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Tea time in Langtang: a play

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Tea Time in Langtang
A Play

By Gibson Collins

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Environmental Humanities.

Whitman College
2016
Characters

Sydney: a 19 year old girl
Lirung: a mountain, a friend of Sydney’s
Paul: Sydney’s older brother
Diane: Sydney’s mother
Gibson: Paul’s friend

Any others (Stewart, Soldiers, etc.) can be double-casted. Except for Lirung. Lirung may not be double-casted.

The following oscillates between four primary settings: the Langtang Valley in Nepal, Paul’s house (the porch, the kitchen, or the backyard), a storage closet in a Nepalese forensics office, and phone calls. There may be others.

Lights up on Lirung.
He smokes a beedi.

LIRUNG

It’s days like today that make me realize just how much this world is governed by random chance. Simple. Fickle. Random chance.

He takes a drag.

LIRUNG

If this were a movie, this is the part where I’d say that the following is based on a true story. But this not a movie. So the following is just a true story.

He plays Amazing Grace on the harmonica, and the lights come up on Gibson. Gibson stands on stage holding an ornate rosewood box of ashes. He wears a nice, brown, leather jacket that’s too big for him.

GIBSON

Hi there! You’re probably wondering what’s in the box. My friend, Stewart, passed away last March from lung cancer. Well.

He raises up the box to the audience.

GIBSON

This is him! Imagine that. A whole body. Made small enough to fit in a box. He was ninety-two when he died so I guess it’s not that big of a deal. The whole lung cancer part’s got me thinking: ya know, maybe this is a sign. Maybe God’s telling me I should
stop smoking! But lung cancer at 92? #lifegoals if you ask me. Beat. Anyways. You know how some folks get old but never stop seeming like they’re still just kids? Stewart was kind of like that. We were always just buds. His wife taught my sisters ballet when they were younger. When I was a kid I used to write these poems for my family’s Christmas card. Some shit my mom made me do. Anyways, this one time at ballet practice Stewart went up to my Mom and said,

STEWART

That was a really lovely poem on your Christmas card last year! I tried looking up some of the lines on the internet but I couldn’t find the writer. Would you mind telling me who wrote it?

GIBSON

That’s when she pointed to ten year old me sittin’ on the bench. Ever since we’ve been writing buddies. When I was a kid, we’d meet every Sunday and make sandwiches and soup and do timed writings for twenty minutes at a time. Stewart taught me an artist’s discipline. He taught me to see the world. He taught me to see the value in writing when the adolescent world around me was telling me not to. Sometimes we’d go for walks and talk about plants and all the microscopic worlds that bustle within plants. Beat. This one time, when I was a little older, he told me about World War II and the time he fought in the Battle of the Bulge. I guess he had to do some pretty messed up shit back then which is strange because he’s so gentle now. Or. He was so gentle. Anyways, when he got back from the war he went straight to Broadway and became an actor. Soon, he was writing movies for Hollywood! You know Rebel without a Cause? That was him! Kind of a crazy transition; from the Battle of the Bulge to the big screen to becoming best friends with James Dean. The first time he met Jimmy, he was sittin’ on a swing chair on a barn porch in northern California. Stewart took the chair next to him and they just sat there like that. In silence, looking out over acres of California farmland. After a few minutes of nothin’, Jimmy finally turns to Stewie and goes,

JAMES DEAN
mooooooooooooooooooO00000000000000000000!

GIBSON

Naturally, Stewart responds,

STEWART

MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

GIBSON

And they just sat there like that! For TEN MINUTES! Mooin’ up a storm before finally introducing themselves. Writer and actor. United to make the best coming of age movie ever. Stewie always said that after that first encounter on the barn porch, he knew they’d
always be buds. Beat. Man. It really messed Stewie up when Jimmy died. That car crash really did something to him. A star went out that night and Stewart felt it. Beat. Stewie. More like Super-Stewie if you ask me. Except it took me a while to see past all that Clark Kent. I guess you learn things about people when you get older. Laughs. You know it never seemed weird. Hanging out with this geezer. Cuz he was a really cool geezer. And he never even really seemed like a geezer. Just a friend. And a mentor. Beat. As he got older, though, the cancer really got to him. His mind started playing tricks. I’d come over and ask him to write but he’d just shake his head. His left eye started seeing the world the way a kaleidoscope does and his hand could no longer hold a pen. We’d find out later that the lung cancer had metastasized to his brain. Some nights I’d come over and sit in his big leather office chair and we’d drink wine and I’d talk about the girl that was breaking my heart at the time or about wanting to travel the world. He’d listen. And laugh. And give me advice. But as the cancer got worse he got angrier and wouldn’t laugh as much. His mind was deteriorating faster than his body, but we couldn’t see that. He’d get fixated on certain things I’d tell him and start yelling at me to stop getting my heart broken. I just. I couldn’t understand where his head was at. Beat. But even then, he was still Superman to me.

He bows his head and rubs the box.

GIBSON

It was strange going to see him in the hospital before he died. It’s just. It’s weird to see someone you care about in the middle of death. Not before. Not after. But right in the middle of it. That’s a weird spot. His wife called me in right at the last minute. I had no idea what to expect because she wouldn’t tell me what his condition was before I arrived. When I showed up he looked like a skeleton baby. Comatose. His body so shriveled and small. His cheeks sunken in like caves. His jaw bones stuck out like knives. His eyes withdrawn into big shaded pools. Marilee, his wife, told me he’d waited for me to come see him before passing on to the other side, which he did two days later. She said he didn’t want to disappoint anyone. Not on that side nor on this one. So I held his hand. I remember it felt so warm. Feverish even. I sang him songs. I cried. I watched him wither away in white hospital bed sheets. I sang him lullabies. I kissed his forehead. I tried to leave but I couldn’t stop singing him songs. I just wanted him to know I was there. I couldn’t say goodbye. I had to literally rip myself away from that hospital bed. I had to walk out the door and not look back. That was the only way I could do it.

Lights up on Sydney. She holds a cardboard box in which her mortal remains are stored. She’s in a stale, dusty, dank forensics office in Kathmandu, trapped in a storage closet. She talks to the audience. She can hear Gibson.

SYDNEY

Hi. My name’s Sydney. Can you get me out here?
GIbson

Now all I have is this box of ashes. It’s made of rosewood. It’s beautiful isn’t it?

Sydney

Please?

Gibson

This might sound weird but sometimes I talk to it.

Sydney

I’m stuck inside this cardboard box.

Gibson

I rub my hands along the smooth grain of the walls of his new home and I pretend he can hear me. Beat. Hey Stewie! Can ya hear me! I’m right here! Holdin’ your box!

Sydney

Can you hear me? I can’t breathe. It’s stale. And really. Cardboard? You couldn’t have put me in a nicer box?! And all these other boxes full of dead people won’t stop talking. Like I get it. We’re dead. It sucks. And we’re stuck in these stupid boxes in this stupid storage closet. Which like, really sucks. But complaining about it isn’t going to help anyone. We gotta try and find a way out of here!

Gibson

I don’t know if he can actually hear me or not but I guess it doesn’t hurt to try.

Sydney

To Gibson. Hey you!

Gibson

So I close my eyes and I listen.

Sydney

Hello!?

Gibson

Kind of the way I imagine Luke Skywalker would listen if he was holding a box of Obi-wan Kenobi’s ashes.

Sydney

HELLOOOOOOOOOOO…?!
GIBSON
I let the world go quiet around me and I listen real hard.

SYDNEY
Listen to ME, Gib!

GIBSON
Sometimes I think I can feel his heart beating. Through the box. I can hear it. *Thump-Thump, Thump-Thump*. Just like that. I know it sounds silly.

SYDNEY
This is pointless.

GIBSON
But it’s kind of reassuring. Like. This one time I was sitting on a park bench and a raven flew up next to me and looked me right in the eye. Something in those deep dark pools looked so familiar. Like I could see Stewie looking back at me. Like he was watching me through the eyes of animals.

SYDNEY
Or maybe it was just a bird.

GIBSON
I don’t know. Maybe I’m crazy. But experiences like this really make me feel like the universe has a consciousness or something. I don’t know. *He shakes his head.*

SYDNEY
Maybe. If you’d stop talking so much. And started listening. You might actually hear ME!

LIRUNG
He can’t hear you.

GIBSON
There’s something really strange about communing with the dead. Especially when they’re in boxes.

SYDNEY
Boxes? HELLO!!! I’M IN A BOX!

LIRUNG
Give it up Sydney.
GIBSON
At first it’s kind of creepy. But then you relax and realize it’s kind of amazing. Like the hand of God’s on your shoulder and she’s just standing next to you. Telling you it’s all gonna be okay.

SYDNEY
CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?!

LIRUNG
I can.

SYDNEY
Fuck you.

LIRUNG
Hey now.

GIBSON
I miss you, Stewie.

*Sydney glares at Lirung.*

GIBSON
Oh! You’re probably wondering about this awesome leather jacket I’m wearing! Yeah, yeah. I know. It’s waaaay too big.

SYDNEY
This guy.

GIBSON
It was Stewart’s. He gave it to me before he died. I’ve been wearing it a lot recently because it’s so comfortable but it’s also really nice so I don’t want to mess it up too bad. Beat. Man. A weird thing happens when you wear a dead person’s clothes. Whenever I put this jacket it on I feel like I’m stepping into Stewart. Or he’s stepping into me. It feels. Protective? Like there he is. Right there. Like it was yesterday. I know it took a while for him to pass, but something about it felt so sudden.

SYDNEY
What would you know about sudden?
GIBSON
He gave me this jacket and he said,

STEWART
Gibson! You make the right choices now, ya hear?

SYDNEY
It’s a trip let me tell ya.

GIBSON
And I asked him, “Well, Stewart, how will I know if I’m making the right choices?” And he just said,

STEWART
You’ll know Gibson. You’ll know.

SYDNEY
Holding a box full of remains.

GIBSON
Ugh. THANKS Stewie.

SYDNEY
Holding a box full of your remains.

GIBSON
It’s a nice jacket though, hunh?

He checks out his new jacket.

SYDNEY
Is it cold in here?

GIBSON
Fuck. Another thing. So I was riding my skateboard to class today.

SYDNEY
It feels cold in here.

GIBSON
And a friend of mine waved at me. So I smiled a big ole shit-eating grin and waved back. All of a sudden, one of my wheels hit this FUCKING seed pod on the ground. The whole
skateboard stopped and I went flying through the air so high. SLO-MO style. Everyone watching. My cup of coffee spilling everywhere. Man. It was a mess. I landed with a big old thud right on my shoulder.

SYDNEY

Maybe you shouldn’t be so careless.

GIBSON

Damn. I just got this jacket and I already scraped up the shoulder and spilled coffee all over it. Probably shouldn’t be so careless. Not too banged up though. Beat. February 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2015. 2/2. Stewie always had somethin’ for twos. And spring time. It’s really weird. All the people in my life have a way of dying in February. Or April. I don’t get it. Like, everyone dies right before spring time.

SYDNEY

Sorry to inconvenience you.

LIRUNG

Be nice.

GIBSON

I’m gonna miss you Stewie.

SYDNEY

I miss my mom.

GIBSON

I’m gonna miss you so much.

SYDNEY

I miss my dad.

GIBSON

Oh fuck.

Gibson pinches the bridge of his nose.

SYDNEY

And my older brother.
GIBSON

I forgot to tell you about Sydney.

SYDNEY

And Chloe. Chloe’s my dog. I think she’s going to die soon.

GIBSON

Oh man. That was really rough.

SYDNEY

I miss the smell of Seattle leaves in autumn

GIBSON

Still really rough.

SYDNEY

and jumping into Lake Washington in the summer time.

GIBSON

She also died right before spring. Or maybe just as spring was starting. April 25th, 2015. The Langtang Valley, Nepal.

SYDNEY

I miss being alive.

GIBSON

I miss you Sydney. I didn’t know you well but fuck I miss you.

SYDNEY

God damn it.

GIBSON

It was all my fault wasn’t it.

Paul careens on stage full blast.

PAUL

SYDNEY!??!

SYDNEY

Oh. DAMN it.
PAUL
SYDNEY WHERE ARE YOU!?

SYDNEY
That’s my brother. He’s looking for me. He’s kind of sad right now.

PAUL
COME OUT, COME OUT WHEREVER YOU ARE!

SYDNEY

PAUL
I’VE COME TO TAKE YOU HOME! Beat. Pip?

Lights out on Sydney.

Paul and Gibson stand on a line parallel to one another looking out, oblivious to the other’s presence.

GIBSON
It was my fault.

PAUL
It was all my fault.

GIBSON
It was my idea.

PAUL
I shouldn’t have told her.

GIBSON
If I hadn’t. If I just hadn’t—

PAUL
I shouldn’t have told her how great it was.

GIBSON
If I hadn’t taken him with me.
PAUL
If I hadn’t gone. If I hadn’t told her to go.

GIBSON
If I hadn’t gone.

PAUL
Maybe she wouldn’t have.

GIBSON
Maybe he wouldn’t have. And then maybe she’d—

PAUL
She wouldn’t have gone there.

GIBSON
She definitely wouldn’t have gone there.

PAUL
She would have just gone to school like she was supposed to.

GIBSON
He might have finally gotten his applications done and not fucked around like I did.

PAUL
She wouldn’t have fucked around like I did.

GIBSON
If I’d just stayed home.

PAUL
If I’d just gotten my shit together.

GIBSON
If I hadn’t given him the idea.

PAUL
If I hadn’t given her the idea.

GIBSON
If I just hadn’t.

PAUL
If. If I’d just.
If. God if—

PAUL

FUCK!

Gibson jumps. He sees Paul for the first time. His eyes reach out in empathic culpability. Lights out on Paul and Gibson.

Lirung takes the stage. He’s a mountain. He probably smokes a pipe. He looks like something the cat dragged in. Something dressed in leather. Someone who carries his whiskey in a paper bag, cast in the frame of an old Langtapa yak herder, dressed in traditional Nepalese garbs or mountain rags. He wears a dress of prayer flags. His full name is Langtang Lirung, but he goes by Lirung. Or sometimes Larry. Larry knows things. He smokes. He picks up a guitar and starts to play part of Oscar Isaac’s “Hang Me, Oh Hang Me.”

