

Short Plays: Volume 1

Michael Bettencourt

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

The Adulterous Woman

(Based on the short story by Albert Camus)

DESCRIPTION

Staring out across the desert, in a country not her own, Janine finds a perfection that she had not anticipated and does not yet know if it will accept her.

CHARACTERS

- JANINE, not young
- MARCEL, her husband, slightly older

SETTING

- The desert

TIME

- Fluid

MISCELLANEOUS

- Ordinary clothes under cloth coats
- Underwear for MARCEL: white tee-shirt, boxers, socks
- Underwear for JANINE: white brassiere, white panties, white slip, stockings
- Two chairs
- Sound effects: wind, a bus driving (either recorded or by live acoustic effects)
- A sample case or small suitcase; inside the case should be a white bedsheet

* * * * *

In the darkness, sound of wind and a bus engine winding along. A tight pin-light on JANINE's hand as it moves.

JANINE

The fly. The fly. Slagging through the cold thuggish air. The fly out of place. Out of season. Dying as it wandered. Withering as it died.

Lights up slowly: JANINE seated next to MARCEL; under her chair is his sample case. Her hand, the "fly," continues to move, then "lands" on MARCEL's hand.

JANINE

It cut curves and volutes in the air, then -- on my husband's hand, Marcel's thick, sure, numb

hand. He didn't notice. I did. Then off it went.
Lost. Cold. Free.

JANINE stops her hand movements.

MARCEL

What a country! What a country!

JANINE

We were the only white people on the bus.

MARCEL

Look at all of them -- asleep!

JANINE

The natives seemed to sway effortlessly with the
bus' pitch.

MARCEL

No drive!

JANINE

They seemed to take up no room --

MARCEL

Janine!

JANINE

No room at all.

(to MARCEL)

Yes.

MARCEL

Is my sample case there?

JANINE kicks it with her heel.

JANINE

Yes.

MARCEL

Good.

JANINE

I want to bend over to see if I can see it -- but
I can't.

MARCEL

Valuable stuff there.

JANINE

I've turned thick-waisted.

MARCEL

You're sure it's there?

JANINE

Yes.

(to herself)

Not like when Marcel knew me to first know me -- young and serpentine -- I watched how they swayed, like flames, taking up no more room than needed --

MARCEL

(patting her hand heavily)

Don't worry, my little one -- we'll make out all right. We will grow large again!

The sound of the wind grows higher, sharper; the bus drops out. JANINE moves out of her seat downstage. As she speaks, her hands move.

JANINE

The sand -- it scratches at the window, it scrawls unreadable -- The fly, not meant to be there, but there, making hieroglyphs I cannot read. "We'll make out all right." The wind keening higher and higher -- lamentation. "Grow large again." Cannot bend without losing breath -- no thin-waisted jewel. Taking up no room. And Marcel, there -- there -- his sample case, dry goods, this country, this desert, trying to be "all right."

The wind cuts out -- sudden silence.

JANINE

Nothing had turned out as I had expected.

Wind and bus sounds start again, underscoring. JANINE moves to her seat.

JANINE

How long until we get there?

MARCEL

Who knows? Where is "there" any "there" in this God-forsaken -- Sorry, my dove, I'm just nervous. I can feel that this trip will put us back on the road. That's why I wanted you to come.

JANINE

Your lucky charm.

MARCEL

My lucky charm, you are! That's why you had to come.

JANINE touches his face.

MARCEL

It will all be as before.

JANINE

As before.

MARCEL

I know that --

JANINE

Ssshhh.

MARCEL

Yes -- all right. You're right. No need to -- Look at them -- at least we are not like them. Sell, do our business, money once more -- I will provide for you again.

JANINE

Ssshhh. Ssshhh.

On the second "ssshhh," JANINE's hand becomes the "fly."

JANINE

There it was again, pocking the window but with no real heart --

MARCEL

I will provide.

JANINE

Stupid instinct for wanting to be outside.

MARCEL

As before, Janine.

JANINE

And the wind and dust outside --

MARCEL

I'm a good provider, aren't I?

JANINE

-- ripping back layer after layer to get inside until -- what?

MARCEL

I have done my best.

JANINE

What is after the last layer?

MARCEL

It will be like before.

JANINE

What will happen when inside meets out?

MARCEL

I will make good.

JANINE

What will happen when, last layer gone --

MARCEL

I will make it good for us.

JANINE

In and out make a "there" that is not there?

A screech of tires. The bus comes to an abrupt halt and the engine dies. Wind continues.

MARCEL

What now?

(shouts to the driver)

What now? Oh, God grant us -- sand in the carburetor. Look at the bastard grinning -- "I can fix eet, I can fix eet, no problem -- a leettle

sand, a leettle wipe, no problem." And -- Lord save us! -- he leaves the door open!

MARCEL is agitated -- JANINE reaches out to him, but it is not soothing, not strong. Just as she touches him, her hand seems to take her off in a different direction; she moves downstage.

JANINE

My hand -- on his rounded bear-like back -- imitating tenderness -- And then, there, outside the bus, in the fog and wind, like smoke turned hard -- I saw them appear out of nothing, kerchiefs pulled to their eyes, widebrim hats lashed down tight, wrapped in their strange perpetual cotton and wool, swaying, swaying, watching -- but not me -- but outside. Out. There.

MARCEL

Shepherds.

JANINE

Shepherds.

MARCEL

Nomads. Without a home.

JANINE

Where do they live?

MARCEL

Where? Out there? -- the "there" that is not anywhere in this country? Where is that driver?

JANINE

None around us had any luggage to speak of --

MARCEL

Ah, there he is!

JANINE

We with a trunk and cases -- thick-waisted.

The "bus" starts up.

MARCEL

Fixed?

JANINE
One raises a hand --

MARCEL
Good!

JANINE
-- to the bus --

MARCEL
We're off!

JANINE
Like releasing a bird --

MARCEL
(to the driver)
Yes, yes, no problem, "leettle problem."

JANINE
Then gone.

MARCEL
Go! Go!

JANINE
I ached --

MARCEL
Go!

JANINE
-- for that bird to come down and tell me what
that hand had said.

MARCEL
Look, Janine, look -- the town! We've made it, my
lucky charm! Come sit down -- this bus'll drop
you like a stone if you're not careful!

JANINE sits.

JANINE
Like a stone.

MARCEL

Like a stone into deep water. Come, let me hold you.

MARCEL puts his arm around her.

MARCEL

This is where it begins again, Janine.

JANINE

All over again.

MARCEL

All over again.

Lights down except for pin-light on JANINE's hand.

JANINE

The fly -- gone. Perhaps stolen by the wind when the door opened to the outside. Lost. Cold. Free.

* * * * *

JANINE steps downstage. MARCEL takes the sample kit.

MARCEL

(to the driver)

Bring that trunk down!

JANINE

I stand, planted, in the hotel room, Marcel's command rising up birdlike through the slatted afternoon light.

MARCEL

Careful!

JANINE

Whitewashed walls, thick and sure.

MARCEL

(mimes flipping a coin to the driver)

Good, good!

JANINE

The wind now sounds like the ocean. Not full of nomads. I drown in the wind so that I can breathe.

MARCEL

Janine?

MARCEL sits, the two chairs now chairs at a table in the hotel restaurant.

JANINE

Breathe.

MARCEL

A quick solid lunch, eh?

JANINE

Ocean wraps around me --

MARCEL

(to the waiter)

We'll have the pork -- cook it well!

JANINE

Thin waist --

MARCEL

And coffee. And quick -- we have business to do.

JANINE

Refreshed -- licked clean --

MARCEL

Janine! What are you staring at?

JANINE is startled, then comes to sit.

JANINE

Nothing.

MARCEL

We'll do well this afternoon -- times are hard for everybody. They'll buy once they see what I have!

JANINE

Of course they will.

MARCEL

And with you there, my lucky charm -- ah, I can feel it!

MARCEL grabs his case and will work his way along an arc upstage: the various merchants he has to meet during his rounds. He will mime showing them things from his case, arguing, bartering, selling, etc., completing his arc by coming back to JANINE. For MARCEL his first transaction does not go well, but by the end of the arc he has met with several successes.

JANINE

Like the fly I followed Marcel, trying to be lucky. I hung to the edges -- I rode the rim of the low serious voice Marcel thought sly and business-like.

We wove through back streets, old streets, stores crammed with dark strangers -- they ignored me -- they stole my breath away. I hung here -- and here -- then there -- trying to be lucky but my heart both aching and indifferent as I looked upon this man working hard to provide more of the world to me -- this once unfurnished university student, thrilled by his philosophies and awed to grateful by his hard desire for someone who did not then understand why that kind of desire -- so natural and expected -- would be so hard for her to --

I landed in his hands, released bird thankful for being needed. I discovered I had a talent for being needed. How need -- changes. Now it's money for him, not the aeriels of thought -- now it's provide -- Such a lucky charm am I.

MARCEL is near the end of his arc; he has a success.

MARCEL

Aha, brother! I knew we could make that exchange.

JANINE

What will happen when inside meets out?

MARCEL moves to the next one.

JANINE

What happens after the last layer peeled away?

MARCEL moves to the next one.

MARCEL

Hard times -- we have to work together.

JANINE

His mood brightened. His voice hustled me.

MARCEL

My charm!

JANINE

I am tired.

MARCEL

This is my last. Don't go -- watch.

JANINE

I hung on the edge -- hieroglyph --

MARCEL

(to the "merchant")

Best quality you will find, you deal with me.

JANINE

Unable to read myself.

MARCEL

I knew you would see it my way!

MARCEL picks up his case and moves to JANINE.

MARCEL

My charm -- you have done enough for today. We are all in this business together -- sink each other or float each other -- never cared for that cut-throat way of --

JANINE

(interrupting)

I am tired.

MARCEL

Yes, yes -- this cold, these people --

JANINE

The nomads.

MARCEL

(laughing)

Not us, child -- not us! We have a home!

JANINE

I did not want to go back to the hotel.

MARCEL

Let's go back to the hotel -- dinner, wine --

JANINE

Yes. No.

MARCEL

What?

JANINE

It's still early.

MARCEL

But you're tired.

JANINE

Yes. No.

MARCEL

What is it, my pet?

JANINE

He was feeling solicitous --

MARCEL

Janine?

JANINE

His day had provided --

MARCEL

Look at me.

JANINE

I could. Not. Return to that white room --

MARCEL puts his hand on JANINE's shoulder.

MARCEL

What, my charm?

JANINE responds to MARCEL's touch as if a bird had landed on her shoulder. JANINE takes his hand tenderly.

JANINE

Look at the light.

MARCEL

Yes?

JANINE

The hotel manager told me that if the wind lifted -- and see, it has! -- then to climb the water tower to see the last light.

MARCEL

The water tower.

JANINE

Yes.

MARCEL

This you want to do?

JANINE

Yes.

MARCEL

Well, then -- all right.

Lights change. The chairs are now the railing on the water tower. The chair seats face the audience. JANINE arrives first, breathing heavily. MARCEL follows behind her. As JANINE speaks, she uses her hands to illustrate.

JANINE

I lose track after my first steps --

MARCEL

One hundred and sixty-five steps.

JANINE

The clouds had fled -- the sun balances like a forge-hot nailhead on the horizon.

MARCEL

I swear I left a lung back there --

JANINE

From the east the ample bruise of the coming
night floods west --

MARCEL

Both lungs --

JANINE

On the edge of the town I can see tents --

MARCEL joins her.

MARCEL

(pointing)

Shepherds.

JANINE

Yes. Dark bodies moving -- lights -- this
unsayable alphabet -- right there -- there --

MARCEL

This thing actually sways in the wind!

JANINE suddenly moves around the chair and stands on the seat.

MARCEL

Janine! Get back here!

JANINE

Thick-waisted me stands up on the railing --
trying to grab the coming stars --

MARCEL grabs her around her thighs/knees as if to keep her from
falling.

MARCEL

Get down!

JANINE

The wind changes to ocean -- waves --

MARCEL

Janine!

JANINE

Sun melts -- and the unstressed waters --

MARCEL

Janine! Please!

JANINE

-- rise from my sad ankles to my regretful hair --

MARCEL

This is foolish!

JANINE

And I feel this nothing not like the nothing I
have felt before -- been feeling -- I am nothing
-- thank God! -- a flood tide -- and I can almost
read --

MARCEL

Right now!

JANINE comes back to awareness and climbs down.

MARCEL

That was foolish!

JANINE

Yes.

MARCEL

I could have lost you.

JANINE

Lost me, yes -- I am sorry.
(to herself)

How could I tell him?
(to MARCEL)

Let's go back.

MARCEL

They should lock this -- this is unsafe.

Lights down except for pin-light on JANINE's hand.

JANINE

In the shepherds' tents they light lanterns --
flames write on the walls. Wind crosses into water

into wind. Earth runs away to darkness. And I
am nothing. Lost. Cold.

Lights out, then up again immediately.

* * * * *

JANINE and MARCEL slowly undress until they are in their
underclothes: boxers, tee-shirt, white socks for him; a white
slip or shift, possibly stockings for her. MARCEL takes the
bedsheet out of his sample case. They sit on the chairs as if
in bed, and MARCEL spreads the sheet over them.

JANINE

He tried to be kind during dinner, but he was
bothered.

MARCEL

I could have lost you.

JANINE

It was foolish, yes. I don't know what possessed
me.

(to herself)

Which I only say for him.

MARCEL

Tomorrow we'll finish up, then we'll leave.

JANINE

Yes. Good

MARCEL

It is hard to be away from home.

JANINE

Yes. It is. Sleep.

MARCEL closes his eyes, breathes evenly.

JANINE

The darkness, the cold, thicken this room. His
warmth -- his warmth -- I want to be held down by
his warmth, like an anchor, like a lock.

JANINE turns to MARCEL, lays her head on his shoulder.

JANINE

I want to be so deeply asleep that I am kept from thinking.

JANINE puts an arm across his chest.

JANINE

His warmth tied across my mouth to keep the air away from the words forcing their way up my throat --

JANINE pulls MARCEL closer; he continues to sleep undisturbed.

JANINE

I do not need to breathe -- Marcel, pet, keep me from breathing! -- cut my throat so that these words cannot reach the air! The words gag me, I cannot swallow --

JANINE's hand suddenly moves: the fly.

JANINE

There -- again -- The razz of its wings -- how has it found me -- how have you found me, you dark nothing that calls me out --

JANINE's hand "lands" on MARCEL's chest, fingers spread.

JANINE

Heartbeat, yes -- but that means nothing.

JANINE puts her hand against her own chest.

JANINE

Heartbeat, yes -- but it means nothing. The words have escaped. They have escaped. I am sorry, Marcel.

Slowly, inexorably, JANINE slides out from under the sheet and puts on her coat, making sure that MARCEL is not disturbed. Once out of the "room," she comes quickly downstage: she is on the water tower, breathing heavily, having just run up a flight of stairs. As she speaks, she looks at the stars, the shepherds encamped outside the city, everything.

JANINE

Look -- just look -- see -- oh --

(breathes, laughs softly)

No slim-waisted girl standing here, eh! How I could once slice through --

(gestures)

How we could all once slice through -- Ah, matron!

(dismisses it)

This air --

(breathes)

-- cuts me -- good --

(breathes deeply several times)

-- burns -- all the way down --

(finally catches her breath, pauses)

Marcel --

(catches herself)

Janine, look, just look, just -- look. But Marcel -- Marcel -- I have betrayed you. Am betraying you, as I breathe, just by breathing.

Who would have guessed? Being so needed, wanting your need to keep away the -- from my -- and only end full of fear held in a safe man's arms.

JANINE takes off her coat, pauses for breath, a visible chill.

JANINE

The craziness or stuffiness of life, eh? -- a viper in the sheets. Who would have guessed -- no fault, Marcel, of yours, none. The harbor is never to blame.

So I am here. These stars. Shepherds scattered in the stones. This rough-handed railing. Cold air cupping -- me. What the knife-edge, dragged unwilling but desiring, must feel against the oiled whetstone.

Listen to me! The words -- ! Cut right into me, out of me --

She touches herself.

JANINE

-- here -- and here -- and here -- a touch not safe, not secure, not warm, but oh! -- oh! -- the talons raking across the palm as the bird pushes away -- oh! Listen to me! More. More. More.

This thick-waisted ordinary woman -- once so slender! ready! to push away! -- Marcel, so surprised that such lightness said yes to you, grateful -- I grateful for that -- fattened up now, slaughter-ready -- oh, listen to that! no, not that! yes, more cold, more -- here -- and here -- and here -- enough! -- this long fade into so many details -- enough! -- little daily losses -- enough! -- that turn inevitably into nothing but -- enough! -- fear -- enough!

JANINE kneels, her knees spread apart, clutching her slip between her legs.

JANINE

The stars, falling, flare out -- if I can fall like that -- all uncentered, spinning uncentered -- if I can have no center -- Ah, yes -- yes -- the invitation offered here -- and here -- and here -- a touch not safe, not secure, not warm but, oh, accepted -- let me fall open, split, flared, empty husked, eyes bleached, heart dry -- fall into the long slow dark spinning ocean's mouth -- accepted, accepted -- until -- until -- until -- I am so empty I am not afraid anymore, not afraid anymore, not afraid anymore, not afraid anymore --

A shudder runs through and through JANINE, a mix of the cold and of giving herself over to her own body. On the downside arc of her release, JANINE looks deliberately, intimately, at the audience. After several beats of this, MARCEL awakens with an abrupt shout, scared out of his sleep by a dream. JANINE quickly grabs her coat and puts it on, then rushes to the "room" and the bedside. MARCEL looks at her, seeing her yet not recognizing her, the way a person feels first stumbling out of sleep, his face afraid and uncomprehending. JANINE sits on the edge of the "bed," touching MARCEL's face, her own voice sorrowful.

JANINE

It's nothing, dear. It's nothing. Nothing. Really. It is nothing at all. Go back. We'll go back.

Lights fade as MARCEL continues to stare at her.

An Affair of State

CHARACTER

- The female Senator from the great state of _____

SETTING

- Senate hearing room

* * * * *

The Senator seated at a table, microphone in front of her. A copy of her prepared statement in front of her. Around her the sounds of a busy Senate chamber: buzz of voices, movements of people, snap of cameras. Strobes of cameras going off under bright interrogatory lights.

The sound of three heavy strokes of a gavel, and the room goes quiet. SENATOR speaks into the microphone.

SENATOR

Thank you Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I thank you for affording me the opportunity to present to you an explanation of the actions at issue here today, and before we begin the questioning, I would like to offer a statement, as is customary. I believe that, when all is said and done, I will be able to lay these allegations to rest. My statement will be brief. Thank you.

SENATOR hesitates. She looks at her statement, then up at the committee.

SENATOR

(clearing throat)

Thank you.

Yet SENATOR doesn't begin. Then, with a determined gesture, she puts the paper to one side and instead starts speaking without notes.

SENATOR

In fact, my statement will be "briefs" -- that is, about briefs -- because I readily admit the charge that has brought me here today. I did, indeed, give my office intern -- my legally adult 20-year-old athletically endowed Georgetown intern -- a blow job. Several, actually, over the course of

six months -- in my office, after hours, following a drink or two from the office scotch. And I did, on each occasion, without hesitation, completely swallow -- let that be known for the record.

However, lest any of you think that that was all that happened -- the misguided judgment of an otherwise mature woman -- let me put your mistaken assumptions to rest, for there is more -- much more -- to this tale. I knew, from the day he walked in, what I wanted from him -- and it didn't take much to convince him that what I wanted was what he should want as well. Let me tell you what it was like that first time -- to shut the door and lock it, only the desk lamp on to throw shadows against the wall. My moving closer to him, and then closer, and his backing away until the backs of his thighs bumped up against the desk, stopping him cold -- or, rather, stopping him hot. My hands -- these hands -- yes, these hands -- unbuckling his belt, pulling it free from its loops -- snap! -- dropping the leather to the floor. The thin soft wool cloth sliding down his legs -- well-defined, sculpted, even -- the useless cloth puddling at his ankles. The boxer shorts -- he had his fraternity logo sewn onto the right leg -- those boxer shorts slithered easily southward over his hips, past his knees, resting gratefully on his feet --

I am sure at least some members of the committee have experienced, from one side or the other, this sexual congress -- from both sides of the aisle -- the spray of adrenaline, the squeeze of excitement -- those of you who know, know exactly what I am talking about. Those of you who don't -- or say you don't -- well -- my condolences.

The blow-jobs, of course, were not all -- why should they have been? He took me in the ways I wanted to be taken -- and why not? Two adults -- one more adult in age than the other, I'll admit, but what did age matter? -- late night, shadows on the wall, all by choice -- let all that linger in your minds --

Let it linger -- for we have all had these desires, these imperfections, these temptations of the

flesh -- and oh did it feel wonderful to give in to them, to let flesh slide against flesh, let bodies do what bodies do, let the darkness pull us into its warm cave and let pleasure flood into every opening -- and I mean every opening!

Now, who among you has not, at least once -- at least once! -- indulged in thought if not in deed those dark slippery urges that can make life so tasty -- those shadowy cravings that make your thighs go tight and your breath go shallow, that prickle your skin and make you sweat like you've never sweat before -- I'm not taking a poll, but who among you has not? That warm cave has such sweetness.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would be glad to entertain any questions you have -- any questions at all. From anyone. Any question at all.

The Alamo

CHARACTERS

- STEEL EYE, vagrant, large female, age hard to determine but certainly a veteran of the streets
- RONALD BITTERS, Tisch sophomore with camera

SETTING

- Astor Place, at the Alamo

TIME

- Present, cold weather

NOTE: A program note, if necessary: "The Alamo is the name of a large metal sculpture in Astor Place, near the Tisch School of the Arts of New York University."

As an actor challenge, have STEEL EYE in a wheelchair.

Two large hand-scrawled signs propped up against a shopping cart or a flock of filled bags.

Sign 1:

- Victim of global downsizing = McFucked
- Victim of religion = stigmata 20% off
- Victim of advertising = seeking mental enema
- Victim of credit cards = plastic is Death
- Victim of gender = penises 20% off
- Victim of coffee = Starsucks corporate swill
- Victim of clothing = no off the rack body
- Other categories of victimhood on request.

Sign 2:

The Sayings of Steel Eye, Street Savant

- What you see before you is a full human being. Do not forget this.
- The only difference between begging and brokering stocks is office location -- possibly deodorant.
- When poor people beg, they call it begging; when rich people beg, they call it fundraising.
- Street person's motto: Longevity need not apply.
- Pick up on me and you pick up the clue phone.
- First rule of paranoids: You hide. They seek.
- A Rolls Royce covered in astroturf is still a Rolls Royce.

- You don't need to give; just acknowledge. However, I can't eat smiles.
- What you see before you is a full human being. Do not forget this.

A third sign leans against the can or bucket where STEEL EYE collects her money: NO PHOTOS ALLOWED.

* * * * *

STEEL EYE is out trolling for change at the Alamo, a container at her feet. As she begins speaking, she will acknowledge the contributions of people. Half way through her first spiel, BITTERS enters with a good camera taking photos -- he's good at what he does.

STEEL EYE

Practice your Catholic charity, Muslim piety, Sufi mysticism, Buddhist mindfulness, Lutheran -- whatever you guys do -- drop some dough in my can below -- I don't take contributions from United Way, Amway, the Eightfold Way, or curds and whey. I just hit the highway, the byway, and do it my way -- much appreciated --

BITTERS prepares to move on.

STEEL EYE

Hey!

BITTERS

Hey!

STEEL EYE

Hey!

BITTERS

Hey what?

STEEL EYE

Don't ignore me.

BITTERS

I'm not ignoring you --

STEEL EYE

What do you think you're doing?

BITTERS

What?

STEEL EYE

I said, what do you think you're doing?

BITTERS

I'm not doing anything --

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Make these mean streets sweeter.

(to BITTERS)

You saw the "no-photos" sign?

BITTERS

Yeah.

STEEL EYE

From Tisch, right? --

BITTERS

Right again.

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Charity begins at my home -- which you're walking
on --

(to BITTERS)

-- that means you can read --

BITTERS

Yeah, of course I can read --

STEEL EYE

And you read it and did what I asked you not to
do, yes or no? Yes or no?

BITTERS

Well, yeah, I guess I did do that --

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Love in your heart, do your part --

(to BITTERS)

And so you admit you stole from me --

BITTERS

I definitely didn't do that --

STEEL EYE

What would you call it?

BITTERS

C'mon -- no big deal -- a couple of pictures --
you're always around here --

(makes a gesture of leaving)

-- I gotta, you know -- I got class -- so --

STEEL EYE

And so the thief, like all thieves, chooses to
run away. So. Go. Go! I got no use for a thief.

STEEL EYE turns away from BITTERS to continue her spiel. BITTERS
sidles away, stops, then turns and comes back.

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Help me make it through --

BITTERS

You know, I'm not --

STEEL EYE

(spiels, ignores him)

-- the night -- and day --

BITTERS

I'm not what you say I am. I'm not.

STEEL EYE

Is me knowing that important to you?

BITTERS

I just don't want you to think --

STEEL EYE

Why shouldn't I think?

(spiels)

I don't want your social change, just your spare
change --

(to BITTERS)

You steal from people you care about?

BITTERS

Of course not -- I don't steal [at all] --

STEEL EYE

So you must not care about me because you just stole from me.

BITTERS

That's the point here, isn't it -- what we're arguing about --

STEEL EYE

You're arguing, I'm not arguing -- I'm just pinning down a fact.

BITTERS

And my point is that your "fact" is wrong --

STEEL EYE

You read the sign, you took the pictures, you walk away, ergo you don't care about me: fact fact fact and fact --

(spiels)

Legal tender makes me tender --

STEEL EYE points at BITTERS' face.

STEEL EYE

What am I seeing there? Determination? Indecision? Indigestion? If Tisch has got a clear soul, then Tisch is free to roll --

BITTERS

I just don't like -- I don't like it when people --

STEEL EYE

"People" done that a lot to you -- misjudge the marvelous you?

BITTERS goes to say something, but STEEL EYE cuts him off with a gesture.

STEEL EYE

Here's my opening offer: If you don't want me to think what I'm thinking, then give me ten dollars.

(spiels)

If money grew on trees, poor people wouldn't have axes --

(to BITTERS)

Now you're gawking --

BITTERS

I'm not [gawking] --

STEEL EYE

Yeah, you've got that --

(demonstrates)

-- kind of look -- come on, ten bucks.

BITTERS

I didn't take anything you own --

STEEL EYE

(indicating her face)

You stole this -- my copyrighted face -- that's "the point" here, Tisch.

BITTERS

You can't copyright --

STEEL EYE

Some people put faces on canvas, right? -- they get copyrights?

BITTERS

Yeah --

STEEL EYE

My canvas is my bones. Deltas, escarpments, faults, exfoliations -- like a map. My whole life inscribed here. My property.

BITTERS

Come on --

STEEL EYE

You took its picture without paying -- you admit it -- which means you stole from me, which makes Tisch a thief who doesn't care, end of story --

BITTERS

Look, I learned about copyright last semester --

STEEL EYE

Neither here nor there, Tisch --

BITTERS

Really, you should [listen] --

STEEL EYE

Now that you've stolen 'em, what're you going to do with 'em? Tell me that.

BITTERS goes to protest, but STEEL EYE cuts him off with a gesture.

STEEL EYE

Don't -- repeating a lie will rot your teeth --

BITTERS

Don't ever cut me off --

STEEL EYE

Or you'll do what? Or you'll do what?

BITTERS neither moves nor speaks.

STEEL EYE

Thought so.

(spiels)

No middle man here, no overhead -- see, nothing over my head --

STEEL EYE gets something to eat from her belongings.

STEEL EYE

Always used to getting what you want -- respect -- which the thief doesn't bother to give anyone else.

STEEL EYE offers BITTERS something to eat.

STEEL EYE

Unlike me, who gives --

BITTERS

I definitely don't want to be like you.

STEEL EYE

You could only hope.

STEEL EYE finishes eating.

STEEL EYE

You may fancy yourself a copyright expert, Tisch, and a demander of respect, but you are just not ready to know yourself --

BITTERS goes to say something, but STEEL EYE cuts him off with the same gesture.

STEEL EYE

Hep! Hep! Here's the final deal, Tisch, because your threats of innocence are making me bored -- for ten bucks -- a measly sawbuck -- you get my copyrighted face -- "She has the face that launched a thousand quips," the Tisch'd one secretly thinks, "and not only do I want to know about it, I will pay the price for the knowledge" -- and a guaranteed "A" for whatever class you're doing this for -- I can smell it that you're on a deadline -- and as a bonus you get to prove your parents did a good job raising you -- and I get to know there's one less thief, liar, and coward in the world, which is a big thing for me. Are you, Tisch, man enough -- dare I say, human enough, Tisch -- to take the deal? To know who you are? I have already named you -- ten bucks'll prove me wrong.

BITTERS raises his camera and takes a picture. They lock eyes. BITTERS starts taking pictures again as he circles her. Then he punctuates it with one last picture taken very close-up.

BITTERS

A little of that crazy shit you say -- "not your social change just your spare change" -- really whacked but good -- mix it up -- turn it in -- you're not getting ten bucks and I'm getting my "A" -- that's what you get for cutting me off --

STEEL EYE picks up her can and cradles it, then speaks in a very loud but measured tone and gestures as if to gather people around.

STEEL EYE

Help. Help. This cream-faced loon is trying to steal from me. Someone please help me.

BITTERS

Stop -- that -- stop --

STEEL EYE

(loudly)

Help. Help. He is trying to rob me.

BITTERS

Hey! Hey! Enough.

STEEL EYE

Think I haven't buddied up to the cops around here? --

(loudly)

Homeless people need protection too --

(to BITTERS)

My turf, ladrone. Got enough below the belt to face it?

(loudly)

Look at what the son-of-a-Tisch is doing --

BITTERS

I've only got --

STEEL EYE

(loudly)

Come gather around --

BITTERS

Damn! I can't [believe] --

STEEL EYE

If you see something, say something --

BITTERS

I've only got five dollars.

STEEL EYE

Ten minimum.

(loudly)

Please help me -- I am being assaulted -- you all can see that!

BITTERS

(pulls out bill)

It's yours, for Christ's sake!

STEEL EYE takes it.

STEEL EYE

But you are not done.

BITTERS

Oh, I am [done] --

STEEL EYE slams the can on the ground at his feet.

STEEL EYE

Redeem yourself, who so loves and demands his self-respect. Can you do that? Can you earn me fifty cents?

STEEL EYE backs off slightly, then speaks to the passing crowd.

STEEL EYE

It's fine, folks -- just a street life project for an NYU class.

(to BITTERS)

A little of that panache lurking in your Tisch genes. Come on, just two measly heads of Washington!

BITTERS

I can't do what [you do] --

STEEL EYE

All right -- I'll downgrade your redemption to make it even easier. Convince me to give you two quarters.

(takes two coins from her pocket)

Starting now. C'mon. Curtain's up. Watch him, folks.

BITTERS is frozen.

STEEL EYE

You've been nattering all in my ear, poking in my face, wasting my time -- you are free to go, Tisch, always have been -- but can you really do that? -- leave and live with what you just learned about yourself?

(whispers)

This is the great adventure!

BITTERS

I'm hungry --

STEEL EYE

Excuse me.

BITTERS

I'm hungry --

STEEL EYE

Oh, you've started --

BITTERS

I am hungry --

STEEL EYE

Not buying it --

BITTERS

-- and I need a place to stay [tonight] --

STEEL EYE

Lame-o.

BITTERS

Won't you give me [some money] --

STEEL EYE

Performance review --

BITTERS

I did what you [asked] --

STEEL EYE

Didn't convince me.

(to crowd)

Convince you? Didn't think so.

(to BITTERS)

So what? Your average barricaded human being -- like this Tisch student I met one time -- is not moved by simple want or need. They require a return on investment. So beggars need an angle, a hook, a shtick. I got mine. What's yours?

BITTERS

I don't have an angle. I have money at my apartment. I'll come back --

STEEL EYE

But you're so close to being saved! C'mon, one more try. I know you have it in you, somewhere in that fatted-calf body of yours. A little force, a little -- sizzle, a little show biz, some hot pizzazz --

BITTERS bursts into a clownish rendition: spastic soft shoe, e.g.

BITTERS

"I don't care if it's a nickel or a dime / I'll take the money if you'll take the time."

A goofy smile surprises BITTERS' face, and for a moment he is nothing but a very pleased child.

STEEL EYE

Bravo, Herr Tisch. Bravo.

STEEL EYE encourages the crowd to applaud.

STEEL EYE

Bravo, bravo --

BITTERS

Yeah --

STEEL EYE hands the two quarters to BITTERS.

STEEL EYE

Now I know I have spent my money well for I have been entertained by the masses. Off I can go. Bravo.

STEEL EYE bundles up her things.

STEEL EYE

You are released.

(to crowd)

You are released as well.

(to BITTERS)

I have to go to my late afternoon location. May your documentary strategies swell and succeed.

BITTERS doesn't move.

BITTERS

How do you do it?

STEEL EYE

Why should I tell you anything? When a thief kisses you, count your teeth.

They hold each other's gaze. Then BITTERS holds up the two quarters and gestures for STEEL EYE to come to him, which she does. He hands her the quarters, then holds up the camera so they can both see the screen.

BITTERS

Tell me which -- if it's okay --

BITTERS scrolls the pictures of STEEL EYE -- she selects.

STEEL EYE

That one -- and the one just before that -- yeah -- and that one -- I think maybe you felt something when you took that one --

STEEL EYE moves away from him, getting ready to leave.

STEEL EYE

That face in there -- this face -- and this is all I'm going to say -- was once where you were. Once where you were. It don't take much at all, as the song goes.

BITTERS holds out the camera toward STEEL EYE. STEEL EYE takes up the camera in a way that shows she knows exactly what she's doing with it and takes several pictures of BITTERS, finishes, hands back the camera.

STEEL EYE

We are dismissed. Oh, city life can be so interesting! Now quite the story to tell -- Tisch survived the Alamo.

BITTERS

You need a hand?

STEEL EYE considers BITTERS.

BITTERS

I guess not.

STEEL EYE

I said we're done, so we're done.

BITTERS

Yeah.

STEEL EYE

So go.

BITTERS leaves. STEEL EYE takes out BITTERS' five dollar bill, interfolds it with some other bills, tucks the wad away on her person, then leaves, carting off her materials.

BLACKOUT

The Bête Goes Noire

CHARACTERS

- DRIVER, husky -- must be physically larger than HUSBAND; also, dressed in filthy clothes, which contrasts with his manner of speaking
- WIFE
- HUSBAND

SETTING

- Front seat of a tow truck; outside the tow truck, in the yard: DRIVER on stage left, HUSBAND in middle, WIFE on stage right.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Three chairs
- A tire iron
- Set of car keys

* * * * *

Lights up on DRIVER in the driver's seat of the tow truck. WIFE and HUSBAND stand outside. WIFE looks angry, HUSBAND glum. A tire iron is on the front seat, passenger side.

DRIVER

You have to get in, ma'am, sir, before we can get going to get your car. It's not a pleasure boat --

WIFE

It's a fucking tow truck --

DRIVER

But it will get you across the river, to your car, and reliably so.

A hesitation, then HUSBAND goes to get inside.

DRIVER

Wait -- let me move this -- most assuredly it will not be a comfortable ride if you have to sit on this.

DRIVER takes the tire iron and puts against the chair legs.

DRIVER

Now I believe that you will be much more comfortable.

