

Another Seascape

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With respect (and hopefully no apologies) 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

TIME

- Present

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
Hmmm, 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 --
(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.

(picking up his book and sitting down)

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?

Awry. Blotched. CHARLIE

Charismatic. NANCY

Streaky. CHARLIE

Rainbowed. NANCY

Nancy -- CHARLIE

Charlie -- NANCY

He looks away, exasperated.

What are you doing? CHARLIE

Preparing the body. NANCY

CHARLIE refuses to answer.

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

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

Sssh! That word -- verboten. NANCY

What word? CHARLIE

One of the ones you said. NANCY

NANCY points to her eye.

I. CHARLIE

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

Will. CHARLIE

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, succinct! 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 coördinated 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.
(urges him)
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 --

(looking to JEAN-PAUL)

-- 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, its 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 --
(pointing to CHARLIE and NANCY)
-- 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 sloggling 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 --
(sees them all looking at him, winds down)
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