who he was. That wasn't the real him. The real him was my husband.

It could've been a lot worse.

I don't think it could've been much better.

BRANDINE

Cool. What does that have to do with anything?

CHER

Be genuine with the relationships that you make. Neither me or Garrett were genuine and so we hurt each other even though we cared about each other very much.

BRANDINE

Do you think this is going to hold?

JOHN

So we're all just going to talk about our lives now then— I can't have that if I'm to get onto this conference call – which I can't get on this conference call without signing into an account I don't have and I'm sorry, who asked?

CHER

I got you your latte, didn't I?

JOHN

It was a bit off.

ALLISON

I liked hearing it. I feel like I understand some side of you I didn't know about before. You're a very kind person.

CHER

Thank you. I really appreciate that. By the way, I called the town. The plows are currently having a bit of trouble, but they should come through in about half an hour. And I've turned the heat up all the way until then.

CHER deposits the dustpan of glass in the trash.

BILLY

They're going to go outside?

CHER

Who? The plowers. Well, yes, in their trucks.

BILLY

Oh god.

CHER

Oh god?

BILLY

It's just... I'm worried. Nevermind.

BRANDINE

Cher, do you think this is going to hold?

BRYCE sits up from where he was.

BRYCE

Good Morning, coffee shop. What's the deal with the plows?

CHER

30 minutes.

BRYCE

Not too bad.

(pointing at BILLY)

What's with the hat?

BILLY

It's complicated. Strange occurrences occur and there's possible explanations. As precaution, I determined I feel safer this way.

BRYCE

From what? Slipping on ice? Getting whacked in the head with a computer?

BILLY

That's specific.

It's something I think about a lot.
You got one too!

BRYCE
(now looking at BRANDINE)

Yeah. Oh my god!

BRANDINE

What?!

BRYCE

You got nothing on your head!

BRANDINE

You're right!

BRYCE

Why did you take that thing from him?

CHER
(discreetly, just to Brandine)

I don't even fucking know.

BRANDINE

What do you mean? I think it just encourages him.

CHER

Your attention please!

KATE

No one pays attention.

Well sometimes we need to be encouraged.

BRANDINE

Brandine...

CHER

Your Bryce is coming over.

BRANDINE

BRYCE heads over to CHER, clearly curious about the hushed tones.

What's this about?

BRYCE

Nothing important – coffee.

CHER

I think I'm going to quit coffee.

BRYCE

How come, Bryce?

CHER

Excuse me! There's a grave injustice we can't keep turning a blind eye to.

KATE

No one's listening.

I don't know. The buzz doesn't do it for me anymore.

BRYCE

I really don't think it's my place to guide you on this matter.

CHER

And why's that?

BRYCE

I sell it to you.

CHER

Yes, but you know me.

BYRCE

I may know you best, but I serve you.

CHER

Fair. Also is there really nothing else we can do about the–

BRYCE

KATE stands on a table.

There's a croissant we need to find! It's been missing. I bought it for my friend Allison who has had a terrible morning–

KATE
(near tears)

What type of croissant? -- Brandine, could I get a double order of the usual. Actually make that triple.

BRYCE

CHER
(to BRANDINE)

I'll cover it. You help them with the pastry.

CHER returns behind the counter. BRANDINE makes their way over to KATE.

KATE
It was a butter croissant. And it was for my friend, Allison. She's been taking care of a child all by herself and we don't have the decency to find the pastry I bought her.

ALLISON
I have a husband...

KATE
Allison, come over here and tell us about it.

ALLISON
Actually, the baby needs a little quiet. But, thanks.

But BRYCE does come over, BILLY and BRANDINE behind.

KATE
It's Bryce, isn't it?

BRYCE
Yes, yeah

BILLY
I can help too.

KATE
And you're?

BILLY
Billy.

KATE
I'm Kate. And this is Brandine.

BRANDINE
Hi everyone.

KATE
Who between me and them, the croissant became misplaced.

BRYCE

I'm glad we got so many people working on this.

BILLY

Do you think she has it?

BILLY motions to UNNAMED WOMAN.

KATE

Who?

BILLY

Her.

KATE

The woman with the earbuds?

BRYCE

And the Dell laptop?

BILLY

I mean, yes. It's the only croissant I see anywhere.

BRYCE

But she's had her croissant—

KATE

She's had her croissant for at least nearly an hour—

BRYCE

Maybe there was some kind of mix up. Maybe she ate her croissant, forgot about it and then mindlessly grabbed the other. I've done things like that before.

BILLY

What?

BRANDINE

But, Kate, didn't you say it was a butter croissant?

KATE

I think so.

BRANDINE

That's a chocolate croissant.

BILLY

You forget eating things and then eat other people's things? Is that what you said?

KATE

Do you remember which croissant I ordered?

BRANDINE

I deal with too many croissants in a day to really like — you know

KATE

Maybe it was a chocolate croissant.

BILLY

We'd have to ask her.

BRYCE

Does anyone want to go over?

KATE

She's got her earbuds in. She's clearly working. It would be rude, wouldn't it?

BILLY

I don't know... I'm not sure...

KATE

I'm not doing it.

BILLY

There's just... there's this kinda energy—

KATE

About her?

BILLY

Yes! Thank you for naming it. That's where it's coming from. There's something about her that's off.

BRANDINE

What do you mean?

BRYCE

She doesn't look up.

BILLY

Brandine, when you served her this morning, do you recall anything weird?

BRANDINE

I think she was the first or second person here, before the weather got bad, and the first to take a seat. But that's really about it.

CHER has arrived with BRYCE's coffees.

CHER

Do you want these on the table here, Bryce?

BRYCE

Yeah, that's great.

CHER

Anyone else?

KATE

Could I have a Caramel Mocha?

BILLY

An espresso would be nice.

CHER

On its way!

BRYCE has already worked well into his first cup.

BILLY

Ok, Brandine, what did she say?

