

You get your stuff all packed up and sit at the picnic table, up here in the mountains, last day of camping, time to go home.

There's nothing to do but wait for the shuttle to come by for you, so you sit and play cards, something that doesn't require too much thought, as dehydrated as you all are despite how much water you've been drinking. It's the late afternoon and you and Brian and Julia are tired, too much beauty, too much afternoon.

Then you hear a van lumber around the corner into view. It is...

## THE SHUTTLE

The shuttle is white and kind of old and your gut registers before your eyes do that it has scratch marks on the side. It is a big van and should have space for all your belongings as well as for all of you. The shuttle parks.

(Waiting for Margot, episode seven...)

The driver gets out and helps you get your things into the trunk of the van. You can see the backs of the heads of two people sitting in the middle back seat, a woman and a man. They turn their heads and greet you.

YOU: Hello.

MAN: We're headed down the mountain, too.

YOU: Great!

You go to get more things and they let you go. Soon you and your friends are done loading the van, and you get in. Brian sits in the front passenger seat, and Julia sits in the back seat. You sit in the middle seat, next to the woman. All the doors shut, all the people buckled in, the driver starts the engine and begins the journey down the mountain.

WOMAN: Hi, my name is Tricia.

YOU: I'm Beth.

TRICIA: "Beth", that's an older name, isn't it?

YOU: Yeah, I was named after my great-aunt.

TRICIA: It's nice.

MAN: Hi, I'm Mark.

YOU: Hi.

MARK: We're on our honeymoon.

YOU: Oh, nice.

MARK: Yeah, we're headed down to the H. W. to see the sights. Can't wait to sleep in a real bed.

YOU: You remember that one comic strip where the dad says, something like, "we suffer for a week during our vacation so that the rest of our lives can feel like luxury"?

MARK: No, I don't.

YOU: It was from this one comic strip, I don't remember the name of it...

TRICIA: I think I know what you're talking about. It was the one with the family, right? The mom, the dad, the brother, and the sister?

YOU: No, I think the boy was an only child.

TRICIA: Well anyway, camping was very nice. I couldn't feel the way I did up there if I stayed down in the city. But I'm a city person.

YOU: Yeah, I guess that's reality.

MARK: You guys are friends?

YOU: Yeah, we're all friends. We came up to get away from the city for a little bit. Try to get out of the routine.

MARK: Routine will get you any day.

TRICIA: It gets you every day!

They laugh and you also laugh.

MARK: Well, we had a good time. We saw the waterfall.

YOU: The waterfall?

MARK: Yeah, on the north side of the meadow, if you go up into the hills for a few miles, there's a waterfall.

TRICIA: It's gorgeous.

MARK: There are ferns growing beside it. And a

pool of clear water.

TRICIA: It's not the biggest waterfall.

MARK: But it's nice.

YOU: Wow, it does sound nice. I guess that's something to check out the next time we're up here.

Saying "we" makes you think of Julia and Brian. Brian is talking to the driver about something. You can't hear what they're saying over the air conditioning and road noise. You look back at Julia and she is lying down on the seat, asleep already.

TRICIA: I could use a nap myself.

MARK: I could use a shower.

YOU: People didn't used to take showers every day.

MARK: I know. I was one of them.

TRICIA: When was that?

MARK: I had a period in my early twenties where I just decided not to take showers all the time.

TRICIA: Why not?

MARK: I don't remember anymore. Probably to prove some kind of point.

TRICIA: Yeah, you're always trying to prove points.

Mark looks kind of annoyed, but he passes over it real fast. You notice but maybe Tricia doesn't, and you wonder what kinds of things these people will go through before they learn to really respect each other.

MARK: Well, eventually I got over that phase. So now I could be a normal person again.

TRICIA: Thank goodness.

She kisses him on the cheek.

MARK: Being normal is a good thing.

TRICIA: Don't be too normal, though.

MARK: Of course not. I'll always be weird in the ways you like.

TRICIA: You don't have to be a certain way for me.

MARK: No, but I *want* to be a certain way for you.

They nuzzle. You feel at peace, the peaceful feeling when you know you're safe.

YOU: Where did you have the wedding ceremony, if you don't mind me asking?

MARK: Not at all.

