

Grave Hearts
by
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INT. BASEMENT

A MAN, 40s, is tied to a chair, lit by a swinging bulb from above. He's been through the emotional wringer.

SOMETHING approaches from the darkness. Shuffle. Drag. CLUNK. Shuffle. Drag. CLUNK. Shuffle. Drag...

A FEMALE CORPSE steps into the light. CLUNK. She's horrifically decayed, but somehow, her bright blue eyes are still intact, though they're fading fast.

Those eyes stare at the man pleadingly. She lifts an OLD FAMILY ALBUM, motioning to it. Wanting something. The man isn't afraid. He looks at her with pity.

MAN

Sweetheart, the love was lost even
before you looked like a used mop.

Giving up, the female corpse wraps her arms around him. Her bones cracking and breaking with her final embrace. The man is overwhelmed. Her eyes fade. She dies.

And moments later, her body crumbles to dust, covering the man in her remains. The family album lands on the ground, open to a picture of a family: The Man, A WOMAN who vaguely resembles the corpse, and a TEENAGE BOY.

He stares at the mess for a beat, utterly traumatized.

MAN (CONT'D)

I need a drink.

Zoom in on the picture of that teenage boy as we cut to:

TITLE: TWELVE YEARS LATER

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Beautiful sunshine. Idyllic woods. Animals prancing. Like something out of a storybook. A deer frolics.

RIPNER (V.O.)

Once upon a time, two people met.
They fell for each other. They
lost each other. They got each
other back.

We follow hummingbirds as they zoom through the trees and up to beautiful flowers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER (V.O.)
It's a classic formula.

A petal falls.

RIPNER (V.O.)
But we don't live in a fairy tale
these days.

It lands on a raccoon rummaging through garbage outside a Los Angeles school. It's rabid. It HISSES at A ROMANTIC COUPLE HOLDING HANDS and chases them into the building, revealing them to be TWO WOMEN.

INT. CAMPBELL HALL - DAY

The couple enters a high school auditorium in the midst of an ANTI PROP 8 FUNDRAISER. The room is swarming with CATER WAITERS and far-too-sober POTENTIAL DONORS.

RIPNER SMITH, 28, the charismatic adult version of the teenage boy, stands at a podium.

RIPNER
Happily ever after isn't a right
that everyone shares equally. Prop
8 made sure of that. And until
every man and woman in this state
can marry the man or woman they
love, the only thing I will marry
is this cause.

The crowd applauds enthusiastically.

BITCHY BOSS (O.S.)
Big sacrifice.

Across the room, the caterers' BITCHY BOSS, 40, is with disgruntled-looking cater waiter EMALINE WHITE, 27.

BITCHY BOSS (CONT'D)
As if straight men need another
reason to not commit. Thanks gays.

Bitchy Boss wanders off. When she's gone, Emaline dumps a BATCH OF PASTRIES in the garbage and replaces them with a batch of her own. They look the same.

She carries the plate around the room, making sure people eat them. But she suddenly stops, feeling light headed. Off balance, she slams into someone. AND ALL GOES BLACK.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TITLE CARD - **BOY MEETS GIRL**

A flash of light. A HANDSOME MAN is backlit by the ceiling lights. His features in shadow except for his PIERCING BLUE EYES.

Emaline is on the floor. The man above is Ripner. As he helps her up, she wobbles again. He catches her.

RIPNER

Careful. Don't fall.

Emaline gazes into Ripner's baby blues and melts.

EMALINE

I already did.

BITCHY BOSS glares at Emaline from across the room. As Emaline picks up the pastries, she brushes hair out of her face, leaving a RED SMUDGE that looks like blood.

RIPNER

Are you hurt?

Emaline looks down at the back of her hand. A RED SMEAR on it. Confused, she licks it. And smiles.

EMALINE

Strawberry jam. Here, try one.

He tries to refuse the floor food, but she shoves a tiny, jam-filled treat in his mouth. It's really good, but...

RIPNER

Is there booze in this?

EMALINE

Of course. I spiked it.

RIPNER

You spiked the desserts? At a school?

EMALINE

Drunk people give bigger donations.

Ripner goes to argue, but can't. He looks around and sees the crowd loosening up. His COWORKER runs toward him.

COWORKER

Ripner, you gotta work the room while it's hot!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A flicker of excitement rushes through Ripner. And when he looks at Emaline, it flows through her too. He squints at her NAME TAG as he's dragged away.

RIPNER

Thanks for the help...Emily!

Emaline's face drops.

EMALINE

It's...
(he's gone)
Emaline.

Annoyed at herself, Emaline drops a pastry on Bitchy Boss' seat before she sits down. SQUISH. Emaline smiles.

TITLE CARD - **BOY FALLS FOR GIRL**

EXT. FARMER'S MARKET - MORNING

Ripner looks at an apple like it might bite him back. He's drawn to a sign reading, "BOOZY FLOOZY'S DESSERTS."

Sweet old GRAMS, 82, is handling a stand filled with ALCOHOL-INFUSED JAMS, JELLIES, PRESERVES AND BAKED GOODS. Emaline, now in her natural habitat, wearing a sundress and combat boots, has her back to Ripner, unloading jars.

RIPNER

Bitter Boysenberry Blues? What else is in it?

GRAMS

Lots of love.

EMALINE

And by "love," she means rum.
Don't jam and drive. Seriously.

She turns to see it's Ripner. He doesn't notice. Emaline instinctively drops and crawls out of her stand. Rip catches a glimpse of her as she ducks behind a peach stand. The STAND OWNER makes a scene. Emaline backs away, bumping into Ripner and sending PEACHES to the pavement.

They crouch down to pick them up. Emaline's cool demeanor is flushed with flirtation, but she pulls a serious face.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

I'm not Emily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

Me neither.
 (beat)
 It's nice to see you again,
 Emaline.

EMALINE

Oh so you do know my name?

RIPNER

I called your boss to commend your
 work ethic. She ran through five
 other names before saying I
 couldn't possibly mean you.

Emaline blushes. She picks up a SINGLE PERFECT PEACH. It
 somehow avoided bruising. She looks at it in awe.

EMALINE

It survived the fall.

Returning it to the stand, she looks over to see Ripner's
 bright blue eyes looking at her in the exact same way.

RIPNER

But I'm not sure I will.

Emaline flashes a smile so radiant it looks like her face
 might explode. And Ripner can't help but mirror it back.

TITLE CARD - **ONE YEAR LATER**

INT. EMALINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Still decorated from her Emo/Punk high school years.
 Emaline comes in wearing her cater waiter uniform. Ripner
 follows, tickling her as she squeals. They fall on the
 bed, knocking her GUITAR to the floor with a loud CLANG.

EMALINE

Shhh. Grams is sleeping!

Ripner nuzzles her neck, and Emaline giggles. She squirms
 out from under him and shimmies out of her pants. Ripner
 picks up the guitar, strumming haphazardly.

RIPNER

Well how am I supposed to get some
 Boozy Floozy action in this house?

Pulling her PAY STUB out of a pocket, she puts it inside
 a FILING BOX and quickly adds this week's pay to a record
 reading "BOOZY FLOOZY'S DESSERT BAR."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE

If you have a better suggestion on how to save rent, I'm all ears.

RIPNER

(avoiding)
I'll think about it.

Emaline crawls back on the bed with him.

EMALINE

And I'll think about the grand opening of my real dessert bar.

RIPNER

To the chagrin of alcoholic diabetics everywhere. Hey, I bet my dad will be your best customer!

Ripner's phone buzzes. He practically knocks Emaline off the bed to respond to a text. She takes his phone away.

EMALINE

Work can wait when I'm in my underwear.

Rip kisses her deeply.

RIPNER

I'll multi-task.

His phone buzzes again. His Pavlovian response is to snatch it from her. Emaline stares daggers.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Hey, I have a historical legacy to live up to here.

EMALINE

Oh, do you need me to scootch over to make room for your ego?

RIPNER

You didn't know my mom. She was obsessed with our family's role in changing history. The French Revolution to the civil rights movement...hell, my mom sponsored three anti-discrimination laws before she died. It's in my blood.

EMALINE

Busy lady. I bet you got to buy all your lunches at school.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

I did actually.

(beat)

Stale tater tots on styrofoam trays. All I really wanted was a homemade peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Ripner gets lost in the sudden memory.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

She almost made me one. Got out the bread, opened the jars. Like a real mom. It's dumb, but in that moment I felt so...loved. Then her phone rang. All I got was bread with peanut butter. No jelly.

A rare glimpse of the sweet man behind the brash facade. Emaline could not be more in love.

EMALINE

So you're just using me for my jelly?

Ripner looks at her, stirred by his own memories. He smiles and holds her face, staring deep in her eyes. Connected. Then his phone buzzes. Moment broken.

RIPNER

(Off the text)

I got it! Tomorrow morning. A meeting with The United States of Equality! They're like the gay rights gods!

He finishes typing a response and puts his phone on her night stand, satisfied. She now has his full attention.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Want me to sing for you?

EMALINE

You're a terrible singer.

But Rip grabs the guitar and sings for her anyway. The lovely melody of The Weepies' "World Spins Madly On." *THE NIGHT IS HERE/THE DAY IS GONE/AND THE WORLD SPINS MADLY ON...* It's charmingly horrible.

Emaline has nuzzled the bridge of her nose in the crook of his neck - her spot. Fast asleep. Ripner smiles, clearly smitten. But a sudden sinking feeling sneaks in.

INT. GARAGE - MORNING

The garage behind Emaline's house is converted into a veritable jam and jelly factory. There is a HUGE FREEZER next to shelves stocked with supplies and BOOZE.

Emaline is hard at work mixing a new recipe with Grams, who uses a VACUUM SEALER to suck the air out of a finished jar. She adds it to the stock on a shelf.

Grams observes her granddaughter, passionately engrossed. Happy. She holds a STRAWBERRY out to her.

GRAMS

You know, as soon as a fruit is picked, it's dying. Preserving its flavor in another form is like giving it a second life.

(tasting the jam)

And your second life is...really strong.

Grams' face contorts from the alcohol. Emaline laughs.

EMALINE

You taught me.

GRAMS

All I did was take your affinity for Jello shots and steer it in a more ladylike direction. And when I'm gone I want you to take the insurance money and finally make something of this.

EMALINE

Shut your mouth you're never dying!

GRAMS

I love you too.

THE PHONE RINGS. Emaline gets jam on it.

EMALINE

(jokingly)

Boozy Floozy hotline.

She's hoping it's Rip, but...

DOCTOR MURRAY (O.S.)

Emaline, it's Dr. Murray. I have your test results.

Emaline quickly steps away from Grams.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE

Oh. That was fast. Are they...

DOCTOR MURRAY (O.S.)

It's what we expected. The results are positive.

Emaline's face goes pale.

DOCTOR MURRAY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

If you'd like to come in to discuss your options we can...

His voice fades, drowned out by Emaline's POUNDING HEART.

TITLE CARD - **BOY LOSES GIRL**

INT. BACKYARD - LATER

Emaline stares at a BUSHEL OF SPOILED FRUIT, confused.

EMALINE

I thought these were fresh.

She's more upset than necessary. Rip walks up. She pulls herself together before he kisses her hello.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Hey. How'd your meeting go?

Rip sits down at an outdoor table as Em distractedly picks through the bushel. Rip looks uncharacteristically nervous.

RIPNER

Em...I wasn't prepared to do this today, but...

Ripner drops his phone, Emaline doesn't notice. He kneels down to pick it up.

Grams comes out with FRESH PASTRIES and sees Rip down on one knee. Thinking it's a proposal, she drops the tray.

GRAMS

I need my Polaroid!

As Rip looks toward Grams scurrying inside, Emaline looks up from the rotten fruit and sees him on one knee. She panics. He looks up and...

EMALINE

I need to tell you something.

RIPNER

I'm moving back to DC.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Emaline loses her breath. Rip sits back down.

EMALINE

You're moving?

RIPNER

What do you need to tell -

EMALINE

When?

RIPNER

Immediately. The U.S.E. guys want me to join their team. That's what the meeting was about. I'm still processing.

EMALINE

Wow. I...that's really great.

RIPNER

It is, right? I spent all morning making arrangements. It's amazing!

Seeing her life changing in abrupt fashion, Emaline laughs the shock away and gets annoyed at herself.

EMALINE

I'm such a girl. I actually thought you were proposing.

Ripner visibly clenches at the thought. Em notices.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Is that such a terrible idea?

RIPNER

No. It's not. I just. Have so much I want to do. The thought of being tied down never crossed my mind.

EMALINE

And I do bear a striking resemblance to a ball and chain.

RIPNER

I didn't mean it like that.

He reaches out to her, but she pulls away. Walls up.

EMALINE

So you're breaking up with me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

I'm being fast tracked, Em. Who knows where I'll be in a couple years. I just...won't have time for anything else.

That comment strikes Emaline in an unexpected way. Her hand on her chest, eyes tearing up, but holding it in.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I should...yeah.

He gets up, goes to hug her. She doesn't reciprocate. He nods and starts walking away.

EMALINE

Tell me you don't love me.

Ripner hesitates, almost speaks, but then he keeps going.

Em picks up a ROTTING PEACH and throws it at him.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

You're a fucking Tin-Man!

That stings. He looks like he might reconsider. But...

RIPNER

Life is more than love, Em.

Grams finally busts out of the house, carrying an ancient POLAROID CAMERA. The picture flashes.

Grams sees her granddaughter's tears. She goes to her.

At their feet, the Polaroid develops - Ripner leaving Emaline alone with a basket of rotting fruit.

We follow Rip, steeling himself in his decision, moving forward with his life as Emaline fades into his past.

TITLE CARD - THREE YEARS LATER: BOY GETS GIRL BACK WHAT HE DESERVES

SMART ALEC (PRE-LAP)

"If love is the root of equality, then Ripner Smith is a gardener planting those seeds."

INT. RIPNER'S OFFICE - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

"SMART" ALEC, 25, Ripner's bookish assistant, is reading the quote off an INVITATION in a downtown office. Ripner is tying a bow tie. The final touches on a dapper tux.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

I do like to get my hands dirty
for a good cause. Who said that?

SMART ALEC

Oprah.

RIPNER

Huh. I was hoping for someone a
bit more notable.

Smart Alec can't tell if he's joking or not. The moment
breaks when the NEWS comes back on a TV in the corner. An
attractive female newscaster (NORA COLLINS) is standing
outside the NEWSEUM on Pennsylvania Ave.

NORA COLLINS

As a controversial new law that
would make same-sex marriage a
federally sanctioned right is
being pushed through Congress,
celebrities and politicians have
gathered tonight to honor the man
responsible.

Intercut footage of Ripner glad-handing various WELL-
KNOWN POLITICIANS and CELEBRITIES over the years. Back to
Nora as ANTI-GAY PROTESTORS clamor for attention.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

It seems that Mr. Smith did, in
fact, go to Washington. And
Washington loves him. This is Nora
Collins, reporting from outside
the gala, about to join the fun.

Ripner snaps the TV off. Turns to Smart Alec.

RIPNER

If she keeps gushing like that
we're both going to lose
credibility. I mean, "Washington
loves me?"

He waits expectantly for Smart Alec to play disciple to
his god-complex. Alec misses his cue.

SMART ALEC

(unconvincing)

They do.

Ripner is on the move.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Smart Alec eagerly chases after him.

RIPNER

The least she could have done was balance it out by mentioning what my detractors say. What's O'Reilly always calling me?

SMART ALEC

The Narcissistic King of Manipulation?

RIPNER

(That kinda stings)

No.

