

Short Plays: Volume 2

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Frankie Is Dead

(Inspired by an essay by Gina Greenlee,
"No Tears for Frankie"

New York Times magazine, June 10, 2001, p. 124)

DESCRIPTION

Gina has to suffer the bullying of Frankie because the adult world will not give her the protection she needs. She has only has one avenue left to end the torment: to wish for his unequivocal death.

CHARACTERS

- Gina, in her twenties but remembering back to when she was 10 years old.
- Frankie, played by an older actor but 12 years old in the story.
- The Adult, man or woman who plays GINA's teachers and parents.

NOTE: Ethnicity is not important.

SETTING/TIME: The present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two armless wooden chairs, strong enough to stand on
- Suit/tie for FRANKIE
- Schoolgirl clothing for GINA
- Suitable clothing for THE ADULT
- Held by THE ADULT: Triangle, Zen bells, whistle, or any other device for making a sharp sound; even a clap of the hands would do
- Two small Tote-size umbrellas, any color
- Funereal music

NOTE: Every time THE ADULT makes the sound, there is a scene change.

* * * * *

In darkness, low soothing music, as found in a funeral parlor. Lights rise to find FRANKIE, dressed in a suit and tie, lying on the two chairs, his arms crossed across his chest or in any other attitude that signals he is dead. GINA stands close to the "casket."

GINA

Frankie. Twelve years old. Funeral parlor. Dead.

(pause)

Good.

THE ADULT makes the sound. Music out. GINA moves into another light. FRANKIE takes off his jacket and tie, rolls up his sleeves, shirt pulled out: he is now the bully. He stands just outside GINA's light, and as she speaks, he begins to circle her.

GINA

We lived in Manhattan, down among the alphabet avenues --

FRANKIE

Avenue C -- for the cunt!

GINA

Poor kids simmering in the lower city --

FRANKIE

Avenue B -- for the bitch!

GINA

Stewing in the shitty schoolrooms funk'd up to make sure we wouldn't make it out.

FRANKIE

Avenue A -- for the asshole!

THE ADULT makes the sound. Scene change to the "classroom," which is the two chairs; THE ADULT becomes the teacher, miming writing on the board with his back to the "classroom." As GINA walks to the chair, miming clutching her schoolbooks, FRANKIE follows, groping, poking, pulling her hair, and generally harassing her. GINA tries to fend him off, but it does no good. FRANKIE can also vocalize hisses, grunts, words, etc. that the actor feels fit.

GINA

Every day -- every day, in every way --

THE ADULT

Hurry up, everyone, get into your seats.

GINA

There was no territory on my map --

THE ADULT

Move it along!

GINA

That remained untouched --

THE ADULT

Move it, move it.

GINA

By his "Russian" hands and "Roman" fingers.

THE ADULT

Last warning!

GINA

(to FRANKIE, loudly)

Stop it!!

FRANKIE immediately gets innocent as the teacher looks.

THE ADULT

What are you raising your voice for? I'm waiting.

GINA

Nothing.

THE ADULT

What?

GINA

(barely audible)

Nothing.

THE ADULT

Answer me. Answer me!

Beat.

GINA

Nothing.

THE ADULT

We will have no behavior like that around here.

Beat as the actors freeze. Then THE ADULT makes the sound. The scene changes: FRANKIE and THE ADULT move upstage; GINA moves to another area. As GINA speaks, she watches the action upstage.

GINA

I knew -- we all knew -- Frankie had problems.

THE ADULT strikes FRANKIE in a very stylized manner: abstract, mechanical.

GINA

His father stropped him.

FRANKIE moves to the other side of THE ADULT, who repeats the beating in a mirror image.

GINA

His mother whopped him.

FRANKIE moves to be in front of THE ADULT, who strikes him again.

GINA

The whole freakin' freaked-up world took a chunk of him, every day in every way --

FRANKIE crumples to the ground.

GINA

Useless, they said.

A long howl, in genuine agony.

FRANKIE

Useless!

THE ADULT

Useless.

GINA

Can't be loved.

FRANKIE

I am alone!

THE ADULT

Get out of my sight.

GINA

Thrown away --

FRANKIE

My home is nowhere!

THE ADULT

I wish you'd never been born.

GINA

This I knew. This we all knew, all of us, down among the alphabet avenues.

FRANKIE is now cowering at the foot of THE ADULT. GINA approaches him slowly, gently.

GINA

And he jammed the bruises back into the public eye every day in every way because -- well, why not? What else do you do with pain you haven't earned? You pay it back.

GINA kneels by him and puts a hand on his shoulder or his head -- somewhere near his mouth. THE ADULT makes the sound. The scene change happens when FRANKIE slowly raises his head, turns, smiles at GINA, and then deliberately bites GINA's hand, clamps down on it. They both slowly stand, GINA's hand in FRANKIE's mouth. FRANKIE growls and smiles. When standing up completely, GINA slaps FRANKIE several times -- again, in an abstract, choreographed way -- until he lets go of the hand.

FRANKIE

You pay it back, and it don't matter who gets in the way.

THE ADULT makes the sound. Scene changes to a stairwell in the school, GINA now the schoolgirl clutching her books. She and FRANKIE stand on one chair, tight. As she moves to the next chair, FRANKIE will scrunch up right behind her on that chair. THE ADULT will take the empty chair and place it so they can make their next step.

GINA

Every day I had to stay after school for "extra curriculum" work because my parents worked until the drop-deadline of 5 o'clock. I found a note stuffed in my literature book.

FRANKIE

"I'll get you in the stairwell."

GINA steps to the next chair, FRANKIE behind her; THE ADULT moves the empty chair.

GINA

My foot moved like a baby's, finding the edge of the step, up then over and down to the next --

FRANKIE

Down, down she be goin'.

GINA steps to the empty chair; FRANKIE follows.

GINA

Looking down through the railing hoping for anybody coming up to yell to --

FRANKIE

Down, down she goes.

FRANKIE pushes her, and in a very stylized way GINA throws her arms up and falls forward so that she hooks one arm with THE ADULT and rolls across his back, legs flared. As she rolls off THE ADULT's back, THE ADULT quickly moves to a kneeling position so that GINA falls across his back, her dress up and showing her underwear. GINA does not move as FRANKIE circles her. Then he kneels in front of her, leaning into her, and laughs in a strained mocking way.

FRANKIE

Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha.

FRANKIE sits in the chair. GINA moves off THE ADULT, who stands and signals the scene change.

GINA: Oh, I told people. The responsible people.

THE ADULT hands GINA one of the umbrellas; she opens it, holds it over her head.

GINA

I needed some mercy, I needed some quality mercy.
(Little voice) Help me, help me! Because didn't
"the quality of mercy droppeth as the gentle rain
from heaven" -- Like hell it did! I wanted
mercy, and all I got was --

THE ADULT (AS THE TEACHER)

He's just got a crush on you!

GINA

And all I got was --

THE ADULT (AS THE PARENT)

Child, what were you doing to egg him on?

GINA

And all I got was --

FRANKIE

Go ahead, ass-face, tell -- go on -- like it's
gonna do a goddamn thing -- they think I'm just a
kid! A kid who's got deficits!

THE ADULT takes the umbrella and puts it down, then hands GINA
a second umbrella.

GINA

What "droppeth" from their mouths -- just stunk
up the joint!

GINA opens the second umbrella.

GINA

So I enrolled for justice -- and all I got was --

THE ADULT (AS THE TEACHER)

He's just got a crush on you!

GINA

And all I got was --

THE ADULT (AS THE PARENT)

Child, what were you doing to egg him on?

GINA

And all I got was --

FRANKIE

Go ahead, ass-face, tell --

THE ADULT takes the second umbrella and puts it down. As GINA says her next line, THE ADULT takes one hand, FRANKIE the other, and they spread GINA's arms as if in a crucifix. They "nail" her hands by slapping their fist into her palm, THE ADULT on "mercy," FRANKIE on "justice."

GINA

So what happens when the adults nail the tongues of mercy and justice to the floor?

After "nailing" her hands, FRANKIE sits down; THE ADULT puts the two umbrellas and himself behind the chairs.

GINA

(arms outspread)

Ever the last syntax of the powerless -- vengeance how could I make it for Frankie to be dead? One day --

THE ADULT makes the sound. Scene changes to a coat closet -- the two chairs. FRANKIE gets up and grabs GINA; THE ADULT takes the two umbrellas and puts them in front of the two chairs, like doors.

GINA

They pushed me and Frankie into the coat closet --

FRANKIE pushes the umbrellas aside and sits them both down. The umbrellas close.

GINA

-- and held the door shut.

FRANKIE's assaults, which can be partially seen by the audience, become more determined and mean.

GINA

I screamed to get someone to let me out. Ahhhh!
He pinched me, poked me, stuck his fingers --
(Screams in true agony) Ahhhh! Ahhhhh! Ahhhh!

THE ADULT throws the two umbrellas to the side, sees the situation.

THE ADULT

Go back to your seats. Frankie --

FRANKIE gives a sheepish grin.

GINA

Right in front of everyone I said

(directly to FRANKIE)

"I hate your guts, and I hope you die. Die. Die!"

THE ADULT

You don't really mean that!

GINA

But I did.

THE ADULT

We will not allow that kind of talk in here!

Beat. THE ADULT makes the sound. FRANKIE begins dressing himself back into his suit; when done, he sits. GINA moves downstage.

GINA

I wished hard, I wished so hard that he would die. I wished, I wished, I wished, I wished until my teeth cracked -- knowing it was wrong but forcing the words out -- knowing Frankie had been made a bastard all his life, but still "I wish, I wish, I wish he would die." The pain of the air through my wretched teeth making true the words, through pain nailing the world to his ass and never letting him go. (Hissing sound) I wisssssshhhh. I wisssssshhhh.

(pause)

And then it happened.

FRANKIE lay back down in the "casket."

GINA

As usual, messing around where he shouldn't, stuck his hand to an electric cable carrying voltage higher than his own red bile, and it just boiled him away. The word of it all made my lips slide around with dark pleasure electrocuted. Eee-leck-tro-cue-ted. What a capital punishment.

Music and lights come up as at the beginning: funeral parlor.

GINA

Frankie. Twelve years old. Funeral parlor. Dead.

(pause)

My father thought I shouldn't go because it might give me nightmares. But I had to go -- wanted to go. I needed to make sure that the creep was really dead. I needed to make sure I was as glad about his dying as I said I was.

GINA puts her hand up to his mouth: nothing. She draws it away.

GINA

And I was. I was 10 years old, and I was glad. I was very, very glad. And I still am.

Lights out, then music out.

George Bailey Redivivus

DESCRIPTION

Life goes on for George Bailey after the last reel of "It's A Wonderful Life" - and what happens? George finds out, "Not much," and Clarence once again has to appear to give him a hand, though with a very different offer this time around.

CHARACTERS

- GEORGE BAILEY
- CLARENCE

SETTING

- A bridge in Bedford Falls

TIME

- Some number of years later

* * * * *

Christmas Day some indefinite number of years later. GEORGE BAILEY is again at the railing of the bridge. Snow swirls around him.

GEORGE

Damn, damn, damn! Nothing's changed! I'm still George Bailey living in this one-horse town, still working this run-down building and loan, making no money, and fit to bust! Yeah, sure, it's a wonderful life!

(looking up)

Clarence, I got to admit that I'm glad you did you what you did, but there ain't been any buffalo gals out at all for a long time, and I'm just gonna bust! Any chance for a return engagement and a slightly better deal this time around?

The snow stops swirling and a set of headlights swings onto the bridge. The car stops and CLARENCE gets out.

GEORGE

Clarence! You're looking mighty good. Heaven has been treating you well.

CLARENCE

Heaven! Oh, my, my, no! Not any more.

GEORGE

But the wings, the promotion -- ?

CLARENCE

In the end, they counted for nothing. You know, George, all this talk about "globalization"? People are so limited. It's not just the globe, it goes all the way...

CLARENCE points upward.

GEORGE

Really?

CLARENCE

Yes. I had a nice position as an assistant to a deputy archangel, and then, bam! cosmosglobalization hit. Suddenly I was "angelically redundant" (a nice kind of phrase, if you think about it). We could either take a demotion down to, well, down there, or our other choice was to take a temporary furlough as a human being. And so here I am.

GEORGE

Did it really get bad up there?

CLARENCE

No, not bad. There was quite a lively trade in halos and wings for a while, but it couldn't really last. You know, heaven is really just a service economy, what with all that singing and charity we dole out (guardian angels are very expensive to maintain! and such divas, to boot!), so there wasn't much cushion. It shook the place up, but nowhere near like down here.

GEORGE

And so here you are. But the car, the nice clothes --

(pats CLARENCE's belly)

The food seems to be agreeing with you.

CLARENCE

True. I can't say I have the mark of Cain about me -- more like I'm living in the belly of the feast!

GEORGE

But how?

CLARENCE

That's what I've come to talk to you about, George. Since I'd taken on flesh, I had to get a job, so I took one -- with Mr. Potter.

GEORGE

Potter?! That old, wizened, bitter --

CLARENCE

I've heard adjectives before. But he still wants you to work for him. George, Bedford Falls is Pottersville -- you saw that in your dream. He owns just about everything worth owning, and what he doesn't own isn't worth the trouble (like your building and loan). It's time for you to start looking out for number one. I find that greed is good, George, kind of refreshing after a pretty long time of selfless hovering. I know you may not like it, but Potter's the American way, George, and a little greed might just make your and Mary's life a little easier. What d'ya say?

GEORGE

Well, I don't know. Wait a second! You aren't trying to tempt me or something? One of those Jesus in the desert things?

(Clarence shake his head no.)

A soul not worth what it used to be?

(Clarence nods yes.)

Well, why not?

CLARENCE

(as they walk toward the car)

Morality, I've found, isn't a market force. He --
(pointing upward)
-- and Mr. Potter aren't all that different on that score.

GEORGE

Martini's to celebrate?

CLARENCE

(patting his stomach)

Oh, yes. It's a such pleasure rediscovering the flesh.

GEORGE

(as they start to get into the car)

You know, Clarence, you've done it again.

CLARENCE

I have, haven't I?

Laughing, they both get in the car and drive away. "Buffalo Gals" comes up briefly as they move, then out.

Glory Train

DESCRIPTION

Biological warfare does not only happen on the international level. Many toxins can destroy our lives on the day-to-day level, as four travelers find out when a disturbed young woman threatens them all with a vial of what she says is anthrax, and they have no way of knowing if she telling the truth or not. Suddenly, the nature and purpose of life become very immediate.

CHARACTERS

- Man, Latino/Caribbean
- Woman, African-American
- Passenger 1 (man), African-American
- Passenger 2 (woman), African-American
- Other passengers, mixed

SETTING

- The Ashmont/Mattapan trolley

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

The Ashmont/Mattapan high speed trolley. A MAN gets on holding a Bible. Several passengers scattered around. The MAN should also be dark-complexioned; his accent can be a mixture, part Caribbean, part Latino. He wears a name tag, but it's blank. One of the passengers, a WOMAN, sits wrapped in herself, literally, her arms crossed tightly across her chest. She wears a "belly bag." As the train pulls out, the MAN begins to speak.

MAN

Good morning, people.

No response from anyone.

MAN

Thank you for letting me talk to you. I'm from Victory Outreach, doing the Lord's work today, like the Fisher of Men himself, trying to reel in some of those lost souls on our streets, raise 'em up. We work mostly with kids, trying to get them away from the streets, away from the evil that hits on them every day of their lives, into something that's gonna turn them around. I

know -- I was there. Heroin. Crack. Alcohol. Homeless. Hooked. All by eighteen. My mind was clouded, closed --

(holds up the Bible)

-- until the Lord Jesus Christ spread his light in me. Spread it everywhere. The Lord Jesus can save you with love -- if he saved scum like me, he can save you -- and that's why I'm out here today talking to you. Riding the rails. With him you can escape the evil around you, the evil in you.

(holds up the Bible again)

It's all right here, the only roadmap you'll ever need.

(MAN begins handing out business cards)

The Lord is good, the key to survival. Praise his name. If you know anyone who needs help, especially young people, if you know anyone needing the Lord's juice -- maybe yourself -- give us a call. I made the call a long time ago. You make the call.

The MAN sits next to a passenger and begins talking. The two sit across from the WOMAN.

MAN

Good day, brother.

PASSENGER 1 nods. They shake hands.

MAN

How are you today?

PASSENGER 1

Fine.

MAN

Good to hear that. Read the Bible?

PASSENGER 1

Used to.

MAN

Are you saved?

PASSENGER 1

Depends.

MAN

Have you accepted Jesus into your heart?

PASSENGER 1

I don't know.

MAN

Don't know?

PASSENGER 1

I did as a kid -- I was saved one time -- does it stick? I like to think so.

MAN

Do you feel Jesus in your heart now?

PASSENGER 1

I don't know. What's that feel like?

MAN

Joy -- that someone loves you. Sins and all. If you just make that effort to know him.

PASSENGER 1

I just be trying to make a living. I don't have time for sins.

MAN

Ah, sins aren't something you do, they're in the blood.

WOMAN

(not speaking directly to either one of them)
Bullshit.

The MAN and PASSENGER look at her.

WOMAN

(still not directly speaking to them)
So much fucking bullshit.

MAN

Young lady --

WOMAN

Fuck you. Fuck the Bible. Piss on it.

(to the PASSENGER)

Don't buy this bullshit about Jesus savin' you.
Jesus can't save no one. There ain't no escape.
From nothin'. We're already dead.

MAN

(enthusiasm)

You just have to let Jesus --

WOMAN

Been there. Had it done to me. Didn't take.

The MAN is really excited now. He leans in to talk with her,
the PASSENGER momentarily forgotten.

MAN

I can't believe that you really believe --

WOMAN

Didn't you hear me? You already a dead man. Sins
and all.

She reaches into her belly bag and pulls out a small glass vial,
holds it up. It holds a cloudy liquid.

MAN

What's that?

WOMAN

What do you think it is?

MAN

I don't know.

WOMAN

You?

PASSENGER shrugs.

WOMAN

It's the comin' death. Yours.

The trolley lurches, and they all jerk forward and back in
their seats. The WOMAN almost drops the vial.

WOMAN

Shit. Don't want to drop this! Not yet, at least.

MAN

What is it?

WOMAN

Know any Latin?

The MAN shakes his head no.

WOMAN

You?

PASSENGER 1

No.

WOMAN

I do. Bacillus anthracis.
(shakes the vial)

Anthrax.

PASSENGER 1

What's that?

WOMAN

You don't know? Don't you read the papers?
Remember that Sa-damn Hussein bastard, all them
chemical weapons they were tryin' to take away
from him?

(shakes the vial again)

I have my own little weapon here. Kill everybody
on this train, and then some, if I just threw it
down on the floor and broke it.

(looks right in the MAN's eyes)

Kill you outright if I opened it up and threw it
on you. Would the Lord save you then? Sins and
all? Huh?

(looks at the vial)

Anthrax. Now there's a Bible for you.

MAN

That isn't -- what you say it is.

WOMAN

How you know?

MAN

It just isn't.

WOMAN

Here, read this.

She pulls a tattered news clipping from her bag and hands it to him.

MAN

(reading out loud)

"Biological terror. Prepare for it, US cities are urged."

WOMAN

Read the circled part.

MAN shakily hands the clipping to the PASSENGER.

PASSENGER 1

"The terrorists released an odorless aerosol in the airport terminal. Several days later, passengers from all over the world began dying from anthrax, a deadly bacterial infection."

WOMAN

Give it back.

(holds up vial)

Weapon of choice among us truth-seekers.

MAN

Where would you get it?

WOMAN

I don't have to tell you that. Lord Jesus gonna save you now? He's gonna have to be quicker than me.

Fakes a motion to throw the contents on the MAN. He raises his Bible to block it.

PASSENGER 1

You a sick woman.

WOMAN

No I'm not. I'm just dead. I don't care. Dead people don't hafta care.

PASSENGER 1

Jesus raised the dead.

WOMAN

Dead bodies. Betcha Lazarus had maggots all through him. What'dya think that did to his self-esteem?

WOMAN makes to drink the vial, with an eye on the two of them.

WOMAN

Or maybe I'll just save myself. Sins and all.

Train lurches again, stops. A large black woman, PASSENGER 2, walks out and gets on the train, sits. She is carrying a magazine, like The Watchtower.

MAN

That's not real. That can't be real.

PASSENGER 1

I'm gettin' off.

MAN

No, you gotta stay, see this through.

PASSENGER 1

Not me.

Train lurches as it starts up.

PASSENGER 1

Ain't another stop between here and the end.

PASSENGER 2

(fanning herself)

Warm today, ain't it?

MAN

Ma'am, you might not want to sit here.

PASSENGER 2

Why should I move?

WOMAN

I am the coming death, that's why.

WOMAN shakes the vial.

PASSENGER 2

What are you talking about? What's that?

PASSENGER 1

She says its anthrax. You might want to move.

PASSENGER 2

That ain't anthrax.

WOMAN

How do you know?

PASSENGER 2

That ain't anthrax. Dishwashing liquid, or something like that. I seen sheep and cattle die of anthrax when I was a kid in Tennessee. Burn the bodies, burn the fields to get rid of it. No fool would carry it around.

WOMAN

I'm not just any fool.

PASSENGER 2

No, you some special kind of fool, most likely. Holy fool.

WOMAN

I could open it right here! Right now!

PASSENGER 1

You shouldn't push her.

PASSENGER 2

I'm too hot to worry about dying.

(to PASSENGER 1)

Don't talk about what you don't know.

(to WOMAN)

Honey, you can put it away.

Train lurches to a stop, then starts again.

WOMAN

I could do it.

PASSENGER 2

I know you could. These two fine gentlemen know you could, too. Right? You've made your point.

WOMAN puts the vial away, speaks to no one in particular.

WOMAN

If you gotta die to be saved, I'm halfway there.

PASSENGER 2

You made your point. You have. Whatever it was, you made it.

WOMAN wraps her arms around herself again, almost like a cocoon.

MAN

If you came to the Lord --

PASSENGER 2

That dog ain't gonna hunt here.

MAN

But Jesus --

PASSENGER 2

Jesus is fine for some. Use it on them. Here, it's water on a hot stove.

(fans herself)

Whew!

PASSENGER 1

Jesus isn't good for everybody?

PASSENGER 2

You have to be reachable.

PASSENGER 1

Some aren't.

PASSENGER 2

They're deep away.

MAN

Jesus can reach anybody!

PASSENGER 2

Young man, you got a lot to learn about the limits of your employer. There's gold in the center of the earth no one is ever going to reach.

Train lurches, comes to a stop.

PASSENGER 1

Last stop.

The four of them look at each other for a moment. The WOMAN gets up, pats her belly bag.

WOMAN

You just never know.

The WOMAN gets off the train and exits offstage. The other three rise and get off the train.

PASSENGER 1

You know her.

PASSENGER 2

I do.

(to the MAN)

She's had pain you can't even imagine. She just wants attention. Human attention. Not ghosts. She has enough of those.

(fans herself)

It's only gonna get hotter today.

MAN

So it wasn't anthrax?

PASSENGER 2

(walking away)

I didn't say it wasn't anthrax.

(walks partly off-stage)

You just never know.

PASSENGER 2 exits. Blackout.

Good Tidings

DESCRIPTION

Domestic servants may not have much economic clout, but they are not necessarily powerless, as Roger finds out when, in response to a request for a gratuity at Christmastime, he snootily responds with high-handed arrogance. They show him that the servants oftentimes know more about the masters than the masters know about the servants.

CHARACTERS

- Roger
- Janine

SETTING

- Penthouse apartment

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

A penthouse apartment, well-appointed with an elevator entrance. ROGER enters, laden with Christmas packages. On a small desk sits a largish white envelope marked with Christmas symbols. ROGER is exasperated. He puts things down , picks up the envelope, and opens it.

ROGER

What is it now?

ROGER pulls out a sheet of paper; several small envelopes pop out, falling to the floor.

ROGER

Shit! Janine! Janine! Where in the devil's name is she? "Dear Mr. Beitz: The staff of the Marmoset Arms would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family the happiest of holiday seasons. The staff prides itself on the quality and dependability of its service, and we trust you have found your needs well met during the year. We hope you will recognize the dedication of the staff by a generous holiday contribution. Again, the best to you and yours, and a prosperous New Year. Sincerely, Kim Philby, Staff Supervisor."

ROGER Picks up the envelopes off the floor.

ROGER

Confianza. Esperanza. Caridad. Janine! Where the Christ is she? I'm not sure I like this...begging. It's one thing to take what you're offered, another to expect that you deserve something by virtue of the fact of doing your job. It would almost be like my getting paid simply for showing up at the office -- except, yes, of course, I do get paid for doing that, even when I don't go in some days. But, dammit, this is different! This is effrontery, this is insurrection! We've always been generous in the past with the help. I am not going to be arm-twisted into my philanthropy!

ROGER sits at the desk and takes a piece of paper from a drawer. He slips a fountain pen from his shirt pocket and speaks as he writes. The actor may ad lib to a small degree over the choice of certain words.

ROGER

"Dear Mr. Philby: While I appreciate the sincerity of your and your staff's best wishes for the welfare of me and my wife, I must protest against your impertinent prompting for 'recognition, as if I were not be capable of knowing good service from bad and subsequently rewarding it with an adequate response. Therefore, I have decided to actually give less than what I had intended in order to make the point as emphatically as possible. In the future, please allow me the dignity to 'recognize' my obligations in my own way. Yours truly, Roger Beitz."

ROGER places the sheet, with the unfilled envelopes, into the original envelope, seals it, and writes "Kim Philby, Staff Supervisor" on it large capital letters. He is quite pleased with himself.

ROGER

There. Done. Janine! I shouldn't have sealed it up -- she should read it. Oh, well, I'll recite it to her -- she likes that sort of thing.

ROGER icks up the gifts and goes off stage, shouting "Janine!" There is a bit of transition music as the lights dim. The audience sees a man walk on stage with another white envelope

and place it on the desk and take the other one away. When he has left, lights come up. Elevator door opens again. ROGER enters with even more presents.

ROGER

Janine! That woman --

ROGER pauses when he sees the white envelope on the desk.

ROGER

What is going on here?

ROGER drops the bags, picks up the envelope, and opens it. As he pulls what appear to be 8x10 prints out of the envelope, he looks absolutely shaken. There is a letter paper-clipped to one of them.

ROGER

"Dear. Mr. Beitz: On behalf of the staff I want to thank you for your forthright declaration; it is always good to know that people still live by a set of strong principles. And I am sure you will want to continue that tradition as you reconsider the staff's request, augmented as it is now by some new information you may find interesting."

ROGER looks at the photos dumbly. He reads.

ROGER

"We are sure that Mrs. Beitz would not want to see the somewhat compromising positions you have been dictating to your secretary, depicted in these somewhat grainy but highly effective photographs; we are sure you would not want her to be disturbed by them. If you look in the envelope you will also see some other items: the charge slip you used to pay for the room, several slips from stores for gifts that most likely are not owned by your wife, even the fortune from the Chinese restaurant the two of you ate at: 'Good luck comes to those who wear an open face.'"

ROGER looks in the envelope, blanches.

ROGER

"There is, however, a mutually beneficial way to avoid any unpleasantness. The three envelopes

for Confianza, Esperanza, and Caridad are there. After consultation, and not wishing to unduly burden you, we felt that \$5000 in each of the envelopes would suffice. And lest you feel put out by that amount, it merely uses the money you have secreted in your safe behind the 18th-century armoire that you access by taking down the mirror at the back of the cabinet and sliding the cedar panel open. (Here is the combination in case you've forgotten it: 14-23-36-12.) And, by the way, you may keep the bicentennial quarter. We are also not interested in the porcelain claddagh ring you gave to your wife, inscribed with 'To My Emerald Isle.' You may wish to verify the amounts."

ROGER drops everything onto the desk and rushes offstage. The director, if desired, can play the waiting music from "Jeopardy." ROGER returns, looking, if possible, even more battered. He drops a quarter and ring onto the desk.

ROGER

"Mr. Beitz, no matter which choice you make, we hope you and Mrs. Beitz have a wonderful holiday season. Sincerely, Kim Philby, Staff Supervisor. P.S. -- It may be one of your principles that those of us who make our living taking care of those like you are simply peasants and rubes, but, as you can see, we have our ways. The slave always knows more than the master."

ROGER looks around him as if he is suddenly surrounded by wild beasts.

ROGER

Who knows? Do they all know? How can I ever look them -- ? The pictures!

ROGER frantically gathers everything and puts it into the envelope and rushes offstage. Just as he disappears, the elevator door opens and a smartly dressed woman, JANINE, walks in, her arms laden with gifts.

JANINE

Roger, are you home? Have I got some surprises for you!

The Greed Gene

DESCRIPTION

Genetic counseling will soon be able to reveal all of the intricacies of our human personality, but this abundance of knowledge is not necessarily a blessing, as Norman and Lauren Drago learn from Dr. Targus, their "Genie of Genes," as the good doctor explains to them what their new child will face in this "brave new world" as a possessor of the "greed gene."

CHARACTERS

- Dr. Marion Targus [male or female]
- Lauren Drago -- she is pregnant but not showing
- Norman Drago

SETTING

- Dr. Targus' office
- Outside the office

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Table
- Two or three chairs
- Folders, charts
- Desk paraphernalia

* * * * *

DR. TARGUS' office. On the desk are folders, charts, etc. along with the usual desk paraphernalia. Or, if desired, charts can be set on an easel or done as projections.

NORMAN and LAUREN DRAGO, along with TARGUS, are reading a report several pages long.

TARGUS

It's quite conclusive, Mr. and Mrs. Drago, as you can see right there. Your child has it.

NORMAN

The greed gene?

TARGUS

Pretty easy call, right there on chromosome 29.

LAUREN

The greed gene.

TARGUS

That's what the press calls it -- easier to type
--

NORMAN

Easier for me to understand --

TARGUS

-- which is why I wrote it down that way for you,
but its official name -- you can see it right there
-- is tripolynomial kleptoavarensis -- I just
wish they wouldn't use "greed gene" -- it's so
prejudicial --

LAUREN

I would think "wealth acquisition gene" would go
a long way towards --

TARGUS

Believe me, I've tried, Mrs. Drago --

NORMAN

These days it's like all genetics all the time --

TARGUS

Giant strides in identifying the genes for human
behavior. My favorite "odd duck gene" is the
one for jaywalking -- the way it diffuses itself
throughout the entire population of New York City,
even in people who are just visiting.

LAUREN

Genes for almost everything!

TARGUS

Well, actually, not "almost" at all --

NORMAN

Including --

TARGUS

Including, yes --

LAUREN

Norman, stop --

NORMAN

I can't help [it] --

TARGUS

Mr. and Mrs. Drago, in just a moment I am going to walk you through the absolutely phenomenal list of genetic gifts your child can look forward to -- but I wanted to start off with this particular point because -- well, your child may have the "greed gene" --

LAUREN

Or "wealth acquisition" --

TARGUS

Yes --

LAUREN

Good --

TARGUS

But whatever we want to call it, there is nothing -- and this is the point I want to make -- there is nothing garden-variety about the variation your child is carrying.

LAUREN
(excited)

Really?

NORMAN
(dismayed)

Really?

TARGUS

As your genetic counselor, your Genie of Genes, so to speak -- oh, I can't wait to tell you just what astounding --

NORMAN

I'm sorry, I don't mean to be impolite --

LAUREN

Again --

NORMAN

-- but --

LAUREN

You shouldn't interrupt --

NORMAN

I know, it's impolite, but -- can we hear the other list first?

TARGUS relents in her eagerness. She gestures for them to turn the page in their reports, which they do, as she turns her own page.

TARGUS

Of course, of course -- and the list here looks pretty impressive. Strong coding for blond hair and blue eyes --

NORMAN

Good, good -- absolutely essential --

TARGUS

-- for the way you've already plotted the child's A.C.E. --

NORMAN

A.C.E.?

LAUREN

Remember -- the Arc of Continuous Evolution?

NORMAN

Yes, yes --

LAUREN

-- Ivy League school, access to the trust fund --

NORMAN

How could I have forgotten that?

TARGUS

The child should "ace" that pretty well.

They all laugh.

TARGUS

The intelligence gene suite looks solid, too, with a tendency toward piquant extroversion and a subtle phenomenological twist with a Germanic flavor.

LAUREN

That comes from Norman's side.

NORMAN

My grandparents were renowned German idealists in a neo-Hegelian vein, but they balanced that with a mildly bon vivant style of Marxism that emphasized dance instruction for the proletariat.

TARGUS

Good -- and this -- the presence of some, well, early artistic tendencies that indicate a dislike of opera and a possible taste for multi-media productions using feathers, garbage, and egg white as a binder. Probably not fundable by a grant. Is that all right?

LAUREN

That's from me. When I was at Bryn Mawr I had a fancy I'd be an artist, and I liked to experiment, you know -- Norman, you remember that homage to Macys I did with gel and macaroni?

NORMAN

Even for an Norman Rockwell kind of guy, like me, Lauren sure made a canvas look interesting.

TARGUS

Let's see -- no shopping gene, apparently, but there is an Eddie Bauer tendency along the fifth chromosome, with an opposing tendency for Salvation Army. Acceptable?

LAUREN

As long as she -- I mean, the child -- grows out of it by late adolescence.

TARGUS

Which is up to the "nurture" part -- that's you two.

NORMAN

Yes.

TARGUS

So, an intriguing composite: A nodding towards the New Yorker, most likely voting Republican -- with a mild but brief Libertarian rebellion -- but the chemical fingerprint for that is not strong -- an inclination to under-tip wait staff and treat doormen with slight but pointed contempt. And absolutely no signs of any telethon diseases!

NORMAN

All of it looking good.

LAUREN

Satisfied?

NORMAN

Looking good. But --

TARGUS

Just let me jump right into this because as strong as our list is --

NORMAN

Yes?

TARGUS

It's going to get even stronger --

LAUREN

Really?

TARGUS

Yes -- when you both hear how -- look, let me explain it this way. Tripolynomial kleptoavarensis is part of a family of genes which -- well, when I say "family," I mean that more in the sense of the Mafia than the Cleavers. Instead of having a single expression itself, it essentially herds together other genes and uses these genes to acquire as many things as possible in the shortest amount of time with the least interference. Clear?

NORMAN

Oh yes.

TARGUS

And the genes it rounds up tend to be chemically wrapped for highly individualistic effects, such as the dickglyceride nixoniantis gene, which displays itself through an ability to lie with the absolutely straightest of straight faces. And we're also discovering that tripolynomial is completely unaffected by the truth and justice genes on the first amendment to the 12th chromosome. Just -- just -- well, what can I say?

LAUREN

It takes all these "bad boy" genes and -- romps.

TARGUS

If that's what you like, then, yes, it "romps."

NORMAN

And it's strong in our child.

