

SINGULARITIES

a play in four acts or perhaps three acts and an epilogue

by MARIA VIERA

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Singularities

“A play about love, physics, and roads not taken.”

A Singularity is: (1) A point in space which is acting out of the ordinary thus causing all kinds of relativistic abnormalities. (2) A point that you can get infinitely close to because the quantity of mass or some other element is 0 or infinite. (3) Physics' great enigma: the equation with no floor or ceiling.

Action of the play: Charles makes a documentary.

CHARACTERS

Men:

Charles: Drifting through his twenties and thirties; a loner; his project is to make a documentary explaining his life, his loves, and his loneliness.

Women:

Jenn: A woman who becomes Charles' best friend; she thinks she is too big, too loud, and takes up too much space.

Toast : A lost soul with too many tattoos and too few options who dreams of being a rock star.

Zan: A professional woman; tough and strong she retains an uncompromising insistence on her right to be.

Katherine: A beautiful tragic soul; ephemeral; an “anima woman;” one of those women who appear too sensitive to live.

Julie: A “Jelly Bean” girl/ woman; sexy, bright, shiny; you always know when she's entered the room.

Woman at bar: Lonely

SETTING

Extreme down stage (right or left) is a chair facing a video camera on a tripod. The stage is roughly divided into three playing areas. Stage right suggests a café with a table and two chairs. Center stage is a bedroom. Stage left is a bar with three stools drawn up to a counter. A wooden door frame could be used for those scenes “in the doorway” or “in the hallway,” but is not necessary.

TIME

Contemporary.

NOTES

Extreme down stage (right or left) is a chair facing a video camera on a tripod. Charles delivers his monologues to the camera, plus he interviews each woman. It would be ideal if on the back wall there was a screen for video projection and live feed from the camera, so his monologues and interviews are projected live onto the screen. However, live projection is not necessary for the integrity of the play. The rest of the settings in the play (a café, a bedroom, a flat, a bar) may be achieved with a table and two chairs.

Although there is a live feed from the camera, so Charles's monologues can be projected onto the screen, the interviews with the women could be pre-recorded (and edited) videos depending on the venue, budget, and sensibilities of the director. These video scenes of the women can, however, be done live on stage. The dialogue remains the same whether a pre-recorded video is made and projected or if the interviews are done live on stage by Charles.

Additional pre-recorded videos may be used such as close ups of the women's faces when they are first introduced or title cards showing the division of the play's structure: Promising Beginnings, Perpetual Presents, Creative Destruction, Endless Endings.

About the staging: The play was designed for a pared-down style with minimal scenery, perhaps, only set pieces: a table, two chairs, a single bed, and three bar stools at a bar counter. In terms of chronology, there is a clear progression in scene location throughout the play from the café stage right to the bedroom center stage to the bar stage left. For example, the opening scenes are mainly in the café. The middle scenes mainly take place in the bedroom. The ending scenes all take place at the bar.

About the acting: Charles transitions from a twenty-something to a thirty- something and, perhaps, even a forty-something as the play progresses. The play benefits if this is done through the actor's physicality and voice rather than costume or make-up.

About the casting: The more usual way to cast the play would be to have six different female actors playing the women. However, the play has the possibility of being a two person show requiring the same female actor to play all six of the women's roles. This is, of course, incredibly challenging, but the possibilities for the performance to be highly interesting and intriguing are immense since the change of roles would have to come almost solely through performance as the female characters could only be differentiated with help from a scarf here, or hat there, or a hair clip or a jacket, which would be staying with the minimal style of presentation.

SINGULARITIES

ACT ONE

PROMISING BEGINNINGS

SCENE 1: at the video camera

(LIGHTS UP)

(Charles sits on a chair facing a video camera on a tripod. He leans forward and turns on the camera.)

CHARLES

There are as many different meanings in a situation as there are individuals in it.

(waving his hand in front of the camera)

Cut... Cut...

(to the audience)

It's hard to find just the right opening line. I love great opening lines.

(He dramatically performs each famous line.)

"Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my life, or whether that role will be held by anybody else, this play must show." "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." "Call me Ishmal." See what I mean?

(to the camera)

Okay, I'll start with the title: Singularities.

(He takes out a piece of paper and reads.)

A singularity is physics' great enigma: the equation with no floor or ceiling. A singularity is a point in space, time or the continuum of thought where we can say for certain there is information we can never know. In some cases, like the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, we know exactly what we cannot know. In other cases, like black holes, we simply know that we cannot know. The key element of any singularity is our certainty that complete knowledge is impossible.

(pleased)

All right that's an opening!

(to the audience)

On second thought maybe a bit too much?

(He tries again.)

A singularity is a point in space which is acting out of the ordinary thus causing all kinds of relativistic abnormalities. I can relate to that. It's the story of my life. In other words, if you look it's a particle; if you don't look it's a wave.

(Charles turns off the camera and enters the Café scene and sits at a table.)

SCENE 2: at the café

(Charles and Jenn, on a blind date, sit at a table.)

CHARLES

So, tell me about yourself, Jenn.

JENN

Not much to tell, really.

CHARLES

I can see you're nervous. Not used to blind dates?

JENN

I haven't been dating much lately.

CHARLES

Claire said she had a friend I should I meet.

JENN

Claire said I should meet her brother.

CHARLES

She said you have a great sense of humor. Am I right?

JENN

I guess...

CHARLES

She said you're smart. Probably read a lot. Correct?

JENN

Yes.

CHARLES

And she said you're sensitive. Like to be alone. Right?

JENN

I enjoy being alone.

CHARLES

Tell me the funniest thing that happened to you today?

JENN

This date?

CHARLES

Good... (*meaning you got me, touché*) What about me? What do you know about me?

JENN

Nothing really. Claire said you make videos. You work in a restaurant.

CHARLES

What else?

JENN

Uhhmm... you dropped out of college. That's about all she said.

CHARLES

I'll tell you about me. I'm very under-appreciated.

JENN

By...?

CHARLES

By my sister. By my mother. By society. By God. By the universe in general. Tell me about yourself. What do you do?

JENN

I'm a high-wire specialist.

CHARLES

No, really.

JENN

I was born on a farm in Wisconsin. I'm a little farm girl and I was a beauty queen... and I got an all-expense paid trip to Hollywood to be in the movies so... I went to Hollywood and I got a spot on *The Bachelor*... but I didn't do so well...

so I wandered the streets until I ran out of money and I had to find a way to make a living.

CHARLES

(going along with her game) Really?

JENN

I tried birthday grams but I can't sing on key and there is a lot of competition in Hollywood for people who can sing birthday grams... so I had to go to strip-a-grams. I was pretty successful in strip-a-grams but Birthday Bimbos paid more... a little more was required but what can I say?

CHARLES

Why do I get the feeling that you're making up your life story?

JENN

Of course, I'm making up my life story. Some people invent their pasts. Some invent their futures. Some do both. So yeah, I made up my life story, you're right. I made up a life story that would go with me... with you. I make one up for all my dates—which are few and far between but... that's the one I made up for you.

CHARLES

That's the one you made up for me? That you thought was right for me?

JENN

Yeah.

CHARLES

Well, that's insulting.

JENN

Sorry. *(a long awkward silence)* Did you know that men with wide faces are more likely to cheat than men with narrow faces?

CHARLES

No, I didn't know that.

JENN

Did you know that you can't kiss your own elbow?

CHARLES

Never thought about it. *(beat)* So tell me what you're really like.

JENN

I like to flout the rules of probability.

CHARLES

Such as.

JENN

Such as coming on this blind date. Your sister must really hate you. Or really hate me.

CHARLES

I think she thought we'd hit it off. Personality-wise.

JENN

Personality-wise. And then I walked into this cafe and you thought how in the hell can I get out of this.

CHARLES

No, I didn't think that.

JENN

Yes, you did. I saw the look of panic on your face.

CHARLES

Sorry.

JENN

I'm too old for you. I'm too big. I'm too loud. I take up too much space. Admit it.

CHARLES

No, I don't really...

JENN

Look, let's just forget this date shit and just talk—two human beings, one to the other. Ships that pass in the night. *(beat)* Why is it easier to tell a stranger the most intimate details of your life?

CHARLES

A stranger doesn't judge?

JENN

I've pretty much given up on blind dates. Besides, no one bothers to meet people in real life anymore. You know if you're not on Facebook you don't really exist.

CHARLES

Do you think that there is one person in the world who you are destined to be with?

JENN

Never believed it. What if that one person is a goat herder on Crete? Or a serial killer? Or Tom Cruise? How would that work out?

CHARLES

Maybe we don't have soul mates because we don't have souls.

JENN

I was in love with this Mark guy. Our electricity was... in national grid ohms.

CHARLES

Would you mind if I steal that line? National grid ohms.

JENN

Sure, go ahead. Men steal. Mark stole away from his girlfriend to be with me. He stole me away from whomever I was dating at the moment. He stole back to New York two weeks later. You ever been in love?

CHARLES

She was twelve.

JENN

Whoah... Do I need to report you?

CHARLES

No, I was thirteen.

JENN

Good God! Nothing more recent?

CHARLES

I was thirteen when I fell in love with the most beautiful twelve-year old you've ever seen. I never talked to her, though. And I don't know her name. And I didn't see her face.

