

TOGETHER

A play with songs

by Alexandra Collier

Lyrics by Alexandra Collier & music by Heather Christian

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Characters:

Aya – 40. Ukrainian. Cleans Cherry and Sam’s apartment and others in the building

Sam – Late 30s. Misses living amidst green, wants Cherry to commit

Cherry – Late 30s. Not white. Wants to escape, not sure where she sits on the Sam issue

Maureen – 60s plus, tour guide, does not suffer fools

Martin (also the Preacher) – African American. Ageless. A counselor, getting over a breakup

Sylvia – 60s. Maureen’s sister (offstage voice) and the piano player throughout.

Alan – 60s. Sam’s father, Virginia-sounding Southern, conservative

Sandra – 60s. Alan’s partner, around the same age as him, Virginia-sounding Southern

Setting:

A large multistory apartment building where our characters live – the kind that includes affordable housing and apartments at steep prices so that city-dwellers from various social classes live side by side.

Other Stuff:

Aya speaks in an accent and limited English only when she’s talking to others and switches into an American accent when she is alone. Devices are represented with a stylized gesture or a blue glow on people’s faces – there are no actual screens or phones in the play . There is a rhythmic quality to many of the scenes, which exist somewhere between sung and spoken.

There’s a constant flow through the play of seeing people in a kind of dumb show of movement through windows, doing things that people do in their apartments – frequently with their faces bathed in the blue glow of a screen. Sylvia’s hands can be seen playing scales on the piano or playing during the songs, in Maureen’s apartments.

Dusk. A series of windows in a large high-rise apartment building. These apartments belong to Maureen, Cherry & Sam, Aya, and Martin.

Each of the building occupants go about their day. They sing to us. As they sing, perhaps they hold their hands out in abstracted gestures of staring at phones.

[Demo 1 attached]

Ensemble:

Let's get together
How's never?
Is never good for you?

Let's meet at never o'clock
Let's get together
We'll get together
We will
we will
we will

See each one-day
Maybe some day
Maybe never
But let's definitely
get together

Let's get together
Together
Together
Together
Together
Together

Together
To

Have you ever seen someone on the street that you
know?

And not even bothered to say hello
Because lonely is easier than clever
And someday is a lie hiding never

(different inhabitants sing)

I have
I have
I have
I have

Have you ever seen a friend calling?
And hit end without even thinking
Because lonely is easier than clever
And someday is a lie hiding never

I have
I have
I have
I have

I have
I have
I have
I have

I have
I have

I have

I have

I have

I have

I have

I have

Let's get together

How's never?

Is never good for you

Let's get together

How's never?

Let's get together

Together

Together

Together

Together

To

Maureen opens her window. Takes out a cigarette, lights it. Blows smoke outside, takes in the coming evening, the audience.

Maureen:

My name is Maureen and I'll be your tour guide. We will be touring up and down and around and through the soul. Did you know that I read somewhere that the soul is feminine and god is masculine? I don't know what that means – do you?

Maureen waits for a response. If none is forthcoming, she shakes her head.

Maureen:

On this tour you'll see the way things have come to be and the way things have changed and you might see... yourself. Or you might not. I like to tell people because no one likes to be surprised by themselves. I don't like surprises and I'm sure neither do you. No doubt you've brought one of those vices with you. In my day people used to carry around little animals or wicker baskets the way you people carry those things. So, I want you to imagine your vice is a little furry animal and now... put it to sleep. Let it have a rest. It will still be there holding all your worries when you return, I promise.

A phone rings in one of the apartments. Maureen listens. The phone dies out.

Maureen:

Look, I'm not one of those seat belt wearing fascists who likes to take away your civil liberties but some personal, intimate things are going to be seen on this tour and if people are going to open up they want to feel that they are alone. We're never alone with those thingamygadgets, are we?

OK. First order of business complete. Where was I? A tour. A tour of the soul – oh no, I already said that. Did you know that the soul is feminine and that God is a 6-foot-four body builder with pecs that can slice granite? (*relishes the delicious thought. Tries to regain the thread*)... ever have that feeling you're falling slowly, and you're not sure where you're going to land? You want to land softly, like a cat. Not with a thud but with springy paws. In my experience, girls like cats

and boys like dogs. I don't like cats. But I like to think my life will end softly. Forget that. Let's start at the top.

Lights illuminate Cherry and Sam in their apartment in separate spaces. They speak by texting.

Maureen: Apartment 34D. Never forgot the number because that's what these beauties used to be (*gestures at her breasts. Sighs.*) 34D. Cherry and Sam.

On the words Cherry and Sam there is a ding for each of them. Like a text message. They speak in text, no typing/miming.

Sam: Hey hey hey?

Cherry: Working.

Sam: Take a break. Eggplant?

Cherry: Croissant fried egg hamburger.

Sam: No. Eggplant. Kissy face.

Cherry: But I'm hungry-

Sam: Eggplant equals edible.

Maureen: They moved in together two years ago and haven't spoken since.

An unseen voice calls from off.

Sylvia: Maureen, Maury! Stop leaning out the window. You might lose your balance.

Maureen: That's my sister Sylvia-God-save-us. Her names Sylvia but we call her Sylvia-God-save-us because she's a martyr- We used to have a radio show. Sometimes if you turn on the radio very late at night, you can hear us- They trapped our voices in the machine so that we never age.

Sylvia: Stop talking to nobody.

Maureen: *(To audience)* They're not nobody.

Sylvia: Honestly those things they inject you with are making you crazy as a coconut-

Maureen: I've always been coco crazy.

Sylvia: That's true.

They cackle together.

Let's move to Cherry and Sam in separate rooms of their apartment.

Sam: Question mark? Question mark? Question mark?

Cherry: Working bon bon.

Sam: U work 2 hard. Loveheart. Eggplant.

Baby?... Baby baby baby?

U know you want it.

Cherry: K. K. K. Eggplant.

They continue rapid fire, building.

Sam: Okaaaay. Kissy face.

Cherry: Kissy face you.

Sam: Banana peel. Ripe cherry. Ready mama. Ready.

Cherry: That ready?

Sam: Ready 4 you.

Cherry: Hot lips!

Sam: Sugar donut!

Cherry: Frazzled robot!

Sam: Frazzzzzzzzzled robot!

Cherry: Jumping whale. Purple grapes. Chicken drumstick.

Sam: Chicken Drumstick. Balloons. Fireworks.

Cherry: Wait-

Sam: Bunny Rabbit. Licky face. Starburst!

Cherry: Wait-

Sam: Heart and arrow. Fireball. Champagne EXPLOSION.

Cherry: *(disappointed)* Oh.

Sam: Sorry. Too soon?

Cherry picks up the pace again.

Cherry: It's OK. Ice cream sundae. Lipstick kiss. Peach.

Sam: Ocean. Wave foam. Sunrise. Watermelon. Bell.

Cherry: Bell?

Sam: You ring my-

Cherry: Clap clap clap!

Sam: Twin Japanese girls with cat ears. Flamenco lady. Cartwheel. Juniper berry. Rhombus. Click. Snap.

Cherry: Snap. Click. Clap clap clap. Childhood trauma. Cantaloupe. Russian flag. Elephant.

Sam: Elephant. Tiger face. Hamlet. Violin. Note.

A long sustained note plays.

Cherry: High heels. Waterfall. Train. Boiled brain. Brrrrrrr.

Sam: Hot face. Running boy. Two yellow people blowing a heart out of their mouths.

Cherry: Avatar who looks like me screaming: "I WUB YOU!"

Sam: Avatar with beard screams: "YOU'RE THE ONE!"

Cherry: "There's no ONE, silly?" says avatar girl who looks like me if I was blonde with glasses. *(Beat)* Wait, why beard?

Sam: I want to grow one-

Cherry: Shocked face. Grumpy face. Cry face-

Sam: *(singing Grease-lightning style)* "But you're the one that I want" – says guitar playing avatar boy with freckles.

Cherry: Freckles?

Sam: My cat. Freckles¹. One finger. One love.

Cherry: Your first love was Freckles.

Sam: Tear face. Erect thumb.

Things start to meld into a kind of mundane poetry of the every day.

Cherry: Erect thumb? That makes me so- Spit on my-

¹ *Freckles was Sam's first cat.*

Sam: Kiss me.

Cherry: Don't. More tongue. Here let me show you-

Sam: I love that-

Cherry: (*shivering*) The heat is off-

Sam: Come under the covers. Your toes are icicles. Give me your feet. I'll put them in my mouth-

Cherry: I don't like that – ooohhhh I do like that. Like sea anemones kissing my feet.

Sam: You are a summer peach.

Cherry: My minutes are running/out-

Sam: Out. Running. Hearts. Catapult.

Cherry: Yes. Did you empty the-?

Sam: It's empty-

Cherry: Did you fill the-?

Sam: It's full-

Cherry: Did you take out the-?

Sam: It's taken. It's gone. I put all the things we don't like about ourselves out on the curb-

Cherry: Are you sure they're gone?

Sam: As sure as we'll ever be-

Cherry: Someone else's problem now.

Sam: Can you feel that?

Cherry: I can feel it for you. Can you feel that?

Sam: What?

