

Short Plays: Volume 3

Michael Bettencourt

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Seconds

DESCRIPTION

Sue, a fire fighter and EMT, comes upon a car accident and tries to save the young woman trapped in the car - though the young woman does not want to be saved. In fact, she drove herself off the road to end her own misery. Sue cannot let the woman die - but the decision is not all in her hands.

CHARACTERS

- Sue, a firefighter
- Hannah, young woman

NOTE: Ethnicity of the characters does not matter. SUE should speak with a soft drawl.

TIME

- Late in the evening.

PLACE

- Side of the road off a major highway

MISCELLANEOUS SOUNDS

- Car crash
- Night sounds: crickets, wind, etc.

NOTE: The characters remain mostly stationary throughout the play, so they should be put into relatively comfortable positions. However, because HANNAH is in a wrecked car, she should be placed in any position but completely upright. Regardless of the positions, they should be just far enough apart to touch fingertip to fingertip and with some strain to grasp each other's hand. No makeup need be used for HANNAH to indicate injuries.

* * * * *

In the darkness the audience hears the sound of a severe car crash, loud enough to be almost physically painful. A rotating light appears, as if a fire truck is on the scene. Lights come up to reveal HANNAH; the lights should indicate night and should be dim. SUE, dressed in regular fire fighter's garb and holding a large flashlight, enters crawling. Much of the lighting for the play will come from SUE's powerful flashlight. There are night sounds in the background; they underscore quietly throughout.

SUE

Anybody there? Can you hear me? Shit, what a mess. Careful. Careful. Hey, anybody there? I hope somebody is there.

There is a groan from HANNAH.

HANNAH

Go away.

SUE

Hey!

(shouts to someone offstage)

Live one!

(back to HANNAH)

Are you hurt? Where are you hurt? Talk to me.

HANNAH

Go away.

Points her flashlight and sees HANNAH; shouts again.

SUE

It's a woman. Looks bad. Get medical down here, quick.

(as if listening)

Okay. Okay. I'll do what I can.

(to herself)

That is not good. Not good at all. Can you hear me?

HANNAH

Go away.

SUE

Don't know if you heard that, but we got a crack team of medics, we just can't get 'em down here yet. You flipped, and the car is about ready to slide down the embankment to the river. We need to stabilize it before we can get you out. Tie it down like Gulliver. They're bringing in the equipment now. Does this make sense to you? Don't go away on me. I can see you.

HANNAH

Leave me.

SUE

Not in my job description. You in pain?

HANNAH

Doesn't. Matter.

SUE

See if you can touch my hand. Come on, see if you can.

HANNAH refuses to reach out.

SUE

Once we steady the car we can get the jaws of life down here and get you out.

HANNAH

Don't want. Out.

SUE

Course you do. Come on, touch my hand.

HANNAH again refuses to reach out. Several beats in silence.

SUE

Man, I wish they'd get down here. Are you still there?

HANNAH

For now.

SUE

What's your name?

HANNAH

Doesn't. Matter.

SUE

Come on, don't do this. Play along with me, please.

HANNAH

Hannah.

SUE

Thanks. Thanks. Mine's Sue. Hannah, we need to talk.

HANNAH

You talk.

SUE

I need to ask you things. It's the drill. What happened?

HANNAH

Gave up. Control.

SUE

How? Don't go away on me, Hannah. Stay here.

HANNAH

Hands off.

SUE

Did you fall asleep? Alcohol?

HANNAH

I was. Angry. I. Aimed. For the. River.

SUE

Aimed? We'll get you out. Got a good crew up there. Would you touch my hand?

HANNAH

No.

SUE

Okay, cool. Just keep talking to me. I'll keep talking to you. Aimed?

HANNAH

You talk. Too much.

SUE

Regular chatterbox. Vaccinated with a phonograph needle, my mom used to say. Motor mouth to my brothers. Why were you angry?

HANNAH

Long story. Why. Send. You.

SUE

That's a short story. Newest meat in the company.

HANNAH

Woman.

SUE

Yeah. Drew the short straw. Second time. I could use your long story right about now, Hannah. Hannah?

(to herself)

Where the fuck are they?

HANNAH

Don't worry. You. Doing fine.

SUE

Who were you angry at -- boyfriend? Husband? I get angry at mine all the time. Seems like they're built for it.

HANNAH cries out in pain.

SUE

What is it? What hurts?

HANNAH

Remembering.

SUE

Good, okay, at least things are opening up. I think. What?

HANNAH

Let me. Go.

SUE

Can't. I have to help you escape.

HANNAH

Damaged.

SUE

That's the shock talking. You got angry at someone -- right? They do you some wrong? Keep it going, Hannah. We'll do the long story in pieces. Fill me in.

HANNAH

Betrayal.

SUE

I can relate to betrayal. We're kissing cousins. I got dumped at the altar once. Not lying to you or Jesus. Slam-bang on my keester.

HANNAH

No.

SUE

Right on my can, rump, fat ass. Any way you fry it up, that's where I landed.

HANNAH

Keester. Funny.

SUE

Mama said I had a laugh track in that phonograph needle. But I didn't let it get me down -- couldn't. That's when I got this job. People have had to go a distance to accept me, but they are. Mostly. You can fight it.

HANNAH

You fight.

SUE

You can't give up.

HANNAH

Quiet.

SUE

You're sounding like you want to die. It's not in our nature. People always have second thoughts. Say yes, you do have second thoughts.

HANNAH

No. Seconds.

SUE

You're just talking out of your hurt. No one had a harder life than Mama, but she came out loving life like it was fresh-baked bread. Pain's no excuse, she used to say. I'm a great fan of Scarlett O'Hara: Tomorrow's another day. Anything's possible.

HANNAH
Leave.

SUE
Come on, give me your hand.

HANNAH
No.

SUE
They should be getting here soon. Somebody should
be getting here soon.

HANNAH
Scarlett?

SUE
What?

HANNAH
Promise me.

SUE
What?

HANNAH
No machines.

SUE
What?

HANNAH
No machines.

SUE
I can't promise that. That's what we do -- we save
lives. Yours included.

HANNAH
Mine.

SUE
It's ours, now. Not in your hands.

Lines overlap, as if SUE is not really listening.

HANNAH

Mine --

SUE

Our job is to get you out of this car and into a hospital --

HANNAH

-- give back --

SUE

They fix you. You soldier on --

HANNAH

-- let go --

SUE

That's the drill. That's my drill. That's why we do this. You have to do it.

HANNAH

Delete.

SUE

You don't have the right!

HANNAH

Go. Empty.

SUE

Dammit, Hannah!

HANNAH

Not. Much comfort. You. Leave.

HANNAH's last word is interrupted by a cry of sharp pain.

SUE

What's happening? Tell me.

HANNAH

Feel -- back -- arm --

SUE

That's good! That's good! That means the nerves are working. Hannah? Don't leave me. We're ten

minutes into a beautiful friendship here, aren't we?

HANNAH

Not true.

SUE

Hannah, I can't let you go. I can't let you go. I have to bring you out. You don't know how much out of my hands it is. I have to be your second thoughts.

HANNAH

Away.

SUE

It's not just about you, Hannah. I told you I got the short straw. Not true -- I asked for it. You're the second -- the second time. They didn't want me to come, but I had to. I couldn't lose again.

HANNAH

My life. Not your. Second chance.

SUE

I couldn't reach her. She stretched her hand out to me. I tried to wish my bones longer. I thought that if I could just get her hand -- I could be a root. The light ran out.

HANNAH

Light. Heavy.

SUE

What?

HANNAH

No light. To give. You.

SUE

Not true! We all have something to give. I'm sure you do. It's part of the drill.

(as if hearing something)

Did you hear that? They're having trouble getting the equipment down here. But the medics are on

the way -- crack team. Really sharp. Hannah,
don't check out. Too early for checking out.

HANNAH

Breathing. Through. Jaws. Of. Life.

SUE

Yeah, me too. I notice you have your seatbelt on.
Good practice.

HANNAH

Ironic. Crickets.

SUE listens.

SUE

Yeah. Strange, quiet, huh? They should be here
any time now.

There are several beats of nothing but the night silence filled
with the sounds of crickets, etc.

SUE

Hannah? Hannah?

HANNAH

Here.

SUE

Hannah, are you scared?

HANNAH

Numb.

SUE

I'm scared.

HANNAH

New meat.

SUE

Don't leave.

HANNAH

Gone.

SUE

Give me your hand.

HANNAH reaches out as far as she can. SUE, stretching, is able to grasp it.

SUE

Good. Now you won't fly away. I've got you.
Rooted.

HANNAH

Sorry. Release. You.

SUE

No! Don't! Tie me down! Don't lose me!

(to offstage)

Hurry up! Hurry up!

(back to HANNAH)

Hannah?

Night sounds.

BLACKOUT

A Senior Moment

DESCRIPTION

Jewel, Darcy, Salvia, and Seeromanie, all in their sixties, wonder why Chantelle, also in her sixties, is looking good these days, as if she's not a day older than, say, fifty.

CHARACTERS

- Chantelle
- Darcy
- Jewel
- Salvia
- Seeromanie

All are in their sixties or older (or can play that age).

SETTING

- Somewhere where five people can sit around to drink and talk.

* * * * *

Five women sitting around having coffee (or something else) and talking. Four of them are looking at CHANTELLE, who does not mind having the four of them look at her.

CHANTELLE

Nope.

JEWEL

Come on.

CHANTELLE

I said no. The four of you -- you and you and you and you -- haven't even gotten close.

JEWEL

A better clue, then --

DARCY

Wait --

SALVIA

Yeah --

DARCY

-- not yet --

SALVIA

-- wait --

DARCY

I still want to try --

SALVIA

Me, too --

DARCY

-- to figure [out] --

SALVIA

-- this mystery who sits before us --

DARCY

Yes!

SEEROMANIE

You said --

CHANTELLE

Only if --

SEEROMANIE

She said, didn't she --

JEWEL

She did --

SEEROMANIE

-- she'd tell us --

JEWEL

-- you did --

SEEROMANIE

-- if we guessed, right? --

CHANTELLE

But none of you -- I'm telling you this now -- not even warm.

JEWEL

Then some better clues --

DARCY

Not yet --

JEWEL

A more clued-in clue is what we need, mi amor --

CHANTELLE
(to JEWEL)

No --

(to SALVIA)

I agree with you --

SALVIA

Mystery.

SEEROMANIE

And that means she wins the [game] --

CHANTELLE

And we can't have that. Can we.

A momentary silence.

SEEROMANIE

All right. She threw down the challenge --

DARCY

The gauntlet!

CHANTELLE

I like my challenges --

DARCY

(likes the sound of the word)

The gauntlet!

SALVIA

(matching her)

All right, the gauntlet!

SEEROMANIE

She thinks she's given us all she needs to give us
-- so instead, let us review.

CHANTELLE

By all means.

SALVIA

Review, review. Items -- hair.

JEWEL

A sheen --

DARCY

A new cut --

SALVIA

A little color --

JEWEL

Highlights --

SALVIA

But the color, too -- there's a name for that?

SEEROMANIE

I think she'd like us to say "brassy."

CHANTELLE

Ah --

DARCY

So, brassy -- she is brassy --

SALVIA

Item -- skin.

JEWEL

That -- a mystery, ain't it -- not lizard skin --

DARCY

Not corrugated card[board] --

JEWEL

Not the sag and the flop, like this --

ALL (EXCEPT CHANTELLE)

Tighter.

JEWEL

Tighter.

SEEROMANIE

In the pink --

SALVIA

One: brassy. Two: pink.

JEWEL

And tighter.

SALVIA

Item three -- clothing.

JEWEL

The clothing.

DARCY

Now that you [mention it] -- right --

JEWEL

New threads.

SERROMANIE

New duds --

JEWEL

(fingering cloth)

Real silk, isn't it, real silk?

CHANTELLE

Indian silk.

SEEROMANIE

Errandi silk?

CHANTELLE

What other?

SEEROMANIE

(to the rest)

Friends, this silk that --

(to JEWEL)

-- you are fingering --

JEWEL

It says "Do not let me go."

SEEROMANIE

This silk -- errandi silk -- is the silk of silks.

JEWEL

(letting it go)

Slick. Smooth and --

DARCY

(to SALVIA)

All right, so silk -- c'mon, let's keep it [going]
--

SALVIA

What're we up to?

DARCY

Number four.

SALVIA

Number four -- jewelry.

DARCY

Don't see a big increase in that --

SEEROMANIE

Except for -- do you see it? -- the second piercing
in the left lobe --

SALVIA

But not the right one -- you're right --

DARCY

Yeah --

SALVIA

-- the little silver hoop --

DARCY

Right --

JEWEL

Don't see any tongue studs, though --

SALVIA

Eeww!

JEWEL

No nostril posts --

DARCY

Eyebrows -- none. Lower lip -- none.

CHANTELLE

But wait.

CHANTELLE lifts up her shirt: a belly-button piercing. Stunned.

SALVIA

That was not expected.

DARCY

(overlapping)

Unexpected -- yeah --

SALVIA

Is there, like -- well --

JEWEL

-- like anywhere else?

CHANTELLE's look says "yes."

JEWEL

Anyone brave enough to guess where?

DARCY

It isn't -- is it? Is it?

CHANTELLE nods yes.

DARCY

Get out!

CHANTELLE

I'll show you --

DARCY

Get out!

SALVIA

I don't even look at my own -- I'm not gonna look at yours --

JEWEL

Our loosened labia --

DARCY

Vanishing vaginas --

SEEROMANIE

Stop the alli[eration] --

CHANTELLE

Clandestine clits --

JEWEL

Good!

CHANTELLE

All right, we'll stop!

SEEROMANIE

Thank you.

(to SALVIA)

You are going to tell me that you're not the
littlest bit --

SALVIA

I didn't say I wasn't --

DARCY

Me, neither --

SALVIA

But still -- come on -- come on -- to do that,
down there --

JEWEL

I haven't seen a cooch in a long time --

SALVIA

It's different if it's in your nose --

JEWEL

I'm up for it --

(to SALVIA)

C'mon, it's not an alien --

SALVIA

Speak for yourself.

JEWEL

Won't bite!

DARCY

Vagina dentata!

CHANTELLE
(to SALVIA)

Look at you -- you are going to tell me that I have a best friend who would not share this with me?

SALVIA

What about old dogs and new tricks?

CHANTELLE

And which for you? Old dog? New trick?

SEEROMANIE

"Woof" or "wow"?

SALVIA

You always want to embarrass me.

DARCY

It's so easy.

SALVIA

I suppose this means I have to go first.

(to CHANTELLE)

All right.

JEWEL

We are proud of our prude!

CHANTELLE pulls out her pants waist. SALVIA looks. Then all of them.

SALVIA

I couldn't imagine --

CHANTELLE

Did not have a single problem with this.

SALVIA

But still --

DARCY

And it's not like you're young --

SALVIA

It didn't hurt?

JEWEL

She didn't say that. Did it?

CHANTELLE

The real point -- if we're gonna talk sensation
-- is not about the pinch of the installation,
but -- after --

Something dawns on them.

SALVIA

You're --

JEWEL

(at the same time)

You're --

DARCY

-- getting it!

SALVIA

You're not!

CHANTELLE

You're not -- but I am.

JEWEL

Wait. Wait! I don't get -- the connection between
-- you know -- all the baubles and bangles and
bright shiny -- wait a minute -- wait --

SEEROMANIE

Dawn comes late to Marblehead --

JEWEL

No! --

CHANTELLE

Go on.

JEWEL

You can't!

SALVIA

She can't what?

JEWEL

Either you're paying for it, or --

CHANTELLE

I am not paying for it.

JEWEL

Something just squeezed in my thighs --

DARCY

(to JEWEL)

What're you thinking?

SEEROMANIE

I'll tell you the other choice.

CHANTELLE

I know you can.

SEEROMANIE

You're getting paid to get laid.

CHANTELLE

(overlapping)

-- paid to get laid. Lights. Camera. And.
Granny porn is born.

They are not sure what to say.

CHANTELLE

You've guessed the secret.

(to SEEROMANIE)

You win.

SALVIA

No shit.

CHANTELLE

No shit.

SALVIA

No shit! And for the record, this time I'm not sorry that word comes out of this mouth.

JEWEL

Will wonders never cease.

DARCY

Wonders? I just don't know. I just don't know.

They are still not sure what to say.

SEEROMANIE

All right, since I won, I get to ask what I'm gonna ask, and simple is what I'm asking: why. Just "why."

DARCY

Yeah.

SEEROMANIE

As you can see, we're all a little shocked --

SALVIA

No shit.

SEEROMANIE

-- and we're not sure we should be doing an intervention on you or drinking more heavily.

JEWEL

We should drink more in either case.

CHANTELLE

Good suggestion. Here, hold up your glasses.

CHANTELLE serves them all.

CHANTELLE

Now lose those tight little sphincter-faces you've put on and listen up. Why? Here's the why. What's a young girl to do after her husband kicks it over -- and the plumbing still works -- and he didn't quite leave enough behind because he had

his own -- well, I don't need to repeat all that to you all.

DARCY

But there's dating.

Everyone bursts out laughing.

DARCY

Well, it's better than --

CHANTELLE

Really?

DARCY

(considering)

All right, then it's different --

SEEROMANIE

It's buying and selling.

JEWEL

Giving and taking -- we give and get taken. You know this --

DARCY

Yeah, but still --

(whispering)

-- porn --

JEWEL

She's thinking "degrading" --

DARCY

We've always been told --

CHANTELLE

And let me tell you what was -- is -- "degrading," and I don't mean to be nasty about this, so don't take it that way, but after he died? I felt shame for being so weak -- I had nothing like a skill or a strength to my name -- always his signature on everything. Now --

JEWEL

Some of the shots you get to call are your own.

SEEROMANIE

The money shots!

SALVIA

Have you done --

Everyone looks at SALVIA.

JEWEL

She speaks.

SALVIA

I can't believe I'm gonna ask this --

JEWEL

Go, girl!

SALVIA

Up the --

CHANTELLE

I've done "up the" all over the place, with all sorts and shapes and hydraulics --

SALVIA

But "up the," you know --

SEEROMANIE

Just say it.

SALVIA

I can't just say it --

JEWEL

The poop chute!

CHANTELLE

Oh yeah.

SALVIA

Wow.

DARCY

Do you -- swallow?

CHANTELLE

Not supposed to -- believe it or not, there're scripts to follow --

DARCY

So it just goes --

CHANTELLE

All over -- well, that depends --

SALVIA

On?

CHANTELLE

How many fountains are flowing, so to speak.

SALVIA

More than one?

DARCY

Look at you!

SALVIA

I had one guy all my life -- then he goes pfft! --
excuse me if I'm a little curious!

JEWEL

Curious?

(to others)

Is that what she looks like? You look hungry!

SALVIA

Who here hasn't been hungry for a long time?

(to CHANTELLE)

Good for you!

JEWEL

And disease?

CHANTELLE

At least this outfit I'm with -- all of us tested,
condoms all around -- STDs are not good advertising
--

SEEROMANIE

Personally --

CHANTELLE

What?

SEEROMANIE

I get all of the curiosity and the hunger --

JEWEL

Don't forget my thighs -- squееееeze!

SEEROMANIE

But -- well -- the body, you know -- it's an older body -- we all got older bodies -- no matter what we --

SALVIA

Do you ever come?

CHANTELLE

Sometimes.

SALVIA

I just wanted to know! Go on.

JEWEL

You are a hoot.

DARCY

A hoot and a half. Go on.

CHANTELLE

Your point about the body -- this body -- let's face it, I can pump my iron and do my senior Pilates and firm firm firm until the bovines waddle home --

SEEROMANIE

But it's still --

CHANTELLE

It is still -- sometimes I go out of my head while the lights/camera/and/action thing is going on -- because I need to let slide away this picture of the too too sagging flesh being --

DARCY

The money's good?

CHANTELLE

Beats Social Insecurity and a silly pension.

DARCY

So it's good?

CHANTELLE

It's good.

DARCY

So if it jiggles -- so what?

SALVIA

Mine flounces -- ka-floom, ka-floom!

SEEROMANIE

And when would it be doing that?

SALVIA

Sometimes, early morning, before getting out of bed --

JEWEL

The five fingers will never divorce you.

SALVIA

Exactly!

DARCY

And they always come home at night!

SEEROMANIE

And they never tell lies!

DARCY

Maybe we should have all just married our right hands.

SALVIA

Left for me. Means I'm in my right mind.

DARCY

And you can get awards -- you know, like the Oscars, only not -- I've heard -- c'mon!

CHANTELLE

I don't think --

SEEROMANIE

You never know --

JEWEL

All your hard work could add up to --

SALVIA

"Best Senior Porn Star of" -- see, I'm not completely clueless.

JEWEL

Not completely, dear.

DARCY

And we'd all be sitting right there, wouldn't we?

SALVIA

Flouncing in --

JEWEL

A night of lavish celebration --

SEEROMANIE

All dressed up to go see the ones who get undressed -- here, here!

THE OTHERS

Here, here!

CHANTELLE

Here, here. Who knows how long it'll last.

JEWEL

But while the ride is good --

DARCY

The ride is good, right? Right.

SALVIA

Um --

DARCY

What?

SALVIA

Nothing.

SEEROMANIE

A nothing like that always means something.

JEWEL

C'mon, cough it up --

DARCY

Eew!

JEWEL

It's not like you're the only one thinking it here.

DARCY

What am I thinking that I don't know I'm thinking?

SALVIA

Do you have any of your movies?

CHANTELLE

To show you?

SALVIA nods yes. CHANTELLE gestures to the rest of them. They all nod yes.

CHANTELLE

Well, let's see -- what from my oeuvre would you like to see? Frisky Over 60? Older and Bolder? Aged to Perfection, volumes 1 through 7?

JEWEL

Dealer's choice.

CHANTELLE

Dealer's choice -- you're all sure?

They nod yes. CHANTELLE raises the glass of whatever she has been drinking.

CHANTELLE

Salud.

SALVIA & DARCY

Dinero.

SEEROMANIE & JEWEL

Y amor.

ALL

And the time to enjoy them.

They clink the glasses and toast each other.

BLACKOUT

Slam Quartet

DESCRIPTION

Slam poetry is all the sonic rage, and the final quartet of Juggler, Jukie, Pagan, and Mikey aim to bring the decibel level up a notch or two as they go for the championship of the "Doo-Dah, Doo-Dah Slam Poetry Contest."

CHARACTERS

- JUGGER: Short for "Juggernaut," he has a very forward personality.
- JUKIE: Latina with Nuyorican shadings.
- PAGAN (pronounced "pah-GAHN"): Proud of her "built-in, shock-proof shit detector," androgynous.
- MIKEY: Somewhat of a "guy" but also a poet -- the poet who played football in high school.

NOTE: Except for JUKIE, ethnicity does not matter; however, there should be a mix of colors and accents. In other words, they should not look "beige."

SETTING/TIME

- Slam poetry competition: finals

MISCELLANEOUS

- A banner which reads "The Doo-Dah, Doo-Dah Slam Poetry Finals" or a large poster on an easel.
- Music, something percussive, such as a Gene Krupa drum solo.
- Lighting should always reflect the mood of the words and actions.

NOTES

- Clothing and accouterments can be individual choices of the actors, but in no instance should they be "safe" or conventional.
- The director/actors must incorporate stylized movements: think of old-style declamatory acting, the Temptations doing dance routines, etc. This means some knowledge of choreography.

* * * * *

Music, loud. Lights up, banner revealed. ACTORS come on in single file, any order they choose, and take their places downstage center.

How to begin? JUGGER

Where to begin? JUKIE

What to begin? PAGAN

Who to begin? MIKEY

With Jugger. JUKIE
(pointing to JUGGER)

With Pagan. JUGGER
(pointing to PAGAN)

With Mikey. PAGAN
(pointing to MIKEY)

With Jukie. MIKEY
(pointing to JUKIE)

Sperm to worm. JUKIE

Womb to tomb. JUGGER

Birth to earth. MIKEY

Lust to dust. PAGAN

This is how all our absurdities begin. ALL

With conception. MIKEY

JUGGER

That messy broth of four elements.

JUKIE

The four elements of mirth --

PAGAN

Prayer --

MIKEY

Desire --

JUGGER

And slaughter.

PAGAN

The mewling infant --

JUGGER

The spewing child --

JUKIE

Under deconstruction --

PAGAN

Dissolution --

MIKEY

Disconnection --

JUGGER

Diminution --

MIKEY

From the first --

MIKEY makes a popping sound with his finger in mouth.

MIKEY

-- out of the chute.

ALL

Absurd! Absurd! Absurd! Absurd! Go, Albert
Camus!

JUKIE

(pointing to JUGGER)

This is you, Jugger.

JUGGER

Ancestors screaming down my blood, DNA gestapo chaining me down, down, down with failures I will defeat but did not choose!!

(pointing to MIKEY)

This is you, Mikey.

MIKEY

My father plunged me with manhood --

(grabs his crotch)

-- toxic androgens, testosteroneed to within six inches of my life, and I did not choose!!

(pointing to JUKIE)

This is you, Jukie.

JUKIE

Latina-ism stuck down my throat like a cracked and leaking cock --

(swings her hips back and forth)

-- made to measure to the man who buys me with his eyes and I did not choose!!

(pointing to PAGAN)

This is you, Pagan.

PAGAN

Dyke-femme bullshit, on top up under, who the fuck cares, give me a strap-on to put on, slap on the desire and get it on, life is short, get naked! and slice and dice everything I did not choose!!

ALL

Thus ends our first act.

Movement.

PAGAN

To be fully --

MIKEY

American --

JUGGER

You need to --

JUKIE

Throw up.

ALL
(as if puking)

Blehhehhh!!

JUKIE & MIKEY
Upchuck the conditioning --

JUGGER & PAGAN
Like a baby begin renewed with the --

ALL
(in a Martin Luther King, Jr. voice)
Dream of freedom.

ALL singing, striking the classic John Travolta pose.

ALL
Stayin' alive, stayin' alive, ah, ah, ah, ah --

PAGAN
Absurdity of the cum-guzzling bourgeoisie mode of
fucking capitalist consumerism --

MIKEY
Chockful of commodified body parts -- blessed be
Karl Marx --

JUGGER
Leading to the flatlining of the planet -- blessed
be Frederick Engels --

JUKIE
In -- our -- fucking -- lifetimes --

ALL
Thank -- you -- very -- much -- Adam -- Smith!!

JUKIE
Here's the invisible hand to you.

They make a "fuck you" gesture. Two beats held with frustration.

PAGAN
No wonder we're hip-ironic --

MIKEY

Spiritually catatonic --

JUGGER

In need of a high colonic --

JUKIE

Chronically demonic.

JUGGER

Morally spastic --

JUKIE

Hooked on plastic --

ALL

Pomo and retro and televisionized --

PAGAN

Deodorized.

MIKEY

Maximized by McDonald's fries.

ALL

Neuterized. Euphemized.

JUGGER

Until --

MIKEY

Until --

JUKIE

Until --

PAGAN

We don't know the real stories anymore.

ALL

We don't know the real stories anymore.

JUKIE

Anymore.

MIKEY

Anymore.

PAGAN

No more -- the real stories have fled to the cave
of the desert wind --

JUGGER

And there they wait patiently for us --

MIKEY

For our tongues to plow their syllables --

JUKIE

For our bodies to discover --

PAGAN

Recover --

JUGGER

Uncover --

MIKEY

The simple brilliance of the fact --

JUGGER

The simple fact --

JUKIE & PAGAN

That we exist --

JUGGER & MIKEY

Against all odds.

PAGAN & MIKEY

And evens.

ALL

End of our act two.

They all change places; lights change. In the next lines,
finishing with "who arrive hungered by freedom," the ending and
beginnings should closely follow one another.

ALL

Put yourselves --

JUKIE

Put yourselves in this place --

MIKEY

This place of expectant warmth --

JUGGER

Warmth fetal and filled with --

PAGAN

With the raw-boned cawing of the trickster ravens
--

JUKIE

Ravens sharp-eyed --

JUGGER

And dismissive --

MIKEY

And waiting to feed all of us --

PAGAN & JUKIE

Who cross the border --

ALL

Who arrive hungered by freedom.

JUKIE & JUGGER

We have so many borders to erase.

PAGAN & MIKEY

But the map is in our bones.

PAGAN

You --

JUKIE

You --

JUGGER

You --

MIKEY

You --

ALL

We all know these stories.

JUGGER

Our thin blood aches to thicken on them --

PAGAN

Our thin breath aches to sing velocity --

ALL

Why have we let ourselves --

JUGGER

Be taught to forget?

JUKIE

Why have we forgotten --

ALL

Our selves? Our eureka!! Our om!! Our hey nonny
nonny!! Our ha cha cha!!

Lights change.

JUKIE

Epilogue.

JUGGER

Y3K.

MIKEY

The linear calendar horsewhipping us up to the
millennium.

PAGAN

Unless, of course, Chinese --

MIKEY

Hindu --

JUGGER

Muslim --

JUKIE

Jewish.

ALL

But who cares about them?

JUKIE

It's only about our millennium.

JUGGER

Our transformation into --

ALL

What?

JUKIE

Jittery American junkies of 21st century jujubes.

ALL

(to JUKIE)

Well done!

JUGGER

HDTV.

MIKEY

Palm Pilots.

PAGAN

Cell phones implanted in our ears and tongues.

JUKIE

Smart houses --

PAGAN

For dumb tenants.

JUGGER & MIKEY

And cars with geo-stationary satellite maps --

PAGAN & JUGGER

So we can go to the fucking convenience store --

ALL

And still be lost!!

JUGGER

In other words --

ALL

-- nothing different!

JUKIE

Linear calendar horsewhipping us into oblivion.

ALL

Yippee high-yo high-yay!!

PAGAN

But make the circle --

JUKIE

Circle --

JUGGER

Circle --

MIKEY

Circle --

ALL

Back to the desert cave.

JUKIE

Where the stories wait --

MIKEY

To hijack our tongues.

JUGGER

Where the stories wait --

PAGAN

To unpack our hearts.

MIKEY

Where the stories wait --

JUKIE

To round off the anger.

JUGGER

Where the stories wait --

PAGAN

To lick us till our brains melt in ecstasy --

ALL

-- and spawn the sky.

JUKIE
(pointing to JUGGER)
You will die.

JUGGER
(pointing to PAGAN)
You will die.

PAGAN
(pointing to MIKEY)
You will die.

MIKEY
(pointing to JUKIE)
You will die.

ALL
(pointing into the audience)
And so will all of you!

JUKIE
The question then --

JUGGER
Becomes --

MIKEY
How --

PAGAN
To die well.

ALL
By living well, dumkopfs!!
(smack their foreheads like a "V8" moment)
Sheesh!!

JUGGER
As if you already didn't know that!!

ALL
Life is short -- get naked!!
(synchronized dance step)
Get naked!! Get naked!!

JUKIE
That's what the stories will do for you.

JUGGER
To you.

MIKEY
With you.

PAGAN
In you.

They speak quietly. Lights change.

ALL
If only you let the time take you --

JUKIE
Back to your original face.

JUGGER
How do you we forgive ourselves?

MIKEY
And what do we do when the forgiveness comes?

PAGAN
Can you imagine what life feels like if forgiven
--

ALL
If forgiven --

JUKIE
Blessed --

MIKEY
Sacred --

JUGGER
Complete as a thimble --

PAGAN
Solid as an autumn acorn.

JUKIE
Imagine --

PAGAN
Imagine --

JUGGER

Imagine --

MIKEY

Imagine.

They do the following gesture: clap the hands together at chest level, and then raise them in an outward arc as if the clap caused them to rebound upwards. Their eyes follow their hands. Then, at the highest point, point sharply into the audience with both index fingers.

ALL

Imagine!!

Lights bump out.

The Socialist Book Of Love

DESCRIPTION

Like those Japanese soldiers who surrendered years after World War II was over, Yury has refused to surrender to the capitalist onslaught of his small socialist country. He has been holed up in his apartment since 1989, refusing to come out. His refusal has garnered him a certain fame, and old, disaffected Socialists have helped him survive by bringing him food and other supplies, and his resistance has taken on mythic proportions around the country. But the building where he lives is now going condo and the owner, Yalena, wants him out. She has arrived to make him move.

CHARACTERS

- Yalena Emmanovna Sayeski
- Yury Leninovich Andropov

NOTE: The characters are roughly the same age. YURY, under all his apparent craziness, is a handsome man, and YALENA, outside her no-nonsense exterior, has moments of beauty. The actors will use what passes for a Slavic accent -- no attempt is being made here to be culturally authentic.

SETTING/TIME

An apartment somewhere in a small, formerly socialist country, now going capitalist. The director can set it as minimal or maximal as time and budget permit, but there should be a good amount of clutter and objects.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Bag for YALENA, with document and cell phone inside

* * * * *

YURY's apartment: cluttered, crowded, verging on implosion. YURY sitting there also looking like he is on the verge of implosion; after all, he's been in this apartment since 1989. YALENA enters carrying a briefcase; she is in the "hallway" of the building, looking around in disgust. She faces YURY's "door" and speaks in a low voice, as if delivering a curse.

YALENA

You pan-brained fossilized turd-smelling butt-end of a human joke, this time -- this time I am really going to make you into history. This place

-- condos! This place -- upscale! Capitalism wearing big goddamn hobnailed boots! Smashing into your face! Walking over your dead body! Start walking, boots!

Incantation over, YALENA settles herself and knocks on the door. YURY hears but says nothing. YALENA knocks again; YURY non-responds.

