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## **My Heart And The Real World**

**Confessions Obsessions Aggressions & Digressions in 30 scenes**

By Broken Gopher Ink

### **THE STAGE**

An open space. Mood is conveyed by lighting and sound. While one scene plays another is prepared so the scenes can flow continuously into each other. Preparation is minimal. Actors carry on their own props. The play is designed to be performed in a three-night rotation. Each night's mix is represented in order within this script. Each actor has one monologue per night. The effect is that there will be a different show every night for three nights running, then cycling back. For in the round stagings we suggest that the actors emerge from the audience to give their monologues and return to the audience when they are finished.

### **CHARACTERS**

This play is written as an actor's showcase. It requires a minimum of five (5) players. Three (3) men and Two (2) women.

### **FIRST NIGHT**

#### **I WAS SITTING IN A BAR WAITING FOR FOOD**

***SCENE** (The stage is empty. No music or lighting change heralds the entrance of a MAN, who walks out onto the stage without fanfare. He pauses ever so slightly at the apex of the stage, and then goes right into the audience. A SPOT follows him as he approaches a woman in the audience. The spot highlights as the MAN stops and gently directs his attention at her.)*

MAN

I was sitting in a bar waiting for food. It wasn't an unusual night; I frequent the place. I was having some pasta with oily dressing and... stuff. I don't remember, but I had beer, and that's what's important. Usually I read a magazine as I drink; it gives a fine gradient to your understanding.

I'm not the kind of person who projects feelings of invitation to others. I just don't. It's not that I'm a bad person; I just know that my teeth are not as prominent as others, and they don't show themselves at every occasion. I bet I don't feel any different from any of you. I feel happy inside. I just don't have the teeth or the patience to warp my face from that normal, standoffish self. That's what made her so unusual.

She just appeared. I looked up and she was in the opposing seat. I must've been taken completely by surprise. I gave her a dirty look but she gently cradled my hand and started singing,

*(He begins to sing to her, completing at least one full section of the song.)*

"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when clouds are blue..."

She went on with the song, singing every verse, holding my hand, and singing into my crooked and imperfect smile. I smiled, and I couldn't prevent it with my usual defenses. When she was done, she explained that her therapist had encouraged her to come out of her shell and do something charitable. Since I was the most charitable case around, well...

I tried to be suave, but she had a boyfriend. We were not to meet again, and even as I tried to make sense of the moment, I realized that this moment was going to slip by like all the other moments in my life.

I drove home trying hard not to lose the moment. She had brought my teeth out, and that was no easy feat. I smiled as I pulled up to my home.

Almost immediately my neighbor approached me. "There's a cat that was hit by a car over there. You should come."

It couldn't be. My cat Moss was well aware of cars and the evils they perpetrate on his species. Plus I had just been uplifted. It couldn't be this direct, this one to one payment plan.

I walked to the gutter with denial but arrived with horror as I saw my Moss crying in pain. He had been hit, and he had dragged himself to the sidewalk. There was no moment of doubt, of not recognizing. "Oh, Moss," I said, transforming my perplexing evening of wonder to my worst nightmare. Moss was my buddy; my friend. He taught me strength that I could not otherwise imagine.

*(He becomes slightly irritated.)*

I know it sounds strange, but you weren't there. So don't doubt it because he was a cat, because if he were a dog, many of you would understand. You should be ashamed of that.

So here he was dying in the gutter, crying for a friend. There was no strength in this. He was afraid. A box appeared, and I pulled him into it. His legs flopped like they were already separate. The only words I could enter my mind were, "fix him, fix him, fix him..." Somehow science, even veterinary science could save him. Don't take him, please! I had no relationship with my family, superficial friends, a wife who betrayed me, and Moss was the only one who truly loved me for no other reason than just... I loved him.

I remembered as I drove him to the hospital the time I was looking out the window and a kid was encouraging his dog to attack my Moss. I became insane. I ran out and threw myself between this dog and Moss, and he immediately ran to me, purring loudly. It was not a normal reaction for either of us; I probably scarred the kid as I physically tossed him and his dog off my property.

I could not protect him this time. He cried out because he felt I was gone. When I touched him, he calmed. I should have known then. He knew.

When I brought him into the emergency room, he started crying, but I ignored him this time. "Fix him, fix him, fix him!" I thought as I passed him to a doctor.

*(With regret)*

This was not the right thing. It was not the right thing.

I waited. A doctor came out and explained how broken he was. In shock. Dying. My Moss. He explained all that would have to be done. "This is a thousand dollar cat," he said, meaning the final bills.

*(Angrily)*

Fuck the bills! I'd get a second job, a third job. If he were your son, your friend, would you say, "Gee, he's going to cost a thousand dollars, so..." Shit! Fuck you! I asked that they stabilize him for the night, and please, please give him some painkillers. They agreed.

Within minutes, they came back and said he didn't make it. It was wrong, so wrong. I suspected later that they made the decision I could not, but it didn't matter. The doctor pulled me aside.

"I took some X-rays, no charge, but I wanted you to see..."

*(He lifts his hand as though holding up an X-ray.)*

"His back is broken. I see." The doctor didn't even have to show me. Of course. I was wrong. I was wrong to try to fix Moss. His only calm was my presence, and I should have been there. He knew it, and he called to me. I should have just accepted it and comforted his last moments. I will always regret this.

*(He looks into the woman's eyes.)*

I don't know why you appeared earlier to comfort me, but I wanted to thank you...

*(He walks off. The SPOT lingers for a short time, and then it goes out.)*

## STORMS

**SCENE:** *(A shattered, shell-shocked WOMAN. She is outwardly calm but plainly desperate.)*

The defining event in my life was when I was hit by lightning while playing night softball with an aluminum bat. It happened on the evening of July 27, 1979 in my neighbor Neva Edwards yard during a perfectly innocent ball game. I swung at a low, inside pitch. There was a flash of light and **BANG!** And I smelled that ozone smell and I smelled burning hair and when I woke up in the hospital three days later my mother told me I had been dead for three and a half minutes.

*(She squirms a little, like she's sitting on something uncomfortable. We hear what sounds like rain outside.)*

I carried no memories of my sojourn into the spirit world. My travels in dreamtime were mercifully brief, but I do have a big ugly scar, jagged and white, that runs down my back like an engraved electrical bolt.

*(She shows the audience.)*

I was eleven when I was hit by lightning. Before it happened I was Miss Goody Two Shoes. I was shy and got all A's and did my homework. After the hospital I changed.

*(She squirms some more and lights a cigarette. Some light flashes from offstage.)*

I got moody and stayed in my room listening to Janis Ian albums and writing brokenhearted poetry. I also masturbated in my room. I masturbated incessantly. Soon after I had woken up in the hospital a nurse had been shaving me and certain feelings were aroused. As soon as I got home I began experimenting with my mom's electrical razor.

*(Her tone is shame-free. She is matter of fact about it all. She smokes and squirms. More flickering light and a far away rolling sound. She doesn't notice it yet though.)*

I masturbated at least ten times a day, sometimes more, depending what movies were on Cinemax. After I burned out the motor in my mother's razor, I experimented with different techniques; such as squeezing my thighs together. This produced only a small and unsatisfying climax. Still the thigh squeeze had the advantage of being quick and silent in tight situations like talking to Grandma at Thanksgiving or sitting in class watching Mr. Gomez absently fingering his ear. I was scared of going crazy.

*(Another cigarette.)*

Everything filled me with a sexual hunger that I had to immediately satisfy. Privacy was secondary to my craving and addiction. Often in school I would go into the bathroom and furiously rub myself in a stall, grunting and puffing, while the other girls Tsked and giggled.

*(More squirming. The flashes of lightning intensify.)*

As I got more into my masturbating I lost all interest in men. I would let them fuck me but they never got me Off. I only wanted to masturbate. Relationships required far more attention to detail that I felt capable of, while self-gratification was always seconds away. Anytime. Anywhere.

*(Just a pause. No big deal.)*

I held down a series of jobs, never looking into a career, but making enough money to keep me in food and rent. Hell my monthly bill for batteries alone was a hundred bucks.

It was in the fall that I noticed my clitoris was numb. I masturbated eleven times that morning so I thought it was just tired. The next day however, it had less feeling in it than before. I rubbed it hard. I wore down three sets of Duracells and all I got was a little whimper of a come that wouldn't even satisfy me in a dream.

*(Puff puff. Squirm squirm. Rumble rumble. Flash flash.)*

I examined myself and saw a large white spot on the tip of my clit. Ten years of hard rubbing had produced a lovely little callus, which had hardened into the thickness of a fingernail. I panicked. I went to a hardware store. I wasn't thinking rationally. I bought myself a little Black and Decker hand sander. At home, I plugged it in. My hands trembled. My stomach tightened with desire. It sounded so powerful. It throbbed and hummed in my hand.

*(She sits there a moment, making everyone nervous.)*

The doctor told me that if I had waited and come to him instead he might have been able to remove the callus with no ill effects. But the sander produced so much scar tissue that it would never heal correctly...wait!

*(She stops mid-sentence, as if hearing something. Her face is riveted. She is no longer interested in her story. Her tone is awestruck and wistful, yet there is hard fear underneath it.)*

Is that thunder?

*(A violent flash of lightning and a huge clap of thunder. Lights.)*

## MAILWIFE

**SCENE** : *(The stage has a small set of stairs leading to nowhere. A MAN walks out addresses the audience. He projects a sense of simplicity combined with honesty.)*

MAN

I know our mothers told us we were something special, but for some of us, it doesn't ring true. I'm not a good looker by any means, and you can see that. But I gotta good heart. I know that's gotta count for something. Well, I was writing these women in foreign countries. They publish magazines you know, and they look for guys like me. They probably look for guys better'n me, but some of them'll settle for guys like me, and that's a start, cause I know I ain't gonna find them around here. I felt pretty ashamed about writing women in magazines. I didn't tell anybody, that's for sure.

*(He peers into the audience.)*

I kept writing and writing. When some of them wrote back, I knew I was a person, just like everyone else. I may not be a person here, but somewhere I was. Plus my simple words was enough for someone who don't speak English too good. Every advantage was mine, and I don't know how to be happy without being scared, but it was mine.

So me and this girl hit it off real good. I say for a couple of you out there, you might find it the same. It was something when I called her the first time. Don't expect to get through very easy cause their phones are all messed up from communism, but it was something when her voice turned from American to foreign in my head. It made me fall in love with her really powerful.

I never had many options in my head, but this time, I had only one. I went to go get her, even though it took all these invitations, visas, and other propaganda from the Kremlin. I don't know, I never would've gone to all this trouble, but it's not like anyone here would pay me no mind.

*(He looks out into the audience hopefully but gets his answer.)*

So I went. I ain't never been away from home. Except for the State Fair. I got to the airport, and I saw her. She didn't see me right away, and I got to compare her to that girl in my mind. She didn't match, but that's ok. I decided on the phone whatever lies she might've sent me in her pictures didn't matter. Her letters didn't lie, and this was the person that wrote'm. I wasn't no great catch either.

As soon as she saw me, she hugged me and grabbed my hand. It was the darndest thing. I didn't need no first date, or have to speak in a certain way. She just grabbed my hand and held on. Some of you out there might think of how rare

that is. I apologize for all my rambling, but I gotta talk about her. Let me read you one of her letters, and if you think I'm making a mistake, you just tell me.

*(He pulls out a worn letter from his back pocket and begins reading.)*

“Dear Snuggly, Today I write you a letter as I promised. First of all I would like to thank you very-very-very... much for two letters with money and pictures. I like pictures very much; I think they turned out well. What do you think?

When I look through them I think of you and your stay here, and our future conversations, outings, adventures, and for sure your tender and caressing hands, childlike smile and huge and kind eyes. Sometimes I feel that just today you will call me, and I often turn out to be right. It's something inside me. Today again I felt that you would call me, but I had to go to my temporary work. I will be paid some money for my work (\$25) maybe for you this sum will seem funny, but you know, here \$25 is also money.

I wish you were here just now, so I could kiss you many-many times.” Here she's drawn a little face with hearts around it. “ You are a real gentleman, and I really don't know how to thank you. Maybe you will prompt me how to do it? I will wait for you to come because I really want to see you. I want you to call me as often as you can, though I understand that it is expensive enough. I miss you and want to see. Kiss you, Irina.”

*(He takes a moment to compose himself.)*

My life's no fairy tale, but this was more than I deserved. She got me an apartment, and her folks showed pictures of when she was queen in high school or something. I was something even to them, and that made no sense at all. Most of you will be cynical and think they were trying to get me because I was American but I don't care.