Cherry: There's a chill-

Sam: You're always cold-

Cherry: Put your arms around this juicy-

Sam: You're crushing my elbow-

Cherry: It's completely dead-

Sam: Your body is like a furnace-

Cherry: I'm hot for you-

Sam: I'm hot hot for you-

Cherry: I'm not hot right now but I owe you-

Sam: I owe you-
But love should cover it, right?

Cherry: I think it's fit for fat-

Sam: You mean tit for tat.

Cherry: Let me get that-

Sam: No let me-

Cherry: Let me-

Sam: Let me-

Cherry: Let me-

Sam: Ok. Fine.

Cherry: We can split it.

Sam: I'm not into splitsies.

Cherry: We can go halves. But I want the duck a l'orange-

Sam: I want the duck-

Cherry: Why don't we get two different things so we can share?

Sam: Only if you list all the things you did today so I can get it out of the way and list all the things I did and then we can stare at the accumulation of our days and months and years and be satisfied-

Cherry: It doesn't work that way-

Sam: Yet everyday-

Cherry: Yet every every day-

Sam: Yet every every every day-

Cherry: Yet every every every every day-

Sam & Cherry: We do it again.

A new day, the inhabitants rise and go about their morning rituals. In her apartment, Aya slowly and carefully applies lipstick in the mirror. Maureen talks us through it.

Maureen: Every day for Aya starts with lipstick. She's in 17L.

Aya: *(To herself)* It is important to look your best. Even if there is a war on. After all, I want the man in the tank who shoots me to see he is killing a beautiful woman.

There is a rumbling shudder from above. The far off imagined sound of bombs. Aya looks up.

Aya lets herself in to Sam and Cherry's apartment, carrying cleaning supplies. Sam goes off. Cherry ignores her.

Maureen: *(To audience)* There is no war on of course but this is the city, every day you're fighting for a scrap of space. We live in a building, which is a democracy. Or so we like to think. Some people have a lot and others have a little but we all get an apartment. Aya cleans the

rooms of those with a lot and takes home a little. She doesn't mind cleaning. As long as they don't make her open their ovens. You never know what you find in an oven.

Aya cleans Cherry and Sam's apartment. Cherry shuffles papers.

Cherry: But I feel like it's a bad idea. Sam wants one. Do you think it's a bad idea to get a cat, Aya?

Aya: You like cat?

Cherry: I'm allergic to them. Not actually allergic. But allergic to the idea of them, to their presence, to the tufts of fur they wipe all over things and the way they scratch at doors and couches and their kitty litter which no matter how many times you empty, just drifts over everything and stinks-

Aya: You don't want cat?

Cherry: They can be cute. But. This is stupid. *(Deep breath)* I'm just worried that Sam will love the cat more than he loves me. That the cat will take all his attention-

Aya: Cats are mean.

Cherry: Cats *are* mean.

Aya: Sometimes they are nice.

Cherry: Oh, I didn't mean... do you have a cat? Or did you have a cat?

Aya: No. Where I'm from. Nobody has cats. Street animals.

Cherry: Rabid probably.

Aya: No not rabbits. Cats.

Cherry: Oh, I meant rabid. You know... rabid?

Cherry makes a rabid face. Aya: what is she doing?!

Cherry: It's when an animal is sick-

Aya: Rabbit is sick?

Cherry: No, cats.

Aya: You want sick cat?

Cherry: No, it doesn't matter... It was like that when we went on vacation in Greece, there were cats everywhere on the streets-

Aya: Until they disappear.

Cherry: What do you mean?

Aya: Cats disappear. In my country.

Aya shrugs, relishing Cherry's interest, waiting to be goaded on to tell the story.

Cherry: Did they put them in a shelter?

Aya: What is shelter?

Cherry: No, that was stupid, you probably don't have shelters. So what happened to them?

Aya: No one know where they go. Nobody know but everyone has ideas.

Cherry: Like what?

Aya raises her eyebrows dramatically.

Cherry: What?

Aya: At the markets, more meat.

Cherry: Oh god-

Aya: Fresh chopped meat and nobody says what it is. People are telling stories: "You know where meat is coming from. You know-" And nobody buy meat. And people selling meat say it is cow or goat.

Cherry: I think I'm going to be sick-

Aya: At first no one buy it. We are proud. But then we too hungry to say no. Those skinny little animals with lice. Lunch.

Cherry: That is disgusting. I mean not disgusting because you're disgusting but disgusting because it can't have been sanitary- Was it really-[cat?]

Aya: It could not be true but it could be true.

Maureen: It wasn't true but Aya wanted to see how much Cherry would believe. The truth was much, much worse.

Cherry holds up a photo of a fat, ugly looking baby: an announcement card.

Cherry: If I get one more of these... My fridge is crammed with them, already. This one kind of looks like Jabba the Hut, don't you think?

Cherry holds up the card to Aya, they laugh. Cherry throws the card on the table, goes out. Aya goes to the card, studies it.

Aya: *(to self)* Who is Jabba Hut?

Aya pockets the card. Cherry calls from off, startling Aya.

Cherry: *(offstage)* Oh Aya. I hate to ask you this. But do you think you could clean the oven today?

An oven wheels out, slowly, its wheels squeaking – Aya stares at it fixated, terrified. Cherry continues to talk but her voice fades out as though she is getting further and further away.

Cherry: (off) Sam's dad and his partner are visiting and I'm afraid one of them is going to open the oven, which we never use. I'm terrified to open it actually, it's a warzone in there, not that we ever use it to cook, we'll probably go out for dinner with them anyway....

*Aya stares with horror at the oven. Maureen takes over.
A generator hums.*

Maureen: Can you hear that? The hum of the city. The melody of air conditioners and electricity and drilling and millions of feet. It plays in C minus. I mean C minor.

Maureen hums in harmony with the city. The others join in. They all stop simultaneously.

Maureen: Other things you need to know? There's a rabid raccoon that sometimes eats from our trashcans below the building. The neighbors like to move furniture at all hours.

An excruciatingly slow chair squeaks across the floor above her. Everyone looks up, annoyed.

Maureen: And if you live in this city and you don't have a therapist than there's definitely something wrong with you. In our building, everyone sees Martin, I call him the Preacher, but don't tell him that, in 4B for their troubles. Their afflictions, their predilections, their addictions.

We move into Martin's apartment but action continues in the other apartments. Aya slowly aims cleaning spray at

the front of the oven then dabs at it ineffectually. Maureen takes off her wig and brushes it out carefully. Cherry's face is lit up by a blue glow, mesmerized.

Sam sits opposite the Preacher, anxious, the scene goes at a cracking pace.

Preacher: So... How many times are you here a day?

Sam: Five maybe six times a day...?

Preacher: And are you here right now?

Sam: I think so, it kind of stutters in and out and...

Sam trails off.

Preacher: Sam?

Sam: Hi. I'm here, I'm here... what were we?

Preacher: You were telling me how many times you're present.

Sam: Honestly? Once or twice a day if I'm lucky- I can usually fake my way through conversations. I take the crumbs of what I need. I pick up the cues.

Preacher: That's normal-

Sam: Is it?

Preacher: That's very normal

A ding! The Preacher checks a vice.

Sam: Did you just-?

Preacher: I'm sorry, I'm waiting for someone... so I have to keep an eye on my-

Sam: That's OK.

Preacher: Tell me about your symptoms-

Sam: I have this crawling feeling, a kind of whirring at the base of my skull all the time-

Preacher: Like a tingling sensation or an itch?

Sam: Both.

Preacher waits.

Sam: And there's a tightness in my chest. My hand is cramped from constantly clenching-

Preacher: That's very common-

Sam: Yeah you'd think that'd be reassuring, but it just makes me feel more hopeless-

Preacher: That's normal too.

They both sit in silence.

Sam: Are you going to say something?

Preacher: What would you like me to say?

Sam: I want to know about the program-

Preacher: OK. Well. Depending on what we think is going on, sometimes I recommend locking up your vice for thirty minutes, an hour. You can purchase lock boxes now with timers so once you put the vice in, you can't open the lock until the time is up-

Sam: But how will I know the time, how will I know what time it is?

Preacher: Some people wear a watch. But I recommend trying to forget time for a while. Time is a symptom. It's another way to excuse yourself from being here, because you're watching it pass and waiting for the next thing-

Sam: For how long? In the box?

Preacher: You start with ten minutes... Build up from there.

Sam: But what do you... do. When you're not? When it's locked up.

Preacher: What would you like to do?

Sam: It's been so long since I... I don't even know anymore.

Preacher: Well... how about:
Go for a walk.

Read.
Journal.
Some people like to cook.

Sam: All my recipes are in the ether-

Preacher: Well there's ways around that. There are books.
Recipe books.

Sam: I don't know. I think I'd crawl out of my skin.

Preacher: Everyone thinks that at first. But after a while, it gets
easier and your symptoms starts to recede-

A bing. Preacher checks.

Sam: That's distracting.

Preacher: Sorry?

Sam: That's distracting.

Preacher: Sorry.

Sam: I'd do anything at this point. To get myself back. I'm
just so... It feels like I'm waiting for something to
happen all the time. And I can't tell if that thing is
going to be a disaster or a miracle. What do you do?