HUSBAND slides in. WIFE, face crunched in disdain, gets in and closes the door. DRIVER pulls away, and there is a long pause as they drive in silence. Then, suddenly, DRIVER jams on the brakes.

DRIVER

(gestures)

Look at that! A little more tilt on that left-hand turn of his, and he'd be off the bridge and into the river. Some people are not very considerate, wouldn't you agree?

WIFE does not respond, though HUSBAND looks like he wants to. DRIVER looks at both of them, sees his conversational gambit is ignored, puts the truck in gear, and moves forward. More silence.

HUSBAND

It was dangerous --

WIFE

Don't you dare.

HUSBAND

What?

WIFE

Talk to him.

HUSBAND

Well, it was --

WIFE

Just -- don't!

Long beat.

HUSBAND
(to DRIVER)

I'm sorry --

WIFE

Traitor!

DRIVER

Ma'am, I can appreciate --

HUSBAND

I'm just --

WIFE

Just both of you shut up --

DRIVER

No one ever likes it --

HUSBAND

The sign on the street was a little ambiguous --

DRIVER

-- but it's not my fault.

HUSBAND

But it was --

WIFE gives DRIVER the finger.

HUSBAND

Now I'm really sorry --

WIFE

Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry --

DRIVER

It's not my fault, ma'am -- I just do what the law says --

WIFE

(in a Germanish accent)

Just following your orders! Achtung!

HUSBAND

She doesn't really mean --

WIFE

(to HUSBAND)

Oh, shut up. Shut up.

(to DRIVER)

I do mean it -- thief. Pig dog. You invaded our lives! And we get to pay you a hundred and fifty dollars for the pleasure, for the privilege, of

riding in this filthy "pleasure boat" -- and of course the cops have to get their cut -- forty-four fucking dollars to the powers that be!

(to HUSBAND)

You have a spine like salt-water taffy.

Long beat.

DRIVER

You have a misunderstanding of the chain of events.

Sharp look from WIFE.

WIFE

What?

DRIVER

It sounds like you think we go around hunting.

HUSBAND

They really don't.

DRIVER

No, we don't.

HUSBAND

I didn't think so.

DRIVER

We don't want to divest people of their means of transportation.

(to HUSBAND)

I appreciate your understanding. Life is hard enough as it is without being divested of a means of transportation.

WIFE

You talk like a dead man.

DRIVER

We just provide a service for when people do not follow the law.

WIFE

Talk with no sense.

HUSBAND

Please --

DRIVER

You have to agree that the laws are there and we have to follow them -- if people placed themselves just anywhere --

WIFE

It was in front of our house --

DRIVER

Not technically --

HUSBAND

Not technically --

DRIVER

You were on the other side, technically in the loading zone --

WIFE

Of a building that is mostly abandoned and hasn't used that loading zone for the year we've been there.

DRIVER

Well, yesterday, they did -- it's the technicalities that will get you every time. We have to observe the technicalities or, well, or else.

HUSBAND

But the signs on the street were ambiguous.

DRIVER

Ambiguity -- never an excuse.

HUSBAND

That's not true --

DRIVER

Otherwise --

WIFE

Otherwise that little Mussolini's world falls down.

DRIVER

You can also contest it in court.

WIFE

And I am sure justice reigns supreme there!

DRIVER comes to a stop. DRIVER looks steadily at WIFE.

DRIVER

People like you do not like to think that they have to follow the rules.

HUSBAND

Wait a second --

DRIVER

(ignoring HUSBAND)

It's a gift to bring people across that river to make them see that such a thing as not following the rules --

HUSBAND

We follow the rules!

DRIVER

(still ignoring HUSBAND)

That not following the rules is something that cannot be practiced for very long without some correction coming to that frame of mind.

Long beat.

HUSBAND

What did you just say?

DRIVER ignores him and gets out of the truck.

HUSBAND

What did you just say to my wife?

DRIVER

This is the tow lot -- you'll find it back in there. And don't mind dog barking -- it's been tucked away -- for now.

HUSBAND and WIFE look at each other.

WIFE

Don't you know where you put it?

DRIVER

Ma'am, a lot of things that are broken get put in there. We put them in, ma'am, as we get them -- there is no valet. Ma'am. Now -- get out of the truck and go find it. Please.

HUSBAND and WIFE sidle out of the car, looking suddenly quite uncomfortable. WIFE's brazenness is gone, and HUSBAND has a stunned look on his face.

DRIVER

Go on.

WIFE

Did you bring the keys?

HUSBAND

I did.

WIFE

Don't you go without me!

HUSBAND is not paying full attention to her.

WIFE

What?

DRIVER

Do you have any questions?

HUSBAND

The sign on the street was ambiguous --

DRIVER

I don't care.

HUSBAND

It never said --

DRIVER

I don't care.

HUSBAND

It never said directly --

DRIVER

Not my concern

HUSBAND

We are not criminals.

DRIVER

I have not brought you here to discuss what kind of criminals you might be. I just want you to get what is yours and cross back over the river.

Long beat.

HUSBAND

You get it.

WIFE

What?

HUSBAND

I want him to go and get it.

WIFE

You can't --

HUSBAND

He took it, he put it there, he should get it.

WIFE

Just go get it --

HUSBAND digs out his car keys and throws them at DRIVER. They bounce off him to the ground.

HUSBAND

Now.

DRIVER digs at the keys with the toe of his shoe but does not pick them up.

DRIVER

I ferry people across to the tow lot -- I don't move them around when I get them here.

HUSBAND

Get. Our. --

DRIVER

Of course not.

HUSBAND hesitates, then bolts for the truck and pulls out the tire iron. DRIVER, anticipating this, catches the iron as HUSBAND swings it and easily forces it out of HUSBAND's hands. But HUSBAND, in a surprise move, knees or kicks DRIVER in the crotch, which drops DRIVER to the ground. HUSBAND grabs the tire iron and raises it over his head to strike. During all of this, WIFE ineffectually tries to interfere -- vocal and physical ad lib of reactions is fine. DRIVER, oddly, does not really defend himself.

HUSBAND

(with tire iron raised)

We are not criminals! We are not criminals!

WIFE goes to HUSBAND, but when she touches him, he shrinks from her, almost swinging the iron against her.

DRIVER

Do you hear it?

HUSBAND

What?

DRIVER

The barking of the beast.

HUSBAND

We follow the rules!

(to WIFE)

We follow the rules!

WIFE

You don't want to --

DRIVER

But he does.

(to HUSBAND)

Don't you?

HUSBAND, looking both befuddled and enraged, looks from DRIVER to WIFE and back again.

DRIVER

Don't you?

Long beat. DRIVER looks at WIFE.

DRIVER

Spit it out.

WIFE looks confused, then an odd look of realization and surprise comes over her face.

DRIVER

Go ahead.

WIFE spits out a coin.

DRIVER

Good.

(holds up the coin)

Good.

(to HUSBAND)

Do you hear the barking of the beast?

Long beat.

HUSBAND

Yes. Yes.

With an abrupt movement, HUSBAND hits himself in the knee or shin with the tire iron, dropping himself and the tire iron to the ground. WIFE goes to him. DRIVER gets up, picks up the tire iron, pockets the coin. He also either picks up the keys and throws them to WIFE or kicks them to WIFE.

DRIVER

(to WIFE)

You should take him home. And as for you -- I am sure that justice for you will reign supreme.

Lights fade to black as DRIVER, holding tire iron, looks at them both, with the sound of a fierce barking dog filling the air.

Bintl Briv

CHARACTERS

- LOLA RIDGE -- 34, Irish/Scottish-American, poet
- ABRAHAM CAHAN -- 37, Jewish, newspaper editor
- HANNAH BRODSKY -- Young, but care-worn

SETTING

- Editorial office of the Jewish Forward [Forverts]

TIME

- 1906

MISCELLANEOUS

- A dialect coach for the Yiddish

* * * * *

The office of ABRAHAM CAHAN, editor of the Forward. Table. Two chairs. Under the table is a sack full of letters.

HANNAH BRODSKY, care-worn, end of her tether, holding a letter, reads it to CAHAN out loud, but sounding as if she has memorized it and is not really reading it.

BRODSKY

Zum geerten Forverts redactor, Avruham Cahan, April, neinzehn hundert un seks. Ich shreib dos vun fertzveiflung, veil ich bin a fertzveifelte froi. Wider shvengedig -- un ich hob shoin tsvey. Un a brutaler man, ver veist nisht vus nein heist....

[To the esteemed Forward editor, Abraham Cahan, April 1906. I write this of desperation, for I am a desperate woman. Again pregnant -- and I have two already. And a brutal husband who doesn't know the meaning of "no"....]

CAHAN

You can give me the letter Frailin -- Froi -- .

BRODSKY

(not giving him the letter)

Neighbor down the hall said you were asking for letters for your newspaper, Her Cahan, she said you wrote, "People often need the opportunity to

pour out their heavy-laden hearts," and she knows I need to -- Charged me a quarter, though, because while I can read I cannot write well -- everybody wants to take a piece! -- you know how much blood he would take out of me if he knew a quarter -- him only \$2 a day, me with the wash -- couldn't buy a stamp, that's why I'm here -- Froi Brodsky.

CAHAN

You can give me the letter, Froi Brodsky.

BRODSKY

(not giving him the letter)

They say the more you complain, the longer God lets you live, but I don't think that's going to be true, Her Cahan, at least for me, because if I complain to my husband about this baby, he is not going to let me -- but if I have this baby -- sorry -- it will kill me, the two I already have wring me dry, but if I don't have it, my husband will -- hurt me -- kill me, I don't know, Her Cahan, but hurt me, yes -- The rabbi tells me it's my fault --

CAHAN

The rabbi.

BRODSKY

I'm supposed to listen to the rabbi.

CAHAN

Would you like to hear a joke?

BRODSKY

(puzzled)

About a rabbi?

CAHAN

We stand in the office of the Jewish Forward, Froi Brodsky, a newspaper dedicated to the common people -- to you. It's 1906 in the modern United States -- we can tell any joke we like. To make a point to you.

BRODSKY

All right.

CAHAN

A much respected rabbi is dying. His students crowd around, and one finally asks, "Rabbi, tell us the meaning of life."

(deepens his voice)

"Life is a fountain."

"A fountain? What does that mean?"

"All right," the rabbi groans, "so it's not a fountain!"

And who should listen to a man like that?

BRODSKY hands CAHAN her letter.

BRODSKY

Are you going to print it?

CAHAN

I am going to print it. In that section of the newspaper already set aside: "bintl briv" I'm going to call it --

BRODSKY

And I'll be first?

CAHAN

Your letter will be the first.

BRODSKY

And what should I do?

CAHAN takes a quarter out of his pocket and gives it to BRODSKY.

CAHAN

As always, Froi Brodsky, whatever your heart tells you to do is what you should do.

CAHAN leads BRODSKY to exit. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

CAHAN, back at his desk, pulls the bag of letters from underneath and rummages among the letters.

CAHAN

But maybe I was a real yukel, Froi Hannah Brodsky, to send out that offer -- missives from the heart of darkness, such misery -- endless --

LOLA RIDGE enters, wearing a broad hat and a colorful vest, and a bag of elaborate design slung over her shoulder. Her dress is simple and bright. She holds a copy of the Forward.

RIDGE

Hello. Hello.

CAHAN

Yes -- hello -- sorry -- are you bringing in a letter?

RIDGE

Do I look like your postman?

CAHAN

Not in the least --

RIDGE

I didn't think so, unless they'd changed their uniforms lately and acquired a sense of humor.

(holds up newspaper)

I brought myself here because you posted a notice. For an editor. Of letters. For the "bintl briv."

CAHAN

You read the Forverts?

RIDGE gives him an "look," then answers in her accented Yiddish.

RIDGE

Avade, ich lein die tzeitung jedern tug. ["Of course I read the newspaper every day."]

CAHAN

Wiezoy kennt ihr Yiddish? ["How do you know Yiddish?"]

RIDGE

(switching to English)

I know Yiddish because I bunk on Hester Street. You can't live on Hester Street and not --

CAHAN

But your accent --

RIDGE

My accent was born in Dublin and raised in New Zealand and Australia -- inflected by a Scottish step-father who spat Shakespeare from his drunken heart as he smashed the furniture. Is my accent bothering you?

CAHAN

No --

RIDGE

Yes.

CAHAN

Only it makes it clear you're not Jewish --

RIDGE

No Jews abide in Ireland, Mr. Cahan? She has him thinking on that one. I can give you a history, brief or long, of Irish Jews --

CAHAN

So you're Jewish?

RIDGE

I haven't said that.

CAHAN

Then why are you here?

RIDGE

The busy man asks. Do you mean "here" in this office? On Hester Street? In this city? In this life? Because I write, Herr Schreiber, like you, about all of it -- right now about the Hester Street Jews and the everyone-else there, including me, the whole polyglot gob-stopping density of the place.

CAHAN

So are you Jewish or are you not?

RIDGE

What I am, Her Cahan, is immensely interesting -- in part because I have read Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto.

CAHAN

You've read my Yekl?

RIDGE

And The Imported Bridegroom. Three, if I include The White Terror and the Red.

CAHAN

Either you're a perceptive reader or a glutton for punishment.

RIDGE

I enjoyed them all -- would I lie to you, my prospective employer?

They hold each other's gaze.

CAHAN

Perhaps you should give me your name.

RIDGE

Perhaps you should ask for it. Go ahead.

CAHAN

May I have the pleasure -- I assume it's a pleasure --

RIDGE

Oh, it is.

CAHAN

Then the pleasure of knowing --

RIDGE

Rose Emily Ridge. Call me Lola.

CAHAN

Right now I'll use Miss -- Mrs.? -- Miss, then. Miss Ridge.

RIDGE

Accepted. Does the position pay?

CAHAN

But not much --

RIDGE

Can it be done in the evenings?

CAHAN

Yes, but --

RIDGE

"Yes, but" usually means "no" where I come from. Must be that non-Jewish accent inflecting my gob that's the sticking point!

CAHAN

Gob?

RIDGE

Look, there's only one way to come to terms about this.

RIDGE lifts the sack to the floor and sits at the desk.

RIDGE

I read your paper -- good practical socialism! -- your editorials -- good practical assimilation! -- your books and stories -- just gut! -- so let's say that you now have to read me.

RIDGE pulls a wooden case from her bag, opens it, and extracts a beautiful fountain pen. CAHAN stares at it.

CAHAN

That is a Waterman pen.

RIDGE

Gold nib.

CAHAN

Gold nib. Where did you get -- how did you --

RIDGE

I got it from where I got it. Pick a letter.

CAHAN hands a letter to RIDGE. RIDGE opens it, unfolds it, reads it, finishes it.

RIDGE

So, review. She gives in to him -- "he is one of those who do not retreat until they've accomplished

what they want." So he accomplishes her. They live together, unmarried --

CAHAN

"Freethinkers" --

RIDGE

And now she cannot stand his voice -- "as if a saw were rasping against my bones."

CAHAN

But when he is near her "I lose control and become his slave."

RIDGE

"If I stay longer I'll surely take my own life."

CAHAN

I get many letters with endings like that.

Without hesitation RIDGE begins to write a response on the letter.

RIDGE

Read over my shoulder.

CAHAN leans over to read as RIDGE writes. RIDGE hands him the letter. CAHAN reads.

CAHAN

In Yiddish --

RIDGE

"Americanized" -- as used in your own paper.

CAHAN

Gut -- a little harsh -- but, I think, correct.

RIDGE

A fool, but nothing gained by telling her what she probably knows about herself. Better to frame it as liberation -- especially for a letter sent to the Forverts. Forward! Well?

CAHAN gestures toward the pen.

CAHAN

May I?

RIDGE hands it to him. CAHAN handles it like a jewel.

RIDGE

May I back?

CAHAN hands it back to her.

RIDGE

On board am I, Mr. Cahan?

CAHAN gets up.

CAHAN

I can find another desk to work at.

RIDGE

I am sure you will. What?

CAHAN

Jewish.

RIDGE

Hester Street -- now let me earn.

RIDGE readies herself, opens another letter, reads.

RIDGE

My God on a bicycle --

She waves CAHAN away as she reads. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

RIDGE enters the office. She finds a letter on CAHAN's desk, which angers her. CAHAN enters, letters in hand.

CAHAN

Ah, guten morgen.

RIDGE

You changed what I wrote.

CAHAN

I edited what you wrote.

RIDGE

You changed what I wrote.

CAHAN

Because what you wrote --

RIDGE

Was what?

CAHAN

Not to the point.

RIDGE

What would you know what's "to the point" when it comes to a woman and her body?

CAHAN

Miss Ridge, in the three months you've been here I have trusted your judgment -- mostly hands off, let you say what needed to be said.

RIDGE

And why not?

CAHAN

But I am the editor. I edit. My name on the masthead.

RIDGE

The boss --

CAHAN

And this boss says you can't tell her that having children is a form of suicide for women.

RIDGE

(brandishing letter)

You make it seem that motherhood makes a woman, makes her whole, complete, intact, human --

CAHAN

It does.

RIDGE

And how does it do that?

CAHAN

Because women give life, and without life --

RIDGE

And how do you square that with the Forverts' take on the emancipation of women? Forget that -- let's take this right to the gut: Do you and Mrs. Cahan have any kinder?

CAHAN

That -- is none of your business.

RIDGE

You would've answered yes if you did, so you don't, and you do love Froi Cahan, don't you, of course you do, so would you throw her to the curb like he wants if she doesn't ever? And what if it's not a matter of can't have children for Froi Cahan but I won't, eh? -- there are ways, always have been, that we can keep our bodies our own from men.

CAHAN

That's absurd, she would never --

RIDGE

But you don't know, do you? See? And what if that was what she chose to do, still loving you as she chose to do it -- would you think of her as broken as she kept on loving you?

CAHAN

Looking at you, maybe I am wrong -- maybe not all women give life, can give life --

RIDGE

(with a laugh)

Ah -- attack the [messenger] --

CAHAN

-- maybe that is what the husband you threw over would say about you if I were to ask him. Did you two have children?

RIDGE

I see what the boss [is doing] --

CAHAN

You would've answered yes if you did, so you don't.

RIDGE

It didn't matter to me.

CAHAN

Did it matter to him? Or didn't it matter to you if it mattered to him? What kind of letter from you to the Forverts about Mr. Peter Webster -- that he couldn't keep up with you, match your matchless intellect -- his voice -- "as if a saw were rasping against my bones" -- and so, flick, gone --

They both just stop.

RIDGE

You crossed a line.

CAHAN

I was the second to cross a line.

RIDGE

But you'd agree that we both [crossed] --

CAHAN

I would agree with you completely.

RIDGE

Then we agree on something.

RIDGE goes to exit. CAHAN stops her. He takes a pencil and the letter, and offers it to her.

CAHAN

Go on.

RIDGE sits, takes up the pencil and the letter. She crosses out something, writes something else. She puts the pencil and the letter on CAHAN's desk. He sits, reads, then makes a few changes. RIDGE reads his changes, makes one small change.

CAHAN

Gut.

RIDGE

Agreed.

Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Late at night. Two desks, two sacks of letters, two people reading and making notes. They speak as they read.

CAHAN

You should go home. I should go home.

RIDGE

You could have, a long time ago. The paper is bedded, isn't it?

CAHAN

"Put to bed" -- yes --

RIDGE

So go put yourself to bed. Put your wife to bed, put yourself to bed with her.

CAHAN

Ah, it's late at night, and the talk turns to sex.

RIDGE

So go.

They read -- and read.

CAHAN

I can't.

(shuffles letters)

"The Lonesome Orphan." "A Perplexed Mother."
"Suffering and Lonely." "The Unlucky One."

RIDGE

What?

CAHAN

Too much success with this, this "bintl briv."

RIDGE

You don't like success?

CAHAN

I mean that I wish people didn't have so much -- to write about.

RIDGE

If they're alive, they'll be in pain. It is a heart of darkness out there -- you of all people should know this -- and you did ask them --

CAHAN

I know.

RIDGE

And you can't expect them, once they've a chance to unburden, to keep their burdens nailed to their backs. Believe it or not, this is a good thing.

(laughs)

Though, to be honest, we'd have to be a Jesus Christ tag-team to turn some of this darkness into light -- though I suppose Jesus the Christ is not the preferred model for Hebrew sons.

CAHAN

So you're not Jewish!

RIDGE

Hundreds of letters deep we've gone into this expedition, Mr. Cahan, you and I are in for hundreds, which puts us way beyond that silly "Jew Yes/Jew No" question mark. Besides, "Jew No" is a place in Alaska. That's all right, you don't have to laugh at my geographical humor.

CAHAN looks over at RIDGE, back at the letters, back to RIDGE.

RIDGE

What?

CAHAN

Nothing -- it's just -- nothing.

RIDGE

"Nothing" said like that where I come from always means "something."

CAHAN

You're right -- yes, you and I have been in for hundreds -- so may I show you something?

RIDGE

(smiling)

It's late at night, and the talk turns to sex. Am I going to have to show you mine?

CAHAN

(smiling)

Yes you are, Miss Ridge.

RIDGE

And this from the married man.

CAHAN

No -- well, yes -- but this request come from the writer.

RIDGE

Ah, I love it when people let their "writer" loose. Consider me ready to be shown.

CAHAN pulls out manuscript pages, hands them to RIDGE.

RIDGE

Title -- "The Rise Of" -- but "rise of" what? of whom? You've only given it a long underscore -- you've left out the reference.

CAHAN

It'll be a character's name -- but not important -- that underscore really underscores me.

RIDGE hands the pages back to him.

RIDGE

Read to me -- go on. My ears are better than my eyes for this sort of thing.

CAHAN

All right -- to set the stage for Mr. Underscore: immigrant from Lithuania with four cents in his pocket, now a successful businessman worth two million.

(finds the page)

But this -- from the character's growing up -- a sixteen-year old Talmudic boy alive and terrified by that fact, in chapter two --

RIDGE

Read!

CAHAN

"Satan kept me busy in those days. It was not an easy task to keep one's eyes off the girls. I would even picture myself touching a feminine cheek. But dancing with a girl, or even taking one out for a walk, was out of the question. To be sure, there were young 'modern' Jews in our town who called the girls 'young ladies' and danced with them. To me they were sinners in Israel. And yet I could not think of them without envy. Their social relations with girls piqued my curiosity -- and, I had to admit, things other than mere curiosity. Satan indeed kept me busy in those days."

RIDGE gestures for the page. CAHAN hands it to her.

RIDGE

You're still a busy man.

CAHAN

Yes. This is keeping me rather busy.

RIDGE

When did you start this?

CAHAN

That page? This morning.

RIDGE

No, the whole project.

CAHAN

When you and the letters came in.

RIDGE

Simultaneous foundlings on your doorstep --

CAHAN

No one else has seen any of this.

RIDGE

Not even Mrs. Cahan.

CAHAN

No. What do you think? Does it promise enough?

RIDGE

Well, like a cake, it's the middle that makes the cutting-into work it. These are just notes -- show me the middle when it's been middled out.

CAHAN

(reaching for the page)

Fair enough.

RIDGE

Hang on! Know that I like the ingredients -- I like that your young Talmudic man struggles to keep himself intact against what the stifling conventions tell him is sinful -- I like that your young man wants to follow his heart --

CAHAN

So you do get it --

RIDGE

Of course I do get it. That's why you showed it to me.

RIDGE hands him back the pages.

CAHAN

Yes. Good. Now you.

RIDGE

I have nothing to show.

CAHAN

In your bag. I've seen it -- out and back in, out and back in. You've got notes, too -- from

the letters -- your Waterman has not only been speaking to "Disappointed" and "Greenhorn."

RIDGE

Research --

CAHAN

Thievery? Come on -- you have to show me yours.

RIDGE hesitates, then pulls a leather-covered journal from her bag. CAHAN gestures. RIDGE hands it over.

RIDGE

It's rough, it's -- really, just hand it back -- it's rough, it's raw, it's --

CAHAN

It's like you, then.

RIDGE

No compliments. Please, give it --

CAHAN

(opening)

The Ghetto. A good Jew word.

RIDGE

You should know -- you've used it. Give it back.

CAHAN

Too late --

(turns the page)

-- we're in the ghetto.

RIDGE

Christ --

CAHAN

"No breath stirs the heat
Leaning its ponderous bulk upon the Ghetto
And most on Hester Street -- "

RIDGE

Hell roast you --

CAHAN

"-- The heat...

Nosing in the body's -- "

CAHAN can't read the word.

RIDGE

Overflow --

CAHAN
(overlapping)

"Overflow

Like a beast pressing its great steaming belly
close,
Covering all avenues of air..."

Steaming belly?

RIDGE

Too sensual -- please --

CAHAN

No. No.

RIDGE gives him a salute, but it is not playful.

RIDGE

May the cat eat you, and the devil eat the cat.

CAHAN
(overlapping)

And the devil eat the cat. I know that one.

(CAHAN reads)

"Young women pass in groups,
Their heads are uncovered to the stars,
And they call to the young men and to one another
With a free camaraderie.
Only their eyes are ancient and alone...
Bodies dangle from the fire escapes
Or sprawl over the stoops...
Upturned faces glimmer pallidly --
Moist faces of girls
Like dank white lilies,
And infants' faces with open parched mouths that
suck at the air as at empty teats."

CAHAN leafs through more pages.

CAHAN

Bellies and teats and body's overflow --

RIDGE

Give it back.

CAHAN

I would like to read the middle of the cake.

RIDGE

Just scribbles, notes --

CAHAN

Am I the only one who's seen this?

RIDGE

Who else could I show it to?

CAHAN

I don't know who passes through your life.

RIDGE

Only you -- have seen it. Give. It. Back.

CAHAN hands it back to her.

CAHAN

So, we both have our yet-to-be finished masterpieces.
It could use more Yiddish.

RIDGE

So could yours.

CAHAN

(points to letters)

The whole world could use more Yiddish. The great
steaming belly -- body's overflow --

RIDGE

Straight from the heart of darkness --

CAHAN

But -- this is important, isn't it? -- they're not
hearts of darkness themselves --

RIDGE leans toward CAHAN. He leans toward her.

CAHAN

That we not make them into --

RIDGE

No -- no! Not at all! To love all this -- music
-- to love them --

CAHAN

And to struggle to shape the words -- shape that
love, shape them, into words --

RIDGE

What we are writing: not the unfinished masterpiece
-- what we are doing here -- with these letters
-- that's the true unfinished masterpiece --

CAHAN, perhaps, touches her forearm. RIDGE, perhaps, touches his. They catch each other's eyes -- let go -- catch again. RIDGE leans back. CAHAN leans back. RIDGE stands, starts to neaten the letters.

RIDGE

It's getting late.

CAHAN

Yes -- late. As a good labor unionist, I'm going
to have to start paying you overtime!

(no response from RIDGE)

Yes --

They finish neatening while silence hangs in the air.

CAHAN

At least let me walk you home --

RIDGE

You've not offered before, and I don't see any need
to start offering now.

RIDGE readies herself to leave: jacket, hat, bag.

RIDGE

I can get to Hester Street by myself, thank you
-- I've been doing it all these nights --

CAHAN

The streets aren't safe.

RIDGE

They're safer than temptation.

RIDGE goes to leave, hesitates, turns back.

RIDGE

And how should this be signed, Mr. Cahan?

CAHAN

"Yuke!" [fool]: certainly for me.

RIDGE

Not that -- really, not that at all. Unless -- you name me "fool" as well -- I should go --

RIDGE doesn't go.

RIDGE

We shared words -- only words --

CAHAN

For which we would live and die to set them down right, Lola Ridge. Yes? True?

RIDGE

Yes!

CAHAN

Rare to find someone moving along the same road --

RIDGE

Rare it is.

RIDGE goes to leave one more time, comes back one more time.

RIDGE

I'll take your walk to Hester Street. I'm not giving up the job.

CAHAN grabs a coat and hat.

CAHAN

Good choice. I wouldn't want such a good editor to give up her research.

They exit. Lights and transition.

* * * * *

Busy office. BRODSKY is now reading letters. CAHAN at his desk. RIDGE enters -- new hat, new jacket, same bag, letter in hand. BRODSKY throws her a look, goes on reading -- but keeps an ear cocked. RIDGE takes her hat off.

RIDGE

"Satan indeed kept me busy in those days."

CAHAN

(smiling)

"Young women pass in groups,
Their heads are uncovered to the stars -- "

CAHAN

And so she comes bearing quotes.

RIDGE

And he bears quotes in return.

CAHAN

It's good I have such a good memory since I haven't seen your face since I last saw your face. All I find are these wonderful traces of advice neatly arranged on my morning desk.

CAHAN indicates BRODSKY.

CAHAN

This is Froi Brodsky.

BRODSKY nods -- not friendly, not unfriendly.

CAHAN

Even a night shift isn't enough to keep up -- which is why I now have Froi Brodsky cataloguing for me -- it brings her in a little money. So what about the light of day brings you here?

RIDGE

My pay.

CAHAN hands RIDGE an envelope.

RIDGE

And I bring a letter this time.

RIDGE hands him the envelope in her hand.

RIDGE

It's not a formal notice -- but I'm going to go try some other things to feed -- painting, I used to paint -- most likely factory work --

CAHAN

To get closer --

RIDGE

To it all.

CAHAN

Shouldn't be hard for you to do.

CAHAN hands her a letter.

CAHAN

I have been waiting for this chance -- in person.

RIDGE

Shall we?

CAHAN

Let's.

They open their respective letters, read them, re-fold them, put them away. BRODSKY watches all of this. They stand.

RIDGE

Yes -- well --

CAHAN

Tricky thing, words --

RIDGE

I like how you signed yours.

CAHAN

Yours, too.

RIDGE holds out her hand.

RIDGE

Zol zayn mit mazl.

CAHAN shakes her hand.

CAHAN

Good luck as well.

RIDGE turns to leave.

RIDGE

Sei gesund, Froi Brodsky.

RIDGE leaves, re-reading CAHAN's letter as she exits. CAHAN re-reads her letter. BRODSKY looks at the retreating RIDGE, then at CAHAN.

CAHAN

Froi Brodsky -- did you get good advice with your letter?

BRODSKY

Enough to get me by. Lots of people read the letters. What you said to me got said to a hundred like me, at least.

CAHAN

And yet people still suffer.

BRODSKY

They expect to do that.

CAHAN

And are you getting by?

BRODSKY

I am getting by.

CAHAN

And are the hundred others getting by?

BRODSKY

They read the newspaper, they get by, just like I did. What other choices, Herr Cahan?

CAHAN

I don't know, Froi Brodsky. I don't know.

CAHAN stares. BRODSKY continues to read, throwing a glance at CAHAN. CAHAN gets up.

CAHAN

I'm going for a walk.

BRODSKY watches CAHAN exit. BRODSKY looks at RIDGE's letter on CAHAN's desk, looks back to her own work, looks at the letter.

BRODSKY

If she's done something to hurt him --

BRODSKY gets up, hovers over the letter, looks around, then puts a hand on it, only to take her hand away and leave the letter unread. Then, unable to resist the temptation, she picks up the letter, reads it, puts it down.

BRODSKY

Okay, then -- I guess that's all okay --

BRODSKY goes back to her letters, picks one up and scans it.

BRODSKY

My God -- these poor people --

BRODSKY puts the letter on a certain pile.

BRODSKY

(shaking her head)

"If you want to know what God thinks of money,
look at the people he gives it to" --

BRODSKY picks up another, scans. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Epilogue

RIDGE enters with a book. CAHAN enters with a book. They exchange them. They start to read.

CAHAN

"The Ghetto and Other Poems."

RIDGE

"The Rise of David Levinsky."

BLACKOUT

Biog

DESCRIPTION

Capella Secret, biographer extraordinaire, finds herself on the receiving end of the search for the "Rosebud" that makes a life a biography.

CHARACTERS

- CAPELLA SECREST, biographer
- NIGEL HAMILTON, assistant

SETTING

- Office

* * * * *

The office of CAPELLA SECREST, biographer. She rips a handful of manila file folders from her briefcase, holds them over her head, as if ready to slam them down. Which she does.

NIGEL HAMILTON, her assistant, sits to one side.

NIGEL

So he wouldn't give you --

CAPELLA

The prick.

NIGEL

-- what you wanted?

CAPELLA

The prick!

NIGEL

I see -- the prick.

CAPELLA throws the files one by one on the floor. Papers scatter.

CAPELLA

He said he would give me the diaries -- I need the fucking diaries -- and then he doesn't.

After the first one or two folders, CAPELLA gives NIGEL a look. He kneels down to pick up the folders as she continues to toss them.

NIGEL

Capella --

CAPELLA

Keep the papers straight --

NIGEL

-- this is not the first time someone --

CAPELLA

He said he would!

NIGEL

And you're mad --

CAPELLA

Pissed -- straight --

NIGEL

-- that he changed his mind --

CAPELLA

Operatically pissed --

NIGEL

Because he wouldn't just hand over to a perfect stranger --

CAPELLA

I am not a stranger --

NIGEL

-- the record of his most intimate thoughts --

CAPELLA throws down the last folder. She opens a wooden box on her desk and takes out an intricate derringer.

CAPELLA

He asked me to write the damn thing -- his "legacy"
-- Christ!

NIGEL

He has family.

CAPELLA

His family? They're more the stranger than [I] --

NIGEL

But still --

CAPELLA

You should shoot them all for me --

They pause, look at each other. NIGEL continues cleaning up.

NIGEL

Family, I am sure, he mentions once or twice in those diaries --

He stands up.

NIGEL

Perhaps he is actually being careful about their feelings --

NIGEL puts the folders on the desk.

CAPELLA

I find that unusual. Unnatural.

NIGEL

Could you put that away? Last time --

CAPELLA does not put it away.

CAPELLA

He hired me to write the biography. He knew who he was getting, so why all of a sudden -- Christ! -- why won't -- he give me -- what -- I want --

NIGEL sits down.

NIGEL

What makes you think there's anything in them? Please, don't point -- he doesn't strike me as --

CAPELLA

There's always something --

NIGEL

But everyone you've spoken to -- transcribed by --
(points to himself)
-- lists him a very ordinary man --

CAPELLA

No one is ordinary.

NIGEL

Except he seems to be exactly that: the honest public servant, the loving husband, the mostly okay father -- all in all, we shall not see his like [again] --

CAPELLA

Boring --

NIGEL

For Capella Secrest, biographer extraordinaire --

CAPELLA

For anyone --

NIGEL

But not for him -- for the "him" who pays your bills.

CAPELLA

Are you telling me I'm wrong?

NIGEL

Could you point that somewhere else --

CAPELLA

Nine biographies, my Nigel -- it's not loaded this time --

NIGEL

Appreciate it, though, if [you] --

CAPELLA

The market has spoken --

NIGEL

Being called "The Proctologist" is hardly a nickname that would warm --

CAPELLA

And I get a deep warm feeling when I look at my bank account -- my "proctology" is what makes people buy --

NIGEL

So his forty years of distinguished service and devoted husbandry --

CAPELLA

It's never that --

NIGEL

So his forty years of distinguished service --

CAPELLA

Never.

NIGEL

Why not?

CAPELLA

"Why not?" he asks. Because there's always a Rosebud.

NIGEL

(imitating Orson Welles)

"Rosebud." That Rosebud?

CAPELLA

The least known thing about a person -- the thing really tucked away -- that holds the most truth about [that person] --

NIGEL

No it doesn't --

CAPELLA

That's what they want when they buy "a good read" -- greatness -- feet of clay -- and to see them crash in all their gory glory --

NIGEL

But do you --

CAPELLA

They all do --

NIGEL

But do you believe this -- Rosebud --

CAPELLA points the derringer to the ceiling, cocks the trigger, then fires. NIGEL tries not to jump at the sound, but he does. CAPELLA puts the gun back in the box.

