All That We Got | a play by: Jenna Xue

Setting: There are benches or chairs in sets of 2 lined up and divided.

At Rise: The scene opens on 4 compartments in a moving train. The sounds of faint chugging and a distant train whistle can be heard. The lights start with warm, yellow-ish colors. ASH is sitting on the left side of the right center compartment, tightly gripping a cassette player and a set of Walkman headphones in their hands. BLAKE is seated on the right side of the next compartment, looking around frantically like they have absolutely no idea what's happening. The two are back-to-back, separated by a divider.

BLAKE

(standing up abruptly and looking around) WOAH. Oh my god.

ASH

(leaning out of their seat) Oh, hi there! *(pauses briefly)* Okay, I know this is all *really weird*, but take a deep breath, alright?

BLAKE

(rubbing the back of their head and groaning) What's…going on? How did I get here?

ASH

Oh, um…well. Okay, this is going to sound crazy, but…you're on a train—

(During this, the Waiter approaches them with a beverage cart.)

WAITER

(kindly, maybe with an accent) Hello! Welcome to the Eternity Express! What may I get for you today? Tea? Coffee? Water? Wine? Soda? Juice? Hot cocoa? Kombucha? Fruit smoothie? Maybe some—

BLAKE

Woah, woah, woah…what?! Eternity Express?

ASH

Yeah, uh, I was just about to explain.

Waiter

Don't worry, everything will be okay. *(reaches for some dishware on the cart)* Here, have some nice, warm—

ASH

Jay, just let me explain. You're gonna scare them.

Waiter

I was just going to offer the new passenger some tea, Ash!

BLAKE

Oh my god…did you guys kidnap me?! Wait…why don't I remember anything? Why can't I remember anything?! You *drugged* me, didn't you?! YOU DRUGGED ME!

ASH

No, no, no! Look, I thought literally *exactly that* when I first got here, too. But really, you're safe with us. We're gonna take care of you. It's just that… *(collects themself)* Okay, there's no easy way to say this, but…I'm dead, and you're dead, too.

(They all stare at each other)

Waiter

I…could've put it more eloquently than that, Ash.

ASH

Sorry, sorry, I thought ripping the band-aid off would—

BLAKE

What?! *(running hands down face)* Jesus…I'm losing it. I'm literally *losing it.* I knew I shouldn't have drank so much at that damn party…

ASH

No…this is real. I know this seems crazy and insane and I know how scary, stressful, and absolutely terrifying all of this is, but you're on a train that carries souls to the afterlife. You're here because you…died. And now you're…hopefully on your way to Heaven.

BLAKE

What the fuck are you even…I—I can't do this right now. Just tell me how to get off.

ASH

That's…the thing. You can't. You can't get off. You're dead. And I'm…I'm so sorry this is happening to you. I was in your place not too long ago, and I know how hopeless it feels right now. But trust me, it's going to be okay and I'm here to help and talk and—

BLAKE

(realizing) Wait! So, I'm…dead, right? And…everyone else who's dead is *also* here?

ASH

Well, no. I'm not really sure how it works, but it's only people who died when they were around our age…and people who haven't left for the afterlife yet. Oh, and Jay here is around a lot, they're kinda just always here, so—

BLAKE

So, everyone who's our age and died but hasn't gone to the afterlife or wherever the hell else is *here*? How do you know if someone's left for the afterlife? Is there a way to find them after they leave?

ASH

Hey, hey, slow down for a sec. Look…I have no idea about any of that and I know that all of this is so cryptic and weird and awful, but just…sit down and take some deep breaths. Being dead is really hard, but we're going to figure this out, okay? We'll—

(Suddenly, the lights start flickering on and off wildly, shifting between complete brightness and pitch black. The stage goes fully black. ASH shouts various remarks of confusion and fear while BLAKE screams and exits in the chaos. After several seconds, the lights return back to normal.)

ASH

(bolts up; looks around) Oh my god, did you see that?! The train just— *(realizes BLAKE is gone)* Wait. They just…disappeared! Jay, where'd that kid go?!

Waiter

(sighs, organizes things on the teacart) Back to the Land of the Living, most likely.

