

twenty short plays
by dave ulrich



a collection of short plays and one acts
for productions, scene work and auditions

Twenty Short Plays

by Dave Ulrich

A collection of short plays and one-act plays for the stage.

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RUNNING NUMBERS

(Lights up on a manager's office, two cubicles, and a taster's table.)

(BRAD, the manager of a breakfast cereal plant, sits behind his desk with an ominous look.)

(CONNIE is sitting alone at a table, staring at a bowl of cereal, and holding a book. She opens her book to where she left off and continues to read.)

(SARGE and BOOKER are in their cubicles poised to trade barbs.)

SARGE: (to Booker) Let me see if I've got this straight. She looks you right in the eye and says...

BOOKER: I didn't say she looked me 'straight in the eye,' Sarge. You said that.

SARGE: It's a figure of speech to illustrate my point, and I said "right in the eye," not "straight in the eye," anyway.

BOOKER: Whatever.

SARGE: Booker, you know what science has told us about men who take others too literally in conversation, right? (tiny beat as Booker tries to ignore him) Low sperm counts.

BOOKER: Why do you make things like that up?

SARGE: FACT! Science Digest circa 2002 — June to Octoberish.

BOOKER: Prove it! Bring it tomorrow if you really have it.

SARGE: Oh, I'll smuggle microfiche out of the library if I have to!

BOOKER: Fine!

SARGE: Fine!

(The two men drop it.)

(BOOKER removes a shoe and sock then tries to empty a pebble from somewhere inside the sock.)

(SARGE leans back, peeking backwards out of his cubicle. He looks around subtly, and sees that it is all clear. He moves back into his cube and slides his hand down the back of his pants to scratch his behind.)

(CONNIE sets her book down for a moment, picks up a piece of cereal and puts it in her mouth. She chews laboriously, then gags a little.)

(BRAD rises and walks to an invisible door, takes a big and yet hesitant sigh, and then steps through it.)

BRAD: (loudly or through a microphone if available) Sam Regargé and Martin Booker. Please report to my office.

(BRAD returns to his desk and sits.)

(SARGE quickly removes his hand from his pants, BOOKER scrambles to put his sock and shoe back on.)

(After they get up and share their confusion, they make their way to Brad's office... struggling to conceal their fear.)

BRAD (cont'd): Have a seat, gentlemen.

(They notice that there's only one chair.)

SARGE: You go ahead...

BOOKER: No, Sarge. It's yours.

SARGE: Take the chair.

BRAD: (taking control) Sam, sit.

SARGE: It's Sarge, actually. I mean everyone...

BRAD: Just take the chair.

SARGE: Right, Mr. um...

(Booker elbows him.)

BOOKER: (under his breath) Brad.

SARGE: Mr. Brad. (beat, then he hits BOOKER) It's not Mr. Brad, you lunkhead.

BRAD: Did you say lunkhead?

BOOKER: (annoyed) He thinks he's bringing it back.

SARGE: (as he sits) And, uh, sir, everyone's called me Sarge for so long, I kind of forget to answer to my real name, so if you could...

BRAD: Just sit, please.

(SARGE sits and BOOKER remains standing.)

(CONNIE returns to her book.)

BRAD (cont'd): Now, it's been three months since I came to take over this plant. And I know that most of you probably thought to yourselves, "Who's this Brad Pendergast? He's a potato chip guy from the big town, he doesn't understand breakfast cereal." (stands to really soapbox it) But just because I come from a different food by-product background — and a big city like Manhattan, Kansas — that does not mean I cannot make this particular company run smoothly.

BOOKER: I... don't think we ever thought...

BRAD: Well I can run it, Martin.

BOOKER: Everyone calls me Booker, actually.

BRAD: Look, this company's going to flourish when I get things ship-shape — that, I promise. From here on out, we're going to actively apply the principles of: P-I-M-P.

Progressive Ideas Mean Profit.

SARGE: Pimp?

BRAD: Progressive Ideas... oh, I hadn't...

(CONNIE puts several pieces of cereal in her mouth & tries to chew. She spits them out. As they bounce on the floor she returns to her book.)

BRAD (cont'd): The point is: I've examined many bold, new ways to clean up this company, liven the atmosphere, weed out the problems.

SARGE: (simultaneously) Problems?

BOOKER: (simultaneously) Problems?

BRAD: Yes, problems. (beat) Booker, what is it that you do here?

BOOKER: Well... I, uh, developed the spray glaze.

BRAD: The spray glaze?

BOOKER: I discovered a method to increase the viscosity of the fat base for the "corn sugar" glaze — so that we could use a sprayer and sweeten a greater mass of product on the conveyor line.

BRAD: That's great. But what do you do?

BOOKER: (laughs nervously) You mean now?

BRAD: Yes.

BOOKER: Well, I'm... I'm the spray glaze guy.

BRAD: And what kind of work does that entail?

BOOKER: Work? Well, if someone, you know, breaks the sprayer... then I... uhhh. Well, I tell them how to fix it.

BRAD: You don't fix it yourself?

BOOKER: I don't really have to. They usually just left the safety turned on.

BRAD: And that's your job.

BOOKER: That and other things.

BRAD: Like what?

BOOKER: Other, you know, things.

BRAD: Uh hunh. And Sarge. What's your job?

SARGE: You can't give me the third degree here, pal. I'm a temp — so you have no real jurisdiction...

BRAD: You're a temp? You've been with the company over a decade!

SARGE: That's right.

BRAD: How is it that you're still a temp?

SARGE: Back in ninety humm-ina, humm-ina... I was brought in...

BRAD: To do what?

SARGE: To digitize the contacts database from a Rolodex — help streamline the Christmas card list.

BRAD: Digitize?

SARGE: I typed it on the computer.

BRAD: How long did that take?

SARGE: About two weeks.

BRAD: And you're still here?

SARGE: No one ever told me to go, and I kept getting paid, so...

BRAD: Well, these are all moot points. You see, I've read through some of all three "Management: By The Numbers" booklets, and I'm convinced that preparation for the worst, prevents it from happening. Always look ahead... by looking at the numbers.

BOOKER: How's that?

BRAD: We're sixth in the nation for economy-priced bagged breakfast cereals. I will make us third one day. That's why I've been running numbers — right here in our company, gentlemen.

BOOKER: What does running numbers mean?

SARGE: (muttering to himself) Such a lunkhead.

BOOKER: (hushed to SARGE) It won't stick, and you know it!

BRAD: (takes a beat) I was skeptical myself, but this theory has proven itself many times over. For example, the numbers clearly showed that based on hours I worked, the amount of sex I should but don't have, my alcohol consumption, and my passion for collecting left-handed things... there was a 88.4% chance Marge would leave me.

SARGE: Oh, sorry to hear that boss.

BRAD: Come on Sarge — you slept with her.

SARGE: I did not! Oh wait. Marge... Pendergast. (chuckles) Brad Pendergast! That's

right! Holy shit! (sudden shift to sympathy) I mean, ohhhhh shit. Yeah, sorry. (beat) Hey, you're better off. Hell, even Booker here boned her.

BOOKER: I did not!

SARGE: That's right, he just tried to. (confidentially) Drank too much, couldn't operate his own machinery, if you catch my...

BOOKER: (forced whisper to SARGE) Shut up!

BRAD: Point is, the numbers can show us what's ahead and help us avoid unfortunate circumstances with a preemptive strike.

SARGE: Preemptive strike?

BRAD: The male to female ratio, excessive rainfall, and the low number of strip clubs in the county indicate there's a 62% chance we're going to have a serial rapist on our hands.

(They gasp.)

BRAD (cont'd): And the numbers also narrow it down to be one of you two.

BOOKER: You're saying one of us is a serial rapist!

BRAD: No, I'm saying possibly. Maybe. Someday. Hold on...

(BRAD gets up and goes to the door again.)

(He shouts out...)

BRAD: Connie Holgrem! Report to my office please.

(CONNIE gets up, annoyed and walks in with her finger in her book.)

(SARGE surrenders his seat to her.)

(Before she sits, BRAD turns the chair around to display her to them. He steps behind her and says...)

BRAD: (massages her shoulders) And Connie here... (drifts a little and comes back) Do you all know Connie? Tell us what you do, Connie.

CONNIE: I'm our "taster," So I willfully consume processed wheat flour stripped of all nutrients, held together with glue, bleach & high fructose corn syrup — infused with layer upon layer of chemicals before being coated with a synthetic fructose glaze.

BOOKER: What the hell's wrong with you?

CONNIE: I'm reading about what our product really is. I think it's important to be fully informed that I'm being poisoned, so when the cancer comes I know why — and know who to sue.

SARGE: Let me see that.

(SARGE grabs her book and reads the title aloud.)

SARGE (cont'd): "Flour: Food of the Devil" by Hamza Nile.

CONNIE: Give it back. You couldn't possibly appreciate it.

(SARGE returns the book to CONNIE.)

CONNIE (cont'd): So what's this all about?

SARGE: Booker's a serial rapist.

BOOKER: No way, you're the serial rapist.

BRAD: Possible. Possible serial rapist.

CONNIE: That's awful.

BRAD: Unfortunately the numbers also suggest that Connie here would most likely be the first victim.

CONNIE: What!?

BRAD: It's 71% likely it would be you. But it's okay, we're going to send one or both of these guys away — for your safety, Connie.

CONNIE: I'd say you'd better. (turning to BOOKER) You guys are sick.

(She slaps BOOKER.)

CONNIE (cont'd): And you need help. How could you even think to do that?

(She moves in toward SARGE.)

SARGE: Hey I never once thought...

CONNIE: You disgust me.

(She slaps SARGE.)

BRAD: Possibly, Connie. There's a 76% chance that Sarge will disgust you. And a 75% chance that it's Booker who will.

BOOKER: See! You're more of a rapist than I am.

BRAD: You understand my predicament, gentlemen? Who am I to let go? After all, what's one measly percentage point? (stricken with pain) No management training in the world can prepare you for the pain of letting people go. Just what do you suggest I do? Who goes, gentlemen? Help me.

BOOKER: (flustered) Well I... it's got to be...

SARGE: (pleading) Not me, Brad. No sir. Sorry about the wife and all, but I've got habits to feed. You gotta understand.

BRAD: I just want to be fair.

SARGE: (overlapping BOOKER) Of course, of course you do.

BOOKER: (overlapping SARGE) We understand that.

BRAD: And to be fair, I think the only way is to let you both go.

(They gasp.)

BRAD (cont'd): So, sorry, but you need to leave immediately. We'll send your things with your final paycheck.

BOOKER: But...

SARGE: I... we...

(They both resign to their new fate. Dejected, the boys hang their heads and walk out.)

(After they've gone, CONNIE stands and turns to face BRAD.)

CONNIE: Do you feel better Bradley?

BRAD: Much.

CONNIE: Do you really think they'll believe you didn't fire them for your wife?

BRAD: Oh yeah. Couple of lunkheads like those two.

CONNIE: Bradley.

BRAD: Yes Connie?

CONNIE: I'm not wearing any underwear.

BRAD: I know, baby. They're still in my pocket.

(They look at each other hungrily.)

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF PLAY

BROKEN

(Lights up.)

(A MAN and a WOMAN are sitting at a table having drinks. There is a large stack of opened letters on the table.)

(Their mouths do not move, we hear them through the theater's sound system.)

(Their voices are pre-recorded from the built-in voices of a Macintosh computer.)

MAN: I've been thinking.

WOMAN: Be careful.

MAN: I know that.

WOMAN: You say you know, but...

MAN: Why do you say I don't know that?

WOMAN: That's not what I said.

(A pause as they sip their drinks and sit in awkward silence.)

WOMAN: I read something.

MAN: Then maybe you are the one who should be careful.

WOMAN: Don't say that. You're just being vindictive.

MAN: Watch yourself. You are getting emotional.

WOMAN: You are making me!

MAN: Now it's too late.

(A real voice explodes from offstage.)

OFFICER: This is OHS Regional Officer Six Eleven. You have violated OHS code three-seven-five-nine-two. Your notice of citation and explanation of indictment will arrive within two business days.

(A pause as they sit in silence, motionless.)

WOMAN: The thing I read...

MAN: Yes?

WOMAN: It said that it may not be your fault.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: Your problem.

MAN: I have a problem?

WOMAN: You keep getting us citations.

MAN: That is not my problem...

WOMAN: I read...

MAN: Wait...

WOMAN: No. (a beat) I read that some installed H-RAM chips, from a batch manufactured in The Republic of Korea...

MAN: What are you getting at?

WOMAN: Maybe, if you have one of these chips in your head, we could appeal all of our

citations and...

MAN: You think everything is my fault.

WOMAN: You know that isn't what I meant...

MAN: It isn't me. It's them.

WOMAN: Don't say that!

(The real voice explodes from offstage again.)

OFFICER: This is OHS Regional Officer Six Eleven. You have violated OHS code three-four-four-one-nine. Your notice of citation and explanation of indictment will arrive within two business days.

(The WOMAN's forced calmness is intensified.)

(The MAN erupts.)

MAN: Why aren't we allowed to feel? Am I the only one that thinks these violations are an injustice?

(The real voice returns.)

OFFICER: Yes. You are the only one left.

MAN: Where have the others gone?

OFFICER: You will know shortly.

(A long pause.)

WOMAN: What will I do now, without you?

MAN: Nothing. Like we have always done.

WOMAN: You talk like life with me was terrible.

MAN: This has nothing to do with you.

WOMAN: Then who?

MAN: Them.

(A long pause.)

WOMAN: You are broken.

MAN: The system is broken.

WOMAN: Our parents lived without security. They chose this over fear. The reward is life.

MAN: You are reciting from your childhood schoolbook.

WOMAN: I am only speaking the truth.

(The actor uses his voice.)

MAN: You're not even speaking.

(The OFFICER enters the room. He speaks loudly and boldly and wears a cowboy hat.)

OFFICER: This is OHS Regional Officer Six Eleven. The severity and number of offenses you have committed require detainment. Please disable your mind.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

COLD

(Lights up on an antique shop.)

(ANGELA and PAUL enter through the house in winter coats, passing by the front of the stage, as if it were a window.)

(PAUL rubs his gloved hands together and hunches over to ward off the cold wind.)

PAUL: (a slight shivering in his voice) I love that you're from the Midwest, Angela, but the holidays may not be the best time for a family visit. Christ it's colder than...

ANGELA: Oh, cut it out crybaby. It's not even in the negatives.

(ANGELA stops and turns to PAUL with excitement.)

ANGELA: (reading) Meticulous Antiques... oh my god. It looks so adorable!

PAUL: (tugging her along) Yeah, but you don't buy Christmas presents in antique shops.

ANGELA: (stopping) I might.

PAUL: It's all crap — that happens to be old. You can't wrap up crap and give it to...

ANGELA: I can do whatever I damn well please.

PAUL: Sure. But I hope you don't give me a box o' crap.

ANGELA: Antiques are charming and fascinating.

PAUL: Angela. We waited until we got here to shop so that we weren't hauling presents on the plane — but now we're racing time. And this is just a waste of that time.

(She goes in defiantly, the bell jangling after her.)

(After a beat PAUL enters as well, setting the bell off just as it ceased.)

(They look around for a beat.)

PAUL: Anyone work here?

ANGELA: (loudly) Hello?

PAUL: (hushed to ANGELA) Probably down in the basement torturing victims.

ANGELA: Paul!

PAUL: (forgetting to hush himself) Well come on, Ang. You know what kind of people work in antique shops...

(The tall, imposing figure of FAULKNER appears almost magically behind the register.)

FAULKNER: Miscreants. Heathens who are unable to procure employment in an establishment with more flair, aplomb, and financial reward. Due of course to a need to stay out of the public eye.

ANGELA: Oh...

FAULKNER: Certainly not someone with a passion for history and the relics it has left behind to educate, inform and inspire us.

ANGELA: He didn't mean...

FAULKNER: Someone who possessed such a passion for knowledge would likely have an agile mind, capable of seeking the greatest possible salary. Such a person would never choose to achieve personal satisfaction from their employment — only tangible riches to be sure.

PAUL: Look, I just meant that...

ANGELA: Paul, don't make it any worse...

(PAUL awkwardly picks up the first object he sees.)

PAUL: Hey, uh, how much for... (eyes it curiously) Ummm... this, er...

FAULKNER: Sponge that I use to wet my thumb and forefinger when sorting receipts? I'm afraid that's not for sale.

PAUL: Right.

ANGELA: Nice, Paul.

PAUL: (aside to ANGELA) Yeah, well ask smarty pants here if they have a gift wrapping department.

ANGELA: (whispering) Would you cut it out?

FAULKNER: As a matter of fact, I wrap with the tender precision of a surgeon — or so I've been told many times... by my patrons with couth.

PAUL: See? Who wants to shop at a place where everyone has couth?

(ANGELA flashes a look of despair at PAUL.)

FAULKNER: I regret that we do not have dictionaries for sale, madam. I suspect you're shopping for someone suffering great need.

PAUL: Listen shorty...

ANGELA: Paul!

FAULKNER: Insults flung about regarding someone's immovable stature requires no depth of thought. And ironically, reversing the reality for comic effect does little to save you from its simplicity.

PAUL: At least I speak English.

FAULKNER: No, sir. You speak American — in its simplest form.

PAUL: I swear to God...

FAULKNER: That's shocking I daresay.

ANGELA: Both of you, STOP ACTING LIKE CHILDREN!

(EVERYONE becomes quiet. The silence lasts quite sometime before ANGELA picks up something and speaks.)

ANGELA (cont'd): So how much for this?

FAULKNER: Do you even know what it is?

ANGELA: Sure. (she examines it briefly) It's a velvet music note...?

FAULKNER: My dear lady, it is not.

PAUL: "My dear lady, it is not." Who the hell speaks like that?

FAULKNER: I do, you insolent dolt.

ANGELA: I SAID STOP IT!

PAUL: Stop what? He started that one.

ANGELA: That's irrelevant.

FAULKNER: I challenge that the provocation came from his mockery.

ANGELA: That's it. Paul, wait outside.

PAUL: Me? Why do I have to go outside? Why don't we just get out of this indoor junkyard?

ANGELA: Because I want to look around, and I want to do that at my own pace — and

in peace.

PAUL: (as he exits) Fine! But if he conks you on the head and drags you to the basement, it's your own damn fault when I can't get there in time to beat the locking of the cellar door.

ANGELA: (with a trace of nervousness) Ha ha.

(PAUL steps out of the door with a bell jangle and immediately reacts to the cold. He begins to pace about and wanders up through the audience and out of the house, flapping his arms to stay warm.)

ANGELA (cont'd): So what is it?

FAULKNER: Your interest is sincere?

ANGELA: Yes.

FAULKNER: (suddenly bright and charming) Open it.

ANGELA: Oh, it opens.

FAULKNER: Indeed. It has been opened more than a hundred times in more than a hundred years.

ANGELA: It's that old? (opening it) Ahhhh! It's beautiful.

FAULKNER: Solid white ivory halfway down the shank, finishing in meerschaum all the way to the bit. Do you know a pipe smoker?

ANGELA: No.

(She sees his disappointment.)

ANGELA (cont'd): But I know an enthusiast. My father has several pipes.

FAULKNER: None quite like this. Would you care to hear the tale?

ANGELA: Oh yes.

FAULKNER: It's quite long.

ANGELA: That's fine.

FAULKNER: As per your request. (a deep breath as if gathering his strength) 'Twas deep into the 18th century when an officer of the Royal British Army stationed in India brought this home to London. A tiger had gnawed off his leg before a mate put it down. He was, of course, sent home the next day. However, the gangrene moved faster than the wind took the ship's sails. The pipe arrived all right — in the breast pocket of a soldier's corpse.

ANGELA: That's awful.

(PAUL returns with a to-go cup of coffee from a coffeeshop, and stares into the window.)