Preacher: I... I struggle with it, like everyone else. That's what
drew me to this work. But I have a lock box, which
my partner and I use, used, when we were together-

Sam: That's nice. That sounds very nice-

Preacher: It is-

Sam: I'll do anything. I just want my here back, ya know?

Preacher: The good news is, you're here is right here. It never went away-

Sam: My palms are sweating.

Preacher: That's withdrawal-

Sam: Ten minutes. Are we done?

Preacher: Let's just sit for a bit. Here I'll even turn this off. Let's just sit and breathe.

Sound of vice powering off. Sam stands and paces.

Preacher: It would be great if you could sit- Let's sit. Look at me.

Sam wrestles with looking, finally looks up.

Preacher: There you go. That's not so bad. Is it?

Sam: *(panicky breaths)* I just feel like I'm missing out on something. Like something wonderful is happening right now. And I'm missing it-

Preacher: Are you? Is there?

Beat.

Sam: Probably not. No.

Preacher: No. I didn't think so. Most of the world is just noise-

Sam: Most of the world is just noise-

Preacher: It's just information and pixels and currents and noise-

Sam: That's true. I hate it.

Preacher: What.

Sam: I hate the world.

Preacher: You make your own world-

Sam: That sounds like bullshit-

Preacher: You do and you will.

Beat.

Sam: I don't know if it's that I want more of everything or I just want more of *Cherry*, ya know? I feel so strung out all the time. Waiting.

Preacher: I know.

Sam: Sometimes she doesn't get back to me for *hours*.

Preacher: Oh, I know.

Sam: I wake up and she's already gone to work and I get this icy feeling of terror that I'm alone.

Preacher: I know... To be continued.

Sam: Sure. To be- whatever.

Sam leaves. In Maureen's apartment, Sylvia's hands can be seen playing piano scales. The Preacher drops his work mode and becomes himself, Martin. He makes a call – perhaps we just hear his voice out of the darkness.

Martin: Hey Brian, it's me. Sorry. Call me back anytime. Anytime. I'm here. I mean I'm super busy but not so busy that I can't answer. I'm just busy, busy but here for you.

Recording: To erase and re-record your message press 2.

Martin presses 2.

Martin: Hey Brian. Just thought that... fuck.

Recording: To erase and re-record your message press 2.

Martin presses 2. Goes to speak, can't. Hangs up.

Maureen is in a different wig, sunning herself on the fire escape in her bright sun outfit. She takes a sip from an ice tea, pulls off her sunglasses, looks at us quizzically.

Maureen:

This feels to me like a dangerous and eclectic kind of afternoon. Like something odd is about to happen, don't you think? I like it when things get odd. Which brings me to our next stop on this tour: America! I'm uniquely qualified to talk about America because... I am an American. It's the only qualification you need.

The thing I hate the most about America is those small neat towns where everyone smiles and dresses identically and each piece of grass is buzz cut in a uniform hairdo of green and everyone is terribly polite and nothing ever happens.

Now then there's New York. I'll tell you a secret: New York is not an amusement park, it's a real place. It's a place where Americans run screaming from the malls and the I-95s and the drive through ATMS and the identical clapboard houses, all of it like a Dante's inferno circling and burning around New York city. People think New York is hell. Oh no, it's quite the opposite.

The rest of America – or a lot of it anyway – is lacquered (like one of those breadsticks that you see on display in a fake French bakery), in a hardened chemical glaze that makes the whole thing inedible. So if you live in one of those places, through no fault of your own, I say if you still have legs, hell if you have stumps: run, crawl, scramble out of there to New York. Smuggle yourself onto a container ship if you have to. Life is too short not to eat every piece of

the world. And all the pieces of the world are right here.

We move to Alan & Sandra in Cherry and Sam's apartment.

Alan: We love South Bloeville. Never want to leave. And Sandra just moved real close.

Sandra: I just moved house.

Alan: She moved house. The new place is real nice.

Sandra: It is nice. You found it but it is nice.

Alan: Show them that movie you made.

Sandra: Oh I have a thingamy. Somewhere in here.

Sandra rummages to find it. Gestures a vice. Their faces all light up with a blue glow.

Sandra: Here you go.

Cherry and Sam feign interest.

Sam: It looks nice.

Cherry: So far it's very Blair witch!

Sandra: Blair witch?

Alan: You're a witch.

Sandra & Cherry: What did you say?

Alan: I wish I had hardwood floors like that-

Cherry: This is making me a little seasick-

Sandra: Well I'm not a movie director!

They all laugh politely. They watch.

Sandra: That's the living room, that's my new white leather
 couch, got it BOGO at IKEA-

Cherry: BOGO?

Sandra: Buy one get one! Which means I have two couches so
 I gave one to Alan-

Alan: It's in my garage-

Sandra: And that's the kitchen and that's the bathroom-

Alan: They know what that is-

Sandra: There's the grill-

Sam: Looks like you had some steaks for dinner that night-

Sandra: Did we have steaks?

Alan: I don't know, I wasn't there when you made the
 movie.

Cherry: Nice washer and dryer. I'd kill for one of those in the city-

Sam: Ohhh, I'm seeing dirty laundry-

Sandra: Where? Oh. You're messing with me.

Sam & Cherry: No, it's really nice-

Alan: Did you get to the pool yet?

The screen freezes.

Cherry: Oops-

They all get involved, talking over each other.

Sandra: Oh no it's- if you press that
f

Sam: I think you just need to hit this-

Alan: Play Sandra. Play. *(Beat)* You just restarted it.

Cherry: It's really nice.

Sam: Really nice.

Alan: It's real nice.

Sandra: Well you found it for me.

Sam stops the video. Everyone sits awkwardly, silent.

Sandra: Excuse me. I have to go widdle.

She squeezes past them. They watch her go.

Sam: *(A text)* Hey widdle. Laugh cry face.

Cherry: *(A text)* Widdle WTF?

Sam and Cherry try not to crack up.

Cherry: *(To Alan)* So you didn't want to live together?

Alan: She wanted to.

Sam: Well why didn't you, Dad?

Alan: I still have Ga Ga to visit every day and there's Zip and Sandra's allergic to cats-

Sam: *(To Cherry)* We could take Zip-

Alan & Cherry: *(Too quickly)* I don't think so.

Cherry: Well good for you, you don't have to live together, there's no rule.

Sam: What's so wrong with living together?

Cherry: I'm just saying, you don't have to.

Sam: I'm not saying they have to, I'm saying why wouldn't they?

Cherry: Why would they?

Alan: Zip is allergic to Sandra, too.

Sam: There's nothing wrong with committing to something-

Cherry: I know. But it's not like life is a predictable series of musts. Courtship. Kissing. Fucking. / Marrying. Moving in. Kids.

Sam & Alan: Language!

Cherry: You know what I mean.

Sam: Not really. We live together. We're probably going to get/ married-

Cherry: Don't say it!

Sam: What?!

Sam stares daggers at Cherry as Alan continuous oblivious.

Alan: I like living alone. I like it. Before she came along of course I had (*lists off with fingers*) TV. Visiting mom. Church. We've been good for each other-

Sam: Exactly. I don't see why you don't let her move in-

Alan: It's just not meant to be. There's Zip to think of.

Sam: Zip is a cat.

Alan: And sometimes there's such a thing as too much togetherness.

Cherry: I agree.

Sam: You do?

This next section gradually pulls slightly away from the present as they talk more to us, the audience, then each other.

Cherry: I like being able to starfish my arms and legs in bed-

Alan: I like eating ice cream for dinner-

Cherry: I like being able to open the window at night and let the cold air in while I'm under the warm covers-

Alan: I like putting my feet in a bucket of ice while I watch TV-

Cherry: I like to sit on the fire escape and smoke joints at two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon-

Alan: I like to lie naked in the living room and listen to Blondie records while I build a pyramid out of the forks and knives and spoons on the floor -

Cherry: I like to masturbate in the morning and take naps on the couch with no underwear on-

Alan: I like to watch Supergirl on TV with no complaints from the peanut gallery-

Cherry: I like to stand right on the edge of the fire escape with no one to tell me not to and imagine I might fly right off-

Sam: *(an outburst)* I like to meld my limbs into one big cuddle puddle with another person under the covers and never ever ever let go!

Alan and Cherry shake this off and keep going. [Play Demo 2 – I Like through to 2:20min mark.]

Alan: *(spoken)* I like to be really alone. With just the TV and the ether and the radio and Zip for company. Not a human soul demanding I make conversation-

Cherry: *(sung)* I like to fly. *(spoken)* First little swoops and dives around the apartment, wheeling and dipping and then I *(sung)* zoom right out the window and disappear into the night with no one to say, *(spoken, annoyed)* “what time will you be home?”

Alan: I'd like to learn how to fly-

Sylvia & Preacher *(loop starts)* I like the smell of tea. I like the smell of tea. I like the smell of tea. I like to dip a wafer in hot tea.

Sam: *(spoken)* I like having Terry Gross talking in the next room. I don't actually like listening to Terry Gross but I don't mind her keeping me company.

Cherry: I like listening to fake rain and pretending I'm in a thunderstorm when it's 90 degrees out.