LIRUNG

D   G   D
Hang me, oh, hang me, I'll be dead and gone
Bm   G   D
Hang me, oh, hang me, I'll be dead and gone
Bm
I wouldn't mind the hangin'
D     Bm
But, the layin' in the grave so long, poor boy
Bb   A   D
I been all around this world

D   G   D
Went up on a mountain, there I made my stand
Bm   G   D
Went up on a mountain, there I made my stand
Bm
A rifle on my shoulder
D     Bm
And a dagger in my hand, poor boy
Bb   A   D
I been all around this world
Are you familiar with Hugh Everett’s Multiple Worlds Theory of quantum physics? I’ve been thinking about it a lot lately. This idea that at the moment a thing becomes possible, a whole universe is born to contain that possibility. It’s incredible. Think about it. If we take Everett’s theory to its logical end one must assume there exists an infinite number of different worlds, so alike yet so different from this one in which we find ourselves. Of course, Everett invented this theory within the narrow context of the Austrian physicist, Erwin Schrodinger, and his cat. You know the story. 1935. The dawn of World War II. Schrodinger places his cat in a sealed box next to a flask of poison which, depending on whether or not a certain radioactive atom decays, will be smashed, killing the cat. Now, if we take seriously the precepts of quantum physics at the time, which would have us believe that an entity exists as all of its possible states at once until the moment it is observed by an outside witness, then we have to conclude that Schrodinger’s cat is, until the moment Schrodinger looks at it, BOTH alive and dead simultaneously! But see, Schrodinger didn’t expect us to take seriously the precepts of quantum physics at the time. And that was the point. He, like most of us, believed in common sense. He knew that the might of our senses does not invent the world as we experience it. An objective reality exists which we can touch, feel, taste, smell, and see. One governed by laws. One which we can trust to provide us with a stable perch in this mad reality. Beat. But I think Everett might have been on to something. Think about it. What if, at the moment the cat’s placed in the box, at the moment the cat is presented with two possible fates, both manifest themselves simultaneously, but in two different worlds? What if, at the encounter of two possible outcomes, the universe splits, bifurcating into two tracks to accommodate both. One in which the cat lives. And one in which the cat dies. Both universes equally real. Equally palpable. Yet at the moment of bifurcation, never again crossing paths. He takes a drag. Now, I’m just a simple Himalaya. The math behind this theory far surpasses the bounds of my rocky understanding. But take an earthquake for example. One that flattens a village after it triggers a landslide on the mountaintop above. If we apply Everett’s theory to this scenario, at the moment the earth rocks and buckles the universe splits in two. One in which the mountain lets go of itself, killing four hundred and sixty-eight living, breathing human beings. And one in which it doesn’t. I find that notion reassuring.

He takes a drag.

It is not true that anything is possible.

Everything possible already is.

These are the laws of the universe in which we live.

One of many.

At the conception of possibility, realities are born to accommodate both fruition and extinction.
Unfortunately, the world in which this story unfolds is the one in which the flask of poison has been, irrevocably, broken.

Paul and Gibson crash on stage full blast. It’s late April of 2012, three years earlier. Big ass backpacks on their backs, bandanas round their sweaty brows, high wool socks and leggings and shorts. They trek on upwards through the Langtang Valley making occasional stops. Lirung remains on stage because he’s a mountain and the boys are in his domain now. The boys bound and bound and bound their respective ways up the rough dirt trail through the valley, hopping off rocks and dirt and dodging pack mules and yaks and running around and exploring everything, overwhelmed by the Himalayan inundation.

GIBSON

LET’S GO. LET’S GO. LET’S GO. COME ON!

PAUL

kyeeeeeAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!

GIBSON

HOLY SHIT MAN. THIS PLACE IS GREAT. THIS PLACE IS GREAT!

PAUL

AYEEE AYEEE AHHHHHHHHH!!!!

GIBSON

kyyyyeahhhh!!!!!

PAUL

Yo dude. I dare you to touch that yak.

GIBSON

Who me?!

PAUL

Yeah dude. I dare you to touch that yak!

Gibson lays down his backpack. He gets closer and closer and closer to the shaggy white-coated yak which eyes his approach. Gibson bends down and reaches a hand out
to pet the yak. The yak grunts in annoyance and rears its head. Gibson pulls back. Tries again. The yak finally relents and lets Gibson pets its furry back.

GIBSON

Hah!

PAUL

Nice! Okay let’s roll.

*Gibson stops to take a picture of a flower.*

PAUL

C’MON man! Let’s keep moving. Let’s keep moving man. Why you gotta stop and take so many pictures? C’mon let’s GO!

GIBSON

I KNOW. I KNOW.

PAUL

We gotta get up there! We gotta get up there! We gotta lotta valley to go man! We gotta get up there. We gotta get to the top man!

GIBSON

Alright, alright I know! I’m sorry. I’m comin’. I’m just. I’m just so excited. I’m just. Gotta capture it all. I gotta capture it all man. WeeeeeoooOOOO! LOOK AT THESE MOUNTAINS!

PAUL

Come ON MAN! Let’s GO!

GIBSON

Okay, okay! Wait we need walking sticks.

PAUL

You’re right. You’re right.

*They walk into a grove of bamboo.*

GIBSON

How we gonna do this?
PAUL

Here.

Paul pulls out his Leatherman.

GIBSON

They gotta be perfect though. We gotta find the perfect walking sticks.

They search.

PAUL

These ones look pretty good. Pretty straight. Pretty solid.

Gibson pulls out the saw tool from Paul’s Leatherman and tries cutting free a stalk of bamboo

LIRUNG

Ouch.

GIBSON

Fuck. This is kind of hard.

He struggles to saw free the perfect walking stick.

LIRUNG

OUCH!

PAUL

Go at it harder man.

GIBSON

It won’t go.

PAUL

Just go at it harder!

GIBSON

I can’t.

PAUL

Here. Let me see.
Paul grabs the Leatherman and hacks free one perfect walking stick from Lirung’s base.

LIRUNG

Seething. Mmmmmm……

PAUL

Ah dude sweet. Look at that! Paul admires his new staff. Alright here you try. You just gotta go at it harder.

He does. And after some grunting finally pulls free his own stick. Lirung looks incredulously at the boys.

LIRUNG

GOD DAMN IT!

GIBSON

Ah check it out!

PAUL

Nice man! Alright let’s roll.

GIBSON

Wait look at that river.

PAUL

That river?

GIBSON

Yeah. THAT river! We gotta jump in it.

PAUL

You’re RIGHT!

The boys remove their packs, their shirts, their trousers, and jump in the ice cold snow melt. Brisk. Refreshed.

PAUL

WOOOOOO!
GIBSON
COLD. COLD. SO COLD.

PAUL
HOLY SHIT!

GIBSON
AHHHH! TOO SKINNY FOR THIS. TOO COLD.

PAUL
YOU SKINNY BITCH! HAH! YO JUMP OFF THAT ROCK.

GIBSON
YOU’RE RIGHT.

  He does man.

GIBSON

   They dry off and dress and hoist their too-heavy packs onto their weary and refreshed shoulders. Brisk. Enlivened. They move on.

GIBSON
Phew. Phew that felt so GOOD!

PAUL

GIBSON
Free man. I’m free man. So free. I feel free like jump off the side of a mountain free and fall forever free and run the hell up this shit—LET’S GO.

PAUL
WOOOOOOOO!!!!

   They bound up the valley. An energy wells up within the fragile frames of their fragile bodies, threatening to bubble over and burst out. They bound off stage, hollerin’ all the way.
LIRUNG

I may not know how tectonic plates express grief and rage, but I know that they do. Just ask any one of my siblings. Except Everest. Don’t ask her. She’ll talk your ear off. Beat. See, I’ve spent the last few centuries bumbling through epochal bloodlines and ancient ancestries trying to navigate the parentage of stone. Striving desperately to pin down my place and heritage in this geologic jigsaw puzzle of moving crust and bone. Inanimate is a misnomer and I should know. I’m made of granite. Beat. Oh. My goodness. I haven’t even introduced myself yet! My name’s Lirung. Langtang Lirung. I’m roughly 55 million years old, I watch over the Langtang Valley, and when the Indian continental plate came rising up from the south some eons ago crashing into Eurasia, I was BORN. UP-lifted in fact. Raised to the sun and sky by my tectonic parents and told to be a hero. Told to be the tallest. Told to be a monster. They told me to be a Himalaya. When the Indian plate slid beneath the Eurasian plate in the process your geologists call subduction I sprouted. And I’m still sprouting. And believe it or not, I still have growing pains! Just like you. What else would you expect? How else do you acquire such sharp edges, serrated spines, knobby necks, and jagged peaks? To speak nothing of an adolescent litany of cataclysmic tendencies? I’m still growing. Inanimate is a misnomer and my parents fight a lot. Just like yours, they do well for a time. Centuries without a spat. But I can always tell when they’re about to fly off the rails. I can smell something boiling underground. I can feel the flexing of rocks and taste the slow creak of tension building along a fault-line, ready to snap like an elastic band. You might have higher expectations for parents as old and presumably wise as those who birthed the tallest mountains on earth, but I’ve learned that parents don’t become adults just because they fuck a baby into this random world. I’m sorry. Tectonic uplift is just such a sterile way of putting it.

He takes a drag of his cigarette.

LIRUNG

Sometimes, a lot of people die when my parents fight.

Paul and Gibson crash on stage.

PAUL and GIBSON

WOOOOOOOO!!!!! OWW OWW AAAAAHHOOOOOOOO!!!!!

They howl in unison from atop the summit of Kyanjin Ri, the high point of the Langtang trek tucked away at the north end of the valley. They can hoot and holler throughout Lirung’s speeches. Or they can just enjoy the vista and the heights like Americans on mountains.

LIRUNG

But these boys? These boys don’t know nothin’ yet. They’re just boys. Two bumbling American boys propelled upwards through this valley to this summit by some ancient internal stirring. The same one which thrums in the blood of mammals as it does in the
blood of rocks. Beckoned by a call that hums in the rivers of their veins as it hums through Nepal’s circulatory system of Himalayan snow melt. This call. The same one that thrust me between plates of rock and into the wide blue sky.

PAUL and GIBSON

AAAA-OOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!

LIRUNG

But right now it’s only April 25th, 2012. And these boys don’t know nothin’ yet. They don’t know just how deadly this playground can be.

From the peak of Kyanjin Ri the boys can see China to the north and the rest of Nepal unfolding sharp and wide to the south. They scream. As if to undo the seams of the world which bind it and all its contents neatly together. They scream that it might all spill out in one isolated moment. They scream as if to scream the world asunder. Lines of Tibetan prayer flags billow violently above their heads. Ravens arch across the serrated sky-line, tracing its contours against the horizon. The jagged, snow-capped Himalayan peaks erupt skyward to encompass their cries as well as the valley into which they shout. The boys stretch their arms back and lean their chests into the mountain wind which suspends them in space, holding back their bodies from tumbling down into the yawning valley below. From here they can see it stretch away into the distant south like a beautifully brutal gash in the earth. Like the maw of some geologic animal prone to long periods of silence and violent fits. Its benevolent harshness finds definition in the hardiness of its inhabitants. The shaggy thick coats of yaks, the chiseled crookedness of bent Sherpa backs, the calloused hands of dairy farmers, the smoke scented hospitality of the guest house village families who take in tourists like Paul and Gibson and cook them dhal in the warm shelter of their humble homes.

PAUL and GIBSON

AAAA-OOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!

LIRUNG

They might learn to be a bit softer in their approach to this place. I don’t mean to be a buzz-kill, they’re just so loud. So loud in an otherwise quiet landscape. And while these, my fellow mountains, may be loud they contain equally a subtle stillness. It might do these boys some good to sink in and settle. To absorb this place. Steep their rambunctious souls in the aged and mellowed wisdom of these ancient peaks. To open their eyes to the spectrum of mountains. To let what we have to offer sink in and settle.

GIBSON

Oh my God.
PAUL
HOLY SHIT.

GIBSON
Oh my God.

LIRUNG
I guess by now I should know better. After centuries of watching over this green, white, black, and yellowed yawn of pastoral valley I’ve learned it’s always the Americans who scream and shout whenever they reach the top.

PAUL and GIBSON
YAHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!! AO. AO. AOOOOOOO!!!!!

LIRUNG
The Langtang Valley.

Oh yes.

Silent and still and running.

PAUL
Holy shit man.

LIRUNG
Come out to play.

PAUL
Ho-ly shit.

LIRUNG
Don’t expect to leave unscathed.

GIBSON
I feel great.

PAUL
Look at that.

GIBSON
I feel great.
PAUL

LOOK AT THOSE FUCKING MOUNTAINS!

They take a single moment of silence
to absorb the profundity splayed out
before them.

LIRUNG

Perhaps there’s hope yet.

GIBSON

I need a fucking Snickers.

Lirung palms his face.

PAUL

We’ve only got…

Paul sits on the cornice behind him,
lays down his walking stick, and
rummages through his pack.

PAUL

Oh good we’ve got two left.

GIBSON

I would have killed you for it.

PAUL

Hah. You could try. And FAIL.

Paul chucks the bar at Gibson.

GIBSON

God. I’m so hungry. So stupid.

PAUL

Fuck that ATM machine.

GIBSON

We should have brought cash.

PAUL

Fuck that ATM machine!
GIBSON
FUCK that ATM machine!

LIRUNG
There have been worse problems in Nepal than the malfunctioning of a rural Himalayan ATM machine.

PAUL
I feel like we’ve literally been surviving on hash and tobacco for ten days straight.

GIBSON
I didn’t think food would be so expensive up here.

PAUL
I thought that ATM machine would work.

GIBSON
Thank God you brought the guitar.

PAUL
Thank God you can play. Shit we’d be starving otherwise. There’s no way we’d have made it up here.

GIBSON
We wouldn’t have starved.

PAUL
I know you’re skinnier than a tooth pick but I cannot—I repeat CANNOT—live on one packet of ramen a day for ten days straight while gaining 10,000 feet of vertical elevation. I’d have eaten your fuckin’ head off. I almost ate your fuckin’ head off.

GIBSON
Really?

Paul considers this for a moment.

