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The Soloist

By Susannah Grant

"Points West" by Steve Lopez.

A construction foreman in Griffith Park
heard the crash.

Hey!

He saw a cyclist cartwheel off his bike
and slam face-first into the unforgiving
asphalt of Riverside Drive.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

As we begin our descent
into Los Angeles,

we ask that you please be sure
that your seatbelts are fastened...

A 911 call brought out the troops
from Fire Station 76.

- What happened?

- You had an accident.

- Do you know what happened?

- No shit, I had an accident. What?

I don't remember any of this,
nor do I recall the cause of the spill.

- Our batteries are off.

- I've been in here six hours now, and...

Listen to me. Wait a minute.

We're ready to go...

Hypochondriac.

OR 2.

County-USC was
the closest emergency room,
and I quickly realized
that if you find yourself there
with nothing more than
a bump on the head,
you are one lucky Angeleno.

Wow.

Ready.

I'm not entirely comfortable with this.

Thank you.

You have no new messages.

You have no new messages.

Okay.

Really?

Doctors told me to expect
up to four weeks of disorientation.

Christ. All right.

I'm not asking for sympathy.
I just want you to know, I just...
I'm not asking for sympathy.
I just want you to understand
what's going on
if I start writing about
what a bang-up job
Governor Schwarzenegger's doing.
S-C-H-W-A-R-Z... Scratch that.
Pass. Lacks context.
Right. So the question is...
Hey, Tommy.
Theoretically could I,
seeing as how the Governor has retired
his position at the muscle magazine,
could I interview him?
Right. And will my non-Teutonic lineage
be an issue?
See, no, that's... That's...
It gets to be funny. It's just an article.
Do I need to have been on steroids
for a long time to even apply?
Good.
Gail, I like
the "attention must be paid" reference.
I might move it down a paragraph,
though.
Thanks. I'm getting you a new desk.
Good morning, gentlemen.
- Thanks.
- Hey, guys. Check it out.
I got a study here that says
the number of Americans under 35
who read a newspaper
is now down to 40%.
- Forty?
- Forty.
And the group we're losing mostly
are college-educated women.
- Pull my finger.
- Jesus Christ.
Hey, honey.
"Welcome back, Steve."
That would have been nice.

Thank you. You know, when Lopez
and I started out together...
You had to walk 20 miles to school
in the snow with no shoes?
...people cared about
what went on in the world.
- Am I right, Steve? I mean, Christ.
- Back when people cared.
We're at war, and the only thing
that sells papers
is a Lindsay Lohan cooch shot.
Jesus, did someone
actually run that in print?
- I thought that was just on the Web.
- All right, all right.
- All I am saying is...
- I didn't see that.
...that if you run an excellent,
if I do say so myself,
front-page piece about how corporate
America is profiting from this war,
and the only reader response you get
is on two hands...
- Meanwhile...
- That was a good piece, by the way.
- Fine. Thanks. You read it?
- I read that.
- Did you really?
- I didn't read it, but I loved it, Curt.
Meanwhile, Lopez here
scrapes his forehead,
and gets, what,
I'm guessing about 75 e-mails
from readers worried about his safety?
- I chased this piece.
- Then I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
There is something
very wrong in this world.
Newsflash, something wrong
with the world.
Yeah.
Your face hurts my feelings, Steve.
That's harassment.
- Mary?

- An environmental group studying...

- Please.

...chemical contaminants

- in people's bodies.

- I literally... No.

- Give some blood and write about it.

- Let me check my e-mails.

I think it would be a good idea for you.

I'm glad you feel that way. I just did that.

What do you think?

The thought in my mind is,

"No, thank you."

It was funny.

People love it when you bleed.

- Readers.

- Busted.

What is that? What do you call that,
what you just did?

- Transference.

- Freud.

Freud. Thank you. No.

Sorry about the face.

- I hate needles.

- So use it.

Originally used as a camp by settlers

outside of what was then

the village of Los Angeles,

it was called La Plaza Abaja,

or the Lower Plaza.

Stevie Wonder fan?

My Cherie Amour is the song of my life.

Signed, Sealed, Delivered.

But you really shouldn't write

on a violin like that

because you have to treat a violin

like a child, you have to protect it.

You only got two strings.

All I want to do is play music,

and here's the problem

that I'm having right here.

This one's gone, this one's gone,

this little one's out of commission.

But you get that in

Cleveland public schools.

A lot of military statues in Cleveland.

- A very military-oriented city.

- Is that where you're from?

You're not gonna get musicians
on parade there.

You got Severance Hall there.

You have The Music Settlement.

Ohio State University.

Whereas in Los Angeles, you have
Los Angeles PD, you have LA Times,
you have Los Angeles Lakers.

Those are armies, too.

Military regimentation, experimentation,
Roman gable, Roman Catholicism,
Colonel Sanders,

- but this guy right here is...

- Colonel Sanders.

...the quarterback with the orchestra.

Now the cello could back this guy
with the same moves,
but the cello can't be concert master.

No. He leads out, this was
Itzhak Perlman, Jascha Heifetz.

You can't play music
in the winter in Cleveland
because of the ice and the snow.

That's why I prefer Los Angeles
to Beethoven City,

because it never rains
in Southern California,
and if it does, all I have to do
is just go in the tunnel,

I could play to my heart's content.

I'm flabbergasted about the statue.

Aren't you flabbergasted about this?

- Anyway, nice to meet you.

- Do you have any idea how it got here?

- No.

- Maybe they dropped it off late at night.

'Cause it's just astonishing to sit here
for hours and just... Just gaze at it.

- It... It just blows me away.

- No idea.

It really blows me away

that someone as great as Beethoven
was the leader of Los Angeles.

Yeah.

I'm Steve Lopez, LA Times.

- Lopez, L-O-P-E-Z?

- Yeah.

Lopez, Los Angeles Times. Mr. Lopez.

- What's your name?

- Lopez.

Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Junior.

N-A-T-H-A-N-l-E-L A-N-T-H-O-N-Y

A-Y-E-R-S J-U-N-l-O-R.

Or J-R-period.

I apologize for my appearance.

I've had a few setbacks.

Me, too.

Who are Nancy, Paul, and Craig?

Those were my classmates at Juilliard.

Good afternoon, Juilliard School.

Registrar's office, please.

What's up?

It's highly classified. I can't tell you.

- How many?

- More than we can afford to lose.

Evidently, it goes like this.

Stock price sinks, we lose reporters.

Stock price sinks more,

we lose more reporters.

That won't produce more or less...

Hi, this is Steve Lopez from

the LA Times. I'm calling to enquire

as to whether a Nathaniel Anthony Ayers

attended your school.

A-Y-E-R-S. I'm sorry.

Freaking child lock.

- How is our son, by the way?

- He's good.

He likes his classes.

He likes his pre-gay roommate.

You should call him.

- I call him.

- Is a lie.

I call him. He doesn't call me back.

- He calls me back.

