

18 VICTORIA

A Full Length Play

By

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BEN	m. 30s.	The youngest of the three but not by much. Gay. The least “together” of the three in terms of having a settled adult life.
CATHERINE	m. 30s	Two years older than Ben. Married. Responsible. Has her shit together. Prickly, though.
STEPHEN	m. 30s	A year older than Catherine. Is very successful, but harbors some deep issues from childhood that have spilled over into adulthood. Fiercely intelligent and the most inaccessible.

WHERE

A mid-sized city in suburban America.

WHEN

The present. Specifically, the three weeks before the end of the world.

NOTES

Each actor inhabits his or her own space on stage, and they never establish any kind of contact with each other throughout the play (until the final scene, which is played in real space and time). It’s either the audience or the disconnected world of phone calls, text messages and voicemail.

Keep it simple. Play it quickly. Steer clear of histrionics.

A NOTE ON THE STAGING

The script doesn’t indicate any particular use of video or projection. However, I think an ideal staging of this show would be visually an aurally kinetic – video, sound, projection. A swirling world of sound and image around the three siblings.

I leave that to the director and designers to imagine and invent.

BEN

It was a Thursday.

No. No wait.

It was.

It was a *Tuesday*, not a Thursday,
Because I was still a couple days from getting paid
And I was broke
And I was at the Noodle House,
Because the Noodle House has that great Tuesday deal for dinner,
Like for college kids that were broke -- and me, apparently,
In his *thirties* and broke --
And shitty noodles were all I could really afford.

So it was a Tuesday.
And the Noodle House had a TV running,
And it's usually tuned to ESPN or something,
Sports, because I guess that's what college kids watch
when they eat shitty cheap noodles,
And it was something... really boring,
Something I... I don't know
The luge. Maybe. Winter sports.

And I had a lot on my mind that day,
Catherine and I had this completely stupid fight
This disagreement over who was going to get Dad's Encyclopedia Britannica --
He had this beautiful old set that we both adored,
I mean we were nerdy kids, the three of us,
And we'd read those damn things like they were Highlights Magazine,
Articles on malaria and Malaysia and malapropisms,
Casual reading for *fun*,

And anyway Catherine and I both wanted the set,
And Dad didn't specify who'd get them,
And we were emotionally raw by this point,
Everything with Stephen, all that bullshit,
We just sort of went at each other over these encyclopedias.

Catherine said I was being a bully, I'd already been given the house.
And I said she was being a martyr, she already *had* a house *and* a husband,
And I had... I mean, honestly, at that point I had
No money

BEN (cont.)

No place to live
A job that sucked the life out of me
No boyfriend anymore because he met someone on the Internet
And this kind of continent-sized low self-esteem

So could you just not be a bitch and give the house *and* the fucking encyclopedias
Which were, if I could point out, already *in* the house?

And she called me selfish and self-involved
And I called her judgmental and superior
And we rehashed shit we hadn't thought about in years
Because that's what you do,

And she hung up on me and wouldn't answer my calls or texts.

So.

I was sitting in the Noodle House being pissed about the noodles
And the encyclopedias
And Catherine
And Stephen --

I mean,
Stephen hadn't even come to the funeral.
He'd called me once to make sure I was okay.
And he'd sent an email at Catherine --

An email! --

And I get that he's got his own life in Denver,
And that he hasn't really seen any of us since he was 18,

But our dad died
You could... you know...
Participate.

And lugers are luge-ing on the television set
And the noodles are kind of gross

And I think I said to myself,
Maybe even out loud:

"My God could this day get any worse?"

And the lugging gets interrupted by the news,

BEN (cont.)

National news, so you know, you get the tinge in your stomach --

“Oh shit, who blew up what now?
Who went shooting in a mall somewhere?
What terrible thing has happened that we’ll all have to obsess over
For the next few weeks?”

And the anchor comes on, and he’s got a very solemn look,
And he says, slowly, kind of with this stentorian thing going on,
That something very important is happening.

And he’s going to introduce this guy from NASA.

CATHERINE

Here’s my thing about the encyclopedias --

And my brother Ben is a very good person,
I love him, he is my brother,
But when it comes to being aware of things like justice and fairness
And being a part of things being just and/or fair
Ben has a problem with recognizing that fairness
Sometimes means he can’t have what he wants.

That fairness is not exactly Ben-centric,
Which is sort of how he views the universe and everything in it.
Ben is interested in Ben,

And if he wants the Britannica,
then he doesn’t understand how anyone else could want the Britannica,
And he’s got the *house*,
And I’m like, “Ben, I’m asking for *books*.”

Books you can come over and see anytime.
It’s not like I’ll take them and burn them
Or hide them in a vault in the Himalayas or something.

We live five minutes from each other.”

So my thing about the encyclopedias is,
Ben’s got a house to remember Dad by,

A whole goddamn *house*!

CATHERINE (cont.)

And I just wanted the books,
To put on my shelf and to remind me of when we were kids

And Ben acted like I was asking him to remove a testicle and eat it

This completely disproportionate response to a simple request.

So I tried calling Stephen,
Which was a very stupid thing for me to do,
Masochistic, just...
But I don't know, I just thought that's what I should do,
I should call Stephen,

And he didn't answer. Of course.
And Ben is texting me every few minutes during all of this.

"I can't believe you hung up on me."

"Why did you hang up on me?"

"I want to finish the conversations about the encyclopedias, Catherine."

"R U There?"

"Catherine."

Theme and variations.
I tried Stephen again. Left a message this time.

"Stephen, this is Catherine. I still haven't heard from you since your email last week, and I'm really hoping you'll call or something. Because... I don't know, Stephen, because you should probably call me. Or Ben. Or anyone. Because... Because it's the right thing to do."

And then Ben's now left a message on my voicemail.

BEN

"Catherine. Seriously? We're going to do this silent no communication thing? I mean... if I were being unreasonable about the encyclopedias I could understand you being a harpy right now, but I'm totally justified in wanting to keep them, and you are being utterly unreasonable and if you use me getting the house one more time as an excuse to deny me what's rightfully mine, I swear, I... my noodles are here. Call me."

CATHERINE

And I call Stephen one more time
Because I'm a glutton for punishment
And I'm just...

I'm not angry.
The nature of what I'm feeling isn't anger
Because anger feels hot and prickly,
And it congests your ability to feel compassion
for the people you're feeling feelings about,
And this wasn't *anger*.

I'm not *angry* at Ben.
I'm not *angry* at Stephen.
I'm not *angry* at my father for being dead too soon.

What I'm feeling is this immense sort of...

Incomprehension.

I don't *understand*.

And Ben is still texting me,
And now he's complaining about how lousy the noodles are at The Noodle House,
And I just want Stephen to call me because...

Incomprehensible is emailing your sister a terse little note,
this:

STEPHEN

Catherine. Thank you for the phone call. I won't make it out for the funeral, but I'll try to get home as soon as I am able. Stephen.

CATHERINE

I mean...
Your father dies and the best you can do is --

"Thank you for the phone call. I won't make it out for the funeral, but I'll try to get home as soon as I am able."

And Dan starts calling me from the kitchen,
Dan's my husband,

Dan's calling me,

CATHERINE (cont.)

“Catherine, come see this.”

And I’m just like,

No.

No I don’t want to come see this.

I can’t process another thing right now.

My father dropped dead in the middle of teaching a class.

My younger brother is a raging narcissist.

My older brother hasn’t seen any of us in almost twenty years

And I’m just trying to get my hands on a fucking set of encyclopedias

That no one will ever use because of the goddamn Internet

No, *Dan*. I don’t want to come see this.

And then he’s there at the door with a very weird look on his face,

And I just sort of snap:

“What, baby?

What is so important that I can’t just have a half hour to myself right now?”

And he doesn’t say anything.

He just turns on the TV in the home office.

And there’s a scientist guy talking.

STEPHEN

You know what I was doing when I found out my father died?

Jacking off.

Watching porn,

I have my dick in my hand,

I hear the little text message thing go off,

Think it’s Annie,

I check it.

It’s Ben.

“Stephen. Catherine’s freaking out. She’s been calling you. Dad died. Call her.”

Like.

Great.

STEPHEN (cont.)

The very last thing I want to make some fucked up mental bridge between
Is jacking off and my dad being dead.

But...
There it is.

I finished,
Because... you know...
I'm not a quitter.

So it was a Tuesday I guess.
It had to be, because the funeral has been that Sunday before,
And I completely avoided it,
Just...

