

RETROSPECTIVE

A Comedy

by T.J. Elliott

Knowledge Workings Theater LLC

118 Cedar Lane

Princeton, New Jersey 08540

knowledgeworkings@gmail.com

www.knowledgeworkings.com

(609) 306-4129

Retrospective

A Comedy

T.J. Elliott

“There is one thing and only one thing that causes unhappiness. The name of that thing is attachment.”

Anthony de Mello, S.J.

“[The artist] says to himself, thinking of life around him: this world at one time looked different and, in the future, will look different again.”

Paul Klee, On Modern Art (1924)

“Rational explanation destroys the faith that art requires of us.”

Jorge Luis Borges

Notes

The current version of this play owes a happy debt to many readers, listeners, and commenters including Liza Phillips, Lenore Skomal, dramaturg of the Broadway Bound Theatre Festival, Jasmine Dorothy Haefner, Gifford Elliott, Patrick O’Shea, Daniel Thompson, and Marjorie Phillips Elliott.

The definition of ‘unselfing’ here was inspired by the writings of Iris Murdoch

Dedications

To Claire Alta, my favorite painter, whose colors inspire me always

To Daniel Thompson who (perhaps unintentionally, but as always encouragingly) set me on this particular journey

Facilis descensus Averno:

Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;

Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,

Hoc opus, hic labor est.

Easy is the way down to the Underworld: by night and by day dark Hades' door stands open; but to retrace one's steps and to make a way out to the upper air, that's the task, that is the labour.

Virgil, Aeneid bk. 6, l. 126

Notes for Actors

Lines ending with ...// indicate next character's utterance overlaps the previous speech.

The mark P^* = **PIVOT to audience briefly**

The mark P^\wedge = **PIVOT ends**

SW stands for 'Sacred Wind,' an altered voice indicating a character's abnormal utterance of the words in **bold**, originates involuntarily, very fast, and taxingly from outside of their abilities and is followed at its conclusion by some sort of dance.

Characters

Rory McGrory: Male, 70s, successful painter of colors

Pippa Lefebvre: Female 30s, rhymer of words

Z: Female, 30s, critic of...everything

Clint Belinsky: Male, late 60s looks even younger, artist & enjoyer of life

(Light rises crepuscularly on a set of empty canvasses arranged in a semicircle upstage. RORY, a seventyish man in an artist's smock, stumbles into sight and stands US amidst those empty canvasses)

RORY

And what have we here? *(To audience)* Blank canvasses. *(Golf Clap)* Final project of a pretentious MFA who will end up trading crypto or writing art criticism? Or both? *(Elicits an audience reaction)*

PIPPA

(From offstage) Oh, I recognize that voice.

RORY

(Ignoring her) I'm so over the irony boys. And girls.

PIPPA

(Offstage) Boopsie, if I'm here, you're over *everything*.

RORY

(Gestures to canvasses, looks for where the speaker might be) Well, I'm certainly over painting shows without paintings. The point of painting is looking. Grab the eyes so the soul will follow. How does this...//

(PIPPA, 1980s look, in brilliant orange dress skips out behind RORY)

PIPPA

Grab the eyes so the soul will follow. That's your line, Rory. What was the other one? Full attention to...//

RORY

(Whirls around looking at PIPPA then the canvasses)
What the hell? Pippa? It's you. Here? Where am I?

PIPPA

You're talking to me! Is the silence over? Good start.

RORY

(Astonished retreats) Wait. No. You're... I mean... This is how you looked when we...//

PIPPA

(Pursuing) When we were together. *(Eyes dress)* Well, when we parted. The U-Haul ride to New York?

RORY

(Bewildered avoiding PIPPA) Yes, that's it. The orange dress. The day I moved you out. But that was forty years... And you're... How do you look this way now?

PIPPA

(Follows) Pulled myself together. *Got* pulled together. On *excursions*, we're dressed... Lots to explain..//.

RORY

(Backpedals) Just how you looked then. *That* orange.

PIPPA

(Pursues) Stop moving, Rory! *(RORY freezes)* Do not fear because I am here. Rhyme! *(Surveys canvasses)* So, setting usually indicates something about something.

RORY

(Views her then canvasses) Oh, I'm dreaming you.

PIPPA

(*Liltingly*) Dreaming? Still see me in your dreams, Rory McGrory? (*Laughs*) Didn't think that was likely. But I did figure we'd meet up here. Sooner or later.

RORY

First time I've ever had *this* dream. With you like *that*. I kept the Polaroid of you on that day. In my studio. For years. In *that* dress. *That* orange. Lost it in a move.

PIPPA

That photo? With me crying? You kept it? For target practice? (*P**) Is that why I show up here first? (*P^ Looks at canvasses*) Yowzah, these are beautiful!

RORY

I kept the Polaroid to remember that color. That's all.

PIPPA

(*Shuddering*) You keeping a Polaroid of me in *this* dress crying on the U-Haul ride day just for the *color*? Seems like *half* a fact, dearie. Oh, you'll learn that unfacts agitate us here. Then am I the *clog*? That day was horrible, (*Musing*) intolerable, sorrowful. Marital?

RORY

Pippa rhyming randomly. Some things never...//

PIPPA

Poet making a poem. You know — *knew* me. Full timer rhymer climber. (*P**) Okay, mustn't get distracted. Here to *unclog*. (*P^*) So, this dress. Clog clue? That day. Kitchen phone rings. Interrupted your complaint that helping me move lost a day's painting. *I* was loading the U-Haul. You answered. Face got tighter and tighter the more that call went on. Like now. Remember?

RORY

Yes, it was Peter Lake calling. Crazy, shouting I was a chump moving you to the city. Why did he do that?

PIPPA

(SW) Peter Lake suffered from histrionic personality disorder. (Twirls) Obviously.

RORY

(Taken aback) Perhaps, but he proceeded to tell me, no, to itemize the names of every guy you...//

PIPPA

(Sing-song) All the men I fucked when we were married. *(RORY jumps)* Fact. Only facts here. *That's* the clog, right? *(Looks US)* But why place us here?

RORY

Only facts? Yep, you fucking every guy I knew is a fact. *(Head slap)* Sorry. Magda said slut-shaming is ...//

PIPPA

You're sorry? Thank you. Never got a chance to say what was happening for me then. My *polyandry*. Perfect word for my...thing. Poets need the right word.

RORY

Polyandry? Is that like a made up dream word?

PIPPA

(SW) Polyandry. A feature of flowers like the Lotus, an aspect of queen bees who copulate with multiple drones during mating flights...//

(RORY interrupts, PIPPA dances)

RORY

What are you doing?

PIPPA

Answering your question. (*P**) *They* move answers through me. *If they* choose to give one. (*P^*) That... what you heard is part of what I do on excursions, but I'm here *mainly* to help you unclog. Get it out to let it go. Detach.

RORY

Get it out. Gotta get out. (*Exits SR, moonwalks back*)

PIPPA

The fact that *they* placed me in *this*, the Polaroid dress, in which I U-Hauled three hours to the city — silently. Not even goodbye. Silence lasting till *now*. So, figured I might be your clog. *Anger about my...eaubruche away your words took*. Wrote that back then.

RORY

(*Sputtering*) Your old what?

PIPPA

Eaubruche is Old English. Earliest word for... breaking a marriage. Used it *then* in a poem about *that* day. To make sense out of...me. Eaubruche rhymed with 'word took' and 'low look.' I hate the word adultery.

RORY

Of course, you wrote a poem about that day. (*Exits SL, moonwalks back*)

PIPPA

Poet! Poems explained me to myself. And whoever else cared. Tried to get *Iowa Review* to publish one to explain to you, but then *silently* you divorced me faster than...(Muses *then laughs*) So, you're still angry about Wayne, Godfrey, Clint, Tony, Jojo...//

RORY

Stop! I don't care. (*Exhales and squats*) Good. Damn. Way too much to drink last night. Magda warned me.

PIPPA

My...adventures are *not* your clog? No? No.

RORY

Clog! Ah! This is one of my indigestion dreams. (*Gestures to stomach, stands*) Soon I'll wake up, go to the bathroom, and...//

PIPPA

Not a dream. *They* send me on excursions to help an entrant — you — let go of a clog. A part of your *self* stuck in someone else. Resentment. Grievance. Didn't *Wayne* imitating my orgasms make you punch him at a party on Broome Street? Pretty cloggy. Probably wanted to punch me.

RORY

You knew about that? You weren't there. Oh, *Clint* told you. Pillow talk? Clint was next in the dick of the month club. (*Head slap*) No. Saying that's misogynistic.

PIPPA

It's fine here to say anything. Clint felt bad for you.

RORY

Clint felt bad. Well, Clint should've felt bad for...//

PIPPA

I worried about you then, but never got to tell you...//

RORY

Then you worried about me! Felt bad one of your... *polyanderers* would embarrass me. I got over it.

PIPPA

I felt bad then because we never talked about my...*thing* and if what Wayne was doing brought the whole...*thing* up again that might...//.

RORY

Wayne? (*Laughs*) Until this silly dream, I haven't thought of Wayne in years. Not since he died.

PIPPA

(*P**) Apparently a fact. Unexpected, given I'm here...
(*P^*) Did you resolve me in therapy? See a shrink?

RORY

Therapy! Now who's dreaming?

PIPPA

Of course. Therapy would've been wasted on someone who had all the answers. Here, you'll have all the questions. Only *they* have all the answers.