ASH

What?! How?! I thought that once you're dead, you're, y'know…dead.

Waiter

This…only happens once in a while. Sometimes, when people die for very short periods of time—say, if their heart stops beating for five minutes or something like that—they sort of…flicker onto the train for a bit. And when their physical body is revived, they return to the living world with absolutely no memory of this place. Well, that is, until they die permanently. Then, they come right back here and that's when they remember their first trip to the Eternity Express.

ASH

God, that's…actually insane. So, that person we just saw…we literally just watched them die for a few seconds and survive a near death experience. Is that…what you're telling me?

Waiter

Essentially, yes.

ASH

Wow. That's…crazy. I didn't even know that was possible.

Waiter

There's…a lot you don't know about this place, Ash.

ASH

I'm…starting to see that. *(sits down slowly, shaking head)* Jesus, I need a literal brain reset…and a Celsius.

Waiter

(chuckles softly) Well, I can assist you with one of those things, at least.

(The Waiter reaches into the beverage cart, grabs a can of Celsius, and hands it to ASH with a slight bow or dip of the head.)

ASH

(chuckles) Thanks, Jay. You're a real one.

Waiter

Of course, Ash. I'll see you soon.

(The Waiter exits, taking the tea cart with them. ASH cracks open the Celsius, takes a contemplative sip, and turns to look out the window, bouncing their leg. The lights change from yellow to deep blue and back, to indicate the passage of four days. ASH shifts around in their seat with the light changes to further show that time is passing. Music can play during this transition. After this sequence, BLAKE staggers back onto the train
and sits down in their old seat.)

BLAKE

(nervously looks around; eyes land on ASH) Hey. Hey!

ASH

(with one hand over their heart) Holy crap, you jumpscared me… Wait…it's you! You're that kid from four days ago! How…how on Earth are you back here already?

BLAKE

It doesn't matter. You're Ash, right?

ASH

Yeah—wait, how did you know that…?

BLAKE

I heard that Waiter say it. *(in a rush; leaning in closer to ASH)* Okay, listen, Ash. Do you know how the seats are organized in here? Is it alphabetical by first name? Last name? Or is it by birthday? Or death date? Or something else?

ASH

Hey hey, slow down! Listen, I have no clue how this train works or how they pick where everyone sits, okay? I've never—

BLAKE

You must know *something*! You've been here for a bit, right? You've got to have noticed something by now! There's gotta be a method to the madness, a—a pattern or something!

ASH

I swear…I don't know anything. I really don't. And…and how are you even back here? You were here a few days ago for, like, not even two minutes, and then, all of a sudden, you just *disappeared* and now you're *back*. None of this makes any sense to me. And I have no idea—

BLAKE

NEITHER DO I, ALRIGHT? BUT… *(takes an anxious, desperate breath)* I need your help. I really, really, *really* need your help, Ash, and I need it fast.

ASH

Okay, okay, okay. Calm down. Just… *(inhales and exhales deeply; gestures for BLAKE to copy until they reluctantly do it; the two breathe together in somewhat sync for a few seconds)* Okay, now…what do you need help with?

BLAKE

(urgently) Could you…could you walk up and down the train car and see if there's—

(Suddenly, the lights start flickering on and off. The stage goes fully black. BLAKE exits, just like before. After a few seconds, the lights return to normal.)

ASH

(looking around frantically) Hello? Hello? *(realizes BLAKE's gone again; sits down)* Shit.

(The lights change from yellow to deep blue and back six times, to indicate the passage of six days. ASH shifts around in their seat with the light changes to further show that time is passing. Music can play during this transition. After this sequence, BLAKE staggers back onto the train.)

BLAKE

(rubbing the back of their head) Ow…that hurt.

ASH

(stunned) Oh my god. You're back *again*. Listen…LISTEN, you need to stop whatever you're doing. You have to—

BLAKE

(to no one in particular as they continue to massage their skull) That time wasn't as smooth as before… *(eyes landing on ASH)* Ash! There you are! Okay, listen, I don't have much time, but I really need your help. I need you to show me how to find someone before they leave for the—what was it?—afterlife?

ASH

(stands up from their seat; slowly starts backing away) Stop! Stop whatever the fuck you're doing! You keep—

BLAKE

(rushes forward) ASH, WE DON'T HAVE TIME.