You know, it *was* shitty of me, I know,
I recognize it,
But I didn't even call either one of them after he died.
I texted Ben I think. Maybe we talked for like a minute or two.
But I couldn't talk to Catherine.
I couldn't bring myself to...

I emailed her this apology,
This vague sort of halfway promise to come when I could,
And I know that sucks.
That's... a kind of emotional brutality,
But the family thing is complicated with us.
Or at least it's complicated with *me*

And in some ways maybe it was a kindness just sending an email
Instead of inserting myself back into the dynamic
When it had been so...

Tough.

So it was the Tuesday after they buried him,
And I'd flown out on the Monday,
Got home that Monday afternoon,
Rented a room for a few nights on the side of town they didn't bother going to
And I was sitting on the ground next to Dad's headstone.

I could tell that Catherine had made most of the decisions,
Because there was a real lack of maudlin death excess at the grave,
Which is her thing, you know,
She's tough, she's generous and openhearted and all that,

STEPHEN (cont.)

But really tough,
And everything was simple
And tasteful
And not too much

And very Catherine.

I appreciated that.

Anyway, I was sitting there on the ground,
Just thinking about Dad
And trying to figure out how I was going to navigate visiting Ben
And Catherine
Without everything turning into a shit show,
And sort of laughing a little to myself
Because, you know, I'm thinking about my dad being dead
And I'm a little bit thinking about jacking off
Because now those things are...

And Catherine calls.
I don't answer.

She calls again.
I don't answer.
She leaves a message.

CATHERINE

"Stephen, this is Catherine. I still haven't heard from you since your email last week, and I'm really hoping you'll call or something. Because... I don't know, Stephen, because you should probably call me. Or Ben. Or anyone. Because... Because it's the right thing to do."

STEPHEN

And Ben texts me this weird text.

BEN

She wants the fucking Britannica. Fuck her.

STEPHEN

And I'm just like,
I got the hell out of here twenty years ago
To never have to be in the middle of this shit again,

I left.
I got the fuck out.
I did the thing I was supposed to do to save myself.

And yet here I am again.
A victim once again of the gravitational pull of a dysfunctional family,
Sitting on the ground next to my father's headstone
Thinking about the last time I whacked it.

Life is profoundly unfair.

So it's a Tuesday,
And no one knows I'm here,
And I'm in a cemetery feeling conflicted in a way I'd never been conflicted before,

And this kid walks over.
Maybe 14. At most 16.
And he's typical teenage boy,
Little on the thin side,

and he's got this energy that's...
Weird.

He's kind of jacked up a little,
At first I think he's high on something,
Little tweaker kid thinking I might have some shit for him,

But there's something in his face that's...

Too normal.
Too "good kid" for him to be on something.

And he just comes over and stand there for a second.
He doesn't say anything.

And I'm like,
"You need something?"

And he says,
"Can you fucking believe it?"

STEPHEN (cont.)

And I say,
“Believe what?”

And the kid tilts his head a little,
Confused,
The way a puppy does when you say something odd in a tone he doesn't get,

And he said,
“We're all gonna die. That's what.”

BEN

The NASA guy starts talking.

CATHERINE

An object that scientists have been observing closely for several years.

BEN

Its trajectory has been observed in recent months to change.

CATHERINE

The new trajectory for this object...

BEN

Apparently a giant rock the size of a few city blocks hurtling through space.

CATHERINE

...now, they've observed, has this object on a path to collide with the Earth.

BEN

Apart from the catastrophic losses that will no doubt occur at the point of impact...

CATHERINE

That's the language they used for this.

BEN

... scientists are predicting that this could trigger the start of an extinction event.

CATHERINE

Extinction event. That's the phrase that really stuck out to me.

STEPHEN

I didn't say anything to this kid,
And he got a little agitated.

"You heard me?
The news just said there's a big fucking rock in space
Coming for us.

We're all fucking space dust, dude."

And I don't know,
That last thing just hit me in an odd way,
Maybe it was the "dude,"
Maybe it was the "space dust" thing,

But I started laughing.
And the kid got pissed off,
Flipped the bird,
Said, "Fuck off, asshole."
And was gone.

And there's a little text message sound.

BEN

Stephen. Call me. Please. This space thing has got Catherine apoplectic. Seriously.

STEPHEN

Then my phone rings.
It's Catherine.

I answer.

BEN

I have this memory of when the three of us were kids.

Stephen is four years older than I am,
And Catherine and I are just a year apart.
So when this happened,
This thing I remember,
Stephen was 15, I guess, high school.

So I'm 11. I'm still a kid.
I still adore my older brother
And want nothing at all to do with my sister.

And it's August. The end of August.
The last little sliver of summer before we go back to school,
And it's terribly late, middle of the night,
(Or maybe like 10 o'clock, I don't know, I was 11)
And Stephen comes into my room and wakes me up.

He's fully dressed, got a stupid baseball cap on his head,
Flashlight in his hand, his school backpack on,
And he's shaking me and telling me to be quiet
But to hurry, to get some clothes on,
Catherine's changing and we're going,
We're all going,

And I'm half asleep, barely conscious,
I'm asking him, "Where? Where are we going?"

And Stephen gets very close to my face,
And holds the flashlight up between us
So the shadows are stark, like ghosts or monsters,
And he whispers: "Antarctica."

And something flashes in his eyes,
And I believe him, completely.
"Should I bring a coat?"

He never answers, just yanks me out of bed,
And I'm scrambling, putting on my play jeans and a shirt,
And Catherine comes in, her backpack on,
And a scarf wrapped around her neck
And Stephen tells her not to make so much noise,

BEN (cont.)

And we have to be, we have to be making an enormous racket,
My parents must have known the three of us were up to something,
Listening at the door or up to the wall
Because how could my father know --

I'm a head of myself.

And I get everything on,
And Stephen tells me to take my five favorite things -- just five --
And put them in my new school backpack
Because that's all we could take to Antarctica with us, five things,
And make it quick.

Five things. I pick my five favorite things:

My Teddy bear.
My Ramona Quimby book.
My cassette tape of Madonna's first solo album.
A notebook I'd been using as a sketchpad for my drawings.
And a broken pocket watch that belong to our next door neighbor.

I shove them into my backpack,
And basically as soon as the zipper is zipped,
Stephen's hand is on my arm and he's yanking me out of the house,
Catherine in the other hand, holding the flashlight,

And we're out the back door,
Into the nighttime,
Hot, humid, this thick quiet stillness,

And we grew up with this patch of trees behind our house,
At 11 I thought it was some kind of forest,
Really just a little patch of trees to keep clear our neighborhood from the next,
And we're headed into them,
Stephen pulling us along with this almost insane sense of purpose,

And he's telling us,
"When we get to Antarctica, we won't have any responsibilities
And we can do whatever we want
And we won't need school
Or church
Or weekend chores."

And I'm struggling to keep up with him,
He's older, and I was a little fat kid,

BEN (cont.)

Still half-asleep,
Getting a little scared of this, a little scared of *him*,

And he's just going on about how things will be so much better
When we get to Antarctica.

And this whole time, Catherine isn't saying much of anything,
And Stephen's reached this part of the Antarctica diatribe
Where he's explaining to us that when we get there
We'll have a house made of ice and how cool that will be

And Catherine finally speaks up,
Finally,
And she says, "You know, nobody actually lives in Antarctica, Stephen."

And it was one of those moments where you wish real life
Was more like a TV show,
Because it was like that record scratch moment,
You know,
Where everyone stops what they're doing and turns to listen, like...

...

And we're stopped in the middle of this suburban forest
With our backpacks full of bullshit
And no idea what the fuck we're doing

And Stephen just stares at her.
For what feels like an hour.

Just... stares.

And Catherine... gets Catherine.

"Nobody lives in Antarctica, Stephen. It's not inhabited by people. Maybe some scientists in a tent somewhere. But you don't *live* there. Polar bears live there. And penguins. But not many. It's uninhabitable. Why would we go to Antarctica?"

And Stephen says,
"Don't you hate where you are?"

And then there's this noise from behind us,
Where we'd come from,
This noise that sounded like animals,

BEN (cont.)

And Catherine starts crying,
Like... I'm serious.
Instantaneous tears. Waterworks.

And we start to see these flashlight beams criss-crossing the darkness
Getting sliced by branches and trees
And our names, faintly, called out.

And Stephen kneels down to me,
Gets right up in my face again,
Holds the flashlight up between us, making us monsters all over again,

And he says:
"He's going to tell you I'm crazy. Or wrong.
Because he wants us to stay stuck here forever.
Die here.
But I'd take us to Antarctica, Benji. I promise I would."