Sam: *(spoken)* I like to color code my books. In theory.

Cherry: I like to watch people on a rooftop party nearby and feel sad that I haven't been invited

Alan: I like to dip carrots in the mayonnaise jar

Alan:
And eat them straight up.

Cherry:
But I'm also happy that I haven't been invited

Maureen *(Loop starts)* I like cheese burgers with a side of sex. I like cheeseburgers with a side of sex. I like cheeseburgers with a side of sex. I like watching Channing Tatum move.

Sam: *(Spoken)* I like to make playlists for my own funeral and think about how everyone will miss me.

Cherry: I like to blast music so loud that it drowns out my heartbeat.

Sam: I like to dance like I'm Elvis.

Cherry & Alan: I like to run through the list of ways that I could die.

All loops stop.

Cherry: Choking.

Alan: *(spoken)* Heart attack.

Sam: *(spoken)* Heart Break.

Cherry: Drowning.

Alan: Seatbelt malfunction. Cancer.

Cherry: Falling.

Alan: Chicken bone.

Aya: *(spoken)* I like ugly babies.

Sandra/Preacher/Aya/Sylvia loops begin.

Cherry: I like to talk out loud to my imaginary 6-foot four
bodyguard husband in case the murderer is listening.

I like to scroll through every selfie I ever took.

Cherry
Are the crinkles on my
brow getting worse?

Sam:
I like to tilt my face up like a
sunflower.
Pretend someone is kissing me on
the forehead.

Cherry: I like to make up songs in the bath and imagine someone is listening and thinking, *(impressed)* who is that voice?!

Alan: I like to do my Tai Chi. *(spoken)*

All loops stop.

Alan: I only have one move. It's this. *(He slowly moves his arms from above his head until his hands are framing his face.)*

Cherry: I like to sing the same song over and over and over and over again. Not even the song but just one line from the song and not necessarily the right lyrics-

Fame! I'd like to learn how to fly. Fame!! I'd like to run in the sky. Fame! Something a jig in the sky?

In Cherry and Sam's apartment, Aya dusts. Sam is watching cat videos, face bathed in a blue glow – we hear the meowing. Sam laughs to himself.

We hear Maureen and Martin (the preacher) on the phone – mid-call. Martin is relishing the story and he and Maureen are having a big old time.

Martin: ... so it was, like, a three-star hotel in Thailand where they seal all the windows and doors so, get this, it's completely dark. I spent TWO WEEKS in/the dark.

Maureen: Oh God-

Martin: It's some kind of Daoist/tradition-
f

Maureen: It's some kind of ninth circle of hell.

Martin: Yeah well, no sunlight, no melatonin so your body eventually starts to produce this thing known as the death chemical/ DTP-

Maureen: What's that?

Martin: It's the signal your body sends to the brain to tell it to shut down. When it's dying. It says to your brain: "Your work is done. Go die now."

Maureen: So let me get this straight, you chose to go die in the dark for two weeks?

Martin: I would have done anything to forget him.

Maureen: So how did it feel, being in the/ dark?

Martin: Like death. I wanted to get out every second. My skin was on fire-

Maureen: Uh huh-

Martin: ...for three days. Then that went away and my mind started scanning through memories from my childhood. Looking for something that was missing-

In Sam and Cherry's apartment...

Sam: You missed a spot.

Aya looks up.

Sam: I was joking. It was just a... joke.

Aya doesn't laugh, keeps cleaning. The call continues.

Martin: When I woke up I couldn't tell if it was night or day. I hit my head a few times while I was doing yoga because I couldn't see what was in front of me-

Maureen: Wait, what? Could you get dressed?

Martin: I couldn't tell if my eyes were open or closed-

Maureen: And you paid for this?

Martin: Top dollar.

Amusement. Sam addresses Aya.

Sam: *(mispronouncing it)* Aye-a-

Aya: *(correcting)* Iiii-yaa

Sam: Aya, sorry- Do you like cats?

Aya: I love cats.

Sam: Me too! What's not to love?

Aya: I would like cat. But building say no-

Sam: Oh, that must be a poor floor, sorry I mean a floor thing because we're allowed.

The call continues.

Martin: Groaning out loud to myself. Cause the pain is physical, you know?

Maureen: I know. Bobby used to say the heart had more mind than the brain-

Martin: Oh right, Bobby... Your husband?

Maureen: No, the old Super.

Martin: Wait. That's Bobby. You had a thing with super Bobby?

Maureen: Maybe.

Martin: Hang on, the guy in the wife beater-?

Maureen: Don't call it that-

Martin: (*c'mon*) Weelllll....

Maureen: He used to come up here and fix things-

Martin: I bet he did.

Maureen: It was mutually convenient.

Martin: Uh huh.

Maureen: Women need sex too, you know. We're no different. That's a myth-

Martin: I'm not gonna argue with you about that... So how'd it, ya know?

Maureen: He came up here one day, the tap was leaking or something-

Martin: Mmhm.

Maureen: Are you going to let me finish?

Martin: Sorry-

Maureen: So I offered him a beer and when he took it, he... (*a nice memory*) kissed me.

Martin: Was it a good kiss?

Maureen: Surprisingly. Yeah. One of the best-

Martin: Go Bobby and your wife beater-

Maureen: Don't call it that-

Martin: Sorry, so Bobby was a good kisser-?

Maureen: You know those types... when you kiss them you don't expect it to be so good... But it is. He had what

they call “erotic intelligence”, Bobby. You wouldn’t have thought-

Martin: No you would *not* have thought-

Maureen: And when someone kisses you like that, all reason goes out the window-

Martin: Do you feel like there was something there, a connection-?

Maureen: No, other than the way he touched me, no. Just dumb animals in the dark.

Sam: Cherry doesn’t want a cat.

Aya: No?

Sam: But I think it would be nice-

Aya: Yes.

Sam: It would be nice to have something solid, someone solid to come home to- It would be a commitment of course-

Aya: Mmhm.

Sam: Some work and time but it’d be worth it don’t you think? The work would be worth it because you’d have this thing who needed you who loved you, who looked forward to you opening the door-

Aya: That's true-

Sam: I mean it's a lifelong commitment or as long as they live, you know? But – and Cherry has a problem with this – it'd be nice to know you were committed to it. That you had a reason to be. That you were both in it together.

Aya: Cherry don't want?

Sam: Cherry don't want.
Or Cherry don't know what she wants. She changes her mind. A lot. And with a cat you can't change your mind because it's love isn't it, it's love that you have, even if it drives you to distraction-?

Aya: I don't know.

Martin: I still feel connected to him. We never speak. We're ghosts to each other, but I feel like he and I are connected through time and space, you know?

Maureen: No, not really-

Martin: Like I'm having a silent conversation with him? I'm not *saying* anything but there's a thread between us, it's pulling at me all the time. I just spent so many years talking to him, telling him my every day that I feel like we're still talking. Probably crazy, right?

Maureen: (*not wanting to confirm*) Ehhhhhh/hhhhhh-

Martin: I know I know I know-

The phone call starts to fade out.

Maureen: No. It's not crazy. I have that with my sister. I never had it with anyone else. I wish I had that-

Martin: Blessing and a curse.

Maureen: Blessing. And a curse.

Sam addresses Aya again.

Sam: You were married, weren't you, Aya?

Aya: I am married.

Sam: We're not married. Where's your... husband?

A pause. Aya considers this.

Aya: I don't know.

Sam: I know, how you feel.

Aya stares at him blankly, annoyed, but Sam doesn't notice, just turns on another cat video. Aya cleans noisily, banging furiously out of the room.

As we transition to the next scene... In Martin's apartment, he paces. Aya takes the baby card out of her pocket and hangs it up on a string of other baby cards in her apartment. These actions continue, muted but present,

giving a sense of the unending life and movement of the apartment building.

Cherry sits in the Preacher's apartment.

Preacher: So what can we do for you today?

Cherry: Who's the *we*?

Preacher: What can I do?

Cherry: I told you, when I called-

Preacher: I'd like to hear more about it from you-

Cherry: I thought you were going to tell me about the program-

Preacher: Let's start with *here*. Are you here now?

Cherry: It's not that- I mean yes I want to be here more, who doesn't, but it's not that. Well it is but it isn't. People think it's just to be here or not to be here but that's not really the question for me-

Preacher: OK. But you seem?

Preacher: Impatient. Cherry: Anxious.

Preacher: That too.

Cherry: It's a constant. I've always been this way. I've always been an anxious person. I'm usually good at hiding it-

Preacher: Why do you feel the need to hide it?

Cherry: I don't want to make other people anxious-

Preacher: Uh huh-

Cherry: And it's embarrassing. So I keep it under the... surface.

Preacher: But it's getting too much.

Cherry: I feel fluttery all the time. Like I'm not tethered to the ground. I might just flight away-

Preacher: Do you want to fly away?

Cherry: Who doesn't? The way the world is. Who would want to be IN it.

Preacher: What specifically about the world?

Cherry: I think it's pretty self-explanatory-

Preacher: Treat me like I'm stupid. Explain it to me.

Cherry considers for a pause.

