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The Elephant and the Wedding

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The Elephant and the Wedding

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Dedication

For Alex.

“He stood upon the narrow balcony and listened:
And all the stars above him sang as in his childhood
‘All, all is vanity,’ but it was not the same;
For now the words descended like the calm of mountains—”

W. H. Auden

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Abstract

The Elephant and the Wedding

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This thesis document discusses my development as a playwright and theater artist over the course of my three years in the MFA Playwriting Program at the University of Texas at Austin. As a framework for inquiry, I will focus primarily on my ways I use transitional space in my plays *Operation Istanbul*, *Karlstad*, and *Lushly* to interrogate and illuminate the value of unity in dramatic narrative. Concurrently, through personal reflection and analysis of my early theater training, I hope to define where oneness sits both in my personal and professional life.

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The Elephant and the Wedding

Introduction: Regarding Unity

In my very first week of undergraduate studies, somewhere deep in Ohio, Professor Tom Turgeon began his exhortation: “Let’s address the Unities.”

Like a man luring wild dogs to him, he squatted in front of this stunned, still pack of freshmen, meticulously describing the meat, the secret of dramatic narrative. Professor Turgeon was a formidable man of the theater — he went to Yale, I heard — and like all formidable men of the theater, he regularly referenced great ancient Greeks like Sophocles and Aristotle. It turns out that Aristotle, in addition to tutoring Alexander the Great in science and philosophy, sought to codify all of theater into an astonishingly brief summary, *The Poetics*. As Turgeon assured us that first day, this document became perhaps the most influential piece of writing in Western drama, and its legacy has remained surprisingly manifold. Causality, catharsis, spectacle, and the custom of making climaxes reflect the protagonist’s perception shift all set their roots in this text.

What sits on me to this day, however, is the theory of the Unities. Simply put (as Professor Turgeon related it), Aristotle believed that plays shouldn’t disrupt the unity of Time, Place, and Action. They should take place in one day, in one place, and follow a single elegant arc of action. Treated literally, this concept sounds preposterous, Puritan even. But, no! No, don’t think about it literally! Read it as you would the Bible: symbolically, metaphorically. Is it not titled THE POETICS? *The Unities*.

Over the course of four genuinely enlightening years, I listened to Tom Turgeon talmudically bend script after script into flawed, though noble, attempts to fulfill the Unities.

Those years of dialectic script analysis eventually internalized for me concepts of causality, action, and the need for lean, muscular narrative in drama. Still, I wondered: When Turgeon preached Aristotle's Unities, was he not implicitly preaching the virtue of oneness? I seem to remember his earmarking stories that resolved in an imbalanced way as messy or lazy, and I too adopted that sensibility and began employing it reflexively. This prejudice followed me to books, to the art museum, to my relationship to landscape, and the people around me. Causality, oneness — the aim!

Around this time, I began repeating a mantra I heard from older theater artists: "Theater is a time-based art form." I suspected that this was another way of saying, "Don't mess around, or people will get bored," and boredom is the unforgivable sin in a "time-based art form." From this thought, I entered the great night of cynicism: Is all this talk about Aristotle, all this unity and action and causality, just a way of keeping impatient people interested in a story for a few hours? Is this philosophy about art founded on the premise that it exists primarily to comfortably entertain, to give the people what they want?

And yet, at that same time, I began to notice this illicit tug within me towards narrative duplicity, triplicity, poliplicity. I couldn't deny it. I wondered if maybe a monk-like devotion to clarity, elegance, and unity might be, well, *problematic*. If good art above all unifies, does it not become a homogenizing or even pasteurizing influence on culture? When a true Aristotelian playwright sees a complex world, does that complexity become an obstacle to translating their authentic experience into worthwhile art?

Forgive me as I wade into the sociopolitical implications of this idea. If art matters (and I certainly believe it does) and if our experience of art impacts our treatment of people

and ideas within our society (which I also believe it does), then what kind of culture grows from a society that values above all the singular idea, the unified artistic experience? In other words, if the majority culture canonizes Unity, wouldn't capturing the grace and singular beauty of the human experience become a process of reducing the varied, unpredictable, *wide* world into its comfortable (or approved) mean? How has it already done so? How was I already collaborating in that exclusion at my small, prestigious liberal arts college?

I was like, twenty, and this line of thought was enough to drive me into contemporary dance for a few years. I moved to New York where I never once heard the name Aristotle cross human lips without someone rolling their eyes. In New York, I could create a life as restless and disorganized as my mind. I joined a food co-op and drank bathtubs of beer and danced at an elementary school with strangers on Monday nights and moved apartments every year. I did jobs that had nothing to do with who I was, or so I thought. I had constant casual interactions with strangers from all over the world and skyped miserably with my college girlfriend. I read anything I wanted all the time and chose my own teachers and grew very, very tired.

Those years feel a long way away now, but as I take this time to consider my work and why I've written how I've written, I've made a concerted effort to ask why I started all this in the first place. Why do I take the time to write plays? Maybe I feel the urge to react against classical values by writing stories that mess them up a little. This makes sense. After all, I perceived the contemporary theatrical literature as largely tame and ascribed that to my assumption that all those writers and theater managers probably learned the same Puritanical training I used to evaluate scripts. I think now that I wanted to wreck something because I

loved theater, but didn't want to give The Theater what I claimed The Theater wanted. Is that really why I started writing? To attack an establishment that I, for some reason, conflated with Aristotle?

Whenever I notice assumptions piling up around my feet, I know it's time to return to the source material. Not surprisingly, upon finally rereading *The Poetics*, I quickly learned that Aristotle was not as extreme as Turgeon made him out to be, or perhaps, as I received him all those years ago. In fact, he never even uses the words "Time, Place, and Action" to define the concept of Unity. The closest he gets is this judicious statement,

"...since the plot is an imitation of an action, the latter ought to be both unified and complete, and the component events ought to be so firmly compacted that if any one of them is shifted to another place, or removed, the whole is loosened up and dislocated..." (Jacobus, 98).

From what I've been able to track down on the internet, the interpretation of Aristotle's Unity I encountered in college didn't develop until the Middle Ages and only took firm canonical form during the French Enlightenment, the age of Racine and Voltaire. This is all to say that after ten years of playwriting, I thought Aristotle chaffed me when it was really French critical theory, as persistently ascribed to Aristotle by my undergraduate faculty.

All the same, I can't deny the fact that Professor Turgeon's reading of Aristotle has been formative in my work. The triplet of Time, Place, and Action still rings in my head. In the way that where you're from can shape your speech for the rest of your life, I suspect that my writing speaks with an ancient Greek accent. I am currently in faux-Aristotelian speech therapy. Just as a cheeky exercise (or maybe an exorcism), I would like to enumerate a few of the ways my most recent play, *Operation Istanbul*, violates Turgeon's reading of the Unities.

Operation Istanbul is the story of Scott, a CIA femme-fatale, who while on vacation in Istanbul seduces a handsome, mysterious man named Asan only to learn he works as a secret agent with a Kurdish nationalist organization. When their love displeases both of their employers, they're forced to flee. The play follows them as they spend the rest of their lives searching for normalcy and peace in a dangerous, changing world.

Regarding its mistreatment of the Unities, the play travels intercontinentally from Turkey to Pennsylvania to Canada and back again, a story covering almost twenty years, intermittently. Repeatedly, the tone swings wildly back on itself – a broad noire/action format wanders into a melancholy, confessional rut, then settles into a quaint suburban bliss. In the second half, the larger geopolitical climate reasserts itself into their lives – the War on Terror grows new teeth. Formally, large portions of the narrative are told in first-person narration, though rarely through the same first-person. Scott and Asan pass control of the action back and forth until eventually it becomes difficult to decipher who, if anyone, is at the wheel of their lives. Even within the scenes, the action fragments into abrupt shifts of time and space.

A few years ago, Tom Turgeon tragically passed away from ALS. I suspect, though, that like most of his students, I'm still sitting in his little stone office. Cornered like a crow's nest above the Hill Theater, I'd scan his bookshelves, distracted, squinting to read the names of the greatest dramatists of Western Dramatic history only to find their spines too worn or unread to decipher. I remember myself back into his presence, his patient attention, how he never blinked in the face of my feverish, argumentative questions. I suspect in his forty years of teaching, he had many students just like me. And like them, I'd wait for him to ask

in his kind, laughing way the question I knew I couldn't answer yet: "What are you trying to *prove?*"

I want to leave the Unities alone for a moment. I'm getting married. Technically, Alexandra and I are already married in the state of Texas, but it's an *informal* marriage, meaning that at some time in the past (we related this to our county clerk, Michael), we led someone to believe that we were married. That means my informal marriage is literally built on a lie, and that lie affords us nearly all of the civic benefits of marriage. If you're straight and not too related, our Travis county clerk can authorize your union for 60 bucks and 20 minutes of your time. Unity comes cheap in Texas.

When I reflect on *Operation Istanbul*, I think of Alex. I wrote the first draft of the play in the early days of our relationship, and I wrote it specifically for her. I set out to write something that she couldn't say no to directing, and my plan worked. Since then, I've gradually added a chunk to the play every few years, and although I never intended to write autobiographically, I can't help but note the parallels between our relationship and the script's composition. What began for us as a seduction became an unmoored wandering, became a deeply satisfying relationship, became a deepening dread that something in the world, some personal event or unforeseen historical challenge might come between our lives. And this dread, this uncertainty that I'd feel during the long-distance period of our relationship eventually drew me to the central question of maybe all of my work: How can I be happy or good or right when so much is changing in constantly changing ways?

Because the truth is, my life isn't unified. It has sharp edges, hard transitions. In fact, those moments of transition are often the most exciting, illuminating experiences for me. I learn more about myself in times of abrupt change in time, place, and action than when everything's solid and stable. For example, just in these last three years, I moved to Texas; I stopped pursuing dance to dedicate myself to writing; I uncovered a vocational love of teaching; I invested in the permanence of my relationship with Alex: These transitional moments that disrupt the unity of my life, that violate the earlier tenets of my behavior or identity, are the moments where I make the story of my life happen.

Therefore, to better understand the use and adaption of the Unities in my work, I will investigate the transitions in my plays *Karlstad*, *Lushly*, and *Operation Istanbul*. For the purposes of this essay, I define transitional space as anytime a play violates Turgeon's Unities by shifting the narrative either in time, place, or action. Despite my previous misattribution of these three metrics to Aristotle, I believe they remain important to understanding how I stitch together and split apart narrative systems in my work.

In my mind, this will offer the most direct route to explaining how I've worked to systematically challenge the exaltation of unity as a value in theater. While this impulse grew out of a churlish, collegiate denial of the Unities, I see my plays now as a concerted effort to utilize the concept's gravity in narrative theater to energize and propel my work away from it. Or maybe I should investigate if my work is at odds with the concept of Unity at all. Am I simply translating the Unities from a historical time period where total continuity reigned into a view of art that reflects my experience today, where firm arguments for continuity feel almost deluded to me? Regardless, my hope in this document is to articulate and interrogate

the ways I use transitional space to explore the limits and consequences of presenting a unified, singular world.

Although transitional spaces take many subtle variations, I categorize my transitional techniques into three broad types: Clean Scene Shifts, First Person Shifts, and Lucid Shifts. I define a Clean Scene Shift as a moment when the play's action abruptly changes time and/or place. A First Person Shift works similarly by jumping in time and/or places, but this shift is controlled by a character within the scene, whereas in Clean Scene Shifts the characters don't realize a transition has occurred. This small distinction carries with it a variety of thematic implications about the audience's ability to observe and participate in constructing our own experience of the play. Lastly, I will discuss Lucid Shifts, which I define as transitions where one or more characters are *aware* of the narrative's change in time and/or place, but are unable to control or affect it. In the Lucid Shift, a character temporarily becomes audience to the action of their play.

Even with my newfound appreciation of Aristotle's Poetics, I must admit, I still bristle at one specific passage. He writes,

“...beauty depends on size and order; hence neither can a very tiny creature turn out to be beautiful (since our perception of it grows blurred as it approaches the period of imperceptibility) nor an excessively large one (for then it cannot all be perceived at once and so its unity and wholeness are lost)....” (Jacobus, 97).

I see the validity of his argument, but I can't help but shake my head. It makes me think of the old proverb about the blind men and the elephant. The way this man describes an ear, another the trunk, another the tail, another the tusk, and the incredible realization that they were all encountering the same, strange animal. I long for the awe and humility they must

have felt in that moment. So when I look at my world and the plays I write, I want to ask what is more faithful to the true nature of an elephant: a thorough, detailed description of its tail or four blind men imagining the unknowable living mystery that exists between their narrow experience and what's recounted to them?

1. The Clean Scene Shift

When I refer to a “scene change” or a “transition” in theater, I venture that most people would expect a simple, abrupt change in the narrative’s time or place. Playwrights use these often, and they’re usually not very disruptive to the piece’s continuity. For that reason, I will refer to this style of scene change as a Clean Scene Shift.

I’d argue that our modern comfort with this narrative technique developed from our exposure to film and certain canonical writers like Shakespeare who frequently shift the story’s time and place. In my recent writing, however, I’ve developed an appetite for exploring how I can push these shifts outside the narrative patterns I’ve grown so comfortable with and into a more dynamic transitional system.

I began to explore the potentials of this transitional model in my play, *Karlstad*. Probably my most naturalistic play, *Karlstad* is the story of how Sally and her roommates in New York City realize they aren’t living the lives they feel they deserve. This isn’t really a problem until Jules brings Herman, Sally’s grandfather, back from Germany. They then learn that that he wasn’t killed in the 80’s as Sally’s father assumed, but kidnapped by the Stasi, forced to perform slave labor, and tortured. In fact, in a way, he’s been with the girls all along; during his imprisonment, he manufactured the same model of IKEA couch that sits in Sally’s apartment, the Karlstad. This absurd coincidence rings with what I feel is the absurdity of living in a seemingly just, ethical society which leads a global economy dependent on slavery, both virtual and literal.

I wanted to highlight and foreshadow this ethical gap in the formal structure of *Karlstad*, so I used Clean Scene Shifts as a tool of juxtaposition. Throughout the play I cut

from the mundane to the harrowing, the relatable to the cruel, the unaffected to the sentimental and back again. The effect of jumping in time and place, as well as in tone, discourages the audience from feeling secure in the unity of the play or that it will always behave as it has before. While this experience can be uncomfortable and at times unpleasant, I don't intend to alienate the audience into a new awareness of their life in some Brechtian or pedagogical manner. Instead, I hope to suggest that the elephant of the play is larger and more complex than we previously assumed.

Perhaps my favorite example of this style of juxtaposing transitions occurs when Jules has just finished her tour of the East German prison, Hohenschönhausen, with Herman, whose recorded torture we've visited repeatedly in the first half of the play. In response to Jules's request that he help her understand the tragedies of her German heritage, he replies,

HERMAN

Why would you want this to be yours?

If it's not already in your arms, why would you carry it?

JULES

I hate Germany.

HERMAN

You cannot imagine.

And the scene ends. I see this final beat as Herman's sincere, solemn attempt to help Jules recognize the potential mercy of losing one's heritage. Moments after this intimate conversation in a political prison, the narrative jumps to Pam, Jules' roommate, elbowing her way through men in a crowded West Village bar after her friends cancelled on her dinner party.

Fiddlesticks

(Bar music blares. The low roar of a West Village bar filled with men. It's very dark, except for one wooden corner table, very close to the audience, maybe. PAM wriggles her way through the crowds.)

PAM

Excuse me, sorry.

Excuse me.

Excuse me.

Sorry, excuse me. Sorry.

(PAM finally finds the small table and perches on the stool. OCCUPY BRO appears behind her and covers her eyes with his hands.)

OCCUPY BRO

Guess who!

Other elements of these two scenes make them a nice pair: Both show the roommates, Jules and Pam, looking to their past for guidance, only to find less than sympathetic male counselors. While we may recognize the ways these two scenes thematically harmonize, the tonal mechanics of the transition (i.e., travelling from the quiet, East Berlin cell to American bar music and the roar of drunk dudes) jars the audience, leading us to ask why these two totally different worlds exist so close to each other in the play. While we may feel confident that the weight and legacy of the GDR will not surface here in post-grad New York, we shouldn't feel confident they've left it behind entirely, especially considering that the recordings of Herman's interrogation repeatedly interrupt the young women's NYC roommate drama.

Of course, the play really does end with these two arcs improbably intersecting in Sally's New York apartment. The two worlds, so distinct in tone from one another, finally

burst out of the transitional space that separates them. In the apartment scene, “Homecoming,” each storyline has to reckon with how the other could possibly exist in their understanding of the world, and the result isn’t elegant unity, but unity through the messy, painful dissolution of the roommates’ friend group. Herman’s arc doesn’t satisfy or harmonize with the young women’s arc; it destroys it. In this way, I would use the Clean Scene Shifts in *Karlstad* to create narrative *instability* rather than an unobtrusive structure of ordered balance or fulfillment.

Whenever I’ve solicited feedback on *Karlstad*, from the first draft to the recent workshop production, I’ve found that almost without fail audience members invest either in one world or the other. Either they love the roommates and don’t buy Herman’s journey or they see the women’s dynamic as a frivolous distraction from the real arc of Herman and Sally’s relationship. I wonder if the narrative insecurity of the play makes us take refuge in the story that feels more comfortable only to have it interrupted again and again with another insistent narrative. This struggle for primacy and entitlement feels thematically central to the play, and I’ve invested even more assertively in the inefficient, sometimes bicameral characteristics of the story.

In the broad terms, the Clean Scene Shift became a crucial element in formally grounding the thematic contrast between the frivolous, over-expressed life and the historically invisible one. These crisp, distinct transitions make the eventual unity of the play as revealed through the undeserving talisman of the Karlstad couch all the more unlikely and unbelievable. Perhaps, the Clean Scene Shift is modern consumerism at its best.

In *Operation Istanbul*, I use Clean Scene Shifts in a similarly jarring manner, but to a different thematic effect. Whereas *Karlstad*'s transitions seem to imply parallel, contrasting action (e.g., between Jules and Pam's simultaneous searches for fulfilment in their histories), *Operation Istanbul*'s Clean Scene Shifts try to illustrate how simple, impulsive actions often have permanent, unpredictable consequences that can shape one's life into distinct epochs.

The first example of this shift occurs at the end of the first chapter when Asan and Scott escape Istanbul on the very day they meet. The scene ends with an elaborate action sequence and this button:

SCOTT

I was the best. The very best.
Happily ever after.

*(ASAN and SCOTT smile. Music is very loud.
Blackout.
All the dead jump up and do a great unison dance.)*

This climax, a heightened, spectacular finale, caps the adventure of Asan and Scott's introduction in Istanbul, but when the lights rise again, we find them in an unexpected new location:

*(Title Card: **CARLISLE USA 2004**
Lights slowly rise on SCOTT and ASAN sleeping in their apartment, ASAN with his arm around her. It's a dark, messy, peaceful place.
An alarm radio. Some music plays, something sleepy and American.
ASAN pops straight up in bed, sweating, heaving for breath.)*

ASAN

It is already 7:15 in the AM.

*(ASAN pulls on boxers, washes his face, brushes his teeth.
SCOTT sleeps and sleeps.)*

ASAN

The American futon is a unique instrument of torture, a goblin-like nightmare of the spine.

I dress, put on my khakis.

Asan and Scott, the beau and femme-fatale *de triomphe*, now sleep on a futon in the least romantic location I can personally imagine, Central Pennsylvania. The world of ancient cities, of action and seduction has been abruptly replaced with khakis and the mundane reality of married life. The combination of all of these new environmental factors announces a tonal, temporal, and thematic shift: the coming section will be dramatically different from the last.

I use Clean Scene Shifts repeatedly in the piece, but most distinctly at the chapter breaks when the story moves from Carlisle to Toronto, from Toronto to Istanbul, and from Istanbul to the Black Site to Toronto. In each occasion, the abrupt transition signals a new era in Asan and Scott's relationship, carrying with it new rules and narrative textures.

Crucial to this play, I think, is the role these transitions play in making and *re*-making location. We return to the same location a few times in the second act and find that the habitats of Asan and Scott's life have changed almost like characters. I try to build a narrative system through which setting isn't just a place the characters travel to and from, but rather a force that very explicitly changes its demands on the characters. For example, after spending an act (and ten years) in suburban Toronto, Asan returns to find Istanbul in chaotic disarray:

*(Title Card: **ISTANBUL, TURKEY 2013.***

A huge swirl of protesters explode onto the stage, screaming at the tops of their lungs. The Gezi Park protests.

A massive cloud of tear gas, wafts into the crowd. They flee, leaving ASAN, smoking coolly, unaffected.)

A great unison dance this is not. The play's re-focusing on Istanbul through political terms rather than the exotic terms we encountered in the first act foreshadows Asan's later encounter with the personal consequences of his association with Scott. Although he is not immediately affected by the danger in this new Istanbul (the tear gas does not bother him), we might suspect from this moment that Asan will enter a very different world than the one he left. He's back in Turkey, but it is no longer his home, as he'll soon learn the hard way.

In reflecting on my use of Clean Scene Shifts, I've come to appreciate how effectively they generate and manipulate dramatic irony. In both *Karlstad* and *Operation Istanbul*, I use the tonal quality of the transitional spaces to signal something about the imminent demands of the play, and these signals come long before the characters themselves can recognize them. In *Karlstad*, the nature of that dramatic irony is that invisible, unimaginable injustices are at work all the time to get you things as basic as couches. In *Operation Istanbul*, the transitional space signals that Asan and Scott, for all their confidence and expertise, may never be able to go back now that they share a life together. The sharpness of departure in these Clean Scene Shifts lop the world into distinct narrative spaces, histories, and circumstances, then dare the characters to traverse those separations. When they do attempt to overcome those distinctions, it costs them dearly. In the case of *Karlstad*, Sally loses her closest friends in the world. In *Operation Istanbul*, Asan and Scott lose their lives.

2. The First Person Shift

In the First Person Shift, the characters themselves guide the transition. Not only do they have awareness of a shift in time, location, or action, but they also *control* where and how the transition moves the play. Whereas the Clean Scene Shift suggests to us that the characters' awareness of their world is incomplete, the First Person Shift invests the narrative almost completely in one character's privileged point of view and their ability to relate it.

From using this style of transition for much of *Operation Istanbul*, I found that placing control of the story in Scott and Asan's hands creates several unique opportunities and challenges. First and most importantly, First Person Shifts allow us to expand our experience of the play from observable actions on stage to include the internal lives of the characters through allowing us to hear the way they describe their world. Take, for example, Scott and Asan's chase through Istanbul during their initial flirtation:

SCOTT

I make him lose me.

Whoosh!

(ASAN looks back – she's gone. The CROWD transforms the stage, creating ASAN's apartment.

ASAN approaches the door to his flat, waits alone before going in, looks around, smokes.

SCOTT watches him from within, through a high window. She is very close to him.)

SCOTT

Having inferred his destination from the pattern of his glances and variable route trajectory, I have beaten him back to his own flat and await in his atrium.

The window in the door is small and high, but I watch him smoke an entire cigarette – I watch closely. The surgical flick of the ash, the way his ribs spread

when he fills with smoke – I’m wet, and I want the air he holds in his mouth to be held in my mouth. I *need* it. I need it *now*.

(She opens the door. He turns around. They share a long look.)

So rather than simply watching Scott watch Asan through a window, the audience learns that she sees the way he smokes as masterful, “surgical.” We hear that she focuses on his ribs, and the way his body fills with smoke. We learn that she is physically aroused without her having to make some kind of ridiculous writhing motion. We not only know that she wants him, we know *how* she wants him.

The narrator’s description of the world provides not only a route into the character’s internal life, but also a more sensorily vibrant external landscape than a physical theater could provide because the shifts in location and action take place in the audience’s imagination. One specific example of how First Person Shifts allow landscape to inform and participate in a transition occurs early in the Carlisle scene when Asan rides his bike to work at the Foodland.

ASAN

I ride my bicycle to the Foodland on Route 11 with great misery.
To be alone. Alone in the hills, the hills of Carlisle, Pennsylvania—
They are inhumane for the cyclist.
I feel the gravel of the cars barreling past.

I have no interest in a projection or a set literally representing the shoulder of Route 11, but through Asan’s description, I can share the repetitive Pennsylvania landscape, and the physical cruelty of biking in that part of the country. He didn’t just bike to work; he *bikes* to work, and we can imagine the gravel kicking up at him from the speeding cars and trucks. We can feel some of Asan’s vulnerability in this impersonal new home.

But are these even transitional spaces? After all, the transition takes place entirely within Asan's speech. How is a monologue a transition? I would argue that both of these moments supplant a narrative jump that would otherwise require a Clean Scene Shift (e.g., Scott's leading us from the Sultanahmet to the foyer and Asan's biking to the Foodland). Moreover, the fact that the First Person Shift enables characters to break (or elide) the unity of time and place while allowing for continuous action positions this convention as a soft transitional space. Asan's isolated journey from home to work on his bicycle shapes his life, and the First Person Shift allows the audience to experience that period of transition with the character in the present tense.

These transitional moments also carry with them a few narrative limitations. While First Person Shifts can allow for great narrative mobility and insight into their internal lives, they also implicitly devalue other narrative experiences of the action on stage, including those of the audience. First Person Shifts don't allow us to interpret a character's response to a location or moment for ourselves; we have that aspect of the story *related* to us. Without Scott's account, the audience might infer a variety of subtextual actions or interpretations when she watches Asan outside his foyer, but with her description, the audience enjoys only the one she delivers to us. This is even more potent in the second example, where the hills of Carlisle will only be "inhumane for the cyclist." We as an audience don't get to make our own associations with the landscape because the landscape exists only in Asan's account.

Worse, if used sloppily or too often, this narrative technique can make action feel simply redundant. If Asan is going to tell me what I should look at and how to feel about it, the play may invite us to become passive, perhaps uninvested, observers. Do we need Scott

to describe Asan smoking outside his apartment if he is already doing so on stage, or would it be more emotionally thrilling to simply *see* it? Jumping the line between evocative description and poetic TMI has killed certain plays for me and balancing this convention remains my biggest formal concern with *Operation Istanbul*. So instead of shying away from this tricky system, I chose to double down on First Person Shifts early in the play so that I can later expose their limitations.

By using these First Person Shifts to near excess, the descriptive moment begins to experientially reflect a narcissism that I hope to deconstruct over the course of Scott and Asan's life. In giving Scott and Asan license in the first half of the play to write their desire across whole cities and everyone around them, I'm setting up their humbling fall in the second half. Hopefully, the audience will look back at their experience of the first act and wonder if Scott and Asan's curated point-of-view may have disguised problematic omissions such as the CIA's methods of waging their War on Terror or the Turkish state's genocidal campaign in the Kurdish East. The brio Asan and Scott feel for their own lenses during their seduction of each other lulls us into forgetting the institutional context of their lives, a context that aggressively reasserts itself ten years later.

In the end, the First Person Shift's subtextual function in *Operation Istanbul* becomes to undermine the authority of the First Person position itself. The failure of this transitional technique to support the narrative heft of the play calls into question the characters' overall reliability and exposes the inadequacy of encountering an experience through one privileged perspective. What at first feels like holding the world in the palm of your hand evolves into an irresponsible, dangerous way to frame experience. The unreliable narrator is an old idea

in narrative storytelling, but the follow-through, in my mind, is not so much that the narrator is unreliable or dishonest, but that even when they do their best to faithfully communicate their lives to us, they still misrepresent themselves and their world. This idea reminds me to constantly question even my own ability to faithfully comprehend my life.

3. The Lucid Shift

While First Person Shifts suggest that characters inevitably view their world through narrow lenses, the Lucid Shift gives them access to more narrative information than their position as characters would usually allow by making them aware of the play's change in time, place, or action as it happens. The catch is they have no control over that shift. In other words, these transitions essentially place a surrogate audience member on stage in the form of a character and make them witness a theatrical convention of change.

In making them conscious of the shift, these transitional spaces can distort the character's sense of agency and alienate them from other characters. I have ongoing questions about whether this makes the characters in the play feel more or less like the audience, but regardless, unity of action splits in the Lucid Shift. Some characters support the transition, while the lucid characters remain present. In maintaining their character throughout a time of change, these transitions may also ask what remains in people during times of profound change or trauma.

I discovered the usefulness of this transitional model through writing my play *Lushly*. For my first workshop at UT with Steven Dietz, I stubbornly set out to write a play that obeyed the Unities. At the time, I felt that I was writing impatiently, and that if I could keep a play in one place for long enough, I would necessarily deepen it and improve my line-to-line craft.

I didn't last fifteen pages before I became a kid in church, bouncing and squirming. It awoke in me a profound desire to trash the place, so eventually, I let myself. As a result, I ended up with one of my more challenging, formally ambitious pieces of writing.

Lushly is a difficult play to summarize. Its spine involves Deb, a high school band teacher, having an affair with her seventeen year-old student, Aaron. Over the course of the play, however, a central group of characters emerges, Deb, Aaron, Peter, and Jackie, whose biographies and relationships to one another change impossibly over the course of the play. Deb is Aaron's lover one moment and his mother the next. She's a high school music teacher, then later she's driving convoys in Afghanistan. This variance in character biography can at times make the play feel symphonic to me. The central melody of Deb's affair with Aaron riffs and echoes through the constantly shifting quartet of characters, resulting in a slippery, imbalanced struggle around themes of abuse and isolation.

Transitional space plays a key role in creating this effect. The play lifts into long liminal spells between scenes, sometimes lasting for pages, during which characters experience varying degrees of lucidity. These spells are characterized by the otherwise constant sound of crickets suddenly dying out into silence and the lights only slightly shifting. Often, only Deb notices this subtle change. Here is how the first of these spells begins. Up to this point, the play has behaved like a conventional two-hander about Deb seducing Aaron in his home. They are midway through a trombone lesson.

DEB

—Your breath, Aaron.

Scales now, please. F-sharp major.

(She snaps the tempo she wants. He does the F# Major. The shadows shift. The sound of crickets die out to silence. During this, PETER enters, takes keys out of the door. DEB stands across from him, observing. PETER slams the door behind him, DEB stops AARON. PETER turns off the porch light. PETER seems completely detached and follows DEB closely behind her, like he's trying to see through her eyes.)

PETER is invisible to both AARON and DEB, but DEB senses him like a pressure change. Her speech becomes increasingly urgent, then frantic during the following.)

DEB

—Excuse me, please stop. Do you, you, do you feel weird, Aaron?

Here, the audience sees a third body in the space, Peter, but the characters don't seem to react to his presence other than Deb, who seems only vaguely agitated. Peter, however, quickly enters the next scene where he will menace Deb and Aaron after catching them in the act.

PETER

This him, Deb?

DEB (*beginning to panic*)

Did you know that when I'm asleep we're always the same age? And I think out loud to myself, I think /

(PETER puts both his hands powerfully on AARON's shoulders. AARON is dreamily aware of him now.)

PETER

/ This your little cub?

Aaron and Deb still have one foot in the previous scene, but Peter keeps insisting that the lesson is over and that they're in the next scene. It's not until the next page when, "The Shadows shift. The sound of crickets return" (Lushly, 19) that Deb, Aaron, and Peter join the same narrative time, space, and action.

Both the characters and the audience should feel somewhat disturbed by these Lucid Shifts. When we see Deb looking at Peter but not speaking, our questions probably range

from, “Who can see whom? Don’t they hear him?” to “I thought he was overseas” or “Does he know Deb has been arrested or is this a flashback?”

So through giving Deb or Peter a lucid sense of the theatrical transition, ironically, I’m clouding the narrative, making less clear the theatrical rules of the world. This radical disunity of action should make the audience aware of the fact that this transition is being done to the lucid character against their will. When Deb feels Peter’s presence, but does not yet understand what it means, she becomes very vulnerable, anxious, and unprepared for the new, imminent circumstance. Deb’s experience of Lucid Shifts also isolates her in the knowledge that she’s the only one sensing the danger.

Deb’s formal powerlessness in these transitional spaces reflects the powerlessness felt by certain victims of abuse. By the end of the play, when Deb finally feels safe and cared for (if problematically) by Aaron, she senses the beginning of another Lucid Shift.

DEB

Oh nonono.

AARON

What—What’s wrong?

DEB

Fuck. Nothing. Fuck it.

You won’t leave me, right? Don’t leave me please, I think I’m sinking.

AARON

Are you ok?

DEB

Oh my god, I can’t feel the edges of me anymore, I’m think I’m sinking – I can’t – I feel like I’m sinking away. I don’t care anymore, I don’t care.

Deb knows the world will change against her again, that she is unable to hold onto this moment of intimacy and comfort. In this way, through forcing her to maintain consciousness during the transition, through unifying her narrative experience during the play's dis-unified transitional space, I've emphatically disempowered Deb. Her awareness of the liminal spell and her inability to determine her future circumstances makes her feel desperate and fearful, as indeed we in the audience may feel during these disorienting moments of the play.

I only use Lucid Shifts a few times in *Operation Istanbul*, and they take a slightly different form than they do in *Lushly*, but they enable one of the central pivot points of the play: I can begin to undo the self-assured agency Asan and Scott possess in the first half of the story. So by watching one character experience a theatrical transition in an isolated lucidity, the play invites us to question Scott and Asan's authority as both observers and participants. Whereas the First Person Shift valorizes the characters' viewpoints, the Lucid Shift humbles them, making them aware that forces outside of themselves participate in the shaping of their lives. One example of this takes place at the top of the second half when Asan leaves his Compatriot at the protests.

ASAN

I'll be there.

(ASAN smiles. COMPATRIOT leaves.)

ASAN

I will not be there. I cannot, of course, afford the risk.