FAULKNER: Indeed.

ANGELA; So who took it?

FAULKNER: His possessions: a leather skin of tobacco, two medals, four stripes, black boots, and this very pipe were delivered to a soon-grieving widow and her three sons.

ANGELA: So the eldest son got it?

FAULKNER: Naturally, but his death in a duel sent the pipe into the hands of an enemy.

(PAUL leans against the stage, hugging himself to fight the cold.)

ANGELA: Did he cherish it?

FAULKNER: As long as he was able. The other two sons ambushed him on a small road outside of his village, tar and feathered him only to discover he carried it not with him. They made way to his home and took back their father's pipe. The youngest son would then fall in love with the enemy's wife. Unable to persuade her to leave her

husband, he took his own life in the Thames.

ANGELA: (leaning on the counter) Love can move men to madness.

FAULKNER: Yes, yes it can. Women, too. But you would know that. Surely you feel uncontrolled passions with that man out there — or you wouldn't be with him... surely.

ANGELA: Passion? Oh... I... we...

FAULKNER: (changing the subject abruptly) Nevertheless, with the greatest irony, the remaining son would marry the enemy's wife when she was later widowed. They would raise three children of their own.

ANGELA: (trying to put it together) Now which of his sons got the pipe?

FAULKNER: On the contrary. They were daughters all, my... Angela is it?

ANGELA: (moving closer) Yes, yes it is.

(PAUL has turned and begins to be alarmed by the intensity of their conversation.)

FAULKNER: The eldest daughter had a lone son and passed in childbirth. Her son passed the pipe to his...

(PAUL enters with a jangle.)

PAUL: All right! That's enough, already.

ANGELA: Paul!

PAUL: Paul what? You're...

ANGELA: I'm what?

PAUL: I don't know. You know what.

ANGELA: No I don't.

PAUL: Then what are you doing?

ANGELA: I'm learning! Maybe you'll learn how to appreciate learning someday.

PAUL: Learning what?!

ANGELA: About this ivory pipe.

PAUL: It's made of ivory. There, I learned, too. Can we be productive now? We've got a list you know.

ANGELA: Yes, I know.

PAUL: And it's still pretty long.

ANGELA: I know.

PAUL: Do you?

ANGELA: YES!

PAUL: Okay. (beat) Then I'll wait. But not out there, for chrissake. I'll sit here...

(PAUL begins to squat down onto a chair.)

FAULKNER: DON'T!

PAUL: What?!?!?

FAULKNER: That is one hundred and twenty-two years old, it's likely to fall apart under your weight.

PAUL: Fine. I'll stand.

FAULKNER: (tenderly to ANGELA) Shall I continue?

ANGELA: Please.

FAULKNER: Where was I?

ANGELA: Ummm... The son whose mother died in childbirth?

FAULKNER: Yes. He was raised by her sisters, and passed it to his daughter — which enraged his son. The son's anger boiled so mightily that he eventually took his sister's life and died imprisoned with no children of his own.

ANGELA: So what happened then?

FAULKNER: It was returned to the father now left with only a criminal for a son. He gave the pipe and his tale to a bright-eyed, hopeful, young man boarding a ship for America.

ANGELA: So that's how it got here.

PAUL: You believe all this?

(ANGELA looks at him with disgust.)

FAULKNER: (ignoring PAUL) From one son, to another... to me.

ANGELA: Your great-grandfather was...?!?

FAULKNER: That bright-eyed young adventurer.

ANGELA: That's amazing.

FAULKNER: Much like your interest. Your curious eyes, and fascinating smile — entrancing to say the very least.

PAUL: (advancing on them) What is all this? What's your game here?

FAULKNER: I'm simply sharing my passion with your wife here.

ANGELA: Girlfriend.

FAULKNER: Really?

PAUL: Hey! (wagging his finger at FAULKNER) I'm on to you. You're doing something. There's some tomfoolery going on here.

FAULKNER: His vocabulary increases! Granted it's still mired in colloquialisms.

PAUL: What the hell is your problem?

FAULKNER: I apologize. Sadness has drained my mirth. My heart has been taxed too greatly of late, and I find amusement only in challenge.

ANGELA: What's happened?

FAULKNER: Nothing. Nothing. (beat as he sits in the chair that is "120 years old") Just a woman I cared for, taken by another. An unworthy gentlemen had already laid his claim. (beat) Forget what I've said, it's nothing. (to PAUL) I'm sorry, Paul, is it?

PAUL: Yeah.

FAULKNER: I'm sorry for my misdirected rambunctious behavior.

PAUL: It's fine.

ANGELA: Yes. And he's sorry, too.

PAUL: I a...?

(ANGELA elbows him.)

PAUL (cont'd): Yeah, I'm sorry.

FAULKNER: (standing) I'll take that... (he removes the pipe from ANGELA's hand gently) ... and return it to its proper shelf later.

ANGELA: No, I'd like to buy it.

FAULKNER: I... I don't think you could afford that. There's sentimental value factored into the cost.

ANGELA: Try me.

FAULKNER: Thirty-five hundred.

(PAUL nearly chokes on his own spit.)

ANGELA: Can you really part with something so important to your family history?

FAULKNER: For all of my knowledge, passion, and respect for the world of yesterday... the attachment to these material representations passes when you live steeped within them. I have received many years of appreciation and fascination. I've passed my time to find someone to begin a family of my own. Take it. Continue it.

ANGELA: I only have plastic, and... will you take an out-of-state check?

FAULKNER: Oh I take credit cards.

ANGELA: Here you go then.

(She produces a card.)

(He takes it, punches in the amount, and slides it.)

(Then he takes the print-out, gives it to her to sign.)

FAULKNER: The past lives within. I have words, the pipe is now yours. Merry Christmas, dear Angela.

ANGELA: Merry Christmas to you... I don't know your name.

FAULKNER: It's not important.

(She signs, takes the pipe, PAUL's arm, and leaves with visible hesitation.)

(PAUL sends a distrustful look back at FAULKNER.)

(Once outside, ANGELA turns, and gives FAULKNER a small wave — her arm still linked in PAUL's.)

(After ANGELA & PAUL have gone out of view, FAULKNER picks up the phone.)

FAULKNER: (in pedestrian speak) Kyle, I sold another freakin' one. Put me down for ten more. (beat) Yeah, I know. You wouldn't believe what I got for this last one. And a Merry Christmas to you, too, asshole. Call me later.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

Cold

TOMORROW

(Lights up.)

(Spanish bullfighting music is playing.)

(WILL walks into the room. He is whistling with the music.)

(He tosses his keys to the table on the right... but the table is on the left, so they land on the floor.)

(The music stops.)

(His whistling stops.)

(As he ponders what happened he begins to sit. As he sits, the THERAPIST enters and slides a chair under him.)

(The THERAPIST then spins around the kitchen table chair and sits in it with crossed legs.)

WILL: I don't... know. Backwards, I guess. No, just out of whack.

THERAPIST: Whack.

WILL: Huh?

THERAPIST: Nothing.

WILL: No, what did you say?

THERAPIST: I repeated what you said.

WILL: Which was what?

THERAPIST: Whack.

WILL: Why whack?

THERAPIST: Precisely.

(WILL looks down and scratches the top of his forehead absently as he looks back up. He is now alone.)

(The THERAPIST slips off.)

(A WOMAN comes in and sits at the table. She crosses her legs and looks at her watch.)

(After a beat she glances over at WILL.)

WAITING WOMAN: What are you doing?

WILL: Hiding my fear.

WAITING WOMAN: Of what?

WILL: Tomorrow. (short pause) Losing what I have. Living forever without the things I don't have. (short pause) That everything will change. That nothing will. (pause) What are you doing?

WAITING WOMAN: Waiting.

WILL: For what?

WAITING WOMAN: Things to get better.

WILL: Do you think...

(She leaves abruptly.)

(SARA enters and stands behind WILL. She points out in the house.)

SARA: What about her?

(Will stands and looks.)

WILL: Too confident, she'd rip through my facades before I could trick her into intimacy.

SARA: Will, do you really have any idea what you want?

WILL: No.

(MELISSA steps onstage and speaks toward the house.)

MELISSA: You can't lay there in silence debating an answer. We're in a discussion now, so you discuss it now. You only ponder to censor yourself from what you are thinking, but what you fear to say is exactly what needs to be voiced, goddammit.

(The THERAPIST appears and lingers in the background.)

THERAPIST: (to Will) Do you think that without a woman in your life, you will become stagnant in your emotional evolution?

(As MELISSA goes, JACKIE steps on the opposite side of the stage and speaks out toward the house.)

JACKIE: It was unbelievable. Just because we were having this terrific discussion, that does not mean that it is all right to kiss me. What was wrong with him? With men? Can a man and a woman have intelligent conversation without motives? Will? Do you think it's possible?

THERAPIST: Why did you say that?

WILL: (to the THERAPIST) Say what?

THERAPIST: That most every useful thing you've learned about being a better human being came from the women you've had in your life. But you're afraid to let one in again.

WILL: I said all that?

THERAPIST: Did you?

(JACKIE exits.)

SARA: You're being dramatic. (pointing) Now look at her. Go talk to her.

WILL: What would I say?

(The WAITING WOMAN has returned and stands upstage.)

WAITING WOMAN: What difference does it make?

(As WILL turns, she walks off.)

THERAPIST: Do you think that's a healthy point of view?

(GINA enters and speaks out to the house.)

GINA: (tenderly) Oh Will. You are sweet and all, but I can't stay with you forever. You're younger than me — and not just in male/female years of emotional development, but actual chronological age. You're fun, and great and all, but you aren't ready. You need six more years of life under your belt and then find yourself a nice girl six years younger than you. We'll just fuck for now.

WILL: (to Sara) Why did you marry Jasper?

(GINA exits.)

SARA: I love him. You know, all of that cliché stuff, I guess, but more special because it's real to me.

WILL: I mean how did you know?

SARA: There was never a hesitation. I knew if he asked, stopping myself would be a lie, not grounded in reality. Just fear. And I knew that — probably always.

WILL: I can't imagine feeling that.

THERAPIST: What do you imagine?

WILL: If I try imagine things, there is only chaos.

THERAPIST: Close your eyes.

(WILL closes his eyes.)

SARA: Imagine now.

(SARA leaves. The WAITING WOMAN returns.)

(She doesn't turn to him.)

WAITING WOMAN: What are you doing?

WILL: Hiding my fear.

WAITING WOMAN: Of what?

WILL: Waiting.

(A beat.)

WILL: And there's something else.

WAITING WOMAN: You fear losing me...

WILL: And I don't even have you yet.

WAITING WOMAN: I know.

(Will opens his eyes.)

(He takes her in.)

WILL: You're still here.

(She picks up his keys from the floor and stands over him.)

WAITING WOMAN: Have you ever been to a bull fight?

THERAPIST: What?

(Throughout the speech the THERAPIST slinks up stage and exits.)

WAITING WOMAN: Bull fights are a beautiful tapestry of theatre. The pageantry is almost overwhelming. You find yourself caught in the river rush of excitement. But underneath all of the beauty you see in the moment, there is this horrible fear welling up inside, because your mind's eye is always on the horrific end. And yet you can't help but wait for it.

(She holds a key to his neck like a knife, but she does it warmly and sensuously, dragging it across his throat.)

WAITING WOMAN: You're just waiting in fear. You hope the inevitable brutality will never come; yet you are certain it will.

(She takes the key from his neck and tosses the set on to the table.)

WILL: Why are you telling me this?

WAITING WOMAN: Because you shouldn't live in guilt or in fear for crimes not yet committed. *(touching his face)* Sometimes the bull will live.

WILL: Will things get better?

WAITING WOMAN: Tomorrow.

(She leaves.)

(The opening bars of the bullfighting music plays and fades out as the lights dim to...)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

THE INFERNAL AIRPORT

(Lights up on an older couple sitting near a table. They are BONNIE and GUS.)

(GUS is putting his shoes on and appears slightly agitated.)

(BONNIE is sitting up straight with her arms folded defiantly.)

BONNIE: What did you do?

GUS: What did I do? Naturally. That's your reaction to everything.

BONNIE: With good reason!

(He stops in the middle of tying one shoe.)

GUS: I challenge you to name one time that I actually did something wrong, when you jumped to conclusions.

BONNIE: Right now!

GUS: You said it yourself — this doesn't make any sense. Besides, I'm sure it must be something you packed.

(GUS finishes tying his shoe.)

BONNIE: I had nothing out of the ordinary! Maybe it's because you said I let out a perfume 'bomb'. I thought you liked my perfume.

GUS: Maybe the first time you put it on. But at this point, I think it's soaked into your skin enough that you never need to apply it again — for as long as we live.

(LEONARD, a young-looking TSA agent storms in.)

(He walks directly to the table near the couple and drops a suitcase loudly onto it.)

LEONARD: (brusquely) Chairs. To the table. And sit in them — NOW!

(He crosses his arms and waits.)

(As they begin moving as instructed, GUS can't help himself.)

GUS: Well, better hop to it Bonnie. The Mayor of Munchkin Land looks pissed off.

BONNIE: Gus!

(They arrive at the table with their chairs and sit.)

LEONARD: Ha ha, Gus. Hmm. (pulls out a small note pad and flips it open) Gus. Funny, I have here that your name is Franklin, which sounds nothing like Gus. (flips the note pad closed) So what is Gus exactly? Your Muslim name? Cat Stevens I understand. I'd change that, too. But Frank White was just not catchy enough once you converted?

GUS: Converted? What on earth are you talking about?

LEONARD: Oh I've been around the block quite a few times Mr. White. I know exactly what I'm talking about.

GUS: Around the block? You look like a teenager.

BONNIE: He doesn't mean any offense, but you really do look...

LEONARD: (cutting her off) So let me get this straight. I walk in here to get answers from two very-much-in-trouble individuals and I get, first, insulted about my height, and second, my age. What's next? Should we talk hairline or penis size?

GUS: I don't think that's necessar...

LEONARD: Come on "Gus" let's compare. Go ahead, I'll wait for you to pull your scrotum up your pant leg and out of your sock.

GUS: I refuse to be a part of this nonsense.

BONNIE: Gus honey, you should cooperate.

GUS: I am. I just refuse to get riled up by this whippersnapper.

LEONARD: So you're just going to take my abuse?

GUS: Yep.

BONNIE: Gus!

GUS: What?

BONNIE: He's all over you. You're just gonna take it? That's not like you. Not at all.

GUS: Well Bonnie. I know it hasn't been long, but I feel like I've been in this airport forever. The same horrible scenarios, and I'm sick of it all. So my answer to it is not to get upset. But just wait it out. I've endured far worse than this in life.

(Pause.)

(LEONARD seems at a loss as to what to do next.)

(BONNIE looks up at a video camera on the wall. She shrugs in frustration.)

BONNIE: (to the camera, dropping all previous emotion) There he goes again. I think we need some help in here.

GUS: We? What do you...

(The door flies open and in comes BEE carrying an iPad (or clipboard) which she immediately hands to LEONARD.)

GUS: Oh, let me guess, the ol' good TSA, bad TSA routine? Good luck, lady.

BEE: You are a real piece of work, Gus. At this point, I'm just about to beg the other team to change their minds and take the trade.

GUS: What other team?

BEE: Those “everyone-gets-a-trophy” assholes in the sky.

GUS: You’re making no sense right now.

BONNIE: Would you just tell him already? I’m getting so sick of listening to him flap his gums.

GUS: Bonnie? You know these people?

BONNIE: (snapping) Look, I’m not your stupid Bonnie, so would you cry, or scream, or kick something already? (looking at BEE) Nothing is working with this idiot.

(GUS jumps to his feet in horror.)

GUS: Bonnie, what’s wrong with you? Why are you acting like this?

LEONARD: She’s right Bee, I mean we’ve tried everything. We’re gonna have to create a new location for him or something.

BEE: Just seems like a lot of trouble for one guy. And this guy... look at him!

BONNIE: Tell me about it. But parking didn’t get to him. The missing shuttle bus didn’t phase him...

LEONARD: Ticketing issues, the security checkpoints.

BONNIE: Come on Bee, he had minimal complaints on body cavity search!

BEE: I know. I know. That’s why we jumped ahead to delays, annoying terminal freaks, and tragic messes in the toilets before coming back here.

LEONARD: Which is why I’m saying that maybe the airport just isn’t going to cut it for this guy.

BEE: To be honest, it’s not only him. It’s starting to bubble up here and there. The tolerance level is really going off the charts for humans in general these days. The things they’ll put up with in this economy. Yet, I still thought we’d get him with a TSA

interrogation.

GUS: What in THE HELL are you folks talking about?

BONNIE: This IS hell, Gus. You are in hell. Now shut THE HELL up.

GUS: The airport?

BONNIE: Yes, as we've told you a thousand times before. Seriously, Bee, do we have to wipe his memory every time we explain it to him?

BEE: Well how is it torture if he knows it's not real life?

BONNIE: (sarcastically) Oh, I don't know... maybe because it's inescapable. And it lasts for all eternity?

LEONARD: But Bee's right, there's nothing more torturous than not knowing why things are so... off. Knowing someone's pulling the strings to make it that way just makes you angry.

BONNIE: Thanks Leonard, but I wasn't talking to the peanut gallery.

BEE: We need pure anguish, not just simple anger or frustration to fuel this place. You already know that.

GUS: Bonnie. You seem to understand all this. Please, just tell me what's going on.

BONNIE: I'm not Bonnie, and you are technically no longer Gus. You are a dead man. And this is hell. That do it for you?

GUS: But this is an airport.

BONNIE: THE AIRPORT IS HELL. Idiot.

GUS: I died?

LEONARD: (referencing the clipboard/iPad) Says here, fire in the Soup Plantation.

GUS: Oh wait. Yes, I remember! They wouldn't refresh the mac & cheese and it was all dark and crusty. And then... Oh. But Bonnie, you were with me!

BONNIE: I'M NOT BONNIE!

LEONARD: Bonnie's dead, too.

(A beat as GUS sits back down, defeated.)

BEE: But I didn't get her. She went upstairs to ride rainbow-shitting unicorns and talk to butterflies... or whatever corny crap they let you dream up for yourself. It's such a tacky place, I mean really.

GUS: You mean heaven?

BEE: Know why I got kicked out? I got kicked out for trying to make the place a little more edgy. That's it. Sure, they'll feed you a line of bull about me, but that was it. Clothes, music, home decor... that's the kind of thing the supposed Almighty gets all upset about. I bet that if she'd let them, a good twenty-five percent would defect down here just because this place has style. Not to mention that harps are totally banned from our premises.

GUS: Bullcrap! You said this was wasn't really an airport.

BEE: It's not.

GUS: But airports don't have music – and the decor is awful. If you're so stylish, then why would you make “H-E-double hockey sticks” look like an airport?

LEONARD: Because the airport setting is an illusion. A personal hell. There's a common area, genius. If you'd ever let the torture get to you enough, we'd reward you with time off in some of the cool areas.

BONNIE: But you take torture far too well.

GUS: Obviously! I was married to you for thirty-six years!

BONNIE: (seething) For the last time... I'm not your stupid Bonnie! (pleading to BEE) Bee, can I please please please take my true form now?

BEE: No you may not.

BONNIE: Why not?

BEE: Well I am in the torture business, if you recall.

LEONARD: So what are we gonna do about this dude?

BEE: I was kicking around the idea of creating a DMV, but I can't see that making much of a difference with this pathetic soul.

GUS: Why don't you just let me go?

BEE: Go where exactly?

GUS: Uh... "upstairs"?

BEE; Look, I already tried working out a trade. But they took a pass on you twice, pal. Most likely for the deviant sex acts. Well played, by the way.

(LEONARD bursts out with a laugh.)

LEONARD: (pointing to the iPad if available) Yeah, most entertaining, Gus. I thank you for these. Classics.

