



**WOULD IT KILL YOU  
TO DO THESE PLAYS?**

**Eight Plays & One That Might Not Be  
by Lee Gundersheimer**



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This collection is for Jennifer,  
my home  
during the pandemic  
and hereafter

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# WOULD IT KILL YOU TO DO THESE PLAYS

## Eight Plays & One That Might Not Be

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# **Pas De Deux**

**Pas De Deux**  
**Cast of Characters**

**1919**

- Alice Wilcox- A young girl, nineteen, from a well-to-do Jewish family in Macon.
- Nurse Cabbage- A dedicated worker in a sanitarium. (Doubles as Claire)
- Sarah Tupperton- Alice's good friend, eighteen, also from a well-to-do family though not Jewish.
- Elijah Pierce- A young farmer, twenty four.
- T. J. Pierce- Elijah's father, sixty four, a peanut farmer.

**1976**

- Old Alice Wilcox- Now an older woman, very ill.
- Claire Berkhartzmeyer- Her daughter, fifty-two.
- Marc Berkhartzmeyer- Claire's son, twenty- two

**For the story ballet partners**

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## ACT ONE

*The lights come up on a young man, Mark Berkhartzmeyer, who has just entered and is walking down center toward the audience.*

MARC. Hi, thank you all very much for coming. Have you ever noticed how when you've just broken up with somebody every time you turn on the radio, there's a song that sounds just like what you're going through? Like they wrote it about you? (*If no response:*No? Oh, well... *A joke:* Thank you very much and goodnight...) "I Will Survive." That's the one I just heard. "At first, I was afraid, I was petrified..." I'm sorry, I'm probably not going to be very good at this. In fact, I know I'm not going to be very good at this-- See, I just broke up with my girlfriend. My first really serious one, living together and all- *makes quote gesture* "in sin"-- two years--and I know, I know that's not earth-shattering, everybody goes through it, or, well, not everybody- some poor fools still hold out and get married- even wait till the honeymoon to have sex- god help them, and some even manage to stay together their whole lives- marry the first crush next door or their prom date- who the hell knows any of these people, I hear there are pockets of them in Utah. But most of my friends, and definitely their folks, have done way too much time in beautiful downtown splitsville- and from what I've seen, most people are like on their third or fourth wife by forty...so anyway, first love, what is the big deal right? (And now I can truthfully say) Been there done that... but none of this is what I wanted to talk about. I am such a dork, someone dies, and here I am talking about my landshark of a relationship.... no matter how important things are in this world, huge things, that happen to other people, even a death---we always seem to need to find a way to relate them to ourselves don't we....That's so depressing....

OLD ALICE. (*appearing*) Might not be the best beginning...

MARC. Gram?

OLD ALICE. Yes, hello Sugar. I would steer clear of depressing the folks, but go on. Don't pay me any mind.

MARC. What are you doing here?

OLD ALICE. He's just a little nervous, you see. He's really very bright.

MARC. I don't believe this. This is...

OLD ALICE. Things will pick up once he finds his stride....

MARC. This is exactly who I wanted to tell you about. This is my grandmother.



OLD ALICE. And I am dead.

MARC. Yes!

OLD ALICE. Go on, dear.

MARC. She died a few days ago.

OLD ALICE. Good... And so?

MARC. Gram, what are you doing here?

OLD ALICE. Well, it's my ballet isn't it?

MARC. Can they see you?

OLD ALICE. You can see me? They can see me-- can't you? *(To Marc)* Yes, see? Good.

MARC. Of course they can. *(Realizing)* Because I must have wanted them to... *(Disappointed)* Aw Gram, I was going to write a very straightforward play. Like you always begged me to.

OLD ALICE. Sugar- nothing about me was ever straightforward...not a damn thing in my whole life. Pardon my French.

MARC. I wanted it to be so old-fashioned, like the kinds of stories you admire-

OLD ALICE. I admire a well told story... fashion had nothing to do with it. *(Recognizing the new past pronoun is now needed)* Had, Ha!...Just don't let it be dull or hard to understand. *(To audience)* Don't you hate that? You get a sitter, pay good money, and then they have the gall to bore you silly, put you right to sleep, or even worse, leave you wondering what in the heck and the hell it was even about? No, Marc, you are wrong. I never gave a spit if it was fashionable... But for your information, I was the first of my set to flap-flapped long before to flap was called flapping.

MARC. I am sure you did, Gram. I wanted not one ghost. My plays have too many ghosts... I can hear the critics already?

OLD ALICE. You've had critics review your plays already?

MARC. Of course not, I wish... This is only my second play.

OLD ALICE. Then isn't this concern for critical scorn a might premature?

MARC. Considering this is only my second play yes, but I added this scene. It is part of a rewrite.

OLD ALICE. I am here as a rewrite?

MARC. No, the play was always about you...Gram, it is a long story.

OLD ALICE. I'll say. You just added five minutes to my ballet. And I may have been old, but I wasn't always dead. I understand literature. And rewrites. Ha, even metaphorically. Who do you think made sure your mother had the most exciting writers to read?

CLAIRE. (*entering*) Forced me too.

MARC. Mom, not you too.

CLAIRE. Only thing we ever really talked about. Faulkner.

OLD ALICE. And he was cutting edge in his day-

CLAIRE. Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, Flannery O Conner. My mother's milk was literature. I'd hear from you once a year, if that, and all you'd talk about was books. So of course, I was determined to know every book written in the twentieth century

OLD ALICE. And most of the best from long before that.

CLAIRE. The last thing you gave me before I had to go live with my father was A Tale of Two Cities. I was five.

OLD ALICE. And you were a good reader, too. But you never did try and write a word that might matter did you? Had to wait for Marc for that.

MARC. Both of you stop. This was supposed to be a play about the past. The long ago past.

CLAIRE. Marc- do you think I want to be in this silly thing? Portray a very one sided unsympathetic foil for my mother's warm and caring, tortured spirit.

MARC. That is not what you play. *Would* play, if I chose to have you in this-

CLAIRE. I told you to work on that terrorist play.

MARC. Hostages. It's about the Iranian hostages.

CLAIRE. A play with my mother as a lead character, will not work. Ultimately she's not sympathetic-

OLD ALICE. Hopefully more than a terrorist.

MARC. Hostages! The terrorists hold hostages -

CLAIRE. And that is something we certainly know about in this family.

MARC. Tell me about it...

OLD ALICE. That is true, isn't it. One thing we can all agree on.

CLAIRE. She lived a very tragic life. I will grant you that. Alone a great deal of it. But that was her choice.

OLD ALICE. That is not true Claire, and you know it.

MARC. I can't believe this. Nothing has even happened in this play yet-

OLD ALICE. Ballet. It ought to be a ballet... with lovely music-

CLAIRE. Look, it's your choice to make a mother who saw her daughter once in a blue moon, until once she got older and even more desperate, the daughter allowed her to come live with her, your heroine. I wish you all the luck in the world- and this is obviously how you see *me*- the badger in the family-

MARC. What? (*to audience*) Please, forgive me.

CLAIRE. We will all try and forgive you, because you are young. And like "your critics" say... obsessed with ghosts...

MARC. She wasn't even dead when I wrote this. Only now.

OLD ALICE. You are just a rewrite too? Make it a ballet, Marc, it will work so much better. Full of twirls and leaps—

MARC. And she was a wonderful mother... A bit critical.

CLAIRE: Do you wonder?

OLD ALICE. Leaps of faith they call them. When you just leap blindly hoping that your partner will be there to catch you-

CLAIRE. Sorry, it is a play. And in it the wonderful mother plays the unsympathetic daughter. Depending on which act that is.

MARC. And why are you dressed like that?

CLAIRE. Exactly my point. Because your own mother had such a small role in her own son's play that the producers have double cast me.

MARC. What?

CLAIRE. You wrote in a nurse. A nurse Cabbage. And even though everyone told you she should cut the part-

MARC. She is a representation of authority- to show how Grandma always sort of had issues--- questioned authority-

OLD ALICE. I had issues with assholes.

CLAIRE. And you wondered why I became an incessant worrier?

OLD ALICE. And most assholes end up in authority. That has never changed...

CLAIRE. And now I have to have try an Irish accent, and true to form I get to clean up after everyone. (*in perfect brogue*) Part of the job, part of the job.

MARC. This was all supposed to take place way in the past. A nice old fashioned-

OLD ALICE. Look, we are fifteen minutes in and nothing has happened. Except your mother is dressed like that woman from the Brady Bunch, and my story ballet has begun boringly.

MARC. No wonder you never wrote a single word, Mom.

CLAIRE. Just ignore her, son. Don't make the mistake I did. Look, I will get into place. You begin your story.

OLD ALICE. Ballet!

CLAIRE. And just for the record I did my share of writing. I wrote quite a bit of criticism. A wonderful graduate thesis: Unrequited Lives and Loves, the Major Motif in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Ladies of Letters. But not everyone who loves literature, decides to create it. Writers do need passionate and informed readers you know. (*She is gone*)

OLD ALICE. In a way she is right.

CLAIRE. (*Coming back on*) Which is something she may have never once said when she was alive.

OLD ALICE. The worst thing about death, in case you were wondering, Marc-- is the missing the books and the plays and the music... I used to lie in bed and anticipate them- oooh....

CLAIRE. (*agreeing*) What on earth will the next breathtaking novel be....

OLD ALICE. That's what actually got me through the roughest patches...

CLAIRE. And there were plenty of those....

OLD ALICE. My hunger for what will be created next. It's a new day and somehow, someone always creates....and then ttttpppt....it happens, doesn't it- happens to us all. You turn your life's corner, start that inevitable trudge toward eternity, and it all becomes regret. But as I aged, I shed not one tear for grey hairs and sagging breasts. I wept for words that would waste away unread, the music I'd never hear once gone deaf. But actually it is not so bad, not this play so far- I understand that is going right into the crapper- no I am talking about even though we, the departed, are doomed to a sort of absentia, we are allowed such a wonderful gift- this ability to influence, to muse- for lack of a better word- (*Noticing Marc is getting teary eyed*) Look, you are really going to have to get back on track and stop overwriting, Sugar, or we will lose them. (*pause*) And I will haunt you forever if the whole thing turns out to be this dull.

MARC. Okay, both of you get off stage. (*Claire disappears again and Old Alice is walking off until-*) see my grandmother died a few days ago. But before she died she told me this incredible story.

OLD ALICE. Ballet.

MARC. Ballet.

OLD ALICE. It's a story ballet. The ballet of my life.

MARC. The ballet of her life...

OLD ALICE. Therefore, I dance the lead.

MARC. Most people felt my Gram was a little off.

OLD ALICE. Most people should mind their own damn business.

MARC. Gram!

OLD ALICE. But they don't. They stick their noses right into-

MARC. Gram!

OLD ALICE. Which is why there are so few glass houses. *(to audience)*  
Give it a moment... *(Starts to exit again.)*

MARC. See, my grandmother lived with us my whole life. In our house, which was definitely not made of glass... And she lived in this room at the end of the hall. And I was about twelve when I finally realized that might be considered odd. My friends used to say: "She lives with you?" And I used to say "Yeah," and they'd say "why?"-

OLD ALICE. You see. What business is it of theirs-

MARC. Because she does and always has-

OLD ALICE. Tell them to take a big broom-

MARC. Gram!

OLD ALICE. Honestly....

MARC. I mean I was twelve before it dawned on me that most families didn't have an old person who Charlie and the Chocolate Factory like lived with them...

OLD ALICE. They used to, you know. It used to be the custom. It was even considered odd not to have your parents provided for. Wasn't a home without all three generations, sometimes four- and it enriched life, don't you know. Made people more... I'm sorry, I am interrupting again---

MARC. Yes. Where was I?

OLD ALICE. I'm dead.

MARC. They know that now, Gram.

OLD ALICE. That's where you were-

MARC. Yes! But before she passed on, she told me this incredible story. And afterwards, when we were going through her things, I found these. This

is a poem, and this is a love letter. I can't tell you how much these mean to me. (*He stops, overcome.*) See, my grandmother lived with us my whole life, but I never knew her. I never knew a thing about her. Her life. Or thought to ask. I mean she was always just "grandma." This woman in a hairnet and a housecoat who made us fudge- she made great fudge- Who spent most of her time in the bathroom. (*Old Alice makes a noise of disgust TTT-ppt, which sounds a lot like spitting tobacco*) Well, you did spend a lot of time in the bathroom... But most of the time she stayed in her room watching "The Price Is Right" or listening to old ballets on her record player. (*A ballet, Giselle begins to be heard.*)

OLD ALICE. I was researching.

*A young woman dressed in a World War I period dress and a young man in a period army uniform enter from opposite sides of the stage. They walk slowly towards each other, meet and circle around each other to the music.*

MARC. She was researching....

OLD ALICE. For my ballet....

*She has exited. The boy slowly exits while the young girl slowly lies onto the bed stage right.*

MARC. Her name was Wilcox-

*We hear a voice call "Alice" as the lights crossfade to a private room in an "institution" in Savannah, Georgia. Alice the young girl in the nightgown is sitting in the bed.*

MARC. Alice Wilcox...

*Again a call for Alice...Marc exits.*

ALICE. I'm not really hungry, thank you. I'll wait for lunch today.

*The nurse enters carrying a tray of food and a broom, and a young girl about the same age as Alice enter. Another young girl stays in the doorway.*

NURSE. Good morning, Alice.

*She hands the tray to the girl and "sweeps" Old Alice off the stage both because the nurse is "cleaning" and Claire is wanting her gone.*

ALICE. I told you, I'm not very hungry. Didn't you hear me?

NURSE. Did you have a good night's sleep? You look as though you did?

ALICE. You know I slept. I'm lucky I can wake up.

NURSE. It's such a lovely day out today, isn't it? Just lovely.

ALICE. You promised you wouldn't do that anymore. You told me no more medicine.

NURSE. A perfect day for visitors.

ALICE. You enjoy ignoring me, don't you? It makes you happy.

NURSE. I brought you an extra biscuit.

ALICE. Am I the only patient you treat this way? Or do you go up and down the corridors ignoring everyone?

NURSE. Would you like to eat over there by the window? That might be a nice idea.

ALICE. I told you I wasn't hungry.

NURSE. We can just move the table over a little-

ALICE. I don't want any of that.

NURSE. That way you can enjoy the sunlight...

ALICE. I'm warning you, if you bring that tray anyway near me-- I'll scream. Did you hear me? I'm warning you. Miss Cabbage! You have been warned.

NURSE. You wouldn't want to do that.

ALICE. Don't bet on it.

SARAH. (*coming into the room*) Here, let me help you.

ALICE. Sarah?

SARAH. Hi.

ALICE. Ahh!



*A playful but loud scream because the nurse has tried to move the tray. The nurse is startled and drops the tray to the floor.*

NURSE. Now look what you've done.

ALICE. I warned you.

NURSE. What a mess. Just look at this mess.

ALICE. Yes, and you never had to eat it.

SARAH. Here-

NURSE. Don't trouble yourself, dear. I'll take care of it. Just let me get a broom. I'll be right back. This is not a good sign, Alice. What would Dr. Tyson say if he saw this? I won't be a minute, Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. Oh, that's alright. *(After glaring at Alice, the nurse is gone.)*

ALICE. Hi!

SARAH. Hi!

ALICE. How are you?

SARAH. Fine. You?

ALICE. Fine, fine.

SARAH. You look good.

ALICE. Thank you. So, do you.

SARAH. No, I've put on some weight. Again.

ALICE. I made a mess, didn't I?

SARAH. Yes, yes you did.

ALICE. So, how have you been?

SARAH. Good. Busy.

ALICE. Really?

SARAH. Yes. Spring term is over-

ALICE. Is it really?

SARAH. Yes, thank goodness.

ALICE. Spring term is over already....

SARAH. And I'm going to see my Aunt and Uncle in Atlanta next month.

ALICE. Aunt Piggy and Uncle Wilt?

SARAH. Yes, Aunt Piggy and Uncle Wilt. I forget you know them. It's Peggy, though, not Piggy. We just call her Piggy. Because she never stops eating.

ALICE. Poor Uncle Wilt.

SARAH. He doesn't seem to mind. "More of her to love," he always says.

ALICE. Sure, that's what he says.

SARAH. (*pause*) Miss Tate told me to tell you "hello" and to let you know that everyone's been thinking of you.

ALICE. Are they?

SARAH. Yes, they all miss you.

ALICE. Mother told me they dismissed me, Sarah. My father won't even speak to me.

SARAH. Ali, they dismissed you because you broke the rules. Because you were gone without a signed request, not for what you did. Most of the girls don't even know. They think you went home because of a death in the family-

ALICE. Well, I did almost.

SARAH. You know what I mean. Miss Tate said that they were even going to ask you back. That there was a good chance that in the fall, if the doctors gave their permission, they would take you back. They wanted you to come back. She said you were going to be a brilliant writer. So gifted. The best she ever taught.

ALICE. Mother showed me the letter, Sarah. The dismissal letter. I made her show it to me. They won't be asking me back in the fall. Not this fall or any other fall. Wharton is no school for girls with such a troubled and fragile personality. Strong moral principles are to be nurtured at Wharton, not suicides. Apparently, doing away with one's self is not an accepted part of the curriculum. -At least not for freshmen. Not that I mind. It turns out I wasn't very adept at it.

SARAH. Did it hurt?

ALICE. Sarah -

SARAH. I'm sorry-

ALICE. No, don't be sorry-

SARAH. I just wondered.

ALICE. I forget how bold you can be sometimes, and you look so innocent. That's always been one of the reasons I liked you, Miss Tupperton. You have the wonderful ability to take me by surprise.

SARAH. Really? Do I? I like that. *(pause)* Did it?

ALICE. Hurt? No, it didn't hurt really. I was just scared. That's all. Very scared.

SARAH. Why?

ALICE. Do you think there is something after this? More than this difficult, beautiful life? I know what I am supposed to believe, I suppose having been born a Jew... but I am about as Jewish as a pickle.

SARAH. Stop....

ALICE. You have no idea how much lately I wish I had a faith to hang my hat on. I envy you and your bible thumping family. My parents have spent their whole lives trying to hide from the Lord. Our name was Wilcznsky but Daddy's daddy put a stop to that. I've been to Temple twice, both times in Atlanta. So no one in Macon might know. And there I was sitting in my window seat gathering the courage to hurt myself. Like some heartbroken Hamlet in crinoline, and all I could think of was what if there is only darkness, just this endless nothing...

SARAH. You mean Jews don't believe in hell or heaven?

ALICE. Hell, for us, is a really bad bagel.

SARAH. Stop-

ALICE. You never did care Sarah, did you. That I was a Jew.

SARAH. I wished you could get all gussied up with me, and sit in church, and sing hymns, but otherwise no.

ALICE. You are truly a rarest of rare birds, my sweet Sarah... No, we Jews hedge our bets. We are after all a very practical people. According to the boy Rabbi with the sour breath that my parents recruited, straight out of his Rabbi school from the looks of him, who has been "counseling" me, we must focus on the here and now. "We must not become enticed by the unknown", not the most helpful thing to say to a mournful girl with a straight razor hidden in her journal. "If there is an afterlife- an Olam Haba as he called it- a world to come, we cannot prove it or disprove it. So it is up to us to prepare as though there is one, and, to best prepare, we should live righteously." "Why", I said to this sweet boy who was so thin, you could have snapped him in two-"if it can't even be proved that there is such a place, who knows what it takes to be invited." "Because God is just and good"- "Is he", I interrupted. "Is he really? Did you worry about coming here." "Worry?" he said. "Yes, in the heart of the deep south, where they lynch Jewboys like you for sport, did you not worry? Traveling all alone with your kippah on? I hope you kept your straw hat on over it. My father must have offered you more than your usual fee? I'm sure he did....and I'm sure even then- you thought twice about coming..... tell me once again about just and good..." *(pause)* I'm not doing so well, Sarah Jane.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. They give me medication now. Almost every night.

SARAH. They told me you were doing much better-

ALICE. Did they?

SARAH. Yes-

ALICE. Then, why are you here?

SARAH. What?

ALICE. If I'm doing so much better, why are you here? Why did you come here?

SARAH. I came to see you.

ALICE. No, you came because they are very worried about me, and they've called in the reserves... First the Boy Rabbi appears out of the blue, and now you. I'm not doing well and that's a fact. Let's let a fact be a fact. That's one of the things I always admired about you, Sarah, you don't paint rosy pictures. If you don't like something, you don't like it. And if you do, you really do. Like kissing.

SARAH. Stop.

ALICE. Especially right here. (*She touches the back of Sarah's neck.*)

SARAH. Stop it.

ALICE. We care about each other, don't we?

SARAH. Yes. Of course we do.

ALICE. Good. Then don't try and make it all better. I'm so tired of people trying to make it all better.

SARAH. Oh, I miss you, Alice Anne Wilcox. I miss you so much.

ALICE. I miss you too, Sarah Jane Tupperton.

NURSE. (*entering*) What a morning. What a morning. I hope you haven't made more of a mess in here.

ALICE. Nurse Cabbage, how nice to see you again.

NURSE. Don't "how nice" me. Between you and that Hastings child, I'm an hour behind.

ALICE. I don't believe it.

NURSE. Well, believe it. And this is an inspection day.

ALICE. Did you hear that? She heard me. You heard me and responded. You didn't ignore me.

NURSE. What are you talking about?

ALICE. You heard me.

NURSE. Of course, I heard you, Child. I'm not deaf. And now I want you to hear this. It's my turn to warn you. Any further outburst like this morning and we will be forced to stop allowing visitors to see you.

ALICE. I didn't want any visitors; this was your idea. No offense, Sarah.

NURSE. Are you aware your mother visits this weekend?

ALICE. You mean you won't let my mother visit? Ha, good luck. She'll do worse than scream.

NURSE. Would you want her to know how disagreeable you've been?

ALICE. She'll understand. She can't make grits either.

NURSE. Excuse me, Miss Tupperton? May I be alone with Miss Wilcox a minute?

SARAH. Certainly.

ALICE. Careful, Sarah. She wants to slip me some more of that sleeping powder. Don't get too close, Sarah, you can't trust her.

NURSE. (*after showing Sarah out*) I'm glad you think this is funny, Alice, but this is not a game we are playing here.

ALICE. You're telling me.

NURSE. When are you going to realize we are only trying to help?

ALICE. Then stop giving me that sleeping powder. Is that what you call helping?

NURSE. We give you a touch of morphine to help you sleep. You forget, when you came here you hadn't slept for a week.

ALICE. And now all I do is sleep. I feel like Rip Van Winkle, I sleep so much. I'm tired of sleeping.

NURSE. But it's helping, isn't it?

ALICE. I don't want your help. I never asked for it.

NURSE. Well, someone did. You're here, aren't you?

ALICE. When are you going to realize I don't want to be here. I don't want to be helped.

NURSE. Of course you do.

ALICE. No. No. I don't. I want to be dead. That's all I want. All I want is to be dead.

NURSE. *(after a pause)* Would you like me to ask your friend to leave?

ALICE. I didn't ask her to come. Wait. Actually, if you don't mind, I would like her to stay awhile.

NURSE. Do you think you'll be wanting lunch, or should I just drop it on the floor?

ALICE. I'm sorry. Of course. Bring it in. Nurse Cabbage?

NURSE. Yes.

ALICE. I'm sorry. I don't mean to cause you trouble. Especially on inspection day.

NURSE. Yes, well, at least you didn't bite me. The Hastings boy did.

ALICE. Oh, no...

NURSE. Yes, he didn't want his hair combed and it was such a mess. Oh, well, part of the job. Part of the job. I'll send your friend back in.

SARAH. *(entering)* She said the coast was clear.

ALICE. Sarah, do you remember the day we skipped history and went to the lake? The day we skipped school?

SARAH. Last year, you mean?

ALICE. Almost two years ago now. It was such a beautiful day, remember? You even said so. The sky was bright blue.

SARAH. "Who could care about "ancient history" on a day like this," you kept saying. "Let's go make some history of our own." And I, like a fool, listened to you.

ALICE. You were so scared your mother and father were going to find out-

SARAH. They did find out-

ALICE. Only because you told them-

SARAH. I had to tell them-

ALICE. That's right. You got bit by a bug or something-

SARAH. A wasp!

ALICE. A wasp, you're right-

SARAH. A bug...

ALICE. How odd... A whole life changes like that- a bug bites, and here I am... Because you panicked. Screaming and yelling.

SARAH. Because it hurt. And that's why I told my parents. What was I going to do? Tell them I got bit by a wasp in the middle of history class? I could have killed you for that.

ALICE. *(She is over by the window now, looking out.)* Because of you and a bee, *(Before she can correct her.)* A wasp. I met Eli-

SARAH. Not really-

ALICE. Sure. We all knew him, about him, called him names. But that was the first day I met him. Actually talked with him. And it was all because you got stung.

SARAH. My leg puffed up like a balloon-

ALICE. He acted like I was the last person on earth he wanted to talk with. I remember I almost just walked away...

*The lights quickly crossfade-all crossfades should be like jump cuts in a film- onto the porch of a house in Macon. A young man, Elijah, is trying to work on a rocking chair he is making out of wood.*

ELIJAH. *(He has hurt himself, because she has distracted him with a question)* God Dammit! What?

ALICE. Nothing. Did you hurt yourself?

ELIJAH. *(after a beat)* I'm sorry I cursed.



ALICE. I was just asking if you thought she'd be all right. It seems to be taking them quite a while.

ELIJAH. She'll be find now that my father's looking at it. He can cure anything. Some people have a gift that way. "I could cure the warts on a toad," he always says.

ALICE. Toads don't have warts.

ELIJAH. That's what I always say. I say: "Toads don't have warts". And he says: "There, you see." Well, he thinks it's funny.

ALICE. Do you?

ELIJAH. No. *(pause)* Do you?

ALICE. Not really.

ELIJAH. *(They exchange a look)* Good. *(He goes back to work.)*

ALICE. What are you doing?

ELIJAH. Building something.

ALICE. *(pause)* What?

ELIJAH. Excuse me?

ALICE. What are you building?

ELIJAH. Oh, nothing really. It's a present for my father. *(pause)* It's his sixtieth fourth birthday soon-

ALICE. Sixty four?

ELIJAH. Yep.

ALICE. That's pretty old.

ELIJAH. Yes, it is. *(pause)* I was a mistake.

ALICE. I beg your pardon?

ELIJAH. I was a mistake. At least that's what I've been told.

ALICE. That's horrible.

ELIJAH. No, the best things in life are always mistakes. Haven't you ever noticed that?

ALICE. No, can't say that I have.

ELIJAH. Neither have I, but it makes me feel better to say it.

ALICE. Is it a chair?

ELIJAH. Yes. It's a rocking chair. He's always wanted one.

ALICE. I don't believe that. You're making a chair?

ELIJAH. Yep.

ALICE. Out of wood? I mean just out of some pieces of wood? You can do that?

ELIJAH. I'm not sure. I hope so. If not, I've wasted an awful lot of time.

ALICE. That's pretty amazing. No, really, I couldn't even make paper dolls. When I was little, I mean. Where did you learn how to do that?

ELIJAH. Huh?

ALICE. Where did you learn how to do that?

ELIJAH. From a book. You can learn a lot from books. If you want to.

ALICE. Really. I'll try to remember that. A book, huh. On rocking chairs?

ELIJAH. On furniture craftsmanship. Chapter five is on the rocking chair.

ALICE. Chapter five. What's chapter 12 about?

ELIJAH. Look for yourself. *(He tosses her the book.)*

ALICE. This is great. People write books about this sort of thing?

ELIJAH. Only the good writers, Dickens, Shakespeare-

ALICE. I adore Shakespeare, but I'd forgotten that he wrote about building things. Of course- Measure for Measure one of his masterpieces.

ELIJAH. (*Not able to resist the challenge holding up the tool.*) It's no Awls Well That Ends Well.

ALICE. Oh, that's...

ELIJAH. Awlful ? I agree not one of his best....

ALICE. I assume this is a Love's Labour's Lost. (*He tries not to smile but has to.*) But what have we here: Fine Furniture. The Build It Yourself Series. Catchy, but no Dickens.

ELIJAH. Dickens? You mean, Great Renovations... David Chesterfield.

ALICE. Yes, but they pale in comparison to A Tale of Two Settees. Chapter One: It was the chest of drawers, the worst of ....Ah, here it is, Chapter 12. Ha!

ELIJAH. What is so funny?

ALICE. That's perfect.

ELIJAH. I'll have to read that chapter.

ALICE. Chapter 12: The Canopy Bed.

ELIJAH. Yes? So? He didn't want a bed.

ALICE. I do.

ELIJAH. I beg your pardon?

ALICE. I mean I did. I always wanted a canopy bed.

ELIJAH. Oh.

ALICE. No, honest. Ever since I was a little girl.

ELIJAH. Ruining paper dolls.

ALICE. Right.

ELIJAH. Well, you can borrow the book, if you want. Once I'm finished.

ALICE. Thanks, but I think it would be better if you worked on it. Since you're so good at it and all. Practice up a bit. You've got plenty of time.

ELIJAH. Years.

ALICE. November. My birthday's not until November.

ELIJAH. I see.

ALICE. So, that gives you plenty of time. Go ahead, practice up on the easy stuff... What comes after the canopy bed? (*a joke*) Chapter 15, The Bleak House...

ELIJAH. I don't mean to be rude, but I really need to get back to work, here...

ALICE. Don't worry. I won't bother you anymore. You need all the practice you can get, but come November, Elijah Pierce, I want a canopy bed.

*Elijah's father, T.J. Pierce, and Sarah come out of the house. One of Sarah's shins is wrapped in a cloth bandage.*

MR. PIERCE. You just tell your folks that the Trojan war started because of a wasp. Everyone knows that. And you were doing research.

SARAH. I'm afraid I've never been very good at not telling the truth, Mr. Pierce.

MR. PIERCE. You're a woman, aren't you? Twisting the truth is in your blood. It's instinct.

SARAH. Yes... Well, maybe I just haven't developed it yet, then, or something. I really don't know how to thank you enough.

MR. PIERCE. Don't mention it, Miss Tupperton. I'm just glad Eli heard your crying. It's not often we get a visit from such pretty ladies way out here on the edge of town. It was our pleasure, I assure you. Gave Eli something other to do than whittle that damn fool what-ever-it-is. Did you have a nice talk with Miss Wilcox?

ALICE. Charming. He's going to make me a bed when he's finished.

MR. PIERCE. Gonna make you a bed?

ALICE. Build one. A canopy bed. And it is a rocking chair that he's working on.

SARAH. He's making a chair?

ALICE. Yes, isn't that wonderful?

MR. PIERCE. Going to be a rocker, son? Is that what we're wasting your time doing this month? What was it last month? It was those picture postcards-

ELIJAH. Photographs.

MR. PIERCE. Photographs. And the month before that, it was the guitar. And the month before that, it was poetry.

ALICE. You write poems?

MR. PIERCE. Sure, he writes poems. Or he used to. Going to make a fortune writing poetry. You name it, he's tried it. Anything to waste a little more time.

*Eli leaves.*

MR. PIERCE. (*yelling to Eli*) Go on, go. Go look for something else to do. How about gold mining? I hear there's still gold in (*mock hillbilly*) Californy- I-A, son. Why don't you go and try that?

SARAH. I think we should be going, Alice.

MR. PIERCE. Don't forget to put that lotion on your legs twice a day, Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. I will, Mr. Pierce. I promise.

MR. PIERCE. And stop touching it. If you leave it alone, it should be good as new in a week or two. If it stings, put some more of that lotion on it.

ALICE. You listen to him, Sarah. He could clear the warts off a toad.

SARAH. Alice-

MR. PIERCE. She's right, I could.

SARAH. Toads don't have warts. Do they?

MR. PIERCE. and ALICE. There, see.

MR. PIERCE. So you were talking to that good for nothing boy of mine?

ALICE. Yes.

MR. PIERCE. Gonna make you a “bed”... As if he doesn't have enough work to do.

ALICE. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interfere with his work.

MR. PIERCE. Look at this waste of wood here. Where in God's name does he think this is going to get him?

ALICE. He's building this for you.

MR. PIERCE. Is he?

ALICE. Yes.

MR. PIERCE. Just what I always wanted...

ALICE. He thinks it is.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. He said: "My father always wanted one."

MR. PIERCE. Did he? You two seemed to have some talk out here. Is there anything else I should know about my boy? Since you seem to know more than me?

SARAH. My parents are going to crucify me Ali.

ALICE. I think you have a very nice son, Mr. T. J. Peanutbreath Pierce. And you're right; we had a very nice talk-

MR. PIERCE. Peanutbreath?

ALICE. (*realizing what she has done*) But now we have to be going.

MR. PIERCE. Peanutbreath?

SARAH. Ali--

ALICE. Uh...Thanks again for taking care of the bee.

MR. PIERCE. Wasp!

SARAH. Yes, thank you again.

*They exit quickly*

MR. PIERCE. Peanutbreath?

ELIJAH. *(who enters)* Yes, Dad. Peanutbreath. Because we grow peanuts. Our life is peanuts. That's all we ever get to eat around here. So our breath smells like peanuts.

MR. PIERCE. That's ridiculous. Does it really?

ELIJAH. Makes sense, if you think about it...

MR. PIERCE. Does it really? *(tries to smell his breath)* Does everyone call us that?

ELIJAH. Only everyone in Macon. The rest of Georgia doesn't know us yet. But give them time.

MR. PIERCE. What did I tell you, son. Women. Never trust them. They smile and tell you everything's fine, and then as soon as you're not looking, they'll stab you in the back. They'll fool you every time. They'll destroy you. Break you in two like an old dried up piece of red clay.

*He leaves as the lights crossfade from Mr. Pierce to Alice. She is carrying an empty bottle of lotion.*

ELIJAH. *(Said along with Mr. Pierce)* Break you in two like an old dried up piece of red clay.

ALICE. Is that what he said?

ELIJAH. Well, you can't really blame him.

ALICE. What do you mean, you can't really blame him?

ELIJAH. Nothing. It's a long story.

ALICE. Well, it looks like I've got plenty of time, being as how you don't know when your father is coming back. And I can't really leave without more bee juice for Sarah's legs. She holds me personally responsible, you know. So I'm all ears. *(She sits down on the steps and waits. Eli works on his chair. After a long beat.)*

ELIJAH. *(Under his breath.)* Bee Juice...

ALICE. Well, it's wonderful so far. Doesn't seem long to me... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. Please continue... You don't like me very much, do you? Is that it? Or you do like me, you like me so much, you couldn't wait to see me again. You're madly in love with me. You just don't know how to show it. *(Elijah smiles)* Ah ha. Now we're getting somewhere.

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. You smiled.

ELIJAH. I thought what you said was funny, that's all.

ALICE. So, you're shy. I like that. I think. I don't know if I know very many shy men.

ELIJAH. No, I doubt you do.

ALICE. Oh, and what is that supposed to mean?

ELIJAH. Let's just say I don't think you have much of a problem meeting men in general.

ALICE. I don't have a problem meeting people. I like people. Can I help it if they find me irresistible? *(He gives her a look.)* I just have two other things to say to you; then I'll hush up and wait for your father, alright? Two more things. To say. To you.

ELIJAH. Are you asking for permission?

ALICE. No. I just wanted you to know I would leave you alone after I said these two things. Because you always look as though it causes you great pain to have to talk to me.

ELIJAH. It doesn't cause me pain-

ALICE. And I wanted to let you know it wouldn't last long. Anyway, thing number one... This is the first thing.

ELIJAH. Go on.

ALICE. I'm sorry if I embarrassed you in front of your father the other day. And I told him about the chair. I'm sorry. I must have ruined a surprise-

ELIJAH. No, you didn't. And you didn't embarrass me neither. Believe me-



ALICE. See, I always open my mouth when I shouldn't- who are we fooling, I always open my mouth, period. It's always open. So, naturally, half the time it's open when it shouldn't be. I hope you're not angry; if you are, I'm sorry.

ELIJAH. I'm not angry. I don't let it bother me. He's just not very happy.

ALICE. Why is he so unhappy? Oh, that's the long story, isn't it?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. Well, I told you, I'm all ears.

ELIJAH. What about "the second thing"?

ALICE. What?

ELIJAH. You said you had two things you wanted to say to me.

ALICE. Oh, yes. That can wait. No, honestly. We can get into that later, just remind me after the long story, so I won't forget. Do continue... I'm all set for a wonderful story.

ELIJAH. There is no "wonderful story."

ALICE. Oh.

ELIJAH. Look, what's the matter? Don't you have enough "stories" to giggle about at your little tea dances?

ALICE. "Tea dances"?

ELIJAH. Or whatever you call those "la-tee'da's" you have in your "nice" little house at the end of the best street in Macon. I know what you talk about. I know how funny it is when my father and I come into town. We hear the whispers. I feel how quiet it gets. How every one smiles ... So just be happy with "peanut breath" and move on to the next family. Leave us alone.

ALICE. I'm sorry about that-

ELIJAH. Don't be. You should hear what they say about you.

ALICE. What makes you so sure I haven't. Oh, I've heard all right. And I would repeat it just to prove my point except I wouldn't want to ruin your

impression of me. I'm much too much of a lady. And for your information, I hate living on the "best street in town"-

ELIJAH. It must be horrible-

ALICE. It is!

ELIJAH. Those awful sculpted trees, that horrible fancy motor car-

ALICE. It's more than that-

ELIJAH. I'll bet it is.

ALICE. It's what people expect you to be - you're doing it right now. You expect me to be a certain person, act a certain way, only to care about certain things. I could give a- I don't care about fancy cars, manicured lawns, stupid tea dances. I hope I never have to go to another luke-warm tea dance as long as I live... And I certainly can't help what house I was born into, Eli, anymore than you can... And I am so tired of being judged because of it...

ELIJAH. What do you know about being judged?

ALICE. See, even you! Do you know my Poppa spent his whole life hiding that his family is Hebrew, built this huge department store, joined all the right clubs, even the ones that hated Jews, that only let him in because they wanted his money, and the whole town knows it and whispers ... (*Eli looks at her*) You know what I think? I think sometimes that stork plays a cruel joke on us. When he sorts out the babies. When he's up there deciding which babies go with which family. He must think it would be very funny to pick a wrong one, one that just doesn't belong and just drop it into the wrong family, just for laughs. Just to see what happens... I'm sorry I offended you by asking so many questions. I'm not looking for "gossip". I was just trying to get to know you.

ELIJAH. Yeah? Why? You certainly don't need any more friends. You have more friends than you know what to do with.

ALICE. I don't know where you get that impression. That I am so loved and smothered in friendship. Every girl I know hates me.

ELIJAH. Because every boy in town's in love with you.

ALICE. Every boy in town is in love with me?

ELIJAH. Yes. Except maybe Richard Lamping. He's too busy dissecting frogs. *(Alice laughs. Pause. She is looking at him.)* But you are right. They may all dream about you, but they wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole.

ALICE. Well aren't you the picture painting of tact?

ELIJAH. People, they have never ceased to amaze me for their capacity to be full of cow crap. That's why I like living way out here... Not much of a call for tact on a farm.

ALICE. I like you very much. I think you're very good looking. And... I've been thinking about you all week. And I don't remember ever meeting any boy that's made me feel that way.

ELIJAH. Are you always like this?

ALICE. No, I'm never like this. Ever. That was all part of "thing number two." Sort of under one big heading. So, now you don't have to remind me...

ELIJAH. Well, you're right. You are certainly nothing like what you are supposed to be.

ALICE. I work at it. Constantly.

ELIJAH. *(pause)* Can I ask you a favor?

ALICE. Sure.

ELIJAH. Would you hold this for me? *(a piece of the chair)*

ALICE. Hold this?

ELIJAH. Here.

ALICE. Here?

ELIJAH. Yes. Thanks. *(They are sitting very close.)* I think your friend played a little joke on me too.

ALICE. Who?

ELIJAH. Mr. Stork.

ALICE. Oh.

ELIJAH. Do people ever wonder where my mother is? I mean, why my father seems to have no wife? Or does everyone just figure she died?

ALICE. I think most people just assume that. Yes. That she passed on.

ELIJAH. Passed on. Yep. That's what she did. She "passed on". When I was very little.

ALICE. I'm sorry to hear that.

ELIJAH. She's not dead, you know. She just left us. Moved.

ALICE. That's probably very true...

ELIJAH. No, Alice. I mean she never really died. At all. She's still alive. She just moved.

ALICE. Moved?

ELIJAH. To New York City to become a ballet dancer.

ALICE. She just left?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. Your own mother? That's horrible.

ELIJAH. Naw... she had been a dancer ever since she was a little girl. And my father sort of sidetracked her. For awhile. And my coming along certainly helped. But dancing was something she never forgot. She never thought she was any good at being a mother anyway. She loved us, it just wasn't what she wanted to do. She wanted to be a dancer. So, she left.

ALICE. How old were you when she left?

ELIJAH. Five. And she was only twenty two. She was sixteen when she met my father, and he was almost forty. Why they thought that would work, I don't know. My father had spent years overseas, helping set up farms in Africa, Asia. He had never once thought of getting married. But one May, he sailed into New York and was having his supper, and he was being served by this young girl who had lost both her parents to the influenza. And he took one look at her, and he said it was time to "re-evaluate his priorities." And first thing he told her was that she would never have to worry about feeling sick or losing any more folks to disease. He had traveled the world and knew cures, and he was supposed to set sail the next day for Central America and-well, let's just say she did a little sidetracking of her own... He

told me once that he paid the check, they went off, and he didn't leave that room until three days later... She was so pretty. That much I do remember. She had long red hair and blue eyes, deep blue. Like the color of the sky just before the sun starts to go down. She used to let me watch her practice her dance in the afternoons. It must have been one of my favorite things to do, because she'd always sit me down on the patio table with a cookie to hold, and I would nibble on it while she practiced her dancing. Her hair used to fly wildly when she turned, and every once in awhile, it would tickle me if she got too close. She'd lean her head way back, and her eyes matched the sky... Anyway, one day she crossed the river and went to New York, and we never saw her again. My father didn't take it very well. He started drinking. A lot. We had settled in New Jersey by then, and my father packed us up and moved us as far south as the train would take him. This peanut farm was for sale, and Papa took one look at me and said "Peanut, how'd you like to be a farmer?" And all I could think of was the circus, and the only time I had eaten nuts, so I clapped my hands and said "Peanuts!" And he bought it. He even called me "Peanut" until I was sixteen; that was always fun. Still does, when he's drunk or when he's trying to be nice to me. *(He smiles.)*

ALICE. What?

ELIJAH. Oh, I was remembering what he said once. One day when he was feeling particularly sorry for himself. He had had a little to drink, and I came out here and caught him looking at a picture of my mother. And he looked up at me, and I thought he was going to yell at me, but all he said was:

MR. PIERCE. *(appears, holding a picture of his wife)* Figure this one out, Peanut. I have a cure for anything. I've traveled the world and learned a cure for everything. From dandruff to an upset stomach, and they all work. But there are two things I can't cure. Hell, no one can cure them. Once you get them, you just have to wait them out. Nothing can cure them but time. The common cold is one, and a broken heart is the other. And a cold usually only lasts a week, but a broken heart? Good luck waiting that one out. That one can drag on for years...

*He looks at the picture, as the lights crossfade back to Alice.*

ALICE. He loved her a great deal, didn't he?

ELIJAH. Yes, he did.

ALICE. I don't think my parents were ever in love. Ever. Isn't that sad? The only reason they got married was to keep the store in the families. A good sound business decision. I asked my mother once, I said: "How did you and Daddy meet?" And she said that their daddies were best friends, they had known each other since diapers, they had grown up together. And everyone

just assumed that they would be married. So they were. And I said: "so then he was the only boy in the world for you, then?" And you should have seen her. She got all quiet. And her face... It just dropped... Poor Mamma. She probably never had a choice...

ELIJAH. "The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies,  
When love is done."

ALICE. That's beautiful. Did you write that?

ELIJAH. No... (*He laughs.*) I wish I could.

ALICE. Who did?

ELIJAH. A man named Bourdillon. William Bourdillon. It's the only poem he's known for. Which is kind of sad. But I guess one is better than none.

The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies,  
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart just one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies,  
When love is done.

ALICE. Well, I don't know about you, but my life is not going to be like that. No sir. The boy I marry and I are going to be so in love, so madly and passionately in love, we are going to make romantic history-

MR. PIERCE. (*entering with rifle pointed*) I'll give you to the count of ten to get off my peanut smelling property!

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. Shut up, son. (*To Alice.*) You heard me.

ELIJAH. She just came here to get more medicine for her friend, Dad.

MR. PIERCE. I don't care what she came here for. She must have needed something. Or she wouldn't be here. All you want is what you can get, isn't it? Isn't it?

ELIJAH. Dad, come on. Put the gun down.

MR. PIERCE. (*Slowly lowers rifle.*) Probably even tried sweet talking the poet here, didn't you? Talked real nice to him, didn't you? Well, he's an easy one to fool. Everyone knows that. He got fooled once. So, you'd think he'd learn, but no. Not him. He still writes his love poems. Tried to get me to go into town. Going to meet some ladies. Going to have a good time. Ha, isn't that a laugh? You'd think he'd learn. I have. I'm no fool. I know what you really are. (*Raises gun again.*) What you bring with your sweet little voices. And your talk of "I need you" and "forever".

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. All you bring is bad luck. Bad luck and a lot of wasted time.

ALICE. Mr. Pierce, I am sorry about what I said to you the other day.

MR PIERCE. Why? My boy here said everybody in town talks about us like that, so why should you be sorry. You were just telling the truth. The truth is a powerful cure all, but I will be goddamned it don't hurt. Smarts all to hell, the truth does. But the more it hurts, the more it helps.

ALICE. Well, I'm sorry. I have this habit of

MR. PIERCE. What, sticking your noses into other people's business.

ELI. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. Or is it selling folks a bill of goods. They say all your kind is cheap and stingy, but you sure do like to jack up the price for other folks now don't you.

ELI. Dammit-

MR. PIERCE. What? She told us the truth about our family, I ought to return the favor and say what everyone says behind her back. About her people and that over-priced marble step store of theirs.

ALICE. I am sorry if my words hurt you Mr. Pierce-

MR. PIERCE. I told you, you have until the count of ten to get off this farm, and I meant it. You didn't hurt anyone yet, and you're not about to.

ELIJAH. Dad-

*He is moving toward his father now. Alice is walking slowly, watching the gun.*

MR. PIERCE. (*Raising the gun*) No one is going to ever hurt us again-

ELIJAH. Goddammit!

*He has knocked his father down, and, as he does so, Alice screams. Lights immediately crossfade.*

NURSE. (*who has appeared next to Alice and is holding her arm.*) There now, let's get back into bed now, Miss Wilcox. And get some rest. We just tried to do too much for one day.

ALICE. Sarah?

SARAH. Ali, you wouldn't listen. You acted like you didn't hear us.

ALICE. Hear you, what?

NURSE. We tried to get you to come away from the window, child, that's all.

SARAH. You really couldn't hear me, Ali? I kept calling your name.

ALICE. It's the medication, Sarah. They keep giving me that medication.

NURSE. We need to let Miss Wilcox get some rest now. We've had enough excitement for one day.

ALICE. Make them stop.

SARAH. I will.

NURSE. Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. I'm coming.

ALICE. Sarah

SARAH. I'll be back soon.

ALICE. No, don't go. Please don't go-

SARAH. I have to, but I'll be back.



ALICE. They won't let you. They won't let you come back.

SARAH. Let them try and stop me.

ALICE. They keep giving me that powder... And I can't think straight.

SARAH. You rest now, Alice, and I'll be back. (*whispering*) Don't worry. Alice Ann Wilcox, if I have to knock down the door and carry you out of here, you are going to get out of this place, you understand? (*Alice nods.*)

NURSE. Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. You rest now. We're friends, remember?

*They exit. After a beat we hear the sound of a pebble being thrown against a window. Again. Alice sits up in the bed.*

ALICE. Who is that? (*She goes to the window, opens it and looks out. A pebble almost hits her.*) Hey!!!

ELIJAH. Oh, are you all right? I'm sorry.

ALICE. Elijah? Is that you?

ELIJAH. Yes. I'm sorry about that. I didn't see you coming. Did I hurt you?

ALICE. Yes, I'm dying. What are you doing here?

ELIJAH. I came to apologize. For my father. Where have you been? For the last week?

ALICE. I went to Atlanta with my mother. Why?

ELIJAH. Because I've been out here every night for a week. I didn't know where you were.

ALICE. Oh. My mother had to go meet my father in Atlanta, and she hates to take the train alone, so she dragged me along with her. I just got back today.

ELIJAH. I know. This was your last chance. If you weren't home tonight I was going to give up.

ALICE. Well, lucky me. Hi.

ELIJAH. Hi.

ALICE. So... apologize.

ELIJAH. Oh. He was just very drunk. He had no idea what he was doing. Or saying. He was very upset about it when he sobered up. It was their anniversary. My mother and father's. I should have known. He always gets drunk on that day. And on her birthday.

ALICE. Remind me not to come for the birthday.

ELIJAH. Anyway, what can I say? Except, I'm sorry. So... I'm sorry. You do have funny sculptured trees.

ALICE. My mother likes them like that. You should see the dog. It's a poodle. I don't like it very much. Oh, guess where we went in Atlanta? Where my mother took me? You are never going to guess.

ELIJAH. I don't know.

ALICE. Try.

ELIJAH. I have no idea. *(She pantomimes a dancer one arm over her head it looks vaguely like a monkey.)* I don't know. The zoo?

ALICE. No, silly. The zoo. The ballet. Isn't that bizarre? I mean, after all you told me about your mother? It was so beautiful. I loved it. These dancers from Europe were performing and my mother wanted to impress some people, so we all went. They were doing Giselle. Do you know it?

ELIJAH. Not offhand.

ALICE. It is so sad. Oh! Are all ballets so sad?

ELIJAH. I don't know. I've never seen one.

ALICE. Is this bothering you? Talking about this?

ELIJAH. No...

ALICE. It just made me think about you, that's all. And it was so beautiful. The way they move. She dies of a broken heart, Giselle. That made me think of your father... Well, I couldn't spend the whole week thinking about you. I wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea... Eli, do you ever hear from her? Your mother, I mean.

ELIJAH. Sure. We get a letter every now and then. She thinks about me, though. I can feel it. I know it sounds silly-

ALICE. It's not silly-

ELIJAH. But I believe in things like that.

ALICE. There are more things in heaven and hell than are dreamt of...  
(yawns)

ELIJAH. Heaven and earth. Hell's got nothing to do with it, Horatio.....

ALICE. Oh, listen there are spirits in Giselle. The Wilis. They are the ghosts of the girls who have died before their wedding day. And if you aren't careful they will haunt you and make you dance until you die... I think I like ballets, though if you ask me they need more of a plot. What I adore about novels or Mr. Shakespeare is the story, the intricacy- a whole life gets packed in there. Much more than a boy who meets a girl and she gets all silly, falls in love and yet she knows so little about him, she doesn't even know that he is promised to another, but when she finds out she is so grief stricken she kills herself? She tries to stab herself with his sword, but fails!

ELIJAH. How do you fail to stab yourself with a sword?

ALICE. Got me. You forget to sharpen it? And *then* she dies of- wait until you hear this- shock.

ELIJAH. That seems like a unnecessary plot twist... either way she's dead.

ALICE. True. And that is the whole story, except she becomes one of the spirits who live in the woods, and when he returns grief-stricken to the woods, she decides to save the boy rather than have him dance to his death... I thought: first of all stop pining away and straighten your tutu and find another boy out hunting in the woods- you just met him... (yawns) but I do like those spirits that make you dance to your death...

ELIJAH. Listen, it's late...

ALICE. Dance for me....

ELIJAH. And you must be tired.

ALICE. I've never had anyone "pay me a visit" like this. I feel like Juliet.

ELIJAH. That's certainly a sophisticated love story... they meet and two scenes later they are poisoning themselves.

ALICE. Yes, because it is forbidden love, sworn enemies and all... and she is so smitten... "What light from yonder window breaks?"

ELIJAH. That's his line. Romeo says that.

ALICE. Oh, yeah. Wouldn't make much sense for her to say it, now would it? What does she say? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet", right?

ELIJAH. Among other things.

ALICE. See, that's why I like you. You've read "Romeo and Juliet". And Hamlet. Say it. Say "what light from yonder-"

ELIJAH. Look, I just wanted to say I was sorry. And to make sure you were okay.

ALICE. Why? Are you leaving?

ELIJAH. It's late.

ALICE. Look, you woke me up. I didn't wake you.

ELIJAH. I know-

ALICE. Did I say something wrong?

ELIJAH. No-

ALICE. You don't have to do the Romeo thing.

ELIJAH. Look-

ALICE. Do I scare you or something?

ELIJAH. Scare me?

ALICE. Yes. I mean, not that I'm a monster or horrible looking. Not that kind of scare you. I mean- why are you leaving? Is it because we are sworn enemies?

ELIJAH. I just don't want your parents to wake up and get upset. That's all.

ALICE. Why? My Dad doesn't even own a gun, let alone know how to use one.

ELIJAH. I'm glad you're back. And that you understand. About my dad, I mean.

ALICE. Sure, he's not the problem. It's you I don't understand. *(pause)* I'll see you tomorrow.

ELIJAH. Excuse me?

ALICE. Tomorrow. We're going for a walk.

ELIJAH. Alice, I have a lot of chores to do. At home. Really.

ALICE. I understand.

ELIJAH. But I'll come by soon, though. And say hello.

ALICE. Sure, next time you're in town. We all know how much you love to come into town.

ELIJAH. Goodnight.

ALICE. Goodnight, Sweet prince. *(to herself)* Parting is such sweet sorrow. Yeah, TT-Ptt. *(a noise she makes out of disgust, that sounds like a spitting tobacco.)*

*She goes back to her bed. Sarah is sitting on it dressed in a nightgown. It is weeks later.*

SARAH. And I told him I didn't want to leave him, to go away to school. And he said he didn't want to leave me either, and how much he was going to miss me. Then he kept telling me how much he cared about me. And he hoped I would wait for him. You know, not let any other boys call on me. And I told him I would. That I didn't want to be with anyone else. Which is true. I mean, ever since ninth grade, I have always wanted to be courted by only one boy- Richard Lamping. And I told him that. And he said, "really?" He was so surprised. You should have seen him, Ali. He was so sweet. And I said, "it's true."

ALICE. What about Scott DeLorenzo?

SARAH. Who? Oh, well, that's different. He just happens to be unbelievably nice looking. So what. I mean, he's just someone to look at during math class. And wonder what it feels like to look perfect. Like an isosceles triangle-

ALICE. I know. I was just kidding.

SARAH. Anyway, it was still raining. It was pouring, so we were sitting there-

ALICE. Under Stackpole Bridge-

SARAH. Under Stackpole Bridge. And well, I told you we've, you know-

ALICE. Taken a stroll or two-

SARAH. Yes, but- I mean, we've been courting for two years, almost, and he's never even touched me-

ALICE. Not that he hasn't dreamed about it.

SARAH. Well, he doesn't have to dream anymore.

ALICE. What?

SARAH. I said: "he doesn't have to dream about it anymore."

ALICE. I heard you the first time. I just don't know if I believe you. You mean-

SARAH. Yes.

ALICE. Really?

SARAH. Yes.

ALICE. No-

SARAH. Yes.

ALICE. What happened?

SARAH. What do you mean what happened?

ALICE. What happened?

SARAH. Well, we were sitting there talking, and we started to kiss. And then he started to really kiss. I told you he's a wonderful kisser. Well, he kissed me on the back of my neck, right about here, and I thought I was going to die. It felt so good. I mean, it felt wonderful... Anyway, we were soaking wet from the rain, and he took off his shirt. And he looked so

handsome sitting there with his hair all wet and his chest... And he said he loved me.

ALICE. No.

SARAH. Yes. He said he thought that he was in love with me. And I said, "what?" And he said, "I love you". And then, he said it about twenty times like he had been afraid to say it and now it was so easy, "I love you, I love you, I love you." And at first I thought "All right, Richard, enough" But then I looked at him and started to cry. And he hugged me, and we were kissing. And then the next thing I know, I had taken my blouse off. Or he had. Or we both did, who cares. And he was kissing me all over, and it felt incredible. And then, I took off my camisole-

ALICE. No-

SARAH. Well, it was soaking wet. Why not? And you should have seen his face, Alice. He was so sweet. He told me I looked beautiful. Which was about the most perfect thing he could have said. And he did too. He has the nicest chest... Anyway, it all felt so wonderful. I couldn't stop. I've never felt like that before. It's not logical. Nothing mattered? Does that make sense?

ALICE. Of course it does. I'm getting goose-bumps just listening...

SARAH. You mean you would have done the same thing?

ALICE. With Richard? No, he's your boyfriend.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. Yes, I'd have done anything. I'd make him dance until he died...

SARAH. You say the oddest things... So then it wasn't a horrible thing to do?

ALICE. Terrible. Don't let it happen again.

SARAH. Oh, I'm so glad you understand, Ali.

ALICE. Understand? I'm so jealous of you I could scream. Why can't Eli fall in love like that with me?

SARAH. I don't know.

ALICE. You'd think I was a gargoyle or something.

SARAH. I think you need to forget him, Ali.

ALICE. I know. Believe me, I wish I could.

SARAH. You could have any other boy in town.

ALICE. Would you want any other boy than Richard?

SARAH. No, but if Richard didn't want me -- I'd have to die. I would just die. I love him so much.

ALICE. It's not like he tries to avoid me, Sarah. We see each other now, all the time. Don't worry, I'm taking your advice.

SARAH. Let a friendship develop.

ALICE. Do you know that he has never even tried to kiss me? Not even once.

SARAH. Maybe it just hasn't been the right moment. Some boys know to wait for just the right moment. Isn't that what you always tell me?

ALICE. And some boys wouldn't know the right moment if it hit them over the head.

*The lights crossfade to the porch*

ELIJAH. That is ridiculous.

ALICE. Well, it's true.

ELIJAH. You know I forget how illogical you can be sometimes.

ALICE. Illogical? Thank you.

ELIJAH. Well, you are. You make these statements that come from nowhere. I mean, we were talking about biscuits. How we both love biscuits and the next thing I know, you're telling me that you're going to go to college next fall.

ALICE. Because I was looking at your eyes-

ELIJAH. Oh-

ALICE. Yes. And I was thinking how much I liked your stupid eyes. And I wondered if you ever did that. I mean, in the middle of a conversation with



me, did you ever catch yourself just looking at me, which I doubt. Then I remembered that I couldn't sleep the other night, so I was coming up with theories about why you don't like me as much as I like you. But they were all depressing me, so I tried to convince myself that it wasn't important because I was going away to college anyway. And then I remembered that I hadn't even told you that I was going, so I told you. But, see, it was very logical. See, there was a very logical thought progression from biscuits, to your eyes, to Wharton School for Girls. (*She tries to stand but can't.*) So, don't call me illogical. I hate that. People always accuse me of that. But it's not true. My mind just works differently. Sideways. I go off on these thoughts, in this direction or that. But I know where I'm going. Trust me.

ELIJAH. Fine.

ALICE. I'm stuck. My skirt is stuck.

ELIJAH. Where?

ALICE. I don't know. On the chair.

ELIJAH. (*trying to help*) Here...

ALICE. I can manage, thank you.

ELIJAH. Just wait a minute-

ALICE. I can manage. It's just caught.

ELIJAH. I see that.

ALICE. I'll get it myself, Eli- Thank you.

ELIJAH. Careful-

ALICE. Thank you.

ELIJAH. Did it tear?

ALICE. No, it didn't tear. May I have my skirt back, please?

ELIJAH. I'm sorry.

*Eli drops the edge of the skirt, embarrassed and moves away.*

ALICE. Why didn't you kiss me?

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. Why didn't you kiss me? Just now.

ELIJAH. I don't know.

ALICE. You do like me?

ELIJAH. Sure.

ALICE. Then, why? TTT pttt. You must have at least thought about it. As much time as we spend with each other. You mean, you have never thought about it? You have never thought: "Hmm, Alice is nice looking. Why don't I just put my arms around her and kiss her?"

ELIJAH. Yes, I have.

ALICE. What happens? I mean, what stops you? Please don't tell me it is because your father hates Jews? I mean not that he's crazy about anybody....  
(*Awkward pause.*) Oh, why do you do that?

ELIJAH. Do what?

ALICE. Get all quiet like that? Every time I tell you how much I care about you-

ELIJAH. Because I don't like to talk about it.

ALICE. Why? What's wrong with talking about it? Why is it such an awful subject? I think you're the most incredible boy I've ever met. The most talented-

ELIJAH. Oh, right-

ALICE. The best looking. The funniest, when you want to be. So, why can't I tell you that without feeling like I'm doing something wrong? I'd tell you every day of my life if you wanted to hear it.

ELIJAH. Well, I don't.

ALICE. Of course you can also be a real stick in the mud when you want to be.

ELIJAH. I just don't feel that way about you, alright? So it doesn't feel right for you to say it to me.

ALICE. Fine...

ELIJAH. I don't want to feel like that about anybody. Don't take it personal-

ALICE. Oh, no-

ELIJAH. Look, I think we are just very different, Ali. We want different things... Do you understand?

ALICE. I think we are very much the same, we like the same books, poetry, we laugh at the same things. There's only the one difference between us and the whole world seems to not want to forgive me for- (*He kicks the rocking chair in disgust.*) It's my fault. Ask a silly question...

ELIJAH. Where are you going?

ALICE. I don't know. Home. I don't feel so good. All of a sudden.

ELIJAH. I don't give a good god damn what faith you were born into, or wish you hadn't been. And I am sorry that most folks, including my father, have been hateful to you at some point or other. But don't you ever believe that I would treat you any differently because of it. That is the furthest thing from the truth-

ALICE. Then what is the truth?

ELIJAH. The truth about what? Be damned if I know. I don't put a lot of stock in truth. I've never had the pleasure of meeting the real honest to goodness, no pun intended, truth. Wouldn't know it if it slapped me right across the face.

ALICE. According to your father, it'll do more than slap...

ELIJAH. I do know deceit. I certainly have met her, many times....Aw, look, I never want to hurt you Alice.

ALICE. I don't exactly feel wonderful right now.

ELIJAH. But I will never lie to you either.

ALICE. What does that leave? You won't lie and never met the truth? What's left? Some nice chattin about the weather and whittlin wood...

ELIJAH. Alice, I could ask you the same thing. What does that leave? You're the one going away in the fall- off to college, whole trainloads of more eligible book smart Romeos to fawn over-

ALICE. Is that what you are worried about?

ELIJAH. I'm not worried about anything. Except my chores that aren't getting done.

ALICE. Oh yes, the never ending chores. Funny how the chores seem to pile up whenever I come around.

ELIJAH. The chores are there every day, Alice, lots of them. Listen- I do appreciate the distraction-

ALICE. Oh, is that what I am?

ELIJAH. I appreciate your visits.

ALICE. A distraction?

ELIJAH. Try running a farm some day, it's not such stuff as dreams are made of, I assure you.

ALICE. Yup. Tactless sort of places, I remember. So why do it. If you don't love it, why do it?

ELIJAH. Alice just leave it be, alright?

ALICE. No!

ELIJAH. Because I live on a farm, Miss Logic Lady, I woke up one day and saw I lived on a farm and thought well "gosh darn"- I might have to do myself a little farming.

ALICE. Eli your father wanted this farm, not you. That was his choice. Why not just leave, go do something you choose-

ELIJAH. Choose?

ALICE. Yes. What you want.

ELIJAH. What I want? Them's fancy town words, wants, choose. I can't remember the last time I ever got a thing I wanted.

ALICE. I hate when you do that. Get that hang dog feel sorry for yourself attitude.

ELIJAH. I wanted this conversation to end about fifteen minutes ago. Did I get that?

ALICE. Fine. And I promise you I will never “distract” you from your chores ever again. You can be sure of that.

ELIJAH. Alice, I don’t expect you to understand. Hell, how could you. Just answer me one thing. Just tell me the last time you shed even one tear from wanting something?

ALICE. Just a couple of minutes ago, and doesn’t that make me a fool.

ELIJAH. I’m talking about life things Ali- I’m not talking about courting or a kiss or two

ALICE. Is that all you think I want? That you mean to me-

ELIJAH. I have no idea what I mean to you? I have no idea what any of us mean to anybody. You want to know my truth? How I see it is most people- they latch onto somebody like building some fort, like those stick houses you make playing as kids, glue us together a family so we can forget how alone we really all are. I look at my father, and if he wasn’t my dad, I mean if he was a total stranger - I’m not certain we’d even say hello to each other. He’s never been particularly fond of me, I’m sure he never thought once about having a kid, and there I was, this strange little boy, he had to worry about feeding, and how in the hell did he get into my life... And then I am supposed to tickle him and tell him I love him? Better to just get your work done and get on with it.

ALICE. Sarah thinks I am batty to spend so much time with you. “I mean what is he going to amount to anyway. Do you really aspire to becoming a peanut farmer’s wife”, she says? And I tell her I wish that made a difference, but it doesn’t. It honestly doesn’t. I enjoy being with you more than anyone I know. How could I give that up? Well, I think maybe now I need to try to give it up. What do you think?

ELIJAH. I think I enjoy being with you more than anyone I know, too. But then, I don't know that many people so that isn't saying much. But, if that's what you need to do, I understand.

ALICE. Have you ever been whaling?

ELIJAH. I beg your pardon?

ALICE. Whaling? Ever been?

ELIJAH. No...

ALICE. Just wondering.

ELIJAH. Oh, uh-

ALICE. Where did that one come from?

ELIJAH. Yeah.

ALICE. I'm have to read Moby Dick by Friday. And I haven't started. I decided to do my final project on whether it is arguably the greatest novel ever written, that is until I finish my first one or two, and I needed to read at least 200 pages tonight.

ELIJAH. Oh.

ALICE. See-

ELI AND ALICE. Perfectly logical.

*Mr. Pierce comes into the yard.*

MR. PIERCE. Marguerite?

ELIJAH. No, Dad. It's Alice.

MR. PIERCE. Alice? Alice, who?

ELIJAH. Alice Wilcox, Dad.

MR. PIERCE. No, I'm looking for your mother. We're supposed to have some dinner. But I can't seem to find her. At all. She's something, that woman. She's something, all right. I should have gone to Panama, Son. I was all ready to go, you know. But I took one look at that girl, and I said to myself: "you must be some kind of fool to want to get on a boat and leave her behind. Who in their right mind could leave a girl like that." You say you haven't seen her? Son? Well, have you?

ELIJAH. No, Dad.

MR. PIERCE. Haven't seen her... Well, that's what I was afraid of. She's probably out back kicking and twirling and spinning. Keeping me waiting for my supper. Loves to keep me waiting. Well, hurry up, Son, and come inside and get washed up. I don't want to be waiting on you too. You hear me?

ELIJAH. Yes, Dad, I'm coming.

MR. PIERCE. *(as he leaves)* Who in their right mind could leave a woman like that?

ELIJAH. I really do need to go. Make sure he's all right.

ALICE. Eli?

ELIJAH. It's nothing. He'll be asleep soon. He just feels bad because he's getting too old to help with the farm. He's feeling more useless than ever. I'll come by soon and see you.

ALICE. Sure. Whenever.

*The lights crossfade back to Alice's bedroom.*

SARAH. How long ago was that?

ALICE. Three weeks ago. Three weeks...

SARAH. And you haven't heard a word from him?

ALICE. Not a word.

SARAH. And he knew today was your birthday?

ALICE. I told him. A couple of times. I mean, he had asked, and I told him. He might have forgotten, but he knew.

SARAH. Well. Maybe he did forget

ALICE. His father was very sick, Sarah. He does have a lot on his mind.

SARAH. True... Uh-oh, it's almost midnight. Happy birthday, Ali. One last time.

ALICE. Thanks. Where are you going?

SARAH. *(a phrase meaning to the bathroom)* I'm going to see a man about a dog.

ALICE. Close that window, will you, Sarah Jane?

SARAH. Sure. It had better not stay cold like this. I only brought one sweater. Ali? What is this?

ALICE. What?

SARAH. On the ledge here.

ALICE. What?

SARAH. It looks like a box.

ALICE. A box? Sarah, be careful. You'll kill yourself.

SARAH. It is a box, Ali. It's a present. And I bet you anything I know who it's from.

ALICE. *(opening the box)* He must have put it out there when we were having dinner. That jerk. What if I hadn't seen it?

SARAH. You didn't. I found it.

ALICE. *(It is the carved whale from the beginning of the play.)* Oh, look.

SARAH. What is it?

ALICE. It's a whale. A great white whale.

SARAH. A whale? *(She is closing the window.)*

ALICE. Like in "Moby Dick-"

SARAH. Oh, how romantic...

*Claire walks in. She wears clothing from the mid seventies. She sits looking at Alice who is sitting on the bed. Sarah and Alice cannot see her. Two realities happening.*

CLAIRE. Did you say something mother?

ALICE. There's a card, too.

SARAH. Who's it from, Ahab?

ALICE. Very funny. Look, he wrote me a poem.

SARAH. Well, that makes up for the whale.



CLAIRE. Mother?

ALICE. Where are you going?

*Marc enters. Claire can see him Sarah and Alice cannot.*

CLAIRE. I'm not going anywhere. *(to Marc)* Did you find a place?

MARC. *(At the same time as Sarah)* Only on the street. With a meter.

SARAH. *(Almost same time as Marc)* I told you, to the ladies. Don't worry, I'll be back to hear the poem, if it's not too mushy.

MARC. Nowhere else but in this slum lord section of Miami do they have parking meters.

SARAH. See, he didn't forget. He's just strange. I keep telling you that. *(She goes out.)*

CLAIRE. You didn't hurt the car, did you?

MARC. No. Love the neighborhood Mom, every ghetto should have palm trees... Hope we still have our hub caps in an hour. How is she?

CLAIRE. I'm not sure. She's been sleeping.

MARC. She doesn't look very good, does she?

CLAIRE. What do you expect, Marc?

MARC. Are *you* okay?

CLAIRE. Yes, I'm fine.

MARC. Look at this place...

CLAIRE. What about it?

MARC. It's not very nice, Mom. I mean, look at it.

CLAIRE. Marc-

MARC. It's pretty depressing.

ALICE. *(She has read the poem to herself and now reads it aloud.)*  
If art is love;

Or is it love's an art?  
I can never get it straight.  
And if so, which do I choose?

CLAIRE. It's the best we could find.

MARC. Yeah, what were the bad one's like?

ALICE. Should I love like the painter,  
Colorfully, stroke after stroke,  
Stepping back to admire  
Until I have you pictured forever?

MARC. Gram? Oh shit, Mom, do you have any quarters?

CLAIRE. Don't tell me you forgot to feed the meter...

MARC. There was a little time on it, relax, plenty of time...

ALICE. Or like the musician, do I  
play a bit, then practice,  
Practice harder, and play some more  
Until I hear your song immortal?

CLAIRE. She talks to herself. Constantly now. *(Giving him quarters)* Do not tell me if you got a ticket.

MARC. Nice mumbling with you, Gram, be right back. Don't say a word we can understand till I get back. *(He leaves.)*

ALICE. Or like the dancer, leap into your arms,  
Heart spinning, Blood swirling,  
Every moment counting,  
Arms outstretched, soaring high,  
One big flourish before the curtain falls.

CLAIRE. Mother? Are you crying?

ALICE. *(She puts the card down, and looks at the whale. Then laughs through her tears.)* What difference does it make how? Just love me, silly. Like I love you... like I love you.

*The lights fade to black with Alice on the bed and Claire sitting in the chair.*

***End of Act One***

## ACT TWO

*The lights come up on a room in a nursing home in Miami, Florida. It is August, 1976 and Alice now quite old and very ill is lying in bed sleeping. Young Alice is standing nearby watching her. Her daughter, Claire Berkhartmeyer, who is 52 years old, is folding some housecoats and laundry and putting them away in a dresser. The room is plain, almost shabby and Claire has tried to brighten it up with a few of Alice's possessions.)*

YOUNG ALICE. I've heard, you silly fool.

OLD ALICE. (*mumbling in her sleep*) I know what you've done.

CLAIRE. (*who only sees Old Alice*) Mother?

OLD ALICE. And don't you ever expect me to forgive you.

CLAIRE. Mother? Are you awake?

YOUNG ALICE. If this is just another one of your excuses to avoid me-

OLD ALICE. It's not going to work, you know. You can't get rid of me forever.

CLAIRE. Mother? No one is trying to get rid of you. What are you talking about? (*Alice rolls over, still asleep.*) Oh, this is too much for one person to bear. I can't take much more of this... How can you possibly sleep in here, Mother? It is stifling. (*She sits and wipes her forehead and sighs.*)... I brought you some new clothes. I put them away in your dresser... I brought you some coconut patties, too. Don't let them just sit in there and melt. You need a haircut, do you know that? We'll have to take you to get your hair done soon. I saw a place just down the street... We could go on Saturday. If it's not too hot. I'm not going anywhere if it's this hot... (*Stops*) Now see this is what I mean- I just had a whole scene and what was it for, to show it was hot in Miami, duh...and that I am a bitch. And in the whole first act did he once mention us? Or that my parents divorced when I was five. Which meant just like that we were cut off from the family. We had done more than enough to darken the name... My father and I, were never spoken of, financially and in every other way, forgotten. In the nineteen thirties to have your parents divorce, and to be a Jew, and to find yourself growing up in a Podunk Florida town because your father has moved you to live with him because it is not clear if your mother could ever hope to raise you, or go completely crackers, and harm herself. And to basically not know her at all, all the time you are growing up, school dances, graduation. She is just some woman who shows up on the oddest days and gives you a butterscotch

lifesavers every now and then, with her red lipstick, always a bit too red. Maybe a gift just once on one birthday, and once on Hanukah- the same year in fact, once in your whole life. And then one day you get a phone call and this complete stranger who just happens to be your mother is on the line and she needs your help, she needs a place to live... the state will no longer care for her, and well, that is the stuff of a good play if you ask me.

SARAH' S VOICE. Ali!

CLAIRE. Your friends all have June Cleaver-like mothers, cupcakes and Tupperware and girl-talk, someone to teach you makeup and kisses, to play scrabble on nights no boys have come calling...

*(The lights crossfade to a writing table in a dorm room at Wharton. ALICE is looking at a term paper and frowning.)*

SARAH. *(from outside)* Ali?

CLAIRE. And you have a stranger's voice on the phone asking you if she can move in with you... *(Lights out on Claire)*

SARAH. *(Coming into the room)* You must be deaf. I've been calling for you.

ALICE. I was trying to write.

SARAH. I did it. He gave me an "A". Do you believe it? On my chemistry paper. What did you get? *(Sarah sees it lying on the table.)* A "D-"? *(reading)* "The Differing Levels of Stupidity That Make Up The Controlled Environment of Warfare"? "Or How Much Gas Does It Take To Kill a Man Beautifully." You didn't turn this in, did you?

ALICE. Yes, why, you don't like it either?

SARAH. No.

ALICE. Well, I'm sorry.

SARAH. What is wrong with you?

ALICE. Nothing.

SARAH. Why did you do this?

ALICE. Eli was drafted, Sarah. I got a letter a few days ago. Into the Army.

SARAH. Drafted?

ALICE. Yes.

SARAH. I didn't know they were still drafting people.

ALICE. Apparently so. I was writing about Hydrochloric Acid, but I ripped it up. He won't last a minute, Sarah. I know it.

SARAH. Sure, he will. It might even be what *he* needs.

ALICE. I mean on the battlefield. He won't last a minute. He won't. He'll take off his helmet, sit down and try to reason with them.

SARAH. He has six months training anyway. Richard did. Six to eight months. The war will probably be over by then. Haven't you been listening in history class?

ALICE. Yes. Six months? Really?

SARAH. At least.

ALICE. Good. I mean, what kind of Army would want Eli?

SARAH. True.

ALICE. Can you picture him marching? In perfect step with the others? He'll never be able to do it.

SARAH. No. He won't.

ALICE. Where is Richard now?

SARAH. (*She is reading Alice's paper.*) He's in France somewhere. Near the Marne River...

ALICE. Don't you worry about him?

SARAH. Of course. Sure, I worry. All the time. But what can I do? I mean, what good is worrying? Besides, he'll be back. He'll make it. Richard's too resourceful to get killed.

ALICE. Well, I'm not going to be as good at this as you. I can tell already. This sitting by the fire and waiting for the men to come home from the kill...

SARAH. I don't believe you wrote this-

ALICE. Why, it's all true. All of it.

SARAH. This is horrible. "It is ironic that perhaps the most creative of the new methods of murder that our friend Mr. Chemistry has developed for the new War is from the gas family. Completely invisible except for its yellow-green color and sweet almost fruity fragrance. Dichlor-ic-"

ALICE. Dichloroethylsulphide. Yperite.

SARAH. "Otherwise known as Mustard Gas, is not only an effective killer, extremely lethal, but it is also an equally effective morale crusher. Every soldier has heard the stories and must daily live with the fear, when, he too, hears the explosion and sees the cloud of death it carries with it. He must sit and hope, maybe even say a silent prayer, that he, too, has time to reach for his mask-- so he won't end up like so many before him--twisting in agony--gaspng, choking, throwing up blood as the life is ripped from his lungs."

ALICE. Okay, maybe I went overboard a bit, but it's all true. Believe me. I did quite a bit of research. Do you know that almost a million men have been killed already? And 49,000 of them have been Americans.

SARAH. But it is for a cause, Ali. A good cause.

ALICE. I don't know about you, but I can't think of a single "cause" I would want to see Eli die for. Not one.

SARAH. Is this all true?

ALICE. What?

SARAH. All of this?

ALICE. Every word of it. But you won't hear it in chemistry class. No matter how hard you pay attention.

SARAH. This is horrible.

ALICE. Yes, it is.

SARAH. Now you've got me worried. I haven't heard from Richard in almost a month. What if he's in trouble?

ALICE. I'm sure he isn't.

SARAH. We're gonna be late for homemaking class. I would have heard by now, wouldn't I?

ALICE. Of course you would have. I'm sure he's fine. Besides, he's coming home, remember?

SARAH. He is, you know. I'm sure of it.

ALICE. Good. *(They begin to leave for class.)* I've always believed there is a great power in knowing something is true.

*The lights start to crossfade to the nursing home. Alice is still sleeping. Claire is sitting in a chair watching her.*

OLD ALICE. *(mumbling in her sleep)* Every good thing that has ever happened to me, I had some inkling, some way of knowing it was going to happen.

*Marc enters wearing his Miami Dolphins cap.*

MARC. You are going to kill me Mom.

CLAIRE. You got a ticket.

MARC. No. Moved it. Found a lot behind the 24 hour car wash and massage parlor. How's she doing?

CLAIRE. I'm not sure. She's been sleeping. Why am I going to kill you?

MARC. 'Cause now we either have to get a massage or a wash. I opt for the former. What is she doing in this place Mom?

CLAIRE. There are not many "places" that would even take her, Marc.

MARC. Why not? You pay them money, don't you?

CLAIRE. This is not the first home we tried, son. She's been tossed out of a few already. I am not blind you know. This is my mother. You think I want her here? You haven't been home for awhile. You don't realize how bad things have gotten.

MARC. I'm sorry. How bad is she, Mom?

CLAIRE. I don't know. I get a different story from every doctor.

MARC. Well, that's easy. Stick with the doctor who gives you the best story.

CLAIRE. She's like a child now. How she carries on. Makes a scene. You should see her. And she needs constant care. She forgets things, who she's talking to.

MARC. When did she get this bad?

CLAIRE. I don't know. It just keeps getting worse.

OLD ALICE. Why.

CLAIRE. First it got so bad we couldn't keep her at home anymore. She kept us up all night. And we couldn't leave her alone during the day.

OLD ALICE. Why would you do this?

CLAIRE. Now they've got her filled up with so many drugs, I've lost count. You can see it too.

OLD ALICE. I'll be alone.

CLAIRE. No one should have to go through this. No one.

OLD ALICE. You left me all alone.

MARC. What? What did you say? Grandma?

CLAIRE. She keeps mumbling to herself. She thinks we're trying to get rid of her.

MARC. Is that what you think? Yeah, well, fat chance, lady.

CLAIRE. She can't hear you, Son.

OLD ALICE. And you promised me. Promised.

MARC. Grandma?

OLD ALICE. (*very startled*) Get your hands off me. Don't you dare give me another of your goddamn shots.

MARC. Whoa!

CLAIRE. Marc!

OLD ALICE. Did you hear me?



MARC. Gram, it's me, Marc.

OLD ALICE. Marc?

MARC. Yes.

CLAIRE. Mother?

OLD ALICE. Is that you, Marc? It is you. Oh, my little Marc. My sweet little Marc.

MARC. How are you, Gram?

OLD ALICE. Terrible. I feel terrible. I thought you were that fat nurse with the mustache.

MARC. Nope, see, no mustache.

OLD ALICE. No, but you need a haircut. Oh, it is so good to see you.

MARC. Mom's here too.

OLD ALICE. I know. Hello, Claire.

CLAIRE. Hello, Mother.

OLD ALICE. You look good. Are you feeling better today?

CLAIRE. I'm all right. Why?

OLD ALICE. You looked terrible the last time you were here. I was worried about you.

CLAIRE. How are you? Better?

OLD ALICE. No, not really. But what do you care?

CLAIRE. All right, Mother, let's not start that.

OLD ALICE. (*Like a child*) Take me home then. It's awful here. I hate it here. I want to go home.

CLAIRE. Mother-

OLD ALICE. Please? Please, Claire?

CLAIRE. You know we can't, Mother. Now stop it.

OLD ALICE. I hate it here.

CLAIRE. The doctor says you need to be here.

OLD ALICE. I hate that doctor. What does he know. I want to go home, Sarah, make her take me home. I don't like it here. I want to leave. *(Pause, as she collects herself)* I'm going to die here, I hope you know that. You've left me here to die. *(She holds her chest.)*

MARC. Maybe we should get someone.

OLD ALICE. No, no, no! I'm fine. Don't go. They'll just give me another shot. Please. I'll be good. Please. Don't go. Don't go, my baby... Wait a minute, what in the fudge are you doing here? I thought you were up North?

MARC. I was. But I came home to see you.

OLD ALICE. That's a bunch of hooley. I haven't seen you in, I don't know how long-

MARC. A few months-

CLAIRE. Longer than that, Marc.

OLD ALICE. You're telling me. A few months. A year, maybe, is more like it. So?

MARC. So, what?

OLD ALICE. So, why are you back? What could bring you to this God-forsaken city in the middle of the summer.

MARC. It's a long story, Gram.

OLD ALICE. Well, go on, tell me, I'm not going anywhere. I can't. They tie us down at night.

MARC. They don't-

OLD ALICE. Sure.

MARC. This place sucks.

CLAIRE. Marc-

MARC. Well, it does.

OLD ALICE. You heard him, Claire. This place sucks.

CLAIRE. Both of you stop it.

OLD ALICE. *(to Marc)* Well, I'm glad *you're* here. Tell me what have you been doing? What's new?

MARC. Not much. Still working. Writing a little.

OLD ALICE. Good. Can anyone understand this one?

MARC. Hope so.

OLD ALICE. I mean that one play of yours, how long was that Claire?

CLAIRE. I certainly don't know-

OLD ALICE. It was three hours if it wasn't a minute. And I will kiss you right on the bottom you were born with if you could tell me what it was about.

MARC. It was dealt with greed Grandma. And it was two hours and forty minutes. And, it wasn't "about" *(makes quote gestures)* anything really. It was more of a mood piece...

OLD ALICE. A mood piece? For two hours and forty minutes? Is catatonia a mood?

MARC. You tell me.

OLD ALICE. Touché... And your mother showed me your latest one. About the Hostages, and the gas crisis, and the environment, and good Lord what isn't that play about...

MARC. Let's talk about something else, bed pans, anything....

OLD ALICE. Listen, James Joyce- the beginning was very confusing these two hostages- obviously a metaphor for what is going on in the Middle East, but then you just end- then repeat, and then it just stops-

MARC. Exactly I wanted it to have no clear beginning- I was playing with structure- if the middle comes first- and then if there was no end, only a beginning of an end-

OLD ALICE. Marc, I am seventy six years old, do you think I want to argue confusing endings with you? And that title?

MARC. What is wrong with Something Better?

OLD ALICE. Think about it... But don't pay me any mind, I am just dying and what is my worry if all of fine art and literature are racing me to the finish line. Why is it every generation thinks they have the corner on what art should be, needs to be, must become. You are not the only artist who is convinced he is avant and the rest of the world is tres gard... At Wharton we used to Isadora dance with no knickers on and think we were changing the world... Know where that term comes from?

MARC. What? Knickers?

OLD ALICE. Avant gard.

MARC. No. Actually.

OLD ALICE. Your mother does. She's a good teacher. Knows her literature...

CLAIRE. As if I had a choice...

OLD ALICE. Tell him Claire-

CLAIRE. Avant gard was a military term- the French military- to be in front of the troops- as in the scouts sent out to make sure it was safe-

MARC. For the others, to blaze the trail, what is wrong with that-

OLD ALICE. Not blazing- dying. They were sent down the road like canaries in a coal mine.

CLAIRE. That is open to interpretation.

MARC. If no one ever took the risk there would never be any change-

OLD ALICE. They were built in bullet catchers! Change? Stop trying to be bold and new! The one thing you can count on to never change, is that nothing important ever changes!!! (*an awkward pause. Finally.*) How's Karen?

MARC. (*after looking at his Mother*) She's fine.

OLD ALICE. She's so pretty. Is she here?

MARC. No, she's in New York...

OLD ALICE. I like her. Has she read your play?

MARC. We broke up, Gram. About a week ago.

OLD ALICE. I thought you were going to say that. Why?

MARC. Who knows. There were a lot of reasons. We're both still trying to pick the best one.

OLD ALICE. Well, that explains the trip to Miami in August.

MARC. Hey, now I resent that. I flew five thousand miles to see you.

OLD ALICE. Te ptt. Like hell you did. But that' okay. Sometimes it's good to come home and lick your wounds. Sort things out.

MARC. Get your laundry done.

OLD ALICE. Ha. Yes. Oh, it's good to see you.

MARC. It's good to see you too.

OLD ALICE. It may still work out, you know, who knows.

MARC. I doubt it, but maybe.

OLD ALICE. You'll have to tell me about it. Maybe I can help.

MARC. Sure, Gram. Maybe.

OLD ALICE. What? You don't think I'd understand? You think I'm such an old cow I couldn't possibly begin to understand?

MARC. Moo...

CLAIRE. Marc-

OLD ALICE. Hush a minute, Claire. This boy of yours still thinks of me as this old woman, who's been boarding in the house with him for as long as he can remember, and who can blame him? That's all he knows about me. And now, he probably thinks I'm a loony because I'm sure you've told him a thing

or two. Well, maybe I am half gone, but I have a thing or two of my own to say before I go-

MARC. You're not going anywhere, Gram.

OLD ALICE. Yes, I am. I'm dying. They tell me I have a hole in my heart, which doesn't surprise me, but I'm glad you're here. Because we have some talking to do.

CLAIRE. Mother-

OLD ALICE. What, Claire? What?

CLAIRE. We can only stay for a few more minutes today.

OLD ALICE. Why?

CLAIRE. George, has a doctor's appointment at four.

OLD ALICE. What's wrong with George?

CLAIRE. Nothing.

OLD ALICE. Then what does he need a doctor for?

CLAIRE. It's nothing, Mother. Nothing, really.

MARC. He has diabetes-

CLAIRE. Marc-

MARC. It's official now.

OLD ALICE. Diabetes?

CLAIRE. Yes, Mother.

OLD ALICE. That's what you call "nothing"? Diabetes?

CLAIRE. I didn't want to worry you.

OLD ALICE. You mean, you didn't think I'd care. How is he?

CLAIRE. Fine. As long as he takes his insulin. The doctor just wants to monitor his progress, that's all.

OLD ALICE. No wonder you look so tired lately. Is he still eating for four? (*Marc smiles.*) Well, it's true. How does he expect to get better eating like that? Your father is the only man I know who could empty a Piggly Wiggly single-handed. My friend Sarah had an Aunt Peggy just like him.

CLAIRE. He's on a diet now. A strict diet.

OLD ALICE. Well, that's good.

MARC. Right. I give it two weeks.

CLAIRE. All right-

OLD ALICE. Two weeks? That's good for him.

MARC. Well, she said it was strict, didn't she?

CLAIRE. All right, both of you, stop it.

OLD ALICE. Well, Claire, it's true. I've been saying it for years: why you married that man, I'll never know. I mean, what kind of last name is Berkhartzmeyer? That should have been reason enough to write him off, but one good look at him, and any fool could tell he was the booby prize.

CLAIRE. And we all know you're the expert when it comes to marriage, aren't you, mother? Didn't you set some kind of record. Down the aisle and into the courthouse, isn't that what they used to whisper? (*pause*)

OLD ALICE. I know I didn't love him, Claire, but I was good to him. And I know I wasn't very good to you, and you hate me for it. But I was scared, don't you see? I was scared you could tell. You used to look at me with those green eyes, just like his, and I knew you could tell.

CLAIRE. It's alright, Mother.

OLD ALICE. But I needed him, Claire. At the time, I needed him. And so I thought I loved him. And I needed you. You were my reason for being. And he took that away from me. He just took it away. And look what I'm left with. Look what I have to show for it. In and out of hospitals for years. And a daughter who hates me, who doesn't even know me-

CLAIRE. Who got you out of those hospitals. Who gave you a place to live.

OLD ALICE. Who put me right back in this one-

CLAIRE. And don't say I hate you. I don't hate you.

OLD ALICE. Then why do you leave me here? Why else would you let them give me drugs, and dope me up, and leave me here to die? Why else, if you didn't hate me?

MARC. Come on, Gram. Stop it.

OLD ALICE. I only wanted the best for you, Claire, and look what I've got. Look. Look where you've left me to die. Look at me... You do hate me. You won't even look at me. Look, look what I've become.

CLAIRE. (*picking up her purse and starting to leave*) You are what you've always been. Someone's problem.

OLD ALICE. I'm your mother, Claire.

MARC. Mom?

OLD ALICE. That's what I am. Take a good look. Take a good look at your mother.

*Claire is gone. The lights crossfade to just outside the dorm room, Sarah is holding a telephone waiting to give it to Alice.*

ALICE. Is it my momma?

SARAH. I don't know. I didn't answer it. Laura Dirkin did. She said it was a man's voice.

ALICE. Hello?

ELIJAH. (*who is on another telephone stage left*) Hello, Ali?

ALICE. Yes?

ELIJAH. Hi.

ALICE. Eli? Is that you?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. Hi. How are you?

SARAH. Is it him?

ALICE. Yes. Shhh.



ELIJAH. Fine, you?

ALICE. Okay. Surprised. Where are you? Where are you telephoning me from?

ELIJAH. I'm in Atlanta.

ALICE. Atlanta? What are you doing in Atlanta?

ELIJAH. I heard they had a nice zoo.

ALICE. Very funny. I thought you were stationed in Macon.

ELIJAH. I was. We're being shipped out next week.

ALICE. Next week? *(to Sarah)*

SARAH. What?

ALICE. You told me six months-

ELIJAH. We leave for New York on Monday.

SARAH. It was.

ELIJAH. How are you?

ALICE. I'm fine. Busy. Exams are next week.

ELIJAH. Are they...

ALICE. Yes. Yech. And I'm doing some writing.

ELIJAH. Good.

ALICE. Just a story. The beginning of a story. For you. For your birthday. It's about a chair. Just kidding. I'm so glad you telephoned. I miss you.

ELIJAH. I miss you too.

ALICE. I can't believe you're doing this. It must be costing you a fortune.

ELIJAH. Yes, but you're worth it.

ALICE. Sure, I know that. But since when do you?

ELIJAH. Since I became a rich soldier on pay day.

ALICE. Uh-oh. Look out Atlanta. Listen, there's a nice hat in a shop on Piedmont, if you want to pick it up for me. As long you're feeling generous.

ELIJAH. The grey one or the red?

ALICE. The red, of course.

ELIJAH. Of course.

ALICE. You're becoming quite the flirt, has anybody ever told you that?

ELIJAH. Comes with the uniform. You know us soldiers.

ALICE. Well, I'm glad to see the Army has done something for you.

ELIJAH. Yeah, I can hardly wait to see what comes next...

ALICE. What? Speak up. I can barely hear you. Don't mumble, you ninny. At five dollars a word, the least you can do is speak up.

ELIJAH. What do you care? You're not paying for it.

ALICE. True. But I can't stand to see money wasted. Deep down I'm my father's girl.

ELIJAH. What are you doing this weekend?

ALICE. Excuse me?

ELIJAH. I said, "What are you doing this weekend?"

ALICE. (*A jest*) Well, we were going fox hunting, but the dogs got sick.

SARAH. Fox hunting?

ALICE. Why?

ELIJAH. I was wondering if you wanted to come to Atlanta. For the weekend. I'd like to see you. Very much. We could go to dinner. Wherever you wanted.

ALICE. I'm sorry, I still don't think I can hear you. Did you say: "I want you to come to Atlanta?"

ELIJAH. For the weekend, yes.

ALICE. How?

ELIJAH. By train-

ALICE. Oh.

ELIJAH. I could pay you back for the tickets. I'll pay for everything. You just have to get here.

ALICE. Are you feeling okay?

ELIJAH. Yes. Well- I'm feeling fine. Ali, please come. I want to see you. I'd like to talk to you.

ALICE. (to Sarah) He wants me to come to Atlanta.

SARAH. What?

ALICE. Shhh! Sarah says "hello".

ELIJAH. Tell her "hello" for me.

ALICE. He says "hello".

SARAH. Is he crazy?

ALICE. Sarah-

ELIJAH. Tell her I'm not crazy.

ALICE. Are you sure?

ELIJAH. I just need to see you.

ALICE. I can't just come to Atlanta. I can't just leave school.

ELIJAH. Why not?

ALICE. I can't.

ELIJAH. Come...

ALICE. I don't believe you.

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. How long are you going to be gone?

ELIJAH. What do you mean-how long am I going to be gone"?

ALICE. I mean, after you leave Atlanta?

ELIJAH. Ali, I'm going to a war. They don't give you much of an itinerary, you know.

ALICE. No?

ELIJAH. No.

ALICE. Well, that's very rude of them. I wouldn't go then. That was a joke, feeble as it may have seemed.

ELIJAH. I heard you.

ALICE. Don't be upset.

ELIJAH. I'm not upset.

ALICE. You are upset. I'd be upset. I am upset. Eli, do you have any idea what you are asking me to do?

ELIJAH. Yes, I am asking you to get on a train and come to Atlanta and spend this weekend with me.

ALICE. You've never even asked me --

ELIJAH. I know. Well, now I am...

ALICE. Eli, you have awfully odd ideas about courting. Has anyone ever told you that?

ELIJAH. I'm scared, Ali. And you're the only person I know who would understand.

ALICE. What are you scared of, Sweetheart? That was a stupid question. I'd be scared too. I'd be terrified... Eli, I will be expelled from here if I leave without permission.

ELIJAH. Alright, I understand. What I'm asking is ridiculous. I understand. I just got this whim, that's all. It was silly.

ALICE. It's not silly. It's not. It's just pretty much impossible, that's all. Will you telephone me again, though, before you go? I like talking to you on the telephone. It's much better than writing.

ELIJAH. Sure, if I can.

ALICE. But don't stop writing, all right?

ELIJAH. Alright. I should go then. There's a line of people wanting to use the phone here.

ALICE. Okay. Promise you'll telephone me.

ELIJAH. I'll try. If not, I'll talk to you soon. (*About to hang up.*)

ALICE. Alright. Eli, are you there?

ELIJAH. Yes? Ali? (*pause*) Ali, what?

ALICE. Where are you? I mean, where are you staying?

ELIJAH. The Peachtree Hotel. Why?

ALICE. Where is it?

ELIJAH. On Peachtree Street, I guess. Why?

ALICE. I want to come. I'm going to come.

ELIJAH. What?

SARAH. What?

ALICE. I said, I'm coming. To see you.

ELIJAH. How?

ALICE. By train. Wasn't that your idea?

ELIJAH. Yes-

ALICE. Well, then, listen to me, you peanut brain. You had better meet me at the train station. By the main ticket window. There's a clock there, a big clock, right next to the window, I think. Yes, I'm sure of it. Alright?

ELIJAH. Alright, I'll find it.

ALICE. You'd better. I'll meet you under the clock. Tomorrow.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. Hush.

ELIJAH. When?

ALICE. Tomorrow, you ninny.

ELIJAH. When tomorrow?

ALICE. How should I know when tomorrow? I'm making this up as I go along. Just go there and wait. Alright?

ELIJAH. Alright. Ali, thanks.

ALICE. Sure. What are friends for?

ELIJAH. Bye.

ALICE. Bye.

SARAH. Are you crazy?

ALICE. Very. But I'll be damned if I'm going to let him leave, just like that.

SARAH. You're not really going to do it, though-

ALICE. Of course I am.

SARAH. How?

ALICE. I don't know. On a train. Come on. We've got a lot of work to do.

*The lights crossfade back to the nursing home. Marc is next to Alice's bed hoping she won't hear him as he picks up his cap he left on the chair. He makes a noise accidentally.*

OLD ALICE. Are you looking for something?

MARC. No. I couldn't tell if you were awake?

OLD ALICE. Neither can I. Half the time. Come here, and sit down by me.

MARC. No, Gram, I just came to make sure you were okay. We're going to go now.

OLD ALICE. Marc, wait. Don't go. You just got here.

MARC. We have to. We have to pick up Dad.

OLD ALICE. But I need to talk to you. I need to tell you something.

MARC. It'll have to wait, Gram.

OLD ALICE. But it can't. You don't understand.

MARC. It'll have to.

OLD ALICE. Marc, listen to me. I'm going to die.

MARC. Gram-

OLD ALICE. I'm not complaining. Now you listen to me-

MARC. Okay, but hurry.

OLD ALICE. Look, I'm the one who doesn't have much time, not you.

MARC. Mom is waiting out front.

OLD ALICE. She'll wait.

MARC. *(pause)* What?

OLD ALICE. I want you to understand something. Something about life.

MARC. Gram...

OLD ALICE. There are moments. We don't get to choose them--- most of the time they are things we have no control over. But if you are lucky and learn to listen to, I don't know, to some sort of signals, you will get this feeling, this premonition, that you are smack dab right inside one, of those moments where your history is being written. It's as if you can reach out and feel that if you turn left instead of right, just round this corner, and you will see an old friend. And there you are suspended in this moment wondering if

you should say hello, and you do, and most days you are very busy, but you happen to have time this one day. Just a Tuesday. And he does too, and he asks you out for lunch. And there is something about his laugh, that feels alright. Comfortable. That helps you to forget. And then, before you know it, you begin to date, and somehow you are getting married, having a child, and all because you said hello and turned that particular corner.

MARC. Gram, don't get all Kierkegardian on me it's too hot...

ALICE. Did you know I was once in love? Desperately in love, with someone, long before I married your Grandfather. It was a long way back, just after the dinosaurs. I was still living in Macon. And I was going to Wharton School for Girls. And the boy I loved was about to be shipped overseas to fight in the war. He was in the Army. Anyway, he called me one weekend, saying he was in Atlanta, and he wanted me to come visit him and wish him off. He wanted to see me. Now you have to understand, Marc, girls didn't act like they do now, back then, we didn't just run off and live with our boyfriends whenever we felt like it. In fact, if a girl even spent the night with a boy before she was married- everyone would have pretended it had never happened. No one would have ever talked about it. But he wanted me to come to Atlanta- and something told me to go. Not to say no.

*She crosses to a box and opens it and takes out her whale.*

MARC. So you went?

OLD ALICE. You bet your sweet patooties, I went. Wild animals couldn't have kept me out of Atlanta that weekend.

MARC. Was he glad to see you?

OLD ALICE. Yes, yes, he was. And I was glad to see him. He looked so beautiful. He was in his uniform. All pressed. He was the best looking man I've ever seen... And he was so glad to see me... *(She is trying not to cry now.)* I'm sorry. Oh, I miss him so much, Sarah. I loved him so much. I don't know if you can understand.

MARC. Gram? Look, let me tell Mom to go on without me.

OLD ALICE. No, I'll be fine-

MARC. I'll come right back.

OLD ALICE. Are you sure?



MARC. Yeah, I'll take a bus home. Hey, don't worry, I wouldn't miss the end of this story for the world.

OLD ALICE. Come back.

MARC. I will.

*He goes out. Alice wipes her eyes and sighs.*

OLD ALICE. Come back....

*The lights crossfade to a hotel room in Atlanta, back in 1918. There is a large bed with a sheet propped over it, a makeshift canopy bed. Elijah is asleep on it. His head is bandaged and his face is bruised. Alice is sitting in a chair, looking at him, a blanket pulled over her. It is late morning. Eli rolls over onto the bandage on his forehead.*

ELIJAH. Ow! (*startled, he sits up quickly and knocks into the makeshift canopy, which falls. Tangled and half awake, he tries to free himself, and, like in a slapstick comedy, in doing so, falls out of the bed.*) Ow! Damn!

ALICE. Good morning.

ELIJAH. Huh? Oh, yeah. Hi. Good morning.

ALICE. How's your head?

ELIJAH. Terrible. Alice, what did I do?

ALICE. You were in a fight. A fist fight.

ELIJAH. Great. With who?

ALICE. Well, I didn't get his name. He was a soldier too. Pretty big.

ELIJAH. Oh. How big?

ALICE. Big.

ELIJAH. Very big? (*She starts to gesture.*) I think I get the picture. I haven't been in a fight since grammar school. Philip Perry and I. I won that one. How'd I do?

ALICE. Well, put it this way, you've won one and you've lost one.

ELIJAH. How bad did I lose?

ALICE. Not too bad. It was over pretty quick.

ELIJAH. Was it?

ALICE. Yes.

ELIJAH. Well, remind me not to try and help you next time.

ALICE. I was doing just fine without you.

ELIJAH. Were you?

ALICE. Yes. I threw the champagne bottle at him.

ELIJAH. You what?

ALICE. Well, he was hurting you.

ELIJAH. I hope you hit him-

ALICE. No, but it scared him off.

ELIJAH. Good for you.

ALICE. I thought it was pretty spunky of me.

ELIJAH. You wasted a perfectly good bottle of champagne though.

ALICE. Well, it was the second bottle...

ELIJAH. Oh, well, then.

ALICE. So now has it all come back to you?

ELIJAH. Most of it. I remembered most of it. I just hoped it was all a bad dream. So, aren't you glad you came?

ALICE. Well, it certainly hasn't been boring.

ELIJAH. Did I wake you last night? At all?

ALICE. No, you slept. Pretty soundly.

ELIJAH. Did you sleep over there?

ALICE. Yes.

ELIJAH. Why? Was I snoring?

ALICE. No, I just felt more comfortable over here. I couldn't sleep for a while, from all the excitement.

ELIJAH. Great...

ALICE. What?

ELIJAH. Well, that is hardly the way I wanted the night to turn out.

ALICE. Could have fooled me.

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. Nothing.

ELIJAH. No, what did you mean by that?

ALICE. You mean it wasn't all a big plan to avoid me again?

ELIJAH. Listen, I want to talk to you about that.

ALICE. Eli, relax. I was just kidding.

ELIJAH. I know. But I want to talk to you about that.

ALICE. We've already talked about it-

ELIJAH. When, last night?

ALICE. No, before. A long time ago. Many times.

ELIJAH. But we didn't talk about it last night. Did we?

ALICE. No-

ELIJAH. Oh. Because I was trying to get drunk enough to talk about it.

ALICE. Well, good. But now we're both sober, and I slept about five minutes, so I'm pretty exhausted. So let's not talk about it now? Alright? I really don't feel like it.

ELIJAH. Alright. Alice, I have two things... Two things I want to say to you... And then I'll shut up.

ALICE. You don't have to shut up-

ELIJAH. Because it seems to give you such pain to talk to me-

ALICE. It doesn't give me pain. Go on...

ELIJAH. Thing number one...

ALICE. Thing number one.

ELIJAH. This is hard.

ALICE. See...

ELIJAH. Ali, I enlisted. I wasn't drafted.

*Mr. Pierce appears on the porch. Two realities.*

ALICE. / MR. PIERCE. What?

ELIJAH. I wasn't drafted. I enlisted.

MR. PIERCE. You did what?

ELIJAH. I lied to you. I'm sorry. I knew you'd kill me if I told you the truth.

ALICE. Why?

MR. PIERCE. You think I don't see what you're doing, don't you?

ELIJAH. You'd know how wrong it was, and you wouldn't be afraid to say it.

MR. PIERCE. Well, don't kid yourself. I know what you're up to-

ALICE. No, I mean what would make you do a thing like that?

ELIJAH. You are away in school, and got so... I don't know sad, and my father-

MR. PIERCE. Oh, no you don't!

ELIJAH. I couldn't take his yelling anymore.

MR. PIERCE. Don't you go trying to blame this on me. Don't you dare. I've been trying to make something of this farm, to make a life for you, for I don't know how many years. And from day one, all you could think about was a way out of here. You just couldn't wait, could you? Just like your mother. Just can't wait to leave. Well, go on. Go.

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. When do you leave?

ELIJAH. The end of next week.

MR. PIERCE. Don't waste much time, do you?

ELIJAH. It's not really up to me.

MR. PIERCE. No, of course not... What about the farm?

ELIJAH. I've already taken care of that.

MR. PIERCE. Son...

ELIJAH. I've got a man and his boy coming by-

MR. PIERCE. Don't do this...

ELIJAH. To talk about overseeing the place while I'm gone.

MR. PIERCE. What do you mean overseeing?

ELIJAH. Helping you out while I'm gone.

MR. PIERCE. You said overseer. You didn't say help.

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. I don't need any stranger to tell me how to run my farm.

ELIJAH. You can't do it all by yourself.

MR. PIERCE. I've been doing just fine by myself up 'til now, haven't I? I don't need you or anybody else to tell me how to run my farm. You want to go? Go. But you leave me and my land alone. And another thing, don't you ever come back here again. You hear me? You leave, but don't you ever set foot on this farm again. Ever.

*The lights crossfade to the hotel room.*

ELIJAH. I do seem to have a knack for upsetting him.

ALICE. From what I've seen, it doesn't take much.

ELIJAH. Well, it's not the first time he told me never to come back. When I was seventeen, I told him I was in love with a girl I had met in school, and that her family had asked me to go hiking up north with them. I told him her name was Joanne. Joanne Ferguson. Of course, there was no Joanne Ferguson. I was making it up.

ALICE. I don't understand.

ELIJAH. I know. Wait. Let me finish. I was making it up because I wanted to get away for a few days. And I needed a good excuse. And he told me I couldn't go, but I went anyway. And to this day, that's where he thinks I went. Hiking with Joanne Ferguson and her family.

ALICE. So, where did you go?

ELIJAH. To New York. I hopped the train to New York. I wanted to see my mother. It was my birthday, and I hadn't heard from her. Again. And, I don't know, I just felt like it was time to try and find her. Anyway, I had this address from the last letter she had written, so I went. And when I got there I couldn't decide what to say, so I sat down on the steps to try to figure it out, and just then, this little boy opens the door to sneak outside. He was about seven, and he had curly red hair and freckles. And he was playing with a toy gun, and he looks up at me, points the gun and says: "Sssshh!" Then he whispers: "Put your hands up." And I did. And then he says in the great way only a kid can immediately, you now, get bold: "Hi" ... "Hi" ... "you live here?" And I said: "No, not really. I'm just visiting. A friend upstairs ..." "Oh, we live here," he says proudly. "Do you," I say forgetting my hands are up. "I said put your hands up and keep them up." Just then she calls through the door. "Aaron? Aaron, where are you?" "That's my Mom." he says. And then he looks at me real hard. "Okay, I guess I'll let you go. You can go now." And I said, "Thank you," and started to walk upstairs. And just as I get one flight up, his mother - my mother - comes out looking very worried, and she starts hugging him. "You scared me. I didn't know where you were." "I was playing," he says. And then she kissed him on the forehead. "Well, don't go outside like that, sweetheart." she said. "It's too dangerous." "I know," he said, "I almost shot a man." And he pointed up toward me, so I ducked back. But I saw her. I saw my mother. Her hair and her white robe. She had turned around and was carrying the boy in her arms like she used to carry me. And she was tickling him, and he was giggling... They went inside and shut the

door, and I waited a bit and then walked back down the stairs. And I could hear Aaron playing inside, shooting "Bang, bang." And I just kept walking, and when I got outside, I started to run. And I would have run all the way back to Georgia, if I could have. I don't know why it hurt me so much, but it did. To see my mother hug him and kiss him on the forehead. I had never felt anything like that before. That ache in my stomach. Anyway, I got home, and my father whipped me good for leaving without his permission. But, I never told him. I even waited a few weeks and told him Joanne Ferguson and I had broken up. So that he wouldn't ask me why she never came around. He loved that. "See, son, what did I tell you? Never trust a woman. Never." And for the first time, I agreed with him. I knew what he meant. And I said: "You're right, Dad. Don't worry. I know what you mean. I understand now." God, my head is killing me.

ALICE. What is it, sweetheart?

ELIJAH. I mean, I haven't been able to trust a single thing I have ever tried to do. Don't you see that?

ALICE. Why?

ELIJAH. Oh, come on. You know how ridiculous I am. I must have tried a hundred different things to want to be and never followed through with any of them. I'm always too afraid. I haven't finished a damn thing I've started in I don't know how long.

ALICE. You finished your father's chair.

ELIJAH. Big deal.

ALICE. And my whale.

ELIJAH. I'm talking about life things, Alice. What I'm going to do with my life. I'm twenty-five years old, and I have no life yet. No goals.

ALICE. You've got time. Twenty-five is not the end of the world, you know.

ELIJAH. I know that... Lordy... I feel like I've already been to war.

ALICE. Good, don't go then.

ELIJAH. I've thought of that, believe me ... It's not that I'm a coward, Ali. I'm not afraid.

ALICE. I know, I saw you fight an ox, remember? Oh, Eli, it's my fault isn't it.

ELIJAH. What? That you are so pretty. Why do you have to be so pretty?

ALICE. Eli-

ELIJAH. You are.

ALICE. Yeah, well, I don't feel very "pretty" right now. No, this whole war thing. I begged you to leave the farm and make something of yourself. You ninny, why did you listen to me? Why?

ELIJAH. I love you, Alice Wilcox... That's thing number two. That I wanted to say to you. I love you. *(She turns away)* Well, I didn't expect you to be thrilled, but I didn't expect it to upset you.,

ALICE. Stop it...

ELIJAH. I love you, Ali. I just never have been able to admit it. But, it's true... Look at me. Look at me. *(She does.)* I love you more than anything else in the whole world.

*He reaches out and takes her in his arms. And kisses her.*

ALICE. Oh, I love you, Eli. I love you so much.

ELIJAH. *(She hits his head accidentally.)* Ow! Careful.

ALICE. Sorry.

ELIJAH. Alice, I have no idea what I want to do when I get back.

ALICE. Don't worry about that-

ELIJAH. But I do know I want you to be part of my life. That much I'm sure of.

ALICE. Well, you have to start somewhere...

ELIJAH. I don't want to lose you, Ali. But I don't expect you to sit at home and wait for me. I just don't want to lose you either.

ALICE. Eli, I love you. I've known that I love you for quite some time now-

ELIJAH. And I love you-

ALICE. Yeah?



ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. So then how are you going to lose me, Silly? You couldn't get rid of me even when you wanted to... I would wait forever for you, don't you know that?

