

FONTANELLE

Characters

PHILIP, mid 40s

JAMES, late 40s

ANNA, early 40s

LAUREN, late 30s

NOTE: When the character name prior to a line is not bold (PHILIP), the subsequent speech reflects the immediate internal thoughts or pronouncement of that character.

When the character name prior to a line *is* bold (**PHILIP**), the subsequent dialogue is a flashback conversation between two characters.

FONTANELLE

Day One

PHILIP

I'm on the job.

So, then, what? Leave me the fuck alone? No. No, not that.

There is an orange-headed girl, sits across from me, so loud on her phone every PR rep on the third floor knows her business. She likes it that way. Terrifying tats and medieval piercings and one-sided conversations that shock.

Her impulsivity is calculated.

But me, I'm new here. So don't expect that I can play at being her, shrieking into the phone, like I own the joint.

For someone else, sure. Maybe. Lauren, certainly. Anna, possibly, except she never shuts up. But you?

Have we ever shared phone words before? The handoff, perhaps, sure.

“Hey ... Yeah, I'll get her.”

I need to get back to work.

I'm on the job.

JAMES

Phil, it's James. Something's happened. I don't know ...

Something's not ... right. I'm, I fell and there's ...

Better call nine-one-one. I'm at home.

Have 'em hurry.

ANNA

Everyone takes their own sweet time around here. Why rush?
We are captives. Those in white are the jailers, they know it, and they abuse that knowledge.

It's ... two o'clock and I've been waiting since ten-thirty this morning. Four and a half hours waiting for a—

Three and a half hours, but still. That's a long time, outside these walls. It's only in here that time no longer has any meaning or importance. Entire days elapse, disappear, without any progress whatsoever.

“That procedure has been postponed until tomorrow.”

“The tests? Yeah. The lab got backed up. Sorry, hun. Tomorrow.”

Why should I care? I'm not going anywhere.

That's what *they* thought. They *thought* that. Turns out I still have my free will.

My god, that is delicious to discover.

PHILIP

Shit. Fuck!

You leave that as a fuckin' *voice message*?! Asshole!

PHILIP (*Cont.*)

So now you don't answer, nine-one-one won't pick up, and I'm still a good twelve minutes away.

Ringing ... ringing ...

Me? You called *me*?! Why?

I blast through an intersection, my foot never leaving the gas.
All my life—

Car horns blare. Brakes squeal.

Idiot. *He* couldn't get through to nine-one-one either. *That's* why. Why'd you think? Keep that ego in check.

Another intersection. Fuck it.

ANNA

Five doctors and not one of them has the Hippocratic balls to sign me out. Cowards.

Five primary physicians, a half-dozen internists, a gaggle of students, two petty administrators and a small, mole-encrusted European woman I suspect is their private chef.

On rounds yesterday morning, not everybody could fit in my room and they had to relay the diagnosis out to the hallway like a game of Telephone. The guy on the end left here thinking I have testicular cancer.

JAMES

Is the door locked?

Have I been outside today?

Did the window read inside out?

ANNA

My new kidney's failing. The neuropathy is worse, which I've known all along. My creatinine level is up, my white cell count is down. Ammonia's all over the place. A barium x-ray shows I might have gastroparesis and an ultrasound revealed gallstones and stomach ulcers.

And it seems I have halitosis.

PHILIP

The paramedics have arrived ahead of me. The front door, smashed open.

James, an unfurled clump in the foyer.

“His brother-in-law. James phoned me at my work. I called nine-one-one. Took forever.”

I learn not to call from a cell phone next time.

Next time.

“What's wrong with him? What happened?”

No one knows anything. A distant siren approaches. James is conscious, but disoriented. His skin the color of pancake batter.

One of the older paramedics who seems ex-military — maybe it's the crew cut — takes me aside.

Has James ever had a stroke? “I don't think so.”

And I'm suddenly aware how little I know him.

The military medic mentions James has his car keys clutched tightly in one hand.

“Sir, we believe he fell down the stairs on his way out of the house. A minute later and this would have happened while he was behind the wheel.”

PHILIP (*Cont.*)

I don't fess up that I myself may be responsible for three intersection smashups in the last four minutes.

Crew cut asks a question he thinks is innocent. "Sir, do you know where he was going?"

"To the hospital. He was going to the hospital.

To pick up his wife.

My sister."

ANNA

A.M.A.

JAMES

A.M.A.

ANNA

It means ... "Against Medical Advice."

A.M.A. also stands for American Medical Association.

That irony speaks for itself.

When James gets here, he will track down a doctor so we can put an end to this shit. A good job for him, tracking people down. Like hunting for large game.

Or finding a lost golf ball in the rough.

Three hours from—

Two hours from now I'll be home, on my own pillow-top mattress. If I want. Or in the living room. On the Horchow sectional by the fireplace. Toasty. Lying back and taking in the Christmas tree.

ANNA (*Cont.*)

There better be a goddamn *tree!* (Sonofabitch James.)

The Christmas tree, a fire is crackling, Philip is there, and the three of us drink milky cocoa with mini-marshmallows and sing carols and shake exquisitely wrapped presents and guess their contents.

