

MANDATORY POST-LUNCH SILENT DISCO CARDIOTHERAPY

by Grey Smith

Characters

STEPHANIE	44-year-old woman. Tattooed-on makeup.
CJ	26-year-old man. Significant contemporary record collection.
JORGE	25-year-old guy. Long-sleeve flannel regardless of the weather.
AYESHA	23-year-old person. Saving for grad school.
ALYSSA	22-year-old lady. Confidently goes by “Lyss.”
EMILY	17-year-old girl. One of those multi-color pens.

Setting

Under the awning by the dumpsters at a drive-thru-only coffee stand in the American southwest.
1:30 PM, on average the least busy time of day for this coffee stand.
High of 110° every day this week.

Note

Studies have shown that two minutes of venting anger can help to regulate positive workplace interaction and to facilitate higher productivity.

STEPHANIE

(Offstage) C' mon c' mon c' mon I'm setting the timer now! Same as yesterday! Don't be late or I'll make you do 20 push-ups!

(STEPHANIE wipes her brow and laughs. She carries a crate of silent-disco headphones. The rest of her colleagues walk into the shade. CJ and JORGE are drenched with sweat.)

AYESHA

Okay! Haha thanks Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

Here you go. Here you go. Here you go. Here you go. Here you go. And here I go.

(They all put on the headphones. STEPHANIE holds up a finger. They all click buttons on the sides of the headphones. A faint robotic voice says, "How are you feeling?" then faint dance music thumps away. All but JORGE close their eyes and slowly begin to dance. Some flashily jog in place, and some bust a move. A car honks.)

STEPHANIE	ALYSSA	AYESHA	JORGE	EMILY	CJ
I am feeling very alone! I don't know how I'm supposed to keep living without any kind of human companionship! After my sister died, I thought I'd be able to move on and find another person to spend all my time with, but it turns out that making friends in your forties is extremely difficult! I went on a date with a widower born in 1972, and it made me want to throw up! We went to this cheap-ass	I never know what to say with these... Um... How am I feeling? I am feeling good! I think. I am feeling stressed, but not	I am feeling very fucking tired. CJ made this fucking comment to me earlier about my sexuality? Or well it wasn't really <i>my</i> sexuality but bisexuality in	Stephanie my- Oh. Stephanie the batteries in my headphones. I don't think... Hm. This feels really-	I'm feeling really bad! Ziar knows that I wanted the vice president position and <i>not</i> the treasurer, and I'm just... I'm tired of him treating me like I'm some delicate little thing that can't make my own decisions. And sure! Maybe they gave it to Lilia because she's a <i>lesbian</i> , and that's great	I feel really... scared? It's a new feeling

Mexican restaurant per his recommendation and the food was awful, the music was extremely loud, and the conversation was so boring I'd rather slowly gouge my eyes out with a fork. I've never been on a date that made me feel so extremely shitty about myself! And I kept looking around and wondering if the way that I saw this pathetic man across from me telling some anecdote about his dead wife's golf career was the way that everyone else in the restaurant was seeing me, as if I was some equivalent to this rat shit asshole of a person! Linda, who I guess is my friend, but I only see her at the daycare and we've barely talked outside work, she set me up with one of her husband's friends, and we went out all together at a

as stressed as I was feeling last week, which is good. I'm still thinking about Bilal a lot, but it's getting better... It does bother me still how much they're hanging out. I mean they were hanging out a lot before anyway. I know they're friends. I know it's all okay. *And* I know that he doesn't owe me anything! So like it's fine! I wish they hadn't been hanging out so much before we broke up, and I wish that I didn't still work with her! I wish that I didn't feel so obligated to talk to her all the time! I wish I wasn't as nice to her! But mostly I am feeling better, and that's what's important I think.

