

8 MINUTES LEFT

by e.b. lee

Observer

START

Opening

" (The sound of a rubber ball bouncing on the stage...DUNK...DUNK...DUNK...

Lights slowly up downstage. The OBSERVER bounces the ball with one hand. Under their other arm, they are carrying a large cue card.

The OBSERVER crosses from stage left to stage right. They should be dressed "formerly fancy"—like in a suit, or a dress, or a long jacket that is just past its prime. Not disheveled, but lived in.

The OBSERVER reaches the far stage left side and stops bouncing the ball. They turn to the audience and hold up the first cue card:)

THE OBSERVER'S CARD: The end is coming...

" (The OBSERVER holds this card up so everyone can get a good look. They nod. They put the card to the back of the stack, and they reveal the next card:)

THE OBSERVER'S CARD: ...at 4:44PM

" (The OBSERVER nods again. They put the card to the back of the stack and reveal the next card:)

THE OBSERVER'S CARD: The Diner—4:12PM

" (The OBSERVER finds a milk crate, or some sort of box just off stage right. They sit as the lights come up, upstage.

Throughout the scene the OBSERVER...observes. They may smile or laugh to themselves, but mostly they sit quietly and just watch.)

END

Scene One

(It's an unseasonably warm late-winter day. March 13th to be exact.

A diner on the north end of Charlesville, New Jersey. Just down the road from the train station—normally, the train runs by regularly every 15-20 minutes, but not today. It's eerily quiet.

It's a fairly typical Jersey establishment—a vague attempt at a retro 50s feel. There is a counter with stools in front, and a coat rack at the stage left side. Behind the counter would be various prep stations, a coffee maker, a window to the grill, etc., but the diner need only be suggested—the counter, the stools, the coat rack, and a couple of tables with chairs in front should suffice. On the tables are plates with half-eaten meals. There are cups half-full and cups half-empty. A few of the chairs are overturned. The general feel is that of a dining room that was recently full and bustling and then all of a sudden was not.

In the midst of all of this, center stage in front of the counter is SANDRA. She is holding a pitcher of water.

SANDRA + CARY

SANDRA looks around the room in stunned silence. She finds an empty glass on the counter. She pours herself a glass and drinks, while still holding the pitcher. She empties the glass and pours another, sips and sets the glass down on the counter. She starts walking to the stage right side of the counter, on autopilot. She stops abruptly, changes her mind.

SANDRA shakes her head and makes her way to the SL side towards a coat rack. At the coat rack, she reaches with her free hand and grabs her coat. She is about to put it on when she realizes she is still carrying the pitcher of water. She sets the pitcher down on a nearby table. She puts on her coat.

SANDRA heads downstage left to where the entrance would be. Just as she is reaching the door, it swings open and CARY enters, nearly bumping into SANDRA. Note: A real door can be used, but it's not necessary—it can be mimed, with maybe a door chime sound effect.)

START
SANDRA: Whoa, hey watch it! /

CARY: Sorry. I'm sorry. I look down too much, I know. And I kind of charged in here—

SANDRA: Excuse me?

CARY: I got a bad habit of looking down, and not in front of me. Not smart when you're entering a place. Are you...leaving? I mean, of course you are. What was I thinking? I'm sorry, I took a chance coming here and here you are and—I'm sorry, of course you're closing up.

SANDRA: ...Uh, we're wide open. Help yourself to whatever you want.

(SANDRA tries to duck around CARY, he tries to move out of her way, but they are off-sync and end up doing the awkward dance.)

SANDRA: No, you go left, I go right. Nope, nope.
Stop! Just stop moving!

CARY: Wait.
Can I just—

SANDRA: I'm trying to—
The door's just—

CARY: Oh, sorry,
can I ask you a question

(CARY's still ducking and dodging, but kind of actively blocking SANDRA now.)

SANDRA: Are you trying to...stop me?
Do I need to mace you? Are you asking to be maced right now?
I have a tactical pen and I know all the pressure points, don't try me.

CARY: (Hands up, steps out of the way:) No, no. Please. I'm not here to...I come in peace.

(SANDRA grabs the door to open it, she's halfway out—)

CARY: I just wanted to...I don't know.