BRANDINE

She ordered?

KATE

Brandine, you seem to know this woman, you're somewhat at fault for the absence of my croissant gesture and you're the employee that seems to have not much else to do – you know what, why don't you–

BRANDINE

But you're right. There's something weird about her. And I'm a kid. You're an adult.

BRYCE, for the first time in a long time, stops mid-sip and puts down a partially fully cup of perfectly good coffee, as if an epiphany came upon him.

BRYCE

I'll do it. If someone gives me one of those hats.

I thought you weren't a fan of them.

BILLY

No, I never said that.

BRYCE

Yes, you did. You gave me a look about it.

BILLY

What look?

BRYCE

A look.

BILLY

Give me the hat.

BRYCE

This one's mine! I'll make you one. It'll take about ten minutes to get the trim right though.

BILLY

With what?

BRYCE

I'll need to grab my bag.

BILLY

BILLY grabs what looks like a backpack a table over.

You know what, Brandine, how about you just do it.

KATE

Are you—

BRANDINE

Yes.

KATE

Ok.

BRANDINE

BRANDINE timidly approaches UNNAMED WOMAN.

Hey.

BRANDINE
(meekly)

She doesn't even look up. Endlessly typing it seems. I hope the poor actresses doesn't get hand cramps.

BRANDINE

Hey. Hello. I was wondering about your croissant? Excuse me. Hi. A-hem. Salutations. Hey.

JOHN

Hey, see that kid?

JOHN points out BRANDINE's struggles to ALLISON. BRANDINE, meanwhile, tries harder and harder to get UNNAMED WOMAN's attention before the wind breaks through the duct taped cardboard window.

The wind whistles through the hole.

BRANDINE takes this as a queue to give up and mend the situation. Different characters of the coffee shop also might start opting for their winter coats as the temperature gets lower. JOHN and ALLISON's conversation.

ALLISON

What about her?

JOHN

She's just flailing up there. There's something about this generation. No social skills.

ALLISON

Kids are more anxious these days, which maybe is fair.

JOHN

How's that? Of what?

ALLISON

A little bit of everything I guess. I still was a kid not too long ago.

JOHN

You still seem young.

ALLISON

Thanks I think.

JOHN

Maybe. What's his name?

ALLISON

Gerald.

JOHN

That's a really lovely name.

ALLISON

My husband's idea. Thank god he's at work safe. He's freaking out that a stop sign came through the window.

JOHN

Tell him I give him his compliments. I have a daughter and a son. I've also been getting notifications. Nothing we can do right now but wait... can't even get the wi-fi to properly work. I don't understand how that woman over there has internet– the one with the Dell laptop–

ALLISON

And the earbuds? Probably a hotspot.

JOHN

I don't need a hotspot. I was considering taking a day off anyway.

ALLISON

But instead you're here. You said you have kids, right?

JOHN

Twins actually. It's the best and worst at this stage. Treasure the good parts.

ALLISON

I'm trying. He's not sleeping well right now. Got any advice?

JOHN

Yes, actually had the same problem with our daughter. You need to powder him up a bit before bed. He poops and pees so many times a day, it can get a bit uncomfortable down there. And if that doesn't work, some soft calming music. There's this modern composer named Ludovico Einaudi that I swear all kids before school age can't get enough of. It's very minimalist, very calming– it shouldn't overwhelm him. His stuff actually helps me sleep too.

ALLISON

That actually sounds really useful. Thanks. Your face looks a little – do you got a bruise on your cheek there?

JOHN

No.

ALLISON

No, I think you do.

JOHN

Who the fuck lets someone try to fight a customer in a coffee shop?

ALLISON

Cher, I guess.

JOHN

Exactly.

ALLISON puts mittens on her baby. Then, she puts on her own coat.

ALLISON

It's getting colder in here.

JOHN puts on his own coat.

JOHN

It's the fucking window.

ALLISON

Everything's weird today.

JOHN

The weather?

JOHN

No, it's like I landed on the moon.

ALLISON

Things just... keep changing. Eventually the Earth becomes the moon.

JOHN

What do you mean by that?

ALLISON

Personally, socially – I mean – the snow out there. It wasn't anything like that when I woke up.

JOHN

I have to disagree.

ALLISON

Why?

JOHN

I don't think the world ever changes. I bet a thousand years ago some Romans got stuck in whatever their equivalent of a coffee shop was and had exchanges exactly like this.

ALLISON

Really?

JOHN

Yeah. Everything is just a fad that's probably borrowing from some other fad that already came and went.

ALLISON

Well, not everything.

JOHN

Like what?

ALLISON

You mean, examples?

JOHN

Sure.

ALLISON

Just. A sense of progress.

JOHN

Bullshit. Excuse my language, Gerald.

ALLISON

I think that's kinda a sad way to look at things. And thank you for apologizing to my son.

JOHN

It's realistic.

ALLISON

It's a little too exact. I'm a new Mom. Everything's messy. To say *nothing* changes—

JOHN

Or you're caught up in the details.

ALLISON

But I like details.

JOHN

Think more...

ALLISON

More what?

BRYCE

Broadly— where's Brandine?

They're still fixing the window.

KATE

By the window.

BRYCE

Brandine, get over here! This is important.

BRANDINE

But the window—

BRYCE

We got more important things!

BRANDINE

A minute.

BRANDINE finishes repatching the window. It's an ugly blanket of tape and cardboard. They head over to BRYCE.

BRANDINE

I'm sorry, it's just anything I'd do, she wouldn't acknowledge me.

BRYCE

You have to have stage presence. Have you ever heard of stage presence? It's a thing actors do. I've dated two actors. They were both too neurotic—

KATE

More than you? That can't be true...

BRYCE pauses, clearly taken aback by the interjection, but quickly sets that—

BRYCE

Brandine, you have to go up there and assert yourself or otherwise, otherwise, they'll see right through you. Like you're a ghost. Do you want to be a ghost?

