

# boom

By Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### **CHARACTERS**

**Jules – a marine biology grad student**

28ish, uncomfortable, excitable, literal

**Jo – an undergrad, journalism student**

22ish, strong, skeptical, physical

**Barbara – A natural history docent**

Mid 40s, buoyant, vulnerable, passionate, grand

### **SETTING**

JULES' subterranean University research lab that has been awkwardly fashioned into a living area. There are no windows. There is a fish tank, bubbling. A large thick door is the only entrance.

A sea of cabinets and drawers and other modes of storage dominate the walls.

This is also an exhibit.

There is a control station off to one side that looks like an old style tech booth with giant levers and switches and analog knobs and such. And a Timpani. Maybe some other special sound devices. This is BARBARA'S main area.

### **TIME**

When we least expect it.

### **A NOTE ON BARBARA'S SPEAKING HABITS**

BARBARA occasionally uses a gesture instead words. In the script I have placed text that the gesture is intended to substitute on a separate line, in brackets.

[like this!]

"The universe could so easily have remained lifeless and simple – just physics and chemistry, just the scattered dust of the cosmic explosion that gave birth to time and space. The fact that it did not – the fact that life evolved out of nearly nothing, some 10 billion years after the universe evolved out of literally nothing – is a fact so staggering that I would be mad to attempt words to do it justice."

- Richard Dawkins

*The Ancestor's Tale*

"There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

- Stage Manager,

*Our Town*, Thornton Wilder

(BARBARA bursts into the space.

She's just come from a meeting. Severe emotion is being wound up in her and contained. She wears a nametag.

A deep breath.

She puts something on the lab set that should have already been there. Fish food, maybe. She crosses to her area.

She pulls a big lever that, with a snap, shuts all the lights off, except perhaps an interesting one around her.

BARBARA picks up a set of timpani mallets and plays a brief, loud, introductory song that suggests danger. The ferocity of the playing contrasts her exterior calm. She's working something out hitting the drum.

Upon completion, she sets the mallets down, pulls another lever that turn on the lights of a fish tank.

BARBARA pulls another lever that lights up the lab/apartment.

JULES, smiling, stares at JO. JO is staring at the fish tank.)

Are you thirsty? JULES

No. JO

(beat)

Can I take your coat? JULES

I'm not wearing a coat. JO

(beat)

JULES

Can I take something from you and put it somewhere?

JO

Take off your shirt.

JULES

Pardon?

JO

You're not deaf.

JULES

Now?

JO

Did you want to fuck clothed?

JULES

You sure you don't want some water? Something stronger?

(Beat

JULES begins to unbutton his shirt. JO  
stares at the fish)

JO

What kind?

JULES

Um, Old Navy.

JO

The fish.

JULES

Oh. Beaugregory Damsel Fish.

*Stegastes leucostictus*. As they were called in ancient  
Rome.

That's Dorothy.

JO

Like the Golden Girl?

JULES

Like my younger sister. Her name, at least.

JO  
Is she tall and mannish?

JULES  
No, we're from Kansas.

You know...Dorothy?

My parents were into obviously relevant names.

JO  
What'd they call you?

JULES  
Jules.

After Jules Verne. I'm glad they didn't call me Vern, you know, because...

They had a hunch I liked aquatic things.

JO  
Why?

JULES  
I was a water birth. If they hadn't pulled me out...

You never told me your name.

JO  
Take off your pants.

(Beat

JULES slowly undoes his belt and pulls his pants down.

JO examines the rest of the room. Or does she just sit on the futon and watch him the entire time? Is JO the type of person who can sit still or needs to be constant motion?

JULES has difficulty with the pants. Balance issues? Forgetting to take his shoes off first?

While doing this...)

JULES

I only lived there till I was five. Kansas. Then we moved. My mom, two sisters and me did. My Dad stayed. Sort of. I mean, I was five so I don't really know the actual details, you know, he, um, well he stayed in Kansas. But left. In a way, I guess. More like sucked up. And then dropped. Into a field.

He wasn't really happy. Before. Hated being a weatherman. I think he hated Kansas. I remember that much. My 5-year-old intuitive sense of...grief.

Anyway, we moved to Florida. Which, at least in my opinion, was much nicer than Kansas. For a while. Until, well, until my sister decided to run outdoors in a hurricane right when a palm tree decided that it couldn't stay in the ground anymore, and my mom, other sister and I moved to Kenya. "Let's start fresh! Let's get away from it all" my mom said. Although the "all" we were getting away from apparently didn't include malaria, and the fevers that malaria causes and the hallucinations that the fever causes and the hyenas that wait outside of medical tents ready to pounce on weak young flesh staggering out in a dream, and soon my mom and I moved here, where we've lived ever since. Except for my Mom, who couldn't have picked a worse time to go on a tour of un-reinforced masonry in California. And here I am.

(JULES is now in his flannel boxer shorts, t-shirt, and socks)

Where are you from?

