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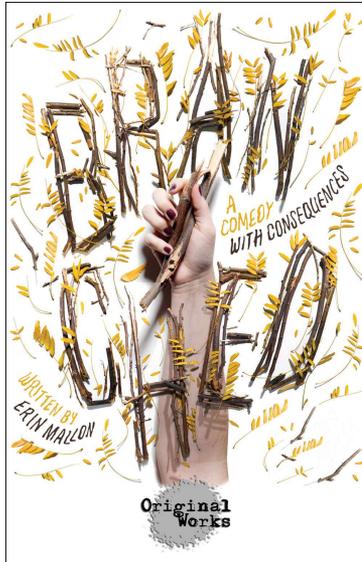
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Chaos Theory
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Branched by Erin Mallon

Synopsis: Ben is having a difficult week. After five whole years of “drinking from Mommy’s boobies,” he suddenly has to step aside for his new baby sister, Beatrice, who may or may not be human. Mommy says he has to “support her appearance no matter how humiliating it is for us as family,” but that’s hard to do when your sister has branches for arms and legs. Plus, he just found out that Daddy is having “the sex” with his new kindergarten teacher and he’s not sure how to tell Mommy. As a five-year-old entrepreneur, Ben prides himself on always staying cool under pressure, but this time... he may just burst.

Cast Size: 3 Females, 1 Male, 1 Freaky Creation

Chaos Theory

a play seeking

order

by Courtney Meaker

“Chaos: When the present determines the future, but the approximate present does not approximately determine the future.” – Edward Lorenz

“Gamow envisioned a prisoner sealed in a jail, surrounded by huge prison walls. In a classical Newtonian world, escape is impossible. But in the strange world of the quantum theory, you don’t know precisely where the prisoner is at any point or his velocity. If the prisoner bangs against the prison walls often enough, you can calculate the chances that one day he will pass right through them, in direct violation of common sense and Newtonian mechanics. There is a finite, calculable probability that he will be found outside the gates of the prison walls.” – Michio Kaku *Parallel Worlds*

“...you can always try to solve a problem by proving that no solution exists.” James Gleick *Chaos: Making a New Science*

“You don’t see something until you have the right metaphor to let you perceive it.” Robert Shaw, physicist

CHARACTERS

Frannie

Bach

Seth

Mack/Josie/Laurel

Setting: The space is a living room, but can also be anything else—the bar across the street, an office, department store, moon. Characters can exist in the space without being with the character in action. At times, it is as if characters each occupy a separate reality.

Scene Headings: Scene headings can be read, projected, fall from the sky, or just about anything. They can be fully noticed as something outside the world that is announcing the current action, or incorporated into the set as a hidden, toy surprise. Consistency should not be considered in presentation of the scene headings, only creativity. For example, if one of the scene headings is said aloud by one of the characters, perhaps the next scene heading is printed on the cover of a book one of the characters is reading. The characters are building their own reality and the scene headings are a part of that.

Time Line: At the top of each scene an undetermined amount of time has passed backwards or forwards. Maybe only seconds, a minute, hour, week, or month. Time jumps can be big or small.

Bach: Bach is post-op FtM. Top surgery only. I mention this only because there is a fixation on trans genitals that is disturbing, annoying, invasive, offensive, and not this play's realm, so I've taken the guess work out even though the play itself makes no reference to Bach's genitals at all. Bach should not be played by a cis-gendered male. Effort should be made to cast a trans*, genderqueer, etc. actor.

Punctuation: No period at the end of a sentence represents quickly spoken dialogue. Some overlap in dialogue is expected and encouraged though not specifically outlined unless otherwise noted in the text.

Appearance: The default appearances of these characters is not white, thin, and able-bodied. If nothing else, this should not be an all-white production.

Chaos Theory premiered at Annex Theater (Seattle, WA) in 2014 with the following cast & crew.

Frannie – Keiko Green

Bach – Eddie Dehais

Seth – Drew Highlands

Mack/Josie/Laurel – Jana Hutchinson

Director – Pamala Mijatov

Scenic Design – Robin Macarteny

Machine Design – Emily Shershon

Sound Design – Kyle Thompson

Lighting Design – Gwyn Skone

Costume Design – Amy Escobar

CHAOS THEORY

ACT ONE: INTRODUCTION TO QUANTUM MECHANICS

1. Inert objects vs. the external force

(Frannie sits in pajamas on the couch in her apartment like she's been for many days. Perhaps there are scattered tissues, snack boxes, DVDs, etc.)

SETH: How to pull your best friend out of the dumps.

BACH: Not quite.

SETH: How to help your best friend get over abandonment.

FRANNIE: I'm right here.

SETH: Shush, dear.

BACH: How about, how to get your best friend to realize that sack of shit isn't coming back.

FRANNIE: Sitting exactly here. I can hear you.

SETH *(overlapping; to Bach)*: That's it.

BACH *(overlapping; to Frannie)*: That's cute.

BACH/SETH: Step One.

BACH: Get her drunk.

(Bach and Seth hand Frannie a bottle of booze. She looks at it. They nod. She drinks.)

SETH: Thatta girl.

BACH: Smashing.

FRANNIE: Smashed, you mean?

SETH/BACH: Step Two.

SETH: Make her put on real clothes.

FRANNIE: My pajamas are comfy.

SETH: Stop whining and go change.

FRANNIE: No.

SETH: If you do, we promise you don't have to leave the apartment.

FRANNIE: You're lying.

BACH: You won't have to leave the apartment today.

