

SUM OF YOU

by Dennis Bush

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SUM OF YOU

A One Act Dramatic Play

by Dennis Bush

SYNOPSIS: The people that move in and out of our lives—sometimes without warning—can say and do things that stay with us, even if the person isn't in our lives anymore. We're impacted and formed by those interactions, leaving us to wonder, "Who would I be, if I wasn't the me I am with you?" With a mix of humor and heartbreaking emotion, the nine characters' lives are woven together in this compelling play.

DURATION: 45 minutes.

TIME and SETTING: The present and past of nine characters in the city, whose lives are connected in ways both known and not known to them.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 females, 4 males, 2 either, gender flexible)

- JAMIE (f)..... Early 20's. Struggles with self-worth; inspired to begin journey of growth. *(22 lines, 61 ensemble lines.)*
- NORA (f)..... Mid-20's. Ghosted by boyfriend after nearly a year together; unable to put it behind her. *(23 lines, 60 ensemble lines)*
- SELVIN (m/f)..... Early 20's. Witnesses a horrible accident and can't move past the images of it that haunt him. *(12 lines, 66 ensemble lines)*
- DARIUS (m)..... Early 20's. Gets into a relationship almost accidentally, then, struggles with where it's going. *(12 lines, 67 ensemble lines)*
- BERKELEY (f)..... Early 20's. Clear-eyed about romance and emotional baggage, but still longs for magic. *(27 lines, 56 ensemble lines)*
- JOSH (m)..... Mid-20's. Connected to an old roommate by shared activities and habits. *(13 lines, 64 ensemble lines)*

- STEPHEN (m) Early to mid-20's. Stung by lies in his past; obsessive; ultimately hopeful. *(26 lines, 59 ensemble lines)*
- AKRAM (m) Early to mid-20's. When his life gets changed by the toss of a Frisbee, he begins to change other lives. *(15 lines, 64 ensemble lines)*
- SHANE (m/f) Mid-20's. Moved away from his childhood best friend, starting an unraveling of his life. *(16 lines, 64 ensemble lines)*

CASTING NOTE: Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting.

SET

Sum of You can be presented with a very simple set. There are many staging options that would work effectively. Directors are encouraged to be creative with their staging.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The original production was staged in-the-round with the actors scattered among and around the audience in a Black Box space. In proscenium or thrust stagings, directors are encouraged to create separate spaces for each actor (which can be done with pools of light or other simple staging techniques), so that they are all in individual spaces and not grouped together. The characters do not speak to each other at any point in the play. The unison lines take on a Greek chorus feel. The unison lines can be spoken to specific audience members (if the actors are close enough to the audience to do that) or as general, audience-address lines.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The unison lines are designated by “simultaneously with...” in the script. This means that the lines should be spoken together in unison, once (both the main character and all other characters together.)

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

SUM OF YOU premiered in Phoenix, AZ in 2022. The premiere was directed by Dennis Bush with the following cast and crew:

JAMIE	Shea Loafman
NORA.....	Tiffanee Hokanson
SELVIN.....	Percy Larson
DARIUS	Edson Garcia
BERKELEY	Annabella Galvan
JOSH	Marlow Odeh
STEPHEN.....	Titus Ritter
AKRAM	Rafael Sanchez
SHANE.....	Alex Whitsett

DEDICATION

The playwright offers special thanks to Andrew Slavin, Karen Brown, Joe Pascale, Dylan Suehiro, Dana Brokmeier, Kenyan Cole-Suggs, Blake Karnes, Marija Petovic, Ryan Bernardino, Monica Ramirez, Nancy Leal, Logan Umbanhowar, Nick Petrovich, Monika Rzezniczek, Melissa Teitel, and Emily O'Brien for their kind assistance and inspiration, during the creation of *Sum of You*.

AT START: *Lights up on nine actors in a diamond formation that allows all the actors faces to be seen. The opening ten lines have a very slight overlap from one to the next.*

JAMIE: Who would I be, if I wasn't the me I am with you?

NORA: If you didn't leave...

SELVIN: If I hadn't seen the accident...

DARIUS: If I hadn't gone to the party...

BERKELEY: When I saw the way he looked at me...

JOSH: If there wasn't an air hockey table...

STEPHEN: Before he told me about the polar bears...

AKRAM: Because I caught the Frisbee...

SHANE: Because we were best friends...

JAMIE: Because of you.... Because of who I am with you.

A beat.

STEPHEN: Before he told me about the polar bears—before he lied to me about the polar bears—I trusted him. I believed the things he told me. But, then, he told me about the polar bears. (*Clarifying.*) The story about the polar bears. How they cover their nose with one of their paws—so their black noses don't stand out against their white fur, against the white snow. So, the animals they're hunting won't see them. The polar bears are smart. They're stealthy.

