

**THE BOY WHO FELT
NOTHING
(AND OTHER STORIES
FROM THE BREAKROOM)**

By
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THE BOY WHO FELT NOTHING (AND OTHER STORIES FROM THE BREAKROOM)

CAST: 4M, 3W, 2Any

ADAM	White male. A college age intern. Quiet, but assertive. Decidedly neutral in most things.
ZILLAH	Female. A college age intern. A challenging thinker who uses sound reasoning to often get the wrong conclusion. NEVER malicious.
JANE	Female. A college age intern. Confident and arrogant.
COLIN	Male. Late 20s. Demure and unsure, but ready to prove himself. Wears glasses.
QUINN	Male. Witty and sarcastic. Late 20s, early 30s.
DEMELZA	Female presenting. Middle aged. Secretarial. Endearingly fails to be hip and cool
THE FIREFLY	Male. 18 years old. Excitable and eccentric.
THE BASILISK	Female presenting. Any age. Posh and uninterested.
THE MOTHER	Female. Any age. Terror itself.

All ensemble members can double as generic office workers and story characters.

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Playwrights Notes:

- This production works best by featuring an ethnically diverse and inclusive cast. I request that best efforts be made to include actors of all genders and ethnicities, with respectable freedom to suggested age limits.
- THE MOTHER can be white or POC. If cast as white, direction should emphasize performative activism. If cast as POC, emphasize the character as a sly, confident, and powerful figure instead of an angry or irrational one.

TIME: Two weeks in the modern day.

PLACE: The break room of an office building somewhere in corporate America.

ACT I

Scene 1	Chapter 1- Caricatures	Now.
Scene 2	Chapter 2- A Strange Case of the 80s Chapter 3- The Firefly Chapter 4- The Basilisk	A week later.

ACT II

Scene 1	Chapter 5- Apocalypse Soon Chapter 6- The Boy Who Felt Nothing	Same time.
Scene 2	Chapter 7- The End	A week later.
Scene 3	Epilogue	Unknown time.

THE BOY WHO FELT NOTHING

ACT I SCENE 1

CHAPTER 1: Caricatures

A break room in an office building. A set of mismatched old couches surrounding a coffee table dominate the space, with a dining table and chairs off to one side. There are large windows in the back wall that let in natural light. There is a sink, fridge, and kitchen counter with various general appliances in the corner. QUINN and other office workers mill about the space, dressed in a mixture of professional and casual wear, working on laptops, making coffee, etc. It is a peaceful, well-used, though not well-loved space. At rise, DEMELZA, ADAM, JANE, COLIN, and ZILLAH file in from stage right. JANE is carrying a large water bottle.

DEMELZA. And this is the break room! It's sort of a bit of everything. We can hang out, eat, collegiate interns like you can do homework, or otherwise chill throughout the day. We have a fridge, so if you need to put your food in there that's fine. Just please don't leave it in there all week because we're getting better about cleaning it out on Fridays.

ZILLAH. Oh my gosh! This place is so cool!

JANE. It's just a break room.

ZILLAH. Don't be a Debbie Downer, Jane. It's a special break room.

DEMELZA. What makes you say that, Zillah?

ZILLAH. I can sense it. I exfoliated my brain in preparation for today, so I feel in tune with my surroundings.

JANE. Right. Do you also wax your kidneys to get them as smooth as that brain of yours? *(She sips from her bottle.)*

ZILLAH. No, that's weird.

QUINN. Hey, new kids! Don't be shy, introduce yourselves.

DEMELZA. What if, and this is a crazy idea, you introduce yourself first, Quinn? It's only polite.

QUINN. Oh right, sure Demelza, that's totally cool. My name's Quinn. I'm one of the senior software engineers. My favorite color is green, I'm a flat earther, and I'm a wanted criminal in seven different countries. It's a long, arduous, and completely true story that I'd love to tell you more about some other time. You, glasses, *(points to Colin.)* What's your story?

COLIN. Oh, well, my-my whole story? Uh. Okay! Hi, My name's Colin. I was born. Uh, except that when I was born, the doctors accidentally cut my head open-

QUINN. Oh, is that why you look like that?

DEMELZA. Quinn.

QUINN. I'm just messin'. Continue.

COLIN. Uh, when I turned sixteen my family moved here because of my dad's job. He ran a formerly illegal distillery.

DEMELZA and QUINN. Hiii Colin!

COLIN. Oh, uhm, could you not do any of that AA meeting crap, please?

ZILLAH. How do you know what an AA meeting is like?

COLIN. Well, in full honesty, not that it's my place to say, but my younger brother has... struggled wi-with alcohol abuse in the past.

DEMELZA. Oh, that's awful!

JANE. Assuming his drunken escapades weren't the whistleblower on the family business. *(She sips from her bottle.)*

COLIN. Oh, my-my family can't whistle.

QUINN. Alright people, take notes. That is a life story. Birth to alcoholic brother in less than five minutes! That's gotta be a record. Right, Demelza?

DEMELZA. No, but you're close. Carol got there in less than three, remember? It was about four years ago.

QUINN. Oh yeah, Carol! It's a shame she lost that eye. *(To the others.)* Terrible for company morale. Now-

JANE. Wait just one second. Colin, if you were sixteen when your younger brother started necking enough bottles to give the glass hickeys, how old are you both now?

COLIN. Well, Connor is 21 and on parole, God bless, but I'm 29.

ZILLAH. 29!? I'm only 18! You're practically ancient! *(A long, awkward beat of silence where Zillah laughs shrilly and in a slightly fake manner.)*

JANE. Well, I'm 23. Quinn and Demelza are already old as rocks.

QUINN. Rude.

JANE. I think you're the youngest one here Zillah. I would ask how someone so infantile got the job, but I don't even know why I had to take this internship in the first place. Why, when I was your age, I'd already completed my fourth business venture.

QUINN. What kind of business?

JANE. A moderately popular mature seasonal beverage startup. Thanks for asking.

ZILLAH. And just what drinks did you sell at this mature beverage startup, Jane?

JANE. ... Lemonade.

QUINN. Okay so, starting lineup roster. We have Demelza, Colin, and Jane.

DEMELZA. And Quinn!

QUINN. And Quinn. Next! -

DEMELZA. Well actually, next for me is a meeting with the manager. Feel free to hang ten for a spell. When I get back, I can assign you to either analytic or paper-pushing jobs for the week.

ZILLAH. Oh, that's so silly! I'm really good at analytics. Why would we ever need to learn to be paper pushers? Oh, you're so awful. You're such a terrible human being.

JANE. Just ignore her Demelza. Baby's cranky because she hasn't had her nap time yet.

ZILLAH. Jokes on you, I took my nap this morning.