FRANNIE: Do you have something more comfortable than the elastic waistband?

SETH: We will strip you naked if we have to.

FRANNIE: I'd like to see you try.

BACH: No you wouldn't.

SETH: Please? Pretty please. For us?

(Frannie resolutely stays put in her pajamas.)

BACH: Step Three. Remind her she's better off.

SETH: You'll be happier now. Think of all the things you can do without checking in with someone. You can cook what you want for dinner without having to plan for an allergy attack. You can admit you like brussel sprouts.

FRANNIE: I don't like brussel sprouts.

BACH: Monster.

SETH: You could go make out with a whole legion of women. When you're out past nine, you don't have to call anyone to say you're fine. Isn't that awesome?

FRANNIE: It's not like she was a nag, Seth.

BACH: No. You're right. Not a nag. A jealous, rager with an expense spreadsheet dependency who'd rather you cooked three meals a day for her than have a decent paying job.

FRANNIE: She was perfect.

BACH: She's a piece of shit.

FRANNIE: Don't speak ill of the dead.

BACH: She's not dead. She left you.

FRANNIE: Whatever. Don't speak ill of the dead.

SETH: Step Four. Get her drunk. Again.

(Bach and Seth hand Frannie another bottle of booze. She looks at it. They nod. She drinks.)

BACH: Step Five. Make her leave the house. I don't care that you're wearing your pajamas. We're going to the bar across the street.

FRANNIE: No thanks. You go. Have fun.

BACH: I'm not kidding around.

FRANNIE: She could call.

BACH: You have a cell phone.

FRANNIE: Or, the kidnapper might leave a note.

BACH: Then you'll see it when you get back.

FRANNIE: I thought you weren't going to make me leave the house.

SETH: That was two weeks ago. We've changed our minds.

BACH: Ah. Two weeks ago. When we were patient, loving people.

SETH: Wears thin, don't it?

BACH: Come on. We're leaving.

FRANNIE: No. Thank you.

SETH: Step Six. Find someone. Anyone. And set her up.

BACH: She's still in her pajamas, Seth.

SETH: Do you have a better idea?

BACH: She's not presentable.

SETH: Nothing like real company that says, "It's time to put on pants." Wouldn't you agree?

(Knock at the door.)

SETH: Ah good. Here she is.

(Laurel enters.)

BACH: Whoa.

FRANNIE: Mack? You're not Mack.

BACH: She's way hotter than Mack.

SETH: Frannie. This is...

LAUREL: Laurel.

SETH: It sure is. She looks like Mack. Sounds like Mack. Might as well be Mack. But hey, she hasn't left you. Why don't you two talk?

BACH: I bet you both like things. Discuss.

LAUREL: Hi.

FRANNIE: She's not Mack. She looks like a dog person. No thank you.

BACH: Can I call dibs on Laurel, then? Since you don't want her?

(Laurel smiles at Bach as she exits. Bach watches her go.)

BACH: So cute. Come on, Frannie.

FRANNIE: No one's stopping you, Bach. Go get her if you want her.

BACH: Step Seven. Tough love.

SETH: Already?

BACH: Do you want to watch her wallow for another month?

FRANNIE: Well, what's one more month in the scheme of things? I could die in another month.

SETH: You're right. This has to stop.

FRANNIE: Are you guys even listening to me anymore?

BACH/SETH: No.

FRANNIE: What about what I want?

BACH: We'll discuss what you want in another month when you're finally beyond this.

FRANNIE: Beyond what? I'm great. Look. I'm knitting again!

SETH: Dear lord. This is terrifying.

BACH: Seriously. You need to get over it. Mack's gone. Who knows where. She was a piece of shit and you're ten times better off without her. Frankly, it's pathetic that you're still whining about it. Wah ha. She's dead. She's kidnapped. Boo hoo. People are starving you know. She's not coming back and it's disgusting that you're still in your pajamas. You reek. March into the bathroom. Take a shower. Put on clean underwear. Brush your teeth. And move on.

(Frannie looks as if to do as she's told. Then she looks like she might hit Bach. Then she collapses back to her previous position, looking darker.)

FRANNIE: It's just. It's just.

SETH: Step Eight. Get her drunk so she can recover from Step Seven.

(Frannie snatches the bottle. And guzzles.)

FRANNIE: You guys didn't really get her, you know. But Mack. She was wonderful. She picked me up from the airport. She was there when my dad got sick. She helped me get that job.

BACH: The one you lost?

FRANNIE: It wasn't her fault.

SETH: We remember that differently.

FRANNIE: Not everything was her fault, you guys. She was beautiful, kind, and supportive.

BACH: When she wasn't being critical and keeping score of all your fuck-ups.

FRANNIE: Stop it. She loved me. I love her. I miss her. I need to find her. Maybe she's hurt. Do you think she's hurt?

(Seth and Bach look at each other. They sigh.)

BACH: Step Nine. When all else fails

SETH: The last resort

FRANNIE: A puppy?

BACH: Fraid not.

SETH: I wish.

BACH: Me too.

SETH: But I guess the time as come.

BACH: We've waited long enough.

SETH: No more fooling around.

BACH: No other options.

FRANNIE: You're going to kill me, aren't you?

SETH: Step Nine. Give her a book about chaos theory and parallel dimensions.

(Seth hands Frannie The Book.)

BACH: I wish it hadn't come to this.

(Frannie opens The Book. Reads.)

2. Only pansies trust Occam's razor

(Frannie's apartment. Frannie holds The Book. A board (dry erase, chalk, clear) is present with the beginnings of notes, perhaps.)