NORA: He left. He just left. We were having a nice dinner—what I thought was a nice dinner—and, when I got back from the restroom, he was gone. He left while I was in the restroom. The waiter didn't know what happened. He said he looked at his phone, got up, and left. I thought something had happened. I thought there was some kind of emergency. The waiter told the manager and they felt so bad for me that they paid for my meal. They even bought me dessert. And I'm not the kind of person who usually orders dessert. I'm also not the kind of person who takes a long time in the restroom. Three, four minutes, tops. No longer. So, he didn't have much of a window of time to make the decision to leave and, then, actually do it.

STEPHEN: I know plenty of people that wouldn't be smart enough to cover up their nose with one of their paws—if they were a polar bear. Plenty of people aren't self-aware enough to figure out how to blend in with their surroundings—especially if it involved covering their nose with one of their paws.

DARIUS: We were both at a party. Not together. Just both at the same party at the same time.

NORA: I called him. I texted. I posted vague passive-aggressive messages on social media, like, "If you had an emergency, I understand. Just let me know. It'd be the decent thing to do." I got responses from everybody but him. A lot of emergencies. A lot of stories. But nothing from him. After a couple of weeks, I deleted all the photos of us. And there were hundreds of them. We'd been together for almost a year. A couple takes a lot of pictures together in a year. (*Correcting herself.*) Almost a year. (*A beat.*) He left all his photos of us up—all over his social media apps. And people were still liking and commenting on them, as if we were still together.

JAMIE: It's not that I felt invisible. It wasn't like that. People saw me. They saw me and decided I wasn't interesting.

DARIUS: She asked if I was hungry, so I said, "Yeah." Like five minutes before that, a mutual friend had introduced us. I didn't think she was asking me out on a date. You don't ask somebody if they're hungry, if you wanna go on a date with 'em. You ask if they wanna go out to dinner with you sometime. It can be a specific time or a vague kind of sometime in the relatively near future. But I went. Because when she asked if I was hungry and I said, "Yeah," she said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Cool, let's go get some food."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with DARIUS.*) Cool, let's go get some food.

DARIUS: Which could've meant, "Let's get some food in the kitchen." (*Clarifying.*) Which is where the food was at the party. (*A slight tangent.*) A lot of parties have the food in the kitchen, so that definitely could've been what she meant. I said, "Okay," and took a step toward the kitchen, and she touched my arm—gently, but like, "Uh, hey"—and she pointed toward the front door. So, I said, "Oh, like out," and she said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Yeah, like on a dinner date that's starting as soon as we get to the restaurant. (*Quick beat.*) Or now. (*Quick beat.*) It can start now."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with DARIUS.*) Yeah, like on a dinner date that's starting as soon as we get to the restaurant. (*Quick beat.*) Or now. (*Quick beat.*) It can start now.

DARIUS: And I said, "Now's good."

NORA: About five weeks after he'd walked out of the restaurant—and out of my life—he texted me. Out of the blue, at like 11:00 on a Thursday night.

A beat.

NORA: (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I think about you sometimes."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with NORA.*) I think about you sometimes.

NORA: That was the whole message. (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I think about you sometimes."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with NORA.*) I think about you sometimes.

SELVIN: If I hadn't seen the accident. (*A quick beat.*) In my rearview mirror. (*Quick beat.*) It happened about two car lengths behind me and one lane to the right. There was some debris on the highway. Pallets, giant hunks of Styrofoam, and other things that weren't as big as the pallets or Styrofoam, but they were there, all over the highway. I swerved to avoid hitting the pallet in my lane. And, as I was doing that, an SUV—two car lengths behind me and one lane to the right—flipped. (*Quick beat, with a breath.*) Like it was doing some kind of gymnastics move. And it rolled over three times, landing upside down and skidding for a while on its roof.

NORA: At 11:00 on a Thursday night. (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I think about you sometimes."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with NORA.*) I think about you sometimes.

SELVIN: And I watched all of it in my rearview mirror. It was almost like a movie. It didn't seem real. But I could hear the sound of the car sliding on its roof. Scraping across the highway. The sound was like a scream—like the car was screaming. My mouth was open as I watched it happen in my rearview mirror. It was like I was screaming, but the sound was coming from outside my car. From behind me. All around me.

ALL: (*Except SELVIN.*) I think about you sometimes.

STEPHEN: But it was a lie. Polar bears don't cover their noses with their paws. It's some kind of myth. Some kind of glacier version of an urban myth. And a myth is basically a lie, especially when somebody tells you it's true. Because it's not. It's a lie.