*(ASAN is at Starbucks.
TOUR GUIDE at the register.)*

TOUR GUIDE

Welcome to Starbucks

ASAN

What?

TOUR GUIDE

You need coffee, of course.

This transition from the protest site to Starbucks leaves Asan disoriented, and we suddenly learn that the world moves too fast for him now. He doesn't know why his location changed, but he's aware that his time and place have shifted. Whereas in *Lushly*, Deb senses with dread the transitional space slowly coming for her, Asan appears as surprised and confused by his arrival in Starbucks as the audience. Deb senses her transition's liminality, while Asan experiences his transition's abruptness. In both cases, the characters find themselves at the mercy of the play's change, aware that things are happening to them that are beyond their control.

In both *Lushly* and *Operation Istanbul*, I also use these Lucid Shifts to create a disunity of action among the characters. Temporarily positioning certain characters as observers of their changing world, Lucid Shifts call attention to those moments when we become observers of our own actions and lives. Maybe more importantly, though, this transitional space thrusts characters into different theatrical worlds of consciousness, so that both characters and audience can become aware of the uniqueness of their experience. What

place does unity hold in our perspective on the world when we account for the fact that so many others observe the same actions so differently and with such different personal stakes?

Taken to its extreme, I fear that this train of thought bottoms out at the other end of unity, in some kind eddy of radical relativism where every point of view is equally invalid. In it, there is no truth. No one has authority over their experience. No one point of view is more valid than any other. Why try to connect to anything or anyone if that's the case? Is this not another kind of unity, one which describes a big world filled with people completely alone in their experience of it?

Conclusion: Regarding the Essential

Professor Turgeon is still waiting for my answer: “What are you trying to *prove*?”

I’m trying to prove that formal challenges to dramatic structure can deepen narrative inquiry rather than just disrupt it. No matter who authored them, “The Unities” have always played a crucial role in my development as an artist. Because of their importance, I need to nurture the fissures in my work; those are the areas of my narrative growth and curiosity. By leaning into the jarring contrast of Clean Scene Shifts, the willfully narrow perspective of First Person Shifts, and the alienating dissonance of Lucid Shifts, I’ve tried to position those violations of the Unities so centrally to the thematic systems of my plays that they become indispensable.

Themes of a corrupt world economy, abuse of young people, and love in a global society feed on, at their core, structures of imbalance, inequality, and disunity. While I rely on the durability of those themes to carry the audience through intentionally disorienting narratives, I also feel that those ideas bloom in systems that reflect their real-world inequality. Through formally integrating theme, I can traverse the expected discomfort of a disruptive theatrical arc and still help the audience invest in the characters’ lives.

There in his office, Tom is smiling at me. Am I not fundamentally describing an effort towards unity? Have I not eaten my own tail?

I wonder now if I’ve been using Turgeon’s Aristotle as a straw man all along. The *Poetics* were supposedly Aristotle’s off-the-cuff dialectics about his favorite playwright, Sophocles. Although I myself am less enamored with Sophocles, I will assume Aristotle did

not intend to exclude aberrant narrative experiments through sharing his preference for the unified, elegant work. Might this aesthetic grow out of his authentic sense of the world? After all, Aristotle was a great mind in a philosophical culture that saw itself as one of the first of its kind. Is that so different from Turgeon's lectures in the Hill Theater way back when? Have I made Tom Turgeon a tackle dummy for the Western dramatic Canon?

More to the point, why am I fighting my teachers? Aristotle's dead and gone, and it's awful, but so is Tom. Why attack and discredit their ideas when all they wanted to do was help young artists like me understand what they found beautiful and why? In my first week at UT, Steven Dietz said in his workshop, "Our culture mistakes criticism for accomplishment." I need to nurture my teachers' individual generosity rather than accuse them of creating an American theater that I find largely unsatisfactory. It's not fair to them, and it's not productive for me nor for my community. How can I remain a constructive artistic force in my chosen artistic field?

Teaching. Writing, yes, but also teaching. Did I mention that I've discovered a love for teaching theater?

I exhort now. *I* describe the delicious meat of dramatic narrative and subconsciously preference my artistic tastes. Do you see the straw here poking out from the cuffs of my sleeves? Yes, I too am a tackle dummy representing my generation, and through me, the rest of the Western Canon. If I've learned anything from my time teaching young artists—and I've learned *many* things—it's that I will gladly be their dummy if it makes them need to tackle. If it makes them stand up and grapple with the truth of their lives, please, by all means, knock me down.

It's time for me to stand up, though. At some point every semester, Steven Dietz challenges us to "essentialize" in our work. Sometimes, I react to this idea like I did to Turgeon's Unities, countering that to essentialize is to hew towards the dominant values of what fits as essential. Now, however, I will suppress that reflexive, argumentative fellow that I took to Turgeon's office a decade ago, and instead, hear the constructive (not to mention intentional) question: What is essential to *me*? Dare me to define *my* essential, even if it's just for me.

What is essential to me is that my worldview is not the world. My view is insufficient, narrow, and like it or not, most peoples' are as well. I believe I must trust myself, but distrust my authority. To ameliorate the insufficiency of my individual perspective, I need to create public opportunities for discourse, intertextuality, and indirect thought. In my writing, I will work to honor the diversity and the breadth of this disorganized world so that that world can feel welcome in expressing itself as itself.

In other words, I believe the essential quality of my work is to encourage audiences to distrust their own ability to determine the essential, to fear the destructive and excluding power of defining unity. When I can present my plays to an audience, I hope to breed a personal conscious reaction to the individuality of our experience and of those around us. I've been to many theaters that claim to present provocative theater in order to initiate discourse between audience members. While I admire the goal of supporting discussion, I'm more interested in sending people out of the theater in a state of quiet, felt unrest, a state that makes them approach one another with humility rather than certainty.

Again, I think of those blind men and the elephant. The challenge facing those men, their limited ability to observe the wide, strange world, and their readiness to try anyway. I believe it is essential to be wrong and to wonder still. Even if there is just one elephant standing with them, I have to remember that there are four more elephants; one in each man's imagination, revising, changing, harmonizing as they share their personal, incomplete accounts.

Unity costs something. I think about it all the time: I don't want my wife to lose her Greekness. I'm aware, though, that in sharing her life with me, she may not be able to avoid it. As hard as I'll work to learn Greek, I will never understand the world of her mother, just as she'll never really grasp the unremitting Ohio-ness of my family's upbringing. We will gain responsibilities and make practical choices in our lives that we haven't had to consider before. We will appropriate and average each other's identities, repurposing them to serve our present lives. In other words, I'm afraid we'll be each other's French Enlightenment. I already feel it happening.

But, you know what? It's a goddamn blessing to marry someone! As a matter of fact, we're planning our wedding right now; our real, formal, big-party wedding, and Michael the clerk is not invited. We are planning an event, a production that will publicly mark this transition for us. The audience: Alex's Greek family, my Ohioan, my Floridian family, our overly successful holdovers from high school, our exhausted friends from New York, our growing sun-dazed family-of-choice in Texas – all will convene in Boston for a massive, meticulously planned spectacle. We will do the Greek dances, my aunts will complain about

how beautiful everything is, the ceremony itself will likely be officiated by a Greek Bishop I've never met, and some people (not me, I promise) will get too drunk. Our friend Ray Ray will be live-illustrating the event, my mom will organize a traditional Ohioan cookie table, we'll have BBQ at the rehearsal dinner, and we can't, no matter what we do, predict or control the weather.

As best we can, we want to create an occasion of constructive transition, one that allows our whole life to be possible, present, and represented. This wedding needs to introduce our insulated families and friends to the gorgeous myriad of people, places, ideas, and experiences that have created Alex and me. Rather than uniting our families, as I'm sure the priest will phrase it in the ceremony, I want this transition to celebrate, to preserve and protect the distinctness of what made us. And we want everyone we love to be there. They should witness with us the productive joyfulness of our disunity for themselves.



OPERATION ISTANBUL

By Patrick Shaw

OPERATION ISTANBUL

by Patrick Shaw

SCOTT - Self-assured, silky-smooth spy. Femme-fatale type. American woman

ASAN - Self-assured, silky-smooth. Charismatic introvert. Male of Kurdish descent.

THE CROWD - A company of about 10-12 actors of all genders and ethnicities. A fluid ensemble that transforms into various roles and makes up the human landscape of the piece. All named characters other than Scott and Asan should be part of this group.

Note on style:

In general, keep the action loose, fast, and fun. The play should feel a little like you're on vacation and you're spending money without thinking and everything's perfect until you get home and you open your bank account and you see that you've made a terrible, terrible mistake.

OPERATION ISTANBUL

by Patrick Shaw

(Swagger Spy Music.

TITLE CARD: OPERATION ISTANBUL

TARGET sneaks in. SCOTT waits for him in the shadows.)

SCOTT

Whistle Whistle.

TARGET

Ach!

(TARGET swings around holding a pistol.)

SCOTT

Pew!

(SCOTT shoots the gun out of his hand.)

TARGET

Ach!

(He throws a knife at her. She catches it in front of her face.)

SCOTT

Pew!

(Shoots him as he tries to get away. He's dead.)

SCOTT

A spicy hit. Target smoked-cayenne for breakfast and sweated terror.

Close call, but I added milk to the stew.

Here's your chemical agent.

MR THOROUGHES

A little too close, I'd say.

*(MR THOROUGHES enters. His men remove the TARGET.
They are in CIA headquarters.)*

MR THOROUGHES

It's just a fancy pen.

(The test tube is a pen.)

SCOTT

But he was the target you—

MR THOROUGHES

—Never mind, accidents happen.

Listen, I've been meaning to talk with you about something.

SCOTT

But Mr. Thoroughs—

MR THOROUGHES

—Yes, Agent Scott?

SCOTT

What use have I for a vacation?

MR THOROUGHES

I don't know, Istanbul.

SCOTT

Istanbul?

MR THOROUGHES

Istanbul.

SCOTT

....

It hadn't occurred to me, but—

(Phone rings.)

MR THOROUGHES

—Enjoy yourself. I have to take this—

(He picks up the phone—the deafening sound of an airplane.)

ISTANBUL TURKEY 2003

(TITLE CARD: ISTANBUL TURKEY 2003

SCOTT is in Istanbul.

THE CROWD mills about. They become increasingly intrusive. Some try to sell things to her. To others, SCOTT is simply in the way.)

SCOTT

Traveling women carry leather bound journals with pens inserted into their spines.
Traveling women stand among uncontrollable groups of strangers, without anxiety.

Traveling women consult geographically inaccurate maps which in no way prepare them for the mind-spinning revisions of an antique metropolis.

Traveling women persist and observe the sites.

(Trying to appreciate the architecture....)

SCOTT

So riddled with the popular architecturally impressive, these *gorgeous*—

Just um. Um.

Oh damn it all, this vacation.

(The CROWD becomes TOURISTS, gathering around the TOURGUIDE.)

SCOTT

Traveling women see the sites.

We take the tour to know we've seen the right sites.

(SCOTT joins the tour.)

TOURGUIDE

And now we're now entering the Hagia Sophia!

(The CROWD disperses in awe.)

TOURGUIDE

Medallions, God's name.

The oldest. Plaster, yes, and Minarets. Such low, low chandeliers.

Low. The dome, historic, large

Yes Yes.

TOUR

Yes, yes.

TOURGUIDE

Designed by Greek scientists, it epitomizes Byzantine architecture and has served as the Greek Orthodox basilica, a Roman Catholic cathedral, a mosque, and since 1935, this secularized museum.

TOUR

Yes, yes, yes, yes....

TOURGUIDE

Hagia Sophia.

Its name translates to mean...

TOUR

Yes, yes, yes, yes...

TOURGUIDE

“Holy Wisdom”...

TOUR PERSON

Got an echo, does it?

]

TOURGUIDE

Oh, let's—

(TOUR PERSON loudly caps. It echoes)

TOUR

Wahhhh.

SCOTT

Turns out I'm not a site lover.

TOURGUIDE

Now if you'll just look down here, you'll notice that we are currently standing on *beautiful* marble —

SCOTT

Until...

(TOURISTS all crouch down to look at the ground, leaving SCOTT standing. She notices ASAN across the room. He smokes.)

SCOTT

A man—

*(Music changes.
The TOURGUIDE, muted, continues his tour, mouthing the words.
Everything is blue light. ASAN returns her gaze.
This should be genuinely hot.)*

SCOTT

A man, his eyes, dark as death's dice, surveys me from across the mosque. I become aware of him.

(The TOURISTS observe different aspects of the mosque as SCOTT and ASAN play a nonchalant game of cat and mouse, peeking through the group as it shifts and points and turns.)

SCOTT

My low brain tracks the correlation of his tracking to mine:

I slow –he slows.

He turns away to inspect some ancient Byzantine masterpiece- he feigns attention, interest –

This tease reminds me of the moment before I—Pew!

TARGET

Ach!—

SCOTT

—My target. The smoldering rush of blood up between my thighs, the chill across my shoulder blades, the flushed rush of warmth fanning out across my sacrum, around my pelvis- The circulation of erotic lethality. And I surprise him when I ask,

“So was this crazy building always a mosque?”

TOURGUIDE

What an insightful question! As a matter of fact, it was first constructed by the Byzantines in—

(Mute the TOURGUIDE.)

SCOTT

—want me – want me - want me - Want me!!!

You see? My foolish question? My flat intonation? My inappropriate and casual use of the word “crazy?”
Yes, I am an American.

TOURIST

Oh, really? Where’re ya from?

SCOTT

It doesn’t matter—

TOURIST

—We’re in from Altoona.

SCOTT

Pennsylvania?

TOURIST

Oh, you know it?! You ever been or—?

TOUR GUIDE

—Now, isn’t it just a small world after all? Ha ha!

TOURIST

Yeah, *wow*. Sure!—

SCOTT

—Uh huh, thanks, yeah.

TOUR GUIDE

Now let’s hear where every single person in this room is from just to see if we got any overlap, don’t ya think—

SCOTT

—Enough of this nonsense!

He wants me.

That man, that man.... He *wants* me.

TOUR (*together*)

Yeah, he does.

STRAGGLER

—the hunk.

SCOTT

He wants to feel that same rush of blood up my thighs against his hips, and perhaps later, against his chest, when my calves will be pressed to his collarbones, my toes like the points of the antlers on a Big Pennsylvania Buck!

(The TOURISTS are breathing heavily. Fanning themselves with increasing rapidity.)

SCOTT

I see it in his artifact eyes and I think -

(The tour freezes.)

SCOTT

I want to Pew you.

MR THOROUGHES

But you're on vacation, Scott.

SCOTT

Right! But I don't. Because ... I'm on *vacation*.
"Tourperson, is the tour over yet?"

TOURGUIDE

Yes. You're now in the tumultuous city streets of Istanbul.

SCOTT

So I follow him.

(SCOTT follows ASAN through chaotic Istanbul. The CROWD becomes the medium of their desire. They could dance. Maybe rose petals should be thrown periodically—A faux-Turkish fantasy.)

SCOTT

I do it in such a way that he knows what I'm doing but can't tell for sure that he knows that I know that he knows it.

This is very erotic.

Do you see?

Do you see how he—?

Everything feels so—AH!

(The chase accelerates into a ridiculous climax, leaving THE CROWD spilled across a hot outdoor plaza. A breath of satisfied relief.)

SCOTT

The day is hot, and he stops to drink from the sweet rose tea in the Sultanahmet.

(ASAN stops to sip from a shoulder-mounted samovar, sold by a man in traditional Turkish dress. This should be a prolonged ritual of almost absurd formality which deteriorates into ecstasy when the music expands. ASAN finishes, pays.)

SCOTT

He finishes, I follow. I sample from the same cup.

(The music starts over again. A repetition of entire Samovar ritual with SCOTT. She is overcome.)

SCOTT

This over-sweet plaza Kool-Aid— it in no way quenches my thirst.

It leaves me dizzy with him,
I double my pace. He knows.

He knows I want him to know he knows.

Then!
I make him lose me.
Whoosh!

(ASAN looks back – she’s gone. The CROWD transforms the stage – music - creating ASAN’s apartment. ASAN approaches the door to his flat, waits alone before going in, looks around, smokes. SCOTT watches him from within, through a high window. She is very close to him.)

SCOTT

Having inferred his destination from the pattern of his glances and variable route trajectory, I have beaten him back to his own flat and await in his atrium. The window in the door is small and high, but I watch him smoke an entire cigarette – I watch closely. The surgical flick of the ash, the way his ribs spread

when he fills with smoke – I'm wet, and I want the air he holds in his mouth to be held in my mouth. I *need* it. I need it *now*.

(She opens the door. He turns around. They share a long look.)

ASAN *(in Turkish)*
Merhaba, Amerikan.
[Hello, American.]

SCOTT
I speak Turkish, I speak it well, and I hear through his subtle accent:

ASAN *(as before)*
Hello American

SCOTT
I use his tongue:
Hello...
Your eyes are ancient.

ASAN
Yes, they are my father's father's father's.

SCOTT
Well done.
Invite me in for tea.

ASAN
I have an appointment.

SCOTT
You're sweating.

ASAN
So are you—Do you like it?

SCOTT
Very much.

ASAN
Do you like that we sweat?
Us together?
At once?

SCOTT

I confess, I do.

ASAN

And I—

SCOTT

—Yes?

ASAN

I do it...for—

SCOTT

—Yes?

(pause)

ASAN

For you.

(They walk upstairs in silence. When they enter, the music changes—A slow-pluck saz or alt-tuned banjo, playing a mysterious melody, perfectly accompanying their every motion.

He enters, pulls out the chair for her.

He sits beside her at a distance that can only mean one thing.

They breathe in unison, wait patiently for the other to speak.

They smoke.

Suddenly, ASAN's mother enters, rearranging furniture, opening the window.

SCOTT and ASAN do not break eye contact, don't seem to notice.)

MOTHER

Why why why why do you sit there with this floor like—This window! This window is *closed*, Asan. A closed window?! It is disgusting, stuffy-hot.

(She opens it.)

MOTHER

And you never fold and you never wipe your shoes—What if you step in, in—

(ASAN's younger brother, RAJAN, the samovar man, comes in. Neither looks at the other or stops moving the entire time they are in the room.)

RAJAN

Mom! You got the window open, Mom! The whole building's listening to you yabbering on and on—

MOTHER

—What do you mean yabbering! Look at your brother, Rajan! Your brother is sitting there staring, like a hunk of marble statue, not offering tea, never offering tea to his American guest. Never thinking of others— just like YOU! Not offering an American guest tea?! *Selfish!*

(RAJAN quickly pours the tea for ASAN and SCOTT, as he bickers. It could have shades of the ritual, but performed without reverence. ASAN and SCOTT don't move a muscle.)

RAJAN

I GOT IT, MOM! I know! I know!

I've been working all day and do I not pay your rent and—

Do I not pay for your new answering machine telephone machine?—

I'm the feral one?!

MOTHER

Oh you got it. No, I got it.

I got a couple of wild worthless Cavemen dog boy stray cat shame—

Oh yeah,

I got it all right!

—A couple of feral children!

MOTHER

Oh, you're not feral?! Do you make *your* bed? Do you wipe *your* shoes? No, Rajan! No – You have a job as a Turkish Clown boy and now you have the bravery to talk to me like—Have I raised a boy with no shame?!

RAJAN

You're shouting with the American company! You're the one who should be ashamed—

MOTHER

—WHAT! WHAT! ME?! ME?! ASHAMED?!!

RAJAN

That's not what I mean, Mom!—

MOTHER *(offstage)*

—My son, dressed as a Turkish clown, dancing monkey pouring tea for tourists? *That. That's what I—No!*

RAJAN

It's just my job, Mom!
Of course, I feel shame! Just—

*(MOTHER exits.
BROTHER follows.)*

MOTHER

—No!

RAJAN

Mom! I'm sorry!

*(ASAN and SCOTT are alone again. Pause. Plucking music returns.
They simply sip their tea in stillness, never breaking eye contact. They
finish their tea, lean down toward the same microphone.)*

SCOTT

You're Beautiful

ASAN

You're Beautiful

*(This is ok, they are fine with speaking at the same time.
They slowly lean in to kiss— but they lean with their chests, not necks.
They have not broken eye contact, and their bodies are very close—very
close. SCOTT's lips quiver, barely noticeable, ASAN's breath has
deepened.
INTERRUPTION—Text Message. Without moving her body, SCOTT
grabs her cell phone from the table and holds it next to ASAN's face.
Reads it without moving her head.)*

MR THOROUGHES

FYI there's a sting on a double agent in your locale involving a terrorist rendezvous. R U available?

SCOTT

Hmmm.

*(INTERRUPTION—Text message. Without moving his body, ASAN grabs
his cell phone from the table and holds it next to SCOTT's face. Reads it.)*

COMPATRIOT

You ought to know there is a traitor in the cell, he now drinks tea with a beautiful CIA woman. Are you free to kill the guy later?

ASAN
Hmmm.

(INTERRUPTION— Texts to both SCOTT and to ASAN.)

MR THOROUGHES
Oh wait shit nevermind—

COMPATRIOT
—Oh wait shit nevermind.

(ASAN and SCOTT put their phones down – look at each other.)

ASAN
You're CIA.

SCOTT
I prefer Spy.
You're a Terrorist.

ASAN
I prefer Revolutionary.

(short pause)

ASAN and SCOTT
I stand corrected.

*(They stand corrected.
They are both incredibly aroused – they are just about to kiss passionately
when the room erupts into revolutionaries and CIA Assassins.
Badass music.
An enormous action sequence ensues in which SCOTT and ASAN kick
ass.)*

SCOTT
He had so many knives lying around!

*(She throws another.
Finally, SCOTT and ASAN have killed all of their attackers.*

The battle is over, and they are finally alone. They look into each other's eyes.)

SCOTT

I was the best. The very best.
Happily ever after

*(ASAN and SCOTT smile. Music is very loud.
Blackout.
Happily ever after
All the dead jump up and do a great unison dance.)*

CARLISLE USA 2004

(Title Card: CARLISLE USA 2004

Lights slowly fade up on SCOTT and ASAN sleeping in their apartment, ASAN with his arm around her. It's a dark, messy, peaceful place. An alarm radio. Some music plays, something sleepy and American. ASAN pops straight up in bed, sweating, heaving for breath.)

ASAN

It is already 7:15 in the AM.

(Music plays: ASAN pulls on boxers, washes his face, brushes his teeth. SCOTT sleeps and sleeps.)

ASAN

The American futon is a unique instrument of torture, a goblin-like nightmare of the spine.

I dress, put on my khaki's. I wear them with no belt because I admire the button, the snug fit, but most of all, I admire the way this irks my partner.

I suspect – but with hope – that these idiosyncrasies will one day transmute into unique lovable quirks that distinguish me in her love.

(ASAN pauses beside her bed, fixes her covers, and goes to the kitchen. ASAN lights a cigarette as he opens the blinds. He makes coffee and breakfast with ridiculous efficiency, he still works like a spy.)

ASAN

In American movies, I have always admired the way heroines list the infuriating qualities of their partners –The way he squeezes the tooth paste from the middle—those ugly shoes and hoodies –

Such banal annoyances can endear one to one's partner.

(Someone walks past the window, ASAN watches after her.)

ASAN

Further, these seemingly careless acts adjust her expectations down just so ever little that when I am normal or make an effort towards handsome, it achieves an even greater effect in my partner. There is a psychological term, I have learned from listening to Terry Gross interviews on my Walkman radio. Anchoring. I utilize anchors and take pleasure in my top button.

(The same woman walks past the window. ASAN doesn't see this time, and the person peeks in as she passes. ASAN places the coffee on the side table beside where SCOTT sleeps. She bolts up.)

SCOTT

Oh my god what time is it?

ASAN

It is 7:25,

SCOTT *(seething)*

Jesus, Asan.

ASAN

I've only been awake ten minutes.

SCOTT

Wake me up, please!

ASAN

Please make an effort to call me Arnold.

(SCOTT makes exasperated sounds, as she dresses furiously and plants herself at her computer.)

ASAN

Life is lonely on the lam.

I understand that in the movies I am in the “happily ever after” portion now, hiding in anonymity with my sweetheart while she pursues an online business degree with the for-profit Phoenix University—

SCOTT

—FUCKING TIME WARNER!!! Come ON!

ASAN

I look at the asymmetrical clench of her trapezial muscles, curling like a fallen leaf, and I wonder— Where has she gone....?

Such ease once, you see?

(He touches her shoulders. Her shoulders relax. SCOTT plugs into her computer.)

ASAN

I am going, Ruth.

SCOTT *(to computer)*

Christ, THANK you.

ASAN

Would you like some coffee?

SCOTT

Oh. Thank you. Did you make enough for—

ASAN

—Of course.

Have a nice day.

(He exits.

He rides his bicycle to work.

Sounds of cars zooming past on wet roads.)

ASAN

I ride my bicycle to the Foodland on Route 11 with great misery.

To be alone. Alone in the hills, the hills of Carlisle, Pennsylvania—

They are inhumane for the cyclist.

I feel the gravel of the cars barreling past.

(ASAN puts on headphones.)

ASAN

The ride is long and solitary, but I listen to Terry Gross on my Walkman for company.

(TERRY GROSS interviews ASAN's brother, RAJAN, about the incident in Istanbul.)

TERRY GROSS

So your family growing up was part of the country's forced migration, is that right?

RAJAN

Yes, but you see, I'm not entirely comfortable with that term.

"Forced Migration" sounds almost productive, even civically necessary.

To those of us the military targeted for "forced migration," it felt much more like a genocidal displacement—

ASAN

—His voice, so much like Rajan’s—

RAJAN

—Or maybe it is simply ethnic cleansing.

This is not the first time the Turkish State has perpetrated this, you understand. Cultural erasure is a time honored technique of suppressing democratic, multi-cultural expression in the Ottoman tradition.

TERRY GROSS

I see. And the PKK developed as a direct response to these techniques? For our listeners the Kurdistan Worker’s—

RAJAN

—The Kurdistan Worker’s Party, yes.

TERRY GROSS

You were once a member of the PKK, correct?

RAJAN

Yes. It was not a large organization, but they were the only people advocating for Kurdish rights at the time.

TERRY GROSS

And just to be clear the Kurdistan Worker’s Party is not an official political party, it’s technically a, uh, a terrorist organization.

RAJAN

I understand your country has experienced challenging times of late, but please don’t insult me, Ms Gross.

TERRY GROSS

I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—

RAJAN

—Every displaced Kurd is not a PKK, every resistance movement is not terrorist.

TERRY GROSS

I wasn’t implying—

RAJAN

—Yes, of course.

TERRY GROSS

O...k.

So how long did they question you?

(ASAN stops and listens.

Pause.)

TERRY GROSS

Do you need a moment?

RAJAN

Yes, please.

(DOMINIC bursts in. A burly grocery store manager.)

DOMINIC

What the hell yer doin out here, Arnie?

TERRY GROSS

Take your time.

(DOMINIC yanks ASAN's headphones off.)

DOMINIC

Dolores working her ass off gettin things ready while you're listening to your goddamn mariachi mixtapes in the parking lot? Christ almighty!

ASAN

I am very sorry Dominic. It was an important radio story—

DOMINIC

— Thanks. Arnie. I don't give a shit.

(They are in the grocery store where sleepy country plays over the store stereo.

ASAN joins DOLORES at a register. They check people out as they talk.)

DOLORES

Hey Arnie, how you doing today?

ASAN

I am well, thank you.

DOLORES

Me too. Oh, you know, I got a call from Howard yesterday about his nephew the Ringgold cornerback, the star, ya know? It's his MCL, he feels *awful* about it cause—

ASAN

—I know more about elderly coworker Dolores than I knew about my own mother.

DOLORES

An' my husband says he's had the prostate cancer *twice* now and—

ASAN

—It connects to nothing. The thoughts that stream out.

DOLORES

It's supposed to be *anonymous*, that's why they leave the envelopes in the pews, but of course, Joey's out there waiving his bills—

ASAN

—I do not know this "Joey."

DOLORES

Do you know if they got pepto fer dogs? I don't know. I know the grass works with the kitties—

ASAN

— I feel my spine curling towards the ground, ears first, my eyes lose focus and swing softly almost imperceptibly, to and fro, like the lanterns in the Hajia Sophia.

My grief, it takes me in her arms, turns me and turns me.

(The lights have changed – The CROWD seems to slow down, all seem lost in thought, thinking of somewhere else.)

ASAN

—Dolores?

DOLORES

Yeah, hun?

ASAN

You are from here, yes?

DOLORES

Born and raised, Mechanicsburg stock!

ASAN

A Pennsylvania woman.

DOLORES

Yes sir, and proud. Go Stillers.

ASAN

Have you ever felt homesick?

DOLORES

Oh geez, yeah.

ASAN

When? Why?

DOLORES

Oh, I don't know. Whenever I'm up by the old house on Sycamore where my parents were livin before they declined. Thinkin about how all us kids used to have run of the land out there, nothing like today— would you believe the Frinkle family used to keep horses across the street from us?

ASAN

I would not.

DOLORES

Well, it was true, dearie.

ASAN

Ah.

So you are homesick for the past?

DOLORES

Well, lemme see.

ASAN

You are sick for before?

DOLORES

I'm sick for how you folks'll never know it how I knew it.

I don't know...

Can't explain everything.

(DOMINIC cuts in. The spell over, and everyone's back to selecting food in solitude.)

DOLORES *(end of conversation)*

But you know me! I ain't one to complain!

DOMINIC

Take your break, Arnie.

(ASAN goes to the back room, where it is completely silent, and he is alone.)

ASAN

I call home during the lunch break from behind the dry goods storage.

(He has the phone. SCOTT sits down across from him with her phone.)

ASAN

Hello, Ruth.

SCOTT

Hi, Asan.

ASAN

It's Arnie.

SCOTT

Ok, yeah.

ASAN

Very often we say little to one another. My mind can wander.

(ASAN lights a cigarette.)

SCOTT

Did I upset you this morning?

ASAN

No, you did not upset me.

*(Pause. ASAN smokes looking at his sandwich.
SCOTT touches ASAN's face.)*

ASAN

This is a ... I am having a hard time, you understand? There is no one here.

SCOTT

I'm here.

(He smokes.)

SCOTT

Thank you for making breakfast this morning.

ASAN

You work very hard.

(pause)

DOMINIC *(walking through)*

Taking the afternoon off, Arnie?

ASAN

Of course, I am very sorry.

*(Pause.
ASAN puts his cigarette out.)*

SCOTT

We ok?

ASAN

Yes. Thank you, Ruth.

*(They hang up.
ASAN returns to the floor where the throngs of customers cut him off with
increasing rapidity until one in particular stops him.
The room changes slightly. An echo of a saz.)*

GRETA

I am so sorry, excuse me.

ASAN

No, I am sorry, excuse me.

(Short pause. The music rises.)

GRETA

Is there an echo in here? Ha!

ASAN

Her posture is unmistakable. An invitation.

*(ASAN returns to the front, GRETA follows.
GRETA waits, blushing as DOLORES scans her groceries.)*

ASAN

She is older than me, but young still. Tanned, taut skin of her arms, the muscular definition of a woman who has read books about chakras. Who is this mysterious woman? I will use my speed—I must know—My chance!

(When she takes her wallet from her purse and begins to open it, everyone freezes. ASAN snatches the wallet from her hand and leafs through its contents.)

ASAN

My conclusions:

She is single, divorced woman, a PNC Bank account, a dependable middle-income job, this being one of her usual days off. She is also a Cosco shopper, which means she has children, and I would infer that they are with her ex-husband today. Judging from her driver's license photograph and her eyes, I can tell that she is lonely, but self-possessed; confident, but not careless, and that she will ask me to carry her groceries to her Sport Utility Vehicle.

*(ASAN replaces the wallet in her hands and restores his exact position.
Time resumes.)*

GRETA

Hey, you know, can you help me out with these?

ASAN

Certainly.

(He carries two of the paper grocery bags to the car, following her across the parking lot. GRETA checks over her shoulder and smiles at him.)

GRETA

You having a long day?

ASAN

How did you know?

GRETA

Can see it in your eyes. Only way to know for sure.
How's my day going?

(GRETA stops so that ASAN can look in her eyes.)

ASAN

Your day is good.

GRETA

Wrong, it's total shit so far.

(She smiles.)

ASAN

I like the sound of her voice. I want to cry.

GRETA

Hey, when do you get off work?

(beat)

ASAN

Five Fifteen.

GRETA

Yeah?

ASAN

Yeah.

GRETA

I'll pick you up then. We'll grab a drink. Be real friendly like.

*(ASAN smiles. GRETA's gone.
He lingers in the parking lot.
Cars far away, light music.
SCOTT appears with a shopping bag.)*

ASAN

But I'm.... married.

SCOTT

Nice, right?

It's temporary.

ASAN

A little rock of a hill, little apartments like powdered sugar.

These buildings were built for easy removal.

Scott is from here, or somewhere like here.

She has no family left, but she's still from here.

Thank you.

SCOTT

We're going to be ok. I promise.

Thoroughs'll never find us here.

(A big plate of casserole.)

ASAN

Her cooking is strange. A little bit of everything. It's heavy.

SCOTT

Tuna noodle casserole. A regional delicacy. What do you think?

ASAN

It's delicious. Makes me feel like a stone mason.

SCOTT

That's the idea.

Tomorrow you'll cook me something, and I'll get you a thing for the house.

Like a winter coat – looks good on you.

ASAN

She was so generous those first months. Planning, gifting.

I was too wary.

I should have been more ready for her—

SCOTT

—Patio furniture for when it gets warm in March.

ASAN

And now she's stopped asking.

SCOTT

It'll start to feel like home in no time.

(SCOTT leaves.)

ASAN

Sunsets on brown tress. Scabs of black rock on thatchy hills, grey sky like dry flaking skin.