RORY

They? Who are *they*? For God's sake, why am I...//

PIPPA

(*Looks up, waves away question*) Don't ask. But that Polaroid must figure. Why keep it? Paint my portrait?

RORY

A portrait? The last portrait I painted was in AP Art in 1969. (*Turns*) So strange. The nurse said the new pills might have side effects. But this...Hey! This isn't right. You're still young, but I'm... older. Why?

PIPPA

(*Looks up, shakes head*) Damned if I know. A constant of the universe: older men with younger women.

RORY

But you're also...

PIPPA

Dead? Yes, Rory. Welcome to the after-death! Damn! Supposed to say that right away.

RORY

(Retreats) I'm not dead. This is a dream. Magda looked it up. *(Searching)* What's it called?

PIPPA

***(SW)* Lucid dreaming describes a state in which the sleeper, aware that he or she is dreaming, is sometimes able to control or influence the course of the dream. *(Dances then shivers)* Yowzah!**

RORY

What is that other voice? Like a computer voice.

PIPPA

(P)* Computers have voices? Don't tell me. Hearing what I missed just distracts me. *(P^)* The voice is sacred wind answering your questions. Could you please limit them? The pass-through is exhausting.

RORY

Sacred wind! *(Snorts)* You. Sacred.

PIPPA

Sacred wind is facts, not gibberish. Flows when new entrants ask questions. I'm the passage for replies.

RORY

Yes, wacky tour guide in the afterlife is the perfect encore career for you. *(Head slap)* Why do I keep...//

PIPPA

It's fine. Dead since 1989. Heard worse. Doing *this*, I needed a label for when *they* answer a question through me and freak out entrants. Like you. So, sacred wind. Facts blowing through me? *Wind*. Sacred seemed right *here*. Finding words. What I do. Did. Do.

RORY

(*Gesturing*) Where is *here* supposed to be?

PIPPA

(*SW*) **In this place. Present, arrived. At this point, at this juncture.** (*Dances*) Not there. An abstract expressionist who can't stand abstract expressions.

RORY

(*Circles*) Gotta be a door. My dreams have doors.

PIPPA

But you haven't even looked at what's here. (*Looking at canvasses*) I think it starts in this...//

RORY

What starts? Empty canvasses?

PIPPA

Empty? You don't recognize a museum gallery? Exhibiting your show! (*Reads*) *Full Attention to Color: A Rory McGrory Retrospective*. Yowzah! If they put *your* paintings here then... maybe I'm *not* your big clog.

RORY

(*Rising goes to Pippa*) My show? Oh! I've had *this* dream. But usually I'm naked. (*Looking*) There's no paintings here. The canvasses are all empty.

PIPPA

You can't see them? Schmutz! You're covered in schmutz. Happens to the transitional, those *between* existences. Schmutzy until you settle. Soon. I hope.

RORY

Schmutz?

PIPPA

(SW) Schmutz, clingy dirt. From the German.
(*Dances*) *Schmutz* blocks you seeing the paintings.
Huge retrospective. Your life's work. (*Gazing*)
Continues over there. Is that a gift shop?

RORY

Gift shop! (*Laughs*) Gift shop for *my* paintings. Right.

PIPPA

Continue touring your retrospective?

RORY

Why not? Let's dream on while I'm schmutzy blind.
Can't wait to tell Magda. (*Points*) What's this one?

PIPPA

#27. Swirling red... horseshoe? Doorway? Vulva?

RORY

It's just red. Anything else is your thing. I just created color. Color is truth. Color is enough. Form is fiction.

PIPPA

Of course. Full attention to color. You always numbered them. #27? You gave this to me for my birthday. I'm in a retrospective. (*Reads label*) This has my name! (*Reads*) *Rory McGrory gifted this early work*

to his first wife, the poet, Pippa LeFebvre. The poet!
Yowzah!

RORY

The poet, Pippa LeFebvre. Author of the debut collection: *Pippa's Crimes — I'm Only In It For The Rhymes*. Mention there who else you were banging the week I gave you #27? (*Head slap*) Can't say stuff...//

PIPPA

I am one of your clogs! You would have multiple clogs. Get it out to let it out, ducky.

RORY

It's a joke. Are jokes allowed here? (*Paces*) Gotta...//?

PIPPA

Hey, I adore jokes. And laughing. You never let me explain this to you when I was alive but those *guys* were just breaks in the inaction. They made me laugh when you were too busy. Mischief of miscellaneous nights. Well, days too. Mornings, once or twice.

RORY

Mischief of miscellaneous nights? More promiscuity in perpetuity. (*Head slap*) Can't control my mouth.

PIPPA

Bantering! We bantered a lot. Until we didn't. (*P**) Am I the big clog if we're bantering? (*P^*)

RORY

Clogs, clogs, clogs. What the hell *is* a fucking clog?

PIPPA

(*SW*) **A negative piece of the self still lying in another person, a vexatious attachment.** (*Twirls*)
Clog's my best word to tell entrants what needs to

move so they can move. But you claim my...
eaubruche is not your clog. Then...//

RORY

(*Storms off*) I'm not clogged! By an *eaubruche*. Or ...//

PIPPA

Not clogged? (*Following*) The poem I wrote *after* you divorced me doesn't still rile you? The one in *Cosmo*? *High Infidelity*? (*Recites*) *Meander. Ring. Philander. Ring. Ding-a-ling. Pander. Ring. Candor. Cling. Slander. Sing. Damn the Thing. (Beat)* Nothing?

RORY

Nope. Just figured you got a new rhyming dictionary.

PIPPA

When we first met you said eliminating middle words from a poem and only keeping the rhymes was clever.

RORY

I said a lot of things and so did you. And then we — mostly you — did a lot of things. Why? Who cares?

PIPPA

(*SW*) **Women with high estradiol levels participate in increased opportunistic mating. Such levels, however, increase the risk of bleeding problems and the thickening of the lining of the womb.**
(*Dances*) Seems sacred wind wants you to know why.

RORY

With a biology lecture? Can't you stop breaking wind?

PIPPA

Nope. But our breakup wasn't all about my... activity.

RORY

Oh, *sacred wind* knows all ? Do tell.

PIPPA

(SW) Married too young because being Catholic you believed in marrying anyone you penetrated. You were bottle-fed as an infant. We mistook each other for other people who actually never arrived. Men view physical infidelity more importantly than emotional infidelity. You painted eighty-two percent of waking hours during those years. (Faltering) I married you because your name, Rory McGrory, rhymed. Relationships formed in a patriarchy can breed boredom. (Dances) Enough?

RORY

You married me because my name rhymed?

PIPPA

One fact of *many* that might help you uncare, ducky.

RORY

Can't uncare if I don't care about... all that. You can't know. I have Magda, the kids, grandkids. And painting.

PIPPA

Your *not* caring about my... escapades feels mostly like a fact, but then (*P**) why am *I* on this excursion? (*P^*) We'll figure it out. Sex comes up frequently in excursions. But only in talk. There's no sex here. Fact.

RORY

No sex here? Even prisons have sex. Not that...//

PIPPA

(Laughs) No sex. Kind of a relief. No bodies anyway after the... transition. Sex is such a human condition.

Schmutzy schmutz schmutz. I'm used to it. Dead.
Since 1989. Fact. You outlived me by...

RORY

I'm not dead. The green chile always screws me up.
(*Squats to examine the floor*) Might be a trap door...

PIPPA

You think this... (*Gestures around*) *This* is from the
combination plate at some cantina? Ultra schmutzy.
(*Points*) Thirty-five years! *Rory McGrory 1951-2024.*

RORY

(*Yelling*) Dream invisible dates don't make me dead!

PIPPA

How do you know? Ever been dead?

RORY

(*Crawls to search*) No. And I'm not dead now. But you
and the wind will explain death to me now, right?

PIPPA

(*SW*) **No longer alive; deprived of life; vital
functions permanently cease.** (*Dances*) You and
Magda sent a get well card just before I *ceased*. Meant
to send you the poem after my *last* diagnosis. (*Recites*)
*Breath In, Kith Kin, Gathered About, Breath Out. Cold
Skin, Breath In, Heart Dims, Breath Slims. Breath Out,
Death Shout.*

RORY

Maybe I'm in a coma. People in comas dream.

PIPPA

A coma? You'd believe anything as long I'm wrong.

RORY

(*Jumping up*) I'd recall dying. And my Mom and Dad would greet me. And where's the light I walk towards?

PIPPA

(*SW rapidly*) **Illusions of light at time of death arise as the brain releases natural opiates that stop pain and fear. Neurons that remain persist in the routine of telling a story with a bright light.** (*Sighs, dances*) Argh. The light *always* comes up. When people ask, *they* should use a recording, not make us do sacred wind. Like calling to get the correct time or weather.

RORY

Calling to get the time? You've been dead a *long* time.

PIPPA

Is that not a thing anymore? Calling for the correct time. *At the tone...* Anyway, we don't do time here.

RORY

(*Ranting*) Great! Add '*Don't do time*' to the clogs and wind and interventions. Don't do time. (*Looks at watch but realizes it's not there*) What happened...//

PIPPA

Let go of time. There is no '*how long*' here. (*Resets*) Boopsie, you think this is a dream? Fine: enjoy it. Tour your retrospective. Maybe the schmutz drops off and you see the paintings. Your colors are *facts*.