SELVIN: I kept driving—because stopping on the highway would probably have caused another accident. So, I kept driving. I kept driving. And crying. (*A beat.*) At first, I didn't realize I was crying. But I was. And snot ran out of my nose and into my mouth. You probably didn't need to know that. But it happened. It all happened.

JAMIE: They saw me and decided I wasn't worth their time. I definitely wasn't special.

SHANE: When you grow up with somebody, you think—you assume—that they're always going to be a part of your life. If they live down the street or in the same apartment building, you figure they'll be close by forever. Or, at least, till you're like thirty. Or maybe just till you go away to college. That's what you think when you're little—when you're young. (*A beat.*) My best friend and I were young together. Our moms were friends, so we played together when we were babies. I don't remember it, but I've seen the pictures and videos, so I know it happened. We were in kindergarten and every grade after that together. Every grade up till tenth. I was hanging out with him—my best friend—when my mom called his mom to tell her we were moving. (*With a definite tone.*) I think a person's family should know they're moving before their friends know. I told my mom that I didn't appreciate finding out about the move from somebody else. She said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "The move wasn't my idea, so how you found out about it isn't my problem."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with SHANE.*) The move wasn't my idea, so how you found out about it isn't my problem.

SHANE: I didn't see how those two things were connected, but it was pretty clear that I wasn't anybody's priority. (*A beat.*) There were only four days between when I found out we were moving and when we actually moved. And most of that time we spent putting stuff in boxes and loading them into the U-Haul truck my dad rented. I didn't have much chance to say goodbye—not even to the people I thought would always be a part of my life. I was going to do it at school the day before we left. I had goodbye notes written and I was

going to give them out at the end of the day. But, when I woke up that Friday morning, my dad said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "We're leaving now. I wanna get on the road sooner not later."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with SHANE.*) We're leaving now. I wanna get on the road sooner not later.

SHANE: So, I didn't get to go to school that day. I didn't get to give the goodbye notes to anyone—not even to my best friend. (*A beat.*) I was holding the notes in my hand as we pulled away. I was riding in the truck with my dad. My mom said she didn't like the truck or my dad at that point, so she made me ride with him. As we drove away, I opened the window and held my hand out and let the wind blow all the goodbye notes away.

AKRAM: He threw the Frisbee and I caught it. I was at Coronado Island. I was there on my college spring break with my parents and my little sister. He threw the Frisbee. It looked like it was gonna hit my sister in the head, so I caught it. I yelled... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Watch where you throw that thing!"

ALL: (*Simultaneously with AKRAM.*) Watch where you throw that thing!

AKRAM: ...and I sent it flying back to him. And he threw it back to me. So, I threw it back to him. It took me three back-and-forth throws to realize that we were having a catch.

JAMIE: I think that's how most people feel. Like they're average. Like they're sliding by under the radar.

SHANE: Even though we didn't see each other after I moved away, I kept in touch with him. Keeping in touch is a weird concept. If you're far away from somebody, you literally can't touch. You're too far away, and a phone call or a text or some other kind of message can only do so much. But even after we stopped communicating—when we were definitely out of touch—I still thought of him as my best friend. Nobody else took his place. Nobody could. I moved six more times before I graduated from high school. And then I moved one more time. Just me. I moved out without telling my parents I was leaving. The move wasn't their idea, so how they found out about it wasn't my problem. (*A beat.*) I had other problems.

BERKELEY: When I saw the way he looked at me, I was a little scared. Somebody looking at you like, "This is love at first sight" can sometimes look like, "I'm going to murder you in a dirty kitchen and put your body parts in the freezer." (*A beat.*) Love and murder can be two sides of the same coin.

AKRAM: Sometimes, it takes me three or four throws of whatever to figure out what's going on.

BERKELEY: I wasn't scared for long. He walked over and said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) Do you believe in love at first sight?

BERKELEY: I asked if he had a dirty kitchen. And he said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "This is gonna sound strange."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) This is gonna sound strange.

BERKELEY: He told me he was minding his own business—deciding if he should go back out to his car to get his glasses. (*Explaining.*) He left them in his car and, without them, he had to kind of squint and stare to see things clearly. And he smiled—a genuine, nice-guy smile—and said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "And, then, I saw you, across the room, and I thought, 'This must be what love at first sight feels like.'"

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) And, then, I saw you, across the room, and I thought, "This must be what love at first sight feels like."

SELVIN: (*Insistently.*) It happened. It all happened.