TARGUS warms to her task.

TARGUS

"Strong" is too, well, mild. Your child carries all nine striations -- each striation controls a body function, such as the "lip sneer" -- and all six voices, which regulate vocal behavior, such as the tendency to use "I misspoke" instead of "I lied."

LAUREN

(relishing the sound)

Dickglyceride nixoniantis --

TARGUS

It also has a -- twist -- I've only seen predicted in the literature, called the "Forbes findibulum," a protein spike which apparently governs the world-wide search for the highest interest rates on a second-by-second basis. The size of the findibulum here is quite large in proportion to the gene itself, and it seems to be linked directly to the genital genes on chromosomes 6 and 9.

TARGUS notes their dismay. Well, NORMAN's dismay. LAUREN is not feeling dismayed at all.

TARGUS

As we keep saying, and you've got to hear this loud and clear, you're the "nurture" part of the nature/nurture equation -- and you both bring an awful lot to the table.

NORMAN

Do we?

LAUREN

Norman --

NORMAN

I mean, I guess, do I?

LAUREN

Norman, all our lives we've been taught that this is all right. Greed is good, and there's no reason to stop --

TARGUS

Greed is good for some -- we do have to make that distinction --

LAUREN

Well yes --

TARGUS

And the price for that is usually paid for by many other people -- we can't deny that.

LAUREN

But if along with all the other things on our list this gene works the way you say [it will] --

TARGUS

Then your child, as I indicated, might possibly be one of its great apostles.

LAUREN

Wow.

NORMAN

So the best for our child -- could be the worst?

LAUREN

Not everybody ever born gets to have the best --

NORMAN

Life is unfair, right?

LAUREN

Has it ever been anything else?

NORMAN

What should we do?

LAUREN

Norman --

TARGUS

At this point, Mr. Drago, you only have two options: go through with the pregnancy or terminate it; there is no "therapy" for this gene, if that's what you're looking for. These genetic data -- you want certainty, but --

TARGUS gets up.

TARGUS

I'll give you a few minutes to talk things over, then we can figure out what our next steps are.

Starts to leave, then comes back.

TARGUS

One other thought, to follow up on what I said a little earlier about the nature/nurture equation. Wanting the best for your child could also be about wanting the best for all the other children in the world who aren't yours because the "nurture" part doesn't have to apply only to your immediate circle. We're all connected right down to the DNA: that much the data show us. Like a spider's web: pluck one thread and the whole thing vibrates. That much we know for certain. Well -- okay. I'll be back in a few minutes.

TARGUS leaves.

LAUREN

Well.

NORMAN

Well.

LAUREN

What do you think?

NORMAN

What do you think?

LAUREN

I think we should go for the birth. Damn it, Norman, it's our kid, and we have the right to do what we need to do for it. We're Americans, for Christ's sake, and what's the point in being an American if you can't just go do what you want to do? I think it's great he's got the greed gene -- tripolynomial kleptoavarensis -- we're gonna have one famous puppy on our hands!

NORMAN

I don't know --

LAUREN

Oh, don't let that New Age claptrap about global responsibility sway you. It's all a plot to undermine the American way of life anyway, which has always been based on having as big a steak as you want when you want it. And we're going for the filet mignon here, Norman!

NORMAN

I still don't know -- Wait, listen to me. A lot of the world is in a bad way, right? We are poisoning ourselves trying to get the big steak! Our child could make that worse. He, or she, could buy up pollution tax credits and kill off villagers in Borneo making sneakers or glow-in-the-dark worms on key chains --

LAUREN

All right, I agree, we don't know which way this thing will go. Like they say with mutual funds: past performance is no guarantee of future success. But we're good people! Dr. Targus said so. We'll be good parents! Our values are on the money -- our child will grow up with a head screwed on right! Give ourselves a little credit here.

NORMAN

Maybe you're right --

LAUREN

Of course I'm right.

NORMAN

But I wish I didn't know. There's no real joy in knowing. I can't help thinking that I'll always be looking at our child and wondering, not trusting. Is that fair?

TARGUS reenters. She puts two documents on the table and a pen on top of each document, and then slides them over.

NORMAN

What are these?

TARGUS

Non-disclosure agreements -- I thought they'd be useful to us as we move forward in our work together.

LAUREN takes up the pen and pulls the document towards her.

LAUREN

Good, because we've decided to go ahead --

NORMAN pushes his document back to TARGUS.

NORMAN

(interrupting)

To go ahead and talk about it some more. I'm sure we'll have more questions -- there will be time for documents.

LAUREN hesitates, then slides her unsigned document back to TARGUS as well. A tense silence. TARGUS does not look pleased but tries to hide it as she gathers up the documents.

TARGUS

(not meaning it)

I think that's good -- but do it soon. I don't want you the two of you to slip through my fingers! Don't want the first trimester to get away from us! When you're ready, call and we'll make the necessary arrangements.

NORMAN and LAUREN walk out of the office. LAUREN is angry as she pushes the button for the elevator. The lines should overlap as much as possible.

NORMAN

Wait a second!

LAUREN

I'm really disappointed in you.

NORMAN

Wait! Just wait! Wait. I'm at a point -- where all this knowledge feels like knowing nothing at all.

LAUREN

It's like you don't trust me.

NORMAN

I'm feeling very uncharted.

LAUREN

We need to carry on the line, and that gives us the right --

NORMAN

The right -- ?

LAUREN

The right to have any kind of goddamn child we want. Don't you want us to have this child?

NORMAN

Of course I do.

LAUREN

So grow up, then, and face the facts.

NORMAN

Which facts? And what do you suggest is our best face?

This calms LAUREN down -- a bit.

LAUREN

I'm sorry.

NORMAN

See?

LAUREN

I'm sorry. I just expected this whole thing to go -- easier. I thought knowing would make it easier to --

NORMAN

And now we can't unknow what we know.

LAUREN

(chuckles ruefully)

I know.

NORMAN

(jokingly)

I no want to know anymore. I just don't feel so brave in this brave new world.

LAUREN

Dinner? Let's get some dinner.

NORMAN

I'll cook tonight. Okay? Let me make something for us.

LAUREN

Just as easy to call out.

NORMAN

No, I'm going to cook. I suddenly want a kitchen filled with the smell of cooked food, my cooked food.

As they exit.

LAUREN

I wonder if you have the gene for cooking?

NORMAN

I don't even want to think about that.

NORMAN stops LAUREN, takes her hand, and makes her face him.

NORMAN

"O brave new world!"

LAUREN

What?

NORMAN

"O brave new world, that hath such people in't."

NORMAN holds up one hand, fingers spread.

NORMAN

Go ahead.

LAUREN

What?

NORMAN

Pluck. One. Thread.

LAUREN can't just pluck one. She runs a finger across all of NORMAN's fingers, as if across a set of harp strings. NORMAN vibrates his hand in response.

The elevator doors dings as it opens.

They grasp hands and enter.

BLACKOUT

The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg

DESCRIPTION

An adaptation of the Mark Twain story.

CHARACTERS

- MAN -- also plays POSTMAN and CURIOSITIES DEALER
- EDWARD RICHARDS, husband to MARY
- MARY RICHARDS, wife to RICHARD
- UTILITY 1 -- SCHOOL TEACHER, REV. BURGESS
- UTILITY 2 -- PUPIL, HADLEYBURGIAN
- UTILITY 3 -- HADLEYBURGIAN

SET

- Chairs
- Seven hanging wires

NOTE: The action of hanging the letters from the wires can be dispensed with. The play works just as well if BURGESS has the seven letters in his pocket as his speech begins.

* * * * *

On the stage, seated: UTILITY 3, and EDWARD and MARY RICHARDS, dressed in shabby but respectable clothes. In front of them UTILITY 1 as SCHOOL TEACHER and UTILITY 2 as PUPIL.

SCHOOL TEACHER

It is said that if a man says he's from Hadleyburg, he need no other reference -- the job is his without question.

Everyone applauds.

SCHOOL TEACHER

And so, in conclusion to Hadleyburg's Old Home Day celebration, we give you "The Lesson."

SCHOOL TEACHER turns to PUPIL, nods. PUPIL nods back.

SCHOOL TEACHER

-- and forgive us our trespasses --

PUPIL
(following)
-- and forgive us our thres-passes --

SCHOOL TEACHER
(correcting)
Trespasses --

PUPIL
Thres --

SCHOOL TEACHER
Tres!

PUPIL
Trespasses --

SCHOOL TEACHER
As we forgive those who trespass against us --

PUPIL
(catching up)
-- forget those who tres[pass] --

SCHOOL TEACHER
Forgive!

PUPIL
Sorry -- forgive.

UTILITY 3
I did the same thing!

SCHOOL TEACHER
Good -- and lead us not into temptation --

PUPIL
(struggling to catch up)
Temptation--

SCHOOL TEACHER
And deliver us from evil --

PUPIL
(overlapping)
And discover us from evil --

SCHOOL TEACHER

Deliver, not discover!

PUPIL

Sorry.

UTILITY 3

Uh-oh!

SCHOOL TEACHER

Why would you want to discover evil?

PUPIL

Didn't Adam --

SCHOOL TEACHER

To indulge in evil is to corrupt the pride that we in Hadleyburg take in our incorruptible honesty.

PUPIL

Sorry.

SCHOOL TEACHER

"Sorry" is unacceptable. Stand forward.

PUPIL stands.

UTILITY 3

I know what's coming.

SCHOOL TEACHER canes the student a few times symbolically.

UTILITY 3

That was me!

SCHOOL TEACHER

All right -- one last time.

PUPIL

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. Amen.

SCHOOL TEACHER

Thus we apply the bleach of purity to the stain of human imperfection to keep Hadleyburg's reputation for honesty pure and intact from generation to generation.

MARY, EDWARD, and UTILITY 3 applaud as SCHOOL TEACHER and PUPIL bow. Then SCHOOL TEACHER and PUPIL lead the crowd in the Hadleyburg cheer [sung roughly to the tune of the Marine Corps hymn].

SCHOOL TEACHER & PUPIL

Wherever one may travel
From Hartford to Hong Kong
They all know that Hadleyburg

Is as honest as the day is
long.

Everyone else joins in.

ALL

When our guardian angels
Raise their heavenly song
They praise the fact that Hadleyburg
Is as honest as the day is long.

Cheers and applause as all exit except MARY, who moves into the RICHARDS' living room. MARY sits and reads. A second chair is nearby. MAN knocks. He wears an eye-patch. On his shoulder is a heavy burlap bag.

MARY

Come in.

MAN enters and slams the bag down.

MAN

There -- good --

MARY

Who are you?

MAN

Mary Richards?

MARY

Yes.

MAN

Have no fear --

MARY

What are you doing?

MAN

The bag -- it's quite concealed, don't you think?

The bag is quite visible. MAN hands her an envelope.

MAN

You really can't see it, can you?

MARY looks at the bag, looks at MAN, considers, then moves her head in agreement.

MAN

Good. Please give that letter to your husband -- Edward, correct? Edward Richards, of the Hadleyburg bank?

MARY

Only their best employee.

MAN

Please give that to Mr. Richards when he returns tonight -- and only to him -- I can trust you, a good honest Hadleyburgian, to do that?

MARY again nods yes.

MAN

I thought so. That will explain everything. Good night.

MARY

Who are [you] --

But MAN has moved into the shadows. He removes his eye-patch. MARY puts the letter on the bag, walks away.

MARY

That man scared me so -- polite, handsome even -- but in his face -- that one eye --

MARY stops, hesitates, then walks back, handles the letter, puts it down, picks it up, all the time muttering to herself.

MARY

But we are, after all, married -- share everything -- he frightened me so, I have a right to learn what -- no, no, he said it was for Edward -- but

still -- stop it, you promised -- well, I didn't actually promise -- I only moved my head in a sort of indefinite way --

Finally, temptation cannot be resisted, and she opens the letter. She reads -- MAN sees everything, snaps his fingers, exits.

As MARY reads the letter, lights shift. EDWARD enters, stands over the bag. MARY scurries to sit, hands him the letter.

MARY

I was just reading my Missionary Herald when that man [barged] --

EDWARD

(touching bag)

One hundred and sixty pounds, four ounces, of gold coin.

MARY

Is -- is that a lot of money, Edward?

EDWARD

Forty thousand dollars, Mary. At the bank I handle gold coin every day, but never -- this much -- and all at once --

EDWARD moves to the chairs, perusing the letter, sits, then looks up, stunned.

MARY

What is it?

EDWARD

I'm just thinking -- it's a rare thing, isn't it? This stranger, out of nowhere, leaves off forty thousand dollars because he wants to make amends by doing a good turn for someone in Hadleyburg who did him a good turn. Isn't that -- well, amazing --

MARY joins him.

MARY

I know -- "I am grateful to a citizen of Hadleyburg, whose name I do not know, for a kindness done to

me a year or two ago" -- I remember it because it seems poem-like, to rhyme --

EDWARD

"I am grateful to a citizen of Hadleyburg, whose name I do not know" -- you're right!

(reading)

But this odd challenge to find that citizen -- didn't you find that odd?

MARY

(distracted)

Yes -- odd --

EDWARD

Feels sort of jury-rigged. We have to post a notice in the newspaper, then hold a big meeting at the town hall one month from the day it appears in the newspaper. Anyone claiming the money hands Reverend Burgess an envelope with the words inside, and the Reverend compares that envelope to an envelope in the bag that has the original words of advice. If they match -- bam! that someone is forty thousand dollars richer.

MARY

But who, Edward?

EDWARD

My question exactly.

(half-laughing)

Who would have loaned a stranger in Hadleyburg twenty dollars -- my salary for almost two weeks! -- not like strangers are very welcomed here --

MARY

About as welcome as a skunk on the Sabbath --

EDWARD

But then not only giving it but being convincing enough to give the man along with the money the advice to go and reform his life -- and the man would have thought highly enough of the advice-giver and the advice to follow it --

MARY

It wasn't us.

EDWARD

No, Mary, not us --

MARY

(gazing at the bag)

When have we ever had the money --

EDWARD

That's true, Mary dear, but we have our health,
I have a job, we have our honesty, our probity --

MARY

You can't eat honesty or probity. You can't go on
a vacation with -- I'm sorry --

EDWARD

Being poor tires me out as well, Mary, you know
it does.

For a moment, they are tired together by their poverty.

MARY

Well, Edward, if not us, then who?

EDWARD

That's what I'm cracking my brain on -- of those who
could afford to give away twenty dollars, I can't
think of a one who would do it, much less chase it
with any advice worth following: Pinkerton, the
banker, my boss, I know him too well -- Wilson,
the lawyer --

MARY

Billson, the accountant --

EDWARD

Especially not him -- in fact, none of our Pillars
of the Community would have done it -- Harkness,
Yates, Whitworth, Baskerville -- they'll pinch a
penny 'til it cries "Aunt" and "Uncle."

MARY and EDWARD look at each other and say the name at the
same time.

MARY & EDWARD

Barclay Goodson.

EDWARD

Who else?

MARY

But he died last year.

EDWARD

(laughing)

Maybe he faked it --

MARY

We saw him in his grave!

EDWARD

That man had enough piss --

MARY

Edward!

EDWARD

-- and vinegar in him to preserve him against mortality and the worm! Well, he did!

MARY

I reckon he did.

EDWARD

(shifting voice)

"Some day, for your sins, you will die and go to Hell or Hadleyburg -- try to make it Hell!"

(back to his own voice)

No need to embalm Barclay Goodson!

MARY drifts over to the bag, caresses it.

EDWARD

He's the only one I can think of who would have had the twenty dollars and the force of character to make his advice stick in a stranger. What are you doing?

MARY

If Goodson did it --

EDWARD

Which we don't know that for sure -- don't touch the bag like [that] --

MARY

And Goodson has no heirs --

EDWARD

Mary!

MARY

Wouldn't it be finders-keepers?

MARY moves quickly to EDWARD.

MARY

Who else knows about this but us? We signed no receipt -- if the man returned asking how things turned out, we'd laugh in his face -- "Fool! What bag?"

Suddenly, MARY has a violent reaction to her own words, and EDWARD has to catch her before she swoons.

EDWARD

You see -- so strong is the honesty in us that our very bodies --

MARY

(holding up her hand)

Stop it!

(calmer)

Stop it.

MARY catches her breath.

MARY

And so our honesty -- and so our honesty makes us fools again. Go post the challenge -- go now -- get it out of [here] --

EDWARD

I don't want to leave you [like this] --

MARY

Go! And make sure that bag goes with you -- stick it in the bank, away from -- but tell me one thing before you leave me. No, we can't just steal it -- as rational as that would be -- as any normal person [would] --

(catches herself)

-- but since no one else can claim it except
Goodson resurrected --

EDWARD

We don't know --

MARY

We know! -- tell me if you have also thought what
I have just thought -- married as we are.

They look at one another.

MARY

You have, haven't you?

EDWARD

Yes -- I hate to admit it --

MARY

Go on.

EDWARD

If we could only guess the advice in the envelope.

MARY

That's at least an honest honesty, Edward, not a
Hadleyburg honesty. Now go before I --

EDWARD

Let's not think on this.

MARY

Might as well say, "Don't breathe." Go.

EDWARD stares at MARY. MARY contemplates the bag. Lights out.
Bag and banner are taken off. Transition: the Marine Hymn

* * * * *

Lights up. MARY and EDWARD in their living room, rocking,
distraught: they are no closer to figuring out the advice. MAN
steps into the shadows, now a postman holding an over-sized
letter, and knocks. Neither stirs. MAN knocks again. Then a
third time. Finally, EDWARD gets up, goes to the door.

MAN

(rapidly)

Letter for Mr. Edward Richards, are you Edward Richards, sure, good, sign here, and here, and here, thanks, let a smile be your umbrella, good day.

As EDWARD opens the letter, MAN moves upstage to the hanging wires. As EDWARD reads the letter, MAN holds up for the audience exactly the same over-sized letter, then clips that letter to a wire. He does this for seven letters. Each letter bears the name, in bold letters, of a Community Pillar: Pinkerton, Wilson, Billson, Harkness, Yates, Whitworth, Baskerville.

MAN then turns and watches.

EDWARD skims the letter -- then, with a jolt, devours it. MARY notices the change, rises, reads over his shoulder. Their despair turns to joy.

EDWARD

"You are far from being a bad man: go, and reform" -- that's the phrase -- that's the phrase! Apparently, it was Barclay Goodson who gave away the money and advice --

MARY rips the letter out of EDWARD's hand and skims it.

MARY

I knew it! I knew it was Goodson!

EDWARD takes it back.

EDWARD

Seems the letter comes from someone who was with Goodson the night he gave the money to the stranger -- overheard the remark. Unsigned, though -- that's odd -- whoever spent time with Goodson -- like hugging a hedgehog --

(looks at MARY)

Goodson didn't have a friend in Hadleyburg --

MARY looks in astonishment and admiration at EDWARD.

MARY

He had a friend in you. You never told me, married as we are.

EDWARD

What?

MARY

That Goodson had always wanted to pay you back for something you had done that was a service to him --

MARY takes back the letter.

MARY

It says it right there. What had you done for that bilious old man?

EDWARD takes back the letter.

EDWARD

(murmuring)

"Possibly without knowing the full value of it" --

MARY

I can't hear you --

EDWARD

I -- I --

MARY

Come on, out with it!

EDWARD

Well, Mary, it also says that if you hadn't done such a service to Goodson, find the man who did because he is Goodson's rightful heir -- "I know that I can trust to your honor and honesty."

MARY

You did the service to Goodson, didn't you?

EDWARD nods and shakes his head, shrugs, all in a non-committal, indefinite way, gives a sickly sort of smile. MAN exits.

MARY

(much heartened)

You should have told me, Edward, that you had done such a fine thing for such an unfine man.

EDWARD

I -- I -- couldn't have told you.

MARY

Even to me?

EDWARD

I -- promised him -- that was it -- I promised him
I wouldn't tell a soul.

MARY scrutinizes EDWARD.

EDWARD

Do you think I would lie to you?

MARY relents.

MARY

I have wandered far from our bearings -- in all
your life you have never uttered a lie. Enough.
Enough. Let us be happy -- you, the legitimate
heir to Barclay Goodson.

EDWARD

Yes --

MARY

We shall be poor no more!

MARY sits.

MARY

Now, let's see --

MARY rocks, contented. EDWARD moves into a separate light.

EDWARD

What was it that I had done for him? I don't
remember doing anything for him -- our paths
rarely -- well, maybe never -- crossed -- maybe it
was -- no, it couldn't have been that --

While EDWARD continues miming his struggle, UTILITY 1, UTILITY 2, and UTILITY 3 come out with a fine hat, a shawl, a tea cup, and other paraphernalia of the rich and, as MARY's dream, dress her out and refine her. Perhaps music with this as well.

Finally, EDWARD manages to convince himself of a story that convinces himself.

EDWARD

Yes, that must have been it! That's the ticket.

At the same moment, MARY's dreams ends, leaving her blissed and blessed. EDWARD returns, sits next to MARY, and together they rock contentedly.

MARY

Are we all right?

EDWARD

We are all right.

MARY

Do you have your envelope ready for tomorrow?

EDWARD

It will be ready in the morning.

MARY

And so will I.

They rock. Lights out. Carnival music.

* * * * *

Lights up on REV. BURGESS upstage. The bag sits next to him. MARY is seated downstage right, empty seat next to her. Off to one side is EDWARD, an envelope in his hand.

EDWARD sidles up to BURGESS with his envelope.

BURGESS

Edward, what are you doing?

EDWARD

Just take it, Rev. Burgess -- please.

BURGESS

Even though your heart may have wanted to give it, I know you never had twenty extra dollars to give anyone.

EDWARD

Just take --

BURGESS

You don't know everything that is going on here -- I can't take -- I shouldn't take --

EDWARD

You have to --

BURGESS

Edward. Edward! When you helped me out of that delicate situation a year ago, I swore I would find a way to repay your kindness -- your courage -- to help a man whom others believed the worst of -- that could not have been easy --

EDWARD

I did what I did because you had always been kind to Mary and me -- now, take the envelope!

BURGESS

This is an Edward I have never seen.

BURGESS takes the envelope.

EDWARD

We shall see what we shall see.

EDWARD sits next to MARY.

UTILITY 3 plays a snare drum in a military tattoo, then stops, and, blowing on a kazoo, trumpets a call to order. MAN, in disguise, slips in. UTILITY 2 enters as a HADLEYBURGIAN. As he speaks, BURGESS fidgets, as if his skin is two sizes too small.

BURGESS

Today we meet a stranger's challenge to Hadleyburg's old reputation for spotless honesty. Today we have before us a -- test -- for we know that there is not a person in this community who would be beguiled to touch a penny not his own. We must see to it that this grace is never betrayed.

(a nervous pause)

Is there anything that anyone wishes to say before we begin? Perhaps from the Pillars of the Community? If there is anything the Pillars of

the Community wish to say before we begin, now would be your best time to say it.

SILENCE. UTILITY 3 begins a drum roll as BURGESS pulls the first envelope from the hanging wire and opens it.

BURGESS

"The remark which I made to the stranger was this: 'You are far from being a bad man: go, and reform.'"

UTILITY 2

Who signed it?

BURGESS

Signed Malcolm Billson.

UTILITY 2 & UTILITY 3

Then he's the one!

(look of puzzlement)

He's the one? Skinflint Billson?

UTILITY 2

If Billson could do it, he'd charge you a water tax for your tears!

UTILITY 3

His wallet is as tight as bark on a tree!

UTILITY 2

He's so stingy that he charges his parents rent to visit!

UTILITY 3

Reverend, that can't be right.

BURGESS

Well --

As he speaks, BURGESS pulls down the rest of the letters.

BURGESS

I don't know if I have better, but I do have -- four, five, six -- more.

UTILITY 2

Six kind people in Hadleyburg?

UTILITY 3

We got us some pretenders to the throne!

BURGESS proceeds to open the letters.

BURGESS

"You are far from free being a bad man -- "

UTILITY 2 & UTILITY 3

"Go, and reform" -- we knew it!

UTILITY 2

Who says?

BURGESS

Lawyer Wilson.

UTILITY 2

Buffalo chips. Next.

BURGESS

"You are far -- "

UTILITY 3

We got it. Who says?

BURGESS

Banker Pinkerton.

UTILITY 2

The man who tried to buy up real estate in Heaven?
Don't think so!

UTILITY 3

Just give us a quick run-down of the rest,
Reverend.

BURGESS goes through the letters. UTILITY 2 and UTILITY 3 whoop and holler after each name or ad-lib a comment.

BURGESS

Harkness, Yates, Whitworth, and Baskerville.

UTILITY 3

Seven claiming to be the one.

UTILITY 2

Even Jesus only tried to put three into one!

BURGESS

Everyone, please --

UTILITY 2

The stranger made out well -- twenty dollars
times seven --

EDWARD

(holding MARY's hand)

We're the eighth, Mary -- doomed.

BURGESS

Please, enough! It appears that those seven
letters are all I have.

UTILITY 2

Look at all --

UTILITY 3

The Pillars fall!

MARY

We're saved!

EDWARD

I cannot stand this.

MARY

But Edward --

EDWARD

Not for another second.

UTILITY 2

They all look like they're sucking lemons --

EDWARD

Not until we confess, Mary --

MARY

Don't be fool[ish] --

UTILITY 3

And sucking 'em from both ends!

EDWARD

-- not until we confess.

EDWARD stands.

MARY

Oh, don't --

EDWARD

My friends, you have known us two --

MARY

(harsh whisper)

Sit down!

UTILITY 2 & UTILITY 3

Hurray and huzzah for that honest man and woman!

BURGESS

Mr. Richards, I agree with them -- this town does know you two, it honors and loves you --

UTILITY 2 & UTILITY 3

Huzzah and hurray for that honest woman and man!

EDWARD

What I was going to say --

BURGESS

We know your good heart, but this is not a time for the exercise of charity toward offenders.

EDWARD

That wasn't what --

MARY stands, clamps his arm in her hands.

MARY

(harsh whisper)

Take the gift!

BURGESS

I see the generous purpose in your face, but I cannot allow you to plead for these men.

(with meaning)

Edward and Mary, with our thanks, you may sit yourselves down.

UTILITY 2 & UTILITY 3

All stand up as the good man and good woman sit down.

EDWARD sits, half-pulled by MARY, half-falling. Defeated.

UTILITY 2

What's in the sack?

UTILITY 3

Yeah, Reverend, let's let that cat out of the bag!

UTILITY 3 does a drum roll as BURGESS undoes the sack and takes out a folded note. As he scans it, a dark cloud passes over his face.

BURGESS

Well -- well --

UTILITY 3

"Well" is a deep subject, Reverend.

UTILITY 2

Pull up the bucket, Reverend.

BURGESS

Well -- you're right -- there's nothing to do but pull up the bucket.

(holds up note)

It says on the outside, "To be read only if anyone submits a response."

UTILITY 3

You got seven reasons to read it.

BURGESS

And so I must. "There is no test remark -- nobody made one."

UTILITY 2

Yowser.

UTILITY 3

Yowser.

BURGESS

"No stranger, no twenty-dollar contribution, no advice -- all these were my invention. And why? One of your prominent Pillars once insulted me. Built as I am, normally I would have killed the man and been done with it. But something in me wanted a deeper damage -- but what could be a deeper damage than death? Something that would make the living want to die -- and I knew I had it: the vaulted vanity of Hadleyburg. I decided to probe your reputation for honesty to see if it held as much water as you say it does. If you are now reading or hearing this, your reputation has failed the examination, as I knew it would. Because there is nothing easier than to make liars and thieves out of those who have never really had their virtue tested in the fire."

Silence descends.

UTILITY 2

Reverend, what else is in the bag?

BURGESS reaches in and pulls out a couple of coins, examines them.

BURGESS

As is only appropriate -- a thin layer of gilt over a lead plug.

UTILITY 3

Hooooo -- now ain't that symbolical.

MAN steps out of the shadows.

MAN

There are two, however, who do not deserve the tar brush the Pillars have earned.

BURGESS

And who are you?

MAN

I deal in the buying and selling all sorts of curiosities.

BURGESS

How convenient.

MAN

I am a moth, and this is a flame, so here I am. You cannot imagine what people will spend their money on -- but I can. Which is why I come bearing a deal. You have two rare people among you -- people who are actually honest -- Edward and Mary Richards touched the sack and did not come away corrupted. And they should be rewarded.

MAN pulls a checkbook out of his inner pocket.

MAN

(to EDWARD and MARY)

I am willing to write you both a check for forty thousand dollars for that bag of gilded lead. Believe me, I will be able to sell them for much more than that once the results of your contest spread throughout the wire services. Do you accept? A reward for your honesty?

Everyone waits for EDWARD and MARY to decide.

EDWARD

It is probably best if we keep the bag -- as a reminder. A lesson.

MAN

Is there any amount I can offer?

EDWARD

No.

MAN

Going once, going twice --

MAN puts away his checkbook.

MAN

Gone.

(to BURGESS)

Treasure them -- they're the best your town has to offer.

Lights shift as MAN, UTILITY 2, and UTILITY 3 exit. BURGESS joins EDWARD and MARY.

BURGESS

I told you I swore to find a way to repay your kindness to me. A small lie, but well worth telling it. I believe we are now square.

MARY

And so what do we do now?

EDWARD

Yes -- what do we do now?

BURGESS

That is entirely up to your consciences.

BURGESS exits. MARY and EDWARD stare at the bag, then move their chairs upstage to make their living room. The bag remains in shadow. They sit. They say nothing.

EDWARD

Our consciences? What do you think he meant by that?

MARY

I don't know, Edward -- I am too tired to think anymore -- too tired to feel anymore.

EDWARD

I think -- I think he was being sarcastic, Mary.

MARY

Reverend Burgess?

EDWARD

I think he wanted to --
(with a twisting motion)
-- stick in the knife and --

MARY

He saved our repu[tations] --

EDWARD

Ah, but -- but -- did you notice? -- he didn't give us back the note we gave him -- did you note that? He's holding on to it for a purpose!

MARY

Stop agitating yourself -- what purpose could he
[have] --

EDWARD

To expose us -- I'll bet you he has already done
that to one or a few -- didn't you observe the
queer looks --

MARY

What looks?

EDWARD

-- we got in church -- the way people congratulated
us --

MARY

They were --

EDWARD

Didn't you sense the little edge they gave to
their congratulations -- a little sneer --

MARY

I saw nothing like that --

EDWARD

-- a little nod and wink --

MARY

Edward --

EDWARD

You saw nothing?

MARY

Well --

EDWARD

Nothing? Come on!

MARY

Now -- now that you mention it --

EDWARD

Hah! You saw it, didn't you?

MARY

Well, perhaps a little [edge] --

EDWARD

Hah!

MARY

Maybe --

EDWARD

I knew it!

MARY

Edward, we are over-tired -- let's just rest --

EDWARD

How can I rest? How can I rest when my soul weighs one hundred and sixty pounds?

MARY

And four ounces.

EDWARD

And four ounces. Doesn't your soul weigh that much?

MARY

I confess it weighs even heavier.

EDWARD

How can we carry that around?

EDWARD rises, moves to the bag, circles it.

EDWARD

Burgess knows. And if he knows, then others will know -- they'll all be against us -- the Pillars will drag us down, too -- Burgess will tell them that I am the man who corrupted Hadleyburg and they will not take it kindly --

MARY joins him.

EDWARD

No more -- I cannot abide the presence of --

With a heave, EDWARD manages to get the bag up onto his shoulder, though his frame can barely hold the weight.

EDWARD

Into the river with this --

MARY

Edward, you'll [hurt yourself] --

EDWARD

Let -- me -- pass -- by --

But before he can take another step, EDWARD crumples under -- and he falls in such a way that the bag covers his head. MARY tries to move the bag as he struggles against suffocating, but she can't, and he dies.

MARY reaches into the bag and takes out two coins. She leans her head back, places a coin on each closed eye.

BLACKOUT

Hammer

DESCRIPTION

Delia, a construction worker, smacked the eleven-year old son of her boyfriend when he told her that he didn't want to learn anything about carpentry from a "girl." She is confused by her actions because, on the one hand, she wants to nip these beginning buds of sexism but, on the other hand, is troubled by her swift choice of physical violence to do it.

CHARACTERS

- DELIA [pronounced Duh-LEE-ah], construction foreman; uses a mild Southern accent or slight drawl
- SUSAN, author doing an interview; using a pad of paper to take notes; same accent or drawl; dressed appropriately

SETTING

- A worksite

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Tool belt, hardhat
- Sawhorse
- Anything else to establish setting, but should be minimal
- Bag/briefcase for SUSAN

* * * * *

DELIA comes on stage and hangs her tool belt and hard hat on the sawhorse, slowly and deliberately. Then she sits on the sawhorse. SUSAN follows her, holding a pad of paper and her bag/briefcase.

DELIA

It wasn't anything of which I am proud.

SUSAN

What was the "it"? Delia, you called me.

DELIA

I couldn't think of anyone else who might be able to understand.

SUSAN

So, I'm here, all ears and notepad.

DELIA

I'm not sure now I want this in the book.

SUSAN

The dissertation -- the book comes later, remember?
along with the website, movie, and a percent of
the gross?

DELIA

You are crazy.

SUSAN

(mock incredulous)

What?

DELIA

Trailing clouds of glory.

SUSAN

Smell the sizzle here! Building The Form: Women
In The Construction Trades.

(pointing to the briefcase/bag)

Got the acceptance speech right in there.

DELIA

So maybe you wouldn't want this in there.

SUSAN

This dissertation grinds all sorts of grist. And,
Delia -- you did call me.

DELIA

Well, then, hung by my --

DELIA & SUSAN

-- own petard --

SUSAN

See, I even know your pet phrases.

DELIA

And we're not even blood-related.

SUSAN

Imagine that! Of which you are not proud?

DELIA

Okay -- well, I don't have much time -- those chuckleheads'll lose everything if I leave 'em alone too long. Okay. What you said last week about being on your last chapter --

SUSAN

The lessons.

DELIA

The lessons. I think I had one, past weekend.

SUSAN

Of which you are not proud.

DELIA

To be sure. If only he'd listened! Jaron.

SUSAN

The eleven-year old.

DELIA

Jaron, son of Jared.

SUSAN

Listened to what.

DELIA

The voice of reason. He wouldn't ease the nail in, you see. Just ease it in. He insisted on banging the board and bending the nail. I tried to show him how it should be done.

DELIA gets a nail and a hammer from her belt and demonstrates.

DELIA

How to set the nail and, with a bit of focus, take your swing short and sharp.

(drives the nail into the sawhorse)

An art to it, make the wood want to accept the nail.

DELIA holds on to the hammer and plays with it.

SUSAN

What were you building?

