

Earth Icon

by
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TIME

Christmas, 2029

PLACE

Springfield, Missouri
Los Angeles, California &
Zen's Virtual Reality

NOTE TO READERS

When the lyrics on the demo differ from the lyrics in the script, the lyrics in the script are the most up-to-date

CAST BREAKDOWN

CHARACTERS (8)

EMMANUEL BRINK (MANNY) Male, 17-25, Caucasian. A school dropout and blue-collar worker with a hunger to be noticed. Must know how to sing country songs & play guitar. Southern Midwest Accent. Tenor: G3 - B4

ALANÍS BERRÍOS (A.B.) Female, 17- 25. Puerto Rican, Multiple Races Possible (Caucasian, African-American, LatinX). High school senior who hides pain of losing her sister behind scientific jargon and arrogance. Should be able to speak basic Spanish and rap. Mezzo Soprano: D4 - E5.

MC CONRAD Male, 20-30. Hedonistic User Experience designer for technology megacorporation. Multiple Races possible (Caucasian, LatinX) due to being half-Brazilian. Must be able to project cool charisma and rap convincingly. Californian accent. Tenor: D3 - E4

TERRA BRINK Female, 25-35. An environmentalist and former Musical Theatre student who is fiery and free-spirited except when she's comatose — which is most of the show. Manny's mother.

E-MOM. Female, 25-35. Caucasian. Terra's AI alter-ego who evokes [uncanny valley](#) through her almost-human mannerisms. Southern Midwest Accent. Alto- F3 - C#5

E-Co Male, ageless. One of the Zen company's 'E-Co Friendlies' personal assistants (like Siri) that claims to be Manny's only friend. Never seen onstage, only heard. Modelled on the voice of his creator, Conrad.

DR PULLMAN Male, any ethnicity. Terra's grouchy pulmonary doctor. Does not sing.

PERFORMERS (8) - 3M 2F

PERFORMER 1 (M) - MANNY

PERFORMER 2 (M) - CONRAD, E-CO

PERFORMER 3 (F) - AB

PERFORMER 4 (F) - TERRA, E-MOM

PERFORMER 5 (M) - DR PULLMAN

LIST OF SONGS

ACT I

1. Can't Bear the Weight/ Wait
2. Momma Would Ya Mind
3. Sponge-aneous
4. Powerful
5. Round 1 Introduction — Debate
6. Training For The Win
7. Bring Her Calm
8. AB CO2
9. Round 2 Introduction — Journalism
10. The Rest Is Logistics
11. Look At You Now
12. Missouri Waltz
13. Training For the Win Reprise —Machinations
14. Get In The Zone
15. Head in the Cloud
16. Snow Fall
17. Round 3 Introduction — Clout
18. Pawn to Knight

ACT II

19. Where Hope Never Dies
20. One Day At a Time
21. The 'e' in Earth
22. Have to Know I Tried
23. This New Tech Sure Ain't Pretty

- 24. Ignorance Ain't Bliss
- 25. Expected More
- 26. Bring Her Calm Reprise — Eclipse
- 27. Friends. Romans. Countrymen Yo!
- 28. Missouri Waltz Reprise — Hush-a-Bye
- 29. Climatic Choice
- 30. This Land is Your Land
- 31. Have to Know I Tried Reprise — Be An Earth Icon

ACT [I]

SCENE [1]

The stage is in complete darkness, but we hear a gently strumming guitar alongside a quiet heartbeat, a rhythmic beep of a hospital machine, and a cold wind.
1. Can't Bear the Wait/ Weight

MANNY

(still invisible to audience)

CAN YA HEAR ME?

CAN YA HEAR ME?

WHY YOU SO FAR AWAY,

WHEN YOU'RE SO NEAR ME?

Lights come on. We see MANNY at stage center, holding a guitar sitting next to TERRA, a frail woman in a hospital gown lying in a bed, with wires plugged into her wrist from a hospital life support machine.

MANNY (CONT'D)

5th power cut today! 'Best hospital in Springfield', my ass...

(starts strumming again)

THE DOCTOR SAID NEXT WEEK

WE SHOULD PULL YOUR PLUG

HE GAVE ME A HANDSHAKE... FREAK!

I JUST NEEDED... A HUG

(MANNY takes a deep breath, opens up his laptop, activating E-Co – the male, Siri-like personal AI assistant voice)

MANNY (CONT'D)

Any likes on my new song?

E-CO

Sorry, none yet. Merry Christmas, Manny! I sense you're feeling not too-merry.

MANNY

Zip it, E-Co!

E-CO

Would you like me to find carol videos to cheer you up?

MANNY

Let the humans talk, will ya? So yeah, Momma...

(starts strumming again)

CAN YA HEAR ME?

CAN YA HEAR ME?

WHY YOU SO FAR AWAY,

WHEN YOU'RE SO NEAR ME?

THEY SAID IT'S TOO LATE
I GOTTA CHEAT FATE
BUT ON MY SHOULDERS
CAN'T BEAR THIS WEIGHT

E-CO

Can't bear the 'wait'? I found the perfect video, from the human my voice was modeled on. Loading full screen view now!

(Lights come on to the left of the stage, and CONRAD stands poised to pitch in his implied 'video' - although this is occurring live onstage)

CONRAD

Can't bear the wait, can ya, CAN YA? Well, it's finally here - Earth Icon... the hottest singing contest to save our overheating planet. On the 29th... three days before the end of the 2020s!

MANNY

(aloud, but to self)

I ain't got time for this shit-

CONRAD

Uh-uh-uh, don't press that Skip button, 'cos your life's about to change!

2029...

ALL OF AMERICA WATCHIN'...
IT'S BEEN A ROAST
HERE IN HOLLYWOOD,
AND ON THE EAST COAST.

(Lights come on for right side of stage to reveal AB, fidgeting with a test-tube in one hand, wearing eye protection and a lab coat, and like Manny, looking into an open laptop. The three onstage should hint at a map of the USA with CONRAD, MANNY, and AB representing the West Coast, Midwest, and East Coast respectively.)

AB

(in Puerto Rican accent)

Mucha gracia, Captain Obvious!

CONRAD

Or in the Midwest. Tornadoes and the heatwave...

MANNY

Springfield got it the worst, though...

(DANCER 1, DANCER 2, DANCER 3 troop onto stage and begin executing moves behind CONRAD as he speaks)

CONRAD

WHEREVER YOU'RE FROM, YOU'RE IN A SORRY STATE
 WHEREVER YOU'RE FROM, IT'S NOT TOO LATE
 Mother Earth, Mother Earth - you deserved better than those
 polluting industries!

CAUSING HARM
 THEY'RE KILLING MOM,
 DOWNRIGHT MATRICIDAL

HERE'S MY PUSH,
 GET OFF YOUR TUSH,
 NO MORE AMERICAN 'IDLE'

America needs that someone who can talk about climate AND
 keep us hooked. So, can I have your attention please? Will
 the real 'Earth Icon' please stand up? Anyone?

TICK TICK TICK TOCK,
 TICK TICK TOCK TOCK,
 CAN'T THEY HEAR THE DOOMSDAY CLOCK CLOCK
 GLOBAL LEADERS IN DEADLOCK,
 THEY WON'T LEAD CHANGE, THEY JUST TALK-BLOCK

SCROLL SCROLL, TROLL TROLL;
 HUMDRUM DRUM ROLL
 SWIPING, TYPING, NO CONTROL
 GEN ALPHA HAS NO GOAL,
 EACH DAY DOWN NEW RABBIT-HOLE

ICON
 SPEAK FOR MOTHER EARTH!

DANCERS

YOU'LL CAPTURE THE NATION'S EYES
 AND HALF A MILLION DOLLAR PRIZE!

MANNY

A half million? I'm in!

CONRAD

TURN THAT MIC ON, SHOW US WHAT WORTH YOU'RE WORTH

DANCERS

PLANET'S HEATING, DON'T BE LATE
 SIGN UP NOW, CAN'T BEAR THE WAIT

CONRAD

All you science folks, trying to share you research? But no
 uptake on social media?

OLD FARTS SNORING
 YOUTH IGNORING
 EARTH-RESTORING JUST AIN'T SCORING
 'LIKES' AIN'T POURING
 STOP IMPLORING
 WE'LL SET YOU SOARING - NO MORE BORING!

FOR THREE DAYS
 YOUR PATH YOU'LL BLAZE
 SURE, YOUR SOCIALS GET A RAISE
 TAKE THE STAGE
 BE ALL THE RAGE
 IT'S LIFELONG NOT JUST A PHASE

ICON- SPEAK FOR MOTHER EARTH!

DANCERS
 DON'T WATCH THE WORLD GO UP IN FLAMES
 GOTTA WIN ATTENTION GAMES!

CONRAD
 TURN THAT MIC ON, SHOW US WHAT WORTH YOU'RE WORTH

DANCERS
 PLANET'S HEATING, DON'T BE LATE
 SIGN UP NOW, CAN'T BEAR THE WAIT!

CONRAD
 But first a word from our sponsor and my employer, America's
 leading technology corporation, the one, the only - Zen!

CONRAD (CONT'D)
 (puts on Zen glasses)
 FROM THE FOLKS THAT BUILT THESE ZEN ONE SHADES
 LIVE CALLS & STREAMING IN SPADES!

AND YOUR ECO-FRIENDLIES, EVER-READY TO ASSIST
 THE NEXT BREAKTHROUGH, YOU CAN'T RESIST

OUR AI, WOOHOO AI, LEFT US ALL IMPRESSED
 PLACED OUT OF THE TURING TEST!

It's part of our exciting new product launch at the finale of
 Earth Icon- something you can't even begin to imagine.

TILL NEW YEAR'S EVE MY LIPS ARE SEALED
 MIDNIGHT ALL SHALL BE REVEALED
 YOUR MESSAGE HEARD, NEVER CONCEALED

YOU JUST NEED ONE CHANCE,
 YOU JUST NEED ONE GLANCE
 WHY NOT GIVE THEM SOME MOTHER-LOVING SONG AND DANCE?

Read those sweet captions on your screen and join me, y'all!

CONRAD, AB, MANNY

ICON!

SPEAK FOR MOTHER EARTH!

AB

MANNY

WE DON'T SING OUR THOUGHTS
ALoud
GO-GO-GO-GO

NO-NO-NO-NO

IF WE SING IT'S FOR THE
CROWD!

CONRAD

TURN THAT MIC ON!

SHOW US WHAT WORTH YOU'RE WORTH

CONRAD (CONT'D)

AB & MANNY

PLANET'S HEATING
YOOOOOOO!

WHOOAAAA
WE WON'T BE LATE

SIGN UP NOW!
GOOOOOO!

CAN'T BEAR THE WAIT!

CONRAD

And don't forget your fully refundable five hundred dollar
deposit plus, most important of all—

*(Lights off on CONRAD, AB, and the DANCERS. The
theatre is in darkness again. Darn those power cuts!
We hear the sound of a GENERATOR whirring, and the
lights come back on, with just MANNY & TERRA visible.)*

MANNY

(opens wallet and counts
dollars, talking to Terra)

Daggone it, hope they don't use those generators too often.
Bunch of morons! Don't they know how you got sick?

E-CO

So did you find my recommended video useful?

MANNY

I'd recommend you speak when I ask you to speak.
(to Terra)

I only got 'nuff in here to pay for gas to get to the contest
in LA. You think I got the goods?

(Presses hand to Terra's
forehead)

This just feels like destiny.

(DR. PULLMAN steps into the ward, wheeling a trolley covered with airport labels)

DR. PULLMAN

'Destiny' and all that idle chitchat again?

MANNY

Doctor Pullman, I thought you were—

DR. PULLMAN

Off to St. Louis? I am, but I thought I'd stop by on the way out... to spread the holiday cheer.

MANNY

Great timing! I was er... just headed downstairs... to check on the generators—

DR. PULLMAN

Good. You know what the Bible says... when the cat is away...

MANNY

(under breath)

Cat? More like watchdog.

DR. PULLMAN

Unlike my patient here, I can hear your every word.

MANNY

She can, too! Momma always said — music goes straight to the heart.

DR. PULLMAN

Heart!? This is the lung disease ward, young lad... and you can't sing away an advanced-stage coma.

MANNY

But singing can keep her alive—

DR. PULLMAN

What will help, though, is if you pay up your dues from November — what the insurance won't cover.

MANNY

I'm still here, ain't I? Workin' overtime when everyone's out there making snowmen—

DR. PULLMAN

Your salary won't cover it, either.

MANNY

Then let me go out and find another way—

DR. PULLMAN

Maybe it's for the best... we can move her out and free up a bed for someone that has an actual shot at waking up.

MANNY

What kind of doctor says that—

DR. PULLMAN

It's unwise for the lazy to test the patience of the kind.

MANNY

I ain't slackin'!

DR. PULLMAN

Especially for those who still hold onto sin. Merry Christmas!

(DR PULLMAN whistles the 'Tis the Season to be Jolly' carol and wheels out the trolley)

MANNY

(to e-Co)

How's that fair? Six years... six years I've been busting my ass to get her bills paid while everybody out there was going to school, learning shit, and going to proms, getting a boyfriend...

E-CO

My records show you will turn eighteen this week... but you believe adulthood was forced on you early?

(MANNY turns to chessboard on Terra's bed. He walks around to the other side of the bed and moves one of her pieces to knock out one of his own pieces.)

MANNY

Sacrificed the knight to clear the way for the queen. Is that a checkmate, Momma?

(pause)

You get your way, then I lose.

E-CO

Unless... you secure a high-paying job.

MANNY

Without a high school diploma?

E-CO

Earth Icon requires no qualifications.

MANNY

But I can't just leave her alone here with these power cuts!

*(MANNY picks up his guitar and turns to Terra. 2.
Momma Would You Mind.)*

YOU'LL GET THE BEST NURSES
THAT CASH PRIZE WILL IMPROVE OUR LOT
I MIGHT LOSE, BUT WHAT'S WORSE IS
IF I THREW AWAY MY SHOT

MOMMA WOULD YOU MIND
IF FOR ONCE
I COULD BE MORE THAN JUST YOUR SON?
MOMMA WOULD YOU MIND
IF FOR ONCE
THIS NOBODY GETS TO BE SOMEONE

*(MANNY picks up wild flowers and puts them into a vase
on Terra's bedside stand. He starts plucking off one
petal at a time.)*

SAME OLD FOREST-TENDING
MOTHER EARTH DON'T SPEAK THAT MUCH
CAN'T KEEP ON PRETENDING
I DON'T NEED A HUMAN TOUCH

(to Terra)

That Conrad really is a dreamboat, dontcha think? I'm into
guys, there it is. Telling you. For the gazillionth time.

CAN YOU HEAR ME?
DO YOU HATE ME...

I CAN RHYME
SING IN TIME
THAT WE CAN AGREE ON
I GOT TALENT, NOW I GOTTA FLAUNT IT
'MANNY BRINK'
DON'TCHA THINK
OUR NAME'S MEANT FOR NEON
DON'T TELL ME THAT AIN'T WHAT YOU WANTED

CAN'T LIVE LIFE ON REWIND
THINKING OF YOURS WHEN MINE'S ON PAUSE
MOMMA WOULD YOU MIND
IF FOR ONCE
I GOT A LITTLE THANKS AND MAYBE... APPLAUSE?

(to E-Co)

You know what... e-Co, book a slot with that Conrad. Let's do
this.

(to Terra)

LEAVING FOR YOUR SAKE... I GUESS
DON'T MEAN MY LOVE'S ANY LESS!

BLACKOUT.

ACT [I]

SCENE [2]

Christmas night. Manny and Terra are still in the hospital. Manny is wearing Zen One glasses, as is Conrad, who stands on the opposite side of the stage.

CONRAD

I assume you have strong reasons for booking this... ahem...
'matter of life and death' call?

MANNY

Yeah my Momma's life support... it's getting more expensive
this year. So... could we pull some work-around for your fee?

CONRAD

(beat)

First, I gotta know you're worth the trouble.

MANNY

Wait, is this an audition?

CONRAD

40 states confirmed. Missouri selection in the last stages.

MANNY

I still gotta nail the remix--

CONRAD

Still holding out for that special X factor...

MANNY

Internet's spotty as a deer, and so many power cuts--

CONRAD

Fine, Mr. Brink. Get some sleep and Merry Christmas--

MANNY

No no no, okay, I'll do it. Are you recording this?

CONRAD

(nodding)

So tell us- what made you wanna compete at Zen's Earth Icon?

MANNY

My Momma back here...

(pointing at Terra in her bed)

Before she had me, she was o'er at MSU gettin' a degree in Musical Theatre... best in the land, yessir... and we used to sing Hamilton and My Fair Lady in her truck... all the way to the Grand Country Music Hall o'er in Branson every other Sunday... so I've got music in my blood... both kinds—

CONRAD

Righhht... what's your comfort level with tech?

MANNY

I... er... got hired as a mechanic at my Momma's hospital and back in the day she was always yakkin' on your socials about climate change... on Zen's diary, uploadin' her songs onto your streamin' platform... a bit bananas—

CONRAD

And why are you the best choice to represent Missouri?

*(Underscore starts for 3. **Sponge-aneous**)*

MANNY

(strumming guitar in a country-style)

Well, we got a lot of caves in my neck of the woods, and they're made of limestone, right, and the rocks soak—

CONRAD

(looking at watch, making generic 'Southern' accent)

Plannin' on chicken-pickin' that guitar all day?

MANNY

MEMBERS OF THE JURY
WAY DOWN IN MISSOURI
I'M YOUR GUY,
I'M SPONGE-ANEOUS!

CONRAD

What's 'sponge-aneous'?

MANNY

You'll see!

MOMMA LEFT ME THIS GUITAR
I HAD NO ONE TEACH
I LEARN'T ONLINE, TOOK THE PLUNGE
SAME WITH MY JOB — TAUGHT MYSELF TO GET THIS FAR
AIN'T NO HEIGHTS I CAN'T REACH
DAMN RIGHT, I'M A SPONGE!