RORY

Maybe playing along gets me out. Let's see what other paintings are supposedly in the crazy house museum.

PIPPA

(*In front of a frame*) #33

RORY

(*Staring still not able to see the painting*) This is #33?

PIPPA

Yes, all greens. Pine. Kelly. Fern. Jade. Pistachio...//

RORY

Stop. Don't sacred wind the Benjamin Moore catalogue. Labels get in the way of seeing. Full attention to color. Even if I can't see it.

PIPPA

I remember you making *this one*. Barely spoke to me for days. You spoke more to that canvas than your wife. And I found other... things to do. Led to another of my poems. *Commenced. Intense. Whence Dense Fence of Silence from Spense. Hence, Flensed. Pense, then Sense. Then Tense. Then Mense. No Penitence.*

RORY

Flensed? (*Waves*) Don't bother. You reciting your old poems in *all facts* world. Nonsense dream.

PIPPA

A poem is a fact. A high quality fact. You once liked my poems. (*Sees button*) Oh, there's audio commentary!

RORY

(*Stalks away*) Commentary? Bad bad dream. Words don't go next to my work. Disengages viewers from the thing itself.

PIPPA

Shall we listen?

RORY

No! I never let words into my shows. You know that's a fact from when we were together. *Full* attention to color. Grab the eyes, the soul will follow. No instructing the viewer how to see. No critic saying what I *intended*. Not that I ever gave a shit about what critics wrote.

(PIPPA shudders, doubles over)

RORY

Hey! No dying *again* in my dream, Pippa.

PIPPA

We only die once. *(Straightens)* But I'm so fact-based now that serious *unfacts* — like that one you just said — make my form a little woozy.

RORY

What *unfact*? I painted color, said screw the critics.

PIPPA

I don't think so. *They* put this button here which means it's probably a clue to a clog. *(Pushes button)*

Z

(Voiceover) "A resolute colorist, McGrory stridently denounced attempts to find meaning in his works. But the deep rich Azul..." *(RORY lunges, PIPPA clicks off)*

PIPPA

What's wrong, boopsie?

RORY

That's Z! What satanic sadist put *her* curatorial crap with my paintings? This is a nightmare retrospective.

PIPPA

You were *resolute* about color. Obsessed. Our first date. Fanelli Cafe. The whole night explaining to me how flowers use colors for sex. Yes, you did. That's what got me. Saying the same eyes that evolved to hunt now let us go gaga at the purples in a sunset. Or a pretty girl sitting across from you in a darkened bar.

RORY

(*Spinning*) I said that? Maybe that was a dream too.

PIPPA

No, poets hold onto words. Another button. (*Pushes it*)

Z

(*Voiceover*) "*Early paintings likely reflected McGrory's feelings of abandonment and sadness at the sudden demise of his first marriage.*"

PIPPA

(*RORY stamps his feet*) Get it out to let it out.

RORY

Demise! Painted 33 *before* Peter Lake recited the...//.

PIPPA

Yes, *demise* doesn't express our ending. Your endless silence. More perished. From the Latin *perīre*, to be lost or destroyed, to die, to be wasted ...(*Resets then P**) Words still distract me. (*P^*) Sorry.

RORY

Well, Z's words disgust me. Woman was queen of the eighties hack art history leeches.

PIPPA

Z was... is my friend. She was with me at the end.

RORY

Yes, your friend. Who else would write in *Artforum* after you died how *you* deserved credit for my paintings? *Our turbulence inspired the raging red in #27?* I'm *not* dead but a dream with Z could do me in.

PIPPA

If Z's words are your clog. (*P**) Why am I here? (*P^*)

RORY

(*Hopping mad — literally*) Z's words? More pestilential mouse droppings the Village Voice diabolically converted into memes for the parrotocracy to rinse and repeat forever. Even now... (*Looking around*)

PIPPA

Is it all Z? (*Pushes button*)

Z

(*Voiceover*) “ “*Shards of color hurl themselves futilely at the edges of the canvas. The work hangs between murderous imagination and suffocating convention.*”

(*RORY futilely rips at the button*)

PIPPA

You always got emotional about people saying your paintings conveyed emotion (*Air-poking him*) Fact.

RORY

I've seen what happened to other painters.

PIPPA

After they died? You are dead. That's a fact.

RORY

(Waving his hands) Go away. The tidal wave dream was bad. Zombies at the faculty party one: terrifying! But fucking Z? I *never* think of Z.

PIPPA

(Contorts) Never think of Z? *Big* un*fact*. Big clog. Z says malattachment. But is malattachment even a word? Clog is kind of...onomatopoeia.

RORY

Dreaming that pipsqueak poseur Z's words next to my work? Next you'll say people I can't see are taking selfies in front of my paintings.

PIPPA

(P)* Selfies? Is that a sex thing? Don't answer. *(P^)* *Pipsqueak poseur*. Pretty good with words for a guy who wants to ban them. *(Looking)* #49. The orange masterpiece. With the Polaroid. All crinkly. Somebody found it. Orangey orange just like my dress.

RORY

This is # 49? *(Beat)* With the photo? More Z?

PIPPA

Yep. *(Reading)* "*Paintbox Boy AKA Rory McGrory, this year's and (sadly) probably next year's star slathers strata of tangerines and terracottas to perform a heavy handed seduction, but viewers beware or you too, like Paintbox Boy, will end up trapped in a box of paints.*"

RORY

That parasitic, talentless, bitter scribbler had *no* idea what I was doing with # 49.

PIPPA

What *were* you doing with this? I always wondered because 49 seemed to pop up soon after I left. In this dress.

RORY

Your dress just had...has a color...worth exploring. You would see that. If Z's blather hadn't made the art a sideshow. She was just a harridan hating anyone getting more attention than her.

Z

(Offstage) I mainly just hated you, Paintbox Boy.

RORY

Did you say something? *(PIPPA shakes her head)*
When I wake up, I'm calling my doctor to go off these meds.

Z

(Peeking from behind a frame unseen by Rory) You're not calling anyone. You're dead. *(Ghostlike)* Whooo!

RORY

What? Who was that? Someone else is here?

PIPPA

(To Z, stage whisper) Stop the fooling around, girl.

RORY

Who are you talking to now? The sacred wind genie?

(Z appears in 80s t-shirt and leather

outfit; RORY hides)

Z

Howdy, Paintbox Boy! Deja fucking vu. Still spewing the same whiny shit like at Mary Boone's in 1990.

RORY

(Still hiding) No! Not Z. Stay out of my head!

PIPPA

Said he's undead. Rhyme! Much to do here, Z.

RORY

It's a dream. Must be a dream. I haven't led that bad a life for eternity with you two. No one has.

Z

Get over yourself. Us assigned to you *forever*? Whatever forever is. *(To PIPPA)* So, the man himself. Finally dead. *(To RORY)* Cut the crap.

PIPPA

Going gently until he admits he's lifeless.

Z

Let me try. *(Chasing RORY out)* You're dead! *(Evading PIPPA's air-clutch)* Pippa, a little help?

PIPPA

The last one made so much noise detaching.

Z

He stopped screaming eventually. Moved on. I think.

RORY

If screaming ends this, I'll do it. *(Screams)* Argghhh!

PIPPA

Some clogs require more work than...//

Z

Malattachments.

PIPPA

(P*) Mal? Malady, malice. Malattachment. Kind of a negative vibe. And is it a real word? (P^) See the...//

RORY

Real! The art assassin shows up in her cliché art opening uniform? Not real. But that deeply repressed memory does make me scream. (*Screams*) Argghhh!

Z

Voluntary screaming doesn't work. In our experience. (*Surveys outfit*) Dolled up for this excursion. Glad *they* skipped using clothes from the night I died. Grunge sweatshirt tangled in seaweed, muddy Manolo slingback pumps, bloody Yankees cap. My mom freaked.

RORY

Right, you drove into Long Island Sound. I remember toasting your departure. Multiple times.

Z

Oh, that's your malattachment talking, Tint-Man. But yes, thanks to dickhead Peter Lake's nasty car, I crashed, burnt, *and* drowned. Bad brakes. Little fucker never took it for scheduled maintenance. That was his malattachment. But Petey detached. Right, Pippa?

RORY

Wait. *Peter?* Peter Lake? (*To PIPPA*) Peter and you...

PIPPA

Unexpectedly. *After* you U-Hauled me, he visited New York to apologize for unmasking my... extramarital mischief. Another break in the inaction ensued. That was all. But he never got over the poem I published about it. (*Reciting*) *Peter Lake / I did make. / Big mistake.* That rhyme was just too good to pass up.

RORY

That poem gave Peter a clog? Why?

Z

(*SW*) **Peter Lake suffered from histrionic personality disorder.** (*Dances*) But we got him detached. And you will too, Technicolor Orgy guy.

RORY

How did you get him detached?

Z

Never mind. But, yes, it did involve *some* screaming.

RORY

(*To PIPPA*) Can sacred wind blow her out of here?

PIPPA

On mutual... malattachments, we collaborate.

RORY

Mutual? Fallen angels tag teaming me?

Z

Oh, a narcissist like you would expect to be borne away by angels. We're no angels, Paintbox Boy.

RORY

Ah. Every painter was a misogynistic narcissist to you. De Kooning. Pollock. Picasso. Me. What's the commonality?

Z

You're all dead. And all men. After that, *no* similarities.

