**Back and Forth**

By

Alison Christovich

**SYNOPSIS**

**BACK AND FORTH.** (1M, 1F) A young woman comes home after a long day at work and attempts to face her demons.

**CHARACTER LIST – [Back and Forth]**

1. **CHARA:** (a young woman in her mid-twenties)
2. **GABRIEL:** (a young man in his mid-twenties)

*Scene opens in the living room of a standard, tidy apartment. It is around nine o’clock at night. CHARA**enters the room with GABRIEL close behind.*

**CHARA:**

So, if you could go to any place in the world to relax, where would you go?

 **GABRIEL:**

Hmm. Probably the beach.

 **CHARA:**

That’s too basic, though. Everybody wants to go to the beach, so it would be way too crowded. I’d have to pick someplace quiet, where no one else can bother me. Like a cabin in the Rocky Mountains.

 **GABRIEL:**

A cabin in the mountains? That would be freezing. Plus, you wouldn’t have any internet.

 **CHARA:**

Who needs the internet when you have the great outdoors?

 **GABRIEL:**

You’ll need it to figure out how to survive the great outdoors. “Okay, Google, tell me how I can walk by that steep cliff over there without shitting myself in fear?”

 **CHARA:**

Funny. You should be a comedian.

 **GABRIEL:**

Please, the chances of that happening are lower than the chances of you actually living in a cabin in the woods.

 **CHARA:**

Ha. Well, no point in lying to myself is there?

*CHARA’s phone rings.*

 **CHARA:**

Hello? Oh, hi Megan, what’s up? Yeah, just got back from work. Uh huh. Uh huh. Ohhhhh, yeeeeeaaaahhh, of COURSE I remembered! She’s what, eight now? Nine! Yes! Exciting! Yeah, it should be coming in the mail soon. I’ll look for the tracking number later and text it to you. Yeah, don’t worry, I didn’t forget! I would tell you but it’s a surprise. I’m sure Abby will love it. Okay, talk to you soon, sis, love you!

 *She hangs up.*

 **GABRIEL:**

You forgot about Abby’s birthday, didn’t you?

 **CHARA:**

I totally forgot about Abby’s birthday. Ugh. This happens nearly every year.

 **GABRIEL:**

I mean, you have more than one niece, so birthdays are pretty easy to mix up.

 **CHARA:**

But she’s still my niece. All the more reason to not get her birthday mixed up. Hopefully I can find something on Amazon to ship by Friday. I still have two or three days.

 **GABRIEL:**

Three days.

 **CHARA:**

Right, three days.

*She opens her laptop and searches for girls’ toys. Not much selection. She sighs.*

You know, if I’d want to relax anywhere right now, it would be right here, on this couch, and I’d never leave it again.

 **GABRIEL:**

Not even to go to bed? I feel like the bed would be more comfortable than this dusty old thing.

 **CHARA:**

Well, yeah, but there’s something different about relaxing on a couch instead of a bed. For one, it’s one of the first things you see when you walk through the front door, so it’s pretty convenient. And maybe there’s something about being comfortable in a space that doesn’t have to function as a permanent resting place. It’s kind of liberating in a way; if you lay down on it you can always sit back up again.

 **GABRIEL:**

Or stand on it.

 **CHARA:**

Why would you stand on a couch?

 **GABRIEL:**

For playing “The Floor is Lava”, of course!

 **CHARA:**

You know, sometimes I have no idea where those thoughts come from.

 **GABRIEL:**

Aw, don’t tell me you haven’t thought of doing it.

 **CHARA:**

Again, I could never lie to you.

 **GABRIEL:**

So what’s stopping you?

 *He stands on the couch.*

 **CHARA:**

Hey, it’s way too late for that. Plus I told you I’m not getting up again.

 **GABRIEL:**

What happened to the freedom of lying down and getting back up again? Come on, I dare you.