YALENA

Yury Leninovich Andropov, I know you are in there. I know you are in there.

YURY

How do you know that?

YALENA

How do I know that?

YURY

Yes.

YALENA

You just spoke to me, that's how I know that.

YURY

Physically, I spoke. Metaphysically -- I'm ignoring you. Metaphysically -- you're pfft! Far gone from me.

YALENA

This time, no. You got my letter?

YURY

(wiggles his little finger in his ear)
Just a bzzzzzz now.

YALENA

This time the cops --

YURY

(muttering)

Cops --

YALENA

-- are coming. This time I have an order of the court.

YURY
(muttering)

Court order --

YALENA
This time your little pony-and-dog show --

YURY
Stop!

YALENA
What?

YURY
Dog-and-pony show!

YALENA
What?

YURY
Dog-and-pony show.
(mockingly)

If you're doing the Americanismo thing -- big thing, now, everybody's got Americans in their mouths -- you gotta get the right idiotisms through your teeth. Dog --

(pointing to himself, miming a dog)
-- and pony --

(pointing to YALENA)
-- that's you. Dog --

(barks)
-- and pony -- giddyup! --
(prances around the room)

-- padadump, padadump, padadump --

YALENA
Whatever.

YURY
Ah, truly American now, you are!

YURY makes two "V's" with his two index and middle fingers and puts them together to make a "W" and wears them like a crown on his head.

YURY

The Americanski flip-offski at the end of any problem that can't be solved immediately. Whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever. Well, whatever, missy missy, I am not moving.

YALENA

You are going to be moved. I have the cops and the court order and no more with this crapola dog-and-pony show of being "the last living socialist."

YURY

It's been a good gig -- gig, yes?

YALENA

Clown --

YURY

A good "gig." Trading up on the nostalgia of the old guard --

YALENA

Codwallop --

YURY

Eh, you do what you can do to make do-do in the new world "ordure," eh?

YALENA

Nincompoop --

YURY

They bring me cigarettes and food and their prayers --

YALENA

Parasite!

YURY

(suddenly stern)

Their prayers! They bring me their prayers! You remember prayers, don't you? Because everything around them's become jokes and shit, and the world they'd dreamed of --

YALENA

They're lazy, just like you!

YURY

The paradise, goddam you --

YALENA

Paradise!

YURY

-- the paradise they dreamed of --

YALENA

Let me tell you --

YURY

-- the paradise where we could all maybe be better than sniveling real-estate stock-market condoizing junkies! C'mon, that was directly directed at you! You there?

YALENA

I don't have to do this with you. I don't. I, Yalena Emmanovna Sayeski, don't have to take your bull-and-cock anymore!

* * * * *

YURY suddenly marches to the door and opens it, which startles YALENA. There is a moment, as they look at each other, of both possible violence as well as undeniable attraction, unsure what they are seeing but also not expecting what they are seeing: be sure to let this moment linger. Finally, YURY speaks, and as much as possible through these lines, they maintain eye contact.

YURY

My bull and what?

YALENA

I don't have to say it.

YURY

My what?

YALENA

I do not have to say the word of what I know you do not have.

YURY

Bet you can't repeat that.

YALENA

Once said is enough said for ears like yours.

YURY

Yeah?

YALENA

Yeah.

YURY

Court order -- let's see it. Let's see the court order from the judges anyone can buy.

YALENA

(taps her bag)

I told you in the letter I'd have one.

YURY

You could be petting a daschund's ass. Let me see it.

YALENA reaches into her bag and pulls out an official looking paper. She holds it up for him to read. YURY reaches for it, but she doesn't let him touch it.

YALENA

Nah-nah-nah.

YURY barely scans it; he know what it says. YALENA puts it away.

YURY

So where are your rent-a-cops?

YALENA

They're on tap.

(pats her bag again)

I tap the cell phone, and they come, and then they tap you out.

YURY

Why do you have them on wait?

YALENA

Because, believe it or not --

YURY

I won't, but forward --

YALENA

-- I wanted to see if we could do all of this with some dignity.

YURY

I didn't see "maintain bourgeois niceties" in the court order.

YALENA

May I come in?

YURY

Why is the assassin always so pretty and so polite?

YALENA

May I come in? May I come in?

There is another pause. YALENA taps her bag. YURY picks up something from the apartment, something stupid, and lays it down as if it were a cloak over a mud puddle, and then moves away from the door, making a big bow. He keeps a confused eye on YALENA. YALENA feels equally confused but is also irritated at having to walk over whatever it is that YURY sets down.

* * * * *

YURY

You are not what I thought.

YALENA

What was that?

YURY

Normally -- hah! whatever! -- your office sends deep voices with no necks to my door.

YALENA

My door.

YURY makes the "whatever" symbol again.

YURY

Easy to confuse them -- American cigarettes, and they lose the trail. But you -- the boss man woman -- that voice -- and the you, there --

Gestures that the two do not match, then gestures as if to throw it away: he will not give in.

YURY

I am not moving.

YALENA

This place is --

YURY

A museum --

YALENA

-- a sty.

YURY

A repository of memory.

YALENA

A pig sty.

YURY

A shrine.

YALENA

A. Pig. Sty. Just as I thought it would be.

YURY

You said with dignity. Eh? Eh?

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

So let's do some dignity then.

YALENA

Fine.

YURY

(moving around, pointing things out)
That, that -- the old peasant who brought me that
-- used to be a storyteller, an artist, someone
important in his town.

YALENA

All right.

YURY

Just like that over there, that painter.

YALENA

Good.

YURY

They all had work in the world.

YALENA

We should all work.

YURY

But now their work has been ground into nothing.

YALENA

Not my fault.

YURY

And that person, over there -- see that?

YALENA

Yury Leninovich --

YURY

What?

YALENA

Some things cannot be helped.

YURY

Some things -- cannot be helped.
(makes the sign of the Orthodox cross)
Absolution, then!

YALENA

Different world now.

YURY

And so different that the only "work in the world" that means anything at all is condoizing, Yalena Emmanovna -- condoizing? You make it sound in step, heroic, but really -- illusions of "grand manure," eh?

YALENA

And the "last living socialist" warns me about illusions?

YURY

(as he prances around the room)

Condoizing, condoizing, condoizing, condoizing --

YALENA

"The kingdom of heaven on earth" -- now, that was a gasbag of words!

YURY

Say "con-do-i-zing" enough, it becomes -- white noise.

YALENA

"King-dumb of heaven" --

YURY

No, no -- a hornet, in your ear, that can sting you deaf.

YALENA

And this junk -- buzz-buzz in my ear -- this junk is all you got. All. You. Got.

YURY

Except my peace.

Pause as YURY notes YALENA's reaction to the word.

YURY

My peace with my life. And the peace I give them when their souls are troubled. You get any of that with your condoized life, Yalena Emmanovna? Have you anyone in your life that can help you remember? I am not going.

YALENA

The last living socialist -- you are already so gone. I feel sorry for you.

YURY

(moves close to her)

There was a time -- and you do remember it, Yalena! I know you do!

YALENA

And now you're out of time. What a great scam!

YURY

Not a scam.

YALENA

The last living socialist, the true believer. The crowds have loved you, brought you food, drink, cigarettes, fame! But you squat here like -- like one of those Russian monks from Lev Tolstoy, keeping the flame alive in the snow! Well, friend, the flame is out!

YALENA reaches into her bag for the cell phone.

YURY

Dignity's over, apparently --

Turns on the phone but doesn't dial.

YALENA

There was a time-- but now it's time to call the cops. As a good socialist, Yury, you should learn to bow to historical inevitability.

YURY

What was that?

YALENA

You know, dustbin of history.

YURY

Ah! And --

YALENA

And --

YURY

And as a good capitalist -- As a good capitalist,
Yalena, you should want to grind me under your
stiletto heel.

YALENA

What?

YURY makes a studied grinding motion with his heel.

* * * * *

YURY

Eh?

YALENA

Would you like that, you historical loser?

YURY

Would you like that, you dominant global power?
It's what the defeated can offer.

Beat.

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

You would.

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

Sex and power.

YALENA

And winning -- yes.

YURY

Then put away the phone.

YURY mimes grinding with his heel in a very studied manner.
YALENA in a very studied manner puts away the phone.

YURY

Ah!

YALENA

Isn't that at the heart of all of it, anyways?

YURY

It's at the heart of your heart.

YALENA

And yours.

YURY

You think?

YALENA

Oh, yes.

YURY

Oh no.

YALENA

Liar.

YURY

You don't know my heart yet.

YALENA

But I know your kind. You play dreamer, you play dancer, but underneath -- you want power, too.

YURY

Your kind.

YALENA

"What is to be done?" you say in your Vladimir-Ilich-Lenin-chop-off-the-dead-hand-of-history voice, but you already know the answer.

YURY

Tell me, tell me, Yalena-goddess.

YALENA

You want flesh, you want perks, you want "on top" just like everybody else. Nobody believed that "last living socialist" crap -- not even you.

YURY

I didn't?

YALENA

No. Not even them that gave to you.

YURY

(mock pain)

Oooh. They had me convinced -- the wailing of their teeth, the [two syllables] g-nashing of their arthritic thumbs --

YALENA

All theatre --

YURY

So -- each according to his needs -- ?

YALENA

No one believed that one!

YURY

From each according to his ability -- ?

YALENA

Theft with the right hand and then the left. Let everybody earn what they can get from anyone else and get to keep it all.

YURY

The new world order -- like you.

YALENA

Like me.

YURY

Hmmm. Wage slave.

YALENA

Oohh! Idealist.

YURY

Ouch! Corporate drone.

YALENA

Gut shot! Trotskyite.

YURY

Yeeesss! Nothing to lose but your chains.

YALENA

My chains are gold; my market shares rise.

YURY

The market -- an open bed where whores --

YALENA

Lev me, Tolstoy!

YURY

-- trade the disease of greed.

YALENA

Oh, that is good, good! Good!

YURY

This monk has his charms.

YALENA

This monk smells.

YURY

Of the earth.

YALENA

Of the dirt.

YURY

Do you want dog? Or do you want pony?

YALENA

Each according to his needs in my bed.

YURY

From each according to her ability in mine.

YALENA

So -- which bed? The bed of commerce?

YURY

Or the bed of art?

* * * * *

They take steps towards each other, with some earthy Slavic music underneath -- and then, abruptly, the cell phone rings. They look at her bag, then each other. YALENA is undecided;

YURY does not want to lose the advantage here. YALENA decides: she answers it.

YURY
(quietly)

Damn!

YALENA
Yes, yes -- no, no, drink, eat -- I am not in need at the moment for you to shake your security apparatus all around! But don't go far away.

YALENA clicks off the cell phone. YURY takes a few steps toward YALENA.

YURY
I don't suppose --

YALENA
No --

YURY
Ah, well.
(coily grinding his heel)
Still --

YALENA
Yeah, well.

YALENA pauses, then, with a half-glance at YURY, she slowly grinds her heel into the floor. YURY smiles; YALENA smiles.

YURY
Okay, okay -- so the world has moved on and over -- I am not one with too pig-headed a head not to see that. But, Yalena Emmanovna Sayeski, and you know this from your old socialist bones, the world always moves more than just two ways.

YALENA turns away from him.

YURY
(sensing the hesitation)
Yeeesss --

YALENA
You mean --

YURY
Yes, mean it I do.

YALENA
Third --

YURY
Third --

YALENA
Way --

YURY
Way -- yes. Third way. Between --
(harshly grinding his heel)
-- and --

YURY indicates the room.

YALENA
You got a pitch?

YURY takes up the stance of a baseball pitcher.

YALENA
What pitch can the smelly Tolstoy monk with no das
capital make to the Slavic goddess who owns every
screw in this property?

YURY winds up slowly, then pitches in slow motion, saying the word as he throws.

YURY
Coöperative. Eh?

YALENA
Did you just say --

YURY
Yes, I did.

YALENA
Again.

YURY changes position and become a batter; he takes a slow swing at the pitch as he speaks.

YURY

Coöperative. Not a word you've heard in a while,
eh?

YALENA

No.

YURY

But you do remember, though, don't you?

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

You remember that word.

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

Coöperative. Co-operate. Co-llaborate. Co-
habitate. Co-activate.

YALENA stands still as YURY speaks. His tone should be sensual but never sexual. YURY can sculpt the air around YALENA's body, but he never touches her.

YURY

There was a time, Yalena, before all this bargaining. When the eyes looked higher, the heart unfolded petal by petal by petal by petal into a horizon hot with rising light. The hot -- rising -- light -- of a much better world.

YALENA

"You have nothing to lose but your chains" --

YURY

(with sharp breath)

Das Kapital along your dialectical thighs.

YALENA

"What is to be done?" --

YURY

(with sharp breath)

Lenin's goatee traces your materialist spine.

YALENA

"There is only one commandment, to love" --

YURY

The son of Galilee walks on the water of your eyes.

Suddenly YALENA turns to YURY and stops him.

YALENA

Justice.

YURY goes to respond, but YALENA puts a finger to his lips, though she does not actually touch him.

YALENA

Justice. Brotherhood. Love.

YURY

Yes.

Makes the "whatever" sign: first a "V" with index and middle finger of the right hand.

YALENA

Yury.

(then a "V" with the left hand)

Yalena.

YALENA brings the two together to form the "W."

YURY puts his hand on either side of the "W," as if he's measuring something, and slowly brings his hands closer together. This causes YALENA to pivot her fingers so that the tips of the index fingers and middle fingers touch. He does this as he says the line, and he should not physically touch YALENA's hands.

YURY

Adam. Eve. You need a building manager?

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

I need a building. My -- fans -- the people -- need a museum.

YALENA

Negotiable.

YURY

And--

YALENA

Yes?

YURY

And -- we need each other to keep these new global
wolves away.

YALENA

And to keep that horizon hot and rising.

YURY

Sounds good. Possible?

YALENA very slowly begins grinding her heel back and forth.
YURY does the same as old rock and roll music comes up and
together they do the Twist as the lights come down.

Sporting Goods

DESCRIPTION

When "sports-approved flesh" is the only way a young man can be allowed to touch other men, he becomes a wrestler - and wrestles not only with just his physical attractions but with a whole society that places such emphasis on what is open to the sense of touch and what is not.

CHARACTERS

- Two wrestlers, male, Joe and Jim -- they should be mid-30s, but they are portraying wrestlers in high school.
- If possible, a third actor should be added as the referee. (However, this script is written without the third actor)

SETTING

- A high school wrestling match

TIME

- Present

SOUND

- A kind of muted crowd roar, played very low, to underscore the action. (Or any other sound/music effects the director feels would work)

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two white towels, one on each side of the wrestling area.
- During the play the two actors will wrestle, though in a very stylized way and not in "real time": moves do not have to be continuous, sequences can be broken up, and so on. In essence, it should be choreography. They speak, but never to each other: the sense should be that the words are their unspoken thoughts while the "real time" wrestling is taking place.
- The wrestlers should dress as if they were at a meet. (The use of helmets is optional)

* * * * *

In the dark the sound of a crowd at a wrestling match -- shouts, encouragement, etc. -- comes up. The two wrestlers enter and stand opposite each other. The lights come up. They shake hands.

The First Round

JOE

At seventeen they would only allow me to lay my hands on sports-approved flesh --

They take their first pose: JIM on all fours, JOE with his hands in preparation on JIM.

JOE

-- which licensed my rude friction and fumbling
-- at seventeen, I wrestled with such painful abundance.

They begin.

JIM

Man, he's quick for a goddam pansy.

JOE

All public, authorized -- such possibility --

JIM

Fuck, shit, he's got my --

JOE

The coach shouting with a rough ecstasy --

JIM

(their faces come close)

Man, I wish these fuckers would shave!

JOE

-- as if he were in love, like me, with these bodies arch and vibrating.

JIM

Ease into the grip, feel for a lull, a forgetfulness
--

JOE

I am certainly in love.

JIM

-- find the opening, then slide into it -- there is always a giving in --

JOE

These bodies electric.

JIM

Shit, missed it -- ! It's like he knows what I'm thinking.

JOE

I know what you're thinking.

They pause and both look stage right, as if at the referee. JIM slaps the floor. They break.

* * * * *

The Second Round

As JOE gets on all fours.

JOE

On the mats, such pure erotic blessing -- but in our daily hallways --

JIM puts his hands in preparation on JOE.

JIM

No more fucking tricks.

JOE

-- we passed unedited. I suspected, him suspecting me, nothing voiced.

They begin.

JIM

All right -- got him!

JOE

No hard proof, everything sensed below the radar.

JIM

Sometimes catch him forgetting --

JOE

He does not like feeling these feelings --

JIM

All right, you fucking fruit --

JOE

-- that fall outside his daily hallways.

JIM

-- watch this!

JOE

He thinks he has me bound. He doesn't know --

JIM

Hey! --

JOE

-- I know his embrace better than he does --

JIM

Hey! --

JOE

-- because I desire it.

JOE slips behind JIM.

JOE

Love is slick. Like the sweat in your hair.

JIM

How can he --

JOE

(whispering into his ear)

Love below the radar is fast and strong.

They pause and both look stage left, as if at the referee. JIM slaps the floor. They break.

* * * * *

The Third Round

They begin this in a standing position.

JOE

This is our last pose, friend, last chance. After this, our souls are stamped.

They begin.

JIM

If I can just --

JOE

Don't -- for the moment, forget the game.

JIM

Fake a knee drop --

JOE

Believe the report of our bodies --

JIM

Wait for his distraction --

JOE

-- carving out this space, together.

JOE moves behind JIM into a full nelson.

JOE

This intimate tangle, rude friction and fumbling -- don't let them steal it away so quickly! Remember it!

JIM slides into a half-nelson, but JOE won't let him free.

JOE

Whenever again will we cross the borders so freely, our bodies the only necessity, bearing such fluid passports?

JIM slides free and faces JOE.

JOE

There is grace in our grinding weights. Don't let them. Don't let them.

JIM

This match isn't going to me, is it?

JOE

Not if we're lucky.

They lock again, and JIM more or less allows himself to be pinned but also cradled. They look out to their front, as if at the referee; JIM slaps the floor. They break. Crowd sounds out. They get their towels and wipe off sweat, and come back to center stage. They go through a choreography of all the ways guys can touch either other in approved ways: they embrace in that "squeeze-hug" way men have, shake hands, mock-box, high-five, etc. It should start out jocky and jokey, but as the exchanges occur, they can slow down and take on more meaning between them, though it never descends to the frankly sexual: suggestion, not demonstration. They do a final handshake. As JIM leaves, JOE slaps him on the ass, in the approved sports manner.

JOE

I never forgot.

They look at each other. JOE exits.

BLACKOUT

T62 Afghanistan 1988

DESCRIPTION

A Soviet tank crew at the ass-end of the war in Afghanistan is trying to make it home in one piece.

CHARACTERS

- COMMANDER
- GUNNER
- LOADER
- DRIVER

MISCELLANEOUS

- Sound design is crucial to the production.
- Light Russian accents but only to indicate who they are.
- The actors are young, the cream of their generation
- All actions are mimed

* * * * *

DRIVER sits stage left on a low chair or cube. COMMANDER sits behind him, on a higher chair or even a ladder. GUNNER sits to COMMANDER's right. LOADER sits behind GUNNER.

SOUND: The grind of a tank along a road. It is not deafening, but then again it is not mild.

COMMANDER mimes looking through a periscope. GUNNER mimes looking through his viewfinder. DRIVER mimes driving.

COMMANDER

Do you see anything?

GUNNER

No.

COMMANDER speaks without heat.

COMMANDER

Shit. Shit.

No one says anything, but everyone is worried.

COMMANDER

Stop.

DRIVER clutches and shifts into neutral, presses the brake, moves the steering laterals to "0."

SOUND: Tank engine idling, radio static -- behind this, slight, the wind of a storm.

COMMANDER

How did this happen?

DRIVER

Not my fault, sir.

COMMANDER

I'll ask you again, how did this happen?

DRIVER

The storm --

COMMANDER

How is it we're all alone out here with you doing the driving?

DRIVER

The snow storm made it --

GUNNER

It was impossible to see anything, sir --

COMMANDER

Did I ask you?

GUNNER

No sir.

COMMANDER

Don't answer questions I didn't ask you. Back to you: how did this happen?

DRIVER realizes that no explanation will do, and COMMANDER knows that his question has no satisfactory answer.

COMMANDER turns to his right for the radio, puts on a headset, turns up the volume: static. He turns a dial to different frequencies: only static.

DRIVER

The snow storm must have --

COMMANDER

We are the luckiest of the lucky few.

COMMANDER takes off the headset, turns down the volume. They all sit in silence, the tank engine idling. Storm winds have picked up in volume and are now a constant.

COMMANDER

How much fuel?

DRIVER

We had enough to make the staging area for the retreat.

COMMANDER

Withdrawal -- negotiated withdrawal --

DRIVER

Yes, sir. Enough to make the negotiated withdrawal.

COMMANDER

Don't forget -- comrade Najibullah is now in charge, and our Afghani comrades have been declared capable of defending their own --

A snort of disgust from LOADER interrupts COMMANDER -- a snort strong enough for snot to come out. LOADER wipes his nose on his sleeve.

LOADER

Sorry, sir.

COMMANDER

You disagree?

LOADER

Nothing, sir.

COMMANDER

Snot, sand, and Afghanistan. What else do you have up there?

LOADER does not respond but then does.

LOADER

I think a pile of shit has more brains than The Ox --

COMMANDER looks through his periscope.

COMMANDER

But now it's The Ox's wasteland, Loader.

LOADER

It wasn't ever ours.

COMMANDER

Wasteland. Always nothing but a waste[land] --

LOADER

We didn't win, did we, sir, was what my snot meant.

COMMANDER does not respond, continues looking through his periscope. Everyone else is nervous.

GUNNER

Sir? Sir?

DRIVER

Can't turn it off, sir, to save fuel -- the heater --

COMMANDER

Aware of how a T62 works, Driver.

DRIVER

Should move, sir.

GUNNER

Turn around, sir, follow our tracks back to the highway --

COMMANDER puts away the periscope. He turns to LOADER, speaks in a low, even voice.

COMMANDER

Of course we didn't fucking win.

DRIVER

Sir --

COMMANDER

We could not have ever "won," no one ever fucking wins in this hellscape --

They are all brought to a quick alert by the SOUND of a single gunshot against the hull of the tank. Immediately COMMANDER looks through the periscope and his vision blocks, DRIVER looks through his vision blocks, GUNNER looks through his periscope. LOADER waits, shivers.

COMMANDER
Gunner?

GUNNER
Nothing, sir.

COMMANDER
Driver?

DRIVER
Nothing, sir.

COMMANDER
Your guess -- stone driven by the wind or --

DRIVER
Commander --

COMMANDER
Always what we don't know, can't see -- can you retrace the compass bearings? No tracks left --

SOUND: Another gunshot against the hull.

COMMANDER
Driver --

DRIVER presses in the clutch, engages the gear, pulls the left steering lateral to "2," and the tank pivots to the right to turn around. DRIVER gears up as the tank moves forward.

COMMANDER is looking through the periscope.

COMMANDER
Stop! Stop!

DRIVER gears down, presses the brake and clutch -- tank slides to a halt.

SOUND: Under the tank idle are indistinct voices through the hull.

DRIVER

Sir?!

COMMANDER

Not ours, if that was your question.

GUNNER

So why have we [stopped] --

COMMANDER does not answer.

SOUND: Tank idle, indistinct voices shouting -- and banging on the tank's hull.

COMMANDER

A tale of empires.

The other three look at each other -- no one knows where this is going.

SOUND: More banging now, rhythmic.

COMMANDER

Pride. Arrogance. Stupidity. Greed. Empire's
four horsemen. The English --

DRIVER

Sir --

COMMANDER in a quiet sing-song.

COMMANDER

Our Viet -- Viet -- Vietnam --

GUNNER

Sir, they have RPGs aimed --

With no urgency, COMMANDER speaks to DRIVER.

COMMANDER

Go. Go.

DRIVER guns the motor forward, bouncing all of them around as it barrels across the uneven snow-covered terrain. All but COMMANDER begin to shout/scream, voices rising over the roar of the diesel engine, urging the tank forward, forward, forward.

DRIVER, GUNNER, LOADER
Aaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!!!!!

Until.

SOUND: Brutal brutal brutal explosion as the RPGs hit the reserve fuel tanks on the rear of the T62, then the explosion of the on-board tank shells.

Then all goes silent. The four sit there, composed. They are now free to move about the stage.

COMMANDER
This would be the part where the Writer would use his art to have the voices of --

COMMANDER raises his hand, as if saying "Present." As the others speak, they do the same.

COMMANDER
-- the Destroyed --

GUNNER
The Damned --

LOADER
The Sacrificed -- hello! --

DRIVER
The "Honored Dead" --

COMMANDER
Rise up to haunt you --

LOADER
With Wisdom --

GUNNER
And Caution --

DRIVER
And Humility --

LOADER
And the Writer would point out how --

COMMANDER

Bang you over the head with how --

ALL

Four people trapped in a tank --

DRIVER

With only a limited view of the world outside --

GUNNER

Symbolize the Blindness at the Heart of the Enterprise --

COMMANDER

With the ability to deal out Death but no understanding of the larger "Why" --

GUNNER

And after the sermon the Writer's hope that --

ALL

Through his Art --

GUNNER

Those of Good Faith would take the hint and resist the Corruption --

COMMANDER

That comes with Empire.

DRIVER

Speak Truth to Power.

GUNNER

And save the lives of soldiers, and save the lives of everybody that soldiers kill.

LOADER

But this Writer --

LOADER snickers.

LOADER

Sorry.

COMMANDER

What?

LOADER

I can't -- I shouldn't --

DRIVER

You've obviously got something to say.

LOADER

It's all okay, really -- the Writer's only doing what he thinks is right -- who can blame --

But LOADER bursts into a long fit of laughter. The others watch, and then join in but on a much lower level.

LOADER

I'm sorry -- I'm sorry -- I thought about the Writer, then roly-poly Gorbachev just popped into my head -- that little port-wine stain --

GUNNER

That? Butter compared to what I had.

COMMANDER

What?

GUNNER

A dream about the zombie Brezhnev, the other night -- made my skin crawl.

DRIVER

Ten bloody years --

ALL

Yep.

DRIVER

Ten bloody years the two of them kept us here.

LOADER

So what chance does the Writer have against two like that, eh? What chance does "Art" have against a zombie and a repo man? That's why I had to laugh --

GUNNER

No, no, it was good you did --

LOADER

Couldn't help it --

GUNNER

I hated being expected to say all the well-meant
shit the Writer had planned for us -- I mean, it
had some poetry in it, but --

GUNNER spits.

GUNNER

No thanks.

LOADER

No "tanks."

Laughter.

COMMANDER

Brezhnev -- he's not dead, you know?

GUNNER

Zombie!!

COMMANDER

He will come along again, you know --

GUNNER

We know.

COMMANDER

Different suit, different tie --

DRIVER

At least Gorby got us out.

COMMANDER

There will be another one of him, too --

GUNNER

We know.

COMMANDER

Different tie, different suit --

GUNNER

But Afghanistan? It will last forever.

LOADER

The Suits will get us into and get us out of every Afghanistan they can find.

DRIVER

That's the nature of Suits.

COMMANDER

I don't blame the Suits, though.

The other three give him a look.

COMMANDER

I blame those who pay the salaries of the Suits.

LOADER does an evil chuckle and rubs his hands

LOADER

Bastards!!

COMMANDER

I blame those who say they support the troops and then don't bring them home. Don't end the wars that kill off the sons and daughters. Don't scream out in rage at every evil done in their names. Them I blame. Them I blame completely.

GUNNER

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori and all associated Najibullah bullshit.

LOADER overlaps with GUNNER.

LOADER

And all that United Nations shit, yeah.

COMMANDER

Exactly.

SOUND: Low at first, but the sound of raging fire rises along with voices in agony.

DRIVER

Come on.

The four take their place in the tank as the fire sound and voices rise in intensity to hellish levels. They are calm. They are dead. They are consumed in a long slow fade to black.

Touching Down

DESCRIPTION

Parents will eventually die, and family members must face this. Thomas Touch-Fire, old and crippled and exhausted, wants to permanently exit his nursing home with the help of his son-in-law Lindbergh. But Lindbergh, remembering the Seneca legends his father-in-law has taught him, offers Thomas another road to travel.

CHARACTERS

- THOMAS TOUCH-FIRE, elderly man, Seneca Indian. Physically weak, frail-looking, needs a cane. He wears a headband.
- LINDBERGH, his son-in-law, Anglo, speaks with an Irish accent

SETTING

- Park, with a river and a bridge -- early morning on a spring day, just before sunrise. There should be a bench.

TIME

- Dawn, present -- upstate New York

MISCELLANEOUS

- Bench
- Cane for THOMAS
- Small beer cooler, with some beer in it
- Two empties
- Birdsong, river sounds

* * * * *

The audience discovers THOMAS and LINDBERGH sitting on the bench drinking beer. Two empties are next to the cooler. The light is soft and lambent, a half hour or so before sunrise. Throughout the play, it will gradually brighten, with birdsong underscoring, until full dawn. There is also a constant purling of water underscoring. LINDBERGH belches.

LINDBERGH

Sorry.

THOMAS

It's fine.

LINDBERGH

Not used to beer for breakfast. We're not all poetizing drunkards, you know.

THOMAS

It's made from grain -- it's a cereal of sorts.

LINDBERGH

But I don't think I'll be adding it to my breakfast menu.

They toast each other.

THOMAS

Eructation.

LINDBERGH

What?

THOMAS

That's what you did -- eruct. You eructed. An eructation.

LINDBERGH

Sounds vaguely sexual, heh? "He could feel himself getting eruct."

THOMAS

Eruct. What a difference a letter makes, hey? Hard-on. Mouth fart.

THOMAS works up a belch.

LINDBERGH

Ah, to the morning songbirds.

THOMAS

Feels good.

LINDBERGH

(indicating the beer)

Given what's on our agenda this morning, I didn't bring this for refreshment, did I?

THOMAS

No.

LINDBERGH

Then why did I bring this, hahnii [my father]?

THOMAS

When you and number one daughter visit, this is where I sneak the beer you bring me.

LINDBERGH

Your little biergarten.

THOMAS

I can sit here, by the water, unwitnessed because nobody on this reservation moves from their soaps or beds. I'm safe.

LINDBERGH

From the marauding nurses.

THOMAS

(shakes his head)

Thomas Touch-Fire, 74 years old, of the once-proud Seneca nation, the People of Stone --

LINDBERGH

Here, here!

THOMAS

Member of the Iroquois confederation --

LINDBERGH

Double here, here! Here, here, here, here!

THOMAS

Ben Franklin stole it --

LINDBERGH

I know.

THOMAS

-- to write the Constitution that murdered us --
How the mighty have fallen.

LINDBERGH

'Tis a sad world, indeed.

THOMAS

Usually have to drink it warm. It feels good to drink it so cold. What I actually want is that: I want to feel this last coldness.

THOMAS tries to burp again but gets nothing.

THOMAS

This shell --
(indicating his own body)
-- this bag, is ridiculous, don't you think?

LINDBERGH

Depends.

THOMAS

Gases, slimes, squeals, splats, hisses, explosions
--

LINDBERGH

Remember, two of these "shells" produced you.

THOMAS

That's a plus?

LINDBERGH

I happen to think so. As does number one daughter.

THOMAS

Well, you two like all those ancient meaningful tribal stories about Haweniyo [Great Spirit] mixing up some dirt with spit or piss or dried sperm or whatever --

LINDBERGH

(pours out a small libation of beer)
Don't forget the waters of creation!

THOMAS

Oops, first man. Oops, first woman. You know what they were? The first leftovers. Afterthoughts!

LINDBERGH

And he's off.

THOMAS

Don't mock.

LINDBERGH

Not when you've got a head up.

THOMAS

Intact bastard. "I breathe the breath of life into you" --

(Bronx cheer)

-- now get the fuck out of here! Dismissed! Dissed! Is that right? Dissed?

(LINDBERGH nods yes)

Dissed! Into the world wit cha [with you], ya clueless and flimsy beast! Ya brittle bastard! Go get yerself conquered! Now I'm sounding like you. It will be good to get away from all of it.

LINDBERGH

The litany of despair still flows.

THOMAS

But -- today is different. Isn't it?

LINDBERGH

Yes it is.

THOMAS

It will be different today.

LINDBERGH

Yes it will.

THOMAS

After today, you won't have to hear the litany any more.

They both finish their beer.

THOMAS

Let's start.

They take a beat by putting down their beer bottles. Then LINDBERGH and THOMAS with his cane walk to the bridge railing in a measured manner. The light gets brighter at this point and will continue to full dawn by the end of the scene. Birdsong and purling water.

THOMAS

When I escape, it's to here. Water, stone arch
-- slip out of this wreck and remember. Well, to
start. Lift me over.

THOMAS holds his hand out to LINDBERGH. LINDBERGH does not
take it.

THOMAS

What are you doing?

LINDBERGH

I'm not doing anything.

THOMAS

That's not what you promised.

LINDBERGH

I know what I promised.

THOMAS

Then why aren't you keeping it?

LINDBERGH

I've promised something else.

THOMAS

You've thought about it.

LINDBERGH

You can hardly fault me.

THOMAS

I told you not to! Makes cowards of us all!

THOMAS turns away in disgust.

THOMAS

You betray me. Like everyone else. Everything
else. Why did your parents give you such a God-
awful first name?

