

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

By

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The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ZOE (Female)....20's.

AUDIENCE MEMBER who accompanies Zoe

ALEXANDER (Male)....Late 20s-40s. Tall.
Carries a camera.

AUDIENCE MEMBER who accompanies
Alexander

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between is to be performed simultaneously, the two separate sections originating at two different locations. The actor playing Alexander will walk and perform for one audience member, and the actor playing Zoe will walk and perform for the other audience member. Both simultaneous performances will culminate with the actors and their individual audience member all converge at the same location for the final moments of the play.

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SCENE ONE:

Zoe's
conversation
with her audience
member

ZOE

Hi. Thanks for meeting me. And doing this. I
...um....hi. First, hi! _____, right?

So, you don't mind if we walk and talk, do you?
I'm a slow walker. I used to be a fast walker but
now I'm a slow walker. I guess I've evolved.
What about you? Fast or slow? Or medium?

Audience member may respond

Yeah. I get that. I understand, I mean. It's really
nice of you to do this. To walk with me. Meet
me and AND walk with me.

Did you drive here? Or uber? Or just...?

She listens to response

Nice. So. You wanna? Walk? Let's. You have all
your stuff? And if you want to check your
messages or anything while we walk, that's
cool. I mean, we're outside. Not like we're in a
theatre or anything. Fair warning, I'm going to
check my phone. 'Cuz we're meeting Alexander.
Did you know that?

Listens to response

Yeah. He's...we're...well, let's walk and talk. I'll
go into the whole beginning, middle, end of it.
Give you some context.

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They start walking

Were you born here? In Chicago?

Listens to response

So, me. I was born on an island. Sorry. It's not exotic like...I wish it was exotic but was a place in Maine. Off of Maine. It's a whole thing my family, you see, they went there for a vacation and Mom, well...nevermind. Let's just say, poor planning and leave it at that.

My brother was born at Lake Forest Hospital.

She waves to the north

A suburb. The hospital, the Lake Forest one, they brag about every new mother getting a champagne breakfast or something, but my mom says it's just this cheap split of champagne like you get at, you know, like the Jewel.

I did go back there once or twice. The island, I mean. And, get this, you'll like this.

If you're born on island and even if you never really lived there, you're still considered an islander. You're called "an islander." And if you are born off island, even like, you go to a hospital in Maine and come back to the island even six hours later and live there forever, you're always an "off islander." It's nuts. Just this random chance occurrence and suddenly you're in this club you never signed up for.

But it's not derogatory. More factual. Like having....I dunno, Italian heritage. No matter

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where you go, what you do, you'll always be Italian. You can never change it, but it happened before you had any choice in the thing.

It's kind of bullshit. But kind of nice. I should go back again. I mean, I am kind of a member. I belong even if I didn't have a vote.

She stops

After a moment

Am I walking too fast?

Listens to response

Okay.

So, we're meeting Alexander. He's not my boyfriend. This is not a romantic thing. He's really nice. It's not that. He's married and all.

Oh! You'll like this. You will.

Well, I like it.

We met because his cell phone fell out of a plane.

Zoe's pace may increase slightly as she talks

I know! He's a photographer. An actual photographer. You know how people say they want to be a photographer? It's like wanting to be a vet or a movie star or an author. You know what I mean.

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But he is. He has clients and the whole deal.
He's older than me. He doesn't look it, but he is.
You know how some people; you can't tell their
age? He's like that.

Hey, what do you do?

She listens

That sounds nice.

(or)

I'm sorry. I know. Well, I don't but, you know.

Oh, yeah. He was in a small airplane, shooting...

She stops

She thinks

I don't know why he wasn't using one of his big
cameras. The fancy ones you never see people
using anymore because we all have cell phones.
But he said he was filming not...um....shooting.
Well, I guess filming is shooting, anyway,
something about filming the shoot for his wife
and well, anyway, the wind whipped the phone
right out of his hand.

And it kept filming. All the way down. You
know how if you drop your phone wrong, the
screen cracks.

Listens to response

His fell 20,000 feet and filmed the whole thing.
Going down through the air and it
landed....wait for it....on a beach. On the sand,

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Evanston Beach, like feet from the water.
Because he had the location app, he found it.
Face up. Not busted.

She stops and lifts her face up to the sky

Still filming. 'Til the battery ran out. But he
found it. Landed and found it. Drove there. Do
you drive? I don't drive. I used to. Do you?