DELIA

Nothing. Jared wanted me to teach him a lesson in using tools, show him something. I didn't really want to -- I don't really like the kid, don't like kids much at all, but I said yes. Well, for love, or at least some facsimile of it. He's chopping wood with this hammer -- board looked bitten by a dragon -- so I make one more attempt, trying to put everything maternal I don't have into my words, and he turns his eleven-year-old face to me -- smooth, unhurried -- and says, "I ain't gonna do it like a girl." Maybe, maybe it was the combination of a humid day and the little snots I could see just inside his nose and the bruised wood and somewhere in the universe a fool moon causing lunacy, but the way he spit out the word -- girl, like it was something he couldn't wait to flush out of his mouth -- I lost it. Wait, no, that is not accurate, Delia, so do not lie to Susan. I did not lose it. Quite the opposite.

SUSAN

You hit him.

DELIA

I had the hammer in my right hand, and I transferred it to my left -- a conscious choice, I want you to note, deliberate as laying a chalk line. And I did that because I knew I was going to cock this boy across the face -- which I did, as you said, as clean and cold as a chisel. With this salt in the wound: "This is how a girl hits a punk." Yes, I hit him.

SUSAN

Of which you are not proud.

DELIA

He took off, like a hare with a hotfoot, leaving me standing there.

SUSAN

With an impatient hammer.

DELIA

Things raced through me.

SUSAN

To be sure.

DELIA

I've had my share of artillery, you know -- "cunt" this and "dyke" that, bam, bam, bam all around me. Half the women I started the apprenticeship with are in the "Loss" column. You can count us in this industry like dandelions on the lawn.

SUSAN

And just as tenacious.

DELIA

I'd like to be more than a weed. It's not like I haven't suffered every variation and had stuff done to me that should have tenderized me. I know! And yet this boy -- tiny, just like that word, "boy" -- It's there, with those, what he did, that it starts, and that's what struck me.

SUSAN

To strike him.

DELIA

Oh, a blow for the sisterhood, right on! I saw it that way -- a little. But I was not going to let it --

SUSAN

That weed --

DELIA

-- take root. That was one lesson.

SUSAN

Driven home --

DELIA

-- so to speak. Eased in with a short, sharp blow.

SUSAN

You said -- one lesson.

DELIA

The lesson didn't only go one way, his way.

SUSAN

So --

DELIA

What -- struck -- hah! -- struck me later -- when I thought about it -- was shifting that hammer from my right hand to my left.

SUSAN

That chilled me, Delia.

DELIA

It was -- it was voluntary. Planned. Planned. If it had been passion --

SUSAN

Defense of the sisterhood.

DELIA

Maybe, maybe, excusable -- "provoked by the stupidity" as my line of defense. But to plan -- pre-meditate -- how to harm -- a child -- now, that is -- troublesome --

SUSAN

You meant every ounce of it, you know.

DELIA

I know.

SUSAN

And you took -- pleasure in it.

DELIA

I had no pleasure in it.

SUSAN

Don't lie to me, Delia. You can't lie to me. That shift from the right hand to the left -- you knew precisely what that meant, and you enjoyed -- at some level you enjoyed knowing that he didn't know, couldn't anticipate -- Having the power of that surprise --

DELIA

Having that power made me feel empty.

SUSAN

Only after, I'll bet -- and only empty, not apologetic. Like a great orgasm. The adrenalin spike, the kick of the surprise -- you wanted to inflict. Make your mark, deep but scarless. Admit it. Little Jaron corrected felt very good. What felt better -- much better -- oh, infinitely satisfying -- was the shock running up the muscles of your arm -- Power requires its own blood sacrifice.

DELIA

Susan, you talk to me with a full dark voice.

SUSAN

You called me because you believed I would understand.

DELIA

Dark and full.

SUSAN

Because you know I know Jaron.

DELIA

Your father.

SUSAN

He was a carrier. A victim, too, in some ways, but definitely an agent of infection.

DELIA

Carrying.

SUSAN

Oh, it's a long old story -- you know it.

(dodging)

Incoming: Cunt! Bam! Dyke! Bam!

(takes a baseball stance)

Battered up!

(swings, shades her eyes)

Bam! She's outta here!

(grabs her crotch)

Let me just cut you up a little to make you perfect. Let me fill you with fear to keep you pure. It's a long old sad story -- my father just brought a chapter home with him. But I'll tell

you -- I'll tell you -- it does feel good -- it cannot be denied, it does feel good -- when the lizard brain clicks in and you take your chance to reply in kind.

DELIA

So you know.

SUSAN

Of which I am not proud. And which set back the progress of everything. And gave the evil a second life. And so on and so on. But -- there it is.

DELIA

You're speaking a nasty truth.

SUSAN

Of which I am not proud. Which I would not take back. What happened after? After the bunt.

DELIA

He ran to his father. Snot, a little blood. What happened, what happened, what happened, all that flying around.

(makes a dismissive gesture)

I hated having to play it out.

SUSAN

Hard to feel superior when you've been caught.

DELIA

I told Jared what had happened, what I did. "Now, I know you're a good man, and you've treated me clear and fair," I said, "but I'm not going to have all of what I've fought for -- " You can guess the rest of the riot act.

SUSAN

And Jaron?

DELIA

Snug against his father's hip -- and that tore it for me. Just a kid. Yes, I know, like you said, the infection, and it should be irradiated early, but -- still a child, this child, scared, hurt.

SUSAN
And Jared?

DELIA
Well, we're not.

SUSAN
He's got to protect.

DELIA
He was good that way.

SUSAN
I'm sorry he's lost.

DELIA
And your father?

SUSAN
He died without ever admitting, ever, I think,
ever being aware he had the plague.

DELIA
Mother?

SUSAN
Still alive, collaterally damaged -- though, you
know, like the land around a volcano, occasional
greenery pries open the hardpan. She's not
completely lost.

DELIA
But numbed.

SUSAN
All major arteries.

DELIA
So -- how?

SUSAN
That's what I'm "dissertating" about.

DELIA
Your book a vaccine?

SUSAN

I wish. No, small voice in a big wilderness.

DELIA

We could hope for the apocalypse.

SUSAN

Purge all?

DELIA

Yeah.

SUSAN

The reign of God's triumphant terror wouldn't be any better.

DELIA

So -- how?

SUSAN

One step, like this: I've got the darkness, you've got the darkness, too -- how could we not? You eat from a sewer, you are what you eat. Fine. But we do know better. And if we don't do better, knowing better -- everyone else pays. Inoculation is a daily act. Just one step, mind you -- about as frail a reed as you can lean on, a human intention, a human vow.

DELIA

I have to go.

They pick up their materials.

DELIA

It did feel good, for that moment, you know. I have to admit that.

SUSAN

So now you know the temptation full-out.

DELIA

I should apologize to them all.

SUSAN

Miss Manners would consider that minimal.

DELIA

What a knot.

SUSAN

Just keep the signal tuned to the right station, the one with this motto: we do not want to be like them. We do not have to be like them.

DELIA

And you're going to get your dissertation published?

SUSAN

Yes.

DELIA

Even if it's pissing in the wilderness?

SUSAN

It's the way I pound nails. Someone will read it -- some people won't use it for a doorstop. That's some progress.

DELIA

Making the flesh into word --

SUSAN

To protect the flesh.

DELIA

You can put this story in there, then.

SUSAN

I had no doubt.

DELIA

That will make me ready for the next time.

SUSAN

The next time.

DELIA

There will be a next time.

SUSAN

Just make the next time an advance.

DELIA

An advance -- like a loan.

SUSAN

Yes.

DELIA

But there will be a next time.

SUSAN

Come hell and high water.

DELIA

Fire and ice.

SUSAN

But make it an advance.

DELIA

The pay off.

SUSAN

See, you got the flow, you got the words.

DELIA

And I got a crew that's brain-challenged. So I'd better git.

They face each other for a moment, then DELIA holds out her hand. SUSAN shakes it firmly. They exit.

Hannah and The Maccabees

DESCRIPTION

A stroke has crippled Hannah, twisting her body in a useless coil and reducing her to four words she can use to communicate -- "yes," "no," "ohjesus," and "whoa." Carol, her social worker, talks with Hannah when it is clear Hannah has tried to kill herself by slashing her wrist on a broken piece of glass. Carol must understand a whole life as Hannah uses a four-part alphabet to spell it out.

CHARACTERS

- HANNAH SEMMELSON, elderly, crippled by a stroke on the left side
- CAROL HUNTER, young, therapist/counselor at the nursing home [can also be played by a male]

SETTING

- Nestorian Nursing Home

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

Downstage left, a wheelchair, standard issue. Just behind it, 3 to 4 feet away, is a wooden chair with arms, also standard issue. HANNAH enters upstage right. Though old, she is a vigorous woman, with a full head of grey hair neatly coiffed, nicely dressed. She enters as if on an errand or something similar: a sense of purpose. As she walks across the stage, the audience sees her begin to crumple physically, gradually losing the use of the left side of her body from a stroke. The lights should track her movement, and the transformation should be painful to watch: a person full of life struck down. Sometime before she becomes immobilized, she slips a piece of white bandaging over her right wrist; it should have a red spot on the underside. By the time she reaches the wheelchair she is completely transformed: her left hand is rigid, bent down at the wrist, her left leg crossed over her right, skewing her body. The left side of her face is slack. She sits despondently in the chair. She looks frail and emaciated. Throughout her speaking, she can use her right hand for gesturing.

CAROL enters, comes to downstage right. The lighting changes so that there are tight pools on HANNAH and CAROL on opposite sides of the stage.

CAROL holds a manila folder and is speaking to someone, an administrative superior; she can pause where appropriate to simulate a question from this person. She refers to the folder for information periodically.

CAROL

I'm not exactly clear on what happened; I'm trying to flesh it out. What do I know? Ah, apparently Hannah Semmelson - she's in the stroke rehab program - one of the nurse's aides - I've got the name right here, well, I thought I did. Correct, it's not important. One of the aides was wheeling Hannah to her weekly group - that's right, the one I run for elderly aphasiacs - and as they were passing the nurses station, there was a vase of flowers on the desk, as they were passing by, Hannah grabbed the vase - it was a small vase, like a bud vase, maybe a little bigger? - Hannah grabbed it with her right hand - her good hand, yes - and smashed it on the desktop. I didn't think they broke that easily, either. From what the aide said, water and flowers went everywhere, and Hannah tried to slice herself by hammering her wrist on one of the glass shards. No serious damage - the piece wasn't big enough, just small cuts, easily bandaged. The doctor examined her. She's been confined to her room for the time being while we contact the daughter - she's in Arizona. An aide has been assigned to watch her. I'm going to visit her now. I'll report back to you by the end of the day - you're right, we need something to satisfy the daughter.

CAROL moves several steps to her left, speaks as if to a new person.

CAROL

Yes, she is Jewish. No, I'm not. No, I don't know what today is. Rosh Hashanah? The Jewish new year? I didn't know that. Hanukkah? I know it involved the Maccabees - the festival of lights, menorah. Hannah was some sort of strong mother figure, warrior figure in the story, wasn't she? I suppose it would be good to know more about that

- I'll look it up later. I don't think I would use the word "pity." Hannah's still a strong woman - a weak person doesn't do what she did. Depression, yes, maybe -- but not all depression expresses itself as powerlessness. Young? I'm 25. Yes, my first job as a counselor -- is that important? Hannah's struggle? She's been diluted from someone respected in her community to a voice with four words. Four words, that's all the stroke left: yes, no, whoa, and "ohjesus." "Ohjesus" I'm concerned about - she hasn't used it in a while. Her brain still steams right along, but -- well, I try to imagine --

CAROL moves several steps to the left, speaks as if to a new person.

CAROL

She's been starving herself - barely pecks at her food. I know. The nurse had the doctor examine her and he doesn't see any immediate danger, but it's clear what her choice is. And Richard. I've talked with him -- he says he feels pity for her. He said he told Hannah that, but what it really meant was that he wanted to take care of her. I don't know if she heard that. Thank God we haven't had another "incident" like last spring. We should have been more helpful; after all, we are talking about adults here -- if they wanted to have sex, we shouldn't have forced them to try it on the sly. And her "diapers" were such an embarrassment to her - it took a long time for the cuts and bruises to heal from when she tried to take them off herself. Sad is a word I would use. This all goes beyond sad. I'll have something by the end of the day.

CAROL walks to HANNAH and moves the wheelchair to center stage.

CAROL

Hannah? Hannah? It's Carol.

HANNAH

Yes.

CAROL

Happy Rosh Hashanah. That's today, right? Jewish new year? Are you all right?

HANNAH

Whoa.

CAROL

(getting a chair)

It's all right, Hannah; I'm here to help --

HANNAH

Whoa.

HANNAH makes a gesture as if directing CAROL to leave, index finger extended.

CAROL

You want me to leave?

HANNAH

(shaking her head no)

Yes.

CAROL

You do that sometimes, Hannah: you say yes but shake your head no. Does that mean you want me to stay?

HANNAH

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Whoa.

CAROL

I'm going to stay, then.

HANNAH

(shaking her head yes)

No. No.

CAROL

That's new. You've never done that one before.

HANNAH

Yes.

CAROL

Let's see: you want me to stay but you don't want to tell me straight out?

HANNAH

Yes.

CAROL

(taking hand)

Then I'll stay. I would love to stay.

They sit for a few moments in silence; CAROL turns HANNAH's bandaged wrist over, notices the blood spot.

CAROL

The aide should have changed this. Let me get her.

HANNAH

No. No. No.

CAROL

What's the matter?

HANNAH

No. Whoa. Whoa.

She pulls her hand out of CAROL's grip, closes the hand into a fist.

HANNAH

No. No. Whoa. Whoa.

CAROL

Is it something about the aide?

HANNAH

(shaking her head yes)

No. No. No.

CAROL

I'll check it out, Hannah. Don't worry.

(takes her hand again)

I'm right here.

(turns her wrist over)

Does this hurt?

HANNAH

Whoa.

HANNAH takes her hand away, holds the blood spot over her heart.

CAROL

I just want to see it.

(CAROL gently takes HANNAH's hand back)

I have to ask you about this. I have to ask you why.

HANNAH

No. No.

CAROL

Yes. I have to ask you why you're not eating.

(goes to touch her face but doesn't)

I'm worried about you.

HANNAH

No.

HANNAH takes her hand back; makes a gesture as if pointing to everything in the room, then throws up her hand in a "halt" position, palm facing outward.

CAROL

I don't understand.

HANNAH

Whoa. Whoa. No.

HANNAH puts her hands over CAROL's eyes.

CAROL

You don't want me to see?

HANNAH

Yes. Yes. Yes.

CAROL

Is that a real yes?

HANNAH

(nodding yes)

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

CAROL

You don't want me to see what?

HANNAH

No. No.

CAROL

No? No? Nothing? You don't want me to see anything?

HANNAH

Whoa. Whoa.

Using the flat of her hand, HANNAH sweeps over her whole body, as if the hand were a scanner, then makes a backhand motion, as if swatting something away.

CAROL

You don't want me to see you?

HANNAH points. CAROL makes as if she's picking something up.

CAROL

The picture of Richard?

HANNAH repeats the backhand motion.

CAROL

You want me to put it back?

HANNAH points to the picture, holds up her hand in the "halt" motion, and repeats the backhand motion.

HANNAH

No. No. No.

CAROL

Something about Richard -- you want him to go away?

HANNAH makes the backhand motion.

HANNAH

No. No.

CAROL

He wants you to go away?

HANNAH puts her hand over her own eyes.

CAROL

He doesn't want to see you?

HANNAH

Whoa. No. Whoa. No.

CAROL

He doesn't want to see you.

HANNAH

(in a whisper)

Yes. Yes. Yes.

CAROL

Hannah, I talked to Richard today. He said he didn't say that. Did he tell you that himself?

HANNAH

(shaking her head no)

Yes.

CAROL

He did?

HANNAH

No. No. No.

CAROL

Is that a real no?

HANNAH

Yes. Yes. Yes.

CAROL

Then who did?

HANNAH holds the blood spot over her heart again.

CAROL

You shouldn't do that - you will get blood on your blouse. The aide really should have changed this by now.

HANNAH

Yes. No. Yes. No.

HANNAH pulls her hand away and makes the fist again.

CAROL

The aide?

CAROL makes a fist and shows it to HANNAH.

CAROL

The aide?

HANNAH

Yes. Yes.

CAROL

The aide said something?

HANNAH

Yes. Yes.

CAROL

Something about Richard?

HANNAH

Yes. Yes. Whoa. Whoa.

HANNAH points to the picture, then makes the "halt" motion with her hand.

CAROL

The aide said something about Richard, didn't she?

(HANNAH makes the backhand motion)

That he doesn't want you? Is that it?

HANNAH
(quietly)

Whoa. Whoa.

CAROL

So, no reason to eat.

(takes her wrist)

No reason for anything. She's wrong, Hannah. Richard loves you a great deal. It will be all right.

HANNAH
(shaking her head no)

Yes. Yes.

CAROL

It will. I will make sure she is reprimanded. You need to start eating again. Richard cares

about you. I talked with him about it. He really cares.

HANNAH gently pulls her hand away; she looks a thousand miles away, staring. CAROL puts the picture back.

CAROL

Don't go away, Hannah. Strong mother. Brave heart. Don't go away. I suppose that's easy for me to say. Why should you believe it? Happy new year.

HANNAH continues to stare. CAROL stands for a moment, undecided. Then she moves her chair to face HANNAH directly and sits. Taking a moment to study HANNAH, she composes her body to mimic HANNAH's: left leg over right, left hand bent at wrist.

CAROL

No. No. Whoa. No.

HANNAH looks at her, points. CAROL puts her wrist over her heart.

CAROL

(shaking her head yes)

Yes. Yes.

HANNAH

Whoa.

CAROL

No. Yes.

HANNAH

Whoa.

CAROL

No. No. Yes. Yes. Yes.

HANNAH

(shakes her head no)

Yes.

CAROL

(nods her head)

Yes.

CAROL makes the same motion sweeping her hand over her own body, but instead of using the backhand dismissive motion HANNAH did, CAROL puts her wrist over her heart again.

CAROL

Yes.

(points to the picture)

Yes.

HANNAH

Whoa.

CAROL slams her wrist down on the chair.

CAROL

No.

(slams it again)

No.

(kisses her own wrist)

Whoa.

HANNAH

(points to the picture.)

Yes.

CAROL

Yes.

HANNAH

Yes.

CAROL

Yes.

HANNAH

Ohjesus.

CAROL

Ohjesus.

CAROL unfolds from her chair and takes HANNAH's hand.

CAROL

Yes. New year. Yes to Hannah.

HANNAH

(but shaking her head no)

Yes. Yes.

(puts her hand over CAROL's eyes)

Whoa.

HANNAH gently slams her wrist down on the arm of the wheelchair.

HANNAH

Yes. Yes.

CAROL kneels on one knee beside HANNAH and takes her hand. HANNAH gently pulls it away and puts the blood spot over her heart. HANNAH stares off into space.

CAROL

Don't go away.

HANNAH stares off into space.

BLACKOUT

But Her Heart Is Warm

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

After the first big snow of the season, MARIA rushes to her front yard and sculpts a nude torso of a full-figured woman. But someone in the neighborhood doesn't like it and complains, and SERGEANT DOMINICK SFORZA comes to deliver the news and a request that MARIA modify it modestly by covering it up.

CHARACTERS

- MARIA
- VENUS
- SERGEANT DOMINICK SFORZA

MISCELLANEOUS

- VENUS is dressed in a white unitard or some other sort of white outfit -- she is a snow sculpture, after all.
- The ability to have something strobe to indicate a flash camera, or several cameras, going off.
- An Alternate: A dozen or so cheap flash cameras handed out to audience members. At various points in the show, they will take pictures of what's going on onstage.

* * * * *

VENUS rests comfortably on her base.

MARIA, wearing a muffler and a pair of gloves -- just enough to indicate cold weather but not so much to roast the actor onstage -- admires her work.

MARIA

Oh, I have sculpted one gorgeous snow-sculpted temptress, I have.

A flash of photographs being taken of the statue and its creator by passing motorists. MARIA waves at the audience

MARIA

Thank you -- thanks -- take all the pictures you want --

SOUND: The short blurt of a police siren.

This startles MARIA.

SOUND: A car pulling up, car door slammed.

SERGEANT DOMINICK SFORZA appears.

This also startles MARIA.

MARIA

Yes?

SFORZA looks distinctly uncomfortable. This makes MARIA even more nervous.

MARIA

Officer?

SFORZA

Ma'am --

VENUS speaks, and though neither of them can hear her, what she says has an influence. It would not be unusual for VENUS to speak on top of the other actors' lines -- after all, she is a goddess.

VENUS

Identification first! Don't forget!

MARIA

Sorry -- can I see some ID first?

This flummoxes SFORZA -- no one has actually ever asked him for his ID.

SFORZA

Really?

MARIA

Really.

SFORZA pulls it out of his pocket and opens it.

VENUS

Hand it over.

MARIA

Please.

SFORZA hands it over. MARIA examines it, hands it back -- an intimate exchange without any intimacy.

VENUS

Speak, long arm of the law.

SFORZA

It's a nice -- well, not a snow man, I guess, but a -- statue.

MARIA

Is the compliment why you stopped?

SFORZA

Not really.

MARIA

I didn't think so.

An awkward silence.

MARIA

Is it the traffic? It's been getting a lot of traffic -- I mean, literally, up and down, up and -- online, too, you know, online traffic --

SFORZA

No, not the traffic.

MARIA

Then why have you come here?

VENUS

Why have you come, intimidator of the innocent? Hmm?

SFORZA is clearly uncomfortable with what he has to do.

SFORZA

We've had a complaint --

MARIA

We?

SFORZA

Someone --

MARIA

Who?

SFORZA

Someone -- about --

SFORZA indicates VENUS. MARIA waits, plays dumb.

VENUS

Be specific, be letter-of-the-law.

SFORZA

About -- her --

MARIA isn't giving him any relief.

VENUS

What you've given me to show off.

SFORZA

Yeah -- I know, it's stupid, but --

MARIA

You still haven't told me what it is.

SFORZA

Her -- exposure --

MARIA looks at VENUS, then back at SFORZA.

MARIA

Really?

SFORZA

Yes, ma'am.

MARIA

Really?

SFORZA

Yes, ma'am.

VENUS

False courtesy -- danger, Will Robinson!

MARIA

Wow -- I thought -- I thought it was something more serious.

SFORZA

Well, you're right, but --

MARIA

No -- I mean, you had me -- I thought, maybe, like, I don't know, terrorism or la migra --

SFORZA

Why would you think --

MARIA

Because you just never know these days -- not to be disrespectful about your profession --

VENUS

I grant you such disrespect.

MARIA

But, you know, Homeland Security, the way you're all deputized -- sorry, you got me flustered -- look, just what is it you're going to tell me? Because we haven't done anything --

SFORZA takes a step forward -- nothing aggressive, just moving into the space, but it makes MARIA very nervous and she steps back. SFORZA notices this and backs off.

SFORZA

I'm not here to -- ma'am --

VENUS

Stop moving -- you're making her nervous -- making me nervous, and I'm ice.

SFORZA stops. Perhaps a few more pictures, which makes SFORZA a little uncomfortable.

MARIA

The whole world is watching.

SFORZA

Ma'am, I'm just here to tell you that someone has complained -- about -- your statue.

MARIA stares at SFORZA for a moment, then laughs.

VENUS

Where she came from --

MARIA

Where I came from --

VENUS

People don't complain about such nonsense.

MARIA

This would not be something people would talk to the police about -- though we don't have snow, so -- but you can understand my point. The police aren't -- wouldn't be -- trusted.

SFORZA

Just a complaint, a simple -- about the nudity. The -- parts. Nothing deeper. Really. I like what you did.

MARIA

So what do you [like] --

VENUS

Don't converse! Don't go soft!

MARIA

Look, never mind --

VENUS

Just --

MARIA

Not important.

VENUS

Good.

MARIA

Who made the complaint?

SFORZA

I can't tell you that.

MARIA

They can talk to you about me, but you can't tell me who talked to you? It seems I have a coward for a neighbor, sending you in --

SFORZA

I don't get to say what's right or wrong.

MARIA

Can you tell me what they didn't like?

SFORZA

Just everything.

MARIA moves to VENUS, runs her hands over the curves -- she doesn't have to actually touch VENUS -- unless the actors are okay with that -- but simply outlines the shapes.

MARIA

You mean like here? And here?

SFORZA

I suppose.

VENUS

Don't forget here.

MARIA

And here?

SFORZA

Ma'am, I get --

MARIA

And this?

SFORZA

-- the point.

VENUS

Which part of him is getting pointed?

MARIA

Do you like the things this invisible neighbor of mine didn't like?

SFORZA comes closer to VENUS and looks.

SFORZA

I think it'll be a shame when this melts. Ma'am.

MARIA

Does this mean this visit is over?

SFORZA

No -- a complaint has to be -- well --

VENUS

Can't leave till he's made you suffer.

SFORZA

Well, both served and acted upon.

MARIA doesn't say anything, just waits -- internal struggle notwithstanding.

SFORZA

It would make things easier if you could cover her up.

VENUS

Think about the choices running through your mind. Remember he has a gun.

MARIA waits a bit longer before answering.

MARIA

Covered how?

SFORZA

It wouldn't take much, I think -- a -- top -- thing, and --

MARIA

And if I don't?

SFORZA, in his reaction, shows that he doesn't really want them to go down that road.

VENUS

Push him.

MARIA

If I leave her just as she is?

SFORZA

Then the traffic on the street would become a problem. Whatever causes the traffic problem would have to be removed.

MARIA

And that's the way it works.

SFORZA

That's one of the ways it works.

VENUS

Beauty versus punishment -- not worth it.

MARIA

She's going to melt anyways.

SFORZA

Later -- won't solve this problem now.

They wait, then MARIA exits. SFORZA fidgets.

VENUS

Hard to feel any job satisfaction when the only strap-on you can use is a gun.

MARIA returns with a bikini top and a length of cloth and two gold tassels. She hands the tassels to SFORZA, throws the top over her shoulder, and begins wrapping the cloth around VENUS like a sarong.

Then MARIA pulls some safety pins out of her pocket and pins the tassels to the cups of the top, talking to SFORZA as she pins on the tassels.

MARIA

From the graduation caps for my two degrees -- two of them. I have been higher educated twice. How about you?

SFORZA

Just one. Once.

MARIA

Ah -- just one. Once.

MARIA then puts the top on VENUS, the two gold tassels in prominent and pendulum splendor.

MARIA

Covered.

MARIA's wicked little grin makes SFORZA both embarrassed and irritated.

SFORZA

You can't -- those --

MARIA

Will the complainer now be satisfied, do you think?
You should go check with him, or her -- obviously
calling the shots in this case.

SOUND: A great grind of wind tunnels through.

All focus is now on VENUS, who has unmoored herself and is now free to move. MARIA and SFORZA are still -- not frozen necessarily, but suspended, like a breath.

**MUSIC: "Bluesy All Alone" from Jampy's "The Unemployed"
[<http://www.jamendo.com/en/album/12064>] kicks in,
loud.¹**

The music lasts one minute. During that one minute, VENUS bends the bodies of MARIA and SFORZA into tableaux that illustrate the possibilities that she presents. VENUS moves herself and them gracefully and grindingly and urgently.

VENUS

What will it be for these two in this instant of
their universe? The law versus art? The hammer
and the spike? Or their twin breaths braided?
Contact without bruise? Force or fusion?

The actors and director are free to add any other phrases to fill out the music and come up with a choreography that satisfies them.

MUSIC: Ends.

1 The music is royalty-free.

VENUS

I hope they choose fucking brilliance over the
snarl of their walls and fear.

VENUS re-takes her place. Time shifts to whatever would now
be considered normal.

SFORZA

You can't --

MARIA

Will the complainer now be satisfied, do you think?
You should go check --

Something makes them realize that they have traveled somewhere
and come back to their starting point. Their bodies ease.

SFORZA

You know --

VENUS

Go on.

SFORZA

I think it's fine the way it is.

VENUS

Ah.

SFORZA

We get to use our discretion.

MARIA

Maybe a little -- much -- maybe -- you know, the
two --

VENUS

Make a suggestion.

MARIA takes the top off. She unpins one of the tassels and
pockets it. She pins the second tassel to the cloth between
the two cups and puts the top back on VENUS.

MARIA

Less of a -- you know --

MARIA makes the Italian gesture for "fuck you."

SFORZA

Yeah -- what you just said.

Not sure what to do next.

SFORZA

Weather will be getting warmer soon anyway, so
-- no more problem.

MARIA

No problem at all.

The silence between them hints at something more -- but VENUS
will have none of this.

VENUS

Don't ruin it, you two.

SFORZA smiles, shrugs, waves, leaves. MARIA watches him go,
then turns and looks at VENUS.

VENUS

No reason to force it over the border into "the
nice" -- be thankful for the gift of a truce.
They're rare enough.

MARIA arranges the cloth, the top.

MARIA

Yeah. They are.

MARIA leaves.

MUSIC: The first seven seconds of "Bluesy All Alone"

VENUS does a short movement piece of melting away.

Blackout.

"Making Light": The Lost Letters of Hester Prynne

A CHORAL READING BASED ON
THE SCARLET LETTER

(with apologies to Nathaniel Hawthorne)

CHARACTERS

- Hester Prynne
- Three WOMEN of varying ages
- Narrator

NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, NARRATOR is part of all group-spoken lines.

* * * * *

A simple set-up: music stands or chairs. NARRATOR enters.

NARRATOR

"Excerpts from the letters of Hester Prynne to her daughter Pearl, now deposited with the Essex Historical Society, and an account, in part, of Hester's subsequent sojourn among the people of Boston." I have a certificate of authenticity from the Essex Historical Society itself --

(holds up paper)

-- you'll be glad to know. We hold ourselves to the most scrupulous research here.

"The letters were found by Pearl's son upon her death in 1727 in Tetuán, Morocco, where Pearl had embraced Islam. The small mahogany box containing the letters was the only possession Pearl had, aside from her clothing. Pearl's remains are still in Tetuán and still revered by the inhabitants."

WOMEN enter.

NARRATOR

See -- authentic in every detail. What we are about to show is the truth, so, shall we begin?

Good. May, in the spring. Dearest Pearl. I have returned.

HESTER
(overlapping)

I have returned.

NARRATOR
The house is no different, only older -- like myself.

HESTER
(overlapping)

Like myself.

NARRATOR
I cannot say --

NARRATOR & HESTER
I cannot say --

HESTER
I return with joy or even fondness --

WOMAN 1
So, then, why come back at all?

NARRATOR
The very question you handed me as I boarded the ship. And the only honest answer is --

HESTER & NARRATOR
I do not know why.

NARRATOR
I only know that in the anger and hatred I feel for this place I seek a flame worth seeing the light of -- I still hope to hear him call my name.

NARRATOR & HESTER
If that flame does not burn in me here --

NARRATOR
It will never burn at all. And so, here I am. This letter must needs be short -- I have --

NARRATOR & HESTER

-- much to do --

NARRATOR

-- to get this house --

HESTER

And myself --

NARRATOR & HESTER

Aright.

NARRATOR

But I must also tell you that about Boston, not a thing has changed.

HESTER

They still believe that --

NARRATOR & WOMAN 3

-- whenever they [we] are uncomfortable they [we] are doing the work of God!

WOMAN 1

And their attitude toward women --

WOMAN 2

-- has not shifted.

Suggestion: WOMAN 2 is this woman in the following words of NARRATOR

WOMAN 1

Just the other day, a woman was whipped for repulsing the attacks of one --

ALL WOMEN

-- John Wedg --

WOMAN 1

-- who was deemed not in control of himself because he was provoked by her --

NARRATOR & WOMAN 3

-- "attention to lascivious detail" --

WOMAN 1

She had done nothing but wear --

NARRATOR & WOMAN 1

-- the looks God gave her --

NARRATOR

-- yet, in that God's name, they crushed her
dignity. I am glad I am freed from that hypocrisy
-- I have no need anymore to suffer --

NARRATOR, HESTER & WOMAN 1

-- the false pride of false men.

NARRATOR

I am filled with you, Pearl.

NARRATOR & HESTER

Much love always.

* * * * *

NARRATOR

June. Whatever year it is. Time slips --

NARRATOR & HESTER

-- by.

NARRATOR

I visited his grave today. I will try to tell
you, with my poor words, what fire moved through
me, what debt I have to this length of ground
which laces me as hard as a sailor's reef. The
grave --

WOMAN 1

-- is tucked away --

WOMAN 2

-- in a corner --

NARRATOR & WOMAN 3

-- how fitting --

WOMAN 3

In him, old men found --

WOMAN 1

-- lighter hearts, old women --

WOMAN 2

-- renewed their nipples, young girls --

WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

-- throbbed with piety.

NARRATOR

But when The Good Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale
showed them himself, they --

NARRATOR & WOMAN 1

-- Judas-kissed him and --

WOMAN 2 & WOMAN 3

-- ditched him in this grave.

WOMAN 1

Grave --

WOMAN 2

Grave --

WOMAN 3

Grave.

NARRATOR

He haunts my thoughts.

HESTER

Rales in my blood.

NARRATOR

And I can almost sense his taut back and thighs
against my hands.

HESTER

No darkness in the passion that created you.

NARRATOR

I barely tasted the man myself, but it was enough.

WOMAN 2 & WOMAN 3

Enough.

WOMAN 1 & NARRATOR

Enough.

HESTER

Enough.

NARRATOR

Pearl, we must never allow any creed to --

WOMAN 3

-- call --

WOMAN 1

-- our agony --

ALL

-- justice.

NARRATOR

Men seem to like such --

ALL

-- sicknesses --

NARRATOR

-- but let's not drag the women along -- we have much better business to do.

WOMAN 1

I miss my grandchild --

WOMAN 2

Is he walking yet?

WOMAN 3

Put him on the right paths early --

NARRATOR

-- or he might get religion and be forever crawling.

HESTER

Much love.

* * * * *

NARRATOR

Your packet of letters rained down today -- ah,
such sweetness to read and re-read them.

NARRATOR & HESTER

My grandson a hellion, you say?

WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

I wonder where he gets that from?

NARRATOR

I have much to keep me busy here now that I have
picked up my needle again.

HESTER

Babies are born --

In chorus.

WOMAN 1

Babies are born --

WOMAN 2

Babies are born --

HESTER

Aristocrats die --

WOMAN 3

Babies are born --

WOMAN 1

Aristocrats die --

HESTER

Brides wed grooms --

WOMAN 2

Aristocrats die --

WOMAN 3

Aristocrats die --

NARRATOR

And my needle eats through thread --

DANCER 1
Brides wed grooms --

WOMAN 2
Brides wed grooms --

NARRATOR
-- like a hog through scraps.