So we spent the time together, and I never felt myself at that time. I guess I never felt more than myself before, that was it.

Then the strangest thing happened. She lived in these apartments that had rows and rows of cement to them. I guess that was the communist way. Cement was just... good. A good color, good building stuff, and everything looks the same. I just went out for a walk, that's all. I had a key. I know I saw where I went, but you gotta understand when you're in the communist world, you can't see one thing from the other. It wears on you until everything looks the same. I wasn't there a few hours when I noticed it.

Everything was gray when I went for a walk. I was still incredible from everything. I guess I shouldn't have said I would go alone, but I'm an American. She was worried, but I was all drugged up from the time change and all the alcohol on the plane, and my head was just turning. I mean, all I had to do was take that fork in

the road, and that other one, and just come back. I don't know why. I just needed to walk.

I guess the cement kind of fools you. Rows and rows of cement apartments. The forks in the road started questioning me. "I don't remember you," they said. I swear that I know where I was, but I was in a foreign country, where I couldn't read and people would act like I was a barking dog. I didn't know that I was just a walk away from... disappearing. I'm an American. I thought I had the right building. It was made of cement.

I went to the fifth floor and tried the key, but it wouldn't work. It was strange. I went back down and started from scratch. It was strange how the elevator smelled of pee as I took it back down. The key still didn't work, even though I pressed the fifth floor. I buzzed the place next door, but a woman just came and looked like I was an alien.

I started the other floors checking my key. I was getting a little scared. I went outside and walked around. It was this cement place, I knew it. I went up and down the floors, you know, maybe I had the numbers wrong. I met the same woman that looked at me strange.

I was beginning to think that I was beaten by this communist world. Maybe it was a joke. I thought of how when I followed my brother in the woods and he lost me. The worst thing you can do is look for each other. I just sat and waited until he came back and belted me upside the head. He thought it was a joke, but I knew better. I thought that was the course of action for this American.

*(The MAN walks over to the set of stairs and sits down.)*

I sat outside on the steps and waited. No matter I had no place to go and no one to ask. I just waited.

You know sometimes you just gotta see around you and things lift? I started seeing things. I didn't have anything else to do, and I was really nobody here. No person, no language, and the key I was using looked like a pretzel it was so bent from my panic. I was homeless, and I couldn't even beg for money. I know you laugh, but try it sometime.

Well something sort of lifted cause I started seeing. A couple walked with their hands together across a cement building. The sky was gray, but the stars I could see were still in the place I left them. Plus I noticed these two cats.

*(He points out two fictitious cats.)*

These two cats were playing this game where one would run like hell and dive into the bushes, and the other one would chase him. Then they'd switch and go the other way. I was sitting right on the sidewalk, so they ran past me every time. There wasn't anything else for them, just fun. I just watched. Run one way.



Switch. Run the other. Now I know these cats didn't belong to nobody, but their joy in chasing was something fierce. I couldn't feel sorry for myself. No way. These cats would be dead in a few weeks, for sure. I just watched this clock that went back and forth, and I'd laugh pretty hard at how they'd stumble and do stupid things. Everything I was was gone. As far as I knew, Irina could have tricked me and pulled up everything and moved while I was on my walk. But I was watching the world entertain me. It was just everything. The cats, the sky, all the ones who just pointed at me. It was there.

After a while I just got up and started walking.

*(He gets up and walks a few feet, looking behind momentarily as he does,)*

I could have been there forever, but something told me to walk. It didn't matter. I walked a few yards and there was this building. The exact same one. And I knew it was the one. I went up to the fifth floor, and there she was. She had tears streaming down her face. I guess she was walking around the buildings, and even asking the police to hold me if I ran into them. I could see that happening. She was going to be very mad at me. This was the end, I knew it. But I held up my bent key, and she knew I was just a baby. She stopped crying and held me for a long, long time.

*(He looks back at the stairs.)*

*(Lights down.)*

## **REAL LOVE**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN, comes out and addresses the audience. He carries a photograph of a woman in his hands, and he is very angry.)*

MAN

Now I know that some of you aren't in on the funny fucking joke, but you won't get a lot of sympathy from me. Okay, so look at this, and tell me what you think.

*(He holds up the barely discernable photograph. He is shaking with rage.)*

Here is a photo of my love, Deanna Troi, counselor on the Starship Enterprise.

*(He can barely contain himself.)*

Now this is a very nice photograph IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE FUCKING ARROWS POINTED RIGHT AT HER BREASTS! I know it was one of you or the whole fucking lot of you! You can't take it that I'm her fiancé, her betrothed and true love. You're just the type of people who would push over a boy's Saturn V toy rocket just because you don't understand.

Well let me tell you how it is. She's been my fiancé ever since she broke up with that loser Riker, the second officer, and it doesn't matter how far apart we are. She's an empath, and she's looked deep in my heart. People like you don't understand the bond we have between us.

I know you fucks out there. You always think that you can hurt people and they'll come running back, kowtowing to your every whim. Well, I've got news for you. Real news. News that you just shove in someone's face and hope they choke on it because you're sick to death of hearing of their bullshit! I'm not going to be seeing you little shits here pretty soon. You people are too small for me. Starting in July, and get this because you fucking deserve your envy, I'm marrying Deanna Troi, and I'm serving on the Enterprise under Captain Picard. I talked to the United Federation embassy, and they're willing to waive my time in the Academy and commission me directly into Starfleet.

I'll be out here talking to you maybe a few more times, but that's it.

*(He throws the photo on the floor, walks off, then decides to come back and retrieve it. The lights go down as he walks off in a snit. Lights Down.)*

## **SLEEPIN' AT DOUG'S**

**SCENE:** *(A very serious young MAN enters with an acoustic guitar and a microphone with stand. He patiently sets up sits on a stool and stares down the audience with a violent mixture of patience and expectation.)*

This is my song. It's called, "Sleepin' At Doug's."

*He starts playing an aimless riff and crooning sweetly into the microphone. "Sleepin' At Doug's" is completely amelodic and meandering. The lyrics don't always follow the beat and the guitar changes are crude, to put it nicely. Still after the initial giggle, the song should start to come together. It is held together by the sweet croon of the MAN's voice. Whatever else it is, "Sleepin' At Doug's" is meaningful for him and he should sing it tenderly; from the very depths of his heart.)*

*(Singing)*

Well we'd go to sleep at Doug's  
He lived in a garage on Poplar Street  
Just off of Lake by where the bars all were

And he'd buy us beer and beat his wife  
And we'd read his dirty books  
And then beat off in an old aluminum shower  
That barely held  
Anything

Well I remember the time at Doug's  
When I threw up in his closet  
It got in all his shoes and socks under a picture of a helicopter  
Then he woke up about three thirty  
Damn he was mad.  
I said it wasn't me; Mike's the one who did it.

When we'd sleep at Doug's we'd stay up late  
I'd wake up first  
And I'd sit there and wish that I was home  
And I'd look at Doug's George Carlin album  
And I'd look at a Spanky and Our Gang album  
And I'd look at the demonstration record he had of a group that he named Hollow  
Young  
And when he played it he asked me if I'd buy it  
And I lied

Sleepin' at Doug's was fun  
But he never got us high  
But he did buy us beer  
But he should have got us high  
But he bought us beer so I guess  
It's okay.

*(The song dies out like a match on the porch taking the lights with it.)*

## **EVERYBODY'S TRYING TO BE MY BABY**

**SCENE :** *( In the dark; a faint, but familiar roar can be heard. It rises and we recognize it. It is screaming girls. Lights come up on a WOMAN. She sits on the edge of her bed brushing her hair. She is wearing a bathrobe. A cigarette dangles from her lips. )*

I'd have to say that my only brush with greatness was when I was fourteen and I fucked all four Beatles. It was in 1966; they were playing the Cleveland Stadium and my dad bought me tickets for my birthday. I remember they cost four dollars at the time, which was a lot of money to see a group. My big sister saw Elvis for two. Anyway I had some pretty good seats, right in the dirt, and there they were the Beatles. They were wearing these tan Nehru jackets, which was really groovy at the time. You know I didn't really care for the music too much, at least until after, but they were just so gorgeous! Especially Paul. It looked like he was staring at me right through the concert. I thought I was going to die. Afterwards me and my friend Nicole were getting our things together and Nicole said she had to pee. So we stood in line to go pee when this big guy with glasses and English accent comes up and whispers to me; "How'd you like to meet the Beatles Luv?" I laughed and tried to ignore him because my father had told me that some guys might try to take advantage of me out here, but the tall guy, Malcolm, handed me a card that said NEMS on it; it was a backstage pass! By

then Nicole was peeing and Malcolm kind of nudged me, saying "C'mon luv..." and I said, "What about my friend?" "Never mind her," he said, pulling me through the crowd. We got into a black Cadillac and drove to their hotel; the Staten, right off Riverfront. Mal didn't say a word to me, but he kept looking at me like he was trying to smell something on me. Well, we walked right past all the cops and security guards! Oh if Nicole could see me! She would die for George. And then there we were. In the Beatles suite. It was full of smoke; pot smoke I learned later. And filthy. Cigarettes ground into the carpet. Empty coke bottles and old food and wads of clothes everywhere. And there were the Beatles. John was sitting in a low chair with these dark dark sunglasses on and this black chick was giving him head. I mean I was shocked. It was the first time I had ever seen anything like that. But I have to admit. It turned me on. Ringo was on the phone and his talk was so thick I couldn't make out anything he was saying. George was watching TV and Paul was walking toward me. WALKING TOWARD ME!

*(She screams like a teenager.)*

"Hullo Luv," he said and smiled. I just melted. I mean, it was Paul! There he was! I had never ever met anyone remotely famous before. I mean it was the Beatles! "How old is she then?" John asked from the chair as the black girl wiped her mouth and moved on to George. "Seventeen," I lied. I told them my name was Cindy, which is my sister. "Let's go then," Paul said, taking me by the hand. We went into a dark room that had a big sloppy bed and smelled like dirty laundry. "Want a toke?" Paul asked me, handing me the cigarette he was smoking. Not wanting to be considered a girl, I took it and tried to look sophisticated. In my head I think I kind of knew what was coming but I wouldn't let myself go that far. I was freaking from the moment. Trying to deal with this sudden intrusion on my reality. I've thought about it a lot since then you know. And after all these years it's like it really didn't happen. It's like it was a dream. Something I made up.

*(She lights a cigarette.)*

But of course, I know it was real. Believe me I know. Paul started right in on me. He grabbed my breasts and pushed up my skirt and his pants came down and there it was! Paul McCartney's dick! I only got a short glimpse of it though because he shoved it in me so fast I didn't have time to brace myself. It hurt like hell! I was still a virgin of course. But Jesus can you imagine? Thirty years later I can say I lost my virginity to the Beatles! I mean it's like being a part of history. It's being fucked by a part of history.

After Paul was done, Ringo came in and said something I didn't understand and then boom. He was on top of me and man! He was way bigger than Paul! With Paul it hurt and I got scared, but with Ringo it felt good. It felt so good I felt like my whole body was coiling up for a sneeze. I didn't know what an orgasm was. Then Ringo was done. And George was in the room. He kind of had bad breath. I mean they all did. They were smokers and everything, but George's was the worst. That's really all I remember about him. I was scared of John. He asked me if I was a virgin and I lied and said no. I wasn't anymore. I'd already had three

men. So he climbed on and was through real fast. I didn't really feel anything then. Then he asked me how old I was and where did I live. I told him. I told him all about my house and my parents and my sisters and school and everything and he just started crying. I felt like I had said something wrong, but he just cried and cried. Paul came and said something sharp to him and they got up and left. I just laid there until Mal came in. He pushed me down and did me too. I didn't like Mal after that.

*(Long pause.)*

You know though it really was a positive experience for me. I mean if I had been gang banged by a bunch of hoods or Mexicans or something it would have been different. But these were the Beatles! It changed my life. Not for the better, at least not outwardly. Of course I had to give the baby up for adoption. I don't regret that either. I was only fourteen. I couldn't know who the father was. What if it was Mal? I hope that it was Paul. My son would be thirty-three today. Think of it! I wonder if he ever plays their records?

