

**Michael Bettencourt**

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**One-Act Plays: Volume 2**

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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**Michael Bettencourt**

**Mine Eyes • Poly X • Samaritan  
Another Seascape • A Senior Moment  
The First Day Of The Seventh Month**

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**Block & Tackle Productions Press**



**Co-Founders Elfin Frederick Vogel and Michael Bettencourt**

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**To María Beatriz - always in all ways**

# Mine Eyes

## DESCRIPTION

In this one-person play, the narrator tells a cautionary tale about his involvement with the American militia movement - as their P.R. person. Figuring that he, an out-of-work M.B.A. with an interest in advertising, could sell ideas just like any other commodity, he finds out the consequences of his actions ripple out farther than he ever thought.

## CHARACTERS

Albert Lawrence Tekton, *late 30s, early 40s*

## SETTING

Run-down studio apartment in a city. The apartment itself is kept neat. If there is an abundance of anything, it is books: the man has been reading for the last two years.

## TIME

- Present

## TECHNICAL NEEDS

- Military handgun

## NOTES

- The play is written to take place in a theatre where the actor can have direct and physical contact with the audience. The audience is a "reporter" who has tracked TEKTON down for an interview; the actor should talk directly to the audience.
- The actor and director should also come up with the some way to indicate the different "characters" TEKTON plays throughout the play: by adding a piece of clothing, using an object, and/or a physical gestures and movement. These devices should be natural, in that they use objects and motions found in TEKTON's environment and character. A change in lighting can also be used.
- Whenever possible, movements that convey the narrative should be well--choreographed and economical, such as in the account of the fight between the two girls and the black man. Convey as much of the words *through actions as possible*.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 1

Modest though run-down (but not decrepit) studio apartment in a city. A reading light stands next to a reading chair, and the light is on. At the back of the apartment is a window. The coloring of the window will change from late morning -- say, 4 AM -- to dawn. There can also be various items around which TEKTON can use: a loaf of bread, peanut butter, bottle of water, a box of plastic wrap, etc. Seated at a table is TEKTON, cleaning a firearm. On the table is a box for the gun.

Make you nervous? No? Sure? Good. Because this is - cleansing - for me. Ah, you got the pun. So shoot me. Metaphorically, of course. This - This is how I - focus during these long winter seminars called "my evenings alone." How I remind myself, re-make my mind. Oop, no questions yet - all in the fullness of time, in a timely manner, time wounds all heels, etcetera. And no tape recorder - no, no. No, you will have to work without that net. You'll find it's invigorating!

(indicating the gun)

Sure? Not nervous? Just checking. Just checking your temperature.

I can't believe you tracked me down and exhumed me. All the real garbage in the world to dig through, and your editors stick you with Albert Lawrence Tekton, V.P.T. V.P.T. Very. Past. Tense. A has-been who never was. I haven't worked the Armageddon circuit in, what, a coon's age -- I take it you've plowed through your newspaper's morgue --

(thoughtfully)

-- but apparently a coon's age is not enough time for my complete and utter deletion. I'm still findable -- too bad.

All right -- one question.

I have been doing honest work. I have earned my money and paid my taxes and at least not wasted too much of the earth's patience. I bag groceries. Very therapeutic. I clerk at a liquor store. Very refreshing. On weekends I clean office buildings-- disgustingly insightful, that. I am the very model of the "working poor." Very uplifting, all, yes, "good news" news -- but hardly newsworthy. So, another question -- a better question.

I let you in for company, that's why. Not many -- no, not many at all -- get to see me do this. And not many -- actually, let's see -- none -- get to see me do this at 4 AM. Don't worry -- no sexual innuendo about barrel size, caliber, whatever. Very literal these days -- it's safer. And speaking of safety: Anyone know you're here? Good -- set the escape plan! Rock on! That's what I'd do, too, if I were here with me, which I am every day -- though no escape plan yet, you're ahead of me on that one. Oop -- Simon says no more questions.

Sits there, flummoxed: What now? How can I get this back on track? How can I get the story? All about the story, getting the story -- all about the product. All right -- he decides on a little pity -- after all, she's come at his pre-dawn/post-darkest hour appointment time, on the verge of a new day's light. Who knows -- perhaps you are an angel. Put the pad down. I put the gun down -- you put the pad down. Good. Put the pen on top of it. Angle it a bit -- a little more. There. You follow so well! We have now both abandoned our weapons. I am now going to feed you. And you will listen.

Something here, perhaps a lighting change, to indicate a change in TEKTON -- some earlier incarnation of himself, though paler and more thinned out than it had been in the original.

You've heard the joke about Timothy McVeigh making Oklahoma City a "boom town"? Of course, I wasn't surprised about Oklahoma City -- you shouldn't have been either. Many short fuses out there --

(a few small explosive sounds  
punctuate the next words)

-- and it's not will there be another, but when, because we've bred our own domestic jihad-makers. The militia movement, once named Montana, may have flushed itself down the toilet by stupidity and excess, but the American mind that made it once tick still ticks. Ticks. Ticks. I want you to try to imagine something, my ink-stained wretch. Eyes closed -- assume the imagination position. Completely closed! Now -- you. This is you. Imagine you:

a simple citizen, a hard-working if reluctant payer of taxes, not much money in pocket or bank. But your one great anchor, the thing that just July 4th's your heart, is that you are one of the "folks," one of the "people," as in "We. The." In one of the greatest countries, this great country of ours!

But around you -- it is all crumbling. Some retard burns a flag, and the courts? "No problem -- artistic expression." The cities? In meltdown. The schools? Free-fire zones. Your paycheck (if still have one)? Barely half the man it was 30 years ago. And the taxes! While CEOs gag on golden parachutes as companies "right-size" people into their graves and export our jobs to slaves willing to work for corn meal. Politicians -- your government, the people you hired to care for your democracy -- just a big bunch of fubars -- eff'd up beyond all repair.

Don't be fooled by the post-9/11 massage that the country now speaks with one voice, beats with one heart, ties one yellow ribbon 'round one old oak tree -- that the axis of evil spins around a dark pre-modern Islamic heart. You know that's not true. Waco and the Branch Davidians, Ruby Ridge and the Weavers, Guatemala '54, Chile '73, Vietnam, Panama, Grenada -- now chuck in Afghanistan and Iraq twice, Iran next, then on to Damascus -- imprisonments without lawyers, your privacy in shreds -- none of that's changed, it's still going on, it's all part of the same game: to steal pride and power from the common people and turn what is great and glorious into trash.

Moves in more closely with his voice.

So -- American Dream? Hah! American Nightmare. Everything right and good now trashed and smithereened, sold to the highest bidder. And what do scribblers like you do about it? Pen mightier than the sword? Too busy pimping to pay attention, just pushing out the product and looking for the next rung up. I didn't tell you to open your eyes yet! You're still blind for me!

Eyes closed! You listen! The seethe, the bile, the pure anger of betrayal -- What would you do with that in your gut? You might think -- and brood -- and search for answers.

Not all of it by chance -- has to be a rhyme to it. And then -- yes! Of course! There is an US, the good US -- You. Ess. -- get it? -- and there is a THEM -- them -- the Money Power or the elite or the politicians sucking corporate dick or the one-worlders at the U.N., the parasite multinationals and the gutless media, the hordes leaking through the borders -- and suddenly, this lightbulb called "Conspiracy," shining a constant and befriending light.

TEKTON picks up the gun; he must do something with it that indicates to the "reporter" that he has it in his hand. The following lines are said with gentle force, an ironic underscore to the vitriol. TEKTON might whisper the "bam"s once or twice in the ear of the "reporter."

Once this "truth" emerges -- this revelation -- something makes sense --it demands action. I must protect the Constitution's Second Amendment to protect my country. Bam! I must study and learn so that the fubars won't fool me again. Bam! I must dig down, root out, to find how deep the rot goes. Bam! I must learn military self-discipline to protect myself. Bam! I must prepare myself for Armageddon for I have seen Waco and Iraq. Bam! I wait in the dark. Bam! "Boom town." End of syllogism.

TEKTON puts the gun down.

Sense, yes? I don't care if you agree -- just, make sense? I think it does. I think it hangs together. I think it is a philosophy, this bone-weary sadness at the loss of so much that is good. This ache for the answer. This desire to protect. I'll bet even you, professionally objective, have felt that. We all have some version of this hunger inside us, don't we? Hunger for justice. Hunger for peace -- of mind, of heart, of gut. We're not that far apart. The militia, Montana and otherwise, maybe, just maybe, aren't quite the aliens we -- you -- make them out to be.

You may now open your eyes.

You may now pick up your sword.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Scene 2

Look at you write! Burns up the ink! However, I can't wait for you. I can't. Not now, so do your best. I am a little -- ashamed at what I just did -- a little ashamed to show you that's all -- just that, that's all I would need to work in the wedge. Just enough truth for seasoning -- demon politicians, cesspool of corruption, economic rape -- I had my checklists -- Column A, Column B -- and the smoky mirrors did the rest. Selective truth equals the artistic lie. In other words, the efficient principles of marketing. And like all good marketeers, I would then trust the pain and loneliness and desperation of the listeners to do the rest of my deceiving for me.

Background you've got, right? A.L.T., the front person -- the brand-tested face that spoke the speech and sold the party line. Just testing your study habits. I was tight with the Church of Aryan Nations, the White Aryan Resistance, the Freeman movement, the County movement, the Patriot movement, Posse Comitatus, Christian Identity -- and a lot of other species ready to fly in from baling hay or bussing dishes to grab their God-blessed guns and bang out the Second American Revolution! Mon semblable, mon frère.

But --

(Paul Harvey voice)

-- the rest of the story -- what you don't know is how I entered that food chain, and that is a long and moist and very American story.

Scene: On the verge of adulthood, grad degree in "biz" management and marketing, minor in graphic design -- but just couldn't snag the job, you know, the one vaguely -- persistently -- promised as I grew up. So I morphed into a "temporary contingent worker." At an ad agency, someone asked me, on a whim, what to do with a certain client's product -- you know, be kind to the handicapped? It was a fart detonator or eyebrow piercer or something equally useless. But I suggested, they liked, and they used it.

A few more questions, a few more suggestions -- and it occurred to me that I had this -- facility. This "marketable

skill." This dark -- vein. To help people believe what they wanted to believe, even if they didn't know yet that they wanted to believe it.

Temp job ended, more temp jobs followed -- years of them, actually -- I began to like the freedom of "temp" and decided not to become "perm." Note that -- it seems to be a personal tic. So one day, on my daily constitutional, I tripped over this white supremacist group in the park barking out their mongrel theories, all pretty vague and spastic to me, but the crowd, about 100, seemed to suck it up readily enough. And at the end they sucked down a respectable sum into their passing hat.

I thought about that. A lot. Money in tripe -- no different than doing the toilet bowl enamler or the eyeball plucker. It had a weird appeal to a lot of people, so maybe it would have a few coins for an ambitious clean-cut young man willing to rent himself out. Lightbulb. Dark vein.

So began my mobius journey as a freelance ultra-right-wing Mouth-for-Hire. I advertised in Soldier of Fortune and got calls from groups all over looking for a better way to massage their messages. These guys had their Popes who wanted the doctrinal line pure. But they also their Jesuit managers willing to dance with Caesar. And the Jesuits paid handsomely.

Didn't matter that most of the crap I spit into people's ears was mean-spirited and spooky -- a hired gun shoots his mouth off wherever it's pointed.

(indicating gun)

Had to pass a few stupid "manly" tests -- a sad footnote for another time -- but no serious injuries to body or soul -- and a bank account like a fatted calf. No real damage. Or so this mouthy myth-making marketeer believed.

Digression -- because this is my dime. Marketing -- marketeering -- what I did -- is exactly what Zeus did when he got a jones for the length and breadth of fair Leda's body. Maybe you don't know this story, but down drops the king of the gods in the shape of a swan -- at first his beauty made gentle under her gentle hand -- and then, when his grace

had lulled her, deceived her -- bam! -- his strong wings crushing Leda close, hissing in her ear "this is will make you great!" while his Olympian cock -- Zeus myth-making Leda for pleasure and power -- that's the marketeer's coat of arms! The words out of my mouth, all lies, but tarted up in a downfall of white feathers to mislead by dazzle while the domination slid right up -- right up! -- and when the soul shivers and cracks, it then belongs to Zeus.

You think you can resist the Zeus-like swanfucker marketeers -- the corporations, the government, the media -- but, man, we bestride the world greater than the Olympians could ever have imagined. When Zeus has been all up inside you for years, believing whatever he hisses in your ear easily becomes your first and second nature. Once you've been tapped, it's not hard to make you believe that your violation feels like revelation.

You know what made me good? My seamless face and voice and body could hit from both sides of the plate. I could bat lefty with the profs and the PBS-ers and coat the poison in a sugared lingo that made it slide down easily -- mellowfied swanfucking. My patrons were not Nazis or supremacists -- they were patriots, descended from the originals. They were A-M-E-R-"I can" Americans.

(as if speaking to such a group)

"Patriot -- what a wonderful word. It means love of country, love of American values, love of Americans themselves -- those Americans who still believe in hard work, in marriage, in family, in God, in freedom. Freedom -- another wonderful word." That sort of thing.

But right-handed -- ooh, then it was just cutting away for center field! Some humid high school gymnasium or church basement to feed them the Word. That was when I flapped my lips like a pair of Zeus-white wings and fucked 'em into believing what they wanted to believe.

TEKTON changes again, different person, different time and place. Pretends that he is holding a microphone. Even a slight drawl if desired.

Good evening, fellow citizens, and welcome! Good evening, freedom-lovers! Good evening, patriots! Always good to

hear the joyful noise of freedom ringing out. Let it ring! Let it ring!

I want to thank you for coming tonight. I know you're busy people -- trying to make those ends meet that just won't seem to meet these days! But I also know that you are sick at heart, and that's why you're here -- you're answering the call because we know that this great country of ours is in deep danger.

I want to begin with a truth, the truth: You are a victim -- each of you. Did you know that? You are, because there is a culture war out there being waged against you. Did you know that? Of course you did because you wake up every morning and you hear the indictment loud and clear: Watch out, the elites gasp, watch out for the God-fearing, law-abiding, Caucasian, small-town, working-class, heterosexual Christian because not only do you not count, you are a downright obstacle to social progress! Frankly, mister, it would be great if you would just wise up and learn a little something from your new America -- and until you do, would you mind shutting up?

That's what happens when the BUPPIES and YUPPIES and DINKS and BOBOS and NIMBYS decide that the America they live in isn't good enough anymore and needs a little more "diversity" to bring it into the New World Order.

Now, let's make it as simple as it really is, let's get back to basics. The Constitution was written to guide us by a bunch of "undiversified" wise old white guys who invented our country! White guys! So were most of the guys who died in our name defending our freedom. So why should anyone be ashamed of white guys? Why is "Hispanic Pride" or "Black Pride" or "Jewish Pride" or "Gay Pride" -- why is that kind of knuckleheaded craziness considered a good thing, while "White Pride" brings up nothing but shaved heads and white hoods and not the long heritage of Western civilization -- your civilization? I'll tell you why: because it's a war out there, and good people like you are losing the propaganda battle to the Jew media, the pudding-headed educators, the botox'd entertainers, and our rat-faced politicians --

(mock spits)

-- don't mind me if I clear my throat after having that word in my mouth.

So why even bother to drag ourselves out of our homes to hear what we already know? Why have we gathered together? I'm not gonna answer that -- I'm not worthy to answer that. Instead, I'm gonna give you the words of someone who knows a lot more about this than I do: Isaiah. Now, here is a truth-teller! "Wash you, make you clean... before mine eyes..." he says, "learn to do well...come, now, and let us reason together." That's why we're here: to reason together about how to "do well" and make it "clean" again. Because if we don't, if we just lay back and criticize -- and, boy, do we do a lot of that! And I'm the first in that line! -- but if we don't -- well, you don't need a weatherman to know which way the dark wind will blow if we don't.

But we're not like that, are we? Are we? We are patriots, and we will do what our patriot forebears did: take action! Take action now! Draw your sword to battle against the homothugs, the feminist man-haters and abortionists, the blacks and other mud-bloods who turn our cities into garbage dumps, the Hebrew rich who steal our money and laugh at us, the government that guts our rights and lies to us and steals from us and kills us off like swine. We have reached that point in time when our social policy originates on Oprah! It's time to tear it to the ground and start all over.

Like those patriots in Boston, who looked at the lamps in the church tower and saw the enemy coming. And like those patriots, we need to stand our ground against the whole stinking mess. This is our right. This is our duty.

Patriot -- roll that word around the tongue -- what a wonderful word --

I don't think I need to keep spitting out the bile for you. I even believed at one point that maybe I was calling forth some "better angels" from the great unwashed. Yeah -- the look on your face -- I'd swanfucked myself.

But not entirely -- I knew there weren't no "better angels" dealt in this hand. They didn't want to "reason together" -- reasoning just got in the way of getting down to the mayhem that would give their sour lives some momentary juice. One eye cocked on my bank account, the other nailed to the exit door, I knew. But I just didn't want to fold my winning hand yet.

And then I had the monster folded for me. Right here in this city, amanuensis. This city of dark awarenesses.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 3

Oh, for a muse of fire, faithful reporter, because we have reached that muddy road down which slouches the rough beast of revelation. I do talk trash, don't I?

TEKTON acts out the next story with gestures and movements.

Right here, in this very city, interviewed for a knee-jerk documentary on violence in America. Interviewer, interview itself, polite, cerebral. On the subway, back to hotel, just humming along, mind geared neutral. In the next seats over, diagonal, two young girls in army camouflage, maybe sixteen, hair in crew-cut, heavy paratrooper boots. And because I know these things -- steel toes.

Directly across from them -- young black man, professional in his carriage, musing.

So clear and so cutting over the subway racket, to each other, you see, but obvious and loud for all to hear -- especially him. "Coon. Niggers. It all means mud." "Too bad we got rid of slavery." "Time to send the fuckers back to Africa." "Best nigger's a dead nigger." Arm patches right here: "White Is Right -- Aryan Resistance," the two curved around a lightning bolt in the dead middle.

Does his best, he does, but they've got lock and load in their voices. Finally, in this high fructose Southern slur: "If I could find myself a jungle bunny, I'd smack him upside the haid." The man -- want, want, want to tell him to stop,

like this lit fuse in my throat -- Don't! -- this man licenses himself: "Go ahead." Shocks 'em for a moment out of the show they've been putting on.

"Go ahead." Bluff called. I can see him checking as they come across -- a practiced eye. People ooze away. Everything in itchy focus, all of us pried out of our self-inflicted cocoons.

The following action should be carefully choreographed.

One girl -- a hitch -- then bam, hits him. Then the other -- vicious, open-handed slap. Then a pause -- that VCR thing, the frozen scene shivering -- and then the black man out of his seat, throws one down. Second one lands a boot to back of knee, he buckles, but he moves before another, by the leg and flips her down. Electrified in rage, he kicks them, deliberate, knowledgeable: he knows.

I do what I now consider stupid -- I try to help -- impulse from way below rational click. I put a hand on him, and he decks me with his elbow -- white danger! -- as I hit the matting he kicks me in the kidneys. One in the left -- yin. One in the right -- yang.

It feels like forever, but it isn't. Train into the station, and there is this crystallized moment when the normal mates with the vicious as people get on and off. He bolts. The two amazons swagger/stagger to a seat, and I rise, bruised from jawbone to kidney. People evaporate, and not a single helping hand lends itself. I can't see them very well, but I don't want to. Next stop, not mine, but I am off.

Back to Very. Past. Tense. I would like to say that Saul turned into Paul right then and right there -- but -- The next train brought me to my hotel. I needed to get into my room -- hear the door click shut locked -- before I could -- otherwise -- I closed the blinds, then sat unpeeling in a broth of hot, hot, hot water.

Very still. Floating. Pressurized. My flesh crawling with chills. I had to sit very still -- otherwise -- The after-images -- his methodical aim, their smug chops when they hit, the

way he knew they'd take his bait. Just that morning I'd sat in a studio -- polite, cerebral, remember? -- my tongue flicking, and now I had to sit, very still -- very still -- filling and re-filling, trying to flush off -- In a darkly comic way that I could only appreciate later, my confessional kidneys -- the bloody piss that came out for the next few days -- became the conscience I had told myself I didn't have and didn't need. "If I could get caught in the blowback -- " Once you start pissing qualms like that, your days as a mouthpiece are over.

So I got out - drop by drop, lie by lie. Nothing noble about it -- just pure cover-my-ass get-the-heck-out-of-Dodge selfishness. I didn't have new eyes -- just a frightened glance, like a tic. A tic. A tic. I drifted for a while -- "temp" again -- classic American response. I didn't read, I didn't write -- I didn't want to think about how I had been unthinking and not-thinking.

And so, dear teller of tales, here I am, sitting in the pale darkness, talking to -- who? To whom. To youm. To you. To myself. To no one in particular.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Scene 4

Change: I haven't been able to sleep lately. At least well. Not dreams -- just that -- it's as if I'm waiting for something.

You know, things are falling apart -- they are. But the rot at the core, the screams at the edges -- If I could go back to those people in the bleachers, I'd start out by saying -- no, I'd confess to them that I lied -- real freedom, real justice, real patriotism will begin --

Do you smoke? Thought so. You're in the street, butt done -- what do you do? Thought so -- just a flick, right? Person opens a pack of gum, unwraps a new CD, finishes that vendorized hot dog cradled in a napkin -- where does it go? Right. Another ounce of unconscious filth. So this is what has to do with that. If I could go back to those people in the bleachers, I'd start out by saying that real freedom, justice,



patriotism will begin when we stop littering our streets. You smile -- your first real one tonight! They wouldn't. They'd look at me goggle-eyed and give me a high-caliber enema to "git my mind straight."

But litter -- waste, garbage, junk, debris, rubbish, orts -- call it what you will -- it drives me crazy. I can't stand trash anywhere because it's only there through laziness, selfishness and stupidity.

Litter and revolution -- so the connection ain't so obvious. But -- but -- Listen.

People say they're angry about a lot, and I'm not saying that what the poll takers report is wrong, but I don't think they dig out the really lower-down fuse-blowers. I've never seen a poll that asks, "Does it piss you off when people don't hold the door for other people?" Would you say yes to that question? I raise both my hands on that one. Here's another: "Does it really give you a spiritual wedgie when that asshole leans on the horn the nanosecond the light turns green?" Eh? Okay, this: "Does it really crack your coccyx when someone takes the dog out for a walk and does not pick up the poop?" I'd bet the pollster would find some high-quality irritation, if not outright fury, if he asked questions like these.

(self-mockingly)

Future career as a pollster?

The point. People -- we -- can actually do something about these insults. Not by packing heat or hate but -- and here's the clincher, the idea that's been tossing me around on my not-sleeping nights -- but by making a decision to act for the welfare of, not friends, not family, but -- listen to me closely here, write this down, this is the nugget, this is the shot -- but to act for the welfare of strangers. That's the key. Strangers. Mark it. Strangers. Me for you. You for me. Freedom will be won or lost depending on how well we take care of people we don't know two bits and a haircut about. Friends, family -- they're easy. Who wouldn't go to the wall for them? It's making the way straight for strangers that really tests whether we have a soul in here or we're just a tub of guts constantly running out of time.

Thus, trash. If you deposit your trash in the proper receptacle -- cleaner sidewalk for someone you'll never meet. If you clean the trash that's there, squawk to the politicians for more receptacles and get people jobs to empty them, do a block party clean-up day -- see the point? People not living in trash might not feel a need to barricade themselves against filth. Unless we find ways to treat each other on this trash-level, we'll never get it right on any level. If we can't be kind to strangers, then we can't be kind, period. It's the strangers that make or break us as human beings.

Litter as revolution -- yeah, it won't blow up the swanfucker systems that suck you dry and spit you out, but little pools of freedom, little harbors of civility -- you and I can build 'em every moment of every day we're awake. It takes discipline -- it takes mindfulness -- but the higher consciousness begins in garbage. Any species that knowingly shits were it eats don't know shinola about freedom.

I admit -- a low-budget redemption -- and no real penance for the damage I did -- pissant and precious and neck-deep sentimental, ain't it? But each day, scribe, low budget or not, I have been trying to commit one act of kindness for a stranger. Hold open a door and not expect a thank you, glad when I get one. I've taken to -- reminding people who toss butts -- so watch out for me! Say "Hello" to people if I can catch their eye -- never fails to amaze me how surprised and pleased they look when someone actually acknowledges they exist. Big smile, opened face. When I bag at the supermarket, I toss in a smile with their weights and measures. At the liquor store, I put the change into people's hands, not on the counter -- moment of contact, whether they buy top shelf or bottom. On the subway, I always wait for people to get off before getting on -- and lately I've been announcing before the doors open: "Let them get off first." People go bland on me -- you know that look --

(imitates it)

-- but sometimes -- sometimes -- they also wait. And I can convince myself -- I do convince myself -- I am building my safe little harbors.

But sometimes -- sometimes -- our taste for inflicting pain seems bottomless -- and then this litter thing feels small and stupid and selfish. I am sitting on the subway and a woman gets on with two black eyes -- her story out there for everyone to know. I happen to catch her glance and smile at her. Smiles back, but tightly -- wounded enough -- and then stares straight ahead into the tunnel walls. She knows every eye is on her eyes. The perfect chance to love the stranger.

Two stops later she gets off, and as she does, two burly guys -- hard hats, belts -- get on, and she has to squeeze between them to move into the station. This ex-swanfucker, who supposedly has been bulking up his better angels with his little safe harbor-building project, should say to them, brassy and bold, "Stand to one side, please and just let her get off." But he doesn't. He doesn't. They sit, and one says to the other, "Takes a lickin', but keeps on tickin'." Laugh, laugh, ha, ha, onto another topic.

I can't describe the sudden rage I feel -- the sudden Biblical rage. I want purge. I want utter devastation visited upon them. No "better angels" -- I want in my hands that terrible swift sword mine eyes have seen!!

Makes some ineffectual comic fighting gestures.

Just scrape some of the hard-hat human muck off the face of the earth -- and give the universe a rest! But -- well -- I didn't -- "Made him sicken, but he's still a chicken." Lord, how intoxicating it can feel "to be right"! Kill 'em all -- who cares who sorts 'em out? The seduction of the righteous! I know all about that.

(sing-song)

Mine eyes have seen the poison / Of the man who thinks he's right -- and so instead, inkslinger -- this -- nausea -- this sadness -- takes up its perch here -- and it watches and it waits. It waits for me to --

I am scared. The dawn is here, and I am scared. I'm scared every day because what perches here asks me to act bigger now -- pokes me, whispers to me with sly affection, And what will you do today, Albert? Hmmm? How

will you pay back the people you hurt? Just asking -- when I don't know! Down among the protons and neutrons, in the minutes and hours, I do all of what I think is all I can do -- bag groceries, give change in exchange -- I can do that -- I can do that -- just a safe sanctimonious weirdo about litter, just talking, talking, talking, just littering words -- I can do that. I just can't seem to do it up in the higher altitudes -- I can't seem to travel in the whole universe again -- two beefy guys on a subway and a missed chance, and suddenly I'm Armageddon Albert all over again and I can't trust myself to travel in the company of strangers --

This is about the time of day I begin to feel so -- ghostly. Just air, just respiration, talking, talking -- to you -- to anything. Even back to them in that high school gymnasium.

In imitation of his earlier incarnation as the speaker in the gym. He makes believe he is holding a microphone. Light should be near dawn.

Good morning, litter-picker-uppers, and welcome! Good morning, door holders! Good morning, my prime mates! Always good to hear the joyful noise of courtesy breaking out. Let it ring!

Gets ready to leave.

Maybe we can all act like some guerilla Miss Manners, huh? An Etiquette Militia. The Courtesy Corps wants you! Yeah. Maybe. I have to go to work. I have to start turning this darkness into a day. So I guess we're done -- that is, you're done, at least -- unless you want to help me tackle the urinals, for atmospheric background?

Wait! Wait! Not really done, you and I. Not yet. Don't go. Still a -- collusion -- collision -- here. You got a story, right? You got "human interest" that you'll cash into résumé and reward, yes? Right. So now, something for me. I can't -- I can't let you go -- without this. It might be my only -- In this low gutter voice that seems mine, I have spoken up for you -- I have cared for you like a stranger, I have given you warnings, I have tried to give you light, to make light. It's not much, what I ask -- but I'm not going to let you go away thinking your loyalty goes to the objective and detached, to

the product. That's swanfucker thinking. And I don't want you to turn out to be a swanfucker-in-training. Perhaps -- perhaps in your own low voice, below "detached," below "objective," in those pages there, those alignments, you can speak for me. Yes? If we -- you and I -- get a murmur going, a kind of subsonic hum of "Pick up that butt!" and "Let them get off first!", then perhaps we -- you and I -- strangers a little less now, right? -- we can pump the volume a nudge to say, "Get off your butt" and "Let the last be first" and "To each according to his needs" and "Love thy neighbor" and nobody has to study war no more. That's what I think you owe.

Who knows? Who knows? Gotta go -- my daily grind.

(takes a key out of his pocket)

You lock up -- place key behind loose brick to right of defunct doorbell. Look at whatever you want -- for the personal effects.

He looks at the gun on the table, then at the reporter.

It's a decision every day.

Looks. Waits.

"Gonna lay down my sword and shield" -- This goes over there, on the shelf -- would you put it away for me? I can trust you to do that? Good. Well, then -- over. And, well, then -- out.

TEKTON hesitates: looks at the door, at the audience, then leaves. Lights go to black.

# Poly X

## DESCRIPTION

A story of war.

## CHARACTERS

### Women

- Hecuba, queen of Troy
- Polyxena, daughter of Hecuba and Priam
- The Trojan Women (8)

### Men

- Priam, king of Troy
- Troilus, son of Priam and Hecuba, brother to Polyxena
- Achilles, Greek soldier
- Greek Soldiers (8)

**NOTE: Race/ethnicity does not matter in casting.**

## SET (Suggested)

The set is constructed of two sets of bleachers or risers on either side of a structure of scaffolding that should be constructed at odd angles but strong enough for the actors to scramble around on. It should be open in the back for entrances and exits. The scaffolding should be made of a heavy-enough gauge of pipe to withstand being pounded for percussion.