BERKELEY: I don't know if love at first sight is real or if it's just good lighting on somebody's face in an otherwise poorly lit room. Or maybe it's somebody who's awkward and not very charismatic trying to make themselves seem more interesting, so they say... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "This must be what love at first sight feels like."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) This must be what love at first sight feels like.

BERKELEY: And in the moment that somebody says that to you, you want it to be real. You want it to be true. It seems like magic, but everybody wants magic to be real.

STEPHEN: A myth is basically a lie, especially when somebody tells you it's true. Because it's not. It's a lie.

BERKELEY: He didn't tell me he was just out of a relationship. He said he was... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Unencumbered."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) Unencumbered.

BERKELEY: (*Continued.*) Nobody is completely unencumbered. No matter what they say.

STEPHEN: When people lie to you, it makes you not trust anyone. And that's a horrible thing for somebody to do to you. One lie is like the flapping butterfly wing of larger and larger circles of distrust.

JOSH: We were roommates for a year. We found a really great two-bedroom apartment close to campus and we moved in the weekend after we signed the lease. The people who had the apartment before us left an air hockey table in the center of the living room. Who does that? It's not like you grow out of playing air hockey. It's fun for all ages. A pool table—a big ol' heavy pool table—I can almost understand leaving that behind, but not an air hockey table. It's not heavy. It's not as big as a pool table. But, hey, their loss. You know what I'm saying?

NORA: A couple months after his, "I think about you sometimes" message, somebody else started showing up in his photos on social media. She was pretty. Or maybe she was just average looking but really good at filters. Either way, she was in a lot of his pictures. (*A quick beat.*) I know I shouldn't have been looking at them. Multiple times a day. But I did. And that's just the reality. I don't think lying about reality helps anyone. It's never more than a short-term solution. If I was him I'd have blocked me. But, instead, he took a weekend trip with her to Cabo San Lucas—which loosely translates to, "We were together almost a year and I never got a trip to Mexico." (*A quick beat.*) I know that's not the actual translation. I was being sarcastic. Sarcasm is a coping mechanism. It may not be your coping mechanism of choice, but it works for me—sort of... sometimes—in specific situations, when you're the person who got walked out on and when... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I think about you sometimes..."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with NORA.*) I think about you sometimes...

NORA: ...doesn't include traveling to Mexico or anything except a random text at 11:00 on a Thursday night two months before some new person starts appearing in his photos. But, sure, tell me what you think I shouldn't be doing. Because I'm so interested in your perspective. (*A beat.*) Yeah, that was sarcasm, too.

AKRAM: And, sometimes, that's all it takes. No small talk. No conversation at all. Just a Frisbee and mediocre aim.

JAMIE: I don't need a lot of attention. It makes me feel like people are expecting me to do something—to be something. That's a lot of pressure. I'm not good with expectations—other people's or my own.

BERKELEY: His relationship with his ex was over before we even met, so I'm not responsible for the break up in any way. He assured me of that. But I insisted on taking things slowly. Even if someone is... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) Unencumbered.

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) Unencumbered.

BERKELEY: ...they still have lingering baggage from the previous relationship—from all their previous relationships. I told him... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) You have lingering baggage.

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) You have lingering baggage.

JOSH: We used it. We played a game of air hockey every night before I went to bed. He stayed up later than I did. We had different classes and different schedules. He stayed up till three or four in the morning. (*Clarifying.*) He told me that. I wouldn't have known, otherwise, because I was asleep when he was staying up. (*A beat.*) I have a picture of the air hockey table on my phone. It makes me sleepy, when I look at it.

BERKELEY: When you're in a relationship with somebody, you're in a relationship with every person they've ever had a relationship with—parents, friends, brothers, sisters, boyfriends, girlfriends—everybody. You're dealing with a lot of... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) Lingerin' baggage.

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) Lingerin' baggage.

BERKELEY: It might be ten or twenty years old. It might've been somebody else's baggage that became the baggage of the person you're in a relationship with. And now you have to deal with it. (*A beat.*) When somebody tells you... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "This must be what love at first sight feels like."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with BERKELEY.*) This must be what love at first sight feels like.

BERKELEY: You can bet money they're just trying to make you think that this magical we-must-be-soulmates kind of meeting is going to be different than every other meeting and every other relationship. (*A beat.*) I didn't fall for it. I insisted that we take things slowly—like I said. It was two months before I agreed to on a weekend trip with him.

NORA: Sometimes, I looked at the photos and thought we were still together. That's what happens when the shield of sarcasm slips and you're left unprotected and vulnerable.