*(She turns out the light.)*

## **I'LL CALL YOU**

**SCENE:** *(The lights come up on a MAN, lit only in silhouette. We can't see his face or features. He is wreathed in backlight and smoke, from a cigarette he's smoking. He is sitting at a small table wearing a phone headset. He is talking into the head set. His voice is calm and collected, almost detached. His voice also carries with it a slight musical quality, a reassuring sound to belie his meaning.)*

MAN

Hi there sweetie, what's your name? Melissa's a pretty name. You must be awfully big to be answering the telephone by yourself... Uh, huh. I can hear that. I thought you must be even eleven. Uh, that's right. You're a smart little girl, I can hear that. I once had a smart little girl named Melissa. She sounded a lot like you... oh, she disappeared. I searched for her and searched for her, but I couldn't find her anymore. I was very sad... yeah, I know you'd be sad too. So tell me sweetheart, are you sure your mommy is really your mommy?... I just mean that sometimes mommies and daddies get kind of tired of their little girls and go out and get new ones. I just thought you might be my missing girl... No? Well sometimes it happens when you sleep, and you wake up in a different house. Do you remember?... what?... okay, why don't you just stop crying and go get your mommy. I need to talk to her. You just make sure that your mommy doesn't get tired of you... ok, so get your mommy...

*(He snickers. His voice changes from sweet to having a sinister edge to it.)*

Yeah, well you just be quiet and listen because I'm only going to tell you this once. If you think your husband Troy is going to go messing around on me with other guys, he's got something else coming because he doesn't know who the

FUCK he's messing with... What? This is Brock, lady, and nobody fucking cheats on me. I can't believe he didn't tell you about me. How many guys is he pumping anyway? He told me he had an open marriage... What? I can't believe you. You're just covering for his next lover. I'm the victim here, you know, and if you think I'm just going to roll over and go away after two years, you've got something coming. I've got evidence... Yeah, well you just ask him and look deep into his eyes as he denies it... I'm not going to give you my number! Why so you can call me and taunt me with his lies! I'm the victim here!

*(He begins to cry.)*

I just don't know what I'm going to do! Is he going back to you? Is that it? Because he told me it was over between you two, and you didn't excite him! He said that he was going to leave you and us and little 11 year old Melissa were going to be a family! *(Maliciously)* Hey. I got news for you lady. I know Melissa. I know her better than you think. He used to bring her over when you were at work. We're going to be a family, you just see... Yeah, well you're away all day and how do you think a court's going to look at that? We're going to win lady. Troy and me are going to be happy, and no insecure bitch like you is going to get in our way. I've got a gun... Yeah well, you just keep thinking that. You just keep crying because that's all you're going to be doing for a long time!

*(He presses a button and lights another cigarette and addresses the audience, still anonymous and in silhouette. His voice, however, is matter of fact and not at all like his phone voice.)*

Telemarketers are funny people. As a rule we like to joke around and not take anything seriously because our jobs are so unremittingly dull and serve no purpose except to generate directionless tension. The difference between us telemarketers and you is that we have secure phone lines. Boundaries become blurred behind the closed, protected consoles. Voices are just voices and not people.

*(He takes a calming drag on his cigarette.)*

So fuck them. Telemarketers say that a lot. There are two kinds of telemarketers. There are those who know they are hassling people and feel bad about it; and there are those who enjoy hassling people, and who, in fact, make it into a sort of game. Guess what kind I am!

Not just a game though, but a GAME. Those of us who play the game play it for real. We get off with fucking with people. We get off with making calls that mess with people's lives just a little bit. Not so much that you'll burn in hell, although there are those who don't care for such fine distinctions. I'm always careful not to go so far that somebody's going to kill themselves. That's just evil. No, I just like to have a little fun. Some of us groove on the pain we cause, but that's going beyond the game. Most of us aren't willing to go that far. We just like poking people with the voice of doom or the voice of salvation. Nothing is real.

The tapes are legendary. They are not the short concise party tapes you've probably heard. They are surreal dances in the dark with a predator and prey. Sometimes the prey escapes unscathed, sometimes the predator feeds. The telemarketers reward is the creation of their own reality. This is a fragile thing at best but even more so when the main ingredient is an unsuspecting person. Plus I make it a rule never to call the same person twice. That's just mean.

Those of us who play the game are not afraid of being caught. That's why we have placed ourselves in these phone sales jobs. We are impervious to long distance charges, phone taps, caller ID and the dreaded \*69. The input block scramblers placed in the telemarketing company's mainframe lines enable them to bypass the normal fiber optic billing archive in favor of a flat monthly payment. It also prevents competition from stealing precious mail order lists through beep-dial identification sensors hidden well within the moldy Bell system.

I am in my third year of telemarketing and if I do say so I have quite a reputation as one of the most fearless players of the game. My palette is monochromatic, but effective.

*(He pushes a button and we hear a phone dialing. He starts to speak, in a wholly different voice than the one he was just using.)*

Well hi there, little guy. Look at you. You must already be in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Really? It sounds like you're a lot more grown up. What's your name there big guy?

*(The lights fade.)*

## **HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A STAR?**

**SCENE :** *(The lights come up on a TV flickering. Presently, we see the forms of a WOMAN, and a MAN. They seem to be fucking. Or rather, the MAN is on top of the WOMAN and all we see of him is his back. The WOMAN faces the audience and while the MAN does his business, she talks. She is distinguished by a large blue tattoo on her forehead. It is a pentagram. She is totally oblivious to the MAN and just lets him do his thing. She watches TV or talks to the audience.)*

Ever try and cash a check with a pentagram on your forehead?

*(Pause)*

I wasn't sorry I got it. It was a beautiful ceremony. My boyfriend at the time, Tony Langoni, was really into the Satanism thing and I went along because I thought the black mass was so romantic. I don't care about Satan or God but at the time I thought Satan would be better because he could get you stuff.

*(Pause)*

But that had been before the three kids and Tony's felony conviction for grave robbing and vandalism. It was his fifth offense and now he's doing a nickel in Clint City. We weren't legally married or anything but I had his kids and I'm his old lady. Tony's been gone a long time though, almost a year and I'm getting sick of people looking at my forehead all the time. I know I have a pentagram up there. A devil sign. But so what? I just wished someone would look me in the eye. It's like having big boobs that you can't ever cover. Usually I handle it well. It gives me a chance to fuck with people. I always have the upper hand because hardly anyone would come right out and mention it. I know what it must feel like to be in a wheelchair or be blind and always have it so unspoken around you that it is all that is there.

*(Pause)*

When I have to write a check at Safeway or go to the bank, I adopt a super friendly manner and I try to lock eyes with whoever I'm talking to. But the cumulative effect is taking its toll. I want to do something about it. I called some skin doctors about having it removed. The cheapest I could find was for three thousand dollars. Since it's on my forehead and the skin is so thin the acid peel wouldn't be effective. They have to peel and regraft the skin and this will not only be painful but expensive.

*(Pause)*

So I tried to save money. It's hard to save money with three kids and a shitload of bills left by a buttfucking boyfriend who only loved Lucifer and crystal meth but I did save all my change. I called and I called but I couldn't find anyone who could do it cheaper than three thousand bucks. I had thirty-one dollars in change saved. A fantastic amount of change. Think of all I could buy with thirty-one bucks. It seems so far away from the three thousand I need.

*(Pause)*

I got depressed so I started staying up late watching those infomercials on TV because they offered this weird ray of hope. Each and every one seemed to be about overcoming some time worn obstacle with the wipe of a rag. I cried. But I cried quietly so I wouldn't wake up the kids. I have my faults, but I didn't deserve this. I had been a pepperette in high school. I had gotten straight Bs. Now I'm just another chick with a pentagram on her forehead.

*(The TV flickers to life, showing another boring infomercial, as she talks. It is the usual type, with an incredulous host and a runty Englishman scurrying around. The lights dim on the prone couple and focus should shift to the video.)*



TV

(Videotape)

HOST

You say STAINBEGONE can remove ANYTHING from ANY surface Ian?

LIMEY RUNT

Thot's roight Moike. Aven uman skeen!

HOST

WHAT? Even human skin?

LIMEY RUNT

Oim glad you arsked me that Moike. Oi'd loike yer to meet someone.

HOST

Who? The president?

LIMEY RUNT

No Moike. Mizz Cindy Shure!

*(The WOMAN, on video, walks out into the infomercial, pentagram and all.)*

WOMAN

Hello everybody. I'm thrilled to be here.

HOST

Say Cindy, looks like you forgot to wash your forehead!

*(Hysterical canned laughter.)*

WOMAN

*(Good sport)*

No Mike. It's a tattoo I foolishly got when I was younger.

*(A canned murmur from the crowd.)*

HOST

Wow! Say Ian, you're not going to tell me...

LIMEY RUNT

Thots roight Moike. STAINBEGONE can remove ENETHING!

*(The crowd gasps.)*

HOST

Even a tattoo? I thought only dangerous lasers and expensive skin peels could do that!

LIMEY RUNT

No problem Moike. With STAINBEGONE expensive tattoo removals are a thing of the past!

HOST

Tell me Cindy how did you come to acquire such a distinctive tattoo?

WOMAN

Well my buttfucking boyfriend was a devil worshiper and one night we were on this acid trip and he tattooed this pentagram on my forehead.

HOST

*(Relieved)*

Oh, it's a pentagram then. I thought for a minute it might actually be a Star of David!

*(The crowd gasps.)*

WOMAN

*(Quickly)*

Oh no Mike! Nothing like that!

HOST

Oh well, that's okay then. Say Ian, can you really wipe out Cindy tattoo?

LIMEY RUNT

That's roight Moike. Ole oi gotter do is spry STAINBEGONE and no more panatgram!

*(He sprays it generously on her forehead and wipes it with a paper towel. The tattoo vanishes. The WOMAN is joyous and the audience wildly applauds In the background, knocking can be heard. Perhaps they are sex sounds.)*

HOST

Oh My God! Do you see it ladies and gentlemen? Do you see it? It's Gone! IT'S GONE!

IT'S GONE.

*(There is a sharp knock and the lights come back up on the couple. The knocking is not sex sounds, but someone knocking at a door. The MAN has slowed down but is still not finished. Another sharp knock. The WOMAN tears her eyes off the TV.)*

WOMAN

*(Flatly)*

What.

VOICE

*(From offstage)*

Mommy I have to go pee.

*(The MAN is finished. We hear him snoring. Her eyes glazed over.)*

WOMAN

Just a minute. I need one more minute...

*(Lights fade.)*

## **GOODNIGHT**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN strides up to a podium. He may or may not be a preacher. He does NOT speak in thunderous tones, but the reverential tones of prayer.)*

I want to urge all of you to pray hard or it won't come true.

Will you stand and repeat this prayer with me?

Oh God who I heartily love and fear please hear my humble prayer.

Please protect me from harm and make sure all my enemies will die.

Please make me lucky in all that I do while my competitors fail and destroy themselves.

Please give me all the things that I want so that I will be happy.

Please make sure I am rich with wealth so that I can afford all the things that will make me happy.

Grant unto me all of my desires no matter how stupid, selfish or crude.

Please make every person; man or woman, fall madly in love with me.

Please hurt all of those who have hurt me.

Please give me the strength and wisdom to manipulate people so that they will do what I want them to do.

Help me oh God to understand why some people are just so useless they don't even deserve to live.

Help me oh God to tolerate the people who will not do what I want them to do.

I offer you this prayer oh Lord because I fear you and I fear the feeling I have that we are all alone and that all we really have is each other.

Which is why I believe in you with all my heart.

Amen and Goodnight.

## SECOND NIGHT

### Don't Try To Make Me Real

*SCENE: (A MAN sits with his back to the audience, looking into a mirror. We listen to his story by watching his face in the mirror's reflection.)*

I could feel the zit on my forehead when I woke up. It was Monday and from its rapid development and burgeoning size I could tell it would be with me for a solid week. This was bad because this was the week I had been planning to talk to Connie Didlot. She works at the front desk of the same hotel I do...She's an interesting girl and I had my eye on her for some time now. She had brown hair and brown eyes and a compelling body. She dressed weird and read interesting books. When I would get my break from the subterranean parking garage booth where I work a twelve-hour shift, I would go to the breakroom and buy my bag of Bugles from the vending machine and she would be there on break too. Always reading some cool book like the movies of Tod Browning or Hollywood Babylon. She smiled at me once and I said hello. I loved her passionately and she was on her way to becoming my main fantasy when I woke up on Monday with the throbbing pimple between my eyes.