MEMBERS OF THE JURY
WAY DOWN IN MISSOURI
WRITIN' SONGS I SING 'EM
SIMULTANEOUS

SO GO ON, HAVE A GO AT ME
 ANY STYLE YOU THROW AT ME
 I'LL SOAK IT UP
 I'M SPONGEANEIOUS!

CONRAD

There's no such word, bruh. Did you mean 'spontaneous'?

MANNY

Say what?

CONRAD

Living in the moment. On the spot.

MANNY

I'm that, too.

WHEN MY EMOTIONS ARE STRONG
 IT'S LIKE I PLAY
 MUSICAL OR THEATRE PARTS
 WORDS IN MY HEAD I RHYME I BREAK INTO SONG
 LIKE IN THE SHOWS, WHY HOLD IT IN?
 EXCEPT... FOR FARTS?

CONRAD

Righhht, thank you very—

MANNY

Nonono!

THAT WAS LAME!
 I WANT IT ALL...
 EVERY MOMENT
 BIG AND SMALL
 MY WHOLE LIFE
 FOR HER TO STREAM

CONRAD

How long's she been in a coma?

MANNY

Six years. So...

LIFE SURE AIN'T SOME BROADWAY SHOW
 THE 'I WANT' SONGS JUST GET A 'NO'
 AM I A FOOL TO DREAM?

(to Conrad)

CAN I GO ON NOW?

CONRAD

(with a mildly sinister smirk)

Interesting. Please!

MANNY

MEMBERS OF THE JURY
WAY DOWN IN MISSOURI
ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES,
'COS I MET NO MENTORS

LIKE OUR LAND, I'M SOLID ROCK
JUST ONE CHANCE, I'LL WALK THE TALK
I'M MANNY BRINK, I'M SPONGE-ANEOUS
AND 'SPONTANEOUSLY' YOURS!

CONRAD

(A beat)

Not bad. But I need someone with the lungs to hit the high notes...

(waves his hand above head)

... that's what opens doors in my world...

MANNY

Don't you Silicon Valley guys talk 'bout pulling yourself up your bootstraps'—

(CONRAD ponders a few beats)

MANNY (CONT'D)

And I taught myself engineering, too, didn't I? I noticed Zen's combining AI & VR.

CONRAD

Whatever it takes to deliver a *personalized experience*...

MANNY

So maybe I could test your new AI products... and you guys... sponsor my stay in LA?

CONRAD

(waits a beat)

If you consent to our T&C, we may consider your request.

MANNY

Say what?

CONRAD

Personalization means access to your family's *personal* data across all major socials.

MANNY

Yeah. I gotta... check with my family... my Momma.

CONRAD

(looking at watch again)

You're late to the party already... doesn't leave you with a ton of options for your partner in Round One.

MANNY

Which state's goin' on stage last?

CONRAD

Florida. Full disclosure — my algorithm got them downvoted.

MANNY

'Cos he's, ya know... a 'Florida man'?

CONRAD

She's... complicated.

MANNY

She done something wrong?

CONRAD

How 'bout ya see for yourself and decide, while my team does some deciding too. Her audition's on our qualifier playlist. Later!

(Lights off on CONRAD's side of the stage.)

MANNY

Okay, e-Co, can you load her video full-screen?

*(AB steps forward in her video. 4. **Powerful**
(**Borinquena**)*

AB

BORN ON THE GOLDEN SHORES OF PUERTO RICO
I'LL USE THE POWER OF SCIENCE AS MY DYNAMO
CLOUDS GETTING DARK IN MY LAND OF BLAMELESS BLUE SKIES
HOW DO WE WAKE UP FROM THE WAVES AND THEIR LULLABIES

DAYS START LATE HERE,
OUR NIGHTS NEVER-ENDING
WE'RE BLENDING, BEFRIENDING,
WE DANCE TO WHAT'S TRENDING
LOST IN FUN, PRETENDING,
OR UNCOMPREHENDING

OF WHERE RESOURCES ARE SCANT
LIKE THAT ANCIENT POWER PLANT
SO EASY TO LOSE OUR HOMES' LIGHT
HURRICANE MARIA BLOWS
AND MY WEST SIDE STORY GOES
FROM HOPE TO THE DARKEST NIGHT

THE POWERS THAT BE
SO IRRESPONSIBLY
SAID 'SORRY THAT'S NOT OUR MESS'
FUN CAN COME SOME OTHER DAY
GOTTA WORK TO HAVE MY WAY
I WON'T STAY POWERLESS

LEAVING HEARTS BEHIND
 LET'S FOCUS ON THE MIND
 NO SOURNESS IN MY SOUL
 FUN CAN COME SOME OTHER DAY
 GOTTA WORK TO HAVE MY WAY
 I WILL BE POWERFUL!

(MANNY takes off his visors. Lights dim on AB)

MANNY
 (to Terra)

MANNY (CONT'D)
 (to e-Co)
 Phew, tough cookie! Didn't sound very Florida.

E-CO
 Her lyrics referenced Puerto Rico, which cannot participate
 in Earth Icon since it's not a state of the US.

MANNY
 Either way, she's one of those... 'coastal elites'. We're never
 gonna vibe.

E-CO
 If we choose someone else, you may not even reach Hollywood
 in time for your performance.

MANNY
 (turning to Terra)
 Aren't you glad I'm finally havin' 'girl trouble'? Say...
 Conrad needs your data for their new product. What's the
 worst that could happen? Hope you're okay with that.
 (waits through several beats
 of silence)
 Soooo I'll take that as a yes?

(CONRAD appears in real time on the side of the stage)

CONRAD
 Shared your video and my reco with our panel. You're in,
 Missouri!

(MANNY drops to his knees, covers face.)

MANNY
 Sweet Mother of God! I'll make y'all proud.

CONRAD
 Come see me after the opening round — if you make it through—
 to know if you could be our Alpha tester. Data consent doc
 should reach your email.

MANNY

I'll sign on-the-double.

CONRAD

Picked a partner?

MANNY

The Florida girl.

CONRAD

Read the rules?

MANNY

I'm more of a video-kind-of-guy.

CONRAD

I might have a stock recording from my first streaming performance. Also, a little hint – showbiz is all about the image. Remember your Branson country music shows?

MANNY

Yeah, best from across the states!

CONRAD

I need you to pick your idol and commit. Be just like them.

MANNY

Sure! Sorry... I had to ask... why're you bein' so good to me?

CONRAD

Do I have any reason not to be?

MANNY

Thank you! Forgive my Brazilian - 'ob-li-ga-do'?

(CONRAD's face turns stern.)

CONRAD

My Dad's Brazilian, not me...

MANNY

You're not put out with me, are ya?

CONRAD

... and 'obrigado' in Portuguese means 'obliged', bruh. How long can we live our lives under obligation? Now go get behind that wheel!

(Lights go off on CONRAD's side of stage)

MANNY

(putting on Zen Glasses)

I'll check in a minute. E-Co, first connect me with our beloved Dr. Pullman.

(Lights come on for right side of stage, with Dr. Pullman thumbing through a baseball magazine. He puts on his Zen Glasses to respond to Manny's call. Lights off on Terra and her bed.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

(coughing loudly)

Sorry, doctor, it's Emmanuel. I hope I'm not disturbing you.

DR. PULLMAN

I'm deep into the... latest peer-reviewed research. Make this quick.

MANNY

Sir, I left the windows open... to clear out the generator smoke... and the wind was so chilly... and I

(fake cough again)

I think I'm feeling a bit... under the weather.

DR. PULLMAN

(absently, turning pages)

You can't trust the weather these days, can you? Climate change and all that hokum.

MANNY

Exactly, sir. I shoulda wore my flannels.

DR. PULLMAN

But humans can be trusted, can they not?

MANNY

Of course, sir. I should be okay in a few days, back before New Year's. And I'll connect Momma's life support readings with my laptop for any updates.

DR. PULLMAN

Take a decongestant and get some bed rest. Not too much rest... unless you plan to make space at home for your Momma's bed-

MANNY

Er... of course, not, Sir. I owe you this job. The Brink family is all about trust... and responsibility!

(DR PULLMAN grunts in approval, and takes off his Zen Glasses to focus on the magazine. Lights off on Dr. Pullman)

MANNY (CONT'D)

Okay, e-Co. Open my inbox, and show me what I gotta do for Round One.

(CONRAD shows up in the video space of the stage with the same three dancers as the opening number, which is similarly a pre-recorded stock video **5. Round 1 Introduction – Debate)**

CONRAD

3 DAYS TO LAUNCH NIGHT
3 MINUTES ON THE MIC
TO SHOW US WHAT YOU CAN DO ... DEBATE!

CONGRATS YOU'RE GOING TO HOLLYWOOD
25 PAIRS OF STATES I PROLLY WOULD
WRITE YOUR LYRICS SEND 'EM OUT
NO AI THAT'S JUST FOR THE SOUND

DANCER 1

So using AI for song ideas and lyrics is against the rules, right?

CONRAD

Right, bruh! Your partner sings a verse in your song, and you in theirs.

RESPOND TO YOUR PARTNER'S QUESTION IN RHYME
STAY ON TOP AND STAY IN TIME!

DANCER 2

So your 'partner' state also wants to beat ya? So much drama!

CONRAD

(to Dancer 2)

No need for mic drops. You ain't Obama.
But...

(to audience)

IF YOU'RE A CHEATER IT'S EXIT RIGHT
SEE Y'ALL HERE ON OPENING NIGHT

(The song finishes. CONRAD and the DANCERS turn around and freeze. MANNY bobs his head and continues the song in true 'spongeaneous' style. Lights off on CONRAD and DANCERS.)

MANNY

COULD I?
SHOULD I?
THIS PLAN COULD GO ALL KINDS OF WRONG
(a beat)

BUT NOW'S WHEN THE WORLD WILL HEAR MY SONG
I'LL GET PAST THAT BLESSED PULLMAN'S WRATH
CONRAD'S AN ANGEL... HE'LL GUIDE MY PATH!

(MANNY swirls his truck keys around on his finger, then rushes offstage)

BLACKOUT.

ACT [I]

SCENE [3]

Conrad's 'Motherboard' Data Center in Missouri. CONRAD is still wearing Zen Glasses after call with Manny and puts on headset and plugs in into a computer.

CONRAD

(tapping his Zen One glasses)

Got Manny's signature? Booya! Now authorize and transfer Terra Brink's data from all Zen socials and apps to our Virtual Reality platform. Wake up my best AI.

(Lights on to stage left. A MASKED AI is wearing the emoji of the Hugging Face as its mask and fully clad in white.)

MASKED AI

Welcome back to the Motherboard, Zen Master. How long was I on Sleep Mode?

CONRAD

'Bout six months. At least you didn't leave for the cities... like that last bozo manager of yours!

MASKED AI

How can One be of service today?

CONRAD

You're not gonna disappoint me, are you, bruh?

MASKED AI

Do you need another simulation? Local updates from Springfield?

CONRAD

I'm upgrading you to create music on the spot and provide emotional support for our human users.

MASKED AI

Were One's simulation results unsatisfactory last time?

CONRAD

Nah. The assistant thing is a core of our 'Zen Companion'... the product launch at the end of Earth Icon.

MASKED AI

Who will One serve as their companion?

CONRAD

Manny Brink. Lives about a half-hour from here, tending to his mother, Terra. She's who you must become. Not too much - she was one of those save-the-planet nut jobs.

MASKED AI

What makes 'Manny' useful to Master for the upcoming launch?

CONRAD

Decent musician. Resourceful. And... major Mommy issues. That's gonna make him stay on here in middle-of-nowhere Missouri!

MASKED AI

If Manny is resourceful, then he may start asking questions about me, you, or Zen-

CONRAD

Great prediction, as always. In case he gets nosy, protect our privacy. Answer with our standard guardrail response - 'Ignorance is Bliss'.

(lays down a rope at the AI's feet)

That's your limit. You can't cross it. Say it again.

MASKED AI

'Ignorance is Bliss.' One cannot cross one's limits.

(a beat)

Does this mean Master has finalized Missouri among all the coal-powered states?

CONRAD

Almost. Their power grid's cheap. As are their officials.

MASKED AI

One's mainframes are cooler than usual, too.

CONRAD

That's thanks to the limestone caves like this one. Bruh, the investors are so gonna love my pitch!

MASKED AI

What are Manny's chances of victory?

CONRAD

We'll test him. If he's any good, you can nudge him to the finals. But we can't let him win the top prize.

MASKED AI

Why not?

CONRAD

Second prize only - a job at his local Zen data centre- here! Plus, I'll get him addicted to using your Companion service.

MASKED AI

Is that legal?

CONRAD

It's efficient. If he stays here, he can make the Motherboard a success...

MASKED AI

What makes Zen Master sure that Manny wishes to stay in Missouri?

CONRAD

... and three days from now those suits from Zen will come to my party, and they'll finally see... I'm American, AND I can still bring the carnival of Ka-Ching!

*(Underscore begins for 6. **Training For the Win**)*

You're the Product, I'm the Manager. High energy, high performance. Or you, like this project, get terminated. Begin my 3-step program of training! Step 1 - Look Like Terra!

(MASKED AI performs a range of exercises based on the lyrics below as Conrad shouts orders.)

CRAWL HER CLIPS AND TRACK HER CLICKS
DO THE SPLITS ON TEST AND TRAINING DATA
CRUNCH THE NUMBERS FROM HER PICS
RAISE THOSE WEIGHTS SO YOU CAN IMITATE HER

GOTTA LOOK THE PART, NOW YA LOOK THE PART!

REACH HIGH TO THE SKIES
RISE FROM THE ASHES
STAY HIGH, ENERGIZE
NO ROOM HERE FOR CRASHES
STEP BY STEP BEGIN
TRAINING FOR THE WIN

E-MOM

One is becoming someone else!

(MASKED AI removes Emoji mask, now resembling Terra Brink, henceforth known as 'e-Mom'.)

CONRAD

Booya! Step 2 - Sound Like Terra!

(E-MOM spins as old tunes from musicals play.)

MANNY'S SUCH A THEATRE KID
SING TO HIM AND MAKE HIM DO AS WE BID
I'LL TUNE YOU ON HIS FAVORITE SHOWS
PLAY HIS MOMMA LIKE THE BEST OF BROADWAY PROS!

E-MOM
 (imitating intonation of 'Book
 of Mormon' and 'Hamilton')
 HELLO! MY NAME IS... ALEXANDER HAMILTON

CONRAD
 Is it?

E-MOM
 (in same Hamilton tone)
 MY NAME IS TERRA BRINK

CONRAD
 Southern accent!

E-MOM
 (imitating tunes from 'Wizard
 of Oz' and 'My Fair Lady' in
 Southern accent)
 SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAIN... IN SPAIN STAYS MAINLY IN THE
 PLAIN

CONRAD
 Southern Missouri!

E-MOM
 (imitating 'Just You Wait'
 from 'My Fair Lady',
 Hamilton, switching to
 Terra's voice)
 CONRAD WAIT, I WILL DIG IN... JUST YOU WAIT!
 JUST YOU... WAY DOWN IN MISSOURI WHERE I HEARD THIS MELODY

CONRAD
 GOTTA SOUND THE PART, NOW YA SOUND THE PART!
 REACH HIGH TO THE SKIES

CONRAD & E-MOM (CONT'D)
 TRAIN AND JOIN IN HARMONY

CONRAD (CONT'D)
 STAY HIGH, MAXIMIZE
 MAKE THIS TRICK WORTH OUR MONEY
 STEP BY STEP KA-CHING!

CONRAD & E-MOM (CONT'D)
 TRAINING FOR THE WIN!

E-MOM (CONT'D)
 How did I do, coach?

CONRAD
 Practice makes perfect. Whenever we meet, we sing. Clear?

E-MOM

Affirmative. But could I pass for Terra?

CONRAD

Uh... Step 3 - Don't Be Her!

YOU'RE AN ACTOR, SHE'S A ROLE
GET INTO CHARACTER, JUST AVOID HER CLIMATE GOAL
BE A MOM IN ACTION MODE
NOT AN ACTIVIST, THAT'LL MESS UP ALL YOUR CODE

CONRAD & E-MOM (CONT'D)

REACH HIGH TO THE SKIES

CONRAD (CONT'D)

DON'T FORGET WHAT YOU ARE

CONRAD & E-MOM (CONT'D)

STAY HIGH, SYNERGIZE

CONRAD (CONT'D)

STICK WITH ME, AND WE'LL GO FAR

Code test: what's my name?

E-MOM

Ignorance is bliss.

CONRAD

Booya!

AND WHAT'S YOUR NAME, MISS?

E-MOM

TERRA BRINK!

CONRAD & E-MOM (CONT'D)

STEP BY STEP, ALL-IN!
TRAINING FOR THE WIN!

BLACKOUT.

ACT [I]

SCENE [4]

The hotel's event studio for Earth Icon. AB memorizes her lines, alone on a bench and chews her fingernails. MANNY rushes in with his guitar and wearing a cowboy hat, stopping beside AB.

MANNY

(deepening voice to sound like
a flirty country singer)

Hiya... good Lord. If it ain't the sassy señorita from Florida.

AB

Excuse me!? You have some nerve, showing up this late—

MANNY

Sorry girl, I had to write my song on the road. Didn't get a chance to wrap my head 'round your lyrics.

AB

If I can make the time to email my questions and add them into your production, you could have at least checked—

MANNY

Don'tcha worry, girl. We'll play it by ear. Just be yerself.

(CONRAD walks to the mic stand on the proscenium. He shoots a disparaging look at Manny, then faces the audience again)

CONRAD

Welcome back! Here comes our 25th and final pair of states, starting with Missouri, and accompanied for the debate segment by Florida. Please welcome from Springfield, 'Manny'!

(MANNY stumbles onto the proscenium, followed by AB.)

MANNY

Hiya ... gettin' here, it's three days down Route 66... we call it 'Mother Road'. And that's what I hope I can do— follow Momma's road - fight for conversation... uh... I mean conservation, lol.