And the muffled voice becomes Dad's voice,
And suddenly he's there with us, in a robe,
Catherine runs to him crying and wailing about how Stephen scared her,
And how he was making us run away to a place with polar bears,

And then we're home again,
Unpacking our five favorite things
And getting back into bed
And going to sleep.

Like it never happened.

STEPHEN

There are three things that happen when people find out the world's going to end:

One: People deny it completely.
Pretend it doesn't exist
Or fabricate wild, exceedingly implausible conspiracies and theories
About why the world *isn't* ending
So no one has to think about why the world is fucking ending.

Two: People buy guns and Spam and a shit ton of Aquafina
and prepare for,
I don't know,
some Michael Bey action flick
"American Militia Versus the Asteroid"
Where some ass backwards hick from Montana is, in his mind, Bruce Willis
And there's a way to stop a giant space rock
With a Winchester you got a gun show.

And Three: Just get on with it.
The world was always going to end, you fucking idiots.
One way or another, there's a last day.

Now, we know it's three weeks from now.

And I guess there's a fourth way,
Which I advocate,
Sort of combines all three, elements of them anyway --

Rent a hotel room fifteen minutes from the house you grew up in
Buy as much alcohol as your Visa can handle
And drink yourself to death.

Cheers.

CATHERINE

So basically we find out this object,
18 Victoria,
(that's what they're calling the asteroid,
It's the naming system,
I think it sounds like a suburban address)

18 Victoria has been on the radar, so to speak, for a while.
It's a near-Earth asteroid that was discovered about fifteen years ago,

CATHERINE (cont.)

And they knew then, when they discovered it,
That it could possibly pose a threat to us, the Earth,
Which, to me, seems alarming enough,

But they weren't *sure*,
So they watched it for about fourteen years,
And a year ago they realized,
"Oh yeah, it certainly will hit the Earth.
Okay... now what?"

And the "now what" was apparently a year's worth
Of backroom meetings
And extensive long-range planning
On the part of global governments and agencies
On how and when to tell everyone else
That 18 Victoria was going to hit us.

And it basically came down to one guy from NASA
Interrupting "Dancing with the Stars"
To say:

"Hey.
Asteroid coming.
It's big.
We're fucked."

STEPHEN

Cable news is much more palatable when you're drunk.
Especially breaking news --

Which for the most part
Boils down to:

"The asteroid is ten minutes closer.
The asteroid is twenty minutes closer.
The asteroid is thirty minutes closer.

Let's ask Piers Morgan what he thinks about extinction."

I keep it on the local news mostly.
It's much funnier.

"Let's ask local resident who failed the ACT the most number of times

STEPHEN (cont.)

What she thinks about the asteroid.”

“Oh, sweet Jesus,
It’s gon be big up in the sky
And I’s be terrified!”

She gets me through another bottle of vodka,
And at least half of the afternoon.

CATHERINE

It reminded me a little of what happened after 9/11 --

The first day: paralysis.
Just sitting there in front of the television
Watching the news,
Dissecting the information piece by piece by piece,
Doing nothing of your normal life,

Because who can have a normal life
When everything’s been dismantled?

And you go out on your front lawn,
And everyone on the block is on their front lawn as well --

And this really happened,
The sun hadn’t gone down yet after they announced about 18 Victoria,
And Dan went outside to,
I don’t know,
I guess just not be in our house,
Which has suddenly become suffocating and small,

And everyone down our street,
Everyone --

Out on their lawns,
Talking to each other,
Crying. Hugging.

Like...

Awareness that other people do, in fact, exist,
And we’re all in something together,
And it’s bad...so,

Solidarity.

STEPHEN

It's about 4:30 the day after
They announced this thing,

And I'm supposed to be meeting Catherine
At a Starbucks,

Because for whatever fucking reason I answered the phone
After the kid in the cemetery.
"We're all fucking space dust, dude."

CATHERINE

Stephen?

STEPHEN

Hey.

CATHERINE

Where have you been?

STEPHEN

Don't start.

CATHERINE

I've spent a week and half. Begging.

STEPHEN

I'll hang up.

CATHERINE

Begging.

STEPHEN

I'm hanging up.

CATHERINE

Don't you dare. Don't you.

STEPHEN

Then don't *you*. Okay.

...

What do you want?

CATHERINE

You need to come home.

STEPHEN

I can't do that.

CATHERINE

You need to. You need to come home. Did you hear --

STEPHEN

Asteroid. Yes. I heard.

CATHERINE

I mean, you can't just not come home when --

STEPHEN

I feel like an ass saying it. "I heard about the *asteroid*." I mean, sounds like some bad dialogue in a SyFy movie.

CATHERINE

Pointless for you to stay in Denver when Annie isn't in the house anymore and we're in the middle of this with Dad, who you never --

STEPHEN

What exactly is the point of coming home, flying to Illinois just to. What, exactly? And how do you know Annie isn't in the house anymore? Have you been talking to her? Fuck, Catherine.

CATHERINE

She called me.

STEPHEN

Like hell she did.

CATHERINE

Last week.

STEPHEN

The world's ending, Cat. Maybe this subterfuge and emotional manipulation about my wife just to get me to --

CATHERINE

She called about Dad, you narcissistic asshole. Dad's dead. She called because that's what you do when you're attempting to approximate humanity. So...

...

Come home.

...

STEPHEN

I'm sitting next to his headstone.

...

CATHERINE

I hate you sometimes.

STEPHEN

I can tell you picked it. It's nice. Simple. Not... ostentatious.

CATHERINE

When?

STEPHEN

Last night.

...

CATHERINE

There's a Starbucks next to Dad's office. On Hill. Tomorrow at 5. I'm off around 4:30.
So.

...

You better be there.

STEPHEN

Okay.

...

So... What's Ben's deal with the Britannica?

And she hung up.

So now it's 4:30,
And I've been drinking since at least 9 a.m.
I stink,
My clothes look like shit,
I feel like death,
And there's nothing in me,
Nothing,
That wants to get out of this uncomfortable hotel bed
And go to a *Starbucks* --

And I know the interaction is going to suck,
I know she's going to try and cram three years worth of resentment
Into the time and space it takes to get a latte down,

STEPHEN (cont.)

And I can't. I just *can't*.

I don't want to *explain* myself,
Not to Catherine,
Because that's what she wants from everyone in her life,
Explanations for why they are who they are,
And that *defense* -- I don't want to defend myself

Why I went to Denver,
Why I left when I was 18, the second I could get the fuck out,
Why I never came back,
Why I don't have any tangible relationship with any of them,
Why I sent her a stupid email instead of just giving her the benefit of my voice for a
minute,
Why I'm so drunk I can't even feel my fingers and the sun's still out

Why an explanation even *matters*
because what will it change?

It won't change how she feels.
It won't change who I am.
It won't make Dad more alive
And it won't make us less destined to be dead.

So...

What the fuck, right?

CNN.

"The asteroid is now an hour closer.
The asteroid is now an hour and ten minutes closer.

Anderson Cooper, what do you think about extinction?"

BEN

I hooked up.
A guy on Craigslist.

"Married guy in his 40s. Never gets it at home. Good looking. Total bottom. Can't host,
but can travel. We're all gonna die, why not have some fun before we do?"

I mean... who could say no?

BEN (cont.)

He was mostly right about himself.
In his 40s. Check.
Total bottom. Check.
Good looking...

In an Armageddon scenario, maybe.
But we're still three weeks away, *mon frere*.
You're just lucky you could be face down.

So we're done, you know,
And there's that required chit chat moment,
The "we shall feign interest in each other as humans
So we don't feel totally cheap and pathetic about having sex with a stranger."

And usually it's the
What-do-you-do-
Oh-that's-interesting-
Email-me-sometimes-
Kind of thing.

But he's lying there, this married guy I'd just fucked,
And the unavoidable arises,
I mean, we were fucking under the shadow of 18 Victoria, for God's sake,
And he says to me

"You think we'll feel it?
I think we'll feel it.
I think it's gonna hit us, and everyone's gonna feel it,
Gonna be like the glass of water in 'Jurassic Park,'
Boom. Boom. Boom."

My eyes have adjusted to the darkness of the room,
So I can see him lying there,
And in the darkness, he doesn't look half bad,
He's sort of stretched out, one arm behind his head,
The other moving back and forth across his belly,
And he's looking at me,
Waiting for an answer.

"How long have you been married?"