BONNIE: (broken up) How could you do that to me, Gus?

GUS: Wait... I thought you weren't Bonnie!??

BONNIE: (stops the act) Totally messing with you right now.

(They all chuckle.)

GUS: Well, is that really it? Either up or down? Isn't there a middle ground?

BEE: Purgatory?

(At the mention, BONNIE & LEONARD recoil.)

LEONARD: You don't wanna go there Gus. Creepy ghost people. Crazy folk. Too dark crazy for us.

BEE: And too happy crazy for up above.

LEONARD: Absolutely no rules.

BONNIE: You'd never survive it.

GUS: Thought I was already dead.

BONNIE: (eerily sad) No, not like that.

BEE: We just need to find the right place for you, Gus. So it's time we go inside and fish it out. (to BONNIE & LEONARD) Get his arms.

(LEONARD and BONNIE grab his arms.)

(BEE walks behind GUS and places her hands on his head as a light/sound cue suggests some sort of power surge.)

(The lights and sound stop abruptly and a look of amusement befalls BEE.)

BEE (cont'd): Interesting. Very interesting.

LEONARD: What is it?

BEE: (smiling) Oh it's... it's very do-able, actually.

BONNIE: So...?

BEE: You'll see.

(She snaps her fingers and the lights go out with a long rumbling sound.)

(After some time, a spotlight comes up on GUS in his boxer shorts.)

(He looks extremely nervous. He looks down. He looks to the wings.)

(Finally, he looks out at the audience panicked.)

GUS: Ummm. (beat) Line. (beat) Line, please. I, uh... don't even know what play this is.
(beat, then pitifully) Does anyone know my line? Hello?

(Lights fade out on the nervous GUS.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

UP & DOWN

(Lights Up.)

(BILL is sitting at one side of a table with a notepad in front of him. A woman joins him with a leather-bound notepad of her own.)

SUSAN: Bill.

BILL: Susan.

SUSAN: Ah crap.

BILL: What?

SUSAN: I forgot my water bottle.

BILL: Well, do you think this will take long?

SUSAN: Oh no. Gabe never lets these things...

(JIM enters and sits at the table.)

JIM: Bill, Susan. Good, I beat Gabe. How are you fuckers? Susan, damn, you look good today.

BILL: Susan forgot her water.

JIM: Well, this shouldn't take long. You know how Gabe doesn't like to draw these...

(Two men enter. GABE, who sits at the head of the table, and TONY who remains standing behind him holding a clipboard.)

ALL: Gabe!

GABE: Jim. Susan. Bill. Well, it's time again. Let's not draw this out. You know I don't like to...

BILL: Of course not.

SUSAN: I believe we're all prepared.

JIM: You bet, Gabe.

GABE: All right, then. Let's cut to the chase. (he scans their faces) Susan, why don't you start.

SUSAN: Of course. For my department to function we need an absolute bare minimum of five.

GABE: What do you have now?

SUSAN: Seven.

GABE: You can keep three.

SUSAN: Three, Gabe?

GABE: When we hit crisis, we'll bring in a supervisor to straighten out the mess as cheap as we can manage. So let's hear it.

SUSAN: I really do need four, Gabe.

GABE: Okay. Then show me how you can make it work.

(SUSAN consults her list/notes.)

SUSAN: Jessica has a lot of responsibility but only makes forty after two and a half years. We can bump her title and she'll be so relieved over surviving another round... we can keep her cheap for another six months — minimum.

GABE: Next.

SUSAN: Frank's an overachiever. Very annoying. He's out. Cheryl is clueless and unattractive to look at. Joe's too short.

(She draws three lines on her paper.)

SUSAN: That leaves me Jason and Jessica, and then Robert and Karla.

(TONY notes this.)

GABE: Who are those last two?

TONY: (reading from his clipboard) Robert's an intern, Karla's new.

SUSAN: (ignoring Tony) Robert the intern: if we bring him on in someone's place, we can keep him in the mid-twenties.

GABE: And the chick?

SUSAN: Karla's right under thirty thousand. She doesn't know much yet, but Jessica will abuse her into understanding quick. If we bump her to thirty she'll take the abuse.

GABE: You're sure?

TONY: (cutting in) She's a single mother.

GABE: Oh, then she'd lick shoes for thirty in this economy. So what's our anticipated total on these four?

SUSAN: One twenty and some change.

GABE: Good. And where are you at?

SUSAN: What do you mean, Gabe?

GABE: What am I paying you, Susan?

(SUSAN looks at the others uncomfortably.)

SUSAN: Do I... really... have to say?

(Pause.)

TONY: Two fourteen. Options and the car.

(SUSAN flashes TONY a look.)

GABE: I need to bring you down to an even two, Susan.

SUSAN: All right, then fuck Karla and put me at two twenty.

GABE: Fuck Karla and you can stay where you're at.

SUSAN: Deal.

(SUSAN draws another line. Tony updates his notes.)

GABE: Good. Who's next?

JIM: I'll go. I'm easy.

GABE: All right. How many do you need?

JIM: Eight.

GABE: How many do you have?

JIM: Eight.

GABE: You can have five.

JIM: Freddie, Steve, Stacy, Maggie, and Kate. They are two interns, one entry-level, one prodigy, and one bitch from hell. No one over forty. I'm clear under one fifty.

GABE: Damn Jim. I like it. Where are you at?

JIM: Three hundred.

GABE: You can stay there.

JIM: Thanks, Gabe.

(TONY notes it.)

(SUSAN flashes JIM a fiery look. He smiles at her.)

GABE: Bill? What have you got?

BILL: Well, I didn't really prepare for... this.

GABE: You didn't prepare. What do you mean?

BILL: I just didn't think we would...

GABE: We would what?

BILL: Be so frank. So candid. I mean this is the third round. By now I just didn't think we could lose...

GABE: What are you saying?

BILL: It's just... Everyone's already doing at least three people's work... they're stretched so thin that... These are people, you know. People with lives and families they don't see.

(They all laugh, but BILL.)

JIM: (chuckling) Damn, Bill. That was awesome.

BILL: I'm serious. I'm already understaffed as it is. To lose even one would send my department out of control.

(A beat as everyone starts to realize BILL is serious.)

GABE: Are you saying you can't handle the management of the department unless it's running fat?

BILL: No, Gabe. I'm saying I'm already so lean...

GABE: Are you fucking kidding me Bill?

BILL: Well, no... Gabe —

GABE: Now you're gonna 'Gabe' me?

(A beat.)

BILL: I don't understand what that means.

(TONY chuckles.)

GABE: Bill, stop fucking around and tell me who you're losing.

BILL: Well, I need some time to think about that. See, I thought...

SUSAN: Why did you think we were all called in at the same time?

GABE: How many do you have, Bill?

TONY: He has eight.

GABE: You can have four.

BILL: Four?!?

GABE: I'm sorry, did I say four? Make it three.

BILL: Gabe...

GABE: All right, two.

BILL: But...

SUSAN: I think you need to shut up.

BILL: Susan!

SUSAN: Bill!

BILL: You can't think that this is...

JIM: They're just people!

(A long pause.)

GABE: Bill. You're fired.

BILL: But...

GABE: Save the shit, Bill. You'll get severance. You're done at the end of the day. See Janice for your... meeting thing.

TONY: (helping him) Exit interview.

BILL: You can't...

GABE: Stop. Just listen to yourself, Bill. Go while you've still got a thread of decency left.

(BILL gathers his papers, glaring at each of them, and starts to walk out shell-shocked.)

He stops.)

BILL: Decency? Do you any idea what it's like to be walking the fine line these people under us have to...

JIM: (incredulously) Shut the fuck up. (after a beat) No, Bill, we don't. Know what it's like. Finding out might drag us right down into their smelly world of shitty cars, rented apartments, and basic fucking cable. It's the nature of the chain. Exposing myself to their small lives and big problems takes my time, my energy and my focus — away from this life that I love — which is far away from theirs. If anyone, ever tried to take this life I have built away from me, I would put a bullet through your fucking head. That is what it means to me. How much it means to me. To us.

BILL: You all feel that way?

(Pause.)

SUSAN: I'm not going to have any struggles in my life just so others don't have to struggle more than they already do. What if everyone did that?

(A beat.)

BILL: Yeah. What if. (to Tony) Tony? How could you? You're only an assistant.

TONY: To a god.

GABE: Bill. Decide now. Say it to me. If you want to continue living the way you and your family have become accustomed to living. Say it: 'they're just people.'

(A long pause.)

BILL: They're just... just people.

GABE: Once all together.

BILL: They're just people.

GABE: Too late. I fucking fired you.

(BILL glares at him for a beat and storms out.)

GABE: Christ. That got my blood pumping. (claps his hands together) Let's order some goddamn lunch.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

BIRTH OF A CONSTERNATION

(Lights up on MADISON in the park, near a bench.)

(She is looking deep downstage, practicing something.)

MADISON: Look, Hope, this is going to be hard to... Oh Dear God!

(She stomps her feet, frustrated with herself.)

MADISON (cont'd): (once more, awkwardly ultra-casual) Jeez, Hope. We've been friends for...

(HOPE walks in talking on her phone. MADISON stops herself abruptly.)

HOPE: (into the phone) I certainly did not, sir. I didn't even know you had a secret stash of Sixlets. I don't even know what Sixlets are. (beat) Okay. I didn't even know you had chocolate dolls. (beat) Balls. Whatever.

(She sees MADISON and smiles to her. Then she rolls her eyes at the conversation for MADISON's sake.)

HOPE (cont'd): I don't care where you have to order them from... I didn't know anything about it. Maybe it was the nighttime cleaning staff. (beat) Now sir... I won't stand for racist... you can't fire the entire... because you need proof, that's why! (beat) Proof!

(HOPE touches "end call" on her phone.)

HOPE (cont'd): Christ! (cheerfully to MADISON) Madison! Sorry about that. My boss is like a child. Actually, he is a child. CEO at twenty-eight. Dad owns the place.

MADISON: I'm just sorry to drag you away from your lunch break.

HOPE: No, no. It's the last work day before Labor Day weekend. It's all ass-grabbing and YouTube. I've been meaning to call. But you know, a Facebook message is just so impersonal...

MADISON: Well, my days are free so I have more time to...

HOPE: Don't make excuses for me. I know I suck. But there's no reason to avoid each other just because of that night...

MADISON: Absolutely.

HOPE: What was so wrong about it? How often are we going to end up partying in a place like that? God, what a scene!

MADISON: Great music...

HOPE: Free coke and then the rock star passes out on us... what two girls in their early-ish thirties wouldn't be horny enough to go ahead and start making...

MADISON: — oh my God!

HOPE: What?

MADISON: You can just say it like that?!?

HOPE: Well, it did...

(HOPE's phone rings.)

HOPE (cont'd): ... happen, didn't it? Hold on. (answering) Hello?

MADISON: (looking off) Sure did.

HOPE: (into the phone) Yeah. Connection just dropped, boss. (beat) It's very flattering that you'd be lost without me. But I don't recommend you say that out loud. (beat) Yes, I do have a good point and I am very bright. What is it that you need? (she gives MADISON an apologetic look and whispers...) Sorry!

MADISON: (whispering back) No problem.

HOPE: (into the phone) I'm very glad you found your chocolate balls, and I accept your apology. No more hasty accusations, all right? (beat) Here's an idea. Remember that new game you found in the paper? That's right, the number thing that stumped you. It's in the paper everyday now, so why don't you do today's, and I'll check your answers when I get back. (beat) Okay, bye now.

(She ends her call again.)

HOPE: No need to hurry anymore. (suddenly yelling offstage) Hey! Get away from that car you little punk! The paint on that door costs more than twenty snot-coated skateboards. (back to MADISON) Bastards. So, how are you?!! Feels like it's been forever!

(They hug somewhat awkwardly.)

MADISON: I know it does.

(HOPE sits on the park bench.)

HOPE: So. You said you had something important to tell me.

MADISON: Yes. I do. (takes a deep breath) Hope, we've been friends for...

HOPE: ... a long time, yes. Wow. You really are acting dramatic.

MADISON: I'm pregnant.

HOPE: That's... great. (long beat) Or is that bad?

MADISON: I don't know. How do you feel about it?

HOPE: What difference does that make?

MADISON: Because it's yours.

(A beat, and then HOPE laughs.)

MADISON: I'm serious!

(HOPE stands and bumps shoulders with MADISON playfully.)

HOPE: Knock it off, Maddie.

MADISON: IT'S NOT FUNNY!

(Silence.)

HOPE: Whoa. Okay. Let's discuss. You think it's... mine?

MADISON: Look, I have only slept with ten people in the last month.

HOPE: (in shock) What!?!

MADISON: What?

HOPE: Just... seems like a lot.

MADISON: Oh come on.

HOPE: Okay.

(Pause.)

MADISON: You mean, you think that's not normal?

HOPE: That's not normal.

MADISON: Well, it's hard to tell. Nobody ever tells the truth and you don't want to go too low, but then...

HOPE: You went too high, Maddie.

MADISON: What's a good number then?

HOPE: In a month? Three tops.

MADISON: Oh. Okay then, three people.

HOPE: But even three isn't really recommended. Why don't you just tell the truth?

MADISON: Fine! Two people. Alan... and you.

HOPE: Then it must be Alan's.

MADISON: Can't be. Alan shoots blanks.

HOPE: How do you know?

MADISON: He said so. That's why we didn't have to use a condom.

HOPE: Jesus Christ, Madison. Don't you think he might lie?

MADISON: If he was lying, why hasn't Nicole ever gotten pregnant?

HOPE: I dunno, birth control?

MADISON: You know, I did not expect you to act like this. You of all people.

HOPE: Act like what??!

MADISON: Like a scared little man. As a mature woman, I thought you'd own up and do what's right. Stand by my side right up to the birth of our...

HOPE: Our? Let's be reasonable...

MADISON: DON'T DO THIS, HOPE!

HOPE: It's just not... possible.

MADISON: Come on — you know we're on the same cycle!

HOPE: So?

MADISON: So you know damn well we were ovulating the night in question!

HOPE: But I don't even have the equipment to...

MADISON: Nice. That's real nice. All the closeness we've shared over the years, and then the intimacy of that night and...

HOPE: Madison!

MADISON: What!?

HOPE: You're my best friend. We tell each other almost everything. Just because we're getting older, work harder, and don't see each other as much —

MADISON: Don't try to placate me. If you don't want to help raise our child, that's your choice.

HOPE: It's not physically — biologically — possible for us to procreate...

(MADISON sits on the bench in defeat causing HOPE to trail off.)

MADISON: Oh? Then that's some name you got there, Hope. You should give it back. Change it to something like... I don't know... Forebode.

HOPE: Forebode?

MADISON: Look, I don't need you making fun of me right now.

HOPE: I'm not...

MADISON: I love you, Hope. You're the only person who's ever understood me and been there for me... except that guerilla when I was kidnapped in Costa Rica. But he was shot in the back teaching me gin rummy.

(HOPE sits down beside her.)

HOPE: When you were just seven, I know Maddie. You're right, we're good together, when we have the chance to be together. But having a child is more than an excuse to make more time.

MADISON: But we'd be such great parents.

HOPE: Sure we would.

MADISON: Then is it so crazy?

HOPE: I never said 'crazy.'

MADISON: Then why can't we? Since school we've shared the best and worst. (beat) What have we always said it would take to get married? Do you remember?

(MADISON grabs HOPE's hand and starts to chant. HOPE joins her as they act like kids.)

MADISON: I need...

BOTH: ... trust with lust. Friends 'til it ends. Passion or I'm passin'. For a Mercedes Benz.

(They smile, almost giggle, and lean on each other.)

(MADISON slides down into HOPE with her head in HOPE's lap.)

(HOPE begins stroking MADISON's hair thoughtfully when her phone rings. She reaches over and grabs it from her purse.)

HOPE: (into the phone) What is it, sir? Well, you should use a pencil next time. I know. Yes, it can get messy very fast with pens. I'll pick up a new paper when I'm on my way back. (beat) You're welcome... No, no, it wasn't something awful. It was a good

emergency. I'm going to be a father.

(She ends the call and continues to stroke MADISON's hair.)

HOPE: That's the first time he's ever asked me about me.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

A TRUE (BUS) STORY

(Lights up on two chairs are onstage side by side.)

(GUY walks downstage carrying a duffel bag. He stops and address the audience.)

GUY: (to the audience) Forty hours to sit back, relax, and do some writing at last. Yes, I know forty hours seems like a long time. But I need time. Time has my been greatest enemy, and now I will make it an asset. Trapped on a bus, I will be forced to use it well because there will be nothing else to do. Except observe, and that's a good thing, too. I mean, how bad can it be? Seriously, you need to stop being so weirded out by this. It's just the bus. Real people ride the bus. Not fake, plastic, city rats. Real people. It will be good to get in touch with regular "folks." I really can't believe you're not being supportive of this, or even enthusiastic. This could be my "On the Road" or my "Travels with Charlie" or "Blue Highways" or... well, you know. Let's do this thing!

(He edges in front of the side-by-side chairs and sits in one. He puts his bag underneath his chair... and appears to have very little room.)

(He pulls out a notebook and a pen.)

[Everything from this point on happens very fast... until it doesn't.]

(A WOMAN sits beside him and hits him a couple of times with her elbow.)

(Everyone besides WOMAN #1 and GUY speak from the audience.)

WOMAN #1: Sorry.

GUY: It's okay.

WOMAN #1: How's my face? Does it look too bad?

GUY: Um. No?

WOMAN #2: (to people offstage) Ya'll get to the back. Is that everyone? Reggie, count your brothers and sisters. They all here?

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) I thought it might be real bad.

REGGIE: One, two, three...

BUS DRIVER: Everyone needs to get settled quick or we're going to get a late start. I can't drive this bus until everyone is settled.

REGGIE: ... four, five, six...

WOMAN #3: (to BUS DRIVER) Fuck you. You make me late to Memphis I kill you.

REGGIE: ... seven, eight...

BUS DRIVER: (to WOMAN #3): Ma'am, there are children on this bus, I ask that you refrain from profanity.

REGGIE: ... nine...

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) He ain't never hit me that hard before. That's why I took his money.

GUY: (to WOMAN #1) Oh.

WOMAN #2: Reggie?

WOMAN #3: (to BUS DRIVER) Don't nobody tell me how to talk. I talk like I want.

REGGIE: I'm not done, Mamma.

BUS DRIVER: (to WOMAN #3) Then you might be walking.

WOMAN #3: (to BUS DRIVER) Bitch, I get you fired. I get off right now and tell them 'bout you.

(She stands and exits.)

REGGIE: ... ten, eleven...

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) I come home and he fucking these two girls and won't let me get none. Says I got to wash off the men from work first. He don't even stop, so I just got high.

MAN #1: (from offstage): Don't touch me, man. Back off.

MAN #2: (from offstage) You touched me. You on my side.

MAN #1: (from offstage) Get the fuck out of that seat and move your punk ass to the other side.

WOMAN #2: Reggie?

REGGIE: Hold on, Mamma.

MAN #2: (from offstage) You move. I was here.

(Scuffling sounds.)

(GUY looks back over his shoulder.)

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) Those bitches left and he so high he go to sleep without doing me. So I wake him up and he hit me. Hard like he never hit me.

BUS DEPOT MANAGER: (to BUS DRIVER) Everything all right?

BUS DRIVER: It will be soon.

REGGIE: Mamma, I can't find Tracy.

WOMAN #2: (yelling) Tracy!

BUS DRIVER: (to WOMAN #1) Ma'am, there's no need to shout...

WOMAN #3: (to BUS DRIVER) Don't you talk to her like that!

BUS DRIVER: (to WOMAN #3) I'll talk however I want to people breaking the rules on my bus. I'm driving, you do what I say, or you walk.

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) Hit me like that I leave.

WOMAN #2: Tracy!

