

**AT
THE
BREAKAWAY**

By Nat Cassidy

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Droll thing life is — that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself — that comes too late — a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable grayness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamor, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be.

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography — to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience.

- Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

You said that *the universe did not know that men were living in it.*

- Thornton Wilder, *The Ides of March*

The suits are picking up the bill.

- Squirrel Nut Zippers

Characters

CAM, *female, 30s*

JETH, *male, 30s*

ELSIE, *female, 20s*

RAJ, *male, 30s*

REV, *male, 30s*

CAP, *male, 30-40s*

AVA, *female, 30-40s*

DOC, *male, 30-40s*

DEE WALLACE, *voice, also plays Bad Guy*

CAPTAIN SHAWCROSS, *voice, also plays Bad Guy*

Setting

Space Station Enos

The future

The stage and all set pieces should be either blindingly white or metallic. And I think all you really need are a table, some chairs, and something cushiony if you wanna go nuts.

Scene One

[*Black. Blackness. The blackiest blackity you've ever not seen. "Lunacy" by the Swans fades away. A voice lovingly intones in the blackishness.*]

JETH (*slowly, warmly, with love*): Hello. Can you hear me? It's me. The Universe. Hi. I want you to understand something very important. Are you listening? You are my child and you are safe. I want you to understand that. No harm can truly come to you for we are inseparable. The tiny hairs in your ears vibrating with my breath were spindled out of the indestructible fabric of suns forged billions of years ago in the great gasp. You were planned before time was a concept and—

CAM (*Quietly; intimately*): Jeth. You're babbling. Put some music on and come back to the party.

JETH: You do not tell The Universe what to do, puny human. IS EVERYBODY READY TO PARTY WITH THE UNIVERSE!

EVERYONE (*meaning every other actor in the show*): WHOOOO!

[*Music starts playing. Strobe lights. Silhouettes of people gathered in a circle. Someone suddenly vomits violently.*]

EVERYONE (*various*): EWWW! Yuri! Oh, Jobs, it's all over me! Why didn't you hold it in, you fucking sookah? Aw, man, what are we gonna do? It's everywhere! &c.

JETH: Oh, oh, oh! I got an idea – let's feed it to the meepnis!

EVERYONE ELSE: What? NOOOOO! Jeth! &c.

JETH: Yes! No, seriously, have you ever seen it eat? Here ... watch ... it's ... it's ...

[*Beat.*]

EVERYONE: OHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[*The song crossfades into softer, weirder music. Future music. After a moment, lights rise. They are all lounging around, still buzzed, but blissful. CAM, a woman in her early thirties, sits in the lap of RAJ, a buff, handsome man who is currently folding a piece of paper into an intricate origami. JETH, a geeky man in his early thirties, stands apart, smoking out of what appears to be half-bong, half-snorkel. He exhales into another small container. There are bottles and cups EVERYWHERE. CAM and JETH are both in jumpsuits.*]

[*Oh, and I guess here's a great place to mention our setting: we're in a space refueling station! It looks pretty much like a large gas station in the middle of nowhere, staffed by slackers and malcontents wearing blasé jumpsuits. The*]

stage and all set pieces should be either blindingly white or metallic. It's about 250 years in the future.]

JETH: That was famous.

RAJ: So, this is a normal night for you guys?

JETH: I mean, did you see the way he just vacuumed that up? Like, *ttthhhllloop*.

CAM (*overlapping; ignoring JETH*): Only when we're bored.

RAJ: So, every night?

CAM (*attracted to him*): Every night.

JETH: With that snout. That's my favorite part. I mean, the snout inside the snout, flips me out every time, I love that little guy—

[ELSIE enters, female, younger than the rest, head partially shaved, scrubbing her jumpsuit.]

ELSIE: AHHHHHHHHH! I swear to Jobs I'm going to murder that floating dingleshit.

[JETH fakes vomiting on her—she punches him in the stomach.]

RAJ: Did it all ... come out?

ELSIE: Physically? Yes. Yes, the projectile vomit is physically no longer on my clothing. Psychically, ugggggh, they're basically haunted now.

CAM (*laughing*): I don't think I've ever seen you grossed out before.

ELSIE: I haaaaate garn.

CAM: You watch fecal matter get dumped into zero gravity on a weekly basis!

ELSIE: It's the sound and the smell and it looked like vegetable soup mixed with blueberry yogurt.

RAJ: I think I saw a button in there, too.

ELSIE: And it was All Over Me.

[She pulls out an inhaler and takes a deep hit. She puts the inhaler on the table in front of her and plops down into a chair. JETH is fiddling with a console.]

JETH: The meepnis sucked almost all of it up, you big diaper.

ELSIE: Hahaha, that little floof LOVED it, holy helloggs!

JETH: Science!

[They orbit each other's fist: circling their fist around the other's without ever touching. Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog" suddenly blares in the room. Everyone but JETH groans loudly.]

ELSIE: Whyyyyy?

RAJ: Ewwwww.

CAM: Jeth, noooo!

JETH: DO NOT QUESTION THE UNIVERSE. We're doing it 20th Century style now!

ELSIE: Uggggggggghh.

RAJ: You don't have any SNZ // or anything? This is pretty cheesy. No offense. Oooo.
(*seeing the inhaler*)

JETH: Overrated. // SNZ is way overrated.

CAM: Best band of the 20th Century, *choolah!*

JETH: OVERRATED. Learn how to listen—you'll be glad you did.

[RAJ has picked up ELSIE's inhaler and is about to take a puff.]

ELSIE (*snatching the inhaler away*): No, no, no! You don't want any of this, studmuff, you couldn't handle it.

RAJ (*mock offended*): You'd be surprised what I can handle.

CAM: Elsie's got the Fungus.

ELSIE: Thank you, Cam!

[CAM shrugs. ELSIE grabs CAM and starts to wrestle with her aggressively.]

RAJ: Oh, shit, I'm sorry—

ELSIE (*getting CAM in a headlock*): Don't be, I just grew up in a Contaminated Zone, and we couldn't afford the credits to actually know that, so c'est la fuckyourself.

RAJ (*re: the inhaler*): Does this—(*help*)?

ELSIE: Tighter than science. Totally under control. The only thing it doesn't prevent is your asshole friends blabbing about personal information in front of cute strangers.

CAM: So, it's boys now?

ELSIE: I like pretty things.

RAJ: She's got you there.

[CAM blows a raspberry on ELSIE's armpit. ELSIE pushes her away. JETH stumbles to his feet, dramatically.]

JETH (*making an important announcement*): OKAY! I— ... !

[They look at him. Pause. He sits back down.]

ELSIE: So. How much longer are you with us, Raj of the Forearms?

RAJ: We should be fully fueled in another erdie and then it's whoosh.

CAM: Whoosh?

RAJ: You don't like my space noises?

CAM: There are no noises in space.

ELSIE: It's been fleet having you with us.

RAJ: Ah, the flying of time.

CAM: Whoosh.

ELSIE: Holy shit, though, be careful when you do whoosh. We've been hearing reports of locusts out and out. (*CAM makes a frightened whining noise.*) Just a little pants-soiling.

RAJ: Yeah, no, we're definitely on alert. It's ... yay ...

CAM: So scary.

RAJ: You ain't wrong.

CAM: Have you ever ... (*had a run in with them*)?

RAJ: Well, I'm still wearing skin, aren't I? No. But we did have a close call once.

ELSIE: Whaaaat?

CAM: Really?!

RAJ: Yeah. Out near Sadge about 5, 6 yearies ago –

CAM: Nabiscocheezits, that close to GC?

RAJ: This was right after they had apparently wiped out that whole colony on Mikoyan, thousands of people tied up in one big cluster and just burned alive ... we pinged off their signal. They were pretty far off, they didn't see us, but even so ... we turned everything off, life support, everything, and we just floated around, breathing into respirators, hoping they didn't catch our scent. Longest night of my life.

ELSIE: So scary.

RAJ: Yeah. But ... *(to CAM)* we do what we gotta do.

CAM *(laughing, leaning into him)*: I can't tell if that's the bravest thing I ever heard or the stupidest.

RAJ: What's the differ?

[CAM and RAJ are making rather extended eye contact. JETH seems oblivious (though he is not).]

ELSIE: Hey! *(They're still staring at each other.)* HEY! You know what we should do? Let's wake up port ring and—