The bleachers should be metal (or metal-framed) and able to withstand some pounding.

There should be playing space around the base of the scaffolding and the bleachers so that the actors can move around it easily as well as playing space in front of the scaffolding. Action can spread out through the stage and house and is not restricted to the area called "the stage."

Hanging from the scaffolding is something that looks like a side of beef -- obviously not a real side of beef but a strong facsimile made out of a durable material that can take pummeling, sword strokes, and tossing around (which means that it needs to be unhooked easily from where it hangs).

## COSTUMES

- The women are dressed in simple white cotton dresses but underneath them wear something military like camouflage pants and combat/

paratrooper boots. They can be adorned with other signs/symbols that each actor feels expresses the character. POLYXENA will wear an oversized black leather jacket with a white knife stenciled on the back.

- The men are dressed in combat clothing but "stressed," the kind of clothing that a soldier would be wearing at the end of a war, not when he is being shipped out for the first time. In other words, no spit or polish left. The actors can adorn their clothing with other sign/symbols that they feel express the character.
- Each character should have a pouch or a bag of some sort into which they can put objects.
- ACHILLES should look especially punk/foppish. He wears an oversize black leather jacket, similar to POLYXENA's, with a large penis stenciled in white on the back.

## **MUSIC/SOUND**

- Whenever and wherever possible, music should be used to underscore battles and other fighting, scene transitions (where appropriate), and to set mood/emotion. The music for confrontations should tend more to a hard edge or punk energy while other scenes of a lower temperature can use more meditative choices. In any case, the designers are free to choose what they need. (Live music would be the best choice, if budget permits.)
- The actors will also be making sounds throughout the play, often by banging on the scaffolding, bleachers, and floor and by using objects. At the opening of the play, each actor will need two pieces of iron with which to bang on the scaffolding and bleachers.

## **LIGHTING**

- Lighting (unless otherwise stated) should at all times be both moody and harsh, as if all the action were taking place in the underworld.

Having said all this, any company doing this play can arrange things however it wants, given budget and time, as long as they can achieve that sense of efficient cruelty crucial to the play.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Scene 1: Prologue**

POLYXENA, wearing the oversized black leather jacket, comes running onto the stage through the house while the music blasts. She could even crawl over the audience if possible. She leaps onto the bleachers, then

scrambles up the scaffolding until she stands at its very peak. Music stops. She smiles, slightly maniacally, slightly waif-like, at the audience, for several beats. She climbs over the edge of the scaffolding and hangs onto the side of beef, letting it swing with her on it smiling, as if she were a child on a playground toy -- but do not count out any lascivious caresses of the swinging beef.

At this point the cast comes out and spreads themselves out across the scaffolding and bleachers; they should carry their iron rods. POLYXENA jumps off the side of beef; one of the ACTORS hands her a clear plastic glass of blood. She speaks and drinks as she moves through the audience. She should speak directly to the audience members.

POLYXENA

(holding up the glass.)

Blood. Ambrosia. The true nectar of the gods -- and of the humans they created -- and the very best source of protein, yes.

The ACTORS bang on the scaffolding and bleachers once, loudly.

POLYXENA

Homer, the blind poet -- how sweetly ironic is that? -- you know, the Iliad?

ALL THE ACTORS

(banging once)

The Iliad.

POLYXENA

The Odyssey?

ALL THE ACTORS

(banging once)

The Odyssey.

POLYXENA

Yes? He must have had jugs of this at his elbow, sloshing it down like a Bacchic drunkard as he orated his orgasmic poems of death, as he versified the brutal shit of his bastard soldiers high on this protein kick-assing themselves across the plains of Troy into -- art. Art. How sweet.



(indicating knife on the back of her coat)

Polyxena -- I am the subject of this play.

(indicating the ACTORS)

Them -- unfortunately -- you will soon know.

As POLYXENA drinks the rest of the blood and spits it out, the ACTORS drum on the scaffolding. POLYXENA crushes the glass and throws it away, perhaps to someone in the audience; drumming stops.

POLYXENA

Me -- I'm the last spitting image. I am the daughter of Hecuba and Priam, king and queen of Troy. Sister to Paris and Hector and Troilus and Cassandra -- do any of these names ring a bell? Of course they do. Bong! My name? Nary a ding. Well, this is my story.

POLYXENA turns to the ACTORS.

POLYXENA

I can't start it out this calmly!

The ACTORS drum on the scaffold, loud and abrasive and yell, "Go, Go, Go, Go." This sends POLYXENA into a frenzy, as at the top of the show. Once back downstage center, she takes a knife from a holder attached to the back of her pants -- it the same shape as the knife on her jacket. She holds it to her throat, and the drumming stops.

POLYXENA

All right! This is where you see me first! Like this! This is my last moment in Homer's gut-filled art!

(to the ACTORS)

This is where I am. All of you -- all of you! -- know it. All of your hands are on this.

(to the audience)

They know it -- and they will not stop it. It will not be stopped, will it?

ACTORS

(banging once)

No.

POLYXENA

Fine. Fine!

ACTORS  
(banging once)

So be it.

POLYXENA  
But bloody speech, then -- bloody, foul prologue!

ACTORS  
(banging once)

Go!

POLYXENA puts away her knife. The ACTORS begin a percussion again, but low, barely audible.

POLYXENA  
It is horrible war -- again!

ACTORS  
Never-ending.

POLYXENA  
Yes. Again we -- some, not all -- spout an acceptable patriotism --

(makes her face look piteous)

-- so that we don't have to think about the unspeakable horrors done in our names! Patriotic gore!

(at a scream)

"It is sweet and proper to die for one's country."

ACTORS  
"It is sweet and proper to die for one's country."

POLYXENA  
(spits on the floor)  
Better the country dies first that believes in that kind of butchery.

The percussion stops.

POLYXENA  
What shit. What lies.

POLYXENA walks among the ACTORS, hitting them, cursing them.

POLYXENA

All mouthed by this dangerous beef. Beef with minds.  
Minds with principles. With conviction. Conviction that  
brings a sentence raped across my throat.

(to the audience)

Welcome to the world where nothing of the good or the  
beautiful is welcome.

As she names the characters, they face the audience. They do not respond  
to POLYXENA.

POLYXENA

My cast of "beef." Priam, Hecuba -- my "dad" and my "mom."  
Hi! Brother Troilus. My other brother, boner-headed Paris,  
is off jonesing the slut Helen.

(yelling, as if to PARIS)

Got to get your dick out of her hand, bro -- the slut is going to  
break it off! Sister Cassandra -- sassy Cassie -- is also off  
somewhere prophesying truths no one listens to, dribbling  
into toilet bowls. She got that way because she wouldn't let  
Apollo pork her, so pissed he gets and breaks her tongue  
so that when she speaks the truth, no one believes her.

(yelling)

Sorry, Cassie, but no one believes the truth anyway, so you  
haven't lost anything! The fucking (in more ways than one)  
Greeks -- especially this one, our "hero" for the evening,  
the punk butt-plugger Achilles. Calm down, boy! Various  
Trojan women for the required rapine and wailing.

The TROJAN WOMEN do a short bit of keening, in harmony, even doing  
some Motown moves if they want.

POLYXENA

Various soldiers simply too sad-assed to name.

The SOLDIERS do a silly synchronized military drill. Then, as POLYXENA  
continues speaking, everyone begins drumming softly on the scaffolding,  
gradually building to a deafening percussion.

POLYXENA

Welcome to the vasty fields of goddamn Ilium. Sing, O  
goddess, of the I-can't-fuck-my-boyfriend-Patroclus-  
anymore anger of Achilles. Hey, Priam -- the twin lords

of sceptred sway will slit you like a roasting pig. Hecuba, mother dearest, the sorrows of your closing years will eat your guts clean out through your asshole. Helen -- wherever the fuck you are -- you ask, "Why, then, do I prolong my life?" I don't know either! You should have cut your tits off and made ashtrays out of them so that we could have gotten some sleep! Hector, my sweet brother -- only your ghost here -- ashes, ashes, all fall down.

POLYXENA begins beating on the side of beef to the same rhythm of everyone else, almost as if she were boxing it. Then, at a pre-arranged signal, everyone stops.

POLYXENA

(screaming)

All right! Get the fuck to your places now! Places!

Everyone exits but ACHILLES.

ACHILLES

Come here, my sweet.

POLYXENA

(to the audience)

Look at him -- he never did listen to anyone.

(to ACHILLES)

Not yet. Not time. Not your place.

ACHILLES

What does it matter?

POLYXENA

How I make sure my name is remembered to them matters.

ACHILLES

(pompously, flexing)

No one is going to remember your name, no matter how much you scream! Mine, yes -- I will be iconic! My slaughterous virtues will champion manly, robust, honorable love of country! Every fucking guy -- and some women -- they are going to want to be like me. Pretty Polyxena -- Poly X -- ain't gonna turn into anybody's epic.

POLYXENA

Not. Now!

ACHILLES

All right -- all right.

ACHILLES goes up to touch her jacket, then reaches inside to grab her breast.

POLYXENA

What would your bend-over-boy Patroclus say to that?

ACHILLES tightens his arm against her throat and raises her off the ground, seemingly choking her. POLYXENA refuses to respond. ACHILLES puts her down, laughs, and exits.

POLYXENA

What an octamaroon, eh?

POLYXENA pulls out her knife.

POLYXENA

Precious Hector, I have to begin --

(looks straight at the audience)

Let's get started with my death -- and with yours.

Screams as she clambers up to the top of the scaffolding, where she sits.

POLYXENA

Achilles! Achilles! Places!

Music for transition.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Scene 2**

From off-stage is a long, rending scream of pain. Then silence. Then another long scream. Then silence. On the third scream, ACHILLES enters, sword in hand and begins murderously lashing the side of beef. Following him is an ATTENDANT, played by one of the SOLDIERS, who watches but does not interfere.

When he is done, ACHILLES, exhausted, falls to his knees.

ATTENDANT

Done? Are. You. Done?

ACHILLES wheels on the ATTENDANT with his sword, threatening; the ATTENDANT does not flinch.

ATTENDANT

Lost your fair-haired boy, did you?

POLYXENA

(hoarse whisper)

Good.

ACHILLES

Hector.

POLYXENA

(hoarse whisper)

To Hector.

ATTENDANT

To Hector, yes -- you can put that down. You're ruining the supper.

ACHILLES drops his sword. ATTENDANT goes to the beef, inspects it.

ATTEDANT

Ach, we may be able to salvage a lop-off or two for you. To feed the beast.

ACHILLES

Patroclus.

ATTENDANT

The ex-Patroclus. Ex-bed-mate, ex-vessel of your affections -- ex-everything, now -- now meat for the pyre. All you can do is make cinders out of him -- very uncomfortable, yes, to press up against cinders in your bed.

POLYXENA sprinkles a thin mist of ash on ACHILLES, who bats it away without knowing what it is.

ACHILLES

Shut up.

ATTENDANT

Yes, your [two syllables] enraged one.

(laughing)

You put the poor lad into your armor -- thinking it would enlarge him -- Hector zeroed in on him and then zeroed him out, thinking he'd castrated the bull -- and all he got was the calf.

POLYXENA

(in a loud stage whisper)

More rage.

The ATTENDANT gestures to POLYXENA, as if to say, "I'm trying my best."

ATTENDANT

What did you expect -- the boy may have been a good gunsel -- a great gunsel -- but as a warrior -- fey beyond belief.

POLYXENA

(to ATTENDANT)

Enough exposition.

(indicating the audience)

They get it -- Hector kills Achilles' boy-toy Patroclus.

(to ACHILLES)

More rage.

ACHILLES

I feel enough.

POLYXENA

No you don't. Not enough for my story. Express it -- after all, that overbearing Homeric puke we're forced to read as a Western classic is all about your rage, your noble wrath. C'mon -- give us some of that patented fury. C'mon, boy -- c'mon, c'mon --

Reluctantly at first, but then taken over by his feeling, he takes out his rage against the scaffolding and bleachers with his sword. POLYXENA lets him go on for a bit until she claps and ACHILLES stops.

POLYXENA  
(to ATTENDANT)

Sufficient?

ATTENDANT  
He's got the hot stuff down cold, doesn't he?

POLYXENA  
Established, then: Achilles is pissed at Hector because --

(to ACHILLES)  
-- because?

POLYXENA encourages him with hand gestures.

ACHILLES  
(with hatred)  
He killed what I loved.

POLYXENA  
Oh, as if you were the only one --  
(to ATTENDANT)  
-- as if he be the only one who has ever had that happen.

POLYXENA swings down from the scaffolding.

POLYXENA  
I need to drill something back into your brain, punk. Thug.  
Pug. Thunk.  
(to ATTENDANT)  
Backstory!  
(out loud to everyone)  
Backstory of Troilus!  
(to the audience)  
Backstory for you.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 3

Transition music. The cast comes out carrying candles in holders that are hung from the scaffolding, which is now the temple of Apollo. One or two SOLDIERS take away the side of beef, then rejoin the crew. They stand



on the bleachers at attention looking in. The TROJAN WOMEN enter and stand on the bleachers. HECUBA and PRIAM climb the scaffolding. One of the TROJAN WOMEN enters the temple carrying a container of water.

POLYXENA

(kneeling, full light on her)

It was said -- whomever it is that says the things that are said when someone says "it was said" -- it was said that the kingdom of Troy would not fall if my brother Troilus were not killed before the age of twenty. Who lays down these stupid conditions on our living lives?

At this point the SOLDIERS climb onto the scaffolding and spread themselves out, peering into the temple, hovering.

POLYXENA

We went to the temple of Apollo to pray and to gather water -- as we had done throughout. The temple had always been neutral ground, in the same way that the water one found there is a neutral element, friend to all, slaker of every dusty throat. Here is what happened.

Over her shoulder, to the SOLDIERS.

POLYXENA

Are you ready?

ACHILLES

What was that, my dear?

POLYXENA

(trying to restrain herself)

Are. You. Ready?!

ACHILLES

Ah, the sweet moan of the hyena bitch.

TROILUS joins POLYXENA and hands her an earthen jug, not large. There is a low, ominous thrum underneath this scene.

POLYXENA

Troilus handed me the earthen jug. I could see in his eyes how scared he was.

TROILUS

Even though this is sacred ground.

POLYXENA

"Was anything sacred left?" was what his eyes said. I  
moved to get the water.

The TROJAN WOMAN pours some water from her container into  
POLYXENA's jug.

TROILUS

She said she needed air, needed space, needed the  
reminder of fresh water.

ACHILLES

And that was when we arrived --

POLYXENA

In the middle of a cool drink.

TROILUS

Falling in like dark spiders.

In the nature of a slow-motion ballet, the GREEKS lower themselves into  
the temple. The TROJAN WOMEN crawl onto the scaffolding and spread  
themselves out, watching. ACHILLES notices POLYXENA.

ACHILLES

(to POLYXENA)

And you are?

POLYXENA

He asked.

TROILUS

(drawing a short sword)

This space is sacred.

ACHILLES

(ignoring TROILUS)

And you are?

TROILUS

Leave her alone.

ACHILLES

Little Troilus.

POLYXENA

Leave him alone.

ACHILLES

Twenty questions minus nineteen. What is tomorrow?

SOLDIER

His twentieth birthday.

ACHILLES

Well -- it's a go, I guess.

The GREEK SOLDIERS grab TROILUS, and in a flip and a lift they have him hanging from the from the scaffolding, in the same place as the side of beef. His legs are hooked over the bar while being held by the SOLDIERS. The TROJANS on the scaffolding recoil from touching him.

POLYXENA

(yelling at the TROJANS)

Do it! It's on your hands, too!

Reluctantly, the TROJANS grab TROILUS and hold him. TROILUS is now hanging upside down, his hands trussed behind him.

POLYXENA

Good! Christ -- how goddamn hard it is to get people to take responsibility!

(to ACHILLES)

Go ahead.

ACHILLES

You're sure?

POLYXENA

Establishes motive.

ACHILLES

You know --

POLYXENA

I don't want to hear it -- I don't want to be undermined!

ACHILLES

(to TROILUS)

You heard her.

(shifting tone)

You know the policy, Troy, baby -- we are search-and-destroy. The Greek Special Forces -- Delta Force. Insert ourselves. Policy: to assassinate all the Trojan bambinos we can find. And bambinas -- but that's for later, and in a purely different way. And if you make it to tomorrow -- well, it's been said -- by whoever it is that says the things that are said when someone says "it's been said" -- that if you make it to twenty, we don't make it home.

ACHILLES snaps his fingers; POLYXENA hands him her knife.

ACHILLES

Without further ado.

(to POLYXENA)

Yes? No?

POLYXENA

Yes. It's already been done, anyway.

ACHILLES grabs the earthen jug from POLYXENA and takes out a small bag of blood. He jabs it, catching the flow of blood in the jug. TROILUS writhes as if he has had his throat slit. Everyone waits. When done, ACHILLES gives the jug to POLYXENA, who mixes the blood with more water and drinks, then hands it to ACHILLES, who drinks as well. He hands it around to the other SOLDIERS, who drink as well. ACHILLES hands back the knife.

ACHILLES

I became enamored of her as the body cooled.

POLYXENA

This man's sword cuts with two edges, I guess.

ACHILLES

Inflamed, actually -- engorged with interest.

POLYXENA

Always a hard prick, that Peleus' son.

The last SOLDIER finishes, then tosses the jug up to HECUBA. ACHILLES motions to the SOLDIERS; together they lift TROILUS' body so that the TROJANS can grab it and pull up onto the top of the scaffolding.

ACHILLES

I told her --

POLYXENA

(mock male voice)

"I'm going to ask Priam for your hand in marriage."

PRIAM

How quaint that sounded.

POLYXENA

"Bind our two families together."

HECUBA

And by this --

ACHILLES

Put an end to the war.

A hesitation -- then all the SOLDIERS laugh.

ACHILLES

(mock indignant)

It's true! It was also a good policy to get closer to the other assassinations.

In the beat, HECUBA laughs out loud, maniacally, then barks like a dog. Then she stops abruptly. Everyone looks at her, then continues.

POLYXENA

It struck me then how I would fight the invader. Not with honor, nobility -- not those infected and diseased words.

POLYXENA motions to the SOLDIERS, who lift her up to grab the bars of the scaffolding. She hooks her legs around ACHILLES' neck so that his head is almost crammed into her crotch.

POLYXENA

I gave him to think that I found submission sexy -- slavery arousing. Death -- especially in the sight of a close brother's cooling carcass -- a real electric charge.

POLYXENA lets go, and ACHILLES supports her as she slides down his body, their bodies intertwined.

PRIAM

He smelled her.

HECUBA

We could all smell her -- how did she do that on command?

SOLDIER

Not a man had an unmasted flag.

SOLDIER

Raised for the honor of his country, of course.

All the SOLDIERS grab their crotches.

POLYXENA

Why not?

ACHILLES

You agree?

POLYXENA

Make an appointment with my "mom" and my "dad." We'll talk.

POLYXENA should now be on the floor.

ACHILLES

Consider it made.

POLYXENA

Consider that you have made me.

ACHILLES motions to POLYXENA, as if to say, "Enough?" She motions for him to leave. ACHILLES motions for the SOLDIERS to follow him, and they exit in some distinct way. POLYXENA rises.

POLYXENA

(to the audience)

Such are the veils that counter-terrorism needs.

(turns on the TROJANS)

What? What?

HECUBA

There is no winning here.

POLYXENA

There are, however, higher and lower ways of losing. Bring him down.

The TROJAN WOMEN come down; they take a large blanket that is under the bleachers and walk to the front of the scaffolding. POLYXENA scrambles up, and with HECUBA and PRIAM, they roll the body over the edge, where it is caught by the WOMEN in the blanket. They lower it to the ground and, using rolls of duct tape, wrap the body. With what's left of the blanket, they drag it offstage.

POLYXENA

Lug out the tub of guts. He'll come later -- to talk.

PRIAM

We know.

POLYXENA

You know what to do.

HECUBA

Know it -- hate it.

POLYXENA

Without it -- no hope.

HECUBA

No hope anyways.

POLYXENA

Don't undermine me! Backstory over.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Scene 4

Very, very short musical transition.

POLYXENA

Frontstory.

ACHILLES is pulled onstage by the ATTENDANT in some sort of child's wagon, stable enough for him to stand up in. ACHILLES is dragging the side of beef behind him, now HECTOR's body. The scene should look both ridiculous and tragic. The ATTENDANT pulls ACHILLES to one side of the stage, then back again.

POLYXENA

(indicating the scaffolding)

Around! Around! Three times.

(to the audience)

The body of Hector.

(to the ATTENDANT)

Come on!

The ATTENDANT acknowledges and pulls ACHILLES around the scaffolding. He may make it comical by not quite being able to make the turn, etc. so that the ATTENDANT only really makes one circle.

POLYXENA

(to the audience)

Achilles' great rage at losing Patroclus ends in unspeakable savagery.

(speaks to HECUBA and PRIAM)

Get started.

HECUBA and PRIAM do great operatic swoops of grief, stylized. They hesitate when they see ACHILLES having trouble getting around and stop when ACHILLES finishes.

POLYXENA

Ash in the hair.



HECUBA and PRIAM take a pinch of ash out of their pockets and sprinkle it on their hair.

POLYXENA  
(to ACHILLES)

You! A bit more of the patented rage, please! Full-out desecration!

ACHILLES gets out of the wagon. He takes the beef, and with equally operatic roars of grief, slams the body of HECTOR around the stage as if it were a WWF match -- but always in a stylized manner. The TROJAN WOMEN come out in choral fashion, keening. They take down the candles and blow them out. The SOLDIERS come out, stand on the bleachers, and march loudly in place. Also, TROILUS comes out and joins them on the scaffolding. ACHILLES finishes.

ACHILLES  
(to HECUBA and PRIAM)

You want the carcass back? Pay up.

The SOLDIERS and TROJAN WOMEN exchange places as the SOLDIERS lift up the side of beef over their heads: they are now a scale to weigh the body.

ACHILLES  
Gold in the weight of his body for the body back to you.  
Nothing in war without its price.

HECUBA and PRIAM sprinkle gold dust from their pockets. As they do, the SOLDIERS lower their own bodies, as if being weighted down by gold. But they are not down far enough.

ACHILLES  
Ooops -- a little short, it seems.

PRIAM and HECUBA throw up their hands, as if distraught.

PRIAM  
(in stilted language)  
We have no more gold, oh great warrior!

ACHILLES  
Too bad.

POLYXENA takes a pinch of gold dust and lets it go. The SOLDIERS go to their knees as if weighted down.

ACHILLES

Well -- sufficient.

The TROJAN WOMEN leave the bleachers and arrange themselves on one side of the stage or the other into a "pyre," on top of which the SOLDIERS place the beef. ACHILLES gets back into the wagon, and the ATTENDANT pulls him off through the back of the scaffolding. Before he can leave, POLYXENA swings down as before and wraps her legs around him. ACHILLES grabs the scaffolding and lifts himself up, and the wagon continues without him with the ATTENDANT and SOLDIERS exiting. As before, their bodies twine, and they move downstage.

ACHILLES

You gave just enough to make the difference.

HECUBA

That smell again.

POLYXENA

I wanted to make sure you didn't leave empty-handed.

ACHILLES

War can be such hell on the nerves.

A hot light shines on the "pyre," and the TROJAN WOMEN begin turning the side of beef as if it were a rotisserie. They also begin to make hissing and popping sounds, as if meat roasting. POLYXENA is on the floor, and she goes to lick ACHILLES' right boot. He reacts violently.

POLYXENA

Not submissive enough?

ACHILLES

Not there.

POLYXENA

Some fears we have about our feet?

POLYXENA begins unlacing his right boot.

POLYXENA  
(to the audience)

Something startled him. Badly.

ACHILLES

Don't!

POLYXENA

And again.

(to ACHILLES)

Tell me what it is.

ACHILLES pushes her away and kneels to re-lace his boot. POLYXENA bowls him over before he finishes, sits on top of him, and begins grinding against him.

POLYXENA  
You have sensitive feet, is that it? Ticklish?

ACHILLES

Get off me!

ACHILLES throws her off and goes back to frantically lacing up his boot. POLYXENA knocks him over again, and each time he goes to re-tie his boot, she disrupts him until ACHILLES grabs her in a rage and pins her against the scaffolding. PRIAM makes to come down and interfere.

POLYXENA  
(to PRIAM)

Don't! Go back! Look to your roasting young son!

PRIAM  
(to the TROJAN WOMEN)

Enough!

The TROJAN WOMEN stop their "pyre" and sit on the stage, holding the side of beef. The SOLDIERS come out.

POLYXENA  
(to ACHILLES)

Are you going to fuck me right now, great warrior? Are you?

ACHILLES

No.

ACHILLES frees her.

POLYXENA

Wait until the wedding night -- it will be much smoother. We  
can use your spit --

POLYXENA spits into his hand and rubs her hand against his.

POLYXENA

Mine's too thin and lady-like.

POLYXENA kisses ACHILLES deeply. ACHILLES responds, then pulls her  
away and looks at her harshly.

ACHILLES

Enough?

POLYXENA

Establishes the point.

ACHILLES tosses POLYXENA to the SOLDIERS. The TROJAN WOMEN  
turn the side of beef over onto the stage and begin a rhythmic slapping of  
the beef, a percussive underscoring.

ACHILLES

It had more honor and glory in the original.

POLYXENA

Only in your own eyes.

(to the SOLDIERS)

Put me down.

ACHILLES nods, and they put her down. They kneel at the bleachers on  
each side and begin the same rhythm as the women, softly, to underscore.

ACHILLES

It was right to do what we did.

PRIAM

None of it was right.

ACHILLES

We fought to do what we were taught to do.

HECUBA

And "glory" turned the ground red, and "honor" filled the air with a shroud of dust. Only fools would agree that this is what our earth-time is for.

POLYXENA

Enough theorizing! Enough poeticizing! Enough glamorizing! Enough "izing" on the cake! Enough farting around! This is mine! Remember?

POLYXENA goes around beating the same rhythm on the scaffolding, on ACHILLES, on the ground, on herself, then stops -- everyone stops.

POLYXENA

End time of earth-time is near.

(to TROILUS)

Play Paris, since our scurvy little brother seems bent in heat somewhere else.

TROILUS

All right.

POLYXENA

Besides, it'll give you a chance to get back at your brother the ball-cock. Let's go, everybody -- betrothal scene at the temple!

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 5

Transition music. The SOLDIERS take the side of beef and hang it from the scaffolding. They then go inside the temple and stand in formation. HECUBA, PRIAM, and TROILUS descend. The TROJAN WOMEN all take out skimpy little lace veils that they put over their faces and a bouquet of fake flowers, like the ones used by magicians, and arrange themselves around the opening of the temple -- it would be good if they could actually make the flowers appear as a magician would. HECUBA and PRIAM stand in front of the side of beef; occasionally, one of the SOLDIERS will give it a little push and bump it against them and laugh. TROILUS stands on

the bleachers with an arrow in his hand and wearing a blond curly wig. POLYXENA and ACHILLES stand like a happy wedding couple in front of HECUBA and PRIAM, facing the audience. Music ends abruptly, and as it does, there is a series of three strobe flashes, as if a camera were being used for a wedding picture. At each strobe, ACHILLES and POLYXENA change positions, always smiling.

ACHILLES

I'm not sure I want to go through with this.

POLYXENA

Having cold feet?

POLYXENA tries to play footsie with him; ACHILLES pulls away violently.

ACHILLES

Everyone knows how it ends.

POLYXENA

No they don't -- they might think they do, but they don't. They always forget how it ends. I am not forgiving any more forgetting of how it ends.

HECUBA

Polyxena --

POLYXENA

Nothing from you.

HECUBA

I can't --

POLYXENA

For them, you must.  
(to PRIAM)

You, old man -- you get off easy.

The SOLDIERS collectively clear their throats to remind POLYXENA to continue.

POLYXENA

Oh, that's right -- pardon moi --

(to the audience)

I'm delaying their rapine, pillaging, and scorched earth campaign.

SOLDIER

Rapine and pillaging will do.

The TROJAN WOMEN collectively clear their throats to remind POLYXENA to continue.

POLYXENA

Sisters, when I think of you I do get faint-hearted.

TROJAN WOMAN

Yes.

POLYXENA

But, yes, I must.

TROJAN WOMAN

You must.

POLYXENA

Because I am not forgiving any more forgetting of how it ends -- and that includes myself. All right, then.

ACHILLES stands to one side of PRIAM, and POLYXENA to one side of HECUBA, and the scene in its symmetry becomes a strange reflection of a marriage ceremony.

ACHILLES

I have to come ask for your daughter's hand --

PRIAM

First, as an honor to temple of Apollo, to the glory of love, we must all take off our shoes and in reverence to the ground on which we stand.

POLYXENA

That was my idea.

ACHILLES

I can't do that.

HECUBA

Do you want her?

ACHILLES

I do, but --

HECUBA

Then you must follow our customs.

HECUBA and PRIAM remove their boots and socks, as does POLYXENA.  
ACHILLES hesitates.

POLYXENA

Don't you want me? Don't you want all of me?

Everybody sniffs the air -- the smell again.

TROJAN WOMEN

She had turned on the smell.

POLYXENA

The nights of Patroclus gone are over.

ACHILLES hesitates a bit more; the TROJAN WOMEN clear their throats. ACHILLES kneels to take off his shoes and socks. Out of the right boot drops a metal heel sheath with a clang. Everyone notices and not-notices; the SOLDIERS become agitated, unable to do anything without a direct command. ACHILLES stands in his bare feet. Scene freezes; POLYXENA turns to the audience. As she starts to speak, TROILUS, holding the arrow, begins to move slowly into the scene toward ACHILLES as if he were an arrow in slow motion flight.