FRANNIE: After analyzing the facts of Mack's disappearance, I have come to several probable conclusions.

SETH: Oh goody.

FRANNIE: The method dictates you should make a list of possible scenarios that would account for the facts.

BACH: *All* the facts?

FRANNIE: Of course, all the facts. You think I'm ignoring evidence?

BACH: I

SETH: We

BACH: We think you're a failed musician barista pretending to know something about scientific method. So, yeah.

FRANNIE: Physics can explain the disappearance.

SETH: Okay.

FRANNIE: It's possible.

SETH: Just. Don't get your hopes up.

FRANNIE: Scenario One. Mack packed her clothes for a last minute business trip. She left a note on the table that fell off and slipped into the vent. It's happened before. On the way to the airport, she realized she forgot her phone charger. Now this is where it gets a little fuzzy. I'm not sure where her flight was going, but there was a plane overtaken by hostile insurgents on the way to Bora Bora that same night.

BACH: Where did the plane leave from?

FRANNIE: Moscow.

SETH: How did she get to Moscow?

FRANNIE (*as if she didn't hear*): I've been in touch with the embassy, but they're impossible. They won't see reason.

BACH: Imagine.

FRANNIE: She could be in their hands right now and she would have no way to get in touch with me.

SETH: Dare we ask what the next scenario is?

FRANNIE: It's complicated.

BACH: Simplify it.

FRANNIE: Aliens. They beamed her and her things aboard.

SETH: Scenario Three?

FRANNIE: Kidnappers.

SETH: Very respectful kidnappers to let her take all of her things, don't you think?

FRANNIE: When Mack wants something

BACH: And Scenario Four?

FRANNIE: That's the least likely.

BACH: Yes?

FRANNIE: And involves bears.

SETH: Right. No black holes in your list?

FRANNIE: Spontaneous black holes are incredibly unlikely and scientifically unsound.

BACH: Right, but aliens

FRANNIE: There is significant

BACH: Frannie. Please stop this. The only real explanation is

FRANNIE: No.

SETH: Frannie.

FRANNIE: No. That can't be. She said she. When she left for work she said. And if that's true. If that fact is true, your scenario is impossible.

SETH: Right.

BACH: Sorry.

FRANNIE: I know I'm difficult right now. But it's just. You know, sometimes when I'm still. Reading or writing. Often when I'm in the kitchen. In a moment of pause. I get that feeling. That feeling of Mack wrapping her hand just here, on my hip. When we slept, she'd leave her hand there. It's always brief. Fleeting. The delusion of being temporarily bonded to someone again. I know. I know that she. I know that. But I just can't

SETH: It's okay. She's not

FRANNIE: Because if she's not

BACH: If she's not, then

FRANNIE: Then the evidence points to a fallacy. A misrepresentation of the data set. One lie repeated many times. It skews the results. Too many outliers. But, if we look at it at the micro level, zero in and zero in and zero in and zero in, a fractal pattern emerges. If there's a fractal pattern, then there's order to it. It can be decoded even if there aren't straight lines.

BACH: Fractal. Fractured.

FRANNIE: But if this one piece of data is changed. Isn't it better if she's missing or dead?

3. Big Bang My Ass

(Frannie reads The Book. Then.)

FRANNIE: I have some terrible news.

BACH: Great.

SETH: Yes. Please share.

FRANNIE: It comes with good news, too.

BACH: Well, that doesn't sound promising.

SETH: Who wants good news anymore?

FRANNIE: Guys, listen. The universe is expanding at an alarming rate. This expansion causes the temperature of the universe to drop as everything expands away from its heat source. The sun, guys. The sun. Essentially, every second the universe is getting a little colder. At some point, this will end in what astronomers call a big freeze extinguishing all life in the universe. Everything.

SETH: Fuck

BACH: Seriously

FRANNIE: It's billions of years away. Theoretically.

SETH: The theoretically is what bothers me.

BACH: The alarming rate. That means it could speed up. That means

SETH: A billion could turn into

BACH: A hundred

SETH: Or, less.

FRANNIE: Maybe. I don't think the science backs up that hypothesis.

BACH: But we don't know.

SETH: Not for sure.

FRANNIE: But here's what's really interesting.

SETH: You mean that wasn't good news?

FRANNIE: We can change it.

BACH: Change what?

FRANNIE: Change everything. The Book details the idea of millions of parallel worlds and I think we could get to them.

BACH: Not following.

SETH: Parallel worlds? Wouldn't that be the same thing that we have now?

FRANNIE: We make a million choices a day. But even if we just look at the big things. The big events in our lives. Where we went to school. Our first best friend. The city we moved to. Each of those choices has a million paths that we could have chosen instead. So we could find the one.

SETH: The one?

FRANNIE: The one where everything is perfect. Where Mack didn't disappear. Where we're still together. Oh! With a dog!

SETH: Right.

BACH: That's your perfect universe? Why do you want her back so badly? I mean. You finally took a shower. Can't you just keep going on that upward trend?

FRANNIE: Getting her back is an upward trend. Do you want to see the graph?

SETH: You made a graph?

FRANNIE: Nevermind. But maybe there's one where we're better off. All of us.

SETH: Where we keep the band together, maybe?

BACH: We sucked, Seth.

SETH: Na-uh! Fishery will ride again! Cast your net and pull them aboard!

FRANNIE: Or, we're all millionaires.

SETH: No one listens to me.

BACH: Or, I was born right?