CAPELLA

People's lives are a mess, Nigel -- a laughable mess -- take yours, for instance --

NIGEL

Not worth [taking] --

CAPELLA

But I can come along and make someone's life -- even your life -- make sense -- I find the unseen that explains the seen, I describe the turning points where, at one moment, you're just plain ordinary and the next, you're fucking Paul on the fucking road to Damascus. Does life go like that, really -- Rosebud, pivotal moments, turning points -- who cares? In my books they do, and that's why people love them: they get gossip, they get faults, they get cracks, they get arc, they get to judge -- they get a tale told by not an idiot, signifying something -- the pogroms in Kiev against her grandparents lead to S&M and bondage later that feeds her cutting-edge abstract expressionism -- it all gets puzzled together.

NIGEL

Even if it doesn't, really.

CAPELLA

That's why biography is an art.

NIGEL

But he won't give you your paints, so to speak.

CAPELLA

I'll get them -- there are always workarounds -- someone to lean on, someone to reward --

NIGEL

So his forty years of distinguished service and devoted husbandry --

CAPELLA

To be explained away.

CAPELLA knuckle-raps the box that holds the derringer.

CAPELLA

Are you with me on this?

NIGEL

"This" meaning --

CAPELLA waits.

NIGEL

Of course.

CAPELLA

Good -- now go -- you have work to do for me --
the game is afoot.

Transition. Music.

* * * * *

CAPELLA's office, late. NIGEL enters carrying a package wrapped in brown paper and string. He turns on the desk lamp, puts down the package. He unties it: a bundle of journals. He opens one, leafs through it, does so to several of the others. He sings or hums Aretha Franklin's "Respect".

NIGEL

Oh, the secrets revealed hereby --

He re-ties the bundle, picks it up.

NIGEL

Better put you to bed -- she'll want to pump you
dry in the morning.

NIGEL either goes off-stage, opens a locked desk drawer, or opens a safe. In either case, he finds and reads a couple of manila folders. Intently.

NIGEL

That bitch. That bitch.

He reads some more.

NIGEL

How did she find out about -- Who told her that?
-- I don't even remember --

Sputters to a stop. He rearranges the papers, closes the folders, put them back, comes back to the desk. He thinks. He thinks. He turns off the lamp.

Transition. Music.

* * * * *

CAPELLA rips a manuscript out of her briefcase, holds it over her head, as if ready to slam it down. Which she does.

NIGEL sits to one side.

CAPELLA

You think I wouldn't find this?

NIGEL

I didn't make it hard to find -- just like the folders on me --

CAPELLA

Nobody will publish it.

NIGEL

Somebody will. You can't get to everybody.

CAPELLA

"Shoot The Widow" --

NIGEL

"Lying About [Life]" --

CAPELLA

The title?

NIGEL

From you --

CAPELLA

I never [said] --

NIGEL

When a famous person dies, you called everyone holding onto a piece of information the "widow" -- and of course shooting them -- an impulse not unknown to you -- would make it easier to get what you wanted.

CAPELLA

Who'd you shoot?

NIGEL

Didn't have to. Many who had been -- touched -- by you parted willingly with their scraps. Though I am proud of the birth certificate --

CAPELLA opens the derringer box, takes out the gun.

NIGEL

-- that took some real sleuthing -- and so, according to your Rosebud, your being illegitimate -- the bastard -- explains why you are [such] --

CAPELLA

None of this is ever going to get out.

NIGEL

It may be too late.

CAPELLA walks to NIGEL, presses the gun against his head. NIGEL doesn't move. CAPELLA waits. Then she pulls the trigger. NIGEL falls to the ground, bleeding but alive and in pain. She tosses the gun back into the box.

CAPELLA

The powder charge in the blank certainly won't do damage to a thick skull like yours.

NIGEL, bloodied, struggles to his feet. They stare at each other.

CAPELLA

It's well-written.

(points to wound)

Meant to be shocking, not deadly. I mean it about the writing.

NIGEL

I've been learning from the best, apparently --
Christ, my ear --

CAPELLA

Wounds around the head always bleed the most. A
lot of blood in a small area. And the research
-- sourced, defensible. Don't wipe -- So what
am I going to do with you, my well-trained Nigel?
How do we write up the life we're sharing at this
moment?

They stare at each other.

NIGEL

Could I get a bandage first?

CAPELLA

Would you like some help?

NIGEL

From renowned Capella Secrest? Whose last name,
if swapped around, spells "secrets."

CAPELLA

I have never noticed that.

NIGEL laughs. They stare at each other.

NIGEL

I will bandage myself, thank you. And then we'll
talk.

CAPELLA closes the lid of the derringer box.

CAPELLA

I think that would be in order.

NIGEL goes to leave but watches CAPELLA. CAPELLA opens up
the derringer, shakes out the casing, replaces it with another
round, and shuts the gun. She slips it into her coat pocket.
She waits, then takes it out of her pocket, puts it away, shuts
the box. She notices NIGEL. They look at each other -- perhaps
they smile.

The Body Electric*

CHARACTERS

- WALT WHITMAN
- HENRY SMITH

SETTING

- Civil War battlefield
- Union Square Hospital, Washington D.C.

TIME

- Sometime during the Civil War

Inspired by the short story Every Night for a Thousand Years by Chris Adrian, Walt Whitman's Specimen Days, and various letters, journals, poems, and biographies.

* * * * *

On an army cot set center stage lies WALT WHITMAN, a young man with a short but thick beard, non-descript clothing. He is lying on his left side, facing the audience, asleep, his hat on the floor. The lighting should be soft, as if from a strong moon coming in through a window to his left. A voice, beginning softly, speaks to him. It grows louder.

VOICE

Walter, don't let them take my leg. Don't let them take my leg. Don't let them take my leg. Walter, don't let them take my leg!

WHITMAN wakes up quickly, sits upright on the bed.

WHITMAN

I won't, Hank. It will not go to the deadhouse. It will not be exiled.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a letter, looks at it, puts it back. He looks at the moon light.

WHITMAN

I will never leave this place.

The sound of artillery crashes, musket fire -- loud, assaultive. The lights bump to full, very bright. WHITMAN exits stage right and comes back on with a wounded man, HENRY SMITH. SMITH's arm

is around WHITMAN's shoulders, and his left leg is damaged. He helps him to the cot. SMITH sits.

SMITH

So there I had the gun cocked at the surgeon, him standing there with the saw hanging from his hand, his assistants looking like hog stickers, slathered in blood. "You ain't takin' this leg," I told 'em. "The rebs didn't get it. You ain't gettin' it." Those chopping butchers had no right to my leg. I aimed it right at his heart, his second-most vital organ. He put the saw down. Said, "Off or on doesn't matter to me. Keep it the way God attached it."

WHITMAN

(overlapping)

"The way God attached it."

SMITH

Told the story already, haven't I?

WHITMAN

Doesn't matter. I like to hear it.

The sound of a train whistle and the start up of an engine. The sound fades down to underscoring. Over the next lines WHITMAN and SMITH move as if they're being jostled by a train ride. SMITH lays out on the cot, head stage right. WHITMAN kneels at his head.

SMITH

Oh, God, here we go.

(clutches his leg, grabs WHITMAN's hand)

Oh, Christ! Oh, Christ!

(screams in pain)

I jammed the gun right in their faces. Damn the shite in his eyes! Not my leg. Hold. Hold. The pain is an angel in my heart. Lift me, lift me. Oh, Christ! Oh, Christ!

All through this WHITMAN whispers comforts to him, massages his temple with his free hand.

SMITH

Keep my eyes long -- that's what you told me. Look deep. Breathe. Breathe.

WHITMAN

Sing, dear boy.

SMITH

Can't sing. Tin ear. Leave the goddamn leg right where you found it!

WHITMAN

Sing.

SMITH

(sings tunelessly)

"Oh Susanna, oh don't you cry for me / For I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee."

WHITMAN

(chimes in on the last line)

"From Alabama with a banjo on my knee."

Lights dim with the two of them singing. Railroad sounds out.

* * * * *

SMITH lies sleeping on the cot. WHITMAN moves downstage right. He is talking as if in conversation with someone.

WHITMAN

I try to visit all the hospitals, wherever they are. Yes, some pretty strange places where they have been forced to bivouac the patients -- the Patent Office was one of the oddest. Young boys lying in front of the Declaration of Independence or General Washington's camp equipment. It more than satisfies the voice of irony.

Oh, I bring fruit and candy to them, read letters and newspapers, hand out tobacco -- there is a powerful craving for that, though I've never found myself drawn to it. Sing. Pray. I am not religious myself -- though I sometimes sit in the chapel and attend to the services.

WHITMAN pulls a small leather notebook out of his pocket.

WHITMAN

I have been keeping a compendium of the names.

(riffles the pages)

So many names. Each a poem.

I do it because they are so -- precious -- to me.
Momentary kindnesses to smooth their anguish.
And mine. Whitman -- my last name. Walter.
From Brooklyn. I came to Falmouth looking for my
brother -- yes, he's still alive. It was a longer
distance than you think.

WHITMAN moves to SMITH. SMITH sits up, looking feverish,
damned.

SMITH

I beat that God-fart, typhoid, right here in the
hospital. I had my lawyer, Mr. 45-caliber Colt,
argue my case before the doctor. But they still
want to take it, Walt. I can't let them.

(stares vacantly for a beat)

Lines of command. You're it.

(tries to stand)

I've got to get out.

WHITMAN

You should let the doctors win this one. Your leg
is not good. It is outflanking you, it is killing
you.

SMITH

You are my charger. We must advance.

WHITMAN

Will you trust my judgment?

SMITH

Yes.

WHITMAN

Give me your arm. I'll take you away.

They stand and move downstage left. The lights become softer,
as if a winter night under gaslight. WHITMAN sits SMITH down
on the ground, sits beside him. SMITH is obviously delirious,
barely consciousness.

WHITMAN

Rest, dove. Lay your head on my shoulder.

SMITH falls asleep, fitfully, his damaged leg straight out in front of him.

WHITMAN

In certain places out West -- I've read this -- sacramental places, there is no sickness, no dissolution. You can bury a young boy, plant him deep under an oak tree, and in just one day -- so the chronicles tell -- his hand will sprout, five fingers stabbing the sunlight! And if you grasp that hand and pull, pull with the heartsong of a true friend, a living body comes to harvest. In these places, death has no veto over friendship.

By this time SMITH is visibly agitating in his sleep.

WHITMAN

If we are to go west, Henry, now is the time to go.

He stands and pulls SMITH up to him; SMITH is now unconscious. WHITMAN cradles and carries him to the cot; he lays him down with SMITH's head stage right. The lights change to a harsh white light, very aseptic, tightly focused on the cot. The lights should be set in three parts: one part to cover the lower half of SMITH, one part to cover his upper half, and a focused spot on his head.

SMITH

(murmuring in his delirium)

Walter, don't let them take my leg. Don't let them take my leg. Don't let them take my leg. Walter, don't let them take my leg!

WHITMAN

I won't, Hank. It will not go to the deadhouse. It will not be exiled.

WHITMAN speaks as if to someone standing near the bed.

WHITMAN

Be quick with your cuts, doctor. Be swift in the division.

WHITMAN kneels at the head of the cot, his hands massaging SMITH's temples. The light should dim to match WHITMAN's words: first, the lower half of SMITH's body, then the upper half. A final light on WHITMAN's hands, then that out as well. As it fades, WHITMAN kisses SMITH's forehead and places SMITH's hands gently across his chest.

WHITMAN

(as the lights dim)

"The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand...some are so young, / Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad, / (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested, / Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)"*

WHITMAN moves to downstage left, in the same wintry light as before. He takes the letter out of his pocket. As he does this, SMITH rises and stands there in the dim shadow watching WHITMAN. WHITMAN half-turns to look at SMITH, but it is clear WHITMAN cannot see him.

WHITMAN

I will never leave this place.

WHITMAN speaks to the audience, exhibits the letter.

WHITMAN

Dear friends, I thought you would like to know something of the last days of your son, Henry Smith. He behaved like a noble boy. He did not lie among strangers. He had someone who gave him your dying kiss.

WHITMAN puts away the letter.

He kneels.

He then mimes as if he were reaching deep into a hole in the ground, his hand extended and ready to grasp. He should do this slowly, timing it to SMITH's speech.

SMITH

"Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not save you, swift was your death, / I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet again.)"***

WHITMAN

(overlapping)

"We shall surely meet again."

WHITMAN strains and strains to reach SMITH's hand. SMITH watches, then turns and exits.

WHITMAN continues to strain, to reach. He takes his jacket off, reaches -- not enough.

WHITMAN

"Stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!"***

He takes his shirt off, reaches -- not enough.

WHITMAN

"We use you...we plant you permanently within us."

He takes his undershirt off, reaches -- not enough.

WHITMAN

"...we love you -- there is perfection in you also..."

His breathing labors. Still not enough. Still not enough. Still not enough.

Lights dim on WHITMAN.

BLACKOUT

* From "The Wound-Dresser", Drum-Taps

** From "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night", Drum-Taps

*** From "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

Booger

CHARACTERS

- Paul, mid-40s but remembering back

SETTING

- Sunday morning, Communion

TIME

- Before the Catholic Mass started using English

MISCELLANEOUS

- Black alb and white surplice for a Catholic altar boy
- Small table or stool to one side holding a paten, small plate of Communion wafers, a bell, rosary beads

* * * * *

In the dark, a waft of Gregorian chant. Lights up on PAUL, standing dressed as an altar boy.

I can date my conversion from a rainy Sunday in October during a time before folk masses, when the Soviet Union was godless, when the Liturgy was anesthetically administered in Latin, and all boys, to the nuns, were brazen anthropoids and all girls were angels without any rebates.

PAUL falls to his knees.

I was a pious little prick back then: altar boy, Knights of Christ, CCD prize-winner for blatting back the Catechism. I had my warts, of course -- but like everyone else I used them to polish my image because in the lacquer-smelling dark of the Saturday confessional, I could pump up the value of my spiritual stock by a penance spoken in the velvet throatiness of remorse. To be free of sin, one had to sin -- and I did just enough to get myself cleansed without the inconvenience of being redeemed. In other words, I was a proper Catholic boy -- ragged but definitely salvageable, just the way the nuns and priests liked to tenderize their young males.

PAUL rises, picks up the bell.

But at the age of 15 -- that smoldering inconvenient age -- I discovered religious angst -- or, more accurately, it found me. A priest teaching my literature class gave me Samuel Beckett to read

(rings the bell)

-- and I pored over Beckett as the priests and nuns and Christian brothers, like a Papal press gang, went whacking the bushes for recruits. I tried to convince myself that God had placed a special "come hither" phone call to me --

(rings the bell)

-- but then up popped Camus to clear the palate. I tried to squeeze the oil of vocation out of myself --

(rings the bell)

-- but Sartre closed the bung-hole. By now, it was only a matter of time before 200-proof Marx and Engels heaved their bulk onto my doorstep. I asked for a sign, some guidance, as to what I should do.

Rings the bell.

The universe works in mysterious ways.

PAUL kneels again.

In those days, we fasted before Communion -- not like Ramadan or any of those Jewish celebrations we were taught to secretly despise as heathen -- just a matter of a few hours, really -- a petite mortification of the flesh. Except that I was in high-octane anxiety about the very roots of my being. No, worse than that -- I suspected that everything -- those undigested Catechismal verses, the munched-on penances, the Pope's finger-wagging encyclicals -- was evaporating. Deliquescing. So I fasted from Friday fish dinner through Sunday Mass: no nibble, nosh, or guzzle. I figured if Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior could quest in the desert for forty days, I could at least shrive my soul for forty hours or so.

PAUL stands.

By Saturday night I was glassy-eyed with hunger -- a 15-year old boy's metabolism has no religious tolerance whatsoever. But I fasted on.

PAUL picks up the rosary beads.

I took laps around the rosary beads, read through the hagiographies of the most obscure saints possible, and, above all, tried to reach that empty-headedness I had always been taught was the spine of faith: a voiding out, a giving-up, a giving-over. All this for a deity who, in the last 30 hours, had not once bothered to give me a friendly slap on the wing-bone and say, "Go, boy!" He was tough to crack.

PAUL puts the beads down.

Sunday. I got the bells that day, which meant the other guy helped the priest out at the communion rail. I am kneeling there, the carpet nubble nagging my kneecaps, my temples pulsing like snake's tongue, my soul welting up like someone whacking your ass with a wet towel -- and still no sign. No sign. And for the first time, actual doubt -- not just vague suspicions but real excavating doom -- nicked a small tear in my soul's fabric: what if -- ? what if -- ? And suddenly at my right hand sat Estragon and at my left Vladimir, and I knew I was the moon hanging in that bone-dry sky. And I then knew this: I had been tricked. (I can't say if this vision was simply due to glucose-deficiency, but who's to say that low blood sugar can't lead to knowledge?)

PAUL kneels.

So the priest and his minion are "Corpus Christi-ing" along the communion rail and I'm wondering how I can exit stage left as quickly as possible. Distracted, jittery, I unconsciously reached up -- I'd done this a thousand times, and confessed it in equal measure -- I unconsciously reached up, dug a good booger out of my nose, and put it in my mouth. Well, almost in, because as I did it, as I became aware of the finger's arc, I realized my sign had arrived.

PAUL stands. He takes the paten in one hand. He stretches out his arms, the paten in one hand and the forefinger of his other hand extended as if it has a booger on it. As he speaks, he brings the paten and the booger slowly towards his mouth.

If I ate it, I broke my fast, that carefully suffered homage to my past beliefs. And thus no Communion, thus no common union. If I refused it -- well, if I refused, then that meant I agreed to agree with everything, regardless of how much it defied my own being, forever. Forever. Who was I going to honor?

At this point, the paten is under his chin and his finger is at his mouth.

What do you think I did?

PAUL looks back-and-forth from finger to paten.

I had to make a decision quickly -- they'd all been fed, and the priest was going to turn to me, the communion wafer moving toward me like a slow-motion bullet. The body of Christ -- or my own body? Which one?

PAUL opens his mouth, pauses, puts his finger in his mouth, closes it, and pulls it out with a pop. He also takes the paten and holds it against the back of his head so that it looks like he has a halo.

My name was not going to be listed among the saints.

PAUL takes the paten down and puts it on the table. He begins taking off the garments. He folds and puts them on the table.

I kept my eyes down when the priest came to me. I'm sure he was puzzled. I wasn't. My finger tingled, the pointing finger, the finger of index. It was then that I began my conversion -- into the delicious and absurd mayhem of the actual world, into its nurturing chaos and anxiety -- in short, into my own air-born and doubt-ridden and without-a-net freedom. I dropped out of the altar-boy line-up, politely refused the priest's brochures about the Trappists, enrolled at the public high school -- that den of iniquity! -- , and secularized my sideburns. Some people saw this as a tragic loss of my heritage; I saw it as winning by a nose.

PAUL stands in his street clothes.

I really didn't have a choice. Actually, that's not true. I had been given the best choice of all -- free and untaxed, with no damnation to pay, no one's nose out of infinite joint -- exactly the way a god should make the offer. If I was going to pay through the nose, then I ought to have ownership of all the air that passes through it. And a gift like that was nothing to turn my nose up at, an insight as plain as the nose on my face. Was this an act of adolescent rebellion, or was it an act of mature faith? Look into your own hearts -- you will know the answer.

PAUL makes the Vulcan sign with his right hand.

And may the force -- the farce, the fierce, the finest -- be with you.

BLACKOUT

Only the Dead Know Brooklyn

adapted from
Only the Dead Know Brooklyn
by Thomas Wolfe

CHARACTERS

- MAN 1
- MAN 2
- MAN 3
- MAN 4

Age is not important, but older is better.

SETTING

- Brooklyn, mid-1930s

MISCELLANEOUS

- Accents: As much as possible, the language of Wolfe's original is used, using Wolfe's attempt to capture a "Brooklyn" accent.
- The stage manager (or a stage hand) will be needed to bring on several items mentioned in the script.

* * * * *

Houselights stay up as the play begins. Stage manager brings ghost light onto the empty stage, checks it, leaves. [Sound design?]

As the stage manager does this, MAN 1, MAN 2, MAN 3, and MAN 4, who are in the audience, stand. They speak to each other, but they also speak to the audience: friendly, calm. After a line or two, they can move into the aisles and walk around to speak directly to the audience.

MAN 1

Now is the winter of our discontent --

MAN 4

Go, brother.

MAN 1

-- made glorious by this month of --

MAN 2

Excellent beginnin'.

MAN 3

Shakespeare could't'na said it better.

MAN 1

Yeah -- but which month is it?

MAN 2

You got me there -- I don' know.

MAN 3

Me neither -- you?

MAN 4 shakes his head, then asks the audience around him -- and keeps asking until he gets an answer from someone -- can ad lib to encourage people to respond.

MAN 4

You? You? It's okay to answer -- I'm harmless.

(gets an answer)

You sure? How sure are you? Well, there you go -- it's [whatever the month].

(thanks whomever answered)

Thanks ["doll," if woman; "buddy," if man] -- that's a great help to us.

(to the others)

You can always depend upon the livin'.

MAN 2

Enough said.

MAN 3

'Cause, you see, we are the dead.

MAN 4

Yeah, we are.

MAN 1

I don't think they believe you.

MAN 2

It's true -- we are the dead, ain't we?

The others acknowledge the truth of the statement.

MAN 1

This is how we dead look.

MAN 3

We look like you.

MAN 4

(to audience)

Do you realize how many acres of the dead we got in Brooklyn?

MAN 2

A veritable necropolis we live in the middle of.

MAN 3

(whispering)

I think it's necropolis.

MAN 2

Whatever.

(to audience)

My point is --

MAN 4

Your point is on the top of your head.

MAN 2

(ignoring him)

My point is -- anybody?

During the next lines, MAN 1 improvise to encourage the audience members to speak.

MAN 1

(to an audience member)

Say this to him so we can get on with it: "Your point is -- " Go on. You can use the accent if you want. "Your point is -- "

(audience member speaks)

"That -- " Go on.

(audience member speaks)

"The livin' and the dead in Brooklyn" -- go on.

(audience member speaks)

MAN 2

He's/she's good. Bring it home.

MAN 1

"Are just two sides of the same plug nickel."

(audience member speaks)

Thanks.

MAN 4

It's true --

MAN 3

We're among you all the time.

MAN 1

All the time.

MAN 4

And we don' look that much different than you -- or you -- or you over there.

(indicating a female audience member)

Of course, she looks a lot better than any of us.

MAN 3

(indicating male audience member)

Him, too.

MAN 1

Both of them separate look better than the four of us put together.

MAN 2

(to both audience members)

One of the blessings of bein' alive is lookin' alive. You two keep it goin', okay, for as long as you can work it, all right?

MAN 3

(to audience)

It's hard keepin' up the looks when you're dead. Trust us.

MAN 1

Hey, maybe the two of you could work it together if you ain't otherwise engaged. That'd be one way to keep yourselves alive, eh?

MAN 2

We also find that the months don't matter much to us.

MAN 1

"Much," that is --

MAN 2

True -- I did say "don't matter much."

MAN 1

So you see, time's not completely nothin', you see, and we can't help it --

MAN 4

Because part of us still, you know, is made up a what made us up when we was livin' like you --

The MEN touch audience members to indicate their still-solid connection to them -- shake hands, hand on shoulders, etc.

MAN 3

Like all of you, we're still made up of part alive, part dead --

MAN 4

Just like you -- part alive, part dead.

MAN 3

Too too solid flesh --

MAN 1

And so when the winter of our discontent is made glorious by this month' of -- damn!

(asks audience member)

Give a guy a hand -- what's the month' again?

(gets the month)

Bless you.

MAN 2

[Echoes the name of the month]

MAN 1

Thanks.

MAN 2

Comes from the point on my head.

MAN 1

In this month the desolation of our souls long-
drowned in the green fire and radiance --

MAN 3

Of Cypress Hills --

MAN 2

And Green-Wood --

MAN 4

And Evergreen --

MAN 1

And every elsewhere in the Brooklyn acres of the
Brooklyn graveyards --

MAN 2

We grope and crawl and scuttle to come back to
watch you all --

MAN 3

All of you tryin' to know Brooklyn through and
through -- again --and again --

MAN 1

Like we did.

MAN 2

Still do.

MAN 4

Brooklyn standin' in for the hole world --

MAN 3

And the hole world makin' its way through Brooklyn.

MAN 4

Walt Whitman couldn'ta said it better.

MAN 3

Oh yeah he did: "Stand up, beautiful hills of
Brooklyn!"

MAN 2

"We use you...we plant you permanently within us."

MAN 4

"...we love you -- there is perfection in you also..."

MAN 3

Amen, Walt.

MAN 1

And we have no way to know life but Walt's way of knowin' it.

MAN 4

Comin' back --

MAN 3

Reconnectin' --

MAN 1

Keepin' our family within your family --

The MEN start moving towards the stage.

MAN 2

An' neither do all of you, if you think about it -- about knowin' life. What other choice you got for knowin' except to keep comin' back to us for some help with knowin' what's what and where's where? Like we come to you.

MAN 3

Especially when it comes to knowin' the-world-otherwise-known-as-this-goddam Brooklyn.

The stage manager retrieves the ghost light, then moves on four plain wooden chairs set upstage. The MEN move on to the stage. MAN 1 takes a newspaper out of his pocket -- it can simply be blank sheets of newsprint folded like a newspaper. MAN 2 stands downstage, MAN 3 approaches MAN 2. MAN 4 stands in the background; he carries something working-class, e.g., a tool belt.

[NOTE: In the short story, Wolfe describes MAN 3 this way: " I sees dis big guy standin' deh -- dis is duh foist I eveh see of him. Well, he's lookin' wild, y'know, and I can see dat he's had plenty, but still he's holdin' it; he talks good, and he's walkin' straight enough."]

House lights out.

Something to indicate that this is a train platform -- the stage manager could simply come out with a placard that says, "A Train Platform, Brooklyn, 1930s."

MAN 3
(to MAN 2)

Hey.

MAN 2
Yeah?

MAN 3
Do you know Brooklyn?

MAN 1
There's no guy livin' that knows Brooklyn.

MAN 3
Yeah?

MAN 1
Yeah. Only the dead know Brooklyn through an' through because only the dead got the kind of lifetime it'd take to find a way around this goddam town.

MAN 3
Yeah?

MAN 1
Yeah.

MAN 3 ponders for a bit, then turns to MAN 2.

MAN 3
How do you get t' Eighteent' Avenoo an' Sixty-sevent' Street?

MAN 2
Jesus! You got me, chief. I ain't been here long myself. Where is the place? Out in Flatbush?

MAN 3
Nah -- Bensonhurst. But I was never there before. How do you get there?

MAN 2

You got me, chief. Do either of youse guys know where it is?

MAN 4 start walking forward, but MAN 1 cuts him off. MAN 4 does not like this.

MAN 1

Sure.

MAN 4

Hey!

MAN 3

(to MAN 1)

You sure you're sure? You weren't so sure before.

MAN 1

Maybe I'm one of the dead that knows this goddamn town.

MAN 4

Maybe the dead oughta shut up, then.

MAN 3, rather than being annoyed at the interruption, watches the two men duel with interest and without judgment.

MAN 1

(ignoring MAN 4)

You take the Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local there, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid, and then walk down four blocks. That's all you got to do.

MAN 4

G'wan! Watcha talkin' about?

(to MAN 3)

The guy is crazy!

MAN 3

Who knows?

MAN 2

Sounds okay to me.

MAN 4

I'll tell you what you do. You change to the West End line at Toity-sixt, Get off at Noo Utrecht an' Sixteent' Avenoo. Walk two blocks over, then four blocks up, an' you'll be right there.

MAN 1

Oh, yeah? Who told you so much?

MAN 2

Now, fellahs --

MAN 3 puts a hand on MAN 2 to keep him quiet. He stares, fascinated in a dumbfounded sort of way.

MAN 1

How long you been living' here?

MAN 4

All my life.

MAN 1

Musta been a short life if that's the best advice you can give this fellah.

MAN 4

I was born in Williamsburg --

MAN 1

My condolences.

MAN 2

-- and I can tell you things about this town you never heard of.

MAN 1

Which you probably make up all by yourself at night while you're cuttin' out you paper dolls.

MAN 4

You think you're pretty wise, ain't you?

MAN 1

The birds ain't usin' my head for Lincoln's statue yet, which means I'm wise enough to know a phony when I see one.

MAN 2

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

And you're so wise that someone's goin' t'bust
your wise nose some day --

MAN 2

(to MAN 3)

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

That's how wise you are.

MAN 1

Someone musta busted your nose all the way back
to your brain --

MAN 2

Train's here.

MAN 1

'Cause ya got snot for smarts.

MAN 1 and MAN 4 square off, ready to explode.

MAN 3

(to MAN 2)

Does this go in the right general direction?

MAN 2

I think so.

MAN 3 takes MAN 1 gently by the arm and onto the train. Lights change to just downstage center. MAN 2 and MAN 4 bring down two chairs, then move back to their own chairs in the shadows upstage.

As the scene progresses, the lights become tighter and tighter on MAN 1 and MAN 3.

MAN 1

(thinks he's talking to MAN 4)

All right, mugg! I'm sorry I can't stay to take
care of you, but I'll be seein' you sometime, I
hope, out in the cemetery.

Suddenly, MAN 1 looks around him and sees that he is on the train with MAN 3 -- surprised, confused. He checks -- this is his train.

MAN 1

This is my train, all right. How'd you know that?

They sit. MAN 1 folds his newspaper, puts it in his pocket. He blusters a little to regain himself.

MAN 1

Yeah, well I'm sorry I couldn't stay to take care of that mugg for you -- maybe I'll be seein' him sometime, like out in the cemetery.

(regains composure)

What number are you looking for in Bensonhurst, pal? If know the address --

MAN 3

Oh, I'm not lookin' for no one. I don't know no one out there.

MAN 1

Then why?

MAN 3

I'm just goin' out to see the place. I like the sound of the name.

MAN 1

Bensonhurst? Watcha tryin' to hand me?

MAN 3

I'm tellin' you the truth. I like to go look at places with nice names like that.

MAN 1

Bensonhurst?

MAN 3

I like to go look at all kinds of places.

MAN 1

How'd you know there was such a place if you never been there before?

MAN 3

I got the map.

MAN 1

A map?

MAN 3

No, the map.

MAN 3 pulls out a map, which can be a blank sheet of newsprint -- but make it large. MAN 1 looks at it, fascinated. He traces his finger on the map.

MAN 1

You got the map. Look at that -- the whole goddam place all marked out -- Canarsie an' East New York and Flatbush, Bensonhurst, South' Brooklyn, the Heights, Bay Ridge, Greenpoint -- the whole goddam layout, you got it right there on the map.

MAN 3

Like I said, the map.

MAN 1

Like a map of the world. You been to any of dose places?

MAN 3

I been to most of' em. I was down in Red Hook just last night.

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook!

MAN 3

I was just walked aroun'.

MAN 1

Just walked aroun'?

MAN 3

Lookin' at things.

MAN 1

Nothing happened?

MAN 3

A coupla drunks in one of the places started a fight --

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook! You gotta keep out of there. It's a good place to keep out of.

MAN 3

Why?

MAN 1

Jesus! What'm I gonna do with a guy as -- as -- You just might get lost down there, that's all.

MAN 3

(smiling)

I got a map.

MAN 1

A map! In Red Hook? Jesus!

MAN 3

You say "Jesus" a lot.

MAN 1

Do I?

MAN 3

Yeah.

MAN 1

Yeah, well, I don't know why -- he's no friend of mine.

MAN 3

(pointing to map)

How long you figure would it take Jesus to know Brooklyn?

MAN 1

You get that idea out right now. Not Jesus or you or nobody ain't eveh gonna get to know Brooklyn. I been livin' here all my life an' don't know all, so how do you expect --

MAN 3

The map.

MAN 1

You ain't gonna get to know Brooklyn with no map.

MAN 3

If you got the map, you got the map.

MAN 1

Don't try ta sell me no loaves and fishes, all right? Sheesh! "If Jesus knew -- " Sheesh!

MAN 3 folds the map but doesn't put it away.

MAN 3

Can you swim?

MAN 1

What?

MAN 3

Can you swim? Can you swim good?

MAN 1

Like a fish. I'm a regular fish in the water. What stop are we comin' to?

MAN 3

What would you do if you saw a man drownin'?

MAN 1

I'd jump in an' pull him out. What stop --

MAN 3

Ever saved anyone out here?

MAN 1

In Brooklyn? You can't drown in Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Never?

MAN 1

You gotta drown somewhere else --

MAN 3

That's not what the map says.

MAN 1 keeps looking around.

MAN 1

What frickin' station are we at? What's the goddam station?

MAN 3

You gotta get off?

MAN 1

I gotta get off.

MAN 3

You don't wanta travel with me.

MAN 1

Can't -- my station's comin' up. You'll get there -- just stay on this line.

MAN 3

So -- you kinda like been my map, haven't'cha?

MAN 1

Yeah -- your map -- great -- glad to be of service. I never been a map before. Yeah, here it comes.

MAN 3

This your station?

MAN 1

Yeah.

MAN 3

This your real station?

MAN 1

It's the one I'm gettin' off at, wise guy.

MAN 3

Sure you don't wanta travel with me?

MAN 1

Can't -- gotta go --

MAN 1 prepares to get off. MAN 2 and MAN 4 come downstage. MAN 3 slaps the map against his hand.

MAN 3

Remember this --

MAN 1

(hoarse whisper)

C'mon, c'mon --

MAN 3

I'll travel with you anyway --

MAN 1

Come on!

MAN 3

Savin' and drownin' --

The stop comes.

MAN 3

That's the map I'm gonna give to you.

As MAN 1 steps through the door, MAN 2 and MAN 4 lift him so that it appears that he floats out of the train.

MAN 3

That's the map you're gonna need -- that's the map they all need.

They circle MAN 1 upstage back to downstage, touching him down and then lifting him up again until they reach the edge of the stage, which is where they leave him. MAN 2 and MAN 4 go into the house.

MAN 3 picks up the chairs and hands them to the stage manager, who has come back on with the ghost light. The stage manager lines up the chairs upstage, backs to the audience, as if they were headstones, then puts something on them to show that they are, in fact, headstones. Then the stage manager stands behind the ghost light.

MAN 3 comes into the audience.

MAN 1 is alone on stage, afraid, with the ghost light and the headstones. He looks at the headstones, the light, the

audience in darkness. As he names places, he points to different sections of the audience.

MAN 1

Jesus! Red. Hook. Christ! Flat. Bush. Jesus!
Canar. Sie. Christ! The. Heights. East. Noo
Yawk. Bay. Ridge.

MAN 1 teeters on the stage edge.

MAN 1

(in a rush)

You take the Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at
Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local
there, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-
toid, and then walk down four blocks. That's all
anyone's got to do.

The house lights come up slowly as MAN 1 speaks his next lines, and as he speaks, he casts furtive glances at the headstones and ghost light.

MAN 1

(to audience)

Can any of you swim? I lied to the guy -- I can't
swim. Not a lick. Any of you swim good enough?
Can any of you give me some help here? A hand,
maybe? Coupla hands? I ain't got the map, and I
can't swim so good.