POLYXENA

Feet of clay -- how neatly turns that phrase. I didn't know the story until later -- of how Thetis, the Nereid, Achilles' mama, dipped her darling little boy into the river Styx to make his soft, silky skin invulnerable -- except for the little itty-bitty part of the heel by which she held him to do the dunking. All I knew is that he didn't want the toes and arch and instep of his right foot to be licked when I wanted to lick him -- some vulnerable part of the bravo-boy that balked at the light of day. That's all the intelligence I needed -- that's all I wanted.



TROILUS is very close to ACHILLES. The SOLDIERS are even more agitated.

POLYXENA

A simple arrow dipped in poison from the bow of my brother Paris to avenge the assassination of Trojan brothers in their homeland.

TROILUS kneels at ACHILLES foot.

POLYXENA

The smell from my cunt that lured him was now the reek of the charnel house -- charred bones, shivered guts, stupid and pointless lamentation.

TROILUS places the arrow against the heel of ACHILLES. Everyone leans ever slightly forward. TROILUS leans on the arrow and pushes it into through a hole drilled in the stage, so that it appears as if the arrow disappears into ACHILLES' heel. Everyone unfreezes, and immediately POLYXENA leaps on to ACHILLES' back as he reacts in pain. ACHILLES is free to use the entire stage, house, and scaffolding as he moves around trying to get POLYXENA off his back. The SOLDIERS take down the side of beef.

POLYXENA

I am on your back, boy! Yippee-ki-yo-ki-yay, motherfucker! Even now the poison travels straight to your mortal heart. Phew! You soiled your pants, didn't you? Didn't you? How does the noble and glorious experience of death feel now, you rotting son of a bitch? You killed my brothers! You murdered our peace! You misguided bastard!

Exhausted, ACHILLES' last move is under the scaffolding. As he passes through, POLYXENA grabs the bars and stops him, then puts her legs around his neck as she had before.

POLYXENA

It's a dark cave now, isn't it?

POLYXENA releases him and gives him a shove with her feet, which sends him sprawling. She jumps down to the stage, then clammers up the scaffolding and stands.

POLYXENA

Meat.

ACHILLES

Am I dead?

POLYXENA

A few more flops, please.

ACHILLES flops around a few more times.

POLYXENA

Enough. Your shade has departed, Acky-boy. So can you  
-- go get ready. Everybody -- go. Go.

Everyone exits except ACHILLES, the TROJAN WOMEN, and HECUBA.

ACHILLES

Are you sure?

POLYXENA

You look subdued. Your moment of supreme triumph over  
the tricky virgin is coming. You had a lot more cocky on  
your face before.

ACHILLES

I had forgotten.

POLYXENA

What?

ACHILLES

Everything.

POLYXENA

In the blaze of glory?

ACHILLES

It can be blinding. I have to go.

ACHILLES exits. POLYXENA descends.

POLYXENA

Now comes the hardest part.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 6

Music. The TROJAN WOMEN re-hang and re-light the candles. They bring out a fresh white dress. Several of the women light incense. As POLYXENA speaks, the TROJAN WOMEN disrobe her and re-clothe her in a simple white dress. They can also adorn her with other artifacts to completely change her visual nature.

POLYXENA

You all know this story and how it ends. The Greeks never went away. We took in their stupid wooden horse -- was there anything ever more tragically silly than accepting a large hunk of wood as a gift? Ten years of war had addled our pates.

POLYXENA indicates for HECUBA to join her.

POLYXENA

Out they came, like roaches from a fire -- and Ilium fell in an avalanche of shame.

(to HECUBA)

Last act, mother.

HECUBA

Don't be an optimist.

Music. The SOLDIERS come on and hand everyone a white half mask. Then they kneel, facing the scaffold. They also each bring out a large sign, made out of flash paper, on which are written the following words: Honor, Glory, Country, Patriotism, Courage, Hero, Faith, God. The director needs to find a way to hang the signs on the stage; perhaps from poles inserted into the stage.

ACHILLES climbs to the top of the scaffold, now dressed completely in white and masked, and speaks to them.

ACHILLES

You want to get out of here and go home? You want the winds to carry your ships back to your horny wives and your dripping lands? Do you?

SOLDIERS

Yes!

ACHILLES

(indicating POLYXENA)

Then cut her throat on my grave.

In the following lines, the TROJAN WOMEN and HECUBA speak their choral parts in two groups, one of four and one of five. The groups can be set as A and B, or a different group of four or five women can speak each time, depending on what the director wants to do. The SOLDIERS all speak at once unless indicated otherwise.

TROJAN WOMEN

She has done nothing wrong.

ACHILLES

She betrayed me.

SOLDIERS

The values must be upheld!

TROJAN WOMEN

She only betrayed one who had betrayed others.

ACHILLES

She killed me.

HALF THE SOLDIERS

Even though we're Greeks: "Dulce et decorum est -- "

THE OTHER HALF OF THE SOLDIERS

"It is sweet and proper."

TROJAN WOMEN

There is nothing sweet!

TROJAN WOMEN

There is nothing proper!

HALF THE SOLDIERS

"Pro patria mori."

ALL SOLDIERS

To die for your country!

TROJAN WOMEN

What is a country --

TROJAN WOMEN

-- that one should die for it?

ACHILLES

Women are such fools.

TROJAN WOMEN

She only sought justice for injustice.

ACHILLES

And that makes her guiltless?

TROJAN WOMEN

That makes her collateral damage.

POLYXENA

It's all right.

TROJAN WOMEN

The damaged innocent can do whatever they need to do --

TROJAN WOMEN

And all without guilt.

ACHILLES

I beg to differ.

HECUBA

The winners always beg. To differ.

(to POLYXENA)

You really think it's the last act?

POLYXENA

Stop it! I have to make this the last act.

ACHILLES

(to the SOLIDERS)

If you want to get home, if you want to avenge my death  
-- that's your goddamn job, after all! -- then cut her throat.

TROJAN WOMEN

(to the SOLDIERS)

Don't kill an innocent person --

POLYXENA

For the sake of a ghost.

ACHILLES

I don't care if she's innocent -- why should I care about  
that? What is important to me -- to me! -- is what is most  
important here. You don't get out of here until she dies for  
me.

The SOLDIER who played the ATTENDANT steps forward and takes up the  
classic posture of a messenger.

ATTENDANT

We don't have a choice: our dripping wives or ten more  
years here? Personally, I cannot imagine emptying any  
more of my piss into this ground.

POLYXENA

Get on with it.

ATTENDANT

We have to go with the ghost, dear one, we have to stay  
with the old values: What can we do? So, announcing: the  
Dance of Collateral Damage.

NOTE: The director is free to stage the following in any other way that gets  
across the action of the scene as long as it includes the elements of the  
dance, the preparation, and the execution.

Loud rock or punk music as everyone goes into a dancing fit. During the  
dance the SOLDIERS and/or TROJAN WOMEN will fire the signs with the

words on them so that they go up in a flash of fire. HECUBA stays with POLYXENA. ACHILLES sits on the edge of the scaffolding. POLYXENA gestures, and HECUBA takes out a black grease pencil or a similar kind of marker. POLYXENA draws a dotted/dashed line across her throat, then hands it back. One by one the TROJAN WOMEN dance by POLYXENA, and as they do, they take out a red marker and write one letter of the word "INNOCENT" in a diagonal from the right shoulder to the left shin. Then the ATTENDANT, sitting on the back of a crouched SOLDIER, sits in front of POLYXENA and, taking out good-sized squirt-gun, aims it at POLYXENA.

Music stops.

In the silence, ACHILLES reaches down with his foot and puts it on top of POLYXENA's head. He tilts her head back, exposing the throat. A SOLDIER takes POLYXENA's knife and draws it across her throat. As he does, the ATTENDANT squirts a red stream of what looks like blood across the dotted line. ACHILLES releases the head; POLYXENA lowers it so that she faces the audience squarely and takes her time to look slowly into the audience members' eyes.

POLYXENA

And it has not changed all that much.

The cast also looks slowly into the audience members' eyes. Abruptly the music blasts again, and there is resistance on the part of the cast to engage, but almost against their wills they begin to dance again, and except POLYXENA (even HECUBA now dances) they dance in a frenzy until the lights fade to black. Music continues into the dark until, in a synchronized cue, the music stops and a tight light comes up on POLYXENA, enough to include the shoulders and head. Then light bumps out. End of play.

# Samaritan

## DESCRIPTION

Based on two biblical stories -- the parable of the Samaritan [Luke, chapter 10, verses 25-37] and the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well [John, chapter 4, verses 4-42] -- the play examines answers to the main question of the parable: "And who is my neighbor?"

## CHARACTERS

- SAMARITAN
- VICTIM
- THREE ROBBERS (also play PRIEST, LEVITE, DISCIPLES, TRAVELERS, POLICE, JUDAS)
- JESUS CHRIST

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 1

VICTIM and THREE ROBBERS: tableau in preparation to attack him, weapons in hand.

Then they savage him and steal his belongings.

ROBBER 1  
(bowing)  
Thank you.

ROBBER 2  
(bowing)  
Thank you.

ROBBER 3  
(bowing)  
Thank you.

They leave him naked and unconscious by the side of the road.

A day passes. PRIEST, going from Jerusalem to Jericho, hustles past.

A night passes.

Day again. LEVITE, going from Jericho to Jerusalem, hustles past.



A night passes.

SAMARITAN enters, dragging a cart behind her.

SAMARITAN stops, unharnesses herself from the cart, removes her headscarf. She does not approach VICTIM.

THREE ROBBERS appear again. SAMARITAN regards them.

ROBBER 1

We did that.

ROBBER 2

We did that --

ROBBER 3

-- to him.

ROBBER 1

We can do it to you.

ROBBER 2

And worse.

ROBBER 3  
(sniffing the air)

Especially to a Samaritan.

They spit.

ROBBER 1  
(sniffing the air)

And to a Samaritan cunt.

They spit.

ROBBER 2  
Unless you give us everything --

ROBBER 3  
(pointing to VICTIM)

That --

(pointing to SAMARITAN)  
you -- that's your fate, drab --

ROBBER 1  
Ass up -- face down -- your fate --

They laugh.

ROBBER 2  
Well?

SAMARITAN  
How do I know he's not one of you?

ROBBER 1  
Look at him!

ROBBER 3  
What, him, like that, he's gonna leap up and join in?

SAMARITAN  
Just checking.

ROBBER 3  
Just checking --

SAMARITAN  
I will give you something.

ROBBER 2  
(dismissive)  
Something --

SAMARITAN moves toward her cart.

ROBBER 3  
Not something, deaf-slut! Everything! Hey, hey, stand down!

SAMARITAN  
You will like this.

SAMARITAN pulls a pistol-crossbow from her cart, cocked and loaded. She fires a bolt into ROBBER 3's groin, which drops him to the ground. While he howls in pain, SAMARITAN reloads and aims.

SAMARITAN

A lesson here for all of us, a lesson about mercy.

ROBBER 3

You ragged cunt! Help me, you dickheads!

But the two ROBBERS disappear. ROBBER 3 sits up. SAMARITAN squats in front of him, presses the pistol-crossbow against his heart.

SAMARITAN

A lesson about mercy.

ROBBER 3

Then have some of that for me -- then have [some] -- have  
--

SAMARITAN fires the bolt through his heart. ROBBER 3, surprised, keels over.

SAMARITAN

I don't think so. You, I do not consider friend.

SAMARITAN looks over at VICTIM.

SAMARITAN

You, on the other hand --

SAMARITAN walks to VICTIM, pokes him. No movement.

SAMARITAN

Definitely not going to leap up and join in.

SAMARITAN kneels down and puts her ear to his mouth, then puts the flat of her hand between his shoulder blades.

SAMARITAN

Breath in breath out -- a pulse is a plus.

SAMARITAN stands, crossbow in hand, and moves to her cart.

SAMARITAN

Dust in dust out dust into dust --

JESUS enters followed by two DISCIPLES. SAMARITAN points the cross-bow at JESUS. JESUS raises his right hand in the classic Jesus gesture as a way to say, "Don't."

SAMARITAN

I know you already "of Nazareth" -- the one with all those obnoxious mangy little parables.

SAMARITAN gestures at the scene.

SAMARITAN

This is right up your allegorical alley -- parable away!

SAMARITAN, cross-bow still in hand, takes out a kit, moves to VICTIM.

JESUS looks at dead ROBBER 3, then walks over to him and gives him a hard hard kick. ROBBER 3 sputters to life. SAMARITAN watches.

ROBBER 3, surprised at his resurrection, stands up, the bolt that had been in his heart now in his hand. He points to the wound in the groin. JESUS heals it -- ROBBER 3 now holds two cross-bow bolts. Healed, ROBBER 3 starts to take off, then inches back.

ROBBER 3

Do you mind -- if I just -- hang with you all -- just for a bit -- I hear you don't mind my likes --

ROBBER 3 gets in line with DISCIPLES. They don't like it but don't say anything.

SAMARITAN stands, points the cross-bow at ROBBER 3.

ROBBER 3

Don't let her again -- I have found it, truly I have, remorse --

SAMARITAN

(indicating VICTIM)

Anything, parable-grinder, dead-raiser, you could do for [him] --

JESUS shrugs, smiles, does nothing.

SAMARITAN

Can I at least get my bolts back? Not easy to make and not cheap -- the times being what they are --

JESUS nods at ROBBER 3, who minces over to SAMARITAN and hands her the bolts. JESUS moves off, followed by DISCIPLES and ROBBER 3.

SAMARITAN goes back to VICTIM. She manages to get him sitting up, though still unconscious -- he is a bloody mess. She drapes her scarf over his groin, begins to clean him up and bandage him with the materials from her kit. She sings as she does this.

PRIEST, going from Jericho to Jerusalem, enters.

SAMARITAN

Busy today between Jericho and Jerusalem.

PRIEST

What are you doing?

SAMARITAN

My question is: Why are you not here doing it with me, rabbi?

PRIEST

Is he still alive?

SAMARITAN

Still?

PRIEST

I mean -- earlier on my way --

SAMARITAN

And the rabbi didn't [stop] --

PRIEST

Who are you to talk to me like that?

SAMARITAN

I'm a Samaritan -- dirt and piss to you Jews -- like him --  
which gives me the freedom [to] --

PRIEST

I couldn't touch him then -- when I -- I can't touch him now  
-- it would make me unclean --

SAMARITAN

I would say not touching him makes you the unclean one  
-- but then, mine's a minority opinion --

PRIEST

You shouldn't be touching him --

SAMARITAN comes up to PRIEST, who shrinks back.

SAMARITAN

Should I be touching you instead, rabbi, is that what you  
mean that's what you mean, isn't it?

PRIEST

You have no right --

SAMARITAN

Where would you like to be touched give me latitude and  
longitude I'm accommodating --

PRIEST

He's unclean -- you're a woman --

SAMARITAN

You noticed.

PRIEST

Unclean --

SAMARITAN

My monthly blood slicks the insides of my thighs -- do you  
want to --

PRIEST

Just stay [away] --

PRIEST goes to leave, but SAMARITAN grabs his sleeve to stop him.

PRIEST

Don't you [dare] --

SAMARITAN

You are not worth making unclean you are not worth being anyone's neighbor he's lucky you passed him by he's lucky he wasn't touched by such a sick man.

SAMARITAN releases him.

SAMARITAN

You should wash yourself after touching yourself because the law the rabbi loves requires it after touching the dead flesh of a corpse. Go follow your law. Corpse. Go.

PRIEST hesitates.

PRIEST

Will he -- I am not indifferent --

SAMARITAN

Once he gets you out of his sight, he will be healed and indifferent to you much blessed he will be on both counts.

PRIEST leaves. SAMARITAN moves back to VICTIM.

SAMARITAN

(as she moves)

Priests -- they're like tits on a bull --

SAMARITAN ministers to VICTIM. She lays out a cloth, then moves VICTIM onto it. She moves the cart in place behind VICTIM, pulls out a canopy with supporting poles that puts a roof over his head, and, when finished, sits under the canopy with him.

Night comes. Perhaps she lights a fire. Night passes.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 2

Morning light arrives in slow bits.

VICTIM lays on his back, still unconscious, still draped with SAMARITAN's scarf, now bandaged. SAMARITAN kneels by him, slowly covered by the morning light.

### SAMARITAN

I don't know what else to do I don't know how else to heal you I don't have the knack that the parable-spinner has misapplying it as he does to certain people to trick you back into breathing into knowing yourself whoever you are stranger bent and broken and I have been trying to understand why I stopped it is not in my nature to do so on this road since I am always hunted even if at first I am not what they came to hunt women are always such prey but stranger broken and bent on the roadside drew me perhaps to make a difference but what tripe is such a thought in a madhouse-world where good intentions can become a kind of hell -- stop.

SAMARITAN shakes her head.

### SAMARITAN

I cannot heal you without honesty I am doing this because in part in part it does me good to grind against the grain of the world and the world is more than willing to guard its comforts and keep the mind dark so it pleases me to make my life an obscene gesture against it to pump up my ego by good works and plug a thumb in its eye by doing what I'm told not to do like saving damaged almost-dead men by the side of the road -- stop.

SAMARITAN takes a breath.

### SAMARITAN

I help you to feed my ego I help you because you need mercy as do I as do all though not all deserve the gift of it such as robbers and priests same class different clothes I have to stop thinking and saying such things no matter how satisfying it is to say them and I am just blathering on



because I do not know what else to do until you know what else to do to --

VICTIM's hands shoot out and grab SAMARITAN by the throat or hair, and before SAMARITAN can protect herself, VICTIM has her on the ground.

VICTIM

Who are you who are you who are you --

SAMARITAN is quick. She bucks him off and jumps to her feet.

They fight, but it is not hard for her to subdue him, since he is exhausted and ill. She subdues him and lowers him to the ground.

SAMARITAN straddles him, pinning his arms down. Waits.

A TRAVELER hustles by, looks, runs on.

VICTIM dry-humps her but not with much vigor.

VICTIM

You shouldn't stop what you've started.

SAMARITAN slaps him, then re-pins his arms. VICTIM stops moving; instead, he laughs. Then coughs.

VICTIM

Water water --

SAMARITAN hesitates, but his cough is harsh. She rolls off him, retrieves a canteen, lifts VICTIM's head, gives him water. Takes a bit of water in her hand and wipes his face, dries it with her scarf.

Waits.

VICTIM

I need to take a piss roll me on my side so I'm not pissing myself --

SAMARITAN rolls him on his side, and he pees -- screams as he does.

SAMARITAN

There's blood.

VICTIM

I'm not surprised -- aaaahhhhh -- everything -- needs -- a  
-- sacrifice --

VICTIM finishes. SAMARITAN rolls him back onto his back, moves to her cart, pulls out something to rest under his head, sits apart from him so he can't see her.

VICTIM

That was refreshing ah careful ah better I can't see you --

SAMARITAN

Don't try.

VICTIM

Your voice --

SAMARITAN

Stop it.

VICTIM waits.

VICTIM

Did they get everything -- they got everything didn't they  
-- you're not informative.

SAMARITAN

You need something to wear.

SAMARITAN moves to her cart.

VICTIM

Why didn't you dress me sooner -- what were you looking  
at --

SAMARITAN

Don't flatter yourself --

VICTIM

At least they didn't take that --

SAMARITAN

They'd've gotten half your brain if they had.

VICTIM

What's the other half?

SAMARITAN

You're lying on it.

SAMARITAN pulls out a rough cotton shift, throws it on him.

VICTIM

Why did you even stop at all -- what were you looking for -- I can smell you -- I can smell myself, yow! -- I can smell that you're not of the usual type --

A TRAVELER hustles by, takes in the scene, moves on. Light is now a much brighter morning light.

SAMARITAN

Put it on -- stop embarrassing the world --

VICTIM puts on the shift.

VICTIM

Does that mean you?

SAMARITAN

I'm not embarrassed by your piece of string --

VICTIM

You're not giving me what I need to know --

SAMARITAN

Shut up.

VICTIM

All right.

VICTIM collapses, out cold.

SAMARITAN

I didn't mean like that.

SAMARITAN waits, then approaches VICTIM with a knife in her hand.

But VICTIM doesn't stir. SAMARITAN kneels down by him. JESUS comes along, alone. He wears a knapsack and sports a parasol. There is a second parasol attached to the knapsack.

JESUS

We need to get him out of the sun.

SAMARITAN

Why would you care --

JESUS

I care about everything.

JESUS slips off the knapsack, puts down the parasol.

SAMARITAN

You passed him up the last time --

JESUS

You had everything perfectly under control --

SAMARITAN

Where are your hang-dogs?

JESUS goes to VICTIM's head, indicates for SAMARITAN to take his feet.

JESUS

I gave them the day off -- come on I'll help you -- they need a break from rejecting the world --

They move him under the canopy.

JESUS

Hefty --

SAMARITAN

You like 'em hefty "of Nazareth"?

JESUS

A razored tongue --

SAMARITAN

Only when something needs cutting.

JESUS

You have something to sit on?

SAMARITAN

We are done here.

JESUS

I took the day off, too, so I've got time --

With a jerk and a sneer, SAMARITAN pulls two camp stools out of her cart while JESUS examines VICTIM.

JESUS

Look at all you've done for him -- bound him rebuilt him -- you have the physician's touch -- if I had done back then what I can do --

SAMARITAN

Giving robbers back a life so they can go back and rob --

JESUS hands SAMARITAN the second parasol, which she takes.

JESUS

If not done for robbers why do it for anyone --

SAMARITAN

Why not done for him then?

JESUS

If I had done what I can do when you asked me to do it then you wouldn't have done what you could do and then you wouldn't have come to know all that you can do for someone like him -- who said there's only one way of getting to a redemption?

SAMARITAN

You have said -- you say it all the time.

JESUS

I change my mind a lot about that no matter what spills out of my mouth -- you have anything to eat?

SAMARITAN

Do you ask everyone you happen across to take care of you?

JESUS

I have no visible means of support -- see --

SAMARITAN goes to cart, pulls out a bag of dates or figs, offers them.  
JESUS eats.

SAMARITAN

Because, the way I hear it, you just knot together some language and stuff it into people's ears -- like a wasp-buzz like a sting -- and I hear people don't always like it --

JESUS

Not up to me if they like it -- these are good --

SAMARITAN

I just know this, that the robbers had given him what he didn't deserve --

JESUS

About which you know much --

SAMARITAN

-- being a Jew-cursed Samaritan -- what are you looking at -- do you curse me --

JESUS

Ah, good!

SAMARITAN

What?

JESUS

That look on your face --

SAMARITAN

I asked you if you curse me.

JESUS

Not interested in that -- that look --

SAMARITAN

What look?

JESUS

You just came up with an answer didn't you -- part of answer at least -- an answer to the why of why you are here three days later and not a lone self with no one else at one end of this road or at the other.

SAMARITAN

You're a Jew -- I'm a Samaritan -- why you even stop to talk to me is another question I have.

JESUS

When I -- you -- reach out to those that everyone hates you -- I -- can find friends anywhere -- an asset in my line of work.

SAMARITAN

I am not your friend.

JESUS

Didn't ask you to be -- but that shouldn't stop us --

VICTIM coughs.

JESUS

"And who is now included as my friend?" is always a question on the air.

VICTIM coughs himself into sitting upright. He sees the two of them talking.

VICTIM

What is your line of work -- what is your line of work --

VICTIM passes out cold again.

SAMARITAN

What is your line of work?

JESUS

Maybe it's to help people fill in what they don't know -- maybe it's get them to know what they already know -- on

the other hand maybe my line of work is to end up being  
nobody at all --

SAMARITAN

You couldn't be nobody if you wanted to --

Two DISCIPLES come along. SAMARITAN stands.

SAMARITAN

I thought you gave them the day off.

JESUS

They don't always give me the day off.

SAMARITAN

You need new disciples then --

JESUS

The two of you? What's your line of work?

SAMARITAN

You don't remember me, do you?

JESUS stands.

JESUS

Of course I do -- by the well -- we talked by the well -- the  
Samaritan woman offered to get me water.

SAMARITAN

My husband didn't much care for me talking to a Jew --

JESUS

I remember him.

SAMARITAN

-- especially one calling himself what you call yourself.

JESUS

Also recall he wasn't your husband.

SAMARITAN

I'd had five of those --



JESUS

None of them very durable, eh?

SAMARITAN

It was hard to endure them --

JESUS

Marriage is such sweet sorrow --

SAMARITAN

I was looking for a different arrangement with his likes --

JESUS

And you found?

SAMARITAN

That marriage or not changes nothing in the natures of men  
-- you find me here, not there -- enough said --

JESUS

I offered you the living water, eternal life.

SAMARITAN

At that point I'd've settled for a decent bath and men keeping  
their cocks locked up.

JESUS

And now?

SAMARITAN

I still have no guarantee that eternal life wouldn't be a cheat  
just like this one.

VICTIM sits up again.

SAMARITAN

You came back here -- by choice --

JESUS

Wanted to see how the unexpected -- look at that -- was  
coming along --

VICTIM stands.

VICTIM

I was coming along this road to find you -- you that's right  
-- when --

SAMARITAN

Why don't you take him with you?

JESUS

Already got a full house.

SAMARITAN

Chuck him into the basement --

VICTIM

I didn't want to go with you -- I don't want to go with you -- I  
was supposed --

SAMARITAN

What's your line of work?

VICTIM

I was supposed to kill you --

This statement strikes VICTIM.

VICTIM

Not you, him -- you, you're nothing -- did I really hear that --  
say that -- I fully can't remember but I have echoes of such  
words bullying me -- commands -- money in hand -- "take  
him out" -- like that --

JESUS

Any memory of who --

VICTIM

Night -- hooded -- snarls for words -- knife at my throat for  
command -- coins dumped in the dirt so I'd have to grovel --  
you don't know how many have a taste for your absence --

SAMARITAN

This is your line of work?

VICTIM says nothing.

JESUS

I would say the unexpected is turning out just fine --  
(to DISCIPLES)

Let's go --

SAMARITAN

You're not going to --

JESUS

Finders keepers --

The three move off. SAMARITAN, discovering the parasol in her hand, takes a step to pursue JESUS but decides not to.

VICTIM

He's not dead -- I failed --

SAMARITAN ignores him. She sits on the camp stool, parasol in hand.

VICTIM fidgets.

VICTIM

I have to piss again --

VICTIM moves around to the back of the cart, pisses, screams as he does so.

SAMARITAN

Good.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Scene 3**

VICTIM standing in moonlight. THREE ROBBERS in the darkness around him. SAMARITAN asleep, fitful. Dream.

ROBBER 1

You found him yet?

VICTIM

No.

ROBBER 2

You tracked him down?

VICTIM

Getting closer.

ROBBER 3

You measured out his life's thread?

VICTIM

You're too poetic for this work.

ROBBER 1 strikes him.

ROBBER 2

Those who have paid --

ROBBER 1

-- for his dispatch --

ROBBER 3

-- are displeased --

ROBBER 1

-- they think --

ROBBER 3

-- you've lost --

ROBBER 2

-- the appetite and only --

ROBBER 1

-- want to keep --

ROBBER 3

-- the money --

ROBBER 2

-- could that be true of you --

VICTIM

I grew up wanting the merchant's ability to turn simple things into value and trade and yet I find myself at this turn in the midst of a painful road where I can claim nothing of any worth cannot claim to have made anything with a claim of worth which includes my life both in part and entire and now reduced to auctioning off muscle for assassination and consorting with bottom-feeding scum who do nothing but give the lie to the ideal that people have a divine spark that at any moment can ignite the universe in a blaze of peace and more peace and I am talking such nonsense to delay the pain you have come to bring me because yes I cannot do this work any more I cannot make slaughter my reason for sloughing off the bedsheets in the morning I cannot be a butcher with a smile don't take pleasure in savaging me just quickly do it so that I can bleed in measured bursts of agony and lose consciousness sooner rather than later --

ROBBER 1

Assuming we've been allowed to let you live --

VICTIM

I've spent none of what I was paid consider it a downpayment on your new-found taste for mercy --

ROBBER 2

We'd already thought of that --

ROBBER 3

-- and decided to redeem ourselves --

ROBBER 1

-- since there seems a glut of redeeming going on these days --

ROBBER 3

-- beggars healed --

ROBBER 2

-- cripples raised --

ROBBER 1

-- and the last inch of life not beaten out of depleted assassins --

ROBBER 2

-- the world is definitely --

ROBBER 3

-- getting better --

ROBBER 1

The money --

VICTIM kneels and digs out a hole, pulls out a bag, holds it up. ROBBER 1 takes it. ROBBERS take up tableau position as in Scene 1. Dream over.

VICTIM screams. SAMARITAN awakes.

VICTIM

Hold me. Hold me.

SAMARITAN

I can't.

VICTIM

Is that can't as won't or can't as can't -- what vile dreams --

SAMARITAN

Why should you be saved from them -- can't as won't --

VICTIM

Why not?

SAMARITAN

Holding men has always disappointed me.

VICTIM

Perhaps it was how you held the men.

SAMARITAN

Perhaps it was how the men didn't know how to be held.

VICTIM

If raw need is a knowing-how then I know how --

SAMARITAN

Just because you've had a bad dream you think you deserve holding --

VICTIM

By you at least --

SAMARITAN

You would not get much from me in any case -- I have not the gift of comfort about me -- and you are an assassin after all --

VICTIM

"If not done for robbers why do it for anyone" --

SAMARITAN

You heard that?

VICTIM

An echo in the rattle-trap of my head -- he said it didn't he -- after all you did stop -- after all you did stay after learning -- that confuses you --

SAMARITAN goes to the cart, takes out something, throws it to VICTIM.

SAMARITAN

Eat -- it's the closest you'll get to being held at the moment -- I need to get rid of you --

VICTIM

I am not everything you think I am --

SAMARITAN

I don't want to think about you at all --

VICTIM

You killed as well -- through the heart -- bang -- we are both killers -- that links us --

They muse. SAMARITAN kneels in front of him.