FRANNIE: Don't say that. You were born right. What are you talking about?

BACH: It's nothing. Forget it.

SETH: There's nothing wrong with you, Bach.

BACH: I got it. Move on.

SETH: You're a thousand times the man I am. And you have been since you were a kid. I've never done a push-up and I still can't grow a mustache.

FRANNIE: Your definition of manliness disturbs me.

BACH: My ability to grow facial hair is impressive.

SETH: How would you define masculinity then, smartypants?

BACH: Oh this'll be good.

SETH: Popcorn?

BACH: Way to prepare.

SETH: I got your back, bro.

FRANNIE: Masculinity. It's you know. Being a dude. It's. Well. Social conditioning. And. Um.

BACH/SETH: Yes?

FRANNIE: Shut up. Stop distracting me from my point.

BACH: Nailed it.

SETH: What was your point?

BACH: Oh. I remember! Universes!

FRANNIE: Yes. Thank you. We could find a universe wherein we're all where we want to be and happy.

BACH: And rich.

SETH: And together.

FRANNIE: With Mack.

SETH: I'm in. Not for Mack. But for us. Sounds fun.

BACH: I can rearrange my calendar and squeeze in some universe hopping.

SETH: Where do we start?

FRANNIE: I need to do some more research. We need to build The Machine to get us there.

BACH: A machine?

FRANNIE: Yes. The Machine that will take us where we want to go. It's all right here.

SETH: Is there a blueprint?

FRANNIE: Not exactly. It's more like suggestions and equations. I don't quite understand, yet. But I will.

BACH: So. We're gonna build a machine. Sorry. The Machine.

SETH: And in the mean time the universe is expanding?

FRANNIE: We can find a world where that's not happening, I bet. I think. I hope.

BACH: Or, we'd find the universe where it's already happened and be dead.

SETH: You're so dark these days.

BACH: Seeing things as they are is not dark. It's observant.

4. Bullshit deterministic systems

(Frannie is in her living room. She's intermittently reading from The Book and writing things on the board, then erasing them. There may be a diagram, but it does not (and likely should not) look like anything really connected to physics, but should not go so far as to look like a horse.)

Seth is asleep in the apartment somewhere visible.)

FRANNIE: No. That's not right. What is it? What is it missing?

(Bach is at a bar, but exists in the same space as Frannie. Bach sees Josie, who is not Mack but someone who looks like her. They exchange significant glances.)

FRANNIE: That's it. It's two masses meeting. There's this thing. This. Maybe it's chemical. No it can't be chemical. But magnetism? Maybe. Magnetism is physics, right? And it's related to chaos. This uncontrolled, barely explainable thing. Masses are inexplicably drawn to each other. The masses.

(Josie and Bach get a little closer. Size each other up.)

FRANNIE: But then. Wait. That doesn't make sense. The Machine. The Machine is one of the masses, right? No. There will be three of us and one machine. So if there are four masses. And they are moving toward an alternate dimension. A parallel world where bees are the overlords, or something.

(Josie and Bach decide they are going to go home together. Neither one speaks.)

FRANNIE: Or even, the parallel dimension wherein Mack's still with me. Or, maybe. Possibly. Even preferably. She's dead. That's not nice. I'm sorry. Getting ahead of myself. In order to get to that point, we need to power The Machine.

(Josie and Bach kiss. Bach leads Josie away from the bar.)

FRANNIE: Well, obviously, we need The Machine first. Like H.G. Wells or something. Something big like that. But we're not moving through time. Well, maybe we are. I guess we could be moving through space. But but but. We need the masses first. Because the masses are what's going to accelerate through. No. Jesus. That's not right.

(Josie and Bach enter the apartment in a “fit of passion” as Frannie’s mom would say. They are in Frannie’s space, now but she does not see them. They are kissing intensely and might be engaged in what Frannie’s dad would politely call “necking” and dad-geeky call “wink wink; nudge nudge.” They get progressively more intense and rough during the following.)

FRANNIE: Okay. Start over. At the beginning. The elementary stuff. So, let x equal mass times acceleration. But. We don’t know how fast we’re accelerating. Velocity maybe. Yes. Let x equal mass times velocity. Squared. The squared is important. It’s two masses moving. Maybe together. Maybe separately, but in the same space. They have to touch, or ricochet at some point. That’s what creates the. The. Come on. Mass times velocity. Fuck. Mass times velocity squared equals. What. It creates. X is. X is.

*(Frannie searches through books.
Bach grabs Josie’s wrists and pins them over her head. Josie laughs.)*

FRANNIE: Force! Mass times velocity squared equals force. That’s it. It’s not magnetism. It’s force. So when applied to the problem of The Machine, moving through dimensions not as heretofore discovered, the force will have to be greater than the measurement of force here. Or less than?

*(Frannie starts writing more on the board and then surveys the work.
Bach and Josie resolve. Josie sleeps. Bach lights a cigarette.)*

BACH: So, you think you’ve got it figured out.

FRANNIE: I think... I’m making it up. No. I definitely know I’m making it up.

BACH: But it might work.

FRANNIE: If I think it will work, maybe. Maybe that’s the key.

BACH: All right, Tinker Bell. When do we leave?

FRANNIE: I don’t know. We have to build it first. We need a power source. A power source to get us up to velocity squared.

BACH: What’s that number?

FRANNIE: 137

SETH (*waking up*) (*he's speaking French, but they can understand him*): Cent trent sept quoi? Gigawatts? [137 what? Gigawatts?]

FRANNIE: Meters per second.

