

Another Seascape

by

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With respect (and hopefully no apologies or payments) to Edward Albee

DESCRIPTION

Another Seascape is a reworking of Edward Albee's Seascape. In this version, Nancy and Charles' easy slide into bourgeois sentimentalism is scorned by the two creatures of the sea that appear, Jean-Paul and Simone. As Jean-Paul says, the whole purpose of evolution cannot be that these two comfortable people nit-pick endlessly about their emotions, and the two creatures try to show them a different path.

CHARACTERS

- CHARLIE, mid-60s, still vigorous, in possession of all his faculties
- NANCY, mid-60s, still vigorous, in possession of all her faculties
- JEAN-PAUL, lizard
- SIMONE, lizard

SETTING

- A beach

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CHARLIE and NANCY are lying on a beach, surrounded by lying-on-the-beach paraphernalia. The day is bright. Overhead, an airplane roars from right to left. CHARLIE is reading. NANCY paints watercolors. She has a wooden suitcase/box that holds art supplies.

NANCY: It's a reassuring sound, in a certain way.

CHARLIE: It's a nuisance—an annoying reminder of civilization.

NANCY: As if that corkscrew isn't, or that book you're perusing or—(using a babyish voice)—the soft cotton underwear cushioning your tush.

CHARLIE: That's different. They're different. They're artifacts we choose.

NANCY: Hmm, yes....

CHARLIE: They are—companions, so to speak. (*indicating all their belongings*) Our compatriots.

NANCY: Our servants.

CHARLIE: Our—compañeros.

NANCY: Our pals.

CHARLIE: While that—

CHARLIE can't find the word.

NANCY: But it can be reassuring—if you don't listen too closely—just feel the sound.

CHARLIE: An unwanted intrusion.

NANCY: By you.

CHARLIE: An invasion, almost. It is not friendly.

NANCY pauses in her painting and looks around her.

NANCY: But this is friendly—the air, the sand, this brash blue light that, well, it kind of injects me with an— an— effervescence! Bubbles in the blood!

CHARLIE: (*trying to read*) Yes, yes.

NANCY: Don't you feel it?

She walks over to him and, with a brush, tickles his cheek.

NANCY: Don't you?

CHARLIE: Hey!

He feels his cheek, sees there's no paint in it.

CHARLIE: I feel like I want to read.

She pokes the brush in an ear.

CHARLIE: Stop it!

She starts flicking the brush all around his head, playfully.

NANCY: I don't think I will. Not until I get you to rise up out of that chair and dance the—
tarantella with me.

CHARLIE: Stop it! You're worse than sand fleas. You're worse than Nora Helmer. Go paint.

NANCY: Go paint, go paint. There was a time—

CHARLIE: There is always "there was a time"—it's just that one shouldn't live for them once
they're gone.

NANCY: You're dry and cruel.

CHARLIE: That is not so—

NANCY: If you flicked your bookmark around my ears, I'd tango for you.

CHARLIE: I don't tango.

NANCY: I know.

*She goes back to her painting, he to his reading. JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE enter in
a way that does not reveal themselves to NANCY or CHARLIE but which makes
them visible to the audience. They listen attentively to the conversation. They are
dressed as, and act like, creatures from the sea.*

NANCY: We could live on the beach.

CHARLIE: I'm sure that's not legal.

NANCY: We don't have to go back—

CHARLIE: And I'm sure it's uncomfortable.

NANCY: Back to that awful civilization you hate.

CHARLIE: I don't hate all of it. Pleather, perhaps, certainly body puncturing, or undisciplined paint brushes—but not all of it. It would be like hating myself.

NANCY: We could roam the world's beaches—why not? We've reached geezerhood, we have enough money, we've been appropriately abandoned by our children. What's to stop us?

CHARLIE: (*putting the book down in exasperation*) What's to stop us? Simple: I don't want to do it.

NANCY: That's what you say.

CHARLIE: No, that's what is true. I don't want to do it. I'm perfectly content—

NANCY: Perfectly—

CHARLIE: Yes, “perfectly”—perfectly. I like my errands. I like my puttering. I like the occasional planned vacation.

NANCY: Plans, plans, plans, plans, plans, plans, plans.

CHARLIE: I like to read the books I get through the book club—

NANCY: Boom, boom, boom through the mail slot!

CHARLIE: —in the order I order them, and not let them pile up unread because I'm too busy out there “living life.”

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE disappear, only to reappear in a different place, still unseen by NANCY and CHARLIE but visible to the audience.

NANCY: And I am just “out” there, is that it?

CHARLIE goes to NANCY.

CHARLIE: We have lived a long and, I think, fruitful life. We've done all that is expected of people in our position: paid our taxes, consumed enough to support the economy, contributed two intelligent, if somewhat diffuse, children to the world, kept faith with the ideals of our liberal education—and the last thing I feel any urge to do is climb the crags and the glaciers. We have earned—

NANCY: (*overlapping*)—earned a little rest—yes, your mantra. Your touchstone.

CHARLIE: We have.

CHARLIE picks up his book and sits down.

CHARLIE: What's wrong with that?

NANCY shows CHARLIE the watercolor she is working on: a picture of sky, ocean, etc.

NANCY: Look.

CHARLIE: It's very nice.

NANCY: Watch.

NANCY slowly crumples it up and throws it over her shoulder. It lands near one of the lizards, who takes it and gently, quietly opens it.

NANCY: Easy come, easy go.

CHARLIE: Why did you do that?

NANCY: Easy come, easy go.

She starts painting her face with watercolors.

CHARLIE: Easy come, easy go. So that's where you've ended up.

NANCY: No, that's where we have ended up.

CHARLIE: Not me—I—

NANCY: Pale colors on a slab of rag paper tossed into the maw of the bleaching sun.

CHARLIE: What?

NANCY: Pale colors—

CHARLIE: I heard you, but I did not understand. Where did you get that language? And what are you doing to your face?

NANCY: It's my summer palette.

CHARLIE: You've gone distinctly awry. The sun has made you—

The sound of the airplane again. The lizards hunker down a bit but do not move. After it passes, they look at one another and then disappear.

NANCY: The sun has made me awry? Not awry enough, if you ask me.

She turns and faces him with a face blotched with color.

NANCY: How do I look?

CHARLIE: Awry. Blotched.

NANCY: Charismatic.

CHARLIE: Streaky.

NANCY: Rainbowed.

CHARLIE: Nancy—

NANCY: Charlie—

He looks away, exasperated.

CHARLIE: What are you doing?

NANCY: Preparing the body.

CHARLIE refuses to answer.

NANCY: C'mon, hold up your end. Preparing the body.

CHARLIE: I've learned not to indulge your—fits. The last one cost us a hundred dollars for a bottle of champagne and the dry cleaning and I will not—

NANCY: Sssh! That word—verboten.

CHARLIE: What word?

NANCY: One of the ones you said.

NANCY points to her eye.

CHARLIE: I.

NANCY shakes her head no; indicates for the next word.

CHARLIE: Will.

NANCY shakes her head no; indicates for the next word.

CHARLIE: Not.

NANCY places her fingers to her lips and nods her head yes.

CHARLIE: Not.

NANCY: Sssh!

CHARLIE: Not, not, not, not, not.

NANCY: I disallow that word forever more.

Writes the word on a piece of paper with charcoal, crumples it, and tosses it.

CHARLIE: (*sing-song*) Not, not, not, not, not, not, not.

NANCY: (*in synch with CHARLIE*) Quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet.

CHARLIE: You're littering the beach. This is absurd.

NANCY: Exactly. You're all "nots." Charlie, and I have run out of any desire to untie them.