RORY

Ha! Saying I'm a narcissist? That's *not* a fact!

PIPPA

Pretty much all psychiatry is *not* facts, But Z really believing you were a narcissist? Definite fact, ducky.

Z

Like the fact that you're not alive, Mr. In Livid Color.

RORY

Facts? Okay, sacred wind me. Who killed JFK? Tupac? Did Shakespeare write the plays? Aliens?

Z

Only facts relevant to *your* situation. Oh, here's a fact: (*In his face*) you're dead! And who the hell was Tupac? I only made it to New Year's Day 1991. Barely.

PIPPA

Settle! (*Air-turning Z*) Darling, we're touring Rory's retrospective. And it has your commentary. But schmutz keeps him from seeing the paintings in the show.

RORY

Commentary? Critical thuggery. Instead of daring to create something new yourself like a painting or a novel or a poem, your words kidnapped my work.

Z

Oooo. I am *your* malattachment. (*Surveying the canvasses*) Well, my kidnapping failed if they still gave *you* a retrospective. Glad I didn't live to cover that.

PIPPA

It's a big show. (*Gestures*) There's a gift shop.

Z

(*Reads placards*) I'm quoted heavily. Critics rule!

RORY

There's no fucking show. Must've burst a blood vessel to be dreaming of the attention vampire who sucked the last drop of attention out of any art. *Don't look at the paintings, people, look at me and my crit-babble.*

Z

Oh, Paintbox Boy, did I upset your *full attention* shtick? No text allowed. No other painters either. No anything. Just globs of paint. (*Points*) Oh, the earwax puke snot green one is here. And #83. Called it *A Tequila Sunrise humping a Rubik's Cube*. That was a bitchin line.

RORY

Tequila Sunrise? Bitchin? Dead a long time much?

PIPPA

Z, excursions should *help* him let go. Enjoy this. You *both* live on in this retrospective.

RORY

I'm living on without her. (*Muses*) Possessed people have dreams. Magda's Catholic; she'll find an exorcist.

Z

You're right. It *must* be a dream for you to get a retrospective, Sir Spray Can. (*Surveys room*) Seeing these paintings again *is* amazing. Remembering how... *lukewarm* they first left me. Underwhelmed. But then on repeated viewings, my feelings turned to *distaste*, then *annoyance*, finally *vexation*. Not so important as to stir outrage, just vexation. (*To Pippa*) Amazing to remember so clearly what we disliked intensely.

RORY

(*Fingers in ears, spins, yells*) Dreaming! Dreaming!

PIPPA

Z, ducky, whose malattachment is this? Yours or his?

Z

Ooo, I was good. (*Reads*) "New wave critic Ms. Z, a one-time companion of McGrory, characterized his middle work as a 'scream of confession of the reality of patriarchal violence lurking in the hearts of all significant male artists.'" (*Finger gun at RORY*) Bang!

RORY

I never cared about what you or any other hack wrote. (*PIPPA and Z swoon slightly, then straighten*) What?

Z

Did you *not* tell him about the bad effects of unfacts?

PIPPA

Yes. (*To RORY*) No unfacts. Shakes us. That's a fact.

RORY

Only facts? 'One time companion' stretches the fact thing. One night stand after which everything you ever wrote about me was a revenge review. This dream is that revenge bubbling back up like acid reflux.

Z

What about *dead* do you not understand? Not alive...//

PIPPA

Z! Stop. I sacred winded death definitions already.

Z

How do we make progress if he insists it's a dream?

PIPPA

Rory, you never dreamed of Z either, did you?

RORY

No, my brain never tortured me that way.

PIPPA

Then Z being here thirty three years after she died means this *isn't* a dream. You're dead and need to unfix a... malattachment with her. (*Sees placard*) Is it the Paintbox Boy nickname? Kind of funny, ducky.

Z

Maybe it's the sex. (*Rory takes his head in his hands*)

PIPPA

(*Comforting RORY*) Don't be embarrassed. I quite enjoyed sex with you no matter what Z experienced.

Z

Same bad taste in men. Over and over. And over.

PIPPA

(*To Z*) Z, don't go there. (*To RORY*) We can see this clog of caring clamps you to Z. You can get rid...//

Z

Right. You have a *malattachment* to me. That you need to remove. You think my reviews resulted from some phone call from you that never came — let alone flowers, chocolate, jewelry — after we... how do I do justice to that cheap sex? A bad bonk? A pitiable poking?

My reviews weren't revenge, Paintbox Boy. And being dead, why care? (*To PIPPA*) Maybe a little screaming?

RORY

(*Aggressive*) Stop that Paintbox Boy crap. It's not fair. You stuck those words alongside my work forever.

Z

Fair? Quel schmutz. (*To PIPPA*) Newly dead always saying things are unfair. Fairness is a metaphor!

PIPPA

Fairness is very human. But not a fact. Obviously.
(*Both laugh*)

Z

(*To RORY*) Try this: act *as if* you're dead. In return, I stop using my *nicknames* for you as we go over your malattachments. If you're not dead, no harm done. This can be a campfire story for the kiddies.

PIPPA

Lose *all* the bad caring, and *they* move you to next.

RORY

Who are *they*? (*Beat*) Sacred wind me. (*Beat*) Well?

(PIPPA and Z P SW doesn't come P^)*

PIPPA

No wind. Not a breeze. Everyone asks that one. *(P*)*
They *never* answer. Dead air. *(P^)*

Z

(P)* They are *they*. They answer. *(P^)* Or not.

RORY

Maybe *they* are just busy with someone else right now? All deaths get this concierge treatment?

PIPPA

In our experience, all entrants move...somewhere.

RORY

All? All deaths? What constitutes all?

Z

(SW) Deaths per Day: 166,859

PIPPA

(SW) Deaths per Hour: 6,952

Z

(SW) Deaths per Minute: 116

PIPPA

(SW) Deaths per Second: 1.93 (Dances with Z)

Z

Two deaths every second. Which means you're not that special. After you're gone, you're one of many.

RORY

Not gone. *(Drops to floor to do push-ups)* See? Alive.

Z

I give up. Screaming begins. During our one night stand, I recall how you fell asleep while...//

PIPPA

Stop that, Z. (*To RORY*) What works once you're dead is to realize nothing matters. Hard to do when you're alive, but dead you drop the clogs, and they dissolve. Then your form moves. You want to move, don't you?

RORY

(Rolling onto his back heaving) Nothing matters but it's *my* retrospective. I mattered. And I'm not done. You two died, but I was at LACMA, The Pinakothek in Munich, The PuDong in Shanghai. Artist in residence at the Phillips. You don't know what I got done.

Z

Don't know. Don't care. This isn't *Our Town*. Do I look like the fucking Stage Manager? Pippa, we have to...//

RORY

(Lunges at Z who sidesteps) Have to what? Speaking of things not making sense, why would you help *me*?

(PIPPA looks to Z warily)

Z

(Coyly) Show up where I show up. 80% of life is showing up, 100% of afterlife.

RORY

But why show up together? You said act as if I'm dead. Fine. Complete my orientation to this funhouse. Explain why a dynamic duo shows. *(Circling)*

PIPPA

I told you. We shared clogs with the same people.

Z

A Venn diagram of bad choices. Diagrams are facts.

PIPPA

Acquaintances who kept some strong feelings that also had to be... resolved. But they let go. Eventually.

RORY

The same people. *Of course*, your sex addict set would end up here. Clowns with clogs. Now they're all dead. (*Z and Pippa are confused*) I kept track. All dead.

Z

Kept track? Yuk! How did you find out who died?

RORY

(*Smug*) Obituary.com at first. Then Google. Now AI.

PIPPA

Obituaries. Read a bunch in hospital the *last* time. Funny stories. Made a poem. (*Recites*) *To fairies, obituaries are adversaries, chary emissaries, airy dogberries*. I finished before finishing that poem. Fact.

Z

(*To PIPPA*) Focus, darling. (*Turning on RORY*) Why so obsessed with knowing when those guys died?

RORY

To keep score. *Detaching*. To use your crazy dream lingo. Reading an obituary each time one of them croaked allowed me to... get it out to let it out.

PIPPA

Their dying let you detach? Outliving is winning. Rhyme! You let go of those guys that easily? Read in a newspaper Wayne's dead and the clog goes?

RORY

Good old Wayne. Shot dead by his wife. Imitations of your orgasms probably not his final words. Bye-bye.

Z

(Starts to imitate orgasms but PIPPA glares) We knew about that. We enjoyed Wayne's malattachments.

PIPPA

If you let those clogs go, why am I here? Died in 1989. Wayne said *Talk of the Town* had it. 'Impudent Rhymer Out of Timer.' My dying didn't detach us?

RORY

Why am I here? I want the dream where each dead guy arrives for his unclogging. Comfortable chair, tall glass of Jamesons, bowl of popcorn. That dream.

PIPPA

Not all of them showed. Only a few held on to their caring so... damagingly. Maybe two times. Three?

RORY

How many exactly, sacred wind?

PIPPA

(SW) **Five, not counting Peter Lake** (*Dances*) Does that cover it for you, ducky? I want you satisfied.

RORY

Yes, totally satisfied. Now, leave! (*Shooing them*) Exit my dream. Maybe that'll wake me. Go astral hitchhike to the next victim of whom I'm sure you have many.

PIPPA

We go where we're sent. And stay until...

RORY

Until when? I still *do* time. Because I'm not dead.