**CHARA:**

 *Considers it.*

You know, I can picture all of the things that can go wrong almost as easily as I can picture myself standing up on this couch, so I’ll choose the freedom to stay lying down and look for a birthday present for my nine-year-old niece, thank you very much. Ugh, all of these things are so overpriced…I need a break. Alright, Facebook, what did I miss? Oh, joy. More engagement photos. Another wedding I won’t be invited to.

 **GABRIEL:**

Don’t sell yourself short, love.

 **CHARA:**

You know, that phrase only works for people who actually have something to sell.

 **GABRIEL:**

You wouldn’t be here if that wasn’t the case.

 **CHARA:**

…alright, you got me. But that’s also assuming that people are buying.

 **GABRIEL:**

It’s a free country. The free market depends on people not selling themselves short.

 **CHARA:**

Well it’s not gonna fall apart when my prediction comes true and I don’t receive a save-the-date card.

 **GABRIEL:**

Hey, just ignore the post and leave them be. You could even unfollow them if you want.

 **CHARA:**

You know what? I think I will. Haven’t talked to her since high school anyway.

**GABRIEL:**

There. Nice job.

 **CHARA:**

Thanks. (*continues scrolling)* Wait, what? “Take this quiz and we can guess how old you were when you first tried Brussel sprouts”? Ugh. I hate this trash.

 **GABRIEL:**

But you’re gonna –

 **CHARA:**

 -- I’m gonna do it anyway. Damn it. At least it’s only 5 questions. “Pick your favorite dog.”

 **GABRIEL:**

All of them.

 **CHARA:**

Ahhh if only! But if I had to pick one…it would have to be this good boy. There. “Pick a color,” that would obviously be red.

 **GABRIEL:**

I mean, that’s the color you look best in.

 **CHARA:**

Of course. “Pick a…man?”

 **GABRIEL:**

That’s a loaded question.

 **CHARA:**

And definitely irrelevant to this quiz. Like I said, this is such trash. I’ll just pick this one.

 **GABRIEL:**

“Pick a plate of spaghetti.”

**CHARA:**

Great, something food-related for once. None of them look all that different, so number 3 it is…“Pick a relaxing place to live.” Of course.

 **GABRIEL:**

See, now you have to answer that question honestly, and the couch doesn’t count. So what’ll it be: mountains, city, beach, or countryside?

 **CHARA:**

Not the city, *definitely* not the beach, and I still like the idea of living in the mountains.

 **GABRIEL:**

That countryside looks pretty though.

 **CHARA:**

It does…but I’m sticking with the mountains.

 **GABRIEL:**

You’re so stubborn.

 **CHARA:**

I am not and that’s what I’m going to pick.

 **GABRIEL:**

Come on, pick the countryside, Chara.

 **CHARA:**

Mountains! Calculating results…”36”? Really? I’m not even 30.

 **GABRIEL:**

Should’ve picked --

 **CHARA:**

The countryside, yeah, don’t remind me.

*She closes her laptop, grabs the remote, and turns the TV on.*

**GABRIEL:**

Now you’re distracting yourself again.

**CHARA:**

I told you, I need a break from online shopping. I just want to sit back and enjoy the show.

 **GABRIEL:**

What? You weren’t even…you enjoy “Keeping up With the Kardashians”?

 **CHARA:**

Ugh. Well, not *really*, but it gives me something to do.

 **GABRIEL:**

And the only things you want to do when you get home are take dumb quizzes and watch dumb TV shows? When you have more important things to do?

 **CHARA:**

We were in the middle of taking a dumb quiz when we got here, weren’t we?

 **GABRIEL:**

Okay, that’s different, that was a questionnaire.

 **CHARA:**

Questionnaire, quiz, same difference.

 **GABRIEL:**

Not really. Dr. Bell gave this to you, didn’t she?

 **CHARA:**

Yeah.

 **GABRIEL:**

Doesn’t that make it a little more important than a Buzzfeed quiz, then?

 **CHARA:**

I guess.