SAMARITAN

You've killed others --

VICTIM

Yes --

SAMARITAN

Did you acquire a -- taste for it?

VICTIM

Did I like it --

SAMARITAN

Not just "like," a taste -- an appetite --

VICTIM

Did I crave?

SAMARITAN

Yes -- yes --

VICTIM

No. Yes. After the first, yes. The first -- the usual -- vomiting, disgust, self and otherwise, fear of failure especially since my recruiters had no misgivings about wasting me if I needed waste management so to speak, still even more disgust as I came closer to the punctuation of eliminating one who walked the earth --

SAMARITAN

I can see that in your face --

VICTIM

Sorry --

SAMARITAN

No -- please -- don't hide it -- after the first --

VICTIM

Even during the first --

SAMARITAN

More --



VICTIM

You ask a lot of someone you're ready to throw away --

SAMARITAN

More --

VICTIM

A knife -- nothing done from a distance -- with a knife you have to smell the garlic on his teeth, the citric sweat on his unwashed skin, it cements you to the task, no not-seeing the light draining from his guttering eyes -- a knife intimates you, not unlike love but not love at all, is it, but still intimate, still penetrating -- can't believe I said that -- all edges erased melted together, same thing, until the only difference is who the knife slices and who slices with the knife but that then makes all the difference since I will walk away and he or she --

SAMARITAN

Or she --

VICTIM

Or she will not and I will walk away with the rush that comes from walking away --

SAMARITAN

And walking away knowing --

VICTIM

That I survived, yes, not just survived but caused to happen a change in the world, I willed the change (who cares if for money or not), my will made the world shift -- his world shift --

SAMARITAN

Her world --

VICTIM

Hers, yes, and how could this not intoxicate with a taste for tasting that intoxication again, the burning jump in the belly, the wild relief from surviving, the bruised delight of doing what is not permitted the ordinary to do -- take charge, bend the world's orbit to my own uncoiling energy -- I felt free,

freed, not under the thumb of a stupid stumbling meaningless life angling towards disaster and disappearance, ending up as no more than a stain on the pavement evaporating -- I talk too much --

SAMARITAN

But what about after the first --

VICTIM

I've talked too much -- you should have left me behind -- I think I should -- go -- I think I should -- leave --

VICTIM stands, manages to stay standing. He turns, exits.

SAMARITAN

That leads to Jericho, if you want to know --

VICTIM reënters.

VICTIM

I can't go to Jericho.

VICTIM points.

SAMARITAN

Jerusalem.

VICTIM shakes his head.

SAMARITAN

You are faced with a pickle up your ass in the middle of this road.

SAMARITAN walks up to VICTIM.

SAMARITAN

What about after the first?

VICTIM

Leave me --

SAMARITAN

What about after the first?

VICTIM

Either the first kills you or it doesn't --

SAMARITAN

And if it doesn't kill you?

VICTIM

I have to --

SAMARITAN

If it doesn't --

VICTIM

I have to --

SAMARITAN

-- kill you?

VICTIM

"After the first" can turn you into a cheap god --

SAMARITAN

Is there anything better? Anything else? Answer me!

VICTIM

Get your hands [off me] --

SAMARITAN

Answer me!

VICTIM

Or what -- you going to off me as your second?

SAMARITAN

Killing you would be my third.

VICTIM

Your third.

SAMARITAN

A man --

VICTIM

I'm not surprised --

SAMARITAN

My somewhat husband --

VICTIM

Husbands can be a kind of robber -- I hear --

SAMARITAN

This one was a thief of happiness --

VICTIM

Too big a mouth?

SAMARITAN

Too heavy a hand -- too heavy both hands --

SAMARITAN pulls up her shirt to show a belly crisscrossed with livid scars.  
VICTIM stares at the belly.

SAMARITAN

Lift up the back of my shirt --

VICTIM

I can't --

SAMARITAN

Do it!

VICTIM does, finds the same. VICTIM pulls her shirt down, hesitates, then  
smoothes the cloth, as if calming by caress.

VICTIM

All your interrogation of me --

SAMARITAN

The first was not hard --

VICTIM

Don't have to tell me anything --

SAMARITAN

I did it after he had spoken to me -- that meat you were supposed to butcher for your pay? The one who sat here, "of Nazareth"? Him.

VICTIM

Don't have to voice it so crudely --

SAMARITAN

If meat is meat, then call it meat --

VICTIM

He's not just "meat," even I know that --

SAMARITAN

How far your blasted soul has come --

VICTIM

Enjoy sharpening that tongue on me?

SAMARITAN

By the well -- where I lived -- in Sychar -- Jacob's well -- I don't know if it was Jacob's fucking well, but they plastered his name to it -- I offered to get him water -- he offered me eternal life in return -- "living waters" --

VICTIM

Did you take his deal? I think you gave him the better deal -- actual water --

SAMARITAN

And then off he goes --

VICTIM

He's like that, I hear -- swoops in, sprays his words around --

SAMARITAN

Shut up!

VICTIM

You keen on him?

SAMARITAN

Not that I wasn't tempted. By his looks? Eh. But by his offer? Who wouldn't be tempted -- trade this gut-bag in for a light-weight well-furnished forever --

VICTIM

I like your gut-bag --

SAMARITAN

Shut up -- but a -- smugness in his way of saying this pushed me away -- his certainty that his here-after would be better than my here-now -- even if he was right -- that the calcified us would be transformed, reformed --

VICTIM

Deformed --

SAMARITAN

Shut up -- we could shuck off the meanness sucked into us through the birth cord just like that --

(snaps her fingers)

-- he came close, though, to tipping me over the tipping point --

VICTIM points to her belly.

VICTIM

But what about all that --

SAMARITAN

I know the someone who had told the man I was living with that he'd seen me talking to him -- to another man -- a Jew -- at the well --

VICTIM

My half of the species --

SAMARITAN

I know what crouched for me inside my doorway -- so I began proclaiming --

VICTIM

The somewhat husband's meanness, brutality --

SAMARITAN

Do you know anything about who gets to be on top these days?

VICTIM

Just wondering --

SAMARITAN

If I had proclaimed that, would've saved the somewhat some trouble by slitting open my own throat -- no, the other's messiah-ness -- the messy messiah-ness -- I bruited it about the town -- "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" -- all innocence in saying shit like "He cannot be the Messiah, can he? Can he?" running from person to person with this open-mouthed dumbled-down look on my face --

SAMARITAN demonstrates the face; VICTIM mimics it.

SAMARITAN

I had to buy some time -- to keep the somewhat's inevitable claws off me, the unavoidable leather isolated from my skin --

VICTIM

But he did get to you -- un-isolated you --

SAMARITAN

"He's the Messiah, he told me everything about my life, he knows, he knows, follow him, he has come" in this breathy stupefied voice --

SAMARITAN goes to her cart, pulls out a quirt.

SAMARITAN

His presence, though, his being-there -- in an odd way, cupped me, held me in a gentle suspense -- a breathing-in, a breathing-out -- made everything, everyone, pause -- my fellow Samaritans cozying up to the Jew that didn't hate them -- a new thing for them, an unhating Jew -- they sucked it down like babies -- that's what he does --

VICTIM

It didn't work --

SAMARITAN

I had to go home -- I had no place else --

VICTIM

Assassins come in so many shapes.

SAMARITAN tosses the quirt to VICTIM. She pulls up her shirt.

SAMARITAN

Add your mark.

VICTIM

Why would I do that?

SAMARITAN

Because I asked you to do it.

VICTIM

I can't do that.

SAMARITAN

I saved your life, so you have no way to refuse me.

VICTIM

I won't do it -- anything like it --

SAMARITAN

You're a murderer, don't think you have a right to perform a decent act -- do it --

VICTIM

I murder, but I'm not a murderer --

SAMARITAN

I am a murderer --

VICTIM

No you're not --



SAMARITAN

I cut his throat --

VICTIM

He cut his own throat --

SAMARITAN

Why do you think you find me finding you on this road --

VICTIM

Why shouldn't you be on this road --

SAMARITAN

Who better to take away the taste --

VICTIM

You don't have the taste --

SAMARITAN

You are as dense a clod as I have ever met --

VICTIM

You need to get out more --

SAMARITAN

Do it!

With a scream, instead of hitting her, VICTIM hits himself. SAMARITAN shudders. A line of blood appears on her stomach. VICTIM hits himself again. SAMARITAN shudders. Another line of blood on her back.

VICTIM throws the quirt on the ground.

VICTIM

You stopped to fix up my carcass, goddamn you! What else you do you need to fucking know?

SAMARITAN grabs him and looks straight at him.

SAMARITAN

Say that again.

VICTIM

You fished my carcass [out of] --

But before he can finish, SAMARITAN embraces him. Hard. VICTIM lets himself be embraced. Hard. Then he embraces her back. Hard. She lets him embrace her back. Hard.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Scene 4

JESUS appears, a walking staff in hand.

JESUS

Well -- progress of a sort -- I have come to warn you.

SAMARITAN

You spend a hell of a lot of time trolling this road.

SAMARITAN busies herself in preparing to leave.

JESUS

You're being looked for.

SAMARITAN

For what, all-knowing one?

JESUS

You know for what.

SAMARITAN

That is something I do not know.

(to VICTIM)

Give me a hand.

(to JESUS)

Because what is it that I have done, really?

JESUS

They say you --

SAMARITAN

I've done nothing compared to what your father has done, if you're who you say you are and he is who he is

-- floods, plagues, slaughter of innocents -- palming off his only begotten son on us -- how much he does love you!  
-- compared to that, I neutralized a venom -- I deleted a hatred --

They are ready to leave.

SAMARITAN

No one deserves to die, but some earn the deserving, and some who do that get what they deserve.

(to VICTIM)

Let's go.

Three POLICE arrive.

SAMARITAN

(to JESUS)

Except for you, does everything arrive in threes?

POLICE 1

Do I need to say, "Stop, don't move!", or is my asking the question sufficient to make our intentions known?

SAMARITAN

I don't know what your intentions are.

POLICE 2

(to JESUS)

We're not after you -- yet -- so you should screw off --

POLICE 3

While the screwing off is good.

JESUS

I'll screw off when I want to.

POLICE 1

Ah, your messiah-ness is truly whatever --

(to SAMARITAN)

As for you --

POLICE 1 moves to arrest SAMARITAN. VICTIM intercepts. As POLICE 2 and POLICE 3 move in to help, JESUS puts them to sleep with his walking staff.

VICTIM and POLICE 1 engage in a vicious fight. SAMARITAN gets her pistol cross-bow, moves in to help, but JESUS holds her back. The outcome is doubtful until VICTIM pins POLICE 1 to the ground.

They gasp as they speak.

POLICE 1

I know who you are, I know what you've done --

VICTIM

First part wrong, second part right --

POLICE 1

Who is she to you?

VICTIM

I am not talking to you.

POLICE 1

So what do we have here? Eh?

(sees the other two)

Are they --

JESUS

They are not.

POLICE 1

(laughing)

Good for them you're the messiah! Well, fellow beings?

VICTIM and JESUS and SAMARITAN all exchange glances.

SAMARITAN

You have to let him up.

JESUS

Blessed are the peacemakers.

POLICE 1

I still have a duty.

SAMARITAN

Do it.

VICTIM

I told you that you don't have the taste --

VICTIM gets off POLICE 1.

VICTIM

I was attacked along this road -- beaten hard -- see these wounds --

VICTIM gives JESUS a look that says, "Don't say a word about what you know."

VICTIM

-- left in a very good likeness of death along the roadside --

POLICE 1

(to JESUS)

Could you, you know -- I don't wish to remain outnumbered longer than I have to be --

JESUS revives POLICE 2 and POLICE 3.

VICTIM

As I was saying --

POLICE 1

All well and good --

VICTIM

My point is --

POLICE 1

My point is, "I'm sorry for your loss, but piss off -- "

VICTIM

My point is, she rescued me -- others saw me damaged,  
passed me over -- a priest! -- a priest!

POLICE 1

He -- he couldn't have touched you -- broken his law --

VICTIM

Then the law is broken that lets him charged with caring-for  
others slip past without drafting his soul into the execution  
of his duty --

(to JESUS)

Isn't that right?

JESUS

I think "execution" is an interesting choice of words --

POLICE 1

Answer his question.

(to POLICE 2 & 3)

You all right?

POLICE 2

He got a drop on us --

JESUS

Sorry --

POLICE 3

-- but we're feeling no pain.

POLICE 1

He's a messiah -- special privileges and powers and such  
-- you're lucky --

POLICE 3

Wouldn't mind having some of those in our line --

POLICE 1  
(to JESUS)

Answer his question -- you're all about from what I hear for making the old new, old law into new law -- me, I'm all about law, old or new --

JESUS

Just two laws, really --

POLICE 2

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" --

POLICE 1

I'm impressed --

POLICE 2

I'm not entirely unbooked --

POLICE 3

And "Love your neighbor as yourself" -- ditto --

POLICE 1

And ditto --

JESUS

And ditto --

POLICE 1

By these lights --

JESUS  
(indicating VICTIM)

He's right.

POLICE 1

You'd do away with the priests?

VICTIM

Not us do away with --

SAMARITAN

They've done away with themselves --

JESUS

They're irrelevant if they have no charity --

POLICE 1

Charity -- justice and charity --

(to SAMARITAN)

So what am I going to do with you?

(to them all)

What advice would you give the law? She's killed a man.

VICTIM

Who would have killed her.

(to SAMARITAN)

Show him.

SAMARITAN

No.

VICTIM

She has scars across --

SAMARITAN

No --

VICTIM

-- her belly --

SAMARITAN

No --

VICTIM

-- and back --

VICTIM fumbles in the cart for the quirt.

VICTIM

Where the fuck [is] --

SAMARITAN

No --

POLICE 1

Might want to let him make a case --



VICTIM pulls out the quirt.

VICTIM

Christ! I'm trying to do for you what you --

SAMARITAN pulls up her shirt.

SAMARITAN

Here. Here!

They all look as she parades in front of them.

SAMARITAN

This is how he signed his property --

POLICE 2

She is a woman, after all --

POLICE 3

Sshh --

POLICE 2

She is --

SAMARITAN walks right up to POLICE 2, pulls her shirt even higher.

POLICE 2

I'm just stating --

SAMARITAN

Want to add a tag?

VICTIM offers POLICE 2 the quirt.

VICTIM

Only a woman, as you say --

SAMARITAN

Do it!

VICTIM

Nothing charged against you --

SAMARITAN

What's a woman compared to the majesty of the law?

POLICE 3

Seems we are being challenged on the laws we just spouted.

(to POLICE 1)

Well, sir?

SAMARITAN

Enough?

POLICE 1

Enough.

SAMARITAN pulls her shirt down.

SAMARITAN

(to VICTIM)

Put it away.

VICTIM

Woman, yes, but --

JESUS

I think you've made your case. Has the case made them?

POLICE 1

What is the case you've made?

VICTIM

He beat her.

POLICE 1

He beat her -- clear -- but he didn't kill her.

VICTIM

He would have.

POLICE 1

Can't know that --

VICTIM

Things follow, one from the other --

POLICE 1

(indicating JESUS)

Maybe he can know, but you can't -- I'm faced with events  
of two unequal weights --

(to JESUS)

Your father says "don't kill" --

SAMARITAN

Doesn't follow his own rules --

POLICE 1

So what? Rule still stands. It's clear, designed. Broken, it  
demands punishment to mend it.

SAMARITAN

How can a rule demand?

POLICE 1

His family howls in pain.

SAMARITAN

And my death by decree --

VICTIM

Don't give him --

POLICE 1

Your decreed death will do nothing for them -- and it won't  
stop someone else from killing --

VICTIM

So then [why] --

SAMARITAN

(cutting him off)

Then my death is useless.

POLICE 1

Useless it is -- but still necessary, like the rule itself -- they  
howl, they hooooowwwlll into judgmental ears --

As the argument continues, SAMARITAN backs away to the cart, unearths a knapsack, hoists it on, and oozes out of the scene.

VICTIM

You say you know what I've done --

POLICE 1

You're hired to employ waste management techniques --

VICTIM

They contracted me to waste him --

POLICE 1

Really?

VICTIM

That's what put me on this road -- in wait -- they say it's "necessary" -- and what is it that he has done to make his deletion necessary --

POLICE 2

No one ever gives up power -- always have to grab it to get it back --

VICTIM

What?

POLICE 2

(pointing at JESUS)

That's his crime --

VICTIM

Can I finish --

POLICE 2

He's getting people to get grabby -- at least they think --

VICTIM

Please --

POLICE 2

(to POLICE 1)

Don't look at me like that --

VICTIM

I'm trying [to] --

POLICE 1

Do I have a revolutionist on my watch?

VICTIM

Listen --

JESUS  
(to VICTIM)

Good luck --

POLICE 2

I'm just saying --

POLICE 3

I told you, you over-think these things --

VICTIM  
(overloud)

Can I get back to --

Everyone falls silent.

VICTIM

Just that -- about her -- her initial "crime" --

POLICE 1

Go on, assassin --

VICTIM

I'm trying to --

POLICE 1

Her original sin, you were saying -- and I'd be a bit more lower-decibel'd, if I were you.

VICTIM

Her original sin, then, is missing a cock --

POLICE 3

Ah --

VICTIM

-- and those that have that added-on just want to hold on to it --

POLICE 2

That's a good one -- well, it is!

VICTIM

Keep the power --

POLICE 2

A good cock-hold -- power grip -- fits my thesis --

POLICE 1

Your thesis?

VICTIM

(indicating JESUS)

What are his laws about but a re-thinking of power --

(to POLICE 2)

Like you said, yes? His crime? Breaking the cock-hold power grip --

JESUS

He's got me on that one.

POLICE 1

He almost did get you.

VICTIM

Never in danger from me -- I backed out --

POLICE 1

And looks like punished for having qualms --

POLICE 2

Punishment all around -- endless supply --

VICTIM

Not the point --

POLICE 3

Endless demand --

VICTIM

(louder)

Not the point! My point --

POLICE 1 gestures for lower decibels.

POLICE 1

Inside voice --

VICTIM

My point -- we can --

(to POLICE 1)

You can -- break the grip -- here and now -- regarding her --

JESUS

(to POLICE 1)

Are you any closer?

POLICE 1

Let us reflect upon choices.

(counts on fingers)

To make believe it didn't happen -- to make believe I couldn't track her down -- to slip in the "higher law" thing as my defense --

JESUS

You're not any closer, are you?

POLICE 1

-- or, as its twin, she is justified through self-defense, giving justice to a woman in the implacable face of men's accusations --

VICTIM

Think of Hannah, Esther --

POLICE 1

That appeal never washes in court.

POLICE 2

Never.

POLICE 3

Ever.

POLICE 1

And then there's you -- and you -- not the best sort of witnesses for her defense -- I am faced, as someone once said, with a pickle up my ass in the middle of this road.

They all look around for SAMARITAN. VICTIM looks in one direction, then the other, then back and forth.

JESUS

Maybe this solves your problem.

POLICE 1

You know that's not true -- the pickle is still there.

VICTIM

What are you going to do?

POLICE 1

She can't have gone far.

VICTIM

Who says she even stayed on the road? She's got a head-start --

JESUS

Don't look at me -- limited repertoire -- can't do geo-locations, only, it seems, resurrections of one sort or another --

VICTIM goes to the cart, straps on the harness, and takes off -- but it's slow going -- the cart is heavier than he expected, and he's certainly not fully recovered. They watch him.

POLICE 1

(to JESUS)

I actually have a major bone to pick with you.

JESUS

Jerusalem or Jericho?



POLICE 1

Are you saying we shouldn't pursue?

JESUS

How powerful is his family?

POLICE 1

Not very.

JESUS

What problems can they cause?

POLICE 2

He would've killed her, probably --  
(rubbing his stomach and back)  
-- she did show us --

POLICE 1

Assuming they were from him --

POLICE 3

No disrespect, but those were old scars --

POLICE 1

I know -- I'm just looking for --

POLICE 3

And we've seen that again and again on our watch, haven't we?

JESUS

(to POLICE 1)

And if he had killed her, what serious outcome for him? Your face speaks your answer. So. So -- Jerusalem or Jericho?

POLICE 1

The first. You two go on ahead. I have words to exchange.

POLICE 2 & POLICE 3 exit.

JESUS

A bone to pick, you say?

They move off, POLICE 1 gesturing.

JESUS

(barely heard)

Is that so? Let me tell you a parable about that bone you want to pick --

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 5

SAMARITAN alone, knapsacked, trudging, muttering. Off to the side in shadow is the body of a TRAVELER, which SAMARITAN does not notice.

SAMARITAN

Who can trust these bastards all cock-ridden rule-heavy leaning always towards punishment righteous judging judging judging smug butchers braying verdicts in slaughterhouse lingo "the law" "what is right" "retribution" "society" all I know is he would have killed me believed he had the right to kill me maybe not intending to but maybe a heavy hand heavier than he meant maybe a knife brandished that spears me almost of its own accord the whip laid on thicker than he planned as his anger boils his brain to a stupid mush of all the crap he'd been fed about his dignity and superior protrusions --

SAMARITAN stops. She slips off her knapsack, opens it, takes out a pistol cross-bow and a bolt. Waits. VICTIM heaves into view dragging the cart.

VICTIM

I -- don't -- understand -- how -- you -- manage -- to -- move -- this -- fucker --

VICTIM slips out of the harness.

VICTIM

Of course I'm not at one-hundred percent but -- fuck, that thing is heavy -- must be all the gold you have ha ha ha -- are you going to use that -- on me --

SAMARITAN

Did they follow you?

VICTIM

I don't think so -- I think the parable-maker headed them off -- he's good at -- diversions -- diversionary tactics -- are you going to use that on me -- I hope you are not going to use it on me though given my past life and everything recently discussed about paying for one's sins --

SAMARITAN

Shut up.

VICTIM

Agreed --

They wait.

VICTIM

We have had our intimacies --

SAMARITAN

Shut up.

VICTIM

I'm just [saying] --

SAMARITAN cuts him off with a gesture. They wait.

VICTIM

I'm not offering --

SAMARITAN

Shut up.

They wait. A groan. A look passes between them. More groans.

VICTIM

How often do you think this happens? What are the possibilities here? Someone planted to get us if we go to the rescue -- ambush --

SAMARITAN

We?

VICTIM

A real victim but one who won't be grateful for our actions --

SAMARITAN

Our?

VICTIM

Or we simply ignore all of these and provide what we can provide because it needs to be provided, regardless of all --

SAMARITAN

Will you zip it shut?

VICTIM

No. I'm saying we cannot choose to have no choice in this matter.

SAMARITAN puts away the pistol-crossbow, shoulders her knapsack. Together, they go to TRAVELER, lift him, carry him downstage.

SAMARITAN

You know what to get.

VICTIM goes to the cart, pulls out the medicine kit and a canister of water. Together they wash TRAVELER's wounds. Bind TRAVELER's wounds.

TRAVELER rests. They rest.

SAMARITAN

You should bring it closer.

VICTIM

Please.

SAMARITAN

Please.

VICTIM brings the cart closer. While he does this, SAMARITAN brushes the hair back from TRAVELER's forehead. VICTIM positions the cart, unrolls the canopy, and sets it over TRAVELER.

SAMARITAN pulls the pistol-crossbow and a bolt from her knapsack.

SAMARITAN

Get the other one.

VICTIM gets the other one from the cart.

SAMARITAN  
(to TRAVELER)

What's your name?

TRAVELER

My name?

VICTIM

What does the world call you?

TRAVELER

Water please.

VICTIM gives him water.

TRAVELER

Excellent -- thank you -- what does the world call me. I am from Kerioth.

SAMARITAN

You're far.

TRAVELER

I'm looking for someone. My name is Judas, traveling to Jerusalem.

TRAVELER groans in pain.

TRAVELER

Please -- I need to rest -- you are both so kind --

VICTIM lays TRAVELER down. SAMARITAN and VICTIM look at each other, check their cross-bows, guard the beaten man.

**BLACKOUT**

# Another Seascape

With respect (and hopefully no apologies) to Edward Albee

## DESCRIPTION

Another Seascape is a reworking of Edward Albee's Seascape.

## CHARACTERS

- Charlie, mid-60s, still vigorous, in possession of all his faculties
- Nancy, mid-60s, still vigorous, in possession of all her faculties
- Jean-Paul, *lizard*
- Simone, *lizard*

## SETTING/TIME

- A beach, present

\* \* \* \* \*

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

It's a nuisance -- an annoying reminder of civilization.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Hmmm, yes....

CHARLIE

They are -- companions, so to speak.

(indicating all their belongings)

Our compatriots.

NANCY

Our servants.

CHARLIE

Our -- compañeros.

NANCY

Our pals.

CHARLIE

While that --

(can't find the word)

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

An unwanted intrusion.

NANCY

By you.

CHARLIE

An invasion, almost. It is not friendly.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

(trying to read)

Yes, yes.

NANCY

Don't you feel it?

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

NANCY

Don't you?

CHARLIE

Hey!

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

CHARLIE

I feel like I want to read.

She pokes the brush in an ear.

CHARLIE

Stop it!

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Go paint, go paint. There was a time --

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

You're dry and cruel.

CHARLIE

That is not so --

NANCY

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



CHARLIE

I don't tango.

NANCY

I know.

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

NANCY

We could live on the beach.

CHARLIE

I'm sure that's not legal.

NANCY

We don't have to go back --

CHARLIE

And I'm sure it's uncomfortable.

NANCY

Back to that awful civilization you hate.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

What's to stop us? Simple: I don't want to do it.

NANCY

That's what you say.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Perfectly --

CHARLIE

Yes, "perfectly" -- perfectly. I like my errands. I like my puttering. I like the occasional planned vacation.

NANCY

Plans, plans, plans, plans, plans, plans, plans.

CHARLIE

I like to read the books I get through the book club --

NANCY

Boom, boom, boom through the mail slot!

CHARLIE

-- in the order I order them, and not let them pile up unread because I'm too busy out there "living life."

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

NANCY

And I am just "out" there, is that it?

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

(overlapping)

-- earned a little rest -- yes, your mantra. Your touchstone.

CHARLIE

We have. What's wrong with that?

NANCY shows CHARLIE the watercolor she is working on.

NANCY

Look.

CHARLIE

It's very nice.

NANCY

Watch.

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

NANCY

Easy come, easy go.

CHARLIE

Why did you do that?

NANCY

Easy come, easy go.

She starts painting her face with watercolors.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

No, that's where we have ended up.

CHARLIE

Not me -- I --

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

What?

NANCY

Pale colors --

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

It's my summer palette.

CHARLIE

You've gone distinctly awry. The sun has made you --

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

NANCY

The sun has made me awry? Not awry enough, if you ask me. How do I look?

CHARLIE

Awry. Blotched.

NANCY

Charismatic.

CHARLIE

Streaky.

NANCY

Rainbowed.

CHARLIE

Nancy --

NANCY

Charlie --

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Sssh! That word -- verboten.

CHARLIE

What word?

NANCY

One of the ones you said.

NANCY points to her eye.

CHARLIE

I.

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

CHARLIE

Will.

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

CHARLIE

Not.

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

CHARLIE

Not.

NANCY

Sssh!

CHARLIE

Not, not, not, not, not.

NANCY

I disallow that word forever more.

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

CHARLIE

(sing-song)

Not, not, not, not, not, not, not.

NANCY

(in synch with CHARLIE)

Quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet.

CHARLIE

You're littering the beach. This is absurd.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

All I said --

NANCY

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

(not untenderly)

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

She covers her teeth with her lips and speaks.

NANCY

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

NANCY starts cleaning the paint off her face.

NANCY

I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

You shouldn't be so --

NANCY

I'm being unfair.

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

NANCY

It's just that this -- beach, this air, this --

CHARLIE

Freedom -- as you've said. To roam the beaches.

NANCY

And why not?

CHARLIE

It seems to open up -- parts of you.

NANCY

And not you.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

(interrupting him)

So never you, opened --

CHARLIE

I'm open, just -- practical. Though there was, once --

NANCY

What?

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

CHARLIE

Something.

NANCY

What's in your voice?

CHARLIE

When I was young -- younger -- twelve or thirteen.

NANCY

Your face --

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

CHARLIE

It was nothing.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

It was -- nothing -- Really. A cove, at my grandparents' beach house. Protected, you see --

NANCY

What happened there?

CHARLIE

It's silly, really.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

Draws me out, huh?

(mimics her drawing)

Punmeister.

NANCY

Don't pay attention. Pick up the thread.



CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Genetic.

CHARLIE

-- and do a kind of nothing that drove me crazy.

NANCY

Body stretched, needing a torque.

CHARLIE

So I left -- ran, really.

NANCY

To the cove.

CHARLIE

To the cove.

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Then --

CHARLIE

Then I would just sink.

NANCY

Sink.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

I can imagine.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Delivered --

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Dissolved --

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

No longitude or latitude.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY stops drawing.

NANCY

Never?

CHARLIE

Uh --

NANCY

You've never told me that.

CHARLIE

I never needed to remember it -- until now, for some reason.

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

CHARLIE

May I?

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

NANCY

Not very good.

CHARLIE

Why did you do that --

NANCY

Secrets.

CHARLIE

What?

NANCY

We all have secrets, don't we?

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Your face --

CHARLIE

My face --

NANCY

Your face had such -- peace in it.

CHARLIE

And that's why you threw it away?

NANCY

It hollowed me out.

CHARLIE

The story wasn't about you --

NANCY

That's exactly what I mean.

CHARLIE

Hollowed out?

NANCY

I have secrets, too, you know.

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

CHARLIE

This isn't about secrets. What secrets?

NANCY

Wouldn't you like to know?

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Just -- secrets.

CHARLIE

You know what "just -- secrets" usually means?

NANCY

Tell me.

CHARLIE

I don't want to play this game.

NANCY

He's emoting!

CHARLIE

I don't like how it makes me feel.

NANCY

Feel!

CHARLIE

I tell you something personal --

NANCY

What are you feeling?

CHARLIE

(goes back to his book)

I definitely do not like how this makes me feel.

