

DRAFT THIRTEEN

Up Strung Down

written by

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CHARACTERS

JESS - Agender, Mid 20s, any race/ethnicity, Shiny shoulder length dull gray hair, adjusting to new things, likes to paint but isn't very good at it,

PETE - Male, Late 20s, brown hair, any race/ethnicity, works at Hallmark, hates capitalism, likes to be safe in his box, dislikes butter

MARC - Male, Mid 20s, any race/ethnicity, artist, knowing, short/shortish black hair, close with oaks

ALY - Female, Mid 20s, any race/ethnicity, explorer, long pink and purple hair, bright complexion, bad singer, close with aspen, good sewer, has a sweet tooth

HOLLY - Female, any race/ethnicity, Late 20s, loving to a limit **The only scene she should be physically present in is "Holly." Every other appearance should be strictly vocal**

KENNY - Any gender, late 30s, aspiring magician, "grass" connoisseur

SETTING

1st Dimension:

The world we trust and know. The store, the apartment, the trees (mesquites aren't the friendliest of trees, but they do what they can)

2nd Dimension:

A world of watercolor and learning. Lots of trees - sturdy and wise Oaks paired with tall and thin Aspen who like to cause trouble. The ground is coated in delicious flowers - Marigolds (a dark dingy muddy blue/purple) and Lilies (bright purple and pink), and just the most beautiful nature scene you can think of. This place is perfect.

TIME

Now and again and again and again - and earlier too. Pretty much all of the time. Yup. All of it.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Approach your characters with sympathy. They've all been through enough. Especially Kenny.

Aly's moans/groans should not be too accurate. Every time she has heard them, it's been muffled and far away. She should not sound like she knows what she's doing, because she really just doesn't. -- Please be sure to be mindful that Marc discourages this because she simply does not know the sound's weight. He's not a monster.

Please note that the following indicates the end of a scene:

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SCENE BREAKDOWN -- Please only look at AFTER reading the play**ACT ONE: PULLING AT THREADS**

1. Happy Birthday
 Jess and Pete; Pete's Apartment
2. Opening and Closing
 Aly, Marc, Holy; The Flower World
3. Calling Card
 Jess and Pete; Pete's Apartment
4. Marigolds are Bitter
 Aly, Marc; The Flower World
5. Happy Birthed Day
 Jess and Pete; Pete's Apartment
6. Tied Together
 Aly and Marc; The Flower World
7. The Next Day
 Jess and Pete; Pete's Apartment
8. Sugar is Sweet, So is She
 Aly, Marc, Holly; The Flower World
9. Closing Shift
 Aly, Holly, and Pete; the Hallmark Store
10. Too Much Zest
 Aly, Jess, and Pete; Pete's Apartment

ACT TWO: BITS OF STRING

11. Holly
 Holly, Marc; Holly and Marc's Home
12. Tupperware
 Jess and Pete; Pete's Apartment
13. Leaves
 Aly and Marc; The Flower World
14. Embroidery...Stuff
 Jess and Pete; Pete's Apartment
15. Pulling a String
 Marc; The Flower World
16. Kenny
 Jess and Kenny; The Hallmark Store
17. Later
 Marc; Holly and Marc's Home, The Flower World
18. Hallmark Shirt
 Pete; Outside
19. Breathing
 Jess; Outside with Trees
20. The Creation of Eve
 Aly and Marc; The Flower World
21. Magic Trick
 Pete and Kenny; The Hallmark Store

TIMELINE -- Please only look at AFTER reading the play

This play is not written in chronological order, so below is a scene breakdown if it were ONLY for timeline purposes (but please, I beg, never perform this piece in this way).

1. Holly
2. Later
3. The Creation of Eve
4. Opening and Closing
5. Marigolds are Bitter
6. Sex?
7. Tied Together
8. Leaves
9. Pulling a String
10. Sugar is Sweet, So is She
11. Closing Shift
12. Too Much Zest
13. Tupperware
14. Happy Birthday
15. Calling Card
16. Happy Birthed Day
17. The Next Day
18. Embroidery...Stuff
19. Kenny
20. Breathing
21. Magic Trick

ACT ONE: PULLING AT THREAD

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

A living room.

There's a lumpy piece of green furniture that once could pass for a couch. It has a grey frumpy pillow originally made for a bed on it along with some sheets poorly folded in the corner.

A side table covered in mail. Maybe not so much a side table...maybe more of a repurposed nightstand missing a drawer or two. It wobbles- the legs aren't even or a screw has come loose.

There's a glass coffee table. It's not fancy or anything - ridden with dirt and covered in Jess's paints. ...Not like the table is covered in paint like it has the paints on top of the table - the paint is in a little tray thing - it's- don't worry about it, it's just a coffee table.

And under this coffee table is a rug that once was white. Jess spills a lot. Oops.

But this apartment is small. Cozy. Cramped.

There's a wall that does a pretty shitty job at separating the living room from the kitchen. -But it's not nothing.

And in this small apartment, Pete stumbles around the room trying to figure out the best hiding spot.

He crouches and extends and leaps and ducks - nothing is quite right.

Pete hears the sound of keys jingling-

PETE

(awkward sounds of panic and distress)

AHhhahshhhnonononahhhhahhahh

...He decides it's best to jump into the shower in the bathroom.

Jess enters. They put their keys on the table and melt into the couch.

Pete quietly peeks out of the bathroom. He is now wearing a party hat and his breath is indicated by the party blower rolling in and out.

He breathes a bit too hard-- the party blower lets out a weak toot.

JESS

Hmm?

Jess grabs a pillow to arm themselves with and slowly makes their way to the bathroom, as not to be heard by whatever made that sound---

They're now close enough to hear the crinkling of the party blower.

Jess jumps out and slams the pillow into Pete's body.

PETE

surPRISSSSSSSHHHHIIIIIIITTTTTT!!

Pete falls onto the tub floor along with the cupcake he was holding.

JESS

Pete, are you okay?

PETE

Your cupcake isn't.

JESS

Cupcake?

PETE

Happy birthday.

Pete toots his party blower weakly.

Jess is confused. They don't understand, but they're trying to.

PETE (CONT'D)

...Oh- you don't- yeah, birthday.

Okay, so once a year, you get a day that's just for you.

Typically it's the day you were born.

Or birthed. Birthed day. Birthday.

But you don't know- um- I didn't know, so I just, I picked one. A day.

You seem like a Sagittarius.

I don't really know what that means truthfully.

But that's what my little sister, Winnie, is.

And you two have a lot in common.

So I figured, why not? Let's Sag-this-tarius.

Anyway.
 Birthed days.
 And it's the only day of the year that you can be like really selfish and people just have to smile through it cuz it's your birthday and you can do what you want- and you get gifts and cake sometimes too. And singing. People sing. And it's embarrassing - for like a minute you just have to sit there while people sing at you, it's so awkward. But it's nice.
 To have your day ya know?
 If you have people that remember and do something. And care.
 But lucky for you, you do.
 So this is just like a Jess day. So.
 Happy Birthday.

Jess smiles. Then observes the frosting mess.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry about your cupcake.

...
 You can always lick it off your shirt. Or mine.

Jess sees their shirt is covered in frosting and cake. They begin to clean it like crazy.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry- that wasn't the- sorry-

Pete tries to help but just spreads it more.

Jess takes off their shirt and begins to soak it in water. Pete stares at their binder for a moment too long.

JESS

What?

PETE

Nothing sorry- sorry about the uh shirt. There's gotta be a stain stick somewhere around here-

JESS

You just had to know my favorite flavor.

PETE

Red Velvet - a delicacy upon men.

Jess scrubs.

PETE (CONT'D)

I've never actually tried that kind.
 I've had chocolate and vanilla before.
 But it's just so intense. So sweet.

Not a big cake guy.
But I figured you would be.
A big cake guy I mean.

Jess scrubs harder and harder.

PETE (CONT'D)

It's just the shirt yea?
I can grab you another from work.

JESS

I like *this* one.

PETE

They're all the same. I promise.
Also please, let me get you a better shirt.
A plain one.
Or with flowers or cool art or something.
As a birthday gift.
You can't just be wearing weird business shirts. Especially
if you don't...ya know...work there.
They should pay you for that ya know?
Walking billboard.
Jess, I'll get you a new one.

JESS

I'll get it clean.

PETE

...Well. Surprise.

Jess smiles and continues scrubbing.

PETE (CONT'D)

Here, put the soap on it and let it soak. Give it time to
marinate ya know-
It'll help.
I promise.

JESS

It'll be good again?

PETE

As good as a uniform can be.

Jess pauses. And leaves the shirt to soak.

PETE (CONT'D)

Ya know, I was thinking-maybe we could get some take out -
watch Survivor.

JESS

I'll get the punch.

PETE

I have another surprise.

JESS

How could you possibly top the last one?

PETE

Hardy har.

Pete gets something from his bag.

A purple envelope, but also...something else- It's poorly wrapped with old newspaper.

PETE (CONT'D)

It's not much.

Jess holds the envelope and smiles, but doesn't know what to do with it.

JESS

(smiling)

Purple.

...

PETE

Open it.

JESS

What?

PETE

This is an envelope - there's something inside. Yeah- just the, just the flap there-

Jess opens it - a card.

JESS

I thought you didn't like to give money to corporations?

PETE

Who says I gave any?

Jess smiles. The card says "Happy 1st Birthday" with a penguin holding a balloon. He scribbled over the 1st and make it into a big heart.

JESS

(pointing to the penguin)

I like him.

PETE

Penguins are my favorite.
They just waddle around all cute, no worries in the world.

*Jess traces the strip of color on the flightless bird
and then his balloon.*

JESS

I've named him Waddles.

PETE

Waddles wishes you a very happy birthday.

Jess pets Waddles.

*Pete guides their attention under the card to the
poorly wrapped gift. Pete helps Jess open it.*

PETE (CONT'D)

It's paint binder! This is like a- so you mix - okay so take
like color, you know, like art, and like okay so say you have
old makeup - not you I know but someone has old makeup or
like if you melted old crayons or I dunno probably other
things too, you can use this with it and make your own paint.
Isn't that cool!!

Pete is genuinely really excited. Jess sniffs.

PETE (CONT'D)

You just seem to be getting really into it these past few
months.

JESS

Yeah, I just- I dunno it's really nice.

PETE

For sure.
Well now you can ethically have as much paint as you want. :)

Pete is very proud.

PETE (CONT'D)

Happy birthday, Jess.

PETE (CONT'D)

(as Waddles)

Happy birthday buddy!

Jess gives Waddles a kiss on the forehead.

.....

OPENING AND CLOSING

Another dimension. The sky opens.

A new kind of light shines onto the flower field. A brighter one, a bluer one, a harsher one.

A loud and overbearing sound, a song almost - but it doesn't bother the flowers or twigs. They seem almost warmed by the familiarity. The leaves however seem troubled.

The song, though harsh, is sweet. A song of longing, of peace. It plays. It creates a rumbling in the earth's ground.

Strange though, the comfort of familiarity isn't warm to all. Just most.

A voice, a sweet voice, starts to sing then is abruptly interrupted.

HOLLY (A POWERFUL VOICE FROM ABOVE)
(rumbled and hummed as the
intro to Bye Bye Blackbird)

DMMM DDM DM DMMMMMM DMMM DMMM
DM DM DM
DM DM DMMM
DM DMMM DM DM
DM DMMMM

They stop mid-note.

Holly didn't want to sing much I guess.

...

Maybe They've changed Their mind.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
DMMM DDM DM DMMMMMM DMMM DMMM

Again, a song, a light, a harsh rumble in the field

And again, the voice begins to sing-

And Holly does not complete Their song. AGAIN.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
DMMM DMM DM.

...

Again. Again. Again.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

DM.
--DM.
----DM DMM.

Silence.

Aly has been laying in the field, getting a massage from the earth's rumble. Again.

MARC
Have you heard from the Up?

ALY
Shh.

MARC
(wanting to lay)
May I?

Aly questions for a moment, then says yes.

HOLLY
DM.

Silence.

MARC
Maybe it will happen again.

ALY
Do you think?

A rumble.

HOLLY
DM DM.

ALY
Maybe-

MARC
(excitedly)
Shh!

Aly smiles a stupid smile too big for her face....Nope. Not this time. Cut off again.