I had this idea to come here, maybe get a pork roll egg and cheese on a roll with some disco fries and just really like, pig out and just—

SANDRA: What? What are you talking about? Did you not hear the news? The world is ending and there isn't much time and they made the emergency broadcast whatever—

CARY: Yes, no I know. That's why I'm here.

SANDRA: To get a breakfast sandwich and some fries?

CARY: And to maybe, talk...? To someone? To you maybe?

I know, I know. I sound weird. But I'm not.

Well, maybe I am, but everything's weird right now, right?

the trains aren't running, they shut it all down, it's a ghost town and it's so quiet and I just...I told myself, I should come in here, I should talk to her, I should order the thing I want to eat, I should make a decisive decision for once and just follow through...for once.

(SANDRA studies CARY for a long minute.)

SANDRA: ...Do I know you?

What's your name? I think I know your face.

CARY: I'm Cary... As for my face, you don't know it from here. I've been meaning to stop in. I've not...*technically* been here before, there was one time I *almost* came in and then I always think, "Just go in, push the door, step inside," but then I change my mind, I get back in my car and keep driving home and then I get home, and I eat the same old things and it's like, such a bachelor's cliché but yeah, sometimes it's a cereal-and-milk night and sometimes it's like, boiled hot dogs, or sometimes yes, it's just a can of baked beans and only once did I just like, heat it directly on the stove and eat it with a glove? But I was tired that night, and maybe I should have gone to the diner to begin with, and oh man. I'm talking too much.

(Clears throat.)

I'm Cary. With a "y." What's your name?

SANDRA: Sandra. Some people try and call me Sandy because they just gotta end everything with a "y" and I don't particularly like it. Yours is fine, though—yours is your name.

CARY: Thank you? I think?

Sandra-not-Sandy. It's nice to meet you.

SANDRA: Cary with a Y on purpose, nice to meet you, too.

You're a strange bird, but...you seem harmless enough?

...

(More to herself:)

I don't know what to do...

I live all the way in New Brunswick. I'd never make it... My cat's gone. My parents are no longer with us, God rest their souls. My brother's in North Bergen but that's...that's a different story...

Oh, what the hell...I would have taken the extra shift anyway. Who am I kidding?

(SANDRA takes off her coat, comes back inside, walks past CARY and finds her pitcher of water. She takes it and finds an empty glass and pours him a drink.)

SANDRA: Sit.

Take your pick—booth or table, the world is your oyster, my friend.

END

TRUDY: Me either...
Is this really happening?

PAULA: I think so...

TRUDY: Will you...?

PAULA: Pinch me.

TRUDY: Yeah.

PAULA: Three...

TRUDY: Two...

TRUDY: One...
Ow!

PAULA: One...
Ow!

TRUDY: Well...

That's that.

It's really happening, Paula... I don't understand, but—

PAULA: I was on the phone with my father when we found out. I told him I loved him and then it cut out. Nothing since.

But you're here. Thank you for coming.

TRUDY: I was home. I heard people outside, yelling, crying. I turned on the news and found out. Then the emergency broadcast thing came on.

I spent, I don't know how long, trying to make calls. Nothing.

A waste of minutes.

And then I remembered I was headed here anyway, so I just came...

PAULA: *Why are you dressed up? What's in the bag?*

TRUDY: Paula, I know you said you wanted to be alone today. I know you said it's just another day and you didn't want to do anything, but I had planned to kidnap you, take you to the city and show you a good time. I missed your thirtieth birthday and I have always regretted it, and here you are turning forty today. Literally not even the end of the world was going to stop me.

(They hug again.)

PAULA: Trudy, you missed my thirtieth because you were in the hospital with appendicitis. It's not your fault...

But I'm, I'm glad you're here now.

TRUDY: *(Near tears:)* I always felt that I could have toughed it out a few more hours and met you all out at Red Lobster. I know how much you love Cheddar Bay Biscuits. *(Crying a bit.)*

PAULA: Okay, okay. Calm down. What's in the bag?

TRUDY: *(Recovering quite quickly:)* I brought you a party.

PAULA: You what?

TRUDY: It may be the end of the world, but it's also your birthday, so we're going to celebrate. It's all we can do...

(TRUDY bends down and opens the bag. She comes out with two party hats. She puts one on PAULA and one on herself.)

PAULA + TRUDY

START

PAULA: You didn't have to do this, Trudy.

TRUDY: Yes, I did.

(PAULA goes to hug TRUDY, but TRUDY pulls back.)