Dolores says you begin to look like your pets, but I know you look like your home, and I'm afraid to look in the mirror here.

(They are at a local beat-down Applebee's, the hang out for working people over the age of 35. Music from a loud old jukebox, a ballad.

Everyone's thinking of someone from way back.

GRETA and ASAN find seats at the bar.)

ASAN

Who *is* Applebee?

GRETA

Perhaps, you are Applebee, mysterious gentleman.

ASAN

I assure you, I am not.

Would you like something from the starter menu?

GRETA

I'm good

ASAN

A glimpse of my reflection in the mirror through the schnapps on the bar.
She makes me feel like a man again.

(The bartender drops off GRETA'S Budweiser.)

ASAN *(quickly, decisively)*

I would like an order of jalapeno poppers.

BARTENDER

From the starters menu?

ASAN *(for GRETA)*

No ... the full order. For now.

And to drink, I would like... a Blue Moon.

(Men from the end of the bar explode in laughter.)

RICK *(drunk)*

Blue Moon! Blue Moon?!

(The MEN at the end of the bar join in laughing and bellow:)

MEN

BLUE MOOOOON! I SAW YOU STANDING ALOOOOOONE!

(ASAN looks at them.)

ASAN

Are they trying to set ... a mood?

GRETA

Just ignore them. You're with me.

(GRETA pats ASAN's thigh.)

ASAN

I can feel through my khaki's when she pats my thigh, she has removed her old wedding ring since I saw her at Foodland.

GRETA

So what's your story, cowboy?

ASAN

My story?

GRETA

You can start with your name.

ASAN

My name is ...Arnold.

GRETA

Greta. Couple of names we got, huh?

ASAN

I know the questions Americans love:
So what do you do?

GRETA

I'm a spy.

ASAN

Excuse me?

GRETA

I'm on the case. Nervous?

ASAN

Not at all.

(She laughs, punches his arm.)

GRETA

How about you?

ASAN

I put people's food in bags, so they don't have to do it for themselves.

GRETA

No, what do you *really* do?

ASAN

What I really do?

GRETA

Yeah. What's your passion?

ASAN

You want to know my passion?

GRETA

I like the way you repeat what I just said but in a sexier voice.

I like that about you.

ASAN

I could have this woman. She hears my no and wants me more for it.

GRETA

You got somebody?

You don't have to explain yourself to me, but I like to know what I'm getting into.

You understand.

(RICK stomps over from the drunk guys, throws his arm over GRETA's back.)

RICK *(bursting in)*

See here's the thing I'm not understanding bout you—

GRETA

—You can't touch me, sorry.

ASAN *(to GRETA)*

Is this something I'm supposed to fight over?

GRETA

No, no—Fuck off asshole!

MEN FROM END OF BAR

OoooooOOOOOOOO!

RICK

No, you see—See what I don't understand is what a pretty, classy woman like you're doing on a date with the Haji bagboy—

GRETA

—I'm not a fucking coatrack, get off me.

RICK

Gropin all up on you under the bar, like he's some slick mother fucker.
(to his buddies)

I saw you—you believe this piece of shit?

ASAN

You're disrupting our conversation, excuse us.

RICK

Nonononono, *I'm* talking to the lady, kid.

ASAN

I'm sorry, you're not.

RICK

What, you're gonna step, kid?

(RICK lifts his fists up, the CROWD all jumps up to watch.)

ASAN

His weight's too far back. Lazy soft fists and tight shoulders.
No need to get creative, I take everything he's giving me and that'll be enough.
It is important to not kill the incompetent.

(ASAN neutralizes RICK professionally. It's sudden, and RICK flops back, unconscious.)

BARTENDER

Shit.

GRETA

I *told* you not to fucking touch me! Who's next, bitches!

ASAN

I am not here to fight with people.

GRETA

Seriously, which whiskey dick's next?

(The MEN back away, throw some cash on the bar, and grumble variously. "We can't be associated with" "Can't, sorry" "I got an appointment.")

BARTENDER

At least lay him down in the booth 'fore you leave. Christ.

GRETA

Looks like you're the spy, huh?

(ASAN smiles)

ASAN

I'm a pacifist. I haven't had a physical altercation since I was a school boy.

GRETA

That's funny, cause it looked to me like that's your PhD.

BARTENDER

These're on the house.

GRETA

Sweetheart.

BARTENDER

Just trying to stay on your buddy's good side.

GRETA

Cheers.

ASAN

Cheers.

(Music again.)

GRETA

How'd it feel?

ASAN

Really good.

GRETA

It looked like it felt good.

ASAN

It felt really good.

Rick was an asshole.

GRETA

Looked like it felt *real* good.

ASAN

I smile, time is passing.

GRETA

Let's get out of here.

(ASAN gives her his eyes to examine.

ASAN

Please excuse me for a moment.

(ASAN in the bathroom.)

ASAN

Look in the mirror, Asan. Make sure.

...

...

...

...

ASAN

Make sure you know what are you doing

...

...

Do you know what you're doing?

...

...

(GRETA takes out her phone. MR THOROUGHGS answers.)

GRETA

He's here. It's definitely him.

Cocktail tab in my sight.

MR THOROUGHGS

Alive, Greta.

GRETA

More fun that way, anyway.

MR THOROUGHES

Careful, he's live.

GRETA

Not necessary, Thoroughes.

MR THOROUGHES

You're the best.

Keep him guessing.

GRETA

Out.

(ASAN's phone rings.)

ASAN

A good alibi—

(He answers, it's SCOTT.)

SCOTT

Hey, everything all right?

(SCOTT appears.)

ASAN

Of course.

SCOTT

Oh, good.

Want me to keep your dinner warm for you?

ASAN

Oh, actually, Dolores invited me over for dinner, and I thought it rude to decline.

SCOTT

But you didn't call.

ASAN

I know, I'm sorry. Dolores just kept talking and talking. I'm there now.

SCOTT

Okay then. Well, have fun.

ASAN

Of course, thank you.

SCOTT

Love you.

ASAN

I love you too. Bye.

(ASAN hangs up. He looks at the phone, at himself in the mirror.)

ASAN

I'm the best.

(He walks out the bathroom to find SCOTT holding his poppers)

SCOTT

Hi Arnie. You weren't just going to leave these, were you?

ASAN

....

....

Hello, Ruth.

SCOTT

Saw you left your bike at the Foodland.

GRETA

You two know each other?

SCOTT

Ah.

Ok.

GRETA

Ah.

GRETA

Look, I don't want any trouble—

ASAN

—And she looks from me quickly to Greta and does exactly what I should have done an hour ago. Am I slowing down already?

(Everything freezes, as with ASAN's wallet search, but this time, SCOTT takes out GRETA's phone to check the texts history.)

ASAN

A text –

MR THOROUGHES

—The pan is hot, time to bring home the baon.

(SCOTT flips the phone shut and returns it to GRETA's pocket.)

SCOTT *(Suddenly, sobbing childishly)*

How *could* you?!

(SCOTT storms out, “making a scene.”)

ASAN

I'm so sorry, excuse me.

GRETA

Nice to meet you—

ASAN

—No, no, I'll be right back.

GRETA

Yeah, sure.

(GRETA takes her phone out, texts. As she runs out the back door.)

GRETA

Hot tamale's comin your way.

MR THOROUGHES

Roger. Rendezvous at their apartment. We have the knives this time!

GRETA

Check plus—

(She rushes outside—ASAN and SCOTT have vanished.)

GRETA

Wait, where'd they—

(Roar of a car engine.

ASAN and SCOTT in the car, burning up the highway. SCOTT is not crying in the least. She doesn't look at ASAN.)

ASAN

We've escaped and barrel up the guardrails of North 11, fast out of Carlisle.

SCOTT

Idiot. Idiot, Asan. Sucker. Cover-blowing, idiot sucker.

ASAN

I made a mistake.

SCOTT

I should have killed you in Istanbul.

(Neither speaks for a time. Pennsylvania flashes past.

Asan's MOTHER pops up from the back seat.

MOTHER

Why, Asan? Why?

ASAN

I don't know, Mom.

MOTHER

Why have you betrayed the beautiful American business woman?

ASAN

She's not a business woman, she was just taking online classes.

MOTHER

She invests in you, and you? You search for a little nookie snuggles from some ruined woman on a bar stool.

ASAN

Nothing happened.

MOTHER

Oh? Maybe not to you, no. If it doesn't happen to YOU, nothing happens!

Nooo, no, it's you, it's all you.

Buckle your seat belt.

ASAN

But it's uncomfortable—

MOTHER

—Exactly, always *your* comfort. And now you flee and I may never see you again, and why? Why do you want to make a Saturday Mother of me, hm? Want me crying with sign at Galatasaray? Why? Because of this thing you want for yourself. That's why.

ASAN

Mom—

MOTHER

—And now, you see, you don't even care for that anymore. Just another thing you want.

ASAN

It's hard here, trust me.

MOTHER

Oh yes, I have such pity for you and your luxurious American job and its lunch breaks. Boo hoo— What makes you think you deserve to be with this woman, hmm? That you used to be handsome?

That you used to fight for what you believed in?

ASAN

I still do, Mom.

MOTHER

No. Someone asks me now? You weren't worth the trouble of your birth.

ASAN

Don't say that, Mom. Mom?

(She vanishes.)

ASAN

Mom?

(ASAN alone with SCOTT again.)

ASAN

Scott, I'm sorry.

SCOTT

What's the point?

You. You and me.

ASAN

All along, this was the danger of my strategy.

SCOTT

What's the point?

ASAN

When met with genuine disappointment, my lack of effort, my slack appearance only make my partner feel more—

SCOTT

—Humiliated. I feel humiliated.

ASAN

For committing to me. I am not endearing. I'm simply not worth it
I should have worn a belt.

SCOTT (cont'd)

I'm sorry for blowing our cover.

SCOTT

Just for that?

ASAN

And she opens the windows to drown me out.
We'll spend the next few nights in our hideout. Then, a new life.

A new hiding, a new running. Who knows if the CIA will catch up to us again.
If we're lucky, we'll grow slowly older and calmer and quieter—That's the best
we have to look forward to.
A dulling of edges.

(Blackout.)

TORONTO, CANADA 2013

(Title Card: TORONTO, CANADA. 2013.

The crowd is SCREAMING towards the audience, jumping, cheering – orange slices are flying everywhere! Then, GOAL! They're all parents.)

SCOTT

Wooooooo!—

ASAN

—Yahoo!!!

(OTHER MOM chats with ASAN. MAD DAD is nearby, too. SCOTT stays totally focused on the game, nervously pounding orange slices.)

OTHER MOM

Which one's...?

ASAN

That one

MAD DAD

That one's me, that—dangit! Hey! Hey, that's all right. Respond! Respond!

OTHER MOM *(still to ASAN)*

Which...?

ASAN

He's got the ball—

MAD DAD

Don't you let him off that easy!

SCOTT

—GO GO—

ASAN

—He just scored a minute ago—wait—

(All the parents rush to one corner excitedly. Goal!)

OTHER MOM

Woah! He's yours?

MAD DAD

Dangit!

SCOTT

That's it, Fish!!

OTHER MOM

What nationality is that, "Fish"?

ASAN

It's short for Fisher, actually.

(to SCOTT)

I think those are for the kids.

SCOTT

Oh, sorry.

ASAN

Which boy's yours?

OTHER MOM

Oh, he's the—ope—Brush it off, hun!

ASAN

Sorry.

SCOTT

Nice physical play, Fish!

OTHER MOM

Where'd he learn to play soccer?

ASAN

I'm sorry?

OTHER MOM

I mean, it's a compliment —He's very skilled.

SCOTT

He shouldn't accept this kind of—

ASAN

—Just Canada.

OTHER MOM

Oh.

SCOTT

Too nice. Asan's grown too nice with age.

OTHER MOM

Yeah, sure. It's just this is supposed to fun.

SCOTT

It is fun.

MAD DAD

Fun for *everyone*. Everyone *involved*.

ASAN

You don't think they're having fun? They're running around, playing soccer.

MAD DAD

Your kid's kind of got the run of it.

SCOTT

Oh, please.

ASAN

He's talented—

SCOTT (*in MAD DAD's face*)

—Yeah, he's *talented*.

MAD DAD

Oh really? Cause he seems kinda *old* to me.

ASAN

He's not—

MAD DAD

—Hey, kid, how old are you?

ASAN

Please, don't distract our son. /

MAD DAD (*to FISHER*)

/ How old are you? /

SCOTT

/ Hey! Leave our kid alone.

MAD DAD

—No, how old are—How old is he?—

OTHER MOM

—He *does* seem a little *advanced in age*, don't you think?

ASAN

He's just big. Looks like his uncle, actually. It's uncanny.

OTHER MOM

And he's never been held back grades or—?

SCOTT

He's. Nine. Just. Like. Everybody. Else!

ASAN

Calm, Scott. Calm.

(FISHER dribbles past, everyone scampers after him. Goal!)

MAD DAD

That's what I'm talking about—Bicycle kicks have no place in pee wee soccer!

(SCOTT gloat-claps real close to MAD DAD.)

SCOTT

Good goal, Fish. Strong play!

MAD DAD

Get out of my face.

OTHER MOM

He's right, though, you know. It's not recreational.

FISHER (*offstage*)

Eat it up, y'all!

OTHER MOM

Did your son just say "y'all"?

ASAN

I can't explain that.

FISHER (*to MAD DAD*)

Eat it up!

MAD DAD

I hope you're real proud of—Hey!

Hey, he's taunting, Ref!

SCOTT

Let him live, Fish! Spare his life!

MAD DAD

You're son's a bully, you're raising a little bully!

SCOTT

And what does that make you?

ASAN

You're only encouraging them, Janet—

(FISHER dribbles the ball past, pauses, doing the "eat it up" gesture.)

FISHER

I'm comin for you, mad guy!

MAD DAD

What the hell?!

ASAN

Hey, cool it, Fish!

MAD DAD

Did your son just threaten me?

FISHER (*offstage*)

Get it!

OTHER MOM (*under her breath*)

What a little thug.

(SCOTT is suddenly very still and focused on OTHER MOM.)

ASAN

Uh oh

SCOTT

Pardon.

ASAN

Janet? The way, walk the way, the path—

OTHER MOM

Oh, you know.

SCOTT

No, I don't.

MAD DAD

Relax, lady.

SCOTT

No, I want to know what you just called my son.

OTHER MOM

I'm sorry, but it's true—

SCOTT

—*What's* true?

OTHER MOM

Your son's a little thug.

MAD DAD

Absolutely!—

ASAN

—Woah woah, what—?

OTHER MOM

—He’s a little thuggy Pelé, and he shouldn’t be playing on the field with our kids!

(JONAH appears, unnoticed.)

SCOTT

THUG?!

JONAH

And breathe!

(JONAH rings a singing bowl.

SCOTT and all the parents all collapse into a cross-legged meditation.)

ASAN

Coming to Toronto ten years ago, the threat of the CIA’s return long gone cold, I met someone, a fellow at the farmer’s market—

JONAH

—Hello.

(JONAH is an older man, the kind of guy who got into Eastern religious practices in the seventies.

ASAN and JONAH shop for veggies by checking the ripeness of the CROWD’s heads.)

ASAN

A totally surprising gentleman.

JONAH

Echinacea, and you should cover the tomatoes. Like to borrow my nettie pot?

ASAN

And immediately, I could tell—yes—he is wise.

JONAH

These may be the finest eggplants I’ve seen in ten years.

ASAN

To present such a sexually rife observation, so matter of factly.
I liked him. I did something I haven't done in years:

JONAH

Hello.

ASAN

I made a new friend.

JONAH

I would be happy to help you shop, Mitchell

ASAN

I go by Mitchell in Toronto.

JONAH (*feeling a head*)

This one will be in the trash by the afternoon sun.

(The head takes issue with that assessment.)

ASAN

Anyway, we became companions.

Turns out he was a priest. He studied at a temple ashram something somewhere
in—

JONAH

—I spent years travelling in India.

ASAN

It is suspicious, I know.

JONAH

Why?

ASAN

An internationally travelled stranger seeks me out in a public place? It's just—
We have not always been able to trust people.

JONAH

That's true of just about everyone.

ASAN

You see? He has a kind heart.

So I broke into his house and read his taxes. That way I could know he was a true friend.

SCOTT

Why didn't you just check his wallet?

ASAN

Not...always reliable.

SCOTT

Right.

ASAN

Besides, I'm not as fast as I was ten years ago—parenting wears on you.

SCOTT

No kidding.

JONAH

Did you know that in some areas of India, cows act like dogs?

ASAN

And indeed, I could tell right away by the furnishing of his home—spare in design, with gentle intentional accents—

JONAH

—They'll just lie down in the street, and you can pet their throats and snuggle.

ASAN

Many plants, and what furniture he had was calm, blond wood, mustard yellow inside the cabinets. The cabinets were filled with vivid turquoise glazed bowls, the scent of incense and sage and wet earth with little low tables and tea tea tea—

JONAH

—Would you like some?

ASAN

Thank you.

There in his still home in the middle of the night, I recognized immediately—this was a life filled with love, stability, and peace. He seemed to have a lovely partner who enjoyed glass blowing.

JONAH (*grief still*)

Darrell did, yes.

ASAN

But he passed.

JONAH

Yes.

ASAN

I'm sorry.

JONAH

You would have liked Darrell.

ASAN

I'm sure. It sounds like he was a lovely man.

JONAH

He was.

ASAN

Jonah is teaching me how to be happy.

JONAH

He absolutely was.

ASAN

How often, it's just letting it in.

(JONAH strikes the singing bell – the air horn sounds— the game's over back at the soccer field.

The CROWD reorients itself after the meditation session, parents again and clap politely.)

JONAH

Is it the mercy rule already?

ASAN

Oh, hi, Jonah. We won.

SCOTT

Hi.

(SCOTT gives JONAH a calm hug.)

MAD DAD *(still a little dazed)*

I'm gonna report your kid, you know that?

ASAN

You may, if you like, I suppose.

SCOTT

Good game.

MAD DAD

Fuck you.

SCOTT

Walk in peace.

*(MAD DAD leaves.
FISHER walks in.)*

FISHER

Was that the F Word?

SCOTT

That's one of them, yup. Great game.

JONAH

Sorry, I missed it, Fish. I thought maybe I could catch the end.

FISHER

It's cool. I housed'em.

(FISHER fist bumps SCOTT)

SCOTT

Set the table, hun.

Jonah always joins us for supper on the weekends.

Life is so slow now, we have a friend.

(The CROWD prepares the table, performs a dance of order and comfort until the space is dark and close and kind and peaceful.)

SCOTT

I have Jonah to thank for my practice.
Meditation. Completely changed my life.

ASAN

It did, didn't it?

SCOTT

Absolutely. It's a physiological change.

ASAN

Amazing, and your blood-pressure, so improved.

SCOTT

Why thank you.

(They smile.)

ASAN

But it's not just that, you—

SCOTT

—You know, I do laugh easier. Or I notice better when I do.

ASAN

It's fun. Things are less—

SCOTT

—Yes, I feel more grounded, and I sleep so much better than —

ASAN

—You used to scream in the night, remember?

(pause.)

SCOTT

Sure.

ASAN

But really, and I didn't realize this when we got married—You're just such an incredible mother, a complete natural.

SCOTT

I don't have to be so vigilant anymore.

ASAN

Jonah changed our lives.

SCOTT

They say you become more vigilant as a parent, but for me, it's different somehow. Maybe for the first time, I see there are ways I can trust the world to help.

(SCOTT takes ASAN's hand.)

JONAH

Quinoa, my victory meal!

SCOTT

Before we eat, we always take thirty seconds of silent reflection.

*(ASAN, SCOTT, FISHER, and JONAH all sit around the table.
They bow their heads.)*

SCOTT

I always wonder what Asan is thinking at moments like these. When we were younger, I assumed he was composing elaborate sexual fantasies with me, some dizzying improvised choreography of I-don't-know-what. A terrific instinctual lover, my husband. Fickle, unique.

JONAH

A bowl of still water, and my concern about the drought in California.

SCOTT

But now, we've calmed and cooled into form—we've become something more like a forge.

JONAH

Why is traffic such a personal challenge for me?

SCOTT

Still, sometimes, when I know we'll have company, I don't wear underwear—

FISHER

—I'm so bored—

SCOTT

—And I let him kiss me in the kitchen before the company arrives, when Fisher is in the bathroom upstairs doing his hair.

Or we have sex, only slightly.

JONAH and FISHER

I love the Maple Leaves.

SCOTT

It is a small, old house and Asan likes it when I open the windows for air.

JONAH

I saw a monkey once kill a friend over a jackfruit. Could you believe it, Darrell?

SCOTT

Our lives sit so well against one another now, everything before feels like scaffolding.

(ASAN looks at SCOTT, smiles.)

SCOTT

But I wonder about him now more than ever.

FISHER *(breaking the meditation)*

It's been like three minutes, guys.

ASAN

Right!

SCOTT

You played a nice game today!

Did Fisher tell you he scored ten goals?

FISHER

I obey The Take No Mercy Rule!

JONAH (*gently disapproving*)

I see.

SCOTT

So we ate dinner.

SCOTT (cont'd)

Jonah told us a curious parable about borrowing lawnmowers that illustrated lessons of sportsmanship told for Fisher's benefit, then he described the Buddhist principle of Dependent Origination,

JONAH

Pratītyasamutpāda

SCOTT

Which is a principle of the world that says:

JONAH

Everything comes from or is caused by something else in the world and that we can tamper with these cause and effect elements of our experience to achieve a more mindful disposition.

SCOTT

I talked a bit about a new project at my job, and how we have this strange new compound that's really tricky, that although we've mapped its chemical composition, it still really doesn't react to other substances as we expect, and Asan wondered what that might have to do with Dependent Origination...

JONAH

Pratītyasamutpāda

SCOTT

Then Fish said,

FISHER

Like maybe you're right about the thing you know about, but there's something up with the other non-compound stuff?

SCOTT

Which was a very insightful point.

We all smiled with pride of this young boy.

(All smile)

FISHER

I mean, I'm probably wrong.

SCOTT

So dinner was just lovely.

We cleared the plates and that's when Asan gets the text—

(ASAN receives a text to his cell phone on the table.)

FISHER

Since when do you text, Dad?

ASAN

What's it say?

(FISHER looks at the phone.)

COMPATRIOT

Asan - I know you will almost certainly die if you come back to Istanbul, but there is a big surprise problem with your mother and you should know.

(Long pause. Everyone in Toronto looks at ASAN.)

ASAN

It's nothing.

FISHER

Who's Asan?

ASAN

....

SCOTT

It's his old nickname.

FISHER

Asan isn't short for Mitchell.

SCOTT

Not all nicknames are short versions of—

FISHER

—Wait, I have a Grandma?!

(FISHER reaches for the cellphone. *ASAN snatches the phone with spy speed.*)

ASAN

I said it's nothing, Fish.

FISHER

Woah.

JONAH

Should I—

FISHER

—What was— how did you get that?

SCOTT

Excuse me, can I talk to you in the other room?—

FISHER

—It's like it was in my hand, then it was—

JONAH

—Shh, dishes time, Fish.

ASAN

Thank you, Jonah—

FISHER

—But—!

JONAH

—Come with me, young man. We've been given our orders.

(*JONAH leads FISHER away to do dishes
SCOTT and ASAN alone.
ASAN paces. SCOTT waits.
SCOTT can't wait any more.*)

SCOTT

I'm sorry, the answer is no.

ASAN

Answer to what?

...

Do you think Fish knows?

SCOTT

Of course not.

ASAN

Oh my god, if he—

SCOTT

—No, it's ok. He doesn't know yet.

He might be old enough to explain if we needed to—

ASAN

Please. Listen to yourself, it's not—

SCOTT

He's our son, we can trust him.

ASAN

But it endangers him. It *endangers* him. To know anything.

SCOTT

Fine.

...

You can't go.

ASAN

They would never text me if it weren't— I can't leave her again, you have to understand.

SCOTT

Then, I'll come, too. I'll leave Fisher with Jonah, I'll be your cover. It'll be safer if we're together.

ASAN

No, you'd stand out. Besides, it's safe now.

SCOTT

No, I'm sorry, you've compromised us once /

ASAN

/ that was ten years ago! /

SCOTT

/ And you can't go—We have a son now! No more dumb risks. No more—
Don't.

ASAN

I'm so sorry, Scott. You have to try to understand.

*(He picks up the phone— the deafening sound of an airplane.
He's gone.)*

FISHER

Everything cool, Mom?

(SCOTT hugs FISHER a little too long.)

SCOTT

Of course, hun.

FISHER

What's going on?

SCOTT

I'm gonna go sit for about 20 minutes. Will you excuse me?

JONAH

We'll finish cleaning up.

*(SCOTT goes away to sit. We hear cars drive past and crickets.
JONAH does dishes, FISHER dries.)*

FISHER

Hey, Jonah?

JONAH

Yes, my son. Dry the dish.

FISHER

Do you know what's going on?

JONAH

Not at all.

(They do dishes.)

FISHER

But they shouldn't have secrets though! I'm not allowed to have secrets.

JONAH

Oh yeah?

FISHER

Yeah.

JONAH

Hmmm.

FISHER

So what's their secret? I should know, so it's not a secret, right?

JONAH

If you need to know, they will tell you. Try to trust them.

FISHER

The text said something about Dad certainly dying in Istanbul.

JONAH

This isn't a movie, Fisher.

FISHER

But what if it *is* a movie, and we just don't *know* it yet?! People in movies don't know they're in movies! And they think they're all safe, then bango! The movie stuff starts happening.

JONAH

Just take a breath—

FISHER

—But I'm too *young* to be in a movie! I'm not ready to, to, like—protect anyone yet!

JONAH

Stop.

Dry this. Focus on what you're doing. Things are always simpler than they seem. Even the complicated things are almost always simple.

(SCOTT is meditating.)

SCOTT

Meditating women.

...

Meditating women.

...

Meditating women have the freedom to reflect on their absent fathers.

(SCOTT's FATHER does PT)

FATHER

Getting' ready for the bad guys, you understand?

SCOTT

I know a bad guy.

FATHER

Oh, you do?

SCOTT

Yeah, he put a juicebox on Lionel's chair because he knew Lionel wouldn't look when he sat and Lionel didn't so his butt got all juicy.

FATHER

That does sound serious.

SCOTT

I tried to neutralize him, but he was really big and his backpack was like—I didn't account for his sizable person, and it kinda went wrong. So I had to put him in a hold.

FATHER

I admire your gumption, but you shouldn't be neutralizing children. They're only 9.

SCOTT

Why not?! Lionel's butt!

FATHER

That kid's just too young to deserve such a brutal rebuttal.

SCOTT

But he's a bad guy! You said the bad force must be met by appropriate good force which is what made me neutralize the kid!

FATHER

Daddy was talking about Daddy's work.

SCOTT

But!—

FATHER

—Attention, soldier!

(SCOTT hits attention.)

FATHER

Your heart's in the right place, but you need to consider scale when enacting justice. Choking out the Brighton kid was disproportionate.

SCOTT

Respectfully, as an order of proportion, it was relatively, um.

FATHER

Finish your sentences, soldier.

SCOTT

Like, compared to my world, what he did was— He could not have been worse.

FATHER

He could have choked out little Lionel. Would that have been right?

SCOTT

I only did it cause he did something wrong!

FATHER

I'll be back for the holidays.

SCOTT

But it's not fair!

FATHER

It's chain of command, and assignment's an assignment!

SCOTT

But you only just got back.

FATHER

Take care of your mother.

SCOTT

Then in a few months, you'll go missing, and we'll get the flag with the guy on it, but I'll know you're really just dead. So I'll join the CIA in a misguided attempt to redeem your failures.

FATHER

Don't get mad now. I'm a hero.

SCOTT

...

Meditating women seek impossible advice.
I'm not ready for Asan to die.

FATHER

What makes you think you have to be ready?

(SCOTT sits.)

SCOTT

Meditating women can lose track of themselves and forget that they can't gain the approval of their dead fathers.

(FATHER is gone.)

SCOTT

We have techniques for refocusing on the present moment.
I frame the thought. I let it exist as it is and I let it pass.

*(Knock knock knock on the door.
SCOTT does not hear.
JONAH goes to answer.)*

JONAH

Hello, can I help you?

MR THOROUGHGS

Yes, I was wondering if someone at this address just received an unusual text?

JONAH

I'm sorry, I don't know anything about—

FISHER

—Who is it?

(MR THOROUGHGS recognizes FISHER.)

MR THOROUGHGS

Their son, unmistakable—

GRETA

—It's them!!!

*(GRETA springs out from the doorway, holds a hand over JONAH's mouth, casually choking him unconscious.
MR THOROUGHGS holds his coat open like he's scaring a bear.
FISHER backs away, terrified, hides.
Meanwhile, SCOTT sits, makes peace with her life.)*

SCOTT

I see my life, and I frame it.

I see my concern, and I frame it.

I see my target, and I frame it.

I see this face, and I frame this face, it is a familiar face

And I place them all, and I let the calm lap at my toes like the tide.

(MR THOROUGHGS and the CIA discover SCOTT.)

MR THOROUGHGS

Shhh.

(CIA stealthily flood through the house.)

CIA *(whispering into their collars, variously)*

Roger, cover, perimeter, perimeter, perimeter, roger seal, roger over up down all around over, roger, muskrat's in the burrow.

(During the following, the CIA team across the stage, overturning tables, chairs silently, sneakily peeling the house away like a banana. They're sneaking closer and closer until they get to SCOTT, sitting completely at peace, with tears running down her face. CIA has found SCOTT and silently surround her, MR THOROUGHES approaches.)

MR THOROUGHES

Agent Scott.

(SCOTT opens her eyes, her father's gone. She looks calmly at MR THOROUGHES.)

SCOTT

I frame it.

MR THOROUGHES

Where is he?

INTERMISSION

ISTANBUL, TURKEY 2013

(Title Card: ISTANBUL, TURKEY 2013.

A huge swirl of protesters explode onto the stage, screaming at the top of their lungs. The Gezi Park protests.

A massive cloud of tear gas, wafts through the crowd. They flee, leaving ASAN, smoking coolly, unaffected.

COMPATRIOT casually joins ASAN, smoking as well. They don't look at each other.)

ASAN

You've been busy.

COMPATRIOT

Not us, this time. It's about Gezi Park.

And the police, of course.

ASAN

I don't follow politics anymore.

COMPATRIOT

I can see why.

I try to stay out of the way, myself.

(ASAN looks suspiciously at COMPATRIOT.)

COMPATRIOT

What?

Make way for the young. One injustice in the Capitol and the world's ending!

ASAN

You're saying the government is potentially collapsing and you...

COMPATRIOT

Yes?

ASAN

You're just ...

COMPATRIOT

Yes?

ASAN

You're just ... letting it?

COMPATRIOT

Yeah, sure.

I'm retired.

ASAN

Can he be serious?

COMPATRIOT

I feel a little self-conscious about my new haircut.

ASAN

It looks good.

COMPATRIOT

Thank you.

ASAN

You seem different.

COMPATRIOT

As do you.

As should we all.

It's been ten years, friend.

ASAN

His eyes meet mine – I plan my escape—

(COMPATRIOT rests his hand on ASAN's shoulder.)

COMPATRIOT

Why don't you come to the party tonight for Zaza—his birthday was Tuesday, and we hired a DJ.

It'll be fun.

ASAN

Zaza? But, Tuk—

COMPATRIOT

—Just come. We miss you.

ASAN

The last time I saw them was the ambush in my apartment when I killed many of our operatives in self-defense.

It was a terrible misunderstanding, you remember....

...

I'm worried the others may still be upset about that.

COMPATRIOT

Oh, no. Don't worry.

ASAN

I worry.

COMPATRIOT

Don't.

It was a difficult time - Just don't bring it up, maybe?

(pause)

ASAN

I thought I could never come back.

(ASAN smokes.)

COMPATRIOT

Your mother's at a triage care site near the protests, but she's recovering well. She may be ready to come home.

...

It's good to see your face again.

Just promise me you'll come to Zaza's birthday party tonight. It will take your mind off your troubles.

ASAN

I'll be there.

(ASAN smiles. COMPARTIOT leaves.)

ASAN

I will not be there. I cannot, of course, afford the risk.

(ASAN is at Starbucks.)

TOUR GUIDE at the register.)

TOUR GUIDE

Welcome to Starbucks

ASAN

What?

TOUR GUIDE

You need coffee, of course.

ASAN

Oh...

TOUR GUIDE

I knew it!

ASAN

In Canada, this patter would cheer me up.

TOUR GUIDE

What can I get started for you?

ASAN

Yes, hello—

TOUR GUIDE

—Of course we have Starbucks, we're a real western city now.

ASAN

You lead tours, yes?

TOUR GUIDE

Led tours.

ASAN

You led my wife on a tour about ten years ago.

(TOUR GUIDE smiles politely.)

ASAN

You're American?

TOUR GUIDE

Not anymore, no.

ASAN

I don't think...that's not how it works.

TOUR GUIDE

How do you like Istanbul?

ASAN

Very much.

TOUR GUIDE

Where are you from?

ASAN

Canada. I'm from the East originally, though. Near Vanli.

TOUR GUIDE

I'm sorry about your mother's injury.

ASAN

How did you—

TOUR GUIDE

—You just told me.

ASAN

Oh, sorry.

TOUR GUIDE

We don't have that tea anymore.
Seems like it's everyone now.

ASAN

What's everyone?

TOUR GUIDE

I'd really appreciate it if you didn't talk about the president like that.

ASAN

I'm not.

TOUR GUIDE

Erdoğan's a butcher, but he still has ears.

ASAN

Please do not—

TOUR GUIDE

—You're not in Canada anymore! Careful, careful!

