

It's Still You

By Raven Petretti-Stamper

A play with music by Josephine Fisher, Stephanie Bianchi,
Lara Cody & Mark Vogel

IT'S STILL YOU

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IT'S STILL YOU

*For HEBEGB,
who once sang something very similar to “It’s Still You” in my kitchen.
This is your fault. Kisses.*

IT'S STILL YOU

Cast of Characters

Please use diverse casting.

PAIGE: 35. An Annaleigh Ashford type. Attractive, smart, spontaneous, fit, stylish, dramatic with a great sense of humor. She is a strong woman who has been pining for Darren for six years. She has never fallen out of love with the memory of him.

DARREN: 35. A Chris Hemsworth type. Attractive, smart, carefree. He has a great sense of humor that is sometimes inappropriate. He is torn throughout the play by his desire for Paige and his feelings for his family.

OLIVIA: 32. A little ditzy and definitely a romantic. She wants everyone to be in love and supports Paige's more outlandish adventures as long as they're about amore.

FRANKIE: 35. Flamboyantly gay. Always quick with a comeback and loves fashion. The voice of reason in their circle of friends. He is no nonsense but with a heart of gold. He knows people and is not afraid to call them out.

JILL: 35. The long-suffering wife. Attractive, spirited, feisty, balanced under extreme circumstances. She loves her husband but refuses to be in a loveless marriage.

Place:

New York City

Time:

Summer and Fall of the present year

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Music Note: The songs are used with permission from the lyricists and composers. For sheet music or recordings, please contact the author at: info@strangebirdproductions.com

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

Lights up on PAIGE. finishing a jog on the Hudson River when she sees DARREN. Darren is sitting on a park bench with his back turned to her. Paige panics because she looks like shit. She's sweaty, her hair and her outfit are a mess.

She fluffs her hair, pushes her boobs up, pinches her cheeks, wets her lips and finally approaches the bench after Darren has put headphones on and started jamming out.

PAIGE. Darren? (*Poses seductively.*) Darren? (*Still no response so Paige goes behind him and pulls a headphone from his ear.*) How you doing, hot stuff?

DARREN. (*jumps from his seat*) What the fu--Jesus. Paige! (*Flustered, he jams his left hand into his pocket to hide his wedding ring.*) You almost gave me a heart attack.

PAIGE. What a surprise, right? It's great to see you too.

DARREN. You scared me to death. Give me a sec. (*Sits down.*)

PAIGE. To run into you while running. That's ironic, isn't it? I thought I'd never see you again.

DARREN. I wondered if we would bump into each other but the city's so big. What are the odds?

PAIGE. The cosmos must be on our side. Ya know, we don't want to let the universe down. Now might be a great time for a hug.

DARREN. You're dripping in sweat.

PAIGE. You're still like that, huh? A little sweat never hurt anyone. (*Darren gets up awkwardly and gives in to Paige's big hug.*) See? Nothing contagious. Not so bad.

DARREN. You look amazing, even with the dripping.

PAIGE. I do, don't I? Do you mind if I stretch? (*Starts stretching, milking*

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it for all its worth. She is showing off her very fit and sexy body.)

DARREN. You look like an entirely different person. It's going to take a minute to absorb. When did you get so fit?

PAIGE. Hm. Let's see if I can pinpoint it. After you left me in the dust.

DARREN. Of course...

PAIGE. Of course what?

DARREN. Of course you'd go right for the jugular. In case you're forgetting, you're the one who left me.

PAIGE. That's not the way I remember it but... *(Darren tries to interject.)* Let's agree to disagree. It's been how many years? *(Silence.)* Six. It's been six years. I drowned my sorrows at the gym. What happened to you?

DARREN. I've obviously put on some pounds.

PAIGE. That's what it is. For a second, I thought you got shorter.

DARREN. Not yet. We're not ninety.

PAIGE. I know it's not logical but that's all I could think of. You look like someone squashed you. Like your legs stayed completely straight and someone took your head and pushed it down until it left a little pouch in the middle. *(Darren laughs, despite the disparagement.)*

SCENE 2

Lights up to FRANKIE. and OLIVIA. at a table in their favorite bar. They are playing a card game and drinking SR.

OLIVIA. Ooooooh, maybe she's pregnant. *(Frankie recoils and Olivia reacts.)* What?

FRANKIE. That's what she said?

OLIVIA. I don't know, it was just a quick phone call.

FRANKIE. And that's the first thing that pops into your head? The preamble to a multitude of discussions about chronic flatulence, vomiting and mood swings? No, thanks.

OLIVIA. Maybe someone proposed and we have to figure out if she picked the right person or scandalously fell for yet another Mr. Wrong's trashy taste in jewelry.

FRANKIE. Not a chance. She's a born-again virgin by now and she'd just

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take the guy to Vegas. That leaves loss of a loved one as the only explanation. I hope not though, unless it's that worthless ex from years ago. What was that douche bag's name?

OLIVIA. You know his name.

FRANKIE. I swore to never say it again. He's like Voldemort to me. Don't make me say it--

OLIVIA. There was nothing wrong with Darren.

FRANKIE. Ew. I asked you not to say it. I don't even like to hear you say it.

OLIVIA. He was dreamy.

FRANKIE. I would love to see the world through your rose-colored glasses just once.

OLIVIA. He was a nice guy. He said he wanted the best for her when their thing was over.