TRICIA: It was *so* nice. We had a beach wedding down in Cove Park in Sunset City.

YOU: Is that where you're from?

TRICIA: Yes.

YOU: Oh, so not too far from here.

TRICIA: Four hours, depending on traffic.

YOU: I go to Sunset City once in a while.

MARK: It's kind of a sleepy place. So for a change, we go to where the action is.

YOU: Yeah, I guess maybe if I got married, I might go to Sunset City for my honeymoon.

TRICIA: You're not married? I guess that makes sense, since you're camping with friends.

MARK: How do you know the guy in the shotgun seat isn't her husband?

TRICIA: He, uh, doesn't look like husband material.

MARK: Whoa, Trish, that was a bit much.

TRICIA: No, I mean, I don't mean that, I don't mean he's not a good guy. He's definitely boyfriend material. But men look different when they're the kind of men who can be married.

MARK: Do I look different?

TRICIA: You've been looking different.

YOU: Yeah, maybe he and I don't have the right kind of chemistry.

There's no hint that Brian has heard you over the air conditioning and the road

noise.

TRICIA: Yeah. You can see it on people's faces when they're in a relationship, Mark.

MARK: Right, right, Tricia, as usual.

TRICIA: Hey, I'm not always right!

MARK: Name one time you weren't right.

TRICIA: Well... uh....

MARK: See? Can't think of anything, can you?

This all is said in some kind of jest.

TRICIA: Oh, okay, I admit it, I'm always right.

Mark and Tricia hold hands, having come back together after a wild vortex of argumentation. You look out the window at the trees that pass by. You feel slightly motion sick, but you know you'll be fine in the end.

Mark and Tricia talk about something in a quieter voice, something they don't feel like you need to hear, and you disengage from trying to understand them. You look out the window.

The shuttle comes out of the trees, passes through a meadow. The road is straight for a ways and then goes over a saddle, back into the trees, and as it descends, it winds its way back and forth, and the shuttle follows in its pattern, and you feel just a little bit

motion sick, but you'll be fine in the end.

MARK: So what do you do for a living, Beth?

YOU: I'm a freelance editor.

MARK: What's that like?

YOU: Well, the easy part is doing the work. The harder part is getting the work.

MARK: Where do you get your work from?

YOU: A lot of it is repeat customers and word of mouth by now.

MARK: But getting started?

YOU: I went out to cafes and struck up conversations. Went to networking events with other professionals. Had a few clients who were people I knew from the past.

MARK: And you managed to find enough customers to be able to do it full time?

YOU: I was working other jobs at first, just doing editing on the side, until I had enough clients. But yeah, it feels like luck that I've been able to find people.

MARK: You just have to keep trying different things until something works.

YOU: Yeah. How about you? What do you do?

MARK: I'm a pastor. Not the lead pastor, but also not a youth pastor. Just a regular pastor.



YOU: Oh, like an associate pastor?

MARK: I think that might be my title.

YOU: What do you do in that job?

TRICIA: He just hangs out.

MARK: Right, I meet with people, to talk about how God is working in their lives. Also, on weeks where I'm supposed to preach, I prepare sermons. And then I preach!

Brian and the driver had been silent. Interested in Mark's conversation, Brian craned around to talk back.

BRIAN: Do you ever help people run errands?

MARK: Excuse me?

BRIAN: My uncle was a pastor and that's all he did.

MARK: No, not really. Our church is big enough that I don't have to do that. Where was your uncle a pastor?

BRIAN: Right on the edge of a rich neighborhood and a poor neighborhood.

MARK: That might explain it. No, usually I just help counsel people. Sometimes they call me up when they have problems. But just to talk.

BRIAN: It's interesting that we don't carry each other's financial burdens or run errands for each other.

MARK: Yeah, that is interesting.

Brian turns back toward the road ahead to rest his neck, then cranes back.

BRIAN: Yeah, we get so self-sufficient when we all have money.

MARK: So it's kind of a good thing that we still have spiritual and emotional problems. Otherwise we wouldn't love each other at all. Is that what you're saying?

BRIAN: Basically, yeah.

TRICIA: I think you're missing something... what's your name again?

BRIAN: Brian, no we weren't introduced.

TRICIA: Brian. No, people can love each other when there aren't any problems.