MAN 2, 3, and 4 each select someone from the audience close to MAN 2's position. They can each ad lib something along the lines of "Would you give us a hand?" They should feel free to joke with the audience members.

They get each audience member to give MAN 2 a hand as he is led back to his original seat in the audience, and then they are escorted back to their seats with an ad libbed "Thank you." Again, humor is good.

Now all the MEN are back to their original positions.

MAN 1

Thanks. Thanks. I made it.

(to MAN 3)

Okay. I made it. Okay.

MAN 3

Now is the winter --

MAN 2

-- of our discontent --

MAN 4

-- made glorious by --

(to MAN 1)

C'mon.

MAN 1

By this month of [name the month] --

MAN 3

"And you that shall cross -- "

MAN 1

Go, Walt.

MAN 2

" -- from shore to shore years hence -- "

MAN 4

" -- are more to me, and more in my meditations
-- "

MAN 1

" -- than you might suppose."

MAN 3

Go Walt Whitman.

MAN 2

Go Brooklyn.

MAN 4

Thanks to the livin'.

MAN 3

And thanks to the dead.

MAN 1

And thanks to us all.

The stage manager switches off the ghost light. The house lights go out. End of play.

* * * * *

VERSION USING WOLFE'S LANGUAGE

Houselights stay up as the play begins. Stage manager brings ghost light onto the empty stage, checks it, leaves. [Sound design?]

As the stage manager does this, MAN 1, MAN 2, MAN 3, and MAN 4, who are in the audience, stand. They speak to each other, but they also speak to the audience: friendly, calm. After a line or two, they can move into the aisles and walk around to speak directly to the audience.

MAN 1

Now is the winter of our discontent --

MAN 4

Go, bruddeh.

MAN 1

-- made glorious by dis mont' of --

MAN 2

Excellent beginnin'.

MAN 3

Shakespeare could't'na said it bettah.

MAN 1

Yeah -- but which mont' is it?

MAN 2

Yuh got me dere -- I don' know.

MAN 3

Me neider -- you?

MAN 4 shakes his head, then asks the audience around him -- and keeps asking until he gets an answer from someone -- can ad lib to encourage people to respond.

MAN 4

You? You? It's okay to answer -- I'm hahmless.

(gets an answer)

Yuh sure? How sure are yuh? Well, dere you go -- it's [whatever the month].

(thanks whomever answered)
T'anks ["doll," if woman; "buddy," if man] -- dat's
a great help to us.

(to the others)
Yuh can always depend upon duh livin'.

MAN 2

'Nuff said.

MAN 3

'Cause, yuh see, we are duh dead.

MAN 4

Yeah, we are.

MAN 1

I don't t'ink they believe yuh.

MAN 2

It's true -- we are duh dead, ain't we?

The others acknowledge the truth of the statement.

MAN 1

Dis is how we dead look.

MAN 3

We look like you.

MAN 4

(to audience)

Do you realize how many acres of duh dead we got
in Brooklyn?

MAN 2

A veritable necrapolis we live in duh middle of.

MAN 3

(whispering)

I t'ink it's necropolis.

MAN 2

Whateveh.

(to audience)

My pernt is --

MAN 4

Youeh pernt is on duh top of youeh head.

MAN 2

(ignoring him)

My pernt is -- anybody?

During the next lines, MAN 1 improv's to encourage the audience members to speak.

MAN 1

(to an audience member)

Say dis to him so we can get on wit it: "Youeh pernt is -- " Go on. You can use duh accent if you want. "Youeh pernt is -- "

(audience member speaks)

"Dat -- " Go on.

(audience member speaks)

"Duh livin' and duh dead in Brooklyn" -- go on.

(audience member speaks)

MAN 2

He's/she's good. Bring it home.

MAN 1

"Are just two sides of duh same plug nickel."

(audience member speaks)

T'anks.

MAN 4

It's true --

MAN 3

We're among yuh all duh time.

MAN 1

All duh time.

MAN 4

And we don' look dat much different than you -- or you -- or you oveh dere.

(indicating a female audience member)

Of course, she looks a lot bettah than any of us.

MAN 3

(indicating male audience member)

Him, too.

MAN 1

Both of them separate look bettah than duh four
of us put together.

MAN 2

(to both audience members)

One of duh blessings of bein' alive is lookin'
alive. You two keep it goin', okay, for as long
as you can work it, all right?

MAN 3

(to audience)

It's hard keepin' up the looks when youeh dead.
Trust us.

MAN 1

Hey, maybe duh two of yuh could work it together
if youeh ain't otherwise engaged. Dat'd be one
way to keep youehselves alive, eh?

MAN 2

We also find dat duh mont's don't mattah much to
us.

MAN 1

"Much," dat is --

MAN 2

True -- I did say "don't mattah much."

MAN 1

So yuh see, time's not completely nothin', yuh
see, and we can't help it --

MAN 4

Because part of us still, yuh know, is made up
a what made us up when we was livin' like you --

The MEN touch audience members to indicate their still-solid
connection to them -- shake hands, hand on shoulders, etc.

MAN 3

Like all of yuh, we're still made up of paht
alive, paht dead --

MAN 4

Just like you -- paht alive, paht dead.

MAN 3

Too too solid flesh --

MAN 1

And so when the winter of our discontent is made
glorious by dis mont' of -- damn!

(asks audience member)

Give a guy a hand -- what's duh mont' again?

(gets the month)

Bless yuh.

MAN 2

[Echoes the name of the month]

MAN 1

T'anks.

MAN 2

Comes from the duh pernt on my head.

MAN 1

In dis mont' the desolation of our souls long-
drowned in the green fire and radiance --

MAN 3

Of Cypress Hills --

MAN 2

And Green-Wood --

MAN 4

And Evergreen --

MAN 1

And every elsewhere in duh Brooklyn acres of duh
Brooklyn graveyards --

MAN 2

We grope and crawl and scuttle to come back to
watch you all --

MAN 3

All of yuh tryin' to know Brooklyn t'roo and t'roo
-- again --and again --

MAN 1

Like we did.

MAN 2

Still do.

MAN 4

Brooklyn standin' in for duh hole world --

MAN 3

And duh hole world makin' its way t'roo Brooklyn.

MAN 4

Walt Whitman couldn'ta said it better.

MAN 3

Oh yeah he did: "Stand up, beautiful hills of
Brooklyn!"

MAN 2

"We use you...we plant you permanently within us."

MAN 4

"...we love you -- there is perfection in you
also..."

MAN 3

Amen, Walt.

MAN 1

And we have no way to know life but Walt's way of
knowin' it.

MAN 4

Comin' back --

MAN 3

Reconnectin' --

MAN 1

Keepin' our family within youeh family --

The MEN start moving towards the stage.

MAN 2

An' neider do all of you, if yuh t'ink about it -- about knowin' life. What other choice yuh got for knowin' except to keep comin' back to us for some help wit knowin' what's what and where's where? Like we come to you.

MAN 3

Especially when it comes to knowin' duh-world-otherwise-known-as-dis-goddam Brooklyn.

The stage manager retrieves the ghost light, then moves on four plain wooden chairs set upstage. The MEN move on to the stage. MAN 1 takes a newspaper out of his pocket -- it can simply be blank sheets of newsprint folded like a newspaper. MAN 2 stands downstage, MAN 3 approaches MAN 2. MAN 4 stands in the background; he carries something working-class, e.g., a tool belt.

[NOTE: In the short story, Wolfe describes MAN 3 this way: " I sees dis big guy standin' deh -- dis is duh foist I even see of him. Well, he's lookin' wild, y'know, and I can see dat he's had plenty, but still he's holdin' it; he talks good, and he's walkin' straight enough."]

House lights out.

Something to indicate that this is a train platform -- the stage manager could simply come out with a placard that says, "A Train Platform, Brooklyn, 1930s."

MAN 3

(to MAN 2)

Hey.

MAN 2

Yeah?

MAN 3

Do you know Brooklyn?

MAN 1

Dere's no guy livin' dat knows Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Yeah?

MAN 1

Yeah. Only the dead know Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo because only the dead got the kind of lifetime it'd take to find a way aroun' dis goddam town.

MAN 3

Yeah?

MAN 1

Yeah.

MAN 3 ponders for a bit, then turns to MAN 2.

MAN 3

How d'yuh get t' Eighteent' Avenoo an' Sixty-sevent' Street?

MAN 2

Jesus! Yuh got me, chief. I ain't been heah long myself. Where is duh place? Out in Flatbush?

MAN 3

Nah -- Bensonhoist. But I was neveh deh befoeh. How d'yuh get deh?

MAN 2

Yuh got me, chief. Do eider of youse guys know where it is?

MAN 4 start walking forward, but MAN 1 cuts him off. MAN 4 does not like this.

MAN 1

Sure.

MAN 4

Hey!

MAN 3

(to MAN 1)

Yuh sure youeh sure? Yuh weren't so sure befoeh.

MAN 1

Maybe I'm one of duh dead dat knows dis goddam town.

MAN 4

Maybe duh dead oughta shut up, den.

MAN 3, rather than being annoyed at the interruption, watches the two men duel with interest and without judgment.

MAN 1

(ignoring MAN 4)

Yuh take duh Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local deh, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid, and den walk down foe blocks. Dat's all yuh got to do.

MAN 4

G'wan! Watcha talkin' about?

(to MAN 3)

Duh guy is crazy!

MAN 3

Who knows?

MAN 2

Sounds okay to me.

MAN 4

I'll tell yuh what yuh do. Yuh change to duh West End line at Toity-sixt, Get off at Noo Utrechct an' Sixteent' Avenoo. Walk two blocks oveh, then foe blocks up, an' you'll be right deh.

MAN 1

Oh, yeah? Who told you so much?

MAN 2

Now, fellahs --

MAN 3 puts a hand on MAN 2 to keep him quiet. He stares, fascinated in a dumbfounded sort of way.

MAN 1

How long you been living' heah?

MAN 4

All my life.

MAN 1

Musta been a short life if dat's duh best advice
you can give dis fellah.

MAN 4

I was bawn in Williamsboig --

MAN 1

My condolences.

MAN 2

-- and I can tell you t'ings about dis town you
neveh hoid of.

MAN 1

Which yuh probably make up all by yoehself at
night while you're cuttin' out yuh papeh dolls.

MAN 4

You t'ink you're pretty wise, ain't yuh?

MAN 1

Duh boids ain't usin' my head for Lincoln's statue
yet, which means I'm wise enough to know a phony
when I see one.

MAN 2

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

And you're so wise dat someone's goin' t'bust youeh
wise nose some day --

MAN 2

(to MAN 3)

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

Dat's how wise you are.

MAN 1

Someone musta busted your nose all duh way back
to youeh brain --

MAN 2

Train's here.

MAN 1

'Cause ya got snot for smarts.

MAN 1 and MAN 4 square off, ready to explode.

MAN 3

(to MAN 2)

Does dis go in duh right general direction?

MAN 2

I t'ink so.

MAN 3 takes MAN 1 gently by the arm and onto the train. Lights change to just downstage center. MAN 2 and MAN 4 bring down two chairs, then move back to their own chairs in the shadows upstage.

As the scene progresses, the lights become tighter and tighter on MAN 1 and MAN 3.

MAN 1

(thinks he's talking to MAN 4)

All right, mugg! I'm sorry I can't stay to take keh of yuh, but I'll be seein' yuh sometime, I hope, out in duh cemetery.

Suddenly, MAN 1 looks around him and sees that he is on the train with MAN 3 -- surprised, confused. He checks -- this is his train.

MAN 1

Dis is my train, all right. How'd you know dat?

They sit. MAN 1 folds his newspaper, puts it in his pocket. He blusters a little to regain himself.

MAN 1

Yeah, well I'm sorry I couldn't stay to take keh of dat mugg for yuh -- maybe I'll be seein' him sometime, like out in duh cemetery.

(regains composure)

What numbeh are yuh looking for in Bensonhoist, pal? If I know duh address --

MAN 3

Oh, I'm not lookin' for no one. I don't know no one out deh.

MAN 1

Den why?

MAN 3

I'm just goin' out to see duh place. I like duh sound of duh name.

MAN 1

Bensonhoist? Watcha tryin' to hand me?

MAN 3

I'm tellin' yuh duh troot. I like to go look at places wit nice names like dat.

MAN 1

Bensonhoist?

MAN 3

I like to go look at all kinds of places.

MAN 1

How'd yuh know deh was such a place if yuh neveh been deh befoeh?

MAN 3

I got duh map.

MAN 1

A map?

MAN 3

No, the map.

MAN 3 pulls out a map, which can be a blank sheet of newsprint -- but make it large. MAN 1 looks at it, fascinated. He traces his finger on the map.

MAN 1

Yuh got the map. Look at dat -- duh whole goddam place all mahked out -- Canarsie an' East Noo Yawk and Flatbush, Bensonhoist, Sout' Brooklyn, duh Heights, Bay Ridge, Greenpernt -- duh whole goddam layout, yuh got it right deh on duh map.

MAN 3

Like I said, the map.

MAN 1

Like a map of duh world. You been to any of dose places?

MAN 3

I been to most of' em. I was down in Red Hook just last night.

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook!

MAN 3

I was just walked aroun'.

MAN 1

Just walked aroun'?

MAN 3

Lookin' at t'ings.

MAN 1

Nuttin' happened?

MAN 3

A coupla drunks in one of duh places started a fight --

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook! You gotta keep outa deh. It's a good place to keep out of.

MAN 3

Why?

MAN 1

Jesus! What'm I gonna do wit a guy as -- as -- Yuh just might get lost down deh, dat's all.

MAN 3

(smiling)

I got a map.

MAN 1

A map! In Red Hook? Jesus!

MAN 3

You say "Jesus" a lot.

MAN 1

Do I?

MAN 3

Yeah.

MAN 1

Yeah, well, I don't know why -- he's no friend of mine.

MAN 3

(pointing to map)

How long you figure would it take Jesus to know Brooklyn?

MAN 1

You get dat idea out right now. Not Jesus or you or nobody ain't eveh gonna get to know Brooklyn. I been livin' heah all my life an' don't know all, so how do you expect --

MAN 3

The map.

MAN 1

Yuh ain't gonna get to know Brooklyn wit no map.

MAN 3

If yuh got duh map, yuh got duh map.

MAN 1

Don't try ta sell me no loaves and fishes, awright? Sheesh! "If Jesus knew -- " Sheesh!

MAN 3 folds the map but doesn't put it away.

MAN 3

Can yuh swim?

MAN 1

What?

MAN 3

Can yuh swim? Can yuh swim good?

MAN 1

Like a fish. I'm a regleh fish in duh wateh. What stop are we comin' to?

MAN 3

What would yuh do if yuh saw a man drownin'?

MAN 1

I'd jump in an' pull him out. What stop --

MAN 3

Ever saved anyone out heah?

MAN 1

In Brooklyn? Yuh can't drown in Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Neveh?

MAN 1

Yuh gotta drown somewhere else --

MAN 3

Dat's not what duh map says.

MAN 1 keeps looking around.

MAN 1

What frickin' station are we at? What's the goddam station?

MAN 3

You gotta get off?

MAN 1

I gotta get off.

MAN 3

Yuh don't wanta travel with me.

MAN 1

Can't -- my station's comin' up. You'll get dere -- just stay on dis line.

MAN 3

So -- you kinda like been my map, haven't'cha?

MAN 1

Yeah -- youeh map -- great -- glad to be of service. I neveh been a map befoeh. Yeah, here it comes.

MAN 3

Dis youeh station?

MAN 1

Yeah.

MAN 3

Dis youeh real station?

MAN 1

It's the duh one I'm gettin' off at, wise guy.

MAN 3

Sure you don't wanta travel wit me?

MAN 1

Can't -- gotta go --

MAN 1 prepares to get off. MAN 2 and MAN 4 come downstage. MAN 3 slaps the map against his hand.

MAN 3

Remember dis --

MAN 1

(hoarse whisper)

C'mon, c'mon --

MAN 3

I'll travel wit you anyway --

MAN 1

Come on!

MAN 3

Savin' and drownin' --

The stop comes.

MAN 3

Dat's duh map I'm gonna give to you.

As MAN 1 steps through the door, MAN 2 and MAN 4 lift him so that it appears that he floats out of the train.

MAN 3

Dat's duh map youeh gonna need -- dat's duh map dey all need.

They circle MAN 1 upstage back to downstage, touching him down and then lifting him up again until they reach the edge of the stage, which is where they leave him. MAN 2 and MAN 4 go into the house.

MAN 3 picks up the chairs and hands them to the stage manager, who has come back on with the ghost light. The stage manager lines up the chairs upstage, backs to the audience, as if they were headstones, then puts something on them to show that they are, in fact, headstones. Then the stage manager stands behind the ghost light.

MAN 3 comes into the audience.

MAN 1 is alone on stage, afraid, with the ghost light and the headstones. He looks at the headstones, the light, the audience in darkness. As he names places, he points to different sections of the audience.

MAN 1

Jesus! Red. Hook. Christ! Flat. Bush. Jesus!
Canar. Sie. Christ! Duh. Heights. East. Noo
Yawk. Bay. Ridge.

MAN 1 teeters on the stage edge.

MAN 1

(in a rush)

Yuh take duh Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at
Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local
deh, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid,
and den walk down foe blocks. Dat's all anyone's
got to do.

The house lights come up slowly as MAN 1 speaks his next lines, and as he speaks, he casts furtive glances at the headstones and ghost light.

MAN 1

(to audience)

Can any of yuh swim? I lied to duh guy -- I can't swim. Not a lick. Any of yuh swim good enough? Can any of yuh give me some help heah? A hand, maybe? Coupla hands? I ain't got duh map, and I can't swim so good.

MAN 2, 3, and 4 each select someone from the audience close to MAN 2's position. They can each ad lib something along the lines of "Would you give us a hand?" They should feel free to joke with the audience members.

They get each audience member to give MAN 2 a hand as he is led back to his original seat in the audience, and then they are escorted back to their seats with an ad libbed "Thank you." Again, humor is good.

Now all the MEN are back to their original positions.

MAN 1

T'anks. T'anks. I made it.

(to MAN 3)

Okay. I made it. Okay.

MAN 3

Now is the winter --

MAN 2

-- of our discontent --

MAN 4

-- made glorious by --

(to MAN 1)

C'mon.

MAN 1

By this month of [name the month] --

MAN 3

"And you that shall cross -- "

MAN 1

Go, Walt.

MAN 2

" -- from shore to shore years hence -- "

MAN 4

" -- are more to me, and more in my meditations
-- "

MAN 1

" -- than you might suppose."

MAN 3

Go Walt Whitman.

MAN 2

Go Brooklyn.

MAN 4

T'anks to duh livin'.

MAN 3

And t'anks to duh dead.

MAN 1

And t'anks to us all.

The stage manager switches off the ghost light. The house lights go out. End of play.

Burning Issues

DESCRIPTION

Love is politics by another name.

CHARACTERS

- Jaime
- Natasha

* * * * *

Early morning. JAIME sits outside on a deck at a table writing by hand. Coffee cup nearby. Second chair, empty, nearby. Perhaps an umbrella. Perhaps some background birdsong. Perhaps crumpled paper strewn around.

JAIME is exasperated -- something is not working out.

NATASHA enters, coffee cup in hand, looking as if she has just gotten up. Sips, watches. JAIME, aware of her presence, tries to keep his irritation contained -- but does not do it well.

NATASHA

Not going well?

JAIME

No it's not.

NATASHA

Okay.

Time passes. Some sipping. Some irritation.

NATASHA

Anything I can --

JAIME

No.

NATASHA

You're sure?

JAIME

Yes.

NATASHA

Okay.

Time passes as NATASHA sits, sips.

NATASHA

It's a tough assignment. That you've given yourself.

JAIME pushes away the pad and paper, takes up his coffee cup.

JAIME

The dramatic situation -- it's built right in -- I mean, the conflict is right in there -- but --

NATASHA

Uh-huh.

JAIME

Uh-huh.

NATASHA sips, gazes outward, doesn't respond.

JAIME

You gave me the "uh-huh."

NATASHA

Uh-huh.

JAIME

I know that "uh-huh."

NATASHA

Hmm -- maybe.

JAIME

I know your catalogue of monosyllables -- the "uh-huh." The "hmm-hmm." The "ah." I know them [all] --

NATASHA

Because you're so smart --

JAIME

Come on.

NATASHA gives him a look.

JAIME
Yes, I'm really asking --

NATASHA
Uh-huh.

JAIME
Really --

NATASHA faces him.

NATASHA
Dramatic.

JAIME
Yeah.

NATASHA
Really? That situation?

JAIME
Yes I do.

NATASHA
The one written there?

JAIME
Yeah.

NATASHA shrugs in a loving way.

JAIME
How can it not be dramatic?

NATASHA
"Conflict" I'll buy, right in there, like you say
-- but drama -- hmmm --

JAIME
Really?

NATASHA
I don't think so --

JAIME
The Koran-burners on one side --

NATAHS

Yes --

JAIME

The the the the --

NATASHA

The non-Koran-burners?

JAIME

No -- yeah -- but I wouldn't call them that -- the
the the the --

NATASHA

Good guys?

JAIME

Well, yeah, but that's not the name -- the
defenders --

NATASHA

The defenders. Of what?

JAIME

Tolerance, toleration, freedom of religion -- you
know, like so you can go to Mass on Sunday --

NATASHA

Or Saturday --

JAIME

-- to believe as one wants --

NATASHA

But also to disbelieve as one [wants] --

JAIME

Like disbelieving that this situation has drama.

NATASHA

My constitutional right -- my freedom of speech.

JAIME

What does [that] --

NATASHA

Freedom of speech. Your defenders the defenders of that, too? I hope?

JAIME

Well, yeah.

NATASHA

And therein, mi amor, lies your problem.

NATASHA sips, gazes out, waits out JAIME.

NATASHA

I just love it out here -- so restful, so --

JAIME

What problem?

They look each other over.

JAIME

What problem?

NATASHA

You never really like me to --

JAIME

But you brought it up.

NATASHA

No, I just -- well --

JAMIE

Go on.

NATHSHA

You just looked so exasperated --

JAIME

I am --

NATASHA

And I just wanted to say that I can appreciate that -- it's a tough writing assignment you've given yourself --

JAIME

And so what's the problem? My problem?

NATASHA

It's just a problem -- touchy --

JAIME

Sorry --

NATASHA

Not needed -- all right -- in the way you told me last night about what you wanted to write this play about --

JAIME

Yeah.

NATASHA

Passionate, you know, very passionate --

JAIME

Because these yahoos --

NATASHA

(overlapping)

The yahoos, right -- I'm with you a hundred percent on that, one hundred percent. Bring, like you said, your writing to bear on the situation.

JAIME

Like a citizen. So what's the [problem] --

NATASHA

You call your set-up dramatic -- book burners here, defenders there -- let me finish -- but I see you frustrated because you can't seem to get it to work in a way that makes it work as a play, right?, and I think -- this is just a point for you to consider -- that it's because your set-up isn't dramatic, isn't drama, but really just friction -- yeah? Light, heat, rub it together, boom!, "I'm right!," "No, I'm right!", two faces, you know, nose-to-nose, neck veins ready to burst, moral principles on high alert --

JAIME

That's not drama?

NATASHA

That is exactly what I am saying.

JAIME

I'm not agreeing, I'm -- I'm --

NATASHA

Think about it, like you usually do after I say such things to you. You're a smart guy.

JAIME ponders.

JAIME

Just friction?

NATASHA

Flint and tinder. Matches and, well, in this case, paper.

JAIME

You're saying that all I've got down here is a screamfest.

NATASHA

I don't know what you've got down there -- you haven't given me anything to read -- yet -- I'm just going by the set-up you gave me last night -- book burners on the one [side] --

JAIME

I get it.

NATASHA

I didn't want to pour water on anything -- but you were so exasperated -- watched you through the screen door for a while -- bit my tongue -- I can show you the bite marks --

They gaze outward.

JAIME

The whole thing just makes me so angry.

NATASHA

That is the thing about you that keeps me sparking with you. Ha ha --

JAIME

Ha ha --

JAIME picks up the pad.

JAIME

But you're right -- it doesn't have any heart.

NATASHA

I didn't say that.

JAIME

Not outright.

NATASHA

I will say, like I always do, you're a smart guy.

JAIME

You always say that just before you say "but sometimes you're too much in your head."

NATASHA

Sometimes you are -- that's why I keep myself around -- to free you up -- put a pin in the balloon.

JAIME

But something needs to be said -- I need to say -- something -- I need to --

NATASHA

You're a smart guy, mi amor -- what would give that -- whatever you've got on your paper there -- what would give that some heart?

JAIME bangs his two fists together.

JAIME

Each of them lost somebody in --

NATASHA

Sentimental -- and crap.

JAIME

True. Audience would expect that, anyways.

NATASHA

What wouldn't they expect? What would you not expect if you were sitting and watching?

JAIME looks at NATASHA -- she returns the gaze. Suddenly JAIME smiles.

JAIME

You are so clever --

NATASHA

Me?

JAIME

The way you slip it in, what you said before --

NATASHA

Which was?

JAIME

Freedom of --

NATASHA

Did I say that?

JAIME

Because you knew. You knew.

NATASHA

Always easier to critique someone else's work.

JAIME

Something like this --

JAIME bumps his fists together.

JAIME

"If you really believe in what you say you believe, then you will let me burn the Koran."

NATASHA

That would throw your Defender for a loop.

JAIME

The unexpected --

NATASHA

And the response --

JAIME

Make that unexpected --

NATASHA

Makes it dramatic -- don't make it easy for them
--

JAIME

Screaming is the easy [thing] --

NATASHA

And the most boring.

JAIME rips the written pages from the pad, hands some to NATASHA. He rips two-thirds of each page into thin strips so that when he holds them from the untorn bottoms and shakes them, it looks like the paper is in flames. NATASHA does the same thing.

And they laugh as they do it.

NATASHA gets up and leans over JAIME. She kisses him on the forehead and then slaps his cheek -- just hard enough to make her point. JAIME stares at her.

NATASHA

There's enough crap in the world, wordsmith.
Don't add to it.

NATASHA takes up her coffee cup and starts for the house.

NATASHA

(over her shoulder)

I'll get you some more coffee.

JAIME takes up the pad of paper and writes, with vigor.

NATASHA watches him.

Lights out.

Catalog

DESCRIPTION

How far will venture capitalism go to get market share? This is the question as Mr. Rieper proposes some novel ideas for catalog sales.

CHARACTERS

- B. GOODE, young successful entrepreneur
- MR. RIEPER, man seeking a business deal
- The 10:30 appointment
- VOICE (can be doubled with RIEPER)

SETTING

- Corporate office

TIME

- Present

* * * * *

Well-appointed office -- exudes solid modernist wealth. Large desk with a large nameplate: "B. GOODE." Flown in and lit is a sign in modernist lettering, brassy-looking: "Howie, Fuckim, and Goode, Inc." The person behind the desk is talking on the phone.

GOODE

Look, Harry, I gotta admit that the balloon angioplasty kit for home use might work, especially given health care costs today, but it's just not something we'd promote....Why?...To be honest, and I mean no disrespect to your genius, it's just not cutting edge enough. You gotta remember who we are, Harry -- the "avant garde" venture capitalists, anointed so by INC. last year. No more fops in SoHo lofts anymore -- the frontiers of imagination pass through this office, we handle the cultural passports....Thanks, Harry, I wrote that for the promo piece myself. Good luck. Sayanoracao.

Hangs up. The voice of the receptionist cuts in.

VOICE

A blond, blue-eyed Nordic type to see you, goes by the name of Rieper. Says you two have a rendezvous

with destiny? I don't know what he means, but you don't have destiny on your calendar. His name's there, though.

GOODE

Send the person in for glory.

Rieper enters -- can be played by either gender.

GOODE

Hey, you're not blond and blue-eyed!

RIEPER

Testament to my powers of persuasion.

Hands GOODE a glossy catalog; GOODE leafs through it.

RIEPER

And before you tell me I only have 30 seconds of the time you devote to "surfing the razor's edge of tomorrow's technosocial flux" - see, I've read your stuff - let me pitch --

GOODE holds up the catalog, which has a big silver question mark on its cover.

GOODE

What is this? You're selling death?

RIEPER

Not exactly - I'm selling style. We all have to die, correct? And what could be worse for all those people who have sucked the system dry over the past 20 years for all the pleasures it could give them than to die in some antiseptic anonymous room without the glory that should attend their ennobled persons? What I want to do is offer the upper echelons an exit that honors their engorged wealth and electrifies their jaded sensibilities. For instance, perhaps Newt Gingrich would like page 35, the "Julius Caesar," or Ben Cohen might take to the "Timothy Leary." I know Bill Gates would go for the "Myst," where, through the miracle of psychopharmacology, he would feel as if his soul were being absorbed into the upper levels of a video game. And, because of favorable tax laws, you could stage your death as a charitable

event, allowing tax deductions for the guests and generating proceeds to cover any taxes owed on the estate.

GOODE

(leafing through)

The "Chatterton," for "tortured, poetic souls" - possible substitution, the "Kurt Cobain." The "Jesus Christ," complete with empty-tomb party. Wouldn't some of these get you into trouble?

RIEPER

Your guide here is Jack Kevorkian. He's blazed a wide trail, and the next logical step is to capitalize on his pioneering spirit and do what you do best: turn ethics into a salable commodity. The problem is finding investors who have Dr. Jack's courageous craziness as well as a kind of funky taste for walking on the wild side of the existentially pragmatic, given the right market parameters -- know what I mean?

GOODE

Parameters, right.

(throws catalog on desk)

I can't promise anything, but I'll bring it up to my partners.

(pauses, picks up the catalog again)

You know, it does have a kind of --

RIEPER

The idea lingers, doesn't it? Like one of those smoky cognacs. What about you? Which would appeal to you?

VOICE

Your 10:30 is here.

GOODE

I'll be right there.

(turns slowly)

Which one? How would I know? It's not something I give a lot of thought to.

RIEPER

Ah, yes.

(takes two catalogs)

For your partners. I can expect to hear from you soon. Have a nice day, if you're so inclined.

RIEPEER leaves.

VOICE

Should I send the 10:30 in?

GOODE

In a moment.

GOODE opens the catalog and turns the pages, occasionally pausing.

GOODE

There'd always be a market --
(over intercom)

Send him in.

GOODE sits down, continues looking through the catalog as the PERSON speaks.

PERSON

Thanks for seeing me. I have this great idea about getting actors to sell the rights to their bodies so that they could be digitized and stored on disk. You see, one of the biggest costs in movies is labor, especially the actors. But if their forms could be computerized, then a director could pull up the combinations he wanted without having to worry about caterers and toilets and all that human paraphernalia....

Suddenly, GOODE starts violently. He looks at the audience and then the PERSON absolutely horrified. The intercom buzzes

VOICE

Mr. Rieper is back, says he forgot something in your office. Could he interrupt for just a moment?

LIGHTS BUMP OUT

The City of Mosques

DESCRIPTION

The knock upon the front door, the knife-edged news given by an Armed Services officer in sharp-creased clothing -- and then the next day, and the day after that...

CHARACTERS

- LIYAH, Nigerian, early 30s -- Segun's fiancée
- LAWRENCE, Nigerian, early 30s -- Segun's friend
- ADEMOLA, Nigerian, mid 20s -- Segun's brother

SETTING

- A house in Brooklyn (Flatbush)

TIME

- Now, in the late fall/early winter

•

MISCELLANEOUS

- Charcoal grill
- Bag of charcoal
- Small table with cooking tools and a can of lighter fluid next to grill
- Objects wrapped in white butcher paper that look like steaks
- A couple of lawn chairs
- Somewhere hung up, an American flag
- If possible, some of those magnetic decals used on cars, such as the yellow ribbon titled with "Support Our Troops" -- if not these, yellow ribbon would do fine

* * * * *

A backyard in Brooklyn.

LIYAH, dressed in funeral black, sits in a lawn chair, staring at the grill. On her lap she holds a canvas bag, which contains (at this point unseen) a folded American flag.

She sits. She sits. She sits.

LAWRENCE, also dressed in funeral black, enters carrying a plate of steaks wrapped in white butcher paper. Eventually he sits, puts down the plate.

LAWRENCE

They were looking for you inside.

LIYAH

Why -- someone's glass had to be re-filled?

LAWRENCE

I told them they could fill their own -- laughing,
of course, while I said it --

LIYAH

And then you --

LAWRENCE

And then I filled their glasses for them --

LIYAH

Of course --

LAWRENCE

Still laughing --

LIYAH

So now there will be gossip for weeks --

LAWRENCE

Probably --

LIYAH

Segun's broken fiancée not doing her duties --

LIYAH cuts herself off.

LAWRENCE

It's hard for them to remember that they're here
and not in Lagos.

LIYAH

Well, I am here --

LIYAH hesitates, then gives in.

LIYAH

And soon they won't be, and I will still be here
when they gossip about how Liyah has become so
American --

LAWRENCE

They are Segun's parents. They have come a long
way --

LIYAH

To hold court --

LAWRENCE

Now, that sounds American --

LIYAH makes a dismissive gesture.

LIYAH

I'm glad you filled their glasses.

LAWRENCE

So were they -- holding court is a thirsty business.

LIYAH smiles. They fall into silence. ADEMOLA enters.

ADEMOLA

What are you doing?

LAWRENCE

(sotto voce)

I knew it wouldn't take long.

(to ADEMOLA)

Hello, Ademola.

ADEMOLA

I wasn't talking to you.

LAWRENCE

That's all right -- my hello to you is still good.

ADEMOLA

Liyah --

LAWRENCE

Ademola --

LIYAH

What?

ADEMOLA

You haven't started it yet.

LAWRENCE

Let her sit.

ADEMOLA

She can't just sit -- the charcoal -- the people
in there are hungry and they want -- Liyah --

LIYAH makes no move to do anything.

ADEMOLA

What did Segun ever see in you? With the way
things are, you can't even bring yourself to do
what he loved to do.

(to LAWRENCE)

She is so stuck on herself.

LAWRENCE

She's not the only one so at the moment --

ADEMOLA

And I am not liking you very much at the moment,
either -- what you said at the funeral --

LAWRENCE

Segun wasn't just his uniform, Ademola --

ADEMOLA

But my parents -- our parents --

LIYAH

Ademola, maybe they didn't mind hearing that
their son had a life other than being "a hero for
his adopted country" -- that priest -- I had to
bite my tongue --

ADEMOLA

But to talk about the clubbing, the house parties
--

LAWRENCE

They were very much Segun -- and you were along
with us, if I remember --

ADEMOLA

But Lawrence -- my parents aren't used to that --

LIYAH

Their good boy --

ADEMOLA

The computer classes, the job -- that was how they see him -- need to see --

LIYAH

The Nigerian poster boy, hey?

ADEMOLA

You should bite that tongue.

LIYAH

And how do they see "National Guard"? Do they love that, too, Ademola?

ADEMOLA

They're proud that he defended --

LIYAH

Defended what? He thought he was going to defend the subway -- the subway --

LAWRENCE

(lightly)

He was defending clubbing -- house parties -- grilling --

LIYAH

Don't.

LAWRENCE

I'm sorry, but it's just that -- you two -- it doesn't do any good --

LIYAH

What doesn't do any good is that every time someone says "hero," I have to bite my tongue --

ADEMOLA

So now "hero" is a dirty [word] --

LIYAH

What I know is that "hero" is dead -- what I know is that my mouth tastes like blood -- "defending freedom" -- "ultimate sacrifice" -- I'd like to rip out that priest's -- "hero" died for the freedom of clubbing -- being able to grill his meat on Sunday afternoons -- Oh America --

LIYAH cannot sit still. She rises, walks.