FRANKIE. Please. That's code for "I hope you're miserable without me." Obviously, you are someone who really needs to date more.

OLIVIA. He didn't mean any harm. Their relationship just hit a plateau.

FRANKIE. Just like this conversation. But we don't have to agree. Drink up.

OLIVIA. To life and love... *(Frankie rolls his eyes and they both drink a shot.)*

SCENE 3

Blackout. Lights up on the park bench as Paige and Darren continue to catch up.

PAIGE. Soooooo, what else?

DARREN. I just moved to Nyack. That took up a lot of my time.

PAIGE. No way—you finally bought? We're both first time home owners.

DARREN. You've never believed in coincidences.

PAIGE. I'm just considering the possibility that the universe is still trying to tell us that we're in sync. Right? At least on some level.

DARREN. Of course we are. We did hard time together.

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PAIGE. Are you saying our relationship was like being in prison?

DARREN. No, because prisons don't leave the door open for you to leave at any time, Paige.

PAIGE. I thought we called a truce...

DARREN. (*Laughs it off.*) Where's your place?

PAIGE. Not far from here at all. I was able to snag a beautiful one-bedroom in my range.

DARREN. Whoa. Did you win the lottery? Marry well?

PAIGE. Neither of the above.

DARREN. Then how?

PAIGE. I've been working since I was seventeen and I'm not afraid of the stock market. But you know that. It's nice. I have an unobstructed view of the Freedom Tower.

DARREN. Wow, Paige. That's awesome.

PAIGE. I hope you're simmering in jealousy.

DARREN. I am. We look at someone's backyard and it's not pretty. There's garbage everywhere, a dilapidated pool--

PAIGE. We? (*Darren does not respond.*) I'm just curious why a perennial bachelor like yourself would decide to get a roommate.

DARREN. Don't try to change the subject. I know there's more to your story.

PAIGE. I refuse to continue this conversation until you fess up.

DARREN. Maybe we should just leave it. I have a roommate and you're sitting on a kajillion dollar apartment on an Administrative Assistant's salary.

PAIGE. Who said I was still an assistant?

DARREN. What?

PAIGE. Things change. I own a business.

DARREN. Phew, phew, phew! Making millions?

PAIGE. I do okay. It's a social media firm and it pays the bills.

DARREN. Sounds like your life turned out perfect. Without me. New job, new place. Congratulations, girl boss. I'm proud of you.

PAIGE. I am not going to let you off the hook that easy.

DARREN. What hook?

PAIGE. Is your roommate a she?

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DARREN. My place is too big for one person, my mortgage is high and I knew someone who was looking for space so it was an easy transition.

PAIGE. So, you like him. It is a he, isn't it?

DARREN. Yes, Paige, it's a he. *(They discard their garbage.)*

DARREN. My roommate is a decent cook, cleans and respects my privacy. What's there not to like?

PAIGE. Do you still cook?

DARREN. Yeah, and I still love it.

PAIGE. We used to make some fantastic dishes.

DARREN. *(laughs.)* Remember the night we made the pesto ravioli?

PAIGE. No, no, no, no, no. I do not want to remember anything about that!

DARREN. Aw, come on, you were lighting the candles--

PAIGE. Oh God...

DARREN. You are such a klutz...

PAIGE. So what?

DARREN. So what? You set the tablecloth on fire! And the bottom of the kitchen curtains. I should have sued for damages.

PAIGE. Nobody's hair was even singed.

DARREN. Says you. I've still got a bald spot--

PAIGE. *(laughing.)* There was white foam everywhere!

DARREN. You sprayed that extinguisher like it was an assault rifle. Are you secretly a member of the navy seals? *(Darren animates the instance.)*

PAIGE. And you said--

DARREN. I have no idea what I said. That was forever ago.

PAIGE. That was a big night for us.

DARREN. I probably said something like I wanted to be with you forever. I was head over heels for you. *(Silence.)*

PAIGE. But here we are.

DARREN. However I said it back then, I did mean it. Back then.

PAIGE. Right. Back then.

DARREN. Right. Look, I really hate to do this but I've gotta run to a meeting. Maybe we'll run into each other again some time and catch up then?

PAIGE. That would be great. My number's the same.

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DARREN. I imagine that's the only thing you haven't changed. It was really great seeing you, Paige. (*Lights up on the bar table where Olivia and Frankie continue to entertain themselves.*)

OLIVIA. Maybe it's not about a man at all.

FRANKIE. She went to the gyno last Thursday. When she put her legs in the stirrups a moth flew out, coughed, and asked for directions to 1998.

OLIVIA. So probably not.

FRANKIE. That is not an understatement. I think it had a tiny cane.

OLIVIA. And bifocals?

FRANKIE. And trauma.

OLIVIA. Honestly, same. (*They both sip their drinks.*)

FRANKIE. Anyway, I say we give her ten more minutes, and if she doesn't show up, we assume she joined a cult.

OLIVIA. Or married a Lyft driver.

FRANKIE. That's redundant. (*Paige enters wearing all black and a fascinator while fighting back tears. Frankie and Olivia greet her with open arms but she dramatically pushes them out of the way.*) You are such a drama momma.

OLIVIA. Stop. She's obviously traumatized. Did you come from a funeral? (*Paige is gloomy.*)

FRANKIE. Who cares. I love your dress. This new look is fabulous.