Into the elevator.

SMART ALEC

The Egomaniacal Poker Faced Double Talking Sociopath?

RIPNER

(frustrated)

No. Not that.

The doors shut.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

The elevator opens. Rip strides out, Smart Alec chases.

SMART ALEC

Oh. The Tin-Man?

That echo from the past hits him, but he shakes it off.

RIPNER

The ICE MAN. Which I think is flattering in its mockery because it draws attention to my reputation as a cool-operator. If she had mentioned that name, then it would have cut nicely with footage of tonight when they get to see what a great sense of humor I have about myself. You did get the special order, right?

SMART ALEC

It was delivered an hour ago.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ripner turns abruptly and Smart Alec runs right into him. Ripner grabs Smart Alec's shoulders dramatically.

RIPNER

It's not Washington that loves me.
She's attached. You're lucky
you're not bringing a date to
this. You're smart, Alec.

Ripner heads out of the building. Smart Alec is stunned.

SMART ALEC

I was allowed a plus one?

INT. NEWSEUM - NIGHT

Smart Alec guides Ripner through the crowd within the newly unveiled "United States of Equality Exhibit."

NORA COLLINS(O.S.)

I wanted the exclusive outside.

It's his girlfriend in the flesh. She's his female equivalent: all beauty, all smiles, and all business.

RIPNER

You know I can't play favorites
Nora. It's nothing personal.

NORA COLLINS

Power couples play favorites Rip.
They grab the world by the balls-
(grabs him by his)
-and squeeze them until they get
what they deserve. Together.

Ripner bristles at the implication. Smart Alec saves him.

SMART ALEC

Miss Collins, Senator Wilkins is
on his fifth scotch and soda.
Without the soda.

NORA COLLINS

Oh, I love when people fall off
the wagon and into the press.

Nora kisses Rip and glides into the crowd like a socializing shark. Ripner refocuses on his surroundings with pride. Alec pulls out PAPER AND PEN.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC

Sir, this may be a bad time, but you never signed the paperwork for my promotion. This cause means so much to me and -

RIPNER

It's a historic night Alec. And you helped! Good for you too! Now where's the special order?

Ripner heads to the elevators, thrilled for them both. Frustrated, Smart Alec puts the letter in his pocket.

SMART ALEC

Also, yay for gay rights?

EXT. NEWSEUM ROOFTOP - LATER

A rooftop gala. Stunning views of all of Washington DC lit up at night. And Ripner is looking out over it all.

Actually, that's not Ripner; it's his "special order" - a TWENTY-FOOT ICE SCULPTURE OF HIMSELF WITH GAY AND AMERICAN FLAGS crossed in his hands.

Below it, the real Ripner is mid-speech.

RIPNER

As some of you may know, there's a little nickname I've been called in the press.

(pause for chuckles)

And as I turn to see this real-life version of myself as "The Ice Man," I can't help but think, "How have I been frozen?"

Smart Alec hands Ripner a CONTROL that ignites a WARM, GLOWING, ELECTRIC HEART in the chest of the ice sculpture, just between the two flags.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

If by "frozen," they mean that I am immovable in knowing what is right and what is just...

The electric heart is emitting heat. The sculpture is sweating. Melting. He reaches up and removes both flags from the sculpture, causing it to crack.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

...then yes; call me The Ice Man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The heart is getting brighter, overheating the ice sculpture. The shoulders are cracking and melting. Bits falling off. Smart Alec sees this, tries to warn him.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Because I will keep this cause
frozen in my heart until the time
comes when granting civil rights
isn't news; it's history!

Just as Ripner thrusts the flags up in the air to a standing ovation, the sculpture breaks apart and THE ICY HEAD PLUMMETS INTO RIPNER'S SKULL, killing him instantly.

The electric heart short circuits, AND ALL GOES DARK.

TITLE CARD - **STAGE ONE: FRESH**

Nothing but black. Then a bright light, getting bigger and bigger. And a FLASH.

INT. HOSPITAL MORGUE

Ripner opens his eyes. He's staring up at a bright examination light above him. Confused, he sits up to see a curtain drawn around his bed. He has a sheet draped over his lower half. He must be in the hospital.

Rubbing his woozy head, he remembers what happened and is horribly embarrassed.

SOMEONE enters the room beyond the curtain. Rip braces himself for damage control, slaps on his killer smile.

But as the curtain is pulled back, Rip's smile drops. He's not in a patient room; he's in a MORGUE.

The young MORTICIAN who pulled back the curtain is still looking at a CHART and preparing SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS.

RIPNER

Hello?

The Mortician SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Please stop.

The Mortician keeps screaming, clutching a SCALPEL. Ripner grabs him by the collar.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I need you to calm down and tell me what is going on and why you have a scalpel in your hand.

MORTICIAN

You're an organ donor!

Ripner lets him go, maintaining his public persona.

RIPNER

Yes. I'm very charitable.

MORTICIAN

But...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Ripner, now in a hospital gown, sits in an examination room. A dozen DOCTORS, NURSES, and ADMINISTRATORS stare at him in various stages of shock, awe, and confusion.

A heart monitor is attached to Rip's body. It's a constant FLATLINE.

HEAD DOCTOR

Mr. Smith, it appears that you're dead. Clinically speaking, of course.

RIPNER

But clearly I'm alive.

DOCTOR 2

That's not what our records show.

RIPNER

But I'm speaking to you.

The doctors, nurses, and administrators confer with each other, looking over charts and documents.

HEAD DOCTOR

The thing is, Mr. Smith, we've never encountered a condition like yours. You have no vital signs whatsoever. And yet, here you are. We've run all the tests we can think of, but we aren't sure there's anything we can do for you. To be perfectly frank, there just isn't a cure for death.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ADMINISTRATOR

On the other hand, you also seem to be in some state of reanimation. Which puts us in a very sticky situation.

RIPNER

I don't understand.

DOCTOR 2

There isn't a hospital policy on this particular scenario.

A NURSE with Ripner's chart peeps up softly.

NURSE

Sir. Is this a matter for health insurance or life insurance? Who are we billing?

Ripner begins to panic.

RIPNER

Forget who you're billing! Worry about who I'm suing!

He rips the heart monitor off. The FLATLINE continues.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

This makes no sense!

HEAD DOCTOR

Agreed.

(to other doctors)

What if the condition is temporary? Maybe we should keep him overnight for observation. It could clear up on its own.

But they turn back to find that Rip is gone. The Administrator is relieved.

ADMINISTRATOR

Oh thank god.

(to the group)

He was never here. We never saw him. And we definitely never tried to harvest his organs.

HE TEARS UP RIPNER'S FILES. The group looks uncertain. Lacking a defense, the Administrator slowly backs out of the room, waving his fingers in front of him.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)

This was all a dream...

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREETS - NIGHT

Ripner flees the hospital, clad only in his hospital gown. Panicked, confused, and bare-assed.

INT. RIPNER'S APARTMENT - LATER

Rip ducks into his apartment and snaps on the lights. It's a hip, modern bachelor pad. Pretty much what you'd expect of this guy. It's safe. Familiar. Out of habit, he plops down on the couch and turns on the TV News.

Nora is holding a candle outside the Newseum. She's bleary eyed, but putting on a show of powering through.

NORA COLLINS

Today we mourn the loss of one of Washington's brightest up-and-comers. Fondly known as "The Ice Man" to those he worked with, Ripner Smith suffered a tragic accidental death that makes that name all too appropriate.

RIPNER

Oh NOW you use the name?

Cut to footage of the ice sculpture's head crashing down upon Ripner. On repeat. Ripner grimaces each time.

NORA COLLINS

As many of you know, Ripner and I were planning a life together.

RIPNER

We were?

With smeared mascara, she pauses for effect - this is her moment in the spotlight. And she is milking it.

NORA COLLINS

Rest assured, I will fight through my own personal loss to continue telling the exclusive, first-hand account of the death of Ripner Smith and the fate of the pending legislation. It all begins here, with a public memorial tomorrow.

A sudden overwhelming feeling strikes Rip. Jealousy.

RIPNER

She's gonna get her own 20/20.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The door swings open and in walks Smart Alec, carrying Ripner's PERSONAL ITEMS and talking on the phone.

SMART ALEC
Well you better FIND IT!

He doesn't yet notice Ripner sitting on the couch.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)
If I don't see the body of Ripner
Smith in the next twenty four
hours, you better prepare yourself
for the LAWSUIT OF A LIFETIME YOU
INEPT PAPER PUSHING BUREAUCRATIC
HEALTH INSURANCE MANGLING MORON!

He snaps the phone shut and drops his head, overwhelmed.

RIPNER (O.C.)
Hi.

Smart Alec jumps, dropping everything. When he sees Ripner, he doesn't scream. He just stands there staring. Ripner sees his I-PHONE.

RIPNER (CONT'D)
My phone! Thank god.

Smart Alec processes this situation and is quickly enraged. He punches Ripner in the face. Ripner falls.

RIPNER (CONT'D)
What was that for?!

SMART ALEC
YOU FAKED YOUR DEATH? Why wasn't I
in the loop? Here I've been
beating myself up as a bad
assistant for failing to keep you
alive, but of course, it's all
about you. What's the political
gain here? Do you think martyrdom
will help get the legislation
through? And what's the plan when
people see you alive and well?

Ripner thinks about this for a moment.

RIPNER
That depends on your definition of
"alive."

EXT. NEWSEUM - MORNING

A CROWD stands outside the location of Ripner's tragic death. Across the street ANTI-GAY MARRIAGE PROTESTORS continue their screaming.

Ripner, dressed in a suit, trench coat, glasses and hat, steps into the crowd with a paranoid, creeped out Smart Alec in tow.

SMART ALEC

This is a terrible idea. I should be in a psych ward. And on the off chance I'm not hallucinating, you should be back in the hospital.

RIPNER

Whatever is happening, I have no pulse. I've risen again.

(beat)

For the first time I actually understand the whole "What Would Jesus Do?" thing.

The street is closed and a stage is set up in front of the Newseum. SWARMS OF NEWS CREWS flank a HUGE CROWD.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

(disappointed)

People must be running late. Can you go find me a program?

Smart Alec can't believe he's doing this, but he weaves through the crowd just as Nora takes the stage, welcoming everyone to the memorial.

Ripner tries to find a better view without revealing himself. He trips over what appears to be a DRUNK BUM sitting on the ground. Ripner lands with a sharp CRACK in his arm, but he doesn't feel anything.

He turns to yell at the bum, but when he sees his face...

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Dad?

Yup. This is Ripner's estranged, very DRUNK DAD, 65. Last seen surviving the Female Corpse in the intro, he now sports a rumpled suit and a week's worth of stubble. His reaction to seeing his dead son alive...an eye roll and a swig from his FLASK. He shakes his head disapprovingly.

DRUNK DAD

Not you too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

You see your dead son at his own memorial after years of radio silence and that's your reaction?

DRUNK DAD

I'm sorry. I forgot to add I told you so.

RIPNER

What?

DRUNK DAD

You had to be just like your mother. Politics and change and family history and self important tree hugging bullshit. Now look at you. Dead and breathing. So congratulations. Just like her.

RIPNER

What are you doing here?

DRUNK DAD

Hoping you managed to rest in peace. But nope. Not my wife. Not my son. And I can't help but feel like I'm partially responsible for the mess you've become.

RIPNER

I'M the mess?

DRUNK DAD

You're a zombie. I'd say that's a mess.

RIPNER

(disbelieving)

I'm a zombie? Like I eat people?

DRUNK DAD

No. You don't eat people. But you do have until that body of yours fully decomposes to sort this out.

Ripner tries to wrap his head around this.

RIPNER

My body is decomposing?

DRUNK DAD

You don't smell that?

Ripner pulls his father away from the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

What the hell is going on and why do you know anything about this?

DRUNK DAD

Let me tell you a little bedtime story. Once upon a time there was your mother. And I loved her. And she spent more time in this god-forsaken city than with her family. And it killed her. One law-making phone call while driving and SMASH BANG DEAD.

RIPNER

And then you went on a drinking binge and I was stuck with the neighbors for a week. Alone! I know this story.

DRUNK DAD

No you don't. She came back. Just like you. Escaped the crematorium and came ranting and raving about how she's in some fairy tale curse she read about in her family album. How she needs to understand the meaning of life before she turns to dust or she won't go to the afterlife.

RIPNER

And what's the meaning of life?

Drunk Dad stares at Ripner for a beat. Ripner stares blankly back. He's clueless.

DRUNK DAD

It's love you idiot! True, pure, love!

RIPNER

Didn't she love you?

DRUNK DAD

Not as much as her job. Anyway, she held me hostage in our basement for a week trying to sort out our marriage woes. A dollar late and a day short.

Drunk Dad's eyes glaze over as he relives the trauma.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DRUNK DAD (CONT'D)

And she rotted and decomposed to a pile of bones and dust before my very eyes. Took two days for anyone to find me and you all thought I had just dumped her ashes everywhere in a drunken fit. But I was dead sober. For the last time.

RIPNER

This is ridiculous.

DRUNK DAD

Says the talking dead guy.

Drunk Dad pulls out a FAMILY ALBUM and thrusts it at Rip. It takes several attempts to connect with Rip's hands.

DRUNK DAD (CONT'D)

You better get reading. You don't have much time.

RIPNER

Are you serious?

DRUNK DAD

As a zombie's widower. You're dead, son. And the quicker you figure out your own fairy tale the better. And...there's lots of fairies here, so...that's weirdly appropriate.

(beat)

You deserve something more than dust.

RIPNER

And what are you gonna do?

DRUNK DAD

Drink till I forget this happened too. I'm sorry Rip. I can't do this again. I came to say goodbye.

Drunk Dad gives Rip an awkward hug, then stumbles off, trying to suppress the emotions and memories flooding back. Rip turns around to see Smart Alec heard it all.

SMART ALEC

I'm...sorry sir. I had no idea he was...Is there anything I can do?

Ripner shoves the album at him and snags the PROGRAM.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RIPNER
No musical tribute?

INT. RIPNER'S APARTMENT - LATER

Smart Alec speed reads the family album. It includes a FAMILY TREE going back through the ages. Ripner paces behind him reading The Washington Post.

SMART ALEC
This is unbelievable.

RIPNER
I know. I'm below the fold.

Smart Alec snatches the paper from him.

SMART ALEC
Your family goes all the way back to a small French village in the late 1700's. According to this, your Mom thought your ancestors were the basis of..."La Belle et La Bete."

Ripner pauses for a moment, mentally translating.

RIPNER
Beauty and the Beast?

SMART ALEC
Yes. But the beast was a heartless creature. A living dead thing.

Ripner leans in over Smart Alec's shoulder. Very close. Smart Alec is suddenly unnerved.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)
You're not...hungry are you?

RIPNER
I'm not a zombie.

Smart Alec takes a FORK from the table and stabs Rip in the hand with it. Rip doesn't even flinch. They both stare at it as it wobbles in place.

RIPNER (CONT'D)
Okay, so I might be a zombie. But I'm not a "zombie" zombie. I can still think and talk and not crave flesh.

He pulls the fork out as Smart Alec continues reading.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC

No one in your family seems to have successfully broken the curse, so it's been passed down generation to generation. It builds up exponentially - none of them go to the afterlife till someone breaks the curse.

RIPNER

That's ridiculous.

SMART ALEC

Says the talking dead guy.

RIPNER

Don't quote my Dad! He hasn't been sober this decade.

SMART ALEC

Well if what he says about your mom is true, I'd say he's dealing with some pretty serious post traumatic stress disorder. And I'm guessing when I come to my senses I'll be joining his support group.