DEMELZA. Well alright then. The meeting's in five minutes, so I'll see you all cool cats later. *(Demelza exits. Adam still stands by the doorway. The rest move further into the room to perch on the couches and chairs.)*

QUINN. *(Noticing Adam.)* Hey, we missed one. Come on in! What's your name? *(A stretch of silence.)*

ZILLAH. *(Sighing)* Ugh, don't bother. Chaplin over there has been silent ever since we got here. He might be mute. Right, Sparky? Buster?

QUINN. Those are dog names.

ZILLAH. Better than nothing.

JANE. At least dogs know when to shut up.

ADAM. Adam. My name is Adam.

QUINN. What's your story, Adam?

ADAM. Not much of a story, I'm afraid.

COLIN. Would you like to take a seat?

ADAM. Sure. *(Adam moves to the very center of the middle couch. Others should move things out of the way to make this movement look as hectic as possible.)*

DEMELZA. *(Entering running.)* Wait a second! Wait! I forgot to tell you one of the most important things.

QUINN. Demelza, again?

DEMELZA. Sorry! I'm sorry. I got so excited giving them the tour, I forgot to mention the eccentricities. This room. It likes stories.

ADAM. What?

QUINN. The break room likes stories.

JANE. What does that even mean?

QUINN. That, at some point while you're here, the room is going to try and drag you into a story of some kind.

ZILLAH. Like, ghosts and haunting things?

DEMELZA. It could be anything. The room just likes drama. If you don't give it enough, it'll get hungry. Then things'll get really weird, really fast, for everybody.

ADAM. Could you please elaborate on whatever you're talking about?

QUINN. It means if the room decides to drag you into a story, let it happen. It's all fine. There's never any malicious intent by the room, and no one's ever gotten too terribly harmed by the drama.

DEMELZA. Except for Carol.

QUINN. Meh, she was fine.

DEMELZA. She lost an eye!

QUINN. She had two!

DEMELZA. Quinn, stop it. This room will be here a lot longer after we leave, so there's no harm in giving back to it, right? It doesn't want any of us to die.

QUINN. As far as we know.

DEMELZA. Alright! So, now I really gotta run, but I hope you guys really like it here! Bye! (*Demelza exits.*)

ZILLAH. Wow. This is great! I know I said I felt the room was special, but that's just because I believe in the power of friendship. But like, are you serious? A sentient room?

QUINN. How about this? Wait, intern, What's your name again?

ZILLAH. Zillah. God Zillah.

QUINN. Great. Let's make a bet. Five bucks the room pulls you into a story first.

ZILLAH. Oh, I don't gamble. It's a gateway to addiction. And it's people who get pulled into a pyramid scheme because someone told them they have the secret of the universe in their pocket who get addicted to trivial things. You know, like Colin's brother.

COLIN. Huh?

JANE. What pyramid scheme in their right mind would want you?

ZILLAH. A lot of them actually. I've been propositioned to by no less than five. It's just unfortunate that the secret of the universe in their pockets turned out to be down their pants instead.

JANE. So, what, you got roped into every scheme that knocked on your door?

ZILLAH. I'm not gullible enough to be lured into a cult. But I am nosy enough to check everyone's pockets. I mean, being able to fit the entirety of the number 42 in one's pocket is impressive! I bet a man could do it though, since their pockets are the size of their egos. At least Colin was nice enough to guide his brother in the right direction.

COLIN. H-Hey, get a grip before I talk to HR about you.

ZILLAH. Ooh, please don't make threats. My dad's a police officer half an hour away. One call and you'll spend the night behind bars.

QUINN. Wow, that's... corrupted. Wonderful. So happy to meet you, Zillah.

ZILLAH. Aww, thanks, Quinnie poo.

JANE. Ew.

COLIN. I... I gotta- go. (*Colin rushes out.*)

JANE. Well, this has been productive. *(The rest are silent, staring at each other. It is awkward. The start of a great, professional working relationship. Blackout.)*

SCENE 2

Chapter 2: A Strange Case of the 80s

Lights up. Same room a week later. Adam sits on a couch. Other people bustle in and out of the room or hang out in corners of the space. It is peaceful. At rise, Colin and Jane enter. Jane has her water bottle in hand. They walk to the couches and sit before looking around carefully.

JANE. Okay. She's not here. I now pronounce this a safe space.

COLIN. Jane, I'm not sure we should be doing this.

JANE. Colin, you have a heart of gold. But that brain needs work. She's the one causing trouble. We're just responding to it.

COLIN. Okay... I'm not- I'm not sure if I can handle another three months of this.

JANE. I know, right?

ADAM. What are you talking about?

JANE. Shh!

COLIN. Zillah.

JANE. She's driving us up the walls. And it's only been a week.

ADAM. Oh, that.

JANE. What do you mean, "Oh, that"? She's a nutcase! Colin, back me up on this.

COLIN. Yeah, what Jane said. Although she's not awful. But-but she also won't stop coming up to me and asking about my brother. Makes me regret opening my mouth in the first place.

JANE. I'm so sorry that's happening to you Colin.

COLIN. I don't want your pity. I want to do my job because that's what we're here to do.

JANE. Of course. That's all you're good for sweetie. And see, I am not one to talk bad about anyone because I try really hard to be a nice person-

COLIN. Right!

ADAM. Uhuh.

JANE. But do you know what she did yesterday?

ADAM. (*Sarcastically.*) No, don't tell me. You're too nice.

JANE. She laughed at me for having toilet paper stuck to my shoe!

ADAM. Okay, so a marital tiff.

JANE. Then today, she somehow sent me a bouquet of foxglove to my desk as an "apology." Foxglove is poisonous! She wants me dead!

ADAM. That makes no sense.

JANE. Exactly! If you kill a killer, the number of killers in the world stays the same.

COLIN. Oh cool, you're into Batman?

JANE. Ew, no.

COLIN. My bad.

JANE. And I can't even report her to HR because the man got busted for sexual misconduct!

ADAM. I mean, it doesn't sound that bad.

JANE. What? He was groping literally everyone who came to see him!

ADAM. No, not him. That's awful. Zillah. I mean, yeah what she did is rude, but it's not like, a hostile environment, right? And calling her an airhead seems a little harsh. She is really good at analytics.

JANE. I don't believe this. I try really hard to stay humble and kind, but when I share some personal problems that I am actually experiencing, this is the thanks I get? Unbelievable.

ADAM. Don't be that way. Just ask her about it. It's probably a misunderstanding.

JANE. I am a businesswoman, Adam. I don't have misunderstandings. I have action plans. Heck, if I were running this slum, which I should be doing, I'd have fired Zillah the moment I heard the slog that spews from her mouth.

ADAM. That's all fine and well, Jane, except for the fact you know nothing about her. Maybe the flowers were a gift.

JANE. Well, with all due respect, I guess you just had to have been there. Right Colin?