PAIGE. Thank you but I feel like a part of me has expired.

FRANKIE. Like a driver's license or a library card?

OLIVIA. You are so not an empath.

FRANKIE. Drink up. (*Frankie gives everyone a shot and they drink.*)

PAIGE. I don't want to feel good. I want to give in to my pain.

OLIVIA. Then tell us what happened.

PAIGE. I can't. I'm still processing it.

FRANKIE. Oh, come on, who died already--

PAIGE. No one.

FRANKIE. Of course.

OLIVIA. You called an emergency meeting to show off a new outfit?

FRANKIE. It is a good one.

PAIGE. I'm in mourning.

FRANKIE. Okay, what are you mourning?

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PAIGE. My past, my future, my common sense. (*Paige takes her fascinator off.*) Promise not to get mad and no judgement.

OLIVIA. Cross my heart. I'm here to listen.

FRANKIE. (*Frankie pauses and they give him a look.*) What? I'll try.

PAIGE. I was just minding my own business the other day and I bumped into an old friend. (*hesitates.*) It was Darren. (*Olivia and Paige scream from excitement until they come to their senses because Frankie is looking at them with disdain.*)

OLIVIA. What happened? I have to know what happened. But whatever happened, I assure you, whatever happens next is going to be okay.

FRANKIE. I don't want to hear another word.

PAIGE. It's the universe's fault, not mine. Apparently, it wanted us to share at least one more moment – and it was a good one.

FRANKIE. I hope you killed him on sight.

OLIVIA. He means with kindness.

FRANKIE. No, I don't.

OLIVIA. Sooo, what happened? How did he look?

PAIGE. He put on a little weight but otherwise he looked good. We talked like no time passed. It was nice.

FRANKIE. That's it? I can't believe there were no theatrics, or profanity or punches thrown.

OLIVIA. Did you finally get some closure after all these years? We need closure. (*Paige leaves the bar.*)

FRANKIE. Speak for yourself.

OLIVIA. You know, Frankie. The hardest shells are the softest underneath.

FRANKIE. Soft underneath? Girl, I'm not a Ferrero Rocher. I'm a diamond—cold, hard, and forged under pressure.

OLIVIA. Don't you want Paige to be happy?

FRANKIE. I want you both to understand that closure is a myth. Like carbs that don't bloat or men who know what they want.

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SCENE 4

Lights up on Darren on the park bench. He's jamming out with his headphones waving his hands in the air. Paige is walking with a coffee when she sees Darren but this time, because he's flailing his arms around, she sees his wedding ring.

PAIGE. Hey Darren. What? I don't believe this. Is that a...wedding ring? You said, "I really like my roommate." Well, no shit. She's your wife!
(Paige starts to leave.)

DARREN. Where are you going? Please don't walk away again.

PAIGE. Give me one good reason not to.

DARREN. I didn't mean to...I said roommate because I didn't want to hurt your feelings.

PAIGE. So you pretended to be single?

DARREN. That wasn't my intention in any way. Please. It just didn't feel like the right time. I know how much getting married meant to you and I'm really sorry that path didn't work out for us.

PAIGE. It didn't work out for us because you didn't want it to. Forget it. It was a long time ago. I don't really care.

DARREN. Do you see why I didn't want to tell you?

PAIGE. I thought you were going to stay single forever. That's what you said. It made me feel so much better to believe that. Please be careful what you say next, Darren.

DARREN. I finally--

PAIGE. Please don't tell me you finally met the right person.

DARREN. Don't be mad.

PAIGE. I'm not.

DARREN. Then why are you yelling at me with your eyes?

PAIGE. That's shock, buddy, not anger. Who did you marry?

DARREN. Does it matter?

PAIGE. Does it matter?!

DARREN. To be honest, I think you prepared me. You always used to say, "Partnership paves the way for a life well lived." I guess it finally just sunk in.

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PAIGE. Why are you throwing my words in my face? Christ, next thing you're gonna tell me is that you have children.

DARREN. Paige...

PAIGE. I'm afraid that this is a little too much for me...

DARREN. I should have just kept my mouth shut.

PAIGE. How many?

DARREN. How many what?

PAIGE. Kids.

DARREN. Two.

PAIGE. And a dog?

DARREN. Black lab.

PAIGE. And the house. You really signed up for the whole thing.

DARREN. What about you?

PAIGE. I own the business and the apartment I told you about. Both are amazing. Fulfilling. Wonderful. Everything I ever dreamed of.

DARREN. That's really great, Paige. Not necessarily what I expected. But I am happy you're happy.

PAIGE. I am. All my needs are fulfilled by Shiver-me-timbers. My cat, Darren. I sleep with my cat. We watch My Cat from Hell and we discuss how unruly felines are just like humans. Only we humans bite each other with words.

DARREN. A cat is not enough, Paige.

PAIGE. That is so demeaning! My life is exactly what I need. Too busy for people and their bullshit. "Oh, I love you. Oh, I've changed my mind." Dammit, dammit. You were one of my most treasured memories.

DARREN. Me?

PAIGE. Yes, you. But after today you -- and the memories will officially be retired.

DARREN. I don't know what to say. I didn't expect things to end the way they did. You were my favorite person. But all of a sudden, being in love wasn't enough for you.

PAIGE. You said we would be engaged in two years.

DARREN. Yes, I was unsure. For a second. I needed you to back off the subject a little, but not entirely. You disappeared completely.