general. Like he said bi men shouldn't lead in queer spaces, and I'm just thinking about all the times when my queerness has been challenged and I've been told like, "oh you're not *gay gay*" or "oh you're not *straight straight*" like those even mean anything, and I take solace in those terms! And I know it doesn't really matter. I just feel pathetic, like I have to keep begging for a place in any fucking community. I wish Bilal was better about that kind of stuff. I know it hurts CJ's feelings, but sometimes... I don't know. I don't really know how to talk to Alyssa about it

for her! I'm sooo proud of her for being happy and proud of her identity! But I also think it's not fair to deny someone who is objectively more qualified for a position, just for optics. And too! Ziar knows that I need a better position than treasurer if I'm going to have any chance at getting an interview at UCLA, which I already have a disadvantage at because I'm just a "pretty little white girl," so it's really doubly evil that he even did this in the first place because Lilia has way better chances of getting an interview at UCLA or anywhere because she's a *lesbian*, which there is obviously nothing wrong with. But still!

for me. Not fear but like. This deep deep fear. Like what if I died? That would make sense I think. *(CJ presses his palms into his face.)* Who the fuck gets a degree in nutrition! What the fuck am I going to do with a bachelor's in fucking nutrition! UGHHH!!!!!! *(CJ starts running in place very fast.)* I'm so stupid!!! *(CJ starts running out of breath, and he contorts his face.)* GOD!!!!!!!!!!

(JORGE takes a deep sigh and looks around.)

Uhhh... I guess I'm feeling confused. *(JORGE laughs.)*

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do uhhhh...

different Mexican place, and the entire time he was extremely obviously staring at the waitress's tits, which also made me want to throw up! It's repulsive! And I fucked him! And it was terrible! He lives in this stupid \$600,000 house way up north with five bedrooms and three baths all to himself, and he thinks he can just talk to people! And Linda hasn't even talked to me since the lock-in a few weeks ago, when Anastasia, beautiful little girl, asked me, "if you're here taking care of us, what are *your* kids doing?" and I just started sobbing! All I have is work, and even that is destroying me! It's like I am wondering all day if this is really *it*, like every day is a new trial of just how utterly fucking alone I can be! And I spend all my

I should've known when he got his fucking nose pierced. And started texting in all lowercase.

(ALYSSA starts crying.)

(ALYSSA stops crying.)

either because I know it would hurt her feelings. Especially if she knew about-well.

I don't know. I don't want to be defined by being attracted to people. But especially men. I don't want to be defined by men. Or a lack of men. My relationship with men should not be my primary social identifier!

(JORGE closes his eyes and starts dancing really hard, completely out of rhythm with everyone else.)

(JORGE starts laughing really hard.)

God this is fucked up man.

I guess it would be different if Mr. Burkhardt had actually let me go to the college fair, when he *knows* that it's the most important thing in the world to me to be able to get in a room with these people. As if I even *need* to learn about Riemann sums like...

I GOT A 100% ON THE CHAPTER 8 TEST ANDREW!!! I DON'T NEED TO SIT HERE AND LISTEN TO YOUR FREAKING LECTURE!

(EMILY takes a deep breath.)

It's okay. I'm good and in control and better than other people.

Some other people. I mean.

And not because they're *lesbians*!

My aunts are lesbians, and I

(CJ stops running in place.)

(CJ starts jogging in place.)

Maybe I can just get a new job.

Maybe that will help.

Yeah.

Get my own place. Get a boyfriend.

(CJ takes a deep breath.)

Get control.

And I can stop talking to my stepdad.

Because fuck him. Or-
(CJ laughs.)

mornings and
afternoons here
with these kids
trying to teach
them something,
anything, and I
do the same
thing at night,
and it's like
Jesus! What
more can I do! I
have to live, but I
don't know how
to keep doing
that when-

Or I don't know.
Maybe it's okay.

*(JORGE starts
laughing again.)*

love them a lot!
I'm not even
religious!

I'm also just
horny!

And I need to
move out.

I just also think
it's important to
give people
credit for what
they have
actually achieved
instead of like-

That's what I'll
do. I'll move out,
and I'll get a new
job. A better job.
A better job. A
better job.

Maybe I should-

(A faint alarm tone rings. A faint robotic voice says, "Wind down! Chill Time is now over! Deep breath in!" They all take a deep breath in. "Hold it!" They hold it. "Hold it!" They hold it. "And out, two three four five six. Back to work!" Immediately, JORGE and CJ throw their headphones back to STEPHANIE and run toward the lengthening queue of cars. The others run back to the stand.)

JORGE

I'LL GET THE BUICK AND THE TRUCK, YOU GET THE BLUE AND THE RED.