PIPPA

When? Damned if I know, boopsie. Depends on...//

RORY

You know if someone really was dead saying '*Damned if I know*' adds one more thing to *fret* about.

Z

Don't let him distract you, darling. (*Air-dragging PIPPA to canvasses*) Oh, here's something to raise a shout. What we have in this frame is painting number zero by Clint Belinsky! Your old pal. (*Winking at PIPPA*) And yours.

RORY

(*Upset*) No! Clint! In my retrospective? My paintings are never shown with others. Thank God I can't see.

PIPPA

(*Looking*) One of Clint's paintings is hung next to # 83. There's vermilion in both. You influenced each other.

RORY

Influenced each other? I terrified Clint into putting anything on canvas. That's bullying, not influence.

Z

Au contraire! (*Reading*) *Belinsky, a seminal figure in the Soho crowd, was McGrory's closest associate...//*

RORY

Closest? He squatted on my couch for two months.

Z

And he fucked your wife. Fact. Very *closest*.

PIPPA

We've covered that, Z. He says he's over it.

Z

(Reading) "Some critics found Belinsky the more adventurous painter though lacking in technique...!!

RORY

Adventurous. They're paintings, not action movies.

Z

Clint is another malattachment. One schmutzy guy here.

PIPPA

Compound clogs. Never this many in an intervention.

RORY

(Pointing at painting) Minor league fuck up. Poltroon of pathetic painting. Derivative! He imitated me badly.

(CLINT, Hawaiian shirt, shorts flip-flops, shuffles in from SR, RORY falls down)

PIPPA

Yowzah! *They sent Clint! (Offers an Anjali Mudra)*

Z

(To CLINT) Take it slow, my dear. (Air hugs)

RORY

(To PIPPA and Z) Why is he here? (Holds up hand to silence them, turns to CLINT) Clint, why are you here?

CLINT

*(SW deliberately while dancing outlandishly) **Goldfish possess a memory span of 3 months actually.***

RORY

Now this is just a *stupid* dream. Eternity can't be *this*.

PIPPA

Clint's still a little schmutzy. Schmutz upsets tuning into *relevant* facts. (To Z) Might be Clint's first excursion.

RORY

He's schmutzy too? I must have a better brand of schmutz then. (To Clint) Where did you come from?

CLINT

(SW) **The planet 55 Cancri e is twice the size of Earth and mostly made from diamond.**

Z

Schmutz can persist beyond malattachments.
Dissolves. Eventually. Everything dissolves. (P*) We think. (P^)

RORY

What the fuck is she talking about, Clint?

CLINT

(SW) **Giraffes hum to communicate with each other.** (Starts) Oh. Oh. Oh, yeah. Here. (Dancing into an air hug of RORY) Rory McGrory. You're dead too? Cool. Good to see you, man.

(CLINT jogs around the retrospective)

RORY

(Claps hands triumphant) I'm not dead! (To PIPPA) I have dreamt *him* before. Popped in during a rare nap. As usual uninvited. Happened right after reading his obituary in the Times. Yes, *his* fucking obituary made the New York Times. Unbelievable, but a fact.

Z

(To PIPPA) Jealousy. The maximum malattachment.

PIPPA

Every guy we see. Especially if they were bottle-fed.

CLINT

(Stops now fully conscious of his surroundings) Wow! This is your retrospective, Rory McGrory. Very cool. Lots of orange. Pumpkin, tangerine, carrot, salmon...//

RORY

Always saw food in everything. Plotting a free meal.

CLINT

I did. Good memory. (*Leans in*) Hey, one of mine! Nice of you to include me, man. Not usually your thing, but, as the ladies say, we detach from stuff here.

RORY

(To PIPPA) He can see the paintings! No. No. No!

CLINT

Easy, bro. Nothing matters. That's the mantra. Nothing matters. You can say it different ways to grok all this being dead thing. (*Portentously*) Nothing. Matters.

RORY

I'm not buying *being dead*. Could be a vegetative state. Maybe Magda froze me. She's very resourceful that way. (*Pained*) Yep. Holding out for that coma now.

CLINT

Yeah, go coma! Maybe we're all in comas.

Z

Of course, expecting a woman will rescue you.

PIPPA

Nobody gets out alive, ducky. Fact.

RORY

Only facts here, but no making sense, no doing time, no sex. But sex is *all* you talk about. People show up. A retrospective of my paintings surrounds me but I can't see. That's a bad ayahuasca trip, not the afterlife.

CLINT

There's no *bad* ayahuasca trip. Just different ones.

PIPPA

(P*) I, a WASP car trip? (P^)

RORY

Okay. This has to end. Not waiting for Wayne, Godfrey, Tony, and a cast of thousands to pop up. (*Faces upward*) Sacred wind, am I, Rory McGrory dead? (SW) **Yes!** (*Awkward dancing, others retreat*) What? Why? (SW) **The distribution of energy in the universe tends to flow towards equilibrium. Equilibrium is decay, disintegration, death.** (*Whirls madly*) Why me? Why now? (SW) **All things must pass.** (*Jigs and falls*) No! This can't be. I'm not done.

Z

What constitutes *done*? Seeing God? Getting wings?

CLINT

I saw God. Just after I got here, right? Him. Her?

PIPPA

No, darling. Your intervention was in an old Volvo and you just saw yourself in the rearview mirror, not God.

RORY

(Ignoring them) Ohhh! That was terrible. *(Stands, looks up)* Sacred Wind, did my obituary make the Times?

(All look upward but nothing comes)

PIPPA

They don't respond to personal inquiries. You okay?

RORY

Okay? I'm dead, boopsie! Being dead.. sucks.

CLINT

It's a shock. But did you notice you haven't had to take a piss, Rory McGrory? That's cool. No more locating the nearest restroom. No Wi-Fi. No cellphones. At first, I kept reaching for mine to take a picture.

PIPPA

(P)* What's 'why fly'? They *did* invent flying cars? *(P^)*

Z

Pippa, don't get distracted! *(To RORY)* Now, let's...//

CLINT

I didn't remember dying, but I trusted the ladies when they said 'Clinty, you are defunct.' How did I die? Electrocutated in a bathtub on pilgrimage in Bangkok?

Z

No, darling. That's just something you read.

CLINT

Plane crash? Not suicide. Could be wrong about that.

PIPPA

We don't know. *(Air-hugs him with PIPPA)*

RORY

Exposure.

CLINT

I exposed myself and got shot? Bizarro.

RORY

No. Upstate last winter, coldest night of the year. You took a wrong turn in the woods walking home from the bar. Probably lay down to sleep. Froze. *Times* obit said natural causes. (Musing) I *must've* made the *Times*.

CLINT

(*Nodding*) Natural causes. I like that it was *natural*.

(*Z and PIPPA air hug him*)

PIPPA

Poor Clint. Alone in the cold. *Breath out. Death shout*

CLINT

No matter how, we all end up dead. It's cool.

RORY

It is so not cool. Magda, I need to see Magda.

PIPPA

Breath Out. Death Shout.

RORY

Argggghh! (*Runs in circles beating himself around the head*) I'm not ready. Not fair.

CLINT

Too bad it wasn't a coma. Would've been cool. You could've told my kids you saw me. They'd love that.

Z

Death does not require your permission, Paintbox Boy. I can call him that again? Now that he admits dying.

PIPPA

Z, are you sure Rory isn't still *your* clog? Be nice.

RORY

(*Collapses*) Dead. *Not* just a terrible dream. Damn! Oh, Magda. (*Head in hands*) Didn't get to say goodbye.

CLINT

Yeah that's tough. But...(*Cheerful*) don't have to go to the dentist anymore. Nobody calls to ask for money. And you don't get dressed; *they* dress you. Plus that burning sensation when you pee...//

PIPPA

No more fear of dying. I considered that a plus.

Z

Yes, you can check dying off your To Do List. In fact, you can check to do lists off your To Do List.

CLINT

But he still has to *do* detachment so we get to...//

RORY

(*Rising*) Wait! Wait! Don't I go through those seven stages everyone talks about before dying?

Z

Seven stages? Only one stage here: dead.

PIPPA

Seven stages? I read that book. Right. Well, denial and anger? Check. Seems you're in shock right now. But

those seven stages are for grief. Something you go through when you're alive. Too late for them now. I mean who could you even bargain with?

RORY

(Pacing) All so sudden. Like being at a movie where the projector broke. At a party, you take a trip to the John but coming back discover everybody left.

CLINT

No, man, we left the party. Party's still going strong.

Z

Typical. Another guy who didn't know he would die.

RORY

Critics. Can't differentiate between knowing and doing.

Z

Good. Get it out to let it out. *Now*, let's move onto...//

RORY

And *now*, you go. Adios. It's been so much *not* fun.

CLINT

No, we can't go until we detach from each other...//

PIPPA

(Stops him) Until *you're* detached from your clogs.

Z

Malattachments. We're here for a reason.

CLINT

We help you move on to all that pleasure out there.

Z

We don't know that. Wishful thinking, darling.

CLINT

Wishful thinking. My second wife always said the only kind of thinking I did was wishful. It's cool. (*To PIPPA and Z*) We do some stuff together now, right?

RORY

What stuff? More dancing?

(Rory imitates SW dance badly. PIPPA, Z, and CLINT burst out laughing)

Z

The worst, worst, worst dance ever. (*Looks up*) Apparently a fact. Oh, it's so good to laugh. It's like...