WOMAN 3
Brides wed grooms --

NARRATORV
And though you would hate this, I have made the
letter visible again -- not out of --

NARRATOR & HESTER
-- shame or deficit but --

WOMAN 1
-- to annoy --

WOMAN 2
-- and to announce --

WOMAN 3
-- and to prick these Puritans --

NARRATOR & HESTER
-- between their categories --

NARRATOR
The young ones think I wear the coat-of-arms of
a noble woman.

ALL WOMEN
I do --

HESTER
"A" for Arthur --

NARRATOR & HESTER
-- and they are the ones I play to.

NARRATOR
Allow me my barbs; I shall soon lose my teeth
anyway, though not the willingness to bite.

HESTER

And I will not return to you --

WOMEN

-- at least not yet --

NARRATOR

There is still much to do here.

* * * * *

HESTER

A curious, curious thing has taken place.

NARRATOR

One night -- a timid knock on the door. I paid it no attention.

WOMAN 1

Then --

WOMAN 2

-- again --

WOMAN 3

-- the sound --

HESTER

Enter.

NARRATOR

And into the light stepped Goody Johnson --

WOMAN 2

-- the deacon's wife --

WOMAN 1

-- one who had baited me --

WOMAN 3

-- as you walked to the scaffold.

WOMAN 1 & WOMAN 2

Goody Johnson.

NARRATOR & WOMAN 3

May I?

NARRATOR
I need --

WOMAN 3
Help --

WOMAN 1 & WOMAN 2
Your help --

NARRATOR
Stay if you wish, I said --

WOMAN 3
And down I sat --

WOMAN 1
No prelude --

WOMAN 2
For old enemies --

NARRATOR
She said I was the best available.

HESTER
For an hour we mulled it over --

WOMAN 2
Small problem --

WOMAN 1
Really --

NARRATOR
And she left with some --

NARRATOR & WOMAN 3
-- happiness bottled in her bosom.

HESTER
Pleasure --

WOMAN 1
And irony --

WOMAN 2
Connected --

WOMAN 3

Shared time with a woman --

NARRATOR

Not embittered or terse --

NARRATOR & HESTER

And I had been of some help.

NARRATOR

My stodgy old convictions about men and women were, for the moment, pleasantly upset. If it had only been Goody Johnson --

WOMEN

But it wasn't --

NARRATOR

Before long other ladies came at all hours to unload their donkey hearts on my wharf.

HESTER

I am suddenly --

WOMAN 3

the Alexandrian library --

ALL

-- for the ills of women.

HESTER

And always the same story --

WOMEN

Variations on a theme.

WOMAN 3

My husband's ardor has cooled and his eye licks over the fresh virgins --

NARRATOR

What can I do?

WOMAN 2

I am pregnant, again -- it will kill me --

NARRATOR

What can I do?

WOMAN 1

I find my heart does not turn towards men but to women --

ALL

What can I do?

NARRATOR

And I counsel them as best I can --

HESTER

And always dose them with myself.

NARRATOR

Because they always want to know --

WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

What happened?

HESTER

And I tell them the --

NARRATOR & HESTER

-- truth --

NARRATOR

That no laws could have held back the waters of what I felt to be right.

HESTER

I tell them --

WOMAN 1

I should not be ashamed of what I feel --

WOMAN 2

That who I am --

WOMAN 3

Does not come from a book --

NARRATOR

-- written by men wandering in a desert --

ALL

-- our souls body forth --

NARRATOR

-- sensations and intuitions full of wonder and
delight and mystery.

WOMAN 1

Most are silent --

WOMAN 2

Some protest --

WOMAN 3

But none stays away for long.

WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

In our silent ways --

HESTER

-- we undermine the foundation.

NARRATOR

This revolutionary talk is hard work, daughter!

HESTER

All I can do is point --

NARRATOR & HESTER

I can't make the journey for them.

WOMAN 3

That is where Christ was wrong.

NARRATOR

Really?

WOMAN 2

He should have stayed a fisherman --

WOMAN 1

Who spoke uncommon good sense --

WOMAN 3

Rather than a Messiah trying to do all the sinning
for others.

NARRATOR & HESTER

Really?

WOMAN 3

They have too much fun doing it themselves to give it over to one man.

NARRATOR

Good.

HESTER

Good.

NARRATOR

My best to all.

* * * * *

NARRATOR

June.

HESTER

By the time this missive meets you --

NARRATOR

I will be fresh in the ground --

HESTER

Buried near your father.

WOMAN 1 & WOMAN 2

I hope only hope that heaven --

WOMAN 3 & WOMAN 1

-- is not boring --

WOMAN 3 & WOMAN 2

-- or run by men --

WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

-- or both.

HESTER

Imminent death gives me leave to make light --

NARRATOR

Make light -- now there is an interesting phrase.
I wait for his voice to call me.

HESTER

At night, when the moon slices through the sky --

NARRATOR

And the sky's throat bleeds stars --

WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

I wait for him.

NARRATOR

I want to pass on a philosophy to you, like a
compost heap --

WOMAN 3

But only this comes --

NARRATOR

Life is meaningless, even with a God --

WOMAN 3

So it is important to do something, not just mean
to do it.

HESTER

My one great sin was having meant to help your
father. After that --

ALL WOMEN

Nothing.

HESTER

It has been good being alive --

NARRATOR

But it is not recommended for one's health and
recreation.

NARRATOR & WOMEN EXCEPT HESTER

Re-creation!

HESTER

Interesting.

NARRATOR

I wait for him, there is no doubt I wait for him, even though I know that no matter what I convince myself to believe, it all comes down to this clay infused with breath that will wither in a fragile bluster of pain and then be no more. I cannot fool myself. I know he will not be there on the other side. Nothing will be there.

And yet -- perhaps all wrong. He may well be there, his face and figure still strong and bracing, and my old woman's body shivers like a lake after a thousand geese leave it at once. Yes, I believe in a total dissolve, but a small part hopes I am wrong. Perhaps he is speaking to me through that, his soft voice breaching my defenses, as it did once before.

The next line is done as a round. Each person begins after the phrase "My old woman's body" and goes in this order: WOMAN 3, WOMAN 2, WOMAN 1, NARRATOR, HESTER.

ALL

My old woman's body shivers like a lake after a thousand geese leave it at once.

NARRATOR

I end the letter here. All my life long you have been my constant companion. I owe you much, daughter, and even though you are not here --

NARRATOR & WOMEN

I do not die alone.

NARRATOR

I give up a claim to this life.

HESTER

Cling to yours and those of your husband and son.

WOMAN 2

Much of life is like smoke from a fire --

WOMAN 1

-- a straight column of ascending emptiness --

WOMAN 3

and then nothing at all.

HESTER

Give it meaning.

NARRATOR & HESTER

Give it meaning.

ALL

Give it meaning.

End.

Hold On

DESCRIPTION

Cappy and Ronnie have come to the end of their sevenyear relationship. Suddenly, a car careens out of control and teeters on the edge of the bridge -- only they can keep it from plunging. They keep a lot more than the car from sliding into the river as they talk out where they have ended up.

CHARACTERS

- Ronnie, *female*
- Cappy, same age, male

SETTING

- A roadside

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

RONNIE is sitting on a bench, alone. She is dressed in a dress nice enough for a wedding. In the background, sound of occasional traffic. CAPPY runs up and sits down as if he's sliding into base at a baseball game. He is wearing a tuxedo.

CAPPY

Safe

RONNIE

Out.

CAPPY

Safe!

RONNIE

Out at home. Play ball somewhere else -- like with your bar buddies back in there.

CAPPY

So you don't want me here?

RONNIE

Go away.

CAPPY

Free bench.

RONNIE

For human beings.

CAPPY

I'm not?

RONNIE

Not today. Not after today. After today you go back to your original tribe of baboons. I can't believe -- Begone.

CAPPY

You're sweating the small stuff. Proven fact: Bad attitudes will kill you early.

RONNIE

And you won't? I've decided that Cappy makes me feel crappy, and in order for me to be healthy, I need to flush you from my system. An ultra high colonic. The enema to top all enemas. From stem to stern and back. It's the least someone of your quality deserves. And you deserve the very least.

CAPPY

Finished?

RONNIE

With you. I've got a big hole in my personal ozone from your toxic waste. Time for you to be phased out.

CAPPY

Anything else?

RONNIE

When they passed out brains --

CAPPY

Ah, something from your second-graders.

RONNIE

I'm not going to dance this jig any more.

CAPPY

C'mon, you're supposed to play out --

RONNIE

-- I get mad -- again! --

CAPPY

-- it brings out your best colors --

RONNIE

-- you sit there and soak up my spew --

CAPPY

-- such lovely spew, well-crafted --

RONNIE

-- we jig this over and over again, and I feel stupid seven different ways for saying what I feel, and you come off squeegee-clean and well-defensed, which I hate, and it's never going to change. Just for the record. You really hurt me back there.

CAPPY

Ronnie, we were just exchanging guy stuff --

RONNIE

"Guy stuff:" Cigars so fat you looked like you were sucking on sawed-off billy clubs and brandy with a testosterone chaser. You don't even smoke.

CAPPY

Peer pressure. Out of my hands. But I didn't inhale.

RONNIE

And you attribute the high level of discourse to --

CAPPY

Just conversational riffing. Male mouth music.

RONNIE

Riffing. Riffing. I can't believe you said -- what you said.

CAPPY

We were just telling stories.

RONNIE

Why didn't you tell me you didn't like them?

CAPPY

Ronnie --

RONNIE

Why didn't you? I went to all this trouble, for your birthday, to buy you some nice French silk underwear.

CAPPY

Low-cut bikinis.

RONNIE

Excuse me, Mister B.V.D. -- how was I to know you held a distinct opinion about the rise of the leg hole?

CAPPY

They just rode -- up -- you know. Up. They weren't comfortable.

RONNIE

So why didn't you say something? Especially when I bought you some more for Christmas.

CAPPY

Didn't want to hurt your feelings.

RONNIE

You don't even know what those are. Instead I get the news flash from a bunch of gargling primates wreathed in blue smoke. A turkey basted with ridicule. The Portuguese in you will always leak out.

CAPPY

I'm not that Portuguese.

RONNIE

Except when you're in a room full of Silvas and Costas and Bettencourts with Portuguese brandy warm in the palm of your hand. Then you become the macho Mediterranean man who cares more about how to get your underwear off than the kind you wear. You didn't have to tell everyone I bought you those. Bought them twice. No, that wasn't it. It was how you made me look like an idiot for wanting to do something nice for you. Like I

was this bubble-brained -- bubble brain! As if I didn't know you. After seven years. As if I didn't know you -- that's what hurt.

They sit, undecided.

CAPPY
Nice wedding.

RONNIE
They usually are.

CAPPY
Am I still out at home?

RONNIE
Cappy --

CAPPY
Ronnie, don't --

RONNIE
What are we up to?

CAPPY
Jeez, I told you not to!

RONNIE
Seven years.

CAPPY
Good ones. Can we go back in?

RONNIE
Not all good.

CAPPY
On average. Back? Go back?

RONNIE
I watched you today, a lot. As the priest blessed them, as everyone clapped, as people came up to them and just bathed in their happiness. And I realized that you and I will never have anything like that. Ever. Not the marriage necessarily. Just that kind of connection. In cigarus et

brandius veritas. We're holding on to nothing.
No trumps.

CAPPY

That's not true.

RONNIE

It's true, no matter what you say.

CAPPY

You're still mad. This isn't the first time. This
has come up.

RONNIE

I think it's the last.

They sit in silence for several beats. In the distance is the
sound of a speeding car approaching, the squeal of brakes, and
a crash.

CAPPY

Christ, look at that! It's hanging off the bridge.
C'mon.

They both stand.

RONNIE

It's Jim's aunt, the one that smelled like
fermenting apples.

CAPPY

She's going for a header in the river if we don't
do something. Grab!

RONNIE

What?

CAPPY

Anything. There. The trunk's popped.

They mime grabbing the open trunk of the car. They are holding
the car up by their own strength and weight. It teeters.

CAPPY

See if we can keep it from see-sawing. Ah -- hey
-- what the hell's her name?

RONNIE

I kept thinking of her as Red Delicious gone bad.

CAPPY

Ah, Jim's aunt. Granny Smith.

RONNIE

Granny Smith?

CAPPY

You're gonna be okay. Whoa!

The car teeters again.

CAPPY

Stay still in there you old fruit. Stay still -- don't rock the car or we're all going down together. Help is on the way.

Several beats. They look around.

CAPPY

Someone must have heard it. I thought it was pretty loud.

RONNIE

The band was pretty loud.

CAPPY

Not that loud. People weren't bleeding from the ears yet.

Several beats.

RONNIE

I hope someone heard.

CAPPY

The band was pretty loud.

RONNIE

What the hell was she doing?

CAPPY

Probably a geezer spasm -- you think the accelerator is the brake and it's off to the races. I read a

story once where Mr. Senile USA drove through a plate-glass entrance into a mall.

RONNIE

What are we going to do?

CAPPY

What are our choices?

RONNIE

We could let go. Make room for the new generation. My hands are going to decide this pretty soon.

CAPPY

I've given you many opportunities to exercise those hands. Not my fault if --

The car teeters again, a little more wildly.

CAPPY

What's she doing in there -- a full gallop? Settle down, Mrs. Appleseed.

RONNIE

My hands don't have too much grip left.

CAPPY

No one's coming.

RONNIE

Cramp!

She takes one of her hands off and waves it in the air. The car teeters. CAPPY teeters with it, stabilizes it.

CAPPY

Warn me at least!

RONNIE

A spasm doesn't come with trumpets!

RONNIE puts her hand back.

RONNIE

Christ, that hurt!

CAPPY

Yeah -- but he got it through the palm. You "knead" to make bread more often. Get it? Knead? Build hand strength?

RONNIE

Shut up.

CAPPY

Just trying to lighten things.

The car rocks slightly, gently.

CAPPY

Well.

RONNIE

Well.

CAPPY

Not what I expected to "come to hand" when I came out here.

RONNIE

Me neither. I guess we're hanging on.

CAPPY

To Granny Smith.

RONNIE

Who had a geezer spasm.

CAPPY

Almost drove her car.

RONNIE

Into a chasm. Wait! Wait! Another one.

Takes her other hand off and shakes out a cramp. The car teeters again, even more wildly. RONNIE clutches madly.

CAPPY

She's running in the home stretch.

RONNIE

(yelling)

Sit still --

CAPPY

-- frisky, isn't she --

RONNIE

-- or the Social Security check --

CAPPY

-- she's probably buried a husband or two --

RONNIE

-- gets it in the neck!

CAPPY

That -- was -- a -- good -- one.

They stabilize the car. RONNIE shakes out her hand.

CAPPY

A reminder.

RONNIE

What?

CAPPY

Remember to shoot me when the dementia sets in.

RONNIE

Should do it right now, then.

CAPPY

No, the senile. Not the juvenile.

RONNIE

That means I'd have to be around that long.

CAPPY

I guess it would. Man, I wish someone would hurry up.

RONNIE

Doesn't help that the band sounded like a car crash.

CAPPY

This'll be quite a story for your class on Monday. This is good second-grade material.

RONNIE

Assuming we don't have to go bobbing for apples.
I'd like a happy ending for them.

CAPPY

Were you serious?

RONNIE

What?

CAPPY

You want it over?

RONNIE

It is. Not what I want. Just is.

Car teeters slightly.

CAPPY

Granny! You think it's over?

RONNIE

Well, life support.

CAPPY

I gotta agree, I guess.

RONNIE

Everything's been boiled down to shoulds.

CAPPY

I take you for granted.

RONNIE

Granted.

CAPPY

And the underwear -- you're right, it wasn't fair.

RONNIE

I should have asked.

CAPPY

We coast.

RONNIE

We're in Lazy-Boy recliners.

CAPPY

We're flipping the remote without a tune.

RONNIE

We're shaving with old razors.

CAPPY

I know all your dances.

RONNIE

I know how you drive to the hoop.

CAPPY

So what do we do?

Sound of fire truck.

CAPPY

What's that?

RONNIE

Someone must've called in. Fire truck. And here come your Portuguese men of war to the rescue.

Voices approaching. They let go as, clearly, other hands take over to hold on to the car. They sit back on the bench. Voices out.

CAPPY

I can come in to your class, and we can do a show-and-tell.

RONNIE

Which part?

CAPPY

The "so what do we do" part.

RONNIE

Maybe we should find another car to hold on to. So we can finish the conversation. It seems to clear the mind. Granny Smith!

CAPPY

Sweet and tart at the same time. Safe at home?

RONNIE

Call under protest -- for the time being.

They end by massaging each other's hands. Blackout.

How Do You Like Your Blueeyed Boy...

"How do you like your blueeyed boy, Mr. Death?"
e.e. cummings

DESCRIPTION

Assisted suicide, death with dignity - Lilah Lawton finds no solace in any of these terms when she finds out that Dr. Jeremiah Kissov, an active proponent of "dignicides," has helped her mother end her life. She is determined to get answers, no matter what it takes to extract them from Dr. Kissov.

CHARACTERS

- Dr. Jeremiah Kissov (the emphasis is on the second syllable: kis-SOFF)
- Lilah Lawton
- **Note:** Physically, LILAH must match KISSOV.

Note: The ethnicity of the characters does not matter.

TIME

- Present

SETTING

- Abandoned room

PROPS

- A folding chair
- A desk chair, with two arms, similar to government issue
- Roll of duct tape
- Automatic pistol that can fire
- Pen knife or Swiss Army knife
- Stage blood (if needed)

* * * * *

Scene begins in black.

KISSOV

Let me go!

No answer.

KISSOV

You don't know how much trouble you're in.

No answer.

KISSOV

(slightly less strong)

Let me go.

A light from overhead, a single bulb covered by a tin shade. KISSOV is taped to the chair in which he sits: arms to the arm rests, a band of tape around his chest. A roll of tape under the chair. LILAH stands there, holding an automatic pistol.

LILAH

Dr. Jeremiah Kissov.

KISSOV

Let me go.

She puts the gun behind his left ear.

LILAH

Shut up. You've been summoned. So shut up until I need you.

Shifts sides, holds the gun behind his right ear.

LILAH

Okay, now you can talk. Oh, suddenly mute? That's actually all right -- I was getting tired of your whininess.

KISSOV

Please put the gun away. Put the gun away.

LILAH circles around him during the next speech. She says nothing and remains impassive.

KISSOV

You are in a lot of trouble! I'm sure someone saw us leave and knows where we are. And I know where we are since you didn't even bother to blindfold me. And when they get here -- Assault, kidnapping, emotional abuse -- my lawyers -- Do you know who I am? I'm known all over the world! You won't get away with this, whatever it is you're

doing. Release me. Now. Right this minute.
Immediately.

KISSOV runs out of steam. LILAH sits on his knees, facing him.

LILAH
Finished?

KISSOV
Yes.

LILAH
Keep adding if you want to -- we have time.

KISSOV
No.

LILAH
Sure? Good, then we can get started.

KISSOV
Started?

LILAH
Why I've brought you here.

Stands up, gets the folding chair, and sits, but soon gets up and walks around.

LILAH
Dr. Jeremiah Kissov. A.k.a. DeathMaster. Murderer.
Résumé correct so far?

KISSOV
I don't kill people.

LILAH
That's right -- you have a new name for your
assassinations. Remind me?

KISSOV
Dignicides.

LILAH
Right. You perform dignicides.

KISSOV

What are you doing to me? Why have you --

LILAH hits him with the pistol on the back of his head, just hard enough to remind him.

LILAH

Don't ask questions. Just obey. Now, what is a dignicide again?

KISSOV

What?

Slowly presses the gun against his temple, forcing him to cock his head to one side.

LILAH

What did I just tell you about questions?

KISSOV

Dignicide. Uh, death with dignity.

LILAH releases him.

KISSOV

I help people die with dignity.

LILAH

And just how do you do this?

KISSOV

How?

LILAH taps him lightly with the gun as a reminder.

KISSOV

Uh, they do it themselves --

LILAH

With a device --

KISSOV

With a device I've put together -- they make the choice when to die.

LILAH

A device.

KISSOV

An injection device -- they push a plunger --

LILAH

I know how it works. I do, very well. Very well.

There is a moment of silence.

LILAH

Dr. Jeremiah Kissov, I want to question you about the death of one Alice Lawton, the most recent victim of your -- circus. I can't wait for the courts or the talking-heads or the Last Judgment to get around to it. You will answer now for her death. And admit what an infection you are, what a running sore you are, what a disposable creature you are. Agree?

KISSOV

What?

LILAH hits him in some way that is moderately painful.

LILAH

No questions! Now that I have your full attention, we can begin. I hope you're uncomfortable. Now, tell me what you know about Alice Lawton.

KISSOV is silent.

LILAH

Oh, all right, you can ask some questions -- for clarification.

KISSOV

What are you doing to me?

LILAH

Why, Dr. Kissov, I am treating you to death with undignity. Just like you do to all your victims. Don't you recognize it, my blue-eyed boy?

KISSOV

That's not what I do. Let me go.

LILAH

Soon released. Tell me about Alice Lawton first.

KISSOV

Age 65. Beginning stages of Alzheimer's. She wanted me to help her die because she didn't want to face the "dissolving" -- her word.

LILAH

And the allegations in the press that you may have "nudged" her along?

KISSOV

She made her own choice. I am in pain -- I need your help.

LILAH

You said in one news story you had contacted all next of kin.

KISSOV

I always do. She didn't have any -- just some close friends.

LILAH

Wrong. Daughter. You missed her daughter Lilah. Me.

KISSOV

She never mentioned you. No one mentioned you.

LILAH

I was the daughter "given away," a youthful -- lapse -- of hers. I never knew the father -- I really can't attach the word "my" to "father." So, technically, according to her, she was telling you the truth -- I was not "mentionable." Points out the research deficiencies of your staff, though, doesn't it?

KISSOV

Her daughter?

LILAH

Trust me. And I know she was not sick. This is when you squeal in protest and say, "How could you know that?"

LILAH taps him on the head again.

LILAH

Hold up your end of the interview.

KISSOV

How could you know that?

LILAH

I also work in the health "industry," though as a real doctor -- not some "lower level" grunt like, say, a forensic pathologist -- oh, yes, I forgot, that's what you are! I was a doctor without borders. Some of my operating theatres: Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda. I could write a Michelin Guide to a killing field. And I can also get access to records, just like you. I know all about her medical history. Her whole history. Did you know about her recent treatment for melancholia? Don't answer -- I already know you don't know.

KISSOV

Why are you doing this?

LILAH

I loved -- I love -- my mother, even if she erased me.

KISSOV

She never mentioned you.

LILAH

Because she was so disgusted with her own life. And because of your ambition --

KISSOV

It's never been about ambition.

LILAH

-- you have stolen my only chance to bring this prodigal daughter back to her.

KISSOV

Prodigal daughter?

LILAH

Do you have any idea the life I've lived?

KISSOV

How could I?

LILAH

Blood up to my elbows in places you can't even pronounce!

KISSOV

What does that have to do with --

LILAH

The defense does not get --

KISSOV

-- your mother? Or me?

LILAH

-- equal time. Shut up.

KISSOV

I won't!

LILAH

Death has no dignity! It's a messy, smarmy business, and no one needs a charlatan like you telling them different!

KISSOV

You haven't seen death -- you've seen slaughter. That's not what I do. We're not different --

LILAH

Not different?

Lines overlap.

KISSOV

I don't know what it's like where you've been --

LILAH

You've never seen such filth!

KISSOV

-- but I'm sure that you did everything you could to reduce their pain --

LILAH

Have you ever seen a leg torn from a body?

KISSOV

No, no, listen to me! If they were dying, you wanted them to die with dignity, yes? Just a difference in degree with me --

LILAH

The defense does not get equal time.

KISSOV

-- but the same point: no one needs the kind of pain that eats away their pride. We're alike.

LILAH

Shut up! Shut. Up.

KISSOV

She never mentioned you.

LILAH

Shut up. The truth is, the Alzheimer's was a ploy to get you to do a low-rent suicide, and you obliged, to up your own score.

KISSOV

That's not who I saw. She didn't do this for attention.

LILAH

What do you know?

KISSOV

I know I saw a woman who did exactly what she wanted to do. She wasn't weak.

LILAH

You're saying she wanted to die?

KISSOV

She chose to die. Freely. Calmly.

LILAH

I can't believe you. I know she wanted me to come home. I know she wanted to see me before she died. She just never got a chance to say it

because you rushed her. You took her away from me.

KISSOV

Prodigal daughter. You wanted to come home --

LILAH

Home!

KISSOV

Home. After all you've seen -- And no one there to greet -- you --

LILAH ignores him, paces fitfully, as if deciding. Decides.

LILAH

She must have wanted me back. She must have.

KISSOV

Let me go.

LILAH

She just never had the chance to say it because you killed her. Prosecution rests.

KISSOV

Wait.

LILAH

Your greatest sin, Herr Kissov, is not killing my mother. What I indict you for is not making her have second thoughts so that she might think of me again. I'll never escape that hunger. And if I can't escape -- neither should you.

LILAH takes out a pen knife or a Swiss Army knife and opens it.

KISSOV

What she didn't say is not my fault!

LILAH

Right- or left-handed?

KISSOV

What?

LILAH
Right or left?

KISSOV
Left.

LILAH cuts the tape holding down his left arm. KISSOV flexes his hand.

LILAH
Leave it on the armrest.

LILAH gets the roll of tape from under the chair.

LILAH
Don't move, or I will stick this in your neck.

Puts the gun in KISSOV's hand, his finger through the trigger guard, and tapes it to his hand.

LILAH
A good doctor always finishes his work.

LILAH puts the tape down and closes the knife, kneels, lifts the gun against her temple.

LILAH
Finish what you started.

KISSOV
I can't do that!

Grabs the gun and replaces it against her temple.

LILAH
Do it! Finish it!

KISSOV
I can't!

Grabs the gun and turns it on KISSOV.

LILAH
I don't need you to do this. I want you to do this. Complete the circle.

KISSOV

You'll have to shoot me because I won't do it.

LILAH

It's my free choice --

KISSOV

-- you haven't made peace --

LILAH

-- you're the device --

KISSOV

-- with yourself --

LILAH

-- what's the difference?

KISSOV

You have -- a life to live.

LILAH

Even the hesitation in your voice shows you don't believe that.

Presses the gun against KISSOV.

LILAH

Do it -- or I'll kill you and do it to myself anyway. Do it!

KISSOV

No!

LILAH

Do it.

KISSOV

No, no, no, no, no --

LILAH slowly lets go of his hand. She gives his hair a stroke.

LILAH

Mama, mama, mama -- it's a long list. Long. I don't want to add his name.

LILAH opens the knife and cuts him free, including the gun. She holds the gun.

LILAH

Go.

KISSOV

Let me breathe first. Just breathe. I forgot to breathe.

KISSOV takes off tape, straightens clothes, etc. Shaken but in control.

KISSOV

I think I'm breathing again. Please put the gun away.

LILAH

You should go.

KISSOV

Honestly, I don't want turn my back on you. You've done some damage.

LILAH

Grief --

KISSOV

-- it can't just --

LILAH

Go.

KISSOV

-- end this way.

LILAH

Do what you have to do.

KISSOV hesitates.

KISSOV

I don't know what to do. I should get out of here.

LILAH

(waving gun)

Crazies on the loose!

KISSOV

Please put the gun down. I would never have done it. It's not the same.

LILAH

Grief cuts -- I still hate you for what you did.

KISSOV

The gun -- ? Good. What I do -- it's not the best way. For some, it's the only way. I am going to go.

LILAH

Tell me about her. You were the last.

KISSOV

I have to go.

LILAH

Bring me home to her. You were the last to see.

KISSOV indicates that he wants LILAH to hand him the gun. She does.

KISSOV

She was never treated for melancholy.

LILAH

I made that up.

KISSOV

I never doubted her. She was quite extraordinary.

LILAH

Tell me. Bring her home to me. Help me remember what I never knew about her.

KISSOV

Alice Lawton, mother of Lilah Lawton.

LILAH

The prodigal daughter.

KISSOV

What do you want to know?

LILAH

Begin with when she never mentioned me. Our last
common point.

KISSOV

The final words of Alice Lawton.

LILAH

The first words for me.

BLACKOUT

If Cleanliness

CHARACTERS

- BRIGID YEATS, a slight woman of 19 -- she is suffering from a mild form of byssinosis, a respiratory disease, and has trouble breathing easily
- ST. BRIGID, a statue dressed as a saint with a halo
- THE PRIEST
- MRS. ITA RILEY, housekeeper, a woman of some size and strength -- dressed with an apron with big pockets

TIME

- August 1894

NOTES

- Brigid, Mrs. Riley, and the Priest all speak in an Irish accent. St. Brigid, especially after her transformation, can be more American but still have a "lilt."
- The height/weight difference between Brigid and Mrs. Riley must be distinct, Laurel-and-Hardyish.
- The poster of Emma Goldman held up by Mrs. Riley should have the photo of the actor playing St. Brigid.

* * * * *

A Catholic church, a holy water font. BRIGID goes to bless herself but sees something in the water that disgusts her. She picks up the bowl and lets out a wail/scream that brings the PRIEST and MRS. ITA RILEY running in. Whether by accident or on purpose, BRIGID splashes the PRIEST, then, breathing heavily, half-swoons into MRS. RILEY's arms. Blackout.

* * * * *

The PRIEST's office: two chairs, a kneeler, perhaps a desk, and a full-size statue of ST. BRIGID with halo holding a cruet of water. MRS. RILEY settles a struggling BRIGID into a chair.

MRS. RILEY

Sit calm, Brigid Yeats, or you will never see the age of twenty!

BRIGID is breathing heavily and shallowly, as if she can't quite catch her breath.

BRIGID

I don't -- take orders -- from a cow.

MRS. RILEY

Even half-fagged for breath, you still have a sharp mouth. Sit still and wait for Father.

BRIGID

By Cúchulain [KOO KHUL-in] --

MRS. RILEY

If you're Cúchulain, missy, then I'm going to be your Queen Medb [MAYV], and I'll make sure your little farts of blather to the Father won't add up to a stink worth smelling!

BRIGID

What can you expect from a pig but an oink?

MRS. RILEY raps her as the PRIEST enters. He is calm, the king in his castle.

PRIEST

If you ever leave me as housekeeper, Mrs. Riley, I'm sure you could job out as a warder at the Tombs.

MRS. RILEY

Such spite and vinegar deserves --

PRIEST

(stopping Mrs. Riley)

A little charity, Mrs. Riley.

The PRIEST pulls up the other chair. He looks at BRIGID closely while BRIGID catches her breath.

PRIEST

Still having that trouble breathing?

BRIGID

Lately I can't get anything down deep, Father.

PRIEST

That's okay, child, just take your time and tell me what happened out there.

BRIGID

I'm truly sorry about that.

PRIEST

Don't apologize -- just tell me the troubles troubling you because I know you're troubled -- I've seen it. I've felt it.

BRIGID

I see your suit is dry, Father.

PRIEST

You gave me a St. Brigid, Brigid -- did you know that?

BRIGID

I suppose I did, Father.

PRIEST

(to Mrs. Riley)

She doused me the way our patron here would salt her healing water over rich and ragged alike.

(to Brigid)

Your parents named you well.

BRIGID's face goes sad at his mention of her parents.

PRIEST

Now I'm sorry.

BRIGID

A lot of good their naming me Brigid did for them, Father, if it's water you're talking about.

MRS. RILEY

Watch your tongue.

PRIEST

I know you're in deep pain, Brigid, but St. Brigid didn't bring the cholera to your family.

BRIGID

I never thought she did -- but she didn't stop it, either. And the water's not gotten any better.

PRIEST

Is all that weighing on your mind?

BRIGID

Like lead.

PRIEST

But you know they're resting in Heaven.

BRIGID

I don't even know where their bodies are, Father

--

(tapping forehead)

-- up here, that day is still fresh like it's today, them taken away in canvas bags -- you trying to say the last rites while they're loaded into the wagon like cut turf --

MRS. RILEY rolls her eyes. The PRIEST frowns at her.

PRIEST

It has not been easy for you.

An awkward silence. The PRIEST does not know what else to say.

PRIEST

(pointing)

As you know, St. Brigid's waters cured the lepers

--

The PRIEST stands in front of the statue.

PRIEST

One of Ireland's three great saints you're named after.

MRS. RILEY

St. Ita, my namesake, was no slouch, Father.

PRIEST

No, Mrs. Riley, no "slouch" at all. But St. Brigid, her sacred waters restoring life, punishing pride, heading off violence -- born with that fire around her head -- I am sure your family is safe with St. Brigid --

MRS. RILEY

And St. Brigid knew her place.

PRIEST

So were you trying to "cure" something when you showered us all?

MRS. RILEY

Answer Father.

BRIGID

I think maybe I was, Father, though maybe without much thinking it through.

MRS. RILEY

That's no surprise.

BRIGID

Did you -- did either of you see what was in the holy water dish? Did you? A lunger. Someone had crouped up a hawk and spit it --

MRS. RILEY

It must have been a Protestant -- or a Jew!

BRIGID

White and slimy, and almost dipping my fingers into it -- God!

PRIEST

Brigid, it's all right --

BRIGID

I just couldn't take --

PRIEST

Brigid, breathe slowly --

BRIGID

Just couldn't take such filth anymore! And I grabbed the dish like I was in a blindness before it could disease anyone else -- I never intended for you --

MRS. RILEY

She makes losing control sound like an act of charity, Father.

BRIGID

I was angry! Water has not been my friend!

MRS. RILEY

Oh, the angels weep --

PRIEST

I can understand your anger, Brigid, coming from your grief, but you have to hold it back, "like the waters of strife" --

BRIGID

That's why I can't breathe, Father, I hold it back so much. I stitch in a workshop that smells like a pit privy -- the streets horse-shitted --

MRS. RILEY

Oh!

BRIGID

-- ankle-deep, turning to spew when it rains -- where I live -- my stinkard relatives -- every surface greasy, reeks of cabbage and sweat -- try to clean your clothes in water as grey as ash because you'd otherwise have to hump a rinse up five flights to soap them out. And the stink of us all, all the time! Once, Father, once, I slaved a nickel from work, for myself, a nickel -- do you know how long that took? -- and I took myself to the People's Baths. Soap and a towel -- and heaven. I couldn't scrub hard enough, I felt so dirty to the bone -- but afterwards -- my bones felt clean and light.

PRIEST

You must calm yourself, Brigid.

BRIGID

Father, forgive me but I can't, not when someone's spat into the holy water! You telling me the world makes sense at that point? Nothing makes sense anymore. I got the ward bosses asking to buy my vote, the Irish Liberator whipping me to hate England, the Holy Father telling me to be St. Brigid, my fat goat of a boss telling me to be more American -- which means to him a lift of the skirts and a tickle -- I got a full choir up here and I can't think straight! Sometimes I think that if cleanliness is next Godliness, then I am next door to hell by the mucky way I live, neither fish nor fowl, neither here nor there. She's right, much as I hate to admit -- spite and vinegar, that's me.