SETH: C'est pas très vite. [That's not very fast.]

FRANNIE: We could probably go faster depending on what we get to power it.

SETH: Que pensais-tu utiliser? [What were you thinking you could use?]

FRANNIE: Sheer determination.

SETH: Sois pas idiote. [Don't be a dumb.]

BACH: How about uranium?

FRANNIE: Maybe. Maybe something less difficult to get.

BACH: I can get us uranium.

SETH: Tu nous chiet. [You're full of shit.]

BACH: Real nice, Seth. I can, too. See. That girl? There.

(Frannie notices the girl blissed out from her foray with Bach.)

FRANNIE: Has she been here the whole time?

BACH: Yeah. You didn't notice?

FRANNIE: No.

BACH: Too bad. It was hot.

SETH: Il se peut que j'en ai vu – ou pas vu – certain moments, mais je tiens à soutenir la remarque de Bach avec un high five. [I may or may not have seen parts of it, but I would like to back up Bach's statement with a high five.]

(They high five.)

FRANNIE: Can't you fuck in your own living room?

BACH: Your living room was closer.

FRANNIE: She looks like Mack.

BACH: Nu-uh. Not everyone looks like Mack, Frannie.

SETH: Je le vois. [I can see it.]

FRANNIE: What's so special about her?

BACH: She's our connection at the nuclear plant.

FRANNIE: And where's that exactly?

BACH: It just happens to be down the street.

FRANNIE: How come we didn't notice it before?

BACH: I don't know.

SETH: On en avait pas besoin, pas vrais? [We had no need for it, did we?]

FRANNIE: Huh. I guess that's true. If you aren't in need of something. Does it exist? Especially if simply needing it makes it appear.

(Frannie writes an equation for this on the board.)

FRANNIE: When did you start smoking?

BACH: Now.

FRANNIE: I see.

SETH: Quand es-tu devenu physicien? [When did you become a physicist?]

BACH: When did you become a physicist?

SETH: C'est ce j'ai dit. [I just said that.]

FRANNIE: Now, I suppose.

BACH: I see.

SETH: Merde. Quand ai-j'appris à parler en français? [Crap. When did I learn to speak French?]

FRANNIE: We're contradicting ourselves.

BACH: We might be getting in a loop.

SETH: Nous sommes foutus. [We're fucked.]

FRANNIE: Well, we're not really messing with time so maybe we won't encounter a paradox.

BACH: Or, maybe we will.

SETH: Tu me donnes... Le Creeps. [You are giving me the creeps.]

BACH: That's not French, Seth.

SETH: Je sais. [I know.]

FRANNIE: Do you think we could be responsible for the collapse of our world?

SETH: Pour sur. [Most definitely.]

BACH: No. Of course, not. Well. Maybe. But it's worth it, right?

SETH: Personne ne m'écoute. [No one listens to me.]

5. Regarding the movements of particles

(Overlapping scenes that become a dance. The dances do not have to be the same genre, but could be.

SETH is at work, sitting at his desk. He looks around, stretches, drinks coffee, types, clicks, gets up, sits down, feels like his life is going nowhere, hopes his life is going somewhere, tries to call Frannie, tries to call Bach, misses them, avoids his coworkers, gets more coffee, stands on his chair, then sits down before anyone sees. Maybe not in that order. Things can repeat. Eventually, his movements start to become a dance.

*FRANNIE is in her apartment reads *The Book*, looks at the door, hopes it's Mack, hopes it's not Mack, sits down, turns on music, turns off music, reads another book, writes on the board, starts revealing the framework of the machine, realizes Mack probably isn't coming back. Maybe not in that order. Things can repeat. Eventually, her movements start to become a dance.*

BACH is in his apartment. He looks in the mirror, examines his chest, adjusts his pack, examines his facial hair, prepares and takes a testosterone shot, thinks about Frannie, hopes Frannie isn't thinking about Mack, wonders if Frannie thinks about him, almost answers a call from Seth, decides not to, pours a whiskey neat, calls Josie. Hangs up on Josie. Maybe not in that order. Things can repeat. Eventually, his movements start to become a dance.

JOSIE (does not enter until near resolution) answers and is happy to have received the call, but sad when Bach hangs up.

They all collide.)

6. Repeating failed experiments, or the definition of insanity

(Seth, Frannie and Bach are building The Machine. An envelope is either slid under the door, or falls into the apartment somehow. Frannie sees it, goes to it, and opens it. Frannie pours three shots on the table. She downs them one after another. Pours them again.)

BACH: Uh, Frannie.

FRANNIE: What?

SETH: You want to share those?

FRANNIE: Not really.

BACH: Why not?

FRANNIE: I'm getting evicted.

BACH: You can't get evicted.

FRANNIE: First notice. Right here.

SETH: Wait what? Let me see.

FRANNIE: I haven't been able to pay rent since Mack left. She was the one who could afford this place.

SETH: But you

FRANNIE: Make \$11.50 an hour as an assistant manager and live off Ramen.

BACH: It can't be that much to stay here.

FRANNIE: Mack could afford it. She wanted to live in a nice place.

BACH: Fuck.

SETH: You never said

FRANNIE: I paid. I paid for some of it. I mean. I wasn't letting her pay for everything. I have my pride.

SETH: Well, yeah. But pride

FRANNIE: Pride doesn't pay bills. I'm screwed.

BACH: How much time did they give you on the notice?

FRANNIE: Eight weeks. Eight weeks to pay, what am I at now? A lot. Let's just say it's a lot. Essentially I have to pay all back rent, plus current, and the next two. Lucy has had it with me.

