

THE CORNER OF ETERNITY

By Ben Gillman

[A stage in complete darkness. Until-]

VOICE: In the beginning, there was light.

*[There's rumble and crash of thunder and-
A single beam of light hits the stage.]*

VOICE: The light split the heavens and the earth. Ancient primordial gases were begotten. Coalescing into pools of acids and swirls of proteins. The oceans began to teem. The lands filled with all manner of plant and beast. Dying. Living. Rising. Growing. Building. For eons until-

[A street light turns on.

The entire stage is illuminated and-

A dirty, dressed-in-rags homeless woman - TINA - shuffles in. She holds a tall can of beer in a paper bag. Once she reaches the corner, she plops down. And cracks open the beer.]

TINA: Well, Billie, here we are. It's hard to believe that it's been all this time already. It seems like just yesterday, we were walking down this street together. But you've been gone a week already. A week. Hard to believe. Seems so long. And not long at all. God, I miss you. Nobody knows what happened right here. Nobody but me. And you. And you can't tell anybody. But, God, can I see it.

[As Tina is monologue-ing - DR. GRIFFITH, a wild-eyed scientist, enters. His face is buried in his notes as he checks calculations and mutters to himself. His arms are filled with papers and complex instruments. He hums with excitement until he sees Tina.]

TINA: I can see you, Billie. I can still see you everywhere. And it breaks my heart. Breaks my freaking heart.

[Dr. Griffith watches her and tries to be patient. But he can't.]

DR GRIFFITH: Excuse me.

TINA: Everytime I think of you, Billie, it breaks my freaking heart.

DR GRIFFITH: *(clearing his throat)* Hmm-mmmm.

TINA: God, I miss you.

DR GRIFFITH: Miss...

TINA: Ah, it hurts so bad.

DR GRIFFITH: Do you think you'll be very much longer?

TINA: (*finally noticing Dr. Griffith*) Can't you see I'm having a moment here?!

DR GRIFFITH: Um... yes. No. Actually, you seem to be- I don't know what you're doing.

TINA: I'm talking to Billie.

DR GRIFFITH: Is Billie your alcoholic beverage?

TINA: My alco-? No, Billie's not my beer!

DR GRIFFITH: Is Billie your psychological projection?

TINA: What? No! Billie died right here. Right here. I'm talking to him.

DR GRIFFITH: A spectre! Billie's a spectre. Wonderful. Intangible. Imaginary. Scientifically preposterous, but that's neither here nor there. The point is, you can do that anywhere. So, if you wouldn't mind taking your conversation and just moving along to-

TINA: Who the hell do you think you are?

DR GRIFFITH: My apologies, "ma'am," but I have work that you cannot possibly... This corner is... I have things to do here that could change the scientific... So if you wouldn't mind leaving-

TINA: I was here first.

DR GRIFFITH: Technically, yes. But I have been searching for this spot much longer than you could possibly believe.

TINA: I was here first.

DR GRIFFITH: This spot. This location. This corner is of vital importance to me, to science, to the existence of our entire world. And I demand you leave so that I may begin studying it properly.

TINA: It's more important to me.

DR GRIFFITH: No, it isn't.

TINA: Yeah, it is.

DR GRIFFITH: No, it isn't.

TINA: Yeah, it is.

DR GRIFFITH: Your little friend who died here is but a blip on the cosmic scale of what this very spot represents for the history of our very planet.

TINA: Buddy, you talk about Billie like that again, and I'm gonna kick your ass.

[Dr Griffith paces and stews for a few minutes until-]

DR GRIFFITH: Shoo.

TINA: Did you just shoo me?

DR GRIFFITH: Come now. Shoo. Be gone. Disperse. Vacate the premises, ma'am.

TINA: Thesaurus, I am this close to cracking your skull.

DR GRIFFITH: I'll call the police.

TINA: For what?

DR GRIFFITH: Public lewdness.

TINA: Are you saying I ain't pretty?

DR GRIFFITH: An open container then.

TINA: I can finish this at the drop of a hat.

DR GRIFFITH: Vagrancy!

TINA: What?!

DR GRIFFITH: Would you please just leave, madam?! Don't you understand?! I must do tests. I must determine with absolute certainty that I am right.

TINA: What is your big deal with this here corner?

DR GRIFFITH: (*dismissively*) You wouldn't understand.

TINA: Well, I'm not leaving here. I promised to spend the night with Billie. So you can do tests on my fat ass.

DR GRIFFITH: You can't possibly plan to stay here all night.

TINA: I've slept on worse corners than this.

DR GRIFFITH: But- but- but- Science!

TINA: Just tell me, what's the big deal with this here corner?

DR GRIFFITH: (*resigned*) Fine. It is far greater than you could possibly comprehend but- I believe that this particular spot may be the absolute beginning of life on this planet. Where a perfect confluence of chemicals, circumstances, and timing converged to create the conditions which led to life as we now know it.

[*A long pause.*
Tina offers her beer to Dr. Griffith.]

TINA: I think you need this more than I do.

DR GRIFFITH: I told you you wouldn't understand!

TINA: You think this is the center of life and everything? In Dayton, Ohio?

DR GRIFFITH: Yes.

TINA: This isn't even the center of the state.

DR GRIFFITH: I have spent my life, nearly every waking hour, studying the complex systems of the earth on a geologic, eonic scale. The shifting of continents. The rise and fall of oceans. Floating magma. Erosions of mountains. Inversions of poles. Ice Ages and droughts. Solar flares and asteroid strikes. I assure you, madam, that what you now consider a street corner was once something very different. It was the place where this planet began to evolve, convalesce, and culture. Amino acids. Parameciums. Single cell organisms. Fauna. Kings of beasts. And me! It's all led to this very moment. And you're ruining it!