PAUL
Fuck yeah man! I still might.

GIBSON
Rude. Pause. Thank God for the kindness of strangers though.

PAUL
Thank God everyone likes music. You can put food on the table with song man.
GIBSON

Man. How rich is this. Two white fuckboys go to Nepal, forget cash, trust the ATM in Syabru Besi to work, and end up having to BUSK just to make it up the valley. I feel so stupid.

PAUL

Hey. We made it up man.

Paul pulls a packet out from his front pocket and withdraws a stick of tobacco wrapped in a tendu leaf.

PAUL

Beedi?

GIBSON

You put hash in it?

PAUL

Maybe. He smiles.

The two boys drag preciously on the warm smoke. After a minute:

GIBSON

Can I ask you somethin’?

PAUL

Shoot.

GIBSON

Growin’ up, as kids, could you imagine we’d ever make it to a place like this?

PAUL

Hell no. I never thought I’d leave the country. He takes a drag. Thanks man.

GIBSON

For what?

PAUL

For getting me out here.

GIBSON

Oh c’mon. I didn’t get you out here.
PAUL
Yeah you did! I mean hell if it weren’t for you I don’t think I’d have ever left the States last summer. Let alone my parents’ basement. And even here. If you hadn’t come down out of Uttar Pradesh last month and dragged my ass out of Delhi, I don’t think I would have made it out. I don’t think I would have made it up to Nepal. I was happier n’ a clam smoking myself into a hash coma. Which don’t get me wrong. I appreciate as much as they next guy. But man I was stuck.

GIBSON
Yeah.

PAUL
Nine months is a long time. It’s easy to get stuck.

GIBSON
Easy to get lonely. Beat. Man, I’m really glad we met up. It wouldn’t have been the same comin’ up here without you. By myself.

PAUL
Word.

They each take drags.

GIBSON
This man.

PAUL
I know.

GIBSON
Look at this!

PAUL
I know.

GIBSON
I’ve never been anywhere this big and beautiful. I feel like I’m in a big infinite bath of mountains. I feel like it could just go on like this forever!

Gibson looks out to the edge of the far horizon. He closes his eyes, crosses his legs, and starts to meditate. Paul gives him a Charley horse.
OWW!!!

Ah c’mon.

That hurt!

Don’t be such a pussy.

Paul rummages two Gorkhas from his pack.

Here. For your pains.

They open the bottles and take long swigs from their beers. They continue to smoke.

Wooo! Man that’s good. That is so good.

Thank God for beer man.

Thank God for fucking beer.

Thank God for cigarettes.

Thank God for mountains.

Thank God for dhal and hot rice.

Thank God for sleepin’ on cold grounds.

Fuck that man, thank God for sleeping bags!
Thank God for bamboo.

Thank God for yaks.

Thank God for cheese and people who give us free food cuz we’re schmucks!

Thank God for music.

Thank God for cold rivers and jumpin’ in ‘em.

Thank God for sittin’ by ‘em.

Thank God for glaciers.

Thank God for clouds. And rocks. And. And thank God for-

THIS! Man, fucking look at THIS!

The two look at THIS. And finally listen…

The boys enjoy the silence and the view. Then a raven flaps overhead.

CAW-CAWWWWWWW!!!!

The boys stretch wide their arms and become ravens for a moment. Lights out on the boys.
Can you feel that? Can you hear the wind blow? Can you hear the silence scream? Can you feel the pressure rise and boil and the stones *creeeeak* waiting to release from under the weight of far too much accumulated strain? Can you feel the earth about to snap like an elastic band beneath your feet? Can you feel the plates prepare to slip along the fault where lovers’ lie and lie and lie alongside their unspoken conflict lying dormant for centuries? Can you feel plates prepare to give way from under the heat of too much intimacy? Gears grind and still things move. The earth thrums, mountains grow, and continents shift in an endless dance of crust and bone. Can you hear the sounds? No. You can’t. You humans. You fancy yourselves evolved but you’ve fallen from those senses that ground you to the ground beneath your feet and the grass that grows upon it. In the clamor of your electronic epilepsy of images you’ve lost touch with the rhythms that birthed you. You’ve come undone. Now come undone. Listen close and you won’t be so surprised when the world comes crashing down upon you in heaps of rock and ice. Listen. Listen closely. There’s a taut stillness. Too still. Waaaay too still. Like a spring coiled tight, ready to pop. It rests heavy and languid on the air. It crawls up my spine like ants. Like a cold breath blowing gently on the back of my neck. Can you feel that?

*Its three years later. Paul sits on his bed at home. His face flickers in the light of his phone into which he stares.*

**SYDNEY**

**HEY BROTHER!**

*We hear Sydney’s voice over facetime. She connects with him from an internet café in Kathmandu.*

**PAUL**

YO YO YO! Doin’ good, Pip?

**LIRUNG**

It’s days like today that make me realize just how much our world is governed by random chance.

**SYDNEY**

Oh. My. God. This place is SICK.

**PAUL**

Far cry from the Rockies?

**SYDNEY**

THIS PLACE IS INSANE!
LIRUNG


PAUL

Just wait till you get out of Kathmandu. The mountains just get bigger and bigger. FUCK. I’m jealous, Pip.

SYDNEY

Yeah, yeah. You had your chance. She laughs.

PAUL

So. You gearin’ up? Ready to go, ready to roll?

SYDNEY

Yup!

PAUL

Remember what I said?

SYDNEY

Yup! We got so much food. SO much food. We’ve packed so much food Paul.

PAUL

And cash?

SYDNEY

Yup. Yup. So many rupees. All the rupees.

PAUL

You can’t count on that ATM machine in Syabru-Besi.

SYDNEY

We’re set. Don’t worry.

PAUL

I’m serious Pip. You gotta be prepared for the worst. You don’t wanna end up like Gib and I. No food. No money to buy food. Singing songs and playing guitar, hoping folks will be nice and give you food but mostly just surviving on hash and cigarettes. At 15,000 feet that’s a bad spot to be in Pip. You gotta be prepared. You gotta be prepared if you’re gonna make it to the top Pip.

SYDNEY

We got hella GU Paul. And Clif Bars. And ramen. So much ramen. I mean SO much ramen.
PAUL

What about pepper spray?

SYDNEY

Yup.

PAUL

You hear about the female trekkers that got attacked in Langtang last month?

SYDNEY

Yup.

PAUL

Those soldiers at the China border post are no good. You gotta watch your back.

LIRUNG

How shaky this ground beneath our feet.

SYDNEY

Anyone tries to mess with me, I’ll fuck ‘em up. You know I will.

LIRUNG

How tenuous this perch.

PAUL

I know, Pip. I trained you well. You just gotta be prepared.

LIRUNG

How tenuous this claim to life and loved ones.

PAUL

Gib and I didn’t have that shit to worry about. Y’all do. And the two of you will be alone a lot of the time.

SYDNEY

I know Paul.

PAUL

You gotta be prepared for the worst, Pip. You never know what could happen out there. It’s a long trek and it’s high up and it’s remote and you gotta have food cuz anything can happen out there. Someone might steal your cash and then you can’t buy food. And someone might try and kidnap you and if you don’t have pepper spray…
SYDNEY
I know!

LIRUNG
The earth may know things about love but it knows a lot more about death.

PAUL
And you gotta have food. No way you’re makin’ it to Kyanjin Ri unless you got food.

SYDNEY
WE GOT FOOD PAUL!

PAUL
And pepper spray?

SYDNEY
AND pepper spray…

PAUL
Okay. Good.

SYDNEY
Damn, Paul. You worry too much.

LIRUNG
Sometimes I wonder if he saw it coming.

PAUL
Okay. Okay. I’m done.

SYDNEY
Good. Beat. Alright. Is there anything YOU need? Anything you want me to bring you back from Langtang?

PAUL
Hmmm…

LIRUNG
Or if he was just concerned about the wrong things going wrong.

PAUL
Oh a kukri knife! A fuckin’ kukri knife! The ones in Khatmandu were way too expensive when we were there, but if ya can find one up in the valley for a deal that’d be sweet.
SYDNEY
Got it. One kukri knife comin’ up!

*She smiles. He smiles. She checks her watch.*

SYDNEY
Alright. I should probably take off. Our bus leaves at 6 tomorrow morning.

PAUL
Sounds good Pip.

*She’s about to sign off.*

PAUL
Hey Pip?

SYDNEY
Yeah?

PAUL
Have fun out there. Be safe.

*She smiles and rolls her eyes.*

SYDNEY
I will.

*Paul hangs up the phone.*

PAUL
Little twig fearless stick Pips. Taking on the Himalayas.

*Cue “I Wanna Be Like You” from The Jungle Book. The sound emanates from Paul’s laptop, also on the bed. He smiles.*

LIRUNG
I feel like I’ve known them their whole lives. I’ve watched them from afar. From across the Atlantic, I’ve watched them. Waiting. Just waiting. From the moment they emerged from their mother’s womb, just waiting for them to stumble upon my precarious body.

*Paul inhales deeply. Closes his eyes. Then closes his computer. He lies back on his bed and crosses his arms over his closed eyes, breathing steadily, dreaming of Langtang, listening to the sounds of the music as “I Wanna Be Like You” slowly fades out. Lights stay up but dim on Paul.*
A shadow emerges and places an ornate and heavy Kukri knife in Lirung’s hand.

LIRUNG

The jugular of the universe stands poised against the edge of some resolute knife. Poised, poised and taut and ready to burst. Beat. Sometimes I get the feeling that I’m the one holding the knife.

He looks down at the knife in his hands.

LIRUNG

No. No, no, no, no, no. NOOOOOO!

He throws the knife. Sydney and Bailey careen on stage, screaming from the top of Kyanjin Ri. Full, high-pitched, and shrill like Paul and Gib. The two girls scream and scream and caw and run and jump through mountains. The shadow returns, picks the knife up off the floor, and places it back in Lirung’s hands. He squeezes the hilt.

LIRUNG

No. No, no, no, no, no.

He lays the knife at his feet.

LIRUNG

I won’t do it. I won’t do it. Because mountains don’t cause earthquakes. Because mountains don’t cause earthquakes. BECAUSE MOUNTAINS DON’T CAUSE EARTHQUAKES, TECTONIC PLATES DO.

The shadow returns from off stage, picks up the knife, and places it back in Lirung’s hands.

LIRUNG

I hold a knife against a jugular. I hold a knife against the world’s jugular. I hold a knife against the jugular of a young girl through whom a world is born. Her jugular is taut. I smell the saltiness of a single bead of sweat roll down that distended vein and land on the edge of the knife I hold against it. At tea time in Langtang a little before noon on April 25th, 2015, I’ll poke a hole in that vein and watch the life blood drain from the earth and from the gasps of 8000 innocents. Innocence. He laughs. Almost maniacally. CAN YOU EVEN BE GUILTY IN A NATURAL DISASTER? But inanimate is a misnomer and 8000 people will be dead. When the earth buckles, 8000 people will be dead and 21,000 injured. And counting. And counting. And I’ll fall down on 468 of them.
One village.
468 people dead.
80 trekkers.
10 soldiers.
176 Langtapas.
Two nineteen year old girls.
And one Pip.

Lirung looks down at the
knife in his hand.

LIRUNG

NOOOOOOOOOO!

He hucks it. The shadow
returns, and, once again,
returns it to its rightful place
in Lirung’s hands.

LIRUNG

Tectonic plates behave like most of us. They’ll do well for a time. Years without a spat.
But I’ve learned that peace does not govern the ebbs and flows of this universe. Pressure
builds. And eventually, pressure behaves as pressure must.

It releases.

The knife clatters to the floor.

Time conflates. Days later and Sydney sits in
Langtang Village, one of the dozen or so
villages that inhabit the Langtang Valley.
The yaks are out, grazing in the sun. Cheese
is made. Tea is brewed. Dhal is cooked.
Sydney sips a cup of chai and strums a small
acoustic travel guitar. She plays Hozier’s
“Work Song.”

SYDNEY

Chorus:

Gm F
When, my, time comes around
A# Cm
Lay me gently in the cold dark earth
Gm F
No grave can hold my body down
I'll crawl home to her

LIRUNG

Namaste dost.

SYDNEY

Namaste yourself.

LIRUNG

That's a really pretty song.

SYDNEY

Thanks! I just learned it.

LIRUNG

Keep playing. It sounds nice.

SYDNEY

Verse 1:

A#        Cm
Boys workin on empty
A#        Cm
Is that the kinda way to face the burning heat?
A#        Cm
I just think about my baby
A#
I'm so full of love I could barely eat
A#        Cm
There's nothing sweeter than my baby
A#        Cm
I never want once from the cherry tree
A#        Cm
Cause my baby's sweet as can be
A#
She give me toothaches just from kissin me

Chorus
Verse 2:

A#        Cm
That's when my baby found me
A#        Cm
I was three days on a drunken sin
A#        Cm
I woke with her walls around me
A#        Cm
Nothin in her room but an empty crib
A#        Cm
And I was burnin up a fever
A#        Cm
I didn't care much how long I lived
A#        Cm
But I swear I thought I dreamed her
A#
She never asked me once about the wrong I did

Chorus

Verse 3:

A#        Cm
My baby never fret none
A#        Cm
About what my hands and my body done
A#        Cm
If the Lord don't forgive me
A#
I'd still have my baby and my babe would have me
A#        Cm
When I was kissing on my baby
A#        Cm
And she put her love down soft and sweet
A#        Cm
In the lowland plot I was free
A#
Heaven and hell were words to me

Chorus
LIRUNG

To the audience. Now, I know what you’re thinking. Isn’t it hypocritical for a mountain to talk about things like shaky grounds and tenuous perches and fickle claims to life? I mean, of all the earth’s creatures I should be the most steadfast. The most unshakeable. The most sturdy. Right? What would I know of volatility? I mean hell I’m not even volcanic. I would invite you to remember that mountains and people are all born of the same stuff. There is as much ocean in me as there is stillness and flesh. I’ve spent the quiet eons which come and go and lap over me like gentle waves contemplating the constitution of that which surrounds me. The laws which define it. Why do you think I’m so fascinated by Quantum Theory? I mean can you imagine! There could be another Langtang Lirung out there! In some other world thinking the same thoughts yet victim to an entirely different set of random chances! Thrust into an entirely different world with entirely different possibilities! But this world. Just like yet so different from the others. This precious, precious, exceptional world. The waves which rock it back and forth and the moon which tugs relentlessly on its heartstrings. Pulling it in different directions, stretching its oceans and tugging at its atoms and its motives. And this geologic jigsaw puzzle beneath our feet which crumbles and crunches and sings in high pitches as tectonic plates kiss one another passionately. Seductively. Quietly. Sometimes violently. Oh yes. There is loudness in the silence of this earth. I should know. I’m made of rock.