SETH: Lucy the landlady. I still find that funny.

BACH: Seth. Please take this seriously.

SETH: Why don't you just sic Bach on her. Straight women beware, this trans queer whatthefuck is coming for your money, her friends' promise to pay rent, and your panties.

BACH: Very funny.

FRANNIE: She's got a cane.

BACH: That's kind of hot.

FRANNIE: She had a hip replaced.

BACH: Oh.

FRANNIE: It's fine. It just means

SETH: I got fired.

BACH/FRANNIE: What?

SETH: I haven't wanted to say anything about it. But since we're confessing, I figured now is the time.

FRANNIE: Why?

SETH: Budget cuts. I'm expendable.

BACH: Holy hell.

SETH: I'm expendable. I never made myself indispensable, which means I'm expendable. I was also called a "goof" when receiving my pink slip, so maybe that had something to do with it. Who knows? It happens.

FRANNIE: You never think it's going to happen to you though.

SETH: You dread it, but you don't think

FRANNIE: But you don't think

SETH: That you'll actually be abandoned.

FRANNIE: Right.

(Seth and Frannie share significant looks. Bach, recognizing something takes action.)

BACH: Well I'm beat. You both look exhausted. I feel like we've knocked as much off as we can tonight. Good work, team. Why don't we call it a night?

SETH: Yeah. That's good.

(Seth and Bach make to leave for the door.)

BACH: Goodnight.

FRANNIE: Night.

BACH: Coming, Seth?

(Seth shrugs. Frannie keeps working. Bach hesitates, then leaves.)

We see Bach exist in the same space though outside Frannie and Seth's current reality.)

BACH: How not to sleep with your best friend when you feel lost. Don't linger after feeling that spark, that realization that this would be easy. Just go.

SETH: Well. I guess.

FRANNIE: You taking off?

SETH: I mean. Yeah. Have you seen my coat?

(Frannie hands him his coat. He starts to put it on really slowly. Frannie doesn't notice.)

BACH: Don't get drunk together.

FRANNIE: Want to stay for a drink? Drinking helps. You know with the insufferable pain of it all.

SETH: Yeah. All right.

(Frannie pours more shots. They sit and drink.)

BACH: Don't talk or even think about the last time you had sex. No matter how long ago it was, it was too long.

FRANNIE: I can't get over how empty it is.

SETH: Quiet. When Jeannine used to

FRANNIE: I miss her.

SETH: Yeah, me too.

FRANNIE: I meant Mack.

SETH: I meant Jeannine.

BACH: Don't touch each other. Right now you aren't you. Physical contact isn't platonic and you can't delude yourself into thinking that it is.

(Frannie almost reaches out to touch Seth on a relatively benign area. But stops.)

FRANNIE: It's gonna be okay. We're gonna be fine. We're just lonely is all.

SETH: You talking to me, or to you?

FRANNIE: Whatever insight-o-man.

(Frannie lightly pushes him. He pushes her back. They laugh and fall into a familiar, comfortable position with one of them is holding the other.)

BACH: Really? I thought we cleared that one. Fine. Fine. Hormone bombs. If at all possible, don't bring up that time you almost.

SETH: Do you remember that night in college?

BACH: Fuck.

FRANNIE: Which night? There were a lot of nights. I haven't done the math on it or anything but there were a lot of nights.

SETH: The night that we walked around with a bottle of wine and watched the trains?

FRANNIE: Oh. That night. Yeah. I remember. Remember being afraid to look back. Finding those abandoned boxcars.

SETH: All that graffiti.

FRANNIE: Crack dens. Most of them. I think one was definitely used to cook meth. It had that methy smell, you know?

SETH: I really don't.

FRANNIE: It did.

SETH: But that one with the big heart on it. And the countdown message. You don't remember? It read,

FRANNIE: "It's ending tomorrow." I remember, Seth.

SETH: Yeah. Why didn't we?

FRANNIE: The cop. The cop with the flashlight. He chased us out.

SETH: Right. But why didn't we continue?

FRANNIE: We were just making out, Seth. Stupid sophomores in college. It wasn't magical or anything. Bach and I had a similar thing happen. It happens sometimes. It doesn't mean

SETH: I know. I know. But it felt like we could have

FRANNIE: I suppose we could have.

SETH: So, why didn't we?

FRANNIE: Cause it would be a bad idea.

SETH: Do you think so, now? I mean then, I think you were right.
But now. Wouldn't it just be

FRANNIE: A friendly exchange? Is that what you're proposing?

BACH: Don't try to rationalize, or work up to the decision by talking about how reasonable this solution is. It's not. You are only sucking each other into a safe delusion. An alternate reality wherein consequences melt away in one moment where it's easier to be with someone than without anyone.

SETH: Well, why not? I mean. We're close. We're great friends. This wouldn't ruin anything. We know what this is. I mean. I'm a straight cis-male. And you're. Well, you're a

FRANNIE: Queer.

SETH: But it wouldn't mean anything. It wouldn't have to mean anything at all. It would just be two friends trying to pass the time. Trying not to feel lonely.

FRANNIE: I guess. I mean. We wouldn't get weird about it. We would keep doing what we're doing. Right? And when we want to stop. We stop.

SETH: Right.

(Seth and Frannie both down the rest of their drinks. They look at each other and pour more. Drink.)

BACH: I can't look.

(Seth and Frannie try to kiss. It doesn't go well. In fact it goes horribly. Think of the most awkward kiss you've ever had. Amplify it by 10,000. That's this kiss. Bach peeks through part of it.)