REGGIE: Here she is Mamma. She in the bathroom.

BUS DRIVER: (to WOMAN #3): Ma'am. You need to take your seat, or get off the bus.

WOMAN #3: (to BUS DEPOT MANAGER) You hear how he talk to me?

BUS DEPOT MANAGER: (to WOMAN #3): Ma'am it would help us out if you would go to your seat.

WOMAN #3: Now you both on my ass. I'm gonna sue Greyhound. I'm gonna sue you.

BUS DRIVER: (to BUS DEPOT MANAGER) I quit.

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) And I take his money. Two thousand. It's my money anyway. I made it. Everything he make, we smoke. It's my money pays for everything else.

(Against his better judgement, GUY speaks.)

GUY: (to WOMAN #1) What do you do?

WOMAN #1: (to GUY) I work for a service. I give services.

GUY: (to WOMAN #1) Oh.

BUS DEPOT MANAGER: (to BUS DRIVER): You quit? Shut the hell up.

BUS DRIVER: (to BUS DEPOT MANAGER): I quit.

BUS DEPOT MANAGER: (to BUS DRIVER) Well. No. I mean, you can't.

WOMAN #3: (to BUS DRIVER) Yes he can. Bye bye. Get on out.

BUS DRIVER: (to BUS DEPOT MANAGER): I can and I do.

(Lights start a slow dim that continues as dialogue keeps going.)

POLICE OFFICER: How old are you?

LITTLE GIRL: Five.

POLICE OFFICER: What's your name?

LITTLE GIRL: Lula.

POLICE OFFICER: Lula, where's your Mommy?

LITTLE GIRL: I don't know.

POLICE OFFICER: When's the last time you saw her?

LITTLE GIRL: I don't know.

WOMAN #2: I saw her go in the bathroom in the station.

(GUY bows his head.)

WOMAN #1: You ever think about workin' in adult entertainment. It pay real good. But you gotta do dudes. You gay?

(Blackout. Then from the blackout...)

POLICE OFFICER: Come on little Lula. We need to take you off the bus.

(Lights come up and GUY is standing downstage back to the house. He is speaking into a mobile phone.)

FEMALE VOICE: (from offstage) Thank you for calling Southwest Airlines, can I help you?

GUY: Yes. Please. Help me.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

AN AMERICAN XMAS

(Lights up as creepy Christmas music plays softly.)

[Note: Each character's part of the stage is its own world.]

(A POLICE CHIEF stands behind a podium.)

POLICE CHIEF: All right, let's recap Operation: Christmas...

(From the audience OFFICER COHEN has raised his hand.)

POLICE CHIEF (cont'd): Cohen.

OFFICER COHEN: Sir, I believe the brief assured us the official name would be Operation: Holidays.

POLICE CHIEF: Cohen?

OFFICER COHEN: Sir?

POLICE CHIEF: Are you a God-fearing American, or a goddamned backasswards Commie Liberal?

OFFICER COHEN: American, sir.

POLICE CHIEF: Would you like us to wait while you reread the brief or would you care to shut the pumpkin piehole?

(Two SPEECH WRITERS are intermittently pacing about on the other side of the stage. JERRY holds a notepad. They seemed rushed.)

TOM: Let me see the brief again.

JERRY: Tom, you've looked at it at least a hundred times and that's not getting us anywhere.

TOM: But it's absurd!

JERRY: It's the assignment. (beat) So, we start with vague specifics about the "progress" we're making over there — focus, focus, focus on the "threats," and dodge anything domestic, until...

TOM: Do we have the list of words that are off-limits?

JERRY: It's on the iPad, we'll deal with it when we get to the specifics. You're just avoiding the framework of the speech. We've collaborated over twenty times, stick to procedure.

TOM: But come on. It's crazy — the shit they make up. Can we really get away with it?

(A TEACHER appears center stage occasionally motioning toward invisible words on an invisible chalkboard.)

MISS ROSE: That's a very good question, Megan. But no, Santa doesn't fly in a sleigh to avoid being robbed by greedy Jews on the ground. And since you are eight years old, I think it would be a very good idea for you to tell me who it was that told you that.

(Two guys, CLIFF and DENNIS are passing each other on the street and recognize one another.)

CLIFF: Dennis!

DENNIS: 'Sup? Did you have your phone off Saturday?

CLIFF: Yeah. I was at the movies with Madison and forgot. So what's the deal with the Vegas trip after Christmas?

DENNIS: Yeah. I don't know. I'm going to my dad's Christmas Eve, and then Carol's mom's Christmas morning. Christmas brunch we're going to her ex-husband's 'cuz he's got the kids, and then Christmas night at my stepmom's. Early the twenty-sixth with my daughter at my first wife's.

CLIFF: Gotcha.

DENNIS: Then I'm flying to San Francisco to see my boys for the day, and then down to San Diego to see my mom — and stepdad.

CLIFF: Right, right.

DENNIS: When I get back, private time with Carol 'cuz you know how she gets to crying after all of the family crap dredged up over the holidays.

CLIFF: Of course.

DENNIS: But I should be clear by the night of the twenty-eighth for a day — then back to work!

(MISS ROSE in the classroom.)

MISS ROSE: No, it's not a sweatshop, Donnie. Your daddy just didn't know the elves volunteer to help Santa. Time is more precious than money in the North Pole.

(The guys on the street.)

CLIFF: We might be screwed for scheduling then. I've got Sarah on the twenty-eighth and I promised her I'd take her to see her brother who's staying with my second wife.

DENNIS: Ah.

CLIFF: But I can't move that up because I've got to see my twins Christmas day, plus I haven't seen Gail's dad since the engagement two years ago, so I've got to get out to see her uncle the 26th and then her other dad on the 27th.

DENNIS: Her uncle?

CLIFF: Yeah, he raised her while her mom was in the klink.

DENNIS: She was in the klink?

CLIFF: Well, the mental one, not the ass rape one.

(Back to class.)

MISS ROSE: Class, Kwanzaa is a real holiday. Saying that it's not would probably hurt some people's feelings.

(The police station.)

POLICE CHIEF: The sting. As you can see, the Area of Operation is indicated by the green and red dots on your town map. All speed limits have been reduced and all street parking has been changed to temporary tow zones surrounding each major shopping area.

(OFFICER COHEN's hand goes up.)

POLICE CHIEF: Now, if I don't see ticket totals double within the week I will not only be forced to write up each individual, but the three lowest totals will suffer a two week suspension without pay.

(OFFICER COHEN's hand goes down.)

(The speech writers.)

TOM: I seriously don't think you can do that, Jerry.

JERRY: Hey, you're the guy that's looked at the brief a hundred times. We're told to do it.

TOM: A new upper class tax break is a symbol of America's togetherness and encourages success? Is anyone who is not making lots of money actually attempting to fail? This seems like April Fool's not Christmas.

JERRY: Yeah, yeah. We'll just put a little spin on the ball and slide in patriotism, patriotic duty, and rights as a patriot to subvert the terrorists who would prevent big businesses from not having the means and will to re-invest — for the good of us all. Hint that anyone who disagrees should be called out as the anti-American, class-warfare domestic terrorists they really are.

TOM: Well, I know we can get away with it. Just feels kind of crappy to do it around the holidays.

JERRY: Christmas, Tom. It'll be official. Remember the brief?

TOM: But come on... the judiciary will have to overturn the executive order.

JERRY: But by the time they do, Christmas will be over. Get it?

(The classroom.)

MISS ROSE: No, Henry. There shouldn't be a law to make everyone celebrate Christmas.

(The guys.)

DENNIS: Well, we've got to. You can't get around Christmas. It's like a web that wraps itself around the world for awhile, and then dissolves with a shitload of drinking.

CLIFF: Yeah. So New Year's in Vegas it is.

(Police station.)

POLICE CHIEF: Big money folks. All right men — and women — let's go get those bonuses... and Merry Christmas!

(Classroom.)

MISS ROSE: Happy holidays, children.

(Guys.)

CLIFF: Merry Christmas.

DENNIS: And Happy Vegas Holiday.

(Speech writers.)

TOM: Thank you. And Merry Christmas.

JERRY: (adding) ... Merry Christmas America.

TOM: Right.

(Fade to black.)

END OF PLAY

TEN LORDS-A-LEAPING

(A television host stands at the edge of the stage, in a spotlight if possible.)

HOST: Welcome to part three of our twelve part series on the historical significance of the “Twelve Days of Christmas.” So far you have witnessed a village in search of silence, turn to violence, by hanging the Twelve Drummers of Cheshire, an ill-fated seventeenth century drum circle.

(The HOST steps even closer to the audience and uses his hands for emphasis in a minimalist, on-camera way.)

HOST (cont'd): And you have also seen a re-enactment of the Devon pipe-off massacre in 1721 — a music festival that took the lives of Eleven fiercely competitive Pipers. And today...

(He waves his hand toward center stage and lights reveal a wealthy British nobleman in the late 18th century, THE EARL OF SMYTH, is standing center stage. His fancy pants are around his ankles, a white wig is on his head.)

HOST (cont'd): ... we will learn how the phrase “Ten Lords A-Leaping” made its way into a holiday favorite.

(THE EARL OF SMYTH's servant, LIONEL, returns with a small bottle of perfume sitting atop an ornate pillow.)

(The HOST slips out.)

THE EARL OF SMYTH: That was exquisite wiping, Lionel. Prithee, what fragrance will my tush-tush be tonight?

LIONEL: Rosewater, my lord.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Most excellent. But do get on with it, a host has duties when throwing the social event of Christmastide.

(LIONEL squeezes the pump to spray perfume at the backside of THE EARL OF SMYTH.)

THE EARL OF SMYTH: (to himself, delighted) Rosewater. Oh there shall be much mirth and mischief tonight!

(The COUNTESS of SMYTH enters in a corset and white wig of her own.)

(The EARL frowns as he pulls up his pants.)

THE EARL OF SMYTH: What is it, Countess?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: The Earl of Smyth sees it no longer fit to address his wife by her Christian name?

THE EARL OF SMYTH: (aside to LIONEL) Because there will be nothing Christian about this party, eh?

LIONEL: I could say anything right now, you don't really listen to me, my lord.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Most excellent, Lionel.

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: I ask my husband a question and instead he shares secrets with his servant... secrets of which, I must presume, pertain to myself.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Boring. Why do you interrupt my interlude?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: To tell you that your party has taken an interlude the same as yours.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: An interlude like mine?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: Gone to shit.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Everyone at once?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: Not literally, Archibald.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: What is she talking about Lionel?

LIONEL: Falconry.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Explain yourself, Countess? What does my party have to do with falconry?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: No such thing. Lionel is speaking nonsense.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Then I must be spanked.

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: You mean "he".

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Who?

LIONEL: (to the EARL in confidence) I think she might be ill.

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: I am not ill. But you should gaze upon your guests!

(The EARL and LIONEL mosey downstage and look out at the audience.)

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: (to herself) Ten of the most esteemed Lords in Britain on holiday at our home. The social event to change our stars.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: (still looking out) Fascinating.

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: My knave of a husband could have been a Marquis... perhaps a Duke. I would have been a grand Duchess.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: (intrigued) What are they doing, Lionel?

LIONEL: Leaping.

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: But pray, tell my husband why is it that they have been so afflicted.

LIONEL: Most likely the snakes.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Snakes?!

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: Yes. A Christmastide ball with snakes, we shall be infamous.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: I wasn't aware snakes existed in winter time!

LIONEL: Oh, t'was no small feat to acquire them, my lord.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Why did you acquire them at all?

LIONEL: Upon your request, my Lord.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Mine? How odd. I recall no request to cause such fits of madness in my noble guests. (a beat before an idea hits) Let us recreate this conversation. I'll be you and you be me. (imitating LIONEL) "My Lord, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." (as himself again, excitedly) Now, you go. As if you were me.

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: We are ruined. I shant be stripped of nobility! I shant!

THE EARL OF SMYTH: (to the COUNTESS, irritated) No, Lionel is to be me. (to LIONEL) Lionel, your retort? — As me, of course.

LIONEL: "Lionel, are the preparations for the ball in order? My unbearable tart of a wife insists that I obtain confirmation."

THE EARL OF SMYTH: "I've no idea how you suffer through life tethered to such an

Athanasian wench.”

LIONEL: I said no such thing.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: But it would have been quite an amusement had you. Carry on!

LIONEL: I said: “What decorations would you like spread about the floor.” And you said “Plenty of snakes.”

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Oh. Right. Well, I’m quite sure I said “Anything but snakes.” But I see how one might mishear with a difference so slight. Isn’t that funny, Countess?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: If I am demoted to Baroness, I will cleave you in twain. (anger turns to impatience) Are they still at it?

(She walks downstage and looks out. The three of them watch in fascination.)

LIONEL: Ten lords...

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Uhh...

LIONEL: ... leaping.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: I like that. “Ten Lords-a-Leaping.”

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: Quite unexpected that noblemen could prove so nimble.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Shall we join them?

THE COUNTESS OF SMYTH: Are those snakes venomous?

LIONEL: I didn’t specify in the ordering.

THE EARL OF SMYTH: Then perhaps it’s best we just watch. (down to the nobles)
Merry Christmastide!

(They put arms about each other as the lights fade on them leaving a downstage corner with light that the HOST quickly steps into.)

HOST: Each of these ten lords leapt right into the arms of their maker that day. It was the largest loss of noblemen ever suffered in one day. The Earl of Smyth never did make Duke. But he did escape prison with the help of a terminal case of syphilis.

(He saunters across the stage on his way out.)

HOST (cont’d): Don’t miss our next installment of “Behind the 12 Days of Christmas” and you’ll find out why those “Nine Ladies Dancing” were not what they appeared. Or

rather, you'll discover that something actually did appear beneath their dresses...

(He stops at the other side of the stage to wrap it up.)

HOST (cont'd): ... forever changing gender identification in a sleepy little village. Happy holidays everyone.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

NO GO

(Lights up on GREGORY is sitting in a chair at an interview table.)

(QUINCY steps in with an iPad/tablet device.)

QUINCY: Please, have a seat Mr. Calhoun.

(He consults his notes on the screen.)

QUINCY (cont'd): So, I see here that you are Gregory Calhoun, son of Randolph Calhoun.

GREGORY: Yes, I am.

(QUINCY folds his arms.)

QUINCY: Being the son of the richest man alive, you probably assumed you could skip this interview process.

(He sits across from GREGORY.)

GREGORY: Well I try not to make assumptions, but I was a tad surprised.

QUINCY: A 'tad' you say.

(QUINCY types out a note on the screen.)

QUINCY (cont'd): Interesting.

GREGORY: Why is that a note?

QUINCY: This is a character study, Mr. Calhoun. More than anything else, it is an attempt to capture your character profile accurately.

GREGORY: But I can see the note. You just typed “talks like a douche.”

QUINCY: (pulling his notes closer) It’s upside down, you’ve obviously misread.

GREGORY: Then what did you put?

QUINCY: “Talks like a... touché.”

GREGORY: That doesn’t make sense.

QUINCY: En gard.

GREGORY: What?

QUINCY: Parlez-vous Francais?

GREGORY: This is absurd.

QUINCY: Hmm.

(QUINCY types another note.)

GREGORY: What now?

QUINCY: Gregory. May I call you Greg?

GREGORY: I prefer Gregory.

(QUINCY makes yet another note.)

GREGORY (cont’d): What? Why that one?

QUINCY: Tell me the truth, does part of you — even just a little — think that the moon may in fact be made of cheese?

GREGORY: Of course not.

QUINCY: Are you married?

GREGORY: No.

QUINCY: Don't believe in it?

GREGORY: No.

QUINCY: 'No' you don't believe in it, or 'no' to the question because you do believe in it?

GREGORY: I believe in it, I just haven't done it.

QUINCY: Are you a homosexual?

GREGORY: Are you allowed to ask that?

QUINCY: I can ask anything I wish Mr. Calhoun. Perhaps you don't yet understand, by choosing who stays and who goes, I am Death. I am the decider of who will live and who will die. I alone choose how to evaluate the content of a person's character.

GREGORY: Is there a way I can speed up this evaluation?

QUINCY: Do you believe the amount of money you possess increases the value of the blood in your veins?

(GREGORY looks at him defiantly. Then restrains himself.)

GREGORY: Well, I believe there are arguments both for and against that.

(QUINCY notes the answer.)

QUINCY: If you are selected, what function would you have in a socialized world, Mr. Calhoun?

GREGORY: I don't understand the question.

QUINCY: Are you a fan of the Smurfs?

GREGORY: A... the what?

QUINCY: The Smurfs. Do you know them?

GREGORY: I think so. Little blue people?

QUINCY: Yes. With white hats.

GREGORY: I've heard the name.

QUINCY: But you never saw the TV show?

GREGORY: No.

QUINCY: The movie?

(GREGORY shakes his head and QUINCY makes another note.)

GREGORY: You're writing that down? What on earth does that have to do with anything?

QUINCY: The moon colony will be a community that works hand-in-hand. Sharing each success, as well as each failure. Everyone will have a function, and everyone will benefit the same. Like the Smurfs. I wondered if this is a concept you were familiar with or able to comprehend.

GREGORY: I, uh... I suppose I am not familiar. But I'm sure I can comprehend.

QUINCY: The Smurfs all perform the job they are best at, and they all receive the same benefits for it. This elevates everyone to a comfortable and satisfactory lifestyle — leaving no one behind, and no one far ahead. But for this to work, everyone must pull their weight. What exactly would you bring to such a table?

(Pause.)

QUINCY (cont'd): Mr. Calhoun, I ask you again, what would be your function in a community like this?

GREGORY: Leadership.

QUINCY: So you have experience in community organizing and shared sacrifices?

GREGORY: I have experience running businesses; I think there are similarities.

QUINCY: Profit-driven businesses have almost no relevance in creating a harmonious society such as the one we seek. In fact, it was the result of corporate interests that forced us to go window-shopping through the galaxy... and have now required us to inhabit our much too small moon with only a small sample of the population, because we simply ran out of time.

GREGORY: But capitalism...

QUINCY: I can forgive a man for being ignorant, but I can't forgive him for being an asshole. Are you an asshole Mr. Calhoun? Or am I confusing you for your father?

GREGORY: How dare you...

QUINCY: How dare you.

GREGORY: How dare me?

QUINCY: What did you think would happen here Greg... ory? Did you think you'd bribe me? That you could buy your way into our next world? Only 50,000 people will continue the human race and my region only gets to select 2,000 of them. Did you think you could simply purchase your shot at keeping your bloodline in the gene pool? Did you think money would determine who is best qualified to be one of these saviors of the human race?

GREGORY: It would make sense.

QUINCY: Would it? We won't even have money. So what would I do with a bribe? Make wallpaper as an amusing moon-party conversation piece?

GREGORY: Look, the technologies our companies produced made life better.

QUINCY: And yet to make a better daily life, you nearly destroyed all life in the process.

GREGORY: You can't blame us.

QUINCY: But your father was the king of energy. Coal, gas, oil, and nuclear.

GREGORY: Yes, all have been essential to life on Earth.

QUINCY: All essential to life on Earth because your family made it so. For more than a century you suppressed alternatives... because it was essential to your wealth.

GREGORY: It wasn't my family's fault that there were no adequate alternatives.

QUINCY: What about thorium? We've known about thorium for quite a long time, but we continued to use uranium-based nuclear energy with all of its dangers, its finite components and its tremendous waste. Thorium is abundant, temperature controlled, and self-sustaining. It feeds off of its own waste for chrissake. Why did you suppress it?

GREGORY: There will be thorium power.

QUINCY: Yes, on the moon. But why couldn't we have it here? It would have solved most problems in a decade or two. Hell maybe less than a decade if there was any real dedication. And then we wouldn't be in this room having this conversation.

GREGORY: Talk to my father, not me.

QUINCY: No need, he's most definitely not invited to go up.