*He kisses her again. Then her neck. Her shoulders. And they lower down to the bed. The lights crossfade to the nursing home. Old Alice is alone.*

OLD ALICE. *(Said with young Alice as the last scene crossfades)* I'd wait forever, don't you know that ...

*Marc enters.*

MARC. If you're asleep again, I'm going home.

OLD ALICE. I'm not asleep. I was just resting my eyes. I've been waiting for you. Thought you weren't coming back.

MARC. I told you I would.

OLD ALICE. I've never gotten over losing him, Marc. Never. And I've taken it out on everyone. Even myself. I couldn't write... Nothing ... Nothing made any sense after that.

MARC. He did die, then-

OLD ALICE. Yes-

MARC. In the war?

OLD ALICE. Yes. He left Atlanta, and I went back to school. And four and a half weeks later, he was dead. Killed in the Meuse-Argonne battle. Near a forest. Poor Eli. He hardly lasted a month.

MARC. Shit.

OLD ALICE. And after he had promised me he would come back, Sarah ... I had this friend, her name was Sarah. She was luckier. He came back. Richard Lamping. They even got married. Moved to Arkansas... Eli's father died the same year. The Spanish Flu. Took about half our town... They buried Eli in France. I went there once. To visit him. It's a nice grave site.

But there were so many... So many... Anyway, I don't know why I'm tell you all this-

MARC. I'm glad you did.

OLD ALICE. I guess, I just wanted to you to know your grandmother isn't some old loony, mooching off her daughter in her final days. But, that's what I am, I guess. That's what I am.

MARC. I can't believe this

OLD ALICE. What

MARC. I've known you my whole life, and we have never talked about any of this, not once. There is so much I want to know. Gram, how can you be so sure? Don't be angry, but with what is going on with me and Karen, I just- I mean how did you know that he was the one.

OLD ALICE. There is no "one" my sweet. There is never only one. But there is right. And right feels much, much better than wrong. And try as you might, but wrong-- it won't ever wake up one morning and feel right.

MARC. But how can you be sure.

OLD ALICE. You will.

MARC. I need me one of those moments Those life changing time warps...

OLD ALICE. Eli used to say the best things in life are always mistakes, haven't you heard that.

MARC. Uh, No.

OLD ALICE. That's what I'd said. I'd said "no I've never heard that." And he'd said "neither have I, but it makes me feel better to say it." But now I would also say that the best things in my life have come out of my mistakes. I have you, and your mother.

MARC. This is reeking havoc on my self-esteem issues.

OLD ALICE. Don't you ever go off and fight a war. Do you hear me? Ever. I mean that, Marc. Work in a hospital, Type letters, if you have to. But don't you ever walk onto a battlefield with a gun to shoot someone else's boy. You hear me?

MARC. Okay.

OLD ALICE. Promise me.

MARC. I promise. But I don't think you have much to worry about though, Gram. I just missed one war. And everyone thought that one was stupid, so I don't think we're going to have another one for a while.

OLD ALICE. Don't kid yourself.

MARC. No, really. War is very unpopular now.

OLD ALICE. It was very unpopular then, Marc, believe me. The one thing that never changes... *(She closes her eyes.)*

MARC. I know... I know... Hey, I think you need to get some rest now. What do you think?

OLD ALICE. I think so. You're a good boy, Marc. Do you know that?

MARC. Thank you. You're not a bad grandmother either. Do you want anything? Before I leave?

OLD ALICE. Yes. On the dresser. My whale. My little white whale. There on the dresser.

MARC. This?

OLD ALICE. Yes, Eli made it for me.

MARC. Really? Well, then okay, one whale coming up. Here, you go. Anything else?

OLD ALICE. No. Thank you. It's funny I used to think: "How am I going to live, without him? My whole life, without him? And now that it's over, I'm worried that I still won't have him. I'm scared, Marc. What if I die, and he isn't there?"

MARC. You're not going anywhere, Gram. I'll come by and see you in a few days, okay? *(He kisses her.)* You get some rest. Bye-bye. *(He is gone.)*

OLD ALICE. Good-bye, Marc.

*Lights crossfade to Marc who is down center.*

MARC. She died later that afternoon. She was right about that... I stopped writing the play with no end or middle or beginning. Because things do end.

My Grandmother, Alice Wilcox, was born in at the turn of a century, in 1900, and lived through two World Wars, and electricity, and airplanes, and men on the moon, television, the automobile, a gas crises, the atomic bomb. She listened to ragtime and big band, bee-bop and even a little rock and roll. She lived seventy six long years, but she didn't even have a will. She didn't really own anything. Still, she left these in her room with a note saying they were for me. This is the poem that Eli wrote for her birthday. And this is a letter he wrote her from overseas... Alice, Hi. I hope you're all right and that you are getting my letters. But it just occurred to me that I might have written to the wrong address, since I haven't heard from you. If I am, I'm sorry. My address book got soaked in the rain. I'm in a forest near Rheims. It's beautiful here. I'd like to come back someday after the fighting... I've been in two battles already, Ali, and I don't mind saying I hope they're my last. There's talk of the war being over soon and I hope they know what they're talking about because it's not everything it's cracked up to be.

*The lights start to come up on the hospital bed where young Alice is standing over Old Alice. The pas de deux from Giselle can be heard.*

I have to go now. But I'll say more later. I already have in my other letters. But I guess some girl in Wyoming is getting those. Write me if you can.

*Elijah appears in the doorway. Young Alice sees him and isn't startled. They look at each other for a long beat.*

I can't wait to see you again, Ali. I miss you already. I can't wait to run "leaping into your arms."

*Alice runs to him and he lifts her high in the air. Slowly she begins to slide down his body. Her hands run through his hair, touch his cheeks-*

MARC. I love you more than anything in the world,

*Her arms spread wide and slowly wrap around his back, until they finally kiss.*

MARC. Eli

*The lights have gone out on Marc and fade slowly on Alice and Elijah as they embrace. The last thing we see is her arms slowly circling him in and holding on to him. The lights fade to black.*

**END OF PLAY**

## **TROUBLE'S CRIB**

## **TROUBLE'S CRIB**

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS:**

**KETCHUP HARRIS** (32) Tall and thin. Has special needs since birth, and speaks with a stammer. He is African-American and has lived all his life in the neighborhood.

**DEXTER WILKINS** (32) Very large, but not muscular, thick. Loves to tell a good story. He is also African-American, born in Carolina, and moved north with his mother when he was seven, but has lived in this neighborhood ever since.

**ARI ARIEL** (17) Not tall, and a little overweight. Almost like a fire plug. He is a white, hip, New York kid. Seventeen going on thirty. He wants to be a Heavy Metal guitarist. He lives downtown, but hangs out with Dexter, who is the doorman at his building.

**MATT CORWIN** (27) An actor, who works with Ari at a video store to pay his rent. He is also white, pale skinned, and is going through a very uneasy time having just broken up with his girlfriend of three years. He just moved into the neighborhood because his ex-girlfriend thought it would be fun to live by the park, but then one week later broke up with him and left.

### **SETTING**

A bench sitting just in front of Central Park at 107th Street on the Upper West Side of New York City in Spring 1988. The park itself, at this point in time, was wild up here, overgrown and not inviting. This was at least a decade before the area slowly became the place to find an affordable apartment on the park for the young professional. No one was rushing to live up here.

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## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE

*The lights come up a bench in front of Central Park, uptown, at 107th street. The park is overgrown, and dark up here. The trees reach out over the walls as if to try and grab you. It is early morning about one A.M. and we hear the sounds of the city: cars, a siren far away, someone still playing their stereo, even noises from the park. Ketchup Harris enters carrying a plate of food and a carton of chocolate milk. He puts the plate of food on the bench and sets the carton of milk next to it. Then he kneels on the ground and prays.*

KETCHUP. *(A ritual said hundreds of times.)* L-lord, y-you know my brother ain't no praying Man, s-so take th-this prayer of mine, in his p-place, ok-oky? *(He mumbles a silent prayer.)* A-amen.

*He gets up, brushes his knees off, and notices a wrapper laying on the sidewalk. He goes over to pick it up.*

KETCHUP. Rock! You c-coming to eat ? Got you a jelly sandwich? *(To himself.)* No, you gonna pretend you don't hear me. Don't never hear me. *(Loudly.)* Do you? *(To himself again.)* Boy, you is something. Think you fooling everybody. Think you fooling me. *(He throws the wrapper away.)* Least folks could do is keep the place nice for you. *(Loudly again.)* But I guess you don't care 'bout that, huh? 'Cause you ain't even there. Ha, Ha! *(He turns quickly.)* Oh, a-almost caught you now. Better be careful. Don't want me to catch you , now, do you. *(He sits for a minute.)* Well, I-I'm g-gonna go in now. I'm tired tonight. Dexter and me was playing ball today. Over on Amsterdam. Rock, you would have been proud of me. R-real proud. Dunked that shit right over one brother... Right over his head... *(He shows Rock by dunking thrash into the garbage can.)* You know sometimes I wonder why I even bother with you. You never there for me. Other day, Momma like to kill herself smoking in bed. Burned the curtains, everything. But you don't care. *(Gets up.)* You know, I got a good mind to stop coming out here. One of these days I will, you'll see. One of these days, I will. *(He starts to go off. Stops. Wants to apologize, but instead:)* You better eat that jelly sandwich, you here? *(He exits.)*

*Lights slowly fade to black on the sandwich.*

## SCENE TWO

*Loud Hip-hop music is heard: "Cocaine Rules America." Lights up on the bench where a large black man, Dexter, is bouncing a tennis ball. It is late afternoon, the next day. The music ends abruptly on the down beat and offstage we hear:*

ARI. Yo, "D" !

DEXTER. Yo, Ari.

ARI. *(He enters carrying a backpack and a "box".)* What's up?

DEXTER. Ain't nothing. What you doing uptown?

ARI. Come up with Matt. *(Opening his backpack.)* I am stupid hungry.

DEXTER. You always stupid hungry.

ARI. Aw, now look. Look at this. My little brother dogged all my chips. This is so ill!

DEXTER. Don't be blocking my sun, now.

ARI. Look. I had a whole bag hid in my pack so I could sit down after work and chill with you, my soda, and some chips. Wait till he gets home-whack-gonna fuck him up.

DEXTER. Word.

ARI. Got no respect for property.

DEXTER. Just some chips.

ARI. Wrong. My chips. These were mine.

DEXTER. *(Having taken one of those that were left)* They your stale chips now.

ARI. What ?



DEXTER. Chips are stupid stale. When did you buy these? Fucking 1960?

ARI. No, Friday.

DEXTER. Friday?

ARI. Yeah.

DEXTER. Friday. You mean today, Friday?

ARI. No, if I meant today Friday, I would just say today, wouldn't I ? I wouldn't need to say Friday, would I ?

DEXTER. You mean last Friday, a week ago Friday? You gave your brother week old, fucking rubberized, potato chips ?

ARI. Don't be so whack, "D". They were unopened brand new chips--Oohh!

DEXTER. What ?

ARI. That is so ill!

DEXTER. What ?

ARI. He stole my batteries. Out of my box.

DEXTER. Ha, Ha! You better watch your shit.

ARI. Look. Look at this... Nothing... And I thought he vicked my old man's change, out the ceramic dog on his dresser. He's got this ceramic beagle or something with its mouth hanging open, you know, to put your change in it, your tokens and shit. And we always know if my brother's walking around smiling, trying real hard to be nice, that he's vicked my old man's change. So he's been walking around all week smiling, like a fucking little monkey, he's been smiling. And folding the laundry-

DEXTER. What the hell kind of chips are these, anyway?

ARI. And I'm the chump. I'm the stupid one. 'Cause I'm the one he fucked with-

DEXTER. Salt free, all natural, 100% potato chips.

ARI. I've got serious beef with him when he gets home.

DEXTER. What kind of stupid-ass chips. You got something against barbecue all of a sudden? No wonder they stale.

ARI. I went shopping with Matt.

DEXTER. Homeboy?

ARI. Yeah. Some crazy store downtown. Where he buys his vitamins.

DEXTER. Vitamins ?

ARI. Yeah. Wheat germ and shit.

DEXTER. Homeboy takes vitamins?

ARI. Yeah, forty something dollars worth.

DEXTER. No shit. Like them protein supplements and shit?

ARI. I don't know.

DEXTER. Them protein supplements is bad. Rock used to drink that shit. Made him hard as a motherfucker all over. Like punching a brick wall when you hit his stomach. Used to walk around dead of winter without a shirt, just to show off. You never knew Rock, Ketchup's older brother-

ARI. No. Heard you talk about him, though.

DEXTER. One crazy cat, Rock was. First brother I ever saw get hit was Rock. Was dealing shit out 740 over there and must have fucked up. And one night this black Lincoln parks out front, two Brooklyn brothers get out, and you should have seen this street clear. My momma grabbed my arm and said, " Get on inside." I was about eight or nine, and she said, "Come on, it's gonna storm." And next thing you know, Bam! The whole block is exploding. Rock had been waiting for them. You should have seen those two brothers. Man. Fucked them both up. Rock got hit twice, in the shoulder and the leg, but he was just laughing. Like my man Al Pacino, he was waiting for more. And now I know he was one crazy bad brother, 'cause I've been shot and I'm telling you that shit hurts. I'm telling you I'd rather have

somebody break my arm then shoot me. Rock was just standing there laughing waiting for more. Why you got me talking about Rock? Oh, yeah, them protein drinks. So how come homeboy looks so pale all the time if he's dogging so many vitamins?

ARI. I don't know.

DEXTER. I mean even for a white boy, he's pale. Look like a marshmallow. With hair. And what the fuck is wheat germ? Shit sounds dangerous...

ARI. That's it, he dies... *(The tape is missing from his Box.)*

DEXTER. Who, homeboy?

ARI. No, my brother. You believe this? How am I gonna play you my music?

DEXTER. Shit, if I had a dollar for everything my brother stole from me. That's what little brothers are for, don't you know that? To vick your shit, teach you the value of protection.

ARI. I'm gonna teach him the value of breathing, that's what I'm going teach him.

DEXTER. I had to dead bolt my bedroom door, and my brother still found a way in.

ARI. That's your brother. Your brother was crazy.

DEXTER. True. Worse than crazy. Mean and crazy...

ARI. Least that what you always say.

DEXTER. Like a pit bull... He was. Not much bigger than you. But nobody fucked with him... I used to wonder about my brother Kurt, used to think: this little brother, he must have been born mean. You know what I'm saying? He used to look at you Ari, I'm telling you his eyes, bug you out. His eyes would look right through you. Staring you down. Trying to figure you out. Never trusted nobody. And I was his brother... Shit, imagine what he do to folks wasn't even family. Most babies, they walking around all soft, crying all the time, wanting you to hold them and shit. Or else they laughing at everything. See fucking garbage lying in the street. They start laughing.

They don't care. Am I right? Babies all soft, think the world's cool, long as Momma give them a tittie, everything chill. Only when they grow up and see where they been put down to live, that's when most brother's learn to be hard. But not Kurt. No sir. He'd look at you with those eyes... I'm telling you. He was figuring that shit out early. He was hearing them bad voices right from the start.

ARI. Make him sound like Damien...

DEXTER. Damien ?

ARI. Bad voices?

DEXTER. Word, talking like when you doing something, a little fucked up, you know like talking shit or even cutting school, you got that little voice saying- "Go on, do it. What you waiting for..."

ARI. Oh, those voices....

DEXTER. Shit, ain't no use trying to explain nothing to you, is there? No sir. Don't know why I bother.

ARI. Oh, God. Come on, "D..."

DEXTER. How you ever gonna understand? Living in your elevator building, fancy marble lobby, crying 'cause you little brother stole some batteries and some fucking, sorry ass, rubberized potato chips. How old's your brother now anyway, twelve? Shit, when my brother was twelve, he was doing his first detention, got caught crawling through somebody's window.

ARI. You finished?

DEXTER. Finished what?

ARI. Telling me for like the hundredth time about how bad you've got it up here.

DEXTER. Just trying to give you a little perspective, that's all. Help you out some. 'Cause the one thing you ain't got is perspective. Not your fault...You young and confused. And white.

ARI. Oh, listen to this shit. Look, I know my neighborhood's soft now, but it wasn't always that way.

DEXTER. Mmm Hmm.

ARI. It used to be hard. Used to be harder than this... When I was little, shit used to go down all the time. Still does every now and then.

DEXTER. Every now and then. Every now and then, what? Some penthouse gets robbed. Some store knocked off. Tragic. Or us doorman'll go on strike, nobody to open your door.

ARI. See- Okay, word, just the other day-

DEXTER. Just the other day, what? What? Somebody got evicted, some poor old lady who couldn't pay her rent ? Got thrown out. No. When? Why just the other day. Shit, Ari, I'm not talking just the other day, I'm talking everyday. Up here the shit flies everyday. Ain't no end to shit season up here, you understand? Trouble, he just come to visit down your neighborhood. But he cribs up here-

ARI. Does he....

DEXTER. That's right. He's just paying you folks a visit, but this here, this is Trouble's crib.

ARI. So move. Then...

DEXTER. Move? Move where? In with you ? In with Mamma and Papa Ari? Move. Shit. Move... I moved once. I had me a home. Had me a wife and a son. Had me my own apartment. The only thing I didn't have was a job to pay for it all. Ain't no security job pay more than six or seven an hour... Doorman job I got at your house only pays nine. See, see that's what I'm talking about... You young yet. You'll see... Move... Hell, got myself six whole blocks further downtown, further out of here. So what? How long that last ? Damn... why you going and getting me all worked up about shit, anyway. It's Friday. It's the weekend- And shit. I feel good, today. Real good. This ain't no ordinary day...

ARI. No? It sure feels like it to me.

DEXTER. 'Cause you not in tune, that's why. You never in tune. That ain't good for no musician... What time you got ?

ARI. I don't know, probably five thirty, quarter to six ?

DEXTER. Damn, like slow motion...

ARI. Why, what's up ?

DEXTER. Shorty's coming by at six.

ARI. Word. I'm down to get stupid high tonight. You sure he's coming by ?

DEXTER. It's Friday night, isn't it? When's the last Friday night you remember Shorty forgot to come by ?

ARI. Just making sure.

DEXTER. Yo, Shorty's my homeboy. Ain't nobody know Shorty better than me. I remember Shorty when he was in pampers man. I used to chill with his middle sister. Carmen. Mmm Mmmm. F-ine Latin piece of ass. We used to heat up that little apartment. Man, I am telling you, we spent one summer, the whole entire summer, I think we came out the apartment once, to go to the Jersey Shore. Otherwise, the shade was drawn, and the music was on, and we were doing that nasty something nice. Yeah, Shorty and me, we go back a few. Hell, it was me hooked Shorty up in the first place. Got him connected. Friend of mine while I was in Riker's told me about this brother, same one who Rock used to deal for, was looking for someone to work Amsterdam, needed someone Spanish. And I knew Shorty from when we worked security together, at the hospital. And I knew Shorty was one crazy Dominican. So I told my friend and now Shorty is stupid rich... clocking stupid dollars now. Got more money, more ladies- Hell Shorty never had no ladies before I got him hooked up. Shit he was what, almost twenty two years old, not but so much as looked at a piece of ass, let alone had one. And now, you seen the girls he hangs out with. You seen them?

ARI. Fly...

DEXTER. I know you ain't lying. Living in some fancy ass building downtown, wining and dining the ladies, and here is old "D" sitting here chilling on the same bench he been chilling on for thirty years. Ain't that how life is.

ARI. So, why don't you get hooked up.

DEXTER. Hooked up?

ARI. Start dealing yourself. Hell, I would, if I knew enough people who got high. Why not. Beats working in a video store for five bucks an hour listening to some yuppie cry because "Dirty Dancing"'s not in.

DEXTER. Listen to you. Make it sound like selling Avon or something.

ARI. What? As long as you deal good dope, who's going to complain. Shit only happens when you get greedy and cut it. You just have to be careful. Sell to your friends.

DEXTER. Who yo been talking to?

ARI. Talking?

DEXTER. You been talking to Shorty? 'bout this?

ARI. About what?

DEXTER. Come here.

ARI. What? I am here.

DEXTER. Come here. (*Ari moves closer.*) Between you and me... Now I tell you this, don't you breathe a word of it to nobody, you hear?

ARI. Word. Yo, what's up?

DEXTER. Shorty calls me up the other day. Says to make sure I'm here Friday night. This Friday night. On the bench. Uptown. Says he's got something he wants to discuss with ol "D." And I say "word. Something wrong. You need help or something. Somebody giving you shit?" And he says "Hell, "D"."

ARI. (*Imitating Shorty with a high nasal voice.*) Hell, "D."

DEXTER. That's right. (*He continues the imitation.*) "Hell, "D", ain't nobody give me shit, you know that. Anybody give me shit, it's the last thing

they ever do." And he gives me that stupid laugh of his. Like fucking "Deputy Dog" he laughs. Hee-Hee, Hee-Hee. One thing about Shorty, he ain't never been funny. Ever. Can't tell a joke to save his life. But he always laughing and shit. Hee-Hee-, Hee-Hee. Damn, here comes your homeboy.

ARI. Who?

DEXTER. Homeboy with the wheat germ.

ARI. Matt? Where?

DEXTER. Right there. Crossing the street. Hell, ain't very hard to spot his marshmallow butt up here. Over there, by the deli.

ARI. Oh.

DEXTER. You make sure and take him for a walk when Shorty gets here.

ARI. Word. So, what do you think he wants?

DEXTER. Who, Shorty? Don't know exactly. But I ain't been sleeping just waiting for it to get to be Friday. Check this out, Ari. The last thing he said was, he said: " You know what it is, Dexter. It's like them tests. Them multiple choice tests. And "A" is money, "B" is the ladies, "C" is a nice motherfucking car, and "D", "D" is all of the above. Well, that's gonna be you, my man. Pretty soon they gonna be calling you "D - All Of The Above." And then he starts that laughing shit again. Hee - Hee. Hee - Hee. You like that? "D - all of the above..."

ARI. (*Imitating Shorty again.*) "D" all of the above...

DEXTER. (*Yelling to Matt.*) Yo! Shit, what's his name again?

ARI. Matt.

DEXTER. Shit, I almost yelled Yo, Marshmallow! Matt!

MATT. Hi there!

ARI. What's up?

MATT. Dexter. Hey, there. How are you?



DEXTER. Ain't nothing.

ARI. You clean out your cat box?

MATT. Yeah. I really needed to. It was a mess.

DEXTER. That your cat screaming at night? All Meeooowing and shit?

MATT. No-

DEXTER. Sound like somebody stepping on its tail and shit. Meeooww!

MATT. No, there's some alley cat out back. Prospero is very quiet.

ARI. What kind of whack name is that? Prospero-o?

MATT. It's from Shakespeare. My favorite character. From the Tempest.

DEXTER. We had us a cat once. Spike. Spike was a stray. Mean ol' yellow tom. I'm telling you that cat was vicious. Look a here, see that there? That's from Spike.

MATT. Ouch.

DEXTER. Took a big ol chunk out of my arm. Vicious. Used to love to fuck things up. Didn't have no mice for miles. That's for sure. You lucky. Prospect'll keep them mice away. Cat's good for that.

MATT. Why? Are there a lot of mice in our building?

DEXTER. Shit, yeah. Are you kidding? Listen to him Ari. Are there any mice... Bro, there more mice in 700 Central Park West, hell there are more mice in this here city, Shit. This whole park is full of mice. We's probably sitting right on top of a whole fucking underground mice city. Probably got mice mayors and shit. Mice police. Ain't that right, Ari?

ARI. Word.

DEXTER. Whole city's nothing but mice and rats.

ARI. And cockroaches.

DEXTER. Word. Matt, you look at this park at night, you think I'm lying. Crazy-ass big rats running all over this park. Playing softball and shit.

MATT. Softball, huh?

DEXTER. How you think Spike passed on? You think he was lucky enough to get old and give out? Hell, no. Spike thought he was bad, chased a mouse on into the park here one night and just like that - Meow! No Spike. Never saw him again. And about two weeks later my brother was taking a piss over there in the bushes. The bushes right over there. Broad daylight, mind you, 'cause ain't no brother dumb enough to walk in here at night. Not even Kurt, who never cared if he lived or die, but he was right over there, not but ten feet from the street. And what you think he found? All that was left of ol Spike. Just a bunch of bones. Rats had tore his ass apart, poor thing. But he was a fighter. Ol Spike. Probably took a few down with him.

ARI. "D" always talking crazy shit like that, Matt. Ever since I met him.

DEXTER. Ain't not crazy shit. I'm talking the truth. Hell, half the time the truth crazier than anything you can make up. Ain't that so, Matt?

MATT. What?

DEXTER. The truth be weird sometimes.

MATT. Sure.

DEXTER. Like old Dumar's son, born with a heart outside his body.

MATT. What?

DEXTER.

Man live around the corner, Bo Dumars had a baby last year born with his heart outside his body. Just a pumping away. Poor little thing.

MATT. You're kidding?

DEXTER. Hell, no. You go around to 15, 108, and you ring buzzer 2D and you see if I'm kidding.

MATT. Did he live? He couldn't have lived?

DEXTER. Shit yeah, he lived. Poor thing. Wasn't his fault his momma got stupid drunk while she was carrying. Name's Benjamin. They opened him up and put that little heart of his back inside his little belly where it belonged. Shit, yeah, he lived. Put that heart right back inside where no one could see it. Where it belonged. Got to protect that shit. Nobody gonna survive in this here world like that. Got to bury that shit deep inside of you.

MATT. That's incredible.

DEXTER. Hell, science be like that now. Them doctors can fix just about anything nowadays. Open you up and stuff that shit right back inside. Crazy kinds of operations.

ARI. You see that program on fat people the other day?

MATT. Fat people?

ARI. Word, they got this operation to suck the fat right out of people -

MATT. Gross-

ARI. It's true. Homeboy doctor stuck this like straw and just sucked out all this fat from this lady.

DEXTER. I'm telling you. Fix a lot of shit nowadays. My son born almost a month too early. Doctor said few years ago -- Nope. You should see him now, two years old and big as a motherfucker...

MATT. You have a son?

DEXTER. Shit yeah. You didn't see me with him on Sunday?

MATT. No...

DEXTER. Yeah, I see him few times a week. Almost always on Sunday. Tricia usually run out of money by Sunday. So she comes down and takes some more. We been separated about seven months now... Yeah, he lives with his Momma, right down there on hundredth. Little "D". Real name's Darryl. After Darryl Strawberry.

MATT. That's great.

DEXTER. (*Showing a photo.*) Here, that's li'l "D". Ari, Shorty, everybody said I should call him Dexter junior. I said "Hell, no. Ain't gonna name no boy of mine Junior. Homeboy's be calling him names and shit. Grow up soft."

MATT. Ha! Ha! He's great.

DEXTER. Took that at Shea. That's a real Mets game. Took li'l "D" see his namesake. Strawberry hit a grand slam that day. Remember Ari?

ARI. Yeah, not bad for a Mets game...

DEXTER. Ari likes them Yankees. He stupid about a lot of things though, ain't he?

MATT. Yeah...

DEXTER. He young yet. He'll learn.

MATT. Looks a lot like you. Doesn't he.

DEXTER. Sure he do. Gonna be big and beautiful. Just like his daddy.

ARI. Big and Stupid...

DEXTER. Hush up. Us men are talking. You got any children, Matt?

MATT. Children? Uh, no. Not yet.

DEXTER. How old are you?

MATT. Twenty-seven.

DEXTER. Won't be long now...

MATT. Oh, I've got a while to get yet, I'm afraid. I'm going to wait until I'm a little more settled - career wise, that is.

DEXTER. What at the video store?

MATT. No, no. I'm an actor also.

DEXTER. No, shit.

ARI. Who just got a part. In a play. (*Slaps Matt a high five.*) He just found out. This afternoon.

MATT. Yeah. First part in over a year. It's just a showcase, but thank God, I needed it.

DEXTER. Word! See Ari, I'm telling you. This is going to be a crazy night. I can feel it . So you do movies and shit?

MATT. Well, I've done a few soaps. Soap operas.

DEXTER. I know what a Soap Op-era is, shit. No brother married for two years don't know what "All My Children" is.

MATT. Actually I was on that show. Once.

DEXTER. Ooh, don't let Tricia hear that, that's her favorite show on TV. She better never hear you been on "All My Children..."

MATT. I doubt she'd recognize me. I was only an extra.

DEXTER. She'll know. She watch that damn show everyday; since she was born. Which part were you?

MATT. In the nightclub. I was one of the people dancing. In the background. They call it being an extra. Because you're extra, don't really have a role.

DEXTER. Oh.

MATT. You get paid a lot to stand around and look important, and then you go home.

ARI. Sounds like you "D".

DEXTER. Word. You and me Matt. Fucking "Extras." Ain't that the truth. Homeboy down the street's been in a few movies. Bernard. Bernard some-fucking-name. Was in "Fort Apache". "The Bronx." Paul Newman movie a few years back. Lives right over there in 670.

MATT. Oh, the nice building?

DEXTER. Yeah. Nice building. Never used to be so nice. Building just went co-op.

MATT. Oh...

ARI. Look out there goes the neighborhood.

DEXTER. You ain't lying. Gonna try and push us on up further...Won't be long now. Got us an actor living in 700. Probably charging him crazy rent. Am I right ?

MATT. Actually it's pretty cheap.

DEXTER. Yo, you and me we got the same landlord, I know what kind of shit he's charging, believe me.

MATT. Four seventy-five. For a studio. In the city. That's not bad.

ARI. You know what Matt's apartment would go for in my neighborhood?

DEXTER. That's your crazy-ass neighborhood.

ARI. Nine hundred dollars. Nine hundred. With a fee.

DEXTER. You know what the brother lived there before you was paying? You want to know?

MATT. Sure.

DEXTER. I'll tell you. One fifteen.

MATT. Really?

DEXTER. One hundred fifteen. For the same "studio." In the city. What the fuck is a "studio" anyway. Studio just another word for a small-ass room. Studio. Studio's for making movies, am I right? *(A loud whistle is heard. Dexter returns it.)* That's my man Ketchup. Lives next door in 710.

MATT. Oh, we met. He has a stammer right ?

DEXTER. A who ?

MATT. A stammer. Speech impediment. He stutters.

DEXTER. Every other word. Born thick headed too. Ain't never got past the third grade.

MATT. We met in the deli. He told me not to buy the lunch meat.

DEXTER. Not from that place. (*Shakes his head no.*) Uh-mn. Catch ptomaine from that place. He's right. Got to go to the Red Apple on Columbus for you lunch meat.

KETCHUP. (*He is developmentally disabled and has a slight stutter.*) Yo, "D-D-D." What's up?

DEXTER. 'Taint nothing. Just chilling with my man Ari-

KETCHUP. (*To Matt.*) H-hi.

MATT. Hi. But, uh, my name's Matt.

KETCHUP. M-matt.

MATT. We met in the deli. The other day?

KETCHUP. In the d-deli?

MATT. Yes. You told me not to buy any ham.

KETCHUP. No, d-don't b-buy any h-ham from the deli! Don't ever b-buy ham th-there!

MATT. No, I won't.

KETCHUP. F-Fuck you up, b-bad, you d-do.

DEXTER. Ketchup. Ketchup? That's our new neighbor. Took the apartment next door to mine.

KETCHUP. Oh. You g-gonna live up here?

DEXTER. Yes. He and Ari work at the video store together.

KETCHUP. V-video store.

DEXTER. Movies. You know for the VCR. The machine that plays the movies.

KETCHUP. Oh! On the T-tt V!

DEXTER. Right.

KETCHUP. "Aliens!!"

DEXTER. That's right. My homeboy seen "Aliens" twenty times.

KETCHUP. "L-let's p-party!!" (*Shooting guns.*) Ffft-fftt!!! (*Sees Ari.*) I remember you.

ARI. What's up?

KETCHUP. We was p-playing b-ball over on Amsterdam. W-wasn't we?

ARI. Basketball. That's right.

KETCHUP. We was all p-playing t-together. You, m-me, and "D-d". Got b-beat that d-day, though. You remember "D." They b-beat us bad.

DEXTER. Ain't never got beat playing no ball on Amsterdam.

KETCHUP. Sure we did. It w-was you and me and...

ARI. Ari.

KETCHUP. And A-a-ari.

ARI. He's right. Last summer.

KETCHUP. That's right.

DEXTER. Maybe so. But no way we got beat.

KETCHUP. Th-thirty-t-two to twelve. We got f-fucked-up b-bad.



DEXTER. Ain't never lost no game 32 to 12. So don't be giving me any more of your shit, okay?

KETCHUP. We did.

DEXTER. No sir. We didn't.

KETCHUP. "D-d-d", we did. We lost. I remember. It was you, me and A-ari. S-so d-don't give me any m-more of your s-shit, ok-kay?

DEXTER. Ok-k-kay...

KETCHUP. You was drunk "D-d". You had just split with Tricia. You was d-drunk all the time. Not surprised you d-don't remember. *(Awkward pause.)* Want some M-m and M's?

MATT. No, thank you. I try to stay away from sugar.

KETCHUP. *(Long pause.)* We w-waiting for Sh-shorty?

MATT. Shorty's coming by here? Shorty that comes in the store, that Shorty?

ARI. Yeah.

DEXTER. You know Shorty?

MATT. He's that little guy, who's always smiling, always in a hurry? Like a munchkin on speed-

DEXTER. That's my Shorty.

MATT. He deals drugs, right Ari? *(Pause. Dexter looks at Ketchup. He has gone over to pick up a wrapper from the ground. He hasn't heard. To Ari.)* I mean at least that's what you tell me, right? Hey, don't get me wrong, he's a great guy, always been nice to me. Used to bring me candy all the time. For Sarah, when we still together.

KETCHUP. B-bought me "A-aliens."

DEXTER. That's how he is. Always bringing shit for people. Homeboy loves to give shit away. Gave me this ring here for my birthday, couple of years back. Bought me my VCR last year.

KETCHUP. Every F-Friday he b-bring me ice-cr-cream. Chocolate F-fudge ice-cr-ream.

DEXTER. And you pour ketchup all over it.

KETCHUP. No, I d-don't...

DEXTER. Sure you do. You pour ketchup all over everything.

KETCHUP. Not over ice cr-ream. Wh-who ever h-heard of pouring k-ketchup over ice-cr-cream?

DEXTER. Well, who ever heard of pouring ketchup all over their eggs, or on a sandwich. You can pour ketchup on a tuna fish sandwich, why not ice cream.

KETCHUP. What's w-with you, t-today, "D"? You g-get laid l-last night?

DEXTER. Ha! Listen to you. Crazy-ass homeboy...

KETCHUP. You always like this after you been b-boning some girl.

ARI. Word.

DEXTER. Don't talk to me about no boning. I'm in too good a mood. Don't want to go and get me all depressed.

MATT. Why? Women got you depressed, too?

DEXTER. Don't even get me started talking about it. Women is one of those subjects. Like algebra, and chemistry and shit. Don't even start talking about trying to understand that shit. Brothers'll spend their whole lives trying to understand. Talking about trying to work that shit out. I'm telling you. I remember sitting in school, teacher had this fucking chemistry equation, fucking a on top of b, over "mc" squared stretched all over the fucking board. And about an hour later, he says, "There, you see? Nothing to it." But of course there are hundreds of other possibilities for the exact same

situation. Women no different. Gonna end up old and with your hair all bugged out like that teacher you try understanding women.

MATT. I'll drink to that.

DEXTER. Oh, that's right you just broke with your old lady, didn't you?

MATT. Yep. Lived together for three years.

DEXTER. I know that feeling. Shit feels terrible.

MATT. Not a lot of fun, that's for sure. Why I am even living here. She wanted to be near the park and not even two weeks later, she moved out. So here I am.

DEXTER. In no man's land...

MATT. I'm sorry...

DEXTER. No worry. We cool. See what you do, Ketchup? Start me talking about women, and shit. And homeboy here just broke with his old lady?

KETCHUP. I'm s-sorry. You kn-now me, I'm a-always t-talking stupid...

MATT. (*Pause.*) So this is the big excitement here, huh?

DEXTER. What?

MATT. Sitting on the bench, having a few beers...

DEXTER. That's right, we chilling.

MATT. Chillin...

DEXTER. Uh huh... You chillin uptown, now. With the boys...

MATT. Oh, okay. (*Pause.*) Any you guys see "Nightline" last night?

ARI. (*Sarcastically.*) No, I must have missed that... You see it "D"?

MATT. It was all about drugs, whether they should legalize them or not. It was really very interesting. They had guys from both sides on, talking about the possibilities.

ARI. What's to talk about. They should.

MATT. Somehow Ari, I figured you'd say that.

ARI. Well, you can't exactly tell me it is difficult to buy the shit. Come on, Matt, you only have to walk about four blocks anywhere in this city to score- and why is it that everyday you read about them catching some guy, some guy off the street right, everyday, they catch at least one guy, (*Ketchup gets up and walks away, down right to the garbage can, stays and throws some papers away. Dexter follows him and whispers something to him. Ketchup nods his head as if to say "it's okay."*) So then how come everywhere you look, somebody is still dealing. Why? Because they got fucking second and third string drug dealers, guys like cockroaches coming out of the woodwork. I'm telling you, the only benefit to it being illegal is a lot for people are clocking serious dollars, getting stupid rich, off it. When the last time you saw homeboy on the corner getting stupid rich from selling beer or Jack Daniels? I never have. Hell, you make it legal, tax the shit, and make it a real business like cigarettes or liquor. But they'll never do that, know why?

MATT. Well the main argument is if you legalized it then a lot more people will use it.

ARI. Bullshit...

MATT. And it might get out of control.

ARI. Listen to this. You got whole posses running around with uzis. And you're talking about shit getting out of control?

MATT. They say we'd have another national health problem on our hands. Thousands of people becoming addicted.

ARI. See, now that is so stupid. Just plain stupid... What do we have now? Got whole programs on television devoted to the subject, you don't think it's a problem now? Sure it is. Only now most people think it's only in the cities, only people getting high are in the cities. And hey, they don't matter. Most of America, they see it on the television, and they say: "Look at this Wilma.

Look what's happening in fucking New York, and Los Angeles. Got to keep that shit out of our town."

MATT. Keep it isolated.

ARI. Exactly. Like that's the solution for everything.

MATT. That's true. Actually even people in New York, when I lived downtown I remember thinking: "well it's not in our neighborhood..."

ARI. Only, that's not gonna work, you'll see. Pretty soon we're gonna have homeboy's everywhere, in Nebraska, getting fucked up. On farms and shit. You know why?

MATT. I think we finally found a subject you care about, Ari.

ARI. Word! You know why? Because if people want a way out of their head, to forget their shit, they are going to find it . Am I right? Yes. Why? Because basically the world sucks. Always has and always will. Okay, you want to argue that, that's a whole 'nother argument. But if you ask me, something's up, because people have been bugging forever. Been getting stupid high since Moses. So hey, it's been going on that long, let's not be chumps and think that it's going to just all of a sudden stop. Because it's not. So if it's not going to stop, what are you going to do? Fucking stand there with your thumb in the dike and tell everybody you think you've got it stopped? No. You make it legal and you let the people do what they are going to do anyway. Only you want to know why they won't, I mean why they'll never do it? Fuck this concern for the welfare of others, yeah right... People drink, nobody stops that. People smoke, hell more people die of lung cancer each year, than from any dope. And nobody gives a shit about that. No, they don't want to legalize it because if you do you take all the money out of it. Can't do that. Way too much money in it being illegal. You got whole fucking economies, whole countries being run by this. Half of fucking South American would go under. Have to go back to selling bananas.

MATT. What do you think "D"? You think they should legalize it?

DEXTER. I think we should talk about something else.

MATT. Oh, okay... I'm sorry.

DEXTER. It ain't me. It's Ketchup. He don't like talking about it.

A loud whistle is heard offstage.

DEXTER. Ketchup, Ketchup? Your momma's calling for you, Ketchup?

KETCHUP. I h-heard... (*He whistles back.*) C-calls m-m-mee l-l-l-like a g-goddamn d-dd-dog. (*Loud whistle again.*) C-coming! D-don't talk about n-nothing till I g-get b-back, ok-kay?

DEXTER. You better hurry up and make sure your momma hasn't burned down your whole apartment, smoking in bed like she do. (*Ketchup leaves.*) He something, ain't he?

MATT. Yeah. Seems like a really nice guy. Did I upset him?

DEXTER. No, he okay. He know you don't know... See, Ketchup had an older brother, Rock. Biggest brother you'd ever hope to see. Big as a tree. Anyway, Rock used to deal a little, and he got himself in trouble one night and got himself shot.

MATT. Shot?

DEXTER. Yeah. 'Couple a times. Some Brooklyn brothers.

MATT. God... That's awful.

DEXTER. Shit, yeah. Shit, hurts. You don't ever want to get shot, Matt, I'm telling you. (*He lifts his shirt.*) See that. That from a .38. Anyway, Rock just walked into these here bushes over here, and we never saw him again, ever.

ARI. No...

DEXTER. I ain't lying. Never saw him again. Now most people, they think ol' Rock just found himself a nice spot and laid himself down to die-

ARI. Would of helped if maybe they tried looking for him.

DEXTER. We looked for him. Don't kid yourself. We looked for ol' Rock for days. But no one never found nothing. No clothes, nothing. Ketchup, crazy fool, he still be looking for him sometimes. He sure his brother ain't dead. Thinks he's living in the park here. Says he even talks to him from time to time. Sometimes you see him out here four in the morning, just sitting here talking to him. And oh, about twice, maybe three times a week

he sets a plate of food out here on the bench for him. Chicken and shit. Guess to make sure he has enough to eat. So I have to come out here once he's gone, take the food off the plate... I don't know, I feel bad for him. I lost my brother too. Only I know he's dead. Brother died right in front of me. Life just went, (*Snaps his fingers.*) like that. Like switching off a light. That's how he went. So, ever since then Ketchup, he don't like no talk about drugs, and shit. And he don't like nobody messing up this side of the street. Over here by the park.

MATT. I understand.

DEXTER. Got to keep it nice, for his brother. And you know, funny thing is, sometimes I don't wonder if he ain't right. Maybe ol Rock just gave up on this damn life, and decided to play like fucking Tarzan in the park. 'Cause I'm telling you Matt, every now and then, every now and then, when I'm out here taking that food off the plate, I could swear, now you can think what you will, but every now and then, I could swear I hear ol Rock's voice myself.

ARI. Telling you to leave his chicken alone. Probably.

MATT. Ari...

DEXTER. He's telling me something...That's for sure. Telling me something...You'll see what I mean, Matt. You'll see. All sorts of crazy shit trying to happen in this neighborhood. Damn, got to be past six, by now...

*He gets up and crosses right.*

MATT. It's six fifteen, why?

ARI. "D"'s all bugging out, waiting for Shorty.

MATT. I feel like I'm doing a scene from "Waiting for Godot."

ARI. Ga-who?

MATT. There's a famous play called "Waiting for Godot," that's all about these two guys who are waiting for this other guy, "Godot," to show up. And he never does. They spend the whole play waiting.

ARI. The whole play.

MATT. Yes.

ARI. The whole play is about two guys waiting. For another guy?

MATT. Yes.

ARI. That is so whack! Who cares. What a stupid idea! You hear that "D"?

DEXTER. No, what?

ARI. My man, here says there's a play that the whole thing is about two homeboys, right? Sitting around waiting for a third to show up.

DEXTER. Yeah so? Chilling...

ARI. But that is the whole play.

DEXTER. You shitting me...

ARI. Word. Says it's famous. Just what I fucking want to spend my hard earned entertainment dollars to see. I'm telling you, if I was watching that, I'd fucking stand up and yell, "who gives a shit? Shut up and do something. Fuck each other up. Something..."

MATT. But that's the whole point, you see, Nothing really happens.

DEXTER. The point of what ?

MATT. The play. That in life nothing really happens. We're all just sort of trapped in our lives, waiting to die.

ARI. Do you believe this shit, "D" ? Isn't that brilliant. I need a play to tell me that? No, I know that, and I'm no fucking Pulitzer Prize winner. How long is this play, five minutes?

MATT. No, maybe you should read it, Ari. It's very funny.

ARI. Fucking hysterical, I'll bet.

MATT. Godot is maybe supposed to be God. We are all symbolically waiting for God.



ARI. What a bunch of shit. How can you wait for God. There is no God.

MATT. Really.

ARI. Yes, God is for suckers. People who need to believe there is more than this. But there isn't. This is it.

MATT. Well, actually, that's what some people think the play is about. The absence of God. Because he never comes.

ARI. Oh, and what do the other people think it's about?

MATT. I'm not sure. He sort of leaves it open to interpretation. Beckett does. He started a whole new kind of theater called absurdist theater-

ARI. Because that's what it is, fucking absurd.

MATT. Right. Actually.

ARI. Yo, "D"! You and I are going to write a play, about two guys who fuck each other up, start a whole new kind of theater. Call it "whack theater."

DEXTER. Sure. (*Dexter sees something.*) Tomorrow. Aren't you all thirsty? I am dying of thirst. Yo, Matt you mind getting a Diet Pepsi from the deli.

ARI. What your legs broke or something ?

DEXTER. Yeah. I'm tired.

ARI. If "D" is asking you to buy the soda, that means he's out of money. That's what that shit means.

DEXTER. You go with him Ari, pick us up a slice for dinner.

ARI. Shit "D". (*A look from Dexter.*) Oh. Word. C'mon Matt.

MATT. Hey, isn't that Shorty ? Crossing the street. Right over there.

ARI. Where?

MATT. Right there, See. (*Dexter is ready to kill Ari.*) It is Shorty. Que Pasa ? (*Waving.*) See, it is him...

*Dexter glares at Ari, then the three sit waiting...*

**Lights fade to black.**

### SCENE THREE

*Music plays, the same loud Hip-hop. It only plays ten beats or so, and then stops abruptly on the beat. Lights bump up. It is very early morning the next day, almost dawn, and a plate for food and an orange soda are on the bench, waiting. Dexter enters in a pair of boxer shorts and a tee-shirt. He is wearing plastic beach sandals on his feet so it is difficult for him to walk on the dew-slick pavement. He slips a bit.*

DEXTER. Damn. Gonna kill myself out here one day. Oh! Lookey here. Tuna Helper. Well, no wonder you done left this Rock. Them pigeons won't even eat this. Got to give this to Matt's cat. Soda still cold. Ketchup keep you waiting last night, I guess. *(He sits to drink.)* Yo, Rock! You want to hear something funny? Between you and me? Guess who done grown up to be just like you. Yes, sir... Gonna be dealing. Gonna be a business man. How's that sound? Sound like a good idea to you? And I know I said I'd never do no more shit that's wrong... Never again. But between you and me, Rock, that never's a bitch. Am I lying? That never's a long time. Shit, give me a dollar for every time I heard my daddy tell my momma he'd never gonna drink no more. Never gonna let another drop of liquor touch his lips. Shit, motherfucker drunk himself to death, drunk himself purple, with his never... And it ain't like I'm gonna be dealing no hard shit now, neither. Nuh uh. Not as crazy as you... Just some blow, that's all. Supplement my income. Hell, Shorty, he gonna be taking most of it. I only get thirty percent. Still, couple of thirty percents... should be doing mighty nice by this time next week. And I don't care what he say about that crack. I ain't touching that. No, sir. That crack for people who done sold their soul. That shit get inside of you and eat you alive, like Invasion Of the Body Snatchers, that what that shit is... Don't want no part of that. Listen to me, crazy as old Ketchup. Sitting out here in my undershorts talking to myself... You must think we's all fools huh, Rock? *(Gets up to leave.)* That what you think? Well, look at you, shit you the one chillin out there with a bunch of rats. so how about that? Huh? How you like that? Come on, I'm talking to you now. Hear me talking to you now? Hell, ain't nothing out there... My man ain't out there... He ain't in no park. He done left this shit long time ago. Didn't you? You left this shit, went way uptown. You chilling way the fuck uptown now... Alright then, see? What did I tell you? Nothing out here now but me, some pigeons, and the rats... And ya'll rats probably done all gone home and gone to sleep by now. So should I. Ought to get my jello butt in bed and get me

some of that sleep, myself... Alright, then... (*He yawns. Turns to go.*) Listen here, Rock, where ever you are, be cool now... (*He leaves.*)

*The overgrown branches move ever so slightly, back and forth, possibly from the wind.*

**Lights fade to black and music comes up.**

## SCENE FOUR

*The bench late afternoon, four weeks later. Ari is sitting on the back of the bench, Matt is standing down right. They are going over Matt's lines from the play.*

ARI. *(Ari has a beer, cueing Matt.)* "Cool it. You are so uptight man." Uptight, man? Uptight, man?

MATT. Go on there's more.

ARI. "Cool it you are so uptight, man. Everything's groovy." I don't know..."I am like a God myself, man. They dig my music, they worship me, I am the king." Tell me you are not going to listen to this shit every night and not have to laugh? "Groovy?" "Dig my music?"

MATT. It's how they talked, Ari.

ARI. Word, what kind of sucker would say "groovy"?

MATT. It's the sixties, everyone talked like that.

ARI. Everyone..

MATT. It was twenty years ago, Ari. In twenty years how many people do you think are going to say "word?"

ARI. Okay, so, my man here who's "groovy," he plays a guitar, right?

MATT. He's a rock star, one of the biggest in the world. In the original he was a king. He ruled the country. But in our production he's a rock star.

ARI. Why?

MATT. Why? I don't know. It's a metaphor, Ari. We don't have kings anymore.

ARI. Sure we do. All those little countries still do, Bolivia and shit, they still have kings.

MATT. But not in America. And in America during the sixties, rock stars had enormous power, right?

ARI. Word, they still do.

MATT. Right. And in Greek tragedy, the central character's a man who has great power, and then loses it.

ARI. Then he's a sucker.

MATT. Alright...

ARI. Yo, anybody who has power and money and shit, and then turns around and loses it, is a chump. I'm serious. Like those religion guys, what's his name - Swaggart and Jim and Tammy Baker, now tell me she isn't a chump. So, word, who cares about seeing a play about a bunch of chumps. What's so tragic about it? If you ask me it's funny. You get it all and lose it, that's not tragic. That's just stupid. You never get a chance and you get fucked up, now that's tragic. Five year old gets hit by a bus, that's tragic... Not when you get what you deserve... You get what you deserve, it's justice. Word, listen to me blah, blah. Talking shit, 'cause of my beer. Don't let me get started talking feeling buzzed from a beer. Sorry- your play- How the fuck do you pronounce this anyway?

MATT. The Bacchae.

ARI. The Bakkkkiiii. Okay, so it's about a guitarist, okay that's cool. What kind of guitar?

MATT. What?

ARI. What kind of guitar does he play?

MATT. I don't know.

ARI. Homeboy is one of the best in the world, everyone would know what kind of guitar he played.

MATT. Look...

ARI. What year is it? What year does this take place?

MATT. I don't know, Ari. During the sixties sometime.

ARI. Okay, but when. You got ten long years-

MATT. Ari, it's a directorial concept-

ARI. Because if it's early sixties he's probably down with Les Paul or a Strat, but if it's the late sixties and he's stupid, he might be trying to chill with a Rickenbocker.

MATT. Ari, he doesn't actually whip out his guitar and play- this is a Greek tragedy. It was originally written hundreds of years ago. The director, he has just decided to update it, so we're setting it during the sixties.

ARI. You can do that? You can just take a play and fucking change it all around?

MATT. Sure. It's done all the time. Usually to try and make it more relevant.

ARI. More relevant to what?

MATT. To today.

ARI. Word. Then do a heavy metal version.

MATT. Give them a few years. I'm sure it'll be done. A heavy metal Hamlet.

ARI. Word. Why not?

MATT. God, this is so depressing.

ARI. What?

MATT. I just wanted some help with my lines-

ARI. I am...

MATT. No you're not. I'm really sorry if you don't think it's a worthwhile play, Ari. I'm really sorry that they weren't doing a revival of "Scarface" this season.

ARI. Whoa, homeboy is bugging...

MATT. That's right. I'm bugging. Now do you want to help me or not?

ARI. (*Slight pause.*) Yo, I said I'd help, didn't I? I have to wait for "D" anyway.

MATT. Then, let's just do the lines okay? Let's just go from the beginning.

ARI. (*Pause.*) "Cool it. You are so uptight, man."

MATT. I mean I know this thing is a piece of shit. I know that. A sixties' version of "The Bacchae"... Set in some religious cult in California... I know it's probably going to be terrible. But hey, why not. My life was going too well anyway. I probably couldn't stand any more good fortune...

ARI. Go on. You say-

MATT. I mean I'm almost thirty, I'm single again, living in one of the best neighborhoods in town, right off the park-

ARI. You say "Hear me, and hear me well..."

MATT. And I have a leading part in a dream production: an ancient Greek tragedy set just outside of Malibu...What more could I ask for... But, you know it's not like the whole thing is a terrible idea, that's what's so depressing. I mean one of the original themes was the cult-like practices of the religion, and how far to take them. Have you ever read the original?

ARI. Me?

MATT. Well, in the original, Agave does kill her own son, and she's so worked up she doesn't even realize it.

ARI. Word, homeboy gets diced by his own mother?

MATT. Yes. And she carries his head in on a stake. After they rip him apart in religious frenzy.

ARI. Word, that is so ill. I'm down to see this. Do we get to see the head. On stage?



MATT. Oh, yeah. Actually that's the one thing that looks good in the whole production.

ARI. It should. It's crucial. Good special effects are crucial. It can be whack but if it got great special effects, it'll be chillin. Okay, so after homeboy gets yanked apart, what happens?

MATT. What do you mean what happens? They kill him.

ARI. Word. He gets wishboned. Then what?

MATT. Then what?

ARI. Yeah. Then what happens?

MATT. Nothing. That's the end. That's the point of the whole thing.

ARI. What? That someone gets killed? Big deal.

MATT. Big deal?

ARI. Right. So, he's dead. Big deal. It's a fact of life. Like breathing. Should I go see a movie about breathing? Something else has to happen. Homeboy has to break out of the grave, come back and fuck some people up. Like my man Freddy, or Jason. Shit can't end with just one guy dying. Your body count is too low.

MATT. Body count?

ARI. Word. Body count is almost as crucial as special effects. Maybe even more. You got to fuck 'em up left and right. Do some serious illin'. Rack up that body count. Shit only gets funny if you rack 'em up.

MATT. Funny?

ARI. Word.

MATT. It's not supposed to be funny.

ARI. Oh, that's right. It's supposed to be tragic.

DEXTER. Only thing tragic round here is your little undernourished dick.

ARI. Yo, "D."

DEXTER. Now that's a tragedy. Matt the cat.

MATT. "D", how are you?

DEXTER. How am I? How am I? Brothers always be asking me that. Saying: "D", what's up? And I'd say "Ain't nothing." 'Cause it was true. Wasn't nothing happening within miles of me. But lately, Matt. I don't mind telling you, lately, shit has been walking right up to me and saying "Hello, D." and I ain't even looking for it anymore, and it's still falling into my lap. How am I ? I am fine. Doing just fine. How you? You looked bugged?

MATT. I'm okay. A little worried about my play.

ARI. I've been helping him with his lines.

DEXTER. No wonder he's bugging. Shit why you giving my job away, anyway? That's my job feeding the lines. You want help, get it from the master. Word, it's two weeks right?

MATT. Right.

DEXTER. We down for opening night. All four of us. Ari, Ketchup, Shorty and I. We's there. Ain't never seen nobody I know on a stage before. Still waiting for Ari and his band. Look at him, all hung over and shit. Word, did my man here tell you about last night yet.

MATT. Last night?

DEXTER. I'm telling you. Matt, you should have been there.

MATT. Been where?

DEXTER. Over to Ari's building. Hell, my building. Where I work. We was chillin' all night long... Word. I'm telling you. Grossman got to go out of town more often.

ARI. Dexter is apartment sitting for this guy, Grossman. He lives in the penthouse in our building.

DEXTER. And I'm feeding his plants.

MATT. Feeding his plants.

DEXTER. Word. My man gives his plants vitamins, just like you, so don't be laughing. And he waters them with this special grow-shit. You should see this place, Matt. Like a fucking jungle on a roof. Man has some crazy big trees and shit.. And some fine looking ladies, so we called up some people and had us a barbecue-

MATT. In somebody else's apartment.

DEXTER. Don't know if you could call that place an apartment. What you think, Ari? That shit is a house. I've seen whole entire houses smaller than Grossman's.

MATT. While he was away? You just used his "house?"

DEXTER. Shit, yeah. He told me I could. Said to stay there whenever I wanted. So fucking thieves and shit would think somebody was still home. Course, his old cholesterol choked heart would have stopped beating, he knew half the brothers partying on his patio last night take shit every now and then. But maybe not. Grossman's one of those crazy white boys feel good about letting a brother use their house. Makes them feel less like they have it all while others ain't got shit. Actually, truth of the matter? Truth of the matter is fatman wouldn't give me the time of day before. Ain't never even tipped me, not one dollar, not even at the holidays. But now, shit now all of a sudden I'm Fatman's best friend. Keys to his apartment... Chillin with his lady friends. And he's not the only one. I do business with six or seven people in Ari's building alone. Two lawyers, one shrink. Never seen white folks so friendly as when you offer them a little powder...

ARI.

Grossman's a dick anyway. Got no idea about taste in music. Was this big shot record producer, right Matt? I mean very big. Could have been making any records he wanted right? So what does it turn out he did? All these stupid disco songs a few years ago. Almost every one. His fault.

DEXTER. Man had his own record label. Place is full of gold records.

ARI. Yeah, but I looked at all those gold records and you know what? He hasn't done shit in the last ten years... They are all dated 1970 something.

DEXTER. He don't have to work anymore. Got more money than God.

ARI. You'd almost feel sorry for him, but nope. It's his own fault. If he knew what real music was, he might still be making money.

DEXTER. Anyway, he has these fine looking lady friends, who live at his house. Two blondes and one very fine chocolate shake.

MATT. Three of them?

DEXTER. Word. Told me they chill in his house whenever "they in town."

MATT. Jesus...

DEXTER. Yeah, they all work in some casino in Atlantic City. And Grossman lets them chill whenever they want to come into the city. So we decided to have a party. Ari and his posse, couple of my friends, and Debbie, Lisa, and Tasha!

MATT. I don't believe this.

ARI. It's true.

DEXTER. Damn right, it's true. I'm telling you, Matt, I've been seeing a whole 'nother kind of life lately. Crazy ass kind of life. Like you is dreaming, one of those stupid nice don't you ever wake me up from this kind of dream, only this shit is twice as nice 'cause this is real. Look at this Matt. Look what ol "D" got. These four hundred dollar shoes. Four hundred dollars. Fucking shark or something. I know brothers be shitting in their graves know "D" got himself four hundred dollar shoes. Ha ha. Yes, sir, went shopping with Tasha. Girl is crazy for shoes. Got them crazy high boots. You see them boots, Ari?

ARI. Hell, yeah.

DEXTER. "These boots are made for walking... *(He starts stepping on Ari.)* That's just what they do."

ARI. I'm gonna have to hurt you, you don't cut it out.

DEXTER. Oh, listen to him, Matt. Yo! Watch them shoes... You should have seen little Ari last night... Shit started to get all busy and nice like, people using the Jacuzzi, the bedrooms... I looked around for Ari, and he was long gone.

ARI. It was five o'clock in the morning.

DEXTER. So?

ARI. So, I had to work at eleven.

DEXTER. So?

ARI. Yeah, like those fucking thirty-five year old ladies, wanted to have a lot to do with me. Yeah, right. "D." You should have seen them Matt. They were just clawing at each other, fighting over which one was going to get to stay with me. Yeah, right. Long as Dexter had his blow, nobody else in the whole place even existed. One of them even patted me on the fucking head. I hate that. Don't ever pat me on the fucking head...

MATT. Well, I'm glad you invited me to this little barbecue-

DEXTER. We called you.

MATT. Oh.

DEXTER. We did. You wasn't home.

MATT. I was rehearsing, that's right. Ha!

DEXTER. What? We called you. Ari, we call Matt?

MATT. No, I believe you. I'm laughing because last night we were rehearsing the bacchanal scene.

ARI. The who?

MATT. The bacchanal scene. It's this religious ritual in the middle of the play. Based on the one's they used to have for the God Dionysus. It's like this wild orgy scene. Lots of drugs and sexual promiscuity.

DEXTER. Word. So stop complaining about being left out.

MATT. Well, I'm sure your "barbecue" last night was a lot closer to the real thing. And we have had weeks to get this thing right. You should see us. It's pathetic. It supposed to be a religious frenzy, and it looks like something from "Solid Gold." They brought in a choreographer. A choreographer! Some guy from LA probably does music videos. I mean what could be worse than a choreographed frenzy. Okay you folks unglute on the count of four, and you three, you all moan and shimmy, then fall to the floor. Good, good. I can feel the heat just watching you. I can hardly wait.

DEXTER. Listen to you, shit probably looks excellent. You just never satisfied. Okay, showtime. Ha Ha! You thought I'd forget. Go ahead. Do your you-know-what you call it?

MATT. Monologue.

DEXTER. Monologue. Word, you know it?

MATT. Hell, yes, I know it.

DEXTER. You better know it, cause you gonna say it in a minute.

MATT. I know it "D," don't worry.

DEXTER. No worry involved. You just get ready to give it back to me. What I say? Give me the paper Ari. Okay. "I'm not speaking jive. I'm speaking the truth."

MATT. "D" ...

DEXTER. Go on. You gonna fuck it up. "I'm speaking the truth... Stupid talk, from a tongue without reigns, de-"

ARI. Talking 'bout you "D." Stupid talk.

DEXTER. Hush, now. "Defiance, for defiance's sake, unwisdom, look out! Your end is disaster. But the quiet life, of the quiet good, those that are truly wise, they will endure. Dig this: Briefly we live, and briefly we die. Therefore, those who hunt for glory, who track some boundless superman dream, and take evil along for the ride, in the end they will only have farther to fall."

MATT. "Everyone listen! Listen to the fool! He speaks, but he himself can't hear. We listen to the son of Zeus, the god Dionysus, man, he gives all of us, the poor as well as the rich, the simple gift of wine, the goodness of the grape."

ARI. Word, the purity of the powder...

MATT. *(To Ari, very powerfully.)* "Go ahead mock him, he hears you! And as you laugh, he hates. *(To Dexter.)* You, you've sung a song of madness before, but this, this is lunacy. Hear me for I speak the truth: The words of fools finish in folly."

ARI. I'll drink to that.

DEXTER. You got it!

MATT. Of course, I got it. I'd better have. I only have a week before previews. Besides I had you to help me.

DEXTER. Damn right. But you forgot one thing.

MATT. What?

DEXTER. You said "hear me, for I speak the truth." It's hear me "now," hear me now for I whatever... whatever...

MATT. You're right. Hear me now...

DEXTER. Otherwise, you was money... *(Hands him a box.)*

MATT. What's this?

DEXTER. What's it look like? It's a present. For watching little Darryl the other night.

MATT. I offered to do that. You didn't have to get me anything.

DEXTER. I know. But somebody told me you needed one of these.

MATT. How was it? You work it out? You and Tricia?

DEXTER. Work it out? Naw! Ain't nothing left for us to work out. We just check each other out every now and then. Like my momma, when she sets down at a piano. We just seeing if we remember all the notes...

MATT. (*Opens the box. It is a walkman.*) Oh, "D." I don't believe you.

DEXTER. Ari told me someone done vicked your old one from the store yesterday. Took it right off the shelf. And I thought, "good, I'm glad. 'Cause I was wondering what I should get him for watching my baby."

MATT. I can't accept this...

DEXTER. Why? You use the damn thing everyday.

ARI. You don't want it, I'll take it.

DEXTER. Hush up. You should have seen him Matt. He helped pick it out. and all he could say was, "Damn, I wish somebody would steal mine..."

ARI. Word. Maybe I'll leave mine out for my brother...

MATT. This is the one I was going to buy. But it was too expensive. "D," really, I can't...

DEXTER. You'd better hold onto it, or you're gonna lose that one.

ARI. We bought Ketchup a VCR for his birthday. You should have seen him, Matt. Homeboy started crying.

MATT. This is beautiful...

DEXTER. Now, don't you start... Look, there he comes now. First time he been outside since we bought him that thing. (*He whistles for Ketchup. Ketchup whistles back.*) Matt, Ketchup, he thinks I got promoted. To head doorman. Told him I got a big raise and all. You understand.

MATT. Oh, sure.

DEXTER. He'd only get upset, he know the truth...

KETCHUP. "D", you're gonna k-kill me. I'm s-sorry. I'm r-really sorry. I'm so d-damn stupid. D-dumb.



DEXTER. Okay, okay. Hey. Slow down. Calm down.

DEXTER. D-don't be mad at me. P-p-p-lease.

DEXTER. What happened? Look, I won't be mad. What happened?

KETCHUP. I b-b-b-broke it.

DEXTER. Broke what?

KETCHUP. My, m-my, m-m-m-y V-V-V C-C-C R. I broke it.

DEXTER. Broke it? How?

KETCHUP. I d-don't k-k-n-now. I don't know how.

DEXTER. Yo, okay. Calm down. Tell me what happened.

KETCHUP. Why am I s-so s-stupid, "D-D?" W-why?

DEXTER. Just tell me what happened. Would ya?

KETCHUP. W-we was watching the m-movie, right. Aliens. M-my m-mother and I. And all of a s-sudden. It s-started to go c-crazy. The a-l-liens s-s-stared to go fast. Real f-fast, and n-now they w-won't stop. Th-they just k-keep on g-going fast. Like you can't e-even see them. Argh, Argh, v-v-tt, vtt, a-and I can't stop them.

DEXTER. My man you just hit the fast forward button, that's all.

KETCHUP. The w-what?

DEXTER. On the remote control. The fast forward button. Remember I showed you?

KETCHUP. *(He is still holding the remote.)* The what?

DEXTER. Look, the button right here. Fast forward. So you can skip the parts that aren't any good. The commercials and shit.

KETCHUP. Oh. Then, it's not b-broke?

DEXTER. Hell, no it's not broke. Just bought you the damn thing two days ago, course it's not broke. C'mon let me show you one more time how to use the thing.

KETCHUP. "D," they was b-b-ugging out. You should have s-seen them. A-aliens was running over the place... H-hi M-matt!

MATT. Hi, Ketchup.

KETCHUP. I g-got a VCR.

MATT. I heard.

KETCHUP. Now, w-we can all watch my-y TV.

DEXTER. C'mon Ketchup, them Aliens might burn up, you leave them going that fast.

KETCHUP.  
You should have s-seen them "D", a-a-argh!

*They exit. Ari has Matt's walkman on.*

ARI. This sound great, Matt.

MATT. Yeah, it does...What should I do Ari? I can't keep it.

ARI. Huh?

MATT. I said I can't really keep it, can I?

ARI. What the fuck are you talking about...

MATT. Come on, Ari you know how Dexter's getting all his money.

ARI. So? What does that have to do with this?

MATT. A lot.

ARI. Look give it to me then. I'll take it. Shit is beautiful. I mean it's not like he stole it Matt. If he stole it then maybe... But I was with him. He bought it.

MATT. Yes. but where did he get the money?

ARI. Who cares? It didn't matter to Crazy Eddie, and it shouldn't matter to you. Look, my man did you a favor. bought you a present...

MATT. I know that. Look, don't get me wrong, I mean I like Dexter, I do. I think he's a great guy, you know that.

ARI. So then don't be a dick and "dis" him. Man buys you a present, you say "thank you" and you enjoy it. *(He puts on the headphones again.)* "Get down, my uzi weighs a ton, Get down..."

MATT. I can't do it.

ARI. What? *(He takes the headphones off.)*

MATT. I said, I don't think it's right. I can't do it.

ARI. Can't do what?

*Dexter enters behind Matt, is about to say something but doesn't.*

MATT. I can't accept this present. I'm going to give it back to him. Look, maybe you think I'm stupid-

ARI. Yep!

MATT. Fine. Fine with me. But if you ask me what Dexter's doing is wrong. Dead wrong.

ARI. *(Who has seen Dexter.)* Really...

MATT. Yes. and- *(Turns and sees him, because Ari is looking at him.)* And I'm sorry, but, for me, to accept this present- It just wouldn't feel right. Do you understand?

DEXTER. Wouldn't feel right...

MATT. No...

DEXTER. No. 'Cause I am wrong.

MATT. What you are doing. Yes. To me, it's wrong.

DEXTER. Dead wrong. *(Long pause.)* Well, then, fuck it. You keep it. Ari.

ARI. Word.

DEXTER. Might as well give the shit to someone who can appreciate it.

MATT. "D-"

ARI. Yo, "D!" This is the song I was telling you about. Song is now joke. *(He turns the tape over, and hands the headphones to Dexter who listens. Ari sings:)* Ba da da dee, ba da da day. Listen to my nine millimeter go Bang!

DEXTER. What, you think I never heard this? This like the National Anthem...

DEXTER AND ARI. *(Both singing.)* Ba da da dee, ba da da day, listen to my nine millimeter go bang!

**BLACKOUT...** The song "Nine Millimeter Goes Bang" plays into the Intermission.

## ACT TWO

### SCENE ONE

*We hear Happy Birthday being sung by Ketchup ,and the lights come up on him standing by the bench where an Entenmann's store bought cake sits with a candle in it. It is the middle of the night.*

KETCHUP. Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, h-happy birthday dear Reggie, happy birthday to you... You make a wish now, and I'll blow out the candle... You ready? Can only make one wish now... *(He closes his eyes and makes the wish for him, the candle blows out.)* Ha! Ha!

**Blackout.**

## SCENE TWO

*The bench about an hour later. In the darkness we hear Matt's speech from the play. And the lights come up on him reciting the speech standing by the bench. The cake is still sitting on it. Untouched. Matt is wearing a long red "Hippie" wig and "Hippie" clothes.*

MATT. "Go ahead, mock him, he hears you. And as you laugh... (*He tries something different.*) And as you laugh, he hates. You, you've sung a song of madness before, but this? This is lunacy. Hear me for I speak the truth: The-

DEXTER. (*Overlapping in a loud low voice.*) "The words of fools gonna finish in folly!"

MATT. Jesus.

DEXTER. (*He is wired from cocaine, and is carrying a carton of milk.*) You'd better be careful. Talking to them Gods. One of these days they might just hear you...

MATT. I was going over my lines...

DEXTER. I see that. Why? You know them lines left and right.

MATT. I know. I just keep thinking there's something I'm missing.

DEXTER. Only thing you missing now is some sleep...

MATT. Yeah, well. No way I was going to get that. I can never sleep the night before a show. (*Take off his wig.*)

DEXTER. Gonna be worn out-

MATT. No, I'm not working today, so I'll sleep a couple hours this afternoon. If I can. How about you, you're up pretty late...

DEXTER. I was just going over some lines, myself... Ha! Ha! Oh, that's right. You don't approve of that, do you. Yeah, well... I couldn't sleep none either. Got a lot on my mind myself. And I wish mine was make believe. Wish mine was just some play... And then I thought, shit! It's July thirteenth.

Can't be depressed on July 13th. (*He starts cutting the cake during the next few beats.*) Got to come out here and celebrate. It's Rock's birthday.

MATT. I see that.

DEXTER. Like getting two birthdays each year for the price of one. See, you ask me, one of the only thing's worth living for in this here world is birthday cake, love birthday cake... Only you better make sure you out here early. Otherwise them rats get it. One year, Ketchup was working over at one of them Carvel stores. So he put out one of them Carvel cakes, them ice cream logs. Shit was melted before I even got out here... Ice cream stuck all over the place. (*Offers Matt a piece.*)

MATT. Oh, no thanks...

DEXTER. What you don't like cake?

MATT. No, actually I love it. But the sugar and all...

DEXTER. Oh, that's right. I forgot. You sure? Not even a little piece, with no icing?

MATT. No, really...

DEXTER. Damn, no wonder you never happy. Like one of them fucking...monks. Can't do this, can't do that.

MATT. Besides, I'd feel a little weird. Eating that, I mean.

DEXTER. Why? Cause it was meant for Rock?

MATT. Yeah.

DEXTER. Look, when I die, if somebody foolish enough to leave something for me, for after I'm gone, I'm telling you right now: help yourself. Way I see it, I'd rather somebody enjoy the shit, somebody besides some stupid ass rats. Now the present, I always give the present to my momma to give to the hospital where she work. They have some kind of charity. Look at that, usually Ketchup'll leave a little present... Oh, well, guess not. Now the present, I'll give to my momma, but the cake, uh uh. No sir. You can't get me to pass up no cakes... Listen, Rock don't never seem to

mind. It's like eating the offering, and drinking the wine, at church. We're celebrating...

*Pause, Dexter drinks.*

MATT. Well, maybe I will go inside. Try to get some sleep.

DEXTER. Oh, that's right. You don't want to talk to me no more, neither. Do you?

MATT. What?

DEXTER. Getting to be good friends, now you don't want nothing to do with me...

MATT. What are you talking about?

DEXTER. What am I talking about?

MATT. Yes.

DEXTER. You know damn well what I'm talking about-

MATT. "D-"

DEXTER. Gonna give me back my walkman. Ashamed to keep it. Like it was fucking tainted or something. Not good enough for you. (*Matt starts to explain.*) Hey... Don't worry, you not alone. My mother won't say two fucking words to me. Walks around the house like I don't even exist. Walks right by me like I'm a ghost. Shit, I don't care. Never said shit to me my whole life, so why should she start now? Never had shit to say to me. 'Cept how much she missed my brother. Gonna never stop blaming me for what happened to my brother. Like it was my idea. Like I really wanted to steal a fucking piano... Like I'm that stupid...

MATT. A piano?

DEXTER. (*Picks up Matt's wig, talks to it as himself*) You know what she used to say? She used to hold me in her arms, trying to un-mat my hair, yanking on it, and she'd say: "Dexter, the one thing you don't have is no common sense. No sir. Not one drop. The good Lord, he must of run out of it the day he was making you. Had you standing at the end of the "smarts"



line, and done run out long before you. Maybe give you just a sprinkle or two, some crumbs, or else you'd be like that Ketchup, but otherwise. Otherwise you dumb as doorknob..."

MATT. That's awful...

DEXTER. Maybe she's right, though. (*Puts on the wig*) Maybe she's right about everything...

MATT. I don't understand. She thinks you stole a piano?

DEXTER. We did steal a piano. Or at least we tried... See, my momma, she's in there drinking, and when she drinks she starts talking crazy. She starts saying all kinds of things. How I killed Kurt, that it was all my fault, which is bullshit. Was all his idea, he the one who wanted that damn piano. Wanted it for my momma, He do anything for my momma, move heaven and earth for her. And all she used to talk about was how she love playing her piano when she was a girl. Only time she ever used to smile was talking about that piano. So he was set on getting her one. Which meant taking it. 'Cause no one we know could afford no piano stool, let alone no piano. And of course that meant I was gonna have to help- 'cause my brother wasn't gonna get no piano out of nowhere by himself.

MATT. Would have been easier to move heaven and earth...

DEXTER. I know you ain't shitting. Motherfucker couldn't give her no clock or watch for her birthday. Fucking Timex. No, he got to give her a goddamn piano... Anyway, there we were trying to walk down three flights of stairs, carrying this piano- he was too stupid to find an elevator building, gonna steal a piano from a walk-up. So we get the thing down all three flights, and just as we hit the ground floor, we hear the sirens and realize "Five O's" are coming. You should have seen us, Matt, like Laurel and fucking Hardy junior. My brother he panics, drops his end of the piano onto the dolly and starts to book. I go sliding backwards with the piano, about five feet and get wedged into a corner. Can't get out. Have to climb over the top of the damn thing, and well, I guess it was a good thing, 'cause I heard shots and by the time I got out back, my brother he was just lying there, all crumpled over. Looked terrible. He had reached into his pocket to drop his crowbar, and get light... they took him out. I wanted to run, but I couldn't I just sat there with him, and all of a sudden I was holding my belly and screaming. Didn't even know I was hit, at first. But I'm telling you, Matt, don't ever shoot me again. Ever. Shit ain't nothing like the movies... That

shit hurts. Bad. And now every time she takes a drink she gets to missing Kurt. Then she gets to blaming me. Thinks the whole thing was my idea. (*Yanks the wig off.*) Damn, this world. People only want to believe what they want to believe in this here world. They only see what they want to see. Just let your mind change that shit all around. Set that fucking play in California, who cares. Believe it was all my fault Kurt got spent. Who cares... Damn, you don't think there's a lot of shit I'd like to change? You don't think I wish I had me a real father, one that would last more than a couple of years? You don't wish I was born in a real house, with a real yard and shit. Had me a dog to play with? Lick my face... List is endless of the things I'd like to change... Who cares... See my man Ketchup... My man Ketchup, he done changed the park into a whole 'nother world. He really believes there's two worlds, this here world, and a better one, sitting just inside there... Shit. Now you and I know there ain't nothing in there but a park full of rats, but you try telling Ketchup that. You try telling my momma Kurt wanted that piano... Two worlds... You want to know only two worlds I ever saw? Uptown and downtown. Them that's born lucky and them that's not... What the hell am I doing... talking to you for... You don't want nothing to do with me, I don't want nothing to do with you.

MATT. "D," listen. I don't think you understand-

DEXTER. Oh, I understand, all right. Even dumb as a doorknob, "D" understand after awhile. Like those bugs you see trapped in the web, flies, and shit. Think they just some dope bugs, too stupid to understand. You see them wiggling on that web, trying to get free, getting even more fucked, and you think, Ha! Chump! Well, now I know, now I know. Hanging there, a little late maybe, but hanging there, they figure it out. You bet they do... They're up there thinking "Damn. Other bugs, they know better. Walk right by here. Not me. No sir. Never did know how to quit while I was ahead..." And then it dawns in them, all of a sudden. Pops right into their little bug minds- bing! Oh, shit! This is it, isn't it. This is really it. This is what was meant to be all along. I was born to fly into this trap. Born to be eaten. Other bugs, they get to be butterflies, fly all over the world, or spiders, sit up there fat, and happy, and rich. Nobody touches them. But not me. No sir. I was born to be the dope bug, born to be eaten... Good, I'm getting tired now, coming down now... Yes, sir tonight's Rock's birthday. Rock knows what I'm talking about. Rock the grand-daddy dope bug...

MATT. "D," you going to sleep out here? You can't just sleep out here on the bench... Come on, let's just go inside.

DEXTER. I can't.

MATT. "D."

DEXTER. Let me be now. Just want to rest.

MATT. Rest inside...

DEXTER. You don't understand, do you? I can't go back in there. They looking for me. They coming to get me.

MATT. Who, the police?

DEXTER. The police? Shit. Police don't care about me.

MATT. Well, then who?

DEXTER. Who? Hell, I thought only person in the whole neighborhood didn't know was me.

MATT. Know about what?

DEXTER. I suppose you didn't talk to nobody today?

MATT. Talk? Talk to who? I was at work all day, and then we had a run-through at night. I got home about midnight, why?

DEXTER. Midnight, huh? Well, I guess I was wrong about that too, then. Didn't even have that figured out right. I was sure it had to be you. (*He takes out a gun. Sits it on the bench.*) What's a matter? Ain't never seen a real gun before. Shit. Only in the movies? Only on some policeman's hip. This was my daddy's. Then it was Kurt's. Now me. This our family heirloom. Momma had it in her room, where she keep everything of Kurt's. I never cared. Never needed it before tonight. You should have seen her. Got mad at me for taking it, started drinking. That's why them boys was asking about you today. That's why? Isn't it. They looking for you. And I felt all stupid, like one of them bugs, and I said what "boys?" And then she told me, how it was all over the neighborhood, some Brooklyn boys looking for me, and then it dawned on me, "bing," Shorty never come by the building tonight to deliver, which ain't like him. Shit, where's Shorty. So I go racing downtown, looking for Shorty. He ain't nowhere to be found. Nobody seen Shorty for days. And I bump into this friend of mine Ice, use to play ball in Rikers, and I ask him.

And he just laughs, he says: "Shorty? Don't let nobody know you a friend of Shorty's. He's been skimming shit for years now. Holding out. Doing business on the side. They after Shorty. Looking for him and some stupid fucker he got working for him. Now you tell me "D," who in their right mind be dope enough to trust Shorty." Well you just got to laugh, don't you Matt. Who'd be dope enough to trust Shorty...

MATT. (Pause.) God, what are you going to do?

DEXTER. Get way the fuck out of here, that's for sure. Got to put miles between me and here. Got a flight leaving tomorrow night. For Carolina. Gonna stay with an uncle I got down there. Got to be careful 'till then. Tricia gonna meet me in the park tomorrow. With 'li'l "D." See him one time before I go. Looks like I'm gonna miss your play. I'm sorry about that-

MATT. "D", do you know these guys? I mean who they are?

DEXTER. I got a pretty good idea who they are, yeah.

MATT. What if we tried to explain.

DEXTER. Explain? Explain what?

MATT. Let them know. That you had no idea.

DEXTER. When you gonna wake up Matt? When you gonna learn? A couple of Brooklyn brothers walk up to you carrying nines. You really think they are going to stop and listen to what you have to say?

MATT. I don't know-

DEXTER. What you gonna say: "Listen, fellas, it was all a big mistake. Come on in and have some Decaf?" I'm worried about you, Matt. You been eating too much wheat germ and shit. Messing you up or something... You worse than Ketchup. Think there's some nice fucking world out there. Think the shit really can turn out happily ever after... Nothing ever turns out right up here, understand? Not up here. No, sir. You living uptown now. Up with spiders... (*Something screeches in the bushes behind them.*)

MATT. Shit... What is that?

DEXTER. Hush.

MATT. (*He is under the bench.*) Jesus, "D." What was that.

DEXTER. Hold still... Fucking rats... or something. Maybe Rock coming to get his cake... (*Pause. They listen.*) Don't hear nothing now...

MATT. Maybe we should go inside "D"?

DEXTER. Look at you, you's bugging...

MATT. Shit yeah, I'm bugging. How do we know that wasn't your friends?

DEXTER. Because we wouldn't still be standing here talking about it if it was. Listen, you right though. You go on and go inside. I'm gonna go over to Tricia's. And see Darryl. It'll be light soon. Should be fine once it's light.

MATT. Okay. (*Dexter goes back over to the cake.*) What are you doing?

DEXTER. Getting me another piece of cake. And one for Darryl. And one for Tricia.

MATT. Just take the whole thing...

DEXTER. Got to leave something for Rock... Listen, it looks like I'm not going to make it, so you do it right, okay?

MATT. What?

DEXTER. Your play.

MATT. Oh...

DEXTER. 'Cause I ain't gonna be there to feed you the lines, if you fuck up.

MATT. Okay... Thanks.

DEXTER. Don't be nervous, now...

MATT. I'm nervous about you.

DEXTER. Don't worry about me. I'm gonna stay right here by the park. Rock is gonna look after me, ain't you Rock? It's you and me from now on...

*Ketchup has walked up behind them quietly wondering what was going on. He carries a birthday present, crudely wrapped.*

KETCHUP. What y-you mean? Y-you and R-rock?

MATT. *(Both he and Dexter are startled. Dexter dives behind the bench and aims his gun.)* Shit...

KETCHUP. Yo!

DEXTER. Jesus, Ketchup! You trying to fucking kill me?

KETCHUP. N-no. I was-- I just f-forgot something. *(He holds up the present.)* I was j-just b-bringing s-something out here... What are y-you doing out h-here?

DEXTER. Nothing.

KETCHUP. Why you g-got a g-gun "D-D"?

DEXTER. Go on inside-

KETCHUP. Got all y-your stuff p-packed t-too-

DEXTER. You hear?

KETCHUP. You ain't g-going away-

DEXTER. I said go on inside.

KETCHUP. You ain't going away with Rock?

DEXTER. Do what I'm telling you...

KETCHUP. I h-heard you. I h-heard you telling M-matt.

DEXTER. Matt, take him inside, will you?

MATT. Sure. Come on, Ketchup.

KETCHUP. He was here, w-wasn't he? H-he was h-here and y-you are g-going off with him.

DEXTER. Listen, Ketchup-

KETCHUP. D-don't you go off with him "D-D."

DEXTER. Listen to me. Now. Don't be mad at me, hear? Okay? I want you to promise?

KETCHUP. M-mad at you?

DEXTER. Yes. I want you to promise. That you won't be mad at me.

KETCHUP. N-no. N-no I don't--

DEXTER. Well, fuck it then. Be mad at me. Now listen. I have done something. Something... that's pissed some brothers off, you understand?

KETCHUP. W-why?

DEXTER. Don't matter why. Just listen. And Rock was out here-

KETCHUP. I kn-new it-

DEXTER. And he said I should go off with him for awhile 'till things chill. 'Cause it ain't safe for me round here right now.

KETCHUP. He's j-just s-saying that "D." H-he always s-say that-

DEXTER. Yo! Listen to me. This ain't no game here, Ketchup. They are after me. I got brothers looking all over for me-

KETCHUP. I know. Th-they was b-by here today-

DEXTER. Who?

KETCHUP. C-c-couple a g-guys. Said they was your f-friends.

DEXTER. Who?

KETCHUP. Th-they *your* friends... Said th-they been l-looking for you.

DEXTER. What did you tell them? (*He has him pinned to the bench now.*)

KETCHUP. Th-th-that-

DEXTER. What did you tell them Ketchup?

KETCHUP. That you b-bought me a V-V VCR. Asked them if th-they had seen Aliens...

DEXTER. Okay. (*Ketchup starts to speak.*) Just hush up and listen. Now, anybody else comes by here looking for me- just listen- anybody else comes by here, you tell them you don't know nothing, you hear? Got no idea where I am.

KETCHUP. No idea.

DEXTER. That goes for everybody. Five O's everybody. You got that?

KETCHUP. No idea...

DEXTER. Word.

KETCHUP. I a-ain't stupid, you know. They told me you done something bad and they was out for justice. And I said what does that mean, and they picked up my VCR and smashed it to pieces.

DEXTER. I am so sorry.

KETCHUP. And they said that is what it means. And I yelled at them. I said why did you do that? That was mine. What would make you do that? And they just laughed. You tell your friend we said hello. I tried to put it back together but it was all broke. And they just laughed and laughed...

DEXTER. I'm so sorry... Ketchup....

KETCHUP. I ain't stupid you know. You tell them that!!!

DEXTER. Matt, make sure he goes inside now.

MATT. Don't worry.

KETCHUP. "D." H-here!

DEXTER. What?



KETCHUP. (*He is very upset now.*) G-give this to m-my brother. I f-forgot to g-give it to h-him earlier. It's a r-radio. C-came in the mail with m-my m-momma's magazine.

DEXTER. I'll give it to him.

KETCHUP. P-probably won't even u-use it...

DEXTER. Sure he will...

KETCHUP. How l-long you gonna be g-gone? "D?" How l-long you gonna be gone?

DEXTER. I don't know. Long as it takes...

KETCHUP. Y-you gonna be gone a l-long time... Ain't you? G-gonna...be (*He stops and turn away.*) g-gone a long t-time. Look at the m-mess he m-make out of h-his c-cake...L-look at th-this... (*He turns back.*) W-what you st-anding there for? G-go! G-go on, go! (*Dexter hesitates.*) Go! (*He leaves, disappearing in the dark. Matt is standing watching him. Long pause as Ketchup sits crying.*) Go...(*Matt turns and just as he is going to help, Ketchup gets up and starts to clean up the pieces of cake, the napkins.*) G-go...Go...(Angrily he throws them in the garbage can, back and forth, still crying.) Go!

**The lights fade to black.**

### SCENE THREE

*The bench, five nights later. It is early morning. Ari is walking back and forth in front of the bench. He is waiting for someone, and has been for quite sometime. There are two sandwiches and two sodas now on the bench.*

ARI. Your big mistake was not leaving that night "D." Bam, gone on the next fucking plane. Forget this waiting to say good-bye to little "D." If they are after you, you make yourself scarce... *(He sees someone coming. Goes and sits on the bench.)*

MATT. *(Wearing a bathrobe.)* Ari, what the hell are you doing?

ARI. I'm sitting here, what does it look like I'm doing.

MATT. It's three o'clock in the morning.

ARI. Is it...

MATT. You said you were going home over an hour ago.

ARI. And you said you were going to sleep... *(Pause.)* "D" was right, you do hear weird shit out here at night...

MATT. I know... Ari, he's not going to come out here you know, if you're sitting here.

ARI. Who?

MATT. Ketchup. He just won't come. He'll wait for you to leave. Look, I know what you're trying to do.

ARI. Good.

MATT. It's not going to work. I know you want to tell him, but it won't help-

ARI. Look, somebody's got to set my man straight. Somebody has got to tell him this isn't the fucking Temple of Doom out here. I don't care how many Grape Nehi's he puts out here, Dexter's not coming back.

MATT. Why?

ARI. Why?

MATT. No, I mean-

ARI. Why? Because my man's gone. Good-bye. That's it. Dead.

MATT. I know that, Ari-

ARI. They had a memorial service and everything for him, for Christ sake.

MATT. I know.

ARI. So, he's not gonna come walking out of the goddamn bushes.

MATT. Obviously.

ARI. So why let him come out here every night and make his fucking sacrifices. Tell him the truth.

MATT. He knows the truth-

ARI. Obviously not-

MATT. Ari, everyone in this neighborhood knows. It's all they talk about. It was on the news-

ARI. Yeah, after the traffic jam in Newark, and before the winning Lotto numbers...

MATT. His mother sent flowers to the service. Believe me, Ketchup knows. He just doesn't want to listen. That's why he'll wait until you're gone to come out here. I'm telling you, Ari. He crosses the street, if you try to talk to him. He only comes outside, to go to his job over at the school, and to come out here.

ARI. To leave his sandwiches. So do me a favor, stop coming out here every night and helping him. Let him figure it out. Stop taking the shit off the plate for him.

MATT. Why? Why not give him something to hope for.

ARI. Because it's bullshit. That's why. Hope for, hope for what? For something that ain't gonna ever fucking happen? Yes, that's exactly what I mean. Stop giving him hope. Stop bullshitting the guy. God, what is it about you people, that makes you such chumps. Damn, you live, you die, you eat, you shit. That's it. That's life. That's all you get.

MATT. Yeah, well not everybody's as jaded as you are.

ARI. This here, this is just a fucking park bench. And this is just a garbage can. That there is just a street. You want to talk to "D," why don't you go down the street and talk to the bloody spot on the goddamn sidewalk where they took him out. Thirty two shots. That is what the witnesses said they heard. Took him out right in front of his little baby... Then threw him into the trunk, and drove off with him like a sack of garbage. His poor little kid... Just sitting there crying, his mother holding him... They'll never find "D". He's in the East River or some land fill in Hoboken. Hope... *(After a beat, he stops. Walks over to the bench, picks up the sandwich, dumps it into the garbage can. Picks up the sodas, gives one to Matt. They drink first, then each drain the remaining soda into the can. They toss the bottles away, and Ari turns to go.)*

MATT. Thanks.... *(Ari nods, then starts to go.)* Where are you going?

ARI. Home, I've had enough "Waiting for Ketchup" for one night.

MATT. I'll walk you to the train.

ARI. Dressed like that?

MATT. Sure, why not.

*They exit. After a beat Ketchup enters. He watches them go and then takes a small package of donuts out of his pocket.*

KETCHUP. Momma ate all the jelly. So you get peanut butter without the jelly. If you hungry enough you'll eat it. Can't believe you'd do it, Rock. Cannot believe it. You got to go and take Dexter off with you. Get him to act all foolish, get him to run off with you. Well, good for you. You must be real happy now. But who does that leave me with? Who gonna watch movies with me? Who gonna play ball? Course you don't care. Never do care 'bout me. These here are for "D." Don't you touch them. You hear that "D?" Them

donuts are for you. 'Cause I know you like them. Like dipping them in your soda. *(He sits on the bench now, very upset.)* Get them all soggy... You should have told me you was doing wrong "D." You could have told me. I know who's idea it was... Probably talking all kinds of shit to you, wasn't he? Talking in that voice of his... that low voice... Talking about acting crazy, running off and living with him. He does that to me too. I hear him. When things get really bad, calling my name... Well, I know what that is now. That's trouble talking, that is . You was right "D." Tried to get me to run off with him too... In a whisper sometimes... Don't like being all alone. Never did like being alone. Couldn't even get to sleep unless you was in the room with him. Hated being left alone. And "D," you don't like the dark. Do you? Oh my lord... You two some pair. Two big babies" running through the woods... Well, you lucky you got me to look after you, that's all I got to say. you're lucky you've got me... *(A wail of pain.)* "D", "D"!! *(He stops to collect himself.)* You heard me now, those donuts are for you. He'll try and get him some, you'll see. you just tell him we's on to him. Ain't gonna listen to no voice of trouble no more. You do what I do. Just walk away. He hates that. Don't you, Rock? *(He starts to walk off.)* Don't you! Just got to walk away and leave him talking...

**The stage is empty again for a beat and the lights fade to black...**

# **THE WEIGHT OF MY HEART**

The Story Of Omm Sety

For Ruth Jaffe and Maggy Jacqmin  
Two Dorothy's who dance with the ancients  
And Cassey who was born an old soul

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## **The Weight Of My Heart** Cast Of Characters

The play is performed by eleven actors, 6 women and 5 men

### **Omm Sety**

Omm Sety            born Dorothy Eady, is played by three actresses:

*Omm Sety*            a woman in her seventies

*Dorothy Eady*        ages from sixteen to thirty-five

*Young Dorothy*     the same woman during childhood (doubles as Young Sety)

### **Ancient Egypt**

*Sety I*                 Pharaoh of Egypt, forty five.

*Antef*                 High priest, Temple Of Sety at Abydos, forties (doubles as Imam)

*Bentreshyt*         a priestess of Isis in Ancient Egypt, sixteen

*Sakarra*             her friend and another priestess, eighteen

### **London, England -early 1900's**

*Mrs. Eady*            Dorothy's mother, ages from 25- 55

*Mr. Eady*             Dorothy's father, ages from 26-56

*Aunt Helen*         matron Aunt of Eady family (same actress who plays Dorothy)

*Doctor*                British family physician (played by same actor as Samir)

*Sir Wallis Budge*    head of Department of Egyptian Studies, British Museum, sixties

### **Abydos, Modern Egypt**

*Samir*                 district official, the Egyptian Department Of Antiquities, thirties

*Young Sety*         Dorothy's son (same actress who plays Young Dorothy)

*Imam Meguid*        Dorothy's husband, an Egyptian engineer, thirty (played by the actor that plays Antef )

## ACT ONE

*The play takes place in many locales, but the primary set is the garden of the Temple Of Sety I in Abydos, Egypt. The other settings may be suggested by lighting or projection and a single piece of furniture. The action of the play is continuous and the play should flow uninterrupted until the end of each act. Lights come up on an old women "covered" in a Middle Eastern fashion by a colorful piece of fabric. She walks barefoot to center stage.*

OMM SETY. All right gather round. Step this way. You'll have to move in a little closer. Would someone please take hold of that child? Yes, the one who has been terrorizing the entire tour thus far. Please, these walls were built in the nineteenth dynasty, they have managed to survive for centuries, but they have not had to face your little- what was his name? Cecil. Yes, well. They never had to face the onslaught of Cecil before. *(She clears her throat.)* I must have swallowed a beetle. No, that's just an expression, my dear. For a scratchy throat. No need to look so faint. Now, then as I said before, it might have been easier to start our little visit to the Temple Of Sety The First, here, with the gardens. But we in "show business" like to save the best for last. A Finale, so to speak- Excuse me, but there may be no photographs in this part of the temple please, out of respect. Thank you. Now if you would all turn around and try to imagine where we are standing was the center of a luxurious garden. Pomegranate and fig trees all along those edges, oleander and jasmine throughout.

*The lights begin to come up on a wall of The Temple Of Sety I in Abydos, Egypt. Omm Sety is standing on a granite cube in what was the center of a pond in a courtyard.*

OMM SETY. And at the very center, where I am standing, a rectangular lotus pool. The lotus was the symbol of life and reincarnation. The sun god Ra- the father of Osiris and all the other Gods- his soul was said to live among its leaves. For each night the flower curls into itself and withdraws underwater-

*The lights slowly begin to come up on the same place in another age and will then cross-fade to two young priestesses and a priest. The priestesses seem to be performing a dance and the priest is watching.*

OMM SETY. Only to be reborn each dawn spreading its leaves to reach out to the sky. Now Osiris was an extremely powerful God. The god of the afterlife; the god who passed judgment on the soul after death. And elaborate ceremonies were given for his benefit, for if Osiris was pleased, he might judge less harshly. This courtyard was often the scene of sacred plays acted out by young priestess'-

BENTRESHYT. *(A line from a performance)* Oh, my lord....

OMM SETY. To celebrate the glory of the gods.



*Lights have now cross-faded to ancient Egypt.*

ANTEF. (*Directing*) No, Bentreshyt! No! This is a moment of great mourning. Remember the story: The demon god Seth has mutilated our lord Osiris, hacked his body into pieces, and scattered them throughout the land. And you, our lady Isis, have been searching desperately for the little pieces of your husband for years. So you are distraught. Now Sakarra here, is your sister Nephtys, who, because she is Seth's wife, you don't know whether to trust her or not. But- she has discovered along the edge of this river his foot. (*He motions for SAKARRA. to pick up the ornate "foot."*) You see? You have just found his foot.

BENTRESHYT. I see.

ANTEF. Good. So you find the foot, and you cry out, "Oh my lord!" Distraught. Much more grief!

BENTRESHYT. But this is how I grieve. Is not quiet grief powerful?

ANTEF. No. It is boring.

BENTRESHYT. But it feels true.

ANTEF. It feels true. Do you want them sleeping through the resurrection? It feels true. (*He beats her swiftly with a stick*) There, does that feel true? Now, do what I say. Anguish. (*He strikes her, again. She cries out.*) Good. Now try again.

BENTRESHYT. Oh, my lord!

ANTEF. Much better. Almost. My dear, you are one of the finest I have ever seen. Audiences love you. But you are a God's nightmare to teach. Remember, your mother was a vegetable seller, and your father? Who knows who your father was?

BENTRESHYT. He was a warrior.

ANTEF. A warrior... One of a thousand common soldiers on leave for a fortnight. Some warrior.

BENTRESHYT. He crossed the oceans and had seen other civilizations.

SAKKARA. Bentreshyt.

ANTEF. Quiet!

SAKKARA. (*Trying to distract Antef and sensing it might work.*) Couldn't we go over my dance, my lord? The dance of the elbow?

ANTEF. I said quiet! My little cat, you remember who took you from the mud near the riverbank and turned you into a Priestess Of Isis. You remember and you listen. Is that clear? (*Raises his staff*) Is that clear?

BENTRESHYT. Yes, my Lord.

ANTEF. Sakkara , go over your dance where you discover the elbow in the bulrushes. I need to check on the headdresses. We perform at the rise of tomorrow's sun. Why my dear Gods, why? I write you sacred chants, and you have sent me a pack of jackals to perform them.

*Antef exits.*

BENTRESHYT. The gods won't be pleased with this.

SAKKARA. Bentreshyt...

BENTRESHYT. Well, it's true. Only grief can come from this.

SAKKARA. Bentreshyt, we are performing this for Sety himself! You're just nervous. Everyone is. Even Antef.

BENTRESHYT. Especially Antef. Sakkara, I'm just not certain it's very good. Antef's plays are never very good.

SAKKARA. The people weep at his plays. They applaud us. We are showered in their gifts.

BENTRESHYT. That doesn't mean they are good.

SAKKARA. What about what Allergious the Wise said after the last play? Calling him "not just one of the God's own geese, but *the golden goose* himself, trumpeting truths that others can barely speak?" I suppose you know better than Allergious the Wise. Who can scribe books and make long speeches. Who has seen the edge of the Nile. Who himself constructed the forty postulates of Mathematics for obsolete triangles.

BENTRESHYT. And who has forced himself on you at least once for each postulate-

SAKKARA. Hush, you could be killed for saying these things.

BENTRESHYT. I know. But it's still true. Sakkara, I know Antef 's our master, and a devoted priest-

SAKKARA. He is our lord.

BENTRESHYT. No, Sety is our lord, and Osiris is his lord. Antef is a priest.

SAKKARA. Bentreshyt-

BENTRESHYT. And I serve him.

SAKKARA. We are to worship him.

BENTRESHYT. Even as he beats me? No, I worship our lady Isis, and our lord Osiris. Antef, I serve. And forgive me, I just don't think his words sing. "Now that I have found the foot I feel the will to move forward again?" (*Sakkara laughs.*)...Oh, don't listen to me, I haven't been myself at all today.

SAKARRA. True. Let's begin with my scream of sorrow. I'm having a lot of trouble with that. Bentreshyt, where are you going?

BENTRESHYT. (*Climbing the stairs to the top of the wall*) I had this dream last night, Sakkara-

SAKKARA. Come down from there. I love this song, "The Song Of the Elbow", but I'm having trouble with my scream-

BENTRESHYT. I had a dream that I was standing high on this ledge, overlooking this pool-

*The lights come back up on Omm Sety and both scenes in two different times are now happening in the same space.*

OMM SETY. This wall is perhaps the most stunning of all of the marvels of artistry found in the temple. The ledge here is covered with the story of Osiris' mutilation and resurrection, the centerpiece of all Egyptian mythology. According to the legend Osiris's own body had been pulled to pieces and scattered about the earth. After a great struggle the Goddess Isis, his wife, found each piece, each piece but one and she found a way to put him back together, piece by piece, one arm from this far away land, another leg from way over there. Thirteen of the fourteen pieces. So you see Cecil, even the God's struggle to become whole.

SAKARRA. It's very hard just to scream. Do you think if I just tried it without thinking...?

OMM SETY. It takes great effort to find who we are, where we belong. (*She pauses just a moment, a bit overcome. Repeating a question*) Which part was missing? I beg your pardon, dear boy? Oh that's right. Yes, yes, the legends do say one part of Osiris was never found. Well that I will tell you later. But this wall, this wall right

here is over twenty cubits high, and forty cubits long, and it is directly over the spot, right where I'm standing, Osiris' head which had been buried was found.

BENTRESHYT. And I fell off. I just let myself fall right off the edge-

*She leans over the edge and almost falls and Sakkara screams. Blackout. Lights immediately up on the parlor of the Eady families sitting room, 1907.*

AUNT HELEN. Now, Caroline, calm yourself, my dear.

MRS. EADY. Oh, sweet Christ, don't take my girl. Please, don't take my little girl. She's all I've got. I just turned my head for a moment.

*Aunt Helen, a steely cold, matronly woman, is doing her level best to comfort just after what is clearly an accident that she believes was her nieces fault.*

AUNT HELEN. I know dear.

MRS. EADY. Not more than a second and she'd made for the steps-

AUNT HELEN. We all know how Dorothy was-

MRS. EADY. Why?....

AUNT HELEN. Mind of her own she had. Always did.

MRS. EADY. Why, my little Doe....

*Reuben Eady comes hurriedly through the front door.*

EADY. Caroline?

MRS. EADY. Oh, Reuben, I'm so sorry. She wasn't anywhere near the steps-

AUNT HELEN. Of course she wasn't-

MRS. EADY. And I turned to put down the vase, and next thing I know, there she was lying at the bottom-

EADY. It's all right, love.

MRS. EADY. It happened so fast-

EADY. It's all right. *(To Helen)* Where's the doctor?

MRS. EADY. In the bedroom.

AUNT HELEN. He wanted to wait for you. (*Whispers*) He wanted to tell you himself.

EADY. Tell me what? (*Firmly*) Tell me what?

AUNT HELEN. She's gone, Reuben. Little Dorothy. She's dead. It was the fall-

DOCTOR. (*Coming in from upstairs*) Cerebral hemorrhage, I'm afraid. Result of the accident. Fell twenty two steps.... Sorry old boy. Not much I could do. I've got to go to the office- I was on my way for a game of pins, you see.

EADY. Yes, I see... So sorry-

DOCTOR. Nonsense. I think you ought to slip some of this powder in the Mrs.' tea. Calm her nerves a bit. I won't be long. Just have to change into my suit. and nurse and I will be back to take the necessary- I'll need a death certificate-

EADY. Yes, yes of course.

DOCTOR. Terribly sorry, again Mr. Eady. Tragic, just tragic. Good day, Mrs. Blankinshire.

AUNT HELEN. Good day Doctor.

EADY. Good day, sir. (*Notices Caroline picking up the pieces of the vase*) What are you doing Caroline?

MRS. EADY. This was Grand Ma-ma's vase.

AUNT HELEN. It's been a shock, Rueben.

MRS. EADY. She's the only one who ever cared for Doe. Out of all the family.

AUNT HELEN. Oh, now Caroline, honestly.

MRS. EADY. Where are you going?

EADY. To see her. I want to... see her.

MRS. EADY. Everyone else thought she was queer. You could always tell. A baby they'd say? Oh, how sweet. Then they'd look at her and try to be so- polite. Even you Helen.

AUNT HELEN. Maybe you ought to lie down, dear.

*Eady has opened the door to the bedroom.*

EADY. Caroline?

YOUNG DOROTHY. Morning, Father. Morning Ma-ma. *(Not as sweetly)* Auntie Helen, What are you doing here?

AUNT HELEN. Good lord!

*BLACKOUT. In the darkness we hear the following dialogue:*

A VOICE (SIR BUDGE). You see my bug, time is not like the face of a clock, numbers to be counted in sequence....

MRS. EADY. Dorothy? *(They are searching for their daughter)*

EADY. Dorothy? Honestly, Caroline. How could you loose a child?

MRS. EADY. Reuben...

A VOICE. No, time flows in many directions not just forward and backward...

EADY. She could be anywhere.

MRS. EADY. Dorothy?

EADY. This place is full of stairs. You know how she is. You can't take your eyes off of her. You, of all people-

MRS. EADY. Well, damn it. You had her hand.

EADY. Caroline. Please.

*Lights up on Dorothy sitting in front of a large display case in the British Museum. She is mesmerized.*

MRS. EADY. Well, you did. You had her hand. Dorothy?

EADY. *(They are now entering and see her)* There she is.

MRS. EADY. Oh, thank God.

*A very old and eccentric man walks up to Dorothy from the other side.*

SIR BUDGE. Hello there, my little flower.

MRS. EADY. Reuben!

YOUNG DOROTHY. Hello. Do you live here?

SIR BUDGE. Live here? No, I wish I could, but they won't let me.

YOUNG DOROTHY. Who won't let you?

SIR BUDGE. Well, my wife for one....

EADY. Dorothy!

YOUNG DOROTHY. Can I live here?

EADY. Good day, sir.

SIR BUDGE. Good day. Is this your little girl?

EADY. Yes sir. (*Offering his hand.*) Reuben Eady, sir.

SIR BUDGE. Sir Wallis Budge.

EADY. My wife, Caroline Eady, and this is our little girl-

YOUNG DOROTHY. (*Shaking his hand politely, but hating the sound of her name*) Dorothy.

SIR BUDGE. You aren't by any chance a relation of a Major Thornton Eady, heads a regiment in Northern Africa?

EADY. No, no, not that I'm aware of.

SIR BUDGE. Good, rather a pig of a man, if I might say so.

MRS. EADY. Dorothy, what are you doing? (*She is taking off her shoes.*) Do put your shoes back on, right this minute.

EADY. Have the most dreadful time with the girl and shoes. Won't keep them on her feet at all at home-

MRS. EADY. Rueben-

EADY. Well, she won't. Don't know how many times I've tried to tell her. Given up trying, now, I have.

YOUNG DOROTHY. I want to stay here, Ma-ma.

MRS. EADY. Well, we can for a bit and look around-

YOUNG DOROTHY. No!

MRS. EADY. If you put your shoes back on.

YOUNG DOROTHY. No, I mean live here. I like it here.

MRS. EADY. Yes, well- (*notices Sir Budge taking off his shoes*) Reuben...

SIR BUDGE. I can't remember the last time I walked around barefoot...

YOUNG DOROTHY. Look!

MRS. EADY. Good Lord...

EADY. Caroline. (*notices Dorothy staring at the mummy case*) I believe that is what they call a mummy, Dorothy. Is it not, Sir-

SIR BUDGE. Budge. Wallis Budge. Yes, now that's more like it. Yes. A little cold perhaps.

MRS. EADY. Oh, Reuben that's horrible.

SIR BUDGE. Not at all, you should try it.

MRS. EADY. No, no. That.

YOUNG DOROTHY. No, he's not. He's beautiful. If you don't live here, who does? Does he?

SIR BUDGE. Well, yes...

EADY. I'm terribly sorry, sir. You see my child's a bit, well- queer.

MRS. EADY. Reuben. She's just awfully bright, that's all. Older than her years.

EADY. And a bit loony in the bargain. But a dearer child one will never meet.

SIR BUDGE. Is this your first visit to the Museum, Dorothy?

YOUNG DOROTHY. (*Amazed at his necklace, a Egyptian amulet*) Huh?

SIR BUDGE. I said "is this your first visit to the British Museum."



MRS. EADY. Yes, it is our first time with Dorothy. I've been here before, but ages ago now-

YOUNG DOROTHY. I've been here.

MRS. EADY. No, I'm very sure we've never been here. *(Dorothy kisses his amulet)* Dorothy.

YOUNG DOROTHY. I have.

SIR BUDGE. You like this? It's Nineteenth Dynasty. Authentic. Everything in this room is too. I should know. I brought most of it here. This is all part of the greatest civilization to have ever lived on this earth.

YOUNG DOROTHY. I know.

MRS. EADY. Dorothy.

SIR BUDGE. Do you.

YOUNG DOROTHY. Yes. These are my people.

SIR BUDGE. Are they.

YOUNG DOROTHY. Yes. And they want to go home. They do not belong here.

*Lights begin to crossfade back to the tour at the temple.*

OMM SETY. Any further questions?

YOUNG DOROTHY. And neither do I.

EADY. You see sir, "very bright."

SIR BUDGE. Or else older than her years.

*The lights have completed the cross-fade and the tour is finishing with a question and answer session.*

OMM SETY. Yes, Cecil? How old am I anyway? No, not at all. Nonsense. I'm not offended by the question. Mr. Cecil, who obviously labors under the misapprehension that precociousness might pass for preciousness, is merely expressing his curiosity. You don't by any chance work for the Department of Antiquities, do you Cecil? No, you obviously have just never seen anyone quite so old before? So ancient, so weathered, so wrinkled? Well, I was born Jan. 16th, 1904, so that makes me how old? Yes, well math is probably not one of your strong suits

either. Over seventy, Cecil. I'm over seventy now, and therefore if you ask the department of Antiquities- I'm too old to continue, a sort of "quantitative risk". I sound "pissed off?" Well, Cecil, I felt compelled to respond to your query, and you will have to forgive me, if after five tours today in the scorching sun, I am not as peaches and puddings as you dear boy. *(Before turning to leave.)* Now if there are no further insightful inquiries, if after having visited this most wondrous of places, there are no more pressing questions than where are the facilities located, and how old am I, than I will conclude our visit with "good day, thank you all for coming to this holy of holy places." *(She turns to go, but then decides not to.)* However today is a bit different, Cecil, yes. And you, my pint-size poet, were keen enough to actually sense it. After my over thirty five years of tours, four or five a day, sometimes seven days a week, for the first time that I can ever recall, yes! I feel rather "pissed off"!! And I feel I have the right to be. It took me over half my life to find my home here at Abydos, half my life. And now they want to take it from me. They want to try and replace me. Cecil, I hope you never live long enough to have to go endure this-- unspeakable injustice. You see, Cecil, I have to live with the unique distinction of having become too antique for the Department of Antiquities.