JETH *(stumbling to his feet again)*: OKAY! I—The *Universe* has an important announcement: Cam. Listen to me. I know that you are “married.” And I know you always say you want to stay “faithful” and “respect your vows,” and the rest of that Bronze Age bullshit, but I would like to point out something: we are currently in space. You understand? We, as a species, we are *here* in the thick of the actual substance of mystery, we have domesticated the blood vessels of God Itself and I just want you to think about how stupid it is to be holding onto an antiquity like marriage. I mean, Cam, did you know they started treating people for ghosts living in their stomachs *after* the institution of marriage was invented?! We have evolved in every conceivable way since then and it gnarls my pipes to think that the claws of superstition are still dug deeply in your heart, and I'm not just saying this because I'm in love with you, or that I count myself among the luckiest people in the entire galaxy for being stuck on this tin piece of star poop with you getting to be around you every day because you're so amazing and beautiful and fill my insides with the most delightful of insects—NO! It is a philosophical

point I am making! Tonight is the perfect night to cast off the oppressive shackles of your anachronisms! Party protocol! You can live in the present with someone who cares deeply for you but will not attempt to contractually obligate your affections beyond their natural expiration date and you are looking at me like I'm a zooner so I am going to stop talking now because the Universe is capricious and filled with hot air forget I said anything I have to go to bed.

[He abruptly leaves. Beat. CAM is absolutely stunned – this little speech got to her.]

ELSIE: Do you want to go see if he's okay? *(Beat.)* Cam? You should go talk to him.

CAM: I— ...

ELSIE: Fucking Cam.

[ELSIE storms out. CAM is clearly shaken.]

RAJ: Is he—

CAM: An asshole?

RAJ: Going to be okay?

CAM: He'll be fine. He's an asshole.

RAJ: Did he say he was—

CAM: Yeah.

RAJ: But you're—

CAM: I know.

[Pause. CAM stewes, thinking about what JETH said.]

RAJ: I mean ... that's great, that's flex. *(Pause.)* What's your husband—*(like)*?

CAM: He's great. *(Beat.)* He's really great.

RAJ: Is he here?

CAM: No. We see each other, like, once a yearie. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. That just ... I was not in the right headset to hear—

RAJ: Yeah. I mean, you know what assholes do, right?

CAM: Yes. Right. That is what they do.

[*Beat.*]

RAJ: Hey. (*RAJ gives her the origami he was folding. She takes it.*) I was married once.

CAM: Yeah? How'd it work out?

RAJ: Look, you can pull on its tail here and make it fly. Right? (*Beat.*) The thing about origami is ... it's really hard and maybe it's pointless, but ... I dunno, there's a certain comfort in it, I guess.

[*Long pause.*]

RAJ: So, I'm zeroed. I'm gonna head to my bunk and—

[*She kisses him.*]

RAJ: Are you—?

CAM: Yes.

RAJ: Even though—

CAM: Yes. (*Kissing him.*) Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

RAJ: I'm sorry. I can't tell, are you happy or are you freaking out?

CAM: What's the differ?

[*They devour each other. Lights fade.*]

Scene Two

[Darkness. We hear voices.]

CAP (*a call and response prayer*): He has lived.

DOC and AVA: But he has died.

CAP: And we are blind.

DOC and AVA: While he explores.

CAP: We are strong.

DOC and AVA: But we can break.

CAP: And we can break.

ALL THREE: And we can break. But not today.

[Beat.]

CAP: We better make trails.

DOC: On it.

AVA: I'm gonna need one of you to help me scrub all this blood up.

Scene Two

[Lights rise. The room is empty, save for ELSIE sitting on the break room couch, bored out of her skull. The station's computer speaks overhead.]

DEE WALLACE (*voiceover*): Attention, Space Station Enos. The relative time is now 12pm, Capital Center Zone, on a beautiful April 27th. That's a Friday, kiddoes. Thank Jobs it's Friday.

[Pause. ELSIE lets out a long, crescendoing bored yell. After another long moment, JETH walks by with a purpose, very annoyed.]

ELSIE: Wanna play Googlers and Injuns?

JETH: I have to go take a shower. Somebody fucked with my room controls while I was asleep and made me piss myself.

ELSIE: Ha! Wasn't me.

JETH (*exiting*): Fuck your butt, *sookah*.

ELSIE: Did you just call me the C-word?!? (*Long pause.*) Hey, Dee Wallace.

DEE WALLACE: Yes, Elsie.

ELSIE: What's our countdown?

DEE WALLACE: You have 92 erdies remaining of your current shift.

ELSIE: Bite my prong, Dee Wallace.

DEE WALLACE: I'm sorry, Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that.

ELSIE: If you say so. (*Pause. She takes a hit from her inhaler. Pause.*) Hey, is Jeth in one of the showers yet?

[Beat.]

DEE WALLACE: Shower stall in Port Ring. He has already begun to apply a generous amount of conditioner to his nether regions. You've got a few minutes.

ELSIE: Famous.

[She gets up to exit. CAM enters from the other side.]

ELSIE: Oh, hey. Wanna play Googlers and Injuns?

CAM: Yes. Yes, I do.