 **GABRIEL:**

She gave it to you because she thinks it will help you. Distracting yourself from that or from getting Abby’s gift isn’t going to help you.

 **CHARA:**

…No, it’s not. (*turns off TV*) Gotta break that habit sooner than later.

 **GABRIEL:**

See? You know you don’t *need* that.

 **CHARA:**

I don’t need it. There are plenty of more productive things I can do with my time.

 **GABRIEL:**

That’s the spirit!

 **CHARA:**

But I really don’t want to go back to shopping right now. Too many options stress me out.

 **GABRIEL:**

Why don’t you get back to the questionnaire? Fill out a couple more questions, focus your mind on something else, then get back to finding a present when you have a clearer head. It’ll be good for you.

 **CHARA:**

Yeah. Alright. Quiet place to relax that’s not the mountains that won’t make me anxious. But wait, if it does, won’t that help me work through that anxiety and even my fear of heights? That’s what this whole thing is for, isn’t it?

 **GABRIEL:**

To find a way to confront your anxiety in bits and pieces rather than all at once? Yeah, that would make the most sense.

 **CHARA:**

Not just a comedian but a genius, too! Imagine!

 **GABRIEL:**

She wouldn’t have given it to you if it didn’t work like that.

 **CHARA:**

But the more I think about trying to fix my anxiety the more anxious I get, and I’m so fixated on my heart racing and my head hurting that I just want to squash whatever’s causing it like a bug.

 **GABRIEL:**

Well, do you see any bugs here?

 *CHARA stares at him.*

 **CHARA:**

No.

 *A light flickers.*

Damn, I gotta get that fixed.

 *Sighs.*

But I’m gonna have to tell Megan I messed up and didn’t get Abby’s present yet. For my own sanity.

 **GABRIEL:**

Megan’s not going to be happy about that.

 **CHARA:**

No, but she can deal with it.

 **GABRIEL:**

I mean, yeah, but only for so long.

 **CHARA:**

You’re not helping.

 **GABRIEL:**

You haven’t asked me to.

 **CHARA:**

I didn’t ask you to stop me from watching more shitty TV but look what happened.

 **GABRIEL:**

You did that yourself. It’s a step forward.

 **CHARA:**

…Right. Thanks for the motivation.

 **GABRIEL:**

It’s what I’m here for.

 **CHARA:**

Again, funny.

 **GABRIEL:**

Try not to worry about Megan.

 **CHARA:**

Alright, what should I worry about instead?

 **GABRIEL:**

Just don’t worry about it.

 **CHARA:**

Well how else can I keep from worrying about Megan if I don’t worry about something else?

 **GABRIEL:**

Find some other way to distract yourself.

 **CHARA:**

You literally just told me to stop distracting myself earlier.

 **GABRIEL:**

That was under different circumstances. Stop talking to me like we’re both stupid.

 **CHARA:**

Okay, fine. I have work to do anyway.

 **GABRIEL:**

See? There’s a start.

 **CHARA:**

A start, yeah. Whether that actually leads to a finish has yet to be established.

 **GABRIEL:**

Why are you such a pessimist?

 **CHARA:**

Hell if I know.

*She opens her laptop again.*

Email. That’s spam, that’s spam, survey I’ll never take, Viagra spam –

 **GABRIEL:**

You’re doing it again.

 **CHARA:**

What?

 **GABRIEL:**

Pretending to do something productive when you’re really not.

 **CHARA:**

What’s your point?

 **GABRIEL:**

You can’t stop thinking about Megan.

 **CHARA:**

Yes I can, I’m going to stop thinking about her by distracting myself.

 **GABRIEL:**

It’s not working.

 **CHARA:**

I just wasn’t ready for her to call me when I have so much else going on.

**GABRIEL:**

And when were you going to be ready for that?

 **CHARA:**

I don’t know.

 **GABRIEL:**

Well, there’s no sense in worrying so much about it when there’s clearly nothing you can do about it right now.