CHARLIE: All I said—

NANCY: We've earned a little rest. But for what? In anticipation of what? After doing what? Rest—what about "the rest" as in "the rest of our days"? The crags and glaciers—yes!! Bring 'em on! Bring me on them!

She moves closer to CHARLIE.

NANCY: (*not untenderly*) To say we've earned a little rest is a sentence of—death. Not even a full sentence, just a couple of diphthongs gummed together. And not even really death, which might at least be something interesting—just a long, drooly nap on a humid day.

She covers her teeth with her lips and speaks.

NANCY: "We've earned a little rest." Geezer-speak.

NANCY starts cleaning the paint off her face.

NANCY: I'm sorry.

CHARLIE: You shouldn't be so—

NANCY: I'm being unfair.

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE come on again, again visible but unseen. JEAN-PAUL picks up the paper that NANCY had tossed with the word "not" on it and gently, quietly, opens it.

NANCY: It's just that this—beach, this air, this—

CHARLIE: Freedom—as you've said. To roam the beaches.

NANCY: And why not?

CHARLIE: It seems to open up—parts of you.

NANCY: And not you.

CHARLIE: Well, to me, one beach is pretty much the same as another: sand, water, the ambiguous line between earth and sky. I can take one beach and turn it, in my mind, to, say, a black sand—

NANCY: (*interrupting him*) So never you, opened—

CHARLIE: I'm open, just—practical. Though there was, once—

NANCY: What?

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE disappear once again and re-appear elsewhere.

CHARLIE: Something.

NANCY: What's in your voice?

CHARLIE: When I was young—younger—twelve or thirteen.

NANCY: Your face—

NANCY grabs a sketch pad and begins to draw CHARLIE, in pencil.

CHARLIE: It was nothing.

NANCY: Oh, don't take it away from me now!

CHARLIE: It was—nothing—really. A cove, at my grandparents' beach house. Protected, you see—

NANCY: What happened there?

CHARLIE: It's silly, really.

NANCY: Not then. Not now. Not if it draws you out.

CHARLIE sees what she is doing.

CHARLIE: Draws me out, huh? (*mimics her drawing*) Punmeister.

NANCY: Don't pay attention. Pick up the thread.

CHARLIE: Well— I would go down to the cove on those hot, brassy mornings, when the adults were licking up their coffee on the porch, evaporating the previous night's alcohol like steam vents—you know, all they liked to do at the beach was sit on that porch—

NANCY: Genetic.

CHARLIE: —and do a kind of nothing that drove me crazy.

NANCY: Body stretched, needing a torque.

CHARLIE: So I left—ran, really.

NANCY: To the cove.

CHARLIE: To the cove.

CHARLIE gets out of his chair and sits cross-legged on the blanket. He picks up his two shoes and holds them.

CHARLIE: I had two favorite stones there. Wave-polished. Like two loaves of peasant bread. I'd pick them up and wade into the water, out and out until the ocean ringed my neck and I was standing on the very tips of the very tips of my toes. Then—

NANCY: Then—

CHARLIE: Then I would just sink.

NANCY: Sink.

CHARLIE: Through that pearlescent water until I landed on the sandy bottom. And I would sit there, full of quiet, the silted water gradually clearing—and the fish would come back and—wonder of wonders—ignore me, as if I were as natural as the stones that tethered me.

NANCY: I can imagine.

CHARLIE: Then I felt—I don't know if "free" is the word. I felt—I felt I was nothing—not an absence or a deletion, but wonderfully empty, delivered—

NANCY: Delivered—

CHARLIE: Numb, but still sensate. Before the lack of oxygen drove me up, as if I had dissolved—

NANCY: Dissolved—

CHARLIE: —and the fish swam through me and I had no present-ness at all.

NANCY: No longitude or latitude.

CHARLIE: And then I'd kick to the top, gasping. I'd try it a few more times, but there was always a fall-off from that first cavernous dissolved feeling. I don't think I have been as happy as I was then, at that moment—

NANCY stops drawing.

NANCY: Never?

CHARLIE: Uh—

NANCY: You've never told me that.

CHARLIE: I never needed to remember it—until now, for some reason.

CHARLIE puts the shoes down, indicates the pad of paper.

CHARLIE: May I?

NANCY does not give him the pad; instead, she rips the page off, crumples it, and tosses it. SIMONE takes it and gently, quietly opens it.

NANCY: Not very good.

CHARLIE: Why did you do that—

NANCY: Secrets.

CHARLIE: What?

NANCY: We all have secrets, don't we?

CHARLIE: That wasn't a secret. A memory. A reverie.

NANCY: Your face—

CHARLIE: My face—

NANCY: Your face had such—peace in it.

CHARLIE: And that's why you threw it away?

NANCY: It hollowed me out.

CHARLIE: The story wasn't about you—

NANCY: That's exactly what I mean.

CHARLIE: Hollowed out?

NANCY: I have secrets, too, you know.

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE disappear, then re-appear in a different location.

CHARLIE: This isn't about secrets. What secrets?

NANCY: Wouldn't you like to know?

CHARLIE: Let me see: no, not really. No, I wouldn't. What secrets?

NANCY: Just—secrets.

CHARLIE: You know what "just—secrets" usually means?

NANCY: Tell me.

CHARLIE: I don't want to play this game.

NANCY: He's emoting!

CHARLIE: I don't like how it makes me feel.

NANCY: Feel!

CHARLIE: I tell you something personal—

NANCY: What are you feeling?

CHARLIE: (*goes back to his book*) I definitely do not like how this makes me feel.

NANCY takes his book.

NANCY: Let's see—on page 116—ooh, I'd forgotten that secret.

CHARLIE: This is about our not going anywhere exotic, right? About the fact that over the years I've put together a pretty good portfolio that has outpaced the—

NANCY: And this one on page 210—now that was a corker!

CHARLIE: This is about how boring, old Charles has made a pretty good life for the two of us.
And now you resent the hand that's held the tiller.

NANCY: And this one—no, I can't go there.

CHARLIE: Stop it!

NANCY: Oh no, I really can't. Really. Do you want to hear it?

CHARLIE: I want my book back.

NANCY drops it, with a thud.

NANCY: I'm done.

CHARLIE lets the book sit there.

CHARLIE: You're angry.

NANCY: No, Charlie, I'm not angry. Not at you, at least. Nancy, wife of Charles, mother of two—
diffuse children has only herself to blame. She has—lost her way. Me and Dante—

CHARLIE: (*muttered*) Dante and I.

NANCY: —the infernal duo, in the middle of the road of life.

CHARLIE: Dante and I.

NANCY: That—undersea reverie of yours— that's me now, except I'm not turning into a
meditative coral reef but drowning, Charlie—no, not even drowning, not anything that
active—drowned before I even hit the bottom, the drifting dead.

CHARLIE gets out of his chair, picks up the book.

CHARLIE: What is it, Nancy? What is so terribly wrong for you?

NANCY: Oh. Oh. I wish it were something as big-dicked, something as, as—fecund as “so
terribly wrong for me.” But, no, I get to get something more petty, trivial, like some
discard at a flea market that people pick up and put down without registering an iota

about it. Charlie, it's just Dante and me—Dante and I—and even he's decided it's too boring for him to stick around. Seeing your face reminded me that once—once—I wasn't like this.

CHARLIE: Are you afraid?

NANCY: Do you really want me to answer?

CHARLIE: No games here. Are you afraid?

The airplane passes overhead. NANCY picks up a scrap piece of paper and begins folding an origami cup.

NANCY: Not on most days. Not this morning. Most days are—compact, tidy. Navigable. I go by the charts.

CHARLIE: As I do.

NANCY: I know.

CHARLIE: And then—the other days?