But something feels especially precarious today. There’s a stillness to this place and this moment that’s unsettling. A taut stillness. I hear springs coiling tight. I smell a bead of sweat dripping down an over-poised jugular pulled taut and tight and true against the edge of a kukri knife. There’s a stillness to this place. A stillness to this day. Like someone’s about to slit the throat of the universe. It’s unsettling. I guess it shouldn’t be. Beat. Because this village. The Langtang Village. It’s always still. With a low hum rippling across its surface. The sun lays soft and sweet on farmers and their yaks. You can smell the shop making cheese now. You can hear the trickling of the small crick that runs through town. There’s a chill. Smell the chimney smoke in the air? Dhal cooks in low pots and young trekkers snack on overpriced Snickers bars. It’s a sunny day here in Langtang. It’s a still day here in Langtang. Still like the surface of a very placid lake. Mmmm. Smell the smoke and the cheese and the sun and the baked yak dung? It’s a good day to be alive. It’s a good day to be alive in Langtang.

He inhales.

LIRUNG

Mmmm. It’s a good day for tea. Pause. Sydney finishes the song. Who’s it by?

SYDNEY

What?

LIRUNG

The song.
Oh. I’m not sure. But I like it.

You an American?

How’d you know?

Cuz you carried an acoustic guitar to 15,000 feet above sea level.

Oh. I didn’t know that was an American thing.

It is. *Beat. Also you talk like an American.*

Oh yeah. *She laughs.*

Enjoying the trek?

Oh my God. I love it here. I could stay here forever.

It’s pretty, hunh?

It’s beautiful. And quiet. And big. All these mountains. My God.

Preeeeeetty impressive.

He told me it would be.

Who?
SYDNEY
My brother.

LIRUNG
He was here before?

SYDNEY
Yup! Three years ago.

LIRUNG
That’s nice. Beat. You come up here all by yourself?

SYDNEY
No. My friend Bailey came with me. She’s just getting some more cheese from the shop up the way.

LIRUNG
Mmmm. Yak cheese. Nothin’ like it, hunh?

SYDNEY
Yah. Rull good. Beat. Say, you got a name?

LIRUNG
Lirung.

SYDNEY
Lirung? That’s a cool name.

LIRUNG
It’s a Nepali name. My family named me after that mountain up there.

He points to the peak towering tall and precarious above Langtang Village.

SYDNEY
Oh. Wow. That’s a really big mountain.

LIRUNG
Sure is.

SYDNEY
It’s really pretty.
LIRUNG
Really? You know, it’s always looked handsome to me.

She looks at him quizzically.

SYDNEY
You’re weird.

LIRUNG
Smiling. Thanks. What’s your name?

SYDNEY
Sydney.

LIRUNG
Sydney. That’s a nice name.

SYDNEY
Thanks. Some people call me Pip.

LIRUNG
Pip, hunh? That’s cute.

SYDNEY
It’s not cute.

She glares at him.

LIRUNG
Okay, okay! It’s not cute.

She smiles.

LIRUNG
So. Just passing through?

SYDNEY
Yup! Just passing through.

LIRUNG
You get up Kyanjin Ri?
SYDNEY
Duh. It was amazing. Summited last night and now we’re on the way down. I’d stay longer. But it’s time to go home.

LIRUNG
You’re a long way from home. I bet you miss your family.

SYDNEY
I do. Pause.

LIRUNG
Well. You should probably take off. I hear the wind’s supposed to pick up around noon.

SYDNEY
Yeah. Soon as I finish my tea and Bailey gets back with the cheese we’ll be outta here. We’re trying to make it down to Syabru Besi in two days.

LIRUNG
You’re going to make it back down to Syabru in two days?!

SYDNEY
Yup!

LIRUNG
Wow. Good luck.

SYDNEY
We don’t need luck.

LIRUNG
Sure ya don’t. Beat. So. Just a quick cup of tea?

SYDNEY
Yup! Just a quick cup of tea.

LIRUNG
What a pretty day to enjoy a cup of tea.

SYDNEY
I know. God. Everything feels so. Still. The sun’s so warm. The birds are out. Everything feels. I don’t know. The universe feels like it’s holding its breath right now.
LIRUNG

Amen, sister.

SYDNEY

Takin’ a big old inhale. And just holding it there.

LIRUNG

Sure does.

SYDNEY

And soon it’s going to exhale. *Beat*. Oh look! A raven.

*A raven flies overhead. Whistling sounds, perhaps like a bomb dropping. Sounds of screaming fill the space. Men, women, and children. The sounds of three hundred mile per hour winds with half the force of Fat Man followed by the sounds of a mountain crashing and falling down. A rumble. A big, big rumble. Like the universe’s stomach just grumbled really, really loudly.*

LIRUNG

You know it’s true what they say.

SYDNEY

BAILEY!

LIRUNG

The world will end in an instant.

SYDNEY

BAILEY WHERE ARE YOU?

LIRUNG

In a cup of tea in fact.

SYDNEY

WEEEEEEE-OOOOOOOO! BAILEY?!!

*The rumbling crescendos. Reaches a zenith. Things fall and break and tumble. The sounds of trees snapping and the wind ripping through the village.*
The larger part of a glacier falls from Lirung’s side, burying everything. All fall down and break in half. Lirung is left standing on stage alone and partly crippled. Everything and everyone else has fallen down around him at his feet. He looks down at Sydney’s body.

LIRUNG

A beautiful day for a cup of tea.

Beat.

LIRUNG

I knew it was too still. I knew today was way too still.

He holds the kukri knife.

LIRUNG

I’m so sorry.

He sheathes the knife and lays her gently in the cold dark earth. Cue the instrumental chorus of Hozier’s “Work Song.”

The next morning. Gibson sleeps in his college bed. His phone rings like a vile intrusion. He rubs the sleep from his eyes and looks at his watch. 10 am. Far too early.

GIBSON

What is it man? I’m sleeping.

PAUL

Wake up.

GIBSON

What’s goin’ on?

PAUL

There was an earthquake.

GIBSON

Hunh?
PAUL

There was an earthquake.

GIBSON

What?

PAUL

There was an EARTHQUAKE! A big fucking earthquake.

GIBSON

Where?

PAUL

In Nepal.

GIBSON

Okay. Beat. And?

PAUL

SYDNEY’S IN NEPAL MAN!

GIBSON

Oh shit! I forgot. Is she okay?

PAUL

I don’t know. I don’t know. We haven’t heard from her.

GIBSON

Do you know where she is?

PAUL

No.

GIBSON

Do you know where she was?

PAUL

Langtang.

GIBSON

How big was the earthquake?
PAUL

_Curtly._ Look it up. It’s all over the news.

  _Gibson does._

GIBSON

Oh fuck.

PAUL

I’m freaking out man.

GIBSON

Fuck. Okay. Okay. We got this. Where in Langtang was she before this happened?

PAUL

We don’t know. We don’t know. We think she was near the top. Or maybe heading down.

GIBSON

Okay. Hold on.

  _Gibson opens his computer._

GIBSON

Okay. Okay maybe that’s good. Maybe that means she’s safe. It looks like most of the damage happened in urban areas. And it looks like Kathmandu took the biggest hit. If she’s up in Langtang, then at least she’s remote. You know what they say. Earthquakes don’t kill people, buildings do.

LIRUNG

Mountains are basically just big buildings.

GIBSON

Hang tight man. I’m sure she’s okay.

PAUL

Thanks. _Sarcastically._

  _Paul hangs up._
LIRUNG

Nepal. The Langtang Valley. April 25th, 2015. The day I buried the Langtang Village alive. See tectonic plates behave like most of us. And mountains behave like most of us. Being made from flesh and stone, our rocks stick and slip. Our jagged edges catch on one another’s. Our differing directions stall our respective momentums. And eventually, we crumble and break. But not all earthquakes make mountains fall down. Only sometimes. Sometimes when earthquakes happen the universe splits and another world is born where mountains don’t fall at all and young girls don’t die. But this is not that world. Beat. 7.8. Magnitude 7.8. THAT’S how they’ll quantify this disaster. That’s the number they’ll use to name it. 7.8 What the hell does that even mean?

Lights up on Diane. She stands in the War Room. The living room of the Schumacher’s house, which has recently been converted into a buzz and hum of concerned individuals and computer screens.

DIANE

Well. Day three in the War Room. Here we are. And everything’s GREAT! Just great. We’ve got a dozen computers set up. Two dozen eyes on. The neighborhood’s been popping by and dropping off meals on our back porch the last few days. Lasagna and salad. Comfort food. I just hope it doesn’t get moldy. No one really has an appetite at the moment. Beat. Jay’s taken off work this week. The boys too. No one’s slept in over 48 hours. Not even a wink. Everyone’s too afraid to leave their computers.

Gibson calls. Diane answers.

GIBSON

Any news?

DIANE

It’s been three days since the earthquake struck.

Gibson calls.

GIBSON

Any news?

DIANE

It’s been four days since the earthquake struck.

Gibson calls.

GIBSON

Any news?
DIANE

It’s been five days since—

_Gibson calls._

GIBSON

Any news?

DIANE

It’s been seven days—

_Gibson calls._

GIBSON

Any news?

DIANE

It’s been ten days since the earthquake struck.

GIBSON

And?

DIANE

Nothing. We still haven’t heard from her. _Beat._ There was a landslide. It wiped out the entire village.

GIBSON

Which village?

DIANE

The Langtang Village.

GIBSON

What? How?

DIANE

The earthquake. It triggered a landslide off the top of Langtang Lirung. The glacier. It collapsed.

GIBSON

Okay. Okay. What about the rest of the valley?
DIANE

Mostly fine. Kyanjin Gompa’s fine. Lama Hotel’s fine. Syabru-Besi’s fine. The whole valley is mostly fine. Just structural damage.

GIBSON

But Langtang Village?

DIANE

Completely buried.

GIBSON

*Pause.* Do you know where the girls are?

DIANE

No. No. We’re not really sure about anything right now. We’re still waiting to hear. Every day, just waiting and watching. Facebook Newsfeeds. The BBC. Aljazeera. But mostly Facebook. It’s been the most reliable source of news so far. Volunteers have been posting casualty reports and survivor docket there. *Beat.* It’s driving me nuts, Gib. Just waiting like this. Waiting to hear. Just staring at a computer screen. Clicking refresh every ten seconds all day long. And nothing. Still nothing. Survivors keep getting pulled. Helicopters keep picking people up. But no Sydney. No Bailey. They keep pulling bodies from the rubble. But we still don’t know where they are. So we just have to keep waiting.

GIBSON

What about eye-witnesses? Did anyone see them before or after the earthquake?

DIANE

A group at Kyanjin Gompa said that they’d seen them the night before. They said they saw them hiking down that morning.

GIBSON

Okay good! So maybe they made it down. Maybe they made it past Langtang before the earthquake hit. Or maybe they didn’t make it all the way and they’re just hiding out somewhere between Langtang and Kyanjin. Waiting to be rescued.

DIANE

It’s been ten days, Gib. If they’re alive, they don’t have food. They don’t have water.

GIBSON

But maybe. But maybe—
There was another party that saw them.

GIBSON

What?

DIANE

Another group. There was another group of trekkers that saw them on the day of the earthquake.

GIBSON

Where?

DIANE

In Langtang Village.

GIBSON

When?

DIANE

A little before noon. They had tea with them that morning before heading down to Lama Hotel. They left before the earthquake hit.

GIBSON

When did the earthquake hit?

DIANE

11:56.

Silence.

GIBSON

To himself, pinching the bridge of his nose. Fuck. Beat. And so… And so—

DIANE

Their bodies haven’t been found yet.

GIBSON

But you don’t actually know if they’re—

DIANE

We don’t.
PAUL
MOM! Mom we got an update!

DIANE
Gib. I gotta run.

Lights out on the War Room. Lights up on Sydney. There’s a ringing in her ears and in the ears of the audience. Like a bomb just went off. The sound of shell-shock. She holds the kukri knife firmly in her hand.

SYDNEY

Lirung emerges from the darkness.

LIRUNG
Hello.

SYDNEY
What. What happened?

LIRUNG
You fell down.

SYDNEY
I fell down?

LIRUNG
Well. Not exactly.

SYDNEY
Who are you?

LIRUNG
I’m—

SYDNEY
Wait. I remember you. We were drinking tea. And then… And then. Beat. Where am I? Pause. WHERE HAVE YOU TAKEN ME?!
LIRUNG

I haven’t taken you anywhere.

SYDNEY

Why can’t I feel my toes? Or my fingers? Or my— Beat. Oh my God. Where are my toes?

LIRUNG

Now. There. Just hang on.

SYDNEY

WHERE THE FUCK ARE MY TOES?!

LIRUNG

Just hold on a sec.

SYDNEY

And my fingers. And my jaw bone. And my elbow.

LIRUNG

This is going to come as a shock, Sydney. So I need you to try and remain calm.

SYDNEY

Calm? CALM?! WHY IS THERE A FUCKING MOUSE IN MY RIB CAGE!?

LIRUNG

It’s not a mouse. It’s a pika.

SYDNEY

WHY THE FUCK IS IT EATING MY RIBS?! Shoooo…. SHOOOO!

LIRUNG

It’s the circle of life, Sydney.

SYDNEY

WHAT?! Am I—

LIRUNG

You’re—

SYDNEY

Dead? Am I dead?
Beat. Yes.

What did you do?

I. I didn’t do anything.

WHAT DID YOU DO?

I didn’t do anything!

Is this a dream?

No.

Fuck. Beat. Did you kill me?

Deep breath. It was an accident.

Lights come back up on the War Room.

Never mind. Beat. She’s not on it.