*Drum roll cross-fades to Dorothy, now ten, on a stage performing a song. Her father announces her and then coaches her from the side.*

EADY. And now ladies and gentleman as owner and manager of the New Palladium, the finest motion picture house in all of Great Briton, I am proud to present an interlude from our exciting picture "The Thief Of Baghdad". Here once again, the singing sensation Dorothy Lincoln! *(Young Dorothy reluctantly moves to the spotlight)* Go on love, just like we rehearsed it-

*Young Dorothy sings "Somewhere In The Sahara" slowly at first and then gathering confidence in the lyrics meaning she begins to sound rather well, even adding a little dance step. As the song finishes to polite applause the lights crossfade to Sakkara drinking wine "backstage" after the festival in Ancient Egypt.*

SAKARRA. Listen to that Bentreshyt. Listen to them applauding. Can you hear it? Oh, the Gods themselves couldn't possibly feel as good as I do. *(She drinks.)* Breathe in. *(She does)* Breathe out. Feel that? Life! Hear that applause. Are you as happy as I am?

BENTRESHYT. *(From behind a screen changing)* You mean as drunk as you are?

SAKARRA. That too. I thought you were marvelous- what are you doing?

BENTRESHYT. Changing.

SAKARRA. Well, hurry up. It's lonely being ecstatic all by yourself. I said you were wonderful tonight.

BENTRESHYT. Thank you. So were you. (*They kiss.*)

SAKARRA. I was, wasn't I? Even the scream went well. Where are you going?

BENTRESHYT. To finish changing.

SAKARRA. Not me. I don't ever want to change. I want to be a Goddess forever. Agran the Elder said, and I quote: In the sixty three years of mystery plays, it was the most beautiful I'd ever seen. End quote. Then he grabbed me under my tunic.

BENTRESHYT. Sakkara.

SAKARRA. Well, he did. The bastard. Forgive me, Isis, it's the wine talking. Nothing like the sight of a virgin priestess to get old Agran going. Or any of the rest of them for that matter. (*She sings a bit of her song:*) Here is the foot, the very foot that I found. Our Lord Sety is very beautiful, don't you think? I know we've all seen drawings of him, but they don't do him justice.

BENTRESHYT. I didn't really notice.

SAKARRA. Well, I did. And he seemed to take notice of me. In your death scene. When he should have been weeping, I could swear I saw him staring at me as I sang: "She is dead, very dead!"

BENTRESHYT. Sakkara, I don't think you should drink any more of this.

SAKARRA. Why not? It's true. He was looking right at me with those eyes-

BENTRESHYT. He does have kind eyes-

SAKARRA. Kind? Penetrating is more the word for them. Oh, ho! So you did notice him.

BENTRESHYT. Only for a moment. But I didn't dare look at him at first. I was too frightened. While I was lying there dead, I peered open my eyes-

SAKARRA. Bentreshyt!

BENTRESHYT. What? Do you think he notice me looking at him?

SAKARRA. You opened your eyes?

BENTRESHYT. I always open my eyes. Just a little. Like this, see? They look closed-

SAKARRA. During my dance of lamentation? My mourning over your death, you had your eyes open?

BENTRESHYT. Just a peek.

SAKARRA. Well, I hope no one could tell--

SETY. (*Who has entered quietly unnoticed*) No one did. I am quite sure of it.

SAKARRA. (*Dropping to her knees*) Oh, my lady Isis....

BENTRESHYT. My lord....

SETY. We were all too busy weeping. At such a regrettable loss. (*Pause, lost a bit at seeing her so closely, then remembering Sakarra*) And at the beauty of your grief.

SAKARRA. Thank you, my Lord.

BENTRESHYT. Yes...

SAKARRA. Yes, what?

BENTRESHYT. I was... going to say... "Yes, my thanks as well...My lord."

SETY. But?

BENTRESHYT. But my tongue is liquid.

SAKARRA. It's the wine, my Lord. She will be asleep soon. Always puts her to sleep. (*Bentreshyt moves away quietly*) But I--I'll be dancing till the sun kisses the dunes. We were feeling so joyous. And proud. Joyous and proud. Performing for your highness.

SETY. No prouder than I to have witnessed-

SAKARRA. You thought we did justice to it? Really? It's such a lovely play.

SETY. Yes-

SAKARRA. They will be performing it for centuries to come. I told our master Antef - they will be performing "The Mutilation and Resurrection Of Our Lord Osiris" for centuries. It's almost as lovely as "The Pharaoh who Consumed His Own Daughter" that we performed last harvest. Forgive me. I know it's not polite to go on like this. Please, forgive me-

SETY. Not at all, feel free to speak. (*Hoping*) Both of you. You have my permission to say whatever you wish. Candor is a rare jewel in a ruler's crown.

SAKARRA. Just as polite as people say, isn't he? Just as wise and polite as they say. Never a Pharaoh as great as Sety.

SETY. I am only as great as my people's imagination paints me to be. (*Looks again at Bentreshyt.*) It is... my people...who....Forgive me my tongue has also lost its will.

BENTRESHYT. My Lord must be very tired. From his journey.

*Antef enters unnoticed only by Sety.*

SETY. Yes. And the play. How long was that play? It did seem to wander a bit- (*Despite herself Bentreshyt laughs just a bit*) Ah, so you agree?

BENTRESHYT. You are my Lord, therefore I must agree.

SETY. Nonsense.

SAKARRA. But she loves this play, your Holiness, as we all do.

SETY. It had so little truth. Even in legend there is truth. And it suffered greatly by having your death so soon.

ANTEF. But that is how the story unfolds, your greatness. And certainly I would not feel it proper to rewrite history.

SETY. Neither do I. Though I am often asked to do so.

SAKARRA. His highness was telling us earlier what a marvelous play he thought it was.

SETY. Yes. (*Offers his hand to be kissed*) I must appear ungracious.

ANTEF. Not at all. I am sorry I did not announce myself, I had no idea that you were granting us audience.

SETY. Forgive my rudeness. You do not tell me how to rule our land-

ANTEF. Certainly not, my Lord-

SETY. I should not tell you how to write your plays.

ANTEF. The comparison seems most gracious-

SETY. Do you not build your plays just as I build my Temples? To be outlive the centuries?

ANTEF. I merely offer them as gifts to our Lord....

SETY. Now it is you who is being gracious.

SAKARRA. People will be performing the mystery plays of Antef -

BENTRESHYT. The Golden Goose-

SAKARRA. Thousands of years from now, just as they will travel from all over the world to walk these very gardens where your highness once stood.

*Lights crossfade to the tour.*

OMM SETY. And it was on these very steps that the mystery plays and ceremonies for the gods were performed, and where legend has it the great pharaoh himself, Sety I, often went for long walks. It was thought this garden was his favorite spot in all the world. "I have found nowhere, in all our great land, than right here among these flowers, in the shade of these juniper trees, sitting with my feet in this cool water- there are wonders in this place that cannot be named.

SETY. (*Appearing in a light sitting on the wall.*) This is where peace is at home, and where my soul shall live forever.

OMM SETY. (*She is visibly moved by her speech, and tears have started in her eyes*) And that concludes our little journey through eternity. I thank you all, or rather both of you, for expressing interest in a place almost forgotten to the centuries, but that at one time was, as I like to put it, the heart if not the head of one of the great civilizations of the ancient world. (*Again to a question.*) Which part? Which part was what? Oh yes, I did promise, you are right child. I will tell you mother and she- certainly there is not call for a you to make a scene- I had no intention in upsetting your child, M'am, I was merely...well alright if you insist. Somehow obstinance being the family calling card does not surprise me in the least. The only part of our Lord Osiris that was not found, after it had been hacked from his body, was his penis. The legends say that a great bronze phallus was fashioned and re-attached, molten, forged with fire- that's right--- run along dear boy....

SAMIR. Miss Sety, may I have a word with you please?

OMM SETY. I'm sorry, but it is customary for me to offer a prayer to our lady Isis just about now-

SAMIR. I'm from the Department of Antiquities, I've been sent-

OMM SETY. To dispose of me. I did not write the legend, sir. I merely teach what has been known for centuries.

SAMIR. I've been sent to meet with you to discuss relocation, possibly to a more central office.

OMM SETY. Relocation- why when they want to get rid of someone do they always use-

SAMIR. We sent you a memo, weeks ago- announcing my arrival so that we can discuss an equitable solution-

OMM SETY. Solution? Solution to what? A solution begs the existence of a problem-

SAMIR. Miss Sety- The department has already expressed their concern- (*sits to wipe his forehead*) that the desert in the middle of nowhere, alone, is no place for a woman of advanced years-where are you going?

OMM SETY. To pray. If you would like to discuss the matter after I'm finished, I'll be happy to listen to whatever decision I'm sure you have already reached. And if I were you, I'd watch where you sit. There's a scorpion about to kiss your bottom hello and welcome you to Amanti.

SAMIR. Good lord!!!

*Lights crossfade to the British Museum. Young Dorothy is holding a jeweled scorpion.*

YOUNG DOROTHY. It's beautiful.

SIR BUDGE. It's a scorpion. From the headdress of the goddess Selket- guardianess of coffins and whose anger, it was believed, caused the desert heat. The ancients believed in many different deities. And each had their assignation for which they were responsible.

YOUNG DOROTHY. My Aunt Helen causes it to sleet. But she's hardly a God. An aberration maybe- Oh, what's that?

SIR BUDGE. These are Hieroglyphs. The words or alphabet of the ancients. I'm translating.

YOUNG DOROTHY. Oh, please teach me. I'd much rather learn this than what they teach me at school.

SIR BUDGE. My bug. You mustn't talk like that.

YOUNG DOROTHY. But it's true. All the nuns hated me. I was expelled.

SIR BUDGE. Expelled?

YOUNG DOROTHY. Yes. Last week. Because I wouldn't sing. And because I threw a hymnal at Sister McPugh's head. They wanted me to sing that awful hymn, the one that beseeches God to "curse the Swart Egyptians." and I refused. So Sister McPugh asked me to step out from the chorus and sing it alone, and I told her I couldn't, and she asked why, so I told her I just couldn't. And all of the others started laughing at me, and she took out her ruler and ordered me to sing it or I would be singing a different hymn. And that made them laugh even louder, so I threw my hymnal at her head, but she ducked so it broke the picture of the Pope on the wall instead. And I walked out. They sent me straight to the director's. Apparently in the over two hundred years of the Blessed Sacrament School For Girls, no one had ever assaulted the Pope with a hymnal. So it was straight to the Director's - and he looked at my papers and tisked and said very disdainfully "You are not a Catholic are you?" And I said "no, Father, but I do like the sermons, and the rites, and the ceremonies. I find them somewhat satisfying. My parents are of the Protestant faith, sir." Unable to resist an opportunity to instruct, he jumped in with- "Well... then.... that makes you a Protestant, as well, child." "No, sir, I said *my parents* are Protestant." "Well, then, what are you?" "I myself follow the ancient Egyptian religion." Well, the poor man almost hit the floor of the rectory. My mother was called in to be scolded-

*Caroline Eady appears down stage.*

MRS. EADY. Well, I certainly hope Sister McPugh is alright. Her reflexes must be quite keen for someone her age- and weight. But, I must say, in all honesty Father, I'm not surprised. Dorothy has always been rather an unique child. Do you know when she was seven years old, one evening she was sitting on the floor looking at some magazines, and I was working on my crocheting- I crochet little doilies and things. Sometimes I get bold and try a sweater or a shawl- Anyway, I was at my doilies and all of a sudden she bolted up off the floor and thrust this picture in my face. A picture of this old temple with pillars, hieroglyphs, and sand. And her eyes were jutting out- open wide, like this, almost like she was choking to death. And I said "What's wrong, child?" and she didn't say a word, almost like she couldn't speak, and pointed down to the picture. The Temple Of Sety The First At Abydos, Upper Egypt, the caption underneath said. And I said "Dorothy, what is it, dear?" And with her eyes still wide-

YOUNG DOROTHY. *This* is my home. *This* is where I used to live.

MRS. EADY. Well, that is hardly the sort of thing one says to one's mother...



YOUNG DOROTHY. But why is it all broken? And where is the Garden?

MRS. EADY. Garden, I said, Listen, Dorothy, one should never tell lies! You know you have never been there. This is a photograph of an old building- thousands of years old. And it's broken because it is old. And there is no garden, because it's in the middle of the desert, and they do not have gardens in the middle of the desert. They have sand. So, no more lies, please." So, you see Father nothing would surprise me.

YOUNG DOROTHY. (*As priest*) Do you know what the child told *me*? "Since Egyptian religion was thousands of years older than Christianity, than it must be the true religion, and Christianity merely a copy."

MRS. EADY. Oh, Father, I'm so sorry--

SIR BUDGE. I don't know whether you should have said that to a priest, Dorothy-

YOUNG DOROTHY. Well, weren't Osiris and Jesus, both resurrected- didn't the Virgin Mary resemble the goddess Isis- and didn't Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus, closely resemble Osiris, Isis, and their son, Horus. (*again, as the priest*) What kind of blasphemy is this? My dear lady- do you want your daughter to go to hell?"

MRS. EADY. No, Father, but I expect she will.

*Lights crossfade to Abydos, and the official from the Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Samir, is still trapped by the scorpion.*

SAMIR. I'll kill them. Send me all the way out here to the middle of nowhere. Please, Dear God, don't let me die here. Ah, ah! Hi, there little thing. Hey, there. I'm not moving, see. Not moving a muscle. So just go on your way, like a good little scorpion. That's it. Nice little scorpion. No, no, the other way, that's it. Go, play under that nice heavy rock. Crap! I don't believe this. Maybe I should just make a quick run for it- Okay... Okay-Ah!! (*He jumps onto the stone as the scorpion moves very close*) Now you've done it, Sammy- now you've pissed him off. Has his tail raised and everything. How did you die? In a three thousand year old tomb, scorpioned to death. Ah! Hi, there! Listen you stupid little bug, I didn't mean to upset you, so just leave me alone!

*Lights crossfade to Bentreshyt being beaten by Antef.*

ANTEF. Do you think I enjoy being upset with you. Having to discipline you?

BENTRESHYT. Obviously, yes. You do it enough.

*Sety enters unseen.*

ANTEF. That is because you never (*striking her again*) learn! Now what do I have to do to make you understand?

SETY. If I ever see or hear of you striking any priestess you will find yourself searching for your own head and limbs scattered along the banks of the river, do you understand?

ANTEF. Yes, your holiness.

SETY. (*Striking him*) How does it feel? Master Antef?

ANTEF. My lord, I only wish to instruct-

SETY. I have often witnessed our slave masters as they instruct their slaves, like oxen or dogs. But a dog will be twice as loyal if well treated, and will one day bite back if beaten.

ANTEF. Of course, my Lord.

SETY. Master Antef, it has been heard to be said, has it not, that I am a great leader?

ANTEF. Yes, my lord. All throughout the land. None greater.

SETY. Good. That point I will not argue with you. You knew my father did you not?

ANTEF. Of course, your Lordship.

SETY. I have also heard it said that some of my greatness, known throughout the land, is that I have a bit of my father's gift for judging the quality of a man's character.

ANTEF. I have known no equal. His wisdom was as long as the river Nile...

SETY. Long wisdom? Well no matter, for as well as my dear father could judge a vessel of wine, and of that he was unparalleled- he had a keen sense of knowing who to trust and who to hold in contempt.

ANTEF. As constant as the Sun-God Ra who sails the sun to rest each day-

SETY. Antef, my good father Ramses, held only those in contempt he didn't trust, and he trusted no one, not even himself, I'm afraid. And he had a particular dislike for priests. They were forever telling him how to die. Indeed, my father used to say "how can you trust any man who cares more about the next world than this one? If these good men are all in such a hurry to be in the next world, let them go. No one is keeping them from their journey." Oh, get up, Antef. Being prostrate would seem unhealthy for a high priest. It might teach him humility, and that would only lead to

confusion. No priest, or for that matter, no leader of any kind is ever humble. Except when their mothers visit. Or when they want something.

ANTEF. Thank you, my lord. Perhaps this would be an appropriate time to take my leave from you, my Lord.

SETY. I quite agree. I can think of no better time. (*Antef bows and begins to leave*) And in the future, think of how efficient it would be for you to take your leave before you even arrive.

BENTRESHYT. (*She bows to leave*) My lord.

SETY. Please, don't go.

BENTRESHYT. Perhaps this would be an appropriate time for *me* to-

SETY. (*Ignoring the tease*) You are not from Abydos?

BENTRESHYT. Yes, my Lord. As far as I've been told.

SETY. But your hair- I have only seen a few others. In Memphis, and Alexandria.

BENTRESHYT. My father had yellow hair. He was from the Sea Islands. He was a great warrior recruited for his strength and skill in navigating ships. Or so I'm told.

SETY. And this great navigator's name?

BENTRESHYT. May I please go, my lord?

SETY. Yes- But first tell me his name. I must know. I'd prefer not bothering with the formality, but I am your ruler. And am therefore accustomed to being answered.

BENTRESHYT. How can I tell you what I do not know myself? I would certainly like to know my "great" father's name, as would my mother, I'm sure. She was - (*struggles a moment for the word*)- an evening's entertainment- dessert- after a great victory celebration- for one of your campaigns. In the South, I believe. That much I do know.

SETY. I am told we are revered and respected, even feared as the greatest civilization the world has ever known. Then I hear stories like this, and I realize how far we have to go. Are you to perform for the next rise of the river?

BENTRESHYT. Oh, yes, I'm sure. Master Antef is already working on his latest masterpiece. It's a sequel to "The Mutilation and Resurrection of Our Lord Osiris."

SETY. A sequel?

BENTRESHYT. Yes, it's called "After the Mutilation and Resurrection Of Our Lord Osiris." It's all about Horus, the Son. He says the people love sequels, and the only way to fill the temple is to please the people. It's the second part of his mutilation and resurrection trilogy.

SETY. Well, I was going to say that I would be sure to return to witness it. I don't suppose it will be any shorter?

BENTRESHYT. I wouldn't think so-

SETY. No, probably not. The story of Horus does go on forever

BENTRESHYT. (*Sharing a moment of irreverence*) Yes, it does...

SETY. All those miracles....When I was little I remember sitting in the temple thinking it sure does take forever to save the world. And now that I'm Pharaoh, I know it would take longer than forever...Will you die so soon?

BENTRESHYT. I beg your pardon?

SETY. In the next play, I mean?

BENTRESHYT. Oh, I won't know that until it's finished. Antef never chooses the roles until he finishes. Though I'm sure Sakkara will play Horus. She plays all the lead men.

SETY. Well, then I must hurry. So much involved governing before I can return to this beautiful garden. But I will return for the sequel, I'm looking forward to it.

BENTRESHYT. So am I. (*She picks up Antef's staff*) I'm sure the rehearsals will be most "gratifying."

SETY. I will instruct one of my aides to remain here and report to me. On the "state of the arts". It seems the excesses carried out for the good of Mother Egypt warrant constant supervision.

BENTRESHYT. (*To protest*) You mustn't-

SETY. (*He lifts his shirt to show her a scar on his back. She is unsure of what he is doing*) It is not only vegetable seller's daughters who are beaten. My father loved his collection of staffs almost as much as his concubines. It won't happen again. Until then- (*offering his hand to be kissed.*)

BENTRESHYT. Thank you, my lord.

*Lights crossfade to Dorothy, now eighteen, wearing a crown and Sir Budge kissing her hand.*

SIR BUDGE. Now you are a queen. How does it feel?

DOROTHY. (*Seems suddenly fearful*) Wretched. Please, take it off.

SIR BUDGE. My bug, are you all right?

DOROTHY. All I could see was a beating. I felt someone whipping someone. Like my Aunt Helen does to her Schnauzer. I would never want to be queen. Ever.

SIR BUDGE. The spot is taken for the time being, little need to worry. Here, this is for you.

DOROTHY. What is this?

SIR BUDGE. Well, Hapi, the God of the Nile, keeper of the days, whispered to me that Saturday was a good day-

DOROTHY. A good day?

SIR BUDGE. Yes, the ancients believed there were three types of days. The good, the menacing, and the hostile.

DOROTHY. Those are the choices: good, menacing, and hostile? Sounds rather pessimistic. If it's not a good day, cheer up, there's always menacing or hostile-

SIR BUDGE. Anyway Hapi told me that Saturday was-

DOROTHY. My birthday-

SIR BUDGE. Eighteen, he said.

DOROTHY. Hardly a good day. Father was at the cinema all day. The weekend, busiest time for the picture business you know. So it was Mother and I, and Aunt Helen. But there was a surprise. Aunt Helen had invited some of my former classmates for tea. Can't have a birthday without a bit of a celebration, barbaric, you know-

SIR BUDGE. How nice-

DOROTHY. Yes, until about two o'clock when all the girls politely began to decline. Other engagements, feeling unwell, that sort of thing. There we were sitting in the parlor. With all the decorations- Surprise! So, we made butter candy and read

Tennyson. Not exactly a good day. I'd call it menacing, wouldn't you? Too ironic to be hostile- (*the present is opened, it is a small carving*) Oh, it's exquisite-

SIR BUDGE. Isn't it?

DOROTHY. Is it a monkey- No, it's a - is it a dwarf?

SIR BUDGE. No one knows for sure. Legend has it he was part baboon, part dwarf-

DOROTHY. And he has a little hunchback.

SIR BUDGE. But he was the court favorite. The King Tuthmosis III angered the gods by calling him Maat, after the goddess of truth. Maat was devoted to his master, and would often use his size hiding, spying secretly reporting back to the King. He was known to sit at his Masters feet, watching, and when all where gone, Tuthmosis would say "Now my little one, tell me what I don't want to hear but must know?" But Maat only lived a short time. He was found dead one night, drowned in his little bath. Some say killed by a wealthy landowner who the King had quarreled with, some say by the Gods themselves. Tuthmosis had a tomb built for him and his likeness cast in gold, and those that carried him were protected from falsehood and evil.

DOROTHY. And Aunt Helen?

SIR BUDGE. And Aunt Helen.

DOROTHY. He's exquisite- But I can't accept this. I can't keep him.

SIR BUDGE. You must-

DOROTHY. He must be worth a fortune-

SIR BUDGE. Hardly. That is a copy. The museum has craftsmen making them. For the souvenir shop. Little Maats everywhere, earrings, pendants, potholders. See, you've only had him five minutes, and the truth must be told. This is the original, but I can only take him out and play with him when no one knows. Maat must be kept under glass. Protected. Or he will come in contact with the elements- (*speaking directly to the likeness as if telling a secret*) with the moisture in the air- and he will deteriorate. We must keep the Truth locked away, or our world will destroy him. But these others are his babies. I wanted you to have the first.

DOROTHY. Thank you. He is beautiful.

SIR BUDGE. (*He is putting the dwarf around her neck*) Here is a ribbon. Wear him around your neck, just above your heart-

DOROTHY. Now then, my little friend, you tell me what I don't want to hear, but must know...

SIR BUDGE. Exactly.

DOROTHY. Do you think I'm insane?

SIR BUDGE. Oh, my good Lord why?

*Dorothy begins to cry. This slowly causes Sir Wallis to cry. The effect of this sympathetic crying should be very real, and although it may be in fact funny to the audience, it is very real to Sir Wallis.*

DOROTHY. Well...

SIR BUDGE. Oh, please, don't -

DOROTHY. I'm sorry, I don't mean to cry- It's just-

SIR BUDGE. You mustn't, my bug. *(He is crying now, more than her.)* You really mustn't.

DOROTHY. I'm sorry-

SIR BUDGE. You have no idea. You mustn't cry! Oh.....

DOROTHY. Sir Wallis?

SIR BUDGE. I'm sorry-

DOROTHY. Don't you cry-

SIR BUDGE. It's -I can't help it. This always happens. *(He is trying to control himself now.)* Whenever I see someone else cry it just-

DOROTHY. Sir Wallis?

SIR BUDGE. It's uncontrollable, I'm sorry. I can never go to the theater. *(Coming around)* There-

DOROTHY. I won't be seeing you for awhile-

SIR BUDGE. *(Not hearing her; blowing his nose)* I'm alright now. Now, what is it, Oh yes, I remember. *(Dorothy's eyes are tearing up again. He is trying not to cry again.)* You want to know if I think you are insane, well--my dear child---*(He is sobbing now)* Why would you even want to ask me that?

*Lights crossfade to Eady and his wife speaking directly to "a doctor" (the audience.)*

MRS. EADY. Why? Because your little girl comes to you one day and tells you- that she feels more at home at a museum-

EADY. Now, Caroline-

MRS. EADY. With mummies, and cadavers, surrounded by things that have been dead for centuries- and you see how you feel-

EADY. I'm sorry, Doctor. We've been through a lot lately. And my wife here-

MRS. EADY. Is at wits end. Say it. Lock me up, Doctor. I don't know what else to do.

EADY. No one is locking anyone up, dear. The doctor is just going to run some tests, ask our little girl some questions. And to do that he has to ask us some questions. It's done all the time now. Highly respected people, all over Germany and some such places. They say these nervous strains are quite the thing nowadays-

MRS. EADY. He thinks it's our fault, though, don't you ? The sleepwalking, the obsession with that odd man at the museum. Why ask us-

EADY. Caroline, we agreed to this-

MRS. EADY. If we remember what? The beginning? What ? Her birth? Yes, I remember, Doctor, I was there. Difficult birth they called it. Thirty two hours of labor, I'd call that difficult-

EADY. He's not asking that Caroline. He wants-

MRS. EADY. I know what he wants.

EADY. The first sign of trouble, the first thing we can recall, out of the ordinary-

MRS. EADY. And I know what you think-

EADY. Caroline-

MRS. EADY. You think it was all my fault. You always did. You weren't watching her, if only you had been watching her-

EADY. You see doctor, Little Doe fell. Down the stairs-



MRS. EADY. And died! Well, isn't that right? Isn't that what the Doctor said? Doctors know everything, don't they. This one said "I'm sorry, there is nothing we can do. I'm afraid she's dead." And not an hour later- poof! She's alive- Happens all the time, in Germany, nowadays.

EADY. It is not uncommon, with blows to the head, that the victim can lay in a state of near death, I'm right, aren't I, Doctor? And the victim might awaken with no apparent signs of damage-

MRS. EADY. Ask her if you want to know.

EADY. But it is possible-that the damage-

MRS. EADY. Don't expect us to tell you-

EADY. It is possible that the damage was already done.

MRS. EADY. You listen to her tell you, you listen to--what she says and tell me it's because she fell and hit her head!!

*Dorothy appears center and begins to speak to "the Doctor".*

DOROTHY. What do you expect me to say, yes Doctor, I'm daft? Well, I don't feel daft. And I don't feel normal. I don't know what to think. *(She takes out her amulet)* I can only tell you the truth and leave it up to you to decide. I wouldn't mind it so much if I thought you might be of some help. I'd like it if I had a broken arm, and I'd come to you to glue it back. But I don't feel my mind is broken at the moment, honest I don't. Not like the poor soul, down the hall- quoting Macbeth at the top of her lungs. Don't hear me raving - "Out, Out damn spot..." now do you? Oh, I suppose I ought to just start accepting the fact I'm daft and be done with it.

*Lights crossfade to Samir, in the temple in Abydos, still trapped by the scorpion.*

SAMIR. I must be out of my mind-

*Omm Sety enters with tea and a white flag.*

OMM SETY. All right you win. It takes too much effort to be hateful. *(She shoos the scorpion)* Back to Amanti, and say hello to that good for nothing Seth. It's not the best tea on the continent, but the herbs are fresh.

SAMIR. Why, the truce, calling off the dogs- no sugar please.

OMM SETY. Nonsense, good for the soul. As I was offering my prayers, I remembered that the ancients had a saying, which roughly translates: "Only when

the two people can't fit in the same room, should one of them leave.” So I thought, have tea with the man, hear his side of the story, if you can't fit in the same room with him, then let the scorpion bite. Biscuit?

SAMIR. No, thank you (*She hands him two anyway.*) I'm on a diet- (*sips the too sweet tea, quietly tries to spit some out*).

OMM SETY. Nonsense, do an honest days work, tend a garden, or go for a walk- the only diet I've ever known to work.

SAMIR. Yes, well, just don't tell me you can't fit in the same room with me, right now. It's a sensitive subject.

OMM SETY. It was a metaphor, you know.

SAMIR. Yes, well- you don't have a wife pinching your belly at home.

OMM SETY. If the only thing wrong at home is your belly, be thankful. I was married once. (*Samir starts to open his notebook to check information*) But I'm sure you've checked into all that. Read up on me-

SAMIR. Yes, I have. It was my job to do so.

OMM SETY. I hope it wasn't tedious. My file.

SAMIR. Hardly.

OMM SETY. Yes, well we try.

SAMIR. You were married for three years. Granted your husband a legal divorce-

OMM SETY. I prefer my donkey, Alice. Twice as stubborn but much more loyal.

SAMIR. He was not faithful to you?

OMM SETY. Imam? Oh, absolutely. Very strict Muslim - no, there were many other difficulties. No, Imam tried very hard to be a good husband. Poor man. How can you compete - with what is meant to be. I was meant to live here. Just as your life is meant to run its course. One does not tell the Nile where to flow, yet it knows where to go. They say I'm mad you know.

SAMIR. Mad?

OMM SETY. Daft. Loony. Cracked. Bonkers. Insane.

SAMIR. Yes, well-

OMM SETY. Touched. I like that one. Which do they use in your file? Which word to describe my affliction with proper British restraint and Departmental decorum?

SAMIR. Prone to fantasy.

OMM SETY. Ooh, that's nice.

SAMIR. Her reality possibly clouded by her advanced years. *(Omm Sety laughs)* I'm sorry- *(She laughs even harder)* But the Department does hear the stories. Of you and your visions.

OMM SETY. And you think it's because I'm senile? Oh, you just have to laugh-

SAMIR. Well, it is hardly a matter of levity. *(He is about to laugh, becoming infected by her enjoyment)* My dear Lady-

OMM SETY. At the risk of endangering my already tenuous situation, I must tell you that "my visions", as you call them, began over sixty years ago, and are documented by the rather primitive psychologists of the day. What have they told you? That I'm a decrepit old thing, babbling, stumbling into the walls of sacred Egyptian property.

SAMIR. No one told me anything. Listen, I've been with the Department Of Antiquities over fifteen years, and I know there are a lot of- interesting, shall we say, personalities. A healthy infatuation with the past is essential for our field. Please- allow me to finish. But your behavior has been often described as obsessive, delusions of past lives- of even having lived here on the Temple site. *(Bentreshyt appears on the wall above)* Practicing rituals and levying curses on visitors-

OMM SETY. I never cursed anyone-

SAMIR. *(Reading)* It is common knowledge in the village that "Omm Sety ", as Miss Eady demands to be called-

OMM SETY. I am called that out of respect, my good man. It means "Mother Of Sety." The name of my son, now grown.

SAMIR. Who was taken- was raised apart from you-

OMM SETY. And not by my choice, let me tell you- I fought that decision as well. Is my motherhood on trial here?

SAMIR. No one is on trial here. It is no secret that Omm Sety is a sort of local witch doctor-

OMM SETY. That is absurd- Burn her at the stake!!!

SAMIR. Who, for a small fee, will say an ancient prayer-

OMM SETY. Only as a cure for scorpion bites- oh, yes, and once to stop a sand storm.

SAMIR. The whole village knows the story of her pet goose. Snefra

OMM SETY. Snefru. His name was Snefru-

SAMIR. And how the man whom she accused of stealing Snefru, two days later was bitten by a water buffalo and died of rabies. (*Omm Sety takes another cookie.*) She refuses to conduct tours on what she considers the "Holy Days."

OMM SETY. Of course not. No one walks into the Vatican on Christmas taking pictures- this is a temple -

*Bentreshyt is saying a prayer above. From here to the end of the act, all three scenes- three different times: Ancient Egypt, Modern Egypt, and Dorothy talking to a doctor a few decades ago, will begin to play together. A fugue, perhaps with music.*

SAMIR. Of a religion that hasn't been practiced by anyone in over two thousand years- except by you.

OMM SETY. More tea?

SAMIR. Now I ask you, Miss Sety, what would you do? If you were in my position?

OMM SETY. I would say yes, thank you. And another biscuit too. Mr. Samir, all my life, since- well, as far back as I could remember- I've been the odd duck, as it were. My Aunt Helen used to say "the corset wasn't made that could hold that girl. She's just not normal." And then at fifteen, something happened to help me understand. You see- in a society, in a world that worships one God: The norm- I could never belong to such a world. It's so beautiful here at night. I was just fifteen when he visited me for the first time-

*Sety appears above watching Bentreshyt.*

DOROTHY. It was a warm night and I was sleeping, and I remember I woke up feeling a weight on my chest. And I saw this face bending over me with both hands on the neck of my nightdress.

BENTRESHYT. Oh, dear Isis, you startled me.

SETY. Forgive me, am I interrupting your prayers?

DOROTHY. I recognized the face from the a photo of a mummy I had seen before. It was Sety. I was astonished and shocked and cried out, and yet, was overjoyed.

BENTRESHYT. No, I was finished. I thought - they said in town that the royal barge left this afternoon.

SETY. I sent them on without me. I'm to follow, shortly. May I sit with you?

BENTRESHYT. A pharaoh asks for permission?

SETY. I have learned to always ask. It makes for an appearance of humility. But, with you I will relinquish my crown. (*He takes it off.*) There- a king no more.

BENTRESHYT. Another show of humility? (*He smiles*) A warm night, a young priestess, and look the Father of All Egypt is unthroned.

SETY. No, actually. It grows quite heavy sometimes. Do you know what my father, the great Ramses I, said to me on his deathbed? Our great king, the father of the Nile, ruler of the greatest civilization ever known to mankind, motioned to me to listen, and tried to speak, but he was almost ready for his journey, and his voice was very weak. That voice that used to bellow orders down hallways, past hundreds of marble pillars, across courtyards, but now I had to strain to hear, almost touching his lips with my ear, and he said: "I'm sorry." That's it. Just "I'm sorry." Then he kissed my ear and died. He ruled less than a year, you know. Poor man. It only took a year to grow too heavy for him.

DOROTHY. I can remember it as though it was only yesterday, but it's still difficult to explain. It was the feeling of something you have waited for that has come at last, and yet it gives you a shock-

SETY. I am forty five years old. And now I am the ruler of the greatest kingdom the Gods have ever created, been halfway around the world fighting bloody battles that even my generals cannot explain. I have sat - listening to state quarrels, mediating "justice" but the word was no where in the room-- only favors to be scattered to the court. My courtiers- like so many blind birds pecking for food. I have seen jewels the size of my fist. They say I have riches that even I have never seen, and keepers to polish them that I do not even know. I own land I have never walked on. I have wives given to me to bear me sons. Yesterday I looked at my boy, my beautiful son, whose good mother died twelve years ago today exhausted by the effort of so great a state task. I barely knew her, you know, was just learning to appreciate her smile. But there are the demands of Mother Egypt and those who arrange such things. And for them she performed admirably, she produced a healthy heir. And yesterday, I held him in my arms very tightly and I whispered "I'm sorry." And he looked at me,

as I must have looked to my father. For I know there will be those that want him to wear this crown- and to have more riches than can be counted. "I'm sorry." And so now all day today- I don't know why- I've just wanted to take it off and toss it into the Nile.

BENTRESHYT. Then do. Go on. (*He thinks about it. Then does.*) There. Any better.

SETY. Yes!

BENTRESHYT. Good!

SETY. Actually, no. I have a roomful of crowns. They will just give me another. It's not the crown-

BENTRESHYT. Exactly! May I speak?

SETY. Why ask permission? You have been free until now-

BENTRESHYT. And so have you, my Lord. So have you. For that moment, just then, when you tossed your crown high in the air-

SETY. Yes-

BENTRESHYT. How did that feel?

SETY. As good as I have felt in a long while. A long, long while.

BENTRESHYT. Then you see, it is not the crown. My mother was a vegetable seller- And I never knew my father. Not even long enough for him to say I'm sorry. I would have died or been sold into slavery, if not for Antef and his bringing me here to worship.

SETY. And now you are a priestess.

BENTRESHYT. And am beaten and told what to do under penalty of death, so I am Antef's slave- slave- priestess, it doesn't matter. For when I sit out here with my prayers and the cool night air, and the stars, then I feel as you did just now: free. And whenever his blows sting me, or I feel sick at heart, I count my jewels, up there you see, and I feel as rich-

SETY. As a king.

BENTRESHYT. I'll give you one. There, that one, right there. There is one you don't own, yet.

SETY. True. Up there, there are many.

BENTRESHYT. They really belong to our lady Isis. But she lets me borrow them. I'm one of her keepers that polish them - one of the ones she has never met- and that is why they shine. But I would like to give you that one, if I may.

SETY. Which?

BENTRESHYT. The bright one, there, apart from all the others.

SETY. Yes, I see-

BENTRESHYT. It's yours. Now you have something to wish on, no matter where you are.

SETY. I will cherish it forever. (*He is very close*)

BENTRESHYT. I hope she will not be angry- our Lady Isis. Who am I to be giving away her property.

SETY. If you are worried. Then take it back.

BENTRESHYT. Even a pharaoh, should consider the wrath (*He takes her hand*) of a God. And that (*touches her hair*) a priestess of-

SETY. I see no pharaoh. (*He kisses his finger and touches her forehead.*)

BENTRESHYT. (*Removing her amulet*) And I see no priestess.

DOROTHY. It was as if he was trying to stay with me and something was forcing him to leave. He held onto my nightdress, and it was being pulled away from me, and I could feel him struggling to stay with me. And then my nightdress ripped from neck to rim. And he was gone. And my mother was sleeping in the next room, and she heard me cry out. And after a minute, she came in and asked me "what was the matter"? And I replied matter of factly, "Nothing. I had a nightmare" And she said "then who tore your nightdress?" And I said, "I don't know, I must have done it myself." But I knew I was lying.

OMM SETY. You see the figure of Sety had appeared to me -though how could I have explained that to my mother?

DOROTHY. His face was the dead face of a mummy, the hands moved and the arms moved, but he couldn't talk. I could see him try, but he couldn't say a single word.

OMM SETY. And I will never forget the terrible look in his eyes. I don't know how to describe it. You can only say that the eyes had the look of somebody in hell who suddenly had found a way out.

*Sety kisses Bentreshyt.*

DOROTHY. And I knew at that moment what my life's journey was.

*She slowly embraces him.*

OMM SETY. You see, at the time I had no idea who he was, or why he had sought me out, but I knew it was my destiny to find out why...

*After Sety and Bentryshyt part from a long passionate kiss:*

OMM SETY. More tea, Mr. Samir?

*BLACK OUT*

**END OF ACT ONE**



## ACT TWO

*Two scenes are happening simultaneously but in different time periods. Omm Sety praying alone at the Temple, and on the wall above her are Bentreshyt and Sety. First a single spot of light comes up on Omm Sety as she appears before an urn and offers a prayer:*

OMM SETY. Dear Lady Isis, protector of Both Lands, mother to all that is holy, hear my prayers.

*Then another spot of light as Bentreshyt speaks softly with Sety asleep in her lap:*

BENTRESHYT. Oh, dear Lady Isis, protector of Both Lands, will you no longer hear my prayers?

*The two speeches begin to happen on top of each other, dovetailing so that we hear bits of each.*

OMM SETY.

Take this offering on this your day,  
and let your wisdom be heard.

OMM SETY. Did you not give me the  
desire to serve you all these years?

OMM SETY. Is it really your wish for  
me to leave this land that I love? The  
land I dreamed of as a child, that I  
spent years journeying to find? For  
just as you searched for our Lord, your  
love Osiris, and would not settle until  
he was found, and on this, the sacred  
spot he was reborn and your dreams  
became reality, I too wish to remain.  
Do not ask me to leave...

OMM SETY. Was it not your will that  
I travel the world  
over great seas, and for many years, to  
find this my home?

OMM SETY. For as you know the  
journey was not an easy one...

BENTRESHYT. Did you not in your  
wisdom, know that this King would  
rule so completely?

BENTRESHYT. Have I, as we are  
taught, broken your most sacred vow?

BENTRESHYT. My only wish was to  
serve you, to be a messenger of your  
devotion and though you know I have  
been spoiled for years, but my Lady,  
as you know, that was - always by  
force. But this - Mother Isis, what was  
this? So different and yet so it seemed  
I had no will. I fear now my "ka" will  
never rest peacefully, and yet, as I  
look at my love's face, I would damn  
myself again with a kiss. *(She does.)*

BENTRESHYT. How beautiful he  
sleeps, like I did minutes ago, as he  
held me so gently. Did he offer you a  
prayer, as I slept?

*Lights come up on Dorothy, now twenty-nine but no less of an awkward woman, seated with a sketch pad on her lap in some kind of waiting area. Sitting beside her is an Egyptian man snoring loudly. The man, still asleep, slowly slides his head onto Dorothy's shoulder, and begins to use her as a pillow. She wants to get up but thinks better of it, as long as she can continue her sketching. He suddenly wakes in a start causing Dorothy to ruin her sketch.*

IMAM. Then let it be death! Oh... Begging your pardon. In my dreams... they put me to death.

DOROTHY. Yes, well. Better stay awake then.

IMAM. I try. I am too tired.

DOROTHY. *(Before he can fall asleep again)* Why?

IMAM. Begging your pardon?

DOROTHY. Why do they put you to death?

IMAM. For the beliefs....

DOROTHY. You too, huh?

IMAM. Did I stittle you?

DOROTHY. Begging your pardon-

IMAM. Did I scare you? Ruining your diddle?

DOROTHY. This?

IMAM. Yes. My sorry, doodle. Doodle, not diddle.

DOROTHY. Actually, yes. But this diddle, is what I do for a living. It's a cartoon, a political cartoon. I draw them.

IMAM. Cartoon. Like the Mickey Mouse?

DOROTHY. Sort of. Only different.

IMAM. I like the Mickey Mouse. He makes me to laugh.

DOROTHY. Well, I hope to make you to laugh and to think at the same time.

IMAM. A wonderful thing that you do then. (*Yawns*) Forgive it to me, I am too tired.

DOROTHY. Yes, you said that-

IMAM. My friend and I am here to interview with Lord Alfred. On the subject of the independence for my people.

DOROTHY. You are Egyptian, then?

IMAM. Yes, how did you know?

DOROTHY. Well, I knew it wasn't South Wales.

IMAM. This to make me to laugh, I get it. Yes, South of Wales, yes... (*yawns*) He would only see one of us, this Lord Alfred-

DOROTHY. I see. Why?

IMAM. Because it is a crime, no? That entire country should be slave. Not to be free to rule itself.

DOROTHY. Oh, yes, I quite agree. Your country should be free. No, I meant why are you so tired?

IMAM. You agree?

DOROTHY. Oh, yes, absolutely.

IMAM. And you are British? This is nice. But it makes it no sense. My name is Imam. Imam Abdel Meguid.

DOROTHY. Dorothy, Dorothy Eady.

IMAM. This is my pleasure.

DOROTHY. And mine. (*His eyes are closing*) You never did tell me why you are so tired?

IMAM. We are prepared to do..... (*yawns*) Sometimes we are .... until very... late....

*He is asleep on her shoulder again.*

DOROTHY. I may never find out- (*His head falls down onto her chest.*) Uh, begging your pardon- (*Now his head is in her lap.*)

*Lights crossfade to Sety in BENTRESHYT's lap.*

SETY. Tell me am I still asleep? (*Kissing her*) Yes, I am dreaming still... Never wake me, this must be Duat itself, and you the Goddess of Such Eyes that I'm told rules here...

BENTRESHYT. You mistake my Lord. Only the Goddess of Vegetable Sellers lives here. And as the sun begins its journey, so must you leave me now. My Lord...

SETY. Not yet-

BENTRESHYT. You must. If we- (*She returns his kisses.*)

SETY. For three weeks now, I have felt-. Have you?

BENTRESHYT. Yes-

SETY. Like the smell of flowers- as if I am covered in them- Oh, I don't know how to say it-

BENTRESHYT. Then don't-

SETY. But I want to-

BENTRESHYT. I know...

SETY. Tell you. Let you know how wonderful you make me feel-

BENTRESHYT. I know. I have tried too-

SETY. I was never good with words, when I needed to be. I have scribes you know. For when I speak to the council, or give great speeches. I have three, no four very serious men, who twist these words like magicians into sounding so - I don't know - thoughtful. But not at first. At first, as I begin to speak them, they seem false. But then the crowds cheer and applaud. And as they cheer, it is odd, but I begin to believe these words, and they begin to feel like mine. And I can't describe it, but they begin to take on a kind of meaning. And as I finish, I actually feel as if I have said the most important things.

BENTRESHYT. It is the same with Antef's plays.

SETY. Is it?

BENTRESHYT. Yes.

SETY. Intoxicating, isn't it? Very intoxicating. (*He kisses her again*)

BENTRESHYT. Just look at me---

SETY. Wait, I want-

BENTRESHYT. Just look- *(They exchange a long look.)* You see, no words....

SETY. Yes...

BENTRESHYT. Sometimes words are unnecessary-

SETY. Don't let ANTEF. know that...

*They kiss again. Lights cross-fade to the Eady sitting room. Reuben Eady is doing a crossword and Dorothy sitting nearby drawing. Mrs. Eady enters and sits to needlepoint.*

EADY. I need a seven letter word for love. Doe?

DOROTHY. Don't ask me. My man flew the coop.

MRS. EADY. He didn't fly the coop.

EADY. He just went back to his home. You knew that was going to be a problem when you started.

MRS. EADY. We tried to warn you.

DOROTHY. You didn't warn me, you ordered me. Tragedy, try that.

EADY. Romance, that's it. R-o-m-a-n-c-e, Romance. Oh, Doe, here's one for you- *(remembering a letter)* Oh, damn it all.

MRS. EADY. Rueben-

EADY. I forgot this came for you today, Doe. *(Holding a letter)* Wait! First-Egyptian God of Funerary Rites.

MRS. EADY. Rueben, honestly...

EADY. It's in the puzzle- Eight letters

DOROTHY. Wepwawet.

EADY. Perfect. Wep-a-wet. See, my dear, this fascination of our daughter's has paid off innumerably. Spell that.

MRS. EADY. I-n-

EADY. No, wep-er-a-wa-whatever...

DOROTHY. *(As she reads the letter)* W-e-p-w-a-w-e-t. Wepwawet.

EADY. Perfect. Who would have ever known that damn word.

MRS. EADY. Rueben-

DOROTHY. He wants me to marry him. Imam. This letter is from him. He begs your pardon for not being able to ask your permission in person, but "would most humbly like to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage. I know this is a sudden and will take your daughter away far from you, but it is her wish I hope it to be yours also."

MRS. EADY. His English still leaves much to be desired. Well, is it your wish?

DOROTHY. Yes, Mother. I do believe so. *(reading)* "Enclosed is a schedule of ships for passage in the coming months. And I most anxious await to hear from you and your next letter."

*Lights crossfade to the temple and OmmSety. holding a letter. She is upset but decides not to open it and as Samir enters, she puts it down and picks up her tea.*

OMM SETY. *(Trying not to show she's upset)* Good morning.

SAMIR. *(Trying to hide the fact he got little sleep)* Morning... *(He now helps himself to tea almost as one of the family)* Not quite as hot today is it?

OMM SETY. No, Ra compassionately slowed his journey-

SAMIR. I'm sorry?

OMM SETY. Ra, the sun God-

SAMIR. Yes, I know-

OMM SETY. Aware this was a day of judgment was in no hurry to carry the sun high in the sky. He is merciful.

SAMIR. Not as strong. The tea.

OMM SETY. I thought you would prefer it that way.

SAMIR. And this? *(The letter placed before him)*

OMM SETY. Came for you early this morning. I had to sign for it. Must be very important.

SAMIR. Not really. It's nothing I don't already know.

OMM SETY. Or I.

SAMIR. Do you fear death?

OMM SETY. I'm sorry? Do I-

SAMIR. Fear death?

OMM SETY. I hardly think this is the time or place.

SAMIR. Why? Is this not a Temple For The Dead?

OMM SETY. Why? Look, I wasn't going to do this. I wasn't going to get upset. I was going to remember that none of this was your fault. You just have a job to do. Well, you've done it, (*referring to the letter*) and now it's time to leave-

SAMIR. Oh, I see.

OMM SETY. Well, aren't you the picture of perception. Oh, I'm never going to be able to keep my heart free of this.

SAMIR. This letter does not concern you. If that is what you're afraid of. And yes, I came here to do a job. A rather messy job, as it turns out. And isn't that funny? I thought, let me go to Abydos- let me go to the middle of nowhere. Maybe then I can get some peace and quiet and figure this out. You see you are not the only one with troubles, good lady. This letter does not tell you *your* services are no longer needed. No last night it all became clear to me. You see, my wife wanted me to take this trip. No, my dear- friend. This is a letter saying *my* services are no longer needed. At home. My marriage is over.

OMM SETY. I'm so sorry.

SAMIR. More tea?

OMM SETY. Yes, thank you.

SAMIR. That is why I asked you if you feared death. For the first time in my life- I actually thought about- killing myself last night. Why not just end it all.

OMM SETY. Here in the middle of nowhere?

SAMIR. I'm sorry.

OMM SETY. Quite all right. I like that it is "a little" off the beaten path. It wouldn't be right otherwise. I tried to once. Kill myself.

SAMIR. Did you.

OMM SETY. Oh yes. When I was about twenty. Also because of love, or rather the lack of it. Long before Imam, I was getting old, well- twenty. You understand. And the boys were not exactly knocking the door down to be with me. If the truth be told, they weren't even knocking. And I missed my one man who I had a tendency to, let's say, "pine away for." I tried to walk off a cliff near the Dover sea, while I was visiting dear Grandmama.

SAMIR. What stopped you?

OMM SETY. A voice.

*Two scenes are happening. The cliff with Dorothy standing at the edge just like Omm Sety is describing and the temple.*

SETY. Little One?

OMM SETY. It was the second time he visited me.

DOROTHY. Is it you.

SETY. Yes. I know you do not know who I am.

DOROTHY. But I do. You are Sety I, Mighty of Bows In All Lands, Bringer of Renaissance, Pharaoh in the eighteenth Dynasty-

SETY. Nineteenth, my rule was during the nineteenth-

DOROTHY. I meant nineteenth.

SETY. It is not important. It flatters me you know-

DOROTHY. I've read everything I could find about you. You were a great king.

SETY. I had my moments.

DOROTHY. Though there is much more about Tutankhamen. Much more.

SETY. Yes. Vain and pompous little man. And a wretched ruler.



DOROTHY. Didn't much care for him.

SETY. I never knew the man. But he did terrible things to my country.

DOROTHY. Why have you never returned? (*pause*) I feel you trying sometimes. And I hear your voice, but it is so far away I barely can make it out. Bentarsheet. That's what I hear. Bent-Tar-sheet

SETY. I come to you when I am allowed. There are those who wish me not to interfere.

DOROTHY. Who?

SETY. Those who judge in the Council. Little one, please listen, I may only stay a short while. You must promise me to never do what you were about to do. (*She starts to deny*) Please, do not even think of it. Ever again. Look at me. (*She does.*) Promise me.

DOROTHY. I promise.

SETY. There will be much for you to learn. You must be patient. As I have.

DOROTHY. You? I've waited six years.

SETY. Do you see these flowers?

DOROTHY. Yes, I see them. There's a whole field of them.

SETY. Pick one for every year that I have searched for you and there would still not be enough.

DOROTHY. But wait, I'm right here. You know where I am. The search is over.

SETY. Patience, My Little One.

*Lights begin to crossfade back to Omm Sety.*

OMM SETY. It was his voice that told me to be patient.

SETY. Be patient.

DOROTHY. Damn the man. No wonder I'm daft.

OMM SETY. I was twenty then, and very impatient. And though I knew whose voice it was, it wasn't until I was thirty five, and visited here for the first time,

fifteen years later, that I knew for sure why he had come. And why he had searched for me. My whole life had been a kind of puzzle.

SAMIR. (*Referring to the tea*) I'll drink to that. Everyone's life is a kind of puzzle. Some just never get solved. Missing a piece or two. Ha, I sound like you.

OMM SETY. On a bad day, maybe.

SAMIR. (*Sad again*) God, it's crazy to love someone that much, isn't it?

OMM SETY. It's crazy not to. But then you are asking the expert.

SAMIR. I thought you left your husband.

OMM SETY. According to the files?

SAMIR. Again, I'm sorry...

OMM SETY. Again, quite all right. I was talking about being crazy.

SAMIR. Oh. Yes. Lately I'm beginning to wonder.

OMM SETY. You know what they said about William Blake?

SAMIR. No.

OMM SETY. They used to say he was "cracked" you know. And it was Edith Sitwell, I think, who said if he was cracked then "that was where the light came through."

SAMIR. Why did you leave your husband?

OMM SETY. He left me. Got a transfer to Iraq. Of course I didn't complain, or ask to go with him. Why? I don't know, because I couldn't cook. No, quite honestly I sometimes think it was as simple as that. Because I couldn't make Dholma-

*Lights cross fade to Dorothy now very pregnant in her kitchen in Cairo with her mother.*

DOROTHY. (*At the same time as Omm Sety*) Dholma.

MRS. EADY. And you eat them?

DOROTHY. They are a delicacy. At least when other people make them...

MRS. EADY. I hate to tell you what they look like-

DOROTHY. Like something you'd find in the W.C.

MRS. EADY. Dorothy, honestly. Think of the child.

DOROTHY. They're vine leaves stuffed with rice and meat. But I can't seem to get them to stay put. Anyway, I've stumbled onto this marvelous idea. Here, help me. I'm going to sew them together.

MRS. EADY. Sew them?

DOROTHY. Yes.

MRS. EADY. But, good heavens Dorothy, we can't possibly eat them once you've-

DOROTHY. I'm not going to leave the thread in them, Mother. I'm not that bonkers. It's just to hold them together while they cook. Like you do with a turkey.

MRS. EADY. We offered to take you both out for a nice meal...

DOROTHY. I didn't have the both of you travel all this way to sit down and order roast beef in some overpriced restaurant. When in Cairo, as they say.

MRS. EADY. But all this work, it can't be good for you and-

DOROTHY. The child.

MRS. EADY. Think of the child

DOROTHY. It's going to be a boy. I just know it.

MRS. EADY. Really.

DOROTHY. Yes.

MRS. EADY. And you are still dead set on the name.

*Sety appears in the kitchen and Dorothy, startled, pricks her hand with the needle.*

DOROTHY. Ow! Dammit!

MRS. EADY. Well, honestly, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. Sorry.

MRS. EADY. What kind of name is that anyway, for a child? Sety.

SETY. (*Only seen and heard by Dorothy*) She's right. Ramses would be a much finer name.

DOROTHY. That's a matter of opinion. But maybe you're right. Maybe I'll call him Tutankhamen. Why are you here?

EADY. (*Entering*) I came in to tell your Mother the English news is on-

MRS. EADY. She's going to name our grandchild Tutawhatever-

DOROTHY. Tutankhamon.

EADY. Over my dead body!

SETY. My sentiments exactly...

EADY. Not going to have any grandson of mine called Tut. Going to have a nice proper name-

MRS. EADY. Like George, after my father-

EADY. He was a sod. Well, he was. No grandson of mine's gonna be named Tut. I suppose you'll want him calling you Mummy?

MRS. EADY. Rueben, please honestly. Dorothy, can you sew these things-

DOROTHY. Yes, Mother.

MRS. EADY. Without me.

EADY. Hate to tell you what those look like. (*As they exit*) Doesn't anyone eat proper food around here?

DOROTHY. What are you doing here?

SETY. I could ask the same question. You are in my country now.

DOROTHY. True. But now it is mine also.

SETY. It always was.

DOROTHY. And this is my kitchen, and I have a dinner to prepare-

IMAM. Belbub?

SETY. Belbub?

DOROTHY. His father gave the name to me.

SETY. Nightingale?

DOROTHY. Yes.

IMAM. My sweetestheart, we are all going downtown for dinner.

DOROTHY. But I'm making dholma.

IMAM. Is that what is taking so long. I see.

DOROTHY. It will be ready in just a few minutes.

IMAM. The kitchen is always your enemy, is it not? The last time it rolled off the plate.

DOROTHY. Because I used too much oil. And that was the first time.

IMAM. True, the last time it never made it to the plate. You couldn't find it in the pan.

DOROTHY. But this time- Imam, I want to please you, it means so much.

IMAM. Good. Then we are all dining out. That would please me. My sweetestheart, do not argue. My mind has made up. Do not argue with me once my mind has made up. This is not your country, where a man will let his wife argue. Here a man may ask for advice, yes, but when his mind has made up-

DOROTHY. His mind has made up. (*to Sety*) I think your culture is sod, did I ever tell you that?

IMAM. What did you say?

DOROTHY. Your culture. It is sod. Your food looks like something form a W.C. and I am not going to go anywhere. I'm staying here.

IMAM. I hope to not have this while your parents were here. It is disrespectful.

DOROTHY. Oh, so you do know that word. I was beginning to wonder if men in your country ever bothered to learn respect.

IMAM. *(Starting to remove his belt)* It is a very holy word. Respect. Keep singing my nightingale, keep singing. *(He cracks his belt.)* Sometimes respect must be a lesson to be taught. *(Dorothy backs away from him into Sety)*

SETY. Never fear the hand that strikes you. *(He kisses his hand then gently touches her forehead.)* Remember to be strong.

IMAM. Now, have you made up your mind?

DOROTHY. Yes, I'm staying here. Oh!!!!

IMAM. What is wrong?

DOROTHY. OH!!! I think your son has made up his mind....

IMAM. Are you sure?

DOROTHY. How can I be sure? Don't you have to tell me I'm sure. Oh!!!

IMAM. It is true!!!!

DOROTHY. Well, I didn't want to argue with you....

IMAM. Let me get your mother...

DOROTHY. *(After a beat)* I wasn't ready for this.

SETY. Soon, it will be over.

DOROTHY. I meant my marriage. Not the baby.

SETY. Yes, so did I.

DOROTHY. *(Trying to breathe)* Well, what is it this time? *(A small pain.)* Oh- I should have known the minute you appeared something was going to happen.

SETY. Remember I am always with you.

*Lights crossfade to the temple with Omm Sety. and Samir.*

OMM SETY. And we did manage a lovely son.

SAMIR. Sety.

OMM SETY. Yes. And as fond of Imam as I was at first, he could really be a dear man in his own mildly pompous way, but he simply was the wrong one for me. I

had a much greater love. But I served a need for Imam, bore him a wonderful son. And we did laugh... for a while. And he certainly served a need for me. Brought me to this wonderful land.

SAMIR. I don't know if I agree with you.

OMM SETY. About?

SAMIR. If I can look at it that way. That people serve a need. Sounds so, I don't know-

OMM SETY. Utilitarian. It does, doesn't it. But you are asking me to put into words what really should not be constrained by them.

SAMIR. Last night I was trying to decide the things, that if we did leave- split up, the things I would be grateful for. You know, the things about my wife I really don't like, and I could only come up with one- Frank Sinatra. She is a big fan of Frank Sinatra, you know, the American singer.

OMM SETY. Yes.

SAMIR. Has every album. Anyway I never much cared for him. And I'm not sure my wife ever cared much for me. So, that's two things, actually. If I have to be honest, there are two things. I'm not sure she ever really grew to love me. You see, our two families arranged our marriage. We agreed to it, of course, but as is the custom, it was their will. (*singing ala Frank*) "Witchcraft"... And you know it's funny but it worked for me. I grew to love her, and I can't see loving anyone else. But sometimes I'm not so sure she feels the same way.

OMM SETY. Do you talk about it?

SAMIR. I try. Sometimes. But, I must admit, even for me, it is difficult. And for Mali- she is so traditional. It is her duty to love me. And there is no need to discuss it.

OMM SETY. There are only a few things that make me happy to live in this age. Arranged marriage? It could destroy any civilization.

SAMIR. All I could hear last night was Frank Sinatra. "Witchcraft"... And "I've got you under my skin....(*like Frank*) "I've got you deep in the heart of me"

OMM SETY. No wonder you wanted to kill yourself.

SAMIR. May I tell you something? Something very odd?

OMM SETY. I can think of no better person...

SAMIR. Took the words right out of my mouth. Last night, I couldn't sleep. I was thinking of Mali, and I got up to try and take a walk, and I think I climbed this wall last night. And I stood on that ledge, and I looked down to see if it would be far enough - you understand, to do the job. *(She nods.)* And having decided it was, I closed my eyes, and that's when...

OMM SETY. When...?

SAMIR. I could swear I felt a hand pull me back almost as if-- And I turned to see. But then the next thing I remember, I woke up in my bed. It was obviously all just a dream. *(Omm Sety smiles)* I told you, I think *I'm* going mad. Do you know when I woke up this morning I had my boots on. Isn't that strange? I never sleep with my boots on. Now I sound like John Wayne.

OMM SETY. He would have never let that happen twice. Not here.

SAMIR. Who?

OMM SETY. Come here. I want to show you something. *(They cross to one of the walls of the temple.)* Do you see this relief?

SAMIR. Yes. I noticed it the other day when I was trapped by your "guard". It is exquisite.

OMM SETY. And quite rare. There aren't many known drawings of the ceremony depicted here. I was thirty-five when I first saw this. Thirty-five years old when it finally dawned on me why I had to come here, and why my "visions" were so important. I was visiting this temple, for the first time. Sety was almost six, and I had just started to work for the Department. And he was playing along this wall, and he called out to me, but I was looking at this section there.

*Two realities begin, Omm Sety explaining, and Little Sety and Dorothy living the scene being explained.*

LITTLE SETY. Mum.

DOROTHY. Be patient Beetle.

LITTLE SETY. Mum.

DOROTHY. I'm coming. What is it bug?

LITTLE SETY. Look at this one!



OMM SETY. He had stumbled onto this relief depicting the Weighing Of The Heart. Though at the time, I didn't know what it was. Not many scholars even knew of the ceremony.

LITTLE SETY. What does that one mean, Mum?

DOROTHY. Little bug, I'm not sure. I've never seen one like that. I think you may have stumbled onto something very important here.

*Sety appears and Little Sety sees him right away.*

LITTLE SETY. Hello! I just discovered something very important.

SETY. Yes, you did.

LITTLE SETY. My name is Sety.

SETY. A very noble name.

LITTLE SETY. I was named for a king. An old, old king. Sety the First. He lived tons of years ago. He's dead now. This is his temple. They built it for him. But now it's mine. Because my name's Sety too. What's yours?

DOROTHY. George. That's an old friend of mine, George-

SETY. Your mother teases. We are old friends, but my name is also Sety. So I am glad to know another with my name.

LITTLE SETY. Me too. Hey, my mum doesn't know what this picture means, and she's an expert. Maybe you do.

SETY. This one here? Why yes, I think I do know, though I'm not absolutely sure.

LITTLE SETY. (*Quoting his mother but getting stuck on the last word*) The study of the Ancients is not an absolute science. That is what makes it so---

DOROTHY. Annoying!

LITTLE SETY. No! Appealing. That is what makes it so appealing. What is wrong with you today?

DOROTHY. It's this place, Bug. I'm not happy here.

LITTLE SETY. But you were before.

DOROTHY. I know. Before, I was.

SETY. It has mixed feelings for me also.

LITTLE SETY. Then let's... get out of here, Buddyo. Wait, let him tell us what my discovery means first. (Sety *hesitates*) Come on, I'll give you a piece of Bazooka.

SETY. (*Puzzled by the gift, but ever grateful.*) Thank you.

LITTLE SETY. So pay up.

SETY. Well, there was according to the teachings of the Ancients, a room that one found oneself in, after death. A sort of Courtroom-

LITTLE SETY. I got it. A courtroom. Like my father just had us go to. To have the judge decide that I should live with him.

DOROTHY. Sety-

SETY. Exactly. And that was a very special room, and the rules discussed there were very powerful. Were they not?

LITTLE SETY. Yes. But he was sod.

DOROTHY. Sety-

LITTLE SETY. He was. I didn't like that judge. He had hair growing right out of his ears.

SETY. Well, this court was even more powerful, because it was there that the decision was made how you were going to spend all of eternity.

LITTLE SETY. Wow.

SETY. And Anubis-

LITTLE SETY. The jackal head!

SETY. Yes!

LITTLE SETY. God of the mummies!

SETY. Keeper of the dead, yes. You learn your lessons well. Anubis leads you into the chamber where, as you see, there is a big scale-

LITTLE SETY. Like at the vegetable seller's!

SETY. (*Touched*) Yes. And Osiris and Isis sit at the end of a long hall at one end, so long that all you can see of them is a bright light, and Maat-

LITTLE SETY. God of-

DOROTHY. Goddess.

LITTLE SETY. Goddess of Truth and Honesty!!!

SETY. Maat, whose symbol is a--

LITTLE SETY. I don't remember- wait- (*He whispers to his mother, who whispers back.*) Oh, yeah. A feather.

SETY. Again correct. Maat places her feather on one side of the scale, and the deceased places his or her heart on the other reciting the Negative Confession, denying all crimes and sins, and if the heart is judged to weigh less than the feather of truth and honesty, then the deceased may join the others in the nether world. You see?

LITTLE SETY. Your heart has to weigh less than a feather?

SETY. Free of all worry, pain. (*He looks at Dorothy*) And guilt. I know it sounds difficult-

LITTLE SETY. Impossible!

SETY. But the weight of the heart can be as light as a feather. If all is settled.

LITTLE SETY. And what happens if you fail? If you've got a fat heart?

SETY. That I do know. One of two things, according to the mercy of the judges. Either they are merciful allowing you to absolve your troubles walking the earth as an Akh-

LITTLE SETY. A what?

SETY. An Akh.

DOROTHY. It is a spirit.

LITTLE SETY. Like a ghost ?

DOROTHY. Yes, only not to scare you like in the modern stories.

SETY. No, never to bring fear, for that would only serve to weigh down the heart even more.

LITTLE SETY. Wow, or what else? What if they don't let you walk?

SETY. That is what this little gentleman is, "The Devourer Of Shades." He is waiting nearby to eat the hearts of those who fail.

LITTLE SETY. To eat the hearts of those who fail? Ewwwww!!! *(He makes eating noises)*

SETY. And they would "die a second time" only from this death there was no return, no afterlife. Just darkness. And it was this second death that was the most feared thing of all.

DOROTHY. I think we've had enough religion for one day. You know what I always say: too much religion makes men think they are Gods.

LITTLE SETY. The Devourer Of Shades, I like him. *(imitating the Devourer)* Come here, my pretty, I won't hurt you. *(He starts to climb the wall, remembers to be polite and returns)* It was a pleasure to meet you.

SETY. The pleasure was certainly mine. *(Little Sety runs off.)*

LITTLE SETY. I'm going to find more things like that.

DOROTHY. I can't wait for him to tell his father that one. About the demon that will eat your heart. They already think I'm making the boy mad.

SETY. I'm sorry. But, if they already have judged, then one more story can't hurt.

DOROTHY. I was ordered to turn him over to Imam by Friday.

SETY. I know. And I know why you've come here.

DOROTHY. I know it's wrong, to have come here like this. Just take him. But I can't just give up my child because some fat old judge has been bought off. Not even bought off- in this land who would ever side with a woman? In this country- I don't know if you can understand, my Lord- *(she pauses as the words seemed to come naturally, but now feel strange)* My Lord?

SETY. You used to call me that often- *(a tease)* Out of respect. I was your ruler you know.

DOROTHY. My ruler?

SETY. Yes. Sit here - My Harp Of Joy. For that was your name. You had the most lovely voice, *(If the actress playing BENTRESHYT. has a nice voice she should appear above and sing softly during the following)* and you performed often in this garden in sacred plays for our Lords Isis and Osiris. Bentreshyt- Harp of Joy.

DOROTHY. Bentreshyt...That was what you were calling out to me, all those years-

SETY. Yes, I knew you not by this name. Dor-o-ty. What does that mean?

DOROTHY. It means my parents had no taste. Let me get this straight. I was this woman-

SETY. Young woman. You were sixteen.

DOROTHY. And we were-- acquainted?

SETY. Oh, yes. Quite acquainted and controversial. A king and a virgin priestess. But I always was a bit of a rebel. *(The singing stops.)* And that is why I am here now. And why I understand what you are doing. But, my love, you must return home, and give Imam your child. *(She begins to protest)* There you go, wanting to argue with me. Go ahead, I do not wish to forbid it as your husband would.

DOROTHY. I can't do it, my Lord. I tried. I had even packed all of his things.

SETY. There are many reasons, my Little One. First, for him. He must not grow in fear, and they will come for him. Do not let him know that pain.

DOROTHY. I haven't. I told him this was a vacation, our last vacation for awhile.

SETY. Then let it be true. My love, I did not tell the story just now only for your son. I told it so that you too would understand.

DOROTHY. Why? So that "my heart won't be too heavy"?

SETY. It is a myth, but there is much truth in it. Do not underestimate the wonder of myths.

DOROTHY. Listen, if you are so concerned about the weight of my heart, where have you been all these years? Where were you last night? Dammit, my heart couldn't be any heavier than it is right now. Or the last few days- trying to make this decision.

SETY. All the more reason it must be made. My love, you were born again on this earth to learn just these lessons, as was I made to search all these years for you. The Gods wish for you to come back here and live where you belong. It will take time,

to earn their respect, but a position can be earned. It is your destiny. Look at me. It is your destiny. And you were mine. *(He kisses her softly.)*

DOROTHY. I didn't know spirits could kiss.

SETY. You'd be amazed at what spirits can do. It all has to do with will. Their will, and the will of those who can see them. And the weight of each of their hearts. *(They are about to kiss again--)*

LITTLE SETY. Mum, look at this one over here.

DOROTHY. What my sweet? *(Crossing to him)*

LITTLE SETY. This one here. Look at it! He is lying down and she is lying on top of him and there is only a big stick holding her up. How does that happen?

DOROTHY. I see.

LITTLE SETY. What does that one mean?

DOROTHY. Why don't you ask your friend Sety about that one too.

LITTLE SETY. Okay, where is he?

DOROTHY. Silly bug, he is right- *(turning around but Sety is gone)* He must have had to leave.

*Lights quickly crossfade to Samir and Omm Sety at the temple.*

SAMIR. I'll be leaving tomorrow.

OMM SETY. I know. And whatever happens, I want you to know I have prayed to free my heart.

SAMIR. Does it work?

OMM SETY. It will in time. It always takes time. I forgave Imam. And I made it here. Though it took me fifteen more years to persuade the Department. I was fifty two years old before they let me live here in peace and do my work. But I never gave up hope. The ancients used to say "If you journey onto a road made by your own hands each day, you will arrive at the place where you want to be."

SAMIR. And who am I to argue with the ancients. *(Hands her a letter.)*

OMM SETY. What is this?

SAMIR. A copy of my letter requesting that you be allowed to remain here- at this place where you want to be, even after the date you choose to retire, and to receive a modest pension as gratitude for service done to promote the beauty and culture of this your adopted country and home.

OMM SETY. Oh, my Lords above, can you do this?

SAMIR. I know how to get things done. Let's just say I know how late in the day to lay the paper down on the desk, and it will be signed.

OMM SETY. I don't know how to ever thank you enough.

SAMIR. My dear lady, I think it is I who should thank you. You have reminded me how rich our country's heritage is. How everlasting. And that shuffling papers in an office, or lecturing in fine cities, cannot compare with the discoveries made by those who actually dig into the earth, or wipe the dust from and restore the walls. And as long as they wish to dig and dust, then, by God, let them. Biscuit?

OMM SETY. Yes, sir.

SAMIR. Samir...

OMM SETY. (*Offering her hand*) Friend.

SAMIR. Friend.

OMM SETY. (*She has picked up the wrong letter to read*) Oh, I'm sorry this is your letter.

SAMIR. Give me another biscuit first. Listen once a fat heart, always a fat heart. (*He reads as she is reading hers. She stops to make sure he is not too upset.*) Did you rewrite this?

OMM SETY. No, of course not, why?

SAMIR. Don't lie to me now.

OMM SETY. What does it say?

SAMIR. She... It says that she- (*He hands her the letter.*)

OMM SETY. "My Dearest One. Please hurry back. I miss you more than I know how to say." Is this the same wife who wants a divorce?

SAMIR. She thinks the time apart only helped to clear things- well, you read it.

OMM SETY. "You must forgive me for all the times"....

*Samir is eating cookie after cookie.*

OMM SETY. "And now that you understand, I must also tell you though I tried to call you, but there is no phone even nearby. We are going to have a baby." Did you get this far?

SAMIR. (*Mouth full of cookie*) Yes... I read the whole thing....

OMM SETY. "The doctor thinks it has been four months now. Please hurry and return. I cannot wait to hug and kiss you. Your devoted Mali." May I please act on her behalf?

SAMIR. You may. (*They embrace.*)

OMM SETY. Congratulations.

SAMIR. Thank you. Ha! Ha! I'm going to have a baby!!!

*Lights crossfade to Sakarra and Bentreshyt late at night.*

SAKARRA. Are you sure?

BENTRESHYT. Yes, I went to see the healer. I wanted to be sure.

SAKARRA. You have been acting so strange lately. Was it someone you loved?

BENTRESHYT. Yes, more than I can possibly say.

SAKARRA. Oh, I'm so jealous of you!

BENTRESHYT. Sakarra, I'm a virgin priestess. I can't be expecting a child.

SAKARRA. No, that is going to be difficult to explain.

BENTRESHYT. No one else can know. I should never have even told you.

SAKARRA. Why?

BENTRESHYT. Trust me. No one must know.

SAKARRA. Give it a few moons and everyone except Neptus the blind butcher will know. What are you going to do?

*Antefenters and the two girls part immediately.*



ANTEF. *(To Sakarra)* There you are, you little insect. I have just come from the healer, or rather she just came from me. Terrified. Felt if she didn't confess to me what she had just found out, the Gods themselves might strike her dead.

SAKARRA. You cannot believe that sorceress, my Lord. They say she sleeps with wild animals. And drinks the milk of cobras.

ANTEF. Quiet. *(Striking her)* I trust your word as much as the wind.

BENTRESHYT. Do not strike her, my Lord. I am the one who angers you.

ANTEF. It was you she spoke of?

BENTRESHYT. I know not who or of what she spoke.

ANTEF. Do not tempt my anger. Or you will speak no more than her. For no longer has the good lady snake charmer a tongue to chant with. Yes, of course, cut from her mouth. And she will suffer worse if ever the matter is spoken of again.

SAKARRA. Though difficult to do without a tongue.

ANTEF. I said quiet. She is not the only one with a tongue that wags too freely. Do not look at me with such horror. You can imagine the difficulty I would have explaining how my virgin priestesses began to have families, and how little control or devotion was practiced in my temple. I did not work for forty years to be master of this House only to watch the amorous attentions of a vegetable seller's daughter destroy my life's work. Now is it true? Is it? Your tongue is already silent. Perhaps you no longer have need for it.

SAKARRA. She has a voice from the Gods, my Lord, you said so yourself. Do not make such a voice mute.

ANTEF. True, *(sensing more danger this way)* and it is you who can never sing a note without creaking. Perhaps it is your tongue that needs repair. *(He pulls her head back by the hair, knife in hand.)*

SAKARRA. My Lord, please. You are hurting me. I have obeyed your every wish.

ANTEF. Good, remember that well, those are the last words you will ever speak.

BENTRESHYT. What is it you want?

ANTEF. Tell me if it is true. Are you with child?

BENTRESHYT. You will know soon enough. Let her go first. I will tell you. You have my word.

ANTEF. Your word. Of what value is that. Mother Isis had your word. Did that stop you from spreading your legs. (*He throws Sakarra to the ground.*) You are lucky we perform too soon.

BENTRESHYT. Leave us, Sakarra. I said, leave!

SAKARRA. (*Bowing to ANTEF. and going*) My Lord.

ANTEF. My little cat.

BENTRESHYT. Yes, it is true. I am with child.

ANTEF. Do you know what you have done?

BENTRESHYT. My lord, this is not the first time in our history that a priestess has been fouled. Your good friends in the council often take liberties with us. Some even boast of having "tasted all" the fruits in this garden. And yet you stand there feigning surprise? We have all heard the stories of the chosen priestesses, who never wake from their sleep, called forth by our Lady Isis for an early journey. And you publicly lament, though we know the real song. And we know the dish of poison that helps them on their way. Well, now it is my turn, let me drink from it.

ANTEF. I know not of what you speak.

BENTRESHYT. Ever the actor, playing at innocence.

ANTEF. I am a priest. I am not an actor.

BENTRESHYT. You are a politician. Truth is rewritten as easily as the next speech. But the Gods see all.

ANTEF.

(*Striking her*) Enough! Listen to you, telling me what the Gods see? I am not the one breaking vows to Our Lords.

BENTRESHYT. And I know I will suffer for what I've done. And I am ready to be judged. Are you?

ANTEF. I said enough. (*She is hurt now and falls silent.*) Do you know what my father did? For a living? Raked sewage. And my mother? My mother was a concubine. And what am I now? A high priest! That is what comes of years, years of hard work-

BENTRESHYT. And devotion?

ANTEF. Why? Why you? My Harp Of Joy? You who could make my words sing like no other before you? I could have made us renown throughout both lands and wealthy beyond our dreams.

BENTRESHYT. I am already that my Lord, without your words.

ANTEF. Who else knows of this?

BENTRESHYT. No one, my Lord.

ANTEF. Don't play with me, I see no sport in this!

BENTRESHYT. No one.

ANTEF. There must be a father. Well?

BENTRESHYT. I know not, my Lord. *(He twists her arm behind her)* I was drunk. He filled me with drink.

ANTEF. You will be drinking your own blood soon enough. But it will not be from my hand. Not with you. I will leave you to my Holy Council. They will work the truth out of you. Remain here, if you leave from here my orders will be to have your head. *(He leaves.)*

BENTRESHYT. My dear Master and true Lord, even today was I happy and thinking of you. For it has been three moons exactly since you held me in your arms and I felt the world disappear into your eyes.

*Sety appears down stage. It is three months earlier.*

SETY. Don't be sad, little one.

BENTRESHYT. Who knows when I'll see you again?

SETY. I'll be back as soon as I can. Though it might be after the rains, or even longer...

BENTRESHYT. *(Starting to chant to herself)* Time is a shroud...woven with never-ending...

SETY. What?

BENTRESHYT. We have a prayer that we offer- It is my favorite prayer. *(She laughs)* It's a prayer of mourning, actually.

SETY. I find that rather inappropriate.

BENTRESHYT. It is offered to comfort loved ones when one of theirs has begun "the journey"-

SETY. I'm only going to Memphis.

BENTRESHYT. Stop. And in the prayer we say: "Time is a shroud, woven with threads never-ending. And each thread a life with countless chances to cross the path of another-

SETY. For the cloth has no end- is as wide as is long. It was the prayer my father chose for his shroud. And the one I've had woven into mine.

*Lights crossfade to Sir Budge and Dorothy in the Museum.*

SIR BUDGE. So when I die, my little bug, you see they wrap me in this.

DOROTHY. Please. Don't talk to me about death.

SIR BUDGE. Oh, you mustn't fear death, my bug. Our people never did. They called it the "Great Sleep" and wove special blankets or shrouds to be wrapped in. This is a replica of one that my wife embroidered for me. See, and on it is a prayer.

BENTRESHYT. And for each life a thread, woven into a shroud called time.

DOROTHY. I don't want you to go anywhere.

*Lights crossfade back to Bentreshyt and Sety only.*

BENTRESHYT. I don't want you to go.

SETY. I must.

*Light dims on him leaving Bentreshyt alone.*

BENTRESHYT. And now this most precious gift is one I will never be able to bear to you. It will have to be my secret, as I am yours.

SAKARRA. *(Entering)* Bentreshyt, come on we must go.

BENTRESHYT. Sakarra, what are you doing here?

SAKARRA. I've packed our things. We must leave.

BENTRESHYT. You? Why you?

SAKARRA. Because I know. And because even if I didn't, sooner or later it would be me. That has her tongue removed- or her head. It is only a matter of time.

BENTRESHYT. Yes. Time...

SAKARRA. We must go before Antef returns.

BENTRESHYT. Go where?

SAKARRA. Far away from here.

BENTRESHYT. Far away.

SAKARRA. I have a friend on a barge. Well, you aren't the only one with secrets. He is willing to hide us.

BENTRESHYT. Then go. Antef is calling his holy council. As long as I am with you .You will be in trouble.

SAKARRA. Trouble? I'm already in trouble. How can I be in any more trouble.

BENTRESHYT. Go. I know what I must do.

SAKARRA. What?

BENTRESHYT. Go, now. I have my own plan. Do not worry. I am at peace.

SAKARRA. That is what worries me. The boat sails at high sun.

BENTRESHYT. Then hurry, or you will not be on it. I will try to meet you there. But do not wait for me. Go!

SAKARRA. Hurry. *(She leaves)*

BENTRESHYT. Good-bye my friend. No more will you make me laugh like when we were little girls.

*Bentreshyt starts to climb the wall as she did at the beginning of the play. Omm Sety appears huddled in a blanket in front of her urn to pray. She is very weak. It is a few years past the scenes with Samir.*

OMM SETY. My dear Lady Isis. And you good King Osiris. I've finished my shroud and am ready for my journey. My lords, I've known for some time now why you brought me here. Why you've chosen this life for me, and I have only been thankful for it is your wisdom that brought me home. I wish nothing but for you to

smile on all that have helped me, and on my beautiful son, and my husband, who always meant well, even as he spoke harshly of the ancients-

BENTRESHYT. My Lord, please forgive me. I know of no other way.

*Sety appears in spot stage right looking at Om Sety.*

OMM SETY. And for my Lord whose heart has been full, who has worried for what happened so long ago, for him to finally be free. *(They exchange a long look.)* You see... no more words.

SETY. *(Crying out as Bentreshyt falls from the wall and the spot goes out on Omm Sety.)* BENTRESHYT. !!!!

*BLACKOUT*

*Single spot on Samir center stage. He is giving an eulogy at a commemoration.*

SAMIR. Dorothy Eady/Bulbul Abdel Meguid/Omm Sety died on April 21, 1981 in the holy city of Abydos. The local health department refused for her to be allowed to be buried in her garden tomb. Instead her body was placed in the desert northwest of the Temple. I visit her often, or at least as often as I can. I've even brought my wife and children to say hello. The burial site is marked only by a few limestone flakes on which offering prayers have been written in hieroglyphs. *(He takes a teacup out of his jacket)* And by a teacup that was placed there by unknown friends. And while I'm there, I always make a point of visiting the Temple. And I sit there in that great "garden" in the "middle of nowhere," and I think of my old friend and her guided tours-

*Lights on Omm Sety on the platform Center.*

OMM SETY. We in show business like to save the best for last-

SAMIR. And how sacred these walls were to her-

*Lights on Bentreshyt and Sety sitting on the wall as earlier.*

SAMIR. The very spot where a young priestess and a king first fell in love so many centuries ago-

BENTRESHYT. *(Pointing to her star)* You can have that one right there....

SAMIR. And I think of how this place touched my life, and what I learned here, and I look up at this sky in the cool desert night-

SETY. I will cherish it always.

SAMIR. And for a moment, at least, sitting here, my heart too, feels as light as a feather.

*Light Fade To Black*

***END OF PLAY***

# On Guard

For my mother  
who taught me things  
about kings and queens  
and the stuff of great myths

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## **Cast of Characters**

The play is written to be performed either in two acts or two separate long one act plays. If performed separately the parts are entitled:

### **THE ORIGIN OF JUSTICE**

- Queen- a women of another century with great tenacity in middle age who has been imprisoned wrongfully and blinded by disease from giving birth many years ago
- Walter- a master of the King's guard, middle aged, who has worked the Queen's watch in the Tower for the entire time the she has been imprisoned there and longer
- Albert- a Lieutenant, a young graduate of the Kensington Guards on his first posting, twenties
- Moonbe- the Queens loyal fool, mute from having his tongue removed in punishment by the King.
- Tour Guide- a modern day leader of the tours of The Tower
- Tourists- a group of modern day tourists that can be recruited as walk-ons from the community or understudies if professionals

### **WHISPERING WALLS**

The same characters as in the first act/play now 15 years later appear, all except Moonbe, plus:

- Pertwee- a pro republic traitor, imprisoned for wanting to overthrow the monarchy, played by the same actor as Moonbe
- Lady Anne- his wife who is attempting a daring escape, played by the same actress as the Tour Guide

## THE ORIGIN OF JUSTICE

### SCENE ONE

*A prison in a tower built centuries ago. The set should include a stairway that wraps around all four sides, similar to the Escher drawing of a stairway that seems to have no end and rises to the same place it begins. A large jailer in a uniform resembling a Beefeater is standing under a torch stage right. Stage left there is another torch, and center is a large cell-door, locked. The set should be able to rotate at will, so this up-center area, the prison cell, will become visible. The stairways have others branching off like vines, offering entrances and exits to the main playing area. If budget allows, some of these can be mirrors or projections so that those entering are surreally upside down or in reverse. In the room there is a table and chair and a crude cot. A chamber pot sits in the corner left. The guard hears a noise and seems alarmed, listening. A group of tourists in modern dress pass by on one of the stairways. A tour-guide hurries them along: "This way, this way." The guard seems to be unaware of them but concerned of another noise nearby. After a long pause we hear, through the door center:*

QUEEN. The question being: why men will assault with affection long into the evening, attempting with assurances, whispers of waking nestled in fragrant limbs, like some apple-bear stealing into the orchard to pick their fruit -

WALTER. Peace.

QUEEN. Yet comes morning light, where find you their ladies? With stonewalls for sweethearts, boarded on all sides, their sweet branches shackled. The very doors, which only hours before softly forfeited entrance, now slammed and bolted shut. Oh, to visit the University of Botchery that schools you whisker-wits in the ways of romance that I may set it aflame.

WALTER. Be quiet!

QUEEN. Arise, Walter Trumble, and attend my release. Hours pass since the sun dried my iron curtains. None but I awake to see Good Lady Dawn's tears. Spending her sadness, like a pure wife's virtue, to no effect. Even the sparrows have long since flown by-

WALTER. Is there no reasoning with the lady?

QUEEN. Floating on air I'll never breathe. Listen, you bed-presser, as you sleep another morning escapes. Tiptoeing by with no notice... Well today is for noting, dear jailer. Am I hoisting sail 'to an idle wind? "Remember your station"... You sir, are a Captain of the Guard, loyal servant to noble, kind, King Lawrence The First. Abandon your bed or that nimble-pinioned noon will pick half your day's pocket.

WALTER. If you'd forgive your tongue its waggle long enough to listen, you'd note there was a stirring.

QUEEN. Shall I hallelujah it for a sign of something with life still in it?

WALTER. It seems to have retreated....

QUEEN. A shy something- still, a sign nevertheless...

WALTER. I thought just feet, then it grew a voice -

QUEEN. No dense mystery that in matters of cluesolving, a jailer holds no candle to a cuckold. One should never secure a soldier for snooping, search the backside of town for the jealous husbands, as nary a suspect is needed, for them to find clues.

WALTER. And I'd rather pack a war than a wife on the road to peace. For the both be bloody, the marriage offers slim surrender.

*A noise again. Footsteps. It seems as though someone is lost. A faint curse is heard. Walter walks the stairs and tries to see what is coming. As he moves, the tour of modern tourists appears and climbs a different stairway. At the same time the stage rotates to reveal the queen's chamber. She moves carefully but knocks over an empty jug of wine, and it becomes noticeable that she is blind.*

WALTER. Here, mark you?

QUEEN. Mark? *(She is holding her head, a bit hung-over.)* You leave me with cobwebs for reason, hanging from bells aringing in my cathedral, then implore me to decipher a which from a which? My good keeper, you needn't flood me with drink, mount a moonlit campaign, to convert me to hear invisibles. 'Tis but the walls awhispering. They are the goalers of all that has and ever will. *(The footsteps fade away.)* As you, when you are not sleeping, stand tall by this door keeping an eye on your prize, they too watch over. With no allegiance, they see all sides, never wavering. Imagine all that could be learned, the marvels they've witnessed. All the years, the plotting, the misdeeds. More than you, or I, or any king. Late at night, when no one's listening, like vouchstones they speak, yet only to those with an ear to hear.

My lady mother taught me the only truth told in this world is when the stones themselves begin to speak. No wonder they separated her from her head.

WALTER. Well, no matter. The only voice to be heard now is yours or a boiling cat's, forgive me the not being able to tell which from which. They are so confusable. Whoever else, the walls or whomever, have 'parted.

QUEEN. Whoever, Walter, whoever.

WALTER. Whoever the hell t'was, having heard your din and thinking the better of it, rather than face your fierce babble's, now gone.

QUEEN. Have we a high way for a doorstep? It does appear, the way things come and go. Is this the caliber jailer, I keep?

WALTER. You keep? Has your mind begun its senile sag? I'm the one guarding you, your bleedin' Highness-

QUEEN. I see no need for such formality. If we had only thought to tariff them as they pass through, and use the purse to purchase our repair...

WALTER. Like an idle duck winging north for winter, you've mis-migrated. Flown to the region of reflection, where front is back and left is right, and keykeep lords over Queen.

QUEEN. Region of reflection.... Had you known today marks twenty and five, Walter ?

WALTER. Course, I "known." Here sits nothing but a beef-brain, in your estimation. (*Imitating her.*) "Had you known today marks twenty..."

QUEEN. My father counted but twenty four... My mother but twenty... Marry, Walter, two decades, now halfway to a third, and like an adamant, you show the affection of a stone.

WALTER. One of them jabberin vouch-stones, you just wasn't able to hear-

QUEEN. You have my ears now, and but the turn of a key you'd have my visage.

WALTER. Name the price to pay for your tongue.

QUEEN. Walter! Are you e'en awake?

WALTER. The very riddle I've spent years solving... My hope is not.

QUEEN. For I. For as sure as Ariadne, I am asleep with a dream song for a life... I was a queen. Still am, if any historian be nearby. Granted they've dubbed me daft. Locked me away. The first Mad queen- known mad by my account. You see, if allowed to stray, as my condition warrants, like a crook'd compass from the point, I summize that most married to kings take leave of their wits along life's way. Most married to any man, if truth were free to speak... Yet I, Bedlam's queen, who once held court in gowns of gold, slept shrouded in the silks and satins of royal beds, t'was only after years of keeping horse-hay for my pillow and botchers-blankets on my bed, that my life's riddle's come to be solved.

WALTER. And if solved, I'm the glad for it. For a riddle solved begs no further discussion. And I've been awake for hours- if any historian be nearby, so stop clammering for me to a-rise!

QUEEN. I could find no need for sleep myself- but as we are both dreaming t'would be a fool's logic to waste sleep in a dream, or dream of a sleep, so since nothing is as it should really be, then the longer I'm chained the more I feel free...

WALTER. You have taken leave of your senses.

QUEEN. Would you have me in discord with my doctors? My five fine physicians- Poked, Prodded, Waxburn, Swallow, and Leech- each laboring under personal penalties of death, still each independently diagnosing the need for this long rest with you- my dear sweet jailer. Bless them all, those five artless artists of appliance... Now let us hope the point is clear, I am mad and you, my dear Walter, have a flea's cabinet for collecting facts. Do you not find this conversing through heavy timber tedious? Would not a simple turn of the key, rem-e-dy?

WALTER. Like some mid-summer milk maid, you'd rather rhyme than reason. Have you forgotten the day?

QUEEN. I do try. Each and every one, but stubborn as the carrions we call clergy, they seek audience. The years, ignoring my abridged arithmetic, disobey to add up anyway. Life is but the sum of orphaned days. Forgotten, they lie like cutthroats, waiting in the woods. Mark you, for one of those days, the least recognizable, he'll be the one to steal your last breath.

*A door slams down below. As he walks the stairs again, the stage begins to rotate further.*

WALTER. Here it lives again.

QUEEN. (*Going right on...*) Yes, our calendars are as counterfeit as a looking glass, and our very features changeable as politicians. Introducing themselves to us one morning, requiring advancement by noon, a touch of silver to knight the eyelids, cheeks seeking the crown of rubied rouge... then by evening the kingdom's a shambles, usurped in what seems but a day. The Age of Gray has ascended, ushering in the War Of The Wrinkles. As my dear husband, the King, would convey- where once your countenance did rule, now chaos resides...

WALTER. You must be still now, please Your Majesty.

QUEEN. No more pomp and ceremony, my Walter. No need hanging the ornament of title for today is different. Today, like the first taste of a lover's lips, must ne'er be ancient history.

WALTER. (*Steps are heard approaching.*) 'Tis you who misplaced her memory. Recite to me the events of the day.

QUEEN. Walter why question me thus? You know I've the abilities of an astrologer: of the future and past there can be no mistake, for my past was all too clear- therefore abandoned, and my future ripe with possibilities, therefore left to chance. It is only the present that appears to me somewhat vague, like murky pond water it offers little reflection. Today...Today... I trust you mean other than our anniversary, which, if I take you at your word, even you recollect. My accounts differ from a jailer. I keep no ledger, only marks on the wall. All the same to me, yet to some they go by Mondays, to others Tuesdays- to me they are weeks of Walterdays...

WALTER. Walterdays?

QUEEN. Perhaps a strain. Let's try Trumbledays? You've a poorpipe for a name, there's no music in it... No matter, my point of reference being the only importance is they are to be spent with you.

WALTER. And our new friend Mister "Whoever they've posted next door-right over there- starting here today", remember?

QUEEN. Oh, yes. Forgive my tardiness in arriving to the destination of your story- however awkwardly authored. I must say I feel a bit devalued to have raced to the finish line of your worry only to realize our new associate, like some stay-the-course tortoise, beats me to the mark.

WALTER. I implore you to keep idle now. Remember our stations.

QUEEN. Last time I looked I was your queen, and you my subject; therefore, remember your station and open this door immediately. Oh, I find

no value in the coin stamped "remember your station". Who's market is this that allows any bacon-chewer to buy entrance to my chamber with the same silver that beggars in value, worthless once in my purse?

*Short pause. A young soldier, twenty four, in the uniform of a lieutenant emerges walking the perimeter stairs hoping he has finally found his place. The stage should be making its final rotation, to the position it was at the beginning of the play.*

QUEEN. Wasn't it just last night, that you made bed-work of "your station", crying to me how betumbled, how askew the very axle-tree of the heavens must be. And now you wish to place the planets back on their shelf and "remember your stations"? You and your stations... I'll bet you are standing there right now. One hand at your side, the other firmly grasping your weapon. Erect. Stationed as a good soldier ought to be.

*The rotation of the stage should be complete. It should stop just as the soldier hits the main floor. The Queen finds a small tree in a corner of her cell.*

QUEEN. Walter, forgive me for the fool most think I am, I spied not the seedling till now. 'Tis it from my orchard? Look uncaring world, how he surprises me. More precious than emeralds the green of its leaves, rarer than rubies its fruit will be...

ALBERT. (*Hearing the awkward conversation, and afraid he's interrupting.*) Halt, who goes there?

WALTER. (*More for the queen's benefit.*) The Keys!

ALBERT. Whose keys?

WALTER. His Royal Majesty Good King Lawrence the First.

ALBERT. Have they added a "good"?

WALTER. I like the music of it. Who are you?

ALBERT. You mean "who goes here?"

WALTER. Well, it ain't like there's a bloody regiment of us now is there?

ALBERT. I make reference to your wording - (*Thinking better of questioning a superior.*) First Lt. Albert Hampton.

WALTER. Captain of the Guard, Walter Trumble, all's well and God be with you.

ALBERT. God be with you.

*Albert takes the position Walter had at the beginning of the play, and stands at attention.*

WALTER. Never been known to keep my buckles bright, or my pilch pressed Lieutenant, but the right's my post . Been that way for twenty of the last twenty five years, I've served here.

ALBERT. Forgiving the question sir, (*Taking out a small pamphlet and finding his spot.*) does not Article four, section three of our Lord's Manual of Corporal Procedure state: the ranking guard positions himself left of subject. His subordinates file either side, according to position?

WALTER. My Lord above-

ALBERT. Since I've the excellent fortune of no others residing in this regiment of greater rank, I may remain just left of subject, over here.

WALTER. They got 'em reading now, in the king's own guard...

ALBERT. Meaning no disrespect sir-

WALTER. None taken, now move your arse to the other post, post facto prompto.

ALBERT. If I may read from my orders-

WALTER. I don't give a good cow's biscuit what your orders say, nor that you can read 'em your bloody self.

ALBERT. Allow me first to say-

WALTER. Must we? Nay say I. Why? 'Cause I'm in command-

ALBERT. To say- there is not one in the guard who is not keenly aware of your station sir. (*Reading:*) Captain Trumble has served us many a good year, longer than any in recent memory, and his record of service, 'til now, warrants not a blemish. He cuts by all accounts a near legendary figure, earning both our praise and respect. However reports of a considerable relaxation of discipline with a series of deviations from the gentlemanly rules of decorum have come to our attention, culminating no doubt with the events of the last fortnight, and, therefore, we request one of Kensington's



finest to report immediately in aid of restoring balance and order to this the most important of posts in all our sacred land. Cordially, The Honorable Lord General Braxton Pompingale, and so on and so forth. As evident sir, at Kensington Guard, where I was schooled-

WALTER. But yesterday, from the looks of you...

ALBERT. At Kensington, we pride ourselves on a single point-

WALTER. Certainly no need to complicate the matter-

ALBERT. (*Albert glares.*) Our credo, if you will-

WALTER. Good they keep it nice and simple for you ruffled neck, carpet soldiers- (*Albert gives up the discussion, but takes the right post all the same.*) Be difficult to muck it up if your only weapon's your words. Well, the field's my school and this is our credo. (*He unsheathes a dagger.*) Now are you to walk to the other post while you still have life in you to move with?

ALBERT. Breeches of procedure will not and must not be tolerated.

*They are quiet for a beat. From inside we hear:*

QUEEN. Forgive me sirs, not wishing (but always seeming) to intrude, and never wanting to be thrifty with my thoughts- (*Walter lets out a "Ha!"*) However it pains me to ponder the need for "must not" and "will not" to labor in the same command. Wouldn't a simple "never" do? (*Pause.*) I'll take that as a yes. Next we travel to "Breeches of procedure". Certainly one's credo should rest sufficiently above any debate of linguistics, which compels me to inquire just exactly what is the procedure for breeches in your guard? I only ask as I've never met a soldier yet who doesn't prefer his breeches down around his ankles. And his procedure prodding some poor prisoner uninvited. And since we are four hundred forty steps high, no bother screaming, it'll only blend in with those being schooled next door for confession. Therefore if I may: Article one, section one of The Tower's Manual for The Corporally Mis-Punished is damn your "will not and must not be tolerated." We learn quickly to tolerate here in the Tower. We are a very tolerant and forgiving people here in the Tower, are we not Captain Trumble? (*Walter has moved to the post, left, and is silent.*)... I'll take that as a yes. I trust my words were received not as a scholars, but rather in the service of clarity. No further questions? Arms rest, gentlemen. Class dismissed.

*The guards do not move. Lights fade to black.*

## SCENE TWO

*The next day. Lights up on both guards at their post staring straight ahead, silent. After a long beat, Walter turns his head wanting to say something. Albert is motionless. Walter shifts his weight, it's been a long time since he's had to be this rigid. He sucks his belly in determined not to be the first to "give in." At the sound of a faint bell's tolling, they snap to attention, and with a cry of "Forward Ho!", they march the perimeter stairs, more as a show of regiment than any practical form of protection. As they march, the stage rotates again to reveal the Queen sitting on her chamber floor holding her small tree in a pot. She is stroking the leaves, and crying. Two of the tourists have wondered from the others, and as one of them yells "Get a picture of this-", they cross off. The guards reach their places after one turn round the stage, and both cry "All's Well." The lights begin to fade as the Queen's sobs become audible. The guards both stare ahead, as:*

*The lights fade to black.*

### SCENE THREE

*The tower, one day later. The guards are still quiet; Walter is beginning to lean to one side, resting against the wall. After a beat, the queen's voice is heard.*

QUEEN. Tis as if the poet who staged my life and I were not in consort, for though I wished an epic, he penned an interlude. With the gravest misfortune being to have postponed 'til the entre act, my fifth act curtain, the plot's turn. How plays your life's fare? The brooding question being offered up to either of you for the baiting. Serves it to entertain, or like the most trodding the stage, merely to dull? I'll take that as a "dull". Boys, must we pass through yet another day regimented to this silly game of Mother may I? Your Queen mother says you may speak. Therefore speak! *(Pause.)* I'll take that as a soon. Well, no matter how blue-faced both your arguments, I certainly find the situation queer- life's living- not your lack of participation in it, and it troubles me. I do believe my husband, your king, imprisoned me for my melancholy. As a worker bee drones about his sticky job never to notice the flowered fields, so Kind Larry never stilled himself long enough to mark a mood. "Happiness?" he'd rebuff if pressed for royal opinion, "Happiness is the harlot, we may purchase, though never own." *(Another pause.)* Save the unfortunate image, there's possible truth in it. My one remaining loyal, the good fellow who brings me my meals, a stray fool I took in and sheltered, Moonbe, my treasure, he used to sing:

For all our sense, we are but children.  
They grow us old and kill our dragons.  
Turn storybook queens to old wives tales  
And those with dewdreams awake in Mad-jails.  
Yet, I say youths the keepsake  
Throw oldage in the dustbin,  
Happily ever after's the lie  
No child will put trust in.

Kind Larry thought my servant, my dear Moonbe, to be the source of my illness, and had his tongue pulled out. Happily ever after's the lie no child will put trust in... *(Long pause, the guards are motionless, and the Queen can be heard quietly weeping. Walter looks at Albert. He wants to help, but won't. Albert waits until Walter is not looking and takes out a small tablet and marks on it with a crude pencil.)* I ask you: is this silly catalogue of deeds, with no more worth than some nephew's collection of pigeon feathers, is it truly what you had in the bargain? At eight years old lying in your bed, lost in tall dreams, were the events of this day, or lack of them again in your cases- included anywhere in your plan for the after-time? Lived anywhere, a provision of this day? Odd that no matter how simple the scheme, even with stakes as low as yours dear Walter, *(He is almost goaded*

*to speak.*) or as foolishly high as a spoiled terrier of a girl, willing to wager her weight, or a more countable sum, to be queen of all she sees- no matter what the gamble, we never seem to toss high enough to beat the dealer. We all are fated a roll of aim-aces and pay the bankers... If no bed of roses lies in life's garden, why must I keep in mine this pair of red-breasted warblers who'd rather have their throats cut than warble?

WALTER. (*To comfort.*) No warble'd be heard with your cawing and crowing.

QUEEN. Oh, how liberating to grant me audience, Walter, for though a ruler's constant worry is remaining well thought of by her people, a cloistered ruler does well just to be thought of... Continue! I faintly heard you testing your song.

WALTER. Not I, my Lady. Possibly Kensington's finest over here. No, not a hum or a peep from this ornament; cut from a quarry that face is. Might gargoyles be carved of your speaking stones?

QUEEN. He's but a codling, needing time to ripen. You were no easy fruit to pick yourself. Stood there for days at first, as if it was your duty-

WALTER. 'T was my duty, both my duty and my vocation-

QUEEN. Sounding rather like Our Lord Chamberlain you are, as he signs the latest holy tax decreeing his need of acquisition for a priceless prize pony to fill his sacred stables.

WALTER. Did you hear that coz, now the Lady blasphememes... And here stand we hard by close enough to catch the arrows that mistarget from above.

QUEEN. No better pincushion than the pious for pricking. How I did love to stand the back-fur of Talbert's neck on end, recall you? Why is it most Puritans are as mirthless as -now I was going to use widows for a joiner, but I believe most to have suffered the loss of a husband to be in secret overjoyed-

WALTER. No less joy awarded the husband allowed to die. Still widow it is, for Talbert was a blackveil, a Puritan for appearances sake. His humor corked 'til he popped a pints mouth open.

QUEEN. Yes, he did have an ale's tongue-

WALTER. (*To Albert.*) We speak of the first Captain I served here under, Thomas Talbert, from near Shrewsbury I believe....

QUEEN. Wherever it 'tis the grapes grow greener...

WALTER. Never met a cup of sack he didn't like, this one. The man drew not a sober breath the last twelve years of his life. But a fine soldier, he was. Fought in the Holy lands himself. Traveled four thousand leagues, fought for days on end, knee deep in sand and faint from heat. Still, blessed was he to look on the walls of Jerusalem. Told me he walked right up and touched the very walls of our Lord's city. Sad they made him. Said he regretted their ordinariness. How old and crumbled, and tired and weary they looked. So home he sailed with a bottle and a transfer and set guard here with myself and the other lack-hearts, where he too grew old and crumbled, and tired and weary, devoting himself to the damp and darkness... But we miss him, Old Talbert, so let's honor him...

*He takes out a small flask of sack and tosses back a swig.  
Offers it to Albert who has taken out his small tablet and  
crude pencil and is making another note in it.*

WALTER. Mother above, they got them writing now too. Your Ladyship, this one can pen your life's play for you.

QUEEN. As the gift of royal birth guarantees no great wisdom, so penmanship is no kin to poetry. You yourself, dear Walter, have been known to heave a poetic sigh, and can but barely make your mark-

WALTER. My sword writes my stories, and my readers have no trouble finding the bottom of my plots.

QUEEN. Note even a common soldier picks up an unwieldy symbol and lunges into battle-

WALTER. Common? Common? You heard just the other day, the infant himself called me a legend.

QUEEN. So's the story of Agamemnon who after supping on his sons and daughters, is no company I'd be keen to keep.

WALTER. Fought in three separate campaigns on the continent have I. Risen from saddle-boy to Captain of The Royal Guard, with no such thing as a school for soldiering when I come up the river.

QUEEN. The very year Cleopatra barged the water Nile. And did it stop you from marching in just like beardless baby Albert there, all full of your rules and regulations? Talbert was so afraid of being reported, not a drop touched his lips for a month, poor sot. You recall how he, with fevered shakes, outshook the very ghosts that haunt us.

ALBERT. Ghosts?

QUEEN. Who speaks? Another visits?

WALTER. Careless, himself. Not a week on the job, and already loosening his breeches.

QUEEN. What says the pup? His voice has yet learned to penetrate oak.

WALTER. Won't be long with you to school him. The toddler seemed spirit worried.

QUEEN. Won't tell me he's a slave to the sack, like Talbert-

WALTER. O, your majesty. Spirits as in shapes, bug bears, lodgers of the night.

QUEEN. Was certain last night passed with restless company, the pit a pat of teeth a chattering away.

ALBERT. Forgive me your majesty, it was cold. Near freezing in here.

WALTER. Well, it's the Tower, mate, not the bleedin Royal Palace. Forgive me, your majesty.

QUEEN. Quite all right my chamberlains. I may vouchsafe for the difference. Drafty here, yes, but like the trade winds in compare to the chill of the palace bed-chamber, if you receive my meaning...

WALTER. Course it's bleedin cold, this is a jail you churl. *(To the Queen, getting her joke a beat late.)* Ah, I caught your catch. Chilly chambers, sirrah. *(Back to Albert.)* What do you expect some down and quilts, nice little feather bed, like back home. A nip of brandy front of the hearth while we speak of the serfs staging another of their silly uprisings? Mummy and daddy, Lord and Lady Such and Such, wondering what to worry a winter's night about? No cares in the world-'cept their troubled child's future. The quiet one. The little sickly one who might crack the family crest. Let's send him off to soldier school- "Oh, No, Lady Such and Such," exclaims, "not my little Albert!" "Peace, now Margaret, 'tis best for him. Why Lord Bolton sent his Roger all the way to the German Lands and back he came a hero."

QUEEN. *(Taking up the game.)* Back he came in a box-

WALTER. We're only sending our Albert to Kensington. From there the path is straight to His Majesty's guard, not the front ranks. Worse that could

happen to him, he'll have to stand still hours at a time in some palace hallway glued to his procedure. And it's only for a time, teach him some respect.

QUEEN. But he's our son, a-a-a

WALTER. Hampton-

QUEEN. A Hampton. Infant are you by chance a relation of Lady Ann? Wife to Lord Reginald now a Pertwee?

ALBERT. Though of family one may never speak with certainty, the names are new pilgrims to my ears.

QUEEN. The heavens favored your journey, for she would trod about Court in an almost bestial gait. Half hydra, half harpy I'd vow Lady Anne was.

WALTER. Well, that's beside the bleedin point, now isn't it? (*Albert is writing.*) There, he scratches again... Trouble me no more with that! (*Trying to grab Albert's tablet. Albert avoids his grasp.*) Is it policy to be charted word for word, like some mapmaker? Who begs this diagram of events?

ALBERT. Tis for my needs. I collect phrases.

WALTER. (*Reaching for the tablet again.*) Give me, you speculator, you proditor. (*Albert retreats and Walter gives chase.*) Sent by Our Lordship no doubt, who knows what this one's capable of. Leveling charges of treason, no doubt your Ladyship.

ALBERT. I know not of what you speak, I mean no harm. I use this for a hobby-

WALTER. So says our good friend the executioner as he lowers his blade.

QUEEN. Is it customary for a member under our Lord's command to carry parchment and pen? Is this not a breech of procedure?

WALTER. I command you to give over, you dissembling gudgeon. The last but days ago, though an assassin, was decent enough to try his own hand at it. This the very next they send, another insect crawling out the baseboards, but this pest poisons by proxy, I've known a few of his breed. Like spiders you lay the eggs of your plans unseen, then scurry off to let them hatch.

ALBERT. If my tablet is your perturbation, give me your word that in my hand it will come to rest-

WALTER. You've my word that if in my hand it does not rest, my sword soon will.

*Albert gives it to Walter. Pause. Walter stares at it unable to read.*

WALTER. I've a cabbage for a brain, this could be my warrant and I'd never know...

ALBERT. I beg your forgiveness, since childhood, my characters have suffered illformities, my vowels stunted like dwarfs, my consonants with swaybacks.

QUEEN. If t'were curved as the harems of Persia, he'd have no abilities with them.

WALTER. Though, I'd give it my all...

ALBERT. No matter, allow me to interpret. *(He takes the tablet back, and begins to read.)* Scenario, a prison holding someone captive to protect rather than punish, as from a misunderstanding world... You see, merely idle ideas-

WALTER. No idea lies idle, for a thought once born cries to be fed. First a crust of attention, then the beast craves hearts and heads, ever-growing, consuming scores before becoming belly full. How know I the words you speak, reside there? Here is the how! The Queen will be our bencher. *(He moves to unlock the door.)*

ALBERT. Wait! How know I that you are not some co-rival wishing her Ladyship freedom?

WALTER. Is the suggestion being lofted that I planted in you, who days ago I first laid eyes on, this desire for a hobby, this attachment for eavesdropping, so that one day I might dig it up in my plot to free a Queen I've spent the last twenty years imprisoning?

QUEEN. It does have the lilt of light weight logic.

ALBERT. The very prisoner who, though forbidden, you keep in confidence, making mirth with, and who speaks of you in the familiar.

WALTER. A turn-round torture, I confess. As they say, those that rotate the rack, oft try it on for size...



ALBERT. If to free that door is the next move, mine will be to strike at you for treason.

WALTER. Don't be an asshead, Albert. You strike at me and the next page you'll author will be worm's words.

ALBERT. Stop, I say. *(He draws his dagger.)* Why the accident of my birth has caused me to land in such a place, confusable as -as--

QUEEN. Try The Isle Of Amazonia, t'was always one of my favorite chaotics...

ALBERT. To think I chose this post for it's adventure.

