

REAL DEAD GHOSTS

a play

By Jonathan A. Goldberg

Draft 7

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CHARACTERS

AMBER: A wife.

GRAHAM: A husband.

TIME: present

PLACE: A cabin, in the woods, in the central United States.

BEFORE

GRAHAM and AMBER create the set as they speak.

AMBER

I have this dream -- I'm running

GRAHAM

Sometimes driving. Or.

AMBER

Moving forward. Suddenly it gets faster -- me -- everything is-

GRAHAM

Being pulled forward, the world is starting to blur, getting faster and faster. Trees, cars, and signs become -

AMBER

Dops of color, then colors pull into ribbons or spaghetti. Lines stacked-

GRAHAM

I'm moving so fast light doesn't have time to register with my eyes -- the dark takes over.

AMBER

And I'm not sure which way I'm falling. Forward, up, all or -- I can't tell, and it's suddenly

GRAHAM

It's suddenly.

AMBER

Gone. Nothing but me. Nothing but. I try to--anything. But

GRAHAM

Nothing.

They stop. The set is about done.

GRAHAM (cont.)

And then suddenly we're here again. Or at least it seems--

AMBER

You asked me once what was the scariest dream you ever had?

GRAHAM

You told me and falling and.

AMBER

And you said you had the same dream.

GRAHAM

I don't know why I said--

AMBER

Because you're always . . .

GRAHAM

Each time you tell it; I feel it, too. And it pulls us down,
back to the moment of. Moving but stuck. There.

AMBER

OK.

GRAHAM

Let's start. Again. Maybe get it right.

AMBER

Almost forgot the bag.

GRAHAM

It can't start without--

AMBER gets the ghost hunting bag.

AMBER

Ready?

GRAHAM

Ready.

END OF BEFORE

ONE

A cabin. GRAHAM and AMBER, a couple, are in the living room. GRAHAM sits, his face contorted. AMBER holds up a bag.

AMBER

And this? This was supposed to be our weekend. I had to beg work—

GRAHAM

It's only ... a little bit of—

GRAHAM mumbles.

AMBER

Don't do that, that mumble thing. I hate when you lie. You are always lying.

GRAHAM

It's not a lie. It's a mumble.

AMBER

We don't have time. Our anniversary--

GRAHAM

Technically our anniversary isn't until tomorrow.

AMBER

Five years.

GRAHAM

What is that the tin foil anniversary?

AMBER

Wood. Don't change the subject; omission is a lie. You omitted the fact you were bringing this ghost shit.

GRAHAM

I never lie about anything real, little stuff. I'm making a simpler narrative.

A pause. GRAHAM grabs the bag from AMBER.

GRAHAM (cont.)

Fine I brought my ghost hunting bag. Notice the little ghost I drew on the side.

AMBER

That's a ghost? I thought it was a lemon.

GRAHAM

I worked very hard on-it is sort of citrus-esque. Citrine?

(Beat.)

Look this cabin is over a hundred years old. People probably died all over this place. Right there. Or over there, or by the window. A guy could have gotten caught in the window and then a bear bit off his face.

AMBER

A bear?

GRAHAM

Or bobcat. Think of all the face eating that could have--

AMBER

Graham.

GRAHAM

Amber.

AMBER

Don't.

GRAHAM

You're right. I won't even unzip it. I'll toss it into the fireplace. Not really. There are some expensive things. But as a symbolic gesture I'm tossing it in. Now.

(Makes a tossing it gesture.)

Look at it metaphorically burn. And what kind of present is wood? Maybe a stick? An anniversary stick?

AMBER

There's lots of good wooden things. With that sandwich place being closed. I'll have to fix the schedule. Completely throws off the whole.

GRAHAM

It's fine—

AMBER

I spent a lot of time figuring out this trip. And it puts us behind, but if we go there for lunch. We can push back the hike. Hold on.

GRAHAM

To what?

AMBER

(Not listening.)

If we move the jam farm to -- then. Maybe.

AMBER gets out some papers shuffles through them.

GRAHAM

What is that?

AMBER

Our itinerary. Schedules. See. I thought it'd be funny if I made up a whole . . . you know. I want to make this, us worthwhile.

GRAHAM

How is this funny?

GRAHAM looks over some of the schedule.

AMBER

If we only spend 45 minutes at the frontier fort we can--what time does the fishing place close?

GRAHAM

This is. We could.

AMBER

What?

GRAHAM

This is very . . .

AMBER

I want it to be perfect.

GRAHAM

This has bathroom stops scheduled.

AMBER

Tripadvisor said some of these places don't have the best facilities or. It's good to be. They said the boat house bathroom was like a Moldavan train station bathroom.

GRAHAM

Who said that?

AMBER

Someone who has been to Moldova, I guess.

GRAHAM

Maybe Moldovan bathrooms are nice.

AMBER

No.

GRAHAM

See that's racist or something. Maybe in Europe? Is Moldova in-right maybe in Europe they go: "wow this place is as clean as a Moldovan bathroom."

AMBER

Are you done?

GRAHAM

I don't see why we can't. You know. Let it happen.

AMBER

"Let it happen." No. We are not named Rainbow wear hemp coveralls and live on an elderberry commune, we don't "let it happen." When you let it happen it all happens without you.

GRAHAM

It's not a big deal or.

AMBER

Ever since you quit the bookstore it-

GRAHAM

I've sold enough books.

AMBER

We met there.

GRAHAM

And that was the best day of my life . . . and that was six years ago. Nothing good has happened there since. And I'm including that signing where Dave Eggers pointed at me. What?

AMBER

When you worked at the bookstore you had. You would get dressed or at least leave the house. Now you.

GRAHAM

I get the mail.

AMBER

In pajamas -- Mrs. Olsen with that dog she said she was scared of you.