- Mary...
- Just try again.
- Yes, Mary.
- Yes, Mary.
- Yes. Yes, Steve.
- I gotta take this call.
- Great.
- Because I don't have a story. Hello?
- Call him.

I'm sorry, we have no record
of a Nathaniel Anthony Ayers
ever attending Juilliard.

Really?

But then I don't have a story.

Thanks for checking.

I'm not doing the blood thing.

I got too many other good ideas.

My dad is gonna freak

when he finds out I met you.

He loves your column.

What about you?

- Well, I don't really read the newspaper.

- Sure.

But when I do...

Hey! Those aren't all for me, are they?

I'm also going to need a clump of hair
and some urine.

That's easy.

- All right.

- Okay.

Make a fist for me.

Come on.

Crap.

- Lopez.

- Mr. Lopez?

Yeah, can you just hold on one second?

I'm having a little
technical difficulty here.

This is Rosie Delgado
from the Juilliard School.

Mr. Lopez?

Yes. Please continue.

After we spoke yesterday, I realized
I only checked our graduates.

So I looked in our matriculates,
and there he was.

Nathaniel Anthony Ayers

enrolled in 1970

and he dropped out toward the end
of his second year.

Thank you.

"Points West" by Steve Lopez.

Nathaniel was shy in our first encounter.

He stepped back... He backed away.

He... Nathaniel is... Is what?

Nathaniel is...

A great column is what Nathaniel is.

Nathaniel is missing.

Son of a bitch.

- Raccoons.

- Oh, yeah?

- That's the culprit.

- Oh, boy.

What are they doing?

They eat the grass?

No, they eat the worms in the grass.

They eat the worms in the grass?

Yeah, we had them.

It's a God-awful mess.

- Wanna know how I got rid of them?

- Yes.

Coyote urine.

- Wow. Coyote urine?

- Seriously. In powdered form.

- Remarkable.

- It's a whole industry, you know.

Funny.

- Hey, I'm Neil, by the way.

- Okay.

Anxiety, restlessness, euphoria.

If you're experiencing...

I would spend every night tossing
and turning...

Wow. Okay, and what is the proper
method of application?

Should I sprinkle it in the yard?

First, you wanna dilute

the urine powder in water.

- Wait, I want to?
- Well, maybe I should say "have to."
And then you're gonna have to hang
the liquid from trees in plastic bags.
So, people are doing this
all over Southern California?
Oh, yes, sir.
Last month, I sold some to Paula Abdul.
But no Simon Cowell?
'Cause that would be exciting. Figure?
I'm gonna call you back a little later.
Hey.
Hey, Nathaniel.
Remember me?
Sorry.
Maybe have a minute when you're done?
Let me know.
I just saw you, so I...
Nothing.
Mr. Steve Lopez, Los Angeles Times,
Los Angeles, California.
Hey, Nathaniel.
I've been searching for Mr. Beethoven,
but he's slipping away like a dream.
I'm trying to get back into shape,
but I don't have any sheet music.
Beethoven's String Quartet,
Opus 59, Number 1,
Violin Concerto, Opus 61 in D,
Fifth Concerto, Opus 73 in E Flat,
red car, green car,
there goes a police car, and God is right
on the other side of that wall.
I had to dig a hole
to bury some human defecation.
But they didn't have
the human decency...
I was looking for you.
... to use the proper facilities.
- I noticed that you've moved.
Well, it's beautiful here,
because you can play music
and have pigeons clapping
as they take off,

and right there
is The Los Angeles Times Building.
- Right, that's where I work.
- Mr. Steve Lopez, staff writer.
New York, Cleveland, it doesn't matter.
All I have to do is
look up at that building
and I know exactly where I am.
I was thinking about...
I'm in Los Angeles,
Los Angeles, California,
- Los Angeles Lakers.
...writing about you
for the paper.
Magic Johnson,
Magic Johnson Theaters.
Magic Johnson is a basketball player,
but he's also a big, black man.
What if I were to wanna write a story
about you for the newspaper?
Los Angeles Times,
Los Angeles newspaper.
- Staff writer, Mr. Steve Lopez.
- Yeah. Yeah, that's me.
Do you mind if I record this?
And I wanna write a story about you.
A column about how a guy like you
winds up on the street.
- What do you think of that?
- Mr. Lopez needs to do
what Mr. Lopez needs to do.
No one could ever stop Mr. Lopez
from doing what he wants to do.
Are you flying that plane?
No. No, I'm right here.
I don't know how God works.
I called Juilliard, and they said
you went there, but you didn't finish.
I bombed right out of there.
I bombed out of Juilliard.
- Yeah, what happened?
- I just... It didn't happen.
I don't know.
I don't know what happened.

Anyone I could contact? Family?
Family? Miss Floria Ayers, my mom.
She's a beautician.
Beauty is art. Music is beauty.
I don't do hair. I do my own hair,
but obviously, my mom does
everybody's hair in the community.
They would come for her.
She's quite a woman.
But I don't know how you're gonna talk
to her, though, because she passed.
Okay. Sorry to hear that.
Who could I call?
Whose number's that?
You know,
it's a dream out here, Mr. Lopez.
The sun is shining.
The nights are cool and serene,
and I notice that everyone is smiling.
- Delivered just hours before...
- Americans are asking...
Hi, I'm calling for Jennifer Ayers-Moore.
How will we finally win this war?
Hello?
Hi, this is Steve Lopez
from the LA Times.
I spoke with your aunt, I believe, earlier.
She suggested I give you a call.
- About what?
- About your brother, Nathaniel.
Is he dead?
What? No, no, no, he's alive.
Is he all right?
He's... Yeah. He's homeless.
I don't know if you're aware of that.
But he seems very bright, and...
May I record this?
And talented, obviously.
Juilliard and all.
I'm, I'm... I'm sorry.
- Your name again, please?
- Steve Lopez.
Mr. Lopez, why are you calling?
I'm gonna write

a column about Nathaniel.

Why?

Because that's what I do. Everyone has a story, and it's interesting, you know, that a Juilliard alum is now homeless.

But he seems smart

and kind, and... And...

And spends his days filling the city air with violin music, and I just...

He plays the violin now?

He's... Yeah. Why?

He used to play something else?

Bye, Mama.

- Good morning, Nathaniel.

- Morning, Miss Little John.

So, what do you want to play for me?

I'm going to play some Beethoven, sir.

I'm crazy about Beethoven.

He was younger than me

when he started playing piano,

and I wanted to play the piano,

but so many kids played it,

and there's only one at school,

so it's hard to get practice time in.

So, I chose the cello. Hardly anyone

at school wanted to play the cello.

And Beethoven was composing

when he was only 11,

and I'm already older than that,

so I figure I got a lot of

catching up to do.

Let's hear you play.

He had the talent, that's for sure.

I called his mother that night.

I told her that I thought he was the most gifted kid I've ever met.

I said that if he made

a full commitment to music,

if he really, really gave it all he had,

the whole world would open up to him.

And he did. He really did.

Go see if Martha's rollers are ready.

They should be on the kitchen table.