CJ

'Kay.

(Three weeks later. Same spot.)

(STEPHANIE leads the team out with the crate. ALYSSA and AYESHA are drenched in sweat. Cars honk frequently. STEPHANIE takes a crumpled paper out of the crate, which she reads as she passes out headphones.)

STEPHANIE

This is from uh,

(She points up.)

"We received a report that immediately following your Chill Time the vibes have been a little bummer, so we think it's high time we start a new experiment! From now on, let's only vent things that make us happy. Y'all are killing it! Joyfully, TR"

So.

(They all put on the headphones. STEPHANIE holds up a finger. They all click buttons on the sides of the headphones. A faint robotic voice says, "How are you feeling GOOD?" then faint dance music thumps away. They all close their eyes and start to dance.)

STEPHANIE

ALYSSA

AYESHA

JORGE

EMILY

CJ

Uhhhh... my
mom's doing
okay. She got
out of the

I am getting
really good at
my job!

hospital like,

Often, I will forget I'm even doing my job!

I've actually been doing pretty well.

god, yeah a month ago today.

I am...

Oh! I got my ACT results back! I got a 35, which wasn't my dream score or anything, but I am glad I tried again, and there's always next year!

Sometimes, I feel like I'm watching a movie about someone who does my job, and I just get to watch my own hands put blue ice in a blender over and over again, and that's so exciting!

(ALYSSA starts crying.)

Yesterday Bilal and I had this long conversation about sex and like boundaries, and it just felt so validating to talk to a man who actually understands the shit I'm talking about.

She's been mistaking me for Tio Eddy, which has been really weird.

I feel like, finally I'm getting some recognition for all my success, you know?

I guess that doesn't make me happy, but it's kinda funny.

It's hard because a lot of people think I'm stupid or frivolous or whatever, but it's like it's on you if you're unhappy.

Hm.

And he actually fucking listens to me! Which is great. And...

I can still read road signs.

I just feel so independent right now!

I guess I still feel weird about Alyssa and stuff, but...

She keeps like, yelling at me, but I don't really know a lot of Spanish, so it's kinda...

And I don't mean that people with depression aren't valid! I just mean like...

That's not really good.

Happiness can be as simple as cleaning your room, you know?

A passive viewer of my own existence!

Like not a single soul even knows I'm here!

I don't know it's fine I guess.

I mean I guess I'm happy that we can still work together well?

I wish we could still hang out, but I get it.

(ALYSSA stops crying.)

And I feel good about my choice not to talk to her I think! I need to be respected. If she has a problem, then she can come talk to me, and if she leaves it unresolved, then that's her issue!

And I feel good about that! I do! I feel good about that.

I feel good about that.

God, it's hard to talk about my mom in these things.

Maybe I just shouldn't try to do these anymore. I could just say anything. I don't need to do what the paper says.

I could just-

And it feels like such a gift to know that at my age, when so many people I know are going through these awful periods of like extreme stress and sadness, which I definitely also have, but it's like wow I can actually function, you know?

It's just very comforting sometimes to see other people struggling with things I find easy.

Maybe that makes me a bad person or something. *(EMILY laughs.)*

No that's terrible. I am just as good as anybody else, and I believe that.

But here I am!

In a good way!

And I'm so lucky to live with my family!

God.

Oh my god. Oh god.

God.

Oh my god. Oh my god.

Oh my god.

Fuck. Fuck!

My leg doesn't hurt too bad today.

(A faint alarm tone rings. A faint robotic voice says, "Wind down! Chill Time is now over! Deep breath in!" They all take a deep breath in. "Hold it!" They hold it. "Hold it!" They hold it. "And out, two three four five six. Back to work!" ALYSSA tosses her headphones at STEPHANIE, who catches them, and runs out to the queue with her face down. AYESHA follows leisurely. The others run back to the stand.)

(A month later. Same spot.)

(The crew enters without STEPHANIE. CJ and ALYSSA are drenched with sweat. ALYSSA hacks a terrible cough, followed by a whimper.)

CJ

Oh my god are you okay?

ALYSSA

Yeah. Just the- exhaust from the- trucks.

CJ

Mm.

(STEPHANIE approaches with the crate and a new box.)