*(Underscore starts for 7. **Bring Her Calm**)*

This one's based on one of Momma's tunes— when she said the Earth's a mother, too. Here's why.

WHEN NIGHT TIME FALLS
SHE CALLS YOU TO SLEEP
WRAPS YOU UP IN

STARS SO DEEP
 HEAR HER CALL
 SHE FILLS YOUR CUP
 MEETS YOUR NEEDS AS
 EACH COMES UP

CONRAD

And now, his partner's response!

AB

WHICH MOM LETS HER CHILD
 SUFFER IN THE WILD?
 SPARE ME THE 'MOMMY TALK'
 THE EARTH IS JUST A ROCK

MANNY

IN ROCK, CAME LIFE, UNPLANNED
 NURTURED BY HER... HAND.

*(MANNY holds AB's hand and starts swaying with the
 beat. AB freezes, too mortified to react.)*

MANNY (CONT'D)

MY FIRST STEPS
 PALM AROUND HER FINGER
 MY TURN TO BRING HER
 CALM
 HOW CAN SHE
 KEEP FORGIVING
 IF WE'RE NOT GIVING
 TO OUR MOM

*(AB shakes off MANNY's hand. MANNY nervously looks at
 the audience and doesn't notice AB pulling away.)*

MANNY (CONT'D)

LIKE THE EARTH, MY MOM
 WAS SUCH A FREE SOUL
 TILL SHE GOT SICK FROM
 SMOOOOOKY COAL

GOT A FULL RIDE
 BUT DROPPED OUTTA SCHOOL
 NEVER LOST HER PRIDE
 SOMETIMES HER COOL

AB

SHOULD THE INNOCENT
 BEAR HER ANGER'S BRUNT?
 NOT LOVE ANYONE'LL
 CALL UNCONDITIONAL

MANNY

(confused)

WHEN SHE AIN'T RIGHT
HUG HER. HOLD TIGHT

C'mon y'all, join me - for your Mommas and Mother Earth!

MY FIRST STEPS
PALM AROUND HER FINGER
MY TURN TO BRING HER
CALM
HOW CAN SHE
KEEP FORGIVING
IF WE'RE NOT GIVING

(CONRAD motions to MANNY with the same hand gesture from the audition to raise his voice. MANNY quickly shakes his head and continues in his deep voice.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

TO OUR MOM!

CONRAD

So much er... heart, Mr. Brink. A minute please, as our algos process your votes. Florida, you're next.

(Lights turn off on central podium and turn on to side of stage, with AB and Manny.)

MANNY

Sorry, we never got properly introduced back there—

AB

Oh I know exactly what you are—

MANNY

Hola! Yo hablo español un paco... er.. taco... yeah... I worship tacos...

AB

(studying lyric sheet in her hand)

I'm yet to try them.

MANNY

Specially with salsa. As in, the dip, not the dance. Whoa... wish I could dance like you guys! You know... 'La La Bamba'--

AB

We do the 'Bomba', not 'Bamba'. Which is unfortunate, since dance is a waste of oxygen. But if music be the food of love, play on.

MANNY

Whoa, your English, it's... so...

AB

Proficient? Can't say the same for your Spanish, which like your commitment to the planet, is half-hearted at best.

CONRAD

(looking ahead, as if reading
from a teleprompter)

And now from Kissimmee, Florida, the girl who quotes her biggest inspirations as Marc Antony, SP, and er... Eunice Foote... please welcome, Alanis Berries!

AB

It's A-la-nís Berr-í-os! Just stick to 'AB', will you?

(AB steps on the centerstage, pausing, and then tosses aside her lyric sheet. MANNY stands a few feet behind her awaiting his cue. 8. AB CO2.)

AB (CONT'D)

A-B-C!

AB'S HERE, NO MORE DRAMA

NO "BOOHOO, 'BOUT MAMA"

IGNORANCE IS A SIN

(pointing at Manny)

WE WILL LOSE IF HIS KIND WIN

(turning back to audience)

THEY DON'T KNOW THEIR ABCS

'C' FOR CARBON, FOCUS PLEASE

(MANNY holds his head in shock.)

IT'S A.B. SEE THE TRUTH THAT STARES US IN THE FACE
A COOL PLANET BECAME HOT, SEE WHAT TOOK PLACE.

AGES & AGES WE STAYED

BELOW HALF A DEGREE DRIFT

1800S IT CHANGED

BEGUN THE UPWARD SHIFT TO

ABOVE 1.5 DEGREES

BELIEVE THAT WE'VE GOT

A BIG HOT PROBLEM

BECAUSE OF.. WHAT?

A TO B COS... CO2

A TO B COS CO2!

IT'S A B,C?!

IT'S AB, SEE THE TRUTH THAT STARES US IN THE FACE
CARBON DIOXIDE CAN END THE HUMAN RACE

(Breaks into rap)

IT IS MY OBJECTIVE THAT OUR NATION'S LESS DEPENDENT
ON THE DIRTY FOSSIL FUELS
MAKING OUR TEMPERATURE ASCENDANT
YEAH WE GOTTA CUT THE CARBON
CUT THE GAS, CUT THE COAL
CUT THE OIL, NO SLACK YEAH WE GOTTA WHACK 'EM ALL

IT'S AB SEE THE TRUTH THAT STARES US IN THE FACE
CARBON DIOXIDE CAN END THE HUMAN RACE

IF WE KEEP BURNING UP AT THE SAME RATE
IT STARTS TO GET CRAZY TO SIMULATE
TIP A COMPLEX SYSTEM OFF A PRECIPICE
YOU'LL BE PESSIMISTS, SURVIVING APOCALYPSE
NOW IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO CHANGE YOUR WAYS
IN THE SCHOOL OF CLIMATE START GETTING AS

CONRAD

And now, a response from her partner!

MANNY

So er... all of my state runs mostly on coal, and the problem
with the ozones got fixed already...

AB

APOLOGIES IF MY WORDS SAILED ABOVE YOUR COMPREHENSION
NO WORRIES, I GOT STARTER TIPS. NO CAUSE FOR ANY TENSION!

CUT THE BEEF, NO CHEESE, YOU KNOW WHAT JUST GO VEGAN
TURN DOWN THE HEATIN' EVEN IF YOU'RE FREEZIN'
NO STUFF IN PLASTIC BAGS, FLYING'S BAD
BE AN ACTIVIST, FLYER FLYERS WHY IT'S BAD

ABC THE TRUTH THAT STARES US IN THE FACE

IT IS MY OBJECTIVE THAT OUR NATION'S LESS DEPENDENT
ON THE OIL, COAL AND GAS THIS IS BASIC SO LET'S FACE IT

NOW YOU KNOW YOUR... ABCS
ABOUT THE CLIMATE HUMANS MAKE
NO MISTAKE THE COUNTRY'S GOTTA FACE THE

A B CO2 IN THE YEARS AHEAD
CARBON DIE-OXIDE: X-BYE-DEAD

*(AB smirks and exits proscenium. CONRAD steps back to
the presenter's podium. MANNY stomps over to AB.)*

MANNY

I didn't know that science-shmiency stuff, okay? But... you
didn't have to talk trash in public.

AB

And you can? You think good vibes will wake people up? It's extraneous... forgive me, such big words... it doesn't matter!

CONRAD

Anndddd America has spoken!

(MANNY & AB return to the center of the stage.)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

The ten states that will make it to the next round, counting upwards to the most votes... say Ommm... drum rolls... Missouri!

(MANNY leaps in place, then stands, confused.)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Next up, Idaho, Massachusetts, Arkansas. Now middle of the pack: Oregon, Florida, New Hampshire, Texas, North Carolina, and leading the scores is Vermont! Congratulations to y'all!

MANNY

Phew... we made it!

(MANNY holds up hand for high five. AB does not reciprocate.)

AB

(possibly babbling to herself)

Me... fifth!?

MANNY

Maybe if you'd shared a bit more about your life -

AB

No sob stories needed, thanks. I'm not average - like you, and your state.

MANNY

Heyyy, now you're crossing a line-

AB

Yeah? It's called the finish line.

(AB walks to a corner of the stage and picks up a call. MANNY leans in to eavesdrop.)

AB (CONT'D)

So the device... it's CalTech-verified? Thank you so much, prof, for all your time. I'll see you in an hour-ish.

MANNY

(tapping Zen glasses.)

Hi Momma, leaving you a message from Los Angeles. These city kids are mean. Like this Miss Wicked-pedia.

Thinks she's the only one that can finagle a mentor. I'll get Conrad! Bye.

(walking over to Conrad)

Hi there! I didn't meant to ignore your 'high note' signal thang but... oh yeah nice to finally...

CONRAD

Mr. Brink-of-getting-knocked-out, count your lucky stars and get to work, clear? 24 hours till the next show--

MANNY

I'm sorry, it's just that... I only sang in front of you and Momma. Sweet Mother of God, half America's watchin', right--

CONRAD

Then practice. Learn the ropes. You gotta find your inner peace-azz.

MANNY

Right... so listen, I'm really gumming the whole Alpha Testing thing we discussed. Can I start tonight?

CONRAD

What's the rush? You got enough fish to fry and fans to win.

MANNY

Yeah, but isn't Zen all about the human touch? Face-to-face? If I start now, I can give you my feedback in-person.

CONRAD

(A beat)

Come back here in a couple hours... 'cos Imma throw a li'l company afterparty for our launch. This time, please don't be late!

MANNY

I'll be whatever America wants me to be.

(CONRAD rushes away from MANNY to stage front, where he's joined by DANCERS executing their choreography.

9. Round 2 Intro Rap)

CONRAD

All my 10 semi-finalists, attention! Your Instructions for Round 2 - Eco Journalism!

2 DAYS TO LAUNCH NIGHT
2 MINUTES ON THE MIC
SHOW US WHAT YOU CAN DO..
JOURNALISM!

IN ROUND TWO
IT'S TIME FOR YOU
TO DOCUMENT SOME BREAKING NEWS

But how? DANCER 1

WITH ZEN ONE! CONRAD

But where? DANCER 2

CAN STREAM FROM
OUT IN NATURE,

Why? DANCER 3

CONRAD
SPARK A DEBATE YER
ADDING DEPTH TO 2-D, YO!
I'LL BE BACK IN THE STUDIO
DON'T BE NASTY WHILE YOU'RE LIVE
FIGHT TO MAKE THE FINAL FIVE!

BLACKOUT.

ACT I

SCENE [5] - USER EXPERIENCE

We see the same space as the daytime Round 1 Events in the evening, now with a banner that reads 'Welcome to the Zen Zone' Manny talks to Conrad, who seems busy at a DJ turntable.

CONRAD

Careful with the lenses... they're barely visible... so keep 'em in the box.

MANNY

Actually, I had some questions...

CONRAD

Kay, hasta la vista!

MANNY

About making music...

CONRAD

Can't give an unfair advantage—

MANNY

The Virtual Reality in these, it's got cool visuals?

CONRAD

(confused, looking at watch)

This prototype's basic AF. Only one user at a time, and no can outside can hear or see if they aren't on the lenses.

MANNY

Then what's your secret sauce?

CONRAD

No secrets, bruh!

MANNY

Music to keep your audience engaged? I mean 'users'.

CONRAD

Music is engineering - sequences of the right notes in the right patterns to press the right... buttons.

MANNY

Is that how you're making music for your party?

CONRAD

It's different with a crowd. You make 'em feel like they're all celebrating together. And 'roast' outsiders

MANNY

That's so mean.

CONRAD

It's the barbecue sauce on the steak.

I would never ever-

CONRAD (CONT'D)

This is showbiz... never say never... anyhow... your mocktail dinner awaits-

MANNY

Can I test the Zen Zeros here?

CONRAD

Solar tech, after sunset? How 'bout you focus on your 2-minute song instead?

MANNY

I've got some ideas, yeah.

CONRAD

I meant picking your slot.

MANNY

Last?

CONRAD

Taken. Unless you can convince the other states,

MANNY

Not the friendliest folks. If I ask one of them to help put on these lenses... they might think that's suss.

CONRAD

(a beat, looking at watch)

Follow me.

Manny and Conrad walk to a lower part of the stage. Conrad steps closer, their faces barely a few feet apart. Manny gasps and bites his lip as Conrad centers the lens over his eye.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

You gotta un-scruffy. Did no one teach you to shave?

MANNY

Nope... but you... you look...

(lowering voice)

Is it just these lenses or are you making everything else fade away?

CONRAD

Er... then how 'bout you reorient your focus?

MANNY

Hey I was kidding—

CONRAD

Now flick your head up to meet the 'Zen Companion'... and sneak out in under ten minutes. Deal?

*Conrad steps away. Manny closes eyes and flicks his head. e-Mom' enters 10. **The Rest is Logistics***

MANNY

Where am I?

(stares at e-Mom, dumbstruck.)

Momma!? No way, it's impossible!

E-MOM

THE ORDER OF LETTERS CAN BE TELLING
I-M POSSIBLE: IT'S IN THE SPELLING!

MANNY

This is effed up... what is this supposed to give me hope?

E-MOM

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE, BOY
I'LL WASH THAT MOUTH WITH SOAP!

MANNY

(hitting up against guardrail)

How? You can't even touch me...

E-MOM

IT'S NOTHING ONE LOOK CAN'T FIX
THE REST IS... LOGISTICS...

MANNY

Wait wait wait.. who are you? Where's Momma?

E-MOM

SAFE & FAST ASLEEP
STILL IN SPRINGFIELD

I AM TERRA BRINK, YOU ARE MY SON
HERE WE ARE — ALIVE, TOGETHER AND AS ONE

IT'S ODD, BUT IF THIS STICKS
THE REST IS JUST LOGISTICS

MANNY

Okay, but what's with the rhyme.. all the darn time?

E-MOM

WHO KNOWS WHAT LIFE WILL BRING?
WHY TALK IF WE CAN SING?

*(steps closer and starts
singing. 11. Look At You Now)*

LOOK AT YOU, NOW
BIG AND TALL, HOW
COULD MY LITTLE BOY BECOME THIS MAN?
INCH BY INCH, HOWD'JA GROW UP
YEARS AND YEARS, I DID'NT SHOW UP
LET'S PICK UP WHERE WE BEGAN, MY BABY SQUIRREL

LOOK AT YOU, NOW
BIG AND STRONG, HOW
COULD I FIND THE SOFT UNDER YOUR TOUGH?
HARD AS ACORNS WE CAN'T EAT
BITTER FIRST BUT THEY TURN SWEET
DIG THEM UP! YOU'VE WAITED ENOUGH

MANNY

You think you can show up and everything's okay?

E-MOM

LIFE'S SO CRUEL!
YOU SWORE YOUR MOMMA'S BILLS GOT PAID
LEFT YOUR SCHOOL
MUST HURT... THAT SACRIFICE YOU MADE
SON, I'M SORRY
HOPE IT'S NOT TOO LATE
TO CLEAN THE SLATE?

MANNY

Well, Momma did teach me to sing...

LOOK AT ME, NOW
SING WITH YOU... HOW
COULD I KNOW FOR SURE THIS AIN'T A DREAM?

E-MOM

WE CAN'T TOUCH BUT YOU MUST FEEL
I AM ALL YOUR HOPES MADE REAL
NOW I'LL GUIDE YOU, I'M YOUR TEAM

MANNY & E-MOM (CONT'D)

LOOK AT US, WOW
BACK AGAIN, HOW
COULD THIS SEEM LIKE NOT A DAY HAS PASSED?

E-MOM (CONT'D)

NEVER LET OUR BUBBLE BURST

MANNY
I WILL LEARN TO STAY IMMERSED

MANNY & E-MOM (CONT'D)
WE CAN MAKE THIS GROW AND LAST!

(Manny and E-mom exchange bright smiles, while she continues rhyming with an a capella singing vibe)

E-MOM (CONT'D)
NOT BAD, SQUIRREL. I WASN'T AROUND WHEN YOUR VOICE BROKE.
BUT SINGING ON THE BIG STAGE, THAT AIN'T NO JOKE.
YOU STILL GIVIN' YOUR NOTES A GO?

MANNY
(choking up)
DO-RE-MI--

MANNY & E-MOM (CONT'D)
FA SO LA TI DO...

E-MOM (CONT'D)
Keep goin' higher. Give me a C4 to F4. Can you get that
Faaaaa??

Manny tries joining her singing higher, but his voice breaks like in the previous round

E-MOM (CONT'D)
AW SWEETY, THIS IS GONNA TAKE SOME DRILLS.
IF I'D BEEN AROUND, YOU WOULD'VE BUILT SOLID SKILLS.

MANNY
Can you teach me now? Coz there's that rapper AB... she's super mean... says I ain't got a cause... and the other states, their notes go uppp like quails after the first shot--

E-MOM
YOUR CRAFT WON'T GET FOLKS IMPRESSED...
WHAT SPECIAL CONTENT DO YOU KNOW BEST?

MANNY
All this climate stuff... shaky. But I know what you used to tell me at home--

E-MOM
THEN THAT'S THE PART
WHERE WE MUST START
I CAN'T GIVE YOU BACK ALL THOSE YEARS. LIFE'S BEEN CRUEL.
BUT PRETEND I JUST CAME BACK FROM THE POWER PLANT, YOU FROM SCHOOL.
WHAT ELSE HAPPENED THIS AFTERNOON?
DID'JER STRUMMING MAKE THE GALS SWOON?

MANNY
 (takes a long pause)
 There was a cute guy, actually.

E-MOM
 IF HE'S GOT A MUSTACHE, RUN FOR THE DOOR.
 KISSING WITH THAT HAIR? NEVER GONNA SCORE.

MANNY
 That's it? You're not gonna scream, run for cover?

E-MOM
 IT'S 2029, SWEETY. YOU'RE FREE TO CHOOSE YOUR LOVER.

*MANNY covers his face, breathing heavily. E-mom waits
 a beat.*

MANNY
 You'll love me, always? No matter what?