MARK: But if people didn't have problems, I'd be out of a job.

TRICIA: And then that would become your problem, and someone would have to help you with that. See? Everything works out.

She kisses him on the cheek.

TRICIA: Brian, you look young. But someday maybe you'll be a father and everything will make sense. Little kids have to learn how to grow up. Every year millions of children turn two and learn to say "no". Every year a bunch of children turn thirteen and discover the opposite sex. Mothers and fathers will always have important work to do.

BRIAN: That makes sense, but it supports my point. We'll never completely get rid of problems, but if we did, we would be unable to love people.

TRICIA: No, we *would* love people. Do you know how much satisfaction people get out of seeing people be happy?

BRIAN: I don't. I only get satisfaction out of helping people.

TRICIA: So you're the problem. You need to learn to be happy when other people are happy.

MARK: Trish! Go easy on him!

TRICIA: Sorry, but it just bothers me when I see talented people not doing what they need to do to help other people.

YOU: I don't believe in God, but you do, I think. I wonder, if God existed, what would God want?

TRICIA: He would definitely want people to help each other.

BRIAN: Right, that's what I'm saying, and we're going to get to a place where there's no one to help, except for children.

TRICIA: People need help all throughout their lives.

BRIAN: But not as much help as they used to.

TRICIA: Are you saying people don't need help anymore? There are millions of people living on the streets and starving. There are lonely people, aching people.

DRIVER: Everything good back there?

The driver is the authority and you know it.

YOU: It's okay.

DRIVER: Okay, keep it down, I need to be able to drive.

BRIAN (keeping it down): No, I'm not saying people don't need help. But they need less help, and so we can get in a state where we don't love other people as much, because we don't have to love them.

TRICIA (also keeping it down): And I'm saying that we can't help people as much as possible if we think they have to have problems for us to love them.

MARK: (also keeping it down): I can see your point, Trish, but also Brian's point. A lot of what gets me out of bed in the morning is the ability to help people. I know I don't really engage with reality as much when there isn't some kind of problem.

TRICIA (not keeping it down as much): Who cares about engaging with reality? Would you put your own psychological state above the interests of other people's happiness? Not if you're really selfless.

MARK (keeping it down): Tricia, I don't know, where's God in all of this, like what Beth said?

TRICIA (keeping it down -- contained): In Revelation, it says that God will wipe away

everyone's tears. So there you go. When God gets his way, there's no more problems.

MARK (keeping it down -- also contained): Yeah, that's true.

BRIAN (keeping it down): But think about this. God is the Father, right?

They can all keep it down now,  
something having changed in the air.

MARK: Right.

BRIAN: And the Bible says he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, right?

MARK: Right... Oh. I see what you're saying....

BRIAN: So in Revelation, when the wicked are in hell...

TRICIA: Oh God. Dear God.

She's praying, or about to pray.

BRIAN: So there is no perfect happiness.

MARK: I never thought of that before.

Tricia looks like she's seen a ghost.

MARK: Maybe... nobody really goes to hell.

BRIAN: Maybe. That's not what the Bible says, though.

MARK: Yeah. Huh.

TRICIA: Are you a Christian, Brian?

BRIAN: I don't know. Maybe. I do believe in God.

TRICIA: What do you think? Does anyone go to hell?

BRIAN: I think the only reason for us to live lives of suffering and fakeness is because we have to learn to be real ourselves, through our own decisions. Our hearts have to change, and that's completely up to us. So I think there are people who will choose to hate God forever -- refuse to listen to him. Or at least, there's no guarantee that there won't be those kind of people.

TRICIA: But God's love is powerful.

BRIAN: Well, if God could overcome all of us so that we would love him, we wouldn't have to go through this life, would we?

TRICIA: Maybe we're all going to be saved, but there's a process to it that has to take time.

BRIAN: What kind of church do you go to?

TRICIA: It's an evangelical church.

BRIAN: So you believe in the Bible.

TRICIA: Yes.

BRIAN: The Bible says not everyone will be saved.

TRICIA: But it also says women should wear head coverings in church. And we don't do that.

MARK: Tricia, that's a cultural thing. What Brian

is talking about is a salvation issue.

BRIAN: There's something in what she said, though. Do either of you really live like other people go to hell?