NANCY, completing her cup, gets up and gets a bottle of water, pours some into the cup, and drinks. She offer CHARLIE a shot, but he declines, irritated. She crumples up the cup and starts making an origami crane.

NANCY: I think about sex.

CHARLIE: Sex.

NANCY: About how it does go first. Or at least reduces itself to occasional, and therefore “let's mark the calendar” kinds of couplings. And I think about how bodies that once wallowed in their fluids and furrows—which we did, querido, which we did—now pucker like dried fruit and sputter with arthritis.

CHARLIE: We haven't stopped doing “it,” by the way.

NANCY: Doing by the way. Besides, Charlie, you miss the symbolic point, as usual: it's not about not having sex.

CHARLIE: Then what?

NANCY: It's about desire, Charlie, about yearning and longing and rocketing off! How life cheats! Desires remain adolescent while bodies shed their mortal coils year by year so you get goose-pimples of desire running up and down your dough-boy flesh—it edges into the grotesque.

CHARLIE: I don't understand this. I don't understand you. You have everything you need, and yet you choose to remain unsatisfied.

NANCY: Some things are not a choice. Some bills that come due are the human condition.

CHARLIE: You've never been one to practice moderation—it's either the crags and glaciers or a slow evaporation in a rest home. Nothing in-between.

NANCY: A rest home—how artfully named! Rest—Charlie, we rest most of our lives, like rests in a piece of music! I don't want music! I want a long, unimpaired scream of delight without any rests!

CHARLIE: Well, you can't have it. There comes a time—

NANCY: You mean you won't give it to me.

CHARLIE: It's not mine to give. I'm content.

NANCY: No, you're not. You just make believe you are because I am so not content, just to cancel me out. You get an immoderate satisfaction out of being moderate in front of me.

CHARLIE: No, I feel content. I really do.

NANCY: No, you don't. Or have you forgotten your “Hamlet” phase?

CHARLIE: Oh, let's drag that from the grave!

NANCY: “That this too too solid flesh—”

CHARLIE: It only lasted seven months. And early on.

NANCY: You can honestly, without irony, use the word “only” to describe the bone-breaking boredom of your malaise?

CHARLIE: (*dismissive*) Boredom. To you, maybe.

NANCY: To me, certainly.

CHARLIE: But you stayed with me.

NANCY: I did.

CHARLIE: You understood.

NANCY: I wouldn't go that far. All I knew was that some black melancholy had descended on you, like ravens on road kill, and that the "for worse" part of the "for better" clause kicked in. I never understood—that secret remains with you.

NANCY has finished her origami crane. She makes it flap along for a few strokes, then tosses it. JEAN-PAUL picks it up, and then JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE disappear and do not reappear.

CHARLIE: (*making a wan reference to the book*) The secret's on page 111.

NANCY: (*she ignores the book*) We should get ready to go. The sun is sliding westward, ho.

CHARLIE: It wasn't a secret with me—

NANCY: I'm tired, Charlie. I've reached the middle of the middle of the road—

CHARLIE: I knew why.

NANCY: All right, Charlie.

She sits and takes off her sandals; she places them behind her ears, as if to hear him better.

NANCY: My ears are yours.

CHARLIE: Put the shoes down.

CHARLIE kneels in front of her; this is a sufficiently unusual move that NANCY puts the sandals down and listens.

CHARLIE: Beyond the usual fears about success and so on, for a young man. Beyond the usual night sweats about mortality and failure.

NANCY: Your ebon melancholy—

CHARLIE: Was about—you. I thought, perhaps, I'd made— that I'd made a—mistake.

NANCY: A mistake.

CHARLIE: In marrying you.

NANCY: I understand the referent. Aghast? I'm shocked. (*gets up*) Let's go.

CHARLIE: (*gets up as well*) We were talking about afraid.

NANCY: Let's not—not anymore.

CHARLIE: You brought it up.

NANCY: And I want to put it down.

CHARLIE: I can't, now—it's out.

NANCY: It's useless. We're here where we are. La, la, la, la. And aren't we a pair! Hollowed out and phony and linked for life.

CHARLIE: We're not phony—we've had a good life, honest with each other.

NANCY: Have had. Have had, had, had. It's all some pluperfect past tense bullshit! I stood by you.

CHARLIE: And I stood by you.

NANCY: After you accepted your—mistake.

CHARLIE: After I realized that I hadn't made a mistake at all.

NANCY: How nice—not to be checked-off as a mistake. And just what kind of mistake was I?

Starts singing the "waiting" music from "Jeopardy."

CHARLIE: Stop trying to be—

NANCY: I'm a geezer—I got a right to a shitty attitude.

CHARLIE: You think I'm saying I made a mistake in marrying you, don't you? That's what you think.

Starts on an origami boat, but furiously, angrily.

NANCY: What do you expect—you said I was a mistake.

CHARLIE: Of course you do, because it has to all be about you.

NANCY: Who else? Do you know that three-and-a-half months into your Hamlet—the half-way point, exactly, though I couldn't know it at the time because everything felt endless—I thought, "I could have an affair."

CHARLIE: Listen to what I say, not what you think I said—

NANCY: An affair—something quick, slippery, suck-cinct! And you would never know, and it wouldn't really be cheating because you can't cheat on a ghost! But I didn't. I didn't.

CHARLIE: Ten-point-oh for you. Now will you listen to what I have to say?

NANCY: I didn't, not because of some moral sense.

CHARLIE: (*sighing*) Then why?

NANCY: Because—

CHARLIE: Because—

NANCY: Because I knew I would have more—leverage—if I stayed true. Your gratefulness would give me power.

NANCY throws away the origami.

CHARLIE: And I thought I was the pragmatic one.

NANCY: I'm ashamed to say it.

CHARLIE: Now that you've done your penance, will you listen to what I have to say?

NANCY: Aren't you upset—the least bit?

CHARLIE: Listen—I said that I had made a mistake.

NANCY: You're not upset—

CHARLIE: My “mistake”—what I felt—pay attention!—what I felt was that I wasn't going to be able to make you happy. That Charles, who had never really taken a risk in his life, now had this wonderful, surprising woman in his life who, mystery of mysteries, had said “yes” to his vastly timid proposal of marriage. I felt that the universe had played a sour joke on me, to give happiness to a man so ill-equipped to enjoy it. I liked holding on to it. I've tried my best.

NANCY: Your best has been pretty good.

CHARLIE: But it has fallen short because you're still afraid.

NANCY: So much for my leverage.

CHARLIE: I haven't been able to soothe away the uncertainties, build us the—

NANCY: Charlie, Charlie—we're past the deficits, what we are and aren't. Now it's about gravity and rise. You, you like gravity—sinking into the cove, building the girdle of a portfolio.

CHARLIE: Without an anchor—

NANCY: Me—you know what I like? I like going out in the ocean until I am standing on one toe, with my nose just above the water—at the last available air—and then, pop myself up as much as I can to gulp the air—

CHARLIE: You've always been hungry—

NANCY: I like the rise, the slight change of the horizon as my eyes bob upward an inch or two. You surface reluctantly—I want nothing else but to travel through the thick air in a fan-tailed arc.

CHARLIE: So why did you—do you—stay if I am so—heavy?

NANCY: Because I can stand on you. Don't look shocked! It's what you wanted, want—to be the thing that people stand on in order to stand for something. The unobtrusive rock-steady rock. You've always told me that I should admire you for being so steadfast. So now I am—by using you the way you've always wanted to be used.

*JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE appear again, still unseen by CHARLIE and NANCY.
Throughout the next lines, they move slowly closer.*

CHARLIE: It's not quite what I had in mind. Though now you've made me wonder what I ever had in mind.