DARIUS: We had a few more dates after the impromptu date that started at the party. They were okay. Nice. Uneventful. It's hard to top getting asked out at a party and having the date start right then and there. It's hard to recreate spontaneousness. It's pretty much impossible. I think it's better to start a relationship in an uneventful, average kind of way.

SHANE: You could say I got in with the wrong crowd—a bad crowd. You could say that. But, really, that puts the blame on the crowd and I'm the one who made the choices. I'm the one who did the... things I did.

DARIUS: After a couple months of average, uneventful kind of dates, we decided to be friends. Just friends. (*Clarifying.*) I decided. I told her we should just be friends. And without even a second to think about it, she said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "It's probably for the best."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with DARIUS.*) It's probably for the best.

DARIUS: Probably. People say "probably" when they want to soften the impact of the other stuff they're saying. To make it seem like it could be true, but maybe it's not. They want to leave their options open. So for like a week—an entire seven-day week—I obsessed about whether or not I'd made the right decision and whether she'd just gone along with it. Maybe her "probably" was like my "hungry." I was hungry so I said yeah to the question she asked me at the party. So, if I hadn't said anything about being friends instead of dating, she wouldn't have said anything about probably and we might still be having uneventful dates.

JOSH: I have a picture of the air hockey table, but I don't have one of him. I feel bad about that. You should have pictures of your friends. Especially when your lives were connected and dependent on each other.

DARIUS: Being friends with somebody you used to date is awkward. It's difficult. Especially when the other person starts dating somebody else—and having more exciting adventures with them than they had with me. (*To his point.*) Hot air ballooning on the third date is excessive. The person who plans that kind of third date is a show off. They're desperate for validation.

AKRAM: Somebody throwing you a Frisbee and believing that you'll catch it and throw it back is taking a risk—a leap of faith... a throw of faith. It makes you rethink your sense of value. My value. If somebody else believes you're worth something, you have to believe it, too. (*A beat.*) After we were done playing catch, I walked over to him and asked, "What d'ya do when you're not throwing a Frisbee on Coronado Island?" I figured if he took a risk to throw the Frisbee to me, I could be friendly and have a conversation, right? And he said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "It's kind of a long story."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with AKRAM.*) It's kind of a long story.

AKRAM: It was a story, but it wasn't funny. (*Explaining.*) He was supposed to be there with his girlfriend, but she dumped him the day before their trip. She dumped him by voicemail. (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I probably should've done this sooner, but I didn't, so I'm doing it now. I don't wanna see you again. Not ever. So, bye."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with AKRAM.*) I probably should've done this sooner, but I didn't, so I'm doing it now. I don't wanna see you again. Not ever. So, bye.

AKRAM: He went on the trip without her. Which I think took a lot of, you know, courage. He said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I wasn't gonna miss out on this vacation, so here I am. And, one thing's for sure, I'll never let myself get in a situation like this again. Not ever."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with AKRAM.*) I wasn't gonna miss out on this vacation, so here I am. And, one thing's for sure, I'll never let myself get in a situation like this again. Not ever.

AKRAM: I felt bad for him. I've been dumped before. It isn't fun. So I gave him my number and told him he could call or text if he wanted to talk. I'm a nice guy. I tossed him a little friendship, instead of a Frisbee. (*A beat.*) We stayed in touch. Once a month or so. He helped get me through some tough times. He let me know what he was up to. He had a pretty bad track record with women. But I guess that figures. I told him, "Be your own Frisbee." It was just something that came to me one morning. I wasn't sure what it meant, but it sounded deep and existential, and he said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I've gotta make some changes, bruh."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with AKRAM.*) I've gotta make some changes, bruh.

STEPHEN: When he told me he'd heard about the polar bears from his grandfather, I was conflicted. Conflicted isn't something I enjoy being. I felt guilty about saying he lied about the polar bears. He was just passing on a lie. So, his grandfather is the polar bear liar—the liar about polar bears. It's his grandfather I can't trust. But he did pass along the lie—the icy myth about a species in danger of extinction. He spread the lie without confirming it's veracity. That's right, I said, "veracity." I was yelling it pretty loud in the break room at the office, and this guy who works like ten cubicles away from me—but who I've never said even two words to—walked past and said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "You're not right in the head."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) You're not right in the head.

SELVIN: When something happens to you—even if what happens to you is something that happened to somebody else and you only saw it—witnessed it—in your rearview mirror, it still happened. You still had the experience. And you continue to see it—anytime you close your eyes. (*A quick beat.*) Anytime I closed my eyes. At night, yeah, but during the day, too. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I couldn't stop seeing it.

STEPHEN: And I said, "Excuse me?!" And he shook his head and said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Bruh... seriously. You're not right in the head."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) Bruh... seriously. You're not right in the head.