Nervous laughter, and he adjusts himself up a little.

"Not what I asked you, and none of your business."

BEN (cont.)

“Oh I don’t know,” I said,
“Less that 24 hours ago, we were all given a death sentence,
Every one of us,
I mean, we all knew we were going to die,
But now, it’s like, we can save the date,

And here you are, a married man,
And I bet you have kids,
Cute kids, too. Bright kids.
A wife. In-laws.
A perfectly acceptable life

And you’re going to lose it,
Horribly, terrifyingly,
The Earth will rain down fire and darkness on your wife and children

And you’re here,
Naked in *my* bed,
Instead of there, with *them*,

And it’s none of my business?

Fuck you.
Get the fuck out of my house.”

And he’s silent.
Just for a few seconds.

“Fucking faggot.”

And he starts to put his clothes back on,
Angrily, like *I’m* the asshole,
And I’m like,

“Oh, no ma’am,
You’re the faggot, motherfucker.
You’re the faggot!”

And I just,
I don’t know,
I was in the middle of some Lifetime movie,
Hysterics with just the absolute least restraint,

And this poor guy,
I mean he just wanted to get fucked,

BEN (cont.)

He didn't intend to wander into this scene,
And he's got all his clothes on finally,
Somewhere around the time I was making fun of the size of his dick

And he's at the front door,
And he turns around
And he says,

"You're dead, too.
You want to go out like an asshole?
Fine. Go out like an asshole.
But you're just as dead as I am, buddy."

And he's gone.

I'm kind of grossed out,
Because it's one of those moments that's just too on-point,
An eye roll moment in a movie,
Who says shit like that?

But then, I'm also kind of...

Standing there in my living room,
Alone,
And he's right.

We're all gonna be dead like my dad.

CATHERINE

"You can have the books."

BEN

I didn't see her text message until my married man had gone,
And it'd been like three and half hours,
She was probably asleep...

I called her anyway.

CATHERINE

Do you have any idea what time it is?

BEN

Thank you.

CATHERINE

It's four-thirty in the morning. Ben...

BEN

Thank you for the books. I know it's hard to admit when you're wrong.

CATHERINE

Oh Christ.

BEN

Especially for you.

CATHERINE

I'm giving you the books, but I'm not admitting a thing. And it's *four-thirty in the morning*.

BEN

Regardless. Admission of whatever, whether real or just... not. Thank you. I appreciate that you're giving me the Britannica.

...
...

CATHERINE

Is there anything else?

BEN

I just went apeshit on a married guy I hooked up with.

CATHERINE

In Dad's house?

BEN

No, Catherine, in the middle of the front yard. Yes, in the house.

CATHERINE

It's still *his* furniture, Ben. That's gross. You're.

BEN

What do you think I am. Some.

CATHERINE

Having sex on your father's bed.

BEN

Kind of. Okay, thank you. *Thank you*. Now it's all even more fucked because I hadn't thought of that. Thank you, Catherine.

CATHERINE

I'm sorry.

...

Is there anything else? It's --

BEN

Have you heard from Stephen?

...

...

At all? Like, *anything*?

...

...

CATHERINE

No.

BEN

I know he's not... *present*. Ever. Or participatory. Because that's who he is, you know, who he decided to be. And I don't expect a whole lot from him, but I think there's something weird about him not calling or saying anything to either one of us... I mean maybe not to you, Catherine. But he'd call me or something. He'd. It's a fucking *asteroid!* I mean.

...

Was that hurtful?

CATHERINE

A little.

BEN

I'm sorry.

CATHERINE

No you're not.

...

I have to work in the morning.

BEN

It's not out of spite. The books.

...

CATHERINE

Ever been in a conversation, and you just tune out for a second. Just... you're gone. And you snap back to it, and you realize, you just missed the most important part of the conversation, and they're asking you a question and you have no fucking idea what you're even talking about? That's my whole life.

...

If I hear from him, I'll let you know.

BEN

Same here, Catherine.

CATHERINE

No you won't. You two never do. Goodnight.

BEN

Catherine, come on.

...

Catherine?

...

I text Stephen.

"Are you alive?"

A minute passes.

STEPHEN

"More or less."

BEN

"Good."

Then I went to bed.

...

CATHERINE

I left work right at 4:30.

Headed over to the Starbucks.

I got there about ten minutes before 5.

I ordered.

The barista was the one I dread,
Really chatty, loved to extend the customer service experience

CATHERINE (cont.)

Beyond the point where it was tolerable,
And today --

Today --

She was in fine form.

“So, 18 Victoria, can you believe it, can you really believe it, an asteroid, like some movie, but we’re actually in it, there’s a woman who came in earlier, said she’s going to spend the next week sleeping with every man who gives her a second look, and I was like, you go girl, hilarious right, what about you, little last night of the world fun for you, and you want that with soy or?”

I had my conversation with Stephen planned out:

Thank you for coming home to see Dad before the world ends.
Fuck you for sending me an email instead of actually speaking to me.
He didn’t leave you anything in the will. Deal with it.
I hope you like Denver.

Now disappear,
Best of luck,
And I love you,
But I don’t ever want to see or hear from you ever again.

And it’s what, three weeks,
So that shouldn’t be much of a problem.

4:50.
4:55.
5:00.

STEPHEN

“The asteroid is now two hours closer.
The asteroid is now two hours and ten minutes closer.
The asteroid is now two hours and twenty minutes closer.”

CATHERINE

5:10.
5:15.
5:20.

STEPHEN

On Fox News, Bill O'Reilly is blaming the asteroid on the Democrats in the Senate.

CATHERINE

5:30.

STEPHEN

On "Entertainment Tonight," they're showing a package on stars at the Grammys responding to 18 Victoria. Now I know what Kanye West thinks about extinction.

CATHERINE

5:45.

The barista girl asks if I want another latte,
On the house.

"Stood up, huh, guess he's not going to be your date for the end of the world, hilarious right, no seriously, I'll get you a free one, if you want, do you want?"

I get up.
I go home.

STEPHEN

I keep waiting for her to call.
She doesn't.

I move from vodka to bourbon.

By the time the asteroid gets here,
I won't feel a fucking thing.

CATHERINE

It's August. The end of August.
The last little sliver of summer before we go back to school, the three of us,
And it's terribly late, middle of the night,
(Or maybe like 10 o'clock, I don't know, I was 13)
And Stephen comes into my room and wakes me up.

"Catherine. *Catherine*.
You're awake, I know it.
I know you were listening."

In our house, it was hard not to listen,
The walls were thin,
And my father --

Well, he wasn't a quiet man.
He was...

Stephen was about to turn 15,
And I guess he reached that age
When boys feel the need to face their fathers
In some sort of, I don't know,
Dick measuring contest,
Rite of passage into manhood or,
Whatever,

There was peace in the house,
Then Stephen grew hair on his chest
And all of a sudden it was World War III.

They went at it constantly, Stephen and my father,
And my mother was gone,
Not dead, not divorced, just... gone,
Absent from us emotionally and psychologically,
She was this cold figure stalking the house
Barely engaging with us,
So there was just my dad,
Just my dad to take everything out on,

So...

Pyrotechnics every afternoon around 4
And they'd last into the evening.
My mother would drink.

CATHERINE (cont.)

Ben would retreat into his room and his books.
Stephen would push my father's buttons.
My father would explode.
The house would rock like bomb went off.

And I watched.

They'd been fighting, my father and Stephen,
Something stupid, something Stephen had done,

And, it was late and they were still in the thick of it,
In the downstairs living room,
So as not to wake Mother or freak out Ben,
But you could still hear it,
Coming up through the floor,
Rising water through the cracks and the splinters,
Words, phrases:

You fucking ungrateful
Never were a father
Malicious little bastard
Haven't been a man in years
Get the fuck out of my house
She owns you like a lapdog
Fuck you
Fuck you
Fuck you

Muffled connective tissue,
But you got the idea.

I was on the floor at one point,
Ear against the floorboard,
Straining to hear more clearly
What they were fighting about this time,

When I heard my mother's voice,
Closer,
At the top of the stairs.

“Quiet. You'll wake up Benji.”

Then it all stopped.

Silence.

CATHERINE (cont.)

Footsteps on the stairs,
Then Stephen suddenly in my room,
Yanking me off the floor
Telling me we're going,
Pack a backpack,

And that he was going to get Ben.