COLIN. Right! Though, Adam has a point. (*Zillah and Quinn enter. Jane sips from her water bottle. Quinn sits at the table away from the couches, mug in hand.*)

ZILLAH. Hey Adam! Hi Colin! Jane.

ADAM. Hello, Zillah.

COLIN. Hi Quinn.

QUINN. Just ignore me until I finish my coffee. You won't like me if I don't finish my fifth cup.

JANE. (*Looking at her nonexistent watch.*) Oh, would you look at that. My break is over! Colin, you coming?

COLIN. Huh? M-my break just started.

JANE. What? Sweetie no, I- never mind. (*Jane exits.*)

ZILLAH. Okay Adam, I have a confession.

ADAM. You're not my type.

ZILLAH. You're not easy on the eyes either.

ADAM. What can I help you with?

ZILLAH. I just wanted to let you know that if you need any help with anything just let me know, alright? I'm always happy to lend a hand. You too, Colin.

ADAM. Okay.

ZILLAH. With that being said, I've been seeing you around the break room a lot in the past week. Don't you have work to do?

ADAM. I get my work done.

ZILLAH. (*sits down*) Really? Great! I actually need your help for the next hour. I'm due for my 10:37 am afternoon nap. It's really rejuvenating. You should try it some time to get rid of those massive acne scars. And I mean huge. Like Grand Canyon-

ADAM. As I said, I get my work done. Not anybody else's.

ZILLAH. No need to be frowny about it.

COLIN. Uh, Zillah-

ZILLAH. Maybe my favorite hallucinogenic ASMR would be better for you to lose all that grumpiness. I discovered it with my old friend Mark Patel. He's so great.

ADAM. Our HR guy?

ZILLAH. Oh, you know him too?

COLIN. Zillah-

ZILLAH. So, what do you say? Wouldn't you like to help a gal out?

ADAM. No.

ZILLAH. Please? All I've seen you do is sit around!

ADAM. All you do is pawn off your work like a lazy cliché.

ZILLAH. That's derogatory misogyny! I don't want to report you to HR.

ADAM. What HR?

COLIN. I can help.

ZILLAH. Really?

COLIN. I guess. In exchange, can-can you stop bringing up my family?

ZILLAH. Why do I need to promise that? *(Suddenly, the lights begin flickering. Quinn jumps up at the change.)*

QUINN. Shoot!

ADAM. What now?

QUINN. The room's getting hungry. Hey! Code Periwinkle! The room is live! The room is live! *(There is a mad scramble. All the office workers aside from Adam, Zillah, and Colin begin to rush out of the room frantically. Quinn sees the trio not moving and doubles back into the room.)*

OFFICE WORKERS. *(Ad lib.)* AAAAAAHHHHHHH! PERIWINKLE!

Move move move! Not again! I won't be able to finish my report. Etc.

ZILLAH. *(After a beat.)* What- *(Sudden Blackout. In the dark.)* AHH!

COLIN. Hey! What the-

QUINN. Quiet!

ADAM. What's going on?

QUINN. We're about to enter a story.

COLIN. Why didn't you run?

QUINN. I'm trying to make sure you guys won't get in trouble. AHH!

COLIN. Quinn? AHH!

ADAM. Zillah?... Colin? *(Lights up on a blinding wash of color, reminiscent of a 1980s sitcom. Theme music begins to blast into the room. Actors begin to stream onto the stage, dancing, laughing, and fooling around, all in bright retro neon. Colin, Quinn, and Zillah, are nowhere to be seen. Adam is still on the couch. The 80s light can't seem to touch him. Demelza enters in a bright, multicolored neon jacket and a corded*

portable phone in her hand. When she starts talking, other actors besides Adam exit the stage.)

DEMELZA. Oh my gosh, Zee Zee! Can you believe it's almost time for our high school junior prom?!

ZILLAH. *(Entering a beat behind Demelza from opposite in similar clothing. She also has a phone in hand.)* Oh my gosh Demi, this is so exciting! Who do you think you're going to get asked out by?

DEMELZA. Well, I hope it's Cool-Whip. He's so cute! Ever since he started riding his dad's old motorcycle to school, he keeps asking me to take me out on it! EEEEEEE! I would ride his motorcycle any day. Though I wouldn't say no to Orange Juice either. *(A fake, sit-com laughter can be heard. Demelza sits in a chair and fiddles her feet in the air.)*

ZILLAH. That is so tubular! What a second. What happened to Asparagus?

DEMELZA. He dropped me for jaded Janie in your AP Chem class.

ZILLAH. Ugh she's such a not even I can't. What about Crusty Lip?

DEMELZA. Ew. He had to get surgery to remove that brain-eating amoeba he got after using unfiltered water in his neti pot. *(Sitcom sounds of disgust.)*

ZILLAH. Yeah, but the scars are still kind of cute, right?

DEMELZA. Not in your life, you bogus. *(Laugh track sounds.)*

ZILLAH. Which one is Cool-Whip again?

DEMELZA. Ugh, Zee Zee, get it together. Colin. Colin Sickneghan. With his dreamy eyes and sparking smile and and broad shoulders and-

ZILLAH. Girl, get it together,

DEMELZA. Right. Sorry. *(Laugh track sound again.)* What about you Zee Zee? Any boys catching your liking? I heard Hottie #2 might be coming your wayyyyyy.

ZILLAH. *(Gasping.)* From who?

DEMELZA. Jaded Janie.

ZILLAH. Ugh gag me with a spoon, she's such a skank. *(A doorbell rings.)* Uh-oh. Looks like someone's at the door. Talk to you later, girl. *(She hangs up.)* Who is it?

COLIN. *(Entering with a swagger.)* Hey, Zee Zee. *(Applause track sounds.)* It's Colin.

ZILLAH. OMG! Colin, hi! What can I do for you?

COLIN. My mom and your mom sent me to pick up some books for their book club today. Apparently they tried calling you, but the line was busy.

ZILLAH. Oh! Sorry, yeah, I was on the phone with Demi just now.

COLIN. I don't mind the visit. It's nice to be needed. Plus, I get to see such a pretty face.

ZILLAH. Aww, stop it.

COLIN. I'm serious. I don't think I've ever seen a prettier girl than you.

(A chorus of Oohs sounds.)

ZILLAH. *(Frantic.)* Seriously Colin. Stop it. *(Laughter sounds.)* I'm sure I can help you find those books. Did my mom tell you the titles? If they're going to be used for the book club they're probably in her office. But she also has a hidden bookshelf in my parent's bedroom where she likes to hide books she doesn't want my little brother to see her reading. Parenting nonsense for a troubled child. But I mean he's eight, so really how troubled can one get- *(As she has been talking, Colin has slowly walked up behind her, smoldering. When Zillah spins around again, she bumps into Colin. She freezes.)*

COLIN. Zee Zee, can I... can I ask you out to Junior Prom? *(A chorus of Oohs sounds.)*

ZILLAH. *(Panicked.)* I mean, I suppose you don't need someone's permission to ask them a question right? I mean, look at me now, asking a question without asking you, or my mom, or anyone else really-

COLIN. Zee Zee?