GRAHAM

Don't talk to her. Look. When that customer threw a copy of Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* - as it sailed across the fiction section, then history, then computer programming, a perfect arc -- I saw flying in *Freedom*, real freedom. *Freedom* was free, and I wanted to be free, free as *Freedom*, and free as that customer who was sick of a world where you can't throw books. And that book, *Freedom*, which is about *I don't know what* because I didn't read it--but if I did, I'm sure it would back me up--in theme and purpose--about my decision to quit the book store.

AMBER

I want you to be happy. And wear pants regularly.

GRAHAM

I have--

AMBER

Not sweatpants. Real pants.

GRAHAM

Ghosts make me happy. And you. Of course. You and the ghosts and dancing, because my fifth grade gym teacher said during our world dance unit I was the best square dancer he'd seen.

AMBER

Why did your gym class have a world dance unit?

GRAHAM

Gym classes are full of mystery. Why do they have that parachute thing? Why do we have to run back and forth picking up erasers? Watch my Do-si-do

(Do-si-dos.)

Later he killed himself. My gym teacher.

(Slows dancing, stops.)

Not because of. It was years later.

AMBER

That is. Not. I'm--

AMBER'S phone goes off. She checks it.

AMBER (cont.)

Shit.

GRAHAM

Don't! Don't answer it!

AMBER

It's. Hold on.

GRAHAM

Hypocrite! Where is cell-phone on this list-

AMBER

Shut up. Hello, yes, I'm here. OK, right.

AMBER goes off into another room.

GRAHAM

Hypocrite! Anniversary weekend. I'm putting a reminder in my phone right now; see I can use my phone too! It'll beep at midnight on our anniversary. I'm going to label it: "Squid day." I put a reminder for our anniversary in as "squid day."

How do you them cephalopods? I wish you were listening. You are not listening.

(Beat.)

Fine. OK, let's do a little paranormal investigation.

GRAHAM goes into the bag gets out a small recorder.

GRAHAM (cont.)

OK, spirit if you are out there, what is your name?

(Beat.)

Spirit, if you are out there, how did you die?

(Beat.)

Spirit, what is your name?

AMBER enters.

GRAHAM (cont.)

Spirit, how did you die?

AMBER

My husband killed me.

GRAHAM

That's sad, how did it happen?

AMBER

He bored me to death.

GRAHAM

Well maybe you need a real man. Me.

AMBER

You remind me of him. You must avenge my restless spirit, I have unfinished business.

GRAHAM

What is that?

AMBER

My husband never fulfilled me.

GRAHAM

Fulfilled? You mean sexually what about that time on the third night of Hanukah? We played strip draidel and--

AMBER

No, no. He was always off trying to find ghosts.

GRAHAM

Well that's a noble, reasonable hobby.

AMBER

He's gotten a little carried away lately.

GRAHAM

Lately?

AMBER

Um, before he killed me? Or. Boooooooo. Booooo!

GRAHAM

That works.

AMBER

Wait. If we ghosts can walk through walls, why don't they--I fall through the floor since the floor is a wall on the ground. Wouldn't I fall through the ground and into space?

GRAHAM

Yeah well ghosts possess many mysterious properties. And--

(Stops, turns to Amber.)

You're not actually dead right? Cause I really don't want to have that whole: I'm crazy and actually in an asylum. With the doctor who turns to the nurse and sighs: "Nope, still thinks he's in that cabin." And the nurse shakes her head but she's not really listening because she's thinking about her son who's off fighting overseas. Will he ever get married will he find-- so, um, alive. You're alive?

AMBER

As far as I know.

GRAHAM

Well that's good, I'm glad we're real. But what is real if--

AMBER

You need an off button.

GRAHAM

Broken, baby, my button is broken.

AMBER

Maybe you're not pressing hard enough.

GRAHAM

(Picks up tape recorder.)

Maybe we can record a little hard pressing session.

AMBER

You want to make an audio sex tape? With your ghost thing.

GRAHAM

It's a spectral recorder, why not. Visuals are so overrated, let's go old school, audio sex is the fastest growing market in the retro vintage sex market. Lucy said in Brooklyn they have a store that only sells--

AMBER

When did you talk to Lucy?

GRAHAM

Oh Lucy. That's not. OK.

(Beat. Course correct ion.)

I almost lied to you; I want you to know that. I am trying to be better. To be truthful and tell you when I get Chinese food or order pizza for lunch but I lie and tell you I made a sandwich, because I have a problem with food and-

AMBER

Lucy.

GRAHAM

Last week. She was. Visiting. Family. It was when you were working late.

AMBER

Was she in my house?

GRAHAM

No, she was not in *our* home-

AMBER

You didn't tell me.

GRAHAM

We got a quick drink at Bar Bar, that place with the. I think it's bar themed. A bar themed bar how novel. It was. Nothing.

AMBER

Then why didn't you tell me.

GRAHAM

I didn't want to fight . . . with you. Look I know you hate her, but. She's my friend. A very old friend. Dinosaurs. We are two dinosaurs in the night waiting for that comet to hit.

AMBER

And I'm the comet.

(Beat.)

I know you were in love with her since forever.

GRAHAM

High school. And it wasn't. That was before you. Before Amber. BA. 10,000 years ago BA. But now we're in Amber Dominae. AD. I love the AD.

AMBER

Right.

GRAHAM

It was forever ago. High school--I hated myself and girls scared me, because they were . . .

(Makes a gesture.)

Waaaah! Girls. And I was

(Gestures to himself.)

But much. I wore Hard Rock café t-shirts. Lots of them. Even a jacket. We only kissed twice. Once after we found out Joe Massamo died in that car accident and we were: "I hate that guy" cause he was a dick but we were sad he was dead - and what if we died and life got scary and, and we kissed. It makes more sense if you were there, but if you were there I would have kissed you, but we didn't know each other you were still in Portsmouth at your grandmother's because of--

AMBER

And the other time?

GRAHAM

It doesn't matter.