He was...
There's really no other way to say it,
He was crazy. Crazed.
His eyes, looking into them right then,
They weren't his eyes.
They were filled with something new,
Something a little scary, a little too demanding,

So I packed a bag,
And before I could leave the room
To go to Ben's,

My father was at the door,
A shadow turned in on itself against the light of the hall.

I couldn't really see his face,
But I could tell he was staring at me.

Silence. Then:

"Don't worry. I'll follow you.
He won't take you very far."

Then he was gone,
Down the hall,
And Stephen again.

Urgent,

"Hurry up, we've got to go."

Then into Ben's room,
Who looked out of it,
Scared,
Shoving a Madonna tape into his backpack,

CATHERINE (cont.)

Down the stairs
each of us tugged along by Stephen,
Out the back door,
Into the nighttime,
The woods,
The flashlights,

And he's telling Ben we're going to
Antarctica.

We won't have to go to school there
We'll have a house made of ice when we get there,
This insane...

Fine,
Drag us into the woods behind our house,
It's an adventure, whatever,

But he was so focused on Ben,
Telling him we were going to live in Antarctica,
We'd be safe there,
We'd be happy there,
And he was going to be the one to save us,

Ben was...
Ben was *believing* it.
I couldn't...

"Nobody lives in Antarctica, Stephen. It's not inhabited by people. Maybe some scientists in a tent somewhere. But you don't *live* there. Polar bears live there. And penguins. But not many. It's uninhabitable. Why would we go to Antarctica?"

And it was like you could see his heart breaking.

And Stephen kneels down to Benji,
Gets right up in his face,
Holds the flashlight up between them, so they look like ghosts or monsters,

And he says:
"He's going to tell you I'm crazy. Or wrong.
Because he wants us to stay stuck here forever.
Die here.
But I'd take us to Antarctica, Benji. I promise I would."

Not me.

CATHERINE (cont.)

That's what I thought right then.
He chooses Benji. Not me.

From then on,
It was always them

And me.

Then Dad's there,
Just like he said he would be,
And we're home again.
Before I fell asleep that night,
Dad in the doorway again,
The shadow turning in on itself,

And he said,
"I'm sorry, kiddo."

His voice.
Something in it.
Like...

I pretended to be asleep.

BEN

This morning, I was looking at this interactive infographic
On the *New York Times* website.

“They” --

Whoever they are, the people that decide
How the rest of find out everything we need to know
About asteroids and extinction events,
Who are “they?” How’d they get to be “they?”
I wonder --

These people decided about a week after
The Big Announcement
To tell us, finally, what’s really going to happen,
What it really means,
And what they’re planning to do about it.

And the *Times* turned it into a cool infographic.
Interactive.
You can spin the globe with your mouse
And change the projected impact site
 (“They”, the vaunted “They,” have determined
The real impact site is somewhere in India.)
And you can double click and see a little illustrated 18 Victoria
hit the Earth,

Boom,

And then see all the repercussions in these cool drop down menus.

Well, the big news -- “They” can’t do shit.
18 Victoria is going to leave a big dent in the bumper, so to speak,
And there’s nothing anyone can do about it.

We’ve got two weeks.
Then...

Boom.

STEPHEN

There’s a point, one would assume,
That the body’s reserves of water
Could be, technically, replaced by vodka,

STEPHEN (cont.)

If you drink enough of it.

I'm working on it.

I haven't showered in a week.
I've eaten whatever I could get delivered
Or yank from the vending machine down the hall.

I stink.
The room stinks.
And the only time I leave my bed
And the endless 24-hour cable news networks

Is to go to church.

There's a little storefront church
Across the street from my hotel.
Used to be a gas station,
Some fundamentalist nutjob's turned it into a church
"The Cradle" it's called.

And let me fucking tell you,
NASA tells the world there's a space rock
gonna kill us all in three weeks,

Jesus gets a lot of new friends.

The place is packed almost 24 hours a day,
the guy who runs it, name is Ted
Or Tim or something monosyllabic with a T,
Told me one afternoon,

"Friend, I'm ashamed to say it,
But I've never been happier.
Look around.
This is the Lord in action."

Bullshit.
It's desperation in action,
Fear in action,
Nobody wants to die.
Of course they'll turn to the man who's got everlasting life.

I go to The Cradle every day,
And I mean it, every fucking day,

STEPHEN (cont.)

Because this TimTomTed, whatever,
This storefront messiah,
he's an inspirational guy.

He gives the same sermon about 10 times a day,
And the room's always full,
No matter what time I go,

And TimTomTed's talking about facing your fate.

Jesus, he says, all preacher-like,
Jesus didn't fight his inevitable death on the cross.
He walked right into it, welcomed it,
Recognized it as his own.

That's what this is, says preacher TimTomTed,
This asteroid,
This extinction event.

It's our inevitable cross.

BEN

Okay, so.
Per the *New York Times*, 18 Victoria hits.

Boom.

Because of its size and speed,
The impact will rip into the Earth with such force
That the top ten miles of the Earth's crust –
Ten *miles* –
Will rip up, peel off,
Raining down everywhere in fire and stone and earth
And start to make its way across the entire surface of the planet.

Like peeling an orange.

And that's not really the worst part.
The worst part,
The part that feels almost inconceivable,
Is that the process,
The peeling away of the crust of the Earth,
Will consume every square inch of the globe
Within two hours.

BEN (cont.)

18 Victoria hits.
Civilization gets peeled away like a bad sunburn
And Earth becomes nothing but a charred, burning rock floating in space.

In less time than it takes to watch a movie.

STEPHEN

2 a.m. and I'm sitting in one of the folding chairs at The Cradle.
I'm the only person here.

Well, me and TimTomTed.
Who looks like shit,
Tired, worn down,
The man's been spreading the good news around the clock
For a week now,
I'm surprised he can even stand.

He comes over, sits next to me.

"What's your name?"

"Lucas," I tell him.

"Well hello, Lucas. I'm Pastor Mitchell.
You've been here every day."

"I'm living across the street.
Temporary situation."

"Everything these days is a temporary situation."

It's a good joke,
But nobody laughs.

"The only kind of man who comes to a place like this
Every day for a week
Is the kind of man who's looking for something."

And I'm thinking,
Fuck you TimTomTed,
I'm not one of the desperate sheeple
You've got coming in here
Hoping Jesus is going to fly from his cloud in Heaven

STEPHEN (cont.)

And push the asteroid out of our way,

I'm an educated person, you fuckwit,
And your "Touched by Angel" dialogue here
Isn't going to get shit from me.

...

"Maybe I am looking for something."

He lights up.
Dumbass.

"Then it's a good thing you're here.
Jesus always has what we're looking for."

"Jesus is a storybook character
And the people who come here are spineless fucks
And you're preaching the abundance of the Lord
In some barely renovated gas station
Like this matters,

And none of it is real,
None of your life has any consequence,
There's no God, no Heaven,
And soon we're all just going to... stop.

The only reason I come here
Is to remind myself what it's like to be in the same room
With another human being.

It sucks."

I get up, head for the door,
And right before I'm out and the door closes behind me,
I hear TimTomTed call out,

"God Bless, Lucas."

BEN

I'm in the middle of sending 18 Victoria
To Kansas on the *Times* website,
When Catherine calls.

CATHERINE

Are you watching the news?

BEN

Hello Catherine. How are you?

CATHERINE

People are losing their minds.

BEN

What's your least favorite city in Kansas? I'm about to blow it up.

CATHERINE

They've had to lock down India. I mean. I can't even conceive of how you'd do that, lock down an entire country, but they've done it. And people are losing their shit. And Kansas what about Kansas?

BEN

New York Times interactive infographic. Least favorite city in Kansas.

CATHERINE

Topeka. They're going to evacuate India. And a few of the surrounding countries. I mean. Can you... they're going to evacuate an entire region of the world. Put people... I don't even know where they're going to put them, but this is millions of people, crammed into...

BEN

It won't really matter, you know. Dead in India. Dead somewhere else. We're all dead.

CATHERINE

I don't like the caustic thing.

BEN

Realistic, Catherine. I'm a realist.

CATHERINE

It's disturbing.

BEN

I'm not going to pretend. Well of course it's disturbing.

CATHERINE

I've had enough death to last me a lifetime. I don't need it from.

BEN

But this whole thing is disturbing. And there's only two weeks left, I think you can manage.

...

CATHERINE

Stephen's in town.

BEN

He... what?

CATHERINE

He's been in town for a week. He was supposed to see me.

BEN

When? He didn't tell me he was in town.