Listens to response

Oh yeah. Okay. Yeah. I don't. I did but...he
found his phone and he had to take a photo of
the phone where it landed. That's what he said.
Like, he had to. But I guess I should be nicer. He
is a professional, so maybe he did.

Have to, I mean.

So, he climbed on the rocks. Do you know
Evanston Beach? Well, there are a few but they
all have rocks. The whole lakefront does.
Erosion. Or not to. To help the erosion not
erode. You know what I mean.

Anyway, he climbed on the rocks with his
camera, a big one, you know. The fancy one. To
take a photo of the phone which had landed
right next to the water, on the sand, well, in a
place. And then he slipped, fell like six feet onto
more rocks and completely jacked up his back.
He literally broke his back.

And he's tall so there's a lot to....jack up, you
know?

Well, you don't know. But you will. You're
meeting him. Yeah. Did I tell you that out?

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Listens to response

Yeah. I told you.

He's nice. Alexander. Not Alex. Alexander.

They walk

So, we met four years ago at rehab. RIC.
Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. Over that
way.

She gestures

Not drug rehab. You probably figured that out.

Anyway.

Alexander takes pictures of everything. And at
RIC, it was this whole thing because you are so
not supposed to take photos of patients.
Because everyone looks like shit. Truly. Puffy
and twisted and everything. Half the people
there can't brush their teeth without help so
it's, well, you can guess. Or imagine.

It drove him nuts. Not being able to take
photos.

In an objective way, it is visually interesting.
Rehab. Physical rehab. Not fun. But
really....human?

Anyway.

It was nice. That he had to keep going. Keep
doing his thing. Even with a broken back.

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So, I went to him and told him, said, “You can take my picture.”

He looked at me like I had said, “Here’s a million dollars.” He just stood there. Well, sat there. He was still in a chair then.

“Yeah. I’ll sign a waiver or whatever. Have at it. Just no bare ass shots.” Too much junk in the trunk, as they say.

It was this whole deal. Which was fantastic. To have something not be about my body. Well, it was about my body but more about my body being a helpful thing. For him.

But anyway, it was a deal. “Can you make your own decisions? You are on medications, Zoe.”

“Yes, I can make my own fucking decisions, Hospital Administrator Guy.”

What finally got them was that I told them that the project was giving me a reason to live.

Free advice? If you ever end up with a massive, life threatening injury, and really want something, tell people it will give you a reason to live.

Because people can’t fix things. Well, they can, but they can’t stop death. They can’t. No one can. But medical people? Fixing shit junkies. Death is like, well....ha! Death. Losing.

I know it suddenly got weird. Bringing up death. But look, we’re both still here so, so not the end. Yet. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink.

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And that's from Monty Python. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink. It's a bit from this comedy show from the 70s. *(In a British accent)* "Nudge, nudge, wink, wink, say no more, say no more."

It's my Dad's favorite show. He has all the DVDs. And the movies. They made movies too. What's your favorite show? You have one?

She listens

You know, I can't decide. What mine is. There's so much good stuff. And since I don't have a car payment anymore, I get like all the streaming services. It's my gift to myself.

So, I think I should touch base with Alexander. Tell him we're actually en route, as they say. So, if you want to check your messages, that's cool.

She stops walking

She doesn't text. If the audience member is checking their messages, she still says the following lines

You know, sometimes, when I'm out, I'll play music and pretend like it's the musical score to my personal movie. But it's weird. I only do that if I have make-up on or just look really good. Like cool.

Waits for audience member to finish, if they are checking messages

Do you ever do that? Give yourself background music?

She listens

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You should try it! You gotta pick good music though.

(or)

Yes. Yeah. I think we've all seen so many movies, it's like a natural reaction.

I thought about it because when I looked at my phone, I sort of saw my reflection.

I'm going to text Alexander now.

She pulls out her phone and looks at it

Oh. Cool. He already...

She replies to the text. She straightens up

They're on their way. Alexander and _____.

She then puts one hand over her eye and looks around. She then takes it down

Let's go. I'm close....we're close. We'll see him soon. Should I play one of my "soundtrack to my life" songs?

*If the response is yes or a shrug, she does.
If it is no, she doesn't*

They walk

They arrive at the lakefront

I wanted to get here first. Before him.

So, favor.

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Will you take my picture? Your phone or mine, doesn't matter. If you don't want to, I'll take a selfie.