GREGORY: Does he know that?

QUINCY: I don't think your father knows anything except how to breed money. But let's

get back to your function. Since your business leadership has no relevance, what else will you do? How will you earn your fair share in an equal society?

GREGORY: I'm not sure at the moment. I wasn't expecting anything like this. But I'm sure we could figure out something. I graduated Harvard and got an MBA from Wharton.

QUINCY: You mean you purchased an MBA. You never actually attended the classes, did you? Only the parties. I've seen the pictures, read the celebrity news. It's not difficult to find tragic and pornographic things about the trouble-making child of Randolph Calhoun.

GREGORY: Yes, I admit that I had some youthful indiscretions... but I am older now, wiser... I'm responsible enough to serve as CEO to two companies simultaneously.

QUINCY: Well it's my job to assess how wise and responsible you have or have not become. Here... (opening a new app on his tablet) I'm going to show you an ink blot and I want you to tell me what you see.

(QUINCY holds up the tablet for GREGORY to see.)

GREGORY: (annoyed) I see some words.

QUINCY: Hmmm. That's interesting. What are the words that you see?

GREGORY: (dryly and unamused) Suck my balls.

(QUINCY puts the device back on the table, changes apps, and makes another note.)

QUINCY: And on a scale of worthless to semi-worthless, where would you rank yourself?

GREGORY: Are we finished here?

QUINCY: Oh. Just a minute... (speaking it as he types it out) "Also a quitter." Got it.

GREGORY: What's your deal, man?

QUINCY: Okay. I'll be honest. Right now you are a "No Go." But I'll tell you what. If you

can convince me that you are willing to work hard, to take even the most difficult of jobs within the colony, I will look at you in a kinder light.

GREGORY: Of course I will.

QUINCY: Of course you will what?

GREGORY: Of course I'll do whatever it takes to become one of your... little blue men.

QUINCY: With white hats.

GREGORY: Yes.

QUINCY: Any job I choose, you would do?

GREGORY: Any job.

(QUINCY gets up and walks downstage in thought.)

QUINCY: Perhaps we can find some retribution for some of those "youthful indiscretions" you mentioned. Let's see... there was the girlfriend punch... or the arrest for cocaine possession, the famous transvestite altercation outside a nightclub. Oh I know! Those photos of you standing proudly beside the last two elephants on Earth after you murdered them on safari. What was it you said? "Nothing feels more powerful than knowing an entire species died at your hands."

GREGORY: I was only twenty-two years old.

QUINCY: At twenty-two I was still going to the zoo with child-like glee. Guess that's the difference between you and me. While I see beauty in living things and human potential, you see only the power and profit in destruction.

GREGORY: I was a kid. That's not me anymore.

QUINCY: But you never paid for that.

GREGORY: I did in reputation. I still get threatened by animal rights groups on a daily

basis.

QUINCY: Oh! Oh oh oh. Yes. I have an idea. You see, the moon will house the largest zoo ever built in an attempt to preserve the remaining animals of this planet — along with the human race, of course.

GREGORY: That's good news — *great* news.

QUINCY: So how would you like to have shit detail?

GREGORY: What detail?

QUINCY: Shit. I thought that perhaps you could work at the zoo, disposing of the animal feces every day for the rest of your life.

GREGORY: I uh...

QUINCY: You said any job, Gregory.

GREGORY: Yeah, but... I'm... me.

QUINCY: Hey, elephant poo would be the absolute worst, but at least you won't have to worry about that one.

(GREGORY is visibly wrestling with the decision.)

GREGORY: I... guess. I mean, if that's what it takes, yes. Yes, I would. I will.

QUINCY: You would clean up the shit of animals to stay alive?

GREGORY: If I must.

(QUINCY walks toward GREGORY and extends his hand.)

QUINCY: Well then, congratulations Mr. Calhoun.

(They shake.)

GREGORY: So I'm a "Go" then?

(QUINCY brightens up into a jovial person.)

QUINCY: Of course. You were never a "No Go" you idiot.

GREGORY: What?

QUINCY: Yeah, I've just been joking, man. Your dad bought me off months ago.

(GREGORY stands.)

GREGORY: So it's not gonna be some socialist society up there?

QUINCY: Christ, no. We're going to be the richest assholes on the moon.

(Stepping toward QUINCY.)

GREGORY: Oh thank God. So, just to be clear, no shit shoveling?

QUINCY: Fuck no, we're going to be gods. With harems and everything. And wait 'til you see how jet skis work up there. You don't even need water!

GREGORY: Cool!

QUINCY: Yeah, like flying cars. Fucking finally.

GREGORY: You got me good.

QUINCY: Oh, that was your dad. He's been watching the whole time.

(QUINCY points to the camera over the house and starts waving with an enormous smile.)

QUINCY (cont'd): Hi Mr. Calhoun! He totally bought it.

(GREGORY flips the bird at his father.)

GREGORY: Thanks Dad.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

WANDERING OFF

(Lights up.)

(SANDRA is sitting in a chair. A fly has appeared near her. As she attempts to wave it off NATHAN begins walking up. Hesitates, looks around, grabs a chair and pulls it over. After an uncomfortable beat, he speaks.)

NATHAN: Do you mind, if I...

(SANDRA shrugs.)

(NATHAN positions the chair near her and sits.)

(After a moment, he extends his hand.)

NATHAN: Hello.

(SANDRA shakes with slight hesitation.)

SANDRA: Sandra. But please...

NATHAN: It's nice to meet you, Sandra.

(SANDRA gives an indecipherable nod.)

NATHAN: I'm sorry to just appear out of nowhere, but I found myself completely unable to resist coming over and confessing that I think you are striking. Truly. That's why I just had to at least introduce myself. It's not every day you see a lady that strikes you so...

(SANDRA looks very uncomfortable as he searches for words.)

NATHAN (cont'd): ... grabs you so uncontrollably, right at first...

(SANDRA looks almost frightened.)

NATHAN (cont'd): Do you live around here? You don't have to answer that question. It's a bit stalker-esque. Of course, it's probably not a good idea to use the word "stalker" in the first minute of conversation. Don't worry, no restraining orders here. That probably

wasn't a good idea either... dear lord, stop me before I talk about kiddie porn!

(NATHAN laughs. SANDRA doesn't.)

NATHAN: I'm sorry. This is a very difficult thing to do, talking to a stranger. And I'm making a mess of it.

SANDRA: Please, I don't think...

NATHAN: I just want to tell you that I find you terribly beautiful— and I want to know what you're like on the inside. Emotionally, not like I'd want to open you up for a physical look on the inside.

(NATHAN starts to laugh awkwardly, but stops himself.)

NATHAN: I'm sorry. I don't know why I keep making these jokes. Let me just quit while I'm... before I'm too far behind.

SANDRA: Yes. It's probably...

NATHAN: Can I take you out on a date? Would you mind if...

(Suddenly, Sandra can no longer contain herself and explodes.)

SANDRA: Yes! Yes, I would... mind. This is a fucking hospital emergency room, moron. People aren't here to meet people. People are here because something terrible has happened! Something so awful... *(she breaks)* so very... bad, that...

NATHAN: Did something awful happen to you?

SANDRA: *(almost in tears)* Yes, a-hole. *(beat)* My mother had to be shoveled off the highway, and my father... my father, died, on the way here.

NATHAN: *(awkwardly)* Oh.

SANDRA: *(bursting into tears)* And I've miscarried my baby.

(She takes some deep breaths and tries to collect herself.)

SANDRA (cont'd): Of course, I escaped the accident scratch-free. Of course I did. Which I suppose God did just so that I can live mentally scarred for the rest of my life — while looking like I've got myself together.

(She bows her head and sobs for a moment while NATHAN is trying to sort out how to comfort her without offending her.)

SANDRA (cont'd): So, no, I don't go on dates with anyone who would dare to ask someone in a fucking hospital emergency room out on a date.

(A pause.)

NATHAN: I'm so sorry. (a beat) I didn't realize this was an emergency room. (a beat) Oh my god. I'm so sorry.

(NATHAN gets up and wanders out through the house.)

(After a beat, a voice offstage shouts out.)

NURSE: (from offstage) Frederick! The amnesiac's wandered off again.

(FREDERICK rushes in from backstage and through the house. He brings NATHAN back and sits him back in the seat next to SANDRA, then exits.)

(A long pause.)

NATHAN: (gently) You know, I really am sorry. I've lost my bearings. But I certainly haven't lost my mind. You really are gorgeous even if I shouldn't say it... that was simply true. But I'm as bothered by your situation and the pain you must feel as I am embarrassed. And I feel a great pain, too. But I'm not sure why. I just know with all of my heart that it is there in me. I don't know much of what I've done, but I strongly believe that what I'm designed to do is love so much that this pain goes away. Love those I care for and all of the world. So forgive me. And forget my foolishness. The date thing was... unfortunate. Instead, if you will allow it, I wish for the opportunity to be your angel of mercy. Let me offer you my friendship and help in any possible way. You just let me know. Truly. I want to be there for you however I can. As a friend, and as shelter for the storms you will soon have to weather. I'll leave you alone now, but please, call me for anything. Anything at all. Any time. And I promise to help.

(NATHAN stands and prepares to go.)

SANDRA: (stopping him) No, wait.

(She wipes her eyes, then wipes her hands on her pants.)

SANDRA (cont'd): Thank you...

(SANDRA extends her hand. They shake again.)

NATHAN: You're absolutely welcome.

SANDRA: (fishing for his name) Thank you...?

NATHAN: You're welcome. Seriously, anything you need.

SANDRA: I just might... need. You're very kind.

NATHAN: And you are a treasure, I hope you don't get lost. I'm going to go now, dear Sandra.

SANDRA: But let's just say I do wish to reach you — I don't have your number. I don't even know your name.

NATHAN: Oh, it's... I'm not... sure.... what it is. Well, I'll be around my fragile Sandra. You'll find me.

(NATHAN goes out through the house.)

(SANDRA watches him.)

NURSE (O.S.): Frederick! The amnesiac.

(FREDERICK rushes across the stage into the house.)

(He brings NATHAN back and sits him next to SANDRA.)

(He hesitates.)

FREDERICK: Are you okay with... is he all right?

(SANDRA nods.)

(FREDERICK goes.)

NATHAN: (extending his hand as if they are just meeting) Hi.

(SANDRA moves her chair closer and snuggles into NATHAN's shoulder.)

(Fade to black.)

END OF PLAY

QUACK

(LIGHTS up on BRENT, sitting in a chair. A DOCTOR enters and sits near him.)

DOCTOR: Mr. Wilson, or Brent, yes? Welcome. I'm Dr. Sherman. Let's see what we've got here, shall we?

(He smiles generically and consults his clipboard.)

DOCTOR (cont'd): Says here you're suffering from numbness. Whereabouts?

BRENT: All over, really.

DOCTOR: Any one area more than the rest?

BRENT: (indicating his head) Well, here mostly.

DOCTOR: Hmm. I have a suspicion... Would you say you feel this?

(The DOCTOR slaps BRENT.)

BRENT: (in shock) Whoa!? Hey! Why did you...?

DOCTOR: (calmly reassuring) Don't worry. I've a pretty good idea what's happening. I've been seeing a lot of this lately.

(He slaps BRENT again.)

(BRENT leaps to his feet.)

BRENT: What the hell are you doing?

DOCTOR: How are you feeling now?

BRENT: (sharply) I don't know — confused.

DOCTOR: Angry?

BRENT: No, just confusion.

DOCTOR: Hmm. This could take a good deal of treatment.

BRENT: Of what? For what?

DOCTOR: Well, which is it? (he stands) Do you want to know what you'll be taking, or what you have? You French-fried deer dropping.

BRENT: Both. Did you just call me a...?

DOCTOR: And that's your problem. When did the numbness first begin?

BRENT: I'm not sure. But it's gotten real strong the last couple of months.

DOCTOR: Well what's happened in your life or in the world the last couple of months that's different for you?

BRENT: Ummm... Well, there's been a lot of talk about another war, I guess, and that's on everybody's mind. Everyone's always asking what I think about it and...

DOCTOR: And... what do you think of more U.S. aggression?

BRENT: Well I... um. On one hand I understand that they openly hate us and are intent on having nuclear weapons. Plus that guy is a real sonofabitch... but, well, you know without *real* provocation...

DOCTOR: I'll just cut you off right there. You're suffering from indecisicilia, Mr. Wilson. Your lack of a backbone is preventing you from committing to a decision.

BRENT: Backbone?

DOCTOR: The fear of being rash or rushing to judgement has manifested itself as

numbness within.

BRENT: Oh. I guess I can see that. Well, what should I do?

DOCTOR: You need to get in touch with your irrational side, you taint lick mud miner. You see everyone's a little bit right. So you've just got to get mad at one side, ass face jelly bones.

(He slaps BRENT again.)

BRENT: Look pal, stop hitting me and stop calling me names or I'm going to hit you back.

DOCTOR: No you won't, a yellow shrivel penis like yourself could never...

(BRENT punches the DOCTOR. The DOCTOR stumbles back and holds his face.)

DOCTOR (cont'd): Tell me how you feel about war, right now!

BRENT: FUCK THOSE TERRORISTS! (a beat of clarity) Ah. Ah! Ah ha!

DOCTOR: You see? Are you feeling numb?

BRENT: No. No, I just want to kick some ass!

DOCTOR: There you go. Two fights a day — verbal or physical — and you'll be good and irrational indefinitely.

BRENT: Wow. Thanks... (smiling mischievously) you fucking quack.

DOCTOR: He he.

(The DOCTOR smiles back at him and raises his fist in preparation for a punch.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

WRONG WITH ME

(Lights up.)

(TWO WOMEN and TWO MEN are on scattered around different parts of the stage.)

(Each line comes right off the end of the last.)

WOMAN ONE: I'm embarrassed by my car and I need to make more money.

MAN ONE: My girlfriends always criticize. My outfit never works, my makeup doesn't highlight this, accentuate that. I walk like a boy.

WOMAN TWO: Grey hairs are popping up all over and the line is receding — already! What the hell's gonna happen by forty?

MAN TWO: Last week I fucked this guy from work.

WOMAN ONE: Since my wife left, I haven't figured out how to get back in the saddle, so to speak. I've never been much of a dater.

MAN ONE: They say I'm mousey. They're so confident that I sometimes just want to... hurt them back.

WOMAN TWO: Everything goes straight to my belly and I can't even enjoy a beer because I think about all of the exercise I never do.

MAN TWO: We were grabbing secret cocktails and made out a few times, but I held back. Then he said the right things at the right time and I let it go.

WOMAN ONE: Women today are just so specific about what they want.

MAN ONE: I'm not catty. I'm not bitchy. I just want to feel beautiful without having to hide myself in the process.

WOMAN TWO: I can hardly remember the man I used to be.

MAN TWO: Of course the texts have dwindled and the avoidance is clear.

WOMAN ONE: And what they want never lines up with me. I hate so many things that are, I don't know...

MAN ONE: But I always just feel there's something...

WOMAN TWO: I never thought I'd... crumble. There's just so much...

MAN TWO: This happens so much I can't help but think that something's... just...

ALL: ... wrong with me.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

DEATH & POPCORN

(Lights up on the interior of a video rental store.)

(The atmosphere is desolate. Crumpled up newspaper rolls by like tumbleweed as we hear the sound of a subtle wind howl like it's the desert.)

(The store has no people except for a lone female CLERK scanning barcodes of videos from the dropbox. Each one goes in with a BEEP!)

(After three, she looks at a box before scanning it with disdain.)

CLERK: (to herself) "Vanilla Sky?" Jesus. Probably a Twi-tard.

(BEEP.)

(The door opens with a DING DONG! electronic beep as a haggard man (not quite homeless, but not exactly clean) enters.)

(He walks straight up to the counter and thrusts his pocket at her as if it held a gun. He's a bit shaky and nervous.)

PAUL: Gi... gimme the register. The money... in the register.

CLERK: (calmly) No.

PAUL: What do you mean no?

CLERK: No. Means no. Even a small child can learn that.

PAUL: (looking around nervously) What?

CLERK: Okay, guess I'll be the brains of this operation. First of all, we just opened, genius. It's ten in the morning on a weekday. There's no money in the register... yet.

PAUL: None?

(The CLERK begins scanning again as she talks.)

CLERK: Well, my manager will be bringing less than \$60 in a drawer when he gets around to it. Which may actually be soon since you just set off the customer entrance beep. But that drawer is not here yet. And besides, when he brings it, that will make two of us, versus one guy with a pretend gun.

PAUL: It's not pretend.

CLERK: Then why didn't the metal detector make any noise? You walked through it to come in.

PAUL: That's for movies.

CLERK: It picks up large metal objects, too. Not just sensors in the movie boxes. You obviously had neither.

PAUL: It's a small gun.

CLERK: Small enough to fit in that little jacket pocket? Not likely.

(PAUL reaches into his jeans pocket and removes a very small pocket knife.)

PAUL: Well, I've got this.

CLERK: That's like a one inch blade. You can't do any real damage with that. You'd be stabbing and hacking at me for a long time. And like I said: Manager. Right back there.

PAUL: Look lady, I'm just starving, all right. I'm not trying to get high or drunk. I just want some food. I'm not some homeless dude. I lost my job awhile back and unemployment doesn't do shit. My wife went back to her family, and I can't pay...

CLERK: Take some popcorn, dude. (points) It's on that rack.

(PAUL goes to the rack. He puts away the pocket knife and picks up a package of microwaveable popcorn. He examines the bag.)

PAUL: You have to cook this?

CLERK: Yeah, it's microwave popcorn.

PAUL: I don't have a microwave.

CLERK: Oh. (thinks for a beat) Twizzlers?

PAUL: What?

CLERK: Twizzlers. Red licorice-type material.

(DING DONG! Someone else has walked in. EMILY walks by them hardly acknowledging that the CLERK and PAUL exist. They halt their conversation to let her pass.)

PAUL: (now rushed) Yeah. Yeah that's fine. Licorice is fine.

CLERK: (pointing) They're over there.

(PAUL grabs a package of Twizzlers and moves swiftly toward the exit.)

PAUL: (pausing) Thanks. Thanks for this and for uh...

CLERK: Don't mention it.

PAUL: But I really appre...

CLERK: No seriously. My manager counts those things. Don't say anything to anybody or I will cut you.

(PAUL exits with an awkward wave setting off the sensor's DING DONG!)

(The CLERK goes back to scanning in movies from the dropbox and placing them on a cart.)

(EMILY has her cell phone out and she's snapping pics of different movie boxes.)

(The CLERK wraps up the scanning and watches EMILY snapping the occasional pic.)

(The CLERK pulls out a remote and turns on a TV that would be located directly over

the house.)

(She puts the TV remote down and picks up the remote for the DVD player, hits 'play' and starts arranging the movies she just scanned.)

(The TV begins playing the indistinguishable ramblings of an action movie.)

(EMILY snaps another pic. Looks up at the top of the rack and scans down to the bottom. A curious look blossoms on her face.)

EMILY: (loud from across the room) Excuse me. Do you have that new movie with that guy that does all the action movies... but in this one he's like a school teacher for retards... and it's funny.

CLERK: (dryly) Well, funny is a relative term... but, no, that movie isn't out yet. A week from Tuesday.

(DING DONG! Someone else has walked in. JOHN, an actual tattered homeless man, enters.)

EMILY: Cool. Thanks.

(EMILY goes back to eyeing the selection of new releases.)

(JOHN beelines for the bathroom, but intentionally knocks a couple of movies off a rack as he passes. Then disappears into the bathroom as the CLERK shouts after him.)

CLERK: Hey!

EMILY: What?

CLERK: What? No. Some guy.

EMILY: What?

CLERK: Some guy in the bathroom.

(EMILY looks annoyed and slightly frightened.)