PAIGE. Was I supposed to wait around?

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DARREN. Yes. That's what people do when they love someone. I like to think I would have come around.

PAIGE. Why?

DARREN. Because we had something special. But you, you wanted the altar and the rice and the death do us part...then bailed at the first sign of distress. Imagine how that made me feel.

PAIGE. Hard to get. It's called playing hard to get.

DARREN. Playing is not something you should do if you're serious about a long-term relationship.

PAIGE. Oh, please. Playing once in a while is what keeps long-term relationships alive.

DARREN. Are you implying that you would know?

PAIGE. Not implying, I'm saying it. I don't jump from one relationship to the next. I need time to purge the damage the previous person inflicted. Which, in your case, was a lot.

DARREN. You weren't ready. That's all. Why can't you admit it?

PAIGE. Ready. As if anyone ever is. Remember my friend Rhonda's wedding, where the groom literally shook the whole way through the ceremony?

DARREN. And when he kneeled you could see that somebody--probably himself, wrote "Why me?" on the soles of his shoes. I didn't do that.

PAIGE. Were you nervous on your big day?

DARREN. Honestly? I kept wondering if you would walk through the door.

PAIGE. This is worse than an old sad song. *(Paige grabs her phone to play the song.)*

DARREN. Oh, no. Paige, please. We don't need to commemorate our emotions with an over-the-top Broadway song.

PAIGE. Maybe not you, but I do.

DARREN. I don't think I can take it.

PAIGE. Will it give you tremendous pain?

DARREN. Probably.

PAIGE. Then this song is perfect. *(Paige hands him a headphone and sings-off key).*

PAIGE. BUT SHE IS YOUR LIFE

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THE ONE YOU ADORE
SHE IS YOUR EVERYTHING
AND SO MUCH MORE.
YOU FOUND THAT SPECIAL PLACE,
THAT EVERYONE IS SEARCHING FOR!
EVERLY-AFTER. EVERLY-AFTER.

(Paige wipes a tear from her eye and gets up. Darren stands, grabs her hand and pulls her close. Despite themselves they kiss.

Lights up on the bar table and Frankie and Olivia.)

FRANKIE. That's tragic.

OLIVIA. No, it's no biggie. Obviously, Darren's not happy if he's turning to her.

FRANKIE. Stop putting that nonsense into her head.

OLIVIA. He loved her first, the wife second.

FRANKIE. So Paige gets dibs? Interesting concept...if you're in middle school! *(Paige saunters in wearing the black dress from earlier as if she was in the bathroom.)*

FRANKIE. *(to Paige.)* Are you still in love with this dickwad? What does that say about you?

PAIGE. I didn't say I was in love. But how can I not be curious? Don't look at me like that, I know it's wrong but he was the love of my life.

OLIVIA. Was?! Are you sure he's not divorced?

PAIGE. He's not.

OLIVIA. Not really the answer I was hoping for.

PAIGE. It is bad, isn't it? I don't want to be a homewrecker but it's Darren and we kissed and he wants to see me again.

FRANKIE. That's trouble. What did he say exactly?

OLIVIA. *(to Paige.)* You've got nothing to lose if you do.

FRANKIE. Olivia!

PAIGE. I've got everything to lose. What if nothing happens? What if he breaks my heart again?

OLIVIA. What if he doesn't?

FRANKIE. *(to Paige.)* Jesus, I don't think I could go through that again. You give new meaning to the term ugly cry, girl.

PAIGE. He said he wants to meet to apologize.

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FRANKIE. For living?

PAIGE. For running away right after he kissed me.

FRANKIE. Like a nine-year-old?

PAIGE. His feelings overwhelmed him because he's married, he said. That's totally understandable, right?

FRANKIE. He doesn't have feelings. He's a cyborg.

PAIGE. He also said it was the most meaningful kiss he ever had and he would like more -- many more the next time.

FRANKIE. Mm-hm. Of course he did.

OLIVIA. This is getting steamy.

PAIGE. I'm spaghetti just thinking about it. This is crazy, I know. What should I do? I still have strong feelings.

FRANKIE. This is why people should bypass marriage completely. Just because you like Prosecco one day doesn't mean you won't upgrade to champagne on another.

PAIGE. I'm not entirely thrilled about being reduced to a fermented beverage, but I do hope I'm the champagne.

FRANKIE. *(to Olivia.)* What's the best-case scenario here?

OLIVIA. I think she needs to go.

FRANKIE. I'm sure she's going to go.

OLIVIA. If so, she's going to need our support.

PAIGE. Hello, I can hear both of you, you know.

FRANKIE. *(to Paige.)* Can you keep your wits about you?

PAIGE. Come on. Who do you think--

OLIVIA. No. She can't.

FRANKIE. You need to show some restraint, girlfriend. No kissing.

OLIVIA. Not even one?

FRANKIE. None! No touching, either. And absolutely no sleeping together.

OLIVIA. What will they do then, talk?

FRANKIE. Yes, talk. You need to interview this gigolo. Get inside his head. Find out what he's thinking about the two of you. See if there's a future or if this is just a shiny toy.

PAIGE. For me or for him?

FRANKIE./OLIVIA. *(emphatically)* Yes!

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SCENE 5

Lights up on the park bench. A day after the kiss, Darren is anxiously awaiting Paige's arrival on the park bench. She approaches from behind him and contemplates leaving, but he spots her -- an old-fashioned eye-lock, drawn to each other moment. Paige proceeds to the bench.