RIPNER

Focus Alec! La Belle et La Bete...I've only seen the movie. And it had a happy ending where she kisses the beast and he turns into the handsome prince again!

SMART ALEC

(flipping through the book)

I don't think that's how this works. It only says that breaking the curse will return your body to how it looked when it first began.

RIPNER

(not listening)

All I need to do is get Nora to kiss me and this will all be over!

Before Smart Alec looks up, Ripner is already gone.

SMART ALEC

That's...a horrible idea.

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nora is snoring on top of her bed next to a bottle of SLEEPING PILLS. Ripner lets himself into the apartment. He stands over her. He gently nudges her.

RIPNER

Nora.

(no response)

Nora.

(she sleepily swats
at him)

NORA!

Nora pops up. He pulls her SLEEPING MASK off. She's too out of it to realize this isn't a dream.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I need you to kiss me.

NORA

Mmmhmmm.

Nora sleepily kisses him. Nothing happens. Ripner grabs her and kisses again. Checks his pulse. Nothing. He kisses her again and again until finally she's wide awake. She pulls back, gets a good look at him.

AND SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER.

NORA (CONT'D)

Poltergeist!

Nora falls off the bed and runs smack into the door, knocking herself out. Not knowing what to do, Ripner checks her vitals, puts her back in bed, and slowly backs out of the apartment, unaware that he DROPPED HIS PHONE.

INT. RIPNER'S APARTMENT - LATER

Ripner returns. Smart Alec looks horribly disappointed.

SMART ALEC

While researching body
decomposition and how to keep a
corpse fresh, I had a moment of
clarity and decided this had all
been stress-induced psychosis and
was convinced you wouldn't return.

Smart Alec gathers his things and heads for the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

Where are you going? You have to help me!

SMART ALEC

This is not in my job description.

Ripner slams the door shut and blocks Alec's escape.

RIPNER

Yes it is! Under personal duties. This is very, very personal.

Smart Alec is torn between duty and sanity.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

WHAT WOULD OBAMA DO?

SMART ALEC

Use you as the new face of health care reform. Now move!

RIPNER

If you do this, I will sign your promotion paperwork. Back dated. It'll be binding. It's in my contract.

Alec hesitates. Looking at this man who has asked so much of him in the past, but never so desperately.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

The cause needs you.

INT. RIPNER'S APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

The sun is rising outside as Alec uses his BLACKBERRY to fire off some final e-mails. He's incredibly efficient.

He looks over to see Ripner lying on the couch, head cocked back. Looks asleep. Or dead. He's not breathing. Alec approaches cautiously. Gets really close to Rip's face, studying him. Sure he isn't going to wake up.

Rip opens his eyes and they both scream and fall back.

RIPNER

What the hell are you doing?

Smart Alec scrambles up, gathering his senses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC

I was. You weren't. Breathing. I...I've delayed your funeral, claimed possession of your body, and I've pulled up a list of ways to keep you "alive" as long as possible. The best bet is to get you embalmed, but until then keeping you refrigerated will help maintain your flesh.

(beat)

I can't believe I just said that.

RIPNER

No no. Crisis mode. It's better than disbelief and panic.

SMART ALEC

There are five stages of decay - fresh, bloat, black putrefaction, butyric fermentation and dry decay. It's all very technical, but you'll probably last anywhere from a few days to a week or so, depending on environmental factors, body maintenance and insect activity.

RIPNER

INSECT ACTIVITY?

SMART ALEC

Yeah. Maggots won't be helpful with this true love thing. What happened with Nora?

Ripner gets sheepish.

RIPNER

You know. We kissed. She knocked herself out. I'm still dead alive.

SMART ALEC

That's gonna be a problem. You can't just go around traumatizing people from the grave. Especially opportunistic journalists using your death as the cornerstone of a multimedia blitz.

Ripner drops his head, at a loss.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

Isn't there anyone in your life who cares about you? Family?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

Mom is dead and you saw the state
my dad is in.

Alec looks at Rip sympathetically, but Rip can't handle
that kind of emotion. He gets up and crosses the room.

SMART ALEC

Too bad you don't have a dog. Dogs
know the purest love.

RIPNER

I hate dogs.

SMART ALEC

But...the Pound Puppy Proposition?

RIPNER

Looked good on my resume.

Frustrated, Ripner bangs his head on a book shelf. He
sees AN EMPTY JAR OF JAM tucked away behind some books.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

The most important after party of
my life and it's the only one I
need help getting into.

He tosses the jar to Smart Alec. The homemade label
reads, "BOOZY FLOOZY'S DESSERT BAR."

SMART ALEC

Who's the Boozy Floozy?

RIPNER

My ex. In Los Angeles.

SMART ALEC

Well, it's your funeral. Are we
moving locations?

RIPNER

She used to love me.

Smart Alec starts tapping away to make arrangements.

SMART ALEC

Hope this girl has more fight than
flight in her.

RIPNER

I'm pretty sure I'm more afraid of
her than she'll be of me.

TITLE CARD - **STAGE TWO: BLOAT**

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Smart Alec sits comfortably in a first class seat, staring with guarded horror and intellectual curiosity at DAWN OF THE DEAD on his in-seat TV. He's taking notes.

He hears some ruckus below. Might be turbulence. Might be something else.

Pan down into...

INT. CARGO BAY/CASKET - SAME TIME

Amidst the luggage and other checked items is a CASKET, and inside it, Ripner lies with a little FLASHLIGHT and a book, THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE. A NOTE on the cover says "Romance 101. Read this." Rip is utterly horrified at his situation. Or maybe just the book.

INT. NORA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nora wakes up from her sleep, confused by the SWOLLEN BUMP on her head from knocking herself out. She looks in the mirror, then at a PICTURE OF RIP. Remembers her "nightmare" and shakes it off. She dials her phone.

NORA

Hey Charlie. Did you get my message about televising the funeral?

(beat)

No I haven't read my e-mail.

(beat)

Well I'm a grieving widow...type person and I-

Nora notices something on her floor. It's RIP'S PHONE.

NORA (CONT'D)

-did not sleep very well.

Confused, she puts the phone down and taps her computer, scanning an e-mail from Smart Alec.

NORA (CONT'D)

LOS ANGELES?!

EXT. LAX - LATER

Smart Alec exits the airport with a suit-clad DRIVER rolling Ripner's CASKET to an idling HEARSE. The casket CLUNKS off the curb with an AUDIBLE GRUNT from inside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The driver pauses for a moment, about to say something, but Smart Alec CLEARS HIS THROAT AND COUGHS AND GRUNTS as if it were him. The driver looks at him like he's nuts.

INT. CASKET - SAME TIME

Ripner tries to remain silent as he's jostled into the hearse. Still reading the book, but now he's into it. He casually scratches at his ear, unaware of the MAGGOT crawling out. It's only a matter of time before...

INT. HEARSE - MOMENTS LATER

Smart Alec sits in the front seat with the Driver when...

THE CASKET SHAKES AND JERKS AROUND.

The driver looks in his rearview, swerving in the road.

HEARSE DRIVER

It moved!

Smart Alec looks back and sees the casket move again. He attempts to think fast...

SMART ALEC

Well if you'd drive like a sane person in this LA traffic maybe it wouldn't! Seriously. This traffic. In Los Angeles. Crazy.

There is no traffic. The driver looks warily at Smart Alec, then back at the casket, which is no longer moving. Then back at the road. Disturbed.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - DAY

The driver unloads the casket like it's possessed. He looks suspiciously at the house and reluctantly hands Smart Alec his CARD.

HEARSE DRIVER

If we can be of further service in your time of... bereavement.

He gets in the car and speeds off like a bat out of hell.

Smart Alec pockets the card and rolls the casket up the driveway, being as intentionally rough as possible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

When the coast is clear, he unlatches the casket and Ripner comes bounding out, jumping and squealing and slapping at his head as if he's covered in bugs.

SMART ALEC

What part of play dead did you not understand?

RIPNER

You try traveling for 8 hours in a coffin only to have MAGGOTS crawling out of your ear! MAGGOTS! Do you know what that feels like? It itches on the INSIDE!

SMART ALEC

And do you know what it's like smuggling a living dead person cross country? It's a tad bit STRESSFUL!

A few final shakes of the willies and Ripner calms down.

RIPNER

I'm sorry if I'm not the epitome of a proper corpse at the moment, but it's my first time as a zombie. I don't know what I'm doing!

Rip then shoves THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE at Smart Alec.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

And this book...you're telling me that love is a tortuous life-long struggle? And I mean, seriously, a genetic disorder that makes him spontaneously time travel? Really?

Smart Alec flicks a maggot off Ripner's shoulder.

SMART ALEC

Says the living dead guy.

Ripner almost snaps back, but sees that he's standing in front of Emaline's garage/jam factory. Right where he was the last time he saw her. This is all becoming very real.

Smart Alec gets a good look at Rip's current state. His skin is starting to look pale and loose. Not quite horrifying, but he definitely doesn't look right.

Rip turns toward the house, suddenly nervous.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

She's not home. I called ahead.

Rip looks both relieved and disappointed.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

When was the last time you saw her?

RIPNER

Three years ago. She threw rotting fruit at me.

SMART ALEC

Oh. So I'm sure this will go swimmingly.

RIPNER

Shouldn't I go find her at work or something? The maggots suggest I'm short on time here.

Smart Alec looks at Rip's condition again. A FLY keeps swarming around his head. The sun beats down on them.

SMART ALEC

I think you'll have a better shot with her when it's dark. Very, very dark. Let's get you out of the sun.

Ripner goes over to the garage. It's locked. He finds a POTTED PLANT and lifts it to reveal a KEY.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

He unlocks the garage. Smart Alec wheels the casket inside as Rip looks around nostalgically.

The equipment is covered in cobwebs. Jars of jams and jellies dusted over. Booze shelf empty. Not a fresh fruit in sight. This isn't the way it's supposed to be.

Smart Alec zeroes in on the OPEN TOP FREEZER and starts unloading Emaline's years-old JAMS.

RIPNER

I feel like I should be starving.

Smart Alec suddenly jumps away, grabbing a nearby RAKE for protection. He holds Rip at bay.

SMART ALEC

I am not food!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ripner stares blankly at Smart Alec. He has a jar of jam open and his finger dipped in it.

RIPNER

Jams. She makes delicious jams.

SMART ALEC

Oh. Right.

(puts the rake back)

It's not for you to eat. This is for you to stay fresh. Get in.

RIPNER

(scratching his ear)

But I just got out of a box.

SMART ALEC

It will kill the maggots.

Ripner dives into the freezer. He's about to say something more, but Smart Alec just drops the top on him and breathes a sigh of relief.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

This was not in my five year plan.

RIPNER (O.C.)

ME NEITHER!

A SCRAPPY DOG comes sniffing up from the neighbor's yard, licking his lips. Alec shoos him out and closes the door.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Smart Alec is asleep by the freezer. His phone RINGS, waking him. It's Nora. He's missed 50 messages/calls from her. He ignores this one too. Through the garage windows he sees the lights are on in the house.

Smart Alec opens the freezer to find Rip frosted over. He can't quite move. Smart Alec has to pull Rip up and help maneuver him out of the freezer.

SMART ALEC

She's home.

Rip tries to speak, but his face is too frozen. He goes to move toward the door, but falls flat on the ground.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

Maybe you should defrost first.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

In the dark we see the silhouette of Rip lumbering forward, walking stiffly from being frozen and looking very much the part of a zombie.

From inside the house, sounds of an ACOUSTIC GUITAR can be heard. An angry punk song. Rip's stiff steps almost look like he's moving to the beat. The music stops.

Rip and Smart Alec crouch down at a window and peek in.

INT/EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

INSIDE, Emaline is wearing her pajamas and doing shots of boozy jam. She's definitely not driving tonight.

THROUGH THE WINDOW we can just make out Rip and Smart Alec peeking in.

Emaline opens a BOTTLE OF PILLS, and takes one by rote.

She pauses for a moment, distracted by her thoughts. Looks over at her guitar sitting on a kitchen chair.

SMART ALEC

She's...so not your type. (beat)
In a good way.

Emaline picks it up and sits down, plucking away on it without purpose, just trying to find a song.

OUTSIDE, Rip's eyes ignite with unexpected feelings.

RIPNER

She does that when she's upset.

BACK INSIDE, Emaline continues to play, gently now. She's found her song - the one Rip played for her so long ago.

OUTSIDE, Smart Alec looks at Rip. He's barely breathing. And there are actual TEARS rolling down his cheeks.

Smart Alec puts a hand on Rip's shoulder.

SMART ALEC

So you do have a heart.

Rip shrugs Smart Alec off and wipes his face.

RIPNER

It's just my eyes defrosting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE DOORBELL RINGS. Surprised, Emaline stumbles over to it and peeks out the window. She's shocked at what she sees. She turns around with a WTF look and wipes her eyes before opening the door to reveal...

Nora is on her doorstep. Rip and Alec's mouths drop open.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

What is she doing here?!

SMART ALEC

Turning her nightmare into yours.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Emaline just stares at Nora, who seems to be expecting some sort of fanfare. She realizes none is coming.

NORA

Hi. I'm Nora Collins.

EMALINE

Uh huh.

NORA

The reporter.

EMALINE

Uh huh.

Nora has nothing to work with here.

NORA

I was involved with Ripner Smith.
You are aware of his demise?

EMALINE

I watch the news.

NORA

So you do know me! Great. Will you
be attending his funeral?

EMALINE

You came all this way to
personally invite me?

NORA

Oh no. Of course not. I'm doing a
televised special that will
include footage of the funeral,
which was abruptly moved to Los
Angeles by his assistant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nora's eyes dissect every inch of Emaline's home, right down to her jammies. Emaline closes the door a bit.

NORA (CONT'D)

You can imagine my confusion and heartache. Particularly since I haven't been able to get in touch with him.

EMALINE

Why are you talking at me?

NORA

Well, obviously Ripner would want me to be a part of this, so I hacked into his phone and you were the only Los Angeles contact listed under personal. I thought maybe you were involved in the plans. Being his...old friend.

Emaline stares.

NORA (CONT'D)

Former colleague?

Emaline just slams the door in her face.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Outside, Nora composes herself.

NORA

Challenge accepted.

As she walks to her car, she pulls out her phone.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rip watches as Emaline walks back into the kitchen, looking like a zombie herself.

RIPNER

That was weird.

Smart Alec's phone RINGS. He scrambles to turn it off. Ripner sees that it's Nora calling.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Maybe I should talk to her.

His frozen body lurches stiffly and does another face plant into the bushes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Smart Alec pops his head up, looking in the window again. Emaline is gone.

CLANG! Something knocks Smart Alec to the ground.

Emaline is standing over him with her guitar. She doesn't see Ripner in the bushes.

EMALINE

I'm drunk on jam and have a lot of messed up emotions right now!

Smart Alec crawls away, Emaline in pursuit.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

I am totally willing to take them out on your pervy ass!

SMART ALEC

Wait, I can explain.

(Emaline pauses)

Well, no I can't really.

(Emaline cocks the guitar)

Just...look.

He points behind her where Ripner stumbles to his feet.

EMALINE

Right. I'm gonna fall for that.

But she hears a SHUFFLE STEP behind her and spins, lifting the guitar to strike.

Rip lurches from the darkness, backlit by the lights inside the house.

Emaline smashes him in the head, knocking him down into the light spilling from the window. She goes to swing again, but he looks up at her.

And she sees Ripner's bright blue eyes staring back at her from beyond the grave.