STEPHANIE

Hey guys! Sorry, I forgot we've got a new gift from, uh, your friend and mine, TR.

(STEPHANIE kneels, wincing, and opens the box.)

STEPHANIE (cont'd)

A hundred thousand dollars and a jerry can?! I'll be damned!!!

...

Kidding. Um.

(She unpacks the box which contains wristbands and a cartoonish envelope. CJ starts laughing hysterically.)

STEPHANIE (cont'd)

Thanks. So we have to wear these. I guess they're like... I don't know, something about health or fitness or "good vibes" or something. The short of it is that we don't talk during these anymore. Just dancing. I'd read you the note, but the line's already in the intersection, so.

(She hands out the headphones.)

AYESHA

Wait, no talking? Do we still close our eyes?

STEPHANIE

Gonna be completely honest, I don't really care.

AYESHA

Ok.

ALYSSA

Can we talk if we want?

STEPHANIE

No.

(She waves the envelope. She lifts a finger. She presses the button on the side of the headphones. They all do the same. A new robotic voice: "Let's unwind! If you're feeling tense, just let it all go in the breeze duuuude." New, chill electronic music plays.)

(CJ dances viciously out of time, as if he's hearing the same track from before.)

(Some have their eyes open, and some have their eyes shut. Some bob along, and some stand completely still.)

(The cars' horns are even louder and more frequent this week.)

(Two long minutes pass.)

(A new faint alarm tone rings. The voice: "We hope you're feeling nice and chill duuuuuude. Let's get back to that great service we're known for duuuuuuuude!" They give their headphones back to STEPHANIE. ALYSSA coughs again.)

ALYSSA

Sorry.

(CJ runs back to the stand with his arms above his head.)

CJ

WOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(Everyone else shuffles back to their posts.)

(A week later. Early morning.)

(For the first time, there are no cars honking. STEPHANIE sits on the overturned headphones crate, smoking a cigarette.)

(JORGE approaches with a backpack, 32oz water bottle, and extremely large lunch box.)

JORGE

Hey.

STEPHANIE

Hey.

JORGE

What's uhh...

STEPHANIE

You smoke?

JORGE

Sure.

(He sits on his lunch box. He takes out his phone and begins to text someone.)

STEPHANIE

I already called the rest of them.

JORGE

Oh.

STEPHANIE

Guess they didn't tell you.

JORGE

No.

STEPHANIE

Sorry. I didn't have your number. You don't live far?

JORGE

Kind of. I'm out in the middle of the desert.

STEPHANIE

Where at?

JORGE

Outside the highways, up off McHenry.

STEPHANIE

No shit, me too. That's funny.

JORGE

Well I would say we should carpool, but uh-

(He gestures to the stand.)

STEPHANIE

Yep.

JORGE

What happened?

STEPHANIE

Burned down.

(JORGE raises his eyebrows and nods.)

JORGE

How?

(She shrugs.)

STEPHANIE

I guess it's dry here.

JORGE

Has CJ shown up? We were supposed to open together.

STEPHANIE

Bunch of cops and ambulance guys here when I showed up. Pulling somebody out of that car.

JORGE

That's CJ's car.

STEPHANIE

Yep.

Just waiting for Todd to get here, and he'll take over with the legal stuff.

JORGE

He hasn't said anything about us I guess?

(STEPHANIE shakes her head.)

STEPHANIE

I bet we could transfer to another stand, but it sounds like that'll cost more in gas than minimum wage for both of us, even if we carpool.

JORGE

They only pay you minimum?

STEPHANIE

I am a "formerly incarcerated individual," so.

JORGE

Fuck man.

(She shrugs.)

(Silence.)

STEPHANIE

You doing anything this weekend?

JORGE

I uh... my mom's funeral.

STEPHANIE

Oh. How old are you again?

JORGE

25.

STEPHANIE

Oh. Sorry.

(Long silence.)

(A car pulls up. STEPHANIE stands.)

STEPHANIE

Well, here's Todd. I'll uh... It was nice uh...

(She shakes her head and walks away.)

(JORGE stares after her. He sniffs. He looks at the stand again. He puts out his cigarette, picks up his things, and leaves.)

(End.)