*(As he's talking, he's dealing with the pimple in the mirror. His actions mirror his story.)*

My plan to lure her was simple. I would bring along a book I know she would find irresistible, CULT MOVIES and then I would magnanimously offer to lend it to her. Then she would owe me, see. Beyond that it's kind of sketchy. I was taking things slow. I had plenty of time.

That morning I looked in the mirror at my forehead. The zit was exactly dead center between my eyes and just breaking the skin. It resembled a tiny volcano. I briefly wondered if the two were connected; if zits were merely volcanoes of the body. It is the circularity of life that always strikes at such odd and profound moments. Yes. Volcanoes were pimples of the earth. Already it was red and hot and seemed to grow bigger right in front of my eyes. I mused on the third eye concept and how my brother told me about some guy who had sliced open his forehead and found a dormant eye there. Now mine was emerging. Coming. Emerging with a vengeance leaving only ash in its wake. I could almost feel the lashes break the skin.

*(Calmer)*

I knew there were two courses of action here. I could leave it alone and hope it would go away on its own or I could squeeze it and hope it healed before my graveyard shift in the parking garage booth started at midnight. I showered in hot water because I knew squeezing it was wrong. I flashed on a family story my mother told me about a distant cousin named Richard Hossfield who, in 1919, picked a scab on his face and died. I knew the story to be true. I'd seen Richard

Hossfield's grave. I'd heard my great aunt Fie talk morosely about it. "He said, Mama, I'm going high high into the sky..."

*(A pause.)*

Periodically I would go into the bathroom and examine my forehead. I even gave it a preliminary squeeze just to see what would happen but it hurt wildly and I quickly stopped testing it. An hour before I was to leave for work I decided to go for it. I summoned up all my courage and stood real close to the mirror with my glasses off. I squeezed the zit. The pain was tremendous and nothing happened. I squeezed again. My forehead became numb. The zit had doubled in size and was scarlet in color. My fingernails broke the skin and I began to bleed. I squeezed as hard as I could now, knowing I had passed the point on no return. But all I accomplished was to make my forehead heavy and purple and to make the zit appear to be ten times bigger than it had moments before. Desperately I slapped a Band-Aid on my forehead and on the way to work I thought of a funny response in case someone had the nerve to ask me about it.

*(He begins to act out roles and use different voices when portraying others in his story.)*

First car that pulled up the guy says; "That looks like a doozy."

Huh?

"Got a bump on the head there."

Oh yeah.

I loaded up. I'd been waiting all night to use my killer line.

I cut myself shaving!

The man in the car didn't laugh. He looked perplexed. I smiled and said; gotta watch them electric razors! The man now looked worried and confused. "You shave your forehead?" He asked me nervously.

It was three AM when I went on break. I had endured comment from every single car about the Band-Aid on my forehead. I went to the bathroom and peeled it off. The zit was still purple and a giant whitehead had formed. I put on a fresh Band-Aid. I wondered when it would all end. I was thirty-three and still popping zits in strange bathrooms. Was I always going to have pimples? Even as an old man? The very thought of it made me desperate. It was getting so that I could not remember a time when I wasn't self-conscious about my face.

*(He turns and faces the audience for the first time. Lights come up onstage revealing a WOMAN, ACTRESS # 1 sitting at a table, reading a book. A TV is on but it faces away from the audience. Its light casts an eerie glow. The MAN walks*

*in, a Band-Aid on his forehead. Shyly but determinedly he makes his way to the table and sits at the furthest edge. The WOMAN doesn't notice. He clears his throat and croaks out what he thinks is a witty opening.)*

MAN

This is my favorite episode.

*(She looks up, half startled, half annoyed.)*

WOMAN

Huh?

MAN

This STAR TREK episode. It's my favorite.

WOMAN

Oh.

MAN

*(To Audience)*

She glanced down at her book not even bothering to see what episode it was. She looked reluctant to tear herself away from it. I was too hyped to notice though. I was improvising now. I felt high. I felt as if a spirit were acting through me. I could see what I was doing and the effect it was having but I couldn't control it. It was controlling itself. *(Blathering like an idiot to the WOMAN)* Yeah. DC Fontana wrote it. That's a woman.

WOMAN

*(Closes her book and smiles but her eyes are dead)*

You work downstairs, right?

MAN

That's right. In the parking garage.

WOMAN

I thought so. I seen you around.

MAN

Yeah. I'm around.

WOMAN

What'd you do to your forehead?

MAN

*(Quickly)*

A bee stung me!

WOMAN  
*(Recoiling in horror)*  
A bee?!

MAN  
*(To AUDIENCE)*  
There was now alarm in her eyes. A veil had been lifted. My heart soared. My Band-Aid was no longer a vain attempt to hide my shame but a red badge of courage.

WOMAN  
Are you allergic to bees?

MAN  
Nah. I don't think so. Maybe. Possibly. I felt pretty bad afterwards,

WOMAN  
Oh my God you must be brave. I couldn't stand that.

MAN  
I just flew into my face and stung me. It just kept stinging over and over. It hurt pretty bad.

WOMAN  
I thought bees could only sting you once.

MAN  
Maybe it was a wasp then. Or a hornet.

WOMAN  
Oh my God!

MAN  
Yeah. It was pretty bad.

WOMAN  
Ooh. Let me see!

*(She reaches over and tears off the Band-Aid. The MAN doesn't move, but addresses the audience. This bit should be slightly reminiscent of the famous unmasking scene in the Phantom of the Opera.)*

MAN  
Before I could stop her she had leaned over and pulled off the Band-Aid. Her hand on my face sent a charge through me. I felt faint. I could smell her hand. It smelled like lotion. I held my breath.

WOMAN

Oh man that looks really bad. Maybe you should see a doctor.

MAN

Oh I'll be all right. I've been stung by bees before. My grandfather was a beekeeper.

WOMAN

Oh my God. I hate bees.

MAN

Yeah, so it's really no big deal. *(To the audience)* I was blushing. I was embarrassed and it came out as the illusion of modesty. And she was going for it. Her attention and sincerity were far beyond anything I had dared to expect. My mind was on autopilot and was dispassionately observing as my ruse wove a wonderful mosaic and my performance shined like a diamond. *(To the WOMAN)* What are you reading?

WOMAN

It's called "My Secret Garden." It's about women's sexual fantasies. Want me to read you one? There's one about two girls and a dog...

MAN

Maybe some other time. I have to be getting back.

WOMAN

What book do you have there? CULT MOVIES?! Oh wow! I always wanted to read that one! Can I borrow it when you're done?

MAN

I just finished it.

*(He gives her the book and she takes it greedily, flipping through the pages. She smiles at him and impulsively grabs his wrist affectionately and pats his hand. He looks shocked. The lights start to dim and the MAN slowly moves back to the mirror. Soon, the scene is as it was before. The Man standing with his back to the audience and his face in close up on the video monitor.)*

MAN

My head swam with success. All I could think of was how much more detailed my fantasies would be now. As we spoke, my mind filled in details and information, printing her image, her body, her eyes, her smell, everything in order to make my fantasy more vivid and realistic. The more things my mind could itemize the longer the fantasy would last me. It did not occur to me to use reality. It would



never occur to me to do that. When my shift ended and I went home I went straight into the bathroom and directly to the mirror. I tore the Band-Aid off and appraised the zit under the bright bathroom light. It was monstrous. Then I squeezed it. It never felt so good.

*(Lights.)*

## **A PERFECT DATE**

**SCENE:** *(A teenage girl. She is anxious but not shy.)*

Okay. A perfect date.

The perfect high school date would begin in late afternoon with only a few hours before dark. The boy would pick me up in his car and have Nine-Inch Nails playing softly on his car stereo. As I got into the car he would hand me a single white rose and laughingly say, "Good morning, how are you?" While smiling and thanking him with a hug I would notice that he was wearing his black leather pants and that he had put on black eye liner. For that I would give him a kiss on the cheek and he would begin to back out of my driveway. He would then drive us out to a secret place in the country with a couple of trees and an old, abandoned camp ground. We would sit outside talking and munching on food from a picnic basket until it got dark. For the next couple of hours we would light candles and watch the stars. I would get cold (on purpose) and he would give me his jacket. When we decided to leave we would pack everything up and go to McDonalds by way of the drive-thru. He would tease me about my "meatless Big Mac" as we drove to his house. When there, we would sit in his living room and watch a movie. I would fall asleep on his couch and he would put a blanket over me, then finish watching the movie. When the movie was over he would wake me up to take me home before my curfew. We would spend forever on my front porch hugging each other goodbye because we didn't want the night to end. Finally he would end this perfect date with a shy kiss on my forehead and a "goodnight sweetheart" and I would walk to my bedroom and fall asleep with my head in the clouds.

*(She drifts off the stage.)*

## **REUNION**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN sits in a car driving home.)*

MAN

I went to my twentieth high school reunion this weekend. Yeah, I know. I can see all of you either cringing, or making faces. It's just that kind of thing, isn't it? We were so cruel back then, and so optimistic, and so unforgiving, that anytime else in our lives has to be placed against it.

I was one of the lucky ones. I got out. When I went back and drove around town, it was like looking at a photo album. Nothing's changed. But it's not like a Norman Rockwell kind of stasis; it's like I was driving in front of a mirage: a photograph that tried to retain its integrity over the years.

You might think that I came back to prove myself a success, and you're right. I am a successful singer weeknights at the Karaoke bar. I've always been talented with words and projection. Most of the people in the bar... I don't want to tell you the name of it because most of you probably know it... most of the people come to hear me. I have a talent, plain and simple. So you can see where I was a bit leery of returning to my hometown. Well, that was before I got a call.

It was her. She was my first crush, and her name was Delores; Del for short. I'd sit behind her in what seemed like most of my classes. Those that I didn't sit behind her I imagined I did, so now it seems like she was omnipresent.

At that time, maybe 13-14 years old, love was pure. Sex was buried in layers of romantic idealism. I used to plan my day around her locker. I'd suffer the thousand variations of rejections played in my mind in order to give her a stick of gum. If she accepted it, that was enough. Our relationship was consummated. Acceptance of such a seemingly small token represented days of planning, anxiety, awkward timing strategies, and an endless array of life-terminating glances and ambiguous acceptances. All for Juicy Fruit.

To have her call me and ask if I was going to the reunion was to flip back to a time predating the sick feelings of the prom to just total sickness where a ten-cent barter could represent marriage, family, and eventual burial together. She asked me to stay with her, and such an invitation, even at my age, meant that hope sometimes just takes time.

What could I expect after twenty years? I was successful, you know, not so much for my sheet metal job, but I was in the papers for my Karaoke. Some people, well women, wanted to team up with me and tour the country. But I'm a solo. I have my favorites: a lot of Signature, some Tony Bennett, but if they cut out the female accompaniment, then people wouldn't know who the lead is. You have to have some integrity.

So I'm nervous because what if she's fat? What if she's never been to a Karaoke bar? What if she was just plain... joking. I'd rather not have the last twenty years... sullied. I got to her door and she simply asked me in from inside. Not good. I had hoped for a timid voice behind a huge door in which I had to say just the right combination of words known between us. Something about gum, probably.

I walked into the apartment and through the hall. She was in the bathroom wearing a robe and frantically trying to get ready for the reunion. I looked at her. Deep. She looked like she was... my age. I know that sounds bad. I suppose if

you were expecting something else, you'd be wrong. I hugged her and tried not to look at the breast that was peeking through her bathrobe.

I suppose useless banter is useless banter even with the woman who held the tiny flicker of lustful hope against twenty years of reality. She prepared for the reunion as only a woman can, and we even joked about it. I suppose that was a good sign.

We went to cocktails before anyone showed, and I looked at her even deeper. We were laughing in that timeless, surreal sense where everything around you is muffled and spinning, but somehow laughter rises above and you know that the evening is going well. I poured my heart out. I talked about gum. I even talked about my first experiments with sheet metal when I'd make her these small animals. She remembered them. She even remembered how she had to turn down my large gifts because they were just too expensive to accept. I was in a welding phase at that time. But I had my hand on her knee, and I suppose that was a good sign.

I watched her lips form sentences and curl delicately around words, and I saw the slight cracking around her lips smooth to adolescence. Here was that little girl merging with the woman before me. I began to ache in a spot reserved only for whiteness, and I didn't hear what she was saying. She could have barked and that spot would still be hurting.

Before long our classmates began streaming in and we were pulled in opposite directions. You see, we didn't hang out in high school. Our contact was in junior high where we occupied a small globe shielded from the real world. Where sincerity was valued above all else. I'm not even sure she was there at the time. Occasionally I would see her across the room, and she would wave. I'd wave back, quickly looking away in embarrassment. I thought that was a good sign.