NANCY takes his book.

NANCY

Let's see -- on page 116 -- ooh, I'd forgotten that secret.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

And this one on page 210 -- now that was a corker!

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

And this one -- no, I can't go there.

CHARLIE

Stop it!

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

I want my book back.

NANCY drops it, with a thud.

NANCY

I'm done.

CHARLIE

You're angry.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE  
(muttered)

Dante and I.

NANCY

-- the infernal duo, in the middle of the road of life.

CHARLIE

Dante and I.

NANCY

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

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Oh. Oh. I wish it were something as big-dicked, something as, as -- fecund as "so terribly wrong for me." But, no, I get to get something more petty, trivial, like some discard at a flea market that people pick up and put down without registering an iota about it. Charlie, it's just Dante and me --

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

CHARLIE

Are you afraid?

NANCY

Do you really want me to answer?

CHARLIE

No games here. Are you afraid?

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

As I do.

NANCY

I know.

CHARLIE

And then -- the other days?

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

NANCY

I think about sex.

CHARLIE

Sex.

NANCY

About how it does go first. Or at least reduces itself to occasional, and therefore "let's mark the calendar" kinds of couplings. And I think about how bodies that once wallowed

in their fluids and furrows -- which we did, querido, which we did -- now pucker like dried fruit and sputter with arthritis.

CHARLIE

We haven't stopped doing "it," by the way.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

Then what?

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

Well, you can't have it. There comes a time --



NANCY

You mean you won't give it to me.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

No, I feel content. I really do.

NANCY

No, you don't. Or have you forgotten your "Hamlet" phase?

CHARLIE

Oh, let's drag that from the grave!

NANCY

"That this too too solid flesh -- "

CHARLIE

It only lasted seven months. And early on.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE  
(dismissive)

Boredom. To you, maybe.

NANCY

To me, certainly.

CHARLIE

But you stayed with me.

NANCY

I did.

CHARLIE

You understood.

NANCY

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

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

CHARLIE

(making a wan reference to the book)

The secret's on page 111.

NANCY

(she ignores the book)

We should get ready to go. The sun is sliding westward, ho.

CHARLIE

It wasn't a secret with me --

NANCY

I'm tired, Charlie. I've reached the middle of the middle of the road --

CHARLIE

I knew why.

NANCY

All right, Charlie.

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

NANCY

My ears are yours.

CHARLIE

Put the shoes down.

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Your ebon melancholy --

CHARLIE

Was about -- you. I thought, perhaps, I'd made -- that I'd made a -- mistake.

NANCY

A mistake.

CHARLIE

In marrying you.

NANCY

I understand the referent. Aghast? I'm shocked. Let's go.

CHARLIE

We were talking about afraid.

NANCY

Let's not -- not anymore.

CHARLIE

You brought it up.

NANCY

And I want to put it down.

CHARLIE

I can't, now -- it's out.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

And I stood by you.

NANCY

After you accepted your -- mistake.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

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

CHARLIE

Stop trying to be --

NANCY

I'm a geezer -- I got a right to a shitty attitude.

CHARLIE

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

Starts on an origami boat, but furiously, angrily.

NANCY

What do you expect -- you said I was a mistake.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

Listen to what I say, not what you think I said --

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE  
(sighing)

Then why?

NANCY

Because --

CHARLIE

Because --

NANCY

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

NANCY throws away the origami.

CHARLIE

And I thought I was the pragmatic one.

NANCY

I'm ashamed to say it.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Aren't you upset -- the least bit?

CHARLIE

Listen -- I said that I had made a mistake.

NANCY

You're not upset --

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Your best has been pretty good.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

So much for my leverage.

CHARLIE

I haven't been able to soothe away the uncertainties, build us the --

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

Without an anchor --

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

You've always been hungry --

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

So why did you -- do you -- stay if I am so -- heavy?

NANCY

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

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

So, what now?

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

Gone, yes. The rise has "riz."

NANCY

The foundation founders.

CHARLIE

And here we are, at rest on a beach, in the twilight --

NANCY

Stop!

CHARLIE

Well, on the downward side of the fan-tailed curve --

NANCY

No!

NANCY rises on one foot.

NANCY

I'm still bobbing, still able to push away --

CHARLIE goes to her to steady her.

CHARLIE

No. There's no water to hold you.

She comes back down.

NANCY

I refuse -- I refuse to acknowledge the end of water.

CHARLIE

I'm afraid nothing's left -- or right.

NANCY

The human condition --



CHARLIE

-- has conditioned us.

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

NANCY

Charlie! Charlie! Oh, my -- Charlie! Look at them! Just look at them! They're -- They're beautiful.

CHARLIE

Beautiful?

NANCY

Yes!

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

No --

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Never --

JEAN-PAUL

They think they're in danger. From us.

NANCY

What's that sound?

JEAN-PAUL

They always think that!

SIMONE

It's understandable, after all.

CHARLIE

Ready to do us damage.

SIMONE

Though look at the look on her face.

CHARLIE

Find me a stick --

SIMONE

Look at her --

CHARLIE

Find me a stick --

JEAN-PAUL

When humans go, "Danger, danger" --

NANCY

What?

SIMONE

Don't generalize --

CHARLIE

Help me here!

JEAN-PAUL

You're much too expansive --

SIMONE

Look at her face.

CHARLIE

A stick -- something to defend ourselves -- from, from them!

JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

Listen!

SIMONE

But look at her face!

NANCY

Listen -- listen!

JEAN-PAUL

Must I?

NANCY

I think -- I can understand them.

CHARLIE

What?

SIMONE

Ears open -- I knew it.

CHARLIE

They're growling, for Christ's sake!

SIMONE

There's hope there.

NANCY

No, it sounds like --

JEAN-PAUL

Hope -- the little feathered thing --

NANCY

-- it sounds -- familiar.

SIMONE

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

CHARLIE

We are going to die, far away from our beds --

SIMONE

Remember when the first ones walked --

JEAN-PAUL

I've heard those stories.

NANCY  
(as if overhearing)

I've heard those stories.

SIMONE  
-- that discovery is on her face.

JEAN-PAUL  
I suppose -- a little.

CHARLIE  
What are you mumbling about?

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

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

CHARLIE  
How can you know that?

SIMONE  
You won't like it.

CHARLIE  
To them, we're just meat!

JEAN-PAUL  
That's a given.

CHARLIE  
Just meat!

JEAN-PAUL  
He's getting on my nerves.

SIMONE  
Why don't we do a little submission --

CHARLIE  
All right, give me a stone, then!

SIMONE

A little submission, just to give them confidence?

CHARLIE

A stone!

JEAN-PAUL

I really hate that --

SIMONE

I know --

NANCY

No weapons!

CHARLIE

Well, if you're content to die --

SIMONE

Remember why we're here.

JEAN-PAUL

All right. All right! I hope this shuts him up.

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

JEAN-PAUL

What are they doing? I can't see.

SIMONE

Gaping. Slack-jawed.

JEAN-PAUL

Standard-issue idiot look.

SIMONE

Her eyes gleam.

JEAN-PAUL

They are so slow to take advantage.

SIMONE

Patience.

JEAN-PAUL

It's a wonder they've survived.

SIMONE

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

NANCY crawls closer.

CHARLIE

Careful.

NANCY

They're like jewels. Intricate, inlaid jewels.

JEAN-PAUL

I don't have much more patience --

SIMONE

What is your hurry?

NANCY

What is your hurry --

CHARLIE

What?

NANCY

Nothing. Come here.

CHARLIE

Be careful!

NANCY

Don't say useless things. Anymore.

JEAN-PAUL

At least mildly interesting.

SIMONE

I agree.

NANCY touches SIMONE, tentatively, but without fear.

SIMONE

Her touch is green. Fractal.

NANCY

Charlie -- Charlie --

CHARLIE begins crawling closer, to JEAN-PAUL.

JEAN-PAUL

Could you entice him to come over to you?

CHARLIE touches JEAN-PAUL.

JEAN-PAUL

Too late.

SIMONE

Stay still. This is an important moment.

NANCY

This is an important moment.

CHARLIE

They're hard.

NANCY

Solid. The ocean made manifest.

JEAN-PAUL

I think I'm aroused.

SIMONE

You'd be out of season.

NANCY

They are --

CHARLIE

They are lizards, that's what they are.

JEAN-PAUL

What an ugly-sounding word.

NANCY

Too ugly, Charlie. No name on them yet.

JEAN-PAUL

Enough -- they get the point.

(speaking directly to CHARLIE)

So, what do you think? Nice work, huh?

CHARLIE pulls back, startled.

NANCY

Answer him.

CHARLIE

Why am I understanding him?

NANCY

I don't know why -- you just are.

CHARLIE

(to JEAN-PAUL)

Why am I understanding you?

JEAN-PAUL

(mimicking NANCY)

I don't know why -- you just are.

SIMONE

You have all the grace of a blowfish.

SIMONE rolls over.

SIMONE

Don't mind him -- a sense of humor the size of a pilchard.

JEAN-PAUL

I've known a dynamic pilchard or two --

CHARLIE

What's a pilchard?



JEAN-PAUL  
(to CHARLIE)

Let me repeat: what do you think? Fine specimen, heh?

CHARLIE  
What are you doing here?

SIMONE  
Do you have -- what do they call them?

JEAN-PAUL  
What?

SIMONE  
What humans use -- when they talk to each other. "Hi, I'm  
-- " "What's your -- " You know.

NANCY  
Names.

JEAN-PAUL  
The smart one, I tell ya.

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

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

SIMONE  
Do you have names?

NANCY  
I am Nancy.

CHARLIE  
I am Charlie. Why are you here?

NANCY  
Do you have names?

JEAN-PAUL

Green slimy lizard names that would make you wretch --

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

SIMONE

You won't mind missing a finger-length or two, will you?

JEAN-PAUL grabs SIMONE's wrist.

JEAN-PAUL

Wouldn't you prefer something else in your mouth?

SIMONE

I have all I need.

JEAN-PAUL

That's very short-sighted.

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

NANCY

Names?

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

Simone has -- poetic leanings, if you haven't already noticed.

NANCY

And you don't?

JEAN-PAUL

I do -- just more strict. More froid.

NANCY  
(to CHARLIE)

Well, go ahead.

CHARLIE

What?

NANCY

Go.

(urges him)

Be friendly. Friendlier.

CHARLIE

What do you want -- shake their -- hands? Is it hands?

JEAN-PAUL

We call them gryntospickitals in lizard language --

SIMONE  
(to NANCY and CHARLIE)

There is no such sound --

JEAN-PAUL

-- but we'll settle for hands.

NANCY

Yes. Shake hands.

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

You're even splitting your infinitives! Well, if you won't --

NANCY extends her hand to JEAN-PAUL.

NANCY

Nice to meet you.

JEAN-PAUL

And I'm supposed to --

SIMONE

You know this!

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

JEAN-PAUL

Why do you do this?

CHARLIE

It's a sign of faith. If my hands are free and empty, I have no weapon to kill you.

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

Give me a break!

JEAN-PAUL

You really don't understand, do you?

CHARLIE

Well, how would you have reacted if two --

JEAN-PAUL

Two what?

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL

Yes. Yes. We have been scared. Are scared. We know.

NANCY

Of what?

SIMONE

Let me take your hand as well.

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

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

(pouting)

It just -- it was just such a fright. Here we were, sitting nicely  
on the beach, minding our own business --

JEAN-PAUL

And what a business that was.

SIMONE

Gently --

CHARLIE

What do you mean by that?

JEAN-PAUL

You're a clammy mess, you are, Charlie. You defend your  
mate -- your Nancy -- when we arrive, you upbraid --

(to SIMONE)

-- is that right? --

(she nods yes)

-- you upbraid me for, well, just about every queasiness you  
feel at the moment, which could just as easily come from  
that salmon salad you carted out here -- and yet you don't  
have the presence of what you call mind to do what your  
Nancy --

CHARLIE

Just "Nancy" will do -- it's not "your" -- I mean "my" -- Nancy.

NANCY takes her hand away from SIMONE at this moment.

JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

My face?

SIMONE

Your face.

NANCY

What about my -- face?

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

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

Silvered.

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

On her.

SIMONE  
(to NANCY)

That was you. Is you.

CHARLIE

Not me?

JEAN-PAUL

You reverted. She advanced.

NANCY

My face?

SIMONE

Silvered.

JEAN-PAUL

Open.

SIMONE

In awe --

JEAN-PAUL

-- and wonder. We really prefer our entrances that way.

NANCY

You were -- are -- so beautiful.

JEAN-PAUL

In contrast to what you both were gabbing about before we showed up.

CHARLIE

You were eavesdropping?

SIMONE

No -- well, yes, but not like picking through garbage --

JEAN-PAUL

That's your opinion --

SIMONE

-- more to get a sense of you.

NANCY

A sense.

CHARLIE

Why? You still haven't said why you're here --

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

About?

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

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

NANCY

Go ahead.

CHARLIE

Oh, its about your silver face --

NANCY

Don't you dare!

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL holds up his hand to stop CHARLIE.

JEAN-PAUL

Did you hear that?

SIMONE

Let it pass -- please.

CHARLIE

What? What did I say?



JEAN-PAUL

(comes threateningly close to CHARLIE)

What, in all that gabble you just spewed -- your indignation?  
-- what in all of that do you think might offend us?

CHARLIE

I don't know.

JEAN-PAUL

You don't know.

CHARLIE

I don't exactly remember what I said -- I was being indignant.

JEAN-PAUL

Short-term memory problems.

CHARLIE

Sometimes you don't remember. You just --

JEAN-PAUL

Spew.

CHARLIE

Yes.

JEAN-PAUL

Well, the offending phrase sounds like --

NANCY

Lower life forms.

JEAN-PAUL

The prize.

CHARLIE

That? That? Well -- aren't you?

JEAN-PAUL

How many reptiles talk to you in a day?

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL

Ecce homo --

CHARLIE

-- you --

JEAN-PAUL

-- the pinochle of evolution! Things are getting a little sloppy here --

CHARLIE continues gathering things, but ineptly.

CHARLIE

I don't care! If you won't go, I'll go myself.

NANCY

Then yourself it is with whom you'll go.

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

CHARLIE

I can't leave you here.

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

I am -- stuck.

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE lapses into silence, NANCY goes to him and lays a soft, but not necessarily comforting, hand on him. They are encased in a momentary silence, and then slowly start gathering their things. During these lines,

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE should come up with physical connections that show their strong bond with each other, the energy that pulls them together.

JEAN-PAUL

Well, what now?

SIMONE

We have to go through with it.

JEAN-PAUL

I know. Well, we don't have to -- we do some options --

SIMONE

They're not bad -- I mean, in some ways, they are the pinochle -- now you've got me saying it! -- the pinnacle -- the pinnacle

JEAN-PAUL

-- self-considered pinnacle, that is.

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

(not looking pleased)

But they're like so many of the others -- I want to appear in someone's vision again, to be considered a little mythical, you know --

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

Grab yourself!

JEAN-PAUL

Don't tell me --

SIMONE

You think you're so froid --

JEAN-PAUL

I am!

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

It's just that I get pissed when I think, after all this time --  
(pointing to CHARLIE and NANCY)  
-- this is what we got.

SIMONE

Let it go -- you know that.

JEAN-PAUL

Let it go.

SIMONE

The lesson you're going to tell them -- practice it yourself.

JEAN-PAUL

Yes, silvered face.

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

Their hearts are not ready yet for such heights from such depths.

JEAN-PAUL speaks to them.

JEAN-PAUL

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

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

Yes -- lower life forms. We've already reviewed my lack of  
social grace.

JEAN-PAUL

Stop being so hangdog!

(to SIMONE)

Really, I can't --

(SIMONE encourages him to continue)

It wasn't about a lack of -- social grace. After all, I can  
understand -- In any case, what you said, as mistaken as  
it is, connects with why we're here.

NANCY

You've come looking for us?

SIMONE

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

NANCY

Kind --

SIMONE

Your kind -- your --

(looking to JEAN-PAUL)

-- what?

JEAN-PAUL

Why do you insist on being so kind?

(to NANCY and CHARLIE)

Your "kind."

NANCY

You mean, homo sapiens?

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

And where are we?

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

Painting.

JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

No, I just -- dabble.

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

(to both of them)

This is how we found you. What were you talking about?

NANCY

Charlie?

CHARLIE

Lions and tigers and bears -- I don't remember.

JEAN-PAUL

Short-term memory problems again.

NANCY

We were talking about -- our lives.

CHARLIE

As we often do.

JEAN-PAUL

Endlessly.

CHARLIE

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

SIMONE

Go ahead -- say the word.

CHARLIE

When you start thinking about -- the time when you won't be thinking any more.

JEAN-PAUL

When you're dead. Dead. We're familiar with the concept -- and the results.

NANCY

Charlie talked about -- usual with him -- about "earning a little rest."

JEAN-PAUL

A little death, you mean?

NANCY

I suppose.

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

You heard everything.

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

You're finding your rhythm: "Your mortal little corpus -- "

TOGETHER

"-- on its way to being dead."

CHARLIE

You needn't humiliate us.

JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

We are on our way to death --

JEAN-PAUL

Aren't we all?

NANCY

-- and that frightens us. Humans are like that. It's our "human condition" -- the fact that this marvelous brain of ours --

JEAN-PAUL

Don't overdo it --

SIMONE

Sssh!



JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

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

JEAN-PAUL

Your taste for destruction --

NANCY

We've never been a balanced species.

SIMONE

(encouraging her to continue)

The bone-yard --

NANCY

The bone-yard --

CHARLIE

She means a cemetery, where we --

JEAN-PAUL

We have our own --

CHARLIE

You see, I have this two cents I want to add --

JEAN-PAUL

Be quiet.

NANCY

The bone-yard. Sometimes it seems everything we do, we do to ignore that place, ignore what we are: finite, fragile,

ultimately nothing. So we make great efforts to turn self-pity into beauty, into a higher consciousness -- trying to fool ourselves into believing that the more sensitive we become to our "human condition," the better human beings we become.

CHARLIE

Which is why we invented the arts --

JEAN-PAUL

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

NANCY

We do like to believe that our artists have special powers --

JEAN-PAUL

Perhaps they don't.

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

JEAN-PAUL

Well, Nancy, nicely done.

NANCY

One other thing about -- Charlie and me. We have lived together a long time -- we have gotten -- used to each other. We will most likely die in each other's presence, though probably not together -- no plane crash in a clutch of last love for us. I don't love him --

(to CHARLIE)

-- you -- any more, but I have great affection for you -- him. We -- I -- have reached a state of resignation, acceptance --

CHARLIE

Acceptance of what is less, the minimum --

NANCY

It just gets heavy after a while.

CHARLIE

Charles the minimum, my noble title --

NANCY

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

CHARLIE

(Ruefully)

No, I'm sorrier.

NANCY

(playfully, ruefully as well)

No, I'm sorrier.

CHARLIE

You are pretty sorry.

NANCY

Sorry-ass.

CHARLIE

I am. I am sorry. I should have --

NANCY

Too late for any "shoulds."

CHARLIE

Better late than never?

NANCY

Not here. Not now. Not possible.

(to JEAN-PAUL)

I think I've said enough.

JEAN-PAUL

Resignation -- is that what you both feel?

NANCY

There is a kind of peace in that.

SIMONE

Look at her face now.

JEAN-PAUL

I noticed.

NANCY

My face?

CHARLIE

What about her face?

SIMONE

No longer argentine.

JEAN-PAUL

(to NANCY)

The price of peace, I suppose. And you?

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

Careful.

NANCY

Why are you so angry?

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

It's true. Sadly. I saw your face when we arrived -- Bloom! Stung!

(to CHARLIE)

Even you, with your adrenaline fear -- your face breached! Shivered! For a moment we thought, "It might be possible."

JEAN-PAUL

But now you've "resigned" yourselves.

SIMONE

Now you've "humanly conditioned" yourselves.

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

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

Indicates the solar plexus.

JEAN-PAUL

It could be gas --

SIMONE

-- you've had the core of you touched --

JEAN-PAUL

"Catharsis," I think you call it --

SIMONE

Catharsis.

JEAN-PAUL

-- which sounds like a gas, yes, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Aristotle --

JEAN-PAUL

At full throttle --

SIMONE

And when you feel that --

JEAN-PAUL  
(making the sound of a gas)

-- catharsis --

SIMONE  
-- it justifies your slogging through your unhappiness --

JEAN-PAUL  
Tramp, tramp, tramp.

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

JEAN-PAUL  
Chasing your tail.

SIMONE  
Lots of motion --

JEAN-PAUL  
-- in the ocean --

SIMONE  
-- but not much movement down the line.

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

SIMONE  
Perhaps enough?

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

CHARLIE  
So just what is your condition? Since ours seems so inadequate to you. No. You know something? I don't want to know. I want to go home. I've had enough of being insulted darwinistically. I appreciate the awe and wonder of a couple of -- of -- whatever word you use for yourselves -- and I thank you for explicating the nature of life and how we're just a couple of soft-shelled dwarves who ooze a little

too much self-pity for your tastes. And having said that  
-- I think it's time for us to go and live our lives of quiet  
desperation. Well, come on.

SIMONE  
(to NANCY)

Perhaps he's right.

NANCY

He's not.

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL

Perhaps our cue to go.

SIMONE

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

CHARLIE

What "thing"?

SIMONE

We're actually here for a reason.

JEAN-PAUL

I like knocking them around --

CHARLIE

A reason?

JEAN-PAUL

-- because they never really get it.

CHARLIE  
(to NANCY)

A reason.

SIMONE

Some get it.

NANCY

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

SIMONE

Some get it.

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

What reason?

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

You can assume that.

JEAN-PAUL

So we must be here for a reason, right?

(to SIMONE)

Really, I can't do this anymore!

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

NANCY

If you came here for a reason -- We're suckers for reasons. We're built for them.

CHARLIE

Some reasons are better.

NANCY

All reasons are good.



JEAN-PAUL

Some reasons are better.

CHARLIE

So what's yours?

JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE look at each other.

SIMONE

We're here to check up on you. No, don't repeat the phrase.  
Just let it sink in quietly. Do you begin to feel the weight of  
what I am saying?

CHARLIE

At some turning-point in the ancient past --

JEAN-PAUL

Before dry land, all land was water, as were we.

CHARLIE

In the textbooks --

NANCY

At some point -- to exploit new resources --

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

Crawled out --

NANCY

And stayed.

JEAN-PAUL

Not everyone -- some hated the gravity of the whole  
situation. Some slipped back -- dolphins, whales: home  
was hard to get out of the blood. We get a lot of our reports  
from them -- they seem to have an "in."

NANCY

That moment --

SIMONE

-- of taking the step --

JEAN-PAUL

-- was the raising of consciousness.

NANCY

What it must have been.

JEAN-PAUL

Contrast and trauma -- always good to get philosophies  
churning.

CHARLIE

And you've come back.

SIMONE

We've never left.

JEAN-PAUL

We've taken on gauging the experiment.

NANCY

Of the ascension.

SIMONE

Into air.

JEAN-PAUL

And new brutalities.

SIMONE

And fresh visions.

CHARLIE

So?

JEAN-PAUL

So what?

CHARLIE

Well?

NANCY

I think Charlie's competitive edge is showing.

CHARLIE

No!

(slowly)

More in the theme of: What hath the ocean wrought? In our case? What are we?

JEAN-PAUL looks at SIMONE.

JEAN-PAUL

I don't think we'd choose to stay with you. Yet.

CHARLIE

Because?

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

JEAN-PAUL

You're not the first, you know.

SIMONE

No, you're not. We gather -- We sift -- We underline and separate --

NANCY

Why?

CHARLIE

And for whom?

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

NANCY

What?

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

We've escaped from "why."

CHARLIE

How can you escape from "why"?

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

That's simple: you people are dangerous.

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

But it looks close -- and of course, you won't just bring yourselves down.

SIMONE

Yes, the damage below -- you have no idea --

JEAN-PAUL

And up here -- whew! You thought nature was "red in tooth and claw"! We'll take the brutality down under any day -- at least it isn't organized and nothing is meant personally.

CHARLIE

(to NANCY)

So, so -- we're the baby with a gun in its hands, the village idiot with the grenade in his hand. You know, we are just not appreciated --

JEAN-PAUL

You are young -- and flailing. Which in a minnow might be bearable --

SIMONE

But not when you have the firepower you carry.

JEAN-PAUL

Not just the "things" you craft --

SIMONE

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

JEAN-PAUL

And -- to get back to my point -- infected with "why."

SIMONE

Part of why it's incomplete.

CHARLIE

We're very proud of "why." We think the word is a great accomplishment.

NANCY

(to JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE)

Honestly, he can have it. I find the word a torture.

CHARLIE

That's because you're not rigorous --

NANCY

He's getting tired -- it's been a long day.

CHARLIE

(angrily)

Without "why" -- we're nothing. We wouldn't have anything to do. Some of our greatest --

(sees them all looking at him, winds down)

I am not babbling! How can you live without "why"?

SIMONE

We haven't escaped it completely -- in our weaker moments  
--

(to JEAN-PAUL)

-- yes, we have them -- we sink down to what you would  
probably call religion --

NANCY

Ultimate things.

JEAN-PAUL

Ultimately boring.

SIMONE

But we do have -- ways of grounding ourselves--

JEAN-PAUL

Well, we'd call it "watering" ourselves since we don't have  
much to do with ground --

SIMONE

It's a little hard with our full weight --

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

SIMONE

For hours, at all levels --

JEAN-PAUL

Unfurling and tumbling --

SIMONE

We drift --

JEAN-PAUL

Until we lose the urge for "why" --

JEAN-PAUL pulls SIMONE close to him.

JEAN-PAUL

There is nothing else but that.

CHARLIE

There's no purpose to that.

SIMONE

But it is a life.

NANCY

It is a life.

CHARLIE

So you have feelings?

JEAN-PAUL

We feel a great deal about our lives --

SIMONE

We feel with our lives.

JEAN-PAUL

We just don't have emotions.

SIMONE

Nasty things, really.

JEAN-PAUL

We don't have a little compartment --

SIMONE

Where we separate out the way you do --

JEAN-PAUL

Heart and head -- I am still baffled by how you chose --

NANCY

It used to be the liver --

JEAN-PAUL

Endlessly weird --

SIMONE

Our body -- is how we think and feel.

JEAN-PAUL

Think/feel -- one word, one action, one reality.

SIMONE

We prefer the impersonal to the emotional --

JEAN-PAUL

The im"lizardal" -- ? Would that be a word?

SIMONE

Detached --

JEAN-PAUL

But umbilical.

SIMONE

Dispassionate --

JEAN-PAUL

But ecumenical.

SIMONE

Foregoing emotions --

JEAN-PAUL

-- gives us more freedom to think/feel more deeply.

NANCY

Imagine --

CHARLIE

What?

NANCY

Imagine feeling without being ravaged. Imagine no "why," just -- just -- "is." We must be a terrible disappointment.

JEAN-PAUL

Not terrible --

SIMONE

Not even a disappointment -- incomplete, like we said. A condition, not a judgment.



JEAN-PAUL

A little, though, for me -- I mean, after all the effort we made to inspire the barren earth into life -- remember the stories?

NANCY

I want to hear those!

JEAN-PAUL

They're around -- and besides, we don't have time --

SIMONE

The ground, still steaming from construction, cracked and elemental -- the first touch was the first death and the first life simultaneous.

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

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

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

Bourgeois.

JEAN-PAUL

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

CHARLIE

You were saying -- the kinds of bourgeois --

JEAN-PAUL

Well, bourgeois nothingness. We almost didn't contact you  
--

SIMONE

He kept wanting to leave --

CHARLIE

I wished he had.

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

Think/feel alive --

JEAN-PAUL

The heavings of what you call the soul --

SIMONE

When you have all the comforts you need --

JEAN-PAUL

And no imminent threat of dismemberment --

SIMONE

Is a waste of the universe's efforts.

JEAN-PAUL

End.

SIMONE

Stop.

NANCY

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

SIMONE

You've taught yourself -- so unteach it.

JEAN-PAUL

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

SIMONE

Or your art --

JEAN-PAUL

-- is all about.

SIMONE

Because --

JEAN-PAUL

Because --

NANCY

There's an accounting coming due.

JEAN-PAUL

She stole the words.

SIMONE

She sees. Again.

CHARLIE

You mean an invasion?

NANCY

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

SIMONE

Even more. The damage -- you really cannot know how deep --

JEAN-PAUL

How slaughterous --

SIMONE

The knife has cut.

JEAN-PAUL

But what is left --

SIMONE

Has no patience left.

CHARLIE

Is that a threat?

NANCY

It simply is.

A plane goes by. JEAN-PAUL and SIMONE, without farewell, disappear. A few second later, a ball of paper is tossed on the stage. NANCY picks it up and opens it. "NOT" is scrawled on it.

NANCY

Not.

CHARLIE

Knot. K-n-o-t.

NANCY

Naught.

CHARLIE

Naughty.

NANCY

Knout.

CHARLIE

Newt.

NANCY

Know. It.

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

NANCY

This has been some day.

CHARLIE

Like no other.

NANCY

Thank -- well, I was going to do a "Thank God," but now -- I don't know!

CHARLIE

And what has He done for us lately, anyway?

NANCY

Is it possible --

CHARLIE

Do you want it?

NANCY

Do you?

They slowly lower each other into a sitting position.

CHARLIE

What do we want?

NANCY

What should we want?

CHARLIE

What have we done?

NANCY

What is to be done?

**BLACKOUT**

# A Senior Moment

## DESCRIPTION

Jewel, Darcy, Salvia, and Seeromanie, all in their sixties, wonder why Chantelle, also in her sixties, is looking good these days.

## CHARACTERS

- Chantelle
- Darcy
- Jewel
- Salvia
- Seeromanie

## SETTINGS

- As indicated in the script.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 1

Five women sitting around drinking wine and talking. Four are looking at CHANTELLE, who does not mind having the four of them look at her.

CHANTELLE

Nope.

JEWEL

Come on.