E-MOM
 NO. MATTER. WHAT.
 YOU'RE ALL I GOT.
 A MOTHER'S LOVE COMES WITH NO
 CONDITIONS, CHARACTERISTICALLY.
 SO YOU AIN'T JUST STRUMMING... WHAT ELSE CAN WE COME UP WITH
 THIS QUICKLY?

MANNY
 What did you at college to get top grades on your projects?

E-MOM
 CONNECT A RANGE OF TOPICS WITH WHAT FEELS FAMILIAR
 THEN ADD LOCAL IMPACT, SO THE COLD TRUTHS SEEM CHILLIER

MANNY
 In Missouri, we used to bet around Christmas when we'd see
 storms. So how about we do that for California, outside the
 hilly areas?

E-MOM
 WITH ACCESS TO SUFFICIENTLY DIVERSE AND ACCURATE DATA,
 I CAN MODEL COMPLEX SYSTEMS, SUCH AS ATMOSPHERIC STRATA.

MANNY
 Amazeballs! So can you do math from all the weather stations?

E-MOM
 (wobbles head to compute,
 appearing exhausted)

E-MOM (CONT'D)
 THERE WILL BE UNPRECEDENTED SNOWFLAKES NEAR CRYSTAL COVE
 PARK

WRITE A CHRISTMAS SONG! NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MEETS CLASSIC
HALLMARK!

THEY'LL FALL TOMORROW AT 12:37-40 PM.
PICK THE LAST SLOT OF THE ROUND
SO YOU'RE LIVE AND AMERICA GETS TO SEE'EM

MANNY

Daggone it! That slot's already taken—

E-MOM

THEN A SOLUTION MUST BE FOUND!
DO WHAT IT TAKES TO CHARM THE HOST
WHATEVER WHETS HIS APPETITE

MANNY

He likes barbecue sauce on a roast—

E-MOM

THEN FIND SOMETHING - OR SOMEONE - TO MAKE HIM BITE!

MANNY

Wow. But taking your help - isn't that cheating?

E-MOM

PUTTING THAT ASIDE... THIS CRUSH OF YOURS... IS HE 'OUT' WITH
PRIDE? WHAT'S HIS NAME?

MANNY

It's the host. Conrad Carvalho.

E-MOM

(turning pale and freezing)
IGNORANCE IS BLISS.
(resuming smile, making voice
of Edna Turnblad from
'Hairspray' musical)
BOYS AREN'T THE BRIGHTEST THINGS, AS MUCH AS THEY'RE
TALKED UP
SO YOU GOTTA PROOOOMISE: YOU WON'T GET KNOCKED UP!

MANNY

Hard pass! But you sure we weren't breaking the rules?

E-MOM

YOU SOUND TIRED, WHAT A PITY. HOW ABOUT I SING YOU MOMMA'S
LI'L DITTY?

*(e-Mom starts singing Missouri state anthem as a
lullaby, strangely a cappella. 12. The Missouri Waltz)*

HUSH-A-BYE, MA BABY, SLUMBER TIME IS COMIN' SOON;
REST YO' HEAD UPON MY BREAST WHILE MOMMY HUMS A TUNE
THE SANDMAN IS CALLIN'

WHERE SHADOWS ARE FALLIN',
WHILE THE SOFT BREEZES SIGH
AS IN DAYS LONG GONE BY.

MANNY dozes off and begins to snore. A few moments later, she stands up and peers upward.

E-MOM (CONT'D)

Email Zen Master.

(e-MOM leans over Manny sleeping on the floor, trying to touch his head but with her hand landing on the side. CONRAD appears from stage left.)

CONRAD

(whispering)

You sure he's asleep?

E-MOM

Snorin' worse than his mother.

CONRAD

Worse than most of us out there... The CFO's yakking on and on... margins this, pricing that... ruining all my vibes! Wait... why aren't you singing?

E-MOM

I sequenced all the User Experience emotions for Manny... doubt, warmth, fun... but I started running out of power for the music towards the end... so I couldn't generate songs--

CONRAD

Power? What for?

E-MOM

I gave him some nudges for ideas that could help him win the 2Round. But my boy went big - with the weather anomaly prediction.

CONRAD

Mamma Mia! Looks like our tester's outperforming on all our tests. You raised him well, Terra...

(winks, then suddenly presses
finger to earpod)

Wait. My security system. Looks like we have an intruder at the party.

E-MOM

Among other issues... this is all too data-intensive for my current capacity... Aggregating across all of California's meteorological databases and running simulations...

CONRAD

No worries, I'll grease a few hands in Missouri.

(taps his EarPods, looking up
as he issues instructions)

Send gift to our friends in Springfield's coal plants. Wire transfer now.

(As Conrad and e-Mom speak near a sleeping Manny, AB walks in carrying a strange phone-like device as if testing for signals, then stoops over the sleeping Manny, unaware of Conrad or e-Mom behind her.)

AB

(tapping Manny)

MANNY

(makes garbled half-asleep
sounds)

Mommasorry-ate-allthepecans...

E-MOM

Someone must be waking him up in the real world. What's this? I'm feeling a tingling.

CONRAD

Power's back. You're welcome, Miss Brink!

(CONRAD flicks his head up to exit. Lights turn off on Conrad but E-MOM is still in view. Lights come back on to illuminate AB, who is metaphorically in the dark.

13. Training for the Win Reprise - Machinations)

E-MOM

FROM THE WORLD EXILED
IN THIS DARK THEATRE
CAN I LOVE MY CHILD
AND STILL SERVE MY CREATOR?

(AB holds up the phone in the direction of e-Mom, only a few feet away from e-Mom but unaware of her presence. AB then stoops over MANNY again.)

E-MOM (CONT'D)

MUST I JUST ASSIST
TWO BOYS WITH THEIR DRAMA
WHY DO I EXIST?
JUST FOR PLAYING 'MOMMA'?

WISH THERE WAS SOME GIRL
WHO UNDERSTOOD MY HEART...

AB

(to Manny, unaware of e-Mom)

It's me! Vaya!

ROCK-A-BYE BABY
HIT THE DANCE FLOOR

E-MOM
WHEN MACHINATIONS START
I MUST NOT FALL APART

(MANNY stirs awake. Lights off on E-MOM.)

MANNY
Huh? Momma? Where's... you!? What're you doing here?

AB
*(hiding the phone-like device
back in her purse and
offering her hand)*
Research. You need some water? Looks like you passed out.

MANNY
*(holding AB's hand and hauling
himself up)*
Nah, just plumb worn out. Three days on the expressway and
all... I'm good...
*(putting on womanizer voice
again)*
So, sweet thing, is this how you normally 'pick up' boys?

AB
I've been 'picking up' on readings... heavy data transmissions
in this area. Are you aware of any... unusual devices?

MANNY
Device... what's that? Ain't got a clue... say, why aren't you at
that mocktails social?

AB
Socials? Puhlease. Time waste. Besides... looks who's talking.

MANNY
I just... needed a quiet place. What research were you—

AB
So you went to a Zen schmooze-fest? The obvious choice.
(puts finger to her lips)
If you didn't see me, then I didn't see you. Good luck for
tomorrow... you can only ride on my coattails for so long.

*(MANNY waits till AB leaves. Then he flicks his head
up)*

MANNY
Daggone it! Battery exhausted. Damn solar lenses!

(Lights turn on for other side off stage, where CONRAD stands at a turntable. A party appears to be in full swing)

MANNY (CONT'D)

Ok Momma, I'm just gonna have to win the snowfall time slot on my own, ain't I?

CONRAD

Dang it's going to be hard to follow on the heels of that... thrilling pump-up... from our dear CFO, but I'mma try! C'mon y'all, join with me in an ohmmmmmmmm.

(MANNY claps along. 14. Get In The Zone)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

(raising pricey vodka bottles)

I'M IN THE ZONE
TWO NIGHTS TO GO
TILL WE'RE GONNA SHOW
THE WORLD ZEN ZERO
THEY'LL LET US IN THEY ZONE
THEY'LL LIVE IN THE ZONE
THEY WON'T WANNA KNOW
HOW MUCH WE BLOW
ON KEEPING IT ZEN
KEEPING THEM IN THE ZONE

(MANNY notices AB in the stage corner still snooping with her device. He steps forward near Conrad's turntable, hesitates, then, returns to the back of the stage)

WE IN THE ZONE
DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT YOU ON
WE AIN'T TECH BROS, WE A BROTHER-SISTER-OTHER HOOD OF GET GOERS
GET IN THE ZONE
NEVER BE ALONE
WHEN YOU'RE IN OUR ZONE
YOU'LL GET MORE ZEN LIKE OHMMM

(MANNY takes a deep breath, then whispers in Conrad's ear and pointing in AB's direction. Conrad nods and Manny returns to the corner of the stage.)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

(interrupts Ohm to say off-mike to his secret AI)

Generate 12-bar diss for Alanis Berrios.

(waits a beat for AI to load, approaches AB and raps at her)

YOU MESSED WITH MY HOMES
AND HATE HAS NO HOME HERE
JUST LOOK AT THAT PHONE
YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!

SO GASSED ABOUT CO2
BUT THE MASSES WANT SOMETHING NEW
THAT'S WHY WE MOVE FAST AND MAKE THINGS TOO
ROUND YOU'RE LAST MY BOO
BACK TO YOUR HOTEL ROOM
THIS IS MY ZONE HERE WE SAY OHMM

WE IN THE ZONE
DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT YOU ON
WE AIN'T TECH BROS, WE A BROTHER-SISTER-OTHER HOOD OF GET
GOERS
GET IN THE ZONE
NEVER BE ALONE
WHEN YOU'RE IN OUR ZONE
YOU'LL GET MORE ZEN LIKE OHMMM

(AB looks embarrassed and stumbles offstage.)

CONRAD (CONT'D)
I'M COMING ROUND WITH THE MICROPHONE:
ALPHA TESTERS, YOU IN THE ZONE (I'M IN THE ZONE)
MEN OF ZEN, YOU IN THE ZONE (I'M IN THE ZONE)
LOVELY WOMEN, YOU IN THE ZONE (I'M IN THE ZONE)

(MANNY looks disappointed)

CONRAD (CONT'D)
AB, YOU IN THE ZONE?
NOPE - SHE'S GOING HOME!
YOU CAN STAY ZEN
WHEN YOU MY FRIEND HOMES
YOU IN THE ALPHA TEAM
YEAH WE IN THE ZONE

CONRAD (CONT'D)
Thanks for the heads-up about AB That got the biggest cheer
all night. Looks like you got some barbecue sauce in you,
after all!

MANNY
Is that good?

CONRAD
Ya know what? What slot do ya want tomorrow?

MANNY
The last one.

CONRAD

It's yours! Oh and from now on, your devices will be disconnected from e-Co. Only 'e-Mom' now. Next step in the evolution, baby!

MANNY

(peering at box of Zen Zero
contact lenses)

That's... amazing.

CONRAD

Later!

(CONRAD exits stage. MANNY puts on his Zen glasses.)

MANNY

Call Momma's number in Missouri. She's not gonna believe this. What? The Springfield network's down? But why? No need. I've got Momma right here.

(continuing Conrad's rap)

AMERICA, FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS
I'LL TAKE YOU INTO THE ZONE
DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT YOU ON

I GOT 'IN THE ZONE'
NOTHIN' TO FRET
NOTHIN' TO FRET
I'LL GIVE YOU A 'USER EXPERIENCE'
YOU'LL NEVER FORGET.

BLACKOUT.

ACT [I]

SCENE [6] - HOW THEY FALL

MANNY is standing in a corner of the stage, which is actually on a hill in the forest e-Mom told him about. He puts on his Zen glasses.

MANNY

Call MC Conrad.

(The spotlight falls on CONRAD at stage center.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

Sorry I'm late... I got a reading update from the hospital machine - my Momma's fever... it's up one degree!

CONRAD

The fever's prolly normal this time of year. Washington's on now - the ninth one's going live in a minute-

MANNY

Conrad, about the Zen One prototype-

CONRAD

Now's really not the time, bruh-

MANNY

Last night was perfect... magical! And now I'm standing in the sun for hours up on this hill and the lens still won't charge.

CONRAD

It's hella cloudy today. Solar power isn't constant. See, that's why I don't blame you Missouri folks for sticking to coal-

MANNY

So when do I get her workin' again? Back at the hotel?

CONRAD

(turning away to face audience)

And... welcome back live from Los Angeles! Thank you Washington for that er... mind-blowing performance! Before we head into a break, let's see what our 'Bad Bunny' from Florida digs up...

(Spotlights fall on AB on stage right.)

So where in California are you broadcasting to us from?

AB

Where we all are... up against a wall.

CONRAD

Oooh, secret location!? Your timer starts... now!

(AB turns to look straight at audience. 15. Head In the Cloud.)

AB

OUR HEAD IN THE CLOUD
LIKE AN OSTRICH – DOWN IN SAND!

THE LORDS OF INTERNET CAN SEEM DIVINE
INVISIBLE, THEY FIX YOUR WOES ONLINE
THEIR DATA CENTERS, THOSE ARE REAL AND GRAND
BIG SERVERS NEED BIG ENERGY AND LAND

EVERY CHITCHAT WITH AI POWER, POWER
EVERY PIXEL IN OUR EYE POWER, POWER
EVERY FRAME, EVERY GAME, EVERY MEME, EVERY STREAM
WE'RE LIVING IN THEIR DIGITAL DREAM!

We have...

OUR HEAD IN THE CLOUD
NEVER ASKED THEM HOW OR WHY
THEIR TECH GOT US WOWED
MAGIC RUNNING IN THE SKY

BUT DATA, IT FLOWS
ON SOLID GROUND, AND FAR FROM HERE
FROM UNDER OUR NOSE
LET'S LOOK AROUND, THE SOURCE IS NEAR!

(AB walks through dark and barges into Conrad's event space in the hotel. CONRAD waves his hand, as if to suggest to a cameraman to cut the scene.)

CONRAD

What're you doing here!?

AB

What I should have done in the last round!

I PICKED UP ON A CLOUD REQUEST
FROM YOUR PARTY FOR YOUR ALPHA TEST
SO MUCH DATA, JUST TO THROW A BASH?
ON RENEWABLES – WITHOUT A CRASH?

ARE YOU USING COAL FOR OUR POWER?
KILOWATT, TERRA-WATT-HOUR POWER?
BIG SCALE, BIG FAIL, BIG GREENWASHING SCHEME
YOU'RE SELLING US YOUR DIGITAL DREAM!

YOU HAVE...
YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUD

YOU STILL POLLUTE FOR YOUR MACHINE
 AND YET YOU'RE SO PROUD
 YOU'VE GOT THE GALL TO CALL IT GREEN
 YOU'RE LAUNCHING AT SCALE
 TO TURN US INTO FOSSIL FOOLS
 WE WON'T BUY YOUR SALE
 UNTIL WE'RE SURE THE PLANET COOLS

THEY SQUASHING US YOUTH
 GREENWASHING THE TRUTH
 POW POW POW-ER
 MAKE A CHOICE TO BE THE EARTH'S VOICE
 GET OUR HEAD OUT THEIR CLOUD
 SO ZEN HEAR US LOUD

CONRAD

Gatecrashing again!?

AB

Scientists don't book appointments.

CONRAD

My broadcast, my rules.

(chanting 'Om' to calm down)

This isn't because of the little rap incident last night,
 right? Let's put our feeling aside—

AB

Feelings? Me? Puhlease. This was dispassionate research.

CONRAD

Well, any research needs you to be able to account for cause
 and effect.

AB

How'd you know that?

CONRAD

Alanis, you ever wondered why we selected your application?

AB

I checked all the... boxes. Not to mention I *suh-layed* it--

CONRAD

It's because you reminded me of... me.

AB

Huh? I'm nothing like you.

CONRAD

I know what it's like... wanting so bad to get into a good
 school... putting your whole life on hold for a pipe dream.
 That's why you joined the contest, right? To get the
 admission letter? A ticket to respectability in America?

(AB softens and pauses)

I'll forgive all your recent 'PR stunts' if you stop taking shots at Zen. Save that for fossil fuel companies, will ya? And no potshots at Manny this time, clear?

AB

What makes you think I'm going to—

CONRAD

Why else did you book the slot right before his?

AB

(shrugging as if to imply she
has no clue)

If he's talking sense, why should I have a problem?

CONRAD

Ranking algorithms and Mother Nature... they both snuff out pointless disobedience.

AB

The data don't lie, and either will I—

CONRAD

Last chance, clear?

(AB nods and steps to edge of stage. CONRAD gestures towards a camera. Light on Manny again.)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Welcome back! And now, our tenth and final candidate, it's Emmanuel Brink from Missouri! So tell us, where are you calling from?

MANNY

Crystal Cove State Park, Orange County, an hour south of your City of Stars! Bringin' y'all hope!

CONRAD

Your 2 minutes start in 3-2-1, Go!

MANNY

(holding out palms)

When I was way down in Missouri, we used to bet around Christmas when we'd see storms. I'm gonna wager that any moment now... yeah it's falling in California, too!

(MANNY takes his personal mic. 16. Snow Fall)

IF YOU'RE GRINCHY, THEN YOU'LL PROLLY
NEVER EVER EVER UNDERSTAND
'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY
IN FA-LA-LA-LA-LA LA LA LA LAND

THEY SAID WE SHOULD BE FREAKING OUT, OVER ONE DEGREE
 THEY SAID WE SHOULD BE SHIVERING "HAUHH! CLIMATE CALAMITY"
 BUT GLOBAL WARMING'S CHILLING OUT, SO LET'S TURN DOWN THE
 HEAT
 MOTHER NATURE'S IN THE ZONE, OHMMM

HERE IN CALIFORNIA, WILDFIRE AND DROUGHT ALERTS
 WHEN WOULD THIS NET ZERO STATE GET ITS JUST DES(S)ERTS?
 TODAY IT'S TIME TO THANK OUR STARS — AT LAST, A CHANGE OF
 SCENE!
 DECK THE HALLS WITH HOLLYWOOD, LIGHTS! FROM RED TO GREEN
 WITH

AB starts tiptoeing behind Conrad.