ASAN

I said I'm from here!!

TOUR GUIDE

Oh!

Well, welcome home, my friend.

(TOUR GUIDE hands him a drink.)

ASAN

...Thank you.

TOUR GUIDE

Milk and sugar over there.

(ASAN turns away, The TOUR GUIDE calls GRETA.)

TOUR GUIDE

He's here.

GRETA

Checker is go, Baristo.

Thank you for your cooperation. Never saw me blink blink.

(The CROWD screams back on,

ASAN

Excuse me! Excuse me?! The triage center?! Can you tell me where the—

(Suddenly, he's there. It's all very quiet in the triage site. Injured people lie in long rows on the ground, side by side.

Beside many of the injured are loved ones, crouching whispering, holding hands. One of these injured people is Asan's MOTHER, laying in a hospital cot, propped up with pillows, with a bandage wrapped around her head.)

ASAN

Everyone's dazed, panicked. Tear gas stinks on our clothes, hair.
I overhear that doctors don't wear coats any so the police won't know to target them. My mother, she...

MOTHER

Asan?

Asan?

ASAN

Hello, Mother.

(MOTHER holds ASAN's hand for a long time.)

MOTHER

You came back—Did you hear they are trying to take Gezi away from me?

ASAN

The park is yours, everyone knows that.
I got you tea. Careful, it's hot.

MOTHER

It's too hot.

ASAN

Yes, I know.

MOTHER

I like the way Rajan does the tea.

(pause)

ASAN

Where is Rajan?

MOTHER

Where's Rajan?! Where are you, huh?! Where are you for ten years?!

ASAN

I know, I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Ten years, Asan! Ten years gone, huh?!

ASAN

I'm sorry to put you through that.

(Pause)

MOTHER

Tuk's a good boy. *He* takes care of your old mother.

ASAN

My compatriot, Tuk.

MOTHER

How is that nice American you drank tea with?

ASAN

We have a son. He looks just like Rajan, actually.

MOTHER

Just one son? What is the matter with you? Just one son?

ASAN

It is hard for us to have children.

MOTHER

Hard. Of course, it is hard. It is the best kind of work, how could you complain—

ASAN

—You're the one complaining, Mom.

MOTHER

I only mean you are taking a foolish risk. What if I had just one son, huh? I'd have *no* son. I'd have no son at all.

(The ensemble starts rocking side to side.)

ASAN

What?

MOTHER

My head hurts. These people smell.

(MOTHER squirms to get up.)

ASAN

Oh, ok, ok. Careful. You ready to go home?

MOTHER

You are coming, too?

You're going on a trip?

ASAN

Yes, later, but right now we're going home.

*(The people of the hospital have all left, leaving ASAN and MOTHER.
The CROWD have set up the flat for ASAN and MOTHER
They're home now.)*

ASAN

That's better, right? Always good to be home.

She still has Rajan's answering machine—

(She pushes the answering machine button.)

ANSWERING MACHINE

You have—NO—new messages.

RAJAN'S VOICE

Please leave a message and your number or we'll never know to call you back.

Thanks.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Beep

RAJAN'S VOICE

Hey Mom, it's Rajan. Sorry to miss you. I ran into some old folks from the village at the Sultanahmet today. They send their best. I won't be home until late, so don't wait up and don't get mad. I'm just—

(She pushes the button.)

ANSWERING MACHINE

Beep.

MOTHER

I'm tired.

ASAN

Then, by all means, rest.

MOTHER

I told you I'm tired. Leave me alone.

ASAN *(smiles)*

Ok, Mom.

I love you.

MOTHER

You torment me!

ASAN

I'll be here

(MOTHER goes to her room.)

GRETA

Whistle whistle.

(ASAN's eyes open wide.

MR THOROUGHGS and GRETA emerge from the shadows)

GRETA

Remember me?

MR THOROUGHGS

Welcome home, Asan.

ASAN

How did you—

MR THOROUGHHS

—More careful, the modern world.

Now a request: Your Compatriot, Tuk. You understand?

ASAN

I'm here for my mother. I don't know who you're talking about.

MR THOROUGHHS

The one with the texts. The really good looks.

ASAN

But he's not a threat.

GRETA

This isn't about threats anymore.

MR THOROUGHHS

Of course it is.

GRETA

Of course it is.

MR THOROUGHHS

You don't have the appropriate intelligence to assess threats, but we do, and we have reason to believe your Compatriot, your texting associate, found himself in possession of a deadly chemical agent.

ASAN

I don't know anything about that.

MR THOROUGHHS

It doesn't matter what you know because you don't know anything.

ASAN

It's just, he says he's a family man now.

MR THOROUGHHS

Well, so. Am. I.

GRETA

We *all* are.

ASAN

But why do you need me? You have his cell, you tracked me down. it doesn't make any—

MR THOROUGHGS

—Mind your beeswax, Asan. Risk. You understand risk? You were once the two deadliest men in Anatolia, and you, you know his moves inside, you know his moves outside.

Make them outside. Winkies?

ASAN

I'm not sure—

MR THOROUGHGS

Shut up. I need this man, I need him alone. I need him tonight.

GRETA

Want and need—there's a difference!

(MR THOROUGHGS smiles.)

MR THOROUGHGS

Call us on this cell when you've got him alone.

GRETA

Or your mother's done.

ASAN

I get it.

GRETA

Got it?!

MR THOROUGHGS

Don't worry, we'll be here.

(MR THOROUGHGS pushes the answering machine button.)

ANSWERING MACHINE

Beep

RAJAN'S VOICE

Hey Mom, it's Rajan. Sorry to miss you—

(MR THOROUGHES presses a button.)

ANSWERING MACHINE

—Beep. Message deleted.

(ASAN in the bustling streets of Istanbul. A hallucination of JONAH appears with his farmers market bag, shopping.)

JONAH

Hello, Asan.

ASAN

I don't know what to do.

JONAH

Well, it's easy. Just sniff, shake, and squeeze, all right?
First, see? You gotta sniff. Just a little quick sniff – you smell a little fragrant floral?
That's a good sign. Then, you do the rest with confidence.

ASAN

Ok—

JONAH

—But here's what I always do, if I'm not entirely sure, you know what I do? I get it anyway. Just a cantaloupe, right? It needs a home. And if it's not ready, that's the cantaloupe's prerogative.

ASAN

Thank you, friend. It was lovely shopping at the open air market with you.

JONAH

The pleasure was all mine.
You have a lovely family.

(JONAH considers the fruit.)

Hmmmm.

ASAN

What would you do?

JONAH

Don't shop hungry.

ASAN

I'm serious.

JONAH

What would I do if I what?

ASAN

If you had to cooperate with the CIA in exchange for your mother's life.

JONAH

Hmm.

Some days, I miss my mother terribly.

ASAN

You're right, I have to save her.

JONAH

But are you able to? To save yourself or your friend?

ASAN

I don't know.

JONAH

What about that person over there? Or her? Or him?

I can't tell you what to do. I don't understand the context, so I don't know what's right, so I can't know what will be right later.

Just speaking for myself, I'd try not to cause any more effects.

But then again, I like boiled eggs for breakfast and read newspapers like an old fogey.

ASAN

Jonah...

If anything happens to Scott, I mean, Janet, will you look after Fisher?

JONAH

Yes, yes, honey. But tell me – What do you think of this one?

(JONAH hands ASAN a cantaloupe and vanishes.

ASAN is standing holding the cantaloupe.

All of a sudden, the guys, OLAN, MERDEM, ZAZA, COMPATRIOT rush in and make a small, crowded room in the basement of an apartment building, the hookahs are bumping. People are laughing, speaking loudly

*to one another, singing along with the music until ASAN enters the room.
Everything halts.)*

ASAN

...

I brought a cantaloupe.

(Pause.)

OLAN

No...

ZAZA

No, it can't....

MERDEM

I almost....

OLAN

No!

(They all lean in to get a better look.)

COMPATRIOT

Welcome back, Asan.

THE MEN

Ahhhhhh!!!!

(They swarm to ASAN and cheer and hug and kiss him with joy.)

MERDEM

Where have you been?!

ASAN

It's a long story.

COMPATRIOT

Yeah, yeah, we all have long stories – what's the rush?!

(ASAN smiles guiltily at COMPATRIOT.)

OLAN

We were so sure the Americans got you!

ASAN

Well, they did. One did.

COMPATRIOT

You mean—ha!

THE MEN

Ooohhhhhhhh!

OLAN

You and the beautiful American?

ASAN

We escaped together. We're actually married now, have a son.

(THE MEN all clap and cheer.)

OLAN

That is a beautiful story. I'm happy for you. Sell it to Disney.

MERDEM

Oh, but the story is a tragedy—you've grown so old!

ASAN

Only ten years! Same as you!

OLAN

Have you spent them lying in the sun making worried expressions with your face?

MERDEM

Screams the raisin, "I was once a grape!"

COMPATRIOT

I'm sure you think of yourself like a fine wine, but you, my friend, are a raisin.

ASAN

I am ashamed to say—I almost didn't come.

MERDEM

Then feel shame! Please!

ZAZA

Stop this nonsense!!

(ZAZA slams down his tea and steps forward. The room tenses up.)

COMPATRIOT

Zaza, it's just Asan.

ZAZA

I know who it is!

But it is *also*...

(with preposterous pride)

My birthday.

And I will cry if I want to.

(Confused pause.)

ZAZA *(joyfully)*

Ahhhh!!!!

ALL

AHHHHH!!!!

(The men cheer and clap, squeeze and shake ZAZA.

Someone turns the music back on, it is the lead in to a karaoke song—

“My Heart will go on” from Titanic.

ZAZA sings it simply and well, briefly.

Things calm down after a while. They become melancholy.)

ASAN

And I had so much fun with these men. We never spoke of nothing.

MERDEM

And would you believe my daughter, just four years old, she bonked her head—*same* place as my sister, Kaja, you remember that day running around the plaza like that?

ASAN

Never small talk, never dull.

MERDEM

Of course you remember! Kaja, she bumps into that bigger boy, Daban, which of course was fun, but she was only four, so she just bounced off him – he didn't even see her – and she BLOCK

(MERDEM slaps his forehead.)

Knocks her head on the stone corner!

OLAN

Oooooo!

ZAZA

Daban did that?!

MERDEM

Blood everywhere!

Gore! Travesty! Genocide!

Kaja's lying there dizzy, crying in this little helpless pile on the pavement, and me? I was just a couple years older, I didn't know what to do!

And do you know who came to her aid? Old Farooq.

ALL

Ah-haaaaaa! / Farooq!

MERDEM

Old Farooq—you remember Farooq. When he dropped that platter at the festival?

ASAN

Of course, the old buffoon!

OLAN

"I have done it."

(They all explode in laughter.)

ZAZA

"I have done it."

MERDEM

Ahhhhhh, that's him, Zaza! You have him!

(ZAZA stands up does a physical impression of the Farooq dropping the huge platter of food.)

ZAZA

"I have done it."

MERDEM

Ah! Champion!

ASAN

I feel sick. I have missed these men so much.

MERDEM

Well, old Farooq, he was standing over Kaja, cooing to her like a bird, and meanwhile, he's searching around behind him, he's reaching and digging and do you know what he's found when he opens his hand?

ASAN

Oh no—

MERDEM

—Coffee grinds!

And he packs them, he packs my poor sobbing sister's forehead with coffee! And she screams and screams and he just packs it and packs it into the, the cut! To stop the bleeding! Coffee!

ASAN

Why didn't you stop him?!

MERDEM

You remember how afraid we were of old Farooq!

COMPATRIOT

He told us he made sausage out of bad children!

OLAN

That was a joke!

COMPATRIOT

I believed him, 100%—I know a butcher when I see one.

MERDEM

Well, he was no surgeon, there's no doubt about that. Coffee!

ZAZA

My grandmother always did that, it helps.

OLAN

Oh, come on!

ZAZA

Helps a little, sure.

MERDEM

Oh yeah, it helps?

I take her to the hospital to get a couple stitches, and they spend half an hour flushing, plucking the coffee out of it. I'm cursing Farooq, wondering, Will my sister ever sleep again?!

ZAZA

Ahhhh! Because of the coffee! I see!!

ASAN

That's good.

MERDEM

And poor Daban. He was sick with guilt.
I think that was the last summer, actually.

ASAN

Most of us lost our fathers that year.

MERDEM

That was—The village guard came that November after the harvest.

OLAN

You were wise to bring your mother to Istanbul so soon.

ASAN

It was my brother's idea.
How is Rajan? I haven't seen him yet.

(A cloud descends over the group.)

ASAN

What?

*(A long pause. Then everyone shifts their weight.
They all smoke.)*

COMPATRIOT steps forward.)

COMPATRIOT

Didn't you know? After the ambush?

ASAN

He doesn't have to tell me how.

Revenger for the men Scott and I murdered that first night in the flat.

Sick with rage, someone in my cell retaliated.

(ASAN looks at the men.)

COMPATRIOT

He was a very good man.

I'm sorry.

It was a difficult time, you understand.

ASAN

How could I have known they would—

COMPATRIOT

—I've looked after your mother ever since.

ASAN

I should have known.

I'm sure you agree that I should have known.

Someone should have told me.

MERDEM

We all lost something that day, and at your hand. You should remember that.

You are not so special, brother.

ASAN

Rajan's murderer is in this room.

Their breath, their ribs confessing to me.

COMPATRIOT

A difficult time, it was a difficult time.

(ASAN gets a text.)

MR THOROUGHES

Are you with the Target? Greta says we don't have all night.

(ASAN gets another text.)

GRETA

We don't have all night, Are you with the Target?!

(ASAN looks at COMPATRIOT.)

COMPATRIOT

Is it your mother?

ASAN

Yes.

COMPATRIOT

How is she?

(ASAN looks at the phone, then back to COMPATRIOT.)

ASAN

She's well, thank you.

Whoever was responsible, the order went through Tuk.

COMPATRIOT

Asan?

ASAN

She wants to know if you're coming by tonight to say hello.

COMPATRIOT

Ah, sure.

I should head home anyway.

(They all smile, vanish.

ASAN and COMPATRIOT walking on the streets of Istanbul.)

ASAN

I don't even remember saying goodbye.

We're walking home in silence, as we did as adolescents, exiled, whispering foreigners from the east, then cold young men wrathfully hoarse with politics.

And here beside me—Here is the man who taught me how to kill, how to smoke.

COMPATRIOT

Can I bum a cigarette, Asan?

ASAN

Of course.

COMPATRIOT

I'm happy you came tonight.

ASAN

I am too. You're all the same. Everything in this world changes but you.

COMPATRIOT

You're more foolish than old Farooq. It's all changed.

ASAN

And he was right. I looked around us,

This city now.

It's passing us.

We're not so much walking as letting it pass us by.

How could I let this happen?

It was a trick of the eye, I forgot who I was. I think I'm this operative, this kid
this father, this...

I'm all at once.

(COMPATRIOT studies ASAN.)

COMPATRIOT

Let's sit down. It's a nice night.

ASAN

The edge of the Bosphorus. The lights, doubled.

Like Tuk.

I had only the one brother.

(SCOTT appears somewhere small and far away.)

SCOTT

Did you forget about me?

ASAN

Of course not.

SCOTT

I wonder what you're thinking about.

ASAN

I'm busy.

This is a busy time.

SCOTT

Too busy to think of me?

It will always be busy. Always.

COMPATRIOT

Are you ok, brother?

ASAN

Of course.

It's so strange to be here again.

SCOTT

I never wanted to replace them, you know that.

ASAN

They were never my friends.

SCOTT

No, you're wrong about that.

ASAN

We were performing family. We were desperate.

SCOTT

I always knew what you were. I loved the parts that didn't look like me. Like with Fisher. But we're something else now, don't you think?

ASAN

Yes.

SCOTT

Then stay there with me. Why do you have to go back?

ASAN

I have no choice, Scott.

SCOTT

You don't have to kill him. They can't make you do that anymore.

ASAN

But look at him.

He took Rajan.

SCOTT

You couldn't go back if you wanted to.

(beat)

COMPATRIOT

... What is it?

ASAN

Tuk, don't come home.

COMPATRIOT

But I want to check on your mother.

SCOTT

Come home.

ASAN

I think about you all the time.

SCOTT

Sure, honey. I know.

(They smile sadly.)

ASAN

Don't come back to the flat.

ASAN

I am betraying you.

COMPATRIOT

You are betraying me.

(GRETA leaps from the wall – she was perfectly camouflaged.)

ASAN

Run! I'm sorry!

GRETA

Pew!

COMPATRIOT

Ach!

ASAN

Tuk!

(GRETA kills COMPATRIOT. He falls in the Bosphorus.)

GRETA

Splash.

*(SCOTT leads COMPATRIOT away.
He joins the CROWD.
SCOTT lingers watching them.)*

GRETA

I'm the best, you see?

ASAN

You said you'd be back at the—

GRETA

—Pew!

ASAN

Ach!

SCOTT

I'm so tired.

GRETA

We followed you, obviously. Amateur.

*(ASAN grabs his leg in pain, sits down, cries in genuine agony,
rocks. This is not brave or stylized or noble. ASAN is slipping into
shock.)*

SCOTT

I'm going back to sleep, hun. I'll see you in the morning.

(SCOTT curls up under the table and goes to sleep.)

ASAN

No.

Please.

MR THOROUGHES

We would have let you go, you realize?

(GRETA pulls ASAN up by his hair.)

MR THOROUGHES

We ask one simple thing of you. Bring us one little person.

All you ever needed to do was cooperate.

And you just chose... not to.

ASAN

Tuk was never a threat. There was never any chemical agent.

MR THOROUGHES

Of course not! There never is. It's just a thing we say in the CIA.

(GRETA didn't know this.)

MR THOROUGHES

This, Asan, is what we call clearing the books. Loose ends are bad for business, you understand. You were a professional once. You have to keep an eye on your allies, and your allies' eyes off you.

ASAN

I don't know what you're talking about...

MR THOROUGHES

Big things going on now. Turkey, et cetera— Don't worry, secret-secret stuff.

ASAN

Please spare my mother, please, please.

(ASAN is rolling, trying to drag himself to standing. SCOTT watches helplessly.)

MR THOROUGHHS

We'll get her safely to Canada, don't worry.
I keep *my* promises. You, on the other hand—

ASAN

—I have a wife, I have a son. Please!

MR THOROUGHHS

Thank you for your service, Asan.

(He's breathing, breathing hard.)

GRETA

You should feel relief.

...

Pew.

ASAN

Ach!

(ASAN falls dead into the Bosphorus.)

BLACK SITE, UNKNOWN 2013

(Title Card: BLACK SITE UNKNOWN 2013

SCOTT lies exhausted. Her captivity has taken a frightening toll on her physically. She's almost unresponsive.)

SCOTT

Tortured women.

...

Tortured women, they...

...

Tortured women, they hallucinate.

(JONAH enters on a camel, with a pyramid hat and a map.)

JONAH

Hello there.

(SCOTT looks up to JONAH. She knows she's hallucinating now.)

JONAH

Have you been to the Pyramids yet?

Skip them. Really. It's hot and sandy and entirely too bright.

I leaned over to the tour guide and I said, "You know we have those things in Canada, but we call them mountains and millions of slaves didn't have to die to make them."

"Wonders of the World."

The food is quite good though, I must say.

(SCOTT closes her eyes.)

JONAH

Don't they usually do this sort of thing to gain information?

SCOTT

Yes.

JONAH

Why don't you just give them information?

Do you have information?

SCOTT

No.

JONAH

Oh... That's a pickle.

(pause)

JONAH

Did someone tell them you have information?

SCOTT

Yes.

Probably.

JONAH

Why?

(SCOTT starts to cry.)

JONAH

I would say someone made a bad mistake.

SCOTT

They won't tell me about Asan.

JONAH

Ah.

SCOTT

Is he alive? Did they get him?

JONAH

Oh, no, honey. He's yours. He's yours for good, where ever he is.

(SCOTT is fading again.)

JONAH

Would you like to sit with me for a bit?

*(SCOTT shrugs. She's too weak to sit up,
but that's ok. He's done this before, sits beside her in the cell.)*

JONAH

When you get out of here, what do you say we go on some kind of a trip.

Maybe Nova Scotia or Bali or, I don't know, Costa Rica— I hear Costa Rica has lot of English speakers so that would be easy.
Where ever we go, I want it to be *easy*. Relaxing.
Just kind of wander from here to there, no planning, just, you know—nothing like Egypt, or, I don't know. *Istanbul*. Calm and safe like, like...
Don't you think that'd be nice?

SCOTT

I'm never coming back.

JONAH

Give it a few days and see how you feel.

SCOTT

No, if they ever let me out, and they won't, but if they do, I'm not coming back.

...

I don't want to um...

It's safer. For you. The real you.

And Fish.

JONAH

Well, honey, if that's your choice, that's your choice.

But if you ever change your mind?—hey look at me.

If you ever change your mind, and make your way back? I'll be waiting at the airport for you.

And breathe.

(JONAH rings the singing bell.)

TORONTO, CANADA 2013

(Title Card: TORONTO, CANADA. 2013.

The sound of the room opens like a mouth.

JONAH sits alone in peace at an airport.

People walk past him with luggage.

MOTHER enters with a suitcase.

JONAH stands, they regard one another.

JONAH smiles, MOTHER sneers.)

JONAH

I am so pleased to finally meet you.

(He leads her to a bed and walls appear, sliding in on them. He tucks her in comfortably. And leaves.

MOTHER and FISHER are in a room - a four walled, enclosed space.

The audience can only see in through the windows of the room, and it's not much. We hear them through the microphones, and their conversation should feel private and intimate.

MOTHER lies in a bed. Ten year-old Fisher enters, cautiously and sits at a chair beside MOTHER.

Meanwhile, outside the house, the CROWD performs their dance from the first scene, but subdued. Maybe half its energy. It should feel sad and endless, in the way that certain Tai-Chi combinations can turn you around and around and around.

Title Card: TORONTO, CANADA 2014.)

MOTHER *(a thick accent)*

My son carried the samovar in the Sultanahmet. He was the most beautiful tea man in Istanbul—Women, men, children came to him from all across the country to drink his tea. But the old Turks especially, they would come for him. They weren't even old enough to remember that dress or the old Ottomans. Museums, costumes, sure, but when Rajan swung the samovar over his shoulder he— It is difficult to explain:

His body reminded them.

And what is really perfect—he was a *Kurd*! These people, when they were young soldiers, they slaughtered and burned the homes of our people, and now in Istanbul, because he didn't speak and they didn't hear his accent—these murderers were so proud of this young Turk! The shining hero of their heritage! They had no idea!

I love this joke – you see how it all looked so familiar to them? And to us, too?

You understand?

FISHER

Not really.

MOTHER

What?! What don't you understand, silly boy?

FISHER

I dunno.

What's a samovar?

MOTHER

What's a Samovar?!

FISHER

Or a Kurd—like a kind of cheese—?

MOTHER

—What's a *samovar*?!?! What's a *Kurd*?!

FISHER

I mean, you said it's a part of a Turkey—

MOTHER

—What's a *you*, huh? What's a *you* then?

You don't even know.

(The CROWD's little dance turns.

Title Card: TORONTO, CANADA 2015

FISHER and MOTHER age without interruption.

JONAH enters their room carrying tea.)

JONAH

Good morning—Oh.

I didn't realize you were up.

(*FISHER smiles.*)

FISHER

She woke me up talking through the wall.

JONAH

Oh yeah? You have visitors this morning?

(MOTHER sneers sarcastically at JONAH.)

JONAH

We'll have to leave in about 10 minutes for your game.

FISHER

Thanks. I'll be ready.

*(The CROWD's little dance turns— it's smaller and smaller.
Title Card: **TORONTO, CANADA. 2017**
JONAH enters with tea.)*

JONAH

Ah.

(They whisper.)

FISHER

She's sleeping.

JONAH

Ah.

FISHER

Is something wrong or...?
You seem a little...

JONAH

I am nervous for my doctor's appointment.
They only invite you to the office if the news is bad.

FISHER

Maybe I could come with you? I don't know what I'd do, but...

JONAH

I think... Thank you. That would be very nice.

FISHER

Ok.

JONAH

You remind me of your father more every day.

*(MOTHER looks after JONAH, suspiciously.
The CROWD's dance turns.
Title Card: **TORONTO, CANADA. 2019.**
JONAH leaves.)*

MOTHER

Who was that?

(FISHER pours her tea.)

FISHER

That's Jonah, Grandmother.

MOTHER

He is *boring*. Too nice to trust, eh?

FISHER

He takes care of us.

MOTHER

Takes care? Care of what? Care?
He's almost as old as me.

(FISHER laughs.)

MOTHER

What?! He is!

*(She laughs and laughs.
The CROWD's little dance turns— JONAH joins them.
Title Card: **TORONTO, CANADA. 2021**
JONAH joins the dancers.
JONAH is dead.)*

MOTHER

What?

FISHER

The service was beautiful.

MOTHER

Eh?

What service?

FISHER

Just us from now on, ok?

MOTHER

Who are we?

FISHER

College will be there. Just us, ok?

I need you to promise to be nice to me from now on. Promise me.

(MOTHER makes a dismissive mouth sound.

The CROWD's dance is just gestures now and turns and turns.

*Title Card: **TORONTO, CANADA. 2023.**)*

MOTHER

Asan?

FISHER

Who?

(MOTHER groans in grief.)

FISHER

Was he someone you knew in Istanbul?

MOTHER

Asaaaaan, what have you done to your poor mother? Asaaaaaan

FISHER

I'm not Asan. Who was Asan?

(MOTHER rolls to get up out of the bed.)

FISHER

No, please, stay there. You're gonna be all right.

Who's Asan?

(MOTHER cries.)

FISHER

Do you want to tell me about Asan?

(She grabs FISHER's hand.)

MOTHER

Those brothers, those dogs.

You are a nice boy?

FISHER

Thank you.

MOTHER

Who are you?

FISHER

I'm your grandson.

MOTHER

Oh yeah? Then, where are your parents, huh?

FISHER

Don't be mean, grandma.

MOTHER

Ok.

FISHER

They're gone.

MOTHER

Oh yeah? Where'd they go?

FISHER

I don't know.

It's been ten years.

MOTHER

Ten *years*?

FISHER

Lie down, grandma, you're upset.

Grandma?

*(The wall rises to reveal not FISHER and MOTHER – they're gone.
Inside the house is ASAN's Istanbul flat. He sits across the table from
SCOTT, smoking. They are seducing one another as on the first day of
their meeting.
FISHER and MOTHER's voices continue above.)*

FISHER

I think they were hiding things from me.

MOTHER

Of course, they hide things, silly boy. They are your parents. They should hide almost everything.

FISHER

Do you know where they went?

MOTHER

Do *I* know?

FISHER

I was so young, so...

MOTHER

Why should I know? Not my job to know. What do *you* know?

FISHER

I'm asking you if—

MOTHER

—What do *you* know, wise guy? What have *you* done with your parents?
(in Kurdish)

(You, You.)

(in English)

I accuse *you*, now.

FISHER

I'm not—

MOTHER (*in Kurdish*)

(—What have *you* done with them?!)

FISHER

I don't speak Kurdish, Grandma.

MOTHER (*in Kurdish*)

(Why not?! Tell me!)

FISHER

Please, Grandmother, use your English. I can't—

MOTHER (*in Kurdish*)

(—Why don't you know anything? You are like a lost puppy in the wild woods.)

FISHER

I don't know what you're saying.

MOTHER (*in Kurdish*)

(How will you ever make it, huh?)

FISHER

Please. I'm sorry.

....

Grandma?

MOTHER

How will you ever make it, huh?

*(A long moment, ASAN and SCOTT smoke.
They put out their cigarettes, lean in toward one another.
Dancing, the CROWD watches them now.
SCOTT and ASAN smile.)*

End of Play



Karlstad
by Patrick Shaw

Karlstad

by Patrick Shaw

CHARACTERS

SALLY – 24. Female, American.

PAM – 24. Female, American. Sally's best friend.

JULES – 24. Female, American. Sally's best friend.

DIRK – late 40's or 50's. Male, emigrated from Germany to America.

HERMAN - 70's. Male. German.

NIETZSCHE - late 50's. Male. German. Sports a Victorian mustache.

OCCUPY BRO – 24. Male, American. Also, the Stasi.

COWORKER – late 20's. Male, American. Also, the Stasi.

TIME

October 2011. New York City

“Vornehmer ist's, sich Unrecht zu geben als Recht zu behalten, sonderlich wenn man Recht hat. Nur muss man reich genug dazu sein.”

[Nobler is it to own oneself in the wrong than to establish one's right, especially if one be in the right. Only, one must be rich enough to do so.]

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Karlstad

Prologue

*(Somewhere in the house or lobby of the theater, HERMAN sits handcuffed at a table.
He is either unconscious or unresponsive to passing audience members.
He has been violently interrogated. When the play begins, he remains in the dark or just out of sight.)*

Occupy Wall Street

*(Lights slowly rise on an old couch. What's with the old couch?
Suddenly, super loud music – Title projected: KARLSTAD
SALLY runs on stage wearing a bandana like a robber, rocking out to an embarrassing degree, douses the couch in lighter fluid, and sets it ablaze.
The couch burns. It's awesome.
We're at Occupy Wall Street.
PAM runs with a big blanket and smothers the flame. Music stops abruptly.)*

PAM (*furious*)
Oh my god, Sally!!!
Why?! Seriously, why.

SALLY
I don't know, OCCUPY! Viva la revolución!

PAM
It wasn't yours, Sally—

SALLY
—It was, actually. It was my Dad's old couch.

PAM
But it was the best piece of furniture in our apartment!
How did you even get it out here, anyway?

SALLY

I have my ways.

PAM

Was this something you've been planning?!

SALLY

Just chill, it's cool—

PAM

—It's not cool! Couches are crazy expensive!

SALLY

I believed you to be sympathetic to the cause—

PAM

—I am, ok? I just.

SALLY

Wait, are you gonna cry?

PAM

I just—I do you this huge favor, go way out of my way to bring your lunch down here, and now there's this whole new like, expense...

SALLY

Why'd you offer to bring it if it's so out of the way?

PAM

It was—I don't know, OK?!

I saw you made that quinoa stuff, and I knew you just forgot it, so I'm stupid. You're my friend, and I thought I would be nice.

SALLY

You are.

PAM

OK!!!

(PAM is mad-crying.)

SALLY
Then, why—

PAM
—I can't talk about this.

SALLY
Then—

PAM
—I CAN'T TALK ABOUT THIS!

SALLY (*very quickly*)
Why are you so mad at me—?

PAM
—YOU DIDN'T CLEAN THE BATHROOM THIS WEEK!!!

SALLY
But it was your week.

PAM
Check the chart, Sally.

SALLY
Chart's at home.

(PAM shows SALLY a picture of the chore chart taken on her phone.)

SALLY
Ohhh, I was looking at last week.

(JULES enters carrying her bagged lunch.)

JULES
Pam! Hey!!! I didn't know you were coming to Lunch Date!

PAM
“Lunch Date?” What's Lunch Date? Is Lunch Date a thing?

JULES
Not a thing, no. I just work in that building, so—

PAM
—It's just I've never heard you guys mention it before, and it sounds like a thing.

SALLY
Sorry! I thought you had work today.

PAM
I do.

JULES
I've been at work all morning – does Abercrombie have you start at noon?

PAM
I mean...

JULES
I'd kill for that!

SALLY
I know, right?!

JULES
Wait, is that our couch?

SALLY
Yes. I burned it.

JULES
To protest?

SALLY
I sacrificed the couch to Occupy.

JULES
Huh.

PAM

I want to point out that I physically brought you a lunch so that you could have something called Lunch Date with our third roommate.

JULES

You see me as the third roommate?

PAM

No, of course not, but my point is like, what the fuck, you know?

SALLY

I mean, you could hang if you want.

PAM

That's not the point! Anyway, I have to go to work.

(PAM stomps off.

JULES and SALLY sit down to eat their food.)

JULES

Is she all right?

SALLY

I mean, she just had her trademark apoplectic nag-attack, so basically, yeah.

JULES

Show compassion, she works very hard.

SALLY

I mean, we all do!

JULES

That's true, but you know. Her job sucks and pays like nothing. And she kind of had a point about the lunch.

SALLY

Yeah, I guess.... So what's up?

(SALLY's phone rings.)

SALLY
Oh, it's Dad.

JULES
Yeah, take it.

*(SALLY answers. JULES watches and eats patiently.
DIRK's on the phone in his office.)*

SALLY
Hey, Daddy.

DIRK
Hello, Sally. How are you?

SALLY
Look, I want to be completely transparent: I just burned the couch. What's up with you?—

DIRK
—I don't understand. Why would you burn a couch?

SALLY
I needed to protest the outrageous crimes of Wall Street.

(JULES fist bumps with SALLY.)

DIRK
Tell me you are not with those homeless degenerate socialists in tents.
I am looking at them right now through my office window—

SALLY
—I'm waving. By the drum circle. I'm with Jules.

*(SALLY and JULES wave upward.
DIRK looks down out of his window. Sees her, sees the couch.)*

DIRK
Oh hello, Jules.

SALLY

Dad says, (*in accent*) “Oh hello, Jules.”

JULES

Hey, Mr Rinchter.

DIRK

May I ask you a question?

SALLY

Jules says, “Hey, Mr Rinchter.”

DIRK

What do you have against couches?

SALLY

Nothing, it’s a symbol. It’s a symbol of the monied class with whom I take issue, and I thought it would be poetically appropriate to burn such an emblem of sloth and luxury. Plus, they burn good.

DIRK

An old couch symbolizes luxury?