 **CHARA:**

But I feel like I have to! For Abby!

 **GABRIEL:**

Abby can wait. Megan can wait.

 **CHARA:**

But I told Megan I’d text her. She’s waiting to hear back from me.

 **GABRIEL:**

Megan can wait. You’re not in the right frame of mind.

 **CHARA:**

I just don’t have the time or patience to get something for her right now.

 **GABRIEL:**

That’s fine. Tell her that.

 **CHARA:**

But then she’s gonna be pissed! If I do tell her that she’s going to be like “It’s bad enough you don’t do anything to help Mom and Dad, the least you could do is get a birthday gift for your niece on time!” She’ll hate me for sure.

 **GABRIEL:**

She won’t -- wait, hang on a second.

 **CHARA:**

What?

 **GABRIEL:**

This is starting to sound familiar.

 **CHARA:**

Of course it does, it’s not like she hasn’t said anything like that before.

 **GABRIEL:**

I need you to take a breath, Chara.

 **CHARA:**

I don’t want to. She’s going to hate me.

 **GABRIEL:**

Listen, she might get mad but she won’t hate you. Try to get that thought into your head right now.

 **CHARA:**

She’s going to hate me.

 **GABRIEL:**

No, she’s not.

 **CHARA:**

I don’t want her to hate me.

 **GABRIEL:**

You’re blowing this out of proportion. You need to breathe.

 **CHARA:**

 *Realizing.*

I’m blowing this out of proportion.

 **GABRIEL:**

Breathe.

 **CHARA:**

It’s on that list that Dr. Bell gave me of all the ways people stress out. That’s what I’m doing.

**GABRIEL:**

Just breathe.

 **CHARA:**

*Breathes.*

Another bad habit.

 **GABRIEL:**

There you go. In and out.

 **CHARA:**

In and out.

 **GABRIEL:**

Nice and easy. You can do it.

 **CHARA:**

I can do it.

 **GABRIEL:**

In-two-three-four, out-two-three-four. In-two-three-four –

 **CHARA:**

-- Out-two-three-four.

 *One last inhale/exhale.*

Okay. Okay. I have a little time tomorrow morning, I’ll text Megan that something happened with the last gift and I’ll order a new one off Amazon tomorrow.

 **GABRIEL:**

There you go. There’s your plan.

 **CHARA:**

I have a plan. And…text sent. God, I feel better now.

 **GABRIEL:**

It’s the little victories. Now you have nothing to be afraid of.

**CHARA:**

Well, there’s always something to be afraid of.

 **GABRIEL:**

There’s *nothing* to be afraid of.

 **CHARA:**

Right. Nothing to worry about…damn it, that’s not true either!

 **GABRIEL:**

Why don’t you get back to the questionnaire?

 **CHARA:**

I don’t want to do that anymore.

 **GABRIEL:**

But you haven’t finished it.

 **CHARA:**

But I don’t feel like it.

 **GABRIEL:**

Okay, now you’re being childish.

 **CHARA:**

Yes, I know, but it’s childish enough that I have to answer a questionnaire to figure out what’s wrong with me.

 **GABRIEL:**

Childish and stubborn.

 **CHARA:**

I just don’t want to do it right now. Is that so wrong?

 **GABRIEL:**

It is when you’re not getting anywhere with anything you need to do. The more you put this off the harder it’s going to be for you to recover and get a hold of yourself.

 **CHARA:**

Look, I’m just not going to think about it anymore.

 **GABRIEL:**

Think about what?

 **CHARA:**

Anything. I want no part in this.

 **GABRIEL:**

You don’t want to help yourself?

 **CHARA:**

No! Yes! God!

 **GABRIEL:**

Then what are you going to do about all these damn problems you have?

 **CHARA:**

I don’t want to keep answering all these random fucking questions!