ASH

(backs up faster) How…how are you doing this?! Who the hell are you?!

BLAKE

(breathing quickens; closes distance between them) My name's Blake. But that's not important. *(grabs Ash's wrist)* Listen, I promise I'm not here to hurt anyone. I just only have a little bit of time and we NEED to go looking for someone right now!

ASH

(rips wrist out of BLAKE's grip) Let me go! How the hell are you doing this?! You died and then *went back* and then died *again* six days ago and now you're *back* but you somehow you *remember* stuff from all of the previous trips and—

BLAKE

IT DOESN'T MATTER. IT DOESN'T MATTER, OKAY? I JUST NEED YOU TO HELP ME FIND SOMEONE BEFORE I GET ZAPPED BACK AGAIN! I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME I HAVE, SO WE NEED TO HURRY!

ASH

Listen, I want to help, but I almost never leave this compartment. I wouldn't even know where to *begin* to look for someone I've never even met.

BLAKE

NO! YOU HAVE TO KNOW SOMETHING. YOU HAVE TO. *(grabs ASH's wrist again)* COME ON!

ASH

Blake! Wait! You—

(BLAKE drags ASH out of the train compartment and scrambles all around the stage and maybe partway up and down some of the aisles, in a complete and utter frenzy. ASH makes a futile struggle against BLAKE's iron grip on their wrist.)

ASH

Blake! Wait! Stop! STOP!

(Throughout this next bit, a spotlight moves repeatedly from the left to the right side of the stage, to show that the characters are moving up and down the train cars.)

ASH

Hey, hey, hey! Please, can you just let me go so we can talk about this?! Who's Rory?! BLAKE, STOP! BLAKE! WHO'S RORY?!

BLAKE

Rory! Rory! Where are you? Rory, I'm here to get you out! Rory! RORY! RORY! RORY, WHERE ARE YOU? RORY! RORY! I'M HERE, ROR—

ASH

BLAKE! *(wrenches their hand out of their grip)* STOP IT! If you want me to help you, you need to chill the fuck out and explain to me what the hell is going on, okay? Please?

BLAKE

WE DON'T HAVE TIME, ASH! I need you to help me find my partner, Rory. Rory Clarison. Do you know a Rory Clarison? They died about a month ago, and I need to get them out of here before it's too late!

(During ASH's next line, RORY enters and watches the exchange with a look of alarm on their face.)

ASH

(takes BLAKE by the shoulders) Blake, I'm really, really sorry, okay? But this train is crazy long and the odds of us finding Rory are…pretty much next to none. There's no—

RORY

What's going on here?

BLAKE

(whirling around; takes in the sight of RORY) Oh my god…*Rory?*

RORY

How are you here right now? How—

(The end of RORY's sentence is cut off by BLAKE rushing up onstage and crashing into them with the most profound hug they can muster. BLAKE presses their forehead into RORY's and puts a hand on their cheek.)

BLAKE

(holding RORY tightly) I found you…*oh my god…I found you…*

(As BLAKE mumbles, RORY slowly eases themself out of their grip and backs up in fear. When BLAKE notices this, they immediately go quiet and their face falls in devastation.)

BLAKE

Are you…not happy to see me?

RORY

Who the hell are you? Is this real?

BLAKE

(rushing back over to RORY and grabbing them by the hands) Babe, it's me. It's Blake. I'm here to save you. I promise I'll explain everything once we get back, okay?

RORY

(visibly flinching) Back to…*where*? I don't need saving—

BLAKE

Back to life! We're going home!

RORY

What?! *(pulling BLAKE off and backing up even further)* You…*killed yourself* to find me? To *resurrect* me? Blake, what the actual fuck?

BLAKE

I figured out a way to *go back*! Just hold on tight to my hand, okay? *(grabs RORY's hand)* I'll get zapped back any minute now, and I'm bringing you with me. We're going home!

(BLAKE places a hand on RORY's cheek again. RORY slaps their hand away.)

RORY

NO!

BLAKE

What?

RORY

STOP. TOUCHING. ME.

(BLAKE releases RORY, distraught.)