CHANTELLE

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

JEWEL

A better clue, then --

DARCY

Wait --

SALVIA

Yeah --

-- not yet --                      DARCY

-- wait --                              SALVIA

I still want to try --                      DARCY

Me, too --                              SALVIA

-- to figure [out] --                      DARCY

-- this mystery who sits before us --                      SALVIA

Yes!                                      DARCY

You said --                              SEEROMANIE

Only if --                              CHANTELLE

She said, didn't she --                      SEEROMANIE

She did --                              JEWEL

-- she'd tell us --                      SEEROMANIE

-- you did --                              JEWEL

-- if we guessed, right? --                      SEEROMANIE

CHANTELLE

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

JEWEL

Then some better clues --

DARCY

Not yet --

JEWEL

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

CHANTELLE

(to JEWEL)

No --

(to SALVIA)

I agree with you --

SALVIA

Mystery.

SEEROMANIE

And that means she wins the [game] --

CHANTELLE

And we can't have that. Can we.

SEEROMANIE

All right. She threw down the challenge --

DARCY

The gauntlet!

CHANTELLE

I like my challenges --

DARCY

(likes the sound of the word)

The gauntlet!

SALVIA

(matching her)

All right, the gauntlet!



SEEROMANIE

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

CHANTELLE

By all means.

SALVIA

Review, review. Items -- hair.

JEWEL

A sheen --

DARCY

A new cut --

SALVIA

A little color --

JEWEL

Highlights --

SALVIA

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

SEEROMANIE

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

CHANTELLE

Ah --

DARCY

So, brassy -- she is brassy --

SALVIA

Item -- skin.

JEWEL

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

DARCY

Not corrugated card[board] --

JEWEL

Not the sag and the flop, like this --

ALL (EXCEPT CHANTELLE)

Tighter.

JEWEL

Tighter.

SEEROMANIE

In the pink --

SALVIA

One: brassy. Two: pink.

JEWEL

And tighter.

SALVIA

Item three -- clothing.

JEWEL

The clothing.

DARCY

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

JEWEL

New threads.

SERROMANIE

New duds --

JEWEL

(fingering cloth)

Real silk, isn't it, real silk?

CHANTELLE

Indian silk.

SEEROMANIE

Errandi silk?

CHANTELLE

What other?

SEEROMANIE

(to the rest)

Friends, this silk that --

(to JEWEL)

-- you are fingering --

JEWEL

It says "Do not let me go."

SEEROMANIE

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

JEWEL

(letting it go)

Slick. Smooth and --

DARCY

(to SALVIA)

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

SALVIA

What're we up to?

DARCY

Number four.

SALVIA

Number four -- jewelry.

DARCY

Don't see a big increase in that --

SEEROMANIE

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

SALVIA

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

DARCY

Yeah --

SALVIA

-- the little silver hoop --

DARCY

Right --

JEWEL

Don't see any tongue studs, though --

SALVIA

Eeww!

JEWEL

No nostril posts --

DARCY

Eyebrows -- none. Lower lip -- none.

CHANTELLE

But wait.

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

SALVIA

That was not expected.

DARCY

(overlapping)

Unexpected -- yeah --

SALVIA

Is there, like -- well --

JEWEL

-- like anywhere else?

CHANTELLE's look says "yes."

JEWEL

Anyone brave enough to guess where?

DARCY

It isn't -- is it? Is it? Get out!

CHANTELLE

I'll show you --

DARCY

Get out!

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

Our loosened labia --

DARCY

Vanishing vaginas --

SEEROMANIE

Stop the alli[eration] --

CHANTELLE

Clandestine clits --

JEWEL

Good!

CHANTELLE

All right, we'll stop!

SEEROMANIE

Thank you.

(to SALVIA)

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

SALVIA

I didn't say I wasn't --

DARCY

Me, neither --

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

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

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

I'm up for it --

(to SALVIA)

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

SALVIA

Speak for yourself.

JEWEL

Won't bite!

DARCY

Vagina dentata!

CHANTELLE

(to SALVIA)

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

SALVIA

What about old dogs and new tricks?

CHANTELLE

And which for you? Old dog? New trick?

SEEROMANIE

"Woof" or "wow"?

SALVIA

You always want to embarrass me.

DARCY

It's so easy.

SALVIA

I suppose this means I have to go first.

(to CHANTELLE)

All right.

JEWEL

We are proud of our prude!

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

SALVIA

I couldn't imagine --

CHANTELLE

Did not have a single problem with this.

SALVIA

But still --

DARCY

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

SALVIA

It didn't hurt?

JEWEL

She didn't say that. Did it?

CHANTELLE

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

SALVIA

You're --

JEWEL

(at the same time)

You're --

DARCY

-- getting it!

SALVIA

You're not!

CHANTELLE

You're not -- but I am.

JEWEL

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

SEEROMANIE

Dawn comes late to Marblehead --

JEWEL

No! --

CHANTELLE

Go on.

JEWEL

You can't!

SALVIA

She can't what?

JEWEL

Either you're paying for it, or --

CHANTELLE

I am not paying for it.

JEWEL

Something just squeezed in my thighs --

DARCY

(to JEWEL)

What're you thinking?

SEEROMANIE

I'll tell you the other choice.

CHANTELLE

I know you can.



SEEROMANIE

You're getting paid to get laid.

CHANTELLE

(overlapping)

-- paid to get laid. Lights. Camera. And. Granny porn is born. You've guessed the secret.

(to SEEROMANIE)

You win.

SALVIA

No shit.

CHANTELLE

No shit.

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

Will wonders never cease.

DARCY

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

SEEROMANIE

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

DARCY

Yeah.

SEEROMANIE

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

SALVIA

No shit.

SEEROMANIE

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

JEWEL

We should drink more in either case.

CHANTELLE

Good suggestion. Here, hold up your glasses.

CHANTELLE serves them all.

CHANTELLE

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

DARCY

But there's dating.

Everyone bursts out laughing.

DARCY

Well, it's better than --

CHANTELLE

Really?

DARCY

(considering)

All right, then it's different --

SEEROMANIE

It's buying and selling.

JEWEL

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

DARCY

Yeah, but still --

(whispering)

-- porn --

JEWEL

She's thinking "degrading" --

DARCY

We've always been told --

CHANTELLE

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

JEWEL

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

SEEROMANIE

The money shots!

SALVIA

Have you done --

JEWEL

She speaks.

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

Go, girl!

SALVIA

Up the --

CHANTELLE

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

SALVIA

But "up the," you know --

SEEROMANIE

Just say it.

SALVIA

I can't just say it --

JEWEL

The poop chute!

CHANTELLE

Oh yeah.

SALVIA

Wow.

DARCY

Do you -- swallow?

CHANTELLE

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

DARCY

So it just goes --

CHANTELLE

All over -- well, that depends --

SALVIA

On?

CHANTELLE

How many fountains are flowing, so to speak.

SALVIA

More than one?

DARCY

Look at you!

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

Curious?

(to others)

Is that what she looks like? You look hungry!

SALVIA

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

(to CHANTELLE)

Good for you!

JEWEL

And disease?

CHANTELLE

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

SEEROMANIE

Personally --

CHANTELLE

What?

SEEROMANIE

I get all of the curiosity and the hunger --

JEWEL

Don't forget my thighs -- squeeeeeeze!

SEEROMANIE

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

SALVIA

Do you ever come?

CHANTELLE

Sometimes.

SALVIA

I just wanted to know! Go on.

JEWEL

You are a hoot.

DARCY

A hoot and a half. Go on.

CHANTELLE

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

SEEROMANIE

But it's still --

CHANTELLE

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

DARCY

The money's good?

CHANTELLE

Beats Social Insecurity and a silly pension.

DARCY

So it's good?

CHANTELLE

It's good.

DARCY

So if it jiggles -- so what?

SALVIA

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

SEEROMANIE

And when would it be doing that?

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

The five fingers will never divorce you.

SALVIA

Exactly!

DARCY

And they always come home at night!

SEEROMANIE

And they never tell lies!

DARCY

Maybe we should have all just married our right hands.

SALVIA

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

DARCY

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

CHANTELLE

I don't think --

SEEROMANIE

You never know --

JEWEL

All your hard work could add up to --

SALVIA

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

JEWEL

Not completely, dear.

DARCY

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

SALVIA

Flouncing in --

JEWEL

A night of lavish celebration --

SEEROMANIE

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

THE OTHERS

Here, here!

CHANTELLE

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

JEWEL

But while the ride is good --

DARCY

The ride is good, right? Right.

SALVIA

Um --

DARCY

What?

SALVIA

Nothing.

SEEROMANIE

A nothing like that always means something.

JEWEL

C'mon, cough it up --

DARCY

Eew!

JEWEL

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

DARCY

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

SALVIA

Do you have any of your movies?



CHANTELLE

To show you?

SALVIA nods yes. They all nod yes.

CHANTELLE

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

JEWEL

Dealer's choice.

CHANTELLE

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

They nod yes. CHANTELLE raises her glass.

CHANTELLE

Salud.

SALVIA & DARCY

Dinero.

SEEROMANIE & JEWEL

Y amor.

ALL

And the time to enjoy them.

They clink the glasses and toast each other.

Transition: space is filled with flickering light, barely heard cheesy music.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Scene 2**

DARCY knits or crochets, a cloth bag next to her feet. SALVIA drinks tea.

DARCY

It was eye-opening.

SALVIA

It was opening, all right.

DARCY

"Openings," plural, kind-of opening.

SALVIA

Did you watch everything?

DARCY

I tried to. She made it seem so funny.

SALVIA

She's always makeing good jokes.

DARCY

And some of it was -- pretty unbelievable. In the ridiculous sort of way of that word.

SALVIA

The kind of way that would make you laugh if you're not taking it in so seriously.

DARCY

Or watching your friend.

SALVIA

Yeah. Yeah.

DARCY

That made it --

SALVIA

Yeah. For me, it made it like, "Let's just get this over with."

DARCY

A little goes a long way. Even a little was too long.

SALVIA

Yeah.

DARCY

What are you thinking?

SALVIA

What am I thinking.

DARCY

You always repeat when you're trying to buy time.

SALVIA

Like I always have an easy time talking about myself.

DARCY holds up the knitting.

DARCY

You want to?

SALVIA

Yeah -- hand it over.

DARCY hands over what she's working on, pulls another knitting project out of her bag. They both knit.

SALVIA

Always glad you taught me how to do this.

DARCY

Even if you do do it backwards.

SALVIA

Left-handed people are in their right mind --

DARCY

-- in their right mind -- saves on Christmas gifts.

SALVIA

Any-time gifts. I had mixed feelings.

DARCY

I was mixed, too.

SALVIA

Yeah -- but maybe not like me.

DARCY

When you're watching someone you know do something  
you never knew --

SALVIA

It was more like "mixed up" for me than mixed.

DARCY

There's a difference?

SALVIA

Big.

DARCY

Watch your --

SALVIA

Oh right -- thanks.

DARCY

Don't want to mix up your stitches.

SALVIA

Who knows what will turn out then.

DARCY

Chaos.

SALVIA lays her knitting in her lap.

DARCY

Go on. Go on.

SALVIA

The good-girl part of me --

DARCY

Which we so love to make fun of.

SALVIA

Glad I give you guys a good time --

DARCY

Go on.

SALVIA

A sin, you know --

DARCY

You were raised so Catholic -- enough said.

SALVIA

They work on you from day one, so the good-girl part never gets to go away.

DARCY

Even when you want it gone.

SALVIA

Threaded in the bone marrow. So, I'm watching --

DARCY

And your bone marrow's going --

SALVIA wags her finger, nun-style.

SALVIA

"Wrong, wrong, bad girl, bad girl" --

DARCY

Like you're talking to a dog --

SALVIA

The animal nature --

DARCY

And good girls don't have an [animal] --

SALVIA

Not when your role model's been a woman knocked up by an angel.

DARCY

And good girls don't do --

SALVIA

And certainly this good girl didn't do -- has never done --

DARCY

What your best friend is doing more or less in front of you --

SALVIA

And I know she's not a bad girl --

DARCY

And yet --

SALVIA

And yet -- there's what my eyes see, and it's --

DARCY

Hard --

SALVIA

Hard, yeah -- hard all over the place.

DARCY

"The angle of the dangle" --

They laugh. They knit. They laugh.

DARCY

I thought the pizza delivery boy -- with the "extra large" --

SALVIA

The cheese -- the sauce --

DARCY

I kept thinking, "Who gets a pizza in the middle of the day wearing a negligee?" But in the world of --

SALVIA

It's a magical world --

DARCY puts down her knitting.

DARCY

What?

SALVIA

Magic.

DARCY

Magic? "Magic" is a beautiful girl cut in half without losing her smile --

SALVIA

I mean, anything can happen.

DARCY

It's not real -- it's manufactured -- you know, "lights, camera" -- she said there's scripts -- you did say "mixed up."

SALVIA

Glad you remember.

DARCY

And you are if you think --

SALVIA

I don't know that I think --

DARCY

You just said --

SALVIA

One man, you know that, first to last and no others -- the good girl -- all my life --

DARCY

Where's this going? You want to go and do --

SALVIA

No -- no --

DARCY

So then --

SALVIA

I want to order a pizza, extra large -- and I don't want just the pizza delivered --

SALVIA puts her knitting down, squares up to DARCY.

SALVIA

Dating -- yesterday, you said dating --

DARCY

Everyone laughed at me.

SALVIA

So I should date.

DARCY

Even you laughed at me.

SALVIA

Answer me --

DARCY

It's a way -- it's been years since --

SALVIA

And just how is that supposed to happen for me? For you?  
For us? You don't know, do you?

DARCY

No I don't know --

SALVIA

You make the suggestion, but you don't know.

DARCY

Don't get so --

SALVIA

And it's not like I know, either, me with my big fat experience  
of the world -- but just the thinking about what you said  
makes me --

DARCY

We all get scared --

SALVIA

I wasn't going to say "scared" so don't put --



DARCY

Of course it's scared --

SALVIA

Well, it's not just that since I'm scared all the time anyway, so that just gets like breathing -- but more this, that I gotta package up the package so that some -- pizza, any size -- likes it. Not what I like but -- "good girl" still! Get it?

DARCY

Loud and clear --

SALVIA

Just tired of being -- placed -- dated --

DARCY

So don't date -- fine --

SALVIA

That's why I diddle myself in the morning because it's mine -- undated --

DARCY

Give me the knitting --

SALVIA

No!

SALVIA picks up the knitting and knits with great vigor.

DARCY

So you think she's got the answer?

SALVIA

At least she doesn't have to date to get her pizza!

DARCY

So you must think I'm an idiot?

SALVIA

No!

But SALVIA means "yes." They knit with vigor until DARCY puts it down.

DARCY

Damn you! Damn her! Fuck!

It's as if the word has tripped a pressure valve.

DARCY

It was one thing for her to tell us what she was doing -- but the movie --

SALVIA

We asked for it --

DARCY

So what? It just --

SALVIA

Big stone dropped in a little pond.

DARCY

Boom! Nothing is the same. You feel that?

SALVIA

I feel that.

DARCY

I hate it.

SALVIA

"Good girl" agrees, but --

DARCY

But you don't care about "good girl" --

SALVIA

I think it's about time --

DARCY

And that's why I'm hating this even more. The snake's in the garden.

SALVIA puts down the knitting.

SALVIA

I'm sorry.

DARCY

Fuck.

Said like a farewell.

Transition.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Scene 3**

CHANTELLE in a bathrobe on set with SEEROMANIE eating fruit.

CHANTELLE

You have a brave soul, my dear.

SEEROMANIE

The Queen has always been curious --

CHANTELLE

You have always been that.

SEEROMANIE

And the Queen has become curiouser. I suppose I should say that the curious pussy has her nine lives back.

CHANTELLE

You could say that, especially around here.

SEEROMANIE

I just did.

CHANTELLE

They may steal it for a line.

SEEROMANIE

I give it freely. Without a footnote.

CHANTELLE

I like how we get fruit on the set. Good crew.

SEEROMANIE

They're efficient --

CHANTELLE

Have to be --

SEEROMANIE

In fact, I didn't think it would be so --

CHANTELLE

So what --

SEEROMANIE

Industrial.

CHANTELLE

It is the porn industry.

SEEROMANIE

I'm amazed anyone can stay, you know, focused.

CHANTELLE

You mean certain body parts.

SEEROMANIE

I do -- like the one you were [with] --

CHANTELLE

Donkey Kong -- his nom de porn --

SEEROMANIE

He was very "professional" --

CHANTELLE

It's a job -- sort of --

SEEROMANIE

So were you --

CHANTELLE

It's a bit -- tight -- to fit him in -- but can't show that -- no one here ever confuses the porn with the erotic --

SEEROMANIE

Who owns the house?

CHANTELLE

And that's another thing. We have to be in and out --

SEEROMANIE

So to speak --

CHANTELLE

Yeah -- in a set time because we're renting the space from, who knows, a stock trader who wants money on the side --

SEEROMANIE

His little on the side --

CHANTELLE

Or hers -- all sorts rent houses, boats, pools -- quick cash --

SEEROMANIE

Not my place --

CHANTELLE

Yeah, well, not mine either --

SEEROMANIE

I'd have to clean it up first --

CHANTELLE

My pull-out couch would not be sexy --

CHANTELLE offers fruit.

SEEROMANIE

I'm fine.

CHANTELLE

Yeah, industrial -- it's a business -- I'm done -- last year "Hollywood" put out about 700 movies -- this industry put out at least 20 times that --

SEEROMANIE

Big demand for putting out --

CHANTELLE

So it goes to follow a big supply of putting out --

SEEROMANIE

And you're doing your little part.

CHANTELLE

In the great scheme of out-putting. All right. Out with it.

SEEROMANIE

You want me to put out?

CHANTELLE

Come on. Why?

SEEROMANIE

You know me --

CHANTELLE

I do.

SEEROMANIE

I'm the curiouser queen.

CHANTELLE

You are.

SEEROMANIE

Because I am truly interested in everything my friends do.

CHANTELLE

And that includes knitting.

SEEROMANIE

Okay, a little overboard with that -- "The Yarn Harlot" --

CHANTELLE

Could be a new porn genre --

SEEROMANIE

Unusual things to do with balls of yarn --

CHANTELLE

There's an audience for anything --

SEEROMANIE

Purling and bondage --

CHANTELLE

Garter stitches and garters --

SEEROMANIE

Double needles and slip stitches --

CHANTELLE

I believe we might have ourselves a winner.

SEEROMANIE

And like I said -- truly interested in everything my friends do.

CHANTELLE

And you're truly avoiding giving me my answer.

SEEROMANIE

All right -- all right -- you probably guessed this anyway --

CHANTELLE

I never guess with you --

SEEROMANIE

I had to see for myself -- in action -- the body that --

CHANTELLE

Really?

SEEROMANIE

Really.

CHANTELLE

Really -- this body?

SEEROMANIE

That body.

CHANTELLE

It's really that?

SEEROMANIE

Really that.

CHANTELLE

Even after all this [time] --

SEEROMANIE

Even after all this time.

A half-joke at best.

SEEROMANIE

The vision's been hauntin' my dreams, the two of you.

CHANTELLE

It's not the same body that screwed --

SEEROMANIE

It is and it isn't -- doesn't matter.

CHANTELLE

Thirty years ago.

SEEROMANIE

Sometimes it feels like you screwed him yesterday.

CHANTELLE

Really.

SEEROMANIE

Sometimes, just out of nowhere, it comes -- the discovery of the screwing -- the vision of it -- it can be years in-between takes, and then --

CHANTELLE

I don't know what to say.

SEEROMANIE

Say nothing -- my dime. Hauntin' my dreams -- ever since you laid this out for us with the salud, dinero, y amor. The



haunt's been coming up each day -- and as I'm watching you industrialize your body, it comes again -- and it's all I can do not to say fuck it and just walk off -- and not ever talk to you again. Ever.

CHANTELLE

Even after all this [time] --

SEEROMANIE

Even after all the thirty years.

SEEROMANIE

Because -- because -- it's been something like a lie that's kept us linked up all this time, the two of us. Hasn't it.

CHANTELLE goes to speak, but SEEROMANIE stops her.

SEEROMANIE

Still my dime. I love you. A lot. That you know. You love me. That I know. But the present -- our present -- has gotten the way it is from its past -- and watching you, even with your body such as it is --

CHANTELLE

Look, I can stop --

SEEROMANIE

I'm not wanting you to stop --

CHANTELLE

I can -- it's not worth --

SEEROMANIE

That would throw everything off even more -- this is not judging or blaming --

CHANTELLE

Good, because we agreed about that a long time ago, about the blaming --

SEEROMANIE

Like I said, not judging, not blaming. He deserved the payback he got from us --

CHANTELLE

And we agreed, no more from you about what --

SEEROMANIE

Stop -- this is not a reminiscence. A contract review. This is about you and me. Not him. This is about you and me continuing. Present tense. Not him, dead tense. What you did with him -- well, we did it back to him --

CHANTELLE

And that made the difference -- he was scum --

SEEROMANIE

Yes. He. Was. And he deserved every inch of what we did to him. All right, on my dime I will allow us one moment of reminiscence.

CHANTELLE

It was sweet.

SEEROMANIE

Getting him back was sweet.

CHANTELLE

Wasn't it sweeeeeeeet.

SEEROMANIE

Reminiscence over?

CHANTELLE

Done.

SEEROMANIE

But.

CHANTELLE

But bodies and curiosity --

SEEROMANIE

All of what we toasted to --

CHANTELLE

Salud, dinero --

SEEROMANIE

That's done.

CHANTELLE

The basis for our --

SEEROMANIE

It's done. That phase is done.

CHANTELLE

Because it's been this old body --

SEEROMANIE

And this one --

CHANTELLE

And the violations --

SEEROMANIE

And what we did about them --

CHANTELLE

That's kept us going. Linked.

SEEROMANIE

And now that you're using it differently --

CHANTELLE

It's become a big stone in a little pond --

SEEROMANIE

In a good way, in a completely good way -- for me, at least -- I can't speak about the others -- I was really annoyed that you went and did this without the least --

CHANTELLE

Kept it private because I didn't know --

SEEROMANIE

Doesn't matter -- it made me realize how you and I have to take a risk to make what works between us not happen just because we've got it sucking on an outdated disaster. I'm getting too old to live with things that suck.

CHANTELLE

Surely you don't mean me.

SEEROMANIE

Surely I don't mean you.

CHANTELLE

What do you propose?

SEEROMANIE takes a bite of the fruit.

SEEROMANIE

Fruit's always best when it's fresh. Then it runs out and you have to go pick some more.

CHANTELLE

Deep.

SEEROMANIE

So we'll go find some fruit.

CHANTELLE

I gotta get back.

SEEROMANIE

To your back.

CHANTELLE

You staying?

SEEROMANIE

I don't know if my thermostat can take it.

CHANTELLE

We're doing just one more shot.

CHANTELLE gives SEEROMANIE a bit of fruit, which SEEROMANIE eats.

SEEROMANIE

Oh, twist my rubber arm. What is your nom de porn?

CHANTELLE

I don't have one.

SEEROMANIE

I'll help you figure one out.

CHANTELLE

Deal.

Transition.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Scene 4**

JEWEL, DARCY, and SALVIA, dressed to go out.

DARCY

I cannot believe I am going to do this.

JEWEL

You fret too much.

DARCY

Speed dating --

JEWEL

It's the cure for what ails us -- it'll be fun.

DARCY

Oh, yeah, laughs -- a barrel of 'em.

SALVIA

I'm with her on this --

JEWEL

You two are afraid.

SALVIA

I've got as much dating experience as a clam --

JEWEL

Even clams open up, and on a regular basis -- and don't forget that hidden pearl.

SALVIA

Not sure bivalve imagery is going to help relax me --

DARCY

Why did you sign us up without asking us?

JEWEL

And what would you have done if I had asked you?

DARCY

Stayed home and washed the insides of my knees.

JEWEL

Ergo, why ask? Like Yoda, just do.

SALVIA

Yoda --

JEWEL

Besides, I've done it before, it doesn't leave bruises, and it'll pry you both out of this funk you've sunk into.

DARCY

I am not in a funk --

JEWEL

You haven't shown me any knitting in a --

DARCY

I'm taking a break.

JEWEL

And doing what instead?

DARCY

Investing in credit default swaps.

JEWEL

Oh, working on getting too big to fail, are you? And you --

SALVIA

I know, I know --

JEWEL

You've stopped our tennis --

SALVIA

I know --

JEWEL

Gotta wonder if you're still doing the sales job.

SALVIA

I do like to eat.

JEWEL

Still freelancing for those greeting card companies, or are you now rich with filthy lucre?

DARCY

Added a new one this week while I'm waiting for the riches to flood in.

JEWEL

So the both of you are working and hiding away -- classic avoidance tactics.

DARCY

Of what?

SALVIA

Don't be so hard-ass.

DARCY

I am not avoiding anything.

SALVIA

She's not stupid --

JEWEL

That I am not. As evidence: so it's not a coincidence that all of this reclusive behavior began after our dear porn star revealed her secret life to us?

DARCY

No!

SALVIA  
Yes.

DARCY  
Fuck.

JEWEL  
What'd you say?

SALVIA  
She's been saying that a lot.

JEWEL  
But it doesn't have any spit in it. Say it again.

DARCY  
Fuck.

JEWEL  
See? Dry as sand. And why is that coming out now?

SALVIA  
Go ahead.

DARCY  
I don't want to.

SALVIA  
Go ahead.

DARCY  
I don't --

SALVIA  
Go [ahead] --

DARCY  
I [don't] --

JEWEL  
If you don't, I will make up something insulting to your intelligence and your station in life.



DARCY

All right!

JEWEL

So commence.

DARCY

It's all different.

JEWEL

What "it"?

DARCY

It. Everything. She's made everything all different.

JEWEL

And that's it for the "it" that's bugging you?

SALVIA

That's the "it".

DARCY

That's not enough?

JEWEL

No it's not. So what?

DARCY

What she's done doesn't bother you?

JEWEL

What "done" are you talking about?

DARCY

Are you testing me?

JEWEL  
(to SALVIA)

She is testy.

DARCY

You're testing my one good nerve.

JEWEL

Honey, your one good nerve went bad a long time ago.

DARCY

I have a very even temper --

JEWEL

So does a corpse. This always happens to you when you don't knit for a while.

SALVIA

She's right.

DARCY

Both of you keep out of my knitting!

SALVIA

Beware of the horny woman with pointed metal in her hands.

DARCY

That is insulting!

JEWEL and SALVIA look at each other and half-laugh/half-smile.

DARCY

That is just so -- so --

JEWEL

True. Oh, sweetheart, it's true, true, true.

DARCY

It -- is --

JEWEL

Should've picked up on the pheromones earlier.

SALVIA

They've been like this cloud around her head -

JEWEL

The horny aura.

DARCY

Do you realize how hard it is to -- handle -- these --

JEWEL & SALVIA

Hormones.

JEWEL

Like being a repeat teenager.

DARCY

Please save me --

JEWEL

Why? The rush, the fizz in the blood --

DARCY

It wasn't much fun the first time around -- now in this -- package -- it's just a farce.

JEWEL

No no no --

DARCY

Yes yes yes --

SALVIA

Going once, going [twice] --

JEWEL

Now you're getting a second chance at a second poke.

DARCY

Yeah, a poke in the eye.

SALVIA

Her yarn's all balled up.

JEWEL

"Balled" is what she wouldn't mind [getting] --

DARCY

Stop it! Just -- you two -- stop -- Whenever I think about what she's doing --

SALVIA

Which is all the time --

DARCY

I get -- I can't believe this! -- I get wet!

DARCY indicates her body.

DARCY

This!

JEWEL

Knit her up a chastity belt!

DARCY

Do you realize what that does to your underwear?

JEWEL

Arrest the pheromones!

DARCY

And as usual you will miss the whole point. She misses the point.

SALVIA

I'm not so sure what the point is now.

DARCY

Yes you do because the "good girl" feels the same thing.

JEWEL

She still around?

SALVIA

Yeah.

DARCY

When you've got an itch in the middle of your back and you can't reach it -- it's gotta -- get scratched -- or else --

JEWEL

Or else a little bit of insanity.

DARCY

And it's not just that there's absolutely nothing around to scratch this itch with --

SALVIA

Something long and hard in the hand.

JEWEL guffaws.

DARCY

It's a constant poke -- you want to know the real poke? -- constant thorn in the middle of the back -- that I am alone -- I am alone. I can't turn right or left and -- and --

JEWEL

Ask --

SALVIA

To get the itch scratched.

DARCY

Something like that -- I don't need to be reminded.

JEWEL hugs DARCY, then holds her at arm's length.

JEWEL

I understand -- I understand -- but you're just doing the self-pity peeing-in-your-pants routine.

SALVIA

Now, that would be wet!

DARCY

Not the right kind -- what're you saying?

JEWEL

Self-pity is like peeing in your pants.

SALVIA

Not uncommon in women our age.

DARCY

It is not.

SALVIA

You know, I just want you to know that none of this language is bothering me one bit.

JEWEL

Our prude progresses.

SALVIA

Big time.

JEWEL

First it's warm and not unpleasant, then it gets cold and clammy and irritating as hell, to you and everybody else around you, and the fact of the matter is that you don't have to do it this way at all.

DARCY

I hate it, though, I just -- hate the alone.

JEWEL

It'll kill you.

DARCY

It's killing me.

JEWEL

Then we have to go kill it.

SALVIA

By speed dating!

JEWEL

By speed dating it will be and not self-pity.

DARCY

Well, how --

JEWEL

Come on, say it --

DARCY

How do you speed-date? I can't believe --

JEWEL

Easier than speed skating, really -- have questions ready --

DARCY

Like what?

SALVIA

Walks on the beach -- deep intellectual conversations -- "I love piña coladas" --

JEWEL

Well, there's that -- drivel -- but I'm fond of things like "Do you have all your own teeth?"

DARCY

No!