Okay, Mama.
Miss Florence, I'll be back in 10.
He ain't gonna get no sleep.
He gonna kill that little girl
before he kills everybody...
\$10,000! I told him he gotta buy me
something real pretty. Real pretty.
Before long, it got so that was all he did.
No more football, no more baseball.
Just music.
Day in and day out.
The whole world
was changing around him.
And that was all he did.
Music.
Hey, you awake?
You know what I hear
when you play your music?
I hear the voice of God coming...
I'm serious.
You got something special here, baby.
A way out.
There is a whole world waiting for you.
"Points West" by Steve Lopez.
Nathaniel was shy in our first encounter.
Period.
He took a step back
when I approached him to say
I liked the way his violin music
drowned out the jackhammers
on Grand Street. Period.
Nathaniel's first instrument
was the cello.
Strangely, he has never had
any training on the violin instrument.
He has never had... Period.
He has never had
any training on the violin.
He switched to the latter
after winding up on the streets.
One day, I asked him
about his hopes and dreams.
"That's easy," he said.
"I'd like to get these other two strings."

Dear Mr. Lopez,
this morning I read your article
about the street musician
and was deeply moved.
This cello is one I used for 50 years,
until arthritis got the better of me.
Please pass it along to Mr. Ayers
with my prayers
for his health and safety.

- Nathaniel!

- All I'm trying to do
is work as hard as I can
to clean up the tunnel.

- Hey! Nathaniel!

- But they don't want me to help them.
I won't have it, you know.

- Don't want to have this degradation...

- Are you out of your mind?

...because they just won't respect
that Beethoven...

What are you doing?

...and I try to tell every one of them,
I won't have this nastiness...

- Nathaniel!

... this degradation, I won't have it.

Don't!

Don't! Don't!

I'm not going to have this nastiness
in this tunnel. This degradation.

Good.

Remember when I said

I was gonna write about you?

Well, I did.

When people heard that you were
just playing with two strings,
some of them thought you might want
something better to work with.

No. I can't cover that.

You don't have to pay for it. It's a gift.

- I'm sure it's a very beautiful instrument.

- Free and clear.

People are very, very generous.

But, look, here's the deal.

It's not safe for you to have something

this valuable on the streets...

You don't have to worry
about that, Mr. Lopez.

I've been mugged 14 times.

I will fight to the death
to protect this instrument.

Right, that's my point exactly.

So, apparently there's a place
that's a couple of blocks down
that's called Lamp.

- I can't go... No, I can't go there.

- And I... Hold on.

I can't go... No, I can't go there.

- They smoke cigarettes.

- I talked to the guy.

- He says you can keep it there.

- They drop the butts on the ground.

They do it to torment me. They just...

They do it to torment me.

That's the deal. You wanna play this,
you gotta do it there.

- I can't do that.

- Oh, yeah.

Except for this one time. Take it out
and give it a test drive or whatever.

- So I can play it here?

- For a couple minutes,

and then we're gonna bring it to Lamp.

Laying in there like a pig in a blanket.

Only... Only the greats.

Really, only the greats.

Yo-Yo Ma, Jacqueline du Pr,

and the coolest cucumber of them all is
Janos Starker.

Gotta put rosin on your bow.

It's just like feeding a parakeet.

A bow needs rosin

just like a police car needs prisoners.

So pack it up. We'll bring it to Lamp,
you can get back at it.

I haven't really gotten a chance
to know her yet.

- So...

- I'm not saying you can't play.

- You can. Just not here.
- This is the perfect music environment
- for playing music.
- This?
- No.
- Yes.

This is a sidewalk, okay?

- That's the deal. We made a deal.
- No, no, no. You'll break the bridge.
- You'll put water in it, you'll drown her.
- That's what I'll do?
- It will be ruined.
- Why would I damage it?
- I gave you the damn thing.
- It won't play right ever,
- because, Mr. Lopez, you'll ruin it.
- I'm not going to...

I'm not gonna see you
get killed over this.

You don't know what you're doing.

Let me put it away myself.

Then put it away.

Thank you.

Because when you start
a relationship with somebody...

- Don't make a big deal of it, okay?
- It is a big deal.

In a minute,
you'll have it set up down at Lamp
and be playing like you never stopped.

- Right?
- It's brand-new, this relationship.
- I don't want this relationship to end.
- Do you know where it is?
- No, I can't do that.
- Just leave that there. I'll drive you.

I have my cart there.

I could get it in my cart.

What are you doing?

You're gonna let go.

- Just let your fingers go.
- Does anyone...

Does anyone see
what he's doing right here?

- He's stealing it.
- I'll... I'll meet you there.
San Julian and 6th.
All right?
- I'll drive. You walk.
- I know where it is...
See you in a half hour?
For cash money
I got speed, man.
I'm good.
Jesus.
Fine.
Tennis shoes.
Oh, boy.
One at a time. One at a time.
The pusher. Ten cents.
- Say, hey, is David here?
- Yes?
I'm here for David.
- Who?
- David.
David? I can go get him.
Thanks.
David!
Hey.
- Hi.
- Hi. You a volunteer?
Steve Lopez, Los Angeles Times.
- Don't be scared. Come in.
- Thanks.
Every staff has a key,
so if he does come by and I'm not here,
then anybody can get it for him.
- Well, he'll be here.
- Okay.
He said he was coming.
Can you sign in for me?
- Sure.
- Thanks.
- Afternoon.
- Hi. How are you?
I mean, it's tired.
It's like they can't find the medication
that's right for me, you know?

- You know what I'm trying to say?

- Yeah.

When they put me on lithium,
it was like a portion of my brain
was fully functional.

You know what I mean?

Because it's like when I take
the lithium and everything,
it totally eliminates
the voices in my mind
when they first start rising up,
you know, and it stops them, right there.

I don't like that,
because they just stop them.

Because, see, sometimes
those voices comfort me.

And when they comfort me,
if they give me all this lithium,
then I no longer have the voices
to comfort me.

You understand what I'm saying?

Do you feel what I'm saying to you?

- You mind if I sit here?

- Not at all.

All right.

- I'm Steve.

- I'm Steve, too.

Oh, boy. Hi.

- I knew I picked the right spot.

- Yeah, you're good.

So are you a new Lamp staff, or...

- No. I'm just waiting for somebody.

- Okay.

I just try to keep Leeann happy.

He is a bright spot in my life.

We value the same things.

And we're comfortable together.

Thank you, Leeann.

That's so nice to hear you say that.

I call him Piggy Boy and stuff like that,
but I shouldn't,

because he's in a bad shape.

We thought his problem was cocaine.

- But it was pancreatic cancer.

- Yeah?