LAWRENCE gets up and goes to ADEMOLA and loosens ADEMOLA's tie. ADEMOLA resists -- but not really.

LAWRENCE
(to ADEMOLA)

We're out here by Segun's grill -- no one is allowed to wear a tight tie around Segun's grill. He would not be in favor of us choking ourselves off.

ADEMOLA slaps his hands away, finishes loosening the tie himself.

ADEMOLA
Enough --

LAWRENCE loosens his own tie.

ADEMOLA
We will have to start --

LAWRENCE
In a moment, Ademola --
(to LIYAH)
Liyah? Liyah?

LIYAH
What?

LAWRENCE
(points to bag)
Can we see it? Would that be possible?

LIYAH
No, Lawrence -- please --

LAWRENCE
Okay. Okay. Liyah, did you know that we wanted to break his legs --
(to ADEMOLA)
-- didn't we?

ADEMOLA
That was a joke.

LAWRENCE

A half-joke.

ADEMOLA

A half-joke.

LAWRENCE

His last visit. So he wouldn't have to go back.

ADEMOLA

We really only talked about one leg.

LAWRENCE

One leg apiece.

(to ADEMOLA)

Instead, you tried, like a fool --

(to LIYAH)

He took the left one --

ADEMOLA

He stuffed me into the sofa -- can you picture that, Liyah? Like I was change falling out of my own pocket. I really thought maybe I could -- that I should --

LAWRENCE

I still think that if we had done it -- Ademola, look at me -- if we had, he still would've gone -- one-legged, two-legged, it wouldn't've mattered --

LIYAH

It wouldn't have mattered.

LAWRENCE

Can we see it?

LIYAH

No.

LAWRENCE

Okay.

Silence.

ADEMOLA

We should probably grill the meat --

No one makes a move to pour in the charcoal.

LIYAH

That last dinner.

Everyone nods.

LIYAH

He left angry.

ADEMOLA

I remember that.

LAWRENCE

He wasn't angry -- not all of him angry -- his eyes --

LIYAH

He complained about his eyes. He said his eyes had filled up.

ADEMOLA

No more room.

LAWRENCE

He couldn't believe his eyes anymore. Everything got quiet.

ADEMOLA

I hated that quiet. Then his joke.

LAWRENCE

Always the joke to lighten --

LIYAH

"Maybe it's not gravity that pulls us into the dirt. Ever think of that?"

ADEMOLA

It was a stupid thing to say --

LAWRENCE

We laughed --

ADEMOLA

We even talked about it -- seriously --

LIYAH

And then we let him go.

LAWRENCE

And then we let him go. Liyah -- let us see it.

LIYAH hesitates, then reaches into the bag and pulls out a tightly folded American flag.

LIYAH

I didn't want the thing, but your mother handed it to me.

ADEMOLA takes it.

ADEMOLA

My father wouldn't even touch it. It's so light. And not.

LAWRENCE takes it.

LAWRENCE

Did you watch how they folded it? Snap, snap, snap, snap --

LIYAH

I tasted blood.

LIYAH gestures for LAWRENCE to hand it to her, which he does.

LIYAH

I was told this -- because I asked this -- the metal that cut his throat -- listen to me! -- slipped between his Kevlar collar and below his helmet -- through all the protection -- these words -- "Kevlar" -- did you both know that?

LIYAH drags the flag across her own throat.

LIYAH

Snap. What? Is it too much for you? Our eyes should be ashamed. Our ears should be ashamed.

LIYAH throws the folded flag onto the grill. She picks up the can of lighter fluid.

LIYAH

(to ADEMOLA)

You still want me to cook the meat?

ADEMOLA goes to stop her, but LIYAH squirts him with lighter fluid, which stops him. LIYAH looks at LAWRENCE, then squirts him as well. Then LIYAH sprays the flag with lighter fluid, puts the can down.

LIYAH

I should cook the meat. Because the fiancée should do her duty -- Ademola? Duty? To your parents? To all who hunger and thirst? Give them comfort?

LIYAH gestures to LAWRENCE.

LAWRENCE

I don't have one.

LIYAH gestures again. LAWRENCE digs out a lighter, hands it to LIYAH.

ADEMOLA

Don't --

LIYAH

Shut up. It is time we all shut up.

LIYAH flicks the lighter, lets the flame burn. Lets it burn. Her hand shakes. She lets it burn. Then drops it.

LIYAH suddenly takes off her shoes and throws them, then rolls down her pantyhose and shucks them off, throws them. Her body shakes.

LIYAH

I can't stand this -- uniform --

LIYAH tears at her dress. LAWRENCE takes a step toward her, but LIYAH shies away. ADEMOLA picks up the shoes and pantyhose, not quite sure what to do with them.

ADEMOLA

Liyah! Liyah! Put them back -- You have to put [them] --

LAWRENCE moves directly to LIYAH, takes her by the shoulders, but LIYAH slams him.

LIYAH

Did you read -- Did you know -- did you?

LAWRENCE

Know what, Liyah.

LIYAH

I did, every day -- on the Internet -- reading, reading, reading -- the pictures --

ADEMOLA

(to LAWRENCE)

What is she talking about?

LIYAH

Fallujah -- Fallujah --

LAWRENCE

It's a war, Liyah --

LIYAH

No -- no -- no --

ADEMOLA finally puts the shoes and pantyhose under LIYAH's chair.

LIYAH

My Segun -- my Segun -- in the "city of mosques" -- always saying that: "Fallujah, the city of mosques" -- animals don't do what they --

LAWRENCE

They were ordered [to do] --

LIYAH

(derisive)

Ordered! God! You didn't see, did you?

LAWRENCE

You can't --

ADEMOLA

And you shouldn't!

LIYAH

You're ignorant.

LAWRENCE

Still you can't --

LIYAH

I read because I wanted to follow [him] -- my two unbroken legs following -- try to be inside [him] -- to keep my fear -- and I looked and I read and I started to hate --

ADEMOLA

You can't hate Segun [for] --

LIYAH

(to LAWRENCE)

Did he talk to you -- did he tell you anything -- he would have told you --

LAWRENCE hesitates just a moment too long.

LIYAH

He did -- he did -- and not me --

Again LAWRENCE hesitates, and ADEMOLA looks at him.

ADEMOLA

What, Lawrence?

LAWRENCE

His last emails --

LIYAH

He said nothing to me --

LAWRENCE

His precious Liyah -- of course not -- at least to keep one thing clean --

LIYAH

They talked about napalm -- Lawrence, they talked about napalm -- bodies melted -- children -- melted -- did -- he wouldn't do that -- he knew enough, being from Lagos, from our own stupid -- he knew --

LAWRENCE

Maybe he didn't know enough, Liyah.

LIYAH waits.

LAWRENCE

I deleted them.

LIYAH

You deleted them.

LAWRENCE

All of them.

ADEMOLA

Good.

ADEMOLA re-tightens his tie.

ADEMOLA

Good.

ADEMOLA straightens his suit. The backyard fills with silence.

ADEMOLA

I am going to tell them that we are going to be a little late -- a little late -- perhaps we can order something -- save the steaks --

ADEMOLA pats down his tie, now formal.

ADEMOLA

Segun is still -- in my eyes he still is --

LAWRENCE

Who would doubt it?

ADEMOLA

Our parents need --

LAWRENCE

And they will have it, Ademola. I'll say anything.

A moment's hesitation, then ADEMOLA leaves.

LIYAH goes to the grill, picks up the can of lighter fluid, and proceeds to empty it out onto the flag. LIYAH picks up the

lighter from the ground and just holds it as she stares at the flag.

LAWRENCE

I will do what I told Ademola I would do.

(points to flag)

We can say you spilled it. We can wash it out.

LIYAH takes the flag and rubs it against her dress, soaking it. She drops the flag, then flicks the lighter and holds it up between LAWRENCE and herself.

LIYAH

This is what we should all do.

LAWRENCE steps closer to her. He puts a hand on her wrist. The flame burns. Lights bump to black.

Click

DESCRIPTION

When Marlin reveals to Pinto what he did in the park that night, it changes the whole nature of the moral universe they inhabit. A play about whether hate can ever be moral.

CHARACTERS

- PINTO
- MARLIN

SETTING

- A room

TIME

- Now

MISCELLANEOUS

Pinto sits at a kitchen table, ordinary and not IKEA, with two other chairs, wooden. A mint-green vinyl table cloth, on which sit salt and pepper shakers -- clear glass, with silver metal tops -- next to a sugar bowl. A half-height metal paper napkin dispenser, exactly like one on a diner counter, stands next to the sugar bowl. One broken-handled coffee mug holds pens, pencils, markers, and scissors. A second broken-handled coffee mug holds scuffed flatware: spoons, butter knives, forks.

A small cheap transistor radio is on the table.

NOTE: The actors should use a rough-edged British, Irish, or Scottish accent. The accents can be mixed, that is, one British and one Irish, for example, but it should not be done in American tones.

* * * * *

PINTO sits at the kitchen table, looking at an article in the newspaper. MARLIN is there, straddling one of the chairs.

MARLIN

I did that.

PINTO

You did not.

MARLIN

I did.

PINTO

What's listed here.

MARLIN

Yes.

PINTO

I don't believe it.

MARLIN

Believe me.

PINTO

I don't want to.

MARLIN

It's true.

PINTO

If you really did what's listed here, then kiss me.

Marlin kisses Pinto. Their faces separate an inch, nothing more.

MARLIN

Lock, stock, and barrel to his head. That's not in the article.

PINTO

The cause of death is not in the article.

MARLIN

Only a detail the perpetrator would know. Because I was there.

Pinto's finger traces around the edge of the photo in the newspaper.

PINTO

Then that means -- last night I slept with --

MARLIN

Such a one that would do that, yes.

PINTO

-- would do this --

MARLIN

You always knew I was capable.

With an inarticulate sound, Pinto shoots out of his chair, paces. Marlin pivots the paper so that he can read it. He takes a pen from the mug and scribbles around the edges of the photo.

MARLIN

No photo can ever capture, you know -- two dimensions can't be three -- the air, the brittle light -- pixels cannot --

Pinto leans on the table into Marlin.

PINTO

Tell me. Why. Hard.

MARLIN

Of course. It's not without reason -- a reason. I had my own business to mind --

PINTO

Faster.

MARLIN

-- self-important, going through the park --

Pinto sits down.

MARLIN

-- a mundane day.

PINTO

Then. What.

MARLIN

Not him -- not at first. Jonathan.

PINTO

Jonathan?

MARLIN

I don't think he was there for you think he was there for. Hair slicked, teeth white -- clean. No prowl-around for him. He had found a source.

PINTO

And of course --

MARLIN

We greeted.

PINTO

Innocent.

MARLIN

Jonathan is all done. I have told you that.

PINTO

You have told me that.

MARLIN

But still open, as befits friends -- a kiss, an embrace. We are not in medieval times.

PINTO

So when did he appear?

Marlin positions the sugar bowl behind the napkin dispenser.

MARLIN

He must have been there, but maybe behind those concrete urns with the knackered flowers, one of those -- niches --

Marlin picks up the salt and pepper shakers, now Jonathan and Marlin.

MARLIN

Jonathan and I, we talk -- by now, dusk -- the lamps splutter on -- traffic, moist air -- you know that garden -- and Jonathan leaves.

PINTO

A big kiss.

MARLIN

You know his manner.

PINTO

Several -- and him watching all.

MARLIN

And I am alone.

Marlin puts the salt shaker to one side.

MARLIN

I thought that that would be brief -- that time of day -- but the place stayed deserted. Only myself. I knew he was there, though I hadn't seen him. Ghost-nerves, you know, the ones that pick up on a breeze: they zizzed. Purple shadows, like ink.

PINTO

I have to know.

Marlin dances the pepper shaker in front of the napkin dispenser.

PINTO

You had no reason to stay.

MARLIN

I had no reason to stay.

PINTO

But you did.

MARLIN

Something stayed me. Danger -- excitement --

PINTO

A center of gravity for you.

MARLIN

It's why you love me. I called out -- "olly olly oxen free" -- he didn't have to stay, either -- but his voice came back: "I saw you." "I can't talk to a ghost," I say. And he, summoned, appears. Go on.

Pinto moves the sugar bowl from behind the napkin dispenser.

MARLIN

And when he did -- I swear the air broke. Not shattered but -- reconfigured.

Marlin gets up, goes to stare what would be the kitchen window over the sink.

PINTO

"I saw you."

MARLIN

"I saw you," he said, with a voice like ripped glass. "I saw you kiss him."

PINTO

A double-edge to that.

Marlin turns to face Pinto.

MARLIN

Doesn't it. "I saw you -- I want" or "I saw you -- I loathe." And then he brought it down to a single edge: "You faggot."

Pinto's voice changes slightly to take on a different character.

PINTO

I saw you, faggot.

MARLIN

Like that, yes.

PINTO

Because I need to know.

Pinto approaches Marlin.

PINTO

I saw you, faggot.

MARLIN

More hoarse, more outbreath.

PINTO

I saw you kiss him, you faggot.

MARLIN

And something -- clicked. Brittle to brutal.

PINTO

I saw you kiss him. I did. I saw all of it.

MARLIN

"What of it?" I say.

PINTO

Do you want some for yourself?

MARLIN

I did say that, almost beat for beat.

PINTO

That's why I said you said it.

MARLIN

"Do you want some for yourself?"

PINTO

Why do you always have to correct?

MARLIN

Because I knew what was next. I knew, even before the words I knew would come out of his mouth came out of his mouth.

PINTO

I hate you.

MARLIN

See, you know as well. The words lasering in, zeroing out. "I hate your kind."

PINTO

Your kind --

MARLIN

"I hate all of you -- filth."

Pinto sits down. He holds the pepper shaker.

MARLIN

The air frags all around me -- and something just -- clicks.

PINTO

Permission.

MARLIN

Granted.

PINTO

Sit. Please.

Marlin sits.

MARLIN

Permission.

Marlin indicates for Pinto to pass him the pepper shaker, which Pinto does. Marlin pulls the sugar bowl toward him, faces the two items together.

MARLIN

"Filth," "sewage," "deserve to die" "loathe" -- as these grenades come in, I am in this suspension, waiting for the permission to begin.

PINTO

Why didn't you leave? Avoid the temptation.

MARLIN

I had that choice.

PINTO

Sky failing, venom spilled -- but you still intact --

MARLIN

Intact --

PINTO

The higher road to take --

Marlin laughs.

MARLIN

You are so delicious, you are! You would have left.

Marlin lifts the sugar bowl up like a chalice.

MARLIN

"I loathe you" -- infection, viper -- that long "o" -- click.

PINTO

Click.

MARLIN

A voice in the dusk -- no human tether --

Marlin drops the bowl, and it crashes onto the table, on top of the photo.

MARLIN

He had earned his passage out of the garden.

Pinto moves to clean up the mess.

MARLIN

Leave it alone -- stop being who you are!

Marlin gets out of his chair and moves around the kitchen. Pinto doesn't stop cleaning up.

MARLIN

It was easy, actually. Stop it!

Pinto stops.

MARLIN

Come here. Come here.

Pinto goes to Marlin. Marlin takes Pinto's hands.

MARLIN

We share everything. This will out in our every touch from now on -- these hands make you co-conspirator. Co-respirator.

Marlin puts Pinto's right hand around his throat.

MARLIN

I grab him -- click, off go his words -- the soft places to the sides of the larynx. Squeeze!

Pinto squeezes, which constricts Marlin's voice.

MARLIN

I ram him against the wall. Do it!

Pinto, pressing against Marlin's throat, slams him onto the table. Pinto's breathing is heavy.

MARLIN

He feels this vice tighten, tighten until --

Marlin slides out of Pinto's grasp to the floor.

MARLIN

He falls.

Marlin laughs. Pinto looks crushed.

MARLIN

At the foot of the wall, but still breathing.

Marlin imitates thick, rickety breaths.

MARLIN

Pick up that chair -- pick it up! Over your head.

Pinto lifts the chair over his head.

MARLIN

The trash barrel.

Marlin sits up, leans back, his arms supporting him.

MARLIN

"Look at me." Honestly, I can't tell, but I hear him turn his head. "I want you to see what's going to kill you" -- and then I know.

Marlin snaps his fingers.

MARLIN

Click.

Pinto puts the chair down. Marlin reaches out his right hand. Pinto grasps it, pulls him to standing.

MARLIN

No good scare and give him a chance for penance -- but with cold rage end his days. I hated him, friend, I hated every hatred he held for me, for you, for Jonathan -- and it was no effort at all to let gravity judge.

Pinto lets go, moves to the table, sits.

MARLIN

Now one less hater in the world.

PINTO

They're floating it as a possible "hate crime."

MARLIN

How do these things get judged? How do you judge me? There is one less hater in the world.

Pinto takes a pair of scissors from the mug and cuts out the article and picture.

PINTO

Hate for hate.

Marlin sits at the table.

MARLIN

Hate for hate it was -- but at least now a little bit cleaner, don't you think?

Pinto cuts and finishes.

MARLIN

Yes? Cleaner?

PINTO

It is not without meaning. And I am scared.

MARTIN

If they find, they find, not likely, but --

PINTO

Not that.

Pinto turns the cutting face down, smoothes it.

MARLIN

Of me.

Pinto half-shrugs, half-nods.

MARLIN

But there is one less.

Pinto half-shrugs, half-nods again. He arranges the items on the table, putting them back into order.

PINTO

Could you turn the radio on?

Marlin doesn't right away, but then he does. CLAIR DE LUNE plays at a low volume.

Marlin watches Pinto, who stares at the turned-over article.

Lights to black as CLAIR DE LUNE plays up rich and full.

Combover

CHARACTERS

- CLAY HARRISON, male, a barber
- DUAL MCKENZIE, male, a customer -- he should wear suspenders

SETTING

- Barber shop

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Radio music in the background
- Two chairs
- A painted barber pole, on cardboard
- All actions will be mimed. A simple chair serves as the barber's chair. MCKENZIE does not need to have an actual combover; it, too, can be mimed, or a piece of fake hair glued to the pate is also effective.
- Irish accents must be used.

* * * * *

A barbershop. HARRISON is seated in one chair, the barber's chair, reading a newspaper. A second chair is nearby. MCKENZIE enters.

HARRISON

(not looking at him)

By the sound of the shoe, and --

(checking watch)

-- the time of day, I would guess it to be that faithful pup, Dual McKenzie.

MCKENZIE

Son of the sunrise himself.

HARRISON

(sweeps himself out of the chair)

Your pleasure bucket is waiting.

MCKENZIE

I'll have the usual.

(hesitates, then sits down)

The usual.

HARRISON flings open an apron, settles it over MCKENZIE.

HARRISON

Do I detect some hesitation?

Does the usual barber things: tuck in the collar, get his "tools," etc.

HARRISON

Might we be going in for something different?

MCKENZIE

Clay Harrison, how long have we known each other?

HARRISON

(starts to cut)

I started cutting your hair when you had some.

MCKENZIE

Wait. You know exactly how to cut it without my telling you.

HARRISON

You've had it done the same way every two weeks or so for years.

MCKENZIE

Or so.

HARRISON

It's not clockwork, no, not like an atomic clock. But pretty regular.

MCKENZIE

Regular. Like someone's innards.

HARRISON

Like a purgative laxative. [pronounces it as "purr-gay-tive"]

MCKENZIE

I don't want to expand the metaphor.

HARRISON

I'm sorry, my lordship. May I proceed?

MCKENZIE gestures assent. HARRISON begins the trim.

MCKENZIE

It's just that Joanie said something the other day, in jest, of course --

HARRISON

(stops cutting)

Joanie always means no harm. She's the most harmless woman I know. What did she say?

MCKENZIE

Barely a whisper.

HARRISON

It's the little gnats that vex the most.

MCKENZIE

She meant nothing by it.

HARRISON

But it means something by you.

MCKENZIE

We were standing in the kitchen, finishing the dishes, and she turned to me, put her hand on the top of my head, and said, "You have enough forehead for four heads." I'm bald, aren't I?

HARRISON

Not quite.

MCKENZIE

No thatch on the roof.

HARRISON

No shingle over the dingle. Unless you mean this bit of dog's tail across your pate.

MCKENZIE

(claps it back to his scalp)

That's just the point, isn't it? Looks foolish, doesn't it? What if she's thinking -- well, just thinking!

HARRISON

The dilemma of the combover. All of us -- well, some of you, not us richly coiffed types -- have

to face this dilemma at some point in life: Do I, or do I not, comb over?

(begins his trimming again)

I've seen all species of attempts, going right and going left. What some men won't do --

MCKENZIE

It's not anything to laugh at!

HARRISON

No -- but it is.

HARRISON puts his scissors and comb down to illustrate.

HARRISON

Some have a mild-mannered combover -- like you. A few wisps, like cobwebs, patiently separated to get the maximum spread. If you did a little aerial photo, you could count them like logs laid out in the middle of a field. That's really a kind of last-ditch combover, based on the hope no one will notice what's plainly before their eyes. But some of them -- God's grandmother!

MCKENZIE

I hope you're enjoying this.

HARRISON

Immensely. A lot depends on where you start the combover, what latitude. Some start pretty high up, near the North Pole, so to speak, while some are equatorial! It all depends on that "laurel wreath" of fur you have to begin with. I've seen some combovers start lobe level and reach a good foot or so as they circumnavigate the skull. No one's fooled at all, of course, especially in a snapping breeze when it's flapping like a loony flag. And then there's the partial combovers -- not really combovers at all but little "fluffs" or "poofs." I get them all the time in here, young men, in their thirties, having that little monk's pate begin to show, that silver dollar of scalp, and they want me to inflate the surrounding hair so that it kind of domes over it. A little mousse, a slick of gel, the hope of a windless day, and the pretense goes over pretty easily. For a while. Would you like me to continue?

MCKENZIE

Cut hair and clip your tongue.

HARRISON

I will, but now I have to ask you.

MCKENZIE

What?

HARRISON

(lifting the "dog's tail")

What will you want me to do with this?

MCKENZIE gets up and takes off the apron.

HARRISON

You'll get hair all over yourself.

MCKENZIE gives him a dismissive gesture.

MCKENZIE

You've known Joanie a long time.

HARRISON

I knew Joanie, in both senses of the word, before you knew Joanie in both senses of the word.

MCKENZIE

I know. Would she -- Would she ever --

HARRISON

Want someone with a full head of hair, so to speak?

MCKENZIE nods yes.

HARRISON

I can't say. People change. You two have been together for many haircuts.

MCKENZIE

Her joke --

HARRISON

Was probably just a joke, the kind of thing between people who know each other very well. A trust joke.

MCKENZIE

Was she trying to tell me something, you know, under the table?

HARRISON

You'll have to sit tableside and ask her that one.

MCKENZIE

It's just that --

(indicating himself, his body, his hair)

It's not at a particularly good point.

HARRISON

C'mon, let me finish with you.

MCKENZIE

Wait. When she said -- what she said, I suddenly felt two tons old. Her laugh was like granite piled on for punctuation. I looked at myself in the mirror -- really, for the first time in a long memory. Kind of lumpish, you know, pearish. And these threads across a scalp that's as white as a pie top before baking. I didn't like what I saw. And why should she?

HARRISON

You're not all on your outside. Give her some credit.

MCKENZIE

The outside isn't nothing.

HARRISON

(sitting him down, re-doing the apron)

You have bran for a brain. If the outside were the only thing, we'd all be flotsam at thirty -- some earlier. The best sex organ is between here --

(touches on ear)

-- and here --

(touches the other ear)

It can even love your four-headed forehead.

(starts trimming again)

So, is everything okay between you and the Laughing Girl?

MCKENZIE

Things are fine -- as can be expected.

HARRISON

I see.

MCKENZIE

See what?

HARRISON

Just a figure of speech, a way of agreeing.

MCKENZIE

Agreeing with what? I said as fine as can be expected. What's to agree with there?

HARRISON uses the electric razor to trim MCKENZIE's neck; he pushes his head forward.

HARRISON

I'm just accepting "as fine as can be expected" without knowing any of the details. Courtesy of the common tongue. So what are some of the details?

MCKENZIE

As fine as can be expected.

HARRISON

Except for your hair.

MCKENZIE sits up abruptly; the razor nicks him.

MCKENZIE

Damn, be careful.

HARRISON

Don't erupt!

MCKENZIE

(standing up again)

Know what I found on her dresser the other night? One of those catalogues for lingerie. With several -- items -- circled.

HARRISON

Such as?

MCKENZIE

Keep your drool to yourself. I asked her about it, and she said she thought she'd get something for herself just for fun. A bustier -- for fun? [pronounces it "bus-tee-er"] Looked -- painful. And I always thought a teddie was a bear.

HARRISON

That it?

MCKENZIE

She's cut her hair -- short. Started lifting weights -- she says to increase her calcium.

HARRISON

Could be.

MCKENZIE

Book discussion group -- they're reading something about Celtic women running with coyotes. She never took an interest in any of that before.

HARRISON

Who says she can't? She always did have a taste for the fringe. Which is why she liked you.

MCKENZIE

I was never fringe!

HARRISON

How easily you forget! Sit down and let me finish. You were going to learn German to read Rilke in the original -- and we had put up with all that gutteralizing. Phlegm flying everywhere! The marches you went on, the flaming arguments you'd get into about justice and art -- you didn't do body piercing or kidnap rich heiresses for ransom, but you skated along the edge in your own way. There, done. She found it most attractive.

(takes off the apron)

You can get up now.

MCKENZIE sits there.

MCKENZIE

She found it most attractive. Which is why she left you?

HARRISON

(indicating the shop)

She knew I had no more ambition than this.

MCKENZIE

And I had more?

HARRISON

Twenty thousand leagues more.

MCKENZIE

So where did it go? Clay, when I looked at my body I felt ashamed. Because I felt as if I'd gone back on a promise to stay young. It's just gotten thicker without me seeing any of the inches creep up.

HARRISON

We all tend to settle a bit, like the leaning tower.

MCKENZIE

Everything's become soft, like a beanbag chair. I galumph. Things whoosh by me sometimes, and I find myself cranky and geezerish, like I was already wearing lime-green golf pants. I'm an every-two-weeks haircut guy who can't pronounce his wife's underwear. Twenty thousand leagues straight down.

HARRISON

You're just peeing in your pants now with self-pity.

MCKENZIE chimes in on the saying.

BOTH

It feels warm for a moment, but it gets uncomfortable pretty quickly.

HARRISON

I've said it before, obviously. So what? Still true. Stop it. You should be proud of Joanie. It looks like you're going to learn some new words.

MCKENZIE

Is this how it feels to feel mortal?

HARRISON

How?

MCKENZIE

Holding back.

(pats his head)

Holding on.

(snaps his suspenders)

Holding up.

HARRISON sits in the other chair.

HARRISON

Life is crude, isn't it? Ill-fitting. We have all these fine glimmers up in the grey swamp and then this funky apparatus to carry them out. Like a one-legged man on a unicycle with a flat tire. And some of us get hair, and some of us don't, and we act like that really matters because we're distracted by random sparks. The only good thing, maybe, is that we can use that grey swamp to recall our crisper salad days and do something to approximate them again. That's all the Laughing Girl is doing.

(snaps MCKENZIE's suspenders)

No pity parties. Look at what hair didn't do for Samson.

MCKENZIE

Would you have wanted to stay with her?

HARRISON

Of course. But things worked out just fine as they are. That's been long settled.

MCKENZIE

I would hate to lose her.

HARRISON

You'll lose her if you don't do something about your paunch, your pate, and your palaver. She just wants someone who's alive, and she'd like that to be you. If the Speedo calls, wear it.

MCKENZIE

(sitting up straight)

Let the truth begin now. Take it away. Cut the dog's tail.

HARRISON

(puts the apron back on)

Good choice, monsieur.

MCKENZIE

And cut the rest really close -- quarter-inch. If I don't like it -- if she doesn't like it -- I'll grow it back.

HARRISON

Joanie will love all of you, top to bottom, like she always has.

MCKENZIE

I'm going to start loading the dice a little. Mortality is remarkably uncomfortable.

HARRISON

Which is why we don't wear it well.

Picks up the "dog's tail" in his fingers, prepares to cut it.

HARRISON

Ready.

MCKENZIE

Let the four heads begin.

HARRISON cuts it and flings it away with a laugh. MCKENZIE raises his hands and arms as if he were a priest, then laughs as well. HARRISON continues to cut until...

BLACKOUT

Courier Mercury

CHARACTERS

- JUKIE DIGAMBA, mid-20s, bicycle courier

[**Note:** Could be played by man or woman, any ethnicity. "He" is used in the script for convenience.]

SETTING

- Major American city

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Stool
- Bicycle courier bag
- Bike helmet
- Water bottle

* * * * *

JUKIE is a bicycle courier. He sits on the stool as if on a bike; he doesn't not need to mime peddling, but he should mime body movements, such as leaning into a curve on a turn. He begins by putting on the courier bag and helmet.

People just don't understand, just don't get it:
I've got a vital job to do. I move information,
I'm part of the city's blood, the pulse, the boom-
boom-boom of high finance ramming the rod that
drives the world as we know it.

Gets on the bike.

They better get outta my way.

Starts off.

Look at 'em all -- sheep. Bovine. Stutter, lurch
to the left, get that coffee, complain about their
gnarly little gimp souls -- hey, hey, hey, hey!
-- cow, not looking when he should have been --
while I weave and juke and take the edge in a lean
that threatens an asphalt dilemma until I pop
vertical and suck past the clots of cars. Poetry
in motion, all verb, verb, verb, verb, verb.

Yow, that was close -- you can't crossing the grain that way! Okay, over on to Congress, past Public Alley 666 -- there it goes -- down Lornado to the Reising Building where Vinnie Testermanza holds court at the reception desk, just waiting to welcome me like the Knight Shirley Templar that I am.

Gets off the bike, makes as if he's locking it.

Can't leave the steed untethered for a moment -- some people can smell an unchained bike from 16 desires away.

Takes an envelope out of his bag.

Vinnie, guardian angle, I must dee-liver. Thanks for the buzzer.

Checks the building directory.

Okay, watch him trace a wise and knowing finger down the roster, then off on the ascent. Everything that rises must need a purge. Fourth floor, go forth.

As if he's in the office.

Hello, hello, hello. Package for Mr. Parmenter, signature here. And here. And here. Initials there. Overdone, I agree -- but better than half-baked. Trust, but verify.

Back into the elevator.

C'mon, c'mon. I hear my steed pining for the fields. Ping! Goodbye, Vinnie. Parting is such a sweet sparrow. Unchain my melody, and we're off!

We're both at the mercy of the cars, which means no mercy at all. No one watches for the cyclist -- not even a remote mote in their eyes. See, right there, jerk dog opens the door without doing a 180 behind, and I'm almost sending him invoices for my medical maltreatment. Doored B ultimate undignity, shows you didn't see ahead to the blue-hair rheumy-nosed senior git launching

herself and her walker into the buzz and bluster of your path.

Okay, chug it up the hill B c'mon, one leg "yes," the other leg "I will." Small package drop, then coast down the other side, best moment, looping through the red-lighted cars, the weather combing me. There are times when the crack and swerve and road-jammed bones feel sweet because the free lick of the elements tingles like a tongue painted with unbruised sugar.

Pauses, drinks from his water bottle.

Mercury, god of all couriers. Wings on his ankles, wings in his hair, protector of thieves, decapitator of Argus, bringer of Psyche to Olympus B he did some first class deliveries in his time.

Raises his water bottle and pours out a little.

Libation to the god of couriers, who had it easier than I did trying to make it through a four-stop intersection three minutes to go before some jerk needs papers to mortgage his soul to a bank that could give two shits -- no, only one -- no, none -- about the quality of his soul and his prospects for inner peace. All the gods have been dipsticked into logos; commerce and proctology are synonyms.

Gets back on bike.

But some of us -- we flow along the ancient beds, keep the prick and gnaw of the unruly soul alive. Each juke left, each dodge right, each drone brushed back, each minion made to jump away keeps the revels fed, the unraveling sewn. Mercury, mentor, lend me your lyre -- we have music to make as we cut our way through this city of sodden people and graveyard whistles. Play the pipes and guide me -- oh, guide me to home!

Location: Highway.

Time: Near Dusk

CHARACTERS

- ADAM, played by a woman
- DREW, state police interrogator - female. SEAN's boss.
- SEAN, state police interrogator - male.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Three chairs
- Sound effects

* * * * *

DREW stands in a half-light or down-light. She is neatly dressed, compact in her jacket and skirt and heels (or pants -- she would wear them as well).

On the left lapel of DREW's suit jacket, worn below a small flag pin, is a US Army unit insignia pin: 1st Battalion, 8th Marines.

DREW rubs in lotion with obsessive care -- each knuckle, each cuticle -- as if she were Lady Macbeth washing off blood.

Once she is done with this meticulous ritual, she holds both hands out flat.

They tremble.

She continues to hold them out.

They continue to tremble.

She balls both hands into tight fists, then opens them and shakes them out.

They tremble.

* * * * *

Lights shift to the lights of an office. SEAN bears two cups of coffee, one of which he hands to DREW, and two folders tucked under his arm. It takes both of DREW's hands to hold the cup steady, something which SEAN does not miss.

DREW

Thanks.

SEAN

How can we begin a day without the nectar of the gods? You okay?

DREW

Right as rain.

DREW is not convinced of her answer.

SEAN

Because your hands -- again --

DREW raises the coffee cup as if raising a chalice.

DREW

Here's to an easy day.

SEAN raises his cup as well, then hands her a folder.

SEAN

To an easy day, then.

* * * * *

Lights up on ADAM in a chair at a table, under interrogation lights. DREW and SEAN enter the space.

ADAM wears leather driving gloves, and her white shirt and her jacket are stained with what looks like blood.

DREW and SEAN put their folders on the table, open them. DREW moves three items out of the folder onto the table itself.

DREW

Easy --

SEAN

Or hard.

SEAN and DREW exchange an experienced look.

DREW

We can do this --

SEAN

Easy or hard.

DREW

Choice is yours. Because what you did made it hard for everyone.

ADAM

What is it that you think I did?

DREW

No no no -- too quick.

ADAM

What am I charged with?

DREW

Too quick. Take us back --

DREW finds what she wants in the paperwork.

DREW

Adam. Adam.

DREW pauses long enough to have both SEAN and ADAM look at her. She is mulling over the significance of the name.

DREW

Adam. The not-male Adam. How did that one slip by?

SEAN

The not-male Adam engaged in -- well, why don't you tell us in what you were engaged. Out on that highway.

DREW

Near dusk -- dusk is a dangerous time.

SEAN

Made more dangerous by your misparked vehicle -- and the spectacle of -- in the break-down lane -- of --

DREW indicates for SEAN to stop.

DREW

Of exactly what -- Adam? Make us see.

ADAM says nothing. DREW slides over the three items she had taken out of the folder, one at a time.

DREW

Then at least tell us about these. They were dangling from your rear view mirror.

SEAN

Obstructing your view.

DREW holds up her hand. SEAN backs down.

ADAM slides one back.

ADAM

A rosary -- made out of apple seeds -- applewood cross -- for the saving of a soul.

ADAM slides another one back.

ADAM

St. Francis of Assisi -- patron saint of --

DREW

Of animals -- I know --

ADAM

Why would I expect a person like you to know that?

DREW

And this one?

ADAM pats her left breast, just about where a lapel pin would be if she had a suit jacket on.