AMBER

It matters because high school was four years but felt four lifetimes. You're full of hormones and fluids and idealism and it's gross but everything means so much, you want to smash and absorb each other whole.

GRAHAM

That's dead all of that me is dead - it's true - every seven years most all your cells die and are replaced. A magazine said it. There are maybe 10 cells in my whole body that ever felt for her.

AMBER

Which cells?

GRAHAM

Pancreas mostly. She's going back to get her doctorate in history -- on McGovern. She always been pro loser. Probably why we got along so well. I'm sorry. I should have--

AMBER

It's. It's fine. Does she still wear that stupid purple nail polish?

GRAHAM

Tyrian Purple because it was created by the Phoenicians using this rare--

AMBER

It's so annoying it's always some historical bullshit with her. It can't be purple, it has to be smarter. Or.

GRAHAM

She's not always--

AMBER

Don't defend her.

GRAHAM

You never talk about high school, what about you, you're big-

AMBER

You know enough.

GRAHAM

I hardly know anything. Your dad. And Portsmouth, but.

AMBER

I moved here because there sucked.

GRAHAM

You're always on me about Lucy and shit but you. You are. Blank.

AMBER

Embrace the mystery.

GRAHAM

You're the one making this a big deal.

AMBER

What do you want, Graham? You want to hear about how my parents got me braces but then had no money for any follow up appointments so I finally chipped them off myself with a pen in 9th grade?

GRAHAM

No. I mean. I. Is that true?

AMBER

It doesn't matter. You can't do anything, I can't. It's gone.

GRAHAM

How did you. With a pen . . .

AMBER

Grit and determination. Geometry class was really boring.

GRAHAM

What did they do when you did that?

AMBER

Sent me to live at my grandma.

GRAHAM

You're teeth are.

AMBER

I'm lucky. It's over.

GRAHAM

So is Lucy—

AMBER

No, because you still live in the same shit town you were born in and you still run into those people all the time, and we see your high school English teacher at the Super Market or.

GRAHAM

So we'll wear disguises or. I don't like those people. I don't want.

AMBER

You don't know. You. It's fine. It's not. All, everything. It's stupid. Caring. Bothering. Planning.

AMBER gets the itinerary she rips it up.

GRAHAM

Don't. How will I know when to go to the bathroom!

AMBER

Let it happen! All over the place! The average mammal takes 21 seconds to urinate, you figure it out!

GRAHAM

Why do you know that!

AMBER

It sucks. Having to plan everything. You won't even pick a place to have dinner. You make me do it, because if I pick it and it's bad: my fault or—

GRAHAM

That's not it! I really don't care if we go to Admiral Chong's Kitchen or General Woo's Number 1 Restaurant! I don't even

understand why the Chinese military takes such an interest in their cuisine in the first place!

AMBER

There it is! Ha-ha!

GRAHAM

It must be hard.

AMBER

What?

GRAHAM

Carrying the world all the time. You know the sky stays up there--you don't have to keep holding it. And if it fell, it's not your job to put all the stars back.

AMBER

I can't count on you to put them back. I *have* to do it. Or things don't get done.

GRAHAM

We're not constantly falling apart.

AMBER'S cell rings.

AMBER (cont.)

Damn it!

GRAHAM

Don't answer it.

AMBER

It doesn't work like that.

GRAHAM

It can.

AMBER

Fine.

AMBER puts the phone down.

AMBER (cont.)

Look. I'm sorry I get busy. But. My time has meaning.

Her phone starts ringing again.

GRAHAM

You're better than me; I get it.

AMBER

That's not what I'm saying.

GRAHAM

Go ahead answer it.

AMBER

It's fine.

GRAHAM

GO AHEAD! You're staring at it like a cartoon dog looking at a bone.

AMBER

Why a *cartoon* dog?

GRAHAM

Because. It's always—

AMBER answers the phone.

AMBER

Hello? No I haven't. When? OK. Right. Yes.

GRAHAM

I was fired. From the bookstore.

AMBER

The server isn't. What?

(Into the phone.)

No, not you. Um. Hold on. I have to. Bye.

GRAHAM

I didn't quit. I was fired.

AMBER

Why?

GRAHAM

Because I was stealing.

AMBER

What?

GRAHAM

I worked at bookstores since I was in high school; my first job was at the B. Dalton's in the Brookdale Mall, back when there was a Brookdale Mall and B. Dalton's. Then I moved down to the store-that-shall-not-be-named AKA Corporate Shit Hole Books. And it was so stagnant. The same thing every day. Putting the same books on the same shelf. I saw everyone leave. She gets her degree. He gets married. They have a baby. Suddenly my co-workers were all younger than me. All full of brightness -- little flitting fireflies who were going to change the world, win the pushcart prize or invent an app that turns sadness into soup for the homeless. As if I hadn't heard it before. No, I don't care that all of you are going to see the cashier's boyfriend's dumb band called Martin Van Pooping! You're music is dumb! How do I know because when I was your age I enjoyed Ska! Ska!

AMBER

So it's about music? You don't even listen to--

GRAHAM

No! Not. Even some of them left. There used to be a guy, an old guy, Weird Pete and he'd always bring his own lunch and if you said hi to him he'd go: "mustard is making a comeback." And we all made fun of how he dressed and smelled -- how he was so pathetic to still be working here. And one day he was gone. And there was no weird guy. And you realize when you don't see the weird guy: you're the weird guy.

AMBER

You are not the weird guy.

GRAHAM

They called me Crackers. Behind my back, I heard them. Because my name is Graham so, ha ha I hadn't heard it since. They think they're so smart cause they were born in the 90's! You know what

else was born in the 90's? Crystal Pepsi - the worst Pepsi -- so fuck them!