No, I'll just take a selfie but you tell me what you think of it. If it's good. You have to tell me if it's good or not, okay?

I want to test the angle first.

She begins framing herself as she positions her phone in the selfie-taking position

So, the reason we met, I mean, not us but me and Alexander, is I was shot.

Puts her phone down

I know. Very odd. Obviously, it's the reason I don't drive. Or maybe not obviously.

Anyway.

You read this shit in the paper, right? Well, see it online. If you have the Trib subscription. People shot at a bar. Or beauty salon. Orwell.

It happens to actual people. Like me. You don't think that it does.

(Assuming a voice) "You young people think bad things will never happen to you." Yeah, Grandma, I know.

Four years ago, next Thursday. Happy anniversary.

And, yes, it does mess you up.

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Have you ever been....wait. Sorry. Don't mean to pry. Or trigger you. But now even that word is a trigger, am I right? "I don't want to trigger you, Zoe!"

Then don't fucking say "trigger"!

Sorry.

She pulls her phone up and takes a quick selfie. Looks at it, squinting. Shows it

What do you think?

Listens to answer

I think I'll take another one.

Thanks for listening, by the way.

She looks in the distance

I think I see Alexander.

Maybe not.

So, here's the deal. He and I usually meet here on the actual anniversary, which is next week, but I told him we had to meet today.

Why you may wonder, because that's what he's wondering.

Okay, real quick. Three bullets. I was at the stoplight by the Quik Mart. It's a couple of blocks over that way.

She points

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There was a shooting. I was not the “intended target” as they say. Which, first off, is awful. That someone else was, I mean. Someone decided that someone else deserved to have...that on this particular day and moment, instead of just yelling, or running away, or even maybe celebrating something even, because they never got them, this person just did this little, tiny motion with their finger, a couple of times and then these tiny metal cannons, or just like smooth rocks, are propelled through the air to land anywhere. Either hit something that stops them or slow down.

You never think about bullets slowing down but some must, right? If they don't come into contact with something. Just gravity and the friction against the air molecules make them just arc down to land. To land on the land. I bet there have been studies about that. I should have looked those up.

One went through my calf and landed in the glove box. One hit the steering wheel and then bounced, nicked my rib, completely trashed part of my small intestine, and went out. The last one, the big one. Well, went in my ass, literally hit my hip socket and travelled up and landed in my brain. It's still there. A souvenir, as us survivors are supposed to say. Yup. I'm now officially in the gunshot victims, I mean, gunshot survivors club. Another club I had no vote in deciding on.

So. Yeah. Ouch.

So, this all happened almost four years ago. And on the exact same day, almost the exact same time, Alexander busted his back up in

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Evanston. And then, we had our very first PT session at RIC the exact same day and time.

So, we come back here every year and he takes my picture to document....that I'm still "vertical," ya know? Well, we actually take each other's. I take his photo too.

She begins to smile

We have this thing. When he documented my glamorous recovery, we would joke, "Okay, THAT'S the obit picture." It started when-

She begins to laugh

-Oh man, okay. This is a little gross but, like I said, I want to give you context.

We were both in PT. Physical therapy. We were both, still pretty messed up but getting better. I'm working with this big therapy ball against a wall. My PT DC...I always loved the sound of that. "PT DC." It became one word. Like, his entire name is PT DC. "Hey, PT DC, that hurts," or whatever.

So, we're working with me squatting.

She squats

And the ball is behind me, against the wall. And I have to go up and down against the wall.

She demonstrates

So up and down, squatting up and down. Oh, this is important. I've still got my bag. The colostomy bag. Where the um....crap goes.

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Sorry, but yeah. And PT DC is next to me and Alexander is over there.

She waves in from of her.

Doing something, but he has his camera. And I'm squatting up and down and I'm...um....crying. But it's more pissed off crying, not sad crying. PT DC is saying, you know, the usual. "You got this, Zoe." You know. And I squat and start going back up. It's the last time. The twentieth.

And my bag breaks.

All my crap just busts out and pours down my front. All down my leggings, which were, wait for it, light pink. I looked very CSI.

We all just freeze for a second. The moment just hangs there in the air. As the crap just sort of cascades slowly down my legs.

And I look at Alexander and, after just the slightest second, he says, "Oh shit."

And the thing is, Alexander doesn't swear. Like, never. It's all "darn" and "shoot" or maybe "hell." He's kind of...proper. A little anal. No. Not anal. Just a tiny bit formal.