PRIEST

You are next to Godliness, Brigid, even if you don't have all the Croton water at your command -- your heart is clean, that much I know -- come, Brigid, all's forgiven -- let us pray -- Mrs. Riley, join us now, a gesture of friendship and charity.

But BRIGID does not move.

PRIEST

Brigid, let us pray.

BRIGID

There's something else -- you asked me to tell you my troubles.

MRS. RILEY

Just be more spite, Father -- let me get her out of here.

PRIEST

Wait -- there's more?

BRIGID pauses: if she speaks, she will cross a line.

PRIEST

Brigid, you must talk to me.

BRIGID

Father -- if all that ever worked before with me -- the praying and stuff -- it all doesn't seem to work now, much as I want it to.

PRIEST

Even more, then, the need to pray and accept my forgiveness and be obedient. You can't let your grief --

MRS. RILEY

You're favoring her again, aren't you?

PRIEST

Mrs. Riley --

MRS. RILEY

Aren't you, even though she's as much as just spit
in your face?

BRIGID

I did not spit in his face!

MRS. RILEY

I thought you'd let her off scot-clean, as you
always do --

BRIGID

I'm not asking for anything except to be heard
out --

MRS. RILEY

So look at these!

MRS. RILEY pulls a pamphlet and a poster from her apron. She
hands the pamphlet to the PRIEST. As the PRIEST reads, he looks
troubled.

BRIGID

(sotto voce)

You sow.

MRS. RILEY

Found these in her locker --

(to Brigid)

I have my job to keep this rectory clean of filth,
too, especially this kind --

MRS. RILEY holds up the poster with a photo on it.

MRS. RILEY

And she carries the face of the anti-Christ!

The PRIEST takes the poster.

PRIEST

What is all this, Brigid? Don't give me any flip,
I won't abide it in my house.

The PRIEST hands BRIGID the pamphlet.

PRIEST

Read.

BRIGID

Father --

PRIEST

Read your impertinence.

BRIGID

(haltingly)

"In honor of the release of Emma Goldman from Blackwell's Island" --

MRS. RILEY

Consorting with criminals --

PRIEST

And where? Read it!

BRIGID

At the Thalia Theatre.

PRIEST

(dismayed)

At the theatre. A theatre. Listening to an anarchist -- an atheist who professes free love and the hatred of authority! Is that what this country has done to you, made you forget your values, your faith, your duty?

The way BRIGID fidgets shows she has more to say.

PRIEST

You did something else, didn't you?

BRIGID

I followed them to a saloon -- they went to celebrate --

MRS. RILEY

May the Lord bless the beasts in Byzantium!

BRIGID

I met the owner, Justus Schwab --

MRS. RILEY

A German!

PRIEST

And another anarchist.

MRS. RILEY

Probably a Christ-killer, too!

PRIEST

Mrs. Riley! Did you drink there?

BRIGID

I did not. I didn't need to.

(another line crossed)

Because I was laughing.

PRIEST

Laughing.

BRIGID

I laughed and laughed, and I never lost my breath. They were so funny! And I danced, danced until I felt clean.

PRIEST

Why were you even there? Whatever possessed you to --

BRIGID

Accident -- mostly. I work over there, stitching, saw the crowd --

MRS. RILEY

You left your job, then, to go!

BRIGID

That job was nothing but slavery anyway -- it gave me these lungs -- and the overseer gropes us like bear bait.

PRIEST

I gave you work in this household because you were an unattached young woman without her family -- you would've been a "handkerchief girl" under the El Train -- or worse!

MRS. RILEY

She's halfway to "tart" anyway!

PRIEST

(waving pamphlet)

And this is how you reward me?

BRIGID is going to cross the last line.

BRIGID

Father, I don't mean disrespect -- I don't -- though it's probably going to come out that way, but since when is listening to common sense from a smart woman -- at least Miss Goldman seemed smart to me -- when did such listening turn into a sin?

PRIEST

Emma Goldman is an enemy to our faith, to our lives!

MRS. RILEY

You cannot get let her get away with this!

PRIEST

She's the worst this country has to offer.

BRIGID

But everything she said made sense of everything that wasn't making sense to me -- more sense than St. Brigid or any of it -- about our filth, about our being slagged over by reechy men, about the way this city burns us up like coal then dumps us out like -- like -- crap on the ash heap!

With an unpredicted ferocity, the PRIEST sits BRIGID roughly into her chair. This momentarily shocks BRIGID. Then anger kicks in.

PRIEST

You are losing your faith, you are losing your heritage.

BRIGID tries to rise, but MRS. RILEY slams her back.

MRS. RILEY

Sit down and listen!

PRIEST

You are letting this country take away the good sense that God gave you, and it's time, in the name of your dead parents and Ireland and your soul, to re-learn what you need to respect.

They lock eyes. BRIGID stands, shrugs off MRS. RILEY.

BRIGID

I don't care for any more lessons.

The PRIEST goes to slap her but stops himself. BRIGID staggers, as if hit, and the PRIEST reaches out to steady her. But BRIGID regains her balance on her own. She moves to leave.

BRIGID

(defiant but sad)

I won't be needing this charity any more.

PRIEST

Brigid --

BRIGID

(with regret)

I don't have a home here anymore.

MRS. RILEY

You think you can just walk away!

MRS. RILEY, with a warrior's cry, grabs BRIGID and bear-hugs her until it is clear she intends to break BRIGID in half.

PRIEST

Put her down!

But MRS. RILEY ignores him, fully into her revenge.

PRIEST

Mrs. Riley, she can't breathe!

BRIGID's struggles get more limp.

MRS. RILEY

Get away with sinning like there's no tomorrow?

PRIEST

You'll kill her!

MRS. RILEY

No one gets away with anything in this life!

BRIGID goes unconscious. MRS. RILEY drops her.

MRS. RILEY

"Crap on the ash heap," to quote a saucy colleen

--

A sudden light change, isolating BRIGID and the statue of ST. BRIGID. The PRIEST and MRS. RILEY exit. ST. BRIGID begins to move and stretch. She snaps a crick out of her neck.

ST. BRIGID

Feck.

ST. BRIGID looks at BRIGID, thinks, looks again, ponders, then takes the cruet of water and pours it onto BRIGID, who wakes up almost immediately.

BRIGID

Oh my Christ -- oh my bleeding Christ -- it's fucking St. Brigid! Listen to that tongue!

ST. BRIGID

The things I can do with water.

BRIGID

But you're a statue.

ST. BRIGID

In that other real world, I am.

BRIGID

So I'm not resident in the "real" real world?

ST. BRIGID

You're talking to a statue who talks back to you.

BRIGID

So I'm as mad as a shithouse rat.

ST. BRIGID

No, not quite -- you're just a translated shithouse rat.

BRIGID

I'm bughouse, is what I am.

ST. BRIGID

Come on, stand up for yourself and help me.

ST. BRIGID doffs her garb and halo to reveal EMMA GOLDMAN.

BRIGID

You!

ST. BRIGID takes a poster from her pocket, opens it.

BRIGID

Emma Goldman the anti-Christ can't be St. Brigid, too!

ST. BRIGID

She can when Brigid Yeats is conjuring.

BRIGID

What?

ST. BRIGID

Back there you're a half-breathing heap in grief with Mrs. Riley ready to squash you under heel and the Priest like a feckless idiot. So you're calling out for help, like any wounded creature.

BRIGID

But I can't hear myself. I can't -- hear -- what --

BRIGID looks genuinely puzzled and frightened by being so perplexed. BRIGID takes the cruet.

ST. BRIGID

Open your mouth. Stick out your tongue.

ST. BRIGID pours a drop of water on her finger-tip and places it on BRIGID's tongue.

ST. BRIGID

What word do you taste?

BRIGID tastes -- then tastes again. Amazed.

BRIGID
Want.

ST. BRIGID puts another drop on her finger.

ST. BRIGID
Forgot something. Here.

BRIGID sticks out her tongue, then tastes again.

BRIGID
I.

ST. BRIGID
And?

BRIGID
Want.

ST. BRIGID
I --

BRIGID
I --

ST. BRIGID
Want --

BRIGID
I want.

ST. BRIGID
Now say what you want.

BRIGID
To say what I want --

ST. BRIGID
Yes.

BRIGID
As if I could actually get what I want --

ST. BRIGID
Yes.

BRIGID

God, it's like you've set this bug loose in my brain! You're cruel, just like them, because when I wake up, I'll be back to an Irish drab from County Fart under Mrs. Riley's thumb and the shoe of the Priest. There is no growing out of that for me --

ST. BRIGID

Snap your fingers.

BRIGID

-- that's all there is for me --

ST. BRIGID

Snap your fingers -- go on. Snap.

Puzzled, BRIGID snaps her fingers, and in walks the PRIEST as CÚCHULAIN and MRS. RILEY as QUEEN MEDB, dressed mythologically. They hold quarterstaves and do a bit of quarterstaffing to show off.

ST. BRIGID

Ah, just in time. She was about to pity herself to a nubbin.

BRIGID

Father -- I've called you back as Cúchulain? (to St. Brigid) Why did I do that?

ST. BRIGID

Because we all need whatever it takes to buck us up tall.

PRIEST

Fresh from the Cattle Raid of Cooley comes Cúchulain, Ireland's warrior nonpareil --

MRS. RILEY

Oh, shut up.

BRIGID

And you as Queen Medb? I must be really desperate.

MRS. RILEY

Yes you are.

BRIGID

You slagged thirty men in a day -- listen to that tongue!

MRS. RILEY

And that was nothing but a tide-me-over until I got to fight him!

They quarterstaff a bit. BRIGID stands on a chair.

BRIGID

Stop it! Wait! I got one of Ireland's greatest saints doubling as a free-love anarchist in America. I got Ireland's greatest warrior, and I got the blazoned Irish queen -- and you all stand there as if you're delivering an answer to me. So, what is it?

They watch her, waiting, amused.

BRIGID

I am now completely daft and fucked over, thanks to you all.

ST. BRIGID

Thanks to yourself.

(to Priest and Mrs. Riley)

Go on.

The PRIEST throws ST. BRIGID his staff, grabs MRS. RILEY's so that it forms a cross-bar, and together they lift BRIGID aloft and move her around the stage.

BRIGID

Oh my Christ! Oh the bleeding sacred heart of Jesus H. Christ! I'm aloft! Put me down!

ST. BRIGID

Don't you dare! You wanted an answer, and you've got it!

BRIGID

Oh my God. Oh my God. Don't -- don't -- don't you dare -- don't you dare put me down! Whee! Yee-haw! [and other exclamations of delight]

They deposit her on the stage. ST. BRIGID gives the staff to the PRIEST and puts her clothing back on.

ST. BRIGID

Brigid -- your health is coming back to you.

PRIEST

With a warrior --

MRS. RILEY

And a queen --

ST. BRIGID

-- and a fecking anarchist -- you now have to go back to what everyone else thinks is your proper mind.

BRIGID

No!

The PRIEST and MRS. RILEY cross staffs, salute, exit.

BRIGID

Don't leave me!

ST. BRIGID puts one last drop of water on BRIGID's tongue before she takes up her statue pose.

ST. BRIGID

You do have to go back -- but you don't have to stay back when you go.

Lights change -- BRIGID isolated, tasting the drop.

BRIGID

My God -- oh yes -- of course!

She swoons into the same position as before the dream. MRS. RILEY rushes on with water and a cloth, ministers to her. The PRIEST hangs back a step.

BRIGID

I am fine. Please. Don't drown me.

BRIGID sits up, takes several deep and satisfying breaths, and begins laughing.

BRIGID

Thank God -- thank God --

PRIEST

What?

BRIGID rises, carefully wipes her face, then stands before them ultra demure.

BRIGID

Father --

PRIEST

Yes?

BRIGID

Father, you were right --

PRIEST

About?

BRIGID

I have been remiss about my spirit. Mrs. Riley -- you, too, have reminded me of my disobedience and what it is I have forgotten about my place. You have. From now on, I will take my namesake seriously and work for the betterment of my spirit.

PRIEST

Well -- well -- you gave us a fright. We thought we didn't know our Brigid any more. She's come back to us, Mrs. Riley. I guess then we have reached some new stage of -- understanding. Would that be what this is, Brigid?

BRIGID

Oh, yes, indeed, Father -- a whole new stage of understanding what understanding is all about.

MRS. RILEY
(dubious)

Well --

BRIGID takes the pamphlet and picture from the PRIEST and tears them in quarters, then puts them in her apron pocket.

BRIGID

Trust me to get rid of them.

PRIEST

Well, I am satisfied. And I should get back.
Brigid, I'm glad to see you come to your senses.
If you lose your faith --

BRIGID

Father, I have definitely come into my senses.

PRIEST

Good. Good. Well, Mrs. Riley, better that we
lose 99 sheep and bring back the one that has
strayed. Thank you, Brigid.

The PRIEST exits. MRS. RILEY circles BRIGID, who is the very
picture of humility.

MRS. RILEY

You won't get away with this.

MRS. RILEY exits. BRIGID goes to ST. BRIGID, takes the cruet,
turns it upside down as if to confirm the truth of her "journey,"
then carefully re-fills it.

BRIGID

(as if a prayer)

By Cúchulain, Queen Medb, and the evil lovely
Miss Goldman.

She replaces it, then speaks to the audience.

BRIGID

I have heard that Caaalllliiifffooorrnnniiiiiaaa
-- California -- I have heard it is a good place
wherein to re-make one's soul. And that the
waters of the ocean are as clean as creation. And
so I begin.

With her arms outstretched, she spins in place as the lights
go to black.

In The Fort

DESCRIPTION

To a nation of immigrants, who is "legitimate" and who is not takes on a great political weight and a sometimes deadly power. No wonder this is all confusing to a young Latino child when someone at school calls his father a name, and he is not sure if it is insulting. His mother, Luz, explains as best she can but knows that the poison of the world is coming closer to her son, and there is not much she can do to stem it.

CHARACTERS

- LUZ, mother
- PABLO, son, 6-years old (can be played by an adult)

NOTE: The mother/son pairing can also be a mother/daughter pairing, with the name changed to MARIA-BEATRIZ for the daughter, with any gender references changed in the language. Which pairing depends upon who is available to cast the roles.

SETTING

- A backyard with PABLO's "fort." There is no actual fort, but LUZ should at all times respect its physical boundaries.

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Cookies
- A toy sword of some sort: Star Wars laser sword, gladiator sword, etc. but flat at the end

* * * * *

Lights discover PABLO holding a backpack, a jacket, and a cap. He slams each item onto the floor, then deliberately picks up the jacket and hurls it offstage. He does the same with the backpack, then the hat. If they don't make it off-stage on the first try, PABLO keeps throwing them until they do. Then he follows them offstage.

LUZ
(from offstage)

Pablo --

LUZ comes in, wearing a jacket, car keys in hand, purse over shoulder. PABLO re-enters, now holding a plastic sword and a bag of cookies.

LUZ ELENA

Pablo? What's the --

But PABLO ignores LUZ and steams past her to go "outside" to his "fort."

LUZ

Pablo --

LUZ trails behind him and watches PABLO go inside his fort, where she loses sight of him.

Once inside the fort, PABLO plumps down and chomps on a cookie. He slams the sword against the stage, finishes the cookie. LUZ stares at his vapor trail.

LUZ

Hmm.

LUZ opens her purse, puts the keys away, closes the purse. She hesitates, then moves to follow PABLO, standing just outside the entrance to the fort.

PABLO sits cross-legged, glumly munching on another cookie.

LUZ

Hola.

No response.

LUZ

Hola.

No response.

LUZ

Como estás?

No response.

LUZ

May I come in, pequeñito?

PABLO

No.

LUZ

Okay. Okay if I sit down out here?

PABLO

It's wet.

LUZ

I'll put my jacket down.

PABLO considers.

PABLO

That's okay.

LUZ

You want to watch me, make sure I do it all right?

PABLO

All right.

PABLO scoots to where he can see LUZ ELENA and she can see PABLO. LUZ takes off her jacket, swings it like a cape.

LUZ

Olé!

LUZ spreads the jacket, sits on it.

LUZ

Is this okay?

PABLO

Okay.

PABLO scoots back. PABLO goes to eat a cookie, doesn't. LUZ looks into the sky.

LUZ

You like being inside your fort, huh? I never had a fort when I was growing up. Mi padre, tu abuelo, didn't think kids should have one -- you know him --

LUZ imitates the gruff voice of her father.

LUZ

"They should work in the house and not be fooling around outside!" Kind of silly, huh? It's much better to be a fool outside, eh? I'm gonna move a little closer -- that okay?

LUZ edges a little closer.

LUZ ELENA

Okay?

PABLO scoots forward again to see, nods yes, scoots back.

LUZ

Everything go okay in school today? Because you just went zoom right out of the car --

As an answer, PABLO whacks the floor with his sword and then eats a cookie. LUZ edges a little closer.

LUZ

Were you just hitting somebody with your sword or was that just a general whack -- you know, like a fun whack? It was a pretty hard whack.

As an answer, PABLO hits the floor again.

LUZ

Ooh, a double whack. Somebody must have pissed you off.

PABLO

That's a bad word. Daddy said so.

LUZ

You're right. I forgot.

PABLO

You shouldn't forget.

LUZ

When you get angry, it's easy to forget your language and your manners. Discúlpeme.

PABLO

It's okay.

LUZ

Are you that kind of mad at somebody?

PABLO

Yeah.

LUZ

Wanna tell me who?

PABLO

No.

PABLO throws up a cookie in the air and tries to hit it with the sword. He misses, picks up the cookie and eats it.

LUZ

Boy, am I hungry.

PABLO considers, then balances a cookie on the end of his sword and reaches it out to LUZ. LUZ makes as if she can't reach it.

LUZ

I'll have to come closer. Is that okay?

LUZ scoots forward, gets the cookie; reaching for it brings her to the "entrance" to the fort.

LUZ

Gracias, querido.

PABLO

De nada.

They fall silent for a moment, LUZ chewing on the cookie, PABLO absently tapping the sword against the floor.

PABLO

Mami?

LUZ

Yes?

PABLO

Do you like Papi?

LUZ

Of course! He's the cream in my café!

PABLO takes this in.

PABLO
Somebody --

LUZ
Some somebody --

PABLO
Somebody at school called him -- something.

LUZ
Something.

PABLO
Yeah. Out at recess.

LUZ
Can you tell me what the something was that somebody said? Do you want to say it?

PABLO
You like Papi, right?

LUZ
I love Papi, just like you do. You want to say it?

PABLO shakes his head no, at first, then yes, but he doesn't say anything. LUZ makes the sound of spitting.

LUZ
Escúpelo fuera, like that time I fed you lima beans. Remember? You kept spitting them out, one by one? Bing! Off the ceiling. Bing! Out the window.

PABLO
Yeah!

LUZ
Just like that.

LUZ makes a series of rapid spittings.

LUZ
C'mon, can you spit for me?

PABLO dry-spits.

LUZ

Good. Now, spit it out.

PABLO

Wetback.

LUZ

Wetback.

PABLO

Yeah.

LUZ

Do you know what the word means?

PABLO nods.

LUZ

Tell me what you think it means.

PABLO

Big voice?

LUZ

Use the big voice only if you want to use it.

PABLO indicates with his sword for LUZ to move closer. She does. He whispers in her ear. She can barely repress a smile.

LUZ

Are you sure?

PABLO

Yeah!

LUZ

Just checking.

PABLO

Well, isn't it?

LUZ

Isn't it what?

PABLO

Doesn't Papi have one in the basement?

LUZ

The WetVac.

PABLO

He uses it when he cuts wood, to clean up. And he used it when the hot water tank busted.

LUZ

Sí, he does. He does. So, you think someone called Daddy a vacuum cleaner?

PABLO

Wetback.

LUZ

And that's what made you mad?

PABLO nods.

LUZ

Fighting mad.

PABLO

No.

LUZ

So how did you feel?

PABLO shrugs.

LUZ

Tiny?

PABLO nods yes. LUZ stands.

LUZ

Hey, come out of there so I can give you a hug. Come on.

PABLO scoots out.

PABLO

You got your knees pn your jacket.

LUZ

Doesn't matter -- come here.

LUZ hugs PABLO. LUZ pats her jacket for PABLO to sit next to her.

LUZ

Your dad will be very proud of you.

PABLO

Yeah?

LUZ

I know I am.

PABLO

Yeah? Why?

LUZ

Because you showed a lot of heart -- you showed me your heart. That is very good.

PABLO

I did want to slap him.

LUZ

He's just a lima bean in your mouth. Ready?

Together, they mock-spit.

LUZ

What d'ya say we get some milk to go with those cookies and get the lima bean out of our mouths?

PABLO

Okay.

LUZ

Go on -- start pouring for both of us.

PABLO

Chocolate for me?

LUZ

Para ambos.

PABLO

Yeah!

PABLO gets up, starts to run off.

LUZ

Hey! The cookies!

PABLO

Oh, yeah.

PABLO comes back to get the cookies, and as he leaves, he gives LUZ another quick hug, which she returns. Then PABLO exits with the cookies. He leave his sword, which LUZ picks up.

LUZ stands, grabs her jacket, dusts it off, puts it on, takes her purse, slings it over her shoulder. She makes a few stabs and swipes with the sword as she speaks.

LUZ

We'll pretend, mihito -- Mami and Papi will keep the sword -- you be the keeper of the cookies -- and together we'll pretend we can protect at least for a little while -- for a little while longer.

LUZ holds the sword up to her face like a mock knight, dips it twice as if dubbing someone.

PABLO

(from offstage)

Mom!

PABLO runs in.

PABLO

Come on -- got it all poured all by myself!

PABLO runs back off. LUZ extends her arm as if heading off into the battle.

BLACKOUT

Ishmael and Ahab Mon Amour

DESCRIPTION

Hell for Ahab and Ishamel has nothing to do with a whale.

CHARACTERS

- WHALE
- AHAB
- ISHMAEL

* * * * *

A vicious storm lashing the sea.

Lung-ripping labored breathing.

Crash of a body in sea-soaked clothes.

AHAB in the WHALE.

WHALE is dressed in a Tom Wolfe-style white suit.

Strapped to AHAB's right calf -- or perhaps his left -- are two pieces of ivory-colored wood: AHAB's peg leg. Though he doesn't have to move as if he has one.

Whale songs, but wrenched and distorted, gradually morph into WHALE's opening words.

Constant murmur of sea-sounds, gut rumbles, etc. throughout.

WHALE

Ahab. Ahab. Ahab. Ahab.

WHALE watches the unconscious figure: nothing.

WHALE

Ahab. I have -- unfortunate for you -- maybe -- can't tell -- anyway, I have decided to keep you alive. So you might as well come talk to me.

AHAB arrives at consciousness, sees WHALE, acts as any recently swallowed megalomaniac would act inside a whale.

WHALE

Oh, Ahab, shut up. Really. Just shut up. Stop it.

AHAB

I should be killing you -- hacking you --

WHALE gives AHAB a nasty good kick.

WHALE

(sighing with regret)

What are you saying, you slugging maggotish lump of curdled undergut? You like that? I like that.

(winds up)

You gleeking fen-sucked hedgepig --

And another.

WHALE

You rancid bum-shucked unsorted scumpool --

And another. And another.

WHALE

-- of wasted piss-shots and congealed lardpops.

And another for good or bad measure -- but WHALE is not done with him -- face right in his face.

WHALE

You tried, gutless puking remnant, twice to kill me -- and then kept searching for ways to try and try and try again -- but now enough -- enough!

(pleased with himself)

That went well. Good.

There is more than enough understanding between them.

AHAB

So --

WHALE

So --

AHAB

So then do it --

WHALE
(mocking)

So then do it --

AHAB

-- finish it --

WHALE
(mocking)

Finish it --

AHAB

Smash --

WHALE

Smash --

AHAB

-- the life out of [me] --

WHALE grabs AHAB.

WHALE

Blah blah blah -- boo hoo hoo -- you think "smash"
would make a difference to me?

WHALE moves AHAB around like a ventriloquist's dummy.

WHALE

A tortured Ahab will always be much more interesting
-- entertaining -- than an Ahab carcass. Come
on, now do this.

AHAB

Suck yourself, scut-punk --

WHALE pops him one.

AHAB

Do what I tell you to do.

AHAB speaks as a ventriloquist dummy while WHALE mouths the
words.

AHAB

"A tortured Ahab can give back something to the
community -- people can piss on him or laugh at

him and thus relieve themselves of the psychic burden of their own meaningless lives -- "

WHALE pushes AHAB away.

WHALE

Besides, why gift you with something you clearly don't deserve: closure or peace or amnesia or oblivion or extra credit or a biological leg to stand on --

WHALE kicks AHAB, but half-heartedly -- perhaps even does a tap-dance routine on his back.

WHALE

You always thought, in that curdling cesspit brain of yours, that you were gunning for me -- searching me out, knotting up the ocean's latitudes to lure me, anger me to the surface -- and yet -- and yet, mate -- I knew, I knew -- I know you -- I was waiting -- you know nothing in the light of what I know, the universes that I make!

WHALE leans down to whisper to AHAB.

WHALE

Is that a little bit, well, much? Even though it's true? After all, I am the god you made me out to be -- that's what this is all about.

AHAB rolls on his back, laughs.

AHAB

So, great white pizzle-licker, you have me -- you certainly have me -- I'm sure you have swallowed some "seamen" in your time, but none like me -- so why not finish off the business? Why do you stomach me?

WHALE

The joke makes some jokes.

AHAB

And here's another: I'm having a whale of time here.

WHALE turns away from AHAB, and in a flash AHAB is off the floor and gunning for WHALE, but WHALE easily avoids the charge and slams AHAB to the floor. AHAB goes at him again and again during the next lines, as he did in real life, but each time WHALE bests him.

AHAB

The little girl's teacher said it was impossible for a whale to swallow a human because its throat was very small. The little girl said, "A whale swallowed Jonah." The teacher repeated her point. The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah". The teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?" "Then you can ask him," she replied.

They rest.

WHALE

"So, great white pizzle-licker, you have me." And what is it that I have in having you?

AHAB

Indigestion?

WHALE

All right, you asked for it after avoiding it: Explain all this to me --

AHAB

Explain?

WHALE

Explain yourself to me.

AHAB

No one can explain himself -- like trying to see the back of your own eyeballs. And always the explanations are boring. And wrong. And boring. And wrong.

WHALE

I ate your leg -- yes? -- doesn't that at least prompt you to -- give you a little dig in the side?

AHAB

At least it was only my leg you ate -- yes? Some things you can't carve a substitute for out of ivory --

WHALE

A codpiece joke from the piece of cod --

AHAB

I know, fishy -- look, all this one-up banter is intriguing -- not really -- though I have to admit that conversating with a god -- is that really [what] -- is you a god? Or just an intestinal hallucination, my very own rumbleguts, my rotgut dream?

WHALE

You miss the point of why you're here.

AHAB

That being?

WHALE

Guilt, of course.

AHAB

Guilt?

WHALE

Uh-huh.

AHAB

Guilt?

WHALE

Not, obviously, the kind that paints the lily --

AHAB

Guilt? For what?

WHALE

For crimes, of course --

AHAB

For what?

WHALE

Crimes -- crimes -- depredations, indifferences, sacrificing people as lambs -- you know, that sort of [thing] --

AHAB

Just stop --

WHALE

Telling the tr[uth?]

AHAB

As I was saying!

WHALE

You weren't saying any[thing] --

AHAB

-- jabbering with this thing which stands before me that spiked me to much madness in my life has its intrigue --

AHAB now begins to walk as if his peg leg were a real peg leg.

AHAB

-- and the spooky cellar-like environs of your gut make for the kind of concentrated tête-à-tête that one could only wish for in such a philosophical quest as savage as -- mine -- as noble -- as unique -- but -- this is not -- this is not -- Guilt? Guilt?

WHALE

Ah --

AHAB

What?

WHALE

Look at how you're walking -- back on that Pequod deck, aren't you, nailing coins into masts, "thar she blows!", your peg-leg dicking each man's soul and ego, prompting them to great lathers of muscular stupidity -- and in the end all of them go down -- glub glub glub -- so that you can be --

WHALE falls silent.

AHAB

What?

WHALE

How would you finish my unfinished thought?

AHAB shakes out his peg-leg -- he has to shake it very hard to get the leg to stop being a peg-leg.

AHAB

All? Down? All?

WHALE

All but one.

AHAB finally has his leg back.

WHALE

(with mock affection)

So, how would you finish this unfinished thought, you slagging maggotish lump of curdled undergut?

Sounds of a great storm lashing the sea.

WHALE

You want a noble hell for yourself? Not this limp-cocked one of your oh-so-vaunted ego, but one that cuts you open for truth, the way you flense blubber off a whale? Do you?

AHAB

I have always wanted that.

WHALE

Then do this: go practice forgiveness.

AHAB

On the --

WHALE

On the one.

AHAB ponders.

AHAB

Do it.

WHALE spits out AHAB. Darkness. The great storm continues.

* * * * *

And continues.

Crash of a body in sea-soaked clothes: AHAB

A body's labored breathing: ISHMAEL

ISHMAEL in the gutter and looking the part. Strapped to this right calf -- or perhaps his left -- are two pieces of ivory-colored wood. Around his neck is a noose.

AHAB stares at ISHMAEL. And stares.

AHAB

Ishmael. Ishmael.

ISHMAEL jerks awake, reacts.

ISHMAEL

You. You.

AHAB

Ishmael, you're in a rough way.

ISHMAEL crawls away from AHAB.

ISHMAEL

I saw you -- go --

ISHMAEL rises, walks with a peg-leg.

ISHMAEL

-- taken -- ahhh God! -- you are just a -- not real -- not real --

AHAB

Your leg --

ISHMAEL

-- leave me -- alone -- you, in here, all the time -- all the time -- I have looked into -- and seen -- and the teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?" "Then you can ask him," she replied -- oh I have asked -- I have been asking --

AHAB

Your leg --

ISHMAEL

Grim about the mouth -- damp drizzly November in my soul -- why did it start -- how did it [start] -- I have these -- dreams -- I have these -- worms -- these -- worms -- these --

AHAB

Your leg --

ISHMAEL circles AHAB, staring at him, then bursts into laughter as he pulls the noose tight.

ISHMAEL

The last thing I saw of you -- aaakkk! -- hog-tied to the whale! -- aaakkk!-- noosed to the carcass -- aaakkk! -- going down down down! -- wiped off the face of the [earth] -- aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk! -- you the peg-legged shit wiped away by apocalypse and leaving us the hell alone!

ISHMAEL climbs on AHAB's back, moves as he speaks.

ISHMAEL

I floated on a coffin spit up to the surface from the Pequod's guts -- I floated for days --

(whispering in his ear)

-- days days days days -- float float float float -- even the sharks wouldn't touch such damaged meat as mine, the sea-hawks gagged when they saw such rot clinging to dead pieces of the forested earth --

ISHMAEL rolls off AHAB's back.

ISHMAEL

-- death lifting me back to be dined on by the wickedness of my own heart, gnawed on by rat-toothed gut-eels with your name scorched across their grinless lips -- and I sang to keep the demons in check and I sang so as to keep my voice and I sang to forget I had ever remembered anything and I sang to remember everything that threatened to forget me and --

ISHMAEL slides into a shanty/work song, perhaps even mimes pulling a rope on the refrain.

ISHMAEL

My clothes are all in pawn
Go down you blood red roses, go down
And it's mighty draughty around Cape Horn
Go down you blood red roses, go down
Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down you blood red roses, go down

For the tune, go to <http://artofmanliness.com/sea-shanty-old-blood-roses/>

ISHMAEL stops.

ISHMAEL

Why have you come back?

AHAB

I have been in the whale.

ISHMAEL

And those from around here, you blowhard, call me daft -- "Ishmael's turned to fishmeal" or "Ish went down with the fish" (though a whale's not a fish I keep telling them!) or "Ishmay-smell" for my gutter-ripe bouquet -- oh, I see the humor's lost on you, so then, what? is your story that Moby Dick spit you out after conversing with you?

AHAB

Yes.

ISHMAEL

Yes? You're --

AHAB

What else would explain it?

(mimes a noose)

"Aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk!" the last time you saw me, remember? By all physics I should be crushed, seafood, wiped away.

ISHMAEL's mind cannot hold these thoughts.

AHAB

You should take that from around your neck -- let me --

ISHMAEL

I can't --

AHAB

Please --

ISHMAEL

I can't! -- it's my link, my umbilical! -- you're here to take me again, aren't you, steal -- what is left -- of -- I will not go to sea again!

By the time ISHMAEL finishes his words, he is upon AHAB, grabbing him from behind around the throat. AHAB puts up no resistance to ISHMAEL's attempt to kill him. Instead, he lets ISHMAEL bear him down to his hands and knees so that ISHMAEL is on AHAB's back.

AHAB

(hoarsely)

Float, goddamn you, float! Float! Float!

Sea sounds. Something comes over ISHMAEL that stops him.

AHAB

Float! I have come to be your coffin! Float! No harm comes to you. Float! You are not alone!

And ISHMAEL does. Peace enters.

ISHMAEL rolls off AHAB's back, walks away. AHAB rises.

ISHMAEL

So that's what --

AHAB

The gist of it, yes.

ISHMAEL

And why --

AHAB

Yes.

ISHMAEL

What next?

AHAB

Who knows? Do you care?

ISHMAEL
(surprised)

I actually do. Care.

AHAB

Then -- all right.

ISHMAEL

I am still not well.

AHAB

Who is?

ISHMAEL

Do I hear a "but"? I need to hear a [but] --

AHAB

But.

ISHMAEL

Go on --

AHAB

You were rescued. I. Then through me, you.
Rescued. Then through us --

ISHMAEL stops him.

ISHMAEL

That is as far as I can go at this moment.

ISHMAEL sings as he takes off the noose.

ISHMAEL

Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down you blood red roses, go down.

I am still not well. Grim about the mouth -- damp
drizzly November in my soul --

AHAB

But --

ISHMAEL

But --

(shrugs)

-- all right.

ISHMAEL unknots the noose and AHAB undoes the wood on ISHMAEL's leg as lights go to black amid whale songs.

J. De La Vega

DESCRIPTION

Violence in the barrios of New York is not uncommon, and with great sadness but pain-filled love, street artist J. De La Vega does not let these deaths disappear as he creates his street-level memorials to the fallen victims of poverty, racism, and simple bad luck. It is not a body of work that offers a great deal of satisfaction or solace.

CHARACTERS

- J. De La Vega, *artist*

NOTE: The character can be played by either gender. The male pronoun is used in the script for convenience only.