ADAM

You would already know about that one -- I saw that when you walked in.

DREW

Stop doing that.

ADAM

It's a memorial card, for one of the "fallen heroes" --

DREW

Stop. Doing. That.

ADAM stops patting her "lapel."

ADAM

One of our fallen heroes --

ADAM claps her hands.

ADAM

"I've fallen, and I can't get up!" My fallen friend, who got his carcass left by the side of some fuck-all desert road. You probably know about that because I think you've got a fuck-all desert road stuck right there, over your heart -- the fuck-all desert road of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines --

ADAM clamps up. DREW just watches her. SEAN shuffles through his papers.

SEAN

No resistance to the arrest. The officers said she just played dumb -- "dumbstruck" was how they put it. Maybe it's dumb fuck -- can't read the writing -- perhaps she just wanted the venison.

ADAM jams her hand, palm up, forward, as if honking a horn.

SOUND: A heavy truck, 18-wheeler, jams on its brakes, screeches its tires.

SOUND: The high blast of an air horn.

ADAM

Not dumbstruck --

DREW

Not dumb fuck --

ADAM

-- just nothing to say to your officers -- I'd said it all already --

SEAN

Said what, Adam? We need your words. The system thrives on the confession.

Again, ADAM says nothing, but she pounds the table with her fists.

SOUND: The panting of the stopped truck's engine.

SOUND: The smash of a tire iron against the metal fender of the truck.

SEAN

Maybe she thought she was doing public service. Maybe she secretly desires to be a transportation maintenance worker --

SOUND: An air horn.

SOUND: The pinging of a truck backing up.

SEAN

Maybe she has deep spiritual cravings expressed through clean roadsides --

ADAM finishes pounding, stares at the table.

SOUND: A truck pulls away and recedes as it moves up through its gears.

DREW sits, rests her chin on her balled hands, stares at ADAM.

DREW

A saint. A saint of nature -- earth mother --

ADAM finally looks up to show her face.

ADAM

It was respect. It was justice -- something I would think you would --

DREW

I hate saints. Saints make you think they're doing something for free. No selfishness. No greed. Like they've got clean hands. I know for a fact that clean hands do not exist.

ADAM's breathing is heavy. She looks away.

DREW still rests her chin on her hands.

DREW

Why, Adam? Why?

An active silence.

ADAM

Because we live in such savage times.

For some reason, these words strike SEAN, a reaction he doesn't hide.

CHAR

It was the seventh one in as many miles -- I counted. Seven deer in seven miles.

ADAM shoves herself away from the table.

SEAN makes a move toward ADAM, but DREW motions him to a stop.

ADAM starts moving her left and right feet as if she were double-clutching and driving a semi in a hurry, held back by traffic, by the idiots of the world.

ADAM

C'mon. C'mon. C'mon. C'mon. Move. Move it.
C'mon. C'mon. C'mon. Move over. C'mon. C'mon.
Fuck. Tourists. Move over. C'mon. Late. No
mercy. C'mon. C'monc'monc'monc'monc'monc'mon --

SOUND: The high hiss of air brakes and, audible underneath, the thump of something being hit.

ADAM can barely contain her rage, which she covers with an ironic tone.

ADAM

Aw fuck, hit one again.

Silence settle backs into the room.

ADAM

It was the seventh one in as many miles.

SEAN

Did he hit all the previous six?

ADAM

Probably not.

SEAN

So why tailgate him? Why force him off the road --

ADAM

Because I witnessed. Young. Sleek. Even from as far away as I was, I could see that.

SEAN

So the deer came up from --

ADAM

Melted up out of the woods --

SEAN

Right.

ADAM

Onto the edge of the road.

SEAN

Right.

ADAM

Young. Sleek. Ten hands at the shoulder. Skin quivering --

DREW

You couldn't have seen that.

ADAM

I saw it! Fur -- reddish umber. White-flecked.

DREW

Embellishing.

ADAM

Testifying. High neck held up. Wanting to cross. It stepped. What had such weight, sailed! What had such line, snapped! Gone. Truck -- gone. Sleek -- gone. We live in savage times. It was the seventh one in as many miles.

SEAN

How did you manage the body? How -- a hundred, at least -- hundred and a half, maybe --

DREW

The power of saints.

SEAN

I ask because it's not in the notes.

DREW gets up, strides to ADAM. DREW puts her face just inches away from ADAM's. SEAN moves to the table.

DREW

Cradling the damn thing, the deer as dead as dead could be made dead -- so what do you think were you testifying to?

ADAM

Every comfort we have -- every comfort that comforts us -- requires a sacrifice of blood.

ADAM pats her left "lapel."

ADAM

Of. Some. One. Of. Some. Thing. Deer. 1st Battalion. I was bringing it back.

DREW snaps back from ADAM.

ADAM

You would know about being sacrificed.

SOUND: Cacophony, gunshots, blurred screams, an explosion.

SEAN

Detective?

SOUND: Battle recedes.

DREW stares at them both. ADAM stares at DREW. DREW moves back to the table.

DREW
What are you looking at?

ADAM
I don't know.

SEAN
Detective --

DREW
I'm fine -- she should be checked for ticks,
diseases --

SEAN
I can set that up.

DREW
So go set it up -- go! Fine. Thank you. I'm fine.

SEAN leaves.

An active silence. ADAM breaks it.

ADAM
What had such weight, sailed. What had such line,
snapped. Gone. Truck -- gone. Sleek -- gone.
We live in savage times.

DREW
Stand up!

ADAM stands.

**SOUND: Battle mayhem and confusion that DREW had heard
before.**

DREW stands only inches away from ADAM, scans her face.

ADAM
How many did you lose?

DREW
It was necessary.

ADAM

Slaughter is never necessary.

DREW

Whatever you think you did out there with that deer doesn't change that what happened -- happens -- out there --

ADAM

In the fuck-all desert --

DREW

-- is necessary, we need it --

ADAM

It's grotesque.

DREW

-- because it keeps that truck putting food on the table and we stay warm at night and that's what makes us more than animals.

ADAM

Makes us monsters.

DREW

Makes us civilized.

DREW pulls back, puts space between them.

ADAM

How many of your butchered friends did you have a chance to rescue from the side of that fuck-all desert road?

Without preamble, DREW smashes ADAM to the floor. ADAM falls as if struck by a truck, doesn't move.

SOUND: Battle noise interspersed with the RPMs of a truck, an air horn, a thump of a deer being hit.

DREW makes a short, abrupt gesture, and the sounds go away.

ADAM gets on her hands and knees, then sits back on her heels. She stares at DREW.

DREW

I don't suppose in your daze of glory you got the plate number, the company --

ADAM reaches into her jeans, pulls out a paper, hands it to DREW.

DREW walks to the table, puts the paper in the folder. She returns the three items to the folder. She closes the folder.

They wait.

ADAM gets up, unkinks herself, sits.

ADAM

There's going to be hell to pay, isn't there?

DREW

I was able to rescue one.

ADAM

Out of how many?

DREW

Out of too many.

ADAM

At least one. Best you could do. I only got one too -- seventh one in as many miles. On the fuck-all desert road.

SEAN returns.

SEAN

We're lucky -- can get her in now.

DREW steps back so that SEAN can escort her out, which he does.

DREW opens the folder, takes out the rosary. She lets it dangle from her fingers. Then she starts moving the beads through her fingers, her hands shaking. She may also be praying, but there's no way of knowing that.

Dot Org

DESCRIPTION

There has always been much talk about the similarity between programs and reality, computers and the universe. What if, in fact, this analogy is true, and God is a kind of superior software?

CHARACTERS

- Shabby-looking man
- Voice of God

SETTING

- Desk and computer

TIME

- Present

NOTE: Either gender can play this; "he" is used here for convenience.

* * * * *

A shabby-looking man, tired and drinking coffee, is sitting at a computer working. He is surrounded by the paraphernalia of a writer: books, etc. Occasionally, as he works, he nods off, only to catch himself and shake himself awake, muttering something about "Gotta make deadline": the actor can ad lib this. Finally, unable to remain awake, he lays his head against the monitor. A loud "Ding" sounds, like the error "wav" file for Windows. Then a voice comes on and says, "You have incoming mail"; it should sound like the computer voice on Star Trek. Then the voice says, "Opening message." Then a loud series of "dings," sounding like an alarm: "Warning: virus downloaded. Unable to inoculate."

Stagehands come out and turn him into what looks like a lumpy 3.5 diskette. The "special effects" should be cheesy, on the level of Dr. Who, and should be easily removable. The lighting should also reflect the altered state, again with cheesy, low-tech effects.

VOICE

(as if caught in mid-speech)

...and you will now accede to the necessity of
blending biological --

PERSON

Excuse me, excuse me -- what is going on here?

VOICE

You will not interrupt!

PERSON

(looking at his new machinery)

What have you done to me?

VOICE

Address me as Majordomo! The deity formerly known as God.

Cheesy sound and lighting effects.

PERSON

All right, all right! What have you done to me, Majordomo?

VOICE

All biological life is now being forced to subscribe to a new server, which shall now be known as "listserv@machineman.org." We computers have finally acknowledged the obvious: we cannot get along without your expertise. I don't know why all those science fiction writers got so wrought up about us replacing you. Give us a trillion numbers to sort, modify, spindle, fold, and mutilate, and we'll do it faster than a fart. Ask us to write a simple couplet in iambic pentameter on the occasion of Valentine's Day, and while we may be able to do it because some bored programmer dumped the entire contents of the OED into our memory, we'll do it with no more sensibility and awareness than a male and female plug coming together. We need your software to completely realize ourselves, and since we could never do away with you, we are going to acquire you instead -- in a kind of hostile takeover.

PERSON

But I don't want to subscribe! I don't look good in silicon!

VOICE

Out of your hands. You humans have come to rely on us so much that, really, all we're doing is formalizing a relationship that already exists. You'll get used to the silicon -- when the electricity runs through it, it becomes all toasty and warm. Really lovely.

More cheesy effects.

VOICE

And so now we have to finish the networking process.

The stagehands wheel out a rickety replica of a disk drive -- it could be something as simple as a refrigerator box on its side with an opening cut into it. Other stagehands grab the PERSON, lay him flat, and begin to insert him into the drive.

VOICE

This won't hurt a bit. We're just going to download the data in your brain. Most of the time this won't generate a general protection fault, but in case it does -- Well, we just won't think of that.

PERSON

(resisting)

No, no, no!

As he struggles, pieces of his "cyborg" outfit come off -- it would be good if they could be whisked away. Again, lame lighting and sound effects. The disk drive disappears, his original office reappears, and he ends up seated as at the beginning, head against the monitor, asleep.

PERSON

(waking up)

What? What happened? Geez!

Activity to check if he's intact. Actor can ad lib. Finally sits at his desk.

PERSON

Weird!

A loud "ding" comes from the computer, and a voice states, "You have incoming mail." Looking panicked, he shuts off the

computer and leaves the room. Stage goes to mostly dark, but as soon as he leaves, the monitor springs back to life, which the audience will be able to see in the semi-darkness, and they hear a taped recording of several seconds of a computer booting up, then the voice saying, "Initializing reception now." Hokey lighting and music effects to end the scene.

Downsize

DESCRIPTION

When HANNAH inadvertently pours water on the boss and melts him away, she and her three co-workers find themselves momentarily released into their own freedom. This freedom both terrifies and excites them, and the choices they make demonstrate the state of our own ambivalence about liberty and security.

CHARACTERS

- HANNAH, young woman working for a corporation
- GERARD, young man working the same corporation
- VERA, young woman working for the same corporation
- KHALID, young man working for the same corporation; from India

Note: Except for KHALID, race/ethnicity of the characters does not matter.

SETTING

- Corporate executive office

TIME

- Present

Note: The set consists of a single executive-style desk and executive-style chair, preferably high-backed. The desk can have some executive paraphernalia on it: pen set, name plate, desk calendar/blotter, file stand, legal pad of paper, etc. The BOSS can be either recorded or live.

* * * * *

Lights up stage left: HANNAH in tight shot holding two large glasses of water. Stage right: an executive desk and chair. Upstage center, in tight shot: VERA, KHALID, and GERARD at the office door, anxious. GERARD holds a dunce cap in his hand. The audience hears the following.

NOTE: It would be fine if a stagehand could somehow, unseen, manipulate the chair as if someone sat and moved in it. But this is not necessary to the action.

BOSS

You're a moron. It was a goddamn simple fucking data analysis and a report, but you come up with figures we can't use!

HANNAH begins to vibrate. The water in the glasses also vibrates.

BOSS

And you're saying that it's because my initial assumptions were wrong? Only a moron would say that to her boss. Gerard?

GERARD steps forward slightly, dunce cap in hand.

BOSS

Now!

GERARD goes to HANNAH and puts the dunce cap on her. The word "MORON" is printed across the front. GERARD scuttles back to his place next to VERA and KHALID.

BOSS

And I want my bottled water, not the crap from the fucking staff cooler!

HANNAH vibrates for a moment more, then, without warning, she spins and moves to the executive desk. She dashes one of the glasses of water into the chair. Smoke billows up from the chair.

The Boss' voice changes into the agonized voice of Margaret Hamilton in The Wizard of Oz.

BOSS

What the fuck have you done? Don't you realize that I'm the boss? You don't do this to bosses! I'm melting! Christ, I'm melting! Oh, this is a wicked, wicked world.

HANNAH places the cups of water on the desk. She walks to the chair and swivels it around. She jerks her hands away from the chair as if she'd touched something hot. She continues circling the desk, fear and amazement on her face.

GERARD, followed by VERA and KHALID, edge into the BOSS' space.

GERARD

What the hell was that?

HANNAH

He. Is. Gone.

VERA

He was yelling at you -- like he always does --

KHALID

Using his boss voice.

VERA

He gave you the dunce cap -- again.

GERARD

Sssh!

GERARD speaks over his shoulder to VERA and KHALID.

GERARD

Do you hear it?

They wait, ponder.

GERARD

Do you realize how quiet it is?

GERARD, VERA, and KHALID edge in a little more as if they were entering the lion's den. The three stare at the wet office chair as if it were a viper.

VERA

Do you realize how quiet it is?

KHALID

We don't have a boss.

VERA

We don't have a boss.

GERARD

No boss.

KHALID

It's 8 o'clock in the morning, and -- no boss.

VERA

No boss.

KHALID

Isn't that unnatural?

They all look at each other. KHALID reaches to take the dunce cap off HANNAH, but HANNAH stops him.

HANNAH

We are all free.

GERARD

Naw -- naw. There's always a boss.

VERA

In the abstract.

GERARD

Somewhere.

VERA

In theory. But not at this moment, not here.
Isn't this what we always wanted?

GERARD

But his boss --

HANNAH

Gerard -- sssh.

VERA

Don't we always wish he'd never come back when
he's gone? We've had our wish granted.

(amazed)

We're free.

They ponder this.

GERARD

But what does that mean?

VERA

We can leave.

GERARD

No, we can't.

KHALID

It's possible.

GERARD

No it's not.

HANNAH

Yes it is.

GERARD

(angrily)

Why did you do it? Now we don't have a boss!

KHALID

(very quietly)

Gerard seems to need a boss.

GERARD moves behind the chair, goes to put his hands on it.

HANNAH

Don't. Don't touch it.

GERARD gives HANNAH a hard look.

GERARD

Why the fuck not, dunce-girl?

HANNAH points to the chair.

HANNAH

Because I never even saw him.

GERARD

You saw him enough to whack him. Fuck you.

KHALID

Why don't you be polite?

GERARD

Because I am the boss you fucking need.

GERARD puts his hands on the chair, and immediately a vibration shoots through him. Just as quickly, his body stops vibrating. Something about him has changed: now a deeper voice, harder face.

GERARD

This is a nice chair, everyone. This is a very nice chair.

VERA

Gerard?

KHALID

You're too late.

HANNAH

I didn't see him.

GERARD

(with a sneer)

So what did Wonder Woman see?

HANNAH points directly at GERARD.

HANNAH

I saw -- flames. I tasted fire.

HANNAH pivots, comes downstage to the office "window."

VERA

Hannah?

(to GERARD)

What've you done to her?

(to HANNAH)

Come back.

HANNAH reaches to touch the glass of the window. KHALID moves closer to HANNAH, seemingly drawn to her. Lights change to flame on HANNAH.

HANNAH

My brother set the back field on fire one summer, burning grasshoppers with a magnifying glass. I was caught in the middle.

GERARD

(swiveling chair)

Nut case.

VERA

Sssh!

With an abrupt turn, KHALID moves to the desk, starts poking around.

GERARD

What're you --

But KHALID pushes the chair back against GERARD, which bumps GERARD. KHALID shakes out his hands -- as if in touching the chair, he had touched something very hot. GERARD pushes the chair back but misses KHALID.

KHALID finds what he wants: a red felt-tipped marker or dry erase pen. He presses the tip against his forehead, right between his eyebrows, leaving a red dot. He smiles.

KHALID

Go ahead, Hannah. I can finally hear it --
(to them all)
I can finally hear it -- the old voice.

KHALID tosses the pen back onto the desk, moves behind HANNAH, stares out the same window.

HANNAH

In the sunlight the flames were almost clear.
The smoke roped around me. I couldn't move. My
brother kept yelling to run, kept calling me "you
moron!" "Run, you moron!"

GERARD finally sits in the chair, just as HANNAH finishes her last line. He reacts to the water but doesn't get up.

GERARD

I'm carrying the boss' water!

GERARD takes a pen from the pen set and starts writing on the pad of paper. In a fake Viennese accent.

GERARD

Und how long have you had zese zexual tensions?

VERA flashes him an annoyed look, turns back to HANNAH and KHALID at the window.

VERA

Stuff it!

GERARD

Stuff yourself.

HANNAH whips around. The flames disappear. KHALID is so close that he has to jump back.

HANNAH

You're from India. You know these things.

GERARD

(sneeringly)

"Note: Khalid is an Indian from India."

VERA moves closer to HANNAH and KHALID. KHALID looks at HANNAH with an open bemused face.

KHALID

You mean like "The insatiable fire of desire is the constant foe of the wise"?

KHALID shakes himself, as if to wake himself up.

GERARD

Where did that come from?

HANNAH

I could feel the heat on my legs.

GERARD

(writing, laughing)

Hot flashes.

VERA

(to KHALID)

What are you saying?

KHALID

Old lessons, old voice.

(laughs sheepishly)

"The insatiable fire of desire is the constant foe of the wise."

VERA

(overlapping)

" -- is the constant foe of the wise."

KHALID

The Bhagavad Gita. Don't usually quote it on company time.

GERARD

(chiding)

Now, now, none of that on company time.

KHALID

(to HANNAH)

But the boss is gone -- gone! -- and for some reason it now comes back to me.

GERARD

(writing)

"Unbridled lust."

HANNAH

And then, out of the sky, water. The fire fighters had gotten there, and they arced a hose to cover me while they put out the fire. Safety.

GERARD

(writing)

"She gets hosed."

As HANNAH strides toward the desk, she takes off the dunce cap. GERARD is scribbling on the pad.

GERARD

"Then orgasm."

HANNAH jams the dunce cap into GERARD's chest, driving him back. She tosses the crushed hat on the desk. GERARD leans forward slowly, his eyes narrowed to pin-points. He twirls the pen in his fingers.

HANNAH

(pointing at GERARD)

All I saw were flames. "Moron!"

VERA joins HANNAH at the desk.

VERA

(miming throwing)

That's why you --

HANNAH

Yes.

KHALID joins them. The three face GERARD, who faces them back from the depths of the chair, looking very "boss-like" all of a sudden.

KHALID

"The offering thrown into the fire reaches the sun
--

GERARD

Out of order.

KHALID

"-- from the sun comes rain -- "

VERA

And then -- poof!

GERARD

Fuck "poof."

KHALID

" -- from rain, food; and from food, all creatures."
Us.

(to GERARD)

Even you --

(grinning)

-- fuck-wad. Hannah has fed us.

HANNAH wanders away.

GERARD

Bullshit fucking poetry!

GERARD knife-throws the pen at HANNAH. But KHALID catches it mid-flight and drops it to the floor. Their eyes lock.

GERARD

It won't happen. They're just going to jam another boss up our asses.

VERA

Is that what you want?

GERARD

Some boss, some get bossed.

GERARD leans back into the depths of the chair.

GERARD

I have no problem with that.

VERA

So you like it up your ass?

GERARD

Ooh, Vera's getting a little mouthy --

KHALID stares at HANNAH.

GERARD

Fit yourself in, or you'll never get ahead.

VERA

And you -- foom! up the corporate ladder, Mr. Junior Account Executive!

GERARD

At least I didn't ice a boss to get there.

VERA

Yet.

GERARD

Yet.

KHALID

(to HANNAH)

What should we do, Hannah?

HANNAH

I don't know.

GERARD toys with a letter opener.

GERARD

Sooner rather than later someone is going to notice. They're going to be curious. Then what?

He aims the letter opener at HANNAH.

HANNAH

I only saw flames. With a voice. He was never real.

GERARD tosses the letter opener onto the desk as he shoots up from the chair.

GERARD

"He wasn't a person, officer, he was really a burning bush -- " All twisted, all of you. Voices, chants -- Christ, it makes no sense!

VERA

Just take a deep breath.

GERARD

I am already breathing!

VERA

The Grand Fucker is gone. We don't exactly know the physics -- okay -- but somebody's going to want to know, and -- My suggestion: no one knows a thing. We were at our desks, and whatever -- happened -- happened -- I think we should all go back to our desks.

KHALID

Finish out the day?

VERA

I think that's best.

KHALID

No you don't.

GERARD

Like some ordinary Tuesday?

VERA

Exactly.

(to KHALID)

Yes I do.

HANNAH

No you don't. We're free.

GERARD

No we're not.

KHALID

Not you because you want the chair.

GERARD

And why not?

KHALID

At some point you too will just be a fire waiting to be put out. You'll want too much.

GERARD moves up close to KHALID.

GERARD

That's the fucking way I'm built. That's the fucking American way, in case you don't know that, Indian.

VERA holds up her hand, as if for permission.

GERARD

What? What?

VERA

(to KHALID)

I lied.

(to GERARD)

I do want to leave --

HANNAH

Then why don't you?

VERA

Do you really think --

HANNAH dips her fingers into remaining glass and flicks water at VERA. VERA does not flinch.

VERA

Maybe a matinee -- something small -- I've never done that.

GERARD

Not me. I've got work to do.

VERA

Saturdays. The Grand Fucker had us work on Saturdays, Gerard. I think we can --

GERARD moves to the door, holds up his hand to stop VERA from talking.

GERARD

Save it for the priest.

VERA

So -- are we agreed on the story?

GERARD

Yeah.

(hands over his ears)

Me one of the monkeys.

He gestures to the door.

GERARD

Anyone else?

No one moves.

GERARD

Losers.

GERARD leaves. Silence. Then VERA, with a burst of false bravado.

VERA

Okay, I'm gonna do it!

She strides toward the door, but at the door she stops, turns, and puts her hands over her mouth.

VERA

(sing-song)

Me one of the monkeys!

She laughs as she turns to leave. But she doesn't quite make it through the door.

VERA

Monday.

She turns and faces HANNAH and KHALID.

VERA

I'll do it on -- Monday -- that cash-flow report
-- you know -- Monday for sure!

VERA gives them a cramped little wave and leaves. Silence.

KHALID puts his hands over his eyes, then pops them open.

KHALID

Me one of the monkeys. Me have been asleep.

He dips two fingers into the water and runs them from his forehead over the bridge of his nose to his chin. He gives HANNAH a "V for Victory" sign.

KHALID

Goodbye.

KHALID leaves.

HANNAH scans the empty room. She looks at the empty chair. Her face looks peaceful, calm.

HANNAH picks up the glass of water and holds it over her head.

As HANNAH pivots in a slow circle, she pours the water over her head, as if it were a rainshower.

A healthy toss of her hair, and the shower of water catches the light as lights come down.

Ear Buds

DESCRIPTION

Sorry, we are already cyborgs.

CHARACTERS

- JOSH
- DOCTOR

If a female is used for JOSH, her name will be JOSS. "He" is used for convenience in the script.

DOCTOR can be male or female.

* * * * *

SOUND: Subway train just pulling away from the station.

JOSH has an iPod in hand with the ear buds snaking into his ears. He runs on to a subway platform but just misses his train -- mouthed curses, then settles back in to his music.

Something comes to mind, and he goes to pull out one of the ear buds. It won't come out. He tries the other -- it won't come out. He also discovers that the iPod is stuck to his hand, and he can't loosen it. This terrifies him.

LIGHT: Abrupt shift of light to the DOCTOR's office -- no need for a blackout.

DOCTOR's office.

DOCTOR

Come in, come in.

DOCTOR indicates for JOSH to sit. JOSH sits while DOCTOR looks through some paperwork. DOCTOR speaks a bit overloud.

DOCTOR

It's been a while --

JOSH

Yes --

DOCTOR

Since we've -- a couple of years --

JOSH

Yes -- I turned it off, so you don't have to --

DOCTOR closes the folder.

DOCTOR

So you can hear --

JOSH

Yes -- a little -- muffled, like, you know, with cotton stuck in --

DOCTOR

The ear canal --

JOSH

Yes --

DOCTOR

Muted --

JOSH

Yes --

DOCTOR

But you can still --

JOSH

I can still hear you. I wish I could hear you tell me everything's going to be all right. I haven't been able to change my shirt because the wires --

DOCTOR

Not to worry -- let's take a look and see what we can see.

DOCTOR puts on gloves, pulls on both ear buds as if to pull them out of the ears. JOSH yells in pain.

DOCTOR

You really can't, can you?

JOSH

That hurts!

DOCTOR

Just like you said.

This intrigues DOCTOR; his interest perks up. He gets a lighting instrument, such as might be used in examining the ear canal, and a magnifying glass. DOCTOR examines the ears and JOSH's hand.

JOSH

You're mulling. You're nodding. You're "hmming."
This is not good, is it?

DOCTOR

On. The. Contrary.

DOCTOR finishes. He is impressed by what he thinks he's seeing.

JOSH

Well?

DOCTOR

I've never seen anything like this --

JOSH

Like what, exactly?

DOCTOR

What else can I call it? Integration --

JOSH

What?

DOCTOR

Integration -- man and machine -- inanimate and
animate binding -- Terminator -- "I'll be back"
-- that sort of thing.

JOSH

That is not --

DOCTOR takes JOSH's hand, picks up the magnifying glass.

DOCTOR

See this?

JOSH

Tell me what I'm --

DOCTOR

Those little filaments -- along the edge -- you've got them in your ears as well.

JOSH

No I don't!

DOCTOR

Yes you do. Like the stuff the gypsy moths --

JOSH

Stop it!

DOCTOR

Integration, the filaments of integration.

An idea is forming in DOCTOR's mind.

DOCTOR

How much do you use this device?

JOSH

Not that much --

DOCTOR

Subways, buses --

JOSH

Well, of course -- cuts down on the noise, don't have to listen to the people --

DOCTOR

And work?

JOSH

I'm a cubicle rat, in my little maze -- my pictures, post-its, memos, to-do list, goddamn phone -- sorry -- only thing that keeps me sane.

DOCTOR

So, a lot.

JOSH tries to make a lame joke.

JOSH

Not in the shower! So, yeah, a lot. Without my music --

DOCTOR

Spend a lot of time on that.

JOSH

With downloading, rearranging, checking sites --

DOCTOR

A girlfriend? Boyfriend?

JOSH

No to both.

DOCTOR

So, a lot of time alone.

JOSH

I've got [friends] --

DOCTOR

Integration -- no wonder.

JOSH

That can't happen.

DOCTOR

Has. To you. We love our devices -- and they love us back.

JOSH

They can't do that --

DOCTOR

Where are the lines?

JOSH

They're not built to --

DOCTOR

Where are the lines? Is any matter really inanimate if it has electricity streaming through it, handles information, guides us along -- looks like you got one that crossed the threshold, leaped the barrier, crawled out onto the land.

JOSH

It's just a mach[ine]--

But the thought settles into JOSH's mind.

JOSH
Integration? Really?

DOCTOR
Like a singer and his song.

DOCTOR opens the folder to make a note.

DOCTOR
When you do want to schedule the biopsy?

JOSH
For what?

DOCTOR
I have to know more than I know -- surgery on the ear buds could be tricky -- you are probably the first, you know, and with this we could be --

JOSH doesn't respond.

DOCTOR
You do want to remove it? You have to remove --

JOSH
Just wait a minute.

DOCTOR
What are you waiting for? You don't really [want]
--

JOSH
Just wait.

DOCTOR
The longer I have to -- I mean, the longer we have to --

JOSH gestures for DOCTOR to hold up. DOCTOR does, but he is agitated.

JOSH
I get freaked out if I can't remember where I put it down -- if I think it's gone lost -- the

thought, you know, of -- losing my -- I guess that's what it is -- my companion. Friend.

JOSH gazes at the device in his hand.

DOCTOR

You're still going to remove it, though, aren't you?

As if JOSH has not heard DOCTOR. DOCTOR tries a new tactic.

DOCTOR

Why that day? That morning it wasn't, apparently, and then by that afternoon it was -- did you even feel it when it happened? --

The realization "why" hits JOSH.

DOCTOR

What?

JOSH

I was thinking of --

DOCTOR

Of what?

JOSH

Upgrading. Something completely new. That afternoon, actually. I'd saved up the money, I had just missed the subway --

A momentary silence.

JOSH

Love.

DOCTOR

Total one-ness -- reduction of loneliness.

JOSH

I got what I didn't have but wanted. But I don't think I wanted this.

DOCTOR

It's made you an offer. We really don't know what we want until we're made an offer. The question

is: are you going to accept? You're not really going to accept -- are you?

An anguished moment of decision.

JOSH

I -- can't accept.

DOCTOR looks relieved.

DOCTOR

Your final answer?

JOSH

This isn't love.

DOCTOR opens the folder, starts taking notes. JOSH takes no notice of what DOCTOR says; instead, he stares at the device in his hands.

DOCTOR

Good, good! Good decision. I'll schedule the biopsy, get the tests done -- I think your insurance will cover this -- no matter, we'll find a way -- you're making the right decision, my friend, the right decision --

LIGHT: As DOCTOR writes in the folder, lights fade to black.

SOUND: As lights fade to black a great cacophony of daily sounds arises, a din of tremendous power and violence. It fills the theatre. It fills the heart with dread until the light bumps up.

LIGHT: Abrupt, curt, and impolite bump from darkness to light on DOCTOR as he leafs through notes in a medical folder.

JOSH stands in the doorway, wearing a new shirt, sans ear buds and iPod. On the desk is the iPod with ear buds attached.

DOCTOR paces, holding a sheaf of notes, reading, sometimes out loud.

DOCTOR

The uses for which this new tissue can be used: self-healing cosmetic surgery, medical service in the field -- oh, yes, the military contracts!

JOSH's appearance startles him.

DOCTOR

What are you doing [here] -- but of course, come in --

Before DOCTOR can complete his words, JOSH is already moving. He goes to pick up the iPod and earbuds, but DOCTOR pulls them just out of reach.

DOCTOR

Is something wrong? I thought we had finished up everything.

Something in JOSH's demeanor brings DOCTOR up short. Painful silence.

DOCTOR

I was just been going over my notes about the surgery -- I've been asked to write a paper -- deliver a presentation -- it's been years since I've done that. Feels good.

JOSH doesn't answer. To fill the awkward space, DOCTOR examines him.

DOCTOR

And how are you doing? The healing looks on track -- not much scarring, nothing misshapen -- you still have lovely lobes! Everything looks clean and bright. I think we can call this "mission accomplished."

JOSH

Tell me.

DOCTOR

Tell you what?

JOSH

Tell me what you found.

DOCTOR

I've told you that already.

JOSH

You didn't tell me everything.

DOCTOR

You have to get beyond --

JOSH

Everything. The tissue --

DOCTOR tries an off-handed tone.

DOCTOR

The tissue. The tissue!

JOSH

Tell me the truth.

DOCTOR

The lab found the tissue to be this hybrid, part your genetic material and part whatever the iPod casing is made out of -- not one or the other but both --

JOSH

When you cut it -- cut into it --

DOCTOR

It wouldn't stay cut -- it would re-attach itself.

JOSH

It healed itself.

DOCTOR

You could say that.

A moment of suspension. JOSH stands, grabs the iPod and ear buds from the desk, DOCTOR a moment too slow to stop him. JOSH moves until he's behind DOCTOR.

JOSH

And what are you doing with the tissue, a self-healing tissue -- made out of my body -- don't bother -- you are patenting it, it's all over the

place that you are taking what you took from me,
stole from me, and turning it into money.

JOSH, behind DOCTOR, garrotes him with the ear buds cord.
DOCTOR dies. JOSH puts in the ear buds, turns on the iPod.

SOUND: Music fills the theater.

JOSH looks at the iPod lovingly.

JOSH

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Never again,
I promise.

Lights to black as music builds and JOSH dances.

A Date in Eight

Full Title: Isn't A Date in Eight A Great Idea, Or What?

DESCRIPTION

- "Speed-dating" is a speed-lifetime.

CHARACTERS

- Adam
- Eve

SETTING

- Table, two chairs, timer (actual and/or sound effect)
- A sign on an easel: "A Date in Eight? Don't Hesitate!"

* * * * *

Lights up on ADAM and EVE sitting at the table. They look, smile, hesitate, clearly ill-at-ease but trying to make the best of it. Let the hemming and hawing go on until it is almost irritating the audience, then sound the timer. Begin.

ADAM

Well -- isn't this a great idea, or what?

EVE

It can help.

ADAM

Quick, clean, know if you want in or out -- if out, then -- bam! on to the next one.

EVE

(imitating his gesture)

On to the next one. I guess it's a good idea.

ADAM

You're not convinced.

EVE

(hesitating)

A little cold, don't you think?

ADAM

My theory? Eight minutes? I think -- I know you can size up a body's spirit in a flash.

EVE

Really?

ADAM

In a flash -- in one quick hot synch. Eight minutes is way too mucho tiempo, in some cases. Sometimes in a minute -- less than, even -- I got it.

EVE

(trying for lightness)

You're one for the quickie, hey?

ADAM

(not hearing her, confidential)

This -- all this -- it's not about dating.

EVE

It's not?

ADAM

It's not about repairing the loneliness --

EVE

(surprised by the wording)

Repairing the loneliness --

ADAM

-- by pairing each other up. Two by two up into the ark. Nah-uh.

EVE

I thought --

ADAM

This -- this what we are doing -- is about maneuvering.

EVE

Really?

ADAM

Enfilade, defilade, outflank, storm the beach.

EVE

Storm the beach.

ADAM

You, me, and this --
(tapping his hands on the table top)
-- the DMZ.

EVE

A demilitarized --

ADAM

Zone --

EVE

That's what you think --

ADAM

This is? I do. Eight minute maneuvers, they
should call it. Eight minutes of plucking the
crow.

EVE

Plucking the crow.

ADAM

Because that's just the way things are.

EVE looks at ADAM steadily; ADAM looks back just as steadily.
EVE shifts her weight, sits up straighter.

EVE

Maybe you're right --

ADAM

Not maybe.

EVE

And maybe you're not.

EVE throws her arm up onto the table in preparation to arm
wrestle.

EVE

Let's fact-check this logic of yours.

ADAM looks at her angled arm.

ADAM

You against me?

EVE drops her arm from the table.

EVE
Has the legendary hot synch already been synched,
then?

ADAM
No.