 **GABRIEL:**

They’re not –

 **CHARA:**

- “Random fucking questions.” Don’t mock me. Do you not see the monotony in all this? Working long-ass hours, trying to keep up with shitty deadlines and shitty coworkers and shitty subway rides, and then coming home to try to decompress from everything and maybe finding something good out of it all -

 **GABRIEL:**

- Only to find yourself stuck in the same shitty cycle of Facebook quizzes, trash TV, and worrying too much about what other people think of you? Yes, I do see it. Why else would we be trying to talk through it?

 **CHARA:**

And where’s that getting us? Absolutely nowhere. I get home, sit down, try to relax, you give me shit about it. I have a problem, you give me shit about it. I try to distract myself from the problem, you give me shit about it. It’s an endless back-and-forth tossup of shit that goes nowhere! So what do you have to say about that?

 **GABRIEL:**

You said it, not me.

 **CHARA:**

Unbelievable! I thought you were supposed to help me!

 **GABRIEL:**

I can only do so much. You need to pull your share of the load.

**CHARA:**

I’m doing my best!

 **GABRIEL:**

No you’re not. If you were, you would’ve found Abby’s gift, you would’ve finished that questionnaire by now, and you would actually be making some progress on your counseling.

 **CHARA:**

I am making progress.

 **GABRIEL:**

You’ve been in counseling for over six months now. What have you even learned in that time?

 *Beat.*

 **CHARA:**

I’m going to get a drink.

 *She starts to leave.*

 **GABRIEL:**

Damn it, you know –

 **CHARA:**

Don’t you fucking start.

*She exits. The light flickers again. She returns with a bottle of liquor and a glass. She sits back on the couch, pours herself a drink, and starts working on her laptop again.*

Just leave me alone, will you?

 **GABRIEL:**

I can’t. You remember what happened the last time you drank when you were angry?

 **CHARA:**

I need to do work on this project for tomorrow.

**GABRIEL:**

Didn’t you get that assignment over a week ago? You should have started it then.

 **CHARA:**

Yes, but I didn’t do that, did I?

 **GABRIEL:**

No, because you just love to procrastinate on everything.

 **CHARA:**

No I don’t.

 **GABRIEL:**

So don’t keep doing it, then.

 **CHARA:**

Easier said than done.

 **GABRIEL:**

If you had started it last week you wouldn’t have to worry about getting it all done tonight.

 **CHARA:**

Stop it.

 **GABRIEL:**

And if you’d done that earlier maybe you would’ve remembered Abby’s birthday earlier.

 **CHARA:**

That’s enough.

 **GABRIEL:**

And the only reason you’re doing it now is to avoid the simple tasks of finding a birthday gift or answering a few questions, and for some reason you can’t even do that. So you drink to make it all less stressful, and you think that in your drunken stupor you’re going to come up with brilliant ideas because you’re so relaxed you feel you can do anything but all you end up with are dead ends and –

 **CHARA:**

Oh, fuck.

 **GABRIEL:**

What now?

 **CHARA:**

Oh no, oh no oh no oh no –

 **GABRIEL:**

 *He reads her laptop screen.*

“The deadline for application submissions is March 7th. No late offers are accepted.”

 **CHARA:**

I thought that was next week.

 **GABRIEL:**

Next week? Today’s the 10th.

 **CHARA:**

No, no, it can’t be. I’d been researching this master’s program for months. I have all their web pages bookmarked. I set reminders to fill out the application. This was supposed to be my ticket out of this shit town, this shit job, it was supposed to make everything so much better.

 **GABRIEL:**

And you didn’t do it.

 **CHARA:**

I was supposed to remember to do the application!

 **GABRIEL:**

You were supposed to have done it months ago just like everyone else!

 **CHARA:**

I had the essays written and everything –

**GABRIEL:**

Well that doesn’t matter now because you blew it.

 **CHARA:**

Yeah, I fucking blew it, didn’t I?

 **GABRIEL:**

I bet you wish Megan called you about *that* instead of Abby’s birthday.

 **CHARA:**

Megan has nothing to do with this!