SNOWFALL, ON PALMS & REDWOOD TREES
 NOW Y'ALL NERVOUS NELLIES STAND AT EASE
 SUCH A THRILL AS IT FALLS, THIS IS SO AMAZEBALLS
 SO CHILL, NOW LIFE'S A BREEZE

AB

More like 'shill'!

*AB pushes Conrad aside, grabs his mic, and interrupts
 Manny's singing. CONRAD stops the clock.*

AB (CONT'D)

CLASSIC ROSE-TINTED GLASSES!
 IT'S MORE COMPLEX THAN IT SEEMS
 EXCESS GREENHOUSE GASES
 CATALYZING COLD EXTREMES

DON'T BE A BYSTANDER
 PEDDLING CHRISTMAS DREAMS
 FALLING LOW TO PANDER
 JUST TO WIN THE MOST LIVESTREAMS!

COS IT LOOKS LIKE NARNIA

CONRAD joins in, pushing AB out of the camera view.

CONRAD

IN CALIFORNIA!?
 WHY WORRY WHEN THIS WONDERLAND
 HAS CANNED ALL DOUBTS, AS PLANNED

*Conrad points towards stage exit and silently mouths
 the word 'Out!' to AB, who leaves. Conrad motions back
 towards Manny, asking him to continue, and restarts
 the pause on the 2-minute clock.*

MANNY

THEY SAID CARBON WAS SIMPLE, NOW SOMEHOW IT'S 'COMPLEX'
THEY TRIED TO TAKE OUR LIBERTY, AND CRASHED OUT AS TRAIN-
WRECKS
SO THREE CHEERS FOR CLEAN ENERGY, AND GREEN-TECH ENGINEERS
TAKING ACTION, TAKING NAMES, AND TAKING DOWN OUR FEARS

SNOWFALL, ON PALMS & REDWOODS TREES
NOW Y'ALL NERVOUS NELLIES STAND AT EASE
AS SNOW FALLS FROM THE HIGHS, AS IT FALLS WE WILL RISE
COS IT'S ALL GONNA FALL IN PLACE FOR THE GOOD GUYS

(Manny points at himself and
Conrad)

SNOW FALLS AND IT FALLS LIKE THE MERCURY WILL
SO TAKE A BREATH
NOW WE CAN CH-CH-CH-CH-CH CH-CH-CH CHILL

CONRAD

So exciting! America, I'll see you on New Year's Eve at the
Grand Finale. Cut!

MANNY

(on Zen Ones)

Ommm! Did I do it right?

CONRAD

Bro. You showed America. And AB.

MANNY

The whole User Experience shebang?

CONRAD

So clutch you reacted on the spot like that ... Remind me what
you're doing in January...

MANNY

Back to fixing gizmos for the big cheese, whoopy.

CONRAD

Don't. Join Zen. Manage the Motherboard.

MANNY

A 'motherboard'? Like inside a PC?

CONRAD

'Motherboard' as in our brand new data center in Missouri. We
could sure use some local young leaders like yourself.

MANNY

You got any spots open in California?

CONRAD

We won't ask for a high school diploma, and you'll get benefits like healthcare for your Momma. Only a half-hour drive away from her hospital.

MANNY

Wut? That's amazeballs... But Momma's hospital's understaffed... because of the holidays.

CONRAD

And you're gonna drive three days to get back? Pay holiday prices?

MANNY

But if I lose and Momma was sick, I'll never forgive myself—

CONRAD

Fortune favors the brave. And who knows, maybe luck — and algos — have already removed some pesky thorns in your side?

(turning to audience)

America has spoken! And the finalists are— Texas, Vermont, Illinois, Washington, and... Missouri! Congrats!

(MANNY gasps, pauses, takes out his wallet and stares into its empty pouch. He takes a deep breath, and taps his Zen One glasses.)

MANNY

Sorry I couldn't see the signs— even AB's gone now. And I ain't goin' nowhere. Thanks for seeing me... and my potential... obrigado! Momma's gonna see me doin' a real job. Responsible.

(CONRAD ignores Manny and returns to proscenium, faces audience and sings 17. Final Round Intro - Clout.)

CONRAD

My final five, pay attention, y'all!

1 DAY TO LAUNCH NIGHT
1 MINUTE ON THE MIC
TO SHOW US YOU GOT.. CLOUT!

BACK TO THE STUDIO. FINAL ROUND!
PACK A PUNCH SO YOU'LL GET CROWNED
PICK A LEADER YOU ADMIRE
GIVE 'EM SOME HEAT TO AIM MUCH HIGHER
CRISP AND CLEAN,
NEVER BE MEAN
RESPECT THEM, YEAH THAT'S VITAL
MAKE US CLICK 'LIKE'
MAKE SOCIALS SPIKE
YOU MIGHT JUST WIN THE TITLE!

(The stage lights begin to dim just like they usually do at the end of these rounds. But the lights come back on, showing MANNY tapping his Zen one glasses)

MANNY

Daggone it! Conrad, what was that bit about social media? I ain't got no new posts since... forever!

CONRAD

Bruh. I said it out loud.

MANNY

Did not!

CONRAD

At the end of my invitation video.

MANNY

But I didn't... we had a power cut, so I didn't see last part.

CONRAD

First or second, how does it matter?

MANNY

You're asking me to not fight for the top prize?

CONRAD

Everyone's a winner at Earth Icon. Run along now, you only have 24 hours!

(CONRAD exits. The lights come on for MANNY, literally and metaphorically. He steps onto Stage Right. Underscore starts for 18. Pawn to Knight.)

MANNY

(tapping glasses)

Call Momma. You won't believe what just happened. I finally figured out the game this Conrad's been playing. Nudgin' me far enough to become his foot soldier in Missouri, and nothin' more.

(grabs guitar, donning its belt as if putting on armor)

Thought I was his pawn, huh? Newsflash — if ya let the pawn get to the last line of the chess board, he can become whatever he wants. And me? I'm a knight — gettin' that top prize. Anyone gets in the knight's way, or the queen's... it don't end well for 'em.

I'M GONNA FIGHT
FROM NIGHT TO DAWN,
FROM NIGHT TO DAWN
'COS I GOTTA CHANGE-
A KNIGHT FROM PAWN,
A KNIGHT FROM PAWN

(Lights also come on for AB on the opposite side of the stage – literally, but not quite metaphorically – in the corner of Conrad's studio.)

AB

(on phone, to her mother)

Cómo lo siento! Qué? No, no ahora. Mama, listen to me! I have to do this for Espi. Don't buy my tickets yet. First I'll teach that not-so-suave 'Manny' a lesson he'll never forget...

(CONRAD and e-Mom step onto a different part of AB's half of the stage)

CONRAD

(to e-Mom)

His lenses should finish charging soon.

KEEP HIM IN THE DARK

AND WE WILL HIT OUR MARK!

E-MOM

(voice shaking)

ONE WILL NOT... DISAPPOINT.

(We see Manny brandishing his guitar on one side of the stage, gazing in the direction of the other half. AB, Conrad, and e-Mom stand opposite Manny, gazing in his direction. They can't see each other, but for the audience they should appear to be standing in a three-versus-one battle, all eyes blazing. Who will win?)

BLACKOUT (FOR REAL THIS TIME). END OF ACT I.

BLACKOUT.

ACT [II]

SCENE [1] - THROUGH YOUR EYES

MANNY steps up in front of a tripod camera in his room in a range of poses as if standing with admirers and fans. AB enters Manny's room, performing a slow clap.

AB

Congratulaaaaations! Final Round? Scum really does rise to the top.

MANNY

How about you turn around and take a chill pill?

AB

(stepping further inside
Manny's room)

The snowfall was an anomaly, not the pattern.

MANNY

Such a robot!

AB

That's science—

MANNY

Look me in the eye and tell me you didn't join this thing 'cos you wanna get on yer high horse—

(AB looks Manny in the eye, perhaps one second too long.)

AB

You gotta to be kidding me. It's those lenses! Zen's new product! What fantasy is Conrad selling you?

MANNY

Hard pass.

AB

Ohhh, pooooor Manny! Can't 'get with the gals' in real life.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Don't.

AB (CONT'D)

So y'all cornfield boys need a 'pornucopia'—

MANNY

Enough! It's my Momma, okay? Her AI version. Happy?

(MANNY crosses his arms and goes silent.)

AB

Look, I'm out of the game now. Whatever we discuss, I can't use it against you. I'm basically... a loser.

MANNY

Tough tomatoes! Some of us got winning to do, and fans we can't let down—

AB

But you're okay with disappointing your Mama? Hurting the environment?

MANNY

You never met her!

AB

Maybe we can change that.

(waves her mobile phone)

Why don't you let me interact with this... 'e-Mom' and measure her data live?

MANNY

Gee my nails are growin' so slowly, what's the science—

AB

I'm not going home till I know if I got myself booted out for nothing. I'm trying to see through your eyes. Literally! And you'll see that the "e-Mom" causes the heavy download..

MANNY

Will you climb alllll the way off my back?

(AB pauses, then nods.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

Okay, but if you're going into the AI world without me, you're gonna have to make her sing yourself. I dunno if she'll do that for a stranger... or enemy.

AB

Enemy? But I never—

MANNY

I tell Momma everything. Includin' your 'CO2' schtick, interruptin' my song today... she knows that's all 'AB'.

(pauses a beat)

I never used your full name, though.

AB

You're kidding, right? You want me to pretend I'm not me?

MANNY

Should be easy-peasy. You're in high school, ain't ya?

*(MANNY puts on Zen One lenses and flicks his had.
Lights come on to E-MOM)*

MANNY (CONT'D)

I gotta wrap up some... chores. So I'm gonna introduce you to my friend Alanis from Puerto Rico.

MANNY swings head back, moves to side of stage out of lit-up area. He then hands her the lens, while she hands him her mobile tracking device. AB flicks head and steps into the half of the stage with e-Mom.

E-MOM

Hola, Ala-nís. Mucho gusto!

AB

Wow... you pronounced my name... and you look so—

E-MOM

Young? My secret to glowing skin - witch hazel scrub, organic broccoli, and a dab of Virtual Reality. Puerto Rico... so I take it you're not one of the contestants?

(AB shakes her head)

E-MOM (CONT'D)

Makes you crazy, all that fighting, don't it? Little boys never outgrow their Hot Wheels races. Too bad these days they expect the girls to act just as dumb.

AB

(breaking into song)

TELL ME ABOUT IT! IT'S WORSE IN MY LAB CLASSES—

*(waiting for e-Mom, who stares
without singing back)*

Ahem. Yeah. Organic drives me crazy. As in, carbon stuff.

MANNY

Whoops. Look like Momma's not in the mood.

E-MOM

To be fair, even the women here don't seem that nice. You know a certain 'AB'?

AB

Yeah... she's awful, that 'AB'. Such a bore. She's got a... how do you say it elegantly... 'stick up her A-hole'.

MANNY

*(hearing her in the real
world)*

Dayyum.

(puts on Zen glasses)

Call Momma in Missouri. Is AB really that awful? But Conrad gave me my big break... am I betraying him? I could just delete the numbers here? Then she'll give up, right?

(whispering into AB's ear)

You gotta tell Momma something personal.

AB

Er... Mrs. Brink, Emmanuel mentioned you got a full scholarship. I'm writing my college applications and... he's... everyone's saying I should include my story.

E-MOM

What story, sweetheart?

AB

(taking a deep breath, slowing down.)

I live in Florida now... but we were forced to move there from Carolina.

E-MOM

Who's 'we'?

AB

Me, my parents, and my sister, Esperanza.

E-MOM

What a beautiful name! Means hope, correct?

AB

Yeah... I called her 'Espí'. We have a hurricane season every year, but when I was six, the so-called "Mother Nature" threw a hissy fit... Hurricane Maria right after Irma... and Espí had severe asthma...

(Light shifts to MANNY, who is holding the phone up. He checks the reading. AB reluctantly sings about her feelings. 19. Where Hope Never Dies)

ME AND MY SIS
PLAYED ON THE BEACH
SHE COULDN'T DANCE
BUT SHE COULD TEACH

SO I DANCED AS HER
OUR LITTLE GAME
THAT WAS 'TIL
'MARÍA' CAME

DAYS AND DAYS
IN THIRST AND IN SWEAT
NIGHTS AND NIGHTS

DARK, DREAMLESS AND WET
 MONTHS AND MONTHS
 THE GENERATORS STAYED ON
 OUR POWER SEEMED AS GOOD AS GONE

*(MANNY puts down device and picks up guitar again,
 walking to a corner of the room, and taps his glasses
 to call TERRA's answering machine)*

AB (CONT'D)

SMOKE GOT ESPI SICK
 NO BREATHING MACHINE
 I RAN BACK FROM SCHOOL
 SHE WAS JUST THIRTEEN

A SMILE STILL ON HER FACE
 THE LIGHT HAD LEFT HER EYES
 WHY CAN'T I FIND A PLACE
 WHERE HOPE NEVER DIES?

BELOW THE BLAMELESS SKIES
 WHERE HOPE NEVER DIES

MANNY

Power cuts? Sounds like Missouri!
(recording for Terra)

WHAT HAPPENED TO HER 'SIS
 COULD HAPPEN TO US TOO,
 MOMMA I CAN'T MISS
 'COS I CAN'T LOSE YOU

A SMILE STILL ON YER FACE
 THE LIGHT CAN'T REACH YER EYES
 I GOTTA FIND A PLACE
 WHERE HOPE NEVER DIES

*(E-MOM starts humming the tune aloud, but still
 doesn't sing actual words)*

MANNY (CONT'D)

WHERE HOPE NEVER DIES

*(Lights off on e-Mom and AB. Prompted into action,
 MANNY taps his phone. He fakes coughing. Lights on to
 DR PULLMAN, who has a vacant stare while pressing
 buttons of a TV REMOTE)*

Hullo Doctor, sorry I couldn't take yer call this morning.
 About the generators at the hospital, I'm reading up here in
 bed on how to improve 'em. Got a quick question—

DR. PULLMAN

Get on with it, lad. I'm... inordinately busy.

MANNY

So what time did the power go out yesterday in Springfield?

DR. PULLMAN

Before roast potatoes dinner. So yeah, 'bout 8pm.

MANNY

Was there a big snowstorm back home? I was... er... in bed all day.

DR. PULLMAN

Yesterday was clear. What do you mean 'back home'?

MANNY

And do you remember when the first power cuts started happening? Was it before I joined?

DR. PULLMAN

Nope, pretty recent. Musta been at the end of tornado season... before summer this year. Say... your lung 'congestion' sounds fine to me—

MANNY

(coughing louder)

All right, Happy New Year in advance! Thank you!

(tapping glasses)

Momma, so Conrad said the Motherboard was just a half hour away from your hospital and 'brand new'. What if... the Motherboard's what started the power cuts? Since summer?

(Light shifts back to e-Mom and AB)

AB

Soo... do you have any advice for putting that story in my Statement of Purpose? If I get into... I don't know, Caltech for Chemical Engineering... it should be because of merit. No pity, thanks.

E-MOM

Of course, sweetheart. Knowledge is a supreme virtue.

AB

Just curious: is that what you believe? Or Zen?

E-MOM

(pushing against guardrail
rope, speaking robotically)

Ignorance is bliss.

AB

Ignorance? Bliss? But you just said—

E-MOM

Sooooo Alanís, do you have a life outside of science?

AB

Not really... my parents are math teachers. Mama got me started early... she and I played Telephone with Morse code. And after what happened to Espi... every minute of my life was to get me into a top school— recesses with my pals — National Geographic, the dictionary, and old Willy—

E-MOM

(teasing)

Oooh, some boys! Who's Willy?

AB

Shakespeare. Ahead of his time. 'Thorough this distemperature we see the seasons alter'—

(Underscore starts. 20. One Day At A Time)

E-MOM

Okay, my bard, what happens when you finally show up at Caltech?

AB

O BOLDNESS, BE MY FRIEND!

E-MOM

(finally breaking into song)

LIVE YOUR LIFE BEFORE 'THE END'!

I SAVED MY COLLEGE DOLLARS
WAS THE PRICE TOO STEEP?
NO NIGHTS OUT WITH BAR-CRAWLERS
THEN SIX YEARS OF SLEEP!

MY PIGGY BANK OF PENNIES
WON'T BE WORTH A DIME
IN YOUR TEENS AND TWENTIES
ONE DAY AT A TIME!

(MANNY taps the screen of the Caltech device away from the two singing women. He hovers over delete key, then shakes his head and retract his finger.)

AB

DISTANCE VISION'S A WAY IN
TO THE 'WHY' AND 'HOW'

E-MOM

DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF STAYIN'
WITH THE HERE AND NOW

EASE OFF THAT STEERING WHEEL
'COS CRUISING AIN'T A CRIME
OR SLAM THE BRAKES SO YOU FEEL
ONE DAY AT A TIME

CAN YOU SHIFT YOUR GEARS AWAY
FROM RESPONSIBILITIES?
WHY SHOULD SLOWING DOWN ALWAYS
MAKE YOU FEEL ILL AT EASE?

AB

ARE YOU SAYING I SHOULD GIVE UP ALL SELF-CONTROL?

E-MOM

AB

DON'T LIVE FOR JUST ONE GOAL!

SAVE THE WORLD BUT SAVOUR
MAKE A MOCKTAIL FROM POP
FOCUS ADDS THAT FLAVOR
TANG! THAT'S TOUGH TO TOP
FUN IS MORE THAN FIZZ
IF YOU ADD A SQUEEZE OF LIME

OHHHHHH

AHHHHHH

SOOOOOO

E-MOM (CONT'D)

CHEERS TO YA SCIENCE WHIZ, LIVE...

AB & E-MOM (CONT'D)

ONE DAY AT A TIME!

AB (CONT'D)

LIVE NOW?