AMBER

I don't see how that's-

GRAHAM

It's all Crystal Pepsi, Amber, it's all so sweet and clear and . . . Pepsi. Pouring all over--

AMBER

You need to-

GRAHAM

I was restocking the Americana section when I reached down and what did I see--*Steal This Book* by Abbie Hoffman. There it was *Steal this Book* and on the back the ISBN and bar code. \$17. I turned it around, the title daring me. *Steal THIS book*. So I stole it. Finished my shift and walked out the front door, book in hand -- no one stopped me, because no one cared. So I stole some other books. Books I wanted, books whose cover looked cool.

AMBER

Did you steal money?

GRAHAM

No. I'm not a crook.

AMBER

Yes you are.

GRAHAM

No, money is a whole other.

AMBER

Money at least would be useful.

GRAHAM

It's the principle.

AMBER

There's no principle! It's wrong!

GRAHAM

So are blood diamonds, and McDonalds, and CBS. But people still buy engagement rings, NCIS is the number one show. And fries are delicious. Life is unfair.

AMBER

You have to give them back.

GRAHAM

Screw them.

AMBER

You could go to jail.

GRAHAM

No, they wouldn't. Not for stolen books. They wouldn't even want them back it would mess up inventory.

(Beat.)

The store factors in stolen books. There's a percentage of theft they tolerate. It's called "Shrinkage." They knew I stole for a while, but it didn't make sense to fire me because of some dumb cost benefit equation. Eventually though they have to draw a line; catch me in the act. So they did with Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*. And they took me to the back room, and they sat me down and Chris the manager -- who I was there when they hired -- he gives me the whole: "I've known you since. And you are a heck of a." And I smile. I'm not nervous even, because what's it matter? Finally he says, "do you plan to steal that book?" As if I needed a plan! He and I both know those sensor bars at the front are fake. It's all show, even the security guard -- Rick -- is a retired social studies teacher from St. Francis who we only hired because he had his own blue shirt that looked like a police shirt. But here I am, the master criminal, with my hard won prize. Did I intend to steal *Freedom*?

"Absolutely." Chris doesn't know what to do. I wanted to explain; that being fired or working there doesn't matter: wars would still rage, presidents elected, people die, antelopes eat grass, the sole balance of the scales I'd throw off would be whether this copy of *Freedom* goes on my bookshelf, or theirs. That's what I learned from all those stolen books: it doesn't matter, no one is keeping score. And when I thought it mattered all I got was a half-finished liberal arts degree and a job selling books.

AMBER

That's not true!

GRAHAM

It is.

AMBER

So we don't matter, you and me.

GRAHAM

That's not what I'm saying.

AMBER

I matter! My job. We matter. This isn't meaningless.

GRAHAM

Retail is.

AMBER

There is a reason we do things we-

GRAHAM

Then there's a reason I stole. And that reason was the sheer joy; it filled me to the brim. The brim's brim. In that break room I meant something to them, I was more than a cog or a-

AMBER

Employee. A trusted employee.

GRAHAM

I was a nothing to them. Until I had *Freedom* and I took that book and threw the book across the store. And as security Rick escorted me out I yelled. "So that's Crackers for you!"

AMBER

That's crackers for you?

GRAHAM

I didn't have time to come up with something grander. Maybe: "clean-up on aisle go fuck yourself."

AMBER

But.

GRAHAM

The more they shrunk the bigger I got.

AMBER

How many books did you steal total.

GRAHAM

Total? More than a hundred.

AMBER

Christ. I knew we should have gone back to church. I wanted to go back but—

GRAHAM

This has nothing to do with that.

AMBER

You have no morals!

GRAHAM

They have no morals!

AMBER

They paid you money to work for them. In exchange for the shit you put up with they give you a check that you use to get green paper that you then exchange at stores to live on! It's a social contract!

GRAHAM

Well they didn't pay enough.

AMBER

NO! You are a selfish dick and you screwed it up! This makes me look. You'll never—and you lied to me! There's a way there's a path.

GRAHAM

Bullshit! There is no path, there's no point—

AMBER

Because you don't see it?

GRAHAM

Maybe I need you to schedule it out for me—

AMBER

Why do you fight against everything! There's good things in—

They yell over each other not listening until--

They stop. They look at each other. Something changes for a moment.

AMBER

I can't keep doing this. I can't. It's been so long. It's been. I can't.

GRAHAM

But if we get it right this time. We can move on. Or.

AMBER

It's not real Graham. It's. We already fucked it up—

GRAHAM

No, there's still. Please.

AMBER takes a breath, nods. AMBER and GRAHAM move back to their places and resume the argument.

GRAHAM

This stupid micromanaged weekend of yours isn't going to—

AMBER

If you were so unhappy we could have—

GRAHAM

What's with you and happiness!

AMBER

Happiness is the point.

GRAHAM

Of what?

AMBER

Everything. Us. The universe.

GRAHAM

What is it? How do you even know if you're happy? I don't even know what that is! Fine I'm happy!

AMBER

If you were happy you wouldn't be doing this! If you could be happy with me it wouldn't be this.

GRAHAM

Why do you care how happy I am! What's it matter!

AMBER

Because of this!

(shows her wedding ring.)

Because. Us. Our life. Our life together you idiot!

GRAHAM

Happiness is made up!

AMBER

Oh so ghosts are real but happiness isn't? If Lucy--

GRAHAM

Stop bringing her up! Who cares?

AMBER

I care!

GRAHAM

Why?

AMBER

Because I'm pregnant you stupid fuck. Why do you think I've been throwing up the past month!

GRAHAM

Bad oysters! Wait. Are you serious?

AMBER

Have you even noticed?

GRAHAM

I don't. It's . . .

AMBER

Don't. You can't bullshit through this!

GRAHAM

I'm not.

AMBER

You take everything and crunch it down into a joke so you can step over it. And we can't do this if you are still going to be. You.

AMBER goes to exit.

GRAHAM

Woah you do not get to say that and leave! You, you. LIAR!

AMBER

What!

GRAHAM

Omission is a lie how long did keep this from me, this is big! Bigger than any book I stole, even 1001 Irish Castles You Need to See Before You Die, that had a brick from a real castle.

AMBER

I didn't lie, I didn't—

GRAHAM

Let's stop lying.

AMBER

I didn't.

GRAHAM

Not forever. That would be stupid. But. Until our anniversary. We are completely, bug-nuts honest.

AMBER

Why?

GRAHAM

Because something is broken. And it's not. So no lies, promise?

AMBER

Fine. No lying.

GRAHAM

Good, real honesty. That's what we need.

(Beat.)

It's. How? Because we barely. Anymore and now.

AMBER

Because we *hardly ever* I stopped taking birth control because I gained weight. And I didn't think. Then that time you. And it was like the old times, when we couldn't wait we'd start undressing in the car and then run up to my apartment--tangled in your.

GRAHAM

I still want. But.

AMBER

We're too familiar with. It's OK, it's Ok to not to. That it dies a bit. But sometimes it's nice when it happens and I didn't want to stop it. Because we're.

GRAHAM

I love you.

AMBER

We're those invincible it'll-never-happen-to-us idiot Americans.

GRAHAM

I love you.

AMBER exits.

GRAHAM

We can still be idiots. We can still.

(Picks up a piece the itinerary looks through it.)

We can pencil in stupid time . . . on the . . . so . . .

GRAHAM throws the pieces of the itinerary all over.

END ONE

TWO

Sometime later. AMBER sits looking at the audience. This breaks the forth wall, but let's not get too theatrical about it.

Also there are now books on the stage, between each scene there should be more and more books.

AMBER

I was weird. Not cute girly cat glasses weird where I take you on a crazy date where we'd break into someone's apartment - put a bowtie on their cat and then dance on a bus eating lunchables until you learn to love again. No. I was the weird girl who took off my own braces with a pen, wrote poems about sharks and laughed too loud . . . and hit people. I was angry, then. Very. Once at the end of summer break, my friend Beth and me, drove cross country. We wanted to get to California, because they have a bear on their flag, so it has to be. That or New York, but tall buildings scared Beth because the word girder sounds like murder. Yeah I know, but. We drove through the desert or whatever Wyoming is. But when you're driving, it's nothing, long stretches of nothing but jack rabbits, and they run across the road with wild abandon. We tried. But eventually there are only so many jack rabbits before you give up. The first couple it was: "oh shit" and we'd cry and pray and imagine Mrs. Jack Rabbit explaining to little Jackie Junior that daddy wasn't coming home but eventually it's: thump. Another: Thump. Another. Thump. 24. Thump. 25. Thump. 37. Thump. 42. Thump. Thump. And it doesn't matter that you're killing these things. You push onward. We only made it as far as Carson City. I forget why.

(Looks around.)

But it made it easier. To let go. Thump. I'm not so weird anymore. I've let it thump away. Shark poems. Thump. Weird hair. Thump. Normal job. Thump. Answer company e-mail. Thump. You become numb to it.

(Beat. Checks phone.)

Work hasn't called back. The sun sets, Graham and I hide from each other in different rooms, hoping that -- sometimes after work, I'll sit in the kitchen and stare at the wall, and Graham will come sit next to me and say:

GRAHAM enters.

GRAHAM

What are you thinking about?

AMBER

I'll say "work" so he doesn't ask anything else. But I'm not thinking about work I'm thinking. About everything--ping-ponging . . .

GRAHAM

Tell me. Don't lie

AMBER

Jack rabbits. Vacations. California. New York. DC. Virginia. Williamsburg. Colonial Williamsburg. Do Black people go to Colonial Williamsburg? How do the re-enactors treat them - also do the Williamsburg re-enactors ever go to Plymouth Plantation which is set 200 years before Williamsburg -- so they'd be from the future but still from the past -- nostalgia, and that movie *Pleasantville* where Toby McGuire was obsessed with-- I used to mix up Toby McGuire and Jake Gyllenhaal: *Donnie Darko* then *The Dark Knight*--the Joker. *Some people call me the Space cowboy, some call me the gangster of love. The 20's, The Great Gatsby.* With Toby McGuire! Why was *Gatsby* in 3-D? 3-dimensions, alternate dimensions. Alternate states. *Altered States.* LSD. Drugs. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* - Which Toby McGuire had a cameo in! -- I used to read that book all the time in high school and I got drunk with Beth and we drove around yelling "we can't stop here it's bat country." Over and over and--was that the same road trip? Or am I merging memories because--the brain. I was so sad--why? 10th grade math class; word problems about dead elephants -- if 20 poachers sell 700 ivory tusks to Tobey McGuire for--I'm crying back on the couch and "what the fuck, why am I crying?" My heart is: thump, thump, thump. All of this bullshit so I make a plan. I take all the pieces and put them in a spread sheet and delete each cell one by one. Because I've seen it let loose, my brain. Or else it all becomes Tobey McGuire looming over everything. He should know better. He should be better than that. Better than . . .

GRAHAM

It's OK.

AMBER

It's not. I close my eyes for a second and I'm being pulled almost falling forward and everything becomes dots of color, and then colors pull into--so fast light doesn't have time to register -- the dark takes over.

GRAHAM

That's only a dream.

AMBER

Is it? Or.

GRAHAM

Don't think about that. Don't.

AMBER

Everything can be pulled from you so fast.

(Considers.)

So I line up a hundred jack rabbits in my heart and thump, thump, thump, until it all goes away. But isn't that fucked? And if I'm this fucked, how the hell can I have a baby. How do I tell a baby about Tobey McGuire. How do I make a list of--

Lights go out.

AMBER (cont.)

Shit.

END TWO

THREE

A few seconds after part 2. A message plays in the dark. More books.

RECORDING (V.O.)

(Musical tone.)

Thank you for calling I&M Power we are aware of the service outage in your area. We are working hard to restore power. Don't worry everything will be resolved soon. Have a happy day! This is not a recording.

(musical tone.)

Thank you for calling--

A flashlight beam comes from off stage, GRAHAM enters. He clicks on a second flashlight hands it to AMBER.

GRAHAM

Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.

AMBER

Is it better? Maybe I'd rather curse.

GRAHAM

OK.

GRAHAM turns off his light.

AMBER

Shit, fuck, cock. This is fun.

AMBER turns off her flashlight.

GRAHAM

Dick, vagina, melons.

AMBER

Melons?

GRAHAM

(Turning on his light.)

Melons, like for boobs. I panicked. Light is better.

(Beat.)

We could do both.

AMBER

No. It's either or. There has to be rules.

GRAHAM

Why?

AMBER

Rules are what separate us from the beasts.

GRAHAM

Do you think if a beast tried to make a rule other beasts would be "hey don't do that that's what separates us from the humans."

AMBER

Probably.

GRAHAM

But then some lion says "isn't not making rules a rule?" That fucks it all up.

(Beat.)

Why didn't you ever tell me about your braces?

AMBER

Why would I?

GRAHAM

Cause I want to. All this time.

AMBER

Does it change anything?

GRAHAM

Maybe.

AMBER

It's not a secret. It's.

GRAHAM

Do you still hate me?

AMBER

Shut up.

GRAHAM

I'm serious. You have to be honest that's the non beast rule we made.

AMBER

You made.

GRAHAM

It's only until Squid Day. Our Anniversary.

AMBER

Squid day?

GRAHAM

It made sense at the--we have to pace ourselves with honesty. Too much honesty killed the . . . uh . . . hmmm.

(He gets distracted by a piece of itinerary.)

This would have been nice.

AMBER

What?

GRAHAM

A waterfall.

AMBER

It's supposed to be as nice as this one in Hawaii.

GRAHAM

Which one?

AMBER

The nice one.

GRAHAM

That would have been. It could have changed everything.

AMBER

Probably not. It's only water. Falling.

GRAHAM

One of those things to see before you die. Or you regret it.
Like Paris or really good nachos.

AMBER

There's still time. We can go and look at it and everything will
be . . .

GRAHAM

There're so many things.

AMBER

I don't hate you; I love you, which is even worse.

GRAHAM

Well I love you, too.

AMBER

Not as much.

GRAHAM

That's not true.

AMBER

You don't even know what happy is, how can you say you love me.

GRAHAM

Because . . . when you're gone it sucks and when you're here
things don't suck so much.

AMBER

Well if that ain't love—

GRAHAM

What do you want me to say?

AMBER

Mostly I want you to shut up. It's fine. It can't ever be
equal.

GRAHAM

Love?

AMBER

Everything.

GRAHAM

How do you know?

AMBER

It's not your fault, I'm sure you love me as much as you can, but it's not the same. It's not as much.

GRAHAM

That's a shitty thing to say.

AMBER

It's not. It's. It's truth.

GRAHAM

That's not true it's an opinion.

AMBER

It's not.

GRAHAM

It's totally shitty.

AMBER

You had a good childhood so you love yourself. I had a shitty childhood so I love you.

GRAHAM

My childhood was not.

AMBER

Portsmouth wasn't so bad I wasn't a child soldier, but. The everyday suck of growing up poor white trash.

GRAHAM

Wait you're white? All this time I thought I married a Samoan.

AMBER

The dream is dead.

GRAHAM

I'm exotic, I'm half-Cuban.

AMBER

We still haven't figured out which half.

GRAHAM

mi corazón, mi alma, y especialmente mi pito.

AMBER

Your *pito* huh?

GRAHAM

Especialmente.

(Beat.)

I like the dark.

AMBER

Waiting for the ghosts?

GRAHAM

They're all around us. Watching.

AMBER

For what?

GRAHAM

For anything.

AMBER

Pervs. Is that what will happen when we die?

GRAHAM

Maybe. Or instead of them watching ghosts are the world's memories being revisited, moments in people's lives they can't get over so they relive it over and over, hoping to change it, hoping to move on. Their haunting is the manifestation of that wrong memory, that broken part of their life. Unfinished business kind of shit.

AMBER

Graham.

GRAHAM

Yes?

AMBER

Do you really believe in ghosts?

GRAHAM

I spent all that money on an EMP reader, so . . .

AMBER

You can't lie remember.

A long pause.

GRAHAM

Ghosts should be real. Because. Ghost stories are the best stories.

AMBER

Then tell me a ghost story.

GRAHAM

OK. Um. The Winchester Mystery House. That place is fucked. This old woman - Sarah Winchester -- kept building her house for over twenty years nonstop because of ghosts.

AMBER

Like ghost builders --

GRAHAM

She was the heiress to the Winchester rifle. She thought all the people killed by the rifle were coming to get her so she hid in this crazy house--getting advice from psychics to put in a door to nowhere and stairs that would lead to walls so the ghosts kept getting lost. She was always keeping herself one step ahead.

AMBER

Until, what? What happened?

GRAHAM

Nothing. She died. Now it's a tourist place.

AMBER

That's not scary.

GRAHAM

(Making himself spooking with the light.)
The admission is *scarily expensive!*

(Beat.)

It's because. It's. A house of unfinished business. A house that could never be completed could never be a home.

AMBER

What about her ghost? Did it get stuck in there, too?

GRAHAM

Maybe. Maybe she died and then joined all the ghosts looking for her, and she forgot who she was and became another angry ghost looking for this bitch who trapped them.

AMBER

It's kind of reverse Pac-man.

GRAHAM

A reverse Pac-man sounds like a sex thing.

AMBER

Gross. Ugh, he's like a bright yellow pizza with shark eyes. I do not want that thing near my things.

GRAHAM

It's not reverse really; the ghosts are chasing Pac-man most of the time. Her ghost could be reliving running away from ghosts over and over because she can't figure out how to escape them.