 **GABRIEL:**

Of course not, because it’s all your fault. You fucked up.

 **CHARA:**

No, no, no, why did I mess this up?

 **GABRIEL:**

Because you mess up everything.

 **CHARA:**

No, I told myself I wasn’t going to mess it up again –

 **GABRIEL:**

But you did. It’s all your fault.

 **CHARA:**

It’s not my fault!

 **GABRIEL:**

But it is. Everything is your fault.

 **CHARA:**

It’s all my fault. No matter what I do I mess up everything.

 **GABRIEL:**

Everything that you mess up is your fault, so what’s the point in trying to change anything?

 **CHARA:**

No. No, it’s not my fault! I can fix this!

 **GABRIEL:**

How? No one’s going to want to listen to anyone plead for an extended deadline. No one’s going to want to listen to a complete failure.

 **CHARA:**

No, stop it, I’m not a failure!

 **GABRIEL:**

You’re a total failure. An idiot.

 **CHARA:**

I am not!

 **GABRIEL:**

If you couldn’t remember to do one simple, important thing, how the hell are you going to succeed at anything else?

 **CHARA:**

I’m not a failure, it’s not my fault!

 **GABRIEL:**

You are a failure and it’s all your fault.

 **CHARA:**

No, stop it, stop it!

 **GABRIEL:**

You’ve always been a failure, a fuck-up, a person who’s impossible to deal with.

 **CHARA:**

Stop!

 **GABRIEL:**

Nobody wants to be around a failure. You don’t mean anything to anyone.

**CHARA:**

I need you to *stop.*

 **GABRIEL:**

How could anyone love a failure like you?

 **CHARA:**

STOP! Just stop it!

*Her glass falls over and it breaks. GABRIEL disappears, and eventually CHARA is alone.*

I’m not a failure. I’m not a fuck-up. I’m not an idiot. I’m not a nobody. I’m not – I’m not – I’m nothing. You’re impossible. I’m so stupid, how could I be so stupid? How could you forget this, any of this, anything important? I’m not important, of course I’d forget something really important. You can’t do it. You can’t do anything right. You piece of shit. You idiot. What the hell is wrong with you? You keep fucking up and you need to stop fucking up. Stop fucking it up. Stop being so stupid. Stop, stop stop, stop –

*She stops herself when she realizes she is about to cut herself with a piece of broken glass. She thinks about what she is about to do. She takes a few breaths, then throws the piece of glass away. She pulls out her phone and dials a number, struggling to get up.*

 **CHARA:**

Hello, Dr. Bell? Yes. I’m so sorry it’s so late, but I had to – yes. Yes. There was broken glass on the floor and I – no. No, I’m fine, just…yeah. No. Listen, I tried that thing you suggested about isolating my anxiety so I didn’t feel like I was talking to myself all the time…it worked for a little while, it really did. I can talk about what I learned at the next session, but there’s a problem…when I do it, I can’t help but see my –

 *A knock at the door.*

I-I’m so sorry, I’ll have to – can I call you back? Yes, I’ll be fine, someone’s just knocking at my door. Thank you, thanks so much.

*She hangs up the phone and opens the door. GABRIEL enters holding a small bouquet of flowers.*

…Gabe.

 **GABRIEL:**

Oh…oh God, Chara –

 **CHARA:**

Please don’t touch me.

 **GABRIEL:**

Okay, I won’t touch you. I only came because I heard – why is there broken glass on the floor?

 **CHARA:**

I dropped a glass earlier. It’s not a big deal.

 **GABRIEL:**

Here, let me clean it up at least. Sit down – geez, you’re shaking like a leaf.

*He sets the flowers down and wraps a blanket around her.*

I’ll be right back with the broom and dustpan.

 *He exits.*

 **CHARA:**

…You brought me flowers.

 **GABRIEL:**

*Enters with broom and dustpan and starts sweeping.*

Of course! They’re your favorite. As soon as I saw them at the grocery store I just had to get them. I think they look just like the daisies we saw on our first date.