BLAKE

(voice breaking) Rory, I'm just trying to help—

RORY

I don't want your help.

BLAKE

Why? Rory, we can go home and be together again just like how we used to—

RORY

Jesus Christ, can't you see?! I can't go home, I can't be with you, and we can't be like how we used to be! Blake, you literally KILLED me! *YOU'RE* THE REASON I'M DEAD. You can't expect me to just…forgive you for that!

(Everyone goes quiet. ASH watches in helpless agony. BLAKE starts hyperventilating.)

BLAKE

I'm…I'm just trying to help. Just let me fix things. Please. *Please*. Rory—

RORY

Yeah, like you tried to "help" last time? Yeah, no, I don't want your help.

(The lights flicker just once or twice.)

BLAKE

RORY, I CAN FEEL IT. I'M ABOUT TO GO BACK. HOLD ONTO ME AND YOU CAN COME WITH ME. Please. *Please*.

(BLAKE extends a hand to RORY as a last ditch effort. RORY doesn't take it. The lights begin flashing wildly again. The stage goes fully black. BLAKE exits. After several seconds, the lights stabilize and return back to normal. ASH and RORY remain on the stage. RORY finally acknowledges ASH.)

RORY

Did Blake just…

ASH

Yeah. They, uh, went…back to life.

RORY

I…I didn't think they'd do that. Come for me, I mean. That…that was a lot.

(Suddenly, a blinding, white-hot spotlight shines down directly onto RORY, illuminating them fully. An ANNOUNCEMENT plays.)

CONDUCTOR

(from offstage; in friendly, robotic monotone) Attention all passengers. Attention all passengers. We have arrived at the next station. Those who have been cast in light, congratulations! You will now be departing for your afterlife! Please leave all belongings behind when disembarking.

(The CONDUCTOR enters and approaches RORY.)

CONDUCTOR

Rory Clarison! Congratulations, it's your special day! Are you ready to see your afterlife?

RORY

Wait, what? Already? I…uh, I—

CONDUCTOR

(extends a hand to RORY) Come on, dear! The future awaits! You must go now.

RORY

(with effort) I…okay. *(reaches for CONDUCTOR's hand, then stops as a thought hits them; speaks directly to ASH)* Hey, uh, I'm…sorry you had to see all that.

ASH

No, no. Don't apologize; it's okay. You're…you'll be okay.

RORY

I don't know. I hope so. I'm just…ready to leave.

(The CONDUCTOR takes RORY's hand. The spotlight over RORY goes out. The sound of the train door opening plays, and together, RORY and the CONDUCTOR exit by walking out of the theater through the main doors. ASH walks back to their seat.)

ASH

Oh no…

(The lights change from yellow to deep blue and back, to indicate the passage of time. ASH shifts around in their seat with the light changes to further show that time is passing. Music can play during this transition. After this sequence, BLAKE staggers back onto the train and sits down in their old seat.)

BLAKE

OKAY, OKAY, I'M BACK! …Ash, where'd Rory go? *(more frantically, when ASH doesn't respond)* Ash, where's Rory?

ASH

Blake…Rory, uh, Rory went to the afterlife two days ago. They…disembarked.

BLAKE

(stands up and starts backing away) No. *(laughs in disbelief)* No. Nononono…

ASH

Rory's…somewhere else now. Blake, I'm so sorry. I'm here for you and—

BLAKE

NO. Nononononono…I JUST MISSED THEM, DIDN'T I?! I JUST MISSED THEM! I WAS SO CLOSE! I WAS SO CLOSE! I WAS—

ASH

Blake…Blake, Blake, hey, hey, listen. Blake, please sit down and we can talk about it, okay? Blake, I'm here. Shh, shh. It's okay, it's—

ASH

(grabbing BLAKE by the shoulders) Blake, hey, hey, HEY. It's okay. I'm here. I'm—

BLAKE

I thought I could get them out! I thought I could save them!

ASH

(pulling BLAKE into their arms) Blake, it's okay, it's okay. Just listen—

BLAKE

YOU DON'T…you don't *understand*, Ash. You don't understand! I loved them! Rory was *everything* to me. I promised them that after we graduated, we'd get married and stay together *forever.* I know it sounds *stupid* and *cheesy* and *cliche*, but I need Rory and…and I won't let you or anything stop me from getting them back! There's got to be a way!