ALY
Did we do something to make Holly mad?

MARC
(teasing)
Have you been good?

ALY

Better than you!

MARC

Hah! Well then it is not either of us, I have been perfect!

ALY

Lies! I heard you gossiping into the hollowed out part of the trees!

MARC

Secrets are different from lies!

ALY

What were you saying?

MARC

I can not tell you! Then it would not be a secret!

ALY

If you do not tell me, I am sure one of them will!

MARC

The Oaks would never betray me. The Aspen might, but never the Oaks!

Aly jumps to the trees. She grabs a twig and threatens to snap it.

ALY

Alright, one of you, any of you, spill! Or the twig gets it!

MARC

(playing along)

The twig did not do a thing!

ALY

Tell me and his life is saved!

A game of chicken.

The trees look to one another - Maybe the twig is too young to die. Maybe the twig has lived enough life.

Aly and Marc stare intensely at one another. Their eyes becomes red - Marc blinks.

ALY (CONT'D)

I WIN!

Marc tackles Aly, the two tumble to the ground. They roll around - they laugh. In a heroic move, Marc grabs the twig and saves a life.

Trickster! ALY (CONT'D)

Savior! MARC

Joy - Marc squeezes Aly tight. A rumble-

See! Even Holly agrees with me! MARC (CONT'D)

Holly likes our hug! ALY

The world praises us for our love! MARC

DM. HOLLY

I want to hear what Holly is saying. ALY

I have always wondered too- MARC

We must keep listening! ALY

Maybe if we offer Them sweetness? MARC

If a wrestling match made them part Their own lips, imagine what else would make Them sing for longer- ALY

Marc hugs Aly. A rumble that ends as soon as he lets go.

DMMM DDM DM DMMMMMM DMMM DMMM HOLLY

Again! ALY

Maybe if I hold you for longer? MARC

DMMM DDM DM DMMMMMM DMMM DMMM HOLLY
DM DM DM.

Holly likes it! They like it!! ALY

Marc picks up Aly and spins her around. She laughs.

They dance. Holly does indeed like it-- The earth begins to rumble.

HOLLY

DMMM DDM DM DMMMMMM DMMM DMMM
 DM DM DM
 DM DM DMMM
 DM DMMM DM DM
 DM DMMMM
 PACKED UP ALL MY CARES AND WOE
 HERE I GO
 WINGING LOW
 BYE BYE BLACKBIRD BYE BYE

Holly closes Their lips and the earth closes again.

Aly and Marc look at each other in shock! They scream with delight! Jumping up and down, dancing round and around.

The Oaks and the Aspen sing along - the grass tries too, but they can't hold a tune.

MARC

(scream singing)

PACK UP ALL MY CARES AND WOES
 HERE I GO

ALY

HERE YOU GO MY LOVE!!

MARC

SINGING LOW!!

ALY

Winging! They sang "winging!"

MARC

(laughing)

This is why I keep you around!!
 WINGING LOWWWWWW
 BYE BYE

ALY

BLACKBIRD

MARC

BYE BYE

ALY

BYE BYE!

MARC

BYE BYE!

They dance. The earth dances. Holly is happy. Marc spins Aly again, and this time ends the dance with a short but gentle kiss.

Marc picks up a Lily and offers it to her.

MARC (CONT'D)

My Blackbird.

You bring sweetness to our world. That is what I told the trees. That we have to protect you. The little kindness we know.

Aly takes the flower and bites onto a petal.

ALY

I thank Holly everyday for the life you bring me.

MARC

Without you, I would only know bitterness and silent evenings and I would never know the joy of crunching leaves and cloudless nights.

ALY

Then you need me. And I need you. You keep my feet on the ground.

MARC

You keep my head from fallen dirt.

Aly offers Marc a piece of lily. He finally tastes one.

MARC (CONT'D)

See? Without you, I do not see any kind of sweetness.

ALY

I love you.

MARC

And I you.

The two eat lilies. Aly feels lighter, but Marc keeps her from flying away. Sweetness.

ALY

We can feel like this more.

MARC

If we eat more, we will become sick. Lilies are for special days. Days when Holly says hello or days where colors are fading.

ALY

But if we feel higher. If we go Up.

MARC

...Up?

ALY

If we go to the Up, we say hi to Holly. And our heads will feel fuzzy and happy like we do with each bite.

Aly takes another bite of the lily. Marc sets his own down.

MARC

What is wrong with Down?

ALY

It is not Up.

MARC

Up there is nothing. Up there are clouds and thin air and long ways to fall. Down we are safe. We are with sustenance and water and each other.

Aly looks Up. She just wants to go Up.

MARC (CONT'D)

Is it because I am Down?
...Holly's voice is so much sweeter than mine - you are weighted by my grovelled tones -

ALY

Go Up with me!

MARC

The trees need me. Who will tend our flowers? Your food. Who will tell the grass bedtime stories so they don't get nightmares? Who will bring pink to your hair?

Aly looks Up. She looks Up. She looks Up.

Marc gently takes the lily out from her hands. He buries it far into the ground.

MARC (CONT'D)

We are happy here.

Aly stares at the grass for an escape.

A rumbling.

.....

CALLING CARD

Jess is on the living room floor - they're finger painting. Their hair is tied back in a knot to keep it from falling in their eyes. It's gray but might be described as silver due to their young age.

Pete comes home from work. He throws his backpack on couch accidentally hitting Jess.

JESS

Ow.

PETE

Didn't see you!

...
You good?

Jess nods.

PETE (CONT'D)

Good good.
Sorry about that.
You want some toast?
I'm making toast.

Jess shakes their head "no."

Pete makes himself some plain toast.

PETE (CONT'D)

(from the kitchen)

Today Kenny was an hour and 46 minutes late.
And hour and 46.
And he didn't say anything.
Like no apology, no nothing.
That guy is such a dick.
And then when Jenny asked where he was and I just had to be like "probably in the bathroom again" cuz like I'm not a narc.
Anyway so Kenny finally comes into work high off his ass - again live your life but don't screw your coworkers - anyway yeah so Kenny finally comes in and Jenny comes back from lunch and pulls him aside and gives him a fuckin' brochure about gut health from her homeopath.
And Kenny is so out of it he doesn't say a thing he just nods and nods while she talks her ass off and now he gets extra long breaks WHENEVER HE NEEDS cuz she thinks has a gluten intolerance or a dairy thing- she's trying to get him to do a juice cleanse to "clear his toxins."
And she's paying for it too! Shit is \$8 a bottle!
He said it tastes amazing but he thinks everything tastes like a gift from above.

So here I am doing twice the work but not getting a dime above minimum.

And this, this is the kicker - Kenny gets called in again at the end of the day and Jenny is like "I know how hard it can be to get good medical help" so she makes him an appointment with the the homeopath dude and THEN COINCIDENTALLY he gets a raise that same day???

AND GETS EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH?!

FOR BEING A TROOPER?!

Meanwhile I'm the only one hauling ass.

Bullshit.

Working is a scam, truly.

...

Why do I have to have a job to be a "functioning part of society." Apparently all I have to do to get a raise is get baked and go to my shift halfway through.

And!!! Do magic tricks!!!

He keeps being like "do we have any volunteers" and it's just me most of the time, and he does these card tricks but they're not like...card cards you know they're the greeting cards from the store.

So he's shuffling like "is this your card" and I'm like yeah I guess but he didn't actually do anything but shuffle around some completely different greeting cards - anyway.

He's a nice guy just...a lot.

...

That's how we're gonna get out of here, Jess.

- I just gotta find someone who sells weed.

Where do you buy that?

You like nature- where do I get grass?

---I'll tell you what Jess, I know I keep saying this but I'm gonna do it.

I'm gonna quit this job and start a cult or something and we're gonna harvest our own berries and carrots and shit and dedicate our lives to honoring true artists of the world. You know?

Like we're gonna be IN the world. And we're gonna see it and we're gonna celebrate it. We'll think about

Georgia O'Keeffe

and Yayoi Kusama

and Jim Davis.

Jim really gets it.

And maybe Winnie could join us too. She's away at college now, but maybe after she could- she likes art and nature and all that. And stars. She can teach us all those stories about the constellations. She told me when we were kids, but I don't have a good memory.

...

Yeah.

Screw this.

I deserved that raise.

I work twice as hard as Kenny.

- Maybe not but I at least usually show up almost on time.

Pete jumps onto the couch while crunching his dry toast.

PETE (CONT'D)

Anyway pack your bags Jess, we're getting out of here.

Crunch. Silence. Crunch. Crunch.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sell anything today?

Jess nods but is still focused on their art.

PETE (CONT'D)

(peaking over at the painting)

That looks nice.

Jess glares at him and covers their work.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry.

Silence. Crunch.

JESS

Did you sell anything today?

PETE

Just a few birthdays and sympathy cards I think- nothing crazy.

I hate when I sell those though.

It's sad.

-Cuz I wanna know what happened but like, you can't ask them that.

It walks a blurry line of "this thing was tragic enough that someone finds it necessary for a whole card dedicated to the grieving process" but "not so tragic that it's offensive to be handled with some pictures of aloe-vera and jade plants that says 'This Succs.'"

Crunch.

How has he not finished his toast yet?

PETE (CONT'D)

Which ones did you sell?

JESS

"I miss you"

PETE

The "I miss you a-waffle-lot" painting with the runny eggs and bacon that make the sad face??

Did you tell them it was your unbearably handsome roommate's idea?

JESS

Just like that.

PETE

What did I tell you - People like silly art.

...
Someone else came in wanting a "sympathy" one and I talked you up.

JESS

Oh?

PETE

Yeah I said we were out of stock but that I knew a local seller who made beautiful paintings that are good for that kind of situation.

JESS

No one asked me for anything like that.

PETE

Yeah she didn't believe that we didn't have any more and ended up buying like five.

Crunch.

PETE (CONT'D)

How do you think she knows she'll need them? Do you think it's a big car accident situation or like maybe she herself is behind them?

JESS

A thoughtful serial killer?

PETE

Maybe her calling cards are literally her CALLING CARDS. Think about it. She may be a genius.

JESS

Do you think she buys them before or after she violently kills her victims?

PETE

She didn't seem like-- like that intense. She was old. Not sure how lethal you can be when you struggle opening a door.

JESS

Maybe she's a gentle killer. You don't have to be strong to murder someone if you have the right tools.

PETE

Like a poisoner?

JESS

Exactly. If you use your brain, you can destroy just about anyone.

PETE

Uh huh.

JESS

Slowly take their life for your own.

PETE

...Jess please don't murder me.

JESS

I wouldn't do that to a friend! And you are Pete the Friend.

PETE

That's good...but...just saying--youuuu cannot do that to anyone. Even "not friends," okay?

JESS

Okay.

PETE

Promise you won't kill anyone?

Jess shrugs and nods.

PETE (CONT'D)

Good. Always good.

...
...Can I see what you're working on?

JESS

Up.

PETE

You're painting the Up again?

JESS

Yup.

PETE

...
Okay.

A moment.

Pete wishes he had more burnt toast to crunch to fill the silence. He doesn't know what to do with this anymore.

... Then- he remembers something.

PETE (CONT'D)

Oh- here-

He pulls some used brushes out from the side pocket of his backpack.

PETE (CONT'D)

Gertrude from Joanns said these were some of the rejects, but I thought you might like them. No reason to throw away perfectly good stuff.
...Good enough stuff.

Jess smiles and takes them. The brushes are mangled and ugly. But they're theirs.

Jess sniffs.

Pete notices that Jess is completely hunched over.

PETE (CONT'D)

Hey you should get up and stretch or something.

Jess huffs at him. Then realizes - their back really does hurt.

They get up and stretch or something.

PETE (CONT'D)

Wanna watch a movie?

JESS

I thought I was supposed "to get up and stretch or something."

PETE

Coffee table.
Could you move your stuff?

Jess begins to move their things. Carefully.

PETE (CONT'D)

Wanna continue Survivor?

JESS

If Zeke gets voted out, I'm gonna lose it.

PETE

Just don't kill anyone.

JESS

Not even Varner?

Pete seriously considers it.

PETE

...No-no we can't.

JESS

Dammit.

Pete pulls out his phone and gets the show ready.

PETE

I'll grab the straws.

As Jess cleans, Pete pours fruit punch into a wide bowl, then pulls two comedically long straws out from a drawer.