KATE

I echo parts of that by just saying, be confident. You're an amazing, fun, cool, fierce, queer person. You got this.

BRANDINE

Um, cool.

BILLY

I've finished your hat, Bryce, if you want it.

BRYCE

Yes, give me that.

BRYCE fits a tinfoil hat on his head.

BRYCE

I'll talk to her.

BRANDINE

Thank you.

BRYCE

Never mention it.

BRYCE strides confidently over to UNNAMED WOMAN.

BRYCE

Excuse me?

No response.

BRYCE

EXCUSE MEE?!

Not even a flinch.

BRYCE

A-HEM.

UNNAMED WOMAN looks up. BRYCE'S tinfoil hat falls off his head. UNNAMED WOMAN and BRYCE stare one each other down while BRYCE increasingly begins to tremble. BILLY, meanwhile, is repackaging his tinfoil hat materials.

KATE

You know, Billy, I just want to say the way you're reclaiming conspiracy theories as a Jewish person, is just really beautiful.

BILLY

Thanks, but conspiracies have never really been my thing.

KATE

Well maybe they should be.

BILLY

Also how did you know I was Jewish?

KATE

I don't know— um I think Bryce said so.

BILLY

He said I was gay. I don't know how he knew that either. // Do you have any cigs?

KATE

You know what is going on with Bryce over there?

JOHN

(to ALLISON)

See that guy? He's flailing up there—

At a point he can't take it anymore.

BRYCE

AHHHHH!

BRYCE runs out of the coffee shop.

CHER

No need for alarm. He does that often.

JOHN

Really?

CHER

He just needs a bit of time to cool down. And it's sure cold out there. He won't go far.

ALLISON

I'd appreciate it if there could be less noise in the coffee shop until we're all out of here. Gerald has been taking it well so far, but I'm sure it's all very overstimulating for him.

CHER

We'll do our best, ma'am, but I often find that a place as public as this one rejects quiet.

CHER looks to the door, expectantly. Furrows her brow. Brief silence. JOHN rises and heads for the counter.

JOHN

I'd like another pumpkin spice latte.

CHER smiles at JOHN before walking out from behind the counter. Where is she going? She calmly exits the coffee shop without any coat. If there's a tangible door, she pushes that shit open as wide as possible. Through the wind and snow near blind her, she seems to look straight through us. She just looks at us and breathes.

Music comes on, "[Strong Enough](#)" by Cher. If the rest of the onstage cast got some choreo up their sleeve, especially of the roller skate variety...

CHER

I don't need your sympathy
There's nothing you can say or do for me
And I don't want a miracle
You'll never change for no one
And I hear your reasons why
Where did you sleep last night?
And was she worth it? Was she worth it?

'Cause I'm strong enough to live without you
Strong enough and I quit crying
Long enough, now I'm strong enough
To know you gotta go
There's no more to say
So save your breath and walk away
No matter what I hear you say
I'm strong enough to know you gotta go

So you feel misunderstood
Baby, have I got news for you
On being used, I could write the book
But you don't wanna hear about it
'Cause I've been losing sleep
And you've been goin' cheap
And she ain't worth half of me it's true
Now I'm telling you, that

I'm strong enough to live without you
Strong enough and I quit crying
Long enough, now I'm strong enough

To know you gotta go

Come hell or waters high
You'll never see me cry
This is our last goodbye, it's true
I'm telling you, now

I'm strong enough to live without you
Strong enough and I quit crying
Long enough, now I'm strong enough
To know you gotta go

There's no more to say
So save your breath and walk away
No matter what I hear you say
I'm strong enough to know you gotta go

Now I'm strong enough to live without you
Strong enough and I quit crying
Long enough, now I'm strong enough
To know you gotta go
(There's no more to say)
(So save your breath and walk away)
(No matter what I hear you say)
(I'm strong enough to know)

At some point in the song the wind overtakes the music and Cher's voice. BRYCE appears from somewhere in the whiteout, not fully visible. Once Cher stops singing, he starts to approach her. Meanwhile, BRANDINE approaches JOHN.

BRANDINE

What was your order, sir?

JOHN

Pumpkin spice latte.

BRANDINE

Lemme check if Cher left anything of the mix for that order out here in front.

BRANDINE looks about the counter space.

BRANDINE

She didn't. I'll have to go to the back.

JOHN

(facetiously)

Great!

BRANDINE stops in their tracks.

BRANDINE

(out of nowhere)

YOU'RE UNSUFFERABLE!!

JOHN

... It's insufferable.

BRANDINE

I don't give a fuck!

Do you really think that about me? JOHN

What do you expect me to think? BRANDINE

I'm... not really sure. JOHN

Don't you think that's a problem? BRANDINE

You remind me of my son— JOHN

I'm not a son. BRANDINE

I know that. JOHN

So what am I? BRANDINE

Isn't that for you to figure out? JOHN

BRANDINE's had enough. Curtly, they exit towards the back of the coffee shop. He feels stares around the coffee shop on him.

Is that you singing? BRYCE

What? JOHN

What?! Bryce, is that you? CHER

Since when did you sing? BRYCE

You heard me? CHER

BRYCE
Not much else to listen to.

CHER
Was I any good?

BRYCE
Better than most singing I hear.

CHER
Thank you.

Silence.

BRYCE
Do you think much of me? Honestly.

CHER
I talk to you almost every day.

BRYCE
I already know that.

CHER
Well, you're a customer—

BRYCE
And?

CHER
And—

The wind suddenly picks up.

BRYCE
GAHHH.

BRYCE is pulled to the ground. Something might grab him that we can't fully see. Or was that just the crew? CHER struggles to keep her feet as the wind hollers more and more wildly.

CHER
BRYCE!

Just wind.

CHER

BRYCE!!

More of where that came from. CHER notices something. She lets out a yelp and then rushes back inside the coffee shop. She looks sick.

