

DRIFT

By Dennis Bush

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CHARACTERS

(4 Males, 5 Females)

CONNOR (f)	19, no nonsense; tough
CARSON (f)	17; has been through foster care system
RIO (f)	19; has been transient her whole life
SUNDAY (f)	mid-20s to mid-30s; her life has unraveled
MERRICK (f)	late teens; ran away from home
DIVER (m)	mid- to late-20s; a man with a mission
PLAYBILL (m)	early to mid-20s; street performer
BUSBOY (m)	late teens to early 20s; aggressive
MONKEY (m)	early to late 20s; a leader; sees himself as revolutionary

SETTING

New York City: 47th Street, just west of Broadway. A September evening.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

After an August 2008 reading in New York City by members of the Element 8 Ensemble, *Drift* was first produced in Phoenix, Arizona, in September, 2008. The original cast included Jared Sikes, Ariana O’Rafter, Samantha Ortiz, Ben Whitemire, Alex Rivera, Derek Weber, Macy Cobb, Emily O’Brien and Roxanne Feldhake. The production was directed by the playwright.

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At rise: A group of people is loosely clustered on a sidewalk. Some are huddled closely together. There is a palpable connection between them. Others have staked out more solitary space. SUNDAY is the farthest away from the group.

MONKEY: What are you lookin' at?

BUSBOY: You want me to push you out into the street? We all have somebody we'd like to push in front of a bus.

RIO: Keep moving.

MERRICK: I'm not a tourist attraction. I'm not on the Gray Line tour, so I'm not a tourist attraction.

RIO: Keep moving!

CARSON: Everything will be fine. Everything will be fine. Everything. Will. Be. Fine.

PLAYBILL: The orange bricks make me happy. It's like a wall of sunshine, even on a rainy day.

CARSON: Everything will be fine.

SUNDAY: The world is upside down.

DIVER: I need U.

CONNOR: I see your shoes. I see you walking by in your shoes. (*Quick pause*) Wearing kitten heels doesn't make you a kitten.

RIO: Keep moving.

CARSON: Everything. Will. Be. Fine.

SUNDAY: I couldn't remember the numbers. I couldn't remember the codes.

DIVER: The signs are messages. The messages are signs.

SUNDAY: Too many numbers. Too many passwords. Too many codes.

PLAYBILL: (*A recitation*) "You have long legs." (*Another interpretation*) You have *long* legs. (*Another reading*) You have long legs. (*Still another reading*) You have long legs.

RIO: Keep moving.

MONKEY: What are you lookin' at?!

SUNDAY: I had to show them my driver's license to buy the decongestant. It's over-the-counter allergy medicine, but I had to go to the pharmacy window and ask for it and show them my driver's license and sign my name like I was some kind of criminal just because I was buying decongestant allergy medicine. And she kept my driver's license. The pharmacy clerk. I didn't notice at first. I wasn't thinking straight. I was congested. My head felt like it

weighed a hundred pounds. All I could think about was how long it would take for the medicine to start working. It was a Sunday night. Late. It was almost midnight till I got home. And I couldn't get in my building. I couldn't remember the security code. We don't have keys. We have security codes and I couldn't remember mine. I rang everybody's bell, but nobody buzzed me in. I've buzzed in other people without even asking who was buzzing but nobody let *me* in.

CARSON: Everything will be fine.

PLAYBILL: Even on a rainy day.

SUNDAY: I couldn't remember the code.

DIVER: All that's left is the ghosts.

SUNDAY: My cell phone was dead. The charger is in my apartment. I didn't have a spare battery. I couldn't call anybody. And without my phone, I don't even know anybody's phone number. They're all *in* my phone. I don't have them memorized. I don't think anybody memorizes phone numbers any more. But your life is in your phone. You open it up and you see your list of incoming and outgoing calls and text messages. Between your phone and your email, that's your communication. That's your life.

CARSON: Everything will be fine.

PLAYBILL: I find things on the ground. I don't dig in the trash. I have standards.

DIVER: I don't have standards. I don't need 'em. Trash is my friend. Dumpsters are the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Inside a dumpster, it's a magical world of possibilities and poetry.

PLAYBILL: There is poetry in the things I find on the ground. Stuff that people drop accidentally. I don't want it if you threw it away on purpose. I want what still means something to you. Something you wish you didn't lose.

DIVER: Treasure and truth.