The coffee table is now clear of clutter. Jess grabs a paper towel and spits on it then wipes it cleanish.

Pete enters the room. They both lay on their backs and scootch under the table.

Jess sniffs. Loudly.

Pete lays his phone on top on it - they begin to watch survivor through the glass coffee table. Pete pulls the bowl up near them and hands Jess a straw.

They slurp and drink and survive.

.....

MARIGOLDS ARE BITTER

Aly is in the field eating flowers.

She picks up each flower carefully and run her fingers over each petal.

She sucks on the sweet plant and delights scraping her teeth against the petals.

A tall shadow looms over her. Panic. She's not supposed to be doing this.

ALY

(in defense)

Lilies have a sweeter taste.

MARC

But they will not fill your small stomach. Those petals hurt you - they will disaggregate your thin skin and weaken your teeth so they fall from their warm homes in gums - how are you not sick from the taste of your own blood?

ALY

I taste nothing but sweetness.

MARC

Those lilies have rotted your tongue. You need to eat the nutrients I have provided you. Marigolds are better

ALY

Marigolds are bitter

MARC

But they sustain you

ALY

What joy can be found through bitterness

MARC

Perhaps not joy but life

ALY

They should go hand in hand

MARC

But do they?

...

MARC (CONT'D)

Your skin is getting pink

Beautiful
ALY

MARC
Let us go back - there is shade under Oaks.

ALY
But here there is warmth and sun

MARC
Too much sun

ALY
It is soaking into my blood, providing me with life

MARC
It is poisoning you

ALY
You are poisoning me.

...

MARC
I will leave you be.

ALY
Marc-

MARC
You are pushing me away. You are pushing yourself away.

ALY
I am coming.

MARC
Stay.

ALY
I do not want to.

MARC
Eat your supper.

Marc leaves. The trees have fed off of Marc's anger and have become angry for themselves.

Aly falls and disappears into the field.

She eats and falls asleep.

.....

SEX?

Aly lies in the flower field practicing sex moans.

Where did she hear these? Not from Marc I'm sure.

*She moans again - but these moans...they're strange.
Muffled. Almost pained.*

A concerned Marc comes running to the rescue.

MARC

Are you hurt?

ALY

I hope to be.

Moans.

MARC

You really should not make such sounds.

Quiet

Quiet

Quiet

...moan.

MARC (CONT'D)

Those damn lilies have ruined your brain.

ALY

(moaning)

Hold me in your arms, make me your world

MARC

Aly, these feelings, they cannot exist in this world you must stop!

ALY

Make me the world!

MARC

Why do you wish to be hurt? Have I hurt you?

ALY

You have not. Yet.

MARC

How will I hurt you?

ALY
Have you not been listening?

Aly moans again. And again, but louder.

MARC
Why must you make those sounds-

ALY
Because you will not make me

MARC
I cannot

ALY
You will not

Aly moans again. Even louder. And again. And maybe again.

MARC
You are teasing me. Testing me. I have told you I have told you these feelings will not blossom in this world. They stop before the roots of our deepest trees.

ALY
Have me.

MARC
Eat your supper.

ALY
I am trying to.

Marc grabs a fist full of Marigolds and shoves them into Aly's mouth.

Aly moans. A moment of temptation.

ALY (CONT'D)
More.

Marc gets more and does so.

ALY (CONT'D)
(Moaning)

More.

MARC
You will leave me.

ALY
More Marc

MARC

You would grow round and float away and then you would leave me

ALY

Let me

MARC

I do not want to

ALY

Feed me lilies

MARC

You would get lost in clouds!

ALY

Let me!

Silence.

MARC

Aly are you leaving me?

...
This world is yours.
What else could you want?

A silence. A painful and long silence.

ALY

I will grab my needle and thread and prove to you I cannot.

Aly grabs her needle and thread and begins to sew her hand to Marc's.

She then attaches their hips. Aly gives Marc the needle.

ALY (CONT'D)

Sew my palm to your cheek. My finger tips will forever brush against your thin brows.

MARC

And what would happen if I grew them out?

ALY

My nails will become buried in between each hair.

Marc does this.

MARC

And what will I do with my spare hand now?

ALY

You will keep me nourished and clean.

Aly moans.

ALY (CONT'D)

I am hungry.

Marc and Aly bend down together.

Marc reaches for the Marigolds, but instead takes a Lily.

Aly moans, but softly into Marc's chest.

Marc smiles.

.....

Happy Birthed Day

It's Pete's birthday!! Aw :)

Jess gets a bagel and cuts it in half. They plate it kindly along with a fresh bottle of water.

They clean up the room a bit - wiping the glass coffee table, straitening the plant on the side table that is actually a nightstand, folding a blanket or two.

A jingling of keys from outside.

Jess grabs a painting they've been working on in secret and place it face down on the coffee table. They hide behind the couch.

Pete enters and plops his things down on the couch.

Jess pops up from behind it and scares the shit out of Pete.

JESS

Surpriseshit!!!

PETE

JESUS CHRIST!

Pete falls to the ground.

JESS

Happy Birthed Day!

PETE

It's not my- um- thank you, Jess. That's so sweet.

Remembering the big surprise, Jess pulls out the bagel and water bottle.

PETE (CONT'D)

My favorite! You remembered - thank you, Jess.

Jess sniffs with pride.

PETE (CONT'D)

Nothing beats a plain bagel. Nothing. No.thing.

JESS

(interrupting Pete's bite)

Wait-

(singing poorly)

E-E-O-EE LYO-LEE-LYOLEE
LYA-A-LEE LYO-LE-LYOLEE

DA RAZYGRAYU V KHOROVOD
DA YA U MILOGO V VARTOT

PETE

...Is that-- did you learn the Survivor theme--

JESS

Your Birthed Day Song! I didn't do a whole minute because I didn't want you to feel awkward. Did I do good?

PETE

Oh- you're perfect, it's great. Jeff Probst would be proud.

JESS

Okay now, bite.

Pete does. Yum :)

PETE

How was your day?

JESS

No.

PETE

Sorry-?

JESS

Today is Pete's day. You are selfish.

PETE

I see, I see. Tomorrow you can catch me up on the life of Jess.

JESS

But not today.

PETE

You can-

JESS

NO.

PETE

Never mind, please don't, it would crush me.

Jess nods aggressively in approval.

PETE (CONT'D)

I got you something today actually, Gertrude said these-

JESS

It has to wait!!

PETE

Fine, fine, fine.

Jess sniffs. Jess smiles - they're trying.

Silence. Kind of an awkward silence- Ehhhh-

PETE (CONT'D)

So...any big plans for today?

JESS

(worried)

I got you a bagel. And a water.

PETE

And a delicious one at that.

Silence.

PETE (CONT'D)

Do you want to do something?

JESS

Did I not do enough? I'm sorry- I should have done more I'm so dumb I am sorry I am sorry Pete it's Pete's day you need more-

PETE

Hey hey- I love it and the surprise was so great- thank you, thank you.

...

JESS

Do you want to watch Survivor?

PETE

Only if you sing along with the theme song.

JESS

Grab the punch. I'll set up.

They do as planned.

Jess slides under the table and waits for Pete.

Pete brings the punch bowl with the straws and sneaks in next to Jess.

PETE

Ready?

Jess stares intently at Pete waiting for him to notice the painting.

Pete...is slow.

PETE (CONT'D)

What?

...

You okay?

...

Jess?

...Jess looks at the painting then back at him.

PETE (CONT'D)

(finally looking)

Oh my goodness- did you make this? How beautiful.

JESS

For Pete's day.

PETE

You made this for me?

JESS

You thought all I had planned was a bagel.
Silly Pete.

Pete smiles a really big smile.

Someone remembered. And cared.

He looks at the painting.

PETE

I like all these circle thingies. Very abstract. Very modern.

JESS

Do you know?

PETE

...uh-

JESS

(whispering)

They're bagels.

PETE

I LOVE BAGELS!

JESS

I KNOW!

PETE

BAAAGEEEEELLS!!

Pete hugs Jess. It's a little awkward. They don't hug much. Also, it's under a cramped table. So. Yeah.

PETE (CONT'D)

I like the texture. It's like, grainy.

JESS

I made the paint with your paint binder stuff. And sunflower petals from the park. And your Zoloft.

PETE

Oh- oh,
Thank you.

JESS

So you can see it everyday. You love Zoloft.

Pete bites his tongue and smiles.

JESS (CONT'D)

OH THE BEST PART!

Jess pulls out a card.

JESS (CONT'D)

I couldn't find a purple envelope.

Pete takes out the card.

It's a drawing of Waddles sitting on top of many balloons in the sky.

JESS (CONT'D)

Waddles says "Happy Birthed Day."

PETE

WADDLES!!! I like the balloons. They're so colorful.

JESS

So Waddles can fly!

PETE

Waddles is looks so happy.
Thank you, Jess.

Jess sniffs.

JESS

Happy Birthed Day Pete.

Jess leans their head up against Pete. It's nice.

They're nice.

.....

TIED TOGETHER

Aly is on her back and Marc lays on top of her, trying his best not to crush her.

The two roll around and enjoy being tied into one another.

ALY

(off-pitch)

NO ONE HERE CAN LOVE OR UNDERSTAND ME

OH, WHAT HARD LUCK STORIES THEY ALL HAND ME-

MARC

(pained)

Your voice makes the flowers grow!

ALY

Then I will sing on and we will feast!

Aly sings more. Flowers grow.

Marc feeds her two Marigolds. She slurps compassionately.

...

Marc is deciding...he is deciding...Marc decides.

Marc feeds her a lily. She eats it eagerly.

ALY (CONT'D)

A gift a gift! Hold me tighter lover!

He squeezes - they both yell in delight.

ALY (CONT'D)

My organs have become yours!

MARC

Our lungs have fused - I can feel your heart beating underneath mine - as if I had two!

ALY

You have half!

MARC

Half?

ALY

My half and your half

One heart

MARC

ALY

You have become silly like when the Aspen play funny tricks!

MARC

Hah! Maybe so!

Joy. Aly moans. Marc feeds her lilies.

MARC (CONT'D)

Are you full little bird?

ALY

Never

MARC

(teasing...mostly)

I will stop soon - I do not want to catch your disease

ALY

I am not diseased

MARC

You are lustful and gluttonous

ALY

I am hungry and full of love for you

MARC

I have never loved anyone else

ALY

I have never known anyone else.

MARC

Is that why you love me?

Silence.

MARC (CONT'D)

You will leave me

ALY

Then hold me tighter

MARC

If I squeeze much more you will vanish

ALY

Vanish?

MARC

Explode and turn into the flowers

ALY

Then I will feed you and bring you joy

MARC

You bring me joy already

ALY

(a dare.)

Pull the thread. Make it impossible for me to leave.

MARC

I do not need string for that.

...Aly rolls over and now lays on top of Marc.

ALY

Come with me

MARC

Where to?

ALY

Eat my lilies and we can float together and see the top of the sky

MARC

I do not share your death wish

ALY

Then Marigolds- we can explore the great world down below

MARC

There is no where else

ALY

There must be world beyond flowers

MARC

Not in our world

ALY

Tell me then - what is

MARC

Our world has the flowers. This perfectly made field - a field designed for just me and you. It has this thread that keeps you close to me. It is our home. I can reach up high on trees and pull down big leaves to shade your sensitive skin. And you can get us our food from down low on the ground.

ALY

I will grow big and tall and then I can grab even bigger and higher things! Things we cannot yet see!

MARC

There are no higher things.

ALY

Where would Holly be singing from?

MARC

Nothing, no where - I swear it!

ALY

Then we will climb and climb and find new things among Store!

Marc stops.

MARC

What?

ALY

Nothing, the sky, the clouds, the world you know?

MARC

How do you know about Store?

ALY

I can- I mean it is up there-

MARC

It is high. Too high.

ALY

What does it matter-

MARC

You cannot reach it how did you get there Aly

ALY

I looked.

Marc glares at Aly.

MARC

Did Aspen tell you?

ALY

No one- I-

MARC

They are too tall and lean, they cannot be trusted. You are not to talk to them again.

ALY

The Aspen are good!

MARC

I knew if you knew you would become obsessed.

ALY

I do not know anything of store but a name!

MARC

I WILL PLUCK EVERY LILY FROM THIS FIELD!