NANCY: What we expect and what actually happens—well, no relationship whatsoever. That's why people gamble—to match up the odds to the evens.

CHARLIE: So, what now?

NANCY: I don't know. That momentary fizz from explaining, from coining the truth—gone.

CHARLIE: Gone, yes. The rise has "riz."

NANCY: The foundation founders.

CHARLIE: And here we are, at rest on a beach, in the twilight—

NANCY: Stop!

CHARLIE: Well, on the downward side of the fan-tailed curve—

NANCY: No!

NANCY rises on one foot.

NANCY: I'm still bobbing, still able to push away—

CHARLIE goes to her to steady her.

CHARLIE: No. There's no water to hold you.

She comes back down.

NANCY: I refuse—I refuse to acknowledge the end of water.

CHARLIE: I'm afraid nothing's left—or right.

NANCY: The human condition—

CHARLIE: —has conditioned us.

At this moment, JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE reveal themselves. They come up in a way where NANCY can see them first. She is stricken by a combination of fear and wonder.

NANCY: Charlie!

CHARLIE whirls to see what NANCY sees. JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE move in closer, tentative.

NANCY: Charlie! Oh, my—Charlie! Look at them! Just look at them! They're—they're beautiful.

CHARLIE: Beautiful?

NANCY: Yes!

CHARLIE: They're dangerous, that's what they are!

NANCY: No—

CHARLIE: We're in mortal danger here! From the ocean!

NANCY: Never—

By this time, NANCY is completely flabbergasted and smitten and is not thinking of danger at all.

JEAN-PAUL: They think they're in danger. From us.

NANCY: What's that sound?

JEAN-PAUL: They always think that!

SIMONE: It's understandable, after all.

CHARLIE: Ready to do us damage.

SIMONE: Though look at the look on her face.

CHARLIE: Find me a stick—

SIMONE: Look at her—

CHARLIE: Find me a stick—

JEAN-PAUL: When humans go, “Danger, danger”—

NANCY: What?

SIMONE: Don’t generalize—

CHARLIE: Help me here!

JEAN-PAUL: You’re much too expansive—

SIMONE stops him.

SIMONE: Look at her face.

CHARLIE: A stick—something to defend ourselves—from, from them!

JEAN-PAUL: See, they always go weapon first, parlez-vous after.

NANCY: Listen!

SIMONE: But look at her face!

NANCY: Listen—listen!

JEAN-PAUL: Must I?

NANCY: I think—I can understand them.

CHARLIE: What?

SIMONE: Ears open—I knew it.

CHARLIE: They’re growling, for Christ’s sake!

SIMONE: There’s hope there.

NANCY: No, it sounds like—

JEAN-PAUL: Hope—the little feathered thing—

NANCY: —it sounds—familiar.

SIMONE: You know that's not what I'm saying.

CHARLIE: We are going to die, far away from our beds—

SIMONE: Remember when the first ones walked—

JEAN-PAUL: I've heard those stories.

NANCY: (*as if overhearing*) I've heard those stories.

SIMONE: —that discovery is on her face.

JEAN-PAUL: I suppose—a little.

CHARLIE: What are you mumbling about?

NANCY: We are not going to die—not here. I know this.

JEAN-PAUL: What do you want to do, then?

CHARLIE: How can you know that?

SIMONE: You won't like it.

CHARLIE: To them, we're just meat!

JEAN-PAUL: That's a given.

CHARLIE: Just meat!

JEAN-PAUL: He's getting on my nerves.

SIMONE: Why don't we do a little submission—

CHARLIE: All right, give me a stone, then!

SIMONE: A little submission, just to give them confidence?

CHARLIE: A stone!

JEAN-PAUL: I really hate that—

SIMONE: I know—

NANCY: No weapons!

CHARLIE: Well, if you're content to die—

SIMONE: Remember why we're here.

JEAN-PAUL: All right. All right! I hope this shuts him up.

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE, in a coordinated movement, roll over onto their backs in a posture of submission. There is silence for a moment as CHARLIE and NANCY look at the sight.

JEAN-PAUL: What are they doing? I can't see.

SIMONE: Gaping. Slack-jawed.

JEAN-PAUL: Standard-issue idiot look.

SIMONE: Her eyes gleam.

JEAN-PAUL: They are so slow to take advantage.

SIMONE: Patience.

JEAN-PAUL: It's a wonder they've survived.

SIMONE: She's moving, stretching. I knew she would.

NANCY crawls closer.

CHARLIE: Careful.

NANCY: They're like jewels. Intricate, inlaid jewels.

JEAN-PAUL: I don't have much more patience—

SIMONE: What is your hurry?

NANCY: What is your hurry—

CHARLIE: What?

NANCY: Nothing. Come here.

CHARLIE: Be careful!

NANCY: Don't say useless things. Anymore.

JEAN-PAUL: At least mildly interesting.

SIMONE: I agree.

NANCY touches SIMONE, tentatively, but without fear.

SIMONE: Her touch is green. Fractal.

NANCY: Charlie— Charlie—

CHARLIE begins crawling closer, to JEAN-PAUL.

JEAN-PAUL: Could you entice him to come over to you?

CHARLIE touches JEAN-PAUL.

JEAN-PAUL: Too late.

SIMONE: Stay still. This is an important moment.

NANCY: This is an important moment.

CHARLIE: They're hard.

NANCY: Solid. The ocean made manifest.

JEAN-PAUL: I think I'm aroused.

SIMONE: You'd be out of season.

NANCY: They are—

CHARLIE: They are lizards, that's what they are.

JEAN-PAUL: What an ugly-sounding word.

NANCY: Too ugly, Charlie. No name on them yet.

JEAN-PAUL: Enough—they get the point. (*speaking directly to CHARLIE*) So, what do you think? Nice work, huh?

CHARLIE pulls back, startled.

NANCY: Answer him.

CHARLIE: Why am I understanding him?

NANCY: I don't know why—you just are.

CHARLIE: (*to JEAN-PAUL*) Why am I understanding you?

JEAN-PAUL: (*mimicking NANCY*) I don't know why—you just are.

SIMONE: You have all the grace of a blowfish.

SIMONE rolls over.

SIMONE: Don't mind him—a sense of humor the size of a pilchard.

JEAN-PAUL: I've known a dynamic pilchard or two—

CHARLIE: What's a pilchard?

JEAN-PAUL: (*to CHARLIE*) Let me repeat: what do you think? Fine specimen, heh?

CHARLIE: What are you doing here?

SIMONE: Do you have—(to JEAN-PAUL) What do they call them?

JEAN-PAUL: What?

SIMONE: What humans use—when they talk to each other. “Hi, I’m—” “What’s your—” You know.

NANCY: Names.

JEAN-PAUL: The smart one, I tell ya.

SIMONE: He carries the sophisticated cold-blooded attitude a little too far, don’t you think?

JEAN-PAUL: Sang-froid. I learned it from a whale—

SIMONE: Do you have names?

NANCY: I am Nancy.

NANCY gestures to CHARLIE.

CHARLIE: I am Charlie. Why are you here?

NANCY: Do you have names?

JEAN-PAUL: Green slimy lizard names that would make you wretch—

SIMONE grabs the tip of JEAN-PAUL’s tail and threatens to bite it.

SIMONE: You won’t mind missing a finger-length or two, will you?

JEAN-PAUL grabs SIMONE’s wrist.

JEAN-PAUL: Wouldn’t you prefer something else in your mouth?

SIMONE: I have all I need.

JEAN-PAUL: That’s very short-sighted.

*There is a pause which is balanced on the boundary between pain and eroticism.
They clearly enjoy the tussle. NANCY breaks the silence.*

NANCY: Names?