JOHN

Your co-worker's lost in the back.

CHER

And they'll take as long as they need. Until then, you wait.

JOHN

Excuse me?

CHER

You fucking heard me.

JOHN

What are you doing?

CHER

My job... You know, if the weather wasn't what it was, you wouldn't still be here, you crusty douchebag looking past his prime transphobe.

JOHN

Convenient then that weather is what it is.

Beat.

CHER

Something's out there.

JOHN

What's 'something' and where's 'there'?

CHER

Outside. There's something outside.

JOHN

Like snow--

CHER

Something that shouldn't be there. Fuck, just thinking about it... I think I'm going to be sick.

KATE

Where's Bryce?

CHER vomits into a trashcan. Eventually she raises her head.

CHER

I don't know. Maybe the wind just swept him up – Noooo. No I can see it— AHHH

BILLY

What?

CHER

Thinking about it makes my head hurt. In the strangest— I can't. think about it.

BILLY strides over to BRYCE's fallen tin foil hat. He hands it to CHER.

BILLY

Here. Put this on.

JOHN

Some wind gusts are approaching thirty miles an hour out there.

CHER accepts the hat.

CHER

... Thanks.

BILLY

Feel better?

CHER

Sure, why not.

JOHN

You're just stressed because the town hasn't come through yet with the plows.

CHER

I know what I saw!

JOHN

What? What did you see?

CHER

It looked like a wolf. With wings and a beard. And it had huge eyes that glistened in the snow.
It—

CHER collapses.

Shit! ALLISON

Oh my god! JOHN

JOHN kneels down to CHER.

She's breathing normally. JOHN

Thank god. KATE

Let's make her comfortable. ALLISON

I'll help. Was she always that crazy? KATE

No, she's just eccentric. ALLISON

Did you hear what she was saying?? KATE

ALLISON
She's not insane. It's ungodly cold out there. And she went out there without a coat.

KATE
There's a lot of conditions that start to pop up usually around her age. She should go see somebody.

JOHN
Everybody ready to lift?

ALLISON, KATE and JOHN lift up CHER.

JOHN
Where are we going to put her?

ALLISON
The bench over there?

ALLISON lets go of CHER, causing KATE and JOHN to half drop her. BILLY, as if transfixed, approaches UNNAMED WOMAN.

ALLISON

She's heavier than she looks.

KATE

She's got muscle.

ALLISON

yup.

ALLISON

I also have a blanket in my bag for the baby that maybe we can scrunch up into a pillow.

ALLISON looks through her bag.

ALLISON

It's somewhere in here.

KATE

Should we maybe set her down first?

ALLISON

Oh, I'm so sorry.

ALLISON joins back in the lifting efforts. The three of them set CHER down on a bench. ALLISON pulls out a medium sized blanket and rolls it into a pillow, which she gently sets under CHER's head.

BILLY

(to UNNAMED WOMAN)

Tell me what's going on.

This woman really loves her computer. To her, it doesn't even seem as if BILLY's there.

BILLY

Hey! We have a right to know. Otherwise, it's not fair— We have a right! What do you need from us to make that happen? I know you get this. I know you do!

ALLISON

What are you yelling at her for?

BILLY

I saw something outside too.

ALLISON
Wait, you were serious?

BILLY
About the aliens? Fucking hell, Yes!

ALLISON
I thought it was a shtick.

BILLY
NO! Brandine saw them too. When they're back, they'll tell you.

ALLISON
(under her breath)
You're crazy.

BILLY
(hearing her)
Where's Bryce right now?

ALLISON
I don't know! He's probably fine! I've seen him come in here for over a year. He just does weird things sometimes. It's a part of the atmosphere here. We're used to it. Gerald is used to it, although he shouldn't. have. to. be.

BILLY
Gerald is an awful name by the way!

ALLISON
You think I don't know that!

BILLY
And I'll remind you that you said you're a grungy slut of a mom!

ALLISON
I say it in the mirror every night before I go to bed and every morning before I change his diaper!

BILLY
You're a strange person, Allison.

ALLISON
At least I know it!

BILLY
Do you?

ALLISON

Yes, I fucking do! And you're weird!

BILLY

No - what I am... is seeing through this shit. You think you don't sleep? - I haven't slept in years.

GERALD begins crying. BRANDINE returns with coffee beans.

ALLISON

Oh fuck.

BILLY

I need a cigarette!

BRANDINE

John, I can make another cup for you.

JOHN

Good... I'm sorry.

BRANDINE

What about?

JOHN

I just am.

ALLISON picks up GERALD.

ALLISON

There you go, sweetums. Mommy's sorry. Mommy didn't mean to yell. It's just been a frustrating morning, that's all! Sometimes we all have frustrating mornings.

KATE

Do you have to do that in front of everybody?

ALLISON

Where would you prefer I do it?!

GERALD, who was just beginning to calm down, gets even louder. ALLISON glares at KATE a death stare.

ALLISON

(to Gerald)

I'm sorry, baby. Sometimes people are clueless. That's all. I'm here for you. SHhhhhhhh. SHhhhhhhh. There you go.

ALLISON continues calming her baby. KATE takes CHER's tinfoil hat and places it on her own head, looking somewhat perplexed.

BILLY

Oh! I can make another one for you.

KATE

If that fulfills you in your reclamation.

BILLY

I don't know what you're talking about, but if you know what – I'm not gonna argue. You want the hat. You're showing some common sense.

BRANDINE

Is Cher still outside?

JOHN

She's taking a nap.

BRANDINE

What?

JOHN

She fainted.

BRANDINE

Oh my god, is she okay!?

JOHN

Breathing.

BRANDINE

Was it the cold? Wait, is Bryce still out there?

JOHN

Seems so. I was thinking if he's not back soon, some of us should go out there and call for him. He might be lost trying to get back to the shop.

BRANDINE

Isn't the sooner we do that, the better? So he doesn't get farther away?

JOHN

That's actually a good point. I'll go out. Let me know when my coffee's ready.

KATE

I'll go too.

BRANDINE

Wait.

JOHN

What?

BRANDINE

There's something out there. I talked to it.

KATE

What??

BRANDINE

It knew English kinda okay, but like it learned it from England. I thought it was a human at first. Its voice was like a growl of a bear mixed with nasal like it also had a bit of Kermit the Frog in it... so watch out for that. I guess.

BILLY

I fucking knew it! I fucking knew it!

JOHN

Ok. I'm going.

JOHN zips up a coat and heads for the door. He holds it open for KATE, who meanders over putting on various winter items.

JOHN

What are you doing? You're letting the cold air in.

KATE

I'm putting my gloves on!

JOHN closes the door behind them. UNNAMED WOMAN rises. As she picks up her bag, a piece of paper falls out and onto the floor. CHER wakes up as she does, UNNAMED WOMAN brings herself, her computer and her bag over to a corner table. There, she takes out a computer charger and plugs it into an outlet in the wall.

She sits back down and returns to her work.

She's left her croissant behind.

BILLY and ALLISON both eye it. BRANDINE returns to making JOHN's coffee, albeit quite distractedly. BILLY and ALLISON share a look before half racing each other towards the plate.

BILLY

I was just about to bring this over to that woman.

ALLISON
Same! Though it also might be the one that Kate bought me.

BILLY
Is it?

ALLISON
Who knows!

BILLY
(fake nice)
I'm sorry I called you a grungy slut parent earlier.

ALLISON
(fake nice)
It's alright. Things happen. I'm sorry I called you crazy.

BILLY
I mean, was it an insult or an observation?

ALLISON laughs.

ALLISON
You have a great sense of humor.

BILLY
Thanks! I really appreciate that.

ALLISON picks up the plate.

ALLISON
And my observation skills are why I can tell that this croissant—

Now BILLY grips the other end of the plate.

BILLY
That this croissant belongs to the woman over there!

BILLY pulls on the plate to bring it to him, but in the process the croissant falls off and hits the ground. ALLISON dives for it.

ALLISON
Five second rule!

BILLY
You're disgusting.

ALLISON
(holding the pastry)

This is hard as a rock.

BILLY

As if it's been sitting out for a while.

ALLISON

Yeah, that's a little gross. That's not mine.

BILLY

Then it's...

ALLISON and BILLY look at UNNAMED WOMAN.

ALLISON

Oh.

BILLY

Uh.

ALLISON

Let's just set this down here.

ALLISON sets the croissant back down on the plate on the table where UNNAMED WOMAN was, filth all over one side.

ALLISON

She won't notice that it's been on the floor, right? I nabbed it right after it dropped.

ALLISON picks up the pastry and wipes some very visible dirt off it.

BILLY

Wouldn't it be better to throw it in the trash?

ALLISON

No! Trying to hide the evidence! That's like admitting you're guilty.

BILLY

We could just buy her another croissant.

ALLISON

Their pastries are really overpriced.

BILLY

Oh, really?

Yeah. ALLISON

Damn't. BILLY

BRANDINE comes out from behind the counter with JOHN's coffee.

Do you two need help with anything? BRANDINE

No, not at all! ALLISON

Thank you, though! BILLY

Alright. BRANDINE

You really think you sleep less than me? ALLISON
(to BILLY)

Maybe. BILLY

What keeps you up at night? ALLISON

We're the ones who aren't helpless. BILLY

... What? ALLISON

I think we've been invaded. BILLY

I'm just gonna stop asking men questions about themselves. ALLISON

Are you just going to hold that? BILLY

ALLISON

I - oh...

Realizing she's been holding it this whole time, ALLISON awkwardly sets the croissant back on its plate. BRANDINE exits the coffee shop. CHER sits up.

CHER

What the hell.

ALLISON rushes over.

ALLISON

Cher! You fell!

CHER

That doesn't sound like me.

ALLISON

It happens. Are you feeling ok? Are you dizzy at all?

CHER

No, I'm fine. Are you ok?

ALLISON

We're managing. We're actually doing so perfectly—
(breaking down)
I can't believe the rest of his life he's going to be named Gerald.

CHER

Oh, sweetie...

ALLISON

And I'm hungry. I didn't get any breakfast this morning...

CHER

Do you want something from the shop?

ALLISON

(recovering)
No, it's ok. We persevere. Onto the next. That's how it has to be.

CHER

Wait, where's—

Speaking of the people looking for him. Now BRANDINE trudges through the snow, searching for JOHN and KATE by voice.

BRYCE! JOHN

BRYCE! KATE

BRYCE! JOHN

BRYCE! KATE

JOHN! BRANDINE

My coffee? JOHN

BRANDINE finds JOHN through the increasingly worse whiteout.

Right here. BRANDINE

Thanks. JOHN

BRANDINE turns around and treks back the way they came. They find their way back to the door.

Pumpkin spice? KATE

What's it to you? He made me coffee. JOHN

They're not a boy! KATE

They. Whatever. JOHN

Transphobe. KATE

Libtard. JOHN

Ableist. KATE

Libtard. Is this really // what you want to– JOHN

Are we just going to– KATE

Just... JOHN

Just this isn't something I want to deal with. KATE

Then why pick a fight? JOHN

I'm not the one that picks a fight– KATE

Me neither. JOHN

I just don't know what to do with that. (gesturing towards the coffee shop)

What's that? KATE

Them. JOHN

They're not a that. KATE

Christ, I'm actually trying to talk here. I just love it when you victimize everything– JOHN

Misogynist. KATE

You're not in the kitchen, are you? JOHN

You did not just– KATE

JOHN
Maybe that was rude. Even if I got a point.

KATE
You don't, but... How's your coffee?

JOHN
A lot better than the last one. Maybe there's something about being out here.

KATE
Warms the hands?

JOHN
A little.

KATE
I'm pretty worried about the coffee addict guy.

JOHN
He's at risk for frostbite. They say just 15 minutes and your body starts to shut down.

KATE
How long have we been out here?

JOHN
Probably 5 minutes? We should go back inside after ten.

KATE
Sounds good.
BRYCE!

JOHN
BRYCE!

KATE
BRYCE!
This isn't doing anything.

JOHN
We don't know that.

KATE
I hope so.

JOHN
Yeah.

KATE

There's something very mysterious about when the snow whirls about like this.

JOHN

It's dangerous.

KATE

Things can be two things at once.

JOHN

I know.

KATE

You know?

JOHN

It is mysterious.

(holding out his cup)

Do you want any of this?

KATE

No, I'm fine. Thank you though.

JOHN

Have you had pumpkin spice before?

KATE

Of course, but I could never out of season. For me, it's as synonymous to fall as pumpkins or as "All I Want For Christmas Is You" is to December. It'd feel wrong to look at a pumpkin any other time of year.

JOHN

This is my first time drinking it. It's what my son always got in high school, and, well, I can't really explain it but he's been going through a few things right now and—
BRYCE!

KATE

BRYCE!
Do you see him?
BRYCE!

JOHN

No, I just thought we hadn't yelled it recently enough.

KATE

Oh. I'm sorry about your son.

Silence.

JOHN

Think we should run an expedition around the area? At least the parking lot?

KATE

It'd be too dangerous.

JOHN

If we travel as a group and make sure there's some tangible way to retrace our steps. Something deep enough in the snow that the wind won't blow around our trail.

KATE

I mean if you have any ideas.
BRYCE!

JOHN

BRYCE!

KATE

BRYCE!

JOHN

BRYCE!
Nothing.

KATE

What's your idea?

JOHN

I'd have to look around the coffee shop to see if there's anything suitable. If he doesn't show up in a few minutes, let's try it out.

KATE

I'm not sure if he is going to show up. Let's just go back—

JOHN

A couple more minutes.

Silence.

KATE

Does the wind sound, at all, like it's talking to you?

JOHN

In a metaphorical way?

KATE

Maybe. It sounds more talkative than it normally does.

JOHN

I can see that.

KATE

Or hear it.

JOHN

Or hear it, yes.

Silence.

JOHN

So much depends. upon
a red wheel barrow. glazed with rain water. Beside—

KATE

What are you doing?

JOHN

I don't know.

Silence.

JOHN

My son, um... he went to the hospital early this morning. I don't know if he's going to live— I decided to go to work... and get my coffee before...

KATE

Oh... I'm so sorry. That's awful.

JOHN

Don't tell anyone I said that.

KATE

Ok... I'm actually genuinely sorry.

JOHN

(with genuine heartbreak)

It's my fault. I raised a fag.

Silence. KATE, oddly, doesn't say anything about this transgression. Maybe stunned. JOHN, wallowing further in his depression or a moment of realization.

JOHN
(self-deprecating)

I'm the fag...

Each searching for words...

KATE

Let's go back in. I'm starting to freeze.

JOHN

Just a few more minutes. Let's give him a chance.

KATE

I'm not leaving someone out here alone.

JOHN

He deserves a chance.

KATE looks around the winter haze. Then, she looks at JOHN, almost pitifully – a first. She sighs.

KATE
(almost yells, out into the snow)

I went to a meeting for a furry group.

JOHN

A 'what' group?

KATE

Some local interest meeting... online – Don't tell anyone I said that.

JOHN

I don't think I could if I tried.

KATE

Good. I don't think it's for me.

JOHN

That's ok I guess.

KATE

I just thought you told me something, so I should tell you something and that's what... came... out...

JOHN

Ok?

KATE

Now come inside.

JOHN

Ok.

JOHN and KATE turn around and make their way back to the coffee shop. BILLY's putting the final touches on another tinfoil hat. Everyone in the coffee shop receives a chime on their devices.

CHER

Dangerous weather - what do you know?

BRANDINE

It's sent kinda late.

The wind loosens the cardboard again. Some snow starts to drift in.

CHER

You know, in my day, I was a fabulous contralto.

BRANDINE

Yes, we know.

CHER

Well, you know, but Billy doesn't.

BILLY

I finished another hat for you if you want it.

CHER takes the hat and fits it on her head.

BRANDINE

You're wearing one of those now?

CHER

Apparently.

BRANDINE

I didn't think you would.

CHER

How's school?

BRANDINE

I just had my audition for Honors Band.

CHER

Yeah? How did it go?

BRANDINE

Good I think? But idk if I'm gonna get in. How are you?

CHER

French horn, right?

BRANDINE

Yeah. What you been up to?

CHER

I sent my short story collection to a publisher.

BRANDINE

Oh my god!

CHER

God I hope it works out.

BRANDINE

Which ones are in it?

CHER

The sailor, the library one, the amazon rainforest exploration one, the giant cat as section 8 housing, the jazz teacher and the barista one. You know I changed the title–

*JOHN and KATE enter back into the coffee shop, looking a bit like popsicles.
BRANDINE looks the other way.*

CHER

Did you find him?

BRANDINE

Oh, the window.

BRANDINE heads to fix up the cardboard. This time, they add an extra layer of cardboard and really mount on the tape.

JOHN

No, we were thinking of doing some type of excursion for him as a group.

KATE

We'd use something from the shop to mark our trail so we don't get lost.

CHER

Would an end of a broom work?

ALLISON

Are you sure you should go back outside?

CHER

I have to.

BILLY takes a breath.

BILLY

I can come too.

JOHN

What's that?

JOHN spots the piece of paper on the floor where UNNAMED WOMAN was sitting. He walks over to it and picks it up.

JOHN

Where did this come from?

Silence.

JOHN

This is Russian. Right? I can read this... boyat... boyat... boyat'sva chegar ugodon

BRANDINE

I read russian. Give it to me.

BRANDINE snatches the paper from JOHN.

BRANDINE

This isn't Russian.

JOHN

Yes it is. "Chegar ugodon". That means anything.

BRANDINE

No, it's gibberish. Anything is "chto ugodno."

JOHN

That's what I said.

BRANDINE

No and that's not what this says either. It sounds like Russian. It looks like Russian. But these aren't words.

BILLY rushes over to BRANDINE and JOHN.

BILLY

(in a loud whisper)

It fell from that woman's bag.

JOHN

Cher? You said something about a broom.

CHER

A suggestion for something to drag through the snow.

JOHN

A broom would work. If you drag it deep enough.

CHER grabs a broom from somewhere behind the counter. JOHN grabs the piece of paper from BRANDINE and folds it.

BRANDINE

What are you doing with that?

JOHN

With what?

BRANDINE

The paper.

JOHN

I just... I don't know.

BRANDINE

It's not yours.

JOHN

I don't think a piece of paper with gibberish is really much use to anyone.

BRANDINE

It's useful to me.

BRANDINE grabs the paper back and puts it in their pocket.

BILLY
Everyone ready to go?

Murmurs of yes.

BILLY
John, do you want a hat?

JOHN
No.

BILLY
Are you sure?

JOHN
What would I need it for.

Silence.

JOHN
I'll take it.

BILLY
(opening up his bag)
Cool, I got one more in here.

BILLY hands JOHN a tinfoil hat. He puts it on. The quartet treks out into the snow.

BILLY
Oh wow, it's gotten way worse out there.

They exit, leaving ALLISON, BRANDINE and UNNAMED WOMAN alone in the coffee shop. BRANDINE takes the paper back to the counter and begins studying it.

BRANDINE
(mutters)
I can figure this out. I'm this fucking close.

ALLISON
(overhearing)
Figure what out?

BRANDINE
Just give me a moment.

A few moments pass.

BRYCE enters from the cold. He's ruffled and maybe vaguely beat up. But doesn't he always look like that? He spots the dirty croissant.

BRYCE

Gah! Who-how-what-this fell on the floor.

BRYCE sniffs the pastry.

BRYCE

It definitely fell on the floor!

BRANDINE

Where were you?

BRYCE picks up a cup of coffee, likely belonging to either KATE, JOHN or BILLY, and takes a sip.

BRYCE

I think I saw God out there.

BRANDINE

They're *looking* for you out there—

BRYCE

What happened to it!?!

ALLISON

I don't know!

BRYCE

(quickly, manically)

The croissant, the croissant, the croissant, what I mean when I say the croissant. A family heirloom, a trinket, it's hollow, sometimes with a little bit of something in the middle like a-a-a-a like a pastry should be. It's the croissant. It's been chewed on at both ends like a human came at it from one end and a family of gerbils came at it from another. Gnawing at it like their livelihood depends on a damn pastry. It's got chocolate on the inside.

I saw God out there. I saw him and I gaped at it. I screamed GAHHH. You aren't— you are— I'm not— I'm not in a coffee shop anymore. How did that happen? God beat me up out there in that storm. God squared its shoulders, looked me up and down and threw punches at me— That time I got lost as a kid. Do I remember if I felt a thing? Small-clawed otters are going extinct. I want to glide like an otter. Just a little odder than that.

(pointing at UNNAMED WOMAN)

AND SHE'S GOD'S FRIEND.

And she finally did it. Her final act of defiance. She ate the ends. It's mostly just hard bread on the end. I've had their pastries. They're very mediocre. I feel like I'm Lucky. This is a sacred

place. This is your sanctuary, isn't it? I feel like the moment before a hiccup and it all tumbles out from the forgotten spot between your chest and belly. AHH.

That's what I sound like. That's what it tastes like. Let me bring this over to you, respectfully, ma'am. You seem to have left your croissant over at your previous table of residence.

BRYCE grabs the plate and carries it over to UNNAMED WOMAN.

BRYCE (cont.)

There you go. Are you going to thank me? You left your croissant at your previous table of residence! I'm returning it to you as you seem to have lost it!!

Earbuds in, UNNAMED WOMAN vaguely smiles.

BRYCE (cont.)

You left your croissant over there.

UNNAMED WOMAN looks at the plate and gives a little "oh".

BRYCE (cont.)

It's yours.

UNNAMED WOMAN observes the dirt on the side of the pastry, looks a little disgusted.

BRYCE

Sorry, it seems to have fallen on the floor.

UNNAMED WOMAN slowly rises.

ALLISON

No, it's my fault!

UNNAMED WOMAN stops in her tracks.

BRYCE

What?

ALLISON

I dropped it. I'm so sorry. I don't even know how it happened. I was being petty with someone I just met. It has nothing to do with you, I promise. I can buy you another one.

UNNAMED WOMAN's stare swallows up ALLISON's words, causing her to trail off. She moves BRYCE aside and walks over to her—

ALLISON

Don't you dare touch my baby!

BRANDINE

It was me! I'm just tired of this job. I'm tired of the smell of coffee. I'm tired of the length of my shifts and how little other staff we have. I'm so far behind in school and I'm a geek. I'm so fucking sick of it. I had to rebel. I had to do something, so I threw the pastry on the floor—

*UNNAMED WOMAN's stare now swallows up BRANDINE's words who crumples up the paper with not-Russian and hides it. She changes her course for them. BRYCE, spotting a moment of opportunity, grabs UNNAMED WOMAN's computer. He approaches behind her quickly. He raises the computer above his head to strike—
And slips, on a coffee cup that he very likely dropped himself, hits his own self in the head and falters to the ground.*

BRYCE

FUuuuuuccckk.