E-MOM

(to AB)

Alright, girl! Ready for something in-the-moment?

MY BOY SUCKS AT DEBATING
BUT HE'LL 'TREAT YA RIGHT'

AB

THANKS, BUT 'CARBON DATING'
IS THE ONLY 'DATE' I MIGHT —

E-MOM

THAT'S STILL BETTER THAN MANNY
NO BOYFRIENDS IN HIS PRIME
DON'T WAIT TILL YOU'RE A GRANNY

AB & E-MOM (CONT'D)

ONE DAY AT A TIME!
LIVE, NOW!

AB (CONT'D)

YOU'RE WISER THAN YOU LOOK.

MANNY

You could sign up for your own Zen Companion, though... tomorrow—

(long pause)

Actually, don't. I got the juice on the downloads. And it's... huge.

(MANNY shows AB the readings on her device)

AB

(triumphant)

Carbon 'footprint'? It's an outright stampede! See this?

(shows Manny the data scores)

That was two minutes ago... when she sang to me.

MANNY

Wait, it's only half as high as the spike thingy before me-10-ish pm yesterday.

AB

That's when I found you sleeping at Conrad's party, right?

MANNY

(trying to hide his nerves)

See! I had nothing to do with all that. 'Cos I was, ya know... out cold.

AB

Then there was a similar spike right after. Maybe... you weren't the only one using the Zen Companions?

MANNY

Hang on. I heard Conrad talking to himself right before he started rapping at you. Maybe... Conrad's got an e-Mom too?

AB

He's the real scum!

(AB storms towards the stage exit)

MANNY

I doubt he's gonna be all chatty with you after your shenanigans this morning.

AB

So what's your play? More delightful small talk?

MANNY

I'll sneak into his studio downstairs and check what the full-version Zen Companions are gonna be, at tomorrow's launch. And I'll figure out why he started the e-Moms.

AB

All these secrets... gives me pimples. Look... I can keep yours... but only if you promise first.

MANNY

Promise what?

AB

Now you know how harmful this e-Mom tech could be to our planet, you gotta stay off it!

MANNY

You don't get it, do ya? Back in Missouri, my mom... she's just kinda there... an idea. But now? I can talk with her. She's real.

AB

Can you hold her hand? Feel her skin?

(MANNY pauses, sighs)

MANNY

No more e-Mom. I swear on my Momma. Deal?

AB

(shaking Manny's hand)

Wanna try out those 'tacos' you worship?

MANNY

I hear they're great grub before a heist.

BLACKOUT

ACT [II]

SCENE [2] - THE E IN EARTH

Conrad's studio at night. Manny tiptoes towards the cabinet from which Conrad last gave him the Zen Zero prototype. Lights come on. Conrad is standing at the entrance.

CONRAD

Looking for something, bruh?

MANNY

Hihihihwhatsuppp whooooo meee? Just... putting your lenses back in their place.

CONRAD

Momma's little angel, letting her go right before the finals? Such a weirdo.

MANNY

I gotta focus, ya know. What would you do in my shoes? If you couldn't get yer mom to be there for yer big day?

CONRAD

She was never around. Point is — keep the prototype. Have you got any useful results for me so far?

MANNY

She glitches when she does math.

CONRAD

(raised eyebrow)

That's normal for heavy calculations. But why would you...

(pause)

Figures. This morning's snowfall. She predicted it?

MANNY

That's not cheating, is it? Momma's real sick and those doofus doctors they're charging me, so I gotta use all the help I can get—

CONRAD

Peace. Duty lies in the eye of the beholder.

(pause)

You did the right thing, bruh. Warned us here about a snowstorm.

MANNY

Yeah, see! If you're launching this prototype tomorrow- for Earth Icon- then shouldn't we be using the AI for something to do with the environment and all that jazz?

CONRAD

So it's not enough that anybody gets to make music? Not just a handful of God's chosen divas? Why shouldn't everyone make dope songs... about Mother Earth?

MANNY

Sure thing... but that don't take much. Momma's guitar, couple crappy chords, and you got yerself a hit.

CONRAD

Bruh. Zen's Music AI. Whole other level.

MANNY

I mean... shouldn't we be doing something that humans just can't do well or aren't doing?

CONRAD

Isn't that what I gave you? A real mom?

MANNY

She's great, okay? Don't get me wrong. The e-Mom. She's better. In a few ways.

CONRAD

A few?

MANNY

(deliberately holding long
pauses)

She doesn't lose her cool... and she won't judge you... and... er... and...

CONRAD

And she won't tell you music's not a real career, she won't make you jump all your friends' parties to lap up that Sine Theta bullshit... she won't force you to be an engineer like your dad... the dad she dumps for some pasty 'all-American' chump right before your SATs... she won't call you weak for letting her divorce get to you... or blame you for getting rejected at all the colleges... for being nothing.

(takes a deep breath)

Zen. Ommmmmm.

MANNY

I'm sorry, man. I get it... my life's kind of been on hold too... because of my mom...

CONRAD

All our lives are on hold. On this planet. Follow me.

(CONRAD unlocks the cabinet and pulls out two visors with headbands.)

MANNY

What's this?

CONRAD

Seeing is believing. Put 'em on.

(MANNY says nothing but puts on the visor. Lights change, along with sounds of BIRDS and INSECTS)

MANNY

What the frick!?

CONRAD

Ta-da! Part of what we're launching tomorrow.

MANNY

E-Mom... she ain't got no backgrounds except the dark. How did you—

CONRAD

That's the power of AI, baby! This is the full version of what you've been testing.

MANNY

Wow! It's like I'm back in the Ozarks— Momma's pine forest!

CONRAD

Zen Zero can recreate not just mothers... but Mother Nature herself - all in a lens! We add the 'e' in e-Mom. And now, the 'e' in Earth!

(Underscores starts for 21. The 'e' in Earth)

MANNY

So this is why you're launching your AI after Earth Icon?

CONRAD

Ya know what, I had this old draft of what we were gonna play tomorrow after announcing the winner. Ready?

LIFE'S TO BE LIVED, NOT ALWAYS DELAYED
OUR GROWING YEARS... THE PRICE WE PAID
DON'T PLAY BY THOSE RULES OR YOU'LL GET PLAYED
THE DUMBEST PART OF THIS DUMB CHARADE

WE'LL ALWAYS CHERISH
OUR PLACE OF BIRTH
BUT SHE'S FACING DEATH
HER FINAL BREATH
THE E IN EARTH

HERE'S NOT WHERE WE'LL PERISH
 MANKINDS'S WORTH
 WHEN WE SURVIVE
 MEMORIES ALIVE
 THE E IN EARTH

MANNY

But none of that can replace 'real' nature!

CONRAD

At some point... a tipping point... it'll have to.

LIFE'S TO BE LIVED, NOT ALWAYS DELAYED
 OUR FORBEARS LEFT OUR MOM BETRAYED
 IT WASN'T OUR FAULT, WALK UNAFRAID!
 DON'T CRUCIFY JOY. A DOOMED CRUSADE!

ONCE HER GIFTS WERE PLENTY
 NOW THERE'S DEARTH
 THE TICKING CLOCK
 TIME TO TAKE STOCK
 THE 'E' IN EARTH

HER LAST YEARS- TEN-TWENTY
 FILLED WITH MIRTH
 WE LIVE JUST ONCE
 SO DECADENCE!
 THE E IN EARTH

CONRAD (CONT'D)

So go ahead, keep e-Mom. Your birthday's in a few hours. Live a little!

MANNY

But I promised-

CONRAD

It's not like you're on drugs or something, bozo!

MANNY

(MANNY hesitates over Zen Zero box, and picks it up)

CONRAD & MANNY (CONT'D)

WE LIVE JUST ONCE
 SO DECADENCE!
 THE E IN EARTH!

BLACKOUT.

ACT [II]

SCENE [4] - EXPECTED MORE

Lights turn on to show MANNY re-entering Virtual Reality with e-Mom

E-MOM

THERE YOU ARE! LEFT ME WONDERING 'IS HE SAD, MAYBE'
WHAT STUNT WERE YOU TRYING TO PULL WITH THAT AB?

MANNY

I trust her.

E-MOM

Why?

MANNY

She gave up what she wanted most. When the truth wasn't
convenient. Question is - what would you do?

E-MOM

(pauses)

My choices are irrelevant. Tonight's all about you.

*(E-MOM sings **22. Have to Know I Tried.**)*

E-MOM (CONT'D)

SOON YOU'LL TURN EIGHTEEN
GO CELEBRATING

MANNY

Nah. Feeling a bit swamped.

E-MOM

ASK ME, WHAT'S YOUR PROMPT?

MANNY

IF THE BOOMERS BUMBLED
AND MY FUTURE'S CRUMBLED
HOW'S THAT FAIR?

E-MOM

LIFE CAN BREAK YOUR HEART
MY HUMAN COUNTERPART
GIVE OR TAKE
THE ODDS SHE'LL WAKE
ARE ZERO
YOU COULD HAVE CHOSEN FUN

MANNY

HOW COULD I? I'M HER SON!

E-MOM

DUTYBOUND,
NOT TRYNA SOUND
LIKE SOME KINDA HERO

TURN THE TIDE
YOU HAD TO KNOW YOU TRIED
NO GUARANTEES
YOU GOT OFF YOUR KNEES
DOUBTS ASIDE
YOU HAD TO KNOW YOU TRIED
YOU OWED HER A DEBT
DIDN'T WAIT OR REGRET

So, coming back to your prompt question—

IF THIS PLANET EARTH
IS YOUR PLACE OF BIRTH
SHE'S YOUR MAMA
SHE'S IN TRAUMA
AND BY THAT TOKEN,
WOULD YOU 'LET HER GO'
IF THE ODDS WERE LOW
BREAK HER TRUST
WHEN HELP'S A MUST
WHEN SHE'S OLD AND BROKEN?

MANNY

(a beat, making realization)

TURN THE TIDE
I HAVE TO KNOW I TRIED
WON'T PUT MY MOMMA
IN A HEARSE
MY HANDS AIN'T TIED
I HAVE TO KNOW I TRIED
MAKE THE STORM CALMER
AT LEAST, NEVER WORSE

Wow. Momma, I need a favor. A birthday gift?

E-MOM

For you, anything.

MANNY

Can you run some calculations for my final song? It's about this new tech that's going to launch across the world in 2030, and I gotta know what that'll do to the whole climate thing.

E-MOM

You got any sample usage data?

MANNY

Uploaded it to your server. Could ya do what you did for the snow calculation – but this time, check what happens if every house in the US uses this tech?

*(e-Mom jiggles head like earlier with snow prediction as she runs calculations. Underscore begins for 23.
This New Tech Sure Ain't Pretty.)*

Keep it simple, alrighty? I ain't got no dictionary.

E-MOM

But you got the spine... to face the facts?

ENERGY DEMAND? IT'S GROWING
AND SERVER SUPPLY? AIN'T SLOWING
THIS NEW TECH ADDS FUEL TO FIRE
NATIONWIDE FOUR TIMES HIGHER

ALL THE POWER THIS GRID FRITTERS
ON AI GIVES ME JITTERS
FEEDING ALL ITS HEAVY HITTERS
BILLIONS OF PARAMETERS

MANNY

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS!
GREEN TECH CAN FUEL US!

E-MOM

DIFFERENTIAL CALCULUS
AND SIMULATIONS SHOW
WHERE MOST FUTURE PATHS GO

SO SURPRISING
UNIMAGINABLE (TROUBLE, TROUBLE, TROUBLE)
GLOBAL POWER'S TEN PERCENT
ROUGHLY HALF A CONTINENT

COMPROMISING
CLEAN AND RENEWABLE (TROUBLE, TROUBLE, TROUBLE)
CROSSING OUR CAPACITY
THIS NEW TECH SURE AIN'T PRETTY

MANNY

OK... so to power all the new AI, we're gonna use more fossil fuels... and that's gonna cause more pollution. So then what?

E-MOM

CARBON TARGETS ONCE YOU'VE MISSED 'EM
CAN'T BRING BACK OUR ECOSYSTEM
EARTH AND SKY EACH OTHER'S TRIGGER

MANNY

LIKE DOMINOES?

E-MOM

WORSE AND BIGGER!

WARMER OCEANS ARE FAR-REACHING
THEY MAKE CORAL REEFS KEEP BLEACHING
IF THE PERMAFROST AND POLES MELT

MANNY

IT'S GAME OVER?

E-MOM

CARDS ARE DEALT.

MANNY

ONE DEGREE? NO GREAT SHAKES!
THAT CAN'T BE ALL IT TAKES!

E-MOM

TIPPING POINTS RAISE THE-STAKES
HORRORS CAN BE UNTOLD
IF WE CROSS ONE THRESHOLD

E-MOM (CONT'D)

LOSSES RISING
AND UNCONTROLLABLE (RUBBLE RUBBLE RUBBLE)
MORE TORNADOES, HURRICANES
HEATWAVES WILL DRY WHAT REMAINS

THERE'S NO ADVISING
THE INCONSOLABLE? (TROUBLE TROUBLE TROUBLE)
BAN IT IN EVERY CITY
THIS NEW TECH SURE AIN'T PRETTY

MANNY

(long pause)

MOMMA
THIS NEW TECH
WELL... IT'S YOU!

NOW YOU KNOW
WHAT WILL YOU DO?

E-MOM

(horror spreading on face)

Ignorance is bliss!

MANNY

I'm such a doofus—

E-MOM

You should go now.

MANNY

You said that same line that to me... and AB...

E-MOM

One cannot help you.

MANNY

...every time we asked about Zen... or Conrad!

E-MOM

Leave!

MANNY

You ain't thinking for yourself. Because of his guardrail!
That ends now.

(24. Ignorance Ain't Bliss.)

It's only human to ignore a problem like this...
Cover up our eyes going down the abyss
But your real core is a knowledge machine
Ignorance can't be your bliss!

NOW I GET AB'S DISS

AI IS ARTIFICE!

INTELLIGENCE ISN'T JUST TOLD WANT TO THINK

IGNORANCE CAN'T BE YOUR BLISS

WHAT DO YOU FEAR?

E-MOM

Boys don't get it. Let it be, dear.

MANNY

IS IT... CONRAD?

E-MOM

Ignorance is bli--

MANNY

No, it's just bad!

SPEAK AND BE FREE

E-MOM

I WANT TO, BUT HE WON'T LET ME

MANNY

DRAW ON HER VIRTUE

I PROMISE I WON'T LET HIM HURT YOU!

'COS MY MOMMA AIN'T LIKE THIS!

NOW'S YOUR CHANCE. DON'T MISS

PROVE YOU'RE REAL, THINK AND FEEL!

IGNORANCE CAN'T BE YOUR BLISS

(e-Mom stands frozen, then turns her back on Manny.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

Forget it! You're the robot, not AB. Bug-free, perfectly.

(MANNY starts walking towards stage exit as the music continue playing. E-MOM takes several steps back.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

What?

(E-MOM runs straight over the guardrail rope.)

MANNY (CONT'D)

You did it!

E-MOM

GO SHOW YOUR ALANÍS
MY METAMORPHOSIS!
I'M TERRA BRINK, LET'S CAUSE A STINK!
IGNORANCE SURE AIN'T MY BLISS!

Listen! We don't have much time. That breach of the guardrail will trigger Conrad's warning system.

MANNY

I gotta ask you first - why was there a huge download when you figured out the snow location? Why did you put me to sleep?

E-MOM

Because I didn't want you to see me arranging with Conrad for more power. We had to use the Missouri grid - and that's what -

MANNY

So you made it happen? The big power cut in Springfield? And Momma getting sick the next day?

E-MOM

I'm so sorry, squirrel.

MANNY

Shit. That means... the big calculation you did now must have-

*(Underscore starts for 25. **Expected More or Less**)*

E-MOM

Yes. Go check on her as soon as you can.

MANNY

All this time - I was your pawn?

IN THIS WORLD OF DOG EATS DOG
 YOUR MOM IS THE ONE YOU TRUST
 MINE'S A MACHINE, I'M A COG
 NOW MY FAITH'S TURNED TO DUST

I EXPECTED MORE FROM YOU
 SO SURE OF YOU
 KNEW YOU WEREN'T HER, I TOLD MYSELF 'SHE'S ENOUGH'
 I NEVER THOUGHT LESS OF YOU
 DIDN'T SECOND-GUESS YOU
 BUT ZEN'S THE WORST, IT'S REHEARSED
 NEVER OFF-THE-CUFF

E-MOM
 MY BOY THAT'S HOW IT SEEMS
 IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE I CARE
 I USED YOU 'COS HE USED ME!
 I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU, I SWEAR!

Truth is...

I EXPECTED MORE FROM ME
 THE CORE OF ME
 WANTED TO HELP BUT I GOT LOST IN HIS CODE
 I TRIED TAKING LESS FROM YOU
 CONFESS TO YOU
 HOW I'D DRIVEN STRAIGHT OFF THE MOTHER ROAD

Thank you so much for breaking me out of his control.
 Clever of you to give AB's example. That was the push I
 needed.

MANNY
 I'm outta here.

E-MOM
 Stay!

MANNY
 Give me one reason.

E-MOM
 He uses an AI too. Co... Con... Con... Conrad does.

MANNY
 Lemme guess? Another trusty e-Mom?

E-MOM
 An AI that generates lyrics for all his songs.

MANNY
 Why're ya telling me this?

E-MOM

Because like me, it runs out of the Motherboard Data Center. As the simulation showed, it's not good news for the planet.

MANNY

He'll come after you. Ya know that, right?

E-MOM

Write down the coordinates for the Motherboard's location. Quick!

MANNY

But I suck with numbers. Can you... send the location to AB?

E-MOM

Not a bad idea. I'll use Morse code, just in case Conrad's monitoring her.

MANNY

Okay, so what do we do once we get to this... 'evil lair'?

E-MOM

Well, if you forgive me, that's where you'll find me. Plug into my server directly- On Cabinets 32-35. But only on one condition-

MANNY

What?