Cherry: There's just a sense of something pressing in from all sides. The shootings and the rallies and the walls and the lies and the constant stream of nonsense. I was in the nail salon the other day and I saw this clip of a woman filming her fiancé bleeding to death and I

literally made a sound like (*she makes a weird strangled gasp/moan*). And nobody even looked up. Nobody was looking. Everyone was soul sucked into their vices – I had been a moment before too. And I tried to tell Sam but he... (*she shrugs*)

Preacher: He...?

Cherry: He shook his head and then a second later, he said, "I made sausages for dinner."

The Preacher and Cherry nod at each other, no words necessary. They let it go.

Cherry: There's just so much pouring into me from all these places. Piped through to me on the vice. And I feel I have to know. I can't look away. I need to bear witness. But I don't know if I can look anymore-

Preacher: You think you can control what's happening by bearing witness-

Cherry: No. Maybe. I just don't want to be surprised by anything. So if I stay on top of it. Nothing surprises me now but also... nothing affects me. I'm watching it all but I'm completely dead to it. The last time I felt something was when I saw that man bleeding and I wonder if something bled out of me too? And now I've flown away. I'm watching it all from a great distance telling myself I'm doing a great job.

Preacher: What would you like to be doing differently?

Cherry: I don't know. I can't look anymore but I can't not look, ya know?

Preacher: I know.

Cherry: So what should I do?

Preacher: I think it will help to disconnect- for at least a few minutes. A few hours at best. It's an impossible tidal wave of... you can't stay on top of *everything*-

A ding – Preacher's vice.

Preacher: Sorry.

Checks it.

Preacher: *(To self)* Damnit, just call me back Brian-

Cherry: Is everything OK?

Preacher is silent. Buttons beeping.

Preacher: *(strangled voice)* I'm sorry. We're going to need to stop there-

Cherry: Did something happen-?

Silence.

Preacher: Nothing to worry about... Now I want you to start with a few minutes a day- Put yourself on airplane. Really let yourself fly away for a bit.

Preacher stands. Cherry stands up. She hesitates.

Preacher: To be continued.

Cherry: To be continued.

Cherry leaves. The Preacher cries quietly. Cherry enters her apartment. Stops herself from checking her vice. Checks it.

In Aya's apartment, an oven slowly wheels out. Aya stares at the oven in horror. There is the sound of a baby crying, softly. The crying becomes louder and louder: surreal. Aya lunges at the oven and yanks it open. The crying suddenly stops. She collapses: relief.

Shift to Maureen, who is wearing a different wig.

Maureen: If it weren't for my sister, I'd probably die alone. I did the Heimlich maneuver on myself once and my soul popped right out of my body. Had a hard time getting it to go back in.

Sylvia's voice comes from off.

Sylvia: What do you want for lunch?

Maureen: Does it matter?

Sylvia: Don't be morbid. Of course it matters.

Maureen: I could put anything in this bag of bones. Give me a cheeseburger, a filet mignon, a dozen oysters, a bag of pickles and a barrel of crinkle cut fries-

Sylvia: I'll make us salad.

Maureen is not happy about this.

Sylvia: I need to look my best for the wedding.

Maureen: Who's wedding?

Sylvia: My son Teddy. Teddy's wedding!

Maureen: Oh. When is it?

Sylvia: It's another five months and twenty-four days with no cheese, bread or pasta-

Maureen: I probably won't make it.

Sylvia: I'll make us a nice salad.

Maureen: *(To audience)* You know what I miss? Sex. God I miss it. It's not gone from my body. Desire. It's just faded a little – more like a dull pulse that's still going: *(taps out a heartbeat with the words)* I want, I want, I want. I miss getting out and about, because I liked to stare at men's crotches on the subway. The pretty men and the ugly men and the tall ones and the old ones and the bald ones. That bulge in their jeans still makes me hot. That dumb animal lust never goes away. I would like a man to run his fingers along my back – gentle

circles. The skin on my body is different now – it's soft in a different way. My skin's still nice to touch if you want to come talk to me after the show.

Sylvia: Lunch is ready!

Maureen: You probably think I made her up. My sister. Because you'll never actually get to meet her. She's not what you'd call a socialite.

Maureen goes inside, they continue to bicker from off.

Sylvia: That's not true.

Maureen: It's true. You're not good with new people.

Sylvia: I meet people all the time.

Maureen: Who? Name one person.

Sylvia: I meet people at work.

Maureen: Well that's different. You have to talk to those people. Got no choice.

Sylvia: I did a test, I'm an extroverted introvert!

Maureen cackles at Sylvia.

Sylvia: What!? What?! I am.

Aya sits in the Preacher's apartment.

Preacher: When was the last time you were present?

Aya: I am not present. I am past.

Preacher: But you're *here*. *Now*.

Aya: I'm now but I'm not here. I mean I'm here but I'm not now.

Preacher: Would you like to be here and now?

Aya: Some days: yes.
It will be easy. Easier.
Other days: no.
I like being past.
I can visit with Yvengi and Borichka and if I go way back my friend Anna brings me caramels and we play on the living room floor.

Preacher: My work is about here. Presence. But you have to want to be here. Don't you think it might be a relief to let go of the past and make a new life?

Aya: Better or different?

Preacher: You don't seem... are you happy?

Aya: Who is happy? I have many *things*. This is enough.

Preacher: Why did you come to see me then?

Aya: My boss – Cherry tell me about you – I did not want to offend-

Preacher: OK. Well why don't you tell me about a time in recent months when you were happy-

Aya: Americans and happy. Happy happy happy.

Preacher: Let's try, Aya.

Aya: OK. Does it have to be awake happy or can it be asleep happy?

Preacher: Anything you want-

Aya: I am happy when I dream.

Preacher: Yes?

Aya: In dream no logic. It is better. When you look for logic is unhappy.

Preacher: What do you mean?

Aya: In my dream, I fly. In my dream, the door open and my husband is home. I say, where did you go? He says: I never left. In my dream I die but then I am alive. I kill but I am not guilty. In my dream a person can turn into water or stone... In my dream a boy can be a bird. It's nice, yes?

Preacher: Yes. And what do you dream?

Aya: This.

Aya looks over at her apartment. The lights stutter and blink – Aya walks over and sits down at the table. Cherry and Sam sit at the table. They all take a shot of vodka. As the glasses slam down the lights resume normality. They all react with shock/laughter at the vodka.

Aya: You are disgusting!

Sam: It's true we are-

Aya: First time I clean your bathroom, there are mushrooms growing in the bath-

Cherry: That's not true.

Sam: It might be true.

Cherry: That was definitely before I moved in.

Aya: It is true.

They laugh.

Aya: And hair hair hair in the drain-

Sam: Not mine-

Aya: Crumbs in the couch-

Cherry: They're Sam's-

Sam: I like to snack-

Aya: But to tell you the truth, you are not as disgusting as some people in the building-

Cherry and Sam lean forward.

Cherry & Sam: Oooooohhhh-

Cherry: Tell us

Sam: Whoooo?

Aya: Well-

But Aya is interrupted by the sound of a baby crying. They all turn towards the sound. The light shifts, ominous.

Cherry: What's that?

Aya: Borichka?

Aya stands.

Sam: What's that sound?

Aya: Borichka?

Sam stands up and takes Aya's hand. He moves in so close, he's almost kissing her.

Sam: You should go save him.

Aya: I must save him, but where is he?

Sam: Where is who?

Aya takes a step towards the sound but the room explodes in sound and light – like a bomb blast. We move out of the dream – Cherry and Sam leave. Aya returns to the Preacher's apartment.

Preacher: I see. *(Beat)* You want, you deserve to have friends.

Aya: No.

Preacher: No?

Aya: I want them to see me as the same.

Preacher: Ahhh. Go on-

Aya: I have a university degree. I don't mind to clean. But I don't want to clean ovens anymore-

Preacher: Great. Good. Great. Why should you have to do that?

Aya: Why should I?

Preacher: You don't have to do anything you don't want to.

Aya: *(Dubious)* Well...

Preacher: You only think you do.

Aya: I cannot quit my job.

Preacher: Sure but not everything deserves your attention in life, Aya. Your attention is more valuable than that. Not every thought needs to be explored. Not every oven needs to be cleaned.

Aya: I don't clean the oven.

Preacher: Exactly. Fuck the ovens.

Aya: Fuck the ovens!

Preacher: Good. Yes. Good. How about you try to ask for that?

Aya: What?

Preacher: Ask for what you want.

Aya: This is hard.

Preacher: Don't ask. Don't get.

Aya: I don't know.

Preacher: I believe that you can do it. Say it. Say "I can do it".

Aya: (*unconvinced*) I can do it.

Preacher: Again.

Aya: I can do it.

Preacher: Again.

Aya: I can't do it.

Preacher: Yes, you can. Again. Don't stop.

Aya: *(gathering momentum)* Icandoit I candoit Icandoit
Icandoit.

Preacher: Excellent. *(Beat)* To be continued.

Aya keeps saying "I can do it" to herself as she leaves.

The inhabitants of the building go about their business as the radio plays. Sam flings open the front door to look for the newspaper. Cherry makes coffee. Aya slowly and chastely kisses her window, leaving a lipstick mark. Preacher mouthes his sermon to himself. Maureen and Sylvia in voiceover.