I was wearing a suit and tie, not that I wanted to impress anyone, but I had spent such time pressing them earlier. Soon I was surrounded by people in shorts, and I was feeling like I was dressed for success. It made me feel uncomfortable, and if you knew me better, you'd know why. I'm the most self-effacing Karaoke star I know.

I was uncomfortable milling around meeting names that could have been picked from a phonebook, but somehow these names meant something. This particular phonebook was the one selected by fate for me to impress. I had to know who they were. I must admit, that some I did know, and it was creepy. One girl, Lupe Lopez, I hadn't seen since elementary school. It was like her mother had stolen her soul. The little girl was taken and smeared across time to become this shadow creature standing in front of me and telling me things I don't even remember about myself. It was like time was treating these people like a wine stain and blotting and blotting them into familiar but formless figures. Eventually, time would blot them completely out of the fabric of life. I tried to concentrate and

talk to Lupe about old times, but these had already been washed out. We drifted, each regretting that we saw the mortality in each other.

Now I knew that Fred Bagliotto and I weren't friends in high school. He came up to me and was so schmoozy that I had to wonder what café we were at where we poured our hearts out to each other and suddenly became lifelong friends. I attributed his newfound familiarity with my local fame, but strangely he seemed to know a lot about sheet metal too.

Then there was the death list. I was wandering to the bar when we all had to bow our heads in remembrance. Why should we have to die? I looked at the names on the death list, and I shuddered to think that I knew them. Oh well.

I wondered if I looked like them. I was shielded, I thought, by the grace of my talent. At that moment I decided I wouldn't sing in front of them because it would be too... cruel. They had enough taste of mortality with their daily lives.

I had had enough. I know that my presence was felt by all, and to be honest, I was beginning to feel sad. I don't want to say why. Del was nowhere to be found, but that was no surprise since she was friends with a rival school, and she had planned to visit their reunion the same night. I'd just go to her apartment and wait.

It was still early, maybe 12:00. It was understandable that she wasn't there. I'd prepare myself with little bits of poetry, and maybe a melange of my most favorite hits. It didn't matter that I didn't have the music to back me up. A professional Karaoke singer makes backup plans, prepares, and looks for the good in every situation.

I started to laugh at how it felt like I was waiting at her locker so many years ago prepared to give her the only token of love I could think of at the time. This time, I was successful, and I could laugh at how silly I was. I would wait, I knew that, but I didn't have to.

*(Pause)*

I woke up the next morning feeling sick. It wasn't the alcohol. She never came back. To her own apartment. I remembered the feeling of standing near her locker. This time she didn't show, as was most of the time even then. But this time I felt just... old.

*(The MAN acts as though parking his car. He gets out and walks off. Lights down.)*

## **DON'T TOUCH THE PRESIDENT'S BRAIN**

**SCENE:** *(An elderly MAN.)*

I've never told this to anyone before. On the twenty second of November I was employed as a custodial arts technician at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, Texas. I had been hired in May of 1960 as an apprentice lavatory disinfecter and by late 1963 I had worked myself up to sink foreman. I remember that day because there was a rash of salmonella poisonings due to the unseasonably hot weather and the improper storage of mayonnaise. Anyhow I was working on the first floor trauma wing, swabbing waste receptacles when I heard the most ungodly commotion.

A bunch of red faced fellows in dark suits and sunglasses busted in through the emergency room doors waving guns and walkie-talkies. I thought maybe it was some kind of Mafia hit or something but they were wheeling in a man on a stretcher who was moaning and trying to sit up. He had white hair was clenching his fist saying, "Ah thank Ah got sum har in mah mouth..." I later learned that this was governor Connally. I had never seen a real governor before. In the flesh I mean.

Just as he wheeled right by me another, greater commotion occurred. More men in suits, guns and earplugs came in wheeling a dead man on a gurney. I know he was dead because his head was all shot apart and his brains was just hanging there. I know that's a bit strong and I'm sorry. At the time I didn't know who it was. My attention was diverted from the dead man by the striking appearance of a tall lady wearing a pink suit that was all covered in blood. I'm ashamed to say it but I'm afraid my first thought was "Shit, I'm gonna have to stay late and clean up this mess." It doesn't give me any pleasure to admit that but I feel it is an important thing for the permanent record.

It was when I looked into the woman's face that I began to realize what was going on. For who could fail to recognize out beloved first lady even if she was all bloody. She walked right up to me and looked me right in the eye. I almost dropped my toilet brush. She was bone dry. I could tell she was in shock. "Could you please get out of the way?" She said in that husky whisper of hers. Every inch a fine-bred lady. I moved to one side and collided with the dead man on the stretcher. I jarred the gurney and some of his brains moved and my hand accidentally touched them. All this happened in a split second you understand.

As I pulled my hand out of his head in disgust (I still didn't register that this was the president) a weeping man in a suit grabbed me and threw me against the wall. His face was purple and horribly contorted. By making this action, he too jostled the gurney and some of the dead man's brains fell onto the floor. It was a chunk about the size of a golf ball. Without thinking I bent over and scooped it up and just as they rolled the dead man into trauma room one, the man in the suit punched me in the stomach. "Don't touch the president's brain!" He screamed and snatched the hunk of brain from my hand. Frankly I was only concerned with

catching my breath. I was younger then but not accustomed to being punched in the stomach. As I was gasping there, one knee on the floor, I saw a black plastic comb in a pool of blood that must have fallen out of the dead man's suit pocket. I don't know why, I just picked it up. Right away another man with a submachine gun seized the comb from my hand. "That's official evidence! That's official evidence!" he shrieked like a woman. He shouted into my face even though I could hear him just fine.

It was at this point that it actually hit me who the dead man was. I'm not ashamed to say that I busted out bawling right then and there, even though I voted for Nixon.

The man who took the comb from me hailed another man who was rushing by. He was a short, stocky man wearing a fedora hat and waving around a short snub nose pistol; the kind boys like to carry around. "Jack! Get this comb outta here!" The first man shouted. The second man reached for the comb, but someone pushes him and his fedora hat fell off and into a blood puddle. I just walked away before they made me clean it all up.

I never told this to anyone before. It was a black plastic comb. I remember it said "Unbreakable" on the side.

*(Lights.)*

## **I PROMISE**

**SCENE:** *(middle aged WOMAN stands over the dead body of another middle-aged woman, the body is covered up to the neck with a white sheet. The alive WOMAN is over made up, and over coifed, and her face is smeared with tear stained mascara. She begins stroking the hair of the dead woman.)*

When Mike called me to ask me a favor I was so scared he wanted me to say something at your funeral. Like a speech or what do they call them? A Eulogy. No way I could do that Dee. No way how I could tell them about you. About us. I was so relieved when he asked me to do your hair. That I can handle. When you came into my shop the last time I could tell you were dying but I hid it in denial. Jesus Dee, we are the denial generation aren't we? Your denial killed you. Mine will kill me. Anything to keep from facing it huh?

*(She pops open a beer and gets to work on the hair.)*

You know Dee your hair is actually better now than when you were alive. It's not falling out in clumps in my hands. They say it gets stronger after you die. They say your fingernails grow too after you die. Do they?

*(She examines the dead woman's hands.)*

Jesus Dee I can hardly believe these are your dead hands. Christ I wish I never told Mike I would do this. I thought he wanted me to read something at your funeral. I never thought about it. I was just so relieved. Then they close the door behind me and I in this room with you. My best friend. Will you still be my best friend? Can I still feel you here somewhere? Remember how we used to promise each other that if one of us died the other would try to get into contact? That was twenty-five years ago. We were all into that witchcraft shit and ghosts and Fate Magazine and Anton Levay. What were we thinking? I remember how pissed off Chuck was when you painted all the doors in your house black. But he never made you paint them back did he. And when Mike was little you took him over to those people's house who were poisoning your cat and you had him with you when we set out those black candles on their porch. But that cat didn't get sick again did he.

(She laughs at the memory, holding her dead friend's hand tenderly.)

Chuck always put up with you. With the way you would go from kick to kick. First it was books and you cracked the floor in that little tract house with all the bookcases. Then it was witchcraft and occult stuff until all the candles you burned melted on to the coffee table and couch and just stayed there in blobs for years. God I remember getting so drunk and high and just cleaning the fuck out of your house. You were such a shitty housekeeper Dee. But you never pretended otherwise. I felt sorry for your kids though. They didn't understand your need to constantly reinvent yourself. After that it was tropical fish. You had nine aquariums, remember? That fucking Oscar you raised to two feet and how he jumped out of the tank and committed suicide the day after you sold him. Then it was houseplants. Then rocks and crystals. But you got into the crystals because you'd already found the lumps, didn't you. And like the fucking fool you are instead of going to a doctor you just denied it didn't you. I know you Dee. You read all about it on the sly, I bet you became an expert on Cancer, but you wouldn't go see a fucking doctor until it was too late, would you. Too scared. I remember the night you told me, clutching these fucking rocks to your tits that looked like long shafts of ice. They really work, you told me. But I knew that fear in your eyes. It was the same fear you'd have when you and me would steal your dad's wine and drink it and wait for him to come home. You knew he'd beat the hell out of you. And he did.

(She lets go of the hand and lights a cigarette.)

Then you fucking lectured me about my drinking. I know I'm a lush. Fuck it. The only things I ever loved have never loved me back. Except booze. And pot. And pills.

(She laughs.)

Jesus Dee remember the time we got drunk and stole that tombstone? And Chuck got so scared he buried it in your backyard? He was so good to you. He must've fucking hated me. The way I'd sweep in and take you out drinking. But

hey at least he'd get the house cleaned. I never could sleep on those nights we went out. I loved to clean your house. It gave me such a feeling of accomplishment. And Chuck...you were so lucky. And you knew it. Even the way he died you were lucky in that. I know you don't think so. To have him die in your arms like that, under an open sky, even if it was a golf course. It was your birthday. He was going to teach you golf. You were going to exercise and spend more time together. A heart attack at thirty-nine. And you spent the next seventeen years committing suicide didn't you Dee.

(Furiously teasing the hair.)

Sitting in that fucking gay bar like some kind of freak queen, smoking and drinking just riding it all downhill. All the pleasure had gone. I didn't even like to drink with you anymore. All the fun days were behind us. Even when we tried to recreate them, like when we decided to shoplift those tires. We just threw them out on the highway, remember? There was no joy in it.

(She stops and appraises the hair.)

That's why I didn't judge you too harshly when you told me about the lumps and how long you knew about them. I knew you didn't really want to be here. But I know too the agony and irony of how when you finally got your wish, two of your kids had babies and you found out that you were a terrific grandmother. I won't say anything about how you were as a mother because I'm no better. I'm worse. Scott's a bigger alcoholic than I am and he's in jail right now as we speak...

(She stops. Full of emotion.)

As we speak.

(Some finishing touches on the hair hurriedly, while trying not to cry.)

Anyway, goddamnit. I knew you didn't really want to live, but I needed you Dee! You bitch! I counted on you. We went to school together. We've always been friends. I refuse to believe that you're dead and that this is your dead fucking body and I am going to your funeral tomorrow.

(She composes herself. The hair is done.)

Jesus I hope they don't ask me to say anything.

*(Lights down.)*



## I LIKE NIGHTMARES

**SCENE:** *(We are inside the car of a MAN. Beer cans litter the floor. The car can be as complete or skeletal as needed. We get the feeling that the incoherency of the MAN is due to something more fundamental than alcohol.)*

MAN

*(He plays with his keys on the end of which is a gnarled hairy object.)*

What's it look like man?

Fuck yeah. It's a monkey hand dude. I got this when I did my community service. For that time I hit that cop with my lizard. *(Sorrowfully)* Poor Ozzy. .

You know City Park? I was sent there to do my community service from that one time and I got there and the guy, a fuckin DICK named Sherman Waslet gave me a pair of green gloves and a bucket and told me to go out onto the old monkey island and pull weeds...

I remember Monkey Island. Had all those spider monkeys running around on it and had that moat around it so they couldn't escape. All that shit was done during the depression. They put all the guys to work building shit like that.

*(He drinks.)*

...so I go into the moat, which was all dried up and first thing I found was this coin from Spain. Real old. Fuckin cool. I traded it for some beer. That fucking monkey island was covered with weeds, so I started pulling. But fuck man. They were everywhere. If Monkey Island was a head then it had long fucking green hair. I never seen so green a weeds as these. They were like psychedelic green...