ELSIE: Faaaaaaaaaaaaamous. Be right back.

[ELSIE runs out. CAM watches her go. Sits on the couch, also bored out of her skull. We hear a ringtone – she pulls out a paperthin device, reads a message, then talks into the device.]

CAM: Yeah, I still have it. Focus on your flight, flyboy.

[Pause. Another ringtone. She reads what's written. She smiles. She thinks of responding, then puts it away. She pulls out the origami swan RAJ gave her. She giggles to herself as she works the wings. A cloud of guilt crosses her face and for a moment it looks like she might cry. She puts it back into her pocket. After a few moments, ELSIE runs back from the way she exited. She's got an armful of clothes. She runs off stage.]

ELSIE (*exiting*): Be right back.

CAM: Hey, Dee Wallace. What do you know about origami?

DEE WALLACE: More than could ever be useful. Would you like to purchase information on origami for 1.3 gigs of credit?

CAM: No, no. But ... It's hard to do, right?

DEE WALLACE: Yes. Unless you're Asian.

CAM: What's Asian?

DEE WALLACE: An anachronism. Would you like to purchase information on—

CAM (*suddenly glum*): No, no, no. Can I have a timestamp?

DEE WALLACE: I already—

CAM: Timestaaaaaaaaaaaaamp.

DEE WALLACE: Sigh. The relative time is now 12:09pm, Capital Center Zone, on a beautiful April 27th. That's a Friday, kiddoes. Thank Jobs it's—

CAM (*staring out the window*): How are the pumps?

DEE WALLACE: Fourteen vacancies. Pumps *Ēka 2* and *Jiũ 7* are still in use.

CAM: Is Captain Shawcross—?

DEE WALLACE: Captain Shawcross has been full for thirteen erdies. He has lodged four complaints since your last check.

CAM: Ugh. What do you say we sever his life support?

DEE WALLACE: ... I could. Are you serious?

CAM: No! *(Pause. She considers it.)* Nnnno.

[ELSIE sticks her head around the corner.]

ELSIE *(reporting to an invisible companion)*: We've found the rebel fleet, sir. They're holed up with them dang Mongols over by the hill.

CAM: Oh, fuck, I'm the bad guys—?!

ELSIE: You're dead, scumbucks!

[CAM ducks behind the couch.]

CAM: You'll never take us alive!!

ELSIE: Did you come here to fight or to flap gums, Yankee scum?

CAM: Quiet thee, monster! Or I shall penetrate your defenses with some slow-motion laser fighting!

ELSIE: I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU TRY!

[They engage in a slow-motion laser fight, pointing fingers at each other and making "pew pew pew" noises. After a few exciting moments, JETH enters, totally naked.]

JETH: ELSIE. WHERE ARE MY CLOTHES?!

[ELSIE and CAM continue their fight, ignoring him.]

ELSIE: Did you hear something? Pew!

CAM: I can't hear anything over the horrors of pew pew!

ELSIE: Why, war, whyyyy?

[More pews.]

JETH: Hey! I'm serious, pissholes! Where are my jobsdammed clothes?!

CAM: Truce, Injuns! Truce! I see a ... Why that's a craylock in our sites! You can tell by its tiny umbilicus!

ELSIE: CRAYLOCKS KILLED MY FAMILY. CRAYLOCKS DIE!!!

[They turn on him, shooting.]

JETH: *(overlapping Elsie's line)*: I'm not playing. I'm not. I'm not play—E.M.P. GRENADE!!!

[He throws an imaginary grenade at them and leaps behind some furniture. They scream in horror. It explodes. The battle crescendos in a three way shootout. Then, ELSIE starts coughing roughly and has to stop playing.]

ELSIE: Ahhh. Okay, I'm dead, I'm dead. *(She takes out her inhaler and takes a hearty pull.)*

[They all fall back, ad libbing deaths. Another long pause. They're so fucking bored.]

CAM: Man. When are we gonna get laser guns? I want mankind to have laser guns.

JETH: Concentrated energy firing with pinpoint accuracy at the speed of light? Yeah, mankind would do great with that. *(He starts to stand, then realizes.)* And I am all skin. Can I please have my clothes back?

ELSIE: Sure, buddy. *(She points out the window.)* There they go right now.

JETH *(standing)*: What?! You fucking—*(shot them into space)*?! ELSIE! You—fine. Fuck it. Whatever.

[He sits back down, angry.]

ELSIE: You called me the C-word!

JETH: It's fine.

[Beat.]

ELSIE: Awwww, you're not really redded, are you? They're just floating there, you can get 'em no problem.