James kisses me and takes my hand and we start up the stairs to bed — two and rest, two and rest — and then he quietly locks the bedroom door and slowly undresses me.

We lie together, wrapped in each other's arms and fifteen-hundred thread count, Egyptian cotton sheets.

And then, so softly, I drift off, and the last five weeks become a very bad dream.

JAMES

Anna.

Anna.

PHILIP

Hey, it's me.

I know you've got a class, so I didn't expect you to pick up.

James has had a ... an accident of some kind. Not a car accident or anything like that.

He fell. But they're not sure why. I'm following the ambulance to St. Matt's.

Call me when you can. On my cell. Not at Windam-Marks.

Lauren, I may need your help.

LAUREN

Metamorphoses.

Specifically, the tragic tale of Narcissus and Echo in Book III. Did everyone read it?

For those who didn't — which appears to be most of you — I strongly suggest you read it anyway. In addition to it being on the final exam, I'm confident you'll find great revelations in these writings. Just because these are Greek myths doesn't mean they can't impart contemporary truths. Trust me ... it's extremely exciting when you first experience that moment of discovery.

So what is the author, Roman poet P. Ovidius Naso, trying to tell us with this classic story of Narcissus and Echo?

Anybody.

Thoughts from someone who read it?

Well, we know that Narcissus is a beautiful young man of sixteen when this particular story begins, having already left a long trail of broken hearts. Of both sexes. Did you get that? Did you understand that in your reading? Both women *and men* lusted after Narcissus, but he rejected them all.

Here. "And many a youth, *and many a damsel* sought to gain his love; but such his mood and spirit and his pride, none gained his favour."

Like something you might see on Cinemax, right?

Yeah. So one day Echo, who's this hot little forest nymph, sees Narcissus for the first time and immediately falls for him. A love at first sight sort of thing.

Now Echo has her own back story, which is that the goddess Juno, who is the wife of Jupiter, had put a curse on Echo some time earlier. That part is especially interesting. Seems that Echo, always a real chatterbox, once had a bad encounter with Juno when Juno came to the forest looking for her philandering husband, Jupiter.

LAUREN (*Cont.*)

Echo delayed Juno in her search by talking her ear off, allowing the other nymphs to high-tail it out of the forest where they had been — we'll say, "cavorting" — with Jupiter.

In the back, you'll want to pay attention to this part.

So when Juno discovered she'd been tricked, she punished Echo.

"Your tongue, so freely wagged at my expense, shall be of little use; your endless voice, much shorter than your tongue."

Harsh, right? I can see that some of you already see where this is going.

And so Echo could no longer speak, except to repeat back the last few words spoken to her.

JAMES

Nanna.

Nanna.

ANNA

James is late.

PHILIP

Mr. Crandall's office, please.

Joyce? It's Philip Hutchison. Is he in?

I don't know yet.

They brought him to St. Matthew's.

LAUREN

So on the day that Echo sees Narcissus for the first time and falls instantly in love with him, she was already the victim of Juno's curse. Echo is incapable of saying anything, and can only hide herself in the trees while she waits for Narcissus to speak.

Finally, Narcissus calls out, "Who is here?"

Echo's reply? "Here ... here ..."

So Narcissus shouts in Echo's direction, "Whoever you are, we'll come together!"

Echo calls out, "We'll come together! ... come together! ..."

Alright, alright. I heard that. Let's not, uh ...

Echo is so overcome with emotion that she bursts forth from her hiding place and runs to Narcissus. But just as she starts to embrace him, he shouts:

"Hands off! Embrace me not! May I *die* before I give you power over me."

And poor Echo can only say, "I give you power over me ... power over me ..."

Isn't that remarkable? Echo's limited repetition of Narcissus' words completely changes their meaning.

Rejected and humiliated, Echo disappears into the forest, concealing herself in the caverns of the hills.

"Nothing remains except her bones and voice ... her voice continues, her bones have turned to stone. For, though we hear her calling in the hills, 'tis but a voice, a voice that lives, that lives among the hills."

So tragic. You can see what I mean, though, about the story's relevance to contemporary relationships. The difficulties we often have communicating and the frequent misunderstandings that arise as a result of—

LAUREN (*Cont.*)

–Okay, well, that’s all for today. We’re out of time. Which means you must wait until Tuesday to learn how Narcissus finally gets what’s coming to him.

Finals in two weeks! And there *will* be questions about Metamorphoses.

(*to herself*) And out come the cell phones.

(*She looks at her own phone and sees the missed calls*)

Philip. Philip. Philip.

PHILIP

Why didn’t you call me back?

LAUREN

I had it turned off. (*thumbing through messages*) I see you called several times.

PHILIP

Yes. Something’s happened. Where were you?

LAUREN

You know where.

PHILIP

With Dr. Rosenthal. “Allan.”

LAUREN

What’s happened that was so urgent?

PHILIP

Don’t change the subject.

LAUREN

I thought whatever happened *is* the subject.

PHILIP

So that’s where you were.