Diane pinches the bridge of her nose. Then rubs Paul’s back. Gibson calls.

Anything?

No. Nothing.
A doorbell rings at the Schumacher house.

Paul goes to answer the door. Lights back up on Sydney and Lirung.

What happened?

An earthquake.

Where?

The epicenter clocked in 80 kilometers northwest of Kathmandu. But. It was big.

I remember. Shaking. Everything shaking. And then.

I collapsed.

The winds.

Air. Tons of it. Compressed and condensed beneath my glacier.

Winds that weren’t even winds but something else.

A force kept at bay for centuries. Sealed tight beneath the frozen weight above. Released. Spewed out by the weight of falling ice.
SYDNEY
I saw trees flying by my head. I saw a young boy holding onto his yak get flattened beneath the tin roof of a building.

LIRUNG
300 miles per hour. Half the force of Fat Man and Little Boy. Winds strong enough to fling bodies and bits and homes and trees about like matchsticks. Snapping humans and yaks and ponies in halves. Thirds. Quarters.

SYDNEY

LIRUNG
I let the hounds loose.

SYDNEY
I was flying.

LIRUNG
And then what? Back to the War Room. A brown paper bag has been left on the doorstep.

DIANE
Who is it honey? Paul reaches down, picks up the bag, and looks inside. His eyes go wide.

DIANE
Honey, who is it?

PAUL
Mom. She approaches.

PAUL
Mom. Look.
He opens up the bag and shows her what's inside. $10,000 cash, wrapped neatly in stacks of Benjamins.

LIRUNG

And then what?

SYDNEY

Blackness. Nothing but blackness.

LIRUNG

And then what?

SYDNEY

Silence.

LIRUNG

And then what?

SYDNEY

Everything felt. Heavy. I felt a heaviness pressing down on my chest.

LIRUNG

The landslide. The second wave.

SYDNEY

I tried to move but I couldn’t. I was in different parts.

LIRUNG

A stampede of rock and ice and wood and flesh.

SYDNEY

It all happened so fast.

LIRUNG

A blink of the eye. A cup of tea.

SYDNEY

Where are the others?

LIRUNG

Sleeping mostly.
SYDNEY

All of them?

LIRUNG

Mostly. A few made it down before I came loose. Before my body crumbled into bits and tumbled into a tidal wave of mountain matter.

SYDNEY

Where’s Bailey?

LIRUNG

I don’t know.

SYDNEY

Where’s Bailey.

LIRUNG

Dead.

SYDNEY

And the villagers?

LIRUNG

Dead.

SYDNEY

All of them?

LIRUNG

One man lived. He hid behind a rock and watched his family die. Beat. Lirung picks something up on the wind. They’re coming for you.

Lights dim on Sydney and Lirung.

Two days later. Gibson calls Paul. Paul picks up. He’s on a helicopter en route from Kathmandu to Kyanjin Gompa. The helicopter cuts north through the Himalayas. Paul sits next to two US Special Forces who prep first aid and search and rescue equipment.
PAUL
HELLO?

GIBSON

Paul…?

PAUL
YOU’RE GONNA HAVE TO SPEAK UP!

GIBSON

WHAT!?

PAUL
I SAID YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO SPEAK UP!

GIBSON

I CAN’T HEAR YOU!

PAUL
TALK LOUDER!

GIBSON

WHAT’S ALL THAT NOISE?

PAUL
A HELICOPTER.

GIBSON

WHAT?

PAUL
I’M ON A HELICOPTER!

GIBSON

OH. YOUR MOM GAVE ME THIS NUMBER AND SAID TO CALL.

PAUL

YEAH. I’M ON A SAT PHONE. WHAT’S UP? I DON’T GOT LONG.

GIBSON

ARE YOU GOING TO LANGTANG?
PAUL

YEAH! I’M GOING TO FIND SYDNEY MAN. I GOTTA GO FIND MY LITTLE SISTER.

GIBSON

IS THAT SMART? IS IT SAFE?

PAUL

IT’S HAPPENIN’.

GIBSON

WHAT ABOUT THE AFTERSHOCKS?

PAUL

WHAT ABOUT ‘EM. BEAT. LOOK MAN. SOMEONE’S GOTTA GO FIND HER. NO ONE ELSE IS. YOU THINK I’M JUST GONNA SIT AT HOME THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY TWIDDLING MY THUMBS STARING AT A COMPUTER SCREEN? THAT’S NOT PAUL MAN. THAT’S NOT ME.

GIBSON

I KNOW. ALRIGHT. BEAT. ARE YOU OKAY?

PAUL

FUCK NO I’M NOT OKAY!

GIBSON

OKAY. OKAY. I’M SORRY. BEAT. WAIT. HOW THE FUCK DID YOU GET A HELICOPTER? I THOUGHT THEY WERE ALL BOOKED UP?!

PAUL

IT’S A LONG STORY MAN.

GIBSON

WHAT?

PAUL

IT’S A LONG STORY.

GIBSON

HOW’D YOU GET THE MONEY?

PAUL
LET’S JUST SAY I SPEAK GOOD ASS BROKEN ENGLISH. WHEN THE U.S. COULDN’T GET A BIRD, PAUL DID.

A mild aftershock shakes the earth below. A draft picks up and tips the bird off kilter.

PAUL

HEY. I GOTTA GO, MAN. I GOTTA GO. I’LL TALK TO YOU WHEN I GET BACK.

GIBSON

OKAY! GOOD LUCK! BE SAFE. BEAT.

Paul hangs up.

GIBSON

I LOVE YOU!

But he’s gone. Lights out on Gibson.

Paul and the soldiers rock back and forth in the bird for a moment. Paul holds a large cloth bag in his lap.

SOLDIER 1

That the money bag?

Paul looks down at the bag. $10,000 converted into more than a million rupees. A colorful spilling heap of bills in Paul’s lap.

PAUL

Yeah. It’s the money bag.

SOLDIER 2

Damn.

PAUL

Yup.

They fly on. Lights up on Lirung.
Everyone deals with loss differently. Some move. Some sit still. Some do nothin’ at all. I’m not sure there’s a right way to do it. There’s no instruction manual. Not even for mountains. Takes a drag from his cigarette. I like to think about Quantum Physics. And Schrodinger. Especially in cases as seemingly random as this. In this instance, Nepal’s kind of like Schrodinger’s box. As is the Langtang Valley. And Sydney’s the cat. As is the Langtang Village. And when the earth shook the universe split. In one world I let go of my glacier and everyone died. And in the other, I held on tight and everyone was fine. I mean after all, it was just the one village that happened to be under me when I fell down. And the girls weren’t there long. Just a few minutes maybe. Their margin of error the size of a cup of tea. The facts seem nonsensical. So I find it reassuring. To think that somewhere out there in some other world, Sydney’s singing a song and finishing her tea. Beat. But then again, to be a mountain is to be volatile. And to be the boundary where tectonic plates kiss is to be unpredictable. Humans have died random deaths in these parts for as long as people and mountains have done this dance. And the dance doesn’t stop. And it won’t stop. And we’ll bury the bodies. No matter the world in question.

The bird touches down in Kyanjin Gompa.
Paul steps out, followed by the two soldiers.
They unload medical equipment, a backboard, rations, and camping gear and divvy it out amongst themselves.

SOLDIER 1

What’s the plan?

PAUL

The plan?

SOLDIER 2

Yeah the plan. This is your show. Where do you want to search?

PAUL

Okay. Okay. He breathes. We know they were last seen in Langtang Village. But if they survived and ran they probably headed up-valley the way they came. So we need to retrace their steps.

SOLDIER 2

Okay.

PAUL

We’ll head down-valley and keep callin’ until we hit the debris field.
SOLDIER 1

Is there anything besides her name she might recognize?

PAUL

Yeah. Just keep callin’ out WEEE-OOOO. WEEE-OOOO. It’s a family hiking call. She’ll know it immediately.

SOLDIER 1

Got it. Now just so you know, our orders are to help you find Sydney and Bailey. But while we’re up here we’ll need to keep our eyes peeled for any survivors.

PAUL

Got it.

SOLDIER 1

And we’ll need to help the main search mission recover whatever bodies are left. Okay?

PAUL

Okay.

SOLDIER 1

Our intel paints a pretty bleak picture. It’s going to be nasty down there.

PAUL

I know.

SOLDIER 1

We’ll need your help taggin’ and baggin’ bodies. Now, if you see your sister, you let us know okay?

PAUL

Okay.

SOLDIER 1

And Bailey’s too.

PAUL

Okay.

SOLDIER 1

Are you sure you’re ready for this?
Paul nods.

SOLDIER 2
We’re burnin’ day light. We need to move. We need to be topside by sundown.

SOLDIER 1
Alright let’s move out. You know the way?

PAUL
We follow this trail down to Riverside and take the left fork to the village.

SOLDIER 1
After you.

*Paul leads the downward march. The soldiers lug the medical equipment and Paul takes the camping gear and rations. We hear them calling out as they depart.*

PAUL
WEEE-OOOO. WEEE-OOOO. SYYYYDNEEEEY!!! BAAAAAIIIIILEEEY!!!! WEEE-OOO. WEEEEEE-OOOOOOOOOO!!!!

*They exit. Lights up on Lirung and Sydney.*

SYDNEY
Is he coming?

LIRUNG
Yes.

SYDNEY
Why?

LIRUNG
Because he has to.

SYDNEY
But. He’s not going to find anything.

LIRUNG
I know.
SYDNEY
I mean for fuck’s sake look at me. I’m in eight different pieces.

LIRUNG
I know.

SYDNEY
Even if he does find me, he’s not going to recognize me. I’m all over the place.

LIRUNG
He’ll find you.

SYDNEY
How do you know?

LIRUNG
I do.

SYDNEY
But I’m not cohesive anymore.

LIRUNG
Look at me.

SYDNEY
What’s he going to find. Just bits and pieces?

LIRUNG
Look at me.

SYDNEY
My skull’s so smashed! I hardly have a face anymore! I—

LIRUNG
LOOK AT ME! *She does.* I’m not cohesive anymore either! *Beat.* I’m bits and pieces too.

SYDNEY
Okay.

LIRUNG
So are they.
I know.

You forget about the village?

No.

468 people Sydney.

I know.

It’s heavy.

I know.


I’m sorry.

It’s okay.

Paul enters the debris field. The two soldiers trail behind him. Langtang Village has been completely buried by rubble and ice.

PAUL

WEEEEEE-OOOOOO!

Oh God.
PAUL
WEEEEEEEEEEEEE-OOOOOOOOOO!

SYDNEY
What do I say?

LIRUNG
Nothing. You say nothing.

PAUL
SYDNEY!

SYDNEY
What do I do?

LIRUNG
You just be still.

SYDNEY
I have to do something.

LIRUNG
You can’t. You’re dead.

SYDNEY
But he doesn’t know that yet. He still has hope. He still thinks Bailey and I are just hiding in a cave somewhere waiting to be saved. That’s so dangerous.

LIRUNG
I’m not sure he thinks that.

PAUL
SYDNEY!!! I’VE COME TO FIND YOU! WHERE ARE YOU SYDNEY?!?

SYDNEY
I’m not sure I want to leave.

LIRUNG
I know.
SYDNEY

It’s so pretty here. I feel like I belong. This place took me and now I feel like I’m a part of it. A part of you. A part of them. I’m not sure I want to go home. I’m not sure I want to be moved again. I want to be more of this place. I want to feed it. I want to be recycled into the trees. I want to be brought back through the critters and the dirt. I want to be the river. I want to be uplifted. I want to be a mountain. I want to be told to be a hero and a Himalaya. I want to be a raven. I want to dissolve. I want to fly.

LIRUNG

I know.

SYDNEY

I hear the voices. For the first time in my life I can hear all the voices so clearly. So loudly. I hear a cacophony of laughter and life and it’s relentless. I hear the trees whisper sweet nothings. I hear the river murmur secrets. I hear yaks gossip. I hear the pika chirp. I hear the mountains moan and ache and grow. I’ve never heard so loudly before. This chorus of voices. The dead. The living. It’s all so loud. It’s all so clear. It’s all so harmonic. I hear them. All of them singing. I hear me singing with them as I dissolve.

PAUL

SYDNEY! YOUR BROTHER’S HERE! I’VE COME TO TAKE YOU HOME!

SYDNEY

I am home.

LIRUNG

What is home when you’re dead?

PAUL

COME OUT, COME OUT WHEREVER YOU ARE!

SYDNEY

I don’t know.

PAUL

SYDNEY!

Paul runs up to the body of a young girl.

PAUL

SYDNEY?
He flips it. It’s the body of a young, long haired, Nepalese boy, mangled and broken. The two soldiers approach.

SOLDIER 2

Fuck.

SOLDIER 1

I told you this’d be nasty.

SOLDIER 2

I think I’m gonna be sick.

Paul yaks into the dirt.

SOLDIER 1

You alright.

PAUL

I’m fine.

SOLDIER 1

Alright let’s bag ‘em.

Paul zips the remains into a plastic bag. He continues his search.

SYDNEY

I feel so badly for him.

LIRUNG

Why?

SYDNEY

Look at him. All alone in all this wreckage.

LIRUNG

He’s not alone.

SYDNEY

Without his sister.
LIRUNG
He’s not without you.

SYDNEY
He looks kind of like Neil Armstrong, doesn’t he?

LIRUNG
A little bit.

SYDNEY
Paul. The man on the moon. All alone in all this nothingness that’s everything.

LIRUNG
He’s not alone.

Paul peels a body down from a tree.

PAUL
SYDNEY?

No dice.

SOLDIER 1
Bag ‘em. Let’s keep moving. We’re running out of daylight. We gotta be back at the bird by sundown.

Paul drags the body of a Langtapa and zips it into a plastic bag.

PAUL
SYDNEY!!! Silence. PIP?

SYDNEY
Oh God.

She cries softly.

PAUL
PIP. PIP WHERE ARE YOU?! All ye all ye oxen free! COME OUT COME OUT WHEREVER YOU ARE!!! PIP!!! Beat. WEEEE-OOOOOOO! WEEEEEE-OOOOOOO! WEEEEEEEEEEEE-OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!
He Wee-OOOO’s until he breaks. He gets down on his knees and prays.