A pause.

MARK: We both try to build up the kingdom of Christ. But... if I have to be honest, no.

BRIAN: People are just annoying, or pleasing, in their spiritual and emotional states? Nothing more, nothing less?

TRICIA: Where do people like you come from, Brian? Who are you?

BRIAN: I don't come from the same place as most people, no.

MARK: If I have to be honest, Brian, yeah, there's nothing life or death about anything in anyone else's life.

BRIAN: How about you, Tricia?

TRICIA: This must be a guy thing.

BRIAN: What do you mean?

TRICIA: Being unable to care about other people.

BRIAN: You care, then.

TRICIA: Everything is life or death.

BRIAN: Do you think anyone goes to hell?

TRICIA: No, I think... I think everyone *should* go to heaven. That's what God really wants.

BRIAN: So then, what's there that's life or death?

TRICIA: Like if someone has cancer.

BRIAN: So physical things can be life or death.

TRICIA: If someone is suffering. They can't see outside of their own moment. So there's no heaven for them.

BRIAN: What if someone is fake?

TRICIA: WHO CARES?

DRIVER: Hey, cut it out.

TRICIA: Who cares about reality? Who cares about love? Does any of that matter? If you were a real person, if you really loved, then you wouldn't need that. You would just want people to not suffer.

BRIAN: Have you ever met someone who was more real than you?

TRICIA: No. What is this "reality" thing you're talking about?

BRIAN: Like someone you respected but didn't know why you respected. Someone who felt solid to you.

TRICIA: Yeah, okay, I think I know what you're talking about. Someone with integrity.

BRIAN: Right. And have you ever been that person to someone else.



She thinks.

TRICIA: Yeah, yeah I have.

BRIAN: I've been in both positions, myself. And there were times when the more real person couldn't handle me. And I didn't understand why, and I thought they were being unfair to me. And then I was with someone who thought I was amazing, and they didn't understand what they were doing to me. So I just left, and I understood what the first person went through.

TRICIA: Insensitive people can't understand more sensitive people. Yeah.

BRIAN: So if we're going to be with God for eternity, he has to teach us how to be in tune with him, right?

MARK: Oh... wait... so this explains why it's so important for people to have a relationship with God...

TRICIA: Oh yeah... People can be really good, but they don't know how to be good... we don't even know what goodness is.

BRIAN: We know, but we don't. Our eyes aren't opened yet.

TRICIA: So God is going to get us through this process. None of us are going to hell.

BRIAN: Does God always win?

TRICIA: No. That's what makes him a good God. A God who always won wouldn't have died on the cross for our sins.

MARK: And yeah, if you think about it, God put up with a lot in the Old Testament. Think about all the times he gets angry at Israel and then suddenly switches to being tender with them.

TRICIA: Yeah, it's like Israel has the real power in the relationship.

BRIAN: God keeps using his muscle on them, but he keeps having to use his muscle on them. Yeah. Interesting.

You've been quiet for a while. The shuttle is now entering the outside suburbs of the city you call home. Your motion sickness is a quieter presence, but your headache has grown. The sun is low enough that the driver has his shade down, but Brian, craned, hasn't noticed, and sun comes through his side.

YOU: Brian, it's kind of warm in here, could you put your shade down?

Brian complies.

Julia wakes up. She looks around.

JULIA: Hey, we're getting into the city.

YOU: Yeah.

JULIA: I could hear you guys talking in my dream. A lot of religious stuff.

YOU: Do you want a synopsis of what we've talked about, to see if it lines up with what was in the dream?

JULIA: It was something about how some people are going to hell. Brian was saying that. He was wearing a lab coat. Is it true, Brian? You believe some people are going to hell?

BRIAN: What I really believe is that the six of us are in this shuttle, and we're in the suburbs, getting further in, that I'm tired and I'm saying what I'm saying.

JULIA: Okay, yeah, same here.

BRIAN: So it's like anything I say about God is what I want to be true of God. So I'd be a really bad person if I said that people go to hell. Because no one really knows. All we've got is how we feel and extensions of how we feel in the moment.

JULIA: Yeah. So the real question is, which feeling of how we feel in the moment is the right one?