ZILLAH. Yes?

COLIN. Would you go to junior prom with me?

ZILLAH. Yes?

COLIN. Great! Thanks for the book. *(He takes it from her hands.)*

ZILLAH. Huh?

COLIN. Catch you on the flip side, Zee Zee! Oh wait, would you like a ride on my motorcycle sometime?

ZILLAH. *(Faintly.)* No, my mom would never allow that.

COLIN. Eh, I'll have to take it up with her then. See you soon! *(He exits.)*

ZILLAH. O.M.Geeeee!!! Wait till I tell Demi! Wait. I can't tell Demi. Oh this is bad. This is really, really bad. I'm going to have to bag my face

when we go to school tomorrow. What am I going to do?? *(The sound of an outro. Zillah exits. An ensemble member comes on with a large sign with "Commercial Break" written on it. Adam, who has been sitting on the couch this whole time, is impassively observing. Then, a school bell rings. Kids with backpacks, musical instruments, textbooks, and other school paraphernalia flood the room. Demelza bounds up to Zillah excitedly.)*

DEMELZA. I can feel it any day now. Cool-Whip is going to ask me out! He can't keep his eyes off me. Did you see him in Spanish? Totally tubular!

ZILLAH. Uhuh. You were sitting right next to me.

DEMELZA. Well what's got you so glum? Has Hottie #2 not made his move yet?

ZILLAH. You could say that, yes. That is something that is happening.

DEMELZA. Well don't you worry your gorgeous little head, Zee Zee. It looks like Hottie #2 is coming this way right now!

ZILLAH. What? Where? *(They look around, as if expecting someone to appear.)*

DEMELZA. That's so strange. I thought that he was headed this way right... now! *(She gestures towards Adam. He looks behind him.)* No. Not there.

ADAM. Who, me?

DEMELZA. Oh my gosh, found him Zee Zee! *(Demelza pushes Zillah into the seat next to him.)* Hey you, don't you have something to ask Zee Zee here?

ADAM. Nope. Keep me out of this. *(He stands and moves behind the couch.)*

DEMELZA. *(Confused.)* I see, uh, you don't want to take Zee Zee to the prom because... you want to take me instead. EEEEEEE! Catch me! *(Demelza flings herself at Adam, who quickly backs away. Demelza lands on the ground behind the couch with a resounding smack.)* Ow. *(Laugh track sounds.)*

ZILLAH. I don't know Demi, Hottie #2 doesn't seem to be into me.

DEMELZA. *(Getting up rapidly.)* Nonsense! We obviously just got the wrong Hottie #2. I mean, what's the point of the cliché of girls giving guys

obscure and random nicknames except to get them all confused with each other, right?

ZILLAH. Right!

DEMELZA. In fact, I think I can see your real prince charming coming right... now! (*Quinn enters dramatically, looks around, then makes a beeline for Zillah. Zillah and Demelza scramble to flatten their hair and smooth their clothes.*)

QUINN. Zee Zee, hey! Do you mind if we talk in private for one sec?

ZILLAH. Of course I do.

QUINN. What?

DEMELZA. What?

ZILLAH. What? (*Sound of a laugh track.*)

DEMELZA. HAHAHA! Forgive her, she's just mad because she didn't score a 100 on Ms. Slaughterhouse's Calc test.

QUINN. Right, right. Those tests are hella tough. So, Zillah, could I get a moment, please?

ZILLAH. I- (*She turns to Demelza for help, who quickly pretends she is not listening by burying her nose in a book or hiding her face behind a hand while turning away. Sound of a laugh track.*) Okay fine. Yes.

QUINN. Well, I've been meaning to ask for a while. Would you be my date to the Prom? I've always wanted to ask that. Since we were little kids. (*Chorus of Oohs sounds.*)

ZILLAH. Oh! Oh Quinn, I... I would love to, but-

QUINN. Great! I'm so excited. I'll start booking some reservations tonight. Do you know what color dress you're gonna wear? That way we can match.

ZILLAH. (*Dejectedly.*) Well, blue, but-

QUINN. Awesome! This is gonna be amazing. (*He takes her hand and kisses it charmingly.*) I gotta get to my next class. See you after school Zee Zee! (*He exits.*)

ZILLAH. Oh my gosh.

DEMELZA. OMG OMG OMG! Me next world! Me next! (*She tumbles down after landing on her ankle badly. Sound of laugh track.*) Ow.

COLIN. (*Enters with a helmet in hand.*) Hey Zee Zee!

DEMELZA. COLIN! *(She hurriedly stands back up with a beaming smile.)* Hi. Did you have a question for me?

COLIN. Uh hey, Demi. Zee Zee, I talked it over with your mom. She said it's fine to ride my motorcycle as long as you wear a helmet. So, *(Gesturing to the helmet.)* here you go! *(Demelza looks horrified. The sound of laughter and oohs can be heard at the same time.)*

ZILLAH. Oh, thanks, Colin. You're so sweet.

COLIN. Anything for you. *(He grabs her hand and kisses it. A school bell rings.)* I gotta go, but I'll take you home from school, ok?

ZILLAH. Yeah. Yeah ok. *(Colin exits. A tense pause.)*

DEMELZA. Zee Zee?

ZILLAH. What? Hm? Oh yes, hello, Demi.

DEMELZA. What was that?

ZILLAH. Well, haha, funny story actually. Colin came over to my house yesterday because my mom and his mom are part of the same book club, and he needed a book to give to them for some reason so we started looking for a book. And you know how my brother is eight and my mother is reading all these books about helping troubled children, but he's eight years old so how troubled can he really be, and-

DEMELZA. That ride was supposed to be mine.

ZILLAH. Well, yes technically, but-

DEMELZA. We were going to go to Junior Prom together.

ZILLAH. Look, Demi, I know. But when a man comes over and you start talking about your troubled brother-

DEMELZA. ZILLAH! *(Demelza runs at Zillah tackling her to the ground. However, their fight is very performative. Lots of shrieking and slapping and hand waving as opposed to actual punches. After a few moments, Colin, Quinn, Jane and Ensemble enter. They start cheering on the fight. Colin and Quinn then rush in to pull the girls apart.)*

COLIN. Demi, what the heck? Get off my girl.

QUINN. Ow, hey stop it! Did nobody teach you how to throw a punch or are you *trying* to stereotype yourself? Good grief. Wait. *Your* girl, Colin?