Maureen: Well that's just terrible-

Sylvia: It's just terrible-

Maureen: Really terrible-

Sylvia: Ok, on that note, let's take a call. You're on call and kvetch... Call us with your complaints and we'll sympathize-

Maureen: We'll empathize-

Sylvia: We'll see it through your eyes-

Maureen: We won't rationalize your fears away-

Sylvia: We'll panic with you and then some-

Maureen: We'll kvetch together-

Sylvia: And we'll all feel better... *(call comes in)* Hello, you're on Call & Kvetch...

Bradley: Hi this is Bradley, long time listener, long time caller...

Maureen: We remember you Bradley-

Sylvia: How could we forget-

Maureen and Sylvia cackle. The radio fades.

Cherry is alone in the elevator. A meditation bell rings. Cherry breathes in. Out. But her thoughts, in voiceover, keep interrupting.

Cherry: *(Sing songy voice over)* Gotta go to whirr-erk. Gotta go to whirr-erk. Can't b-e bo-thered.

Her vice beeps. She checks it.

Sam: Whatcha doin baby?

Cherry rolls her eyes. Ignores him.

Sam: Question mark. Question mark. Question mark.

Cherry: *(spoken)* Busy bae.

My boss know I'm hungover? Probably not. Richard.
Bald toddler. Wears sunglasses inside the office even
though there's no windows. Dick.

Sam: Hey babysnakes. My widdle baby baby babysnakes.
Sausages OK for dinner?

Cherry: (*voicover*) Being single is the best. Zero compromises.
If it wasn't for sex...

Sam: Hey, sexy sausage. Mmmmmmmmmmmmm.

Cherry: (*listing as dings continue*) Lemons, Echinacea, butter.
Lemons, Echinacea, butter. Lemons, Echinacea,
butter. Bundy.
Should be a creep hotline, where you can call and
report things. Tiny details: "Hi, so there was this guy
who just looked at me funny for two seconds on the
subway." Like a counselling service, leave the date,
time, place of the incident. At least there's a record.
God, being in this woman body is so fucking
annoying sometimes.

Cherry: (*sings*) Anxiety got its grip on me. Anxiety got its grip
on me.

[Play a few opening bars of Demo 3 – Anxiety]

*The other characters sing Anxiety as she continues. [Play a
few bars of Demo*

Cherry: Crick neck. Call Mom.

From now her thoughts are sped up on the track. Double speed.

Cherry: Lemons. Creep hotline. So fucking annoying.
Sunglasses inside. Dick.
Squirrels or rats? Too much Tequila Ted Bundy. Eye twitch. Butter. Memorising my routine. Need a routine. Jog tomorrow.
(sings) Fame. I want to live forever. I want to something to die. I feel it coming together. Baby remember my /name-

She checks her vice.

Sam: (sings from Fame) Remember. Remember. Remember.
(speaks) Remember? Remember? Remember?

Cherry: (A meditation bell rings. voiceover) Breathe in. Breathe...
(spoken) question mark?

Sam: When we first ogle eyed each other?

Cherry: Ogle eyes distraction. Busy.

Sam: My busy heartbreaker. C'mon.

Cherry: (voiceover) Babysitting is good contraception. Did I change my tampon? (scratches her arm) Mosquito at midnight. Couldn't be bothered turning on the light.
(The sound of a mosquito buzzing)
Sam sleeps like a happy baby. Smiles all night long.
What an asshole.
I like him asleep.

Oh god, do I like him better when he's asleep?
He'll be waiting. Make him wait. Don't make him
wait.

Cherry gives in and responds to Sam.

Cherry: At Jimmy's? On 4th?

Sam: Be4 Jimmy's.

Cherry: First time was Jimmy's.

Sam: Incorrect. Saw u flamenco lady dancer video.

Cherry: Crazy face.

Sam: Eyes of love eyes of love eyes of love.

Cherry: Bunny rabbit stalker

Sam: Purple heart.

Cherry: Yellow heart.

Cherry: *(voiceover)* Sweetheart neckline... Should I wear
tonight? Lemons, Echinacea, butter. Tampon. Breathe.
Itchy mosquito fucker. Sleeps like a baby. Never
called Mom. Breasts are weird body lumps.

Sam: I knew. Right then. There was *(sings)* "somethin bout
the way she moves..."

Cherry: You just wanted a piece of me.

Sam: True. I wanted a piece of your heart.

Cherry: *(voiceover)* Sure.

Sam: And a piece of your ass.

Cherry: *(Flirting)* Stop it.

Sam: I wanted your je ne sais quoi. Realness.

Cherry: Huh.

Sam: You're sureness. I thought if I had you, I'd have that and if I had that, I'd have you.

Cherry: I'm never sure.

Sam: I know.

Cherry: I'm never sure of anything.

Sam: I know that, now.

Cherry: Do you regret it?

Sam: Never. Sometimes. Always. Never.

Cherry: Ouch.

Sam: Do you regret me?

She doesn't respond. Silence.

Sam: Cherry? Bb? Cherry? Bb? Do you? I'm serious.

Cherry: Sorry, seriously busy. Have to go.

Sam: OK later but not too late. K? K? K? K?

A beat.

Sam: You annoyed with me? (*Beat. Fast.*) Question mark?
Question mark. Question mark? Question mark?
Question mark? Question mark? Question mark?

Cherry: (*voicover*) I don't know I don't know I don't know-

The elevator doors open and a rush of noise/New York/the world/all the noises we've heard in the scene fly at Cherry. Perhaps this also becomes the Anxiety song. Cherry steps into the rush and disappears.

Aya enters Cherry and Sam's apartment, carrying drycleaning. She goes to hang it up but instead puts Cherry's dress over her clothes. Puts on Cherry's hat. She sits in the half dark and imagines she is Cherry.

Sam enters. Watches "Cherry" from behind. Silence.

Sam: What are you doing?

Aya: (*American accent. Imitating Cherry in a whisper*) Waiting for you to get home.

Sam: (*Happy*) You were?

Aya: I wait for you every night.

Sam: *(Pleased)* No you don't.

Sam goes to Aya, and puts his hands on her shoulders.

Sam: Are you OK?

Aya nods. Sam kisses her neck, Aya melts.

Sam: You smell different.

Aya: You shouldn't do that.

Sam: Why not?

He kisses her mouth.

Sam: You taste like oranges.

Aya stands up.

Aya: It's time for me to go.

Sam: Go where?

Sam turns on the light, illuminating Aya.

Sam: Aya?

Aya: Please don't say my name like that.

Sam: I'm sorry but you- I thought you were- Isn't that Cherry's hat?

Aya pretends nothing has happened: officiously takes off the hat and dress and folds it.

Aya: (*officious*) I drop off the cleaning. And I did not clean the oven. I left \$10 because I did not clean the oven.

Sam: You don't have to leave \$10. Just take it.

Aya: No.

Sam: Just take the money.

Aya: No.

Sam: OK. I'll let Cherry know.

Aya: No. Don't. Keep the money but don't tell Cherry. OK?

Sam: OK.

Aya: She won't know because she is not looking.

Sam: OK.

Aya: She never know.

Sam: No, she won't know.

Aya: Promise?

Sam: Yes. OK. OK. Promise.

Aya goes to the door, but Sam catches her hand.

Sam: Aya.

Aya: Don't.

Sam: Sorry.

Aya leaves. Slams the door.

*Night falls. No one in the building can sleep. They sing.
[Play Demo 4 – Find me a Mind – to 2:21min mark.]*

Cherry: I can't sleep-

Sam: I can't sleep-

Aya: I can't sleep-

Maureen: I can't sleep-

Preacher: I can't sleep-

Aya: It's my mind-

Cherry: It's my mind-

Preacher: It's my mind-

Sam: It's my mind-

They all continue to sing.

My unkind mind
That will never halt
A kind of mind
That knows all its faults
A manic mind
Filled with deep dark vaults

Find me a mind
That doesn't wander
Find me a mind that's fixed and true

Find me a mind
That doesn't squander
Find me a mind that's here with you

Find me a mind
That doesn't wander
Find me a mind that's fixed and true

Find me a mind that's here with you
That's here with you (harmony)
That's here with you (harmony)
That's here with you (harmony)

Maureen:

There's no ending. None of this has an ending. I mean the lights will go down, I'll walk off stage to our cramped dressing room where each of us has a small succulent in a brown plastic pot that refuses to die. We'll all go through the ritual of the end and then you'll stand up politely, shuffle out, muttering or loudly declaring your comments into the night,

looking for a drink and us, the other players, we'll unspool backwards through other doors into an evening that may intersect with yours. And some of you will go home and some of you will eat together and some of you will smoke cigarettes or stand alone on subway platforms and some of you will have rushed or delicious sex with each other or maybe one of us.

And beyond tonight, way beyond what you can see, another group of people about the size of this audience but less pale will run across an invisible line in a desert and be shoved violently back by men with masks and batons and guns and plastic shields.

(She stops, touches her chest.)

I'm sorry. I think have the hiccups. *(Beat. Holds breath.)*
No, they've gone.