LINDBERGH

Take your hits.

THOMAS

Lind-bergh. Lind-burger --

LINDBERGH

Read 'em off.

THOMAS

Lind-boig, Lind-booger, Lind-bunghole --

LINDBERGH

(as if said a hundred times)

An uncle, mother's side, her favorite brother --

THOMAS

Lind-boozer, Lind-bugger --

LINDBERGH

For Charles Lindbergh --

THOMAS

Lind-burp, Lind-barf --

LINDBERGH

The uncle was hatched the year Charles crossed the pond. C'mon, more.

THOMAS

Are you called Lindbergh because you want to "take flight"?

LINDBERGH

C'mon.

THOMAS

Fly, fly away at the least little storm!

LINDBERGH

I'm bruising up nicely.

THOMAS

You promised!

LINDBERGH

I promised, yes -- I promised to help you. Subject to interpretation.

THOMAS

I have been at 27,000 sunrises. Of all, I don't know how many I've really noticed. But this sunrise -- this one, this one --

LINDBERGH

Because --

THOMAS

Because I have decided.

LINDBERGH

Thomas --

THOMAS

Look at me!

LINDBERGH goes to say something, but THOMAS stops him.

THOMAS

The litany? I hear it, I smell it, every day. Every subtraction. You should sit in the rec room of the Shady Grove Retirement Community -- you'd be sore amazed at the noises and smells. There comes a time when, héawak [my son] -- and you know it is done: No more reservation! And to need a fellow bastard like you to help me get over this railing, something I could have flown over! This high -- and I can't get over it myself!

THOMAS puts his hand out.

THOMAS

Now do your part.

LINDBERGH comes to THOMAS and, in one smooth motion, picks up him and gently but firmly sits him on the bench. He take THOMAS' cane and uses it in a variety of ways through his lines: a rapier, a pointer, and so on.

THOMAS

No! No! No!

LINDBERGH

En garde!

THOMAS

No!

LINDBERGH

Sit down.

THOMAS

I would kill you if I could.

LINDBERGH

I believe you believe that.

THOMAS picks up an empty and makes to throw it. LINDBERGH takes up a batter's stance.

LINDBERGH

Right down the middle.

(he points)

Right field, upper deck.

THOMAS does throw it but not hard; LINDBERGH easily catches it.

LINDBERGH

Strike three.

THOMAS

I want out.

LINDBERGH

No you don't.

Fake-tosses the bottle to THOMAS, who reacts to catch it. Having gotten his attention, LINDBERGH very softly tosses the bottle back to THOMAS.

LINDBERGH

If you had wanted out so bad, you could have just walked into the river. Right around there. Or there. Then down to the ocean, Thomas Touch-Fire Hamlet's Ophelia bobbing like a fishing bob. You didn't need me. But here you wanted me. Obvious question, then, Thomas. Number one daughter and I figured it out, so so can you. C'mon, what would that question be?

THOMAS

I want out.

LINDBERGH

And I -- we -- don't want you out.

THOMAS

You don't get to say.

LINDBERGH does a little sloppy soft shoe holding the cane, somewhat to "Tea for Two."

LINDBERGH

"No -- more talk -- of ending -- things / Now -- let's talk -- of mending -- things." Raise high the roofbeam, carpenter. Now comes the new generation. Sounding prophetic enough, Thomas? Getting into that storyteller zone? Because that's right where we are at the moment. I have a story to tell you. Eh, put it down!

(points with the handle of the cane)

Put it down -- or I'll give ya the hook! Now, listen!

THOMAS

Why should I?

LINDBERGH

Listen!

LINDBERGH undergoes some kind of small but clear physical transformation into the storyteller.

LINDBERGH

Haweniyo decided that something was missing in the world he'd made.

THOMAS

I know this story.

LINDBERGH

Too quick on the draw. Old version -- but now new generation, the re-generation, Thomas. Haweniyo decided that something was missing in the world he'd made. What comes next?

THOMAS

I don't want to.

LINDBERGH

You have to give something to the teller for the story.

THOMAS

No.

LINDBERGH

Contribute, damn it! Contribute! Be in powerful voice again!

THOMAS

He created a man and a boy.

LINDBERGH

Good.

THOMAS

"Walk like human beings," he told them, and they were perfect. They followed Haweniyo down to the river, where he gave them speech.

LINDBERGH

Like us, palavering. C'mon.

THOMAS

"What state are we in?"

LINDBERGH

"This is life," said Haweniyo . "Before, you were mud. Now, you live."

THOMAS

From dust and shit --

LINDBERGH

"When we were mud, were we alive?" Come on, Thomas.

THOMAS

"No."

LINDBERGH

"What is that called?"

THOMAS

"Death."

LINDBERGH

"Will we be alive always?" Look at me, Thomas. Haweniyo pondered. Follow me. "I didn't think about that. Let's decide it right now. Here's a chip of bear dung. If it floats, then people will die and come back to life four days later."

THOMAS

"No."

LINDBERGH

"No" said the man in his brutal innocence.

THOMAS

"The chip will dissolve in the water. I'll throw this stone, which will not melt. If it floats, we'll live forever. If it sinks, then we'll die."

LINDBERGH

He didn't know about stones and water, having only been alive for a few hours.

THOMAS

He threw the stone.

LINDBERGH

Yes.

THOMAS

Haweniyo watched it flash in the sun, and he could have had Raven come down and snatch it away. But he let it fall --

LINDBERGH

Stop.

THOMAS

You can't --

LINDBERGH

Rewind. New generation.

THOMAS

The stone falls, we die -- that's the story.

LINDBERGH

We have more choices than you dream of, Thomas. Listen: Haweniyo with a bam of his cane summoned Raven, Gáqga, to catch it. Which Raven did, and brought the stone to Haweniyo, who gave it to the man and said, "Take more time to learn." Then the man tossed the stone to his son and said, "You hold on to the future."

THOMAS

No, no, no! Haweniyo lets it sink because that's how it has to be!

LINDBERGH

No.

THOMAS

"You made a choice there," said Haweniyo. "Now nothing can be done about it. Now people will die." That's how it ends!

LINDBERGH

The son has the stone, Thomas. And, yes, at some point he must throw it, and, yes, it will sink, and Raven will not always catch it. But -- but, Thomas Touch-Fire -- there are an infinite number of ways, and an infinite number of appointed times, to throw it.

THOMAS

And you have the stone.

LINDBERGH

Right in my pocket.

THOMAS

What are you offering?

LINDBERGH

You know I love you. That we love you. Do you know that? We have watched you be a restless shade at Shady Grove for so long -- a stone in mid-flight, that's what you were --

THOMAS

Are.

LINDBERGH

Lusting for the water --

THOMAS

Just to sink. No more gravity on my bones. There's a ledger book in me. Accounts receivable.

LINDBERGH

Accounts payable.

THOMAS

When my spirit is over-run with visions of "can not" --

LINDBERGH

Ah!

THOMAS

I can't pay --

LINDBERGH

And hope tastes like warm beer!

THOMAS

These knees push, gravity -- pulls --

LINDBERGH

-- the stone to water. But that's in the old story. I have the stone in my pocket. Remember -- infinite ways. Thomas Touch-Fire, you are not in mid-arc any longer.

THOMAS

What do you mean?

A few soft shoe steps, ending with a button.

LINDBERGH

Raven, at your service. You are coming home with us.

THOMAS

You can't afford that!

LINDBERGH

We will.

THOMAS

You can't!

LINDBERGH

You're not the only one who knows how to read a ledger book. Home with us.

THOMAS

Really?

LINDBERGH

(looking at his watch)

Number one daughter is getting the papers ready right now.

THOMAS

Can I drink beer?

LINDBERGH

We'll graduate you from macrobrew to microbrew.

THOMAS

(gesturing vaguely)

All of them -- They all have families --

LINDBERGH

Well, that's the problem, isn't it? We've made everything so convenient and disposable. We're not disposed toward that with you.

LINDBERGH points toward the water.

LINDBERGH

I would never have done it, you know. Nope. Like Anchises, I would have strapped you to my back.

THOMAS

May I ask one thing?

LINDBERGH

Unlimited menu.

THOMAS

Pick me up. Pick me up.

LINDBERGH cradles THOMAS.

THOMAS

Bring me there. Hold me over the water, like you would have.

LINDBERGH

Why?

THOMAS

Because I need to remember.

LINDBERGH

What?

THOMAS

Just do it.

LINDBERGH holds him over the water.

THOMAS

Do you know what the stone said to the man, but the man didn't hear? "I do not want to leave your hand and sink in darkness alone. Bring me back." Bring me back. Neither had a second chance. You can put me down.

LINDBERGH sits him down.

THOMAS

I wanted to remember that. Thank you, Raven.

LINDBERGH

(gathering up bottles and cooler)

Let's go. You have some papers to sign.

THOMAS puts his arm through LINDBERGH's.

THOMAS

What's a microbrew?

They walk.

LINDBERGH

We'll line 'em up and try 'em all!

THOMAS

I could live for another 20 years.

LINDBERGH

It'll take us that long to drink 'em.

THOMAS

Good.

They exit.

Treetop

DESCRIPTION

Julia Jackson Sequoia Sempervirens has been sitting for two years on a 6' by 8' platform 180 feet up in a redwood (Latin name: Sequoia sempervirens) to protest logging in ancient virgin forests. She is close to a resolution with the company that will result in the redwood being saved from logging.

CHARACTERS

- Julia Jackson Sequoia Sempervirens, political activist
- Zach Reising ["rising"], former logger, now company "spokesperson" -- old enough to be her father

NOTE: Ethnicity is not crucial, and accents should be distinct, not bland, news-anchor voices.

SETTING

- An ancient redwood, somewhere north of San Francisco

PROPS

- Two step-ladders of at least 8' height: the higher, the better. (The best would be two tall A-frames of the kind used to focus lights.) If only shorter ladders can be used, then ZACH's "climbing" needs to be done in some way to indicate that he is climbing 180 feet above the ground. Just below Julia's "platform" would be a series of cleats nailed into the tree as a ladder up to the platform -- the steps of the ladder can be seen as these cleats. The director should play with the placement of the ladders to find a combination that works. If the director has some other ideas about how to achieve the climbing effect, he or she should feel free to use them. (For instance, it might be sufficient to have ZACH simply stand to one side in his own light until he needs to be at the foot of the ladders.)
- A cell phone for JULIA (either working or with a ringing done on tape). It would be good to have a "flip" kind, where the mouthpiece/earpiece flips open and closed.
- An intercom device for ZACH so that he can speak to people on the ground. There needs to be a sound effect of static and voices as they try to contact him.
- A large knife. Attached to the ladder.
- Small bucket filled with water colored yellow, for urine -- quarter cup in all. Attached to the ladder.
- Clothing, logger equipment, etc. as appropriate to the scene -- but JULIA's clothing can be mismatched, since she has been sitting up in the tree for two years. (Note on

climbing equipment: it would be impractical to use actual climbing equipment of heavy spikes clamped to heavy boots, axes, leather belts, ropes, and cables. But some equipment could be used to suggest -- telephone companies have a lesser version of it for climbing utility poles. And if the illusion of equipment can be done, rather than the actual thing, then that choice can be made as well.)

- JULIA is also tied in to the tree -- a leather belt with clips and a thick heavy rope would do. It does not have to support her weight at any time but must be free to move.

* * * * *

In the darkness, wind through tree branches and other sounds to establish mood. These continue very softly under the action during the play. Lights come up slowly, as if at dawn, to reveal JULIA, sitting on one of the ladders. She looks, for the moment, completely at peace. In the dawn light enters ZACH, equipped for his climb. As ZACH begins, JULIA's cell phone chirps several times before she takes it out of her pocket, puts it to her ear, and speaks.

JULIA

Yes, Jessie.

JULIA listens but does not engage in a dialogue. After a second or two she climbs partway down the ladder and sees ZACH.

JULIA

(into the phone)

Yes, he's there. Wait.

(to ZACH)

Hey!

ZACH looks up; they catch eyes; he salutes her and responds.

ZACH

Hey!

JULIA

Who in the hell are you?

ZACH

My name is --

JULIA

What are you doing?

ZACH

I've got something to tell --

JULIA

Shut up!

JULIA retreats up the ladder.

JULIA

The Visigoths are attacking Eden, Jessie. No --
you listen! No! None of it -- not any of it!
Turning you off, Jessie.

JULIA holds the phone at arm's length and makes an elaborate
gesture of turning off the phone.

JULIA

No. More. Lies.

JULIA sits for a moment, thinking -- the sounds in the background
can still be heard. She then carefully sneaks down the ladder
and "peeks" to see ZACH again.

JULIA

Damn! Time is being lost.

JULIA goes to replace the cell phone in her pocket, but it slips
and falls -- ZACH moves as if to indicate that it just missed
him. During the next lines, the actors will need to talk as
if there is still some 45' feet between them, but the volume is
reduced as ZACH gets closer.

ZACH

Hey!

JULIA

Damn!

ZACH

What was that?

JULIA

Cell phone.

ZACH

Artillery?

JULIA

It just fell.

ZACH

Fifty feet of cell phone is a mighty weapon.

JULIA

What are you doing here?

ZACH

(to himself, as he adjusts)

Too damned small anyway.

JULIA

What do you want?

ZACH

(to himself)

Rotary's fine.

JULIA

Just. Go. Back!

ZACH

Can't.

JULIA

Are you alone?

ZACH

Yes.

JULIA

How do I know that?

ZACH

Just look.

JULIA goes pivots on the top of the ladder, checking out all sides.

ZACH

Satisfied?

JULIA

You should be so lucky. So you're alone -- big deal. Makes it easier to go back alone.

ZACH

I have news for you.

JULIA

You and it are not wanted up here.

ZACH

I know.

JULIA

You don't deserve -- none of you deserve --

ZACH

I know.

JULIA

But still you're coming up!

ZACH

Yes I am.

JULIA

I can see you.

ZACH

I can see you, too.

JULIA

The eyes of the world are stuck on us.

ZACH

We are naked to the world one hundred and eighty feet above the earth. Damn these crampons!

JULIA

So you can't do anything dastardly --

ZACH

(surprised by the "old-fashioned" word)
Dastardly?

JULIA

-- to me --

ZACH

-- at this height?

JULIA

-- or to Eden -- Not to Eden or to any of us!

ZACH

Where did you get "dastardly"?

JULIA

It's all dastardly -- all of everything you all are doing. Just because you're some bloated multi-corporational Frankenfreak lumber company you think --

ZACH

I've read the manifesto.

JULIA

Don't mock me!

ZACH

I'm not -- I just said I read the manif --

JULIA

All that -- raping! Get those big chainsaws humming, hold 'em right against your big old bulgy guts --

JULIA mimes holding a big chainsaw as if it were an oversized penis, makes a roaring sound. ZACH should now be at the foot of the ladders.

JULIA

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! Well, no more!
No more! Hey! Hey!

ZACH

What?

JULIA

Hey!

ZACH

What?

JULIA

You stop right there. Right there! I know what you're up to.

ZACH

I'm just about up to you.

JULIA

Stop it, smart-mouth!

ZACH

Okay --

JULIA

Or I will piss on your head! Look! Look!

JULIA gets the bucket.

JULIA

I got a pot to piss in and its aching for gravity.

At this moment, ZACH's intercom comes on, with a mix of static and voices -- unintelligible. For a few seconds its blare fills the air as ZACH and JULIA listen. ZACH does not respond.

JULIA

You said you were alone.

ZACH

I am.

JULIA

You're recording us!

ZACH

It's just --

JULIA

You vandals always lie.

ZACH

I am alone! This I can turn off if you want.

JULIA

What I want? This is what I want -- piss off!

JULIA empties the bucket out. The contents just miss ZACH.

ZACH

Hey!

JULIA

Damn!

(shakes the bucket, re-attaches it)

Damn! Damn, damn, damn, damn! Should have drunk more water. Make a note. I said stop!

ZACH

I am stopped, Julia. I -- await.

Beat, in silence. The static and voices comes up again. This time, ZACH claps a hand on the intercom to shut it off. Then, with very visible and deliberate gestures, he detaches the unit and "drops" it to the ground, following the cell phone.

ZACH

Now, Julia, no one else is sitting at our table. I have something to tell you, Julia. That cell phone call of yours was about letting you k[now]
--

JULIA

You have either good news or bad news, and I don't want to hear either.

ZACH

Julia Jackson Sequoia Sempervirens -- I can understand that.

JULIA

(astonished)

You used my whole name.

ZACH settles himself against the ladder, now on the cleats of the "ladder" up to the platform.

ZACH

Well, it's your name, isn't it? You took the name of the tree as your own, right?

JULIA

In solidarity.

ZACH

And since I am on an "ambassadorial" mission, it's only etiquette that when I present my bona fides, I should call my diplomatic dance partner by her proper name. We are in a dance, you know? And

now, Julia Jackson Sequoia Sempervirens, I, Zach Reising, have to deliver --

Suddenly, JULIA comes down the ladder fiercely and tries to kick ZACH.

JULIA

I told you I don't want you to tell me anything!

ZACH

Hey -- stop --

ZACH manages to grab her foot, and for a moment they square off at each other.

ZACH

Don't be stupid!

JULIA

I didn't ask you to invade!

ZACH

You don't want to kill me.

JULIA

I just want you to leave us alone.

ZACH

You and Eden.

JULIA

I just want you to stop hissing, hissing, in my ear.

(trying to shake her foot free)

Yes -- me and Eden.

ZACH

Eden.

ZACH lets her foot go; JULIA retreats.

JULIA

From the first day her name.

ZACH

I know.

JULIA

And I don't need any "Adam" up here!

ZACH

You're an "Adam" smasher, to be sure.

JULIA

It's been enough for me just to be here. It's sacred.

ZACH

That's what you've said.

JULIA

You work for them -- how can you know what I've said?

ZACH

You cross a border, you do your research. I've read up on you. I've listened to you.

JULIA

And that makes you what?

ZACH

May I stand unmolested on the bottom rung, here? It's been a long time since I've hung by the belt this far above the noise.

JULIA

(stamps her foot)

But no closer!

ZACH stands on the "rung."

ZACH

Creak, crack. Unhitch the back.

Several beats as ZACH looks out over the "forest."

ZACH

It has been too long --

JULIA

That's far enough.

ZACH

No farther, Julia, I promise.
(back out to the "forest")
I have -- forgotten.

JULIA

Forgotten what?

ZACH

Unearthly.

(to JULIA)

Yes. This, Julia, this -- this! I have forgotten
-- to my great loss. You see this every day.

JULIA

I see this every day.

ZACH

You are very lucky.

ZACH takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

ZACH

It has been too long. I always understood, you
know. Why you would give up so much of life down
there for life up here.

JULIA

(uneasy)

I don't think you understand at all.

ZACH

It's important for you to think like that, yes.

JULIA

Like what?

ZACH

That you can't be understood by someone like me --

JULIA

Well -- you're the enemy. You probably just want
to know if I have sex up here with myself!

ZACH

Down there, maybe they want to know -- gossips
-- but that's because they have never been up

here. This is better than sex. Where the air -- Words. Either you know it or you don't. You know it. I know it. Sex -- I'll tell you, Julia, and I'd tell them down there if they'd understand -- this is sex, if you mean union, ecstasy -- you know, lifted out. Sex down there -- pale, huh? A pale imitation, hey?

JULIA

I wouldn't know -- down there --

ZACH

But up here, you know, don't you? Sex! You're funny -- this is so beyond that.

JULIA

Yes.

ZACH

Beyond politics, economics --

JULIA

Yes.

ZACH

-- beyond what the ants consider important.

JULIA

Yes. Lifted in a leap of light.

ZACH

Yes.

JULIA

As beautiful as a cornerstone.

ZACH

Yes.

JULIA

Healed.

ZACH

Healed.

JULIA

It is -- home.

Beat as JULIA looks at him, unsure.

JULIA
(harshly)
Who are you, corporate flack, Reising, Zach?

ZACH
That's one way of putting my name.

JULIA
You said you read about me.

ZACH
I have.

JULIA
And Eden.

ZACH
And Eden, too. And everything else about you,
your group, your cause -- your poetry. The ones
you float down on parachutes.

JULIA
Stop smiling!

ZACH
Why?

JULIA
I know that smile -- soothe-smooth-it-over smile.

ZACH
Just appreciation. May I come up another step?

JULIA rushes back down the ladder and threatens to kick ZACH again.

JULIA
No you may not, Zach flack!

JULIA, balanced against the ladder, drops her pants and squats slightly as if she is going to go on his head. ZACH, of course, ducks. A few grunts, but nothing. Frustrated, JULIA pulls up her pants and goes back to the top of the ladder.

ZACH

I'll stay right here, then.

JULIA

You will stay right there!

ZACH

Right here.

JULIA

I don't have to keep any pepper spray or mace crap up here --

ZACH

I won't move.

JULIA

-- because there are no liars! Nothing ever attacks! Well, except for the company helicopter trying to blow me out of the tree -- Oh, and the floodlights, the sirens, the police attacking my crew --

ZACH

That all happened, yes.

JULIA

But mostly without the humans it's safe up here.

ZACH

The storms?

JULIA

No revenge in them, no meanness. Not like human storms. With Eden, it is always safe. Was. Safe.

ZACH

I am not here to hurt you.

JULIA

Yes. You are.

ZACH

You know why.

JULIA

No -- I refuse.

ZACH

You know why I've climbed up here.

JULIA

Tell me nothing! Tell me nothing!

ZACH

It's over --

JULIA

" In the treetop -- "

ZACH

The deal has been struck --

JULIA

Tell me noootttthhhiiiiinnnnggg, Zach flack!

ZACH

It is time --

JULIA

Nooooootttthhhiiiiinnnngggg!

Several beats.

ZACH

You got what you w[anted] --

JULIA cover her ears or make some kind of similar gesture. Her body language is increasingly anxious.

ZACH

(changing tack)

Like floating on an ocean -- an ocean. Isn't it? An ocean. This ship. One of those figureheads on the bow. You used that in one of your poems. "Being on top of this slow geyser of wood." I liked that one, too.

JULIA

Shut up!

ZACH

You've been up here for two years and eight days --

JULIA

Shut up, shut up --

ZACH

I did this for 20 years.

JULIA

Killing trees.

ZACH

That I did, Julia.

JULIA

Butchery -- chainsaw, bow saw --

ZACH

Every method.

JULIA

And now you hack for the masters.

ZACH

I saw too many thin get crushed --

(holds up his hands)

-- every bone, at least once -- too many widow-makers, too many slivers and slack times. Took myself to school, put on a white collar, used elevators rather than crampons.

JULIA

Zach rising up to the middle class.

ZACH

(jokingly)

And now I "are" a spokesperson -- and now I need to "spokes person" with you. We don't have much time -- and it's time.

JULIA

Tell. Me. Nothing.

ZACH goes up a step, but before he knows it, JULIA is down the ladder with her foot on his throat, leaning him far back. It should be staged so that it appears ZACH is barely holding on.

ZACH

(barely able to talk)

You're crushing --

JULIA

Shut up, mouthpiece, shut up, shut up, shut up!

ZACH

I can't hold --

JULIA

I won't let you!

ZACH

You're killing me -- killing me --

JULIA realizes that ZACH is right -- she could kill him -- and immediately releases him. ZACH clings to the "tree," gasping for breath. JULIA retreats, frightened at what she just did.

JULIA

Go, go -- I'll come down -- I'll come down, I'll come down -- it's not safe any more --

ZACH

(hoarsely but without rancor)

Shut up --

JULIA

Go --

(to herself)

-- not safe, not safe --

ZACH

Listen --

JULIA gets the knife. She starts to hack at the rope around her waist.

JULIA

Go -- I'll come down -- right away --

JULIA can ad lib other phrases until ZACH stops her.

Seeing what she is doing, ZACH climbs up the ladder and grabs her hand.

ZACH

Stop it. You haven't done anything wrong.

JULIA stops but does not give up the knife -- there is a moment of tableau with ZACH holding JULIA's wrist, the knife suspended, JULIA not looking at ZACH. Then slowly ZACK pries her fingers off the knife, one by one, until he holds the knife. When he takes the last finger off and has the knife in his hand, JULIA gives him a horrified look. Another moment of tableau, then they separate. ZACH looks around and sees where the knife was kept; he replaces it.

ZACH

(massaging his neck and throat)

The deal is this, Julia. Julia. Eden is saved -- and everything within 200 feet of here. You got yourself an acre, more or less, of saved ancient redwoods. Other parts of the deal you wanted -- you got.

JULIA

(not facing ZACH)

Could have killed you. You.

ZACH

Your group agreed --

JULIA

Killed you, Zack flack --

ZACH

Yes, yes -- but down there your group said they didn't want to speak for you -- that was probably the cell call -- listen to me! They said only you could give the "yes" -- it was your ass up here, they said -- which is true, I have seen that to confess it --

JULIA

(facing him directly)

I never knew -- never thought --

ZACH

I take it we have a "yes."

JULIA

I feel -- ashamed. I am ashamed.

ZACH

Do you know why I am up here -- why Zach corporate rising flack clumb 180 feet above his natural position on the earth? Any idea, Julia?

JULIA shakes her head no.

ZACH

My handlers thought it would be a great PR move to have this crusty veteran deliver the news to the flannel fanatic poetic anarchist -- and when we both climbed down, there would be the press to record the fall of the wall, the rapprochement. Yes, the trucks and everything and everybody are waiting. Personally -- stupid. Clumsy. No one will ever believe it. But I didn't tell them this -- zipped my lips -- because I had my own reasons for agreeing. Actually, two. Now you say, "What are they?"

JULIA

What are they?

ZACH

I wanted one more time up here before I was cubicled forever. And I wanted to meet you. I wanted to meet the "enemy." I wanted to meet the enemy who was doing something I admired and never had the smarts to do myself.

JULIA

Admired? You're Zack the Hack.

ZACH

Zach the Hack not toeing the company line. You had your very own mole on the inside.

JULIA

My very own mole.

ZACH

You're quite a hero, you know -- heroine?

JULIA

I don't always know --

ZACH

Doesn't your crew tell you? I know you've given interviews. Your parachute poems are everywhere.

JULIA

I don't always -- listen. Zach. I lose batteries -- sometimes on purpose.

ZACH

And cell phones.

JULIA

It drives them crazy. For days -- I think it's "for days" because I forget to remind myself about time, watches -- I lose my -- place. Everything just kind of -- fizzes away. I stop being -- I stop being ego, ego, ego -- and it's nice. Ocean.

ZACH

Ocean. Yes. If I had a daughter -- I don't, but if I did -- I would hope she'd do something like this. That I had taught her well enough. This moment is not without some irony.

JULIA

The universe's high octane fuel.

ZACH

There's more than you think. You got what you wanted -- but because the Corporation doesn't need it anymore. Deals within deals, Julia. The Corporation just signed an "agreement" with the government that gave it an "in" somewhere else on new uncut territory in return for Eden. Your "costs" became bearable. You've been filed away. That's the inside poop.

ZACH

So.

JULIA

Can you forgive me?

ZACH

I hear -- inside poop -- that some of those pines in the new territory go for a hundred feet or more.

JULIA

Yeah?

ZACH

Yeah. Piece of cake, I would think. For a veteran.

JULIA

Piece "oh" cake.

ZACH

Then -- then there would be forgiveness.

JULIA

And light.

ZACH

And light.

JULIA

Okay. Okay.

JULIA and ZACH sit there, transfixed by the forest, as the lights fade to black and the sound of the wind comes up, then out.

Zibn un Tsvontsik [Twenty Seven]

DESCRIPTION

In 1952, Josef Stalin executed a group of Soviet Jewish intellectuals among whom were counted the best writers in Yiddish, in order to stop a growing movement to create an independent Jewish culture within the Soviet Union.

CHARACTERS

- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- Guard
- Agent in Charge

MISCELLANEOUS

- Prompted by Nathan Englander's The Twenty-Seventh Man though not in agreement with his presentation of the story.

* * * * *

A prison cell, lit by one grim lightbulb. A piss-bucket in one corner. Two cots.

25 sits on the edge of one cot: his bow-tie is still neatly cinched around his neck. The only unkempt thing about him is the number 25 written in grease pencil on his forehead.

Door opens. GUARD frog-marches in 26, who is disheveled, unshaven, pissed-off -- and has 26 written on his forehead. GUARD gives him a hard shove, sends him tumbling.

GUARD

I fucking hate Yiddish.

26

I fucking hate that you hate Yiddish. Why have you been told to --

GUARD

I'll rip out your tongue.

26 goes silent.

GUARD

I don't need to be told to fucking hate people who talk Yiddish -- it's like I breathe.

26

Then I have to fucking counter that I fucking hate that you fucking hate me, since I haven't fucking done --

GUARD advances on 26.

GUARD

I will rip it out. I will nail it to that.

26

Strange pleasure.

GUARD

Any other kind these days, eh, zeks un tsvontsik? Didn't think I knew any, huh? I know your number. Fuck off with you.

GUARD slams 26, leaves, slamming the door.

26

Why did he call me "26"? Accent like piss.

25

You have a number on your forehead.

26

You have a number on your forehead.

25

I remember them doing something -- so that's what --

26

They had to hold me down -- I think -- I'm pretty sure --

25

What's mine? I can't see my own forehead.

26

Twenty-five.

25

Twenty-six.

26

Neatly, you know, penned, or just scrawled like a pig would write it --

25

A neat hand.

26

Good graphics -- humiliating. At least no branding, eh? Sssss!

25

Our luck runs strong.

26

Being ironic, even if you don't sound like it.

25

No I'm not -- am I? I find it hard to --

26

Then this -- twenty-six -- twenty-six -- come on --

25

Ah! Ah!

26

I knew you'd know.

25

Well -- the number of generations from Adam to Moses.

26

Ah, I have even better than that -- the numerical value of the name of God --

25

Good!

26

-- in Hebrew formed --

25
Yod, he --

26
-- of the Hebraic letters --

25
-- waw, and he --

26
Right.

TOGETHER
-- equals twenty-six.

26
So fucking blessed, aren't we, by him above.

25
Beyond measure.

26
And I thought you didn't do irony!

25
Really, is it? I guess it leaks [out] --

26
I think my number will bring me good luck.

25
Twenty-six -- look around us.

26
Irony, twenty-five -- back at you.

They fall to silence and breathe together.

26
Just so that you don't think I've got bad manners,
I know who you are, of course -- your non-number.

25
And I know you -- of course I know you.

26

But I'm not going to say your name, not in here -- underwater in this cesspool, it would be a sacrilege to let out that air.

25 takes in a big gulp of air and holds it -- half-humorous look on this face.

26

Use 26 for me.

25 lets out the air as he says the number

25

26.

26

Instead, let us say how Stalin, our Dear Father, provides -- apparently he knows us both.

25

Though a little less "fatherly," yes?

26

Dear Father must father everything, isn't that true?, to keep the revolution going, keep it on track, keep it pure and --

25

You should stop.

26

Throw me in prison? Throw us?

25

Because -- because it will make your heart -- hard --

26

Your books --

25

Harder --

26

All that's in your books -- the softer heart -- that's why people love them.

25 gives 26 a searching look.

25

And what good has that done? Done them?

25 has the saddest look on his face.

26

Jail. Us. Us in the jail. Crime. Crime, twenty-five -- what do you think is our crime?

25

What?

26

Our crime. Against the Father.

Like a hammer on glass, two gunshots ring out. The silence that falls afterwards falls like lead.

26

Yod, he --

25

Our offense? Column A. Column B. Column C and D and -- Mix-and-match. Jewish. Yiddish. Writers. Thinkers.

26

Matzoh-maker, fish-eater --

25

Shylock --

26

There you go -- but "dangerous"?

25

That isn't up to us -- has it ever [been] --

26

My parents never raised me as an enemy of anything.

25

And that, twenty-six -- in your poetry -- you do yield --

26

I've never considered myself as "yielding" --

25

Yield to beauty, I've seen it, read it, "what is life's length without beauty's measure" --

26

Huh.

25

I read when I'm not writing.

26

Hardly "dangerous" in that, is there?

25

Not to me.

26

Hardly dangerous your vest and shoes, twenty-five -- your bow-tie!

25

A bow tie without spite.

26

Your books like that bow tie -- a night breeze on a sweltering night, even.

25

You've shifted.

26

Sometimes my poems strike -- sometimes -- every once in a while I have a word like a nail and paper like wood and I bring down the pen -- bang! Solid. But you, your words -- every one is a nail -- paper, wood --

25

Even "and" and "the," eh?

26

Every page -- bang!

Twenty-five mock-pats all of his pockets.

25

I'm so sorry, twenty-six, they took all my money
--

26

This is not ironic. In this stinking dungeon,
twenty-five, squatting in this rotting hole -- two
gun shots in some other rotting hole down here
-- not ironic. I don't have the patience of your
bow-tie.

Again they fall into silence.

26

I have to piss -- I have to clear my brain.

26 goes to the bucket and pisses. The door slams open, and
GUARD two-hand pushes 24 in, who falls to his knees.

GUARD

I fucking hate Yiddish.

26

Saying this is part of your job description?

GUARD

You can talk and piss at the same time.

26

When you talk piss comes out, too -- only just
from your mouth --

GUARD approaches 26. 25 gets up, though there's not a thing
he can do.

26

If you hit me, I'll piss on your boots.

GUARD

Then I'll wait.

26 pisses -- but he can't piss forever. Finally he finishes, and
GUARD clouts him on the back of the head. Then GUARD rubs his
shoes off on 26's pants leg.