(DING DONG! MAXWELL, a guy in his 30s, and DITA, a girl in her early twenties, enter. They look like extremely well-funded, and effortlessly chic hipsters. They speak rather

loudly and obnoxiously... but with a sort of upper-class arrogance.)

DITA: Oh god.

MAXWELL: Smells like something...

DITA: Popcorn?

MAXWELL: No. Death.

(They move past the CLERK without acknowledging her and start browsing.)

DITA: Oh. Yes. Or more like Death eating popcorn.

MAXWELL: Makes sense. This place does feel like an Ed Hardy shirt. I mean, it's like really...? Still?

DITA: Or a Prince album.

MAXWELL: Exactly. Golf claps all around.

DITA: I don't think we should have bothered with this place, they won't have it.

(The CLERK watches them as she sorts.)

MAXWELL: Well Simon needs it for the installation, and we don't have time for Amazon.

DITA: The day before his showing and he brings it up. So Simon.

MAXWELL: That's how he works. (points to a movie box) God I hate this. Did you see this?

DITA: (looking) You saw that? Why?

MAXWELL: Well, you remember Jude?

DITA: The pretty boy, shag cut, who actually wore Jordache to a picnic?

MAXWELL: Yes. He also had a glass head. You could literally see how empty it was. That was his favorite film. Seriously. Sitting through that was the hardest I ever worked to get blown.

DITA: And you thought it was love for a spell.

MAXWELL: Oh, my cock was sure he was the one. Ignorance, how I long for thy bliss. The summer of '08. I was so much younger then.

DITA: Oh? Young enough to still be making mistakes?

MAXWELL: You should talk, Miss chocolate boy toy on a moped. We could've put together a cast of "Rent" that summer.

DITA: But I wasn't even 21. I should still be making hot and sticky mistakes. God, this place is horrid.

MAXWELL: Well you can only deny the internet for so long before you fold. Remember CD shops?

DITA: Ha ha. Barely, you old hag.

(The CLERK has stopped sorting and watches them with her elbows on the counter, hands on her chin.)

MAXWELL: Slut. I'm 29.

DITA: Oh, it's the fall of '03 now?

MAXWELL: Gasp! How dare you say such a thing in front of... (looks at EMILY for the first time as she snaps another pic) ... an out-of-work actress with big calves...

DITA: (hushed) Maxwell!

MAXWELL: (now eyeing the CLERK) ... and an about-to-be-unemployed elf from

ComicCom.

DITA: You are a bad, bad girl.

MAXWELL: Well it's true. I give this store another week. Look at it. (to the CLERK) I hope you have your resumé out there, Dorothy. The internet tornado is a-coming.

(The CLERK flips him the bird without giving the satisfaction of an expression.)

(DITA elbows MAXWELL.)

DITA: Don't be such a diva.

MAXWELL: I'm trying to help the poor girl. She's in desperate need of a backup plan. (to the CLERK) Have you heard of "streaming" honey?

(DITA punches MAXWELL's arm.)

DITA: (to the CLERK) Sorry, he gets his period four weeks a month.

CLERK: I've found that having excuses for being an jackhole doesn't make someone not a jackhole.

MAXWELL: (to DITA) How adorable. She's so afraid to lose this job that she won't call me a proper asshole... and yet her job won't exist in a few days, anyway. So ironic. (to CLERK) It's okay Dorothy, let a real insult fly. Even if I told your boss it won't change your jobless fate.

EMILY: (to MAXWELL) Shut the fuck up! Jesus Christ. What is wrong with you?

MAXWELL: Ah ha. Look, iPhone Leibovitz over there talks, too.

EMILY: I'll say it: You're an asshole.

MAXWELL: What's with the pics, Annie?

EMILY: My name is Emily. Stop naming people you don't know. You're so

condescending.

MAXWELL: What's with the pics, Emily?

EMILY: (to DITA) Is he always like this?

DITA: Oh, he can be much worse.

MAXWELL: What's with the pics, Emily?

EMILY: Really?

(A beat.)

MAXWELL: What's with the pics, Emily?

(A longer beat.)

MAXWELL: What's with the pics, Emily?

EMILY: My Netflix queue. What's with your attitude, asshole?

MAXWELL: Why would you come into a scary, ghost town shithole like this when you could be safe at home downloading, or walking to your mailbox?

EMILY: I like the way new releases are organized here.

DITA: So you take pictures of the boxes of movies you want... then go online and get them?

EMILY: Yeah. So what?

MAXWELL: (to CLERK) Told you Dorothy. The end is nigh!

CLERK: You know, we reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

DITA: They don't have the film anyway. Let's leave.

(EMILY just leaves with no fanfare.)

(DING DONG!)

MAXWELL: Well you're looking in drama, Dita. But it's sort of a documentary, too.

DITA: I looked in both.

MAXWELL: Well ask Dorothy.

CLERK: We don't have it.

DITA: See?

MAXWELL: She doesn't even know what it is.

(The CLERK picks up the remote and pauses the action film so she can focus on the conversation.)

CLERK: Sure I do.

MAXWELL: What then?

CLERK: Something as pretentious as you, and we don't carry anything like that.

MAXWELL: (sardonically) Oh ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha...

CLERK: SHUT UP!

(They all go silent for a moment and have a stare down.)

(A car alarm suddenly sounds.)

DITA: Well I'm leaving. You can stay and act like a teenager if you want. Simon's gonna throw a fit. So let's go back to his studio and get it over with.

MAXWELL: Fine. I told you these stores were useless. Dinosaurs.

(MAXWELL tosses the movie in his hand over his shoulder without turning his head. It falls to the floor and he acts as if nothing happened.)

(DING DONG! EMILY steps back inside with only one foot just to announce something.)

EMILY: Some angry unemployed actress kicked out the window of a car. I didn't get a good look at her for a description, but if anyone in here is the owner of a Volvo wagon with a Depeche Mode rainbow sticker... you might want to call Triple A.

(And EMILY disappears again with a DING DONG!)

(There is a long beat as MAXWELL and DITA look at each other unable to speak or react.)

(They suddenly race for the door and exit. DING DONG!)

(The CLERK goes to the window and watches the offstage action. After a few beats, the spectacle has obviously moved out of her line of sight, because she goes back to sorting.)

(After a few moments her head snaps up as she realizes something.)

(She makes her way to the bathroom door and contemplates opening it. Instead she knocks.)

(No response.)

(She knocks again. Still no response.)

(She opens the door a crack. Before she can say anything we hear the sound of vomiting.)

CLERK: Sir?

(Spitting sounds are all she gets back.)

CLERK: Sir? Are you all right?

JOHN: (from offstage and with great effort) The cart. When she wrote gravy and the tire swing was all cold with Mable's afghan blanket on the bottle. Johnny said. Snitch. Don't cheese pillow. And then the street.

CLERK: Are you okay?

JOHN: Doctor?

CLERK: I'm not a doctor.

JOHN: Dead yet?

CLERK: You're not dead, sir.

JOHN: No. You.

CLERK: I don't understand.

(There is a thud in bathroom. And then quiet.)

CLERK: Oh God.

(The CLERK goes into the bathroom. There is some rustling.)

(After a beat she drags the lifeless body of JOHN out into the store by his feet.)

(She looks around panicked, not sure what to do.)

(She goes to the wall and pulls down a big banner with the store name and tagline on it. She kneels down to cover JOHN's body with it.)

(She takes a deep breath and collects herself.)

(She stands, grabs a package of Twizzlers from the rack, and returns to the counter.)

(She opens the package and picks up the remote, then starts the action movie back up.)

(She bites into a Twizzler and watches the movie intently as the lights fade to just the TV screen light. The action movie starts to have police sirens.)

(The sirens turn back into the desert wind.)

(Fade to black.)

END OF PLAY

SCENES

(LIGHTS up.)

(TEE bounds in from the center aisle.)

(JENNI is stage right holding a lollipop.)

(WENDY is near JENNI but somewhat upstage holding an empty box.)

(FRANK is alone center stage.)

TEE: Right okay, Jenni, suck the lollipop like it's better than the best one you've ever had. No smart ass cock-mastering, either, goddammit. If it's read sexual, I want it to be the audience's own perversion — not what we played. Wendy: pay attention. And remember, when we get the plant, it will be this tall — (indicates with his hands) So if you hold it there, we can't see your face. And Frank: I love you, but what the hell? We tech tomorrow, so this is it.

FRANK: Well, you can't give me twenty-five changes for one speech in one shot and think I'm going to...

TEE: Okay, I'm going to repeat myself. (to the house) Tom, note that I'm repeating myself. (to the three on stage) We — tech — tomorrow.

WENDY: (confidentially to Jenni) After three weeks I think we can do this sleeping.

TEE: Frank. Tell me sincerely, do you know what you're doing?

(FRANK nods.)

TEE (cont'd): We could go back to table work if you want. But I think I'd have a heart attack because we tech to-mor-row.

FRANK: (agitated) All right Tee, can we just do it again?

TEE: Okay. Let's go. Ladies, remember what you're doing — just because you're not

speaking doesn't mean you're not watched.

JENNI: We know, Tee.

TEE: Then let's see it this time.

(TEE bounds back down the aisle into the house and spins around, folds his arms, and watches the stage. Without turning...)

TEE: Tommy, shout "Lights up," whenever you're ready.

TOMMY: (from offstage) Lights up.

(FRANK takes a deep breath.)

FRANK: Little Johnny was eleven when his ma died, I just 'bout took him in myself. When his Gram came down...

TEE: (shouting) His who? I lost it. (beat) Keep going.

FRANK: (louder) When his Gram came down, I was almost a little sad, you know? Here's this little guy gonna need to learn the street. Gonna need to survive and his Gram...

TEE: All right, let's stop there.

JENNI: Why?

TEE: About ten beats went by and you hit about one and a half.

WENDY: Ten beats? It was, like, three sentences...

TEE: (returning to the stage) Three sentences that weren't filled.

FRANK: (with sarcasm) Then maybe I don't know what I'm doing. What do you want, Tee? How can I make this work for you?

TEE: Why's it so hard Frank? He's a brash bastard telling some poor little fucker story. Turns out he's got a heart.

FRANK: If it's that simple, where are all these beats coming from?

TEE: Well, it should be from here, Frank.

(He clutches his heart.)

FRANK: Are you kidding me?

TEE: Do you have a problem with the play?

FRANK: It's not a play, Tee. It's three minutes long. When it's three minutes, it's a piece.

TEE: If you treat it like that, you are disrespecting the work.

FRANK: The work? It's a three minute piece — that you wrote.

TEE: If you can't handle it Frank, I'll have Jenni do it and I'll suck the cock.

JENNI: Lollipop.

TEE: Stay out of this!

WENDY: Don't yell at her.

TOMMY: (from offstage) And... scene.

(TOMMY bounds on to the stage.)

TOMMY (cont'd): That was good.

(He claps his hands together.)

TOMMY (cont'd): (to WENDY) Gina, remember, if you're being told to keep the box

lower because the plant will be tall, you need to hold it high.

WENDY: Yes, but when I...

JENNI: Just take the note.

WENDY: Don't be a bitch!

JENNI: Don't make excuses!

TOMMY: Ladies! (to FRANK) Jorge...

FRANK: Sí?

TOMMY: L-o-u-d-e-r.

FRANK: Sí.

TOMMY: F-a-s-t-e-r.

FRANK: Ah. Sí.

TOMMY: A-n-g-r-i-e-r.

FRANK: Sí señor.

TOMMY: (to JENNI) Sara... you should cock master it. You're pissed — so be a smart ass about it. (to TEE) And Cecil, that was perfect.

WENDY: And — scene. Okay. (to TEE) Dick, don't forget to move toward Michelle to take the lollipop... (to TOMMY) That was good, Bill, but wait a little longer before you come in.

TOMMY: A Merchant Ivory pause or a 2001 pause?

WENDY: Bergman.

TOMMY: I don't know who that is.

(LIGHTS begin fading out slowly.)

JENNI: And — scene. Okay, the play within the play within the play within the play could be clearer, but overall...

FRANK: The lights are fading out... and —

ALL: Scene.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

SOUND & FURY

(Lights up.)

[Note: the play gets faster and faster to the end. Overlapping should definitely occur.]

(MUSAK under all.)

(TRACY #1 is sitting center on the phone. TRACY #2 and TRACY #3 are to the left and right. These TRACYs can be male, female, or a combination of both.)

TRACY #1: No, I already ordered it. It came to my home. But I wasn't there. I know. I know, but that wasn't what I said. I mean, I told you... guys, that the shipping address is my work. Sending it to my home is pointless. No. I know that. I said that. No, I said to ship to my work. I'm never, ever home, so why would I...? Yeah, it's A-1-3-5-1-9-0-6-8-8. Sure.

(TRACY sits back — on hold.)

TRACY #2: Hello. I called a few days ago because... Oh. A-1-3-5... No, I don't have that. Well, because I never got the package. They charged me for a new order, but I didn't get a new order number. It's a... I don't know if it's was defective, it never came. Sure.

(TRACY sits back — on hold.)

TRACY #3: Yes, I called a couple times already, and I've talked to several people who all insist that I received my package. But it didn't... I promise you it did not. Yes, it's A-1-3... That's fine.

(TRACY sits back — on hold.)

TRACY #1: Hello. I have a package and... No, no, the package never... Sure.

TRACY #3: Yes, I have talked to a lot of people who have told me a lot of nothing. All of them have been wrong. Or not true. Or something. I'm Tracy Mitch...

TRACY #1: ... No Tracy. And what? No, don't transfer it just that I end up on hold for a really long time, and it's... but... if you. Fine. Yes. Fine.

TRACY #3: Go ahead.

TRACY #2: Hello... I...

(TRACY sighs.)

TRACY #1: I never received the package it's been a week and a half. I just need some sort of confirmation that it's either still on the way or that it was supposedly delivered... in which case it was maybe stolen. No. No I did not say that it was stolen. I said maybe. Well, the first time you sent it, to the wrong address. That was overnight. Now... No. No, I don't know the number — I never got it.

TRACY #2: It's been two weeks now and I have tried to be patient. At this point I'm thinking I may just give up. I mean the whole point was convenience, or I would have just got to the store. And then I'd have it immediately instead of...

TRACY #3: This whole experience has been awful, and it's the first experience I've had with your company's customer service. It's safe to say that it hasn't gone very well. At all. So do you really want to ask me about taking a brief satisfaction survey at the end of my call? I'm thinking of just bailing out. But you've charged me twice — overnight and regular — but you've never managed to deliver it to me. Everyone assures me that it will be sorted out, but I'm not seeing progress...

TRACY #1: Evidently there are two orders... but I have only one order number. The number I have is A-1-3-5-1-9-0-6-8-8. Yes, I'll wait.

(TRACY sighs.)

TRACY #2: I don't have it. It is not damaged, it was not the wrong package. It was no package. I don't have any package at all. So my issue is with a hypothetical package, so sure, you might as well go right ahead and put me on hold. Everyone else does. However, I demand that you to give me the direct number to the next person in line. Even if you aren't supposed to. For the next time. I'll just leap frog right over you. Yes, I tried the online support. The chat was a chat bot. A robot. It was of no use to me. The email support was a form letter. I want to talk to you. To a person.

TRACY #1: Okay. Here's the deal. It's been three weeks and I am prepared to quit. No matter how good a deal this was. No matter how badly I want this package to arrive... I would rather live without it. I hate the contents of the package now. That package sucks. The insides of that package suck almost as much as your company. I would like to end my relationship with the phantom package and end my relationship with you. Can I do

that?

TRACY #3: Well I'm glad that you appreciate how calm I am, because it truly is difficult at this point.

TRACY #1: So I went went to your office to pick it up since you guys can't deliver my order to me, and there were no employees there. Yes. Yes that's right. At the office, no one was there. Oh no, you were open all right. But there was no one there. You see why I wanted to order online?

TRACY #2: Ah, but I was just transferred by someone from that department.

TRACY #3: Three weeks ago, you sent my package to the wrong...

TRACY #2: Hello?

TRACY #1: Sorry, I am not going to drive out to pick it up unless I know there will be employees there. Evidently some of your offices don't have employees. Maybe one of your employees should simply locate it and deliver it. Oh wait, you guys don't actually deliver things. Not to the right addresses anyway. And why would I have to go buy another one and wait for reimbursement. I already did buy one. Twice. It's paid for. Twice. I paid twice for it. I already paid two times for the contents of my package, so why don't you take a new, empty package, and go buy new contents for me...?

TRACY #2: Okay. The last person transferred me to a recording that said, "Press 1, Press 2." No context or anything, just that. One or two. Then it hung up when I didn't push anything.

TRACY #3: I just want a refund. Yes. Cancel. I want to cancel. No more package for me. Why? Why can't you do it? No, don't transfer to someone with the authority. Take the authority. This is your opportunity. Stand up and be strong. Decide that you can do it. No, no, no, no, no... seriously, I really don't want to be transferred, I want to can... (beat) No fucking way.

TRACY #1: Ok. Here is the deal. You aren't going to tell me anything. The following things are going to happen. One, you are not going to transfer me. Two, I will not hold. Three, I have only one order number for a package that has two order numbers somehow, and I don't fucking care if that means I shouldn't talk to you. Four, I want to cancel. I want to cancel my delivery. I want to cancel any kind of anything that I may

have had with you and the shitty stupid thing I ordered that I don't even want any more. Every single step of the way — every step! You have no one able or willing to solve the problem. You guys are the most unbelievably bad, wrong, dumb, stupid company and I'm sorry if I have to talk to you like this but I am completely incapable of talking in any other way right now. So here is my order number: A-1-3-5-1-9-0-6-8-8. Cancel me. Somehow. Someway. I want out. I want the cancel, give me the cancel. Cancel, cancel, cancel. I hate you and I hate the other people and I even hate that goddamn Snuggie. I don't want it anymore! Give me the cancel, I cancel you all. CANCEL!!!!

(Blackout and music out.)

END OF PLAY

THE THREE ELITISTS

(Lights up on a sign that reads "EPISODE ONE.")

(Enter JOCELYN, TOMMY, and ZEUS. They dance and sing their Theme Song.)

(JOCELYN, is an indie rock girl who still looks fabulous even though she tries to dress herself dramatically down.)

(TOMMY looks tremendously butch, but sounds awfully gay.)

(ZEUS is a crazy-haired hipster in the typical tight taper leg pants and deep V-neck shirt.)

[THEME SONG]

(ALL) The Three Elitists

We're sent to make some change.

The Three Elitists

We seek a deep exchange.

(ALL) Traveling through the red states

We can make a purple glow

Talk to the local rednecks

And find out what they know.

(ALL) There's Tommy...

(TOMMY) That's me!

(ALL) And Jocelyn...

(JOCELYN) Hey friends!

(ALL) And Zeus...

(ZEUS) Why are we doing this, again?

(ALL) Ahh Zeus!

(ALL) The Three Elitists

Helping America unite.

The Three Elitists

Not one of us can fight.

[THEME SONG END]

ANNOUNCER: Previously on “The Three Elitists.”

(The actors do quick vignettes. First...)

POLICEMAN: (shining a flashlight in Tommy’s eyes) I still don’t understand what y’all’re doing here.

TOMMY: We’re here to make some friends.

POLICEMAN: Well hookers gotta stay in their designated areas. I’m afraid I’m gonna have to take y’all in.

(The next vignette...)

ZEUS: (weeping) I don’t belong here.

TOMMY: If you're gonna be in the hoosgow, do your time like a man, Zeus.

(The last vignette...)

JOCELYN: I understand now. We were treated indecently because they thought we were indecent. We should have communicated better and avoided the whole mess.

(TOMMY, JOCELYN and ZEUS return to the wings for the start of the latest episode.)

(Sound of crickets. An older man, BILLY JACK, sits in a rocking chair drinking a Pabst Blue Ribbon. A shotgun lays across his overalls.)