STEPHEN: And that was the first conversation we had. When the first thing somebody says to you, after being ten cubicles away from each other for two years is... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "You're not right in the head."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) You're not right in the head.

STEPHEN: ...it means something. It lingers in your head. The head you're not right in. And, as I was pondering the veracity of his statement—his observation—he said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "We've all heard about the polar bears. He's told everybody in the office. And we all knew it wasn't true." (*A beat.*) "But the possibility is fun to think about. And, sometimes, that's enough."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) We've all heard about the polar bears. He's told everybody in the office. And we all knew it wasn't true. (*A beat.*) But the possibility is fun to think about. And, sometimes, that's enough.

SELVIN: I wouldn't drive on the highway. I couldn't. I didn't want to drive anywhere. I didn't even wanna be a passenger in somebody else's car. I couldn't shake the feeling that something could happen—would happen. And it could happen at any moment. In the blink of an eye. Think about it—every time you blink, something horrible is happening to somebody. That awareness gets in your head and bounces around until it's all you think about. It's all I could think about.

STEPHEN: And, then, he kind of bent over a little and put his hand over his nose. Like he was a polar bear putting a paw over his nose. And it made me laugh. An actual, genuine laugh, not like... (*Simultaneously with ALL. An obviously fake laugh.*) Ha ha.

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN. An obviously fake laugh.*) Ha. Ha.

STEPHEN: And the fact that I'd gotten so upset about whether or not polar bears put their paws over their noses when they hunt, and whether somebody telling me about it and finding out it wasn't really true was the beginning of the erosion of trust on a global scale, all kind of fell into place. Like perspective. And all because of a guy ten cubicles away saying what everybody else was probably thinking. (*A beat.*) I haven't seen him around lately. Not for a while. I'm not sure how long. It's hard to keep track of things or people when

they're ten cubicles away. Somebody said he was in an accident. But you can't always believe what people tell you.

The following three lines should feel like one single line.

JAMIE: When...

NORA: Where...

BERKELEY: And how you meet somebody impacts the way you think about the relationship—the whole time you're in the relationship, not just at the beginning of it.

JAMIE: If you meet somebody on an app—even if it's a perfectly respectable one—you're always a little embarrassed to admit it. There's a little pause before you answer the question... *(Simultaneously with ALL.)* "How did you two meet?"

ALL: *(Simultaneously with JAMIE.)* How did you two meet?

NORA: If you meet somebody at a bar or someplace like that, there's always a little hint—a little stain—of bad decisions. It's like when you get a stain—an actual stain—on a really pretty skirt. Even after it's been washed or dry cleaned and the stain is gone, you still think of it as "the stained skirt." It'll never be free from that association. That's how it is when you have a relationship with somebody you meet at a bar or someplace like that. The stain of bad decisions is always there.

BERKELEY: Getting introduced by a mutual friend is ideal. People love that. *(Simultaneously with ALL.)* "How did you two meet?"

ALL: *(Simultaneously with BERKELEY.)* How did you two meet?

BERKELEY: *(Sweetly, playing the part.)* We were introduced by a mutual friend.

NORA: For the record—and because I know some of you have made assumptions—we did not meet at a bar or someplace like that.

JAMIE: We met at the car wash. I fell asleep in my car, while I was in the car wash. You know, the automatic car wash where your left front wheel goes in a little track and you put your car in neutral and the car wash moves your car through the various parts of the process. And, at the end, a sign lights up: *(Simultaneously with ALL. Politely, efficiently.)* Please pull forward.

ALL: *(Simultaneously with JAMIE. Politely, efficiently.)* Please pull forward.

JAMIE: Except I didn't pull forward. So, all the cars behind me were stuck in the car wash. Apparently, people were honking their horns. A woman in a Volkswagen had a panic attack in the soap-squirting section, before the giant strips of wet fabric flop all over your windshield and the sides of your car. (*Getting back to the point of the story.*) We met because he was in his car behind the woman having the panic attack. He thought she was having some kind of medical situation—I mean, a panic attack is a medical situation, but he thought she was having a heart attack or a stroke or something. So, he got out of his car—in the car wash—to check on her. The water and soap and brushes and flopping wet strips of fabric were all going on like nothing was wrong—like I wasn't holding up a line of cars by being asleep. After he checked on the woman in the Volkswagen, he kept walking through the car wash. When he knocked on my window, I woke up, and I screamed when I saw him. He looked like some kind of monster. A helpful monster. A handsome monster. So, maybe not so much of a monster. Anyway... I pulled forward. I pulled forward and into a parking space next to the "Free Vacuums" area. He ran back into the car wash and, a few minutes later, he emerged—washed as clean as the outside of his car. And he parked right next to me. That's how we met.