DARREN. Hi.

PAIGE. Hi.

DARREN. *(Opens his arms for a hug, but Paige puts her hand out for a shake.)* I bought you some flowers. *(He grabs them from the bench.)*

Actually, I didn't buy them. I picked them from a nearby flower bed.

PAIGE. You stole them? I don't remember you being cheap.

DARREN. I was hoping for more of an "isn't that sweet" response.

PAIGE. Oh. Well...thank you. It's a beautiful gesture.

DARREN. *(holding the flowers tight to his chest.)* It means the world to me that you're here, Paige.

PAIGE. Are you going to give me the flowers?

DARREN. Oh. Yes. Right. Sorry. I was sidetracked by the sight of you. These flowery blooms represent my feelings for you.

PAIGE. Are you sure? They're dying.

DARREN. Oh. Geez. Well, how about these healthy stems are symbols of our next phase?

PAIGE. They're not that healthy. Looks like our next phase is going to be very short-lived.

DARREN. This isn't coming out the way I wanted it to.

PAIGE. They kind of look like they've been stepped on.

DARREN. Stop. Once you put them in water they'll perk right up. They just need a little TLC.

PAIGE. I don't know, Darren.

DARREN. Like I did when I saw you yesterday. To new beginnings. *(He hands her the bouquet. Paige is moved and sits. Darren goes to give her a kiss, but she Euro kisses him.)*

PAIGE. I was so glad you changed your mind about wanting to meet at my apartment.

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DARREN. I can't believe I even asked. Once it flew out of my mouth, I knew it wasn't appropriate.

PAIGE. I've gotta be honest, for a minute I thought you were going to ask me to do something I wasn't comfortable with.

DARREN. *(quiet, then laughs.)* Then I guess having an affair is out of the question.

PAIGE. Darren!

DARREN. I know. Of course you wouldn't. *(waits for a second.)* Are you sure?

PAIGE. Oh my God. Is that why you wanted to see me?

DARREN. No, not entirely. No, really. I just wanted to see you again. I feel like I'm home when you're around. It's nice.

PAIGE. Then let's keep things light.

DARREN. Okay. But I really do want to see your apartment one day.

PAIGE. There's plenty of time. I'll be there until I'm old.

DARREN. You never know.

PAIGE. Why would I ever give up my apartment?

DARREN. You might find something you like more.

PAIGE. Like what?

DARREN. Waking up next to me?

PAIGE. How is that even a possibility? Last time I checked you were married. Married.

DARREN. Paige, my marriage is practically over.

PAIGE. You're just saying that.

DARREN. We've been having problems for a long time.

PAIGE. I'm sorry. Do I look like I was born yesterday? You're just saying that because you want to have--I can't believe you're even thinking it--an aff-

DARREN. That's not why. I honestly didn't realize how big my problems at home were until I saw you. You made me realize what I have is not wedded bliss.

PAIGE. Every once in a while I try to look at your Facebook page to get a glimpse of your day-to-day but I can't because it's private. I bet there's tons of pictures there showing plenty of wedded bliss.

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DARREN. You think so, huh? *(Darren whips out his phone and opens Facebook.)* I can't believe you tried to check it. I'm flattered.

PAIGE. Like you haven't checked mine. *(looks closely at his page.)* She's barely in any photos.

DARREN. I told you. We have problems. We're never together. And you. Why are you always at some work function with your crew?

PAIGE. My life is work, Darren.

DARREN. Maybe things will be different now.

PAIGE. No, thank you. I like my work-centric ways. My life is very orderly.

DARREN. You used to be a fly-by-the-seat-of- your-pants-girl. I used to love that about you. Obviously, you still have that spirit otherwise I wouldn't be here.

PAIGE. That spirit got me nowhere. Order got me my apartment and my business. I'm very by-the-book these days. The rewards are greater.

DARREN. But...you're alone.

PAIGE. What planet are you on? I'm not alone. I've got Frankie, Olivia and Captain Scallywag.

DARREN. Paige. Does the cat have an actual name? You've never called it the same thing twice.

PAIGE. Oh my God. How can you not know it's Billy Bones?

DARREN. Because you're always calling it "Arrrrgggghhhh" or "Matey." See? You always do things a little differently than everybody else. Maybe there's a little room for me in your life? For a new adventure with someone you know and might still care about.

PAIGE. I can't.

DARREN. Paige, I don't know anything about order being the key to success. My biggest triumphs come when I open my heart and let the wind take me. Romance is messy even under the best circumstance. You can't control it. It sweeps you off your feet and takes you where it wants to. Not the other way around. I'm supposed to be in love with my gorgeous and tolerant wife and earn my pals' envy for my great taste in women and ability to breed. You're supposed to stay locked away in a photo album. But you're not, you're here.

PAIGE. You asked to see me. That's the only reason I came.

IT'S STILL YOU

DARREN. That's not the only reason and you know it. You have feelings for me too. I can't stop thinking about you and I don't think you can stop thinking about me either.

PAIGE. That's irrelevant. You're married and I don't want to hurt anyone. We can't just--

DARREN. There's no logic to love, Paige.

PAIGE. Love?!

DARREN. You can't compartmentalize -- organize your feelings. That will get you nowhere.