Her face drops.

Her guitar drops.

She takes a step back.

Ripner stumbles to his feet.

Unsure what to say, they stare at each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He half-smiles, awkwardly, the way exes do when they don't know where to begin.

But Emaline just stares.

Ripner takes a step towards her. Reaches out. About to speak. His frozen jaw locks and he GROANS instead.

Emaline RUNS FOR HER LIFE!

Ripner stays put, unable to act or speak.

SMART ALEC

This is when the zombie chases the girl.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Emaline slams the door shut, locks it. And slumps down with her back against it. She's horrified and confused.

And then she hears the SLUMPING SHUFFLE STEPS. He's approaching the door.

EMALINE

Bad batch of jam. Bad batch of jam. Bad...

She scurries across the room and braces herself for...

DING DONG.

Well that's not how zombie movies go.

DING DONG.

RIPNER (O.C.)

Em? It's me. It's Rip.

EMALINE

No it's not. You're dead!

RIPNER (O.C.)

I'm not. Well, I am. But I, Em please let me in. I just want to talk.

Emaline scoots over to the door and tentatively peeks out the window. Rip looks dead, but his eyes are the same.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I need your help. I don't know who else to go to. Please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She calms a little. This is really happening.

EMALINE
Who is that with you?

RIPNER (O.C.)
My assistant. Alec.

SMART ALEC (O.C.)
I'm just glad you can see him too!

Emaline cautiously unlocks the door. Opens it a crack to make sure she's not being attacked. Then she lets Rip and Smart Alec in. She can't take her eyes off Rip.

EMALINE
So you're alive.

RIPNER
Sort of.

Emaline stares at him a moment, taking it in. Then she SLAPS HIM. AND KNEES HIM IN THE GROIN. AND PUNCHES HIM. Rip falls to the ground. AND EMALINE KICKS HIM WHEN HE'S DOWN. Rip rolls into a ball.

RIPNER (CONT'D)
I'm not going to hurt you!

Emaline steps over him and walks to the kitchen.

EMALINE
You already did.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ripner walks into the room examining his hand. One of the fingers flops to the side.

RIPNER
You broke me.

Emaline gets a really good look at his deathly face and instinctively grabs a JAR OF BOOZY PRESERVES.

EMALINE
I always kind of wished you dead for what you put me through, but this is ridiculous.

She takes the fruit out of the jar.

RIPNER
What did I put you through?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She swigs from the booze inside the jar instead.

EMALINE

(to Smart Alec)

So, do I just pretend like I
haven't gone insane here and talk
to him like he's real people?

Smart Alec is fascinated by Rip's floppy finger.

SMART ALEC

It's best to not over think it.

RIPNER

Where's Grams? I don't want to
give her a heart attack or
anything.

EMALINE

She had one. Two years ago. But
she stayed dead.

Ripner looks genuinely sad at that news. It upsets Em.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

You said you need my help. Isn't
it a little late for that?

RIPNER

Not according to my dad.

EMALINE

You saw your dad?

RIPNER

Yeah he explained this all to me.

Emaline sits down and continues chugging straight from
the jar, keeping her eyes on Rip the whole time.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

(awkwardly)

So...as you know, I died.

EMALINE

Uh huh.

RIPNER

I have until my body fully
decomposes to understand the
meaning of life.

EMALINE

True love?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

Yes. Why does everyone know that?

Emaline looks at him like a curiosity. Then she smiles. And starts laughing in disbelief. Quietly at first, but building to a manic, crazy, lost her mind laughter.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

It's really not that funny.

That makes her laugh even harder. And it's contagious. Smart Alec starts laughing at how ridiculous this is too.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Seriously. Stop it. You're hurting my feelings.

Now Emaline collapses on the table heaving with laughter. Smart Alec tries to compose himself, but he snorts.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Glad my death is so hard on you.

That snaps Emaline out of it. She takes a deep breath and wipes the tears of laughter from her eyes.

EMALINE

For a while I fantasized about what it would be like when you came to your senses and begged me to take you back. But this is not how I thought it would go.

RIPNER

You think this is what I wanted?

EMALINE

You know your girlfriend was just here looking for you? Can't she teach you about love?

RIPNER

That's not love.

EMALINE

Like you would know.

Ripner can barely look her in the eye now. He isn't used to having to ask anyone for help like this.

RIPNER

Evidently, I don't know. That's the point. But I thought maybe I did once. Or almost did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

They sit there in awkward silence for a beat. Emaline trying to wrap her head around this.

EMALINE

So after all this time, you come back to me...from the dead...and what? Hope I'm into necrophilia?

RIPNER

Well you just made it sound awful.

EMALINE

You're right. Because otherwise this is a girl's dream come true.

Ripner reaches out for her hand. She yanks it away, knocking the jar to the floor. IT SHATTERS.

TOMMY (O.S.)

Stranger danger?

Standing in the hallway is TOMMY, 3 years-old, in Batman pajamas, rubbing his sleepy eyes. Emaline quickly picks him up so he doesn't step on the glass.

EMALINE

Tommy you should be in bed.

Rip and Smart Alec are both shocked that she has a kid.

TOMMY

(looking at Rip)
His face is gross. Where's Boyd?

RIPNER

Who's uh, who's Boyd?

BOYD (O.C.)

I am.

A strapping young man just walked in the front door and put his bag down. This is BOYD, he's 27 and better looking than Rip ever was. Smart Alec's mouth drops.

BOYD (CONT'D)

Em, are you okay? What's going on?

EMALINE

Boyd. This is Ripner Smith. He died, but now he's alive and in our house. That's his assistant Alec.

(Smart Alec waves)

I just drank the preserves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RIPNER

So are you guys, like, together
or...

EMALINE

Rip is going to be the living dead
until his body decomposes or I
teach him about true love.

Boyd takes a moment to process this information.

BOYD

Sweetie, you aren't supposed to
drink on those pills.

Smart Alec grabs a KNIFE off the table and stabs Ripner
in the shoulder. Rip doesn't react, just rolls his eyes
and pulls it out. Boyd and Emaline are stunned.

TOMMY

He made an ouchie.

With military precision Boyd grabs Rip's arm, twists it
behind him, slams his head to the table and makes him
drop the knife.

RIPNER

(smushed face)
Oh great he's a ninja.

Boyd pulls out his CELL PHONE ready to call 911.

EMALINE

Boyd. Check his pulse.

BOYD

What?

EMALINE

Just check it.

Skeptical, Boyd puts his fingers on Rip's neck. Looks
confused. While still pinning Rip down, Boyd reaches into
his bag and pulls out a STETHOSCOPE.

RIPNER

(dismayed)
And he's a doctor.

BOYD

Med student.

RIPNER

Super.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

He uses the stethoscope to find Ripner's pulse. But he can't. The more he looks, the more disturbed he becomes.

BOYD

He has no pulse.

RIPNER

(face still smushed)

A brilliant medical analysis.

Boyd releases Ripner and steps slowly back to Emaline and Tommy, confused, fascinated, and wanting to protect them.

BOYD

(to Emaline)

If he's the living dead, then he's a zombie. And don't zombies...eat people? You shouldn't have invited him in.

SMART ALEC

Oh, that's vampires. Zombies can go wherever they want.

BOYD

Really? But how do we kill them?

SMART ALEC

Bullet to the head, decapitation. Just have to kill the brain. At least that's what the movies say.

Ripner looks at Smart Alec with a "could you not" expression. Smart Alec shrugs. Boyd grabs a BUTCHER KNIFE and Ripner falls out of his chair, scrambling away.

RIPNER

No, no, no, I like my head!

TOMMY

What's nec-ro-fila?

EMALINE

Enough!

Emaline pulls Boyd back, trading him Tommy for the butcher knife. She drags Ripner up and away.

RIPNER

Where am I supposed to go?

EMALINE

I don't care.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

Emaline shoves Ripner out the door, then turns on Smart Alec, who follows obediently.

RIPNER

How about your garage?

EMALINE

I DON'T CARE!

Emaline tries to close the door, but Rip blocks it with his arm. Emaline looks down at the butcher knife, considering action. But she sees Rip's reflection in it.

RIPNER

Em. Look at me. Please.

She sees her ex. The man she once loved. The man she was just mourning. A zombie. Begging for help.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

If I don't figure this out before I'm dust, I don't go to the afterlife. You're the only one who knows me.

Overwhelmed and conflicted, the anger wins over.

EMALINE

I'd say go to hell, but you might already be there.

She SLAMS THE DOOR on him till his arm pulls out. She locks it shut. And pulls the curtains on all the windows.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rip stands there for a beat, defeated.

SMART ALEC

That went better than expected.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Ripner sulks back into the garage holding his belly in sudden discomfort. Smart Alec is thinking hard.

SMART ALEC

Clearly Boyd isn't Tommy's father, cause he called him "Boyd." And the kid looked like he's about two or three. When did you say you dumped her?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

Three years ago.
(realizing)
And she wanted to tell me
something right before I did.

SMART ALEC

And you didn't let her get to
that? Classy.

Ripner might vomit. He heads for the freezer.

RIPNER

You can have the coffin.

Rip climbs in and closes the top. Leaving Smart Alec
staring at his own disturbing sleeping arrangements.

INT. GARAGE - MORNING

Smart Alec wakes up staring out of a coffin. Ripner is
standing above him like it's his funeral.

SMART ALEC

Thank you for making my recurring
nightmare come true.

Smart Alec climbs out of the coffin. Ripner is looking at
the long-unused jamming equipment. He strokes his belly
in discomfort - IT'S BECOME DISTENDED WITH INTERNAL GAS.

Ripner pauses in front of a wall of empty jars.

RIPNER

Have you ever been in love?

SMART ALEC

(caught off guard)
Well no, not yet. But it's been a
little complicated for...

The garage door opens. Smart Alec turns to see Boyd,
stunningly shirtless. Boyd jumps back upon seeing them.

BOYD

You're still here.

RIPNER

Till I'm a pile of dust.

Boyd grabs a PAIR OF GARDEN SHEARS. He gets right up in
Ripner's face with them. Rip scrambles away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER (CONT'D)

She said she didn't care if we
stayed in here!

Boyd considers him for a moment. Backs down.

BOYD

I don't understand any of this.
But let me just say. You hurt her.
I kill you.

(remembering he's
already dead)

More.

Boyd looks over at Smart Alec as if seeing him for the
first time. He grabs some more GARDENING TOOLS.

SMART ALEC

You're...gonna garden?

BOYD

Life doesn't stop because his did.

Alec swoons as Boyd heads to the backyard. Rip glares.

RIPNER

A muscle hunk ninja doctor who
gardens? You could do better.

SMART ALEC

Yeah, maybe if you ever gave me a
night off. Or a weekend. Or a
lunch. Even a bathroom break.

RIPNER

Hey, the fight for equal rights is
filled with eligible gay men. Work
and play are not mutually
exclusive.

Smart Alec snaps out of it. Looks at his Blackberry.

SMART ALEC

The vote is today.

Ripner RUNS FOR THE HOUSE. But Smart Alec follows
dreamily after Boyd.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ripner bursts in and puts CNN on the TV. Nora Collins is
covering the story remotely from LA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORA COLLINS

...landmark vote today on whether to make same-sex marriage a federally sanctioned right. But the ghost of Ripner Smith still hangs heavy over the proceedings. There is speculation that without his presence, bipartisan support may be crumbling.

EMALINE (O.C.)

I was really hoping I had just eaten some bad berries.

Ripner turns to see Emaline standing a safe distance away from him. As she talks, she eases closer.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

(off the TV)

She's stunning. Really. I have to say it's been a special treat to see how happy and successful you are...were every time I turn on the news. Especially your interviews with herrrrrr...

(covers her nose)

Oh my god.

Too close. She's hit by a STENCH emanating from Ripner's rotting body. She grabs an AIR FRESHENER and sprays.

RIPNER

You get used to it.

EMALINE

Does she know about your... condition?

RIPNER

That conversation didn't exactly happen.

EMALINE

I don't get it. You wanted to make history. That was your thing. Here you are. Back from the dead. And you're hiding?

Tommy comes tearing into the room SCREAMING and THROWING THINGS around. Emaline tries to wrangle him.

RIPNER

Can you...will he...
(turns the volume up)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I want to hear what Anderson
Cooper is saying!

Emaline finally catches Tommy, holding him upside down.

TOMMY

You made a stinky.

RIPNER

No I didn't. I AM a stinky.

Tommy laughs. Rip actually smiles.

EMALINE

Well, don't let us bother you. I'm
just taking Tommy to the park and
pretending like life is totally
normal. You keep worrying more
about your earthly legacy than
your everlasting soul. It's worked
out really well so far.

She carries Tommy out the door, leaving Ripner with the
TV. He looks at the door. The TV. The door. He's torn.

ANDERSON COOPER

...voting won't begin until this
afternoon. Stay tuned for up to
the minute coverage -

NORA COLLINS

- as well as my own, personal
insight into how this will affect
the as yet unplanned funeral
arrangements for Ripner -

Ripner snaps the TV off and runs outside. A beat later he
runs back in, looks all around him, grabs a pair of
SUNGLASSES, A HAT, AND A HOODIE and runs back out.

Then he runs back in and grabs the AIR FRESHENER too.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Rip pulls on the hoodie and trails Emaline and Tommy into
a park. The NEIGHBOR'S DOG is sniffing down his trail.

Ripner crouches behind a bush as Emaline lets Tommy loose
in a PLAYGROUND. She handles him with grace.

Rip's distended stomach makes a HORRIBLE GURGLING NOISE.

It keeps going. Confused, Rip looks behind him to see the
dog GROWLING. Rip is yanked away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The dog is biting his leg. Rip tries to kick it off, but the dog really wants that leg bone. It's a tug of war.

RIPNER

Sarah McLachlan!

Rip yanks himself free, leaving the dog with some unfortunate zombie flesh hanging from its mouth.

TOMMY (O.S.)

Puppy!

Rip turns to see Tommy watching. The dog happily receives a pat on the head, then runs away with its morbid prize.

Rip pulls his pants over his NOW-EXPOSED LEG BONE as Emaline comes to find Tommy. Rip startles her.

EMALINE

I know you're a zombie and all,
but if you're trying to keep a low
profile maybe you shouldn't be
lurking in the bushes near a
playground looking like a sex-
offender. Just a thought.

Emaline sends Tommy back to the slides and returns to her bench. Ripner gathers his dignity, adjusts his hood and climbs out of the bush to join her.

They sit for a long, long beat. Emaline gets a whiff of Rip again and moves to the other side of the bench.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Upwind.

Rip nods. Subtly sniffs himself, doesn't smell it. He looks at Emaline awkwardly.

RIPNER

So...how have you been?

EMALINE

Fine. Thanks.

RIPNER

That Boyd sure is handsome, huh?
How long have you lived together.

EMALINE

He moved in when Grams passed.

RIPNER

Is that why you don't make jam
anymore?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EMALINE

Why do you deserve any answers about my life? You didn't care to ask them while you were alive.

They watch Tommy go nuts in the playground.

RIPNER

He's a spitfire. His father must be...

EMALINE

A real deadbeat.

That shuts him up. She looks at him and pulls his sunglasses off. She really, really looks at him.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

God this is so weird. What's it feel like? Being dead.

RIPNER

Well. I don't feel any physical pain. But I still feel things.

EMALINE

Like feelings?

RIPNER

Is that what they're called?

Emaline looks at him in disbelief, but he smiles, gums rotting, teeth gleaming white. He's kidding. Emaline smirks at him, still unsure. Looks off at the playground.