*(He unzips his pants and starts urinating into his beer can. This fact can be obscured by the car dash if necessary.)*

So I fucking started pulling weeds and right away I knew something was up because they came out easy, like the ground was real wet underneath. And right away in the dirt and the bucket I saw these real white rocks and I thought it was like a broken dish or something then the next weed I pulled up came in the black dirt a little white mask...

But it wasn't a mask. It was a skull. A monkey skull.

*(He carefully places the filled can next to a row of filled cans and opens another beer.)*

Sure enough, the more weeds I pulled the more monkey bones came up. I mean thousands of them. I had to do 48 hours of community service and I was there for a couple weeks and every day I had a bucket full of monkey bones. Then when I pulled weeds all the way across I got to the outer stone wall of the zoo and I found this little mummified monkey, like crammed into this crevasse in the rock and he had his little monkey arm raised like this.

*(He does a Hitler salute.)*

So I thought you fuckin' Nazi monkey and I cut off his wrinkly little hand with my trusty Gerber knife. Then it dawned on me. I mean, *(emphatically)* HOW COME there were monkey bones there in the first place?

Turns out that when they shut down the zoo in the 70s, they sold all the monkeys to a roadie for the Eagles who was gonna use them in their stage show, but he got busted for selling coke in Florida and forgot all about the monkeys and so did everyone else.

*(He gestures as though swatting a fly.)*

Yeah. Think about it dude. It was the time of the great starvation. People would come and hoot at them and the monkeys would beg for food... and dude there's one more thing I didn't tell you. I saw signs of, like, civilization.

*(More beer.)*

Yeah. Like this kind of pyramid made out of monkey shit, with like symbols and stuff.

What, did they just kill each other like Planet of the Apes, or did they starve to death and turn to cannibalization or Jesus Christ, think about it man. If they had like this war until just one of them was left, the one I found, I mean, how do two spider monkeys kill each other? Maybe they had these rocks... So it was like a monkey holocaust and all those people strolling by...

You don't want to think about the island. You'll have to stand aside. Little feet. Little hands. *(Profoundly)* They...made...me...realize. Like I could do something still.

*(Grimly)*

It's all good.

*(Lights down.)*

## A FACE IN THE WINDOW

**SCENE :** *(A stage window is suspended, as if in thin air. A shade is drawn tightly across it. A WOMAN, comes out very calmly and stands by the window.)*

I don't believe in ghosts per se. I do believe that certain places have certain vibes to them but as for the dead returning and all that I don't really believe it. However, I do have a ghost story. I know everyone has a ghost story but usually they're a "this happened to my cousin's friend" type of story. But this one happened to me.

*(She looks at the window.)*

We moved into this house when my son was only a few months old. My husband worked the graveyard shift at the steel mill and I was all alone all night with an infant. My husband didn't know it but my brother Johnny gave me my dad's old .22 pistol. He knew I was afraid. And he knew why. When we were moving into the house a neighbor told Johnny that the house was supposed to be haunted. So then the dumb sonofabitch tells me. Why would he tell me a thing like that? Then to give me a gun. How's a gun supposed to protect you from a ghost?

*(She looks at the window again.)*

To be honest though I never liked that house. It was a sad place especially when you were alone at night. I was young and trying to be a good homemaker because that's what the times dictated. This was in the early sixties mind you. Anyway, I never liked it there. One time I tried to bake a cake and ended up killing a family of mice that lived in the oven. My husband was furious because we had mice. He didn't care that they died. But I made him bury them in the backyard all the same. I was never like that before. One time I laughed while my brother Johnny ran over a mouse with his bike. I laughed because the mouse's blood squirted all over Emily Asker's dress and it was funny.

*(Another glance at the window.)*

I especially didn't like the windows in that house. Windows are very important to me. I like to look out of them. I like to sit and watch what's going on outside. But I never liked to look out these windows. One window in particular, in the living room, I always kept the shade down. It just looked out onto the wall of the next house over, but I never looked out that window if I could help it. I kept the shade drawn tight. It's hard to explain, but I knew if I pulled up that shade, especially at night, I'd see someone looking in.

*(Nervous glance at the window.)*

I mean, yeah, there were times when I looked out of it and I didn't see anyone else looking in, but when that shade was drawn late at night I just knew it. **I knew it.** And I knew I wouldn't like what I would see.

*(She fingers the shade but doesn't raise the window.)*

This one Friday night in August my husband was working late and the baby was up and I was almost losing it. I just couldn't get the baby to sleep. I was watching TV but I had this feeling of dread all night. I don't believe in all that psychic crap, but I sure as hell felt something strange that night. I couldn't keep my eyes off the window with the shade drawn. It's like I got lost inside of it, and I began to feel a compulsion to raise the shade. But I fought it because I knew I would see something on the other side of the window. I didn't even notice that the baby was crying and the TV was blaring. It was like I was in this vortex.

*(She faces the window. It is that night. A baby crying, a TV going.)*

It just kept building and building. I was full of dread but I was also excited and determined and finally I just stood up. And I went over to the window.

*(She's standing at the window with her hand on the shade. The crying and TV seem to reach a crescendo pitch.)*

And I drew up the shade.

*(She does so slowly and sure enough there is a horrible, contorted face staring right back at her, screaming. She screams, pulls out the pistol and shoots. The lights go out. Then come back up on the WOMAN and the window, shade pulled back down.)*

It was the kid next door. He was sixteen. He had sneaked across the fence and was smoking a joint. I guess I scared him, but he scared me more. I didn't hit him but he had to go to the hospital anyway because he tore his vocal chords screaming. I guess that pot really messed up his mind.

*(She looks at the window.)*

I found out later that a woman had died in that very room. Not from foul play or anything. She just died. I wonder if she was looking out that window.

*(She goes to lift the shade but the lights go out first.)*

## **THE KIND OF MAN I WILL BECOME**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN comes out and sets up a pretend slide projector and a screen he uses a remote control for the "slides.")*

This is me right before the end. See? It was right before my heart gave out. They were barking questions at me and I couldn't hear. Jesus! That pisses me off! They know I can't hear but they still talk to me from the other room. This is the last picture they will take of me. When I saw the print, I didn't recognize myself. I don't look like that, do I?

*(Next slide.)*

This is my morning crew. My boys I meet at McDonalds every morning. We get free coffee because one time they had this deal where if you bought one of their mugs you'd always get free coffee. So we sit there and bullshit. This guy here is Ray. He used to be an optometrist. Made eyeglasses. One day he was grinding some lenses and a sliver of plastic got in his eye. It sliced the main ocular artery and he was never the same after that. Kept saying that someone was going to the bathroom in his toilet at night while he was asleep. He'd wake up every morning and... The guy next to him is Randy Winton. He was a sonofabitch. Used to be a math teacher. Retired after thirty years. He was proud of the fact that he peed on every desk chair in his room at one time or another. I hate math.

*(Next slide.)*

This is Pepper. He's a major pain. Seventeen years old can barely walk and I'm stuck taking care of him. All he does is roam my house and holler; not really even barking, but a kind of low moan. I ordinarily love animals but Pepper makes me hate him. I hit him and tell him to shut up. I can't stand the sound of his voice. It's like every voice that's ever nagged me or yelled at me. Sometimes I can't take it and I lock him up in the basement. I hope and hope that he'll die because I can't afford to have him put to sleep. I don't have the guts either if you want the truth. He outlives me and goes on to be experimented on by a veterinary school after I'm dead. They play with his brain. I don't like to think about it though.

*(Next slide.)*

This is my main occupation for the final twenty years of my life. I don't drink at all now, but I will. I'll like 7&7s and beer. I go to this bar, Roasty's, and I drink there. I'm on a program for recovered alcoholics when this picture is taken. I'm supposed to be at Mass but I go to Roasty's instead. The priests find out about it and try to come and take me back to the Villa, where I live. It's for old men like me who have problems. But I showed them fucking priests a thing or two. Until they knocked me down. I couldn't get up. It was the funniest thing. But I was drinking cheap beer that night. Otherwise there would've been worse trouble. Priests always bring out the worst in me. So does beer.

*(Next slide.)*

Here I am cooking for my kids. When I visit them they put me to work. I worked as a cook for thirty-three years. My specialty is breakfasts; I make big huge pancakes, as big as the plate. I prefer to make good link sausages, not bacon. And home fries not hash browns. I used to love to cook breakfasts, but by the time this picture was taken I was breaking all the yolks and couldn't keep the pancakes from sticking. They don't have no Viagra for what you once were. When you lose the skills that made your living you know your life is almost over.

*(Next slide.)*

This is my grave bought and paid for. I visit it often. It's under a tree right next to a golf course. I don't think about being buried there too much, but I like to think about someday being there. If that makes any sense. A year after this picture was taken I'd be buried right there. And you know what I'd feel? Nothing.

*(The final slide. As he talks, the MAN proceeds a lighter and holds the flame to his palm. He doesn't flinch.)*

This is my favorite picture of myself when I get old. I can't do this now, but someday my hands are going to be hard and the lack of circulation will allow me to do this without much feeling. I'll win a lot of money at Roasty's doing this and I'll win a lot of respect too. It isn't any man who can hold his hand in the fire and look you in the eye and smile. I find when I get older that my smiles are rationed. I can't seem to help the kind of man that I'll become. I look at these slides and have no fondness for any of them. Except this one. I don't know why.

*(Lights fade on him, but stay on slide for a moment then down.)*

## **GOODNIGHT**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN strides up to a podium. He may or may not be a preacher. He does NOT speak in thunderous tones, but the reverential tones of prayer.)*

I want to urge all of you to pray hard or it won't come true.

Will you stand and repeat this prayer with me?

Oh God who I heartily love and fear please hear my humble prayer.

Please protect me from harm and make sure all my enemies will die.

Please make me lucky in all that I do while my competitors fail and destroy themselves.

Please give me all the things that I want so that I will be happy.

Please make sure I am rich with wealth so that I can afford all the things that will make me happy.

Grant unto me all of my desires no matter how stupid, selfish or crude.

Please make every person; man or woman, fall madly in love with me.

Please hurt all of those who have hurt me.

Please give me the strength and wisdom to manipulate people so that they will do what I want them to do.

Help me oh God to understand why some people are just so useless they don't even deserve to live.

Help me oh God to tolerate the people who will not do what I want them to do.

I offer you this prayer oh Lord because I fear you and I fear the feeling I have that we are all alone and that all we really have is each other.  
Which is why I believe in you with all my heart.

Amen and Goodnight.

## THIRD NIGHT

### I WILL WALK YOU HOME

**SCENE:** *(A MAN carefully climbs a ladder in the middle of the stage. The ladder has a bank of lights atop it. The MAN climbs nervously and steadies himself.)*

MAN

Whew! I don't usually mind heights but this thing is a little too tall for me.

*(Steadies himself more. Then spreads his arms out as if invoking the godhead.)*

MAN

This is for my schizophrenic friend!

*(Nothing but the sound of wind.)*

MAN

His name was Jeff and he jumped off this stadium light tower a year ago tonight. He was a schizophrenic and I truly believe that he went to a better place. I was his friend. I knew him since school. He was a real good football player. Made all state. His picture is over there in the gym. They won state that year. He got a football spray painted gold. Later n when he got weird, he claimed that Vince Lombardi lived in that golden football and scolded him at night through the leather. Jeff had some weird stories. When it first hit him, we all thought he was just making that shit up. But then it dawned on me that he actually believed it. Then something happened to his eyes. It's like when someone wears those contact lenses that change the color of your eyes? His eyes didn't change color, but there was something different about them. Different bad.

*(A gust of wind and he steadies himself again.)*

I saw him the day he died. He came by my place looking for some beer money. He wasn't supposed to be drinking beer so I didn't give him any. It fucked up his medication or something. Anyhow he got mad. He asked me if I had anything to smoke and I said no. HE was a hog when it came to smoking. Finally I gave him a cigarette and he left. That night this guy Vince, whose a drummer for this lame band downtown, gave me some mushrooms to paint his shorts with triangle and stuff. It's a long story. But anyhow I took the mushrooms and went to Lincoln Park and started tripping. It was a real windy night. Kind of like this. But

everything was so exaggerated that night it's hard to tell. I had just bought the new CD by Unrest and this song was going through my head over and over ...