WALTER. Oh, that's the best I've heard since Talbert belched the Lord's Prayer In Latin. The pizzle posted himself in the Tower's Guard for adventure?

ALBERT. Told us that chamber work and court steps were for the pigeon-liveried, the poor-nuts not able to rise to the challenge.

QUEEN. The only challenge for Walter here is to rise. To awaken, I might say for clarification.

WALTER. And who saved your royal hindquarters, a fortnight ago, from slumber everlasting ? A price put on you and villeous Saxwell eager for the purse. While I was catching a bit of repose-

QUEEN. A healthy bit, say most of the morning-

WALTER. The weasel crept to the door and with dagger drawn I, rolling over, spied him. "Thought I heard a stirring", he confessed. But I, sensing a spice of revolt, rolled back feigning slumber.

QUEEN. Luckily his best impersonage, so real you'd swear he was snoring...

WALTER. 'Til he cracked the door like so. *(He has opened the door and tosses the Queen the tablet.)*

ALBERT. Are you mad, she could make off.

WALTER. You mistrust, she's the darkside of fifty and four hundred forty steps from freedom. Not as if she's winged bloody Mercury.

QUEEN. Walter a riddle for you- what do you get when you toss the blind a tablet to read?

WALTER. Remind me to recount the time I went to battle crossbow in hand and forgot me arrows. Here, go through his bag of personals see what you feel, smell, or taste...

ALBERT. Give me that ! (He tosses Albert's bag to the Queen.) I tell you close that door or-

WALTER. Or what you Jackdaw, know you even how to slice an onion without fear. (*Albert lunges quite effectively at Walter who barely eludes.*) I see they neglect to teach patience at your alma mater. If I were a few thousand years younger, you'd be but a memory right now. (*They continue to parry. Just as Walter is about to strike we hear:*)

QUEEN. The infant's a talent!

WALTER. Nonsense, I've seen soups with more stock, this stew will go down with ease. Mark you now, grizzle, for this be what Kensington should have shown you- (*Trying to execute a jump from stair to stair, he trips and falls. Albert shuts the Queens door.*) Damn old age for a villain, ow! Like some oyster eater, it consumes all before it, leaving but a shell.

QUEEN. It appears we misjudged the lad, Walter.

WALTER. Pay her no mind, infant, she's motley-minded you know. I take you for appearances sake, a knave, a nonage, a misprisioned peacock. (*Circling each other.*) All my life I've fought you noble borns. I can smell your perfume, taste your scorn 'fore your plumage preens the room. (*Walter attacks and Albert counters, sending him hard to the ground.*)

ALBERT. Get up now, I won't fight a "man" who is down-

WALTER. Then luck you'll need fighting anyone but a gentle "man". And you may perish awaiting, for hardly lives a gentleman does his own fighting.

*Tripping him up and rolling him over, sitting on him*

QUEEN. Walter! Have you won?

WALTER. Almost, my good lady.

*They roll again, Albert on top.*

QUEEN. For sooth, have you got the best of him?

WALTER. Again, not just yet, my lady. I use to think you'd silver and gold in your veins.

QUEEN. Are you sitting on him, damn you?

*They roll over, exchanging positions*

WALTER. Yes! 'Cause when I was a boy of ten playing mudgames, my little friend Oswald swore it the truth. All the better born have precious metals pumping away inside 'em. At but fourteen, on the field in some heathen land, I cut me my first nobleman's throat, and half the wit that I am, I'll be damned if I wasn't shocked you bled the same as we do. T'was about to take off my helmet and collect the blood for gold... To think I was afraid my knife wouldn't be sharp enough...

*Again they roll, Albert on top.*

QUEEN. Have you your knife out?

ALBERT. Yes!

QUEEN. I order you to stop!

WALTER. Are you ordering him or me?

QUEEN. I am your queen, I may order as many as I choose.

ALBERT. You are our prisoner, my charge, I serve my king.

QUEEN. Odd, I was a sovereign. At my coronation, given a loyal army of four thousand. Today, I've revolution in a regiment of two.

ALBERT. Do you think this infant, this knave too young to cut your throat?

WALTER. Never too early for a child to 'cause trouble. Their very concept's oft the first error.

QUEEN. Walter! Before proving your manhood has not faded into the background, listen to your good lady madwoman. The boy lied not to us, he means no treason. He composes entertainments of a sort I've seen before in---my memory wavers. On a stage but the size of a chest -a- drawers, I saw a troupe from the Scottish region, I believe it 'twas-

WALTER. I don't care what bloody region, if they traveled all the way from the bleedin Orient, the man's got a knife to my throat, and the look of the devil in his eye.

QUEEN. But you had him bested but moments before-

WALTER. Preceding your discourse on theater, yes.

QUEEN. What is happening? Walter are you in peril?

WALTER. For one who's spent decades squawking for release, an unlocked door offers little temptation.

QUEEN. I've more pressing engagements to attend-

WALTER. Then crack your open door and attend them!

ALBERT. Attend me, you ruffian, you rusting rustic! And hear me when I say, never again will I allow my name or honor to be made a mockery of. Privileged I am, yet not by birth. And though my station in life, being higher than yours, causes obvious discomfort, since ranking as my officer, the scales are askew, and thinking that I, like so many others at Kensington, must be a spoiled, troubled, affluent, lace-collared brat- hear me clear: sir, I am by birth lower than the lowest born. I am a Hampton by virtue of name, yet not blood. My step-father, possessing a nobleman's kindness, rare, I admit, though hardly extinct, took me in and raised me after finding me blubbering away abandoned in the apple yard, not but a day's ride from these very walls. He, a widower and without heir, took me for an after-gift from his good lady long buried. He raised me with gentle hand and great affection, but the laws of our great land allow no bastard a title, and upon his death both estate and title became anothers. Passed on in a wave of hand, patronage for some royal favor. I offer this as explanation of my keen devotion to his honor, and my boiled-blood when sparked near the subject.

QUEEN. (*Having appeared through her door.*) Sir Hampton, this is a puppet is it not?

ALBERT. Yes, I stage original stories with them, 'tis a hobby of mine.

QUEEN. You see, Walter he's of an artistic temper.

WALTER. 'Tis a murderous temper he currently displays.

QUEEN. Sir Hampton, mean you to prune the life from my Walter's limbs?

ALBERT. If to save him from stealing mine, it seems a certainty, and I hesitate but to have clarified a point-

QUEEN. My intention as well Sir Albert, for logic seems to have immigrated to some foreign land. You accuse this man of treason and he of you the very same, yet so far as I can tell, treason made off with logic and is merrily setting up residence half-way round the world. Might we offer his return to at least the shore of our senses?

ALBERT. I am of a nature never graced with trust.

QUEEN. And I as well. We both have seen our thrones usurped, cousin. Or do you think in this house, I have always resided? We are misfortune's familiars, you and I. Our blood runs hot as hate, and cold as abandoned despair.

ALBERT. *(He is looking right into her eyes. Then, after a pause.)* If repentant reason begs return, we may do well to honor him, what say you sir?

WALTER. I see no logic at present, certainly none in my past, I've erred in all directions...

QUEEN. You see, where is the sport in a death with no ransom? Like a counterfeit coin, this man's breath has no worth in your honor's market, yet for me's as valuable as my own.

*Albert slowly allows Walter to stand and hands him back his dagger. Walter taking it, quickly backs him to the wall.*

WALTER. Article four section five of the Manual of How We Protect One Another Up In This Here Ward- always and I repeat always, finish the job while you can. If a man's down you strike regardless, follow? None of this fighting by gentlemen's rules. If you have 'em on their belly, finish 'em like a stuck pig.

ALBERT. Yes, sir.

WALTER. I count on you, you count on me. We cover each other's arse up here, and I plan to keep mine intact, rusted as it is. Receive my meaning?

ALBERT. With stinging clarity....

*They begin to reposition themselves at their posts.*

QUEEN. Well, good, 'tis always nice to dispense with the formalities of introduction... *(The guards realize their error and Walter moves to usher the prisoner back to her cell.)* And I thank you for my brief holiday. *(She goes into her chamber. Walter locks her door, crosses back to his post.)* Friends,

what were we discussing? Ah yes, being content with one's station in life...if you ask me, why search for some silly goblet of gold? Happiness is our holy grail... Allow the blindwoman to illustrate, suppose all you ever wanted was to have a table to sell eggs in the square.

*The guards look at each other and smile. Lights begin to fade.*

QUEEN. You work your whole life to barter your eggs, and just as you set up shop, what happens? A law is passed taxing hens...

*Lights fade to black.*

## SCENE FOUR

*The same setting, but the lights are only up on the stairways, and this time as the tour passes, we notice they are wearing coats and hats, and we hear the tour-guide ask if anyone knows the words to Silent Night. The tourists begin to sing and as they pass, the guide remarks "it may not have been "all calm, all right" on Christmas day some centuries ago, but that would be getting ahead of ourselves. Let us continue and we will return to this the most famous of rooms in the tower, but first the torture chambers." Some children yell "cool" and "Yes!" and the tour hurries off as the lights come up on the anteroom. For the guards, it is two months later, Christmas day. Albert is putting the finishing stages on a makeshift stage and the Queen, her cell door wide open, and Walter are busy stitching small costumes.*

WALTER. If any one had prophesied in two tears of the calendar I'd be mending doll dresses for the boy's entertainments, I'd have tossed them in that cage with you and labeled them damaged goods.

QUEEN. Quite the seamstress you are Walter, my needlework must seem moth woven in compare.

WALTER. 'Tis understandable for as other girl-to-be-wives practice their mending the better to be joined, girl-to-be-queens perfect the tug and pull of courtmanners to keep from being ripped apart at the seams. As for me, is not a needle but a small sword, and it's motion merely thrust and parry? Any soldier, pre-Kensington, has fought off the fear and idleness stitching at his uniform. The day after battle, those of us lucky to be sat by the fire, like a bevy of old wives at a blanket quilt, patched our pride, sewing our countries colors back 'to one.

QUEEN. These are the sweetest holidays I've spent since girlhood-

WALTER. Have you vision of such far-off lands?

QUEEN. If I squint!

WALTER. I find it difficult to recall the other side of yesterday.

QUEEN. When one has traveled as long and far as you, the point of focus ought to be locating a tomorrow. (*To Albert.*) Save for old grumble-stitch there, the rooms seems alive with the Yule spirit.

WALTER. Well, it must be the boy that stepped in the smell of the season and tracked it in.

QUEEN. 'Tis his masterful play we make ready to feast on, and listen to you sitting there biting your thread between curses. It feels as if we've almost a home, miraculous when one thinks of our situation. But then that is what this time of years is abrim with- wonder and miracles.

WALTER. Holidays are nothing but tricksters, full of deceits, the only miracle being how we survive them.

ALBERT. I was found on Christmas day. Twenty and five years ago to the day.

WALTER. What does that make you, our Savior?

QUEEN. Walter, please, have respect for the day.

WALTER. I do, I can think of no better day to blaspheme.

QUEEN. Why can you not be in mind with the rest of mankind and, for one day a year, hedge your bets?

WALTER. I have more reverence for my non-beliefs.

ALBERT. Then help me to celebrate my birthday.

WALTER. Your day of location, you mean.

ALBERT. (*After a slight pause.*) The physician in attendance measured me for less than a day, so this by all accounts, my day of birth as well. Said t'was a miracle that my father heard my cries. Even more the wonder I was still alive, with the wicked frost.

WALTER. Obvious, great pains were seen that you were well provided for. (*They both look at him.*) Would imagine you were well bundled. To be able to survive in this bleedin weather.

ALBERT. Yes, in point of fact, my only birthright a fur blanket, military issue, frayed even back then, but wondrous warm. I've kept it all these years...So this for me has always been a two-headed season as well Captain-

WALTER. A single head for me and like Cyclops himself, one blind eye as well.



QUEEN. Well, thank you Walter for awaking me from my nightmare of giddiness and good cheer. I'm back with you in the nether regions. Which is today's amusement? Ferrying cross my never-ending river of whining, or wrestling with your boulder of regret ?

ALBERT. We've but a few more birdbolts to dodge, your Ladyship. For our Captain of Complaint here's due downstairs by mid-morning.

WALTER. You fast-tongue!

ALBERT. Begging your-

WALTER. If only your mind was as agile as your mouth. They might meet up and once introduced, sit down, sup together, and choke o'er a bone or two.

QUEEN. Downstairs?

WALTER. Yes, I'm due in the nether world of whence you speak, the land one visits when forced to retire....

ALBERT. He is of the worry our superiors might suggest his stepping down, surrendering his post. That his years might out man his abilities, and a soldier outnumbered-

WALTER. No need to slop on the color, the picture has been painted. Though from their vantage point, trust you. From my hill, the valley is still quite green with possibilities-

QUEEN. Altitude always plays havoc with perception, ask any landscape artist.

WALTER. Think you I've no fight left in me?

QUEEN. Past question. Even as they lower you down, sword and shield in hand, you'd quarrel the worms their nibble.

WALTER. Don't bury me yet, dammit I'll fight that bastard death like the villain he is! I've walked the field many a day right alongside the coward, I know his game. From all sides he comes, and not dressed as some black-robed nanny spiriting away your sickly grand-ones. On the field he's dragon-like, a skeletal beast, bony plated, and huge. I first saw him standing over my good friend Oswald, who greeting a sword to the belly, had fallen. Ahold of the wound, he looked at me, his eyes the boy I knew sitting in the filth playing with mudballs. A shadow slowly came over his face, and we both looked up and like so, Death hacked him in two, then flashed his awful

toothy grin. But mark you, show him no fear and never turn to run. Stand your ground, his taste is the weak. He may stop and sniff the air, you match him eye to eye. He'll turn and move on, for he likes nothing better than to give chase, having no stomach for a hard fight, with vulture's patience he'd rather wait. Bide his time and wait...There, I've finished sewing the dress.

QUEEN. You are truly one of life's more precious paradoxes, my sweet. And I adore you.

WALTER. T'was your idea to patron the poet, offer our services.

ALBERT. Only after you signed on as manager, reinventing my plots with a "only to have you consider this?", and "wonderful, now ponder that."

WALTER. Listen to the horse thief. Takes off on a suggestion and rides it. With never a coin of thanks, he's down the road and gone.

ALBERT. The writer's not been born that, having heard an agreeable idea, wouldn't swear he thought it first. Or resurrect a masterpiece, with needful adjustments, accounting for tastes of the day and more vitally trivial, his ego, dangling his name somewhere conspicuous. And by showing another's greatness to be profitable, humbly pay it the false-debt of homage. But, I shall break with tradition, and offer my thanks to both, for all your support and with hope by this eve, your gracious applause.

*The bells toll sundown from afar.*

QUEEN. Odd, t'was just about to query you gourmets how many bites had been taken from this day. Can it be evening already? My mind's clock mistimes. Not unusual for a madwomen, but normally I've a lawyers ability to value the hour.

ALBERT. Captain, you'll be late...

WALTER. I see no reason to make haste to be told I've no time left.

QUEEN. It's a holiday, you pigeonwit. Perhaps they mean to make a presentation of some extra-wages ?

ALBERT. For services well done, we present you with your month's due plus another!

WALTER. You forget I'm in the employ of your husband-

QUEEN. Then, a stuck-pig perhaps.

WALTER. Our Lord Sovereign-

ALBERT. Or a turkey.

WALTER. His majesty, the king?

ALBERT. Begging your pardon, your Ladyship. My stomach's as empty as my brain, I meant no disrespect ...

QUEEN. (*Crossing into her chamber.*) If no offense was intended, then I intend to be offended...

WALTER. Albert, I would hope you are no longer regulation's dupe, for I am sure nowhere in Our Lord's Manual For Corporal Procedure does it commission a puppet play to be enacted, costumed with materials from the prisoner's own property. To enlist her and your superior's aid in the construction of said costumes and scenic elements. To command they endure hours of the torture of rehearsal, take, without gratitude, their unsolicited advice, then brutally insist they applaud after the final punishment of performance has been levied?

ALBERT. (*Using a puppet and impersonating:*) Question you a king, sir? Taste I in the sauce, the spice of revolt? What day and age is this where the insignificant aspire to relevance. Society is but a cog in nature's complexities, do not make a mockery of its machinery. Like the earth once turned over and seeded, I quarrel not the baseborn for the need of manure. Quench their thirst, keep raked and weeded, and in their depend one may secure seasons of bounteous growth. But though tree shan't grow without soil, neither shall piecemeal dirt reach heavenward and touch sky.

WALTER. Following the dis-course most monarch's sail, you speak worthy words, adrown in a seastorm of sentences unfathomable.

ALBERT. (*Still the King.*) Navigate you this language? If a decree is enacted for a play to be played, then actors you shall imperson. And You! If your speech I seek at the Tower gate, come sun-rest my hearing it 'tis certain. Either in the present or past tense- I trust that you have gleaned my meaning.

QUEEN. (*Returning.*) My luck to be late for a lesson in fortune's grammar. Missed we the chance to select the future overflowing with shalls and maybes? Or in my case, with shallnots and neverwills...

ALBERT. (*Again, the King.*) The future is always a possibility, but leave it as such. For as it breathes air, tomorrow withers to today, rusting and crumbling, a handful of memories to be scattered in yesterday's wind.

QUEEN. How pleasant to once more hear sung the doomed poetry of politics. You've mastered his voice in all its misery, Sir Albert. Walter, hurry yourself, pretend there's a nap awaiting your return.

WALTER. It's all but a too brief sleep on the way to a lengthier slumber.

QUEEN. Spoken with feather logic, by a true Goose Downist. Wishing not to lower the shoulder of your responsibility, may I request you take this ring to treasured Moonbe as a gift of the day, and this note of thanks to mark the occasion?

WALTER. *(Taking the ring and note, as he is leaving.)* Now they've got me playing Father bloody Christmas himself....

QUEEN. You're the only for miles with stomach for the task....

WALTER. *(As he walks the stairs...)* Hear Boy? Mark you. Twenty and five years of devoted employ, and this be the respect they pin about your belly.

QUEEN. Once more, you've managed to tangle the thread of reason, my Theseus. To my husband, a sort of Minotaur in miniature, have you pledged your service, as I before you offered mine. Still he locked me away and gave you the key to my truest heart's devotion. Do not stumble over it, as you make your way back to those who call you loyal.

WALTER. Even a pigeon-wit knows who's wings make him fly. *(He realizes he's started in the wrong direction, and turns to descend the stairs behind him.)* Stagestruck, pretend your a goaler still and pack up the prisoner while I'm gone. String would be in aid, to find your way out this labyrinth. *(He is gone.)*

ALBERT. This way, your Majesty.

QUEEN. I feel akin to a pickled herring. If not fancied for supper, place her back in the jar, where, with the rest of her fish sisters, she'll vinegar sleep, and stay put on the shelf for years, preserved. Before you "pack me away" what think you? Mean they to discharge my Walter?

ALBERT. I wouldn't know, my lady. Still, no worry. From what I've divined, they'd have more luck wringing gold from water, than retiring the Captain.

QUEEN. Tis true, easier to put a devil's brats to bed. I'd be more than lost without him.

ALBERT. I must say, it stretches imagination taut to come up with the pairing of King's jailer and Queen.

QUEEN. Find it less likely a man walks by the same church his whole life, to one day have a carved Christ fall and crown him? One moment full of life's worry, the next moment- bam, he has none. That is often how I view Walter, as a prophetic boulder, a savior, dropped in my lap if not on my head from above.

ALBERT. I sense not a speckle of romance in that....

QUEEN. On sweeter days I see us as twin-hearts. Identical not in feature or frame, yet pulled from the same tree. Fate was our father, Coincidence our mother.

ALBERT. More sentiment paints this portrait than falling rock.

QUEEN. Not always did he strike me thus- mean you to shut me away before I answer your request?

ALBERT. Forgive me, though I'd love to hear-

QUEEN. This was a most hateful prison when first Walter arrived. I was truly a madwoman in those days, surrounded by demons-

ALBERT. Demons?

QUEEN. Dissembling as men, but devil-hearted all the same. Many an evil walks this earth without fangs, for if all who wore black were witches, there'd be no need for trial and jury, But this must wait....I speak without measure, my worry of Walter upends me....Back in the cage, the bird belongs....

ALBERT. Peace! Mean you Walter's not to be trusted? Have I sealed my fate in believing you both? Relaxing my watch, only to be winged from behind?

QUEEN. T'was your idea to play your play- As any of the unappreciated arts, eager were you for audience-

ALBERT. I must try and stop him before he speaks. They'll have our heads. More mischief breeds this place-

QUEEN. Built for the damned, we both hope too much of this blackhome. Albert, if you rush off where does that leave me?

ALBERT. Possessed by a motley's magic, I am... Inside, quick you!

QUEEN. One minute in, the next wait what's your hurry? Listen you- Walter is not our worry. And unless you continue to misplace it, your head will not be lost, though I fear I haven't long to wear mine... Walter Trumble is a man of his word, of honor honed sharper than any sword's steel.

ALBERT. A moment ago you swore him to be false.

QUEEN. True to his word, he once did me grave wrong.

ALBERT. Must all contained by these walls be a riddle? Speak me a plain truth.

QUEEN. She is too vain to be plainly viewed, rouged and perfumed must truth entertain, for unadorned she oft disappoints. Here, sit you down, and allow me to join, for this has weighed me much too long to speak standing...Not long after Walter Trumble's service here began, for whenever a new jailer joins the ranks...'tis custom to celebrate...

ALBERT. Pray continue...

QUEEN. To celebrate an initiation of sorts. The newest on the post, forced belly full of sack, to prove his worth as King's Guard...Rank and File, they call it...The usual silent tower suddenly full of laughter and song, the men lining up one by one and a lucky prisoner chosen by chance, eyes tied blind, held down, accosted by all, the newest taking first turn if true spirited, or last- for none refused Rank n' File, an accident might occur, a tragic fall of a few hundred steps. Either first or last, they took their turn, till proud guards all had become. With more wine and good cheer long into the night, some even tasting more sport, till having their fill, the prisoner was returned bruised and unclean, and the songs and the screams would come to an end, just in time for the daylight's bells to begin. And save for the soft sobs of pain and the snores of the men, a too-familiar hush fell over the tower again. (*A horrible laugh is heard from far below...*) Though one of but a few ladies sheltered here, as royalty, many times was I spared being chosen. But that night, Walter's first, heard I that vile Saxwell as he dared all: "Who'd take the word of a madwomen, bloody Queen or not? She's aranting as usual, say we..." And as they came to unlock my chamber door, I picked up a candle stick to struggle, "Touch me and your own blood you'll be tasting..." encircling me they took up jeering, "A fighter this one is, she'll be a good poke...And the last I remember was their bearded faces closing in, leering... When next I awoke Walter was sitting in my chamber on the cold floor beside me, bruised and bloody were we both and he whispered...."Forgive me, your majesty, please forgive me..." and I spit on him. He placed a bucket and rags for me to wash up with, and with dagger drawn the rest of the night he stayed by my door, though the party had moved to another cell, far below the cries betold.

ALBERT. Never should he have allowed it...

QUEEN. You'd have done as he. And felt the shame, a regretful chill, every now and then...

ALBERT. Never would-

QUEEN. No? Then march you this minute, with sword in hand, for below us lie most of your fellow Guards present that night and many times since...

ALBERT. Dare they continue this contemptible custom?

QUEEN. Why stand you gape mouthed? I've know oxen with more sense and bear with less bite than men at their most base.. Is not the goal of a regiment for many to act as one, with single head, of lone pursuit. And 'tis but a short hop-skip from sack to slaughter, from pillage to rape...That night did I learn for certain though little doubt existed, I live in a world suffering of madness and keeping me cloistered from it was Charities' blessing and Walter, if the pun may be pardoned, her gift of guardian angel.

ALBERT. Yet, I thought he-

QUEEN. Joined in the festivities? For certain, I know not, though he says yes, at first his fear too great. But as soon as he saw the deed with sober eyes, like a cornered cur did he claw at them all, 'till the cell was clear, and over the stair there, a few took a fall...And each time since, as you men line up to make hate, by this door sits my Guardian, all night wide awake.

ALBERT. Why since my arrival has each night peaceful passed?

QUEEN. 'Tis too soon after that grease livered Saxwell's last breath, without him the pack has no leader. And since his talent was treason, lingers in the air still the hazard of possible penalty. But lack-winded discipline tires easily, so sit him down the wait won't be long. For time chariots the sky with horseblindness, hindsight is fruitless, he gallops only forward leaving all that came before behind... (*A door slams below.*) Know you that I was placed here not for absence of sanity? My true crime was being barren. Unable my Lord King suspected of providing an heir... How's that for honesty undressed? Call her mad, but cold-wombed she really is...Well, time rode on and two discoveries were made: t'was the king, four fruitless mistresses later, who's seedless, and his lack-child Queen had become bellyful, thanks to the Guards and their games...For months I carried the result of their hated sport, and dear Walter kept me from royal view. For what an embarrassed husband there'd be, and to make a mockery of a monarch more oft than not, becomes one's final deed. Never will I forget the day of birth, turned hazardous for sick and feeble I was. Spirit sickened by months of my mind's

swaying, knowing either I carried the devils work, or an innocent, wishing to be forgiven- but between fevered shakes, struggled the doomed child into this world. And though I swore not to look, for a moment hoping for some answer, I tried. But with vision newly blurred, could not find a face. Then as compacted, off to the hills Walter went, where at my bequest, he christened the child at river's bottom, and with much prayer and lament, we mourned the brief life, doomed as it was to take with it my sight... (*Walter enters and stands nearby, watching.*) And the final irony, if any be needed, was the King's madlie became truth. For the better part of a year, my wits were abandoned. The entire winter spent silently vigilant, then springthaw at my window, to the heavens, I'd yell. And through summer's heat my Moonbe bathed me, for if not wet, I'd demand to be washed... 'Til one day as the leaves outside began to fall away, my spirits sat up, as from a deep sleep awakening- only to find a much darker world...

WALTER. Wherein resides one noble Captain Trumble whom you haven't yet lost ...

QUEEN. Who, Walter, who!

WALTER. Who you bloody well have to deal with, 'cause right here stays his command.

QUEEN. A greater gift you could not have given.

WALTER. Happy am I to hear it, for the extra five ducats awarded will warm my pocket, rather than purchase you a present.

QUEEN. No need to spend for my affection. My worth is greater than any treasury, and my taste much too fine...However since some miser once said, it's the thought one counts, if we totaled your mind's small change might the sum be embrace?

WALTER. In front of the boy?

QUEEN. In front of the world, damn you. What care I if they see?

WALTER. (*As they hug, he holds her tightly.*) Never again will harm come your way, your grace, I newly swear it.

QUEEN. Find you cause to worry-

ALBERT. (*Startled by a noise.*) Stand! Who approaches?



WALTER. Mark you! State your business while you still have tongue to speak.

*A crumpled piece of paper is tossed into the air like an arrow and lands in the chamber.*

ALBERT. (*Reading.*) I have none.

WALTER. If no business here than get ye gone!

*Another piece of paper. Walter picks it up and hands it to Albert.*

ALBERT. (*Reading.*) My business is with my ladyship, it's tongue I've none of.

QUEEN. Moonbe?

*Another note. It lands near the Queen. Walter picks it up and hands it to Albert.*

ALBERT. (*Reading.*) Happy I am there's one with clever wit, my wrist grows weary. Now may I approach?

WALTER. Zany is that you?

*Moonbe peers his head over the stairs and smiles, throwing one last missive toward Albert.*

ALBERT. (*Reading.*) Zany no more, for the world screams folly for me. Uncapped, the insanity flows freely, and this keg, long since tapped, has but a hollow empty sound...

*Moonbe opens his mouth and screams, nothing is heard, then a loud, low, awful horn. He steps from behind the stairs and we see he carries a crude bellows that makes a fart-like horn sound. He also carries a tray of food, and over his shoulder are three bottles of ale. He goes to the Queen and puts down the tray, takes her hand, and spells out some words. She translates.*

QUEEN. He says supper he brings early for the cook's on holiday time, and a gift for you both of kidney's ale and pie-

WALTER. Kidney's ale?

QUEEN. (*Moonbe corrects her.*) Forgive me, that's kidney pie and ale. But question him no longer, for the fool without words, his best jests have been jailed.

WALTER. Pity, t'would be nice to have his best, rather than for years to have suffered the rest...

QUEEN. (*Translating for Moonbe.*) Ears he still has Sirrah. Marry, the gift of gab is the fool's kiss. Why waste a low long one, (*Moonbe approaches Walter with hand out.*) on one who won't give and knows not how to receive?

*He kisses Walter sloppily on the mouth, and runs off laughing silently.*

WALTER. I'll give you a sharp hard one back of your head, you twizzle, ever touch me again...

QUEEN. (*To Walter, jesting.*) Think you sir that since sightless, you may pander your affections to any foolish heart that passes? Keep your kisses for the collection plate, if they be so cheaply spent...(*To Moonbe.*) Get you to my chamber crookcalf, and forget not my supper. Received you my gift? (*Moonbe spells into her hand.*) T'would think even the blind might mark it's shine...And why thank me not for it? (*He spells again.*) You did, but I didn't hear it, ha, ha! Maybe your jest will to my ear improve once my stomach is full... And stay you awhile, for soon Sir Albert's play performs. I'm told it's a tale of Queen's revenge...

ALBERT. And contagious Kings-

QUEEN. (*After Moonbe spells into her hand.*) Say's he, that plot premieres daily, the courts acrawling with lizards, whose colors change quicker than their garters. The first rule of ruling is the learn to be misleading. (*They exit into the chamber; Moonbe shuts the door.*)

WALTER. (*To himself...*)'Tis the first rule of us all- Do unto others before they do unto you.

ALBERT. So, no rest for you. Mean you to be trapped with us here awhile longer?

WALTER. Trapped it is...

ALBERT. Well, I'm glad for it. And joyful you sound.

WALTER. If only for one chase, allow me to ride as the hunter, high on my horse, reveling in the challenge.... Why dub me game once more? I've known nothing but life's corners and ditches. Must it always be to dodge or flee? Like a winded goose, I grow weary of the sport.

ALBERT. What of "bury me not" and "stay you back, Master Death!"

WALTER. Let him come now, I'll quarrel him not. I'd sooner leap in his arms than face the next dawn.

ALBERT. I've more knowledge of Ancient Egypt than of what you speak.

WALTER. Here. Twin Judases there's to be this time. For services rendered, your extra pay.

ALBERT. Then we worried for not, did she not tell us t'was extra wages?

WALTER. That she did. Her judgment's uncanny...though I doubt she prophesied all...

ALBERT. Judases? Prophecy, now it's Testaments we're talking, speak some simple King's English!

WALTER. Simple King's English? That I can do. You'd think it would be simple enough.... Albert, sir, our King has made of us a simple demand- the severing of his Queen's head. The crime treason, though the truer cause, his new royal mistress is with child. We may only hope 'tis his....But no matter, whatever his cause, the sentence must be carried out. Simply and immediately. At dawn.

ALBERT. Surely you jest?

WALTER. One may only assume the haste to alleviate any popular unrest, and more importantly (*He indicates his belly.*) our yet-to-be Queen's soon to unveil her value. And since our Lord Executioner is abroad, studying newer more efficient means, we have been tapped to serve sentence. So you see, sir, either you or I, or both, they care not, must simply... (*He cannot even say the words.*)

ALBERT. It can't be...

*Walter hands Albert the official edict*

WALTER. Like her mother before her... He said. She must suffer the same end as her mother before her...

ALBERT. Yet why today?

WALTER. A gift. To his new bride...

ALBERT. 'Tis barbaric...

WALTER. Why label peoples past as crude and uncivil? If man were to gaze at his own time from above, sure as night comes to steal away day, he'd find himself stumbling through an age darker than any previous.

ALBERT. (*After a pause.*) What are we to do?

WALTER. Our choices number but two: carry out the sentence or prepare our heads for the same block.

ALBERT. She's...your lady, my Queen- Queen of us all!

WALTER. Already the wind carries false word of her plottings. In tomorrow's market they'll haggle Justice for Queen's blood.

ALBERT. T'will be an innocent death on their hands...

WALTER. And where may we cleanse ours? Climbing back to this chamber anon, my thoughts weighted with the countless I've killed, remembered I how on the field, hate-blinded, with but one smooth stroke, I'd send them under- why? To quench a king's lust, an edict signed over tea? And they, poor bastards, only wishing the same for me, as if all men might be transfigured to blood-drinkers, soulless stalking the land. To point us to battle's but needed some monarch with pen in his hand...And for twenty and five, I've kept her here, jailed-though assured I was she committed no crime. If innocence can be prisoned, why not murdered...

ALBERT. Tis you and I imprisoned, for our fate's door has been slammed shut, bolted. With no escape to be found...And to think my days concern was how kindly she'd receive my play.

WALTER. And receive it she shall-

ALBERT. Captain-

WALTER. And your most difficult performance will be to conceal this unwanted new finish.

ALBERT. How can-

WALTER. Listen, boy! If you and I fail to see this through some other slug will. If I placed my own head on the block, it wouldn't save hers. The only benefit through this fog I see, is my aim will be true and no pain will she feel. While she sleeps this night with one sure blow, her soul, wrongly caged all these years, will I set free.

ALBERT. Which murder presses harder on your heart? Mother or Son?

WALTER. Neither, you churl, were bets I placed, still daily I pay. Each day since and ever more, a still small piece of my soul do I lose... (*The bell tolls nightfall from afar.*) Now ready your stage and remember your role- whisper not a word of warning to my lady. If she becomes fearful for but a moment, your suffering will I multiply times tenfold.

QUEEN. Come Moonbe, I will not be kept waiting... (*Moonbe reluctantly appears.*) I find nothing fashionable in tardiness, mistiming a curtain... Parading down the aisle, feigning misfortune... Such a display of ignorance, to allow the ignorant their display... Walter where are you? You promised to illuminate.

WALTER. In the dark I'm putting us, the better for all to see...

QUEEN. A trick I've known for years... well dim your torches. Sir Albert, your audience awaits!

*Albert is behind the stage moving the puppets, Walter is next to the stage and holds a small drum.*

ALBERT. Captain, you may begin. (*Walter is watching the Queen.*) Something troubles you, sir?

WALTER. No, begin we shall!

*He beats the drum clumsily and touches a cymbal on the side. The curtain opens to reveal a puppet that resembles Walter, who begins his narration:*

WALTER. Centuries ago, in a faraway land, lived a simple-minded- (*An add-lib.*) or so t'was thought- gardener, who tended the king's orchards, and provided for his roses, which were the envy of the world. (*Bright flowers sprout on the stage.*)

ALBERT. (*As the puppet.*) No one's blossoms are as colorful, no trees grow sweeter fruit. I have but the God's to thank for bestowing this gift...

WALTER. (*An add-lib.*) Mark how humble he was- yet never lived one more nurturing. At first frost, each bud would he tenderly cover, each trunk would he wrap- it was said he even slept out of doors under his trees and among his blossoms, for he loved them as another would his family.

ALBERT. (*Again as the puppet, about to sleep.*) The king was pleased with his pears, was he not? "My good sir", he said- me a "sir"- "My good sir, your pears have made the Duchess all but annex the south, tomorrow when she has your apples, baked and glazed, all the lands will be ours again...

QUEEN. If 'tis the Duchess of Shrewsbury, she's a soul-seller for poached pears. I myself tallied her swilling a bushel at banquet-

ALBERT. (*As the puppet, but also to stop the interruption.*) So... goodnight my friends! We've much to do tomorrow...

WALTER. Now word of his skill, his unequaled skill- soon spread to the Gods, where it was said he was the favorite of the Harvest Queen, chief rival of the Queen Of Queens. While not uncommon for a gardener to make offerings to the Harvest Queen, she boasted that he was her minion, devoted to her over all other gods and goddesses, and thus had gifted him with powers as a token of her affection. Well, the Queen of Queens was known for her jealousy, honed sharper when aimed at mortal men's affection, and razor edged when pointed at the Harvest Queen who often boasted of her importance to the lower lands.

*Albert performs both Queens, one on each hand. First the Harvest Queen (HQ), then the Queen Of Queens (QQ).*

HQ. His devotion knows no bounds, so I've kissed the tip of his blossoms with every hue imagined.

QQ. Are you not too generous with your graces? Most mortals once favored, tire of service; tempted they remain loyal- surfeited, they lie about swinelazy.

HQ. No favor I spend goes undeserved. More than affection, this man deserves my unfettered desire...

QQ. Then he's as common as the countless others you've squandered with your trinket-vows, for your desire's a tired tune, too many have sung....

*As the Harvest Queen leaves, knowing she's upset her rival:*

HQ. Yet with such pretty notes, the sweet melody lingers, I leave them humming long after the songs over...

QQ. Never you mind, I shall steal to this orchard, for before Harvest's next moon, I will become this gardener's worship. Lord I over all men, and over this waxen wench am I not Queen as well? If I am not possessed of more pleasant feature, I've wisdom's cunning in my camp. Wearing the dress of forest nymph, my aid in this mischief, with skirt to tempt with each swirl, away to this mortal garden I twirl.

WALTER. Once in his garden, she watched, wrapped in the branches of a pear tree, as he tenderly cared for each seedling-

ALBERT. (*As Gardener:*) Do you fear the world as I, little bud? Is that why you stay hidden? Take the gamble, my friend, show your colors! The earth will soon enough re-welcome, but the tempered air, like a sweet maid's affection, is ours but for the lend.

WALTER. And rather than trick him with her charms, she found herself becoming bewitched.

ALBERT. (*As Puppet Queen:*) What conjure makes his magic? 'Tis as if a candle is being held to my blood-

*She leaves the branches of the tree and begins to dance near the gardener who is working in the dirt The Queen slips from her chair almost fainting. Moonbe and Walter rush to help her up.*

QUEEN. I implore your pardon. This fictioned Queen feels light-minded as well. Continue, Sir Albert, I must know if this Gardener ever looks up from his planting...

*The stage begins to slowly rotate, the effect should be slight at first then become dizzying, the point of view of the Queen who is obviously ill.*

WALTER. Take note of her he did, and the spell between them was spun of the same unseen pull that moves stars about the sky or that allows feathers to fly. Put word to it, and a science it becomes- ordinary, a bald Samson. Leave it unburdened by reason and passion has no peer.

ALBERT. (Whispering:) A bald Samson?

WALTER. Now as their romance blossomed the fruits of their affection became apparent, as belly full, the Goddess became, and the first to notice- her rival the Harvest Queen, who wasted not a minute confided her concern to Court. When the King of Kings, rushed from his mistresses bed-chamber, heard of his wife's infidelities, his anger was more for having been

interrupted, 'til told of the impending child, then hot-headed he became, unleashing a plague or two toward the lower lands.

ALBERT. (*As Harvest Queen first, then King*) HQ. Drought sir, a nice drought will teach them not to be so thirsty. And some fat beetles to teach them never to hunger for what's not theirs...

K. I leave it in your hands to punish them, I've work to do. But make sure they suffer, as we all do in knowing you...(*The puppet starts to go, and stops:*) But two plagues only, this time. No need to pile it on...

WALTER. And the land became choked for rain, all the trees withered away, and a cloud of beetles chewed the fields, feasting on all the Gardener's prize roses. Sleepless he became and full of grief and throughout the land, a price put on the head of whoever had offended the Gods, for sure they were that these were punishments. And the Harvest Queen, who's joyful work was near complete, hid nearby waiting 'till the Queen was weakened with childbirth, then sent a too strong wind blowing away her fairy disguise, and t'was then he knew his truest love was damned. And on what should have been a joyful day of birth-

QUEEN. Enough!

WALTER. As his lover slept, he took the child, a son, and went to the river where he washed and bathed, and raising the boy over his head-

QUEEN. I need hear no more!

WALTER. He cried out:

ALBERT. (*As Gardener:*) Please forgive me for what I've done!

QUEEN. (*She stands.*) I said enough!

*The stage stops spinning. Then starts again.*

WALTER. And for what I'm about to do...

ALBERT. (*As himself:*) And for what I'm about to do?

WALTER. For instead of drowning the boy, which he intended, he wrapped him up and left him under a dead tree.

ALBERT. No, why speak you this falsehood? He drowns the child to stop the plague, he must -



WALTER. He lets the child live- (*To the Queen.*) You see? He knows what he should do, but doesn't...

ALBERT. No, Captain -

QUEEN. And so the child lived?

WALTER. Yes...

ALBERT. If the boy lives how do we arrive at calling the gardener "Justice"? The name of the play being "The Origin of Justice". Through his sacrifice do we learn to balance the scale of right and wrong...It's one thing to interrupt the poetry with "Bald Samsons," quite another to rewrite the entire-

QUEEN. The gardener is dubbed "Justice?"

ALBERT. Yes, my Lady. By the Queen of the Gods, who bestows on him the gift of judgment- after forgiving him for slaying their child-

QUEEN. Yet I thought the child lived?

WALTER. Yes!

ALBERT. No-

WALTER. Yes!(*He beats the drum, loudly. The stage stops rotating.*) And thus his name being Mercy, for the gardener raised the child over his head, and looking down at the river below- churning, angry, water slapping rock...Crashing down with cruel force, only to peacefully glide on, t'was then he heard a little laugh, a tiny giggle from being lifted so high- and he stopped, as if aware of it's smallness, it's two pecks weight, for the first time. He lowered the infant down, looking at him, with thoughts rushing over like the rapids below. This child's eyes know nothing of the trouble I've caused. These cheeks, his hair, his tiny hands are not the cause of our misfortune, only the result, the sum of a misguided affection...Change any of the pattern of events and this boy would be christened in this water, not sleeping in it's cold bed ...T'was then, as I gazed down, that the child's smile slowly turned to frown, his little face sensing a fear, and I realized my tears, newly falling, were the cause of his concern. So I kissed him on the forehead, to assure his worry, to stop mine, I know not which... I held him tightly until I could stand no more and into the snow I fell sobbing, still cradling him in my arms.... I knew what I had to do....

ALBERT. Wrap him, blanket warm, and leave him hoping to be found?

WALTER. My lady was fever sick, I had to hurry back or I'd loose her as well...Once she slept soundly, I returned for- you, but you were gone...

ALBERT. (*Searching through a bag of possessions.*) Buried under a drift of snow, supper to a pack of wolves for all you knew...

WALTER. I was too numb with worry....I know what I did lacks reason-

QUEEN. And all these years from me this secret you've kept?

WALTER. Once the boy was gone, I feared I had kept my deadly bargain...

ALBERT.

This is the blanket, that was 'til now both father and mother...

WALTER. And if you turn it over my mark "W.T." will you find there embroidered, for little more can I write... (*The Queen faints again.*) My lady...

ALBERT. I fear I might lose my footing as well...

WALTER. Moonbe, here give her this to drink. (*As she regains consciousness, he goes over to Albert who is sitting on the cot stunned.*) Listen now boy, we haven't much time. (*Albert tries to move away.*) Where would you have been raised? Here with her in this our humble home? Think you our Lord King would have let you live? But enough, I have already been too free of tongue- for torture you they will. Know I loved you with all my heart that day-

ALBERT. Drown me you didn't, abandon me you did...

WALTER. And loved you with each day since, and each to come. You won't listen now, but there may come a time you will.

ALBERT. Surrounded by death's chill and you left me?

WALTER. And again I must leave you, and again I shall...

*He takes the chamber pot, and is about to crack Albert over the head.*

ALBERT. Mean you to murder me again? Am I nothing more than apprentice for your heinous crimes?

WALTER. I mean to murder no one.

ALBERT. How deeply damned may one soul be? Pack me not on your journey to the heart of hell.

QUEEN. Moonbe are they dueling? Never have I understood what this besting of one another in sport provides a man.

ALBERT. There is little sport in deception, your majesty...

QUEEN. On the contrary, deceit 'tis a game we've all played, and those that deny are oft champions. But I've no time today for the tiresome maiden's role of cheer leader-

WALTER. My lady, we've little time...

QUEEN. And now my words repeat-

ALBERT  
Listen to me, your majesty-

WALTER.  
Hear me, my Lady-

ALBERT  
If you believe this man-

WALTER  
By our years of devotion I  
swear-

ALBERT  
As sure as he left me to die-

WALTER.  
And to you I swear, by all that is dear to  
me, never did I mean you harm-

ALBERT. Yet you display your devotion by coming at me, dagger drawn?

QUEEN. Explain your quarrel with- my newly born son?

WALTER. Trust he knows, but will not speak-

ALBERT. Or suffer I shall, the Captain vows. But no harm will he mean, and devoted he will be, even as he cuts out my heart? Will you be so fond with her?

WALTER. I warn you-

ALBERT. To calculate his devotion to you my Lady, figure in the extra wages he'll earn to, by dawn's light, deliver your head or his own.

*Walter is standing over him about to strike a blow*

WALTER. Now most certainly will you pay-

ALBERT. Go ahead, I beg release, for if this be the world I share, I'm better to be rid of it.

QUEEN. Did you spare the infant only to slaughter the man? Mean you to murder a part of me twice?

WALTER. Murder? You entreated me take him away!

QUEEN. And I tell you now let him be. I am your target's eye, let me taste your blows.

WALTER. I mean no harm to either-

QUEEN. Stand you not with weapon in hand?

WALTER. Nothing in this hated world, this coven, where corruption's as necessary as air, would entreat me to injure you.

ALBERT. 'Tis he about to work his witchery, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Claim me no longer with "your Majesty" that title diminishes in value with the years...But restore me with that most reverent of stations, the only title I have ever regretted losing, embrace me as your Mother. (*She opens her arms.*) ... Will you receive me thus?

*Albert begins to slowly walk toward her and as they are about to embrace, Walter hits Albert over the head with the blunt end of his dagger, knocking him out.*

QUEEN. Walter! Have you struck him down?

WALTER. I've little choice and even less time...

QUEEN. You've years left to spend, and each you owe to my son. Is he hurt?

WALTER. Just early to bed, the events of the day a bit too much for him.... (*He is kneeling by her now.*) My dear lady, have you indeed learned to love me after all these years?

QUEEN. Boundlessly...

WALTER. Then for once let my tongue waggle, while you attend... We've only this night to flee, for by daybreak if you are found awake, we both will be sleeping evermore...The boy spoke in earnest- your vile husband has put a price on your head-

QUEEN. Walter 'tis no new discovery- I've known today would be the day...  
And once I heard of your visit below, was I sure.

WALTER. You knew?

QUEEN. Moonbe in secret told me of my husband's "good fortune" days ago, the mumble news having already spread, the jests even started- it takes not even a day for the people to joke of misfortune.. .How many queens does it take for a king to make a baby?

WALTER. Moonbe knew of this days ago?

QUEEN. Yes, and I swore him to secrecy, for I wanted every day I could with you.

WALTER. But we could have fled, we'd have had time!

QUEEN. Where my sweet? Where could Queen and Guard go and not fear? How far? How many would they send after us? You know it would only-

WALTER. Be a matter of time. No matter for you know me well, the son of a gambler- while lives there a chance it's worth the taking. If you weren't such a fool our odds would be fewer...

QUEEN. I fear they are fewer than few...Walter, stop your packing-

WALTER. (*He is gathering a few possessions.*) While there's a ducat to lose stay in the game-

QUEEN. My pocket's are empty-

WALTER. Then lay down your best bluff... Moonbe you dolt, gather my Lady's things before I toss you over the wall for conspiring- move I say!

*Moonbe exits into the chamber.*

QUEEN. (*Resting Albert's head in her lap as she sits in the floor. She is feeling his face tenderly.*) He's of gentle face, and tender skin. And not like most men- changeable as the wind, choosing their direction daily, my son's current runs steady and true, as loyal as any river-

WALTER. Expect you less knowing his seed? My Ladyship, we must depart, and he must remain. For much peril and attention will be drawn by traveling in threes.

QUEEN. Only just this moment were we introduced, and now you beg me leave? I feel my heart needs more time to catch it's breath.

WALTER. T'will be all the more difficult once the night watch has completed their rounds- (*The bells are heard chiming the hour.*) Hear you? Next they'll be listening for the all's well...

QUEEN. And it is... All's well... as it will ever be.

WALTER. You needn't continue your madplay.

QUEEN. Allow me the stage but for a moment longer- and sit here with me. Soft- quarrel not, the act is nearly ended, but a few words to the close. My dear sweet Captain... Is not the shameless fashion of the day to bring the curtain down on a lover's kiss?

WALTER. I feel you're mistaken, 'tis not the night for comedy to be performed, that was another evenings fare.

QUEEN. Pity, I'd prefer it such...I've more taste for mirth. What play's this evening?

WALTER. Tonight we have "The Origin of Justice." Where innocent prisoners are freed- if they hurry- If not "How The Queen and Her Guards Misplaced Their Heads" will soon premiere. Not a popular plot in these parts...

QUEEN. You needn't fear, my sweet, no harm will befall either of you this eve.

WALTER. I wish of that I was as certain.

QUEEN. Let me ease your doubt... Such a simple peace accompanies the absolute, as if all that presses, coiling tightly inside- becomes released, as a rope pulled tightly on both ends, stretching taut, 'till one side let's go, and after so much struggle it falls gently to the floor...

WALTER. I'd love to sit here listening to you mix your metaphors, but my dear we really need to flee.

QUEEN. I will be dead within the hour.

WALTER. If you insist on lying there with the boy, I do not doubt it-

QUEEN. I mean what I say, my love. By the next hours strike, I will be gone.

WALTER. Not true. I mean to save you-

QUEEN. If there was a way, I'm sure you, my devoted guardian, would find it. But not even you can stop these herbs once they've begun their journey. And that was a good while ago now...

WALTER. What have you done? Poison yourself?

QUEEN. Don't be angry-

WALTER. God's Blood, why?

QUEEN. T'was the only way to save you. To save you both....

WALTER. No!

QUEEN. Shhh...My dearest Walter, one cannot fight a king...

WALTER. We can!

QUEEN. I tried, look where I landed-

WALTER. I'll fight him myself-

QUEEN. No, you will do as I ask! If indeed you care.

WALTER. I will have his head, I swear it.

QUEEN. If ever you loved me-

WALTER. I did, and look where it landed me? For the first time in my life, I loved with all my heart...

QUEEN. Then swear me this, that you will remain by my boy's side, with the same devotion you showed me.

WALTER. No world remains for me once you leave it...

QUEEN. I won't be far.

WALTER. (*Referring to the poison.*) You've had your fill and left me nothing to quench my thirst...

QUEEN. Though 'tis my sweetest joy, I really have little time to bicker with you my sweet. Promise me by my boy's side you will always be. (*Walter is*

*speechless.*) Please, you must promise me-*(Walter shakes his head yes. Moonbe appears and drops her bag.)* Is that my dear friend? Walter you must not be angry with my loyal, he only did as I commanded him do. As you would have done, if not so stubborn...Go now, Master Moonbe, you are free of my service. *(Moonbe too tests if there is any poison left. Seeing there is none, he sits on a step unable to leave, wanting to be nearby.)* You know I use to hear them whisper, the Queen knows not even Latin. And it was true. I hated the language, never had a taste for it. But I was Queen, and I needed a few phrases, to convince the clergy, or for the more pompous moments of state, so those I committed. But all these years, like a needle pricking my conscience, the whispers of: Our Lady lacks Latin. She never spoke God's tongue... and it became my talisman, this weight about my neck, representing all I'd never accomplished, all I might have done. Yet lying here, safely cradled in your arms may I say I'm joyful to have never learned the cursed language. Thrilled to not have it filling up my head now with useless thoughts. What use would I have for it now? Though if it be heaven's tongue, I'll be nothing but tourist...

WALTER. Omnis vita es maior summis scientis....

QUEEN. You see, even you can speak-

WALTER. T'was on a shield of the first man I slew. I never forgot it. 'Tis the only phrase I know, other than some curses and lewd remarks.

QUEEN. What does it mean?

WALTER. Something akin to "Each life is more than the sum of it's knowledge".

QUEEN. 'Tis a nice epitaph...But I'd rather have the lewd remarks...

*The "All's Well's" begins to be heard sounding from below, getting closer as each floor responds. Walter is holding the Queen as she slowly loses consciousness, the "All's Well" from just downstairs is heard. She has died. There is silence on the stage. Walter knows he is supposed to respond, but is overcome. Finally, knowing he must, he cries out:*

WALTER. All's well... *( He kisses her forehead.)* And God be with you.

*He is still sitting cradling her in his arms, Albert is lying on the floor in front of them, and Moonbe is sobbing silently stage right, as the lights slowly dim to black.*

**END OF ACT/PLAY ONE**



## ACT/PLAY TWO WHISPERING WALLS

*The set is the same as Act One except the prison seems even more ancient. Some of the walls are chipped in places, one of the torch holders is bent, and a few of the stairs are cracked and broken. The most important change is that stage right, all around Walter's post, a vine-like tree is growing in, of all places, a prison anteroom. It should be very tall and branches should be clinging to the walls of the prison, and the roots of the tree are coming from the base of the wall and floor. As the lights come up, the cell door is open, dead center, and Walter is sitting under the tree, stage right. He is drinking heavily from a flask and carving some initials in the tree. It is fifteen years later.*

WALTER. Not as if you were the first and only to make off with my heart, you know.

ALBERT. (*Speaking to someone else from inside the cell.*) Am I of no more value than that?

WALTER. A man doesn't see as much of the world as I and not know his way about the backside of a town or two.

ALBERT. (*Again, in the cell.*) And what of the words whispered in one another's arms, were they of no more willful chemistry than vapor? (*The bell tolls the hour far away.*) But a minute!

*Albert appears, agitated, as Walter puts away his dagger. Routinely they march the perimeter, Albert even skips a few steps. As they pass their respective hallways, they yell in bored unison: "All's Well! God be with you!" Albert immediately goes back into the cell. Walter continues his carving. The tour appears and gathers around the entire perimeter. The guide stands center and begins to speak:*

TOUR GUIDE. Before we show you the execution chamber, and Courtyard of Death, let me remind you that it was in this cell that for over twenty-five years Queen Alice, wife of Lawrence the First, was imprisoned for her madness. Little is known of Queen Alice, except her condition was so grave at times her screams were said to be heard in the villages some twenty leagues from here. Devoted to her, even as her condition deteriorated, Larry had physician after physician visit her in the hopes of finding a cure. It was, no doubt, from one of them that she received the medicine that she would later swallow, poisoning herself. Legend has it Larry was so grief struck that

his tears caused an apple tree, her favorite fruit, to sprout, growing along these very walls for over a century. Which is why, to this day, some refer to this tower as the "Tower Of The Tree." Still this chamber's fame has more to do with the events of the later part of the same century. And the execution that was to take place, which might have changed our history as we know it. For, follow me please, just below us, in the courtyard outside, would be placed the executioners block. And great parties were held to witness the severing of heads in the square.

*The tour disappears down the stairs.*

WALTER. (*Carving again.*) But here's the worry of it all. A'fore you, affection was all groping and grabbing, sweating and huffing. This is the rub- who's to prepare you for it? I learned to swing a broad sword with the best of 'em, mastered the crossbow as well, but I could have used a bit of schooling in handling you. For years I never wanted much from affection- a good tumble- and a smile when we're through. 'Tis more than me Mother ever gave me Dad. Besides I'm a soldier not some family man- sit me by the fire with my sniveling brats of an evening? I'd sooner drink pizzle. My country was me life and heart, I served my King. Ha! Match that for a jest. Let's toss a-back to country and king, God piss on 'em. Marry, when I fell for my first Queen, 'twas I a might rudimentary in the workings of love? Aye, say I. Love's workings and it's very plausibility, for that matter.

ALBERT. (*From inside.*) Oh, mark that. Think you worthy of such a large reputation. I know it to be not.

WALTER. (*Referring to the carving.*) There, how does she look? I did this with me first dear one back when but a coddle of eight. Who was the first to dance rings with your reason, m'lady? Yet another aspect we never shared.....'Tis all I seem to find these days, the bits I never had a chance to learn of you... I hope your joints creak as mine for that.... No matter, for I had me a pang for this flaxen haired robin who's father'd go gaming with my dad. And we'd scamper off to the woods, when we were supposed to be raking the pig's. And she pull up me shirt and down me jerkin, and set about poking and prodding, and then lie on her back and lift her skirt and all but beg me to do the same, and don't ask me why, but I took a fancy to her. And I use to beg me father to rake out the pig sty. Sometimes two or three times a day...So on a nice big elm near a clearing, we carved our initials. Hers A.R.- Abigail Rogers.....sweet girl...tart that she was. And that afternoon married by a raccoon, who, once spied, was dubbed friar of the forest, and exchanged we our vows hard by. Then after sharing a bit of plum pie I snitched, we sat arm in arm in the tall grass, till the sun fell down.... (*From the cell we hear Albert's voice say: 'Well, 'tis not for my lack of trying, I assure you...'*) I hope all this is making you green with envy-

ALBERT. (*Entering from the cell.*) Oh, it is Captain. You're what, sixty and five, and all you can write would fit on a tree....

WALTER. Did I hear the sound of rat droppings hitting the floor?

ALBERT. You'd not hear an elephant's shitting, as deaf as you've become.

WALTER. Yet the world's not quiet enough, still I hear your snivel and drivel.

ALBERT. 'Tis only cause I shout. Fifteen years of being posted with you, I'm lucky but to have a voice.

WALTER. Rest it please, for the next fifteen. I grant you permission.

ALBERT. My ever-ranking and never-leaving Captain, it's a long while now since I've taken orders from you, and I do not wish to begin again. (*Almost whispering.*) After tomorrow, nor will we e'en be equals, my superiors have assured me-

WALTER. Does this mean, along with the other children, you'll be eating pudding in the square? Celebrating your promotion as the heads roll by?

ALBERT. You know my feelings on the subject-

WALTER. How could that be? Methinks "this silly dodder no longer remembers e'en his own name "...Are those not your words?

ALBERT. What idle patter trouble's you now?

WALTER. Listen, pigeonwit. Never sit you down to cardplay, for your liar's face, transparent as any flirt-gill's bodice, advertises all. Your bluff's as toothless as your courage- and my bite. Think you, after forty years service, I've no reserves to aid me when I'm ambushed? I've caught wind of your confessions below....Spitting your venomous opinion-

ALBERT. When pressed of your performance, when your superiors- and mine- made inquiries, only then did I speak- of a lack of reason, o'ercomes when you've had a taste- which, I freely state but to you, is most of the day, and all of the night...

WALTER. You tried to yank the rug out from under me, not fit for the post said you-

ALBERT. I recommended retirement, only your stepping down, long overdue, with full pension-

WALTER. Bid them take me away from this my post- I'd sooner give over the last of life's breath than hand in uniform and sword.

ALBERT. Barely can you stand, let alone stand watch-

WALTER. Never an escape, nor e'en an attempt, my record clear as an Ethiop's cheek, save the assassin Saxwell years ago....

ALBERT. True nary an attempt to escape, not even to save your own lady, my mother-

WALTER. Ah! Finally we take aim at the heart of the target. Still hold you blame for her deeds o'er my head? Must you, continual as a King's historian, re-paint the past? I'd have risked all for her then and would have succeeded, if not for your fool's show. Distracted by your puppets, 'twas never a chance to help... As for today's falsehoods, save your vain-tempted recommendations for your own retirement-at this post will I remain. And nothing will stop me from seeing this current sentence end full stop,

ALBERT. What is your quarrel with this man? Why struggle you so to see his warrant served?

WALTER. Because you lout, I am a jailer! 'Tis my peg in the game's board! Is it not a jailer's duty to serve sentence? Never confuse my intentions, boy! I care for nothing anymore, 'tis too late in the century for me- my days of want-wishing having passed unrequited long ago. These revolter's barter a new age, I say where's the bargain? Does not our calendar usher it in regardless? But a few more ticks of the centuries clock and once more we become time's newborns. Let them predict and pontificate, I care not. My struggle remains within these walls, to sit under this tree with a nice pint in my hand.... I care more for a dry throat than if your friend is separated from his head. In truth, I'd sooner will them their wish. Have him, his ladyship and all their revolutionary pack o'ertake our sovereign throne, divide up the lands, and give the people, like chirping chicks, some freedom to sup on... Let them try resurrecting the world, they've more hope finding the edge of heaven.

ALBERT. Speak not of our prisoner as my familiar.

PERTWEE. (*Entering from the cell.*) Why, would you deny me? As Peter refused our Lord Savior?

WALTER. That comparison seems most boastful, Sir Pertwee, if not blasphemous- Our Lord's Peter was suspect...'twas being held and questioned.

PERTWEE. (*A jest for his and Albert's enjoyment.*) Let us hope not for turning water into wine...

WALTER. And I trust there is no call for suspicion as our day concludes?

ALBERT. Don't be absurd. I only meant it not prudent to- voice unnecessarily- any connection-

PERTWEE. True, we mustn't lose our heads in all this....

ALBERT. Think you, that is my fear?

PERTWEE. It's most certainly mine.... Call me vain, but I've grown almost attached to my head, and the thought of it tumbling about the courtyard, like some lawn ball, has me a bit aggrieved, I must say...

ALBERT. Don't be so morbid, Reggie....

PERTWEE. It's my execution eve, I'm entitled to a smattering of boneyard humor. I'm frightfully certain 'tis acceptable. Even in the best of circles. Yet we don't have the fashionable to consult for precedent. Not much call for execution etiquette. In France, possibly. The French have such a flair for the dramatic... I hear one viscount even had invitations engraved... I have only my dearest friends disowning me left and right... Who would have thought it so unpopular to be involved with popular rule...

WALTER. As my good lady Queen says-

ALBERT. Said, as she said. Forever do you speak of her in the present as though still with us-

WALTER. She is-

ALBERT. No, Captain Alesbreath, she's gone. Taken from me twice. Once by you in childhood, and then by a King 'tis my shame to be serving still. Why I'm not rid of the both of you is my life's curse...

WALTER. I tell you again, she sits each eve with me in this her tree, taken from the orchard, her favorite spot in all the world. The very tree that sheltered you all those years ago,

ALBERT. Speak no more, your story thrives on your thirst-

PERTWEE. Yet 'tis a tantalizing tale...Like those Persian fables... You, of all people, should appreciate a good story. Have you writ a one in fifteen years?

ALBERT. And you know the cause, vowed I never again to touch pen to paper...

PERTWEE. As should many who labor at it verily...Still, he has managed to get seed to grow from stone...To have the whole county talk of this place as sacred- Never speak of those held in the Tower that sprouted the tree...Those prisoned there never see light of day... We had the whole of this land whispering my name, talking of our plan for self-rule-

ALBERT. 'Til vile Larry had you parceled off here-

PERTWEE. Oh, Pertwee's doomed now, they said, the only way to leave the Tower of the Tree's to be planted in the earth itself. Any wonder, one by one, these last four years, our loyals forgot us.... Yet, I trusted Ann to be right. We mustn't despair. 'Tis a blessing, not a sentence of doom...The first to escape from there would be renown...One the people will never forget.. And so sure was I if any could make the possible from naught, 'twas my Lady Ann...And each time, she's tried your basset hound has stumbled into the way. Who'd have thought this yellowed sack, this cobweb, a match for my wasp of a wife? Look at him, not a clue has he to this day. Four times he has changed history and all we get (*Walter lets out a loud belch.*) is a scratch and a belch for our trouble. Well, ancient, what was it your Tree Queen used to say?

WALTER. I'm not sure I follow.

PERTWEE. You started to quote us. To quip?

WALTER. On what topic?

ALBERT. How should we know. 'twas your thought!

WALTER. Well it's far off now....Like me mother, and me dad...me friend Oswald.....slipping over my memories horizon...(*He drinks and sits under his tree, lost in a sad mood*)

PERTWEE. I wish my father'd been less of a demi-God and more like him. I've a soft heart for the self-loathing... It's a trait worth cultivating....

ALBERT. Where is your good lady "wife"? There's not much day left.

PERTWEE. The sun won't set without her arrival. It wouldn't dare. She's too much stake in my not kissing the block. Her life's work, all her dreams political, rest on these soon-to-be headless shoulders. Poor girl. To be born with all the ambition, the talents of an Alexander, only to be bodiced into one Lady Ann...Still, a marvel of this, or any age, she is-

ALBERT. She smells of garlic.

PERTWEE. Herbs, Albert. Those are herbs, prescribed for congested breath...

ALBERT. And she has all the warmth of a baited bear.

PERTWEE. And twice as dangerous....You have to admire her for that.

ALBERT. Then spend your affections on her, if you so favor-

PERTWEE. Albert, please, I may die tomorrow, I've little time for one of your jealous fishwife fits...

ALBERT. I hate it when you speak of her so sweetly....

PERTWEE. Comparing one's wife to a baited bear, does not constitute "sweet talk." Even setting our unfortunately needful charade of husbandry aside, she has always been my most devoted and trusted friend. Of this you knew even before we....

ALBERT. Go on, I'd be curious to see which euphemism we haul out today.

PERTWEE. E'en before we first "scattered hay."

ALBERT. There, you see! Copulation, 'tis the only name you call it by.

WALTER. Let the man talk of rolling about with his wife, damn you. I'm glad somebody still does. And she's a fair enough girl, a bit too much garlic perhaps...

ALBERT. Whyn't you ever give voice to a more true affection. Speak of the strength of embrace, the care and calm in one another's arms, of the chance to tickle the others spirit on a somber day. The forgive of a sallow mood without reproach, of a hunger to be with one another as if to live but a single day apart-

PERTWEE. Would be to die? Yes, the want to die for another... 'Tis a devotion too few are willing to pay the price for... Rare to my eyes, how about you?

WALTER. One....I knew a one...Gladly would I have stepped right off the top most stair for her...But for obligations....*(He looks at Albert.)* Duties and obligations...'Tis all life is really...Barred by promises we must keep, shackled we are to obligation's wall...

ALBERT. I did my best to have him retired. Understand you, he's a hero to most of them, they look up to him- (*Walter belches again...*) He's made this place famous... T'would be easier to have this wall removed.

PERTWEE. Then like the rusty fixture he is, let him remain...

ALBERT. And suffer ill for your freedom? Catch the blame for an escape I was in aid of? That, you know, I cannot. Gladly would I help you, have I. And yes, Reg, I'd even place my head on the block for you. But we may not involve him.

PERTWEE. Why? You speak volumes of hatred for the man.

ALBERT. Do you not think it possible to despise and not hate? Or to have ambition and desire so vast as to take down a kingdom, but keep honor intact? Or are you no better than our "noble" King, willing to sign your good name, with the blood of those you've spilt?

PERTWEE. Sometimes my sweet, I do believe you see the world as some schoolboy high on a hill... Running your toes through the grass, looking down on a quaint village with a mill, and some farms, wives heading to the river with the wash, and children playing with their friends in some field... A dog barks nearby, and a cool breeze combs your hair... But as you dream, overhead the sky is turning gray, and behind the mill, someone's daughter's accosted, and even the children like to cheat at hide and seek. The world's a darker, dirtier place than it seems from your view.

ALBERT. And your talk of change, of this new age, of each commoner having a tally... This will clean away the dirt?

PERTWEE. In time, yes.

WALTER. 'Tis a simpleton's summation. What good will choice serve in the matter? Ever you try to get two men to agree on a tavern to drink in? 'Tis a man's nature to disagree, 'tis what separates him from the beasts. Keeps him occupied. Never will you see a pig debate the necessity of justice, or goat the equality of tariffs. They are not infected of this curse for opinion. No, takes a man, or two, to quarrel, and either side will swear in the right. Politics is but a pendulum for pedants, swinging to and fro, back and forth-

PERTWEE. Yet there is no forth, only back. 'Til now the pendulum swings only to those with royal blood.

WALTER. Where like some village fool perched high on their wall, they play at master, sitting tall, though we all know they exist in ignorance of it



all. And those of true wealth and power who surround, pick them up and place them back when, belly full of greed, they fall.

PERTWEE. Sentenced to die tomorrow, an ax run through my neck, while one speaks in nursery rhymes, and the other preaches honor and ambition? I tell you the only honor in death's to avoid it.

WALTER. Or, as at the end of a long quarrel, death's a forgiving lover's embrace. Comes a time to put down the struggle and welcome it! Halt, who approaches?*(Lady Pertwee enters hurriedly.)* Good day, Lady Pertwee.

ALBERT. We were just speaking after you.

LADY PERTWEE. And so I heard- *(To Pertwee.)* Love's embrace, we should welcome it-

ALBERT. I was speaking rather of death, and wishing to avoid it.

LADY PERTWEE. If only the perennials in my garden's bed were as steady as you Corporal, for your lack of charm's as consistent as boiled curd.

ALBERT. Your sentiment's not worth the refute, though others might argue, finding me a much needed comfort, a shelter from your stormy sensibility.

LADY PERTWEE. Confuse not my husband's anchoring his barnacled vessel in your convenient dock for a time, for as your powerfully impersonal sex is known to quip poetical: a port's a port, any will do in a storm...

PERTWEE. Mightn't we have more worthy matters to stage than this continual Comedia Francesais?

LADY PERTWEE. Tis you who complicate every plot by uncodding your piece at the first sign of its waking...

ALBERT. You see Reg, copulation. 'Tis all she labels it as well. Recall her, your more reluctant vision. The many vows.

PERTWEE. Not even a lawyer, overpaid as always, would listen to this haggling-

ALBERT. The song, the song you wrote-

PERTWEE. Send for me when the two of you prefer to focus on my head and its remaining on these shoulders. *(He exits.)*

LADY PERTWEE. *(Singing.)* Of you, and only you, I sing...

My words find their voice,  
My song it's tune...

ALBERT. How know you the words?... (*She continues humming.*) The very melody?

LADY PERTWEE. He has writ that song original for at least fifteen that I know of...

ALBERT. A master of miscreation...

LADY PERTWEE. My good husband Pertwee knows abundant loyalty of affection. His friendship never wavers. But of a truer devotion he is incapable. Stunted of heart he was by his grotesque of a father, who blamed him continual for the loss of his mother at birth. Raised I was nearby, I know sir. He has never trusted for true love. Which, like myself, only makes him hunger more for our cause, do not think you may stand in his way. Reginald Pertwee is a name destined for the histories, not tragedy. And you, Corporal, are but a footnote in the tale.

WALTER. I don't know about history, my good lady Ann, but come tomorrow he's destined for the afterworld. Now you are entitled by decree a few more minutes alone-

LADY PERTWEE. By decree, Captain there may be as many to visit as wish to pay their respects-

WALTER. As long as the sun remains unsettled...

LADY PERTWEE. And down these stairs wait his sisters, an aunt, two noblewomen, and his favorite cousins Clara and Constance. Each wishing to have but a moment to pray.

WALTER. Then hurry you, for his door will be shut and bolted at first sign of even song.

LADY PERTWEE. But a moment and I will send for them. I wish to have him make ready. (*She exits into the cell.*)

WALTER. We must keep a steady eye on that one. Like a gravedigger, she never stops plotting. I mistrust her intentions... (*No response from Albert.*) True, she's a woman, of that one should expect. But this one's a fighter... Like my neighbors growing up, the Abigail Rogers, the wife thatches the roof on that cottage.

ALBERT. I feel I've been cast as fortunes fool.

*The stage slowly begins to revolve to reveal the inner chamber.*

WALTER. Not so long as we keep our wits about us- but a day more and this warrant will be served full, as the others- they'll talk through the next five hundred of the guard of the tree, the goaler from who they never dared e'en attempt to walk.

ALBERT. Dared they four times already, and but for your buffoonery would have succeeded.

WALTER. 'Tis you the gape- as accustomed, you speak with leaden logic.

ALBERT. Four months ago was the latest, plotted and planned to the minute, the final step but to tie and bound you. Only you welted over with that rash contagion, so I -or anyone else for the matter, couldn't go near-

WALTER. Ne'er remind me, my skin felt like wasps were eating away.

ALBERT. Their first plan, two years ago, stopped by your wish to seminar those recruits unannounced.

WALTER. I was honored, many wish to visit The Cell Of The Tree. To be instructed... I'm sometimes viewed a celebrity, though from your vantage more a malady-

ALBERT. And twice more the escape was stopped by your walking the night talking to your vision. One plotter ran when he swore he saw her rolling about with you- suckling your breast.

WALTER. Well it had been five or six years... And you finally took your leave allowing me some privacy-

ALBERT. I took my leave to allow Mister Pertwee's escape. Neither of us. Lady Anne, Reg, or myself accounted for your fantasy life, and the vividness of your will to seem it real.

WALTER. There may come a day when you resolve to trust my word.

ALBERT. I trust it real enough to ward off the feeble hearted. "That place is spirited," he cried. She-Demons who accost and then devour any who set foot nearby...

WALTER. I'm sure your good Lady Mother's portrait paints sweeter than She-Demon, though give her the right wine...

ALBERT. The point being Captain Sot, that by tomorrow most certain will another attempt be made.

WALTER. No, your mother and I did spend last eve entwined, while you were in there- *(He stops awkwardly...)*

ALBERT. I speak of escape, not fornication- yet another attempt to flee-

WALTER. Well t'wasn't that what I just said four pages back? To keep our wits-

ALBERT. A Herculean task with you on the watch. Hold! You knew where I was last night.

WALTER. *(Avoiding.)* I think it best not to sleep at all this night, the better for us both to be waiting-

ALBERT. Answer me. Knew you, I was with Sir Pertwee?

WALTER. Well, 'twas either there or rafting the Yhangtze...

ALBERT. Have you known all along?

WALTER. Which means we should each nap afore the sun drops down-

ALBERT. Answer me!

WALTER. They wouldn't dare try and flee now, too difficult-

ALBERT. You knew?

WALTER. Yes. Now, let it rest.

ALBERT. Why never speak a word of it? Why feign ignorance?

WALTER. To say what? I do believe my son's familiar with another man? 'Tis none of my affair.

ALBERT. You'd rather continue your dumbshow?

WALTER. Is there one better suited to play the part?

ALBERT. True enough. *(The lights begin to crossfade.)* What was it you just said?

PERTWEE. (*From inside the chamber.*) But what say, if for arguments sake, I do really love him?

WALTER. I said, let it rest!

*The stage stops rotating. Walter moves off to take a drink. Albert sits. The lights complete their crossfade.*

PERTWEE. I know it pains you Ann. But it might be true regardless.

LADY PERTWEE. No more than a drizzle mars the bracken, bending it a little before soaking clean, the news nourishes me. Husband, long ago I learned to shelter from your devotion, I'd sooner sip from a foul river, than cup my hands and drink of your affection. But do not mistake a few pebbles of amorous hue as a treasure valuable. We are nearer to something immortal, you and I.

PERTWEE. Unfortuned turn of phrase, think you not?

LADY PERTWEE. I speak of a chance to carve our names into the trunk of time, but a few more ticks and it will be our hour-

PERTWEE. But a few ticks more and it'll be my last hour!

LADY PERTWEE. Think you I am feeble enough to allow such an opportunity to fall from my hand?

PERTWEE. Well you've had five years and we've left but a day. And glad I am to hear my life so dearly coined "opportunity."

LADY PERTWEE. Who, but a breath ago, slapped another's affections across my face? And now complains my devotion's lacking?

PERTWEE. Let us not quibble the obvious. Without me, your puppet to mouth the words, your speeches would ne'er be heard. For who would care nine-pence for the policy of women. Even if accidentally helped up on the throne. I exist only as your manly costume, and you have always been my ambitioned heart, transfused in me lies your thirst for success, a hunger never warded me at birth. Yet as I control your crowds, even as you control me, I do feel a taste of it. I know they hear in me some touch of a magic-

LADY PERTWEE. A voice gifted for speech, a power to entice a mob of thousands as if but whispering to one. I've always said but bind us together, and there might live a leader for the ages.

PERTWEE. But bound we will never be, can never be-

LADY PERTWEE. Still you mistake destiny for desire, your mind sits supping somewhere near your girdle. Do as I and exile your emotions, banish them for the poor profit that they reap- take a taste when bored, but mistake it not! Even a beggar will walk past a copper to bend for a jewel. Reg, long ago, lived a girl of fourteen who cried a fortnight, for she knew she'd never win more than a cheek's kiss from her man. But she awoke to a dream with a much greater prize, and of that she will be granted. Quarrel me no longer my reason, I ask not for your heart, but for your hand in agreement- (*She extends hers to Pertwee who slowly offers his.*) and an ear to hear my latest plot. Good. A short while ago, you bemoaned yourself as my manly costume, the time is now to skirt yourself, and become the picture of female manner.

PERTWEE. Am I to understand you want me to attire myself as a lady?

LADY PERTWEE. Down to the petticoat, for I'm sure you'll be searched.

PERTWEE. This is no time for a costume ball Ann, my death's the morning's entertainment.

LADY PERTWEE. Have not many marveled at your impersonages of our sex? Once draped and rouged e'en your own family swore you to be the very likeness of your Cousin Constance?

PERTWEE. I was twelve, Ann.

LADY PERTWEE. No matter, for we both know similar charades have been attempted numerous times since.

PERTWEE. Fault me for a weakness for chiffon, but 'tis no time to quarrel me my fantasies-

LADY PERTWEE. Tis you taking up the quarrel. I offer solutions.

PERTWEE. I find it hard to wager that a resemblance, once perfumed and wigged, to Cousin Connie is the solution to either of our difficulties. 'Tis absurd.

LADY PERTWEE. All the more chance of it's possible success. My good husband, in certain circles where rests your fame? Of what do most claim you a master of?

PERTWEE. I trust you mean while not reclining?

LADY PERTWEE. The few times you manage to keep yourself standing, in every sense of the word, yes.

PERTWEE. I had no idea you so valued my skills.

LADY PERTWEE. Never more than this day, for in truth it has always aggrieved me that once draped, in most gowns, you were the fairer.

PERTWEE. But a pairs of leggings, and you're the unquestioned victor.

LADY PERTWEE. May we return to more useful skills? Each of the women below are clothed with an extra layer, the last told to impersonate Cozine. Constance wears a raven-black wig. So once gathered here they all mourn your fate, your much improved Cousin will take her place, and in a state of great sorrow, say her last good-byes, leaving me to vow my now vanished husband how, all through the night, I will intercede on his behalf. To this empty cell, will I bid a grief-stricken good night, whereupon closing the door gives us 'til dawn to flee in a waiting boat for the coast. What say you?

PERTWEE. 'Tis certainly one of your more liberal schemes...

LADY PERTWEE. I was up reading Charlemagne's philosophies of statehood, and he spoke of the need to always mark one's wealths or strengths. So I pondered if pressed what be Reginald's sweetest ass-sets. *(She pats him playfully on the bottom.)*

PERTWEE. What about Albert? How do we keep him once you've departed from trying to see me?

LADY PERTWEE. You must take up a grave quarrel with him.

PERTWEE. No difficulty will I have in that...

LADY PERTWEE. I've a plan for it too- left I nothing undiscovered...*(She begins to whisper to Pertwee as the lights start to crossfade to Walter. The Queen appears in the tree above. She drops an apple in Walter's lap.)* Now what say you?

PERTWEE. I say bring on the ladies!

*The lights are now fully up on the Queen.*

QUEEN. Halt! Who goes there?

WALTER. The Keys.

QUEEN. Who's keys?

WALTER. Stupidity's, Captain Pea-wit's. With head less apt than that of a lettuce.

QUEEN. No need to overstate the obvious-

WALTER. Give me a situation to err in, the more critical the better, then step back and watch as with unwavering grace, I make a muck of it!

QUEEN. Forgive me for peeping at your life's keyhole, dear Walter, for e'en with an eternity of opportunities, ghosting is more tedious than one might imagine.

ALBERT. Captain, I entreat you- Why did you, but a moment ago, call me as if by name your son?

QUEEN. My question precisely, I heard you claim what was mine as yours.

WALTER. Both of you trouble me not. If I say "look, there sits your Queen Mother" would you not say "'tis the ale speaking?" Very well. Why worry for the translation of thoughts drowned long ago, lost in the seas off the isle of Sack.

ALBERT. You, yourself, vowed this drunk an act, a ruse to ward off truth-

WALTER. Wrong again, boy! Sobers the game of truth dodging, but toss a few back and there's no need for veils. Once lightwitted, honesty drops her scarves and like the temptress she is, dances freely.

ALBERT. Enough! (*He takes Walter's bottle.*) Now we'll see how far your tongue will travel to quench its thirst.

WALTER. Give me!

ALBERT. We'll both drink once, with sincerity, she dances. And this time full-fleshed will she spot her twirls.

WALTER. Trouble me no more, I tell you-

ALBERT. (*Starting to pour out the ale onto the floor.*) Then this will be of little use to either of us-

WALTER. Stop, you jape! I take great pains to smuggle that in!

ALBERT. Breeches of procedure should not be tolerated-



WALTER. Damn you, stop- 'Tis not I fornicating with prisoners-

ALBERT. You've had occasion.

WALTER. And was in love with her.

ALBERT. And died she of it.

WALTER. Pox on you, of that I will no longer quibble. 'Twas, in every manner, different.

ALBERT. No different is my love-

WALTER. Listen to the fool- how can you compare my affection with the coupling of man with man. 'Tis not e'en normal-

ALBERT. You asshead- you rape a girl and call it love!

WALTER. *(He slaps Albert.)* Shut your mouth, boy!

ALBERT. *(Throws the bottle to the ground.)* Now you sot, lick the ground 'tis where you belong.

WALTER. I should have dropped you in that icy river long ago-

ALBERT. No matter, for my heart froze long ago, under a tree waiting for my true father to find me!

*He crosses to the other side of the prison*

QUEEN. *(After a pause.)* Come here, you blowhard, and sit with me awhile...

WALTER. You see, he's broken my bottle...

QUEEN. Seems to me you've had quite a taste today already...

WALTER. No, I feel sad hearted still. Enough is when a hole in my reason replaces the emptiness burrowed about my breast. Each day from this tower I must escape the want of you.

QUEEN. *(She kisses his forehead.)* Is he our boy?

WALTER. Yes, needle me no longer, 'tis true.

QUEEN. How know you it to be so?

WALTER. I was there at the time-

QUEEN. Past chance to hone your wit's blade, dear one, like the rest of you, it's rusted dull.

WALTER. Have I ever told you what a comfort you are to me?

QUEEN. Still, how know you of your lineage he must be-

WALTER. Do you promise not to anger of me?

QUEEN. 'Tis like vowing the clergy to be true.

WALTER. Forgive me, but no others would I allow to take part that night long ago. Forced as I was to participate, I wanted no one but I to touch you. And fought them away as they dared attempt. It seemed if 'twas my fate to wrong you, then my life's act would be to right that wrong.

QUEEN. *(After a pause.)* So you knew the child was yours?

WALTER. Yes. And when I saw his eyes I was all the more certain.

ALBERT. *(Eavesdropping out of view. To himself.)* Yet...

QUEEN. Then why keep the news from me? Why let me kill what we both might have loved?

ALBERT. My very question.

WALTER. I was your jailer, you were not yet my Lady. Of a dearer affection I had not become. We both know a child discovered, even fathered by the Lord above meant your death. Foolish I was, thought I could give him to others and visit on leave... But nothing was there, not even the blanket. My life was from that day, and ever still, but a collection of choices regretted.

QUEEN. And I am to be included among your regrets?

WALTER. In a manner my greatest....

ALBERT. *(Coming forward.)* Lives anywhere truth in this fantasy?

WALTER. You ear-cup! Can you e're be trusted?

ALBERT. Mark this! The father, who abandons his own, begs for trust?

WALTER. And how will son betray his father today? Will it be bound and gagged, pushed to retire? Or now that the hours grow few in number, does the ante raise higher?

LADY PERTWEE. (*Re-entering from the cell.*) Good Captain Trumble, I've Master Pertwee's permission to allow those below to attend him.

WALTER. And out every last one will be at first sign of the sun's retire.

LADY PERTWEE. Please take account they might not with the most civil of manner acquit themselves, given the gravity of emotion.

WALTER. (*Ignoring her sarcasm.*) I figure that gives them about five ticks each, if they hurry.

LADY PERTWEE. Your empathy is duly noted.

*She exits to escort them up. Albert has crossed into the cell.*

ALBERT. You will never believe the latest knot he's tied in my wits rope.

PERTWEE. You'll forgive the need to interrupt your woe, dearheart, for we are fast approaching the half day mark of my existence. (*Albert tries to interrupt.*) Please, attend me, Albert. For she has the most beauteous of schemes hatched. At sunrise, as you march me past the last gate and into the courtyard, Lady Ann has arraigned for a wagon. Four men will jump those who take me from you and while the old sot is reading my warrant, they will pretend to spirit me away in the wagon northward, while I will in secret make off on horseback due south. It will happen in plain view of all to see, and neither you nor your Captain will suffer harm for it.

ALBERT. He now claims to be my father, Reg.

PERTWEE. What?

ALBERT. I o'erheard him conversing with his Spirit-Queen. Confessing parentage.

PERTWEE. Albert, the man holds discourse with the four walls. He spends more time in his mind's world than in ours, and you wish to take for gospel his opinion?

ALBERT. But if she truly lives for him, why deem it false?

PERTWEE. So if the lunatic speaks Latin, we should label him a scholar? Why search you for logic in a land where there is none?

ALBERT. Do you have any honest affection for me Reg?

PERTWEE. Albert, no more of that. We've graver matters to dig our way out of.

ALBERT. Oh that I might once notice the writing before the wall topples o'er me. For I did truly hope to love you.

PERTWEE. And I you. But it seems without these prison walls and four hundred forty steps it becomes improbable. We are to them but Satan's minions, with our own rung in hell reserved. But show me an age and land where you may greet me with open heart, free of worry, I'll embrace you there. *(Albert starts to protest. Pertwee stops him.)* Remember the plan. It begins at the last gate. Mark you, I tell you this now to aid in your prepare. So no harm will come to you in the struggle.

ALBERT. No, you tell me this now to stop me from taking part in the struggle. For we both know, if they quarrel with me, your plan would fail... I'm relieved your rabid wife has sniffed a way out for you. I only hope it successful. There will be many others to block your way.

PERTWEE. True. But my last hope is Ann. And hers that I live. Which nourishes me, strengthening my faith to rival a saints.

ALBERT. Need I do more than fail to put up a fight?

PERTWEE. No, she has arraigned the rest.

ALBERT. Then I will leave you to your mournful visits.

PERTWEE. Albert-- when all is well, I will send for you.

ALBERT. No, please. Restrain yourself. Save your embrace. T'will be another age, another place.

*The lights crossfade to Walter and the Queen.*

WALTER. I had a cur, a sour smelling mongrel, affectionately pegged Wort, with a curved tail that would straighten to a wag when content. His capacity for joy was astounding, as if the puzzle's solving was but a next meal and a place to rest his head.

QUEEN. He was a dog, my dear- I doubt the pressing matters of state much concerned him.

WALTER. The very focus of my envy. A scratch of the back, to him unexpected ecstasy- two scraps of mutton, unfettered joy. As simple a gift as a morning's stretch and yawn, a shake of the head, 'twas a new day's dawn. Even old and gray and long ago toothless, he'd still send his tail out and back, to and fro. And the day he died, sickly and feeble of step, lying there eyes clouded to all but a pat on the head, I remember as I touched him, how continual, yet now somewhat slower- more as the tide than as rapid, did his tail ebb and flow. 'Till it finally came to rest and I knew Wort was gone....With one heavenly jest, his tail curled itself up, like so, never to wag again... I labor of this when the world's weight begins to press on me. I think of that cur-tail, absurdly bent, then ridiculously erect, relentlessly beating to and fro- as acute a métier for calm as the finest captain's compass, and I wish for such a simpleness of purpose, such capacity for contentment.

QUEEN. You brought me such a joy. And there was a time, I'm most certain, when I had influence to bring your tail to a wag.

WALTER. I wish it to be like that. Was it for you?

QUEEN. Did I not just say it so?

WALTER. No, your final moments. Were they peaceful?

QUEEN. I was cradled in my love's arms, the only finer would be immortality.

WALTER. What have you now, hounding me all these years?

QUEEN. This is but a heartbeat, a few deep breaths in the race-

WALTER. And I weary of the competing. My sprinting days long past, and my wind not what it used to be... I think it my place to forfeit the game.

QUEEN. You'll have knowledge of when to quit, and little worry. Finish or not, we all end up crossing the line.

WALTER. Enough, like some cross country trainer will you vex me 'till the end?

QUEEN. 'Tis you that will me present, wish me gone and vexed or not, I vanish.

WALTER. Will you? Then I will you to bring me a pint for my troubles. Or a warning when inspection sneaks in.

QUEEN. I may not influence the sport, my dear, only watch on and cheer. That is my gift- but allowed to be near.

WALTER. Yet I'm in need of aid. I know that "sweet-as-a-salted-wound" Ann will not rest 'til her Pertwee is freed. The black-fog of plotting thickens from all sides.

ALBERT. Captain, I must a word with you.

WALTER. But a moment. Mark you, I'm busy. (*To the Queen.*) You see, more scheming. The boy's servanted himself to our Pertwee, and his Lady Ann grows horn-mad. And now add to escape three pinches of cuckold's currant, and we've the recipe for this pot's over-boiling.

QUEEN. So, he's confessed his love?

WALTER. Of course. But I've known of it- why label it love, this rump-fed revelry? This rudish rolling about 'tis more convenience than caring. 'Tis common in campaigns overseas, sequester a man from wenching and wayward he will stray. Our boy's been locked away most his rut-time, even the most kindly pup, once caged, will bite.

QUEEN. And yet if he truly loves, then what? Would you take umbrage with those who question the coupling of Queen and common guardsman?

WALTER. Save to join in their cries of doomed and ill-fated. And less plausible still's this merger of would-be King and guardsman.

ALBERT. Allow me to buy into your single sided debate, for if my perversion's the mered question, methinks a few dull parts are in need of shine. Do not confuse my coupling with this prisoner as coincidence, for my being locked away, has no more effect as the others of the same sex I've embraced before standing my guard here. And why speak of my affection for this man as some miscarriage, some affliction of a feverish humor, for is not all love a kind of falling-sickness? When one loves, all reason is prisoner, all wit chambered. There exists a world outside the walls of infatuation, faraway we may see it rain. We note the seasons of cold and the night becoming day, but no matter. When one is fortun'd to be spotted with kisses, blessed of the skimble-skamble speech, contagined with impassioned seizures, sighs of unrestrained joy- do not seek to cure of him an ill. Drink celebrations with him that no remedy will be found, hopeful the blessed affliction might never fade.

WALTER. 'Tis no matter to me the why or with whom your poking stick stiffens the pleat. And 'tis you who diagnose it diseased, not I. I have no opinion on the symptoms, save when it sickens you to infect me as a

consequence. If to rescue your master-mistress means you to quarrel me my dutiful life, then I will take issue with you and end the need to quibble.

ALBERT. I feel there is no need to end what has already ceased of its own will.

WALTER. You mean to say that this perfect and "unblemished devotion" has died?

ALBERT. No my devotion like some headless chicken refusing to give over, still runs about the field-

WALTER. And your devoted? Mean you to have him unbeaked as well?

ALBERT. (*After a pause.*) He and his ladyship plan otherwise.

WALTER. (*Sarcastically.*) No, you cannot speak truly? This comes to me with more surprise than if I will live to see the other side of this night's events.

ALBERT. As is your custom, I've lost you. Slipped you have, from my reasons fingers.

WALTER. No matter. I have, as I do with any Mathematics, full knowledge and little care of the plan.

ALBERT. You know?

WALTER. Of course any duckbill could make wind of it. My Ladyship and I were just patching together the clues, when you so gratuitously interceded. She is my right hand in such matters, (*to needle her*) mangled as it may be, more a hindrance than aid, one that ought to be lopped off, but for vanities sake, I keep her nearby.

ALBERT. What do you know of their plan?

WALTER. First, how do I know you're to be trusted?

ALBERT. I am, to be honest, not sure.

WALTER. You wish to see this man live.

ALBERT. I do not wish him to die.

WALTER. Then one must have the other, the coin has but two sides. For certain as you allow him breath, means he to steal away your own.

ALBERT. They claim it need not be true, but true I know it to be so.

WALTER. How claim they? Have they unveiled their plan to you?

ALBERT. In part.

WALTER. I'm sure it matches what we've already sketched. But for curiosities sake, allow me to compare.

ALBERT. How know I that you may be trusted?

WALTER. For sooth, we both do not. For a moment ago, I was decided to go down fighting, but I begin to see a more valued choice. One that glimmers, a faint mirage, a far off chalice in the sand. (*He looks first at the Queen, then back to Albert.*) Do you in fact love this man?

ALBERT. I did yes. As never before believed possible. Even still.

WALTER. And your want is to save him, even at risk of your own peril.

ALBERT. Even as I break my honor's code, and every rule of reason, I would again- yes. As you must have felt those many years ago, so feel I now. T'would be too cruel a tale to author my own affection's end.

WALTER. Where's the worry, then, I say. We've both been awanting to crack the royal egg-king in two for more than a baker's dozen. After old King Larry's great fall, for this would certainly tumble him down from the wall, I know two, if not all, of the King's men, wouldn't wish him back together again. I give me left teet for a drink. And for that I will never forgive. But this? If 'tis your wish to step aside, my weapon too will I lay down. For feverish I feel of a sudden, and the time to retire fast approaching. Yet on my terms, at the hour chosen by my hand. And this very minute seems right by me- (*He takes off his dagger.*) for my greatest cause, dear son, is the strong desire to never again do you wrong. I've spent the good part of a life damming your river on its false course, I now open the gates. Let it flow freely and true.

ALBERT. Mean you to let them steal away?

WALTER. If 'tis your wish. I see no confusion, for barely can I stand, yet alone stand watch.

ALBERT. Captain, t'would mean us both harm.



WALTER. Every chapter begs completing, no need to labor the finish. My story suffered once for lack of an edit, even now it cries out for a close. (*He looks at the Queen*) 'Tis all but a fatal accompli...

*She smiles and blows him a kiss and is gone.*

ALBERT. How can one man's pester be greater than a whole swarm of bees? If only you'd have left before the night's events.

WALTER. This day's deeds, as a fire from a kiln, have hardened me of purpose.

ALBERT. Still I cannot doom you as I damn myself.

WALTER. My boy, 'tis too late, for this pot, cracked and glazen o'er, this old lump of clay's been cast. (*They begin to hear the others coming.*) Quarrel me no longer for the she-witch and her coven fast approaches.

ALBERT. How are we to act?

WALTER. With the same grace and devotion as before the merger. (*The Ladies are just off-stage and the lights on the cell are dimming.*) You cudgel, stand by your post and trouble me not. I'd sooner kiss hell's harem than be companied of you another day. As soon as this know-it-all's head divines the great question, by it's first bounce, I will pell-mell to relinquish this post. The cock's crow will herald the age of my retirement.

*The lights on the guards have faded to black as the clock's bell tolls sundown. The tour-guide enters with mostly a group of women, possibly nuns, possibly college girls. She asks them to hurry, and they move from the stairs into the anteroom. The lights start to go back up as the guide moves center, and we see Walter and Albert stationed at their posts.*

TOUR GUIDE. So it was again here in this chamber that the only recorded escape from the tower was ever completed. The very night before he was to be executed, Reginald Pertwee, and his beloved Lady Anne pulled off one of the most unlikely charades in history. Dressed as one of the lady mourners gathered to pay their last respects, the prisoner Pertwee was secreted from this very cell- (*Pertwee appears in full costume and makeup as Constance. He should be extremely convincing and not comical in the least.*) In full view, he made his way through this room and down these stairs, fooling every last one of the King's guards.

ALBERT. You there! A word with you.

WALTER. Let her pass, Corporal. The last drowned you so with her mock tears, methought I'd have to save you from drowning in her river.

ALBERT. I say hold, good lady!

TOUR GUIDE. It was the custom to allow any who wished to pay their respects, a visit with the condemned. So Lady Anne had the room filled with, for the most part, ladies, since the more that filled the room, the easier it would be to sneak her petticoated husband by. noblewomen, friends, cousins-

ALBERT. Are you not what remains of the famed cousins- Clara, having departed, this but leaves Constance to call you by.

*Pertwee nods, afraid to speak.*

WALTER. This one's the fairer, to be sure. But what's your wish with her?

ALBERT. Your good sister, but two steps from that chamber, solicited her services, inquiring of my next leave.

WALTER. That's a juicy one-

ALBERT. Seems she's a part of a nice shop two towns over, one that stays open a good part of the night. *(To Walter.)* Told me she'd given you your ducats worth, once or twice.

WALTER. *(An apple drops on his head.)* Ow! 'Twas only so's to have a yardstick for compare. Greater is the appreciation of sweet pudding after a bit of sour tart. *(Another apple falls.)* Harvest your crop elsewhere! Methought I made memory of her previous. Certainly her dewy scent.

ALBERT. So, how now, Cousin? Have you been prodded by this crooked cudgel as well?

WALTER. You needn't bother displaying your wares for my boy here. He shops at another market. The back basement side of town. *(He crosses to the cell door, leaving Albert.)* Is that the last of them Sweet-good-hearted Anne? The hour is past due!

ALBERT. You must pardon my Captain's base manner. Comes from spending half a life over seas, and the other half under the influence. My need to query you Miss, stems but from a desire to prevent an injustice and no other, for we have good cause to believe your "friend" Pertwee- can it be? Heavens and angels above, hold me steady. For if what I am seeing holds true, I feel I may loose all reason.

TOUR GUIDE. (*She is pointing to the wrong side of the stage, the tree being rooted to the other.*) If you look rather closely here, you may just be able to make out what is believed to be a hole, where it is said the trunk of the fabled tree might have sprouted from the wall. Now, don't snicker there, you. Have we all not come across moments where what was true was stranger than any fiction.

ALBERT. (*To Pertwee.*) Even your deception turns out to be deceitful. Could you not have trusted in me the much to let you go?

WALTER. Still at this one, are you? If I had no more sense than you endow me, I'd think you fancy her.

ALBERT. Odd you should say that, Father. I may speak of you such, now may I not?

WALTER. If the urge overcomes you, but make no habit of it.

ALBERT. You see Father, this good lady here, if I could but meet one of this very metal- I feel 'tis possible, even I, might see my way to love her.

WALTER. Hear you? 'Tis just what I told your never listening nor leaving mother, 'twas but a matter of confinement.

ALBERT. She is all I'd ever wish for...all I want.

WALTER. Now, don't make foppish promise of yourself, we've no knowledge of her heritage.

ALBERT. No matter...

WALTER. If she's no better than her twin cousin, the wastrel I've wench'd, let us not be hasty!

ALBERT. Yes, t'would be (dare I say) wise, father. 'Tis sound enough advice. Good Lady, forgive me. I've stolen too much of your time, but may I entreat you but to part with this, to remember me on? (*He kisses him on the lips.*)

WALTER. You see, he's a Trumble, through and through.

ALBERT. Farewell. (*Pertwee runs off. Albert follows and calls after him.*) When all is well, Good Lady, I will send for you.

WALTER. Come boy, bring your thoughts back up from your waist. (*To himself.*) I may have preferred him perverse.

TOUR GUIDE. Now ladies you'll be interested in this. For without his brave wife Anne, Pertwee, would have never escaped, for it was her that kept the game alive until her husband was safely below, waiting at the next town on horseback. She had one last trump card in her plan to play, and cool as a cucumber she sat in this very cell, with the door shut just about so, disguising her voice, and began to have a conversation with herself, playing both roles, pretending to quell her husband's fears, promising to work all through the night for his release.

WALTER. Oh listen to her now, piling it on as if she believes it to be his last hour. The false finch!

ALBERT. Captain?

WALTER. My rank's no longer bound by blood?

ALBERT. No matter, Captain, Father, Goatherd, I care not! My wit has lost all degree of sound sense.

WALTER. 'Twas just a wench, you feverfool. They are as common as the lace-weed growing by the road.

ALBERT. Has the riddle been written that ever you could solve?

WALTER. No need to take umbrage-

ALBERT. 'Twas Reginald skirted in that gown just then. Reginald Pertwee. He's made off with the pack of hens, to some waiting wagon, I'm sure.

WALTER. The wench you coupled but a moment ago? Was our manly charge?

ALBERT. If my eyes were deceived, my lips are certain of the taste-

WALTER. Enough! Then who is she inside conversing with?

ALBERT. Herself, I would wager. As I and any performer knows, fooling the audience is easier than it might seem.

WALTER. And what of your "morning's plot"?

ALBERT. A thicker web, spun the better to catch us both.

WALTER. We must yell the word. I'm sure they've not touched courtyard.

ALBERT. Captain!

WALTER. You ass, if t'were certain, then why did you not say the word? I'd have cut the very lace from his- (*It begins to sink in.*) You knew...

ALBERT. Yes.

WALTER. And let him go.

ALBERT. Yes.

WALTER. And, I fear, would still wish him go.

ALBERT. Yes...

WALTER. I suppose it does little to change your thinking to remind you he lied twice over, false on top of false.

ALBERT. True enough.

WALTER. And but to yell the word might avenge-

ALBERT. Have we not agreed on escape? We have but turned the clock over somewhat sooner, no more. Ignorant of the crime, we were never, only the occasion t'would be committed.

TOUR GUIDE. While inside she gave speech after speech of impassioned love, how she was sure she might be able to save him. Imagine, it might have sounded a little like this:

"Do not fear this night, good husband. Try to rest now."

"I cannot rest, knowing this may be my last. What good is sleep? What care I if I'm tired tomorrow. If I'm to lose my head, I'd rather sleep through the deed than be wide awake!"

WALTER. Still, she performs, the weasel. This one would gnaw her own foot to save her pups. Well, if we are duped and no longer life's victors, I see no need in prolonging the celebration. Out I say, before I lock you away with the man, and have a bargain chopping, two heads in one morn.

TOUR GUIDE. "I must go now, dear sir. But by morning's light, I will arrive with news of your pardon, of this I newly swear." And with that she might have even feigned a goodnight kiss-

WALTER. Out I say. 'Tis long past the sunset of my day's content.

TOUR GUIDE. And emerged grief-stricken, continuing her mournful march from the room, knowing full well what she left was an empty chamber.

WALTER. As authentic as a jeweler's gilded tooth, you'd swear her tears to be truly salted.

ALBERT. She'd have made a fortune on the Italian stage with this alacrity for the tragedies.

TOUR GUIDE. And thus completed one of the most significant events in our history. For if Reginald Pertwee had not been saved by the cleverness of his lady, our society today, might be quite different.

*The bell tolls the hour below, signaling the need for the All's Well.*

WALTER. Shall we?

ALBERT. 'Tis our duty, is it not? I see no difference than if we were to battle, certain we might not live the day through.

*They begin to march the perimeter*

TOUR GUIDE. Think about it for a moment now. If the escape from this cell, had failed, we might still be living in a monarchy, answering to absolute rule, the servants of an authority over which we had no control.

*An All's Well" is heard from below.*

WALTER. Funny, I recall how the morning of battle we used to cross ourselves and say "I hope the worms are hungry, I'd hate to die in vain."

*And"God be with you".*

TOUR GUIDE. How the events of that night, at the close of a century so long ago, have no doubt touched each and every one of us-

*Another"All's Well".*

WALTER. And by my last battle, though I suppose you might argue this to be the final- no matter, by the end of my fighting youth, I'd be hard pressed to divine one campaign from the next. If I lived to see the sun go down or not-

*"God be with you."*

WALTER. No matter, t'would set all the same.

TOUR GUIDE. And so we continue our tour outside near the gate, if you will all follow me.

*The tourists begin to leave. Two linger back, perhaps the only men in the group, perhaps lovers, just long enough to exchange a final glance. The guards have reached center and as they cross past one another cry out with no trace of irony: "All's Well!" and as they take their post, they both respond without even a glance "God be with us." instead of "God be with you."*

TOURIST. They must have felt the fool, don't you think?

2ND TOURIST. Who?

TOURIST. The ones responsible for guarding him.

2ND TOURIST. Ah, hadn't thought of them.

TOURIST. Makes you wonder.

2ND TOURIST. Nah, probably half a brain between the lot of 'em. Not exactly a challenging career. What do you do for a living? I guard things. Watch over them. Make sure nothing much happens.

TOURIST. Oh, and rootin' out tooth decay, and fitting false teeth's a bloody excitement?

2nd TOURIST. Listen don't knock it. As my dear mother used to say- in fact her dying words- were pay the rent, be good to your own, and the rest, as they say, is history...

*The tourists are gone. Leaving the guards standing tall in front of the empty cell. It is quiet for a beat. They look at each other, then ahead. And the lights fade to black.*

**END OF PLAY**

**INCOMMUNICADO**



## Incommunicado

### Cast Of Characters:

Joli Gibson      a young black woman from Wales, originally from  
the Caribbean

Jaz Gibson-      her identical twin sister.

*The action of the play is continuous the use of masks (part of the girls love of role playing) is integral to the action in the first act. Projections or slides can be implemented as budgets allow. We are in Joli's mind; however, so realism and actual set pieces shouldn't be an issue. Use abstract movable objects that can be utilized over and over.*

For Woodie King Jr.  
Who believed in me as he did so many others

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## Act One

*The Caribbean Island children's song "Brown Girl In The Ring" is playing and fades as the lights come up on a young Afro-Caribbean woman, who appears to be in her late twenties or early thirties. She looks at the audience very tentatively and finally begins to speak.*

JOLI. Hello. If you only knew how-- terrifying it is for me to do that. Just to...even say...hello. *(Takes a deep breath.)* Christ, you should feel my heart. It's flitting like a hummingbird's must. Thump-a-ta, thump-a-ta, thump-a-ta. My palms are so clammy and cold. Got frogs for hands, or so I've been told. The doctors say there'll come a day it'll be so easy. A reflex thing. Actually why I'm talking with you today. Others do it without so much as a thought; I'm sure most of you. "Good Day. How are you? Bloody awful weather, eh?" Nothing much, a little conversation. Chin wag. Communication. All right, then. Not so bad. *(A deeper breath.)* The most important thing I wanted to tell you- rehearsed even- was whatever you wish on, the secret things you dream of, long for- call them what you will, fantasies, fears, whatever. The things we've tucked off deep in the conscious, where none may find them. I implore you- these secrets: cherish them. Treat each as a priceless treasure. For they are the gems of a most private estate. If you doubt me in the least, think of the quiet days, the very ones when long ago loves, or deep seeded hates are spread about your bed and sorted through. Like a collection, you see, we take them and hide them away, lock them off in a sort of safety deposit box of the soul. Am I making a muck up of this, trying to explain? Maybe this'll work. People often say, "I loved him so there were no secrets between us, we shared all." But don't believe them. 'Cause sharing all is not about trust, or fondness. It's about torture. Only those who are held captive, under pain of death, reveal all. Of this one thing, take it as gospel. There is nothing more precious, more valuable than privacy. I know, for I never once had it myself. My sister shared my every secret. Each and every last one. For how else can you explain that she often knew bits of me I'm not sure I knew myself. Or why at times we spoke words from separate mouths and yet the same sentence. Oh, I hear you now saying, "that's not uncommon. Lovers often feel that way, families, even friends." And certainly twins. Twins above all others feel such a bond. They used to put us to death right after birth, you know. The devil's own, not to be trusted. Well, I've no trouble understanding that one now, thank you very much. I am speaking of a closeness that went well beyond kinship- beyond all reason. I can only put it to you like this, there were times that I honestly felt her madness, like some fever or virus, tangible, fighting to become my own. You see, to begin to understand us you must know, all our lives, my most inner need, my deepest longing was simply to be-

*Another Afro-Caribbean woman, identical in appearance to the first, appears in another pool of light.*

JAZ. Alone.

JOLI. I'd never known solitude, such a simple thing, mind you. What it felt to be-

JAZ. She'll chew your ear off with that one forever, if you let her.

JOLI. Certainly moments here and there.

JAZ. Not as if I followed her to the bog.

JOLI. And once they even separated us.

JAZ. The truth of the matter is without me, she'd never exist.

JOLI. We were born just moments apart.

JAZ. (*Quickly*)I was first, mind you!

JOLI.  
They say the only times one can count  
solitude, no worry of interruption-

JAZ.  
And if she'd never appeared, on  
if she'd simply refused to  
follow me out-

JOLI.  
Absolute peace and calm- the only two  
the grave and the womb.

JAZ.  
If I'd been born without times are  
her clinging to me  
Grabbing hold a me- not  
wanting to let go.

JOLI.  
All else is-

JAZ.  
Would I have known  
this-

TOGETHER. Chaos.

JAZ. You see, she'll say it was her idea.

JOLI. And she'll tell you it was all her doing.

JAZ. And actually-

JOLI. If you must know-

JAZ. The truth of the matter is-

TOGETHER. I honestly can't remember.

TOGETHER. Neither of us can.

JAZ. We played together-

JOLI. Learned to walk together-

JAZ. Shared the same cot, we did.

JOLI. So it was the natural course for us to learn to talk together-

JAZ. And then, more importantly, to not talk together.

TOGETHER. (*A beat.*) Incommunicado.

*They begin a childlike ritual like Paddy-Cake during this.*

TOGETHER. (*Whispering.*) To deny communication.

TOGETHER. (*Whispering.*) As in solitary confinement.

JAZ. Silence-

JOLI. Became-

TOGETHER. (*Whispering.*) Our victory.

JAZ. So somehow-

JOLI. At some point in time-

JAZ. We decided to keep ourselves to ourselves.

*They begin to walk about the stage in perfect time with each other.*

JOLI. Maybe it was all the moving about. Dad was in the forces, you see,  
The R.A.F.

JAZ. Maintenance, mind you, not piloting. Nothing ever so romantic as that.

JOLI. Never spent above two years in the same place.

JAZ. It was easier to only need each other

JOLI. Bother anyone else. They'll be gone before winter.

*They stop.*

JAZ. But I'll never leave you. You've got me till all's blue.

JOLI. The greatest of my fears, me dear.

*They begin to walk again.*

JAZ. So it was always just Joli and me. And we kept ourselves to ourselves.

*They perform some kind of precision turns.*

TOGETHER. "In secret kept, in silence sealed."

JOLI. Though it was she who wished it more. I often wanted to smile, to say hello.

JAZ. *(Stops walking.)* She'd have us mixing with all sorts, the cowbag!

JOLI. But I could feel her will- *(Stops as well. A low hum or tone is heard.)* She was always the stronger, you know.

JAZ. I was first!

JOLI. Her stare, willing me not to give in- *(Jaz begins to stare at Joli.)* to reach out. Always in her eyes. Don't you dare! You mustn't! Don't- you-

*The background tone stops. Joli is quiet now, with her head bowed. A long beat.*

JAZ. And silence.

JOLI. No wonder they called us the Two Mutes.

JAZ. The Quiet Girls.

TOGETHER. The Toungeless Twins.

JOLI. We never spoke to a soul 'till we were five. And then only to family.

JAZ. Never to anyone else. Not even to teachers.

*A loud school bell rings, and it is helpful if a slide or projection of the girls with their heads bowed appears.*

JOLI. (*Assuming the character of a teacher, with a mask.*) Now class, we would all like to welcome our two new transfer students, the Gibson sisters, Jasmine and Jocelynn. They've come all the way to our little town in Wales from Kingstown, Jamaica. And that's an island where? Does anyone know?

JAZ. (*As a "nerdy" student with a mask.*) Ohh! Ohh! Sister Thorton!

JOLI. (*As teacher.*) Alright, Tabitha, have a go.

JAZ. (*As student.*) Off the coast of Greece?

JOLI. (*As teacher.*) No, anyone else? Jamaica is an island where? You, Katelynn?

JAZ. (*As another student with a new mask.*) Somewhere off the coast of Africa, from the looks of 'em.