 *Beat.*

I heard that things were getting really busy for you at work lately, so I thought I’d come cheer you up after you got home. My train was running late so I couldn’t be here right when you got back, but –

 **CHARA:**

I need you to leave.

 **GABRIEL:**

What?

 **CHARA:**

You can’t be here. I can’t be here with you.

 **GABRIEL:**

I don’t understand. Did something happen?

 **CHARA:**

I told you, I was working on a couple things and I had a drink and I accidentally dropped my glass. That’s all that happened.

 **GABRIEL:**

Did you have that much to drink?

 **CHARA:**

No, just a glass.

**GABRIEL:**

…okay. I trust you. Did you hurt yourself at all?

 **CHARA:**

No. It all happened so fast, it shattered on the floor before I even had the chance to cut my—

 *She chokes up.*

 **GABRIEL:**

Before you *what*? Chara, honey, please, look at me. Please.

 *CHARA stares off into space.*

O-okay, that’s fine, you don’t have to look at me. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. Just, please, just tell me if you were about to hurt yourself. It’s okay if you were. I won’t get mad. I won’t tell anyone. I won’t blame you for it. I just need to know…what you’re thinking right now.

 *No response.*

Chara, please, I can’t read your mind. Tell me what’s wrong.

*CHARA bursts into tears. GABRIEL sits with her for a moment and gently puts his arm around her.*

 **GABRIEL:**

I’m right here, honey, it’s okay.

 **CHARA:**

No, no, everything is all wrong. I’m all wrong.

 **GABRIEL:**

Chara, nothing about you is wrong, you’re –

 **CHARA:**

Just stop talking, please.

 **GABRIEL:**

Okay. Okay.

*He gives her a moment to calm down and rubs her back. Eventually she comes to and looks at him. He pulls his arm away and gives her space.*

**CHARA:**

Why did you come here?

 **GABRIEL:**

I told you why, I wanted to check on you -

 **CHARA:**

It’s not like I was going to kill myself or anything. So you didn’t have to come check on me like I’m a bomb waiting to go off.

 **GABRIEL:**

…Chara. Please don’t say things like that.

 **CHARA:**

You know it’s going to happen. The way you interrogated me after I told you what happened sounded like you’d been preparing for this moment for a long time. Which makes sense, because I imagine you talking to me like that all the time when I get upset. It’s almost like you talked me into it.

 **GABRIEL:**

What? I don’t understand, how did I - ?

 **CHARA:**

I need you to leave, Gabriel.

 **GABRIEL:**

Are you sure you don’t want to talk about –

 **CHARA:**

I *can’t* talk about it. I’ve done too much of that already.

 **GABRIEL:**

Then what can I do to help you?

 **CHARA:**

 *Pause.*

I don’t know.

 **GABRIEL:**

 *Longer pause.*

Let me at least finish cleaning this up.

*He goes back to sweeping up the glass and dumps it in the trash in the other room. The sound of a sink running is heard offstage. He comes back with scissors and a vase filled with water and starts cutting the stems off the flowers.*

So what were you working on before…earlier?

**CHARA:**

I was looking for a birthday gift for my niece. She’ll be nine on Friday but I have no idea what to get her.

 **GABRIEL:**

I can help you look for one if you want.

 **CHARA:**

Thanks, but I’m gonna try looking again tomorrow. It’ll be fine.

 **GABRIEL:**

Are you --?

 **CHARA:**

Yes, it’ll be fine.

 **GABRIEL:**

Okay. Sorry.

*He notices the questionnaire on the table.*

What’s this?

 **CHARA:**

 *Defensively.*

No, don’t touch that! I mean, that’s nothing. A thing from work.

 **GABRIEL:**

“If you could go any place in the world to relax, where would you go?” This doesn’t look like something from work. Are you doing this for fun?

 **CHARA:**

I – no. My therapist gave it to me.

 **GABRIEL:**

Huh, I didn’t know they had things like this.