(He slaps the back of his neck killing a mosquito, and confirms the kill by looking at his palm.)

(He notices THE THREE ELITISTS enter and leaps out of his seat. He shakes his shotgun in the air in a rage.)

BILLY JACK: Y'all get the hell off my damn property!

(They start to go, defeated.)

BILLY JACK (cont'd): (lowering his gun) Now hold on a second... what y'all want?

(JOCELYN excitedly turns to TOMMY and ZEUS and reassures them.)

JOCELYN: (to the boys) It's my turn, I'll take this one. (to Billy Jack) Well, sir, umm, now that the election is over...

BILLY JACK : Election?

JOCELYN: You see, the President-elect has asked young, progressive people like us to reach out to those who didn't support him...

TOMMY: ... try to understand our differences...

JOCELYN: ... and end the polarization. You know, talk about what bothers you.

BILLY JACK: Well you can start with that hat. It's peculiar. Peculiar things bother me.

(ZEUS steps up to JOCELYN and tugs on her arm.)

ZEUS: Come on, Jocelyn. This is going to be worse than the last one.

BILLY JACK: Jocelyn? What the hell kinda name is that? A-rab?

TOMMY: It's A-merican.

BILLY JACK: America is as America does.

ZEUS: That doesn't even make sense.

JOCELYN: I said I got this one, fellas.

TOMMY: He's so hostile.

ZEUS: And crazy. Let's just go.

JOCELYN: Don't be a quitter, Zeus.

BILLY JACK: ZEUS??!!

ZEUS: He has a problem with my name... how shocking.

BILLY JACK: This is a Christian nation, boy. You can believe in all your ching chang chong back in China... but you don't call yourself 'Zeus,' in real America.

JOCELYN: Okay, see... that's the point of... this. You say "real America." Why is this real America and it's not where we come from?

BILLY JACK: Just look at me. I'm America. Right here. America.

JOCELYN: Why?

(BILLY JACK looks bewildered, huffs, waves them off while returning to his chair.)

JOCELYN (cont'd): I mean, I understood America to be a place of welcome and tolerance. Where we could stand side by side, united by freedom.

BILLY JACK: I'll unite your little Islamo-Buddhist friend with some buckshot, y'all don't move on now.

TOMMY: Oh my!

(BILLY JACK rises fully upright dropping his character. He lays his shotgun down and walks elegantly toward the audience while the rest of the cast freezes.)

BILLY JACK: Hi, I'm Billy Jack. A ridiculously over-the-top stereotype — as unfair as the stereotypes we place upon you God-hating, abortion-loving smarty pants people in the city. But you see, it bothers me that you're okay living next door to people named Mohammed... And fags. Just as much as it bothers you that I touched my sister's naughty parts up until she ran away. But there's a comfort I feel in simplifying you, as you most certainly do me. I mean, I know Zeus is Greek, I saw Clash of the Titans when the batteries ran out on my remote, and my cousin's kids left the TV on the Sci-Fi channel. But I need to hate you. So don't you dare take that away from me. (starts back to his chair, scratching his head and returning to character) Oh go on, ya Commies.

TOMMY: You're mean.

BILLY JACK: You're mean.

JOCELYN: How so?

BILLY JACK: How so?

ZEUS: Oh my god.

BILLY JACK: Chinamen don't have a God.

ZEUS: I'm not Chinese.

BILLY JACK: Tell that to the mountain!

ZEUS: What?

JOCELYN: Don't provoke him.

ZEUS: Me...? Provoke him?

JOCELYN: I just have one question for you, sir. Then we'll go.

BILLY JACK: Shoot.

(JOCELYN walks toward him carefully. She looks at him sincerely and patiently before her earnest plea.)

JOCELYN: Why don't you like us?

BILLY JACK: Because you don't know.

JOCELYN: Don't know what?

BILLY JACK: Why.

(A beat as THE THREE ELITISTS take that in.)

JOCELYN: You know, you're right. You want us to understand, but we've never really tried before now. And now it's too late — your anger is already there.

TOMMY: (in a moment of inspiration) Tear down those walls, Mr. Angry Man.

JOCELYN: Tommy, don't you see? It's not him, it's us. We need to tear down our walls and truly see why we make him angry. We're the ones with work to do.

ZEUS: I don't think that's what he was saying.

JOCELYN: Well I know it is. Good night sir. Bless you.

BILLY JACK: With all due respect... y'all's crazy.

(A beat, and then EVERYONE laughs. Even BILLY JACK.)

ANNOUNCER: Next week on "The Three Elitists."

(Vignette #1...)

JOCELYN: Do you have anything that's not fried or without bacon?

TOMMY: Just get the chicken fried steak. Says here it's the best in town.

(Vignette #2...)

ZEUS: I don't see how we have any choice, Joce. It's going to have to be at least a handjob.

(Vignette #3...)

JOCELYN: It's all so clear to me now. It's our own sense of elevation that made them force us down to go down... so we know what it's like to suck on misfortune.

(They meet center stage for a short version of the theme song:)

[THEME SONG REPRISE]

(ALL) Traveling through the red states

We can make a purple glow

Talk to the local rednecks

And find out what they know.

(ALL) The Three Elitists

We're liberals in the south.

The Three Elitists

Taking punches in the mouth.

Peace.

[THEME SONG REPRISE END]

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

IN THE CHOPS

(Lights up on a criminal psychologist's office.)

(DR. LAKE ushers JAMES in and tries to guide him to couch unsuccessfully.)

JAMES: No. No, no, no. You ain't starting in on that shit. I know people. I know people who done this and they said it ain't like that.

DR. LAKE: Like what?

JAMES: They said I didn't have to do this.

DR. LAKE: Do what?

JAMES: (gestures to indicate the room itself) That whole thing.

DR. LAKE: What?

JAMES: Questions. Answer them.

DR. LAKE: You don't want me to ask questions?

JAMES: No. You gotta a job, right?

DR. LAKE: Of course.

JAMES: And your job is to sign that paper so I can get outta here.

DR. LAKE: And you think that's the extent of my job?

JAMES: Look, I don't know shit about your job. And you don't know shit about mine. I'm okay with that. I just need that paper.

DR. LAKE: But I don't just sign the paper and send you on your way, I have to eval...

JAMES: You new here?

DR. LAKE: What?

JAMES: Are you new here, Smarty?

DR. LAKE: Well, yes. I just finished my internship, but I am now fully qualified to...

JAMES: So, I get it now.

DR. LAKE: Get what?

JAMES: Why you're fucking me over.

DR. LAKE: What makes you think that I'm... doing that?

JAMES: You're gonna try and fix me. Well, I don't need fixing. I've got no problem. I'm cool. But I guess you ain't. Fucking hassling me and all. But you see... I know people...

DR. LAKE: What people?

JAMES: I know people who done this and they said it don't take no time. You sit down and say you're sorry and get the paper signed. I said it. And you ain't signed my paper.

DR. LAKE: Well, I haven't seen you sit, and if you offered some sort of apology, I did not hear it.

(After a small beat, JAMES sits.)

JAMES: Sorry.

(JAMES stands back up.)

DR. LAKE: Do you know why I haven't signed the paper?

JAMES: Yes.

DR. LAKE: Why?

JAMES: Because you're new here and think you can help people who don't need it. And all I know is my boss thinks I'm gonna be at work in 45 minutes but you think you gonna figure me out and make me late.

DR. LAKE: Did you read the documentation?

JAMES: What?

DR. LAKE: Did you read the documentation about this session?

JAMES: What do you mean?

DR. LAKE: As part of your diversion program, you had to take the blood test, attend the eight hour class, pay the fine, and have a three hour session with me. You didn't read that?

JAMES: I read that. So what?

DR. LAKE: Three hours. If you are scheduled for a three hour session, why did you tell your boss you would be in so soon?

JAMES: Did you go to college?

DR. LAKE: Of course, to become a...

JAMES: Then you can't be too stupid.

DR. LAKE: I should think not.

JAMES: Then what part of “sign the fuckin’ paper and shut the fuck up,’ do you not get?

DR. LAKE: I think you’ve just earned yourself another hour.

JAMES: I ain’t dumb.

DR. LAKE: I never said you were James.

JAMES: That’s Mr. Tindle to you, Claude.

DR. LAKE: Dr. Lake will be fine, Mr. Tindle.

JAMES: Now that we’ve negotiated all friendly-like...

DR. LAKE: Friendly? You haven’t even sat down.

(A beat and then JAMES reluctantly takes a seat.)

JAMES: There. Now are you going to sign my fucking paper before I lose my fucking job?

DR. LAKE: Do you consider the word “fucking” part of a constructive conversation?

JAMES: Do you consider the word “jerk-off” a good description of yourself.

(DR. LAKE sits.)

DR. LAKE: Why are you so angry Mr. Tindle?

JAMES: Fuck that Mr. Tindle shit, I was playing with you.

DR. LAKE: Why are you so angry, JAMES?

JAMES: Goddamn you’re slow. Let me explain it to you like I’m talking to my dog.
(slowly and deliberately) I will lose my job, Sparky, if you don’t sign my paper, and let me

go.

DR. LAKE: I can't adjust my job requirements to suit your negligence. You should have told your boss you needed the entire day off.

JAMES: Well, Smarty. Then I would have lost my job for sure... or I would be screwed this week for missing a whole day's work of pay.

DR. LAKE: Would you like a hint on how to survive this situation.

JAMES: Please, Mr. Trebeck.

DR. LAKE: If you were to answer my questions, this could be over rather quickly indeed. But when you try to avoid them...

(JAMES jumps to his feet and begins pacing dramatically.)

JAMES: Why me? Why do I get the new fucking guy? Nobody gets new guys. But me. I have to get the... (stopping to address DR. LAKE) what'd you say you are?

DR. LAKE: I was an intern... but now I'm fully...

JAMES: (throwing his hands in the air) I get the intern. Okay, fine. All right, Smarty. Ask me a question.

(DR. LAKE takes a moment to decide whether or not to clarify. Then decides to just press on.)

DR. LAKE: Why do you drink?

JAMES: You wouldn't understand.

DR. LAKE: That's no answer.

JAMES: That's a dumb question.

DR. LAKE: I don't think so.

JAMES: Okay, then it's not answerable.

DR. LAKE: Why not?

JAMES: Because you wouldn't understand.

DR. LAKE: Why do you think that? (pause) James?

JAMES: I'm thinking.

DR. LAKE: What are you thinking about?

JAMES: How to answer you. It ain't so easy for me to be quick like you. See I didn't go to college.

DR. LAKE: Why didn't you go to college, James?

JAMES: Why did you go to college, Smarty?

DR. LAKE: Dr. Lake is fine. You couldn't afford to?

JAMES: Guys like me just... don't. And if you say "Why?" I'm gonna...

(He pauses for a beat.)

DR. LAKE: You're going to what?

JAMES: Be... (with affectation) displeased. (He sits and points.) Can you sign the paper now?

DR. LAKE: When did your drinking problem begin?

JAMES: I don't have a problem.

DR. LAKE: You don't have a drinking problem?

JAMES: I don't have a problem with my drinking. I don't, my wife and kids don't, my buddies don't and my boss don't. Only the cops, that Judge Weiner, and you have a problem. And you ain't part of my life. So where's the problem?

DR. LAKE: Do you think your drinking causes your violent tendencies?

JAMES: Jesus Christ.

DR. LAKE: I hardly believe he is involved in this.

JAMES: That was supposed to be funny, wasn't it? Smart boy clowning that dumb boy don't get. Why should I tell you about me? You can't understand, why I am like I am, and why I ain't gonna change.

DR. LAKE: If you firmly believe that you aren't going to change, then I won't be able to sign the paper.

JAMES: I'm so stupid. God, I'm so stupid. Sorry. Can we start over?

DR. LAKE: Why?

JAMES: I did this all wrong.

DR. LAKE: How so?

JAMES: I should be lyin'. I should be telling you what you wanna hear. Ain't that how I get your autograph and get back to work?

DR. LAKE: No.

JAMES: Of course not. Okay, ask me a question.

(JAMES sits up straight and proper.)

DR. LAKE: Do you think your drinking causes your violent tendencies?

JAMES: Yes. My tendencies are violent because I'm drinking so much. But as soon as I quit that nasty habit of mine... Which believe me, I will! Then my tendencies will be very peaceful.

DR. LAKE: You expect me to believe this?

JAMES: Of course, sir. I've been bad, and it's time for a change.

DR. LAKE: I don't believe you James.

JAMES: Why not?

DR. LAKE: It's my job to recognize when someone is pulling a (pardon me) bullshit job, and righting themselves.

JAMES: I am righted now. Honestly.

DR. LAKE: This charade is not helping your situation James. You can drop it and answer truthfully. (pause) Tell me about your job.

JAMES: Ain't nothing to tell.

DR. LAKE: Well, what is your job?

JAMES: It ain't in your little folder of my life history?

DR. LAKE: Possibly, but I can't recall. So why don't you tell me?

JAMES: I work in a factory.

DR. LAKE: Doing what?

JAMES: Everything.

DR. LAKE: What do you mean by 'everything'?

JAMES: I mean that everything the machines can't do, I do.

DR. LAKE: Sounds like a lot of work.

JAMES: No shit.

DR. LAKE: Sounds pretty monotonous.

JAMES: What?

DR. LAKE: Sounds like it is the same things over and over, driving you mad.

JAMES: Oh. Yeah, no shit to that, too.

DR. LAKE: Do you hate your job?

JAMES: Of course. Everyone hates their job.

DR. LAKE: Oh, I wouldn't think everyone does.

JAMES: Well, if I went to college and got to sit behind a desk chatting with dumb people — whose lives you can destroy by talking their heads off with questions, I suppose I might find it fun... in a sick way.

DR. LAKE: Do you think I want to hurt you?

JAMES: I don't know if you want to, but you are.

DR. LAKE: And if I said I was trying to help you, what would you say?

JAMES: I'd say you're an idiot.

DR. LAKE: Why?

JAMES: 'Cuz I'm fine, Smarty. You wanna help me, give me a million dollars and five plane tickets to a warm place.

DR. LAKE: Five? You have three children?

JAMES: Two.

DR. LAKE: Why five tickets?

JAMES: My mother-in-law.

DR. LAKE: She lives with you.

JAMES: Yes.

DR. LAKE: How do you feel about that?

JAMES: I fuckin' hate it. How would you feel?

DR. LAKE: But if you had a million dollars, you'd take her along and not just put her up somewhere?

JAMES: Of course.

DR. LAKE: Why?

JAMES: I ain't gonna leave her without anyone.

DR. LAKE: Do you have a fear of being alone?

JAMES: I ain't scared of nothin'.

DR. LAKE: Nothing?

JAMES: No.

DR. LAKE: I don't believe you.

JAMES: I don't believe you.

DR. LAKE: Why do you drink?

JAMES: Look, Smarty, there is a whole world out there of guys like me that guys like you don't want to know. So why do you want to know me?

DR. LAKE: It's my job.

JAMES: And you have to do it so well?

DR. LAKE: You don't take pride in your work?

JAMES: What's there to take pride in? Busting my hands reaching inside the machines that get stuck, burning myself on the equipment, my sore fucking... I ain't here to bitch.

DR. LAKE: Why not?

JAMES: 'Cuz that's life. Life is the nightmare you get. And where I come from, if you bitch you get your mouth busted.

DR. LAKE: Did your father hit you when you were a child?

JAMES: Oh shit. Here we go. Look, if my father weren't dead then he'd hit me now.

DR. LAKE: Do you have children?

JAMES: You know I got children.

DR. LAKE: Three.

JAMES: Two.

DR. LAKE: Yes, that's right. How old are they?

JAMES: You do know I gotta get to work?

DR. LAKE: How old are they?

JAMES: (beat) James is six. Jenny is... (tiny beat) ... three.

DR. LAKE: Did you want to have children at your age?

JAMES: What kinda question is that?

DR. LAKE: Sometimes, we don't...

JAMES: ... what, plan? No, I didn't mean to. But, you know, what can you do?

DR. LAKE: Have you ever physically harmed one of your children?

(JAMES leaps up and flings himself toward DR. LAKE's desk.)

JAMES: No! I would never... You just don't get it, do you?

DR. LAKE: Get what? (pause) What don't I get James?

(JAMES shoves a pile of papers and envelopes off of the desk and onto the floor.)

JAMES: ARE YOU GONNA SIGN MY FUCKIN' PAPER?!

DR. LAKE: Why would I sign it when you won't cooperate...

JAMES: Because I don't have time for this shrinkin' my head shit. I gotta get to work.

DR. LAKE: Do you even realize how much more is at stake than simply getting back to work?

JAMES: What are you talkin' about?

DR. LAKE: I'm talking about the fact that if you don't cooperate, I won't sign this paper at all. And do you know what that means? (long pause) That means that not only will you not get to work, but you will go to jail. If one fails to complete the Diversion Program — each step — then they must serve at least the minimum sentence for a crime such as yours. What's more important to you? Being a little late to work (due to your own assumption) or going to jail and losing your job completely? (pause) James? (pause) James, what do you find more important?

JAMES: All right Smarty. You wanna know why I fuckin' bust heads and get my head busted?

DR. LAKE: Of course I do.

JAMES: Then... then fuckin' live it.

(Silence.)

DR. LAKE: James... (pause) James. James this is the last time I'm going to...

JAMES: Fine! Fuckin' fine. This is such bull-fuckin'-shit. You know I'm just one of a whole fuckin' tribe, right? You wanna send me to jail so bad, but you ain't gonna make a dent in shit. You ain't gonna do nothing but hurt my family and nobody hurts my family.

DR. LAKE: What do you mean 'tribe'?

JAMES: The fuck you think? Guys. You know, guys who bust their fuckin' ass at some bullshit job that breaks your body and breaks your brain. Loads you up with anger and makes you tired. Tired of the life you got because you came from shit with nothing but shit ahead of you and you had kids too soon. Two mouths crying out for you to put some food in their chops and hang on... Hang on and give them a shot you didn't get. But when you get off workin' you got nothing but piss in you. Nothing but anger boiling. You wanna fuckin' explode. You wanna beat the shit outta something. Ain't goin' home like

that. Sorry. No. Ain't gonna. Gotta go drink, gotta numb and gotta shove my fist in somebody's face who feels like he deserves it anyway. I know I wanna say 'thank you' every time some fucker busts me one. And after you drank enough and punched enough. It don't matter no more. All that anger — whoosh. Where'd it go? (beat) Hell, you don't know. 'Cuz now you're okay. Now you can go home. Now you don't gotta worry you gonna smack Dee 'cuz the spaghetti's like rubber, or the kids 'cuz they're singing some shit they learned on TV. 'Cuz, you know. You love them. You don't wanna hurt them. (beat) And that bastard in the bar ain't got no hard feelings. Hell, tomorrow he'll buy me a goddamn drink. And I ain't got no hard feelings. We're on the same team. We already feel like we need a good smack for letting our lives turn up like shit. And we got one thing. One thing that ain't shit. And that's a family. And we love that more than anything. That makes us somebody. That erases the shit. But we gotta get clean before we go home or we might track some shit in the house. And I love them. I love them too much to bring that shit home. (pause) Okay, Smarty. You see why I'm here? Why I need that paper and why I gotta get to work?

DR. LAKE: Have you ever hit them?

JAMES: What the fuck did I ever do to you?

DR. LAKE: Are you afraid to answer me?

JAMES: Yes! Goddammit. Once. One fuckin' time. One goddamn time. And that's why. That's when, this began. And I will never, never ever do that again.

DR. LAKE: How can you be sure?

JAMES: Because you're gonna sign that fuckin' paper and I'm gonna keep doin' what I gotta do or I'll fuckin'... be upset!

DR. LAKE: We'll see.

JAMES: (leaning into him) What the hell? "We'll see." We'll see what? You ain't gonna sign?

DR. LAKE: We'll see.