PLAYBILL: You drop a phone number and the world changes. The person who gave you that number will think you're not interested, because they didn't get a call. Missed opportunities. (*Pause*) The first thing I found was a message written on the back of an understudy notice in a Playbill. "You have long legs." Had to be a man. The way it was written, it had to be a man. I take the poetry I find and I perform it. I call it "Lost and Found Theatre." You lose it, I find it and I tell the world about your missed opportunities and lost dreams.

MERRICK: I didn't run away. (*Pause*) I took the train.

DIVER: Treasure and truth.

MONKEY: When some tourist had a heart attack and died coming out of the Olive Garden over there around the corner on Broadway between 47 and 48, I protested the restaurant. It's not really

authentic Italian food. It's Americanized, let's-pretend-it's-real Italian food even though it's not. And it's filled with artery-clogging cholesterol that gives people heart attacks. So, I took a big piece of cardboard I found in front of Westway Diner and I made a giant N. A huge letter N and I stood next to the beginning of the Olive Garden sign, so it spelled NO LIVE GARDEN. I'm a revolutionary. I made my point.

DIVER: The signs are messages.

MONKEY: (*Emphatically*) I made my point.

DIVER: The messages are signs.

MONKEY: I was protesting at least a half hour before the cops told me to take my big N and move along.

RIO: Keep moving.

PLAYBILL: Move along.

CONNOR: . . . Walking in your shoes.

SUNDAY: I didn't know what to do or where to go. (*Pause*) Where do you go when you can't get into your building? Where do people who don't have a home go? I should have paid more attention to the news when they did stories about shelters. It was almost 3:00 in the morning and I was walking around like I was lost. I wasn't lost but I didn't know where to go. Can you be lost if you know where you are but don't know where to go?

RIO: Keep moving.

SUNDAY: There aren't a lot of people out on the street at that hour on a Sunday night. So much for the "city that never sleeps." And people who are out don't have a sense of humor. I stopped a lady and asked if I could use her phone. She wanted to know who I was going to call. And I said, "I wanna order a pizza." I was joking. But she thought I was a crazy person. I wanted to call information and get the phone number for one of my friends. I just said I wanted to order pizza. I was making a joke. A little conversation. A little humor in an otherwise humorless situation. But no. She kept walking. And so did I.

PLAYBILL: Missed opportunities.

SUNDAY: I must have walked seventy blocks. I started out at my apartment and kept heading west. I don't know why. I just kept thinking, "Go west" and . . .

CARSON and SUNDAY: Everything will be fine.

SUNDAY: I ended up on Ninth Avenue and my legs felt like they had big ankle weights on them. They felt so heavy. And I couldn't walk anymore. I sat down in front of the Amish Market between 49th and 50th. Who knew we had Amish people in Manhattan? And I fell asleep. I woke up with the sun in my eyes and some guy kicking me. He told me to . . .

PLAYBILL and SUNDAY: Move along.

SUNDAY: He had a mohawk. I've never liked people with mohawks. I just don't. I look at them and think, "Your hair is dangerous. You could put somebody's eye out with it."

MONKEY: I made my point.

SUNDAY: And he was kicking me. He said he would call the cops.

While he was kicking me, he said, "I'm gonna call the cops." People with mohawks used to run away from the cops. They were who other people called the cops on. And, now, Mr. Mohawk Man is gonna call the cops on me? The world is upside down. So, I got up and started walking down Ninth Avenue and people were staring at me. You've seen the people on Ninth Avenue. A lot of them are *peculiar*. And *they* were staring at *me*. I didn't appreciate it. I said .

..

MONKEY and SUNDAY: What are you lookin' at?

SUNDAY: It was a holiday. (*A daydreamy tangent*) So many holidays are on Mondays. (*Back on track*) I went to where I worked and nobody was there. The security guard told me he was a temp. A temporary security guard. (*An announcement*) Security should never be temporary. (*Pause*) He wouldn't let me up to where I work. He wouldn't even let me in the building. He wasn't the slightest bit helpful or hospitable. (*Pause*) I walked back to my apartment building. I still couldn't get anybody to buzz me in. (*Angrily*) Where is the trust, people? Push the buzzer. What's the worst that can happen? (*Quick pause*) Never mind. I know what could happen. (*Quick pause*) But it wouldn't. Not with me. Maybe if you buzzed somebody with a mohawk in. But not with me. I kept trying to remember my security code, but it was like my mind had lost the ability to remember anything. I wasn't even sure I was really at my building. Maybe that was the problem. And I was hungry. I was hungry but I didn't have any cash. So, I went to the ATM down the block.

CONNOR: Walking in your shoes.

SUNDAY: I put my card in but I couldn't remember my PIN number.

And, after I tried a few times, the machine sucked my card in and wouldn't spit it out, again. Bye bye ATM card. Somebody has my driver's license. I don't remember who, but somebody has it. It's gone. My driver's license is gone. My ATM card is gone. (*Simply*) My memory is gone. I don't remember any of my numbers. Not my zip code or my birthday or my social security number. If you don't know your numbers, you're nobody.

RIO: Keep moving.

SUNDAY: You're nothing to nobody.

MONKEY: Nobody can stop me from telling the truth.

DIVER: Treasure and truth.

MONKEY: They put that security camera on the front of the W Hotel across the street to keep an eye on me.

DIVER: . . . On all of us.

MONKEY: But they're gonna get more than they planned on. I'm gonna make a documentary. I'm gonna tell the truth about the world.

DIVER: It's a calling.

MONKEY: We used to hang out in front of the hotel.

DIVER: The W.

MONKEY: But they didn't like that.

DIVER: W is for "We don't want you in front of our hotel."

MONKEY: The doorman and a manager told us we had to move.

PLAYBILL and SUNDAY: Move along.

DIVER: W is for Why.

CONNOR: We're not good for business.

DIVER: Whatever.

MONKEY: They don't own the sidewalk.

DIVER: Word.

MERRICK: I didn't want to be there.

DIVER: Why not?

RIO: Keep moving.

DIVER: Where?

SUNDAY: I didn't know where else to go.

CONNOR: (*Reporting a fact*) They herded us like cattle.

DIVER: Who do you think you are?!

MONKEY: The manager got the cops to move us across the street.

CONNOR: (*Indignant*) Like cattle.

BUSBOY: (*Like a cow*) Moo!

MONKEY: What is the world coming to, when I can't sit on the sidewalk in front of a hotel.

SUNDAY: The world is upside down.

CONNOR: (*With hurt feelings*) They herded us like cattle.

RIO: We had to keep moving. From one apartment to the next. Two months in one place, two weeks in another. Two days. Two hours. A few nights at a shelter. A couple more someplace else. A rainy weekend in the basement of an apartment building on West 96th Street. Some shelters won't take you if you're over 18. Not in a family shelter. It's gotta be a parent and young kids. And the family shelters are the nicest. Usually. So, if my mom and little brother and sister got in a family shelter, I'd go someplace else. Anywhere I could. I'd meet up again with them the next day and I'd tell my mom I went to a shelter. It made her feel better. She has a lot of guilt about our situation. She's had some bad luck and she's made some

bad choices. That's pretty much what life is – luck and choices.

(Pause) So we had to keep moving.

ALL EXCEPT RIO: *(Like an echo)* Moving.

RIO: And moving . . .

ALL EXCEPT RIO: . . . and moving . . .

RIO: . . . and moving . . .

ALL EXCEPT RIO: . . . and moving . . .

RIO: . . . and moving. It was like we were on a raft in the middle of the ocean and we drifted wherever the current took us. You don't have any control over the current. It just is. And you drift along. You float or you sink. And nobody . . .

ALL EXCEPT RIO: Nobody!

RIO: . . . Nobody wants to sink. *(Pause)* I don't want to sink.

CARSON: Everything will be fine.

MERRICK: I used to take the train into the city. The Long Island Railroad. I'd come in and hang out. Sometimes in the East Village. Sometimes up here in the theatre district.

CONNOR: I met this girl in front of the Winter Garden Theater. I like the name. Winter . . . Garden. Kind of an oxymoron. Plus, it's always best to ask for spare change outside a theater where a happy musical is playing. People are more likely to give you money if they're happy than if they've just seen some depressing play about murder or the end of the world. *(Pause)* And there was this girl standing there. She looked about my age. And she was asking for change, too. So, I said, "Hey," kinda like, "Hello," and kinda like, "Back off, this is my spot." But she didn't move. Instead, she started talking to me. And telling jokes. Stupid jokes. But I laughed. Neither of us made much, 'cause we were too busy talking to ask for change. And, after everybody was done coming out of the show, I was gonna go over to the Majestic. *(Explaining)* The show that plays there is longer and, even though it's not, technically, a happy show, the people are usually good about coughing up some cash. But the girl was like, "You wanna come over to my apartment and hang out?" *(Pause)* She has an apartment. Her and her mother. *(Quick pause)* On 51st Street between Broadway and 8th. Like a half a block from the Winter Garden. She thinks asking people for change is fun. *(A mix of awe and resentful)* She does it to supplement her allowance! And, as she was telling me this, I felt like knocking her down and stomping on her face. *(Pause)* But I didn't. *(Pause)* I couldn't remember the last time I was in somebody's apartment, so I went. She said I could use the bathroom, too, which was a bonus. *(Explaining)* Bathrooms are important. *(Pause)* It was a nice apartment. Two bedrooms! Her and her mother each have their own room! *(Pause)* Her mom came home and I figured the girl was

gonna get in trouble and I was gonna get thrown out, but her mom was like, “Hello. How nice to meet you.” And she gave me a protein bar that tasted like something you’d scrape off the bottom of your shoe. And her mom asked if I like shoes which made me wonder if she could read minds and knew what I was thinking about the protein bar. So, I said, “Sure, shoes are good.” And they are. I don’t have anything against shoes. I wear ‘em. So, then, her mom takes my hand and leads me down the hall to her bedroom and opens her closet and there are dozens and dozens of pairs of shoes. All kinds. She has more shoes than a shoe store. And she takes a pair and says, “These are my favorites. I love the kitten heel.” And she put ‘em on and starts walking around the room saying, “I love my kitten heels. Meow. Meow.”

BUSBOY: Moo!

CONNOR: She was meowing at me. So, I was like, “Uh, thanks for the protein bar and for letting me use your bathroom, but I’ve gotta go.” And the girl said, “Don’t go. We can watch TV.” I was walking down the hall to the front door and her mom was following me, saying “Meow, meow. Kitten heels, meow.”

BUSBOY: Push her out into the street.

CONNOR: And I don’t stay anyplace where people “meow” at me.

BUSBOY: We all have somebody we’d like to push in front of a bus.

DIVER: The sign on the bus tells us where it’s going but nothing about where it’s been.

RIO: Keep moving.

DIVER: The sign is the message.

PLAYBILL: The subway station at 49th Street and Broadway is different. It’s unique. It’s special. It has orange bricks. It makes me happy.

Sometimes, I go down the stairs just to look at the bricks. I don’t get on the subway. I can’t go through the turnstile without a Metro Card. I just look at the bricks. It’s like a wall of sunshine, even on a rainy day.

MONKEY: A lot of people sleep on the steps of the Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue at 55th Street. Right across from the Disney Store. It’s not so bad, now, but there’s a guy who sleeps there in the winter in bare feet with only a little blanket covering him. The blanket’s not big enough to cover his whole body, so his bare feet stick out the bottom. It’s amazing that he hasn’t gotten frostbite. Maybe he’s protected by the aura of the Disney Store.

SUNDAY: The world is upside down.

MONKEY: I made my point.

CARSON: My parents died when I was seven. (*Quick pause*) Not at the same time. (*Quick pause*) Not in a car accident or anything. (*Quick pause*) But they died within a month of each other. My mom had an

aneurism. My dad got shot. Well, technically, he shot himself, but he still got shot. *(Quick pause)* So, I went to live with my grandmother in Pennsylvania. *(Quick pause)* Lots of trees. *(Quick pause)* It was nice. *(Quick pause)* If you like trees. *(Pause)* My grandmother died when I was eleven. *(Quick pause)* She just died. *(Quick pause)* No reason. *(Quick pause)* You don't always need a reason to die. *(Pause)* And there weren't any other relatives who would take me, so I got put in a foster home. *(Pause)* They got rid of me when they had a baby of their own. *(Pause)* The next place they put me there were already four foster kids and . . . *(SHE struggles)* And I don't have any good memories of my time there. *(Quick pause)* None. *(Quick pause)* Not a single one. *(Quick pause)* I wish I did. *(Quick pause)* It would be easier that way. *(Pause)* One of the boys was seventeen and he said, "Foster kids are like rental cars. People treat 'em like crap because they know they're gonna give 'em back. Nobody cares about you when you're temporary." *(Pause)* Not all foster parents are bad. And not all foster brothers will . . . *(Pushing away the memory)* make you feel so . . . *unwelcome.* *(Quick pause)* I know that. *(Quick pause)* I just had bad luck. *(Quick pause)* And I kept waiting for that to change. *(Pause)* My grandmother used to say, "Everything will be fine." *(Pause)* Seems like pretty much of a lie. But I'm not hopeless. I just hope *less.* I don't expect things to turn out well because, in my experience, they usually don't.

DIVER: The message is the sign.

CARSON: No pity. No shame.

PLAYBILL: Even on a rainy day.

BUSBOY: It was an accident.

PLAYBILL: A blood-stained fingerprint.

SUNDAY: Too many numbers.

PLAYBILL: "Call me. 212-375-98.." The last two numbers were smudged by the blood-stained fingerprint. *(HE strikes a performance pose and begins with a flourish.)* I saw you at the Starbucks. You caught my eye. We were meant to be. Forever was as close as the cash register. You ordered a pumpkin spice latte even though it wasn't on the menu. And they made it for you. They made it for you! *(Dramatically)* And I saw the future in the back of your head. *(Pause)* My heart skipped a beat. *(Pause)* You have power. *(Pause)* You can move mountains. *(Pause)* You can get seasonal coffee drinks made for you even when they're not in season. *(Passionately)* You spice my pumpkin. *(Even more fervently)* You pumpkin my spice! *(Bringing to a big finish)* Let's harvest our love from this cold, impersonal, isolated-by-iPods world. Call me.

ALL EXCEPT PLAYBILL: *(Like a revival meeting)* Call me!

PLAYBILL: Call me, soon.

ALL EXCEPT PLAYBILL: Call me, soon!

PLAYBILL: Call me, now.

ALL EXCEPT PLAYBILL: Call me, now!

PLAYBILL: Dial your love into my heart.

ALL EXCEPT PLAYBILL: Do it!

PLAYBILL: 212-375-98-bloody fingerprint.

MONKEY: Move along.

MERRICK: I lived in Merrick. *(Quick pause)* On Long Island. It's 25.9 miles from Penn Station on the Long Island Railroad. The stop closest to my house was at Sunrise Highway and Merrick Avenue. My family lives on Merokee Drive, right on the Newbridge Pond. It's more like a small lake, but it's called a pond. My family has a nice house. Five bedrooms, three bathrooms, a three-car garage. But I never felt like I lived there. When I'd come into the city to hang out, it felt like I was a world a way from home. And a world away is a lot farther than 25.9 miles. Sometimes, I'd go down to the Village. Mostly the East Village. And, sometimes, I'd hang out up here in the theatre district. My dad said, "You sure are spending a lot of time in the city."

DIVER: Treasure and truth.

MERRICK: And I told him, "It's where I belong." And he got all ticked off and yelled at me. "This is where you belong! With your family! In this house! Not in the city!"

MONKEY: *(Shouting)* Nobody can stop me from telling the truth.

MERRICK: I wasn't going to spend my life on Merokee Drive on Newbridge Pond. I wasn't going to spend my life in a house with five bedrooms and three bathrooms where nobody talks to anybody else. A "good morning" text message from your mom when she's already at work before you wake up isn't communication. It's technology. *(Getting angrier and louder)* A sister who cares more about mascara that doesn't clump than she does about what's happening in the world is not somebody I want to have in the room next door. *(Louder and more uncontrolled)* And yelling at me like I'm a bad dog is not going to make me see your point.

MONKEY: *(Shouting)* I made my point.

MERRICK: So, I took the train into the city. And I stayed. *(A wave of emotion comes over her)* This is where I belong. *(SHE fights the tears.)* I didn't want to be there. A house is not a home if it's just a house. *(Angrily trying not to cry)* Mascara that doesn't clump won't change the world and I am not a bad dog. *(Pause)* I didn't run away. *(Pause, without emotion)* I took the train.

CARSON: No pity. No shame.

BUSBOY: It was an accident. It really was.

MONKEY: (*Sarcastically*) We all have somebody we'd like to push in front of a bus.

BUSBOY: We were just messing around . . . Being silly . . . Having a good time. (*Pause*) We were walking up 6th Avenue. Vanessa had just gotten her hair cut at a place on the corner of 6th Avenue and 46th Street. They cut it really short. Shorter than I wanted. I liked it better long. I told her that but she didn't care. She said the guy who cut it told her she looked sexy. So, some hair stylist guy's opinion is more important than mine. Whatever. (*Pause*) I said, "What do you expect him to tell you? He's the one who cut it. You think he's gonna tell you it looked better before he cut it so short you look like a guy?" (*Pause*) That made her mad. And she started walking away. Really fast. At first, I was like, "Go ahead, walk away. (*Shouting*) That's real mature. (*Louder*) That's really good communication skills." (*Pause*) If I'd walked away from her like that, she'd have thrown a fit. Right there on the street, she'd have screamed at me and told me I was behaving like a little kid. But there's a double standard with her. She gets to walk away and I'm just supposed to take it. Just deal with it. Just let her go and not say anything. But I was like, "No, not today. You don't get to walk away from me, today." So, I ran after her and I grabbed her arm and I got right up in her face and yelled, "Don't you ever walk away from me!" And people were looking at us. People stopped and stared at us and I was like . . .

MONKEY and BUSBOY: What are you lookin' at?

BUSBOY: But I didn't care. I wasn't gonna let Vanessa get away with acting like that. I wasn't. But she tried to pull away from me. She was all, "Let me go. You're hurting me." Whatever. I wasn't letting go. All I did was tell her her hair was too short. It was. (*Quick pause*) Her hair was too short. It made her look like a guy. That's all I said. And it was true. (*Quick pause*) She was always saying she wanted our relationship to be based on honesty. But when I was honest with her, she got ticked off and walked away, disrespecting me on 6th Avenue. And I wasn't taking it. So, I grabbed her shoulders and told her to, "Shut up! You don't get to tell me what to do!" And I was shaking her and she bit me. She bit me like an animal. She bit off a hunk of my skin. And she was screaming with the bloody hunk of my skin in her mouth and I almost puked. I yelled, "Stop it!" And I shoved her. Not hard. Just to get some space between us. And she kinda tripped. She was trying to get her balance but she couldn't and she fell . . . (*Pause*) She fell in front of the #7 bus.

(*A beat.*)

PLAYBILL: “Pancake mix . . . Cat food . . . Hummus.” *(Pause)* I found that grocery list outside the Food Emporium on 8th Avenue at 49th Street.

DIVER: W is for Why.

BUSBOY: It was an accident. *(Pause)* I liked her. A lot. Sometimes, I even thought I loved her. Like we’d be together forever. *(Pause)* Every couple has fights. They do. We were just having a fight.

DIVER: The sign on the bus tells us where it’s going but nothing about where it’s been.

PLAYBILL: . . . “and thirteen onions.”

BUSBOY: I wanted to cry. Not in front of the people on 6th Avenue, but I wanted to cry. Not because I felt guilty. *(Quick pause)* Because it was an accident. *(Quick pause)* It wasn’t my fault. *(Pause)* There was a good turnout at her funeral. She was cremated. No open casket. I was happy about that. I didn’t want her to get buried in that haircut that made her look like a guy. *(Pause)* That would suck.

PLAYBILL: It was a woman’s handwriting. Very flowery. Clearly a lady who had more than one cat.

CONNOR: And I don’t stay anyplace where people “meow” at me.

PLAYBILL: *(Beginning a performance, with a flourish)* Depressed in her apartment . . . Brunching with the cats. Pancakes for them, cat food for her and hummus for everyone else!

ALL EXCEPT PLAYBILL: Hooray!

PLAYBILL: *(Continuing)* Chop all the onions, but try not to cry. Nothing .

..

ALL EXCEPT PLAYBILL: Nothing! Nothing dampens a brunch like tears.

SUNDAY: You’re nothing to nobody.

MONKEY: Nobody can stop me from telling the truth.

DIVER: Treasure and truth.

SUNDAY: I wasn’t lost but I didn’t know where to go. Can you be lost if you know where you are but don’t know where to go?

DIVER: The signs are messages. The messages are signs. *(Pause)* I write down the missing letters. *(Quick pause)* *(Quick pause)* The letters that are burned out on neon signs. *(Quick pause)* They’re missing, because they’re burned out. You can see the letter but it’s not lit up. All that’s left is the ghost of the letter. *(Pause; explaining)* So, whenever I see a missing letter, I write it down in my notebook. *(He takes a small notebook out of his pocket.)* I found this in a dumpster on 11th Avenue. Only a couple of the pages had any writing on ‘em. The rest of it was like brand new. That’s a lucky find. So, I use it to keep track of the missing letters. *(Quick pause)* At the end of the day, I look at the list of letters and try to figure out the message. *(As if we should already know this)* The universe is

leaving messages for us all the time. We just have to find ‘em and figure ‘em out. (*Plaintively*) I wanna figure ‘em out. I’ve *gotta* figure ‘em out. (*Trying to focus*) I have a particular area I’m responsible for. (*Proudly*) I handle the messages for the theatre district. I have the whole area bordered by 54th Street to the north, Broadway to the east, 40th Street to the south and 9th Avenue to the west. There’s a lot of lights here, so there are a lot of missing letters to keep track of. It keeps me busy. It keeps me plugged in. Like a light. Get it? Plugged in, like a light gets plugged in? (*Pause*) So, welcome to my letter patrol area. (*Pause*) Nobody assigned it to me, but it’s mine. (*Territorial*) It’s mine. (*Pause*) And keeping track of the missing letters . . . It’s a calling. (*Paging through notebook*) I write the letters down in alphabetical order. (*Show’s a page*) These were the first four letters I found: T O S L. In alphabetical order, that’s L O S T.

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: Lost.

DIVER: The first word I found was lost.

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: Lost and found.

DIVER: Found and . . .

SUNDAY: Lost.

DIVER: Two weeks ago, on a Thursday night, I had B E I R T. I thought it was a Middle East reference. Something to do with Lebanon. But the U was . . .

MERRICK: Missing.

DIVER: A missing U is hard to find. I wandered around for hours trying to find U.

BUSBOY: Buy a vowel.

DIVER: But I didn’t need U after all. B E I R T.

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: Tribe.

DIVER: (*Showing a page*) I’ve had E H O P.

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: Hope.

DIVER: (*Showing another page*) And the very next day, there was A C E E N O P S.

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: No escape.

DIVER: Hope . . .

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: . . . if you can.

DIVER: . . . and No escape.

ALL EXCEPT DIVER: . . . if you can’t.

MONKEY: Nobody can stop me from telling the truth.

SUNDAY: Lost . . .

DIVER: (*Holding his notebook*) . . . and found.

CARSON: Everything will be fine.

SUNDAY: Will it?

RIO: (*With tears*) I need you.

PLAYBILL: Dial your love into my heart.

CARSON: It would be easier that way.

DIVER: Life is like a seesaw.

SUNDAY: (*Acknowledging him*) The world is upside down . . .

RIO: . . . and you have to keep moving. (*Pause*) I'm drifting wherever the current takes me. But I can't stay on the raft . . . the *life* raft. I can't keep holding on. I don't have any control over the current and it's getting stronger. I haven't seen my mom or my little brother and sister for a while. (*A confession*) It's been a couple months. Things started to get worse. (*Pause*) It happens.

CARSON: I don't expect things to turn out well.

RIO: It was hard for her to get through the day. She has a lot of guilt about everything that happened. About things she did. And when you feel bad all the time about stuff you've done and how your life is, you start doing things to forget why you feel bad. It happens. It's what people do. And when you're doing things to forget, the shelter people won't let you in anymore. And you fade away. And the little kids you're supposed to take care of disappear . . .

DIVER: All that's left is the ghosts.

RIO: (*With tears*) So, I'm on my own.

CARSON: (*Crying*) Everything will be fine.

RIO: I hope.

(CARSON and RIO embrace, comforting each other.)

MONKEY: (*To audience, protective of RIO and CARSON*) What are you lookin' at? (*Pause; MONKEY moves downstage. HE directs his anger at the camera on the front of the W Hotel . . . angry and confrontational*) What are you lookin' at? (*Pause*) They're afraid. (*Pause*) We're all afraid.

BUSBOY: (*Trying to keep from unraveling*) No pity. No shame.

MONKEY: We're out here. We're trying to make it from one day to the next.

RIO: Trying to keep floating.

MONKEY: (*Desperate rage*) And you don't care. (*Pause*) We're . . .

MERRICK: Nothing to nobody.

MONKEY: We're afraid.

(RIO, CARSON and MERRICK cluster together. The OTHERS move toward them.)

Do you think this is easy? (*Pause*) Do you? We're not movers and shakers.

SUNDAY: We just get moved and shaken.

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