ALY

I LISTENED!

Silence.

ALY (CONT'D)

I listened. I listened and I heard something. I made out a few words- some I had heard some I had not. I remember "loss" and I remember "greeting" and I remember "Store." I remember "Store" the most. The word came down from the sky and it hugged me and made me warm. It made me feel safe. It swaddled me and melted me into their kinship.

I need to be with them.

I keep eating lilies hoping to feel the warmth like words once had.

Your words have become so cold, Marc.

I am afraid of you now.

Silence.

MARC

Only Marigolds. Your mind has melted.

ALY

We could go and feel warm together, Marc!

...

Mark says nothing. He pulls the thread tighter.

Aly winces.

ALY (CONT'D)

(fearful)

Only Marigolds.

.....

THE NEXT DAY

Pete is on the phone. It's ringing...it's ringing...it's ringing..

PETE

Hey Winnie, I guess I missed ya.
 And I do- miss ya. I miss ya. Ya been missed Winnie! Yeah.
 Okay. Well. Ummm I just wanted to say hi and was hoping we
 could catch up soon.
 It's been so long since we've talked. I wanna hear how things
 are. I know you're probably super duper busy with your first
 year of college, and your cool new friends, and your new
 boyfrieeeeenndd. I still gotta meet him. Gotta make sure he's
 good enough for my lil-sis. Otherwise, I'll beat him up. Oh
 yeah. I'll uh- I'll beat him up real good. Eugene won't know
 what hit him.

*BEEEP. "To replay your message, press one. To rerecord
 your message, press two"*

PETE (CONT'D)

God dammit.
 - Winnie! Wiinnaayyyyyy
 Haven't heard from you in a hot sec so I figured I'd check
 in. I'm sure you're killing it with starting college and all.
 New job, new look, new boyfriend, new everything. Everything
 is a lot of things. All the things. Every of the things.
 And studying astronomy still? Stars and shit like that right?
 Can you tell me about Sagittarius again? I know you've told
 me before, but I don't think I remember it right.
 I'd love to hear about Eugene if you'd let me...if you want
 you can call me back. --- Don't feel like you have to, but if
 you're free or just want to say hi or whatever, I'm here.
 I know you're probably still mad at me- And that's fair I'm
 not saying don't be mad-
 I just.
 I want things to be better.
 I love you.
 And I miss you.
 ...You know, I met this person a while back and they-

BEEEP. "To replay your message press one..."

PETE (CONT'D)

Fuck- Winnie, I'm sorry.
 I'm sorry I didn't say the right things and that I made you
 feel bad about who you are.
 You don't deserve that!
 I support you! I really do-- Number one ally over here. I've
 been doing some research so I can know you better. I think
 maybe I was a bit jealous that you knew who you were so young
 and I'm still just this mess of a man. And you are- a
 freaking awesome young female woman who is super cool.

--I also wanted to say I really like the name you picked out. It suits you way better Ti--Umm- the other one. The bad one. The "dead" one. Sorry.
And I actually met someone who is similar and I think I'm starting to get it-- I--

Jess enters the room.

PETE (CONT'D)
(embarrassed and quickly hanging up)
Okay cool, I'm an ally, see you bye.
Hey Jess! Are you busy? Can I give you your gift?

JESS

It is no longer Pete's day.

Pete pulls out terracotta pot from the side table.

PETE
For your plant.

JESS
Dirt.

PETE
For your dirt.

While Jess grabs a Tupperware full of dirt with the sides colored with cheap markers and watered down paints, Pete pulls a price sticker off the bottom of the pot and hides it in his pocket.

Jess sets the Tupperware in the pot.

JESS
Perfect.

Jess sniffs.

PETE
(very carefully)
I'm just gonna- it's safe - it's safe -

Pete carefully pours the dirt into the pot.

PETE (CONT'D)
See? Even more air and light. And you can paint the sides if you want.

Jess hugs Pete very tightly. This was the best gift of all.

PETE (CONT'D)

This way the dirt can be pretty too.
And I can get my Tupperware back.
It's my only one.

Jess is still holding onto Pete. And holding onto the pot.

Jess sits and begins to color the pot. They paint beautiful stripes on the side.

PETE (CONT'D)

Pretty.

Jess is in the zone and doesn't process Pete anymore.

PETE (CONT'D)

Well, I, I hope you enjoy it. The pot.

... Pete gives them some space.

Jess grabs a water bottle and teaches the dirt how to drink.

JESS

Ready?

They pour.

JESS (CONT'D)

Good.

The dirt drinks. It was thirsty.

They put the pot on the side table that is really a nightstand.

The plant begins to grow.

.....

SUGAR IS SWEET, SO IS SHE

Marc is sleeping under the Oak trees.

Flower petals hit his face-- they slowly begin to wake him.

He moves and tries to avoid them, but the petals are too much.

MARC

Stop it.

More fall.

MARC (CONT'D)

Let me sleep.

...
...
...

More fall.

MARC (CONT'D)

FUCKING STOP!

Marc sits up and notices he is surrounded by Marigold petals.

And somehow, the thread is even looser. Marc stands and tugs on it.

MARC (CONT'D)

Aly come to sleep.

...

Aly, come now.

...Is this a joke?

Did I not tell you to stay away from Aspen?

They are not a good influence on your simple mind.

...

Aly...Alyyy...ALY! ALY!

Marc begins to pull the string-- he follows it.

MARC (CONT'D)

Stop hiding! You need to rest!

He follows the string until there is nothing left to follow.

The string is buried deep into the ground, into the dirt. And in the dirt is a portrait of Aly.

MARC (CONT'D)

Now is no time for jokes.
Come up, let me warm you up.
Aly. Aly get up. Aly up up up. Get up. ALY. GET UP. NOW. UP.
UP! UP!!!

Marc dives into the dirt, hoping to pick her up-- but she is just a drawing now.

Marc finds more Marigold petals within the dirt.

He picks them up and examines them.

They have been chewed up already.

MARC (CONT'D)

I will give you a lily I will give you as many as you want
just get up from this grave-

Marc frantically searches for a lily. And finds one.

MARC (CONT'D)

Aly tell me where your teeth are- is this your stomach?

Marc starts to chew the lilies but spits them out and smears them into the dirt.

MARC (CONT'D)

See? Your favorite. These will bring you back up.

He chews more. And more and more. And spits them out for her.

MARC (CONT'D)

Aly--
Oh my god.

He digs more.

MARC (CONT'D)

I warned you- I told you of your glutinous mind-- Why would you eat so many Marigold? You hate they way they hit your shallow tongue.
...Were you trying to be good? Fill your body with nutrients? You did good little bird you are so good come back and let me praise and worship you.

Silence.

MARC (CONT'D)

I-- I tried to give you the perfect life. One free of stress, full of love, of joy, of beauty, of stillness.

...
I did it again.

I did.

...

--I told you your gluttony would return you to nature.

I. Warned. You.

Now the worst has happened-- Your skin is petal and your veins have become stem And I am stuck here on top of dirt

On top of dead petals and leaves

On top of the girl I stitched myself too.

Everything I have done. For you. For you.

...

But I cannot bare anymore loss.

Marc begins to eat all of the Marigolds surrounding him. He eats the flowers he once fell in love with.

Slowly, and barely noticeably, he hums Their song.

MARC (CONT'D)

I am nothing without you. I need you.

He grabs the dirt from her portrait and begins to eat it. He eats her fingernails and her nose and her spinal cord. He eats he eats he eats.

MARC (CONT'D)

(a dare)

Try and hurt me again.

Slowly slurping up her organs through twigs and grass

And he begins to seep into the ground.

Marc has become earth.

...

...

...

After Marc completely becomes his grave, there is a rustling.

And the Aspen let out their secret.

Aly comes out of hiding.

Aly slowly walks up Marc and grabs a handful of him and smears the dirt on her arms and her legs and her face.

She stuffs him into her pockets.

*She picks a chewed up lily. She takes a deep breath -
she breathes in the world.*

*She breathes in freedom. She breathes in a world
without strings. And she bites the petal.*

*As promised, Aly begins to float. She kisses clouds
and breathes new air.*

And we finally hear the end of her song.

ALY AND HOLLY

BLACKBIRD
BYE BYE
BYE BYE
BYE BYE

Aly is gone.



CLOSING SHIFT

A rumbling. It shakes each part of the flower world.

But as Aly flies up and up, lights get brighter and brighter

Holly sings louder and louder

Loud loud

Loud Loud

LOUD LOUD

The world becomes thin

Aly holds her breath and squeezes through the cracks in the atmosphere

LOUD LOUD LOUD

LOUD LOUD LOUD

LOUD LOUD -

-----quiet.-----

A fuzzy sound

Flickering lights

A blip. Blip. Blip.

PETE

(faintly)

Thanks - Have a good day.

Quiet.

THUMP

Aly falls onto the Earth's ground. The EARTH's ground.

Holly is singing again, but this time, it's quiet. And kitschy almost...definitely kitschy.

The song that once sounded so beautiful and enchanting sounds like what would play at the end credits of a children's television show. It's almost annoying.

A card lies on the floor - the song continues to play from it.

Aly, adjusting to her surroundings, looks at it. She studies it. She sniffs it - nothing but paper and glue.

She notes the flowers and tries to take a bite. Flowers are not as sweet now.

She plays with the binding - the songs starts and stops.

She is learning.

HOLLY

BYE BYE BLA-

...

BYE BYE BLACKBIRD-

...

BYE BYE-

BYE

BY

BYE BYE

BY

BY

BY

BY

BY

PETE

Ma'am, are you okay?

An employee, Pete, notices Aly is sitting on the floor playing with the card.

Aly finally looks out from the former flower world.

The walls are lined with little paper slots - cards. Birthday. Congrats. Anniversary. Graduation.

She points to the bold letters above her own head.

There is so much new here - it's overwhelming

PETE (CONT'D)

Sympathy? You need a card for that?

*Aly looks at him funny - but also: who are **you**?*

Her hands graze the crumb and clutter ridden cheap carpeting. She panics -

ALY

Oh grass - oh grass - why where what took your shine?

ALY (CONT'D)

(aggressive to Pete)

You. Your grass! It fades! Your trees! Have you shunned them from here? Or did they leave when you hurt the ever loving grass?!

Pete doesn't make enough to deal with this...but he tries anyways.

PETE

Do you...like the one you have in your hands there?

ALY

Holly? Are you Holly?

PETE

Um- Pete, actually.

ALY

But I am going Up! To Holly! To Store! I did not know that the clouds looked like this from the inside. Spacious. Big! They look so small from Down.

PETE

...are you okay?

Aly looks down. She opens the card for him.

ALY

What?

She opens it again.

PETE

That's one of our music cards. They're a bit more expensive, but people seem to like them I guess.

ALY

(genuine)

Am I supposed to like this?

PETE

I think they get a bit annoying after a while, but yeah, I guess they're nice. They can be comforting I suppose.

ALY

Comforting.

PETE

Mhm.

Silence. She opens the card again.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but- you look- are you okay?
Do you need help getting home?

He observes the dirt and old clothes that cover her.

PETE (CONT'D)

Do you...have a home?

ALY

Store.

PETE

Uh-

ALY

Can you help me get to Store? Up, up, up?

PETE

Are you high?

ALY

Not yet - can you help me to the Up?

PETE

Oh shit, are you one of Kenny's friends?

ALY

HOLLY!!! HOLLY HOLLY HOLLY!!!!

PETE

Again, we don't have a Holly-

Aly opens the card. It sings.

*Pete takes pity on her. She's scared. Clearly lost.
Maybe on drugs. Who knows.*

PETE (CONT'D)

Give me a second.

*Pete runs into the back and returns with a red shirt
and some baby wipes.*

PETE (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

ALY

Can you get me high?

PETE

I know a guy.

Pete offers his hand. Aly takes it. She stands. Marc falls from her clothes. She tries to catch it and stuff him into her pockets.

He flips the closed sign. He brings her to the cash register.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry, all we had were smalls.

Pete offers a red "Hallmark" uniform shirt. She sniffs it then licks it. Pete takes it from her hands.

PETE (CONT'D)

Can I?

Pete pulls the shirt over her. It fits her a bit snug.

Pete pulls out some of the baby wipes and begins to wipe her face.

ALY

MARC!

PETE

Oh, it's Pete actually.