*(He sings.)*

"Angel/ I will walk/You home..." It's a real sad song. And while this eerie music and wind was going on, these great big sheets of paper were blowing all around the park like ghosts. Then a huge tree branch just fell off a tree. In my tripified state I thought I could hear the tree groan with pain and I went over to the branch and could feel it throbbing and then dying away. *(Singing)* Angel...I will walk you home...and then the next day I don't hear from Jeff. And I don't think anything about it, but then two weeks later I find out that he took a swan dive off this light tower. Just dove headfirst into that little Coke stand down there. Fucked up his head so bad they couldn't identify his for a week...

*(He stops and listens to the wind.)*

...Jeff did some fucked up things. I mean the mind is an awesome thing. He just suddenly changed. All of a sudden he was reading the bible. Or huffing gas and smoking cigarettes while trying to piece together torn up paper he'd found in dumpsters. One time he told me that two German women lived in his microwave and argued all the time about whether this *(He crosses his arms)* or this *(he puts his hands on his hips)* is the proper way to show disapproval. He told me that God pulled up to his house in a limousine and told him to take a shower and clean the place up. Another time he pulled the eyes out of one of those big bulge-eye gold fish because he was sure they were video cameras. He put them in his pocket because he wanted to look at them later, when the mind cloud wore off and he could see the wiring and circuitry and not blood and veins.

*(Another gust of wind. He has to steady himself.)*

I mean I don't know. We weren't really friends at all. I mean Jeff was the last person I'd turn to. But I felt like I couldn't just abandon him. Everyone else had. He'd been like big man on campus, you know? Everyone thought he really had it together. Then he ends up talking to squirrels because he thinks they're messengers from the inner realm to Satan.

*(He pulls out a piece of paper.)*

Here's the poem he had in his pocket when he died.

"The trees in the darkness swim through the light  
A little spark in the breeze shows itself despite  
A wave of clouds showering the sky  
A brief flickering has caught my eye  
The hope of brightness is coming to a close  
The light will soon shine  
Forevermore a new wind blows."



*(A gust of wind. He pulls something out of his pocket.)*

I caught a butterfly this morning and that's how I got the idea to come up here. I mean Jeff was my friend. So I thought I'd release this butterfly in his memory. Good old Jeff. One time he looked at me real seriously and said, "Do you know that hair has feelings?"

*(He dramatically flings the butterfly outward but it's dead and it just flutters to the ground. The MAN looks sadly after it.)*

MAN  
Fuck.

*(Lights down.)*

## **I KNOW THAT YOU LOVE ME**

*SCENE: (A WOMAN strides up to a MAN who is seated, reading. She carries with her a boom box that she starts to playing. A plaintive piano comes from its speakers. She starts to sing in his face. It can be either good or bad, but remember, it'll be funnier if it's bad.)*

MAN  
*(Alarmed)*  
What are you doing?

WOMAN  
*(Suddenly breaking into song, accompanied by the music)*  
I know you love me you must care...

MAN  
*(Nervously)*  
Why are you singing?

WOMAN  
*(Singing)*  
I know because I've seen you stare

MAN  
What? I don't know you!

WOMAN  
*(Singing)*  
I know you love me though you say you don't  
You're just confused by that bitch whore skank wife...  
Oh we must be together or together we must DIE!  
I call your house and cry...

MAN  
That's YOU?

WOMAN  
*(Singing)*  
I call you and I sigh, and I'm really fucked up and I'm high but you should really love me true...

MAN  
Oh man this is jacked up

WOMAN  
*(Singing)*  
I know that we've just met...  
You're what my Lord has sent  
If you don't agree with me or God well,  
We can both go straight to hell

MAN  
Wait a minute, you just wait...

WOMAN  
*(Singing)*  
Oh we must be together or together we must DIE!  
You see what you must do for me  
It's very plain for us both to see  
We'll be married and have seventeen kids  
First we must smash you're bitch wife's face to goo  
I know that you are here and can agree with me right now  
and if you don't trust me you just try me  
and you'll truly know what hurts  
Search your heart and you will see that you truly love me.

*(The song finishes. The WOMAN fumbles with the boom box and frantically rewinds her tape. The MAN takes this chance to escape. The WOMAN follows in pursuit, starting the song all over again.)*

WOMAN  
*(Singing)*  
I know that you love me...

*(Lights)*

## SHAME

**SCENE:** *(The stage is dark. We hear the voice of a MAN.)*

MAN

I don't like to talk about it, but I guess we've come to know each other.

*(The lights come up, and we see the MAN sitting on a toilet. His pants are drawn to his ankles.)*

MAN

We're not gonna become friends though because I couldn't stand the idea that you'd know. Unless, of course you tell me something. We can talk about it later. I guess I'm going to feel bad no matter, but at least you can help me to feel something different. Guilt. Self hatred. I don't know. They don't sound any better than shame, but it's all I know. I'm 41, and I want to feel something else before I die. I mean, I was married to shame when I was 5 years old.

I raped a little girl. That's it. Now you might as well point your fingers and get over with it. Go ahead. I've punished myself for 36 years, and I never deserved much else.

I don't expect you to hold back on your judgement; I understand. I made sure that I would never be alone with any girls or have any girlfriends since then. I should say that I was very young. It's no excuse. In fact, when you're young, God says you're innocent. So if you start off wrong, you must be totally damned, right? I'm sorry I said that nasty word. It's not you; it's me. I apologize.

*(He squirms uncomfortably.)*

It was just that my... butt... hole always fascinated me. Ever since I was three, maybe, it was there. I remember I used to enjoy holding back on, you know... boy this is hard. I used to keep myself from getting rid of that nasty stuff. It should have been a clue to me, but how are you supposed to know you're evil?

So anyway, I'd sit and position myself so that any urges to eliminate were dealt with. Oh, I don't mean peeing. Peeing's not so bad; the other stuff, you know. I had those urges to make the most vile stuff, but I suppressed them as long as I could. I guess that was something.

Even my father early on realized how much I had to answer for. I was too young to actually clean up after myself. My mother always did it, God bless her soul. How she could ever stand it, I'll never know. I tried to only do it maybe once every few days so she didn't have to deal with it too often, but I guess that was her penance. But I wasn't ready to like, do it myself when I was done. And this time my mother was gone.

My dad came in and showed me how bad it was. He didn't have to. I knew. But he showed me. I mean, you gotta clean up after yourself because you're the only person who can stand your own shame, you know? He showed me to fold the paper neatly into consecutive squares, one after the other. It never made sense to me. Why should I make something so neat and better than me to clean me? I don't know, but I don't have a lot of respect for toilet paper to this day.

It just always came back to that place on my body. Why did God have to burden us with it? So that we can have weak and shameful reminders of who we really are day after day? I... my worst... experience was when my mom was cleaning em, you know with a wash towel. It felt good, dang it. Maybe if it didn't feel good. I know. It disgusts me to this day, I was so stupid. I thought that it was the soap. I wanted more of that feeling, and that's just wrong. That's the point where I think everything got out of control.

I took this soap, when nobody was looking I swear, and just... jammed it into that nasty place. Nasty. I don't know why. I don't blame you for thinking what you're thinking. I just thought it would feel like the washcloth, only... more. I wish I'd been punished just right there. That instant. I wouldn't be speaking to you now. It just burned.

I think that's where it was. I couldn't have been more than three, but that's no reason. I don't know, maybe I was four, but you can still feel shame then. Responsibility?

It was the neighbor's girls.

*(With great shame)*

Oh, God, I can still see them. There were two of them. One was my age, the other was maybe two years younger. That's a big difference at that age. There's no consent. I was the predator! Damn! Sorry, you're just going to have to excuse me. I'm way too far gone.

I was probably seven, maybe six. I had full control over the youngest, just like on those programs on TV. I had her. Whenever her older sister and I used to sing, we'd tell her to shut up and listen. She was too young to sing with us. I was such a control freak. Yeah, I know. You're right to use harsher words.

I'd go over to her house and ask her to pull her pants down. Here's where the monster comes out. I'm sorry that you have to hear this, but I warned you. If you have to get sick, I won't judge you. I can't. I just wish that I could get as sick as you.

You know, she'd resist asking "why?" And I'd say, "Do you want to die? If we don't do this, you'll DIE..." I didn't even know what it meant, but I must have, because she'd do it. It wasn't a threat that I was going to kill her. I mean, I think I meant that I was there to save her. Pretty warped. Whatever, I had full control. I

could have done something positive like complimenting her on how she was developing or something. I don't know. I wasn't good with women... uh, girls. I'm still not. Instead I just shamed myself.

I used sticks...or fingers. It was horrible. I should have known it was wrong. I mean, God says something is wrong, it doesn't matter your age, does it? I was just evil. I told her she would die.

As with all evil I ended up going too far. My rapes and molestations became more frequent. One time I did it on her steps. Right outside her house! "Do you want to DIE," I said. She was ready to fix herself, but her older sister saw me. I think I wanted to be caught because God was telling me this. She said, "No, no no..." shaking her finger like I had simply touched a hot stove. I'd done something far, far worse. Didn't she see this?

I saw it, even if she didn't. Maybe I was just a seven years old standing over a four year old you know, naked, but I understood. That shaking finger held the Lord's judgement itself, even if the hand behind it didn't understand. I felt like I was supposed to. Ashamed. Deeply, profoundly ashamed. I scarred this little girl, and I should never be allowed to hurt another girl the same way. She didn't ask for me, and she didn't deserve me. No one does.

*(He reaches behind and pulls out a roll of toilet paper. He begins to get up, but stops and peers accusingly at the audience.)*

*Do you mind?*

*(The lights go down.)*

## **TIME HAS TOO MUCH MEANING**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN sits crossed-legged in the middle of the stage. He stares into a cheap electronic version of a fireplace. The neon lights of the fireplace illuminate his face with flickering light. The crackling sounds of the imitation fireplace permeates the scene.)*

**MAN**

It was the end of day 2 and I saw 2 rocks left in my circle. You start with four to count the days. When you fast from food and sit in a circle for days, your ideas of time are lost, and the rocks help. After day two, what was left? I had experienced what I came for; breathed through the demons in my heart, cried at the boredom, slid through the moments of oneness and bliss. I had asked for the purpose of my life. I saw before me many ways to get to the point of where I had to be. Of course where I had to be continued to rescind in the distance as I stepped on the rocks I saw from far away. It was strengthening to know that I had come upon a time where I could see ways to fulfill the purpose of my life. What else was there?

It wasn't quite the end of day 2. The sky was overcast reflecting the uncertainty of both time and direction. I sat and meditated. Boredom welled up in me like in a prisoner facing a life sentence. I had two more days, but it could have been two more decades. Time has too much meaning when each passing microsecond is necessary to add up to a single second, a single minute, a single hour... Time has too much meaning when you are present in the moment, but not part of it.

I decided to go to bed. Drug myself, beat myself unconscious if I had to. Even though it was probably only 5:00 PM, I could not stand the thought of having two more days of knowing I had my questions answered, of knowing that I was to simply bide my time in case God decided to send me a small burning bush into which I could stare and amuse myself.

I lay in bed with a tarp over my head to keep out any bugs; a small opening poured grayness into my cave. Grayness turned to light as the sun decided to remind me of how long it was still until darkness could turn off my senses. Damn. What I thought was a half-hour left of light quickly turned into probably two hours. Two hours, each hour counted by fractions of a second. I was not tired. Suddenly, like being torn from a half sleep by screams from the other side, I bolted upright. What was I doing here? My time here is done! I had to know what was happening to my father and my family. I realized that I could not bear the thought of being in a quest whose time had expired while my father lay dying. It wasn't so much for my father; he would not recognize me even if he tried. To him, I would simply be a passing orderly who just served him breakfast and wiped the confusion off his forehead for a moment. It was the idea that my father might die and I would be sitting under a tree contemplating a rather mundane navel. A moment would pass that was of such importance that it would not pass again, and I would not be there to complete it.

I packed as much as I could in the time my short breaths allowed. I had way too much junk of comfort. No matter. I realized why I had strode into the woods with such confidence: it was to bolt out of there with as much fear and sense of purpose. I paused as I started my escape. Was I leaving because I was simply bored? Was it because I had to have contact with my family, or was this reason an excuse? Probably the latter, I thought, but I bolted anyway.

I walked the path back stronger than when I entered, determined to escape. I thought my friends would be disappointed that I had not stayed the full four days; that I had not suffered the full ritual and that somehow I was spiritually weak. Before I entered the woods, it was explained to me that if I left early, I would simply sit bored in camp because the gates to the outside madness would not be unlocked early. Screw that. I have a dying father!