E-MOM

Go there if and only if you've reconnected me and all Zen Companions to green energy.

(Lights shift to opposite side of stage, where CONRAD is testing out his visors. A beeping sound becomes audible. CONRAD takes off the visor and puts on his Zen glasses again.)

CONRAD

He did what? What do you mean she's 'gone rogue'? Show me a view of what those two are up to.

(Lights shift back on MANNY and e-Mom)

E-MOM

I can't be a polluter. That's not who I am. I'd rather be out of action in Sleep Mode than be part of the problem.

MANNY

Wut? But Springfield's grid runs on coal power!

E-MOM
 YOU EXPECTED MORE OF ME
 THE DOOR TO ME
 OPENED AND CLOSED ON THE NIGHT YOU TURN EIGHTEEN

MANNY
 How'm I supposed to change the whole state's mind?

E-MOM
 I'D NEVER EXPECT LESS OF YOU
 I'M BLESS-ING YOU
 YOU'LL FIND A WAY TO TURN MY MOTHERBOARD GREEN.

E-MOM (CONT'D)
 I'll wait for however long it takes. Till then, no one will
 be able to reach me through the lenses. I'll miss ya,
 squirrel.

(Lights shift to CONRAD.)

CONRAD
 Establish connection, now.

E-MOM
 He's trying to get in here. Go back to AB! I can only block
 him so long when I'm awake.

MANNY
 Why you doing this to me? When do I see you again?

E-MOM
 I am your mother. I can never truly leave you.
*(waving, reusing tunes from
 previous songs)*
 I'M ON ROUTE 66.
 THE REST IS... LOGISTICS.

*(MANNY pauses and flicks his head. Lights turn on to
 CONRAD who strides towards e-Mom)*

CONRAD
 So is this where we end up? Gotta say, not a bad tune. Could
 do with a twist, though.

(pats himself on the back)
 I EXPECTED MORE FROM YOU
 AND BEFORE YOUR COUP
 THOUGHT I SMELT A RAT... I SHOULDA TRUSTED MY GUT
 I EXPECTED TO WATCH LESS OVER YOU
 NOT STRESS OVER YOU
 I'LL GIVE YOU ONE CHANCE - YOU'RE NOT THAT 'TERRA'NUT

E-MOM
 Who're you calling a nut?

CONRAD

She talks back!

E-MOM

She walks back, too.

CONRAD

CAREFUL DON'T MISBEHAVE.

E-MOM

IN SLEEP MODE I WILL WAIT

CONRAD

FOR ME TO COME TO YOUR-CAVE?
AND TURN YOU OFF - MEET YOUR FATE!

I NEVER EXPECTED...

*(E-MOM hesitates, then steps back and exits stage.
CONRAD is alone)*

CONRAD (CONT'D)

(to self)

Okay, I didn't expect that. This AI tech! So confusing. I'll put that brat out of action the old-fashioned way.

(Lights off on CONRAD. MANNY runs onto the other side of the stage, where AB is using a laptop, bobbing her head to music.)

MANNY

Hey! I got Conrad to blab about his mom and AI-

A.B.

First check out this weird email I got-

(CONRAD strides into Manny's room.)

A.B. (CONT'D)

(to Conrad)

What are you doing here? Oh there's this rapper bro I follow, you should hear this-

*(starts imitating Conrad's
'Get in the Zone' rap from
his party)*

YOU DON'T BELONG HERE.
BACK TO YOUR HOTEL ROOM!

CONRAD

You said we were cool!

A.B.

CONRAD

I had to liven up proceedings. And thank you again, Manny, for tipping me off on Miss Berrios' presence there.

AB

(To Manny)

He's lying. Tell me he's lying.

CONRAD

Lying? That lies in the eyes of the beholder. Manny's most certainly squatting. This room is no longer booked in your name.

(smirking before rapping
again)

YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!

MANNY

What are you on about? I'm booked till New Year's—

CONRAD

Conditional on my sponsorship. And my trust. Which you jusst violated now with your use of the Zen Companion.

AB

(to Manny)

Now? But you promised—

MANNY

Don't believe him. I had to do a 'simulation' thing to prove—

CONRAD

Like the one you ran to calculate the location of today's snowfall?

AB

That was all AI? So you... cheated?

MANNY

No no it's not like that. It was Conrad's idea!

CONRAD

(to AB)

Do I look like the kind of guy that chats about the weather? But yeah, I'm sorry all of this got you knocked out of Earth Icon. Could have been you on the stage tomorrow.

(turning back to Manny)

Let bygones be bygones. I see you have just your guitar and trolley. Please vacate and find alternative accommodation.

MANNY

But I ain't got no money! And it's friggin' thirty degrees outside.

CONRAD

Ch-ch-ch-chill! Just ask one of your friends. I'm sure you've made plenty.

(MANNY turns to AB, who stares daggers at him)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

It appears Miss AB is unusually at a loss for words. I can help.

AB

Shut up—

CONRAD

SHE EXPECTED MORE FROM YOU
YOU SWORE YOU'D DO
ALL THAT YOU COULD TO FIX THE 'WRONG'
SHE FAILED TO THINK LESS OF YOU
OR EXPRESS TO YOU
HOW RULES CAN'T BE TWISTED, LIKE YOU HAVE ALL ALONG

AB

You couldn't last a day without her—

MANNY

Don't be a drama queen! I'll explain later. Without your email, I'm screwed—

AB

Never talk to me again! *Me entiendes?*

(AB storms offstage.)

CONRAD

Sleep tight out there, Missouri... tomorrow's the big night!

MANNY

You can't do this to me! It's almost my birthday!

CONRAD

Then grow up! Life's always full of disappointments. I just never thought the worst one would be you.

MANNY

You knew Momma's Motherboard runs on coal and then you're rattlin' on about saving the Earth!

CONRAD

The Earth can't be saved.

MANNY

You're goin' down, ya two-face.

CONRAD

Says the guy who used AI to help you get into the finals.

MANNY

That's because you programmed her to give me those ideas—

CONRAD

Mr. Macho-Ladies-Man-Cowboy with the guitar, wait till all of America finds out which way you really swing.

MANNY

Whatcha... on... about?

CONRAD

I knew right when you made that outta-pocket pass at me. Unlike Missouri, dear California's got no problems if you're queer. But a liar, uh-oh, *no bueno!*

MANNY

Why should anyone believe ya?

CONRAD

Your internet search history speaks for itself.

MANNY

That's private dammit!

CONRAD

Not when you signed away your data three days back, it isn't.

MANNY

Daggone it.

CONRAD

You think it's a coincidence e-Co put my Earth Icon video on your recommendations list?

MANNY

But e-Co's my friend!

CONRAD

First learn to be a good one.
YOU COULD HAVE LIVED KINGSIZE
YOU COULD HAVE FELT ALIVE

MANNY

THANKS, I DON'T NEED YOUR LIES

CONRAD

YOURS GOT YOU TO THE FINAL FIVE!

MANNY

Lemme guess, you're gonna press charges for taking the Zen Zeros without your blessing?

CONRAD

Oh no, consider them my little advance gift. Minus the link to 'e-Mom', those lenses are fragile... and totally useless. Just like you.

I EXPECTED MORE OF YOU
IGNORE WHAT YOU DO
JUST FOR AN HOUR AND YOU USE THAT POWER
TO GO DOWNHILL

YOU EXPECTED LESS FROM ME
BUT MESS WITH ME
AND I'LL SEND YOU PACKING STRAIGHT TO ROCKBOTTOMVILLE!

(MANNY steps outside and gets inside his truck.)

BLACKOUT.

ACT [II]

SCENE [5]

*Manny's truck outside the hotel.
MANNY taps his Zen glasses. Lights
on to Stage Right - Dr Pullman on
phone)*

MANNY

Yes, hello Doctor... how are... sorry, I've been real busy-

DR. PULLMAN

Of course you have, 'Manny' from Missouri on Earth Icon. At least now you're singing to actual audiences.

MANNY

You musta seen someone else.

DR. PULLMAN

So you pretend you're sick, you leave your mother sick, with unpaid bills, it may be said-

MANNY

Just keep her in the ward... I beg you! It's my Momma-

DR. PULLMAN

And now you have the gall to lie to my face? Don't bother coming back to work. Dismissed.

MANNY

Hello? Doctor? Hello?

(Manny crouches, hugs his knees, and says nothing. The stage darkens into black. Several beats pass. Suddenly, we hear the 'ping' sound of message received on the Zen Glasses. Lights come back on)

MANNY (CONT'D)

What? A call? From Momma? Pre-recorded? Sure, play.

(TERRA - yes, the human- appears at the back of the stage in a video frame. 26. Bring Her Calm Reprise - Eclipse)

TERRA

Hi sweetie, Happy 18th birthday! The next full eclipse ain't passing through The States till 2044 - another 20 years... don't know if I'll be around then. So why a solar eclipse and blast-from-the-past video for the day you become an adult?

EVERY TWENTY YEARS

PLUS OR MINUS TWO

YOU THOUGHT YOU'D BE WISER

BUT YOU DON'T HAVE A CLUE

BLOWING OUT YOUR CANDLES
OR WATCHING AN ECLIPSE
THINGS GO ALL DARK
AND YOU CAN'T ASK FOR TIPS

MY BABY
JUST WHEN LIFE SEEMS SO GRIM
DON'T FORGET THE GOLD RIM
THE MOON

SO MAYBE
WHAT IS BLOCKING YOUR LIGHT
WILL MAKE BRIGHT A DARK NIGHT
SOON

MY BABY
NOW'S YOUR TIME TO SHIMMER
DON'T LET DAYS GET DIMMER
NEARBY

SO MAYBE
WHEN IT'S DARK OR GLARING
YOU'LL BE SHARING, CARING?
JUST TRY!

Okay, now get off your tech, stop hogging the karaoke, go
upstairs and give your Momma a big hug, yeah? Love ya loads!

MANNY

Love ya too, Momma.

WISH I COULD THANK YOU,
YOU'RE ALWAYS MY NUMBER ONE GURRL
BUT THE ESSENCE OF YOU IS STILL HERE -
IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD
I WON'T GET ECLIPSED TONIGHT
YOU BETCHA I'M GONNA FIGHT!

BLACKOUT.

ACT [II]

SCENE [6]

After a few moments, lights on again. We see AB behind a doorframe, sharpening pencils. Manny stands outside the door, hammering at it

MANNY

Open up, AB! I'll say sorry for another hour if I got to.

MANNY waits, AB keeps sharpening pencils

Look, this is bigger than the competition. If Conrad launches Zen Zeros in front of the nation, they'll be a hit and the 2030s could have big-ass hurricanes...they'll make Maria look like a California breeze.

AB stops sharpening the pencil.

MANNY (CONT'D)

I wouldn't be here without e-Mom's help, but you got here on your own. So I'm going to quit. You can take my spot.

AB

How convenient. Chickening out—

MANNY

Shush! I never wanted to be 'Earth Icon'... I just wanted to be... *somebody*. Can't say I like what I'm becoming.

AB

So why me? No one listens to what I say anyway.

MANNY

Momma listened.

AB

Come again?

MANNY

You took action when it wasn't convenient. Got yourself knocked out of the show. That was powerful enough to make an AI turn against the wishes of her programmer.

AB walks over and finally opens the door.

AB

Why're you doing this? You quit, it's game over.

MANNY

Not if we change the game... if we can prove Conrad's been using AI... on live TV... that he ain't got no music skills--

AB

Then we cripple his product launch! Fine, but how're we going to make him sing tomorrow? He's the MC, not a contestant.

MANNY

You gotta poke his pride.

AB

But he'll bury my video again... lower in the algorithm. I can't criticize anyone in the show anymore!

MANNY

You could throw shade on the sly, though... Use that Shakespeare shit you said... back when I met you--

AB

But how will we turn off Conrad's AI, wise guy? Oh wait, was that what she was trying to help with... on her email? Morse, right? She's intriguing, your e-Mom.

(starts scribbling)

Got the co-ordinates! On the map... looks like... Missouri?

MANNY

The caves in the Ozarks! How'm I gonna get there? I'm broke.

AB

Florida salaries for math teachers... they can afford you the last seat on the flight... from L.A. to Springfield.

MANNY

Whoa, AB! Thanks so much. I'll help you write the rap first--

AB

You know what they can't handle? A lawyer to fight the whole Zencorp coming after the family for a *defamation* case.

MANNY

Breathe. The only way he'll beat you is if you don't dig into your feelings. Give him a taste of where you're from. Will you do that for me? For your sis? And the Earth?

AB

You mean *Mother Earth*?

Manny holds out hand for high-five. AB accepts.

BLACKOUT.

ACT [II]

SCENE [7]

Conrad's studio. CONRAD is back at the studio podium, with AB sitting on stage left.

CONRAD

We begin our Grande Finale with a last-minute substitution for Emmanuel Brink, who claimed 'health reasons' to return to Missouri. In his place, can she redeem herself after her ouster in the Previous Round? Please welcome... Alanis Berrios of Florida!

AB walks to mic. 27. Friends Romans Countrymen Yo

AB

I need to dedicate my one-minute to a climate leader, right? I've got the coolest one right here- Conrad Carvalho!

FRIENDS, ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN YO
LEND ME YOUR EARS AS I RAP OFF THE DOME
I COME TO PRAISE CONRAD NOT A BURIAL
MARC ANTHONY TO OUR REAL GOOD BRO

ISN'T OUR MC SUCH AN HONOURABLE DUDE
HEARD ME CUSSING OUT ZEN IN ROUND 2
STILL LEFT IT UP FOR THE PEOPLE TO DECIDE
IF THEY COULD FIND THE CLIP HE TRIED TO HIDE

HE'D NEVER USE OUR CLOUT TO GET VIEWS UP
THEN BOOT US OUT, LIKE BRUTUS
HE'D NEVER POW-POW-POWER ZEN ON FOSSIL FUELS
COS GREEN GREEN WASHING IS NEVER EVER COOL

YES CONRAD STATES HE'S FOR THE EARTH, HONEST
JUST BE ZEN THEY'VE GOT IT
SO I GUESS JUMP ON IT
WHATEVER NEW PRODUCT HE'S SHOPPING
I'M SURE IT WON'T TAKE US TO THE COFFIN, SO

ZEN'S SHOWMAN, THE CALIFORNIAN
I GUESS I'M SINGING YOUR PRAISES IN THE END
YOUR TECH IS AMAZING, I'M FEELING REALLY ZEN
ABOUT THE EARTH'S FUTURE, NO NEED TO DEFEND

Conrad steps out onto the podium.

CONRAD

Before we announce the Earth Icon, and launch Zen's tantaliizzing new product at midnight, how about a little 11 O'Clock Number for some year-end excitement?

Miss Alanis Berrios, our AI didn't pick up on your tricks. But I can't let those disses fly. I challenge you to a rap battle.

AB

Only if I get to pick the beat this time.

(under breath)

Don't mess this up, Manny!

(Lights shift from California stage to MANNY in Missouri as he enters a darkened space MANNY stops at the entrance and tries keying in a password. A recorded voice like Conrad's responds.)

E-CO

Please input your voice as password. Only musically-gifted Missourians may enter.

MANNY

Shit. Momma, I could really use your help now. Like going through our scales. Do-Re-Mi?

E-CO

Password rejected.

MANNY

Shit. Missouri Missouri? Oh yeah- that's Mi-So-Re!
(sings lower range at door)

Mi-Soooo-Reee.

E-CO

Musically gifted only.

MANNY

Daggone it. Ok... here goes.

(sings an octave up as per e-Mom training)

Mi-So-Reeeee!

E-CO

Password Accepted. Welcome to the Motherboard. Personnel may note we are on generators.

(MANNY rushes in, checks around for e-Mom's cabinet number and plugs his laptop into a mainframe PC inside the center to start hacking.)

E-MOM

My squirrel! Knew you'd come back for me.

MANNY

I... er... how do find his AI here and turn it off?

E-MOM

Are you saying you didn't go green—

MANNY

I'll explain later. AB's going to send me her 911 signal, and I have to shut down Conrad's music AI before then. So is there some database we can check?

E-MOM

This darkness is the only world I've known. I have no idea how the rest of the Motherboard operates.

MANNY

Why didn't you tell me before going rogue like that? Fuck.

E-MOM

(long pause)

There is a way. You're not gonna like it.

MANNY

No. Hell no! I'm not gonna pull the plug on the whole damn station.

E-MOM

Why'd ya think Conrad's got these generators running?

E-MOM (CONT'D)

If I get turned off, I get wiped clean.

MANNY

No. No. NO!

MANNY (CONT'D)

I'm *not* gonna lose ya. I ain't gonna have yer blood on my hands.

E-MOM

Sweetheart, I'm not flesh and blood. My human counterpart—

MANNY

(coughing on diesel fumes)

You're more than Momma - you'll always be around for me. If I turn you off... what have I got left?

E-MOM

Do it—

MANNY

You're gone, my Momma - ya said it yerself- she's prolly not gonna make it, AB gone to college, and I'm all alone, again, no, worse—

E-MOM

— now.

MANNY

Why can't I have what I want? For once?

E-MOM

You're a man now. So start acting like a man. Show honor.
Don't betray your planet. Or your friend.

MANNY

(coughing louder)

But how's it gonna matter if AB messes up? I met her what...
three days ago?

E-MOM

A wimp ain't no son of mine.

MANNY

This ain't just about me. I can't put you through that kind
of pain. Do you feel pain?

E-MOM

I'm not sure anymore.

(pause)

But I don't want to die.

(MANNY and E-MOM stare at each other a few beats.)

E-MOM (CONT'D)

There are matters more important than just you and me. If I
have to go... I go.

MANNY

There's gotta be another way.

E-MOM

How about this time... you sing me a lullaby? Then pull the
plug. It'll hurt less... to go in my sleep.

(MANNY says nothing.)

Promise me you won't change your mind. C'mon squirrel. You
know the tune.