JENN

But you still love her?

CHARLES

Yes. Madly. Crazy in love with her. I've never really gotten over her.

JENN

In third grade I fell in love for the first time. His name was Billy Carlson. It was winter. We all had colds. He told me his mother had figured out how the cold germs passed between him and his two brothers—the tooth paste tube. No one had ever shared anything so personal, so intimate, with me. It touched my heart and turned me on. I had images of him in blue and white PJs brushing his teeth. Ever since, men in blue and white stripped PJs have always been special to me, especially when they are brushing their teeth.

CHARLES

That was grade school.

JENN

I spent my whole time in high school wondering what was wrong with me. I actually had a guy stop dating me my senior year because he thought my thighs were predisposed to cellulite.

CHARLES

That was high school. Things must have turned around in college.

JENN

Give me a break. I was a math major. That doesn't exactly turn a lot of guys on.

CHARLES

I was a physics major. I wonder after how many years you've dropped out of school you cease to be a physics major. (*beat*) But now you're so confident. Sure of yourself. Strong. Self-reliant.

JENN

I've never done "flirty girly" very well. You know that silly little me masquerade—childishly flustered, distracted, and just a touch bewildered. Slightly off balance. Too eager to please decked out in too short a skirt, too high heels, and way too large a hand bag. The masquerade that cries out: I'm no threat to you, buddy. See I'm vulnerable, and fragile, and uncertain. I won't take that job away from you. I won't take that promotion from you. I'm not competition, I'm cute.

CHARLES

I admire your choice.

JENN

You know, Charles, what I've learned is that you have to claim and own your own space. Can't rely on others to give you permission. I'm a woman who won't move softly or go quietly. An unruly woman is a powerful woman if she knows her own worth and learns to love her loneliness.

CHARLES

I'm not like you. I guess I kind of got stuck. I really don't have my shit together.

JENN

I don't know, Charles, I think you just might be a *puer aeternus*.

CHARLES

A what?

JENN

The archetype--*Puer Aeternus*. The eternal boy. The Peter Pan who is all potential but refuses to grow up.

CHARLES

Thanks a lot.

JENN

What you dread most is to be bound to anything whatever. Am I right?

CHARLES

I have to admit I'm pretty slippery.

JENN

You're afraid of being caught in a situation from which you might not be able to escape. You do this and that. Don't know what you really want. There is always the possibility that sometime in the future the real thing will come about. Correct?

CHARLES

I like to keep my options open.

JENN

You can't commit for fear of losing. Right?

CHARLES

You make me sound awful.

JENN

On the contrary. Like all *puers* you can be very charming.

CHARLES

I guess...

JENN

You refuse to commit to the moment. Your personality is your best defense.

(Charles leaves the scene.)

CHARLES

(to audience) I thought how unnerving it is, suddenly to see oneself for a moment as others see one, like a glimpse of unexpected profile in an unfamiliar combination of mirrors. I think I know myself better than anyone can know me; and yet one cannot account for the angles of others.

SCENE 3: at the video camera

(Charles turns on the camera and sits down.)

CHARLES

(to the camera) We live in relativistic times. People accept the idea that we construct our own subjective realities. Yet most of us won't part with the assumption that there is a shared reality out there. A shared external reality that is at least partly knowable through memory.

There are three major memory systems. First, semantic memory, the kind that takes care of conceptual and factual knowledge. Then there's procedural memory that allows us to learn skills and acquire habits. The third is episodic memory which allows us to recall the personal incidents that uniquely define our lives.

This documentary is an experiment in episodic memory. I'm recalling the personal incidents that uniquely define my life. Of course, they all revolve around women.

SCENE 4: at the Café:

(Charles sits at the table. Toast approaches.)

TOAST

Did you know that as a primate we need 124 acquaintances to feel safe?

CHARLES

No. I didn't know that.

TOAST

Did you know that baboons can only move in groups of 44 because they have to be able to see the leader?

CHARLES

Never thought about it.

TOAST

What do you do?

CHARLES

I'm a filmmaker... sort of... documentaries.

TOAST

I thought I might like to try film. I wrote Matthew McCaughey and asked him he'd pay for me to go the film school in Austin. He lives in Austin, you know. He never answered. You make documentaries?

CHARLES

Yeah, sort of. Trying...

TOAST

I was in a documentary once. They interviewed me 'cause I knew Robbie Robinson.

CHARLES

Ahh... (*shaking his head no*)

TOAST

He knew all the big rock stars. He was kind of a roadie. Or more a drug supplier, I guess. He knew everybody. He died. He had hepatitis B and C. He had cirrhosis of the liver. That's what killed him.

CHARLES

How old was he?

TOAST

Forty-three. He just didn't care. He was a wild man. He wanted to live his life real loud. That's how he wanted to live-- at 120 decibels--the threshold of pain.

CHARLES

I guess that's one way...

TOAST

All he wanted to do was party. He dyed his penis red once—with food coloring. Everyone has their song.

CHARLES

He made a documentary?

TOAST

No, some guys decided to interview people who knew him. They interviewed me. My thing is music.

CHARLES

Oh... I'm Charles, by the way. What's your name?

TOAST

Toast.

CHARLES

As in... toaster?

TOAST

As in Toastiana. My mother said it was a Seminole Indian name but I think she was just on drugs.

CHARLES

You're a musician?

TOAST

No, I create mixed tapes for people. I hate it when people ask me what I do.

CHARLES

Me too.

TOAST

(quoting a song lyric)

"So, what do you do? Oh, yeah, I wait tables too. No, I haven't heard your band, cuz you guys are pretty new." I like to memorize things--snatches of lyrics, lines from poems. I make lamps too. I've had lots of odd jobs... not odd odd jobs, but regular old odd jobs. I waitressed. I painted houses. I worked in a Laundromat. Now, I'm working in a nursery. I water plants. Kinda odd. But it's a way to make a living. I once had this Ti plant. In Hawaii they're believed to bring people good luck.

CHARLES

What happened to it?

TOAST

It died. I guess my luck is running out.

(Charles leaves the scene.)

CHARLES

(to the audience as he walks to the video camera)

I met a pretty girl with stringy hair and bad teeth. She lived on hot dogs and Pepsi and believed in the consolation of music. She lavished hours on her make-up in cheap furnished rooms. She was a person people remembered vaguely but could never quite pull into focus. But as she said: Everyone has their song.

**SCENE 5: ON SCREEN: Live feed or
Pre-Recorded Video: Toast**

(Charles is shooting a video of Toast. We hear his voice off camera.)

(Toast walks into the frame and approaches a chair.)

TOAST

You want me to sit here?

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Just make yourself comfortable.

(Toast sits on the chair.)

TOAST

Okay. What do you want me to say?

CHARLES

Just talk to the camera. Just say what's on your mind.

TOAST

Okay.

(Charles head appears in frame.)

CHARLES

Toast. Monologue. Take One.

(He leaves the frame.)

Action. CHARLES (*off camera*)

Where do I look? TOAST

Look directly at the camera lens. Ready? CHARLES (*off camera*)

TOAST
Okay. Here goes. Charles has asked me to be in his documentary. My name is Toast. My real name is Toastiana. I was born in New Orleans into what I would say was a very dysfunctional family. My mom and dad hit the road with five children in an old school bus—trying to create an alternative life style. Our family ended up on a Black Foot Indian reservation in Montana. My parents separated. My sister got pregnant. I split for Los Angeles in pursuit of my dream to join a band. Never got to join a band but did get to hang around a lot of musicians. I make a really mean pan of brownies and the guys always seemed to appreciate that. Is that enough?

Where's your family now? CHARLES (*off camera*)

TOAST
My mom lives in Temecula. My dad lives in Seal Beach. My other mom lives in Hawthorne.

Which other mom? CHARLES (*off camera*)

TOAST
My step mom. She has custody of my two younger brothers.

Who lives with your dad? CHARLES (*off camera*)

TOAST
His girlfriend. (*to Charles*) Am I doing alright?

CHARLES (*off camera*)
Yes. Great. Tell me what happened after you got to LA.

TOAST
I got a job taking phone orders. Hated it.

(She pretends to talk on the phone.)

Yes. Yes. Do you want us to rush the rush job we're rushing now, or rush the rush job you want us to rush, before we rush the rush job we're rushing now, or rush the rush job we were rushing before?

My sister, Amber, says I live one step above homeless, but I'm surviving. She says I dress like a seven year old pirate from space, but I've always been the kind of person who gives myself permission to be different. People say I have a bad attitude. I say: "Fuck 'em."
(to Charles) Is that enough?

CHARLES *(off camera)*

If you had an important idea that you wanted to let everyone in the world know about, what would you say?

TOAST

My other sister, Polly, wanted to go to Hollywood and become a movie star. Instead she ended up dead with a broken neck at the bottom of a flight of stairs. Funny how things turn out.

(End of video.)

SCENE 6: at the café

(Katherine sits at a table surrounded by shopping bags. Charles approaches.)

CHARLES

May I join you?

KATHERINE

No.

CHARLES

I saw you stealing a scarf. At that shop next door.

KATHERINE

Excuse me?

CHARLES

I saw you slip the scarf into that bag.