JETH: It doesn't matter.

CAM: Yes, it does. You're getting taint marks all over the furniture.

JETH: It's just a body, Cam. It doesn't matter. Just a stupid sack of guts and shit running on the fumes of self-fucking-deception.

[Beat. It's suddenly rather tense.]

CAM: You're a weird one, what's your name?

DEE WALLACE: You all do understand that you are actually employed here, right? Don't you have things to be doing?

[The three humans stare at each other, still kinda tense.]

ELSIE: Shall we get back to making the universe a duller place?

JETH: Sure. Great.

CAM (*joking, but still kinda distracted*): Chores, chores, I'm making up a chores song!

DEE WALLACE: Fantastic, we're halfway there.

JETH: Who's on dust mitigation?

[CAM and ELSIE start responding coincidentally and end up sounding like a choral chant.]

CAM and ELSIE: FUUUUUUCK YOU

ELSIE: —wow, we got a nice harmony there.

[They fist-orbit each other, proud.]

DEE WALLACE: One of you also needs to repair the starboard gate surger Delta Pē 3X3.

ELSIE: Whyyyyy? Why can't you fix it yourself, you wretched machine?!

[CAM's device has another ringtone. She looks at it.]

DEE WALLACE: If you do not repair it soon, the other surgers will have to bear the energy load. Fuses will be in danger. What will you do without your precious toys? I'm looking at you, Jeth.

JETH: I'll do the repairs. Poop.

CAM (*thrown by what she's read on her device*): Um. So, Elsie's on DM, is that ... ?

ELSIE: Fuck that. I'm on latrines.

CAM: Fine. I'll do DM.

JETH: Great. Go, Station Enos.

[He grabs something to cover himself and starts to exit. A chime sounds.]

DEE WALLACE: Ship docking at pump Gamma 6.

CAM, ELSIE, JETH (*deadpan*): Hurray.

[The three of them stare at each other some more.]

JETH: Hey, Dee. Can I ask you something?

DEE WALLACE: Of course.

JETH: Why don't we have laser weapons yet?

DEE WALLACE: We do.

ELSIE: What? We do?

DEE WALLACE: The military does. Any further information will cost you 16 petabytes of credit.

JETH: 16 petab—?! Never mind. See you guys at lunch.

[He gives CAM a look, then exits. ELSIE shrugs.]

ELSIE: Probably getting his period.

[She exits in the opposite direction. CAM pulls out a vacuum with a hose and starts sucking up dust. Her device rings again.]

CAM (*into the device, with a smile, in spite of herself*): Wouldn't you like to know?
Emotion: wink with sarcasm.

[After a moment, it beeps again.]

CAM (*into the device*): You're disgusting. I like that in a pervert.

[Another few moments of dusting. Another beep. As CAM answers it, a man enters: REV. She doesn't notice at first. He walks stiffly, as if unused to gravity after a long journey. He has flowers in his hand.]

CAM (*into the device*): All the time. I harvest them like handfruit so I can use them when I'm—(*she sees REV and stops dead in her tracks.*)

REV (*with a smile*): Hi.

CAM: Holy shit.

REV: I know.

CAM: Holy shit.

REV: Hi.

CAM: Holy shit.

REV: I didn't think we'd get here in time, we got held up in transit. But, look. April 27th.

CAM: Holy shit.

REV: Happy anniversary.

CAM: Happy anniversary.

[She rushes to him and throws her arms around him. She kisses him deeply.]

CAM: Hi.

REV: Holy shit.

CAM: Did you hitch a ride with—?

REV: Yeah, it's a mercantile— I saw on the company manifest that it was heading this way, so I took the month off to come out here.

CAM: Holy shit. How long are you staying?

REV: I only got a few erdies before I gotta head back. I forgot how long the trip was. My legs are killing me. But there's another one coming in the opposite direction right around when I need to head back, so—

[He suddenly faints dead away.]

CAM: Holy shit! Dee!

DEE WALLACE: Yes, my love?

CAM: Dee, get Jeth and Elsie back here – on the double.

DEE WALLACE: You mustn't forget your workload, Cam—

CAM: Dee!

DEE WALLACE: One moment.

[CAM puts REV's head in her lap.]

CAM (*stroking him*): You just ran over here to find me, didn't you? You stupid dumb butt.

[CAM's device beeps again. She tries to fight checking the device, but after a moment, gives it a glance. While still tending to REV, she quickly speaks into the device.]

CAM: Yes, you're very charming. I gotta go.

[Lights fade.]