JEAN-PAUL finally looks away from SIMONE and to NANCY.

JEAN-PAUL: For your sakes—Jean-Paul. I learned it from a whale—yes, that same whale—
who'd overhead French sailors in the South Pacific.

SIMONE: Simone—I like it because it's the sound the water makes when I break the surface to
see the sun.

JEAN-PAUL: Simone has—poetic leanings, if you haven't already noticed.

NANCY: And you don't?

JEAN-PAUL: I do—just more strict. More froid.

NANCY: (to CHARLIE) Well, go ahead.

CHARLIE: What?

NANCY: Go. Be friendly. Friendlier.

CHARLIE: What do you want—shake their—hands? Is it hands?

JEAN-PAUL: We call them gryntospickitals in lizard language—

SIMONE: (to NANCY and CHARLIE) There is no such sound—

JEAN-PAUL: —but we'll settle for hands.

NANCY: Yes. Shake hands.

CHARLIE: No. It's enough they've frightened us, and they refuse to tell us why they're here, and
I don't care how miraculous you think all this is, to me it's taking on the nature of a bad-
tasting nightmare and I prefer to not make friends with things that, at the moment, are
scaring the shit out of me!

NANCY: You're even splitting your infinitives! Well, if you won't—

NANCY extends her hand to JEAN-PAUL.

NANCY: Nice to meet you.

JEAN-PAUL: And I'm supposed to—

SIMONE: You know this!

JEAN-PAUL extends his "hand," and he and NANCY shake.

JEAN-PAUL: Why do you do this?

CHARLIE: It's a sign of faith. (*holds up his hands*) If my hands are free and empty, I have no weapon to kill you.

JEAN-PAUL: Like, say, a stick—or a stone? You know, I would have strung your lower intestine on the ground before you could even—

CHARLIE: Give me a break!

JEAN-PAUL: (*deliberately*) You really don't understand, do you?

CHARLIE: Well, how would you have reacted if two—

JEAN-PAUL: Two what?

CHARLIE: That's not the point. If you were scared. Have you ever been scared? Terrified? Right out of your skin—scales? As scared as—

JEAN-PAUL: (*simply*) Yes. Yes. We have been scared. Are scared. We know.

NANCY: Of what?

SIMONE: (*to NANCY*) Let me take your hand as well.

SIMONE shakes NANCY's hand while keeping an eye on JEAN-PAUL. She holds on to NANCY's hand.

CHARLIE: And you still haven't told us why you're here. I assume you're not on holiday—you do that with the whales in the Pacific, right?

JEAN-PAUL: I can respect your fear—your fears—but don't let them make you stupid. Or rude.

CHARLIE: (*pouting*) It just—it was just such a fright. Here we were, sitting nicely on the beach, minding our own business—

JEAN-PAUL: And what a business that was.

SIMONE: Gently—

CHARLIE: What do you mean by that?

JEAN-PAUL: You're a clammy mess, you are, Charlie. You defend your mate—your Nancy—when we arrive, you upbraid—(*to SIMONE*)—is that right?—(*she nods yes*)—you upbraid me for, well, just about every queasiness you feel at the moment, which could just as easily come from that salmon salad you carted out here—and yet you don't have the presence of what you call mind to do what your Nancy—

CHARLIE: Just "Nancy" will do—it's not "your"—I mean "my"—Nancy.

NANCY takes her hand away from SIMONE at this moment.

JEAN-PAUL: All right—what Nancy did—her face, did you notice her face when we came into your view?

NANCY: My face?

SIMONE: Your face.

NANCY: What about my—face?

JEAN-PAUL "hands off" the situation to SIMONE.

SIMONE: You've probably never seen it, either of you, because you don't watch for it when you're in the water, but we have, we always do. When we come up out of the depths, out of the darkness, up to the light, there is a moment just before we break into the air when our faces are—

SIMONE looks to JEAN-PAUL.

SIMONE: —what did you call it?

JEAN-PAUL: Silvered.

SIMONE: Silvered—with the sunlight and the bubbles trailing and the thin veil of water that covers our faces. I've seen it on him.

JEAN-PAUL: On her.

SIMONE: (*to NANCY*) That was you. Is you.

CHARLIE: Not me?

JEAN-PAUL: You reverted. She advanced.

NANCY: My face?

SIMONE: Silvered.

JEAN-PAUL: Open.

SIMONE: In awe—

JEAN-PAUL: —and wonder. We really prefer our entrances that way.

SIMONE shoots him a look.

NANCY: You were—are—so beautiful.

JEAN-PAUL: In contrast to what you both were gabbing about before we showed up.

CHARLIE: You were eavesdropping?

SIMONE: No—well, yes, but not like picking through garbage—

JEAN-PAUL: That's your opinion—

SIMONE: —more to get a sense of you.

NANCY: A sense.

CHARLIE: Why? You still haven't said why you're here—

JEAN-PAUL: Because you're not ready yet—until we clear up a few things.

CHARLIE: About?

JEAN-PAUL: Oh, let's see—fear and anger and regret and nostalgia and mistakes—do these sound familiar?

CHARLIE: You can't—clear those up! Nancy, I think it's time to leave.

NANCY: Go ahead.

CHARLIE: Oh, it's about your silver face—

NANCY: Don't you dare!

CHARLIE: (*begins gathering things, but ineptly*) They're jerking you—they're jerking us. Why, I don't know—and I can't even believe I'm trying to argue rationally about what is clearly a, a figment, an apparition. Lower life forms do not simply appear out of the sea and begin to harangue—at least not without a chemical jump-start—

JEAN-PAUL holds up his hand to stop CHARLIE.

JEAN-PAUL: (*to SIMONE*) Did you hear that?

SIMONE: Let it pass—please.

CHARLIE: What? What did I say?

JEAN-PAUL: (*comes threateningly close to CHARLIE*) What, in all that gabble you just spewed—your indignation?—what in all of that do you think might offend us?

CHARLIE: I don't know.

JEAN-PAUL: You don't know.

CHARLIE: I don't exactly remember what I said—I was being indignant.

JEAN-PAUL: Short-term memory problems.

CHARLIE: Sometimes you don't remember. You just—

JEAN-PAUL: Spew.

CHARLIE: Yes.

JEAN-PAUL: Well, the offending phrase sounds like—

NANCY: Lower life forms.

JEAN-PAUL: The prize.

CHARLIE: That? (to NANCY) That? Well—aren't you?

JEAN-PAUL: How many reptiles talk to you in a day?

CHARLIE: I'm only saying, that's what we've been taught. We evolved from—

JEAN-PAUL: Ecce homo—

CHARLIE: —you—

JEAN-PAUL: —the pinochle of evolution! Things are getting a little sloppy here—

CHARLIE continues gathering things, but ineptly.

CHARLIE: I don't care! (to NANCY) If you won't go, I'll go myself.

NANCY: Then yourself it is with whom you'll go.

CHARLIE continues collecting while the three of them watch. He feels them watching, becomes self-conscious, and eventually winds down, defeated.

CHARLIE: I can't leave you here.

NANCY: I don't think that's what it is.

CHARLIE: I am—stuck.

JEAN-PAUL: That, my featherless biped, is the first true thing I've heard and overheard you say today—From such muck, clarity may grow.

CHARLIE lapses into silence, NANCY goes to him and lays a soft, but not necessarily comforting, hand on him. They are encased in a momentary silence, and then slowly start gathering their things. During these lines, JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE should come up with physical connections that show their strong bond with each other, the energy that pulls them together.

JEAN-PAUL: Well, what now?

SIMONE: We have to go through with it.