SALLY

Sure, I mean, the whole thing is rarely used, and people may recline. It’s like, platonically bourgeoisie—it made more sense before I had to explain.

JULES

No, it makes sense.

SALLY

Thanks. It was kind of sad actually.
All the good times—I lost my virginity on that couch.

DIRK

That was our family couch.

SALLY

It was amazing.

DIRK

Sally, let me ask you.

Where will you sit when you play your Xbox Nazi simulator, hm?

SALLY

It's 'Medal of Honor', and I don't need a couch.

I'll take yoga.

DIRK

Out of the question, I am ordering you an IKEA.

SALLY

No, Dad!

DIRK

This is absurd, please—

SALLY

—No, I want to be self-sufficient!

DIRK

Ah! So we do share some dreams for a better tomorrow.

SALLY

Of course, we do!

DIRK

Oh yeah? How's the job search?

SALLY

The job search?

DIRK

Yes, yours. Your job search. You're the one without a job. I have a job, so you would be the one with the job search, correct?

(Pause.)

SALLY

You don't think I'm trying.

DIRK

Trying to what?

SALLY

To get a job.

DIRK

Oh. No, I don't think you're very focused on that, no.

SALLY

I am, though. I'm trying.

The economy is terrible, and no one's hiring in my field, so it's just...

And I'm not gonna blindly apply for jobs at places that don't even know what I'm about.

Life's too short, and I can't afford to waste it on shitty work.

When I look at people my age—

Like Pam's living my current nightmare—Total, you know, Freddy-Krueger-nightmare job. That's not me.

JULES

She strives for stability.

SALLY

But then, down here, I see these runaway St Marks kind of kids that've rolled down to Occupy, and I think... What if I were like....

And the drugs are serious, and, I mean, I love pit bulls, and I had a gothish phase, but...

But you know what? Actually, that couldn't have been me, no.

I'd never leave the grid, no, because like you always said, I'm a visionary.

But I'm a visionary of the grid, so...

And when I tell people I'm a philosopher, they just—

Even if we live in a specialized society,

WHAT I DO IS VALUABLE.

In fact, what is valuable about what I do is that I'm not specialized.

I'm creative

I'm a problem solver

I'm spatial

And you know what? It's up to me to make people understand what I'm worth.

They aren't just gonna know, you know?

That's an unreasonable expectation.

Of strangers.

(Pause)

SALLY

I just.

I can't afford to make a mistake.

(DIRK has been on a computer during all this.)

DIRK

O.....k.

I bought you a Karlstad.

SALLY

A what?

DIRK

Karlstad. It's kind of a couch-chair.

Are we still on for brunch this weekend?

SALLY

I mean, obviously.

DIRK

Terrific—Say goodbye to Jules for me.

SALLY

Yeah, bye, Dad.

JULES

Bye, Mr Rinchter!

(She hangs up.)

SALLY

He's kind of obsessed with you and your company.

JULES

Aww.

SALLY

Oh my god is that a bald eagle?

JULES
Wait, where?

SALLY
There.

JULES
Where?

SALLY
Like, there.
Behind the like.
There. Do you see it?

JULES
Oh.

SALLY
So awesome!

(They look.)

JULES
I believe that's actually a red-tailed hawk.

SALLY
Oh my god, thanks Steve Irwin.

JULES
I mean, I don't know about birds.

SALLY
This is America, when am I gonna see a bald-eagle?

JULES
There was a feature about city hawks in the New Yorker a couple of months ago.

SALLY
But, seriously, what do hawks even eat here?
Rats? Pigeons?

JULES

Probably pigeons and rats. Maybe some trash or whatever. Bagels?—

SALLY

—Like when was the last time you saw a field mouse?

JULES

I haven't.

SALLY

Yeah, I don't think I've ever seen one. Not once.
And we grew up here, and kids look for that shit.

JULES

It's so beautiful.
Look at it.

(They both watch it for a while.)

SALLY

It just doesn't make sense to me.
If you were a hawk, why would you even stay here?
You could go anywhere, you know? You're a hawk.

JULES

Oh, there he goes.

(JULES is very disappointed for moment.)

SALLY

So what's up with the sweatshops?

JULES

They're cool, but wait—I had a very interesting, provocative dream last night.

SALLY

Ooo, nasty. Tellmeaboutit.

JULES

Not like that.

You remember my Nana died?

SALLY

Oh....

Yeah, I'm so sorry.

JULES

Yeah. Thanks.

Anyway, so my dream:

I was in my Nana's bed.

But the bed was a matchbox.

And the matchbox had thousands of thin matchsticks lying there with me,

Thousands, and I knew...

Each was a relative. Or a person from before. From my before.

SALLY

This does sound like a deep dream.

JULES

And all of a sudden I was building a house, a house with my matchstick ancestors in this flowery field. And when I finished, I sat down, and I felt so at home, like I was in a land of my people, not just a land with people.

SALLY

Like New York.

JULES

Yeah, but I also felt very much that this house of mine was composed entirely of matchsticks and I knew that this house could at any moment – that if a great breeze would blow through or if anything created the slightest friction anywhere, then the whole structure would just...ignite.

But all the same, in the matchstick house, I felt so...

You know how a dream can seem to dip down into the middle of you and you fill up like a sad swamp and you think, I don't feel this much ever for anything anymore.

SALLY

And you think you can't feel anymore.

JULES

Right, but you can. It's there, the capacity is there. It's just got nothing to, you know, engage with, or—inhabit! I'm all field, no house.
I just, you know, I feel like...

(JULES looks for the word. SALLY waits. JULES makes vague handshapes in the air. SALLY looks at them. It seems like JULES is about to articulate her thought, but we wait and wait.)

SALLY

They symbolize...?

JULES

I need to blog about it.

SALLY

Yeah, and people'll have helpful comments, too.

JULES

Yeah, I know...

Something's happening.

(JULES finishes her sandwich.)

I think Pam's mad at you about the bathroom.

SALLY

I know.

JULES

Cool.

Interrogation

(1986:

HERMAN handcuffed, sitting at a desk. A STASI agent paces around the small room, asking questions we can't hear. HERMAN sits still, not speaking.

The interrogator grows impatient, leans over close, picks up the phone, dials it. He leans across the table, holds the phone to HERMAN's ear. HERMAN still does not speak.)

Zuccotti Law

*(Back at OWS. SALLY's playing Dots on her phone.
OCCUPY BRO appears as if from nowhere.)*

OCCUPY BRO
Ummmm.

SALLY
Oh, hey, Lionel.

OCCUPY BRO
Hey, did you burn that couch earlier today?

SALLY
We're an invisible army.

OCCUPY BRO
No, we are an ethical, law-abiding movement. Meaning that if you did that, it's kind of a huge problem.

SALLY
For the last time! It was a symbol—

OCCUPY BRO
— We don't really do symbols here, we do actionable measures—

SALLY
—We're 20 yards from a never-ending drum circle. Yeah, "we don't really do symbols."

OCCUPY BRO
I'm just saying you're probably going to get police charges.

SALLY
Yeah, right.

OCCUPY BRO

I'm serious. I was talking to the General Assembly dudes, and they're gonna pass a motion that says people who perpetrate vandalism or unlawful disturbances are personally accountable to, you know, the authorities that be.

SALLY

They're turning me in?!

OCCUPY BRO

Just listen, I like you, and I thought you should have a heads up before they—

SALLY

—Excuse me, you like me?

OCCUPY BRO

I'm not hitting on you.

SALLY

You're just condescending to me. You like me, and you're about to do me this big favor by protecting me from my non-hierarchical governing body within which I hold equal if not more power than you.

OCCUPY BRO

That would make it hierarchical—

SALLY

—I'm not even starting with you.

OCCUPY BRO

I'm just! It's a crazy big ticket, and that's if you're lucky—

SALLY

—Fuck your inside scooping!

OCCUPY BRO

Fine.

SALLY

Whatever.

OCCUPY BRO

Hey, do you want to grab a drink sometime?

SALLY

What.

OCCUPY BRO

No, it's just I finished "The Will to Power," and I know how much of a Nietzsche buff you are, so—

SALLY

—It was my honors thesis. I'm not a buff.

OCCUPY BRO

Sorry, I just thought maybe I could run my thoughts about its social implications past you to see if I'm off-base, or—

SALLY

—Jesus, you really are the same old Manarchist.

There were days in 'Metaphysics of *Mean Girls*' freshman year where I prayed for a grenade to roll under the door just so you could throw yourself on it.

OCCUPY BRO

I was just a freshman. It was Dickinson.

SALLY

No shit.

OCCUPY BRO

I'm really trying not to be a Manarchist anymore.

SALLY

Yeah, I know.

OCCUPY BRO

I'm better, right?

SALLY

I've noticed a difference, yeah.

OCCUPY BRO

Thanks.

That really means a lot.

(They stand for a bit.)

SALLY

This sucks. I love Occupy.

OCCUPY BRO

We'll miss your energy.

SALLY

Ohmygod shut up.

RangeRoving.com

(JULES speaks from far away. This is her blog.

The text could scroll across in supertitles.

We see video taken on a cell phone from the AirTrain to JFK at sunset. We watch a sea of little houses in outer-Queens roll by. Everyone on the train sits silently with their luggage.)

JULES

When my Nana died, she left me all of her most personal affects in a small worn plastic bag: her love letters, obituaries from German newspapers, snapshots of an old house, and all I could feel was shame: There I was, holding the most precious possessions of the most precious woman in my life, and they meant nothing to me. And I realized that I never really knew my Nana: she never once discussed her childhood with me, much less why she left Germany before WWII—I had never asked, and as a result, I'd lost touch with her world entirely.

I am now in a period of deep reflection:

This morning, I saw an elegant red-tailed hawk. It was soaring above lower Manhattan, so free, and I began to wonder: Do hawks remember their Nanans? Do hawks dream or ascribe meaning to their lives? (I don't know about birds). I, for one, believe they do, they must. And all a sudden, I comprehended the true depth of my plight: I am adrift. I am distracted and history-less. I have lost touch with my natural rooted hawk-ness.

So I ask you reader: What am I to do?

I will tell you: After work today, I took the E train to the AirTrain to JFK and bought a one way ticket to Dresden. Its cost doesn't matter.

I am on a quest to seek the truth of myself, of my history, and I'm not coming home until I find some tangible connection to my Nana in Germany.

Some things are more important than money – I love you, Nana.

Boarding Group 3 for Self-Discovery,

Jules

(JULES's phone looks at the sun setting behind Manhattan – it looks very far away, almost fake.)

Abercrombie & Fitch

(PAM is endlessly folding a sweater, talking to her male COWORKER, who folds silently beside her.)

PAM

I was reading Jules's blog on break,
And she's zero warning—zero—in Europe.

(PAM becomes instantly acidic when addressing a customer.)

PAM

hey.

I mean, yeah.

In the back.

(COWORKER looks judgmentally at PAM.)

PAM

What? Manager Laura wants us to be jerks.
Anyway, can you believe that?

COWORKER

Who's Jules?

PAM

My roommate! You don't know Jules?

All right, so Sally and I have been best friends since freshman year of college, and I really believe that's where we grew into the people we are now. I mean, I didn't think I'd ever know someone as well as I knew her. I would have married her if I liked girls.

Do you ever wish you were gay? Or queer or whatever?

Wait, are you?

(COWORKER shrugs.)

PAM

So when we graduated, Sally said she had this friend she from growing up who went to NYU and started this company to "battle sweatshops" and that was Jules.

Which is why we all live together now.

Which is to say that I didn't know Jules before coming here.

And I love Jules— They're both gonna be in my wedding, for sure,

But when I'm being completely honest? I don't really know Jules.

Which is weird for me because Sally and her are like developmentally entwined.

Um, no. We don't have that anymore.

Summer's gone. It's WINTER now.

Fine, soon. Whatever.

And then yesterday I'm finding out the two of them have been having these secret lunch dates downtown without me,

Then all of a sudden—Boom—it turns out Jules just skipped out today for some indefinite bootleg Birthright trip to East Germany,

And she doesn't even have the courtesy to leave a rent check,

So I'm all – IT'S MY NAME ON THE LEASE.

So what the fuck happened at that secret lunch date, you know?

I don't even wanna talk about it.

(short pause)

I thought I'd know dinner party people by now

I should know dinner party people by now.

Times Square

(Someone's cellphone video of Times Square at night. He pans all around him, and we see Friedrich NIETZSCHE enter the stage, holding the cell phone, carrying a suitcase.)

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

Der philosophische Mensch hat sogar das Vorgefühl, dass auch unter dieser Wirklichkeit, in der wir leben und sind, eine zweite ganz andre verborgen liege...
[Underneath this reality in which we live and have our being, another and altogether different reality lies concealed.....]

(He turns around slowly, steps into Abercrombie & Fitch, records the clothes, the manikins, the black painted shutters, the posters of abs.)

PAM

Excuse me, you can't do that in here.
Hey. Sir?

(NIETZSCHE nods solemnly. He puts his phone in his pocket.)

PAM

What's his deal?

COWORKER

I like his mustache.

PAM

The music should be louder.

COWORKER

I'm so on it.

(COWORKER exits. The music pumps.

PAM is mesmerized by this guy. She doesn't know why.)

PAM

Are you a tourist?

(He takes the sweater she is folding.)

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

Aus dem Tiefsten muß das Höchste zu seiner Höhe kommen.

[It is from the deepest depths that the highest must come to its height.]

(NIETZSCHE folds it for her perfectly with totally excellent technique.)

PAM

You folded that very well.

Actually, that's exactly how my mom does it.

(NIETZSCHE straightens the sweaters on the table perfectly, amazing PAM.)

PAM

You must be a very neat person.

NIETZSCHE *(In German)*

Was gross ist am Menschen, das ist, dass er eine Brücke ist und kein Zweck ist.

[What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal.]

PAM

Huh.

Hey, do you need a sublet?

General Assembly

(SALLY enters dragging a series of huge cardboard boxes into the apartment.

Pump up music plays.

SALLY gets her tool box and confidently field strips it into its composite tools/pieces.

Then, she rabidly rips apart IKEA boxes and lays out the parts of the couch.

She's totally got this.

She dives in, tries to assemble it without consulting the instructions, struggles for a long time, trying to use tools which have NOTHING to do with IKEA assembly. Her frustration escalates. She sweats through her shirt. No amount of effort will make this a sit-able piece of furniture. She

has a few pieces connected, but it's hopeless. Worse, she has squandered the pump-up music.)

Vetting

(PAM and NIETZSCHE enter. SALLY caught in the act of failing.)

SALLY
I couldn't do it.

PAM
Did you clean the bathroom?

SALLY
Shit.

PAM
You know what? Forget it.
I found someone.

SALLY
For what?

PAM
Did you see Jules's post?

SALLY
Oh, right! I can't ask Dad to pay her share this month because I really laid into the financial sector this morning and made a fuss about being financially independent, so I'm not gonna—I like your friend's mustache.

PAM
Your roommate's mustache.

SALLY
Are you moving out?!

PAM

He's gonna sublet Jules's room, so we can pay our rent next week, and I won't have to like, default on my student loans.

SALLY

Hm.

Can we interview him?!

PAM

Sure! Yeah!

(They all sit on pieces of the incomplete couch.)

SALLY

Ok. So what're you like, 45?

PAM

Um.

SALLY

Not that you don't look great.

PAM

He would be a great 45, sure.

SALLY

Like a Daniel Day Lewis kind of thing.

PAM

Exactly. That would be his type.

SALLY

Right, but what I'm wondering is like, you're a real grown up. Or maybe a little past that....

PAM

We're just hoping to get to know you a little better.

SALLY

Are you a divorcé? Kids with the mom kind of thing?

PAM

Do you think that's a little personal?

SALLY

Oh wait—What if it's something hot like a pied-a-terre!

PAM

I guess he could be between careers.

SALLY

Or between lives— Countries?!

PAM

Oh, you think he's immigrating?

SALLY

It's possible.

PAM

He does speak German.

SALLY

Think he's looking for a German enclave or—?

PAM

Um.

SALLY

We're a German enclave! My dad's German, and I'm pretty sure Jules's dead grandma was German-mix at least!

PAM

I don't know if we qualify as an enclave.

SALLY

He's German ... You don't think he has a dark past, do you?

PAM

Oh....

SALLY
Could he be a refugee? Like a kind of political refugee?

PAM
Refugee...

SALLY (*in German*)
Sind Sie ein Flüchtling in Ihrem Land?
[Are you a wanted man in your country?]

PAM
I didn't know your German was still conversational.

SALLY
Weird what sticks.

PAM
Yeah....It is.
Excuse us.

SALLY (*in German*)
Entschuldigen Sie uns.
[Excuse us.]

(They pick up their couch sections and move a few feet away.)

PAM
So what do you think?

SALLY
He seems pretty cool, but he's still kind of an old dude, so it's shady.

PAM
Yeah, I guess....

SALLY
Can I be honest?

PAM
I mean, that's up to you.

SALLY

I don't know if I really feel safe.

PAM

Fair, fair.

But at least he'd pay Jules's chunk for next month, right?

SALLY

It's just...

I'm too young to die.

PAM

Oh my god—

SALLY

—I'm serious!

PAM

Well, you'd better be ready to cover Jules's part.

SALLY

That's not how it works, by the way.

I mean, do we even know the murderer's name?

PAM

Oh, right! What's your name?

(NIETZSCHE offers his hand formally.)

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

Friedrich Nietzsche.

SALLY

No way! He says his name's—

PAM

—Yeah, I caught it. He said it weird, though.

SALLY

You're named after my favorite philosopher!

PAM

That's awesome. And bizarre.

SALLY

All right, he can stay.

PAM

Really?!

SALLY

Yeah, but seriously, what are you doing here and what do you want from us?

NIETZSCHE (in German)

Was weiß der Mensch eigentlich von sich selbst?

[What does man actually know about himself]?

PAM

Ok....

SALLY

Mysterious answer.

PAM

What'd it mean?

SALLY

Didn't quite catch it. I think it was very philosophical, though.

PAM

I don't want to talk about philosophy. I spent the entire day folding a sweater.

SALLY

Oof...

PAM (*all business*)

Anyway, so rent's 820 before utilities, and Jules might come back at any time, so yeah.

SALLY

We cool?

PAM

Leave dishes in the sink overnight and you're dead just kidding.
I'll add you to the chore chart!

SALLY (*to NIETZSCHE*)

I don't date roommates. It's my only real rule.

(SALLY and PAM exit.

NIETZSCHE takes out the directions and expertly assembles the couch during the following scenes.)

Dresden

(JULES is very far away. We see video of the inside of a silent dark cathedral.)

JULES

Parts of Dresden look like those impossible 3D puzzles of cathedrals.
Have you ever successfully finished one of those?
Me neither.

I have a confession to make: I'm struggling.

I've spent the last few days wandering around Dresden showing Grandma's addresses and photos to the locals, but nobody can identify anything. When I find an address that exists, the buildings there look nothing like the photographs from the Nana's bag.

At first, this, of course, seemed very peculiar, but then it hit me: World War Two. The Allies firebombed basically the entire center city and everything in it during the attrition chapter of the war. (Slaughterhouse Five, duh.)

Turns out, the Germans rebuilt some of the historic stuff so it looks old, but Nana's lovely downtown flat? Just a slabbed Soviet apartment building now. And here I just expected to waltz on into my Nana's old neighborhood - Not my proudest moment.

So I'm taking a fresh tack:

In lieu of physical heritage, I going to try to understand myself through immersion in the cultural customs of my German cousins. What might it have felt like to be my Nana? To be a young German woman?

Working on the 3D puzzle,

Jules

(JULES settles on a specific statue. It's an obscure saint or non-descript disciple.)

Brunch

(SALLY and PAM at brunch with DIRK. He tries to get the waiter's attention. PAM is totally cowed by DIRK.)

DIRK
EXCUSE ME?
3 more bellinis?
Am I expected to tip for effort? Pity?

SALLY
You don't tip anyway—

DIRK
—But I'm supposed to!
I don't understand tipping. They don't even make it, the bellini.
They just bring, bring it over, walk too and fro, and I'm supposed to give a percent cut for that?

SALLY
You're like, subliminally describing banking, Dad.

DIRK
My wiseass daughter. How is Abercrombie & Fitch?

PAM
's fine, I guess.

DIRK
Have they sold you into sex slavery yet? Hahaha, just kidding, Pam.

PAM
I might become a full manager this year.

DIRK
Oh, wowie!

Sally, I want you to get a real job. Do something more like Jules! She does well even if she is preoccupied with piddling liberal pool water. Sweatshops?! I laugh at the moon!!!

SALLY

You've had too much peach juice, Dad. You're getting mean.

DIRK

I love peaches.

(He looks at PAM weirdly. The girls look to each other weirdly.)

PAM

...Great.

SALLY *(changing the subject)*

Um. Anyway, I saw something on Facebook about the GDR—

DIRK

—GET OFF FACEBOOK!

SALLY

I know, Dad, but did you hear about the GDR and the pharmaceutical companies? I think it was BBC—

DIRK

—Of course, I heard about it. I have taught computers to make my coffee while I am asleep, so that I possibly can be one of the first people on America's east coast to hear about things like the GDR's unethical pharmaceutical testing. The only difference is that I hear about it when it is presently reported, not years later in a newsfeed backwash.

SALLY

Seriously, Dad, you're being a total dick right now.

DIRK

No, I am not a dick. I am pragmatic, I am realistic. I am buying brunch.

PAM

Thank you, Mr. Rinchter.

SALLY

But really, when you left there, did you have any idea that your government was using public hospitals to test drugs??

DIRK

Am I supposed to think the great tragedy of the GDR was that a few people got to try out the hot new drugs? In America, when you are dying of something you beg, you beg to be put on those tests! In the German Democratic Republic, they save you the trouble!

SALLY

It's not funny, Dad!

PAM

Oh! So the GDR stands for—

DIRK

—Yes, the German Democratic Republic, you foolish American. It is where the people spied on one another all the live long day and evil entered the world. Am I right, Sally? Was East Germany the Devil's belly button?

SALLY

All I'm asking is if you knew about it!

DIRK

Did I know? No.

Am I surprised? No.

Do I give a shit? No.

SALLY

You should, though! When a society is messed up, its citizens need to hold their leaders accountable or like, enact change—

DIRK

—Oh, I see. The Occupy Wall Street. Yes, of course.

You Occupiers, you are so foolishly free, you have no concept of how the world economy works, and you mistake that vacuum of experience for insight!

You read each other Goodnight Moon and call it Tolstoy.

SALLY

Jesus, Dad, you're in high form—

DIRK

—Oh, no. Listen to me: I should have “held my leaders” accountable? The Stasi, they sat in little closets listening on their little headphones— listening to every phone call, listening to my father spank me after dinner, listening to my mother snore in her bedroom—I couldn’t even quote-quote occupy my own bathroom without potentially incriminating myself!

SALLY

Ew, Dad.

DIRK

You think this is funny?

Really—Do you think this is funny? The government murdered my father, eh? He disappeared, and I don’t even know why because in that country, they didn’t even need one, so tell me honestly, do you think I was in a position to right the wrongs of my society?

Tell me.

(SALLY looks at her plate.)

PAM *(sheepishly)*

No, Mr Rinchter.

DIRK *(to SALLY)*

You don’t understand anything. You don’t know anything about me.

SALLY

I wasn’t trying to dig up bad memories.

DIRK

It’s not the memories, Sally. I’m just wishing I hadn’t raised such a fool. Use the AmEx when you’re done.

*(DIRK finishes the girls’ bellinis and leaves.
Pause.)*

PAM

Mind if I skip brunch next week?

Interrogation

(1986:

HERMAN is still in the chair. He looks very tired.

A STASI agent sets a cool glass of ice water on the table in front of him.

HERMAN looks up to him, pleadingly, but the officer shakes his head,

“No.” We see HERMAN is bleeding badly from above his eye.

The officer sitting across from HERMAN takes out a towel and dabs blood from the wound, then stuffs it in HERMAN’s mouth.

He smiles and leaves him alone at the table. The surveillance cameras click from angle to angle as HERMAN stares at the water.)

Company

(NIETZSCHE has quite tastefully furnished the apartment with IKEA.

He sits stiffly on the couch when SALLY and PAM return.)

SALLY

Best roommate ever!!! Look at all this IKEA stuff!

PAM

Oh. Oh wow. Wow.—

SALLY

—I feel like I’m in a magazine!!!!

(She hugs NIETZSCHE.)

PAM *(in awe of the room)*

It’s so beautiful.

SALLY

Look at me. Look at me walking in our magazine room!

Who needs Dad when we’ve got Friedrich!

PAM

It’s like company beautiful.

Oh my god.
Oh my god.
Ok, what's your month like?

SALLY
Month's good. Month's great.

PAM
Seriously? Cause I think we should try to host a dinner party.

SALLY
For whom?

PAM
Our friends, our other friends.

SALLY
Like our old Dickinson friends?

PAM
Yeah!

SALLY
Like Mick, Rocky, and... what's Rocky's girlfriend?

PAM
Broke up.

SALLY
Oh, cool. Maybe Yolanda then?

PAM
Yolanda, yeah!

SALLY
I could live with that.
But wait, do we have to cook for like eight people or something?

PAM
Pot luck! But we'll have some base dishes, obviously.
Awesome base dishes—I'll make them.

I'll make a Spotify mix.
And a seasonal tablescape.
And we'll drink wine. We'll have people bring wine, and we'll drink it in mason jars.

SALLY
What's gotten into you?

PAM
Friedrich pimped our house, so I'm not too embarrassed to have people over!

SALLY
Embarrassed?

PAM
I mean—

SALLY
—That was my childhood family stuff.

PAM
Yeah, I know, but it smelled like your old cat's pee.

SALLY
That was my pee, and I was just a kid, so it wasn't my fault.

PAM
Whatever, you burned it – Let it be!
We're having a gathering. A pot luck gathering.
It could be like our housewarming thing!

SALLY
We've lived here for two years!

(PAM stops.)

PAM *(whispers)*
We've been here for two years?
Is that really...?

*(PAM calculates—oh my god, she's right. PAM tears up.
NEITZSCHE places a comforting hand on PAM's shoulder.)*

PAM

We've actually been living like this for two years.

SALLY

Well, I'm from here, so it's been a tad longer. Well, Connecticut.

PAM

Fuck, this is on!

SALLY

Um—

PAM

—I'll organize everything. Later.

(PAM's gone.)

SALLY *(to NIETZSCHE)*

Hey, you hungry?

(NIETZSCHE shrugs.)

Nietzsche: A Primer/ Company Prep

(En route to A&F, PAM works the phone.)

PAM *(on phone)*

Hello? Sweet. Saturday or the 6th? Two weeks, yeah. Ok, cool, yeah we can do it late, or really early, but I think late is better because Rocky's got a Flea booth. Yeah, no,

PAM *(cont'd)*

brunch is old hat. We're making the jump, we're going full dinner-housewarming shindig.

(SALLY and NIETZSCHE appear, strolling in a park eating hot dogs.

NIETZSCHE listens thoughtfully.

PAM continues.)

PAM (*on phone*)
Ok, but just remember: Bring your dish! I don't know. Whatever your dish is. I'll have base dishes, definitely. I work Sunday days, and you do too, but what I'm thinking is you get off at 8, so it's cool, get here when you can, but make your dish ahead of time and we'll just dinner party late. Like southern-France late, ohmygod this is so awesome. And you too, and you, and her— Sunday the 6th— Thanks!

SALLY
Ok. So. The philosophy of Nietzsche. So basically, Nietzsche thought that Christianity came and did a terrible disservice to humanity by instituting a slave morality (so by following it, you're making yourself a slave) and undercutting our natural human excellences. (I'm getting out of genealogy of morals a bit)
So the will to power is basically how he thought all human interactions worked or maybe should work. I forget.

(SALLY's phone rings. She answers.)

SALLY
Hey, Pam.

PAM (*on phone*)
We're on! People are coming on Sunday the 6th! Put it on your calendar!

SALLY
Sweet, later.

*(Time passes.
SALLY and NIETZSCHE are back at the apartment, hanging out.
SALLY is doing some yoga, NIETZSCHE kind of follows along.)*

SALLY
But the idea is basically that everything we do is an exercise of the will to power, the desire and willingness to possess, exercise, and experience power slash dominance over other things.

*(SALLY's cell phone rings.
NIETZSCHE answers it.)*

NIETZSCHE
Uh, ya?

It gets a little weird when you start to tease out the practical and moral consequences of that, but the direction

PAM
Hey Friedrich, I'm at Key Foods— do we have any more grape seed oil? ? I forgot to check before I went to work, and I need it for the base dish. Could you check for me?

Nietzsche usually goes is to say that you have to live your life with this in mind: When you make a choice, you're committing to living through its consequences over and over and over and over.

NIETZSCHE
Ya.

(NIETZSCHE gets up quietly and walks into the kitchen. SALLY shouts after him. PAM waits impatiently for the word.)

It's not that you have to be perfect, but the life that you live should be one that you choose because you can feel justified in repeating it forever.

PAM
Friedrich? You there, Friedrich?

There's also some agonizing over the completely disproportionate import that every trivial thing in life takes on when you look at it that way, but that's fine.

NIETZSCHE
Ya.

PAM
Did you find it? Do we have enough?

He just thinks that, as humans, we should embrace and fully accept being human.

NIETZSCHE
Ach, ya.

We shouldn't deny ourselves and make ourselves miserable for no reason. And breathe.

PAM
Thanks, later.

*(Time passes.
SALLY's playing the old Medal of Honor video game (the European one) at which she ruthlessly excels.
NIETZSCHE smokes a glass pipe and watches, rapt.)*

SALLY
Oh! Just one more thing and I promise I'm done.

(Meanwhile, PAM comes home with groceries, unnoticed by SALLY.

She throws on an apron and starts working like a maniac to spruce the apartment up for company.

She's vacuuming.

She's dusting.

She's taking the trash out. She's taking still more trash out.

Oh my god, there's still so much to do!

She's brings the tablescape out and puts the finishing touches on the company prep.

She looks to SALLY as if to say, what do you think?

SALLY *(cont'd)*

You can't do Nietzsche without at least addressing the god is dead thing. So there are two ways to go on it: It usually gets talked about as though it's an exultant thing.

Like an atheistic celebration of secular humanism and rejoicing in the fall of religion—that's how most people recognize it, and is probably the easiest way to go, but it's actually way more interesting than that and people generally have it wrong because he thought that that was a terrifying thing, no god.

If god is dead, then there's no absolute non-relative basis of meaning, truth, value, anything.

(She has totally dominated the level of the video game. She sets the controller down.)

SALLY

The person who actually says god is dead is a madman wandering through a town at night wailing about how terrible it is.

PAM

Ahem!

Ahem, Sally.

(in her "company voice")

What do you think of my seasonal tablescape?

SALLY

Oh shit, wait— Is the dinner party tonight?! I can't come! I have Dinner Date with Dad!

PAM

Are you seriously serious? Tomorrow! Sunday the 6th! I told you to put it in your calendar!

SALLY

Wait, I thought you like just told me that.

PAM

Weeks, Sally. That was two weeks ago.

SALLY

For real?

PAM

Yeah.

(SALLY looks at NIETZSCHE. He shrug-nods.)

SALLY

Woah, I thought it was just—

PAM

—Ohmygod, I don't believe you.

(PAM stomps off into the kitchen.

After a stunned moment, SALLY returns to her thought.)

SALLY

Do you think the mad ever get used to being mad? Gimme a hit.

(NIETZSCHE passes it.)

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

Ich würde nur an einen Gott glauben, der zu tanzen verstünde.

[I would only believe in a God that knows how to dance.]

SALLY

It's actually depressing, yeah.

Germany Sucks

(Cellphone video of crowded public transit in Dresden. JULES is taping, and she's got coffee. She pans across all the tired commuters and the cloudy German weather.)

JULES

I hate Germany. I hate Germans.

I should just get business cards printed that read, "I didn't vote for George Bush" and hand them out because everyone here is either trying to have sex with me or blame me for the world, and I am not responsible for either of those two things. I'm not a war criminal, all right? Or, like, interested. I'm nice.

It took a week, but I've decided cultural immersion's a no-go. No more bars, no more "fun" German adventures with people at the hostiles—Modern German life is exactly like modern life in New York City, but the guys here have less hair on their chest.

Only museums from here on out for me—And sad ones. Places where no one feels entitled to "approach" me. This is my best shot at experiencing a visceral connection to my people's history.

Wish me luck—Berlin here I come,

Jules

(A bump on the bus, and she's spilled her coffee down her sock.)

Dinner at The Plaza

(DIRK and SALLY at a fancy restaurant, drinking their wine, reading the menus.

SALLY's still a little stoned.)

DIRK

Are you suffering from depression again?

SALLY

I mean, I don't think so.

DIRK

Hm.

Good...

(They sip their wine.)

DIRK

I am concerned about Jules. I have read her Range Roving blog this morning, and I find her diary entries and video art posts at once hilarious, but also distressing.

SALLY

Yeah, I don't know. She'll figure it out. It's only been two weeks.

DIRK

But who are these hundreds of people following her? Are they really interested in reading descriptions of hairless men and the interior of her own belly button?

SALLY

I think they might be. She's a major figure in sweatshop reform and part of her brand is that she like— her personality, her ability to articulate her experience is what inspires action. And fundraising.

DIRK

Yes, I understand brands very well, and I am happy that she is successful, but I don't know how else to say this—Why isn't she ashamed?

SALLY

Like, it's the internet, Dad. I can't explain the internet to you.

DIRK

Is your Occupy group involved in this sort of exhibitionistic brand activism?

SALLY

Well, I'm not involved in Occupy anymore, so I can't speak for them.

DIRK

Oh?

SALLY

They were gonna turn me in for the couch burning thing.

DIRK

Ah, you see? Who needs enemies, right?