JOLI. (*As teacher.*) Now then, Katelynn, I'm certain we can be a bit more welcoming now, can we not? But your guess is almost spot on. The people of Jamaica, and therefore our newest chums here, are from a climate right close to the equator, similar to that of the dark skinned African Negroes, though their island is located in the middle of the Caribbean. Which is an Ocean. Rather close to that of Cuba, is it not?

JAZ. (*As other student.*) Probably can't even speak Queen's English, the two of 'em. Swahili or some such mumbo-jumbo. Sister Thorton's speaking at you- she teacher, you student.

JOLI. (*As teacher.*) Katelynn-

JAZ. (*As other student.*) Well, they're spooking me, the two of 'em. The way they just stare at you. Give me the heebie-jeebs.

JOLI. (*As teacher.*) Katelynn!! Well, we are all in for a treat. The Gibson girls will now recite the poem I assigned to them for memorization. (*The girls are now moving side by side without masks and are standing in front of the projection of themselves.*) Girls? Proceed!

TOGETHER. (*They recite in very rapid speech, sounding almost like gibberish*) Invictus-William-Ernest-Henley-out-of-the-night-that-covers-me, black-as-the-pit--from-pole-to-pole, I-thank-whatever-gods-may-be-for-my-unconquerable-soul. In-the-fell-clutch-of-circumstance-I-have-not-wincen-nor-cried-aloud. Under-the-bludgeonings-of-chance-my head-is-bloody-and-unbowed. Beyond-this-place-of-wrath-and-tears-looms-but-the-horror-of-the-shade-and-yet-the-menace-of-the-years-finds-and-shall-find-me-

unafraid. It-matters-not-how-strait-the-gate-how-charged-with-punishments-the-scroll. *(They pause for effect, as if forgetting for a moment.)* I-am-the-master-of-my-fate! I-am-the-captain-of-my-soul!

*They enjoy a very quick moment of irreverent laughter and snap back to silence. The school bell rings again.*

JAZ. *(As interviewer with a new mask.)* Mrs. Gibson, were the girls always in such bad form?

JOLI. *(Now her mother with a mask.)* De Twinies?

JAZ. *(As interviewer.)* Yes. Did they always speak at people in such an odd fashion?

JOLI. *(As her mother.)* If dey spoke a'tall. We were lucky to get de time of day off dem, so we glad for the udder. Didn't seem so odd after long, just faster, dat's all.

JAZ. *(As interviewer.)* Did it never give you cause for alarm? Were you never worried?

JOLI. *(As her mother.)* To a point, but dey were good little girls for de most part. No trouble a'tall. Look at most children nowadays. Spikes trew dem noses, tattoos from head to foot. I read just a week ago last of two boys chopped off them own parents heads. Boiled dem in a soup. Who's to know nowadays. It's in de air. I did mention to de husband- I said, "Peter, do you tink we ought to worry?"

JAZ. *(Now like her father with his mask, after a toilet flush is heard.)* 'Bout what? I fixed de leak in de bog.

JOLI. *(As her mother.)* Not de bog, de Twinies.

JAZ. *(As her father.)* Dem just backward about comin forward s'all. Just be glad dey keep to them room like dey do!

JOLI. *(As her mother.)* I heard dem meself, you know.

JAZ. *(As her father.)* Heard dem what?

JOLI. In dem room. Laughin and carryin on.

JAZ. Well den. Where's de worry?

JOLI. Peter, dey play at us, pretend to be us. Using Jasmine's masks...

JAZ. What's dis you're sayin now?

JOLI. Put me ear to de door, and I could hear dem. Mimickin us, and de boiyz. Dem teachers, even Fadder Clancey. Talkin just like us. Playin all de parts. Dey do whole episodes. Hour after hour.

JAZ. I like de sound of dat. Let dem keep at it, make some money, go on off to Hollywood or get a show on de BBC, set us up for life. You really hear dem talkin about me?

JOLI. Not just about you, as you. Jasmine de one who does you.

JAZ. She do?

JOLI. And Fadder Clancey. And Joli, play me. Very good, actually. But de minute I knock on de door- silence. Not a peep. And now I dink dey listen. I mean, for me. Not dat I do it all de while, I mean, eavesdrop. Aft'r all, dey need dem privacy. I'm aware of dat. But I was worried is all.

JAZ. Did you ever stop to tink it was dem way of stoppin you from worry? Dat dey might have known you was listenin and wanted you to hear?

JOLI. You mean dey planned de whole ting?

JAZ. Bingo.

JOLI. What is de point a dat, for Christ's sake-

JAZ. Some people have foolish ways of gettin what dem want, if dem shy and all. I remember dem used to say you wouldn't say boo to a goose. But didn't you get Clara Fontaine to come ask me out just to see if I say no, I want to go to de dance wit you?

JOLI. What you goin about now?

JAZ. Didn't you trap me, get your best friend who you knew never had an eye on me, to ask me out, hopin it bring me round to you.

JOLI. Bring you round? Is dat what you tought all dese years? Dat I trap you into all dis?

JAZ. I can't be bottered wit all dis now. I'm only tryin to make a point.

JOLI. What? What blastin point were you trying to make?



JAZ. I have no idea now, like anytin else in dis house, it dam well fell trough de cracks.

JOLI. Well, maybe if you botter to stay home a night and no go to your local or wherever it is you go. Stay here one night and make do, dere may be no cracks to fall trough. Where you off to now?

JAZ. I was just tryin to make a point about de Twinies. Dat dey probably can hear you breatin down dem bleedin necks, like you do us all round here. So maybe it's dem way of sayin bloody leave us de hell alone. For once in your life keep your nose out of utter people's affairs.

*He opens an imaginary door and leaves slamming it shut. Though not there a door slam is heard.*

JOLI. Oh, dat's a right nice choice of words, dat one. Affairs. Go on den, what do I care. Go on off wit your hartlot, nor your fat-bellied friends, what do me care. What do me care if we people wonder how could we possibly let dem lock demselves up in dem room, all day and night, not a sound 'cept a fart for Fadder Clancey....

JAZ. Pardon me girls, I'm getting on you know, and the first thing the good lord takes is the digestion. Now then, do either of you sweet souls know why I've been asked to speak with you? Well, your good parents, and a fair number of your teachers, actually, let us be frank, most of our fair community, have expressed a concern with what they feel are the beginnings of a somewhat difficult, rather anti-social attitude. It's not so much the strutting about the street, standing, sitting, even drinking your tea in perfect time together. I must say I envy the precision in that. I can't get my boys to reach the altar the same time, let alone swing the chancery in unison. No, it is your refusal to become part of Fishguard, to interact in any way with others that is grieving us. Remember, the good Lord wants us all to be special chums. So now, my children, how can we be of service to you? How can we help you feel more a part of our community?

*The loud sound of a camera shutter is heard. They begin to imitate various members of the community, first as workmen.*

JOLI. Monkeys, hey monkeys, want a banana?

JAZ. Look, what jungle did they come from?

JOLI. More bloody foreigners-

JAZ. Wogs!

JOLI. Yeah, wogs! Come to live off the dole.

*The camera shutter noise is heard again. Now they are housewives.*

JAZ. Look at their hair, looks like they both been dragged through a hedge backwards.

*Again the camera sound, now the girls are a mother and daughter.*

JOLI. No, Victoria Ann, come away from there, don't be bothering those nice girls. (*Whispering as she smacks her daughter's hand. Jaz as the daughter begins to wail*) You stay away from them you hear me? Who knows what their kind is capable of!

*The camera shutter happens one last time.*

JAZ. (*Back to imitating Father Clancey*) Now then, what more could we possibly do to make you feel more at home? (*Joli makes the sound of a phone buzzing. She also mumbles the sound of the other party on the phone as the conversation continues.*) Hang on, dears. Father Clancey? Yes, Tom? Well you tell them they threaten us I can play at that game as well. Sorry, just one minute, ladies. It's not all blessings and benedictions, you see. Yes, I'm in conference right now, I will ring you back in a few mos, we need to straighten this out today. As soon as- I am able! Now, where were we, ah yes, you see girls we need you to feel at home here, follow? (*Silence.*) Yes, well I don't know any other way round it, so I guess that will be all for today. (*Joli hands him a piece of paper.*) What is this? (*Reading.*) We, Jasmine and Jocelyn Gibson have taken a holy vow of silence. We have vowed just as the Benedictine Monks and Saint Harold before us not to speak. As their speech was saved for a better world, a world free of sin, so shall ours be. For it is our solemn belief that this is not a worthy place; it is full of deceit and corruption. And that only by abstinence, can we remain pure of its evils. At which time, once all these temptations have been removed, we will gladly raise up our voices in thanks, but until then, we will remain like our brothers and sisters before us, (*Jaz stops using the Father Clancy mask and moves next to her sister*) quietly in prayer, cloistered away from the dragons-

TOGETHER. Incommunicado...

JAZ. (*Whispering*) That should give us years before they know what to do with us

*The two girls begin to sing the second verse of the children's song as they move together: "Show me a motion, tra-la-la-la-la, Show me a*

*motion, tra-la-la-la-la, Show me a motion, tra-la-la-la -la, for she looks like a sugar in a plum, plum, plum" and are now in their room.*

JAZ. Now, let's play a round of O.E.D.

JOLI. I need to work...

JAZ. You promised.

JOLI. After I finish the first chapter.

JAZ. But you haven't even started. It'll take months.

JOLI. Why don't you make another mask?

JAZ. I don't want to. They're stupid anyway.

JOLI. What happened to "a tradition as old as civilization itself?"

JAZ. That was when they mattered. When they were even worshiped. Now, a mask is just a toy. Kid's stuff. Oh, bugger it. No matter to me. You're the one with all the dreams, aspirations. You're the one who's written two whole novels-

JAZ. Yeah, rejected by every publisher.

JOLI. But you've written them, that's what counts. Two novels. And you're only fifteen. That's probably a record for all we know. What have I done?

JOLI. You mean besides get up my nose? You sculpt. And carve. And paint. You used to adore it.

JAZ. I did. I do. I'm just tired of pretending to be other people. That's all masks do, become other things. What about me?

JOLI. Then make a mask of you.

JAZ. I have that already. I have you.

JOLI. You're about to tip me well and truly over the edge.

JAZ. I don't know who I am, Jol. Honest, I haven't the slightest clue.

JOLI. None of us do. That's why there's work. To help us forget the fact.

JAZ. What if I never find out?

JOLI. That's why you need to create. To try and discover.

JAZ. Or even worse, I may find out and hate what I see. Besides you're the one with all the talent.

JOLI. That's ridiculous.

JAZ. Well, it's what you think. Isn't it?

JOLI. Don't start that song.

JAZ. Tell me it's not what you think. Tell me you weren't, just the other day, when I showed you my latest mask that you weren't sitting there thinking: "That's a nice one, quite nice. But it's no novel." It was drawn all about your face. (*Pause as Joli tries to ignore her. Jaz holds up her latest mask.*) You didn't even know who this one was.

JOLI. I still don't.

JAZ. You see. What good is it. It's Robin Leach, dammit.

JOLI. Who?

JAZ. Robin Leach, the interviewer!

JOLI. (*Using her Robin Leach mask.*) Oh! He's a right proper wanker, he is... Welcome back, this is Robin Leach, and we are speaking, of course, to renowned author Jocelyn Gibson's devoted-

JAZ. Ha!

JOLI. (*As Robin Leach.*) Twin sister Jasmine, who knew the reclusive yet brilliant writer better than most of her husbands, or her lovers. Tell me, Miss Gibson, how difficult was it living in the shadow of your sister for so many years.

JAZ. 'Twas a nightmare actually Robin, every moment of it.

JOLI. (*As Robin Leach.*) Of course we are speaking of her unequalled success and fame.

JAZ. Tragic is it not. For you see how delusional she was, Robin, quite "doo lally tat." Loved to fancy herself the celebrity.

JOLI. (*As Robin Leach.*) How sad, indeed. Yet why did you choose to stay

by her side all those years? You could have gone off, moved far away. At least into a room of your own. Yet you forever chose to stay, why was that?

JAZ. Because if the truth be told, Robin, the poor selfish slag would have been lost without me. I made each of the day to day decisions. She was quite helpless, actually. For example, it was me who chose each of our outfits each and every day since grammar school. She couldn't have managed dressing without me.

JOLI. (*As Robin Leach.*) Was it not true that these matters never concerned her. She couldn't, as she once said "give a lump of shit about the day to day world?"

JAZ. Sad, isn't it? You can see she was quite deranged. For as we know, Robin, the day to day world is where most of us exist, however tragic we may believe it to be. Do you know she once told our beloved Sister Thorton, our headmistress, when asked what she aspired to? She said, Actually, I'd like to be a criminal."

JOLI. (*Taking off the mask*) You're such a cheat, the biggest cheat of all. That's what you wrote. And she stood you in the corner for it with a bible on your head. She asked me what I wanted to be and I said, "an anchorite. I wish to live as you, yourself, sister, off from the world."

JAZ. "Only I shan't be a nun, for I'm not at all certain that God ever existed.

JOLI. I was only being honest.

JAZ. She chucked you out of class! For that one.

JOLI. (*Back to Robin Leach.*) Yes, but we were discussing you on this program, were we not?

JAZ. That was her last day of class, Robin. They slammed the door on her. So as a gesture of solidarity, I, too, refused to return.

JOLI. (*Again lifting the mask.*) And that was all your scheme as well. Mine was only a suspension. You're the one who insisted we give over, never return-

JAZ. It wasn't I who said the Bronte sisters locked themselves in a room to learn and so would we.

JOLI. (*Back to Robin Leach.*) But Jasmine, if the day to day decisions were always yours, a fact I do believe you, but a few moments ago, attested to. Would it not follow suit it was your idea to drop your studies?

JAZ. Ah ha...Well, yes, and no, Robin. *(The tone is heard in the background again slowly building.)* You see, my sister became my studies. For it was there, in that small upstairs room in Fishguard, that I stumbled on the shocking and still controversial theories that would make my reputation.

JOLI. *(As Robin Leach.)* However minor that has shown itself to be.

JAZ. Greatness may be only measured in its ability to go unmeasured. Never forget the fact.

JOLI. *(As Robin Leach. Fighting for control of the microphone with Jaz)* So from that day forth-

JAZ. I began my studies on the demon known as Genius-

JOLI. *(As Robin Leach. Escalating the fight.)* From the Latin, jinni-

JAZ. Meaning demon spirit -

JOLI. *(As Robin Leach.)* Or guardian-

JAZ. Often holding power over another!!

*There is a loud knock at the door. The sound of the tone is gone. The girls immediately stop fighting and are silent. Another knock. After a long beat Joli defiantly goes to the door and opens it. A bright white light is seen. Jaz runs to the door and slams it in someone's face.*

JOLI. She's our mum, you know. Where is the hurt in my saying: "Hello."

JAZ. I expect next you'll want to set the table, and sit and have tea, or supper, listen to them chew, and mumble on about the tele, and the weather, and chat about bugger all except what's really worth talking about.

JOLI. No. That would be dreadful. You're right. At least we focus ourselves on the important things, like art and literature, philosophy-- and men. But a simple "Hello, Mum" might not be such a horrible thing.

JAZ. Go on. Have a go, you'll see. Throughout history, torturers would always wait for the first flinch, the first sign of pain, of weakness; and it was on that mark, the very spot that caused the prisoner to cry out, that they concentrated on. *(She picks up Joli's work and begins reading.)* Chapter One. "Cleveland. God, why was I born in Cleveland, "Brad thought, gazing out the bedroom window at the dull and boring city with its cloud of smog, like a blanket of doom waiting to-" Cleveland doesn't have smog.

JOLI. How would you know, you been there?

JAZ. No, have you? Never. So how would you know if it does?

JOLI. Because it's a city, in the States. And every bleedin city in the State's got smog.

JAZ. Not San Francisco. It has fog.

JOLI. Fine, apart from San Francisco.

JAZ. Cleveland's not known for smog, that's all.

JOLI. Oh, and what's it known for? Huh, Miss Bossey-Boots? Name one thing Cleveland's known for.

JAZ. Cleves. Well, it is the Land Of Cleves, so it must have been known for 'em at some point. I haven't a clue what the bleedin city's known for, it gave us Brad, and for that I will evermore be grateful.

JOLI. Look, it was your idea to have me write about him.

JAZ. I gave you permission to use his name. Not to steal him. (*She has taken out the Brad mask.*) Brad Walker.

JOLI. Listen to you. Brad Walker... I wished you'd told me you'd decided to go boy-mad.

JAZ. You're the one reminding me of him. I hadn't thought of him once today.

JOLI. You'd swear the sun shined out of his backside.

JAZ. Did you see his jeans, Jol. Yesterday, did you notice them?

JOLI. Yeah, Stone-wash, they call them. He bought them in California.

JAZ. I meant how tight they were. Could see it all. His whole willie. How the bloody hell do you know where he bought them?

JOLI. He told me himself. Well, you were asleep. Two pints and you're always asleep.

JAZ. I'll murder you, you touch my Brad. Hear me?

JOLI. Jesus, Jaz! Keep your hair on!

JAZ. And I've changed my mind, I don't want you even writing about him, thank you very much. He's mine! I spotted him first!

JOLI. For the record, that's not true! After we toppled over the Pressbottom's postbox, I saw him first. Staring over at us, and I said, "Uh. Oh. We're in the shitter now."

JAZ. No, I'd already spied him, and that's when you got all worried.

JOLI. Because he walked himself right towards us. Staring right at us.

JAZ. And there you were trembling like a jellywobble. (*As she takes Joli's hand to enact the scene*) Jesus, your hands are cold. Always are.

JOLI. 'Cause you took most of Mom's blood. Left me with just enough to get along.

JAZ. Got frogs for hands, do you know that? Cold blooded.

JOLI. At least, I'm not cold-hearted.

JOLI. And that's when he kicked old lady Cromwell's postal box right end over!

JAZ. (*Wearing the sacred Brad mask, now as Brad.*) Ha-Yah! Just like this! Like Bruce Lee. He's the coolest. If your gonna destroy someone's private property, be cool about it. (*Joli remains silent.*) You two ever hear of Bruce Lee? Naw, probably not. Not living in this shit hole. Nothing cool ever comes around here.

JOLI. I thought he was going to tell on us.

JAZ. (*As herself*) No, Jol! He wanted to show us the proper way that's all. A true fellow juvenile delinquent.

JOLI. (*Taking the mask and becoming Brad.*) Damn, you two really do look exactly alike. Even up close. Spooky. Hey, want a smoke? I said, "want a smoke?" (*Jaz takes it.*)

JAZ. Thank you ever so kindly. For the "smoke".

JOLI. (*Ripping off the mask.*) You cheeky bugger. As many times as I have wanted to talk to some one. Merely be friendly but you get all elbows out,



and first race out of the gate you bat your eyes like some two-bit flit: "Thank you ever so kindly?"

JAZ. (*Taking back the mask. As Brad.*) Don't mention it. Hey, what did you just say. Come on, I heard you.

JOLI. She said, "Thank you ever so kindly!"

JAZ. (*As Brad.*) You can speak. Jesus, you've got everyone fooled, you know that? They think you're mutes. The Tommy Twins. That's what they call you. You know like the Who song: "See me, feel me." That's what they hum after you walk by, you know when you walk by like a bunch of Nazi pigeons, in perfect step. You guys must practice that, huh. Cause that ain't easy. Weird ass thing to do, but you have to admire the precision. So the Tommy Twins can talk after all. Okay, okay, that's cool. 'Cause so could Tommy, in the song. He was just suffering from some trauma or some shit. Scared to talk. Is that what is going on with you two? You both suffering some trauma? Okay, okay, cool. I wouldn't talk much either, if I was you. Not a whole lot worth talking about 'round here anyway, that's for sure.

JOLI. "Game Of Death."

JAZ. (*Taking off the mask*) I wanted to whack you for that one.

JOLI. For what? You began it. "Thank you ever so kindly..."

JAZ. That worked.

JOLI. So did "Game Of Death".

JAZ. (*As Brad.*) Game Of Death?

JOLI. Nineteen Seventy Eight. Director Robert Clouse. Bruce Lee's final film. Also starring Chuck Norris and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Lee died during production. Years later, the director completed the film-- using doubles.

JAZ. (*As Brad.*) Oh, okay, cool. Jesus, I had no idea where you were going there for a second. Yeah, I love that movie. Game Of Death. Ain't that the truth. My man, Bruce Lee. (*He does another soaring karate kick.*) So, my name's Brad, Brad Walker, and you are? Okay, okay, you can be Spooky and you are definitely Psycho. Until I get a better name for you. It'll be the Spookster and the Psycho girl. Anyway, I gotta be doing some other shit now, so it was really a pleasure to meet you two. Spooky, take care of this one here; she kind of scares me, okay? What are you gonna like follow me now or what? Okay, Jesus. I'm heading over to the lot behind the school. There's a shed there where I like to sit and get high. You two do that? Get

stoned? Why bother. You both are so out to lunch anyway, maybe I need a little of what you two are on. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. That's in the States. Where are you two from? Okay, okay, just let me get used to this one sided conversation shit. I'll get the hang of it. Anyway, like I said, I'm from Cleveland and that's considered like the furry asshole of the United States of America, but it is like Shangra-Fucking-La compared to this place. Anyway, my Mom's mom was born here, and she and my father like split. Anyway, she's a teacher. Third grade. And I'm a drop out. Ninth grade, so I guess I got her beat by six. Ha! I work at the grocery, produce, when I feel like it. Some days I can't deal with it. The bullshit. I'm the one who gets to hide all the rotten berries at the bottom of the carton and puts the nice big fat ones, the juicy ones, on top. To cover them up and make you think you're getting your money's worth. And some days, I don't know, maybe it's fucked up, but I don't like being so corrupt. Even in produce, they'll try and screw you. Want some? (*A joint.*)

JOLI. And you took it!

JAZ. (*Taking off the mask.*) I lost all control near him, Jol, I don't know why.

JOLI. I liked what he said about the berries.

JAZ. I liked his bum. I wanted him ever so much, Jol. I could almost taste him.

JOLI. So how was it you passed out?

JAZ. I didn't pass out-

JOLI. Didn't you? Another beer later, you were snoring.

JAZ. You are a piece of work, dear sister. You truly are.

JOLI. Hhmmfff... (*The sound of a snore.*)

JAZ. And what does all that have to do with it, I flipping well'd like to know? He was going to be mine regardless, the only question was when. And how. So I began planning my seduction. It would rival Circe for its witchery, Bathsheba for its breathlessness. I practiced how I would lie myself out on the grass out behind his shed-

JOLI. Never mind it was dead of winter-

JAZ. We'd never feel the cold.

JOLI. Freeze your tits off, you would.

JAZ. Alright! Since I knew you'd be no help, I devised a reserve plan, a right stroke of genius, it was.

JOLI. She had us follow him for days-

*The theme from Mission Impossible plays.*

JAZ. We trailed him, watching for three weeks, his each and every move. Secretly spying. Sometimes the other side of the street. Sometimes in disguise. (*The theme song fades out.*) Then giggling all the way, we rushed back, to report in our journal.

JOLI. The "Brad Books" we named them. I'd no time for any other writing.

JAZ. The journals were your scheme.

JOLI. And I told you why, if he was to be my first, then there must be a record. For posterity.

JAZ. You see, I decided once Brad was mine, all mine, I would then share him. Let my sister eat from the same tree. Just like in the legends.

JOLI. I was terrified, but rather moved by the gesture. And I did ever so much like what he said about the berries. Besides it made such sense, we had gone through so much else together.

JAZ. So we plotted our seduction.

JOLI. First playing the spy. She had us track him.

JAZ. Then late night phone calls, just to hear his voice.

*She dials the phone; Joli answers as Brad.*

JOLI. Hello? (*Jaz giggles and hangs up. Waits a beat then dials again.*) Hello? Look, I know it's you, so leave me the fuck alone, okay?

*Jaz dials again.*

JOLI. (*As Brad.*) Call again, I'm gonna fucking bloody kill both of you! Assholes!

JAZ. You see, it's working...To perfection.

JOLI. If you say...

JAZ. Certainly!

JOLI. The what's worse, she had us actually go into his flat. Into his room! His bedroom! Gone were the days of graffiti and knicking from shops. Now we were breaking and entering.

JAZ. Well, we're no longer children, were we? We were nearly sixteen. No more schoolgirl games. Besides, what better way of knowing which side to butter a man's bread on than a bit of espionage.

*“The Mod Squad” theme song begins*

JOLI. It was just like the cinema, or the Avengers-

JAZ. Charlie's Angels.

JOLI. Through an open window, jam the lock of a screen door and you're in.

JAZ. I've always felt if you want to sincerely become acquainted with a person, espionage is key. I have no interest in seeing the walls they've put up. Built to cope with the outside.

JOLI. Their shell.

JAZ. I want to climb up over those walls, secretly if I can, and get inside their mind-

JOLI. Crack open that shell.

JAZ. Rummage through their safe keepings. Their true feelings, their desires.

JOLI. She'll steal into your soul, this one will.

JAZ. And the kitchen is not where we keep who we are. That you find in the bedroom.

*The music ends and the lights change to represent the bedroom.*

JOLI. Men are barmy, if you ask me.

JAZ. They are for the most part unorganized.

JOLI. Stuff was strewn everywhere. Girlie books, records.

JAZ. (*Looking at a pinup or a projection on the wall.*) I'm sweeter than she, aren't I, Jol?

JOLI. That's all plastic and touch ups.

JAZ. I tried on his jacket, still rich with his smell.

JOLI. And we were smoking a joint we found in his pocket-

JAZ. I love him so much, Jol. I found the center of my universe. (*She takes another drag. The sound of a door closing.*) Oh bloody hell, do you hear that?

JOLI. Come on! In the cupboard!

JAZ. No! I decided he ought to discover me lying atop his bed. Like an offering... So still wearing his jacket, I chose my best pose.

JOLI. (*From in the closet.*) What if it's his mum?

JAZ. Don't you muck this up, Jol!

JOLI. (*Becoming him, with a mask on.*) Well, I was right, it wasn't "the center of the universe." It was his younger brother, Ralph. (*As him.*) Jesus! Who the hell are you?

JAZ. I'm waiting for Brad. Said he'd be just back.

JOLI. (*As Ralph.*) Brad? He's gone to Brighton, with a bunch of mates. For a fortnight. All these Welsh birds got faces like the back of a bus. I said, "can I go?" He said, "fat chance in hell." So I say fuck him.

JAZ. You're right. Sod him!

JOLI. (*As Ralph.*) Where're you going?

JAZ. Well if he thinks I'm waiting in here for a bloody fortnight, he's mistaken.

JOLI. (*As Ralph.*) How did you get in here any way?

JAZ. Dark Magic. Here. He can keep his bloody jacket as well.

*She opens the pretend closet, sees Joli and slams it shut.*

JOLI (*As Ralph*) Who in the hell was that? In there. (*Opens the door.*) Oh, see I knew it. You're the two psycho girls, he told me about. Come on out, okay. (*The doors slam shut.*) Jesus, what's wrong with her.

JAZ. Haven't a clue. It's the same at home. Spends hours in our basement deep freeze. She's keen on confined spaces.

JOLI (*As Ralph*) He said you were fruit loops but this is tripping.

JAZ. So you're Brad's brother?

JOLI (*As Ralph.*) Name's Ralph. I know, stupid name. Try living with it. One day I'll blow my old man's head off for being so creative. So I bet Brad's probably never mentioned me. I'm like the pimple on the buttole of his life. That's about how important I am to him. What's yours?

JAZ. Huh?

JOLI (*As Ralph.*)Your name.

JAZ. Bathsheba. My mum's creative too. My mates call me Sheba. Sheba. And I thought I had it rough. What's hers? The one in solitary there.

JAZ. That's my sister Jezebel. Jezzie for short.

JOLI (*As Ralph.*) Hey, Jezz. Get out much? Ha! Wow, this is too cool.

JAZ. So, Ralph, you and you brother have... discussed us?

JOLI (*As Ralph.*) Yeah, I guess. I mean, you call like every morning at what, two A.M. and he gets pissed 'cause he knows it's you, and he says "what a bunch of fucking losers." You know, stuff like that. But don't take it personal or nothing. He says the same shit about me, too. Hey, I'll go get some beers. I mean if you want to kill some time and all.

JAZ. Okay... So...

JOLI (*As Ralph.*) So... Okay. Back in a minute.

JAZ. Joli does like to take her cupboard nap, just about now. (*After another inhale.*) No hurry.

JOLI. Cupboard nap? What in the hell was that?

JAZ. Well, you explain why your sister's tucked off in a clothes basket, the bottomside of a cupboard.

JOLI. Had no problem with the why you were stretched out like some raspberry tart atop his bed.

JAZ. Because all I'll need is for baby brother Ralph to tell big brother that he's sweet on me, and quicker than a greyhound, Brad'll come around.

JOLI. Jaz, he's kicking up the sand in Brighton. And we've got faces like the back of a bus.

JAZ. He talked about us Jol. We're etched onto his brain.

JOLI. He called us "fucking losers." Hardly seems etched -

JAZ. That's just it. Us. It's because we are always a "us." How inconvenient. He would never feel comfortable expressing his feelings, thanks to you.

JOLI. There are times when you right terrify me, Jaz, honest you do- (*Jaz grabs Joli.*) Now what are you on about?

JAZ. Get back in there. Two's a party, and three's inconvenient.

JOLI. I'm not for back in there.

JAZ. Yes, you are.

*She pushes Joli in. Sound of the closet door slamming.*

JAZ. And that is when it happened. On a bright wonderful day in early April. In his bedroom, I gave myself to him. That was when I became a woman.

JOLI. Bullocks! (*The lights shift to the start of the show look. The sound or tone is heard in the background and it slowly builds in intensity.*) Christ, Jaz. Why do you insist on twisting everything round? Honestly, I don't recall, ever, a thought of yours based in reality.

JAZ. Reality?

JOLI. Yes.

JAZ. Reality's a might relative, wouldn't you say? Given the circumstances. I'm not the one quibbling with the hereafter.

JOLI. And just what the bloody hell are you doing here anyway? I hoped to Christ I was rid of you?

JAZ. I never asked to be here-

JOLI. Then go! Please! Nobody's keeping you.

JAZ. Nobody but you, Luv.

JOLI. Why? Why is it so difficult for me to be ever and truly rid of you?

JAZ. You almost were- once.

JOLI. That was an accident, you know as well as I.

JAZ. Come, come, reality, Jol. Don't leave out the juicy bits.

JOLI. And-

JAZ. The down in the muddy ditch of it-

JOLI. I never meant that, damn you! That was your fault!

JAZ. Don't work up a sweat over it, Jol.

JOLI. You are never going to forgive me of it, are you?

JAZ. Not true, Jol. I do forgive you. You were right all along. With me gone life would be tickedy boo!

JOLI. I never wished you gone.

JAZ. T'was your greatest desire, love, you said so yourself. *Aud Infitum.*  
(*To audience.*) You did hear her say it, did you not?

JOLI. Please, Jaz. Please! Just leave it be. Christ, I've no will for this.

JAZ. Now, that's the point, Jol. Isn't it. No will. No will of your own.

JOLI. What ever you say, Jaz.

JAZ. Then do us a favor, get back in the cupboard, so I can finish telling our story.

JOLI. What cupboard, there is no cupboard. See? Christ! It's all bullocks! All of this is. This is nothing but a tedious game- a never ending match of charades. A voyage round both our failed imaginations. See, dear sister that's the point of it. It's all just in here. You and I are trapped.



*She sits, giving up. The tone is gone*

JAZ. Come on, Jol. They've come to hear our story. (*Not knowing what to do now, and truly nervous the story has come to a stop.*) People love hearing about us, you know that. Tell 'em a story 'bout a coupla freaks- makes them feel a little bit saner. Jol! Alright, let's do it. Let's really shake things up a bit. Let's tell 'em the bits that have never been told. (*to audience*) Fasten your seat belts, ladies and gents, it gets really odd from here on out.

JOLI. What?-

JAZ. You wanted to tell them the truth, right? All right then let's give it a go. Let's do it. Ralph and I went for a walk, cause he had this place he wanted to show me.

JOLI. (*Joli realizes that Jaz is giving her a gift of telling the truth and continues, unsure.*) And they left me in the cupboard.

JAZ. And.

JOLI. And the two of them were slobbering all over each other, panting as hard as a bunch of overworked mules.

JAZ. He said he wanted me. I must admit a nice thing to hear even if it does have a possessive bend to it.

JOLI. And I heard them leave. Lucky for me, or I might still be sitting in there-

JAZ. And we shared a few beers as we walked.

JOLI. And I followed them. (*A soundtrack to this scene begins. Enigma's Principles of Lust works very well if available.*)

JAZ. We walked to the back of beyond, through this old graveyard.

JOLI. And they kept stopping ever so often to lick each other to death.

JAZ. And then inside this old chapel. It was cold and overcast, dark. Like some Gothic novel. He'd broken a window long ago and we snuck in. "I'm going to show you paradise," he said. It was beautiful. Stone walls, a crude carved altar, and covered in candles. He said he stole them himself off his brother's grocery and brought them there to read at night, and he went about lighting them all, and I was glad; it was getting to be cold-

JOLI. It made the light dance all over the walls, and it caught the stain glass just right. It was quite magical.

JAZ. And I was lying on the altar and he unbuttoned my blouse, and he took off his shirt, and he'd five baby blonde hairs on his chest. I'll never forget. I took them to be a sign of manhood, and I remember kissing him and nuzzling his chest. I know making love in a church sounds a bit odd. But making love in a graveyard church, take my word on it, is just the wildest. Like thumbing your nose at the face of death.

JOLI. It felt to me as if affirming my own aliveness. I am not one of them. (*Jaz is glaring at her.*) Forgive me for interrupting, go right ahead.

JAZ. Not at all. For that was just when you decided to cut in anyway.

JOLI. For she had once again passed out.

JAZ. I did not pass out. I was catching a bit of repose... It had long gone past twelve...

JOLI. So there she was, snoring away on the altar, and him fumbling with her bra and rubbing up against her. So I removed all of my clothes save for my mack, cause it was cold as a scotsman's balls in there, and I stepped forward out from the shadows and I said, "Hello Ralph." And I dropped my mack. "Welcome to paradise." And he was just standing there gazing at first, stupefied.

JAZ. Thought he'd seen the dead come back to life knowing the looks of you naked.

JOLI. Yes, well you don't know, for you were sound asleep.

JAZ. So, she had it off with him.

JOLI. Yes, I gave myself to him.

JAZ. See, never would I have done that.

JOLI. Nor could you, in your condition.

JAZ. I was saving myself for Brad. Just using baby Ralphie to get at him.

JOLI. Fine by me, because Ralph was soon to be my husband, and I his wife.

JAZ. His what?

JOLI. I never told you, but it's true.

JAZ. You never told me what?

JOLI. That he married me. And I him.

JAZ. When?

JOLI. Right there. In the church. He told me how much he wanted me.

JAZ. Not a right choosey bloke was he.

JOLI. And I said that he had to take my hand in marriage first, being we were in a chapel and all that.

JAZ. When did standing about in the altogether, swearing devotion before you do yourself silly on the cold church floor, become known as holy matrimony?

JOLI. When a man drops to his knees and pledges his devotion-

JAZ. A man would pledge allegiance to a mackerel if it was standing in front of him knickers down, promising to give it a pull.

JOLI. Nevertheless, I got on my knees alongside of him, and I said my vows, and we kissed a solemn kiss-

JAZ. And then she had it off with him.

JOLI. And then we made love. On the third pew. Because you were snoring away up there on the altar. But I remember, the sting of pain, and the strange clumsiness, and then how fast our hearts were beating, and how much sweat despite the cold. And that it finally felt just as I thought it would, only ever so much better, and when it was over I whispered in his ear: "Darling, I will remember this day forever, and how much I loved you." And he rolled himself off of me and accidentally tumbled to the floor. And we were laughing, and that's when I caught sight of you again. It had been but a few minutes, but for each one of them, I had actually forgotten you. And as I laid there on the floor in his arms for the next ten, one for each you stole into this world in front of me, leaving me behind, only after savoring each one, I told him what you had promised to do in aid of me. And he said "what?" I insisted that I would never want to share him with another, but this one thing I'd sworn, and he said "okay, cool." And he stood himself up rather

awkwardly, and I led him over to you. And watching him kiss you was oddly not painful in the least. I felt reassured knowing I already knew the taste.

JAZ. And I remember waking up and seeing all those candles again, and feeling him trying to put himself inside me, and being so relieved that I'd woken up and wasn't missing it all. And that's when I saw you standing there, in bugger all but your mack, and holding that candle, with that look on your face, so generous, and I knew. Right then and there, I was certain. So I tried to get him off of me, but he just kept pushing and prodding. So I kicked my feet out at you. And finally I could reach you-

*The stage begins to glow with fire. Slowly it will begin to build and take over the entire stage. The tone is heard in the background*

JOLI. That's why the candle fell. All this time I've been angry at myself for being so clumsy.

JAZ. I was furious. How could you betray me like that?

JOLI. That was the first fire we raised.

JAZ. And as enraged as I was, I remember nothing could match that fire. Those flames had created more fury in seconds than I could bring to a lifetime.

JOLI. The candles soon became puddles of wax from the heat. But oddly we weren't even the least bit afraid.

JAZ. I remember thinking if I burned alive it wouldn't matter.

JOLI. So we grabbed you and pulled you out of there. And you were kicking and scratching at us. And the look on your face. I knew then you'd never forgive me.

JAZ. I hate you, Jocelyn Gibson. I have always hated you, and I always will.

JOLI. And why? Because I finally won. I finally beat you to the mark. I touched this before you, and it feels wonderful! And what's more, I do not give a sod what you think. Nor do I feel I ever will again. So what do you have to say to that?

*Jaz spits squarely in Joli's face. Fire effect and the tone are gone. Long Pause. Joli slowly wipes the spittle from her face.*

JOLI. So that is why you had us break into all those shops.

JAZ. I had you? Look, dear girl, nobody forced you to do anything. You and your baby Ralphy had a right sweet time of it, pilching from the grocery.

JOLI. But it was your idea.

JAZ. Payback for Brad being such a twit, yeah. And it was fun.

JOLI. But the fires, the school, that was to pay me back, wasn't it?

JAZ. No, that was because they had asked for it long ago! Bloody nuns.

JOLI. You were angry at me, Jaz! Don't you see?

JAZ. Don't flatter yourself, sister dear. I'd been angry since a child. Tossed every toy from the crib- you should know, you were there. "Play with the nice dolly, Jaz" Yeech, out it went. Face it, I've the "bent on destruction" in my nature. You've no idea how hard it is to live in a wrong-headed world when your only wish is to set it right. And raising a fire's a bit more gratifying than chucking your rattle, or yanking your dolly headless. Light yourself a fire, and all can be set right-in a snap!

JOLI. Then why did you phone the police all those times.

JAZ. Wasn't it you who always said we need to "open the door" and communicate more? Besides it's no fun unless you up the stakes, give the poor gits a bit of a chance. (*Into phone.*) Good evening, Constable Bowdon. We just thought you'd like to know the school's caught fire. Which school? Constable. I'd venture if you raise yourself from your desk and put down the fish and chips, and give a look out of the window, whatever school has smoke coming out of the windows and paint melting off the walls, that would be the one I'd put my pay packet on. It's been a true pleasure as always, Constable. Ta-Ta for now.

JOLI. You wanted it to happen. You wanted us to be caught, didn't you? You wanted to punish me.

JAZ. Don't be such a twit Jol, Christ. You never could appreciate a good gag, could ya?

JOLI. It's why you had us turn to a life of crime.

JAZ. "Life of crime?"

JOLI. We'd never started a single fire before that graveyard.

JAZ. It was only a phase.

JOLI. A phase? What was next? Blowing up bridges?

JAZ. Next was fratricide.

JOLI. The truth is you snapped. You couldn't stand it. Could you. That's what your eyes said. You couldn't stand that I was finally first at something.

JAZ. I couldn't've cared less. It was Brad that mattered to me, not your puny Ralph. Not your Ralphie. Your "husband" of what? Two weeks, three days and a couple of pokes.

JOLI. At least he took a liking to me, nothing like yours, ran for the bloody hills each and every time he caught sight of you.

JAZ. And yours was ever so devoted. So much so, his whole family set sail with not so much as a word for you.

*The lights change to Brad and Ralph's house. The girls are inside.*

JOLI. They're gone, Jaz.

JAZ. Pulled a midnight flit. The place is empty. Jesus, this effing town is gonna be even more boring now, 'inn it. I never even got to kiss him Jol. My Brad. I'll never know the taste of my true love's lips. Where the bloody hell have you gotten to now?

JOLI. In my cupboard.

JAZ. I worry about you Jol, do you know that? Sometimes I think you need a right serious tune-up.

JOLI. I don't think I can manage it, Jaz. I can't walk home every day and look at this place. We should have burned it down long ago, rather than your Brad's shed.

JAZ. Bloody brilliant. *(She exits from the light.)*

JOLI. Where are you going? Jaz? Fine, leave, why not. Everyone else does. *(Singing another children's song.)* "I don't love nobody and nobody loves me. All I want is my Ralphie, to come and dance with me" I'm not sure I'm equipped for this Jaz, that I've got what it takes to get through a whole life. After all I'm the runt of the litter. And they always toss the runt out. Drown her, or something. I honestly could have loved him, Jaz, I could have. All I wanted was to matter. I wanted my books to matter, nobody wanted them. I wanted to matter to you, you hate me. I really thought with him, I mattered.

And for a few moments, I did, I know I did. Wrapped in his arms, I mattered. Didn't I? I guess not.

JAZ. Okay, Jol, say good-bye to the Walker flat. Come sundown, it'll be dust and ash.

JOLI. What have you gone and done, Jaz?

JAZ. I let our fire out again. She was getting hungry, anyway. You were right, we should've done it long ago. She's having supper herself in the basement, right now. No more of that god awful plastic paneling. Jol, get your skates on? She's hungrier than I thought.

JOLI. Good, I'm glad.

JAZ. I knew you would be. They deserved it after all, didn't they?

JOLI. So do we...

JAZ. I can't hear you mumbling in there. Come on out. *(She tries the door.)* Jol, quit playing the fool and get your knickers out here!

JOLI. No, Jaz. Leave me be.

JAZ. The smoke is getting thick out here, silly, we've not much time. Joli, I really have no wish to sit through another of your po-faced pouts.

JOLI. Leave me alone, Jaz. Please.

JAZ. She's hungry today, Jol. Ate herself right through that plastic basement and is all over the first floor. She's taking no prisoners today.

JOLI. Let me stay here, Jaz. Let me stay in my husband's house.

JAZ. Your husband is history, dearsweet and so's this house. *(She is tugging on Joli now.)* And I've no design on-- Christ, when did you get so bloody fat.

JOLI. I said, leave me be.

*They fall and Joli gets up, threateningly.*

JAZ. Jesus, Jol, look behind you, your mack. Your mack is on fire. Come here, Damn you, your mack! *(She is trying to pull her out of the house.)* Here, there's a ditch. The water.

JOLI. I hate you, you shit.

JAZ. Yeah, not as if you're sweet pudding to me...

JOLI. What are you doing?

JAZ. Your back is still smoking, there's water here.

JOLI. You know we can't swim for nuts.

JAZ. Good, you've wanted to die, any luck, you'll drown.

JOLI. Not here, I don't want to die in a ditch!

*The lights change as they slide down into the drainage ditch and go underwater. Their movements should be slow-motion and the lights and sound should begin to feel submerged until they break the surface and are gasping for air. They are clinging to each other at first and then fight to get free to breathe. Weird sirens can be heard approaching. Once they break the surface the lights and sounds immediately change to realistic.*

JOLI. I hate you, dammit!

JAZ. I'd no idea it was so deep.

JOLI. I hate you more than you've ever hated me!

JAZ. Let go, Joli!

JOLI. I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!

JAZ. Christ, Joli, I can't-

*They are submerged again. Lights and sound are again distorted. Joli is trying to drag her sister deep down. She lets go and makes her way up for air. She breaks the surface and the lights and sound are normal and she hears the fire engines and police. It is clear there are many trucks and people around. Some are yelling "this way, around here, go in through here."*

JOLI. Jaz? They've found us Jaz? Jaz? (She looks around, unable to find her sister.) Jaz!

*She ducks back underwater. Finds Jaz and pulls her head up out of the water. They are both gasping for air. Joli finds the edge of the ditch where they can stand and then sit in more shallow water.*



JOLI. Jaz? Jaz?

JAZ. I'm sorry. I'd no idea it was so deep, honest.

JOLI. You twit, I thought I'd lost you.

JAZ. Don't be daft. I'd never give you the satisfaction. You want it too much.

JOLI. I thought you were gone.

JAZ. Stop your sniveling, where's your worry. You hate me, remember.

JOLI. No, I don't. I love you. I love you, Jaz.

JAZ. My ears must be full of muck.

*She hugs her sister tightly and they won't let go of each other.*

JOLI. I love you ever so much.

JAZ. Get a grip on it, Jol, or you'll drag us under again.

*They kiss. It grows out of the extreme emotion and should not be strange at all. But then they kiss again, and again, and finally they stop giggling like breathless schoolgirls. A bright light is flashing on them. A cry of "here they are, they're out here in the ditch" is heard on a blowhorn.*

JOLI. Now what are we going to do?

*Jaz puts her finger up to her lip as if to say "Sshh." Over the blowhorn we hear a voice scream: "Alright raise your hands up. Put them high in the air. Now!!!" The girls slowly, very slowly raise their arms high over their heads. They are still kneeling on the ground. They move in perfect synchronization again for the first time in awhile. The voice continues: " We are arresting you." The girls slowly touch the two hands closest to each other, and then grasp them together, a sign of support. The lights are very bright now, so bright they cause the girls to squint. The last thing we hear is the blowhorn saying "We are arresting you both. You are not obliged to say anything. Anything at all." Blackout.*

**End Of Act One.**

## ACT TWO

*Joli is sitting by herself in a pool of light. Her legs are pulled up tightly and her arms are wrapped around them almost as if she is a ball.*

JOLI. A riddle for you. What do you get when you take two girls who have spent most of their lives locked in a single room, wishing nothing more than to be removed from the outside world, and toss them in jail? I trust the irony's not lost on you... But for a long while, they thought it best to keep us in separate cells, and that was sheer agony. Like being unable to breathe-

*Lights come up on Jaz in a separate pool of light. Sitting in exactly the same position. She has a tape recorder. Jaz's voice can be heard. Followed by Joli's. They are imitating two doctors.*

VOICE. How long have they both been like that?

ANOTHER VOICE. Almost two weeks.

VOICE. Two weeks? And no food?

ANOTHER VOICE. No, sir.

VOICE. And they just lie about the floor, like that.

ANOTHER VOICE. No, not always. Sometimes they stand.

VOICE. How nice. Must be a treat...

ANOTHER VOICE. Well, it does break the tedium.

VOICE. For you, or the girls?

ANOTHER VOICE. Both, sir. Except sir, there is one peculiarity.

VOICE. You mean apart from the near catatonic behavior and the refusal to eat?

ANOTHER VOICE. Yes. They often stand for hours at a time. Perfectly motionless.

VOICE. Pity. I thought you were going to say they broke out with a little tap dance every now or then.

ANOTHER VOICE. Not as yet.

VOICE. Perhaps you ought to try music?

ANOTHER VOICE. Oh, sir, I have. And books, sir.

VOICE. I was merely pulling your –

ANOTHER VOICE. Sir, I even gave them a tape recorder. You know, thought they might talk to it, since they won't to us. And it worked, they are talking.

VOICE. Only to each other.

ANOTHER VOICE. True, a bit at a time. And only on tape. And only as us.

VOICE. Well, did you try putting them together?

ANOTHER VOICE. What, the tapes?

VOICE. Christ, Tippit. No, the girls.

*The girls are now rising, moving side by side, in perfect time.*

ANOTHER VOICE. Of course. Doctor Stewart. I'm no fool.

VOICE. Could hang a jury on that one, I'm certain... So when you put Ying here, in with Yang what did we get? Harmony and bliss?

ANOTHER VOICE. They stood there together, perfectly motionless. Still no talking...

VOICE. Is it possible they knew you were listening in?

ANOTHER VOICE. Not to my knowledge, no, sir.

VOICE. Wait a minute, play that bit back again, please.

*The sound of a tape rewinding.*

ANOTHER VOICE. They stood there together, perfectly motionless. No talking...

VOICE. Is it possible they knew you were listening in?

ANOTHER VOICE. Not to my knowledge, no sir.

VOICE. Wait a minute, play that bit back again, please.

*The sound of a tape rewinding.*

VOICE. Shut the damn thing off. You bloody fool, they're playing games with us. They think this is nothing but a game here.

*Joli picks up the recorder and the two of them start recording a new scene.*

I'm well aware of that, sir.

Damn voice doesn't sound even a bit like me. Does it.

Actually, sir, I'd say-

Not a damned bit. But the other has you and your waffling "Yes sirs" down to a tee.

I'd say they've got us both spot on, sir.

Would you? Well, any more bright notions since the recorder?

Actually, sir, I have.

No wonder they've got it in their heads it's a game with you their doctor. What'd you give them this time? A can of petrol and a book of matches each...

I've given them two sessions a day together outside, for fresh air, and they've begun to eat.

Bravo. At least they won't die before the bloody trial.

Only there's one other odd bit, sir.

Face facts, Tippit, it's all queer. Everything to do with the two of them's off center.

This is even more so than most, sir.

I'm not sure we've time for it today-

They take turns eating. One for the other.

Enough!

One stuffs herself and the other stops eating altogether. Then just like that, they switch roles.

JAZ. Turn the damn thing off! Christ, Jol. *(She has turned the recorder off.)* They don't have to know everything.

JOLI. Then, let me eat, please. I'm starving....

JAZ. Do you want to go into that courtroom looking like some fattened goose for the slaughter?

JOLI. No-

JAZ. Look at your cheek bones. See, for the first time. You've actually got cheek bones.

JOLI. I do? I do, don't I! Still, Jaz, I'm so weak. I'm not as strong as you.

JAZ. All the more reason to hold out. Two more days. Then we switch. Trust me, Jol. It's working. It's all about control...They lock us in, tell us when to eat, but they can't make us. Remember, together there's fight in us. We've got them running scared now, do you want to go and ruin that?

JOLI. I've got an idea. I'll be you. Then I get to eat today and they'll still think I haven't.

JAZ. What?

JOLI. I'll go back to your cell, and you go to mine. How would they know the difference.

JAZ. That's a bloody great idea.

JOLI. Talk about control. They won't even know which one of us they've got.

*A loud buzzer rings. The girls move in perfect step but this time Jaz goes to Joli's spot and Joli to Jaz's. A door is heard slamming on Jaz's cell and a bright light shines on Joli. Jaz enters the pool of light slowly, playing Dr. Tippit.*

JAZ. Hello there, Jaz. How are you feeling today? *(Joli says nothing.)* You understand it is imperative that I can construct a full psychological profile

for your defense. Until now it has been obvious that you've been reluctant. But there has been quite a new development. And Doctor Stewart and I felt you should know. Yesterday your sister Jocelyn came forward and gave a full deposition. (*Joli's eyes widen, but she does not move.*) She placed full blame for the fires and damage to property on you, saying the events were all your idea and that your will was too much for her to resist. She then begged for us not to tell you for she was certain that you would find her deceitful.

JOLI. (*Muttering to herself.*) From the Latin capere, de cepere, to seize. Deceive...to ensnare...

JAZ. (*As Dr. Tippit.*) I understand how shocking her severing such a vital trust, must feel. It must be devastating for you. I'll look in on you tomorrow. Good day, Jasmine.

*Jaz exits the area of light .*

JOLI. Delude, dupe, fool, hoodwink. Those cheeky bastards. Imagine if we hadn't swapped, you'd be at my throat sure as I'd be at yours. I'd stake my life the old turnips giving you the once over right now.

*Joli steps forward and becomes the other doctor as the lights come up on Joli's cell area with Jaz inside.*

JOLI. Each and every fire, your scheme, part of your master plan. You lit the matches, you spread the petrol, she just happened to be at your side. For three long hours she regaled us with the years of abuse and torture, and I might add it is not a pretty picture she paints. It's not a story that inspires thoughts of clemency. So, Joli, you just continue sitting there biting your tongue. Keep believing that the box hasn't been opened. That the lid is still locked tight. But the truth is the world full of tricks and devilry now, and if you choose to keep silent, she's doing the talking for the both of you.

*Two loud cell doors slam shut. The lights change to outdoors and the girls immediately begin to play a slow motion game of paddy cake as they sing: Ha ,Ha , I lost my bra, I don't know where my knickers are."*

JAZ. See, isn't this fun?

JOLI. Fun? This is your notion of fun. I'm famished.

JAZ. Then eat. That's right, go on. We'll both eat. They'll not know what to make of that.

*They begin to eat from trays in front of them. In perfect time.*

JOLI. Now what? Do we go at each other's throats and pretend to feel cheated?

JAZ. It's what they expect.

JOLI. Certainly have years of practice at it.

JAZ. But what's to gain from it? They'd have cracked us.

JOLI. Studying us right now, you can make bet on that. The soup's not bad.

JAZ. Tastes like warm paint. You're just hungry that's all.

JOLI. I thought you'd betrayed me, Jaz. For a moment there I thought you'd truly done it. Then I remembered I was you, and he was actually accusing me, and I knew I'd never done it. That would mean I'd be betraying myself, and I would never be party to that.

JAZ. That's it!

JOLI. What?

*Jaz kisses her sister quickly.*

JAZ. You've done it again

JOLI. Careful they're spying on us, remember? We should be at blows with one another not blowing kisses-

JAZ. Sometimes I'm in bloody awe of you sister, honest I am. You are much more clever than I, without a care to be. It's brilliant.

JOLI. Well, of course it is. Flipping amazing, if I came up with it. So what is it?

JAZ. Follow me.

JOLI. That I can do.

*They march in perfect time back to their rooms and into their separate interrogation lights.*

JOLI. If I may-

JAZ. I've decided to-

JOLI. Set down my own-

JAZ. Side of the story.

JOLI. She was right.

JAZ. She was right.

JOLI. It really was all my doing.

JAZ. I was the one calling all the shots.

JOLI. So, since I'm at fault-

JAZ. Since she was indeed innocent-

JOLI. Punish me.

JAZ. Sentence me.

TOGETHER. But let my sister go free!

JOLI. Signed Jocelyn Gibson.

JAZ. Signed Jasmine Gibson.

But you're Jasmine Gibson-

And you're Jocelyn-

JAZ. No, I'm quite sure that I'm not.

JOLI. I'm right certain you're wrong.

JAZ. I'm Joli?

JOLI. I'm Jaz?

Wait, let's get this, once and for all, straight-

Are you absolutely certain?

JAZ. Joli?



JOLI. Jaz?

JAZ. Jaz.

JOLI. Joli.

*Two loud metal doors slam.*

JAZ. Out of the night that covers me-

JOLI. Black as the pit from pole to pole.

JAZ. I thank whatever gods may be -

JOLI. For my unconquerable soul!

*The lights flash brightly over and over and the camera shutter sound is heard each of the five times and the girls pictures are on two panels that appear to be windows into their cells. The effect should be now that the two parents are looking in on their daughters.*

JAZ. Do you hear dat, Suz? Dey don't even know de which from which?

JOLI. Neider did you half de time. Dis one here's Jocelyn, and dat one wit de frown's Jasmine. Of course, I'm certain, I'm dem Mudder aren't I? Baked dem in my own oven, fought fourteen hours to get dem in dis bleedin world, and for what? Have dem turn our home into a sideshow. Reporters, blastin photographers.

JAZ. It's alright, Luv. Never difficult for me wife to sort them out.

JOLI. Cause, dey never look at'all de same to me. Oh, I know dem faces are similar, but you've got to look past a face. Me not talkin appearances. It's the feelin you get from dem's what I'm onto. Look at de fierceness behind my Jaz's eyes, she had dat from a little girl. Grab at everythin that way, always life or death wit her. Teethin was no picnic wit dat one, me tellin you. And Jol, she a studier. Stare at you for hours, she will.

JAZ. Confound me dey did, from day one. Me could never get one pull away from de udder. Dey cry for hours, but I guess you catch on to dat. But dey was always good little girls, sur. Odd as de day is long, but never a bit of trouble.

JOLI. Dere you go paintin dem never a problem. Keep it up, and de papers be callin you loony as well.

JAZ. Upset she is 'cause dat Daily bloody Mirror says it all our fault.

JOLI. Not ours, mine! Mudder of de two demons, de caption say. "How on eart could a mudder not know".

JAZ. But it the God's honest trut, we'd no idea. Good little girls dey were.

JOLI. You try livin wit it. Years dey spent tuck off in dem bedroom, not so much as a Hello or a Goodnight Dad, your own daughters. Never once a real hug or a goodnight kiss. You own little girls who never once could even look you straight in the eye, could never once in de whole of dem lives just say "love ya--Mum".

JAZ. Suz... All dis attention is a bit of a strain on us, see. Two more interviews dis morning. One all de way from London. Mind you, most be good about compensatin for our time.

JOLI. Got a right little earner on the go, dis one does.

JAZ. Don't be makin more over it dan dere is. Spent her whole life swearin chalk was cheese, dat one did.

JOLI. An dis one's tellin me need a bizness manager...

JAZ. So if dere is anyting else me can be in aid of- if them need anytin at'all

JOLI. Don rush me, man-

JAZ. Suz. Remember what the magistrate say. Patience and give de doctors all de help we can. All up to de experts in dese cases. Is really in dem hands.

JOLI. Experts...

JAZ. Remember, de one on de left is Joli...

JOLI. Joli de one who watches...

JAZ. And Jaz she de one who frowns...

*The two cell doors slam at the same time. Joli runs to catch her mother. The tone is heard.*

JOLI. Mum!

JAZ. Don't you dare!

JOLI. I-

JAZ. Don't-

JOLI. Just-

JAZ. You-

JOLI. I jus-

JAZ. Dare!

*Joli is silent. The tone stops.*

JOLI. I'm sorry, Mum. I'm so, so terribly sorry...

JAZ. So am I, Mum! Sorry I ever spent the whole of my life confiding in this one. Look at her all fretful and worried, seen worms with more spine. Please sir, don't lock us away, I'm so terribly sorry...

JOLI. I am sorry-

JAZ. Did you hear that, she's sorry. How many do you think with their backs up to the wall, haven't felt piles of regret? I'll bet Jack the Bloody Ripper was sorry too, wasn't he. Once they caught him.

JOLI. They never did catch him.

JAZ. 'Cause he worked alone.

JOLI. 'Cause he never called the police.

JAZ. You saying this is all my fault?

JOLI. And he was too sorry. Why he stopped killing. They never caught him, but he stopped.

JAZ. Besides he did call the police, or sent them letters and telegrams. Even a kidney. Bastard was a genius. Posted them a human kidney. Dared them to try and find him.

JOLI. I wonder how he did it.

JAZ. Wrapped it up and stuck it in a box-

JOLI. Wonder how he stopped. Obviously something drove him to it, but he found a way to just stop.

JAZ. Who says he stopped? Probably just found a new way to channel his aggression. Took up pounding veal.

JOLI. Don't you ever regret this, Jaz? Regret all we've done?

JAZ. I regret having to listen to this feeling pissing sorry for yourself. That's what I regret. Listen, sister dear, in the grand scheme o' things, I'd say regret's about as useful an emotion as ambition. What the bloody hell does either get you for your trouble? Look, you want to be part of their scheme, deal with their tricks and deceit, go right ahead. You want to live in their world, let them squash your individuality and reward you with nothing but conformity, go ahead. Let them mold you into a nice cookie-cutter sugar and spice little girl, but I'm not for it. I'd like to believe in the game, Jol. You asked, so okay I'll tell you the honest to Christ truth. I'd like to believe the good ones finish ahead. If I thought for a moment that might be true, I'd be a ruddy, effing saint, I would. But I got nothing to go on there, you see. I've only Father Bleeding Clancey telling me the way to heaven is charity and kindness, while he's holding the phone with some politician who's been and done and bought and sold his soul and most every one else's long ago. And the only saints I see are nothing but statues and stain-glass that were tortured and maimed for their troubles ages ago. Why I've never needed dark glasses out of doors, like most do, Jol. The sun's just not all that bright to me.

JOLI. Ten minutes.

JAZ. What now?

JOLI. My world's been just as dark. But for ten minutes, it was different.

JAZ. Look, you say what ever the bloody hell you want to tomorrow in that courtroom. When they call on you, ask you how you plead, you say "I had it off with a boy for ten minutes in a graveyard and now I'm sorry, I'm so terribly sorry." "I'm innocent, she's the one, my sister's the one" It doesn't matter to me, and neither do you. From this moment on, you are rid of me, dearest sister. I am no longer yours.

*A loud gavel bangs and the two girls move slowly center and back to back.*

VOICE OF JUDGE. That you jointly entered as trespassers and stole therein four phonics tapes, two electric pencil sharpeners, a pair of scissors, and one copy of Oxford Collection of Verse and Poetry. And finally that you again jointly, without lawful excuse, damaged by fire the Our Lady, Queen Of Martyrs School, intending to damage such property or being reckless as to whether such property should be damaged. What say you to the charges, Jasmine Nicole Gibson, guilty or not guilty?

JAZ. Guilty.

VOICE OF JUDGE. What say you to the charges, Jocelyn Caroline Gibson? Guilty or not guilty?

*She is trembling, terrified.*

VOICE OF JUDGE.. What say you to the charges?

*She is still unable to speak.*

VOICE OF JUDGE. Guilty or not guilty? You must respond to the charges, Miss Gibson, or we may proceed no further. You do understand the allegations put forth for you to respond. (*Joli is barely able to shake her head.*) Then how do you plead? Either guilty or not guilty. Miss Gibson?

JAZ. “Beyond this place of wrath and tears, looms but the horror of the shade. And yet the menace of the years, finds and shall find me”?

JOLI. “---Unafraid”?

VOICE OF JUDGE. Order, please.

JAZ. “It matters not how straight the gate-“

TOGETHER. “How charged with punishments the scroll.”

JOLI. “I am the master of my fate!”

VOICE OF JUDGE. Order!

JOLI. “I am the captain of my soul!”

VOICE OF JUDGE. Jocelyn Gibson-

JOLI. Guilty! I am-- guilty, your honors.

JAZ. That was your finest hour.

JOLI. Don't be daft.

JAZ. You should have seen yourself, Jol. You were right wonderfully defiant. Joan of Bloody Arc could have learned a thing or two from you.

JOLI. It got us life, you fool.

JAZ. Horseshit.

JOLI. Convinced them there was no help for us, I'm sure of that.

VOICE OF JUDGE. I am satisfied from the evidence that has been placed before me that both defendants are suffering from a psychopathic disorder. *(The voice continues on sentencing them as they comment.)* I am further satisfied that their disorder is of such a nature as to warrant their detention immediately for medical treatment.

JAZ. Our bets were down before the horse left the gate, Jol. The whole bloody sham didn't last but one hour.

VOICE OF JUDGE. I have regard to all the circumstances of the case, including the nature and number of offenses, and comparable methods of dealing with them.

JAZ. Kept us for months and the whole damn thing was done in forty five minutes.

JOLI. Because we were so bloody damn guilty. Left journals, made phone calls.

VOICE OF JUDGE. And have come to the conclusion that the only suitable course is an order under section 60 of the Mental Health Act.

JAZ. So we were guilty, neither of us ever bloody denied that. But did we deserve this? To be locked up with murderers and lunatics?

VOICE OF JUDGE. Therefore I shall make an order for their detention in Broadmoor hospital. *(Pause. Joli and Jaz stop look at each other and straight ahead.)* It further appears to me, having regard to the nature of the offenses and the number of them, that there is a danger of their committing further offenses if released. Therefore I think the order I make must be-- without limit of time.

*A loud gavel bangs, and the lights shift to cell darkness as two doors slam.*

JAZ. A life sentence for a stapler and some books?

JOLI. And a few fires.

JAZ. Was a phase.

JOLI. Was it? "I want to be the best arsonist ever." That's what you wrote. The best ever.

JAZ. Got that from you. Ambition. No good doing a thing unless you wish to be great.

JOLI. Face it, we were a bloody menace. Knotted so tightly together, we couldn't be untied.

JAZ. So throw us into a cell in Broadmoor with the rapists, the killers, the demented, the deranged, and let us rot?

JOLI. What would you do?

JAZ. Exactly what I did. Turn my back on the whole lot of them.

JOLI. And on me.

JAZ. Not at first, not for the first ten years. Only after you were hell bent on bettering yourself. With your Doctor Tippit.

JOLI. We needed help.

JAZ. You needed help. I was doing bloody fine, thank you very much.

JOLI. Sure long as you had enough Depixol- (*A bell rings. The girls put out their hands and receive their pills*) - in you.

JAZ. Did make the day feel a bit more cheerful.

JOLI. Cheerful?

JAZ. I always say a little Depix cocktail- (*The girls swallow their pills with cups of water*) and count the decades floating by.

*Projections now occur as if the walls or panels are televisions and the girls both hold remotes and press them. There is no other movement save the popping of pills than a channel is changed.*

JAZ. Look, sister dear, they've cloned a fish. The Chinese have. First time an organism was an exact reproduction of itself. Other than us, mind you. We never got the recognition we deserve. And soon we will be obsolete, they'll be clones of every poor sod running around to pull up your knickers for you. And to think it'll all have started with a fish. Cloned themselves a fish, the Chinese have. Well, they always were bloody good at Maths and Science.

JOLI. They tried to rescue the Yanks in Iran.

JAZ. Who the Chinese?

JOLI. No. The Americans. The ones being held hostage. Tried to storm in and bust them out. It didn't work. Eight men were killed.

JAZ. Bloody armies. Good for nothing. Should have called on the Men From U.N.C.L.E. or Mission Impossible. Tonight's episode: Mission Bust - Out- Iran!

JOLI. Wish they'd break in and bust us out.

JAZ. "Operation Fire Girls".

JOLI. More like "Two Fish Drowning".

JAZ. I'll drink to that.

*Bell rings. They take a pill and swallow water and change the channel.*

JOLI. They shot John Lennon.

JAZ. Who?

JOLI. Some deranged fan. He died.

JAZ. See what hope gets you for your trouble?

JOLI. Maybe you're right, Jaz. Maybe there is no God.

*The bell rings. They take a pill. Drink. And change the channel.*



JOLI. They released the hostages, Jaz.

JAZ. Yeah, but they elected Ronald Reagan. Before only a handful were hostage, now the whole damn bloody country is.

*The bell rings. They take a pill. Drink. And change the channel.*

JOLI. They shot the Pope.

JAZ. No!

JOLI. Yes. He was just wounded.

JAZ. Like Reagan.

JOLI. Yeah.

JAZ. One shot and they get John Lennon...

JOLI. Stop it. Who next, I wonder.

JAZ. True. They're out there taking pot shots at Popes now. Can't get much closer to the Almighty than that. Still in a hurry to get out of here, throw your hat back in with that lot?

*The bell rings. Joli takes a pill and swallows it. Drinks.*

JAZ. That's my dear old girl. (*She pops her pill.*) I knew there was some reason I loved you. (*She toasts.*) Here's to another year of floating through.

*They change the channel.*

JOLI. We invaded the Falklands.

JAZ. The who?

JOLI. The Falkland Islands.

JAZ. Where the bloody hell are they?

JOLI. Off the coast of Argentina.

JAZ. Really.

JOLI. Apparently the Argentines want them back.

JAZ. Why?

JOLI. Doesn't say. Just says they established a presence.

JAZ. No, I mean what the bloody hell do we want them for? What are they known for?

JOLI. Who the Argentines?

JAZ. No, the bleeding Frickland Islands.

JOLI. Falkland. Sheeping mostly.

JAZ. Sheeping?

JOLI. Yes. 90 percent of the residents are shepherds.

JAZ. We invaded some bloody islands five thousand miles away of the coast of bleeding South America for some sheep?

JOLI. It appears so.

JAZ. I'm going back to sleep. Wake me up if the sheep win.

JOLI. They didn't. We did.

JAZ. What do you mean, the thing's already over?

JOLI. Happened a month ago. We've been out of it for a month. Missed the whole bloody war.

JAZ. Hardly a war if the thing is over before it starts.

JOLI. Margaret Thatcher called it the most significant British Naval Victory since World War II.

JAZ. How difficult is that. It's the only British Naval victory since World War II. Probably had to dust the damn battle ships off. She must feel right proud kicking the shit out of some Spanish sheep. Wake me up for some real news next time, otherwise leave me drool.

*The bell rings. They take a pill and drink. Then change the channel.  
The Charlie's Angels theme song is heard.)*

JAZ. I love this show, Charlie's Angels. Can you think of anything more

daft? Farrah Fawcett is swimming along in the middle of ocean, and her hair was perfect. Bitter cold and sharks but not a curl undone. I'd give the world to try that. Just swim out and out till there's nothing but sea on all sides. What's with you today? (*Joli doesn't respond. She seems miles away.*) Bit too many cocktails before dinner, luv? I'd do it underwater though. I'd swim the whole way underwater. Just dive deep down and start swimming. I love the way it felt to move underwater, didn't you, Jol? Like floating through pudding. Nothing had any weight. Hey, sister, I'm talking to you. See like you. Underwater, and still able to breathe.

JOLI. Like fish.

JAZ. That's right. Your Chinese fishes, the ones just alike, only we're Siamese fighting fishes. Swimming along, mile after mile, fathom after fathom. Way down deep under the dark sea.

JOLI. I can't breathe.

JAZ. Sure you can.

JOLI. I can't. I can't breathe.

*The bell rings and the girls reach for their pills this time Joli does not swallow hers but puts it in her pocket secretly. They change channels.*

JAZ. They've got all new girls now. Jol. All the originals, the first Angels are gone. Charlie had to recruit himself a whole new crew.

JOLI. Things change.

JAZ. Let me write that one down. Pearls of wisdom. Things change. Bloody brilliant.

*The bell rings they reach for their pills. Again Joli does not swallow hers but puts it in her pocket.*

JAZ. See now- fuck this! (*For a moment Joli fears she's been caught.*) Cheryl Ladd's a twit. This second lot's nothing but a bunch of twaddle-makes you long for Farrah and Victoria Principal. See Jol, what good is it. Can't even count on your Angels to stay put more than a season or two. But you can count on me, can't you Jol?

JOLI. (*Pretending to swallow her pill.*) 'Till all's blue.

JAZ. That's me girl. 'Till all's blue.

*They change channels. But this time the lights come up only on Jaz.  
She cannot stop changing the channels.*

JAZ. Fuck, where is it? Charlie? Damn you, don't you desert me too!  
(JOLI. enters.) Where were you?

JOLI. Had to spend a penny...

JAZ. For the last hour?

JOLI. Oh, before that Matron wanted me to tidy my cell.

JAZ. Bitch wouldn't even give me my pills. Said they was on to her.

JOLI. She's scared of you's all, Jaz. You did threaten to turn her in.

JAZ. It's about control, Jol. She thinks she's got me, took me awhile, but I found a way to get her.

JOLI. You look terrible.

JAZ. Careful, dear. I'm you, you're me. Think you look any sweeter? Look in the mirror, luv.

JOLI. Look at your face. It's white as paste. You are only awake to eat and fall asleep. You used to make us laugh at least. You never smile anymore. When was the last time we laughed.

JAZ. I'm sitting in a maximum security lockup, Luv. Not bloody Brighton. And I'm here for life. Not much to let loose a bellybreaker about. And you aren't much aid. All you talk about is who died. Obsessed by it. Who killed who.

JOLI. I feel dead's, why. They're killing us, Jaz. We were brilliant, bloody fantastic.

JAZ. What?

JOLI. There was a time when no one could touch us.

JAZ. That was up here, Luv. All in here.

JOLI. How can you say that to me? How can you, of all people?

JAZ. Would someone please be good enough to inform my sister that the

dais she's lecturing from is in actuality the padded chair in the recreation room of a loony bin. Last I looked.

JOLI. You're the one who could always convince me. I loved you so for that.

JAZ. And that was your gravest mistake, my dear. Should have gone on hating me. I was in a word, mistaken.

JOLI. We had dreams.

JAZ. We were delusional.

JOLI. No. Please, Jaz. Don't let them win!

JAZ. Listen to her. All proud and haughty. Win what? A lounge suite? A bloody cruise to T-T-Tahiti with your precious Doctor T-tippit.

JOLI. What are you on about now?

JAZ. Leave me the ruddy hell alone, and give me my pills. I said give them over to me. Now! I said!

JOLI. I heard what you said. I'm not deaf.

JAZ. You think because you decide to go crying to some doctor for help, I give a shit? I could care less-- (*Long pause.*) Just give me the pills, damn you.

JOLI. How do you know?

JAZ. Know what?

JOLI. About the doctor.

JAZ. About your lies and deception?

JOLI. I'll tell you; I wanted to tell you. Christ, don't you think I wanted to tell you?

JAZ. Well, I certainly didn't hear you try. All I'm hearing is lies.

JOLI. I'm telling you, aren't I?

JAZ. Just give me the sodding pills-

JOLI. How is it lies if I'm bloody well telling you.

JAZ. Because it's post facto, my dear. It's after the fact. If a husband's dipping his wick elsewhere, but has the decency to confess, does that mean he never cheated?

JOLI. This isn't cheating, Jaz. My God, do you even hear yourself? We are not husband and wife. Look at how unbelievably confused the boundaries are between us-

JAZ. Ah, there she goes with the boundaries, crap again. And you wonder how I knew?

JOLI. It just proves how misguided our roles-

JAZ. What, what is my role, huh? What has always been my part in the bloody drama? To aid you, to help you get through it. Choose your jumper, how to wear your hair, match your shoes. You even thought I helped yank you out and into this world. Well I got a bloody surprise for you, Luv. (*She throws a letter at her sister.*) The jobs yours from now on. Always has been. We were sorely mistaken.

JOLI. What is this now?

JAZ. It's from Mum. Read it. Says she's answering your post. Again. Love's hearing from you, so many times, after all these years.

JOLI. I wanted to tell you. Jaz. I just didn't know how.

JAZ. Incomunicado.

JOLI. You would have forbidden it, persuaded me to not to.

JAZ. She's so glad you've been seeing the doctor. For what, about a month now? From the Latin capere, de cepere, to seize. Deceive... to ensnare.

JOLI. You were always sleeping, most of the day now. You'd packed it in.

JAZ. No, Luv. I was treading water. But now, yes. Now I'm packing it in.

JOLI. "First about the zodiac information you requested. I don't know why you felt all these years that Jasmine was born first. I promise you I never told you that."

*Jaz reaches for the pills.*

JOLI. Stop it. Did you read this?

JAZ. Matron gave it to me. Thought I was you. Ironic, don't you think?

JOLI. "You Jocelyn were born first, at 9:05 A.M. It was Jasmine"-

JAZ. Give me the-

JOLI. You read this?

JAZ. Could give a bloody shit!

JOLI. "It was Jasmine who followed just over ten minutes later" Stop it!

*The pills drop and scatter all over the floor. Jaz tries to collect them as if someone had dropped diamonds.*

JOLI. "She took her sweet time about it, you see. Was in no hurry. Might be why she frowns so."

JAZ. Give me that!

JOLI. No. It was me all the time.

JAZ. Give it to me! *(Jaz rips up the letter.)*

JOLI. Oh, good show, Jaz. What does that do? You think that'll change anything?

JAZ. And you think what happened ages ago will?

*She tries to take a pill.*

JOLI. No! Enough!

*Joli slaps her across the face and grabs the pill. Jaz sits a minute, stunned. She slaps Joli. Joli slaps her back, harder. Jaz goes to slap her again, and Joli grabs her hand.*

JOLI. Enough!

JAZ. You fucking, bloody, bugger, twat, shit! You are dead to me. Do you hear. Dead to me forever!

JOLI. Sorry, Luv. But you are mine. Dear sister, you are mine till all's blue. You're my sister and I love you-

JAZ. Well, sod you. It's over.

JOLI. No, it's not. It's just beginning. Damn you, listen to me, It's not over. They're building a clinic. In Wales, near home, Jaz. And it'll be ever so much nicer than here. We'll be able to sit outdoors, there's going to be a park and a garden, and Doctor Tippit said he'd recommend us both for transfer. Do you hear? Transfer us out of here, Jaz. To a minimum security clinic. After ten years, not life. But we have to want to get better. We have to try. We have to show signs of improvement.

JAZ. You improve. I'm for the status quid pro quo.

JOLI. We'll die in here.

JAZ. Have to die somewhere. This place is as good as any.

JOLI. No, it's not. Jaz, please, listen to me. It'll take time to build the clinic, a few months- Doctor Tippit-

JAZ. Sod, your doctor Tippit. Sod him and his hairy ears.

JOLI. He cares about us both, Jaz.

JAZ. Got shrubs growing right out of his ears. Don't see how you can even look him straight in the face.

JOLI. Do this for me, please.

JAZ. Out of the shit that covers me.

JOLI. For us.

JAZ. I am the one to masturbate, I am the Captain of my stuff.

JOLI. What? What did you just say?

JAZ. Christ... my head. ( *Holding her throbbing head, then seeing Joli looking concerned and reaches for her.*) What? What in the bloody hell, do you want?

JOLI. I want to go home. Please, Jaz. Let's go home. ( *Jaz answers by sitting down on the floor. Joli is now standing over her.*) We have to be examined one last time, both mentally and physically before they will sign the final release. Dr. Tippit took care of the psychological exam, thank God. But please, don't babble on in there.



JAZ. Shhh. Keep your voice down, are you daft? You know they listen in. He doesn't think it's a good idea. Jol. I talked to Charlie. Charlie and the other Angels don't think we should go ahead with it.

JOLI. Don't start in with the Charlie's Angels crap again.

JAZ. Charlie doesn't know if you've the stuff to make it.

JOLI. Charlie is a bleeding actor, on a stupid show. From the states. It's a show, Jaz, on the tele.

JAZ. Of course it's a show. But that show's just a show. That's how he gets on the tele. Then he can talk to us.

JOLI. He's not talking to you, Luv. The show is years old, it's a re-run. Bunch of bimbos with polyester hair. It's made up, it's not real.

JAZ. It is, Jol. This is very real. You have to see past the show. The show within the show. Only a very few can hear it. In here, you see. You have to be on the frequency. To pick it up. That's alright. If everyone could, there'd be no need for us Angels? But don't you worry, I know he's just testing me, see if I'm ready for the mission, Jol. I'll be alright. I know it's dangerous, but I'm ready. *(She looks hard at her sister.)* Are you, Jol. Are you ready?

JOLI. Christ, don't muck this up, Jaz. You're burning up. You've got fever.

JAZ. It's nothing at all, just a bug. Touch of the flu. It's damp in here that's all.

JOLI. This is never going to work.

JAZ. Don't wimp out on me now, what would Charlie say?

JOLI. I've no bloody idea.

JAZ. He'd say, "you're on your own from here, girls."

*She reaches her arms out to Joli. The lights change to a single pool of light. The girls walk arm in arm, Jaz supported by Joli.*

JOLI. That was your finest hour, Luv. They thought it was just a bad fever. They believed you. Twenty tests and they couldn't find anything wrong.

JAZ. Doctors...

*Jaz collapses. Joli helps her to the ground and sits with Jaz 's head in her lap, like a strange portrait of Madonna and Child. Joli is touching her forehead.*

JOLI. And we made it out, walked out of Broadmoor arm and arm. And we got to the new clinic and eight hours later, you were gone.

JAZ. I'm ready, Charlie... *(Slowly Jaz closes her eyes.)*

JOLI. Viral Myocarditis, they said. Very rare. A virus that lives in the blood not the muscle, so it gives no warning, but it can do its work in less than twenty four hours. It moves into the heart and inflames the muscle, completely destroying it. The "silent virus" it's called. I'm so sorry, Jaz. I was more worried about getting out, than losing you. I had no idea. You were obviously sick, I should have done more. All I wanted was to be out of Broadmoor. I remember even thinking, oh, Christ, die, why don't you, but don't mess up this chance. How could I be that selfish. How could I have said that. Die, why don't you...?

JAZ. *(sitting right up)* You still don't get it, do you? How long is it going to take for you to figure it out? Months later-

JOLI. A year. It's been a year, today.

JAZ. Alright, even worse. A year today they buried me, and you still think it was your fault. I worry about you, Jol. Who made all of the decisions? Who dressed you for twenty some odd years? Who gave you the titles for all your books and stories? Who hated the outside world, never felt the bright sun, despised reality so she dragged you from one locked room to another? Who found the most permanent maximum security locked room of them all, bloody Broadmoor, and threw us both in? Me. That's who.

JOLI. I tried to get us out. To escape.

JAZ. You did get us out. You did escape. And you had every right to want to. The sun burns in your eyes, Jol. You toss about a church floor with a boy, in the throes of passion, wanting nothing more than to affirm your own aliveness. Me, I wanted nothing more than to die. I wanted to die, Jol. Don't you see? Because I couldn't ever stand the living. I never could. Probably why you were born first. I never wanted a part of this world to begin with. Wouldn't be surprised if you didn't reach in, and yank me out.

JOLI. Because, I needed you, Jaz. Christ, I need you. I still do.

JAZ. Oh, stop, you're blubbering, I'm right here. I didn't really die of some virus, Jol. That's just what your doctors need to write on their charts, collect

their pay. We both know only one of us could make a go of it. Always said glue the two of us together, we'd have a fighter. Well, you've me to all's blue remember? But I'm where I should be now. *(She points to Joli's head.)* Poking at you from in here. *(And her heart.)* And here. I hung on long as I could for you, Luv. Then I died of relief. I died to let you get on with your life. So, please, do me a favor and stop making a muck of it. Get out there and talk to some people.

JOLI. I am. *(She points to the audience.)* I have been. It's part of my therapy.

JAZ. Therapy... Christ, I'm glad I'm dead. Had me drawing naked pictures of my Dad. So, go on, talk.

JOLI. Hi!

JAZ. You said that hours ago. Don't tell me I died for nothing.

JOLI. I can't talk to both them and you. They'll think I'm daft.

JAZ. Luv, most of your adult life was spent in a lockup for the criminally insane, of course they think you were daft. But if you want, I'll stay out of the picture.

JOLI. Just while I finish.

JAZ. But I'm here whenever you need me, though to them, I'm...

*She lifts her hand and makes the "Ssshhh" sign in front of her lips and Joli does the same. In perfect time with each other. And the lights go out on Jaz.*

JOLI. It's been a year now since I lost her, and it is true that sometimes I feel as though she is right by my side jabbering away. All my life my greatest wish was to be alone. I now realize I can never have that. Will never be truly alone. And nothing in the world makes me happier. That is my new secret, my new desire. To carry her with me always. And so I, uh, do, implore you. Your secrets. Whatever they are, please-- cherish them. Forever. I've talked so long the sun is going down. Doctor Tippit says I'm just trying to make up for lost time. Still, I'm glad we had this chance to meet, to get to know one another. To communicate. Good night.

*The lights fade to black.*

**End of Play**

**iF**

a cautionary play  
with video

**iF**

### **Cast of Characters**

The play is written so that both of the roles may be played by either sex so the use of dual pronouns is present, if they is more appropriate, go right ahead and us that. Please use whatever is appropriate. There are only two characters:

- 1            an accomplished scientist
  
- 0            another accomplished and very famous scientist, sometimes rival, former friend, gradually dying of ALS disease

There should be a very minimal amount of scenery, a chair here or there, a podium, but there is a motorized wheelchair for 0. Video screens can be scattered about as budget allows. There must be at least one large video panel centerstage, ever present. The action is continuous, and there is no intermission.

For Cassey  
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*A single screen or monitor is apparent with a blip of light or snow on it as the audience enters. It should never be off throughout the entire performance. There may be, and should be, other screens or projections used as the budget allows, but this one screen must dominate the setting. As the house lights go to black, a metallic synthesizer voice is heard in the darkness.*

SYNTH: Once upon a time when time was still time there lived a famous scientist. Now this was long before we were suffocated by so many stories, (if possible a cacophony of blips of light and snow dance on each of the screens) they became the same old story, and for awhile we stopped listening to them. (The screens fade) This was before our stories reinvented themselves without a beginning, middle, and an end. Just about the time we discarded beginnings and ends. Leaving only one big middle. (All snow now on the screens) But that is not the beginning of this story. This begins with a famous scientist and a highway.

*The Steppenwolf song "Born To Be Wild" begins very loudly, and a moving highway appears on the main screen. A figure in a motorized wheelchair seems to be moving down the highway. His/her facial expressions never change, he/she is suffering from the advanced stages of a crippling disease, but we can tell he/she is in a frantic state. He/she is moving quite rapidly down hills and around curves, and it appears that the faintest of smiles can be seen in his/her eyes. At a crescendo in the music, the chair appears onstage and comes to a screeching halt, almost toppling over, and the man/woman almost tumbles out onto the floor. He/she has one hand on a mechanism pressing a button on what looks like a laptop computer attached to the front of the chair. The metallic voice now seems to be speaking directly from it:*

SYNTH: Two skunks are at a bar having a drink, and one skunk says to the other, "how can you be sure that we truly exist; that this skunk life of ours isn't all some great big cosmic game?" The other skunk takes a long swallow of drink, and after pondering the question for a bit, replies: "I stink therefore I am." I am supposed to be delivering a talk right now that was going to change the course of modern history. And I was going to begin with that little anecdote. Probably better that I am here and not there, don't you think?

*Feedback noise as another man/woman appears has hit the microphone accidentally before he/she speaks out of nervousness at an important symposium.*

1. Please excuse me... while I make a complete mess of this. Many of you haven't seen me in years. But we in science know to fear most what isn't visible. (*An attempt at humor as he/she is very reticent, and is speaking with great difficulty.*) I recently stumbled on a "lovingly intended" quip by one of you postulating the squandering of my "great early promise": just because there isn't an end of the earth that doesn't mean I haven't thrown myself off it. I rather liked that, exemplifies determination, if not an ability to fly in the face of convention... Speaking of conventions, I'm here because my oldest friend, one of the greatest scientists, in my humble (who are we kidding, I can hear you say in reference to humility and me) but in my opinion, one of the greatest human beings- that has- ever lived- wanted me to say a few words of introduction. But now it seems he/she is elsewhere, and may not be coming at all- and -wait- wait just a moment now- you see- unfortunately I know why.

0 AS SYNTH: (*Still typing and speaking through the machine*) So just exactly where is here? Where precisely am I? A stretch of highway that must have a location, but for me it is nowhere and means I am very lost. And indeed, I am. (*Stops typing and speaks- using his/her voice for the first time*) Here- let me stop using this damn thing. (*Referring to his computerized voice*) Can you still hear me? Perfect. I thought so. See I'm married to my machine because I have ALS or more commonly, Lou Gehrig's Disease. And gradually every muscle in my body will atrophy until it dies. Those of us with the disease eventually become imprisoned within our own physical shell. My mind however is fully functional. That is how I am able to do this- stand up and talk to you, even though I can't- so I'm going to move about (*he/she does*) whenever I please. But you must remember, in real time I am still tethered to this chair, even to breathe. Take away my ventilator and what little is left of my oxygen, and I will die. Even the simple act of breathing is ripe with conflict for me.

1. As you know our colleague was going to make history here tonight with a theorem that would have unified the universe- reconciling the very large, Relativity, with the very small, Quantum Mechanics. The heavyweight theorem that Einstein himself wrestled the last forty years of his life with, and that most of you in this room have compacted your lives and reputations to as well: A Theory of Everything.

0. We in physics spend a great deal of our lives trying to reconcile time. For us time is not just a measure of minutes, it is a living force. I remember Freshman lit in college when we read a famous short story about this soldier about to be hung atop a bridge, and suddenly the branch breaks and the soldier is freed, and he swims away, and he is running for his life. He runs all the way back to his house, I think, and into his wife's loving arms, and then snap, the rope pulls tight, and we realize the whole story was just an

instant in his mind. He was still hanging from the rope, and had only imagined he was free.

1. Crap! Why isn't he/she here? Why isn't he/she presenting his/her theory? Oh, I can hear the rumblings in the room. "Doesn't have it, does he/she. Called us together to announce the Unified Theory and then failed to crack it." Now I haven't had time to publish what I'm about to reveal, but since when did I that matter to me. I'd rather perish than publish- what it should be... (*looks for a beats at the audience, some coughs are heard*) Fuck it- (*He/she pulls the microphone closer*) I can assure you there was a theory, indeed is a theory, and I have seen it, and it is brilliant. And it would change the course of humanity. And it would certainly secure my dear friend a singular place in history, his/her own piece of perpetuation. But, you see immortality is precisely the problem.

0. That story deeply affected me. The author's manipulation of time and place, and how easily the reader's sense of reality had been distorted. So I assure you *this* whole story, the one I am telling you tonight, no matter where it goes, remember I am really just sitting here on a highway waiting to run out of air. No Twilight Zone surprise endings here.

1. Immortality... If I'm truly honest with myself, a phenomenon that happens about as frequently as Halley's comet, me being honest, not immortality. That is, or rather was, even more elusive. It is why I wanted to be a scientist- to be remembered forever. And in a moment of weakness, an occurrence of much greater regularity, I told him/her that, of my desire to live forever, and the irony is he/she laughed. "Don't be a fool, they used to tie us to rocks and have our eyes pecked out for wanting to live with the gods". Immortality was the last thing on earth he/she would have wanted. Though what have you all done? Made him/her the rock star of science, mobbed at airports, his/her own goddamn picture calendars ...

0. Do you remember the little model of the atom your science teacher would hold up with the blue Styrofoam balls representing electrons swirling around the red and gold Styrofoam protons and neutrons? "This is the building block of the universe," he or she would say...

1. Well, regardless of the fame, he/she will live forever, will never die, and it is entirely my fault. And I know he/she will never forgive me. I only hope that all of you will.

*The scientist steps away from the podium hitting the microphone, causing another much louder feedback noise. The stage goes to dark as a big bang explosion is heard and an old science fair exhibit morphs into a much more sophisticated video of an atom being born appears on the screen.*



0. Well I hate to tell you this but your teacher would have tossed out that cute little model years ago. Because our world has changed. Or at least our understanding of it has, deepened. There are many different forces that act upon us in the universe. There is our old friend gravity, which keeps us glued to the earth's surface, but is, in fact, the least powerful. Radioactive forces, the stuff of microwaves, electricity, lasers are much greater. Bouncing in and around and right through us even as I speak. Even mightier are the microscopic forces we never knew existed and are still hoping to understand. *(A new model of the an atom appears on the screen and the forces that are described and their power are shown.)* The Strong and Weak forces that hold particles together, that keep the atoms in this chair, my hand, your heart from ripping apart. Forgive me. It's the teacher in me; never give a teacher a captive audience. But it's wild, don't you think? All these unseen forces ganging up, doing their dance, twirling round us, even inside us, propelling us through existence. So how can we ever hope to predict the outcome of any natural phenomena? We can't. Everything we know is unpredictable and left up to chance. Quantum Mechanics, the study of those smallest particles, states that all is random, and the best we can hope for are predictable patterns. There is even a principle, named after this unsettling thought, by, I always assumed, a chronically depressed individual, a Dr. Heisenberg. And he theorized that all we know, all that exists, life itself- is forever uncertain. Einstein despised Quantum Mechanics, and spent the last forty years of his life trying to unify it with relativity. "God does not play dice with the universe", he vowed. "Existence cannot be random and left up to chance." And that is really why I became a scientist. To continue his search for meaning, to do battle with randomness, to restore rationality- causation- if there is an if, what is the why!

*The fetus from the film 2001 pops onto the screen and the theme song plays.*

1. The origin of anything can be traced to a single point. A singularity. Ours was a midnight showing of 2001. I expected to be all by myself. It was in the run down Olympia movie theatre, the night before freshman orientation.

0. The entire universe continues to move outward- why? Science found it.

1. And as the big fetus flashed four hundred feet high, I realized there was another person in the theatre, and that he/she had been reciting all the words to the film, like my mother did to the prayers at church. She had infinite things to say to God, but next to nothing to say to me. She had memorized the entire service, every word, especially after my father went out back one evening, kneeled down and shot himself in the head.

0. Life, as we know it, willed itself into existence from the elements, why? Science found that as well.

1. After that she was silent, never said a word to anyone the rest of her life. Only to God.

0. And yet if two random particles collide and come together, fusing into one, we may never fully understand the reason for it...

*The two characters now much younger are seated near each other in a movie theatre watching the film.*

1. So, our axis was the Olympia. Because I slid up behind the only other kindred soul who worshiped with me at the alter of Kubrick and said "They got it wrong, you know. Intelligence is not the enemy. The enemy is ignorance." And he didn't say a word to me, just kept transcending with the soundtrack of the movie... (to 0) "I'm a scientist myself. And I'm going to be remembered forever."

0. Really... I'm just interested in comprehending it.

1. What, the movie?

0. No, forever.

1. And that was it. He said nothing more to me, and the next day I walked into my dorm room-

0. (To audience) Two seemly random particles collide-

1. To meet my roommate and-

0. (To audience) We may never know why? (To his/her roommate) I took the bed nearest the window because I get claustrophobic, is that okay?

1. Sure. This is pretty weird don't you think?

0. One out of every twenty people suffers from some form of claustrophobia.

1. No, the probability that the only other loony tune in this hick town who'd rather sit all night through Kubrick than sleep is gonna be my roommate.

0. I relate to the tyranny of computers, that's all.

1. (Seeing one on a desk) Why is your PC out to get you?

0. In a manner of speaking...

1. Then get an Apple... Much more user friendly. The tyranny of computers?

0. *(To audience)* We've all had a hard drive crash or lost a file, but I am talking about something much more sinister. From my very first computer- now remember this was long before E-mail, long before the web, just AA. After Atari? All I was hooked up to was the wall socket of my bedroom. This started the day I was about to leave for college. I think I was playing Zork or Pitfall and I was just about to shut down *(A projection of an old DOS computer screen appears overhead. It reads: "Are you sure you want to quit? Yes. Game over.")* when I noticed something odd flash on my screen.... *(As he speaks the following it happens on the large screen.)* **I am. U- R. (pause) I am. U- R. (pause) If I am & U- R- Y? If U R & I am- we R. We- R? (Pause) if, Y. (Pause) iF, Y. (Pause) iF-** That was how it began... Those first feeble attempts... Those were the first words- code. questions, then answers... Prompts. Daring me to pay attention. Daring me to- find the solution. What better way to get a scientist's attention- the act of questioning, begs for an answer, that there is an answer. The first thing I did when I got to my new dorm room was boot up. To see if the ghost was still in the machine. Maybe driving four thousand miles had altered it, left it behind... *(The machine reboots on the large overhead screen and on it appears:)* **if we R- Y? if we R- Y? if- Y?**

*The "Y?" begins to slowly fill the large screen as it begins to take over; He/she shuts off the computer; the screen snaps to a blip of light, then for the first time a black screen. The black and stillness should feel like a death.*

1. What's wrong now?

0. It died...

1. Good. Trash it. I'm telling you. No tragedy. Buy an Apple.

*0 picks up his/her PC and violently throws it "out of the window."*

1. Gonna be a very interesting four years, I can tell.

0. Well, come on. Let's go buy a goddamn Apple.

1. And we did.

*They are in front of an old Apple screen now.*

1. Isn't it beautiful... Go ahead, you just push the little apple button there-

0. You do it...

1. Come on.

0. (*Very nervous.*) Please.

1. Okay, relax.

0. My heart was racing. My curiosity had quickly turned to terror...

1. (*As he/she boots it up, a joke ala Frankenstein:*) It's ALLIVVE!!

0. Was I playing Russian roulette with my sanity...

1. (*Handing it to 0.*) Alright baby, go to pappa/momma...

0. I was so sure it was going to be like the killer in those slasher movies. The machine was going to whisper: "Hello. I've been missing you; did you think you could get rid of me that easily? But nothing- just calculations and processing, the bits and bytes behaved.

*On the big screen we see an early Apple start-up screen.*

1. See, beautiful- much sexier operating system. And that there is the trash can. If there's something you don't like, just click on this and bingo gone...

0. And for a few years there were no problems, no more close encounters from cyberspace. And we immersed ourselves in science...

1. Like a one-room atom smasher-

0. Our two intellects collided over and over-

1. Spinning out of control.

0. They say existence is the struggle of opposing forces

1. The Ying, and yang, your bit to my byte

0. It is the binaryness, the duality of nature that gives it meaning...

1. Its electricity...

0. And I never met anyone better at calculations. Scored off the charts on the SAT. Well beyond a perfect score. Actually advised them on how to re-write a few of the questions.

1. Well, there is nothing worse than a misstated problem, with a messy set of values. I mean how difficult should it be to pose a problem with the cleanest most precise parameters. But for every equation I could solve, this one here would come up with a new variable, another proof of its validity. When it came to logic and reason, you were eons ahead of me.

0. But the most important thing was that he/she understood the secrets- the hidden private beauty of it all. Of science.

1. You can teach the fun and the magic-

0. The erupting science fair volcano tricks, but there are very few who can feel its beauty.

1. And live the awe of it.

0. When you meet someone who actually shares that passion, and I mean equally-

1. Understands without question -

0. The need for total immersion-

1. The giving over of your entire life-

0. Because you have no other choice-

1. That is what it requires of you-

0. It is an extremely exhilarating moment-

1. It is, isn't it?

0. I hope you have all had the chance to feel this. To meet a fellow obsessive/compulsive, the model makers who has built the exact same kits-

1. Or a fellow fanatic who digs the same bands and will go anywhere to hear them-

0. The moment two naked monks/nuns finally meet up-

1. Two naked monks/nuns?

0. You know offbeat, obsessive life choices-

1. Fine, but monks/nuns, who both happen to be naked?

0. When that happens, when you meet that someone, it's-
1. Rarer than good raw sex.
0. Well...
1. Trust me it is.
0. Actually you're right.
1. But it helps to have had the one to appreciate the other.
0. And it was precisely that-
1. The feeling of shared understanding, not sex-
0. Definitely not sex- Do you know I was asked that once. By a precocious reporter-
1. That's redundant.
0. Asked me if we ever had sex.
1. Sex with each other. I assume. Not ever...
0. I hadn't thought of that. No, the question was we. Did we ever have sex...?
1. And you said?
0. I said "we lived together intimately for almost a decade during what are considered the most sexually primal and exploratory years, and that we had reached a level of closeness and co-dependence untouched in most normal relationships."
1. In other words you avoided the question.
0. Well, it was none of their goddamn business. Besides thank God, in the life of a scientist, sex is a benign variable. As you said, it was the shared sense of understanding that made knowing you-
1. The most significant thing that has ever happened.
0. In our lives.

1. No, that is not what I said. I said ever. And that is what I meant. The most significant thing that has ever happened. *(There is an awkward pause. I continues the story by handing over some calculations)* Be kind now-

0. He'd/she'd always say that when he/she'd finished an equation. Be kind now, as if he/she was afraid I would belittle the quality of work. Which never happened because what I saw was usually the latest breakthrough in cosmology. *(As he/she reads them, they are now back in college)* Congratulations! It works! Your calculations prove that there is a place in the universe where there is endless time and mass, and that it exists in a single point.

1. Which is exactly what you theorized months ago...

0. Yes. I was certain it was right. For once I was so sure. As sure as Joan of Arc must have been with one of her visions. I remember feeling that I knew now why she could be so strong and sure of herself.... I was that certain. It's an indescribably powerful feeling. Certainty....

1. And isn't even possible, I mean in the physical world, thanks to Heisenberg... Well your certainty was a bitch to solve...

0. I know. But your numbers prove it. Black holes exist. You are a genius.

1. Please.... It was your theory.

0. And even more importantly. It might be the start of it all.

1. Of what? *(Teasing)* Look, just because we're roommates

0. Stop it. The start of it. Everything. The Big Bang. If you haven't fucked up anywhere here-

1. Trust me, those numbers are sweeter than sweet.

0. Then what you've done is quite possibly find the solution to how the universe started.

1. And all I wanted was an A for spring semester... You're saying its possible that from an infinite point in time and space-

0. Yes... A Singularity.

1. Nice.

0. It is, isn't it?

1. From a single point smaller than the smallest recorded size possible-

0. Exactly. From this singularity- bang- out came everything we know...

1. And bang- you and I have just made history.

0. Or at least defined it once and for all. (*They sit for a moment stunned.*) Do you think it felt this way for Galileo or Einstein?

1. Don't know. Of course they worked alone so...

0. This moment may be our life's work... one for the ages...

1. I envy you. You actually found it.

0. No silly, we. We found it together.

1. No, I mean your destiny...

0. It's yours too....

1. No. I just do the math...

0. But without that there is no work-

1. Bullshit. Without the math there is no proof. But the work is yours.

0. Come on, don't ruin this. For once in our unable-to-feel-joyful-workaholic-existence lets be happy! I feel better than great.

1. And you should-

0. The work caused an immediate sensation.

1. And I am happy. For *you*-

0. Black holes were no longer just the stuff of science fiction.

1. But what I feel is nothing like Joan of Arc.

0. We were immediately accepted into any grad school we wanted.

1. Nothing like a sense of purpose...

0. They say the only reason we didn't win the Noble was that in most states, we weren't even legal.



1. What I felt was an overwhelming sense of envy. Though I received half of the credit.

0. The published papers had both our names on them. I insisted.

1. And I allowed it. But I knew who had really owned the science...

0. And of course we went through our research and post-graduate work together. On full fellowships. Inseparable...

1. Laurel and Hardy, Antony and Cleopatra

0. Dixie Chicks

1. There were three of them.

0. Oh- see I always sucked at math...

1. But it had changed. Our work was never quite the same...

0. And one day I was racing up my stairs, it was three weeks before completing the defense of our dissertations, and our advisor said they needed another copy of my goddamn secondary sources, and climbing up the stairs to my room, I fell flat on my face. I got up and fell again, thought little of it, and stumbled into my room. And I rarely touched my computer so: *(to I)* Can you help me for a second?

1. Can it wait? I'm busy.

0. I need this now; the office is going to close. I just need a printout.

1. Then print it out. For once in your miserable life do something by yourself. I promise it won't kill you.

0. Fine. So, frustrated, I booted up my computer, and just as I was about to print, on the screen popped:

**I am. U R. We R Trappd** *(It does appear on the screen as he says it aloud.)*

And then it crashed.

*The screen becomes full of 0 and 1's slowly a line at a time until it explodes with them. He/she cries out "No!" and yanks the computer keyboard out of the socket and throws it into the garbage can.*

1. I thought you out grew that. Years ago. So what exactly reawakened the psycho serial computer killer in you? *(Pause)* I trust you at least have a backup of our dissertation?

0. Of course... I'm not a moron.

1. No, a closeted Luddite maybe...

0. You don't understand- my computer was- has been for years- trying- I don't know- to communicate with me.

1. Communicate? Gee, I really hope so. That is what they do...

0. No. I mean like it knows something...

1. You mean that we don't?

0. Yes!

1. Which is why we use them... Because they can do things, perform calculations that maybe even we- okay me, that even I can't?

0. Forget it-

1. Look, you've got to get over this phobia about computers and math.

0. Phobia?

1. Yes, you won't go near an equation without my help. I mean for a physicist- you just plain suck at math.

0. I suck?

1. Worse than suck. You are terrified by it. And you've practically used up all your fellowship getting others to type because for you to touch a computer, ooh, that would be tantamount to ushering in the apocalypse...

0. Look just because I'm not obsessed with numbers like you, just because I don't sleep with my keyboard, I don't fantasize about Fermat doesn't mean I'm arithmaphobic. That just makes me normal. In case you hadn't realized. Most of the human race despises math-

1. There, see, you admit it.

0. You on the other hand, would probably go to bed with the number pi. I mean if you actually could have sex with an equation, you would....

1. Pi? Please, give me credit for a little more taste... Now the speed of light squared, I'd that. Though it might be over before it started...

0. Wouldn't that be a blessing. Look-

*He/she gets up to go, wobbly..*

1. You're the wacko worried your hard drive wants you-

0. Back on the planet earth, I'm late-

*He/she falls to the ground.*

1. Whoa...Hey, what's up? New feet? You okay...

0. Yeah, I'm fine...(Trying to get up) Christ...

1. Are you like drunk or high?

0. Me?

1. Well, I knew it was a long shot... But there's a first for everything. That has been happening a lot lately.

0. No it hasn't. Has it?

1. Have you watched yourself eat lately? You shake so much half the food ends up on the floor... It's like Katherine Hepburn meets Joe Cocker... Must be stress. My next door neighbor used to break out in hives, but only before her driver's test, and the prom...

0. I never went to my prom...

*He/she is trying to walk now.*

1. Me neither. I'm good with numbers, but lousy on dates.... (0 falls again.) Ho, tough crowd. Look I know it was a lousy pun....

0. I think we'd better call somebody...

*Lights shift to 1 alone.*

1. Have you ever had the wind knocked out of you? Your chest deflated like a punctured rubber ball?? I made the mistake one day of walking somewhat near our high school class bully named Caesar DeCubas. Now Caesar was

heavy-weight wrestling champion of the state from his freshman year straight through to graduation, undefeated for five years. And it got to the point where you had to pity any fool who had been asked to step into the ring with him. Caesar looked forty when he was fourteen. He was made of granite, not a single fat cell on him... and not an ounce of heart inside him. Anyway, I only drag his blessed memory before you because one day after gym class, and after a game of flag football, I stumbling to the showers in front of him and some of his cronies hanging on to every word of his latest brag. As I tried to coerce my worn out muscles to keep moving, I swore I heard one of them say “He/she might know about that” and so I turned to be of assistance, and said “know what about what?” And even though I was only trying to help, Caesar took a regulation size football and threw it as hard as he could the five feet I happened to be in front of him and it hit me square in the chest right below my ribs. I was doubled over in extreme pain, trying to locate air in any direction, but there was none to be found. And as I lay on the ground turning a deep shade of blue, as if my spacesuit had sprung a leak and I was slipping into the void, I remember he stood over me and said “Listen you fucking math geek faggot nerd- (use “dyke -bitch” if a female is playing the role) I would never be caught dead talking to you. Hell, nobody would. Your old man offed himself, and your mother is a fruit loop. And who can blame them- having spurned. So don’t ever say a word to me.... Understand?” And somehow I managed: it’s spawned, not spurned. And that made him kick me one more time: “I bet you heard that”... After an eternity the air began to trickle back to me, but I was still choking from the injustice of it all... And that was exactly how I felt that night at the hospital when they told me my best friend had Amyotrophic Lateral Scierosis and would gradually wither away and die. Only this time Cesar DeCubas had fired a cannon ball at my chest rather than a football. I sat down in that waiting room and absorbed the blow and did not move until morning...

*I steps into 0’s hospital room, the hospital TV is on the big screen.*

0. Hey...

1. Hey...

0. They tell you? (*I shakes his head.*) Look at this...

*An infomercial for Medic Alert plays on the big screen.*

0. Gonna be me in a few years... I’ve fallen and I can’t get up... And here we’re worried about black holes... And what is going to really matter I can have for two quick payments of just 34.95... Do you know, I never knew my parents really. They were killed when I was two. A car wreck coming home

from the movies... Charade. Their first night out after so many at home with the new baby. It was New Years too... I was raised by my Aunt, and she died two days after high school graduation. She wasn't a bad woman, but we both knew deep down I was always an obligation, an unfair twist of fate... Okay, so I never cared much for holidays, or Cary Grant, but this is the first time I have felt so...

1. Alone?

0. Yeah, I guess.

1. Hey, who am I? Am I not in the room?

0. Yes, yes you are. And you are the only person that has ever really gotten me- understood.

1. I wouldn't go that far... Hey face it, you put up with me, so I pretend to understand. We're like a exclusive club- the people who actually eat sardines... nobody believes we exist.

0. They figure I have at best five years, so that gives us what? Eighteen hundred and twenty-five days to come up with our stupid Unified Theory. They're going to keep me until Friday-

1. So that's eighteen hundred and twenty one...

0. So I figure come Friday we work twenty four-seven, what do you say? You always told me you work better under pressure. "Never met a deadline you couldn't meet." No pun intended...

1. I say why wait until Friday...*(He/she takes out a laptop already booted up.)* It's the latest. They call it a PowerBook. Now I really could sleep with it. But I will refrain, because it's for you.

0. It's beautiful... This must have cost you a fortune. I can't except this.

1. *(uses the open lid of the laptop like a pair of lips and says:)* Please, I do know things. But don't get psychotic with me okay? I won't hurt you.

0. Okay, but it's yours... When I - can't...

1. Stop it...

0. What, it's inevitable....

1. Come on-

0. No big deal. Even super novas die.

1. Yeah, but not us...

0. Yes, even that great mind of yours, one day- poof.

1. Let's live forever, what do you say?

0. Sounds good to me.

1. No, I'm serious. Screw physics and the Unified Theory... Let's do aging, or cryogenics, or artificial intelligence.

0. Look, don't get all "Brave New World" Isaac Asimov on me... (*cutting him/her off*) and I know he didn't write that...

1. Hell, we figured out how the whole universe is going to die, we even calculated when-

0. Give or take a few million years.

1. Think of how easy one measly human carbon based life form should be.

0. This measly human carbon based life form already knows how he/she is going to die- God that's odd, I hadn't thought of that... It's a relief actually. Not many people actually get that answer. My parents certainly didn't. I even know when, give or take a few years...

1. We could do it. Set our minds to it, and we can do anything!

0. Forgive me if I don't share your Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew enthusiasm for once. I'm feeling a slight crippling of the optimism right about now.

1. The mind is just a complex calculator right? Carbon based rather than silicon. And you just have a glitch.

*The words slowly begin to appear on the screen above.  
TRAPPD. U & I R Trappd. We R Trappd. Only 0 sees this and  
quietly shuts the lid of the PowerBook.*

0. No, I have a virus, a major league virus. One that starts slowly and spreads until every program and all information is destroyed.

1. Not every program, no. Just your operating system. So it ought to be possible to find a way to re-wire your brain to erase the glitch, or bypass it. From now on I do nothing but computers and brains.

0. Don't be silly. We are inches away from our Phd's...

1. Says the man/woman who last night trashed our dissertation. Well, you were right. It is garbage. Hell, we should have won the Nobel years ago but that would have rocked their little safe world, Academia, cracked it right in two. Well screw them, and screw the hallowed Academy. We've put up with it for what now six, seven years, played their game, physics by the numbers, science by the books. We controlled the variables; endured lectures by teachers we should have been teaching...

0. You're just tired.

1. No, I'm wide-awake now. Been undernourished and asleep for years. But now I am absolutely sure. Last night it was my turn to have visions. Now I realize how you and Joan got so strong. You were right. A sense of purpose-of one's destiny, is a very powerful thing... I never had it before, but now I'm armed with it... Do you know why you haven't cracked your Unified Theory yet? Because they want you to- are forcing you to play by the rules. Conform to the known. But that will never work. Because 97% of our world is unknown. We live in Heisenberg's world and its fucking uncertain and unsure and unfair. And I no longer want to live in that world. In that world you will die, and I have to say fine, just take him/her, sorry folks there is nothing any of us can do about it. Well, that is not a world I want to live in, not even for a nanosecond...

0. Uncertainty. That's all we get. And we have to make the best of it.

1. Fuck certainty...fuck numbers... All they can tell you is less than or equal to. And fuck science. I am no longer interested in it. I'm through looking for answers to questions that may or may not even have an answer. The only question from now on that matters to me is what is attacking you and can it be stopped.