JEAN-PAUL: (*sighs*) I know. Well, we don't have to—we do have some options—

SIMONE: (*indicating CHARLIE and NANCY*) They're not bad—I mean, in some ways, they are the pinochle—now you've got me saying it!—the pinnacle—the pinnacle

JEAN-PAUL: —self-considered pinnacle, that is.

SIMONE: They're the ones who need to be reached, even if they might not be the ones who will do the actual work—

JEAN-PAUL: (*not looking pleased*) But they're like so many of the others— I want to appear in someone's vision again, to be considered a little mythical, you know—

SIMONE: The times, my metalingual dialectical critic—even you know that—every language infected, every word needing to be rinsed and re-negotiated.

JEAN-PAUL: All right. But I can't be responsible—well, I can—all right, I will be responsible for every harshness I bring to them, especially the dead-end wuss, there—they are, especially him, so—smeared that they need a good, rough, teeth-rattling—

SIMONE: Grab yourself!

JEAN-PAUL: Don't tell me—

SIMONE: You think you're so froid—

JEAN-PAUL: I am!

SIMONE: —but you have a big ol' hot nasty chip on your shoulder—if we had shoulders.

JEAN-PAUL: It's just that I get pissed when I think, after all this time—

JEAN-PAUL points to CHARLIE and NANCY.

JEAN-PAUL: —this is what we got.

SIMONE: Let it go—you know that.

JEAN-PAUL: Let it go.

SIMONE: The lesson you're going to tell them—practice it yourself.

JEAN-PAUL: Yes, silvered face.

SIMONE: No, yours in the strict blue-white moonlight—I didn't tell them about that one, the really beautiful one.

JEAN-PAUL: Their hearts are not ready yet for such heights from such depths.

JEAN-PAUL speaks to them.

JEAN-PAUL: You can stop doing—whatever you're doing. Puttering. Fluttering. We have something to say.

They stop their puttering, almost glad for the command. They sit, expectant.

JEAN-PAUL: You—Charlie—you said something, whether you meant it or not, that really offended us.

CHARLIE: Yes—lower life forms. We've already reviewed my lack of social grace.

JEAN-PAUL: Stop being so hangdog! *(to SIMONE)* Really, I can't—*(SIMONE encourages him to continue)* It wasn't about a lack of—social grace. After all, I can understand— In any case, what you said, as mistaken as it is, connects with why we're here.

NANCY: You've come looking for us?

SIMONE: Not you exactly. More in the nature of "your kind."

NANCY: Kind—

SIMONE: Your kind—your—*(looking to JEAN-PAUL)*—what?

JEAN-PAUL: Why do you insist on being so kind? *(to NANCY and CHARLIE)* Your “kind.”

NANCY: You mean, homo sapiens?

JEAN-PAUL: No—well, yes, in a rough way—but more of where you are in your life.

CHARLIE: And where are we?

The airplane passes overhead again. They all wait and watch it go.

JEAN-PAUL: Just the accompaniment I needed. Get up. You, Charlie, take your book and sit down the way you were before the two of you began feeling sorry for yourselves. Go on. Nancy, you back to spreading those colors around—what do you call that?

NANCY: Painting.

JEAN-PAUL: I understand it's big among the sapiens. Whole buildings where it piles up and gets old in front of people. Have you put anything in one of those buildings?

NANCY: No, I just—dabble.

JEAN-PAUL: Dabble. I don't know what that means, but I'll assume it means that you don't accomplish much, since that seems to be a theme here.

They are at their opening positions.

JEAN-PAUL: Good. Now—

SIMONE: *(to both of them)* This is how we found you. What were you talking about?

NANCY: Charlie?

CHARLIE: Lions and tigers and bears—I don't remember.

JEAN-PAUL: Short-term memory problems again.

NANCY: We were talking about—our lives.

CHARLIE: As we often do.

JEAN-PAUL: Endlessly.

CHARLIE: We're old—well, getting there, which in our life means that there comes a time when— when—

SIMONE: Go ahead—say the word.

CHARLIE: When you start thinking about—the time when you won't be thinking any more.

JEAN-PAUL: When you're dead. Dead. We're familiar with the concept—and the results.

NANCY: Charlie talked about—usual with him—about “earning a little rest.”

JEAN-PAUL: A little death, you mean?

NANCY: I suppose.

JEAN-PAUL: And you didn't like that—throwing paper around—wanting to live more life—

CHARLIE: You heard everything.

JEAN-PAUL: What we heard was both of you sliding into that sentimentality—I almost want to say that brutality, that brute banality—how I really, really hate that!—that sentimental nyah, nyah, nyah of thinking it all has to do with you, with your mortal little corpus on its way to being dead.

SIMONE: You're finding your rhythm: “Your mortal little corpus—”

TOGETHER: “-- on its way to being dead.”

CHARLIE: You needn't humiliate us.

JEAN-PAUL: Yes. Yes, we do. Because the only way to get you to stop wasting your lives is to get you to stop talking about how you're wasting your lives.

NANCY: We are on our way to death—

JEAN-PAUL: Aren't we all?

NANCY: —and that frightens us. Humans are like that. It's our “human condition”—the fact that this marvelous brain of ours—

JEAN-PAUL: Don't overdo it—

SIMONE: Sssh!

JEAN-PAUL: But we've heard this before—all right, all right, I will be silent in the face of repetition. Nancy, advance.

NANCY: The “human condition”—well. Humans, I think, can pretty much face anything—or at least they can pretend to—except for the fact of their own death. Death—it gives the lie to everything we think of as beautiful and useful and unique about us. In the company of death, we're just—well, walking meat, full of fear and the realization that no matter how much we do or don't do, we all end up in the bone-yard, rotting away, our wonderful imaginations, our complex symphonies—

JEAN-PAUL: Your taste for destruction—

NANCY: We've never been a balanced species.

SIMONE: (*encouraging her to continue*) The bone-yard—

NANCY: The bone-yard—

CHARLIE: She means a cemetery, where we—

JEAN-PAUL: We have our own—

CHARLIE: You see, I have this two cents I want to add—

JEAN-PAUL: Be quiet.

NANCY: The bone-yard. Sometimes it seems everything we do, we do to ignore that place, ignore what we are: finite, fragile, ultimately nothing. So we make great efforts to turn self-pity into beauty, into a higher consciousness—trying to fool ourselves into believing that the more sensitive we become to our “human condition,” the better human beings we become.

CHARLIE: Which is why we invented the arts—

JEAN-PAUL: And we've all seen how much they have made the earth a better place for all creatures to exist.

NANCY: We do like to believe that our artists have special powers—

JEAN-PAUL: Perhaps they don't.

NANCY falls silent, and silence descends for a beat or two on them all.

JEAN-PAUL: Well, Nancy, nicely done.

NANCY: One other thing about—Charlie and me. We have lived together a long time—we have gotten—used to each other. We will most likely die in each other’s presence, though probably not together—no plane crash in a clutch of last love for us. I don’t love him—(to CHARLIE)—you—any more, but I have great affection for you—him. We—I—have reached a state of resignation, acceptance—

CHARLIE: Acceptance of what is less, the minimum—

NANCY: It just gets heavy after a while.

CHARLIE: Charles the minimum, my noble title—

NANCY: Sometimes it’s not great art that gets kicked off by the bone-yard. Sometimes it’s the slow arc of an ending lifetime traveled with someone who, after all, turned out to be good enough— Charlie, I’m sorry.

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE watch this exchange closely.

CHARLIE: (*ruefully*) No, I’m sorrier.

NANCY: (*playfully, ruefully as well*) No, I’m sorrier.

CHARLIE: You are pretty sorry.

NANCY: Sorry-ass.

