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TEXT script

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Be Near Me (after In Memoriam)

FADE IN:

INT. LORE'S HOUSE — DAY

A comfortable, lived-in house. Not especially spacious but with appealing character. There are books everywhere — overflowing from the many bookcases, piled on stairs, tables, lying half-read on sagging armchairs. The artsy prints and posters framed haphazardly on the walls suggest that this is the home of some kind academic of the Humanities.

*And here he is. **LORIMER STACK**. Called **LORE** by all who know him. Not your typical fusty academic. He's not that old and kind of funky. The sort who wouldn't look out of place at a low-level, sedate rave, or on a BBC4 artsdoc.*

He's dressed in austere, mourning black. Roaming the house, iPad in hand.

LORE

*Tis better to have loved and lost
Than to never have loved at all.*

The stupidest lines, or so you might say.
Passed through the collective gut
slithering from insight to cliché.

Now strictly for tea-towels and gift-shop tat
Or buffoonish spin in ministerial lies.
But once it must have been solace,
summoning sad nods, frustrated sighs.
The acceptance, of 'yes, this is sad.
But all that lives, it has to die.'

And still...

The most famous line of any elegy
if not of English verse. Full. Stop.

*He stops. Suddenly pensive. Marches back through the house to a study where
his laptop sits on a cluttered desk. Thoughtful tiptaptap as he changes a few
words on an open doc.*

That's also a crock of crap.

*He looks up at a framed print of **ALFRED TENNYSON** above the desk.
Long-locked. Austere. Victorian. Useless.*

Sorry, Alfred, but
that's just a stone-cold fact

I might have loved you once.
But now you grate. Inviting argument
like cage-fight lovers. But not over dishes
or socks on floors or careless infidelity,
but that worst betrayal of all;
Death. Death. Stupid Death.
Of thoughtless and unkind expirations.
Of rubbing shoulders in public places.
Or Metro confinement, a contaminated meal.
Hacking idly at us, the feverish,
ransacking of careless lives.
And leaving little but rage,
booming dully in a hollow can.

*He stops. Collects himself. Puts his grief tidily away. Scoops up the iPad to
resume his notes.*

But let's think positively.
If we can. Just for a moment.
Not the easiest to do in this day
of panicky locked-down discontent.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. LORE'S HOUSE — NIGHT

*No lights in the house, just cold darkness, with perhaps a suggestion of sodium streetlight outside the window. **LORE** at his desk, tip-tapping away on his laptop. In full flow. Writing like a demon to keep the pain at bay. And then ... he stops, fatally pausing for thought.*

LORE

Because the darkness will come.
Is, in fact, now here.
Haunting this room, filling this air
with the thought of you,

Come; let us go; your cheeks are pale;

the absurdity
of your cold, locked-down body

But half my life I leave behind.

lying trapped in some Venetian morgue.

Methinks my friend is richly shrined;

Locked away, sealed, grief-proof, impregnable.
Leaving me gashed and hooked. Choking,

But I shall pass, my work shall fail.

For half the life I could have been.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LORE'S HOUSE — LATER

***LORE** hasn't moved from his chair, although he's now slumped over his desk, dozing face illuminated by the light of his laptop. Outside we are well into the small hours now — just cold moon and streetlight seeping through branches and into the house.*

He creaks awake and groans as he shifts upright. Something on the flashing screen of the tablet catches his attention. Out of battery. He curses and fumbles for the charger, plugging it in clumsily. And as he props the tablet back on its stand again, there's something else in it...

*... a face. **HALLIE**. Staring back at him. With love.*

*This is not a FaceTime call or anything of that nature. There's not lit reflection — just solid black and the face is barely lit, half in shadow. It could be reflection on the blank screen and indeed **LORE** looks over his shoulder to check. But there is nothing there.*

But still the spectral face in the screen looks out at him.

LORE

*So hold I commerce with the dead;
Surrendering to a floundering grief.
Lamenting a love that was all too brief
and unravelling now like broken thread.*

*Or so methinks the dead would say;
I see here now your smiling face,
chastising with love my fond disgrace.
To not encloud our too-short days.*

*Or so shall grief with symbols play
Burying rage in borrowed tears,
in pains reflected, made safe by years,
or re-versed in style, black turns to grey.*

*And pining life be fancy-fed
Till ghosts themselves they do appear.
To remonstrate, but out of love, not fear.
So the live stay living, the dead stay dead.*

HALLIE

*Now looking to some settled end,
that will not come; it will not come.
The ache of error, of clocks run down,
of thoughtless cruelty I failed to amend.*

*That these things pass, and I shall prove
these failures will not our lives define.
That what endures of our cut-short time
is fixed gladness none can remove.*

*A meeting somewhere love with love,
such an easy promise for me to make.
Just close your eyes, breathe in that ache
and feel me here, not below, or above.*

*I crave your pardon, O my friend.
For my errors made; they were not few.
but never in malice, or the hate of you;
just dumb denial we could ever end.*

*And now a jolt as the iPad slips from its place. And when **LORE** picks it up to
look at the screen, **HALLIE** has gone.*

INT. LORE'S HOUSE — MORNING

*The house is bright with sunlight. LORE stands at his desk, facing the laptop,
which has a Zoom screen upon it, broken up into little squares of dozens of
students. An online lecture. He stands before them, finding his centre,
limbering up.*

LORE

Tis better to have loved and lost

So overquoted.
So clichéd.
So powerless.

So instead,
how about this?

*Be near me when my faith is dry,
when all my sense of you has fled;
when your laugh, your love, and all are dead
and all I wish — crave — is to also die.*

*And men the flies of latter spring,
a pestilent and inescapable blight*

that teems in ignorance, hatred, spite
and infects with death all joyful things.

*That lay their eggs, and sting and sing
of progress, commerce and other saws
that hide corruption in ceaseless jaws
and mangle nature in a golden ring.*

*And weave their petty cells and die.
The threads of our lives are left undone
By a petty contagion we cannot outrun,
out-think, out-live; nor even outcry.*

*And so the lecture goes on. He's finding his pace now, his rhythm — so much
so that he doesn't notice that among the multitude of faces there is one that he
would find achingly familiar. One that that is looking out with love. And
saying goodbye for the last time.*

HALLIE

But be near me, my love, all the same;
When I am trunked in your memory store
until we are snared, unawares, once more
on that ebbing, deceptive, wave of pain.

So let me be near you and yet be so far
that I cause no pain, nor fear, nor regret.
Be in gladness of a tender, grateful debt
and trace the line of our healing scar.

*Prior to becoming an academic, Cailean McBride worked in journalism, based both
in the UK and in Australia. He is a published poet and novelist and was awarded his
doctorate in fine art in creative writing by the University of Glasgow in 2020. His
current research interests include the screenplay as literary form and an ongoing
examination of the economic challenges and concomitant 'digital anxiety' faced by
the modern creative practitioner.*