ALY

Do not take away my lover!

PETE

Is there someone else here?

ALY

Leave him smeared on my skin.

PETE

Whoever he is he's clogging your pores.

Pete goes to wipe the dirt again. Aly stops him.

PETE (CONT'D)

Can you just- just sit okay?

Aly does. She responds well to his directness.

PETE (CONT'D)

How about this: I'll clean off your face and you can keep...Marc...on the wipes. Deal?

ALY

He will be safe?

PETE

Sure. Yeah.

ALY

As long as he is with me when I meet Holly.

PETE

Sure.

...
Can I ask you something? What's um- who- are-

ALY

I am not Holly.

PETE

Gathered that one - who are you?
What happened to you?

ALY

I am on my way to Store. To Holly.

PETE

Well...you are in a store-

ALY

THIS IS STORE?

PETE

But there is no Holly here-

ALY

Where did They go?

PETE

Maybe...perhaps...a different store?

ALY

DIFFERENT STORE?!

PETE

Maybe I can help you look-

ALY

(A realization)

My stomach is angered- it weeps for nutrients.

PETE

Oh- I might have part of my bagel left. That has some-um-nutrients. I think.

Pete goes into his bag and pulls out a half eaten bagel.

PETE (CONT'D)

Corporate is getting really stingy on breaks. Not enough time to toast it let alone finish a bagel.

My coworker, Steven, he's a cream cheese guy and man it's pretty tragic how little he gets into it after all the prep is done.

That's why I eat it raw. No rush. No hassle.

I can enjoy my half a bagel without fear of it not toasting in time.

Aly moans. Pete immediately drops the wipe.

PETE (CONT'D)

Oh geeze sorry-

ALY

Hungry.

PETE

Maybe I can steal some of Steven's cream cheese - maybe someone else left something - Do you have a gluten thing? Sorry I didn't meant to- make you - oh geeze.

Pete looks down - out of shock. Maybe guilt. Maybe pity.

ALY

Lilies?

PETE

We don't sell flowers here - you might want to try the Sunshine Market kiosk tomorrow when they open.

ALY

Wait for the rumble if you wait for the rumble it opens.

PETE

...Everyone is closed by now.

ALY

Hm.
Lily?

PETE

Um. The card you're holding has lilies I think-

Pete carefully takes the card from her hands.

PETE (CONT'D)

See?

He opens it - Holly sings.

PETE (CONT'D)

Lilies.

ALY

I tried those - they taste sharp and cut my tongue.

PETE

Oh those ones aren't for- that's just the card decoration.

ALY

(overwhelmed)

Store has so many new things.

Pete closes the card and points to the print.

PETE

See- under the text- there are flowers. I think those are lilies- the pink ones. I think. Right?

Aly strokes the card.

ALY

Pink.

PETE

...I really think you'd like the bagel if you tried it.

Aly unwraps the half eaten snack.

*She sniffs it. She takes a bite. A bite! Then a bite!
And another bite!*

ALY

Even sweeter than lilies!

PETE

...That's what I've heard.

Aly eats the rest quite quickly.

PETE (CONT'D)

You're like hungry hungry huh-

Aly begins to moan-

PETE (CONT'D)

You don't need to do that again I got it.

ALY

Oh- bad?

PETE

Not bad, just maybe not now? Not with me?

ALY
(nodding)

Marc.

PETE

If he's cool with it.

Aly looks to Pete. She looks at him. She looks to his shirt and sees the "Hallmark" logo.

ALY

Pretty.

PETE

If you think corporations with overpriced cards and underpaid employees are nice then sure yea pretty I guess. They sell 6.5 billion cards a year but sure they can't give anyone a penny above minimum wage because then our lord and savior Mike Perry wouldn't make his \$900,000 a year salary. Without his precious employees he would be going pay check to pay check like the rest of us. But no - he is real comfy just signing off on stupid birthday jingles and photos of dogs in silly hats and wine moms justifying their alcohol dependency. But yeah, sure, it's real pretty.

Aly is quiet.

PETE (CONT'D)

Sorry.

ALY
(smiling)

You are making my head feel fuzzy. Like I am in the air again.

PETE

Oh- I wasn't trying to attack you I just hate when the upper class takes advantage of-

ALY

Maybe you can get me to Store in the Up!

PETE

I guess I could look at flights-

ALY
(whispering)

Have you learned about those yet?

PETE
(whispering back)

I've heard of them, yes.

ALY
(still whispering)

Excellent.

Pete checks the clock.

PETE
We have to go soon. Security gets mad when we stay past 10.

ALY
But you do not have any lilies.

PETE
I sure don't.

ALY
We must wait until more grow.

...

PETE
Um-- I think we should-
Ready? We can uh-
I have keys.

*He jingles them. Aly grabs them and nearly puts them
in her mouth when-*

PETE (CONT'D)
Geeze, I'll get you a burger or something okay just stop
doing that. You're freaking me out.

The two leave.

Aly is still clutching hard onto the card.

.....

TOO MUCH ZEST

Pete unlocks the door. It's the small and messy apartment.

Not dirty - just old and there are some dying plants and unframed posters on the wall.

PETE

It's not much, but make yourself at home.

Aly looks at the card. Then the room. Then the card again.

ALY

Not home yet.

PETE

Just an expression - sorry.

PETE (CONT'D)

If you could leave your shoes at the door.

She questions him. Pete looks down.

PETE (CONT'D)

How did I not notice you don't have shoes.
Okay tomorrow, we'll try to find you some shoes.

...
Sit, sit.

Aly lays down on the floor.

ALY

Cold.

PETE

Try the couch maybe?

He points to the shitty green blob that may or may not pass for a couch. Aly sits.

ALY

SOFT!

PETE

It was. I imagine. Don't sit on the left side though - the springs broke and you'll fall through it.
...Don't ask.

Pete leaves into the kitchen.

Aly bounces a bit. She laughs. Fun :)

PETE (CONT'D)
 (calling from the kitchen)
 Do you have any allergies?

Aly ignores this and bounces more.

Pete reenters with a plate of food. A bagel. A FULL bagel.

PETE (CONT'D)
 I didn't bite out of this one. Promise.

Aly eats it eagerly.

PETE (CONT'D)
 Careful- the crumbs-

ALY
 (with her mouth full)
 Careful- okay yes.

Aly eats VERY slowly.

Pete watches. It's painful. It's painful to watch.

PETE
 Fuck it, you're hungry.

She eats like never before.

PETE (CONT'D)
 I may have some butter if you want? I don't usually add it to mine, but a lot of people do. I don't see the hype though. Too much zest.

ALY
 I like this.

PETE
 Bagels are a crowd pleaser, that's for sure.

ALY
 Thank you for the...bagel.

PETE
 Bagel yeah, you're welcome, sure.

She licks her lips.

Aly takes the wipes filled with dirt and along with the clumps from her pockets and places them on the table lovingly.

PETE (CONT'D)

Do you have a place to stay?

ALY

I have grass.

PETE

Great.

Um.

Guess I'll grab you a blanket.

It's more like a thick sheet but it's better than nothing.

ALY

We will sleep then you will take me to Store in Up?

PETE

I open tomorrow but if it's not too dark after maybe we can ask around? I'm not really sure how-

ALY

I will sing and Holly will be proud and lift me to the sky again.

PETE

That's great.

ALY

Why is Their voice here?

Aly pulls out the card and opens it. It sings.

ALY (CONT'D)

That is Holly's song. They used to be so loud. They would wake me from my sleep by opening the sky and They would sing Their song and make me and Marc aware of Their presence.

We never forget who is in charge of clouds and growing flowers and giving us all of our life.

They will bring Marc back and we will live happy away from sneaky Aspen and stubborn Oaks.

...
Up, up, up, out, out, out.

Pete nods. What the fuck.

PETE

Are you in a cult?

Aly gives Pete a look.

PETE (CONT'D)

(smiling, teasing)

Just weird on your own. Good for you.

Pete laughs a little.

Aly laughs. She feels permission to laugh. She laughs a little too hard.

She coughs. She coughs a lot.

Air is thinner up here.

Pete grabs her a water bottle. He opens it for her.

PETE (CONT'D)

Oh good, here.

Aly stares at him- unknowing what to do.

Pete catches on. He holds the water bottle up to her lips.

PETE (CONT'D)

Ready?

He slowly pours the water into her mouth.

She coughs a bit more. She drinks.

Pete brings the bottle down -

She takes the bottle from him. She takes more and more sips.

PETE (CONT'D)

Good?

ALY

You are so good to me, my love.

PETE

(nervously)

Pete is fine.

ALY

Pete IS fine.

PETE

What do I call you?

ALY

What would you like to call me?

PETE

Your name, preferably.

...
Do you need one?

Aly stares.

PETE (CONT'D)

Maybe Flower?

ALY

Why not call me grass or tree? Quite silly.

PETE

Lily?

ALY

Lilies are sweet.

PETE

They're pretty too.

ALY

I am not quite as sweet.

PETE

...Holly?

ALY

(deeply offended)

HOLLY?!

PETE

Sorry, not Holly.

ALY

My deepest and truest and only love, Marc, calls me a name, but now I fear it may offend you like "my love."

So maybe you must call me something new.

Something to match Store.

Who is your favorite one? I want to be like them.

That way you will hear my name and you will love me.

PETE

...
My cousin Jess is pretty cool.

ALY

Jess!

PETE

He sells shrooms but he makes bank so it's okay.

ALY/JESS

Bank making sounds fun.

PETE

Doesn't it though?

ALY/JESS

I am Jess. I will sell shroom and make banks like the cousin
Jess.

PETE

Let's just start with the name, okay?

JESS/ALY

Jess.

PETE

Jess.

JESS

Jess.

PETE

Jess.

Jess.

PETE (CONT'D)

Well Jess, you should get some sleep. We've got some cloud
watching to do tomorrow.

*Jess closes her eyes and falls asleep instantly. Jess
snores.*

PETE (CONT'D)

It'll be fine, Petey boy, it will be fine it will be
fiinnnnneeee.

Pete gets the thick sheet and wraps Jess in it.

He starts to clean her dishes.

He looks at Jess. He shakes his head. Then he smiles.

PETE (CONT'D)

What the fuck.

.....

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO: BITS OF STRING

HOLLY

The past. Pretty far into the past.

A different Marc. A younger Marc. A lesser Marc. Less wise. Less blue. Less green. Less. But he is also so much more.

And Holly. She is much lesser than Aly's Holly. This is Marc's Holly.

The trees outside dim the already softened moonlight. But it's still enough for them.

Holly and Marc lean up against one another.

Holly is writing poems. But it's forced and weird. They aren't flowing through her the way they have in the past.

Marc is lightly sketching flowers - he's preparing to paint soon.

Marc nuzzles his head into Holly's shoulder. She allows it...but is clearly annoyed with him. He looks over to her work.

MARC

Billys, spillys, fillies, crillies, frillies, dillies, pillies

HOLLY

(annoyed)

Shh.

MARC

Grillies, hilbillies, big willies, super sillies-

HOLLY

This isn't making me go faster.

Marc stops. He finds a spot he thinks he'll fit into.

He almost does. Until she moves her head and her hair starts falling in his face.

Pthht. He pulls a long hair out from his mouth. He coughs on it lightly.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

...You okay?

What was that? HOLLY

Vanilla MARC
(muffled)

Hm? HOLLY

Vanilla MARC

Speak up, Marc- HOLLY

Vani- MARC

HM? HOLLY

Marc begins chewing. He takes a big gulp. It itches his throat but he powers through it.

EW!! HOLLY (CONT'D)

Holly gives in and pulls her hair from his mouth.

Put it back! MARC

Holly shoots him a look of disbelief. Marc bites down.

I'll have to make another batch of this shampoo. HOLLY

It's scrumptious. MARC

Now I have to wash it again. HOLLY

I could really go for some dessert right now- MARC

Alright, you're distracting me. HOLLY

Come on, you were being so cute. MARC

HOLLY
Can we please just-

MARC
Fine fine.

Quiet. Awkward and quiet...Holly takes a deep breath. Then kisses him. Holly pulls one of her hairs from her own mouth.

HOLLY
I hated that.

MARC
You're gonna have to get used it.

They kiss. Another pull.

Holly pulls her hair into a ponytail.