CHARLIE: I am. I am sorry. I should have—

NANCY: Too late for any “shoulds.”

CHARLIE: Better late than never?

NANCY: Not here. Not now. Not possible. (*to JEAN-PAUL*) I think I’ve said enough.

JEAN-PAUL: Resignation—is that what you both feel?

NANCY: There is a kind of peace in that.

SIMONE: Look at her face now.

JEAN-PAUL: I noticed.

NANCY: My face?

CHARLIE: What about her face?

SIMONE: No longer argentine.

JEAN-PAUL: (to NANCY) The price of peace, I suppose. (to CHARLIE) And you?

CHARLIE: Resigned? Another name for reality, I suppose. At my age—our age—the two blend.

JEAN-PAUL: So, you're both comfortable with this—surrender? Comforted? Ah, such luxury.
Are you both feeling luxurious now?

SIMONE: Careful.

NANCY: Why are you so angry?

JEAN-PAUL: Because you deliberately returned your face from silver to lead. Right now! By choice! By thinking you were being sensitive to your condition.

SIMONE: It's true. Sadly. I saw your face when we arrived— Bloom! Stung! (to CHARLIE) Even you, with your adrenaline fear—your face breached! Shivered! For a moment we thought, "It might be possible."

JEAN-PAUL: But now you've "resigned" yourselves.

SIMONE: Now you've "humanly conditioned" yourselves.

JEAN-PAUL: And now it's all drained away, which just goes to underscore—double, double—that if you give sapiens anything with a warm syrupy buzz—especially if it brings what you call "tears" to the surface—tiers and tiers of tears and tears—

SIMONE: What he's trying to say in his usual over-abundant way is that you seem to convince yourselves that if something moves in here—

Indicates the solar plexus.

JEAN-PAUL: It could be gas—

SIMONE: —you've had the core of you touched—

JEAN-PAUL: "Catharsis," I think you call it—

SIMONE: Catharsis.

JEAN-PAUL: —which sounds like a gas, yes, Charlie?

CHARLIE: Aristotle—

JEAN-PAUL: At full throttle—

SIMONE: And when you feel that—

JEAN-PAUL: (*making the sound of a gas*)—catharsis—

SIMONE: —it justifies your slogging through your unhappiness—

JEAN-PAUL: Tramp, tramp, tramp.

SIMONE: Which, to us—well, you might as well swim in a circle—

JEAN-PAUL: Chasing your tail.

SIMONE: Lots of motion—

JEAN-PAUL: —in the ocean—

SIMONE: —but not much movement down the line.

JEAN-PAUL: So why do what simply sends you in circle?

SIMONE: Perhaps enough?

JEAN-PAUL: We long ago gave up—well, to use your word, the "lizard condition"—right?

CHARLIE: So just what is your condition? Since ours seems so inadequate to you. No. You know something? I don't want to know. (*to NANCY*) I want to go home. I've had enough of being insulted darwinistically. I appreciate the awe and wonder of a couple of—of—

whatever word you use for yourselves—and I thank you for explicating the nature of life and how we're just a couple of soft-shelled dwarves who ooze a little too much self-pity for your tastes. And having said that—I think it's time for us to go and live our lives of quiet desperation.

NANCY has not moved.

CHARLIE: Well, come on.

SIMONE: (*to NANCY*) Perhaps he's right.

NANCY: He's not.

CHARLIE: I'll go myself—I'll wait in the car. I'll lug everything down to the parking lot and sit quietly waiting for you.

JEAN-PAUL: Perhaps our cue to go.

SIMONE: You always get to this point and then want to leave. You knock them around and then suddenly get tired of the whole thing.

CHARLIE: What "thing"?

SIMONE: We're actually here for a reason.

JEAN-PAUL: I like knocking them around—

CHARLIE: A reason?

JEAN-PAUL: —because they never really get it.

CHARLIE: (*to NANCY*) A reason.

SIMONE: Some get it.

NANCY: They'd said that, "Why we're here."

SIMONE: Some get it.

JEAN-PAUL: Yes they do. But the effort-to-understanding ratio!—it shortens my tail to think of it.

CHARLIE: What reason?

JEAN-PAUL heaves a large sigh.

JEAN-PAUL: Let me ask an obvious question: it's not, within the daily run of your lives, usual for two scaly monsters to come from the deep and engage in you philosophical badinage—is that correct?

CHARLIE: You can assume that.

JEAN-PAUL: So we must be here for a reason, right? (*to SIMONE*) Really, I can't do this anymore!

NANCY moves to him and puts a hand on him—this is sufficiently surprising to shut JEAN-PAUL up for the moment.

NANCY: If you came here for a reason—we're suckers for reasons. We're built for them.

CHARLIE: Some reasons are better.

NANCY: All reasons are good.

JEAN-PAUL: Some reasons are better.

CHARLIE: So what's yours?

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE look at each other.

SIMONE: We're here to check up on you.

CHARLIE goes to speak.

SIMONE: No, don't repeat the phrase. Just let it sink in quietly. Do you begin to feel the weight of what I am saying?

CHARLIE: At some turning-point in the ancient past—

JEAN-PAUL: Before dry land, all land was water, as were we.

CHARLIE: In the textbooks—

NANCY: At some point—to exploit new resources—

JEAN-PAUL: We emerged—well, not us, but what you would name your ancestors—actually—
(*indicating them all*)—our ancestors.

CHARLIE: Crawled out—

NANCY: And stayed.

JEAN-PAUL: Not everyone—some hated the gravity of the whole situation.

No one appreciates the pun.

JEAN-PAUL: Some slipped back—dolphins, whales: home was hard to get out of the blood. We
get a lot of our reports from them—they seem to have an “in.”

NANCY: That moment—

SIMONE: —of taking the step—

JEAN-PAUL: —was the raising of consciousness.

NANCY: What it must have been.

JEAN-PAUL: Contrast and trauma—always good to get philosophies churning.

CHARLIE: And you’ve come back.

SIMONE: We’ve never left.

JEAN-PAUL: We’ve taken on gauging the experiment.

NANCY: Of the ascension.

SIMONE: Into air.

JEAN-PAUL: And new brutalities.

SIMONE: And fresh visions.

CHARLIE: So?

JEAN-PAUL: So what?

CHARLIE: Well?

NANCY: I think Charlie's competitive edge is showing.

CHARLIE: No! (*slowly*) More in the theme of: What hath the ocean wrought? In our case? What are we?

JEAN-PAUL looks at SIMONE.

JEAN-PAUL: I don't think we'd choose to stay with you. Yet.

CHARLIE: Because?

JEAN-PAUL goes over to NANCY's paints and begins painting, awkwardly, since he's not used to handling the brush.

JEAN-PAUL: You're not the first, you know.

SIMONE: No, you're not. We gather— We sift— We underline and separate—

NANCY: Why?

CHARLIE: And for whom?

JEAN-PAUL stops painting; he and SIMONE look at each other.

NANCY: What?

SIMONE: It doesn't quite—work that way. There is no "why"—not the way you look at that word.

JEAN-PAUL: We've escaped from "why."

CHARLIE: How can you escape from "why"?

SIMONE: Not the lower-level "why"—why do we watch you, why are we "checking up."

JEAN-PAUL: That's simple: you people are dangerous.

SIMONE: The experiment has taken some—explosive twists, like a splurge of fractals, and we need to track your journey toward—well, it looks like self-destruction, but we’re not settled about that yet.

JEAN-PAUL: But it looks close—and of course, you won’t just bring yourselves down.

SIMONE: Yes, the damage below—you have no idea—

JEAN-PAUL: And up here—whew! You thought nature was “red in tooth and claw”! We’ll take the brutality down under any day—at least it isn’t organized and nothing is meant personally.