JEWEL

She's so easy. Of course not, though it's not a bad item to check out as he talks -- you know, try to get a gander at those back molars --

DARCY

She's kidding me, right?

JEWEL

Just the usual -- foods, movies, books, hobbies. I shy away from alcoholics and those who chat about dead wives or gastrointestinal challenges, but not everyone minds that --

SALVIA

My bar is set low -- I'd be happy if I could find someone to talk at the dinner table -- my one and only never did, really --

JEWEL

It's not a high bar or a low bar -- it's not being at the bars -- it's just having some -- fun -- and who knows --

DARCY

What about -- bodily stuff?

JEWEL

And just what do you mean?

DARCY

You know -- equipment? Stop it! I mean like knees --

JEWEL

I told you -- teeth.

DARCY

I don't want something that's in the shop every week --

JEWEL

I would keep the biology probe to a minimum on a speed date -- but, you know, look for the hair in the ears --

SALVIA

And the nose --

JEWEL

-- how long it takes him to get out of the chair, canes --

SALVIA

Avoid the ones with the claw fingers at the end --

JEWEL

-- is he bent like an angle-iron when he walks --

SALVIA

Look at his shoes --

JEWEL

Hearing aids --

SALVIA

Especially the big clumpy types.

JEWEL

Think of it like checking the produce in the produce aisle without getting to smell it or poke it.

DARCY

And look at me -- what're they going to think of --



SALVIA

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. This is all about the chemistry, the rolling of the dice, the taking of a chance --

DARCY

Sex?

SALVIA

I'm going for the poetic, and --

JEWEL

It's all sex, honey, from the ringing of the timer to the handshake at the end -- and if it turns into breakfast the next morning, fine, but the best sex organ is between the ears, not the legs.

DARCY

All right, let's do it. I've got the list in my head. I've had it there for years.

JEWEL

And you?

SALVIA

Like I said, low bar -- do you say more than three words during dinner? Yes? You're coming home with me!

DARCY

Hey, hey, how does this look? "I'm so interested in what you're saying." And this? And these?

JEWEL

I believe you have made your faces ready.

SALVIA

All for one --

JEWEL & DARCY

And one for all.

Shifts of lights to another part of the stage. The three of them enter the light.

DARCY

That was -- interesting.

SALVIA

"Interesting" is a good choice.

JEWEL

"Interesting" is what makes a horse race a race.

DARCY

You know, we're in a lot better shape than they are.

SALVIA

A lot.

JEWEL

It's not easy being a man, not after what a lot of them have been through. Feel better?

DARCY

I have a phone number.

SALVIA

I do, too.

JEWEL

Makes me three.

DARCY

I hope we don't have the same number.

They check. They're relieved. The three of them bump knuckles together.

ALL THREE

Salud, dinero, y amor.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 5

The five of them seated on stools, in separate lights, holding wine.

CHANTELLE

It is not easy.

SALVIA

It is certainly not easy.

DARCY

It is not easy --

JEWEL

At all --

SEEROMANIE

This growing and getting older.

DARCY

We can say it's about not getting older --

CHANTELLE

But getting better, aging --

SALVIA

Like wine --

JEWEL

Or cheese --

SEEROMANIE

Or seasoned like a sauté pan --

JEWEL

But, really, honey --

DARCY

You can offer up all the niceties you want --

CHANTELLE

All the pithy little sayings --

SALVIA

Like "Wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been" -- or --

SEEROMANIE

"Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional" --

SALVIA

You know, the little heart-warming Hallmarked packets of  
crap that're meant --

DARCY

To blunt the sag, the ache, the --

JEWEL

Snap, crackle, and --

CHANTELLE

Pop of a body going gentle or not into that good or not-so-  
good night.

ALL

Rage, rage against the dying of the light --

CHANTELLE

Especially against the dying of anything good.

Lights blend to a domestic glow, and they face each other.

CHANTELLE

I've decided -- I've decided I'm going to give it up. The "biz."

SALVIA

You have given it up, or you're going to give it up?

CHANTELLE

I'm in the process.

SALVIA

Why would you do that?

CHANTELLE

It's just time.

SALVIA

"It's just time" -- what kind of reason is that?

DARCY

Agree -- not good enough.

CHANTELLE

Listen to you two.

SALVIA

You said it was working for you, so why give it up?

DARCY

You know how hard it is to find something that works?

CHANTELLE

They're busting my balls.

SEEROMANIE

And your chops.

JEWEL

And they have phone numbers.

CHANTELLE

You told me -- a date in eight is great.

DARCY

Don't knock it.

CHANTELLE

I'm not.

DARCY

Just don't --

CHANTELLE

I'm not. They're fierce.

SEEROMANIE

The power of a phone number.

SALVIA

Phone numbers.

CHANTELLE

Ah.

DARCY

Plural.

JEWEL

I have created --

CHANTELLE

You have. Salud to you three.

DARCY

Not so quick -- why would you give up --

CHANTELLE

It's time to move on -- it's that simple.

JEWEL

Is it about the two of you?

SEEROMANIE

Yes.

JEWEL

Then it's not so simple.

SALVIA

You're now lesbians?

JEWEL

Stop it!

SALVIA

I'm mostly serious -- maybe you two always were, which is why you could, you know, screw him over the way you did --

DARCY

You did a great job with that, great job.

SEEROMANIE

If we're lesbians, it's in a completely non-genital, un-dyked and un-lipsticked hetero-leaning sort of way --

CHANTELLE

The real trick was that we were good haters --

SEEROMANIE

Good haters --

CHANTELLE

But not anymore --

SEEROMANIE

Not anymore.

DARCY

You guys were good haters -- made me laugh my ass off  
with your revengicals --

SALVIA

Castration by chorus --

DARCY

Metrical murders --

SALVIA

So non-sexual, hetero-bent lesbians with a musical tone.

SEEROMANIE

Should there be any other kind?

JEWEL

Well.

DARCY

Well.

SALVIA

Well.

CHANTELLE

A deep subject.

SEEROMANIE

-- a deep subject.

SALVIA

What now? It's all the same, but it's not, and it's all different,  
and it's not.

DARCY

I suppose you're still not open to doing more knitting.

The four of them say "no."

JEWEL

And I guess we can't speed-date each other --

CHANTELLE

Someone would always be the fifth wheel --

SEEROMANIE

I have an idea. For a new beginning.

CHANTELLE smiles. The other three look at each other.

JEWEL

It's not going to be like --

SEEROMANIE

Not it's not.

SALVIA

Thank God.

DARCY

And not the --

SEEROMANIE

(mock pain)

Will I always be reminded?

DARCY

Just as long as --

SEEROMANIE

My idea.



CHANTELLE

Go.

SEEROMANIE

Coney Island.

Beginning at a low volume but rising quickly is the sound of the Cyclone roller coaster carrying a screaming load of riders.

SEEROMANIE

They've got all new rides, but this is what I see -- this is what I want: all of us on the Cyclone. Hands-free, riding at the front or the back. Ups and downs and dips and falls and curves and slams and we all end up back at the same place at the same time together.

Sound is up full. The five of them look at each other with rising joy on their faces and in their bodies until, as one, they pivot on their seats to face the audience, then pop their hands in the air and, in synch, lean and bump and scream like banshees as the lights go to black.

# **The First Day of the Seventh Month**

## **CHARACTERS**

- Crane
- Puck (can be played by either gender; "he" is used for convenience)
- Mom
- Dad

Except for CRANE, all actors will play multiple roles.

## **SETTING**

- Different places and times

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

- Sound cues throughout
- CRANE will need to learn some sleight-of-hand tricks with the two stones
- Three sets of Chinese balls (use the smaller ones for women)
- Two roundish stones
- Halloween half-masks and candy, bowls; one homemade mask
- Kid's bike, helmet, elbow pads, etc. and kid's backpack with kid's thermos
- Table, chairs for kitchen
- Other props as needed (see text)

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Scene 1**

Interior of the Church of the Holy Scepter in Jerusalem. CRANE asleep on the ground, covered in flickering shadows. Possibly night sounds, building settling, etc. However set, an incredibly peaceful moment. PUCK appears and hovers over CRANE, inspecting him. CRANE wakes, startled, and backs away.

### PUCK

I suppose I should say, "Don't worry." So -- don't. Worry. Really. Yes, yes -- foggy brain, shake it all about -- go ahead, rub your eyes, first right, then left -- well, left, then right, if you want -- just the way you're supposed to. Dig wax out of ear, pick nose, eat it -- why not, it's natural?

CRANE

Wha -- Huh --

PUCK

Inarticulate sounds -- yes, good. Fog lifting, dim light glowing. Are you scared?

CRANE nods yes.

PUCK

Don't be.

CRANE points at PUCK.

PUCK

Of me? I am not incubus, I am not succubus -- I am -- friend --

CRANE

Friend --

PUCK

-- of a sort --

CRANE

Where am I?

PUCK

You don't know.

CRANE

I don't --

PUCK

The Church of the Holy Scepter. Dateline: Jerusalem. Time --

CRANE

Sshh --

CRANE gestures for PUCK to be quiet, looks around, baffled. PUCK eager to speak.

PUCK

You wonder how you got here -- sorry, just can't stay shut up for long. Look Crane -- yes, that's your name --

CRANE

Crane.

PUCK

Crane -- I know your name -- remember your own name?

CRANE

Crane --

PUCK

(overemphasizing)

Kah -- rane -- Kah --

CRANE

All right!

PUCK

You are here because -- this is what you need to remember, so pay attention -- because you missed the curfew at your hostel and there was no room at another inn.

CRANE

I remember --

PUCK

Yes?

CRANE

-- wandering the streets.

PUCK

Thinking that you had slipped backwards --

CRANE

Yes. Narrow streets --

PUCK

-- slipped backwards in time -- into medieval times --

CRANE

Narrow stone streets of Jersualem.

PUCK

Winding. Closed off to you.

CRANE

Nothing open to me.

PUCK

Except this church. The Church of the Holy Scepter.

CRANE

(pointing to the stone slab)

And that --

PUCK

Has been your resting place.

CRANE

That stone slab --

PUCK

Well, yes -- supposedly, that is where it happened and why they built this church.

CRANE

Really?

PUCK

The crucifixion. The Crucifixion.

CRANE

Really?

PUCK

Who knows these things?

CRANE

Really?

PUCK

If you want to believe it.

CRANE

Really.

PUCK

Where they really nailed him --  
(mugging fiercely)  
-- for hanging around.

CRANE

I slept on --

PUCK

Hope you --

CRANE

-- the spot --

PUCK

-- didn't wake up cross.

CRANE

Then why am I here?

PUCK

You dream in a really boring way!

CRANE

I was nowhere --

PUCK

You don't laugh at my jokes, I don't get to lay down --

CRANE

-- but I am here!

PUCK

-- some subterranean boogie-man fears--

CRANE

Just a simple "why" would be fine.

PUCK

Oh, pardon me as you snap into focus!

CRANE

Here -- why here?

PUCK

(sing-songy)

Religious doubt. You have been having. Crisis of faith. For three years now you have been pho-to-graph-ing --

CRANE

Shut up.

PUCK

(quick shift to a regular voice, deep)

For three years now you have been photographing religious festivals (you're a freelance photographer -- did you forget that's what you do for a living?) --

CRANE

No --

PUCK

Good -- looking --

(PUCK takes a deep sigh as he recounts)

-- looking for some evidence of the deeper meaning of life. You so normal! So you decide to come to the Ho - Ho - Holy Land. Cheap trip, hostel -- locked out, curfew -- penny-wise, shekel-foolish --

CRANE

You're not much of a demon --

PUCK

And you're a pretty predictable dubitant -- how's that for a word?

PUCK jumps on CRANE's back.

PUCK

'S'not me flattened like an old toothbrush on a stone slab full of doubt and dust trying to dope out "the deeper meaning of life" --

(big yawn)

-- excuse me!

(yawns again)

-- as if it has any.

CRANE shrugs him off.

CRANE

It doesn't?

PUCK

I should tell you? Oh, quit the hang-dog look! You're going to find one, yes or no -- you're just built that way --

CRANE

Do you have a name?

PUCK

For you I'm using Puck. Motherpucker to you.

CRANE

So let me get this straight --

PUCK

No, don't -- don't -- don't re-hash -- re-peat -- re-ca-pi-tulate -- that bores me, too. Short form --

(yawns again)

-- sorry -- you've got a hunger in your soul to find out what the whole shebang is about. Lucky you -- you've come to rest at a longitude and latitude of --

(carney barker voice)

-- certified death -- marked with a cross -- and maybe -- who knows? -- a usable resurrection. Is that a good thing? We shall see.

Lights change to the beginning of the scene.

PUCK

Now, back to sleep -- you have work to do.

CRANE suddenly collapses into PUCK's arms, who gently lays him back down on the slab, a Pieta moment. The rise of holy music.

MOM and DAD come out, dressed in white. They prepare to lift CRANE so that he is in a crucifixion position; PUCK can help them. They do this so that



they end up with their backs to the audience, hunched over, while holding CRANE, who extends his arms across their backs. CRANE should take the classic Christ pose.

All through this PUCK talks.

PUCK

Crane lifted. Crane aloft. Soon the blinding confusion will come, and this Everyman -- this Everyguy -- this unfeathered Crane, will throw his eyes like dice and follow out the bet. Or something like that. Be seeing you.

With a crash of sound and light, it is morning. MOM and DAD drop CRANE to the floor and exit. From off-stage a stagehand throws PUCK a rough cotton robe or tunic and white knit cap, like those worn by some Muslim men. Also thrown a feather duster: he is now the janitor.

Morning sounds, city sounds, etc. PUCK is free to use an accent if he wishes and the feather duster to whatever comic effect.

PUCK  
(dusting)

Hey! Hey!

(pokes CRANE with the feather duster)

You -- you're too big a piece of dirt -- hey, you piece of dirt, I can't dust you off. So move! Move! Bless Yahweh, Allah, Ram Baba Das, Baba au Rhum, and the 17 Moon-Hung Buddhas: I always get the worst trash to clean up.

CRANE wakes up befuddled, again, sees the janitor.

CRANE

Puck?

PUCK

What did you call me?

CRANE

Nothing.

PUCK

What did you call me?!

CRANE

I'm sorry -- you reminded me --

PUCK

You swear at me, a stranger?

CRANE

No -- my mistake -- ah --

PUCK

You have to leave -- it is time for you to be going, going, gone. Tourists, crazies -- like God has made a few more plagues to add to the usual ones, like we don't have enough variety on that list! -- they will fly in soon, and if you lay there by their feets they will trample you under, leaving a stain that I will have to get down on my ancient knees and strike away with bird spit and my beard -- if I had a beard and some spit from a bird! So, go! Get on your ways!

CRANE

Is it true?

PUCK

It?

CRANE

True?

PUCK

I don't like that word.

CRANE

Is it true?

PUCK

That --

(sound of initial "t")

-- "tuh" word -- avoid it. You should avoid it.

CRANE

About Christ --

PUCK

Banish it.

CRANE

-- here -- here!

PUCK

Who knows? I didn't have the job then! Look, it was all so long ago, and no one took pictures and gave autographs. But you drop some stone chunks here, give it a churchy name, spin out some good relations for the public for a few centuries -- and --

(makes a vocal sound)

-- you got yourself a "true" you get to spread around like the stuff that makes the flowers grow and greases the mouths of lawyers. Cash cow, cash bull, cash sheep --

(pokes duster under his tunic)

-- they all, you know, giving it to you. But, you -- you look almost smart, friend. Almost wakey-wakey. Almost -- whatever. So don't go fretsome about "true." Eat some breakfast -- after that and a good sit-down on the porcelain throne, the urge will go away.

CRANE

I like true.

PUCK

Then have a big breakfast -- double side of eggs -- coffee like mud -- and a long sit-down because you got a lot to clean out --

PUCK takes the duster and begins to whirl it in circles, like a whirlwind, forcing CRANE to exit -- large sounds of wind accompany. PUCK slows, the sounds die. PUCK smiles and exits.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 2

Almost immediately CRANE reappears on the stage, lost but not scared. Music: Middle Eastern pop. Behind him PUCK, MOM, and DAD push large cardboard boxes, the kind a stove or refrigerator would come in, two or three rows high, or even higher, if possible. Or the shape could be a pyramid --

feel free to experiment. The boxes can be decorated as houses and other buildings if desired.

MOM and DAD are dressed in untacky tourist clothes, with tourist accouterments. PUCK is a tour guide -- he wears the janitor's clothing plus something else, like a sash, preferably outsized, to distinguish him as the tour guide. He exchanges his duster for a riding crop, which he can use to whatever comic effect he likes.

PUCK

Step right this way, right this way! Careful of that -- right, right, just step around it -- around it -- good -- hazard of the streets, some local color, eh? And odor, too! Now step right right this way! Next stop: our historic, our exceptional, our mysterious -- empty tombs --

(in a lower voice)

-- empty tooombs! --

(in a louder voice)

-- come get a taste of the divine and passionate --

MOM

(consulting a guide book)

It says here --

PUCK

Oh, madam, please, please --

MOM

What?

DAD

That -- put away that -- me you will insult --

MOM

Sorry --

DAD

Now, look --

CRANE

Where am I?

PUCK

(ignoring CRANE)

Sir, no insult I mean to your lovely wife -- your very lovely cash-paying wife -- but please understand me full as life -- how can you rest your judgment upon a book made by Westerners -- and college students at that? you know what college students are like -- drop by, drink, take a few notes, spread stuff around that we don't need --

(using the crop in an obscene manner)

-- you know -- then bam! gone. Rest upon them to tell you the truth about our home, my home? Feh!

MOM

He has a point.

DAD

On the top of his head --

CRANE

(pointing)

Sun rises in the --

PUCK

I know the truths you need to know about these tombs --

CRANE

And sets --

PUCK

(reverential but mocking)

-- about life in this ancient ancient land as old as the bones of the earth itself.

CRANE

(pointing)

And sets in the --

MOM

I like the sound of that.

PUCK

You hire me, you hire history itself.

CRANE

But I can't see --

MOM

History itself, Daddy.

PUCK

I am past, present, and futureness -- depend upon me --  
you can put that away for later -- and you will not go wrongly.

DAD

Watch that thing!

CRANE

Where --

PUCK

(exasperated)

If you would like to conjoin with us, sir, the tour price is --

CRANE ignores him and wanders to the tombs. During the next lines, he tries to crawl in one or two of them, not quite being able to fit his body into the space.

DAD

So you're saying that what it says there is wrong?

PUCK

Give me the book.

MOM gives him the book. PUCK flips through a few pages, then stabs with his finger.

PUCK

See, there!

Rips the page out and slams the book shut before DAD can really see.

PUCK

Wrong, wrong, double, triple dutch wrong.

PUCK tosses the page.

DAD

Hey!

PUCK

No matter -- always these things a little less than as much  
as they could be --

DAD

You talk a bunged-up English --

PUCK

(handing the book back)

There are always local -- flavors --

DAD

Flavors --

PUCK

For instance, for instance -- this one. I will bet, madam  
-- open out your book again, lovely wife --

DAD

Hey --

PUCK

(to DAD)

Such a lovely wife! I will wager a lamb's eye in honey that  
in your book it says --

PUCK points to one of the tombs.

MOM

That one?

PUCK

That one.

MOM

It doesn't say anything about that one --

PUCK

Well, there you are -- how can you trust --

DAD  
(looking over MOM's shoulder)

It doesn't?

PUCK  
(seeing CRANE)

Sir, please don't --

DAD  
After all the money we spent --

CRANE  
Empty --

PUCK  
So observant -- just like stand -- or squat, if you prefer --  
over to there --

DAD  
(to PUCK)  
So, all right --

CRANE squats down and hugs his knees, conspicuous in making himself small.

PUCK  
This tomb -- well, officially -- aha! -- they say here sat St.  
Arbitron, who retired his sacred buttocks to here to practice  
hypnolithic meditation --

MOM  
Hypno-what?

PUCK  
Hyp-no-li-thic --

MOM  
(overlapping)  
Hyp-no-li-thic --

PUCK  
Good!



DAD

You made that up.

MOM

Daddy!

PUCK

I swear on my mother's ankle bones not. Greek root-around  
for "sleepy stones." You can look it up. He would take two  
rocks --

Takes two rocks out of his pocket.

DAD

How convenient.

PUCK

-- and swirl them in his hands like this --

(moves them around deftly)

-- and as the sacred stones massaged the points of five  
divine pressures, he would speak to God --

MOM

Like dialing in.

At this point, CRANE simply falls to one side, putting him into a fetal position.  
There is a brief pause in PUCK's delivery, then he moves on, still twirling  
the stones.

MOM

(whispering)

Is he all right?

PUCK

See how he has the spirit taken up, eh?

DAD

See him keel over like broken lawn ornament.

PUCK

This place --

(makes a grand gesture)

-- it has its powers, hey!

(whispering to CRANE)  
Get up, dung-beetle!

CRANE pops over onto his other side, still in a fetal position.

PUCK  
The spirit moves him!

DAD  
I'd like to make a suggestion.

MOM  
(warningly, imploringly)  
Daddy --

DAD  
That we ignore this transfiguration --

PUCK  
That is what it is!  
(to CRANE, hissing)  
Sand flea!

DAD  
-- going on at our feet --

PUCK  
At no extra charge!  
(to CRANE, hissing)  
Earwig!

DAD  
Right -- and let Mother here enjoy her experience of the  
holy land --

PUCK  
(indicating the tombs)  
What could be more wholly holy than -- !  
(handing her the stones)  
Would you like to --

MOM, with a look to DAD, takes them and begins to move them. DAD reaches for them, but MOM keeps them, liking the motion very much.

CRANE rolls over onto his knees, still tucked. Reluctantly, she goes to hand them back to PUCK, who instead folds her hand over them, indicating that MOM keep them.

MOM

Hypnolithic --

PUCK

Meditation --

MOM

Hypnolithic meditation -- learned a new word!

PUCK

Right here, St. Arbitron's ancient posterior -- looking heavenward --

MOM

His posterior?

PUCK

No, no! While perched -- you know --

DAD

Hard to look heavenward in a cave.

PUCK

On the lip, then --

DAD

His posterior --

PUCK

Yes, of course!

DAD

Wonder if he ever fell off --

CRANE rolls over onto his back, still tucked.

DAD

Fell like a stone --

CRANE slowly falls onto his side.

DAD

Hypnolithically speaking, of course.

MOM

Daddy has his doubts --

PUCK

But -- but --

DAD

Lotsa butts here.

PUCK

Did your book tell you about St. Hirsute?

MOM

No. Do you spell that with a --

PUCK

Died a horrible death for the faith.

PUCK leads MOM over to CRANE. He gently nudges CRANE, who rolls over onto his back, still hugging his knees. PUCK sits MOM on his upraised knees.

MOM

Do you think I should --

PUCK  
(to DAD)

Make use of him, eh?

DAD  
(to MOM)

Go ahead -- the man obviously has the self-respect of a slug.

MOM

(sitting, looking in the index of her book)

Is that with a "h" "e" --

PUCK

You won't find it there.

(pointing to his own head)

Find it here.

MOM pats CRANE softly, as if to comfort him.

PUCK

When he refused to deny the existence of the higher powers

--

(pointing upwards)

-- you know the higher powers, eh? -- well, not pleased.

Being a hairy man, very thickety-thick, they started covering his body in wax --

DAD

How hairy?

PUCK

He was hairy as the top of your head is not.

MOM

Gotcha!

PUCK

(using DAD as a model)

Being a hairy very man, they started covering his body in wax -- a little here and there, then riiiiiiiiiipppppppppp -- you know, they'd put the wax on then walk around a little --

PUCK walks around, hands behind his back, a little whistle.

PUCK

-- then, when they thought he wasn't paying attention, run up to him and riiiiiiiiiipppppppppp.

PUCK pinches some hair off DAD's arm.

DAD

Hey!

PUCK

But he wouldn't give up -- give in -- give out -- so they  
dunked him -- like a baby in a baptism --

MOM

Like a cruller in morning coffee --

PUCK

Like a finger digging out the last lamb's eye in honey -- into  
a cauldron of wax made from all the king's leftover candles,  
and then --

(with appropriate sounds and gestures, even overdone)  
-- well, you can imagine --

MOM gives an involuntary shudder. So does CRANE.

PUCK

Now that story alone is, is it not, worth the price of the tour?  
But I have more. Now this one, over here --

CRANE starts shaking.

MOM

I'm getting a rush --

CRANE suddenly goes flat onto his stomach. DAD grabs MOM just in time  
so that she does not fall with him and stands her upright.

DAD  
(to CRANE)

You got to get a grip on yourself, son.

MOM

Whew!

MOM takes out the stones and begins twirling them.

PUCK

Good idea.

CRANE  
(muffled)

I'm going to die in six months.

DAD

You're talking into the dirt, son.

CRANE repeats himself, louder.

DAD

You're still just making mud.

CRANE flops onto his back.

CRANE

I am going to die in six months.

CRANE raises both his arms, and after a brief hesitation, MOM and DAD give him a hand up -- mimicking the crucifixion gesture in Scene 1. CRANE watches MOM move the stones.

PUCK

No you are not.

CRANE  
(to MOM)

What are you doing?

PUCK

In six months you are not going to die --

MOM

Hypnolithic meditation.

CRANE

Does it help you?

PUCK

Because I am going to kill you right now.

DAD

He'd make a better a lawn ornament.

PUCK

Over here we have --

MOM

Help me what?

CRANE

Accept.

(looking at PUCK)

Did you believe his story about --

CRANE makes a ripping sound.

MOM

It sounded a little -- well --

DAD

A little?

CRANE

But you both bought --

DAD

Mom more than me -- as usual --

CRANE

But you some, right, even though you knew -- ? Why?

PUCK

People who are wise --

CRANE

Because --

PUCK

-- don't ask so many "whys"!

CRANE

Because you wanted to believe. Right? Huh? Believe.  
Right?



PUCK

I am fading into the backwood.

DAD  
(to PUCK)

Ground.

CRANE

Because it felt --

PUCK

There goes my lovely hood --

DAD  
(to PUCK)

Liveli --

CRANE

Because it felt --

MOM

Because it felt --

CRANE takes MOM's two stones and palms them, making them disappear. He then digs into his pocket and pulls out one -- or from behind her ear, hands it to her.

CRANE

Like that, right?

MOM nods, then DAD.

CRANE

Just like you, I have decided. I have decided.

PUCK

You can't just -- decide something like -- six months.

MOM

Unless --

CRANE

I'm not checking out that way.

Pulls the second stone out of PUCK's ear, wipes it off, hands it to MOM.

DAD

The old "to be or not to be" --

PUCK

Why are you saying this?

CRANE

I don't know -- except --

PUCK

Except what?

DAD

Except what, son?

CRANE

Except that I feel that it's true to say it.

PUCK

Always the true with you.

MOM

Are you really?

CRANE

I think so.

DAD

Die from what?

PUCK

He could die right now if I push him into the street --

MOM

Don't push him, Daddy.

DAD

From what?

CRANE

From "as if" --

DAD

You're going to die from "as if"?

CRANE

I am going to live from "as if."

DAD

What is that?

PUCK

Did I tell you about St. Crane? That tomb right there.

CRANE

As if I know when the end will come --

PUCK

They tied St. Crane up in a fetal position -- he stiffened --

DAD

Let me get this straight: you're going to die --

CRANE

And live.

DAD

-- from a simile?

PUCK

Made him a lawn ornament --

DAD  
(to PUCK)

Stop.

PUCK

All right.

DAD

From a simile?

CRANE

Not die. Live.

DAD

By getting ready to die?

CRANE pulls out a standard magician's bouquet and hands it to DAD.

PUCK

We could probably book you into St. Crane's up there if you want. Right now.

MOM

I think I've had enough of tombs.

PUCK

But you haven't heard the best --

DAD  
(angrily)

I do not live to die.

CRANE

I don't think I know any other way right now.

DAD

I don't!

MOM

Daddy --

DAD  
(to PUCK)

You should watch your clientele better --

DAD stalks off.

MOM

I have to follow him-- I have to.

CRANE

Of course.

PUCK

Off course.

DAD  
(from off)

Mother!

MOM  
(handing CRANE the stones)

It's all I can do sometimes to keep myself afloat -- in the  
face of -- the face of things -- to make believe I believe -- to  
make believe I am still making believe --

DAD

Mother!

MOM

A weakness, he thinks.

(touches CRANE on the cheek)

"As if" -- I know all about "as if" -- may an answer come for  
you --

MOM leaves. CRANE hands the stones to PUCK.

PUCK

So I won't eat tonight --

The magician's bouquet comes flying onto the stage. They look at it.  
CRANE picks it up and, with a flourish, presents it to PUCK.

PUCK

As if --

CRANE

Starting now.

PUCK

The circus parade --

CRANE takes a deep breath.

CRANE

The first of my last breaths.

PUCK

Use breath mints.

CRANE looks over the tombs.

CRANE

If you don't mind, I think I'll pass.

PUCK

You look excited -- finally.

CRANE

Is that foolish?

PUCK

You are what you are.

CRANE

No -- no --

PUCK

Such a grin.

CRANE

All that was before -- you "are" what you "are" stuff -- that  
was nothing -- just verbs of being -- now --  
(makes a big ripping sound)

-- action!

PUCK

And you think that will be enough.

CRANE

Becoming fully aware --

PUCK

You mean putting a limit on yourself --

CRANE

What?

PUCK makes the motion of buttoning his lips.

CRANE

Living "as if" I am dying will make me become alive.

PUCK shrugs.

CRANE

It won't?

PUCK shrugs again.

CRANE

C'mon!

PUCK

You want to stop with just that?

CRANE

With what?

PUCK

With that -- with just -- becoming "alive"?

CRANE

There's something past becoming alive?

PUCK

The real death --

CRANE

Not that!

PUCK

That scares you.

CRANE

Before that -- but more than what's now.

PUCK

Yes.

CRANE

Better than becoming alive?

PUCK

Why does the serpent keep trying to sell his apple? You think the Garden of Eden happened only once? You think the serpent is such a bad guy?