Once it's secured, Marc observes, and they kiss again. Marc pulls her hair out from the hair tie. She's getting a bit annoyed.

HOLLY
I wanted it up.

MARC
It looks so pretty. Plus I like having more of you around. Even if it itches my face. Or gets caught in my teeth. Or gets stuck in my lungs.

He tries to breathe with hair in his lungs He's gasping in the most dramatic way possible. He flops around like a fish on land.

MARC (CONT'D)
Save me, Holly! Save me from my hairy lungs!

HOLLY
Come on-

He ignores her and keeps flopping. Holly gives him weak one-handed chest compressions.

MARC
(between gasps)
Mouth...to...mouth...

Holly rolls her eyes and kisses him.

MARC (CONT'D)
I'M ALIVE!

Holly smiles weakly...Marc notices.

MARC (CONT'D)

That's a good thing. I didn't drown via hibiscus hair with hints of vanilla.

...
Holly-

HOLLY

We have to finish.

MARC

Or- hear me out- we -don't-

HOLLY

Be serious.

MARC

I'm being serious! What if we just stopped? What if we stopped trying to keep this business going and we just ran away.

HOLLY

God you will just do anything to get out of work.

MARC

And you'll do anything to stay in it!

HOLLY

We have to live-

MARC

You want to survive. I want to live. You're stuck in this man-made world of bills and taxes and rich people who don't pay their dues.

HOLLY

Then what? We just live in the trees? Call up the birds and see if they have room in the nest?

MARC

Why not!

HOLLY

...We were having a nice night Marc.

MARC

Were we?

A moment.

HOLLY

Let's just cool down for a sec. And get back to work. Then we can get some wine and chocolate. Maybe cuddle on the couch a bit. I could stuff my hair in your mouth again?

MARC

What time is it?

She looks at the clock. But doesn't respond.

MARC (CONT'D)

What time is it?

...
You want this business to be our lives. Most people are asleep by now and you just want us to keep working?

HOLLY

Our business is never going to pick // up if

MARC

// pick up if we don't pick up our slack. Yeah. I know.

HOLLY

That means long meetings, that means working through breaks, that means working late nights sometimes.

MARC

I used to find joy in my paintings.

HOLLY

You still love painting.

MARC

I love you.

Silence.

HOLLY

You said you wanted this.

MARC

I want to support your dreams.

HOLLY

How is this MY dream?

MARC

Because every young artist lays awake at night thinking about painting backgrounds for shitty poems on cards he can sell for 10 cents.

A loud silence.

MARC (CONT'D)

Your poems aren't shitty-

HOLLY

You made your point, Marc.

MARC

Can we talk about this in the morning?

HOLLY

I can't do this anymore.

MARC

You know I don't think when I'm tired-

HOLLY

Which you always are because of me. Right?

MARC

That's not what I said I-

HOLLY

Neither of us are changing.

MARC

We can figure-

HOLLY

Are you going to?

...
Yeah. Okay. Well. It's your lucky day, Marc. I'm setting you free. Go off and live in the trees. Fly up into the sky and be fucking free or whatever the hell you want to do.

MARC

Holly-

HOLLY

Enjoy your nights off.

And she leaves. And she leaves. And she leaves.

Marc pulls a hair out from his mouth.

She leaves. She leaves. She leaves.

He wraps the hair around his fingers.

Leaves.

Leaves.

Leaves.

.....

TUPPERWARE

Jess is going through Pete's things. A closet - once nice and neat - well neat-ish - is scattered around the floor.

They drop and clatter and get frightened and delighted by new sounds.

Jess has a pair of socks on her hands and is using a pair of his khakis as a scarf. She picks up a shirt that looks like Marc's and pull it over her head.

JESS

I am beauty.

Jess is holding up the dried up wipes with Marc on them with a few books so he can admire her beauty.

She scoops the dirt from her pockets and any that had fallen onto the couch and places him gingerly onto the dresser.

*She kisses Marc. Her lips are lined with the dirt -
Pete walks in and observes the mess*

PETE

Jess you can't go through other people's things-

Trying to avoid the mess, he bumps into the Marc dirt on the dresser - Jess rescues him.

JESS

CAREFUL!

PETE

I'm sorry- I'm sorry- is it okay?

...

Do you want like a bowl for this? A bag maybe?

...

Pete leaves and returns with spaghetti stained Tupperware and scoops Marc into it.

JESS

CAREFUL! Marc is a gentle soul.

Pete is careful. He puts the lid on.

JESS (CONT'D)

Make sure he can still bring life into his lungs.

PETE

This is actually a special Tupperware made specifically for-dirt breathing.

JESS

Wow.

She admires it. She admires him. Pete.

PETE

Someone was playing dress up huh?

JESS

How did you find all of these beauties?

PETE

There are these little worlds called stores - and in those, they have tons of clothes like mine. And a lot that aren't like mine. Most aren't like mine actually - I have a shit eye for this stuff.

JESS

Which eye is shit?

PETE

(with a soft chuckle)

My left.

Jess closes his left eye and carefully runs her finger over it. They breathe. A moment.

Pete snaps out of it.

PETE (CONT'D)

If you're going to stay here, I think we need to lay down some ground rules. Can you listen?

JESS

Yes, lover. Feed me wisdom.

Uh-

PETE

Rule one: If you want to wear my clothes or use any of my things. You have to ask me okay? Anything in this room, just ask. Got it?

Jess moans.

PETE (CONT'D)

Rule two: no more moaning. Or calling me "lover" or "my love" or any of that. It's creepy.

JESS
What do I call you?

PETE
Just Pete.

JESS
(genuine)
If you are not my lover, who are you?

PETE
Um. How about we stick with "friend?"

JESS
Pete the Friend!

Jess begins to moan, but stops herself. She sniffs loudly instead.

She looks to him for approval - Pete smiles. Better than her moaning.

JESS (CONT'D)
Pete the Friend is happy.

PETE
Pete the Friend is happy.

JESS
Tell me more ways to please you.

PETE
Maybe not a rule, but we're gonna work on how to talk appropriately.

Jess sniffs loudly.

PETE (CONT'D)
Rule three: You have to eat more than just bagels. I'm glad you like them, but we're gonna try something else today okay?

Jess doesn't like this rule.

PETE (CONT'D)
I know, I know, but maybe you'll find something even better than bagels.
Remember, the first time? You didn't even want to try those. All you wanted were flowers, and now you have five bagels a day.

JESS
Feed me?

PETE

Okay, so this is a continuation of Rule 2 I guess um-- Let's not say things like "feed me" - say "I'm hungry" or "Could I get some food?"

JESS

(practicing)

I'm hungry or could I get some food?

PETE

Yeah, either one works.

JESS

I'm hungry or could I get some food?

PETE

"I'm hungry" OR "could I get some food?"

JESS

I'm hungry OR could I get some food?

Pete sighs.

PETE

(Realizing)

Oh - wait are you actually hungry?

JESS

Or could I get some food?

PETE

Of course - let's try something new.
A delicacy from my people: Pizza Rolls.

The two start to head out

PETE (CONT'D)

Wait, could you take off my clothes?

She starts to unbutton his shirt-

PETE (CONT'D)

(stopping her)

NOPE - the ones you're wearing.

Jess sniffs loudly and laughs.

She twirls.

She is world.

PETE (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Pretty.

Jess is art.

JESS

Beauty.

In these I resemble Marc.

...

I want him.

(grabbing the Tupperware)

Marc and I were in our world. And each day he brought it new beauty. Every inch was prettier than the last.

And here. In this store- it is harder to see.

-- Why do you not make it beautiful like him? --

This is Store - Almost to Up- And this place looks like the dead leaves up up up and in in in.

A realization.

JESS (CONT'D)

How far in are we?

...

JESS (CONT'D)

I am too in.

And Jess realizes: her hair has started to fade.

JESS (CONT'D)

Get me Up. I need to go Up- and out - out out out - If I stay here I will turn into mushy gray and I will never get water again-

Jess begins to panic.

PETE

I have water-

JESS

This Store is dying! So we are dying! We cannot turn into rotting leaves!

PETE

(grabbing water from an abandoned cup)

Hey hey- Jess- stop for a sec.

JESS

WE ARE TURNING GRAY!

PETE

Here.

He hands her the old water. She chugs and chugs. Until each drop is gone.

JESS

Marc is stuck here. And I am stuck here. If I do not go Up up up. And out out out. Into Higher Store.

Pete goes into his closet and grabs some old markers.

He pulls out a green and a blue. He runs them under her eyes. Then under his.

Jess traces these lines...on her own face. Then on his.

JESS (CONT'D)

You made color.

PETE

I really don't know what's going on.
 And I really don't understand.
 And I will try to help you in whatever way I can, going up or whatever, but for now- we can have our own color and dress up like this Marc guy-whatever you want.
 --Sometimes, people just need help.
 ---And that's okay.
 We can make art or climb tall trees - well not too tall I kinda have a thing with heights whatever it is we can figure it out, but for now, let's go make some pizza rolls.

Jess takes the marker from Pete's hands and runs them down her arms.

PETE (CONT'D)

We can make this world beautiful too.

JESS

(quietly)

This is a Store.

PETE

We can make this Store beautiful too.

Pete leaves and begins to make the pizza rolls.

Jess hangs onto the markers and grabs the Tupperware Marc lies in. She colors on the outside to make him beautiful too.

.....

LEAVES

Aly is tugging at the strings. They hurt and pull at her water-based skin.

MARC

Are you trying to break your promise?

Aly is hyper focused on the thread. The thickness of it, the color, the weight, the tension, the way it drags her skin so abrasively-

She pulls she pulls she pulls

And...Marc-

He notices. He sees. He feels.

...Marc pulls a bit from his end causing Aly to wince.

Marc feels pity.

And as she cries indigo tears, Marc notices the urgency in the new colors distorting her face.

...He pulls again - but this time, from Aly's side, compressing his own pain.

Using the leverage from the string, he pulls her hair from her face and the Aspen thank him.

...Only Aly doesn't seem to notice the loosening of strings. She still feels they're taught. And in her eyes, maybe they always will be.

Marc brings her down to earth.

MARC (CONT'D)

Look up.

Look at the branches.

These young ones, the ones closest to us, their leaves look combed.

They present their finest self to make us jealous of them.

They are eager, full of color and confidence - each leaf knows its place.

They are pretty.

Right?

...

And now, look up further.

Up, up, up, and in, in, in too-

At the top, those ones up high, not showing their faces, but more hidden like the marigold before they bloom but those trees, those trees and their leaves have folded and flopped and given up the hope of impressing us.

They sneak into crevices and into the in-betweens.
 The youthful leaves have stolen from their elders through the
 currency of color - greens and yellows and oranges make them
 supple beyond reason. They consume it past drunkenness to the
 point of harming their host's veins.
 They boast and laugh and taunt those poor frail leaves-
 They drain these quiet and meek branches into this mushy gray
 shade that never really goes away.
 And you can try. You can. But the gray is darker than you
 think. You may use your bright hair to coat them in life or
 borrow from blades of grass, but the gray peaks through- and
 it seeps and clings onto all new life, until it is old and
 gray itself.

...
 Even if the gray was not tainting, these older branches, they
 do not have the energy to paint themselves clean - nor can
 they find it in themselves to ask from someone who could.
 They are too prideful.

...
 I heard whispers once - a gentle plea, but I can no longer
 reach them.
 I have tossed them my brushes and pallets in an attempt to
 help them, but they are too high.
 They are so high up in the sky from their own days of sucking
 color dry, that today, they cannot and will not do it
 themselves.

...
 Now look at the trunk. It is giving opportunities to new life
 new branches, new stems, new leaves
 And these leaves, these ones we now admire so warmly, and
 gaze lovingly on the brightness they bring to our little
 world,
 the ones we only hope to be as great as one day-
 they will become ugly and gray too.
 Because they are making the same mistakes as the ones before
 them.
 Because they thought they knew better.

...
 These colors are fading.
 And each day brings them closer to gray.

*Marc looks at Aly, but she is in an almost catatonic
 state- drunk from red and yellow and orange.*

Marc notices.

*And it's not enough to tell with a naked eye, but
 Aly's hair becomes brighter.*

Marc tugs.

.....

EMBROIDERY...STUFF

Jess is creating something.

Pete walks in holding a plastic bag.