GUARD

Just in case.

GUARD leaves.

25 and 26 turn to their new cellmate.

26
Let me see your face. Twenty-four. See.

24
What do you mean?

25
They've written 24 on your forehead. Look, 25 on mine -- 26 on his.

24 remains on his knees.

25
You should get up -- the floor is cold, not forgiving. Here, let me --

24 shrugs him off. His body shows bewilderment, rage, dismay.

26
Of all of us, I guess he'd feel the most betrayed.

24
Shut up. Shut the fuck up.

25
There is no need. He's right.

24
Shut the fuck up!

Still on his knees, 24 pulls out a watch from the watch pocket of his vest, checks the time, puts it back.

24
My wife will be here soon. To speak to the agent in charge. And then I will be released.

26
You have a number scrawled on your forehead.

24
It's a mistake.

26
It's mathematics.

25
Stop.

24
Shut! Up!

But 24, despite his bravado, is in shock.

24
Comrade Stalin would not --

26
Would not jail his poet laureate? Who happens to
be Jewish. Writing in Yiddish.

24
And Russian!

26
What is the math of --

24
I write in Russian! About him, in Russian!

26
In jail -- Comrade Stalin's -- liaison -- to the
world of the Yiddish literary universe -- the
earth is off its axis.

24
I am sure there is a mistake being made.

26
Believe what you need to believe.

24 pulls out his watch again, checks it.

24
She'll be here. Soon. You'll see.

25
I think you might prepare for her not --

24

My wife is strong, she is resolute --

25

No doubt. But. This is not about her.

24 stares at floor in front of him. 25 goes to him.

25

Come on, get up -- it's cold, the floor is not forgiving.

24 gets up, with 25's help. 24 sits on one of the cots. 26 speaks in a low voice.

26

We really are fucked.

Like a hammer on glass, another gunshot rings out.

24

There are twenty-six of us --

25

Maybe --

26

More like were, at this point.

24

We all worked together on the anti-Fascist campaigns.

26

Ah, the good old days --

24

Do you even remember the work we did?

25

I remember the work.

26

Who could forget the "work"?

25

We did good work, twenty-six --

26

We good Jewish Communists --

25

Jews everywhere to support the Russian fight
against Hitler --

26

Good work -- vibrant --

25

In Yiddish, even.

24

The truth -- we spoke the truth --

26

In Yiddish, even -- sorry --

GUARD, unseen, pounds on the door -- just to irritate them.
Then he laughs and moves away.

26

I will piss on his boots next time.

25

You'll have to ask him for water first -- how much
hope for that --

24

Why --

26 goes to say something, but 25 holds up a hand to stop him,
then sits on the cot and takes 24's hand.

25

Yes, we did good work to save what we could save.
We were good Jews, good Russians, good Soviets,
good anti-Fascists, good Communists --

24

Why?

A tense silence.

24

I was shaving when they came.

25

Shaving. I was done with my shaving. I was
shining my shoes.

26

I want to say I was fucking my next poem -- but
they pinched me at breakfast.

24

They let me finish. My wife, hysterical -- she can
be strong, but -- I'm trying not to nick myself --

24 takes out his watch, checks it, puts it back.

24

Trying not to nick myself -- speaking to soothe
her while all the time I'm -- shaking --

25

No shame in being terrified --

24

The razor in my hand -- the sound of it -- the
whiskers -- trying not to shake -- too much --
nick --

24 takes out his watch, checks it, puts it back.

24

I looked at my wife -- looked at them in their
khaki raincoats and -- their blunt ears, these
small lobeless --

26

Mine had mugs like baked lard --

25 holds up a hand to make 26 wait.

25

Go on.

24

The razor in my hand -- one -- slice -- I thought
about that -- even with my hand shaking I could
have -- I think I could have --

25

But you thought "This is a mistake, I will get this corrected, after all I wrote poems in praise of Josef Stalin" --

24

I trusted, yes, if that's what you're saying.

26 grunts, says nothing. 24 checks his watch again.

24

Soon.

25

They let me finish my shoes, like you, your whiskers. It didn't take long -- I was on the second one anyway. Same khaki raincoats -- mine had mugs like beets -- raw beets.

26

Lard-faces ate the rest of my breakfast. I'll have to say they were polite about it -- dishes to the sink -- though they didn't wash them, now that I think about it --

24

They didn't seem afraid that I had a razor in my hand. I could have cut them.

26

Theoretically -- but they knew who you were. You knew who you were.

24

Makes me feel ashamed.

25

Why -- because you refused to hurt them?

24

But they had come to hurt us -- and I didn't defend. My wife --

26

Please don't check your watch again.

24

I didn't defend.

25

You're doing your best -- that's all anyone can ask.

26

What's so good about our best?

24

But I didn't defend -- what sort of "best" is that?

24 jumps to his feet and starts banging on the door.

24

Guard, guard -- I demand to see the agent in charge! Now! Guard, I demand --

24 continues to pound, but when he stops, there is only silence. 24 looks dumbly at the door, as if he expects it to open. And then it does, smacking 24 hard as GUARD barrels into the room.

GUARD

Who the fuck do you think you are?

24

I am --

GUARD

You're 24, piece of shit, no name, No-Name doesn't talk back to me, I will break your hands if you pound on my door again!

24

I want to see the agent in charge!

GUARD moves toward 24, who cowers. GUARD looms over 24.

GUARD

I will break your hands bone by bone.

25

Really, sir, ease up on him -- he meant no harm to your door. Look at him -- what harm could he do? Look at your door.

Without responding to 25, GUARD kicks 24 once and hard, then turns to 25.

GUARD

You better make sure of it.

25

I am a great protector of doors.

GUARD

Yiddish, Yiddishit --

GUARD spits, exits, slams the door shut.

26

I wonder if it's locked.

26 tries it -- it's locked. 25 helps 24 off the floor.

26

Just a thought. Who knows what games?

26 lends a hand, and they sit 24 on a cot.

26

So, not that again, eh?

24

I don't think he broke anything.

26

They're experts.

25

Hard to remember there is humanity in them --

26

This is not time for one of your books.

24

Do you think they have everyone?

25

I don't know -- when they brought me here, I saw a few -- I think I did -- paraded, handcuffed -- but I don't how many of us they have.

26

"Us" --

24

I'm assuming --

26

The Yiddish cream, floating on the top. I wonder how they numbered us -- if they ranked us -- if these are rankings --

25

I suspect that because our names end the alphabet --

26

Cossacks as critics -- critical Cossacks -- the small details that make the terror terrifying --

25

It's often the [small] --

26

Stop it -- I was being sarcastic -- maybe all due to a clerical error -- the wrong keystroke -- but they'll still slip the bullet into the brain because --

24

A clerical error --

26

You're in the hospital, the chart says, "Grind his nuts" instead of "Bind his cuts" because two flies fell into the typewriter and --

24

I want to see the agent in charge.

25

Please don't bang on the door -- I've taken a bond out on you.

24 goes to the door, but this time he stands to the side.

24

Guard. Guard. I would like to see the agent in charge. Please.

The door opens, and GUARD tosses in another person, a young man, with 27 greased on his forehead.

24

I would like to see the agent in --

But before 24 can finish, GUARD pushes 24 back and shuts the door.

The three of them look at 27, who looks back at them.

27

I know who each of you is.

24

But who are you?

27

What I don't know is why I am here -- I mean, with writers like you, so much better than I am because I'm nobody. I could be brought here for other reasons, I suppose, though I don't know --

24

But they've thrown you in with the twenty-six of us -- they've given you a number.

27

What's my number?

26

Twenty-seven.

27

The twenty-seventh -- could be a title for something --

25

You are young.

24

But who is he?

27

We all have to go through being young -- it's not my fault.

25

Some of us would like to have that fault again.

26

Not me. My adult faults have been so much more interesting.

24

Do you have a name?

26

Leave him alone.

24

I want to know if he has a name!

26

He has something better -- he has a title!

27

I think I prefer the title -- I think when I get out of here, if I get out of here, I will use that rather than my name -- I will use it even while I'm in here. Please refer to me by twenty-seven.

25

Sit down -- sit down next to me, twenty-seven. Do you have any idea why you're here, any specific idea?

27

None.

25

What happened to you?

27

I was writing at my desk, as I do every day, when these two men --

26

What kinds of faces?

27

Faces. One had a face the color of the inside of my cheek, and the other -- a broken sphincter.

24

This is how you write?

27

This is how things come in to me.

26

I think it's excellent.

24

No grace.

26

You say that because your ribs hurt.

25

What did the men do?

27

What did they do. One stuck his hand inside my typewriter. To stop the keys, though I would have stopped if he'd asked me. The other lifted me out of my chair.

25

And you?

27

I did ask them who they were, which they didn't answer, and I asked them if they wanted tea, which they didn't take, and then I asked them why they were there, and they laughed.

25

So you don't know.

24

Who is he? This is outrageous. He's nobody.

26

Feeling professionally insulted? That our coming deaths will be less operatic if an innocent is

folded in? No wonder you were a good laureate to Dear Father.

25

Please.

26

I don't mean to hurt your ears -- it's just that his [smug] --

24

We were known as The Twenty-Six, not The Twenty-Seven -- what are they telling us by throwing him in with us? We don't even know if he knows Yiddish!

27

I've written eight novels -- five in Yiddish, one in Russian, one in English -- it's very bad -- one in Esperanto -- five six seven eight -- yes, that's all of them, not including the one I was working on when --

24

Why haven't we read your novels?

27

I've never published. Asked to be published. Why would I do that? Such a waste of time. I've also written poetry --

27 pulls a sheet of folded paper out of his back pocket.

26

They didn't take that from you?

27 shrugs.

25

Let me see.

25 reads it, hands it on to 26, who then hands it on to 24, who hands it back to 25, who hands it to 27.

27

You can say whatever you think to me because it doesn't really matter to me. I just write. I

write whatever asks me to write it -- just in the
brain, out it comes --

24

It's not [very] --

26 interrupts him.

26

It's the only way to keep it pure, keep it clean.
If that's your way, then that's your way, no one
can say a thing about it --

24

But --

25

It's because your ribs hurt you want to say
something. It's your ribs talking criticism.

Like the hard slam of two doors, two gunshots ring out. They
all listen.

26

One for each of his names: Josef. Stalin. Or,
"Kremlin Highlander." Or "Vozhd," twice. Which
of his noms de famille did you like to use?

24

Shut up.

27

So they're assassinating all of you?

25

That seems to be their agenda for today.

27

Aren't you all afraid?

25

Would you be afraid?

This question strikes 27 -- he doesn't have an immediate
response.

24
Where are your parents?

27
My parents.

24
You do have parents?

27
Everyone has parents.

25
So where might they be?

26
Were they there when Inside-of-the-Cheek and
Broken Sphincter came?

27
I think so. I can't -- say -- they must have been
--

24
Did they say anything?

27
I don't know -- I was writing -- things, certain
things, do not make themselves known to me when
I am writing --

24
Do you love your parents?

26
Really --

24
Well, he doesn't show much feeling for them.

27
I am not -- human -- when I write. I know that.
About myself. My parents have said.

24
Well, the poem --

26

Shut up.

27

Afraid. You asked. I don't know. I don't know if I've been afraid, before. I was irritated when they came -- they were interrupting.

24

Just outside that door they are killing people -- eliminating! And for nothing! And you talk about "interrupting" --

27

I'm sorry, I don't mean to show disrespect, but when I'm writing -- when I am not human -- I don't think I'm afraid -- get afraid -- can you say that about when you're writing? I suppose if the writing doesn't keep you from being afraid, then what's the point?

A silence falls into the room.

24

We were once praised -- in a good cause --

26

Used-up anti-Fascist Jews ----

24

A good cause.

25

It was [good] --

24

We can argue against this! I will argue against it when I see the agent in charge. My wife will --

26

If she's not in here, that is. Ah, that made him shut up.

25

Twenty-seven --

27

Yes.

25

Do you understand any of this?

27

What I'm beginning to understand is that everything I have written is worthless. That writing itself may be worthless, though I'm still turning that one over, because I do not feel afraid, because I am not worried about my parents, because this poem says nothing -- because I am in here. With you.

27 looks at them all.

27

Superfluous, right? Yes.

25

It is a possibility.

24

No!

At that moment, GUARD opens the door, and AGENT IN CHARGE enters, dossier in hand. GUARD brings in a chair for AGENT, who sits.

AGENT

Outside.

GUARD

I was told to --

AGENT

Outside. If they gang up and kill me, it'll be over before you can barge in here. So be it. It won't make a difference.

GUARD pauses, then leaves, closing the door. AGENT looks at them all.

AGENT

Now.

24

I want to protest.

AGENT

Duly noted.

24

On behalf of --

AGENT

Duly noted.

24

I haven't finished.

AGENT

Duly noted.

26

Next.

24

Why are we here?

AGENT

There was a reason I wanted him to leave. About ganging up -- I suppose you could do it -- you could take this pen and stab me -- turn a pen into a sword -- hmm, clever -- but what would it gain you? Besides, you're all civilized men -- we are all civilized men -- nothing so brutish.

26

Except that you are shooting someone out there -- we can only assume they have foreheads above twenty-four.

AGENT

Assume what you want. While you are in here, your assumptions aren't my concern because they can't circulate anywhere but in here, and in here belongs to me -- well, not to me but to our Dear Father. But you understand. No, that is not why I asked the guard to go.

27

It's about me.

AGENT lets out a sigh, shakes his head.

AGENT

He is clever.

AGENT opens the dossier, takes out three sheets of paper and hands one to 24, 25, and 26.

AGENT

Please, look it over.

24

These are all our names.

25

See, I was right about the end of the alphabet.

26

Except --

AGENT points his pen at 27.

AGENT

Who is he?

24

He is not one of us. This name -- I've never heard of it. We've never heard of it.

26

He is at least right about that. All these others -- yes. Him -- no.

AGENT

Then why?

The question descends upon them all. AGENT take the papers back.

AGENT

That -- that is the thing. His name -- right there. This is the list that Comrade Stalin approved -- he looked it over at his breakfast, he approved it. Him -- he has to be one of you.

25

But he isn't it. Someone made a mistake.

AGENT

No. There is something else going on here. The name is on the list.

26

Clerical error.

25

A fly falls into the typewriter --

AGENT

What are you talking about?

26

You have to make this right, don't you, even though you know it isn't.

25

You must answer to someone who answers to someone who --

AGENT

This is how civilized men gang up.

24

We do not acknowledge him as one of us. He should be released. He should be apologized to. He should be free. Freed.

25

We deny him three times.

AGENT

So you're denouncing him.

25

We're not denouncing him.

AGENT

That's what I heard.

26

We're telling you what you need --

AGENT

You said "deny," which means you withdraw your protection of him.

24

Wait!

AGENT

I'll wait.

24

We can only protect him if we say he is one of us even when he isn't even when you are going to shoot us which means he will have no protection but if we deny him tell you he is untainted by association with us that puts him in danger --

26

Wheels within wheels --

25

It's only about the look of things, isn't it?

24

You just want an official record!

27

May I speak?

Everyone looks surprised because they have forgotten 27 is even there.

27

I am talking notes of all of this because it will make for a very good story I am sure but this is how it has to end. If they will have me, I would like to be considered one of them, at least for official purposes. Yes?

25

You know what that means.

27

I have written as many novels as any of you, good or not, and poems and essays, whatever their quality, and in more languages as well as Yiddish as all of you so at least by volume I should be twenty-seven. I think that is my application. I don't need my parents' approval.

A studied silence falls on the room. AGENT looks at all of them.

25
Application accepted?

26
Yes.

24
Yes.

AGENT
So he can be considered one of you?

27
Yes.

AGENT makes a note in the dossier.

AGENT
" -- is not a clerical error but is -- "

AGENT finishes writing with a flourish, closes the dossier, stands.

AGENT
Good. Well. Good.

24
You still haven't answered my question.

AGENT
That?

24
Why are we --

AGENT
Really? Your question is quite useless.

24
Not to me.

AGENT
We are done here.

24

Not to me.

26

Humor him -- humor us -- why not, agent in charge? It'll at least confirm you're a different species than the guard out there.

25

Civilized men, after all, you said -- you did say that.

AGENT

The truth of the matter -- one of the matters, at least -- is -- I lied. About that -- about you being civilized.

24

What, because we're Jews?

AGENT

That's irrelevant. Anti-Semitism -- a waste of time. No, it's about you being what you are -- writers. The kind of writers that you are.

26

Kind.

AGENT

Is this really the sort of thing you want to talk about now?

26 laughs.

26

You mean, as the end times slouch towards us? What could we be losing by talking about it?

25

We're Jews, agent in charge -- not irrelevant to us. The end times are always just around the corner for "the Jews."

AGENT

Well. All right. Please, sit.

The others sit on the cots, except that 27 sits on the floor. After they sit, AGENT sits.

AGENT

What do you want to hear?

24

Kind.

AGENT

Kind. Writers -- I mean, who are they anyway? Who are you? You ask why you're here. You have made this happen to yourselves by dealing in dreams. Yes, you are here by the choice you have made. By making people believe that what they believe inside -- in here -- the heart or the gut or wherever -- is the truth. It's not truth -- it's just an experience, an event, nothing more than what it is. This is not to say that dreams are useless -- we use them all the time to keep people on the true path. But dreams have a shelf-life, they have an expiration date that is usually set by those who have the power to separate this from this and that from that -- and when a dream has expired, then -- deletion. There is a mechanics about this, a bit, but it has a sanitary purpose: to banish the ghosts so that the real work of history can proceed. You want to populate your readers with ghosts, with phantasms -- their feelings, their spirits, their utopias or paradise -- Jewishness -- or even their despairs or ironies -- inward-focused, that's all of you. You cheapen what it means to be a human-being.

AGENT stands.

AGENT

Don't try to offer a defense -- your specialness, the voice of humanity, the "unacknowledged legislators of the world" sort of thing -- you were useful in the anti-Fascist effort -- you made useful ghosts then. But not now.

27 stands.

27

If this is the world you offer --

AGENT laughs, pinches 27's cheek.

AGENT

Some find naïveté charming. I don't. But if it gives you comfort -- who am I to say --

27

What would a world be like without these things you hate -- ghosts, such an insult --

AGENT

Clean. Modern. Rational. Scientific. Guided by logic. For starters.

26

I guess you're not so different from the guy outside.

AGENT

What? Did you think I'd reveal some secret unity with self-named artists -- with you? -- a closet artist myself? You see, that is one of your weaknesses -- you believe in a spark of humanity within each body, ignited into a kind of Christian -- is that offensive to you? -- a Christian generosity, we are all brothers -- I'm sure you know the lingo. I am the agent in charge and you are not -- enough said.

AGENT checks his watch.

AGENT

And I do have to wrap this up.

AGENT knocks on the door.

AGENT

You can come in.

GUARD enters. AGENT nods to him.

GUARD

Turn around. Now. And keep your mouths shut.

All four face upstage. GUARD unholsters his gun, then shoots 24, 25, and 26 in the back of the head. As he goes to shoot 27, AGENT puts a hand on his hand. 27 stands there shivering.

AGENT

It was a clerical error, I understand that -- that simple -- twist, that -- torque of the universe -- it designed your fate -- ludicrous, isn't it, how our lives get their meaning. But even though it was a mistake doesn't mean it was wrong. You want to die with them, don't you? You belonged with them even if you weren't one of them, yes?

27

Yes. I am proud --

AGENT

Ssh. And listen. I can, within my powers -- I can change the outcome of history -- unscrew what has screwed you over. Would you like to be released? To go home to your parents? To write your nonsense in peace?

27

What about your paperwork?

AGENT

It is like the Jewish physics of Albert Einstein -- it can change its nature by the way it is observed. Well?

27

You would do that?

AGENT

Would I give you back your life? Yes. If you do one thing for me. Denounce those three as traitors. Just say it. They're dead -- what does it matter to them? And your words? Will never leave this building. Ever. No one will ever know. Confirm what we have done, and history is changed. What will you do now?

27

They were --

The eyes of AGENT and 27 lock on each other, then 27 faces front again.

27

They were -- traitors.

AGENT

Good. Good. Smart. On your part.

AGENT raises GUARD's gun-hand to the level of the back of 27's head.

27

You have confirmed my suspicions about human nature.

AGENT mimes shooting the gun, and GUARD shoots 27 in the back of the head. They both look at the fallen body.

AGENT

Go on.

GUARD

Why did you do that?

AGENT

I'm a story-teller. What can I say? Good. That one, I believe, finishes the case.

GUARD

You would know.

AGENT

Yes I would. And I do. And it is done, as I said. Do your duty.

AGENT takes the chair and exits. GUARD holsters his gun, turns and leaves, leaving the door open.

After several moments, GUARD returns with a bucket and mop and a large piece of burlap.

GUARD

Fucking staff cuts.

GUARD spreads out the burlap and rolls one of the bodies onto it. As he stands up to drag the body out, light bumps to blackout.

Undress Me

DESCRIPTION

The language of love has many dialects, and Stefan and Laura explore the diphthongs of desires as Laura asks Stefan, in the middle of a crowded bar, to undress her with words. He gladly responds in the best mother tongue he knows.

CHARACTERS

- Stefan
- Laura (the "au" should be pronounced as "ow," the sound made when someone is injured).

SETTING

- Bar

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two bar stools
- Table
- Two glasses of beer

LAURA wears earrings and a pendant. The earrings will be removed. The pendant must also be easy to unclasp and remove, possibly connected with a small piece of velcro.

NOTES

In directing this, the director should aim for as much physical movement as possible, but kept small and, in most cases, never making actual contact. For instance, when STEFAN describes his breath along her neck, he should be standing close enough for LAURA to sense this, but he never actually touches her. Suggestion rather than palpable contact.

What also makes the play "work" is if the actors speak the stylized language as if it were "normal" routine speech. Emphasizing the stylization takes away the chance to play with(in) the language.

* * * * *

A bar -- chatter in the background. STEFAN and LAURA are sitting. She turns and looks at him, pauses, then speaks.

LAURA
Undress me, Stefan.

STEFAN
Undress you.

LAURA
Yes.

STEFAN
Here.

LAURA
Here and now.

STEFAN
And why?

LAURA
It is time.

STEFAN
Time for what?

LAURA
For our leap forward.

STEFAN
This is quite a leap.

LAURA
Aren't you ready?

STEFAN
Quite a leap forward from just yesterday, where, if I remember, we held hands for the first time without acting as if we'd touched each other by accident.

LAURA
Your point?

STEFAN
Well, to go from that to this without spending a little more time there and here --

LAURA
You're scared.

STEFAN
No. Of what?

LAURA
Of me.

STEFAN
No.

LAURA
That I would go from that to this without following
you there and here.

STEFAN
It is quite a lunge --

LAURA
(overlapping)
He's thinking, "I should leave --

STEFAN
I don't want --

LAURA
" -- before she takes me over the edge."

STEFAN
-- to leave. I don't want to leave.

LAURA
You want to stay.

STEFAN
Yes.

LAURA
Then you'll have to undress me.

STEFAN
The price of staying.

LAURA
The blessing of being here with this, which you
say you want.

STEFAN

And only required that I undress you.

LAURA

In a manner of speaking.

STEFAN

And how?

LAURA

In a manner of speaking.

STEFAN

How?

LAURA

By word of mouth.

STEFAN

Meaning?

LAURA

With your mother tongue.

STEFAN

I am to unhinge you by vocables.

LAURA

Singe my ears.

STEFAN

Lay siege by syllables.

LAURA

Desire by diphthongs. [pronounced "dif-thongs"]

STEFAN

What brew are you drinking there?

LAURA

Lay it not to the alcohol.

STEFAN

Then what?

LAURA

I want you to undress me here.

STEFAN

Here.

LAURA

In public.

STEFAN

Because?

LAURA

I want to sit here with my eyes closed, in eye-range of everyone, while you whittle at my buttons and clasps and elastics, knowing that no one here knows what you are knowing about me.

STEFAN

Low-rent strip-tease.

LAURA

Now you see it, now --

STEFAN

That -- moistens you?

LAURA

Like a stamp.

STEFAN

A new way to "go postal."

LAURA

Harden your resolve -- and do it.

STEFAN

And if I -- refuse? From modesty, of course.

LAURA

I will counter with flattery of the cunning linguist. Such as: flatter, flatter, flatter, and flatter -- enough?

STEFAN

You drive a sweet bargain.

LAURA

The dotted line awaits.

STEFAN

Signed -- sealed --

LAURA

Deliver.

STEFAN

Any particular style?

LAURA

Just start! I am not in the mood for disquisitive analysis. Any style -- just make it bold and italic.

STEFAN

Then close your eyes -- I am going to sit on the porches of Laura's ears and tell tales of steam.

LAURA

I knew the slangster would come through.

STEFAN

Imagine --

LAURA

I obey.

STEFAN

Imagine this: in a room, warm -- with light, lucent -- and music, dulcet. You know I'm there, but can't see me.

LAURA

Is this a slow stalk, or a pounce?

STEFAN

Sshhh! You know I'm there because I am close enough for you to feel my breath trace your neck -- to trail along the slope of muscle that runs from just behind the ear to your shoulder. I say to you --

LAURA

"You are as savory as -- "

STEFAN

Who is telling here?

LAURA

Sorry.

STEFAN

In fact, I say nothing.

LAURA

What am I wearing?

STEFAN

Begin with your jewelry.

STEFAN takes off her earring as he says the line.

STEFAN

Lifting the silver slick of your earring, I slip the back off and ease the post through the lobe -- a slight fleshy tug, and then it's free.

STEFAN does the same to the second and puts both in his pocket.

STEFAN

Then the second earring.

STEFAN does not actually lick her ear.

STEFAN

With just the tip of my tongue, I trace the crimp and cockle of your ear --

LAURA

Which one?

STEFAN

The right one -- my breath embroiders. You shiver.

LAURA

I -- squeeze.

STEFAN

(STEFAN unclasps the pendant)

The clasp of the pendant kneels on the top nub of your spine --

LAURA

You unlock it --

STEFAN

-- and let the pendulous weight slide through the valley --

STEFAN lets the pendant fall into his hand, which he positions at LAURA's waist.

LAURA

It is not the valley of shadow.

STEFAN

-- and then catch it at your waist --

LAURA

The equator --

STEFAN

And the light dances on the silver.

STEFAN puts the pendant on the table.

LAURA

What else?

STEFAN

Self-restraint! There are miles to go -- The latté-colored sweater you wear has small buttons that squeak as they squinch through the button hole. My fingers, thick and calm --

LAURA

Calm?

STEFAN

Narrator's prerogative. Thick and calm -- I poke them clumsily, but they're agreeable. Separation is their freedom.

LAURA

How many buttons?

STEFAN

How many do you want -- what will your impatience endure?

LAURA

Twelve -- no, fourteen.

STEFAN

I am at seven, then -- half done, half unopened gift.

LAURA

And what do you see?

STEFAN

Undergarmental infrastructure --

LAURA

Unlink it.

STEFAN

Low on the agenda.

LAURA

Move it up!

STEFAN

Seven buttons left, magic seven. Unbutton or rip through -- no, this instead: I will lift the sweater off, leaving the remaining seven buttons enslaved. Feel the slide of the yarn's grain --

LAURA

My hair sparks --

STEFAN

The hesitation of the cuffs over the wrists, then --

LAURA

Off.

STEFAN

Like a fallen flag.

LAURA

What color?

STEFAN

What?

LAURA

The brassiere.

Burgundy.

STEFAN

Underwire?

LAURA

Soft cotton.

STEFAN

What to do.

LAURA

Indeed! To the southern hemisphere next and spelunk, or do slalom these gentle tectonics?

STEFAN

Do something!

LAURA

Stepping behind you --

STEFAN

I'm thirsty.

LAURA

STEFAN takes her beer and guides it to her mouth. She drinks.

Behind you.

STEFAN

The length of you -- yes.

LAURA

I slide each cord over the flare of your shoulders and let it fall over your triceps --

STEFAN

Stop! Stop. I have to know your intentions past this point. Breasts unaltered are nothing, palm-sized flesh -- "tits" are like a snack food. But there are grottoes and groves --

LAURA

Deeper divisions.

STEFAN

LAURA
Deeper nourishment. Do you plan to pillage?

STEFAN
No -- ponder.

LAURA
Loot?

STEFAN
No -- linger.

LAURA
Disappear?

STEFAN
No -- discover.

LAURA
Can I trust?

STEFAN
You wouldn't have started if you didn't.

LAURA
You have your passport, then.

STEFAN
Urgency -- the skirt unzipped, run down the rigging of your legs -- the gartered stockings, puddles at your feet -- the silk diphthonged underwear, darted off hummingbird-quick. Thick and no longer calm.

STEFAN hesitates.

LAURA
Go on!

STEFAN
We have arrived.

LAURA
Where?

STEFAN
At the border.

LAURA

Cross it!

STEFAN hesitates again. LAURA opens her eyes.

LAURA

What?

STEFAN

Wait.

LAURA

For what?

STEFAN

Should we cross this border?

LAURA

Imagine it!

STEFAN

The room, warm -- the light, lucent -- the music, dulcet. The discarded clothes watchful. The narrator -- the narrator is at a loss for words as he looks upon --

LAURA

What?

STEFAN

Close your eyes.

LAURA

What?

STEFAN

Close your eyes.

LAURA

And then?

STEFAN

The narrator looks upon more sweet beauty than his eyes deserve.

LAURA

And what sayeth the tongue?

STEFAN

This: "nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals / the power of your intense fragility: whose texture / compels me with the colour of its countries... / (something in me understands / the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses) / nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands" [e.e. cummings, "Somewhere I Have Never Travelled, Gladly Beyond"]

LAURA

(opens her eyes)

That's what it says?!

STEFAN

Consider it a moment of -- ripeness. Consider it -- stepping *on the border*. *Not over*.

LAURA

Close your eyes. Close them! All right: the room, warm -- the light, lucent -- the music, dulcet. Urgency -- the pants unzipped, run down the rigging of your legs -- socks and shoes, scattered -- cotton briefs --

STEFAN

Bikinis --

LAURA

Bikinis, darted off hummingbird-quick.

STEFAN

The shirt?

LAURA

Ripped open like a veil. Now -- thick, and no longer calm. "His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters... / his cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers... / his hands are as gold rings set with the beryl... / his mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend." [Song of Solomon, 5:10-16] A second foot on the border.

STEFAN opens his eyes.

STEFAN

How well do we know each other?

LAURA

How well should we?

STEFAN

How well can we?

LAURA

How much to risk?

STEFAN

How much more undress to undress?

They close their eyes.

STEFAN

Those two people standing in the room, warm --

LAURA

The light, lucent --

STEFAN

The music, dulcet.

LAURA

They are standing breathful and poised.

STEFAN

Let's leave them there.

LAURA

Next to their tree of knowledge.

STEFAN

Growing on the border.

LAURA

The fruit hanging.

STEFAN

Their mouths prepared.

LAURA opens her eyes and picks up her beer.

LAURA

And as for our mouths --

She proceeds to drink. So does STEFAN. They finish and put their glasses down. They bring their faces close together but do not kiss. STEFAN balls his hand into a fist and holds it over their heads. LAURA reaches up and "plucks" the fruit and brings it up between them. They both bite on it as if biting an apple. Sounds of chatter in the background. Blackout.

Whispers

Triggered by Eduardo Galeano in Bocas del Tiempo

DESCRIPTION

As the family fights over the inheritance from Mario, Gisela's husband and Luiza's great-grandfather, the two females, from opposite ends of life's timeline, manage to extract some comfort from both a hatred of God's indifference and the freedoms of an unknown future.

CHARACTERS

- GISELA, Luiza's great-grandmother
- LUIZA, Gisela's great-grand-daughter

* * * * *

SOUND: Murmurs of adults indoors at a subdued celebration: voices, plates and glasses, the occasional laughter

Light falls through windows onto a small courtyard where young LUIZA plays by herself. There is a small table with two chairs where one can rest one's weary bones.

She hops around on one leg and chants as she counts the buttons on her dress, one button per word (or even per syllable, depending upon the number of buttons).

LUIZA

Uno, dos, porotos con arroz.

LUIZA stops hopping and thinks, based on the number of buttons she's counted.

LUIZA

A king? A captain? Soldier? Pirate!

LUIZA starts doing some jumping jacks and recites the next part.

She doesn't see, standing in the gloom off to the side, GISELA, dressed in her black clothes of mourning, a cane in her hand -- an apparition out of a Lorca play: long black dress, a jacket overlaying a white shirt, both with a high collar, grey hair pulled back tight. The dress has pockets.

LUIZA

Tres, cuatro, porotos en el plato.

LUIZA then turns a couple of somersaults and declares her conclusion in triumph.

LUIZA

Cinco, seis. ¡Me caso con el rey!

GISELA

A king.

This startles LUIZA.

GISELA

Only a king?

LUIZA

I'm sorry.

GISELA

She wants to marry a king.

GISELA takes her time to cross the courtyard to the table, where she slowly lowers herself into one of the chairs. At first LUIZA stands frozen, then, recovering her manners, helps GISELA.

GISELA

Thank you. Do you know why you're here today?

LUIZA

Tía?

GISELA

Go ahead -- you know, don't you.

LUIZA

Yes.

GISELA

Then it's all right -- you can say the name of the dead one out here -- out here, it's nice. Less crazy.

LUIZA

Quieter.

GISELA

Quieter.