SALLY

Oh, shut up.

DIRK

Haha, you're right!

SALLY

Just, don't worry about Jules. She's on a spiritual journey, and she'll come back when she's got some clarity.

DIRK

Yes, and we'll all have the pleasure of reading about it in Arial font, I'm sure.

SALLY

Nobody's making you read it, Dad.

DIRK

Don't embarrass me.
I know you too are on some kind of spiritual journey—

SALLY

—I'm really not, though.

DIRK

Whatever—Don't drag me into it. On the internet.

SALLY

Don't worry.

DIRK

You can't google me.

SALLY

Yeah, I know.

DIRK

You can, but you won't find anything.

SALLY

I know, Dad, don't worry.

I don't have anything going on in my life to entangle you in anyway.
Even if I wanted to.

(Beat)

DIRK

Really, Sally, what is the matter? Are you still upset with me about brunch with Pam? I have come to enjoy your haranguing me during our Fortnight Dinner Date.

SALLY

It's just...
Why do we do this?

DIRK

Fortnight Dinner Date or are you referring to a wider, more humiliating why?

SALLY

Why do we talk like this? Like, I'm trying to talk to you, but you just want to help me by like, managing me, so I just feel kind of dumb and worthless as a result.
And you're my Dad, you know?

DIRK

I don't want an employee for a daughter, if that's what you mean.

SALLY

I think you kind of do, though.

DIRK

Ha.

SALLY

Like, what are we gonna be like—What if I get a job somewhere out of the city or...
What is our relationship?

DIRK

Well, Sally, I will always remain your scurrilous papa, and you will never be separate from me because you are too dependent on me, you see?

SALLY

What I'm saying is I'm already separate from you.

DIRK

No, you're not.

SALLY

But I feel that way. When I think about it.

DIRK

No, believe me, you are not. You send the bills for your prescriptions to the house in Stamford, where you store all the things you've bought in your life that you don't care about anymore.

SALLY

I'm not talking about money, Dad!

DIRK

Well, if you're not talking about it, I guess it doesn't matter then, hm? Who cares—it's irrelevant! Sally's not talking about it!

SALLY

Fuck. You, Dad.

(SALLY throws her napkin on her plate and storms off.)

DIRK

See you in two weeks, darling daughter of mine!

A&F: Ghosts

(PAM is folding a sweater with her COWORKER at Abercrombie & Fitch.)

PAM

Hey, do you mind if I bounce early?

I'm throwing a housewarming-reunion dinner party potluck for a group of old friends tonight, so you'd really be doing me a huge favor by, oh—wait a sec...

(PAM gets like five texts in rapid succession.)

PAM

Oh.

Oh.

...

Oh

.....

(Every single guest has cancelled on her.)

COWORKER

You cool?

PAM

Um....

So are you free later tonight?

COWORKER

I've got a date.

PAM

Oh.

COWORKER

Yeah, I'm really nervous about it.

PAM

That's cool.

COWORKER

I just bumped into this guy in Tompkins Square Park, totally randomly, kind of by the courts but—like just west of the dog parks, by the bathrooms, but over by where they have all those flowers in the Spring—

PAM

—Look, I don't know the park.

COWORKER

Right, so anyway, I feel this little tap on my shoulder, and there's this guy I knew in high school. I couldn't believe it.

We were never very close, and neither of us have been back to New Mexico in like a decade, so it was just totally out of the blue.

PAM
Wait, New Mexico?

COWORKER
Yeah.

PAM
How old are you?

COWORKER
Anyway, he's got this great dog now.

PAM
A dog in the city?

COWORKER
Yeah! And we walked over to his place and had some tea on his back patio. I think I talked too much.

PAM
I do that too sometimes.

COWORKER
Yeah, you do.
But it was so nice this time. He does freelance graphic design and was so funny and smart, and he put on this great music. And I was just so... I felt cared for.
I don't usually feel that way.
Anyway, on the way out, he leans over to this huge homemade book shelf and grabs this little book of short stories by someone I'd never heard of, hands it to me, and then, he kisses me on the cheek like a kid and says, "I want it back, ok?" And I left.

PAM
Barf.

COWORKER
Yeah.....
So then, I kind of just stayed up all night and read all the stories.
They were about people like us, but something really big or ominous— some kind of big hairy animal or event seemed to just barely brush up against them before moving on.
We're getting a drink at his favorite place tonight.

PAM
Cool.

COWORKER
You ever have a ghost come back for you like that?

PAM
Not really. I'm from Central Pennsylvania. Most of my high school ghosts are on their first kid.

COWORKER
Woah.

PAM
Yeah, I guess the big hairy animal didn't pass them by.

COWORKER
That could be nice, though.

PAM
Yeah, maybe....

*(PAM glances again at her phone, puts it away.
COWORKER senses she's totally down.)*

COWORKER
You want me to pump up the music again?

(PAM shrugs.)

Herman's Tour Of Hohenschonhausen

*(The sound of dripping.
HERMAN leads a tour of his old Interrogation Room in
Hohenschonhausen. JULES is his only charge.)*

HERMAN
The Stasi often interrogated me in this room.

(When he turns to face the room, HERMAN can't speak. He stares for a while, then shuffles around the room, hovering his shaky hands over the objects and furniture.

He appears to be vaguely explaining what happened to him there, but he is quite traumatized, and JULES can't make sense of what he's doing. He mumbles to himself in German. JULES leans in to try to understand him, she can't and gets closer.

HERMAN looks at his hands for a long time. They finally stop shaking.)

JULES

Umm—

HERMAN *(abruptly)*

—That is the end.

I'm done. Tour over.

JULES

Oh.

HERMAN

Enjoy the rest of your visit to Hohenschonhausen, prison of high little houses.

(HERMAN turns away. JULES lingers.)

JULES

Nice tour.

So terrible. This is a really terrible place.

I'm very sorry that you...

I know this is embarrassing, but I guess I thought most of this kind of stuff was Nazi-related, but I see this whole GDR time was, uh...rough.... As well.

Don't hear as much about it in the US, you know? Why is that you think?

HERMAN

The Nazis had better outfits.

JULES

Ah. Funny.

...

Can I ask you a question?

(HERMAN looks at her.)

JULES

Why do you work here?

HERMAN

This is my job.

They pay me for being myself.

JULES

You just seem to be in so much pain, you know?

HERMAN

This is my job.

JULES

That's nice. Very German.

I'm German, you know. My Nana grew up here.

Came to America before the War, so there's not much left to, um.

I don't know anything about where I'm from.

HERMAN

That should be a great relief to you.

JULES

No, actually, I feel quite disconnected from the world. Emotionally.

HERMAN

That too should be a great relief to you.

JULES

Uh-huh....

(She approaches HERMAN with an old snapshot.)

JULES

I know this is a crazy question, but um.

(JULES slides the photo across the table to HERMAN.)

JULES

Did you ever know this woman? She was my grandmother.

(HERMAN doesn't look at it, stares at JULES.)

JULES

What?

(HERMAN stares at JULES.)

JULES

Did I say something....?

*(HERMAN pours himself a glass of water. Drinks it all in one pull.
JULES takes back the picture, sits down.)*

JULES

Sorry.

HERMAN

Why would you want this to be yours?
If it's not already in your arms, why would you carry it?

JULES

I hate Germany.

HERMAN

You cannot imagine.

Fiddlesticks

*(Bar music blares. The low roar of a West Village bar filled with men.
It's very dark, except for one wooden corner table, very close to the
audience, maybe. PAM wriggles her way through the crowds.)*

PAM

Excuse me, sorry.
Excuse me.

Excuse me.

Sorry, excuse me. Sorry.

(PAM finally finds the small table and perches on the stool.

OCCUPY BRO appears behind her and covers her eyes with his hands.)

OCCUPY BRO

Guess who!

PAM

Ew, gross, Jesus Christ, mother fucking YUCK.

OCCUPY BRO *(laughing)*

Jesus, sorry.

PAM

Don't do that. It's not funny, that's my face.

OCCUPY BRO

Sorry, yeah. It's Pam, right?

PAM *(recognizing him)*

Oh, hey!

OCCUPY BRO

Hey! You look great.

PAM

Uh...thanks!

OCCUPY BRO

Lionel? From Dickinson?

PAM

Yeah, I remember you were hooking up with my roommate junior year.

OCCUPY BRO

Uh... yeah.

PAM

She's still my roommate, so try not to say anything you're gonna regret.

OCCUPY BRO

No, it's cool. I actually used to hang with Sally down at Occupy before the whole couch fiasco.

PAM

Huh. She never mentioned you.

OCCUPY BRO (*disappointed*)

Oh really?

PAM

That's cool, though, that you do. I admire the cause and all.

OCCUPY BRO

It's pretty amazing, huh? It's cool changing the world.

PAM

Yeah, I guess. Hey, can I ask you kind of a rude question?

OCCUPY BRO

Awesome.

PAM

I was wondering if you Occupy dudes—Do you have jobs now, or what?

OCCUPY BRO

I did before, yeah.

PAM

But like, shitty jobs you hated, right?

OCCUPY BRO

What does it matter?

PAM

I think it matters.

You may recognize me from the Times Square Abercrombie and Fitch.

OCCUPY BRO

Yipes.

PAM

Yeah. What I'm saying is I wouldn't be giving up too much to quit.

OCCUPY BRO

Why do you do it?

PAM

Student loans. Why else?

OCCUPY BRO

I burn those now.

PAM

Really, though?

OCCUPY BRO

Oh, yeah. It's like a ritualized sacrifice. I say a big "fuck it" and light em up.

PAM

You know that's not how those bills work, right?

OCCUPY BRO

Of course, but it feels so good! It's paper with words written to exploit and contain and subjugate you, but it's just paper.

PAM

I remain skeptical.

OCCUPY BRO

That's cool.

PAM

You know, I actually like paying off my loans. It feels productive to chip away at them. Actually, you know, it's one of the only things I pay for that legitimately enhanced my life.

OCCUPY BRO

I've never heard that before.

PAM

It's just, I spent four years—I read so many books and travelled and made all these friends, then these professors were like, taking interest in me. Genuine interest in me. And I compare all that to my life now? I've made one real new friend in two years, and it's only because we share a bathroom— My life doesn't even resemble my life back then.

OCCUPY BRO

But you're still roommates with Sally, right?

PAM

But it's not the same, you know?

OCCUPY BRO

Yeah...

PAM

It sucks.

OCCUPY BRO

Ok, and this is kind of big pic, but if I've learned anything at Occupy, it's that we can't just rely on the world to like, just on its own, become what we want it to become. We've got to determine what matters to us and make demands of it and each other and that takes being honest and direct with one another, you know?

PAM

Yeah, but I did that. I honestly, directly tried to throw a dinner party, and no one came.

OCCUPY BRO

Oh.

PAM

Yeah.

Yeah, so like. Yeah.

I can see why Sally was into you.

OCCUPY BRO

I can see why Sally was into you.

PAM
Wait, what?

OCCUPY BRO
Back in college.

PAM
What?—

OCCUPY BRO
—You know what—Forget I said anything. I actually see my friends, so I need to—

PAM
Wait, did she ever say anything to you, or—?

OCCUPY BRO
—Seriously, they're leaving—good seeing you, bye.

(He's gone.)

PAM
What the fuck?

(She looks around the bar stunned. He's really gone and the crowd is big again and she's feeling a little embarrassed to be alone.

Reflexively, she takes out her phone to look at Facebook, and, projected, we see her scroll through the app.

The room is suddenly silent. A song plays loud and clear: something sweet and comfortable that PAM listened to in college, but sounds a little toothless to her now.

PAM goes to her own profile. She goes to her own photos.

She opens the most recent photo of herself, she's doing the dishes, pushing the camera away. She scrolls back through photos of her time in New York: brunch dishes, city sunsets, PAM's toes on a picnic blanket in the Central Park.

Then suddenly, photos of PAM and SALLY in graduation gowns.

PAM gets up and wanders closer to the projection.

Photos of PAM and SALLY scream-singing a song at a party, PAM and SALLY dressed up for a formal, PAM and SALLY sun-bathing on a rock by the creek, PAM and SALLY making pancakes, PAM and SALLY laughing at

a table in the library during Finals, PAM and SALLY asleep together on a couch in their apartment's common room.

She zooms in on their faces, so close to one another.

PAM turns back to the audience—she has tears in her eyes.)

PAM

Did I miss something?

Can We Go Back?

(The music cuts, and PAM finds SALLY alone in the apartment, eating PAM's base dish.)

SALLY

—Did you just run all the way home? You look like you just gave birth.

PAM

Where's Friedrich?

SALLY

Oh, he got kind of tipsy and started instagramming moody selfies and posting all this weird stuff, so I took his phone for his own good and sent him to bed with a Nalgene—
Did you know he has a blog?

PAM

Um.

Cool.

Is that my base dish?

SALLY

Oh shit dinner party right!

PAM

Forget it. Everyone cancelled.

SALLY

For real? That sucks!

(PAM is looking at SALLY with strange intensity. It is not base-dish related.)

SALLY

Um.

What, uh—

PAM

—I've had a lot on my mind.

SALLY

Yeah, me too. It occurred to me last night that my relationship with dad is kind of primarily financial, so ... yeah there's that.

PAM

Yeah...

Do you mind if I put on some music?

SALLY

I mean...

*(PAM puts the song from the bar on their stereo.
Pause. SALLY listens concerned.)*

SALLY

Are you ok?

*(PAM shakes her head no, then shrugs, kind of.
SALLY gives PAM a hug, PAM tightens and holds it.)*

SALLY

Aw, I'm sorry, what's the matter?

PAM

I don't even know anymore.

(They rock slightly to the music.)

SALLY

I haven't heard this song since college.

....

....

....

Does this count as snuggling?

PAM

I was just thinking at Fiddlesticks of how at school we always used to be together. Do you think we could ever get that back?

SALLY

I guess we grew up.

PAM

But, I mean, did we?

SALLY

You sound like my Dad.

PAM

That's not what I— Look, when we were together back then, I really felt like I was my best self, and I'm wondering if, since then, we just kind of grew apart, or...

SALLY

Oh.

PAM

Do you feel that too?

SALLY

Yeah.

I do, actually.

PAM

Yeah.

(PAM looks into SALLY's eyes.)

SALLY

What?

PAM

Hey, Sal?

SALLY
What?

PAM
Do you remember that time in Senior Week?

SALLY
Senior Week?

(PAM softly takes SALLY's hands and looks in her eyes that way.)

SALLY
Oh...
That was one night, and we were gin drunk.
...
I'm not lesbian.

PAM
I know.

SALLY
...Ok.

*(PAM kisses SALLY lightly. SALLY's eyes remain open.
SALLY begins to lower her guard with the music as PAM rests her
forehead against SALLY's.
SALLY kisses PAM, this time more deeply.
They stop kissing—This was a mistake.
Suddenly, JULES bursts into the apartment with her bags and new Euro
look.
The music stops.)*

Homecoming

(JULES looks at them, dumbfounded. All freeze.)

PAM
Oh, hey—

SALLY
—AND I DON'T DATE ROOMMATES!!!—

PAM
— Fine, take everything back, sorry /

SALLY
/ Not even for you! /

PAM
/ I take everything back, stupiddumb.

(It's all very tense for a second. Then, suddenly, they all decide to completely ignore what just happened. PAM still feels little weird, though. REUNION!)

JULES
I'm back!!

SALLY, PAM, and JULES
Oh my god/welcome home/wow/ you look great/ the place looks amazing/oh my god!!!!

SALLY
Tell us everything.

PAM
Yeah, how was it?

JULES
You should really consider travelling the world sometime.

PAM
Thanks....I hear it's great.

SALLY
Was it great?
Did you finally find out who you really are?!

Does anyone want whiskey?!

JULES

Ok, I was having the most awful trip, right?

PAM

Yeah, we read your blog.

JULES

Aw, you're sweet!

So anyway, I was all depressed, visiting all these prison camps, trying to like, hurt myself with history, like, "Make me feel it!" you know? and I met this guy! At first he was just like everyone else, but then I discovered that when we talked in German he wasn't an asshole at all! It was just a translation thing.

SALLY

Oh, cool.

JULES

So we were talking, and he happened to mention that he had a long-lost son named Dirk. So just for shits I asked, and his last name was Rinchter—

SALLY and PAM

—Oh my god—

JULES

—So I thought, "What if?"

SALLY

Oh my god.

PAM

No way.

SALLY

You found my grandpa in Germany?!

JULES

Yes! The Stasi let him out of prison like 25 years ago!

SALLY
He's still alive?

PAM
Do you have his number or something?!

JULES (*feigning discouragement*)
No....

(She opens the door. HERMAN shuffles in.)

JULES
I have him!

SALLY
Shut the fuckuuuuuuuuuupp.....

PAM
No way.

SALLY
Grandpa?!?! Are you, is that—? Hello?

(HERMAN is looking at the room, all that IKEA.)

PAM
Welcome!hey, welcome!

SALLY
Grandpa?

HERMAN
Die Karlstad....

PAM
Are you ok, Mr Rinchter?

(HERMAN looks at the couch for a long time. From his pocket, he produces the perfect tiny little allen wrench and begins to expertly disassemble the couch.)

SALLY
Um.

PAM
Where did he get that wrench?

JULES
Nice couch, guys.

SALLY
Thanks! It's a Karlstad.

JULES
From IKEA, right? Herman, do you believe this? From *IKEA*!

(HERMAN nods)

SALLY
What?

JULES
Maybe we could get a slip cover, spice up the place a little.

PAM
Is he trying to take it apart?

JULES
It appears....that....yes. I do believe that is what he's doing.

PAM
Excuse me?
Excuse me? Are you taking our couch apart?
Are you taking our couch apart?
How do you say couch in German?

SALLY
I don't know the word for couch.

JULES
It's couch.

PAM
Same as—?

JULES
—Yeah.

PAM
“Das couch, nien!” “Das couch nein!”
He speaks German, right?!

JULES
So this is kind of a crazy coincidence.

PAM
That seems to happen a lot to you.

JULES
I know, right? But I mean the apartment— Herman was just telling me that the Stasi made him manufacture IKEA furniture when he was a political prisoner in the 80’s.

SALLY
Wait, Ikea?

JULES
Yeah, Herman said the GDR used the prison population to fill private manufacturing contracts! Isn’t that crazy?!

SALLY
That’s so fucked.
That’s like a sweatshop. Did you know about this?

JULES
Not specifically. My company focuses more on current slave labor.

SALLY
He’s my grandpa—That’s so totally fucked.

JULES
You ok?

SALLY

Yeah, I just....IKEA shouldn't get away with that.
It's like you'd expect companies like Walmart or Abercrombie to use slave labor, cause, you know ...

(SALLY references PAM.)

SALLY

No offense.

PAM

Um—

SALLY

—But an ethical, Scandinavian company like IKEA?
I feel like they've been lying to me. With their beautiful furniture.
I'm like, wondering about everything.

(SALLY's pulling things out of her pockets.)

Like who's grandpa made this?
Or this?
Or these keys?
Or this credit card?

PAM

Your Dad made that one.

SALLY

I'm being serious. I have no idea where anything comes from.

(JULES takes SALLY by the shoulders, motherly.)

JULES

Once you wake up to the lie of consumer society, it really makes you reconsider everything, doesn't it?

SALLY

That's what they said at Occupy.

JULES

I know, but I mean reconsider in a productive, goal-oriented, less Woodstock-y way. That's what my non-profit's all about.

PAM

Wait, are you about to hire Sally?

JULES

What?—

SALLY

—Oh my god, are you about to hire me?!

I could be like a consultant. I don't know, a cold-case consultant? We're gonna take Ikea down! I can interview or... I can start with Grandpa Herman— I can start on Monday?

(JULES freezes.)

SALLY

What?

Is something wrong?

PAM

Oh, you don't want to hire—

JULES

—No, it's not like that at all, no.

I just can't really hire you right now, Sally.

SALLY

Oh. It's your non-profit, though, right? And, I mean, you're doing almost exactly what I'm talking about so...

JULES

Can we talk about this another time?

(SALLY is clearly disappointed.

HERMAN has finished the disassembly.

HERMAN

Nicht mehr—

[No more—]

*(He opens the window of the apartment.
He picks up a piece of furniture, examines it briefly, then throws it out of
the apartment. He quickly then throws another and another.
In fact, he throws all of the IKEA stuff out the window, completely
cleaning out the apartment. He throws out the company stuff, too.
When he's done, the room looks bare as a jail cell.
The girls are all too stunned to move.)*

HERMAN *(in German)*
Viel besser.
[Much better.]

PAM
Holy shit. Throwing it out the window?! Seriously?

SALLY
What the fuck, Grandpa Sally?

PAM
I don't feel safe here.

JULES
What's gotten into you, Herman?

PAM
I'm calling the police.

JULES
No, just wait, you don't—

PAM
—No! This is crazy! You're supposed to vet people before bringing them over!

HERMAN *(in German)*
Wo ist die Toilette
[Where is the bathroom?]

JULES
Second door on the right.

(HERMAN exits.)

PAM

This is fucking tragic— Our place was so nice.

JULES

Look, I had no idea his PTSD would make him trash our place, I'll have it replaced, ok?

PAM

Seriously?

JULES

Yeah, don't worry.

Hey, you hungry, Pam? I'll GrubHub your Malai Kofta from Spice Road—that's your favorite, right?

PAM

I am actually really hungry, yeah.
Sally ate my base dish.

JULES

Aw. I missed you guys so much!

The trip was kind of an unmitigated disaster for me, but if I learned anything about myself in Europe it's that you're what matters. You two, us three, the people in our lives here now. The present moment is our only shelter from a past of atrocity and a future rife with immense, existential dread.

SALLY

Woah.

JULES

I know, right? Herman has really expanded my horizons with his worldview. I kind of don't give a shit, anymore.

SALLY

Huh.

JULES

Yeah. It feels good.

SALLY

Cool.

PAM

Why didn't you leave a rent check, Jules?

JULES

Um, I'm sorry?

PAM

Your rent. You went to Europe indefinitely to expand your worldview, and I needed your rent check

SALLY

It's cool, though. Friedrich paid her share.

PAM

No, I mean, we didn't know how long she'd be gone, and I don't have thousands of extra dollars sitting in my bank account to, you know, hold me over, so—

JULES

—Oh, I'm so sorry! I could have wired you the money if I had just known you were so hurt. You should have emailed me.

PAM

I shouldn't have to beg you to emergency-wire your rent! It's not fair to me that you like, vanish without paying rent.

JULES

Um, I didn't vanish, you saw my post—

PAM

—But I mean, it doesn't even occur to you to think of anyone else! You just do whatever you want!

JULES

Ok, I'm sensing a little animosity here, and I want to understand why I'm sensing that you feel that.

PAM

Just please. I'm sick of your therapist bullshit, for real. I like you, but just stop.

JULES

Excuse me?

PAM

All of this, the way you treat Sally ,me—

JULES

—I have no idea what you're even talking about right now—

PAM

—You're condescending! You're condescending, and I don't need you to buy me Indian Food. You're just like, constantly calling me poor and I'm kind of sick of it.

JULES

Hey, Pam? You may be hangry, but you're not poor.

PAM

What do you know about—

JULES

—You live in New York City. How many poor people get a 200 buck haircut?

PAM

You don't know anything about me! I'm in serious debt—

JULES

—You're in debt because you have an elite education and now you refuse to translate it into a legitimate career!

PAM

Oh, right!

JULES

It's just a fact, Pam, sorry!

(HERMAN enters unnoticed.)

SALLY

This is getting mean, guys—

PAM

—Fuck your shit, Jules! Not everybody's daddy can drop half a mill of seed money on a bullshit humanitarian company.

JULES

I don't need to justify myself to you.

You're just trying to shame me because you sell the ugly clothes to tourists and you wage proxy wars about the bathroom and you bitch Bitch BITCH and that's why Lunch Date is Secret Lunch Date to us—Cry about it.

PAM

I cry when I'm angry. Fuck you—

SALLY

—PLEASE STOP FIGHTING!!!

PAM

Just so you know, Sally? She doesn't respect you.

(PAM exits.

A long silence.

NIETZSCHE enters with his empty Nalgene.)

NIETZSCHE

Herman?!?!?

HERMAN

... Friedrich?

(HERMAN and NIETZSCHE run to each other, crying with joy.)

SALLY *(with German pronunciation)*

Friedrich?

JULES

Who's that guy?

SALLY
That's Friedrich your sublet.

JULES
Oh.
Did that old man sleep in my bed?

SALLY
...

JULES
I guess they know each other from somewhere.
I like his mustache.

(JULES and SALLY look at the old men mumbling, hugging each other joyfully. This is completely baffling.)

SALLY
I feel really bad.
That was really mean, and— You were really mean.

JULES
In the past, Sal. Let it go.
Seriously, this is weird—Herman: What's going on here?

HERMAN
Er ist mein ältester Freund!
[He is my oldest friend!]

JULES
From like, Germany?

HERMAN
Ya!

JULES
That is the craziest shit, do you believe that, Sal?

SALLY
Yeah....

Why don't you want to hire me?

JULES
It's not that I—

SALLY
—Really, though. You can tell me the truth.

JULES
Sally? I believe in you. The real question is: do you?

SALLY
What?

JULES
Do you believe in you?

SALLY
I think so. Usually.
What does this, uh—

JULES
—You know what? It's been a tough night, I'm jetlagged as shit—Does anyone want ice?

*(HERMAN and NIETZSCHE are good.
JULES exits.
Beat.)*

HERMAN
Excuse me, Sally.

SALLY
Oh, you do speak English.

HERMAN
May I ask you a question?

SALLY
I mean, yeah.

HERMAN

Are you related to one another?

SALLY

Me and, uh...

HERMAN

Them, yes. I met you only minutes ago, I know, but I'm wondering why you, uh. Why this?

(gestures vaguely as if to say, "You all")

Like this?

(gestures vaguely as if to say, "Here")

It takes a lot, ya? To fight like this.

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

Herman, bitte, sie sind noch jung und denken, sie brauchen einander.

[Herman please, they're young. They think they need each other.]

SALLY

Hey, English—

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

—Sie werden erwachsen.

[They are growing up.]

HERMAN

All I mean to say is you're not prisoners to one another.

SALLY

Yeah.

(JULES comes back with the drinks. Thanks you's and danke's)

JULES

New friends and old, cheers.

SALLY

I'm actually really tired—

(PAM bursts into the living room with a huge loaded backpack and holds up the lease to the apartment.)

JULES
Is that our lease?

PAM
This is our lease.
Fuck it.

*(PAM lights the lease on fire, drops it to the floor.
PAM sarcastically double-cheek-kisses shocked JULES, SOHO-style and gives her the finger on the way out.
JULES stands stunned, then shouts after her.)*

JULES
Hey, that's not how leases work, asshole!
Who owes who money now, huh?! Hope you like getting sued!
What a child—Can you fucking believe that, Sally?

(SALLY's gone.)

JULES
Sally?

HERMAN
She went to bed.

JULES
Oh.
Whatever, good night.

(JULES goes to bed, leaving the two men.)

I'm Sorry

(NIETZSCHE and HERMAN, alone again, sip their drinks.)

HERMAN (*in German*)
Jung zu sein, ja?
[To be young, yes?]

NIETZSCHE (*in German*)
“Geh in dein Zimmer!”
[“Go to your room!”]

HERMAN
Do you still speak English?

NIETZSCHE
Of course.

HERMAN
Sly old dog.

NIETZSCHE
“To find everything profound—That is an inconvenient trait.”

HERMAN
I’m sorry about your furniture.

NIETZSCHE
It’s all right.

HERMAN
I didn’t know it was yours, I just saw it, and, well... You understand.

NIETZSCHE
Of course.
I’m actually quite fond of the store now. Not sure why.

HERMAN
Stockholm syndrome.
I have missed you, friend.

(They sip their drinks.)

NIETZSCHE
Herman?

HERMAN

Yes?

NIETZSCHE

Was it because of me that they—?

HERMAN

—Of course it was because of you.

NIETZSCHE

Ah...

HERMAN

It was an honest mistake.

NIETZSCHE

I knew it. I knew I'd left it out. So foolish.

(beat)

Why didn't they take me, though?

HERMAN

I took the blame for your writing, of course.

NIETZSCHE

Herman—

HERMAN

—They were happy to believe me! Besides, I had so much more life behind me than you, knew more people. You were a good worker for them.

NIETZSCHE

Where'd you end up then?

HERMAN

Hohenschonhausen.

NIETZSCHE

Oh.

HERMAN

It was very nasty business. Every day, “Do you know why you’re here, do you know why you’re here?” It was like one of your essays, ya? Oh—Are you still writing?

NIETZSCHE

Not since, no.

HERMAN

Shame.

You know, for years now, I have led American tourists through my old cells, telling ghost stories like a politician or a college professor. Like you! Ha!

NIETZSCHE

Ha, yes.

I was so afraid to look for you after.

HERMAN

Old men and their regrets! Look at us now, though – can you believe it?

(SALLY enters.)

SALLY

Hey.

I’m too mad to sleep.

I don’t know if I should feel dumped or abandoned or like, graduated.

It’s weird.

NIETZSCHE *(in German)*

Es scheint nur alles sehr schlecht.

Das stimmt aber nicht.

[It seems very bad now. It is not.]

SALLY

Thanks, Friedrich.

I don’t think I caught that, but I can tell it was nice.

(SALLY really observes HERMAN for the first time: this is him.)

SALLY

You know I always thought you were dead? S’what Dad told me at least.

HERMAN
Oh really?

SALLY
Yeah.
It's ok, though.

(HERMAN takes SALLY's hand.)

HERMAN
Sally?

SALLY
Yeah?

HERMAN
Can you help me with something?

SALLY
Sure.

HERMAN
I would like to see my son.
Is that possible?

SALLY
Sure, yeah.
Of course.
He's in Connecticut, though.

HERMAN
Is that very far?

SALLY
To you? Probably not very far at all.

Stamford, Connecticut

(BBC plays on the radio while, projected, we see the security video suite of DIRK's sprawling home in CT. The time stamp reads 4:15am, and it's still basically night.

The video shows a view of the garage from the outside and holds for a few seconds, then clips to a view of the inside of the garage and its several cars. Clips to the back garden gate to the pool in the back yard to a view of the front driveway to a view of the front door.

This suite of videos repeats again (now with the timestamp 4:16am) until in the view of the front driveway, we see a cab pulling up. Before we can see who's in the cab, the view cuts to the front door again, then on.

DIRK wanders into the kitchen of his sprawling Stamford home. He wears a shirt, tie and blazer, but carries his suit pants on a hanger. He hangs them on a door handle, pours himself a mug off coffee, and reads his a newspaper on his ipad.

SALLY's voice calls from outside the room.)

SALLY (outside)

Dad? DAD?!

(SALLY enters.)

SALLY

Hey, Dad. Ohmygod—

DIRK

—What are you doing here?!

SALLY

I grew up here!

DIRK

It's 4 AM! How did you even get here—

SALLY

—I took the train, God— Are you nude?!

DIRK

Of course, I'm not nude. You saw me already.

SALLY

I don't know, I thought maybe my imagination traumatically photoshopped that weird outfit on you.

DIRK

It's not weird; it's just not finished.

SALLY

Seriously, why aren't you wearing pants?!

DIRK

I don't have to explain myself to you.
So what brings you to Connecticut—Is it Christmas already?

SALLY

No... I've had a really intense night.
Things went all Real World Seattle in our apartment, and you know what? Let's not talk about it.

DIRK

What about Seattle?

SALLY

Actually, Dad, hang on. I think maybe you should sit down.

DIRK

Never.

SALLY

Whatever, fine.
Ok.

(Beat)

I met your father tonight.

DIRK

My father?

SALLY

Yes.

(Beat)

DIRK
My father?

SALLY
Yeah, Dad, he's—

DIRK
—My father's dead.

SALLY
Um...

(HERMAN enters with NIETZSCHE following.)

DIRK
Oh...

(HERMAN approaches DIRK.)

DIRK *(German)*
Hallo, Papa.

HERMAN *(English)*
Hello, Dirk.

(short pause)

DIRK
Would you like a glass of water?

HERMAN
That won't be necessary. This is my travelling companion, Friedrich.

DIRK
Hello.

HERMAN
He is my dearest friend.

DIRK

Ah, well.

It is good to see you.

HERMAN

And you. You look well.

(DIRK feels very uncomfortable. Resumes dressing for work.)

DIRK

So I am wondering something....

Where have you been?

HERMAN

I went to the wrong meeting.

DIRK

The wrong meeting?

HERMAN

Yeah, I had no idea! I found out much later—years—that I had a friend who was undercover, and that was it. They took me, that's all—

DIRK

—No, no no. I think you miss understand me: Where have you been?

The wall has been down for twenty years and now is when you decide to find me?

HERMAN

I tried to find you, I googled you.

DIRK

You googled me.

HERMAN

Yes, I—

DIRK

—Did it ever occur to you to explore other avenues of inquiry?

Did it never occur to you to maybe ask around, maybe hire someone professional to help you? You gave up at google?

SALLY

Dad, it's not his fault you're secretive.

DIRK

No, no, no. You are naïve Sally.

He's not a fool. If he wanted to find me, he would have found me.

The question is why has he decided to find me now?

What? Do you need a little money, hmm? Maybe you're sick, looking for a little kidney surgery, eh? Or maybe you have a gambling debt, or, or, or perhaps—ah this is it! You want to atone for your sins! You want to get to know your granddaughter before you croak and vanish into dust and someone wipes you off their radiator with a paper towel, hmm?

HERMAN

Please don't be angry with me.

DIRK

I'm not angry with you.

SALLY

He is.

DIRK

Be quiet Sally.

HERMAN

Dirk, please.