ASH

Blake…there isn't a way. Rory's off the train now. There's nothing you can do.

BLAKE

NO, Ash. You don't understand. This is so FUCKING UNFAIR. We only got to spend three years together before I *killed* them! That's all that we got. Three fucking years. That's barely *anything*! That's all that we got before I *killed* the person I love most in the entire goddamn world! It's all my fault…*it's all my fault*...

ASH

Blake…I'm sure it wasn't your fau—

BLAKE

YOU LITERALLY HEARD RORY, ASH. IT *WAS* MY FAULT! We were…at this pool party…and we got hella drunk. And we were playing around and I…I pushed them into the pool. It was just for fun, you know? But…they hit their head on the concrete wall of the pool…and they drowned. *I KILLED THE LOVE OF MY FUCKING LIFE, ASH!* I...

ASH

Oh my god. Blake, you…you *actually* killed them? I thought Rory was… Oh my god…

BLAKE

I didn't mean to…I didn't…I didn't mean to.

(ASH has no idea what to do. They turn away, shaking their head and covering their mouth with a closed fist. They're about to leave, but then take in the sight of BLAKE crying and trembling. They sit down.)

ASH

It was a mistake. You didn't do it on purpose…

BLAKE

I…I thought this would work. I'm *so stupid*. I've *always been stupid*. The first time I came here…it was because I got so fucking wasted, I ended up in the ER. And then I got this crazy sense of hope, that maybe I could make it up to Rory and save them. I knew—*I knew*—it was insane, but I thought that if I kept…taking pills and hitting my head and dying in short bursts so I could come here…I could get Rory back. I thought if I didn't give up, if I just kept coming back and did it over and over and over and over *and over*…one of the times would *have* to be successful, right? *RIGHT?!*

ASH

(grabs BLAKE's shaking hands) Blake…*please* stop doing this to yourself. You're hurting yourself. You *have to* stop. And I'm here for you, okay? I'm here for you and I need you to know you're not alone in this and that I—

BLAKE

This wasn't supposed to happen. I was supposed to bring Rory back. I was supposed to save them and they were supposed to *want* to go back with me and we were supposed to be together forever. They didn't even *want* to see me. Why the fuck were they so upset to see me?! I was trying to help them! None of this was supposed to happen. NONE OF IT.

ASH

I know, Blake…I know.

BLAKE

NO, ASH, YOU DON'T!

ASH

What? No, I just…Blake, it's okay. I'm here for—

BLAKE

(standing up and backing up) STOP SAYING THAT YOU'RE HERE FOR ME LIKE YOU'RE MY FUCKING THERAPIST. YOU DON'T GET IT! Everything was supposed to stay *exactly* as it was. And now…Rory's *gone*. I *killed* the love of my life and now they're gone and want nothing to do with me. You have *no idea* how it feels to be abandoned. To be left behind. Whatever you've been through couldn't possibly—

ASH

You think I don't know about being left behind?! You think I haven't experienced loss? I died when I was eighteen years old, Blake! YES, Blake. YES, I know what it feels like!

(They both go quiet and stare at each other. ASH sits down with a sigh and lets their head fall into their hands. BLAKE looks down at the floor, once again consumed with guilt.)

BLAKE

(with a chuckle) I really am a piece of shit aren't I? First I kill someone, then I go hurt someone who's already dead. Jesus, what the actual *fuck* is wrong with me?

ASH

No, no, I get it. I thought that if I just made you feel less alone, I could fix things for you. But that's not how anything works. *(Sighs)* I have no clue what to do.

BLAKE

You and me both.

ASH

I'm sorry about Rory, Blake. I really am sorry.

BLAKE

No no, stop it. You did nothing wrong. I brought this shit upon myself. *(looks over at*

ASH) Why are you looking at me like that?

ASH

It's just… *(sighs quietly)* You…remind me a lot of…myself, actually.

BLAKE

(Gives a chuckle) How so? You don't seem like…a murderer to me.