SETTING

- East Harlem, New York City

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Heavy-duty marker: black -- the kind used by taggers
- Small boombox
- Music: various hip hop and Latino songs on two tapes
- Half mask of a skull

VEGA is a painter, and during this piece a painting must take shape. VEGA will face the audience, though, in reality, they would be behind him. The screen is off to one side or hung above him.

Four suggested ways:

1. A large frame with muslin or some material on which to project slides from behind. (The size of the frame will be determined with the slides.) There would be two projectors, with a dissolve, and slides. The slides will show the painting in various stages of completion.
2. A similar set-up, but the slides are projected from in front. This would be done if there is not enough room for rear-projection.
3. The actor is a graffiti artist and can create an actual painting.

4. The action of painting is completely mimed, with no actual image.

Option #1 is the first choice, with Option #2 the second. For the purposes of this script, Option #4 has been used.

* * * * *

A small boombox sits to one side sits center stage.

Before the lights come up there is music in the house. As the lights rise, the music changes to make it seem that it's coming from the boombox. At some point it can stop. In front of his "canvas" is J. DE LA VEGA, painting. He will mime painting except at the end of the play. A heavy-duty marker is in one of his pockets.

He mimes painting; he is using brushes, spray cans, markers and needs to distinguish between them as he uses them.

I know you're from the neighborhood and all, but I usually don't like people watching. It's a private thing, you know. I like to do 'em late at night, no one around, just some heavy-duty lights hooked up to car batteries and me, alone, with my thinking, trying to figure out what my paint is gonna say. I never know until I start dressing it out.

He stops painting for a moment; his whole body slumps.

I hate having to do these.

I hate having to do 'em because they're so many to do. I'm tracking a disease. I'm a chart with a heart. These people, these names up on the walls, are dying from the disease of life in America. They're our war memorials, our veterans.

Alternates between painting and talking to the audience.

I know you know that. That's why you're here, witnessing. How many years I been doing these? I been memorializing the Barrio since 1989. Someone dies, call J. De La Vega. This one had eighteen years. Eighteen. Sammy. Sambo. A lot of you knew him. Good kid, huh? They're all good kids.

He actually had a chance, don't you think? The schools hadn't bitten off his head, he actually had a mama and a papa -- God give them peace! -- no gangbangng, sang in the church -- he had the résumé, know what I mean? The bona fides. The ticket. And here we are today, painting him out, "Goodbye from your friends and family on 102nd." Worm meat now. Goddamn!

And look at this building. You know why I can paint it here and no one's gonna care -- ain't nobody lived here for years except the rats and pigeons and crackheads. The Jew landlord (or the Anglo landlord or the bank landlord -- all wear the same face) -- living somewhere else. This building is ours, and it ain't. In our neighborhood, looking bombed-out, but might as well be on Mars because we can't own it, we can't knock it down with the cleansing fire of anger and get it out of our eyes. Fits, don't you think, that we use it as a headstone for someone we all loved, his golden name giving glory to what is rotten and falling down around us? We'll get us some redemption out of this building yet.

VEGA flips the tape in the boombox and pops it on. A hot salsa number. For 30 seconds or so VEGA paints energetically to the music, working up a sweat, possessed. Then he stands back, turns down the music.

Destruye lo que te destruye. Heh? Am I right? That's what my father, Jaimito, used to tell me. That's his memorial over there, on the train wall. The first one I did.

Stops painting for a moment.

Destroy what destroys you. Sayings of a Puerto Rican man. See what I wrote for him: "Great Men Live Forever." And that other one, down the street, on the building that used to have the abogados, about freeing the Puerto Rican prisoners of war? Those words are Jaimito's, too: "I have lived in the monster, I know his entrails...and my weapon is David's sling." Great man, Jaimito, a dreamer, a rebel.

Begins painting again.

And a fool. Yes, you can be all of that and a fool, too. He was. That's why I loved him so much.

Insult him? I mean him no disrespect. The man spent almost every day of his life hungering for Puerto Rico, for independencía from the "monster," the gringo thief and murderer. Yes, he put food on the table and did what he had to do, but his heart -- his heart was not with us. It was with some beautiful mujer called Puerto Rico, and he cheated on us all, fighting for her honor. A beautiful thing. But with David's sling? Come on -- America's Goliath carries a Glock's 9 millimeters of refutation. Foolish man -- a holy fool is still a fool.

Sammy was a holy fool, too. He was. He believed in the dream. The dream. The dream of white. The dream of BMW. The dream of the middle. The dream of the Declaration. Sambo lived here, but his heart was out there. He had -- visions. Up and out visions. And he probably would have made it. Maybe. Time used to be that a handsome young Latino with smarts had a ticket -- you know, someone could check off a lot of boxes with that one. But not anymore. We're bein' 187'd and 209'd and INS'd to death, immigrated out, deleted.

Mi tío, it is better here than there? I have respect for your bones and wisdom, but where's the payoff? It's not like we haven't sweated for them, not like we didn't help those who have the money get more money, not like we didn't build some of the glory and the power. And our reward? We're asked to hand over the family treasures as part of the admission price. Puerto Rico, once a jewel -- now thrown away like the peel of an orange. All those states out west that used to be Spanish, stolen, the heritage turned into k-nick-k-nacks.

And now another treasure thrown away -- Sammy Hoya, Sambo, el hermano de la sangre, brother of the blood, that blood now down in the sewers. Don't get me started, el viejo.

Goes back to the canvas.

You all heard how he died? Yeah, right over there. Gang stuff -- got caught in a cross-fire coming back from the market. He was carrying rice. I remember the rice. The bag busted open and all the rice mixed with his blood, like pearls in wine. He didn't suffer much, I guess, from what the EMTs said -- the first bullet sliced him right in the heart. Big heart.

Begins to paint more furiously.

But it wasn't just the bullet that took him. It was this whole -- place that busted his heart. Do I blame the gangbangers that diced him? Course I do. They should pay -- they did something evil and should know the price. But I know who they are, too -- we all know 'em -- know what's left of their families, know the dead-end in their eyes, and while I blame 'em, I don't blame 'em either. They should have memorials, too, because they're already in a kind of dead zone, that purgatory place of being half-alive and half-erased in the Barrio.

Yeah, we play our music and roast a pig every once in a while and we got the look of family and sometimes even the truth of one, one big lifeboat of people clinging to each other 'cause we have nothing else to hold on to. But look at it! We're a colony, imperialized. That's what Jaimito used to say about the Barrio. Law of the colonizer: Take out what you can, put nothing back. And, madre del Dios, have we had a lot of "nothing" put back here! "Nothing" has been our primary crop! The projects like coffins, the dead schools, no jobs, young men sacrificed to the prisons, children with babies, sickness and disease -- these are the crops that grow in the vacant lots where they tore down everything and replaced it with nothing. I bet you never thought of "nothing" like it was a product. It's our biggest import.

Stops painting.

Destroy what destroys you? Nice work if you can find it, Jaimito. You can fight it in here and here --

(indicates head and heart)

-- you can keep your pride, some of your heritage
-- maybe -- you can keep your spirit alive --
maybe -- but the firepower ain't on your side.
Look at me -- I'm painting memorials to the dead,
trying to make sure that people do something and
don't forget. But sometimes I have this fear that
I'm gonna have to paint the whole Barrio because
that's how fast our best ones are slipping away,
and that nothing we ever do is gonna stop the pile
of bones getting higher and the wind whistling
louder through our skulls.

This whole Barrio is a memorial to us, the walking
dead, the zombies of the dream!

I don't want to have to paint any more of these.

Sammy. Sambo. Not too far from here is a casita
in one of the lots. Some of you probably know
the shack. It has paintings hanging on the back
wall -- I don't know where the owner got them,
but they're all about places, like a forest or a
hillside with cows. Definitely not from around
here. Someone called the place Pleasant Valley.
Pleasant Valley. Sammy, I tried to make a little
pleasant valley for you, with the angels here,
looking up, the doves around them -- some peace
for you.

For the rest of us -- sign this any way you want
to express your feelings about Sambo. But don't
forget -- as you sign it and feel your sorrow,
just six blocks away from your back is the border
of the dream, between midtown and here, between
more money spent on a girl's dress than you spend
in a month on groceries, between the colonizer
and the garbage heap of everything he's finished
with. The fat spider sits in its web, smiling at
you through its forever hunger.

He takes out the marker and mimes writing J. DE LA VEGA across
the canvas or paper.

I am finished. For today. Add it to the fucking
résumé.

Changes the tape in the boom box and plays it. Pulls the half mask of a skull out of his pocket, puts it on, and dances to the music as the lights go to black. The music comes up loud.

BLACKOUT

Leaf Meal

(with apologies to "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry)

DESCRIPTION

An experiment to modify humans to make them able to photosynthesize sunlight makes for a very interesting love story.

CHARACTERS

- Gerald
- Geraldine
- Or any names director and actors wish -- it makes no difference

SET

- One table with two table clothes: one indicates a kitchen, one indicates a diner
- Two small tables (one to stage right, one to stage left) with documents on them
- Chairs

* * * * *

Lights up on a pair of arms, GERALD's arms, bathed in sunlight. Then on GERALD sitting at a table in GERALDINE's kitchen, arms outstretched, eyes closed. He is absorbing the sunlight. GERALDINE, sitting to one side, watches him.

GERALDINE

Tell me again what you feel.

GERALD

Be more specific.

GERALDINE

What do you feel? God --

GERALD

You mean, do I feel something "gastro"-related?

GERALDINE

Yes.

GERALD

Something like what I feel when my stomach calls for food?

GERALDINE

We can start with that.

GERALD

I don't feel anything like that.

GERALDINE

Then what --

GERALD

There's nothing -- mechanico-gastro -- about it.
It's quieter.

GERALDINE

Then describe "quieter" to me. Please.

GERALD

More like a wash of -- no -- a shift in -- a shift
in states of being.

GERALDINE

From low to high? First gear to second? Solid to
liquid -- or gas? Autumn to winter? The reverse?
Soap accidentally stinging the eye? A puncture
wound?

GERALD

From empty to filled.

GERALDINE

What does "filled" feel like? Sorry.

GERALD

Without bloated or heavy -- without the rumblings
or gases or hunger pangs. Just -- I feel empty
-- vacant, really -- vacated -- then the sunlight
strikes my arms and the chlorophyll in my arms
does its work, and then I am not empty -- no
longer vacant.

GERALDINE

So "filled" does not mean "filled up."

GERALD

No.

GERALDINE

I'm trying to understand.

GERALD

I appreciate that. So am I. So am I.

GERALDINE

It's easier for you, though, isn't it, since it has all been unfolded within you -- all of it is unavailable to me, that is, outside of -

GERALD opens his eyes and looks at GERALDINE. He touches her.

GERALD

I'm sorry -- I've been too absorbed --

GERALDINE

You mean "absorbing" --

GERALD

(half-smile)

Yes, true. Absorbent.

GERALD puts his arms back into the sunlight.

GERALDINE

You know why I am afraid.

GERALD

I have my guesses.

GERALDINE

Don't "guess" -- I want you to know.

GERALD

Then tell me so that I'll know everything.

GERALDINE

I don't want to have to tell you -- I just want you to know.

GERALD

This is what I know. I know that what I have had inserted into these arms is important -- whole-world important, if the experiment works.

GERALDINE

But why YOU as -- the sponge? The beta? I'm sorry.

GERALD

Why not me?

GERALDINE

Your question is a measure of the distance between us.

GERALD

Someone has to take the leap --

GERALDINE

Not you --

GERALD

-- make the forward move.

GERALDINE

Go backward.

GERALD

This chlorophyll that we've reengineered -- it has to exist in someone's skin -- subcutaneous --

GERALDINE

I don't know what that means.

GERALD

We've even been able to re-color the chlorophyll so that no one would have to walk around looking green. The chemical pathways have to be tested, the nutritional curves, effects on health --

GERALDINE

But you will never become the same.

GERALD

I will always be the same, chlorophyll'd or not -- but if this works, the world will be made different. Imagine --

GERALDINE

You've already gone through this with me.

GERALD

Maybe not hard enough.

GERALDINE

(in sing-song)

If people can process their own nutrition through human photosynthesis, with little or no regard for agricultural inputs, then hunger will be eliminated, environmental decay halted --

GERALD

You make it sound stupid --

GERALDINE

Of course I make it sound [stupid]--

GERALD

Like I made a mistake in inventing this.

GERALDINE

Of course I will make this sound stupid because I am being completely selfish. Let me bring it to you on a completely selfish childish level, a stamp-my-feet-in-a-tantrum shift of a state of being: you and I will never. Cook. Together. Again. Why would you want to?

GERALD

Of course we can --

GERALDINE

As an exercise, a ritual spasm -- but not with joy. How could you? No appetite, no mechanico-gastro impulse --

GERALD

I can still eat as a regular [person] --

GERALDINE

Without desire. Without desires. For me. Food is so much of how we share each other. Here, in this kitchen, how many times -- how many -- But now you will be sufficient unto yourself, and I will always feel -- accommodated. Added on. Until, of course, you make a chlorophyll woman, at which point I shall be completely superfluous, a relic of the emotionally outdated nutritionally backward

species who likes a good Thai basil chili sauce with her salmon -- who loves sharing a forkful with -- you --

GERALDINE has said all she can say. GERALD, hesitating, takes her hand, stretches out his arms to the sun, closes his eyes. She does the same.

GERALDINE

I can pretend.

* * * * *

They sit separately at separate tables in separate worlds. Documents lie on each table. They sign the many documents.

GERALDINE

There.

GERALD

There.

TOGETHER

Done.

GERALDINE

And yes, I am sure I want to do this.

GERALD

Yes, I am sure about the amputation and, no, I don't need the counseling -- this is a choice --.

GERALDINE

-- freely made. I realize my apartment's selling price is lower than I could've asked for, but --

GERALD

I don't think it's too high a price.

GERALDINE

But time is of the essence.

GERALD

If we had world enough and time -- but we don't. I don't.

GERALDINE

Let's move forward.

GERALD

Let's move forward.

Transition.

* * * * *

GERALD sitting at a diner table. He now has two advanced-design prosthetic arms, perhaps shown by the fact that he wears black gloves and a bulky jacket, perhaps in some other imaginative way, such as a sound design with servo-motors. GERALDINE enters. Both stare at each other.

GERALDINE

You disappeared.

GERALD

Not completely. Why did you want to meet here?

GERALDINE

I didn't know where you were for --

GERALD

But you knew I was alive -- I let you know that much.

GERALDINE

That wasn't very much. Something's --

GERALD

What aren't we at the apartment?

GERALDINE

I sold it.

GERALD

Sold [it] --

GERALDINE

Something's --

GERALDINE feels one of his arms, then the other.

GERALDINE
-- changed -- what did you do?

GERALD stands up.

GERALD
What does it feel like I did?

GERALD moves his arms in a mechanistic way.

GERALD
What does it look like?

GERALDINE
Engineered. Reengineered

GERALD
Take my hand.

GERALDINE takes one of his hands and massages to examine it.

GERALD
Now this one.

GERALDINE does the same to the other hand, then takes both of his arms and puts them around her. GERALD hugs her. GERALDINE begins to laugh, and GERALD more or less lowers her into her seat at the table.

GERALD
You're laughing.

GERALDINE
Oh yes yes yes --

GERALD
Not the emotion I expected from -- this --

GERALDINE
Oh, you'll see why. Wait, wait --

GERALD
Why did you sell --

GERALDINE

Wait -- oh my -- I sold the apartment to get money for an operation -- the mother of all operations -- to become Chlorophyll Woman!

GERALD

Did you actually -- you didn't --

GERALDINE

Couldn't find any offers on Craig's List -- I didn't gotten much beyond the intention because I didn't know where you were, but that was where I was headed -- Chlorophyll Woman! But, no, I did not -- no loss of my mechanico-gastro. And you --

GERALD

And I go and get my chlorophyll arms deleted and replaced because of my loved one's desire to cook --

GERALDINE

I can see. Feel, that is.

GERALD

Aren't we a pair?

GERALDINE

Which is why I had to -- had to! -- laugh.

GERALD shrugs. They both laugh.

GERALD

A good experimental trial for advanced-design prosthetic arms was not easy to find -- but I had my Defense Department/DARPA connections.

GERALDINE

Do you get hungry now?

GERALD

In all the old usual ways -- for all the old usual hungers.

GERALDINE

Can you still cook?

GERALD

Haven't tried. There is much I'd like to try -- need to try -- these neural-networked arms learn from doing, so more doing -- more [learning] --

GERALDINE

Come here -- let me learn you.

GERALDINE puts up her dukes. GERALD puts up his dukes. They shadow-box with each other. Then patty-cake a few times. Then grab each other's hands and hold them.

GERALDINE

I am so completely without-apology selfish.

GERALD

I've found out that I'm no different.

GERALDINE

Will the world survive us?

GERALD

Not likely. No, it's true.

GERALDINE

I know. But we have a right to happiness.

GERALD

Indeed.

GERALDINE

To pursue it.

GERALD

Yes.

GERALDINE

Everyone does.

GERALD

Yes.

GERALDINE

Then what should we do with my money?

GERALD

Something that involves food. And feeding.

GERALDINE

As long as we do it together.

GERALD

What else would you expect?

GERALDINE

I wouldn't expect anything else.

They continue to hold hands. Rays of sunlight falls across them and grow and grow. And then, of course, blackout.

Llorona

DESCRIPTION

A young woman is abandoned by the father of their child when he goes to marry someone else, and she exacts her revenge for his betrayal.

CHARACTERS

- Luisa
- Don Carlos

* * * * *

As lights ease in, we see, we hear, we smell LUISA and DON CARLOS' ecstasy and passion.

LUISA

You will never leave me.

CARLOS

Of course I will -- never leave you.

LUISA

What was that?

CARLOS

What was what? Don't stop --

LUISA

That, in your voice --

CARLOS

What?

LUISA

Your hesitation.

CARLOS

I didn't hesitate.

LUISA

Yes you did, between "will" and "never."

CARLOS

I was catching my breath -- you take away my
[breath] --

LUISA

(in two voices)

"You will never leave me." "Of course I will --
never -- " You hesitated.

CARLOS

Come back.

LUISA

To what?

CARLOS

To me.

LUISA

Can you understand why?

CARLOS

It was nothing -- a catch in my voice --

LUISA

Your leaving always threatens me --

CARLOS

But I'm here now --

LUISA

It's in your clothes, your hair --

CARLOS

And I've told you, our differences --

LUISA

Are differences, no matter what you tell me --
hard borders, can't be crossed -- difference in
your hair, my hair, your clothes, my clothes -- in
our child --

CARLOS

I won't [leave] --

LUISA

Then marry me --

CARLOS

I can't -- you know I can't --

LUISA

You say "can't" but I won't stop wanting it.

CARLOS

Wanting it won't change anything about my "can't."

LUISA

That's where you're wrong -- I've heard the rumors, the buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz -- why do you think you had me easier than ever tonight? I was on my back before you even unbuckled -- I was unbuckled before you were! I was going to lock you down with my legs, keep you hard in me by hard against me. But buzz-buzz, buzz-buzz, buzz-buzz, buzz-buzz -- zzzzzzzzzzz all around -- and you say nothing to me. My voice in your ears, my tongue, my fingers, giving you every chance -- but -- nothing to me. Not one word. They must be true.

CARLOS

Yes. They are. Within the month.

LUISA

And your tongue doesn't rot.

CARLOS

You have always known.

LUISA

My mistake was hoping that you would behave better than what you keep telling me I know. Who is she?

CARLOS

Someone my parents have decided is fit -- they fit her to me, I get fitted [to her] --

LUISA

And you never said "don't" to the fitting, "don't" to your parents.

CARLOS

No. Because I did not want to.

LUISA

You chose.

CARLOS

I chose.

LUISA

Not forced.

CARLOS

Not forced.

LUISA

Not me.

CARLOS

You were never a choice.

CARLOS' words are knives.

LUISA

Start forgetting me -- now. Start now because I have already finished forgetting you -- I have completed it, it makes me complete. Don't, don't even -- just go -- choose choose choose choose -- buzz buzz buzz buzz -- choose buzz choose buzz choose buzz -- and away the fly flies! Buckled up and gone!

Nothing but silence accompanies the solitary LUISA.

LUISA

Wanting it -- wanting -- wanting! -- will always change everything.

* * * * *

A church. Echoing whispers from the wedding service at the altar. LUISA enters, shawl over her head, and a baby in a sling hanging from her shoulders across her body. She raises her hand.

LUISA

Yes -- yes yes yes -- there is a reason why this marriage should not happen!

LUISA unslings the baby and holds the bundle over her head.

LUISA

Here! This! I am his first, and this is his child! This is our child!

Murmurs, shouts, a scream as someone faints. LUISA lowers the bundle into her arms. CARLOS marches up to her.

CARLOS

What are you doing?

LUISA

Wanting.

CARLOS

To ruin me.

LUISA

By one already ruined. Have I ruined you?

CARLOS

Yes!

LUISA

Then come back to me -- you have nothing to lose and so much to win.

CARLOS

We are not ruined in the same way.

LUISA

That's your money talking, your breeding --

CARLOS

And it's not talking in your favor. I have to go.

LUISA

Then go with this.

LUISA holds the baby overhead again.

LUISA

Here! This! This is our child!

Taking the two ends of the sling, LUISA slams the baby into the ground again and again until the sling holds nothing but a bloody pulp.

One last time, LUISA holds the bloody bundle overhead, then flings it into the darkness.

LUISA

Now you can call me -- you can all call me -- La Llorona because I will do nothing forever except weep and gnash my teeth for the butchery you have all made me do.

LUISA glares at CARLOS.

LUISA

That you have made me do.

CARLOS turns and walks away, finally devastated.

Blackness.

* * * * *

Sounds of water fill the darkness and continue as the light rises. In a centered light, LUISA appears standing in a wooden or metal washtub, naked. Behind her, on a stepladder above her, is CARLOS, dressed simply, now a stagehand holding a watering can. A towel hangs from one of the ladder's rungs; a rough cotton dress hangs over another.

He tilts the can over her, and a gentle rain falls. When done, she takes the towel, dries herself, steps out of the tub, then puts on the dress. CARLOS disappears into the darkness.

CARLOS re-appears, holding a baby in a sling, which LUISA drapes across the front of her body. He then goes back up the ladder, watering can in hand.

LUISA

Did you think I really would? Did you, to spite him? Them? To round-off the fucking tragedy of it, concoct a fucking Medea out of it? A pig's heart and guts in butcher paper -- smash 'em down hard enough and they weep blood. Why should the innocent suffer for our cock-ups and soap operas? I wanted him gutted but by the sharpest knife ever tempered -- remorse, guilt, and infinite loss. So I cheated on the deal -- so what? So what? When people see me cry, they may think it's because I am a tragic figure searching for the soul of

my murdered child, but, shit, they are tears of triumph. La Llorona, yes, but crying at my secret joke, my cosmic con-job -- but most of all for my fierce love of the thing that deserves it most, this weight across my heart. Fuck 'em all.

LUISA leaves the stage. CARLOS rains out the rest of the water as lights go to black.

Love Letters

DESCRIPTION

Love must be renewed, but how it gets renewed is never quite under our control. When Dale finds, in the attic, a bundle of love letters addressed to her but unsent by her husband Roger, her feelings for him are revived. Roger has a different reaction.

CHARACTERS

- Dale
- Roger

SETTING

- The attic of a house

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

An attic. DALE, a woman, is going through stuff in the attic. Eventually she comes to a trunk and opens it. She rummages through and pulls out a packet wrapped in paper and tied with string. She sits and then unties the string and begins to leaf through the pages.

DALE

What are these?

She leafs through several sheets of paper.

DALE

None of them are dated.

She selects one and reads it for a moment, then reads it out loud.

DALE

"Dale. You didn't know it, but I saw you today as you crossed the street. It is always wonderful seeing you, rich and luminous. It is difficult, sitting here in this drab room, to feel this closeness to you and not be able to share it, completely. It makes it hard to breathe, to think, to connect with the daily functioning of

life. And all this from just seeing you cross the street."

She unfolds another one from the pack.

DALE

"My dearest Dale. I almost declared to you today. Declared what? What beats in my heart, reaches down to the core of my bones -- that I love you, that I want nothing more, and nothing less, than for us to be united in every way possible."

DALE lets her hands drop into her lap, and she gazes off into the distance, her face with a look of wonderment on it. Suddenly, to break the moment, ROGER's voice shouts to her.

ROGER

Dale! Dale! Where are you?

DALE

I'm up here, in the attic.

ROGER enters.

ROGER

There you are. I guess you didn't hear the phone ring. It's Margie. Something about the support group meeting tonight.

DALE

Right, right.

ROGER

Well, aren't you going to get it?

DALE

Yes, yes, I will.

ROGER

What's the matter?

DALE

What are these?

ROGER

Well. I didn't know these were still here.

DALE

What are they?

ROGER

They're letters I never sent you. When we first met. I wrote them to express my feelings, but I didn't think I could send them to you because, well, just because. I didn't realize we'd been lugging them around all these years.

DALE

Oh, they are so beautiful, Roger. It's such a gift to get them after all this time, to know that you cared so much. That you still care.

ROGER

Of course I still care.

She gets up and gives him a big hug.

DALE

Thank you.

ROGER

The phone?

DALE

Oh my god, I've left Margie hanging. She'll never forgive me.

She bustles out of the attic, a smile still wreathing her face.

ROGER stands there with the packet of letters in his hand. He goes to put them back in the trunk, then thinks twice about it and keeps them.

ROGER

Man, was it a lucky thing that he had the same name!

ROGER exits.

Moment

DESCRIPTION

Roger shoots his mouth off while the bank is being robbed, and the robber shoots his gun to keep him quiet. The motion of the bullet can take an entire lifetime.

CHARACTERS

- ROGER, bank customer
- MAN
- WOMAN
- ROBBER 1 & 2
- THREE POLICE OFFICERS

SETTING

- Bank -- waiting line

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

A line of people in a bank on Saturday, waiting at the one teller. Security guard to one side. ROGER is dressed nattily, perhaps even wearing a hat. He should look genteel and patrician, as if born with leather elbow patches and always speaks in a superior tone. People are exasperated

MAN

This line moves as slow as two old people making love!

WOMAN

I don't know why I do my banking here.

ROGER

(condescendingly)

What good does it do to complain? It doesn't make the line move any faster, and it makes it unpleasant for everyone else. Perhaps you could simply talk to each other about the latest wrestling match or something fascinating like that.

Two men walk into the bank and look around briefly. Then they take out ski masks, pull them over their heads, and pull out guns. As ROBBER 1 speaks, ROBBER 2 walks over to the security guard and, almost casually, hits him over the head and knocks

him out. He then takes a short iron bar he has under his coat and slips it through the handles of the front doors. Lastly, he walks to the teller and motions her to begin filling a bag he hands to her.

ROBBER 1

All right, everyone! This can go easy if you all coöperate.

Pulls a large piece of cloth from his pocket and puts it on the floor.

ROBBER 1

Throw your money and wallets on the floor. Let's move with a little more alacrity, if you please.

ROGER

Alacrity. You have a vocabulary. But it's "easily," not "easy." "This can go easily."

Walks up to ROGER and shoves the gun against his head.

ROBBER 1

You have a death wish? Shut up. Understand that, fag-boy?

WOMAN is struggling to open her purse.

ROBBER 1

Let's hurry it up.

ROBBER 2 has the bag from the teller in his hand.

ROGER

Tell me, for people like you, is this easier than playing the lottery?

Presses the gun even harder against ROGER's temple.

ROBBER 1

Last time, professor. Shut the fuck up.

MAN

Man, just keep quiet!

ROGER

Why? Is there an etiquette about being robbed?
From people like them?

ROBBER 1

All right. That's enough.

Without a moment's hesitation, ROBBER 1 fires the gun.

The following action should appear realistic but it should also be choreographed so that the audience will get the sense that there is a subtle stylization to it. Apparently ROBBER 1's point-blank aim is off because ROGER twists out of the way at the last minute, and as he does so, he swings his arm against ROBBER 1, knocking his gun arm up. The gun goes flying. With a few deft punches he disables ROBBER 1. By this time ROBBER 2 has dropped the bag of money and stepped up to take care of ROGER, but again, with a few quick movements, he incapacitates ROBBER 2. While all this is happening, one of the customers takes the iron bar out of the door and three POLICE OFFICERS rush in, easily subduing the ROBBERS. While two OFFICERS escort the ROBBERS out of the bank, the third OFFICER comes up to ROGER. The other customers stand around with looks of admiration on their faces.

OFFICER 1

That was quite a brave -- and stupid -- thing you did back there.

ROGER

It's what any concerned citizen should do. Unless we all take responsibility for ensuring the quality of our lives, we will go back to the barbarians.

During the last sentence, ROGER's voice begins to slur and falter, as if a tape were slowing down, and when he finishes it he falls to the floor unconscious. Everyone clears away, and the MAN leans over him and says, "Jesus Christ!" As he says this, the action the audience has just seen quickly runs in reverse, as if a tape is being rewound, until the scene ends up with ROBBER 1 pointing his gun at ROGER's head.

ROBBER 1

All right, that's enough.

Without a moment's hesitation, ROBBER 1 fires the gun.

ROGER falls to the ground, shot through the head. There need not be any special effects for this. ROBBER 2 gathers up the cloth from the floor and starts for the door. ROBBER 1 looks at ROGER for a moment, then up at the customers.

ROBBER 1

He "easily" pissed me off.

The ROBBERS leave. The MAN walks over to the body, leans over it.

MAN

Jesus Christ.

BLACKOUT

Mucho Macho

DESCRIPTION

Testosterone poisoning is probably one of the greatest environmental hazards the world faces, and on a simple day on a simple subway ride, two men cannot resist the hormonal urge to do ritual combat.

CHARACTERS

- A and B -- Two men of ordinary appearance
- Voice

SETTING

- Subway car

TIME

- Present, mid-day

MISCELLANEOUS

- A newspaper
- A magazine
- Two chairs

* * * * *

Subway car, mid-day; it can be shown by two chairs. On one chair is a newspaper. A enters and sits; there is a newspaper on the bench next to him. B enters. B is carrying a magazine.

VOICE

Next stop: Broadway. Please stand clear of the closing doors. The doors will be closing. Please move to the center of the car and cuddle with your fellow passengers -- it'll improve your mood immensely.

A and B react as if they hadn't quite heard what they just heard.

B
You reading that?

A
Huh?

B
The newspaper.

A
The newspaper.

B
Yeah.

A
That newspaper.

B
Yeah.

A
Don't talk to me.

B
Well, okay -- but are you reading the newspaper?

A
Don't talk to me.

B
I'm trying not to, but I have to talk to you if I want the newspaper.

A
Read your magazine.

B
Bored with it.

A stands up, takes the newspaper, and sits on it.

A
Yes, I'm reading it.

Stands up, turns a page, and sits back down.

A
I haven't gotten to the comics yet.

B
You're reading it?

A
Yeah.

(wiggles his butt)

How uncultured we would be without our daily information.

B sits.

B

Oh, yeah? What're you reading?

A

Huh?

B

Right now. What's the article?

A makes a facial expression to show he's reading.

A

The Attorney General --

B

Yeah?

A

Is investigating --

B

Oh, good guess.

A

Let me skip down a few paragraphs.

B

Take your time.

A

Crimes. White collar.

B

You read pretty thoroughly. I guess you can do that when your brains are so close to the page.

A turns the page again; B looks like he's going to try to snatch it away, but A sits down before he can act.

A

On to the editorials.

B

Where'd you learn how to do that?

A

Special school.

B

Butt school? Derriere academy?

A

Don't mock my alma posterior.

B

You brought it up. How do you do it?

A

Promised never to reveal the secret.

B

Is it through the texture of the paper --

A

Stupid!

B

Hey!

A

Not you. This letter writer. Some people ought to be denied access to the mails.

B

Yeah?

A

He's complaining about people who leave newspapers on the subway. Obviously he doesn't read.

B

You think you're pretty smart.

A

Not everyone can do this. Takes talent.

B takes his magazine, stands, spreads it on his seat, and sits on it.

A

Thought you were bored with it.

B

Haven't finished it, though.

B turns a page.

A

I'm on to the business news.

B

I'm reading about sex tours in London.

A

Sex tours? In England?

B

Something for everyone. Ooh, doing that must hurt!

B turns a page.

B

Whew -- now that would be interesting.

A

Something with kippers and bangers?

A turns a page.

B

You read pretty slow.

A

I don't move my lips, though.

B

But I bet you use your finger.

A turns a page. B turns a page.

A

The financial news in Asia is pretty bad. The bhat --

B

The what?

A

Bhat. A kind of money. Jeez, didn't know that?

B

Naw, I'm more interested in B&D.

A

B&D?

B

It ain't a deli sandwich. Whips, rope.

(turns a page)

And things with angel hair pasta.

A turns a page.

A

The Federal Reserve is talking about raising interest rates to offset --

B turns a page.

B

This review about the latest movies from underground Iranian directors --

A and B turn pages rapidly now in a bid to outdo each other. They do this until they reach the last page in each publication. The comments should fly, and they don't even need to coincide with the turning of the pages. The actors are also free to add any lines they wish, the more outrageous, the better.

A

New snack called Anne Frank; best place for ribs; Demi Moore changes name to Semi Phore; gift ideas for Boxing Day; tofu turkey for Thanksgiving; weird 'zines; drive-in funeral parlors; carbonated coffee.

B

Politicians thrown into jail; boy kills mom with Cling Wrap; fossils show humans born yesterday; proven you can get blood from a stone; free trade,

no free lunch, free gift, no free trade; personal digital assistant implants.

In a frenzy as they reach the last page, they both grab their respective publications and put them on their heads, like tents. They both sit breathless, staring.

A

Beat you.

B

No, you didn't.

A

Did.

B

Didn't.

A

I can read it, even like this.

B

So can I.

A

Yeah?

B

Yeah. Only -- I don't much feel like it at the moment.

A

Me neither.

They both slowly slide the publications off their heads.

VOICE

Coming in to Broadway. Be sure to check that you have all your faculties, and have a nice day.

A

All your "faculties"?

B

Read any good books lately?

A
Huh?

B
Books.

A
I gotta get off here.

B
Right.

A gets up. B offers him the magazine. A offers him the newspaper. A exits. B puts newspaper on seat next to him.

VOICE
Next stop, Park Square. All aboard who are getting on board.

A re-enters, wearing something different to indicate a new passenger.

VOICE
Please be careful, the doors will be closing but will open up soon for other possibilities.

A
(indicating the newspaper)
You reading that?

B looks at the audience and smiles.

BLACKOUT

Newyorkistan

DESCRIPTION

All the New York subway is a stage, and all the riders merely players. Until, by accident or fate, something cuts through the clutter and invites our eyes to see and ears to hear -- as happens one late evening to two men as they hear an angel sing.