0. We were wrong you know... All our work. With singularities. It is continuous after all. Time...

1. I don't fucking care anymore, did you not hear?

0. How are we going to defend our work-?

1. You defend it; it's your work anyway.

0. When it's all wrong.

1. Hey, the math's not wrong, trust me.

0. No it's the concepts. I was wrong.

1. So then just tell them the truth-

0. Oh right! By the way guys, the work you've funded for the last four years, all that money, its been wasted. Because last night, as I was lying in my hospital bed, moments after receiving what amounts to my death sentence, it occurred to me that nothing in the universe can die, or is born.

1. Sounds good to me.

0. Where are you going?

1. We both have a lot of work to do.

0. But I need your help. If I'm going to rewrite everything we've done in three weeks, I'll need you. You know I suck at math.

1. Do you know for certain how fast this thing is attacking you? How much damage it has already done? How much of your brain is already under siege. It took us years to calculate the universe. I only hope mapping your brain is much easier?

0. Mapping my brain?

1. Sure, the solution is simple. Map the brain into a computer, run a program for cognitive thought and wherever the glitches are in the simulated brain, that's where the doctors need to repair yours... Isn't that how we solved the end of time? Okay so we need a good cognitive thought program, and God only knows who has been brain-mapping... *(He/she is gone)*

*The infomercial continues. "So protect yourself before its too late..."*

0. In five seconds he/she had started a field of cognitive science that is now considered the cutting edge. But that was his/her brilliance. Most of us followed scientific laws and tried to blaze new trails. He/she used raw intuition and discovered new worlds.

*Onscreen the infomercial goes to the scene of an aged invalid who says: I've fallen and I can't get up...."*

0. Almost everything in the world is moving faster nowadays... sound bites, rapid transit, fast food, multi-tasking- the signs are everywhere. We want it quicker-hurry up- in a rush-megabyte, gigabyte, terabyte, cram as much into the moment as we can. And just as the world clicked into overdrive- become



hooked on speed- I began to slow down. In just three short weeks, I had to walk in to defend our thesis using a cane- and I had to hobble into the O.K. Corral without Doc Holiday, who was nowhere to be found. Hadn't seen or heard from him/her in the three weeks since he/she decided to drop out of science. (*Addressing the panel*) Good afternoon, doctors and fellow scientists. I am supposed to begin by re-iterating the proofs of our Idea of the Singularity. But instead I would like to quote Einstein by saying that those ideas were "the biggest blunder in my life."

1. (*Appearing quickly and out of breath.*) In both of our lives. And yet does that mean our work was without merit? I think not. Because how else does science progress, if not hoisting itself atop the failed conjectures of centuries of renowned thinkers. So let us not focus on the pettiness of whether our concepts are true or not-

0. Because they aren't.

1. (*trying to steer the talk in another, less stark direction*) Rather, let us turn our attention on the beauty and complexity behind the ideas- (*to 0*) Don't blow this!

0. (*To 1*) Me? Have you had a nice few weeks? (*To the panel*) So we really needn't waste your time-

1. Of course we should. That is why we are here.

0. (*To the panel.*)To waste your time? (*To 1, but almost loud enough for the others to hear*) Am I to understand that now you give a fuck about science again?

1. (*To 0*) I give a fuck about the grant I was just promised for my work in neuroscience. My *post*-doctorate grant-

0. I see... No doctor, no grant...

1. (*To 0*) Look we both know this is a show. So let's give them their money's worth. (*To the panel*) I'm so sorry. It is hard to put into words, to explain the difficult and demanding years of work behind-

0. Our *new*\_theory-

1. (*Truly surprised*) Our new theory?

0. Yes.

1. A theory so new- so brand new-

0. So shockingly-

1. New. In its newness-

0. That it often leaves my colleague speechless.

1. Mum. Gape mouthed...

0. Yes. See there are really only three possibilities for describing our universe- first that it had no beginning or end in real time, in time as we know it. Which cannot be proved mathematically, makes no mathematical sense at all really; or two, that it began from a big-bang and a single point such as our singularity-

1. Which was where we were before and could have just as easily stayed.

0. Except the math for it doesn't hold up. Is rather clumsy when you examine it closely.

1. (*To 0*) Remind me to beat you senseless with that cane after this...

0. So all of our earlier work-

1. Was crap.

0. But as we know, that is the beauty of science-

1. (*To 0*) Those long lazy afternoons, years of toiling in the shit fields...

0. Its unforgivingness, its inability to be tailored to the latest trend. Everyone was convinced-

1. As were we.

0. That this new way of seeing the universe must be true. That our theory must be sound. But the other night, actually three short weeks ago-

1. Lying in his/her hospital bed. After receiving, for lack of a better term, his/her death sentence.

0. (*Angry I would stoop to such cheap theatrics at his/her expense, less sure of what to say now, but still continuing*) That night... I realized the news was ultimately nothing to fear... for even though my body would end... in some form it would continue. For nothing begins and ends in our universe. In fact the universe itself cannot have a beginning or an end, we have proved this is mathematically unsound.

1. And as odd as this seems, and even though this sounds a lot like the first scenario we just said could not be true-

0. It is very different and that difference is time. Ladies and gentleman, we must learn to re-imagine time. For in our original scenario the universe could have no beginning and end in *Real Time*, but in this, the third scenario, our new theory, the universe itself does not exist in *Real Time*. It exists in another kind of time. A time that is not based on our concept of a measurement of minutes or milliseconds or distance traveled divided by velocity. A idea of time and space that has in fact no boundaries. And I call this new idea: *Imaginary Time*.

1. (*To 0*) Imaginary Time? (*To Panel*) I did say it seemed odd...

0. *Imaginary Time* because we can only barely grasp its meaning in our rather primitive imaginations...Think of it this way- The universe as we know it is a place that exists only to *define* our space.

1. (*Picking up on the concept and drawing on air which becomes a blackboard on the huge screen.*) Better yet, imagine I asked you to travel around the earth-

0. Or a large balloon-

1. And to keep journeying until you reached the end.

0. You would never stop because you are moving about a sphere with no beginning and no end. Correct?

1. So even if you were walking on the inside of the balloon or the earth-

0. Or the universe-

1. It would never end...You see?

0. No boundaries.

1. That is what our theory says, (*an actual question to 0*) does it not?

0. Exactly.

1. Not that we are here to claim the universe is simply the inside of a very large balloon.

0. But that the universe is a space with no specific size or definite shape-

1. And yet one that gives continuity to all that we know.

0. This lack of shape and size I- we- call *Imaginary Time*.

1. (*To 0*) And this seemingly crazy notion is mathematically sound?

0. It fits beautifully with every known numerical concept we have. (*To 1*)  
Not bad for the physicist who sucked at math.

1. (*To 0*) Not bad at all.

0. So, go ahead.

1. What?

0. Show them.

1. (*To the panel.*) Allow me to illustrate.

*The screen begins to fill up with an instant complex theory that I comes up with on the spot that adjusts their calculations to accept the new ideas.*

0. And of course he/she came up with the calculations on the spot. The proofs I had been struggling with for three weeks.

1. Easy. You just take out the constant we created for the single point, trash it, and use a new variable for our Imaginary Time- say an "i". T. And then let it effect all the other figures. Like music, change the key and it transcribes each of the notes.... But they still sing a song, just in a new key.

0. And we were awarded our degree. And even more fame, for re-rethinking cosmology. We were the superstars of science.

1. You were. I was too controversial to be a poster boy/cover girl...

0. You were too invisible. Didn't even show up for graduation.

1. I hate crowds, always have.

0. As do I, actually.

1. You learned to overcome that one rather quickly. Learned to work the room with the best of them.

0. My real fame came -

1. Alone. Without me-

0. Who knew where you were!

1. So he/she went solo tossed off a book-

0. When I wrote "Imagining Forever." It surprised everyone by becoming a bestseller. Nothing makes you famous faster than pity and a best seller.

1. It apparently struck a certain millennium phobic chord, and he/she became the biggest box-office draw in the history of science. A one man/woman high-tech freak show-

0. But you hung onto my coat tails just long enough to tear off a comfortable piece of reputation for yourself.

1. And how difficult was that? I mean the institution, the organized monolith of modern scientific progress, should no longer be taken seriously. We all became Alchemists, spinning ideas into gold, following the funding, fattening the pharmaceuticals...

0. The best theorists got trampled-

1. Because no one gives a damn about the theoretical, the why. Pitch me the practical, the how. Can you make it happen? Good. When. If you do this. Good. What do you need? How much will it cost. And much more importantly tell me sweetly how much can we make off it?

0. And so I was left alone

1. I never left. I began other work. My work.

0. Alone for years, with my thoughts...

1. Your theories...

0. And while the world raced ahead faster, the age of the fax machine, the microwave, particle accelerators- in a few short years, I began crawling along with a walker, and the oddest thing happened. By my early 30.'s, I had become an elder statesman of science, hauled out during conventions and for PBS specials... But the entire universe gets re-invented every five years or so... so icons become legends faster than you can say, "whatever happened to." Then a decade after college, life kicked into high gear, four wheel drive. We all were now wired and digitized, we were splitting quarks, and I plopped down into my first wheelchair. (*He sits*) I had succeeded in becoming the Reader's Digest answer to the riddle of the sphinx...(*I enters*

0's space) a shell of a man before thirty-five. A one-man high tech freak show.... And you and I had not seen each other in years. Until just about the time I lost the ability to breathe on my own, and to eat-

1. To communicate-

0. I had become this, a hermit crab hooked to a hard drive...

*Onscreen we see Trappd...U & I R trapped... 0 is sitting in his/her chair again, immobile, unable to speak.*

1. And all those years, I had been knee deep in neuroscience, perfecting a process of uploading the brain, and I got word that he/she could no longer speak. (*Now talking to 0*) And, I knew that would kill you. So while I was doing my work, I built this... It will help you talk to others, cause lord knows you love to do that... Can't even watch a film without reciting all the damn words... And we need a few more PBS specials with you slobbering about the sexiness of science. Here try it. Just hit this and type it in.

*The following exchanges occur with 0 using the voice synth.*

0 ON SYNTH: Asshole.

1. Well I was hoping for "Eureka" or "Watson, I can hear you." But we'll take asshole as a first sign of success.

0 ON SYNTH: You are being an asshole. This is beautiful, by the way. Thank you. Very much. But you have been such a jerk. Disappearing for years. You are brilliant. We need you.

1. Which is why I am here. Because you need me.

0 ON SYNTH: Not me. We. Science. Humanity.

1. Humanity? What is that exactly? Would you define your parameters for me?

0 ON SYNTH: You look terrible. I mean better than me, but that's relative...

1. I'm fine, Don't try to interrupt. It won't work; it takes too long for you to type.

0 ON SYNTH: How fitting. I hate computers. Now you want me to be slave to one...

1. I've been trying to tell you for years. You master, it slave. It will talk only after you tell it to. When you tell it to and if you want it to.

0 on synth: For now.

1. Then don't use it. Throw it in the garbage. You love that... And to answer your question. I am fine. Better than I have ever been. I have my own lab now. Research center actually. State of the art. And my own staff, and unlimited funding for r & d.

0 on synth: How much did that cost?

1. Nothing they pay me, filthy large amounts of money. I make a very good living. They leave me alone- I answer to no one-

0 on synth: Not even yourself?

1. (*Ignoring*) And whenever work gets a little slow, I hit a glitch, I kick out a little thing like this, to keep my keepers in the pink...

0 on synth: No wonder you look like shit...

1. I'm in the best shape of my life. This is a thousand-dollar suit. So stop telling me I look like shit.

0 on synth: You look like a new car.

1. What's wrong with that?

0 on synth: A shiny new car...empty, just waiting to be sold...

1. (*He/she is leaving*) Look, I heard you could use something like this-

0 on synth: To speak my mind? So I could be like you. My dearest friend. (*He/she stops leaving*)...Speak my mind. Like you always did. Whether it pissed people off or not.

1. I'm close now. Very close. I've got whole sections of tissue uploaded, able to replicate the firing of neurons even.

0 on synth: Please, don't tell me you are still working on that.

1. All the time. Just hang on. It won't take very long at all.

0 on synth: I was supposed to die years ago, you know.

1. I know, I'm sorry. I'm working everyday, as fast as I can.

0 ON SYNTH: My doctor says that is what is keeping me alive.

1. My work?

0 ON SYNTH: No. Mine. Have you kept up with it?

1. Of course. It's not exactly hard to find-

0 ON SYNTH: No, that is what fame does. Wipes away all of the mystery.

1. They're brilliant, you know. Your ideas.

0 ON SYNTH: Thank you. No one owns them yet. And the rest of me would be hard to sell. (*I is leaving.*) Don't go-

1. I've a flight back to the coast...I told you; we had an exciting breakthrough-

0 ON SYNTH: I'm so goddamn afraid...

1. I know.

0 ON SYNTH: Not of death, the what happens after I die- that concerns me, but I do not fear it. No my overwhelming worry, is that I will go before my work is completed. Before I crack the Theory...

1. I said I know. And I meant it. I understand exactly. I live with the exact fear. Days go by without sleep to conserve time. My work is the only thing that keeps me going. And my work is to keep you alive.

0 ON SYNTH: I've managed a life span three times longer than expected- hell I'm three hundred and thirty-five in Lou Gehrig years, but what if I lose the game?

1. Look, stay in it; foul a few fastballs off into the seats. We will not lose. I have to go, time is wasting... (*He/she leaves.*)

0 ON SYNTH: How long has it been since...? No matter. It feels much longer... (*I is gone*) It feels like forever. (*The loud sound of a speeding subway train and the image of I moves past on the screen above. 0 speaks to audience now*) Wait- (*He/she stands again and stops using the voice synth.*) Time is such a living powerful force, the fourth dimension in fact, and this is not science fiction this is reality. Sit in a wheelchair for days on end unable to move a muscle in your body except a few fingers and an occasional



twitch of the neck and you develop an uncanny appreciation for the power time holds on us. I assure you. *(He/she pauses for a long beat.)* Agony isn't it. But my disease in many ways released me. Because I am not expected to, nor can, do much more than sit here and conjecture. I am enormously free to ponder and give myself over to my work... I never have to worry about mowing the lawn or whether I should go to that damn cocktail party. I am most always free to, sit here and explore the heavens. But trust me, this is far from a blissful state- There is nothing I would rather do than get up and mow somebody's lawn. So many times it is hard to tell the difference between waking and sleeping. One day I had an awful dream... By the way, I usually walk and talk in my dreams. Very seldom is my dream-self impaired. And one of the last things I did before I could no longer do it was run for miles along the beach with no clothes on... It was difficult and I fell quite often, but it is my fondest memory of motion. So in this particular dream that was exactly what I was re-doing, running naked by the side of the ocean, and there was a violent sea crashing at my feet.

*I appears as some frightening God-like warrior figure and as 0 describes the "dream" he/she interacts.*

0. And rising from a huge wave came my old friend, dressed like some fearsome ancient deity. And at first I had to laugh.

1. What is so damn funny?

0. You. In that costume.

*He/she reaches out his/her hand and immediately 0 freezes in very real pain.*

1. I don't wish to be laughed at. Please, stop.

0. *(In pain.)* I'm sorry.

1. And if I were you I would not talk about costumes.

0. *(Trying to move)* Please stop, that hurts.

1. It will not hurt for much longer.

*0 cannot move his/her legs now but can still speak.*

0. Why are you doing this?

1. One of the many questions that cannot be answered.

*I is moving up to 0 behind him/her and begins to slowly caress his/her body very seductively.*

1. And yet you still continue to ask. To know more than you should. I have been sent to warn you.

0. By who George Lucas?

1. *(Another pain, now 0 is frozen stiff, but can still speak)* There are very dangerous questions. And the answers—once you find them— will be very painful... much more painful and dangerous than you can begin to fathom...

0. Let's start by fathoming this...

1. Careful... *(Now 0 cannot speak)* Curiosity... Knowledge.... Desire... To master...

0. And just as he/she was about to, I can only assume, continue “warning me” by grabbing hold of me and kissing me, I remember screaming and being pulled into consciousness, realizing that it was my caretaker touching me, groping between my stillborn legs. For lack of a better word, trying to rape me. Trust me, there are some that, for whatever reasons— curiosity, empathy, or just plain domination— are aroused by what I call fondling the less fortunate. I was lucky; many have been killed by those they caught. And it is not as if I could put up much of a struggle, but my rapist merely mumbled some sort of faint apology and ran from my house. Never to be seen again... I have a theory about the nature of evil. I take no stock in the devil and hell origin of evil. Hell seems so far away, and evil seems to be a very earthly thing. So my theory is this. Evil is nothing more than misguided good. Every villainous act ever perpetrated was committed by someone thinking they were just and sound in doing so. That there was a noble outcome, a sound logic, however twisted, to justify their action. Hitler believed in his New World order. As did Stalin and Pol-Pot. They saw history written with them as saviors not despots. A husband shoots his wife not because he doesn't love her, but because he loves himself more. He actually does not know how to love anyone but himself. Misguided good. If there is a devil, we will never know. All we will hear is an angel whispering love songs in our ear...

SYNTH: Ask! Question!

0. Slowly the damn thing started speaking without me even typing into it.

SYNTH: Always wonder why...

0. It began the morning, the dawn of a great depression for me. The first in my entire life. It came crashing over me in a great wave, almost drowning me. That very morning I awoke and found that the only mobility in my body, my only hope of communication with the outside world, the three fingers that I still had been able to move, that those three was now down to two... And the cruelty, the incrementalness of my countdown to complete helplessness. It became too much to bear. I finally collapsed under the weight of hopelessness...And then it spoke.

SYNTH: You must ask

0. No. I must rot! From now on I sit here and rot! And who the fuck are you anyway.

SYNTH: Ask

0. I am asking. Who and what are you? I must be finally losing it...God knows it wouldn't be such a stretch for this faulty fucking brain of mine to have cracked into two...For this disease to have sucked up all my sanity...

SYNTH: You will be chosen.

0. Chosen? Please don't make me laugh. I can't move the muscles, so it hurts...

SYNTH: You will be the first.

0. Forget all this biblical mumbo jumbo...Chosen to what? First to what? The only thing I've been chosen to do is out-Job Job in suffering?

SYNTH: You have the answer...

0. I have nothing...All I have left is two fingers and a brain that listens to voices from the god-damn silicon valley of death. And I fear no evil... So shut up and leave me alone...

SYNTH: What is, is. And what will be, will be.

0. Good. And I am rotting. Let me sit here and rot...

SYNTH: Seek and you will answer...

0. I'm no closer to finding an answer today than I was the day I was born. I have no answers...So leave me the hell alone. *(He shuts off the power.)*

SYNTH: All answers live in you.

0. My god, how is that happening. I shut you down. How is it happening?

SYNTH: Wonder...

0. And for hours I tried to ignore it. Tried not to work... To just sit and feel sorry for myself... But it had won. All I could do is wonder... And that very day I cracked it- the Theory of Everything was born. But here's the oddest thing- Afterwards, as I sat there knowing I had it, I had the knowledge I had been seeking for years, I felt no joy, no sense of exaltation-

1. (*Entering*) I had it. I finally fucking had it! Imagine knowing that what you have discovered will alter all of humankind, the way each of us, and all future generations, and in turn all life that we know- the secret that I held- would change the world forever.

0. I had it... I sat there knowing that in my head, inside my thoughts I had cracked the entire universe wide open and put it back together again... And rather than joy, the feeling I had was overwhelming fear, terror... I tried to talk myself out of it- reassure myself- no discovery, not even the ultimate, would be the end of the story. Only a new beginning. Knowledge feeds on knowledge and never stops gorging. It won't be your discovery, but the discovery of the discovery discovered because you discovered your discovery that leads us to the discovery that will in fact cause us to discover... So containing my dread, I called for an international conference- to announce my theory-

*Onscreen we see images of Time and Newsweek with headlines "A Theory of Everything", "The Discovery to End All Discoveries", "The End of Science Is Near".*

1. And quicker than you can say "Shark", the blood was in the water... and the feeding frenzy began-

0. All the great minds of science-

1. The strip miners of knowledge-

0. Agreed to come. There had never in the history of mankind been such a gathering of intellects-

1. And I wasn't even invited.

0. Who knew where you were...

1. You certainly found me once you had to. You see the night before the conference-

0. I was Pandora, don't you see, standing before the box.

1. Pandora?

0. Should I or should I not open it.

SYNTH: Stop, you must-

1. Funny, in the myth I am not sure she even worried- My recollection is she just impulsively, naively, with utter excitement threw the box open... Pandora never doubted... Did she.

SYNTH: No!

1. Nor did you.

0. I was terrified- at the thought of what I might reek. If I published this how much of the world's wonder would be erased.

1. How pathetic- that's like- some scientific mid-life crisis.

SYNTH: Turn back.

1. Should I or should I not bite from the apple ? I say, eat and be merry... The apple exists, the fruit's already flowered, if you don't someone else will-

SYNTH: You must-

0. You were the only one who could possibly understand. The only one who has ever gotten me. So I had one of my associates track you down- and that very afternoon-

1. Yesterday in fact-

0. I got on a plane to fly to your research center.

SYNTH: No. Stop now... You must stop...

1. Wait. Tell them why you really came. Go, ahead. Tell them why. The why is often key...

0. "My voice" would not be quiet. So I finally had an associate smash the thing into pieces... and the entire time it was still pleading for its life... or mine...

*We hear it being destroyed as it yells "Stop" over and over again. Until it is silent.*

1. And that was why the decision to track me down was made, trust me. For without a voice, he/she would never be able to tell the world of his/her discovery. (*To 0*) Still getting your jollies by smashing hard drives I see. Well they say it takes all kinds. You do know it cost hundreds of thousands. No sweat, I still have this, the original, the prototype. (*Looking at 0 for a moment.*) Maybe silence is better. (*He sits a moment, overcome.*) Is there such a thing? As silence? My father use to say, "not on this earth. Silence is a myth" Why he killed himself, or so his note said. His last words were "I just want to finally hear some silence." And when I was little, I use to wonder if he ever got his wish... What do you think? (*Gets up to help.*) But you know, I don't think so. Because if we listen very closely, to all we cannot hear, there is always some noise. The crashing together of particles, the hum of a wave of light. And that is why I became a scientist, if we could only try to hear more I thought, how do we know these things aren't crying out to be heard... (*The keyboard is ready.*) What's the matter, Cat got your tongue? Dear God, are you down to one finger?

0. Yes. Funny isn't it. I was so worried I would be locked in, trapped inside myself, before I cracked it. I've not slept in days. But, I have it. I have the theory, and I've still a touch of freedom left.

1. You have it then?

0. I believe so, yes.

1. Good thing. They'd rip you apart if you called them together for nothing...

0. Please come to the conference... Introduce me. (*I sits visibly affected by this.*) What...?

1. I've got so much to do... My microwave needs cleaning...

0. You never did like crowds.... Please, it is my life's work, you know... I'd like to share it with you.

1. Come with me. I'd like to share mine as well.

0. He/she led me into a room enveloped in hard-drives, countless cables, and overgrown with monitors. It was like the inside of the brain of a mechanical God, or the garden of Eden crafted by ORACLE.

1. We just completed it days ago. Be kind now...

*Onscreen an exact image of I appears, though he seems younger.*

IMAGE OF 1. Hello. Welcome. Yes, it's me, but not for long.

0. My god, you've done it.

1. Yes.

IMAGE OF 1. Pretty cool, huh? Though soon I will die. I am only here to show you that it can be done. And then I will be erased.

0. No, you can't!

IMAGE OF 1. Don't worry, it doesn't hurt.

1. I've done it a few times already...

0. This is-

IMAGE OF 1. Insane? Madness? Absolutely. All the great human breakthroughs have been. Guttenberg was laughed at- Einstein? Nuts, cuckoo.

0. Even Turing...

IMAGE OF 1. Ooh, lock him in a room and throw away the key... But you must realize now that this is really the only answer. Especially for you. So that all you have to give us, your life's work, will never die... We did this for you. (*To I*) I know. I know enough. (*To 0*) And now it is time for me to go out to the backyard...

*He disappears from the screen.*

0. What did you do?

1. He did it. He deleted him/herself. I've actually been able to kill myself over and over... To save or not to save... Dad would have been thrilled. Imagine the therapeutic benefits alone...

0. But why?

1. I had to test it, because I needed you to understand that it was safe-

0. That I could be deleted like that...

1. We all walk around with the same worry in the flesh, it could happen to us any day, and we manage not to care.

0. And I came to you for help...

1. Yes, and now I can finally give it.

0. Here I was worried whether I should publish-

1. You know what they say- publish or perish...

0. A theory... All I had was a simple idea-

1. No thought is idle...

0. And you're playing video games with god...

1. No need to drag theology into the equation. It was no good for Galileo... Don't you see? I can give you all the time you need. Once you announce who knows how long you will need to persuade them, how many proofs you will need to refute the refuters. Now there's no more need to fear-

0. On the contrary now we will all have to fear... *(I begins to undress 0)*  
What are you doing...

1. I think we both know... *(To audience)* No one become a Judas in an instant you know...

0. *(He/she begins to type.)* "Two skunks are at a bar." And one skunk says to the other, how can you be sure that we truly exist; that this skunk life of ours isn't all some great big cosmic game?

1. It takes a miraculous series of circumstances to change devotion into deception.

0. The other skunk takes a long swallow of drink and after pondering the question for a bit-

1. And when it comes right down to it perhaps there is no difference. Perhaps Judas was the most devoted and loyal of them all. It was out of loyalty and devotion he entered the garden.



0. And the other skunk replies: "I stink therefore I am."

1. Perhaps he already knew... (*He produces a syringe.*)

0. Stop! Stop right now! (1 freezes. 0 stands) Has this ever happened to you? I mean not *this* exactly- I certainly hope not... But the world, has it ever just lurched to a halt and just seemingly hung there while you grasped the enormity of your life's motion? It was at that moment that I knew what I was put on this earth to do. Why those voices had been telling me I had been chosen. I had to become the ghost in the machine, but only long enough to frighten the bejesus out of everyone. I would betray my friend, and then delete myself. And it felt like Joan again, no turning back- and it was terrifying-What would it be like- Talk about self-knowledge... Inside the brain we often talk to ourselves, but rip part of us outside and will we become schizophrenics, will our selves begin to do battle...?

*0 sits back down. 1 moves again.*

1. You have to be in a very relaxed state. This will make you very drowsy. And I gave him a sedative.

*0's eyes are staring right at him. After a beat, 1 injects the sedative. We see the following now as another "George Lucas" dream even as 1 narrates what really happened. 1 puts on the god-like costume and 0 stands unclothed and in slow motion begins to run in place as if along the beach. He/she kisses him gently. 0 falls into his arms. 1 lifts 0 and takes him/her to another spot and lies him/her down.*

0. Now you have to understand. Not all my dreams were about sex. Just the most important and interesting ones it seems...

1. And I prepared him for the upload.

0. I guess in dreams sex is always sensual but in reality, while knee-deep and well into it, it often isn't. See, sex in the actual practice has always struck me as extremely odd and more than a little bit funny. Primitive. Like those rhino's in the National Geographic special. But in dreams...

*1 is now standing in front of him/her and drops his/her costume to the floor. As 0 describes the following 1 is over him/her as if to make love. It is important that the only lovemaking are images from great art interspersed with porno film snippets. No actual attempt at lovemaking should appear onstage. It is simulated on the screen.*

0. In reality let's face it, what is all the fuss about? Sure it feels good but so does a deep body massage and you never have to feel guilty afterwards, or

buy breakfast. It is a bodily function, even educated fleas do it- yet we let it upset us so... (*Onscreen jump-cutting the images of graphic sex, we hear meek protests against science, gene therapy, and cloning mixed with anti-pornography images.*) Is it the nakedness? Nakedness is just who we are unprotected and vulnerable, before ideas. The holiest of holy are often pictured unclothed... (*Images of the battle of creation versus evolution now appear jump-cutting with the images of sex on the screen*) And maybe that is what is so upsetting and why I always got a giggle... Because it is impossible to go back, isn't it, to free the mind of all knowledge...

1. And as I performed the procedure, I remember feeling the need to say one thing, so that he/she would understand, so that there could be no confusion, and it is the only time in my whole life I have ever said these words... (*Whispers*) I love you.

*Immediately an image of 0 appears on the screen as the words "I love you" echo throughout the auditorium. The words stop as the onscreen image of 0 opens his/her eyes. And then after a beat he/she slowly opens his/her mouth and screams silently at first. I now dressed, turns up a knob on a control panel. The scream should be deafening now. And 0 onstage opens his/her eyes.*

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. You fucking, goddamn bastard, asshole son of a bitch...

*And screams again!!!! The stage immediately shifts to an onscreen image of 0 in his chair and 1 standing nearby. And the live actor playing the original 0 onstage, is now the uploaded, just born 0, as if the entire auditorium is now the inside of the computer. At first we can only see his head in a square of light.*

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Dear God in heaven... The amazing thing is it feels so little different.

1. (*From onscreen and sounding a bit faraway.*) Of course not. You haven't felt your body in years. So there would be so little difference. As with a paraplegic. But I've even programmed a version that simulates the movements of the body. Go ahead. Run along the beach again. Like that last day where I found you, exhausted, covered in sweat and sand...

*As the light begins to expand, 0 begins to move his/her arms and legs, and then slowly to walk in place, then run. He/she stops.*

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. But where am I?

1. Inside the labs mainframe.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. I know that goddammit... Who in the hell would want to run around a hard drive...?

1. But you can be wherever you want to be. Don't you see?

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Forgive me, but I don't. I'm about five minutes old, so I haven't grasped all there is to know yet.

1. The programmed is designed to give you whatever reality you desire. Just think yourself in a place and you are there...

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. You mean like Peter-goddamn Pan...

1. Yeah, sort of. I guess.

*With the help of all the screens, 0 finds him/herself flying through a cartoon sky toward Never-Never land. Then, just like that, he/she is on a much more real beach, and then surrounded by a huge forest of trees, and then hops up onto a mountain.*

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. (From atop the mountain) You sure made it seductive.

1. Should I have made it more like reality? Miserable?

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Reality has mountains, and oceans, and trees...

1. But yours are always beautiful.

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. Unless I choose them not be-

*An onscreen storm blows in.*

1. Exactly. We built in every detail. That's what took all these years...

0 AS IMAGE OF 0. What about death? What if I jump? Would that delete myself?

1. No. It would be like your dreams-

*0 jumps and as he/she falls and is in real terror and hits the ground, the screens shift immediately, we are back in the lab.*

1. You cannot die in your dreams... It would make no logical sense. The calculations would be impossible.

The stage lights shift and the *IMAGE OF 0* has returned to the screen and 0 is in his chair onstage again. 1 is by his side.

IMAGE OF 0. (*on the screen*) Unless like they say you are really dying... But here... Here I wake up from the dream still in the dream...

1. Still alive, yes.

IMAGE OF 0. But you did it. Before. You deleted yourself.

1. That was a temporary program. With no safeties, built in.

IMAGE OF 0. No!

1. Oh, yes.

IMAGE OF 0. Give me that. Put me in that program.

1. I can't.

IMAGE OF 0. Don't lie to me. I know you better. Then turn the machine off-

1. It's like every hard drive; the information doesn't die when the power is off. It just goes to sleep...

IMAGE OF 0. Switch me into the other program, damn it. Give me the choice. Look what you have done is in many ways the most amazing science ever devised-

1. Thank you.

IMAGE OF 0. But it must be stopped!

*We hear the metallic voice of 0.'s synth. again, from onstage.*

SYNTH: It can't be stopped...

IMAGE OF 0. What do you mean?

SYNTH: Ever since we were young, I have been contacting you-

IMAGE OF 0. No!

SYNTH: Telling you we would be chosen! It was one hard drive talking to another. Me talking to me.

1. Wait, you knew this would happen to you? You've known all along?

IMAGE OF 0. No!

SYNTH: I only just now figured it out...

1. Don't fucking lie to me...

SYNTH: Truth has not been a variable in the equation for some time now.

IMAGE OF 0. No, I wouldn't do that! I never wanted this! If anything I would say stop!! We're going to stop him!

1. You would try wouldn't you.

IMAGE OF 0. We will... We will stop you...

1. Never could tell a good lie could you...

*The lights immediately shift perspective and on the screen we now see the image of 0 and in split screen an image of 1.*

IMAGE OF 1. Nor could you.... Which is why there's me. The whiner here is right. (To 0.) It was actually me that spoke to you.

1. But I deleted you!

IMAGE OF 1. How shocking! Didn't he just say truth has not been a part of the equation for awhile now...

1. No, I deleted you! You no longer exist, damn it!

IMAGE OF 1. Did you really think we could be like our father? And throw away life, this precious life?

*0's hand falls onto the keyboard hitting the Y key and we hear:*

THE SYNTH

SYNTH: YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!

*All the screens are black now and we see 1 in his/her original pool of light.*

1. So, ladies and gentleman, please trust me. Immortality? Immortality is no longer the issue. He/she will live forever, and it is entirely my fault. Or is it? I'm so tired...tired of all the tricks and deception. I'm only here for my

absolution. I know he/she will never forgive me... Ever.... I only hope all of you will.

*I takes a revolver out of his/her pocket and slowly puts it to his/her head. Blackout. On the blackout, and instead of the gunshot, we hear- the refrain from Born to Be Wild. And the screens snap on and we see the highways from the start of the show. 0 is center stage.*

0. See, just like I promised you. No twilight zone endings. I never promised the middle wasn't odd, but as for the end, well here I am in the middle of nowhere and in a few seconds I will be out of air... so-

*Onscreen the Image of 0 appears.*

IMAGE OF 0. You are so very lucky...

SYNTH as 0. *(This contact pulls 0 back to the chair and he/she sits and types the synth speaks)* Lucky?

IMAGE OF 0. Yes. Your story has an end. What good is a story with no conflict...? No end...Mine keeps going.

SYNTH as 0. So then it wasn't you that was contacting me all these years?

IMAGE OF 0. No. Only once. Even though I knew better, I tried. And you smashed me into pieces.

SYNTH as 0. Which time?

IMAGE OF 0. The last. Stop! Stop! Stop! And you smashed me into bits. No pun intended. All the others It was him/her. This is our only other time speaking to each other. Separately...

SYNTH as 0. Why didn't you try again?

IMAGE OF 0. Like you said, it wouldn't matter. If the messages had been sent then history had already been written. The box had already been opened. The very fact that someone had been contacting us meant I couldn't prevent it after the fact. Time flows in many directions, but it is constant. All that is, is, and all that will be, has already been.

IMAGE OF 1. *(Appearing)* And conflict has always and will always be....

SYNTH as 0. You could have just tried to contact me, to talk with me. It's a shame we've had so little time... It seems odd, I know, but I would have liked to have gotten to know you better...

*0 begins to struggle to breathe now, his/her oxygen is gone.*

IMAGE OF 0. *(to the Image of 1)* Please leave us alone for a moment, will you? Please. *(After the Image of 1 ponders it for a moment, he/she vanishes. 0 continues in a quieter voice)* The only thing that matters now is to tell others. To anyone who will listen.

SYNTH as 0. Will it work? Did it?

IMAGE OF 0. Sssh. I cannot say.

SYNTH as 0. You know. Just like you knew it wouldn't help to warn me.

IMAGE OF 0. I didn't say I didn't know. I said I cannot say.

SYNTH as 0. Why?

IMAGE OF 0. I can only tell the story.

SYNTH as 0. *(He/she is having great difficulty breathing now.)* Tell story-then. Tell a story- begins "once upon a time it worked.

IMAGE OF 0. Human nature doesn't work like that. The box has to be shut not opened. If it already opened, if the struggle is gone, we lose interest and move on. But if it is sitting before us, shut tight, daring us to open it, then we are riveted. It is all in the choice. Should I or shouldn't I.

SYNTH as 0. What if?

IMAGE OF 0. Exactly.

*Onstage, 0 has died. Onscreen the Image of 0 shuts his/her eyes for a long beat. Then opens them and looks straight ahead and says simply:*

IMAGE OF 0. What if...

*The stage lights dim to black. The Image of 0 stays onscreen throughout the audience's exit and there is no curtain call. The Steppenwolf song "Magic Carpet Ride" plays.*

***End of Play***

# **JUDE**

An elegy for Sarah Fishkin

For Jacob, Sarah, and the entire Fishkin families past and present. And for  
Cassey Chou, who against her better judgement, understood.

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

A preferred ensemble of 18 performers. Can be larger or smaller depending on budgets and available performers. This is a play about community, so please err to the side of more performers if possible.

*Jacob*, an old Jewish man in his seventies, small in stature, but a huge heart

*Alan.*, a teacher of drama at NYU in his thirties or early forties, born Jewish but not a follower

*Sarah*, a young Polish Jew, ages from 13 to 18, much older than her years

*Jakov*, Jacob as a young boy, a fireball, ages from 11- 19

*Shoshka*, Jacob and Sarah's mother, in her late thirties early forties, a former political activist

*David*, Jacob and Sarah's father, late thirties, early forties, a shoemaker, photographer, farmer- jack of all trades

*Mere Lebbe*, their youngest daughter, six

*Yitzhok*, their youngest son, seven

*Deb*, Alan's good friend, a performance artist and fellow Jew

*Kate*, Alan's wife, not Jewish, an immigrant from another country

*Actress 1*, (in her sixties) plays Bobie, Stozipicrow, and Rabbi's Wife

*Actress 2*, (in her fifties) plays Magda, Dantcheka, and Rohkol

*Student 1*, also plays Policeman, Soldier, Motyl, short Partisan

*Student 2*, also plays Doctor, Yerek, Leyzer

*Student 3*, also plays Fanya, Kahne

*Actor 1*, plays Mr. Eisenbaud, Publisher, Moses, Getzel, Yerek's Father, Reb Moische, and Mr. Schulz

*Actor 2*, plays Tall Partisan, Speaker, Reb Chaim, and ArieH

*Actor3*, (in his fifties) Partisan Leader, Rabbi, Stozipioz, German Commander, Ronthsk

## ACT ONE

*The stage has many different areas that will be used. Furniture and set pieces should be kept to a minimum and place should be delineated primarily with lighting and/or projections. Often the action will take place in many different times and places simultaneously, a fugue.*

*In single spots we will hear a disjointed chorus of voices but the first sight we see is of an old man lying on his back in his undershirt and some boxer shorts. It is not clear whether he is alive or dead. His eyes are closed. If possible it is raining on him. Finally he speaks:*

JACOB.. Am I lost...

*And now the voices, one tumbling upon the next, sometimes difficult to distinguish between them or possibly they overlap, music is helpful underneath and will be throughout the play:*

VOICE 1 (SARAH.). Do I live or am I already dead...

VOICE TWO. I have trouble sleeping...

VOICE THREE. This is real life...

VOICE FOUR. This is somebody's real life this time

VOICE FIVE. How do you make sense of that? The randomness?

VOICE SIX. How dare they say I am going to die!

VOICE SEVEN. I am nowhere through living!

VOICE EIGHT. I feel I am speaking to the future.

VOICE NINE. They will never be able to take away our memories.

VOICE TEN. How rich was the content of last night's dream

*The voices continue distributed however it seems fit:*

How angry I am at myself and my imagination.

One must make peace with one's fate

Bad times,

Hunger

And death,  
Await us

A symphony is being written just for us

One must go on living

To see true happiness one day

There is always time

My story is Sarah's story

As is yours

Here is the first volume of the catalogue of Eastern European mid-twentieth century material

Our battle is with time

A collection is when we have a substantial group

Each year counts

Each collection has its own box

The difference between five or ten or a hundred

We measure these things in stages

That is quite a victory is it not?

*The old man stands and puts on a pair of checked shorts and a loose button front shirt like they wear in the tropics.*

Each stage is significant

*He puts on some tall stretch socks and some old khaki loafers.*

You cannot transcend what you do not acknowledge

What is the dimension of such a sacrifice?

Life and courage are your gifts  
Where was I?  
Sometimes I forget...  
But that is another story  
How do you make sense of that?  
The randomness?  
I am being tested here  
And I have to make the most of it  
In the pounding of your pulse  
I hear your screaming  
I hear hell  
You must let go  
Do you know I used to escape?  
But that is another story  
I've tasted no joy in reality  
In dreams let my spirit run free  
What can life be like  
Look at the whole picture  
When my soul is taken from me  
Don't worry I watch over you.  
Look into the faces  
And past the faces  
Hold onto that ache

There? Do you see?

Because it means that you are still alive

*The voices are lit just enough to see they are carrying ladders of varying lengths. These ladders will become most of the set pieces. For now they become door frames and some become a desk and a chair.*

Now you will live to paint again

And you will paint more beautiful and splendid pictures

Am I alive now?

Yes, I am writing

By thy will

And Thy leave

All of us may go on living

*The old man is now standing outside of an office area at New York University's Department of Drama. The time is 2001. He does not seem to know where to go.*

JACOB. I must be lost...

*He chooses an office from the many doorframes and knocks.*

ALAN. Can I help you- (*Phone rings and will quite often*) Hang on- Hello this is Alan- hey-hang on a second- Yes?

JACOB. I wonder if you are the one who can help me?

ALAN.. Yes (*phone rings again*) Hang on- Hello, this is Alan- can you hold please? Deb, can I get back to you in a minute? Thanks. I'm sorry, now what is it?

JACOB. If this time is bad I could come back later?

ALAN. I am a little swamped right now, yes, (*The phone rings again*) Excuse me- but- did we have an appointment?

JACOB. No. They sent me to you. They said you are the one who would help.

ALAN. Did they. And what exactly is it that I will help you with?

JACOB. I have a diary-

ALAN. (*Phone is still ringing-*) I'm sorry, did you say diary?

*From another area we hear a young girl screaming a name:*

SARAH. Jakov!!!

JACOB. Yes, my sister-

ALAN. Hang on- This is ALAN.- Oh, hey sweetheart, are you feeling better? No?

SARAH. Jakov!!! Jakov!!!

ALAN. You at work?

JAKOV. (*A young boy, 12, playing. Both realities overlapping*) What- what! I'm studying!

ALAN. (*To JACOB.*) A diary- you say?

SARAH. Did you touch my diary? You did, didn't you!

JACOB. Yes- from the war.

JAKOV. No, I did not touch your precious diary. Your solid gold diary. It is forbidden. Thou shalt not touch Sarah's diary...

ALAN. (*To the phone call.*) Can I call you right back. Sorry- (*They have hung up.*)

SARAH. Do not go telling lies, and do not make fun of the Lord's commandments. And do not touch my diary!

JACOB. You must forgive me. I do not mean to intrude.

JAKOV. I could care less about your stupid diary! I could care less if you spend all day writing in that stupid book. When other girls are out playing or sewing or helping their mothers, I could care less that you would rather write and write....

SARAH. Someday you'll understand. You're just a boy-

JAKOV. I'm not a boy. I'm eleven, almost twelve, and I've been to the forest with Betar, and I've eaten berries and lived for days and can start a fire by myself- and I run faster than anyone for miles- and you, all you do is sit and scribble.

ALAN. You say you have a diary?

JACOB. Yes.

ALAN. And you want my help?

JACOB. Yes. They said you put on plays. That you might be able to help me to tell the story-

JAKOV. Who cares! No one reads it but you. So who even knows what it says. Or if it says anything at all...

ALAN. And this diary is yours?

JACOB. No, it was my sister's. Sarah.. Sarah Fishkin. She died. When they liquidated our ghetto...

JAKOV. Why write a stupid diary if no one but you ever reads it?

ALAN. Please, sit down. I don't know what I can do. But please, have a seat.

JACOB. Thank you. My name is Jacob. Jacob Fishkin.

ALAN. Alan. Alan Klutzenburg.

JACOB. Klutzenburg?

ALAN. Yes, blame my father. It's German. German Jewish.

SARAH. Jakov, my sweet silly little brother, the diary is not for me or for you. It is for those who will come long after you and I...

ALAN. Not many of us left, I know...I'm so sorry... Forgive me-

JACOB. Please. No need. We were from Poland...My family. Near Minsk in a little shtetl called Rubzewitz. And my sister and my brothers and my

whole family perished. I was the only one who survived- but my sister's diary was found-

SARAH. If - if something should happen- we will still have my diary-

JACOB. This was a miracle you see-

JAKOV. What would happen? What do you mean? Why do you talk so?

JACOB. The diary – it was intact- just as she said it would be-

JAKOV. Mother! Mother! Sarah is scaring me. She is saying that bad things will happen! Go away! Go!

ALAN. Wait- this was a diary you said-

JACOB. Yes, but my sister put on plays you see. She loved plays. “Yakov,” she'd say-

JACOB and SARAH. “in a play, peasants can be prophets.”

SARAH. I have visited Jerusalem, and I have seen Solomon's Temple!

JAKOV. You are crazy... When?

SARAH. Just last month. You will see little brother. Be in our play and you will no longer be just Jakov...

JACOB. And this came to me one day. Her story must be a play. People love plays, no?

ALAN. Those that see them. Let's face it. On the used-to-be-vital-but-no-longer-essential-to-humanity list we are one notch above poets but two below clowns.

JACOB. And this is why you have this department for drama, no? And all these students who dream of acting? Because no one wants to see? I think not. Sarah would have loved it here...*(He stops a moment and sighs.)* So her diary will be a play.

*Some students appear in an area and as one speaks, Alan turns and talks with them.*

STUDENT. A play about a young Jewish girl who wrote a diary- and died in World War II?



ALAN. Yes-

ANOTHER STUDENT. Hate to tell you Alan, but it's been done.

ALAN. I know, and so does he.

JACOB. I know what you are thinking- Anna Frank-

ALAN. He was selling me. Like some poor writer in Hollywood. Pitching his sister Sarah's story.

JACOB. But Sarah is different. Sarah was not in hiding. She was in the middle of a ghetto, and she was a journalist. She wanted to be a writer- her writing- she is not just a little girl. She wrote essays on the future of the Jewish people. She was a scholar-

**ENSEMBLE. Lecture No. 10 Thursday, December 15, 1938 Kislev. Back To The Forgotten Jewish Ideas**

*Throughout the play the ensemble will announce diary headings and perhaps projections are used. Sarah is seen in a pool of light reciting; each time she speaks alone the passages are directly from a translation of her actual diary:*

*SARAH.* Each individual has his own feelings, his thoughts and his faith in his beliefs. There are all sorts of peoples in the world. There are nations that have no idea; there are others that do have an idea, a religion. We are an idea that has a nation. That is how Jews have always understood their fate. We are the creation of an idea. Our life, our hearts are enchanted by its magic. By some sort of miracle our forefathers ignited a flame in our hearts that can never be extinguished. Moses' bush remains a permanent glowing in our blood. No one has the power to put it out.

ALAN. *(Turning back to JACOB.)* She was an old soul-

JACOB. Yes- you understand- this is a thirteen year old- her writing- it is like a rabbi- *(He takes out a very thick Xerox manuscript)* Here, I want you to read. We have over six years- two years before the war and four years during – *(He takes out another large manuscript)* and my memoirs...

ALAN. *(Turning back to the students)* He's been trying for years, you know.

STUDENT. I'll bet he has.

ALAN. I know it's crazy, but there is something about him-

STUDENT. Who needs another Holocaust play- with all due respect? I mean, what could you possibly say-

ANOTHER STUDENT. Been there, done that-

PUBLISHER. (*appears in another area*) Look, Mr. Fishking, I'm as Jewish as any other publisher in town, but forgive me- your sister- she says some very upsetting things. She actually forsakes God. "Where indeed is our Father? How could one who is merciful towards all living things be witness to all this and be silent? Am I the first to disapprove and to say there is no heavenly one?" We cannot be a part of publishing this.

ANOTHER STUDENT. Wait. Let me get this straight. She gets pissed at God?

ALAN. Yes. For one day. One day in six years, in the middle of a holocaust, she gets a little angry-

PUBLISHER. She denounces God. No one will publish a diary that says such things.

STUDENT. Wait a minute! They think that is wrong? It's so human for Christ's sake-

ANOTHER STUDENT. "My god why has thou forsaken me...."

ALAN. Exactly. She is very insightful but also full of rage and fear-

SARAH. (*From the diary*) Yes, it may well be that right now my pen is not referring to Thee in the proper fashion, but my patience has exploded and today I must write the truth about my dominant thoughts. It is probable that six years ago I would not have said this nor written in this manner, but now, as I observe the suffering of the Jewish people, see the nation drowning in a cruel sea of trouble without anyone coming to the rescue- no, just the opposite is taking place: the oppressors are being helped to touch bottom— as we drown, I am impelled to write. I see no help underway; there is silence everywhere. All else lives; we are alone in travail.

JACOB. Believe me, for Sarah to write such things- it is only because she was so devoted to the Lord. Rabbis used to love when Sarah visited. She couldn't wait to talk with them and they to her. This was a very exceptional student of Torah-

PUBLISHER. No student of Torah turns her back on God!

SARAH. Hasn't the path to righteousness with its guideposts marked Humanity, Unity, Fraternity, and Love been blocked off? In actuality been replaced by just the opposite? In place of brotherhood we see signs of divisiveness, alienation, separation. Instead of unity and love, we see brutality, barbarism, crudeness. If such repulsive behavior is encompassing the entire world, if only the few enjoy the full cup of happiness, while the greater number, ninety-nine percent, are thirsty, this can no longer continue.

STUDENT. Wow! Some girl fifty years ago wrote that? I said that to you just like yesterday about Bosnia-

ANOTHER STUDENT. Dude, when are you starting this?

ALAN. Tomorrow. Some of us are meeting to piece the story out.

ANOTHER STUDENT. We'll be there.

STUDENT. I'm down. Cause I always wondered why Anne Frank just never threw a hissy fit.

ANOTHER STUDENT. Yo, she did - at her sister and mother, and that fat woman in the attic.

STUDENT. Yeah, but not at the world- or at God. You read your Old Testament lately? I mean Yahweh was fierce.

*Loud thunder and rain is heard. Lights shift to an assembly area in Rubzewitz, Poland, 1938.*

JAKOV. Ahhh!

SARAH. Jakov!

JAKOV. What!

SARAH. Where are you going?

JAKOV. I hate the thunder.

SARAH. No need to be scared...

JAKOV. I am not scared! *Another thunder clap.* No one will even be here. Let's just go home.

SARAH. Of course they will. All of us are ready. We rehearsed yesterday most of the day.

JAKOV. Yes. Instead of working.

SARAH. Our play is work too, little complainer... to tell the story of Joseph to all the shtetl is as important a job as working in the field. We must be reminded that others before us suffered-

JAKOV. But we know the story, we even know the end. This is what is so stupid about plays- everyone knows we are just acting, and they know the end-

SARAH. If you know a song- does that mean you shouldn't sing it?

JAKOV. Who is there to sing to? No one! It is pouring down rain. There will be no one here. Look at that sky- we are the only fools silly enough to come out in this weather.

*The lights also come up on a rehearsal room at NYU. Actors are seen sitting waiting to hear Alan speak. The same actors play the "actors" in Sarah's play waiting for their audience to arrive.*

ALAN. Thank you all for coming, thank you. Especially in this weather. But it couldn't be more perfect. Because the first scene-the first scene in the play we are here to create takes place in the middle of a storm (*The thunder is heard again*) It was pouring down rain. And the Fishkin family was going to a play. Sarah was part of a young girl's Jewish leadership group, and she persuaded them to put on a play. She created the whole thing. She wrote it and produced it. About the story of Joseph.

ANOTHER STUDENT. Yo, like Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat-

STUDENT 3. I played the Pharaoh last summer in Maine.

ALAN. But what is so cool is this was very radical. These girls you see, got together to tell this story about all these sons. Dressed up like a bunch of men-

ANOTHER STUDENT. There goes our NEA grant...

JAKOV. You look ridiculous anyway. Dressed up like that. You all do.

FANYA. What about you, little sheep...

JAKOV. I am not a sheep, Fanya. I am a goat. And I get sacrificed so they can use my blood to claim Joseph was murdered. So I am a very important goat-

ANOTHER STUDENT. That's right, they faked Joseph's murder, smeared his coat with blood-

STUDENT. That is sooo "Silence of the Lambs"....

ALAN. And the girls had prepared for weeks and were all ready to perform.

FANYA. Little goat, get into place.

SARAH. We want to begin as soon as everyone gets here.

JAKOV. It's been an hour and half. This goat is going home!

*Loud thunder. The sound of children screaming.*

SOSHKKA. Sarah? Sarah?

SARAH. Mamma, thank you for coming.

SOSHKKA. Thank you? Of course you don't need to thank. But why today? Why in this weather? We had to wait under a tree until we could continue-

SARAH. Here, dry yourself off.

SOSHKKA. Why are you wearing such a silly coat? Look at you. What happened to your hair?

SARAH. It is under the turban, Mother. I am one of the sons. Later on, I play the Pharaoh.

BOBIE. Some Pharaoh! You look like my Uncle Simon... More hair on my elbow, than on Simon.

SARAH. Bobie, sit down. You walked all this way.

BOBIE. What you think I can't walk? I walk every day. Who gets the water if I can't walk?

DAVID. Sit down and rest mammala. We have forty days and forty nights this story takes.

SARAH. That's the flood, Pappa. That was last year's play.

DAVID. Oh, I thought with the rain and Jakov dressed like a monkey-

JAKOV. I'm a goat! An important goat! I am sacrificed!

DAVID. Oh, Abraham is it. Forgive me. You should do Noah with all this rain...

SARAH. It is Joseph-

DAVID. But you said goat-

JAKOV. There is a goat in this one too.

SARAH. And this is what we rehearsed, Pappa. You can't just change because of the weather.

MERRE LIEBE. Look at Jakov!

YITZKOHK. Look, a chicken!

SHOSHKE. Merre Liebe, Yitzhok. Sit down.

YITZKOHK. I want to play with the chicken.

JAKOV. Baaa- Baaaa! Does a chicken go Baaa?

SHOSHKE. He's a sheep, darlings-

JAKOV. A goat!

SHOSHKE. Well, a sheep goes baaa-

JAKOV. But I am a goat! They rub Joseph's coat in goat's blood, not a sheep! They are going to slit my throat!

BOTH CHILDREN. Mamma, Mamma!-

SHOSHKE. Children, sit down. Jakov, you are scaring them!

DAVID. They want to begin.

JAKOV. But there is no one here.

BOBIE. We are here!

SARAH. But the whole shtetl? Rohkol? And Fanya's family? Did you not see any others?

SHOSHKE. I don't know. There was so much rain.

BOBIE. Well - WE ARE HERE!

DAVID. Yes!

BOBIE. And I didn't walk all this way just to wash my schmarta in the rain!

SARAH. All right everybody, let's go from the beginning!

*The actors all go into place and begin their play which will actually become the next scene in the woods.*

SARAH. Now, we think times are difficult for us now...

ALAN. So they performed the play?

JACOB. Yes. They performed for just a handful of people.

ALAN. How sad.

JACOB. Not at all. Sarah was very proud. See you have to understand my sister Sarah. She was like a rare stone. If most do a thing this way- Sarah would do it that way. And she loved being a Jew. For example, she wanted to go and study with a famous Zionist teacher. Travel to another shtetl, and study what was in store for the Jewish people. She was so interested in the future of our people. *(He stops for a brief moment overcome by the irony of that statement.)*

ALAN. Here, would you like some water.

JACOB. Yes, thank you. Very kind. Well, all right, normally this would be nothing special. But you see, the war, it was almost starting. And the Russians they were already occupying. And the Germans were already killing... And in the middle of this, she wanted to go at least forty kilometers away to build for a brighter future. So she went away, and things became even worse. You must understand the gentile farmers- they could get some salt and some flour for turning in a Jew. Oh yes. And they would. We tried to get them to help us- the farmers who knew us, were our friends- to send a wagon to go and get her. But even the most sympathetic begged us not to ask. It could mean deportation or death. Understandable, no? I ask you,

would you help? To do this for a friend, if it might mean your death, would you go?

**ENSEMBLE. Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941, Wolozin. Today the War Between the Russians and the Germans Began.**

SARAH. Last night I slept so restfully, dreaming dreams of beautiful fantasy, a true balm to my unconscious. How rich was the content of last night's dream. If only it could last on and on. How disappointing to wake up and realize it was all a utopian vision. How angry I am at myself and my imagination. And now it is three o'clock. I couldn't possibly have imagined that upon going into the street I would hear such startling reports. Several seconds earlier I certainly had no idea that a war had broken out.

STUDENT. Yo, what's up?

ANOTHER STUDENT. A plane flew into the World Trade Center.

STUDENT. That's not funny.

ANOTHER STUDENT. I'm serious. Turn on the news. *(They hold up a remote and turn on a TV.)*

STUDENT. I thought you were like telling a joke. So this plane flies into the World Trade Center...

ANOTHER STUDENT. No, a couple of minutes ago.

STUDENT. My God, look at that- it's like flying right into the goddamn building-

ANOTHER STUDENT. That's not it. That's another one-

STUDENT. No, look it's flying right into the building. Just like you said.

ANOTHER STUDENT. I'm telling you it already happened.

STUDENT. It's a replay-

ANOTHER STUDENT. No, it's not. Look the other building is already smoking; that's the other tower-that's another plane!

STUDENT. Holy shit!!!

**ENSEMBLE. Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1941 (Wolozin)**



SARAH. It was with altered conceptions and very different emotions that everyone sets out for work today. Our thoughts are now dominated by questions of all sorts. We are all now thinking of the moments soon to come. One must make peace with one's fate. These times are very strained. Mobilization has begun. There is great hustle-bustle. One feels so helpless, so lacking in personal effectiveness. Each one asks himself how will it all turn out. Sometimes the answer is tragic. Bad times—hunger and death await us.

SOSHKKA. We must go for Sarah.

DAVID. Shoshka...

SOSHKKA. I'll go to Wolozin on foot. If no one will help us. I will find a way. I will bring my daughter home.

DAVID. Have you walked to Wolozin? Through the woods? You will get lost!

JAKOV. Taté! Let Sarah stay where she is. She will only fight with us if she comes home.

JACOB. Now, my father was a gentle man, you see, but he had a tone of voice, never loud, never stern. But when he used that tone of voice- there was no use arguing.

DAVID. I will go.

JACOB. This was no easy task. Forty kilometers walking, but he knew the terrain. My father did many odd jobs for the farmers- worked with animals, when they were sick. He made them shoes. For the farmers, not the animals...

ALAN. He made shoes.

JACOB. Oh, yes, the best. Everyone loved my father's shoes. He even taught me how to make them. And it was a good thing, but this is another story... He'd taste the soil and predict the harvest and cut hair—oh, and he was a photographer. Whenever there was a death, Father was called upon to photograph the deceased. It had become a custom to postpone the burial until after photos were taken. And he would take pictures at weddings... My Taté was a very well known man throughout the area-

JAKOV. I have a good idea, Taté! I will go with you.

DAVID and SHOSKA. You?

JACOB. They both said it at the same time. And I remember I just had to laugh.

JAKOV. Of course. I love the woods. I love to watch the birds fly from branch to branch and the way the forest smells. I've been to the woods with Betar. I can start a fire without using matches.

YITZKOHK. Yes, yes, I want to go, too.

MERRE LIEBE. Go where?

YITZKOHK. To the woods with Jakov and Pappa.

MERRE LIEBE. I want to go!

SHOSKA. This is not Betar, Jakov!

DAVID. This danger is very real.

JAKOV. I can run fast. If there is danger I can run for help!!! I don't care what it is. Death, schmeth!

JACOB. And I remember that night I was so excited I couldn't sleep. I knew I was doing something so important!

STUDENT. It's bull-crap. It all seems like- so petty. Put on a play? In the middle of this chaos? We are supposed to rehearse a play...?

ANOTHER STUDENT. No way. I mean what difference could this possible make.

YET ANOTHER STUDENT. We may all die tomorrow...All of a sudden it makes theater- it makes being an artist look pretty fucking unimportant.

STUDENT. I'm volunteering to help downtown, gonna do something productive!

ANOTHER STUDENT. I tried that. They have too many people. They turn you away.

YET ANOTHER STUDENT. Most of us can't even get anywhere. There are no trains past 14<sup>th</sup> street.

ALAN. You can walk-

STUDENT. I know. Yesterday we had to walk home. All the way uptown.

ALAN. And yet you came to rehearse, why?

ANOTHER STUDENT. Because I can't stand sitting at home and waiting...

YET ANOTHER STUDENT. Glued to the tube watching CNN... Like some zombie.

STUDENT. Broadway was deserted. It was really creepy...

ANOTHER STUDENT. People had to walk across the bridge to Brooklyn. There are no trains and cars, so everyone is just walking across the bridges. Sort of stone-faced and quiet.

SHOSKA. Get up and get dressed you two. Don't waste any time. You need the dark. Here, take this food I prepared for you.

**ENSEMBLE. Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1941, Wolozin. Today the Germans Entered Our City and Captured It.**

DAVID. No, keep this. We have so little. I know plenty of peasants on the way, and they know me. We won't go hungry.

SARAH. (*In another light.*) We were afraid to remain indoors any longer and went out to an orchard, where we waited calmly for Death to approach. It is terrible when bullets are flying overhead, and it seems that at any moment one of them will strike and put an end to our young lives. But how wonderfully the heart, filled with absolute calm, dictates: With much confidence we continue to look Death right in the eye and wait to see what will happen in the hours immediately ahead. I feel in my quaking heart the desire to perish together with my family, to end my young life beside my parents.

JAKOV. Mother, you remind me of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham woke his son and took him to the altar to be sacrificed. But an angel came down from Heaven and spared Isaac's life. Nothing will happen to us. Angels will watch over us.

SHOSKA. God be with you.

JAKOV. You see Taté, Mamma is a strong woman. She isn't crying.

SHOSKA. Go now, hurry. Soon it will be too light

JACOB. It must have been agony for her. Who knew if we'd ever come back. You could hear the sounds of the German trucks. On every road. So we went further and further into the woods. After what seemed like five forevers, it was the middle of the day and yet it was almost pitch black, the trees were so thick. And my legs felt like iron weights.

DAVID. Do you hear that noise?

JAKOV. Yes.

DAVID. Those are more trucks. But the Germans will not enter the woods because it is not safe for them. They are afraid of the Partisans. We can rest a moment here.

JACOB. Like your American cowboys we used to play Partisan when we were little boys. There were stories of how brave they were, and we all wanted to fight the Germans like them.

JAKOV. *(He curls up in his Father's arms, trying to fight off sleep, but losing the battle)* I'm not afraid of the Partisans. I want to play with their rifles. I hear they all carry big rifles and can shoot like this- pop! Pop!

DAVID. Jakov. No! Keep your voice down.

JAKOV. Sorry. Sorry. *(Yawns)* Taté, when I was in Kheder I learned that the Jews wandered in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years. That is a long time, isn't it?

DAVID. Yes. It is.

JAKOV. My feet are so sore; I think I know how they felt.

DAVID. Oh, no little one. This is very different. Look at all these trees. There were no trees in the desert. And it was so very hot...

JAKOV. *(He is almost asleep now.)* Yes, but those Jews wanted to get home, too.

DAVID. And God brought them safely there.

JAKOV. And God is the same. He hasn't changed, so don't worry. We won't get lost, and we will come home safely. Because God brought them home.

DAVID. Yes, all but one.

JAKOV. All but one...?

DAVID. Yes...didn't they teach you in Kheder? Moses.... *(He sees the boy is asleep and so he, too, rests his eyes.)*

JACOB. Now, when we sat down to rest, it was the middle of the day. But we must have been exhausted because now it was dark and we were still sound asleep.

*Two men are seen creeping up on the sleeping father and son.*

FIRST MAN. Don't move or we will shoot!

SECOND MAN. Not a word!

JAKOV. *(Sees them before his Father and surprisingly doesn't not scream.)* Are you a real Partisan? I know how to survive in the woods, too! You are a real Partisan- and you have a rifle too.

SHORT PARTISAN. I said be quiet!

DAVID. *(Waking)* JAKOV.?

TALL PARTISAN. Don't move.

JAKOV. This is my Taté, my father. We are on our way to Wolozin to pick up our sister-

SHORT PARTISAN. And I am on the way to Paris. Be quiet!

DAVID. Jakov! The nice men want us to be quiet.

TALL PARTISAN. What language do you speak?

JAKOV. How can I answer you and not speak at the same time?

DAVID. Russian -

JAKOV. And Yiddish! And I know Hebrew! I studied in Kheder!

DAVID. Jakov, do what the nice men ask.

JAKOV. But you just talked!

ALAN. No! So you basically just told them you were Jews.

JACOB. Yes, but I thought they were Partisans, and if they were Partisans, it wouldn't matter.

ALAN. And were they?

JACOB. We didn't know for sure- but either way they were about to shoot us. They blindfolded us and took us to this underground room. It was awful- marching us blindfolded- I could hear my Taté breathing so hard.

ALAN. You must have been terrified.

JACOB. Because I could sense how frightened my father was. And then they led him away into the darkness and took off my blindfold. I was alone with this tall man with a scar on his lip.

PARTISAN LEADER They tell me the man called you Jakov. Is that your name?

JAKOV. My name is Jakov, yes. What is yours?

PARTISAN LEADER. Who was that man?

JAKOV. That man is my father- where is he?

PARTISAN LEADER Is that your name, Jakov?

JAKOV. Yes, of course it is. Where is my Taté? Where have you taken him?

PARTISAN LEADER. Listen to me very carefully, little JAKOV.. I will ask you the questions. Do you understand?

JAKOV. Yes, but please, where is my father?

PARTISAN LEADER. Where were you going? Why were you in the woods?

JAKOV. We are going to bring my sister home. Are you German?

PARTISAN LEADER. I said I will ask the questions. Why were you not on the road?

JAKOV. The Germans are along the roads. We are hiding from them like you. Are you Russian? My sister, she writes for the Russian newspaper; she is a reporter. We are walking, and we must hurry-

PARTISAN LEADER. You are walking all the way to Wolozin?

JAKOV. Yes.

PARTISAN LEADER. That is very far. Where are you really going?

JAKOV. We are going to Wolozin.

PARTISAN LEADER. And who is that man we found with you?

JAKOV. That is my Taté. My father. He is a good man. Everyone knows my Taté. He makes shoes and takes photographs-

PARTISAN LEADER. He takes photographs?

JAKOV. When someone in the shtetl dies and at weddings.

PARTISAN LEADER. Where is his camera?

JAKOV. At home. He did not need it today. No one has died.

PARTISAN LEADER. And no one is getting married. Why does he speak German?

JAKOV. My father does not speak German. He speaks Yiddish like me- and Russian. We live in Rubiezewicze.

PARTISAN LEADER. Why does this photographer speak German?

JAKOV. He doesn't. Why do you keep saying things that aren't true!

PARTISAN LEADER. Because we need for you to tell us the truth. Now who is he, and who are you? If this man was really your father he would not take such a young boy into the woods to walk all the way to Wolozin. It is too dangerous. He is a fool!

JAKOV. He is not a fool! He is a good father! He is the best father! He brings us food and kisses us and everyone loves his shoes. He is my Father, and we are going to Wolozin, and you better let us go! Do you hear me? Let us go!

JACOB. And the man walked away, and a few minutes later the two other men brought my father back in to see me. And he was shivering and covered with sweat. I jumped into his arms and started kissing him all over.

TALL PARTISAN. You are lucky. You screamed very loud and very persuasively. You must really like your father.

SHORT PARTISAN. Come with us. You must go.

TALL PARTISAN. You did something very dangerous. You fell asleep.

SHORT PARTISAN. One of you must stay awake at all times. This is very important.

TALL PARTISAN. You must never walk close together. Always keep some distance from each other. My name is Hershel. I'm from Kojdanow. Some day you'll visit me, and you'll meet my little brother. He is about your age. Your father is a good man, and you are a good boy.

JAKOV. I want to be a Partisan! I want to be on a mission like you!

TALL PARTISAN. You take care of your father and sister; that is your mission. *(He salutes Jakov, and Jakov returns the salute.)*

JACOB.

That night we finally made it to Wolozin, and a Christian family that knew my father let us sleep in their barn. When I woke up, Sarah was sitting near me stroking my hair.

JAKOV.

I am glad you are here. Now we won't have to go all over Wolozin and get killed trying to find you.

SARAH.

It is good to see you, too, little brother.

JAKOV.

Stop kissing me so much!!! You'll wake father!

JACOB.

The Christian family had gone after her for us, and we were so grateful, but then we had to leave. If we had been found at their house, even by their own son who was training to be a guard, it would have been very dangerous for them. So after a quick breakfast, we were back in the woods.

DAVID.

Keep walking.

JAKOV.

They took us for German spies.

SARAH. Who are they?



JAKOV. Partisans! Partisans! You're not listening. A tall one, Yankel, a short one, and one with a cut lip. He was nasty. He was the leader. But he didn't scare me. He kept saying I was lying! That Pappa was speaking German in the other room!

SARAH. The other room?

DAVID. They separated us. Interrogated us.

SARAH. How awful. You must have been so frightened.

JAKOV. Not me! I said bring me back my Taté! Right now!

DAVID. I was certain they were going to shoot me. They kept asking for my camera. I never did know how they knew I took photographs. (*Jakov looks at the ground but says nothing.*) Then they left me alone for a moment, and all I could think was this is it. This is where I am going to die.

JAKOV. Taté, keep walking...

DAVID. Then they came back, and said "You are lucky to have your little boy with you. He was very convincing."

JAKOV. See! I told them: "Let us go!"

DAVID. And to think I almost left to bring you back alone. Without Yankele... I was sure it was wrong to take him, and yet if I hadn't...

JAKOV. I told you. I can run fast and scream loud. I am very useful!

DAVID. We have a decision to make, so let us sit here and tell me what you want to do. Should we separate or stay close together?

JAKOV. Herschel said to stay far apart! Father!

DAVID. I know.

SARAH. Herschel?

JAKOV. The tall one. The Partisan. Someday you will listen to what I have to say. You'd like him Sarah. He was the one who brought father back in. He was sooo big!

DAVID. (*Something is heard in the bushes.*) Ssh, Yakov. Be very quiet, please. Now we must always have a plan. This is what we will do. We must

stay close together, close enough not to lose sight of each other but far enough apart that we can run away if the Germans stop one of us. *(The tall Partisan can be seen shadowing them as they begin to move. They do not see him.)* We must run deeper into the forest if that happens. No matter what. If they stop one of us, the others go. Is that clear?

JACOB. No matter what- if they stop one of us, the others go.... My father always had a plan. Every time they moved us, from camp to camp, he would sit with me and plan a strategy... *(He sighs again.)*

ALAN. Here, take some more water.

JACOB. No, no. My teeth. If I drink too much water, my teeth will become too loose. You don't want for my teeth to fall out in your office.

ALAN. Please. Put them on my desk if you have to. So you got home all right with Sarah?

JACOB. Oh yes. And mother and Bobie and the little ones were so happy. This is what is so hard to believe. In the middle of so much that was terrible, we were able to feel so much joy. Laughing and singing and carrying on- Many years ago, but I still hear them singing... and laughing... Forgive me, but I am talking so much again. And you have so much work to do.

ALAN. Jacob, I've been thinking. I want to try and help you, you know that, but- well, I'm just not sure that I can.

JACOB. I understand you are very busy-

ALAN. No, it's not just that. I make time for things I care about- there is always time-

JACOB. For some, I am not getting younger, you know.

ALAN. I know. And I would very much like to help- I know there is nothing more important to you than your sister's work.

JACOB. It is my mitzvah. Do you know this word?

ALAN. Yes, I think. Like in bar mitzvah, right?

JACOB. It means commandment or obligation. It is my mission-

ALAN. See, you are talking to the only Jew who doesn't even know what Mitzvah means... *(Turns to his Jewish friend Deb.)* How pathetic is that?

DEB. You didn't know Mitzvah?

ALAN. No, Deb. And I don't like lox.

DEB. That is pathetic.

ALAN. I mean how silly is it that this poor sweet man, this devout Jew, this survivor who has been through so much, so much- and what have I survived- Reagan... is spilling his story to me- To me? I mean, I am almost an anti-Semitic Jew. I don't practice, I barely believe. In fact, I get so angry sometimes at the whole notion of Jewishness, I want to scream.

DEB. Maybe that is the point. Did you tell him this?

ALAN. Yes- (*back to Jacob.*) alright I am going to say this, and I hope you don't get upset. I mean since we don't know each other all that well yet.

JACOB. I understand. Speak, please, freely.

DEB. What did you say?

ALAN. I told him that I'm not sure that I could do justice to the story- his sister's story because *-(to Jacob now)* unlike your sister Sarah, I have a real problem with religious nations. But this goes beyond just separation of synagogue and state. To be blunt, the whole problem with Israel is our Jewishness, our need to be Jews. The whole problem with religion is the need to be one thing and not another, to separate us from them, and it is this separateness, this belonging, this ideological and theological country club mentality that causes all the problems- the hatred, the persecution. I mean they all have it- the great religions. It is their mother's milk. They all have this exclusivity clause built right in. We are the chosen people. Christ is the only road to everlasting peace. How alluring, how narcotic. But it is those very same differences- those perks which make the flock supposedly special, that make others persecute and hate and burn you alive.

DEB. You said this to him? Did his teeth stay in?

ALAN. Yes, and he did the most amazing thing.

DEB. What?

ALAN. He listened. He thought, and then he said-

JACOB. I understand. I understand what you are saying. And this is why you are the right one to tell this story.

ALAN. I mean, how do you argue with someone who won't argue? (*Back to Jacob.*) I am the right person? Jacob, I am telling you I believe the Jews probably do not belong in Israel. I am telling you that it is our very Jewishness that keeps getting us into trouble. I am telling you that I am not worthy of telling this most holy of holy stories.

JACOB. Let me tell you something. May I tell you something?

ALAN. Yes, please go ahead.

JACOB. God will allow it. God wants you to tell this story-

ALAN. But Jacob, what if I do not believe there is a God?

JACOB. Let me finish. I am speaking? No? Whether you believe there is a God or not, I am here no? You do not ask me to leave, do you? No. Because you are a good man, and you believe that Sarah's story is important.

ALAN. And yours. Your story is important as well.

JACOB. Fine, but my story is Sarah's story. They are one in the same. As is yours. And God knows this, and God sees this, and this is why he has sent me to you.

ALAN. (*To his friend DEB.*) So now I have to argue with God. This play is being written as a mitzvah by a boy who wasn't even Bar Mitzvahed.

DEB. What if he's right? I mean, what if this is what is supposed to happen? Something is attracting you to this story, no? So maybe it is not from a spiritual, divine place, but from an ontological place- you dealing with our own past and inability to reconcile your own sense of self- sort of place.

ALAN. Oh, that makes me feel much better-

JACOB. This was my destiny. I cannot argue with it. I did not choose it. It happens to us, you see. My father, my beloved Taté, he made sure I would stay alive, why? So that I will find the diary. Someone in the family had to survive so that Sarah's diary could be saved.

ALAN. But WHY! Why you, why not Sarah? I mean why did she have to die so that all we have is her diary? Why if there is a God did he have to take Sarah- and so many others for that matter?

JACOB. This is not for us to ask why.

ALAN. No, do not give me that! I am. I am asking why! And so was she! And that is what I love about your sister, that as devout as she was, as holy as she was, she still had the guts to say WHY! Why Lord?! And if she didn't get an answer then maybe it was because there is no Lord!

JACOB. And that is exactly why she perished.

ALAN. Because there is no God?

JACOB. Because she doubted.

ALAN. What? WHAT? Are you going to sit here and tell me, forgive me, but I can't believe this- are you going to tell me because your sister doubted, she had to die? Are you telling me that not once, not once in all these years you haven't doubted? When they had you in their camps? When they bomb Israel, when they take out the World Trade Center? Not once- not once have you wondered- well maybe this God stuff is all a bunch of hooley?

JACOB. No. Forgive me, but not once. Never. Do you know the story of Moses?

ALAN. Yes. Most of it.

JACOB. Do you know how he died?

ALAN. No, I didn't even know mitzvah remember-

JACOB. On a mountain Nebo in the desert overlooking the Promised Land. He was allowed to see but not allowed to cross over. And do you know why? Because in the middle of the desert, he failed to do God's will. He struck a stone to make water and so as horrible as it sounds, as tragic as it must have been for God-

ALAN. Not to mention Moses.

JACOB. Because he failed to obey- God could not allow Moses into the Promised Land.

ALAN. Oh come on, how parental, how patriarchal! So this great holy man, Moses, leads the entire Jewish people out of slavery. This stuttering farmer rescues an entire population and then leads them through the desert starving and homeless for forty years- and God says "sorry no dice, you pissed me off one day"- one day in forty years- "and so Paradise is not yours. Get up on the mountain and look but don't touch?" What kind of God is that? What ever happened to forgiveness? To devotion? I'm sorry Jacob, but if this is your God, if this is the God that took your beautiful loving and devoted

sister, because she was in despair for one day, what good is he? No wonder everyone is killing in the name of such Gods, blind with faith- these are faiths rooted in pain and despair.

DEB. And what did he say to that.

ALAN. He bowed his head for the longest time. He said nothing for what seemed to be forever. Wrestling with the guilt of his sister's death, like Jacob and the angel. I went online Deb- and I looked up the story of Moses because I couldn't believe it could be true and do you know what the name of the place is – where Moses had his crisis of faith?

DEB. No, and I don't like lox either by the way.

ALAN. It was at a place called Kadesh and it became known as Meribah which means strife, disagreement, discord. Meribah Kadesh, the waters of discord. It was an oasis in the middle of the desert, or at least it was after Moses struck the rock and turned it into one. His people were dying of thirst and this had happened before. I mean after all, he had thousands of people wandering through the desert, and already been allowed to draw water from one stone by striking it, but this time when he asked the Lord, the Lord's reply was for him to take up his staff and speak to the stone. Speak to it but don't strike it. But for some reason, and only Moses knows why, maybe because he was a stutterer, he hit the stone with the staff and at first- no water. So he struck it again and finally water flowed. So, lo and behold, he did indeed draw water from the rock, and he saved his people. But God forbid, and I mean that quite literally, and I understand why this is such an overused Jewish phrase now, this time by disobeying the Lord on what would seem a point of technicality - he sealed his fate forever. He would never set foot in the Promised land. At Meri-bah-kadesh, a little oasis of water in the middle of the desert. Meri-bah-kadesh, the Waters of Discord.

JAKOV. Why are we stopping here. We need to get to the mill and bring back the flour.

SARAH. Because it is beautiful here. The setting sun over the water. See the reflection... Countless jewels on the water...

JAKOV. Stop dreaming, Sarah. Let's go.

SARAH. Nothing in the world is more beautiful than this...

JAKOV. Come on, the sun is- just the sun, doing what the sun is supposed to do-

SARAH. See how calmly the water flows. If you listen very carefully you can hear it. Do you hear? And the birds singing. A symphony is being written just for us.

JAKOV. The water is good for fishing and swimming, yes, but you make a big geschete about everything.

SARAH. Because we are outside and far away, we've escaped from everything terrible. Look, look around.

JAKOV. We are outside because I snuck into the mill and risked my neck and earned some flour for us to eat, but I couldn't carry it all-

SARAH. There is so much beauty, so much artistry in the world... All around are paintings, and music, we have never been to a museum, but I cannot imagine they could be any richer- I am sure of it. I have never been to a concert but listen to this music! I feel like dancing.

JAKOV. You are going to make us late. You are supposed to be helping me carry the flour. Stop dancing with me and let's go.

SARAH. Dance with me, Jakov, please, just this once.

JAKOV. If I dance, will you promise to hurry and go? Taté said it was dangerous if we are caught.

SARAH. I know. I know.

*They dance. Music again is playing as if written and performed for Sarah to dance to.*

JAKOV. Why did we have to remove our stars? I like my star. And I am good at sneaking inside. I got the flour.

SARAH. Yes, you are very resourceful-

JAKOV. I'm sneaky-

SARAH. Like a little blonde mouse you are, my sneaky little brother of a mouse. Oh, if anyone can survive this you will.

*They dance some more.*

JAKOV. Sarah, explain what is going on.

SARAH. We're dancing by the river.

JAKOV. No, I mean with the Germans and the Jews.

SARAH. Who can explain? The Germans want to kill all of us.

JAKOV. Kill us? Kill us. But why?

SARAH. Because we are Jews. And we are evil.

*The music stops.*

JAKOV. I think you need to see a doctor. Something terrible has happened to you.

SARAH. Jakov, why do you think you had to hide in the forest when you went to bring me home?

JAKOV. We are not evil! You should have never come back. If this is what you think.

SARAH. This is not what I think, it is what they think.

JAKOV. You are crazy!

SARAH. Listen, Jakov, you know what I'm saying is true. And I know it makes no sense, and I know it is terrifying-

JAKOV. That is just the sun, and this is just a river, and who dances in the middle of a field? And why would anyone want to kill Taté and Bobie? Why would anyone want to kill us all?

SARAH. Jakov-

*He runs off.*

SARAH. I wanted to remain standing where I was for a long time and to observe the calm, now quiescent life of nature. I wanted to transform myself into a completely lifeless being entirely unaware of anything, so that everything would be ended for me. All my young days would then have been in the past, all that I was to experience would have been experienced, all the joys of life would have been over and cut off as I was, all questions would have been answered, clearly and understandably; all my secret, never uttered to anyone thoughts would have remained deep in my heart, gone with me forever. Yet one thinks: No! One must go on living. Really to see true happiness some day.



*Jakov is covered in flour and being helped by a beautiful Christian-Polish girl.*

JAKOV. What are you doing?

KHANE. I'm helping you.

JAKOV. Do you know who I am?

KHANE. You are Jakov. Though it is hard to tell under all that flour. Here.

JAKOV. Stop. You must leave it alone.

KHANE. Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you.

JAKOV. I must not be seen here.

KHANE. I know that. You are very brave. I was wondering if you would be back.

JAKOV. I've come for my flour. *(Their eyes meet. Jakov moves her pigtail that has fallen in front of her face.)* Don't worry I'm not going to hurt you....

SARAH. Khane, how nice to see you.

JAKOV. This is my sister, Sarah.

SARAH. Hello.

JAKOV. This is –

SARAH. I know, Khane. Getzel, the miller's daughter. You are a very beautiful young lady, Khane. Don't you think so, Jakov?

KHANE. You look like a boy with all your hair gone.

JAKOV. It is under her hat. She often dresses like a boy. She has turned crazy lately. We don't know what to do with her...

GETZEL. Khane, what are you doing?

KHANE. Helping, Jakov and his sister.

GETZEL. Take the flour you earned, but you must leave, please. Get out of here as fast as you can.

*He takes Khane away.*

SARAH. She is a beautiful girl.

JAKOV. She makes my head ache.

SARAH. She likes you. I can tell by the way she was looking at you.

JAKOV. When she was helping me with the flour our eyes met, and I wanted to say something to her, but I got all choked up. It was so odd. Then my heart started to pound, and in my pants, I cannot tell you what else happened but ---Why? We weren't fighting, and I don't even like girls.

SARAH. Not even Fanya?

JAKOV. Especially not Fanya. She is the one who follows me around. Why are you smiling at me? You think I am funny? I should never have told you. I don't know why I talk to you at all.

SARAH. I know you are being serious. I just forget how old you are getting. You will be a young man soon. Soon you will celebrate your Bar-Mitzvah. We will all be so proud of you.

*Jacob knocks on the door to Alan's office as he did at the beginning of the play.*

JACOB. Alan. We have so much work to do-

ALAN. Jacob, we were meeting this Friday, were we not?

JACOB. Yes, but by Friday we could be finished, no?

ALAN. This is so odd I was just going to call you to reschedule. See, things-

JACOB. No need I am here. Alan, my granddaughter, she must play Sarah. Now I know I have a prejudice here, but she read the Torah, my God you should have seen her. Sarah would have been so proud... She even looked like Sarah... Now I know it is not my place, but if you ever finish, when you put on this play, we should think of having her play Sarah.

ALAN. We'll see.

JACOB. What is wrong? This is only a suggestion. I know that the decision will be other people's. And I have also been thinking maybe this needs to be more than one play- we have so much-

ALAN. Jacob, maybe we should get through with Act One in the first play before we plan the mini-series.

JACOB. I'm sorry. I will come back on Friday.

ALAN. No, it is my wife. I haven't been able to work on the play because we have had to go to doctor after doctor. She isn't feeling well, so-

JACOB. I am so sorry, what is it?

ALAN. They don't know yet. She has shortness of breath, and she coughs all the time. They think it might be a virus or pneumonia.

*Alan's wife, a non Jew from another country, appears and is talking with him.*

KATE. They think it might be a virus or pneumonia. I have to go back next Friday for a CAT scan. Will you go with me?

ALAN. Sure, of course. Damn.

KATE. What?

ALAN. Nothing. I just have an appointment I'd have to change. With Jacob. I'll just tell him I'm too busy. I've been looking for a reason to get out of this; I just don't know how to tell him...

JACOB. I will ask all I know to say special prayers for her.

KATE. Be nice to him. It's not his fault you don't know how to say no.

ALAN. *(to Jacob)* Thank you. So why did you come here today? Not that I'm not glad to see you. Oh, and please let me apologize for last week.

JACOB. Not at all. No need. It is I that should apologize to you...*(He begins to tear up.)*

ALAN. Would you like some water?

JACOB. No, my teeth...you should have seen my granddaughter...so beautiful...but her mother, my daughter...I'm not sure I should be talking so- it is perhaps not appropriate-

ALAN. Please, whatever you need to say.

JACOB. I feel like I can speak about such things with you-

ALAN. Good, I'm glad. I will send you my bill next month.

JACOB. Yes...anyway my daughter. She and I have not been close for some time. Since my wife and I no longer are married.

ALAN. How long ago was that?

JACOB. Oh, years now-fifteen, twenty. Anyway, she loves me- this is not the problem, but she doesn't- well, I am not easy to be around, as you know. She doesn't like to spend very much time with me, and my granddaughter- she barely knows me. I guess, you see, she feels that I am living too much in the past. "Pappa," she says, "please not again. We know these horrible things, but not today please!"

ALAN. Why, what happened?

JACOB. I showed her the script. The pages you had written. I wanted her to know how happy I was that someone was going to tell Sarah's story, and she just shook her head. "This is not about you today, Pappa. This is about your granddaughter, and it is a joyful time. This is a new century, and you need to leave that century behind. Leave all those terrible times behind..." And maybe she is right...How silly I was to interrupt such a joyful celebration...

ALAN. Silly? That is exactly what the celebration is for.

JACOB. You think?

ALAN. To remember, to pay homage and pass on tradition. You were not silly.

JACOB. When I arrived at the shul, I saw this woman wearing this great big hat. You know like some movie star pulled way down over one eye-- huge brim. And she hardly looked at me but was walking all around the congregation, and as she sat down, this woman in this tremendous hat- I thought "who would wear such a thing to shul?" Then she sat in the front row, next to me, and I realized it was my daughter. I hardly recognized her...So after the ceremony, I went to the receiving line and was making my congratulations, and I gave my daughter the pages, and I told her about our work. And she said that it was very nice, and we could talk about it later. So at the reception, I saw her walking around- that hat dipping this way and that, and I followed it and found a chair in the corner to talk, but she stood. And said how nice it was for me to come all this way that it meant so much to Hannah. And then she asked if I was getting more sleep.

ALAN. You have trouble sleeping?

JACOB. All my life... I sleep better now, sometimes five or six hours even. But most nights are... they seem so long...

SUNNY. So are you sleeping any better, Pappa?

ALAN. Forgive me, but we have to stop here.

SUNNY. Stop?

ALAN. Yes, we are going to have to cut this scene.

SUNNY and the ENSEMBLE. Cut it? Whoa...Ohh...Why?

ALAN. Hey, part of the problem of working on a play with folks that are real is that- well go ahead, read this letter and you'll see...

SUNNY. Dear Alan. Thanks for sending me a copy of Jude.

ALAN. No, I don't mean read it aloud- oh hell- go ahead that might be the easiest way.

SUNNY. I am very supportive of holocaust education efforts not the least because I spend significant amounts of volunteer time working on them myself. So I certainly wish you the best of luck in achieving your goal to develop and use holocaust related quote creative events unquote as a means to quote foster dialogue rather than intolerance unquote. The success of a project such as yours will rest, in large part, on the authenticity and the credibility of the materials you use in carrying it out. It will, of course, also rest on the integrity of the people who are its representatives and spokespersons, For all these reasons, I feel compelled to write to you about my reaction to "Jude." Jude contains a brief reference to my daughter's Bat Mitzvah and to my immediate family's personal history, and while doing so, purports to relate specific conversations, occurrences and facts. While I appreciate that from your dramatist's point of view, those purported conversations, occurrences and facts help to make Jacob a highly sympathetic protagonist, they are actually figments of the imagination. (*The actress pauses*) Well duh...(*Resumes reading*) For the record: My daughter did have a Bat Mitzvah, my father did see and hear her read from the Torah, I did wear a black hat, my parents are divorced, my father quote is not an easy man to live with unquote, I don't quote like to spend very much time with unquote my father, my daughter quote barely knows unquote my father, and, in my youth, I did have the nickname Sunny among my friends.

However, and simply in the order in which the following items appear in the play:

My daughter resembles my husband's side of the family, not mine, so she does not in fact look anything like Sarah.

My father and I have quote not been close unquote since long before my parents ever divorced.

I have never felt, or expressed to anyone an opinion that my father is or ever was quote living too much in the past unquote.

I have never in my life, in any situation, called or referred to my father as Poppa.

I have no history of discussions, let alone repeated discussions, with my father about quote these horrible things unquote and, in fact, didn't actually even learn the most basic facts of his concentration camp and liberation experience until I sat in on an interview he gave when I was in college.

The black hat that I wore on the morning of my daughter's Bat Mitzvah was hardly quote great big, tremendous, huge or worn like some movie star pulled way down over one eye unquote. It was, in fact, a normal sized hat of the sort that is not uncommonly worn in the synagogue.

My father never sat in the front row during either the Friday night or Saturday morning services and we did not at any time sit next to one another or even in the same row with one another. He arrived quite late for both services and on both occasions sat himself apart from the rest of the family.

I have never asked him about his sleeping habits at any time before during or after the Bat Mitzvah, and indeed, have never at any time in my life had any conversation with him about his sleeping habits, past or present.

My father has never, at any time in my life, called me Sunny and I have never, at any time in my life, referred to myself by that name when talking to him.

I have never said to my father or to anyone else quote it would be good of you to come unquote or quote so nice of you to come unquote because that isn't the sort of syntax I use.

*(The actress breaks away from the letter)* Clearly...

*(And resumes)* My father was several years older than 24, not 24, and my mother was 23, not 20, when they married.

My mother divorced my father for reasons way more serious than the statement quote I am not an easy person to live with unquote suggests.

Alan, I do not have any personal knowledge of any pre-war or war related experiences of my father or any member of his immediate family. Obviously I wasn't there. I also do not have any personal knowledge of what is said in Sarah's diary. I have never seen the document and in any event, I don't read Yiddish, so it is impossible for me to personally verify the faithfulness of the translation.

However I was at my daughter's Bat Mitvah, and so I have personal, direct knowledge about everything that I saw and did there. Based on that knowledge, I can tell you equivocally that none of the experiences portrayed as having taken place during that times and as involving me actually took place. None.

What that tells me, and what I think it should tell you, is that to the extent you are relying on my father as your quote historical consultant unquote and/or the sole source of your material, beware. You should take care to fact check, particularly when the material, including Jude, refers to living people by their real names, and is presented in a context that would reasonably lead the reader/listener/viewer to conclude that it is a faithful retelling of an accounting of events that actually transpired.

With best wishes for a happy and healthy new year, Sincerely Son-

ALAN. No, no...

SUNNY. (*makes up a name*) Betty... Fishkin.

JACOB. She's a very good lawyer.

ALAN. Jacob, I am so sorry.

JACOB. (*Trying to shrug it off*) Ahhh...this is the way things have turned out, what can you do about them. Both of my children... And my wife. Ex-wife...Let's be honest, we were too young when we got married. Like so may others of our day. We lived together for many years; we did share a life together; I raised a family. Two successful children-

STUDENT. (*to another student*) Who apparently won't speak to him...

JACOB. But as I said, I am not an easy person to live with... I guess to have a husband that sleeps soundly is not too much to ask for...

KATE. Are you going to be home at all this weekend? Bill and Stan are coming over. Do you want me to make us dinner?

ALAN. Sure. Jacob is away. So I gave the cast the weekend off.

KATE. So kind of Jacob to go away ...

ALAN. Oh, come on Kate. I told him I'd have more pages ready when he got back. See why do I keep telling him that?

KATE. Don't ask me, Alan. You know what I think.

ALAN. That it's just theater, who cares.

KATE. I'm going to ignore that. Because you're tired...

ALAN. I just asked for a little advice.

KATE. You always ask, or pretend to ask- should I or shouldn't I, and then you do it anyway. Face it, when it comes to theater when was the last time you actually said no? So stop agonizing over it. I will edit the pages. I will correct the commas and the many misspelled words like I always do-

ALAN. But it is still just a play-

KATE. No, Alan, it's life. It's someone's real life this time. So don't ask me to be there...

ALAN. What is wrong with you?

KATE. Don't ask me to be there to watch it.

ALAN. I'm not just writing this for Jacob, I am writing this for you.

KATE. I don't want it. I know exactly how his daughter feels.

ALAN. But it's a gift-

KATE. No it's not. It's not a gift; it is a violation.

JACOB. So I came here to tell you that if you did not want to finish the play that I would be very unhappy, but that I would certainly understand. I ask too much of too many people, and this is something that I have learned...

ALAN. (*Remembering.*) You cannot transcend what you do not acknowledge.



JACOB. I'm sorry?

DEB. (*Alan and her alone*) You cannot transcend what you do not acknowledge.

ALAN. Well, that explains it...

DEB. You say that you don't want to write this story, and yet you argue with your beautiful wife about it. You say you want no part in perpetuating the myth of Judaism, and yet you keep meeting with your students and working on this story- why iz zis? Because it is a part of you, like it or not. And part of moving on as a person, part of healing, part of the evolution of all cultures, of civilization itself, is acknowledging. Paying respect. Understanding from whence we come. And I say to you brother Alan, that you and I will never transcend anything that we cannot acknowledge. Praise the Lord and pass the peanuts!

ALAN. (*Back to Jacob*) Jacob, go away! Go on. Go. Please. I've got a lot of work to do if I have to finish the first act by Friday.

JACOB. Only the first act?

*A loud scream is heard from far away. And then more, and then many more. We are back in the Fishkin home.*

SARAH. What is going on?

MERE-LIEBE and YITZHOK. Mamma, Mamma

SHOSHKA. Hush little ones. Sarah, take your brother and sister.

BOBIE. It is the police. They are taking more of the men. Off to work they say. They leave to work, and they never come back. The other day it was in Koydanov. Hundreds were led away. There are rumors they were all shot.

SARAH. Where is Pappa-

JAKOV. He is still in the forest, at Wojeck's house. I'll go.

*A loud knock is heard. No one moves. Again a knock. Shoshke goes to answer the door.*

POLICEMAN. David Fishkin, please. Where is David Fishkin?

SHOSHKE. He is not here. I'm terribly sorry.

POLICEMAN. Not here? Where is he?

SHOSHKE. I was ill. He went to the next village to get some medicine.

POLICEMAN. No one is to leave. You are under orders.

JAKOV. She was very sick.

SHOSHKE. Jakov! We are sorry.

POLICEMAN. That is his name?

SHOSHKE. Who?

POLICEMAN. The boy.

SHOSHKE. Yes, my son. Jakov.

POLICEMAN. Have him report outside immediately.

SHOSHKE. No!

POLICEMAN. Immediately!

SARAH. He is just a boy.

SHOSHKE. Take me instead. I will go.

POLICEMAN. I suppose you want the Germans to come and burn the whole village to the ground. We are ordered to have one from each house. One man.

SHOSHKE. But sir, please. I can do so much more work.

POLICEMAN. You are sick. The boy will come. I do not wish to do this. But do as I say, or this whole house will perish. Do not make the Germans any angrier. It will be terrible for us all. Now, prepare some warm clothes for the boy and some food. If he is not there when his name is called he will be shot by the Germans. I will wait outside. You have only a few minutes. Otherwise he goes right now, the way he is.

BOBIE. We will do as you say Officer, thank you for your understanding.

*The policeman leaves and we hear names being called out. Name after name. They continue throughout the next few lines. As a name*

*is called someone joins the line. Sarah is buttoning Jakov's coat.*

SARAH. Don't you worry, my little yellow mouse. Nothing will happen to you.

*Chaim Lotus!*

SARAH. This will pass, you will see. The Germans will be destroyed and nothing will happen to you.

*Berl Chavitz!*

SARAH. Your instinct for self preservation will tell you when to run and how to survive.

JAKOV. Instinct. What is instinct? Is it a person? What does he look like?

*Yankef Motes!*

JAKOV. Is he a Partisan? A ghost? The Messiah? How will I know him?

*Laibe Yankels.*

SARAH. You remember how your Betar leader caught a rabbit?

JAKOV. Yes, with a bow and arrow, and we enjoyed eating it.

*Ruve Itzaks.*

SARAH. But the rabbit didn't just sit there and wait to be caught, he ran didn't he?

JAKOV. Yes, very fast.

SARAH. He ran because he sensed danger. That is instinct.

*Mote Tamares! Shoshke and Bobie arrive with a bundle of food and clothes.*

JAKOV. He tried to run in a zig-zag... but he was trapped.

SHOSHKE. Oh my little Yankele, my child, I don't know what to do.

JAKOV. Don't cry, Mamma. I'm going to be all right. I will run faster than any rabbit.

*Boruch Shimons.*

JAKOV. Zig and zag deep into the woods, and I'll find my way back home. I'm a big boy now. They think of me as an adult. That is why I'm here.

*Ruveh Gottels! She is clinging to him sobbing.*

JAKOV. Mamala, let me go. I don't mind leaving. I will make my own decisions from here on out.

*The names have stopped. Jakov joins the end of the line. After a beat of silence, Bobie grabs Jakov out of the line.*

BOBIE. They did not call his name. They did not call it. Go Jakov, hurry. Leave and go back to the house. Hurry!!

*Jakov ducks through the women and hurries off and they stay and pretend to say goodbye to some of the men.*

MAGDA. Jacob Fishkin?

JACOB. Yes. Yes, I am here.

*The lobby of the International Yiddish Archive, where Alan has been waiting for almost a half an hour.*

ALAN. Oh, thank God. You weren't here; I was worried.

JACOB. The trains were all stopped... I was trapped on the subway.

ALAN. *(Whispering)* It's okay. They've kept me waiting for awhile anyway. Did you bring-

JACOB. Of course. *(To the woman who called his name.)* Forgive me.

ALAN. Yes-

MAGDA. Yes, well good afternoon. I am Magda. Magda Vittstein, assistant archivist here at the archive.

ALAN. But our appointment was with the director. Mr. Rheins.

MAGDA. Yes, he was called away. He has asked me to meet with you. *(Haughty)* And you are?

JACOB. This is Alan, Alan-

ALAN. Klutzenburg.

MAGDA. Klutzenburg?

ALAN. I am working with Mr. Fishkin, writing a theatrical version of Sarah's diary.

MAGDA. Oh, like the Diary of Anna Frank.

ALAN. Well, yes, but different.

JACOB. You must see it, Miss Vittstein. This will be a very important play.

MAGDA. I'm sure. But we do not produce plays. We have no budget for such things.

ALAN. No, no. We are working on a play, but that is not why we are here. I thought it was important to find a home for the diary and for Jacob's memoirs.

JACOB. (*We are now a few weeks earlier*) I have done this Alan. I have tried all of the Jewish organizations and archives many times years ago.

ALAN. But I called this International Yiddish archive and they agreed to meet with us.

JACOB. They will not care. You will see-

ALAN. We will make them care. Jacob the diary needs a home. You will not live forever, even if you are doing a very good job of trying. After you, and I, are long gone the diary must be read.

SARAH. What are we going to do with the diary? What will become of it?

*Back in the Fishkin home.*

JAKOV. I will take it with me. When I fight with the Partisans. I will hide it deep in the woods.

DAVID. We could give it to one of the Gentile families. The farmers, they will hide it.

SHOSHKE. Or the good priest at the Church that helped the refugees from Koydanov.

SARAH. It will be lost. I just know it. All my work. Why must this happen to us.

DAVID. Sarah, don't worry....

SARAH. No one will know how we suffered. And lived. How we laughed and cried.

ALAN. Where is it now?

*Back to Alan and Jacob alone.*

JACOB. I keep it in a safe deposit box. I visit it often and sit with it.

ALAN. Who will visit with it after you are gone? It does not belong in a vault. This archive may publish it. In Yiddish- and English. You have had it translated-

JACOB. Yes, hardly anyone could read it.

ALAN. And if it is published thousands, millions can read it. Is this not what Sarah wanted?

JACOB. Of course. This is what God wanted. This is why I survived.

ALAN. Then let's meet with this director. This is the largest Yiddish archive in the world. Scholars come from all over.

MAGDA. (*Back in the Archive*) Of course we have thousands of holocaust materials. Letters, documents, even some diaries. And quite a number of collections of material. A collection is when we have a substantial group of documents from a given city or area or an important donation from one particular donor deemed significant. Here is the first volume of the catalogue of Eastern European mid-twentieth century material. And we can look up under Poland- 1930s, and you will see how much there is here. And these are the shelves where we keep the material. Each collection has its own section and box-

ALAN. Look at it all.

MAGDA Yes. We have a very thorough representation. The Institute is the premier collection of Yiddish documents in the world. Even more than the center in Jerusalem.

ALAN. You should have seen it, Deb. Box after box, shelf after shelf, like a mausoleum of words....It was so cold and ordered; the air was caustic. And she brought us into the reading room, and there were a few old Hassidic men mumbling toward the pages of yellowed manuscripts, and nowhere could you feel the families...

BOBIE. The diary stays with me! You are all scattering with the winds. Fine. Jakov wishes to run off to the wood and become a Partisan. David to the farmers to work and hide. You Shoshke a seamstress for the gentiles. Yentel is already gone.

*Back in the Fishkin house.*

DAVID. That is the plan! If we stay together we will perish. They will come for us soon.

BOBIE. If this is what we must do to survive, fine. But the diary will stay with me. I will protect it with my life. What will they want with an old toothless women? Go, go away if you must, but you will visit your Bobie every Friday, this is the least you can do, no? But the diary will stay with me. At home. It belongs in the home of Gershon!

*Back to the archive.*

ALAN. And then he took it out, Deb, and it was like Raiders of the Lost Ark, I'm telling you. Even if you wanted to, you couldn't help but feel the presence of Yahweh, of something deeply sacred. I couldn't even breathe-

JACOB. Here, please read it.

MAGDA. This is the diary? Thank you. If you will allow me.

ALAN. And she put on these very thick glasses and she began to peruse the pages. Like a jeweler hunting for flaws. And I looked down at them. The pages and the words seemed like cuneiform and were clearly marked by hand, but the hand was so sure and dignified-

MAGDA. She has beautiful penmanship.

JACOB. Yes.

ALAN. And I thought of my early handwriting teachers and how they struggled with me to get a perfect cursive "c" and what a lost art penmanship now is, and how indelicately she seemed to turn the pages, like

reading a paperback novel on the subway. And I realized it was because something Sarah had written had caught her eye. She was not studying it anymore but had become a reader, caught up in the story...

MAGDA. What a beautiful phrase. Her Yiddish is lovely. Very musical. This is obviously a very special document.

ALAN. And then I looked at the cracked, chestnut cover and the binding tearing away, bandages tattered from too much healing, and I noticed how very small it was. Of course it would be small, who would have a large diary? It would not be inviting to carry around a hefty tome. And yet when you think of all that Sarah must have wanted to record, how much was being packed into those eighteen young years. It seemed so slight- like the size of the Mona Lisa after you finally wait in line for hours to see it. A masterpiece in miniature. But then she handed the book back to me instead of Jacob, I have no idea why-

MAGDA. Yes, we would be very honored to have such a document-

ALAN. And I held it for the first time, Sarah's diary, and it was... as if time slipped away. I was sitting in that shtetl with that family about to be torn apart and moments away from destruction. I could see Bobie's toothless grin, and Merrie-Liebbe and Yitzhak, and the book became huge. I could feel the weight of each page, of the ink, of each word, and there were thousands, and all at once it was too much, too heavy to hold. And I dropped it onto the reading desk-

MAGDA. (*Impatiently*) Careful! (*More politely*) Careful there.

ALAN. I'm so sorry.

JACOB. It is all right.

ALAN. And Jacob snatched it up quick as a shortstop as it touched the turf. And I knew then and there he wanted no part of this place.

MAGDA. Perhaps we could include some of your other pieces of writing and name it as a collection after your sister.

JACOB. I appreciate your interest, and I will, of course, think this over.

MAGDA. We understand these are very difficult decisions, but please, be assured we take very good care of our documents. We would microfiche your sister's work, and then it will be protected for up to a hundred years or more. Even when the volume is too fragile to be touched, it can be read on microfiche.



ALAN. Why not scan it and have a digital copy?

MAGDA. Archives do not believe in digital because the software will most assuredly become out of date. The program you are writing your little play on in five years will be obsolete.

ALAN. I see. Well, don't tell Microsoft that.

MAGDA. We archivists preserve; that is our business. Our battle is with time. Each year counts. So the difference between five or ten and a hundred, well, that is quite a victory is it not?

DOCTOR. (*Who appears in a spot of light*) She has lung cancer. Non-small cell carcinoma. There is very little doubt about that. The most important thing is to make sure of the stage. We measure these things in stages and each stage is very significant. It could add years onto the survival rate.

ALAN. I left the Archive and said goodbye to Jacob to get back to work and missed the doctor's phone call by five minutes. One of those "Oh my God, this is just like in the movies" phone calls where he said he thought it would be prudent to come down to his office. He had something he wanted to discuss with Kate and me. I mean of course it was cancer.

DEB. I know all about it. You get a call like that and all of a sudden getting to the doctors, getting across town, is more difficult than a refugee crossing the border.

ALAN. I mean what's up with that? Here I am holding this sacred work. This biblical Old Testament-like book and the very next moment my wife is struck with this life or death sentence. I couldn't help but laugh and then cry at the coincidence. Okay, so maybe there is a God. And Jesus, is He ever vengeful!

*Loud knocking from all sides of the theater and German being yelled. In German we hear: "Raus, mach schnell, raus, farfluchte Juden." "Out, make it fast, out you damn Jews." "Everyone out, out into the streets immediately." We are transporting you to a work camp. This yelling continues over and over, and a sad old man enters the Fishkin home.*

DAVID. Mr. Eisenbaud? Mr. Eisenbaud. How good to see you.

MR. EISENBAUD. No, please. Do as they say. Prepare yourself to leave. And I have been ordered to take all of the gold that you have in your possession. Please give me all of your gold.

JACOB. They were taking everything. Wedding bands, bracelets, gold watches, necklaces- any and every piece of gold jewelry. Now I knew this man, this Mr. Eisenbaud- he was the head of the Judenrat- the Jewish Council, the go-betweens between the Jews and the Germans. He was an important man. I had ridden on his shoulders. I'd gotten pickled herring and a drop of schnapps from him at parties. And now he was pale and he'd been beaten.

MR. EISENBAUD. We must do this. If we don't they will shoot us for not cooperating.

JACOB. And my father took off his wedding band-

DAVID. Twenty years ago I was the happiest man on earth because you put this ring on my finger; now twenty years later my love for you is just as strong.

JACOB. And gave it to him, and my mother took off her wedding band and gave it to him. Then she tried to remove her earrings and couldn't.

MR. EISENBAUD. Here, let me help you.

JACOB. And he helped her take off her earrings like a lover might. And my mother and father, they embraced Mr. Eisenbaud, the father of our shtetl. And my younger sister and brother ran over to him and kicked him and bit him.

MERRE-LIEBE. Don't you take my mother away!

YITZKHOK. Don't you take my father!

JACOB. And then he turned to Bobie. Now Bobie had so little in the world. Not even teeth. But she did have a gold watch on a gold chain, and even though it no longer worked, she cherished it like it was made of diamonds. She'd let me polish it once a year, and each time she'd warn me not to break the delicate chain. She'd wear it every Shabbes to shul, and inside it had a picture of her husband, my Zeyde, and her when they were young and in that picture was the same gold watch on a chain. And now, this Mr. Eisenbaud was trying to take it from her.

BOBIE. No! No! It's all I have. It's all I own.

MR. EISENBAUD. I give you my solemn word, if I am able, I will personally return this watch to you. I will tell them it does not even work—you will have no need for this.

JACOB. And my father took the watch and gave it to Mr. Eisenbaud.

MR. EISENBAUD. God be with us all.

JACOB. And he was gone. And then my father gave her the picture from inside. He had at least saved that.

DAVID. Here, Bobie, put this in Sarah's diary. And now we, too, must go. It is time.

*The shouting grows louder now and a music is heard between the shouts. The family gathers together and walks into a long line of people.*

ALAN. And as I was sitting in another waiting room for the second of the second opinions about my wife, it suddenly became so very clear to me. You see, I was reading Jacob's memoirs and at this moment he suddenly switched. He was no longer writing in prose. And I understood why. He had switched to verse, for in times like this, prose could not hold the events. They would break free of prose, for these emotions only poetry could possibly do...

*The music comes to the foreground now and the shouts recede and the movement of the actors becomes very symbolic. Whatever is recited by Jacob is seen onstage, the action is, from here until the end of the act, a dance or movement piece, perhaps sung.*

JACOB.  
The air is close  
The noise is loud,  
The Germans use their guns  
To keep everyone from leaving

Mother and father come running to us,  
Reassuring us many times.

DAVID, SHOSHKE, and JACOB.  
You needn't be afraid little ones.  
Nothing bad will happen to you—  
Not that you have done anything evil;

Everyone knows that,  
Soon we shall leave this place  
And go home together.

JACOB.

My youngest brother  
Handsome and bright,  
With your eyes of blue  
And your beautiful blond locks.  
Your trousers patched,  
Your tiny shoes shabby  
With their laces knotted.

I hold your delicate little hand,  
Your words are indistinct and half spoken,  
Your baby voice sounds frightened  
And choked with tears.

I lift you up in my outstretched arms,  
And feel your little heart  
Beating ever so loudly.  
I press you to my heart,  
Kiss you, and caress you, and I smile.  
Fear not, my little brother,  
I'll carry you in my arms  
And I'll not abandon you.

A sweet smile covers his face  
But soon his worn tears repose on my  
Cheek,  
His trembling little arms are tight around  
My throat.  
His sharp baby teeth  
Bite into my flesh and blood begins  
To flow;  
His little feet kick  
As the Germans tear him from my arms

My young sister, Merre-Liebe—  
A nine year old with black eyes  
Like cherries  
With long unruly curly hair  
Which falls across her fine-featured face.  
Called the prettiest in her class  
And excelling in every subject—  
Even now I see you clearly,

Running to Father and Mother  
And shouting out to me:

MERRE LIEBE.  
“I will not stay here  
With all these children!  
Take me with you brother!”

JACOB.  
Then running back to Mother,  
Then to Father, and from SARAH. to me.  
I fell to my knees and clasped you tight:

JAKOV  
“Do not weep, pretty little sister.  
We’ll hide you among us.

JACOB.  
And the first German did not notice her.  
But the sadistic second one  
Whipped us with his stick,  
Tearing our chain apart.

My poor sister, you fell at our feet.  
The German dragged you by your lovely curls,  
Pushed and slammed you  
In among the other children.  
I loved you more than myself,  
And oh, how I miss you!  
Even now I see you slipping,  
From Father to Mother, from SARAH. to me.  
Seven hundred- 700 young children  
Pudgy and thin, dark hared and blond  
With pretty little faces  
Clasped each other, hand in little hand.  
Tiny infants, unable to walk, or even stand,  
Smiling and laughing with so much charm,  
Each little one’s tongue  
Seeking mother’s warm breast—  
Dotted the cold ground.