PAUL

Dear God.

LIRUNG

Who’s he talking to?

PAUL

I swear if you point me in the right direction I’ll be good forever and ever. And I’ll stop smoking cigarettes. And I’ll go back to school and start working again. And I’ll help Dad with the house painting. And I’ll be nicer to Mom. And I’ll stop playing World of Warcraft. And I’ll get my shit together. Please, God. Just help me find Pip. Just help me find my little sister.

SYDNEY

Wow.

LIRUNG

What?

SYDNEY

He’s willing to give up World of Warcraft? And cigarettes? That’s big.

PAUL

I just want my sister back.

A flash. A glint in the night. A glimmer, a shimmer, a shine from a small clump of rocks.

SYDNEY

What’s that?

LIRUNG

It wasn’t me.

Paul gets up off his knees and walks over to the clump of rocks. He grabs hold of the shine and pulls it loose. In his hand he holds a large kukri knife. The sheath lies on the
ground next to it, an elephant carved into its side.

SYDNEY

Oh God.

LIRUNG

What?

SYDNEY

He’s going to think. He’s going to think I left it there for him.

LIRUNG

Why’s that?

SYDNEY

I told him. Before I left, I told him. That was the last thing. I told him I’d bring one back.

A raven flies down and lands on the blade and stares Paul smack dab in the eye. Paul backs up and bumps into a small pile of remains. Paul is losing his mind.

SOLDIER 1

Looks like we got another one.

SOLDIER 2

Looks young.

SOLDIER 1

She look familiar?

PAUL

I. I don’t know. I’m not sure. I can’t tell.

SOLDIER 1

Alright bag ‘em.

Paul helps the soldiers scoop some of Sydney’s remains into a plastic bag.
SYDNEY
Wait. Wait I DON’T WANT TO GO!

LIRUNG
You have to.

SYDNEY
WHERE ARE THEY TAKING ME?!

LIRUNG
They’re taking you home.

SYDNEY
Don’t let them take me! I don’t want to go home. I want to stay here. With you!

LIRUNG
You’ve already been buried, Sydney.

SYDNEY
Wait. Wait my ribs! Don’t let them take me without my ribs!

LIRUNG
You will always be here.

SYDNEY
Don’t let them take me without my ribs!

LIRUNG
Buried in the dirt. Humming with the river. Creaking with the rock.

SYDNEY
BUT! But I don’t think I can be in two places at once! I don’t know if I can have two homes!

LIRUNG
This is the way it is now Sydney. Your ribs will bleed into the dirt, into the worms, and into the gut of a raven and you will fly. You will watch over this valley. From the peaks and hills and the sky above. You’ll need to look after this place now. You’ll need to look after your brother okay? He needs you. Now more than ever. Okay? Beat. Okay?!

SYDNEY
Okay.
LIRUNG

Do you trust me?

SYDNEY

Yes. Yes. I trust you.

LIRUNG

Look out for him. He’s going to need your help. Beat. You were born to build a home in the earth Sydney. No matter the continent.

SYDNEY

Okay.

LIRUNG

You’re home now.

SYDNEY

I know.

LIRUNG

And you will be again.

SYDNEY

I know.

LIRUNG

I’ll see you soon.

Paul bags a few other bits and bones.

LIRUNG

Hey SYDNEY!

SYDNEY

As she’s leaving. Yeah?

LIRUNG

I’M REALLY SORRY ABOUT ALL THIS!

SYDNEY

It’s okay.
Sydney and the men exit. Lirung plays the chorus of Hozier’s “Work Song” or the chorus and second verse of Oscar Isaac’s “Hang Me, Oh Hang Me.” He lights a cigarette. He listens to the silence that hangs over the vacated valley of death.

LIRUNG

Can you hear it?

Two days later. Lights up on Diane. She calls Paul. Sydney listens in from her box in the storage closet in the Kathmandu forensics office.

DIANE

HELLO!?

PAUL

Yeah.

DIANE

Are you okay?

PAUL

Yeah.

DIANE

Where are you?

PAUL

Mom I’m fine.

DIANE

Where are YOU!?

PAUL

Back in Kathmandu.

DIANE

You weren’t—

PAUL

No. We were gone by the time the aftershock hit.
DIANE

Silence.

PAUL

I’m fine Mom.

DIANE

Thank God.

SYDNEY

You’re welcome.

DIANE

I was so scared.

PAUL

I’m okay Mom.

SYDNEY

To audience. They don’t realize how much work it took to hold it back.

DIANE

And?

PAUL

Nothing. Silence. We didn’t find her.

DIANE

Silence. Okay.

PAUL

I’ll be home soon. My flight leaves in the morning.

DIANE

Okay.

PAUL

I’ll see you in a few days.

DIANE

Okay.
They hang up.

SYDNEY

They’ll come back for me. I know they won’t leave me here.

Lights out. Lights up on Lirung.

LIRUNG

We’re not so different you and I. When the world around us starts to rock and shake sometimes we fall. Sometimes people are hurt. And if they’re angry at me for letting go I won’t blame them. Beat. I could blame parents for all of this. I could say that inanimate is a misnomer. But at the end of the day mountains don’t cause earthquakes, tectonic plates do. I can say I am but the byproduct of the geologic violence but ultimately, it’s not my fault my parents slipped. That’s what plates do. They rest alongside each other quietly for centuries and then they explode. And then they settle again. So you can be mad but ask yourself: how long can you go without erupting at your loved ones? How long can you go without shaking the earth around you? Humans and tectonic plates are not so different. Tension builds. Strain accumulates. We don’t always treat each other with kindness. With earth as well as with flesh, tension will always behave as tension must. It releases. He takes a drag from his cigarette. We point the finger. We seek a culprit. But what is guilt in the face of natural disaster? Who do you blame for an earthquake? Tectonic plates? What about the landslide? The mountain? Or still the plates? What about God? Can we blame that? What about coincidence? Can you blame random chance? 8000 dead across the nation. 468 people buried. Who do you blame?

Paul plays a song. Lights up on Diane.

DIANE

What would Sydney do? That’s what I ask myself these days. What would Sydney do? Beat. Here’s a picture of her.

She shows a picture to the audience.

DIANE

Look at her. She was such an angel.

LIRUNG

Still is.

DIANE

A light touch.
LIRUNG
A light load. A vibrant buzz of light.

DIANE
I just hope it was quick.

LIRUNG
It was.

DIANE
I just hope she didn’t see it coming.

LIRUNG
She did.

DIANE
I just hope she was inside. When the winds hit. I just hope they flattened the room she stood in quick before the mountain came down. Before the second wave buried everything. I just hope she was inside when it happened.

LIRUNG
She wasn’t. But it was quick.

DIANE
It’s a bitter thing to lose a child. No one should have to go through that.

LIRUNG
But they do.

DIANE
No parent should have to face that. I mean, Christ, it’s my job! It’s my job to protect my daughter! *Beat.* And I didn’t. I couldn’t. I. I didn’t see it coming.

LIRUNG
No one could.

DIANE
I just hope she isn’t lonely right now. Wherever she is.

SYDNEY
I’m not.
DIANE

I just hope she wasn’t afraid. To face death alone. Without her Mom there. I don’t think I could handle that. Because if she was scared… and… and I wasn’t there to hold her and tell her everything was going to be okay. Beat. I should have been there. I should have been next to her. I should have been there to hold her. I just. I just want to reach out and hold her. I just want to hug her one more time.

LIRUNG and SYDNEY

I’m sorry.

Lights out on Diane. Lights up on Lirung.

LIRUNG

They’ll hate me. They’ll hate me and blame me because it’s easier to hate inanimate objects but they don’t know. They don’t perceive the animism of rock and earth. They only perceive the surface of mountains. And they’ll judge me for what they think my surface has done but they won’t know. They can’t see me. They can’t hear me. They can’t fathom the pain we’ll share. Beat. You probably don’t know this but mountains get their hearts broken pretty bad. Worse than most when it does happen. Beat. You would accuse me of being heartless for the simple fact I’m made of stone but inanimate is a misnomer. Just ask Sydney. Nothing on this earth lacks heart. Nothing on this earth lacks soul. Nothing on this earth lacks life and its glorious precarity. Before you cast judgment, remember that.

Lights up on Paul in what was once a War Room but is now back to being a normal, everyday living room. Gibson enters. Paul sits at a computer playing World of Warcraft. Silently. He chain smokes.

LIRUNG

He’d like to point the finger at me. You’d like to point the finger at me. You’d like to sit back and accuse me of the violence I’ve committed. You think I don’t feel terribly? You think I don’t feel naked now? You think I wanted to lose this large a portion of myself? You think I wanted to bury Langtang alive? You think I don’t feel his grief? You think I don’t know? You think I don’t see his chest breaking into little pieces? I hear him relenting silently against the earth for having stripped everything from him. I feel his rage seething like magma beneath my bedrock. I know he wishes to return the pain I’ve caused. I know. I’ve looked anguish like his in the eyes a dozen or more times.

But he doesn’t know. He doesn’t know the burden we share. He and I? We’re more kin than he’d readily admit.
Hey Paul.

PAUL

Silence.

Hey Paul.

PAUL

Silence.

Hey Paul! How was your trip!?

PAUL

I’m playing World of Warcraft right now.

HEY PAUL! HOW WAS YOUR TRIP!?

PAUL

I’m playing World of Warcraft right now.

DID YOU FIND HER?! WAS IT HARD?! DID YOU SEE LOTS OF DEAD PEOPLE?! IS SYDNEY DEAD?! LIKE DEAD, DEAD?!

Paul takes a drag.

PAUL

I’m playing World of Warcraft right now.

Paul finishes his cigarette in one go and lights another.

DID YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU AND I’M REALLY SORRY YOU’RE HURTING RIGHT NOW AND I WANT TO HELP BUT I DON’T KNOW HOW AND I FEEL GUILTY LIKE THIS IS ALL MY FAULT?!

Pause. Drag.

PAUL

I’m playing World of Warcraft right now.
GIBSON

Paul’s angry. Paul doesn’t want to talk right now.

Paul glares at Gibson.

GIBSON

Paul—

PAUL

I’m going to drop a nuke on those mountains.

GIBSON

What?

PAUL

I said. I’m going to drop a nuke on those mountains.

GIBSON

I – Okay.

PAUL

I’m going to blow ‘em up.

GIBSON

Paul. I know you’re mad but—

PAUL

No one takes Sydney, ya hear? No one takes Sydney.

GIBSON

I know. But mountains don’t cause—

PAUL

THEY FUCKING TOOK HER MAN! SHE WAS THERE. AND THEY TOOK HER. AND NOW SHE’S JUST… She’s just GONE!

GIBSON

I know man.

Beat.

PAUL

I’m going to get her back.
Gibson tries to find the words but doesn’t.

PAUL

Fuck maaan. This hurts so much.

GIBSON

I know.

He doesn’t. Paul drags desperately on his cigarette.

PAUL

My little fucking sister man. My little fucking sister. She was my protégé. I was training her. She was going to be so good. So good.

Paul continues to smoke. Gibson turns to face the audience.

GIBSON

I’m having a lot of difficulty coming to terms with how big his grief is right now. Like. I see it. There it is. This big black blob of pain lying on the table all bloodied and gross and it won’t stop growing. And there’s nothing I can do about it. Beat. Have you ever seen that Miyazaki film? Spirited Away? The Japanese animated film? Everyone’s seen that movie right? Well a lot of it takes place in a bath house. And in the film there’s this evil spirit called No Face. And he has an infinitely large stomach. And he goes around the bath house eating everything he sees. It’s like he’s got this black hole where his stomach’s supposed to be and he just has to destroy everything in sight to try and fill that infinite and irascible emptiness in his gut. And then there’s this little girl, Chihiro, she’s the protagonist, and she has to give No Face a bath. Of course, she’s the only one brave enough to do it. No one else wants to because No Face has become this big monstrous bully of a gross smelling slug from all the eating he’s been doing. So, she rolls up her sleeves, fills the tub, and scrubs the evil spirit down. And while she’s deep in the thick of the thing, she sees this sharp jagged edge sticking out and shining from inside No Face’s gut. Like some thorn buried deep under all the sludge and the muck. So Chihiro reaches in, grabs hold of the thing, and pulls it loose. Then all of a sudden, all this SHIT! I mean… ALL THIS SHIT just comes POURING OUT OF HIM! Rusted metal, bikes, cans, half-digested crap, people, dirt, buildings, all this SHIT! Mostly sharp rusted metal. It’s crazy. It kind of looked like someone popping the world’s biggest zit, except if the zit was full of pure pain, sadness, and rage. Like. Like that thorn, that metal thorn or blade or whatever it was buried deep in No Face’s side was like the seal holding back a tidal wave of unfinished business. And all that needed to be done for the spirit to be free and stop being so mean was to break that seal and release it all. And. And I think about Paul right now and I think that maybe—maybe I can help that happen. Maybe he just needs to be sad right now instead of mad, and then everything else will release. Beat. Sorry. Paul and I got high and watched Spirited Away one time and. Well I don’t know. It made me start
thinking. Like. I feel like Paul’s grief is No Face or something. Or maybe Paul is No Face. And I’ve just gotta reach in and pull out the edge of that knife that’s buried deep into his side. But I don’t know how to. Or if I should. Or if it’s my job. But. But I know if I do. If I can, that the rest of his grief will come pouring out and he’ll feel nice and clean and all better afterwards. And I just want Paul to feel better. Because—

PAUL

I’m going to fucking kill ‘em.

GIBSON

Because I think I’m responsible for all of this.

PAUL

I’m going to kill them all.

GIBSON

Because she wouldn’t have been there if I hadn’t, ya know? If I hadn’t planned the trip to Nepal. I mean I told Paul. In Delhi. When we were living in a cheap, dingy hostel in India, suffocating ourselves in clouds of hash smoke and the urban life and the mental and physical claustrophobia that comes with the sort of drugged out stupor so indicative of the white fuckboy experience abroad. Pinches the bridge of his nose. I told him then, ya know? I told him we needed to get clean. I told him we needed to get out of the city. I told him we needed to go to Nepal. I told him we needed to go to the mountains.

PAUL

I’m going to kill ‘em. Every last Himalaya.