**SOUND: A shift in the activity inside: an angry voice raised,
a soothing voice that counters -- a space of silence.**

GISELA and LUIZA exchange a look which seems to say, "Yes, quieter."

GISELA

Go on.

LUIZA

My great-grandfather, Mario.

GISELA

Good. You knew him well?

LUIZA

He taught me the poem.

GISELA

He taught you well.

LUIZA

I guess.

GISELA

Uno, dos --

TOGETHER

Porotos con arroz.

**SOUND: Music -- a guitar, most likely. Voices go back to
their murmurs.**

GISELA speaks off into the distance, not really to LUIZA.

GISELA

And marry a king.

GISELA focuses on LUIZA.

GISELA

But what about the hair?

LUIZA

What?

GISELA

The hair in your bisabuelo's nose.

In her embarrassment, LUIZA doesn't know what to say, so she doesn't say anything.

GISELA

Well? He had it, didn't he? You can say yes.

LUIZA

Yes.

GISELA

And in his ears.

LUIZA

And on his ears.

LUIZA rubs the rims of both ears to demonstrate.

LUIZA

Long.

GISELA

Never would shave them, trim them -- stubborn that way.

LUIZA

Tres, cuatro, porotos en el plato.

GISELA

All that hair -- sprouting. All that life -- sprouting.

SOUND: The music cuts out suddenly. Silence.

LUIZA looks at the house.

SOUND: A glass smashes on the floor, followed by an angry male shout, which is also followed by an angry female shout. Silence.

LUIZA looks at GISELA, whispers.

LUIZA

Cinco, seis.

GISELA

And me? What about me? Do I have anything like that?

SOUND: Someone starts clapping in rhythm, taken up by others, which prompts the music to start -- everything muted.

LUIZA

What are they -- you know --

GISELA shrugs.

LUIZA

I don't really -- understand.

GISELA

Neither do they.

LUIZA

Mi bisabuelo is dead.

GISELA

Which you have already pointed out. It's about stupid things. Money. Land. A snuff box. A silver comb. A ring -- two rings. Cufflinks made from wisdom teeth.

In spite of herself, LUIZA laughs.

LUIZA

No.

GISELA

Yes. That says something about your bisabuelo, doesn't it?

SOUND: Someone begins to add in a soft drumming on something wooden: table top, box.

LUIZA

Really.

GISELA

Mounted on silver. A dull yellow -- the teeth.

LUIZA

Did he ever wear them?

GISELA

He did. With pride. Come here.

LUIZA sidles over to her aunt. GISELA grips the cuff of her shirt and pulls it down tight, shows it to LUIZA. LUIZA gasps.

LUIZA

That's really them?

GISELA nods, indicates for LUIZA to touch the cufflink, which LUIZA does, fascinated.

LUIZA

Will I get wisdom teeth?

GISELA

The teeth, yes -- everybody has those. Wisdom we'll have to see about.

GISELA lets the jacket sleeve fall over the cuff.

GISELA

You didn't answer my question, nena. Look my face all over. Go on.

SOUND: An ending flourish from the guitar and the drumming.
A few cheers. Voices go to murmuring.

LUIZA is reluctant, but GISELA grips LUIZA's arm firmly -- she doesn't pull LUIZA forward, but it's also clear that she is not going to let LUIZA go just yet.

LUIZA sits, leans in close to look at GISELA's face.

GISELA

There's no shortage of time yet.

LUIZA

I see powder, in the [lines] --

GISELA

Vanity, betrayed by my shaky hand.

GISELA mocks dabbing powder on her face, which makes LUIZA laugh. GISELA touches her own cheek.

GISELA
And here?

LUIZA
A little rouge.

GISELA
Your mother let you yet?

LUIZA
No.

GISELA
It's silly, anyway.

GISELA pulls on an ear, gives LUIZA an inquiring look, which makes LUIZA laugh.

LUIZA
Nothing with the ears.

GISELA
That's good. But now I want you to look harder.

SOUND: The sound of chairs scraping against the floor, the chatter of people moving out of the room -- then silence.

No one from inside checks the garden.

GISELA
Not rouge, not powder, not ears.

LUIZA
Eyes.

GISELA
Good -- windows to the soul -- you ever hear that?

LUIZA shakes her head no.

GISELA
Now you have. It's in there. Eyes?

Blue -- no --
LUIZA

What?
GISELA

Grey. Grey-blue.
LUIZA

Cloudy.
GISELA

No.
LUIZA

Stone.
GISELA

No.
LUIZA

Then like?
GISELA

I don't know. Not cloudy. Not stone.
LUIZA

Then like cinco, seis, maybe?
GISELA

They respond together, softly.

TOGETHER
¡Me caso con el rey!

They sparkled!
LUIZA

Did they, now?
GISELA

Yes!
LUIZA

That's what he saw, I think -- cinco, seis.
GISELA

LUIZA
Did you see it in him?

GISELA
Never. Stopped. Windows to windows.

The silence settles.

LUIZA
They left us.

GISELA
A blessing.

LUIZA
My parents.

GISELA
They have to come back for you, so they will.

LUIZA
But not --

GISELA
No.

LUIZA
Ever.

GISELA
Ever.

LUIZA
Sad.

GISELA
Sad. Sad. Come here. Look at me again, but look
at me straight-on this time.

LUIZA positions herself to look deep.

GISELA
Don't look so hard. Let the eyes go soft -- you
let them, I let them -- soft -- think bisabuelo,
think sad and sad --

SOUND: Night sounds around them.

A sudden jerk takes LUIZA, a recoil, a fright.

GISELA settles into her spine, hands propped on the handle of her cane.

LUIZA stares at GISELA, unsure, the same sort of unsure the traveler feels when dropped off in an unfamiliar train station late at night.

GISELA

What comes next?

LUIZA

What?

GISELA

The numbers -- cinco, seis. Answer me.

LUIZA

Siete. Ocho.

GISELA

They say it is necessary to love God, in grief -- to accept God that has taken away and will not give back and that -- is -- somehow -- acceptable. You've heard that.

LUIZA

From my parents. The priest.

GISELA

He said that today.

LUIZA

Word by word.

GISELA

So this is what you saw. Touch your buttons.

LUIZA fingers a button.

GISELA

Siete. Go on.

LUIZA fingers another button.

GISELA

Ocho.

LUIZA fingers another button.

GISELA

Yo lo odio. That's what you saw through the windows. Through mine into yours.

LUIZA

You can't hate him.

GISELA

I say "hate" because your bisabuelo has been taken. Your bisabuelo is not here to keep me from feeling it, as he always did all our lives, and so I say it because I feel it and I mean it.

SOUND: A gunshot in the distance. A second. A third.

LUIZA jumps, stares at GISELA.

SOUND: A rush of people into the room -- crying, screaming, pounding.

GISELA

I hope the wills are made.

LUIZA looks at her in stricken disbelief, then rushes into the room.

SOUND: The crowd of people move away into another room in the house. Courtyard to silence and night sounds.

LUIZA returns.

GISELA

Well?

LUIZA

No one is hurt.

GISELA

Ah, well, it's always good when a funeral party doesn't lead to another funeral. Awkward. Your parents.

LUIZA

They want me to get ready to go.

GISELA

Probably best.

LUIZA plays with her buttons. GISELA waits.

LUIZA

I can hate him for you, if you want me to.

GISELA

Your parents would tell me to tell you no. I would have to agree -- you haven't earned it yet. It only feels right, feels good, if you've earned it.

LUIZA

I have to marry the king first.

GISELA

Give yourself the chance to be gutted by God -- which is another way of saying, Be alive. He has picked me clean as a winter bone -- you are going to have to go through your own messy turn.

LUIZA leans back slightly to reach into a pocket in her dress and pulls out a slim box.

GISELA

Come here.

GISELA puts the box on the table.

LUIZA

I have to go --

GISELA

Let them come and get you when they're ready to come and get you. We've taken a long trip together -- keep me company until then.

LUIZA sits. GISELA opens the box -- she shakes out a set of dominoes.

GISELA

Know how to play?

LUIZA

Of course.

GISELA

Then mix them up.

LUIZA turns the tiles faces down, shuffles them.

GISELA

This was our traveling set. Wherever we went, in case we were stuck somewhere with nothing to do -- like today. We kept scores.

LUIZA

Who won?

GISELA

We both did. How many bones from the boneyard?

LUIZA

Eight.

They each draw eight bones, set them on edge. GISELA shows LUIZA her heaviest; LUIZA does the same. LUIZA starts, and slams the bone down, which makes LUIZA laugh.

GISELA slams down hers. LUIZA has to draw.

GISELA

You better be careful.

LUIZA plays her drawn bone, which makes GISELA draw one. Then two.

LUIZA

Ha!

GISELA plays her second draw.

SOUND: A man saying LUIZA's name.

VOICE

Luiza! Luiza!

GISELA

Voice of God.

LUIZA hesitates, then plays a bone. GISELA plays another. In a rapid succession of moves, as if trying to outrun fate, they move through the game, ad libbing as they want as each play is made.

They finish. They look at each other.

SOUND: Again, the name.

VOICE

Luiza!

LUIZA rises, kisses and hugs GISELA, and runs out.

GISELA puts the dominoes back.

GISELA

Siete. Ocho. Yo lo odio. Siempre.

GISELA sits, at ease in her hatred, listening to whatever sounds fill the night.

The Window

DESCRIPTION

One patient in the room had the window; the other didn't but wanted it fiercely. Finally, the first patient has the wish granted.

CHARACTERS

- MAN A
- MAN B
- NURSE

SETTING

- Hospital room

TIME

- Present

NOTE: All characters can be played by men or women. "He" is used for convenience. Also, there is no need to use hospital beds, monitoring equipment, etc.. Chairs, perhaps some sheets, some monitor "blips" over the sound system -- anything simple to establish the scene.

* * * * *

Two men lie in a hospital room. In one wall is a window; opposite the window is a door. MAN A, next to the window, is propped up in bed; his lungs need to drain. MAN B must lie flat on his back as part of his recuperation. A NURSE is in the room, speaking with MAN A.

NURSE

You're doing fine. If you need me, just press this button.

NURSE hands him a long cords with a button on top of it. To MAN B.

NURSE

Your button is there to your right. I'll check in on you both later.

MAN B

Tell me some more of what you see.

MAN A cranes up to look out the window.

MAN A

Well, as you know, it's spring, so the lake is positively beautiful with sunlight. The little wavelets are tipped with diamonds. The boats cut through the water like swans, and the clouds float like the feathers of an angel.

MAN B

And the people?

MAN A

I can see all sorts of people. Families out picnicking, young lovers, old folks on the benches. The leaves are all out, you know.

MAN B

No, I don't know! I'm nailed to this bed, no better than the sheets I'm lying on. All I can see are the ceiling, your profile, and a blank wall. A blank wall. Who can see anything in a blank wall? Oh, I wish I were you, able to look out upon the world. I want to see!

MAN A

It's not so hard.

MAN B

For you! You've got the window! Tell me more.

MAN A

Do you remember yesterday I told you about the little boy who fell into the lake off the jetty? Well, he just walked up with this parents. And you know what they're doing? They're taking him out on the jetty and now they're standing right where he fell in. They're talking with him. He looks scared, but he's listening. Now they're putting him down, and, and, he's reaching out to touch the water.

MAN B

They're very smart -- teaching him not to be afraid. It's important to see things as they are.

MAN A

It's important not to be afraid.

MAN B

Tell me more.

MAN A

I can't. I'm tired. I'll tell you more later.

MAN A closes his eyes, falls asleep.

MAN B

(muttering to himself)

I don't see why I can't sit by the window and get some of that pleasure! He paints a good picture -- I swear sometimes his words can actually make me smell the blossoms and taste the wind -- but it's not the same. It's not the same as seeing it for myself.! I want more. I want more.

MAN B falls silent, and the light in the room dims down to indicate that night has come. Suddenly, MAN A begins to gasp. He gropes for the button but knocks the cord to the floor. MAN B looks up as best he can to see MAN A. He grabs his own cord but hesitates, then does not summon the NURSE. Before long, MAN A's breathing slows and stops. Several beats, and then the lights comes up to indicate day.

NURSE

(cheerily)

Good morning.

(sees MAN A)

Oh my God!

NURSE checks his pulse, then picks up the cord off the floor and presses the button. Another NURSE and a DOCTOR enter; they examine the body while the first NURSE goes to MAN B.

NURSE

I'm afraid he's passed away. Did you notice anything during the night?

MAN B

Not a thing. He died quietly.

The NURSE turns to leave, but MAN B touches her to get her attention.

MAN B

When you have taken him away, could you put my bed over there so that I could look out the window?

NURSE

(quizzically)

You want to look out the window?

MAN B

Yes, yes. To see the lake and the clouds and the people walking around.

NURSE

(laughing)

The only thing you'll see out that window is the blank wall of the building next door.

MAN B

He used to tell me about the things he saw out of that window!

NURSE

Then he was just leading you on. Excuse me, I'll be right back.

The two NURSES and the DOCTOR wheel MAN A's bed out of the room. MAN B is left alone.

Mochila Bears the Chrysalis of the World

DESCRIPTION

DEREK and LUZ, living "pre-apoc" under the highway, have a chance to recreate the universe, enclosed as it is in a backpack.

CHARACTERS

- LUZ, small and light to carry
- DEREK, strong enough to carry LUZ

MISCELLANEOUS

- Sound effects
- Backpacks

* * * * *

A backpack on the ground, underneath a highway overpass. Night. Reflected light from some streetlamp. Gritty.

LUZ hangs on the back of DEREK. They both stare at the backpack.

SOUND: Overhead, tires hitting a seam in a roadway: thump thump. Then another. Then silence.

They look overhead, then back to the backpack.

DEREK

You have to get off. My lower back -- the hinge
-- can't --

LUZ dismounts. DEREK straightens up.

LUZ

Your name is Derek.

DEREK

"Derek," not "derrick" -- and you can walk.

LUZ jumps on his back again. DEREK shrugs her off.

DEREK

We need to pay attention.

LUZ

I think we should leave it alone, let it be, walk right past, who knows what evil lurks.

DEREK

I think so, too.

LUZ

C'mon -- I was just shitting you! Can't afford not to.

LUZ runs up to the backpack, goes to open it, but doesn't. Hovers.

DEREK

Well?

SOUND: A heavy tractor trailer hits the roadway seam: multiple tires. Shaking of the roadway.

SOUND: The sifting of dust. Then silence.

LUZ

You have to open something like this, Derek -- you can't let it go to waste, not these days, not in these ways that we have to live in these days.

DEREK squats down, stares at the backpack.

LUZ

It's a gift.

DEREK

Luz, be the kind of quiet that lets me think.

DEREK ponders some more.

DEREK

If you see something, say something -- that's what we're told by the voice all the time: see something, say something. So I said something.

LUZ

To me.

DEREK

Well, you were on my back, so how could I miss telling you?

LUZ goes to jump on his back again, but DEREK shifts, and LUZ misses him.

DEREK

You got legs -- stand on 'em.

Before LUZ can make another assault on DEREK, something happens inside the backpack.

SOUND: A buzzing sound, intermittent, comes from the backpack.

The backpack moves. This brings even LUZ to a halt.

DEREK

See something, say something -- always see that pasted on the walls, too. So I saw, and I said something when I saw -- this.

LUZ

We can't afford to be choosy, Derek, in our pre-apocalyptic --

DEREK

PA --

LUZ

-- condition.

DEREK

Condition -- our PA condition.

LUZ

Pre. Apoc. Calyptic.

SOUND: Add in another sound -- wheezing or ticking or radiators banging.

LUZ

Hammers of hell.

SOUND: Add in still another sound -- it's a noisy backpack.

LUZ and DEREK watch, not sure whether to run or stay -- fear or hunger. DEREK indicates for LUZ to get on his back, which she does -- just in case.

The bag goes silent, goes still.

LUZ

How did you find this?

DEREK

Picking around -- you know, daily grind sort of stuff, the stuff that we have to do.

LUZ

Just there?

DEREK

Just there. Sitting there.

LUZ

If it's going to explode whether we open it or not, then we should open it.

DEREK

What's to lose?

LUZ

Except our lives.

DEREK

So what's to lose, like I said.

LUZ

That's what I meant by what I said.

DEREK

Pre-apocalypse doesn't care for us.

LUZ

Never did, never will.

DEREK

Never could.

LUZ

Free market is just pre-apoc by a different name.

DEREK

Capitalism -- snake eating its tail.

SOUND: Now a sweet sound, soothing.

The backpack begins to rise -- no need to hide the wires, could even be a stagehand with the backpack hanging on the end of a pole.

LUZ crawls off DEREK's back.

LUZ

Dark matter. That's what it is. Dark matter.
Makes up most of the universe. This is dark
matter.

DEREK

How do you know that?

LUZ

What else could it?

DEREK ponders this irrefutable logic.

DEREK

You should be more careful about the magazines
you steal to read.

LUZ

No one knows what it is.

DEREK

How can no one know that?

LUZ

They know that they don't know, which makes it
interesting -- to know what you don't know. Dark
matter may be at the root of it all.

DEREK

You're suggesting --

LUZ

Isn't it time for something new, isn't this the
moment when something new should --

DEREK

Luz --

LUZ

Dark matter -- darkness of matter -- fills the void and keeps the universe from collapsing in on itself.

DEREK

Luz -- won't happen in our lifetimes, short as they are. That bag -- can't --

LUZ reaches for the bag, but it's just out of reach. She goes to DEREK, who bends to get her on his back. She touches the backpack but can't grab it, and it rises just past her fingertips. She climbs on DEREK's neck -- still not high enough.

SOUND: Backpack sound goes out.

SOUND: Heavy tractor trailer going over the seam with a high blast of an air-horn -- blindingly loud.

Suddenly, DEREK moves away, gets LUZ off his back and behind him. LUZ struggles against him. As they struggle, the backpack slowly descends.

LUZ

What're you doing -- I almost had it!!

DEREK

It's not right -- backpacks don't float.

LUZ

Let me --

DEREK

Stop it! They don't make sounds!

LUZ

Stop --

But it's no good -- LUZ can't break out of his grip.

LUZ

You don't know what's in there -- could be a whole new -- let me go -- we got nothing to lose! --

that's the gift, we got nothing to lose! -- I want
what's in there -- I want --

DEREK

Stop! It!!

DEREK more or less flings LUZ to the ground. He looks up at the
backpack, sees that it's within reach, and pulls at it until it
comes loose and falls to the ground.

SOUND: Absurd sound of something like broken dishes.

LUZ crawls to it. She nudges it.

SOUND: Absurd sound, something like a cow mooing.

LUZ nudges it again.

**SOUND: Absurd sound, something like a bit of organ grinder
music.**

LUZ nudges it one more time.

SOUND: Absurd sound, something like a deep sigh.

LUZ

If you broke something --

DEREK

If it's the beginning of the new world, you can't
break something like that.

LUZ

I'm just saying --

By now, LUZ is in tears.

**SOUND: Three cars in succession over the seam: thump/thump,
thump/thump, thump/thump.**

LUZ

Just look at us -- rags, bones -- pick and scavenge
-- the whole course of evolution --

DEREK

It's not your fault.

LUZ

The earth sweat to put me here, and look at --
rice pudding in a diner is of more use than me
-- sweeter -- like a chicken with lips like mine
is worth worrying about.

DEREK

I hate it when you --

But LUZ is inconsolable.

DEREK

I've told you, it's the social relations of
production that are --

But LUZ won't have any of it.

DEREK

Pre-apocalypse sucks.

DEREK goes to the backpack and unzips it. LUZ stops immediately.
They wait.

DEREK reaches inside and pulls out another, but smaller,
backpack.

SOUND: Something like a silly little trumpet fanfare.

**SOUND: Car thump, but a long car, a limo -- like waiting for
 the other shoe to drop.**

LUZ has fixed her eyes on the bag.

LUZ

I remember when -- the back days, our better back
days.

DEREK

Our social relations of production were much
better then.

LUZ

Pre-pre-apocalypse.

DEREK

Rice pudding in a diner. What do we know? The
backpack made noises, levitated --

LUZ

Did not explode --

DEREK

You thought about dark matter --

LUZ

Sweet sound it played, then rose --

DEREK

And now this. A birth, like -- you know, smaller out of bigger.

LUZ

From one, another.

SOUND: A really loud old-fashioned alarm clock.

SOUND: Then, a heavy-duty thrum, low bass -- makes the solar plexus vibrate.

LUZ takes the small backpack and stuffs it under her shirt. Almost immediately, she falls to the ground and thrashes, and as she does, it's clear that she's in labor. DEREK rushes to her, unsure what to do, but it doesn't really matter since LUZ is already giving birth, so DEREK positions himself to catch whatever falls out.

Which turns out to be a clear glass globe. The globe shines in DEREK's hands. LUZ removes the small backpack from under her shirt, then takes the globe from DEREK.

SOUND: Three emergency vehicles speeds over the bridge, with Doppler effect.

LUZ

A new one. A new one.

DEREK

What's so new about it?

LUZ

That it's new, that's what's new.

DEREK

Better?

LUZ

At least new.

DEREK

What good is new if not better?

LUZ

This came from dark matter -- the stuff that keeps everything from collapsing.

DEREK

Well, if we come from dark matter, too, why is everything collapsing?

LUZ

Why are you so angry?

DEREK

I'm not angry!

LUZ

You sound angry. You look angry. You smell angry.

DEREK pivots on her, and LUZ protects the globe.

LUZ

Be careful!

DEREK

You're so easy!

DEREK wrestles the globe from LUZ's hands, puts it back into the small backpack, then proceeds to smash the contents of the small backpack. LUZ is devastated.

SOUND: A quick compendium of all the sounds that have come before.

DEREK takes the small backpack and stuffs it into the larger backpack, then flings the backpack away.

DEREK

If it had had food -- medicine -- a pen and paper, goddamn it -- dust from the Gobi desert --

LUZ is in despair.

DEREK

A cat -- coupons -- salt from the Arabian Sea --
who the hell needs another world? -- decent water
filtration -- bio-luminescence --

DEREK stops, breathless. LUZ sobs.

DEREK

We'd just fuck it up, anyways.

LUZ gets up and stalks off. The presence of her absence becomes palpable for DEREK -- painful for DEREK.

SOUND: Water dripping. The buzz of the streetlamp. Sift of dust.

LUZ rages back on, carrying the backpack on her back.

DEREK

Hey.

This brings LUZ to a halt.

LUZ

Hey.

DEREK

What's that on your back?

LUZ takes her time to face DEREK.

LUZ

I am never going to jump on your back again.
Ever.

DEREK

C'mon, it's not that [bad] --

LUZ

Ever -- you hear me?

SOUND: LUZ's line in reverb, echo.

LUZ

I got my own to carry now. I got to carry my own.

DEREK

What in that that's on your back?

LUZ

Your soul.

DEREK

It's all broken glass.

LUZ

Enough said.

DEREK

The dark matter?

LUZ

You only get that once in nine hundred million lifetimes. This pre-apoc is obviously not going to be one of them because someone --

DEREK

Is it heavy?

LUZ

It could be sad.

DEREK is at a loss. He gets onto his hands and knees, hangs his head.

LUZ considers the offer. She takes her time, but she moves toward DEREK. With a slight hesitation to show who is boss, she straddles his back, wraps her arms around his neck.

DEREK stands.

SOUND: A glass harmonica plays.

DEREK

Did I really break it?

LUZ

Let's go try to find something to eat. Soup. Soup would be good.

DEREK eases LUZ off his back.

DEREK

You have to show me. Before we can break bread -- well, break soup -- together, you have to show me.

LUZ slides off the backpack, opens it and takes out the small backpack. She unzips that one and offers to DEREK.

DEREK reaches in, and what he finds makes him smile.

DEREK

You had me going there. Is that what dark matter feels like?

LUZ

It's cosmic, yes?

DEREK

Astronomical -- universal.

A light grows inside the backpack, shining into DEREK's face.

LUZ

And it can't be stopped.

Lights get brighter and brighter until they blind everything and everyone.

SOUND: Something like the last chord on "A Day in the Life" follows the brightening of the lights.

The lights have come to blinding.

SOUND: The thump of cars on the highway but now in the rhythm of a heart-beat: thump/thump, thump/thump.

And the lights go to black as the heart beats.

Breast of Show

DESCRIPTION

Felice Gallagher-Jimenez runs Breast of Show, which offers information and products for breastfeeding mothers, out of her street-level unit in a very exclusive residential building. The building association, in the person of Elizabeth Thornton, president, has decided to fine Ms. Gallagher Jimenez for keeping her street door open for her "moms," an action that Felice must challenge and not accept.

CHARACTERS

- ELIZABETH THORNTON
- FELICE GALLAGHER-JIMENEZ

LOCATION

- Elizabeth Thornton's apartment

SET

- Table
- Two chair
- An elegant tea pot, two cups, sugar, milk on a tray
- A letter in an envelope
- A bag of breast-feeding paraphernalia

* * * * *

ELIZABETH THORNTON, coiffed and impeccable in a fashion that went out of fashion in the mid-1960s, sits backbone-straight at a table while FELICE GALLAGHER-JIMENEZ empties a bag of breast-feeding paraphernalia on the table. There is a china tea service on the table as well set for two.

ELIZABETH

This isn't necessary --

FELICE shakes out the bag.

FELICE

Here we go.

ELIZABETH

Ms. Gallagher.

FELICE

Gallagher-Jimenez.

ELIZABETH

I invited you here as a courtesy --

FELICE

Don't think I haven't heard "the Breast Nazi" around the place --

ELIZABETH

There's really no need --

FELICE

Or "boob" as in "booby" as in "booby hatch" --

ELIZABETH

Again, there's no need --

FELICE points to the pile.

FELICE

Now, do you see anything here that constitutes a clear and present danger to the domestic tranquility of the building?

FELICE holds up certain objects as she speaks: a breast feeding bra, bottles, pumps, nipple shields -- the possibilities are endless. FELICE also doesn't mind thinking that she's making ELIZABETH feel uncomfortable, though it's unclear if that is happening.

FELICE

You'd think -- this is interesting -- from what our fellow condo association members are saying, that I'm peddling porn out of my unit -- what'd'ya think of this? -- or belching cheap beer in the common areas. It's just breast-feeding gadgetry for breastfeeding females.

FELICE grabs her own breasts and goes rat-a-tat-a-tat like they were machine guns, then laughs.

FELICE

My nuclear nipples!

ELIZABETH lets the silence settle.

ELIZABETH

Are you finished?

FELICE

Depends.

ELIZABETH

Will you at least sit down? You seem to have made the sort of point you like to make.

FELICE ponders what ELIZABETH has said.

FELICE

I can sit down.

ELIZABETH points to the paraphernalia.

ELIZABETH

And this has made its point as well, so its job is done. Go on, it can go away.

FELICE concedes and begins gathering the items back into the bag.

FELICE

Did you breastfeed your children?

ELIZABETH's expression doesn't change, but it does, but FELICE either doesn't notice or ignores it.

FELICE

I breastfed mine, until I had to stop because of the cancer scare, but I tell you that it wasn't easy getting info or a decent fitting bra in this city, which is why I started Breast of Show so that no one had to be humiliated by what had humiliated me. And feeding the child in public?! You'd think that when I flopped it out --

ELIZABETH

Ms. Gallagher-Jimenez -- please stop -- please -- for just a moment -- so that we can get back to why I asked you here.

FELICE

I know why you asked me here.

ELIZABETH

I don't think you do.

FELICE

Well, I know the condo association has fined me -- \$250.

ELIZABETH

For leaving your street-level door open, which we have repeatedly --

FELICE

I paid \$825,000 for my unit -- I'll leave the door open if I want.

ELIZABETH

The rules say --

FELICE

You ever tried to open that brass motherfucker of a door, especially when you're lactating and have a babe in the carriage or the carrier and lugging the equivalent of D-Day in your prep bag? Leaving it open so they can get to my goods and my services is an act of simple kindness. Fine me all you want -- I'm keeping it open, as long as the weather lets me. And you didn't answer my question about breastfeeding your kids.

ELIZABETH slides a letter over to FELICE.

ELIZABETH

Let's focus.

FELICE opens it, reads.

FELICE

You're not serious.

ELIZABETH

We will get an injunction if needed.

FELICE

Breast of Show is not a retail store.

ELIZABETH

You -- sell -- materials.

FELICE

I provide a community service --

ELIZABETH

You charge fees --

FELICE

-- a goddamn important community service -- and the zoning allows for that.

ELIZABETH

That's not for you to say.

FELICE

Or for you and your fellow condo-mints to say, either. Damn! Damn!

FELICE leans back, a little stunned at the moment, a little winded, a little thrown off-kilter.

ELIZABETH

Are you all right?

FELICE

I -- don't -- can I -- may I -- have some tea?

ELIZABETH

Of course -- that's why I have it.

ELIZABETH pours FELICE a cup.

ELIZABETH

Sugar? Milk?

FELICE declines both. ELIZABETH hands the cup to her. FELICE drinks. ELIZABETH drinks. FELICE calculates. ELIZABETH calculates about FELICE's calculations.

FELICE

Breasts -- the trouble they can cause! Tits all over a billboard and people just call that "natural," it's just "the way." But a nipple in a toothless mouth in a restaurant -- this doesn't have to be a war.

FELICE holds out her cup.

FELICE

May I?

ELIZABETH takes the cup and saucer, refills it, hands it back.
FELICE laughs.

FELICE

That's funny.

ELIZABETH

In what way?

FELICE

I would've just brought the pot over and poured it in, like a diner waitress! You take it, hand it back -- you serve -- that's a distinction with a difference.

ELIZABETH pauses, teapot hovering. Then she decides on the approach she wants to take. She places the pot down and gives FELICE a direct look.

ELIZABETH

You're kind to say that. But I don't think there's a difference at all.

FELICE

What are you saying to me?

ELIZABETH

Only this: I'm sure you act with the same care toward your --

FELICE

My what?

ELIZABETH

I was going to say "customers" --

FELICE

Don't do retail --

ELIZABETH

And I was going to add that that's probably not what you call them.

FELICE

My moms -- that's all I call 'em, my moms.

ELIZABETH

So, toward your moms.

FELICE

I know you have two children.

ELIZABETH

It was -- interesting.

FELICE

Momhood.

ELIZABETH

Momhood. Mothering.

FELICE

And thus to breasts again --

ELIZABETH shifts in her chair, leans forward on the table, hands clasped together.

ELIZABETH

Breasts. You mentioned cancer.

FELICE puts her cup down and slides the cup and saucer forward, positions it -- buying some time.

FELICE

I did mention it. Cancer-free for a lucky seven years.

ELIZABETH

Your son and daughter --

FELICE

He's seven -- I had to stop it with him because of the "C", but my daughter got the full breast buffet.

ELIZABETH

I want to let you know that I am the same -- though I have been "free," obviously, for a few more years than you.

FELICE plays with the cup and saucer while she thinks.

FELICE

Well, you just never know.

ELIZABETH

Breastfeeding, you asked.

FELICE

Bad manners on my part --

ELIZABETH

With my first child --

FELICE

Really, you don't [have to] --

ELIZABETH

With my first child, Ms. Gallagher-Jimenez -- no. The manners of the day did not allow it. So, bottle-fed and upraised he was. With my second child --

ELIZABETH pulls FELICE's cup towards her and puts it one side -- a mannered stall.

ELIZABETH

With my second child, also no. But not because of manners. Biology intervened.

FELICE

How bad?

ELIZABETH

They took both.

FELICE

Both.

ELIZABETH

The manner in those days. I was glad, and I wasn't. Missed the pleasure -- infrequent, but still. But missed the danger as well -- I had two children to raise, so it was good to miss the danger.

A silence settles into the room.

FELICE

You should come meet some of [the moms] --

ELIZABETH

Of course I would like to meet them. I appreciate their struggle. You and I both appreciate it.

FELICE

So come.

ELIZABETH

I will.

FELICE

Great.

ELIZABETH

However, meeting your moms won't change two facts. One, you have thirty days to pay the fine, per the association's rules. And, two, the brass motherfucker of a door will remain closed.

A thick silence settles in the room. ELIZABETH takes FELICE's letter and replaces it in the envelope and slides it back across the table.

ELIZABETH

And if that's not satisfactory to you, the association has a ready response.

FELICE stands up. Without hesitation, she takes off whatever shirt she is wearing, plus her brassiere, and stands unhaltered in front of ELIZABETH -- the attitude is "I've still got 'em."

ELIZABETH does not look away.

ELIZABETH

You are going to have to sell a lot of breast-pumps and nipple shields to do what you want to do.

FELICE puts her clothes back on.

FELICE

Good thing getting pregnant doesn't go out of fashion. Good thing breasts are here to stay. Good thing nice people are still in the majority.

FELICE shoulders the bag. ELIZABETH stands.

ELIZABETH

I think it turned out better this way. Besides, how could you have known not to try to soften me up? I gave you some useful information for the next steps you want to take.

FELICE

There are steps -- and there are steps. I'm thinking about science and technology. I'm thinking about automatic doors. I'm thinking about the rules and automatic doors and doorbells. And the state's Division of Human Rights.

ELIZABETH

Your tax dollars at work.

The two women appraise each other.

FELICE

I can read what the association's rules let in and keep out just as well as anyone.

ELIZABETH

May all mothers have protectors with such good eyes.

FELICE

I'm going back down to do my community service.

ELIZABETH

Don't forget to send in the check with the payment coupon. Address is right on it. Or you could drop it off to me personally.

FELICE

When can I expect you to visit?

ELIZABETH

Once the fine is paid, all things are possible.