EMALINE

(genuinely)
I'm sorry you died.

That registers with Rip, like for the first time he's really seeing that he's dead. It's disturbing.

RIPNER

I'm sorry Grams died.

Tommy is SCREAMING and chasing another TERRIFIED CHILD. Em stands up too quick and gets light headed. She sits to gather herself, and when she looks up, Rip is gone.

Tommy screams in glee as Rip chases him toward the swings. Tommy wants to ride, but the THREE KIDS occupying them just stick out their tongues.

Rip pulls his hood off, reveals his rotting face and makes a big, zombie-style OOGIE-BOOGIE noise.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The children run off screaming. And Rip puts Tommy on a swing, happily pushing him by his feet from the front.

As Tommy goes higher and higher, Rip looks over at Emaline. Eye contact. It lingers. Seeing Rip as the fatherly type makes Em smile, bittersweet.

TOMMY (O.C.)

Catch me!

RIPNER

(distracted)

What?

Tommy jumps off. Rip turns as Tommy knocks him down and lands on his DISTENDED BELLY.

An EXPLOSIVE BELCH/FART COMBINATION dispels from Rip's body as all that internal decomposing gas is released.

The STENCH is awful and kids flee.

Ripner pulls out the AIR FRESHENER and sprays.

EXT. SIDEWALK - LATER

Emaline and Ripner are walking up the sidewalk, Tommy swinging from their hands between them. They eye each other, both weirded out by this faux-family moment.

AN OLD COUPLE approaches, holding hands like they'll never let go. Rip pulls his hood tight and looks at his own hand, holding Tommy's, holding Emaline's.

RIPNER

Did you really love me?

That caught her off guard. Tommy swings harder.

EMALINE

What do you think?

Tommy swings even harder. Rip is still troubled.

RIPNER

But how did you know?

Tommy swings so hard he PULLS RIP'S ARM OUT OF ITS SOCKET!

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Shit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tommy looks at the SEVERED ARM he's holding. And he CRIES. This would be traumatizing, except...

INT. ICE CREAM SHOP - LATER

Tommy now happily eats a sundae as if nothing happened.

Rip is pulling his arm back through his sleeve and into its socket, but it keeps slipping.

EMALINE

I have a staple gun at home. I'm happy to shoot you with it.

Rip gives up for now. He doesn't know where to put his arm, so he stashes it in an Ice Cream to-go FREEZER.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

That has to be a health code violation.

RIPNER

I think my whole being is a health code violation.

Tommy throws a cherry at Ripner. It sticks unnaturally to his face. It's gross. Emaline can't help but laugh.

Ripner sticks his tongue out, dazzling Tommy with multicolored grossness. And Emaline has a reality check.

EMALINE

What am I doing here with you?

RIPNER

You're about to explain true love.

She shakes her head in disbelief.

EMALINE

That's just...dumb. I mean, it's something you just know. And it's mostly a chemical reaction anyway.

RIPNER

Em. This is my eternal soul we're talking about. Could you maybe humor me with a Sesame Street explanation?

TOMMY

Elmo loves everyone. Even Oscar. And he's a Grouch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

See? Teach a Grouch about love.

Rip's eyes are pleading. Em fails to avoid them.

EMALINE

What, am I supposed to tell you
how I fell in love or something?

RIPNER

With me?

EMALINE

(exasperated)
Sure. Fine. Ready?
(beat)
Once upon a time-

RIPNER

Wait, how did you know my family
inherited a fairy tale curse?

EMALINE

I didn't. I'm just a wise ass.

RIPNER

Oh. Right. I remember. Go on.

EMALINE

Once upon a time, in a really
idealistic romanticized world that
in no way resembles the present...

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD GARDEN

Smart Alec watches Boyd tending an impressive GARDEN.

EMALINE (V.O.)

...a naive young princess laid
eyes on a dashing young prince and
felt a rush of unfamiliar feelings
that made her heart soar and her
rational mind turn to mush.

Boyd motions for Smart Alec to bring him a SAPLING. Smart
Alec nearly falls over himself to plant it. Looking up
for approval, Boyd holds his gaze longer than expected.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE (V.O.)

For the mischievous universe had enchanted the princess to feel so connected to the prince - mind, body, and soul - that there was no escape. One touch from him sent electric waves through her body.

As they plant another tree, their hands touch in the dirt and pull away. Boyd stands up to survey their progress.

EMALINE (V.O.)

And then with three magic words...

BOYD

Nice job Alec.

EMALINE (V.O.)

...love was declared. And believed. And truly, deeply felt. By her.

Smart Alec smiles like a fool, and Boyd can't help but smile back.

EMALINE (V.O.)

But as all enchantments go. There was a catch.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Boyd and Alec have COLD BEERS in hand, glued to CNN, watching the final vote on the Same-Sex Marriage bill.

EMALINE (V.O.)

Just at the moment where the princess and prince felt like one.

The TV says: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BILL DEFEATED BY 3 VOTES. Smart Alec loses his shit. And so does Boyd. They look at each other. And it clicks.

EMALINE (V.O.)

The prince's true nature was revealed.

INT. ICE CREAM SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Ripner is leaning on his one good hand, fully engaged in Emaline's story. Tommy mirrors him, totally asleep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE

It turns out that the prince was really a shell of a man who had long-ago been cursed to be heartless. He was, in fact, a Tin Man. Gleaming on the outside. Hollow on the inside.

Ripner snaps out of his reverie.

RIPNER

When did you become so cynical?

EMALINE

I don't know Rip. You come back from the dead and ask me what it's like to love? It's insulting. Love isn't rocket science. It's just a gut feeling. I had it and I didn't fight it. But it felt like you did. So I think the question is if you really loved me.

Rip looks at her as if she has the answer.

RIPNER

What if I'm not capable of that?

EMALINE

Then this is the saddest story I've ever heard.

RIPNER

No. That's "The Time Traveler's Wife."

EMALINE

SHUT YOUR MOUTH I LOVE THAT BOOK!

Tommy's sleeping face suddenly falls into his ice-cream. He wakes up confused. Emaline and Rip laugh and Emaline cleans Tommy up. Rip watches her with affection.

RIPNER

And do you love Boyd?

Emaline looks at him like he's crazy.

EMALINE

Yeah. But it's different.

Suddenly Emaline is distracted by the TV up in the corner behind Rip. A NEWS REPORT: SCROLLING HEADLINE READING "Same-Sex Marriage Bill Defeated."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EMALINE (CONT'D)

You lost.

RIPNER

(thinking about Boyd)
Yeah I guess I did.

EMALINE

No. I mean, the vote. You lost.

Ripner jumps up and grabs the TV, turning the volume up. He can't believe what he's seeing.

ANDERSON COOPER

...in a nail biter of a vote,
Congress rejected the first
federal bill to legalize same-sex
marriage by a mere three votes...

RIPNER

NO! I missed it!
(watching the report)
This isn't possible. How the
hell...

Rip is visibly crushed. And for a moment Emaline feels sympathy for him. She puts her hand on his shoulder in support. But he snaps his head up, angry now.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

They can't do this...to ME! What
am I supposed to do now? All that
work for nothing. And now I'm
dead.

Emaline takes her hand off Rip.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

EMALINE

Do you feel bad because millions
of people are being denied their
rights, or do you feel bad because
YOU lost?

RIPNER

(half-truth)
...the first one.

Emaline picks up Tommy and walks out the door.

At that moment a YOUNG CUSTOMER reaches into the to-go freezer and Rip's FROZEN SEVERED ARM falls out like it's grabbing her breast. She SCREAMS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Ripner peels his eyes away from the News and grabs his severed arm from the screaming girl.

He waves it in the air and gives her a MOCKING SCREAM!

RIPNER (CONT'D)

It's just an arm! You have two of them!

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - LATER

Emaline opens the door and snaps on the light to see Boyd and Alec making out.

Rip catches up as Smart Alec and Boyd pull their clothes on. Rip looks at Emaline in shock.

EMALINE

What? You've never walked in on a roommate hooking up?

Emaline puts Tommy down and heads to the kitchen as Tommy runs up and jumps on Boyd.

Rip is dumbfounded by this reveal. Looks at Em with newfound hope. Then points his severed arm at Smart Alec, who responds like a chastised child and goes outside.

Emaline grabs her PILL BOTTLE and pops another one. Then stares at the bottle like there's no point to it.

She looks at the floor, Rip has left ooze everywhere.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Could you at least pick up after yourself?!

She picks up a gob of something. Looks at it curiously.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

What is this?

Boyd walks by to put Tommy to bed. Takes a peek.

BOYD

His ear.

She flings it.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Ripner marches back and forth alternating between trying to get his arm back in its socket and swatting at Smart Alec to accentuate his points.

RIPNER

We need to get on the phone to the U.S.E., to Senator Stillman, to the Washington Post, The New York Times...We have to mobilize! I can't believe I let this happen. Three votes! We lost by three votes! There has to be an appeal. We have to issue an immediate response. People will want to know what I have to say!

SMART ALEC

The dead can't issue statements.

RIPNER

It can't end like this!

Rip's arm falls to the ground again. Alec looks like he might vomit. Rip sits down against the garage, defeated.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I can't end like this.

Smart Alec throws his note pad down.

SMART ALEC

This isn't about you!

RIPNER

What?

SMART ALEC

No matter how good you are at talking about love and commitment, you've never understood it. You're not in this because it's the right thing to do; you're in it because it's the right thing for your career. This endless ambition is exactly why your family has been cursed for generations. You're a selfish bastard!

RIPNER

Well doing the right thing for the wrong reasons is still doing the right thing!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ripner gesticulates with his severed arm, loses his grip, and it flings at Alec, slapping his face. Alec gags.

SMART ALEC

(seething)

Fine. I'll issue a statement in your honor -

(gag)

- but in the meantime, we should really get your -

(gag)

- arm reattached. I can't -

(gag)

- look...

Alec turns around to dry heave, but he's caught by Boyd, who came out to check on them. Boyd rubs Alec's back and stares at Rip's arm with pity.

BOYD

I might be able to help you with that.

Boyd grabs the arm and motions for them to follow him to his TRUCK. Smart Alec does so, but Rip can't quite move.

RIPNER

What was that you said about dogs knowing pure love?

The DOG is biting Rip's leg. Again.

TITLE CARD - **STAGE THREE: BLACK PUTREFACTION**

INT. UCLA MEDICAL CENTER ANATOMY LAB - NIGHT

LIGHTS SNAP ON, revealing ROW AFTER ROW OF COVERED CORPSES prepped for study.

BOYD

We have to make this quick. We're not supposed to be here after hours.

RIPNER

I'm not supposed to be here at all.

Rip lies down on a vacant table. Boyd goes to a cabinet and grabs some supplies.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Why are you doing this for me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOYD

Professional fascination.

Rip doesn't buy it. Boyd lines up Rip's severed arm with his body as best he can. But Rip is staring at him dubiously. Boyd takes a moment.

BOYD (CONT'D)

It's not every day your roommate's dead ex comes back to life to redeem himself in the ways of love.

(Stealing a glance at Smart Alec)

Call me a romantic, but I do believe everything happens for a reason. And maybe this all happened too fast for you to really take stock, but it seems kind of profound doesn't it? I can't imagine the depth of things going through your head.

Alec's Blackberry BUZZES, but he looks at the caller ID - NORA COLLINS - and ignores it.

RIPNER

(To Alec)

Did you send out a statement yet?

Alec goes to speak, but Boyd cuts him off abruptly.

BOYD

You're a real piece of work. You know that? You get another shot at making something of your life and you still can't see the big picture.

He's threading a SUTURE NEEDLE and preparing Rip's flesh.

BOYD (CONT'D)

The glory of your win would have paled in comparison to the impact it had on the people it actually affects. Like Alec. Or me.

Rip goes to speak, but Boyd is on a roll.

BOYD (CONT'D)

And now here you are, rotting on the outside because you didn't take care of yourself on the inside.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOYD (CONT'D)

And here I am, talking to a dead man who is somehow still taking his life for granted. And here's a big-ass needle I'm going to use to put your arm back on because there has to be a reason for all this. And dammit I want to find out.

Boyd stabs Rip in the shoulder and starts stitching his arm back on as best he can. The tirade hit Rip hard, but he's trying not to show it.

RIPNER

I think your bedside manner could use a little finessing.

BOYD

I speak from the heart. Want me to cut you open to see if you still have one?

Smart Alec takes a peek at the arm and then turns around again, queasy from the gore.

SMART ALEC

Will he be able to use it?

BOYD

The tendons are too deteriorated to connect. But he's a zombie, so who knows?

Smart Alec looks under the sheet of another corpse, visually comparing it to Ripner.

SMART ALEC

How come this one looks so...not gross?

BOYD

Grab the embalming fluid from the green cabinet and you'll find out.

As Boyd finishes off his final suture. Smart Alec pulls out a BIG CANNISTER OF RED FLUID from a cabinet.

Rip tries to move his reattached arm. Nothing. He uses his good hand to lift it, but it falls with a thud.

RIPNER

It feels like it's asleep.

Rip tries harder. Really focusing. ONE FINGER MOVES. And suddenly the whole arm flails to the side and hits Boyd in the nuts. Boyd doubles over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Oh shit. Sorry.

Boyd nods understandingly, gathers himself, and picks up a SCALPEL. He grabs Rip's head, tilts it to the side, and slices into his neck. There's a little blood, but without a heartbeat it's just a trickle.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I said I'm sorry!

Boyd sticks his finger in, raises the CAROTID ARTERY and severs it. Smart Alec goes pale and drops the EMBALMING FLUID, nearly spilling it.

SMART ALEC

Oh god that's not right.

BOYD

Well usually the corpse isn't talking.

Boyd works fast, inserting a CANNULA into the artery and connecting a length of TUBING to the embalming fluid.

BOYD (CONT'D)

This type of embalming is only meant to keep you fresh for a day or so.

Alec looks over his shoulder with disgusted fascination.

SMART ALEC

I have total respect for what you do, but this is nauseating.

BOYD

Funny. That's how I feel about politics.

Smart Alec gives Boyd a playful shove. Ripner stares at them with equally disgusted fascination.

RIPNER

Are you guys flirting? Right now?
Over my rotting flesh?

SMART ALEC

Just mixing work and play boss.

Boyd starts the PUMP.

Rip's whole body reacts. He squirms uncomfortably as the fluid begins coursing through his withering veins.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Boyd and Smart Alec have to pin him down.

RIPNER

Why does everything tickle on the inside?

His body begins to look noticeably rehydrated. His sunken cheeks fill in a little bit and his skin starts to flush.

SMART ALEC

Will he have...leakage?

BOYD

Probably not. But this is just a temporary fix. As soon as he ends up back in the elements, the moisture and heat in the air will start to reverse the chemical reactions of the embalming.

RIPNER

Emaline said that love is mostly a chemical reaction. Is that what you guys are feeling right now?

Smart Alec and Boyd smile at each other.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Maybe my pheromones are gone.

SMART ALEC

Rip. Cut the crap. You fell for each other once before. You have some idea of how this works. You just lost yourself along the way. Think back to how it began and start from there.

RIPNER

You're right. I just need to show her I'm still the guy she fell for.

Boyd shakes his head, frustrated. Smart Alec's Blackberry BUZZES again. He ignores it. Again.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Who keeps calling you?!

BOYD

Why are you really doing this? Why Emaline?

Ripner forgets about the phone and answers Boyd honestly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

RIPNER

Because she has a good heart.

That catches Boyd off guard. He shakes his head, unsure how to proceed with Rip.