DIRK

You're too late.

What good is a father to me now? You're too late for me, too late for Sally—See? Even Sally grew up without you.

HERMAN

I can see that.

DIRK

So what are you even doing here? What do you want from us?

HERMAN

Nothing.

I want nothing from you.

DIRK

Hm.

HERMAN

I just want you to know that I'm still alive.

DIRK

Ah. Well, I can see that. Call them a cab, Sally.

*(DIRK leaves, to go smoke on the back Veranda.
A long pause.)*

HERMAN

Well.

*(NIETZSCHE puts a hand on HERMAN's shoulder and hugs him.
SALLY stands back, uncomfortably.)*

HERMAN

Well, then.

SALLY

I'm so sorry. I really thought he'd be happy to see you.

Our relationship's not, you know, great.

Clearly.

HERMAN

It's ok. I'm glad I came.

You know, I was just like him.

SALLY

Really?

HERMAN

Ya. It's been a long century.

SALLY
Sounds like it.

HERMAN
Yeah, well...
Friedrich is going to show me New York's sites and monuments before I go back.
Here is my blog; I want you to follow me.

SALLY
Ohmygod, you have a blog?

HERMAN
Just little things, videos. It's nice. Like a scrapbook, but I share it with other people.
Like you.

(SALLY smiles.)

HERMAN
You've grown into a fine young woman, Sally. Goodbye for now.

*(HERMAN and NIETZSCHE are gone.
SALLY watches her father smoke on the surveillance screen.
He's sitting on a little wall in the backyard.
She goes out to see him.)*

SALLY
Hey, Dad?

DIRK
Oh, have you come to scold me? Have I ruined your plans for a triumphant reunion?

SALLY
No...

DIRK
Maybe someday, you see, maybe I will come to you in need.

SALLY
That might be nice, actually.

DIRK

That's what you think now, yeah sure.
You'll see. When I'm old, you'll hate me. Just wait.

SALLY

I'm not gonna be anything like you, so you may as well get used to it.

DIRK

Ha!

SALLY

I'm just saying.
Nothing personal.

DIRK

Of course.

(DIRK smokes.)

SALLY

Are you ok?

DIRK

A meeting. Isn't it ridiculous?
You can see why I worried about you and the anarchists, eh? One wrong meeting and you're gone. Maybe you misunderstand who you're talking to, the kind of place you live? – Did you read about the Homeland Security in the paper yesterday? They have operatives embedded in the Occupy!

SALLY

For real?

DIRK

Oh yeah. You say one wrong thing to the wrong person? Poof—jail, terrorist, CNN.

SALLY

I had no idea, actually.
They all seemed cool to me.

DIRK

Yeah, I bet.

You can see why I worry about you.

SALLY
Yeah, I know.

DIRK
Good.

(beat.)

SALLY
Hey Dad?

DIRK
Yeah?

SALLY
I need another couch.

(short pause)

DIRK
Ha.
No.

(DIRK gives her his cigarette.)

DIRK
Here, finish it.

SALLY
I don't get one of my own?

DIRK
Take it.

(SALLY takes the cigarette. DIRK awkwardly pats her shoulder, squeezes it. He almost says something. SALLY takes his hand on her shoulder and inhales a long drag on his cigarette.)

SALLY
Thanks, Dad.

The Ferry, The Statue

*(Shaky phone video of HERMAN on the Staten Island Ferry, wearing his new Abercrombie and Fitch outfit.
It's very windy, NIETZSCHE gives directions in German about where HERMAN should stand, pose.)*

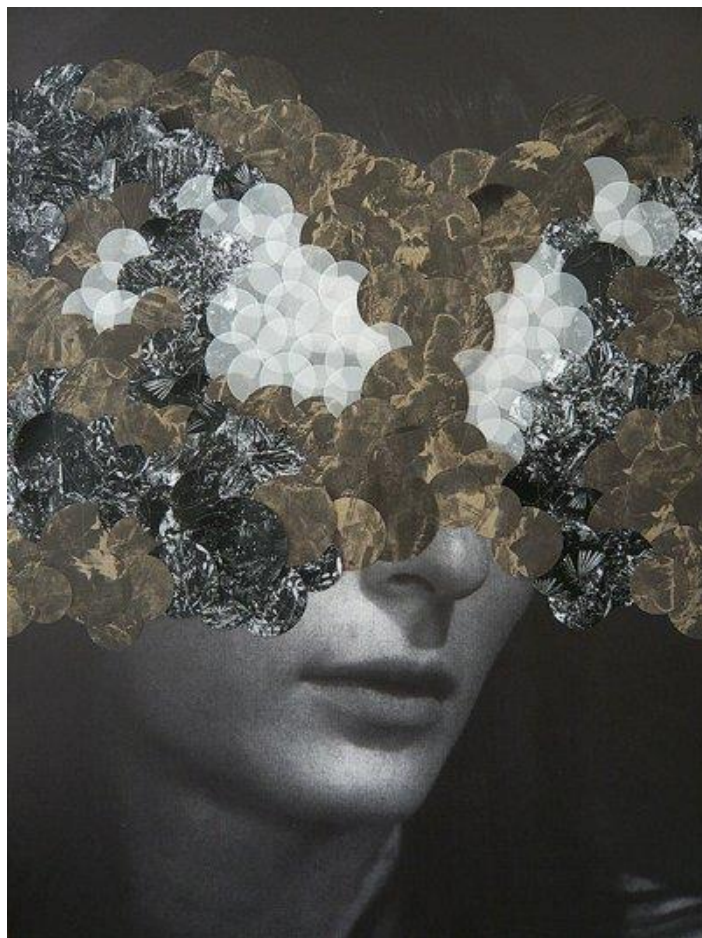
HERMAN
She looks like Sally, ya? Here I am with my granddaughter—Ha!

*(NIETZSCHE laughs and waves.
Suddenly, some people push between them to get a better view of the statue.)*

NIETZSCHE
Ach!

*(We see HERMAN jump forward, just as someone bumps the camera out of NIETZSCHE's hand.
It lands in the water, floating for a moment. We see the clouds in the sky and hear the men laugh and laugh before the phone finally sinks into the dark of the Hudson Bay.)*

End of Play.



Lushly
by Patrick Shaw

Lushly

by Patrick Shaw

Characters:

- DEB F, 40's. Brilliant, beautiful woman. The kind of person who could be anything.
- AARON M, 17. Developed a mannish body early and has a warm magnetic quality even when he's clumsy.
- PETER M, 40's. Shorter than DEB and AARON, but compensates through self-conscious masculinity as certain aging men do.
- JACKIE F, 15. Poised, sharp. Will be very successful if she can just make it to 25.

Setting:

Outside Pittsburgh
Today.

Notes on Style:

A few of the characters' identities and life circumstances shift dramatically throughout the play, but I believe the heart of each character remains consistent, or at least *persistent*. The cost of previous scenes should accumulate in these people so that in the end, even though the characters don't remember the past scene's events, those events have changed them somehow. When possible, I would encourage the director to reuse staging as scenes progress.

Everything takes place in this specific house, all of it at night. The shifts are subtle and shouldn't imply passage of time or shift of location. The cricket sounds are not merely atmospheric and should persist throughout the play, with indicated interruptions. When they die out and the shadows in the room shift, the characters are in a liminal, suspended space. Sometimes some characters can't see or hear the others. Some can, but don't recognize the others yet. I hope these transitions can be light, clear, and strange.

Lushly
by Patrick Shaw

*(It's the middle of the night. The sound of crickets.
DEB stands in the center of a dark living room, alert and still, holding a
screwdriver at her side.
The sound of an orchestra tuning rises to a blaring volume, drowning out
the crickets. The word "LUSHLY" flickers huge and gold in the room.
The sound of the orchestra fades further and further away.
Suddenly, the word and orchestra cut out. Silence. The shadows in the
room shift, subtly. The humming sound of crickets return and fill the
silence.
DEB senses this change, becomes frightened, clutches her screwdriver,
and hides perched in the corner of the dark, hot room, breathing hard.
We hear someone fiddling with keys to the front door. AARON enters,
drops his backpack, trombone case, and turns on the lights.)*

DEB
He's coming back, shut the door —

AARON
—JESUS!

DEB
Is that you Aaron Dalton—?

AARON
—How did you get *in* here?!

(DEB taps window with the screwdriver.)

DEB
—Don't worry, I fixed it.
I didn't know who I could go to, so I called you, but your phone's not working. I called
and I called, and then I thought you were screening me, so I came over, and I saw the
windows were dark, so I thought you deliberately closed the blinds to trick me, so I
knocked and I knocked, and no one answered, so I *knew* you were just waiting for me to
give up and go away, so I popped the screen and let myself in. You weren't home.
Is your phone not working or are you screening me?

AARON
You're supposed to be in—

DEB
—It's called bail, Aaron.

AARON
Please put the screwdriver down.

DEB
What if I need it?

AARON
What could you possibly need it for?

DEB
Protection? Take your clothes off.

AARON
Um, no.

DEB
Take your coat off and make yourself comfortable.

AARON
You can't be here.

DEB
Why? You expecting your girlfriend?

AARON
Stop. Mrs. Davis, you're like, legally a predator now, so you can't—

DEB
—*CALL ME THAT AGAIN!*

AARON
A predator?—

DEB
—NO, *Aaron*. You will Use. My. Name. Say it.

AARON

...

I don't want to.

DEB

Close your eyes, and say it like you say it.

AARON

No.

DEB

Please?

(short pause)

AARON

Deborah—

DEB

—Ahhh. Close your eyes. Come on, relax. Deborahhh—

AARON

—Deborahhh

DEB *(approaching him)*

That's much better.

Stop squirming. Listen to me.

(Whispering in his ear)

How was school today?

AARON

My mom's gonna be home soon.

DEB

Don't lie to me, sweetie.

AARON

I'm not lying.

DEB

I can read your family white board. She's working graveyard. You're lying.

AARON
School was good—

DEB
—Shut up, I need you so fucking bad right now.

AARON
I said school was good—

DEB
—Make me feel safe again, baby.

AARON
I'm like 17, Deb. I can't protect you from anything.

DEB
Sometimes you don't get to choose. You're not driving, baby. You're just there next to me, and there's no getting away, and I don't mean to threaten you or anything, but seriously. When I was your age, I knew better than to look around and think I could get away from what I am

AARON
What am I?

DEB
What *are* you?
Fuck you.

AARON
Are you still trying to seduce me?

DEB
I lost my virginity at summer camp, and it fucking sucked. It was wrong and sticky, and sticks and things scratched my back up, and the girls made fun of me in my bathing suit, but I couldn't tell and who gives a shit anyway - I've still got blood running in my wrists. Car's still running like, like, like, so why don't you just liberate yourself from that t-shirt and—

AARON
—*Please*. It's not right anymore.

DEB
Is that you, Aaron Dalton?

AARON

It's not right. Stop.

DEB

You're acting very...moral. I don't find it attractive.

AARON

Sorry.

You lost your virginity at summer camp?

DEB

Yes, it was traumatic.

AARON

You went to summer camp?

DEB

Listen to me very carefully: When someone needs someone, you give it to them. That's how, um, that's the way we're evolved to treat one another.

AARON

You don't need me.

DEB

You don't know what need is. Have you ever blown out a tire on your car?

AARON

No.

DEB

Have you ever held the hand of someone dying?

AARON

No.

DEB

Has anyone ever tried to kill you?

AARON

Not yet, no.

DEB

Have you even almost died yet?

AARON

Actually, yes.

My heart didn't work right when I was born so they had to open me up, and I almost drowned in my own blood on the operating table, I was leaking everywhere— something about being premature, and I actually flat lined for a second there—

DEB

—Jesus—

AARON

—Yeah, but they acted, like, really quickly and got me through. Should've died. I was a miracle baby.

DEB (*sincere*)

Wow.

AARON

Yeah, my mom was really scared.

DEB

I can imagine.

AARON

I'm ok now.

DEB

But do you remember that?

AARON

I was a baby.

DEB

Yeah, then, it doesn't count.

AARON

Of course, it counts.

DEB

It's the fear I'm talking about. Fear doesn't count if you can't remember it.

AARON

Is this some kind of competition?

DEB

Yes

....

I don't know, no.

Have you kissed another girl since me?

AARON

Do you want some popcorn?

DEB

It's not a competition anymore.

AARON

I know, I'm offering to make you some popcorn?

DEB

...

Yes. Like I like it.

(AARON leaves the room. Microwave beeps in the kitchen. DEB shakes out her nerves. AARON returns.)

AARON

It's gonna be a few minutes on the popcorn.

DEB

I'm aware.

AARON

Yeah.

(Pause)

So since you paid your bail, does that mean you might be able to like, get off?

DEB

No, I'm definitely going to jail.

AARON

Oh.

DEB

Bail doesn't work that way.

AARON

That sucks.

DEB

It does.

AARON

Yeah. How long, you think?

DEB

Why are you asking so many questions? Don't all the tough kids bully you about this stuff already?

AARON

Nobody knows, actually.

DEB

Everybody knows. The *internet* knows.

AARON

No one knows that it's *me* – Confidentiality agreements. Everyone thinks it was Mike Wolfbrendt, and the more he denies it, the more they're all sure it was him.

DEB

Mike *Wolfbrendt*? *Alto sax* Mike Wolfbrendt?

AARON

I know, right? But they can think whatever they want as long as I'm not on the ballot.

DEB

What's that supposed to mean?

AARON

What?

DEB

You ashamed of me?

AARON

That's not—

DEB

—I know. But are you?— I didn't ask that.
So you're saying you're completely off the hook then.

AARON

I know, right? I'm the *victim*.

DEB

Good for you. Miracle baby.

AARON

I don't know why I told you—

DEB

—Don't be so modest. People love miracles. If you find another one of those lying around, send it my way.

AARON

Oh my god, I wanted to tell you - I totally killed my callbacks!

DEB

You auditioned already?

AARON

I met Donald at Peabody!

DEB

Did you say hi for me? / What'd you end up playing?!

AARON

No, I forgot, / but I played almost everything we worked on!

DEB

I can't believe you auditioned already. I am so—

AARON

—Donald really drilled me on the Hindemith, but overall he seemed happy. /

DEB

/ I am so proud of you. /

AARON

/ Then, they sent me out for like half an hour and brought me back /

DEB

/ I am so proud of you /

AARON

/ And I was like totally alone, no other kids left with me, so I was, like, *freaking out*, right? /

DEB

/ I am so proud of you. /

AARON

/ And they said they'd be in touch, but when I was walking out, I swear Greta Johansson *winked* at me!

DEB (*almost overwhelmed*)

I am *so* proud of you!

AARON

Are you really?

DEB

Really what?

AARON

Proud of me

(*DEB is. He sees she is.*)

AARON

Can I ask you a question?

(*DEB shrugs.*)

AARON

Why you don't just divorce him?

DEB

Our marriage is very difficult, Aaron. He's a hero.

AARON

I guess so.

DEB

Serving his country. People my age don't dump heroes.
It's none of your fucking business anyway.

AARON

Sorry.

DEB

This is not how I imagined my life would end up.

AARON

Me neither.

DEB

...
You promised me popcorn.

(AARON exits.)

AARON *(in the kitchen)*

I'm not skimping on the basil either.

(AARON enters with a bowl of popcorn. AARON sits on the couch, DEB joins him, and they eat the popcorn for a few moments.)

DEB

This is really good.

AARON

I know, right?

DEB

Yeah. I love popcorn.

AARON

Yeah.

DEB

You know what? I like, uh. Like, uh. I wanna...

(DEB gets up, closes her eyes, and slow-grooves to the music in her head. Maybe she takes the popcorn with her. It's quite lovely and captivating. AARON watches her.)

DEB
Will you dance with me?

AARON
There's no music, Deb.

DEB
Come closer and maybe you'll hear it.
You scared of me?

AARON
No.

DEB
Then, what's the matter? Do you like my dancing? You *look* like you like my dancing.

AARON
You lost a lot of weight.

DEB (*dancing closer to him*)
Sweet talker. Stress does wonders. Did you miss me?

AARON (*not retreating*)
I don't know what to do anymore.

DEB
Get used to it.

(She dances closer to him.)

DEB
Hey.
....Hey.

AARON
What?

DEB
Hey.

Look at my body and tell me what you want from me. I won't give you anything extra.

AARON

I...

DEB

Tell me what you miss.

AARON

I miss...

DEB

Tell me.

AARON

I miss... the smell of your chest.

DEB

Yeah?

AARON

And the muscle in your hands. Your wrists.

DEB

Mmmm. You missed a woman, baby. The press of my thighs?

AARON

Taste of your skin.

DEB

I'm a grown woman, did you miss that? Tell me what you want.

AARON

I want...

DEB

Tell me what you want, Aaron.

AARON

I want everything.

DEB

You want fucking everything?

AARON

I want everything.

DEB *(kissing his neck.)*

Then, why don't you do something about it, love?

Don't fuck with regret. People don't always come back.

AARON

I know, I just—

DEB

—You just what, love?

AARON

I think I'm in love with Jackie.

(pause)

DEB

I see.

Go get your trombone.

(AARON does so reluctantly. He assembles his trombone like he's undressing. He stands with his horn.)

AARON

I feel really guilty.

DEB

I know, hon. Stop talking.

AARON

...

I want to be a good person.

DEB

You are, baby.

(AARON positions his music stand. DEB stands over him, watching. Both are tense, professional.)

DEB

Give me the long tones, please.

(She watches him play the Remington long-tones at the beginning of Arban's for Trombone. It's incredibly dull, but he plays it well. AARON finishes and looks up at her, looking at him. DEB offers no approval, stands slightly behind him. He licks his lips.)

DEB

You're not practicing.

AARON

Yes, I am—

DEB

—You're not practicing, *and* you're lying to me again.

AARON

Relax, I already auditioned.

DEB

So you can slack now? No. You're not good enough to slack: you're pitchy and your breath—

AARON

—My *breath*—?

DEB

—Your breath, Aaron.

Scales now, please. F sharp Major.

(She snaps the tempo she wants. He does the F# Major. The shadows shift. The sound of crickets die out to silence. During this, PETER enters, takes keys out of the door. DEB stands across from him, observing. PETER slams the door behind him, DEB stops AARON. PETER turns off the porch light off. PETER seems completely detached and follows DEB closely behind her, like he's trying to see through her eyes. PETER is invisible to both AARON and DEB, but DEB senses him like a pressure change. Her speech becomes increasingly urgent, then frenetic during the following.)

DEB

—Excuse me, please stop. Do you, you, do you feel weird, Aaron?

AARON

Weird how?

DEB

Little —uh— bubbles in your spine, like—

AARON

—No.

DEB

Me neither. Ok.

AARON

Why'd you stop me?

DEB

Scales sucked, and you know it. Get the metronome?

AARON

I don't need the metronome. Are you ok?

DEB

It's ok.

Prove you don't need it.

Prove it.

Prove it to me, yeah.

(DEB sits next to him, slides her hand between his leg with one hand and lets PETER kneel and hold the other.)

DEB

Now, play it again. Molto legato now, like I like it. Soft edges

(AARON plays. He sweats, closes his eyes and fills out his tone. PETER puts his ear to DEB's hand as though he thinks the music is coming from it.)

DEB *(while he plays)*

Much, um. Yes, but watch your embouchure. It's affecting your tonguing.

But that's much, much better. Now, molto *molto* legato. Lushly, very lushly. Like you're um. Like you....

(When AARON finishes, he empties his spit valve and looks to DEB, satisfied. Her mind wanders to AARON's mouth. PETER looks at AARON's mouth, too. Something feels wrong here. They look for a long time.)

AARON
I can play—

DEB *(still distracted, half to herself)*
—But more, yes, lushly. LushlyLushlyLushlyLushly.....

AARON
—I'll play it. Like you like it.

DEB
Play it like I. Like I love you, but I don't actually, really—

AARON
—I don't either, no, sooooo....

PETER
This him, Deb?

DEB *(beginning to panic)*
Did you know that when I'm asleep we're always the same age? And I think out loud to myself, I think /

(PETER puts both his hands powerfully on AARON's shoulders. AARON is dreamily aware of him now.)

PETER
/ This you're little cub? /

DEB
/ I think we should just take my car, and run way out West to Phoenix or the Res or something, and we'd teach the children how to be music.

PETER
All these goddamn lessons.

AARON (*to Peter*)
Who are you? How'd you—

DEB
—Have you ever been? I hear the people are so nice, we could hide on the Reservation.
And, And /

AARON (*to PETER*)
/ How'd you get in here? /

PETER
/ All week long. Teach, teach, teach. /

DEB
/ Do you think they want to learn trombone? We could do so much good for a change.
No one'd care that you're with me. We'd have a little place that costs nothing, and just
enjoy ourselves, just slather it on and on. No one needing anything anything from us.
Forget we were ever—Uh. Uh—

PETER
—Deborahhh.

*(She stops. DEB seems stuck in time.
The shadows shift. The sound of crickets return.
She's back, looking at PETER.
PETER tosses the keys back to AARON. AARON left his keys in the door.)*

PETER (*to AARON*)
Hello.

AARON
Hey.

PETER
Not safe. Leavin' them in the door.

AARON
Who me?

PETER
Hello, Deborah.

DEB

Hi, Peter.

PETER

You give all the boys this kinda lesson, Deb? Three consecutive days, this kinda lesson? I've been researching.

(to AARON)

Hey, how old are you anyway?

AARON *(starting to leave)*

Look, no it's cool, I'll just—

(PETER blocks his path.)

PETER

Don't get the wrong idea, bro. I love you.

DEB

Leave him alone, Peter—

PETER

—I feel you.

You're a young man, I can see that. I understand that. Your little jaw, the shape of your bones, the way you left your keys precariously in the lock—I hear it, I feel it, I sense it, that young cub energy poppin', radiatin' off you.

AARON

Who're you?

PETER

It doesn't matter. Where's your mom at?

AARON

...

I don't know.

PETER

Don't you got a white board or something?

AARON

I don't know.

PETER
She got hobbies or something?

AARON
No.

PETER
Oh, she got a job then –Think maybe she’s an exotic dancer? Coal miner maybe?

AARON
She’s a nurse.

PETER
So you *do* know where your mom’s at?

AARON
Yeah.

PETER
Don’t got no Dad around either, huh?

AARON
She works a lot.

PETER
I’m just putting pieces together.

AARON
I’m sorry?

PETER
Listen, I’m not gonna hurt you. You gotta understand that, son.

AARON
O....k.

PETER
Let’s three sit.

*(PETER sets out a chair for AARON, one for DEB, one for himself.
Gestures to them. They sit reluctantly.)*

PETER

You know, when I was like you, I didn't know how to buy clothes that fit me. I didn't know how to cut my hair or grow a beard to trim like so. I was very worried about my appearance, the way my hair looked, I had a nail thing. Sometimes I'd wear winter stocking caps in the morning because I believed they made the do sit like— you know, the shape. Do you see what I'm saying?

(AARON *does not.*)

PETER

I'm saying somebody needs to teach you how to be a man, son.

AARON

Um. I've got homework—

PETER

—*Sit down.* Thank you for your cooperation. Observe, son.

Now, Deb, I've been back in country a few months now. I seem to have been wrong about certain things, the *duration* and *severity* of certain things. But I am here, I love and support you, and we're gonna have ourselves a talk. Is there something you want to tell me?

DEB

Not now, please—

PETER

—Tough crap.

DEB

Stop it—

PETER

—Now, you listen to me. You made me follow and find you here with your little wet-dick cub, so you've already surrendered your control over this situation.

Sit down.

This is marriage, Aaron. Communication is one of the three C's.

DEB

Take me home.

PETER

Tell me what you gotta tell me.

AARON
She doesn't know what—

(PETER yanks AARON's chair out from under him. Replaces it.)

PETER
Sit down, son.

(AARON sits, subdued.)

DEB
Honey, please, I...

(PETER shakes his head.)

DEB
Fine. I've been unfaithful—

PETER
—Ok. I knew that.

DEB
What do you want to know?

PETER
I don't uh...

DEB *(confused)*
I'm sorry?

PETER
Oh, that would be good.

DEB
And I want to ask you to forgive me please.

PETER
Ok.

DEB
... Do you forgive me please?

PETER

Yes. I love and forgive you. What else?

DEB

Um. I'll never do it again?

PETER

I know, but this is not enough, honey. Boy's gotta learn how to love in more than one sentence. We ain't hallmark over here.

DEB

It was a long tour.

PETER

Tell me how you missed me.

DEB

I missed—

PETER

—You missed *how*. Help me *see* it.

DEB

Ok. Fine.

Sometimes, all by myself in the middle of the night, I'd drink way way too much and drive out to the IHOP by New Castle. I love pancakes—you know, I love pancakes—but instead of the regular maple syrup I love, I'd pour the blueberry syrup all over the stack because I hate the blueberry syrup. IHOP gives you those kind of choices. It wasn't just IHOP, I did it everywhere. Cause I missed you.

PETER

You missed a man, baby.

DEB

Um, sure.

PETER

You missed your man.

DEB

I missed our dinners and falling asleep with you cause I always knew you'd turn off the TV. I missed—

PETER
—You missed—

DEB
—I missed—

PETER
—I missed you, too. Thank you.
I like your hair change, by the way. Looks good.

DEB
I know, right?

(PETER takes her hand. DEB smiles.)

PETER
This is nice.

(DEB puts her head between her knees like she's trying to keep from fainting. PETER continues as though he doesn't notice.)

PETER
You see, son? This takes practice. Life can be a trial, but we're back together and one again. You noticed that I was kind and patient with her, and I listened to her pour her heart out about challenges and other things between us. If you love her, you gotta go all the way, even if she's carnal with her band geek cub out of loneliness. And you gotta *accept* what you're getting. Own up and *learn* that.

AARON
...Ok?

PETER
Ok?

AARON
Yeah, I got it.

DEB
Ok. I feel kind of dizzy.

PETER
I'm starving too. Big time hunger town.

DEB
I'll go whip something up.

PETER
You got food in there?

(AARON shrugs.)

DEB
Whip it on up.

(DEB exits into the kitchen. PETER studies AARON.)

PETER
I quit my job at the Loews earlier this week. Didn't have the heart to tell Deb yet. They got all different guys working kitchen and bathroom, and I just fucking hated 'em, so I quit. So when she was thinking I was at work, I was following her around town all week. I figured it was fishy she'd teach you three nights in a row. Don't you think? Sometimes you gotta just stand up and make things right? Hell if we'll make rent. You ever get a job? I had two when I was like you, but they were both junk, and I didn't do any music or band or any of that shit. Took the stupid classes in school just because. But I wasn't dumb, just took the classes for them. You seem like a smart guy. You're smart, right? I'm talking to you.

AARON
I'm really smart.

PETER
Yeah, wrestling took a ton of my time, but that was just winter, and we were all too hungry to really work then anyway cause of the weigh-ins, so mostly I worked during the summer doing landscaping with this guy Doug Everling, the biggest dick-stomp I'd ever met. Even the signature on his paycheck was mean. All scratchy, Chinese-looking...
...
You know, I wondered about you.
What you looked like. Kind of clothes and hair.

(PETER starts to cry, but refuses. His speech slows to a very deliberate pace to stay in control.)

I. Always. Wanted to be. Father. Of a kid.
Couldn't. Body wouldn't, don't know why.
You seem like an all right kid.

I don't blame you, really. Woulda done the same if I was you. Deb's very attractive, lovely person. Dedicated teacher. Very...creative....
Why do you think she married me? Honestly.

AARON

I don't know. You seem like a good— like a confident kinda good guy?

PETER

But why *me*? I ask myself that most days. Why this woman, why me? Why this place here, her and her many-threaded expensive sheets and disobedient mind of the artistic interests and all those goddamn bird feeders with not a damn bird to feed, far as I could tell. Fucking cricket feeders. Doubt like snow, building up, bundling up, thicker and deeper and colder til you can't move—
I don't understand why.

AARON

I really don't know, Mr. Davis.

PETER

Sure, you don't. Of course, you don't.
Look. No, seriously, look at me.
I get the sense you're trying to skip ahead. You gotta grow up for a woman like Deb. No use jumping to the middle of the book. Won't mean nothing to you, won't appreciate it. High school was fun. *Is* fun. *Should* be fun. For you.
So wait your fucking turn.

AARON

Ok.

PETER

You know, when I was your age, way before Deb and me, I was kind of with this girl. She was with some fuck-limb wrestler, and she wouldn't go with me cause of that, and I respected her all the more for it. I really think she felt for me, too. We'd sneak out at lunch sometimes and drive to this hill by the only goddamn field in Franklin Township, you know, the one by that YMCA camp.

AARON

Not really, no.

PETER

Might not be there anymore. I haven't gone to that hill in years. And I don't gotta, get me?

AARON

Um—

PETER

—I'm saying that under no circumstance shall you return to the hill or I'll kill you.

AARON

I don't know what hill you're talking about.

PETER

Marriage is a fucking sacrament.

Ok, forget the hill, and see yourself in the ocean now. Or the lake. You been to the lake, Aaron?

AARON

When I was little, yeah. Lake Oswego.

PETER

Yes sir, that's the one I'm thinkin, too. Now close your eyes.

(They close their eyes and visualize together. They feel like they've sunk to the bed of the lake, they feel the solid slimy rocks of the bottom with their backs.

The shadows shift. The sound of crickets die out to silence.

JACKIE enters, turns on the TV, sets the table, listens to PETER passively. PETER and AARON don't see her.)

PETER

Now swim out to the middle of Lake Oswego, swim swim swim fast as you can swim till you're so tired you feel the blood in your wrists. Now look up at the sun, then close your eyes, and relax your body, blow all the air out of it, let it all wash over you, wash past you. Now leave it there. Sink into it, swim into it. Let the shapes and the ache of the backs in your eyes all wash past you.

(JACKIE touches AARON's shoulder. AARON sees PETER sinking, grabs his coat and leaves without PETER noticing.)

PETER

Let the love you don't want no more wash past you.
Just washwashwashwash yourself deeper and deeper—

(JACKIE gently tries to wake up PETER.)

PETER
—and deeper until you're so deep you can't swim to the surface in time...

DEB *(offstage)*
Your father up?

PETER
No chance, just give on up—

JACKIE
—Dad? Dinner's ready.

PETER *(waking up)*
Huh?

DEB
Hun? Dinner's ready!

PETER *(instantly energetic and positive)*
Oh, that's just great.

*(The shadows shift. The sound of crickets return.
DEB enters with a huge, magnificently roasted chicken, places it on the
table.)*

JACKIE
Holy crap, Mom. Chicken much?

DEB
What, you don't like chicken?

*(PETER returns with sides, he's a much warmer man now. They all sit at
the table. JACKIE is a moody teen. They're a family now.
They half-watch TV throughout dinner.)*

PETER
This smells just great. Super duper—

DEB
—Just what we needed tonight, right?—

PETER
—Smells great. Looks great.

DEB
How was the rest of school today?

JACKIE
You know.

PETER
Nope, we don't actually. Please elaborate.

JACKIE
I don't know.

DEB
So *we* know, but you don't?

JACKIE
It was the same as always. Why're you bothering me?

DEB
"I don't know"

PETER
Please talk to your mother please.

JACKIE
I am.

PETER
You're being rude, Jackie.

JACKIE
She's not asking because she's actually interested. It's a stupid question, honestly.

DEB
Well, it certainly beats a rude answer.

JACKIE
The day was just... there.

DEB

Where? What are you talking about?

JACKIE

It just happened, ok?

(DEB turns off the TV, yanks the antennae out of the back of it, and returns to the table. Smiles.)

DEB

How was school today?

JACKIE

—Fine. Good.

PETER

What happened?

JACKIE

Mom adjudicated the brass today.

PETER

For the concert?

JACKIE

Yeah, she like, pitted us against each other for the chair order.

DEB

Jack, I didn't invent this – You have to audition for chair order.

PETER

What'd you play?

JACKIE

Hindemith sonata.

PETER

And you played it beautifully, I assume?

JACKIE

Like it matters.

DEB

It matters.

PETER

It matters.

DEB

Of course, it matters.

JACKIE

Not when Aaron Dalton's ahead of you in the chairs.

DEB

What's that supposed to mean?

JACKIE

You should have seen Mom when Aaron Dalton was playing. He was blowing away, and Mom just sat there tapping her leg, staring at him like he was a TV or something, staring like she wasn't listening, just staring at his body blank.

PETER

You go in a trance, Deb?

DEB

Your daughter's lying to you.

JACKIE

You think I could make that up?

DEB

He's very talented.

(JACKIE smiles at DEB, PETER doesn't notice.)

DEB

I hate adjudications, too. I was tired.

JACKIE

How's he holding up?

DEB

Aaron?

PETER
What do you mean?

JACKIE
His dad's overseas, how's he holding up?

DEB
How should I know?

PETER
Oh, right!

JACKIE
You're his private teacher. You should know.

PETER
Has his playing gotten better or worse now that he's under a lot of—

DEB
—He's under a lot of stress, I guess. I don't know.

PETER
His Dad's army proper or is he just a reserve?

DEB/JACKIE
He's a reserve.

PETER
Right!

JACKIE
Was a reserve—

DEB
—*Is*, but deployed—

JACKIE
—Shipped out, tours on tours.

PETER
He get to keep his job? I always wondered—

DEB

—Sure. Worked at—

JACKIE

—Worked at Lowe's, yeah.

DEB

Keeping his job—

JACKIE

—Keeping his chair—

PETER

—What a job job. Handshakes, lumber and trim.

DEB

Accent wall, big getters, fixtures, hose, weather-treating, paint-shakers, ceiling fans, multiple screwdrivers, sizes and types.

JACKIE

You're just listing tools, Mom.

PETER

I went to high school with him. Worst French accent ever to grace the human mouth, and a shameless cheat on the wrestling team.