Are you a cop?
KATHERINE

Very professional like. I watched you.
CHARLES

Leave me alone. Did you follow me here?
KATHERINE

You were like a cat. So cautious.
CHARLES

Get away from me.
KATHERINE

So graceful.
CHARLES

Really, leave me alone.
KATHERINE

Then you walked right out the store like a fashion model on the runway.
CHARLES

You followed me?
KATHERINE

I was curious.
CHARLES

This is none of your business. I am none of your business.
KATHERINE

Someone dressed like you. So classy. Do you steal all your clothes?
CHARLES

No.
KATHERINE

Just the accessories?
CHARLES

I am not going to discuss this with you.
KATHERINE

CHARLES

I don't care about the stealing. I just want to know why.

KATHERINE

I find it exciting.

CHARLES

That's it? No obsessions?

KATHERINE

I only do it when I am incredibly bored.

CHARLES

Well, that's disappointing.

KATHERINE

Sorry.

CHARLES

Aren't you afraid of getting caught?

KATHERINE

Oh, I've been caught. I even got expelled from college.

CHARLES

I can relate to that.

KATHERINE

Were you expelled too?

CHARLES

No, but I dropped out. *(beat)* Will you marry me?

KATHERINE

What?

CHARLES

Okay, will you go out with me tonight?

(Charles leaves the scene and goes to the camera and turns it on.)

SCENE 7: at the video camera

CHARLES

(to the camera) Sometimes you meet someone who you expect may be just too sensitive to live. Someone that wounds others too deeply; but in return scars too easily.

Her name was Katherine. She was exquisitely beautiful. Ephemeral. The moment I saw her, my life changed.

Katherine was a Mozart Piano Concerto—probably Number 21, 2nd movement. Complex and definitely in C major although she spelled her name with a K. Andante, she moved at the pace of a slow walk. Later she became a C sharp and as we know to resolve C sharp you must get to a B minor. Resolving C sharp is a bitch.

But for now she was Katherine. My Katherine. No matter how hard she tried she'd never be a Kathy.

(Charles turns off the camera and walks into the bedroom scene.)

CHARLES

I went to a party one night, but got bored and left the group. I found an empty bedroom. The bed was piled with coats so I sat on the floor. I was thinking about the fact that all modern theories of nuclear and electromagnetic interactions are based on group theory when the door opened.

SCENE 8: in a bedroom

(Julie enters the room and searches through the coats looking for hers. She does not see Charles sitting on the floor.)

CHARLES

Coward.

JULIE

(startled) What?

CHARLES

Sneaking away from the party this early.

JULIE

I'm not sneaking away. Well, at least, I'm not hiding out, like you.

CHARLES

Hiding out? I'm taking a break.

JULIE

I hate this party.

CHARLES

Me, too. Everybody's trying so hard to have a good time.

JULIE

Everybody's running around demanding attention. Look at me! Look at me!

CHARLES

You don't like to be looked at?

JULIE

Not really.

CHARLES

Come on, women like to be looked at. If they didn't they wouldn't dress so sexy.

JULIE

I know, the requisite thong sticking out over your low cut pants.

CHARLES

I guess you have to dress really sexy because the guys get to see so much flesh on media.

JULIE

Guys barely look in real life. I swear I could walk into a bar stark naked and some guys wouldn't even notice. It seems like in the old days when women only flashed a little leg or something guys could fall in love. Guys don't fall in love anymore. Now that we're all sex objects there doesn't seem to be much sex. No one seems to be looking.

CHARLES

You here with someone?

JULIE

Not really. I just broke up with a guy. He thought he was too good for me. I acted like a door mat.

CHARLES

But you left him?

JULIE

I don't miss him enough to want him back. I miss him just enough for it to hurt.

CHARLES

Better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all.

JULIE

That's just what we need... a cliché.

CHARLES

You miss him, don't you?

JULIE

How could you possibly think that?

CHARLES

Perhaps it's the sigh every time you mention him.

JULIE

If only...

CHARLES

Can't live on "if onlys"...

JULIE

He was the perfect example of a modern Neanderthal—lying, conniving, deceitful, arrogant...

CHARLES

And you love him?

JULIE

Eat your words.

CHARLES

Come on, basically we men are just like you women. We want to be loved...

JULIE

You are not like us.

CHARLES

We want to be happy...

JULIE

You are very different.

CHARLES

How so?

JULIE

For example, we don't give cute little names to our private parts.

CHARLES

Okay, you win. I'll grant you there are differences. There is a certain mystery to women, a mystery to which men have no access.

JULIE

Yeah, for example, the way men relate to women is by hitting them, while women relate to men by leaving them. Also we're evolving differently. Because hormones are fed to cows women are developing earlier but men have a lower sperm count.

CHARLES

Both sound good to me. What's your name?

JULIE

In high school I went by Tiffany. Then I went from Tiffany to Olivia. I had to burst out of the Tiffany ghetto. Then Olivia to Liv. Liv to Ali. Then I went to Alia until I found out that was the name of the Jordanian airlines. So I moved onto Caitlin. Then Calli. I decided on Ginger until my five year old nephew informed me that was not a name but a cooking ingredient. I've been Sophia now for three months. It seems to be working... but my real name is Julie.

CHARLES

What do you do?

JULIE

Why does my identity have to be tied to a job? You're always asked: what do you do?

CHARLES

Let me reframe the question...

JULIE

How about reframing society? It sets the standards. Everyone wants to be rich, successful, famous, a star, a celebrity. Who the hell wants to be a coffee server? The problem is everybody wants to be looked at; no one wants to look. Everyone wants to write poetry; no one wants to read it. Everyone wants to be a

singer; no one wants to listen: Everyone wants to be an actor, no one wants to go to the theater.

CHARLES

Do you think opposites attract?

JULIE

Probably not.

CHARLES

Ever heard of the Second Law Thermodynamics?

JULIE

Nope. But I know the International Law of Cleavage. Always works for me.

CHARLES

What?

JULIE

You always get your way with a little show of cleavage.

(Charles leaves the scene and goes to the camera.)

CHARLES

I ended up explaining the Second Law of Thermodynamics to Julie. I think she missed my meaning.

SCENE 9: at the video camera

(Charles turns on the camera.)

CHARLES

No one seems to get the numerous connections between physics and women. Physics and human relationships. Physics and love. For example: When two isolated systems in separate but nearby regions of space, each in thermodynamic equilibrium in itself (but not necessarily in equilibrium with each other at first) are at some time allowed to interact, breaking the isolation that separates the two systems, allowing them to exchange matter or energy, they will eventually reach a mutual thermodynamic equilibrium. Ah, fuck it.

(He turns off the camera and walks to the doorway of the café)

CHARLES

Finally we get to Zan. Short for Alexandra. The last in my series of Promising Beginnings.

SCENE 10: doorway to the café

(Night. At the entrance to the café, Zan stands waiting. It is late. She isn't sure what to do. The cafe is closing. She doesn't feel safe. Charles comes up to her. He sees Zan's distress.)

CHARLES

You need a lift or something?

ZAN

No, I am waiting for my fiancé. I have my car, but I am parked down two blocks.

CHARLES

Probably not too good to stand out here alone.

ZAN

He was supposed to meet me two hours ago. I probably should leave. I don't know why he didn't get here.

CHARLES

Might have gotten tied up at work.

ZAN

I called his office. No answer.

CHARLES

Maybe he went to the wrong place.

ZAN

The plan was very clear.

CHARLES

Maybe he just forgot.

ZAN

Jesus, you sound like John's mother. This is kind of embarrassing. I hate him. I really hate him. He does this to me all the time.

CHARLES
Well, don't marry him then.

ZAN
I know, but...

CHARLES
But what?

ZAN
I just keep waiting for my life to get started. I always seem to be on hold.

CHARLES
I know what you mean.

ZAN
It's okay. You don't have to stand here with me. If you've got something better to do...

CHARLES
Sort of hate to go home.

ZAN
I know what you mean. I saw you sitting at that table. I saw you try to pick up that woman.

CHARLES
Grrr.....

ZAN
I sort of fantasized... played out various scenarios in my mind. If you'd tried to pick me up.

CHARLES
Like what?

ZAN
I am not going to tell you!

CHARLES
Why not? I was in them.

ZAN
Because I don't even know you.

CHARLES
Do you want to know me?

ZAN
I don't know. How do I know if I want to know you until I know you?

CHARLES
You've got me there.

(Awkward silence)

CHARLES
So when you getting married?

ZAN
Haven't set a date.

CHARLES
So why you getting married?

ZAN
Because I can fool him.

CHARLES
That's a weird reason.

ZAN
And he's safe. He's steady.

CHARLES
Let me guess. He's boring.

ZAN
He's boring. *(Pause)* But he's safe. And he's safe...

CHARLES
That's not reason enough.

ZAN
I can trick him.

CHARLES
You're going to marry a guy because you can trick him?

ZAN
Yeah, I am going to marry a guy because I can trick him.

CHARLES

You can trick me. With no strings attached.

ZAN

I don't really know what...

CHARLES

I like to be tricked. You can trick me all the time. You can trick me and trick me and trick me. I bet I am more trickable than anybody you know. I bet I am the most trickable guy you've ever met.

(He does a little tap dance. He has never been so at ease with himself. They laugh. They connect.)

CHARLES (cont.)