CLINT

(Agreeing heartily) Oh, man, it does feel like that.

PIPPA

Yes, laughing reminds me of...

RORY

Being human?

Z, PIPPA, AND CLINT

Sex!

PIPPA

Good sex. Warm love.

RORY

Does it? Well, you're welcome.

PIPPA

Laughter is as close as we get now to touching. Won't get much more of it, I guess. Can't imagine any other interventions for me. I'm glad you're my last.

Z

A few more malattachments out there for this bad girl. But not anyone dancing so hilariously awful. That laugh is the closest I'll ever again come to coming.

(CLINT nods, strolls to the canvasses)

PIPPA

Yes, I'm going to miss what laughing feels like.

RORY

You said no more sex was a relief. Not a fact?

PIPPA

Relief is no mess, no hassle dealing with another body afterwards. No regret. Laughing is the delicious part.

CLINT

(Pointing to his painting) I wonder why they picked this one of mine. Doesn't really look like any of yours.

RORY

(Sardonic) None of your paintings look like mine. Having one of yours in my retrospective is absurd

CLINT

(Studying) Granted, not a masterpiece. My talent lay in a different direction than yours, Rory McGrory.

RORY

Your talent? Your talent was your imaginary friend that the adults pretended was real so that you wouldn't cry. You couldn't draw, for the love of (*Looks up*) ... Jesus?

PIPPA

(*Air-hugging Z*) He's unclogging. Angry guy to the end.

CLINT

Came to terms with my drawing being imperfect. Deciding drawing's overrated was a breakthrough.

RORY

You couldn't fucking draw. (*Unconsciously mimes painting*) What painter can't draw?

Z

Imperfect drawing is not couldn't draw. Fact.

CLINT

Z wrote trying to be perfect ran contrary to my lifeforce. That was cool.

(*Z and PIPPA air-hug CLINT*)

Z

(*Reading*) I did. "*Perfection's pursuit perpetuates the primacy of privileged predatory plutocratic patriarchal paradigms.*" I could alliterate to obliterate.

RORY

Drawing skills weren't all you lacked. Uneven compositions, bad brushwork, crappy painterly texture.

Z

Your career just had better luck than Clinty's. That breakthrough 1990 Whitney show? Your agent got the curator's kid off a kindergarten waiting list at Dalton.

RORY

Our careers don't compare. We went to art school together. Along with fifty other nonentities. That's what lazy writers like you glommed onto to make Clint and me a sort of Manet-Monet, Picasso-Matisse type duet.

CLINT

Which one was me? Manet? I mix them up.

RORY

Right. You never put in the effort. Drove me nuts. The sum of creating anything includes the hours applied. Painting isn't meant to be easy. It's a job. A life's work.

CLINT

It's a job. I know. A hard job. Had to lie down. A lot.

Z

(Pointing to PIPPA) And not always alone as I recall.

PIPPA

Now who's getting distracted, Z-Girl?

Z

(Whispering to PIPPA) Not looking for a scream, but getting him to rant should detach... something.

CLINT

Actually, I agree with you. But people wrote stuff like this. *(Reads)* *Belinsky, a seminal figure in the Soho crowd, was McGrory's closest associate...//*

RORY

Stop. Hearing that tripe once was too much. (*Hounding CLINT*) You were nothing like me. No one is... was like me. Our only connection was living in the same shitty hovel for a few months. Sharing a kitchen and a toilet, which you never cleaned, equals mutual influence?

Z

Not your *only* connection, I think. (*Mimes sex*)

RORY

(*To CLINT*) Why even become a painter at all?

CLINT

To ball chicks. (*PIPPA and Z crack up*) And it worked. Fact. (*Air-hugs them*) Art was cool but some days I just heaved the paint up there and hoped for the best.

Z

So did Pollock, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell...//

CLINT

But they did it better. Much better. So did Rory McGrory. Only facts. (*To RORY*) Look at me. No, Pippa says you have to really look at the other person. Don't you see you *were* a better painter than me? (*To PIPPA and Z*) Don't you know I always knew it? Don't you know it doesn't matter anymore?

RORY

I do. I know. I don't understand but all of a sudden, looking at you, really seeing, hearing. Care's gone.

CLINT

Uncaring. Wish I told you all this when we were both alive. But that's what I like most about being dead so far: you can say or hear anything without caring. Cool.

RORY

(*Confused*) But why? How? All of a sudden? Just from really looking at you. I don't...

CLINT

Because we're dead. Once you let go of life all that shit can go too. I liked my life. Had a good time. And somebody (*Points*) thought my painting could be in a Rory McGrory retrospective. That's sweet.

PIPPA

You're delfing his unselfing. (*To Z*) Delf *is* a word.

RORY

Unselfing? What the fuck is unselfing?

Z

**(SW) To see and to respond to the real before us:
holding a just gaze directed upon...//**

RORY

No more fucking sacred wind! (*Grabs at Z to stop her, but finds he cannot touch her as she dances*)

RORY

What the hell was that? We can't touch. Why?

(They all P expecting an answer. None comes. P^, collective shoulder shrug)*

PIPPA

Nobody knows.

Z

And when we ask, they don't answer.

CLINT

Believe me, I tried... *touching* these two once I got here and it's no go, man, even though I think we would all have been cool with *some* touching, right? Don't want to get cancelled again. It's kind of a drag, but we do the best we can. Like this.

(*CLINT air-hugs RORY*)

Z

(*Laughing*) Ohhhh, that is so very good, boys.

RORY

So, if I don't unself, if I don't stop caring about all of these things you've brought up like (*To Z*) your bloody mindedness, (*To CLINT*) and your...

CLINT

Admiration.

RORY

Appropriation, artistically and personally. But it's cool.

CLINT

(*Raised arm fist salute*) Uncaring to the max, man!

RORY

(*To PIPPA*) And your whatever... If I don't detach, I'm stuck here? Never see Magda again?

PIPPA

Don't know. Magda and you might have... something.

Z

Forty years married. Beaucoup malattachments.

PIPPA

Z, not helpful. (*To RORY*) Clogs are these negative pieces of ourself that we throw into someone else. Mutual love doesn't hinder us. We think. You're here to lose the wrong kind of care. We help you lose the clogs and you...we...us move. We think

CLINT

Isn't it bogus that our cares about the bad stuff should end up here as well? Hate seems stronger than death.

RORY

How is it that you sound almost...wise in the afterlife?

CLINT

Maybe you're just paying more attention than you did when we lived. If I could've been just a little dead when I was alive would've seen things differently. Maybe.

RORY

You're right? Feels dumb now — statusy! —to throw fits at you being in the same conversation as me.

CLINT

Everyone's status is the same here: dead. Funny. I end up *invading* your space again to get rid of our clog. Really, my clogging with you because of the painting stuff surprised me, Rory McGrory Sure, you were stuck up about your paintings. A control freak with a bit of an anger problem. But I would have guessed that my shtupping Pippa was our... malattachment. (*Looks to Z for approval*) Hey, I swear I *never* did the sounds of her orgasms as a party trick like Wayne. That was bogus.

PIPPA

Rory said my...flings aren't a clog so let's just...//

CLINT

I did tell people that her poem was about me. My bad. *(To Rory)* You must've seen *our* poem in *The New Yorker*, yes, *The New Yorker*. Said, I could be wrong, but Rory McGrory might take this the wrong way.

Z

How about a poetry reading? *(Aside)* A little scream to make sure that last cl...malattachment is detached.

CLINT

I memorized the whole thing. *(Dancing gently by RORY)* *My vessel. Your pestle. Our trestle. Then nestle. Some wrestle. Leaves rustle.*

Z

(To unfazed RORY) You detached from *that*?

RORY

I don't think it ever bothered me. *(The others writhing drop to their knees)* Alright. Unfact. I did care about it *at the time*. But then reading your obituary — *in the Times* — capped my scorecard. So this is what has to happen? Forgiveness? Fine. I forgive everyone. Can I go now? Or can you go now? Can we at least stand in separate corners?

Z

Forgiveness is useless here. It's incomplete.

PIPPA

Uncaring was what happened to you and Clint just now. Forgiving only for the living. Rhyme!

CLINT

Not *all* the living. My exes have my fuckups on a loop.

RORY

So, it's just this unclogging, unselfing that needs to happen? What about Hell? What about sins?

Z

You Catholic boys start much too late. The whole hell thing's because Saint Augustine didn't know Greek.

PIPPA

No inferno. Beautiful poem, but Dante made it up.

Z

I'd take any of Dante's first five circles over this dullness.

CLINT

No virgins in paradise, no Rubens cherubs. Not even a heavenly cloud. They call it art *history* but it's all fake.

Z

That ascetic stuff is all from hairshirted men hallucinating in a desert, eating bugs, *not* getting laid.

RORY

So, just an infinity of facts. No purpose?

PIPPA

We didn't say that.

RORY

So, is there a God? (*The others P**) We're dead: how is whether there's a God still a question? (*They P^*)

Z

Barely here, already telling us how things should be.

PIPPA

Men with a better plan. A constant of the universe.

Z

If there aren't words to capture the color in your paintings, how do you expect words to capture God?

PIPPA

Is this (*Gestures*) 'God'? No answer yet to that question. No words found. Maybe that's next.