CATHERINE

And he didn't. He did the thing he does. The thing I hate. The "I'm gonna be a human being, Catherine. No seriously, I am. But not really. No I'm not. Ha!" And if you could just, you know for *once*.

BEN

I was *joking*.

CATHERINE

Interact with me in a way that isn't vicious or meanspirited.

BEN

You can't take seriously.

CATHERINE

Or snide.

BEN

Everything I say. What do you want exactly, Catherine? What? Like, Hallmark Channel moments, all of a sudden, because we have to now be completely different people, pretending our life before now didn't completely suck, suck *spectacularly*, and continues to suck - *continues*, Catherine, despite the current global crisis, despite our wanting things to be different, despite *everything*. Is that what you think should be happening now?

CATHERINE

Yes.

...

Yes.

...
...

BEN

I don't think we're equipped for that.

...

They're evacuating India?

CATHERINE

And the surrounding regions that are expected to be catastrophically impacted by the asteroid when it hits the Earth. Says the NASA guy on CNN.

BEN

I feel like I'm in a sci fi movie sometimes. People... shouldn't be saying these things in casual conversations.

CATHERINE

When he calls you.

BEN

If he calls me.

CATHERINE

When...

BEN

If he does, he does. And I don't need you to manage my adult non-relationship with my older brother.

CATHERINE

Fine.

BEN

You can get... how you get, I don't care. But what he does to you.

CATHERINE

It's more than what he does to me.

BEN

He does to you and. Fine. That maybe be true. But you can't manage it. Okay? I don't feel the same need to hate him as you do.

CATHERINE

Why?

...

He left you, too, Ben. Just like he left me. Like he left all of us. But you.

...

Why?

...

...

BEN

What's your least favorite city in Texas? Let's fuck up the south.

CATHERINE

Ben.

BEN

Least favorite city in Texas.

CATHERINE

Ben.

BEN

Least favorite city in Texas.

...

CATHERINE

Houston.

BEN

Houston it is.

...

Boom.

...

CATHERINE

I'm terrified of what will happen when the asteroid hits.

People are...

Well, they're already losing their minds.

It seems like MSNBC is running a 24-hour stream
Of the completely insane things people are doing
Since the end of the world is coming.

CATHERINE (cont.)

There was a riot in Chicago by this
Band of people calling themselves the Survivalists,
(in a week, apparently, crazy people can still organize and plan riots,
These crazy people who believe if we dismantle the “System”
We have a better shot of saving ourselves from extinction)
And they shut down downtown Chicago,

Like literally shut it down

Because there were thousands of them.
Thousands of rioters descending upon Chicago,
Signs and guns and stones in plate glass windows.
Homemade bombs into state and federal run buildings.
People injured. Dead.

Military intervention to stop it.

And in the last few days, they’re reporting a trend
Of this extremist religious militia
(which I don’t think Jesus signed off on, a militia,
But then what do I know, we were raised Unitarian.)
Who’s going around, in cities across the country,
Enacting what they’re calling “righteous murders”
To appease the Lord and to encourage him to save the Earth.

They’ve killed doctors performing abortions.
The women who ran the Denver branch office of the ACLU.
The leading Democrat in the Tennessee Senate.
Two drag queens at a gay bar in Austin.

Just... any public face of their fears.

Apparently, when it comes down to it.,
the best part of ourselves
Dies before the rest of us.

STEPHEN

4 a.m.
The Cradle still has a light on.
TimTomTed is there alone.

Once I’m inside,
TimTomTed just looks at me and smiles.

STEPHEN (cont.)

“What can I do you for, Lucas?”

I’m silent for a moment.

“Which God do you believe in?”

He raises an eyebrow.

“I don’t know what you mean, Lucas.”

“I want to know which God you believe in.
The warm, fuzzy one of the New Testament
Or the crazy wrathful motherfucker of the Old Testament.
Which God do you believe in?”

He doesn’t say anything.
Not for a while.
Then:

“Lucas,
The point of believing of God
Is knowing you’re in good hands
No matter which one He turns out to be.”

And TimTomTed
had this little flash of doubt
Pass over his face.

This made me like TimTomTed.
This made me respect him.

“I’ve got more vodka than a Russian nightclub
Over in my hotel room.

You drink?

“Who doesn’t these days?”

TimTomTed
(who’s name, it turns out, is Richard)
Drank with me until the sun came up.

...

It was 6:30 in the morning when
Stephen called.

BEN

Ben?

STEPHEN

Who the fuck is this?

BEN

Your brother.

STEPHEN

...
Hello?

It's 6:30 in the morning.

BEN

That too early?

STEPHEN

It's *6:30 in the morning*.

BEN

I'm sorry. I haven't slept. How are you?

STEPHEN

What do you want?

BEN

Did Catherine tell you.

STEPHEN

Yes, she did. And I'm a little pissed off at you, Stephen.

BEN

I know. I'm sorry.

STEPHEN

You come into town and Catherine gets to. I mean. I stuck up for you.

BEN

I know.

STEPHEN

BEN

I'm the one who didn't turn his back. Well then if you know, then why'd you let her know you were here and not me?

...

And why the fuck haven't I seen you? Where have you been? A week.

STEPHEN

I've been... around. I was just going sneak into town to see Dad's grave and then head back to Denver. But.

BEN

You've been to Dad's grave?

STEPHEN

Yes.

BEN

Good.

STEPHEN

But then the whole asteroid thing.

BEN

Mom didn't come.

...

To the funeral. Or to any of it. So you hurt a lot of people who really cared about you for nothing, because she didn't even come.

...

Catherine is still totally clueless, so whatever she says to us, it's because she's just angry and upset about Dad and you being gone for so long and she doesn't understand it. So if you're hiding from us.

STEPHEN

I'm not hiding from you.

BEN

For whatever reason. Then what are you doing? Why haven't I seen you?

STEPHEN

Ben.

BEN

You're my brother. The world is ending. You've been here a week.

STEPHEN

I can't.

...
...

I know you don't understand it, but I can't.

...

BEN

Dad didn't leave you anything. I don't know if Catherine told you that.

STEPHEN

I'm not surprised.

BEN

But I fought Catherine to let me keep the Encyclopedias. The Britannica. I was going to ship them to you in Denver before... so if you want them, you can come to the house and get them and bring them wherever you're staying or. Just.

...

You should just come to the house. Stay with me at the house.

STEPHEN

I can't do that.

BEN

Stephen.

STEPHEN

I have to.

BEN

Wait.

STEPHEN

Bye, Benji.

BEN

Stephen.

...

Stephen.

...
...

...

STEPHEN

When I was eight,
My father bought me a set of Encyclopedia Britannica.

We had this thing:
He and I would grab a volume,
Go in his office (his home office)
And we'd crack open the volume to some article,
Whatever it was,
And read it. Talk about it.
I'd ask a thousand questions,
He'd tell me all this stuff, whatever he knew.

This was... our thing.

...

When you're a kid,
You don't need the vocabulary to describe it
To know that something is wrong.

And there was something wrong with us.
Our family.
My mom and dad, really,

Because all things start at the wellhead, right,
Sins of the father,
Sins of the mother, too, they should get their due,
And it trickles on down
In little streams and rivers and floods
Down to the children.

To us.

And my dad, when I was little,
When the three of us were little,
Was a good parent.
My mother...

My mother was like a panther,
Stalking around the perimeters of our life,
Eyeing each of us with disdain or mistrust
Waiting for...

STEPHEN (cont.)

The kill, I guess.

She'd said yes to some life that she didn't really want with my dad
And he took care of her --
There were mental disorders in her family, both sides,
Going back a long way,
Sins of her fathers and mothers, bearing out in her --

And so she was never *well*,
And she blamed *us*.

And this is all...
I mean, who can tell you her side of the story but her,
And she's not here, to explain herself,
And all I've got, all any of us has got,
Is what we think,
What we gather,
What we cobble together out of what we saw and did and were told,

So I could explain to you all day
Why I think my mother decided to fuck me
When I was fifteen,

But who really knows?
It happened.

...

She was cold, and then one day she was not.
And it became... confusing.
And... wrong.

So of course, I decided to hate my dad,
That switch just... turned,
And he was the enemy,

And mother,
My brilliant devious damaged mother
Decided one night to tell my dad
Everything,

And all hell breaks loose downstairs

You fucking ungrateful
Never were a father

STEPHEN (cont.)

Malicious little bastard
Haven't been a man in years
Get the fuck out of my house
She owns you like a lapdog
Fuck you
Fuck you
Fuck you

My mother standing at the top of the stairs
With a drink in her hand,
A smile on her face.