COLIN. Uh yeah, Zee Zee said she would go to Prom with me.

QUINN. Uh actually, I think you're confused, because I just asked her to go with me five minutes ago.

COLIN. Oh yeah, bags for brains? Is that so? Because I asked her yesterday. *(There is another brief pause. Then they launch themselves at their gender counterpart. This fight is less performative. The onlookers go back to cheering on the fight. This continues for several seconds before, with a loud thud, the 80s style lighting is shut off and the room returns to normal light. All the office workers in their 80's attire seem to snap out of it. The fighters relax and sprawl on the floor. Beat.)*

ZILLAH. What the heck?

JANE. What in the world was that?

DEMELZA. Aw man, I was hoping I wouldn't get dragged into another one. You have a mean right hook, Zillah.

QUINN. Is everyone alright? *(There is a chorus of confirmation. Colin remains silent.)* Colin? Everything alright?

COLIN. Of course not! What the heck was that?

QUINN. That was a story just like-

COLIN. That wasn't a story! That was some sort of twisted, freaky perversion.

QUINN. Hey man, calm down. It happens to all of us.

COLIN. Calm down? I just spent the last ten minutes being forced to 'fall in love' with the same person who keeps asking me what my brother's secret is as to why he hasn't offed himself yet. *(All but Adam gasp. Then all turn to Zillah, who has the presence of mind to look sheepish.)*

ZILLAH. I was just- I mean it's difficult to get over addiction! I've told you I'm a naturally curious woman.

COLIN. This isn't a sitcom. Your curiosity doesn't come with a laugh track. Find someone else to help you with your inane schemes. *(He stalks out the door. Zillah runs after him.)*

ZILLAH. Colin, wait. I was just trying to get to know you! *(Exits.)*

DEMELZA. Are we not going to go after them?

QUINN. Why? It's good that Glasses stood up for himself and Ms. God has got to learn some boundaries.

DEMELZA. Hmm. Adam? You're not in costume.

ADAM. That is correct.

QUINN. How were you not pulled into the story?

ADAM. Guess I didn't have anything interesting to tell.

QUINN. Huh. Weird.

JANE. That was a story?

DEMELZA. Yes. They rarely make logical sense, just full-on drama. We're not sure how to get it to stop.

ADAM. Why doesn't the company simply move out?

QUINN. The contract to lease out the office says the company has to stay here for ten years, rain or shine.

ADAM. How many years are left on the lease?

DEMELZA. Six. Alright people, I love a break as much as anyone else, but most of us are still on the clock. Let's scoot. *(There is a collective groan, then all but Adam begin to leave. A beat.)*

ADAM. Huh. Was that all?

Chapter 3: The Firefly

Adam grabs his phone and begins to scroll. After a moment, a blip of light swoops across the room. It happens twice more. Adam barely reacts. Then, as the light zooms to an entrance, THE FIREFLY pops into existence.

FIREFLY. *(To audience.)* Weeeeeeeelllllll howdy doody! Ladies and gentlemen, y'all and y'asses. Children of all ages! Including those over the age of ninety-nine because I think I'm better than LEGO in that way- How is everyone doing tonight? *(Hopefully no one in the audience reacts.)* Wow, tough crowd. Right, Adam?

ADAM. *(Bewildered.)* Who are you?

FIREFLY. Your worst nightmare! Haha!

ADAM. I'm calling security.

FIREFLY. Nooooo! Security is so boring. They just sit in their security chairs behind their security desks playing on their security phones alllll day. *(To audience.)* Kids these days are so attached to their technology.

ADAM. Who are you talking to?

FIREFLY. Why, to you, my fine feathered friend.

ADAM. I'm not feathered.

FIREFLY. You did a very bad thing.

ADAM. Oh yeah? How so?

FIREFLY. You gave us nothing. NOTHING! Not one spark of joy, fear, disgust, sadness, anger, schadenfreude, or even adronitis! Or whatever other emotions humans anthropomorphize into movies these days. The room did not like that. Not one bit.

ADAM. Why should I care what the room thinks?

FIREFLY. You don't understand, small fry. The room gets hungry, so it makes a story. If you don't contribute to the story, then the room can't feed. No one's been able to escape it so far. And the fact that you did made it very angry.

ADAM. How is that my problem? And you never answered my question! Who are you?

FIREFLY. Well listen up, Buttercup. I am the Firefly. I feed on high-intensity emotions. I got a kick out of the last story because that fight overpowered your stupid weaponized apathy. But some of the others are still hungry. There are plenty of other things the room can deploy to make sure it gets fed, and most of them you don't want anywhere near humans. But because of you, they're waking up!

ADAM. I am starting to see how this may be a personal problem.

FIREFLY. Good. Now. I am going to conjure a story. I'll dumb it down just for you. You are going to sit there and empathize until the room is satisfied. *(To Audience)* And you all are going to like it. Pretty please?

ADAM. *(Looking around.)* Who are you talking to?

FIREFLY. Shut it. Here we go. *(The Firefly claps twice. A 1920s film noir soundtrack plays. The lights, except for those around Adam and the Firefly, shift to black and white. Jane enters with a bland trench coat and black fedora hat, leaning against an imaginary lamppost.)*

JANE. *(Dramatically)* I had planned to take the day off, but I smelled trouble in the wind. Nothing worse than smelling trouble over the scent of eggs and bacon in the brisk morning air. It's the kind of scent that curdles your orange juice. Makes your bank account quiver in fear. Makes some friends call in with an apology for double booking with another friend at an earlier time, then taking a rain check. Me? I got ready. I have to be ready for these sorts of things. It's what I do. You see, I'm a private eye. At least, that's what is says on the door. The door to my meager little office where I smoke cigars and read the paper all day waiting for business.

Today, however, I sat at my desk. Waiting. Waiting for trouble to find its way to my doorstep. (*Demelza enters in femme fatale dress. She knocks before entering the space. The music could become briefly sexier.*)

Demelza Slaughterhouse. A reputable woman from the other side of town where the grass is greener. Known for her style as a Hollywood starlet. Whatever she was doing in my office, I knew it was gonna be no good.

DEMELZA. I hear you're a woman who can find things fast.

JANE. Well, the speed at which the thing is found is dependent on several things.

DEMELZA. Really? Do tell, Jane Marpie, PI.

JANE. Well for starters, it's usually more difficult to find something when that something doesn't want to be found.

DEMELZA. Any other criteria?

JANE. The hidden thing usually stays hidden when one doesn't have the right... incentive to find it.

DEMELZA. (*Laughing airily.*) Oh, Miss Marpie. You know I'll pay you for whatever services you need. It's what I do. Pay back.

JANE. Come, sit down. Why don't you tell me about this little problem you're facing, Ms. Slaughterhouse.

DEMELZA. Demelza, please. Slaughterhouse is my husband's name.