CRANE

I have to go.

PUCK

Then begone.

CRANE

You'll see.

PUCK

Prove it.

CRANE

You'll see!

PUCK

Prove it twice on Sunday, then. You want to see your ideas in action?

PUCK sticks the end of the magician's bouquet against his rear and makes a farting noise, and the bouquet, as in a cartoon, looks like the escaping gas. PUCK flies the bouquet around until it lands on CRANE. CRANE starts to exit, holding the bouquet.

PUCK

Where are you going?

CRANE

Home. Yes. I want to go home.

CRANE exits.

CRANE

Home. Well, cholo, no one will ever accuse you of having a wild imagination. Home.

(to the audience)

Quest -- ultimate questions -- body/soul -- deep-rooted urge --



(as if defecating)

--     uuuurrrrgggeeee     --     fffffoooooorrrrr     --

mmmeeeaaaannniinnngggg -- feh! He'll find out.

CRANE takes off his robe and skullcap, then gestures off-stage as MOM and DAD bring on the accouterments of a simple dining room in a simple home.

PUCK

So let him go to home. Assuming such a place ever exists.

MOM

Home always exists.

PUCK

Oh ye of such plucky plucky faith!

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 3

At home. Dinner-time. MOM and DAD are seated there, DAD with a letter in his hand. CRANE is also seated there, jacket on, small valise by his feet, unnoticed by either. DAD holds the letter tentatively for several beats.

MOM

You can open it.

CRANE

Go ahead, Dad.

DAD

That is what we do with letters.

CRANE

Go.

MOM

And you don't need to be sarcastic.

CRANE

He's really not, Mom.

DAD

That is true. And I'm not being so. Or trying to.

MOM

Isn't in you, that's true.

DAD

Just not -- usual -- a letter -- from him.

MOM

Twists us around a little bit --

DAD

Which makes me sound --

MOM

You do when it comes to him, but I know you're not.

CRANE

Go ahead --

DAD spins it on the table, plays with it.

CRANE

All right -- circle around it a little more -- suss it out -- I understand.

MOM

But it won't open itself.

DAD

Now who's sounding sar[castic] --

MOM

Just stating a fact.

CRANE

Good for you, Mom!

DAD looks at MOM for a moment, then smiles.

DAD

"Just stating a fact" --

CRANE  
(to DAD)

Ace -- some of your guff back to you --

DAD

Got me on that one.

CRANE

You have -- mellowed, my father.

MOM

So?

DAD

The few letters -- they always had -- surprises in them.  
Didn't they?

MOM

I doubt this one is different.

DAD

Probably true. So, do we --

MOM

We always opened the other ones. And as I said two  
heartbeats ago - won't open itself. Just the facts.

DAD opens the letter, reads.

MOM

Why don't you read it [out loud] --

DAD

This says he's coming home.

MOM

Here.

DAD

Yes.

DAD carefully puts the letter down; MOM spins it so that she can read it.

CRANE

It's not a letter bomb. Literally, that is. Literarily, well --

MOM

Why do you think?

DAD

I don't know. I've never known -- completely -- with him.

CRANE

You're not the only one in the dark.

MOM

But it will be nice.

DAD

I suppose.

CRANE

(spins the letter)

Still circling.

DAD

He's never been mean.

MOM

Or disrespectful.

DAD

That's true, too. Just --

MOM

Just -- Distant.

DAD

That would be a word, yes. His own person.

CRANE

I do want to come home.

MOM

(indicating the letter)

He says he wants to come home.

DAD  
Yes.

MOM  
To us.

DAD  
None other.

MOM  
Well --

DAD  
I know.

MOM  
Who said there was never room for change in the world?

DAD  
I never said there wasn't room, only --

CRANE  
Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad.

They turn to him slightly and now include him.

MOM  
Your room --

DAD  
We did rent it out, once.

MOM  
But it's back.

DAD  
Young man worked in the feed mill.

MOM  
He moved to Alaska.

DAD  
To live with the Inuit.

MOM

Took your father forever to pronounce the name.

DAD

Kept calling them Eskimos -- wrong. In-u-it. Inuit. He was "into it."

Embarrassed beat.

DAD

It's been a long time, Crane.

MOM puts her hand on DAD's arm. CRANE opens his valise.

CRANE

I've brought gifts.

CRANE brings out two boxes, each holding two Chinese balls. MOM and DAD open the boxes, take out the balls.

MOM

What are they?

DAD

Too small for bowling.

CRANE

This way.

CRANE takes his MOM's gift and shows her how to roll the balls in her hand to make them chime. CRANE encourages DAD to do the same, and a sound cue comes up reinforcing the sounds. CRANE takes out his own set, and the three of them sit there sharing the sound and movements, for a moment untethered to reality or history.

CRANE

According to traditional Chinese medical theory, the ten fingers are linked to the heart and other bodily organs by a lacework of channels through which the vital energy of the body flows. By rotating the two balls on your palm with the fingers, the acupuncture points on the hand are -- stimulated. This encourages an eager flow of blood and vital energy throughout the body.

Eventually they stop and come back to "reality," putting away the balls.

DAD

These are quite -- unusual, son.

CRANE

Not from the five-and-dime, eh, Dad?

DAD

That's a fact.

MOM

We have to ask.

CRANE

And it shall be answered.

MOM

Are you -- ill?

CRANE

On the contrary.

DAD

You're completely healthy.

CRANE

In all the usual ways.

DAD

What about your work?

CRANE

I've put it on vacation. My schedule is clean for the next six months.

DAD

So that you could come home?

There is a change of light, the light for *The Domestic Ballet*. What follows is the barest suggestion for the choreography of the Ballet, and the director is free to arrange it in any way possible.

PUCK brings on a wagon of some sort with a variety of props that are used in the Ballet. Perhaps barely underscoring the Ballet is a soundscape of "home" sounds: dishes in the kitchen, a lawnmower, etc., but done musically. The four speak to the audience but also to each other -- they are not isolated. They begin with something like a quadrille.

PUCK

They were understandably --

CRANE

Confused.

DAD

We were.

MOM

Because there was something underneath --

PUCK

Almost inhuman --

MOM

In his wish --

PUCK

No one likes too much confidence.

MOM

But at the same time --

PUCK

All too human --

DAD

Which frightened us just as much.

PUCK

No one likes too much vulnerability.

DAD

We talked, late into that first night, turning it over -- yes, it felt as --



MOM

-- as gold to airy thinness beat.

DAD

(overlapping)

-- to airy thinness beat.

PUCK brings two chairs downstage.

PUCK

But not despair in him, you'd have to admit.

DAD

That would have been familiar to us.

MOM and DAD sit.

CRANE

I was calling it a grace.

MOM

A word out from you quite often, yes.

CRANE lays down across MOM and DAD's laps.

CRANE

In my own bed, that first night --

(exaggerating the sound and movement)

-- I streeettttched my legs down to the footboard unpacking  
my adult bones.

PUCK playfully pulls on CRANE's ankles, making cracking, creaking noises.

CRANE

I felt all my joints air out --

MOM and DAD roll him off, move to the cart and get dishes. They toss the  
dishes to each other.

MOM

You washed lots of dishes.

CRANE  
(joining the tossing)  
Very contemplative, water laving --

Meanwhile, PUCK takes out a skateboard.

DAD  
You even washed dishes we hadn't used in a while.

CRANE  
Dust in the cabinets.

MOM  
The water laving.

MOM and DAD put the dishes away. PUCK lays on his back on the board, CRANE takes his legs and pushes him around. MOM and DAD stand still, arms by their sides.

PUCK  
You mowed the lawn.

CRANE  
Regularly.

Makes lawnmower sounds as he mows around MOM and DAD.

DAD  
Even using the hand-clippers around the base of the trees.

CRANE  
No weed-whacker for me!

DAD  
I was never that finicky.

PUCK rolls off the board, gets back on it facing CRANE, head down, hands up. CRANE pushes him like a shopping cart.

CRANE  
I went shopping.

MOM

For hours.

DAD

The abundance mesmerized you.

CRANE

Sometimes I wouldn't buy anything -- just walk.

PUCK

They valued him like the village idiot.

CRANE

I was -- what a grace.

PUCK gets off the board, and he and MOM bring large garbage bags to CRANE and DAD, then return with long springy poles from which hang cut-out stars and hold them over CRANE and DAD.

MOM

Garbage night.

CRANE  
(to DAD)

Garbage astronomers, you and I -- my father and I would lug the leftovers to the curb --

DAD

Plop, plop -- and loosen our necks --

MOM

Overhead rocked the black star-smeared ocean --

CRANE

At the lawn's edge --

MOM

They stood --

PUCK

Unenlightened by street lights --

MOM

Solid --

CRANE

We would gaze there -- and there --

DAD

Garbage at our feet --

MOM

And my heart would ache to see them so small and --

CRANE

And what?

MOM

So fierce --

PUCK

The way the heat poured out of you both.

CRANE

Evaporating together, hey?

DAD

Deliquesce.

PUCK

Trim the hedges.

DAD

Re-paint the deck.

CRANE

Weed the garden.

MOM

Poke the wasps' nest.

PUCK

Mend the broken-winged oriole.

CRANE

All of it so -- exotic! It was -- to me.

MOM

It was wonderful to see him become so -- ordinary. We were all becoming so deliciously ordinary.

PUCK

But still, at heart -- that airy thinness beat --

Beat as MOM and PUCK let the stars descend. PUCK takes MOM's stars and puts them both back. He takes out a large pile of dominos and puts them on the table.

CRANE

What?

DAD

Which, to be honest --

PUCK

No pain --

DAD

Well, to be honest --

PUCK

No gain.

DAD

Kind of got on my nerves.

MOM

Me, too -- a little, honey, ooh, I don't mean to be hurtful --

The three retire to the table and start slamming dominos down as they talk. PUCK occasionally slams one down as well as he speaks.

PUCK

Honesty debuts after kindness and grace wear thin.

Dominos slam: one, two, three.

PUCK

Even the deliciously ordinary --  
(to MOM)  
-- yes? -- after a while, gets --

MOM

Ordinary --

PUCK

A cage --

MOM  
(hurriedly)

-- but it's been wonderful having you here.

DAD

Will you be getting a job?

CRANE

That's not what --

MOM

Not that we mind --

DAD

Well?

CRANE

I'm still sorting things out.

DAD

Things --

MOM

Now --

DAD  
(to MOM)

What's to sort out?

MOM

He's in -- crisis. Can't you see --

(to CRANE)

Isn't that right?

DAD  
(to CRANE)

Are you in a crisis?

PUCK  
(slams one down)  
Things were getting testy and tested.

DAD  
Answer me.

MOM  
Don't push --

DAD  
I never pushed enough --

Three quick slams. Then PUCK, after a hesitation.

PUCK  
The box of disappointments had now been opened.  
Pandora cringes and weeps.

To the staccato of many slamming dominos, the three voices speak at the same time and drown each other out, but all end on the word "despair."

MOM  
You pushed too much too hard on him wanted him to be old  
before his time solid like a stone stones have no feelings he  
always had feelings he couldn't tell us about a shame I know  
a poet was in there still in there if he needs to understand  
why he feels so empty and unsure I know how he feels in  
my soul cracking against stone I love you but sometimes in  
raw darkness I ache where you cannot sail and feel despair

DAD  
I didn't push enough always this alien to me son hardly  
couldn't get him to always these ideas in his brain ideas  
locked himself away with his ideas rebel had to rebel fine  
for a while young man has to but in the end hated his ideas

felt insulted now in crisis I'll tell you what crisis is working till  
your fingers are crushed to make a home certain and safe  
have it rejected thinks he can make things right now with  
his despair

CRANE

All beside the point not what I wanted not about deficits  
but I have this question about what is worth none of your  
answers answer anything I have no answers and I am trying  
to live like a dry river waiting like an empty glass waiting  
because no waters come down nothing nothing nothing  
nothing make the nothing sing and I hear no singing I love  
you who gave me life curse you for delivering me to despair

Final word, final dominos. MOM, DAD, and CRANE walk downstage center.  
PUCK again hangs out the stars.

MOM

Will we see you again?

CRANE

(to audience)

Home must always be left.

DAD

Son --

CRANE

You will see me again.

MOM

We will see you again.

CRANE

But they were already gone from my mind.

MOM and DAD drift away, take away table and the dominos and the cart.  
PUCK lowers the stars, and CRANE goes to reach for one. PUCK pulls  
them away.

PUCK

Nah-uh. Not for you, oh dry river, oh empty glass. You are  
going to have to go loooong.



Bops him on the head with the pole. MOM comes on with a bag, which she hands to PUCK, then takes the pole and exits.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Scene 4**

Light change -- weird landscape. As PUCK talks, he takes material out of the bag that, when donned, makes him look like a cartoon Buddha: big ears, belly, saffron robe, etc.

CRANE

What?

PUCK

How now, my long dark night --

CRANE

I'm fine.

PUCK

-- of the soul?

CRANE

I'm fine!

PUCK

You got no religion, you got no home, you got no rice and beans -- well, you could always twirl your own two balls in your hand -- creature pleasures.

PUCK pulls one stone from CRANE's nose, the other from his rear-end -- hands him both. With resignation, CRANE plays with the stones.

PUCK

That, right there -- that's all you got. Two -- reduced to two facts. Here and now -- entrance and exit -- food in, shit out. All fancified dream flights, angel-winged thought-rockets, sublime imaginings, the cosmic cosmetics of our brains --

PUCK lets out a razzberry, then another.

PUCK

Divinity --

Another razzberry.

PUCK

Soul.

Another, then another, and then PUCK really gets into it, pumping the sound beyond any humor or sarcasm. In-between razzberries, he punctuates with a laugh words like "cosmic," "divine," "angelic." Then PUCK stops just as quickly and continues dressing.

CRANE  
(mumbling)

Stupid.

PUCK

Say what, bro?

CRANE  
(louder)

I am feeling stupid.

PUCK

Are sta-yoo-pid.

CRANE

Am stupid.

PUCK

Good to know what you am.

CRANE does not respond to the insult.

PUCK

I said -- Sometimes stupid is as good as it gets -- it takes a lot of work to get to the right kind of stupid. Sometimes stupid is a salvation, a good place to get started for a start. Cleansed palate, cleaned clock

PUCK is now completely garbed as Buddha. He gestures, and from offstage rolls in a child's-sized bicycle, with training wheels.

PUCK

Ah, ready. Emptiness. No mind.

(points to the bike)

What is the sound of one snickerdoodle doodling?

PUCK starts to bump CRANE hard with his belly. His accent changes: mock Buddha-Indian-subcontinent as he recites the lyrics to "Born to be Wild" by Steppenwolf. CRANE protests the pushing but doesn't put up much resistance.

PUCK

Get your motor running. Head out on the highway. Lookin' for adventure. And whatever comes our way. Yeah darlin' go make it happen. Take the world in a love embrace. Fire all of your guns at once and. Explode into space.

By this time PUCK has backed CRANE up against the bike.

PUCK

Road trip, Quest Boy. You have three months left and the clock is tick-tick-ticking -- three months left and then the big flush. On.

CRANE hesitates, clearly frightened, and there is a moment where he looks absolutely terrified.

CRANE

I can't -- I can't get past -- I thought home would -- protect me -- ahh! -- born between piss and shit -- aren't we? -- gah! -- between excrements -- and it never stops -- can't get past -- it's all worms no rhyme no plan making it up go along exit name then gone as gone as blood dripping from a spike feel alive? alive? what a cheat like thorns alive drinking vinegar alive grace in plural acids alive alive cheat -- cheat -- cheated --

PUCK/BUDDHA bumps him again, but gently, and speaks just as gently.

PUCK

So what? So what, Quest Boy? A common knowledge. Go.

CRANE gets on the bike. A backpack comes flying onto the stage -- a child's backpack. PUCK hooks it on to CRANE's back. Other items come flying on -- a helmet, elbow pads, etc. They should all be child-like in appearance. PUCK gives CRANE a push.

PUCK

See how easily you are pushed around by the forces of fate?

CRANE sits, immobile. PUCK, grinning, pushes him again.

PUCK

See how easily you are pushed around by the forces of fate?

CRANE again sits immobile. PUCK takes one leg, then the other, to show him how to pump.

PUCK

One leg says, Yes. The other says, I will. Little engine that could-thing. What other choice do you have, unfeathered Crane, now that the grinning worm has married the sweet but perishable apple?

Finally, CRANE starts riding on his own, haltingly but steadily. PUCK intones, as if they were holy words, the refrain to "Born to be Wild."

PUCK

Like a true nature's child. We were born, born to be wild.  
We can climb so high. I never wanna die. Born to be wild --

Pronounce "wild" as it is sung in the song, with the extra beats in the middle of the word.

Lights change, and CRANE begins his journey, biking around the stage. MOM and DAD, also dressed like cartoon Buddhas, enter. They each bring in a large blow-up pool cushion shaped in the shape of a catcher's mitt (or any other figure, depending on what's available) to sit on in a meditative way. One of them also brings this on for PUCK.

Each BUDDHA also has a large manila envelope, inside of which is an oversized copy of the headshot of the actor playing CRANE, and a metal bowl (brass would be nice).

The three Buddhas place themselves upstage, sitting, the bowl in front of them. Music plays -- it would be excellent if something like a Muzak version of "Born to be Wild" could be playing. William Shatner's "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" would work fine as well.

CRANE peddles until he reaches downstage center at some point, then stops, facing the audience. Music stops.

CRANE takes several seconds to look into the audience, making eye contact, saying nothing, perched on his little bike, looking ridiculous, resting. Throughout CRANE's words, the three BUDDHAS will take the headshot out of the envelope and slowly rip it into increasingly smaller bits. They will do this in perfect synchronization, holding the picture overhead, ripping it in half, putting half of it down then ripping the remaining half in half, and half again, and so on until the bits are very small, which are then placed into the bowl. Then the same thing with the second half of the picture.

#### CRANE

I had become a little crazy, a little -- unloosened. The WD-40 of life had unrusted my hinges. Some of you -- maybe all of you -- know what that's like.

(a rusty hinge)

Erh-ooh, erh-ooh. Brushing one's teeth seems pointless without a future to chew on. Flossing, too. If you erase the word "tomorrow" from Macbeth, why order Chinese take-out and put the left-overs in the fridge for breakfast? The present tense -- it's not called "tense" for nothing! -- the present tense is very, very, very cruel. As are the most excellent teachers. So I started biking cross-country. I had always wanted to. With three months left -- as far as I knew -- and who knew? who knew? -- why not? I took a notebook along that kept a journal of me.

CRANE takes a notebook out of his backpack -- something like the Powerpuff Girls or something similar. Shows it, puts it back.

#### CRANE

I met amazing people, I did, people charmfull and grace-filled and just plain fucking nice. I also met dunderheads

and gruesome narcissists and violent pieces of shrapnel with tongues full of sewers and bitterness. I met a woman who let me bury my nose in a bristling white sheet on her clothesline because I had never smelled sun and wind uncoiling with such incense. I met a man who with others guarded turtles spawning on slaughter-birded beaches. I met a child with one eye, who wore a patch painted with a four-leaf clover in malachite, on a field of cinnabar. I met a grime-soaked beggar who offered me a hard-boiled egg watermarked by his fingerprinted grease -- I ate it. I met a 97-year old woman who drank whiskey before swimming to protect her from germs -- we downed a couple of stiff bolts and swam like renovated dolphins. I met a living Communist. I met cancer calling itself Alice or John as it ate through hope and bone. I met a divinity student wrestling with doubt, I met a doubter at rest with his questions. I met geezers full of prostate worries, running-suited blue-hairs fuming with rose water. I met a young girl, fifteen, pregnant, her life rounded and cracked like a broken earthenware jug. I met a young boy, eyes deadbolted, survivor of his African civil war. I met a guru who believed that the weight of starlight, not gravity, kept us pinned to the earth's lapel. I met officers of the court who made me afraid that justice had expired. I met people named Zonnie Butts and Narka Flocker and Ramzanali Bacchus and Essence Crockett and Gumercinda Narvaez and Darren Zipperer and Heeling Wong and Cohava Dodo and India Mingo and Albania Supple and Reenamaravilla Lavezzari. And through it all --

CRANE reaches into his backpack and pulls out a thermos -- again, kid-like. Unscrews the cup and pours himself a shot, raises it like a chalice.

CRANE

Coffee.

(sips)

Coffee.

(sips)

Coffee.

(sips)

Over coffee, over the dark roasted elixir, over the aliphatics and carbonyls and alicyclics and ketones and aromatic benzenoids -- over the brew, the joe, the java, the mud, the

large drip, the brown gargle, the cuppa, the Americano, the black water, the rio -- over all I told them all my story.

By this time the BUDDHAS have finished their tearing of the picture and are sitting quietly. CRANE gets off the bike, if he is sitting on it, puts away the thermos, and as he speaks picks up one bowl and empties the torn bits of one of the other bowls into it, then picks up the second bowl.

As he walks back downstage, holding the bowls, the BUDDHAS stand and, in a holy and dignified but not necessarily serious way begin a slow choreographed Motown routine to accompany CRANE's words.

CRANE begins orbiting the bowls around each other.

CRANE

I would ask to camp out in their backyards if they had one.  
Or I'd bunk in a park, under a bridge -- wherever they lived.  
Coffee, talk -- and story.

CRANE puts the two bowls together so that they empty into each other, then nests the full bowl into the empty bowl. CRANE then simply holds the bowl.

CRANE

As I spoke, I realized -- I realized how much I had lost of my fear of the fear of life, how much I had lost of that face that had cringed and crowed on a stone floor in Jerusalem, how much I had lost the taste for anything I had been told was so, so, so important -- money, success, happiness, a youthful boner in old age, a head of full hair -- I would joke to them, "According to the charts, I am a real loser -- and proud of it, by Jesus!" And they would laugh. And there would be a moment --

CRANE takes a lighter out of his pocket -- an unusual lighter -- puts the bowl down, and sets the paper in the bowl on fire.

CRANE

There would be a moment -- a moment -- when the time  
and space around us would stop --  
(sound of brakes)  
eeerrrrh! -- hang, inhale, hold --

(takes an inbreath, then lets it out)

-- and my story would lift the dread and fright and exhaustion from their frames, and their faces would rise and loom illuminated, like a billowing bedsheet sun-drying and winded. And then, almost always they would say -- in the face of the evidence -- in the face of the evidential "me" -- the evidence that they had a chance for a hurtful and humbling but exhilarating freedom -- they would say something like --

(in an accent)

-- "I am so amazed. But I couldn't. I can't. There's just too much -- " And then the list would follow. But for a moment, their terror, their fright at their own heartbeat, went away --

CRANE holds up the bowl and, standing where he is, joins in the last dancing movements of the BUDDHAS. The BUDDHAS stop dancing and take a bow. Change of light: colder weather. One BUDDHA gets CRANE's bowls, and then the three BUDDHAS exit with all props. CRANE gets back on his bike.

CRANE

I was enjoying my disappearing act -- but it was getting cold, and time was getting close, so it was on to home I headed.

At full throttle, "Born to be Wild" comes up as CRANE, head down as if he's racing, rides his bike in circles.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Scene 1

In the transition, MOM and DAD appear as MOM and DAD, wearing half-masks of a colorful design and carrying bowls of Halloween candy. Lights up, music fades out. A doorbell sounds periodically, and MOM and DAD, each with a bowl of candy, go into the audience and hand it out as if the audience were trick-or-treaters. Their lines are suggested -- they can improv responses to the audience if needed. CRANE comes to a rest, gets off his bike as if he's getting off a horse, undresses.

CRANE

Halloween.



MOM

Happy Halloween.

CRANE

I had arrived home --

DAD

Hey, there!

CRANE

-- on Halloween -- All Hallows Eve --

MOM

Not too much!

CRANE

-- Nutcrack Night --

DAD

Great face!

CRANE

-- the next day All Souls Day.

MOM

You going to eat all that?

CRANE

How's that for allegory?

DAD

A ghost?

CRANE

The ubiquitous "they" say that anyone born on Halloween has the gift of second sight.

MOM AND DAD

No tricks here -- all treats!

CRANE

'Twas not I. The last night of the sixth month. My last night of present tense.

CRANE puts his traveling gear to one side, grabs a bowl and a mask, and joins MOM and DAD, ad libbing as needed. PUCK comes on, trick-or-treat bag in hand, mimes ringing the doorbell, with a mask on: he is eight years old. MOM and DAD stay in the audience and watch.

PUCK

Trick or treat!

Taking off his own mask and emptying the bowl into his bag.

CRANE

You're lucky -- my last customer for the night.

PUCK

Oh, great! Thanks.

CRANE

What's the mask?

PUCK takes it off.

PUCK

My mom and dad made it -- mom doesn't like the ones in the stores. They're over there. Little sister -- she can't go by herself. I can.

CRANE

May I?

PUCK

Sure.

PUCK hands CRANE the mask.

CRANE

This is great.

PUCK

Yeah. You wanna keep it?

CRANE

I can't -- your parents wouldn't like that.

PUCK

Oh, they wouldn't mind. I'm done, anyways. My sister got scared -- so we gotta take her home. What's a navel?

CRANE

A navel?

PUCK

Yeah.

CRANE

It's, uh, your bellybutton.

PUCK

Nah-uh. It's an orange.

(disbelieving)

A bellybutton!

CRANE

It's true. Some people look at them a lot.

PUCK

(looking down at his own)

That's stupid.

CRANE

A lot of people do it.

PUCK

Still stupid.

CRANE

What rhymes with orange?

PUCK

Doorhinge! Knew that one! What's a vena cava?

CRANE

I don't know that one.

PUCK

(in triumph)

"Either of the two large veins in air-breathing vertebrates that enter into and return blood to the right atrium of the heart." My friend and me are looking at this plastic model of the heart they got in school, you can take it apart and stuff, at recess we take it outside because the teacher lets us --

DAD

(from the audience)

Hey sport!

PUCK

(yelling)

Just a minute!

(to CRANE)

And his father's a doctor and he teaches me how the blood goes into the --

MOM

(from the audience)

Honey, we have to go!

PUCK

(yelling)

Okay, okay!

(to CRANE, in a rush)

The blood gets mixed up with air and the good blood comes in and the bad blood goes out and the heart goes ka-choom a hundred million times a day and at night too and that's how we stay alive doorhinge orange bellybutton bye!

PUCK takes the mask and races off-stage; MOM and DAD enter.

MOM

Quite a talker, that one.

CRANE

He was telling me all about the good and the bad blood and a doorhinge on your bellybutton.

DAD

Now, that is some philosophy.

MOM

It's nice to have you back. Safe. And sound.

DAD

Your mother was worried with you out on the road.

MOM

So was he!

CRANE

I have a lot of adventures to tell you about.

DAD

Tomorrow, then -- I've got to hit the hay.

CRANE

Sleep well.

MOM

You, too.

MOM and DAD exit, DAD talking off the bike and other items. CRANE walks downstage center; PUCK enters and comes up behind him.

CRANE

A most ordinary day in the most ordinary way.

Lights to night and sleeptime.

CRANE

I went to sleep "as if" --

PUCK

"As if" --

As CRANE lies down, PUCK kneels, and CRANE rests his head against PUCK's knees, as if they were a pillow. PUCK sings to CRANE a verse of a lullaby, in Spanish, gently and sweetly -- but also with humor where possible.

PUCK

Arroró mi niño  
Arroró mi sol  
Arroró pedazo

De mi corazon  
Arre caballito  
Vamos a Belén  
Que en Belén acaba  
Jesús de nacer

Then there is a pause, and the lights slowly shift from night to the dawn of day. Very slowly PUCK disengages himself, cradling CRANE's head, then unceremoniously lets it fall to the floor with a clunk. PUCK hovers over CRANE, as at the start of the play. CRANE begins to awaken.

PUCK

I suppose I should say, "Don't worry." So -- don't. Worry. Really. Yes, yes -- foggy brain, shake it all about -- go ahead, rub your eyes, first right, then left -- well, left, then right, if you want -- just the way you're supposed to. Dig wax out of ear, pick nose, eat it -- why not, it's natural?

CRANE

Wha -- Huh --

PUCK

Inarticulate sounds -- yes, good. Fog lifting, dim light glowing. Are you scared? A most ordinary day in the most ordinary way.

CRANE

The first day of the seventh month.

PUCK

And just look at'cha!

CRANE

What should I do?

PUCK

Should do. Shouldn't do.

CRANE

Blessing.

PUCK

Doo-dah.

CRANE

Curse.

PUCK

Doo-doo.

CRANE

Deep.

PUCK

Doo-dah and Doo-doo. Doo-doo and Don't-do -- so many possibilities!

PUCK shrugs his shoulders. They face each other for a moment, then they do a complicated hand-shake routine of their own device. Then PUCK reaches into his pocket and brings out the two stones, which he hands to CRANE. PUCK nods and simply exits. CRANE does the routine again, alone, then stands and faces the audience squarely. Lights begin to fade. Halfway down, CRANE raises his hands; the fade stops, and the lights come back up. He holds the two stones in his palm, and then makes them disappear.

As he does this, PUCK, MOM, and DAD come onto the stage and position themselves in separate places. They are going to mime doors that CRANE will open to exit the stage. CRANE hesitatingly makes his way off-stage in full light, a dance of sorts. The movements should show both blessing and curse, reluctance and expectation. He comes to PUCK as the first door, opens, goes through, closes. And he does the same with MOM and DAD.

When CRANE has left the stage, PUCK, MOM, and DAD begin dancing as the last refrain of "Born to be Wild" starts low and comes up to full. They don't need to dance separately but can partner, bump against each other, etc. At an agreed-upon moment, the music stops and the three ACTORS stop in whatever position they find themselves and look directly at the audience. Music comes up again for several more seconds, then stops. They dance during it and then stop as well. Look at the audience. A couple of beats of the music; dance, stop, look. Then, without the music, they continue dancing, with increasing frenzy and abandon, as lights fade quickly to black.

## 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 looks to collaborate 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](http://www.m-bettencourt.com)

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