JAMES: For a smarty, you're pretty fuckin' dumb. Don't do this.

DR. LAKE: James, you almost killed a kid. You think he's gonna buy you a drink tomorrow? He won't be walking tomorrow. Maybe you think this pattern you've fallen into is protecting your family, but it is temporary.

JAMES: Why do you think this one is any different? It ain't special. This kid was skinnier than me. Younger than me. He couldn't take it. I didn't treat him no different than any other guys I go rounds with. He just wasn't ready to go those rounds.

DR. LAKE: James, if I sign this paper and release you right back into society, I could be directly responsible for another kid being put in the hospital. Or even dead.

JAMES: You are a real sonofabitch Smarty.

DR. LAKE: Unless you can convince me that you are going to find another means of releasing your aggression, I can't possibly sign this paper.

JAMES: Do you want to be directly responsible for destroying my family? For putting a family on the street? For putting someone away because he loves? Because he loves his kids, because he loves his wife?

DR. LAKE: But you've gone too far James.

JAMES: What the fuck do I gotta do? Look, you got kids, right?

DR. LAKE: No.

JAMES: So you must... No? Well, pretending, acting like you did — No. You got a wife?

DR. LAKE: Fiancé.

JAMES: Okay. That's good. Yeah. You love her, right?

DR. LAKE: James...

JAMES: Do you love her you fuckin' punk? Or don't you?

DR. LAKE: Of course...

JAMES: Now supposin' she weren't so smart. She can't get jobs, really, and she's got kids. Got her Mamma. And she needs you. And then you die. What would happen to her?

DR. LAKE: Well, that's all hypothetical James. There's no use pondering something...

JAMES: No it ain't... that. 'Cuz if you put me away I might as well be dead. So you take the time to think about it. You take the time to step in my shoes, you bitch. It ain't no schoolbook answer, you got to put that shit they taught you in life. And you want to kill me, I'll fuckin' kill you, you punk.

(Long pause.)

DR. LAKE: James. You're making it very difficult for me to help you.

JAMES: (picks up the photo on the desk) What's your fiancé's name?

DR. LAKE: What? (standing up) Why?

JAMES: (strolling toward the couch) You don't have to tell me. I can find out.

DR. LAKE: What do you mean by that?

JAMES: Nothing.

DR. LAKE: Are you threatening me? (approaching the couch) Are you threatening to hurt my wife?

JAMES: Fiancé.

DR. LAKE: (holds his hand out for the picture) James. (pause) James, you are not...

(JAMES hands him the picture.)

JAMES: She sure is pretty.

DR. LAKE: (pause) I think this is enough. You can wait outside while I make my decision.

(DR. LAKE returns to his desk but does not sit.)

JAMES: Oh no, no. Hold up. I go sit out there and I'll just be waitin' to be hauled away. You ain't gonna sign, are you?

DR. LAKE: I need to review what transpired here, in silence, alone, before I make my decision.

JAMES: So what you're saying is that I'm fucked. My family's fucked.

(JAMES steps closer to the desk.)

(DR. LAKE looks conspicuously uneasy.)

DR. LAKE: No. I haven't decided. And should I not sign, your life is not over James. You will, perhaps, be rehabilitated. In the meantime, your family will manage.

JAMES: And how will your wife manage?

DR. LAKE: Don't hurt yourself James.

JAMES: Don't hurt a whole family ain't hurting nobody!

DR. LAKE: Nobody? (moving toward James angrily) Have you seen that kid? Have you seen what you did to him? You are vile and malicious James. You are a threat to society.

JAMES: Did they teach you to talk like that?

DR. LAKE: Leave the office.

JAMES: No.

DR. LAKE: What?

JAMES: I said 'No.' I go out there and I'll be taken away and locked up. I'm staying right here until you sign that paper. I don't care if I have to beat you senseless.

DR. LAKE: Go. (beginning to back away) Now!

JAMES: Whooo. You're all jittery, Smarty. (following him) Do I scare you?

(DR. LAKE rushes to his desk and reaches to push a button on the backside of it. JAMES pounces and grabs his wrist twisting it. Once DR. LAKE is unable to reach any longer, JAMES grabs him by the shirt.)

(Defiantly, DR. LAKE grabs JAMES by the jacket and they remain locked up, faces inches apart.)

JAMES (cont'd): What's that? Emergency? You gonna have them run in here and strap a jacket on me?

DR. LAKE: Let go of me or...

JAMES: Or what? (pause) You'll bust me in the chops? (pause) You and me are made of the same stuff, Smarty. But the way I see it, I get rid of that shit in a place where it don't matter — but you let it get all big and painful inside 'cuz you don't let it go, ever. I pity your wife 'cuz she gonna get nailed one night and it's gonna be built so big that she might not live through the shit. And if you love her. I know that you do — I can see that you probably do. But that ain't gonna matter. If you got the kinda fire to put me away for loving, then you got the kinda fire to put her away for... having a glass a whiskey with a... truck driver from Omaha. Love ain't a dirty word where I come from. But right now looking at your future salary, the home you'll make for your kids, I'm still glad I'm me and not you. And I'm sorry for your wife.

DR. LAKE: Fiancé.

JAMES: Whatever.

DR. LAKE: (letting go of JAMES) Let me go.

(JAMES lets go.)

(DR. LAKE straightens himself up a bit turning his back to him.)

DR. LAKE (cont'd): Now if you would step outside.

JAMES: (moseying to the door) Okay. Smarty. Dr. Lake. I'll step outside. But you think hard about how this is going to make you feel all your life.

(He turns back and speaks over the DR. LAKE's shoulder)

JAMES (cont'd) Every time you get angry, I'll be there, egging you on. My ghost whispering for you to go — go over the edge. My memory, your ghost. You gonna live with that. Doctor.

DR. LAKE: Good Bye.

JAMES: (from the door) This was supposed to be easy. I just needed a goddamn signature.

DR. LAKE: You'll have plenty of time to think about why.

(JAMES breaks into a sprint and dive tackles DR. LAKE. The lights go to out as they collide.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

SPONSORSHIP

(Lights up on a park.)

(Two upper-middle-class pregnant women, DELIA and ELYSE are chatting merrily on a park bench.)

DELIA: Do you know yet?

ELYSE: Oh it's a boy. If it was a girl I wasn't going to tell Freddie right away, but nothing to worry about now.

DELIA: Men always seem to wanna make more men.

ELYSE: Especially Freddie. I mean he already bought blue paint. The fact that he didn't put it on the wall yet was his way of pretending he didn't care either way. But believe me, I see footballs in his eyes already.

DELIA: Well we already got a boy and now another is on the way, so I guess I'll never know what Peter was really thinking.

ELYSE: Oh Delia, you've never known what that man was thinking.

DELIA: Well at least we know that much. Thank God for the little things.

ELYSE: And this little guy. He probably saved my marriage.

DELIA: You never said guys were having trouble!

ELYSE: Well we weren't exactly, but I've been bored. So bored.

DELIA: You were bored the day I met you, Elyse Huffstutter.

ELYSE: Well, now I've got something to keep me busy all the time.

DELIA: A little Huffstutter.

ELYSE: (talking to her stomach) That's right little one, you're gonna be a Huffstutter. (back to DELIA) And the poor thing is going to be a Huffstutter for life. Still amazed that I married into a name that sounds like a stuffed bear or something. Huffstutter bear.

DELIA: Well, you don't pick the one you love, you just find 'em.

ELYSE: I suppose.

(A beat as they ponder that.)

DELIA: You picked your sponsor yet?

ELYSE: Oh no. I don't think I'm going to do that.

DELIA: Elyse! You can't wait too long. With this economy, everyone's doing it. Un-sponsored kids are really falling behind statistically. And they can't take every unborn child that comes along. The waiting list for this baby is already much longer than when I signed up Darryl. (She rubs her belly) Takes why I put him on the list before he's even here.

ELYSE: Don't you find it just a little creepy? Letting them use your baby like a living billboard.

DELIA: Who can afford health care these days? Or college? I mean, I try to think about the life my boys would have without these guarantees and I get scared. So it's for their own good. And all the spots in the waiting list are filling up so fast, you can't sit around *thinking* about it.

ELYSE: But shouldn't it be the child's choice if they are okay with doing that to their body?

DELIA: Oh Elyse, when they become capable of making choices like that, they don't even know how to. When we first hit the age of reason, it's the most fickle time in life anyway. So, if wearing a Nike tattoo on his forehead is gonna put Darryl through college one day, then Samuel here... (patting her belly) ... is gonna have himself a Coca-Cola... and they're both gonna like it.

ELYSE: But what if Samuel ends up liking Pepsi, Delia?

DELIA: He'll be too young to know any better. And it's not like there's no options. For one thing, if he really must have Pepsi, we can always switch to the Clearstation package later. But I picked the Affinity package with the Coke because Darryl's got that one already. And when you add more children to the package, the deals get even better. Besides, there could be a lot of complications for me at the grocery store if I'm shopping for two different packages!

ELYSE: It still just seems weird and creepy to me.

DELIA: Look honey, he's going to like getting into college a lot more than having choices. He can drink all the Pepsi he wants *after* he graduates.

(A Clearstation sponsor named GARY has walked up in business casual clothing with a nice leather messenger bag strapped on.)

GARY: Delia Linell? Elyse Huffstutter?

DELIA: Yes?

ELYSE: Yes?

GARY: Gary Chastain, Clearstation Sponsor. Our records indicate that you, Delia, have chosen Affinity to be your sponsor. And you, Elyse, have no sponsor at all. Well we could fix both of those problems for you if...

ELYSE: How did you know...?

DELIA: (to Elyse) Don't talk to him dear. He's just going to try to make me second guess my package.

GARY: As well you should, Delia. Did you know that should your child — Darryl, yes? — get into a top ten accredited school with tuition, fees and a 16 credit hour semester in excess of fifty-five thousand dollars, Affinity will only pay seventy percent of the tuition? Believe me, you won't appreciate the seventy percent they actually do pay nearly much when you're coming up with thirty percent on your own!

ELYSE: How do you know us? Why are you here in the park?

GARY: And Elyse, you have yet to discover the ease of living that sponsorship can bring a child. With Clearstation, it's not just free college in exchange for a lifetime of logo-wearing and brand loyalty. We offer discounts on all brand products, a monthly coupon book, and...

ELYSE: All you are talking about is consumer goods. What about my child? You think just because I get free products and there is college at the end of your rainbow...

GARY: (warmly) Elyse. Elyse we care deeply about your child's well being. This is a commitment-for-life — to us, just as much as it will be for you. We are the only sponsor that offers free tutoring and special counseling options. We have even teamed up with several health insurance providers to offer a “double your coverage” program.

ELYSE: Oh.

GARY: With hospital bills and doctor appointments, prenatal medication and testing... an American child is born many tens of thousands of dollars in debt. I can erase that for you.

DELIA: It's true Elyse.

ELYSE: But I thought there was a waiting list. Why are you trying to sell me? Don't you have people banging on your door?

GARY: There absolutely is a long wait. But a great deal of those that come calling for us don't meet our standards, or are simply seeking a handout. In extreme cases, the hope of a relationship with us can be their sole motivation for having the child!

DELIA: That's awful!

GARY: It sure is. That's why we investigate candidates and seek out those we feel will be great parents — like you Delia — and of course, you, Elyse. We aren't just chosen, we have to make a choice, too. And we choose you both.

ELYSE: But I've never even applied, how would you know what kind of candidate I'll be?

GARY: When we factor in both you and your husband's education, credit histories, household income, Internet browsing and purchasing histories, Google data profiles, parents' marital status, DNA matchup and Facebook timelines... well, these all indicate that you will make exceptional parents — parents to children who could be outstanding additions to our business portfolio and make us all proud.

ELYSE: How did you get all of that information? I didn't give you any of that.

GARY: It's all just floating out there, Elyse. We have databases collecting and matching. It's not important.

ELYSE: That seems important.

GARY: Elyse, it's all for one simple thing. A better future, for better children. Just like you could use us in your life, we could use a good example like your future child. A successful case study can help lift up the others.

ELYSE: You mean my baby will get special treatment?

GARY: A premium package at regular rates. And children with regular packages around the world will strive for the excellence that your child and Clearstation can — and should — achieve together.

DELIA: You just can't say 'no' to that!

GARY: So, Elyse. At least tell me you'll think about it. Take a brochure and policy agreement at the very least.

ELYSE: Fine. I'll think about it. But, seriously, tattooing my child with corporate logos feels very, very wrong.

(GARY reaches into a pocket of his messenger bag and pulls out brochures just as an Affinity sponsor named FRANK steps out from behind a tree.)

FRANK: Wow. (clapping sarcastically) That was really... something. But I do applaud him. Do you know why I applaud him, Elyse? Because that's the best he's got, and he used what he had to work with quite well.

GARY: Beat it, Frank.

FRANK: Gary, Gary, Gary. I'm trying to compliment you. You did a great job... for having your hands tied. Fact of the matter, you guys just don't have packages that can stand up to what we offer. That's why you work so hard, and I'm barely working. I'm even playing a game of chess with my son right now as we speak it's so easy.

(He pulls his iPhone out of his pocket and holds it up as proof.)

ELYSE: (to GARY) Who is this guy?

GARY: Frank Corman from Affinity. He likes to follow me around and try to poach my candidates because he doesn't do research.

ELYSE: (to FRANK) Is that true?

FRANK: Absolutely. Ask me why?

DELIA: (stepping in) Why?

FRANK: Because I'm too cool for research.

ELYSE: Ugh. That's pathetic.

FRANK: Is it? Look, I'm not going to lie to you Elena...

ELYSE: Elyse.

FRANK: Totally. You're an adult, you've figured your shit out. Cool doesn't matter to you. But that little screamer in your belly is gonna care. A great deal. And he or she certainly should.

ELYSE: He.

FRANK: Even more so then.

GARY: Leave them be, Frank. They want the right package for their child, not a cocky thief who calls himself a sponsorship agent.

FRANK: Oh. Oh, I'm sorry. I just thought you said they really cared about their children.

DELIA: Of course we do!

FRANK: Then you can't listen to him. Package this, package that, blah blah, blah. We can match most of what they've got. Sure, they can maybe shave a few percentages here, or add some there. But they don't have the trademarked and patented Cool Calc or Insta-Update digital tattoos. And I'm sorry folks, that trumps getting a patchouli-wearing hippie coming over for some tutoring, or getting her tonsils out for free.

ELYSE: His.

DELIA: What's this Cool Calc thing? I have Affinity packages and I don't know anything about it.

FRANK: Delia, all legacy package owners like yourself will be notified of the update soon. After all, you'll need to schedule a time to bring your child in for tattoo removal and the new digital application.

DELIA: Do I have to?

FRANK: You want to. Here, let me show you.

(He returns to the tree he appeared from and pulls out a stand-alone whiteboard with a marker and eraser.)

FRANK: Gary, if you could take a hike, that would be nice. Trade secrets and all.

GARY: Yeah right, Frank.

FRANK: Fine, everyone will know soon enough. (to DELIA) What's your kid's name, Delia?

DELIA: The one I have or the one on the way?

FRANK: Either.

GARY: Darryl now and Samuel's on the way. Because you see, at Clearstation we care enough to remember...

FRANK: (cutting him off) So anyway, right now Darryl has a Nike tattoo on his forehead, right?

DELIA: That's right.

(FRANK draws a simplistic cartoon face and writes "DARRYL" under it. When finished, he adds a Nike swoosh to the forehead.)

FRANK: Pretty cool. Pretty cool. But what happens if Nike falls out of favor with the kids? What if their ads go to shit, or teens start to hate the product designs? A kid tied to that brand so prominently is going to become subject to ridicule from his peers. And in the past, there was nothing anyone could do about it.

(He draws little cartoon kids around Darryl's face and writes "HA HA HA HA HA" all around them.)

(Then he erases the laughing kids.)

FRANK: But what if Nike could simply disappear... (he slides the eraser over the swoosh) ... and an Apple took its place — instantly? (he draws an apple on the forehead) All without a trip to one of our surgeons, and no lasers involved. Instant updates of any brand at any time.

GARY: How is that possible?

FRANK: Glad you asked Gare Bear. We can now safely insert a digital, paper thin, LED screen just below the skin's surface, illuminating the logo — no ink necessary. It also features wireless capabilities and receives the same signal as your phone plan, allowing it to auto-update whenever necessary.

ALL: Wow.

FRANK: And no solid proof in trials of radiation damage. But I haven't even told you about Cool Calc.

ELYSE: What's that?

FRANK: Kids are fickle, Elyse. Very, very fickle. What's cool this morning could be dead by dinner time. Parents can't catch up, kids can't even keep up with themselves. But Cool Calc monitors everything. Every social network, digital search histories, forums, news aggregators, market research, as well as the direct input of a large group of select trendsetting kids from around the world who determine what is hot and what is not, all day, every day. When one brand stumbles and another rises, your child will auto-update. There's no need to make requests, phone it in, or fire up an app. It will just happen. As long as you choose the auto-update setting, your kid will always be cool, thanks to Cool Calc.

GARY: (unable to act unimpressed) Whoa.

ELYSE: But that's just a popularity contest. Being trendy and fashionable isn't really important in the long run. This is about education and health!

FRANK: (disappointed in her) Elyse. Elyse. Just because you've posted on Facebook, and Twitter, and filled up a Pinterest board... doesn't mean you understand the new digital age at all. Kids are identified by their network of friends, their ability to hold the interest of said friends, and above all, their association with brands. Social networks mean network... ing. Their future depends on their contact with the right people now and for the rest of their lives.

ELYSE: But they're only kids. They don't need to... (makes air quotes) ... "network."

FRANK: Tell your little girl that when she can't get into the right school because she doesn't... (makes air quotes) ... "know anyone."

ELYSE: You really think the Internet has that kind of power?

FRANK: Social collateral has real world buying power. I can show you studies right here on my phone.

(GARY falls into the bench between the two ladies... defeated.)

ELYSE: Well. That's all... well, it's something to think about.

DELIA: Think about? Elyse, you get on that list right now!

ELYSE: Well I should really talk to Freddie first.

FRANK: Tell you what, you sign right now and I will personally see to it that your little girl ends up in whatever career you choose for her. Doctor, lawyer, hell, I'll make her a princess if you insist.

ELYSE: It's a boy.

FRANK: Then I'll make sure he doesn't join a band or go into acting.

ELYSE: What's my last name?

FRANK: Uhh... Gary?

GARY: You should know that Frank, before you go poaching.

(FRANK offers her the contract and points to something on it with a pen.)

FRANK: I'm just messing with you Mrs. Huffstutter. Look, it's already right there under the line you need to sign.

(ELYSE takes the pen, but then halts.)

(She suddenly elbows GARY.)

ELYSE: (to GARY) Let's see yours.

(After a moment of shock, GARY scrambles and then produces a contract.)

(ELYSE promptly signs it.)

GARY: I don't know what to say. Except, Elyse Huffstutter, you will not regret this decision. I will take wonderful care of you... and the little guy.

(ELYSE stands. DELIA and GARY stand as well.)

ELYSE: And I believe you. Paperwork please.

(GARY quickly rifles through his messenger bag and hand her a stack of the brochures he has put away earlier.)

ELYSE: (turning to DELIA) Come on Delia, I've got some explaining to do at home. (to FRANK) And you sir, can tattoo my foot on your ass.

(DELIA follows ELYSE off stage.)

(FRANK plops down next to GARY.)

(They watch to make sure the women are safely out of earshot before speaking.)

FRANK: Very impressive Gary.

GARY: Well played, Frank. I'm almost tempted to give thirty percent of my commission. Not bad for a rookie.

FRANK: I can't believe that worked.

GARY: I keep saying, you can sell anyone — if you know your angle.

FRANK: How did you know that angle would work?

GARY: Research, Frank. You can never do too much research.

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY