

# The AfterParty

## 20-page sample

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*Claire is sitting in the darkness fiddling with a small mechanical object.*

*It's a bicycle light. She gets it working. It flickers.*

CLAIRE

Well, ok. So that was the first thing.

*She turns the light on definitively.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Let there be light!

Except of course that wasn't the first thing. The emancipation of light didn't happen till way after the first thing. Before that the universe was a hot angry darkness, so jostled with matter that no photon could travel unencumbered. It took over 300,000 years till we chilled out enough for light to, you know "be," which is to say, move, and then it all just lit up like Christmas. Well, probably not much like Christmas. I wasn't around then. I was born about 13.8 billion years later, on the third of July.

By that time a whole lot of stuff had happened.

*She walks over to a bicycle, and begins attempting to attach the bicycle light to the bicycle by the light of the bicycle light. This is actually pretty tricky.*

Matter domination, re-ionization, the formation of stars and galaxies, the cooking up of all the higher mass elements inside said stars, enabling the creation of planets and carbon-based lifeforms like myself... oh wow! (referring to the bicycle light.) This really is completely impossible, right? Trying to attach a bicycle light to a bicycle by the light of a bicycle light? Anyway, my name is Claire. I'm a poet, and I'm in love. I was born at the center of the observable universe, in the Virgo Supercluster of the Pisces Cetus Supercluster Complex, in the Orion Arm of the Milky Way...

*Having attached the bicycle light successfully, she mounts the bicycle.*

...in the loving orbit of the solar system, in the Western hemisphere of the planet earth, in a small town outside Madison, Wisconsin in the United States of America, looking up.

*There is a ringing noise from everywhere, like first 12 and then 50 and then 500 bicycle bells. She looks around.*

*The sound dies out. Then Claire reaches over and rings her own bicycle bell, just once. It sounds clear for a moment, then fades away.*

Up is a metaphorical direction.

Can you have a metaphorical direction?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED :

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Can you have a non metaphorical direction?  
I hope so, because I'm about to go backwards.

*Claire pushes off, and starts to cycle. A sci-fi organ plays momentarily, thrummingly. Claire bicycles in a circle and the lights come up, for the first time, and she is bicycling through and into a starry Midwestern night. A boy runs onstage, and hails her.*

DEVON

Claire! Over here! I'm right here!

CLAIRE

Devon!

*Claire leaps off the bicycle and lets it fall, running towards Devon's arms. Seconds before their embrace, she makes a quick gesture and they freeze. Claire speaks excitedly over Devon's shoulder.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

This is Devon, long since dead. We were sworn sweethearts at the ages of ten and eleven, respectively. He liked older women and, as a prepubescent, had better game than any mortal man I've met.

*She waves her hand. They unfreeze. She moves in and he pushes her away.*

DEVON

I'm not going to kiss you right now.

CLAIRE

Now?

DEVON

Come here. Let's sit down and look at the stars. I want to give you a present.

CLAIRE

A present?

DEVON

Because I missed your birthday.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

I missed you so much I can't even believe it.

DEVON

You look just the same.

CLAIRE

You too.

DEVON

No. I don't.

Here. I'll put my hoodie down. You can sit on it.

CLAIRE

I like the grass. Do you have to go back soon?

DEVON

It depends.

CLAIRE

Everyone missed you. Everyone talked about you all the time. Mrs. Gomez basically cried in front of the entire class when she was collecting your letters.

DEVON

I got those.

CLAIRE

You got mine.

DEVON

Eight o'clock by the old stone wall. Took me three days to figure it out, the cipher was a total bitch.

CLAIRE

Thank you. It was the very first cipher I made up by myself.

DEVON

We'll make something of you yet, Ms. Claire.

CLAIRE

I still suck at school math. It's easier when it's not boring.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DEVON

That's how I can tell you're really smart.

CLAIRE

No-

DEVON

Yeah. People don't think you are, because you're pretty. It's good, it will make you a good spy, because you'll always be underestimated, but you have to remember not to believe them. Ok?

CLAIRE

I can't-

DEVON

Just promise to remember.

*Claire nods.*

DEVON (CONT'D)

Are you looking up? It's not bad tonight.

CLAIRE

We decorated just for you. See? We re-arranged the stars in Orion to spell "Welcome Back, Devon." You kind of have to cross your eyes, but it's there.