NORA: And we never broke up. (*Clarifying.*) The relationship ended, that's for sure. But there was never any official breaking up. No words were spoken. No note, no letter, no voicemail. Nothing. That's definitely a passive-aggressive message, but ghosting somebody—somebody you've been in a relationship with for almost a year—is not the same as breaking up. It's not. It's a complete shirking of responsibility and civility. It's cowardly. And texting somebody at 11:00 on a Thursday night to say... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I think about you sometimes."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with NORA.*) I think about you sometimes.

NORA: ...Two months after you walk out on them just makes them think that you haven't moved on and neither should they. That's what I thought—even after other people started showing up in the photos he was posting. (*On the verge of being profound.*) We go from being in each other's pictures to seeing people we don't know in each other's pictures, to not knowing each other. That's the

evolution of a relationship. But, even when we get to that last step—that last stage of the relationship's lifespan, when we think that we don't really know each other anymore—we still think there's a possibility that we could get back together, when the other person never really broke up and they tell you... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I think about you sometimes."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with NORA.*) I think about you sometimes.

NORA: When somebody tells me they think about me, I think about them. I can't not think about them. Even though I don't really know that person anymore.

JOSH: When you stop being somebody's roommate, you don't stop being their friend. (*Quick beat.*) Unless you stop being their roommate because you stopped being their friend. But that's not what happened with us. We just got other apartments with other roommates. And, then, our own apartments—roommates.

BERKELEY: Love at first sight isn't guaranteed to be permanent. It's not "I'll love you forever because of some fleeting feeling I'm having in this particular moment that could be love or could just be physical attraction."

JOSH: We still hung out. We went to games together—football, basketball, even baseball. But you don't really talk during games. And, if you go out before or after a game—for dinner or whatever—you talk about the game, not what's happening in your lives. One time, we were playing tennis—which is a lot harder to play than it looks—and I asked him how things were going. "Things" is general. It can mean pretty much anything. He yelled from across the net... (*Simultaneously with ALL. Shouted.*) Are we playing or talking?

ALL: (*Simultaneously with JOSH. Shouted.*) Are we playing or talking?

JOSH: So, I waited till we were taking a break between sets. I asked how things were going with his girlfriend. Asking about his girlfriend was more specific but it was still general enough so it didn't feel like an interrogation. He didn't look at me. (*A fact.*) Guys don't need to look at each other to have a conversation. We prefer not to look at each other while we have a conversation. (*Back to his story.*) He kinda whispered, like he was embarrassed. (*Simultaneously with ALL. Quietly.*) "I'm not good at relationships."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with JOSH. Quietly.*) I'm not good at relationships.

JOSH: And I was like, "Who is? Nobody's good at relationships." And he shook his head and, I swear, it looked like he was gonna cry. He didn't, but it looked like he was gonna. And he said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "When you know that what you're doing behind somebody's back is wrong, but you keep doin' it, you're a special kinda jerk."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with JOSH.*) When you know that what you're doing behind somebody's back is wrong, but you keep doin' it, you're a special kinda jerk.

JOSH: So he broke up with her. He was kinda vague on the specifics, but he said it happened at a restaurant. (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I walked out. I didn't know how else to do it."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with JOSH.*) I walked out. I didn't know how else to do it.

JOSH: A few months later, my girlfriend and I went to a game with him and the new woman he was seeing. When the ladies went to the restroom, I said, "Looks like you got better at relationships," and he was like... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Baby steps, bruh. Baby steps."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with JOSH.*) Baby steps, bruh. Baby steps.

BERKELEY: If we're being perfectly honest, love at first sight doesn't feel much different than having gas after a spicy meal or getting a buzz from too much coffee in the morning. What people attribute to love at first sight could be any number of things. None of which are permanent.

SHANE: When you move out of your parents' house—to go to college or just get a place of your own, you do stuff. All the stuff you couldn't do, when you were under your parents' roof. Some of it is good stuff. Great stuff. But some of it is just stuff that you think you should do because you couldn't do it before. It's not anything earth shattering or life changing. At least you don't think that's how it'll be. It's more like you've got a to-do list of stuff to try with all your new freedom—the lack of rules and supervision. And some of it starts to be stuff you do every day—out of habit... out of boredom. And pretty soon, the only people you spend any time with are people who are doin' the same stuff. It's like your life gets completely swallowed up by it.