And these men are pushing back the people who are running from another group of men with their guns and their batons, so if it was a cartoon, this group of desperate people, are running back and forth, between these two groups of men who refuse to let them be anywhere, to belong on any piece of the earth.

I'd like my life to end softly, but it refuses to go that way.

And in Modena, an opera singer will stop breathing and collapse into a bowl of gnocchi. And in Stuttgart,

a man is carving a tattoo into his right arm using a pin. A thousand babies will be born right... wait... now. All with different lives ahead of them. It doesn't end. On the way home, you'll walk past a pair of men on the street whose dogs – a border collie and a pug – are sniffing each other's butts. Those men just met and when they looked at each other, their hearts leapt into their throats and one of them is already falling in love. It doesn't end.

A big fireball will rise in the sky tomorrow and light the day. A truck will rumble down your street and pick up your trash while you sleep.

A woman is drowning in the ocean right now because the boat she was escaping in capsized off the coast of Italy – and you can't put your hand out to pull her or any of the others to shore. It doesn't end-

A blackout cuts her off.

Intermission

Act 2

A glorious new day dawns. All the characters sing Find Me a Mind as they start their day [Demo 4 - 2:21 through to end].

I'm looking in your eyes
But I've travelled a million miles
I'm looking in your eyes
But I've left you a thousand times

Find me a mind
That doesn't wander
Find me a mind that's fixed and true

Find me a mind
That doesn't squander
Find me a mind that's here with you

Find me a mind that's here with you
That's here with you (harmony)
That's here with you (harmony)
That's here with you (harmony)

Sylvia noodles on the piano, playing scales.

Sandra and Alan are staring out the window of Cherry & Sam's apartment. Contemplating the city.

Sandra: It's like rats.

Alan: Mmm.

Sandra: Rats in a cage. *(Beat)* A small cage.

Alan: I've never felt so many pointy ends of so many elbows-

Sandra: I know.

Alan: I don't know how people live here.

Sandra: And the smell. I felt dizzy.

Alan: Mhm. Did I tell you about the last time I visited?

Sandra: No. Pray tell.

Alan: I was walking up 42nd street from Grand Central Station to ah. What's the place? Bryant Park. And I turned to go down the subway steps and a man was at the bottom of the steps, mid-squat, ass in the air, shit dangling from his-

Sandra: No! Stop!

Alan: About to drop.

Sandra: Oh my-

Alan: Treating the subway like his restroom with no doors- for all the world to see.

Sandra: *(clucks or makes some disgruntled sound)*

Pause.

Sandra: Well I'm counting the minutes till we leave.

Alan: Don't say that.

Sandra: What? I can't walk on this leg. You have to walk everywhere to get round.

Alan: We had those bagels though. They were real good.

Sandra: That's true. *(Beat)* Do you think they'll get married?

Alan: Heck if I know.

Sandra: She has a bit of an uppity-ness to her.

Alan: I like her.

Sandra: Well, I find her intimidating.

Alan: She's sweet.

Sandra: I feel like she's talking about how stupid she thinks we are behind our backs.

Alan: Like you're talking about her now.

Sandra: *(grumbles then...)* I heard her say-

Alan: I don't like gossip-

Sandra: I do! (*Beat*) I heard her say to Sam that he's never here-

Alan: He works at home.

Sandra: He's not *here* though. That generation is always looking at their vices.

Alan: So are you.

Sandra: I like the photos. And the video. And the maps. They're handy.

She takes out her vice.

Alan: I don't know if he spends any time with friends. He was the kind of kid who preferred to play alone. But I think that there can be such a thing as too much aloneness. Like the more alone you are, the more alone you become, you know?

Beat. Eventually Sandra looks up.

Sandra: What?

Alan: Nothing.

Aya appears from the other room with a mop. Sandra and Alan, under their breath.

Alan: Did she hear that?

Sandra: I don't think she speaks English.

They both smile at Aya. Aya smiles back. Sam enters from the front door.

Sam: Hi guys.

Alan: Hi son.

Sandra: Hi Sam.

Sam: How was your day?

Alan and Sandra speak simultaneously.

Alan: Wonderful.

Sandra: Oh we had a big old time.

Sam: Good. Good. *(Beat.)* Hi Aya.

Aya: Hello.

Alan: *(To Sam)* Can you ask her to not move my shoes?

Sam: I'm sure she hasn't done anything to your shoes, Dad.

Alan: Well I couldn't find them this morning.

Sandra: That's because you forgot where they were.

Alan: Just ask her not to touch them.

Sam: I'm not going to-

Alan: Just ask her.

Sam: No.

Alan: Why not?

Sam: Because.

Alan: I don't see why-

Aya: *(interrupting)* I. Will. Not. Touch. Your. Shoes.

Alan: *(Loudly to Aya)* THANK YOU.

Sandra and Alan beam at Aya. Sam wants to die.

In Maureen's apartment, Sylvia plays scales. Martin makes a call.

Martin: *(Gentle)* Brian. I'm just calling to let you know that I won't be calling anymore. Ever. I'm hearing your lack of response. And I get it. And I wanted to say I'm sorry for... *(Annoyed)* but also, I'm not sorry, because we were everything to each other and you can't even bother to call me, to tell me what you're telling me without actually telling me. So go fuck yourself.

He hangs up.

Later, Cherry sits alone in her apartment, in the same place that Aya sat pretending to be her earlier.

Aya enters, gathers her courage.

Aya: *(under her breath)* Icandoit Icando it I can do it I can do it. *(Beat. Aloud.)* I am not clean oven. I am never clean oven.

Cherry stirs, but doesn't turn.

Aya: At home. In my building. There is woman who is my neighbor. She lives down the hall. She has a baby. No father. This is bad enough but this baby, this baby knows it is a mistake, because it cry cry cry day and night. Wah wah wah. Me me meee. I do not smile at the woman in the hall.

Then when the bombs start. One blessing is I no hear the goddamned baby.

And every night there are soldiers. Everyone knows they raid buildings. Looking for god knows who. God knows what. And everyone knows they go to your friend's building or your sister's building or your bosses' building. Thank god, never my building. But tonight. Tonight, I watch from the window... they are downstairs in the courtyard. And then *(a thunderous door cracking boom)* They are inside. And then I hear woman with the baby. She knock on doors – “please take him, please take him”. She is begging someone to hide the baby. She is alone, everyone knows what happens to a woman alone.

The sound of knocking.

Now she is at my door. I hold my breath. Pretend I am not home. Everyone wants to be a good person but in truth, when they knock on your door, do you open it?... I feel her bad luck slide under the door but I cannot say no. (*She softens, awed, smiles*) And ahhh the baby. It's a miracle. The baby IS asleep... this little thing, black hair. Like... a mohawk? But there is nowhere to hide the baby. We must hide the baby. What about... ah! The oven! It does not work for months. Like everything in this fucking city, the oven is broken. I open the oven door and she, so gentle, puts the baby. (*Saying it to the mother*) "Careful, careful."

And then (*another boom, the front door bursting open*) Men are inside, pushing us and yelling: "Where is he? Where your husband? Where is he? Are you alone? Where is he? Don't lie to us or we kill you. Where is he?"

Aya gradually shifts into an American accent.

I say, "Yes, yes, we are alone, we are alone, please, please please we are alone". And the mother is crying. She and the baby are the same. Big dumb tears. Then this soldier slumps down at the kitchen table like he's tired. I almost want to bring him lunch, rub his shoulder, make him tea. He is just a boy too. He lights his cigarette and watches us. He scratches between his legs and blows smoke at us like we are in bar and he is going to buy us a drink. We both stand still on the wall. We do not move. We do not breathe. My face is bleeding. I don't remember how it happened.

I turn to the woman and she is staring at the oven. I reach out to touch her, to distract her. But it's too late, the soldier follows her eyes. And he stands up and slowly moves to the oven and he squints through the dirty glass.

The sound of a baby, quietly crying, muffled.

And he smiles. And he turns to us and says, I'm going to ask you one more time: is there anyone here with you?

"Ok then," he says. And he reaches out-

Aya reaches out and mimes turning on an oven. We hear the oven click, click, clicking to life. Then WHOOSH. Aya stands, watching this memory. Cherry slowly puts her head in her hands. Aya blinks herself out of the memory. Goes back to heavily accented English.

Aya: So I will never. Clean. The oven.

Silence. Finally, Cherry stirs, takes her earphones out of her ears.

Cherry: I'm sorry, did you say something, Aya?

Aya can't speak. Then...

Aya: Your husband kiss me.

Cherry: What?

Aya: Your husband kiss me.

Cherry takes this in for a pause.

Cherry: He's not my husband.

Aya: Well whoever he's not. He kiss me.

Cherry: What the fuck are you saying?

Aya: I say he kiss me. *(Regretting)* It is nothing, nothing. I can go. Forget this.

Cherry: No, you're not leaving.

Cherry stares at Aya in disbelief for a long moment.

Cherry: Really. He really kissed you?

Aya: I am not ugly.

Cherry: I didn't say that.

Aya: You should keep an eye on him.

Cherry: Maybe I should keep my eye on you-

Aya: I am nobody.

Aya goes to leave.

Cherry: Wait. *(Beat)* What was it like? The kiss?