TRUDY: We have a lot to do and we don't have a lot of time, so we've gotta get moving.
Game face, Trudy.
Go go go!

PAULA: We really don't have to—

TRUDY: We have to...

(PAULA tries to read TRUDY's eyes. TRUDY stares back at her. Serious.)

TRUDY: Please. Let's just have this...and forget...

PAULA: Okay.

TRUDY: So, first cake, then presents, then drinks, a game, more drinks, then popcorn and a movie to end it, just like we used to when we were younger *(She starts to tear up.)* Hold it together, Trudy. Okay, let's begin.

PAULA: If you say so.

(TRUDY reaches down into the bag and comes out with a small cake with a candle in it.)

TRUDY: Hold this, please.

(TRUDY hands the cake to PAULA. TRUDY finds a lighter in her purse. She lights the candle, puts the lighter away and takes the cake from PAULA.)

TRUDY: *(Singing...a bit fast:)* Happy birthday to you / Happy birthday to you / Happy birthday dear Paula / Happy birthday to you.

(PAULA stands there, still a bit stunned. TRUDY nods to her.)

TRUDY: Blow it out!

PAULA: Oh...

(As PAULA leans forward to blow out the candle, over at stage left, the OBSERVER leans forward a tad and blows in unison with PAULA.)

TRUDY puts her hand in her purse and comes out with a handful of confetti, which she tosses into the air at PAULA.)

TRUDY: Happy birthday!

PAULA: Thank...you...

TRUDY: Let me just get my knife...

(TRUDY once again goes into the duffel bag. She looks around in there but comes up empty-handed.)

TRUDY: I forgot my knife.

PAULA: It's okay. I can go get one.

TRUDY: There's no time. Just take a bite.

PAULA: You want me to bite the cake?

— END

NAN + JULIUS

Just as JULIUS reaches the bench, NAN enters from stage left and also reaches the bench. NAN is in a comfortable tracksuit and sneakers. She has perfect posture, despite her advanced age.

They stop on opposite sides of the bench when they see each other.)

NAN: Well, well, well...

JULIUS: It's you.

NAN: Julius.

JULIUS: Nan.

NAN: Nice day.

JULIUS: Perfect day.

NAN: End of the world.

JULIUS: So they say.

(A tense pause.)

NAN: You're not getting my bench.

JULIUS: Your bench?

NAN: My bench.

With the good pond view.

I'm here five days a week, weather permitting.

The only reason I'm not here seven is because I volunteer the other two days.

JULIUS: Well, I'm here six days a week.

I golf the other day, weather permitting. Keeps me active. Agile.

NAN: Well, you're early. This is my time, and you know it.

JULIUS: There isn't going to be my time apparently.

NAN: That's not my problem.

JULIUS: You know, there wouldn't even be a bench here if it weren't for me.

NAN: Oh, don't start with that again.

JULIUS: Go-carts.

NAN: I don't need to hear this now.

JULIUS: They wanted to turn this place into a go-cart, and, and mini golf place.

But I put a stop to it.

I said let's make it a park. Trees. Grass. Playground for the kids... Benches.

A pond.

NAN: Yeah, yeah, you fought off the big corporation single-handed and planted every tree yourself. Some even say you dug the hole for the pond in one day... with a wooden spoon.

JULIUS: Your sarcasm is not appreciated. Now, I never said I did it all alone, I just said I was a part of it. An important part.

NAN: It was your brother-in-law who did it. He was the one on the town council with the vote. You are just a loud old man.

JULIUS: Who do you think convinced Eddie to vote how he did? It was me. I swayed him. You should've heard him before I got to him. The go-cart boys had him eating out of their hands, but I set him straight.

NAN: I've heard enough. I want to sit down on my bench. And I want to spend my last few minutes in peace.

JULIUS: Stop calling it your bench.

NAN: Well, it does have my name on it.

JULIUS: What are you talking about?

(NAN points to the metal plate on the top of the bench. JULIUS leans in closer, his eyes aren't so good.)

JULIUS: What the...? How did you...?

NAN: You're slipping, old man. When you were down in Boca, the town council voted to allow certain sponsorships to raise money for park maintenance. For a hundred dollars you could get your name put on a bench. I figured your brother-in-law would have mentioned this to you. But the day came where you could fill out an application at town hall and I was first in line. Now here it is, my name on this bench. They installed it just yesterday. It's official.