KK's French, Egyptian,
and African-American,
and I am a quarter French.
I know about disease.
I know how to treat it.
Now I understand people.
I can help so many people fast,
and I can comfort them.
They've got Italian nurses, 6'4",
in the county hospital.
And one of them talked to me
like I was trash.
Now, this is probably that the hour
of power that the Bible speaks of,
somebody who speaks a harsh
language, will have what the computer...
The computer is probably the beast.
My aunt ended up with
because she didn't want to go to bed
with her sex-crazed husband.
He was paying call girls \$100 apiece,
going to bed with them
and coming home
and giving my aunt all kinds of diseases.
I got sick. I was working over there.
And I got sicker than a dog one day.
I got an infection in my esophagus.
The neighbor's dog was sick one day
and the only thing I had on hand
was a packet of tetracycline
for my chickens.
So they wouldn't... They were too busy
to treat her at the moment.

- You're fantastic.
- They'd already given her...
Ice cold. Ice cold.
"Points West" by Steve Lopez.
I put Nathaniel's new instruments
in safekeeping and waited.
Fifteen minutes.
Thirty minutes. An hour.
Too long, in fact,
'cause guess what, schmuck,

you got a deadline tomorrow.
And the story of a guy not showing up
is not a story.
Nathaniel. Nathaniel. Nathaniel.
Okay.
So, you guys are basically united
by non-belief.
- That's right.
- Yeah.
So, do you non-gather?
And non-worship?
We tried, but...
- Not a lot to talk about.
- Yeah.
- Now we have a website.
- Swell.
Anything else you don't believe in?
- Sorry.
- Yeah, actually...
- Sorry.
- Okay.
- Lopez.
- Can you hear this?
Sorry, can't hear you.
I said, can you hear this?
This family thinks it can have
this conversation at every step.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Junior.
N-A-T-H-A...
- I need Charles for the practice.
...because you're so good.
I am so good, but I still have
to tweak things so I can win.
There's a fine line in performances.
- I mean, I can't let her beat me.
- I really have to practice.
Half an hour is all it takes for me.
Half an hour.
Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel.

- Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel?
- Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel Ayers.
- Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel Ayers.
- Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel. Nathaniel.
- Nathaniel.
- Ayers!
- Nathaniel!

Ma, I'm good, honestly, it's just that...

- I'm real proud of you, baby.
- Thank you.

It's just that I'm not always so sure
I know what's going on, and...

You are gonna be fine.

It's so frightening, and...

And I'm having trouble
differentiating certain things.

Keeping things separated.

If you'd like to make a call,
please hang up and try again.

If you need help...

- That's where your pain is stored.

- Nathaniel.

- Nathaniel. Nathaniel.

- Paint your chest white.

Protect her from the pain.

Nathaniel.

I'll be here to protect you from the pain.

- I'll protect you from the pain.

- I'll protect you from the pain.

I'll protect you from the pain.

I'll protect you from their eyes and ears.

Nathaniel.

Are you finding this piece to be
beyond your abilities?

They're listening to you, Nathaniel.

They can hear your thoughts, Nathaniel.

- I can hear your thoughts, Nathaniel.

- Well, then I suggest you do better.

They can hear your thoughts, Nathaniel.

- Don't think, Nathaniel.
- Bar 179, ladies and gentlemen.
- Run away, Nathaniel.
- Run away, Nathaniel.

Run away, Nathaniel.

- Come on. Run.
- You should run.
- You'll have to hide, Nathaniel.
- Run!
- You'll never get out of there.
- You'll never get out of there.
- Run! Run! Run!
- You'll never get out.
- Quick, like a jackrabbit.
- Nathaniel.

They're white, heartless, aren't they?

- Heartless.
- Hide.

Hide for me here, Nathaniel.

We see you, Nathaniel.

- They'll see you, Nathaniel.
- Whiteness.
- There's no hiding, Nathaniel.
- Whiteness.

You'll never hide well enough.

... turn you white...

- Whiteness!
- No hiding for you, Nathaniel.
- Whiteness. Whiteness.

Whiteness.

You'll take it,

because I want my out.

Detroit? Anger management.

It's amazing, right?

Does it look like

I need some anger management to you?

Yeah. Man, I'll take him any day.

He quiets everybody down.

- What does he have, schizophrenia?
- I don't know.

Well, we should hook him up with psychiatric services and find out, right?

Yeah, I don't get

too hung up on diagnosis.

What do you mean?

What do I mean?

But how do you help somebody
if you don't know what they have?

Look at these people.

Every one of them's been diagnosed
more than you can imagine.

And as far as I can tell,
it hasn't done them any good.

But he needs medication, right?

I'll tell you one thing he doesn't need.

One more person telling him
he needs medication.

Son of a bitch.

- Where'd he go?

- Who?

- Nathaniel.

- Don't ask me, dude.

- Thanks, Steve.

- You're welcome, Steve.

- Keep walking. Keep walking!

- There's a cop over there.

- He'll shoot a nigga with a pop.

- You got that cheese, huh?

- You're right about that cheese.

- Hold on, hold on. Hold up.

Hey, wait!

Want to buy some candy?

Five-o. Five-o.

No way this is gonna be...

That boy's not the real police.

Oh, man.

Hell, man. Where's my piece at, nigga?

Back up.

I went over to the library.

I thought I might pick up
some sheet music.

Sonata Number 1, F Major, Opus 5,

Sonata Number 2 in A Major,

Opus 69 for String Quartet.

What happened?

Somebody get beat up?

Overdose, I think.

The other night, someone...

There was a beating over here.
Someone got bones rearranged
in their face. It was just crazy.
I don't understand why anybody
would do something like that.

- This where you sleep?
- I used to sleep on Wall Street,
but it's too dirty.

You know, Mr. Lopez, my vision...
I hate to admit it, but I'm gonna have
to be like Beethoven.
Just do what he did and just die.
Thank you, Mr. Lopez.
My vision is not far-off stuff,
just basically getting
across the street safely.
Honor thy father and mother,
and then, hopefully,
the music will take care of itself.
That's really all you can do.
I mean, when you think about it,
there's not much that
you can do other than that.

- Would you care for a drink?
- I'm fine.

Thanks.
Gotta tuck this guy in here,
nice and safe.
Put that down there.
Make sure this corner...
You can rest on this.
Do you think of writers often, Mr. Lopez?
Do you think of writers
the way I think about musicians?
I write for a living,
and it's not like it used to be.
I love thinking about musicians.
I imagine Beethoven and Mozart
in that window where the light is,
and they just hunger and they thirst
like we do.
It's angelic.
I believe these children of God are
gonna be okay tonight.

They're gonna sleep and dream
as humans do.
Our Father,
who art in Heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread...
Just keep it coming. There's plenty.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
I knew only part of his story.
I knew him playing the violin
on a dairy crate in the morning sun,
suspended somewhere between
boy genius and lost traveler.
Every night, my friend Nathaniel tucks
his instruments away
and lays his head
among the predators and hustlers,
among fallen drunks
sprawled in the streets,
as rats the size of meatloaves dart
out of the drains to feed off the squalor.
... lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
forever.
Forever and ever.
I tell him this is no place for him.
He says he wants to be here.
He says this is his choice.
Should I take him at his word,
or should I try to force him inside?
Wouldn't a little arm-twisting be
more humane
than leaving him here on the streets
in this lost colony of broken,
helpless souls?
I hope you sleep well, Mr. Lopez.
I hope the whole world sleeps well.

A-D-A-M C-R-A-N-E.

He wants to meet you.

Who?

The guy from the Los Angeles
Philharmonic, Adam Crane.

Wondering if you wanna come
hear a concert

at Disney Hall some time as his guest.

They're doing Beethoven.

- Ludwig van?

- Beethoven, all season long.

They got one coming up. The Third.

- Well, what's the date today?

- No, the Third Symphony.

I'll cause a scene.

I don't wanna cause a scene.

I don't wanna stick out
or anything like that.

So it's just...

It's impossible. It can't happen.

What if I could get us in for a rehearsal?

Nathaniel, let's go.

What I did with the keys right here...

Come on. Lock up the cart.

- No. You know what, Mr. Lopez?

- Come on, we gotta go.

I can't leave my stuff here
with these rascals.

They can't be trusted.

They'll do anything.

Oh, no. We have an entire orchestra
waiting for us. We are gonna go.

They have drug addicts
and cigarette smokers here,
and they will steal all of what I have.

- No one is going to steal your shit.

- I can't leave it.

No, no. We have to get in touch
with the mayor...

- Nathaniel, it's garbage.

...Antonio Villaraigosa...

... or the president.

- No one is gonna steal this garbage.

- In the corner...

- No, no, no, Mr. Lopez,
I'm not gonna be
able to make it up there.
Okay. Oh, boy.
Fantasia. Walt Disney Hall.
Donald Duck.
I have to deal with things here
because I wouldn't leave a dog
with these people here.
Right. Okay. Fine.
A cockroach does not tell a greyhound
what to do.
It's fine! Do you understand? It's fine.
I do not give a smooth fart
if we go or not. Do you understand?
There are a million other things
I could be doing right now.
Obligations,
things that people pay me to do.
I have a job. I'm a professional person.
- Sorry.
- All right.
What?
Still not gonna leave my cart here.
Okay.
Pick a side.
The company is offering you
a very generous exit package.
Yeah.
- I understand how difficult this is.
- Wait!
Right.
Unfortunately, this is the reality
of our business.
Nathaniel, hard left
coming up right here.
Mr. Lopez, are you okay?
How long has it been
since you've been in a concert hall?
This is great.
There's the conductor.
- Just us.
- Yeah, just us.
It's the way it should be.

- He's in the room.

- Who is?

Beethoven.

Sing the hate out!

Stop.

- All right.

- Strong finish!

Get up there.

I'm telling you,

it was such an unbelievable experience,
the whole thing, the whole day.

And if you had seen him,
if you could have felt him...

I mean, it's the same hall.

We're listening to the same
goddamn music, but... But no.

You see him, it's one thing,
but you feel him...

I'm watching him.

He's watching the music.

And while they're playing, I say,

"My God, there is something
higher out there.

"Something higher out there,
and he lives in it, and he's with it."

I've never even experienced it,
but I can tell...

I don't even know

what you fucking call it.

- Grace.

- What? What is it?

- Grace.

- All right. That's grace?

- Yeah.

- Thank you. Yeah.

To be there with him like that
and see the way that he is transported.

He surrenders.

Damn it, honey.

I mean, I've never loved anything
the way that he loves music.

Hey, come on.

I'm thinking about my day.

I'm thinking about my day.

I wasn't thinking about you.

That I believe, honey.

Call the mayor.

He's been trying to reach you.

- Which mayor?

- The mayor!

Okay.

Call the mayor.

Thank you.

"Points West" by Frank Sinatra.

Every now and then,
in this city of innumerable wrongs,
the powers that be get things right.

Los Angeles has
the ignominious distinction
of being the homeless capital
of the nation,
and skid row is
ground zero of the crisis.

So, I am pleased to announce
that I am increasing the city's
financial commitment to this area
by \$50 million.

Every now and then,
the words I write do not leap
straight from this page to the ether.
Instead, every now and then,
they reach the right reader
at the right time.

Every now and then,
the hearts, minds and wallets
of the city's officials
open simultaneously.
And when that happens,
every now and then,
the city is a better place for it.

- Steve.

- Yeah?

Your boyfriend is downstairs.

Thank you.

That's funny.

- Nathaniel? You all right?

- I'm good.

- Yeah?

- Yeah.

You need something?

A man only needs

what he can carry, Mr. Lopez,
and I have all I can carry right here.

I have my bedding.

- I have my drums. I have my flower.

- Yeah. Okay.

- I have my water bottle. I have it all.

- Hey, listen, listen. Listen.

You can't hang out here.

- I can't?

- You can't hang out here.

You can't. Sorry.

I don't mind that at all, Mr. Lopez.

Not at all.

You understand, right?

It's a... It's a thing. Policy.

- I'll be over here if you need me.

- Over there?

Okay. You all right?

Yeah, I just... You know, I... Yeah.

Sorry. I gotta...

All right, Mr. Lopez, I completely
understand that you're working.

You're working. You have to work.

People have to work.

All right, get out of the way

when people are working,

because you don't wanna

stand out there

in front of people,

especially not Mr. Lopez.

You stand in front of Mr. Lopez,

he's gonna tell you to get out of here.

So, it's a lot of work.

- I think he's good. You know, I really do.

- I'm sure...

I mean, I just... This is great.

I think... I think it'll really help.

I feel like you are exactly what he needs.

Well, thank you.

- Does that make sense?

- Yes, it does.

- Graham Claydon. Thank you.

- At your service.

All we need is a place for them to meet
and rehearse, like an apartment.

You're asking for an apartment
for Nathaniel?

- Yeah.

- Does he want an apartment? Thanks.

- Yes.

- And he told you this?

- Yes.

- You're so full of shit, Lopez.

- I don't want an apartment.

- Good, 'cause it's not.

It's actually a music studio
for Mr. Claydon to give you
the cello lessons.

Well, why don't we have Mr. Claydon
come down here?

This is a perfect place to play in,
the tunnel.

No, Mr. Claydon doesn't like tunnels.

We'll just have Mr. Claydon come here
to do the lesson.

- He says it has to be quiet.

- Well...

It has to be quiet for the cello lessons,
so your apartment...

It's not my apartment.

I know. I know. The apartment
that belongs to no one.

I don't have an apartment.

I don't wanna be in an apartment.

I don't need an apartment.

Beethoven lives out
in the freshness of the air.

Nathaniel, the apartment
is not the point.

He's the leader of Los Angeles.

- It's an opportunity.

- "Angeles" means "angels." You can't...

- You can't hold down angels.

- Do you want the opportunity?

- You can't clip angels.

- Stop.
- Do you want an opportunity or not?
- Do you have an apartment?
No. I have a house.
So angry. Yelling.
It doesn't make sense.
- Do you have a family?
- What?
Are you a married man?
- Is there a Mrs. Steve Lopez?
- No.
I did. Mary. But we split up.
We have a son, Thomas.
He's in college now.
Mr. Steve Lopez, Mr. Thomas
Steve Lopez, Mrs. Mary Steve Lopez.
Not Mrs. Lopez. Mary Weston.
- Mrs. Mary Weston Steve Lopez.
- No. Just Mary Weston. Period.
We were married. We're not anymore,
so now she's just Mary.
You were married to Mary,
but you're not married to Mary anymore.
Correct. Don't ask me how.
Mrs. Floria Ayers, Miss Jennifer Ayers.
And then there was
Mr. Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Sr.
He was a big man. He had big hands.
I have very small hands.
Fit around a violin, a cello.
Mr. Ayers was a big man,
but he wasn't a god.
I have my god.
Mr. Steve Lopez.
Oh, boy.
Yeah, you're my god.
Flying around high.
- You're my god.
- I'm not comfortable being your god.
Mr. Steve Lopez, staff writer,
you are my god.
- That it? I'm your god?
- Yes, you are. You're my god.
All right. I am your god.

And as your god,
I command you to be at Lamp,
for a cello lesson. Done deal.
And it's a really sweet deal, too.
'Cause if you show up,
I will grant you eternal life.
Hell, I might even make you a disciple.
If you don't, you're on your own.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
This is my apartment.
Always number one.
Always number two.
Nathaniel.
We've always been here,
Nathaniel Ayers.
I've always been with you, Nathaniel.
I'll never leave you, Nathaniel.
I love you, Nathaniel.
- I love you.
- No one else loves you, Nathaniel.
But I love you, Nathaniel.
I'll protect you, Nathaniel.
When you fell from Heaven,
they laughed at you, Nathaniel.
You're my heart, Nathaniel.
I do love you, Nathaniel.
We'll be together forever, Nathaniel.
I'll protect you.
Look, I'll be here
to protect you from the pain.
- I'll be here to protect you from the pain.
- Fibber. You fibber. You fib.
I'll protect you from the noise.
Fear for you. Fear for you.
I'll protect you from their beady eyes.
- I'll be here to obey.
- I'll protect you from their eyes.
- Step right, Nathaniel.
- No one else loves you, Nathaniel.
You're my boy, Nathaniel.

- Take off the shoes.
- I'll protect you. I'll protect you.
No one can kill the child.
That's what the child is about.
Forget you. Jump off!
Come on.
Hey. Look at that.
Don't see those on the street.
Quick right.
And then, and then...
And then right again, right here.
Nathaniel. Come on down.
What are you... Come on. We go down
here and then to the end and left.
I think we should do the lesson out here.
No, no, no. It's just this way. Come on.
Mr. Lopez... Mr. Lopez.
Mr. Lopez, I really think
we should do it out here.
No, come on. Let's have a look.
It's right down here.
Mr. Lopez.
Nathaniel, come on.
It's really clean.
Come check it out.
We should do it out here. It's better.
I'm more comfortable out here.
Looks nice.
Looks nice.
It's nice.
Come on. You can do it.
Hey.
I can't live here.
I'll give you a hand with that.
Got it.
Oh, boy. Let's get this in nice.
Good.
It's great, right?
I mean, I like it. What do you think?
It's nice. It's clean.
The bathroom's better than...
Except for him.
I don't wanna die in here.
Don't...

Somebody could just come in here
and kill me...

- You'll be fine. Nathaniel?
... and take all of my belongings.

- Nathaniel, the door locks.

- A fly only lives 12 days.

What if in 12 days, someone walks
through that door and murders me?

And I don't care
about this Claydon thing, either.

Walt Disney Hall. Disney Duck.

Doesn't make a difference.

I don't need any of that.

If I'm gonna take a lesson,
I should take the lesson in the tunnel
where I can hear the city sounds
and not be locked off from life,
locked off from the world.

In the tunnel I can hear the music
the way it's supposed to be played.

Not in this place, there's no city sounds,
there's no Beethoven,
there's no Los Angeles, California.

I don't belong here.

I'm never coming here again.

Nathaniel, that's Graham Claydon.

Pleased to meet you, Nathaniel.

I always love meeting a fellow musician.

I brought you something.

I know you're partial to Beethoven,
so I thought you'd enjoy this,
because, you know,

without Johann Sebastian
there would be no Ludwig van.

The A, the D, the A, the D, the A, the D.
Steady. Don't rush it. Don't rush it.

And...

Well, for someone who hasn't had
a lesson in three decades,
you play quite beautifully.

Thank you.

- So...

- Thank you.

Work on a smoother rhythm

with the right hand.

And don't stop-start.

Carry a phrase all the way through.

- Great.

- Give you a ride uptown?

- Thank you.

- Mr. Claydon?

- Yes.

- Sir?

Do you think I could be good again?

Yes, I do.

I like your apartment, by the way.

- It's not my apartment.

- It's not. It's just a...

I don't live here.

Well, you should.

God has blessed you

with a gift, Nathaniel.

Nothing pains God more

than when we squander his blessings.

- You owe it to him to care for this...

- I don't owe God.

Mr. Steve Lopez is my god.

- What?

- Star writer for Los Angeles.

Higher power flying around

with wings like an angel.

Mr. Steve Lopez is my...

He doesn't know what he's saying.

Mr. Graham Claydon is going to tell me
who my god is?

Down by the car?

Do you know who my god is,

Mr. Claydon?

I know who my god is!

- He's a good teacher.

- I know who my god is.

You should accept his help gracefully.

Graceful is the ballerinas at Juilliard.

Those girls were graceful.

- Tiny ballerinas just twirling round.

- There's other people in this...

- Twirling round. Angels.

- All right,

- graceful as little ballerinas.
- I love them flying around
like I love Mr. Steve Lopez flying around.
I love God. I love you!
I love you.
I don't want him to love me.
Well, it looks like
you might have to get over that.
It's a bad idea.
"I love you, Steve,"
turns into, "You failed me, Steve,"
turns into very bad things.
That's my limited experience.
I don't want to be on the other side
of that with him. Would you?
He doesn't know if I'm a ballerina,
if I'm God, if I'm an airplane pilot.
He has no idea what he's saying.
Is there something you want
from me, Lopez?
Or did you just come to show me
your prom dress? You look nice.
I want you to help him
because he's sick
and he needs medication
and you have a team of doctors here.
Tell them to sit down with him.
Isn't that what you're supposed to do?
Nathaniel's made it quite clear
he's not ready to speak to a psychiatrist.
Force him.
- Force him?
- Tell him to do it.
Tell him he can't play his instruments
until he sits down with a shrink.
- That's not what we do here.
- What you do here is fucked.
It is.
Look, even if I did wanna
cohorse Nathaniel into psychiatry...
- Coerce.
...which... Whatever.
- Coerce.
- If I wanted to do that, which I don't,

I couldn't force him to take medication.
The law is the law.
Unless he's an imminent danger
to himself or someone else...
Are you gonna answer that, or what?
I'm in the car. What if he was
a danger to someone else?
- But he's not.
- Mary, I'm on the way. Relax.
What if someone said he was?
What if someone dialed 911
and said Nathaniel had attacked him?
They'd put him in psychiatric hospital.
I know you're not thinking
of lying on him, Lopez.
And then he would be
in a 14-day psychiatric hold,
they'd put him on meds straight away.
What if that's all it took
for him to be well?
What if two weeks of meds,
a two-week window
into what his life could be,
changed his life? Saved his life?
Why wouldn't you want to be
part of that?
Steve, Nathaniel has one thing going
for him right now. A friend.
If you betray that friendship, you destroy
the only thing he has in this world.
I don't want to be his only thing.
Didn't you just tell somebody
you was in your car?
Mary, relax. What table are we at?
This is Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, Jr.,
Mr. Lopez. I was calling...
- Nathaniel.
...because you promised me
a hard case for my cello
and I haven't received it yet.
- Yeah?
- And also I need sheet music
for Beethoven's Second Sonata.
And also Opus 131 and Septet for

strings and woodwinds, and Opus 20...
Can you just... One sec.
... and also my A string is missing...
- So, we're talking about...
I need my A string replaced.
Nathaniel, you know, this is not...
... his series in the Times
on the struggles and the triumphs
of Nathaniel Anthony Ayers
has brought crucial attention to one
of the most pressing issues in our city.
... promises you should make good
on those promises...
Get off the phone.
... to address this problem
with compassion and commitment.
And in honor of this,
it is my pleasure to present this year's
Media Award to Steve Lopez.
Thank you.
... you know that I can't leave
my cart anywhere.
It houses my violin, my cello,
and my weapons of mass destruction.
A child needs protection. You don't want
to put a baby in the trunk of a car
and have it get bashed up
against the wall.
Bashed up against the wall.
Bashed up against the wall.
I got a phone call from Mark Rosenthal
today, remember him?
Book editor?
Bob Geldof with a crew cut.
He's been reading your Nathaniel stuff,
thinks it's genius, whatever.
- Whatever.
- Anyway. He said it's a book.
What did he say exactly?
"It's personal, it's political, it's timely.
I can sell the shit out of it."
- Oh, boy.
- His words, excuse me, not mine.
Well, it's complicated.

Nathaniel's complicated.
Well, yeah, he's mentally ill, I mean.
Right. But beyond that, it's endless.
I just...
I don't want to take full responsibility.
By all means, avoid full responsibility.
Just, you know, keep going
with the partial responsibility
and exploiting him
like you are now.
You should stop.
'Cause that's a slippery slope
right there,
Lopez.
- Stop. Stop.
- One day, you're getting a book...
- Please stop.
... from the guy. And the next,
he's expecting, I don't know,
some sort of...
Mary, stop.
...consistency in the relationship.
Screw that, man.
Who needs that shit, right? My words.
- You driving?
- No, I have a car.
And a driver?
- Oh, my God!
- Oh, shit.
It's Nathaniel for you.
... as a youngster labeled mentally ill
because of the underlying
cigarette habit,
constant disturbance,
constant disturbance.
You know, bigots have children, too.
Pens from Steve Lopez. Many thanks.
Constant disturbance,
constant disturbance.
Bigots have children.
Bigots have children, too.
Pens... Paper...
Pens from Steve Lopez. Many thanks.
And a cello from Steve Lopez.

Steve Lopez... Many thanks to that.
Without Steve Lopez,
I wouldn't have any of that...
Constant disturbance.
Constant disturbance.
Constant disturbances.
I've had what I think is a beautiful idea.
I think Nathaniel should give a recital.
I don't know if I can make that call.
He hasn't been very lucid lately.
- Right. When is he clearest?
- I don't...
When is he most able
to focus his thoughts?
- When he's playing.
- Right.
This could increase his confidence
a thousand fold.
It could be transformative.
How can we not give him that, Steve?
God bless you, Steve.
Sure he does.
My first concert, I was so nervous,
I vomited all down my tuxedo.
It was so embarrassing.
Want to know how I got over
those jitters, Nathaniel?
I prayed.
Shall we pray together, you and I?
Heavenly Father,
shine your light on brother Nathaniel,
that he may speak
with your voice tonight.
Nathaniel, you never have been here,
Nathaniel. I'm here, Nathaniel.
- You're not there.
- Nathaniel.
You never have been here.
You never will be here.
My voice is all there is.
Everything's fine.
- Follow my voice, Nathaniel.
- Tune up and play.
Run away from these people, Nathaniel.

They'll laugh at you.

- You're nothing.

- Nathaniel Ayers.

Nathaniel?

I got some soup here for you.

Nathaniel?

You think I'm stupid.

Is that what you think?

You want to kill them, Nathaniel.

They'll kill you first, Nathaniel.

No.

They'll string you up, Nathaniel.

No. You think I can't see everything.

I see everything.

I know who you are.

I know what you're doing.

- Dogs, biting at your feet.

- Nathaniel.

- I thought you might be hungry.

- Nathaniel, over there.

- The dusty open manual.

- Nathaniel, come here.

The manual.

That's hydrochloric acid. If I eat that, it'll burn me up inside and kill me like a dog.

- Oh, no.

- Nathaniel.

- Nathaniel, I wouldn't do that.

- Nathaniel.

Nathaniel.

Nathaniel.

You'll eat it, dust and all.

Okay.

It's good, see.

Shit.

Don't put your hands on me!

- Nathaniel!

- Back the hell off!

Don't you ever touch me!

Don't ever put your hands on me!

Please, don't. Nathaniel.

Don't you ever touch me.

Stop.

Nathaniel!

What am I supposed to do?
I should have support.
Hi, Nathaniel.
It's freezing out here.
Don't you wanna come home?
I can't go back there. It's not safe.
Come on, home, Nathaniel.
Nathaniel?
Where are you gonna sleep?
David, sorry, it's Steve. Listen.
Can you call me back
when you have a second?
There was an incident
with Nathaniel tonight. I'm a little
worried. Anyway, call back
when you have a sec.
All right, let's go.
It's my thing!
I claim my right to those possessions!
Show me your stuff!
- Linda!
- What?
- Hey, where's Nathaniel?
- I don't know. I haven't seen him.
- I haven't seen him.
- Hey! Hey!
Is it Darryl?
Hey, stay back. Who the hell are you?
LA Times. That's the last guy
you should be arresting.
- Come on, man! Come on.
- Skid row cleanup, sir. Let's go.
Steve! Steve!
This man is in illegal possession
of a shopping cart and a milk crate.
Are you gonna arrest him
for possession of a milk crate?
- Steve! Steve!
- That's correct, sir.
Take it easy.
Help! Help!
Come on!
Officer, what happened?
A couple of kids came out here

with some baseball bats
and beat the shit out of this poor guy.

- Get a name?

- Negative, sir.

Sorry, excuse me. I'm sorry.

Is this Admits? May I make
an enquiry about a... Excuse me.

- This way?

- What?

Yeah, down here.

It's usually on the... I'm sorry.

It's usually on the screen.

Excuse me, ma'am. Recent ER
admits named Ayers, A-Y-E-R-S.

Thank you, by the way.

No.

Hi. Thank you.

I'm looking for a recent admission.

I'm hoping you have a recent admission
with a man named Ayers, A-Y-E-R-S.

I know. Contreras was the reporting
officer. He was the officer on site.

It's not the... It's not the...

Mr. Ayers. A-Y-E-R-S.

Nathaniel Anthony Ayers.

Hi. It's me again.

It's gonna be a long shift.

What's your name?

N-A-T-H-A-N-l-E-L A...

I do words for a living. It doesn't matter.

Whoever has two stripes
on their arm or more.

Ayers! A-Y-E-R-S.

N-A-T-H-A-N-l-E-L

A-N-T-H-O-N-Y A-Y-E-R-S.

No! Do not put me on hold again!

A-Y-E-R-S!

- Lopez.

- Steve, David.

I got your message, what's up?

There was a beating of a homeless man
on Winston Street,

- it was right in Nathaniel's spot.

- It wasn't him.

What? How do you know?
'Cause he's here,
eating a crazy-big breakfast.
I guess sleeping inside
can give a man an appetite.
What?
He spent last night in the apartment.
He came inside.
Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you so much.
I thought I lost it forever.
Hi.
You good?
I literally looked everywhere else
in Los Angeles but here.
Not that I was worried.
What happened? What made you
decide to sleep in here?
Oh, well, a body can only take
so much, Mr. Lopez.
I'm not young anymore,
I'm a middle-aged man.
- You know how it is.
- Sure.
I mean, a body gets weary, a body...
Housewarming gift.
Thank you, Mr. Lopez.
Thank you, Mr. Lopez. Thank you.
I've done good by you, haven't I?
I mean, things aren't so bad, right?
Say, things are set for Jennifer
to become your executor.
I can't believe Beethoven himself
is in my own apartment.
Are you still okay with that?
Having Jennifer handle things for you?
It's all right with me
if it's all right with Beethoven.
Well, you guys let me know.
'Cause there's papers you gotta sign.
They just got back from...
You should read them
so you know what you're signing.

All right, yeah, I'll just sign them
Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, Jr.,
apartment B-116, and the B stands for
Beethoven.

- Read them and sign them.

- All right.

- Okay.

- All right.

What do you...

You got anything to drink?

Yes, sir, Mr. Lopez.

Absolutely, Mr. Lopez,
help yourself to some water, it's where
the dripping sound is coming from.

- At your leisure.

- All right.

Is there a...

What's with Neil Diamond?

I thought that was you.

Well, I'm flattered.

He's a good-looking guy.

What's wrong?

What's this business about me
having a schizophrenic mind?

It's, it's... It's legal jargon.

It says that I have a schizophrenic mind.

I do not.

It doesn't mean anything.

- I have a schizophrenic mind.

- That's not what I think.

Nathaniel, they try to put people in a...

- I'm not going anywhere.

- And the good news is that
it has nothing to do with you.

I don't go where you say to go.

I go where I want to go.

You don't put me away, Mr. Lopez.

You don't put me away.

- Okay. Okay.

- You don't put me away.

I'm not gonna... I don't...

- No, no, you don't have to go...

- Yes, you are. Yes, you are.

...to court.

You don't have to go anywhere.
Jennifer will take care of you.
My sister's not coming near me.
She is not coming near me.
- She's not coming near me.
- Okay, remember when you said...
If I say she's not coming
then she's not coming.
You said... Nathaniel, you said...
Listen, I'm not going to have anymore...
I'm not going to have anymore...
I will tell you. I will tell you. I'm sick
of being Nathaniel and you Mr. Lopez.
Okay. I'm not just...
Wait. I'm not your boy.
I am not Mr. Colonel Sanders's boy.
You know, I'm sorry I was wrong.
I'm sorry I was wrong.
I can take care of myself.
I can take care of myself, Mr. Lopez.
I don't need you. I don't need this city.
I despise this city and I despise you.
And if I ever see you again,
I'll cut you open
and gut you like a fish.
Because I'm Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Jr.
Mr. Ayers.
I'm Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Jr.
N-A-T-H-A...
N-A-T-H-A...
- N-A-T-H-A...
- You're of no consequence.
- Hi.
- Hi.
So, that was my first mistake.
The Northridge Quake, '94, remember?
I smelled the toast.
We'd been here two days.
All our crap still in boxes.

And at 4:

God, that terror.
You, me and Thomas.
What was he, nine?

All huddled
under that bedroom door frame.
I told him it was a good omen.
Welcoming us to our new life.
Better life.
In LA.
I should have had us
on the first flight back to Philly.
I thought I was helping someone.
And it was a guy who's got a gift.
He's lost his way. I'm gonna...
Inevitably backfired.
He's backlashed to the...
And the very person I was trying to be of
some redeeming service to turns on me.
I'm the enemy. You know?
A stranger.
And...
I don't know who to fault.
I can't see any outcome to support.
Can't believe in anything worthwhile.
Done trying. I resign. I resign.
From everything.
It's... It's official.
You couldn't stop that earthquake.
You can't fix LA in just...
And you're never gonna cure Nathaniel.
Just be his friend and show up.
Good? I'll be right here if you need me.
...go, next to the gold store.
You know what I mean.
He wanted to drink and everything.
Okay, okay, okay. Bitch, slow down.
Do you still love me?
Like you did at the start?
I ain't playing with you.
I'm saying I do.
It means you and me together forever.
So that's why I'm saying I do.
- I love you, Lois.
- I love you, too, Darryl.
Disguise himself now as...
They disguise themselves...
Where is Los Angeles?

Cleveland?

And...

We...

We had some life, didn't we?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Beethoven's Triple Concerto, right?

- Yeah.

- It's a good one.

I liked it.

Mr. Ayers, I'm gonna give your sister
a ride to the hotel.

You don't have to
call me that, Mr. Lopez.

I know. I want to. I should have been
calling you that all along.

I said such terrible things
to you, Mr. Lopez.

I... I hate myself for saying those things.

Sometimes friends piss
each other off, right?

It's part of the deal.

I can't imagine that you would want to be
my friend after I said all those things.

I just...

Mr. Ayers,

I'm honored to be your friend.

"Points West" by Steve Lopez.

A year ago, I met a man
who was down on his luck
and thought I might be able to help him.

I don't know that I have.

Yes, my friend Mr. Ayers
now sleeps inside.

He has a key. He has a bed.

But his mental state, and his well-being,
are as precarious now
as they were the day we met.

There are people who tell me
I've helped him.

Mental health experts who say
that the simple act of being someone's
friend can change his brain chemistry,
improve his functioning in the world.

I can't speak for Mr. Ayers
in that regard.
Maybe our friendship has helped him.
But maybe not.
I can, however, speak for myself.
I can tell you that by witnessing
Mr. Ayers's courage,
his humility, his faith
in the power of his art,
I've learned the dignity of being loyal
to something you believe in.
Of holding onto it, above all else.
Of believing, without question,
that it will carry you home.