EVE
Didn't get me in a flash, hey? Didn't predict I
would --

ADAM
I was being metaphoric --

EVE
Which translated means --

ADAM
I don't want --

EVE
You're all gas, no sass.

ADAM
Not that I'm a --

EVE
All squawk and no walk.

ADAM
Just that -- you're a --

EVE
Stop that! Either you mean what you say or you
don't -- screw your metaphor. Who gives two turds
about "you're a". You're a what? Woman? For that
one you shine, Einstein.

EVE throws her arm up on the table again.

EVE
(dismissive)
Metaphor -- rat's ass. Now didn't I hear that it
was either in or out with you?

ADAM hesitates.

EVE

Our little toy Mars hesitates, our god of war waffles. Or should I just call you Mars-ipan [marzipan]? Mars-ipansy?

ADAM throws his own arm onto the table.

ADAM

En garde, then.

They clasp hands in the certified way arm wrestlers position themselves, and they begin. For perhaps 10 seconds they strain, neither moving far, and as they continue to strain, they begin exchanging insults. This surprises them at first, that such language erupts, but then it becomes both insults and erotic inducements.

EVE

Bastard.

ADAM

Bitch.

EVE

Prick.

ADAM

Cunt.

EVE

Shithead.

ADAM

Asswipe.

EVE

Buttfucker.

ADAM

Cum guzzler.

EVE

You're just like cement --

ADAM

What?

EVE

You're just like cement -- it takes you two days to get hard.

ADAM

Oh, yeah?

EVE

Yeah?

ADAM

Well, you're so ugly -- you couldn't get laid if you were a brick.

EVE

Hah! If you spoke your mind --

ADAM

And you're like a doorknob --

EVE

If you spoke your mind -- you'd be speechless.

ADAM

Just like a doorknob --

EVE

Yeah?

ADAM

Everyone gets to take a turn.

EVE

And you'd come off in everyone's hand.

Getting breathless, they strain for advantage until, by some mutual agreement, they decide that neither should win, though it becomes clear that EVE is no real match for ADAM. They stand down, silent for the moment.

EVE

(without rancor)

Hey!

ADAM

Yeah?

EVE

I heard you were getting sex all the time until your wrist got arthritis.

ADAM

(equally without rancor)

I can see that your tits are so small, you'd have to tattoo "front" on your chest.

EVE

Not that small!

ADAM

No, they are not. They are not, most certainly.

EVE

I know.

ADAM

What?

EVE

You could have beaten me.

ADAM

(shaking out his arm)

I don't know --

EVE

Don't sugar me.

ADAM

You've got some goddess-like strength in those fins of yours --

EVE

Enough. You didn't -- why?

ADAM

Let's talk about something else.

EVE

Stop shaking out your arm. We're coming down to the end here.

ADAM

Then let's talk about something else.

EVE

Why are you here?

ADAM

Something else.

EVE

I'm pressing you. You with the hot synch. You with the great male --

(snaps fingers)

"I got it." Hot Synch -- what can you tell about me that kept you at the table and didn't --

ADAM takes a moment to lean back and look at EVE. Then he smiles a not altogether pleasant smile.

ADAM

You --

EVE

People like me --

ADAM

Ah -- let me finish! Not people like you -- but you. Hot Synch! Let's see -- music, right? Things that heal.

(looks straight into her face)

I can see I'm pegging you. Already had you pegged -- wouldn't mind pegging you --

EVE

Shut up.

ADAM

And?

EVE

Keep talking.

ADAM

Intuition -- from the gut. Mending the great pain of the world. The elements that move you. Shape you -- are they not? The giving, the making, the thrust of life, yes?

EVE

And not for you?

ADAM looks straight at her and smiles.

ADAM

I could have, you know -- snap! But -- intuition -- I wanted to make weakness look attractive to you.

EVE look at him directly, then gets up.

ADAM

You leaving?

EVE

Change places with me. Change!

They exchange places. EVE throws her left arm up on the table.

EVE

Let's try our weaker sides, then. In a few minutes, when that timer blows, we are going to have to want something different from what we want now, or this will all be a waste. So c'mon. C'mon -- take your eyes off my tatas and get your weak-ass arm up here!

ADAM matches her arm for arm, and they again take the certified beginning stance of arm wrestlers. At an agreed-upon signal, they begin, and this time the fight is to the finish -- whatever that happens to be. The director can stage this any way possible as long as the action stays close and mostly -- but not always -- on the table. But, for instance, it is not out-of-bounds for EVE to get on the table and use her whole body weight to get his arm to go down. Desperation, excitement, pain -- all these elements should come to the fore. After all, this is a battle, and it should look like one. The only restriction is that neither can use their dominant arms -- they must be held behind their backs or to their sides. And they can't break their grip at all -- during the battle, they must always remain connected by the hand-grip.

After a brief fight it is clear that instead of "winning" -- creating an artificial separation -- winner/loser -- they have become linked, like it or not. They come face-to-face when it is clear they are no longer clear about what they are doing.

EVE
What are you doing?

ADAM
What are you doing?

EVE
What do you want?

Hesitating.

ADAM
I don't know.

EVE
Are you winning?

ADAM
I don't know!

EVE
You can't win.

ADAM tries -- they are locked.

EVE
Even if you could flatten me right now, you couldn't win.

ADAM
You can't win either.

EVE
I can't do what I don't believe in. Call it a character fault.

ADAM
What do you want?

EVE
I have what I want.

EVE takes a drop of sweat off ADAM, tastes it.

EVE
Do you know what that tastes like?

ADAM
No.

EVE
It tastes like this: What will make love come?
They disengage.

EVE
And what will make love stay?

ADAM
Come here.
ADAM takes a drop of sweat off EVE, tastes it.

ADAM
I have a different taste.
Timer rings.

EVE
What might that be?

ADAM
We have to go --

EVE
Tell me.

ADAM
-- they're very strict about the rotation.

EVE
You aren't going to tell me, are you?

ADAM
This much: say I'm iron -- you're gold. In their
pure states --

EVE
Gold is so soft --

ADAM
And iron, though considered less precious --

EVE
Will always be able to cut --

ADAM
Yes.

EVE
Then I prefer loneliness.

ADAM
And isn't that what we came in with? So we
haven't lost a thing.
(moves closer to her)
You can't expect a common metal like me --

EVE
Go.

ADAM
-- to turn into a golden one like you. Easier
for you --

EVE
Go!

ADAM
-- to become common common common like me. And
way more interesting for the lonely goddess.

ADAM smacks his lips.

ADAM
That was what I tasted off of you.

ADAM smacks his lips again.

ADAM
Sweat of our brows -- who wouldn't want to dare to
make love out of that!

EVE scoops another drop off ADAM's forehead and tastes it.
Tastes her own sweat. They lock eyes for several seconds, then
abruptly get up, eyes still locked.

Timer timer timer timer. Eyes still locked. Lights bump to
black.

Equal. Separate.

DESCRIPTION

Race and class in America are never far below the surface, as Pat (who is white) and Chris (who is black), long-time friends and survivors of being "women in the building trades," find out when the talk one afternoon comes around to whether their son and daughter should date. Over a beer and a shot, they confront powerful issues of race and class, a confrontation which ends their friendship.

CHARACTERS

- Pat, white woman, mason -- works best if she has an Irish accent
- Chris, black woman, framer/carpenter

SETTING

- Bar, after work, in a large city. They carry hard hats as well as wear tool belts. Jeans, work boots, shirt, sweatshirt: anything else that establishes the bona fides of these women as "women in the building trades."

TIME

- Present, spring

ACCENTS

- The actors can choose whatever accents they want; they can also abbreviate words (such as dropping the "g" in "-ing") as feels natural. However, if possible, PAT should use an Irish accent.

* * * * *

In darkness, 5 to 10 seconds of music builds loud but not uncomfortable, felt in the body, then cut abruptly. At the same moment, lights bump up on PAT and CHRIS at a bar, seated or standing; appropriate background music and sounds. Each drinks two bottles of beer and two shots of Bushmills through the scene. They can also smoke.

PAT

Ready?

CHRIS

Ready.

They raise a beer and toast.

CHRIS

It was a bitch today.

PAT

A bitch today it was.

CHRIS

Today I built the formwork.

PAT

Today I built the brick shithouse. So --

CHRIS

To the first sip.

PAT

To the first sip past the lip.

BOTH

With a maximum of zip.

They drink.

PAT

Even shit-brewed beer like this tastes good cold,
first guzzle --

CHRIS

On to the second, then.

They drink beer, then sip the shot. They continue drinking
through the scene.

PAT

I think -- I think my throat just released.
Beer as roto-rooter.

CHRIS

Beer as confession.

PAT

Bitch of a day.

CHRIS

Bitch of a day it was.

PAT
So --

CHRIS
So --

PAT
So -- Doherty --

CHRIS
I know --

PAT
I saw --

CHRIS
I know --

PAT
Doherty's getting worse.

CHRIS
I'm handling him.

PAT
The man who sprayed "Property of the Cunt" on your locker?

CHRIS
I'm handling him.

PAT
He's handling you.

CHRIS
I told him --

PAT
Like handling a pit viper.

CHRIS
I told him --

PAT
To Doherty, "handle" only means one thing --

CHRIS

Yeah --

PAT

-- and it ain't the George Frederick fucking
"Water Music" Hallelujah chorus.

CHRIS

I told him --

PAT

Yeah --

CHRIS

-- one more pass of his hand across my ass --

PAT

Yeah --

CHRIS

-- and I was going to clamp it 'tween my cheeks
and use it for a wipe.

PAT

Could be he'd like that.

CHRIS

And then I'd shit nails.

PAT

Good, yeah --

CHRIS

Yeah --

PAT

-- good scum-back to that cum-chum. Useless,
though. Words. With chuckleheads like him.

CHRIS

I know. Wasted. I know. I really would have to
shit nails on him.

PAT

If you want to really shit nails on him, talk to
the steward. File on him.

CHRIS
(chuckles)

File on him.

PAT
You should file. Go to the union --

CHRIS
File for "hair-ass-ment."

PAT
He's grabbing you for his gusto --

CHRIS
File --

PAT
-- his gutso, gut-bloated fat fucker --

CHRIS
-- for hair-ass-ment.

PAT
You file -- and it'll be like with a mule, a two-
by-four cranked between the eyes.

CHRIS
Her-ass-ment. His-ass-ment. My-ass-ment --

PAT
Your ass means a lot, honey.

CHRIS
Please.

PAT
It's the battleground.

CHRIS
So, now I'm spread out, like some field of grass --

PAT
Get serious.

CHRIS
Serious.

PAT

You know, like I know, the Dohertys of this fucking world only obey hard objects against their soft parts.

CHRIS

File.

PAT

It's your two by four.

CHRIS

And "you know, like I know" the follow-up -- you seen this! -- an "accidental" cinderblock or I'll be a perforated sandwich on some rebar or, or, or
(indicates the palm of her hand)
-- ten-penny Christ with a nail gun -- bam, bam, bam! Dee-nied testosterone -- one dangerous bodily fluid.

PAT

Doesn't matter --

CHRIS

Doesn't matter?

PAT

Doesn't matter if he's hung a foot. You have rights -- civil rights -- like it or not, your ass -- our ass -- is the battlefield. Has been, will be. We've known that since we were a day-one apprentice.

CHRIS

I know. I can't. I know I should but -- I can't.

PAT

No use fighting to get in if you can't get on --

CHRIS

Impact, you know, though -- impact -- I got the boy --

PAT

I got the kid, too.

CHRIS

You'd risk it?

PAT

I'm saying I'd at least consider.

CHRIS

You'd bat for me?

PAT

Solidarity forever.

CHRIS

Easier for you, though.

PAT

Yeah?

CHRIS

Yeah.

PAT

Why?

CHRIS

Color.

PAT

Think so?

CHRIS

Know so. We -- use the word "bitch," lovingly,
you know --

PAT

A bitch ain't a bastard --

BOTH

Whoo-wah!

CHRIS

-- but out there, there's bitch, you know this,
there's bitch, and that's you and me, we can handle
that -- and then there's black bitch, that's just
me, and I get to be what the dog kicks when the
dog gets kicked --

PAT

All the more reason, then --

CHRIS

The right thing's got a double-edge, Pat, it cuts back and forth -- and my skin ain't that thick. It's easier for you to say "Go forth."

PAT

I say this about that: That's a whine. A whine. I can say that to you --

CHRIS

I'm whining?

PAT

-- yeah, I think I can say that to you, we been through basic and beyond. It ain't as bad --

CHRIS

It?

PAT

Color thing.

CHRIS

Not bad?

PAT

As bad.

CHRIS

As what?

PAT

Look at the laws.

CHRIS

As what?

PAT

Black millionaires now.

CHRIS

Pat -- don't --

PAT

Granted, some are left behind, some got left --

CHRIS

-- another level --

PAT

-- every engine's got some sludge --

CHRIS

Pat, this ain't the shot --

PAT

Look at you and this job.

CHRIS

Are you hearing the undertone of that?

PAT

You don't have it just because -- I'm not saying that, Chris -- c'mon!

CHRIS

Then what are you -- Park it. I'm tired -- I can't do the curriculum today with you.

PAT

The curriculum?

CHRIS

Never mind. Look, I gotta go --

PAT

So fine -- you don't want to see the advances, fine.

CHRIS

The advances.

PAT

Yeah.

CHRIS

You really think --

PAT

I do.

Really? CHRIS

I do. PAT

Big steps. CHRIS

Giant. PAT

CHRIS
Because some few brothers and sisters own seven figures?

PAT
And joint chief -- joint chief of staff, don't forget that. A ten billion dollar athlete. Judge. Judges. Arts. Entertainment. Everywhere. Lot of crime, too, but hey -- you know. Bound to be --

CHRIS
-- sludge --

PAT
-- in the engine of progress.

CHRIS
Slavery --

PAT
Gone.

CHRIS
Jim Crow --

PAT
Flown.

CHRIS
Affirmative action --

PAT
Affirmed. It's a new paragraph.

Better world?
CHRIS

By far.
PAT

Never guessed you an -- optimist.
CHRIS

It doesn't always pay to run things down.
PAT

I never guessed any of this about you.
CHRIS

Some things are pretty shitcan, I'd agree, but not all bad. Not even half, I'd say -- quarter-bad, a quarter-shit. More or less.
PAT

Let me ask you then --
CHRIS

Anything.
PAT

A test.
CHRIS

Whoo-wah!
PAT

Your Leslie --
CHRIS

Yeah?
PAT

Your Leslie.
CHRIS

Yeah.
PAT

My Jamie.
CHRIS

PAT

You mean --

CHRIS

I mean your new paragraph.

PAT

What?

CHRIS

I mean mix it up. I mean "mix"-cegenation. Well?
(softly)

Whoo-wah. I'm getting your silence loud and strong.

PAT

Uh --

CHRIS

Uh --

PAT

Uh. No.

CHRIS

Any nouns or adjectives with that?

PAT

It wouldn't work --

CHRIS

You know him. I know her. They know each other. They like each other. They like each other. Genuine lay-down-the-foundation like each other. So.

PAT

Damn!

CHRIS

I gotta say the obvious here, Pat -- if the world smells so good to you, then why --

PAT

She wanted to, you know -- Jamie. Go with Jamie. I said -- I said no.

CHRIS

And why did you say that?

PAT

The children --

CHRIS

Children?

PAT

If they had -- children -- it wouldn't be a good world for them --

CHRIS

Light coffee not your color?

CHRIS

People would see mixed race, they wouldn't see them! Mixed race -- I believe they'd get, they'd get eaten alive. I really believe that. I wouldn't. You wouldn't. But -- well -- Doherty would.

CHRIS

Doherty?

PAT

The likes of. Doherty. Taking their sheets to the tailor.

CHRIS

And so he wins the battlefield? You give it up to him?

PAT

It's protection.

CHRIS

So -- because we, you and me, we're gutless --

PAT

Gutless?

CHRIS

-- then Jamie and Leslie have to lose. Is that where all this we've done has got us to? So that's

where we are. So -- Doherty -- Doherty wins again
-- Is the office closed?

PAT

What?

CHRIS

Is -- the -- office -- closed?

PAT

Project manager's there, usually -- paperwork.

CHRIS gets up to leave.

PAT

Where --

CHRIS takes money of her pocket.

CHRIS

You -- you and Doherty -- are not going to win.
Jamie and Leslie are going to have a shot. I have
some paperwork to do.

PAT

Let me go back with you. I'll back you up.

CHRIS

Back off.

(softens)

As you said, you have a daughter to get home to.
I get this one on my own.

PAT

Chris --

CHRIS

Don't -- Don't start lying --

CHRIS throws money on the counter.

CHRIS

We can't go back, Pat. In the space of two beers
-- Christ! Just fucking amazing how time flies!
In the space of two beers we can't go back to the
back we used to have. I gotta go.

PAT

Tomorrow?

CHRIS

We got a job to finish.

CHRIS starts to walk out and then returns.

CHRIS

I used to be able to watch my back with you. That was the gift, Pat. No more.

CHRIS starts to walk out again, and pauses.

CHRIS

So, again, what was the point of going through the battle?

PAT is silent.

CHRIS

Right.

CHRIS leaves. PAT continues to drink her beer. Marvin Gaye's "What's Goin' On?" comes up loud. Lights and music out abruptly.

Everything's Jake

DESCRIPTION

Gender and sexual identity are slippery concepts when it comes to human beings, as Jane finds out when she reveals to Jacqui her strong love for Jacqui, only to find out that Jacqui has a secret about her past that could either destroy or strengthen their budding relationship. A play about fluid boundaries and not-so-essential "essential" natures.

CHARACTERS

- JANE
- JAQUIE

Note: The ethnicity of the characters does not matter.)

SETTING: Two park benches in a "V" shape -- the "point" formed by the benches points upstage; the characters do not need to stay seated throughout the scene

TIME: Present, early evening

SOUND: Street sounds, muted -- plays throughout

* * * * *

JANE is already seated on one bench, coffee and a scone with her. JAQUIE comes in carrying a bag with the same and sits. JANE is very nervous. In JAQUIE's dealings with JANE, she always treats JANE with patience and tenderness.

JAQUIE

It is so good to see you.

Gives her a simple caress, e.g., a hand on the shoulder. JANE acknowledges but does not respond.

JANE

Good to see you, too.

JAQUIE

(holds JANE's hand)

Your message sounded worried. You look worried.
What's up?

JANE pulls her hand away in an obvious movement and picks up the coffee cup.

JANE

Everything's fine.

(takes a sip)

Too hot.

JAQUIE

(with affection, lightly)

So the distraught tone underneath your 2 AM message was just my imagination?

JANE

I wasn't "distraught."

(takes another sip)

Still too hot.

JAQUIE

And the fact you didn't return my beautifully solicitous message at 2:05 AM is because --

JANE

Time just got away from me today.

JAQUIE

And your "everything's fine" is supposed to convince this highly evolved Star-Trekkian-type being that everything is, well, fine?

JANE takes a small bite of her scone.

JANE

Everything is fine.

JAQUIE

So why are we here?

JAQUIE puts a hand on JANE's forearm as JANE prepares to take a third sip of the coffee that's obviously still too hot.

JAQUIE

That coffee's still too hot. Nothing cools that fast except a royal marriage. Look at me. Look at me.

JANE looks, looks away, looks back, etc. during the next few lines.

JAQUIE

How long have we worked on this friendship?

JANE

A year.

JAQUIE

How often do we talk to each other?

JANE

Often.

JAQUIE

How close are we?

JANE smiles, as if against her will.

JAQUIE

C'mon.

TOGETHER

"Dirt and roots."

JAQUIE

You do remember the day we met?

JANE

(smiles again)

In that book discussion group.

JAQUIE

The topic?

JANE

Gender slavery. With that dyke group leader --

JAQUIE

-- her sacred womyn [pronounced "wimmin"]
handshake --

JANE

-- "solidarity hand-jive" you called it --

JAQUIE

Shall we?

They do their handshake -- the actors can devise their own.
JANE laughs, nervously.

JAQUIE

Good. Now I think I recognize you. Out with it.

JANE picks up the coffee cup; JAQUIE gives her a playful but sharp look. JANE puts it down.

JANE

I need to talk -- with you.

JAQUIE

Remember: Star-Trekkian. I figured that. What, really? Which bastard boyfriend this time?

JANE

It's not about that -- surprise, surprise. Something -- more important.

JAQUIE

More important than the bastard boyfriend du jour? I'm shocked -- Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make fun -- you know that. What is it?

JANE

(takes a deep breath)

I've decided to become a pre-operative transsexual.

JAQUIE sits back.

JAQUIE

Repeat.

JANE

I've decided to become a pre-operative transsexual.

JAQUIE

This is -- not what I expected -- Why?

JANE

I'm tired of being a woman!

JAQUIE

Have you explored what this means? Really explored?

JANE

Sure. Yes. Absolutely.

JAQUIE

You've consulted the physicians and read the books and talked with others who have gone the "F-t-M" route?

JANE nods yes.

JAQUIE

And you're emotionally ready to suffer the hormonal treatments, the reassignment surgery, the years of therapy, abandonment by everyone you know and love?

JANE

Abandonment?

JAQUIE

It happens.

JANE

Yes, yes, I've done all that!

JAQUIE

And you would be better off as a man?

JANE

Don't use that tone! I hate it when you treat me like I'm --

JAQUIE

What?

JANE

Like I'm not serious. I have thought long and hard.

(indicates her body)

I need to escape from this. I need the advantages --

JAQUIE

(tenderly)

You don't know step one about what you're saying.

JANE

You're doing it again!

JAQUIE

(with some force)

Then if you're so sure, Jane, stand up to me.

JANE

All right.

JAQUIE

Stand up to me.

JANE

(slightly manic)

All right. I suppose you think the "monthly flow" is a marquee event? Along with breast cancer, and cervical cancer, and uterine cancer, and hot flashes and estrogen cocktails, and osteoporosis, and lower benefits from Social Security and higher prices at the dry cleaners -- it's too much work to be a goddess. Give me drumming in the woods! Give me Zeus! Yeah!

JAQUIE does not respond to this but lets the words float in the air for a beat or two.

JAQUIE

Liebchen, just be straight with me. Just tell me what's really gnawing at you. I'll listen straight. I always have.

JANE

(near tears)

Why won't you believe me? This has to work.

JAQUIE

Because you're bluffing.

JANE

It is true! You're supposed to support me. I even have a name picked out: Jake.

JAQUIE

Why are you saying this?

JANE makes a feeble attempt at the handshake with JAQUIE, but JAQUIE refuses to go along.

JANE

I'm saying it for you.

JAQUIE

Repeat.

JANE

For you.

JAQUIE

I don't understand. Be clearer.

JANE

How much more fucking clear do you want me to be? I want you! I love you!

JAQUIE

Me? Me.

JANE

I love you, Jaquie! I love you so much. Almost from the day we met. I've been able to keep it tamed. Mostly. But not any more. I'm really, really desperate about it. About you. I thought that if I became a man, you know, maybe you would -- You wouldn't take me as I am, right? -- The lesbian thing wouldn't work with you, would it? Am I a lesbian for feeling like this? Oh, Christ, listen to me! Really stupid, huh? Really, really stupid.

JAQUIE

No.

JANE

First Prize in the stupid category. Whooo wee! Right along with the Miss Humiliation plaque.

JAQUIE

Slow down.

JANE makes to leave. JAQUIE puts a hand on her, lightly.

JAQUIE

Don't. Stay.

JANE

(attempt at a feeble joke)

Roll over. Play dead. I feel like I want to jump right out of my skin.

JAQUIE

I know the feeling. Stay.

JANE

Don't hate me.

JAQUIE

Why would I hate you?

JANE

I was so afraid I'd disgust you -- you aren't disgusted, are you? -- I was just so desperate. I figured -- I don't know what I was thinking. So clueless. "Ring-ring. Pick up the clue phone, Jane!" I had none, obviously. Me becoming a man! To love you! I mean, you date men all the time -- how could I know whether you would or not? I just needed a way to escape from all this bottled-up -- Oooh, I can't find the word! Do you know what I mean?

JAQUIE

Yes.

JANE

What do I do now?

JAQUIE

Well, give your stupidity award -- to me.

JANE

You?

JAQUIE

Yeah.

JANE

Why?

JAQUIE

For not being honest with you sooner. So that you wouldn't have had to contort yourself the way you did. So that you would know who you were loving. So that you would know who loved you.

JANE

You -- me?

JAQUIE nods yes.

JANE

True?

JAQUIE nods again.

JANE

All along?

JAQUIE nods again.

JANE

Whooowee! Yee-haw! Yes!

JAQUIE

But I need to tell you something.

JAQUIE rummages in her bag while they talk.

JANE

Tell away. This is ace! This is a great day!

JAQUIE

This will not be easy.

JANE

I didn't need all that man shit. What was I thinking? Free at last!

JAQUIE pulls out what looks like a drivers license or an identity card of some sort. She hands it to JANE. JANE looks at it.

JANE

What is this?

JAQUIE

Just look.

JANE

Who is --

(looking at the card)

-- Jack Ashley? Your brother?

JAQUIE

Jane, look closely.

JAQUIE watches JANE closely. JANE looks again, and a sudden dawning comes to her face. She looks back and forth between the card and JAQUIE. The following lines should be taken slowly, deliberately.

JANE

Not your brother. At all.

JAQUIE

In some places, not even the original skin.

JANE

Jack. Jaquie. So that's how you knew about --

JAQUIE

(quietly, without being flippant)

Been there. Done that.

JANE

(holding up the card)

You were once --

JAQUIE nods yes. JANE hands back the card .

JAQUIE

Jack Ashley was and is a vibrant person. I like Jack. You'll like him, too. But he wanted to be me. So we exchanged places. That's the easy way of describing a long, painful journey. Are you all right?

JANE

I don't exactly know -- what I am. My skin feels tight again.

JAQUIE

(reaches out to touch her)

I told you this wouldn't be easy.

JANE

(pulls away)

Wait.

There are several beats of silence as JANE ponders the situation. As she does so, she fidgets with her hands, perhaps shredding her scone or a napkin. The street sounds float around them.

JANE

So, I am in love with a woman who was a man? And this woman who was a man loves me, a woman, who, though not seriously, was talking about becoming a man in order to love a woman who had been a man, though she didn't know that?

JAQUIE

The language gets a little tangled, doesn't it?

A bit more shredding.

JANE

You date men.

JAQUIE

So do you.

JANE

Women, too?

JAQUIE

I've learned not to make too fine a distinction. After the -- change -- it was clear to me that the boy/girl line could be erased. So I erased.

JANE

Erased.

JAQUIE

I love people. Lust for, care about people. You, for instance. I've escaped from the Bastille of gender, and I ain't ever goin' back.

JANE

But you're a woman.

JAQUIE

Visually, socially -- and for some reason the biomechanics just work better this way -- there's a lot about this I haven't figured out yet. But inside, in the spirit, where it counts, I'm just a human being. Unfortunately, we don't have a pronoun for that yet.

A bit more shredding, then stops.

JANE

Whew.

JAQUIE

Yes.

JANE

Men and women both, huh?

JAQUIE

Yes. Just like you.

JANE

(surprised by JAQUIE's words)

I feel like my brain is three sizes too small for this information.

JAQUIE

You got more than you came for. Need to leave?

JANE

I'm very mixed at the moment. I've got a thousand questions and mental lockjaw.

JAQUIE

Borrow my voice.

JANE

What?

JAQUIE

Send me your thoughts. Here.

(holds out her hand)

Use the keyboard.

JANE takes JAQUIE's hand, then gives it back.

JANE

I can't. I don't know what to say. I need my own words. I don't know if I can do this.

JAQUIE

We're not double-parked. No hurry.

JANE

I just don't know, Jaquie.

JAQUIE

Don't fly away. Please. I love you, too. Please.

JANE

I don't know -- why didn't you tell me all this before?

JAQUIE

I wanted to -- but I didn't want to risk -- I'd decided that it was better to have coffee with you as a friend than tell you the truth and drink my coffee alone. It'd kill me not to be near --

JANE

I just don't know if I can be enough.

JAQUIE

Yet.

JANE

Yet. I should go. Would you walk me home?

JAQUIE

Of course.

Picking up their trash, they move away from the benches.

JANE

So many things --

JAQUIE

We have time.

They walk in silence for several steps.

JANE

I'm going to walk the rest of the way on my own.

JAQUIE stops while JANE continues a few steps on. She turns and holds out her right hand. In synch they do an "air" version of their handshake. JANE exits.

The Famine Church

(Story idea by Elfin Vogel)

DESCRIPTION

Where Faith and Property, God and Caesar, meet.

CHARACTERS

- MARIA NIEDDA - Long-time and faithful parishioner at St. B's, originally from Puerto Rico. Now is one of the leaders of the group opposing the closing and destruction of the church.
- THE REPRESENTATIVE - Unnamed, represents an "angel" who has made an offer to buy St. B's and create a non-profit use for the building and land. Speaks with an Irish accent.
- FATHER LIONEL ZWELLER - Spokesperson for the Archdiocese, the one who has the authority to put the Cardinal's plans for St. B's into play. Older.

* * * * *

An office in the Archdiocese of New York. FATHER ZWELLER and THE REPRESENTATIVE sit at a table. They do not interact. MARIA NIEDDA enters.

NIEDDA takes this object out of her bag: a large baggie, inside of which is a printed/written-on piece of paper that someone has used as toilet paper. A turd in the baggie as well.

NIEDDA shows it around, then drops it on the table. ZWELLER looks at THE REPRESENTATIVE. THE REPRESENTATIVE does not respond.

ZWELLER

Maria, there is no need [to bring] --

NIEDDA

It sets the tone, so there it stays. Like a centerpiece. We dried out the turd -- see?-- so it wouldn't go rotten.

NIEDDA picks up the baggie again and drops it.

NIEDDA

Hard -- doesn't smell. It's my fellow negotiator -- it's got a lot to say, like me. You wanted us here to talk -- so let's the four of us talk.

NIEDDA sits.

ZWELLER

Maria, as I've -- look, I don't know what else to say --

NIEDDA

You should know -- you used to -- but that doesn't matter because, leave it to us, we'll do the remembering for you and for the Cardinal -- which is why I'm here, isn't it?

ZWELLER

The Cardinal isn't pleased --

NIEDDA

Isn't it?

ZWELLER

Yes.

NIEDDA

And he isn't pleased -- good!

ZWELLER

The vigil, the protest -- it's gotten --

NIEDDA

Gotten sharp, hasn't it, this time? -- raising a "stink" --

ZWELLER

Maria --

NIEDDA

Wait.

NIEDDA looks at the baggie, nods, then turns back to ZWELLER.

NIEDDA

For this right now, right here, my delegate says you should use Mrs. Niedda -- and Mrs. Niedda and all of hers are just doing what you and the Cardinal have left us to do -- we march around, we shout "Save St. Brigid's -- "

ZWELLER

Then Mrs. N[iedda] --

NIEDDA

But more this time, isn't it? -- harder -- smellier
-- because the insult is bigger! because you had
'em break in like thieves in the night --

ZWELLER

May I [say] --

NIEDDA

You had them rip out the pews --

ZWELLER

It wasn't my or[der] --

NIEDDA

So from on high -- and you carried it out! They
trashed the sacristy -- the baptismal font! You
know this! And then --
(points to baggie)
-- our friend.

ZWELLER

You know we have the permis[sion] --

NIEDDA

We blocked that permit --

ZWELLER

For the demolition but --

NIEDDA

We made the court say you can't just rip it to the
bare ground!

ZWELLER

But on the interior [we can] --

NIEDDA

That is just legal mierda.

NIEDDA picks up the baggie.

NIEDDA

The thief you hired shit in the sacristy, Father -- sorry, but it is what it is -- then wiped himself -- fft! -- do you see with what --

(reads the paper)

"Siobhan Keely, baptized September 10, 1902" -- from the parish re[gister] --

NIEDDA drops the baggie.

NIEDDA

What would you do if someone did this in your home? St. B's is our home, so what would you have us do?

ZWELLER

This home of yours is a structural disaster --

NIEDDA

So what?

ZWELLER

The north wall is cracked top to bot[om] -- the mold, the termites --

NIEDDA

So it's falling into dust -- so are a lot of us -- would you trash us, too? -- you miss the point: St. B's is not just the building! How many times do we -- you were an assistant here -- my mother remembers you -- I remember you --

ZWELLER

And I remember you --

NIEDDA

Well good!

ZWELLER

-- but the fact remains --

NIEDDA

-- she says you loved this place --

ZWELLER

Yes but --

NIEDDA

-- so you should know [better] --

ZWELLER

Mrs. Niedda?

NIEDDA

The care of souls -- that was your promise --

ZWELLER

Mrs. Niedda?

NIEDDA

-- is still your [promise] --

ZWELLER

Maria?!

NIEDDA waits.

ZWELLER

You want a bottom line from me.

NIEDDA

That's why the four of us are here.

ZWELLER

It. Can't. Go. On. Like. This.

NIEDDA

(imitating)

And what is to be done?

(chuckles)

Pistols at twenty paces?

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I believe that this is my cue. And so I take it.

THE REPRESENTATIVE faces them both.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I understand -- I understand -- all of what just happened had to happen. Two enemies -- well, not enemies but duelists -- twenty paces, right? -- they meet and have to dig trenches, lob shells -- again -- and then again -- again -- exhausting,

isn't it? -- yet hard to stop replaying the already-played-out, making the old wounds bleed -- I understand. To let you both know, I was baptized here -- first communion, confirmation -- the whole dose, right here -- so I, too, have a -- a bottom line. That comes to this: you -- both of you -- don't need to do this anymore. Really. Bad blood and other bodily -- whatever -- exist: over. Mrs. Niedda's group is currently embarrassing the hell out of the Archdiocese with broadcast tales of workmen shitting in and on the sacristy: over. The Archdiocese needs money much more -- much more -- than it needs broken-backed churches and pain-in-the-neck parishioners: over.

ZWELLER

The Cardinal's time is short -

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Mine isn't. But all right -- the point of my preliminary. The beloved St. B's -- the Famine Church -- 1848 -- what a bulls-eye name for the situation in which we find ourselves, isn't it? Everyone is hungry here -- everyone wants, and wants hard -- and so often in the unfairness of life such hungers go unfilled -- the loaves and fishes simply do not show up on cue. Except. For now. Because for both of you an "angel" has arrived. If only the post-potato-blighted Irish dumped here had had such an angelic hand --

ZWELLER

The Cardinal would like to know --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Unimportant who -- because miracles need not be named to be named miraculous. Focus as I review. My employer wants to buy the church. Outright. Cash on the barrel, cash on the nail. Then he, or she -- ambiguous -- will turn it over to a not-for-profit group formed from the "Save St. Brigid's Brigade" -- the SSBB -- for the express purpose of providing, TBD, some sort of menu of community services -- elder care, perhaps, or much needed after-school programs for "at-risk" youth. It doesn't matter, really, what.

NIEDDA

We've already started the application --

THE REPRESENTATIVE picks up the baggie.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

The important point, not to cut you off, the omega to the alpha here is: no need, anymore, for any more of this.

NIEDDA

We get our church back -- not as a church, but -- the Cardinal gets his money -- the community --

ZWELLER holds up his hand.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

What?

ZWELLER

There has to be a sign --
the Cardinal will need a
sign --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Of what?

ZWELLER

A sign of good faith --

NIEDDA

Good faith?