JULIUS: It can't be.

NAN: It is. Now, why don't you take your old bones and shuffle on down to the bench down the path?

JULIUS: But you can't see the pond from that bench.

NAN: Not my problem, old man.

JULIUS: And what's with the old man comments? You're three months and sixteen days older than me.

NAN: Don't you know age is a construct? I'm young in here *(Points to her chest)* where it counts. You're old everywhere. *(She waves her hands to indicate the old all around him.)*

JULIUS: You are, without a doubt, the most vexing person I have ever known.

NAN: Vexing schmexing. Leave me be. I want to be alone for this...
Whatever it is that's going to happen...

JULIUS: I...

NAN: What?

JULIUS: Never mind. I'll be going.

NAN: Good.

(NAN sits down on the bench, not looking at JULIUS. JULIUS stares down at NAN. Then he lifts his head high and slowly makes his way stage right. He stops at the far stage right side. NAN looks over at him. JULIUS turns and sees her. She quickly looks away. JULIUS sighs. He walks back towards the bench. NAN glances over at him as he approaches.)

NAN: What is it now?

JULIUS: You want to know the truth?

END

START

VIOLA

~~Fill your life with purpose.~~

Why couldn't I just have...done this? Felt the sun on my face, pulled you both to me, breathed you in, pressed your cheeks to mine...

(To her kids, but they don't hear her:)

I'm sorry, my loves. I wish I could have given you more. You deserved so much more. More time to grow into your lives.

(Determined, stands up.)

No. I'm not going to do that.

I'll just move a little closer now. I'll stand here, I'll watch.

I want this, right now.

Just so.

Just exactly so.

Without any cruelty, without any lines of pushy parents behind us, without any whining kids in front of us. You'll swing, higher and higher, I'll push you, I'll let the chains twist while you both squeal. Maybe you'll think, "Our mother, she's fun today!"

(She moves closer to them.)

And I'll have to lie to you once more my loves, I'm very sorry for that.

I'll say, "Let's go get some bubble tea and a bagel, let's stay up all night and watch a movie tonight, let's read under the covers until our eyes hurt."

And then I'll run my finger down the bridges of your noses, kiss the tops of your heads, wait and listen to the sweet sound of your sleep. I'll feel the warmth of being snuggled between the two of you, my loves. My heart.

All your favorite things. All my favorite things.

There isn't enough time to do all that, of course.

There never is enough time, is there.

(She looks at her watch.)

Eight more minutes. *(A sigh.)*

(She composes herself, puts on a bright smile. To her kids:)

Okay, hold on. I'm coming. Close your eyes, hold on tight.

Ready? Pump those legs. Lean back.

Get ready to fly.

(The lights dim.)

END

~~The OBSERVER crosses and bounces. They show their next card.)~~

THE OBSERVER'S CARD: The Turnpike. 4:26 PM

~~(The OBSERVER bounces their ball once more and takes their seat.)~~

START (The sound of cars honking, bumper-to-bumper traffic, nobody is going anywhere. It's the New Jersey Turnpike at rush hour, times infinity. MIKA and RAVI are center stage in a car and they aren't speaking. They sit in tense silence for a minute before...)

MIKA: I told you to take the Parkway.

RAVI: Wouldn't have made a difference.

...

I'm sorry my apocalypse navigation abilities are not up to your standards.

MIKA: ...

They only bloom for one or two weeks out of the year, depending on the weather. And it's warm. So.

(They sit in silence for a few seconds.)

MIKA: Of all the places in the world.

It's going to end for us here on the New Jersey Turnpike?

RAVI: I can't control *rush hour* at the end of the world!

MIKA: You know how much I wanted to see the cherry blossoms in DC, just once. I told you that back when we first met.

Every year, it's always something. Too early, too cold, there's a work trip for you, there's a big project I'm on, and then we look on the cherry blossom cam and it's too late.

"They've bloomed and we've missed it!"

Always!

This was going to be the year I made it to see them before the petals all dropped, weeks and weeks of scheduling our itinerary around this one moment in time—

RAVI: So it's all my fault.

MIKA: Is that all you heard just now?

I'm talking about regret, Ravi.

Big picture stuff.

Life stuff.

RAVI: Uh-huh.

(More silence.)

RAVI: I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but—

Well, but...