Anyway.

And we begin laughing. All three of us. Me, PT DC, and Alexander. Hard. Really hard. And PT DC is supposed to help me, you know. But every time he even moves to start cleaning me up, it makes us all laugh even harder.

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Alexander, Alexander is in his torso cast so he is flapping his arms, and he has long arms, but he's trying to laugh with his arms and legs 'cuz he's all plastered up.

She demonstrates

And I'm on the floor, laughing in my own pile of shit.

She stops and remembers

We begin to calm down just a second. Just at the point of getting it together and beginning to deal with me and my "situation" as PT DC called it, Alexander lifts up his camera and takes my picture.

And that set us off again.

She laughs and then stops

When he snapped that picture, I think it was either the very best moment of my life or the very worst. I don't know why.

So that was the beginning of, "THAT'S the obit picture." Every really awful moment or photo we would just look at each other and say, "That one."

It will make you think. Really! Because people get one picture in their obit. An entire life and there is just one second snapped. Caught.

And you don't know at the time that THAT is the one. The one image representing you for all eternity. Like you're at a picnic or on a birthday

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or at a bar. Whatever. And the people left behind, one of those people picks.

It's very arbitrary. I don't want some photo from the fucking yearbook to be me. Who I was. I want to pick. Decide.

Do you know what photo of you you would want?

She listens

I know. It's a lot to think about.

She turns and looks at the lake. She squints

I think I see them.

She points

Think that's them? Oh. You wouldn't...um....yeah. That's him and _____, I think.

Maybe she waves

So, the bullet shifted yesterday. The one still in my head. This morning, I went blind in my left eye.

She covers her right eye

Can't see a thing.

She takes her hand down

See, they could never even try to get it out. Right in a certain spot. Too deep, it's sort of

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along a major, oh, whatever. When it begins tipping, slipping, I'm, well, time for the obit pic.

That's why, well, this is why, I can't drive.
Anymore.

Don't worry. My dad is coming to get me.
Maybe my mom. He doesn't know yet. That this is....

I do have an obit contender picture. Alexander took it about two years ago. Well, one year, fifty-one weeks ago. My hair looked so great that day.

She looks off in the distance towards Alexander and audience member

They stopped. I think he knows. That it's us and that...well...

That's another thing.

One photo. And also, one last time when you KNOW it's the last time. Very strange. How do you end that conversation? "Okay, well, bye"?

'Cuz this is the last time he's going to see me.

She turns to audience member

I'm glad this is our first AND last time. Just one meeting. No frame of reference. But also, no shock.

"I met this girl once. Zoe. And then I heard she died."

None of that. You know it. Right now.

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What I like is that I am pretty certain you're going to remember me. And this. Because I think sometimes, usually, it is a last time but you don't know it right then. Only later. "Oh my god. That time at the..." in the parking lot or wherever. "That was the last time I saw" whoever.

She looks towards the lake. She puts her hand over one eye, and then over the other

(To herself) Yeah. Okay

Waving and calling in the direction of Alexander and audience member

(Calling) Hey. That you?

ALEXANDER
Hey. Yeah. Me and _____.

ZOE
(To her audience member) I just went blind. But it's okay. You don't have to....I mean, he's here now and will, you know. Make sure I can get to my dad's car.

Alexander and his audience member arrive

(To Alexander) Alexander, before anything, take my pic.

Zoe positions herself with her back to the lake, facing Alexander and audience members.

Is the lake behind me?

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ALEXANDER

Yes. Zoe?

ZOE

Alexander. Take my picture right now. Okay. Is the light like you like it? How do I look? Fix anything that's weird or sticking up.

Perhaps the audience members respond

Perhaps Zoe fusses with her hair or clothes

ALEXANDER

Ready?

Alexander takes a photo. He looks at it for a moment.

(To Zoe) Do you want to see?

Zoe turns to her audience member.

ZOE

You know what's funny? After all that wanting to decide which is going to be my obit picture, someone else IS going to have to choose. You tell me if this one is the one, okay?

Alexander shows the photo to both audience members

A car horn is heard

I think that's....Alexander, is that my Dad?

ALEXANDER

I think so....yes.

Zoe turns to each audience member

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ZOE

(To Alexander's) It was nice sort of meeting you. *(To her audience member)* It was really nice meeting you. And, yes, this is that weird conversation I was talking about earlier! What do you say?