And I'm fifteen.
Fifteen.

And this is like...
Completely feeling like a fiction,
The *unreality* of it,

And like, what the fuck do you do?

And my father and I are snarling like dogs at each other,
Rabid,
And mother calls down from the top of the stairs,

“Quiet. You'll wake up Benji.”

Benji.
Ben.

And all of a sudden, it's like the world opened
And I could see what could be coming
And I refused it
Refused it.

Not Benji.

I ran upstairs,
Woke Catherine,
Told her we were going,

My heart leaping out of my chest,

Get him out of here
Get him out of here

STEPHEN (cont.)

And then Benji's room,
Thinking to myself,
"make it a game,
Make it like a game he'll want to play."

So I told him we'd be going to Antarctica,
Because a few days before,
I'd done the encyclopedia thing with Benji
That my dad used to do with me,
And we'd read the article on Antarctica,
So... fine, Antarctica
We're moving to Antarctica.

And I told him to bring his five favorite things,
Give him something to focus on
It's a game,
A puzzle,
An adventure.

And he's done
And we're out the door, the three of us,
Into the woods behind our house,
And I had no plan,
At fifteen how could you have a plan,
But we were going,
Somewhere, *anywhere*,

Because my mother was a threat
And my father couldn't save us
And we only had each other,
The three of us.
And I'm starting to believe in it,
Antarctica,
The more I talk to Benji about it,
The more I lie to him about where we're headed,
I start to believe my own teenage bullshit,

Because maybe there he'll be safe
And maybe there Catherine will never find out
And maybe there I can somehow not be who I was in that house
I can erase that part of me that ruined everything
That stained everything
That...

STEPHEN (cont.)

And Catherine destroys it all,

“Nobody lives in Antarctica, Stephen. It’s not inhabited by people. Maybe some scientists in a tent somewhere. But you don’t *live* there. Polar bears live there. And penguins. But not many. It’s uninhabitable. Why would we go to Antarctica?”

Boom.

You can’t run away from it, Stephen.
There’s that voice in my head telling the truth.
You can run away from it, Stephen.

It’s in you wherever you go.

And how can you protect anyone from disaster
When you’re carrying the disaster inside you?

I kneel down to Benji,
Get right up into his face,
Hold the flashlight up between us, making us ghosts or monsters,

“He’s going to tell you I’m crazy. Or wrong.
Because he wants us to stay stuck here forever.
Die here.
But I’d take us to Antarctica, Benji. I promise I would.”

Then flashlights.
My dad.
He’d followed us.

Catherine cries, runs into his arms.
Benji gladly goes where Dad tell him to,
The adventure was fun, but it’s over,
And my dad just looks at me,
As if to say:

“Here’s your chance, kid.
Run.
If you need to, run.”

I don’t.
Benji’s up in bed,
And so is Catherine.

My mother’s passed out in the bedroom upstairs,

STEPHEN (cont.)

And my father's waiting for me in the kitchen.

He's got a bottle of bourbon
And two glasses.

He fills one, slides it across the counter
For me.

"Here."

"I'm fifteen."

"*Here.*"

I take the glass.
I drink it.
My first time tasting bourbon.
It stings like hell.

"We're just gonna erase tonight, kiddo."

This is my dad's solution.

"We're just gonna erase tonight,
Pretend none of it ever happened
And you..."

You just go back to being a kid, okay?
And I'll...
I'll try to take care of your mother better.
So...

No harm, no foul, okay Stephen?"

...

I don't know if this happens to everybody,
Or just the kids who are lucky, like me.

But there's a moment when you realize
No matter what you do, you're alone.

Just you.
In the whole universe.
And no one is ever going to save you.

CATHERINE

Three days.

The asteroid hits in three days.

BEN

They evacuated India.

Can you fucking believe it?

They evacuated India

And they spread out the country's population

Across Europe and North and South America.

Not that it matters,

Everyone will be dead in two hours after it hits,

But I guess, I don't know,

They wanted everyone to enjoy extinction the same way.

Or something.

In the last few days,

Most of the business of the world

Has come to a halt.

Essential things continue,

The things we need to stay alive until it's all through --

Power, food, internet, cops --

There's this sort of insane, sort of comforting

Decision that seems to have been made everywhere

That we should all attempt to carry on like nothing is happening

For as long as we can,

As some symbol of resilience,

Or some kind of... balm, I guess, against the inevitable end.

But most things are done.

All mass transit's been stopped, no planes, no trains,

And police have barricaded major roadways,

So most cities are locked down,

Essentially, where you are is where you'll be when the asteroid hits.

Suicides have gone through the fucking roof,

I know at least ten people who've killed themselves,

Can't handle the thought of dying because of 18 Victoria,

BEN (cont.)

So they take pills
Or a gun
Or whatever,

And end it.

And I think they're idiots because,
Seriously,
We get to see what the end of the world is like,

And if I'm going to die,
I want to fucking do it in the coolest way possible.

So it's sort of a weird place to be.
There are tents in the downtown green space
Where Indian immigrants are camped out,
Military trucks run through neighborhoods
Directing people to websites with instructions for impact day,
And there are still people who have to get up
And go work a shift at Whole Foods or Starbucks,

Like...

The *unreality* of it.

CATHERINE

My husband left me.

Last week, Dan comes home from work
And he says we need to talk.

He sits me down,
He says, "Cat, this isn't working,
This marriage isn't working,
It hasn't worked for years,

And there's so little time left,
And I feel like I need to do this before I die
Otherwise I die not being true to myself and my heart

And there's this woman I met..."

I mean...

CATHERINE (cont.)

Who leaves their wife
A week before the end of the world?

And I just...

He moved out.
I'm in our house alone.
He's sleeping some Indian woman he met at the green space

And...

...

I'm starting to think extinction will be a relief.

BEN

18 Victoria will hit Earth
At 2:37 a.m. our time.
Middle of the night.

That's good, because I don't sleep anyway.

People are planning all-night vigils
All around the country
To celebrate -
Well, celebrate is the wrong word
And memorialize isn't quite right
But mark, I guess --
To mark the impact event.

It's going to be maudlin.
Candles and music
Signs and crying
Hugging
All kinds of...

The worst sort of public display.
Grief should be...

And I don't really know what people are grieving,
Because we're not going to feel a thing,
That's what they're telling us anyway,
We're on the other side of the world,

BEN (cont.)

It'll happen,
This giant rock will slam into Earth
And we'll just be ticking off another minute on the clock
120 minutes.
60 minutes.
30 minutes.
10 minutes.

CATHERINE

I imagine it will look like a tidal wave.
Only it'll be fire and rock and buildings and bodies
And cars and belongings and...

Lives.

A tidal wave coming over the horizon,
At first just a shimmer of red and orange in the distance,
Then taller
And taller
and taller

then the street starts to peel up outside my window,
houses and cars and mailboxes carried up in the air
the other side of the world raining down in pieces in my front yard
and then me lifted up as well
into the wave
another part of the end of everything,
ripping through the next street
and the next
and the next...

BEN

Antarctica.

The night after Stephen called me,
I took out the volume with the "Antarctica" article,
he had read it with me once.

"Antarctica, fifth in size among the world's continents. Its landmass is almost wholly covered by a vast ice sheet. Lying almost concentrically around the South Pole, Antarctica—the name of which means "opposite to the Arctic"—is the southernmost continent, a circumstance that has had momentous consequences for all aspects of its character."

BEN (cont.)

I text Stephen.

“Hey. Let’s go to Antarctica. It’s covered in ice. Maybe we’d survive there.”

He texts me back:

STEPHEN

“Three days. 2:37 a.m. Dad’s grave. Want to hang?”

CATHERINE

I go to the Starbucks --

Can you believe the Starbucks is still open

Three days to the end of the world

And you still have to pay 4 bucks for a latte,

Bastards --

And the barista I hate is working the bar.

She’s less chatty this time,

Less social,

Actually she looks like she’s on the verge of tears

The entire time she’s making my latte,

And she hands me my drink

And she says,

“Did he ever show up?”

For a moment,

I didn’t know what she was talking about,

Just gave her this baffled look.

“The guy who stood you up

Your end of the world date,

Did he ever show up?”

Ah.

Stephen.

“No. No he didn’t.”

“My boyfriend killed himself two days ago.

He couldn’t handle it.”

CATHERINE (cont.)

And we just stand there for a minute.
Nobody says a thing.

I put five dollars in her tip jar.

This is...