You could have gone yourself.

You *didn't* have to wait for me, you know.

MIKA: I cannot believe you just said that.

RAVI: What? What did I do now?

MIKA: Forget it. Just...forget it.

RAVI: Please, Mika, can we not do this? We don't have the time to go in circles.

Why couldn't you go by yourself?

MIKA: The entire point was for us to do something *together*. I wanted to see them *with* you.
How do you not know that?

RAVI: Oh.

MIKA: Oh.

(An awkward pause.)

RAVI: Well, it's just that...it's just that, I...
Did you forget about my allergies?

MIKA: What?

RAVI: Every year, you talk about these cherry blossoms and every year, I dawdle and I hem and haw and...
The truth is, I didn't feel like all the sneezing and the itchy eyes, the runny nose, the stuffy nose...

MIKA: You sound like a commercial for Claritin.

RAVI: It's just that it would have been nice, if you, you know...

MIKA: If I what?

RAVI: If you *asked* me. If it was something that *I'd* like to do.
That's all.

MIKA: Or, *you* could have said you didn't want to, and for me to go ahead instead of holding me back!

RAVI: Is that what I do? Hold you back?

MIKA: In this instance.
You're otherwise pretty supportive, I guess.

RAVI: Gee, thanks.

MIKA: Rav, I really don't want to spend the rest of our time...doing this.

RAVI: And you think I do?

(MIKA switches on the radio to break the silence: all that is there is the sound of an emergency broadcast siren. The sound shakes them both to their core. RAVI quickly switches it off.)

RAVI: *(Feeble joke:)* Remember when the radio used to play songs?

MIKA: *(Getting upset:)* Things were so much simpler then.
(RAVI looks to comfort MIKA. She pulls away, he retreats.
Long beat.)

MIKA: *(Small:)* I just feel like...
The person who is supposed to know me best, out of the whole entire world, the person who I picked, the person who picked me.
Doesn't know me at all, in the end.
(The OBSERVER tries to look away, maybe fidgets with the ball, but doesn't bounce it.)

RAVI: I know you. Mika, I know everything about you.

MIKA: No you don't.

END

DAD: / We love you, peanut.

MOM: / Love you! See you next week and don't forget to pack sunscreen—

[BEEP!]

(From off, we hear the faint sound of sirens. AMALIA covers her ears, the OBSERVER mirrors her—covering their ears, too. AMALIA squeezes Reddy to her, burrows her face into the blanket.)

(She goes back to the first message again—she's hiding from the noise now.)

WOMAN: Hello? Hello? Did I miss the beep...?

I guess I missed the beep.

Amalia, it's your Mama. Pick up the phone won't you? I know you can see it's me. We all have the calling IDs now...

(Lights down as the sound of sirens overtakes the sound of WOMAN's voice.)

The couch and furniture from this scene can stay on, but things like the blanket can come off.

The OBSERVER crosses once again. They display their card.)

THE OBSERVER'S CARD: The Couch. 4:32 PM

(The OBSERVER bounces their ball once more and takes their seat.)

PATERSON

Scene Eleven

(PATERSON enters from stage right and drops a doggy bed near the couch and immediately begins pacing. PATERSON is somewhat...shaggy.)

PATERSON: Something isn't right. I can feel it. I don't know what it is, but something is off. Something is definitely off. There's like a weird energy. There's sirens. People running in the street. Something is just...not right.

And, and where is Simon? Where is he? He's not here. He should be here. Something is wrong, and he should be here. He's usually home a little later. I get that. But still. He should be here.

I need to sit.

(He stops in front of the couch.)

I'm going to sit on the couch. I'm not supposed to, but I'm gonna do it. And it's his fault. He's not here to stop me. He should be here. If he was here, I wouldn't. Unless he wanted me to. But I'm gonna do it.

I am.

(He goes to sit on the couch. He stops himself.)

I'm not gonna do it. That's not who I am. And besides, I don't want to sit. Maybe I'll just take a nap. I'll take a nap. *(He stops for a second.)* I'm not gonna take a nap. I'm not tired. I'm hungry. I'm always hungry. I'm not any more hungry than normal. Maybe I'll eat something. Do I have something to eat? I'm not gonna eat. I'm just gonna do this. I'm gonna walk around until my legs fall off and I die. Because he is never going to come home. He forgot about me.

START