But I am here to help you with this. I've thought alot about it.

(In the direction of her audience member) Wink, wink, nudge, nudge, say no more, say no more.

(In the direction of Alexander's audience member) _____ can explain it to you.

(To Alexander) You ready?

ALEXANDER

Are you?

ZOE

Just one more second.

Zoe turns towards the lake and feels the air on her face. Perhaps she extends her arms out

Feel that? It feels so good. I wonder if this is what being on that island felt like?

Alexander turns towards the lake as well

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SCENE TWO:
Alexander's
conversation
with his audience
member

ALEXANDER
Hi. I'm Alexander. And you're?

Alexander listens to response.

Alright. Nice to meet you, _____. I'm
Alexander. Alright, we're walking to the
lakefront. I'm glad you're coming.

Gestures to his camera

And yes, I will be taking pictures, but none of
you, unless you want me to. See, I'm a
photographer. In my business, you learn that a
lot of people do not want their picture taken.

Some do though. Especially if they know I'm
professional. I think people think I can make
them look better than, you know, regular
iPhone pictures. Even with the portrait setting.

You have an iPhone?

*He listens to response. Perhaps Alexander
looks at their phone*

Hey, I will tell you, between you and me, I do
make people look better. I can. I'm pretty good.
My mother says I should do, like, be like Annie
Leibovitz. You know her? Famous celebrity
photographer-

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Listens to the response

She's good. I've got some issues with how she always...never mind.

Perhaps he waves his hand

Technical stuff.

But I will take your picture later if you want.

I always bring it with me. Konner, my wife, she says if I leave the house without my camera, I feel how a most people feel when they leave their house without their phone. Or their keys. It just doesn't happen.

And if I EVER leave without my camera, that's the day. The day the light is perfect, or something happens. You know?

He listens if there is a response

My wife calls it the Dominick's Rule. If you go to the supermarket looking like a movie star, you see no one. Fall in a pit of excrement and go in for toilet paper, it's class reunion time.

So, I prefer to be prepared. And it pays the mortgage.

Tell me if I'm going too slow. I, well, sometimes, I go too slow, because...anyway, you married or with anybody?

He listens

Konner and I've been together, it's almost nine years now. Can you hold up for a second?

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He stops and points his camera. Takes a few photos, between second or third, checks a setting, makes an adjustment, finishes, and puts camera down.

I never look. After, I do. Scroll back. Oh, well, when I'm shooting, I do. But only to check settings. Really fast.

But, because, you can lose the next shot. A photo is a moment. But the next moment, you can lose it if you get hung up in the previous moment. You're either shooting or editing. You can't do both. It's like trying to catch water in your hands.

His pace changes, either slows or quickens

It is the hardest thing, for young photographers. But you have to wait. Just shoot. Be right here. Be in the place you are.

Get back to the studio, then edit, then get all in your head. Intellectual and, Konner calls it, the "artsy-fartsy" part. You know, I'll show her shots. After curation and then I'll go into the specifics of why and she'll say...

I'm so sorry. I'm sounding really pompous. I do that. I can get a little, "over-explain-y and teacher-y," Konner calls it. And she's an English teacher.

What do you do, _____?

He stops and listens

Really? Very nice.

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(or)

Okay. Okay.

So, we're meeting Zoe. She's coming with _____. She and I meet here every year since we first met.

We met four years ago at rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. RIC. Not drug rehab. Physical.

Zoe, she was....by the way, she knows I'm sharing her story so it's not a violation of her privacy. She has permission to share mine and I can share hers. "To provide context," as she says.

He pulls out his phone

I'm going to text her, to make sure she's, you know. You can text somebody too, if you need to.

As he texts, he continues talking

She bumped it up a week this morning. Said she couldn't do next week so...

He stops typing

We've always done this the day of, the anniversary of when we....well, it's a little odd. Her. Bumping it up.

Maybe he shrugs

Looks back at his phone. He sends text and waits

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A response arrives

They're on their way.

If audience member was texting

You done?

*He listens to response. If needed, he waits
He may take a few photographs*

Alright, yeah. So, Zoe was shot. Three times.
She was just sitting in her car at a stoplight by a
Quik Mart about two blocks that way-

He points

-and I broke my back up in Evanston-

He points in another direction

-at almost the exact same moment. We figured
it out. And we both ended up in RIC the exact
same day for our very first PT session. Physical
therapy.