UNNAMED WOMAN panics, seeing her laptop dropped on the floor, probably in a pool of coffee. She grabs it, opens it and checks its functionality. It seems fine. She takes another look at BRYCE, ALLISON and BRANDINE, steps over BRYCE and returns to her seat, confused, moving a bit mechanically. She picks up her pastry and wipes the rest of the dirt off it. She's about to take a cautious bite, then changes her mind. She puts the croissant in her bag and then gathers up the rest of her belongings. BRANDINE exhales. BRYCE jitters. ALLISON appears perfectly calm. From behind the taped up cardboard window, a bright light shines from offstage. UNNAMED WOMAN tears down the tape and cardboard and exits into the cold and into the light through the hole. Once she's gone, crew begin removing parts of the set. BRANDINE decrumples the piece of paper and begins writing notes on it – before a crew member takes away their pen and the paper itself.

BRYCE

That – that – that—

ALLISON

Do you really hate your job?

BRANDINE

Yeah.

ALLISON

I know what that's like. I've had shitty jobs. Are their moments when you confoundingly love it?

BRANDINE

Yeah.

ALLISON

“Yeah.”

I don't ever have much to say—
 BRANDINE

Yes you do—
 ALLISON

I do.
 BRYCE

I know that.
 BRANDINE

We know that.
 ALLISON

I don't know. Everyone said there's always a nonbinary barista, so I thought – might as well.
 BRANDINE

I'm going to want more coffee.
 BRYCE

What do—
 BRANDINE

Let me finish this though.
 BRYCE

BRYCE picks up the cup he slipped on, which apparently still has a bit left in it.

BRYCE
 When they first created the world, they divided it into seven parts. I don't mean continents. Don't fucking mistake it with continents. We're talking layers. We're talking the surface— with the oceans and trees, the magma— with the lava and melting rock, the diamonds— with reflections and blood, the soil— with dirt and coffee beans.

BRYCE's coffee cup is taken away from him.

BRYCE
 Aah! Nooo.... Ocean, trees, magma, diamonds, dirt, coffee beans. Which comes out about close enough to seven.
 I read it in the stars somewhere. Somewhere with lots of them. Not like a day like today. Where you can't see three feet. It's horrible out there. God beat me to a pulp out there. God was Rocky and I was me. Shifting like the molten, melting rock. Do you know we're in a dissolving place right now?

ALLISON

I know I'm in a coffee shop right now. And so is Gerald. And Gerald's safe. And I'm safe. I think. I'm— balancing on the tightrope of the tip of my tongue — Balancing.

BRANDINE

Mornings are such a fever dream.

BRYCE and ALLISON approach the counter for new orders. But then the counter is rolled off. All three, BRYCE, ALLISON and BRANDINE, following after it, exit. Left on the stage, until now hidden behind the counter, is a croissant on a small white plate. The wind picks up. We're outside. The snow obscures vision. JOHN enters.

JOHN

HEY! HEY! Where are y'all?!?!

CHER

Right behind you! I'm just short!

JOHN

Where's — where's — what's her name again?

CHER

KATE!

Silence.

CHER

KATEEE!

KATE (O.S)

Where are you?!?

CHER

FOLLOW MY VOICE.

JOHN

WE'RE OVER HERE.

CHER AND JOHN

THIS WAY, THIS WAY, THIS WAY, THIS WAY!

JOHN

I swear I'm going blind in this.

CHER

Me too. I haven't seen a whiteout like this in 40 years. But I think we're almost there now.

KATE (O.S.)

HEY!

JOHN

THIS WAY!

KATE enters.

KATE

There you are!

BILLY

HELLO??

CHER

Is that—

KATE

BILLY!

BILLY

I think I see you guys!!

BILLY enters, no tinfoil hat.

CHER

What are you doing out here?! I thought you went back!

BILLY

I needed a smoke. And then a piece of metal hit me in the head and I went flying.

CHER

Crap, let me see it.

BILLY

It's fine! My hat took most of it. But they can track me now.

CHER

BRYCE!!

KATE

BRYCE!!

CHER

He's gone at this point! But I think I know where we are! We're almost there!

BILLY
Do any of you hear that?!

KATE
Hear what?!

BILLY
Listen!

It's wind. Is there something else?

BILLY
Do you hear it?!

CHER
No! Can anyone else hear it!?

BILLY
It's like a faint whining noise!

KATE
Maybe faintly!

JOHN
I can't tell! It's the plows?

CHER
Let's just keep moving!

BILLY
It could be somebody! It's getting closer!

CHER
BRYCE!?

Now the whining seems to drift away from them. The winds die down a little bit, making the world around the quartet a bit more clear.

KATE
Is that?

KATE rushes over to the pastry on the plate.

CHER
(to KATE)
Hey! We stick together!

CHER, JOHN and BILLY follow KATE. KATE picks up the butter croissant.

This is Allison's croissant. We found it. KATE

How is that— JOHN

How do you know it's hers? BILLY

It looks right. KATE

That's a meaningless statement. BILLY

No it's just — That's Allison's croissant. KATE

It's definitely one of ours. CHER

Do we take it back to her? JOHN

BILLY reaches out to touch the croissant.

It's hard as a rock. BILLY

The wind begins to pick up again.

Oh, that's cold. KATE

Visibility is getting tougher. The whining noise returns.

I hear the whining noise, I hear it! CHER

It's // the plows. KATE

JOHN
(much louder)

Jesus Christ.

BILLY

Oh fuck.

Each of the quartet freezes, as if confused, if they're not already frozen, as their gaze fixates on something. Then they look at each other.

The four characters simultaneously collapse to the ground. After a moment, they start making snow angels, maybe laughing while they do.

A moment.

UNNAMED WOMAN enters from the light. She finds the croissant that Kate found and puts it in her bag. She exhales. The cold doesn't seem to bother her.

She looks up at something. Sees something. Smiles.

UNNAMED WOMAN

It's the plows!

A light from above spotlights her. She lifts her arms in embrace. Then, she's lifted into the heavens.

WHITEOUT.

END OF PLAY