CHARACTERS

- Young Person (could be male or female -- "he" is used for convenience)
- Older Person (could be male or female -- "he" is used for convenience)
- Him

SOUND

- Sound design of a New York subway train
- Garbled voiceover from PA system

* * * * *

Two passengers: YOUNG PERSON (YP) and OLDER PERSON (OP) several seats apart. YP is scanning his electronic device and enjoying what he's seeing; he may also be listening to music.

OP is reading (perhaps a book, perhaps a Kindle). He checks his watch, sighs, goes back to reading.

The racket of the train fills the air.

VOICEOVER

This is an important message from the MTA and the New York City Police Department. Panhandling on the New York City subway system is a crime. If you wish to give, please give to an organization that will help the homeless. Thank you, and have a safe trip.

They ignore the announcement.

Through the door at the end of the car HE comes. HE is dark-skinned, tall, thin, raggedly dressed but not untidy. After taking several steps into the car, he stops and stands quite still.

The three pairs of eyes meet, then slide away from each other. YP may roll his eyes at yet another panhandler as he goes back

to his device. OP may steal some sidelong glances, not sure whether to be interested or fearful.

HE stands there, silent.

Then, without preamble, HE begins to sing -- something sweet and high, without tremor, well-trained -- not "Ave Maria" but something in that category, recognizable even if you've never heard it before. [Suggestions: A slice of Pietgro Mascagni's "Mamma, mamma, quell vino e generoso" or César Franck's "Panis Angelicus"]

The song goes on for what on the subway would be a long time, especially with only two passengers. But HE is, after all, giving them a concert.

The two passengers respond differently. YP is at first annoyed, but he changes, amused by it all. He snaps a few photos, perhaps even getting out of his seat to do it. He types in a text to accompany the photos that he will send to someone as soon as he gets a signal. For him, this is entertainment.

OP seems more "struck" -- that is the word that best describes his reaction. He closes his book/Kindle, stares into the middle distance, watches HIM sing.

The sound of the train slowing down for a station coincides with the completion of the song. HE does not move -- that is, HE does not hold out a hand or a receptacle for money. OP reaches into his pocket and pulls out a dollar bill. Only then does HE move, and HE takes the bill with reserve, as if to say "Times have not been easy."

YP, seeing this, pulls out some change and drops it into HIS hand, almost immediately going back to the perusal of his device.

The train pulls into the station.

VOICEOVER

[garble garble garble garble]

Doors slide open. HE leaves. No one gets on. Doors close. Train pulls out. Train racket crams the air.

OP and YP go back into their own worlds. YP slides over to OP and shows the photos he took; OP half-smiles, nods. YP slides away, puts away device, close his eyes to listen to his music.

OP opens his book but doesn't immediately go back to reading. He glances at YP, snug inside his music. He looks at the book but doesn't read it, then closes it. He pulls out a handkerchief from his pocket and dries his eyes because, for some reason, he has begun to cry -- not vigorous, not sobbing, but lightly.

YP opens his eyes, sees what's happening, pulls out the device, takes a picture, closes his eyes.

The crying doesn't last long. OP puts away the handkerchief, opens the book, reads. Train racket in the air as time passes.

VOICEOVER

An important announcement from the MTA and the
New York City Police Department --

But the announcement cuts out as something fails in the PA system. The train slows down to pull into the next station. The doors open. YP gets off. No one gets on. The doors close, and the train pulls out.

OP puts the book down on the seat next to him, pulls out his handkerchief, and this time cries as if he has lost something precious.

VOICEOVER

An important announcement --

Again the PA cuts out, then cuts back in.

VOICEOVER

An important announcement --

OP cries. Train rattles on into the night as the announcement keeps cutting out, cutting out, cutting out.

No Great Loss

CHARACTERS

- EMMA NEWMARK, late 50s/early 60s -- aging colleen, speaks with an Irish accent, thinning hair, poofed, brittle look common to some older women's hair styles
- AWAGU KIDANE, early 50s -- Ethiopian, wears a headscarf

SETTING

- AWAGU's hairdressing shop, set up in her house.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two wooden chairs (one being the "working" chair, with arms -- the other chair without arms)
- A small table holding some implements -- scissors, electric haircutter (cordless, battery powered), an apron, small towel, etc.

NOTE

- Looking toward the audience when in the working chair is considered looking into the mirror.

* * * * *

EMMA, in a rage, apron around her neck, points a pair of scissors at AWAGU -- except that the scissors are backwards and therefore pose no threat.

AWAGU

Emma, sit down. This is not like you.

EMMA

This is a "like me" you don't know about.

AWAGU

Emma, sit down.

EMMA

Not until you take it back.

AWAGU

Take what back?

EMMA

What you said.

AWAGU

Which what I said?

EMMA

(brandishing the scissors)

You know --

AWAGU

About?

EMMA

Spurgeon --

AWAGU

I said I thought his new trimness fit him well --

EMMA

(with a pop)

That's what I mean! His "trimness"! You hussy!
Take it back!

AWAGU takes a deep inhale, as if sucking back the words.

AWAGU

Will that do?

EMMA

Ha, ha, Smarty Jones. Don't mess with me! What do you know about his "trimness"? Tell me!

AWAGU

Less than you do, I'm sure, who watches him whip it out every night!

A shocked look on EMMA's face. EMMA sputters.

EMMA

Why you -- Why you --

AWAGU

Aha! You didn't think I knew such lingo, hey?

EMMA

I didn't know I knew such lingo.

AWAGU

But there you are, every night -- Spurgeon whip,
whip, whip, whip, whip --

EMMA

Stop it --

AWAGU

And if you continue letting the scissors be held
like that and spouting off silly things -- go on,
look at them --

EMMA looks down at the scissors, sees that they are backward.

AWAGU

-- you are going to shame yourself with one of
your excellent friends.

(pointing to handles)

Not built for stabbing me to death -- or anyone
else. I thought a smart woman like you knew such
things.

EMMA, almost defeated, won't quite give up yet. She brandishes
the handles with a half-heart.

EMMA

You've always wanted him, haven't you?

AWAGU

Let me finish your hair.

EMMA

You mean bale the straw, don't you?

AWAGU

I mean the finish the hair I have been fixing for --

EMMA

You're deliberately making it ugly, aren't you?

AWAGU

Emma, the scissors -- before we share another
syllable.

EMMA

Making it ugly so you can get Spurgeon all for
yourself.

AWAGU
(gesturing)

Come on.

EMMA
You've been making it ugly for years -- me, a twice-a-month regular trusting you, and you making me ugly beyond repair --

AWAGU gestures once more for the scissors, which EMMA, with only a slight hesitation, hands over. AWAGU snaps them open and shut several times.

AWAGU
Your sweaty hands haven't rusted them out. Good.

EMMA
(without much heat)
Don't smart-mouth me.

AWAGU
Sit down.

EMMA sits down.

AWAGU
Tell me what happened.

EMMA
Nothing happened.
(hesitates)
It's embarrassing.

AWAGU
Embarrassment can equal a waking-up call.

EMMA
Maybe in Ethiopia.

AWAGU
I learned that wisdom thanks to the ultra-modernized West, from a teabag at Boston airport. Tell me.

EMMA
Nothing happened.

AWAGU

Except a "nothing" that was a something embarrassing --

EMMA

Nothing -- much -- happened.

AWAGU

That "much" make you a liar with your pants all on fire -- eh?

EMMA

(hesitate, hesitate, hesitate)

Doing the dishes the other night -- oh, a right joke he thought this was! -- when Spurgeon was doing the dishes -- he reached for the new dish soap, and by chance grabbed the Miracle-Gro -- you know how he does his repotting in the sink, which drives me -- sorry --

AWAGU

Good -- focus -- breathe --

EMMA

And he made a grand joke of pretend-pouring it over my head with some sly horticultural digs about roots and wisps and vines -- and that's not all!

AWAGU

It never is.

EMMA

Weights, mind you -- he's hefting weights! And his biceps are --

AWAGU

I noted.

EMMA

"No more damn combover," so he's shaved himself bald.

AWAGU

I was blinded by the chrome of his dome.

EMMA hesitates.

AWAGU

And?

EMMA

And then there's the Speedo catalogue!

AWAGU

(with great delight)

His package!

EMMA

He's circled things like "the lunar luster" and "the electro surge."

AWAGU

A tattoo, I'll bet.

EMMA

A tattoo he's thinking about! How did you know that?

AWAGU

It stands to male reasoning.

EMMA

He's making himself look good --

AWAGU

Damn good.

EMMA

And then you blabbed out about his trimness!

AWAGU

I was observing what he wants to be observed.

EMMA

Because you want to get me out of the way, don't you, so that you can --

AWAGU

I can what?

EMMA stares at AWAGU.

AWAGU

I can what?

EMMA continues to stare at AWAGU, suddenly deflated.

EMMA

I can't believe I am thinking of saying what I thought about saying. About you. About you. What is happening to me? I should go -- I've got to go -- this embarrassment is not waking me up at all.

AWAGU holds out the seams of her pants.

EMMA

What? What are you doing?

AWAGU

I don't want these to be all on fire.

EMMA

As in "liar, liar" --

AWAGU

I won't lie to you, Emma Newmark.

AWAGU sits.

EMMA

Are you suddenly going to stick into me one of those revelations that I am sure at my age I do not want to have?

AWAGU

No.

EMMA

Don't tell me that I am going to have to kill you before I leave.

AWAGU

I've put the scissors away. Sit.

EMMA sits.

AWAGU

We have made our friendship through your perms, highlights, split ends, shag cuts, kiss curls, tendrils, chignons -- those feathered wing-things -- and so I will say this to you: if the universe

made Spurgeon available to my hand, I would take him, Speedo or not.

EMMA

You would, would you?

AWAGU

I would.

EMMA

You would.

EMMA and AWAGU carefully look at each other.

EMMA

But, you know, not that you have, right?, with Spurgeon, in the past carnal tense --

AWAGU

Not that I have yet -- but there is this new trimness of his --

EMMA

It's good you're smiling or your pants would flaming faster than cherries jubilee.

AWAGU

Who knows if they aren't already? The tides don't stop whoosh-and-whoosh because the Earth is old! Don't you think I don't still miss my Halie [hah-LEE] after all these years!

AWAGU holds up her hand, wiggles her fingers.

AWAGU

That these fingers don't still dance down there under the covers when I picture him as I picture him!

EMMA

Awagu!

AWAGU

And not the same dancing for you?

A longish silence.

EMMA

In the shower for me.

AWAGU

Thoughts of Spurgeon.

EMMA

Yes --

(hesitantly)

-- but not only him --

AWAGU

Well, there you go --

EMMA

The Internet is a wonderful thing in some respects
--

AWAGU

Whoosh-and-whoosh, tide comes in, tide goes out!

EMMA

I have to admit to a small tingle, now that you mention it.

AWAGU

When my Halie died, both you and Spurgeon were a great comfort. I am forever in debt to your help, to both your helps, in helping me start this business. If I ever wanted to climb a man's bell tower again -- well, enough said.

EMMA

Yes, enough on that count, I think.

AWAGU

But there's also you. And we're getting older. And I envy you. And we're getting older. And I will always love Halie. And we are all getting older. And mix, mix -- mush, mush -- slop, slop. Like a stew.

EMMA

Awagu --

AWAGU

Let me finish your hair.

EMMA takes off the apron to show her body.

EMMA

It is not in a particularly good phase, now, is it?

AWAGU

Emma, it's all right --

EMMA

Wait -- after he did the Miracle-Gro -- I took off all my clothes in front of the mirror.

AWAGU

You like to live dangerously.

EMMA

And the inventory did not raise high the roofbeam, you might say. I took note -- hep -- don't start, don't even try to smooth it out for me, Awagu, because it is as plain as this straw flapping on the roof that I am a downhill fleshy mess, I am. I am a twice-a-month-get-a-rinse-to-hide-the-goddam-gray-body-past-the-due-date-stuck-up-on-the-shelf colleen! And if those are the only goods on tap -- well -- why would he want them? Maybe you should take him --

AWAGU waits.

EMMA

You're waiting.

AWAGU

And are you done pissing self-pity in your pants?

EMMA

Awagu!

AWAGU

It feels nice and warm for a moment, but then gets cold and clammy, and only people who are quite stupid and blind never change their pants. So stop it.

EMMA
(smiling)

"Pissing" -- from your mouth?

AWAGU
You should be proud of Spurgeon. He jokes for you. He's making himself better -- for you. He's teaching you new words, and you better learn the tongue of them, or I will come along and move you right out and climb his bell tower!

EMMA
So -- so -- upon these mortal thoughts, eh?

AWAGU
(cups her breasts)
Hanging down.

EMMA
Hanging on. Hanging in.

AWAGU
It is said that man is a log with nine holes (we women -- lucky for the men -- get an extra one). Like a flute the wind can play over the log and the music spills out. But the log falls apart -- hair gets thin, bellies get thick -- and --
(tapping her head)
-- at the same time we see it all and don't want to see any of it at all. Cruel trick, maybe, but falling apart is what we do best -- and all you can do is do what you can do to keep the holes open and the wind blowing.

EMMA
Spurgeon and his Speedos. I would hate to lose him.

AWAGU
He just wants someone who is alive, and he wants that someone to be you. If Spurgeon comes down like the wind, pick up your skirts and --

AWAGU hesitates, as if it might be too much to say, then says it.

AWAGU

Pick up your skirts and open your holes!

EMMA pauses, looking at AWAGU, then puts on the apron and sits.

EMMA

(patting the top of her head)

All of it -- off. Buzz cut it right off.

AWAGU

I have a better idea. Let me show you what got my Halie really hot.

AWAGU takes off her headscarf to show a head with thin hair -- or even bald. EMMA laughs.

EMMA

Ain't much grass on the top of that hill!

AWAGU

Ssshhh! Watch!

AWAGU, in a few swift moves, drapes the headscarf around EMMA..

EMMA

Now, that --

AWAGU

Yes -- is a new wind indeed.

EMMA

You think?

AWAGU

I know. Spurgeon will know.

Together they make a whooshing sound.

EMMA

So will I.

EMMA takes off the headscarf. She turns, and with a quick gesture, she pulls AWAGU to her and gives her a full kiss upon the lips. EMMA then sits herself in the chair, hand on her head.

EMMA

All right, Awagu -- no foof, no floom, no mousse,
no tricks. Short and to the point -- the first of
many things to be tightened up.

AWAGU leans down and puts her cheek against EMMA's cheek, and
they both look into the mirror. Then AWAGU gives EMMA a solid
kiss on the cheek, stands, takes the scissors. But does not
begin cutting. Waits.

EMMA

Good.

AWAGU

Good.

Blackout

Not Here

DESCRIPTION

Jeff Boss sends the President of the United States a podcast.

CHARACTERS

- Jeff Boss
- Arm of the Government
- Collateral Damage
- Innocent Bystander
- Voice of Warning

MISCELLANEOUS

- Sound cues throughout

* * * * *

JEFF BOSS at a table, with a notebook, a la Spalding Grey. A digital voice recorder and a cellphone are also on the table. Perhaps a table lamp, making the lighting constricted.

He is nervous, agitated. He looks overhead: faint but noticeable, the rotors of helicopters. The sound is not imagined.

He touches, then pulls away, from the voice recorder, as if it were hot to the touch. Finally, he turns on the voice recorder.

BOSS

Mr. President I've already sent you one of my broadcasts already but I don't think you really listened to it not really

BOSS pulls a letter from the back of the notebook, but before he says anything more, he looks overhead again.

BOSS

Can you hear them the helicopters they pass themselves off as news copters the morning tunnel traffic etcetera but they're not I know this focus focus

BOSS punches the pause button, but it's too late since it's recorded what he said.

BOSS

Damn keep going keep going

He unpauses it. The helicopter sound does not go away but continues, subsonic, as an underscore, coming in and out as the helicopters change position.

BOSS opens the letter.

BOSS

Your response this rag it's a form letter form letter and that's not your real signature I'm pretty sure you robosigned a bill from Europe so you can robo-sign from anywhere like operating a drone "Thank you for your communication" "I listened to it with interest" I don't think you did Mr. President I don't think you did either listen to it or with interest

A police siren approaches and passes. BOSS waits, gathers himself.

BOSS

Focus

Another police siren approaches and passes, trying to catch up to the previous cruiser. BOSS turns a page in his notebook. He turns pages as he needs to.

Helicopters still in the background.

BOSS

It's [date of performance] Mr. President this is my second communication to you I think your staff didn't really let you hear my first one which is why I'm sending you this second one because I think time is running short is running out I really do for all of us for me and for all of us and that includes you and yours I was walking through Port Authority the other day half a dozen soldiers in camo lined up on either side with pistols and rifles and for what some of the NYPD cops also had rifles and for what I didn't feel any safer with all of these weapons around all this testosterone in their fingers do you really think this scares the terrorists no because it's not about the terrorists it's about making all of us terrorized and keeping us in line because that's what governments do like to do that you like to do I have to say with regret because that's the kind

of president you've turned into a scaremonger
with an appetite for

Something that sounds like a footfall. BOSS stops to listen. A
second footfall. Then nothing.

Helicopters still in the background.

BOSS

You've become a horrible president I say that with
great respect I mean great regret and yes respect
I guess not only about making promises and not
keeping them but being worse than the person who
came before you which is not easy I mean that
non-elected one we carried on our backs for eight
years you still don't think voting machines can
be hacked and from a distance it's just like
the way those drone operators kill at a distance
you brought back military commissions and never
closed Gitmo Gitmo so Marine and never rolled
back all of the invasions of the fourth fifth six
eighth amendments in the Patriot Act warrantless
wiretaps still going on NSA Verizon

The cellphone vibrates. BOSS looks at it, puzzled, but does not
pick it up. It buzzes and buzzes until it stops.

BOSS

Torture you're still doing torture it's still going
on and you want the power to put Americans in
Gitmo forever Gitmo if you think if you think they
did something you didn't like that you didn't like
ever hear of habeas corpus mister constitutional
scholar but now to you habeas corpus is like we've
got your body and who's to tell us we can't have
it not the Supreme Court that's for sure it's not
just the liberties stuff you should be ashamed of
I mean you've turned the White House and Justice
Department and the Department of Hopeless Security
into these machines these engines for making us
slaves without putting any chains around us

The phone buzzes again. Two more footfalls. Helicopters still
in the background.

BOSS

You and the non-elected guy before you just tell
us to go shopping so that we can make the economy

go north again that is just stupid when you don't do anything to put a muzzle on the Goldman Sucks and Citigropes and Bank of Charge 'Em Five Bucks To Use Their Debit Cards and put the wolves next door to your office who are only going to take care of their wolf buddies and when some people finally just can't take anymore how the game is just rigged against them and decide to do something pretty inoffensive like take over a public park and say the 99 percent is mad as hell and won't take it anymore and why should we and instead of respect from you for making sure the Constitution still works mister constitutional scholar by really testing it out they get torture done back to them by thugs paid for by public money our money in our name and there's no big vomit in the society about how they got smashed for speaking their minds because the stage set by you and the non-elected guy in front of you makes it okay the default option to use violence against something you don't like like Libya who gave you the right to start another war you should've been impeached and Afghanistan is like you have to prove to somebody that you're tough by making a lot of young men and women die on your watch that was the thing with Bin Laden wasn't it that you could say I can kill with the best of 'em this from the president who got the peace prize but who doesn't have the first idea of what a peaceful world would look like or to make it come home to roost I bet you got a hard-on

BOSS stops, looks abashed. He pauses the recorder. He gets up to pace -- his pacing is circumscribed, as if he were in a small room -- or thinks he's in a small room.

A footfall. Helicopters. Cellphone buzzes. He puts his fingertips on the phone.

BOSS

It's a burn phone no one's supposed to

He pulls back his fingers, as if singed.

BOSS

Well of course they're doing it you idiot

BOSS sits back down, checks his notes, and unpauses the recorder.

BOSS

Sorry I shouldn't have said that about the hard-on

He pauses the recorder again. He chides himself silently but agitatedly for speaking this way.

He unpauses the recorder.

BOSS

Because this is not about making it personal or slander ad hominem

Cellphone buzzes.

BOSS

I don't think I have much time

He watches the phone until it stops.

BOSS

Regime change about Libya I was saying something I don't understand why we can't have it here because you're building a regime here that really should be changed that we should change but people are stupid about this they squeal about socialism and government control but they don't seem to mind being controlled by corporations this myth of the free market and business savvy and private is better really look at the poor the homeless the hungry the jobless the regime has taken such good care of us they give us Black Friday black all right like the death of sanity and reason and still people won't give it up the kool-aid Cyber Monday One-Day-Sale and then trample one of their own to death like the joke from the Catskills where one woman says how rotten the meals are and the other woman says yes and such small portions too amusing ourselves to death there is better there is better

BOSS pauses the recorder again. This time he looks forlorn, forsaken. He paces again, looks up at the helicopter sound. Two footfalls. He unpauses the recorder.

BOSS

I am a patriot but not a patriot of the state a patriot of the heart not the flag-waving and bodily pain and punishment kind of patriot but a patriot of the it could be so much better so much better for everyone and my heart is my heart is my heart looks at actions your actions the actions of people you have trusted and shouldn't have and sees the road not taken and feels this really deep emptiness about how it could've been and wasn't and we fooled ourselves by placing all this hope in you even though you asked for it begged us to do it because we should never put hope in anyone hope is foolish we need to build a fire and keep your feet to it until they're fried and make sure that the game gets rigged our way for once and not be such suckers for stupidities like first black president and

BOSS stops, immensely sad. ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT steps into view, aims a high-powered rifle at BOSS.

BOSS

I could continue the list but you know what you haven't done I don't think there's any time left for you to do it right you've already wasted time and money and bodies it has cost us a lot and I don't think we should pay you anything like respect any more

ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT fires. The gun's report is amplified to a painful level. The bullet smashes into BOSS' back and through his heart.

The bullet continues through BOSS' body to hit COLLATERAL DAMAGE in the audience. The impact flings COLLATERAL DAMAGE against INNOCENT BYSTANDER, who screams, pushes away and back from COLLATERAL DAMAGE's corpse, crawling over any audience member in the way.

VOICE OF WARNING comes into the theatre, quickly surveys the scene.

Helicopter sounds rise. Police sirens rise. The cell phone buzzes on the desk.

VOICE OF WARNING

You've gotta get out of here now. Get out! Get out! Now! Now!

Smash to blackout. VOICE OF WARNING continues in the darkness.

VOICE OF WARNING

Get out now! Get out now! Get out now! Get out now!

VOICE cuts get off -- garrotted. Other sounds continue for a second or two more, then cut out.

The Origin of Zoos

DESCRIPTION

Early 20th-century American jitters about democratic and racial survival makes the Lower East Side either a genetic cesspool or a political success.

CHARACTERS

- Madison Grant, 48
- Margaret Sanger, 33
- Walter, a waiter and store owner, older, Polish

MISCELLANEOUS

- Modest sound design
- Modest set requirements

* * * * *

A coffee shop near Seward Park, 1913, late in the day, winter.

SOUND: The voices of children playing in the park.

MADISON GRANT sits at a table, journal in front of him, fountain pen, mug of coffee. WALTER sits to one side, reading his newspaper.

MARGARET SANGER comes in, beating her arms against herself to warm herself up. She wears fingerless mittens.

SOUND: A small bell to indicate someone has entered.

WALTER puts down his paper.

SANGER

A mug, and hot, and black, like usual, Walter.

WALTER

On the way, Mrs. Sanger, like usual.

WALTER goes off. SANGER sits.

SANGER

I haven't seen you in here before.

GRANT

I haven't been here to be seen.

SANGER

And writing, no less.

WALTER comes back with a mug of coffee and a small basket of bread.

SANGER

Oh, Walter, thank you, but I can't pay you for the bread.

WALTER

It's day-old, if you don't mind -- it's to you or the birds. Better to you.

SANGER

You're always too kind.

WALTER

You do good work for us around here.

SANGER

And you are a gentleman without equal.

WALTER looks at GRANT.

WALTER

Sir?

GRANT

I'm fine, thank you.

WALTER goes back to his paper. SANGER guzzles and eats.

SANGER

Can you hear that?

GRANT

Hard not to.

SANGER

That is the sound of health -- children screaming in play. So.

GRANT

Is this an interview?

SANGER

Maybe. Let me observe first. Leatherbound journal and a Waterman pen. Your coat glows with warmth, unlike my threadbare rug. I'll imagine soft buttery leather gloves in the pockets -- not like my knitted monstrosities. These are not the specs of the Lower East Side, of Seward Park and Hester Street and its environs.

GRANT

I'm doing research.

SANGER

On?

GRANT

The waiter --

SANGER

Walter --

GRANT

Walter --

SANGER

You're researching him?

GRANT

No.

SANGER

You should.

GRANT

He thanked you for doing good work. What might that be?

SANGER

I answer you, you answer me?

GRANT

That's one way we could arrange it.

SANGER

Has a stuffy sort of wit -- add to list.

SANGER holds up her mug.

SANGER

Walter, may I renew my subscription?

WALTER

Of course. Sir?

GRANT

I will be renewed as well.

WALTER takes both of their mugs away.

SANGER

Research. You published anything?

GRANT

I've written about caribou. And moose. The Rocky Mountain mountain goat. Life in Alaska.

SANGER

What now -- the Lower East Side as wildlife preserve?

GRANT

That's an interesting way to put it. Isn't it that, though -- a zoo of sorts?

WALTER comes backs with a tray bearing two mugs of coffee and two small plates of cookies.

WALTER

Because something sweet makes the cold go better. Kolaczki [koh LOTCH key].

SANGER bites into one and loves the taste.

SANGER

I choose to be your kind of Polish for this moment! These are excellent.

GRANT bites into one and finds himself surprised at how good it is.

GRANT

My compliments.

WALTER is pleased.

WALTER

I have to go put things away. We'll be closing up soon.

WALTER leaves. SANGER eats another.

SANGER

Now this is something a caribou could never do. Or even a moose -- no opposable thumbs to tie an apron or roll out the dough.

GRANT

Not to mention fitting a chef's hat over the antlers.

SANGER

I've written things, too -- articles about sex entitled "What Every Mother Should Know" and "What Every Girl Should Know" -- for the New York Call.

GRANT

Socialist publication -- just an observation, not a [judgment] --

SANGER

I'd use "common-sensical" and "rational" for my adjectives -- but we have different gloves covering our hands, don't we, so --

GRANT

What is it that they should know -- your audience?

SANGER

Is there a Missus --

GRANT

Grant -- no.

SANGER

Is there a girlfriend Grant?

GRANT

Is there a Mister Sanger?

SANGER

There's one around but in name only these days.

GRANT

No girlfriend Grant, then, in name or body.

SANGER

So how could I begin to tell you what the women should know when you don't know any women? Your mother, I presume, but still.

GRANT

Presumably what a mother should know is what a father should know as well -- my sex doesn't disable my ears or brain.

SANGER

Hmm.

GRANT

Or are fathers an obstacle for you?

SANGER doesn't answer, muses.

GRANT

Do you have children?

SANGER

Do you?

GRANT

Even without a Mrs. Grant around I suppose I could -- but I don't.

SANGER

That you know of.

GRANT

Some things I know with a high degree of certainty.

SANGER

With a high degree of certainty I have two -- sons -- Stuart and Grant. A daughter -- Peggy.

GRANT

And a husband that's around in name only -- Sanger, right?

SANGER

Sanger -- my -- evanescent husband. Change of topic. Did you wander through the playground?

GRANT

I did.

SANGER

Do you know that when they opened this place ten years ago, the kids jumped over the fence to get in? Two hundred coppers couldn't stop the tidal wave -- eager, hungry to get out of their filthy apartments and --

GRANT

I know the people who designed this park --

SANGER

Ah -- in those circles.

GRANT

I knew Mayor Low, I know Mayor Mitchel.

SANGER

Circles within circles --

GRANT

I don't disagree that this is a good thing for the lower classes -- good for them to have a way to control their behavior, exercise their judgment.

SANGER picks up her coffee and cookies and moves to GRANT's table.

SANGER

Have you been to the library?

GRANT

Yes.

SANGER

Did you see the line of kids waiting to get into the children's reading room?

GRANT

I counted at least sixty.

SANGER

And that's at the low end on a slow day. The reading area -- on top of the building?

GRANT

Like an Italian terrazzo.

SANGER

That is the kind of zoo worth having. It should even be a bigger zoo, in my eyes. But I suspect -- not your kind of zoo.

GRANT

Were your articles shocking? Not much that's shocking about a caribou, but I imagine --

SANGER

Some cancelled their subscriptions.

GRANT

Protesting what?

SANGER

It's dangerous to talk about sex in this country.

GRANT

Yet --

GRANT points out towards the playground.

GRANT

It's all some people can think about doing -- thus we build playgrounds among the slums, and keeping building the buildings that then become the slums.

SANGER

You got a fear about that?

GRANT

Yes, I "got" a fear about that -- about the breeding -- yes, of course. What civilized person wouldn't?

SANGER

Breeding -- very Charles Darwin that word.

GRANT

I confess to its use. We are a Darwin creature, after all. A thinking animal, an animal with doubts -- animal, like it or not.

SANGER

We're all on a monkey honeymoon, eh?

SANGER makes a funny rendition of a monkey, then leans back in her chair, munches on a cookie.

SANGER

I work at Henry Street Settlement on, of course, Henry Street. As a nurse.

GRANT

"You do good work around here" I've heard tell --

SANGER

Something I can do well enough.

GRANT

Though it must be like shoveling sand against the incoming tide.

SANGER

What I tell my mothers -- in print and by voice -- is to make sure, first, that they aren't ignorant about sex, and then, second, to make sure their children aren't ignorant about sex.

GRANT

Your articles.

SANGER

That is a lot of sand to shovel.

GRANT

The puritan mind comes in all sizes.

SANGER

But you want to talk about really shoveling sand, try to deal with the unwanted pregnancies and the home-made abortions -- that's my biggest worry. Blood-soaked sheets, infections, death.

GRANT

So you want them to be safe --

SANGER

Of course.

GRANT

To have children they want --

SANGER

Of course!

GRANT

Or even not to have children if they want, I would imagine.

SANGER

Their bodies, their choices -- morally, medically --

GRANT

So, to conclude, it would be better to have in the world only those children that should be in the world. I agree.

SANGER

Why -- why does that sound like you're agreeing with something I didn't say?

GRANT

The only thing I would add to what you say is that, to me at least, the people you care for at Henry Street Settlement are not the people to be having the children that are being had.

SANGER makes the monkey sound again, though this time with contempt.

SANGER

Like breeding in the monkey house, right?

GRANT

Well, yes -- up in the Bronx we do control how and when all the animals mate -- keeps the stock strong.

SANGER

You work at the zoo?

GRANT

I'm one of the founders, so I guess I work there -- as secretary of the New York Zoological Society.

SANGER

I get it now, the caribou, the moose --

GRANT

It's what I do, what I study.

SANGER

Now it's the American herd.

GRANT

I'd take your idea of contraception one step further, Mrs. Sanger, avoid the whole thing about their choice altogether -- what matters is what keeps the race strong. Besides, who knows what people here really want, especially when life's pressures down here are so great? Relieve them of choice and make their hard lives better.

SANGER gets up and moves around. Unknown to either of them, WALTER appears in the doorway.

SOUND: The children's voices ring out.

SANGER

I've seen many dead women who shouldn't be dead -- or who are scarred inside, crippled in their parts.

GRANT

Because of this imperative to breed. The intersection of caribou and man, yes? So why not apply our intelligence and make it better for the women you want to protect?

SANGER

What do you think of Walter? Our waiter.

GRANT

He seems nice enough.

SANGER takes a chair and sits in it backwards, like a man would.

SANGER

I saved his wife. From a self-induced abortion. Eighth child, with four living. And he stood by me while I ministered what I could -- not the usual male-of-the-species thing where he blamed her for what the two of them had done. No more children if this is what it does, he said to me.

WALTER

She's more kind than she should be.

SANGER

Walter! I'm --

WALTER

I was being a beast, and not a good beast. Breeding.

GRANT

You said only four living -- what happened --

SANGER

Being birthed in this dirt is not a good roll of the dice for kids.

GRANT

Or there is another explanation.

SANGER

Your Bronx solution?

GRANT

The weakest of the herd should be -- well, how else to say it? We are a Darwin animal -- even as you --

SANGER

That's barbaric --

WALTER

They were weak.

SANGER

Don't listen to him!

WALTER

You know what kind of weak the living ones are -- you're a nurse -- you see --

SANGER

Walter --

WALTER

I was coming to say I'll be taking your mugs. I have to go finish up.

WALTER leaves.

SANGER

Walter! What are you trying to --

GRANT

What goes for a herd of moose goes for the herd of human beings -- the imperatives are the same, to breed the best, the strongest --

SANGER

That's your research?

GRANT

I'm planning a book.

SANGER

So this place is another zoo to you?

GRANT

As it is to you.

SANGER

But I mean "zoo" as a place of chaos --

GRANT

If you allow an animal to outbreed its resources, then that's what you [get] --

SANGER

I mean because of how this country chooses to arrange resources -- who gets what and who gets left out.

GRANT

But I mean "zoo" as a place where the future of the race gets decided --

SANGER

The "race" --

GRANT

You'd deny the human races?

SANGER

No -- no one does -- but --

GRANT

Then it's a question of do the best survive, or do we become overrun by those who should not be protected from what nature needs to do? Your children or Walter's children, to bring it down to cases? I mean, he is Polish, from the Slavic branch of the race -- far down from the Nordic --

But something in SANGER's face stops GRANT. It is late afternoon now. WALTER comes back, collects the mugs and plates.

WALTER

I have to close up -- supper, I have to get the supper --

SANGER goes to help WALTER, but he gently indicates "no" and does the gathering himself.

WALTER

My children love this park. It gives them healthy lungs. And I will take them home and cook for them.

GRANT

Your wife --

WALTER

In Calvary Cemetery.

GRANT

Catholic.

SANGER

I couldn't stop the infection. Maybe her death certificate should read "stock comma space inferior."

WALTER says nothing, takes the dishes. GRANT says nothing. SANGER says nothing. GRANT shuts his journal, puts away his pen.

SANGER

When is this book coming out?

GRANT

It will be a while yet. But I will get it published -- that won't be a problem.

SANGER

And then the zoos will begin.

GRANT

You spoke about "chaos." Wouldn't your work be more -- effective if those who shouldn't breed didn't breed?

SANGER

But it can't be legislated.

GRANT

But it can. And it should. And it will.

WALTER comes back, coat and hat on, keys in hand. SANGER gathers up her stuff. WALTER walks up to GRANT.

WALTER

He's right, you know, Mrs. Sanger. It comes out of our bones.

SANGER

You didn't slog yourself from Lodz to America to --

WALTER

I have to go -- sorry --

They move to a different part of the stage --

SOUND: Bell on the closing door.

They are now outside.

SOUND: Children's voices abound.