AMBER

She should do what Pac-man does, eat that thing and they turn blue.

GRAHAM

Power pellet. In the higher levels it doesn't even stop them. Then if you get to a certain level the game goes crazy and you die.

AMBER

So you can't beat Pac-man?

GRAHAM

Nope, it kills you. There's nothing you can do, even if you're the best, you still die. Business unfinished. I'm sure there are ghosts of gamers haunting arcades because they can't beat Pac-man.

AMBER

Stuck playing the same levels . . . putting quarter after quarter into the--

GRAHAM

At least we get to be together.

AMBER

That's not fair.

GRAHAM

It's not fair that that Pac-man should live in a maze and spend his days eating things and getting chased by ghosts.

AMBER

It should have an ending.

GRAHAM

What?

AMBER

Something good, um -- the ghosts were all him from the future come to teach him about Christmas. That but better.

GRAHAM

What if he was the ghost and they were the alive things.

AMBER

No, that's dumb. Maybe he realizes ghosts don't exist and then he can leave. He walks away--

GRAHAM

He doesn't really walk, he more--

AMBER

He *whatevers* away, down a street then maybe into a grocery store or a movie theater and it's over.

GRAHAM

What's over?

AMBER

All of it, Mrs. Winchester leaves the mystery house. Pac-man hitchhikes the American Southwest and finds himself . . . at Burning Man.

GRAHAM

Gross. You want to go to Burning Man?

AMBER

Not me. Pac-man.

GRAHAM

What does he want from Burning Man?

AMBER

Naked hippie chicks I guess or more drug pellets. Maybe he sees those ghosts because he's eating all those little circles. He's a junkie. He should leave. We should leave.

(Beat.)

Why do we stay here?

GRAHAM

In this cabin? We just got here.

AMBER

Ha. Ha. No in. Here.

GRAHAM

Where would we go?

AMBER

Anywhere else. Where people don't know us.

AMBER goes to the pile of books, she looks at one.

AMBER (cont.)

Kittens for dummies?

GRAHAM

I showed them.

AMBER

Why is this a book?

GRAHAM

You'd be surprised. 90% of books are bought for decoration. They should sell them by the pound like deli meat. You're still mad.

AMBER

Less and less.

GRAHAM

What happens if it doesn't go away, or if one day all those little pieces of angry collect to create a wall of hate?

AMBER

We'd deal with. I deal with it. There's two possible options: it happens or it doesn't. That's it.

GRAHAM

But.

AMBER

You deal with it. One time I was with my dad at this social worker, because. That was my life. I had this rash, and the social worker said I should get this special soap, and I laughed, and I said they'd never buy that for me. Right in front of dad, and in the car ride home he hit me, the only time he really ever. And he said: "you don't tell them anything you don't ever tell them." And eventually the rash went away. And so did the bruises. And so did the social worker. And so did. Thump, thump, thump.

Long beat.

GRAHAM

Let's never fight again.

AMBER

OK.

GRAHAM

You're lying.

AMBER

No I'm agreeing to an improbable future, but I am saying -- as of now -- I would enjoy never fighting again. It's unlikely but not a lie.

GRAHAM

Are you really pregnant?

AMBER

Yeah.

GRAHAM

How long?

AMBER

We have time it's early.

GRAHAM

Well how about this, you keep that baby inside you for a few years while we sort everything out, cure wars, end disease, learn to tango, and figure out what aioli is and why it's so popular.

AMBER

Sounds like a plan.

GRAHAM

A shitty plan.

AMBER

For shitty people.

GRAHAM

For our shitty lives. Are you happy?

The lights come back on. AMBER gets up.

AMBER

It's a shitty miracle, for us shitty people, in our shitty lives, for our shitty world.

GRAHAM

Are you?

AMBER

Happy? Not lately. Not since. Sometimes. At night when my feet are really cold and I press them against you and you sort of jump and snort but stay asleep. I'm happy then for a minute or two.

END THREE

FOUR

GRAHAM alone on stage. Again fourth wall breaks, but let's be casual about it.

GRAHAM

One tool of ghost hunting is the audio recorder. You go to a haunted area press record and ask questions. Spirit, what is your name? Spirit how did you die? You can record the dead in the static. When you listen back you can hear them. Hidden in the everyday noise, the background noise. Refugees of history long drown, shut out from the normal human ears. An echo, a last statement. I haven't personally heard anything. Static. One time I thought I heard a ghost say hamburger, but was a commercial on a TV in another room. For hamburgers. But. I'll find the talking; history calling back from the void.

(Beat.)

Lucy loved history. Her father was a professor at the college. They would take Americana road trips every summer. She smelled like candy necklaces and kept pens in her hair. All those wonderful new things you crush over. Those feelings you still love even though you've push past her. She is past. Mostly. I want to be with Amber, I love being with her -- but sometimes you want. Lucy. We're different now; we've shed teenage quirks and gained new new things. I don't even know what her favorite movie is anymore but back then I could trace the lines of her palms. Lie in bed and build every inch of her. Now I've forgotten whole swathes of our past. We've become foreign countries with cultures and customs and words unknown separated by a new ocean full of monstrous whales and all the ships get stuck halfway between ...

(Beat.)

When she comes to town we trade broken memories. She forgets, I forget. We remember. We pretend. I'm not sure what, but we pretend.

AMBER enters. She looks at him.

AMBER

What did you talk about?

GRAHAM

Crassus.

AMBER

Don't lie.

GRAHAM

I'm not. We were talking and this memory hit me and I told her about it. Before she left for her big Gettysburg trip which was also when she got back her mom had moved out and . . . but before she left she was obsessed with Crassus.

AMBER

What's a Crassus?

GRAHAM

He was part of the first triumvirate with Pompey Magnus and Julius Caesar.

AMBER

I would have beat you up so often if we went to high school together.

GRAHAM

She was upset that no one knew about Crassus that he was like this forgotten guy. Even though he was interesting and died by having gold poured down his throat.