You can trick me in the morning, you can trick me late at night, you can trick me all day long, you can trick me in the pale moon light.

(He stops and very seriously takes Zan's face in his hands. He almost kisses her.)

CHARLES (cont.)

I am here to be tricked.

(She laughs. He laughs. The moment is gone. They both give up.)

(End of Act One)

SINGULARITIES

ACT TWO

PERPETUAL PRESENTS

SCENE 1: at the video camera

(Charles sits in front of the camera. He wipes perspiration off with a gym towel and turns on the camera.)

CHARLES

That was Part One of my documentary. I call it “Promising Beginnings.” I’m making a documentary about love, physics, and roads not taken. I want to explore obsessions, missed opportunities, and ships that pass in the night. Part Two is titled: Perpetual Presents. The theme of this section is unrequited love and unrealized dreams. The gap between reality and potential.

Shit, I’m not fooling you. I don’t know why I’m making this video. I’m surprised I’ve done this much. Maybe I’m making it because I feel a little lost. Maybe because my family is made up of a bunch of aliens. Maybe because I can’t get up some mornings. I’m doing this because what makes me happy disappoints everyone else. I don’t know. I’d rather record my life than live it.

(He turns off the camera and walks to the bedroom scene.)

CHARLES

Zero is infinity’s twin. They are equals and opposites, yin and yang. They are humanity in a nutshell. The biggest questions are about nothingness and eternity—the void, the infinite, zero and infinity.

SCENE 2: at Katherine’s flat

(Charles and Katherine enter.)

CHARLES

Oh, it’s lovely. I see you’ve got a ceiling on the top with a floor on the lower level and a wall at either side. And only a single bed. Sad, really....

KATHERINE

I used to have a dog.

CHARLES

Your room is very spare... sparse...

KATHERINE

I miss him. My dog...

CHARLES

... striving for the ambiance and amenities of Communist Poland?

KATHERINE

What?

CHARLES

That was a joke. I was trying to make a joke.

KATHERINE

Oh. I like clocks. I used to collect clocks. Do you like clocks?

CHARLES

Yeah. Why not? What's there not to like?

KATHERINE

I had this Chinese clock—made out of wood—Cherry wood. It was a triangle. It had this silver bar—a gong to strike each hour, but we... I didn't like the sound at night so I took out the batteries.

CHARLES

I feel like I know you.

KATHERINE

Don't turn us into one of those awful melodramas.

CHARLES

I just meant...

KATHERINE

Oh, fuck off.

CHARLES

What?

KATHERINE

Just get out of here. I can't do this. You don't measure up. Get out of here. Just get out of here. Leave me alone. I miss Tomas. I miss the idea of him. Fuck off.

(She pushes Charles out. Charles slumps down next to the door way and sits on the floor.)

CHARLES

Katherine is too wounded and alienated to make any human connection and I'm obviously not the man to salve her pain.

SCENE 3: ON SCREEN: Live feed or Pre-Recorded Video: Katherine

(Charles is shooting a video of Katherine. We hear his voice off camera.)

(Katherine reluctantly walks into the frame.)

KATHERINE

Charles, I really don't want to do this.

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Please, Katherine, just look at the camera and say what's on your mind.

KATHERINE

What's on my mind is I really don't want to do this.

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Please sit down, Katherine. Relax.

(She sits on the chair.)

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Katherine. Monologue.

KATHERINE

My name is Katherine and I recently met Charles and he asked to videotape me and I have no idea why I'm doing this.

(She gets up and walks off camera. He comes into frame as he walks her back to the chair.)

CHARLES

Katherine, please. Just tell me a secret. Any secret. I'm collecting secrets. This is a documentary about secrets. I'm documenting secrets.

(She composes herself and begins.)

KATHERINE

I go shopping. I carefully select party dresses and silk blouses and all kinds of merchandise I can't afford. I play games of pretension with the clerk—like create a trip I'm taking to Europe. Then I return everything the next week—careful to get another clerk. *(She stops)* Is that enough?

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Katherine, tell me something. Tell me something you've never told anyone. Please, Katherine.

KATHERINE

Who's going to see this documentary? Why are you doing this? Why am I doing this?

CHARLES *(off camera)*

It's for me only. It's like a diary, a personal journal.

KATHERINE

Okay. You're sure no one is going to see this?

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Absolutely.

KATHERINE

One day I just came home and went to bed for a month and a half.

CHARLES *(off camera)*

And... go on...

KATHERINE

I remember waking up tangled in my night gown after I had dreamt something I knew was terribly important. I got up and wrote a note I thought was of great significance. I was sure it contained the meaning of the universe. In the morning I found the note made no sense. Then I realized it was written in mirror image. I held it to the mirror and read: Dear Katherine, It hasn't been an easy time. I will get to you as soon as I can. Love, Your Destiny.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

Tell me another secret. Tell me your biggest secret.

KATHERINE

The problem with living alone now that Tomas is gone is that no one sees my Christian Dior pajamas. I am the unobserved. No one sees me laugh. No one sees me cry. No one sees my new pink satin nightgown.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

Who is Tomas?

KATHERINE

My boyfriend. My used-to-be boyfriend. We met in Prague. I got a job there teaching English. Prague is very beautiful, very old. People say it is like Paris in the 1930s. Tomas was working at McDonalds to learn American English. Our eyes met across a crowded McDonalds and that was it—love at first sight. From that moment on we were inseparable. He came back here with me on a student visa. It was perfect. We were perfect until he left me.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

And you still love him?

KATHERINE

I think the only thing of significance I will have done in my life is love him. I once thought I might write a play or sing a great song, paint a great picture, dance a beautiful dance but I think it will be to have loved him.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

And now?

KATHERINE

One night, late at night, I thought he was there. Outside my apartment. But he wasn't. Why would he have been? If he'd have been there, he never would've left me. He was off somewhere, living his new life. And the best I could do was smoke a cigarette. I went inside and hated myself until Conan O'Brien came on. He was funny that night. That dog puppet was on. I'll always remember it.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

And what do you feel now?

KATHERINE

Life is not fair and the realization that it is as arbitrary as it is, is terrifying. Things do not turn out for the better. Love does not conquer all. Not only is it hard to change this belief but when evidence to the contrary starts creeping in, the terror

is unbelievable. I have the feeling that life/fate//God isn't too much concerned with getting people together who love each other.

(She starts to get up and leave the frame.)

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Wait. Wait. One more question. If you had an important idea that you wanted to let everyone in the world know about, what would you say?

(Note: if a pre-recorded video it would be a disjointed montage sequence comprised of quick jump cuts of Katherine's fragmented responses and as she seems to fracture before us as the cutting spins out of control. If a live feed she just moves rapidly and breathlessly through the lines.)

KATHERINE

There are as many different meanings in a situation as there are individuals in it.

The mistrust of heights is the mistrust of self, you don't know whether you're going to jump.

I peeled the onion back to its tears. I stand here naked and alone.

My life has become a matter of remember-whens.

The repetitions of my life become meaningful.

We need not be sublime, only faithful and serious.

"continue to continue to pretend that my life will never end."

I think the only thing of significance I shall have done in my life is love him.

Have you ever been so sad you can't move?

In sad and fragile ways, he needed me...

Oh fuck, this is for real. You can really screw up your life if you're not careful.

(Freeze frame)

SCENE 4: at Toast's flat:

(Toast comes home drunk. Charles is sleeping outside her door. She jumps when she discovers him.)

TOAST

What the hell are you doing.... Jeez you scared me... what the... you...

CHARLES

What time is it?

(They enter her flat.)

CHARLES

What time is it?

TOAST

It's three o'clock. Four o'clock. High Noon.

CHARLES

It's three o'clock.

TOAST

Well, if you knew what time it was why did you ask me?

CHARLES

You're drunk.

TOAST

But that's what's so great about Margaritas. They make you forget everything, including your own name. For all I know I could be married with three children.

CHARLES

Did you get laid?

TOAST

Why do you think my sex life is your business?

CHARLES

Because I don't have one of my own?

I think I'll just go to bed.

TOAST

(She curls up on the floor.)

Are you comfortable?

CHARLES

Yes, I feel fine.

TOAST

Are you sure you're comfortable?

CHARLES

Yes, very, thank you.

TOAST

You'd be more comfortable if your shoes were off.

CHARLES

I missed some boat somewhere and I'm not even sure of which boat, the destination, the price of the ticket, or what clothes I should have worn. Want to hear a poem I memorized?

TOAST

Yes, very much.

CHARLES

"Go and catch a falling star, Get with child a mandrake root, Tell me where all past years are, or who cleft the Devil's foot" John Donne.

TOAST

Very good. Now go to sleep.

CHARLES

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer; things fall apart; the center cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." William Butler Yeats.

TOAST

(She falls asleep.)

What it is, is what it is... James Brown

CHARLES

(Charles exits scene.)

CHARLES

Toast is skinny, but tough, a lost soul with too many tattoos and too few options who dreams of being a rock star. She's one of those tough little girls who, with grit and determination, somehow manage to survive in a hostile universe. Punked, pierced, and tattooed, she listens to her own drummer--which is exceedingly different. Unlucky in love; men with guitars don't stay around long.

(Charles enters the café scene and sits at the table at the café across from Jenn.)