FELICE moves to leave, and she has every intention of leaving. But because she is who she is, she instead turns to face ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH

Yes?

FELICE hesitates.

ELIZABETH

Go on.

FELICE

You said it would be a waste of time with you,
softening you up.

ELIZABETH

I know myself well.

FELICE goes to say "So why?", but ELIZABETH stops her.

ELIZABETH

I said I gave you some useful information.

With only the slightest hesitation, ELIZABETH undoes her jacket
and her blouse to show FELICE what is not there.

ELIZABETH

I call the scars my scarlet letters. One is not
minimized like this without -- effect.

ELIZABETH closes up her clothes, smoothes herself back into
shape.

ELIZABETH

First I was made a woman. Then a mother. Then
breastless, first by surgeon, then by an evaporating
husband, then by the sleek disregard of my two
children. It is a scale of diminishment that at
some point I refused to let own me any more.

ELIZABETH picks up the envelope and hands it to FELICE.

ELIZABETH

I believe this is yours.

FELICE takes it.

ELIZABETH

The one thing that has never betrayed me is the
savage loneliness behind my scarlet letters. I

trust it more than anything else. Your "moms"
never had a chance against it.

FELICE tears the letter into precise sections and drops the
pieces in her bag.

FELICE

I don't litter.

They face each other.

Blackout.

Las Cartas

Triggered by Eduardo Galeano in Bocas Del Tiempo

DESCRIPTION

Friends of the Peruvian poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, in order to speed his recovery in a sanatorium on the outskirts of Spain, compose "fan" letters from one Georgina Hübner, which have the desired remedial effect. But when Juan decides to travel back to Lima to meet Georgina, the friends decide to let Georgina "pass away" instead of revealing their well-intentioned hoax to their friend.

CHARACTERS

- Pablo Bracho
- Mateo Menotti
- Osvaldo Reyes

SET

- Table littered with writing materials and other stuff
- Chairs
- Bottles of wine
- Pitcher of water
- A clothes rack
- Radio

* * * * *

In a pool of light sit PABLO, MATEO, and OSVALDO at a table, with wine bottles and glasses nestled among boxes of colored paper and envelopes, along with pens, salt-and-pepper shakers, etc. Perhaps also music from a radio in the background, say, Susana Baca.

Nearby stands a coat rack with coats and hats and other paraphernalia hanging from it.

PABLO reads through a three-page letter while the other two look on.

PABLO

Ah -- he liked that phrase we came up with --

OSVALDO raises a glass.

OSVALDO

To Georgina --

OSVALDO drinks.

PABLO

And that other one at the end of the second page
--

MATEO

He is always one for sugar.

PABLO

Not always -- and, in any case, the man is sick,
and he is far from home --

OSVALDO

From his cherished Peru and his cherished Peruvian
friends.

OSVALDO raises his glass again and drinks.

OSVALDO

To our cherished Peru! And its Peruvian friends!

PABLO

So what does it matter if such sugar betters his
condition? Don't drink so much.

OSVALDO

It betters my condition.

MATEO

Does he say anything about his condition?

OSVALDO

You know him -- in his mind, ever the youth with
the capable lungs --

PABLO

Only hints, as usual -- he's right about that --

MATEO

Well, then, the hints, please, at least.

PABLO

He says -- he says he's breathing better, not
feeling so weak, went for a walk among the geese
by the lake --

OSVALDO

I wish he would stop trying to make us feel better -- he has rotten lungs, he's always had rotten lungs.

MATEO

This is to his love, don't forget, not us! To his Georgina! He does not want his Georgina to worry about his mortal soul --

OSVALDO

He pictures her -- he pictures her gazing from the Bridge of Sighs near her home in Barranco, gazing east to Spain, to Madrid, to his sanatorium nestled in its suburbs!

MATEO

With each letter, his heart arcs back to his beloved Lima --

OSVALDO

Now you're getting the spirit!

MATEO

To his treasured Georgina walking along the Bajada de los Baños to the sea.

PABLO

The ever-restless sea --

OSVALDO

Good! Like the tides of my heart.

PABLO

He felt pleased when he came up with that one for her.

OSVALDO pours each of them more wine.

OSVALDO

I think it gave us all heart when we heard him say that -- write that, I mean -- hope in our heart that he will return to us.

The three raise their glasses in salute.

PABLO

To the safe and happy return of our beloved poet
and friend Juan Ramón Jiménez.

They drink. They muse. They fidget.

MATEO

Well, not really, you know. We can't really have
him come back.

OSVALDO laughs.

OSVALDO

How ripe is the world with irony.

MATEO

Well, can you imagine us telling him?

OSVALDO

Oh, I have drunk enough to imagine it!

MATEO

So what do you we do if our Georgina's letters
heal him enough to -- to -- well, you know!

OSVALDO nods toward PABLO.

OSVALDO

Ask him -- he kickstarted it all. El escritor.
El activador.

MATEO

I don't even want to think about it.

PABLO

We do have to think about it.

OSVALDO

Entertain the idea.

PABLO

We knew it would come to this, at some point, my
fellow Georginas -- she was ours to begin with
but is not now ours -- our spirited admirer of the
poet Juan Ramón Jiménez is, well, alive. He's got
the same letters we have to prove her mutability.

MATEO

But those letters, we wrote them -- how stupid it sounds to say that now.

PABLO

Not stupid at all.

OSVALDO

Not at all. They've had the desired medicinal effect, yes? Georgina helped save our friend in exile, our dying friend. That's all we ever wanted to do. And we did it. Will he return? I don't know. But he is alive. Today.

MATEO

But he also loves her -- it's clear, clearly written. And we've sent her love back to him -- God, it now really does sound stupid for us to have --

OSVALDO

You squirm too much. Wrestle with angels too much. You need more wine.

Which OSVALDO pours for him, and which MATEO drinks.

OSVALDO

How does he end this letter? We didn't get to the ending.

PABLO holds out his glass, into which OSVALDO pours wine. PABLO picks up the letter he had been reading, goes to the third page.

MATEO

Hah, I can see it on your face.

PABLO

It's not what you think, it's not that. The doctors say that he still needs to remain where he is.

MATEO

But for how long?

PABLO quotes from the letter.

PABLO

"They, of course, do not allow themselves to nibble at optimism -- ambiguity suits their scientific temperaments. But I can read behind it -- at the least, I am not sentenced here forever. At the least, Peru is within reach. At the least, you are what I reach for -- and what I will reach."

OSVALDO

Our medicines have medicated well, if I do say so myself -- which I just did.

MATEO

And how shall Georgina respond to this small, but straight, ray of sunlight shining westward from the east? If -- when --

OSVALDO

When --

PABLO

It will be "when" --

MATEO

So, when he returns, we will have to tell him the lie.

OSVALDO

Unless we hire a Georgina.

MATEO

Oh, and for how long?

OSVALDO

I'm only spinning out possibilities.

MATEO

Impossibilities.

OSVALDO

No stone should stay unturned when one wrestles with the angel of conscience.

OSVALDO raises his glass and laughs.

OSVALDO

Sayeth the lover of Bacchus and the grape!

PABLO

We can't hire a Georgina.

OSVALDO

Let us figure out exactly why.

PABLO gives OSVALDO a "look" that is loving and chiding at the same time.

PABLO

Even Bacchus can see that it is an impossibility.

OSVALDO

Why?

MATEO

Why?

OSVALDO

We'd just have to find a woman -- luckily we sent him no photos, so no need to match one for one -- a woman willing to sacrifice herself forever for a certain sum of, say, monthly money and who would have to memorize every jot and tittle of every word she had ever written to the poet and who would have to fall in love with him in some real and depthful way and who would --

MATEO

The grape-lover speaks madness.

OSVALDO

So, possible, yes, of course -- probable, no. I can see that through my lens of wine.

MATEO

Why are you not worried about this?

OSVALDO just grins stupidly. MATEO turns to PABLO.

MATEO

Why is he so flippant and -- and --

OSVALDO

And -- and --

MATEO

Well, why?!

OSVALDO both roars and guffaws at the same time.

OSVALDO

Because I fucking love the great loving joke of it all -- we've screwed things up like life itself in the most interesting of ways!!

OSVALDO goes for another bottle of wine but can't find any wine in any of them.

OSVALDO

¡Que lastima! Where shall I find my poetry? How shall I find my way home?

PABLO reaches under the table and pulls out a bottle. He pops out the cork and pours some into OSVALDO's glass, who sips.

OSVALDO

Ahhhh! You start with the best intention in your in your heart, and the spider of that intention spins and spins, and the warp spools out our friend's health and the weft leaves us both ass-faced and the most super-duper-terrific friends anyone could ever have, and then pain will follow joy, joy will bring us pain, and then -- and then --

OSVALDO puts on a sad face, looks at PABLO.

PABLO

I know.

MATEO

You know what?

PABLO

I know.

MATEO

What do you know that I don't know?

PABLO

You already know it --

OSVALDO

Our angel-wrestler --

PABLO

-- you just don't want to admit it.

MATEO

I don't know what you're talking about! And I certainly don't understand what the one with the sideways mouth over there is saying about "weft" and "warp" and spiders and -- and --

MATEO trails off, goes silent. He holds out his glass. PABLO pours, then pours some into his own. MATEO sighs deeply.

MATEO

It's not right.

They all fall silent.

MATEO

Shouldn't we at least wait until we know he is actually going to return, you know, tickets bought, in hand, trunks packed, passport stamped, up the gangplank, into the cabin? The letter -- you said that he said the doctors aren't ready to release him yet, so she can still write to him, she can --

PABLO and OSVALDO peer at him.

MATEO

Well, she can still write to him!

OSVALDO

His youth is showing.

MATEO

We -- she -- can write more letters!

OSVALDO

His tenderized heart.

MATEO

Don't --

PABLO

Don't mock him.

MATEO

Right!

OSVALDO

Might as well tell me not to breathe.

PABLO

You make such an improbable cynic.

OSVALDO

True -- I have not the self-discipline to suck the oxygen out of a room.

MATEO

Stop it! Stop it! This is our friend's heart we are talking about. It is breaking our friend's heart that we're -- talking -- about --

They all fall silent.

PABLO

When -- and how -- on the table, now. We only have two choices: we either break it here, or we break it there.

They muse in silence some more. MATEO is distraught.

OSVALDO

I have a friend. Several. In the embassy. And in the consul's office in Madrid.

PABLO

You never told me.

OSVALDO

It is a shady past we share. Shared. We were just lucky we never got caught.

PABLO

You, a smuggler?

OSVALDO

Please -- I do not want to taint your good soul.

MATEO

What are you talking about? How would that work? How would that work?!

OSVALDO

Come with me.

OSVALDO takes MATEO over to the coat rack. He selects off it what looks like a suit-jacket and a formal-looking cap and hands them to MATEO. He puts on his own rumpled linen jacket and battered panama.

He speaks to PABLO.

OSVALDO

You know what to say -- telegram-style, por favor.

PABLO scribbles words on a piece of the rose-colored paper, then folds it and envelopes it, and hands the envelope to MATEO.

PABLO

Don't read it.

OSVALDO

You're a courier. From the consul's office -- connection from my friend. And I am Juan Ramón Jiménez. Recently recovered from a touch of -- something -- lungful and romantic.

OSVALDO takes up a convalescent pose. He coughs.

OSVALDO

Go on -- come in.

MATEO, distraught, stamps on the floor as if he's knocking on a door.

OSVALDO

Yes?

MATEO hesitates, then stamps again.

OSVALDO

Coming.

OSVALDO moves as if he is coming to a door.

OSVALDO

What can I do for you, young man?

MATEO

I have -- I have a message.

OSVALDO

From?

MATEO

From the consul general's office.

OSVALDO

Which country? I have many in my back pocket.

MATEO

From Peru, señor.

OSVALDO

Is there a name on it?

Without answering him, MATEO thrusts the envelope forward. OSVALDO looks at it, and something shifts inside him, away from his flippancy towards something more dense. He coughs from deep in his lungs, then he takes the envelope. He fishes out a coin and hands it to MATEO, who takes it but looks confused as he takes it.

OSVALDO opens the envelope and takes out the paper.

OSVALDO

Have you ever loved, young man, been loved in return?

MATEO doesn't answer, just waits. OSVALDO reads it.

OSVALDO

Georgina Hübner is dead. Stop. Deepest condolences. Stop. This came all the way from --

MATEO

By cable. Today. Your friends wanted you to know.

OSVALDO

My friends. They introduced her to me.

MATEO

They must love you deeply.

OSVALDO coughs, and it is not a performance. MATEO puts a hand on him to comfort and support, gives PABLO a worried look. PABLO hands MATEO a glass of water, which he gives to OSVALDO. OSVALDO sips, gives it back. When OSVALDO stops coughing, he is in tears -- and they are not from coughing.

OSVALDO

This is good -- this is good, what they did, what they have done.

OSVALDO folds the note back into the envelope, puts the envelope in his pocket, wipes his eyes on his sleeve.

OSVALDO

Thank you. Thank you.

MATEO

Is there a message you want to send back? I can arrange for that.

OSVALDO

No. Thank you. You can go now.

MATEO backs away, takes off the suit-coat and hat, hangs them up.

PABLO

Is that what he will do?

MATEO

We need to add another line: "Come home. Stop."

PABLO

We can do that -- that would be good. Is that what he will do?

OSVALDO

Well, he won't go raving into the streets or starve himself --

PABLO

That's true.

OSVALDO

He will have his beloved melancholy to soothe him and keep him inspired and afloat.

OSVALDO takes off his coat and hat, hangs them up, sits, drinks.

OSVALDO

You know, of course, that he will want to see the grave. And headstone. Or at least the urn. If we know about her, then we will know that about her as well, know it for him.

The other two grab their wine glasses and drink.

MATEO gets OSVALDO's hat and puts it on. He raises his glass and speaks, in a smooth imitation of OSVALDO.

MATEO

Such a death is not an easy thing to pull off. It is, in its own way, our last work of art.

OSVALDO laughs.

OSVALDO

I do believe he has matured in the course of these several hours.

PABLO

Let us plot this out some more. Contact your friends in the embassy, make sure this can be done.

MATEO

I will check out urns.

PABLO

I will work the wording.

PABLO picks up the three-page letter.

PABLO

In the meantime, Georgina has some things to say about the diagnosis of doctors.

PABLO pulls out a fresh sheet of rose-colored paper and hands it to MATEO, along with Georgina's fountain pen. MATEO writes the date.

PABLO

Now, let's see -- "Querido Juan" --

As MATEO writes, lights out.

The Games of Time

Triggered by Eduardo Galeano in Bocas Del Tiempo

DESCRIPTION

ASAF and JORGELINA literally fall into a painting, and then into love.

CHARACTERS

- ASAF, young
- JORGELINA, young

MISCELLANEOUS

- Sound effects

* * * * *

SOUND: Murmurs of people at an art gallery or museum.

ASAF and JORGELINA enter the gallery, hand in hand, or arm in arm, and when they see what they've come into the room to see, they move slowly downstage: a wall-size painting, of ancient Chinese vintage, depicting a group of peasant women overseen by a male overseer in a field of poppies gathering the buds into their baskets. It is a big painting -- they need to walk back and forth to see it all, which means eventually they have to separate.

There is a bench, which they can sit on if they want.

Throughout the scene, where possible, they touch one another: a caress, a hand on a shoulder, etc. They enjoy each other's company.

ASAF

Oh my --

JORGELINA

I'm -- just --

ASAF

Just --

JORGELINA

Wow!

ASAF

Look! Those wonderful wonderful brush strokes.

JORGELINA

The broken-ink style.

ASAF

And the use of the overall wash -- makes the mountains and trees seem to float --

JORGELINA

Like a paradise -- like in Paradise --

ASAF

So different from our Western feeling about landscape -- all domineering -- or nostalgic for what we've fucked up -- just look at those --

JORGELINA

The subtle touches --

ASAF

God, subtle, yes!

JORGELINA

-- the dotted brush-tip work on the stones -- the rubbed brushwork for the mists -- the spiritual --

ASAF

Taoist.

JORGELINA

Did you know that the Chinese word for "landscape" is made up of two characters meaning "mountains and water"?

ASAF

I did indeed!

They laugh. They kiss.

ASAF

I did indeed. All this from paper, brush, ink, and inkstone. Retreat. Contemplation.

JORGELINA

The reaching upward.

They both sigh. They both look some more -- moving back and forth, leaning in, pointing. Obviously in love with what they're seeing, including each other.

ASAF points.

ASAF

Do you see that?

JORGELINA

What?

ASAF

There -- down in the field --

JORGELINA

Amazing!

ASAF

How could we have missed them?

JORGELINA counts.

JORGELINA

Five, six -- ten -- fifteen women --

ASAF

Doing --

JORGELINA

What the title of the painting says -- of course!
-- "Gathering Poppies" --

ASAF

The buds --

JORGELINA

About the people in the land --

ASAF

Those buds -- into those baskets hanging from --

JORGELINA

And look -- look over here!

ASAF

Incredible!

JORGELINA

You can barely make him out --

ASAF

Must be an overseer of some sort -- the way he's perched on that rock -- he even looks like the rock -- and can you see --

JORGELINA

The one who's closest to him --

ASAF

Right!

JORGELINA

She's looking, too --

ASAF

You can trace that gaze straight on through -- from his eyes to hers --

JORGELINA

And straight back from hers to his --

SOUND: Barely audible, soon crowding out the murmurs, is wind -- starting very sotto voce but getting louder.

ASAF

And these mountains -- and these trees -- all around them --

JORGELINA

It's probably hot, though --

ASAF

That long dress is hot --

JORGELINA

That rock is hot --

They look at each out, enjoying the story-making.

SOUND: Wind is now a stronger -- rustle of leaves.

ASAF

But he has a jug of water -- behind the rock --

JORGELINA

And she knows this --

ASAF

And he knows she knows this --

SOUND: Wind is now strong.

They have to raise their voices. They move closer together

JORGELINA

And every time they do this harvest, she puts herself near him --

ASAF

Because they know --

JORGELINA

Because they know --

TOGETHER

Because they know --

SOUND: Wind is loud now.

Lights flash, sparkle. ASAF grabs a staff and a water jug and wears anything to make himself the overseer. JORGELINA grabs a basket, puts a kerchief on. They take up their positions in the painting.

SOUND: Wind dies away. A warmish day in May -- perhaps the buzz of insects.

JORGELINA straightens her back, stretches. ASAF watches closely.

JORGELINA

Ahhh!!

ASAF

Still early -- you have a long day ahead of you.

JORGELINA

So do you.

ASAF

But you're already stretching.

JORGELINA

I don't have the pleasure of just sitting and watching.

ASAF

I do.

JORGELINA

I know you do. Commanding us. I know what your pleasure is.

They exchange a significant look.

ASAF hands JORGELINA the jug. She drinks, hands it back. He drinks. He runs his fingers over her lips to dry them. She does the same to him.

They drink again, this time moving closer. The drying of the lips. Then the moving closer.

SOUND: Wind.

Lights go to black, up on another part of the stage.

ASAF is on his knees, sitting on his heels. JORGELINA, on her back, is reclined against him, and is in hard labor, breathing deeply.

SOUND: Just underneath his shouting and her shouting, hard breathing shifting into a heartbeat.

ASAF

Come on, my love, come on -- push -- push --
pppuuusshhh --

JORGELINA

Arrrggghhhhhh!!!

ASAF screams in sympathy.

ASAF

Arrrggghhhhhh!!!

JORGELINA

Oh god oh god oh god oh god --

ASAF

Come on -- you can do it -- you can do it you can do it you can do it --

JORGELINA

Aaaaarrrrrrrgggggghhhhhhh!!!!!!!

JORGELINA's scream dies away. They both of them pant.

SOUND: A heartbeat.

They laugh, they smile.

SOUND: Wind.

Lights go to black, up on another part of the stage.

JORGELINA

You lied!

ASAF

I lied!

JORGELINA

You lied!

ASAF

I know!

JORGELINA

You cheated!

ASAF

I did!

JORGELINA

I hate you!

ASAF

I hate myself!

JORGELINA

I hate loving you!

ASAF

Forgive me!

JORGELINA screams, then they slam their bodies together in an embrace and hold on tight.

SOUND: Wind.

Lights go to black, up on another part of the stage.

JORGELINA and ASAF stand next to each other, gazing out, their arms around each other. Together they wave goodbye to someone leaving. They strain to see the person until they can see the person no more.

They are alone, and their bodies and faces show this.

SOUND: Wind.

Lights go to black, up on another part of the stage.

JORGELINA is sitting on the bench. ASAF is flat on his back, his head in her lap, his breathing wracked and painful.

JORGELINA smooths his forehead, his hair, his face. There is nothing else she can do to ease his agony or hers.

ASAF

I wish I could have some water.

JORGELINA

Do you remember that day?

ASAF

We watered each other that day.

JORGELINA

As we have done for each other every day in our lives.

ASAF

Ah. Everything forgiven?

JORGELINA

It has always been forgiven.

ASAF lets out his last breath. JORGELINA lets grief settle into her.

SOUND: Wind, then the murmurs of the museum.

Lights go to black, then back to the gallery. ASAF and JORGELINA face each other just as they did before the wind came along.

They take a moment to register their surprise and delight at the journey they've just taken.

They pivot and face the painting. They hold hands. They exchange a look with each other, then face the painting.

Still holding hands, they slowly back up to take in the entirety of the painting, and they sit on the bench.

They each take in a deep breath and release it slowly -- perhaps even a small "ah!" escapes from them.

SOUND: Wind mixed with a heartbeat.

And, of course, lights to black as they revel in the painting, themselves, and their possible life together.

Phlegraean Fields of the Sea of Sicily, or Ferdinanda

DESCRIPTION

Giuseppe Trentino sits in a boat in the Mediterranean between Tunisia and Sicily, in 1863, waiting for the underwater volcanos, known as the Phlegraean Fields of the Sea of Sicily, to rise above sea level so that he can claim the islands for the new kingdom of Italy. They had erupted 32 years before, in 1831, but before sovereignty could be claimed, they sank back into the sea. Not this time -- the newly united kingdom of Italy deserves better. His only companion on this vigil is an albatross who has lost his bearings.

CHARACTERS

- Giuseppe Trentino
- Albatross [can be played by male or female]

SET

- A bench can serve as the boat
- An overdone admiral-like uniform for GIUSEPPE -- absurd amounts of braid, for instance
- Boxes of stuff under the bench: food, navigation instruments, flags, ledger, etc.
- A plaque
- Albatross, being played by a human, acts like a human playing an albatross

* * * * *

GIUSEPPE TRENTINO sits in a very proper manner in a boat in the Mediterranean.

SOUND: Sun, wind, loneliness -- this plays throughout as an underscoring.

ALBATROSS sails in and sits at the opposite end of the boat.

The two look at each other.

GIUSEPPE

You're an albatross.

ALBATROSS

I know.

GIUSEPPE

There are no albatrosses in the Mediterranean Sea.

ALBATROSS

I'm finding that out! Albatross equals zero. But how do you know that?

GIUSEPPE

I'm a scientist.

ALBATROSS

Logic and order, right? But then again, you're talking to an albatross.

GIUSEPPE

Because it has been a lonely -- a lonely vigil. The mind -- even the logical and orderly -- wanders.

ALBATROSS shrugs.

ALBATROSS

Yeah. Well. High winds -- that's how I got lost. High winds. Blew me, yon and hither. High winds blow you, too?

GIUSEPPE

In a manner of speaking.

ALBATROSS

Hmm.

GIUSEPPE

Sorry, such filthy -- I mean, it is an honor, don't get me wrong -- to be sent out here on this mission. Let me tell you, it is a real honor to serve the new kingdom of Italy, the newly unified greatness of Italy, to serve Victor Emmanuel the Second -- a very real honor, yes.

ALBATROSS mulls this over, mulls GIUSEPPE over.

GIUSEPPE

Sounds like they kicked you to the curb to get rid of you.

GIUSEPPE

No! No! Not at all!

ALBATROSS

I have to say it sounds like that.

GIUSEPPE

You're wrong!

ALBATROSS

Well --

GIUSEPPE

You're completely, completely wrong -- completely!

ALBATROSS mutters.

ALBATROSS

Doth protest too much --

GIUSEPPE

Do you know what happened in this very spot thirty-two years ago, in the year of our Lord 1831, under the blessed, blessed, blessed reign of Ferdinand the Second, the King of the Two Sicilies -- such a time then, such -- elegance, such a kiss of courtesy to everything -- you can't imagine what we have lost since those rats Garibaldi and Mazzini -- liberals! traitors! rebels! democrats! -- now we are "unified," Italy is "unified," and --

GIUSEPPE catches himself.

ALBATROSS

Go on -- I won't tell anybody. Nobody'd believe me anyways, even if they could hear me, so rock on. Were you, like, someone important, and then you weren't?

GIUSEPPE

I'm talking to an albatross.

ALBATROSS

Not stupid, you know.

GIUSEPPE

I am talking to an albatross.

They fall into a silence. ALBATROSS shifts his position, settles his feathers. They mark some time.

SOUND: Sea, wind, loneliness continues.

ALBATROSS

You were, um, telling me about this 1831 thing.
"This very spot."

GIUSEPPE

It is not important.

ALBATROSS

Yeah. Well. Just trying to keep it going, you know.

ALBATROSS picks up the plaque.

ALBATROSS

What does this say?

GIUSEPPE

Put it down.

ALBATROSS

After you tell me what it says.

GIUSEPPE grabs the plaque away, cradles it.

GIUSEPPE

It says, "This piece of land, once Ferdinandea, belongs and shall always belong to the Sicilian people."

ALBATROSS

I don't see any land -- I don't know much, not like some scientists, but I know I know squid, I know krill, and I know land. And there is not --

GIUSEPPE points downward, into the water.

GIUSEPPE

Eight meters down.

ALBATROSS looks over.

ALBATROSS

That's twenty-five feet, right?

GIUSEPPE

If you want to be English about it.

ALBATROSS

Have to always convert -- kinda hard to see in this crappy water --

GIUSEPPE

It is there, believe me. The top of a volcano. In 1831, it rose 63 meters high, out of the splendid sea, and my precious Ferdinand --

ALBATROSS

Like 200 feet, right?

GIUSEPPE

And my precious Ferdinand claimed it for the Two Sicilies! -- Ferdinandea, it was called! -- expanding his glory, our glory, until those fils-de-pute French and son-of-a-bitch British and hijo-de-puta Spanish came along to steal it for themselves! Bastards in three tongues!

ALBATROSS

Yeah, I've noticed you humans get into that muck a lot. So, where is it?

GIUSEPPE

The land --

ALBATROSS

Well?

GIUSEPPE

It sank.

ALBATROSS laughs.

ALBATROSS

Like one of those orbicular things you guys fly so you can go up to where I go -- bal-loon!!

ALBATROSS makes the sounds and motions of a balloon losing its air, laughing all the while.

ALBATROSS

You guys fight over hot air all the time! So tell me again why they booted you out here.

GIUSEPPE

Not booted -- chose --

GIUSEPPE's voice breaks. Hugging the plaque, he rocks as if mourning -- perhaps even keening a little, though not much and not loud and a little bit nasal.

ALBATROSS

Oh stop it! At least they didn't assassinate you right off! Humane and civilized that they let their useless ones continue to see the light of day.

GIUSEPPE gives ALBATROSS a look that is both hurt and full of hatred and surprised that he's making such trenchant statements.

ALBATROSS

Well, look at that uniform, really, which you probably think is magnificent -- courtly -- and look at the equipment they give you -- more rust than anything else --

GIUSEPPE

I have a mission. I have been given a mission.

ALBATROSS stops baiting him.

GIUSEPPE

I have a reason for being here.

ALBATROSS

So -- what is your reason?

GIUSEPPE stands -- sways because the boat sways under his shifting weight. He has the plaque gripped in his hands.

GIUSEPPE

Ferdinandea will rise again, it will, it is in the nature of volcanoes to rise, and when it does, I shall claim it, once and for all, with this, affixed to its summit --

ALBATROSS

But you hate this new Italy.

GIUSEPPE laughs -- just a touch of madness, the merest hint.

GIUSEPPE

Not for them -- for my precious Ferdinand, for his memory -- they can think it's theirs, but it will be his, finally. Ours, finally.

ALBATROSS

I don't think, though, volcanoes explode when you tell them to --

GIUSEPPE scrambles down, pulls out a box from under the bench.

GIUSEPPE

I have been trying to -- convince the geology --

GIUSEPPE pulls out a round object with a fuse on it.

GIUSEPPE

My own invention -- I call it a depth-charge. A bomb, a water-proof fuse, I light it --

GIUSEPPE makes the gesture of throwing it overboard.

GIUSEPPE

Fire calling forth fire.

ALBATROSS

Has it worked?

GIUSEPPE

I don't know. It's been difficult to know if the timing is right -- the rate of descent measured against the burn rate of the fuse -- if the explosive force is enough -- maybe it's just like a flea bite rather than, you know, a goad to glorious action -- not enough time to do the proper experiments --

ALBATROSS

What else?

GIUSEPPE

I send a plumb-bob down to measure any depths changes -- and, no, there haven't been any, I can see the question on your face.

ALBATROSS

Which is pretty good, given how this beak stiffens up everything.

GIUSEPPE pulls out a ledger.

GIUSEPPE

I keep a log of everything --

ALBATROSS

Stained with salt tears.

GIUSEPPE

-- so there will be a record for history.

ALBATROSS

You mean, my friend, a record of your failure.

GIUSEPPE

I keep watch, I keep the [flame] --

ALBATROSS

You are a failure, you know -- you must know -- not even a magnificent one, to light up the sky -- not even a failure much past the ordinary kind.

GIUSEPPE is stunned at the truth of the matter.

ALBATROSS

Look, maybe it's not my business to interfere in the affairs of men, but why don't you just dive down there, nail that thing to the stone, come up, go home, and call the mission accomplished? And if the sea vomits forth Ferdinandea again -- the stamp of approval is already there, planted by you. And if it doesn't -- sit at home in your pee-stained underwear drinking wine and know that either way you've done your duty.

GIUSEPPE makes a sudden violent move at ALBATROSS, as if he wants to catch and throttle him. ALBATROSS easily moves away,

and the boat rocks violently. GIUSEPPE still tries to get to him, but ALBATROSS is not to be caught. They square off.

ALBATROSS

I was wondering when you'd get around to that.

GIUSEPPE

My mission is to wait -- to keep faith with the future. How could you ever understand --

ALBATROSS

They kicked you out because they needed a laugh. You sit out here, sweat-soaked in your braid, shitting and peeing over gunwales, convinced you have a purpose -- all the while, the ones who sent you here lick the sugar off dates, read telegrams out loud in anapestic cadences, find new sensual uses for olives -- and tell tales of a man somewhere, I don't know, out there -- out there, out there, have you heard anything about the poor figlio di puttana out there? -- dedicated to a sentence with no verb, to an absurd geology. You are a government-funded joke.

It is not as if this possibility hasn't crossed GIUSEPPE's mind, which takes the air right out of his balloon.

ALBATROSS

Another possibility is that you take the plaque down there, nail it home, and then -- and then just hold onto it until your lungs empty and heaven enters and the long trail of pain which has been your miniscule life resolves itself. When Ferdinandea ascends, your bones will be the first to fertilize its air-borne majesty, and fame of a sort will be yours. If not -- what have you really lost? Your bones are already dissolving, why not let them --

GIUSEPPE picks up the journal and opens it, pulls out a pencil from a pocket, and writes in it. As he writes, he begins to laugh and laugh and laugh.

ALBATROSS

What are you writing?

GIUSEPPE

They say that the albatross carries the souls of the dead.

ALBATROSS

I am stuffed with the souls of the dead.

GIUSEPPE

Sent to drive people mad.

ALBATROSS

Sent to make them realize what they know and won't admit.

GIUSEPPE

No no no -- you're just feathers and guts, stringy muscle, sadness that shits --

GIUSEPPE taps his head, touches his heart.

GIUSEPPE

No no, those souls are up here, in here -- this madness is all my own, and being my own, I embrace it, I suckle it, I couple with the uselessness I am and breed ever-more absurdity, knowing that I have kept faith with myself, been honest where the world has been a fraud --

GIUSEPPE dips his hand into what would be the sea, then hovers it over the journal, letting it drip onto the page.

GIUSEPPE

My salt signature.

GIUSEPPE closes the journal and puts it down. He picks up the plaque, embraces it.

ALBATROSS

A most excellence performance.

GIUSEPPE

No performance -- but excellent, yes.

GIUSEPPE balances himself on what would be the edge of the boat, a man ready to leap into the heart of his fate.

SOUND: Boiling seas, a solar-plexus shaking rumble, the coming volcano.

GIUSEPPE

No no no no -- not now!

ALBATROSS

Too late! Too bad! Ferdinandea arises!

GIUSEPPE

No!

ALBATROSS

You're being sucked back into the real! No glorious exit for you.

GIUSEPPE

I can't go back to them! I can't! The waiting was the mission, I see that now -- to finish the mission -- to have success -- to go to them and say, "Behold what I have done" -- what a joke! A joke! A joke! A joke!

SOUND: Even louder now, the island rising.

GIUSEPPE throws down the plaque, turns to ALBATROSS.

GIUSEPPE

Save me.

ALBATROSS

Are you sure?

GIUSEPPE

You know I am. The mission is accomplished.

GIUSEPPE throws open his arms, throws back his head. ALBATROSS comes to him amid the crush of the rising volcano and embraces him -- and absorbs his soul.