BOYD

I suppose she does. She's the only person with a good enough heart to humor a monstrosity like you.

RIPNER

I'm not a monster.

BOYD

Then stop acting like one!

A NOISE BEHIND THEM. FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING. Boyd slams Rip down on the table and throws a sheet over him just as PROFESSOR STERN, 65, walks in and snaps the lights on.

PROFESSOR STERN

Mr. Allister. What are you doing here?

BOYD

It's not what you think, sir.

PROFESSOR STERN

This is highly inappropriate. You are not to be in this laboratory without supervision. And guests are strictly forbidden! This is grounds for suspension, if not expulsion.

Professor Stern notices the embalming pump on. He approaches quickly.

PROFESSOR STERN (CONT'D)

Step away from the cadaver immediately.

(Boyd and Alec don't move)

I said IMMEDIATELY.

Professor Stern shuts the pump off.

PROFESSOR STERN (CONT'D)

I don't know what kind of shenanigan you're trying to pull here. And don't give me the extra credit excuse. That fooled me once with that necrophilic foreign exchange student. But not again!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

As he talks, Ripner slowly rises to a seated position behind him. The professor turns to see a living corpse with an embalming tube in his neck. It's gruesome.

After a beat of confused silence on all parts...

RIPNER

GRRRRRR!

Professor Stern stumbles back in terror. Ripner jumps off the table, pulls out the tube, and plays the part of a zombie. His reattached arm flailing in delayed reaction to what he intends, making him all the more zombie-like.

PROFESSOR STERN

What's happening? What have you done?

RIPNER

BRAINS! AAAAARGH!

Ripner goes after Professor Stern, who instinctively grabs a nearby FIRE EXTINGUISHER and clobbers Rip with it, sending him sliding across the floor toward the exit.

Rip recovers, gets up, and, out of ideas...does a half-assed zombie-walk out the door.

A moment of confusion on what to do next. Professor Stern looks up at Boyd and Smart Alec in shock and fear. Boyd crouches down and pats him on his shoulder.

BOYD

Now you know what I'm capable of.
And no one will believe you. See
you in class!

They run out, leaving the shell-shocked professor behind.

INT. EMALINE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Emaline sleeps peacefully in her bed. The morning sun shines in, birds chirping, gently waking her. She opens her eyes and sees a ZOMBIE standing over her. SCREAMING, she falls to the floor.

RIPNER

Hey, hey. No. It's just me.

Rip stands there with a BOUQUET OF FLOWERS. It's odd.

Emaline clutches her chest, gasping for breath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE

You can't just hover over people
looking like that! My heart is
racing.

Emaline grabs a PILL from her bedside and swallows it.
Gathering her senses.

RIPNER

I just wanted to give you these.

He hands her the flowers, but his reattached arm doesn't
comply, and he throws them at her instead. They scatter
on the floor.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Sorry.

EMALINE

What are these for?

RIPNER

I would very much like to take you
on a date today.

Emaline picks them up, confused by the gesture.

EMALINE

Is this a shock and awe tactic?

RIPNER

No. I'm just...rusty I guess.

Emaline thinks about that for a moment.

EMALINE

I don't know. Tommy is...

RIPNER

He can come. I'd like to get to
know him better.

EMALINE

Why?

The DOORBELL RINGS. Emaline gathers some of Tommy's toys
scattered on her floor.

RIPNER

I just thought it would be nice to
get to know him before...I want to
make sure he knows his dad isn't a
deadbeat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Emaline pauses. Realizing what he thinks, she's at a loss for words. The DOORBELL RINGS again. She snaps out of it.

EMALINE

Jesus Rip, he's not yours. Is that what you think? He's not even mine. I'm a nanny for my old boss. The psycho bitch? Remember? Yes. I now take care of her kid. And that's her at the door, so...

Tommy comes tearing into the room, screaming and running around Rip, who is still trying to process this reveal.

RIPNER

Wait, but I thought...

EMALINE

Just...don't sweat it. You're dead, but you're not the deadbeat. You have no responsibilities here.

The DOORBELL RINGS again. Emaline corrals Tommy and his things and leaves the room. Tommy waves goodbye to Rip.

And Rip's eyes might be defrosting again. He wanders out of the room, trying to figure out how he feels.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - DOOR

Rip passes unnoticed as Bitchy Boss picks up Tommy.

TOMMY

Mommy I met a zombie!

BITCHY BOSS

That's nice honey.

(to Emaline)

I hope he was less trouble than his father was. The bald bastard. What a nightmare. You have no idea.

EMALINE

I've had my share of nightmares. But Tommy isn't one of them.

BITCHY BOSS

Well, we're already late for our Mommy & Me retreat. I swear, therapeutic bonding is just a waste. You're so lucky you don't have anyone in your life. Enjoy your time off!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The door SLAMS shut.

INT. EMALINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Emaline comes back to the bedroom and sees Rip is gone. She looks at the flowers, clearly torn from the garden.

INT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Emaline enters, holding the bouquet. She finds Ripner staring at his coffin, looking devastated. Looking real. His rotting body sitting next to her vacuum sealing equipment. She gets an idea.

Rip feels her take his hand. He's surprised by the gesture. She pulls him over to sit on a work table.

EMALINE

The ads say this can keep anything fresh.

She puts his arm in a plastic bag and hooks the vacuum sealer up, shrink wrapping his flesh. It's weird.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Did you really want him to be yours?

Ripner is surprisingly lost for words on that one, but from the bittersweet smile, it's clear he kind of did.

RIPNER

It's for the best. One way or another, the curse ends with me.

That really hits Emaline. She shrink wraps his other arm.

EMALINE

I'm sorry for the confusion.

As he watches her wrap the rest of his body tight like a mummy, something dawns on him.

RIPNER

What was it?

EMALINE

What was what?

RIPNER

You were going to tell me something before we broke up. If you weren't pregnant, what was it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Emaline pauses for a beat. Looks at him all wrapped up.

EMALINE

Why couldn't you have stayed gone?

She turns the vacuum sealer on and it squeezes the plastic on him. Crinkling tight.

RIPNER

Wasn't my choice.

EMALINE

But you chose to come back here.

The shrink-wrapping makes him completely restricted.

RIPNER

Is this...uh...is this supposed to be so snug?

EMALINE

And you showing up all DAWN OF THE DEAD...I don't know what to think of that. It's like some sick omen that my time is coming soon.

RIPNER

What are you talking about?

EMALINE

It doesn't matter.

She shuts the vacuum off. Ripner can barely move. But he's suddenly very concerned. About her.

RIPNER

Is it the pills? Are you sick?

Em just puts the sealer away. Ripner's mind is racing.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Em. Is it serious?

Her silence speaks volumes.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Talk to me. I...could have been there for you.

EMALINE

I shouldn't have to be sick for you to want to be there for me.

Ripner tries to move toward her, but the shrink wrap prevents this. He jostles empty jars off a shelf.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

And you shouldn't have to be healthy to know that playing house with a gay guy and your boss's kid isn't the life you want.

Flustered, Emaline grabs the jars before they fall.

EMALINE

I have people I care about in my life. What do you have?

RIPNER

20/20 hindsight. I may have been afraid of love, but you're afraid of life!

Emaline tosses a jar and it shatters over Rip's head.

EMALINE

I am not afraid of life, I'm afraid of death!

She's as shocked at her own outburst as Rip is.

RIPNER

Well here I am, staring you in the face. Your parents died young. My mom died young. I died young. And maybe you will too. But what are you going to have to show for it?

He manages to move forward, but teeters and falls. Emaline catches him, struggling to keep him up.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Look at this. You're not a damsel in distress. You're still alive. What more motivation do you need to go after your dreams?

Getting angry, Emaline drops him face-first onto the floor. Right on the shards of glass. She's crying now.

EMALINE

It's not motivation I need, Rip. It's time! I NEED time!

She grabs her BICYCLE and heads out of the garage. Rip tries to get up and realizes he has zero mobility.

RIPNER

Little help here.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Emaline locks the gate and peddles out into the street, cutting off a RENTAL CAR, which screeches to a halt.

The door swings open to reveal NORA COLLINS.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The DOORBELL RINGS. Boyd answers, but Nora sees Smart Alec behind him and shoves her way inside.

NORA COLLINS

You've been dodging my calls.

Smart Alec freezes like a deer in headlights.

SMART ALEC

How did you find me?

NORA COLLINS

Please, having a cell phone is like having a personal tracking device. You think I haven't slept with anyone in the FBI?

She walks around the house, casing the joint. Alec casually kicks some more RIPNER FLESH under the couch.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

Where is Ripner Smith?!

SMART ALEC

He's dead Nora. You were there.

NORA COLLINS

I've spoken to CNN and I expect to be a part of his funeral arrangements.

(To Boyd)

It's my Barbara Walters moment.

SMART ALEC

Barbara Walters wouldn't use her dead lover to boost her ratings.

NORA COLLINS

Listen small fry, Rip and I are two of a kind. And if the roles were reversed, I would want him to make the most of my untimely demise.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nora spots the BUSINESS CARD the hearse driver left behind. She snags it with a gloating air.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

Oh good. I'll take it from here.

And she's gone as quickly as she arrived.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Smart Alec runs into the backyard looking for Rip. He finds him shrink-wrapped and crawling out of the garage.

SMART ALEC

Are you trying to be a mummy now?

RIPNER

She thought it would help. She tried to help. She still cares.

SMART ALEC

Yeah, so does Nora. She was just here looking for your remains. She knows something's not right.

Smart Alec rolls Rip onto his back. He's impaled with SHARDS OF JAR GLASS. Alec recoils.

RIPNER

That's an understatement.

Boyd comes out, sees the FLOWERS on the floor.

BOYD

Is that my garden?

RIPNER

Part of it. Is she really dying?

Alec is surprised, but Boyd dodges the topic.

BOYD

It's not really my place to share her medical information.

Boyd helps Alec pick Ripner up.

RIPNER

You're not a doctor yet.

And Boyd lets him fall again. Alec goes with him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC

(to Boyd)

Don't you think we're past formalities in this situation?

Boyd helps Alec up. Looking at the pitiful sight of Ripner. Eyes pleading. Boyd gives in. Helps Rip up too.

BOYD

Emaline has a condition called Cardiomyopathy. It's an enlargement of the heart that has been weakening her system for years. She used to think they were just fainting spells.

RIPNER

(realizing)

That's how we met. She passed out and I caught her. I had no idea.

BOYD

Neither did she. She's tried every treatment, even has a ventricular assist device implanted in there. But she needs a transplant and she's too far down the donor list.

SMART ALEC

That's awful.

BOYD

She's been living on borrowed time. Best she can do is just make the most of however long she has.

RIPNER

But she isn't doing that!

Boyd turns on Ripner, who teeters like the real Tin-Man till he's propped up against the house.

BOYD

You know, miracles don't just happen to everyone. Maybe you used the last one up this year.

Ripner really lets that sink in.

SMART ALEC

Her heart is so big it just couldn't contain itself.

(To Ripner)

It's kind of like you broke it, for real.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RIPNER

How have you become such a
hopeless romantic?

SMART ALEC

How have you NOT become one?

RIPNER

Cut me loose.

SMART ALEC

But it's keeping you fresh...ish.

RIPNER

Cut me out of this shrink wrap!

Alec grabs GARDEN TRIMMERS from the garage and cuts at the joints, giving Ripner mobility again.

Tearing at the plastic, he storms into the house and comes back gripping Emaline's GUITAR.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

You want a hopeless romantic?
(to Boyd)
Tell me where she'd go.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Rip busts out the driveway gate on BOYD'S BIKE with guitar strapped to his back.

Weaving in and out of traffic, the heat and movement is undoing all the good the embalming accomplished. Speeding around a corner, Rip's reattached arm spazes out and turns his bike too sharply, right into traffic.

A CAR HITS HIM and he crashes into a reservoir. The TEENAGE DRIVER pulls over and rushes out.

TEENAGE DRIVER

OH MY GOD OH MY GOD! Are you okay?

Ripner drags himself out of the water and flips his hood off, revealing a wet, decomposing zombie with his reattached arm now hanging by a thread, literally.

Rip looks at the driver in all his horror movie glory.

RIPNER

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Terrified, the teen runs back to his car and locks the door, watching Rip remount the bike, which isn't quite as mangled as his body, and continue after Emaline.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - SAME TIME

Nora interrogates a frustrated FUNERAL HOME DIRECTOR.

NORA COLLINS

But this is the service that was used to transport his body. If you don't have it, then where would it be? A dead body doesn't just up and walk away!

The director turns to the hearse driver from earlier, sitting in the back office eating a POWDERED SUGAR DONUT while watching the News.

FUNERAL HOME DIRECTOR

Phil, where was your last drop?

HEARSE DRIVER

Who's asking?

At that moment, a recycled clip of Nora pops up on the News. The real Nora sees this and marches back to the driver. She strikes the exact same pose as she's doing on television.

NORA COLLINS

Nora Collins. CNN.

Driver inhales the powdered sugar causing a coughing fit. Nora leans in seductively.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

Tell me everything.

TITLE CARD - **STAGE FOUR: BUTYRIC FERMENTATION**

EXT. GRAVEYARD - SAME TIME

Emaline sits on an unused cemetery plot. It's peaceful.

Until Ripner arrives, a mangled mess of decomposing flesh again. Dripping and dragging himself across the graveyard like a horror movie.

RIPNER

The dead are not built for cardio.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His reattached arm falls off again. Emaline stares at it as Rip collapses face first into the grass.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Are you even allowed to do this?
Whose plot are you sitting on?

EMALINE

It's mine.

A TOMBSTONE nearby reads "ELEANOR WHITE - beloved grandmother." This is her family's plot. Rip sits up.

RIPNER

Wow. This is morbid. And coming from a zombie, that should mean something.

EMALINE

I come here to clear my head. You should go.

Rip props himself against the tree next to her.

RIPNER

Why did you give up?

She takes a frustrated breath, looking at a FLORAL ARRANGEMENT dying on Grams' grave.

EMALINE

What good comes from preserving something that's already dead?

RIPNER

But you're not dead.

EMALINE

I got tired. Always tired. Heart murmurs. Pains. Trial medications. The surgery. The worse my condition got, the less money I had for my bar. Some dreams just don't come true.

Emaline gazes off at the gravestones ahead like it's her future laid out in front of her.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

I never told Grams. It's hereditary and she would have blamed herself. And then she died and I'm going to die and you're already dead and I don't know what to make of any of it. I'm scared.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Ripner hates it. He puts his usable hand on hers.

RIPNER

So am I.
 (beat)
 I'm sorry Em.

She has trouble looking him in the eye, but when she does, she can see that he genuinely means that. She squeezes his hand back and then lets it go.

Feeling helpless, Rip remembers the guitar. He pulls it around his shoulder, but looks down at where the chords would be played by his left hand. He doesn't have one.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

Can I get a hand here?

Emaline gives him a dismissive look.

EMALINE

Should we dance on my grave too?

RIPNER

C'mon. For old time's sake.

He positions himself close enough that she could join if she wanted to. But she still refuses. Undaunted, Rip strums the guitar once for good measure.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I woke up. And wished that I was dead. With an aching in my head. I lay motionless in bed.

EMALINE

What?

RIPNER

I thought of you. And where you'd gone. Let the world spin madly on.

Emaline realizes he's speaking the lyrics to their song.

EMALINE

This song is as dead as you are.

But Rip nudges her arm, hoping she'll join him.

RIPNER

Ahem. LET THE WORLD SPIN MADLY ON.