DEVON

How long can you stay out?

CLAIRE

Till 9:30. Does your mom know you're here?

DEVON

What's she gonna do about it?

CLAIRE

She'll worry.

DEVON

She'll worry no matter what. We don't have much time. Here.

*He takes something out of this bag.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DEVON (CONT'D)

It's that book I was trying to remember. It's like all the different myths about constellations. Not just Greek stuff, but like Africa and Norway and everything.

CLAIRE

Stories of the Night.

DEVON

And the coolest part is that after every story, they tell you what the story is for real. Like, how far away the stars are, and in what galaxies, and how old they are. Like the Greeks say Hercules was placed among the stars as a reward for his general awesomeness, but his shoulder is actually made up of a 370 million year old binary system.

CLAIRE

What's a binary system?

DEVON

It's two stars that orbit each other, and from here they look like one star.

CLAIRE

Oh.

*(Claire searches the sky, then suddenly, triumphantly, points.)*

Hercules!

DEVON

Yup. See his shoulder?

CLAIRE

It looks just like one star. What do we look like to them, one human?

DEVON

No. By the time they're looking at us, we're not there.

CLAIRE

Oh, come on.

DEVON

Those stars are 400 million years old, and they're still young. I'm ten.

CLAIRE

I should have brought a present for you. I would have, really, but the only store I'm allowed to walk to by myself is the drugstore. I went over, you know, but they just had- really stupid toys from tv shows, and lightbulbs, and candy. Nothing like this book.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I thought of making you something. I thought of writing you a poem, but it wasn't good enough. I thought you should get something... really... really fine.

*Pause.*

DEVON

So you didn't buy candy?

CLAIRE

Um...

DEVON

Because if you bought me candy, that would be the most awesome present ever. I'm not allowed any, you know.

CLAIRE

Oh, I-

DEVON

Oh my god, did you? Do you have any candy right now?

CLAIRE

Kind of...

DEVON

It doesn't even have to be chocolate, I would eat a jolly rancher or a smarty. What do you mean, kind of?

CLAIRE

I bought a snickers bar. But I ate half of it.

DEVON

That means you have half left?

*Claire rummages in her coat pocket, and pulls out half a candy bar.*

CLAIRE

Welcome home, Devon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

DEVON

Yes, very yes.

*He takes a generous bite.*

Oh my god, the pleasure centers in my brain they don't even know what's happening. Claire. Claire. For this service you shall be placed among the stars. Oh wow. Have you ever tried eating a candy bar and rolling around on the grass and looking up at the sky all at the same time? Here, take a bite.

CLAIRE

Devon, it's your present!

DEVON

And this is how I want to use it.

CLAIRE

But I already ate half.

DEVON

Not with me. Here. Bite.

*She bites. He tickles her. She shrieks, giggles and rolls back.*

CLAIRE

No!

DEVON

Just do it- try it!

CLAIRE

I'm laughing- I can't chew... I'm gonna choke....

DEVON

*(his mouth full)*

No, no.... open your eyes. Open your eyes. Look up.

*Claire is quiet for a second.*

CLAIRE

You're right. This is good.

*They lie quietly, chewing, looking up.*

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (7)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Devon, I have a question.

DEVON

Mmmhmmm?

CLAIRE

It's about something you said.

DEVON

A binary system is two stars that orbit each other.

CLAIRE

No, not that. When I got off my bike, you said you weren't going to kiss me right now.

DEVON

Mmmm.

CLAIRE

But you've never kissed me.

DEVON

Mmmmm.

CLAIRE

So what did that mean?

DEVON

Did Mrs. Gomez teach you about light yet? I mean, the speed of it?

CLAIRE

Um....

DEVON

You know, how it's so fast that here we think it's instant, that I just open my eyes and see you instantly? But really it's only incredibly incredibly fast?

CLAIRE

Yes.

DEVON

The light from Hercules' shoulder was made 79 years ago. For the life of an entire human old person, it's been coming toward us, just so we can be looking at it right now.

When I was little, my mom told me a kiss is like that.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

DEVON (CONT'D)

If you love someone, and you're far away, and you send them a kiss, it'll find that person. Even if it has to go all the way around the world.

CLAIRE

Is that true?