PAIGE. But what about your wife? I keep thinking about her and I feel terrible.

DARREN. You don't know Jill. She'll probably be relieved. Six years with me is like sixty with anyone else. But it wouldn't be like that with me and you.

PAIGE. Are you going to tell her?

DARREN. Will you give me a reason to?

PAIGE. I don't know, Darren.

DARREN. Because I will. As soon as I have the right protective gear. I'm sure Amazon's got protective gear for when you've pissed off the Missus.

PAIGE. Darren, be serious.

DARREN. I didn't mean to upset you. Yes. I'm not going to hide the truth from her, and I'll be gentle telling her, when the time is right. I might not survive so just remember I wanted to revisit our relationship but you had rules that caused my demise.

PAIGE. You almost make it impossible to be mad at you. Almost.

DARREN. Then mission accomplished.

PAIGE. Yes, almost. These are serious matters.

DARREN. I know. I'll talk to her. I promise. *(makes the sign of the cross and Paige bows her head.)* What's wrong?

PAIGE. I still feel guilty just to be considering it. We should feel awful for a second. We should have a moment of silence for all the people we might hurt. We will hurt. *(bows her head again and sings horribly.)*

"WE KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG
NO, WE DON'T BELONG"

DARREN. You said a moment of silence.

IT'S STILL YOU

PAIGE. “HEARTACHE IS ALL THAT EXISTS
NO, WE MUST RESIST”

DARREN. Please make it stop. I’m begging you. (*looks to the sky.*) If off-key were an art form, she’d be Picasso. But I still adore her. Please, cosmos, let us have this relationship.

PAIGE. What did you say?

DARREN. I’m begging the universe to work a little magic for us. (*There are a few claps of the thunder and it starts to pour.*)

DARREN. That was not an answer! (*Paige laughs.*) What’s so funny?

PAIGE. The universe is conspiring against us.

DARREN. I don’t care. I can’t go another day without you. I’ve, I’ve been suffocating in my marriage for years because she isn’t you. That’s my fault, not hers. But still. Please, we can finally have our happy ending.

PAIGE. I appreciate your dedication, your determination, Darren. I really do but I’m gonna say no. It wouldn’t be right.

DARREN. We can do it. We just have to take it one day at a time.

PAIGE. You didn’t hear me say no?

DARREN. (*puts his hands over his ears.*) Did someone say something?
(*Lights up on Frankie and Olivia in the bar. Paige saunters in after the park.*)

FRANKIE. It’s nice to see you still have your clothes on. Good girl.

OLIVIA. Was it hard not to give in?

PAIGE. We were in a public place! He was beyond understanding, a total gentleman. And we’re going to be friends.

OLIVIA. Forever?

FRANKIE. She doesn’t know if she still cares for him yet. She has to do some soul-searching first. Right, Paige?

PAIGE. Right, Frankie. We’re going to meet in the park next week and talk some more and be platonic and stuff.

FRANKIE. You should sing to him. (*Paige exits.*)

OLIVIA. Please, Lord, no.

FRANKIE. Just one verse of *Wind Beneath My Wings*. Off-key and earnest—it’ll clear the place faster than a fire drill.

OLIVIA. Or spark one if Darren hurls himself into a lit candle.

FRANKIE. Exactly. Self-extinguishing romance. Very efficient.

IT'S STILL YOU

OLIVIA. You're brutal.

FRANKIE. I'm helpful. There's a difference.

OLIVIA. Not to Paige.

FRANKIE. Girl, Paige needs a reset and a terrible serenade might do the trick.

OLIVIA. So your whole plan is public humiliation?

FRANKIE. Yes. And I have a backup plan if she somehow hits a key.

SCENE 6

Lights up on the park bench where Paige and Darren are seated side by side. It is a week later.

PAIGE. You can do this.

DARREN. I don't know, Paige. It's never been my thing.

PAIGE. It's been six years. Surely you've evolved. For me?

DARREN. I'll try. *(Paige hands him a headphone and starts singing off key. He cringes as if he's in pain at every line.)*

PAIGE. "REMINISCING ON USED-TO-BE'S

YESTERDAYS GONE BY

ALL THE FUN, ALL THE HEARTBREAK

ALL THE QUESTIONS WHY."

OLIVIA. *(Lights up on Olivia and Frankie in the bar.)* I told you. Things are different this time. He passed her singing test.

FRANKIE. He must have been wearing headphones to drown out the sound.

OLIVIA. He loves her, Frankie.

FRANKIE. Or the wifey-poo is withholding on the horizontal mambo front and he sees an easy score.

OLIVIA. You make it sound like our best friend has no hope in the relationship department.

FRANKIE. She has hope. But she should stop aiming it at men with wives and tax returns that say "married filing jointly."

OLIVIA. He said they're in a rough patch.

IT'S STILL YOU

FRANKIE. So is my sidewalk, but I'm not dragging anyone through it barefoot.

OLIVIA. Maybe he doesn't live with his wife.

FRANKIE. Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster don't technically cohabitate. But they still count as a couple to me.

OLIVIA. Okay, now you're just being dramatic.

FRANKIE. No, Paige is being dramatic. We're just the ones buying snacks and pretending we're fine with it. *(Lights up on the park bench. A few more weeks have elapsed. Paige runs in at a very healthy pace.)*

PAIGE. *(over her shoulder)* You're doing great. Just hang on. You're almost there.