And, instead of having more freedom, you're trapped by the stuff you're doing and the people you do it with. And, then, you don't have an apartment anymore, and you flunk out of college. And none of your friends have a place you can stay because they were all hanging out with you because you had a place to stay. That's a cold realization, but it doesn't make it not true.

STEPHEN: Ice sticks to wet fingers. (*A beat.*) My mom told me that when I was little, but it's not like I hadn't figured it out on my own because the ice was sticking to my wet fingers. So, I said, "The ice cubes are sticking to my fingers." It was an observation. It wasn't like I needed to have the scientific properties of the combination of ice and wet fingers explained to me. I'd seen the movie where the kid gets his tongue stuck to a pole or something in winter. So, I already knew that ice sticks to wet things like tongues and, as I was experiencing in that moment, wet fingers. But she felt like she needed to comment on my observation. Sometimes, people can't stop themselves from commenting on a situation. So, she did. She said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Ice sticks to wet fingers."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) Ice sticks to wet fingers.

STEPHEN: Which is pretty much what I'd just said. (*A beat.*) I had been helping her with the dishes—I was a helpful eight-year-old, so I helped with the dishes. And, then, I reached into the freezer to grab some ice, because we didn't have any Dr. Pepper that was already cold. And the ice cubes stuck to my fingers—because they were still wet, which is when I said, "The ice cubes are sticking to my fingers" and she said... (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "Ice sticks to wet fingers."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) Ice sticks to wet fingers.

STEPHEN: And then she said she was tired and was going to bed, but that she'd pick me up after school the next day. That's pretty much exactly what she said. (*Simultaneously with ALL.*) "I'll pick you up after school tomorrow."

ALL: (*Simultaneously with STEPHEN.*) I'll pick you up after school tomorrow.

STEPHEN: She picked me up most days after school, so it wasn't like it was something out of the ordinary. She was asleep when I left for school, the next morning—which also wasn't out of the ordinary. I could make myself breakfast and get dressed and ready and walk to the bus stop. I wasn't helpless. I was helpful. (*A beat.*) But she didn't pick me up the next day. My uncle did. He said my mom wasn't around anymore. At first, I thought he meant she was dead, but she just wasn't around. She left while I was at school. Took a suitcase full of her stuff and just left. I stayed with my uncle after that. He wasn't good with kids—he didn't really like kids. But he was nice to me. (*A beat.*) My mom sent me some cards and stuff after that—a few times a year—but she never explained why she left or apologized for lying to me. If you're not going to pick somebody up, don't tell them you're going to do it. When somebody lies to you, it makes you not trust anyone. And that's a horrible thing for somebody to do to you. One lie is like the flapping butterfly wing of larger and larger circles of distrust.

SHANE: I ended up in Vegas—which seemed like a good place to end up. It was sunny most of the time, and you can blend in, no matter what kind of stuff you're dealing with... no matter how far out of control your life gets.

AKRAM: I got an email from him—my Frisbee-throwing buddy—saying he was gonna be in Vegas for a bachelor party weekend and wanted to know if I was gonna be around. I'm from Vegas—that's why he asked me. I told him I'd try to carve out some time. I really did wanna see him. I'd been putting things in motion that, really, he was responsible for. I was putting together a non-profit organization that could help people when they didn't have a network of friends or family or whatever. Not like a hotline or anything where somebody's problems are at a crucial intervention point. Earlier than that. When you wanna just bounce some ideas off of somebody. Like having a catch. Like making a connection where there wasn't one before. He's the one who threw me the Frisbee. But I know that, if I hadn't thrown it back, no connection would've developed. So, I don't undervalue my own part in that initial exchange. But he started it. Being the one to toss somebody that lifeline of connection is like the flapping butterfly wing of larger and larger circles of connection, right?

STEPHEN: Sometimes, I walk past the cubicle of the guy who told me... *(Simultaneously with ALL.)* "You're not right in the head."

ALL: *(Simultaneously with STEPHEN.)* You're not right in the head.

STEPHEN: ...and I laugh. People probably think I'm not right in the head because I'm laughing at an empty cubicle, but that's their problem. And, as I walk past the cubicle, I think about him.

NORA: *(Simultaneously with ALL.)* "I think about you sometimes."

ALL: *(Simultaneously with NORA.)* I think about you sometimes.

STEPHEN: I think about what he said, more than about him. But you know what I mean.

NORA: The fact that I think about him is frustrating. And infuriating. People who choose to make you a part of their past shouldn't get to be part of your present.

BERKELEY: *(Simultaneously with ALL.)* You have lingering baggage.

ALL: *(Simultaneously with BERKELEY.)* You have lingering baggage.

BERKELEY: Nobody is completely unencumbered. No matter what they say.

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