DEVON

I guess what I meant is how do you know I haven't kissed you before?

CLAIRE

Show me.

*He brings his knuckles to his lips, and kisses his fist.*

DEVON

For Claire LeVerrier.

*He throws the kiss. It's a little like he's throwing a baseball.*

CLAIRE

Is that going all the way around the world?

DEVON

Or further. People used to think that the earth was just flat, and went on forever, then we figured out you could go all the way around it. Maybe it'll go all the way around the universe.

CLAIRE

Oh. How long is that going to take?

DEVON

Longer than the universe is old, probably.

CLAIRE

Oh. Can we maybe send one... in the other direction?

*He turns his head, and they look at each other for a long moment.*

*Shift. Claire turns to the audience.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Were you ever a kid who wanted only one thing with your entire being? Like a trip to the waterpark, or a particular advertised candy? And it was always, always some very small thing that you never got.

Particles of light don't have intent, of course. And particles of kisses, while full of intent, don't have much in the way of existence. If they did, and if it was measurable- holy cats would they be useful. We would separate two lovers and measure the universe. A scientist would say this is the kind of crap a poet would say. Anyways.

I never got a kiss of any kind. Not the one coming toward me, not the one he threw away from me. Maybe if I stick around long enough, it'll come back.

DEVON

Awww crap.

*Claire shifts back into the scene with Devon.*

CLAIRE

What is it?

DEVON

I'm fine.

CLAIRE

Oh my god, are you going to puke?

DEVON

No. It's just... probably I shouldn't have eaten that candy bar.

CLAIRE

Maybe you should just puke. You'll feel better.

DEVON

NO. No. It's mine. I'm keeping it.

*Devon's teeth are clenched. He clutches his own body. They sit for a moment, miserably.*

CLAIRE

Why don't you.... quiz me on my constellations. You don't have to say anything, just nod if I get it right.

DEVON

Mmmhp.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

CLAIRE

Ok?

*He nods his head.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Ok. So, we were looking at Hercules. So... there's Perseus. Right?

*Devon nods.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Perseus slew the gorgon, and had those sandals with wings and all, and when he was flying around he rescued Andromeda, this princess who was chained to a rock in the sea. She was naked. (Claire points.) Andromeda. Right?

*Devon nods.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

The gods put Perseus in the sky as a reward for his bravery. And then they put Andromeda in the sky... because she was.... naked? Ok. And ... Cassiopeia. She's Andromeda's mom, and it was her fault that Andromeda got chained to a rock, because she was very mouthy about how hot she was, and that got some of the hot lady gods pissed. Is it punishment or reward to go among the stars?

DEVON

I don't know.

CLAIRE

The gods are really inconsistent.

DEVON

Sometimes, the gods do it when they have mercy on you. There was a king called Merope who wanted to kill himself after his wife died. Juno felt sorry for him, so she changed him into an eagle and tossed him on up there.

*(points to constellation)*

Aquila. That means eagle.

CLAIRE

Why did she change him into an eagle?

DEVON

Because if he'd stayed a man, he would have remembered his wife. Kind of a bitch move on her part, what if he wanted to remember?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

CLAIRE

But then he would have been sad forever.

DEVON

He would have gone supernova eventually.

CLAIRE

We know that, but did Juno?

*Devon shrugs.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

An eagle made of stars. That's pretty metal.

*She makes a hand sign.*

DEVON

You're doing it wrong again, but in like a different way.

CLAIRE

Do I have the right fingers?

DEVON

Yeah, but you have to make the front part a fist, not all pointy. You're making the quiet coyote.

CLAIRE

The what?

DEVON

Don't you remember Mrs. Laghada's class?

CLAIRE

Oh, dude! The quiet coyote.

*She makes the quiet coyote. Devon makes the quiet coyote. Then they both make the quiet coyote with their other hands. The coyotes all stare at each other.*

*Claire turns to the audience with her coyote and becomes a grownup.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Now class. If I have your attention....

*She picks up "Stories of the Night." Perhaps she slams it down on a table.*

I hope you guys *were* paying attention to this book- it's very important to what I'm trying to do here and I don't have it anymore. This is just a memory of it.

I must have read it every day, afterwards. I'd ride my bike out to the old stone wall and sit on the grass all by myself.