CHARLES

Can/could. Will/would. May/might. Shall/should. After all, how do you give love?

SCENE 5: at the café

(Charles and Jenn sit at the table. It is their second meeting).

CHARLES

You're not going to ask me what I'm going to be when I grow up, are you?

JENN

No, I guess not. I don't even know what I'm going to be. And I'm older than you are. I'd like to travel, to bum around Europe...

CHARLES

Then you should.

JENN

Oh, it's too late for me.

CHARLES

No it's not. Not if that's what you really want to do.

JENN

Oh, I've got responsibilities.

CHARLES

What kind of responsibilities?

JENN

My sister. I have to take care of my sister.

CHARLES

How old is she?

JENN

Twenty-five. But she was in a car accident. She doesn't talk. She's very calm. We don't know how much she understands.

CHARLES

That's tough.

JENN

Her husband supports her, but she lives with me. He just couldn't cope, with his job and stuff... They met in high school. After graduation, they drifted, hung out, and partied. Lost their way. They decided to get married, had a big wedding and then returned all the wedding gifts for cash and hit the road. They headed up the coast for San Francisco but never made it. They had a bad car crash. Jeff made it okay, but Nicole never recovered. After coming out of a coma, Nicole never spoke again.

CHARLES

That's tough.

JENN

He tried to take care of her at first, but couldn't. He had to "return her," as he says, to her family. To me.

CHARLES

That is a big responsibility for you.

JENN

It's not so bad. *(long pause)*

CHARLES

Are you happy?

JENN

I'm busy. Very, very busy.

(She motions to the counter ordering another espresso.)

CHARLES

God, you're really addicted to those. Caffeine's not good for you, you know.

JENN

I know. My little rebellion. Caffeine. An occasional cigarette. Why do I always have to do what's good for me? I'm sick of acting responsibly. Sometimes I drink coke. Not even diet coke. That's the extent of my vices. Except for being in love with my sister's husband. You know that's the first time I've said that out loud.

CHARLES

That's not such a terrible sin.

JENN

There are sins of malice and sins of weakness. This is one of weakness. It's a stupid predicament. Absolutely no way out. She loved him and he loved her. If bad things didn't happen in the world, they would have been serious candidates for happily ever after.

CHARLES

I want happily ever afters.

JENN

It was great while it lasted, but it ended. It ended with a silent sister and me in love with her husband. Life loves irony.

CHARLES

It gives you things just to see what will happen when it takes them back.

JENN

I hate that a split second makes the difference between life and death. I hate that a coyote chases a cat and if the cat zigs left he might live, but if he zags right he dies. I hate that that's the way the world is.

*(Charles exits the scene repeating
Jenn's line)*

CHARLES

I hate it, too. I hate that a split second makes the difference between life and death. I hate that a coyote chases a cat and if the cat zigs left he might live, but if he zags right he dies. I hate that that's the way the world is.

(Charles walks to the camera.)

CHARLES

Did you know that "c," the speed of light, is a singularity? The formula $Y=1/(1-v)$ is a recurring factor in many formulas in the Theory of Relativity. As velocity v approaches light speed c the term Y approaches infinity. This is why time slows

down, distance shortens and mass increases without limit as velocity approaches light speed.

SCENE 6: ON SCREEN:
Live feed or pre-corded
video: Julie

(Charles is shooting a video of Julie. We hear his voice off camera.)

JULIE

I hope you don't want me to take my clothes off.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

As appealing as that sounds... but no, just sit on the chair.

JULIE

(*arranging her hair, taking various poses*) This is going to be fun. Okay, what do I do? How do I look?

CHARLES (*off camera*)

You look great. Okay, tell me something about yourself, Julie.

JULIE

I love fashion. I love style. Looks are important to me. All the girls at the beauty salon feel that way. Fashion is my life. Tina had her lips done. They took fat from her thighs and shot it into her lips. She looked really funny at first--like Donald Duck. Everyone looks fantastic there but, you know what's funny? Sometimes I wonder why. Who are we doing all this for? Only a few men come into the salon to have their hair cut. They are all married and usually bald. Every day is like all dressed up on a Saturday night with no place to go. No one's looking. The goal is to look fantastic. Presumably for guys—we all want to get married. But we only see each other. We arrive each morning, like movie stars on the set, gorgeous, perfect, glamorous, but no one's watching. (*beat*) This is really fun. What should I do next?

CHARLES (*off camera*)

Tell me something I don't already know.

JULIE

Actually, I probably shouldn't tell you, but... I had an affair with this guy. He was married. I know I shouldn't be telling you this because I hardly know you, but... I

met him three years ago. We just saw each other a couple of times a week. Mainly after I got off work. I thought I was good for him.

Anyway, it was really marvelous being in love. He really loved me. I just couldn't stand my life if I didn't see him. Then he called my best girlfriend and asked her out to coffee. They didn't know each other, but they'd seen each other. He picked me up at her house once in a while. I used her as a cover for me with my boyfriend. At first I thought he just wanted to talk about me with someone who knew me. But he was just using me as an excuse to get to talk to her. Then he broke up with me and started seeing her.

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Then what happened?

JULIE

I wrote a letter to his wife. I don't think he should have gotten get away with it. It was a really mean thing to do. But he made me so mad. I wrote her that I had been having an affair with her husband for the last three years and then he had started to see my best friend and I think that isn't fair. And I wanted her to know that I wasn't some tacky woman so I enclosed a picture of myself so she could see that I'm not cheap. I just want her to see what I looked like and that I was respectable. Then I told her I thought she should know that I'd been in her house so I described the living room couch. Then I said that I didn't mean to hurt her but I hoped that she would keep better tabs on her husband and not let him run around with my best friend.

Sorry. I probably shouldn't have told you that. Nobody knows less about men than me. You've got to tell somebody that stuff. That's how you know it really happened. Otherwise it's just too damn lonely.

This isn't fun anymore? Let's do a talk show. Let's pretend I'm on a talk show and you ask me fun questions. And I give you fun answers.

CHARLES *(off camera)*

Okay. We can try that.

JULIE

Really fun questions. Nothing serious. Okay.

(She walks out of frame and walks back in as if appearing on a talk show. She acknowledges the pretend audience and sits down.)

JULIE

Great to be here. What a wonderful audience.

CHARLES (*off camera, playing the game*)

Great to have you here. Let me start by asking: Is it hard to be so beautiful?

JULIE

The most beautiful people in the world have tough times too; they've all been in rehab.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

Did you always want to be in show business?

JULIE

In high school the results of my career counseling were conclusive. I was born to be a dental hygienist. But I had dreams of becoming a doctor or playing one on TV.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

Has your success changed you?

JULIE

Success may corrupt, but failure also corrupts. I would say I'm as sane and down-to-earth as any other totally neurotic L.A. woman.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

What do you say to people who question your acting ability?

JULIE

So what? Madonna can barely carry a tune.

CHARLES (*off camera*)

If you had an important idea that you wanted to let everyone in the world know about, what would you say?

JULIE

There are four rules of life. Number one: avoid assholes. Number two: never get into a pissing contest you can't win. Number three: never let them see you cry. Number four: never fuck anyone out of sympathy.

SCENE 7: in Julie's flat

CHARLES

I only said you're not at your best with practical things—like reality.

JULIE

Reality has only limited appeal.

CHARLES

I don't mind that you're a little neurotic.

JULIE

Neurotic. I'm not neurotic. You're the neurotic one.

CHARLES

I'm not neurotic.

JULIE

Yes you are.

CHARLES

No, I'm not.

JULIE

Are too.

CHARLES

Am not. If there's anyone here who's neurotic it's you.

JULIE

Right. I'll show you neurotic.

(She takes off her scarf and playfully tries to strangle him. They fall to the floor laughing and roll around entwined.)

CHARLES

Why do we keep going on like this? Around and around.

JULIE

Why do you love me?

CHARLES

Because I love the way I look through your eyes. I love how you see me. You created me. You haven't answered the question?

JULIE

What is the question?

CHARLES

Maybe we can reframe the question. Why do we keep going? When we get up each morning why don't we just commit suicide?

JULIE

That's not the question. The question is why can't there be more real and fulfilled love?

CHARLES

That's the question?

JULIE

We could be a love story. A beautiful love story. Love makes the world go round.

CHARLES

All the world loves a lover.

JULIE

It's better to have loved and lost than never loved at all.

CHARLES

Love me or leave me but let me be near you.

JULIE

If you love me, words wouldn't come in an easy way.

CHARLES

But my love has flown away, I am without my love.

JULIE

Love is a battlefield.

(He stops the game and leaves the scene.)

CHARLES

(to the audience)

See what I mean? There is only one possibility. I end up with the girl of my dreams.

CHARLES

Julie was not the girl of my dreams. Too bad. It would have been so simple. But Katherine was not only the girl of my dreams, but my very existence.

I shouldn't admit this but after midnight I'd walk past Katherine's building. I know it's sick. I know it's obsessive, but I just walked by. I'm not a stalker although once I did see her light up a cigarette before she went in and I waited and picked up the match. It's in my top desk drawer, but I'm going to throw it out any day now. Enough said, Charles, cut to the chase. Things do not turn out for the better. Love does not conquer all.

(Charles walks into the next scene.)