Aya: Nice.

Cherry: Nice, like what? Be more specific.

Aya: I pretend he is my husband.

Cherry: Was it sweet or rough or like a lotta tongue or-?

Aya: It was- (*Aya shrugs*)

Cherry: Tell me.

Aya goes to Cherry, kisses her gently.

Cherry: Oh.

Cherry reaches for Aya to kiss her again but Aya moves away.

Aya: No, I am not like that.

Cherry: (*embarrassed*) Oh god. I'm not. At least I didn't think so.... (*Annoyed*) Wait. You kissed *me*.

Aya: To show you.

Cherry starts to cry.

Aya: Please don't cry. I hate this.

Aya pats Cherry ineffectually on the back.

Aya: (*In Ukrainian*) There there. (*In English*) Do not be sad.

Cherry: I'm not sad crying. I'm not. I'm sad because I'm not sad. If you hadn't told me, nothing would have to change but I can't with him... anymore.

Aya: I don't understand what you saying- You have good man. You keep him.

Cherry: *(pulling herself together)* Forget it. You should go now.

Aya: OK. My cleaning supplies are in the-[kitchen]-

Cherry: Get the fuck out-

Aya: Am I losing my job?

Cherry: Probably.

Aya leaves, slamming the door.

This sets off a series of sounds that meld and build – air conditioners humming, wrecking balls crashing through walls, sirens, horns, the Call & Kvetch radio show, an operatic soprano, protesters, panhandlers, catcallers, preachers sermonizing on street corners, advertisements, children yelling in a playground, email alerts, messages, ocean waves, news flashes, an unholy roar of information. The inhabitants move about their apartments at a manic pace, faces bathed in a stuttering blue glow, checking and checking and rechecking their vices. Until everything builds to a deafening pitch and suddenly all sound and light shorts out. A citywide blackout. In darkness, the actors sing.

[Demo 5 – You are Here]

I'm looking at a map of my life
I'm searching but I'm lost I'm at sea

But then I see a sign that says
You are here

We can't escape it
We can't fake it
We're here
again

Here is where we are
Are is where we hear
Here is where we are
And there's just nothing to fear

Isn't it wonderful
Isn't it terrible
Like life

Isn't it glorious
Isn't it horrible
Like life

You are here
You are here
You are here
You are here

I thought the moment was overrated

I could give or take it

But then I saw a sign that said
You are here

We can't escape it
We can't fake it
We're here
again

Here is where we are
Are is where we hear
Here is where we are
There's no need to disappear

Here
Here
Here
Here
Hear

Et voila

I wanted to daydream
Piss life up the wall
Arrive at my own death
And find I missed it all

Until I saw a sign that said
You are here

Years later. Light floods the world – a new day. Men in work clothes move boxes out of Maureen’s apartment, speaking to each in muffled voices. The plants on her fire escape are yellowed and dead. Sylvia comes to the window, stares out. The Preacher appears behind her. Puts a hand on her shoulder. They both look out. A radio plays Call & Kvetch and we hear the voices of Maureen, Sylvia and Bradley.

Maureen: Hello, you’re on Call & Kvetch...

Bradley: Hi this is Bradley, long time listener, long time caller...

Maureen: We remember you Bradley-

Sylvia: How could we forget-

Maureen and Sylvia cackle.

Maureen: Go ahead Bradley...

Bradley: I’m calling about those flip things everyone has these days-

Sylvia: Everyone has one! Even my grandson.

Maureen: Everybody. It’s ridiculous.

The radio starts to fade out so we hear it only as background and the next scene starts. In Cherry and Sam’s apartment, a small boy’s face appears in the window. He points out.

Bradley: Exactly- And everyone's walking around talking loudly into these *machines*. What happened to etiquette?

Sylvia: Etiquette has gone kaput.

Maureen: Etiquette my ass.

Bradley: Plus all that electricity running into your brain... what people don't realise is that they're being *controlled* by.... Like, they think they own those things but one day those little gadgets are going to own them-

Sylvia: I know. And meanwhile, everyone's broadcasting everything. I have to hear about your doctor's appointment on the bus? Forget about it-

Maureen: It's disgusting-

Boy: [In Ukrainian] Mama! A helicopter-

Aya comes over and picks him up, playfully.

Aya: [In Ukrainian] Come away from there, it's dangerous.

Sam appears, puts his arms around Aya's waist, kisses her, she smiles.

Sylvia: I don't think they're gonna last- Who wants to be in touch *all the time*.

Maureen: You've got your head in the clouds-

Sylvia: Maybe, but a gal can dream. Thanks Bradley.

Bradley: Thank you-

Maureen: Alright, let's take another call-

Susan: Hello? Hello?

Maureen: Yes... hello? You're on Call and Kvetch-

Sylvia: What's your kvetch caller?

Susan: Hi, I'm Susan from Sunnydale-

Sylvia: Hi Susan...

*Radio fades out completely. In Maureen's apartment,
Sylvia snaps the blind shut. Blackout.*

We come back up to a clear stage. No apartments. No humans. Our actors are now seated in the audience in their street clothes.

The Preacher enters from the audience. Shakes peoples hands and welcomes them. He goes to the lecturn/mic.

Preacher:

What a day. What a week. What a month. What a spring. What a summer. What a year. What a life! I know it's been hard. It's been real hard.

And so you came here for something, you didn't know what exactly, maybe it was the cool lick of a drink that was going to get you through the week... maybe it was because you have a crush on her or you have a crush on him or you know he has a crush on him and you wanted to keep an eye on them...

You exited your front door today with the sense that something was beginning – the morning air hit your face with gladness. And you placed your feet one after the other after the other at a harried pace to where you were going – you were running on time, running behind, running back through your worry beads that you touch over and over to make sure they're still there. Too much flab, check, not enough sleep, check, too much sleep, check, too much to drink the night before, check, too old, check, too stupid, check, too unfinished never enough don't quite won't ever amount to something, check check check check check.

The next time you're sitting on the train, each time the train rolls into the station, at the top of your voice, announce the name of the station. *(yells)* ASTOR PLACE! I do it all the time. *(yells)* TIMES SQUARE! You'd be amazed what horrors don't befall you. What terrors never unfold. *(yells)* ROCKEFELLER CENTER!

So you started the day glad but then the noonday devil appeared before you to take away the things you thought were possible, to breathe hot malice in your ear about your incompetence, your idiocy, your inability to refuse a blueberry muffin that's going to drag you to a fatty grave... and that phone call you hoped for never came and that soft hand never touched your neck and your socks were soaked through and now in the evening light everything you own looks worn and cheap and it's clear that you're bound for a lifetime of imperfection.

(despondent) WALL ST.

And oh, has this ever happened to you? One day you fill out a piece of paper, and you give a little bit of money to someone with the paper and then you fill out another piece of paper and give a little bit more money and then another piece of paper and another and another and each time you hand over the paper, a little bit of money is leeches from you *(slaps arm as though killing a mosquito)* and another paper *(slaps arm)*... but it turns out all the pieces of paper aren't enough so you take a train all the way to the end of the line – *(yells)* FAR ROCKAWAY! - and you go into a tiny beige office and you sit and you

wait and you wait and you wait 'til your number is called and you slide over the Final Piece of Paper and the Last Bit of Money (*slaps arm. Pauses, looks at audience.*) But of course, it isn't the right piece of paper at all so you have to get back on the train and go back to your life, which is the one you chose anyway so it's most likely all your fault.

So I know. I know. But I want to give you something tonight. (*Music starts to ramp up slowly*)

Isn't it marvelous, isn't it miraculous: this? You all left your separate destinations, from each corner of the island and its boroughs – you left the land of the ether to arrive at the allotted hour.

Let's rejoice in that. Let's congratulate each other.

I want you to turn to your neighbor. And shake their hand. And look them in the eye. And say loudly "We're here!"

I'll show you. (*Goes to an audience member*) We're here! (*Goes around shaking hands.*) Go on, shake hands.

We're here! We're here. We're here!

All the actors hum underneath this in harmony.

(*solemn*) Now please close your eyes. (*Bows head and closes eyes*) And so we are gathered here in the dark. To join together, to find solace. Be not afraid for we are with each other. Be not lonely or anxious because you have relinquished yourself to this, there is nothing else you can be doing but sitting here. So just stay with each other here and now.

A slow underscoring of Take me out to the Ballgame starts.

Preacher: Now let us sing together. Stand if you can. Stand if you are brave.
A song we all know, just for the hell of it, just for togetherness, just because we can.

The Preacher sings a rousing version of Take me out to the Ballgame. If the audience joins in, sing it twice for good measure. The other actors join also.

Preacher: Take me out to the ball game
Take me out with the crowd
Buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks
I don't care if I never get back
Let me root, root, root
For the home team
If they don't win it's a shame
For it's one,
Two,
Three strikes you're out
At the old ball game

The song finishes. The lights gradually dim to black throughout the following. The other actors join the preacher onstage and sing the words "together" as per the opening.

Preacher: We are here together
to be together

to get to be together
to get to be together
to get to be
together
together to get to be together to get
to be together
to be together
together
together
together
together together together together together together together
together together together together together together together
together
to get to be
together