Four years ago, in a week. Every year since
then, we've meet here on the day of. The exact
anniversary. But this year, well...like I said.

It's sort of an acknowledgement of "Hey,
neither of us died. We're both still here. We
won."

And I take her picture. I've documented her
recovery, I guess one would say, since early on.

You cannot take people's photo without their
permission, I mean, professionally, for

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publication. And just, at all in a hospital or rehab setting. Huge privacy issues. Which are appropriate. But it was, I mean, to be without my camera was...

Konner brought it to me. And I just had it with me. Like most people and their phones, I guess?

Perhaps a small smile

And I was just photographing me, my experience, but it set off alarm bells and drama.

He stops to make his point

I am an ethical professional. I would never....because...

Well, I'm getting off track. Zoe and I had sort of become PT buddies. Friends, you know? So finally, Zoe comes over to me and she just says, "They are being so fucking ridiculous. I mean, really? Look at us. They're freaking out because you want to take some pictures of your fucking toes? I'm telling them that you can take photos of me. I'll sign whatever paperwork shit you need signed. You know. Waivers. Okay?"

Well, not exactly that, but she was insistent. She swears some. Well, not alot. For rehab, I mean. There is ALOT of swearing in rehab.

Resumes walking

Anyway, so, after jumping through numerous hoops, I got to document her recovery. Well, mine and hers.

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And, okay, I'm leading up to why we're here, okay. So, we started this thing, that I was going to take her obit picture. It all started, this one day, in PT.

*He may stop walking during the following.
He may not*

Zoe is working with a therapy ball and I'm doing, something, I don't even remember.

No, I think I had finished. Because I had my camera in my lap. Whatever. She was rolling up and down against a wall, with the ball behind her back.

He may demonstrate

And, well, it's hard. And, also, okay, like I said, she said I could talk about her....experience. She had a coloscopy bag. She had some internal, intestinal, well, she lost part of her colon and there was damage, so she was on a bag.

She's squatting and it's difficult. Of course. She's not in a great place but she's doing it. And she's almost done.

I remember waiting, yeah! Because we had planned to do something afterwards, coffee of something. Whatever. I'm in a chair still. A wheelchair.

She squats. And then there is this little "pop."
Her bag breaks.

And all, well, the contents of the bag come out. Down her legs. A...noticeable amount.

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And she just looks at it all. She and me and her PT DC. We all just freeze for a moment.

And I do not know what to do or say. I want to do something but, it was, she was just at the...lowest, you know? I think. I think that was it.

And then I said something. I didn't even think about saying it, but I did.

I said, "Oh shit."

And she started laughing. And then PT DC started laughing and so did I. I mean, it was...you know?

Alexander is smiling, maybe laughing

I think we laughed for five minutes. People were looking at us. We were dying. And right when we were just beginning to get it together, you know, it's like a tide ebbing away, I look at Zoe. And she is sweaty and messy and raw and she is so incredibly beautiful. At that moment, I have never seen anyone so beautiful. So, I lift my camera up and take her picture.

And then there is this second frozen moment. And I wasn't sure what it was. Was it a "How dare you" moment or something else? But then she began laughing again.

And we all lost it. Again.

When we finally pulled it together, she looked at this gorgeous photo of her. And it is her laughing but also she has stuff on her hands

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

and it's just, wow. Anyway, she looks at it, grins, and says, "Well, shit. That's it! We got it! THAT'S my obit picture."

From then on, whenever I took a really raw picture of her, working or, you know, doing PT or OT, or just a picture with her eyes closed or out of focus, we'd say, "That's the obit picture."

But every year, on the anniversary, we meet at the lakefront and I take really good photos. And she gets to edit, I mean, you know, pick the one she really would want for her obit picture. It sounds so morbid but it's really fun.

I mean, think about it. What picture do you want as your obit picture? One image to represent you forever.

It's tricky, isn't it?

Listens to response

Okay, so I'm going to fill you in a little bit more on how we, well, how I ended up in RIC. Real quickly. So, you can get the whole picture.

So, Zoe was shot and, well, my back thing? It was bad but, interestingly, it wasn't the thing that almost killed me. Like, Zoe almost died obviously from being shot three times. But me. Breaking my back wasn't it. After it happened, when it happened, I almost drowned in two inches of water. Same day as my back injury.

But it started when I dropped my phone out of a plane.

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

I'm going to back up even more, so you understand the reason I was in the plane. Well, you see, there was an artistic reason.