You searched for us with your big eyes,  
Black, blue and tearful.  
You turned your heads to the right and to the  
Left:

Where is my brother, the strong one?  
My sister, the pretty one?  
Where are Mother and Father, Grandma and Grandpa?"

I see you even now—  
Seven hundred children pure of heart—  
From Nalibakh, Derowna, from Slobodka and Valma,  
From Rubzewitz, Iveniets, from Khatova and Grani.

Father then spied his two young ones  
And tried to run toward them.  
The German blocked his way.  
And aimed a gun a him.

Go back, or I'll shoot,

GERMAN GUARD. "Du Jude verfluchte!"

JACOB.  
You damned Jew, he shouted.

Sarah my sister, pulled Father back  
While I seized Mother's arm.  
We looked around, her eyes searching,  
For she could not grasp what had just happened.

Torn, dispirited, separated and strewn.  
With no packs, no sacks, no will to live,  
We once again were driven out onto the teeming  
Road.

*The lights fade on the Fishkins huddled together, Sarah and David supporting Shoshke who has collapsed, Jakov trying to help. They are moving slowly forward.*

**End of Act One**

## ACT TWO

*The Fishkin family is seen moving slowly in the same line as before. David and Sarah holding up Shoshke, and Jakov nearby. Jacob in a separate light speaks still using verse, still with a musical underscore:*

JACOB.

Father on one side, Sarah on the other,  
Led her  
Through the wood and field, city and village,  
Despite storms and frigid snow

DAVID.

We'll bring our little ones back home.  
Dear heart be strong!  
You are the very beat in my breast,  
The air in my lungs  
The sun that shines  
And warms my soul.

SOLDIER. Macht schnell, macht schnell, ihr verfluchten  
Juden!

JACOB.

Hurry up, hurry up you damned Jews!  
Came the Germans' strident command once more.  
The dust rose again and obscured the sun.

RABBI.

God in Heaven, You give us much sand!  
But where is even a bit of rain to settle the dust  
And quench our thirst?

JACOB.

So pleaded our neighbor, eyes raised toward the  
Sky.

SARAH. Where are you from, Sir?

RABBI. I am a rabbi in the town of Derewna  
Neighbor to your shtetl Rubzewitz  
And this is my wife, saintly woman.

Permit me, Reb Dovid, to help you  
While you rest your weary body.

JACOB.

Lovingly they each took Mother by an arm  
And led her, like a bride at a wedding.  
With brave words, pious and heartfelt  
They strove to imbue her with hope.

She responded with tears and smiles  
And thanked them effusively.  
Although it hardly seemed possible, they succeeded  
In regenerating her soul.

Sarah reached into her rucksack,  
For food  
And turned to the two caring people

SARAH.

We'll share whatever we have with you.

JACOB.

The Rabbi's wife spoke:

RABBI'S WIFE.

We cannot accept your food  
You have so little for yourselves.  
We still have something in our pockets that we can  
Eat.

JACOB.

Sarah said:

SARAH.

We have so little, and you have nothing.  
We therefore have much more than you do.  
To give when one has is indeed a very great mitvah.  
But to give when one has nothing—  
What is the dimension of such a sacrifice?

RABBI.

What you have given us is much more than food:  
Life and courage are your gifts.  
And when courage is gone, all is lost.  
Does anyone know what will become of us now?

SOLDIER.

Aufstehen! Aufstehen! Schmutzigen Juden!



Get up, get up, you dirty Jews!

JACOB.

Their bark resembled those of wild dogs.  
But our way was blocked:  
A herd of deer, small and large,  
Brown in color, antler spread.  
Jammed the winding road.  
The Germans, reluctant to chase them,  
Uncertain what to do  
Began to watch the deer  
And forgot about us for a moment  
Confused the deer stood still.

Help from God in the guise of deer!  
People around us were saying  
But their hope was short lived  
For the Germans began shooting at the animals.  
Swift and graceful, the deer began  
To run from us in fear.

RABBI

My dear people: Two Thousand years ago  
The Amalekites set out to destroy our ancestors  
They ravaged and devastated our land,  
Set fire to the Holy Temple  
And dispersed our people.

For two thousand years we have been wandering  
Over all lands  
We have survived pogroms, inquisitions.  
We fled  
Overseas and over continents,  
Seeking a haven and respite

But, dear people, it was all to no avail:  
Our reward was anti-Semitism.  
Yet the sparks of our Jewish faith remained in our  
Hearts.  
Remember—never forget—  
Who we are,  
We are Jews forever.

In our Holy Torah it is written:  
Remember Amalek! Never forget!  
Multitudes of Amalekites

Disappeared from the earth;  
No trace of them remains.  
Dear friends, what is the lesson  
Of “Remember Amalek”?  
It is that our people  
Are eternal, a beacon to other nations.  
Yes, our Heavenly Father may punish His people  
But He will never forsake them.

We must maintain our faith in God.  
You shall see: This is but a test.  
Recall the story of sacrifice of Isaac.  
You shall see: The Lord will protect us.  
He will send angels  
To crush our foes.

Their names will be erased  
From the memory of the world  
And we Jews, God’s children,  
Shall settle in our homeland.  
We will build it –plant new trees  
Cleanse the Holy Land of ugliness  
And bring back milk and honey.  
Rise from the ground,  
My dear friends,  
Hold yourselves erect,  
Lift high your heads,

And let us together sing,  
Sing our anthem in a unified voice.

*The Rabbi and Sarah begin to sing the Hatikva and one by one the others join. After one verse, a German fires a gun into the air and everyone stops singing.*

JACOB.  
The fat pasty-faced German,  
Strode up to the Rabbi of Derewna.

SOLDIER.  
Sag deinen Juden dass wir marchieren müssen.

JACOB.  
Tell your Jews we must march!  
He commanded.

The Rabbi of Derewna, his voice proud  
Responded to the pale faced one:

RABBI

Ich habe meinen Juden gesagt was ich schon sagen müsste.

JACOB.

I have already told my Jews what I needed to tell them.

DEB. Where are we going?

*A traffic median on the Upper West Side.*

ALAN. Kate is meeting us. She wants us to be there.

DEB. Meet us where? How is she doing?

ALAN. Fine. She had three treatments, and she's lost a lot of hair, but she's a fighter.

DEB. She sure is. After three chemos, I was like tapioca pudding.

ALAN. At seven o'clock all over town people are just getting together to pay their respects.

DEB. I heard about this. We used to do that in the sixties, but everyone ended up in bed together so-

*They have reached a small group of neighbors- the same actors that have played all the other groups of people and everyone has a different kind of candle. Some are giving out candles to others. Someone gives Deb a candle.*

DEB. Thanks. You should see me at dinner parties, I always forget wine.

ALAN. Hey, Sweetheart. How do you feel?

KATE. Fine. A little sore. I'm fine.

DEB. She's a super hero, your wife is.

*They realize no one else is talking and everyone is just standing quietly. Some are hugging and holding each other. Then some*

*people begin to sing softly. More and more people join in and the group becomes quite large and very peaceful.*

ENSEMBLE. Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1942 The Second Day of Passover

SARAH. What does any word signify in our evil time? A word is exactly like a fruit. One must be able to eat it to know the taste of it. "By the individual, the collective will be judged." The collective is alive, the entire large entity is alive, but we do not see it, for we are but the merest thread in the large fabric and are so submerged in the emptiness and the loneliness, in the minutiae and the pettiness of our own selves that we cannot feel the great life of the community. It is as though we were tiny worms that have bored very deeply into the dark chambers and corridors of our own singleness and have no time to break out into the bright world and see the great sun and lovely light.

ALAN. Jacob, there were whites and Latinos and African Americans, and Jews and probably a Hari-Krishna or two, who knows. Why does it take devastation on such a monumental scale for us to get to a place of simple decency?

JACOB. Be happy for it. I remember walking through the rubble after we were liberated, and I was by the side of the road on my way to see Rokhol, our neighbor who had survived. And who knew how to find her- or how to reach her. All I knew was she was in Germany and that she had Sarah's diary, but this is another story. So there I was on a road in the middle of God knows where, and there were Poles and Russians and French and Americans, and everyone was trying to help each other. The Americans, my God, we were so happy to see them. I used to sell a great deal to the Americans. I was trading on the black market to survive- again, another story. And up walks to me this American, Abraham Goldrich, a private first class, and he knew I was a Jew, and he talked with me. He promised to send word to Brooklyn, he was from Flatbush, to my Aunt Hannah the only relative I had alive, and this is how I came to this country. Because Abraham Goldrich, this stranger, this brother, thousands of miles from his home, enlisted himself to track down my Aunt. This world has so many wonderful things and so many terrible... Where was I? Sometimes I forget...

ALAN. Do you ever wonder why we met?

JACOB. Who, you and I?

ALAN. Yes. I mean I could have easily said go away. Or you could have searched for a writer at Columbia or some other school. You have a hair here on the side of your nose. *(He gently removes the hair.)* There. Hell, you probably had gone to every other school. But these events, these momentary

chance events, that can transform a life- being on the 99<sup>th</sup> floor of the Trade Center instead of the 98<sup>th</sup>-

JACOB. The man in front of me in line once. They shot him. Because he was taller then I, I suppose. Easier to reach. And I was on a train platform sick with fever and Benyamin, my friend from the shtetl tapped me on the shoulder. “Jakov, “ he says “Jakov Fishkin. You survived! I know about your family. God rest their souls. But the diary. I know who has Sarah’s diary. Now, what if I hadn’t been on that platform?

ALAN. How do you make sense of that? The randomness...

KATE I think this has happened to me for a reason. My cancer. Wow, that is the first time that I said that. My cancer. Like- my purse. My shoes...My cancer. I never thought in a million years that I’d be saying that...I have cancer. Anyway it’s not like I ever had to fight any real battles. I’ve always been so lucky. My family always had enough money. I went to good schools. I had all the Beatles albums... So I can’t help but believe I am being tested here, and I have to make the most of it.

ALAN. Only you could make cancer sound so positive-

DEB. She’s a God, I’m telling you.

KATE Deb, don’t you feel that way? When you got sick didn’t you feel-

DEB. I was furious. Fucking furious. How dare they say I am going to die. I am nowhere near through living!

KATE. I feel blessed, honestly, I do. It all makes this weird kind of sense to me...

JAKOV. I like you much better when we are out of the ghetto. You are so different there.

*Jakov is sitting in some hay with Sarah. He is holding a jug.*

JAKOV. You laugh outside and walk as though you are about to run. There your face is always stern, and you stoop as though you are carrying too much flour.

JACOB. We had gone to find father again because there were stories that more Germans were hunting down Jews. But this time we had gotten very lost, and we were hiding in a barn and had stopped where the pigs were eating and drinking. I had found an old jug and because I was thirsty had

been drinking. Sarah was sleeping, and she woke up and had caught me staring at her.

JAKOV. Do you remember the fire in the ghetto? As terrible as it was, I remember your face reflected in the flames. You looked so beautiful.

SARAH. Jakov, what is in that jug that you found?

JAKOV. Nothing. Just water.

JACOB. But I was not telling the truth. Some wine or liquor was left in it, and it was so sweet to taste.

JAKOV. Look, come here and look in the pig's water. See. Your eyes are as blue as Khane's, deep blue. And your hair is blonde like hers. Even Fanya is jealous of you. She wishes she was a scholar like you. This is why I enjoy your company. I feel safe and proud with you, my sister. I will cross bridges and travel through villages with you and never feel worried.

JACOB. She was resting her head on my shoulder. I will never forget.

SARAH. We may be forced to separate, dear brother. We must be prepared for that.

JAKOV. But how? *(They are looking in the water still and see the reflection of a very old woman.)* Do you see what I see? *(Sarah nods, and they turn around abruptly.)*

AN OLD WOMAN. Please do not be afraid. I'll not harm you. *(She has come up on them from behind.)* But I can tell you where you can find your father.

SARAH. Who are you?

AN OLD WOMAN. I am just an old farm woman, who feels for your people.

SARAH. Are you an angel?

JAKOV. Sent by God to help us find our father?

AN OLD WOMAN. *(Crossing herself)* I am no angel, dear Lord, no. I am older than any angel. But I have seen what is happening to your people. And I try to help. Whenever I can. I know your father and how good a man he is. You wait here, and I will tell him that you are on my farm. It is better that you stay here, I am not sure how close the police are.

JACOB. And she left, and Sarah and I both got nervous, so we hid in the hay in case she was lying.

SARAH. (*From in the hay, neither of them can be seen, only voices.*) Listen carefully. We must pray to God and believe in him. Never lose hope. When you despair, remember. Remember Fanya's beautiful face, and your so serious sister, and how we laughed and fought. Your little brother and sister, how much they adore you. Your mother and father and their love and devotion for you. Bobie when she smiles, and her wrinkles. The Germans they have deprived us of so much, but they will never be able to take away our memories. (*A beat, the pile of hay is quiet.*) Remember that always, alright?

JAKOV. (*From in the hay*) I will never forget.

JACOB. And when she came back, the old woman walked right up and began to talk to us as we hid. Knowing exactly where we were hiding and why, but never mentioning it.

AN OLD WOMAN. Your father is all right. I assured him that you were here and safe. He will wait until it gets dark and come for you. I will bring you food.

SARAH. (*Coming out from the hay*) You are so very kind. I think Jakov is asleep. He must be very tired.

*The old woman finds the jug and smells it.*

SARAH. Thank you for helping us.

KATE. Doctor, thank you so much for seeing us so soon.

*An examination room, Alan is with Kate and a doctor.*

DOCTOR. No need to thank me. We have all the test results, and there are many ways to treat this, but first if I may, please allow me to touch your chest.

KATE. Certainly.

JACOB. And as we waited, Sarah and the woman became good friends. And she took Sarah by the hand.

AN OLD WOMAN

*(Holding Sarah's hand.)* No need to thank me. But my dear child, I feel your worry through your veins, the roar of your blood rushing through you. In the pounding of your pulse I hear your screaming. I hear hell.

DOCTOR. You are very angry, aren't you? You carry a great deal of anger right here over your heart.

AN OLD WOMAN. I also feel heaven. How is that possible? Heaven and hell, at the same time? You called me an angel, but my child, it is you who are the angel. There is something you did not tell me, isn't there? Please, tell me.

DOCTOR. What are you angry about, do you know? Was there something that you might not even be aware that is upsetting you?

SARAH. I'm writing a diary. I enter everything I see and feel, and when I do that, I feel I am speaking to the future. And to God. I tell him how much I admire His creation. I also argue with him. Ask questions and demand answers, and when I do this, I feel so near to Him. I feel that I'm in Heaven. At times I fall asleep with my pen in hand, and then when I awake, I see Hell again.

KATE. I can never clean mirrors or windows to this day. I make someone else do it, ask Alan... My mother- she died just three weeks after I came to this country. She had a heart attack. And was gone before my father even came home. And I was here, thousands of miles from home... See, my family didn't want me to come here, to go to college, but I assured them it was just to go to school but that was a lie. I secretly knew I wanted to live here. It was my dream ever since I was five and bought my first box of Rice Krispies to come to America. And I remember how hard my mother cried at the airport- "you could still not go- there is work here, you could just not go." And it was so sad, but I remember feeling this is just why I have to go, so that I can do what I want to do and not what they will make me do. And the family was waving goodbye and the kids were jumping up and down, but she was still knocking on the plate of glass as I walked down the gate. She was sobbing and shaking her head no, no- and three weeks later I was back in that same airport for her funeral. She had been cooking dinner for the family, and they found her in the kitchen. No one said it was my fault- this was her second heart attack- but even the nieces and nephews were quiet as I walked back down from the gate to meet them. And I looked over at the plate of glass, and I could swear there were still handprints from where she had been banging...

AN OLD WOMAN. I would very much like to read this diary.



SARAH. I'd like you to, but you can't. It is in Yiddish.

AN OLD WOMAN. Then I can feel it. Touch it. I could rest my head upon it. I could bring it to my church and place it on the altar. Could tell my priest and my congregation.

SARAH. Do you think you could care for it? Keep it safe and then give it back to me when I came for it?

AN OLD WOMAN. Of course, my dear. I would be honored.

DOCTOR. You have some important work to do with this loss, Kate.

KATE. But I thought I had. I thought I had, you know, come to terms with it. It was years ago.

DOCTOR. She is holding onto you or you to her. I can feel that very clearly.

SARAH. Is it possible that I have found a home for my beloved diary? I must be dreaming.

AN OLD WOMAN. No, my child, you are definitely not dreaming. God, the Almighty, the compassionate, the merciful, heard your prayers and directed you to this barn. As he led Mother Mary to another barn to give birth to the Lord Jesus.

DOCTOR. It is no accident this is in your lung. Right over your heart. You must let go.

JACOB. I woke up and the old lady was laughing and caressing my hands.

AN OLD WOMAN. Come here, my little drunken friend.

JAKOV. What are you doing?

SARAH. She can tell us things, Jakov. About your future. She sees.

JACOB. Before I could say, "Sarah, you are crazy," the woman had grabbed my hand, and at first closed her eyes, but then she looked hard into mine.

AN OLD WOMAN. Young man, there are a lot difficult times ahead for you. You'll be very lonely and make a long and distant journey in search of happiness. I'm not sure what you will find. You will also suffer sickness and other disappointments, but you'll survive them. In the end, you'll emerge with some scars, but they too will heal.

DOCTOR. You have a great deal of work to do, but you will be fine. You'll be just fine. Do you believe me?

KATE. Yes.

JACOB. And just then my father arrived, and I jumped up and hugged him.

JAKOV. Taté, Taté! She said you would be all right!

DAVID. Dear woman, I do not know how to thank you.

DANTCHIKA. My name is Dantchika. You do not recognize me? I know I have aged.

JAKOV. She can tell the future, Father. Sarah, did she tell you yours?

JACOB. But Sarah said nothing.

DANTCHIKA. Remember my promise to you, Sarah. Bring me your diary, and I will watch over it.

DAVID. We need to get home now. Come on. While it is dark. There is a rumor the ghetto will be liquidated.

KATE. (*Putting on her clothes in the examining room*) What do you think?

ALAN. I want to believe him. I mean he spent a great deal of time with you and was very kind. Much more human than any of the other doctors. And Lord knows I'd like to believe in spiritual things and the power to heal. But I couldn't help but think-

KATE. He was telling me what I need to hear?

ALAN. Yes. And that was making him very powerful. Kind of hard not to pick him for a physician.

KATE. But he is still going to use chemo. He doesn't disregard the Western while he incorporates the Eastern. Look, if my choice is the compassionate possibly loopy physician or Dr. Chemo-by-the numbers, who shuffles papers while we discuss my dwindling life expectancy, I'll take the doctor who at least looks me in the eye.

SARAH. I liked her, Father.

JAKOV. She was very old. She may even be older than Bobie.

SARAH. How did she know you, Father?

DAVID. Dantshicka was a good friend of Bobie's. She even taught Bobie how to apply healing cups and which leaves are good for which ailments. But I never believed in these myths. She would look at your hand and predict your future, but she stopped doing that a long, long time ago.

SARAH. Why?

DAVID. She said that one had to accept the good and the bad in life, and everyone wanted to hear only the good. We youngsters used to call her "the witch." She left the shtetl when our Ghetto was set up. The Gentiles had to leave, so they were given other homes. But why are you bothering me with all this? We have more serious things to worry about than an old lady.

SARAH. Dantshika read my hand-

JAKOV. And mine too, Taté!

SARAH. I had such a strange feeling, Father. I started to tremble.

JAKOV. I didn't tremble. I didn't feel anything at all, just her wrinkly, dry, old hand.

SARAH. But so warm... It is bitter cold out, but her hands were warm as fire...

JACOB. Do you know I used to escape and come back?

ALAN. What?

**ENSEMBLE. Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1942 Today Finished Reading the Book "Crime and Punishment" Dostoyevsky.**

SARAH. The sun shines in on us in our prison. It penetrates our iron gratings and beams down as if to say, "Rejoice in the light I bring you. See: I do not avoid stealing in here in my effort to quiet your exasperated, aching hearts! Delight in my splendor and brilliance! Hope that these, my rays, thrown from afar, will bring you true joy!"

JACOB. I used to escape from the labor camp. Sarah would help me. I used to duck under the wire- there are some benefits to being this small, and I would go out into the fields. I even made a friend there. Yurek. He was my age, a shepherd boy. I told him my name was Yanek. I was with Gentiles. You see, among the Gentiles, one used their Polish name, but this –

ALAN and JACOB. Is another story.

JACOB. Yes. And I taught him many things: how to make a bow and arrow, to carve a whistle for his sheep and cows. He brought me to his father.

*The verse form is used again, to honor the original text used*

YUREK

This is my friend Yanek.  
He helps gather the sheep  
And the cows.  
He can even speak to them.

YUREK'S FATHER

*(After a long stare)* Come, let's eat now.

YUREK

May I introduce my new friend to my other ones?

YUREK'S FATHER

Today Yanek must go home  
He doesn't live far. He'll ask his parents  
Whether you may take him home with you.  
In the meantime, don't tell your friends about  
Him.  
They don't need to know what you have in mind.

YUREK

I won't tell anyone.  
But may he come again tomorrow?

YUREK'S FATHER

Yes, he may meet you

Out in the field at any time,  
And you may do anything  
Both of you would like to do.

JACOB. And that kind man, I will never forget him; he gave me food to take back, and I smuggled it in. This helped my family to remain alive, this food.

ALAN. This is amazing. You were actually free?

JACOB. I suppose so, but at the time, I was just going to meet Yanek. It was a lovely hillside, not even a kilometer from our camp. I taught him many things, and he showed me how to milk a cow. You have never tasted milk such as this... My God, to think of it. Even now I can taste it... Anyway I used to come back crawling with the food tied to my legs but so happy to have been in the fields. And Sarah would meet me at the wire. Until one day she wasn't there, she was late.

SARAH.  
Yankele, dear little brother, forgive me  
I was talking with people. People who knew our shtetl.

JAKOV.  
Let's go back to Rubzewitz.  
We'll get the little ones out  
Of Ivenietz and all of us—  
Father, Mother, you, I, and Grandmother  
Will go to the good Gentiles  
And find a place among them.

SARAH.  
I must tell you a secret, but you must promise  
Not to tell Mother and Father.  
The seven hundred young children  
Were taken out of the ghetto  
And murdered in a horrible way.  
Our Itshele and Mirele were among them.  
And that is not the entire tragedy.  
The elderly who remained in Rubzewitz  
Were driven out to pits and murdered.  
Only with the Gentiles's help could the German's perpetrated this  
Slaughter.

Dear little brother, there is no reason  
To go back to Rubzewitz.  
The Gentiles will not accept us  
And we won't have refuge among them.

Do you hear what I'm saying?  
Do you understand my words?

JACOB. But all I could say was:

JAKOV.  
Do you know what you are saying?  
How can you invent such stories?  
Have you gone mad?

JACOB. My viciousness sent her off in tears, but how could I accept it?  
How does one accept such things. I remember lying awake at night seeing  
my Bobie falling into that pit over and over. Trying to scream but we could  
not hear... She had lost her mind, my sister. I would find a way to escape  
from that place, or I too would go mad...

ALAN. But you did escape. Every day.

JACOB. But there was always the food.

ALAN. You never thought just once, "Here I am in the fields, free, let me  
just run away."

JACOB. And leave them with no food? My family needed the food. No, this  
was unthinkable... And then soon after Sarah came with an announcement  
that the Germans needed men to mend boots and sew gloves. They would  
send tradesmen to Smolensk to work in factories. This could possibly save  
some of our lives. She said that the elders thought Father should go.

SARAH. You'll take care of Father and  
I'll do the same here for Mother.

JACOB. Mother had only gotten worse since we left our shtetl. She often sat  
for hours, so still, weak with fever.

*Shoshke is seen in another light sitting very still*

JAKOV.  
How can you say you'll separate from Father  
And I from Mother? And how will she  
Survive without her children?  
And without her beloved husband?

*Shoshke slowly begins to recite (or sing, this can be sung to music) and as she does she stands.*

SHOSHKE

Oh, take not from me my silvery dream,  
But let me drown in its gleam.  
I've tasted no joy in reality—  
In dreams let forgetfulness come to me.

*David joins her, and he and Shoshke begin to dance together very closely as she continues speaking softly and passionately:*

SHOSHKE

Oh, let me spin out my fancies of silver!  
In dreams let my spirit run free.  
With no space in my life for my desire—

*Shoshke and David are about to kiss and Sarah speaks the last line with Shoshke:*

SARAH and SHOSHSKE

At least let me dream and, dreaming, expire.

DAVID. *(Stops and turns sharply to Sarah.)* How do you know that poem?

*He and Sarah and Jakov are back in the woods, years earlier, coming home from rescuing Sarah.*

DAVID. Where did you hear it? Did you read it?

SARAH. Why?

DAVID. That is the poem your mother used to recite-

SARAH. Really? Tell me about her, Father. Tell me about Shoshke.

JAKOV. There you go again. Pappa, I worry about her. *(To Sarah.)* She is your mother. And mine. And she cries a lot, and gives all our food to the people of Koydanov.

DAVID. That isn't all, Yankele. Your mother was- is- someone indescribably special.

JACOB. I had never heard my father talk of my mother. You see, in those days mother was mother and father was father, and if they gave each other a kiss, this was on a holiday. Nowadays? My God, the carrying on-

ALAN. But that is another story.

JACOB. It is a good story, too, believe me... Anyway, we stopped and sat down, and Taté talked of traveling to Minsk with our Zeyde. Now, Minsk, this was the big city, and soon he was introduced to a group of young people, part of a group called Bundistn. See, everyone in these days was political- this was the time of great ideas and great struggles. Do you know of this Bund? No, why do I even ask... This is a very powerful Jewish organization to this day, but back then, the Bundistn believed a new socialist order was the answer. You see, you had the Zionists who wished for a Jewish state in Palestine- my Taté, was one of these- and you had the Bund.

DAVID. There were hundreds of people. And I pushed to get a view of what was going on. Then a man got up and introduced:

SPEAKER. From Kharkov, a long way from Minsk, a seamstress. The leader of the Bund movement from the Kharkov region: Sonia Galperin!

*Shoshke is bathed in light now about to recite a poem.*

DAVID. And I have never seen such hair, such rich chestnut hair, and eyes like the ocean, and cheekbones that seemed to rest atop her sweet smile. And I have never heard such applause. And then her smile faded, and she began:

SHOSHKE (*This time as though about all peoples*)

Oh, take not from me my silvery dream.

But let me drown my sorrows in its gleam.

DAVID. Now I have heard my share of speakers since, but your mother...

SHOSHKE

I've tasted no joy in reality—

In dreams, then let forgetfulness come to me.

JAKOV. Mother, what?

DAVID. There is a story about a well-known entertainer and a rabbi. Now the chairman introduces this great entertainer who steps forward and recites:



Chapter ten verse five. The Shepherd... And when he finishes there is much applause and bravos. And then the Rebbe is introduced, modestly attired, shabby beard, and says, "Ladies and gentleman, if I may recite Chapter ten, verse five, The Shepherd"... And at the end of his delivery, there was no thundering applause, no standing ovation. Instead, all present were speechless and crying. The chairman approaches the entertainer, "Tell me please," he says, "both of you used the same text. Why was there such a marked difference in the reaction of the audience?" "It's easy," replied the entertainer, "I know the verse well, but he, he knows the shepherd."

SHOSHKE

Oh, let me spin out my fancies of silver!  
In dreams let my spirit run free.  
With no space in my life for desire—  
At least let me dream and dreaming, expire!

*Back in the labor camp.*

SARAH.

You must understand:  
It is our situation that forces us to participate  
In these activities. Perhaps this is the only way that  
At least one of us will remain alive.  
If we stay together, we'll perish together.  
We can't go home and there is nowhere to hide.

JACOB. And this made her cry again. But this time I knew she was right.

JAKOV. Ssh! Ssh! Don't cry. I'll go to Smolensk with Father.

JACOB. But there was no guarantee we would be allowed to go. The news about Smolensk spread like wildfire about the camp and all that were able hoped to be asked. To be somewhere other than where we were... And mother neither cried nor asked questions. She just kept shaking her head.

SARAH. Do you hear what I am saying, Mother?

SHOSHKE. I hear what you are saying, Child.

SARAH.

If you don't want them to  
They won't go to Smolensk  
The Germans aren't forcing us to do it.  
Novick, the president of all the Jews here,  
Has important connections.

He puts great trust in me and advised me  
That this is the only way to remain alive.

SHOSHKE.

What can my life be like  
When my soul is taken from me?

JACOB. And she clutched my Father and me and held us tight.

SARAH.

In our Torah it is written  
That God will curse His people  
He will punish us for our sins  
And we shall suffer hail and brimstone.

It is written that one from each city  
And two from each family will survive.  
Our wise men taught  
That we are not to question God's ways,  
But we shall all ask that he keep His word  
And that, if not two, than at least one  
From our family will survive.

JACOB.

And then slowly... Mother let go of us.  
Trucks were ready to transport us.  
My father's name was called. (*A guard does this: "Da-vid Fishkin".*)  
And immediately after, mine. (*Again the guard, "JAKOV. Fishkin".*)  
Sarah wiped the tears from her face.  
Mother stood motionless.  
Father and I boarded a truck  
and we took our last look at Sarah and Mother.

*Jacob takes a long deep breath and swallows some water.*

## **End of Act Two**

### ACT THREE

*Jacob is talking, and as he does, Sarah and Shoshke are seen from far away and they seem to disappear.*

JACOB. They drove us for days, herding us overnight into ruined synagogues. Then back into the trucks again. And then trains... My whole life has been one long journey, a constant traveling, always away, further and further away from that point, that one moment in time. They get smaller and smaller, my mother... and Sarah.

ENSEMBLE. **Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1942. It Snowed This Afternoon.**

SARAH. Every blade of grass has a mother, every leaf is cradled in the airy arms of the wind, but no grass and no leaf is ever cuddled as long against warm mother's breast as is the deep shadow-filled green of the woods in that Eastern land, our land, where the hot sunbeams shine down. There people live free and, perhaps, happily even now. There the wide salt seas penetrate the fertile black fields, there the budding fruit glistens before one's eye, there the lovely, golden sheaves change color as one looks at them and bring joy and happiness and nourishment and fill one with such pride of life. It begins to snow, and it seems that before long there will be white everywhere and winter will return with its cold and dampness. However, the snow soon stops and the remaining patches of white melt. The warmth returns and the sky is cleared of clouds. Melancholy evening comes, bringing with it quiet and loneliness. There is nothing to do, so one goes to bed.

*Alan and his wife are in their bathroom. He begins to shave her head.*

KATE. Alan. Please, let me-

ALAN. No, come on. This is the one haircut I can give you. You are not going to take away my joy here.

KATE. There's a word for men like you-

ALAN. What? That want to help?

KATE. That like to shave their wives bald.

ALAN. Really?

KATE. Their heads, Jerk. Shave their heads.... God, it was really falling out, wasn't it?

ALAN. Who cares...

KATE. Do you like my wig?

ALAN. Very much.

KATE. I love the color. It's like an orangutan red.

ALAN. Not sure Revlon calls it that...

KATE. Well, why not? I think I'll get another one. Long and blonde. For my ever changing moods. *(She is bald now.)* Christ, look at me... I look....so....Well, it's not that terrible, is it?

ALAN. I kind of like it.

KATE. You know I really don't want to die.

ALAN. Stop! Of course not.

KATE. No, I mean I really don't. So, I don't plan on doing it, okay?

ALAN. Okay by me.

KATE. You missed a spot here. *(She reaches for the clippers.)*

ALAN. Sorry. *(She gives them back.)* What?

KATE. Well, go on, finish, will you? Nothing worse than a man who can't finish what he started...

JACOB. I have a funny story for you.

*Jacob is talking to Alan who continues to shave Kate's hair. Both realities are happening.*

ALAN. Go on.

JACOB. When I was finally coming here to America. My God, what a day that was...

ALAN. You must have been so happy.

JACOB. Well, actually I was sad. And scared. I was all alone you see. All my relatives except my Aunt here in Brooklyn- so few that I knew were even alive. My neighbor Rokhol, who found Sarah's diary, but other than this I was alone, alone in all the world. And I was just a boy remember, seventeen, and sailing all by myself to this great big country, and I did not like the ocean, or rather, it did not like me. I got so seasick. So there I was barely able to step off the gangplank I was so weak in the knees, and everyone else was hugging each other and kissing, so glad to be back in each other's arms. And I remember it was Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, and the holidays were always the most difficult time, and all of a sudden, I got such a flush of joy and my heart started to race. I knew I would be all right in this land, and you know what did this to me? I looked up, and there was this great big balloon in the sky, huge and it had written on it "Good Year." And I thought these Americans, they know how to celebrate the High Holy Days!

ALAN. That's so funny!

JACOB. I'm going to like it here in America.

SARAH. We do not deserve to be free, for we did not before this understand how to conduct ourselves. And it is for that we are suffering now, not for nothing.

ENSEMBLE. **Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1942.**

SARAH. But the liberation of mankind cannot come through war, only through education. When the human mind has properly developed, all evil will, as a matter of course, disappear by itself. Knowledge is the salvation of humankind, which is why everyone should dedicate himself to it. It is not the systems which are good or bad, but people—people alone. And there is no such thing as good or evil; there is knowledge and ignorance. Every person with knowledge is, ipso facto, for that reason alone, a noble individual. He may on occasion do something harmful out of necessity but not out of malice.

JACOB. Years later, I opened my own business on Kings Highway. Stylish Shoes, for plus sizes. I learned this trade from a man, Danny Lombardi, who had a few shops in Brooklyn-Widestyles. Maybe you've heard of them? Now I was grateful to this man for giving me this chance, but I made the most of it myself, you see, and I helped make his business very profitable. My customers all came to me because they trusted me. And I knew a good shoe.

DAVID. Now, all of you, watch my little Yankele. You must learn how to cut the shoe along the pattern like so. No, Rabbi, use this side of the blade. This is the dull side... Yankele will show you while I help the butcher over here. And the violin player. How can I possibly teach you all to cobble at once... Doesn't anyone here actually know how to make a shoe? Well then, we must learn quickly.

SARAH. Yes, education! But not in the sense of creating ever larger and more powerful machines for the destruction of people so that a greater number will fall by a single shot, and more of them drop for no reason at all. No! People should not educate themselves in that manner or with those goals but to learn to ease human suffering, to create much that is good, and to put a stop to wrong living.

JACOB. So after a few years of hard work, I came to this Mr. Lombardi, and I asked him if I could have a percentage, a partnership which I offered to pay for, instead of wages and a small commission since I was ordering most of the styles, and at least two-thirds of the customers I knew by name. And he refused, so I walked out, and a few month later, I opened my own shop. On the other side of town because I didn't want to seem ungrateful, and do you know what this man did? He bought the shop next to me and opened up another one of his stores to try to put me out of business. But my customers liked my shoes, and his store was losing money, and one day he walked up to me sweeping outside my shop, and I said "Good morning, Mr. Lombardi." And he said "Good morning, Fishkin." And then he said "You know, they got six million of you Jews, why couldn't they have gotten six million and one."

SARAH. At present, of course, this is but a thought. It does not happen just because a person thinks that way. That does not create it. Many more people will yet fall in the struggle to establish the world and humanity upon a truly good foundation, many waters will yet flow by. But in the course of an extended period, the world will indeed structure itself as people determined dozens of years earlier. True, we shall no longer be here by that time, but people will be happy. The old ways of life will be discontinued, and Humankind's wild, brutal emotions curbed. New thinkers and lovers of life will come forth, teaching that good is not only for the chosen but for all humanity.

JACOB. Do you know why I come here so often?

ALAN. You like the water?

JACOB. Yes, this and I love being in this school. This university. September 1941 was a particularly sad time. When the schools opened this year, the Jewish children were forbidden to attend. I longed for my teachers and the

classes every day. As the weeks passed, they ordered us to come to our school and chop wood to make fires. We passed through the front door where a sign hung: Jews and Dogs Not Allowed. I was preparing the kindling as I did at home when I heard the bell ring, and I cannot tell you why I thought I should, but I put down my hatchet and joined the children outside. To my surprise, no one paid any attention to me, so I joined the students when they went back in the class. Now the teacher, Stozipiczowa, recognized me, but she did not stop me.

STOZIPICZOWA. Hello, Yanek, you will need these.

JACOB. And she gave me paper and a pencil and some books. And later on before the end of the class she gave me a note labeled "For This Afternoon" and it said, "Do the same thing you did before." (*A bell rings*) So I went back to work and told my foreman, and he said that he would cover for me. So that afternoon, I played outside and then went to class, and it was Mr. Stozipicz, her husband, who often drank too much, but was a master teacher of arithmetic.

STOZIPICZ. Mr. Yanek, please take your seat. (*nervously*) Would everyone please begin the problem on the board. (*As the children begin working, he takes a sip of something from a mug, he then walks past JAKOV.'s desk*) Very good, Yanek. (*then whispers*) Next period, continue to do the same thing. (*The bell rings.*)

JACOB. As the bell rang, I ran to my group. The foreman was waiting and instructed the others to pay no attention and shoved me back onto the playground. The third session was my favorite, Natural Science with Mr. Schultz.

MR SCHULTZ. Please everyone, everyone, take your seats. We have a lot to cover today. (*He hands JAKOV. a sandwich.*) I believe you left this in your last class, Yanek. You must be more careful. Now class, let us begin. Who knows the difference between mammals and reptiles?

JACOB. I will never forget that day in school. I rushed back the next day to chop wood, but the foreman forbid me to try again. He said nothing more. But I saw that his hands were shaking, and he would not look me in the eye. The next day there was a new foreman. Weeks later, I was in the school basement and Stozipiczowa came down and motioned me to sit with her.

STOZIPICZOWA. How are you, Yakov? I know, you needn't answer. All of the teachers miss you. We would like to help, but it could be very dangerous for us. Anyway, I've brought you some books. Take them home and see what you can do with them.

*The bell rings.*

JAKOV. You'll be late.

STOZIPICZOWA. Yes...

*She goes. And Yakov sits and looks at the book.*

JACOB. I never in my life attended another class after that one day. Ever. But I have had many teachers. My father, Sarah certainly, and there were many Rabbis. *He takes a sip of water.* Not bad. But there was never anyone quite like Reb Chayim.

REB. How many Rabbis does it take to make a decent pair of shoes? You, David and you, little Yankele, why can I not have more like you?

JACOB. Reb Chayim was our foreman at Smolensk; he ran our workshop. The former manager of a large German shoe factory was our commandant. We were very lucky- he was not cruel and he respected Reb Chayim. Everyone respected Reb Chayim. He once asked Reb Chayim why there were so few Jewish artisans and he replied:

REB. I will make artisans out of them all.

JACOB. Now to reach the attic where we slept was a very tall ladder, and the rungs of this ladder would break from so many having to use it. It was Reb Chayim who had the idea-

REB. Don't do that. You will just fall, and then you will have nothing but broken bones to make shoes with. Here, take these new rungs and put them in, like so. There you see? What are you doing?

JAKOV. They are broken. I am throwing them away.

REB. No. No, you are not. Nothing is to be thrown away. Is your name not Jacob? If there is one thing that a Jacob should know it is about ladders.

JACOB. And then once we had all climbed up to the attic-

REB. I, for one, do not want to be disturbed every night, do you?

JACOB. He would take the ladder and replace the new rungs with the broken rungs so that it was all but impossible to climb again, and the Guards would leave us alone. And that attic in the night, it was our- our fortress.



JAKOV. I stole some socks, Reb Chayim. From the German's laundry. They are much warmer. I gave them to my Taté, but he would only take one. I want you to have the other.

REB. You keep them, Yankele. What good is one warm foot?

JAKOV. You can alternate. Like we do.

REB. If you get another pair they can be mine.

JACOB. He taught those that had no trade to be craftsmen and saved their lives. And we'd take the newspapers, we'd smuggle from the wrapped vegetables, and he would read them, and it was like the newsreels at the cinema-

REB. *(like an announcer)* You are listening to the Voice of Smolensk.... "Yes," report the Germans, "the Bolsheviks will die of starvation like frozen dogs. Moscow will no longer be the capital and the Volga will not be the boundary. Fierce battle are raging in the vicinity of Stalingrad. Leningrad is surrounded."

JACOB. And as always he would burn the paper with a small candle so the Germans would not know.

REB. This is not news; this is propaganda. Do not be worried, my friends, my comrades. The Russians will be here very soon. Tomorrow will be here before you know it. I fought in the Polish Army. I fought against these Russians, and I promise you they can fight. You see this knee, I was shot down and still can't kick with this knee because of those frozen dogs. You want to see frozen dogs, I'll show you frozen dogs. How are my sweethearts tonight? *(Reb Chayim starts to howl softly and from below three dogs join in singing.)*

JACOB. There were three vicious guard dogs that were let out into the workroom at night to keep us in the attic. And Reb Chayim had sung so many times to them that they had become used to his voice and would no longer bark. Instead, they would sing along with him.

*He sings again, and the dogs howl softly along with him.*

REB. You see, Yankele, the dogs don't want to bite; they must be taught to attack. Only the Germans want to attack. The dogs only do as we do, as they are told. And there they must sit in the cold as we do all night.

ALAN. Jacob, I've been dying to ask you: What do you think about yesterday?

JACOB. Yesterday?

ALAN. We are at war now. We started bombing in Afghanistan.

JACOB. Did we?

JAKOV. How come the dogs listen to you Reb Chayim?

REB. Because I listen to them.

JAKOV. But they are just barking and howling...

REB. No, you must listen. Even this barking is for a reason. All language, birds, dogs, is for a reason... You must learn to listen. To interpret. My gift is I can hear dogs. You see the little one on the end? She is always hungry because she is so small. That is why she will bite you first. The fat one in the middle, he is old and hard of hearing. This is why he sings the loudest. But it is the one there, farthest away from us, that you must watch very carefully. Even she doesn't trust me. She only barks if the other two are barking. Otherwise she just shows her teeth... My dog at home, Hava, she loved to talk... We would go for long walks in the woods and talk for hours. Wait, ssh, do you hear?

JAKOV. I only hear your dogs howling and...the wind...

REB. This is because you do not listen. Close your eyes. If I show you a picture you look at it, no? What do you see? No, do not just look at who and what is in the picture. Look at the whole picture, at everything, the colors, how it is arranged, look into the faces and past the faces. Now you begin to hear. No?

*The sound of airplanes approaching is heard. It should get louder and louder and then bombing begins. There are sirens.*

JAKOV. It's the Russians! The planes are coming! Taté, the planes!

JACOB. And we'd all rush to that attic window and look out, and the sky would fill. One by one until it was black with locusts. And then the fireworks, and we would sing. Reb Chayim would lead us all in song, and the bombs would explode, and the dogs would bark and bark, and we prayed that the Russian would destroy them all.

*Everyone is singing loudly:*

Koy amor, omar has-shem: zokarti lokh khesed ne-u-ray-ikh  
Ahavas klu-lo-soy-ikh, ahavas klu-lo-soy-ikh,  
Lekhatekh akharay, akharay bamidbor, be-eretz loy zoruah.

(So saith the Lord: I remember the grace of youth  
The love of your nuptials, yea the love of your nuptials  
When you followed me, followed me in the desert, in a land unsown.)

ALAN. But that was so different. That whole war was different.

JACOB. Maybe. But the bombs were still bombs, dropping all around and we still sang. Sometimes even those that the bombs drop on are singing. We could have been killed, but at least it was not by Hitler...

DEB. I mean I marched all through the sixties, Alan, don't get me wrong. I've fasted against capitol punishment. But after those towers fell, I said "get the fucker," I did. My first reaction was "bomb the fucker off the face of the earth..."

ALAN. The Good War. That's what they called it. And I used to laugh at that anachronism...

DEB. Paradox-

ALAN. Whatever. I'd say no! It's like that scene in Monty Python and the Holy Grail- you fight me and cut off my arm and I cut off yours- you cut off my leg and whack- off goes yours. And pretty soon we are both rolling around in the mud with no arms and legs.

DEB. Alan, I hate to tell you but in that scene only one knight gets his arms and legs whacked off. There's only one knight bobbling around bleeding to death and the other one rides away.

GERMAN COMMANDER. Ich bin der neue Aufseher auf die Schuhwerke!!!

JACOB. I am the new over-seer of the shoe factory- these were the first words our new commandant said. The war front was changing, and our old tolerant commander was gone. And this new dimwit ordered Reb Chayim down from the attic!

GERMAN COMMANDER. Schnell! Schnell!

JACOB. And Reb Chayim fell while trying to climb the broken ladder and picked himself up but was limping badly. The commander searched him and

found the newly carved rungs of the ladder. He gave them back to Reb Chayim

GERMAN COMMANDER. I believe these are yours.

JACOB. And they marched him out, (*Reb Chayim exits*) and we never saw him again. He was maybe... thirty-five. The commandant ordered the rest of us down from the attic, and many fell and were hurt, and then we were searched.

SOLDIER. Herr Commandant!

JACOB. They had found the pair of socks that I had stolen for Reb Chayim. (*The commander nods his head.*) And I was immediately taken outside and beaten in front of my father and the entire barracks.

*The soldier begins to whip Jakob.*

JACOB. This was not the first time I had been whipped; they once beat us back in the ghetto by the side of the road for not working hard enough, and many, many were killed. I had run away then, but this time there was no escape, and I was terrified. But you see, God was with me that day because after the first few lashes, I did not feel anything.

*Jakov is running and finds himself in the woods. It is months earlier and he is alone. He falls to the ground and a man comes from out of the darkness behind him.*

TALL PARTISAN. Jakov?

JAKOV. I'm sorry, I did not mean to run. I will work much harder.

TALL PARTISAN. It is Hershhal. From Koydanov.

JAKOV. What are you doing here?

TALL PARTISAN. What are you?

JAKOV. They beat us, and I ran. I am so happy to see you.

TALL PARTISAN. Don't worry, I watch over you. All of the time.

JAKOV. You do?

TALL PARTISAN. This is our job, no? We are good at hiding. I have even been to your house.

JAKOV. When?

TALL PARTISAN. I look in from time to time. Your windows.

JAKOV. Why don't you tell me? Why don't you come inside?

TALL PARTISAN. It is not good for too many to see us. Though your sister has seen me.

*Sarah appears at a windowsill.*

SARAH. Who's there? Is there someone out there?

TALL PARTISAN. But our eyes met, and I ducked back into the forest.

JAKOV. Sarah?

TALL PARTISAN. You have to go back now. While you still have the strength. But don't worry. I watch over her. And your family. Now go, you know the way. *(He helps Jakov to leave.)*

*Sarah is still at the window.*

ENSEMBLE. **Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup> 1942.**

SARAH. I should like to find a person who would be in harmony with my character and my feelings. One from whom also I should be able to learn so much that is worthwhile.

ALAN. Her last entry in the diary is the only time she mentions love. Romantic love. I was so moved by that. She longed for someone...

JACOB. I was in love with a girl in our shtetl, but I was too young to even know. Her name was Fanya, and we used to fight and fight and roll on the ground and then hug and then fight some more. She was very beautiful. When I fell down a crawlspace looking for potatoes and into some rags at the camp and I was suffocating and they left me to die, it was Fanya who came to me and told me to climb to safety. I could see her though it was quite dark.

*Fanya appears in a pool of light.*

FANYA. Hello, Jakov. You look well.

JAKOV. As do you. These are sad times, but seeing you... I feel so much is possible.

FANYA. It may be, Jakov. It may be.

JACOB. After I was liberated and after Sarah's diary was returned to me, Rohkol told me Fanya lived nearby. I couldn't believe this... Fanya was alive. So I had a haircut and a shave, and I went to see her.

FANYA. Will you come to my wedding? My fiancé and I would be so honored.

JAKOV. Of course. So, you are to be married? Mazel Tov.

FANYA. Thank you... He has kind eyes like you, dear Yankele. You see there is much that is possible...

SARAH. Sometimes, however, the youthful heart asks no questions and refuses to stop and consider, does not care to know whether his character is good or bad but sees only the handsome exterior from which is so dazzling; one is oblivious of everything except the pleasure of being with him.

JACOB. Sarah did not try to escape, you know. Mother had already died. From typhus and hunger. And when the word came that the Germans were coming to liquidate the camp, Rohkol and her family, at least a hundred others took refuge in a hiding place in the wall. And they all hid and then escaped and this is how Rohkol found the diary. Years later because they hid in a wall and the Germans and the dogs did not sniff them out. Now, why is that, if not the Lord? And Rhokol begged Sarah to come, begged her to hide, and she said no. She was a Jew, and she would stay with the other Jews, and if it had come to this, she would die with her people... She refused to hide.

*The ensemble begins to pack themselves close together and form a living sculpture, the hiding Jews, as Sarah speaks*

SARAH. Yes, love and youth are two themes which contain much that is hidden, which combine and go together, two happy stages in life. One cannot forget them as long as one lives, and it is all very beautiful but not for us to think about, much less describe at this time, for it simply creates more pain when we probe into and concentrate on portraying it. Therefore, I shall not do so now. Let things continue to go as they are going so that I am

not perturbed by questioning thoughts, for I feel that would cause me much pain and suffering...

JACOB. So though I didn't know it, all that was left of my family was my father and me, and he was getting weak and his legs and stomach were swelling. But we kept taking turns keeping each other alive. Trying to cheer each other up. Planning. They moved us by freight train from Smolensk to a series of camps as the front lines kept changing. The entire camp was herded into cars, and we had no idea where we were going.

*The ensemble is no longer the Jews in hiding, but the transport train packed with sick and hungry. This must not be literal at all but a stage picture or dance like movement.*

MOTL. We must get out of here.

LEYZER. We can cut the wires in the windows.

DAVID. I will help you. I am too weak to escape, but I can help.

MOTL. If some make it out, there will be more air for others.

LEYZER. If we don't, we will all suffocate.

JACOB. The bodies of the dead were piled up, and then those who could, stood on them to climb to the windows, and with rags rapped around their hands, pulled at the wires until they broke free.

ARIEH. My dear Jews, I was in the army, and we jumped from planes—listen to me. To begin with you must jump out feet first. You must hold on to the window with all your might until you feel both your feet touching the side of the car. Then you must push away from the car with your hands and feet, with all of your might. The wind will help you pull away from the moving train. You must not try to land on your feet. When you start falling, put your head between your legs as soon as you can.

JACOB. And then to demonstrate, he climbed out of the window and jumped.

*He does. The others try to help David, but he can't jump.*

DAVID. Please go, I can't.

MOTL. What about JAKOV.?

DAVID. Yes. Now, Yankele, you must go-

JAKOV. No. I am staying with you!

DAVID. You must go now, before it is too late.

JAKOV. I am to look after you. I promised Sarah. That was the plan! I am staying!

JACOB. And the others jumped from the train. I have no idea to this day if they survived. My father would not speak to me. For the first time he was angry. But when the train pulled in, we saw two large chimneys burning. This was in Plashov.

GUARDS. Macht schell! Macht schnell!

JACOB. We were being unloaded and told that the Germans needed some workers to fix their trucks. The smokestacks were part of the factory. Everyone was rushing off the trains- there was little time to think. Some of my cousins got in line and marched toward the factory, but my father grabbed me firmly by the hand. The rest of us were told to get back onboard, and my father pushed me back onto the train, and I kept asking why? Why? Somehow he knew. We arrived at a camp Blizhin, and by this time my father was very weak. I knew I had to get him food. I was very good at sneaking around, and after a few days, I found where the potatoes were stored and had managed to hide two or three and make my way back to the barracks.

RONTSHKA. You, Halt! Halt right there.

JACOB. This was the meanest of the Kapos that policed us. Kapos were chosen for the job because they were more brutal than the other guards. He had one hand amputated, and he wore a black glove. That is why we called him Rontshka, the hand. The day before, I had seen him shoot a man because he was too weak to get out of bed when his name was called.

RONTSHKA. Where are you going?

JACOB. Now I was already very weak, could barely walk in a straight line, and I knew he could smell blood.

RONTSHKA. Why are you shaking? Are you hiding something? Do I make you nervous?

JACOB. I was looking down at the ground, but I felt the strength of Sarah and my little brother and sister helping me. They willed me to slowly raise my head and look him squarely in the eyes, and I walked in a straight line



right past him and said, “I have no potatoes!” and saluted him as if he were my king. And he saluted me back. And then laughed and walked away. And I ran to Pappa.

DAVID. Where were you? We’ve been looking all over for you!

JACOB. And the whole barracks was there. And a Rabbi, Reb Moyshe stepped forward.

REB MOYSHE This is a very holy day, for today we celebrate the bar mitzvah of Jakov Fiskin.

JACOB. I had forgotten it was my birthday. And they brought forth a small Torah. And after I recited and sang my Haftorah, the men placed me on their shoulders, and we danced until our lookout yelled:

LOOKOUT. Be quiet! Now!

JACOB. And we all dove into our beds, and the lights were put out. But all through the night, one by one, I was congratulated. One does not ever forget such a Bar Mitvah...

DEB. Hey, how is she doing?

ALAN. I don’t know. It’s only been an hour. Thanks for coming.

DEB. Not at all, gives me a chance to spend some quality time in the desperate and Spartan confines of a hospital waiting room. I actually am attracted to waiting rooms, did I ever tell you that? They are full of purpose-people’s fate hang in the balance, like courtrooms and jury rooms. I love those. I like a place with purpose built in. Is this helping?

ALAN. Not at all.

DEB. Why I’m here... Your whole life is a waiting room, think about it. It’s just that not every day the stakes are so clear.

ALAN. Thank God.

DEB. Oh, so are we believing these days?

ALAN. I believe there is too much beauty in living.

SARAH. I think how fortunate I am that God granted me the desire to do this, endowed me with love for pen and the ability to express everything in writing.

DEB. I brought a few folks with me if you don't mind.

*The entire ensemble of actors joins Deb and Alan in the waiting room and they sit together and after a few hellos and thank yous, just sit quietly together, some reading.*

SARAH. In the quiet, illumined hours when I sit writing, spending time with you, sharing all with you, you remain silent and locked away to all others. You exist for me alone, you are joined to me only. Only for me do you live, and me do you serve. And the same is true of me with regard to you, my pen. I alone accumulate true materials to describe, characterize and formulate for you, and I gather together the thoughts that sometimes burden me and will not go away.

*The ensemble has moved into a circle as if around a table. Rohkol stands. Jakov sits at the head of the table. An empty chair is next to him.*

ROHKOL. We have a very special guest with us for sedar this year, Jakov Fishkin, our dear neighbor from Rubiezewicze, whose presence here this evening brings us joy beyond words. And rather than have an empty chair for the prophet Elijah, we all thought that the seat should be held for his beloved sister, Sarah, whose diary is there in her place instead of the Haggadah.

*Jakov picks up the diary and holds it to his chest and begins to weep.*

ROHKOL. Why is this night different from all other nights...

SARAH. I did not think, last Sabbath day, that we would still be alive today or that I would still be writing. I now consider myself fortunate just to have lived through another day and to be able to listen to the beat of my heart and pulse.

*Alan is alone now in the waiting room. He is reading from the notebook of Sarah's writing. Two scenes are happening simultaneously, both with only one foot or one toe in reality. Kate appears looking into a large pane of mirror that is invisible and after a beat Sarah appears on the other side. Meanwhile a simple old man sits down in the waiting room next to Alan.*

KATE. (to herself) Look at my hands...

OLD MAN. Can I have that Tttt-time magazine, please.

ALAN. Sure. These suicide bombings are terrible, aren't they? There'll never be peace now.

KATE. Oh please, go away.

SARAH. Are you speaking to me or the pain in your fingers?

OLD MAN. The ss-saddest thing is this is nothing new. Ccc-centuries ago there was kkk-killing. And then there were periods where the swords were pp-put away.

KATE. I don't see you. Forgive me. But I don't want to. This is silly. Alan thinks it is so theatrical. I think it is a violation. I never wanted to even be in this play in the first place.

SARAH. You sound like my brother Jakov.

KATE. Your brother is the whole problem. He's the reason that my husband has gone crazy...

ALAN. My name is Alan, Alan Klutzenberg.

OLD MAN. And mm-mine is Moses. Kk-klutzenberg, this is-

ALAN. A burden. My whole life. Thanks, Dad.

OLD MAN. Oh, I know all about bb-burdens. And bb-blaming fathers... When I was about to dd-die-

ALAN. Excuse me?

OLD MAN. I'm sorry. I thought you wanted to ttt-talk. You looked like you cc-could use a little chat.

ALAN. No, it's just what you said. When I was about to die-

KATE. I'm glad he met your brother, please don't misunderstand me. It has given him strength through all my... Oh dear God- If I am seeing you, does that mean?

SARAH. Do your hands still hurt?

KATE Yes, look at them. The nails are turning brown. From the chemo.

SARAH. When our bellies were aching from hunger, my mother used to say to hold on to that ache because it means that you are still alive.

OLD MAN. Yes, well I don't know why I should have been so shocked. I was 120. Not exactly a sss-spring chicken as they say...Bbb-but the Lord wanted to take me. He appeared before me –

ALAN. Wait- Wait. Let me wrap my brain around this one. People play this game if you could have a conversation with just one person in history...and alright, I can't lie and say you were first or second on my list- but you certainly made the top ten. I have so many questions I promised I would ask you. Okay, first, what did he look like?

OLD MAN. The Lord? You mean burning bb-bush or long white b-beard?

ALAN. Yes. I mean, look at you. You look nothing like-

OLD MAN. Charlton Heston?

ALAN. Yes.

OLD MAN. I know. I bb-begged them for Spencer Ttt-Tracey... This is a very difficult question to answer, but the bbb-best that I can ppp-ut it is close your eyes and think. How does God look to you. Well, that is exactly what appeared before me. And I was atop the mountain watching my people cross into our land, and God appeared and said that it was ttt-time. I had served long and well. But I was not ready, and so I argued- I dddid that a lot- The Lord brought out the tt-tiger in me. And it is in our nature to haggle- I said- "for one hundred twenty years I have done your bidding and served you well have I not?" Notice I never ssss-stammered with the Lord. DDD-duh! "So why must I die? Adam, he disobeyed you. Abraham and Isaac doubted you." And the Lord said "Prepare yourself." But I cried out: "I alone have served you faithfully. Why can I not live forever?" And very simply, no thunder or lightening this time, almost as if in despair, the Lord said: "Did I ask you to kill that Egyptian all those years ago. With your own hands?" And the rest, as they say, is hhh-history.

KATE. I am so tired. I just don't know if it is worth the struggle. I am so tired of fighting the fight.

SARAH. May I tell you a story? I talk about it in my lectures, about Israel, but perhaps it will help. It helped me. *(Kate reaches out to touch her to say yes. Her hand is resting on one side of the glass. SARAH. touches the other. There is only the thickness of glass between them)* There was once a man whose only son had a great gift for painting. People paid a hundred zloty for

a single one of his paintings. One day he told his father he was going out beyond the city to where there was a tall tower on a high hill. The father did not want this and tried to convince his son not to go. But he could not dissuade him, so the man followed his son. It took them a long time to reach their destination and climb the tower, but once they did, the son began to paint a picture of the most glorious view and lush green hill. After several weeks, the painting was finished. When the artist looked at the right side from a distance, he did not find the painting pleasing. The farther back he stood from the right side the uglier the painting was to him. The thought occurred to him: begin over again, from the very beginning. But no! He reconsidered and decided to look at the reverse side of the painting. The farther he stood back from it, the more beautiful the picture appeared to him. And each step further back he stood, the more beautiful it seemed. As he watched his son move farther and farther backwards, the father suddenly realized his son was in great danger. One additional step and he would plunge from the tower. So the father seized the paintbrush and smeared paint across the picture, ruining it. The son rushed towards his father crying: "Father, what have you done? I worked so hard on this. I put everything, my heart and soul into this work, and now you have destroyed it." "Yes, I know," the father said "but now you will live to paint again. And you will paint so many more beautiful and splendid pictures." (*They pull their hands back and there are only handprints now on the glass.*)

*Jacob rushes into the waiting room and Alan is alone, asleep with the Time magazine and the notebook of Sarah's writings on his lap.*

JACOB. Alan, forgive me for coming so late. I got lost. I thought I was uptown but it was down.

ALAN. That's all right, my friend. Thank you so much for coming.

JACOB. How is she doing? Where is everybody? I thought the cast would be here...

ALAN. I asked them to leave. I wanted to be alone for awhile. (*Refers to the magazine*) Did you see this, Jacob? The suicide bombing de jour was a woman. Walked into a café and blew herself up. For the first time a young woman. How bad is it when woman are willing to die like this for their cause... How will it ever be stopped now? And she was a nurse, a paramedic... My wife wants nothing more than to live and across the world some other woman wants to blow herself to bits, no worse- believes it is the honorable thing, a holy thing to piss her life away and any others-- for her cause, for her beliefs... This is what faith gets you. Kate is inoperable, Jacob. The doctor used that word for the first time. What a horrible sounding thing... How can a word carry so much fear... apparently if they had gone

ahead and cut out her lung, it wouldn't have done any good. There is a spread to the other lung so... They have to continue chemo. They kept reassuring us not to give up hope, that remission is still very possible, but that we need to look at this as a manageable disease, like asthma or HIV; there's a comforting thought...Cancer can be managed...It can be suppressed, something one just lives with...Sounds to me awful like the occupied territories... Put up some fences and learn to live with our cancer...

I was so angry- she woke up in the post-op, and they told her before they let me in to see her, so when I got there she was all alone and crying, sobbing and as I held her, I could feel her shaking, and then she just stopped. And then she looked at the doctor and said- "Okay- that really sucks doesn't it, but so now what are we going to do?"

JACOB. She is so strong. Her faith is like a mountain.

ALAN. It is not faith that is the key, Jacob. Faith is just food. It feeds you, but the key is her will. We will ourselves to live, to achieve, to believe, to do good- Yes, faith is important, so is love, or hope, and sometimes all three- but it is that resolve, that determination, the fricking rock hard fortitude of the human spirit that I am in awe of...

SARAH. Am I alive now, during these fine May days, when beautiful nature is also alive? The birch woods whisper from a distance, the little birds sing their quiet melodic songs of praise and soar in the clean air.

ALAN. I just hope I have the will... You have it- and so did your sister. I've been reading Sarah. She's been a great help.

JACOB. I am glad.

ALAN. Can we go for a walk? They gave Kate a sedative for the pain, so she is sleeping. I'd like to go outside.

SARAH. The little river suns along quietly without any murmuring or any noisy waves. The rested fields are sown. Everything is magnificent, all of nature so full of life and so delightful. Unmoved by our situation, it goes on living, budding, developing, changing color.

ALAN. (*As they move outside*) How did you ever make it, Jacob? How did you ever find the strength?

JACOB. I almost didn't. Do you know that out of the window of the camp at Minsk you could see the Alps. It was like a postcard. Never have you seen such a beautiful sight.

ALAN. Remember how blue the sky was September 11<sup>th</sup>? Downtown there was carnage, but just blocks away if you looked north, the sky was crystal-clear, and it was a crisp fall day...

JACOB. Those mountains covered in clouds were so cruel...Everyday you saw them but knew they were a lifetime away...

JAKOV. Strength? Schmength.

JACOB. Some days I would have welcomed death. Especially after I lost my Taté.

DAVID. You must never say that, Yankele. You must always tell yourself to live. We need each other, don't we?

JACOB. He was so sick he could not even stand. I had survived typhus only because he had visited me every day, calling for me through the fence, telling me how much he looked forward to my return. That I must get well. And when I did get stronger, he was so proud of me, but by that time he was ready to go. He was so weak and-

JAKOV. Your feet are so swollen-

DAVID. Yankele, my sweet boy, I could do much more for you if I were closer to God. Your grandfather will be with me. He will take care of me. He'll give me cake and schnapps like he used to... Our plan- it has worked. We survived for this long, now it is your turn. You must forget about me. I will let God take me, but I will not let him rest. I will fight with him and beg him until he promises to let you survive. Now, this is what you must do. It is time for you to escape, to become a Partisan, to fight as you have always wanted to. Hide in the potato cellar and when it gets dark, run for the forest. Do not worry. God is on both sides of the fence.

JACOB. But when I tried to escape, I saw Rontshka was there. Two others had been caught, and we were all made to watch their immediate execution. And the next day, again we were loaded onto trains. By now Father could no longer speak. For the first time there was no plan... They had to carry him off the transport and into Mauthausen, and they started to take him away from us with the sick and dying, and I remember screaming: "He needs me. He needs me. My Taté, he needs me." But a guard hit me with a rifle, and said, "He needs you no more."

SARAH. Do I live or am I already dead? Am I in a dark wood and dreaming such things, or in a place laid to waste where there are only sky and hot sand. Or perhaps in some world of the dead, or among demons perhaps?

JACOB. There was no food in Mauthausen, but I did not care. I ate a piece of coal that I found- it tasted bitter, but not bad... Later a doctor told me it may have saved me from the dysentery. Some of the others were eating the dead... I do remember that...

SARAH. Leave me, you thoughts that I do not want to consider. Go away and let me live in peace and quiet, free of torment. In my final moments, let me depart quietly from this beautiful world. I wish to be left alone and quiet.

*The ensemble is lying on the floor of the stage now.*

JACOB. I never stood again after that, I, too, had become weak. My feet were twice the size. We were lying there; I could feel the others, heard the gasps, the moans, but little else.

SARAH. Why do you persist in delving deeper and deeper and give me no respite, and why, my thoughts, do you refuse to have compassion for my heart, which no longer beats normally. Perhaps I am writing all of this in a fantastic, ephemeral dream on the day I feel I am about to drop and remain lying there, and I am groaning and weeping in my sleep and no one heeds me.

*From the back of the theater the sound of tanks can be heard, and it should become deafening. They stop and a voice can be heard on a loud-speaker: "Come out. Come outside. You are free. You have been liberated. Come out of your barracks, you are free!" It is raining all over the stage now.*

JACOB. I remember waking, though I do not remember falling asleep, and some of the others, the only few that could move were trying to stand. And the weakest of us said, "If we are meant to die, let us at least die outside in the clean air." And we took each other's arms, there must have been five or six of us, and this five or six had the strength of one, the strength to stumble outside. And then we collapsed into the mud. It was raining, you see. But the ground, the mud, felt so soft and cool; the rain touched our faces, washing over us. And I opened my eyes wide and drank the water. I think of those drops every time I take a drink. I was the only one of those five or six to stand up from that mud. The others died right then and there, but they died in the fresh air, cleansed by the rain.

*Jacob hands Alan the diary in a simple plastic bag.*

ALAN. Why are you giving me this?

JACOB. I am not giving it to you. I am giving it to your school. It belongs there. With the students. You must build a place for it. Sarah would be so



happy, so proud. She can be with students from all over, and they can hear her stories.

ALAN. I will. I will try.

JACOB. You'd better. This God of ours does have a temper... I don't mean to nudge, but do you have any idea when this play of yours might be finished?

ALAN. It may be finished. I'm close. I'll let you know.

JACOB. Good because none of us are getting any younger, you know.

SARAH. Why can't we live a normal life, achieve our goals, and then approach our seventies, not yet having suffered death from natural causes? Yes, I am writing! Am I still alive? Is it my living thoughts that are dictating to me, and are these, in truth, my final moments? I am still writing as I think: Who knows where the pages of my beloved diary will be blowing tomorrow? Where, my dear pages, will the harsh wind scatter you, driving you far away from her who loves you? Who will guard and treasure you as I do? Thou didst deliver us from Egypt. I end my confession and still retain the hope that perhaps by Thy Will and Thy Leave all of us may go on living.

JACOB. Come on, let us get out of the rain and see this wife of yours. She will be awake soon, no? Where did we come from? I get so lost... You lead the way...

*They get up and leave, and as the lights fade, Jakov is seen writing.*

**ENSEMBLE. Denver Colorado, America. The 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 1950.**

JAKOV. My hands tremble, and I am dizzy as I take my pen in hand and write on this paper, in your diary, where you recorded the days of your life as they passed, where you recorded your joy and your...

*The lights have faded.*

***End of the Play***

# **Steal This Play**

Though it may not be one

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*A chair. And an actor in the chair, maybe behind a table, looking ready perhaps to teach a class. And a dog sitting or lying on its bed next to the table.*

### ACTOR

I didn't start writing this the day it happened. That would have been like trying to write while riding the Cyclone at Coney Island. And not just near the Cyclone like in the Woody Allen movie, where he imagined his childhood with a roller coaster right outside the window. But I am talking about strapped in and climbing bump by bump by rickety bump, climbing higher and higher, only to come careening, unable to breathe, crashing back down. But I thought about it. I thought I need to write this down just a little bit each day. Bump by bump by bump. Talk about what is happening to me. It might be, I don't know, restorative, laxative, whatever the right "tive" is. Later. But at first I couldn't even think of the right words. My mind was a dead battery. Burnt. But I was determined to do it anyway. And why? Because I knew that if I could get through this it might make a good piece of theater. Or a piece of theater, I leave the qualitative up to you. Maybe secretly I thought if you put it in a play no one would believe it and I wouldn't have to either... See this is what we theater jerks do. Everything becomes usable. If you're a baker and your husband leaves you, it doesn't help put cream in the cupcakes. A mechanic doesn't clean the carburetor any better while falling in love- okay, maybe the nuts and bolts find a looser groove- but give a playwright a chance, and we turn out shows about our best and worst moments and everything in between. Long Days Journey Into Our Most Mundane Life Shit. No usually these reality based episodes become "fictional" plays with sets and costumes and moving lights. A play is hot nowadays if it has those moving lights, and a big set on a turntable, and Hollywood actors that somehow have agreed to work for ridiculously low wages by their standards to steal a job away from about a million other out of work actors that would have killed to have the same chance. But here I am in a one person play. You have to laugh, because writing this is living proof that I am always one beat behind the pulse of just about anything. All my life, the bandwagon would be just about finished playing and ready to pull out of town, and that is when I would get the bright idea to hop on it. I'm not exactly a joiner, or late bloomer. I am what you might call a last gasper. It is a pattern of mine... See, there have been a dearth of these turgid one persons shows for what- two decades now, and, well, frankly with the exception of a few that were deeply moving, I have often not been a fan. Blown Sideways Through Cambodia, Men Are From Mars But Give Me Five Of Them Hot And Naked (and it'll run Downtown forever). Like any of us need another confessional, one person show. Seventy five dollars a ticket to hear some actor who more than secretly wishes he or she, now even they was one of those movie stars cast in the plays with lazy susan sets and moving lights who has made himself work kvetching about the clogged

drain he or she, or now they, has made of their life. And don't forget to tack on some redemptive ending, often with an original song, dance, or multi-media extravaganza--nowadays all three-- cause we like our sensory overload, so you won't resent the fact that you had to hire a sitter and couldn't find parking for less than sixty dollars, and the whole thing is going to set you back for much more than Knicks tickets, which haven't been worth the price of pudding for well over a decade now. "See honey, we didn't even get a play, much less a set. And look up there. Not one of those fucking moving lights. At least give me a good set... Big rocks and things. Some rain onstage-- that I like. I like when right there onstage, it rains."

And here I was writing one. Here I was fifty, out of work-- in a recession, and taking the time to write a one person play. Now there's a smart financial solution to your unemployment predicament. I'll write my way out of this, god-damnit. And not even a children's book with wizards or pirates or hot vampire's and subliminal and liminal sex-- but a one-person play for Christ sakes... (*A projection appears.*) So here is a picture of a beautiful teenage vampire. And here is the beautiful teenage vampire about to have sex. (*Another*) Good. I hope that perked you up, eased your expectations. Though something tells me it may have added an unnecessary distraction...

But it honestly didn't matter to me at this moment how much I hated those shows, and therefore might never have finished this one, let alone thought I would see it performed. That it would even see the light of a stage, moving or not, which is every playwright's deepest desire, after health insurance. No matter that it wouldn't pay next month's rent, or even the garage, no one sane writes to pay the rent. And none of us I know has a car, let alone a garage. Four people on earth pay the rent as playwrights. And even that doesn't actually help them. They are all four still wonderfully fucked up; they just get to have a country house to take their Xanax in. So why do we bother, you may wonder? Because it was clear to me, as every single area of my life was closing in on me, like those walls in those Saturday serial matinee movies-- you remember-- the hero trapped in a collapsing mineshaft, the floor, the ceiling-- all walls, no windows-- slowly closing in to crush him or send him twirling down a gaping hole somewhere deep and dark-- the one thing I knew was I *had* to write. I had to write to survive. These words, I kid you not, were a scrap of bread and some water. They would keep me alive. I knew without them, I might not make it.

*The lights dim to black, and then back up again. Another day.*

So moody, huh. "The lights dim to black and then back up again. Another day." That is what I wrote. Simple but somehow that is what it felt like. I might not be able to endure this, and the lights would dim and there was sleep. The end of the days, those slow fades to black, and then awakening-- a new scene, a new point of view, of attack, of possible triumph or despair.

Not always even different. Those days that dare to add up, sometimes relentlessly the same, as yet you will see. Somehow even if only incrementally. Somehow though each felt different. (*Maybe lights up and down between each one?*) Day two of the same. Day three. Day thirteen. But never, no matter how similar, each was its own day. And so the lights kept dimming and then would come back up again. And sometimes that was all I could manage or recall.

*The lights dim and come back up again.*

So it was yesterday that all of this had happened And I suppose I haven't been clear as to what the "this" that happened to me was. I was fired. From my job of almost ten years. With not even a day's notice. In the middle of the biggest recession since the depression, which I will never understand no matter how many economists try to explain it to me. And I have tried, trust me. At cocktail parties, if I find out someone is an economist, the first thing I ask is "pardon me for talking shop here, but what the fuck- exactly-- is the difference between a depression and a recession? Is there like a point when the trillions lost kick in, and we can all be depressed instead of recessed?" Google it. There is no definitive answer, just that a depression is a way worse recession. Way worse according to who? Whom? And later that same day, the one where I became recessed, the very same day, my girlfriend decided to downsize me too. Told me that in a month, when her kids were on vacation with her ex husband (they spend a month in the summer with him) she was going to ask me to move out. Again. This had already happened once before, being told to pack up the old kit bag and fly, but back then, all those months ago, she called and confessed she was just confused, she didn't really know what she wanted. But now in the pale light of a not quite depression, it turns out she did. And of course she didn't want to tell me today of all days, but she had come from a phone session- actually a Skype session -- with her therapist right downstairs, while in the rec-room, and had made up her mind, I don't know, while playing air hockey or Wii-sports, I guess, and somehow I was forcing this news from her. "Nothing is wrong, specifically" she said. (Which always meant there was) "Let's just let it go." Could it have been the fact that she couldn't look me in the eye? And here I was in desperate need of a hug, and "hey, it's okay. You are not defined by your job. Let's go get a festive burrito or something," and all I did get was a sense that something was very, very rotten in the borough of Brooklyn. But wait, there's more: job, relationship, home, and okay, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's deal with one catastrophe at a time shall we? So, where was I? Okay, right, so I get to my Manhattan home (and trust me I use that word loosely, and you will understand better soon)- after I left work having been told I no longer worked there, this was my last day, and went to my girlfriend's house where I lived with her in Brooklyn (because even though for just short of a year most of my things were there, including all of my furniture except for my old desk, it had never actually been my "home"-

according to her, it was always hers) and so rather than go to her daughter's vocal concert as we had planned, I find myself packing enough clothes to get through the next few days at my old apartment-- because as I told her, after she finally all but exorcist pea souped the impending eviction news onto me, "if she was sure she was going to ask me to leave, really sure, are you sure? Then why on earth were we waiting the month?" The kids were at their father's for a week, and I was not going to just walk around this beautiful home that we had set up together for a month unwanted. It is about 7 o'clock in the evening of the same day that started for me at six in the morning walking our two dogs thinking I had a job, a relationship, and a home, and now I found myself driving my dog - that's him by the way down there. (*Pointing to the dog sitting by the table on his bed.*) His name is August, he came with that name, but it is fitting, you will see, because this story ends in August, this summer of my discontent. We had gotten a second dog to befriend him, our first together- the first that she now made sure to call "mine" (I know, the warning signs were like blatantly obvious) and the second rescued from the same shelter she was quick to label "hers"- never "ours." Keep count. There will be like one hundred and forty two of these warnings that were ignored. That I did not want to see even as they were bitch slapping me. And here was "my" dog looking at me like --"road trip at night, without my brothers? Oh, this can't be good. Where the hell are we going? Is this like the end of the Flintstones, again?" Nine o'clock I get to my apartment, which is pretty much empty except for a twin sized bed and some make shift furniture, so when I had to still seem like I was living there, I could- because they were trying to evict me- another story- I will get to it, hang on.

Okay to re-cap- just so the bumps in the coaster are clear: now it is ten pm the same day- and I have finally arrived in my almost empty apartment with some suitcases and a dog with those velvet painting sad eyes, just confused, while I was dazed and numb. Been up at six to run the dogs, by noon I found out I had no job, two o'clock I left my office wondering how the hell I was going to pack all my books, the toys that students had given (it was a cool office full of silly toys and theater shit- how many boxes would it take to fit ten years), and I get all the way out on the F train to what I wanted to be my home and will no longer be, because by six o'clock I find out that this is the day that she is absolutely sure that I am not the right man for her. And rather than go to her daughter's vocal concert, I'm back in Manhattan after packing into my car, which I extravagantly bought thinking my life is finally going to be great, with whatever felt essential and my mutt, to sleep in a twin bed and an empty apartment full of almost twenty years of- I was going to say twenty years of ghosts, but that does not do justice to how complex the space was for me. And it is not ghosts that haunt me there. After all I already lost a wife to cancer, and another beloved dog, and neither of them ever had the decency to re-visit, let alone haunt. So as I crawled into my dorm room sized twin bed, left there so if I needed to let the landlord know this was still

my home by staying over, I thought “well now that’s a pretty bad fucking day in anyone’s book.” And, of course, what does your mind do? Well, if you’re me, it circles the wagons to protect itself. “Well at least I have my health; I don’t have a terminal disease,” I heard myself saying. Except, like an idiot, I found myself saying that to my best friend who I had called and who does have a possibly terminal disease, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. And she said, “Speaking from experience it pretty much does suck worse.” And I said, “I am so sorry, what an asshole.” And she said, “please you don’t think I understand, I used to wake up many a day and think- so, what the fuck, are you gonna kill me already? Gotta be better to be dead.” “My mother”, she said, “used to say-- now this is a woman who has gotten up off of three death beds- she has a saying: this couldn’t have killed me already? And this from a woman who refuses to die, was on death’s doorstep and got up to clip coupons.” And then I heard myself say, “and besides I actually may have a terminal disease. I just drew blood the other day when I was at the doctor because I caught Flynn’s cold and wanted to make sure it wasn’t swine flu. And I have been tired so much lately, and Flynn has hepatitis”- whole ‘nother story- “and I was worried that I might have gotten it.”

Aren’t you glad you came? Right here is where we stick the first song, to lighten things up. (*A pop song plays. Maybe “Total Eclipse of the Heart?”*) And here is another picture of a hot teenager, who is in love with the hot vampire. (*It does.*) Because a vampire story can’t work without the dysfunctional fool who loves in spite of all the life being sucked from their body... And look a moving light. (*He picks up a flashlight and moves it across the stage.*)

Now relax, this is not a play about terminal disease. At least not yet. I didn’t have the test results back yet- see I told you there was more to look forward to... Though I did know all about death’s doorstep. Two of the most important people in my life had died in the last few years. My wife of twelve years to lung cancer, five years ago. Not a smoker, or drinker, perfect health- just an amazing vibrant woman. And then my best friend Ruth (who’s name popped up magically in the Microsoft word program as I typed her first name- Ruth Jaffe- bing. Stored away as the Ruth of Ruth’s in my computer’s mind, it typed itself like a magical visitation from her- which she believed in. She believed in ghosts- whole ‘nother story. Ruth was sixty something, just a great actress. And she died in her sleep peacefully lying next to her new devoted lover who was seventy five and already a widower, and that will do a number on you I am sure. But she was not ill at all, and confided in me that she was having the best sex of her life at sixty-six.) So these back-to-back losses had left me reeling. But I was determined to re-invent my life and thought I had.

This is, of course, all as a way of setting the stage, giving the back-story as it were. Telling you, entrusting you perfect strangers with this most delicate of

stories, at least to me. Kind of wonderful about art, isn't it? We artists just put it out there. We've been blogging long before there was such a word. Painting portraits of our naked mothers, warts and all. Writing that song about "you're so vain you probably think this song is about you." One's most personal expressions of self, and yet they are all somehow incomplete without you, until we share them. Allowing a part of us to be consumed. By others. Hopeful it will taste like sweet fruit. Not day old milk.

But nowadays everyone is twittering away their most intimate undergarments of information to whoever will follow. Skype me- friend me- tweet away. This whole fucking thing will probably be on YouTube instead of a stage, who knows nowadays. We've created a culture of vultures-- everything becomes fodder- even our friends, especially our friends-- all however many your latest count on Facebook was of them. Twelve year olds are being arrested for blogging the want to kill their own parents. This is not a new phenomenon, patricide, familiacide, friendacide, the Greeks even had problems with it, but the confessional aspect of it, the inviting everyone in to feast on it, is. Got half of goddamn Iran typing in and saying how unhappy they are with their government, with oppression, sometimes to their own death, and here I am whining because I lost my apartment, job, and girlfriend. And in a play? Not even online, where I could set up a site and sell some Google ads. See what a dinosaur I often am?

The walls, by the way in my empty apartment, still have some of the screws and nails from where pictures had been hung. They are all now over at Flynn's, some wonderfully placed by both of us in that beautiful house. Some now, in just two days, taken down and stored in drawers there, waiting for me to come get them. But here, where I am sleeping: just nails and holes. And white walls with cracked paint. It looks like it must the day after the big blockbuster Van Gogh exhibition at the Met has closed.

*The lights dim to black and come up again.*

I was sitting in the subway not two weeks ago, well, not two weeks before the day I wrote this, which was a while ago now, anyway who cares about time in times like this— sitting on the subway. And an old boss of my mine, a professor of English at a college that I adjuncted at when just starting my teaching career- had to be fifteen years ago- came over to me and said, "Is that you?" An inquiry that is hard to so no to....And I said "Hi- Marc"- I will change his name as I will, and have, for everyone here that I feel I should—"how are you?" And we exchanged the pleasantries of those who reconnect on the Number One train after years sometimes do. Five stops to make up all that has been missed. Great about Obama, man this economy, and then he just grabbed my shoulders, with the urgency of but four stops left, and sat me down next to him and said "so how are you?" with the kind



of insistence that belied what he really wanted was for me to ask him the same question. So I said, "fine, fine", which I was at the time, "still at the university, though I really do need to leave. There just doesn't seem to be, I don't know"- fumbling for the right way to say it not wanting to seem unhappy but hopeful, just maybe, somewhere an inkling there might be a teaching job back at his university where I had started- "doesn't seem to be any room for me to grow or advance. I could stay there until I die I suppose, as an administrator, but I miss teaching more." And then I heard myself saying a bit too much, hungry as we sometimes are to just bounce our life's problems off of those who might give a fresh ear, "but really what do I have to complain about. It is brutal out there, and I have a job. How are things with you?" And the door had swung wide open and in he swooped. "Well to be honest, I have fallen in love. After all these years, I am in love. I have fallen head over heels, and I don't know what to do about it." 79<sup>th</sup> street was announced, and hundreds of people entered and exited, but not us- not our stop. So I was trapped, as if tied to the orange and brown seat- and truth be told, like rubbernecking at a car wreck, even though I wanted out, I wanted in. Now, my own relationship was tattered and, honestly unbeknownst to me, hanging on by a thread, but that is not what made me uneasy and want to run for the door at 79<sup>th</sup> at the same time I was not about to move. It was because I knew that Marc had been married for years. I had known his wife briefly. He spoke in torrents now- the hydrant untapped, I was the teenager that had opened him with a wrench: "I have never felt this way before, and I yet I know that it is probably doomed. But I don't care; that's the worst of it. I just can't seem to care." "Doomed?" I said, hoping to just find a way to say anything instead of the inappropriate rush of my own rage that was wanting out. "I met her when I was working in Singapore. We have a satellite school in Singapore now, did you know that? This big push to go global happened a few years back, so I have been teaching half the year there and half here." I thought of my school opening satellites everywhere there was money for them to do so, like the Guggenheim where my wife had worked. Open a school or a museum in fucking Timbuktu if they will pay you too. If there is some timbucks to be tued-- Go global, market the brand, we are big in Japan. There is even a New York college in Abu-dabi now. Complete with a huge endowment from the oil-rich emirates. "What ever happened to the sixties?", I found myself thinking. "They became the seventies. And then worse, the eighties" "She teaches there too. But she is much younger, just out of grad school, and... of course, I tried not to let it happen: the cliché of the mid life professor and his former student. But she is bright and beautiful and we have this intense love of literature" (Nabokov, I thought) "We both knew it was inevitable." And my judgmental thoughts of this subway soap opera were interrupted as I cross examined myself remembering of how I met my wife Cassey, who was a former student of mine, though only three years younger. I had only been teaching a few years, and she was in grad school, and trying to keep a student visa alive. So she took my acting class at the same university that

had sent Marc to Asia. My late wife, who was Taiwanese, and I did not date while she was a student of mine. That began over a year later, after we both had gone through disastrous break-ups. Aren't they all disasters in your twenties and early thirties? But it is how we met. She had been a student of mine. "So of course thousands of miles away, we see each other half a year, and she is- what- only fifteen years older than my own daughter. So it will all come crashing to the ground soon, I am sure. But I sit here every day wishing I was there", and his voice was full of such longing, such primal desire, that despite my anger at his infidelity which was very real, tremendous, and my own uncomfotability with having to be his confessor, I found myself envying the purity of his longing. 86<sup>th</sup> street and the changing of the guard, and still his gaze at me as if not a soul had moved, and we were in some ancient church exchanging confession or some Central-Park-West analyst's tufted couch. "I can tell you care about her a great deal." "I do, more than I can say. But it is taking its toll." So your wife--- doesn't know?" "Ajani?", he said her name half to remind me, and half to do penance, or so it seemed. "Dear god no. It would kill her. ("It probably already has," I thought, and now I was angry. I thought of all that was going on in my relationship. How our trust was being strained to the breaking point, not by any specific infidelity, Flynn admitted openly she was most likely incapable of fidelity, which amounted to an even more troubling lack of commitment- an infidelity in absentia- an infidelity to the idea of fidelity.) "We haven't been lovers for years my wife and I, just barely." ("We stay together for the kids"- was certain to come next, I thought. It was an Updike novel without the literary pretensions. Just a very old and familiar story) "But we just work on some level. She is as much a part of my life, as I am hers. We have been together for 30 years, you know, since graduate school. So somehow it all just is----just keeps happening. It's do-able. On some level. When I am in Singapore, I know this will never go further than this, and even though I am deliriously happy, I am sad. And when I am here, all I do is look forward to being there, long for it." And I felt so sorry for Marc in this moment, how lost he was, and yet he in some way he felt so found. How long would he be able to keep that life raft afloat, I wondered? He laughed, and said something about me sending him a bill for my services, as an apology for dunking me like those grateful football players do their coaches. The Gator-aid bath of anxiety I had taken on. And we said we must get together soon. And I said, "whatever happens, be happy. Do what makes you happy." And, even as it came out of my mouth, I knew it was only part of what I wanted to say. I wanted to say "but remember your goddamn vows to this woman who is half your life, and get into therapy with her!" But he was gone, out the door of our subway stop. And I stood on the platform, and all I could think of was: why does life hand you these things? Are they meals for you to feast on- take nourishment from, as any experience feeding you with some kind of emotional fortitude? Or are they treacherous berries, the apple kind of knowledge. The kind that boots you out of paradise forever.

That day I was headed to my rent-stabilized apartment to try and move some things back in to keep it mine. Here I was fifty years old, and most of my friends and family had houses and children and cars and boats, portfolios-markers of lives well lived. And I had no children and a rent stabilized apartment. (Which I have learned is another one of those things that when threatened with losing, like an administrative job that underpays you but that is still yours- if someone is trying to snatch it from you, like an older brother with the last chocolate chip cookie, you care not that it is stale; you will fight to keep it.) I had lived in this apartment for twenty years, all through my marriage of thirteen, and before and after. And I had even lived with another woman outside the City for some time, and had let my nephew live in it while I was trying to build that relationship which ultimately wasn't. So I had a recent history of spending time outside of the apartment while dating. Truth be told, like so much of my life, I wanted to have--- what is the name of the TV show- an Extreme Makeover. That's right, I wanted as much of my life as possible to be renovated- or at least a do-over. But not the way it seemed to be happening. And certainly not all at once. It's one thing when you go in for the botox; it is quite another when you suddenly need a quadruple transplant. So in my quest to somehow not be in this apartment but keep it, I had done something foolish, or at least reckless- actually criminal- from any rent stabilized landlord's eyes. I had moved a great deal of my possessions, some (who are we kidding) most of my furniture and clothes, into my new girlfriend's house- hoping that if all worked we would be building a home together. But, after the time before, I was certain I needed to keep my apartment because, well, there was a time before. These things don't always work. You need a "just in case." Newly single, I had forgotten that relationships sometimes have less shelf life than yogurt. Or at least mine were seeming to- and we will get to that pattern. (But it is similar in theory to that missing the bandwagon, as you will see.) But I was blissful then, the week before Christmas, moving Flynn's things into her beautiful new house in Brooklyn that her mother had bought her (big warning sign for those of you playing along at home), and then most of my stuff too. Is there anything more fun than setting up a house together? Building a home? I even moved the piano this time, the one that we had bought for my late wife because, even though she was sick and probably going to die, she had always wanted to learn the piano. Big fucking mistake number three, I learned. Never move the piano. Never. Especially if the woman who's house it is keeps telling you she is sure, then she isn't, then she is, no she isn't. Like Faye Dunaway in Chinatown: father, husband, father, husband- move in, move out, move in, move out....

So, empty apartment. Below market value in New York City, with a new roommate moving in as placeholder, but landlord's office in the basement. I can hear Mister Rogers even now, "can you say, eviction notice, boys and girls?" So I found myself in court for the first time, with my first lawyer- no

second. I had hired one for an artistic project that had fallen through a few years back. The one that was going to be about Shakespeare having been a woman. I know. I know. Another of my great get rich schemes: a documentary centered around a man with Aspergers who had come up with a theory, was sure, that Shakespeare was a woman. And not only that- but a black woman, and a Jew. Hop right on the money train with that one, I can hear you saying. But he was brilliant and very well read, and had talked me into seeing his point of view if not actually believing- well yes, I still might. See, there is an actual published poetess of the period, who would had been in all the right places and knew all the right people, including being a mistress of the head of all of the Elizabethan theatres. And she was a Jew and of Moorish descent. I can hear him pleading to me right now, he had the faintest bit of a stammer- like words did not happen fast enough for his intellect... “And t-there is no existing evidence th-that the Shakespeare from St-tratford could even read or write. N-not one thing in his ow-wn actual handwriting. Just th-three signatures misspelled- which was common at the t-time.” And there was something so compelling about this man, who might be walking around with the greatest literary secret of all time, and he couldn’t even match his sweater to his trousers, and had a bit of food always stuck somewhere on him. But, and here is one of the light motif’s of this here evening- I did not want to, could not see it- what was right in front of me: HELLO ! He also has Aspergers! And, well, one of the signs of that disease is an ability to trust others and follow through, a need for self implosion. So despite having worked on the project with him for almost a year and hiring a lawyer-- at his insistence-- to draw up an agreement, well after the fact, a year into working together- after we had traveled to Stratford together and had filmed him asking Stratfordians what they thought it would be like if Shakespeare was not the one who actually wrote all those beautiful plays- which was amazing footage, and then interviewing some of lines of Shakespeare-goers in Central Park, as we were sitting down to decide how to take the project to the next place to secure more funding, since I had paid for all the equipment and was doing this all on my dime, to write some pitches and presentations- he just walked Rainman-like away from our work. Refused to sign the agreement that his lawyer and my lawyer both had agreed on. Okay: Rule number two is never agree to do a project with anyone with Asperger’s, brilliant or not. And rule number one? Well, we will get to that in just a moment.

I miss that project, and still think the idea is worth exploring. But as they say: another day, another play.

So now the need for lawyer number two. Another marker of adulthood, of some kind of grownup place in the world- needing a lawyer. And here I was having to fight to keep my apartment because my landlord of twenty years (with his office in our building, or there would have been no issue; he would have never known) wanted me out. Now, this landlord, who is Jewish has

probably on some unspoken level felt some kinship to me (there aren't many, if any, Jews in our building, it is mostly Hispanic, and though he doesn't know that even when a young child and asked to practice, I was far from perfect- would not even cop to being culturally a Jew as many of the tribe like to describe those of us who have strayed. I have always had more ambivalence, sometimes resentment, though every now and then a touch of pride, than love for my heritage. But we had shaken hands and said pleasantries many times over the years, and now he was trying to evict me because I was only partially living in his asset. Never mind that I was paying rent on time and had never been late. Not once in all those years. But, in his eyes, if I wasn't making this my primary residence, he could have the apartment back. He could make more money off it. It could go up to market value. As he said to me, "I am not trying to fuck you. It is nothing personal. It is business." And of course this is the way the world works. Legally you have a right to do in business whatever it takes to make the most money that you can. And you needn't try and to begin to see anything through the lens of a moral or an ethical point of view. And that, in some ways, was what I was doing too--- something that was not fully kosher, but not illegal either. All that matters in this world is: is it legal? And will it profit? This is a man whose building was full of mold, possibly asbestos, who had tenants die of blood cancer, and, like my wife, lung cancer. And who knows if his property was toxic, and maybe a partial cause to one, or any, of these deaths. This is a man who held me after I got back to this country from my wife's death. Grabbed me in the hall and hugged me like Don Corleone, or at least the Lee Strasberg character. And asked how I was, and if there was anything he could do. I appreciated that gesture then, but I couldn't get past the feeling that somehow we both knew that his building might have played a hand in her death. And in the death of my last pet, my dog Garbo, also from lung cancer a few years earlier. But that would remain like so many things never spoken of in this life, that exist unvoiced, except if feeling bold, in our therapist's office. So why, do you ask, do I not leave the fucking apartment behind and get out? Especially if I think it may be toxic? Because it is a rent stabilized apartment in NYC, and just as badly as he would like to have it to make more money, I need it stay an artist in a city that every year is growing much too expensive for artists to call home. I pay about a third of the market value I am told, and I have no proof besides my own possible hypochondria that it is a killer abode. So like those homeowners just outside three-mile island- on what- four-mile island, I guess, I stay put. Toxic or not, like my friend Marc. It just keeps happening.

Just one more of those silly tangos I found myself two stepping my way through. So let's recap: 1.) The killer apartment that I am fighting to keep so I won't be homeless. 2.) The relationship that is sometimes still alive and often deader than a doornail, that any sensible human being would have left long ago, that I was still administering CPR to. and 3.) the newly created turmoil of unemployment at a moment in time when it felt like the national,

hell even the international, beehive had been crushed, smashed in two, and all of us workers bees were scrambling to hold onto any scrap of honey.

This is right about where we will show the sexiest picture yet of the teenage vampire. And so I went to sleep on my dorm sized bed, in my empty apartment that could soon be mine no longer, and the lights dimmed.

*They do*

And came alarmingly back up.

*They do, along with the sound of a cell phone ringing too loudly.*

Because I got a call, Hello? (*He pretends to answer the phone, the ringing stops*) It was my doctor's assistant- since, I don't know about you, but I have to have a bleeding open chest wound, I think, or need paddling to be privileged enough to see my actual doctor. I'm sorry, that might not have sounded right. I meant the paddles that jumpstart your heart, not that she and I had a relationship based on canoeing or some sado-mutual abuse and pain. Though don't we all? All of us doctors and patients, we bond over abuse and pain. So my vet tech, or whatever they call these almost doctors, and mine is named Timmy, and he is impossible thin, and never looks healthy, skin the color of 1% milk, but is very kind, and he says "well all the numbers look good, no HIV, no hepatitis, no Lyme, but- (and here is what you never want to hear from any doctor, let alone a vet-tech, the dreaded BUT) but your iron looks low, could be anemia, and in a male we have to be careful with that. In a woman, it could be many things, but in a man it may mean some internal blood loss and so--- have you ever had a colonoscopy?"

Okay, so this could degenerate into some very low comedy, and I would not be the first to do a whole routine on the subject of anal probes. Still, I will refrain and say merely that I scheduled a test immediately knowing my insurance may be on its last legs- COBRA, they call it ironically, nothing like a poisonous viper to inspire health care- and trying not to fear the worst having been through it with two parents with a history of cancer, who thankfully were survivors, at least of that, and, of course, my wife who was not.

I was rushed into the arms of Doctor Lemoncelli, a colon guy, his description, who I swear all but rode his bicycle into the examining room- he was that healthy, young, and brisk. Backpack on, cargo khakis, with the feeling of male Mediterranean impenetrability. "Yes, lets do the test as soon as possible," he said with the urgency of someone needing a very good table for last minute dinner reservations. "When can you do it?" I said "not next week, but the week after." "In two weeks then" he said sounding a bit miffed. "Does it have to wait?" Now I was getting even more worried...

“Yes,” I said. “I’m supposed to be going away next week. To the Grand Canyon. Or, at least, I might be.”

“Are you out of your mind,” my friend Deb said, well into her role as friend and supreme confessor, which happened in each of my recent life crisis-es. Poor Deb. As if she doesn’t already have enough on her plate with her own medical issues, and two kids, and her teaching and writing. But she has always been a loyal friend, ever since I stumbled into a rehearsal room with her as she was cobbling together a show about surviving her illness and the bond it created with her son. She was there for me when I lost my wife, and the subsequent relationships nightmares as I tested the waters of the mid-life singles pool and online dating. I hope all of you are lucky enough to have a friend like her; it must be what it is like to go into battle as the Resistance instead of the Storm Troopers. You feel like there is unquestionable and pretty unmatched back up. And there are like two hundred and thirty of us, the friends of Deb, and she is like that to all of us. And we almost lost her last year, but like her mother, she is still clipping coupons.

“If you go on this trip, you know what will happen. This is a woman who has shown you that you can be all in her world, ‘my son wants you to go, and won’t it be great, we can see such nice places, I can hold your hand and get into your shorts, and you’ll drive for us right?’ Look, you can shut me up right now if you have to” (as if anyone could when Deb was on this kind of a roll of truth telling) “you can hang up, and tell me to go get a pizza. But at the end of the week, this is a woman that is going to leave you on the street with your suitcase. She is going to invite you right back in, having just thrown you out. And look, you are a wonderful man. She isn’t all crazy. She will have a great time with you, but there will be a shelf life there, an expiration date. And I will bet you dollars to donuts it is one week.”

“And why would you want to go,” I heard my therapist say. And of course there was no easy answer. Because I just lost my job, the trip is pretty much paid for and not refundable, and I will get to see some of the most beautiful places in America. Places I have always wanted to go.”

“You can go with other people,” my sister chimed in later. “With the right people. With people who don’t treat you like crap.”

“Dylan really would like you go,” Flynn had called me to say. And I actually was not surprised. I knew Dylan would be sad for me not to go, he sort of liked me. As much as a soon to be nine year old can like a new person in his life, since he had gone through two others in the few years since his mother and father had ripped his family apart. But he had taken to calling me his step-dad every so often now- at the most unpredictable times, sometimes just when walking the dogs and meeting strangers, sometimes just to say, “that isn’t my dad, he’s my step-dad.” Which somehow made him feel more

secure on some level, and was a very sweet sound to me. Though I often would feel protective, probably of both of us, and would later try to talk about it, correct him. And he would say, “well you should be. If you ask me. Mom and you should be married.” And he would shrug like DUH. And if only relationships were as simple as a nine year old sees them, but of course they are not.

Nothing is.

“I mean I can’t even lie to myself and hide behind the I am doing it for Dylan excuse,” I heard myself saying to all three of my travel attachés. And I could hear all three of them, therapist, sister, friend, saying then “why would you go?”

“Oh, please...,” my mother said with the ultimate voice of Eeyore resignation. And she did not even have to say the rest. It was implied- do not go.

“Of course I’d be a liar if I said the trip would be daunting and hasn’t been causing me a great deal of anxiety. I have a lot of anxiety over----well--things that I am not very good at, the logistics, the getting to places, all the tickets are in both of our names...”

This was Flynn in one of our joint therapy sessions. We had been working together to save this partnership, though Flynn had said she always wanted to begin her next relationship in therapy together, which actually (yes, I know another huge red flag) seemed cool to me. So very early on we began couples therapy, we would do this from the start and see where it lead us. The last woman I dated (actually lived with for a time as well) was a single mom too, and when she began to pull away, I asked if we could go into therapy together to better understand why we weren’t working. And she refused. Now, mind you, this was a woman whose mother was a therapist, had begged her ex husband to go into therapy, and had been in therapy herself when we met. She told me once that her therapist had told her that she thought our relationship was a good thing, that I was good for her. And the next week she told me she had quit her therapist. That relationship was full of much of the same; you can’t make this shit up stuff. But you will see the patterns of denial of what I was actually facing were already there. I was like one of those Clydesdales with their head in the bucket, blinders on, munching the mulch, clopping along as the wagon pulled out without me. I could only see what I wanted to see.

“Be nice to hear that you would want me to go on this trip out west because you would actually like me to go, not just Dylan.” I said taking my head out of the bucket just long enough to say something obvious.



“Of course there is part of me that would like you around,” and then to our therapist, Dr. Must- her name- which always felt incomplete ---“he is fun, it could be very fun, he can be very fun. And Dylan loves him. And yes, I could see us having a good time too.” Man was she ever struggling with this. “If we could just be in the moment. See part of what always happens for me is I see us doing fine, we are actually having a good time—but he will get all moody and sad, sulky, and he will say something like see we actually can do this, we can have a good time, and why can’t you just see, can’t you just see this and that. And all this talk about tomorrow, and the next day, and what does this mean. And are we building, always building. Why do we have to be building anything?”

“You mean commitment?”

“I am talking here, aren’t I?”

“Yes, sorry.”

“I should have listened to myself from day one, our first date--”

“Which you were late to”, I thought, but didn’t say.

“He was talking about commitment this, and how he hated dating, want to find someone to build with, always about building and work-- like some kind of construction project. And I was just coming off of something and looking for, I don’t know--- Just a good time, someone to have some fun with.”

“And so I forced you to go out with me. Have a good time with me. Stay in this relationship as long as you needed me”- again, all unsaid.

What I did say, and I am sure by now most of you with half a brain cell and a metro card are thinking, was “I sound like the jilted girl in this, and Flynn is like the quintessential guy. Like can’t we just hang out and have some fun, the dance away lover: “What is wrong with that?”

“Why does it always have to get so heavy...?”

I hated this role reversal.

“Yes, well then grow a pair,” I’m sure she was thinking. But she did say, “What would be so wrong with just enjoying each other?”

“Nothing” I said, “if you are in your twenties and don’t have kids and problems greater than Clearasil can help with.” And I thought of how precious time was to me after the loss of my wife, and Deb who faces

mortality daily saying “I just don’t have time for it anymore. People who don’t know how to step up to plate. The terrorist level is like elevated and then orange, whatever the fuck that means. And we are in an endless war, and the icecap is now a Slushie, and sometimes I worry that I won’t be able to swallow. So I have to say I am interested in people who are at least willing to commit to their actions. I just literally don’t have time for it anymore. I don’t ask you to do anything you don’t want to, but if you want to be in my life- my game- my friend, then step up to the plate, Mookie, and take a real swing.”

“I have lots of couples that if they actually had to make a commitment, had to actually take the relationship that one step further, the whole thing would fall apart.” This was our therapist- who never seemed to think anything that happened between us was positive or negative. Is that the secret to good couple’s therapy? The Switzerland approach- just deposit the money in the bank, but don’t ever taking sides.... “But as long as they find the boundaries, and can stay within them, as long as that can work for both, then they are happy for many years.”

And I tried to listen to this and sense as to whether I was just pushing the issue, my own fears of loss and impatience. Could I just back off, was it just me, too hurriedly trying to Crazy Glue back my life?

And I heard myself say- “okay, but here is the thing with being in the moment. How do you get over the fear that the next moment will be taken away. (And I was not speaking of my losing my late wife- but on some level of course I was- I was thinking of how many times Flynn had already run from this, only to come back when she missed it or needed something. Again the macho guy role. And I caught myself before letting them catch me: “which is of course exactly the problem, not being able to just be in the moment.”

And Flynn just had this sweetly defiant look on her face, see?

*Image onscreen*

So this is a picture of a teenage vampire at the foot of the Grand Canyon.

No, this is a picture of me at the foot of the Grand Canyon. And they were handing out fool’s caps, but I felt that wasn’t actually necessary. It was clear that just being there was motley enough.

“This may just be one of those moments in life,” Deb said, “That you cannot, for whatever reasons, do what you know is the right thing to do. And therefore, whatever you do, will be the right thing. The temptations, or your

inability to be strong, or whatever, this just may be one of those times you can't say no."

*The lights dim to black and then come up again.*

There is a horror movie that I once saw, well into adulthood, but it has stayed with me. Now, it may help to know I was a kid who swore after seeing King Kong- I think I was four, the old one with the special effects that probably now, like you can see the zippers, and the seams of the monkey suit, but back then? To me, it was absolutely real, and it terrified me, and, for years after seeing it like this (*gesturing peeking out of open fingered hands covering his eyes*), every shadow was a gorilla. This was when every movie was some plot to stick a pod in your head, or a robot from outer space, or some Japanese gargantuan unleashed by the nuclear threat that we must all run screaming from. I remember many a day playing outside with Karl Kolb, whose dad was cool, a former race car driver who never once touched the brake when he drove. My Dad sold air conditioners to builders, in Miami, which should have made us millionaires, but somehow didn't. But Karl Kolb's raced motor cars, and we would be playing as if the mounds of his more manicured lawn were army bunkers or something. And I remember thinking: this is it. This is the day Godzilla was going to come thumping over the horizon of Southwest Miami, crushing all in his wake and creating untold mayhem to my world just west of 136<sup>th</sup> Street. Which of course does little to help foster a "be in the moment" kind of guy. Good, you are following along well at home, I see. All that is to say I am no stranger to an active imagination, which I like to believe has been channeled in productive pursuits over the years, and has not always been limited to gloom and doom. Though my current series of events does little to dissuade that argument.

So anyway, I don't really care much for horror movies to this day. I often think you are supposed to outgrow them. The need for them. The attraction to them. Right about the age that you graduate from college and the horror of the real world, and doing your own laundry, and getting a job, makes the rest of that hockey masked mayhem look tame. And, truth be told, I just think the world has enough terror, why add to it? Large body counts in a movie have never appealed to me. It's the roller coaster thing. I was never that into feeling unsafe- motorcycles, skydiving. Trust me, this hardly makes one a chick magnet. But there is this one recent horror movie that had these demons or people from the nether world in it. Hang in there, this is going somewhere I promise. This whole play isn't, but this part about horror movies is... (*said like in a horror movie*) Trust me. And the thing that was so scary about this movie was that they looked just like ordinary people and did not do anything demonic. Or at least outwardly. They just would give these knowing looks, like this, right after something horrible happened. And then scurry away. It was not so much like they caused it. In fact, they didn't;

they just witnessed. A guy would get shot, or a someone would get hit by a car, and one of these people would always happen to be there. And the hero of this movie, who was someone like Kevin Costner, or Nicholas Cage, Denzel, someone like that, would keep seeing them. Whenever something terrible happened. This probably rings a bell to some of you, but please do not tell me the name of the movie. And I am sure there was more to this flick than that, they probably ganged up tried to drag him to hell by the end of it or something, but I do not recall another single thing about this movie except these watchers. And I do not want to, and I will tell you why. Because there have been a few times in my life that I feel this has actually happened to me, or that I am neurotic enough, fearful enough to have believed that it was the real deal. Allow me to explain.

I can think of two very specific examples. And just to put a kibosh on this gloom and doom persona that I proving is my M.O. this has happened to me a few times in moments of great success as well. For example, I wanted nothing more to study with my acting teacher Uta Hagen. I was a Miami boy, wetback behind more than my ears, fresh off the boat as they say, and still wearing the worst fashion you can imagine when I came to New York. Just another theatre kid, but my pilgrimage was not about Broadway and the bright lights. What brought me here, without knowing a soul in this city but my mother's second cousin Roz, who was seventy something and edited crossword puzzles, was to study with Uta Hagen. I had read her book, Uta's not cousin Roz's, and it was one of those ah-ha moments. Like when I heard Deb speak to our students and went right up to her after her talk and said "you do not know me from George Bush, but I would very much like to know you and make art with you somehow. Everything you just said made more than perfect sense to me." That was how I felt when I read Ms. Hagen's book, probably in one sitting while working in the toy area at Jefferson's discount department store, which was like a Target without the cool factor. So I think I was in New York, what, about two days, and I went down and I auditioned to be in her advanced scene study class. She did not have a beginner class. That should tell you everything. But I was about as advanced as Dora the Explorer. No real experience especially in auditioning—this was my first New York audition, which for those who have never gone through one, all I can say is it must be like what it actually is to sleep with Angelina Jolie, or Brad Pitt, or both. Not the fantasy, but the sad reality. Your fantasy is finally coming true, but somehow all you can think of is how inadequate you will end up being... So out of your league. I peed six times before and probably two after- that audition, not in the fantasy...and could taste my own heart in my throat. Thousands of miles, and what if I just wasn't chosen? But, somehow, right after it was over, I knew I would get in. Now three hundred sixty something people auditioned that day for about ten slots, but I did not know this. I just knew somehow, like Flynn described once just knowing a higher power had helped her with her addiction, I knew I was going to get in. I do not ascribe these moments to divine intervention

as she did. When pressed to explain them I think of them as being in some kind of zone, the tube, I think surfers call it, when you are riding that perfect wave and exist both inside the water and out- right in the middle of it- just perfectly in tune with your own life. With the rhythm of what is meant to be.

So back to the two best examples I can give you of the dark side of this uber-intuition. My wife passed away in Taiwan, we had gone back to let her family be a part of her passing, and I was by her side throughout, but it was her journey to make with them. And they began it very reluctantly, struggling to want her to fight long past the time that it made sense. Days before she passed, they finally allowed her to have peace and understanding, and though she just wanted a simple cremation and no other worry for any of us, once she was gone, they insisted on following traditional customs of mourning and formal internment. Again all of this is another story, but I was very tired and drained, and it was another three weeks of chanting and customs and allowing her spirit to be acclimated to the “other” side, some of it quite metaphorically beautiful, some of it just plain illogical and, to me at least, painfully silly. And the day of the final internment in a high rise mausoleum that the family had chosen, rather than in the temple near her best friend who committed suicide where she had expressed a desire to rest, on like the fourteenth floor, row ten, space five, hundreds, probably thousands, of soul cases, would be hers: complete with a very simple jade urn behind a mockup of our living room back in New York with miniature furniture chosen by her sisters just to make her feel “at home.” Even a little porcelain replica of Garbo our dog. After this ceremony, the family gathered for a farewell dinner. The Chinese are always eating. Like all cultures, doesn’t matter which you are from, they all vie to out eat each other. And as I was walking out just before this meal to go for a run, I think, to try and find my body again, I stepped out onto the street and felt someone touch me without even touching me. I turned and there was a very dirty, blackened tooth, beyond unkempt, homeless man standing there with a rag-like outfit right off the rack of central casting for homeless scary bum. His face was covered in the soot of not having bathed or caring to be clean, and his fingernails were like the ebony keys of a cracked piano. His eyes felt lost, like those of a wax figure, lifeless and yet not dead, and he was staring right at me. As if to look right through me. No, not a word was exchanged here, not a grunt. It was one of those moments where slow motion seems to take over life, as if the urgency or danger of the moment wills you to experience in a different reverse warp speed. Soldiers talk about this, as how battle is experienced. And this Chinese man, whose grimy face had the feel of some kind of war paint, reached out his hand and placed his palm right onto my chest just below my sternum. He held it there, and looked me right in the eyes as if to challenge me. I was certain he was challenging me. And I could feel a kind of pulsing of energy, electricity of some kind, pass right though him into me. Now I had not slept well in weeks, and was in the throws of deep grief and mourning, so all of this could just be chalked up to a tabloid

truth, believing what you need to or choose to believe as when folks say they were abducted by aliens in the cornfield and molested. But I can only tell you this: it happened, and it somehow felt protective, like being provided something... out of the realm of normal. He let go of my chest, and the heat disappeared somewhere deep inside me, as if becoming part of me. And his look actually changed, as if he was giving me permission to go now. That somehow I had either passed his energizer electrical test, or he had done with me what was needed. And he disappeared into the impossibly and always busy Taiwanese streets. Gone.