JANE. Oh, so close to passing the Bechdel test. Trouble in paradise?

DEMELZA. You could say that. You see, my darling husband Earl seems to have gone missing.

JANE. Missing how?

DEMELZA. In the sense that two nights ago, the dogs started barking up a storm. Earl went downstairs to check on them. A few moments later, I heard a scream, the sound of breaking glass, and the dogs started barking again. When I rushed downstairs, the dogs were in the backyard, broken glass was everywhere in the house, and Earl was gone.

JANE. Miss, this sounds like an abduction requiring a police investigation. Not a private one.

DEMELZA. Those police bastards don't know clues if they started tap dancing on their noses. Please Miss Marpie. You're the only person I trust.

JANE. Fine. But I'm not a fan of the damsel in distress trope you're pulling.

DEMELZA. But I am in distress. I am.

JANE. Have a good day. (*Demelza exits the way she came in.*) I already knew where to start. With the neighbors, not the wife herself. Like any good movie detective knows, the most likely culprit in a husband's disappearance is the wife. It's in the name too. Slaughterhouse. Good foreshadowing, if a bit on the nose. The writer could be a bit more clever with the subtlety.

FIREFLY. Shut it and keep going.

JANE. I'm usually right about these things, so I decided to walk through the affluent streets of town all afternoon. Funnily enough, no one had a conclusive story on the Slaughterhouse tragedy. (*Ensemble appears as NEIGHBORS.*)

ZILLAH. I'd say those darn dogs barked all through the night, no breaks. I hardly got any sleep that night. Ruined my husband's entire presentation at work the next morning.

COLIN. I don't remember any glass breaking. I do think there was a gunshot though. Woke me clean awake. However, I may have dreamt the gunshot instead. That happens sometimes. Sometimes my dreams get so real that they impart on my brain as memory. Isn't that wild?

QUINN. The Slaughterhouses? Love them! Best pool parties every summer. It's huge. Could probably fit a hundred people, easily! It's just a shame that their backyard lacks some aesthetic greenery. Great mansion, great artwork. Epitome of taste. What's this about Earl?

ZILLAH. Demelza is such a dear though. You know when my grandmother died, Demelza was right over here every week with a new casserole to try. Did the cooking all by herself! She knows how to chop up onions without crying. I mean, what do I have to do to get my cooks to stop crying? Pay them minimum wage?

QUINN. Screaming? No, Earl isn't the kind of man to scream. He's stoic. Loving, on his wife, of course- The two are never seen apart from one another. But other emotions seem to escape him. I might go so far as to call him emotionally constipated.

COLIN. He has a nasty habit of sitting on the couch all the time at home. He lets everyone around him do the work and doesn't try to give back to the community. Not like his wife does. I'll never know how she puts up

with him. I'm a huge helper in the community. She wouldn't have to put up with me. She'd love me. I love her.

QUINN. Hey officer, one more thing. Oh, you're not an officer? Then why did you come up to my door asking all these questions about my neighbors? Private investigator my butt. You're probably the woman that drowned Earl in the pool or whatever. Get off my property before I call the real cops to arrest you!

JANE. The day was fruitful. It was lucky for me that the night of the kidnapping, everyone had trouble sleeping. What was strange was the possibilities. Some said they heard a gunshot, not broken glass. Demelza said the dogs were in the backyard, but the Slaughterhouses have no backyard, only a pool. Some don't believe that Earl would ever scream. Not even with his very life on the line. *(A modern phone timer goes off.)* Eleven pm. Around the same time Demelza's husband disappeared. In the dark, it would be difficult to make out any faces on the street. *(A lamppost lights above Jane's head.)* But what if the person couldn't be seen? What if the trail goes cold because there is no trail? There're too many holes in the story. This means that the culprit is making these plot holes happen. They aren't contributing their share of the story. The culprit in Earl's disappearance is YOU! *(Jane points her finger at Adam, still sitting on the couch next to the Firefly. The lights surrounding Adam flash to black and white. All the neighbors gasp and point their fingers at Adam. Adam looks around, skeptical.)*

ADAM. Me? No.

JANE. Oho! It almost makes too much sense.

ADAM. What? No it doesn't.

JANE. You thought you could get away with it, right Adam?

ADAM. *(Getting flustered, stands up.)* No it doesn't. I've been here the whole time. Just ask him. *(He points to the FIREFLY.)*

FIREFLY. *(Smiling.)* Who, little old me? Investigator, I've never seen this man before in my life.

JANE. Aha! Caught red handed! I'm taking you in. *(Jane starts for Adam. He breathes in deep, releases it, then sits back down. The lights around him return to full color. Jane stops.)*

FIREFLY. What do you think you're doing?

ADAM. Nothing. I didn't do anything, so I'm not going to do anything.

FIREFLY. Pick it back up, pick it back up!

JANE. Uh, ah I see. Your alibi is soundproof. It happens. The first reasoning of an investigator is often wrong. Usually not mine, but that's what builds the suspense. So our abductee or even killer is still on the loose. Unless... Earl faked his own kidnapping! It makes almost too much sense. This payday will be worth a fortune! Loving on Demelza, but stoic and emotionless everywhere else. This means whatever love he held for Demelza would eventually be overshadowed by the unfeelingness of his heart. So, he faked his own death and ran away to a space where he could hide. He ran away to sit on the couch like he always does. That means **ADAM IS EARL.** *(Jane and the neighbors whirl around to point their fingers at Adam again. Demelza appears.)*

DEMELZA. *(Hysterical.)* Gasp! Earl, how could you? *(She pulls out a gun and points it at him.)* Do you see? How you've driven me to madness?

ADAM. No.

JANE, DEMELZA, and FIREFLY. But whyyyyyyyyy?

ADAM. I'm not about to lose a limb getting shot just because an insect told me to.

FIREFLY. Fine, fine, fine. *(The Firefly claps their hands twice. The lights revert to normal. Jane, Demelza, and neighbors stumble or collapse out of the story.)*

COLIN. Ugh, my head.

QUINN. What, are you offering?

ZILLAH. Do you need ibuprofen? I put a bottle at my desk this morning. And everyone knows any self-respecting woman is also a drug dealer.

COLIN. Get away from me.

JANE. It's probably poison anyway. I have my own bottle he can use.

ZILLAH. Okay. Anyone else?

QUINN. Nah I'm good. Surprisingly, no one got hurt this time. Adam really stole the spotlight on that one.

DEMELZA. How are you doing it, Adam?

ADAM. Doing what?

DEMELZA. Not getting pulled into the story. You stared right down the barrel of a gun and didn't bat an eye.

QUINN. Are you really, you know, incapable of feeling emotions?

JANE. Good point Quinn. *(To Adam.)* Are you a psychopath?