AMBER

That sucks.

GRAHAM

Yeah they knew how to kill people back in the day.

(Beat.)

How is it someone can be so famous and so popular and then nothing, he falls off the world. It's unfair. Caesar yes but Crassus no?

AMBER

Caesar, he did all kinds of shit. That salad . . .

GRAHAM

She cried. And grabbed me and I remember her saying, how he's gone and then we'll be gone And cemeteries all full of people who are now only rows of rocks. "I don't want to end up only a stone, she said. There has to be more -- I have to grab on to Crassus and carry him in my backpack and take him to Spanish

club and bowling practice and, and keep it safe. Someone has to love his ghost. I have to." That whole memory hit me again from whatever lost crypt it jumped from.

AMBER

And what did she say? When you told her?

GRAHAM

She didn't remember. At all. She took a sip and laughed. Said: "Crassus was an asshole. He deserved it. Fuck Crassus," And then she looked at me with her gray eyes.

AMBER

Do you still—

GRAHAM

I never cheated on you.

AMBER

That's not my question.

GRAHAM

I almost kissed her. This last time.

AMBER

Shit.

GRAHAM

I didn't.

AMBER

Why?

GRAHAM

She stopped me.

END FOUR

FIVE

AMBER and GRAHAM sitting across from each other.

AMBER

Honest, real honesty. Right?

GRAHAM

Yeah.

AMBER

I did. Cheat on you. Once. Before we were married.

GRAHAM

What?

AMBER

Are you?

GRAHAM

With who?

AMBER

This guy. I met him at a bar back in Portsmouth when I was visiting my family. I didn't know his name I didn't want to. I was dealing with mom. Dad was dead; we had that fight, remember our big fight.

GRAHAM

It's why I didn't go up to.

AMBER

I wanted to fuck someone else. Since you were the only one.

GRAHAM

Did you enjoy it?

AMBER

I didn't know him, we were both too selfish to enjoy it much, we didn't care about learning about each other's secrets -

GRAHAM

The armpits.

AMBER

Beyond sex. I didn't ever want to get to know someone again, all those little asterisks and footnotes. It was good in that beast way in that rule-less beast way.

GRAHAM

Why didn't you tell me before?

AMBER

Because there was nothing that could be done. Because it would only hurt you. But I could hold it inside, I could control it, something terrible about me, that when I do hate you or get upset I know I have this thing. An anchor. A control of.

GRAHAM

Yeah well I don't believe you.

AMBER

You don't have to.

(Beat.)

I didn't cry after my dad killed himself, but I cried after I fucked that guy. And

GRAHAM

I would have fucked Lucy, if she'd have wanted it. I would have bent her over the bar and fucked her. I would have fucked her back to high school, when I was smart and the teachers liked me and I knew that when you finished 10th grade you went to 11th grade and you took honors chem. And it all was all a straight path . . .

AMBER

Go on.

GRAHAM

I thought about the shape of her body, I let my eyes drag across her and I thought about how I would carve away her age and mine until we could go back to that moment, until our dead teenage selves could come back and we would fuck in the way that only teenagers can, as if the world is ending and they're forever. And I'd say all the shit I didn't say to her and

AMBER

Thump. Thump. Thump. Until it's over . . .

GRAHAM

Then I'd beat my teenage self to death with a shovel. Because he's an arrogant dick. And he made the mistake of turning into me.

AMBER

And Lucy?

GRAHAM

We're done. That was the last time.

AMBER

Bullshit.

GRAHAM

No, it's good. Because I hate her: for leaving, for growing up, for my insecurities, because when I see her I always shrink back. Recede.

AMBER

Did you tell her that?

GRAHAM

No I'm a coward. But . . .

AMBER

But?

GRAHAM

She was reading this book on memory that said the way we remember - it's as if a little Benedictine monk transcribes each memory fresh again. Our brains are illuminated manuscripts. So the more we remember -- the more mistakes and typos get in. But the monk burns the previous version. The original is long gone. As soon as we remember something, the real memory is lost. The imperfect copy takes its place.

AMBER

So . . .

GRAHAM

She wanted us to think about each other so much, so often, remember everything every moment, every conversation until that

little monk in our head is so burned out that all our memories of each other become lies and change until we become so abstract and obtuse that we wouldn't recognize each other on the street.

AMBER

Is that even possible?

GRAHAM

I don't know. But then she said she'd think back on my awesome body and how amazing--

AMBER

She did not say that.

GRAHAM

No.

AMBER

You lied. You lose.

GRAHAM

It's not a game.

AMBER

It is, the ghost got you, Pac-man, you die. You die alone in the maze and become a ghost and wait for another Pac-man to try his luck but you know he's doomed because the game is rigged by a programming error.

GRAHAM

So I leave the maze, I walk away.

AMBER

You can't.

GRAHAM

I can, because it makes me happy.

AMBER

Yeah well me fucking too.

A pause.

AMBER (cont.)

So the ghosts the memories they're stuck in. Are they true or is it a lie?

GRAHAM

Does it matter?

AMBER

We don't even know what we're trying to escape.

GRAHAM

How do we know anything—

AMBER

We can't -- even if all this is fake -- it's real. To us. To you and me, here and now. Stuck. With each other. With this life. Not stuck. But. Stuck.

GRAHAM

Things are going to keep breaking.

AMBER

We had to break a lot of things to get to each other.

*They both exhale and put their hands on the table.
GRAHAM's phone beeps.*

AMBER

Happy squid day.

GRAHAM

We can lie again.

AMBER

Or we can keep telling the truth.

GRAHAM

Sure. You first.

AMBER

Everything will be all right.

GRAHAM

We'll never fight again.

AMBER

This baby will make everything better.

GRAHAM

It keeps getting better and better.

AMBER

We can't keep going, but we'll keep going. Until.

GRAHAM

Until . . .

END FIVE

END PLAY