WALTER touches the brim of his hat, leaves. SANGER and GRANT stand there, not sure what to do. GRANT pulls out butterleather gloves and puts them on.

GRANT

On my father's side is Richard Treat -- came to New England as one of the first Puritan settlers. They -- hoped that here -- well, that they'd find perfection -- the perfection of themselves. Themselves made better -- and better through time. I see my work as their work -- I'd like to think it might be the common work we do, our national work.

SANGER

What did you find for your research today?

GRANT

What did you find in yours?

SANGER

That you are a dangerous man.

GRANT

And I'll say, What are your birth control efforts but what I want, just in a different form? I'm not dangerous -- what's dangerous is doing nothing, or worse, letting people think they are something they aren't. This place is a zoo, it's a wonderful zoo, a great experiment in many ways -- your Walter, for instance -- but it shouldn't be allowed to be the future of the country.

SANGER

So I guess you'd count this a great day.

GRANT

Productive.

SANGER

I have my own herd to get home to.

GRANT

Would you like me to escort --

SANGER

I'll make it through the wilds, thanks.

GRANT

I don't even know your first name.

SANGER

Margaret.

GRANT

Mine is Madison.

He offers his hand, and she shakes it. He leaves.

SANGER

You bastard, Madison Grant. You are not going to win.

SOUND: Fading down of the children's voices.

As the voices fade, light fades to blackout.

In the darkness, an audio clip from Bill O'Reilly after the recent election. (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uqy5CBWjKw>)

VOICEOVER

"The demographics are changing. It's not a traditional America anymore. -- Hispanic -- black -- women -- The white establishment is now the minority -- minority -- minority -- minority --"

The word reverberates until it dies away.

Pamplona

DESCRIPTION

It's the running of the bulls in Pamplona -- and several of the bulls have existential questions about why they run.

CHARACTERS

A crowd of eight people wearing horns (cited simply as A through H) -- gender is unimportant for the roles (even if they are bulls), as is race, creed, color, nutritional preferences, etc.

- A the bold one
- B the traditionalist
- C the capitalist
- D the existentialist
- E the socialist
- F the foreigner (any choice of accent)
- G the poet
- H the philosopher

SETTING

- The streets of Pamplona, Spain

TIME

- The running of the bulls

MISCELLANEOUS

- Eight chairs -- matched if desired, but they could also be selected to reflect the personality of each character.
- Eight handkerchiefs.
- Eight pairs of horns -- they do not need to be matched, they can be made out of any materials, and they do not even need to be bulls' horns (i.e., they could be reindeer antlers).

* * * * *

As the lights come up we hear an excited crowd and running feet. In the background someone plays a trumpet fanfare, as heard by someone who has never seen a bullfight but imagines it begins with just such a fanfare: gooey Tijuana Brass-style. The actors all come on in formation as if they have just taken a corner and stand in some formation; while standing there, in place, they start softly with a rhythmic tramp, gradually getting louder and more forceful until they break ranks and sit in the chairs, which can be arranged as the director feels. They are all wearing horns of one sort or another. The director should feel free to move them about as he or she sees fit.

A

Scope out all this meat on the hoof.

B

All snot-nosed petit bourgeoisie with more time
than brains --

C

But with gobs of dispensable cash.

A

Such adorable gore-able flesh!

B

Money is all that ever moves your -- vowels.

C

Only selfish I-already-got-mine money -- like yours
-- would say that.

B

I remember when --

A

Shit, just missed him!

E

Flicked his shirt-tail.

B

A bloody groin hook to sate the media's blood lust
--

E

No, nicked his glutes!

B

-- and we can trail off with some dignity.

F

From where from I come --

C

Our foreign "guest" breaks wind --

H

Let him speak.

C

Oh, yes, great hornéd-one! [pronounced with two syllables: "horn-ed"]

F

Where from I come, the people are, are, are adjudicating -- does that word make -- ?

G

Addle-pating?

A

Ho, down he goes, going for him --

D

(to F)

What? What?

A

Damn, booiinnnggg! up like a rabbit on crystal meth!

H

Advocating.

F

Advocating -- for not having the bulls to run anymore.

B

This modern world --

C

Zeus' toe jam, people need blood sport -- we need this --

G

Not all.

C

Oh, moon-pie, cow-eye, with your iambic and sensitive soul: "Let the stars brand me / Not the cruel radiant iron -- " Such a heifer.

G

Someone's got to protect the finer points --

B
Exactly!

E
Bulls could learn from cows --

B
What's the point if it all --

E
-- cows mooove together to produce wealth --

A
Cows for me because I like to stud.

E
-- they work in a common effort --

A
Oh, better red meat than dead meat, huh?

E
He said balefully --

B
What's the point if beauty is lost to, to --

A tries to goose E.

E
Hey!

B
(to A)
Stop that!

(to C)
-- lost to your all-precious "consumer" or --
(to A)
-- filthy license --

E
Beauty's in the herd of the beholder --

B
(to E)
For Minotaur's sake, stop that -- the herd instinct
kills beauty --

F
Much to be said in flavor --

A
(laughing)
In flavor!

F
-- of the bondage --

G
Bonding.
(to A)
Don't laugh at him!
(to F)
I like "flavor."

B
My point: The beauty of the run, its purity, its grace, has been sacrificed on the altar of these adrenaline junkies with their "dispensable" cash.

H
Without them --

C
Hornéd one, the big Cornute --

G
Some respect, ring-nose.

B
(to H)
We don't need them! Rely on the traditions!

A
Hey, less gas-bagging! We're slowing down!

F
So, if bulls from where I come from do not no longer run --

A
They're getting away!

B
They lose their soul.

H
No -- move beyond the soul.

B
Beyond the old ways? Ha! That way lies the
slaughterhouse.

D
You can't move "beyond." You just get moved
around. And it's still the slaughterhouse.

A
Got one!

A. wipes off one horn with a handkerchief.

A
Knocked in the back of the knee --

C
The popliteal --

D
Endless tortured circling.

A
I can't believe it -- taking pictures of him!

B
Philistines. Arrivistes.

D
Why do we run?

A
Stupid question!

D
Why do we run?

A
We just run -- it's loaded in our balls. It's fun.
You look so sour!

D
Hedonism.

A

Swedenism -- whatever.

H

Are you just bored or really interested in the question?

D

What's the difference?

B

The bulls in my family have always run.

G

"One great line, an endless line, a line of blood unreeling -- "

B

Our line has great length --

A

Prick-length is the only length --

B

-- Minoan bull-jumpers used us --

C

Hup! The superior vowels!

B

There is good stock and --
(looking at F)
-- and -- other stock --

C

Bullshit!

B

-- no matter what you believe.

C

Bullshit! Only bulls and bears --

E

Argh! Capitalist dialectic -- prepare hip-boots and shovels!

C
I run for opportunity! All at the same starting
line, and then the best bull wins --

D
Wins what?

C
-- start out equal and then those that got --

G
Wins what?

C
-- get to get more. Law of nature.

E
Wins what?

C
Whatever -- it's open-ended.
(to D)
There's only one "why." To get more.

D
Ever have enough?

C
Not in my lingo.

E
That's the problem.

F
Colonialism.

E
And exploitation --

A
Hey, the crowd's starting to boo!

E
-- of the mean streets of production --

A

We're gonna get bounced from this gig if we don't crack it! We're gonna end up as carne asada if we don't get a hoof on. Will you all just shut trap for a snort and gore somebody?

They all, in a synchronized stylized motion, gore somebody. In an equally stylized way, they pull out handkerchiefs, wipe off their right horns, and put them back.

A

Ex-cel-lent! Eight down, none serious. If that ain't a rush in --

B

-- in the balls, yes.

A

Yeah!

B

How nicely put --

E

(to B, indicating A)

Your social relations decreed by economic relations --

B

It's bloodlines, not bank accounts, thank Angus!

E

(to all)

I run to free us from the domination of the farmers who raise us --

C

(to B)

Of course it's money, you blowhard Brahma!

E

Every year we get trotted out --

A

C'mon!

F

And the way the farmers, they take from everywhere,
breaking up families --

D

The boo-hoo banality of evil.

F

(to D)

Only if you've never been to have to wear the yoke
of someone who just sees you as meat and muscle --

A

(to B)

Hey bro!

H

(to D)

You know evil is never banal.

G

(to F)

You have a gift, my friend.

A

Come on!

F

Ripped from the ground native like a root --

A

A "crowder" for the finale?

F

Crowder?

E

Slam into the crowd --

B

Bully for you. Not for me.

D

Bush league.

C

It'll "move" the spectators.

H

No "crowder."

A

No cr -- Why don't you just die now?

They take off their horns.

B

Well, another year for posterity.

A

We didn't horn-row anyone, man.

C

Bigger crowd this year -- shopowners won big.

E

And we'll get none of it.

F

I am far from a home.

G

And all for what?

C

Hey, make another boring poem out of it.

D

And all for what? Look at us. Why, why, why year after year? Absurd ritual -- driven by blood or money or sex or slavery, it's absurd. Just as ignorant at the end as at the starting gun.

H

Perhaps it's just the run itself.

D

(point to A)

This -- wants to plant his horn and his dick anywhere he can. Absurd.

(to B)

This aches for royalty, blood thicker than brain. Absurd.

(to C)

Cash register for a heart. Absurd.

(to E)

Revolution drivell -- which is just about letting
the oppressed be oppressors for a while. Absurd.

(to B, indicating F)

Your worst nightmare -- the campesino in your
closet. Absurd.

G

And me?

D

I love your poems, your courage for something so
useless --

G

I pride myself --

D

-- but they're piss in the ocean, tears in a salt
mine. Glorious absurd, but still --

A

And you?

B

You seem to have all of us pegged.

D

My absurdity? My absurdity is that after
everything I just said, I still want to know why.
Now how absurd is that?

H

You must feel --

D

Yeah, yeah, yeah, abysmally alone, so don't even
try to imagine.

B

I can imagine -- detached --

D

Which, by the way, also feels incredibly free.
Unloaded!

B
That I can't imagine.

G
I can.

D
So, no pity.

B
(to himself)
Not being supported by --

A
No pity from us, you wanna live like that. But
you got no right --

H
And I?

A
Yeah, how about him?

D
Who knows, oh great Cornute? Perhaps it is just
the run itself -- but doubt it.

H
Why? Simply because you want something more,
there should be something more for you?

B
Who really knows what the end is at the beginning?

H
(to B)
Perhaps the problem is in even asking "why" --
why ask?

C
In a world of flesh and fangs, money is an armor.
(pause)
But sometimes -- sometimes that makes me feel as
alone as --

E

Not money for armor but the common good. Only
flesh can protect flesh from the abyss.

F

And no borders anymore -- none foreign anymore.

D

Without "why," so we run -- ?

H

So we can have conversations like this. Don't
you notice? Don't you see how we're all paying
attention? For the first time to each other?

A

You make a weird kind of sense.

C

Let's go back to the barn -- Let's go back to the
barn, bulk up some feed and water, and talk some
more about our "bullness." I'm kinda liking this.

F

Agreed.

A

In the aye-yi-yigh affirmative.

B

It would shorten the night.

F

I would feel to home at the moment.

E

Then "to home" let's go.

G

Home is --

C

-- where your horns fit.

A

(singing)

"Show me the way to go home / I'm tired and I
wanna go to bed" --

They exit, except for D and H.

D

Them?

H

Them.

D

They?

H

They.

D

They are the "why"?

H

They are why you don't need to ask "why."

D

The inmates?

H

Nice word, that, "in-mates." I don't know about
ultimate grounds of being. Just intimate grounds
of being. I-N - parenthesis - T-I - close
parenthesis - M-A-T-E. Get it?

D

The horns of the dilemma -- if you have no idea
what the question is -- no idea what a proper
answer would be.

H

I think it might be good to chuck away such
questions, grab some feed and water, and talk
about our "bullness."

D

And the night will pass.

H

By the grace of the imperfect.

D

In the company of our in-mates, our in-ti-mates.
It'll all continue to make no sense, you know.

H

But it'll make no sense in the best of company --

D

And that's all we have?

H

We have what we need.

D

Yeah?

H

Yeah.

D looks at H, then the audience.

D

Them?

H

All we need.

D

Well, here, by their lights, then, is the meaning
of the run.

(imitating Groucho Marx's dance)

With a hey nonny nonny --

BOTH

-- and a ha, cha, cha! Yeah!

BLACKOUT

Ripped From The Headlines

DESCRIPTION

Homophobia may be bred of fear and bigotry, but that does not excuse the violence it uses to exercise its terror. On the surface, this play is a meditation upon the death of Matthew Shepard, but it is also a meditation on the poison of intolerance and the loving rage that must confront it.

CHARACTERS

- Wretched Fag, must be male, 20s
- The President, *male, 50ish*
- *The Senator, female, mid-40s*
- *The Supreme Court Judge, male, white, mid-60s*
- *The Minister, male, African-American, mid-40s*
- *The Wyoming Man & Woman, mid-30s*
- The T.V. Producer, female, mid-30s, lesbian

SETTING

- A fence
- A theatre

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Weathered fencing, large and strong enough to hold the weight of a body.
- A crown of thorns made of barbed wire.
- Sign with "Wretched Fag" on it, to hung around the neck of the WRETCHED FAG.
- Each character has a trademark item

-- Ribbons for the PRESIDENT.

-- Two eye patches for the SENATOR, one over each eye.

-- A judicial robe cut into tatters and a broken gavel for the JUDGE.

-- The MINISTER is in white face, but only the front -- no make-up below the jawline.

-- WYOMING MAN & WOMAN have a length of chain around their necks, connecting them

-- The PRODUCER wears a black half-mask (like Zorro) and a set of studio headphones with a microphone (one-ear, not two-ear).

- Bible for the MINISTER
- Beer bottle for WYOMING WOMAN; pool cue for WYOMING MAN
- Various other props as mentioned
- Other sounds are up to the discretion of the director.

* * * * *

Light comes up extreme downstage on the WRETCHED FAG. Music to match the scene. The WRETCHED FAG hangs on the fence wearing a leather coat and no shirt or pants. His underwear, boxers, is pulled down to his ankles, and he is shoeless. His body, from his face to his feet, is smeared with blood and dirt. He has a crown of barbed wire pushed on to his head. It is a picture straight out of a crucifixion Christ scene. Around his neck hangs a sign: "Wretched Fag."

Behind the WRETCHED FAG appears the PRESIDENT, his lapels festooned with ribbons of all colors in the shape of the prototypical AIDS red ribbon. These should be large and foolish-looking. The other characters will be scattered around the stage in various locations, up to the director, but they should be no more than three or four steps away from the WRETCHED FAG. Each stands in a separated pool of light. If possible, it would good if they also stood inside something like a hula hoop or even a chalk circle drawn on the floor.

PRESIDENT

I hope that in the grief of this moment for his family and in the shared outrage across America, we will once again search our hearts and do what we can to reduce our own fear and anxiety and anger at people who are different.

Sound to indicate the start of a race: starter's pistol, part of the fanfare from the Kentucky Derby, "Gentlemen, start your engines," movie "clapper," etc.

SENATOR

Now, it may not be --
(air quotes)
-- "PC" to say this --

JUDGE

The Court today refuses to review --

SENATOR

-- but it's a known fact --

JUDGE

-- the discrimination case from the Court of Appeals --

SENATOR

-- known to all my Senate colleagues --

JUDGE

Municipalities will be allowed --

Beat. ALL look at him.

JUDGE

Municipalities will be allowed to ban laws passed to protect gay people from discrimination.

Beat.

SENATOR

Known to all Christian one-hundred-percenters: --

JUDGE

In other words --

MINISTER

-- they can burn!

SENATOR

-- being a "fag," a "homo," is a sin.

SENATOR & MINISTER

Kill them all!

Beat.

PRESIDENT

I instituted "don't ask, don't tell" --

MINISTER

I don't hate the sin --

PRESIDENT

-- because it was the safest alternative --

MINISTER

I hate the sinner!

PRODUCER

Why not take out a full-page ad --

PRESIDENT

-- the safest alternative to demanding full equality --

PRODUCER

-- "Wanted: Fag Killers -- Full Employment."

JUDGE & PRESIDENT

-- safest alternative for me, that is.

JUDGE

The Court, of course, has provided relief --

WYOMING MAN

The fag-bashing starts later.

JUDGE

-- for "othered" peoples --

WYOMING WOMAN

He shouldn't have been in here.

JUDGE

-- but "special preferences" --

WYOMING MAN

Only real American beef around here.

JUDGE

-- should not be given to marginal citizens.

Beat.

PRODUCER

Difficult, fighting from inside the networks --

MINISTER

They sashay across our televisions --

PRODUCER

-- to get gay characters accepted --

SENATOR

That filth from Hollywood --

PRODUCER

-- to stop jokes about "burning faggots" --

SENATOR

-- arguing they're normal --

PRODUCER

-- you know, the bunch of sticks --

WYOMING MAN

"Normal" is me doing it to her.

MINISTER

No Adam and Steve --

PRESIDENT

I have gays in my administration --

MINISTER

-- it was Adam and Eve --

PRODUCER

Of course, I haven't come out myself, yet --

SENATOR

Others have sex addiction or are kleptomaniacs --

PRODUCER

-- I don't have a script for that.

SENATOR

-- all sorts of things wrong with people --

WYOMING WOMAN

And me with him. That's normal.

MINISTER

I would argue --

SENATOR

-- but they've got be set straight!

MINISTER

-- that this "queer nation" --

PRODUCER

Oh, you learn to be straight --

MINISTER

-- is not really human -- do I hear an "Amen"?

ALL

(except for the PRODUCER)

Amen!

PRODUCER

-- which is, of course, not straight at all --

SENATOR

Make straight the way.

PRODUCER

-- because you can't be straight-forward --

MINISTER

-- not humans at all -- Amen!

ALL

(except PRODUCER)

Amen!

Beat.

PRESIDENT

All right, perhaps I should have made the military
toe the line --

MINISTER

Sinners beyond saving --

WYOMING MAN

We don't care that they beat him.

WYOMING WOMAN

Said he looked like a scarecrow.

MAN & WOMAN

(laughing)

"If I only had a brain" --

Beat.

SENATOR

Bible's very clear on this.

JUDGE

Upholding the laws against sodomy --

WYOMING MAN
(overlapping)

They should've set him --

WYOMING WOMAN

-- set him on fire!

JUDGE

-- and the rush to deny them marriage --

PRODUCER

Homos are, still, exotic blossoms --

JUDGE

-- do create a hostile mood --

PRESIDENT

-- but good order and discipline --

JUDGE

-- good order and discipline is important --

PRODUCER

-- the golden-hearted flaming queen --

PRESIDENT

(shrugs)

So what could I do?

JUDGE

So what could we do?

PRESIDENT

Though compared to him --

(pointing to the SENATOR)

-- I look pretty humane.

Beat.

MINISTER & SENATOR

When they choose their degraded lifestyle --

MINISTER

-- and it is a choice --

PRODUCER

They think it's a choice --

SENATOR

My colleague, the honorable Senator Fag from --
oh, I'm sorry --

WYOMING MAN

You can't respect a lower life form.

PRODUCER

But never a word about their flaming heterosexuality.

WYOMING WOMAN

At least if you kill a deer, you can eat it.

MINISTER

They deserve AIDS.

PRODUCER

Irony shatters against a stony heart.

MINISTER

And so we must make our choice --

JUDGE

It's ultimately up to the people.

SENATOR

Their end is what I mean.

MINISTER

And if they soil the flock --

PRESIDENT

I used what means I had.

MINISTER

-- they should be eliminated by any means
necessary.

MAN & WOMAN

By any means at hand.

PRODUCER

It's hard to match means and ends --

JUDGE

Such imperfect means --

PRODUCER

-- when they mean your end.

JUDGE

-- to reach imperfect ends.

WYOMING MAN

(directly to the audience)

He shouldn't haven't been what he was or where he was. So why don't you all just fuck off? We did what we learned to do.

There is ten full seconds of silence: no one speaks or moves. At the end of that time there is a blinding flash of light and anything else the director wants to use to startle the audience. The WRETCHED FAG awakens. The rope drops from him; he pulls up his underwear and takes off his sign and hangs it on the fence. The next sequence of events will work this way:

- The FAG will walk to each person and speak.
- After he speaks, he slaps the person: not hard, but to affirm the connection between pain and awakening.
- The person will then blurt out a phrase, looking startled and abashed.
- The FAG will then throw/push/lead them toward the fence. If they hold props, they will be placed on the stage near their position.
- They should move in a stylized manner, and beginning at the fence, they will form a chain that will put them into the audience but keep them connected to the fence. The chain should have a stylized look to it as well, with the actors assuming body shapes and positions. It should look as if the people have taken the place of the FAG and in some way express the lines they have said.

The order in which the FAG talks to the others can be varied, depending on where people are placed by the director on stage.

FAG

(to the SENATOR)

I am your son.

SENATOR

We hold these truths to be self-evident --

FAG

(to the JUDGE)

I am your daughter.

JUDGE

The inherent dignity of the human family --

FAG

To the MINISTER. As he speaks, the FAG smears the whiteface.

I am your brother and sister.

MINISTER

All men are created equal --

FAG

(to the WYOMING MAN)

I am your father.

WYOMING MAN

A world in which human beings --

FAG

(to the WYOMING WOMAN)

I am your mother.

WYOMING WOMAN

Shall enjoy freedom from fear --

FAG

(to the PRESIDENT)

I am the stranger you should protect.

PRESIDENT

Certain unalienable rights --

FAG

(to the PRODUCER)

I am the stranger that could be you.

PRODUCER

Act in a spirit of brotherhood.

At this point, all the actors have made their "chain." The FAG turns to the audience.

FAG

It is so easy to forget. And if we forget, what is there left but to burn with shame?

The FAG steps to the audience and, randomly selecting a person, links that person to the chain made by the actors. He then links the audience member to another audience member, and that second audience member to a third audience member. He then indicates for everyone to do it. As he says the next lines, the FAG should pause to let the audience repeat each line and, if necessary, he should continue to urge people to link hands so that the lines and the linking of hands all happen at the same time. As the audience finishes the line, the actors will say, in unison, the lines they said earlier. Thus, the sequence should be:

- FAG says line.
- Audience repeats it.
- Actors say their lines.

FAG

Repeat after me: I am your son.

AUDIENCE

I am your son.

ACTORS

We hold these truths to be self-evident --

FAG

I am your daughter.

AUDIENCE

I am your daughter.

ACTORS

The inherent dignity of the human family --

FAG

I am your brother and sister.

AUDIENCE

I am your brother and sister.

ACTORS

All men are created equal --

FAG

I am your father and mother.

AUDIENCE

I am your father and mother.

ACTORS

Shall enjoy freedom from fear --

FAG

I am the stranger you should protect.

AUDIENCE

I am the stranger you should protect.

ACTORS

Certain unalienable rights --

FAG

I am the stranger that could be you.

AUDIENCE

I am the stranger that could be you.

ACTORS

Act in a spirit of brotherhood.

The actors remain silent. On these next lines, the FAG should move close to the stage.

FAG

Repeat after me: It is so easy to forget.

(audience speaks)

And if we forget --

(audience speaks)

-- what is there left --

(audience speaks)

-- but to burn in shame?

The FAG holds up his hands as if to indicate he wants to speak alone.

FAG

Silence will not have the last word.

A blinding flash of light and whatever the director wants to use to startle the audience. The actors break their chain and

quickly return to their circles and former attitudes, and the FAG to the fence, taking up his former position, though without the sign. Lights bump out, first on the actors, and then the FAG. This should be done very quickly so that the audience finds itself in the dark holding hands before they realize fully what has happened.

Rooted

DESCRIPTION

Can death rid us of our bigotries? Can the final demise reform our hearts? This is the question at the core of this play. When ADDISON O'Riley, "American by way of the potato famine," buys a cemetery plot for himself, he does not know that it sits next to MINVERA O'Riley's, the black groundskeeper for the cemetery. She is not taken with the idea of spending eternity as his neighbor, though he tries his best to convince her that she could do worse.

CHARACTERS

- MINVERA O'RILEY, female, African-American, head groundskeeper for the Sunset Ridge Cemetery Association, late-40s/early-50s; speaks with a soft drawl
- ADDISON O'RILEY, male, white, mid-40s/early 50s; speaks precisely but not too fussily and with a very lightly Irish-accented voice

NOTE: The two characters are not related.

SETTING: A cemetery plot at the Sunset Ridge Cemetery Association

TIME: Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Lawn chair, large umbrella, and book for ADDISON. He also wears a wedding ring.
- Overalls with sewn patch on the left breast, work boots, etc. for MINVERA
- Sound effect of distant thunder and rain

* * * * *

ADDISON sits in a lawn chair, a furled umbrella next to him, reading. He takes a deep, satisfied breath. MINVERA enters.

MINVERA

Hey.

ADDISON

What? Oh, hello --

MINVERA

You can't --

ADDISON

I'm sorry --

MINVERA

You can't be sitting there.

ADDISON

I was told I could.

MINVERA

Down at the office?

ADDISON

Yes.

MINVERA

The pencil-necks down there don't know the schedules up here, so they get a bit confused. I have to bring the backhoe through.

ADDISON

Through here?

MINVERA

Yes.

ADDISON

To dig --

MINVERA

Right. Swing low, sweet chariot, and all that. So you have to move.

ADDISON

Right across these graves?

MINVERA

Yes. Right across here. So you have to move.

ADDISON

That doesn't sound right.

MINVERA

Right or not, this is where it has to go. A regular Highway to Heaven through here. And the bereft are expecting a hole when they get there, so, you have to move.

ADDISON

I don't see any tracks. On the grass.

MINVERA

Very springy grass.

ADDISON

It must be.

MINVERA

You know the plots're better down by the pines --

ADDISON

I don't hear it.

MINVERA

What?

ADDISON

The backhoe.

MINVERA

Not yet. But it's coming. It's scheduled.

ADDISON

I'll move when it comes, then.

MINVERA

You need to move now.

ADDISON

What is the big hurry?

MINVERA

Are you the groundskeeper here?

ADDISON

No.

MINVERA

(indicating the patch on her overalls)

What does this say?

ADDISON

Minerva O'Riley, Head Groundskeeper.

MINVERA

I know what they don't know down there --

ADDISON

O'Riley.

MINVERA

-- and I know what you don't know, and I need to bring the backhoe through here. Now.

ADDISON chuckles.

MINVERA

What?

ADDISON

How strange the ways of the universe.

MINVERA

Meaning what?

ADDISON

You and I have the same last name.

MINVERA

You can't -- mean that.

ADDISON

Addison O'Riley. American by way of the potato famine.

MINVERA

(Irish accent)

Faith and begorah, and Erin go bragh. Now --

ADDISON

You don't look native to the Emerald Isle.

MINVERA

I'm Alabama by way of Kansas City and Chicago. I don't drink green beer, and I've never been Irish on any day of the year. Now --

ADDISON

So, I take it you won't be coming to the O'Riley reunion this year?

MINVERA

You have to move.

ADDISON

Not until I hear the backhoe. Until then, I think I'll just take in my view.

MINERVA

So you already bought --

ADDISON

I just signed, half an hour ago. The beginning, middle, and end of the plot. Which is funny -- the word "plot" --

MINVERA

Buried here? How strange the ways of the goddamn [universe] -- you know who your next door neighbor is going to be? I just paid off the last installment this month.

ADDISON

Huh.

MINVERA

Hear him say "huh."

ADDISON

It's just that -- well, it's not every day one meets the person they'll be spending eternity with. By the way -- I don't hear the backhoe.

MINVERA

There's no backhoe.

ADDISON

Ah.

A moment of silence.

MINVERA

Your wife --

MINVERA points to her left ring finger.

MINVERA

-- why isn't your wife up here with you?

ADDISON

She's already taken her turn.

MINVERA
(sotto voce)

Shit --

ADDISON

Her "plot" is a metal urn over the fireplace. I'll take her with me when I do the "six-foot" shuffle.

MINVERA

You won't take the fire?

ADDISON

She hated the thought of wasting away -- which was funny, given what -- Well, anyway, she wanted to go with a whoosh. The slow melt back into what I am made out of -- doesn't bother me. "The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out -- "

MINVERA

So, it'll be the three of us.

ADDISON

My only ménage. Sorry. This is her journal. Written over her last year.

MINVERA

How'd she die?

ADDISON

Page by page.

MINVERA

And this place?

ADDISON

We used to picnic right here, early on, sunsets and jug wine. Then came page 70. She wanted one last look. So, the old picnic basket with food I knew she couldn't eat, a jug neither of us would touch, and right here, here, a sunset that just paralyzed us. Don't think I had a choice.

MINVERA

Man --

ADDISON

What am I sensing here, with no backhoe coming?

MINVERA

Man!

ADDISON

What?

MINVERA

Do you know who your other neighbors are?

ADDISON

No.

MINVERA

Do you care to know?

ADDISON

I care about a lot of things.

MINVERA

(indicating the plots as she speaks)

They all worked here at the Sunset Ridge Cemetery Association and paid for this "benefit" out of their own pockets. Just like me. People like me. We're all the same here. The man who gave me a job and taught me -- what's his patch say?

ADDISON

Septimus Verdon.

MINVERA

Septimus -- because he was the seventh generation to make it through the darkness. His wife.

ADDISON

Leda.

MINVERA

Her branded slave name, Jefferson. These two --

ADDISON

Joseph -- Isaac -- Verdon

MINVERA

Brothers, died in the war together. Septimus and Leda's sons -- their only children, but they got no special fraternal dispensation, not for their kind. No, ordered off to fight in some "action."

ADDISON

Junius Lodge?

MINVERA

House nigger -- he was the Association's accountant and made it real clear to us that his collar was white. But he's up here, too. He's one of the family. So, your neighbors.

ADDISON

And you.

MINVERA

And me. Right here.

ADDISON

And Addison and Carmel O'Riley -- right here. Good company.

Muted thunder in the background throughout the rest of the scene.

ADDISON

So. Your name --

MINVERA

We had white birch among the black oak a long time back.

ADDISON

No, the Minverva.

MINVERA

My father. Look --

ADDISON

He read --

MINVERA

Self-taught -- believed Aristotle was black and western culture owed its ass to Africa. Look --

ADDISON

The goddess of wisdom.

MINVERA

Don't [use] --

ADDISON

I'm not going to give up the space.

MINVERA

No one asked you.

ADDISON

Not directly.

MINVERA

Because you'd expect decent people to know these things.

ADDISON

I have strong ties here, just like yours.

MINVERA

No, you don't. You don't have "ties" here.

ADDISON

How can you even judge?

MINVERA

We're not equivalent.

ADDISON

We have a competition?

MINVERA

What you have is a nostalgia. Like a fever, or a phantom limb. It'll pass.

ADDISON

That's not fair.

MINVERA

That's not what this place is for us. This is our final resting place.

ADDISON

We watched --

MINVERA

This is not about your homesickness. This is about our sanctuary.

ADDISON

Carmel and I watched the sunset with her body dying every inch it lived.

MINVERA

Please stop --

ADDISON

Nothing remains ordinary after a thing like that.

MINVERA

Please -- just -- stop --

ADDISON

Why?

MINVERA

One useful thing my father taught me -- always been very useful to me -- never put up with that kind of sentimentality.

Their eyes lock. ADDISON slips the journal into his pocket.

ADDISON

I think it's time to go.

MINVERA

Do you even know what I'm talking [about] --

ADDISON fumbles with the lawn chair.

ADDISON

It doesn't matter -- just --

MINVERA

Journal, wedding ring, urn hugged to your chest -- angels'll weep! -- leave that alone! -- greeting card companies'll knock down your door -- leave that --

ADDISON

Just stop!

MINVERA

I want to keep this as safe haven -- listen! -- as a safe place in a dark world that barely had any use for us after it used us up. I do want you gone, I do, I can't make you go, but I do want you gone, I'm sorry for your pain, as I am for any pain -- but not "brethren" on this. I've got to work.

ADDISON

Why like this?

ADDISON bangs his two fists together.

MINVERA

I don't have any hate for you.

ADDISON

No?

MINVERVA

I said I've got to go.

But MINVERA can't quite make herself go.

MINVERA

And that's another thing -- you would think it's about you, that I don't like you -- that's your frame. I have hate for many things spring-loaded in me but not for you because you don't mean anything. Right now you're an obstacle, an accident, a circumstance. Nothing personal. I'm going.

ADDISON

I don't want us to leave it like this.

MINVERA

What could you possibly say?

ADDISON

I can say this: that you're wrong.

MINVERA

You can say that all you want, but "you're wrong" is still wrong -- I know what I need.

ADDISON

Carmel -- in her journal -- there are no differences between us, really, not deep down.

MINVERA

One of your O'Rileys my O'Riley?

ADDISON

Listen -- if we go to the molecules, the DNA -- blood is red, no matter who bleeds it.

MINVERA

And skin color's just pigment?

ADDISON

Or out to the stars. We're all made of the stars -- all come from the same place. In the end --

MINVERA

In whose end?

ADDISON

We're the same stuff -- especially when you look at where we're standing right now --

MINVERA

And I should be saying "brother" to you --

ADDISON

Same stuff, Minerva O'Riley --

MINVERA

Don't use --

ADDISON

It's the same stuff.

MINVERA

Clearly you like believing that "stuff" -- comes with your privilege. I don't have, and I don't believe.

MINVERA bumps her two fists. Thunder and heavy rain. ADDISON opens his umbrella, gestures to MINVERA to join him. She hesitates, does.

MINVERA

You call this in?

ADDISON

It'll pass.

MINVERA

Storms do.

ADDISON

Look at how the rain spins in. You have enough of the umbrella?

MINVERA

You always carry such a tent with you?

ADDISON

Only when I get advance warnings from Noah.

MINVERA

My lucky day -- two by two. You'd like to think that death's got a smooth equality to it --

ADDISON

It does.

MINVERA

Democratic.

ADDISON

I do.

MINVERA steps out into the rain.

MINVERA

I don't. I'd like to, but I don't.

ADDISON

Come back --

MINVERA

Death does not change some things in life.

ADDISON

Come on back --

MINVERA

Care for the dead goes on, even in the rain.

ADDISON

Minerva --

MINVERA

Have you noticed that not once have I called you by your first name? Not once. There's a reason, why, if you'd only get around to thinking about it. The dead beckon. Gotta go.

ADDISON

You -- you deserve --

MINVERA

What?

ADDISON

Nothing.

MINVERA

What do I deserve?

ADDISON

Nothing -- forget [it] --

MINVERA

What? Say it. Say something. Say it -- last chance.

ADDISON says nothing.

MINVERA

Of course.

MINVERA leaves. Sound of rain.

ADDISON behaves as if he wants to crawl out of his own skin, as if he'd very much like to break something. He paces back and forth over the graves. Thunder. Rain. End.

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also look collaborates with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

**Block
&Tackle**
PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