I think it warped me.

I think it might have ruined my entire life.

Right? This stuff you read as a kid. It's warping. Like a bunch of cultural black holes.

This book taught me that love is something that conquers you. That changes your life.

Oh you think that sounds fun. You have not read Greek myth

DEVON

Maybe the gods just put stuff up there that they want to remember. Sort of like a scrapbook. Hey, remember how Cassiopeia was kind of a bitch? I dunno if it's just a picture of you, or actually you or...

CLAIRE

I always think that a god should look down from heaven, and see some exceptional person, and just love him so much that she won't let him die. Are there stories like that?

DEVON

Gods fell in love with mortals a lot, but it usually didn't work out for the mortal. So if a god is like, hey baby, you just say no thanks. Wait, actually, don't, because then the god will just try and grab you and you'll have to be turned into a tree. So just stop... stop being pretty.

CLAIRE

Ha hah.

DEVON

Or don't stop. Just don't let the gods see you. Here.

*He takes off his hoodie and drapes it over Claire's head.*

DEVON (CONT'D)

Hide under this. I only hope no-one saw you already.

CLAIRE

You better get under here too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

DEVON

Me?

CLAIRE

You're pretty cute. It's not safe for you either.

*They hide under the hoodie.*

DEVON

Can you see the stars now?

CLAIRE

Not really. But the important thing is, can they see us?  
Can they hear us?

DEVON

Sound waves can't travel through /space-

CLAIRE

Shh!

*She makes the quiet coyote. After a second, Devon makes the quiet coyote. The coyotes sneak their way out from under the hoodie. The coyotes look at each other.*

*Then they look up.*

*Then they kiss.*

*Then someone rings a bicycle bell, just once. Claire drops her hand.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I knew a guy- it didn't work out- who always liked to ask people "What's your favorite story about love?" He said he found the answer very revealing, but I think he just wanted to tell people that his favorite was "The origin of love" from the Aristophanes section of the Symposium, which I think he thought made him an enlightened being... because it's all about equality...you know, in the iron-forge days of the earth every human was a big ball with four legs and two faces, until the gods got pissed and split us down the middle, and so we spend every waking moment trying to smash ourselves back together with our other halves?

But Aristophanes was a comedian. His job was to make funny stories where everything works out ok.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

And while it's nice to think that we all have soulmates out there, we have to remember that there were scientists at that party too, and they came to a completely different conclusion, that didn't have much to do with equality, and had kind of a lot to do with banging your teacher.

And honestly that makes sense to me. If you're going to run around trying to be a part of something... wouldn't you try to be a part of something bigger?

DEVON.

Do you want to play a game?

CLAIRE

Sure.

DEVON

Five people you meet in heaven. Go.

CLAIRE

Devon!

DEVON

What? It's a good game. Mine are Albert Einstein

CLAIRE

This isn't....

DEVON

Carl Sagan.

CLAIRE

Ok.

DEVON

Benjamin Franklin, Wild Bill Hickock

CLAIRE

Ok, good.

DEVON

Tycho Brahe-

CLAIRE

Who?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (15)

DEVON

He's my new favorite dead person. He was this scientist from like, Shakespeare times, who owned his own private astronomy island. And he had a silver nose, and like a pet moose that drank beer. He's in this book.

CLAIRE

Did he discover something important?

DEVON

How the planets orbit the sun. Except not really. This guy who worked for him named Johannes Kepler figured it out, but honestly, Brahe seems like way more fun. He lost his nose in a duel.

CLAIRE

Cool.

DEVON

Ok, now you go.

CLAIRE

How am I meeting them? Is it one at a time, or is it like a party?

DEVON

Oh, a party.

CLAIRE

Like a birthday party or a grownup party?

DEVON

An extremely grown-up party.

CLAIRE

Ok. Um. Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare. I'll also take Albert Einstein.

DEVON

He's popular.

CLAIRE

Um. Cleopatra, and....

*Claire pages through the book.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

DEVON  
 What are you doing?

CLAIRE  
 I'm looking for a girl scientist.

DEVON  
 What? Cheating!

CLAIRE  
 Your party was all dudes and I want a lady scientist at my party.

DEVON  
 They didn't let women do science back then.

CLAIRE  
 That is so sexist, Devon.

DEVON  
 I wasn't there!