(JO kisses JULES actively, aggressively, maybe pressing him against a wall. JULES is frozen, stiff, not responding in any way, perhaps trying to move away?)

JO stops kissing.

A moment)

JO

Massachusetts.

Oh. Nice. JULES

No, it's not. JO

Too many blizzards? JULES

I like snow. JO

(beat)

Which part of Massachusetts? JULES

What was that? JO

(beat)

Worcester? JULES

You said you loved to kiss. JO

When? JULES

"I love kissing, body contact, oral sex, and intensely significant coupling." JO

Oh right. JULES

You wrote that in your ad. JO

You remember things. JULES

That was the worst kiss ever. JO

JULES

It was surprising. I was surprised.

JO

You have soggy lips that taste like brine.

JULES

I was hoping we could talk a little bit first.

(JO Smiles)

JO

I didn't come here to talk.

JULES

It would help me relax.

JO

Why?

JULES

I've never met anyone. This way.

JO

Which way?

JULES

With the help of technology.

JO

So?

JULES

I'm anxious.

JO

Why?

JULES

It's abrupt.

JO

And?

JULES

I've got some Spanikoppita. I just heated them up. So maybe we could-



(JO stops)

JULES

I think that's why I'm having a difficult time.

(pause. JO gets off of JULES.)

JULES

Do you mind if I put my pants back on?

JO

Jesus.

JULES

I should have mentioned it earlier.

JO

You didn't.

JULES

No.

JO

Why didn't you?

JULES

I thought it would make you not want to come over.

JO

You don't look gay.

JULES

Clothing-wise?

JO

You don't have gay eyes.

JULES

I'm wearing contacts right now so-

JO

Did you think I was a man?

JULES

What?

JO

Jo with an e?

JULES  
Your name is Jo?

JO  
The female spelling.

JULES  
You sent me a picture.

JO  
So you're bi-curious.

JULES  
Oh, no. It's good to know your name.

JO  
Are you a fundamentalist?

JULES  
I'm a marine biologist.

JO  
What *is* this?

JULES  
I should put on some music.

JO  
This is bullshit.

(JULES walks to an iPod w speakers)

JULES  
I just bought one of those things that play all your songs.

JO  
Total and utter.

JULES  
I'll put on some music, we can drink some "booze," eat something, have some good talks and, eventually, I think I'll be able to-

JO  
I don't have a lot of time!

(BARBARA dums the timpani, lightly.)

No. We don't. JULES

I'm 22. JO

OK. JULES

It's Saturday night. JO

I think if I explained why- JULES

And there is an enormous world out there! JO

Uh huh. JULES

Millions and millions of options. JO

It's a vibrant campus. JULES

And I only get to pick one at a time! Of all the recitals,  
ragers, and sex partners I could have selected from  
tonight, I picked this. I picked you. And...And... JO

Yay? JULES

And what if? What fucking if? JO

(beat)

What if what? JULES

What if this is it? JO

What if all there is is this room? And you. And those.  
And that's all we get. And then we die.

JULES

Mm.

JO

Did you think about that?

JULES

Wait.

JO

Did you think about what that means?

JULES

Don't go.

JO

Maybe you should think about that 'cause WE'RE ALL GONNA  
DIE!

(JO is almost at the door when BARBARA  
pulls down a large lever/switch, which  
makes a loud noise.

JO instantly collapses to the floor as  
though she has just been unplugged.)

JULES

Are you OK? Jo? Hello?

(HE feels her pulse. HE shakes her  
gently. She doesn't move. Checks for  
breathing. None.)

JULES

Shoot! Shoot shoot shoot.

(JULES looks around as though maybe  
someone could help, does that 'pre  
asserting self in emergency moment'  
shuffle of indecision.

Finally, he kneels beside her, pinches  
her nose and slowly moves in to do  
rescue breathing. Mouth open he slowly  
moves down and is almost over her lips  
when BARBARA flips the switch up. JO  
jerks awake)

AHHHH!

JO

(JULES falls back, relieved)

JULES  
Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness.

JO  
Motherfucker.

JULES  
That was shocking.

(JO sits up, looks at the surroundings suspiciously, as though searching for a cause to the event that just took place. She eyes the door.)

JULES  
Are you all right?

JO  
I hate that question.

JULES  
You weren't breathing.

JO  
What's your point?

JULES  
You were about to open the door, passed out and then you weren't breathing.

JO  
Whatever.

JULES  
Has that happened before?

JO  
What?

JULES  
What just happened.

JO  
What just happened?

JULES  
I'm being confused.

JO  
Do you have bourbon?

JULES  
Yes.

JO  
I'd like some bourbon.

JULES  
Are you sure that's a good-

JO  
On the rocks.

JULES  
That's one of the truths of biologists. We always have ice.  
To freeze the things we kill.

And for drinks.

(JO pulls out a notepad from a  
backpack, starts to scribble copious  
notes in a steno-pad.)