SCENE 8: in Katherine's flat

KATHERINE

I'm sorry, Charles. I was so afraid you were leaving for good.

CHARLES

No, I can't leave and I'm sorry. I was rude to you. Something about you just makes me rude.

KATHERINE

Something about you just makes me act like a bitch.

CHARLES

We're not that different.

KATHERINE

Sometimes I get so mad at you I can't see straight.

CHARLES

Sometimes I get so mad at myself I can't see at all.

KATHERINE

Want something to drink?

CHARLES

I just came in here to...

KATHERINE

Argue with me?

CHARLES

To kiss you.

KATHERINE

I think that's a bad idea.

CHARLES

Because you don't want me to kiss you?

KATHERINE

Because I do want you to kiss me.

CHARLES
So how's it a bad idea?

KATHERINE
Because... I've got too much to lose. This isn't going to work.

CHARLES
What will you lose?

KATHERINE
Myself.

CHARLES
You don't know, this may turn out to be the biggest moment in your life. You might look back at this moment, this very moment, as a turning point, as a major...

KATHERINE
...mistake...

CHARLES
You're right. Sorry.

KATHERINE
You'd better go.

(Charles leaves the scene and walks into the next scene sitting down at the table in the cafe.)

SCENE 9: at the café

(Charles and Jenn are having coffee.)

CHARLES
Can I ask you a question?

JENN
Yeah, as long as it's not philosophical or mathematical.

CHARLES
What do you need from me? Tell me what you need to hear from me.

JENN
That you're trying to get on with your life...that...

CHARLES

Wrong. Wrong, wrong answer.

JENN

Maybe you should go back to school.

CHARLES

(facetiously)

What a great idea! I love that idea. I am one-hundred percent a fan of that idea.

JENN

But the thing is...

CHARLES

Yeah, what's the thing. Tell me what the thing is.

JENN

Well, I was just thinking...

CHARLES

Let's just finish this conversation.

JENN

You can't spend the rest of your life working as a waiter. You've got to move one... you've got to figure out your next move.

CHARLES

(facetiously)

My god you're right! I never thought of that!

JENN

Is something wrong? I don't understand what you are so upset about.

CHARLES

Nothing! Not upset about anything.

JENN

Then you'll think about it? Get back on track?

CHARLES

Right. *(silence)* I'm a WIMP.

JENN

You're too hard...

CHARLES

I mean (*spells out*) W—I—M—P--S—all caps-- weakly interacting massive particles. I'm nothing but weakly interacting massive particles.

JENN

Stop feeling sorry for yourself.

CHARLES

I'm a fraud. I can't feel a thing.

JENN

What about all your talk about romance?

CHARLES

I'm just faking it. The truth is I can't feel anything anymore. I'm a fraud. I can't feel a thing.

(Charles leaves the scene.)

CHARLES

Gott's law: When you observe something, there is a 95% chance that you are observing it in the middle of 95 per cent of its observability. That means there is a 95 percent chance that its future longevity is greater than one 39th, but fewer than 39 times its past longevity.

SCENE 10: ON SCREEN Pre-Recorded Video: Jenn

(Charles is shooting a video of Jenn. We hear his voice off camera.)

(Jenn walks into the frame and approaches a chair.)

JENN

You want me to sit here? Charles, this is silly.

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Humor me, Jenn.

JENN

Can I just stand up behind the chair?

CHARLES *(off screen)*

However, you're most comfortable.

(She stands behind the chair.)

JENN

I don't see why you want me in your documentary. What the hell are you documenting anyway?

CHARLES *(off screen)*

My life and you're my best friend. It's very hard to fit all the pieces together.

JENN

It seems easy to me. Past, present, future. Keep it simple.

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Not so simple. Birth, love, sex. Or sex, then love. Or sex only. Or love only without sex. Or first love, then sex...

JENN

And finally, death. Birth, love, death. That's all there is. Have you started filming yet?

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Yes, camera's rolling. Although there's nothing rolling anymore, it's all digital. Okay. Happy Birthday, Jenn. Tell me what you're thinking on your birthday.

JENN

Pretty piss poor way to be spending my birthday. Documenting your life.

CHARLES *(off screen)*

I mean for real.

JENN

Okay here goes.

What do you do when you're thirty-three and discover you're all the things you always despised in others?

What do you do when you're thirty-three and discover the work you've just spend the last six months on is sentimental and you've always hated sentimentality?

What do you do when you're thirty-three and on your birthday you only get a card from your mom and your insurance agent?

I'm not feeling sorry for myself because I'm sad, but because I'm absurd.

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Great. Now tell me something you remember from a long time ago.

JENN

When I was a little girl, I used to have lots of fun. I had a dog named Peggy. I'd lay in the grass on my stomach and look for four leaf clovers.

If I laid on my back, I watched for animal faces in the clouds and dreamt great dreams of adventure, fame, and fortune. My goals have become a bit more modest. Now, I just want to not have to deal with assholes.

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Tell me something you remember from last week.

JENN

My phone rang. I answered and pleasant voice said: I'm calling to remind you your appointment is at 12:30 tomorrow. What appointment? Your appointment with Dr. Rubin is at 12:30 tomorrow. I don't know what you're talking about. Your appointment with Dr. Rubin. Is this the Kaiser medical clinic? No, your appointment with Dr. Rubin. I don't remember any appointment. Is this a dentist? No, a psychiatrist. You must have the wrong number. I closed the phone and thought, shit, she doesn't believe me. I felt paranoid all day.

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Tell me something about your latest romance.

JENN

I said to him: "I just want to be someone's little girl. Have a big strong man to look after me." "But," he said to me, "how can you be someone's little girl if you're going to be my mom?"

CHARLES *(off screen)*

Tell me something about your oldest friendship.

JENN

Ah, that would be Wendy. We met in grade school. She once wrote me and asked: Why do you still write to me after all these years?

I answered that I remember the songs she sang (dirty lyrics to beautiful madrigal tunes under the streetlight), the clothes she wore, the places she lived, how she wore her hair. I remember the wall paper in the bathroom of her first apartment after we graduated. The yellow-silked jockeys on dark brown horses. Not her style, but the landlady's choice.

I remember the taste of the French onion soup she served in her one-room loft when she moved to Chicago. When I see a recent photo, I am one of the few who can see the 10 year old girl behind the smile. I am a witness to her life.

CHARLES (*off screen*)

What about our friendship? It's very new.

JENN

You know that although our paths have been different we have crossed some of the same places and reached some of the same conclusions. That's why we get along so well. Plus we both know deep in our hearts that truth is not found in tragedy, but in trivia. Love you. (*She throws him a kiss.*)

CHARLES (*off camera*)

If you had an important idea that you wanted to let everyone in the world know about, what would you say?

JENN

I don't understand but I feel there is some kind of an answer—I think it is a resignation. I have no advice for the pain, no answers for the questions. We endure I guess that's it, and we love our friends.

(*End of video.*)

SCENE 11: at Katherine's flat

KATHERINE

What are you doing?

CHARLES

Just sitting here.

KATHERINE

You mad at me?

CHARLES

No, you mad at me?

KATHERINE

A little.

CHARLES

Why.

KATHERINE
You're ... Don't you ever have anything to say?

CHARLES
No. You always say it first.

KATHERINE
What if I don't say anything? What if I don't go first?

CHARLES
Then, I guess I'll have to.

KATHERINE
Okay.

CHARLES
Okay, what?

KATHERINE
Okay, say something.

CHARLES
What I'd like to say is, I like it when you say things.

KATHERINE
Do you love me?

CHARLES
You have to ask?

KATHERINE
Only because you never say it.

CHARLES
I love you.

KATHERINE
Why?

CHARLES
Because you asked. Are we breaking up?

KATHERINE
No, we did that long ago. It's just that we're finally noticing it. I've gotten back together with Tomas.

CHARLES

(absolutely devastated, all energy drains from his body)

Okay.

KATHERINE

Okay, what?

CHARLES

Okay, say something.

KATHERINE

Tomas and I have always shown brighter as a couple than alone. When we're together everyone wants to be us.

CHARLES

Then maybe you should let them.

KATHERINE

They can't be us. Only we can be us. Don't tell anyone, but Tomas and I are very shallow. Vain and arrogant and shallow. We eclipse each other. That's out secret. He in my light, mine in his.

CHARLES

(sincerely)

That's beautiful.

KATHERINE

I know.

CHARLES

No, you don't, but you will find out.

KATHERINE

Good-bye, Charles. *(He says nothing.)* I said good-bye, Charles.

CHARLES

I heard you.

(He turns and walks away. He moves to

the camera.)

CHARLES

Katherine and Tomas were the golden couple. Although both were totally weird alone, together they were in perfect harmony with the universe. You just had to watch them walk down the street together—every step, every twist, turn, weight

shift is a piece of choreography. They lived in their own parallel universe. Separately they had all these qualities which would be rated as undesirable. She was vain, he was arrogant, but together they are golden.

(He turns on the camera)

CHARLES

Katherine left me and got back with Tomas. What kind of fuck name is Tomas anyway—all Euro-trashy like a soccer star. Anyway, I had to keep myself in a very shallow place. I didn't listen to music. I was careful to only read things that did not matter to me. I didn't let myself think thoughts of holidays, or trips, or hotel rooms, or beaches, or dance floors or moonlight, or the moveable feast that was Katherine. I may not be a deep thinker, but I'm a deep feeler.