ASH

Please don't say that, Blake. No, it's because you… *(considers their words for a moment; clears their throat)* You struggle with…accepting change. Change is…really hard for you. *Loss* is really, really hard for you.

BLAKE

(shrugging) You seem to be handling the whole *being dead* thing fine, though. Like, if that's not being good at accepting change, I don't know what is.

ASH

(scoffs) I thought I was fine. I thought I was…done healing, somehow. I mean, I'm better, but…nowhere close to done. And I'm going to tell you right now: Your grief isn't gonna go away. I wish I could tell you otherwise, but…I can't. You'll be making up for what you did for the rest of your life. But…Rory being gone doesn't mean you're worthless. It might not feel like it right now, but there's people out there who love you *so much*. Some of them you already know, and some of them you have yet to meet. You'll never be alone.

BLAKE

(voice breaking) Then why does it *feel* like I am? Why do I feel so alone and hopeless all the goddamn time, Ash? What's the point of holding onto all of these broken pieces of Rory if I can't *have* them? What the hell's the point of any of it if I can't bring them back?

ASH

Sometimes… I think at some point, we need to learn that just because we love someone, it doesn't mean we can be with them. Sometimes, we fuck up. I don't know, Blake. I don't know how to help you, because I'm…honestly still figuring it all out, myself… You're not alone.

BLAKE

Thank you, Ash, I–

ASH

Blake, you don't need to thank me.

BLAKE

Yes, I do.

ASH

You really don't. This is just…one person being present for another person, you know?

BLAKE

I…honestly forgot what that feels like.

ASH

What do you mean?

BLAKE

What it feels like to have someone be here for me… Like you being here for me right now. I just met you and took all my anger and shit out on you, but you're still being so damn nice to me.

ASH

Well, that's kind of you.

BLAKE

No, I mean it. Seriously, why do you have to be dead, dude? You're too nice to be dead. If you could go back to the real world with me, we'd have so much fun.

ASH

Okay, how about this? When we both inevitably end up in Heaven one day, we'll meet up and hang out, okay? We could—I don't know—frolick around the meadows or whatever pretty nature Heaven has. We'll meet up there when you die.

BLAKE

I doubt I'm going to Heaven, but sure. Deal.

ASH

No. When you die, you're going to Heaven. And you're only allowed to die from old age, you understand? No other reason. I don't want to see your ass around here ever again until you're, like, 85. Promise?

(ASH extends their pinky to BLAKE, who reciprocates. They pinky promise.)

BLAKE

I promise.

(The Waiter has approached them with a beverage cart.)

Waiter

Hello, hello! Can I get either of you anything to drink?

(BLAKE looks at ASH. ASH thinks for a moment, then smiles.)

ASH

How about two sodas? One for me, and one for my new friend here.

Waiter

Coming right up!

(The Waiter pours the drinks, sticks two straws in the glasses, and hands them to ASH and BLAKE, who each express some form of thanks. The waiter leaves.)

ASH

(lifting drink in BLAKE's direction) To life.

BLAKE

Hell yeah. To life. *(toasts with ASH's glass and drinks)* Damn. I didn't expect death juice to taste so good. Wait…I have taste buds here? Woahhhh.

ASH

I know, right?! It's trippy as hell!

(They laugh for a few seconds. Suddenly, the lights start flickering on and off, shifting between complete brightness and halfway to black. Time's up. BLAKE is about to come back to life. Please make sure this flicker is less frantic and slower than the ones before.)

BLAKE

(looking around, setting drink down, and standing) Well...I guess I'm going home now.

ASH

(setting drink down, standing up, giving BLAKE a hug) Take good care of yourself, okay?

BLAKE

(hugging ASH back) I'll try. *(breaking away)* Thank you. For everything. For giving me a chance. You didn't have to do that.

ASH

I wanted to. Just…never forget that I'm here and thinking of you, okay?

BLAKE

I could never forget you, Ash.

(The light flickers become wild and fast, like the times before. BLAKE exits. After BLAKE leaves, the lights stabilize. ASH sighs, sits back down, and picks up the Walkman headphones. They contemplatively look at the headphones for several long moments.)

ASH

I…could never forget you either.

Fade to black as ASH puts the headphones on.