PETE

Hey I got something for ya-
Look- okay this is called embroidery- um, stuff.

He dumps out a bag of the floss and needles.

PETE (CONT'D)

You can use this on fabrics or canvas too I think or whatever. It's cool, it like adds a texture to stuff. You like sew it into things and it just, I dunno you can make stuff! I found it near the dumpsters at work but they're still in the packages so I think they're fine.

Jess investigates the gift.

PETE (CONT'D)

I'm not very good at it but my mom taught me and Winnie how to sew when we were kids. I can show you. I think it's similar.

JESS

(pointed.)

I can sew.

PETE

Oh? Oh- sorry I just figured - well if you know you know. Anyway I just- I figured you might like it.

...
You don't have to use it.

....
I can find you more paint or markers or-

JESS

Thank you.

... Jess fakes a sniff.

PETE

Okay. Well. I'm gonna go shower. Do you need anything?

Jess shakes their head no.

PETE (CONT'D)

Okeydokey then. Okay. Um, well, I'll-I'll be out soon and maybe we can try that or watch Survivor or like we can- Yeah I don't know. Um, you good? You're good. ... You can barley see the stain anymore. That's good. You look good.

Jess is quiet.

Pete goes into the bathroom and starts his shower.

And the plant on the side table is as big as a plant on a side table could be. It steals all the air in the room.

...

Jess holds the thread and remembers. They remember the pulling and tugging. Their skin begins to hurt.

They notice the dullness of their skin again.

Panicked, they grab a marker and try to color their skin purple, but it's dried.

JESS

I'm becoming gray.

They take off the Hallmark shirt and put Pete's "Marc" shirt on. They grab the potted plant. It's heavy.

Jess places the shirt under the thread.

And they leave.

.....

PULLING A STRING

Marc is climbing trees.

He gripping the string. Tight. He pulls he pulls he pulls.

Marc whispers into the Oaks. The Oaks respond.

Marc whispers something else. The trees look sad.

Furrowed brows of concern - confusion - surprise

MARC

Have you heard anything from grass?
From stems, from broken branches maybe - they stay close to
the ground, they could have overheard -
Did she say anything?

No?

That makes sense.

She is sometimes careful.

I think she knows how close we are.

...

She has been so wild recently.

Lily after lily-

She stuffs herself full

My own stomach hurts just by hearing hers whimper and beg
for relief.

And then there are the moans!

Where did she learn such sounds? Surely not from me-

Not from you-

Was it you?

The trees get upset.

MARC (CONT'D)

I kid, I kid!

He laughs nervously.

*Marc, without paying attention to his own actions,
pulls on the string.*

MARC (CONT'D)

Her stomach of iron and glutinous mind

It races and runs and runs and runs

Much faster than I ever could.

Even before all of this, before coming to- or- creating all
of this.

I never went very fast.

...

Maybe it makes sense though. After all she is just an image.

A new figure of my own making. Based on-

...

*She had that flame too. - Not nearly so gaseous or bright -
but at the back of her throat lied heat and loud noises that
drove me up walls and through mountains*

I always thought I would never give in. I can be just as
stubborn.

But she lifted me.

She always lifted me.

Her sweetness, her sugar, filling my pores, making me lose my
balance. My feet would slightly just slightly hover above the
ground whenever she sang.

Oh oaks - her voice.

Her voice.

Her voice.

MARC (CONT'D)

With Aly, the passion is there, it is, but she couldn't hold
on to a tune if it was perfectly sculpted around her own
hands. She is somehow both flat and sharp - she rips soft
notes of lullabies into a shreds and they pierce the inner of
my ears. The world feels so small when she sings.

But her.

Holly.

Even a slight hum, and everything would be still.

And the whole world would stop.

And the whole world would listen.

Marc sings, a little. Maybe we hear Holly faintly too.

MARC (CONT'D)

This was supposed to comfort me.

Losing myself into this world -

Painting myself into the opportunity of having only what I
need - balance, control, beauty, and most of all, her.

But I was too late.

I thought by entering this world I would see her again.

...

I painted a card- the most beautiful card, with everything
she loves.

Big tall trustworthy oaks paired with suspicious aspen - she
never believed their length and stillness but still she was
so drawn to them, and grass that could warm cold feet.

Delicious fluffy clouds, Flowers - sweet, just like her.

...

But the world, the card, cracks open. A potential buyer
maybe, a curious wanderer, whoever it may be, and I fade a
little more.

She has to see this card. She has to.

...Someone opens it up, I hear it. Who else could have known
to put in our song? I feel her voice, and I lose her.

Again and again and again.

- There is no stillness.

a song once so beautiful shakes every inch of this water colored world - and the worst thing - Aly seems to love it! She wonders why clouds sing and what clouds are and what singing is. She scream's Holly's name, without knowing who she is or who she could be. She seeks her love and approval, and hopes to know her someday. But she doesn't know.

...
I know she's going to leave me. once she figures out how, she's going to leave me. Just like Holly did.

Marc tugs the string tightly. A wince.

MARC (CONT'D)

She is not Holly.
No matter how much I tried she is not her.
I spent years drawing - hoping to get every detail down from the highlights of lightness between strands of hair to her questioning nature and loving adventure and desire - but I guess it wasn't good enough. Over time, my memory got worse. the longer I was away from my dear Holly, the more lines became smudged and the more I had to guess.
And I love Aly. I love her. I do.
But I can only love her the way you love oil paintings or calm music or sad plays.

...
She is not Holly.

Marc tugs.

MARC (CONT'D)

But I can't lose her too. This little world is the only thing I have left. I cannot lose my precious work of art.
And I won't.
I will not.

Rumbling.

The string begins to choke Marc

.....

KENNY

Kenny is practicing magic. In front of him lays an assortment of mismatched greeting cards.

Being the big multitasker he is, Kenny takes a really juicy bite of a bagel. He moans loudly.

Another bite. A louder moan.

Jess rushes into the store wearing Pete's "Marc" shirt.

JESS

Kenny?

KENNY

Pick a card, any card.
Come on, pick one!

JESS

I need help.

KENNY

I think this one'll suite you fine.

JESS

That is not my card.

KENNY

Dammit.

JESS

I need you to get me out of here.

KENNY

Ma'am with our quality of cards you'll feel transported ya know? Like look at this one. The ocean. The trees. Such big trees. With supple coconuts just waitin to be cranked open and slobbered over with joy- man you are in a different world. We're not in the store anymore, we're on the ocean blue baby.

JESS

STORE. Get me into the Higher Store this one is too low.

KENNY

(looks around then whispers)
Oh believe me my man, this is the Higher Store.

JESS

The Up - the, what, the- sky like bring me UP

KENNY
 (grasping on)
 You wanna fly?

JESS
 If it gets me there-

KENNY
 No no my man, do you want to *fly*.

JESS
 I want to go Up.

KENNY
 Aight. Let's grab some food on the way and lemme tell Jenine.
 (Yelling into the back)
 Jan, I'm taking a wellness check - My aura needs cleansing.
 (back to Jess)
 I kinda run this place. You're lookin at Hallmark's Employee
 of the Month. It's a pretty big deal. There are a lot of
 stores and I am THEE employEE.

JESS
 How many stores?

KENNY
 (serious)
 Like. So many.

JESS
 Wow.

...

KENNY
 Whatcha cravin' my man?

JESS
 Freedom.

KENNY
 Right on.
 And for food?

JESS
 Do you know of bagels?

KENNY
 DUDE LOOK AT ME. DUDE. NO SHIT DUDE LOOK WHAT I WAS EATING
 THE SECOND YOU WALKED IN HERE!

JESS
 REALLY??

KENNY
MY GUY WOULD I EVER LIE TO YOU?

JESS
NEVER.

KENNY
LET'S FUCK UP SOME BAGELS!!!

JESS
FUCK YEAH BAGELS!!!

KENNY
YEAH! Oh my god dude a bagel sounds so good right now.

...Jess hands Kenny the very bagel he was eating before.

KENNY (CONT'D)
(genuinely touched)
Bro. You know me. You really know me.
I think the universe wanted you to find me.

JESS
You think?

KENNY
TOTALLY! THE UNIVERSE KNOWS ALL!! It knew that my body needed a bagel and BAM here comes some guy who just happens to have one? FATE.

He takes another bite and moans.

KENNY (CONT'D)
Anyway, let's get you set up here. Pick your poison. You strike me more of an edible dude am I right? Nah nah nah - wax for sure. Wait no- I got it. Flower. Definitely flower.

JESS
I do love flowers!

KENNY
Just that raw sweet flower taste there's nothing quite like it. There's a fine beauty in appreciating it just how mother nature intended.

JESS
EXACTLY I've been telling Pete that forever and he doesn't quite get it!

KENNY
Remember, Patrick is on his own journey. He may be straying but he'll find his way. People have a way of ending up where they're supposed to be. Take me for instance.

I'm thriving here. My colon health is through the roof, I've got Employee of the Month like basically since I've taken over, and best of all- I'm really getting good at magic.

Jess sniffs.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Oh you go hardcore! Right on!
Okay flower then magic. I got a whole world to show you my dude.

(gesturing to his nose)

And I guess I gotta learn from you too.

Jess sniffs.

Kenny sniffs.

They find an understanding.

KENNY (CONT'D)

There is so much more than eye the meets.

And just like that, Kenny has made Jess magically disappear.

.....

LATER

Marc is looking through the old cards.

He looks at her shitty poems.

At his shitty backgrounds.

...

Marc decides to leave.

...

He grabs his brush and slowly begins to paint his hands.

His arms become blue and purple and lined with white streaks to outline his soft frame.

His arms, his legs, his feet, his stomach, his back, his neck, his ears, his hair-

He sits on the floor and begins to paint delicate flowers.

Then to the walls he creates tall trees.

He leaves the 3 dimensional world.

And once his new world has its base, he paints his face.

Mark is watercolored.

Mark spends time alone in this world.

And then, and then he gets lonely.

MARC

(sitting near freshly painted flowers)

Holly? My dear?

I have plenty of paint - let me bring you into my world.

And then, maybe then you will see how much joy each stroke can bring you?

I can create anything you'd like - I can paint you flowers and grass and clouds and trees and beauty and lust and I can take away every ounce of pain.

He waits for a response.

MARC (CONT'D)

It's rather nice here I think.

He looks, admiring his work.

MARC (CONT'D)

We could make a new life here, you and I.
 You won't have to work.
 You can write your ethereal poems for the flowers and the
 clouds if they'll come down to listen.
 We can lay in the grass.
 Always be fed by sunlight and the joy brought to you by
 lilies.

A moment.

MARC (CONT'D)

You were so sad then. The lilies I got you after we first
 said I love you - they died so quickly. You said you didn't
 want out love to fade the way they did.
 And you screamed and yelled and commanded them in hopes of
 bringing them back.
 But Earthly flowers are disappointing and never seem to
 listen.
 And they didn't.
 And they won't- if you stay up there.
 But here, my love, here, you can give orders and every blade
 of grass will listen.
 And they will listen.
 They will have to.

Marc paints obeying blades of grass.

And he waits.

Time passes

And he waits

More time

No Holly

Time

...

He pulls a long hair from his mouth.

...



HALLMARK SHIRT

Pete is looking.

He's holding the Hallmark shirt.

PETE

Jess. I have something for you. It's a surpriseeee-

...

Are you tired of the apartment? We can go somewhere else. I've been looking at cheap airline flights. They're kind of sketchy but who says I can't overcome a lifelong fear of flying?

...

Jesus, Jess. I'm here. Okay? I'm still here you know? I'm here.

--You gotta look at what I did-- I think it'll be good and you'll be happy again!

Dammit, Jess. I hate this. Just. Come on. Let's go home. I hate this, I hate this.

What am I doing wrong?

I'm your friend. "Pete the Friend" remember? We can paint or go explore or eat whatever you want, I'll help you murder Varner just please come home!

...

I read online that if you scrub dish soap on it, it gets stains out. And I scrubbed and scrubbed but I still kinda saw it. So I tried another thing that said vinegar would help so I did that. And I held it up in the light and it still kinda was there. So I went to a dry cleaner and ya know they dry cleaned it-- and it- I think it's perfect again!

As perfect as this shirt can be I guess.

The offer for a new shirt is still on the table though, if I didn't do a good enough job.

Or if the dry cleaners didn't dry clean enough.

We can have an early Birthed Day celebration and and we can get you as many shirts as my next paycheck can get!

Or as many as I can stuff in my backpack without anyone noticing. I really do think you'd look good in like a flannel or like even a basic t-shirt.

More of a relaxed fit- can be nice, I think.

Pete begins to lose it.

PETE (CONT'D)

GOD JESS WHY DO YOU LOVE THIS SHIRT I HATE THIS SHIRT! I HATE THIS FUCKING SHIRT!!!

GOD.

Sorry. Sorry. I'm not mad. I'm not mad. You know me.

I hate shirts with large brand names.

I know, right now you'd be rolling your eyes at me.

But come ON you're paying them to advertise their own business.

And everyone is like "oh cool shirt" but then they go and cause oil spills or they support conversion therapy or they take sips of water out of the mouths of small children. Kinda not cool enough to pay thirty dollars for if you ask me. But you liked this shirt. This fucking stupid Hallmark shirt.

...
...
...

Fuck.

I'm sorry I teased you about it.

It's quite literally everything I hate in this world, but you said this is the only thing that's made you feel-- or not feel-- I guess- like you were trapped.

Stuck in that body again.

You said you finally were starting to look like yourself.

And I thought that was silly. I said you've always looked like yourself- it's you, there's no one else to look like.

I didn't get what you meant.

...I'm sorry...

And honestly, I'm not quite sure how some shitty fabric can do that, make you feel, like you, but this is me trying to understand, Jess.

...
...

It's not a stupid shirt. It's perfect.

...
...

I just. I just need to see you.

And if this shirt is you, please- please put it on and I won't make fun of it anymore.

I'll wear mine too, everyday. I'll wear it everyday.

...
...
...

I don't know what I keep doing wrong.

.....

BREATHING

*jess getting more adapt to the real world- their body
can't keep up*

*they're climbing a tree gripping tightly to the
terracotta pot*

coughing up bits of string

JESS

air is thinner here

...
i breathe in
and in and in and in
i can never get enough

...
maybe here trees don't laugh as hard
they don't provide us with as much as i need

...
i could tell a joke to this mesquite
but i doubt he would listen
he laughs, but it's shallow
I could dip my hand inside of it and only reach to the end of
my fingernail
i hear a slight chortle after comments from small birds
they gossip about the weather
about the people who walk by
ignoring the land in front of them
and they sigh
small shallow sighs
ones where no air can leave small lungs
it is not enough for everyone here
after a while they must have realized they will never make
enough
they will never be enough for greedy humans
so they stopped trying

...
my lungs hurt
my body aches more
my ankles now pop when i take long steps
and when i climb to the top of large hills
i can't speak for minutes

*jess feels up and down their arms, they feel their
legs and torso*

from their chest they pull a long string

JESS (CONT'D)

i am still finding bits of him
of marc
he is hiding under the folded layers of skin i have found in
this world

his dirt has dried and i struggle to hear his voice
 i doubt i would recognize it anymore
 but it's later, it's later i still feel him tugging
 my arms begin to tickle
 and my chest becomes tight
 and marc takes away my ability to breathe this new thin air
 again and again and again

...
 maybe him and the trees are in on it together
 he always seemed too close with the oaks
 they would laugh and laugh at me
 and the air would become so thick it would take me days to
 exhale

maybe this is revenge
 a lashing, a punishment for eating too many lilies
 for searching for sweetness when he had already dedicated
 each blade of grass to me
 I am sickened by my own greed and unthankfulness

...
 or maybe it was to be a gentle greeting
 a reminder that he is still here
 in the earth
 in the string
 in my lungs
 in me

a moment

*jess reaches for a branch --they whisper something to
 it - a secret*

they sniff. the tree laughs

jess takes a deep breath, jess breathes

and for a moment, the air thickens

*jess pulls of pete's "marc" shirt and stuffs it on top
 of the dirt in the terracotta pot. they are wearing
 their binder.*

*they pull out the terracotta pot and let it crash to
 the ground.*

JESS (CONT'D)

i've known you long enough.

marc finds a new place in the world.

a moment, a moment, a moment

...and thinness returns

.....

THE CREATION OF EVE

Marc is still waiting.

He has been sitting still for time. Lots and lots of time.

He stretches out his neck a bit. It's stiff. He stands and dust falls from his pores. He shakes his limbs - dust. He cleans all around him - more dust.

He cleans the world.

MARC

My dear Oaks, please I cannot live!

I am empty -

My chest - is hollow and my feet are numb and I sit and listen and sit and listen but I have yet to hear her voice. Without my dear Holly I am but boring blue and purple and greens.

I fear without her fresh life my paints will soon dry and I will become stuck in this place and gray.

The trees shake.

A realization.

Marc paints a long long rope into existence.

He creates a lasso and throws it into the sky-

FLOOP - failure.

He goes to higher ground.

FLOOP - failure.

He adjusts his grip.

FLOOP - liQUGEfhlauwh;foivwrqofh

His rope snags and pulls on an aspen. It crumbles and falls to the ground.

MARC (CONT'D)

My bad guys - my bad.

Anger. The feud between Aspen and Marc begin.

He tries again - The Standing Aspen take his rope from him.

STANDING ASPEN

Have you not done enough?

Hush.

Marc is startled and thrown to the ground from their deep and demanding voice. He lays in the dirt, defeated.

Hush.

Marc takes a broken branch and draws into the ground. A girl.

MARC

You will not leave me.

More details. Her hair, her long arms, her short legs. He admires her beauty.

An idea.

Marc finds his paints and begins to color his drawing. And soon - she comes to life.

It takes as long as it takes.

...

Aly.

...

He pulls Aly up gently - the paint is still wet.

He is in awe of his creation. Her hair is dark and gray.

MARC (CONT'D)

I can fix this.

He paints her hair yellow.

Aly looks at him. She cocks her head and feels her form.

Her fingers glide through her hair. She points to the purple and pink flowers then to her hair again.

ALY

Fxxxxxx

Sound - she made sound!

MARC

*Lilies.
Try with me.*

Lilies.
Li-
-lies

Aly begins her learning.

Lies. ALY

Good. MARC
Let's try again.
Li-
-lies.

Lies. ALY

Lilies. MARC

Li - lis ALY

You are perfect. MARC

U. ALY

Marc is laughing and jumping- Aly tries to copy.

ALY (CONT'D)
(with a blank expression)
Aaaaaaaaaahhhhh

Yes! Hahahah! MARC

ALY
(blank)
Aaaaahhhhhhaaaaaaaahhhh

Marc gently lifts her cheeks and widens her mouth. Her teeth say hello.

He raises her eye brows and crinkles her nose and raises her arms up into the sky.

ALY (CONT'D)
(smiling)
ahhhhaaaaaahhaaa!

MARC

Good! You are so good! You're so good my dear love!

ALY

Good.

MARC

GOOD!

ALY

GOOD!

Marc holds her tight.

MARC

I have missed you my dear I have missed you.

Aly is still wide and high and doesn't understand his hug.

Marc hold her. Aly stays frozen in the way he set her to be.

Marc slowly pulls away. Afraid to see her face-

A moment.

He relaxes her face and body.

ALY

Mi - ss - ed.

MARC

Missed.

ALY

Missss

MARC

Missed.

Marc strokes her hair. She cocks her head.

It's not her.

MARC (CONT'D)

I am no perfect artist.

A mere impression of what you should be.

Of who you should be.

Over time my brain has slowed.

The small details.

Were there three or four crinkles near her eyes? How long did she keep her nails? What was her favorite part of our song?

Aly is quiet. Listening.

MARC (CONT'D)
(to himself)

You are not her.

Nother
ALY

Not her
MARC

Nother
ALY

A breath.

MARC
When she gets here she will be so proud of the portrait I
have created.

Aly looks to the lilies again.

She touches her hair.

*Marc pulls one out of the ground and places it in
behind her ear.*

Aly's widens her face and lifts her arms high again.

Marc laughs.

*He pulls out his paints and colors her hair to match
the purple and pink and white in the flowers.*

ALY
AAAAHAAAA!

MARC
You will grow. And bloom. And together we will make this
world beautiful.
I am Marc. And I will provide for you. You will never feel
hunger or fear or pain with me.

Marc softens Aly's smile.

MARC (CONT'D)
Holl- no.
...
...Hally?
...
Hillary?

A soft laugh. A soft smile.

Aaaahh. ALY

Marc grins.

Aly. MARC

Aly pulls up Marc's arms into the sky and widens his face. She holds him tightly.

Aaaahhhh. ALY

Aaaahhh. MARC

.....

MAGIC TRICK

Pete, wearing his uniform even though it's his day off, is tearing apart the card store. He opens cards.

Open - wrong, Open - wrong, Open - wrong

He's humming manically.

Open - wrong, Open - wrong, Open - wrong

KENNY

Are you gonna buy one of those?

Open - wrong

KENNY (CONT'D)

We've got some nice selections.

Open - wrong

KENNY (CONT'D)

You really like the grieving section huh?

Open - wrong

KENNY (CONT'D)

You're like...into this into this-

Open - wrong

KENNY (CONT'D)

Is this a sex thing? Cuz look, if this is a sex thing you can't do that here.

Open - wrong

KENNY (CONT'D)

I guess if you went in the corner-

PETE

(without looking at him)

Kenny- shut up.

KENNY

What

PETE

You get singing cards

KENNY

I'm flattered but I'm not into greeting cards like that but I don't judge-

PETE

GET ME THE SINGING CARDS FROM THE BACK

KENNY

Well sir it sounds like you are interested in our "Musical Greeting Card Extravaganza only an extra \$3.99 for a song that will play a pure 8 seconds of joy?"

PETE

(grabbing him)

GIVE ME THE SINGING CARDS WITH THE DIRT AND FLOWERS AND BALLOONS KENNY YOUR BRAIN CANNOT BE THIS FRIED

KENNY

Sir you will have to be more clear at this store we have many incredible cards that could and do fit that description.

PETE

DIRT.

KENNY

You are into some weird stuff my good dude but don't trip I gotcha. You know, between you and me I've glanced a few times at one of the frisky leopard cards in the 50+ birthday section.

PETE

(grabbing kenny)

DIRT!

KENNY

It's more tasteful than you think!

Pete lets him go and dives into the celebration section.

Kenny stands uncomfortably close behind him.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Dude are you crying?

...
We have a section that could help.

Pete glares.

He swing around his bag and dumps out bagels. And cargo shorts. And a wilted, dying lilies.

He puts them high and low.

Pete starts singing

PETE

NO ONE HERE CAN LOVE OR UNDERSTAND ME
 OH, WHAT HARD LUCK STORIES THEY ALL HAND ME
 PACK UP ALL MY CARES AND WOE, HERE I GO, WINGING LOW
 BYE, BYE, BLACKBIRD
 WHERE SOMEBODY WAITS FOR ME
 SUGAR'S SWEET, SO IS SHE
 BYE, BYE, BLACKBIRD

He takes a bit of the bagel and flowers and swings the shorts around his neck.

KENNY

You sound real nice dude.

Pete shoves the bagel into Kenny's mouth

KENNY (CONT'D)

(muffled)

I'm not supposed to eat on the clock

PETE

(taking another bite)

NO ONE HERE CAN LOVE OR UNDERSTAND ME
 OH, WHAT HARD LUCK STORIES THEY ALL HAND ME

KENNY

(trying to sing along)

Packed up ba da dooo da da

Kenny starts to scat

They sing they eat they jump

...

Nothing.

...

Louder they sing louder and higher they jump higher too

Louder and higher

Louder and higher

And so loud and so high there isn't any more they can go

And then

Nothing

...

KENNY (CONT'D)

You were in my community college class the English one with all the fancy poems and stuff right?

Or maybe you're friends with my mom.

Beth.

That's probably it.

Becky.

...

KENNY (CONT'D)

Sorry- I only know part of that song.

...

I've only heard like few seconds.

... I'm gonna grab one of Paul's bagels.

Kenny leaves.

Pete sits. His face is blank. He bites down hard on his teeth.

Defeat. Silence. Silence.

And then:

VOICE

BYE BYE BLACKBIRD BYE BYE...

Kenny comes back with something magical.

KENNY

Was this your card?

Pete takes the card and opens it gently

A light.

A voice.

A string.

End of play.

.....