CLINT

Pippa says asking questions is a clog. Needing to know. You'll get over it. I think. Giving up attachments' hard. Like I'd love to know that this stuff was out there forever. Cool, right? The paintings. Your colors. A *little* writing about you and me. But mostly about you.

RORY

Yes, something of us enduring. That'd be cool, Clint.

(*CLINT's painting illuminates*)

RORY

(*Excited*) I can see. I can see. (*Beat*) But only *his* painting. Why can't I see my paintings? Why?

PIPPA

It's good, Rory. The schmutz is dropping. (*Goes to Z*)

CLINT

(*Twirling*) Hey, we're unclogged. I'm going. Nice.

RORY

You're leaving?

Z

You're moving? Why does the man always finish first?

PIPPA

(Laughing) Another constant of the universe.

CLINT

I am outta here. See you at the next exorcism, kids.

PIPPA

Excursion, Clint. You'll find no devils here.

CLINT

No devils? You never met those young exes of mine. I'll be doing *excursions* until...the end of time.

RORY

That's it? I cast off a moldy art school grudge and his form flies off to *next*? How can the universe be so trivial?

Z

Have you not listened to the sacred wind, you tie-dying tyrant? The universe is nothing *but* trivia.

CLINT

(Dancing madly US) I guess I have to go. Sorry, man. I never knew when to leave a party. Or when to arrive.

Z

(Dripping insincerity) Oh, darling, so happy for you.

PIPPA

If we do not gather together again, Clint: go good.

RORY

Hey, you two: go with Clint. Give me a rest.

CLINT

Oh, they can't go yet: they're attached until *you* unclog. See, you threw a funky piece of your self into...//

Z

(*Shooing*) Go on ahead to next now, doll. Bon voyage.

RORY

Clint, why can't they go? How are we *attached*?

CLINT

(*SW*) **Attached: fastened, joined to another, sticking, stitching, affixed.** (*Whirls*) **Attachments — mal or otherwise — require another. A rope has two ends. Detachment must be mutual. Pulling two quarks apart from each other, the attraction between them becomes stronger. You never find a quark alone.** (*Dances wildly*)

RORY

(*To Pippa & Z*) The sacred wind is saying that you *need* me to detach so *you* can move? It takes two to tango. One hand clapping won't do.

CLINT

(*Dancing*) Two to tango! Cool. Looks like I'm soloing.
(*Tangoes*) Can't stay still. Know I've gotta be somewhere else, even though I don't know where yet.

RORY

But the trauma twins can't just disappear? Call it a day? Throw in the towel. Take a hike. Can they?

CLINT

(Dancing away, SW) **A clog is a piece of self attached to another. Fretting is two surfaces clamped together damaging each other...//**

PIPPA

What Clint means in that explanation is...//

(CLINT dances off SL)

RORY

No, It's crystal clear. You need me to detach, or you're stuck. You're *not* doing me some favor.

Z

Do you *want* to stay here *untransitioned*? Be here longer than needed? I don't.

RORY

Maybe I do. My choice, right? *(Looks upward)* Fact. So that's why you cared about my *uncaring*. You were right; you're no angels. Just cogs in this machine. Spear carriers in my opera. Nobodies. Ha! *No bodies!*

Z

Clint, please explain... *(Notices he's gone)* He moved.

PIPPA

Vintage Clint. The Belinsky Goodbye.

(They all laugh)

RORY

We're a threesome, a throuple, jazz trio with no jazz.

Z

Throuple? Us? Now you are dreaming.

RORY

And here I thought you just wanted to be the chiropractors of my clogs, acupuncturists of my auras.

PIPPA

Get it out, Rory and we'll all leave *here*.

RORY

Who says I want to? Let's hang out for a while. I have to *uncare to unself to unclog*. Unexpected Uncanny! That could take *time*, Z. We'd have to *do* some time.

Z

You know I could have made you scream.

PIPPA

Here, you really see Clint and unclog. Alive, you stopped caring about the others once they died, Rory. (*P**) Why not me? I'm dead longer than them. (*P**)

Z

It's got to still be all your licking and sticking, Pippa. Your straddling and battling, their begging, whimpering, shouting, and frigging...//

(*PIPPA air-grabs Z, RORY eavesdrops*)

PIPPA

Z, Leave the words to me. I can handle this.

Z

(*To RORY*) What about '*who am I to tell a woman what to do with her body*,' Mr. Male Chauvinist Pigment?

PIPPA

Z. whatever his clog is with me, he says it's not my...*eaubruche*. We need to sort it out.

Z

He threatens to just sit here! (*Resets*) Let's work on his malattachment with me. We know what that's about.

PIPPA

Malattachments out! Detach, ducky.

Z

Fine. We're stuck here with each other until you vent and get it out to let it out. Whatever it is. With me alive, Mr. Color-Wheel, you declared you didn't give a shit what critics, especially me said. Thanks to the factual forces of the universe we now know that was... false. You cared and that caring is a malattachment. (*To RORY*) I guess I should be flattered that I'm still so important to you, but that would require me to have thought you were important. Didn't. Ever.

RORY

Then why did you write about me so much?

Z

It was a living. Morticians fix dead bodies. Garbageman grab garbage. Critics **criticize**.

PIPPA

Z, focus. This must be a two-way clo... malattachment. Both sides need the other to keep it going. So, you...//

RORY

Need? I never needed her. She needed me to create. She needed me to make color so she could make her mishmash of misunderstanding and misanthropy.

PIPPA

(*Air-turns RORY to Z*) Unclog with her, not me.

Z

Make color? Like a little God? The stuff comes in a tube. (Sighs) Pippa's right. Needed and need each other. Fact, Paintbox Boy.

RORY

I didn't need you. You needed me. Your words *needed* my paintings. Paint Box Boy? Yep, I fucking owned that box. Full attention to color, not to you.

Z

(To PIPPA) Full attention to boring. How the hell did you ever live with him? (Sighs) All right. It is a two-way malattachment. (To RORY) You miss the point. We needed each other then. We need each other now.

RORY

Ah, you *need* me. *(P* to his own surprise) Fact? (P^)*

Z

(SW) I always needed you. (Dance)

RORY

(Taken aback) It really was only a one night stand.

Z

*(Staring deeply into his eyes) See me, Rory McGrory. And don't take this look the wrong way. Even if I had a body... I needed you to be *noticed*. What most people need. Trashing you got me noticed. Right from the start. The Voice got dozens of letters of protest. More death threats to me than for the music and film reviewers combined. Editors loved it. The more I panned each new show, the more people defended you. A good gig. Everyone wanted to see if I'd outdo my previous screed; we'd run out of copies below 14th Street. I was very good at being very bad to you.*

RORY

The whole thing was an act? I was just oxygen to your flame? (*Howling*) You were just being an asshole the whole time? (*Skipping away*) I was right! I was right! You were only in it to get noticed. Critics! (*Breathing deeply*) They don't matter.

PIPPA

Everyone everywhere always is in *it* to get noticed. Definitely a constant of the universe.

Z

Deeming your work sucky? *Fact*. Did everybody's work suck for me? *Fact*. Ever read any of my columns *not* about you? Fischl, Salle, Schnabel. Koons. Trashed 'em all. Girl goth with a grudge. Dying I finally figured out that I didn't really like art. *Fact!* Paintbox Boy made me – and you -- memorable. Go ahead: scream.

RORY

What like Peter Lake? Even dead, I'm not that guy.

PIPPA

No? Peter Lake's screaming came from two things: First, for that excursion Z *was* covered in seaweed. That stirred some shrieks. Second, Peter always thought the car crash was *his* fault. Finding out Z was very very drunk that night brought out the big howls.

Z

That car was due for maintenance. (*To RORY*) You're sure you don't want to scream at me? (*RORY stops and shakes his head*) Are you faking it? You can't fake it. I tried. (*To PIPPA*) Why does an Alpha male proving he was right clear a clog? Another constant of the universe. So, you're good?

RORY

(*Smacks head*) No. Not good. My life *is* flashing before me. But just the mistakes and fuck-ups. Argh! I see I was *wrong*. That energy wasted on you. If I'd let go when I was alive, I could have... (*Laughs*) Same with Clint. What an idiot.

PIPPA

The views from death are amazing. You see what happened, the facts. How little things mattered.

RORY

(*To Z*) Like you making a guy mixing pigments a big deal. People came to see for themselves that I wasn't as crap as you claimed. (*Beat*) Me giving you credit starts to make me think that this is a dream again.

PIPPA

No, it's significant progress. And fun for us. Fact.

RORY

You would think after dying there's no more surprises. Who knew it's just one damn thing after another again.

Z

You're able to just look at me and not have that homicidal impulse? Don't wanna rip out my heart?

PIPPA

Already dead, my dear. Internal organs have exited.

Z

My reviews don't make you want to scream? (*Recites*)
"The work hangs between murderous imagination and suffocating convention...*Paintbox Boy? Trapped in a box of paints.* Nothing?

RORY

Nothing. Matters. Nothing matters. Nothing matters.

Z

Fact! (*Dancing slowly*) Oh, I like this.

RORY

(*To Pippa*) But why these clogs? Not others? Alive, I was perpetually prepared to be pissed off. Magda could tell...Wish Magda could see this. Could see her.

PIPPA

But you let those clogs go. And kept us. We stuck.
(*Laughs at Z dancing faster*) Until now.

RORY

But everything has to go somewhere. Do people just go into some celestial compost heap? What's next?

