

HELP FROM THE POD
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Cast of Characters

- FLO: A woman of any race, flexible age, but probably older than 20s.
- J35: A mother. Any race, age, gender.
- ANDY: A man of any race, flexible age, but probably older than 20s.

Setting:

A couple different rooms in an apartment
and an oceanlike dreamscape.

CONTENT WARNING:

This play discusses death of an animal and miscarriages.

[Dim, blueish lights up. FLO is dreaming, and is sort of aware of it. In a liminal space, she sees another figure - J35. J35 moves like she is in water and belongs there. When she turns toward Flo, she is clutching something in her arms, a mass of black, white, or both.]

Seeing Flo notice the bundle, J35 smiles and starts to hold it out to her for admiration. Just as what's inside would become visible, Flo awakes with a start in her room. J35 does not disappear, but Flo is no longer able to see her. She searches around the room for her.

Now fully awake, Flo gets out of bed, where her husband ANDY still sleeps. Still a little shaken from the dream, she settles herself in a quiet space in front of her computer or phone, maybe with a hot tea and music playing, and starts reading.]

FLO [to herself]:

Read that one... read that one... New York Times again, CNN again, bla bla... oh you know what, maybe NPR... aha.

"Last week, just off the coast of southwestern Canada, there was newfound hope for the local orca population, despite looming environmental threats. A Pacific Beach marine biologist had spotted a healthy newborn calf swimming beside its mother.

[J35 is happy to hear this.]

However, upon the Center for Whale Research's arrival - only half an hour after the initial spotting - the calf had died.

[Her face falls, tightening around her bundle.]

Even after passing, the mother has not dropped the infant's corpse, carrying it where wherever she travels. When she is not able to balance it on top of herself, she grips it in her mouth by the flipper. She has been spotted nudging the calf with her nose and diving to retrieve it when it falls out of her grip."

[Flo notices how J35 has been moving continuously around her.]

"J35 has been observed by several sources in this apparent show of grief for seven days. Her journey with the corpse spans hundreds of miles so far."

[Flo jumps around on her device, looking for new items, reading desperately. J35 watches her with equal desperation]

"Update, August 6: As of yesterday afternoon, Tahlequah was still carrying the calf. With the temperatures dropping, and the wind causing choppy conditions in the water, it's been harder to track updates from local sources."

"Update, August 7..." still carrying...

"Update, August 8..."

[ANDY is awake. At some point he came in and was listening.]

ANDY:
Come back to bed.

FLO:
Oh my god, Andy, I'm so sorry. I didn't realize how much noise—

ANDY:
It's four A.M. We have work tomorrow. Let's go to bed for a little while, come on.

FLO:
I can't sleep. I'll be there soon.

ANDY:
You're still recovering. You need to sleep.

[She turns her attention back to the screen.]

FLO:
If I'm well enough to work, I'm well enough to stay up a bit...

ANDY:

We can't do anything about the healthcare system in the country at two A.M.

FLO:

Two-oh-four.

ANDY:

You know I love it when you talk numbers, but come on, Flo.

FLO:

I just need to read a bit more.

ANDY:

What are you reading?

FLO:

Just... Wikipedia. A Wikipedia spiral.

[Maybe he acknowledges J35 still in the room, holding her bundle.]

ANDY:

A Wikipedia spiral about that whale?

FLO:

I-what? Who? No.

ANDY:

I'm in I.T., honey. You think I don't know how to recover browser history?

FLO:

Why would you go through my browsing history anyway?

ANDY:

Considering what we just went through...

FLO:

Yes? Considering it? What's wrong with staying up and doing a little research to find out what went wrong?

ANDY:

More like I was making sure you weren't researching ways to... hurt yourself.

FLO:

I wouldn't. You know I wouldn't.

ANDY:

You went to a pretty dark place. Right there in the waiting room, before the ultrasound even. I saw the shift.

FLO:

Research helps.

ANDY:

How does *that* research help?

FLO:

Will it make you feel better if I also try to research what happened? Because I did that the first night we found out, and the entire next day. It's not comforting to know that late miscarriages are much rarer. It's not comforting to know that the best anyone can come up with is "most likely a chromosomal abnormality." And it's certainly not comforting to see how likely it is to happen again, according to every dot-E-D-U, dot-gov, and dot.org I can find. So yes. At some point I switched to National Geographic's ocean page. I wanted to check out some sting rays and seahorses. Okay?