God, that sounds pompous. Again. So sorry.

But the thing is that the lakefront, the skyline, Chicago, it's this ubiquitous image, low on the water, usually a "nighttime lights" shot or a big blue sky. You know. The image on all the postcards and calendars.

It's so boring. Derivative.

I decided I wanted to capture the moment when the sun is just rising, but not the sunrise but the sun, the light, beginning to hit the lakefront. The city. That particular moment that none of us see because we're in bed, or on land, or making coffee or not in our yacht or rowboat or whatever yet. You know. When night ends and day begins.

I saw it in my head. So, my friend Josh has a plane. We've collaborated before. Super reliable. Always up for things.

He calls himself the Man of Yes. Not a Yes Man but a Man of Yes. So, I just called him the night before, I knew it was going to be clear, a great morning. And Josh said, well, guess.

He waits for a response.

Yes, yes!

I drive up to meet him. It's three in the morning when I have to leave because he keeps his plane at Waukegan Airport.

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You have no idea how many times....the hours you keep as a photographer. One time I...never mind...

I got it. The shot. Really, a series. From driving up, meeting Josh, getting on the plane, taking off, it was three hours for about twelve seconds of real work. Just being there when the light just crests over the horizon, skitters over the water, propelling through the air to sudden strike, to illuminate, what is in front of it.

I got it. Knew I got it. I knew it. Didn't have to look.

And we were done. And Josh, being Josh, said, "Let's go up a little. Call Konner. Wake the wifey up! Let's say 'hi' from 20,000!"

I pull out my phone, call Konner. She's up. She's into it.

"Hey, Josh!" "Hey, Konner!" "Look where you're flying. You got my husband with you." "Oh baby, dump his sorry ass and run away with me." Josh is gay, but it's this thing they have.

Then she tells me to show me where we're at so I point my phone out the window and, I'm filming because this will go into the end of the year video we make for our parents and her brothers, they all do this Christmas thing.

And the wind whips in and snaps the phone out of my hand. And out the window. Josh sees it. He starts laughing. "Dude, I've never seen anyone throw twelve hundred dollars out the window of my plane before! Respect!"

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His phone goes off right away and we're both laughing, but, of course, it's Konner. "Josh, my husband had better not be falling out of your plane."

We are both laughing really hard. I will admit, Josh is laughing a little harder than I am.

But Josh manages, to, well, reassure her. "No, Konner baby, it's just your next few week's paycheck hitting Lake Michigan right about now."

Well, Konner tracks it, with the "Find Your Phone" app. It stops moving and keeps, you know, registering.

It's not dead.

It pings in Evanston, right on the beachfront. Near Northwestern but a little bit south.

Lucky, right? So, we land. I jump in my car and head to Evanston. But now I have no phone. But Konner told me almost as exactly as she could where it was.

Josh is out. He's taking his kids to gymnastics. And he's still laughing when he's pulling out of the parking lot.

I get to the beach and I'm there for a while. I'm looking on the grass, on the bike path, people are stopping, "Hey, dude, you lose your keys?" Stuff like that.

I cannot find this darn phone.

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So, I climb on the rocks along the lakefront, the shoreline, to get a better view. And I turn around, scanning, looking, you know.

He may stop and demonstrate

And I see it. Right down on the beach. No. Not on the beach but sort of where the beach starts ending and the rocks and sand and water all begin.

It's face-up, this much from the water.

Holds up his fingers to show about a three-inch span.

And it is....gorgeous. It's incredibly...okay, I'm going to sound pompous again...but it's so metaphorical. This precarious meeting of elements and technology. We are chained to our phones, our media, but water is eternal. Water makes rocks into sand. Nature will always win. We think we're the boss of life and death and time and information. But we're all just inches away from getting submerged into the universal, cosmic soup with barely a ripple.

He brings his camera to his eye

So, I, of course, I've gotta get that! So, I start shooting.

Lowers the camera

The light is elegant. God, I really was having a great shooting morning that day.

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And then, through the viewfinder, it looks like the perspective is shifting, just for a second. I start to pull back and I realize that I'm shifting.

I'm falling. My feet fly out behind me and...

He stops and takes a breath

You know....have you ever been in a car accident? And you see the other car coming and there is that second when you think you might get out of it, but you don't, and that crunch happens? Or you dream you're in a car or a plane and it's going to crash...maybe. Maybe not.