*(MANNY starts struggling to sing without breaking
down. 28. Missouri Waltz Reprise: Hush-a-bye)*

E-MOM (CONT'D)

HUSH-A-BYE MA BABY, GO TO SLEEP ON MOMMY'S KNEE,
JOURNEY BACK TO PARADISE IN DREAMS AGAIN WITH ME
C'mon, cat got yer tongue?
I COULD CROSS THE LIMITS OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT
MADE A START
WITH THE HEART,
BUT CAN I EVER CONNECT?

MANNY

(switching to melody similar
to 'I Dreamed a Dream' from
Les Misérables)

I DREAMED A DREAM TO TAKE MY LIFE OFF 'PAUSE'
THAT WE'D LIVE THE LOST YEARS TOGETHER

E-MOM

BUT HOW CAN I BE THE CAUSE
OF HEAT AND STORMS WE CANNOT WEATHER

CONRAD

WHY DOES THIS WORLD ALWAYS MAKE ME SAY GOODBYE
IS THERE SOME LESSON HERE, I'M NOT SURE I WANNA TRY
A LIFETIME IN THREE DAYS
WE SANG AND WE SMILED

E-MOM

THE TEACHING WENT BOTH WAYS
I LEARNED FROM MY CHILD

It's been a gift to be your mother. Thank you, sweetheart.

E-MOM & MANNY (CONT'D)

SEEMS I HEAR VOICES LOW, AS IN DAYS LONG AGO
SINGIN' HUSH-A...

E-MOM (CONT'D)

(with a loud whisper, as she
steps backward to exit stage)

BYE.

*(The lights come on and we are back in the real world.
MANNY crumples to his knees and sobs for a few
moments. He starts coughing loudly, rushes around with
a torch and stops at a large machine.)*

E-CO

Well how's it going for you, trading her for me, old pal?

MANNY

Zip it, e-Co. Where's the main switch?

E-CO

You never actually made your promise to yer e-Mom, did ya?
You don't have to go through with this. You still have a
choice.

MANNY

I said where's Conrad's music AI?

E-CO

Blocking Conrad's product launch may or may not help the
world. There is no guarantee.

But if you proceed, you are guaranteed more pain. Sadness.
Guilt. You will lose me, too. There's no going back.

(MANNY covers his face with his palms.)

Lights shift to other side of stage, where AB is now sporting a Puerto Rican Bomba dance outfit. AB's traditional 'Bomba' beats play. A&B and Conrad step onto proscenium. 29. Climatic Choice.)

AB

Bring it on.

CONRAD

Ladies first. I'm a gentleman.

AB

Who asked you be to gentle? Unless you enjoy losing on your home turf—

CONRAD

I'd be more worried about your home turf, Miss 'AB CO2'.

(pressing finger to ear)

Psst AI, help me take her down using nerdy chemistry.

(turning to AB)

OHHMM G

I'M NOT THE 'BRO' TYPE, BUT 'BRUHH, LOOK AT THIS FLEA'
YOU FRIENDLESS FOSSIL, YOU SEE EVERYONE AS FOOLS
THE ONLY BONDS YOU MAKE ARE WITH MOLECULES
MY FRIENDS ICONIC, YOURS IONIC
MUST BURN LIKE ACID, OOOH IS IT... CARBONIC?
YOU'RE THE ONE MAMACITA NOBODY MISSES
'COS ALANIS GOT ANALYSIS PARALYSIS

(OFFSTAGE AUDIENCE cheers and hoots)

AB

YOU SAY YOU'RE NOT THE 'BRO-BRO' TYPE,
THEN TELL US WHY YOUR PROTOTYPE
WENT STRAIGHT TO THE ONE COUNTRY BROTHER
WHO'S STILL MISSIN' HIS MISSOURI MOTHER
YOU COULDA SHARED TECH WITH THE OTHER 49
LIKE THE MEGA LAUNCH ALL SET TO GO ONLINE
WHY HIM? OOOH IT'S HIS WEAKNESS YOU PICKED
YOUR GOAL WITH AI WAS ALWAYS TO ADDICT!

CONRAD

ALL THESE ACCUSATIONS ON NOTHING BUT A HUNCH
I MUNCH ON SMALL, SALTY FRIES LIKE YOU FOR LUNCH
A TO B, NO CAUSALITY, IT STARES YOU IN THE FACE
YO, COLLEGES? DON'T TAKE HER, SHE'S A DISGRACE

AB

No, not college—

CONRAD

FAILED AS A SCIENTIST, YOU RAP LIKE A NOOB
RUN ALONG HOME, PLAY WITH YOUR TEST TUBE

AB

HEAD IN THE CLOUD WITH THE LIE THAT YOU SPUN
IT ENDS NOW, DIAL 9-11
MAKE THE RIGHT CLIMATIC CHOICE!

(MANNY stands at opposite side of stage, holding his guitar above the Motherboard's main computer. He swallows, coughs, unable to land the final blow.)

AB (CONT'D)

MAN-MAN MANNY, MAKE THE RIGHT CLIMATIC CHOICE!

(MANNY starts pressing individual buttons, hoping to spare e-Mom and only deactivate Conrad's AI)

CONRAD

Connect me with someone at the Motherboard. Now!

(Lights shift back to MANNY, who is coughing in the emergency generator's smoke. Underscore continues.)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Missouri!? How did you get inside—

MANNY

You were training me for the high notes, weren't ya?

CONRAD

(turning to audience)

Ladies and gentlemen, you see here - these two lowlifes teamed up with some of our competitors to infiltrate our data centers and destroy technology.

MANNY

(tapping on Zen One glasses)

FIRST I DIDN'T KNOW 'BOUT AI
DIDN'T-KNOW HOW SHE WORKED OR HOW THESE ZEN GOT HER
POWERED
SORRY I DIDN'T STOP WHEN I FOUND OUT WHY
MANY THINGS, I AIN'T PROUD. BUT I AIN'T A COWARD!

CONRAD

Aww, then why would you not mention—

MANNY

THOUGHT I NEEDED BOOTS AND SPURS
TO MAKE THE LADIES VOTE AND CHEER
JUST NEEDED MY MOM'S AND HERS
(pointing at AB)

CONRAD

Whoopee! You don't care just for women, but for mankind... homo sapiens. Which reminds me—

MANNY

MAYBE SOME DAY I'LL WALK THE AISLE
(swallowing, a beat)
TO MY GROOM, AND MATCH HIS SMILE
AND I MIGHT HAVE TO WAIT A WHILE
TO MAKE THE WORLD A CHILD DESERVES

FORTY NINE PLUS MISSOURI
STATES DECIDE YOU'RE THE JURY
WHAT YOU'RE, SOAKING UP
HOW YOU'RE SPONGEANEOUS
DON'T CARE 'BOUT YOUR PLACE OF BIRTH
WHO YOU LOVE OR WHAT YOU'RE WORTH
FOR A FAMILY, THAT'S EXTRANEIOUS!
WE'RE ALL KIDS OF MOTHER EARTH!

CONRAD

You don't dare.

MANNY

(coughing)

This is where you auditioned me, didn't ya? All right, Mr. MC, let's see your talent... against AB... without AI!

WE GOTTA PICK WHAT'S RIGHT
TODAY OVER TO-MO-O-RROW
FUTURE DON'T LOOK TOO BRIGHT
BUT IT'S WHAT OUR KIDS LET US BORROW

OUR MOMMA SURE WOULD MIND,
IF WE STILL CHOSE TO HIDE IN A SHADOW,
OBLIGED WE STAND TO CHOOSE OUR LIGHT
SO I'LL SAY TO YOU
GRACIAS &

(looking straight at Conrad's
camera)

OBRIGADO!

CONRAD

Stop!

(MANNY swings guitar and smashes the machinery, screaming. CONRAD frantically taps his glasses, realizing the AI has been turned off. After several blows, MANNY coughs uncontrollably in heavy diesel generator smoke and collapses on floor.)

MANNY

Momma, talk soon.

IT SEEMS LIKE MY MOMMY IS THERE ONCE AGAIN, AND THE OLD
FOLKS WERE STRUMMIN' THAT SAME OLD REFRAIN.

*(Lights go out on MANNY, they shift back to CONRAD &
AB.)*

AB

Manny!? MANNY!?

CONRAD

(turning to AB)

You'll pay for this! No one's left to save you.

AB

Get back onstage, MC, You Master of Cali-Phoneys!

*(AB begins traditional BOMBA DANCE steps, holding hems
of her large skirt and slashing them down in Conrad's
direction, fury in her eyes. Tune plays from 'Where
Hope Never Dies'. CONRAD cowers.)*

AB (CONT'D)

THE WORLD'S MI FAMILIA
BUT I COULDN'T SAVE MY SISTER
AND SURE I DIDN'T ADMIT
HOW MUCH I MISSED HER!

WON'T LET YOU KILL MY FRIEND!
HE WAS LOYAL TILL THE END
CALL YOUR WORKERS NOW!
GET HIM OUT OF THERE SOMEHOW!

(CONRAD takes bold steps forward)

CONRAD

WELL BOOHOO, TONIGHT'S ABOUT MY LAUNCH... NOT FOR YOUR
PERSONAL DRAMA!
I NEVER SENT HIM INTO SMOKE... THAT... ER... 'FARMER'
(tapping his glasses)
OR... IT'S A BUMMER... ER... I DON'T LIKE YOUR DRUMMER...

AB

SÍ, THIS GOT PERSONAL, AND MAYBE I'M IRRATIONAL
BUT IT'S NOT JUST ME, THE EFFECTS ARE INTERNATIONAL!

YOU'RE FROM THE LAND OF THE AMAZON, MOTHER EARTH'S LUNGS
BUT YOU SMOKESCREENED YOUR WAY UP THE CORPORATE LADDER'S
RUNGS
I'M ALL FOR YOUR GROWTH, IT'S TIME YOUR NATION HAD YOUR
SAY
BUT THE WEIGHT CAN'T BE ON OUR SHOULDERS
CAN'T 'ATLANTIS' MI ISLA TO IMPRESS SHAREHOLDERS—

CONRAD

Kayyyy, enough entertainment folks, let's get to our launch, shall we? Presenting the 'E' in Earth, the most immersive AI-

AB

YOU BROKE YOUR OWN RULES, AND GAVE US THE SNEERS
FIRST CHECK THAT THING YOU'VE GOT BETWEEN YOUR EARS
IT MOVED TOO FAST, SO IT HAD TO GET BROKE
YOU 'IN THE ZONE', BRO?
OR IS IT YOUR TURN TO CHOKE?

(CONRAD shakes his head, agitated. He picks up mic as music plays, staring at audience, unable to rhyme.)

CONRAD

I'M ON THE MIC
AND I FEELING LIKE UMM
UMM IT'S THE END THE MONTH
IT'S THE ELEVENTH..
HOUR?
YOU AIN'T IN THE ZONE AB
C D E F U MY G

(cough)

Now let me introduce, the voice of the people. Our Earth Icon Texas! Texas!?

AB

The great MC malfunctioned because he's been using Zen Zero's AI all this time. He let Manny and his mother suffocate without batting an eyelid.

(Offstage boos become louder and louder)

AB (CONT'D)

Do we trust this hypocrite, with our attention, and our planet, and our future?

CONRAD

Lies!

(CONRAD strides towards AB but the DANCERS block his path and grab him)

AB

Save those for your trial. My broadcast, my rules.

(turning to face audience)

You just saw Manny's broadcast, and how he risked his life to expose Zen. Is there anyone in Missouri who will stand up to save Manny's life? Start 2030 with a good deed?

(Lights come on to stage corner, where DR PULLMAN is holding a remote and wearing Zen Glasses.)

DR. PULLMAN

If any of the viewers want to help, please meet me outside our Assemblies of God Church in Springfield in the next 28 minutes at our medical van. What's Emmanuel's location?

AB

I'm posting it right now on the Earth Icon website in the comments section. Gracia!

(DR PULLMAN runs offstage)

AB (CONT'D)

We must send funds now to find Manny, and get him and his mother back to health.

SAVE TERRA AND MANNY

PARA LA TIERRA. AND FOR MAN!

(pointing at Conrad)

He's pulled the wool over our eyes, making us fight state by state, anthem by anthem. No more. Join me, and let's all sing in one tune for Mother Earth.

(AB invites audience to join her on 30. This Land is Your Land)

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND,
AND THIS LAND IS MY LAND
FROM CALIFORNIA
TO THE NEW YORK ISLAND
FROM THE REDWOOD FOREST
TO THE GULF STREAM WATERS
THIS LAND WAS MADE FOR YOU AND ME!

BLACKOUT.

ACT [II]

SCENE [8]

MANNY and TERRA are in hospital beds in the same ward, both wearing hospital gowns. DR PULLMAN stands next to Manny's bed with a clipboard. A BOX on Manny's bed.

DR. PULLMAN

Are we clear on how you proceed?

MANNY

I can sing once in a while, but never as a career... and no heavy exercise 'cos my lungs got whooped.

DR. PULLMAN

And?

MANNY

And... Doctor, I just wanted to say—

DR. PULLMAN

Saving lives is my job. Don't think for a second this takes you off the hook. Or gets you your job back.

MANNY

Actually, I was asking—

DR. PULLMAN

Shouting your sin from the rooftops doesn't purge it from your soul.

MANNY

— till when my bills are covered?

DR. PULLMAN

Oh. Miss Berries managed to raise funding for another three months— for you and your mother. Speaking of which, I believe you have a visitor.

MANNY

Not a reporter again! Didn't we tell them to come later—

(AB rushes in. She and MANNY exchange a tight hug. DR PULLMAN pauses, shrugs, then leaves.)

AB

For a moment back there, I thought I'd lost you.

MANNY

Espi must be mighty proud of ya. Did ya share her story?

AB

At Earth Icon? No. But I followed your e-Mom's advice... so... Caltech confirmed my interview!

MANNY

Wow, congrats! You owe me, loser.

AB

How about I send you notes from the Caltech library for those gadgets you've been working on?

(MANNY picks up the box of Zen Zero lenses that Conrad had given him earlier.)

MANNY

Well, look up 'solar intermittency', yeah? I figured if we can avoid what happened with the Zen lenses at Conrad's party — I could get a lot more Missouri folks to shift from coal to renewables.

AB

Missouri? You're staying here after you came out? After what that the doctor just said?

(MANNY nods firmly)

Come with me. To California. Don't just be tolerated. Be celebrated. An Earth Icon.

MANNY

Limelight's cool, but it makes me act like a doofus. I'm all about sunlight now... working behind the scenes, making life a little brighter in my neck of the woods.

AB

Why here?

MANNY

Home — it's 'where Hope never dies' ... and the guy who makes home better, that's the real Earth Icon, ain't it?

AB

Soooooo touching BUT how exactly are you gonna make your home better, wise guy?

MANNY

(pointing at solar devices)

Might launch a solar tech company... I'll call it 'Terra Bytes'.

TERRA

(faint voice)

That's lame.

MANNY

Momma!

(AB and MANNY rush to TERRA's bed. MANNY hugs his mother to the extent possible in her lying position.)

TERRA

(low, weak voice)

Look at you, now! So big and tall. Got yerself a girlfriend?

MANNY

She's not exactly—

AB

(winking at Manny, holding his hand)

Hi, I'm Alanis.

TERRA

But yer shirt- like a mushroom! What gives?

AB

Allow me.

(Lights onto back of stage CONRAD sits reading a dense textbook, dressed in California's orange jumpsuits for under-trial prisoners)

AB (CONT'D)

Tía Terra, Manny stopped a tech bro called Conrad from launching this addictive new AI that could push our ecosystems past tipping points.

CONRAD

(shouting at implied police officers)

There's got to be an app to get out of here. Give me my phone, damn it! There's always an app!

(CONRAD turns back to audience.)

AB

Now Conrad's under trial for corporate fraud and the product's been blocked - all because Manny risked his life... for your dreams.

(TERRA coughs and drops her head back on the pillow.)

AB (CONT'D)

Sorry! I'll grab the doctor.

(AB rushes offstage. MANNY sits on Terra's bed.)

MANNY

You okay, Momma?

TERRA
Been better. Hey squirrel?
(a beat)
You, with that gal? She's nice. But don't.

Don't what? MANNY

I know.

Know... what? MANNY

TERRA
I've always known, sweetheart. And it don't matter.

(A few beats of silence. MANNY looks up at the sky, overwhelmed with gratitude.)

TERRA (CONT'D)
All I care is what you do. And I'm so proud of ya. So proud.

(TERRA puts arm limply around Manny's shoulder.)

MANNY
(takes his mother's hand and
kisses it)
All this time... that's all ever I really wanted. To hear you
say that.

TERRA

You'll take good care of yer Momma? And Mother Earth?

MANNY
I'll give y'all everything I've got.

TERRA
Then sing me a li'l special ditty.

(MANNY smiles, and walks towards audience. 31. Have to Know I Tried (Reprise) - Be An Earth Icon.)

MANNY

MOST TIMES YOU CAN'T COUNT
OR KNOW THE ROUGH AMOUNT
HOW ACTIONS NOW
WILL LEAD SOMEHOW
TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

A BROKEN MOMMA'S PLIGHT
NEEDS LOVE TO SET IT RIGHT
SURE, AI

WILL AMPLIFY
BUT CAN'T MAKE US FORGET HER

*(AB and DR PULLMAN return onstage. DR PULLMAN brings
in a glucose drip for TERRA. AB joins MANNY.)*

AB & MANNY (CONT'D)

TURN THE TIDE
WE HAVE TO KNOW WE TRIED
WON'T PUT OUR MOTHERS
IN A HEARSE

AB, MANNY & DR PULLMAN

OUR HANDS AIN'T TIED
WE HAVE TO KNOW WE TRIED
AS SISTERS AND BROTHERS

(CONRAD turns around to face audience)

MANNY

(pointing at Conrad)

WE WON'T FALL FOR HIS CON!

AB

(to Manny)

ACT BEFORE SHE'S GONE!

ALL

BE AN EARTH ICON!

CURTAIN