BACH: Oh. It's so much worse than I imagined.

SETH: Well that was

FRANNIE: Awful.

SETH: Pathetic really.

FRANNIE: We could try again.

SETH: Yeah. We could. But

FRANNIE: But it seems like it's a

SETH: A really bad

FRANNIE: A really dreadful idea. I guess you should

SETH: Yeah. I guess I'll be

BACH: When someone says they should leave, or go to bed, let them. Don't hesitate. Let them go.

(Seth goes toward the door.)

FRANNIE: Hey. Seth. It wasn't the worst idea.

SETH: I didn't think it was at the time.

FRANNIE: I don't think

SETH: In the end it's not going to be worth it.

FRANNIE: I really wish that we could though. Pass the time.

SETH: The close our eyes and think of England kind of friends?

FRANNIE: We'll find people.

SETH: I hope so. You've been single for a few months. Try a year.
Night.

(Seth starts to exit. Seth joins Bach.)

BACH: Thank god.

SETH: Don't judge.

BACH: Not judging. Just.

SETH: Jealous? Really.

BACH: It's probably nothing.

SETH: You should. You know. Go in there.

BACH: What? I couldn't.

SETH: You could. You could try.

BACH: You think?

SETH: Go for it, stud.

(Bach does a breath check and enters. Frannie does not see Bach. Bach comes up behind Frannie, turns her. And kisses her. This kiss is the kiss kisses are made of.)

SETH: How not to sleep with your best friend.

(Frannie stops the kiss.)

SETH: I was kidding! You totally should!

FRANNIE: That was.

BACH: Tremendous, I know.

FRANNIE: It was. But. Bach.

BACH: Oh.

FRANNIE: It's just.

BACH: That's fine.

SETH: Bach, don't you dare leave. Frannie!

FRANNIE: I'm sorry. I just have too many

SETH: Frannie, don't.

BACH: Hey. Don't worry about it. We get The Machine up and running. Get Mack back and it's all golden.

FRANNIE: It's not about Mack anymore.

BACH: Sure.

FRANNIE: It's not.

BACH: You said.

FRANNIE: We're okay, right?

BACH: Of course. Why wouldn't we be? It was a crazy thought, anyway. Feeling lonely is all.

FRANNIE: I guess it's in the air. I wish

BACH: It was just an impulse.

FRANNIE: I impulsed back. It was a really great kiss.

BACH: I have many skills. Night, Frannie.

(Bach, Seth, and Frannie occupy different realities. They are not addressing each other. But they are.)

SETH: We can bounce back from this right?

FRANNIE: I wish I. I just need to finish working.

BACH: I'm going to kill Mack.

7. Because, a joint thesis

(Seth, Bach, and Frannie exist in many different times and spaces. Sometimes it is as if they can hear each other. At other times it's something they've never voiced before.)

FRANNIE: Because I still get a whiff of you. I still smell you on my clothes. My pillow. I have tried to find its source. I can't do laundry. I can't. I can't wash it off. A part of me doesn't. I don't want to get rid of it. Not yet.

BACH: Because that part of me won't go away. Won't disappear fully like it should. It haunts me. That girl. So many parts. So many fucked up parts that don't mesh with who I am now. Who I've always. Never her. Not her.

SETH: Because I'm still here.

BACH: I'm still here. Right?

FRANNIE: It makes me think you are still here.

SETH: With you. With both of you. I can't get rid of you. Of the time exponentially multiplied to be more time than any other person or persons on the planet.

BACH: I'm me. These are the parts that have made me what I am. Elbow. Knee. Shoulder. Face. Hair. Always so much hair. Everywhere. How could I be anyone else? I'm me.

SETH: Because when you're not here. Both of you. Everything falls a part. I have no one. I have nothing. I'm not me. It's like things are missing from my apartment. When we're not together

FRANNIE: Sometimes, when I find that smell again on my clothes, I won't shower for a couple of days so I can keep it close. Pathetic, I know. I'm not ready to give up that feeling of you still being here. I think, This can't be who I've become. I think, I should be stronger than this. I am stronger than this, right?

BACH: I'm not that. That girl. That fucking girl who wished. Who was. Who is now not her anymore. And. And never really was her. Not really.

FRANNIE: Because I can't.

BACH: Because it's always about a girl, right? Josie, Mack, Frannie. Dammit, Josie. I. Fuck.

FRANNIE: Because I can't do this. Because I don't want to get up in the morning one more day. Face another morning. Without. Without your taste.

BACH: Her taste, my taste, my fingers, toes, stomach. These parts. These concrete parts that can be explored, dissected, explained. And yet.

SETH: And yet.

BACH: I don't know what to do. Because it's not concrete at all. Not at all.

SETH: Fucked up, right? There should be a reason behind it. A path to choose. So there we are. Because sometimes there is no discernible reason. Why we're drawn to this or that. The people who come into our lives.

FRANNIE: Because thinking of you. Smelling those smells, tasting that familiar. The saddest part. It makes me sick. I literally want to vomit your smell. Expel you. And yet.

SETH: And yet.

FRANNIE: I still want you. What does that say about me?

SETH: It doesn't make sense. I don't know why you two resonate so perfectly with me and who I am. When I'm not around you I fade away. Nothing to bounce off of, nothing to reverb, to vibrate. Oh that sounds dirty. Reverb me. Vibrate me.

BACH: That's why. We need to build The Machine. The whole world is in chaos. Lacks reason. We're fucked. But The Machine.