She reluctantly puts her hand on the chords. And suddenly they're playing guitar, together. He sings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RIPNER (CONT'D)

*"And everything, that I said I'd
do/ Like make the world brand new/
And take the time for you..."*

Goofy and charming, he resembles the guy she once loved.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

*"It just got lost/ And slept right
through the dawn..."*

Emaline joins in. Softly.

RIPNER AND EMALINE

"And the world spins madly on."

The words resonate. Rip looks her dead in the eyes, and she could be wrong, but they look teary too.

It's too much. Emaline lets go of the guitar. Ripner lets his goofy side reign with a little Bon Jovi.

RIPNER

*"Shot through the heart and I'M to
blame/ I gave love a bad name!"*

And Emaline laughs. Rip does too. It's been a long time since either has really connected with someone. He takes her hand again.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

From one living dead person to another. You have a lot to live for, Em. You're not preserving the dead; you're just making the most of a rotten batch.

And she finally looks at him like she did when they first fell in love. Beyond the corpse, beyond their past. In this moment she sees the best in him.

EMALINE

Where have you been?

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Finding the driveway gate unlocked, Nora snoops around the house. She peeks in the window and sees Alec and Boyd making dinner with fresh food from the farmer's market.

In the background the TV airs news coverage of the fallout from the vote. Nora steps away, then steps right back to view herself in a previously aired clip on TV.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A beat of self-admiration and then she edges over to the garage and peeks in a window, sees the closed casket.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Emaline and Ripner walk their bikes home. Well, Rip shuffle steps, barely able to walk right anymore.

At the house, Rip drops his bike and offers Emaline his hand. She looks at it a beat, then drops her bike too.

And with that, Rip is holding his severed arm, and Emaline is holding that arm's hand. It's weird but sweet.

INT. GARAGE - SAME TIME

Nora opens the garage door, careful not to make too much noise. SOMETHING SCAMPERS BY HER FOOT and she jumps. It's just the neighbor's dog again, sniffing around for Rip. She kicks it away and enters.

Approaching the casket, nervous. She reaches out and lifts the lid, afraid of what she might see.

But there's nothing there. No body. She looks around, confused. Focuses on the freezer and throws it open too. Again, no body. This can't be...

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Rip walks Emaline to the door. They dance around eye contact like it's their first date.

RIPNER

Well, I better get in my freezer before I turn any more rank.

EMALINE

You were right. I'm used to the smell.

Their eyes meet. His are still miraculously intact. And hers have lost that hateful glare they've had since he returned. She hugs him. He's surprised.

She puts the bridge of her nose in the crook of his neck. He smiles, remembering.

RIPNER

It's your spot. I've never let anyone else have it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Going with the nostalgia, Em closes her eyes and places a chaste peck roundabouts where his lips should be. Holding for a second before pulling away. She opens her eyes.

And Rip's JAW FALLS LOOSE in a look of exaggerated shock. It's held only by a tendon. And it kills the moment.

They stand there for a beat, wondering if anything magic is going to happen. But nothing changes.

Disappointed, Rip puts his jaw back into place. Sort of.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

So much for fairy tales.

Emaline looks beyond Rip, her face in true horror.

NORA COLLINS (O.S.)

YOU SON OF A BITCH!

Surprised, Rip turns and reveals his decomposed visage to Nora. She SCREAMS and falls back, scrambling away.

Rip doesn't know what to do, so he steps towards her, reaching out, but accidentally offers his severed hand. Nora slaps it away and it lands in the yard.

She won't stop screaming. Lights are coming on in neighbors' yards. Panicking, Ripner tries to shush her, but to no avail. Finally he can't take it.

RIPNER

WHAT WOULD DIANE SAWYER DO?!

Nora clamps her mouth shut. Takes a moment to collect herself. Stands up and looks at him in a professional, detached manner. She eases closer to him. He's gross.

NORA COLLINS

What, what is this? What happened to you?

Her eyes fill with tears and she smiles.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

I can't believe you're alive!

RIPNER

I'm not, really. It's complicated.
I'm kind of a zombie, but...

Nora is now ecstatic, pure joy. She actually hugs him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NORA COLLINS

Ripner Smith I absolutely love
you. I love you love you love you.

Ripner is overwhelmed by her response. He didn't know she cared this much. And seeing the woman who replaced her connect with Rip like this is about all Emaline can take.

EMALINE

You two deserve each other.

She goes inside. And slams the door. Nora releases Rip.

NORA COLLINS

This is unbelievable. A medical
breakthrough. No, a miracle! Rip,
I knew you had a God complex, but
does this mean...are you...

(whispering)

...the second coming? Because I
want the exclusive! You just made
my day! No, my CAREER!

Rip levels her with his eyes. He can't believe he was ever involved with someone like this. He can't believe he ever WAS someone like this. The lights go off in Emaline's house. And with that, his hope.

RIPNER

I'd say go to hell, Nora, but you
might already be there. I know I
am.

Rip goes to pick up his severed arm, but the NEIGHBOR DOG snags it, wagging his tail as he scampers off in victory.

Rip watches. Defeated. He shuffles himself up the driveway, closing and locking the gate in Nora's face.

Her head is spinning in an opportunistic frenzy. She instinctively pulls out her Blackberry and dials.

NORA COLLINS

(into phone)

Hey Charlie, I'm going to need a
full news crew on standby.

(beat)

I don't care if they have tomorrow
off. Get them here!

And with that, she hangs up and heads to her car with her future journalistic glory beaming across her face.

INT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Rip goes to get into his freezer, but it's stocked with FRESH FRUIT AND BOOZE AGAIN. That's strange.

SMART ALEC (O.S.)

We went to the farmer's market.

Rip turns to see Smart Alec standing there.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

Thought maybe if we stocked up she might make something of it. But we can move it.

RIPNER

Don't. I'll sleep in my coffin.

SMART ALEC

But you should really be...

RIPNER

Alone. I want to be alone.

Smart Alec nods his head and turns to leave.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

This is bullshit!

Smart Alec turns back.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

She kissed me! And nothing happened. Every freaking story about true love ends with a kiss making it all better! Why isn't it all better?

SMART ALEC

Well I'd wager it's because you're not a twelve-year-old girl and in real life a kiss doesn't equal love.

Rip suddenly has a case of the SNIFFLES. His nose is leaking. He wipes it with his sleeve. Alec is concerned.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

I think you're getting mushy.

RIPNER

Obviously. Isn't that the whole point of why I'm doing this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC

No. I mean...I think you're dying.
Again. For real.

RIPNER

What? Already?

SMART ALEC

It's crazy that your brain lasted
this long. Usually it's one of the
first organs to putrefy.

RIPNER

This is my BRAINS?!

Ripner pinches his nose and tilts his head back to keep
his brain contained. It comes out his ears instead.

SMART ALEC

You've seen zombie movies - you
always gotta kill 'em in the head,
cause once your brain goes, well,
that's it.

Ripner panics, searching for tissues, rags, anything to
cram in his ears and nose. Smart Alec tries to calm him.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

The more upset you get the faster
it's happening.

As Ripner calms down, the leakage temporarily stops.

RIPNER

And if I manage to figure this out
before my brain is gone, there
wouldn't happen to be a loophole
where I come back to life is
there?

Smart Alec pulls the family album out of the coffin.
Flipping toward the end again. Same answer.

SMART ALEC

You'll look like you did when you
first died, but I really wouldn't
count on another resurrection.

Rip sits there, his mortality really sinking in. He looks
up at Smart Alec, flipping through the pages looking for
help. And for the first time realizes something...

RIPNER

Wait. You should be in DC doing
damage control.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SMART ALEC

I know, I know.

RIPNER

But you're here. For me.

Ripner shuffles up to Smart Alec, reaches in his jacket pocket and takes out his promotion papers and pen.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

You care about things for the right reasons. That's why you're smart, Alec.

He signs them and hands them back.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

You have what it takes to be the man I never was. And do what I couldn't. You're a good friend.

Smart Alec is speechless. Rip has never said something so nice to him. But Rip turns to face his coffin.

Alec's phone RINGS. He checks the caller.

SMART ALEC

You need to talk to someone who loves you.

RIPNER

I'm not talking to Nora.

SMART ALEC

It's not Nora. He's been calling all day.

Rip takes the phone. Smart Alec leaves.

RIPNER

Hello?

DRUNK DAD (O.C.)

Are you dry and crusty yet?

RIPNER

Dad...

Intercut with Drunk Dad in his tiny apartment. Looking at an old family photo.

DRUNK DAD

It's horrible seeing someone you love decompose before your eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RIPNER

I thought you didn't care.

DRUNK DAD

I guess you weren't the only emotional zombie in the family.

RIPNER

(defensively)

That's harsh.

DRUNK DAD

Tough love. Better late than never.

RIPNER

(suddenly angry)

So now I'm supposed to take a post-mortem lesson about love from you? I know damn well that love does too much damage when it dies. When they die. It all goes away.

His brain is leaking again. It's making him feel wonky.

DRUNK DAD

So it's not worth having at all?

RIPNER

Mom died.

DRUNK DAD

She died.

RIPNER

And it ruined everything.

DRUNK DAD

And WE LET IT ruin everything.

That killed Ripner's momentum. He's stumped.

DRUNK DAD (CONT'D)

Didn't see that one coming, huh?

RIPNER

No. Not at all. You really suck at this.

DRUNK DAD

I've been on the other end of this and let me tell you, the Beauty and the Beast shit? Stockholm Syndrome is not romantic.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DRUNK DAD (CONT'D)

(beat)
Do you love that girl?

RIPNER

I don't know.

DRUNK DAD

You do know!

RIPNER

I used to. I think.

DRUNK DAD

Not good enough. Do you love her?
Right now. In your unbeating
heart.

RIPNER

I'm scared. She scares me.

DRUNK DAD

Good! DO YOU LOVE HER?

RIPNER

Yes! I never stopped loving her!

Ripner is suddenly scared.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

But if she doesn't...if I don't
make it to the afterlife...then
mom doesn't...no one does.

Drunk Dad closes his eyes, conjuring his sobriety.

DRUNK DAD

Listen to me, Rip, and listen
good. Real love means putting
someone else's needs before yours.
It's selfless. Not selfish. If I
could give my life to bring yours
back, I would. Because I love you.
No matter how shitfaced I've been.
Don't forget that.

Ripner really lets that concept sink in. His dad finally
being the father he always needed.

RIPNER

I love you too Dad.

Rip hangs up. His eyes focus on his coffin. Resigned to
his fate, he climbs in and shuts the top.

INT. GARAGE - MORNING

Rip wakes up to find FLUID LEAKING OUT OF HIS EARS. He wipes it away in horror. He looks around, all alone.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Rip knocks on the door to Emaline's room. He looks like a lost child. She opens it a crack.

RIPNER

I'm really dying.

And with that, Ripner starts to cry. For real this time. No defrosting eyes. Emaline's heart melts a bit and she lets him in. He crumbles onto the bed, head in his hand. Emaline tries to comfort him.

EMALINE

You have to feel it Rip.

Rip gathers himself a bit and sits up, looking at her.

RIPNER

I never let myself feel anything.
Em. I shut you out. I was afraid.
Of this. And now...I'm so sorry.

EMALINE

Rip. It was so long ago.

His brain leaks again. He wipes at it with his sleeve.

RIPNER

No not. Feeling go bad with that.

Emaline looks at him in confusion. That was weird.

EMALINE

Are you okay?

Rip shakes it off and tries to compose himself again.

RIPNER

No. I'm dead.

Ripner puts his head on her shoulder. And for a moment, Emaline comforts him. This is scary. For both of them.

RIPNER (CONT'D)

I need you.

And that hits Emaline the wrong way, she drops him and stands up, walking across the room, anger building.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE

You need me. And you think it's fair to ask me to open myself up to you again? WHEN YOU'RE DEAD? DEAD! Do you know where that leaves me? In love with a corpse. You get what YOU want and then you go away to the afterlife and I'm left here alone and hurting. Again. It's always your way or nothing. That's not fair, Ripner. And that's not love.

Ripner doesn't know what to say.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

You might need me. But I don't need you.

She opens the door. Rip looks at her like a lost puppy.

RIPNER

I love you.

Emaline might believe that, but it's not enough.

EMALINE

Life is more than love, Rip.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Emaline steps outside, genuinely upset. She paces through the garden. But it's not helping. She's too worked up and she needs an outlet for this. She turns to the garage.

INT. GARAGE - SAME TIME

Emaline enters her old work space like it's a tomb. As she runs her hand across the freezer, her foot kicks something and it rolls across the floor.

A FRESH PEACH.

She picks it up in wonder, unsure where it came from. She opens the freezer to find it FILLED WITH FRESH FRUIT.

She smiles. But the smile fades to an unreadable expression. She grabs her chest in discomfort.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Alec sits on the couch watching the news. He sees Rip's silhouette in the reflection on the TV and turns. Rip's head is leaking. A lot.

SMART ALEC

Rip. Are you...

BUT BOYD YELLS FROM OUTSIDE...

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Rip and Alec rush out to find Emaline in Boyd's arms. She's not breathing.

BOYD

Call 911!

Smart Alec pulls out his phone and dials. Boyd starts CPR. Rip stands there, helpless.

For the first time he has to see Emaline face her mortality. This is real.

As Boyd continues CPR, Rip kneels down next to her. With his one good hand, he reaches out and takes Emaline's hand. Squeezes it.

Emaline is still unresponsive.

SIRENS are approaching in the distance.

Boyd keeps going with CPR...

Emaline's hand squeezes Rip's back. She starts breathing again, but she's not fully conscious.

Boyd hears the sirens. Then looks at Rip, a freaking zombie. Boyd picks Emaline up.

BOYD (CONT'D)

Rip. Stay here.

RIPNER

Em.

BOYD

You can't help her!

Rip reluctantly lets go of her hand. Boyd carries Emaline towards the front of the house, out the driveway gate.

Smart Alec puts a hand on Rip's shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC

You can't be seen. I'll go.

Rip nods. And watches as Smart Alec runs after them.

He looks down and picks up the fresh peach Emaline dropped. It's now horribly bruised.

TITLE CARD - **STAGE FIVE: DRY DECAY**

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - LATER

Rip lurches around the house, not doing so well with the walking anymore. He bumps into a PHOTO ALBUM, scattering images of Emaline's life across the floor.

He picks up the POLAROID Grams snapped of the moment he left Em. The look of devastation on Emaline's face is unbearable.

Stuck to it is an old photo of EMALINE IN A HOSPITAL. Boyd's giving her a HEART-SHAPED BALLOON. She's laughing. So much living left to do.

Rip touches the heart balloon, an idea trying to penetrate his mushy mind.

BANGING ON THE DOOR

Rip shuffles that way, hoping for news from Alec or Boyd. But when he opens the door A CAMERA FLASHES in his face.

He slams the door on Nora.

NORA COLLINS (O.S.)

Ripner, this is too big a story
not to tell. You know that!

Ripner leans against the door. Nora yells at him from outside

NORA COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You should be famous!

Ripner slides down onto the floor, clutching Em's photos.

NORA COLLINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Why are you hiding from your fate?
This is everything you ever
wanted!

Ripner looks down at the photos. Emaline's broken heart, both figuratively and literally.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIPNER

(to himself)

No it's not.

OUTSIDE: Nora looks at her digital camera, THE BLURRY SHOT is not quite the evidence she needs. She steps away and pulls out her Blackberry.

NORA COLLINS

(into phone)

Charlie? Nora. WHERE THE HELL IS MY NEWS CREW! I'm sitting on the story of the goddamn century!