CLAIRE  
 Ok, ok. I found one.

*(sounding it out, with difficulty)*  
 Henrietta Swan Leavvit. Leave-it? Levit....

DEVON  
 What'd she do again?

CLAIRE  
 She worked at Harvard as a... computer?

DEVON  
 What?

CLAIRE  
*(overlapping)*  
 She discovered

*(sounding it out with difficulty)*  
 Cepheid... variable stars.

DEVON  
 What are those?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

CLAIRE

They measure the universe. I thought you read this book.

DEVON

Not the boring parts.

CLAIRE

Whatever, she's invited.

DEVON

She doesn't sound like any fun.

CLAIRE

Ok, so who should I invite instead?

DEVON

How about me?

CLAIRE

You haven't discovered anything.

DEVON

That's not fair.

CLAIRE

Neither is sexism. Get back to me when you discover something.

DEVON

I won't have time.

CLAIRE

Devon..

*He starts to exit.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

*(as a grownup)*

Devon!

*But he's gone. Claire turns to the audience.*

Do you remember your favorite story about love?

I want you to think about it now. I want you to tell it to yourself, as simply as you can, inside your own head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (18)

*Time passes as Claire searches the faces of every audience member.*

*She opens the book. It expands into a puppet theatre, or maybe light shines out of it and the theatre space fills with potential shadow puppets.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Weaver girl and cowboy!

This story is Chinese. The book is multi-cultural. It says so right on the back cover.

*As she speaks, the most fabulous shadow puppets possible appear. They are in fact so fabulous that they are probably embodied by actors.*

Once, long ago, when the stars crowded low to the earth, and the sky resembled a blazing upside-down city, there lived a cowboy. The book says cowherd, but that doesn't sound as sexy, and for plot reasons it's better if this guy is sexy. Also, if we call him a cowboy we can use the horse puppet.

*She wiggles the horse puppet, with enthusiasm.*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

This cowboy was everything he should have been. He lived out in the country, with his cows, had a zither and a pipe, sang, lay on his back in the grass, and looked up. Sometimes, a star would swing down on one of the sky's many convenient trapezes, and trade him some celestial milk for cow's milk, which was considered a rustic delicacy by a whole subculture of stars with a condescending but intense interest in earthly food. There was a particular window in a particular building of the night city that passed, at least once a night, over the cowboy's favorite patch of grass.

*The Weaver Girl appears, gazing wistfully out her window.*

This building happened to be a sort of starry live/work collective for traditional artisans and the window belonged to the studio of a young star with a promising career in textiles. In fact, she was rapidly becoming the favored weaver of the Celestial Emperor,

THE EMPEROR

which was a big deal.

CLAIRE

You couldn't really rise higher than that in the world of star fabrics, and as a result she was very stressed and driven. Her one nightly indulgence was looking out the window at a particular patch of grass, which, it has to be said,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (19)

WEAVER GIRL

framed the cowboy gorgeously.

CLAIRE

And sometimes, he would look up and she could swear that his eyes reflected her own bright face. Which just goes to remind us- never underestimate the potential effects of looking up.

The weaver might have continued staring sadly out her window indefinitely, but one night...

*The cowboy enters, strumming a zither and singing:*

COWBOY

IN NO WAY IS ANYTHING  
LOST OR FORGOTTEN  
FOR ME THERE IS ONE STAR  
IN SEVENTY SKIES  
MOONLIGHT AND NIGHTFIRE  
TO LEATHER AND COTTON  
IMPOSSIBLE WEAVER!  
PLEASE JOIN THE REPRISE...

COWBOY/WEAVER GIRL

AND OH I WILL SING  
TO THE FACE IN THE WINDOW/ LOOKING OUT FROM MY WINDOW  
AND THE VALLEY WILL RING  
LIKE THE HEAVENLY SPHERES  
I THINK YOU COULD LOVE ME  
IF I COULD BELIEVE IT  
THE ONE STAR ABOVE ME  
THAT ALWAYS APPEARS

COWBOY

Good lord, I thought you'd never come down.

WEAVER GIRL

Am I down? Oh-

*The star skitters backward, looking at her feet.*

WEAVER GIRL (CONT'D)

-dear. I'm not burning the grass. ... I'm not burning anything!

(CONTINUED)