ANDY:

Okay.

FLO:

Okay. I'll be in bed soon.

ANDY:

I researched it too.

FLO:

What did you find?

ANDY:

That at a certain point, J35 started to show signs of exhaustion from carrying the corpse for too long. That she wasn't eating right because she was so distracted. That orcas are matrilineal.

FLO:

You probably know I don't know what that means, and I hate it when you--

ANDY:

It means a pod depends on the mothers and her death would have been a threat to all of them.

FLO:

When you said you researched it, I thought you meant the miscarriage.

ANDY:

Please come to bed.

[He starts to leave, but Flo's eyes are glued on J35 as she sinks to the floor, but still holding the bundle.]

FLO:

I want to try again.

ANDY:

Tonight?

[This quick response startles her.]

FLO:

Maybe not tonight—

ANDY:

Flo—

FLO:

But I do.

ANDY:

It was tough to see you in that dark place, Flo. Tougher if there's not something to look forward to—

FLO:

What does that mean?!

ANDY:

I need to know you really want it.

FLO:

It was tough to be there.

ANDY:

Not sure you left yet. Come to bed.

[He exits.]

Flo waits for him to leave.]

FLO:

I'm going to find something for you before I leave.

[She scrolls.]

"Dwindling food sources..."

"Cold waters..."

"Onlookers..."

"Chemical pollutants..."

[She types instead:]

"Matrilineal."

[She reads, not out loud this time.]

J35 becomes impatient not being given instructions. She paces with the bundle. She seems to want to put it down very badly.

Eventually, exhaustion takes over -- Flo gets up and walks to the bedroom. J35 watches, then follows.

The blueish liminal dream space takes over again.]

J35:

What did you find for me tonight?

FLO:

No, cause but your name. Names, actually.

J35:

My... what?

FLO:

You had two names. All your pods are named by letter, and then the individual whales are named by number. So you're J35, but

there was some sort of Adopt-A-Whale program from a museum, so you're also Tahlequah.

J35:
Tahlequah.

FLO:
Which do you prefer?

J35:
Does it matter?

[Flo doesn't know how to respond to that at first.]

FLO:
Can I ask you something? I've seen you for three weeks now, every night, and I try to tell you what you need, but... I think I may need to know something, too.

J35:
I don't know why mine didn't swim. So I don't know why yours didn't swim either. I'm sorry.

FLO:
No, I just want to know... how much do you know? About who you are and the world you live in? *[J35 looks puzzled.]* Like, do you know what a museum is? A pod? A whale? Names? Do you know who you are?

[Flo is looking at the bundle. J35 realizes this.]

J35:
I know who *she* is. I knew her for seventeen months. How long did you know yours?

FLO:
Not even half of that.

J35:
Still. You knew her.

FLO:
I did.

J35:
Do you know what... mine's name was?

FLO:
There wasn't a number yet.

J35:
Oh.

FLO:
But she was called Tali.

J35:
Tali!

*[She looks as at the still bundle with
unbridled joy.]*

J35:
Hello, Tali.

FLO:
Yeah. Hello, Tali.

J35:
What was yours called?

FLO:
We hadn't picked yet.

J35:
Oh. Well, how about Tali?

*[J35 gets up and hands her the bundle. If
Flo is too stunned to take it, it's only
momentary. Instincts take over and she holds
the bundle.]*

Her burden gone, J35 smiles and exits.

*Flo wakes up in her bed, next to Andy. Still
holding Tali.]*

FLO:
She had help from the pod.

ANDY:
What's that?

FLO:
Tahlequah's pod helped her while she grieved. They made sure she had adequate food to keep pushing the baby around. Sometimes they helped carry it. And when she dropped it, they all gathered in a circle to grieve it one last time.

She did drop it one last time. It took seventeen days, but it happened. She let it happen at some point.

I know I'm a little behind... it's been twenty-one days for me.

[He looks at the clock or his phone.]

ANDY:
Twenty-two. But who's counting?

FLO:
I have something to look forward to.

ANDY:
Tell me.

FLO:
Naming it. When it comes. And it will come.

ANDY:
What do you want to name it?

FLO:
We can develop a system. But my first vote is Tali.

[End.]