GIUSEPPE

Ah!

GIUSEPPE's body collapses into a grateful heap.

SOUND: The tumult continues for a little bit longer, then subsides into sun, wind, loneliness.

ALBATROSS looks around him.

ALBATROSS

With this new weight, I need to find the high winds to carry me. I need to let his soul go in bits, scatter him in bits, so that he does not come back together and suffer being alive again. I owe him that.

ALBATROSS stands on the boat, spreads his arms, rises, and disappears.

In its own light a small rain of salt sifts down.

Blackness.

When Ayn Rand Walked In L.A.

"Economic redlining sponsored by financial institutions makes the situation in South L.A. worse," said Harris-Dawson, who remembered former Federal Reserve bank head Alan Greenspan walking the vacant and burned out lots in South L.A. and promising re-investment.

DESCRIPTION

A trio of LA economic desperates holds Alan Greenspan captive in hopes the capitalist system will reconfigure.

CHARACTERS

- ALAN GREENSPAN
- AFREEN (female)
- SALIM (male)
- NAHIM (male)

MISCELLANEOUS

- The year is 1998

* * * * *

ALAN GREENSPAN sits in a chair in some large echoing space -- a warehouse, perhaps. Under fluorescent light.

Also seated is NAHIM. AFREEN and SALIM stand. They all observe GREENSPAN.

NAHIM

I don't know if this is good luck or the worst luck ever.

AFREEN

Couldn't help myself.

SALIM

Snatching up the Chairman of the Federal Reserve?

AFREEN

Yeah.

SALIM

Worst, not good. Like, what kind of trade-in power does he bring to the table?

GREENSPAN

They will find me.

SALIM

Of course -- of course they're gonna find him because we're gonna let Mr. Alan Greenspan go.

AFREEN

No.

NAHIM

I agree.

AFREEN

Thanks.

SALIM

You two are bat shit -- bat shit and a half.

AFREEN

I mean, when's the next time a motherfucker like him --

NAHIM

Right.

AFREEN

-- is gonna walk through south-central?

NAHIM

Right. Not in 1998 again. Not ever again.

AFREEN

Snatch what you can, get what you can for it.

SALIM

And what do you think we can get for him? The grab wasn't the bad idea -- the bad idea was him -- like, why would you bring something dead and rotten into your home?

NAHIM

I think you just hurt his feelings.

SALIM

If we'd taken Waters instead --

AFREEN

Maxine is a friend.

SALIM

A friend? You on the Congresswoman's Palm Pilot?
You on her Christmas card list? Didn't think so.

SOUND: Helicopter overflight -- up loud, then fades away.

They all look up and track the sound.

NAHIM

See the look on this face? Too bad.

AFREEN

Too bad.

GREENSPAN

They'll come back.

SALIM

They will come back.

NAHIM

Mr. Greenspan, I'm surprised -- aren't you two surprised? He didn't use 1400 syllables to say something simple -- that's how he tells his lies -- must be nervous.

SALIM

He may be a piece of shit, but he's their piece of shit, and they won't leave him behind --

NAHIM walks over to SALIM and gives him a big hug.

NAHIM

Friend, what do you we have to lose? Hmm? What do we have to lose that he hasn't already lost for us?

AFREEN

Come on.

SALIM gives in to the moment. NAHIM turns back to GREENSPAN.

NAHIM

The power of the state will come back -- the power of your state, not ours. Why did you ever come walking around south-central L.A. and lead us into a temptation that we had no choice but to give in to?

GREENSPAN

I came --

NAHIM

Come on.

GREENSPAN

I came to see what good can be done.

NAHIM

Really.

NAHIM looks at SALIM and AFREEN with mock admiration. AFREEN laughs. Even SALIM finds himself laughing.

SALIM

I am surprised his lips don't turn into, like, scorpions, or dry up from embarrassment.

AFREEN

I'm surprised words like those ever make it to the light of day from a tar pit like him.

NAHIM

I didn't -- we didn't -- wake up this morning planning on your kidnap, but, well, there you were, walking around photo-op-ing the former riot scene and, well -- I only wish I could have Rodney-King'd you in front of the cameras, though that is not in my nature, but given the bullshit you've put us through, this country through, you deserve to have the shit beaten out of you three or four times on video before you can begin to call yourself anything close to the kind of human being that could do anything called "good."

NAHMIM gets ahold of himself -- this isn't pleasant for him.

GREENSPAN

Who are you? Who are all of you?

NAHIM

We're your editors.

GREENSPAN

I don't need any editing.

SALIM

You're a dangerous man because you believe in a utopia, so, yes, you need some editing.

GREENSPAN

Let me go. I've seen your faces.

AFREEN

You're not tied down, not shackled.

GREENSPAN holds up his hands and suddenly realizes that he is indeed free to go, has been free to go all along.

SALIM

Didn't expect that, did you?

GREENSPAN

Why?

NAHIM

Because you can't debate with someone when they're enslaved.

GREENSPAN

You have an argument with me.

AFREEN laughs.

AFREEN

I don't know -- is it possible to argue with someone who is not in his right mind? Like teaching a pig to sing -- a waste of time, and it irritates the pig.

GREENSPAN gives them all the once-over, then turns to leave.

SALIM

There goes the coward.

NAHIM

There goes the mad man, the destroyer of worlds.

SALIM

Don't make him bigger than he isn't. "Coward" fits best.

AFREEN

Agreed. Coward. A coward pussy.

GREENSPAN stops, then exits.

SOUND: Helicopter overflight -- up loud, then fades away.

The three wait. NAHIM shouts.

NAHIM

Did'ya leave or did'ya stay?

They listen.

SOUND: Two police cars, sirens going, doppler by.

GREENSPAN reenters. The four stare at each other.

NAHIM

Those could've given you a ride --

GREENSPAN

Why do you say that? Why do say I'm not in my right mind?

NAHIM

You want to come sit back down? Like you do in front of all those Congressional committees that you baffle and punk out?

GREENSPAN

I'll stand.

NAHIM

Where do we begin with you, Mr. Greenspan? Let's begin with your capitalist utopia -- "the efficiency of markets to enlarge standards of living."

GREENSPAN

That's not utopia, markets are not a utopia, they're rational machines to allocate --

AFREEN

Every capitalist wants to believe we live in the best of all possible worlds.

SALIM

That people get what they deserve.

AFREEN

And they deserve whatever it is they get.

GREENSPAN

And the market makes sure that happens -- but a market that's not tied down, regulated. Free flow of everything, everyone gets to play.

NAHIM

Such a clean theology.

AFREEN

The capitalist rapture.

SALIM

You get any "irrational exuberance" -- see, we read the papers -- get any of that on your little walk through the bombed-out parts -- the still bombed-out parts, six years post-Rodney, post-rebellion? Get much of a sense of everyone getting' to "play"? Honest now. Honest --

GREENSPAN

No.

NAHIM

Because your markets don't hunt here. We're not necessary for your markets except that what little money we have in our pockets is like coal, something to be dug out of us and never put back. C'mon, Mr. G. -- you mean it never occurred to you that what you and Ayn Rand and her crowd and all your buds on "The Street" --

SALIM

Etcetera, etcetera.

NAHIM

-- are engaged in are occult practices?

AFREEN

Witchcraft. Reading animal guts. Throwing bones.

SALIM

You and your little governors at your meetings sifting through magical numbers looking for The Word -- talk about a cult!

NAHIM

Come on, G., give us your best shot. Give us your core belief, the thing about "markets" and "efficiency" that gets you up the morning, the -- the --

SALIM

The thing that if we ripped it out of you, you would find life even more stupid and useless than it already is because of what you've done.

AFREEN

Can you really say -- really say -- given what you saw out there, little as it was, that the free market is the thing that makes you whole and gives meaning to your universe?

SOUND: A concurrence of two police cars, sirens going, and the helicopter, all of it really really loud.

Something happens to GREENSPAN during the soundburst-- it is the rapture he feels, it is epilepsy, it is true belief, it is a nervous breakdown, it is a visitation, it is sexual release. GREENSPAN falls, writhes, dances to this tune.

GREENSPAN

Ayn! Ayn! Ayn! Ayn! John Galt -- yes, John Gaaaalt!! Goolldddd ssttaannddard -- ahhhh!!! -- Fountainhead! -- ohhhh!! -- Atlas -- Exuberance! Exuberance!

GREENSPAN speaks the next words as if it were one long sentence and as fast as he can.

GREENSPAN

"For monetary policy to foster maximum sustainable economic growth, it is useful to preempt forces of imbalance before they threaten economic stability. But this may not always be possible--the

future at times can be too opaque to penetrate. When we can be preemptive we should be, because modest preemptive actions can obviate the need of more drastic actions at a later date that could destabilize the economy."

All too much for him, and GREENSPAN swoons. The other three are in amused shock. GREENSPAN suddenly pops up and blurts out -- again, all words in a rush.

GREENSPAN

Capitalism is a lot like an airplane in which the pilot announces to his passengers that he has two pieces of news to tell them. The good news is that they are traveling at the pre-established speed of 600 miles an hour and all the systems on the plane are functioning perfectly. The bad news is that they are lost.

GREENSPAN looks stunned by the revelation, then swoons again -- out cold.

They wait to see if GREENSPAN will offer an encore. He doesn't. They cannot help bursting into laughter. AFREEN kneels by him.

NAHIM

Oh man -- I wonder if it's going to be like Saul on the road to Damascus.

SALIM

Or Jack Nicholson in Cuckoo's Nest.

AFREEN strokes his hair.

SALIM

What are you doing? And be sure to disinfect your hand after doing that.

AFREEN

It's like finding something in the middle of the road that's been hit and ain't dead yet -- maybe even not that hard hit, maybe even with a chance for repair.

NAHIM

Do you kill it or do you move it?

AFREEN

Not even that -- not only that -- just feel sorry for something so unfortunate. He got infected too early on.

SALIM

Yeah, well, his infection's just about ruined everything, so I've got no sympathy -- rabies you put down, not share with one another. Kill it, don't move it.

NAHIM

You want to do that?

This gives SALIM pause. AFREEN looks at him.

AFREEN

Shit.

NAHIM

Nothing stopping you from doing that.

SOUND: A low rumble -- still far away, but the low rumble of something like a tank moving slowly forward. It builds throughout.

NAHIM

Get rid of the scourge. Once. And for all of us.

SALIM looks at them both. He goes to GREENSPAN, kneels by him, looks at him, then AFREEN.

SALIM

What about you?

AFREEN

Killing one cockroach don't change the DNA of the species.

SALIM

But it does get rid of the one roach.

AFREEN

No argument there.

SALIM

Which devils are you two playing on which of my shoulders here?

SOUND: The rumbling, though still low, is evident -- maybe even felt.

AFREEN looks up.

AFREEN

Grim Reaper's on its way, it seems.

NAHIM

Narrows the mind. Maybe he converts into Paul, maybe he stays as Saul --

AFREEN

Crap shoot either way.

SALIM

Yeah, but I let him live, I have a better chance of living -- and you're right about changing the DNA of the species -- killing him just makes a mess, the rest of his brother cockroaches out there still, and the fucking-over marches on with or without him.

SOUND: Rumbling is significant now.

GREENSPAN snaps awake, sits up, looks around, stands up. NAHIM gestures for GREENSPAN to leave.

NAHIM

Your driver's coming for you.

GREENSPAN

Exuberance. Exuberance.

GREENSPAN leaves.

SOUND: Rumbling is up full, stays at full pitch. Now mixed with shouting voices.

The three of them wait.

SOUND: Rumbling fades away, voices fade away.

No police come in to the building.

AFREEN

Well -- guess he did us a favor. Guess we were worth his time and trouble.

NAHIM

Doesn't mean that we should hang out here any longer than necessary.

SALIM hugs AFREEN.

SALIM

I think you did a great thing.

AFREEN

Which part?

SALIM

All your parts.

NAHIM

Let's go before the utopia comes back and gives us some exuberance up our ass.

They move to leave.

AFREEN

Which part?

SALIM

Getting me not to kill him.

NAHIM

Hard not to want to blow the whole fucking thing up, whatever piece of it you can get your hands on.

AFREEN

Especially when you got your own utopia.

SALIM

It is not a utopia, what I have!

AFREEN

"Power of the people" -- you mean the people we know, all the chuckleheads and burn-outs and low-

lives we know? Imagine -- the universe in their hands!

SALIM

You gotta start somewhere -- if it don't work with them, it ain't gonna work with anybody --

AFREEN

Talk about pushing a rock up a mountain of shit --

SALIM

You've got no faith --

AFREEN

I got as much faith in faith as when the dentist says, "This ain't gonna hurt."

NAHIM

Let's do this over some food and drink, eh?

They continue the argument as they exit.

SOUND: Three expert gunshots.

Lights to black.

I Know What I Did Not Know

Triggered by Eduardo Galeano in Bocas del Tiempo, "La Carta"

DESCRIPTION

A worker asks a playwright to write a love letter for her. In writing the letter, he discovers what he should have been writing all along.

CHARACTERS

- ENRIQUE BUENAVENTURA, playwright
- ELENA
- WAITRESS

MISCELLANEOUS

- An old bar, not too seedy, in Cali, Colombia -- not well-lit, but its dimness is somehow artistic in feel. A table and two chairs.
- Guitar in the background throughout

* * * * *

SOUND: A guitar playing in the background, as if in another room.

ENRIQUE is smoking and drinking rum, a writing pad and pencil next to him, the ashtray and rum bottle not far away, surrounded by crumpled papers. He makes marks on the paper, then scratches them out. He's trying to capture some idea, but it won't be caught.

He crushes out the cigarette, exhales, leans back, stretches (a little groan, maybe), stares at the paper, papers. He drains the glass.

ELENA edges in. She is dressed, oddly enough, in workman's clothes. She clutches a worker's cap or beret in her hands -- clearly something that's been worn a lot.

ELENA

Hello.

ENRIQUE

Hello -- you're sneaking up on me.

ELENA

The barman said I could find you here.

ENRIQUE

This is my spot, where I retire for inspiration.
Though not much today.

ELENA

Maybe you haven't drunk enough yet.

ENRIQUE

Yes -- still early in the day. And you are --

ELENA

A mason -- bricklayer --

ENRIQUE

I know what a mason is -- it's still early in the
day --

ELENA

Across the street -- I drink here after work. Go
on -- say it -- I can see it in your face.

ENRIQUE

Amazing you can see anything in here --

ELENA

People always have a --

ENRIQUE

I have to say what the others say -- a woman
working with the bricks -- that's rare.

ELENA

May I sit down?

ENRIQUE

You have to sit down because you have to tell me
more. Will we need a second glass?

ELENA sits.

ELENA

No -- this is my lunchtime.

ENRIQUE

And bricks have to be straight -- I understand.
But --

ELENA

Bricks keep me out of the kitchen, out of the
laundry room, out of the nursery -- I thank my
father for giving me the skill to escape all that.
So I owe the bricks being straight.

ENRIQUE

An interesting father --

ELENA

My father had a heart.

ENRIQUE

Maybe I should use him in my next play.

ELENA points to the pad.

ELENA

Looks like a difficult birth -- my father would
certainly give it some spike.

ENRIQUE

So what does the woman mason who escapes the
domestic life thanks to an intelligent father
want with a poor playwright like me?

ELENA takes her time to answer.

ELENA

I saw your play the other night. A la diestra de
Dios Padre.

ENRIQUE

Show me what's under your hat. Ah, good -- I don't
see a brick, didn't get one through my window, so
I guess you at least didn't hate it.

ELENA

And I know you drink here -- everyone knows you
drink here.

ENRIQUE

I depend upon the right hand of the barman, my real Dios Padre.

ELENA

I thought the play was very funny -- fun to be in the theatre, to watch everybody. I came away from it better than when I walked in.

ENRIQUE gives ELENA an appreciative look, one a man gives a woman who intrigues him.

ENRIQUE

So the mason loves the arts -- working hands and a working head.

ELENA

Don't act so surprised.

ENRIQUE

It's not surprise I'm feeling -- the theatre is a democracy, open to all.

ELENA

At least yours is. Like my father.

ENRIQUE pours a bit more rum, sips it. He raises his right hand.

ENRIQUE

You're who we want in our seats -- but -- there's something else, something else. You didn't come sit at the right hand to give me a review.

ELENA

In your play --

ENRIQUE

In our play, the company's -- we all made it together.

ELENA

But the right hand of the father -- that one there, holding the chalice -- it does make the choices.

ENRIQUE

True.

ELENA

In your play -- you know how to talk about --

ELENA hesitates.

ENRIQUE

About what?

ELENA

About how one person can feel about another person and say what they feel -- it was true, how you had them say it.

ENRIQUE

Thank you.

ELENA finds it difficult to continue.

ENRIQUE

But there's something else.

ELENA

I don't have any right to ask you this, but I want to ask you to write a letter for me. No, not "want to ask" -- I am asking you to write a letter for me.

ENRIQUE

A letter --

ELENA

A love letter, to be specific.

ENRIQUE

For?

ELENA

For -- well, for her.

Time slows down. ELENA may be anxious, but ENRIQUE is all smiles, at least on the inside.

ENRIQUE

For her.

ELENA

That's what I said. I can write, you know -- I'm not illiterate.

ENRIQUE

Your father wouldn't let you be.

ELENA

So that's not the point.

ENRIQUE

What would you want this letter to say?

ELENA

That's the point -- if I knew what the letter would say, I wouldn't come ask you to write it. I can pay you.

ENRIQUE

You've seen our show already -- payment enough.

ELENA gestures for the glass. ENRIQUE gives it to her, and she downs the contents.

ELENA

Will you? This is terrible rum.

ENRIQUE

Perhaps that accounts for my lack of inspiration.

ELENA lays out a few bills on the table, gets up to leave.

ELENA

Buy some better rum and write the letter for me.

ENRIQUE

I haven't said I would.

ELENA

Why would you say no?

ENRIQUE

It's not the kind of thing I usually write.

ELENA

When is it ever too late to learn something new?

ENRIQUE

Can you give me some information about her?

ELENA

Use your imagination.

ELENA leaves.

ENRIQUE thinks. He pushes around the paper discards with his pencil, lays his hands on the flattened bills, taps the pencil against the bottle -- fidget, fidget, fidget, thinking, thinking, thinking.

He fans out the bills, picks them up, and gestures toward the bar.

ENRIQUE

I would like to request an upgrade.

WAITRESS enters: apron on, cloth over her shoulder, bottle in hand. ENRIQUE hands her the bills. WAITRESS hands him the bottle, turns to go.

ENRIQUE

A question.

WAITRESS

You always have questions.

ENRIQUE

Life is questions.

WAITRESS

Can I keep the change?

ENRIQUE

Keep away.

WAITRESS

Then you can ask.

ENRIQUE

If a woman loves a woman --

WAITRESS

"If"?

ENRIQUE

When?

WAITRESS

Silly man.

ENRIQUE

All right, so when a woman loves a woman -- what does one say to the other to say that?

WAITRESS

And why would you think I'd know?

ENRIQUE

It's just a question, unless, of course, you do know, then it's a consultation.

WAITRESS

When a man loves a man -- what does one say to the other to say that? Eh? Think! You already know! When a person embraces the dog -- when the one dying grips the priest's hand -- the morning kiss on the forehead --

WAITRESS raps her knuckles on the top of his head -- but gently.

WAITRESS

Just use that, all right? It's the best part of all your other parts. Enjoy your lunch.

WAITRESS leaves.

ENRIQUE opens the new bottle, pours for himself, lights a cigarette, muses, then clears off the papers on the table, picks up the pencil, and writes, smoking and drinking as he does so.

LIGHT: The light passes from one side of the stage to the other, like the sun in transit. It can be a slow arc.

SOUND: Guitar continues to play in the background.

ENRIQUE reads over what he has written.

ELENA enters.

ENRIQUE

Is it lunchtime already?

ELENA

It comes every day just about this time.

ENRIQUE

And how are your bricks?

ELENA

Getting laid. And yours?

ENRIQUE pours himself a shot.

ENRIQUE

I think -- well, you tell me.

ENRIQUE hands her what he has written. ELENA reads. Together, as she reads through the text, they look at each other, nod, perhaps giggle a bit -- he gives her an inquisitive "eh?", she returns with a "hmm" -- full non-verbal communication, thoroughly enjoyed. She is touched by what she reads.

ENRIQUE

Well?

ELENA

I didn't know that that was what I wanted to say.
But it is what I want to say.

ENRIQUE

It will do?

ELENA

That's up to her. But it does for me.

ENRIQUE

I think it was the new rum.

ELENA

Maybe -- and then maybe not.

ENRIQUE stands and faces ELENA. She faces him back.

ELENA

What?

ENRIQUE dips his fingers into the rum and traces them over her lips. Then he kisses her. She kisses him back. That's all they do -- kiss. Not embrace, not caress -- just kiss. Once.

ENRIQUE

I think it was "maybe not" about the new rum.

ELENA

Pleasure is as pleasure does.

ENRIQUE

I should apologize.

ELENA

But you won't.

ENRIQUE

No.

ELENA

Good. You shouldn't.

ELENA carefully folds the sheet of paper into quarters and slips it into a pocket.

ENRIQUE

Did -- does -- your father know?

ELENA

My father has always known where my love lies.

ENRIQUE

I agree with you, then -- he should make an appearance in whatever plays are coming up. Broad minds are hard to come by these days.

Just before she leaves, ELENA takes the pencil and writes something on the pad of paper. Then she dips her fingers in the rum and flings drops at him as she "blesses" him. ELENA leaves.

ENRIQUE reads what she has written and laughs out loud, really loud, from the belly. He dips his fingers in the rum and makes the sign of the cross.

ENRIQUE

Another use for the right hand of Our Father!

Still laughing, he downs the rest of the glass of rum and begins writing, writing, writing, writing his new plays from the end of the phrasing that ELENA has given him. The guitar plays on and the sun crosses the sky.

Hole In The Pocket

DESCRIPTION

A well-meaning Christian woman, trying to help a man keep money from falling out of a hole in his pocket, faces the devil for good intentions.

CHARACTERS

- LOUELLA, older African American woman
- RESTON, African American man

SET

- Bench, pole for the bus stop sign, a community notice on the pole

* * * * *

Bus stop. LOUELLA sits on the bench: prim, proper, bag near her feet like a dog, a well-thumbed Bible in her hands.

Next to the bench is a pole with the bus stop sign affixed to it. Taped to the pole is a "community notice" with a police artist sketch and a headline saying something like "Have you seen this man?"

RESTON stands at what would be the curb, looking down the street for the bus. His dress is ragged but not "street person": he looks like a man who shops at Salvation Army when he has a few bucks to spare -- sneakers, jeans, a loose-fitting shirt (Hawaiian, guayabera).

LOUELLA notices something about RESTON that bothers her, but she hesitates to say something until she finally does speak.

LOUELLA

Sir?

RESTON doesn't respond, keeps looking down the street.

LOUELLA

Sir?

RESTON shows he hears her, but he does not face her.

LOUELLA

Your back pocket -- it's got a hole in it.

No response from RESTON.

LOUELLA

Your back pocket, with the hole -- you've got money hanging out of the hole.

No response from RESTON.

LOUELLA

I wouldn't want you to lose it, especially if it's your bus money. Someone could just come along and snatch it.

RESTON

Like you?

RESTON goes back to looking for the bus.

LOUELLA

I just want to warn you -- it's not a nice world around here.

RESTON reaches behind to touch his back pocket, then brings his hand forward again. LOUELLA hesitates, then speaks again.

LOUELLA

The money is still, you know, just hanging out there for all the world to see. You should shift it out of sight -- I would not want you to lose what is rightfully yours.

RESTON

How do you know it's rightfully mine?

LOUELLA

It's on your person, in your possession, so I just assume it's yours. Rightfully. I'm sorry if I interfered.

RESTON

You're not sorry. I don't care about your apology. Maybe you will be the one that snatches it.

LOUELLA

Are you always this rude to someone trying to help you?

RESTON

Are you always rude enough to think you can help?

LOUELLA

Since when is it rude to try to help another person?

RESTON

How about when a person doesn't want your help.

RESTON still looks for the bus.

LOUELLA

That bus is not due for another 15 minutes, at least. Your looking for it won't bring it any faster. Why would you say you wouldn't want to be helped? All God's children can use some help.

RESTON

God's children: you might as well say "the world's garbage dump." That's what I say, always.

This does not sit well with LOUELLA. She wants to keep her mouth shut, but she can't.

LOUELLA

That's a harsh judgment about God's world.

RESTON

From the shape it's in, it's clear he stopped owning it a long time ago.

LOUELLA

I haven't seen you here before.

RESTON

I'm not from around here.

LOUELLA

I mean at this stop.

RESTON

Like I said.

LOUELLA

Where are you from?

RESTON

I. Am. From. Mars.

LOUELLA

You don't mean that literally.

RESTON

How would you know?

LOUELLA

There are three places in the United States named Mars -- I was always good in geography.

RESTON

California, Pennsylvania, Texas.

LOUELLA

I see we have something in common.

RESTON

It's none of them.

LOUELLA

It can't be the planet.

RESTON

We have nothing that's common between us, which I have said to you.

This consternates LOUELLA even more: he's a tough nut to crack, especially when he's looking for the bus and not at her.

LOUELLA

Still at least 10 minutes for that bus -- assuming it comes on time. I, in fact, never assume it comes on time. They have a printed schedule, but that is simply a theory. I remember when this line had buses all the time because a lot of people lived out here and had to take it to the city center for their work. Good days, those -- person could stand here and have five excellent conversations with complete strangers and feel safe and good about it all.

RESTON

This is a God-forsaken place to live.

LOUELLA

Well, it's down on its heels -- what place isn't these days? Mars, where you're from, is not like here, I take it.

RESTON

What you don't know about Mars would make any place not worth living in.

LOUELLA

I'm not sure I understand that. I think it sounded rude.

RESTON

You think you have goodness in you.

LOUELLA

Now I know that was rude.

RESTON

You think this goodness will protect and save you.

LOUELLA

Is that kind of negativity what they believe on Mars?

RESTON

What you don't know about Mars would make any place not worth living in.

LOUELLA

Have I offended you in some way?

RESTON

This is a God-forsaken place to live.

LOUELLA

That's not my fault.

RESTON

You wouldn't have enough guts to make it your fault. Because you have goodness. Because you want to help people.

LOUELLA

Now you have lost me completely.

LOUELLA raises her book.

LOUELLA

Helping people, helping them to be good, that's our work upon this earth -- so much wickedness and strife, we have to battle against --

LOUELLA swallows her words as RESTON, for the first time, faces her. The edge of the money sticking out of his back pocket is visible.

Before LOUELLA can move, RESTON takes LOUELLA by the arm -- not roughly but firmly -- stands her up, and makes her look at the sketch on the pole. She does, then looks back and forth between the sketch and RESTON. RESTON speaks as if quoting.

RESTON

Have. You. Seen. This. Man.

RESTON lets her sink back onto the bench.

As RESTON sits next to her, he pulls a small-caliber pistol from his waistband. He takes her Bible, sets it on his lap, then puts the gun on top of it. LOUELLA steals a glance in the direction of the bus.

RESTON

Ten minutes, you said. Nothing is coming.

LOUELLA

They have schedules but sometimes they come ahead of [time] --

RESTON

Not to this God-forsaken place.

LOUELLA

You just need to have hope --

RESTON

From the Lord and Savior.

LOUELLA

Gift freely offered.

RESTON

In a God-forsaken place, there is no pleasure but in being mean. Being mean. I am waiting to be carried away.

LOUELLA

It doesn't matter what you've done, there is always forgiveness avail[able] --

But LOUELLA stops as she sees what she believes to be anguish cross RESTON's face -- here is her chance.

LOUELLA

Always forgiveness, son. Christ is always ready to offer forgiveness, even for --

LOUELLA indicates the notice on the pole.

LOUELLA

-- for whatever it was -- for any transgression -- Christ rose from the dead --

RESTON

See -- see -- now, this is where -- I wish he had just stayed dead because I wasn't there to see if he -- the stone rolled back but nothing left -- and I wasn't there, so how do I know what true is? Would have been better to just let dead be dead, then I could check the bones, then I could believe. He upset everything, left me not knowing -- I'd be better off if I didn't not know.

LOUELLA

Like being on Mars. God-forsaken.

LOUELLA gazes at him, tenderness in her face. She reaches out to touch him.

LOUELLA

You are one of my lost sons, you are one of my hungry children --

As LOUELLA touches him, RESTON recoils as if bitten by a snake. He jams the Bible against her heart and fires three times.

SOUND: Three gunshots, with reverb.

LOUELLA clutches the Bible to her as she slumps dead to the ground. RESTON looks around as if he expects something to erupt from the sky. Nothing does, of course, so he looks down at LOUELLA -- she doesn't resurrect either.

RESTON

You'd be a better woman if someone shot you three times every day through the heart. God-forsaken. No real pleasure but in being mean. And maybe even then no real pleasure at all.

RESTON stands, puts the gun back in his waistband under his shirt. He tears down the poster, folds it, and puts it into his back pocket where the money is, takes the money from the back pocket and puts into his front pocket. He pulls out a bus schedule from his other back pocket and consults it. He looks down the road, back at the schedule.

RESTON

You were wrong about the time.

RESTON folds the schedule, puts it back.

RESTON

Figures. No real pleasure at all.

RESTON exits.

Mission Creep

DESCRIPTION

Military technology finds a place in the home.

CHARACTERS

- CHUCK
- MARLA
- YOUNG MAN
- QUAD-ROTOR DRONE (this is a model hanging from the end of a long pole, manipulated by a stagehand or actor)

SET

- Except for some simple furniture, the bloodied towel, and the model of the drone, all other props/materials are mimed and/or indicated by sound, unless, of course, the director wants to do otherwise and has the budget.
- An exception could be made for the smartphone, unless the director can find a way to light CHUCK's face in the dark to make it look like it is being bathed in the light of the phone.

* * * * *

On one side of the stage, CHUCK holds a smartphone which controls a small quad-rotor drone. MARLA sits in a chair or on a coach on the other side of the stage and reads a newspaper.

SOUND: A soft whirring or buzzing which changes as the drone flies.

CHUCK manipulates the drone up and down and around and eventually flies it over MARLA, who doesn't notice it at first. CHUCK enjoys spying on MARLA.

CHUCK

Hey there.

MARLA happens to look at CHUCK, then look up -- and lets out a yell that is part fright and part "you're such a pain in the ass."

CHUCK

Pretty cool, eh?

MARLA

Get that thing away from me, Mr. Gadget-man.

CHUCK

You don't like my quad-rotor drone --

MARLA

No.

CHUCK

Or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle --

MARLA

I'll unman you, you bastard --

CHUCK

It's the official name for --

MARLA

How much did you waste on this one?

CHUCK

Doesn't matter -- have to see things in an evolutionary perspective, improvements and --

MARLA

How much?

CHUCK

Three hundred dollars -- but I can run it off my phone! See!

SOUND: Drone moves back and forth -- maybe even buzzes
MARLA.

MARLA

Stop it!

CHUCK

I have something even cooler to show you. Come here -- leave the newspaper there, and come over here.

MARLA does and joins CHUCK. CHUCK shows her the phone.

CHUCK

Go ahead.

MARLA reads the headline on the newspaper across the room.

MARLA

"War dims hope for peace."

CHUCK

And what God-forsaken part of the world is that?
Who cares?

MARLA

So you could read over my shoulder.

CHUCK

It has a front-view camera with a live video feed.
How cool is that!

MARLA

And you don't care that the hope for peace is dim?

CHUCK

Who cares? Isn't that always the case? But then
there's this!

MARLA

Stop it -- just stop it! Now! Land the goddamn
thing now!

Faced with MARLA's wrath, CHUCK lands the quad-rotor drone,
puts the phone in his pocket.

MARLA

Give me the phone -- give me the phone!

CHUCK hands it over.

MARLA

I didn't mind the home alarm system -- it seemed
to make sense, except that the only things that
seem to trigger it are squirrels and cats -- cats
chasing the squirrels --

CHUCK

You never know.

MARLA

Yes, yes -- the bands of terrorists who mysteriously
have not yet shown up in our community --

CHUCK

But they're out there -- that mosque downtown --

MARLA

But they haven't come here.

CHUCK

Because we have an alarm system! They know that!

MARLA

Then there are the house cams for when we're at work.

CHUCK

Just in case --

MARLA

-- the alarm system doesn't stop them, yes, I know your argument. Have you ever seen anything on your house cams?

CHUCK

No.

MARLA

Has your supervisor warned you about spending too much time checking the house cams?

CHUCK

Yes.

MARLA

Yes he has.

CHUCK

But something may happen when I'm not checking!

MARLA

So let's get a dog.

CHUCK

That's so low-tech. And they could distract it with goodies while they install keyboard readers --

But something in MARLA's face and posture tells him that this is not a good line of argument.

MARLA

You've already installed the anti-keyboard reader software, and every malware, grayware, and spyware scanning program, both free and paid, that's out there, plus the updates -- it's a wonder we can even use the computers since they're always being scanned to make sure they're safe to use!

CHUCK

Online is a dangerous place. The cyber-terrorists --

MARLA

Enough!

CHUCK

The quad-rotor will allow us a greater range outside so that we don't have to wait until --

MARLA

Enough! You think there are enemies everywhere, you think you're so vigilant -- and there is so much you miss, so much you miss --

MARLA cuts herself off, enraged. She throws CHUCK's phone back at him, then storms off.

SOUND: The air fills with the drone of drones.