JULES walks to a cabinet filled to the  
brim with plastic red frat-party cups.  
Gets two. He opens a cabinet filled to  
the brim with bottles of Bourbon. He  
gets a bottle. He opens a stuffed  
freezer, retrieves some ice and  
prepares the drink. Perhaps he presses  
play on the iPod.

Before returning to JO with drinks,  
JULES heads towards the door and locks  
the deadbolt, or perhaps some  
futuristic impressive electronic  
locking knob.)

So. You go to school? JULES  
Here?  
What are you majoring in?  
Do we have to talk? JO  
No. No. JULES  
(pause)  
Journalism. JO  
Oh neat! Journalism. That's really neat. JULES  
Yeah, it's neat. JO  
What got you into that? JULES  
The hair. Newscaster hair. JO  
Oh. That's great! JULES  
(not hearing)  
Never seen in the real world. Difficult to reproduce. Huge. That's powerful. JO  
Mmm hmm. JULES

JO

Newscaster hair keeps the public from going insane. A soothing visual balance to that cruel graphic icon in the corner of the screen, some artist's rendering of the worst things. The world may be unraveling at a disturbing pace but lo, the hair is not: noble, reliable, immobile...it's the helmet we all need so badly to help us tolerate another day.

I wanted hair like that.

(JULES returns with the drinks, and a plate of Spanikoppita.)

JULES

That's so great to be a journalist. Guardians of the First Amendment. Protectors of democracy. Deep Throat. What?

JO

You weren't listening.

JULES

I was making the drinks.

JO

What was I saying?

JULES

The ice was loud.

JO

You just want to talk about you?

JULES

I'm listening now.

JO

So your family's dead?

JULES

Pardon?

JO

You have an entire family of dead people?

JULES

Oh. Yes.



JO

Why am I here?

JULES

That's something we all want to know, isn't it? Is there a "purpose" to our form and substance? Or are we simply the random result of billions of years of chemical reactions and accidents influenced by pressures from the environment? Do we really-

JO

That wasn't my question.

JULES

It's what you asked.

JO

Why did you invite me to your...what is this, a lab?

JULES

My grant doesn't cover housing.

A drink. Or two. Conversation. Dinner. Building trust. A bond. Dessert. Probably some more drinks. Deep breaths. Focus. Keeping the goal clear. And then...

JO

What?

JULES

You know.

JO

No I don't.

JULES

What I wrote. Intensely significant coupling.

(beat)

JO

You're a fag.

JULES

You shouldn't make assumptions based on that.

JO

I'm assuming that you fuck men.

JULES

That doesn't mean I wouldn't be able to with a woman.

JO

Have you ever?

JULES

No.

JO

See?

JULES

I've never had sex with anything.

(JO takes a drink)

JO

Interesting.

JULES

I mean, of course, with myself. I'm familiar with the general sensations.

JO

How do you even know you're a gay?

JULES

The non-randomness of the erections.

JO

And still you've never.

JULES

I don't know if it's been a choice.

JO

Yes it has.

JULES

I haven't found the opportunity.

JO

There are thousands of men out there with low standards.

JULES

I know. Was that meant to be insulting?

JO

You have chosen to only make sweet love to your hand. Just like you chose to go online, post a misleading ad and have me here for...why am I *really* here?

JULES

The future of humanity depends on it.

(BARBARA hits the timpani)

JO

I have a final project for my magazine class: "Find a story in an unconventional place that uplifts you. Personally. Deeply. Truly."

JULES

Are we changing subjects?

JO

"The following topics and items may not be used in your uplifting story: The sick, disabled, whales or any animal with fur, sports, war, poor people getting rich, rich people getting morals, underdogs in general, or anything that could be celebrated on a card."

JULES

I used to send those to myself from across town.

JO

"In other words: no tricks. No lies. Find a story that makes you feel honest, genuine, hope."

JULES

Neat.

JO

I'm having a hard time with it.

JULES

So...you went online to clear your head-

JO

This is the assignment.

JULES

Oh.

JO

Random sex as the last glimmer of hope in a decaying society. Everyone feels betrayed by their friends and families, their country, their dreams, their own selves. You know?

JULES

(doesn't know)

Mmm.

JO

With nowhere to go in their normal depressing lives, people are forced to turn to the anonymous, the stranger. Alone, on laptops in isolated homes, a series of emails or an online chat bring two or more people together for a brief moment in time. No past. No future. All that matters is the moment. They meet to fulfill each other's carnal needs, to find a moment of happiness, of sensory bliss that makes them forget how *motherfucked up* everything is. In no-strings sex, hope is still possible.

It's due Monday.

(JO goes to write again)

JULES

I could be uplifting.

JO

I should just make something up.

JULES

You can't do that.

JO

Why not?

JULES

You're a journalist.

(pause)

JO

Where've you been the last few years?

JULES

On a desert island.