DARREN. *(Catches up. He is extremely disheveled and sopping wet with sweat. Terrycloth headbands, muscle T without the muscles. He's out of gas.)* Is it over? Please let it be over.

PAIGE. Sorry, but I'm going to need some squats. Twenty deep squats. Go!

DARREN. Why are you trying to kill me?

PAIGE. Because I've got questions.

DARREN. Just ask them. Please before I get poisoned by my own body fluids.

PAIGE. You've got kids. What about them? If...if we take the big step, how are they going to handle it?

DARREN. You're going to be one hot baby momma.

PAIGE. Darren.

DARREN. They're going to love you.

PAIGE. In time, maybe. But in the beginning?

DARREN. Me and their mother fight so much they'll be thankful for the change. And they'll be lucky to have you. I'm sure you have great maternal instincts.

PAIGE. I don't know anything about children. I could pick one of them up and drop them on their head when a work call comes in.

DARREN. Think of them as cats, with only two legs. You're good with animals. Children are like pets. Except they occasionally talk back.

PAIGE. I won't tell them you said that.

IT'S STILL YOU

DARREN. It's a win win. We'll be an instant family. No labor, no epidural, no stretch marks for you.

PAIGE. That is a compelling argument.

DARREN. All they need is food, baths, some discipline and love. You can handle that.

PAIGE. Under these circumstances? I don't know. Did you have "the talk"?

DARREN. With Jill? Not yet.

PAIGE. Then give me twenty!

DARREN. But we're in a friend zone.

PAIGE. For now. We'll see.

DARREN. Okay. I'm open. Can I get a kiss?

PAIGE. That would be cheating and we're not cheating. You have to tell her first. I can't believe you. You should be prepared to rise to the occasion for me every day! Squats, twenty more!

DARREN. You make everything too hard.

PAIGE. Ohhhhh. Too hard? You want to quit? Okay. Let's just do things that are easy and part ways now.

DARREN. That's not what I meant.

PAIGE. (*referring to herself*) You wanna get this? (*pointing at his stomach*) You gotta get rid of that. Squats, pronto!

DARREN. This is so unfair.

PAIGE. You've got to show me you're ready, Darren. That you're dedicated to me – that you can work with me.

DARREN. I don't think I like this new and improved you. She's kind of scary.

PAIGE. Oh, yeah? You've just earned yourself twenty-five push-ups after the squats.

DARREN. You should sit down and eat a doughnut. Or let me eat one. Either way.

PAIGE. Darren! Mo-ti-vate!

DARREN. You're in really great shape, which makes you an even bigger flight risk now. A doughnut will slow you down.

PAIGE. If you stick with the program, you'll be able to keep up with me if I decide to run away.

IT'S STILL YOU

DARREN. I didn't think of that.

PAIGE. Some added inspo. Let's go. We're going to sweat it out, and you're going to like it. Now drop! One! Two! Three!

DARREN. So...no doughnut then?

PAIGE. Drop! (*Lights up on the stage. Frankie is SR, Olivia SL and Paige center stage. Paige, Olivia and Frankie in a 3-way convo on the phone.*)

OLIVIA. So...the latest?

PAIGE. Well...he still doesn't love my singing.

FRANKIE. That settles it. He can't be the one. Come over and we'll celebrate — I mean, commiserate.

OLIVIA. You just have to give him time. He'll come around.

FRANKIE. Or not. (*Paige and Olivia scowl. Lights up on the parch bench. It is still late Fall. Paige and Darren are wearing Fall coats and sitting on the bench.*

Paige once again hands Darren his headphone and turns it on. They sit and listen to the music in silence until they are both moved to sing. That's right, both of 'em.)

PAIGE. "IT'S STILL YOU, IT'S STILL YOU
WHENEVER I'M LONELY"

(Darren surprises her by singing the next lines.)

DARREN. "IT'S STILL YOU, IT'S STILL YOU
THAT'S HAUNTING MY DREAMS"

PAIGE./DARREN. "TWO PATHS WE HAVE TAKEN
BUT THERE'S NO MISTAKING THE TRUTH

IT'S STILL YOU" (*Paige takes a moment while Darren bops to the upbeat song.*)

PAIGE. I'm ready.

DARREN. Are you sure?

PAIGE. Yes. It's time to tell your wife. Will you?

DARREN. I will, Paige. Yes. Absolutely. (*They hug. Lights up in the bar where Frankie and Olivia are deep in conversation.*)

FRANKIE. Falling in love is like watching a lunar eclipse. Beautiful, rare, until everyone you know turns into a howling lunatic.

OLIVIA. But it does light up the sky.

IT'S STILL YOU

FRANKIE. And burns your retinas if you stare too long. But yes—shine on, heartbreak moon.

OLIVIA. You make it sound like a disease.

FRANKIE. It is. Loss of sleep, loss of judgment, impulsive texting...

OLIVIA. *(sighs)* Elevated heartbeat. Irrational hope. Delusions of picnic compatibility.

FRANKIE. Exactly. Lunacy.

OLIVIA. But the good kind. The kind that makes you feel alive. Like anything could happen.

FRANKIE. Even if it breaks your heart?

OLIVIA. If it does...it was true. For more than one moment. *(They sit with that for a beat. Then Frankie groans.)*

FRANKIE. Ugh. I hate when you win the conversation.