GIBSON

I told him we needed to clean out our lungs with fresh Himalayan air. I told him we needed a bath! A fresh mountain bath! “C’mon Paul!” I said. “It’ll be fun! We can go trekking! I’ll look up the routes and everything!” It was MY idea… MINE. I guess I didn’t realize how dangerous baths could be. Or mountains. We thought we were invincible. We didn’t know how vulnerable we were. We didn’t think she would be.

PAUL

I’m gonna kill ‘em.

GIBSON

I need to help Paul. He’s my best friend. And he’s hurting really bad right now.

PAUL

I’LL KILL EVERY LAST GOD DAMN ONE OF YOU, YA HEAR! I’LL FUCKING LEVEL YOU!
GIBSON
I don’t think he realizes yet that mountains don’t kill people. At least not intentionally. I don’t think. I don’t think mountains are deliberately malicious.

LIRUNG
We’re not.

GIBSON
They certainly don’t cause earthquakes. Tectonic plates do.

LIRUNG
What about landslides.

GIBSON
I mean. If Paul’s going to blame anyone, he should blame me! If he’s going to be mad at anyone, he should be mad at ME! It was my idea! All of it! If I hadn’t planned the trip, if I hadn’t planned the gap year… if I hadn’t told him to take one… he’d never have gone… we’d never have gone! And then she’d never have gone. And. Fuck. I think.

PAUL
I’LL DROP A NUKE ON EVERY LAST GOD DAMN ONE OF YOU.

GIBSON
I think it’s all my fault.

LIRUNG
Americans.

GIBSON
I think. I’m worried that—

PAUL
WHERE ARE YOU!

GIBSON
I think I killed Sydney.

Paul runs his hand along the blade of the kukri knife, which he’s been clutching the whole time. Gibson dissolves. Paul begins to hear whistling. Like the sound of high pitched winds running over rocks or bodies of water. Lirung may whistle Hang Me Oh Hang Me. Paul puts his cigarette out, stands
up, and assumes a backing up defensive position. He begins to charge, on the offense.

PAUL

I KNOW YOU’RE HERE!

Silence. Paul paces the floor. He stands center stage, knife poised, scanning the corners of the room from its center.

PAUL

SHOW YOURSELF YOU FUCKING COWARD!

Lirung approaches.

LIRUNG

Please. Can you please stop yelling?

PAUL

You.

LIRUNG

What?

PAUL

You FUCKING. BASTARD!

LIRUNG

Please. Just please calm down.

PAUL

You took her from me.

LIRUNG

No I didn’t.

PAUL

You killed her.

LIRUNG

No. No I didn’t.

PAUL

You took Pip.
LIRUNG
No. Subduction did. Tectonic plates did.

PAUL
I’m going to kill you.

LIRUNG
I wish you’d listen.

PAUL
I’m going to fucking kill you.

LIRUNG
And how exactly do you plan to do that? Hmmm? You’re going to kill a mountain?

PAUL
I’m. I’m—

LIRUNG
Blind. You’re blind.

PAUL
gyeeeeeeeaaaAAAHHHHHH!

*Paul charges Lirung with the knife. Lirung remains motionless as Paul sinks the blade into Lirung’s breast.*

PAUL
HAH! AH HAH! HAH!

*Paul attempts to retract the knife but it’s stuck. He grunts and tries in vain to pull the blade free.*

LIRUNG
Americans. So exceptional. So self-important.

*Paul screams and tries again to pull the blade free.*

LIRUNG
Death’s as common as dirt Paul.
PAUL
STOP.

LIRUNG
As common as birth.

PAUL
STOP TALKING!

LIRUNG
More common in fact.

Paul spits in his face. Lirung smiles wide and Cheshire. He grips Paul’s wrist and squeezes like a vice. The blade clatters to the floor. From the wrist, Lirung flips Paul on to his back and lays a heavy boot on his chest.

LIRUNG
Do you know how many people died that day Paul?

PAUL
Silence.

LIRUNG
DO YOU!?!?

PAUL
Silence.

LIRUNG
Eight-thousand people, Paul. And counting. I’ve got a village decomposing on top of me. Right now. 468 bodies revoked of their breath breaking down into me. You want to take about pain? About weights and burdens? About bones? About Bailey? Beat. Oh you forgot about Bailey, didn’t you? She wasn’t your sister, right? And the Langtapas? They weren’t your sister. So fuck ‘em right?

Paul screams and tries to break free. Lirung restrains him with his boot.

LIRUNG
Eight thousand dead across the nation Paul. And counting. Do you know how many lives are still threatened by cholera? By thirst? By starvation and cold? Did you know that India’s blockaded the border between it and Nepal because it’s worried about a refugee
crisis? Did you know that? Do you know what that means for Nepal? Do you know how crippled the country is right now? No. The world may have ended in a cup of tea for you, but for a nation full of people this disaster’s not even close to being over. And for the villages? For the rural mountain towns like Langtang? Do you know how much it costs to help those people? To ship medicine and rations out to a place like Langtang? Do you? No. Of course not. Because you don’t have to know that. Because an anonymous donor drops off $10,000 on your doorstep and you go hire a helicopter and a team of Special Forces to help you look for your loved ones. Aww. How sweet. But what about the others? The Langtapas? Who’s gonna drop off a bag of $10,000 on their doorstep? Hmmm? You? The US embassy jumps at the bit and the money to put you on a helicopter to go dig up the bits and pieces of two American girls, but what of cholera? What of blockades? What of the Langtapas? Who’s going to collect their bits and pieces? The US Embassy? The Nepalese government? You think they give a damn about a few more dead Sherpa buried beneath the dirt? Hell no. Because that’s to be expected. Because that’s the narrative we know. Because the media regurgitates dead brown bodies until the image becomes practically stale. Until remorse dissolves in the wake of precedent. Because mountain folks made their choice. Right? Because they knew the risk, right? But the girls? The other tourists and trekkers? The Italians, the Israelis, the Brits? The Americans and the Spaniards? Those naïve bumbling foreigners who come to get a peek? Who come to snap a picture of my beauty, so carefully wrapped and decorated for their consumption? For YOUR consumption. They? They were just victims of circumstance. Right? Because it’s just a trip, right? Just a trip to Nepal. Just a trip to the Himalayas. Everything’s gonna be okay, right? Because Americans are invincible. In spite of mountains. Who could dare hold them accountable for their arrogance? For their fallacy? For their pride? For their exceptionalism? Who’s gonna blame ‘em? Y’all don’t deserve the unexpected, right? Because white folks don’t deserve disaster, but somehow the Nepalese do. Sydney didn’t mean to crawl into the tiger’s jaws. Right? Because she didn’t know the risk, right? Beat. Wake the fuck up Paul. Death’s as common as dirt. You think because you found your sword in the stone somehow this is fucking special? Somehow, you’re fucking special? Somehow, Sydney’s death was fucking special? No. No. This? Death? It’s common as dirt. As common as dirt, Paul.

Lirung vanishes. Paul is left alone on stage, prone on the floor. He holds the knife in his hand. He places it in its sheath and holds the knife. He begins to shake. Diane materializes. Sydney sits in her box in Kathmandu, listening. Gibson sits in the Schumacher’s living room.

DIANE

The embassy’s been asking me to send little bits and pieces. Hairs and toothbrush bristles. Dental records. So lately I’ve been swimming. Swimming in strands of my daughter’s DNA. I go into her bedroom. Every morning I sit down on her bed and cry. I cry until there’s no water left in my body. Then I get to work. I take my tweezers out and my little zip lock bag. I
carefully locate the little strands and pinch them off her pillow, her jackets, her bed spread. I lift them like feathers and send them east for some uncaring forensics specialist in Nepal to dissect to try and find some corresponding box of bits of flesh and bones. Beat. They haven’t found a match yet. Out of all the boxes of bits and bones, they haven’t found a match. She could still be up there for all we know. Beat. Maybe. Maybe that’s nice. Maybe she should still be up there. I don’t know. Pause. This morning, when I went into her room, I just sat there. Staring at these strands of my daughter’s hair shining between the plastic. These little threads. Still so strawberry blonde. Smiling. These little strands. They’re all I have left.

SYDNEY
She doesn’t realize that it’s going to take them an extra six months to figure out who I am.

DIANE
I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know. For a while there I thought I wanted a body back. I wanted to bring her home. That seemed… right? She crumbles. Now I’m not so sure. I don’t think I could stomach picking through the bits and pieces of my daughter.

SYDNEY
My dental records are useless because my skull’s so smashed.

PAUL
It’s going to be okay, Mom.

GIBSON
Somehow I feel comforted knowing she might still be up there. You know? It’s gruesome to think of bodies breaking down into their composite parts. But at the same time, she died doing what she loved. She died exploring the most beautiful place on earth. She’s Himalayan now. And I can’t help but think that the only reason Paul made it out before that aftershock hit was because Sydney was holding it back.

SYDNEY
Part of me wishes they’d left me up there. This cardboard box is stale. I can’t breathe. And the other boxes won’t shut up. They moan and they moan and they moan and I can’t hear myself think. I’m glad Paul came looking for me I really am. But I miss it up there. You could breathe up there. I was a part of something up there. And I guess I still am. Part of me anyways. That’s what Lirung said. He told me to find home everywhere. And I am. But it’s hard being in two places at once.

DIANE
Is it? Is it going to be okay?

PAUL
I. I don’t know. Beat. I hope so.
DIANE
I love you, Paul.

PAUL
I love you too, Mom.

SYDNEY
I love you.

DIANE
You were such a good brother to her.

PAUL

Silence.

DIANE
You were.

PAUL
I know.

DIANE
She loved you so much.

PAUL
I know, Mom.

Long pause.

PAUL
I think I’m going to go sit on the porch with Gibson.

DIANE
Okay.

PAUL
Do you mind if we smoke?

DIANE
No. I don’t mind.

*Paul opens the sliding glass door and steps out on to the porch.*
Hey man.

Hey.

Mind if I take a seat?

It's your porch.

Paul sits.

Cigarette?

Christ please.

Gibson hands him one. They smoke through a pack of American Spirit Blues.

You alright?

No. He thinks. Not at all. I feel like this is all my fault.

That's stupid.

If we hadn't gone there. If I hadn't told her to go.

It's not your fault, Paul.

If we hadn't done it, she'd still be alive. I told her. I told her to go to Langtang.
GIBSON
Paul. Shut up and listen to me. It is not your fault. This isn’t anyone’s fault.

PAUL
But it doesn’t make sense! They were fifteen minutes away from safety. A fifteen minute walk up- or down-valley and they could have been fine! They could have missed the slide completely. Or if they’d started their trek a day later. Or if they’d stayed one more day up at on top. Or. Or if we hadn’t ever gone! Or if we’d gone somewhere else! Or if we’d told her to go somewhere else. Or if—

GIBSON
Paul. You can ask all the what-ifs in the world but the fact of the matter is: it doesn’t change a thing. It’s not going to bring her back. Beat. I mean. Fuck man. You remember that bus ride from Kathmandu to Syabru Besi?

PAUL
Yeah.

GIBSON
You remember how sketch that was?

Paul laughs.

PAUL
Yeah. Beat. Riding on the roof because we thought it was safer than riding in the bus.

GIBSON
Tin can on wheels. Winding our way through the mountains on a sketchy ass highway with just a sheer bottomless drop off the side with no barrier and every turn just praying we wouldn’t have to jump for it.

PAUL
Fuck man.

GIBSON
Her chances of dying on that bus ride were WAY higher than her chances of dying in that earthquake. I mean shit, our chances of getting hit by a car today are higher than that! Beat. But, at the end of the day, it’s just chance. It’s just chance man. But it was the chance. The only chance. And it happened. And you can ask what-if, what-if, what-if till the cows come home. But it’s just going to drive you crazy.
PAUL

I know. *Pause.* It just doesn’t get better.

GIBSON

I know.

PAUL

Time isn’t going to make it any better.

GIBSON

You don’t know that.

PAUL

Yeah I do. A year from now. Three years from now. Thirty years from now. She’ll still be dead. *Beat.* Maybe it gets better. But it’ll never get good. It’ll never just be okay.

Paul starts to cry. Gibson rubs his back.

GIBSON

Fucking drink man.

Gibson hands him a beer. Paul chugs. He lights a cigarette. The two share.

PAUL

I never thought there could be a world without Sydney. It never occurred to me. It never seemed possible. I should have known. *Beat.* I mean, fuck. I was freaking out about the ATM machine bustin’ on her like it did on us. And about her not having food or pepper spray. *Beat.* So stupid.

Paul hits himself.

GIBSON

Kind of hard to predict earthquakes.

They each take drags.

PAUL

It’s so fucked man. It was so fucked. *Beat.* When I went to look for her. When we flew up to Kyanjin Gompa and walked down looking for survivors, the valley was just so fucked. Everything broken, everything dead. Children. Little girls. Mangled bodies. Literally peeling ‘em off of rocks, each time just hoping it wasn’t Sydney.
GIBSON

That. That must have been hard.

PAUL

And when we were done. And we still hadn’t found her. I knew. Beat. She was under it. She was under all of it.

SYDNEY

No, I wasn’t.

PAUL

So many people died that day, man. SO many people. Beat. And I got a helicopter. When the US Embassy couldn’t communicate with the Nepalese government, your boy could. I busted out the best broken ass English you ever heard. I told them what was up and they gave me a bird. Beat. But I had the $10,000 to get it. He takes a drag. We carried a lot of dead people out that day. And not a single survivor. Long silence. You want to know something crazy?

GIBSON

Sure.

PAUL

When we were there, and the sun was starting to go down and it was starting to get dark, I saw something. I saw something shining in the rocks. So I walked over to check it out and I pulled on it. And it came loose. He takes a drag. You know what it was?

GIBSON

What?

PAUL

A fucking kukri knife. Beat or drag. You know what I told her to get me before coming home?

GIBSON

A kukri knife?

PAUL

A motherfucking kukri knife.
GIBSON

She’s looking out.

PAUL

I know.

GIBSON

She’s looking out man. If you had been there two days later you could have been dead too.

PAUL

I know.

GIBSON

Crazy ass chance man.

PAUL

It’s not chance.

GIBSON

No. No it’s not.