TINA: I was here first.

DR GRIFFITH: Aaaaaahhhhhh!!!!

[Dr Griffith collapses to the ground in frustration.]

DR GRIFFITH: You are impossible, madam. And I don't use that term lightly.

TINA: Tina.

DR GRIFFITH: Pardon.

TINA: My name's Tina. You can stop calling me "madam."

DR GRIFFITH: Dr. Tennyson Griffith.

TINA: Have you given up there, Dr. Griffith?

DR GRIFFITH: No, I have not. I am currently concocting a new scenario that will eventually succeed in convincing your addle-minded form to abandon this spot so that I can give it the scientific attention it duly deserves.

TINA: I'm gonna keep sitting here with Billie.

[They sit in stony silence together for a long time.]

TINA: Anyway, I heard the earth has only been here for 6,000 years. Maybe you got your stories mixed up.

DR GRIFFITH: Where did you hear that? Do you really believe that? How could you believe that?

TINA: Heard it in church.

DR GRIFFITH: Ha! Preposterous.

TINA: Well, they give me a hot meal and place to sleep on cold nights - you've never given me anything. I'll stick with them.

[Dr Griffith shakes his head as he rises to pace in frustration.]

TINA: Unless, you'd like to give me a little something more to leave my spot.

DR GRIFFITH: What?

TINA: I can come back to see Billie another time... For a hundred bucks.

DR GRIFFITH: A hundred...?! In the face of the enormity of this scientific... enormity?!

TINA: It's a bargain, right? C'mon....

DR GRIFFITH: (*searching through his pockets*) I-I-I don't have- Would you accept twenty-three dollars and my lifetime pass to the Space Museum at Cape Cod?

TINA: That's all you got on you?

DR GRIFFITH: I don't concern myself much with earthy minutiae. I consider myself a brief inhabitant of eternity.

TINA: Well, I'm just an inhabitant of this here corner.

DR GRIFFITH: Who was this Billie who is so vitally important that he can ruin my life's work?

TINA: Billie got killed on this street corner a week ago.

DR GRIFFITH: A week?! ONE WEEK?!

TINA: And as he lay dying, I promised to come back here every week to spend the night with him. And I sure as hell am not giving it up before I've barely even began.

DR GRIFFITH: But don't you see?! This is so much more important! Our lives - Billie's life - is just a blink of an eye. But this spot has endured for thousands of millions of years. Billions! We are not important. But this spot is important.

TINA: Billie was important to me.

DR GRIFFITH: We have an opportunity. If we can do tests and prove that this is the spot where everything began, we can erect monuments that will stand for thousands and millions and billions more years. We can leave something that truly matters!

TINA: Billie mattered.

DR GRIFFITH: How can you say this about some friend of yours? What was he a boyfriend? Husband?!

TINA: Billie was my dog.

DR GRIFFITH: A dog?!

TINA: My best friend. A car jumped the curb and wiped him out when I was taking him for a walk. Just drove off. And I lost my best friend.

DR GRIFFITH: But he's just a dog! A miniscule 10 to 15 year lifespan in the face of science and the magnitude of time.

TINA: If all we have is a blink of an eye, then every second we have together is important.

DR GRIFFITH: Not in the scale of the universe. I'm sorry, but Billie isn't important.

TINA: He's keeping you from your street corner right now. So he must be worth something.

[Dr Griffith has no answer to that one.]

TINA: I'll make you deal, Mr. Scientist, because you're so good with words, you say some nice things about Billie and I'll get up off of this street corner and let you make your predictions.

DR GRIFFITH: Observations.

TINA: Just a few nice things.

DR GRIFFITH: I- But- I didn't even know him.

TINA: You're a smart guy. Work with what you've got.

[Dr. Griffith stands up. He paces for a bit. And then finally addresses the street corner.]

DR GRIFFITH: Billie, from an evolutionary standpoint, you were a failure.

TINA: Hey!

DR GRIFFITH: You asked me to speak and I am speaking. Give me a moment, please.

[Tina shuts up.]

DR GRIFFITH: But you were loved. That most elusive and immeasurable quantity that those of us who study the forces of nature struggle so hard to understand and quantify. You inspired it in another. An oversimplification of the Law of Conservation states that energy can neither be destroyed or created. You had the energy of love about you. And that energy must continue on in some form or another throughout the infinite reaches of time and space. You will continue to have an impact. You will continue to exist. You will continue to be with us. Somehow. Somewhere. Beyond this little corner of eternity.

*[Dr Griffith stops. He looks to Tina.
After a moment, she nods. And gets up.]*

TINA: That'll work, Doc. Thank you. You gonna be around here for a while?

DR GRIFFITH: Oh, I should say so. A discovery of this magnitude cannot be quickly and fully absorbed.

TINA: Then I'll see you next week.

*[She shuffles off.
And, very quickly, Dr. Griffith pulls out his instruments and starts studying the corner.
The stage goes black, and-
Dr. Griffith freezes as the single ray of light returns to point at the spot he stands on.]*

VOICE: The pavement cracks and wears away. Species that once ruled fade and are replaced by unpredictable variations. Oceans are filled. Mountains worn down. Suns dim. Time passes. And-

[There's the BARKING OF A DOG.]

BLACK OUT
THE END