COLIN. Psychopaths are f-freaks! Adam's not a freak.

ADAM. Thank you, Colin. Of course I'm capable. I just won't lower myself to poorly written, hapdash plotlines. I have standards.

ZILLAH. Or you're a psychopath. Jane's story could hold water. My dad's seen guys like Adam all the time while on duty. Psychopaths are pathological liars! For all we know, Adam has been lying to himself this whole time.

COLIN. Be for real.

DEMELZA. Yeah dawg, get real.

ZILLAH. I'm serious! There are recurrent, studied signs to look for that are 60% accurate. Firstly, they commonly wet the bed. *(All turn to look at Adam's crotch.)* Secondly, they are prone to starting fires. *(At this point, the gun Demelza has been holding onto goes off into the ground. Zillah continues with a flourish.)* And thirdly, they love to hurt animals!

DEMELZA. The office doesn't have pets.

FIREFLY. *(Speaking though only Adam can hear him.)* Believe me sister, I'm very hurt.

QUINN. And how, pray tell, are you an expert on this subject, great prophetess?

COLIN. Yeah, sounds like a batch- bunch of lies.

JANE. Now hold on Colin, Zillah said I might be right. And I'm usually right about most things. So if I say Adam's a psychopath, doesn't that mean he has to be one?

QUINN. Are you high?

JANE. Excuse me?

QUINN. You gotta be a better flier than an airplane with whatever you're spouting.

JANE. I don't believe this. I never talk bad about anyone! You all better hope Demelza locks that gun away before Adam uses it on you. *(Jane slinks away.)*

QUINN. Can we fire her?

DEMELZA. Don't say that. She's probably having a bad day.

COLIN. Well, whatever she is, she's not high.

DEMELZA. Oh thank goodness. How do you know?

COLIN. I could smell her water bottle when I walked by her desk. Either she enjoys drinking straight wood varnish or God gave her the gift of his own kidneys. *(Beat)*

Maybe we should take the things she says with a grain of salt.

ZILLAH. Fine by me.

COLIN. No one asked you. *(Colin exits, Zillah following.)*

DEMELZA. Well I'll be damned. This can't be good for my blood pressure. Sorry about that Adam.

ADAM. It's fine.

DEMELZA. No, it's really not, but I'm sure it'll all blow over soon! Hopefully. *(To Quinn.)* Let's get away from the break room, shall we? *(Demelza and Quinn exit.)*

Chapter 4: The Basilisk

The Firefly begins hitting Adam with a pillow.

FIREFLY. You. Absolute. Numbskull.

ADAM. What now?

FIREFLY. Why are you malfunctioning? The room's still gonna be hungry because you didn't participate in the story!

ADAM. Stop it. It's bad enough my coworkers think I'm crazy without an invisible insect telling me I'm broken.

FIREFLY. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure. Whatever. It's fine. I can stop. HA. You're funny. Still though. Lots of energy in the room now. That might have been enough. That might be... *(They wait in silence. Then the room begins to rumble.)* Oh no. *(The lights flash and flicker. The rumbling gets louder. A bell clangs. THE BASILISK appears.)*

BASILISK. Hello, my darlings.

FIREFLY. NO. Not you!

BASILISK. Aww, poor thing. Not happy to see me?

FIREFLY. Adam is my charge. Get away, you spineless, stony reptile! *(The Firefly rushes forward to prevent the Basilisk from coming any*

further into the room. The Basilisk flicks their hand. The Firefly is sent tumbling backwards.)

BASILISK. How pesky. *(To Adam.)* Hello, my dear.

ADAM. Uh, hi.

BASILISK. My, my. You sure are a pretty thing. I'm surprised. I was ever so curious as to who was escaping the story's grasp, so I came to see for myself. Thank you, dear, for being such a delicious meal.

ADAM. What do you mean?

FIREFLY. The Basilisk here feeds off of apathy. And your ability to ignore the stories completely must have given her a huge power boost. But she usually only works for the higher-level Spinners.

BASILISK. Thank you, Firefly, for the unnecessary explanation.

FIREFLY. Show some respect to your superiors.

BASILISK. You're a child.

FIREFLY. No, I'm a young adult.

ADAM. Superior?

FIREFLY. Oh yeah, I'm quite high on the totem pole where I come from.

BASILISK. Being able to eat any intense emotion does make one versatile and powerful.

ADAM. Really? Who knew.

BASILISK. Yes, well, he's also an idiot.

FIREFLY. Hey! You're lazy.

BASILISK. Only when I want to be. And due to your lack of intellectual prowess, I will be creating the next story. *(To Adam.)* There are few beings greater than us that pay attention to such a small story space like this one, but thanks to this blundering fool and you, they're paying attention now. The Storm. The Unicorn. The Mice. The Mother. *(The Basilisk and the Firefly shiver in fright and disgust.)*

FIREFLY. Uh. Yeah. Yes. Ok. Ok. Ok. Good idea, Basilisk. You take the next one. I'll tell ya, though, Adam may not look like much, but he's a tough nut to crack.

ADAM. I'm right here.

BASILISK. I see that you are. Excuse us. *(To Firefly.)* Your stories are so overblown and drawn out there was probably nothing more for dear Adam

to contribute. Let us make a story so overwhelmingly boring that he will be compelled to put his quick mind to work at spicing things up.

FIREFLY. But I'll get nothing out of it.

BASILISK. Exactly. I'm sure the good people here have had enough of your charming personality. Sit down. *(The Firefly sits in a huff.)* Now. Feast your eyes, your ears, your tongues! Ready? Set? Action! *(The Basilisk snaps. Blackout. When the lights come up, Demelza, Colin, Jane, Quinn, and Zillah sit in chairs around the room. "/" Indicates the next character begins speaking before the preceding line is done.)*

DEMELZA. And I was like, nuh uh, no I don't want to do that, that's totally racist!/ He never even tries to keep up with current politics.

JANE. My teacher is so crazy! Like certifiably insane. I don't know where she comes up with these ideas./ They're really bonkers. So, so, so bonkers. I'm like wow.

COLIN. So I basically decided to drop out of school because/ My teacher wanted to try out this weird improv trick. We had to become mice that scampered around the roof.

QUINN. I'm allergic to black-footed albatross, Laysan albatross, short-tailed albatross, anhinga, Cassin's auklet,/ crested auklet, least auklet, parakeet auklet, rhinoceros auklet...

ZILLAH. This one time I got so scared. The other time, I was incredibly happy./ Now I can't tell the difference between the two.

DEMELZA. And then he said "Why should I care," like diversity doesn't matter to him. And why should it?/ He is the epitome of ignorant men. And I was like, me bitch. This matters to me.

COLIN. But at the end of the day, she said wow guys this is great/ but now we need a villain. Who is gonna be the villain in our story?

QUINN. American avocet, beardless-tyrannulet, Northern bishop, Northern red bittern, American bittern, least bittern,/ brewer's blackbird, red-winged blackbird, rusty blackbird, tricolored blackbird, yellow-headed blackbird, mountain bluebird...

JANE. I didn't know the world could be that way and create a person this off-their-rocker using the sperm from some man's testicles/ and an egg from some woman's ovaries.

ZILLAH. I used to get sad. All the time. But then I got confused and embarrassed./ I didn't like that so I told myself to stop being so sad all the time.

DEMELZA. There are a lot of students who benefit from having a culturally diverse community./ But America seems to get a hard on for putting itself in the worst cultural landscapes as possible. What's up with that?

QUINN. Western bluebird, bobolink, brown booby, brant, bufflehead,/ indigo bunting, lark, lazuli bunting, painted bunting...

COLIN. And we were like, what villain? We were improving as mice?/ And she started talking about how mice were a metaphor for migration and change, which sure, I guess that works.

ZILLAH. And a few times I got flustered? And envious. Loads and loads of envy./ But why be envious or scared or happy or sad or flustered or embarrassed or confused?

JANE. What are the chances that this deranged, lock-them-up-in-a-prison-to-never-see-the-light-of-day-again person/ would be born and would be my teacher? I guess the world works in mysterious ways. It's so crazy!

DEMELZA. So, I packed up his suitcase and was gonna throw it out the window/ but instead I carefully placed it at the bottom of the stairs and let him roll it to the door. Maybe if he was forced to do his own work for once he could start thinking critically.

COLIN. And then she said, what if the mice are the villains! And we all stood there- the group was mostly white kids- wondering,/ you want us to be evil immigrant mice?

QUINN. McKay's bunting, snow bunting, varied bunting, and bushtit. And that's just birds from letters A to B. In this essay I will-

ZILLAH. Lobotomy. Ask your doctor.

BASILISK. Yessss. Feel the apathy. Feel the boredom. Let it seep into your bones! Do you feel that, Adam? *(After a beat.)* Adam? *(The Basilisk turns around to discover that Adam and the Firefly have both fallen asleep. If they are sitting on the same couch, one should rest their head on the other's shoulder. The Basilisk is embarrassed.)* Yes, well. Uh, yes! Feel the emotionless nature of sleep! The utter void- oh who am I kidding.

QUINN. Barn owls, barred owls, burrowing owls, elf owls, great horned owls-

BASILISK. Enough already. (*The Basilisk snaps their fingers. All in the story fall out of their seats to sleep on the floor.*) Really. This is insulting. (*They walk to the Firefly.*) **WAKE UP.**

FIREFLY. (*Waking with a start.*) Bushtit! Oh. Hi.

BASILISK. Hi yourself. I hate to admit this, but you're right.

FIREFLY I'm sorry, you'll have to be more specific.

BASILISK. Don't look at me like the bug who got the berry. About the boy. Aidan.

FIREFLY. Adam.

BASILISK. Yes that. My plan didn't work.

FIREFLY. Well duh, 'cuz it sucked. He doesn't respond to anything we throw at him. How in the world do we pull him in if he doesn't seem to care about the stories we spin?

BASILISK. You could just ask him.

FIREFLY. Like a simpleton?

BASILISK. (*Gesturing to the Firefly.*) Like someone who is genuinely worried for him. (*Gesturing to herself.*) And someone who couldn't care less.

FIREFLY. (*To Adam.*) **WAKE UP.** (*Adam wakes.*) Hey Adie Bear, what's a story that you would *want* to be a part of? We've just been throwing stories at you without wondering what tickles your fancy.

ADAM. My brother used to call me Adie Bear. Why are you just asking me this now?

BASILISK. Because normal humans just fall into the story anyway. We shouldn't have to ask.

FIREFLY. Consent is a very big deal to humans. Did you forget?

BASILISK. I am a predator. Fireflies are too.

FIREFLY. I would appreciate it if you could find literally any other way to word that sentence in the future, thank you. Adam?

ADAM. Well... I guess... I don't know.

BASILISK. You don't know?

ADAM. Well, I was raised to be so unassuming that now I have trouble getting shareholders in my emotional real estate. But it's fine. My life is

pretty darn good. There's nothing making me say 'huh, I wish my life was better in this way.'

FIREFLY. So you have no worries? Your life is just perfect?

ADAM. I'm not saying that I don't struggle. I get seasonal depression. Heck, my younger brother, Gabriel, went missing on a trip to New York! Isn't that wild? But that's nothing compared to the rest of the world. There's genocide and war. Racism is systemic to 90% of societies across the globe. Celebrities are giving their children terrible names. Mental disorders and suicide rates are on the rise. My mental health? Peak working condition on the average day. What's the point of trying to fix the small issues when the rest of the world has got it so much worse?

BASILISK. Well that's the most stupid idea I've ever heard.

FIREFLY. Basilisk!

BASILISK. What's the big deal? Adam here talks about the woes of the world as though his lack of ability to solve his personal issues is a self-sacrifice.

FIREFLY. That is so mean.

ADAM. No, it's fine. It's how she ticks... Apathy, right? (*Beat.*) Why *do* you guys tick? Like, what are you guys? Were you born from this room?

FIREFLY. Oh gosh no. There are story spaces all over the planet. Stonehenge, the top of Mount Fuji, The Pentagon, even (*The Firefly recites a specific real-life address.*)

BASILISK. We're called Story Spinners. We help humanity experience the full breadth of life. From what we can tell, to become one requires giving into a feeling so completely that you can never fully come back from it.

FIREFLY. I gave into complete vehemence and exuberance while playing on the *Alice in Wonderland* statue in Central Park.

BASILISK. I gave into the desire for apathy in the Pantheon. I was on holiday in Greece. My frantic attempt to escape the story made me what I am now.

FIREFLY. But the evolution hardly ever happens. I was so busy playing around I didn't notice the story space activating around me. Be thankful that you don't understand. It's... difficult to become something different. Something more.

BASILISK. Some Spinners go corrupt. They need to cause suffering to survive.

FIREFLY. That's why we need to get you empathizing.

BASILISK. Wait a second. That's what he needs! A completely equal, empathetic story. One where everyone shares the same problem all at once.

FIREFLY. Oh yeah! So even if Adam doesn't share the individual experience-

ADAM. I'll still be compelled to join in and fix something!

FIREFLY. And we'll all be saved! I got something. You got something?

BASILISK. Always.

FIREFLY. *(To the audience.)* Alright. Here's a story! Freshly curated for your entertainment, and ours!

BASILISK. Feast your eyes, your ears, your tongues! *(The Basilisk and the Firefly perform a fun handshake ending in a percussive sound. Blackout. End of Act I.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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