JACKIE

Anyway, Mom must feel really bad for Aaron. She seemed distracted during adjudications—

DEB

—We don't talk about his Dad.

JACKIE

Not even in the lesson?

PETER

What do you talk about?

DEB

I just think...

I get the...

We do music.

JACKIE

What do you think *he* thinks when you watch him play like that?

(tense pause)

DEB

I can't tell what he's thinking. It's in the mind.

PETER

I suppose how *could* you tell?

JACKIE *(smiling)*

Other ways, probably.

DEB

How could anyone tell what someone's thinking?

JACKIE

It's weird – You look at him like a boiling pot. And in front of all of us.

PETER

Leave your mother alone. She's gotta look somewhere.

JACKIE

Not like *that*.

Aaron's fucking hot, it's a fact.

PETER

—Language—

JACKIE

—It's gross, Mom. You're gross.

PETER

That is quite—

(DEB stops him. Leans over to JACKIE.)

DEB

The sooner you accept the fact that Aaron is better at his instrument than you are - that he works harder than you - the sooner you'll understand the disappointment I feel in that classroom when the only thing my daughter seems to make is excuses for herself. If you want first chair, you're going to have earn it. And you don't know what I'm thinking, so give it a fucking rest.

JACKIE

You're just a mean old woman.

(PETER does not jump in. DEB thinks about the way she imagines people looking at her. JACKIE's cell phone rings, and she walks to the corner of the room to whisper into it, her hand covering the receiver.)

PETER

You just stifle her sometimes. Kids go through stages.

DEB

Don't talk to me about fucking stages.

PETER

It is. It's her age.

DEB

We're supposed to be a team, Peter.

PETER

I'm sorry, I know.

(Pause.)

DEB

I've got some dry skin here.

PETER

Oh, look at that. Hey, you remember Donald Smith from high school?

DEB

Think it's the dish soap?

PETER

I heard his wife was sick somehow, so I friended him on the Facebook to see, you know, what the time has been doing to him, and it's looking like he's a major music teacher these days. He posts all those funny card-looking things on his wall—I just went down the wall liking liking liking them all. He's still looking good. Thick-ribbed and ruddy, I'd say. I don't know why you don't like Facebook.

DEB

Everybody knowing where I am all day.

PETER

Why would you want to disappear if you don't have to?

(DEB shrugs.)

DEB

Gonna crack and bleed, I just know it. Look at them.

(DEB offers PETER her left hand to inspect. He contemplates her wedding band. Then, he puts his fork down and repairs the TV. DEB watches.)

DEB

Do you love her more than me?

PETER *(to the TV)*

Look at that! Back from the dead!

(He turns it off.

JACKIE hangs up and returns to the table, pushes her chair back in.)

JACKIE

I need a ride.

PETER

Where? Who're you seeing?

JACKIE

Just meeting a friend at Eat'n'Park.

PETER

What kind of friend?

JACKIE

I don't want to talk about my sex life.

PETER

Ho-ho! Excuse me?!

JACKIE

Just kidding! Haha.

(JACKIE getting ready to leave, puts on DEB's hoodie.)

JACKIE

But seriously, I need to go, like, now.

PETER

Hold your horses!

(PETER gets up to get ready.)

PETER

How you gonna get home? You gonna be late?

JACKIE

One of my friends.

PETER

Well, geez, why doesn't she pick you up then?

JACKIE

They're already there, I don't want to talk about it.
All right, let's go, bye.

PETER *(fake saluting)*

Be right back, hon.

(DEB nods slightly.

PETER slams the door shut behind him.

*DEB alone at the table. She looks at the table of food. Smiles, confusedly.
She wants to clean it up, but stops herself.)*

DEB

Dear God, I made too far much.

*(A very long pause.
The shadows change. The crickets die out.
DEB looks around the room, doesn't recognize it. She feels increasingly agitated.)*

DEB *(to herself)*
Oh. Oh, this isn't my house, is it?

...
I guess it's...um.
Um. Um. Um. Um.

*(DEB mumbles anxiously to herself throughout the following, vaguely narrating what she's doing.
She looks around, touches surfaces unfamiliarly. It's way too quiet in here, so she turns on the radio; it's an orchestra. She turns the radio UP. She decides to rearrange the room. She takes all the pictures off the walls.
She decides to paint an accent wall blood red. Or maybe sky blue. Or traffic cone orange. Whatever color, she does so quickly, sloppily. She gets really into it. She thinks it's awesome.
She wipes off her hands on some paper towels, takes the smock off. She puts the furniture back in different parts of the room.
When she's done, she thinks the room feels much better now.
Then, all of a sudden, she feels MUCH worse. Oh my god, it's so much worse. DEB becomes very frightened, feels faint, turns off all the lights, turns off the radio, grabs the screwdriver, and cowers in her corner, crouching and waiting.)*

DEB *(like a mantra)*
I am in complete control of my life.

*(The sound of crickets return. The shadows shift again.
PETER enters with a trombone case and luggage. DEB leaps into his arms in a desperate hug. She is laughing crying, hysterically happy. He is happy, but not exactly happy to be lifting DEB.
PETER is DEB's gentle, exhausted spouse now.)*

PETER
Hi.
Jesus.
Wall.

DEB

I was so scared, I don't know why.

PETER

I always come back.

DEB

I heard the car door, and I was gonna stab you.
You're not a murderer!

PETER

Not at the moment, no.

DEB

Yeah.

PETER

God, I'm exhausted.

DEB

And you're back. I missed you.

PETER

Great.
How're you?

(PETER sits and picks at the food.)

DEB

I'm good.

PETER

The wall.

DEB

Like it?

PETER

It's uh. Brighter.

DEB

Yeah. It's wayyyyyy brighter, right?
Dinner's ready.

PETER

Thank you.

(DEB watches him eat. She's getting used to having him back in the room.)

PETER

Oh! Let's watch Tremé.

DEB

Is it on now?

PETER

It's eight o'clock on a Sunday.

DEB

Wonderful! Eat, though, first.

PETER

Would you believe we stayed in the same goddamn hotels, the same exact hotels we stayed in last tour? The same pale wood one with the corner desk. The one with the low king and the detachable showerhead, so I'd get water everywhere—

DEB

—You don't have to take the head off the hook—

PETER

—The one with the sulfur sausage patties and earth coffee.

DEB

That sounds comforting to me. Some familiarity.

PETER

It wasn't. It just made me feel older. Or that I used to feel much younger, which I think is different.

(short pause)

PETER

I didn't want to see anyone anymore. I'd find myself standing in front of the bathroom mirror, staring there until I looked like someone else. I forgot where I was, but I knew I was somewhere familiar. I thought I was forgetting things, and I probably was.

DEB

You should have called. I would have reminded you.

PETER

Sorry.

DEB

I needed reminders, too.

PETER

It's ok. We're back now.

(PETER squeezes DEB's hand.)

DEB

I never left.

PETER

Anyway, the same goddamn places. Lynchburg's still a pit on a cliff-face. Fucking Tampa. Salt Lake's still very interesting in some ways, but, Jesus, Phoenix. Something about that city...

DEB

I've always wanted to visit Phoenix.

PETER

Trust me, you don't.

DEB

I do, though. I had an old aunt who spent several seminal years there doing music education with indigenous Arizonians. And the Navajo Indians.

DEB *(cont'd)*

She had a terrible time finding instruments for them, but she did develop a fondness for the color turquoise and for... less speech. Longer hair for everyone and just deadly poor. And those poor women. Just have so much, you know— It's not safe. And their language is dying there. Just about dead.

PETER

I believe Americans used it as a code to obfuscate the Germans in WW2, the Navajo language.

DEB
I knew that—

PETER
—Isn't that remarkable? What do you think the Nazis thought of that?!

DEB
Yes, I know, but I'm saying their language is dying in Phoenix.

PETER
There're no Navajo in Phoenix.

DEB
Not anymore?

PETER
I think they live kinda in the Canyon now.

DEB
I wonder what happened.

PETER
I really couldn't tell you. It's sad.

DEB
Do they have music?

PETER
Do they have music?

DEB
Yeah, like—But I suppose everyone has music. Animals have music.

PETER
Not everyone.

DEB
It's biological.

PETER
No, it's not. What about that student of yours? The guy who knows the notes, but plays them in a way that they seem to have nothing to do with one another.

DEB
What about him?

PETER
Yeah, sounds like he's got everything *but* music.

DEB
Aaron Dalton has music. He just doesn't know how to *express* it yet.

PETER
He's too handsome to be a musician.
You can't be that beautiful and play beautifully. He'll never forget himself. He'll always see the way girls are looking at him—it doesn't work. Believe me.

DEB
You're being ridiculous.

PETER
Aaron doesn't have music. Girls aren't music.

DEB
I think I'm music.

PETER
You're a grown woman.

DEB
I think I used to be music.

PETER
Wait, how do you mean you're music?

DEB
I'm music.
...

(PETER makes a condescending mouth sound.)

DEB
Yeah, ok. I'm gonna pack this up. You gonna have some or not?

PETER
I just did!

*(DEB looks at the food distraught.
PETER leaves the table and fiddles with several controllers to turn on the
TV, searches around in the channels. PETER lies on the floor with a
pillow under his head.)*

DEB
It should have been me. Touring and—

PETER
—Instead of me?

DEB
Of course not.

PETER
But if you had to choose.

DEB
You get to wear a tuxedo 3 times a week.

(DEB exits with food.)

PETER
I'm dead sick of it, take it. I was just wondering if I should get a gig teaching at a conservatory or something. Peabody usually hires alumns. The money'd certainly be better—
Shit.

(DEB reenters.)

DEB
Just wish it could have been me.

PETER
We missed it.

DEB
It was just coming on.

PETER
Nope, we missed it.

DEB

But it was *just* coming on.

(PETER shrugs. DEB lies down on the couch.

They watch TV.

During the following, they rapidly slip into sleep. Allow for overlap and air as they slowly stop registering what the other says and begin to mumble reflexively.)

DEB

Wanna watch *Girls*?

PETER

Sure, whatever.

DEB

You don't care.

PETER

I'm getting tired.

DEB

You wanna just head up to bed or....

PETER *(eyes closing)*

No, I want to watch some TV.

(TV on low volume.)

DEB

He's got the technique. He'll figure it out. He's just afraid, I think.

PETER

What's he got to be afraid of? His parents probably send him to fucking summer music camp or something—

DEB

—You don't even know—

PETER

—Know how much that costs?

DEB

Don't get mad at me about it.

(Pause.

The frustration leaves them with amnesic speed. During the following neither turns or looks at the other. The breeze blows moonlight into the room, it's so, so dark. They're basically asleep and seem to speak parallel to one another.

The shadows change. The crickets die out, but DEB doesn't notice because the TV continues. Pause.)

DEB

What'd it be like?

PETER

What be like?

DEB

Kids....

Sending kids to the summer camp.

Little sleeping bags.

Extra batteries

Way out in the woods.

PETER

We'd get our time.

DEB

Together, yeah.

PETER

Alone. To appreciate, yeah.

...

DEB

Not safe though. A kid out in the woods.

PETER

Counselors.

DEB

My aunt? In Arizona....?

PETER
...Fabulous woman...

DEB
...Long life.
So much happened to her.

PETER
Old, yeah....
Yeah....
...

DEB
Not so, no...I never, uh...
...
...
...
She took liberties with me.

PETER
Me too....

DEB
With me, but she's my aunt...

PETER
Old Dale was me...took liberties with ...

DEB
Me too...
I never knew.

PETER
Me neither...
I'm so sorry—

DEB
—Me too...
So sorry...

*(They're asleep. A long moment.
AARON skillfully sneaks in through the window, wearing the hoodie.*

AARON notices the TV is turned on, and goes to turn it off. PETER jolts half-awake, gropes around for the controller, turns the TV off, goes immediately back to sleep.

The sound of crickets returns. The shadows shift back.

AARON and JACKIE enter.

They tiptoe and whisper throughout. Anytime something moves or shakes, they freeze. AARON closes the door silently behind him and leads JACKIE by the hand to the middle of the carpet in the room. AARON has teeth again.

DEB and PETER, lying there in the room, are invisible to them.)

JACKIE

Can we sit on the couch?

AARON

It's squeaky.

JACKIE

Why would it squeak?

AARON

Here's a cushion. Pretend you're Zen.

JACKIE

It's so quiet.

(JACKIE looks around the house. AARON looks at JACKIE.)

AARON

What's wrong?

JACKIE

Nothing.

AARON

What're you looking at then?

JACKIE

I like your living room.

AARON

What do you like about it?

JACKIE

It reminds me of my living room. Exactly. It's actually kind of weird. Something about it.

AARON

That is weird....

JACKIE

Except for that crazy accent wall.

AARON

...You comfortable?

JACKIE

What's it like playing in the pit?

AARON

Just like the band, but with lamer music and you have to pay closer attention or your cues wiz past. And less pressure.

JACKIE

You don't seem nervous at all.

AARON

I don't?

JACKIE

I sneak peaks at you in between songs. You look like you're really good - You get a lot of the solos.

AARON

I'm ok.

JACKIE

Do you take private lessons with Mrs. Davis, too?

AARON

Three years, yeah.

JACKIE

What's she like?

AARON
Hm?

JACKIE
What's she like? As a teacher?

AARON
She's...demanding.

JACKIE
Yeah, I get that.

AARON
Yeah.

JACKIE
Yeah, like, she-scares-the-actors intense.

AARON
Really?

JACKIE
Yeah, we're all scared of being the one to stop the run. You should smell the green room after rehearsal.

AARON
She doesn't like mistakes.

JACKIE
What's it like to study with someone like that, though? Her eyes are all—and the muscles in her hands and wrists.

AARON
She's a good teacher. If she sees you're talented, she'll demand more of you, and then you gotta give it to her. Then, she'll demand more, and if you're worth her time, you'll give that to her, too. But then later, you find it all somewhere in yourself again, like it's something surprising now.

JACKIE
I don't understand.

AARON
I don't either. It's hard to explain.

I really like your voice.

JACKIE
How old are you?

AARON
Come and sit down.

JACKIE
I thought you were a, uh. You know I'm a freshman, right?

AARON
Seriously?

JACKIE
I know. It sucks.

AARON
I don't believe it. You're such a confident performer.

JACKIE
Thanks.

AARON
You look like I can't even tell you're scared up there.

JACKIE
I'm not.

AARON
I'm not like that at all.

JACKIE
How old would you have guessed I am? If I didn't tell you just a second ago?

AARON
Junior, definitely. At least 16.

JACKIE
I don't believe you.

(AARON smiles. She's very nervous, but likes him.)

AARON
How about me?

JACKIE
You're a senior, right?

AARON
Am I a senior right?

JACKIE
You sit with them at lunch, and you seem to be, like, head trombone.
But if I didn't know that, I'd probably guess, 22.
Like you just finished school and moved back into your parents' house until you can follow your girlfriend to wherever she goes to school.

AARON
How old's my girlfriend?

JACKIE
We're three years apart, right?

*(AARON slides closer to JACKIE.
DEB rolls over and watches them like she's dreaming it.
Maybe during the following, AARON and JACKIE explore poses of
intimacy. Slow, tentative, sincere. It adds to intimacy, doesn't parody it.
No sex, please.)*

AARON
Hey. You wanna hang out sometime?

JACKIE
I'm Jackie.

AARON
This weekend?

JACKIE
I don't know.
I hate Eat'n'Park. Everyone smokes in there.

AARON
Besides, we'd probably run into a ton of people so—

JACKIE
—You ashamed of me?

AARON
Of course not.
I'll go anywhere.

JACKIE
Me too.
I, like, don't even know you.

AARON
You ever been up Mount Washington at night.

JACKIE
Is it safe?

AARON
You cold? I have a blanket in the car.

JACKIE
You seem like you have older sisters.

AARON
Only me.

JACKIE
I know you won't agree with me, but I really think Mrs. Davis is crushing on you.

AARON
What?

JACKIE
From the way she's looking at you when you play in the pit – I watch her watching you
and...Have you ever thought, like, I don't know...?

....
Thanks for the blanket.

AARON
You're really beautiful.

JACKIE
Thank you very much.

AARON

What do you want to be when you grow up?

JACKIE

I don't care, I just want to be good at it.

AARON

Yeah...

JACKIE

Yeah...

AARON

It's so late.

JACKIE

I'm not ready to go home.

AARON

Me neither.

JACKIE

Fine.

AARON

You sure?

JACKIE

Yeah.

AARON

My parents are asleep.

JACKIE

You sure it's ok?

AARON

Positive.

Just shhhh—

(He kisses her.)

AARON
Are you comfortable?

JACKIE
Are you nervous?

AARON
Of course.

JACKIE
You don't seem nervous.

(AARON smiles. AARON kisses JACKIE again, sweetly.)

JACKIE
I've never had sex before.

AARON
Me neither.

JACKIE
Liar.

AARON
You're really beautiful.

JACKIE
I know. You already said that.

AARON
Sorry.

JACKIE
I believed you the first time.
I think you're beautiful too.

AARON
I'm a boy.

JACKIE
I know. I think I love you.

AARON
Is this ok?

JACKIE
What if I'm not myself after this?

AARON
Am I hurting you or does it feel good?

JACKIE
Did you put a condom on?

AARON
You're ok.

JACKIE
Did you put a condom on?

AARON
Does it feel good?

JACKIE
Aaron, did you—did—

AARON
—Shh /

JACKIE
/ Aaron? Aaron? /

AARON
/ Shhhh /

JACKIE
/ Aaron? Stop, just. *Aaron—*

AARON (*good*)
Shit.

JACKIE
Just get off of me please. *Get off.*

(*JACKIE sees DEB, vaguely, becomes serious, detached.*)

*The shadows change. The crickets die out.
DEB slowly sits up. JACKIE sees DEB like a shadow, hears DEB like
she's speaking her thoughts.
JACKIE feels the way DEB feels during the shifts.)*

AARON

What's going on? What—I didn't mean to, uh—

JACKIE

—Aaron?—

AARON

—What?

Is something going on?

JACKIE

I...I feel like little bubbles in my spine.

Like something awful's going to change without me, and there's nothing I can do to stop it. Or, like control, or hold on to....

DEB

Cold lake water bubbling up between your shoulders, into your neck.

JACKIE *(to DEB)*

Yeah.... I don't think I'll be myself for long.

DEB

That's exactly right.

JACKIE

What if I'm not myself anymore?

DEB

No helping it.

*(DEB touches AARON and JACKIE's heads gently, like she's waking up
her children.)*

DEB

No helping it, honey,

Honey?

Aaron, honey?

AARON
What?

JACKIE
Hmm?

DEB
Honey, it's time to wake up.

(AARON and JACKIE look at DEB, unphased.)

AARON
Hi, Deb.

JACKIE
We fell asleep.

DEB
Us too. Late, late.

(PETER wakes up.)

PETER
What time is it?

DEB
You have to go now, sorry.

PETER
Who's she?

DEB
You remember Jackie.

PETER
Oh.

(PETER joins AARON, who has installed himself on the couch. The two watch Sportscenter.)

JACKIE *(referring to PETER)*
Who's that?

DEB
I'll drive you home, Jack.

(JACKIE nods blearily.)

JACKIE
Call you tomorrow.

(AARON stays focused on TV.)

JACKIE
Aaron? Why're you—Aaron?

(AARON doesn't register JACKIE anymore.)

DEB
No coat?

JACKIE
Nope.

DEB
Freezing now, coat time still—

JACKIE
—Nope.
I'm warm as a muffin.

DEB
For me then. Won't even know you're cold until you are. Changes quick.

*(DEB puts the sweatshirt around JACKIE. JACKIE does in fact feel better, and the two leave together.
The sound of crickets return. The shadows shift again.
PETER and AARON watch TV for a while. They are father and son now.
PETER looks at AARON.)*

PETER
You got a minute, Aaron?

AARON
Yeah.

(pause)

PETER
Hey, you feel like a beer?

AARON
I can drink now?

PETER
No.
You want a beer?

*(AARON shrugs.
PETER walks out into the kitchen.
PETER returns with the beers, sits across the room from AARON.)*

AARON
Thanks.

(PETER stares at AARON.)

AARON
What's the occasion?

PETER
You see that email I printed from Mom?

AARON
Yeah.
She sounds tired.

PETER
I think she really is. She misses us.

AARON
Yeah.

PETER
You scared for her?

AARON
I mean, sure.

PETER
You're not worried?

AARON
I just don't see what worrying all the time about her is gonna accomplish.

PETER
It's not about accomplishment.

AARON
Exactly, so why do it?

PETER
Feelings don't have to be purposeful to exist.

AARON
Fine, ok. I'm glad Mom's still alive. I hope she comes back safe and alive from driving trucks across the desert. Happy?

(long pause)

PETER
I'm worried about you.

AARON
Are you worrying "purposefully" or does it just exist?

PETER
Do you mind if I turn this off for a second?

AARON
I'm watching it.

(PETER turns the TV off.)

PETER
Do you want to tell me what's going on?

AARON
Is it bigger than a bread basket?

PETER
I'm serious.

AARON
I am, too. I have no idea what you think is "going on."

...
Do you mean with auditions? I mean, I'm definitely stressed, but I'm handling it.

PETER
I see that. I'm proud of you for sticking with it, no matter what happens.

AARON
Um. Thanks.

*(AARON turns the TV back on.
PETER turns it off again.)*

PETER
Have you been texting with Mrs. Davis?

AARON
Shit.

PETER
You can tell me.

AARON
Shit.

*(AARON's furious, realizes what PETER's probably read and deduces
that he's got bigger problems.)*

PETER
Aaron, it's ok.

AARON
Ok, first of all, you have no right to read my phone, even though you probably don't agree with that.

PETER
Noted.

AARON

Second of all, we're not calling the police.

PETER

Why not?—

AARON

—Third, I'm sorry.

PETER

You shouldn't be sorry.

AARON

Don't call the police. *Please*. I gotta get into that school—

PETER

—Just sit down. Calm down.

...

What do you think I think about this? Reading those texts.

I know you've thought about how this must affect other people, but, just in case, take a second and think of what I must think about this.

(pause)

AARON

Mom can't know.

PETER

Why not?

AARON

It doesn't concern her.

PETER

Deployed or not, she's still your parent. What do you think she'd think?

AARON

She'll probably blame herself. For being away so much.

PETER

Do you think that's right?

AARON

I don't know.

PETER

It's not. It's not right. Mrs. Davis took advantage of you. Broke the law.

AARON

You just did too! Cheers!

PETER

Don't you joke around about this.

AARON

Look, Dad, I'm not a kid! Eight months, ten months later, we'd be totally fine. Besides, her husband's away on symphony tour all the time. She's really struggling—

PETER

—My wife's away too, but I don't molest children.

AARON

She just needed somebody, she's so lonely and—

PETER

—Everyone's lonely, Aaron. That's everyone.

...

Yeah, that's pretty much everyone.

AARON

Please don't make it a big deal, Dad. To be completely honest, I was cool with it. It's just two people who're—

PETER

—Just please stop.

...

I see that what you're doing, that you feel bad for her. You care about people in a way that your mother does. And, I know you've got, you know, *urges*. Mrs. Davis *is* very beautiful, I see that. And I work weird hours, so...yeah.

Did you do it here?—I didn't ask that.

AARON

All right.

Cool.

(PETER plays with his wedding band. Long pause.)

AARON

We cool?

PETER

This makes me think of, uh. Your mom and I used to party a lot when we were your age, and there was this one weekend our friend Mickey's parents went out of town or something, and we got really messed up.

AARON

Please don't overshare, Dad—

PETER

—*Sit down.*

Your mom and I got really messed up, and I said I'd drive her home. So I did, and I turned off the radio so nothing would distract me, and I squeezed the steering wheel 'til I felt the blood in my wrists, and I opened the windows to keep me awake. It was freezing, it was February.

And I remember your mother sitting next to me, realizing I had no idea how to make the car stay in a lane, and she *begged* me to pull over, pull over, pull over, and she was grabbing the door handle and pressing her feet against the dashboard like that was gonna save her.

When I got home I was too drunk to work my house keys, so I passed out in the backseat of the car. Your mother walked herself home from my parents'.

I was stupid. I was disgusting.

I have no idea why she stayed with me all these years. Makes no sense. But that's not the point. The point is she should never have gotten in that car with me like that and I had no business getting in that car like that with her. Do you understand what I'm saying?

(AARON stands up.)

Sit down. Aaron.

(AARON does not, but he listens to PETER.)

...

Listen to me: You're *nice*. But listen to me: no amount of niceness, no amount of pity or creative intimacy between you and your teacher will keep the mistakes you make from following you your entire life. I'll never forgive myself for that night with your mother. After mistakes like that, all you can do is make right what's in front of you.

Ok, I'm done channeling your mother.

AARON
You don't sound anything like her.

PETER
I'm doing the best I can.

AARON
That's your best?

PETER
I'm your father.

AARON
You're also abusive, apparently.

PETER
Aaron—

AARON
—You don't have any more stories, Dad?

PETER
I didn't *abuse* her. I was just a kid, I was *reckless*—

AARON
—You don't even know what you did. Your own fucking story.
You asked me what I think she'll think if she finds out?
If this gets out? If you take this to the police? Mom's gonna blame *you*.
And she'll be right to.

(AARON does not and starts to assemble his trombone.)

PETER
...
....
Oh, you're gonna practice now?

AARON
She's gonna blame you for this. You do this to Deb and my life? You're doing it to Mom's too. I'll make sure of it.

*(The shadows change. The crickets die out.
AARON no longer sees or responds to PETER.
AARON starts to practice his scales.)*

PETER

Don't you dare threaten me. Do you hear me, Aaron? Aaron? *Aaron?*
You can't just do whatever you want.
Put that thing down—Fine!

*(PETER turns on the radio to drown out AARON. He continues,
unphased.
PETER snaps. As the music builds, PETER's fury intensifies until he
destroys the room - somewhere between a dance and a temper tantrum -
mumbling incoherently, furiously as he flips a chair over. Flips the couch
over. Knocks the table over.
AARON keeps playing.)*

PETER *(mumbling almost inaudibly)*

—Father. I'm your father. This fucking room, this, this shit, I'm your father for
christ's sake, your father, for now, *for now*, for now, I'm still your fucking father for
christ's sake...

*(PETER has trashed the room. He's winded.
PETER turns off the radio.
PETER yanks the chair out from under AARON, spilling him to the floor.
AARON seems to look through PETER.
PETER rips the trombone out of AARON's hands.)*

PETER

For now, I'm still your father, and for now, you're not grown, so for now you have to
listen to me: You're gonna ruin people's lives. You'll be lucky if it's just yours. *Lucky.*
You'd be fucking *lucky*. This is your only warning.

*(AARON gets up, restores his chair, and continues his scales.
PETER exits into the kitchen.
JACKIE lets
The sound of crickets return. The shadows shift again.
AARON stops for a moment to count out a particularly difficult passage.
DEB unlocks the front door and comes in.)*

AARON

Hey—

DEB
—*JESUS!*

AARON
Sorry, I was just practicing—

DEB
—You're in my house.

AARON
I used the window.

DEB
Ah.
And the horn?

AARON
I used the window.

DEB
What if my neighbors— You broke the law, Aaron.

AARON
I thought you were home. Your front light was on.

DEB
I leave it on so *people don't break into my house*.

AARON
I thought maybe you were just waiting for me to give up and go away, so I let myself in.

(Pause)

Oh.
(referring to the wrecked living room)
This wasn't me, I didn't—

DEB
—I know.

AARON
What happened?

(short pause)

DEB

What can I do for you, Aaron?

AARON

I want to play for you.

DEB

No lesson.

AARON

No, I want you to adjudicate me now. I get nervous in class.

DEB

Part of music is having to deal with being nervous.

AARON

I'm ready.

DEB

It's late.

...

Are you ok? You're looking a little, uh.

*(They look at each other. AARON takes a step towards DEB.
DEB steps back.)*

AARON

Can I have a glass of water?

DEB

Sure.

(Neither moves)

Why're you really here? You don't want to play for me.

AARON

I need a glass of water.

DEB

Have you been drinking?

AARON
It's late.
Deborahhh.

DEB
Mrs. Davis, thank you very much.

(AARON approaches DEB very slowly, patiently. She lets him.)

AARON
Deborahhh.

DEB
...
...
No.

AARON
Why not?

DEB
You're too young to be drinking.

AARON
You're too young to think I'm too young to be drinking.

DEB
It's not right, Aaron.

AARON
I know you're attracted to me.

DEB
Do you need me to drive you home?

AARON
I can see it in the way you look at me. I'm attracted to you, too.

DEB
I'm married.

AARON
I have a girlfriend.

DEB
Those are not equivalent.

AARON
Where is he, then?

DEB
He's back on leave, Aaron.

AARON
Where is he, then?

DEB
I don't want to call your mother—

AARON
—Just please, stop it, Deb. We're not in class. I'm not a kid.

DEB
You're a kid.

AARON
You think so?
You really think I'm just a kid?

DEB
I know so.

AARON
Fine. You win.

*(AARON restores the living room. DEB watches, starts to get dizzy again.
Sits down in one of the chairs, puts her head between her legs.
AARON finishes, comes back to her.)*

AARON
Deb?
Deb?
...
Are you safe here?

It's ok, you can trust me.

...

Where is he right now?

DEB

I don't know.

AARON

You don't know where he is?

DEB

I don't care. Probably sleeping in his car somewhere. Freezing his ass off.

...

He doesn't like how I spend his money. Is what he said.

I had a minor car accident, and those cost money, so. You know.

AARON

Have *you* been drinking?

DEB

Our marriage is very difficult, Aaron.

You, you, you, you can go home now.

AARON

No.

DEB

Please put your trombone away, and go home.

AARON

No. I want to help.

DEB

You're sweet. You're a sweet boy, but—

AARON

— I can call the police.

DEB

There's nothing you can do to protect me, so just grow the fuck up and accept it, excuse my language, *fuck*.

AARON

I'm not about to look the other way.

DEB

Cut the hallmark card shit. Please.
You're sweet.

AARON

Would you like a glass of water?

DEB

Yes.
Thank you.
That would be just wonderful.

AARON

Sure.

(AARON goes to the kitchen, comes back with water. He pulls a chair across from her, close. She fiddles with her wedding band. AARON doesn't know what to say.)

AARON

I'm sorry.

DEB

You know, it's really not your fault.

(DEB drinks most of the glass of water.)

DEB

You put the living room back wrong.

AARON

What's wrong?

DEB

Wrong places, and...

(DEB suddenly wonders if she's wrong.)

AARON

You want some popcorn too?

DEB

Absolutely not.

AARON

I love being your student, you're the only teacher I've ever not hated.

DEB (*smiles*)

That's not good, Aaron.

I love teaching you. Almost makes it worth it.

Actually, you know, I want to tell you honestly – I don't think you're going to make much of a musician. I'm sorry.

AARON

That's ok.

I don't care what you think.

DEB

Good boy.

(*pause*)

AARON

What's he like? Your husband?

DEB

Who the hell knows what anyone's like.

This is not how I imagined my life would end up.

AARON

Yeah.

DEB

Aren't you ever afraid?

AARON

Not really.

You?

DEB

I'm just— I'm really tired.

(AARON takes her hands.)

DEB
I don't think I know anything anymore.

AARON
Do you want to watch TV?

DEB
No.

(DEB lets go of his hands, holds his face, looks in his eyes. He seems trustworthy enough, and she kisses him for the first time. This takes time.)

AARON
Do you think it's too quiet?

DEB
No, honey.

AARON
I might like some music.

DEB
It's already there, baby. Stop talking over it.

(He kisses her, but she stops. Closes her eyes. Drinks more water.)

AARON
Are you ok?

DEB
—It's just been a really long time.

AARON *(teasing)*
Since someone kissed you?

DEB
Yes. Actually.

AARON
Oh. I've only had sex with one person. If that helps.

DEB
It doesn't.
Was it that chorus girl, Jackie?

AARON
Yeah.

DEB
How was it?

AARON
I couldn't tell.

DEB
Peter says I'm not much of a woman.

AARON
Fuck him.

DEB
I know. I've hated him for so long.
But he's the only person who seems to love me right now. So that's...unfortunate.

AARON
That's not permanent, Deb.

DEB
You don't think so?

AARON
No, you're music. Music changes all the time.

DEB
You're gonna make someone so happy someday.

(They kiss again. They begin to undress each other. They become happier and happier. They forget who they are. He's unbuttoning her pants when the shadows shift and the sound of crickets disappear. She's scared and clings more desperately to AARON.)

DEB
Oh nononno.

AARON

What—What's wrong?

DEB

Fuck. Nothing. Fuck it.

You won't leave me, right? Don't leave me please, I think I'm sinking.

AARON

Are you ok?

DEB

Oh my god, I can't feel the edges of me anymore, I'm think I'm sinking – I can't – I feel like I'm sinking away. I don't care anymore, I don't care.

*(The crickets return and the shadows shift back.
DEB's looks around the room. It's still just the two of them.
Her relief is profound.)*

DEB

Oh Jesus, thank you.

I'm so sorry.

AARON

What happened?—

DEB

—I never know if I get to come back. You're still you, right?

(PETER silently walks in through the unlatched door. He wears DEB's hooded sweatshirt. DEB and AARON don't notice him.)

AARON

It's me. I promise I'm not going anywhere.

DEB *(overwhelmed with relief)*

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Come back to me, baby. Come on.

(PETER watches them. DEB and AARON don't see him.)

AARON

Oh my god, Deb—

DEB

—Yes. please. Lushly, yes. Lushlylushlylushly, please please lushly yes.

*(PETER silently picks up the screwdriver by the door.
His fist clenches around it.
Blackout.)*

End of Play.

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