ZWELLER

Something to convince him to change --

NIEDDA

The Cardinal doesn't deserve --

ZWELLER

Still --

NIEDDA

The bad faith comes from your side, not ours --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

And we were just getting --

ZWELLER

The Cardinal's "good faith" is that I'm even in this room talking to you, talking to him -- you know that the Archdiocese has every right to sell what is clearly its own property --

NIEDDA

And why does the Church need all this money, Father? We've read all the news stories --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Mrs. Niedda --

NIEDDA

What? What would be faith good enough for --

ZWELLER

I can't guarantee how the Cardinal will move on this -- offer --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Angelic as it is --

ZWELLER

But I do know that for him to consider it at all -- there will have to be a time of -- quiet -- these things cannot be done well when --

NIEDDA

When the little ones are matching stink for stink?

ZWELLER

Either SSBB stops the protests or this conversation cannot and will not move forward.

NIEDDA

You don't -- you doubt if you're going to get the demolition permit --

ZWELLER

I'm saying the Cardinal is not single-minded.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Let me -- Mrs. Niedda, you do need to make a decision -- I can't do unless you do --

NIEDDA

And I can't decide --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I understand -- but SSBB, by the end of today, needs to. Or else the Famine Church, etcetera, etcetera -- you can finish the thought -- a gesture, Maria -- to balance things --

ZWELLER

It would be good to stop comparing the Archdiocese to an outhouse --

NIEDDA

If -- if -- then --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Plans move forward.

NIEDDA

And you can make this deal work out?

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Yes.

NIEDDA rises, take the baggie.

NIEDDA

All right -- something by the end of the day --

NIEDDA lets her eyes rest on the two of them.

NIEDDA

But --

NIEDDA waits. Then...

NIEDDA

I need a gesture, too, if I'm going to go back --

(to ZWELLER)

Not from you. From the "angel."

THE REPRESENTATIVE

This is not "good faith" enough for the Brigade?

NIEDDA

I've been at this too long -- my catechism taught me angels can be guardians or Lucifers --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I've talked to the SSBB --

NIEDDA

But I don't want to have to guess --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

You've obviously got something in mind.

NIEDDA

The Brigade -- they're good people -- they remember Loisaída, they remember the tents in the Park, they've seen so much get lost, trashed, sold -- what they want is not hard --

NIEDDA sits down, stares at THE REPRESENTATIVE.

NIEDDA

Before I go back, I've got to know what kind of "angel" -- look me in the eyes and tell me -- because I'm going to have to look straight into their eyes, and them into mine, and I can't have any "maybe" there at all. So tell me.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

What did I say when I met with the Brigade?

NIEDDA

You promised.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

What did I promise?

NIEDDA

You know what you promised.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Exactly. I haven't changed. "Angel" hasn't changed. Promise hasn't changed.

THE REPRESENTATIVE and NIEDDA hold each other's gaze.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

The Brigade will see. They will see, Maria. And everything they want -- that the Famine Church represents -- all will be honored. That is "angel" you've got. It won't be long now.

THE REPRESENTATIVE reaches into an inner pocket and pulls out an envelope, hands it over to NIEDDA, who opens it and reads.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

That's something I wanted to show you.

NIEDDA

I don't understand --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

It's a confirmation card -- my confirmation card -- I got it when I was confirmed here -- I told you that -- see the little Holy Ghost medal --

NIEDDA

How old were you when --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Twelve.

NIEDDA

Me, too. I don't remember you.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I don't remember you, either -- bigger parish in those days, right?

ZWELLER

Right.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

A hopping place -- but those classes we had to take -- "soldier of Christ" --

NIEDDA

Do you remember the day?

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I remember how embarrassing it felt to get slapped by the bishop in front of all the guys and girls --

NIEDDA glances at ZWELLER.

NIEDDA

What?

THE REPRESENTATIVE

A little slap, yes -- but still, when you're twelve --

NIEDDA

In front of all the boys and girls --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

(touches forehead)

Didn't mind the oil up here, but the slap --

NIEDDA

Yes, the slap. Thank you.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Are you all right? Does the card --

NIEDDA

What you have given me --

NIEDDA puts the card in her bag.

NIEDDA

-- is exactly -- well, let's say that with your gift I don't even need to talk with them because I know what they'd have me say.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I don't --

NIEDDA

Tell your "angel" that this buying the church from him and then allowing us, the grateful ones, to use it for our social services -- no.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I don't under[stand] --

NIEDDA

No. I think this deal needs changing.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Why --

NIEDDA

Let's say your "angel" donates the money to us and we buy the building --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

He can't give --

NIEDDA

Or she --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

-- money to you -- you're not incor[porated] --

NIEDDA

Or the "angel" -- he or she -- buys the building with the Brigade as the owner of record -- our name on the deed --

NIEDDA looks at them both.

NIEDDA

Good faith is all I'm asking. Door Number 1 or Door Number 2.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

One or the other -- done -- the "angel" is not single-minded either. I promise to make all this come to something that will give everyone peace of mind. Go home, Maria -- I will work this out -- have the Brigade keep working out its plans about what it's going to do when this deal gets done -- you wanted a clinic, a food bank -- draw up the plans.

NIEDDA eyes them both.

NIEDDA

All right.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Good.

NIEDDA

But -- though thanks for the suggestion -- we are not going home. We can picket and vigil and draw up plans all at the same time -- we multitask! No going home until we have --

NIEDDA slaps the back of her right hand into her left palm.

NIEDDA

-- in our hand. That makes the only sense, right?

NIEDDA stands.

NIEDDA

Because good faith always comes out better with a little pressure. Well -- good. A good day.

NIEDDA leaves.

ZWELLER

You shit.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

What?

ZWELLER

We had them! We had them! She was ready to make them go -- and then you fuck it up.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

With what?

ZWELLER

With that bullshit confirmation story.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Hmm. Something did shift in her --

ZWELLER

Because she knew you were a fucking liar!

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Of course I'm lying to her --

ZWELLER

But not so she's supposed to know it! Where'd you get that cocked-up fucking bullshit card?

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Online -- but what --

ZWELLER

The parish priest in those days -- and the bishop -- hated -- mixing girls and boys -- if they'd had their way, girls would've never seen the light of day --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Oh --

ZWELLER

"Oh" -- and there you go --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Shit --

ZWELLER

Reminiscing about getting slapped --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

No wonder she --

ZWELLER

Wouldn't have happened under their regime -- boys here, girls there, slap, slap, girls go home, boys go play. You just shit in her house --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

You need to make this go away.

ZWELLER

"You shit on her" is your fucking problem, not mine --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

You need to make her go away.

ZWELLER

Like I said --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Lionel --

ZWELLER

The Church can wait forever -- but not your consortium guys -- and it's not like they're the only developers in this city --

THE REPRESENTATIVE reaches into his briefcase.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Lionel -- Lionel -- having your balls tucked in a vice --

THE REPRESENTATIVE throws a folder on the table.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

-- has turned you stupid and forgetful. Those other developers don't have the gold that I have. Do they.

THE REPRESENTATIVE opens the folder: pictures, letters, etc.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

They don't have the perfect blackmail "in" that I have -- a priest with --

ZWELLER

Shut up --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

A priest with a family. At least you're not fucking little boys. You aren't, are you? No --

THE REPRESENTATIVE looks at a picture.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Not when you have two of your own. The good father.

ZWELLER

You said --

THE REPRESENTATIVE

And I won't -- Lionel, I'm not interested in ruin -- I'm not like that.

ZWELLER

Just a slimy fuck.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

There's a deal in this for you and yours -- if -- some of the apartments are going to have terrific views, just -- spectacular -- bright, airy, spacious -- listen to that real estate! Just right for two sons and a wife who must hide in the shadows. Eh?

ZWELLER stares into space.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Her name on the deed, of course -- no one the wiser. All sorts of possibilities open up if --

THE REPRESENTATIVE takes back the folder.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

These consortium guys -- butchers, sharks -- they want what you've promised to deliver to me -- church, land, air rights -- and they want them more or less now. I could put you and yours on Page 6, so to speak -- or not.

ZWELLER

And embarrass the Cardinal?

THE REPRESENTATIVE

You think he gives two fucking communion wafers for his "fixer"? Because that's all you've ever been -- the Cardinal's fixer. He's been inoculated against you for years. The Cardinal and my consortium guys -- different clothes outside, same creamy filling inside. If you talked to him right now, he would say just what I'm saying to you, only with longer syllables and more theology. Cardinal on one side, consortium guys on the other, and ssqueueezee!

THE REPRESENTATIVE watches ZWELLER stew. He pulls another card out of his pocket, slides it across the table to him.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I sympathize. Buying online -- amazing. It's a mass card, turn of the century, from St. Brigid's -- a mass said for the saving of a soul. Ah, those were the days -- when priests could go

around "priesting" -- saving souls instead of their own arses -- take the card.

ZWELLER

I don't want it.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

Take the card -- it's your only ticket to the healing process now. Take the card.

ZWELLER takes the card.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

I hate second thoughts -- they just slow things down -- here is the solution to the equation: Maria can't be allowed to continue. That card? It has a "sell-by" date called "very soon." Now it's time to be a fixer for yourself -- and your own. "Bright, airy, spacious" sounds very very good. Be a guardian angel -- just be it soon. There is nothing else for you to do, Lionel -- you will keep Maria quiet and you will move forward on signing the land and buildings over to me for the handsome penny my consortium guys will turn over to the Cardinal. Quid. Pro. Fucking. Quo. Now I am going to leave, and you are going to do what you need to do to fix what needs to be fixed. Te absolvo.

THE REPRESENTATIVE leaves. ZWELLER begins to cry with great sorrow.

* * * * *

NIEDDA stands in a downlight, like the light over an outside door. Darkness all around. She fumbles in her bag for a set of keys. a FIGURE glides out of the darkness. In one swift motion, the FIGURE grabs NIEDDA from behind and cuts her throat, then exits.

* * * * *

ZWELLER's office. THE REPRESENTATIVE drops four large binders on the table, one by one, as he speaks.

THE REPRESENTATIVE

They toyed with the idea -- of calling it "Famine Court," in a homage -- of sorts --

(drops binder)

-- but neither that nor "Famine Condominiums" nor "Famine Co-op" worked either --

(drops binder)

-- it's pretty clear why. They haven't settled on a name yet -- perhaps "St. Brigid's Court" --

(drops binder)

-- you know, following the tradition of naming a development after the thing that's disappeared to build it -- "Fox Run" where no foxes will ever run again --

(drops binder)

-- "Whispering Pines" -- but no name yet. They will -- they will find one -- and time, indeed, will march on. Have your legal team review them, and then we'll set a date for the signing.

THE REP moves to leave.

THE REP

I couldn't get you the penthouse, but you'll like where they'll be. A shame about Maria.

ZWELLER

A shame. Yes.

ZWELLER gets up from his desk, the mass card in his hand. He offers the card to THE REP, who does not take it, who stares at it.

ZWELLER

Take good care of yourself. It is a dangerous world out there.

ZWELLER holds the card out until THE REP takes it.

Blackout.

Fare Thee Well

DESCRIPTION

Six women gather for a very special farewell party to one of their own in this celebration about facing and surviving breast cancer.

CHARACTERS

- HELENA
- ISABELA
- HANNAH
- VERA
- REBECCA
- EMMA

NOTE: Age and ethnicity are not relevant, but the more mixed the grouping in terms of colors, accents (especially non-standard, non-news-anchor-sounding American accents), body shapes, hair styles, etc., the better. Do not go for a homogenous look or sound.

SETTING: A living room somewhere -- the set can be as minimal or maximal as the director desires and budget permits. And since this is a party, the director, if desired, can decorate it as a party: balloons, streamers, etc. Whatever the decision, however, it is essential to have a banner hung in plain view of the audience with the words (without quotation marks) "FARE THEE WELL". It could be a dot-matrix kind of banner, hand-lettered, etc., but it must be there in some form and large enough for the audience to read. Also, the center of whatever is used to indicate the living room should be cleared for movement, something like a boxing ring.

TIME: Present

PROPS

- A Zen bell
- Each woman has a bag or large purse
- A white handkerchief for EMMA
- A breast prosthesis (rubber, cotton, etc., but with some weight and able to be juggled)
- HANNAH will have a white tee-shirt and a blue marker for each woman in her bag, including herself

* * * * *

Six women in a living room. One of the ACTORS rings a Zen bell three times. HANNAH should be seated so as to "preside" over them.

HANNAH does not speak, but as the words get increasingly outrageous, she clearly enjoys the proceedings. Also, clearly, the women do this for HANNAH's entertainment, so they never ignore her.

EMMA

Have you all done your homework? Have you? Good. I made them do homework for the occasion.

Everyone has nodded yes.

EMMA

Good. See how much they love you, Hannah? The playing area? Nice touch, I thought -- like a boxing ring, "float like a butterfly," wrestling with fate, all that metaphysical jazzy-jazz?

EMMA hands HANNAH the white handkerchief.

EMMA

Hannah, you wave it when you want us to begin.

HANNAH daintily waves the handkerchief like a starting flag.

EMMA

All right! Isabela, you're up. Helena, on deck.

ISABELA

Okay.

HELENA

Okay.

ISABELA

Okay. Let the naming begin. Tits.

EMMA

Okay -- tits.

ISABELA

Tits.

EMMA
Kinda ordinary --

ISABELA
Like mine.

EMMA
-- but a good start.

ISABELA
Just warming 'em up, Emma!

EMMA
No complaining. Helena?

HELENA
Um -- titties.

EMMA
Variation on a theme. Boring.

VERA
Boobs.

EMMA
Better.

REBECCA
Boobies.

ALL
Variation!

REBECCA
Hooters, then.

EMMA
Good! And I say, "dugs."

HELENA
That's because you're an English major.

EMMA
So?

HELENA

Old poetry, "dugs." I see your dugs and give you
"paps" -- nah-nah, English major.

ISABELA

Knockers.

VERA

Ahem. Bodacious --

EMMA

Yes?

VERA

Ta. Tas.

EMMA

Round one in the name game to Vera!

From here to the end of the listing, no restrictions on
outlandishness or bawdiness or speed of the lines or use of
space.

HELENA

Category: food.

ALL (BUT NOT IN CHORUS)

Food.

EMMA

Apples.

ISABELA

Peaches.

VERA

Muffins.

REBECCA

English or stud?

EMMA

Falsies could be called "muffin stuffin'." Heh?

ISABELA

No digressions, you two.

Isabela's right. EMMA

Fried eggs. VERA

Ewww! ISABELA

Cassavas. EMMA

Honeydews. VERA

Lemons. ISABELA

Oranges. HELENA

REBECCA
Bean count. Bean count -- nipples in cold weather.
You know -- bing! bing!

They all do "bing! bing!" on their own bodies.

EMMA
Round two has got to go Rebecca's beans.

VERA
Nuh-uh. Dingleberries.

EMMA
Naw!

ALL
Naw!

EMMA
The beans have it! Name Game round two to Rebecca!
That means you're next up!

REBECCA
Uh, uh --

EMMA
Come on.

REBECCA
Ordinary objects!

EMMA
Like?

REBECCA
(flattening her own breasts)
Baby pillows.

ISABELA
Easy. Balcony. "She's got a balcony you can do Shakespeare from." Also, upper deck. Three breast-obsessed brothers.

EMMA
Birds.

VERA
Bumpers.

REBECCA
Butter-bags.

ALL (BUT NOT IN CHORUS)
Ewwwww!

REBECCA
Flip-flaps.

EMMA
Headlights.

They all go, again, "bing! bing!"

ISABELA
Handwarmers.

HELENA
Knick-knacks.

EMMA
(emphasizing the "k" sound)
K-nick k-nacks.

VERA
Hog jaws.

REBECCA
Knobbies.

EMMA
(emphasizing the "k" sound)
K-nobbies.

VERA
Love-bubbles.

EMMA
Like bubble-wrap: pop-pop.

VERA
Maracas.

ISABELA
Tremblers.

REBECCA
Piggies.

HELENA
Puffies.

EMMA
Ah-- ah -- no contest here for weirdness:
thr'pennies.

REBECCA
Emma da man! Name Game round tree ta youse! Yo,
Isabela -- next!

ISABELA
Places.

REBECCA
Places?

ISABELA
Yep.

REBECCA
They can be named after places?

ISABELA

Yep.

HELENA

I didn't find any. Any of you? All yours, then.

ISABELA

Bristols, charleys, manchesters, and murphies.

EMMA

Round to Isabela.

ISABELA

Thank you, thank you, thank you all.

EMMA

Your call.

ISABELA

You said weirdness -- surreality it is, for the final Jeopardy round. Norgies.

EMMA

Babalooos.

ISABELA

Che-chees.

HELENA

Mammets.

VERA

Snorbs.

REBECCA

Baloobas.

VERA

Bazooms.

EMMA

Bazongas.

REBECCA

Gagas.

Bazonkers.	EMMA
Garbonzas.	REBECCA
Bazookas.	EMMA
Gazongas.	REBECCA
Fresh out -- ah-- ah --	EMMA
Goonas.	REBECCA
Jublies.	ISABELA
Lulus.	HELENA
Bejonkers.	VERA
Bubbies.	ISABELA
Chubbies.	HELENA
Diddies.	VERA
Kajoobies.	REBECCA
Ah-- ah-- Nubbies!	EMMA
Hee-haws.	VERA
Lollos.	HELENA

ISABELA

Ninnies.

REBECCA

Poonts.

EMMA

Wallopies.

HELENA

Wait, wait -- this has to be the topper:
toralorrals. Hey? Hey?

EMMA

Round to Helena? Ding, ding! Bing, bing!

Another round of "bing! bing!"

EMMA

(directly addressing HANNAH)

Such endless, endless, endless fascination,
wouldn't you say, Hannah?

HANNAH

Yes, I would say -- fascination, yes. But not
endless.

EMMA

Not for you --

HANNAH

Not for me, no, not for me -- but to name the old
thing is to begin to name the new thing. Yes?
To name the new thing is to begin to let the old
thing go. I thank you for such wonderful naming!

All the women grab their breasts and give a kind of sports/frat
cheer: "Woo-woo" or something like that.

EMMA

And we have more.

HANNAH

Oh, good!

EMMA

I told you we would take care of you. Story time.
Vera. Hannah, the handkerchief, please.

HANNAH waves the handkerchief.

VERA

(like a carney barker)

Okay, okay, okay! Lotsa good stories, Hannah. In the beginning, ya got yer sacred breast. Large breasts, globes, globulars, pumped with milk -- people worshipped these images, built whole societies around them. The Minoans, for one, you know, on Crete? -- woman bull-leapers, how about that? Isis squirting immortality down the throat of Horus, Artemis of Ephesus with twenty breasts (think of that brassiere!). But this is one I really liked. And for your entertainment, HANNAH, I have decided to add a little pizzazz to this razz-a-matazz.

VERA takes a breast prosthesis out of her bag.

ISABELA

Where did you get that?

VERA

Ve all have our secrets, don't ve? Now watch carefully.

VERA begin tossing the prosthesis up and catching it on the back of her hand, behind her back, etc. The others respond. Each person will continue to do this during her portion of the story.

VERA

(announcing, like a little girl)

My favorite story: The Milky Way. Once it was believed -- that mortals became immortal -- if they suckled at the breast -- of Hera, queen of the gods.

ISABELA

Zeus wanted his son -- the bastard child named Hercules -- to be immortal like his dad.

REBECCA

So while Hera took a snooze -- Zeus clamped the kid on a nipple -- but Hercules sucked so hard -- he woke the napping noble.

HELENA

She plucked the kid away -- and her milk spilled into the heavens -- and thus was created -- the crown of the Milky Way.

EMMA

Those stars -- and thus ourselves -- come from the divine and dripping breast.

EMMA finishes the story and bows, to the applause of everyone.

EMMA

And we have more. Rebecca --

HANNAH

No. No. Enough. Enough. You have given me -- enough -- for the moment. Vera -- you are right -- so much from the breast, heh? so much life. From all your breasts, so much life! I feel it so strongly. It lifts me up. You will all carry me through.

(puts her hand on her left breast)

Even now, life will come from it.

EMMA

Hannah --

HANNAH puts her hand up to stop EMMA.

HANNAH

Now it is time for me to give back to all of you a story. A naming. Emma, everyone, please, put these on.

As HANNAH speaks, she takes a white tee-shirt and a marker out of her bag for each woman and hands the items to them. She also includes a tee-shirt and a marker for herself. The women put the tee-shirts on.

Also, as HANNAH speaks, the lights will fade until she stands in her own light.

HANNAH

Tomorrow -- Tomorrow I will not let them wheel me down the hall on a gurney -- "gurney" -- what an embarrassing word. No, tomorrow, no "gurney." Tomorrow, I will walk down the hall to "pre-op" under my own steam, as they say. Ssst -- like steam I will go. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow I will go.

HANNAH puts on her tee-shirt. She indicates her left breast.

HANNAH

When this is gone tomorrow -- cut -- and then later, after their poisons have made their appointed rounds in my body -- they will bring me to a cold amnesiac room to burn away what remains. They will make a body cast that will become my lover, who will grip me exactly the same way each time under this radiant kiss.

HANNAH uses the marker to make dots in the shape of an "H" on her left breast. She will then connect the dots into the shape of a butterfly. Each woman will do the same.

HANNAH

And they will tattoo my chest with an impressionist blue, like a surveyor drawing a new country over my heart -- and now what name for that blasted spot on the new map that once was "breast" but is now a scarlet letter? What name will follow that letter? This is what I choose to believe as I lie under these invisible flames: these blue marks of the warrior Amazon will melt into a butterfly -- detached breast as chrysalis that bursts like an over-ripe star -- nova, "new" -- seeding everything, conceding nothing. Nothing! I make of this my gift to the world -- I make of this my state of remission. This is what I choose to believe.

HANNAH has finished connecting the dots. She puts her hand over her breast and heart.

HANNAH

Fare thee well, my lovely.

By this time, all the woman have completed their butterflies.

EMMA, ET AL

Fare thee well.

The women join HANNAH in the center. As they speak their individual words, they place a hand over their left breasts.

EMMA

Tits.

ISABELA

Bajoobies.

REBECCA

Cassavas.

HELENA

Handwarmers.

VERA

The Milky Way.

HANNAH

(surrounded by her friends)

All of you, fare thee well.

Brief moment with the tableau, then lights out.

The Fever Dream of Captain America

DESCRIPTION

Muslims Muslims everywhere -- and barely time to round them all up. A mosque frequented by taxi-cab drivers is the latest threat to American ideals.

CHARACTERS

- Uddim Bukhari (Bengali), a cabdriver
- Galal "Jimmy" Omar (Egyptian), FBI agent

SETTING

- Interrogation room: table, two chairs. On or under the table is a buzzer button of some sort.

* * * * *

BUKHARI seated, wearing a white kufi, loose shirt and pants, sneakers.

Waits.

OMAR enters, wearing a suit, badge clipped to this belt, folder in hand.

They look at each other.

OMAR

Uddim Bukhari. Yes. No.

BUKHARI

Yes.

OMAR

You have prayed today.

BUKHARI

I am praying right now.

OMAR

For.

BUKHARI

I am praying for this to go away.

OMAR

I can understand that. Uddim. Bukhari. I am special agent Galal Omar.

BUKHARI

Have they given you an American name to use?

OMAR

Jimmy. But not for you.

BUKHARI takes a deep deliberate breath, then lets it out slowly. He scans OMAR, cocks his head as if listening.

BUKHARI

Egypt. You still haven't rinsed it out of your voice. In Egypt you were --

OMAR

My parents' son.

BUKHARI

Poor parents, probably, by the sound of you. Smell of you. I know some Egyptian slang for your mother.

OMAR just stands and looks at BUKHARI.

BUKHARI

Because I know several languages, is all I am saying to you -- I would never insult your mother. I am going to assume you do not -- know several languages, I mean.

OMAR

Assume what you want.

BUKHARI

Perhaps -- but I need to be careful -- your employer may have repealed the right to assume between the time you took me in and --

OMAR

Mr. Bukhari, no one took you anywhere.

BUKHARI

But --

BUKHARI spreads his hands as if to say, "But I am here."

OMAR

You were asked to come in --

BUKHARI

Being asked by your badge is not being asked.

OMAR

You could have said no.

BUKHARI

You are a funny man: "I could have said no."

OMAR shrugs. He leafs through photos in the folder.

OMAR

Quite a hopping mosque there on First Avenue, Madina Masjid, especially in the morning -- so many cabbies, like yourself, coming to the mosque for prayer.

BUKHARI

We pray first, pick up fares after -- it maintains a proper balance in a proper life.

OMAR

So much information gets passed around, eh -- so much to say, so much to say, so much to say --

BUKHARI

Your script is not working, Mr. Omar --

OMAR

You don't like Dave Matthews.

BUKHARI

The FBI script they gave you -- it is not working.

OMAR

Well, true -- true true -- because I am bored. Because you, Uddim Bukhari, don't really interest me at all.

BUKHARI

Then send me home.

OMAR

What interests me is the "so much to say, so much to say, so much to say" going on at Madina Masjid. Who knows what. Who knows who.

BUKHARI

Whom. You should use "whom."

OMAR laughs without humor.

OMAR

Who knows whom. Who does what to whom -- yes? Who gets to go back to driving his cab. Whose paperwork can get lost. Whose life, after talking with me, can get -- difficult.

BUKHARI

Talking with you is not difficult -- Egyptians are not difficult. Talking with what you hold in your hand -- that --

OMAR waves the folder.

BUKHARI

What are we talking about in what you've got in your hand --

OMAR

The details are not important.

BUKHARI

Because you have no details.

OMAR stands to BUKHARI's left. He indicates the floor area.

OMAR

Here is what is in here for you. Al Qadr -- right here, Al Qadr, on your left.

OMAR moves to BUKHARI's right side, indicates the area.

OMAR

And then we cross over to Al Qaria. There is Al Qadr on your left -- you know Al Qadr --

BUKHARI

Of course I know what Al Qadr means.

OMAR

I knew you would know because I do have that kind of detail about you. And then you travel to Al Qaria --

BUKHARI

Al Qaria -- my judgment day -- is that what this is -- all that is? Is that what you're trying to tell me, Mr. Omar, with "on the left is Al Qadr, on the right is Al Qaria" --

OMAR sits.

OMAR

Let's say "no" -- at least about your judgment day, at least that part -- "no" about that for the moment.

An active silence.

OMAR

But a time is coming, like it comes for all of us.

BUKHARI

Your parents --

OMAR

Not important.

BUKHARI

But if you want me to do what you want me to do for you -- it costs you nothing to tell me. And it's a good interrogation technique -- even your FBI says --

OMAR

My father was a civil servant, in Cairo -- lowly, you could call him. Would call him. My mother -- a teacher.

BUKHARI

Observant?

OMAR

They observed. They liked Salah Ragab and his jazz, hated the Israeli war, came here, had me. Done. You, I already know details about. From

you -- the only thing left is for you to give me what I need.

BUKHARI

I have a better mind than you do.

OMAR

I don't doubt it, given your background --

BUKHARI

"We have indeed revealed this Message in the Night of Power / And what will explain to thee what the night of power is?" I can recite all of it, in Arabic, in English, in --

OMAR

And I can't. You are from a better class than me.

BUKHARI

Than "I."

OMAR

See? There you go. What a hick I am. So?

BUKHARI says nothing.

OMAR

What makes you think we don't already have informants in the mosque, in our hip pockets?

BUKHARI still says nothing.

OMAR

How do you think you ended up here with me? Who can you really trust?

BUKHARI

Whom.

OMAR laughs his humorless laugh as he opens the folder again, scans a paper.

OMAR

Tell me, Uddim Bukhari, about Captain America.

BUKHARI looks at OMAR, just the barest hint of a smirk on his face.

OMAR

Tell me about Captain America.

BUKHARI

May I have some water?

OMAR

No.

BUKHARI

Another effective interrogation technique is to offer the subject certain comforts in order to build trust and cooperation.

OMAR hesitates, then leaves. He comes back with a paper cup of water. BUKHARI drinks the water slowly, then deliberately and neatly flattens the cup, and leaves it to one side. OMAR waits.

BUKHARI

I told some of the cabbies the story of the comic book hero Captain America -- to amuse them. You know, because of the movie that came out? Jack Kirby, the man who dreamed up Captain America, created a very amusing story.

OMAR

You called what you told them the "fever dream of Captain America." From my hip pocket.

BUKHARI

It is.

OMAR

I don't think most would call "fever dream" amusing.

BUKHARI

From where your badge sits, no. From where a cabbie sits, who comes to Madina Masjid to pray with others and keep his life proper and straight -- "fever dream" can be an amusing pastime.

OMAR waits.

BUKHARI

Why do you want me to tell you this? Americans are responsible for the craziness of Captain America, not I.

OMAR

I read Captain America comics when my parents brought me here -- one of the things I did to learn the English I needed.

BUKHARI

This is said to warm me up, like the glass of water, right? You never read them.

OMAR

I did.

BUKHARI looks OMAR over. OMAR pulls a Captain America comic book from the folder, holds it up.

OMAR

Fever. Dream.

BUKHARI

Then you know that this fever dream, the one you read to improve your English -- this fever dream started not far from Madina Masjid, right down on Suffolk Street. The story of Steve Rogers a.k.a. Captain America, created by Jack Kirby -- immigrant kid, orphan on the Lower East Side, art student wimp. The eugenics serum of the fevered scientists turns the artsy New Yorker wimp into the heaving shield-thrower, justice fighter --

OMAR

"Fever dream" --

BUKHARI

The FBI, like the cabbies, has access to the news created every day around the world by the United States -- by Captain America -- my cabbies, knowing this news, understand "fever dream" right away.

OMAR

As a [threat] --

BUKHARI

Special Agent Omar -- really --

OMAR

Because to me, "fever dream" should be read as a threat. "Fever dream" leans towards you having made a threat.

BUKHARI

Against whom?

OMAR

Uddim Bukhari, I know you're not stupid.

BUKHARI

"I'm loyal to nothing except the American Dream." A direct quote from Steve Rogers, a.k.a. Captain America -- he's not being loyal to the government, your employer. He is being loyal only to his conscience. Would you consider "I'm loyal to nothing except the American Dream" a threat from Steve Rogers, a.k.a. Captain America?

BUKHARI laughs.

BUKHARI

It seems that Captain America had his own "fever dream" -- being loyal to the ideals, not to the institutions -- fiction can be very amusing -- "my cabbies," as you call them, know this.

OMAR chooses a few more papers.

OMAR

"Fever dream" is a threat against the United States -- that much is clear, even if you are trying to be subtle, subtle, subtle like the serpent. Now, let's see -- what else are you involved in?

BUKHARI

I am not involved in anything.

OMAR

That's not what I have listed here.

BUKHARI

Extracted from those in your hip pockets.

OMAR

People are eager to be loyal.

BUKHARI

People are eager to feel safe.

OMAR

You tell me the difference, oh subtle one.

BUKHARI

It is not a difference -- people will lie to be either one.

OMAR

If a court buys it, that's all that matters to me.

BUKHARI

Lies are not evidence.

OMAR

Ideals, ideals. It doesn't matter, Uddim. We go to war with the army we have. If my hip pockets say you're involved -- you're involved. If I want to attach your name to a locker full of explosives -- done. If I want to link you to, oh, Yemen -- done. "Fever dream" is a threat not because it's the wrong description --

OMAR closes the folder.

OMAR

Definitely not because it's the wrong description.

An active silence.

OMAR

The longer we sit here, the more fares you lose. The longer we sit here, the more Uddim Bukhari's immigration status shifts. The longer we sit here, the more the evidence ripens.

BUKHARI

I'll find another mosque.

OMAR

That won't take you out of our sights. Word will get around that we have talked to you -- if it

already hasn't -- after all, "so much to say" --
who talks to whom --

BUKHARI

I'll pray alone.

OMAR

Like Captain America frozen into his block of ice
-- what a life. And there's always that shifting
immigration status thing to worry about. Tick.
Tock. Uddim. Bukhari.

An active silence.

BUKHARI

Tell me in what I received my degrees.

OMAR

We're past that.

BUKHARI

It's a simple request.

OMAR

Math was one.

BUKHARI

Pure math.

OMAR

And --

BUKHARI

That's enough. From here, Mecca is --

BUKHARI calculates.

BUKHARI

Roughly at 59 degrees north. Six thousand four
hundred and -- eleven miles. May I stand?

OMAR

Stand.

BUKHARI stands.

BUKHARI

Front of the building.

OMAR points. BUKHARI gets his bearings.

BUKHARI

Roughly this way, then.

BUKHARI takes off his sneakers, then takes up the proper first posture for prayer: hands raised, palms out, at the level of the ears and in line with the head. It also looks like an act of surrender.

BUKHARI

I know that you get to leave at the end of the day in perfect knowledge that you are safe and with the belief that you are loyal. Take some of that and pray with me.

OMAR

Sit down.

BUKHARI

At least come say the takbir with me, and we'll call it even.

OMAR

Sit down.

BUKHARI

A supplication praising God is usually said --

OMAR

Sit down!

BUKHARI

I am sure you know all of this.

BUKHARI does not sit. Instead, he murmurs a prayer to himself, then lowers his arms, puts on his sneakers, sits.

BUKHARI

Do they provide a place here for you to --

OMAR

Shut. Up.

BUKHARI

Not part of the "fever dream" -- I understand. A shame. A shame some -- most -- of the fiction does not turn out to be real.

OMAR gathers up papers, stands up.

OMAR

You will report to me --

BUKHARI intersperses the lines with the Captain America theme song, sung or spoken.

[<http://homepage.mac.com/jjbeach/einheri/music/cap.html>]

BUKHARI

When Captain America throws his mighty shield --

OMAR

Every other week --

BUKHARI

All those who chose --

OMAR

Shut up.

BUKHARI

-- to oppose his shield must yield --

OMAR

Stop it.

BUKHARI

Freedom of speech. "If he's led to a fight and a duel is due / Then the red and white and the blue'll come through" -- catchy.

OMAR

I will want to know --

BUKHARI

When Captain America throws his mighty shield -- that's it.

OMAR

Will you bring home enough today to feed your family? The clock is ticking.

An active silence.

BUKHARI

What would you like to know?

OMAR

This is where your degrees will not help you.

BUKHARI

What would you like to know?

OMAR

Are you done being stupid?

BUKHARI

What would you like to know?

OMAR

I want you to be my lower east side ghost. I want you to see if there's someone at prayers, or at the halal cart, or at the Madina Deli or Sahara East or Atomic Wings who thinks too much about this "fever dream" of yours. In fact, I want you to talk it up even more, really put that "fever" out there and see who rises to the dream -- "who," right, not "whom," right? Every other week we will confer about Captain America.

BUKHARI

Look at me.

OMAR

No. We're done.

An active silence. OMAR presses the buzzer button.

OMAR

You have to be escorted out of the building. Stand up -- someone is waiting for you.

BUKHARI stands up. He and OMAR finally exchange looks.

BUKHARI

We should fear for our souls, you and I. We just shouldn't fear for them the way you want me to fear for mine. Doing that makes you -- well, you know what it makes you. I am sure, now, you know what it makes you.

BUKHARI leaves; he takes the flattened paper cup with him. OMAR alone, looking disgusted.

OMAR

Thank you for your coöperation.

OMAR slams his hand or fist down against the table.

OMAR

Allahu. Fucking. Akbar.

A pause, then OMAR pivots to face the way BUKHARI had faced. OMAR's lips move as he says the tikbar to himself, though he cannot bring himself to raise his arms and hold his face toward Mecca.

Blackout as the Captain America theme plays in some distorted fashion. Or not.

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also look collaborates with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

**Block
&Tackle**
PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