CHARLIE: (*to NANCY*) So, so—we’re the baby with a gun in its hands, the village idiot with the grenade in his hand. You know, we are just not appreciated—

JEAN-PAUL: You are young—and flailing. Which in a minnow might be bearable—

SIMONE: But not when you have the firepower you carry.

JEAN-PAUL: Not just the “things” you craft—

SIMONE: But the brain you have. Sharp, yes, acrobatic, bristling with nodes—but very, very, very incomplete.

JEAN-PAUL: And—to get back to my point—infected with “why.”

SIMONE: Part of why it’s incomplete.

CHARLIE: We’re very proud of “why.” We think the word is a great accomplishment.

NANCY: (*to JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE*) Honestly, he can have it. I find the word a torture.

CHARLIE: That’s because you’re not rigorous—

NANCY: He’s getting tired—it’s been a long day.

CHARLIE: (*angrily*) Without “why”—we’re nothing. We wouldn’t have anything to do. Some of our greatest—

CHARLIE sees them all looking at him, winds down.

CHARLIE: I am not babbling! How can you live without “why”?

SIMONE: We haven’t escaped it completely—in our weaker moments—(to JEAN-PAUL)—yes, we have them—we sink down to what you would probably call religion—

NANCY: Ultimate things.

JEAN-PAUL: Ultimately boring.

SIMONE: But we do have—ways of grounding ourselves--

JEAN-PAUL: Well, we’d call it “watering” ourselves since we don’t have much to do with ground—

SIMONE: It’s a little hard with our full weight—

SIMONE places her feet on JEAN-PAUL’s. They grasp hands and lean back against each other’s weight. And then slowly JEAN-PAUL rotates, so that they appear to spin slowly.

SIMONE: For hours, at all levels—

JEAN-PAUL: Unfurling and tumbling—

SIMONE: We drift—

JEAN-PAUL: Until we lose the urge for “why”—

JEAN-PAUL pulls SIMONE close to him.

JEAN-PAUL: There is nothing else but that.

Beat. JEAN-PAUL releases her.

CHARLIE: There’s no purpose to that.

SIMONE: But it is a life.

NANCY: It is a life.

CHARLIE: So you have feelings?

JEAN-PAUL: We feel a great deal about our lives—

SIMONE: We feel with our lives.

JEAN-PAUL: We just don't have emotions.

SIMONE: Nasty things, really.

JEAN-PAUL: We don't have a little compartment—

SIMONE: Where we separate out the way you do—

JEAN-PAUL: Heart and head—I am still baffled by how you chose—

NANCY: It used to be the liver—

JEAN-PAUL: Endlessly weird—

SIMONE: (*indicating her body*) All of this—is how we think and feel.

JEAN-PAUL: Think/feel—one word, one action, one reality.

SIMONE: We prefer the impersonal to the emotional—

JEAN-PAUL: The im“lizardal”—? Would that be a word?

SIMONE: Detached—

JEAN-PAUL: But umbilical.

SIMONE: Dispassionate—

JEAN-PAUL: But ecumenical.

SIMONE: Foregoing emotions—

JEAN-PAUL: —gives us more freedom to think/feel more deeply.

NANCY: (*to CHARLIE, but also in general*) Imagine—

CHARLIE: What?

NANCY: Imagine feeling without being ravaged. Imagine no “why,” just— just—“is.”

NANCY goes to her paint box and puts everything away. She places it with the pile that CHARLIE had started.

NANCY: We must be a terrible disappointment.

JEAN-PAUL: Not terrible—

SIMONE: (*chiding JEAN-PAUL*) Not even a disappointment—incomplete, like we said. A condition, not a judgment.

JEAN-PAUL: A little, though, for me—I mean, after all the effort we made to inspire the barren earth into life—(*to SIMONE*)—remember the stories?

NANCY: I want to hear those!

JEAN-PAUL: They’re around—and besides, we don’t have time—

SIMONE: (*briefly, to NANCY*) The ground, still steaming from construction, cracked and elemental—(*raising her hand*)—the first touch was the first death and the first life simultaneous.

JEAN-PAUL: As I said, they’re around, if you’ve a mind to find them—my disappointment, a little—a lot, though without judgment, believe me—

CHARLIE: Why should it matter? why should we matter to you?

JEAN-PAUL: Haven’t you heard anything? Because after all the stories and sacrificed bones and the swampy millennia-long kneading of mammalian vertebrates into you, for you to sit here, the two of you, and moo away your limited time with the kinds of— of—(*to SIMONE*) What was that word again we just learned, from that unlovely wine-drinker on the French coast—b—bour—

SIMONE: Bourgeois.

JEAN-PAUL: A very useful word, we’ve come to find out—it covers a lot of territory and it explains a lot of laziness we see in people—not just physical but also what you would call political—what we’d call “sucking the bottom”—the old and dying do it when they can’t eat for themselves anymore— Yes, bourgeois.

CHARLIE: (*huffy*) You were saying—the kinds of bourgeois—

JEAN-PAUL: Well, bourgeois nothingness. We almost didn't contact you—

SIMONE: He kept wanting to leave—

CHARLIE: I wished he had.

JEAN-PAUL: Because I couldn't believe, given everything that's falling apart around you—
because of you—or your kind—you would find it an issue of argument whether you
should or should not do things that make you feel alive—

SIMONE: Think/feel alive—

JEAN-PAUL: The heavings of what you call the soul—

SIMONE: When you have all the comforts you need—

JEAN-PAUL: And no imminent threat of dismemberment—

SIMONE: Is a waste of the universe's efforts.

JEAN-PAUL: End.

SIMONE: Stop.

NANCY: It's what we've been taught to do.

SIMONE: You've taught yourself—so unteach it.

JEAN-PAUL: There's more and better work to be done. The experiment cannot end up with the
belief that the picky explication of your emotions is what life—

SIMONE: Or your art—

JEAN-PAUL: —is all about.

SIMONE: Because—

JEAN-PAUL: Because—

NANCY: There's an accounting coming due.

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE look at each other.

JEAN-PAUL: She stole the words.

SIMONE: She sees. Again.

CHARLIE: You mean an invasion?

NANCY: No, Charlie. The origins want an accounting, a—summation. An airing. A hearing. A seeing, a touching, a taste.

SIMONE: Even more. The damage—you really cannot know how deep—

JEAN-PAUL: How slaughterous—

SIMONE: The knife has cut.

JEAN-PAUL: But what is left—

SIMONE: Has no patience left.

CHARLIE: Is that a threat?

NANCY: It simply is.

A plane goes by. JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE look at each other, then, without farewell, disappear. A few second later, a ball of paper is tossed on the stage. NANCY picks it up and opens it. It is the paper she has thrown away earlier, with the word "NOT" scrawled on it. She shows it to CHARLIE.

CHARLIE: Not.

NANCY puts the paper with her things. They start cleaning up.

CHARLIE: Knot. K-n-o-t.

NANCY: Naught.

CHARLIE: Naughty.

NANCY: Knout.

CHARLIE: Newt.

NANCY: Know. It.

NANCY goes to CHARLIE, and with a little coaxing, gets him to do the slow twirl that JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE did, she standing on his feet.

NANCY: This has been some day.

CHARLIE: Like no other.

NANCY: Thank—well, I was going to do a “Thank God,” but now—I don’t know!

CHARLIE: And what has He done for us lately, anyway?

NANCY: Is it possible—

CHARLIE: Do you want it?

NANCY: Do you?

They slowly lower each other into a sitting position.

CHARLIE: What do we want?

NANCY: What should we want?

CHARLIE: What have we done?

NANCY: What is to be done?

BLACKOUT