Alexander listens to the response

Allow for a possible side conversation about the audience member's response

Okay. I fall onto the rocks. I hit twice. First hit was not too bad but then I twist to try to grab something, to stop my progress.

He stops

That's a lie. A partial lie.

No.

It's a real lie. I didn't try to save myself.

I tried to save my camera.

I had a choice between my body and my equipment. It was instinctual.

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

What kind of instinct is that? Save a piece of stuff instead of your body?!

But I thought I was....tough. Immortal. I knew I was tougher than my Nikon.

I went to protect my camera and broke my back.

I came down on this part....

He stops

He gestures to his back

And then I'm on my stomach, face down in the sand. Well, my head, my ear is in the water and my cheek is in the sand and about five inches in front of my nose is my phone.

And I can't move. Part of me feels fine, other parts of me I can't feel. And then there is this crazy pain that starts in my neck and crawls up my scalp. Then I realize I'm moaning, and it doesn't sound like me. I mean, I don't even know how I'm making sound, because...

So, my mouth is open, and the water that my ear is in begins to go in my mouth.

Now, the thing is, Lake Michigan is thought to be non-tidal. But it does have minute tides, sort of these gravitational fluctuations. Not big. Not like the Atlantic or Pacific. But inches.

And I was lying face down in a few inches of water and couldn't move.

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

So. That was...there was that. It felt like a really long time.

Clearly, I survived.

It was....well, the camera I was trying to save that got shattered anyway. But it was enough of a novelty to draw attention, sitting all broken, on a rock close to me, above me sort of, above and behind me, that these kids came to get it. They thought someone had left it and, well, they saw me.

I always wonder if it traumatized them a little? You know, finding someone almost, well, close to being dead. I was close to it.

It still had the sunrise photos. They survived too.

And all this happened almost the exact same time Zoe was at a stoplight by the Quik-Mart over there, getting shot.

And that's why we come here. Zoe and I. Close to the Quik-Mart and close to the rocks.

And I take her picture. She takes mine too. We take what we call, "Each other's obit picture." She's gotten pretty good. Although she's pretty short so she usually ends making me squat or she stands on a bench or something.

He looks around

Look.

He points

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

I think that's her. Them.

He waves

Hold on.

If they were walking, he stops

Alright, I'm sorry to do this to you but, I'm pretty sure....the thing is, she's got one bullet left. In her brain. And eventually, it's going to move. And, you see, when it moves-

Perhaps he shrugs

I am pretty sure this is why she bumped us up to today.

I think it's moved.

I think she's dying.

Zoe and her audience member are stopped by the lake

ZOE
(Calling) Hey. That you?

ALEXANDER
Hey. Yeah. Me and _____. (To his audience member) I'm glad you're here. I'm glad I don't have to do this alone. So, thanks.

Alexander and his audience member arrive

ZOE
(To Alexander) Alexander, before anything, take my pic.

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Zoe positions herself with her back to the lake, facing Alexander and audience members.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Is the lake behind me?

ALEXANDER

Yes. Zoe?

ZOE

Alexander. Take my picture right now. Okay. Is the light like you like it? How do I look? Fix anything that's weird or sticking up.

Perhaps the audience members respond

Perhaps Zoe fusses with her hair or clothes

ALEXANDER

Ready?

Alexander takes a photo. He looks at it for a moment.

(To Zoe) Do you want to see?

Zoe turns to her audience member

ZOE

You know what's funny? After all that wanting to decide which is going to be my obit picture, someone else IS going to have to choose. You tell me if this one is the one, okay?

Alexander shows the photo to both audience members. A car horn is heard

ZOE

I think that's....Alexander, is that my Dad?

The Air, The Water, and The Space In Between

ALEXANDER

I think so....yes.

Zoe turns to each audience member

ZOE

(To Alexander's) It was nice sort of meeting you. *(To her audience member)* It was really nice meeting you. And, yes, this is that weird conversation I was talking about earlier! What do you say?

But I am here to help you with this. I've thought alot about it. *(In the direction of her audience member)* Wink, wink, nudge, nudge, say no more, say no more. *(In the direction of Alexander's audience member)* _____ can explain it to you. *(To Alexander)* You ready?

ALEXANDER

Are you?

ZOE

Just one more second.

Zoe turns towards the lake and feels the air on her face. Perhaps she extends her arms out

Feel that? It feels so good. I wonder if this is what being on that island felt like?

Alexander turns towards the lake as well

END OF PLAY