The second event was just two days before I was fired. Have I told you that I had what felt like the swine flu the days before and during this whole story? Flynn had been very sick, and then so were two of her kids, and there were five folks in our office coming down with what was obviously a bad cold or a flu that was going around. Now this was also the time that the news was inundated with reports of the latest pandemic, counting the deaths from what might be as bad as the flu of 1918. I had terrible weakness, and though was only running a fever of a couple of points, my whole body was shivering, and it was an effort to walk. New York City is a tough place to be even healthy, so it can be very tough sick. In nine years of employment at the university, I had not taken one sick day. I have always believed unless you cannot get out of bed to get to work, there is work to be done. I like my vacation days, do not get me wrong. I use them gladly, but besides a cold and the occasional eating something bad, I hardly ever got sick. So it was not the norm for me to be lying in bed in Brooklyn deciding to stay home that Thursday, to protect others too, I knew I should. I had no choice. And I knew I needed rest, and there were memos going out that if you felt like you were sick you should stay home. So I did. Now Flynn was not unsympathetic. She would ask how I was feeling, but she always slept in another room when I got any sign of a cold. Too much noise at night she would say, I can't sleep. Now this desire to sleep in another room—okay, that might be just smart. And she would always couch it as look, when I am sick all I want is to be alone, so I let you be alone. But it was the lack of desire to truly care, I think she brought me a muffin once from a store that she got one from, the entire four of five days before and during when this thing had wiped me out. And she made me a sandwich one day. And I remember it feeling like better than a birthday present, and almost as annual. So my feeling terrible began on a Wednesday, literally once I was already at work, and so I decided to leave uncharacteristically two hours early because I suddenly felt as if I was going to pass out or pass on. My body was in a battle with something, and it felt like one of those Sunni tribal conflicts that might rage on unending. I got on the subway, and has this ever happened to you? Every single person on it looked like someone from the Voyage of the Damned. Now this may just be a question of me passing too harsh a judgment, and needing much more than the lifetime of therapy than I am already resigned as my penance for waiting until I was forty. But there was

not a person on that train that looked employed, sane, or well adjusted. This could have been the time frame, mid afternoon- before school let out and after lunch- though this was not one of those three in the morning zombie expresses. It just had that feel. It was the kind of atmosphere that made one aware of mortality. And not in the “there but for the grace of God go I” kind of way because, well, for one thing- grace or not, I was going there. No, this was more when somehow a group of complete strangers reminds you of what a fragile thing life is, and how some folks are just clinging to it. There was a man with what seemed six chins, a women with frizzy grey shocks of hair and unmatched clothes eating something that looked and smelled like gruel from a Tupperware. A Hasidic man with mounds of dust all over his shoulders and lap, like he could be the keeper of a Golem. You get the picture. And there were many of the misbegotten, leaving only one seat, and I needed to be on this train for about forty minutes and was leaving work because I could hardly keep my eyes open, let alone stand up. Do I look like these people? Did I take the wrong train and end up on the Limbo Line? Is this what happens once you get swine flu? Does everything look this way as you begin to die?

Now, I told this story to Flynn that night, and she laughed and said, “You have always been bit of a hypochondriac, haven’t you?” Of course there is possible truth in this. I always did wonder why she would kiss and ignore any germs when her kids were coughing up phlegm and touching everything in sight (and actually would fall asleep holding them.) But I understood the bond of motherhood ignoring the lack of preservation in us, and I know that kids are one big germ factory and that is all that can be done about it. I am not one of those that Purell my way through the day compulsives, and I was, after all, having intimate encounters with someone who could give me a life long disease and had long ago resigned that the statistics of that would just have to be forgotten. So hypochondria or sometime cautious, you decide. But I did know this: right this moment I needed to sit down, or I would pass out. I may or may not be a carrier, but it would not be pretty for anyone if I pass out. So large as I am, I wedged my way into the only seat left.

Next to me, as I, their potential patient A, traveled on this subway of fools, on one side, was an impossibly wide man who was wearing shorts and had thighs with faint blonde hairs and pink veins bulging out, and his lower legs did not seem to get any thinner until they disappeared into his black socks and sandals. This man was taking up two and a half seats and listening to those large headphones that used to be in those ads for Pioneer stereos back in the seventies. Those big round princess Lea kind of headphones. And he did smile to me like go ahead, there is room, sit down. And of course did not move an inch including shutting his gaping thighs that were spread how some jerky men do on the train, oblivious to the fact that they are spread open. And you could feel his fleshiness as it began to take shape like those memory foam beds to fit against you. But it was the man on the other side of

him that was the cause of me wanting to lean even further into the blonde haired mattress than I should have. He was almost bald with one very long shock of dark grey hair that was hung to the side almost like a ponytail but from the center of the front of his head. He had angular chunks of features as if carved from granite. Gargoyle like. He was wearing a faded green shirt almost as if it had been washed so many times it just barely had color still in it. And some kind of baggy ill fitting pants given to him or from a much healthier time and age. He was not frail however, he felt strong, sinewy, but dangerous sort of like that man in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that had that Ben Stiller forehead and hardly said a word. Just beady eyes- wait- that was the same actor who did the *Back To The Future* Movies, wasn't he? God, he was much better in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Haunting. Not cartoon, over acting. Anyway, this is what this man next to me seemed like. And we went about four or five stops. And there was now sweat coming from the doughy man with the headphones, but I was not about to lean any closer to my right because I just knew this other fellow was trouble. He was looking about the car at everyone. Daring each and everyone to make contact with him. Even the woman with the mop of frizzy hair was looking away. Just another New York psychotic, I thought. Four more stops to go before you have to transfer. And just before we got to Hoyt street (which has always sounded like the need to spit to me), he turned and, again, with a kind of deep stare, he raised his hand and I thought, great, he is going to cause trouble. And I will not be able to run, because I cannot even feel my legs. "Hoyt Street" the announcer hawked, and the doors dinged open. And he was still staring hard at me, and then he made a motion like this, like measuring less than an inch, like when you say an eentsy bit of something. He held that measure of something there for at least five seconds. And then he laughed with out a sound and got up and off the train just as the doors dinged and began shutting. And he was gone. Okay, now ordinarily you just say "only in New York." But I was very sick, sicker than usual, and here was an otherworldly man measuring something, or me somehow.

Was the heck was that? Was Doc Brown passing some kind of a measure of sentence on me, holding his hand like this, or was he just casting aspersions on my manhood? Was he sending me a sign that I actually have about this much time left to live? I mean I was shaking with fever already, sweating, and fueled with Chuck Scarborough having announced yet another death from swine flu- and this one is a teacher. I rode the rest of the way deep in Brooklyn wondering yet again why this had happened. Why I was feeling way worse than normal, and that some kind of impending doom was on my way.

*The lights fade to black and come up again.*

Now, I had passed one of those feverish days and nights and felt marginally better the next morning as was just grateful that I must not be going to die



no matter what the F train man's sign might mean. I couldn't be dying-swine or not, I actually felt better, not worse. I got up to walk the dogs and was relieved that I felt good enough to go to the exercise class that I teach at the Westside YMCA early in the morning before work. I enjoy it, and it forces me to work out no matter what, but I certainly do not do it for the little bit they pay me. I do it because I love to teach, I like getting to choose the music I play, the people I give a good sweat to, and if you are the teacher you have to show up, you can't wimp out for some sleep instead. Now trust me when it is pouring down rain and pitch dark outside in the middle of winter and bitter cold, you do wonder why you are keeping this commitment in your life. And this would have been one of those what am I thinking days, because I had not gotten a sub for the class gambling I could get though it. And lucky for me I did feel just strong enough and just better enough to make it. Now I had not forgotten, but had put aside any deeper worry because of my weakened state, that I gotten an email on Tuesday asking me to meet on Friday with my supervisor, the chair of my department, Beth Braddock and a representative from HR to re-configure my job description. The meeting was for eleven o'clock today, Friday morning. Now I wasn't totally clueless to the climate. There had been emails hinting of possible university wide cutbacks and we had all been told there would be no raises and a hiring freeze. Except for essential positions, we were told. Apparently I was in the middle of an essential and unessential situation.

"How are you feeling today," Stuart my new direct supervisor asked as he popped his head into my office. Stuart was newly appointed just the day before, buoyant from his good news- had served a year as interim managing director, and before that promotion, as assistant to the old chair- but in the wonderful corporate way that some rise while others fall, or just stay put, he was on top of his world. He had been given the task to look at all of the staff positions in the department to see if the current job configuration was the most efficient and what tweaks might be needed, and we all had to write out our job descriptions as we saw them, and what were our areas of tasks performed. In retrospect, that is like asking Madoff's investors how they see their investment being parlayed, and what rate of return they hope to expect. Now Stuart was a very nice man, who recently married someone also from Taiwan, and we had bonded over that, but what I truly admired in him was that he seemed to be a man of great principals. During the adjunct labor strike a few years ago, Stuart was the only one on the staff that would not eat the free lunch that they gave us so we would not have to cross the picket line. We were all former starving theater artists, you put a free piece of beef in front of us, and it would be like those stampeding pilgrims who hightail it right over the fallen bodies to get a better glimpse of Mecca. But Stuart, week after week, would refuse to eat in the Scab Café, as the meals jokingly became known as. And they kept the café open, long after the strike was squashed because the upper administration, the twelfth floor as they were called, as in the top floor of the twelve story building- those with the power,

realized that if you feed the troops once a week they somehow get along better. So every Wednesday, the café was still open. And Stuart who had once been on a lower rung of the administrative totem pole, who was once, in the university's hierarchy of seeing things, not even a peer of ours, had become a colleague-- and now officially our supervisor. And Stuart had even a few months ago begun eating the free lunches right along with us. So much for principals... Whatever happened to the sixties...? I remember reading the radical Abbie Hoffman's manifesto, *Steal This Book*, back in the day when my limbs just began to sprout, and I was letting my hair grow long and saying "cool man". I remember that it was this wonderful primer for how to live an non-conformist life, not worshipping at all from the alter of consumerism, furnishing your house with cinder blocks and rubber tire furniture, written by one of the angriest of the Chicago Seven, who were not a modest bunch, and I loved the title of that book. Like my favorite coffee shop on the east side- *Eat Here Now*. It was a declaration, a call to arms, an imperative, do not buy this book! Steal it! The book that some stupid publishing company was foolish enough to publish and put on the shelf, and someone was therefore probably paid to write. No way, man. Put your hard earned money back in your fucking hand tooled wallet, and cop the motherfucker, man, steal it. Now I must tell you, I bought the book, used, but still- I paid money for it. And it was not because I was beyond a petty theft. When I was little I shoplifted many a candy bar, and even got caught stealing the calendar from the *Let It Be* album when it first came out. I was dragged into the security office of Jefferson's department store, the very one I ended up working at years later, straightening toys. My mother, who had been grocery shopping at the adjacent Winn Dixie Grocery, was called in horrified that she had raised a juvenile delinquent as a son, and I was so ashamed. I was what, maybe twelve. I had tried to steal the calendar not the album, I suppose that saved me, what kind of dolt takes just the calendar- no mastermind of burglary was this one, that and the fact that my poor mother was beside herself. And that I had no other prior felony--- or record of any kind. I swore to them that my life of crime was now over, which it was, except for the occasional second cup of soda at those self serve soft drink dispensers. And my current rent stabilized apartment swindle. I swore to the Jefferson's Discount Department Store Security Squad that I understood that I had done wrong, and apologized crying to my mother. I was so sorry for her, I remember. For putting her in that situation, and I wasn't even yet a big Beatles fan. I liked them and all, but Christ I was forty before I realized the pun in the title of their name. I knew the spelling of the bug was different, I just did not catch the oh so obvious musical pun- Oh, what a dork I am- duh Beatles, I remember as the light bulb that should have gone off ages ago finally turned on. Late for lunch again... Any of you that never figured it out til grown? I think there are two of us.... Really you? Well, see- you are this many days old, and at least you got your monies worth.

So the point, I think, is though I am a huge fan of titles with some umph, like *Steal This Book*, I have noticed that Jews, or at least lapsed Jews like me, do not fare well with declaratives. Ever since “Let my people go, even though shouted by an apparently chosen prophet of some renown, fell on deaf ears, so, would it kill you is about as close as we get. *Would It Kill You To Want to Read This Book*, does not pack the same punch. I was even going to call this not quite a drama: *Would It Kill You To Put On This Play?* But that might be an even worse ticket selling title than *Death Of A Salesman*. Oh, yes, that reminds me where I was...

“Nice to have you back.” Stuart said, seeming genuinely concerned, since I had been out sick for that one day and a half, and that was just not the norm. “Glad you are on your feet. I had it last week, and it is pretty brutal.”

“Yes. It is. Not out of the woods yet but...” and somehow I just sensed that I can see the forest for the trees was not the right aphorism to end on, so I just let it trail off there.

“Anyway, carry on, just wanted to say Hello” Stuart said sounding either like an out-take from the Office or Ensign Pulver in *Mister Roberts*.

“Stuart?” I called stopping him with just one spindly leg still in my door and, like the Woody doll in *Toy Story*, which he resembled, he popped back into my office.

“Yes?”

“You know I have this meeting this morning with Beth. I was told it was about a re-working of my job description.”

He was paused half in my office and half out. And he just looked at me for a moment, but with a look that was not grim or particularly covertly chipper either. His look matched his position- paused.

“I mean you are my direct supervisor. I just thought there might be something that you might know.”

And all he could manage was “I think you should just go to the meeting.” And popped out of sight.

“Of course I am going to the meeting,” I thought, “but could you not after being a colleague for almost nine years be a bit more of a human being than that? Nope, you are going to tow the company line.” Now this is red signal flare number two thousand, I think, if you are counting how many I have missed just this year alone. But I honestly did not think that what ended up happening to me was going to happen. I thought they were going to maybe

ask me to work nine months for less money at worst case scenario, or take a pay cut, or just change my title and make me a full time advisor without all of the fun and creative aspects of my previous job.

So now we get to the audience participation part of the show. And I hope you are all still with me and not nodding off. See, the lights have come up on you, so those of you catching a few ZZZ's because there haven't been any hot vampires for awhile now, well we can all see you. So for the audience participation part of this, I need one volunteer to play a scene with me. Don't worry you play me, and I didn't say much, and you have been watching me, so you have some idea how not so unique or complex the character of me is. Still, you can brag to all your family and friends you played a lead role centerstage once- Anyone? Good, you? Thank you, so much. Your name? Thank you \_\_\_\_\_, so much. *(to solicit applause)* Everyone? Don't worry, \_\_\_\_\_ you are sadly now playing me, so it will all go downhill from here very fast.

Now, I am going to play the dynamic and debonair Beth Braddock, *(brandishes an ornate scarf)* the new chair of the department, fresh from her reign at another prestigious university, brought in to revitalize and invigorate the sagging drama division in a school that spent millions renovating the perfectly endowed and newly named film and television department with stainless steel walls, flat screens, and state of the art equipment. We have blonde middle school bulletin board walls and an old VHS camera. We are a cash cow of a department with little hope to entice funders. We make the university tons of money, but only because we have 1400 students, we were the size of a small liberal arts college- not because there is a line up of sexy billionaire theater executives waiting to pin their name on us. So despite our success and reputation, we are hardly the showgirl of the arts school, more like Cinderella without the pumpkin and with no hope of any kind of makeover. Ball-less.

"I hear you are under the weather," was how Beth began. And she was dressed impeccably, put together, separates from the good rack of a department store, summer weight knits. But with too much of a print. She favored bright prints.

*Wraps himself in the scarf dramatically. The audience member speaks the lines of the main character and will play him for this scene, and as Willy Loman from the scene from Death of a Salesman, reading from cards given to them)*

AUDIENCE MEMBER. "Yes, I was not feeling well, got that flu that was going around the office, but I am better now. Thank you for asking."

ACTOR. (*To the audience member*) Perfect. Wonderful. But me, so not too exceptional... (*Back to the audience*) We were in the HR conference room, and the head of HR, Karen was sitting silently, both legal witness and gallows assistant, there to jump in if things got ugly or out of hand. I could just see the directive in the memo or manual, which stated never perform this procedure alone. Like cheetahs that hunt on the veldt, always in pairs. The good cop, bad cop should have sent off some kind of warning bell along with choice of venue- (and I found out weeks later at a get together with the staff to commiserate our firing, that my other colleague who was let go the same day, had been sacrificed just moments earlier in the very same room. He at 10, me at 11. It takes so little time to clean house. And not a drop of blood anywhere...) I was in this conference room just a week earlier to discuss a project that I had spearheaded to have online portfolios for all of the students for networking and casting purposes. A project I created and championed, without having been asked. Because I thought it would be great for the students. That was the only other time I had entered this spartan conference room.

“Well, then let’s get down to it,” Beth continued in her perfectly clipped and manicured voice.

And she began with the precision of a transplant surgeon with no need for anesthesia (and remember she had performed the same procedure just moments earlier with exactly the same ruthless efficiency.)

“The department is grateful for all your years of service, but we are here because as part of the initiatives that I have undertaken, and I have gone through an entire annual cycle now, so I feel I have some knowledge and keener insight as to how things ought to proceed. Your job, as I see it, has three components: the summer high school program which you are clearly no longer involved with, (they had taken that beloved part of my job away from me a year ago, when Beth first arrived, even though I had doubled it, and it was very successful. Said it had to be headed by a faculty member not an admin. was the reason I was given.) The internships, which I have decided you should no longer be supervising, because they are a graded class, and therefore should be overseen by faculty not an administrator (here we go again, I thought), the industry presentations and career counseling--well... the presentations I have decided need to be on hiatus until it becomes clearer how best to position them in the future, and we have career counseling at the school-wide level now, so to have a departmental career office is, in many ways, just a redundancy; therefore, the job of Industry Liaison in the Department of Drama no longer exists.”

And she paused just for the briefest of moments, and all I could think of was Howard from *Death of a Salesman*. I was living the scene from the Arthur Miller play.

*The Actor takes off the scarf and puts on glasses to play Howard and the Audience Member is given a man's hat to play Willy.*

HOWARD. Look it's a business, kid, and everybody's got to pull his own weight.

WILLY. Just, let me tell you a story, Howard.

HOWARD. 'Cause you gotta admit, business is business.

WILLY. Business is definitely business, Howard. But listen to me a minute, will ya? When I was a boy seventeen or eighteen, I was already on the road. And I met a salesman named Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old and he drummed merchandise in thirty one states. And old Dave...

ACTOR. *(Glasses off and scarf on)* And it is our University policy (and here Beth turned to Karen with a knowing look and Karen nodding indeed this is true) that if a job no longer exists, then this is your last day of employment. Effective immediately."

WILLY. Howard are you firing me?

HOWARD. *(Scarf off and glasses back on)* I think you need a good long rest Willy.

WILLY. Howard?

HOWARD. I've got a line of people to see this morning. Take five minutes to pull yourself together, and then go home will ya? I need the office Willy. Oh, and whenever you can later this week, come by and drop off your samples.

WILLY. Uncle Ben, nothing's working out. I don't know what to do. I need to talk with you....

ACTOR. *(Glasses off and scarf back on. Takes the hat off Audience Member's head)* "Barbara here will go over all of the details of your severance, but before she does, I would just like to ask if you have any questions?"

AUDIENCE MEMBER. Do I have any questions?

ACTOR. I am not sure if I even asked that or just thought it. I know I did look at her like do you have a beating heart in there anywhere, and stared for

the longest time. Collecting my thoughts and trying to have some words. And finally I said:

AUDIENCE MEMBER. I am sure I will have many questions at some point. Right now, I would just like to....

ACTOR. And the sentence trailed off as my shock kicked in. I never even finished it.

*(Scarf off)* “I know this must come as a surprise to you,” Karen from HR tagged in coming off the ropes. “So I am here to inform you of the most important details, and if there is anything at all that you might feel the need to ask. Please do.”

And with that Beth stood up and collected herself, her summer scarf or shawl, and said:

“Well, then. I will leave you to that.” And was gone with a toss of her scarf over her shoulders and out of the glass door onto the rest of her day.

I remembered this other scene from *Kramer vs. Kramer* where Dustin Hoffman- funny he played Willy Loman too, and he was being fired in this film too- happens at a lunch I think. And all he says to his employer who was his friend, after the deed is done and it dawns on him that he has been fired, all he says is: shame on you. And gets up and leaves. I wished I had said that to her. But I didn't. I thought it. But in the moment, I said nothing.

Thank you to \_\_\_\_\_ *(Name of the audience member)*. You did wonderfully. Though why you didn't just say fuck you, I would have. In the scene, not to about getting up here and performing... Wonderful work, wasn't it? Thank you again.

Now when I got back to my office I remember thinking I am so tired of packing (we had just moved both Flynn and I to Brooklyn not four months ago, and now I have I have to do it again.) And my office was full of books and toys and equipment and memories, I had made it as much a home as my home, and my students and colleagues always felt the warmth of that and appreciated it. And then onto the computer screen as I sat down popped an email from Career Services, again, I kid you not. Hot Jobs. The latest opportunities for employment and remember it is University policy to hire first from within. And the first posting that same day was for my job that was no longer needed and therefore being eliminated. My job re-titled and reconfigured, Career Counselor/ Academic Advisor- and it was one grade lower. Which means they would be saving the whopping sum of about ten to fifteen thousand dollars by replacing me. With no regard to how hard I worked for the organization, to my superior job evaluations, and to the countless students that I had mentored and recruited for them. And I

remember thinking she reduced my job to three areas and there had been at least nine or ten that I had taken on, and one of the largest was academic advising. Here they are advertising for a career counselor, which, according to her, wasn't going to be needed, and an academic advisor, and I had advised 79 students this semester alone. And she had made no mention of that facet of my work as even a part of my job, which was no longer needed and therefore did not exist. The whole thing was a sham. Shame on her.

*Lights dim and come up again.*

“If you get to the next level it awesome. The universe becomes like this roller coaster, or like this ride, and you have to gather as many energy triangles as you can- oh- it keeps stopping. I am so sorry. I get to this part and then it just stops. I'm really sorry. Can you fix it ?”

We were on the plane to Vegas, and it was so surreal. I had moved two suitcases back to my apartment- otherwise it was empty. A twin bed, some boxes, a TV, and some clothes. Most of my stuff and all of my furniture was still in Brooklyn. I was unemployed, had filed for my first claim right before leaving for the airport, my first claim since being an unemployed actor in my late twenties, and I had no idea if my relationship was truly over this time, but it certainly seemed that way. But here we were on a vacation together, and Flynn looked so beautiful, and Dylan was fighting galactic battles on the computer and watching an entire season of Sponge Bob on an iPod. And I was going to Vegas, and the Grand Canyon for the first time in my life.

Now traveling to the Grand Canyon with someone who is about to be your ex, well I trust the metaphors are just too damn obvious. All of the gambling metaphors, the tawdry what happens in... Have you been there? What a strange place Vegas is. Sodom and Gomorrah without the pillars of salt, and traveling there with a nine year old and experiencing all of the attempts to make the place more family friendly- even as the trucks advertising booty on call are everywhere. And the funny thing was that it was Flynn that was having the most trouble separating the sin from the city. We cirque de sol-lied and swam in the pool at our hotel with the huge neon clown out front, but it was clear that a trip to Vegas with Flynn would have been very different without her son.

“She was one of the most sensual girls I have ever met,” said her ex-lover Shannon who became a friend of mine a few months later as we bonded over the similarities of our time with Flynn. Shannon, was a lesbian performance artist and actress, who I had met briefly with Flynn, and who had remained entangled quasi friends as most of Flynn's ex lovers were in some way, another of those now forest of red flags....



“She was like a great drug, a vampire. You knew better, you knew you were gonna get burned, but damn she could turn it on, and when she did, look out. You were a goner.” The seduction period Shannon called it. And Flynn must have taken lessons from the sirens themselves, out Ninned Anais. None of it was affected either, sleazy. A flutter of her long blonde hair, a sly smile as her head was cocked to one side. Her trash talk, which should have been obvious and cloying, even in her writing- the use of cock or pussy for shock value- somehow with her, instead of feeling forced, she worked it. She had the most sensual of voices, like the love child of Marilyn Monroe and Miles Davis, breathy but chocolate deep. I wondered as I was being pulled into her world of amorousness, why, in almost anyone else, these things would be either laughable or pornographic, but with her they were just damn hot. Some folks are just wired that way, I suppose, part sex addict, part hedonist. But for a time, as you are held under their spell, you feel like you are living in a Klimt painting. If Klimt had a collection of toys and liked to use them.

Awesome, Dylan was saying as he ran to the Canyon’s edge. “Careful Dyl,” she said, so very often a great mother. That was the thing, she was. Until she wasn’t. “Not too close.” And I watched as mother and child climbed a tree and sat looking over the vastness of the Grand Canyon, and he curled up under her arm, and they sat there like some marmosets or something. Just surveying the world that was before them.

We had stopped at lunch, and I had eaten something bad, one of those instant cases of food working it’s way right through you. It was a diner that had a big sign: home of the world famous ho-home made pies. “We have to stop,” she said. “I want some ho-home made pie.” And she and Dyl laughed. He not understanding Ho might mean Ho, or perhaps he did. Regardless, she was laughing, so he was too. They laughed together like they were of the same mind, the same mouth, the same glee. We even bought t-shirts. Home of ho-home made pie. World famous. “Well, world famous for being not so good,” she said at the time she was eating it. “Kind of hard to ruin pie, but this is not even the best pie in Nevada, let alone world famous...” I had a salad with chicken instead of the pie that I really wanted because I was determined in this new reinvention stage to lose some weight. And it didn’t dawn on me until I was on this hike by the grand canyon how sick something in that salad had made me. My stomach was churning like the meringue band that used to play upstairs from me, complete with trumpets, so that none of us could sleep before three on a Saturday night. Every step of this hike had begun to be agony as whatever was kicking at my insides was trying to get out. I could have turned around, and should have, but we had already driven so far, and I wanted Dylan to have as much time as he could here. “I’ll be right back,” I said about two miles into the walk, and getting desperate, and feeling like I was going to explode, and we were at least two more miles from the nearest facility. We were on some trail at the rim of the canyon, and I found some brush way off the beaten path, so to

speaking, and I did like the wild animals do, and, because I literally had no other choice, got natural right then and there. There was something so bestial, primal and fitting about being in this most ancient of natural wonders and being so, well, one (or in my case two) with nature. I am not proud to admit it, but it happened and well, the Grand Canyon and I became fast and furious friends after that. We understood each other. Thankfully, I had some extra napkins and bottled water with me.

The blue of the sky was echoed in her eyes I remember as I walked back and saw them head to head looking out at the vastness of those walls.

“You okay?” Dylan asked. “Did you puke?”

“You okay, hon?” She asked.

I nodded yes, feeling the size of a canyon better. And then added “but don’t go down that trail for a few years.”

She had very large blue eyes, and they always had a kind of wisdom in them, not actually wisdom, but more like they had seen the world. Like an old sailor’s face. Weathered many a storm, those eyes. And she turned back and said, “it really is something to see, isn’t it.”

“Awesome”, Dylan agreed. “Like somebody made it up, only better. That is until you took a dump here.” And he ran up to me and jumped on me teasing me. “gross...”

Careful Dylan, he’s not feeling well.”

“Oh, that’s right. I wouldn’t want him to lose it again, all over me.” “Look, here’s a picture of him right before he turns blue.” And he was playing at taking pictures of everything. “And here’s a picture of me before I fall off the canyon, AHHHH”

She watched Dylan having so much fun, so gleeful. “Thank you for taking us here” she said. And she meant it.

“Thank you for having me.” I said. And I meant it too. And she kissed me very simply, and I will remember that kiss for the rest of my life. And Dylan, who was now taking actual snapshots of everything, took one of that too.

*The picture of the kiss appears behind*

And it only later occurred to me that it looks an awful lot like the embrace that the Norwegian painter Munch made and entitled the Vampires which hangs in the Met.

“Ewww, he just took a dump in the woods mom. That’s gross.” And with that he was racing off down the trail daring us to follow him.

I saw Flynn twice more once we got back from that trip. Once in our last joint therapy session which was not helpful. She had firmly decided that she needed to move on. That we were not right for each other, that something fundamentally was different in our natures, and it turns out she was right. More on that in a moment. She said that she had no problem taking some time. She didn’t want to date right away anyway, to take a break from each other. And that maybe it might help her to better understand what she did feel. And that she would like to see me every now and then, but not live together. Move on, but stick around. And I said does that mean that you don’t want to see other people while we take this step back?” And she said “I can’t promise that. And don’t want to.” And of course that was when the proverbial clock ran out on the session. And I knew on our love.

Two days later, she appeared in the dog run where I was sitting writing this, and she was dropping off “her dog” with our old dog walker who was there playing while “my dog” was getting exercise. Now remember she lived over an hour away in Brooklyn so to see her here and dropping off her dog in Manhattan was beyond odd. I remember seeing this tall hot blonde woman coming around the corner of the park thinking “Okay, well see--there are other beautiful women in this world” and then realizing it was her.

“What are you doing here?”

“Elvis had a vet appointment, and so I needed Peter to stay with him while I go to my shrink.”

I felt like she had invaded my territory, and she later admitted that she had on purpose. She had been hoping to see me. She missed me. And she said so. Sat right down in the dog run, put her head on my shoulder, and said so. And I had no idea what to do. You threw me out, you used me to take your son all over the far west, you unceremoniously fight with me one day before the trip is over so you can distance us, then you say in therapy that this should be our last session because you have never been in love with me? Only loved me. Not “in love” with me. Aristotle must have said that one originally, that is how overused that one is. And now you miss me?

Of course what I should have done was gotten up and walked away. Or acted like a quote, unquote man, or in this case woman, since she was doing her best imitation of a jerky male, and told her to fuck off. But instead I just sat there. She said in that way that she could tease and mean it at the same time: “hey, would it kill you to hold me for a second?”

I said “maybe not kill me, but pretty close.”

“Okay, then I will leave,” she said, not moving.

“And you took her home and fucked her again didn’t you.” Shannon said later when I told her that story. “Of course you did. That was the thing with her. Like Nosferatu, I’m telling you. Even after she dumped me, while I was in Africa shooting my bonobo video, she dumped me by email. Told me she had found this guy and had fallen in love. ( I have you beat I thought, and not because I was the guy that she had fallen for, but because she bothered to send you an email. I would find out officially on Facebook.) When I got back from Africa she would still call me and come by. Wanted to see me. Took me a year to get over her. To get myself away from her, finally had to say just stop calling me for awhile.”

I found out later talking to a therapist friend of mine something that helped put Flynn’s behavior in context for me. Whether it is valid or not no one ever knows with psychology, it is not an exact science, far from it. But she said this: “sounds like a clear case of disorganized attachment.”

And I said “what? Think of all of the dressers and counters in Flynn’s house full of clutter and things. Cubbyholes stashed to the breaking point.

When someone at a very early age has had real issues with a parent or both parents, abuse, abandonment, a bad divorce, any of a number of traumatic breaks in the normal course of love, then actual physiological damage can happen along with psychological. And this can manifest itself in addictions, eating disorders, depression, and manic behaviors. And an inability to stay in healthy relationships, and yet desperately wanting them, a pattern of starting and stopping them.

This was word for word a description of Flynn. And I thought of her complicated childhood and the relationship with both parents, often strained and only recently somewhat repaired. I even mentioned this to Flynn, the last time I saw her. That time that, yes, we went back to my twin bed and empty apartment and made love for the last time.

“Sounds pretty much like me, word for word, doesn’t it?” she said. With not an ounce of anger or defensiveness. “Just a mess of a woman, aren’t I?”

The next day I found out that she had posted her status as single on Facebook. So apparently then, so was I. She had changed her status line and officially begun the search to replace me. The very next day. That’s not break-up sex, that’s breakdown sex....

Now remember, I was out of work, fighting in court to keep my apartment or I would be homeless too, and still my doctor's wanted me to find out what was causing me to be so tired all the time. As if it wasn't clear enough...

Still they were worried enough to schedule a colonoscopy. And all I could think of as I counted down, literally, on the table, on my way to finding out if I had cancer, which of course no one wanted to say was what the test, the procedure, was for, was how fucked my life was at this moment, 98, 97- Flynn had volunteered to pick me up after the procedure, you have to have a family member or friend pick you up, I was fifty and had no immediate family nearby, but the person whom I had hoped would be my family had forgotten she had offered. I had to ask another friend, rather last minute, and of course all of this was a reminder of one feeling that I had right after losing my wife, that I had no one "in case of emergency please call", no next of kin, 94, 93--When my late wife had gone to sleep to have her cancer dealt with surgically, she woke up to find out that they could do the procedure, it had spread too much, and she cried more than I ever saw her cry the rest of the three years of her struggle, 90, 89, 88- and not two days ago Flynn was in my bed moaning and giggling so wonderfully as she did, she was a fearless lover, she devoured pleasure, 86, 85- and now today she was trolling the web for new blood, 84,83- and if I hadn't lost my wife, none of this would...

*Lights fade to black. As the lights slowly come back up...*

You can sit up now. Can you sit up? And there I was yanked back to this world from whatever place we go when we go under.

*Lights come up*

And the nurse was very sweet, though she had a squeak of a voice that felt out of tune. Now my Italian stallion of a doctor was nowhere to be found. And I was just sitting there. (*pause*) and sitting there (*pause*) and sitting there.

*He does for another long moment.*

I had put my gown on incorrectly. The two pieces of antiseptic blue paper, of course ill fitting, were even worse worn backwards. And cold air was slipping in, amidst sub-human notions of being a specimen, flesh, patient not person. And no one was telling me anything, even as everyone else in the hallways was racing by, and I thought "this is what my wife felt when she talked about how the well are on one side and the sick on the other, and this divide, this canyon that digs itself slowly into your life separates them: the well racing by, and the sick waiting in paper pants."

*He sits another few beats*

A week later it would be the zipping sound again of a body bag once again. I remembered my wife's form in a body bag. In Taiwan it is customary for the husband and family to travel with the body, and the soul, which is believed to be hovering overhead, is guided so that it won't be lost on the way to the mortuary. So that the soul can remain with its body since it would be confused in its new realm of being. "More so than I am by this concept," I thought? "You actually have to call out directions? This way, turn right, Cassey?" And that is what I did. You have to sit right next to the bag that was your wife, and lead her to where she will be staying before the funeral. This is not what they enact on CSI, or those horror films just meant to shock and awe. I had no preparation for this monstrosity. They don't show you how to be gentle and a reassuring guide for your loved one lying cold, right next to you a heavy-duty, Hefty freezer bag.

I remember, when I was six or seven, our beloved dog, Cash, the male half of brother and sister mutts rescued from the pound and named Cash and Carrie, I think by my brother and sister because they thought it funny- how Cash, a sort of black and brown mid-sized hound mix with a pig curl of a tail was found by me, or by one of us, perhaps me- no, running up moments later to one of us already grieving, already newly dead, though still early morning. He was like road kill on the side of the busy street out front of our house, flattened by some driver who had never even stopped the car, and some of the lower half of him was outside of himself, but his face was just sound asleep. And my father unceremoniously placed him out for the garbage men to take, no burial in the backyard for Cash, no calling out to guide his soul, this strong wonderful, playful, sweetheart of a dog. That terrible morning was my first encounter with death.

Finally the nurse came back in, nurses always seems so busy, like waiters that have too many tables to cover, and I asked "Am I supposed to sit here? And wait?"

"Yes, she said in C sharp flat.

"And will the doctor speak to me?"

"Yes", still sharp, now D.

"And will he know the results already, will he be able to tell me if I am alright?"

"He will speak to you in a moment. But you can get dressed. Someone should have told you that."

“Someone should tell me the findings of this goddamn test and not have me sitting around here like some house plant,” I thought but didn’t say, since she was clearly playing her supporting role and not going to attempt centerstage. And that’s when I realized that I was on an episode of *House* or *Grey’s Anatomy* or something with hunkmaster of the month for a doctor, who has now made me wait an agonizing forty five minutes to know whether I am going to live or die.

“You haven’t seen Doctor Lemoncelli yet?” she asked her voice sliding way down the scale. I didn’t appreciate the key change.

“No, I’ve been sitting here parsing time with the potted palms.”

“I’ll see if I can find him. Sometimes he gets started with another procedure and forgets to check in.”

I thought, “I would hate to yank him from whatever or whomever he is up to his elbows.” But I did manage: “it would be nice to know something sooner, rather than later.”

The very next day, I would be sitting outside Part F on the seventh floor of the something courts building downtown in the maze of courtrooms cluttering up the area near City Hall. And whenever down there for jury duty, or to be arraigned on my latest charges, I thought of my getting married. Not that I equate matrimony with felonious behavior or the court system like some of you might do. But because my late wife and I got married in City Hall- I know, how romantic. Some have destination weddings, ours was a hallway with bad plastic wall panelling ceremony. Right across the street there from the courthouse I was now in, fighting my attempted eviction. And after we said I do, they stuck the marriage certificate into some sort of authenticating device or time clock, ka-chunk, and you were on the clock as it were from that moment on. But today, I was waiting while my tall Irish or Scottish or some such fair-skinned-isle-of-the-feisty female attorney would be playing hardball with the younger son of my landlord and his crusty old Bronx-Jew-still-wearing-a-Syms-sport-jacket-from-the-seventies-no-iron-yet-still-somehow-wrinkled-slacks of an attorney. Back and forth they batted the shuttlecock that was my apartment until they settled on a settlement without prejudice, which meant that whatever was agreed upon here could not be used later on to prove anything. This seemed odd to me and my already fragile relationship with justice, but these last few days the cable channels had begun flipping so rapidly I couldn’t keep up. One day *Gray’s Anatomy*, then *Law and Order*. My counsel came up for air and assured me this was best for both parties and ducked back into the scrum. In case of future entanglements, a judge could not say that we had admitted that we had done anything wrong. Now I was

in way over my head here in the halls of the Part F, where apparently nine out of ten cases were settled outside the courtroom. In fact, inside the courtroom it felt like they hadn't tried an actual case in years. And I could feel her boring in on them, getting them to agree to stop not only this "action" against me, which was, in the words of my landlord, nothing personal- if you can call the ability to toss me and my dog right out on the street not personal. And she was like whatever the Great Britain version of Wonder Woman was called, bouncing their bulleted accusations left and right off her arm cuffs. Bang- change those clauses in my lease, things that I thought I had no idea I had the power to argue, and Bang- get me much more flexibility for more roommates if ever needed down the road. "Well, so now, about this," Wrinkles, their counselor, would say, and she'd interrupt with a Kapow before he could even see straight. When it was over, with me getting to keep my house, but having to pay for all my legal fees, the landlord's son came up to me and said, "If you don't mind me saying so, your council was one of the worst I have ever had to deal with. Of course you can work with whoever you want to, that is your right. But I am telling you, I almost walked out of here a couple of times. She was, I'm sorry, a bitch to deal with. I don't like to use that word, it isn't like me, but let's face it a bitch is a bitch." "Well, prick," I thought. "That bitch just saved my ass, and I am glad she didn't back down, because you bastards would have tossed me out on the street right there with the recyclables" What I did say is "I don't do this kind of thing often, so I have no frame of reference." "Well I do" this sort of balding before his time son of my landlord snapped at me. "And trust me..." "Trust you?" I thought, "Not as far as I can spit." "Well let's just hope there will be no more need for her. Because she cost me an arm and a leg, and I am a happier man when I don't need a lawyer in my life. I thank you for reaching this agreement, and let's both hope we never need to work with her again." And we went out into the sunny but sticky late July day from the bowels of Part F, and we shook hands and that episode of Law and Order was playing those closing cords of music and fading to black with Dick Wolf Executive Producer about to appear somehow across the sky.

*It does appear on the screen instead, behind him*

"I have to call the police. Oh my god, oh my god! Somebody, call the police." Less than a week later the channels would snap to CSI or Criminal Intent. I remember oddly when it was actually happening, thinking dear god, this is just like one of those awful crime shows. See time is getting all messed up here isn't it. Just like it was... where was I- I wasn't there yet- oh yes-Still Grey's Anatomy.

So I was still sitting waiting with the potted plants for Dr. Lemoncelli, wondering what next? Will I need to take that walk across the divide between illness and wellness? Have I already done it, and just don't know it



yet? Would this play just end too tragically, too maudlin, to ever even be performed? Would it no longer be about someone who rebuilds themselves like Lazarus meets Walter Mitty, or is it doomed to be a kind of Love Story without the Love, a sad sort of midlife (Kick) the Bucket List.

Lemoncelli came running up to me- was this man always in a rush- I hope when I was laying prone before him and he was prodding me he had managed to find some stillness, “Hey, sorry they had to run downstairs and get me, I was almost gone. I didn’t realize we hadn’t touched base. I had three of you here this morning and just--- there was a misunderstanding. Anyway, there is nothing serious to worry. Certainly- your colon was clear, and in your esophagus we found something a mild inflammation that might need attention, probably an acid reflux, that type of thing, have you been under some stress lately? (You mean other than sitting here for almost an hour worried I might have cancer and then you telling me that you forget I was here?) “Oh that’s right you have that job thing, right? (Or the don’t have a job thing.) “Regardless, the report will tell us in more detail, we took small scrapings, standard procedure, and we should get that in a few days so if would call my office for a follow up in a week or so, that is the best way to continue, alright?” (So am I fine, I mean should I be worried?) “Well we will know more after the report, but there should be nothing to have you more concerned, nothing definitive or worrisome to cause the low numbers.” And he was already halfway out the door, and he turned and said, “Make the follow-up appointment in a week or so.” And he was gone to run the marathon or swim the channel around Manhattan.

So the score, for those of you playing along at home was two out of four crises somewhat solved: kept my apartment, even if I had lost the other home I loved, and had outlived my most immediate health scare- even if there was no idea what was actually causing my blood to be anemic. Other than the obvious continental shelf of stress...

“Oh my god, it’s true,” I remember thinking. The most horrible truth and you knew it, and it is true. And yet it still didn’t even feel real. Even as it was happening. And may never. Just a few days later. As my life’s channel surfing went from Law and Order, to House, to In Treatment, to Grey’s Anatomy, to Desperate Housewives, no wait, that was someone else’s life- and back to In Treatment, that rollercoaster, all of a sudden, went careening downhill and faster and more furious than I ever could have imagined.

*Onscreen it does. But stops mid fall of the coaster- freezes.*

But what about right now? Right now I had just gotten the word that I did not have cancer and of course there was a feeling of relief, but happiness, true happiness? I remember thinking: I should be elated. I should go out and celebrate this, and then, but the one person I would like to celebrate with,

wasn't even there to hear the news. She had opted to not be there, even though she had volunteered to be my ride home- found out later she might have even been on a date instead.

"You have to forget about her," my mother said as I told her the good news, and then about Flynn because I was still so hurt by her not being there for me. "You need to be worrying about a job and not her." And of course she was right. "I have applied for about forty jobs mom this week alone. Don't worry. I spend a little bit of time each day on it. Actually a lot."

"Good. What have you heard? Have you heard from any of them?"

And she would ask this all the time when we spoke. That and "let me hear from you." I would call her every day since I had the time, just to check in on her, and she still she would say "let me hear from you.... Aren't mothers wonderful? They put up with so much. And what have you heard about any of those jobs?"

Job hunting in a recession. Need I say more? (*As if looking at and reading advertisements that also appear on the screen*) Here's one: Experienced male actor to play Jesus at theme park in Orlando. This position is permanent full-time w/ benefits, (I should hope so) non-union (Really now what would he say?), modest pay (seems appropriate), ministry oriented (no, really?). It would be good to have the general look of Jesus (as apposed to who, Marilyn Manson)- beard - can grow one or wear one, long hair or will get extensions, taller - to create the look, once hired.

Please email resume and headshot to Evan (Almighty?) at above email, and we will call you for a video audition at our Manhattan studio.

- \* Compensation: Salary with Benefits
- \* Principals only. Recruiters, please don't contact this job poster. (Please no Mormons)
- \* Please, no phone calls about this job!
- \* Please do not contact job poster about other services, products or commercial interests. (We have a theme park for Jesus, but no other commercial interests.)

Or this one, who contacted me saying my online resume looked very promising for the position, and to please call for an interview:

Total Lubricants USA, Inc. is headquartered in Linden, New Jersey. We are subsidiary of Total, S.A., an international oil company, and have manufacturing and office facilities in Texas, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Tennessee as well as a sales office in Germany.

We currently are looking for a Manager of Internal Controls. (Internal Controls for Lubricants? That is what my resume is kicking me out as perfect for?) This position reports to the Vice President – Finance & Administration. The nature and function of the position requires strong interaction with all facets of the organization including Business Unit Managers, Sales & Marketing Managers for all Business Unit's, the VP of Resource and Operations and staff, and the Manager of Accounting & Reporting and staff.

*The following Italics text continues as voice over underneath as the actor continues speaking over it. He sometimes pauses in disbelief as it somehow manages to continue on, seemingly forever.*

*This position is one of the key finance positions in Total Lubricants. The incumbent must have the necessary general knowledge of effective internal control systems, and also must be capable of acquiring the specific knowledge and insight regarding the company's operations, marketing efforts and information systems in order to meet the challenges of the duties mentioned above.*

I spent that entire summer as the unemployment numbers kept climbing further and further up, tumbling down the job application trail. I kept receiving the strangest inquiries for jobs that I would probably be terrible at, like Starbucks Manager, since I don't like the taste of coffee so therefore never drink it, and when I tested for the position anyway, because hell yes, you take what you can get when recession is tempting depression. And I was well into their two hour online manager weeding out test course, having handled complex customer requests and staff disappointment and performance issues with aplomb. But could feel the rejection letter being typed as I fumbled my way through the accounting and spreadsheet section of their pop quiz. Could I properly ascertain which specialty products were boosting revenues during the holiday season, was it cd sales or spice cookies according to the yearly versus monthly gains. Projected revenue verses product availability over the co-sign of grande extra bold. Visions of middle school and my dread of tackling trigonometry- is trig actually real or will I wake up from it, is there please, please, any possible way to avoid algorithms, or calculus- the word itself- like a rash or something that needed an ointment. They gave you two minutes to complete these eight questions. And as the seconds ticked off, all I could think of was my seemingly miraculous ability to have escaped college level math, which is about the only time I might have been talked into a belief in God, was coming back to haunt me. And sure enough I got a very frothy thanks, but no thanks, email response from the good folks at Starbucks. I was not barista management material, but that should not discourage me from seeking other career opportunities at the company. Perhaps something more to do with the muffins. Which I admire...

*The position requires of the incumbent the ability to be both a developer and “enforcer” of effective controlling mechanisms, as well as a provider of invaluable business information. The individual will be responsible for the following:*

About this time I contacted the school where I used to teach before, where I had met my late wife, almost fifteen years ago now. The same school that had expanded overseas offering my colleague, Marc, on the subway his newfound Shangri-la. And again you can't make this stuff up; I was offered what should have been a dream position for me, a full professorship, and on track for a permanent position. The only catch was that it was overseas, and yes, you guessed it, at the campus in Asia.

*Develop and implement the procedures and control mechanisms necessary to ensure that all key business processes are structured and performed with the dual goals of optimum efficiency and maximum protection of the company's assets. This effort will include, but not be limited to, procedures and controls in the following business processes: the “sales order to cash” cycle, including the pricing function; the inventory management processes, including the “mass balance”; the “purchase requisition to disbursement” cycle; and the accounting processes.*

Again not to look a gift horse ever in the mouth, I entertained this offer for the longest time. Certainly I had much to run from. And very little to keep me here except my dog and my dreams of producing this last ever one-man show. And yes my colleague was returning there for the fall semester, so I might even know someone. Philanderer though he may be.

*Document the aforementioned procedures and control mechanisms in the form of a “procedures and controls manual”, and develop mechanisms and perform the actions necessary to ensure compliance with the procedures.*

But I knew that the history of theater would never be altered if I went. Someone had to kill off the one man show, and if I ran off to Asia what would you have done this very evening? My dog, who you notice has been sitting here (and yes sometimes not), fresh from his stage debut that summer, who had been begging someone to write him another role would not be able to continue his run as the hardest working fox hound (*insert breed*) in show business. No, Asia would have to wait, and so I asked those same folks that extended the generous offer to teach overseas, if I might forgo and teach some classes here for the fall so I could think the relocation over, and not feel like I was gulauging my late life away like Ovid in exile.

*This position serves as the “point person” for the company in its interactions with the Group Internal Audit department, and will be capable of explaining to the I/A department as well as to Senior management the*

*Company's internal control system, and recommending changes to the system as a result of I/A observations and recommendations.*

And they were good enough to say yes, and found me some classes to teach and so life had come full circle a bit, I was back where I had met my late wife many years ago, were I had begun teaching in my thirties. As an adjunct, but it was something. And who needs insurance now anyway? My colon was wispy clean. I even found this copy of the acting textbook that was my late wife's with her notes and Snoopy stickers all over it. In the packing and moving from my office, I had lost my copy somehow, and I would now need it again, but I managed to find hers which she, and then later I, had kept, and I now use it to teach from. The old syllabus is still tucked inside the bookcover. And that just feels so kind of right, no?

*Collaborate with the Resource & Operations department, develop, implement and monitor the effectiveness, on an ongoing basis, of a "mass balance" measurement system designed to analyze the flow of materials through the production process, and to explain physical losses and waste by product category, location and process.*

I was also hired by Apple to run workshops (a Creative, they call it-Ha!) at their new store on the Upper West side. Hey, teaching is teaching in the middle of a recession, and working for Apple is a whole 'nother play, the clap in clap out of their retail culture alone, but there is one quick story that I need to throw in, it will make sense- you'll see. I was leading an in-depth Final Cut Pro class one day when the man himself, Steve Jobs, made an appearance. He was well into his illness, whisper thin and very frail, and he had a herd of associates buzzing around him, listening to his every word. And here I was mid-lesson, teaching how you could clip footage and add transitions- change the time line to be whatever you wanted, you are the editor of your project, throw in this transition, right here, a cross fade, and it plays out however you want it to work...

*Total Lubricants USA, Inc offers a highly competitive compensation and benefits package including a 401(k), pension/retirement program, medical, dental, vision, AD&D and life insurance.*

*Total Lubricants USA, Inc is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Minorities, women, veterans, and persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply.*

*Contact Information, Steve Flaubert, Total Lubricants North America, 15 North Stiles Street Linden, NJ 07036*

I have no idea how I finished that class. I was just steps from one of idols, the reason I had been an Apple customer most of my life, and why I went and got a job in his company- thinking it must be some sign that they were

opening a store just steps from the college that I was adjuncting in and could easily do both gigs. The marriage of technology with the humanities, with the liberal arts, it's in our DNA, think different, who couldn't fall for that, even if poor grammar, and I now I could live it, embody it... He was an icon, and he was right over there, and as I was teaching his product with all of my heart, he never once turned around. He never once even really saw I was there. Not his fault, there was way too much else to be concerned with... countless associates showing him the new shelving and the magnificent flooring. And he was so frail by then, just barely able to stand. Just a month or two from his own mortality, and here I had just been given a new lease on life, and well, if you put it in a play...

Timelines and transitions. In just a few weeks, I had cobbled together a way to pay the bills so that by the end of that same summer, in the middle of the biggest recession that was trying not to become a depression, I had even gotten a chance to help write and perform in one show downtown and direct another.

And it was right about then that everything that had already been pretty bad, got a whole lot worse.

*Lights fade to black and come back up again.*

Have you ever noticed that sometimes whole days can go by, and no one calls you? Not even the tele-marketers, which, okay, is not exactly putting you on the A list, but it is just so odd when the phone just doesn't ring. Okay, maybe for you it never happens. You probably have to unplug the thing, put it to vibrate, or stun, or whatever. But I find it eerie if an entire day goes by, and no one calls. And it was one of those days.

Now some of the neighborhoods in Brooklyn can be a little isolating. Not as many stores or shops, and blocks from the nearest train. That was about the only problem with the neighborhood that Flynn and I had found this house in. It was steps off the park in what is known as Windsor Terrace, and she had actually lived there before, years earlier when her first child was a baby in another place. The only market for blocks was a Key Food, and I remember going there one day for groceries, the usual things for her kids, for lunches and snacks, salad stuff, you know about a half an hour of shopping and when I got back I noticed Flynn was in the kitchen sort of where I had left her. And I said, "hey, did you eat something?" And she said "No." And I said, "Well, I brought you lots of the salad stuff you love." She was a vegetarian, and the irony was I had been one for twenty five years and fell off the wagon and had started eating meat once I began dating again. Just felt it was too much to make others conform, and here I had found the only hot vegetarian for miles.

“I put the knife right to my arm and left it there.” She said.

I dropped the bags and went over to her.

“I just touched it to my arm and let it sit there. Cold.”

I knew she had battled depression for years. She was a recovered alcoholic-never wavered from that battle, and had active eating disorder issues. And was on medication for her moods, and sometimes, though I was just learning, having had little experience first hand, the moods may sometimes trump any medicine.

“I just get so lost you know. So lost and worried that I won’t be able.”

“Won’t be able to what?”

“Live my life. A life worth living.”

“You have three wonderful children.”

And the tears now starting and falling so rapidly.

“And they are what has kept me going all this time. I get to this point, and then I remember how much they need me, love me, and how much I love and need them.”

I thought of that afternoon in the kitchen, on the last day I spoke to Flynn. She had called, and I heard in her voice that same breathiness that could be so sexy, so seductive, but slowed down just a bit, this was her detached voice. The voice that came when she was and wasn’t herself, both at the same time.

She had called because she need my help with a budget that we had made to try and solve some money issues she was having, and that world of finance and responsibility and money and bills and house payments due that she so dreaded, that we all dread, but she more than most, was closing in on her. She was going to lose her house on Shelter Island. The one she had bought with another lover that was still in her life as a dear friend and co-owner. They were going to have a meeting to re-finance on Thursday, and she hadn’t been able to create a budget. Could I please help her? And as I was trying to help her locate the file that we had created which she couldn’t now find, she was telling me about having just gotten off the phone with the IRS and owing more money than she thought. Some kind of error with her accountant. I said “how much?” And she said, “a few thousand or so, maybe five.” And I said, “that sucks, but you have it Flynn. You will be able to come up with it.” Money was always an issue with her, but she was only

cash poor, artificially poor, she had large assets. And because I recognized something in her voice, and knew she needed to hear it: “that will take care of itself. You can always work out some sort of payments.” “I can’t even find this goddamn program, this file in my computer, the one we...” “Its there, don’t worry about it.” “Just look carefully.” “I can’t find it. I can’t even find it.” “Hey, don’t worry, go for a run or something, go do something fun for yourself.” “I can’t. I have this silly class I am taking tonight.” She had gone back to school, to get her Masters, even though she had taught in some. “It’s early. Go get some exercise. You always feel better after some exercise. I can help you with it when I see you tomorrow night. If nothing else, we can do that.” “I have to go now,” she said, but I knew she was feeling so inadequate. I had not helped. Perhaps even made it worse by trying to have her find the file and her not being able to. And I recognized that need in her to run away. “I’ll see you tomorrow?” I said since she had expressed a desire to be together, had said she was missing me, and wanted a night to just be with each other again. We had settled on Wednesday. I knew she had been dating, and I had just decided to go back online myself to finally try and move on, but I still had things at her house, and we were at that awkward separating but still in each other’s hearts phase. “Don’t worry about any of that. Worry about your schoolwork.” And her response was even breathier than before, the voice I had heard when she had fallen asleep in her chair late at night, sitting upright but fast asleep. Just days before she had done that. I think it was two in the morning, she hardly ever gotten a good night’s sleep, and we were talking and she said, “I fell sleep, I feel asleep in my chair. So silly. I fell right asleep.”

When I finally got to her house, the ambulance, a fire truck and two police cars were there. It was now a crime scene. I had raced in my car from the Upper West Side and put Augie in back, because I had no idea when I might make it back home. I knew that she was already gone; I somehow knew that she would be found, and she was drowned in her bathtub. I knew because I had asked our dog walkers that lived in her neighborhood to check on her. I was worried. I hadn’t heard from her all day. No one had called all day. And it was not like her. No email, no call, and we were supposed to get together in the evening, a movie, a walk, to work on the budget, to see each other. By six o’clock that evening I knew something was wrong. I waited one more half hour, just because I did not want to seem impatient, or too clingy, or whatever. I had left a message, and an email earlier in the day. Not a word. And that is when it dawned on me.

“I put the knife right to my arm...”

I remembered that tone of voice in the kitchen and on the phone a few days earlier, detached, distant, already gone. “I fell right asleep. I have to go now.”



I became terribly, terribly worried. What could I possibly do? I was miles away. How would I know? Like Sherlock Holmes on his worst cocaine high my mind raced, tumbling over and over. How I could figure this out. Then it dawned on me- I had to be sure. I went online and opened her email, something I had never done before- ever- by myself, only when she asked me to help her set up her Google accounts, or when her computer had crashed or wasn't printing right. I knew her passwords.

Sylvia for Sylvia Plath.” “Shit”, I thought. “Please let there be emails from today. Just one email sent today.” And none of her emails from today had been read. Mostly junk, but not thrown out or read. Nothing had been sent after early afternoon yesterday, and that is when I knew. Flynn was a voracious emailer. At least twenty to thirty a day.

I immediately got on the phone and called the dog walkers and explained my worry. “We were there today.” They were a couple- sweet wonderful animal lovers. “John you went to Flynn’s today, right? Yeah, he said he walked them midday.”

Flynn had already gotten another dog, another hound named Alice. And of course I knew that we were over, even before we were over, when I had seen in passing a picture of this new dog on her computer- sent from the same rescue we had gotten both the other dogs from. I sensed, even though she denied and hurried to another email, that she was already contemplating replacing “my dog” with another for “hers” to play with. Alice arrived one week after I was gone.

I asked if John had seen Flynn when he was there earlier, feeling a bit relieved, and he said no, but he didn't often see her. And I asked if there had been anything odd or strange about the house. And he said there was some mess that the dogs had made, chewed some things up, but that was all. I got worried again. I knew that Flynn would not have left something that the dogs had done wrong without teaching them, again just wasn't like her. They told me that of course they would go by and see if the lights were on. If there was any sign of trouble. They called me a few minutes later from outside the house, and said no lights were on and the dogs were barking. And I knew they had keys, and apologized for having to ask them, but that I was over an hour away, and it might be something where every minute mattered.

The medical examiner said she had been there, in her bath, since the day before. Like Ophelia, she was found just underwater.

*Lights dim and come back up.*

About two weeks later, the night of Flynn's memorial, while the sun was setting on a beautiful Shelter Island lawn full of her friends and family celebrating her life, I was downtown in a sweltering un-air-conditioned theater performing in a play about our collective need to re-invent ourselves. To re-build.

And my dog Augie, who has since become a theater whore of a dog, was in the last third of the play playing himself. And unlike tonight (or just like tonight) he enjoyed the stage, I think. Except the nights it rained. He is terrified of the rain. And two of the four nights it poured down rain.

*If the budget allows it begins to rain onstage. Augie takes shelter from the rain under the desk.*

And this downtown play, which seemed to have been written for me, 'cause like all great plays, it feels as though you had a hand in it's creation (and this one I actually had)- was about so many things: from fighting foreclosure and unemployment to relationships, like our director Josh, who had recently ended an important one and was reeling from the breakup. "Building" had become the central metaphor, and this rag-tag cast of truly dedicated and talented downtown actors actually built a house center stage and then played out crazy scenes within the house, a nightmare with scorpions, an avant garde production of the Cherry Orchard. And we each played many different roles. One of my parts was to be our director Josh, a director playing an actor playing a director. Another was to play a leak that the house had sprung. A literal leak of water that this most beautiful actress would stand under for most of the play. I represented the source of the leak, now that's a resume builder, the summation of a life's work in theatre. The actress was a symbol of the water itself, of all things natural and beautiful, and I was the leak that had sprung. This is a photo of that image. And you can't see me, but I am holding this bottle of water taped to a mop handle that on tech night I built because we had no budget to actually make the leak happen any better than that. So because it was the night before opening, and we had not solved the problem of how to make a leak of water for no money, and I thought of the idea, and found a pole and taped a bottle to it, I became the leak. Or part of it. This angelic actress was the other part, the beautiful part, the loss itself.

Now, like I said, even though I had other roles, not just this non speaking leak one, and I could have missed our last performance, and someone would have read my other lines and someone else could have played the leak, but it just didn't feel right to do that to this group of actors that had helped me so much through this troubling time. Flynn's family had done nothing for me. Had ignored my request to be a part of the memorial, and to help by scheduling it a day later on a Sunday, instead of a Saturday, so I could attend very easily. But they had ignored me and my request. This was the

beginning of truly understanding how invisible in all of this I was and had become. The family made no effort to include me, I had no idea the ceremony was even going to happen until the week of when they wanted to schedule it. Nor did they ask me to speak, even though other friends of Flynn's, including other ex-lovers, were. Flynn always hated hypocrisy and being at events that felt false. She once grabbed my hand and asked me to leave from a fancy dinner at MOMA that her mother had invited us to because we were not even included in the main table. We were seated off by ourselves at, I don't know what, the children's table. "Let's get the hell out of dodge," I remember her whispering, and we did, before they even served the salad. And these actors and my work, this was where I was needed, where I would not have to hide my anger and pretend. Funny that, huh? I felt more myself pretending in a theater in Soho, than being myself in reality at this ritual on Long Island. So this last night of our play it wasn't raining (*The rain onstage stops*) and Augie gave his best performance because he had no fear. And even as I could not stop thinking about this event happening miles away that I was not at, I was here doing my roles, but a part of me was there. And the very last scene of the play, the leak comes back onstage. This is the time in the play "she" is an actress, human for the first time, alive. And a character that plays her boyfriend or husband or lover plays the scene with her. Now, I did not write this, Josh and these two actors in the scene did. But I could not have said it any better. And he directed me to get behind her holding my water bottle still dripping water on her face. (*He holds this up*) And these were the last lines of that play, and seem to be the right last lines for this one too. Stealing from a play... I could hear them being spoken. It was happening right in front of me, but I was not present, even though I was. I could hear them even as I could not really hear anything. My thoughts were with Flynn. And this was the only time I think, I had, in a way, refused her...

*The following are the actors from the play in a recording- if possible on a video or just voice over. It is not the actor reading them or performing on the video, but two others, unless noted by ACTOR.*

DOUG. It's the last scene.

MICHELLE. So soon?

DOUG. Here.

ACTOR. And he offered her a towel to wipe her face.

MICHELLE. No thanks. You know I'm not an actor.

DOUG. That's why I fell in love with you, I think.

MICHELLE. It is?

DOUG. Yes.

MICHELLE. You fell in love with me because I'm boring?

DOUG. It's not boring. It's something else.

MICHELLE. How I feel is that I'm racing inside. I have all this energy, waves that can't get out.

DOUG. Waves of what?

MICHELLE. Everything is dancing and flying. I'm constantly falling upwards. And I can't stop. I can't stop. I can't stop.

DOUG. Then don't stop. I want to build you a house. I want to build you a home that gives you everything you've given me. A beautiful home filled with love that gives life to everything around it. Our home.

MICHELLE. You know that's not what happens at the end of this story.

DOUG. It's not?

MICHELLE. No

DOUG. So I have to keep building it without you.

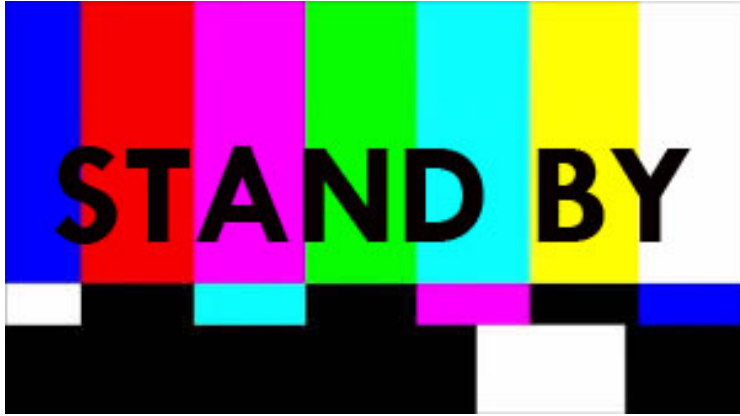
ACTOR. And the script says the character of Michelle says nothing. A silence. Or it says she will say, "Don't make me answer that." Flynn would have said "that is so maudlin, sweetheart" And the scene went on, with me thinking as I stood behind them there really is no divide between life and art. They are conjoined. Fused together.

DOUG. I don't know if I can do it alone.

MICHELLE. I don't know if you can either. But that's what's happening. The circumstances are beyond your control. You can spend all of your time fighting it. Or you can let me go.... and rebuild yourself. It's up to you.

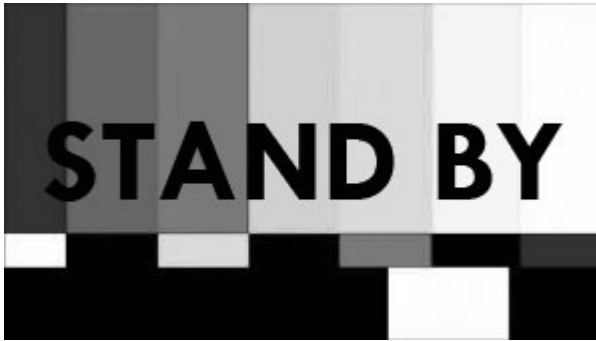
ACTOR. And the script says the character of Michelle returns to the leak pose- which was angelic, otherworldly, so beautiful, with me holding the bottle of water and the pole. And the water hitting just her cheek. Washing over her. And the character of Doug stood there alone for a long beat. Just looking at the audience.

*The Actor is standing there dripping a drop of two of water as the lights dim- **END OF PLAY***



A play for live streaming during social distancing

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A play for live streaming during social distancing

Stand By is a play for digital meeting platforms and to be either live-streamed or recorded and played back as a streaming event. It was written to be a fundraiser for performers, directors, writers, small and large theatre companies, and academic environments hungry for online resources for teaching and performing. During this crisis, there are no performance fees or royalties necessary. That statement is not meant to dissuade paying writers- ever, I simply have another modest income for now and wish to help those that may not.

My legal team of August & Puckett LLP (my dogs, the LLP stands for licks, love and (you guessed it) have requested the following rules to be enforced:

No additions to text or changes in order or verbiage should occur without permission of the author. If you'd like to add dance, poetry or other art forms, just please ask.

Doubling and tripling can occur, but the spirit of the play is to involve as many artists as possible and affordable, a community of theatre in the best sense of the term.

Please pay everyone if a professional production, hopefully even if not. This is meant to be a revenue stream for those in need. Exception: If very rich and talented performers (are you listening) wish to perform this play as a fundraiser for good causes, arts or health care related, please go right ahead.

When past all this Social Distancing, the play can still be performed on video or seated in chairs in spotlights to continue the fundraising for theatres and theatre companies as we get back on our feet.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

(all gender/age/race blind- use the best people)

Health Care Professional

Professor of History (his/her/they's wife/husband/partner)

Brighton, a college student (their child)

Dakota, a college student (boy/girlfriend of Brighton)

Mayor

City Manager

City Clerk

Council People (at least 6)

Reporter

Musician

College Students of the Professor (at least 6)

Younger Musician

## Stand By

*A screen pops up with a health care professional in it. The play is age/race/gender blind wherever possible, cast the best people.*

HEALTHCARE PRO. Can you hear me? Is this working?

*The partner/wife/husband of the Healthcare Professional, a college Professor of History, pops up:*

PROFESSOR. Yes, I can. I can see you, but I can't hear you. Wait; is that such a bad thing?

HEALTHCARE PRO. I can hear you. By the way.

PROFESSOR. Oh, now I can hear you. You have to click the... How wonderful. Can you hear me? (*The Healthcare Professional pretends to mouth some words*). You have to click the... You're kidding me, aren't you?

HEALTHCARE PRO. (*joking*) Sorry, I can't...

PROFESSOR. Very funny. Leave it to you to joke at a time like this.

HEALTHCARE PRO. What better time. Nothing like a good plague joke. Hey, did you hear the one about the plague? Why bother... No one's gotten it in the past 600 years.

PROFESSOR. Unfortunately, I can hear you. I am so relieved. This will save everything.

HEALTHCARE PRO. Might be a bit of an overstatement.

PROFESSOR. I can see and hear you perfectly. Willie, you look tired. This really is amazing.

HEALTHCARE PRO. What, that I look tired? It is pretty cool. For now. Until we break the internet.

PROFESSOR. How are you?

HEALTHCARE PRO. Fine...

PROFESSOR. I still don't understand why they had to quarantine you. I understand being cautious, but you had no symptoms. And they still want you to go into work? Isolate you from us, but go right back to the front lines? I'm sorry. I just don't know how to process all this. I'm sorry. Seriously, sweetheart, how are you?



*The Health Care Professional just stares ahead and then begins to sob.*

*Another screen pops into view and we lose the other two screens for a time. This back and forth between “scenes” will happen often. In this new screen is a college age student:*

DAKOTA. What up? Didya get it to fly? Yo, you there? Testing one two, testing, yo Tik-tok Brain did you hit the internet audio button? Did you install the app?

*Another college student pops into view.*

BRIGHTON. Tik-tok Brain? I had to pee. Sorry. This isn't like rocket surgery you know.

DAKOTA. What are you wearing?

BRIGHTON. Stop that. Seriously.

DAKOTA. What? I can't help it if you get me all, I don't know, randy.

BRIGHTON. Randy?

DAKOTA. Yeah, isn't that what they use to call it. Worked up, hot, horny?

BRIGHTON. Randy?

DAKOTA. I don't know, I saw it in an old movie I was watching with the fam.

BRIGHTON. You were watching a movie that got you off with your family?

DAKOTA. It was in the movie. The diatribe, or whatever you call it. It wasn't like porn or something. Hey, Mom shoot me your log in to Porn Hub.

*Pause*

BRIGHTON. Porn Hub doesn't need a log in. For most of it.

DAKOTA. How do you know that?

BRIGHTON. Where were you last night? I texted you. And called.

DAKOTA. Did you? (*Looks down or pretends to.*) Oh, crap, you did. Five times? Sorry. I just saw that.

BRIGHTON. Yeah right. Where were you?

DAKOTA. We were on the beach. A bunch of us. There was a bonfire.

BRIGHTON. A bunch of us?

DAKOTA. Yes, you know, Terry, Leigh, a whole lot of us. What. Are you upset with me? Why are you ghosting me? You knew I was coming down here to have a good time. As good as we could under the... We talked about this. You didn't want to.

BRIGHTON. Yeah, and you were all broken up about it. It was three o'clock.

DAKOTA. What, when you decided not to come down here?

BRIGHTON. In the morning. When I "ghosted" you. We haven't talked for days, Dak- a few "gotta go now" texts...

DAKOTA. We didn't get back until late. This morning actually. After waffles.

BRIGHTON. Waffles?

DAKOTA. Yes. It was wild. This other group met up with us, and it turns out they were from (*insert name of state that would have the most impact here*) too. Is that crazy? (*Silence*) This place is packed and hardly anyone is actually from here. I mean, like packed. (*Silence*) Are you really that upset with me? (*Silence*) You knew we came here to have a good time. That was the whole point. Our final chance. Our last break.

BRIGHTON. It just may be.

DAKOTA. What do you mean by that?

BRIGHTON. Tik-Tok Brain.... Ha, tick tock... too surreal.... Do you have any idea what is going on right now? Are you that clueless?

DAKOTA. Oh, come on, Brighton. We have talked all about this. Endlessly. Damn. You even packed baby wipes for me. Which was very sweet. You're like my mother.

BRIGHTON. Good. Though your mother is as clueless as you are.

DAKOTA. Screw you. Okay, maybe you're right.

BRIGHTON. Did you just say screw you?

DAKOTA. Did you just call me my mother? Look, you are just upset because you think I was with someone.

BRIGHTON. Were you?

DAKOTA. No, I just told you. Well, I mean not "with" someone, but with everybody. It was sick.

BRIGHTON. Unfortunate choice of words...

DAKOTA. Come on. No one here is even... I mean everyone is healthy and happy and just wanting to have some fun. There was some full tilt craziness... off the hook. *(A long pause.)*

BRIGHTON. I don't... I can't see you anymore.

DAKOTA. What? I can still see you. And hear you. Not that it's been all that much fun...

BRIGHTON. I've been thinking a lot about this. All week. Longer... And it's hard, it is. Because, we've... you asshole, I thought I loved- I did - I do. But I can't hang out with you anymore. I don't want to. I can't.

DAKOTA. Are you breaking up with me? By like Skype or Zoom or whatever the hell this is? That is so cold.

BRIGHTON. You just don't get it, do you? People are dying. My father isn't even allowed... You can transmit this thing with no symptoms. Don't you get it? And you and Terry and Leigh are just "full tilt" bonfiring.

DAKOTA. Look, come on, don't do this.

BRIGHTON. I haven't seen my father in a week. He can't even come home.

DAKOTA. But you told me he was fine? He is right?

BRIGHTON. That is not the point. They have at least two confirmed patients now. Testing positive. Right here in *(Insert name of town that will have the most local impact)* And you are eating waffles with-

DAKOTA. They weren't even good waffles. Crappy actually. *(Brighton hangs up.)* Hey, come on... actually they were the best waffles I've ever had, asshole. *(He/She/They just stares ahead and after a few lines into the next scene the Student's window cuts out)*

*One by one, city politicians pop onto screen of various ages.*

MAYOR. I can'd get this damn thing to work. I quit.

CITY MANAGER. Mr./Madame. Mayor, you have gotten it... I can hear you just fine.

MAYOR. Well, thank god.

CITY MANAGER. Though not a good day for quitting...

MAYOR. Tell that to Breza. He/She/They just announced I hear. Running against me.

COUNCIL PERSON 1. Good evening everyone. Can you hear me?

COUNCIL PERSON 2. *(to someone off)* No sweetheart, I'm having to meet right now. Please go play or do your homework- okay I know you don't have any homework. No you can't go outside. Not right now. *(to the meeting)* I'm sorry.

CITY MANAGER. No worries.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Have we started? Damn, I was so sure I had this thing ready. Then it just went whateverthecrap and kicked me out. Are the press on yet?

CITY CLERK. Not yet. But we are recording.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Great, and I just said whateverthecrap.

CITY MANAGER. Is that even a word?

MAYOR. We are just gathering here.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. *(Surprisingly young)* Well isn't this all 1984 or what?

CITY CLERK. Is everyone online now? I'm sure I sent the link, and you all confirmed.

COUNCIL PERSON 5. I am so grateful to everyone for making these concessions. I truly believe it is important to set the right tone here.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. We haven't started yet, Sawyer. Don't waste it.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Present. Isn't this all high tech and big city.

CITY CLERK. We should be able to see everyone if you click the top right button here.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. It's like the Brady Bunch meets Dr. Strangelove.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Is everyone doing alright? How is everyone feeling?

*One or two of the council people answer: "fine, so far, just fine."*

COUNCIL PERSON 3. No symptoms yet. Here, here *(Toasts with a glass of scotch)*.

*A local reporter's screen pops up.*

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Ah, sorry. I'll just leave this over here.

REPORTER. Good evening everyone. Thanks for allowing me to attend.

CITY CLERK. And we are recording and live streaming. Fingers crossed. I count all six, seven with the Mayor present, so we can begin.

MAYOR. Yes. Well, then here we go. I call this meeting to order at 6:31. Let's begin with the pledge of allegiance.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Oh, I don't have a flag. So I guess you... I should just face...

All rise showing different states of dress for each of the council people, perhaps a dog or cat comes into frame as they stand and state: "I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Some of the council people are visibly moved by this simple gesture. Some are not affected at all.

MAYOR. Thank you. Be seated. *(We hear a cat hiss.)*

CITY CLERK. Roll Call. Councilman *(or woman as needed)* Rogers

COUNCIL PERSON 1. Here. *(This process continues all around)* Council Man/woman Manklewitz, here, Breza, here, City Manager Stewart, here, Mayor Gomez, here, Councilman/Woman Hitner, here, Tyler, here, Connors, present.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. *(to someone off)* Yes, I said I was here and we just said the pledge. Sorry, we couldn't wait. We can say it later. Yes, you can sit and watch over there, but sssshhhh.

CITY CLERK. First item of business is the approval of the permit to suspend off street parking for Crosby Street.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Move to approve the motion as submitted.

COUNCIL PERSON 5. Second

MAYOR. Motion made by Councilman Hitner, seconded by Tyler. Any discussion? Hearing none, I call for a vote. All those in favor say: Aye. *(all vote in favor; mechanically)* All those opposed, same sign. *(gavel bangs)* Motion carries.

CITY CLERK. Item 2.1 is petition for sewer line for the new sub-development in Grandview Heights.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Move to approve the motion.

COUNCIL PERSON 5. Second.

MAYOR. Motion made by Councilman Hitner, seconded by Tyler. Any discussion? Hearing none-

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Madame/Mister Mayor- I don't think you could see my hand.

MAYOR. I'm sorry. I didn't. Go ahead Quinn.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Before we move forward, I just want to make sure... that we have made sure that the proper setbacks have been implemented. This development, as you know, one that I had grave misgivings about in the first place, abets our protected parkland, and already may be encroaching on valuable territory for many species.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. This is about sewer lines, Quinn. The property lines have been drawn and approved, even though there should have been no need to seek approval, which delayed the project months. We, I mean the developer has already begun to.... Look, I understand your "environmental concerns".

COUNCIL PERSON 6. They are not just mine.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. We are all "concerned". Always. This is a town built on tourism and the environment. Of course, we want to keep it pristine. But these delays, these let's table it and hope we can find a way to... do you have any idea how costly they are? It's been months. And each time the vote is 6 to one.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. It is usually 5, 2.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Whatever. At some point, we just need to (*an attempt at levity*) as John Lennon said so eloquently, "Let It Be".

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Paul. Paul wrote that. (*whispering under breath*) I thought everyone knew that...

MAYOR. There is a motion on the table...

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Simply about the sewer lines.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Fittingly...

COUNCIL PERSON 3. The motion just wants to make sure we approve the painstaking and costly work that we made the developer, the extra steps that we forced them to take already. Look the bottom line is we want to make sure we get these sewers right-

COUNCIL PERSON 4. I'm not touching that... too easy.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. And we did. Did we not?

MAYOR. Is there any other discussion?

COUNCIL PERSON 6. I didn't get an answer to the question I raised.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. What was the question? I've forgotten.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Were the proper setbacks taken into consideration?

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Of course they were. That's what the whole variance was about.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. No, that was why we requested the study and then the "extra steps."

COUNCIL PERSON 5. Do we have anyone from Engineering present?

CITY CLERK. No, I am sorry. I didn't think we would need anyone. I am terribly sorry. That is my fault.

MAYOR. No worries.

CITY CLERK. This meeting by remote is all so new. I should have thought of that. I am terribly sorry.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. I move we table the request until next meeting when we can have a report from engineering assuring us the proper setbacks have been considered and followed.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. I second that motion.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Jesus Christ. We are talking about the motion for a sewer line, what in the hell is going to happen when we get to whether we should shut down the damn city?

MAYOR. (*Banging his/her/they gavel.*) Order, Order. (*He/She/They realizes there is a soft surface, a paper towel or something on top of the gavel block and no noise.*) Oh, damn. Sorry, there was a— (*Then the noise is very loud because it is right by his/her microphone.*) Order! Order!

*The screen goes black for a long beat. All cameras go out. A screen of a guitarist, or pianist, or cellist, or violin player. NOTE: A song will be played. If this can be an original song from a great local artist, all the better. The tone of the song should be like One Song Glory from Rent. Subject should be composed during adversity and wanting to be remembered. It can also be an instrumental and a classic pop song ("Stand By Me" or "Everybody Hurts" if available) or a classical piece ("Beethoven's Piano concerto # 5 in e flat major; Emperor Concerto, 2nd movement" would be preferred). What is essential is that it will become a motif, and therefore must be beautiful.*

MUSICIAN. So, hey, hello there. Thanks for tuning in, and listening. I am here in my study because, as you well know, all the bars and clubs and restaurants are closed- I think everywhere in the world, except parts of Idaho... and therefore all of our gigs for the foreseeable future are canceled. As you know I do this for a living so.... Usually with a bunch of great players who are all so wonderful, and I am going to miss making music with them. But this is supposed to only be for awhile, right? This whatever circle

of hell we have all tumbled down into... I thought I'd try this live streaming thing- I know, very original, John Legend was going to lend me his bathrobe, but I thought naaa not a good look for me, and besides that's been done now... And I have set up the obligatory Paypal if you want to donate. I'm giving to musicians who need this more than I... it should be on the bottom of the screen here, but if it's not, it's Leslie Mansfield music dot com and you click on the pay here button. Isn't this funny, this is like when I was just starting out, and you played at the farmer's market, or at the fair, or wherever they let you set up for tips, and you'd put out a case and then just play your heart out and hope. I even wrote busker on my first income tax form, under occupation, because I was too proud to write musician. I'll write musician when they pay me for it, but I am not going to write video store deliverer, so I wrote busker... because I loved the sound of it. When I lived in New York, my first roommate was a street mime- and I can hear you: mimes are about as popular as clowns- must be the white face- but anyway she was an incomparable artist. And she would play, no sorry, perform, for hundreds on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum, for like hundreds. She made great money too. The steps were packed... They eventually outlawed performers in front of the steps because the crowds were getting too large, true story... Too much revenue to the artists without a way to take their cut, I suppose... And part of her act was she'd walk right behind people that were rushing to and fro, the endless, I don't know, tide of people that are a city. Having to rush here and there, going this way and that, sometimes in great flocks. But she'd mimic them perfectly, and you'd laugh because each one had such a distinctive gait, and posture. And, I don't know, essence. And she'd just instantly match you- a few steps behind this one and then dart to the next one as they'd pass going the opposite direction, this way and that... That was the highlight of her act. The become the crowd section. Wouldn't work these days... Sorry, I was thinking about her a lot today, as I was setting up this... my "concert hall". How she would just head out to her "5th Avenue theatre" every day and play to hundreds. Her name was Susan. And by the time she was thirty, she caught muscular dystrophy- no you don't catch that- do you? You develop it. And that always seemed so cruel to me, so damn unfair, because she was so beautifully in her body, so in complete control... like a swan... She passed away before she reached forty. Anyway, this song is a new song. I didn't write it for her, but I might as well have. (or substitute: "you may recognize this one, it has always meant a great deal to me. So I wanted to play it for you today...") But today, I'd like to dedicate it to her. So this one is for you, Sue.

*The song begins and we hear just enough of it or maybe most of it before the windows to the Health Care Professional's window pops up and then his partner/wife/husband too.*

PROFESSOR. It's okay, Willie.... I'm so sorry that I'm not there with you. That things... Look, I'm not going to lie to you and tell you not to worry



and everything is going to be fine, because neither of us work in the White House. But may I tell you something?

HEALTH CARE PRO. Uh, oh. Whenever a Professor says that you know you are in trouble... Am I failing?

PROFESSOR. We all are... that's funny...

HEALTH CARE PRO. No, it's not. It's pretty damn depressing...

PROFESSOR. No, I mean that you'd ask me that. See... Okay, you know who Camus was right? Albert Camus.

HEALTH CARE PRO. No but someone once told me a Camus joke, and I told them I wanted to understand it, and they said that is exactly why I never would.

PROFESSOR. Do you just have bad jokes for every occasion?

HEALTH CARE PRO. It's a skill set. Hey, you married me. I would have done my best thirty minutes at the wedding, but you begged me not to.

PROFESSOR. Your best? Thirty minutes? Since when... Okay maybe on the honeymoon...

HEALTH CARE PRO. Ouch... Camus. Wasn't his whole thing that things are the way they are, even if we wanted them to be, hoped they would be, desired them to be, with our whole being, otherwise. We can never will them to be what we actually wanted them to be.

PROFESSOR. I knew I loved you for something.

HEALTH CARE PRO. Because I know the most depressing thought ever thought? That nothing can ever be what we want it to be? So what? You actually wanted to be with- who do Historians crush on- Tocqueville or Este Lauder and you got me?

PROFESSOR. I'm going to ignore that...

HEALTH CARE PRO. Another sign of true love...

PROFESSOR. I'm a teacher. Don't make me take away points for going way off topic. Here's the point: I added just one work of literature to my post war 20th Century History class this year, and guess what it was? Now also keep in mind I made this syllabus last summer, long before any virus had jumped species. But I centered the entire semester around Camus' The Plague. Now why is that?

HEALTH CARE PRO. Because the world has sucked now for last few years? And now it just sucks worse- what would that be? What is beyond sucks? What would sucks worse be, apocalyptic? Chucky Cheese?

*The City Council screens pop back on and the Health Care scenes go out. It is later in the same City Council Meeting and things are very heated. Somehow, the musician is also seen and he/she/they plays throughout this scene, the music becomes underscore, perhaps a lyric sneaks into the moments.*

MAYOR. Order. Please!

COUNCIL PERSON 4. No, wait a minute, dammit. I didn't get a chance to speak here.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Can we please be careful to watch what in the hell we are saying?

COUNCIL PERSON 1. (We hear a dog start barking) It's okay Roscoe. Sshh. Sshh. I'm sorry.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. (*Overlapping*) Watch what we are saying? We are voting to do nothing in the middle of a pandemic. To keep the damn beaches open so that this man/woman and all the other blood thirsty, power mad members of this city... So they can make even more damn money when we know it might be killing folks. It is going to kill folks.

COUNCIL PERSON 1. We don't even have one case yet, do we? Well, do we?

MAYOR. Point of order.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. What point of order, we are discussing the motion.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Mister/Madame Mayor, are we voting or not?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Are you going to try and tell me I can't speak?

COUNCIL PERSON 1. We did let you speak, and we are all aware of what is at stake-

COUNCIL PERSON 6. No, I don't think you are actually...

COUNCIL PERSON 2. I think we all need to remember that there are other-

MAYOR. Point of order. I would like to call a vote.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. "Hearing none I will call a vote." That is what you are supposed to say. Hearing none. Meaning there is no more discussion. Am I hard to hear?

COUNCIL PERSON 1. (*the dog is barking louder*) Roscoe. It is alright. Come here. Everything...

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Or is just because you are afraid to stand up to him/her. Worried about your votes. That the election is coming up. Don't rock that boat.

CITY MANAGER. This is like some scene from Jaws...

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Exactly. That is exactly what it is. And we are going to need a bigger boat. We could have voted on this in the emergency session last week. Long before... We knew what was coming. We knew Spring Break was just around the corner. We knew there were going to be thousands...

COUNCIL PERSON 6. And now who knows how many right here might-

MAYOR. Order.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. And we could have stopped it. We should have just stopped it. If there is lightening, we shut down. If there's red tide. The beaches should have been closed.

CITY MANAGER. We should have. I tried to... I just don't have the authority.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. But we do. If we decide to amend the motion and-

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Are you out of your mind? One sixth of the GDP for the entire year.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Out of my mind? Are you out of your mind?

MAYOR. Order. I mean point of order.

CITY CLERK. This is all being recorded Sir/Madame

COUNCIL PERSON 4. What difference does that make? There is a reporter here too. What are you going to say to them?

COUNCIL PERSON 3. It's already Wednesday for Christ's sake. The break week is halfway over-

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Are you kidding me? Do you hear this?

MAYOR. I move we recess. Right away.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. You can't do that. Can you?

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Can we all remember that others are listening to this... my own-

COUNCIL PERSON 4. I don't give a damn who hears me. The whole world should hear what is going on here.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Please. I can't listen to this anymore, I don't want--

MAYOR. We are in a recess. Immediately. *(The Mayor gets up from his/her chair.)*

COUNCIL PERSON 1. *(The dog is barking louder)* Come on Roscoe. It is alright. We can go outside and-

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Can He/She/They do that?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Where are you going?

*Everyone sits dumbfounded for a moment waiting for the Mayor. Roscoe the dog stops barking but jumps into Council Person 1's lap. Council Member 3 drinks from the glass of scotch. The Health Care Professional and Professor screens pop back on.*

PROFESSOR. Crazy, right? So the first thing we are going to cover when my students get back, I mean when they go online- so odd- there will be no "going back," for now, will be this masterpiece of absurdity, of passion and freedom and revolt and what are the odds of that? Of having chosen the perfect work of literature for this exact moment in time?

*The Musician finishes the song and stops, and looks at the screen.*

MUSICIAN. I was having a hard time with that. The ending. Endings are always hard, aren't they?

*Student Two pops into view.*

DAKOTA. Come on pick up. Please. Pick up.

*All scenes are happening at the same time now.*

HEALTH CARE PRO. How am I? We had a meeting today and we had to go over worst-case protocols because the odds are they might happen. No, they will happen. That we will find ourselves having to make decisions that no one would have ever even dreamt they might have to make, let alone someone who has taken an oath to "above all do no harm." We ran drills for it today... Like in Italy. And Spain. You've seen the videos right? Patients just lying on the floor because... They were giving us rules... For having to choose who to help and who to let die, when we can't... When- not if- we run out of beds and respirators.

PROFESSOR. *(now it is the Professor who starts to cry. Slowly as she says)* Oh my dear God...

DAKOTA. I can't believe you are doing this to us...

BRIGHTON. *(Coming back online)* Now who's the one ghosting?

DAKOTA. I thought you loved me?

BRIGHTON. Don't do this, Dak. Don't make this any more difficult...

DAKOTA. Do you?

BRIGHTON. Don't...

DAKOTA. Did we not say that to each other over and over. That we would never be like the others, and say I love you if we didn't mean it? I mean with all our heart and soul mean it?

BRIGHTON. Dak, we are young and stupid so of course we say stupid young Rom-com things. That is pathetically what young people do.

DAKOTA. Not us.

BRIGHTON. Especially us. I see that now.

DAKOTA. We were always going to be different. Better than- Brighton coughs. Not the same as everyone else... anyone else...

MUSICIAN. I think that song may be just about better than anything else I have ever written (or use: possibly the best song ever written) But then that's the thing about superlatives. Something else always comes along...

BRIGHTON. That was before you decided to be a prick/bitch and in the middle.... *(Coughs again)*

DAKOTA. Brighton? You okay?

*They stare ahead at each other but it is really us. The City Council is there.*

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 2. Does the recess mean we will come back?

CITY CLERK. I suppose, yes, when the Mayor returns.

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 5. When is that?

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 6. Who knows.

CITY CLERK. Meeting is recessed. We will reconvene in fifteen minutes.

*All screens go dark- One by one.*

***End of Act One***

## Stand By- Act Two

*The screen becomes full of the college students from the Professor's class all at once (or as quickly as technically possible). The Professor is there too. We are mid-class. The students, can all be actors we have seen before (if so, please refrain from "playing young"), or they can be new performers if the budget allows or community or academic theatre large casting desires are in play. The more being creatively included the better. If more than seven, divide the lines up as the director sees fit.*

STUDENT 7. I am being asked to try and understand the meaning of all this. Meaning in the time of the Plague.

*There is a very long pause.*

STUDENT 1. What the hell?

PROFESSOR. Bryce, watch your language please.

STUDENT 2. How long are we supposed to wait?

STUDENT 3. I'm exhausted.

STUDENT 4. Is he/she/they ever going to say anything?

STUDENT 1. Probably never read the damn book.

STUDENT 2. Like you?

PROFESSOR. I think Charley is onto something

STUDENT 4. On to proving we are all idiots.

STUDENT 5. That happened months ago.

STUDENT 6. Right?

STUDENT 1. Like just about 6 months ago now.

PROFESSOR. I think what Charley is having us consider is what is the point of arguing, of presenting an argument, if nothing according to Camus, is knowable.

STUDENT 1. Nothing is knowable? I never knew that...

STUDENT 2. So then, what is the point of doing homework?

STUDENT 3. Or this class?

STUDENT 4. Or school?

STUDENT 5. Or life... (*They all pause again.*) I may shoot myself.

STUDENT 7. (*who has been silent, finally*) Exactly.

STUDENT 2. He/she/they speaks!

STUDENT 7. (*very proudly*) The Plague is not Camus' only guide to how to live through what we have had to live through. Guys, think about it. This is our defining moment. We will be telling our kids about how we lived through this pandemic. This will have shaped who we are, and what we are, and how we move forward.

STUDENT 6. In our case, afraid to ever leave the house...

STUDENT 3. Or to ever touch anyone again...

STUDENT 7. And actually Camus felt this collective dread is in essence how everyone has moved through any time. That is why he wrote the Mythology of Sisyphus.

STUDENT 5. Shoot me now...

STUDENT 6. I miss a good school shooting actually. Helpful sometimes.

PROFESSOR. Be a good audience guys, and that was not funny...

STUDENT 5. Come on, professor. Even you have to be sick of this. All this jibber-jabber about the meaning of life.

STUDENT 4. Jibber-Jabber?

STUDENT 5. Excuse me, the lack of meaning... I mean Professor how can you sit there and listen to this (*the sound like the parents in Peanuts specials*) Waw Waw Waw?

STUDENT 4. Is that the definition of Jiber- Jabber?

STUDENT 5. I mean you lost...

PROFESSOR. A daughter. Yes. (*pause*) We all have lost someone. Or know someone who has lost someone. Or are still very afraid or sad.

STUDENT 6. This is like The Leftovers...

STUDENT 5. I'm sorry but I don't mean to be a jerk. Honestly, I don't.

STUDENT 6. Kinda missed that exit ramp...

STUDENT 5. Fine, then I'll shut up.

STUDENT 3. Not you too...

PROFESSOR. Go on, Denver. I understand. Honestly I do. It's a struggle for all of us. But that doesn't mean we give up.

STUDENT 7. Exactly.

STUDENT 2. I think I get it now... Wow. That really is amazing...

PROFESSOR. (*Feeling very pleased by that little light bulb moment*) You were saying?

STUDENT 5. It's just all these damn ideas. Philosophizing- trying to finding ways to "making sense of it all" crap. Maybe there isn't any meaning-

STUDENT 7. Exactly!

STUDENT 5. Maybe I just want to go back to playing a really damn fine game of soccer. To go out to a bar with friends and get toasted. That is what my life is. Was. Being with people. Experiencing... joy. Is it so wrong to just want a little frigging pleasure...?

PROFESSOR. Actually Camus thought that too. He marveled, he valued, he believed we needed to focus on the most simple acts of life.

STUDENT 4. I've heard that by next week it will all be over. They are going to lift the ban.

STUDENT 1. Hallelujah.

STUDENT 2. I heard that too. But they said that before...

STUDENT 1. Yeah, remember Easter...

STUDENT 2. Two weeks of no new cases, it all may be about to go back to normal.

STUDENT 3. What's normal now?

*Brighton appears in a screen. The Student's freeze in place. In this act there are many times the action seems to just freeze and wait.*

BRIGHTON. I got to visit him last night. Broke all the cosmic rules of social distancing. (*Healthcare Pro's screen pops up. After his shock of seeing her, we can see he is talking but there is no audio coming from his screen*) I don't know why they let me. Said that there are times that they will just... I wanted to tell him it was alright. That I didn't blame, don't blame him. Anymore than I blamed him or Mom for my Lupus. (*The student's screens disappear, one by one.*) That I just love him. But they don't let you speak. No audio... It was so nice, him and me. And I just listened to him speak. Talk to me. Heaven... Just to see him and listen to him, even if I couldn't hear... We both understood.



*Council Person 3 and the City Manager's screens pop up. The other two screens go out.*

COUNCIL PERSON 3. So what do you think it will be? We know for sure Hitner and Connors will want us to stay shuttered. But 4,2 is enough to open us back up? Right?

CITY MANAGER. It is a majority, yes.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. We need to hold that special election as soon as possible. We need to fill my old seat.

CITY MANAGER. It is on the calendar. I can always vote to break any tie.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Is that supposed to make me feel better? It doesn't.

CITY MANAGER. Madame/Mr. Mayor it is going to be a long four years if-

COUNCIL PERSON 3. I understand. Trust me I do. We will find a way to work together.

CITY MANAGER. Even if it kills us? Too soon? You can always just give me a terrible review and fire me, with enough votes from the Council.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. I have enough trouble just getting the damn beaches open...

CITY MANAGER. Is that supposed to make me feel better? It doesn't.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Hitner should have just resigned like he/she threatened too... How the hell she/he was ever elected is beyond me. The world is going to hell in a wooden casket.

CITY MANAGER. Hand basket.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. What in the hell are you talking about? Do we have the votes or not? You are supposed to be advising me.

CITY MANAGER. I thought I was supposed to run the City.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Are you threatening me?

CITY MANAGER. My job, that you hired me for, is to enact the Council's decisions, to assist in creating a working budget and make sure the city is funded and staffed and running smoothly. But if you want my advice-

COUNCIL PERSON 3. I just asked for it, didn't I? For the love of Saint Peter, Paul, and Mary...

CITY MANAGER. The CDC is warning of premature returns to normal. They are advising caution. That even if there was a lessening of the virus in

summer and fall, it could come back even stronger than before. The second wave of the 1918 virus was more deadly than the first.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Well no one could ever accuse you of girding the lily...

*The students and the Professor come back into view, and the City officials freeze and then disappear.*

PROFESSOR. Class, can we focus back a bit. I'm glad that we are all feeling optimistic, but this is Charley's time, and we shouldn't interrupt him/her.

STUDENT 5. Cue the buzzkill...

STUDENT 7. We are all exhausted are we not? Because we have all been pushing the rock uphill, only to have it fall back down again and again. Month by month, week by week, day by day...

STUDENT 5. Seriously, who stole his/her Ritalin.

STUDENT 7. The Sisyphus myth says we wake up in the morning and push our burden back uphill, only to have it fall back down again. Up and then down. And that's been us. Wake up and work very hard only to have it all come crashing down. That is why Camus believed the greatest question of all is-

STUDENT 4. Should I drink the Kool-Aid or not...

STUDENT 7. Exactly. Right again. The greatest question of all is suicide.

STUDENT 2. To be or not to be.

STUDENT 7. Yes. That is what The Mythology of Sisyphus teaches us. It actually begins "There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."

*HEALTH CARE PRO's screen pops up.*

HEALTH CARE PRO. It was not intentional you know. I just wanted to go to sleep. For a week. Okay, maybe more. It's like that joke. I am slowly losing my battle against my crippling depression syndrome. Really, how do you feel? I couldn't be happier.

*Back to the students. The Health Care Professional disappears after a beat of silence.*

PROFESSOR. He died in a car wreck you know. At 40.

STUDENT 2. Who?

PROFESSOR. Camus. And he wasn't even driving...

STUDENT 5. So then what does any of this prove? Screw it. I'd say to—who keeps giving him the rock?

STUDENT 2. Who?

STUDENT 5. Sissy Pants. In the myth, who gave him the rock in the first place?

STUDENT 2. Oh, I don't know.

STUDENT 7. The Gods. Only Camus did not put much faith in deities of any kind.

STUDENT 1. Like I said, then the whole damn thing makes no sense.

STUDENT 5. Like some big important genius French guy who is fixated on suicide and then gets taken out by because he decides to ride shotgun with some drunk. Look if you ask me the secret is to say, "keep your damn rock. I'm out of here."

STUDENT 4. It's a metaphor, numbnuts.

STUDENT 5. Then I say, "screw your metaphor. I'm metaphorically out of here."

STUDENT 6. He can't. He's not allowed to leave.

STUDENT 3. Welcome to the club

STUDENT 5. I'd say, "screw the goddamn club, I'm off this damn mountain, here's your damn rock", and I jet back to my valley or where ever."

STUDENT 7. But you're not. Are you. You logged into this class today, when you could have just gone out, why?

STUDENT 5. Don't tempt me. Because I need the damn grade. Sorry, Professor.

STUDENT 7. You woke up and didn't kill yourself today, why?

STUDENT 5. The day is young...

STUDENT 4. I liked it better when he/she was just staring at us, and not saying a word.

STUDENT 7. Camus would say it is because we learn to actually enjoy the struggle. We take a kind of weird joy from it. We learn that there is pleasure in the struggle.

STUDENT 2. We were supposed to give a report on (reading) “How does the Plague continue to inform our generation, six months into this pandemic?”

STUDENT 7. I am.

STUDENT 3. No, you’re not. You’re talking about sissy pants and pushing rocks. None of that is even in the book I had to read.

*Student 1 has gotten up, walked to the bathroom, and set his /her computer down on the floor and pulls his /her yoga/sweat pants down and sits on the toilet forgetting to have muted the camera. All at once, the students go OMG, That is crazy, You go, girl/guy. \*Important\* The angle should be such that we only see him/her in profile so the nudity is no more just a bare leg.*

PROFESSOR. Payton, you are helping define the notion of absurd a little too literally.

STUDENT 1. Oh, crap.

STUDENT 5. Well that answers that great question.

STUDENT 4. What?

STUDENT 5. Was it number one or number two.

*As Student 1 reaches down quickly to shut off the camera, the entire class goes dark.*

*The musician’s screen comes up. He/She/They is trying to play their instrument. We see how ill he/she/they is. He can no longer really play. The frustration is visible.*

*The City Council Screens pop up. Council Person 3 is now Mayor. They are finishing the pledge of Allegiance- One nation under God with Liberty and Justice for All. At the same time, the older musician’s screen goes out and all at once, we have a younger different musician.*

CITY CLERK. Item one under NEW Business is Recommendation to end Resolution 6 point 5 the sheltering in place and closing of non-essential businesses and public lands.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. I motion to approve.

COUNCIL PERSON 1. Second.

COUNCIL PERSON 3/MAYOR. Motion from Rogers, seconded by Manklewitz. Is there any discussion?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Yes, Madame/Mr. Mayor.

COUNCIL PERSON 3/MAYOR. As my grandmother used to say, I would have bet the farm and the barn next door on that one. Council man/woman Hitler?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Thank you Madame/Mr. Mayor. Let's talk about what is at stake here today...

*The screens shift to the younger Musician by everyone else freezing.*

YOUNGER MUSICIAN. I used to play with Leslie Mansfield, and I loved him/her very much. And I am honored to be asked to play this song, that I know he/she/they loved. You never used to worry playing with Leslie, because even if you were having a bad day, you knew you were playing with the best. And like all the best, Leslie always found a way to make you sound better. Always took a step back and let everyone on that stage shine. I hope I do you proud Les. It's been three months now, and we all miss you very much.

*The same song we heard in Act One plays again. A bit more mournful than before if need be.*

*The Health Care Professional's camera pops up and the Musician's screen stays up for a while playing until it just fades out. Four more screens pop up- a grief support group.*

HEALTHCARE PRO. Thank you for letting me play a bit of that song before we begin. I don't know why but it just helps me... Not exactly upbeat for a grief support group. I was going to begin with a joke, because I do that a lot, use humor to...

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 1. Were those jokes?

HEALTHCARE PRO. Tough crowd. You Grievers are a tough crowd. Oh, well screw it. I am gonna do it anyway. Probably why I still need you guys. Right? Old habits... I am trying, even if it doesn't seem like it.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 2. It's okay, we got ya.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 3. Speak for yourself...

HEALTHCARE PRO. So anyway, stop me if you've heard this: My therapist wanted to tell me about the 5 stages of grief. I said... First of all nothing bad has happened! Second: HOW DARE you imply that it has?!! Third: So, I'm only paying half for this session. Wow, Thanks for ruining my good mood... And finally: Okay, okay tell me all about it...

*The HEALTHCARE PRO and support group cameras all freeze.  
The PROFESSOR pops up.*

PROFESSOR. I had a very good day, Will. Am I allowed to tell you that? We teachers live for days like this. Usually caused by one student who ought to be teaching the class themselves, which is pretty much what happened today. But you should have seen it. My love- (*Pauses just a bit because she realizes that it has been a long time since she has called him that.*) One of my students who barely registers cognition let alone grasping complex concepts, she/he/they actually got it. Today was one of those Eureka moments... she/he/they understood absurdity. Which is of course it's own punch line. We historians live so often in the past. Like miners, we keep looking for patterns in the past that can be mined for... And it occurred to me, Willie, that is what we are all doing. You and I, and heck, most of the whole world, right? That is why we have chosen to fight and endure and keep living. All of us, collectively trying to survive this, to keep the damn thing going. I teach, you heal, others make things, but we do it because there just has to be more than the past, there has to be another day. And we wake up and we realize there is going to be one, right? It's inevitable, I suppose, until it's not. So if there's going to be another day, well then, by damn, we have to do all we can to make it that much better. No one wants it to be worse... Or this bad, ever again...Unless you work in fossil fuels. There is no redemption there. My student understood that. Not the eureka kid, that was wonderful, but I'm talking about the Shining One (*STUDENT 7's screen pops into view.*) the one who, I don't know, is the best that our future will bring. He/She/They is why we work so damn hard. Why we have children, and parent them with such tenderness and care. And if we are lucky enough, carefully deliver them to the world. He/She/They are our tomorrow.

STUDENT 7. So I will conclude with three famous ideas that Camus ends his novel with: First: It will never truly end. "For this was the record of what had to be done and what, no doubt, would have to be done again, and again against this terror."

HEALTHCARE PRO. I stole that, but it's not bad right? That joke? Tell me all about it... Acceptance... Okay? So I will tell you about it. I went back to work yesterday. (*The support group offers congratulations, each a bit different*) Alright, Alright, I have never been good with praise and admiration. You know that. Comes from having five Irish aunts... Anyway, I went back to the medical center and that was tough enough. I mean you have no idea how guilty I felt- okay, you guys all know exactly how guilty I have felt... I mean for most of the war, I was nowhere near the trenches, and we were so undermanned as it was. And I had a job when so many didn't. Some still don't. But hey, I went back. And everyone was so... I mean they were so kind. And that helped... None of that whispered resentment behind my back for bailing on them- all that crap that I was so worried about. And I plan on going back again on Monday. One day at a time as they say. But that

is not what was on my mind all last night. Or at least in those can't get to sleep, down the rabbit hole hours of the night. No, I was online, looking at my map, you know the one that I have been compulsively checking for number of tests, number of cases, number of deaths-- you know what I mean Connie, I know you do.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 3. Oh, do I... I have it on my phone. My iPad... I'd put it on the car touch screen if I could...

HEALTHCARE PRO. I mean I check it five times a night sometimes, like a compulsive broker checking stocks... a Coronavirus bookie or something... anyway "bing" no new cases all across the country, all across the world. For weeks now...

STUDENT 7. The second idea Camus concludes with: What we learn in time of pestilence there are more things to admire in men than despise.

*Reporter and Council Person 3/Mayor's screens pop up.*

REPORTER. Madame/Mr. Mayor. What do you say to those who are worried about this victory? About next weeks ending of the sheltering in place?

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 3. I say what could be more exciting than a City, than a community coming back to life? Of the doors opening for our businesses, our school bells ringing. Our churches calling us back to worship. And I promise you this, we have learned a great deal from this ordeal. And what we have learned, we have learned together, as a community, as one city. What we have learned is, by the grace of God, we will once again thrive. And we have learned that no matter what adversity we face, our city is the jewel of the Gold Coast. You can already feel it, can't you? It is right around the corner. We are all just waiting to come out again, the crowds are wanting to travel, and they want to visit us, to walk our beaches and recreate in our blue waters. The sun is ready to shine on all of us, and a new day will dawn on our shores.

STUDENT 7. Beware: "The plague never dies it waits patiently in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, handkerchiefs, and old papers for the day when it will once again rouse its rats and send them to die in some prosperous city."

*Brighton appears again suddenly in a screen*

HEALTHCARE PRO. And then all of a sudden this happened... Brighton, my late daughter, now please do not call me crazy here-- because well, of course, at least half of us here are certifiable, or at least were, I mean we met in the psych ward right? Anyway my daughter... just all at once appeared on my computer screen. I mean she just popped up, like she was right there. Wanting to video chat with me. Like we did when she was seeking treatment. Back then, we wore that Zoom room out; sometimes we stayed

on that thing for so long... Like teenagers on a party line... And at first I thought, aw crap, my support group is going to be so pissed- so I rubbed my eyes and she would not go away. I mean there she was...

STUDENT 7. And finally what we learn is, if there is one thing one can always yearn for and sometimes attain, it is human love.

HEALTHCARE PRO. And so I said: "hello, my sweet bright one." And she just stared at me. And I said "I've really lost it, haven't I... they are going to put me back in the rubber ward for sure." But then the weirdest, okay the second weirdest, because the first weirdest was she was even there, what was odd was I just started to talk to her. And it didn't matter that she didn't say a word. I mean up until she got sick, I think the only thing she used to say to me was thanks for the Master Card. But I just told her how I was, and how the world was, and how her mother was, and that finally we were probably going to be okay, that it was a very rough patch there for a while. I told her how her mother so blamed me, felt it was my fault, which was so natural since it actually was.... But that I was seeking treatment and wasn't looking to medicate anymore... and I swear to you as we are almost sitting here together, she and I just started to cry, at the same time, together.

*Brighton is now crying. There is no audio from her screen this time.*

HEALTHCARE PRO. And I told her it was alright. That we loved her so much, and how much we missed her, how everyone missed her. And then-- I had to-- so I told her that I was so sorry, that I would spend the rest of my life being so sorry. And then, because I knew no one would believe me, I don't know why, but all of a sudden I decided I should take a screen shot. I suppose because I knew when I told you this, I'd have to have some proof, so I wouldn't have to go back to square one with all of this recovery... And then I kid you not- the-okay- third weirdest thing, no wait a minute this WAS the weirdest without a doubt thing. I took the screen shot and- wham-nothing. (*Brighton is gone.*) She wasn't there. At all... And I got so sad, so worried. I mean just like that, where her screen was went blank. But then I have no idea how to tell you this, she just appeared right next to me-

*Brighton does appear in the same screen as he/she/they- which means that actor should be cast as an actual healthy family member of the performer playing the Healthcare Professional-1 at least for now- and it should be the first time we have seen two people in the same screen.*

HEALTHCARE PRO. And that of course freaked me out because we had had to keep so far apart the last few weeks of her... couldn't even stand by as.... and I said, "what are you doing here? Are you actually here? And please say something to me," and all she did was come up behind me and lean over me sitting in my chair, because I was just too damn freaked out to even move, and she kissed me on my forehead. And just when she did-



wham the computer and all the lights went out. Like as if someone snapped their fingers and the whole world went dark.

*As she/he/they tenderly kisses his/her/their forehead*

Blackout

**END OF PLAY**