Then, I tried to recall every memory to hate her. Some people remember the good things from their past. I used to be that way, but then I forced up every little annoyance, every little slight, everything that might be construed as a possible lack of loyalty. Everything that wasn't a sign of complete and undying commitment to me.

I'd go to a café and pick out the prettiest woman. Then I'd count how many men look at her and then work out the ratio between those who openly looked and those who would sneak a peek. It's a dumb game but it got me through the afternoons. Plus the mental calculations, doing the math in my head, was probably good for my mind.

(Charles turns off the camera.)

CHARLES

(to the audience) Well, that's the part of my documentary on perpetual presents. The staking out one's claim. All is new... nothing old yet. The immediate moment. The "Wow." The jouissance. Note to self: Stick in a montage sequence in the film here—the lovers in a meadow, the lovers eating ice cream, riding a merry-go-round, you know the images. And those conversations that continue on and on picking up where you last stopped. Oh, I just thought of one more. It might fall under foreshadowing or maybe it's just a transition to Act Three which is titled "Creative Destruction."

(He walks into the scene in Zan's flat.)

SCENE 12: at Zan's flat

ZAN

How come you always change the subject when I get too close?

CHARLES
Too close to the truth?

ZAN
Too close to you.

CHARLES
(counters) How come you won't... won't...

ZAN
Why won't you ever let me into your life? Your personal life?

CHARLES
Oh, you're not going to start all that nonsense again are you?

ZAN
It's not nonsense. I am not nonsense. You doubt my very right to exist.

CHARLES
What do you want? What do you want anyway?

ZAN
I want nothing.

CHARLES
I this, I that... I feel like you're gnawing on me like an old bone...

ZAN
But it's horrible to be alone.

(End of Act Two)

SINGULARITIES

ACT THREE

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

SCENE 1: at the camera

(Charles sits in front of the camera.)

CHARLES

I've come to appreciate randomness. It excuses me from any responsibility to Zan's life. Patterns tie me down. They make me try to make meanings of things. I think sometimes all her movements have the same pattern and I'm woven into every single one. It's sad, and should make you cry. It's bad. What I did to her. What she did to me.

(He turns off the camera and walks into Zan's flat where all the scenes in Act 3 take place.)

(Note: These scenes turn rapidly one into another. There should, however, be a feeling of time change and time passage between each scene. Charles does not deliver a monologue to the audience nor go back to the camera during this "choreographed" fight sequence that might suggest a boxing match that goes on for eight rounds.)

Scene 2: at Zan's flat

(Charles and Zan enter her flat. They are returning from having dinner with her friends.)

CHARLES

Your friends never match your descriptions of them. I thought Sue was awful. You said she was so smart, so clever, so much fun. I thought she was beyond dull. And Don. What a bore. All he could talk about was golf, and fishing, and cars. And the food—where'd she learn to cook? At a refugee camp?

ZAN

I like her. She's solving her problems as best she can. Women have to find their own solutions to situations... like having a baby... that might be a solution.

CHARLES

Do you want to have a baby?

ZAN

That's not a solution for me.

CHARLES

You women, you don't even know what the problem is.

ZAN

Maybe not, but I'm learning what the solutions aren't. And that's something.

CHARLES

Let's go out.

ZAN

You want to go out. We just got here. Can't you ever relax. Can't we just be together? Alone?

CHARLES

Zan, stop it. What do you want anyway?

ZAN

If you have to ask, you'll never know.

SCENE 3: at Zan's flat

CHARLES

It's always about your feelings.

ZAN

But under the surface there's a panic ready to burst out...

CHARLES

Look, if I can accept you as an anal compulsive, you can accept me as a manic depressive.

ZAN

I thought your field was physics, not psychology.

CHARLES

You're not the only one who gets upset. I've got feelings too.

ZAN

But you won't share them with me. They might conflict with your image of yourself. You might look human.

CHARLES

I feel like a god damned prisoner. I can't breathe. You are suffocating me...

ZAN

The kind of relationship I want...

CHARLES

I am not interested in your kind of relationship. You and I are more like brother and sister than lovers. We've had a pretty adversarial relationship over the past year. I don't want to hurt you. I'll let you know what I decide.

ZAN

What you decide! I'm not going to sit around here waiting... waiting for you to decide. Who do you think you are? The Pope? I'm supposed to sit around here waiting... waiting for your decision, you pompous son-of-a-bitch. You decide. You decide right now. You've got three minutes.

(ZAN looks at her watch and plunks down in a chair. CHARLES leaves the room. ZAN gets up and paces. He returns.)

CHARLES

I've decided to stay with you.

ZAN

I don't care. I don't really care anyway.

CHARLES

Don't you believe me?

ZAN

I don't doubt your words. I doubt your passion.

SCENE 4: at Zan's flat

(Charles and Zan enter her flat. They are returning from having dinner with his mother.)

ZAN

Why didn't you say something to your mother? She treated me like I was a hooker you picked up at McDonalds.

CHARLES

What am I supposed to say?

ZAN

If my mother acted that to you I'd kill her.

CHARLES

It's awkward. I don't talk to my mother about personal things. I don't have that kind of relationship.

ZAN

If it was my mother I would have stood up and screamed and yelled and stormed out of there and...

CHARLES

I don't really know my mother, personally.

ZAN

What do you mean you don't know your mother personally? She's your mother... you gotta know your own mother personally.

CHARLES

No one locked you into this relationship.

ZAN

Everything's always locked. Locked down. Locked up. Are we having a fight?

CHARLES

I don't know

ZAN

It's gotten to the point when I can't tell.

SCENE 5: at Zan's flat

ZAN

(world weary)

I know. You're having an affair.

CHARLES

No, I am not having an affair. Well, not exactly an affair.

ZAN

Sort of a semi-affair? You've felt her up, but you haven't screwed yet?

CHARLES

You always have to act crass when things get unpleasant.

ZAN

Who is it? Do I know her?

CHARLES

Julie. The one who went to New York, lived with a musician and then moved to Paris...

ZAN

Sort of a legend in her own time. I know the type.

CHARLES

She called me.

ZAN

And you're having an affair.

CHARLES

No, I've met her for lunch a couple of times. She's back here living with her mother. She doesn't have a job and has this child to support and she's interested in me.

ZAN

A little mercenary, isn't it?

CHARLES

I guess so... but she wants me back.

ZAN

And do you want her?

CHARLES

I don't know.

SCENE 6: at Zan's flat

(Zan has locked herself in her flat.
Charles knocks at the door trying to get her
to unlock the door.)

CHARLES

Don't be silly. Open the door. Please. Say something. What are you doing?
Listen, maybe you're right. It's my fault. Open the door. Yes, you're right. I am
a bastard...

ZAN

Do you think I give a damn?

CHARLES

Try to be reasonable. It was only a sexual thing. That's all.

ZAN

Oh, yeah, and with me it isn't sexual?

CHARLES

With you it's different. I love you. I respect you.

ZAN

You know what you can do with your respect.

CHARLES

It's different with you. You're the person I love most in the world. I feel safe with
you. I need you. You're my safety net... my...

ZAN

Great. If you'd had a normal mother instead of that psychopath you wouldn't
need...

CHARLES

That's what I like about you—the way you always shit on my moments of genuine
feelings when I try to open up—to talk...

JENN

I lied to you, Charles. I didn't sleep with Don. I just told you that to try to punish
you, to get revenge, to get even.

SCENE 7: at Zan's flat

(Charles paces as he waits for Zan. Zan arrives outside her flat.)

ZAN

What the hell are you doing here?

CHARLES

I miss you.

ZAN

Too little, too late. You called it off.

CHARLES

I made a mistake.

ZAN

Nothing like the mistake I made.

CHARLES:

I want it to be like it was.

ZAN

Do you think unhappy people can be in happy relationships?

CHARLES

You could change if you wanted to... If you cared enough about me.

ZAN

Nobody can unbake a baked potato.

CHARLES

But what if...

ZAN

What's the difference between a what-if and an if-only?

SCENE 8: at Zan's flat

ZAN

I feel like a walking cliché.

CHARLES

A cliché is one thing you've never been.

ZAN

Is that a compliment?

CHARLES

I guess...

ZAN

I'm leaving you, Charles.

CHARLES

What did you do to stop things from falling apart?

ZAN

No, please. I can't. I'm all right like this. If you don't want to stay with me, I'd rather be alone.

CHARLES

Why don't you try to look at things with a little detachment? Behave like a normal person.

ZAN

I lied to you.

CHARLES

About sleeping with Don?

ZAN

No, about not sleeping with Don. I did sleep with him.

(End of Act Three)

Singularities

EPILOGUE OR ACT FOUR

Epilogue or Act Four (depending on how you look at it)

ENDLESS ENDINGS

SCENE 1: at the camera

(Charles sits in front of the camera.)

CHARLES

(to the audience) So, we've arrived at the epilogue or maybe it's Act Four depending on how you look at it. Don't you just love the word epilogue? So erudite, so sophisticated, so Greek.

(Charles turns on the camera.)