SETH: I guess it is dirty.

BACH: Focus, man.

SETH: Sorry. Focusing.

BACH: There's too much unknowable shit. When accounting for the chaos factor.

SETH: The human factor.

FRANNIE: Because it doesn't make sense.

SETH: We're better when we don't try to make sense.

BACH: Because there's something clearer. Something solid. I hope.

SETH: Because I need you.

FRANNIE: Because there must be something quantifiable. Something that wouldn't make me ill to think on.

(Seth and Frannie join the same reality. Seth brings a box into Frannie's apartment labeled "Seth's things".

Josie enters Bach's reality. They share a moment and exit in the same direction.)

8. New research on the paradigms of emotional pair bonding and social media usage

(Seth and Frannie work on The Machine.)

Bach enters. Slams door with back to it.)

BACH: HIDE ME!

(Laugh track.)

SETH: What bee crawled into your bonnet?

BACH: What the hell is a bonnet?

(Laugh track.)

FRANNIE: A fancy hat.

BACH: Why would a bee be in it?

FRANNIE: “Bee be in it.” You crack me up.

(Laugh track.)

BACH: Jesus fucking Christ. I listen to your crap all the time and you won’t take one second to stop talking about bugs and hats to listen to me.

SETH: Wow. Bach’s arrived in the mysterious land of No Humor. Population one.

(Laugh track.)

FRANNIE: Did you hear that?

SETH: Hear what?

BACH: The laugh track.

(Laugh track.)

SETH: Oh. I didn’t notice.

FRANNIE: How could you not notice? It's obnoxious.

SETH: I hear it all the time. In my head. I've always thought I lived in a sitcom. I think I'm naturally funny enough for it.

(Laugh track.)

SETH: See? Naturally funny.

(Laugh track.)

Bach snaps fingers. The laugh track stops abruptly.)

SETH: Ah, man. You guys are no fun.

BACH: Can we get back to the issue here?

FRANNIE: Right. The bee in the bonnet.

BACH: Right. So there's this girl.

(Pause. Everyone stops and waits for the "whoa" track. It doesn't happen.)

BACH: I was expecting the "whoa" track.

FRANNIE: I guess it's not going to happen.

SETH: Too bad.

("Whoa" track plays.)

SETH: Your timing is off, God! Go back to Comedy 101. Am I right?

FRANNIE: So there's a girl?

BACH: Woman.

SETH: Isn't there always a girlwoman? I mean for you? Isn't there always another girlwoman.

BACH: Yeah. Only this one didn't leave this morning.

FRANNIE: So?

BACH: So? I cooked her breakfast.

SETH: Was it warm and tasty?

BACH: It wasn't a euphemism.

FRANNIE: So you made her breakfast.

BACH: How long have you known me?

FRANNIE: Well. Time's relative.

BACH: Well. Relative to right now. How long have you known me?

FRANNIE: A long, long time. Eons at least.

BACH: And in that time, have I ever cooked breakfast for anyone, ever? You, Seth, any nameless girl? Woman. Have I ever cooked breakfast?

FRANNIE: Oh my.

SETH: This is serious.

FRANNIE: You.

SETH: You cooked.

BACH: I cooked breakfast. For a girl. Woman.

FRANNIE: So, does that mean that you have feelings? Cause that would

SETH: That would be big.

BACH: I called her.

FRANNIE: But you already cooked breakfast.

BACH: I'm saying. She left my apartment after eating breakfast to go to work. I. I. It's so much worse. I'm embarrassed.

FRANNIE: What could be worse?

SETH: Oh my.

BACH: Shut up.

SETH: You texted, didn't you?

FRANNIE: You called and texted? Right after she left?

BACH: With an emoticon.

FRANNIE: Oh Bach. That's pathetic.

BACH: It was winking. What am I going to do? You have to hide me. Tie me down. I can't be near social media. Or, a phone. Or, a keyboard. I can't be trusted.

FRANNIE: Well. I mean we could hide you.

SETH: Yeah. We could. I have rope. We could tie you down.

FRANNIE: You have rope?

SETH: Don't pry your nose into my bedroom and I'll continue to pretend I don't hear a loud buzzing coming from your room in the middle of the night.

FRANNIE: You do not.

SETH: You should really be subtle with the Hitachi. Use a muffler with it. A towel. Something. It sounds like it's going to vibrate your clit off.

FRANNIE: You have no idea.

BACH: Can you two focus for two minutes?

FRANNIE: Right. Well the thing is.

SETH: Yes. The thing is.

FRANNIE: Is this that bad?

BACH: I made breakfast.

SETH: Right. We heard you.

FRANNIE: But. You see.

SETH: You made breakfast.

FRANNIE: Do you think it's really the worst thing?

BACH: But the calling. And, the, the, the, the,

SETH: Texting. You can say it.

FRANNIE: I think that maybe you're making too big a deal out of this. You like someone. That's okay. I know it's hard to face, but I think you'll be stronger in the end.

BACH: Okay. I mean. Let's put this in perspective. It's not like we're in a relationship. It's not like we're. Together.

FRANNIE: Pair bonded.

BACH: Pair bonded. Right. It was just breakfast.

FRANNIE: Right.

SETH: Warm, tasty breakfast.

BACH: But what if it's more than that? What if, what if

FRANNIE: Shush now. Everything's going to be fine. Here's a wrench.

(Frannie and Seth return to The Machine. Bach looks at his phone and eventually, bravely smiles.)

END OF SAMPLE