PIPPA

(*SW*) **Infinite space is full of particles in all directions forever forming, reforming, disforming, informing, conforming.** (*Dances*) Could be anything.

Z

(Dancing fast) Moving! Air hug, Rory McGrory.

RORY

(Rising toward Z) A hug? But you hated me.

Z

Then. When I thought you were a misogynistic narcissist asshole, but now, here, your dorky hug will make me laugh. Gotta get that last laugh.

(RORY air hugs. Z departs laughing)

RORY

She didn't even say goodbye to you, Pippa.

PIPPA

We've said goodbye *(Counting)* seven times. I'm okay. I mean we're dead. So *'Hello. So long, Let's get together soon'* don't really fit. You'll see. But not yet. Because I'm still here. We're still attached. I'm not moving. What is it? *(RORY throws up his hands)*

RORY

Maybe your... eaubruche wasn't *my* clog, Pippa.

PIPPA

(Agitated) Then what? If not my random rutting, why am I here? *You* have to answer, Rory. Sacred wind is silent. Get it out to let *me* out. In '78, you said maybe we should separate for a short time. But I booked a moving van that same day because I knew we were not the love of each other's life and our separation wasn't likely to be short. But you say you're over that, *(On one of the canvasses the Polaroid becomes visible)* So what am I doing here in this dress? Just like that Polaroid. Why did you even grab the camera to take that Polaroid as I escaped the bathroom?

RORY

To drive you crazy? It's what we did then. Drove each other crazy when we weren't ignoring each other. Never meant to keep it. Would have trashed it with every other evidence of you there, but when I got back long after midnight from that trip to the city, I saw the snapshot on our kitchen table, took it into my studio, tacked it to my easel, and started to paint. That's where number 49 came from. At first, it was (*Points to dress*) just the energy of orange rays.

PIPPA

They did call this shade 'bittersweet orange.'

RORY

Put yellow and red and yellow and red on my palette 'til dawn. Then to match the dress just a tinting of pink.

PIPPA

You got a great painting. And yet we are still fretted.

RORY

Not right away. I scraped every inch of paint off that canvas then. I erased. Started all over knowing that I would probably erase again. And again. Ten times.

PIPPA

But you said your anger with me is gone.

RORY

Now the anger's gone. Then? Painted that orange for a year. Full attention to color. A great picture often has to destroy a good one. The others? They all sold. But none matches 49, the one from a pinned up Polaroid.

PIPPA

Why? (*Walks toward the Polaroid*)

RORY

Why? We were *not* the love of each other's life, but we were the loss of something.

PIPPA

(*Agog*) What did you lose?

RORY

Illusions. Painting #49, I looked at the photo every day. The more I looked the more I saw a tiny flash of myself in it, in the mirror behind you, behind a half open door.

PIPPA

There. (*Points to the Polaroid*) Yes. And got what?

RORY

Retrospective. (*Hands up*) Every innocent art student gets excited learning *perspective*. They study Masaccio, Master of Perspective. (*Reciting*) *When viewed from a particular point, the illusion of depth and space makes things at a distance look real.* Objects appear farther than they are. But perspective commits itself to *one* point of view. *Retrospective* holds the whole past in an inescapable closeness. That Polaroid, that flat little square, made me see us, upfront and faltering, Took me out of myself to see how I wasn't enough, drove me to never be less than enough again.

PIPPA

So you put your **self** into that painting, not just color.

RORY

Maybe. In perspective, we look at a scene in which we are absent. In *retrospective*, in this curled up photo, the color still popping, we can't escape ourselves. #49, *I'm in there*. And every time I looked at it was a proof that I could fail, that life frays if you don't give full attention. That snapshot was a cattle prod Polaroid to keep me moving. With painting. Then with Magda too.

PIPPA

Cattle prod Polaroid? So my photo helped you be better to Magda. Good. But why am I here? Retrospective me that, Rory McGrory.

RORY

What if *your* caring about what I never let you fix keeps us clamped together? You have it upside down. (*Beat*) Pippa, I'm *your* clog. You left a piece of yourself in me.

PIPPA

What? No! That doesn't make any...

RORY

Sense. We don't make sense here, ducky.

PIPPA

But why? Why are you here?

RORY

Because I never let you let me go. My silence...

PIPPA

Kept me clogged? (P*) You're *my* clog? Not the other way around. (*Glowering at audience*) A goddamn fact. (P^) (*Beat then stomping*) I have to let *you* go? Screwing me around is another constant of this horrid, good for nothing, fact-fucked universe.

RORY

Get it out to let it out, Pippa. Not just three hours of silence in a U-Haul blocking you. My silence right up to the day you died made this fret.

PIPPA

Yeah, one card. A *'get well even though we know that's not fucking happening'* card. Which Magda probably mailed, right? She always covered you.

RORY

I never let you let me go. Left you with dead air until... you were dead. Forgiveness *is* for the living. You had none from me. Go ahead. Scream.

(PIPPA air-strangles RORY)

RORY

We fell out of love. Both wanted others. The difference was others wanted you. Nobody imitated my orgasms.

PIPPA

I stayed guilty right to the end about never getting straight with you around my... feltering. And you're having a mystical moment with the Polaroid every day adding silence upon silence to all the others. Even when you knew I was dying... silence. How did I not stop caring, stop being a little desperate to explain what never needed explaining if you had only been able to give me a little of that full attention?

RORY

Not about what *you* did then. You're here with your clog of an ex because of what *I* didn't do. Now let go.

PIPPA

Poets hold onto words. And you gave me none, silence. The worst punishment, Rory McGrory.

RORY

In my gut, your polyandrous posse was always in the way of reaching out. Once I pissed on their graves — metaphorically — anger passed. But you had died.

PIPPA

Yes, I died first. (*Enraged*) Ended up here retrospectively with people stuck in *my* past. Men sure it's all about me *until* they detach, realize it was always about *them*, and go to *next*. Constant of the universe. It's always their retrospective. Their can't let go-spective, defective, selective, infected, unreflective, projected, collective retrospective. (*Collapses*)

RORY

Think you got it all. (*P**) Yes, fact. (*P^*) Good thing we only die once or I know you would've killed me.

PIPPA

You're bantering. If you'd reached out back there, we could've bantered about all of it. Alive. I bet Magda would've liked that. But Magda didn't mind you having a photo up of me in tears? Even crying, I look good in this dress. And always young.

RORY

She didn't mind. Or she did and Paintbox Boy missed that. If that's the case, we'll be unclogging that one. Hopefully not for a long time. She still does time.

PIPPA

The love of your life. Forty years. You'll be ok. (*Sighs*) Who's removing an attachment from whom? What were we? Four years? Started in Fanelli's, when I realized your name rhymed. When *you* gave me the pretty words. When you made me laugh.

RORY

The closest thing to sex you said. Apparently, a fact.

PIPPA

(Fidgety) OH! Ohhhh. This is *good* going! Yowzah!
Totally worth waiting for. *(Dancing wildly)*

RORY

You were a fine tour guide.

PIPPA

My last gig. I think. *(Dancing)*

RORY

How does this work? Do I see my paintings on the way out? *(Dances badly. PIPPA laughs hysterically)* What? We're unclogged. Schmutz is temporary. *(PIPPA laughing rolls on the floor)* Not a joke. Stop laughing.

PIPPA

(Laughing) Can't stop. And don't want to. Fact! This laugh is the closest *I'll* ever again come to coming.

RORY

What is so damn funny?

PIPPA

(Giggling) Z would've *loved* this. You expecting to move because *I* uncared. Men expecting something for nothing. Unearned luck. Constant of the universe.

RORY

I'm not moving? Why didn't you tell me? I helped you.

PIPPA

Wasn't sure until the dancing. (*Looks around*) Setting indicates something about something still attached.

RORY

Yeah, why don't I see my paintings? What do I do? How do I detach from them? More screaming?

PIPPA

You said it, boopsie: there is a piece of yourself attached to those paintings. That's your big clog. You put yourself in those paintings. With a vengeance apparently. Now you need to take yourself out.

RORY

How do I do that? I can't even see them? Sacred wind, tell me how. (*They both look upward futilely*)

PIPPA

(*P**) They don't respond to personal inquiries (*P^*)

RORY

(*Stomping*) 27, 33, 83, 49. Yes, 49. I can't go until...//

PIPPA

You have to let go of the paintings, this retrospective. And the gift shop.

RORY

Argghhh! (*Circles canvasses*) I want to see them. (*Looks upward*) Sacred Wind, what do I do?

PIPPA

(*Looks upward while dancing*) Silence. Oh, *silence!* (*Laughs*) Cosmic joke, boopsie. (*Points at canvasses*) There's *your* big clog. Your getting, netting, sweating,

never forgetting, all abetting fretting. The *real* love of your life. (*Exiting*) Detach, Rory McGrory, detach.

RORY

Do you have to go?

PIPPA

I believe so. (*Musing*) Rhyme! Go good. (*Vanishes*)

RORY

(RORY sits cross-legged DS meditatively) Nothing matters. Nothing. Matters. Nothing. (*Exasperated he gives up and looks upward*) Well, fuck you, whoever, whatever you are. (*Laughing he stands and paints in the air*) I'll just paint them all over again. (*Continuing his imaginary strokes as #49 illuminates behind him, a painting of turbulent orange. Then another painting and another and another as the lights dim*)

End of Play