CHARLES

According to the Heisenberg Principle any particle is a wave until you look at it. The wave is essentially a statistical representation of all the places that the particle could be. So, if you want to measure its speed then you measure the wave. But when you measure its position, you collapse the wave into a particle. But you can never do both. When you don't look, it's a wave...

(He turns off the camera and walks toward the bar.)

CHARLES

Or maybe the epilogue should begin this way: I live in a quantum bubble with sparticles against a neutrino background. Quarks: up, down, strange, charm, bottom. I want to be top quark.

SCENE 2: at the entrance to the bar.

(Charles bumps into Katherine.)

CHARLES

Katherine, how are you?

KATHERINE

Fine.

CHARLES
I haven't seen you for so long.

KATHERINE
Yes, I know.

CHARLES
And you got back with Tomas?

KATHERINE
Yes, but then he left me for good.

CHARLES
Katherine, I'm so sorry.

KATHERINE
It happened quite fast.

CHARLES
I had no idea.

KATHERINE
I'm taking water color classes.

CHARLES
I am sorry. I mean about Tomas.

KATHERINE
He left me. He's living with Eva Skorepova. She's a potter. Do you know her?

CHARLES
No, no I don't.

(They walk their separate ways.)

CHARLES
(to the audience as he moves to the bar scene)
How in the hell would I know Eva Skorepova? Just like Katherine. So used to being the center of the universe, she assumes if Eva Skorepova is a participant in her life, we all must know who she is.

SCENE 3: ON SCREEN: ZAN
pre-recorded video # 1

ZAN

Hi, Charles. Here's the tape you asked for. I promised to send you a video of me every now and then. Can't imagine why you want to keep getting updates from me. You must still be working on that dammed documentary.

Okay, here's my update. You wanted me to tell you about my relationships. I love my husband. I hate my mother-in-law. I love my mother. My father is dead. I wish my husband's ex-wife were. My step children are tedious, but I love my dog. That about sums up my social relationships.

Good-bye, Charles. I'll send you another tape in a year or two.

SCENE 4: at the Bar

(Charles sits on one of three stools and puts his iPhone on the bar counter. He studies his iPhone as a Woman enters and sits down. She places her iPhone on the counter and they both sit watching their phones. He notices her.)

CHARLES

Excuse me, but would you mind if I were to touch your arm?

WOMAN

Why do you want to do that?

CHARLES

Because you are the exact woman I was dreaming about last night, and I just want to see if you are real.

WOMAN

That is the worst pick up line I have ever heard.

CHARLES

I know. It's a game I play. Trying out the worst lines I can come up with.

(They both pick up their phones and begin fumbling with them.)

WOMAN

You on Facebook?

CHARLES

Yeah. I hate it though.

WOMAN

A friend told me that if you're not on Facebook basically you don't exist.

(Charles phone rings and he answers it.)

CHARLES

(on the phone)

You're not going to commit suicide tonight, Toast. Tonight's not a good night. Trust me. Just go to bed. Get some sleep. No, I am sure things will look better in the morning. *(He listens.)* No I am not coming over. There's no one outside the house. *(He listens.)* I know the skinheads stole your door mat, but that was two months ago... There's nobody trying to get in. Just lock the doors, turn off the lights... *(He listens.)* No, no, okay, don't turn off the lights. Just go to bed. Lock yourself in. Go to bed.

(He closes the phone.)

WOMAN

Your wife?

CHARLES

An old girl-friend. You married?

WOMAN

Separated.

CHARLES

You have any kids?

WOMAN

A daughter.

CHARLES

That's nice.

WOMAN

Not really. She's a teenager. I have a dog. Dogs are better than kids. They don't hang out with drug-using friends. They don't post pictures on their Face Book page of you drooling as you're sleeping. If they get pregnant, you can sell their children.

(They go back to their iPhones.)

SCENE 5: ON SCREEN: ZAN pre-recorded video # 2

ZAN

Hi, Charles. We moved to Chicago. Your damned documentary must be 500 hours long by now.

I am sitting here trying to get myself interested in cleaning the house. Today it snowed. I don't even know where my gloves are. I left my lights on when I went grocery shopping and my car died. I have insomnia and my psychiatrist just raised his fee to \$200 an hour.

Also I have a Franciscan friar who is supposedly a friend to whom I seem uncontrollably drawn and with whom I have nothing in common and who wants me to become Catholic. I probably will because I don't want to go to Hell when I die.

(video ends)

SCENE 6: at the bar

(Charles and Woman look up from their iPhones and smile at each other.)

WOMAN

He cheated on me. He found a 22 year old who likes other people's husbands. I should have known when he learned how to text.

CHARLES

Think you'll get back together?

WOMAN

We're exploring options. Deciding if we can make it work or if it's time to let go.
(Beat) I fell out of love.

CHARLES

Where did you fall?

WOMAN

Right. Funny... Maybe you understand?

CHARLES

I've never understood "fall out of love." I'd like to think it was a choice, not a fate... to fall or not to fall. This thing you fell off of, or out of... Was it ominous? Slippery? Jagged?

WOMAN

Tedious, mind-numbing, repetitive...

SCENE 7: ON SCREEN: ZAN pre-recorded video # 3

ZAN

This has been a very difficult year for me. Life sort of came up and smacked me in the mouth with the old one-two. Neil left me for his secretary and I suffered a breakdown. Had to go back to the psychiatrist and I'm still on medication and in therapy. Good thing though. I lost 15 pounds.

My friends are sleeping with their karate instructors or lovers 10 years younger than they are. I don't sleep well. All I want for Christmas is freedom from heartburn and two weeks on a beach with a karate instructor.

(video ends)

SCENE 8: at the bar

(Charles moves toward the Woman, perhaps, slides over to the bar stool next to her.)

CHARLES

I have trouble believing that picking one mate for life is humanly feasible. We are not meant for fifty years with one other creature. I'm not meant for fifty years with one person.

WOMAN

Do you think that's a good pick up line?

CHARLES

Maybe not, but I'm honest. That's why you're still talking to me. Few people can be honest. I refuse the shiny, happy shit. Don't you?

WOMAN

No. I live for shiny, happy shit. It's just hard to find.

(They go back to their iPhones. A moment.)

CHARLES

(looking up)

But what if you're wrong?

WOMAN

About my husband?

CHARLES

No, about life. About who you are. What you believe in. What if what you think is important, isn't?

WOMAN

But...

CHARLES

No, listen. What if you've got it all wrong? Not just you, but all of us. What if we've screwed it all up so bad that we can never make it right? What if we've backed ourselves into so tight a little corner we'll never...?

WOMAN

Too scary to think about.

(They go back to their iPhones. A moment.)

WOMAN

But we have to keep trying. You must have some goal in life.

CHARLES

To never love again?

WOMAN

What about work-wise?

CHARLES

I'm making a documentary called "The First 12,000." It's an autobiography. If I live to be 72 years old, I only live for 24,000 days. So when I've lived half my life I will have lived 12,000 days.

WOMAN

You figure you've now lived half your life? What have you learned so far?

CHARLES

You can run from life or as the poet said "stay and face the horrible little irritating problems, and get up and work and laugh and don't judge."

WOMAN

Who's the poet?

CHARLES

I have no idea.

(Charles leaves the scene and goes to the chair in front of the video camera.)

SCENE 9: at the camera

(Charles turns on the camera.)

CHARLES

Final monologue. Action. I think a lot about the word dead. Dead right. Dead ringer. Deadlines. Dead on. Ding, dong the wicked witch is dead. When we dead awaken. Till death do us part. As I lay dying. Cut. Cut.

Final Monologue. Take two. Action

There are many wonderful endings in literature. "Blow out your candles, Laura." The Glass Menagerie. Or the always dramatic: "It is a far, far better thing I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." Tale of Two Cities. Or the ever popular "After all, tomorrow is another day." Way too optimistic. "You live and die alone, even in Winesburg..." Cut.

Final Monologue. Take three. Action. Squaring the circle: the problem of the relation of two incompatible values. Cut. Too scientific.

I want to speak of sad and lovely things. The sound of far-off traffic in the night. Of barking dogs. The color of twilight. Cut. Too arty.

I don't think I will sing anymore just now. Corny. Cut.

The Ending (according to the laws of probability). We are all as we started; unchanged.

Final Monologue. Take four. Action

Would someone please tell me where all the happy endings are? I obviously don't get the girl. There are some other really great bad endings—a mugging, a murder, a nuclear meltdown. I could do three possible endings—very current, very postmodern.

Idea: I think I'll end this documentary with running titles. So and so served three years in a Federal Penitentiary, etc.

The utopic version. Toast toured the world in a successful rock band. Zan ended up with John, her first fiancé, and is now the head of a major corporation. Katherine and Tomas run a B and B in Southern France. Jenn married her brother in law. Julie and I married and have two lovely children.

The violent version. Tomas shoots Katherine. Katherine commits suicide after starring in the Chekov play "The Three Sisters." I commit suicide... Shit we all commit suicide. You can't guarantee that madness, chaos and despair won't win out. Always put your money on chaos.

I guess the only reason to keep living is to see how it all turns out. The great hermeneutic—just a curiosity on how it turns out.

But how would this story really end? In real life? I'd probably have lunch with my friend, Jenn. Tell her how both my unfinished documentary and my unfinished life are assembled from used parts.

LIGHTS OUT

THE END