OLIVIA. I don't win. I just remember what it's like to be brave. *(Paige runs in.)*

PAIGE. It's going to happen. I invited him over.

FRANKIE. Stooooooooopp.

OLIVIA. Frankie!

FRANKIE. *(to Paige)* You know that tingly feeling in your tummy right now. That's not butterflies--it's common sense leaving your body.

OLIVIA. I think it's wonderful. You've taken your time.

FRANKIE. Or, another perspective, run for your life!

PAIGE. You said you'd support me no matter what I decided.

FRANKIE. I'm having the second thoughts that you should be having.

OLIVIA. Marianne Williamson says, "When our minds move in harmony with love then mountains move and the universe shifts--"

FRANKIE. That should be when the mountains move and the wife shits a brick.

PAIGE. He's going to tell her.

FRANKIE. You say that like it's a good thing.

OLIVIA. Just go with love. Everything will fall into place.

FRANKIE. Abort! Abort! Save yourself while you still can! *(The girls both scowl again.)*

IT'S STILL YOU

SCENE 7

Blackout. Lights up on the park bench that's been turned into a couch. It is a few days later, Darren is sitting on the couch. Paige is frantically keeping busy by readying her apartment. She's very disheveled and underdressed.

DARREN. I can take a walk around the block and come back.

PAIGE. What are you talking about? You're right on time. *(Paige goes back to arranging the table--champagne, flutes and some finger food.)*

DARREN. You seem busy, maybe I should just--

PAIGE. I'll be done in a second. There. You now have my undivided attention.

DARREN. Someone seems...underdressed.

PAIGE. For what?

DARREN. What should we call it, a date? Yes, we're on the date that will kick off our great, messy and disorderly romance. *(Darren pulls Paige close, but she squirms away to avoid a kiss and starts busying herself again.)*

DARREN. I don't care about the finger food, honey.

PAIGE. I just want everything to be perfect.

DARREN. Tonight will be perfect, even if we sit here watching television all night.

PAIGE. Then I won't get to say my best line.

DARREN. What's that?

PAIGE. The best part of this outfit is what's underneath.

DARREN. Paige... *(Darren goes to her)*

PAIGE. No, not yet. I had a momentary lapse of reason.

DARREN. You surprised yourself and you liked it.

PAIGE. I need you over here. *(Paige points to a spot on the couch and Darren sits.)*

DARREN. Anything for you. My sole purpose in life suddenly is to make you deliriously happy.

PAIGE. Okay, then I'm just going to come right out with it. Did you talk to your wife? *(He has to think about that.)*

IT'S STILL YOU

DARREN. Yes.

PAIGE. Oh, Darren. Thank you. Are you okay?

DARREN. I think so.

PAIGE. Do you want to talk about it? You probably feel terrible.

DARREN. I don't want anything to get in the way of our evening.

PAIGE. But it must have been horrible.

DARREN. It wasn't easy. I had to practice what I wanted to say, what she needed to hear, so I could break the news gently. It took a lot of word-smithing, but I put my thoughts in order, and in the end, it went as well as could be expected. I told her everything was all my fault and she deserved better.

PAIGE. And how do you think all that landed? For her?

DARREN. Well, I suppose her feelings will probably change daily. But, to be honest, I imagine there was a lot of relief.

PAIGE. Yes, I imagine. Well, Darren, I want you to know, for sure, I'm here for you every step of the way. If you need to talk, we can.

DARREN. You are an angel. And I promise, I will never give you another reason to walk away ever, ever again.

PAIGE. And I will never pressure you to marry me again. You're here. That's all I need.

DARREN. You didn't want the ring, Paige. You wanted a lifetime together.

(She takes a moment.)

PAIGE. I did, yes. And I still do...

DARREN. The way you look at me when your guard is down. No one else exists in the world when that light shines in your eyes. But you have to have faith this time. You have to believe that we will be together because we were meant to be together. That we'll climb every mountain.

PAIGE. "WE MUST CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN
UNTIL WE REACH THE VERY TOP
CAUSE YOU AND ME, WE'RE MEANT TO BE."

DARREN. Paige, focus.

PAIGE. I want to...

DARREN. I need you to.

PAIGE. Do you promise to be one hundred percent honest at all times?

IT'S STILL YOU

DARREN. Always. Now, why don't you come over here and finally give me a kiss?

PAIGE. I have waited for this moment for so long. To be honest, I'm not even sure I know how to do this anymore.

DARREN. Do you want me to refresh your memory?

PAIGE. Yes, please.

DARREN. Eh-hem. The birds and the bees, chapter one.

PAIGE. Very funny.

DARREN. First, you need to come over here. *(She scooches over.)*

PAIGE. Then...?

DARREN. Then I put my arms here... *(She starts laughing when he puts his hands on her hips.)*

DARREN. I got you in your giggle spot, didn't I? *(Darren tickles her again and she laughs harder.)*

PAIGE. Stop. I'm going to pee in my pants.

DARREN. Okay, I'll put my arms a little lower.

PAIGE. Thank you.

DARREN. And then... *(He pulls her closer.)*

PAIGE. Yes?

DARREN. I'll tell you how beautiful you are.

PAIGE. And then I'll put my arms around your neck.

DARREN. And then we should--

PAIGE. Woooo-whooh! *(Paige pulls Darren in tighter and gives him a big kiss. He bends his knee and puts his heel in the air like women used to do in old movies.*

Blackout)

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