BRIAN: There's the one that goes along with feeling that we have to have everyone be okay in the end, that there's perfect happiness, that tragedy is unacceptable. And there's the one that goes along with the feeling that it's impossible to make everyone be okay in the end, that there is no perfect happiness, that tragedy is inevitable.

JULIA: Huh. It seems like both positions are kind of messed up. In this shuttle, it feels like everything is fine.

YOU: I have a headache.

JULIA: Yeah, everything's fine except for headaches. Easily solved, right? You just get some fresh air and relax and you'll be okay.

YOU: Yeah, I think that'll work with this headache.

JULIA: Things are basically fine, Beth?

YOU: Yeah, I just have a headache, it's not like I can't deal with that.

JULIA: So there's no question to us, as we really are. As we really are, right here, we're all fine. We don't need anyone to be okay in the end, because in our reality, where we really live, we're all okay. And no one is going to hell, either. So whatever we say, whatever position we take, is us trying to argue. And it sure seemed like you guys were arguing, in my dream.

MARK: Don't you believe in reality outside the moment?

JULIA: Yeah, I guess, sometimes. But honestly? No. Even if I'm wrong, I really just believe in my own feelings and my own moments.

MARK: Interesting.

TRICIA: God created a whole world.

MARK: Yeah. What does God say about all this?

JULIA: Can God be present in a moment, in the reality inside the shuttle?

BRIAN: I wonder that sometimes. I think sometimes he is. Remember that time when we all went crazy together? Like we were in a play.

JULIA: Oh yeah, definitely.

BRIAN: That was God's power, in a moment.

JULIA: Okay yeah. It was the Universe's power, and God's power. In the moment it's the same.

BRIAN: Oh yeah, you're right.

JULIA: We'll have to remember that.

BRIAN: Maybe we will.

JULIA: So God can be present in a moment.

BRIAN: But maybe not in this moment. And this is all we can speak of, what we really know.

The shuttle has made its way to where the buildings are taller. You can see the Hell Hills approaching.

TRICIA: I think tragedy does matter, in the moment.

JULIA: Yeah?

TRICIA: I think if everyone has to be okay in the end, and you're on the side of making that happen, you have to win. You can't lose, because you have no place for tragedy in your life. And you can do some really messed up things when you have to win.

MARK: So that's why we argue, because there's no place for tragedy in life.

JULIA: Arguing and fighting can be good things.

MARK: You're not going to argue with us or fight with us, are you? You three aren't that kind of person.

TRICIA: What are you talking about? Brian was arguing with me.

BRIAN: Yeah. Well, what is the answer, after all?

TRICIA: I don't know. But I think true wisdom is beyond answers. You don't understand it, but you trust it.

MARK: Amen.

TRICIA: Do you think we'll remember any of this in a week?

MARK: I hope so.

DRIVER: Hey guys, it looks like there's going to be a good sunset with the way the clouds are. You want to stop on one of the Hell Hills and watch it go down?

MARK: Sure, we can check in a little later.

YOU: Yeah, that sounds good. Julia or Brian, is that a problem?

BRIAN: No.

JULIA: No.

You sit quietly and Mark and Tricia murmur to each other. The driver drives up Second Hill and parks alongside the road. You all get out. You can feel the sea breeze and banks of clouds fill the sky. You are quiet, and Mark and Tricia murmur to each other and are quiet. The sun lowers itself fully into the clouds. Everything is lit up. In the world of the

senses, there is the sound of the breeze and the traffic going by, but in the world of the spirit, there is perfect silence.

No one can break that silence, except the driver.

DRIVER: Okay, I have to get going, gotta get the van back.

The sun isn't finished going down, but you know that there will be another day to see the sunset.

The driver drops off Mark and Tricia at their hotel, then Julia and Brian and finally you.

YOU: Thanks for the ride!

DRIVER: No problem. Life is a journey and a moment.

YOU: That's a beautiful thing to say.

DRIVER: It's how you get through the day.

He's helping you get your stuff out of the back of the van.

YOU: Yeah, I guess so. Well, hopefully we're living in reality.

DRIVER: I hope so too. Good night!

The sun is all the way down.

YOU: Good night!

He drives away.

You open the door to your apartment,  
and get to putting things away.

[closing theme]



WAITING FOR MARGOT  
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## COMMENTS

(no comments)

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