PAUL

I miss her man.

GIBSON

I know.

PAUL

I miss her so much.

GIBSON

Just listen. When you miss her. Just listen.

They smoke and think and listen.
Sydney sings Hang Me, Oh Hang Me from her box.

LIRUNG

I don’t believe in random chance any more. I really don’t. With all the quantum possibilities out there, all the infinite universes, it’s impossible to believe in a world so meaningless. The earth is written in story and time follows a narrative arch. Beat or drag.
Sydney entered this world the way she left it. With the shifting of plates and the moving of bones. From the moment she took her first step, every stride through life was a stride closer to me. A stride closer to April 25th, 2015 and the valley into which I’d eventually fall. The bones of this earth made way for her exit as the bones of the womb from which she’d emerge made way for her entrance. Undoubtedly, the day will come when the earth swallows itself. We must make peace with ourselves and the ground beneath our feet before it does. Beat. I was uplifted into this world with the shifting of bones and plates. Just like you. We all came into this world the way we will someday leave it. The earth will shake to make room for our exits and our entrances. It’s a beautiful thing, this dance.

_Six months later. Lights up on Diane._

**DIANE**

We got her back. It took six months, but we got her back. We got a call from the forensics office three weeks ago, saying that they’d identified her. So we flew to Kathmandu, Jay and I, to collect her. We cremated what was left. They put on a big Buddhist ceremony for us amid the half-rebuilt rubble of fallen temples. It was beautiful. It was Jay’s first time out of the country. He was blown away. He couldn’t believe the mountains and the towns and the people and their resilience. How quickly they’d begun to rebuild. Beat. One night, we could see Langtang Lirung in the distance through our window. We went out on the porch, a little buzzed, and we just started yelling at it. Screaming at it as loud as we could. Flipping it the bird. Beat. Then we just start laughing. Laughing at how ridiculous it was. I mean. How can you stay mad at a mountain? That’s stupid! And at the end of the day, this is it. This is our life now. And every step from here, I’ll just keeping asking myself, “What would Sydney do?” And then I’ll know. I’ll listen to the wind nice and close and I’ll know. I’ll know she’s here. Right next to me.

_Lights up on Sydney. She sings Upwards over the Mountain by Iron and Wine to her mother. Slowly, the voices of the cast join in. Lirung begins his monologue half way through and the song fades out over his last few lines._

**SYDNEY**

Verse

Em C G D*

mother don't worry, i killed the last snake that lived in the creek bed
mother don't worry, i've got some money i save for the weekend
mother remember being so stern with that girl who was with me?
mother remember the blink of an eye when i breathed through your body?
Chorus
Em C G D
so may the sunrise bring hope where it once was forgotten
sons are like birds flying upward over the mountain

Verse
Em C G D
mother i made it up from the bruise of a floor of this prison
mother i lost it, all of the fear of the Lord i was given
mother forget me now that the creek drank the cradle you sang to
mother forgive me, i sold your car for the shoes that i gave you

Chorus
Em C G D
so may the sunrise bring hope where it once was forgotten
sons are like birds flying upward over the mountain

(Slide Lead)

Verse
Em C G D
mother don't worry, i've got a coat & some friends on the corner
mother don't worry, she's got a garden we're planting together
mother remember the night that the dog had her pups in the pantry?
blood on the floor & the fleas on their paws
and you cried 'til the morning

Chorus
Em C G D
so may the sunrise bring hope where it once was forgotten
sons are like birds flying upward over the mountain

LIRUNG

It's autumn now. The leaves have begun to fall. Everywhere I look the world seems to be feeding itself. This morning I put my hand in the dirt. I lifted and came up with a handful of organics. Bits of leaves and earth and bugs. It was beautiful. So deciduous. So electric and alive. Beat. He looks up from his hands and straight into the eyes of the audience. I feel Sydney’s bones. Most of them may be lying in a cardboard box in a stale forensics office but not all of them. I still feel some of her bits and pieces. They're still here. And they are not lifeless. They are singing. They are dancing as they crumble. I hear her song as she breaks down into her smallest parts and feeds me. Feeds us. Beat. Meanwhile, Langtang rebuilds. The world family has arrived to come pick this
place back up. The rains have come and the grass grows up between those whose lives have been taken. Fueled by the matter of the dead. *Long beat.*

Grieve. Grieve for you have lost. Rejoice for you have lost but a single representation. *Beat.*

I love her. I will always love her. As I love you. And when you think of me know that we are one. *Beat.* No. I did not take her from you.

*She just moved in.*

*Lirung exits.*

*Lights up on Paul and Sydney. They talk via Facetime.*

**PAUL**

Hello?

**SYDNEY**

Hi.

**PAUL**

Is that really you?

**SYDNEY**

Yeah. It’s me.

**PAUL**

Wow. *Beat.* It’s crazy. I can’t remember your face.

**SYDNEY**

It’s still a face.

**PAUL**

I can’t remember your neck.

**SYDNEY**

It’s still a neck.

**PAUL**

Your hair.
SYDNEY
It’s still got some red in it.

PAUL
Your laugh.

SYDNEY
Oh, come on.

PAUL

SYDNEY
I miss you too bro.

PAUL
What’s it like where you are.

*Sydney looks around.*

SYDNEY
It’s nice.

PAUL
Just nice?

SYDNEY
It’s expansive. Kind of cold. But not in a chilly way. It’s not uncomfortable is what I mean.

PAUL
That’s nice.

SYDNEY
It is.

PAUL
I wish we’d left you.

SYDNEY
What?

PAUL
I wish we’d left you in Langtang.

SYDNEY

Oh. Yeah.

PAUL

It was so much prettier there than in our backyard.

SYDNEY

Yeah. Yeah it was. But Mom and Dad weren’t there.

PAUL

No. No they weren’t.

SYDNEY

It’s good to be home.

PAUL

Good.

SYDNEY

And I decomposed up there for a while before you showed up.

PAUL

I’m sorry, Pip.

SYDNEY

No! No it’s fine. Actually, it’s kind of nice being in two places at once. I’ve got two homes now. I get to be home with you all here, and the rest of me gets to be home with all of them up there.

*Pause.*

PAUL

Can I ask you something?

SYDNEY

Sure.

PAUL

Did you save me?
SYDNEY

What?

PAUL

Did you save me?

SYDNEY

When?

PAUL

When I came looking for you? The aftershock. Was that you? *Sydney smiles.*

PAUL

I knew it.

He laughs. *His eyes well up a bit with happy tears.*

SYDNEY

You know I got your back.

PAUL

Can I ask you something else?

SYDNEY

Shoot.

PAUL

You make it to the top of Kyanjin Ri?

SYDNEY

Seriously…?

She eyes him incredulously.

PAUL

Good. *He laughs.* Good.

SYDNEY

You should stop smoking you know that.
PAUL
Damn it SYDNEY.

SYDNEY
You should.

PAUL
God damn it.

SYDNEY
What would Mom say?

PAUL
Mom would say, “What would Sydney do?”

SYDNEY
Yeah. What would Sydney do?

PAUL
Stop smoking.

SYDNEY
Yeah. She would.

PAUL
I love you sis.

SYDNEY
I love you too bro.

PAUL
I’m scared.

SYDNEY
It’s going to be okay.

PAUL
I miss you so much.
I know you do.

PAUL

I want to hug you.

SYDNEY

You can’t Paul.

PAUL

Please sis.

SYDNEY

I’m sorry.

PAUL

Just one hug.

He weeps.

SYDNEY

Shhh….

He cries harder.

SYDNEY

It’s going to be okay. I’m not that far away.

PAUL

Come here if you’re not that far away.

SYDNEY

I can’t.

Beat. She throws him monkey.

SYDNEY

Whenever you miss me too much, just hold monkey. Put down the knife. And just hold monkey a little tighter.

Paul drops the knife. Lights out on Sydney. Lights dim on Paul, who has buckled beneath the weight. He holds monkey. He holds monkey so tight. He cries and grieves and wails for all the sorrow and all the loss that could ever
exist in this world. For all the lost loved ones and all the bereaved who remain to walk this relentless yet benevolent earth. He wails and cries and softens. His grief finds a mellow mood, a mood indigo. Cue Mood Indigo by Louis Armstrong or the chorus of Hozier’s Work Song. He holds monkey. Lights out on Paul.

Enter Gibson. Gibson reads a letter to the audience.

GIBSON

Advice on Grieving by Stewart Stern

There is no advice other than to go through it and feel whatever you feel as deeply as you can, and if you can’t feel what you think you ought to be feeling, accept that as all right too.

No one gets a prize, no one gets a demerit when it comes to this kind of goodbye. It helps to talk about it with others who are kin to the dying if they are people you like and can be clumsy with, and it’s fine to walk away and then come back. It helps to do favors for those who are closer than you are, or taking it harder than you think they deserve to. It can help to be a servant of the ritual, to exhaust yourself in helping to create one, to do slavish mundane tasks in its support and be glad when you’re thanked and not pretend to devalue what you did.

Mourning can be a pool of unexpected decisions, too, where old relationships are suddenly revived, old wounds forgiven, fresh starts made with people you never liked and now feel sudden love for. Express it as extravagantly as you feel the urge to and forgive it if it’s gone a minute later. And if the whole thing just feels fake, it’s fine to take a walk and kick a wall. Just remember that the foot you kick it with can break, and if you’re the thing you’re mad at, it’s not for this. If you can’t think of anyone who needs the dressing-down that’s got you stuck, pick God. If there is one, She won’t take it personally. There’s special dispensation for the grieving fist that shakes its rage at heaven, if we could only figure out which direction Heaven is. And if you find yourself confused about that, and are standing on a corner shaking that fist at everything, just take a look at yourself, and, if you think you’re funny, laugh.

Lirung enters.

LIRUNG

That’s good advice.

GIBSON

Thanks. Beat. A friend of mine wrote it not long before he passed. I asked him for help, and in ten minutes this is what he emailed me back.
LIRUNG
Pretty prosaic for an email.

GIBSON
He was that kind of guy.

LIRUNG
Mind if I take a seat?

GIBSON
Not at all.

LIRUNG
Cigarette?

GIBSON
What are you smoking?

LIRUNG
American Spirit Blues.

GIBSON
Sure.

He does.

Lirung hands him a cigarette and a lighter.
The two drag preciously on their cigarettes.

GIBSON
Got a name?

Lirung takes a deep drag and looks at him through squinted eyes.

LIRUNG
Larry.

GIBSON
Larry, hunh? So what do you do... Larry?

LIRUNG
I watch the grass grow.
GIBSON

Doesn’t that get boring?

LIRUNG

Sometimes.

LIRUNG

Lirung takes a drag.

LIRUNG

But you never know when things are going to get shook up.

GIBSON

Yeah.

LIRUNG

What about you.

GIBSON

Gibson.

LIRUNG

How you doing, Gibson?

GIBSON

Not so great to tell you the truth.

LIRUNG

Why’s that?

GIBSON

My best friend’s sister just died. Beat. And my grandpa just died. And my avalanche instructor just died. And my parents just got a divorce. And Stewart just died.

LIRUNG

That’s a lot.

GIBSON

And I just broke up with my girlfriend.

LIRUNG

When it rains it pours.
Yup.

Bad break up?

Yeah. It was pretty bad.

I’m sorry to hear that.

It’s alright. You know. It’s so funny. I feel like I’ve learned a lot from this whole experience. Like. The other day I came home and I was really angry and upset. So I stormed into my kitchen trying to think trying, trying to think, but just feeling too mad. And I thought to myself, what would Paul do? Paul’s my best friend. And he’s really good at taking out his anger. He just takes it out on dead things. So I went into my kitchen. And I grabbed the coffee pot. And I looked at it long and hard. And I walk into the living room and I see my house mate sitting on the couch. And I look at her. And I say, “You know, for a second there I thought really long and hard about destroying this coffee pot. Long and hard considering smashing it into little pieces. But then I realized something.” She says,

Glad ya did.

And then I tell her, “Ya know, this coffee pot didn’t do anything to deserve this. Just an innocent bystander. And if I break it I’ll just have to buy a new coffee pot. So I’m going to let it live.” So I turn around, walk back into the kitchen, and put the coffee pot back into the coffee-maker. I stand there breathing just for a moment, when all of a sudden I see the cupboard of glassware open. And in it I see this STEIN. This big old beer stein that she got me for Christmas, custom made with my name on it and everything. And I just look at it. And I get so mad again. And I grab it. And I storm back out through the living room and I say, “But this motherfucker. This motherfucker’s DONE!” My house mate goes,

Oh, Gib. Don’t do that.
GIBSON
But she knew I was gonna and I think she understood. So anyways, I storm into the
driveway and I find a spot where no one could see me. And I HAYMAKERED that thing
into the ground SO hard. MAN it felt good. So good. Then Paul came out and he said,

PAUL
Holy shit.

GIBSON
And I said, “Don’t worry I’ll pick it up.” And he said,

PAUL
The glass went like forty feet. How hard you throw it?

GIBSON
I didn’t know. So we just started laughing. Hysterically. Man it felt so good to just sit
there and laugh. Beat. Then Paul helped me clean it all up. Man. He’s really been solid
through all this.

LIRUNG
It’s good to have a friend like that. He’s a good man.

GIBSON
You know him?

LIRUNG
Yeah. Yeah I do.

GIBSON
He’s my best friend, you know?

LIRUNG
I know.

GIBSON
He’s hurting really badly right now.

LIRUNG
He’s a sick cookie.

GIBSON
What?
LIRUNG
He’s got a lot on his plate.

GIBSON

LIRUNG
I know.

GIBSON
Helping rebuild.

LIRUNG
I know.

GIBSON
It was the one year anniversary yesterday. Their doing the whole trek. Paul. His dad. Everyone in the world who lost someone in the landslide. The surviving Langtapas. The world family. Everyone. Together. Trekking the trail. Reaching the summit. And coming back down to rebuild Langtang Village. *Beat.* I kind of wish I was there. But I also feel like Paul needs to do this alone.

LIRUNG
He’s not alone.

GIBSON
I know. *Beat.* Ya know. I think he’s going to be okay. In a strange way, I just know it.

LIRUNG
I think you’ll both be okay.

*Curtain.*