**CHARA:**

After our last session she thought it would be a good idea to put my thoughts and opinions on paper so I don’t have to keep them all in my head all the time. A way of “externalizing my anxiety” I think is how she put it.

 **GABRIEL:**

So why didn’t you want me to read it?

 **CHARA:**

It’s…a long story.

 **GABRIEL:**

And what did you mean earlier when you said you imagined me talking to you like that when you get upset? Does that have anything to do with it?

 **CHARA:**

Just…please stop asking questions. I’m tired of answering them.

 **GABRIEL:**

What do you mean?

 **CHARA:**

Exactly that! I say something and you respond to it, I say something else and you ask me about it, I answer your question and you ask another one, and another one, and I feel like I go back and forth between trying to answer your questions and trying to make sure you don’t ask anymore. It’s a cycle that just doesn’t stop. Not even when I’m alone. That’s when I create someone else to talk to, someone else who I know really knows me and who I trust to point me in the right direction of thinking and help me not doubt myself. Then I don’t have to keep everything inside. But then when I start doubting myself they start doubting me too, until all of a sudden they just become this sick, twisted extension of myself that wants to put me down, that won’t help me get up and get out. And then I’m all alone again, and I can’t even help myself out.

 *Silence.*

This is why I can’t talk about this, because all I do is talk and no matter what I say it never goes anywhere, it never helps me, it never lets me help myself, it never –

 **GABRIEL:**

Chara.

 **CHARA:**

What?

 **GABRIEL:**

You don’t have to say anything else. Can I have a turn talking this time?

 *She nods.*

Okay. I’m not sure I fully understand everything you’re going through right now, but it kills me to see you like this, Chara, and I can’t bear the thought of being partially responsible for putting you in this position. I just want to be there for you and to help you feel better. But I don’t want to get in the way of you helping yourself get better. I know that’s what you’ve been working on in counseling and I know that’s really important to you. You’ve come so far with it, and you’re a strong person to continue with it. I have no doubts about it. Never have, never will. I know you’re not always comfortable with me asking a lot of questions, if there’s one thing I can ask of you it’s that you remember that I love you, I care about you, and that I have so much faith in you even if you don’t have that faith in yourself…even if you don’t want that from me. All I want is what’s best for you, even if I’m not the one who can give it to you.

 *Beat.*

I hope I don’t sound like I’m some old-timey narrator telling the moral to the story you just told me.

 **CHARA:**

You don’t. I believe you.

 **GABRIEL:**

Thank you. I’m really, really glad you do.

 **CHARA:**

Me too. I’m sorry I haven’t told you about this before.

**GABRIEL:**

Don’t apologize. You’re working through your own thing at your own pace, and I’ll always respect that.

 **CHARA:**

Thank you.

 *Her phone chimes.*

I think that’s a text, can you read it for me?

 **GABRIEL:**

Sure. It’s from Megan. She says, “Don’t worry about it. I know you’re busy so just make sure to take care of yourself. Miss you!”

 **CHARA:**

Thank you. Thank you.

 **GABRIEL:**

You’re welcome.

 *He stands.*

I’m going to head home now. Why don’t you get some rest and we can talk more in the morning – if you want to?

 **CHARA:**

Yeah. That would be good.

 **GABRIEL:**

Okay. You’re gonna be okay, Chara?

 **CHARA:**

I’ll be okay.

 **GABRIEL:**

I know you will.

 *Kisses her.*

Goodnight. I love you.

**CHARA:**

Love you.

*GABRIEL exits. CHARA sits quietly for a moment looking at the flowers, which have been trimmed and placed neatly in the vase. She picks up the questionnaire and a pen.*

If I could go to any place in the world to relax, it wouldn’t be in any one place. The mountains – er, no, the countryside – might make for the nicest scenery, but it won’t bring me the peace and security I’m looking for. I don’t know yet where I’ll find that, but I know one thing for sure: it starts with me.

 *END.*