This is *bullshit*.
All of it.
The world makes sense to some people,
And I hate them,
I've always hated them
Because for me, for us, my family,
Nothing has ever made sense,
Nothing,

The whole of it has always been
This incomprehensible struggle
To just scrape by
To just tolerate each other

To find some way to live together
Without annihilating each other

And that didn't *work*.
We did.
We imploded.

And just when you think there might be peace
When my mother finally disappears for good
And my father dies
And you think there just might be some way
To mend the three of us
Into something that looks like a family

There's a space rock hurtling through space
And it's gonna hit us,

Like...

Fuck you, universe.
Fuck you, God.
Fuck you, whatever set everything in motion,

CATHERINE (cont.)

Because the deliciousness of the irony is not lost on me.

That rock's been headed for us for years,
We've been asking for it, extinction.

Since we couldn't finish the job ourselves,
We got a little help from above.

BEN

Catherine calls me
and lays on this thick layer of bullshit
about the asteroid being divine justice.

CATHERINE

That rock's been headed for us for years. Ben. We've been asking for it, extinction.
Since we couldn't finish the job ourselves, we got a little help from above.

BEN

Oh God, Catherine.

CATHERINE

Don't you feel.

BEN

No. I don't. Feel that.

CATHERINE

I don't understand it, Ben.

BEN

Catherine.

CATHERINE

This is not... *logical*.

BEN

Of course it isn't. It's an asteroid. It's disaster porn on the television twenty-four seven.
It's completely absurd. It's completely fucked up. So you can either lose your shit like
everyone else in the world (which is what it seems is happening right now) or you can
calm the fuck down, take a moment, and just... get on with it.

...
...

CATHERINE

Why won't he see me?

...

I've called him a few times in the last few weeks, asking him to just... for a few minutes, you know. Just a hello. A hug, A stupid handshake. And... I'm not asking for a lot from him, Ben. And he can't even offer me that. Why?

...

...

BEN

I don't know.

CATHERINE

You *know*. You've always known. That's part of the reason we've never gotten along the way we should. Right? I'm right, aren't I? You *know*. You just won't tell me.

BEN

Can't tell you.

CATHERINE

Semantics.

BEN

Truth. I promised.

CATHERINE

Oh, damn you and Stephen and your little.

BEN

I promised.

...

...

I'm never gonna tell you, Catherine. And Stephen won't either. Dad's dead, so he can't fuck with your head. Count yourself lucky. And let it go.

...

CATHERINE

Will I see you?

BEN

When?

CATHERINE

Before.

BEN

No, I know. Before the. I mean, when? What time?

CATHERINE

Where do you have to be these days?

BEN

Sarcasm.

CATHERINE

Truth.

...

Tomorrow, maybe?

BEN

Tomorrow.

...

...

I went to Catherine's house and we had a very nice, totally awkward conversation.

CATHERINE

I made coffee. A cake.

BEN

Weirdly, she made this chocolate cake.

CATHERINE

I had stuff to get rid of in my pantry.

BEN

And we talked. It was nice. To see her.

CATHERINE

It was terrible.

BEN

She was civil and kind and... like, the Catherine I knew as a kid.

CATHERINE

His face stopped looking like his face.

BEN

She told me about Dan and his Indian immigrant girlfriend.

CATHERINE

I hardly ever saw him. Even though we lived in the same city.

BEN

She told me about the weird Starbucks barista with the dead boyfriend.

CATHERINE

He's my brother, but I don't know a thing about him.

BEN

I told her about my married guy. Embarrassing...

CATHERINE

He's as much a mystery to me as everything else. My blood.

BEN

And it was almost like we were family.

...

Right before I left, she asked, out of the blue:

CATHERINE

Did it happen to both of you?

...

Whatever it is, the thing, the stupid *thing*, did it happen to both of you? Or Dad? Or?

BEN

Stephen left when he was 18,
The second he could leave the house...

He was gone.

Before he left,
He drove us to McDonald's,
Bought lunch,
And told me everything.

Mom. Dad. The bourbon.
"No harm, no foul, okay Stephen?"
Antarctica.

And he made me promise two things.

STEPHEN

Promise me if Mom even comes close to... *anything*... you'll go.

...

And don't ever tell Catherine. Protect her, Benji.

BEN

I left Catherine's house
Without telling her a thing.

CATHERINE

He left.

I told him,
"Call me on Impact Day."

He laughed.
Said it was weird that we were making it sound like a holiday

And I said,
"Well, it kind of will be."

After he left, I sent Stephen a text:
"I don't hate you. And I don't blame you. Call me."

This time, he responded,
Which shocked the hell out of me.

STEPHEN

"Thank you. I love you, Cat. Even though I suck at it. I won't be calling. So best of luck."

CATHERINE

I replied.

"You too, Stephen."

...

One year, we took this trip,
The five of us,
To Minneapolis.

CATHERINE (cont.)

My dad had some sort of work thing to do,
A conference or something,
So we all just tagged along,
It was summer, we were free,
And we weren't the vacation types to begin with
So this was an adventure to us,

And we were young,
Ben was maybe three,
And Dad was young and happy
And Mom loved him
And everything...

Felt like a life.

I miss that.

...

The night before Impact Day.
3 a.m.
Ben left hours ago.

The house is incredibly quiet.

I open the bag I brought home from the CVS.
I take every pill in all ten bottles.
I tuck myself into bed.

Boom.

-8-

BEN

Hey.

STEPHEN

Benji.

BEN

Nobody calls me Benji anymore.

STEPHEN

And it's very good to see you, too.

...

BEN

Call her.

STEPHEN

Benji.

BEN

It's Ben. And if you don't call her, I'm going to leave.

STEPHEN

Don't threaten me.

BEN

We had to live without you for twenty years. It sucked, Stephen. It sucked *hard*. So, you can make a phone call. You *owe* her that.

...

He does.

He dials.

It rings. Rings. Rings. Rings.

Voicemail.

STEPHEN

Um. Catherine... This is. Stephen. Um. Call me.

He hangs up.

BEN

Are you fucking kidding me? That's it? That's?

STEPHEN
What?

BEN
You're the worst. Seriously....

STEPHEN
She didn't answer.
...
You're... like a grownup.

BEN
Like a grownup. Funny. That's actually how Catherine would describe me, too. *Like a grownup.*

STEPHEN
I mean you're... like, *grown*.

BEN
Approximating one, not actually. Yes. It's been twenty years.
...
You look pretty good.

STEPHEN
Thanks.

BEN
I sort of expected you to look like shit.

STEPHEN
You're just a mess of compliments tonight, aren't you?

BEN
I figured you've been holed up in some hotel room somewhere, drinking yourself into oblivion.

STEPHEN
You're good.

BEN
Considering... you look pretty good.

STEPHEN
So... how about that asteroid?

BEN

I know, right?

STEPHEN

Go figure.

BEN

You can't imagine the hell it was getting across town. The vigil.

STEPHEN

What a clusterfuck.

BEN

I know.

STEPHEN

Maudlin bullshit.

BEN

Exactly.

STEPHEN

Go home. Spend your time with people you know and care about. Not a thousand strangers.

BEN

And stop clogging up streets for the rest of us trying to go extinct with some dignity.

...

I fucking *missed* you.

STEPHEN

Me too, Benji.

...

...

Want a drink?

He's brought two bottles of vodka.

Ben sits.

Takes a bottle.

They clink bottles.

STEPHEN

Listen, about Dad's funeral.

BEN

Look, Stephen. I don't care. I don't want to talk about Dad. I don't want to talk about what happened with you and... I don't want to talk about anything, really. As far as I'm concerned, we could just get drunk in a cemetery and wait for the end of the world.

STEPHEN

Did you make it out okay? Just tell me that you made it out okay.

BEN

Mostly, I guess.

...

Yeah.

STEPHEN

Good.

They drink.

Silence.

Silence.

Stephen checks his watch.

STEPHEN (cont.)

Well, motherfuck.

BEN

What?

STEPHEN

We missed it.

BEN

What time is it?

STEPHEN

2:54.

BEN

Fuck.

STEPHEN

Did you hear anything or?

BEN

Not a thing.

STEPHEN

Goddammit.

...

...

So... what happens next?

BEN

Two hours.

About.

Then...

...

...

STEPHEN

Come on, Benji. Let's go to Antarctica.

Ben smiles at this for a moment.

Stephen doesn't.

Ben's smile turns serious.

Serious turns into a little bit of fear.

Stephen is emotionless.

Ben closes his coat a little tighter.

END OF PLAY.