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Hours later Rip is sitting in the dark living room, staring at the Polaroid.

Noise at the door, thinking it's Nora again, Rip attempts to jump over the couch to hide, but his stiff body only makes it halfway over. The lights flick on to reveal Smart Alec at the door.

Ripner falls off the couch with a CRUNCH. He definitely broke something. He barely manages to get up. Limping around the couch on one leg, carrying the other one.

He looks to Smart Alec for hope.

SMART ALEC

She's stable. Boyd's with her.

Ripner nods his head, gets himself back onto the couch.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

They're keeping her overnight.

Ripner nods again, but he isn't responding.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

Rip?

In front of him is a PIECE OF PAPER. It's a mess of childish writing. Smart Alec picks it up. At the top the words read "Ripner Smith's Will." The rest is a sloppy drawing of stick figures and a heart.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

I don't understand.

RIPNER

Brain not so much.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SMART ALEC
You want to write a will?

Rip nods.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)
But you had one. All your assets
have already been taken care of.

Rip hits the paper, unable to get the right words out.

RIPNER
Me...heart...Em.

SMART ALEC
I know. You love Emaline. But what
am I supposed to do with this?

Ripner pulls out his wallet and points at something.
Smart Alec sees his UNITED STATES OF EQUALITY ID BADGE
and assumes this is about the case again.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)
There's nothing else you can do
for them. You're on your last leg
here, literally! (sees fluid
coming out of Rip's ears) Rip,
your head is leaking.

Smart Alec goes to get a towel but Rip doesn't care about
himself. He grabs Alec and shows him his wallet again.

He points at something else. Though it's not revealed to
us, Smart Alec finally understands.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)
Do you think that will work?

Rip nods his head. Nothing but hope in his eyes. Smart
Alec lets it penetrate. He looks at Rip differently.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)
I'm proud of you.

Ripner smiles, sort of, if he had a mouth. At least his
eyes seem to be smiling.

Smart Alec can't help it. He hugs Ripner. And Ripner
attempts to hug him back with his one arm, but Smart Alec
accidentally crunches his bones. Fragments fall to the
floor. Rip doesn't care anymore.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

A NEWS VAN is outside. CAMERA CREW swarmed around Nora Collins, prepping for her big expose.

Boyd's truck drives up with Emaline inside. She's looking at the circus outside with resigned annoyance.

Boyd pulls into the driveway and parks. He jumps out and runs around to help Emaline out of the car.

Nora approaches with her CAMERA MAN finally in tow.

NORA COLLINS

Emaline White, what do you gain
from harboring the reanimated body
of Ripner Smith?

Emaline looks at her like she's crazy.

BOYD

Could you back off? She just got
out of the hospital!

NORA COLLINS

Is this in relation to his
decomposing body? A bacterial
infection? You and Ripner Smith
used to be lovers, did you
rekindle that flame with his
corpse?

Emaline stops and turns on Nora.

EMALINE

You dated him too. Make up
whatever story you like to make
yourself feel like you deserve the
spotlight of his passing shined
only on you and your giant hair.

Nora touches her hair insecurely. Then she covers the microphone and leans in toward Emaline, off the record.

NORA COLLINS

Hey. You're not special here. I
loved him too.

EMALINE

People like you don't know what
love is.

And with that, Boyd gets her to the door, leaving Nora behind with her Camera Man who finally heard what this story is about and can't quite believe it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAMERA MAN

I'm out here on a Saturday morning
because you think there's a
walking dead guy in there? Did
Bigfoot put you up to this?

NORA COLLINS

Shut up.

INT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Emaline walks in with help from Boyd. Her body may be
weak, but her spirit is still strong.

EMALINE

I got it from here, Boyd. (Boyd
won't let go) I said I got it!

But Boyd won't let go. He pulls her into a hug instead.

BOYD

Don't scare me like that Em.

She doesn't want to make more of this than it already is.

EMALINE

Says the guy who manhandled a
zombie in my kitchen.

(Boyd still won't let
go. She softens)

Okay. I won't do that again.

Smart Alec bursts through the front door and slams it
shut behind him.

SMART ALEC

That woman is a piranha in heels!

BOYD

Where were you?

SMART ALEC

I had to get something notarized.

He places an envelope on the table. Boyd gives him a
confused look, but Smart Alec shakes his head not to ask.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

(to Emaline)

So how's the patient?

EMALINE

Losing her patience with being a
patient.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMALINE (CONT'D)

It's not the first heart
palpitation I've suffered. Won't
be the last either.

BOYD

Don't say that.

She wants to change the subject.

EMALINE

Who wants some Boozy Floozy
Bruised Peach Jam? I started to
make it and then got horribly
interrupted by life.

Emaline heads out the back door. Boyd and Alec follow.

EXT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Emaline walks slowly into the garage again, she's still
not quite up to snuff here.

BOYD

Em. You really should be resting.

EMALINE

I'll sleep when I'm dead Boyd. I'm
supposed to be making the most of
the time I have right? And don't
pretend like you haven't been
dying for some fresh batches.

She goes to the freezer and opens it up, half expecting
to see Rip. But all she finds are frozen fruit. She turns
to the coffin, but that's empty too.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Where's Rip?

Smart Alec suddenly looks sad.

SMART ALEC

I left him in the garden. He's...
not doing so well.

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD GARDEN

Boyd and Alec follow Emaline into the garden, where she
finds Rip propped up on a bench, staring up at a LEMON
TREE. His broken, detached leg next to him. He's baking
in the sun. He looks pretty dried out now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It brings tears to her eyes. She goes to him, a bit wobbly. Boyd moves to help her, but Smart Alec holds him back. Motions that they should give them a moment.

Emaline moves a fallen LEMON to sit down on the bench.

EMALINE

Please don't say anything about turning lemons into lemonade.

Rip GRUNTS SOMETHING UNINTELLIGIBLE and looks at her. But this time, his bright blue eyes are faded, almost lifeless. Emaline is taken aback, but tries not to show it. Tries to carry the conversation.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

So thanks to my grand performance yesterday, the doctor says I moved up the donor list a couple notches. That's something.

Ripner barely registers her. He's in final zombie stage and she knows it.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

I mean. I guess I shouldn't complain about dying to someone who already died. It's kind of rude isn't it?

Ripner just stares at her, faded eyes searching for a way to say what he can't say.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

But hey. I thought I'd make a batch of Bruised Peach jam. I'm a little rusty, but it was your favorite. Right?

Ripner can barely move his hand, but he drops it on the bench, palm side up. Emaline looks at the bony remains, then at his fading eyes. And she places her hand in his.

Tears flow freely now. She can't help it.

She looks around the garden. It's an utterly beautiful day in an utterly beautiful place.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

We were never right for each other were we? Had our time and place. Then we had this, whatever it was.

She looks at Ripner, who won't take his eyes off her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EMALINE (CONT'D)

But it was special. This thing.
The dead guy asking the dying girl
to help him with the meaning of
life.

(beat)

The meaning of life...you'd think
love would be the simplest thing
to understand. I thought I
understood it. But I don't know
anymore.

(beat)

I did love you. I do love you, in
my way. I always will.

Ripner squeezes his fingers around Emaline's hand as
tight as he can. So tight his bones crack. It pains her
to see this. She puts her other hand on top of theirs.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

You'll go to the afterlife. I know
you will. You have a good heart,
Rip. Damaged or not. It's good.

She looks at the ground and chuckles through tears.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

And hey, maybe I'll be seeing you
soon, right? Rip?

(She looks at him)

Rip?

But Ripner's eyes have gone completely blank. Emaline
tries to wake him. She shakes his hand, but it just comes
off, clutching hers.

She touches his face with her other hand, and jumps back
as his whole corpse slumps over to the grass.

Dead. Again. For good.

Emaline stands there a beat. Ripner's detached hand still
clutched on hers.

Boyd and Smart Alec approach her sullenly.

Emaline kneels down next to Ripner's corpse, placing the
hand where it should be, releasing its grip on her.

EMALINE (CONT'D)

Rip.

She puts a hand on his chest. And she sobs.

Smart Alec has tears in his eyes. Boyd's arm around him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Emaline looks up at them, but there's nothing any of them can do at this point. Ripner is gone.

Emaline bends down and places a gentle kiss on what's left of Ripner's forehead. She reaches out and closes his eyes. Boyd helps her stand up, pulling her into a hug, looking away from the body.

This isn't the fairy tale ending Rip expected.

But Smart Alec can't take his eyes off Ripner. Willing something to happen. Believing it could.

And he sees something. It looks like the skin on Ripner's hand moved. Like it reconnected. And it's not alone.

As Smart Alec watches, Ripner's body starts to rebuild itself. Struck silent, he reaches out and pokes at Emaline and Boyd.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S YARD - CONTINUOUS

The neighbor's dog is still happily chewing away at Ripner's SEVERED ARM, but it disappears, leaving the dog scurrying around in confusion.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Emaline and Boyd turn just as the severed arm reappears and reattaches to Rip's body. It's happening faster now. Gruesome and miraculous, bones lining up, tendons reconnecting, veins snaking through flesh as it fills itself out, skin wrapping around it all.

They stand in awe as Ripner's body takes on an otherworldly glow for just an instant. AN UPWARD FLASH OF LIGHT. And he's left there, returned to full form.

No one knows what to do. Emaline steps forward. She can't believe her eyes, so she touches him. Places her hand on his arm, and looks back at the guys.

EMALINE

He's warm!

Ripner's body has returned to its original "healthy" state. Boyd steps forward, the medical professional, still shocked by what he's seen.

He opens Rip's eyelids - blue eyes staring back blankly. He takes Ripner's pulse. Nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOYD

He's still dead. Just, fresh dead.

EMALINE

Maybe we need to wait a little longer. Maybe he just needs more time.

But now it's Smart Alec's turn to step forward.

SMART ALEC

No. YOU need more time.

Emaline's confused.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

We need to get to the hospital.

Boyd and Emaline just kneel there, unsure what to do.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

Let's go! Boyd get the casket.
Emaline, get the truck. Now!

Too shocked to argue, they both jump into action. Smart Alec looks down at his former boss and friend.

SMART ALEC (CONT'D)

You actually pulled it off.

TITLE CARD - **STAGE ONE: FRESH (AGAIN)**

EXT. EMALINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Emaline runs out front to get Boyd's truck. She blows right by Nora, who snaps her Camera Man into action.

Too frantic to pay attention, Emaline actually drives up her driveway and right through the gate to the garage. Nora Collins comes chasing after just as Smart Alec and Boyd are carrying the casket out to the truck.

NORA COLLINS

Stop right there!

Emaline jumps out of the truck and Nora snaps her fingers at the Camera Man. He starts filming.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

This is Nora Collins on location in Los Angeles where I've just uncovered the story of the century.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

The corpse of Ripner Smith, whose tragic accidental death was caught on camera during my own live report, has miraculously come back to life.

She grabs the casket, causing it to tip open.

Ripner's body rolls out. Still freshly dead. And not changing. Nora looks at him baffled. She pokes at him. Tries to get him to wake up.

NORA COLLINS (CONT'D)

Ripner! I know you're alive.

(looking at Emaline)

How'd you get him to look like this again? How is this possible? He's...

EMALINE

Dead. Show some respect.

Emaline shoves Nora out of the way. The guys get Ripner back into the casket, load it in, climb aboard, and they peel out. Leaving Nora with her Camera Man still rolling.

CAMERA MAN

You want this for your reel?

The entire crew looks at her like she's lost her mind.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

A SURGEON runs tests on Ripner's body. Boyd paces outside while Emaline tries to wrap her head around all of this.

Smart Alec pulls out Ripner's wallet, looking at his LICENSE. Focusing in on a LITTLE DOT on the card we remember that RIPNER IS AN ORGAN DONOR. That's what he was telling Smart Alec before.

The surgeon steps out of the examination room. He looks dumbfounded.

SURGEON

I can't think of a single medical explanation for how this is possible, but his organs are still viable. We have to act quickly though.

Smart Alec pulls out Ripner's last minute notarized Will. Emaline doesn't quite understand. But then it hits her.

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EMALINE

He gave me his heart?

SMART ALEC

Legally binding. No take backs.

Overwhelmed is an understatement for Emaline.

TITLE CARD - **BOY GETS GIRL BACK (SORT OF)**

INT. HOSPITAL RECOVERY ROOM - DAY

The TV in the corner plays footage of Nora's meltdown on Ripner's casket, on repeat. It's gone viral.

ANDERSON COOPER

CNN's own Nora Collins has become an internet sensation for all the wrong reasons. Her bizarre accusation that Ripner Smith is some sort of zombie even has its own autotune song.

Cut to an "autotune" musical version of her tirade. There's no recovery from this humiliation.

ANDERSON COOPER (CONT'D)

Professional self-destruction has never been this catchy.

Boyd and Smart Alec, both dressed in suits, enter the room solemnly to find Emaline's bed empty.

But a toilet flushes and Emaline carefully steps out of the bathroom, dressed nicely. She smiles.

Boyd pulls out a wheelchair.

BOYD

Ready?

EMALINE

Is that really necessary?

SMART ALEC

You want to break that heart before you get to use it?

Emaline reluctantly sits in the wheelchair.

EMALINE

No more broken hearts.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - MORNING

Smart Alec is giving a eulogy. We see Emaline sitting at what was meant to be her grave, which is now prepared for Ripner.

No spectacle or media circus; only a small gathering, including Drunk Dad. Sipping sadly from his flask.

Alec finishes his eulogy, reading from Rip's mother's family album, where he has written the final entry.

SMART ALEC

In his final moments, Ripner Smith realized that to truly love someone means to put their needs before yours. And with that, the curse was lifted. I have no doubt that Ripner made it to the afterlife. But he sure found a way to leave his heart here with us.

(looking at Emaline)

Now, I won't say they all lived happily ever after, because that would clearly contradict the reason we're here today. But I will say this: they all lived, and they all loved, and that's happiness enough.

The casket is lowered into the ground. Smart Alec throws a shovel of dirt on it. Boyd does the same. But Emaline pulls out a peach and drops it down into the dirt.

She touches her chest, where a scar peeks up over the collar of her blouse. And she smiles, bittersweet.

EMALINE

Way to leave your mark, Rip.

TITLE CARD - **ONCE UPON A LATER TIME**

EXT. BOOZY FLOOZY'S DESSERT BAR - DAY

A KNIFE slices into a jam-filled wedding cake with TWO GROOMS on top. Smart Alec and Boyd, now years older, are married. Legally. They kiss and celebrate.

As Emaline puts out the slices of cake, we see that the reception is being held in her very own bar. It's edgy and fun. Friends and guests drool over her boozy treats. And she has never looked happier.

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As she makes sure the strawberry jam fountain is fully stocked with dippable treats, she bumps into someone.

It's a DASHING MAN and she's spilled jam on his hand. He smiles and licks it off. She smiles, assumes he's gay and continues happily hosting.

But the Dashing Man doesn't take his eyes off her, causing him to trip and stumble. Emaline grabs his arm before he hits the ground.

EMALINE

Careful. Don't fall.

As she helps him up, he gazes at her with the DEEPEST BROWN EYES she's ever seen. And he melts.

DASHING MAN

I already did.

Emaline smiles. Radiantly. The way she smiled when she first met Rip. The man can't help but mirror it back.

And that's when she reaches out to check his pulse. He's baffled yet intrigued. She feels a heartbeat.

EMALINE

Don't ask.

She pulls him onto the dance floor, smiling as she sees how happy Boyd and Alec are. Emaline holds her heart, knowing she has a chance at that too. Amongst the living.

THE END