Lights to black.

* * * * *

Night light.

SOUND: Night sounds.

CHUCK's face in the glow of the smartphone.

SOUND: The quad-rotor drone rises.

CHUCK guides the machine over the landscape.

In a flame-like glow, MARLA and YOUNG MAN, naked, couple enthusiastically -- all reflected in the glow of CHUCK's smartphone.

At one point MARLA shifts her gaze upward and connects with the quad-rotor drone -- through it she looks CHUCK directly in the face, and she shows not a flicker of shame, and possibly even lets a smirk cross her face. Then she gets back to the business at hand.

CHUCK watches -- this is the price he has paid for his vigilance. He presses a virtual button on his smartphone.

SOUND: Ignition of a small guided missile and consequent explosion.

Orange explosion, then blackness.

* * * * *

CHUCK to one side, MARLA in the middle wrapped in a large bloodied towel, YOUNG MAN naked and dead to the other side.

MARLA

You had it armed?

CHUCK

It was an extra module they offered.

MARLA

A missile?

CHUCK

Comes with two. It didn't add that much to the cost. I didn't think it would be so precise -- right in the ear canal, wow. You okay?

MARLA just looks at him, dumbfounded. CHUCK gets the message.

SOUND: Police sirens approaching.

CHUCK slides the smartphone across the floor to MARLA.

CHUCK

The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. How fucked-up is that?

MARLA

You want a calculation of how fucked-up it is?

SOUND: Police cars are getting closer.

CHUCK

It's still got one armed.

MARLA picks up the smartphone, looks it over for a moment, then begins to manipulate the quad-rotor drone.

CHUCK turns, faces the quad-rotor, puffs out his chest. MARLA punches in the command.

SOUND: Police cars arrive, car doors open, slam shut.

SOUND: Missile fires, then explodes.

CHUCK is bathed in flame.

Then darkness.

Electricity

Triggered by Eduardo Galeano, Bocas del Tiempo

DESCRIPTION

An America newcomer to the town of El Bolsón expects certain amenities to be available. They are, but in ways that The Engineer has to demonstrate.

CHARACTERS

- Horacio Tubio
- The Engineer, Bautista Fiolfo

* * * * *

The inside of a rustic public office in the town of El Bolsón, Argentina. HORACIO, seated, is waiting, waiting -- waiting. Waits some more.

Finally, THE ENGINEER comes in -- self-important. He fiddles at his desk, arranges some papers, then turns his gaze upon HORACIO, thus giving him permission to approach.

Which HORACIO does.

HORACIO

Good day, señor.

THE ENGINEER

Yes?

HORACIO

I am new in the town.

THE ENGINEER

I know that.

HORACIO

It is your business to know that, of course.

THE ENGINEER

You have bought the house in the valley.

HORACIO

And it is exactly about that house that I am here.

THE ENGINEER

And you are from California.

HORACIO

Well, yes.

THE ENGINEER

The land of actors.

HORACIO

Not everyone there, or who comes from there, is an actor.

THE ENGINEER

That's not the point: are you an actor?

HORACIO

I have been known to act.

THE ENGINEER

Then you are an actor.

HORACIO

You make it sound like I've sinned.

THE ENGINEER

We have actors in El Bolsón -- not many. Which I find to be good thing.

HORACIO

What do the actors think about that?

THE ENGINEER

I don't know. It's not part of my duties to know. Land, houses, water, roads -- these things are knowable. Like a horizon.

The two of them stand there, not sure where to go in the conversation.

THE ENGINEER

They say you brought a washing machine.

HORACIO

They did, did they.

THE ENGINEER

A computer, fax, television.

HORACIO

They are observant. In fact, it is on the behalf of my artifacts that I come.

THE ENGINEER

You are the servant of your machines.

HORACIO

I am their advocate. Because they are hungry.

THE ENGINEER

They are machines.

HORACIO

But you can appreciate this, as an engineer -- they are hungry for electricity.

THE ENGINEER

You don't have electricity in your new house?

HORACIO

My machines would like to run on the flames of candles, but alas, they cannot.

THE ENGINEER

No electricity. Hmm.

THE ENGINEER goes to a cabinet or shelving unit and pulls down a book of maps or drawings -- a large heavy book full of carefully drawn schematics that also look like ancient inscriptions.

He opens the book to a page and scans it. Then another page and scans it. This goes on for several more pages and scans. HORACIO is trying not to fidget, but he is from California, after all, and an actor.

Finally, with a heavy thud, THE ENGINEER closes the book of life.

HORACIO

Well?

THE ENGINEER

You have electricity.

HORACIO

No I don't.

THE ENGINEER

You have electricity in that zone.

HORACIO

But not in my house.

THE ENGINEER

You have functioning electricity in that zone.

HORACIO

I admit it functions. It functions in the forest.
The trees are happy. Electrified.

THE ENGINEER gives him a cold appraising stare, bites his lip, says nothing.

HORACIO

What?

THE ENGINEER

You know what your problem is?

HORACIO

I did not realize I had a problem.

THE ENGINEER

You do have a problem. You have the problem of
arrogance. And with that arrogance, you are not
going to achieve anything in life.

THE ENGINEER nods at the door. HORACIO trades a look with him, turns, and goes to leave. As HORACIO turns, THE ENGINEER picks up the map book and turns to put it away. HORACIO, looking over his shoulder, see the back of THE ENGINEER, so instead of leaving, HORACIO turns and lowers himself to his knees. He leans slightly forward and raps his knuckles on the floor, as if knocking on a door. He is thus in this position of humility when THE ENGINEER turns and sees him.

HORACIO

Engineer, you have had the luck of being able to study.

THE ENGINEER

Get up, please.

HORACIO

You have a title and respect.

THE ENGINEER

Get up, you [fool] --

HORACIO

Engineer, please understand my situation.

THE ENGINEER

Please, just get up before --

HORACIO

I would like to learn to take the full measure of the beauty around me. To be part of this life at the foot of the Andes mountains --

THE ENGINEER

Piltriquitron Mountain --

HORACIO

At the left hand of Patagonia -- in Río Negro -- to wash my clothes and cook my food and light the darkness --

THE ENGINEER

Please, please, get up, just get up.

HORACIO stops talking, but he doesn't get up. THE ENGINEER lets out a long sigh.

THE ENGINEER

Electricity has a way of finding where it needs to be. Today the forest is electrified. Tomorrow -- who knows? Even for actors.

HORACIO stands. The two men appraise each other.

* * * * *

HORACIO's house. On a table is an old Victrola hand-cranked record player. HORACIO is looking it over.

SOUND: The creaking of a bicycle coming up the road.

THE ENGINEER appears at the door, tool case in hand.

HORACIO

Engineer, you made it!

THE ENGINEER

I said I would come. I wouldn't want the actor to be too long in the dark.

THE ENGINEER sees the Victrola, and it's clear he is interested in the machine.

HORACIO

Would you like something to drink? I would offer maté, but, alas, I have no way to heat my water quickly, so I have, in essence, only water to offer you. Or a warm beer.

THE ENGINEER

Nothing, thank you. What year is that, if I may ask?

HORACIO

1914. Victor Victrola IX.

THE ENGINEER

The Victor Victorla IX.

HORACIO

But in bringing it here I think I damaged something -- perhaps the coilspring -- do you know the machine?

THE ENGINEER

Where is your circuit-box?

HORACIO

I have a circuit box?

THE ENGINEER

Haven't you noticed the wires -- looping out like a spider's web from your roof?

HORACIO

I assumed --

THE ENGINEER

What?

HORACIO

I'm not sure what I assumed, now that you mention it.

THE ENGINEER

Instead of investigating, you came straight to me to complain. California and actors. The kitchen?

HORACIO

Back there.

THE ENGINEER disappears. A few moments of silence.

SOUND: A loud "click," like a large switch being thrown.

A light comes on.

SOUND: A general humming sound.

THE ENGINEER comes back. HORACIO wants to say "thank you" but isn't quite sure how to do so, looking as stupid as he does.

In any case, THE ENGINEER saves him the embarrassment by pulling up a chair to the Victrola.

THE ENGINEER

May I?

HORACIO

Of course.

THE ENGINEER puts down his tool kit next to him and inspects the machine, carefully opening it up, looking at the mechanism, nodding his head, poking around. He goes to his kit, pulls out a small screwdriver, and tightens something inside. Without looking at HORACIO, he speaks to him as he does this.

THE ENGINEER

My name is Bautista Fiolfo.

HORACIO

Thank you for electrifying my house, Señor Fiolfo.

THE ENGINEER

Thank you, Señor Tubio.

HORACIO

Right -- it is your business to know my name.

THE ENGINEER continues to tinker.

THE ENGINEER

My great-grandfather -- I knew him, he was still alive -- an oil-man before they created the state-run business in 1922. He would take his Victor Victrola with him wherever he went -- didn't need electricity to run it. Comodoro Rivadavia, Caleta Olivia, General Mosconi, Plaza Huincul -- it didn't matter where, he'd play his music and drill for oil and be a happy man.

THE ENGINEER sits back, puts down his tool, and gives the hand-crank a few turns. The turntable spins without complaint.

HORACIO

Do you know what he liked to listen to?

THE ENGINEER

Oh, I don't know. By the time I knew him, his beloved machine has grown rusted, just like him. I made it run again, but all of his records were gone -- broken, flown away.

HORACIO

Are you in a hurry?

THE ENGINEER

Do you have something worthwhile to keep me here?

HORACIO

I'll heat the water for the maté -- I have some alfajores -- and I have something worthwhile for you.

THE ENGINEER nods yes, and HORACIO moves into the kitchen for the water, then into some other room, then back into the living

room, a booklet of seven 78 RPMs in his hand, which he hands to THE ENGINEER.

HORACIO

He might have listened to these. 1921. I think it is the first acoustic recording of Beethoven's 9th. 14 sides. From Berlin.

THE ENGINEER is only half-listening to HORACIO as he slides one of the discs out of its sleeve and holds it up to the light.

THE ENGINEER

I have never heard it, I am sorry to say.

HORACIO

Here, let me.

HORACIO takes the disc and places it on the turntable. He turns the crank several times to get the machine running, then lowers the stylus to the surface.

SOUND: It begins with the thin sound that would have come from the actual record but then morphs into a lush full-throated version of the opening of the choral section of the 4th Movement.

For three minutes or so, they listen to this wonderful music. THE ENGINEER has his head buried in his hands. THE ENGINEER makes a gesture, and HORACIO lifts the stylus from the record. Silence invades.

THE ENGINEER stares at the machine, then looks at HORACIO, then puts his tools away and gets ready to go.

HORACIO

I've got the water on the boil.

THE ENGINEER

I need to go back.

THE ENGINEER turns and heads toward the door, followed by HORACIO.

At the door, THE ENGINEER turns back.

THE ENGINEER

That -- that -- that is electricity that I did not know existed in the world.

HORACIO

You're welcome to come back. You're welcome to attend with your great-grandfather.

THE ENGINEER

I have to go. Thank you.

THE ENGINEER leaves.

SOUND: The creaking bicycle going away.

SOUND: The whistle of a teapot.

HORACIO runs back into the kitchen.

SOUND: The whistling dies away.

HORACIO returns. He puts the disc back into its sleeve. He pauses, then puts the discs inside the machine, closes the Victrola's lid, puts on a light jacket and, with a little difficulty, picks up and cradles the Victrola. Getting his balance, he heads out the door.

Veterans Day Parade

DESCRIPTION

Four veterans, on the advice of their barkeep, choose to defy the town's cancellation of the Veterans Day parade because of budget cuts caused by the globalization of capital.

CHARACTERS

- DIGGER
- SAINT MARTIN
- SATCH
- COFFEE
- JIM, barkeep

MISCELLANEOUS

- Bar, stools, etc.

* * * * *

A bar -- not seedy, not elegant. A watering hole with four patrons and one barkeep, early in the day. A newspaper lies on the bar.

SOUND: Perhaps a television on somewhere -- muffled. No music.

The patrons are like the bar -- not seedy, not elegant. And none of them is young any more.

JIM, the barkeep, listens to them with arms folded. He might also be drying glasses, cutting fruit, etc. -- some of the thousand things that barkeeps do.

DIGGER puts his glass down a little too heavily, digs a thick finger into the newspaper.

DIGGER

You all read this?

COFFEE

Yeah.

DIGGER

I cannot believe this shit.

SAINT MARTIN

It's budget cuts -- what're'ya gonna do?

DIGGER

But canceling the Veterans Parade?

COFFEE

You hate the military.

DIGGER

Completely separate.

SATCH

And you never march in the parade --

DIGGER

I was a fucking butcher back then, a mercenary --

SATCH

But on the government payroll.

DIGGER

You don't march, either.

SATCH

Uniform doesn't fit anymore -- gotta think of my public image.

DIGGER

Your public image is like mine -- overweight and arthritic. Fuck!

COFFEE

I don't understand this -- you hate all that shit: July 4, Memorial Day, Flag Day --

SAINT MARTIN

Arbor Day, Boxing Day --

DIGGER

Shut up.

SAINT MARTIN

"Not the holiday type" would be on your mug shot at the Post Office --

SATCH

They still do that?

SAINT MARTIN

Yeah.

DIGGER

That's not the point.

COFFEE

Then what is your point, because it's not clear to the brain trust here.

But DIGGER falls into a silence. He sips, he stares at the paper. The others sip as well. JIM barkeeps.

SATCH turns to COFFEE.

SATCH

You served, right?

COFFEE

Yeah, but stateside. You know that "tooth to tail" thing for each soldier? I was the tail, right near the anus -- quartermaster corps.

SAINT MARTIN

I got called down to Central America -- the contras, that whole cesspool.

SATCH

Didn't know that.

COFFEE

Didn't know that, either.

SAINT MARTIN

Was not a glorious episode for anyone.

SATCH looks over to JIM.

SATCH

You ever serve?

JIM shakes his head no.

DIGGER taps his glass on the bar. JIM refreshes his drink.

SATCH

So, except for our barkeep here, we are all vets.

COFFEE

And none of us ever march in the parade.

SAINT MARTIN

We usually just sit here and let it pass us by outside.

COFFEE

Raise our glasses, maybe.

DIGGER

It's fucking globalization, is what it is.

The four look at him.

DIGGER

Do I have to spell it out to you? Again?

COFFEE

The town can't run the parade because of China.

DIGGER

It's all linked.

SAINT MARTIN

Can we not do the Marxist analysis this early in the day?

DIGGER

Because you don't mind sitting here while they all ream us out.

COFFEE speaks as if he's reciting a mantra or a litany. The others join in after "the banks."

COFFEE

The banks. The military-industrial complex. The financiers on Wall Street.

SATCH

If it's a conspiracy? Most open-faced coven of witches I've ever seen -- no secret that the government sends our asses overseas to make the world safe for ExxonMobil and Warren Buffett.

SAINT MARTIN

And bails out the banks -- they all shower together, anyways, so why wouldn't they give each a good rub?

COFFEE

Don't even want to think about that image.

DIGGER

Make fun -- go ahead. But it trickles down -- no, fucking rains down -- and --

DIGGER digs at the newspaper again with his index finger.

DIGGER

This is what gets the shit tsunami -- things we've done in this town forever --

COFFEE

Even if "we" don't do them --

DIGGER

Fucking comedian. Not the point.

COFFEE

Well, it is, in a way, since if we don't do them --

DIGGER

The tradition of it, is what I mean -- what makes this place hang together -- us hang together --

SATCH

We hang together because we get Social Security and a military pension and nobody's got any use for us anymore.

COFFEE

Here, here.

DIGGER speaks to JIM.

DIGGER

Cannot have a serious conversation with the clientele you get in here.

SAINT MARTIN

Ever notice that after a certain amount of Jack Daniels, his righteous takes over.

COFFEE

Makes it easier to make fun of him, though.

SAINT MARTIN

Doesn't mean you aren't right.

SATCH

Doesn't mean the apocalypse isn't coming.

DIGGER

Doesn't mean the end times aren't already here --

ALL THREE

"Just in slow motion."

DIGGER

Amen, roger wilco, over and out. The apocalypse in slow motion.

SAINT MARTIN

That's us -- at least the slow motion part.

They all sip and think.

JIM leans forward on the bar.

JIM

Why don't you guys march?

They all give him a "look."

JIM

You wanna do something, then march yourselves. Do something.

They look at each other.

JIM

Most days of the week you all sit here and analyze the state of the world. You all talk a lot. Helps my bottom line.

COFFEE

But you never chime in.

JIM

Not my place.

COFFEE

You must have some ideas.

JIM

I've got plenty of ideas. But as my dad said, take a lesson from your anatomy: you have two ears but only one mouth. Better to listen.

SAINT MARTIN

Your dad serve?

JIM

Nope. Hated the military. Never saw any use for having one.

DIGGER

Really?

JIM

Yep.

DIGGER

Care to elaborate?

JIM

Nope.

They all tap their glasses on the bar. JIM refreshes drinks.

JIM

No I don't.

SATCH

Why not?

JIM

I just don't. I get the sense that even though you all badmouth what you did when you did it, making a career in the military, you're glad you can call yourselves vets. What my father thinks has no bearing on that.

DIGGER

And you -- you believe in what he believes?

JIM pauses.

SATCH

We're not gonna leave your bar.

JIM

Yes. Yes I do. I hate how the military way of thinking has taken over everything. Police departments with drones -- please. And that's all I'm going to say.

SAINT MARTIN

I think it'd be interesting to meet your father.

JIM

Of all the fathers my mother might've hooked up with, I'm glad I got him.

SAINT MARTIN looks at DIGGER.

SAINT MARTIN

Well?

DIGGER

Why are you looking at me?

SAINT MARTIN

Because a challenge has been laid down to you.

COFFEE

A conundrum.

SATCH

To be the very thing we say we don't want to be a part of. Not to mention getting off our asses and getting some exercise.

SAINT MARTIN

Be the change you want to see. I remember someone saying --

DIGGER

Enough, all right. Thanks.

JIM

You're welcome. I've gotta go lug some cases up from the basement for tonight.

JIM exits. SAINT MARTIN sort of hums the words.

SAINT MARTIN

Be the change you want to see -- see the change you want to be --

DIGGER speaks with more insistence than usual.

DIGGER

All right!

DIGGER drains his glass.

DIGGER

If I march, then it means I accept what I did back then, and I don't accept it, I never have -- no fucking honor -- and I don't want people standing along some fucking parade route waving -- flags and -- not knowing --

SATCH

I believe that took you right out of breath.

COFFEE

And it's a full-of-shit argument. If we do what our young barkeep suggests, we march together. For what we are now, who we are now. And it kicks China in the balls.

SAINT MARTIN

Town council in the balls.

COFFEE

Town can make what they want of what we do, if we do this thing. This is about not sitting around and complaining. This is about doing what we said we were protecting when we were in the shit.

SATCH

Quartermaster corps?

COFFEE

Ever have to defend a load of prime -- whatever from a general who wants it for some special purpose? I had to wear my steel underwear a lot, believe me. In the shit.

SAINT MARTIN

He's right -- we didn't do what we did so we could come back and not do what we said we were making sure everyone could do. Got that?

DIGGER looks at them all. They all look at DIGGER.

LIGHTS: Bump to black.

SOUND: A high school marching band playing John Phillips Sousa.

LIGHT: Individual lights come up on the four of them as each speaks.

As each speaks, he begins to march in place -- an attempt to look dignified but with bodies that don't always allow that. However, the marching should have some coördinated grace to it.

DIGGER

Fuck China.

SAINT MARTIN

Fuck the banks.

SATCH

Fuck austerity.

COFFEE

Fuck doing nothing.

They march in place with the music around them -- shabby and silly but determined.

LIGHT: Up on JIM to the side, as if watching.

JIM claps as they walk by. The four look, then eyes forward.

LIGHTS: Fade out.

SOUND: Band plays as lights fade, then fades as well.

On Your Mark

DESCRIPTION

LOUIS and LEWIS, two brothers, contemplate good reasons not to complete a choreographed suicide. It's a very short, and not altogether convincing, list.

CHARACTERS

- LOUIS
- LEWIS

SETTING

- Table, two chairs, bottle, two glasses

* * * * *

LOUIS and LEWIS at a table, drinking shots from a bottle. Throughout one or the other will pour. Both slightly stewed, not over the edge. Maybe a tea candle on the table, fake flower, napkin dispenser -- something.

LOUIS

What is sloth?

LEWIS

Why?

LOUIS

Amy accused me of it the other day. Actually, both of us.

LEWIS

You know what a sloth is?

LOUIS

The three-toed thing.

LEWIS

There's a two-toed version as well, I believe.

LOUIS

Okay.

LEWIS

Do you know?

LOUIS

Slow, right? -- moves slow.

LEWIS

Slowly. Upside-down. For years. In the same tree.

They drink.

LOUIS

That's not me.

LEWIS

I don't think Amy was meaning "tree."

LOUIS

You mean the slow part.

LEWIS

The slow "you never get off your ass and make something of yourself" part.

LOUIS

I'm built for comfort, I ain't built for speed.

LEWIS

It's not just about slow, from what I understand.

LOUIS

Lazy, you mean.

LEWIS

Lazy in your soul. not just body. Lazy in not doing good deeds, the will of God.

LOUIS

Kind of evil by default.

LEWIS

Evil is always a default. The world runs on default. This has always thrown Amy slightly -- off-center, hasn't it?

They clink glasses and drink.

LEWIS

What she said of you she means of me as well.

LOUIS

I think that's what Amy's doing more of these days
-- looking.

LEWIS

At you.

LOUIS

At me. At you, too. What she sees is --

LEWIS

What she's got.

This dismays LOUIS.

LEWIS

Another skidmark on our souls.

LOUIS

How did it turn out this way for us? How did we
go from the exuberance of a child to --

LEWIS indicates the bottle in front of them.

LOUIS

Right. To a life where we take a perverse pride
in feeling lust and greed, yet envy those whose
gluttony is, well, more gluttonous and glamorous
than our own -- and then slothfully do nothing
about anything to change a thing about ourselves.

LEWIS

The point of it all is --

LOUIS

The pointlessness of it all.

LOUIS belches, which he hides behind his hand.

LOUIS

Sorry.

LEWIS

This is the point we come to, isn't it, at this
point in the evening, usually.

LOUIS

Except -- except that we have chosen this day as our Passover.

LEWIS

Why is this night different from all other nights?

They both reach into their jackets and pull out pistols, which they lay on the bar.

LOUIS

Good thing we live in Florida.

LEWIS

We are standing our ground. There is an eighth deadly sin, you know. The worst, from what I hear.

LOUIS

You were the seminarian -- you tell me.

LEWIS

The sin of despair.

LOUIS

All seven rolled into one?

LEWIS

The opposite -- not even mustering the energy to sin.

LOUIS

That might be a great disappointment to God. Is that what we have done? Are doing?

LEWIS

Apparently, the sin is not in feeling despair but in giving in to it -- to reject the love of God by an act of selfishness.

At this, LOUIS lets out a full belly-laugh -- as long and loud as he wants to laugh it out.

LOUIS

Oh, that's good! That's rich! Whoo! He Who Must Be Obeyed sends us a shit-storm called "life" and

then has the balls to call the logical choice of self-slaughter --

LEWIS

You do know your Hamlet.

LOUIS

You must've had a fun time at the seminary.

LEWIS

I can't say the teaching is wrong -- it is a selfishness.

LOUIS

With which we are born. As Amy our dear sister would judge us, and fault us -- and fault herself, since she does have the fault of completely honesty.

LEWIS

To Amy, our perpetually honest and pained sister.

They drink.

LOUIS

She won't like being an only child.

LEWIS

She will turn to her faith for guidance.

LOUIS

Unlike us.

LEWIS

Well, come on -- the question of the age, any age, has always been "give me a good reason not to do it."

LEWIS holds his glass up to the light to look at the amber liquid.

LEWIS

I just find, of late, that I find no good reason not to do it.

LOUIS

Same here.

LEWIS

No counter-argument.

LOUIS

Not a one that carries any weight, though the arguments in themselves might be good and forceful. I wish we were wrong.

LEWIS

I do, too, brother, I do, too.

They muse.

LOUIS

There is, however --

LEWIS

What?

LOUIS

Well -- pleasure. Yes? I mean, lust does feel pretty good, both in the anticipation and the -- ejection, so to speak. And sloth can be a rebellion against the craziness of capitalist over-work.

LEWIS

You have a point -- several --

LOUIS

So why wouldn't pleasure -- pleasures -- be enough -- "reason enough"?

LEWIS

Because they don't last, they don't sustain -- a life pursuing pleasure -- how exhausting, assuming that the body can even keep up with it -- and you know, the perverse little shits we are, it wouldn't be enough, ever enough --

LOUIS

Moderation, then --

LEWIS

Another word for being a wuss -- "I'll only have this much so I won't go over the edge into

indulgence, addiction, release, liberation" -- boring.

LOUIS

Buddhism.

LEWIS

Can't trust anything based on breathing.

LOUIS

If not the pleasure of sin, what about the pleasures of virtue? Seven of those, I believe, as well.

LEWIS

That's what Amy would say.

LOUIS

It's almost as if by my saying it she was here saying it.

LEWIS

Selflessness. Self. Less.

LOUIS

So that we wouldn't contemplate -- wouldn't actually "do" --

LEWIS

Our sin of commission.

LOUIS

Amy is all about omission if it gets you through the day.

LEWIS

It certainly gets her through her day.

LOUIS

And are things any the worse for wear by her doing it that way?

They drink, muse.

LEWIS

No. I envy. That.

LOUIS

It's not certainty with her. It's what soothes.

LEWIS

I wish that were enough.

LOUIS

I wish anything was enough -- being a sloth has failed me utterly.

LEWIS

Me, too. All right, then.

They put down their glasses. They slide their chairs close together. They put their heads together, temple to temple. They pick up the guns and place them against their own outside temples.

LOUIS

Sure-fire, eh?

LEWIS

If the right one don't get you, then the left one will.

TOGETHER

I got sixteen tons, and what d'ya get / Another day older and deeper in debt --

They hold their suicidal pose for the time it takes for them to think through what they're doing and decide what it is they want to do.

They lower their guns to the table, then put them back in their pockets.

LOUIS

Damn.

LEWIS

Not this time, either.

LOUIS

Damn. Damn.

LEWIS

Amy will be pleased.

LOUIS

Yeah -- more opportunities for her to read us her riot act.

LEWIS

It's a decent riot act.

LOUIS

Decent -- how nice.

LEWIS

Beware of anger.

LOUIS

Ha. Ha. Are you pleased that we couldn't make it happen again?

LEWIS takes his time to answer.

LEWIS

No.

LOUIS

What makes it so -- all right, I'm going to say it this way --

LEWIS

Amy's probably listening.

LOUIS

So fucking hard?

LEWIS

For us.

LOUIS

For us! Why can't we just -- ease in, let things be --

As LOUIS talks, LEWIS silently mouths the refrain to "Let It Be."

LOUIS

-- accept, find the good, "let go, let God," be in the present moment, purity of heart is to will one thing -- and please don't sing "Let It Be" under

your breath, it really really irritates me, it has always irritated me.

LOUIS pours them each a small amount, picks up his own glass. LEWIS picks up his. They drink.

LOUIS

Just a wuss. Just a sloth am I.

LEWIS

Sometimes I feel completely unfit for living -- not machined well for the present times.

LOUIS

I suspect that we would not fit into any time very well, given how we're built.

LEWIS

How we're built. You think nature would've gotten rid of the melancholics somewhere along the line.

LOUIS

Why? Without Eeyore, Winnie the Pooh would be even more insufferably gooey-sweet than he is.

LEWIS

There is all that honey.

LOUIS

We keep reminding people what they don't want to be, which keeps them moving the species forward rather than killing themselves when faced with the pointlessness of it.

LOUIS pours again.

LOUIS

We serve the vital Darwinian function of "there but for the fucking grace of [fill in the blank] go I." Aversion therapy, that's us, and for that service, our genes are allowed to persist. To drink. And indulge in seven weather-beaten and threadbare sins.

LEWIS

And virtues, if we choose.

LOUIS

More by default.

LEWIS

The world runs by default.

LOUIS

We've said that before.

LEWIS

More-than-once-said doesn't make it not true.

LOUIS

Whatever you say.

They drink.

LOUIS

Of course, it would make a world of difference if the guns were loaded. Though sometimes, in my anguish, I forget that.

LEWIS

So do I, brother, so do I.

LOUIS

Is the forgetting-that-they're-loaded a kind of wish?

LEWIS

I think it's more important that Amy is not assaulted by a world of difference of our making.

LOUIS

What's the harm in wishing?

LEWIS

So long as no harm comes to Amy.

They toast each other.

LOUIS

So that no harm comes to Amy.

LEWIS

Amen. We have done a virtue again.

LOUIS

Let's just not get too Winnie-the-Pooh about it,
all right?

LEWIS

As always, agreed. I love you.

LOUIS

I love you, too.

They drink.

End of play.

There Is No Greater Grief Than For A Loss That Is Yet To Come

Sparked by Eduardo Galeano, Bocas del Tiempo

DESCRIPTION

One man drinks two glasses of wine for him and his far-away friend. Then, one night, there is only one glass on the table.

CHARACTERS

- EDUARDO
- BARTENDER

* * * * *

It is a drinking establishment -- not refined, not seedy, but certainly where young people would not go except as an ironic statement about their elders -- or in search of something cool.

MUSIC: Juanjo Dominguez, "Cuando tú no está"

BARTENDER -- white shirt, black vest and pants -- at this station reading his newspaper when EDUARDO comes in and takes his accustomed table. Perhaps today he wears a white linen suit. In any case, what he wears, including his panama, he wears with ease and indifference.

Once he settles in his seat, EDUARDO gestures, and BARTENDER brings over two glasses of wine, sets one in front of EDUARDO, sets one in front of the empty seat across from him.

EDUARDO

The shiraz?

BARTENDER

As you had requested the other night.

EDUARDO

Good. Good. It will be well-liked. Thank you.

BARTENDER backs away to his station, reads his newspaper.

EDUARDO checks his watch, waits. Then he checks his watch again. This time he picks up the glass and sips his wine. At

times he looks at the other, untouched, glass -- perhaps nods to it, perhaps not. At some point he checks his watch again and then drains the glass.

BARTENDER picks up the empty and full glass and takes them away. EDUARDO leaves money on the table, stands, puts on his hat, nods to BARTENDER and leaves.

When EDUARDO is gone, BARTENDER sips the wine from the full glass, nods his approval, raises it in a salute to the departed EDUARDO.

Lights down.

* * * * *

Lights up.

MUSIC: Cem "Gem" Duruoz playing Lucio Demare's "Malena"

It is hot. BARTENDER is at his station, but his shirt sleeves are rolled up. EDUARDO enters, coat draped over his arms, shirt sleeves rolled up as well, fanning himself with his panama. They nod to each other, and EDUARDO sits at his accustomed place, after first hanging his coat on the back of his chair and placing his hat on the table.

BARTENDER brings over two glasses of wine as before.

EDUARDO

The malbec?

BARTENDER

Unfortunately not, at least from the vineyard you suggested. The markets, you know -- not always reliable. I have taken the liberty of offering you a malbec from Fincha Flichman.

EDUARDO hesitates, as if unsure that this break in the routine is bearable, but then takes up the glass and sips. Both men wait, then EDUARDO nods.

EDUARDO

He will like this, I believe.

BARTENDER

I am glad he will -- whoever he is.

When EDUARDO does not offer any more information, BARTENDER nods and moves back to his seat.

EDUARDO checks his watch, then drinks as he did before. BARTENDER watches him from behind his newspaper.

When EDUARDO finishes as before, after checking his watch, and puts down his glass, he doesn't pull out the money from his pocket right away. Instead, he stares at the full glass.

EDUARDO

My friend --

BARTENDER lowers his paper with care so as not to break the mood.

EDUARDO

Several months ago my friend went to Lima. A good friend -- "life-long" you could say.

BARTENDER

Those are rare.

EDUARDO

We share our wine each night, as we did before he left -- he there, me here.

BARTENDER

By the watch.

EDUARDO

And by the glass. And speaking of by and by, I must pay you.

EDUARDO wrestles money out of his pocket, uncrumples the bills and lays them on the table. Coat over his arm, panama fanning himself.

BARTENDER

I trust he liked the malbec.

EDUARDO

I can say that he did. But the Luigi Bosca next time -- if possible.

BARTENDER

If possible, of course.

As before, after EDUARDO leaves, BARTENDER sips the wine from the full glass and muses.

BARTENDER

Luigi Bosca it is.

BARTENDER raises the glass in a salute to the departed EDUARDO.

Lights down.

* * * * *

Lights up.

MUSIC: Por Una Cabeza by Carlos Gardel (guitar version)

BARTENDER at his station, reading. EDUARDO enters, wearing a light coat and a pair of gloves. He takes off the coat and sets it across the seat of the empty chair, puts his gloves in his hat, sets the hat on the coat. And sits.

BARTENDER goes to pour the two glasses, but EDUARDO holds up a hand.

EDUARDO

Just one, please.

BARTENDER brings it over. Without checking his watch, EDUARDO drains the glass, puts it down -- perhaps more heavily than he would want. Then he nods, rises, pulls money from his pocket, lays it out carefully on the table.

BARTENDER

I am sorry for your loss.

EDUARDO barely nods, puts on his gloves, coat, and hat, and leaves. BARTENDER sits in the emptied chair, puts his head in his hands, and stares at the empty glass.

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
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www.blockandtackleproductions.com