Scenarios played through my mind as I stormed down the trail; no hunger, no boredom, just raw purpose. I had a rifle in my car. If I needed it to blow the locks off the gate, so be it. If I had to threaten people with it to get the key, well, it probably wouldn't work since I couldn't imagine shooting one of my friends. All this because I decided I had to escape the boredom; the excuse was my family.

I realized that I was in such an emotional state that I probably would not last more than a few words of explanation before breaking down. Why was that? Going through the words in my mind led me to choked off tears of humiliation. I hate emotion. I hate crying suffering such in front of others. It was like being de-pantsed in the middle of gym class. You can't recover gracefully once the pants reach your knees; you can't recover once that first choked emotion becomes obvious to even one other person.

Why should I even have such emotion? I was leaving because of boredom and using the only legitimate excuse I could: the possible death of a family member. It wasn't logical.

I did not have my contact lenses in because I had retired them for the night in a solution of hydrogen peroxide. I had tried to put them back in only to have them light my eyes with fire. Perhaps the burn made my eyes tear as I marched down the escape path. Although I could barely see, my focus caused my feet to land where they had to: away. I approached a figure in camp whom I thought to be my longtime friend. I called him by name, and he turned as though startled. "I can't be here."

It was about all I could say without the emotional pain bursting through my 7 layers of protection.

"My family. My father."

Even though this person was not who I thought he was, he nevertheless understood. I guess I understood at that point as well. I was not leaving by excuse, but by purpose. I was not running away from a reality left in the woods, but towards a reality I had denied all my life. Being human sucks, but it is the only being that truly is for humans. I realized that even though my father had not crushed through his own walls of pain was no excuse for me as his son. If I had broken through even one wall that made our voices louder, why should I still be speaking in muted tones of fear? Fear of actually feeling an emotion whose very nature will rip me apart? Fear that I might expose myself as the illogical, self-centered, loving, confused person that I am?

I tried to explain, but being split down my center by savage reality prevented any words. Words do not form while you're spread along the bread of darkness. Still, I felt a great sadness that for my father and me, it was too late. It was too late for either of us to heal each other, to even make meaningful physical contact. He was alive, but in body only. Still his spiritual death as a father did not stop my role as a son. It was to the rest of my family that my obligations remained. I realized that too much healing was necessary with so little time left in my own life. The long path that should have started when I was just a child had just begun.

*(He walks over to the electronic fireplace and pulls the plug on it.)*

## THE SECRET ART OF HANDLING WOMEN

**SCENE:** *(A rooster of a MAN strolls out onto the stage. He thinks he is something really special. His shirt is open almost down to his stomach. He isn't a freak or anything, but he isn't Cary Grant either. He stands defiantly surveying the audience.)*

Shit man. I can fuck any woman I want any time anywhere. You don't believe me do you? You better believe me. I'm telling you. It's the easiest thing in the world I kid you not. I can walk into a bar and scope out a woman and have her in bed before the night's out. That's no lie either. I got no reason to lie. I'm going to be fifty next month. I had to start my life all over when my wife cheated on me five years ago. Fuck it. She's gonna do what she's gonna do. I mean hell I thought we had a pretty good marriage but one night I came home from work and she said she wanted to talk and we went for a walk and she told me she was involved with this other man. Some guy who owns a construction company. She told me, you know, that I was a good husband and a good lover and a good man and all, so I asked her point blank if it was because of money. And see, she just didn't say anything. She didn't say a word. So that night I packed up my shit and left. The bitch can rot in hell for all I care. I see her driving around sometimes in one of his white pick-ups with his company name on it. A fuckin truck I probably painted down at the shop. You tell me what kind of man it is that steals another man's wife.

*(Some bravado kicks in.)*

Shit man, I got four women now I'm fucking. There's Christy; she's this little biker chick man she'll fuck you till your dick falls off. Man. She's wild. Let me tell you. I like Christy. She don't want to marry me. She just wants to fuck. She's about thirty-three or so. Only got a couple of kids but you can't tell. She wanted me to stick a cucumber up her ass. Man she's wild. Fuck yeah. I did it. Why not? It made mer orgasm more powerful. Whatever. More power to her. All my orgasms are good. Ain't never had a bad one yet! You don't believe me do you. Then there's Jenna; she works in my brother Rudy's restaurant. She's a white chick and she likes Latin men so I give her what she likes. Hell yeah man. Us Latin men have the secret. We know how to eat pussy, which is the only thing a woman really wants. They want you to eat their pussy till they come then they want you to pound 'em as hard and as long as you can. Man, they don't care if your neck hurts or your tongue's sore. They figure by giving you their pussy they done their bit. It's like their ultimate gift man. Fuck it. I'll eat their pussies and pound 'em. What the fuck. Jenna she likes it from behind. Like a dog, man. Hell yes. I ain't lying. She's a little older, probably mid-forties I'd say, but I like 'em older. They got no expectations. Their husbands never made 'em come. Never ate their pussies. That's all you gotta do. But you gotta do it right man. Like this.

*(He demonstrates with his tongue.)*



You don't believe me do you. Bring your fucking girlfriend in here I'll show you how to eat pussy! Fuck man. Then there's Traci, she's a younger gal and tell you the truth she don't have it going on. I'm probably gonna dump her man. She just lays there and lets you do your thing but she don't get into it much. I hate that man. One time I was fucking her and she got her goddamn menstrual period right there in bed. Fuckin' had blood runnin' down my leg and shit. Fuck man. I told her to take a shower and go home. It was nasty. Naw, man. I don't like that shit.

*(Makes a face and a dismissive wave of the hand.)*

I'm careful too man. I don't spill my seed in any woman anymore. I pull it out and shoot it on her. They like that. I'm too old to have any more kids man. Fuck that. You really want to know what the secret is? Shit man, I'll tell you. Aside from eating pussy real good, that is. You gotta pretend to listen to 'em. That's all there is to it, man. I know you don't believe me. But just act like what they're sayin' is important and special and hell they'll suck your dick have your kid any damn thing you want 'em too. I know. Wait up, I'll call Jenna now. You'll see. I feel like fucking her tonight. I'll make her drop whatever she's doing and come to my house. You watch, man.

*(He pulls out a cell phone and dials, smirking at the audience. As soon as someone else comes on the line he changes into a super suave and polite conversationalist.)*

Heya, Hi there. This is Junior. Is your grandma home?

*(While he waits she winks at the audience and sticks the tip of his tongue out. LIGHTS.)*

## **DIG YOUR OWN HOLE**

**SCENE:** *(The lights come up on a typical old folks living room, complete with his and her easy chairs facing a TV. Inside one of the chairs is, BEN. The glow and shimmer from the TV is not unlike a campfire, and BEN, not unlike some prehistoric man gazing thoughtfully into it. His wife JEAN, is in the kitchen, offstage.)*

JEAN

*(Slightly hollering, from offstage.)*

You want ice?

BEN

*(Harshly)*

You know I do! What the hell! *(To the audience, in a more normal tone)* I try not to let my job get to me, but sometimes it does. I know that what I do repels some people and fascinates others. When people ask me what I do for a living I usually just say "Maintenance," and let it go at that. It saves everyone a lot of trouble. What the heck. The pay is good, the benefits are good and I get to work out

doors all day in a peaceful setting. Still, every once in a while I am reminded just what it is I really do and it never fails to jolt me.

JEAN

*(From kitchen)*

You want a cheese sandwich? I'm going to make myself one.

BEN

*(Apopolectic)*

Do you want to see the show or not?!

JEAN

*(Unconcerned)*

It's on a commercial...

BEN

*(Back to audience)*

My last job was for some teacher who had been murdered by the school janitor. I watched the funeral from a respectable distance, sitting in my backhoe with the engine idling. You turn 'em off and it takes six gallons of diesel to get 'em running again. Anyhow, after the services were over and I was about ready to lower her down and cover her over, her husband, some damn bigwig, made me open the casket when everyone had gone. I thought he was going to kiss her goodbye, but instead he spit on her. *(Long pause)* Sometimes I have understanding the relationships people have with one another. I think about it a lot; perched on my jerking backhoe...

JEAN

*(From off)*

You never said if you wanted that sandwich...

BEN

*(Fuming)*

Alright! *(To audience)* Take my wife, Jean. She always demands that I make her feel special while I, myself, have to live without that feeling. She always wants me to tell her how much I desire her, but she never tells me she desires me. *(Hollering into the kitchen)* Put mayonnaise on it! *(Back to audience)* How could she? I'm not a handsome man. I once might have been inoffensive but now mirrors and window glass hurt my feelings. But I'm a reasonable man. But it gnaws at me that I'm not good enough. I know I can be stubborn and set in my ways, but I wish I was allowed to just be myself. I long to be comfortable but I don't dare. Jean thinks she could have done better than me and this unspoken threat always hangs over my head...

JEAN

*(FROM off)*

I can't find the mayonnaise. Where is it?

BEN

*(Exploding)*

Jesus Christ how the hell should I know! *(To the audience, more softly)* Even though we've been married for over thirty years and we have a fine son named Curtis who is an Amyway distributor and a burglar alarm installer, my wife Jean is in love with another man. She has been since our fifth year of marriage when I caught her watching THE NAME OF THE GAME with a funny look on her face. At first she denied it, and I did too. I tried not to notice it, but it crept uninvited into my dreams...

JEAN

How about mustard? Or just plain?

BEN

Just forget it then! *(Back to audience)* I know that I am a jealous man. I have to be jealous because nothing I ever do is good enough. If I allowed Jean to be fearless of my jealousy she would surely leave me for the first man who came along. Like Tony Franciosa...

JEAN

Did you say something?

BEN

NO! *(To audience)* Tony Franciosa is the man Jean loves. I can't even allow myself to say his name inside my own head. I fight back sometimes, by commenting on every pretty girl I see, hoping to hurt Jean and make her feel insecure like me. I want her to know what it feels like, but she doesn't. If only she would be jealous then I would feel secure. But she never does. She doesn't care whether she loses me or not. She can always do better.

JEAN

I'm just going to make you a beef sandwich then. Alright?

BEN

FINE! *(To audience)* One time she tried to save a TV GUIDE with Tony Franciosa on the cover but I found it and threw it away. She never said a word about it. I always leave the room when Tony Franciosa comes on TV. It was always an unspoken, vaguely emotional thing. A tug of silences.

JEAN

Is the commercial over yet?

BEN

NO! *(To audience)* I've lived in Tony Franciosa's shadow for twenty five years growing more and more insignificant. The holes I dig at work are nothing compared to the holes I dig at home...

*(Suddenly BEN stares dumbly at the TV. JEAN finally enters; a perfectly normal looking middle aged housewife, bearing food and drink. She settles down into her chair with BEN gobbling the food she brought with no thanks. She peers at the television and sees something that interests her.)*

JEAN

Look at that Tony Franciosa. He sure is a mess! To think I used to consider him attractive...

*(BEN keeps on grimly eating his sandwich. He offers an aside to the audience.)*

BEN

See? How can she ever want to stay married to a man like me?

*(They continue to eat in silence, staring blankly into the primal, electronic fire.)*

### **I NEVER WANT TO GIVE UP MY MEMBERSHIP TO PANTHERS**

**SCENE:** A WOMAN is standing aimlessly in a bar. We hear disco music that swells then fades away. The WOMAN should switch between moods as directed, being dark and like a small child, then confident and mean-spirited.

WOMAN

*(Quiet and dark)*

I don't know why I keep coming here. It's always the same. My friends keep telling me, "Hey Julie, it's ladies' night at Panthers tonight. You know what that means." I know what it means. It means we'll get here and they'll all be dancing and off leaving me standing here. "You'll meet somebody." *(Nodding her head)* yeah, that's the problem. I'll meet somebody. *(She targets a man in the audience and steps up to him. She becomes accusing.)* What is ladies' night, anyway? Did one of your guy friends make that up so that you can trick me into coming into this smoke filled room so you can fill me with alcohol and date-rape drugs so YOU CAN GET YOUR FINGERS DOWN MY PANTS?!

*(She pulls back and becomes quiet again.)*

I mean look at him. He's gonna want to dance with me. Then he'll ask me to have a drink with him. I'll accept because, well... because it's hard being a working mother and getting out 3 times a week. *(She quickly turns her attention to the rest of the audience.)* DON'T YOU LOOK AT ME THAT WAY! FUCK YOU! *(Quietly, almost under her breath)* Fuck you. I shouldn't have to buy myself drinks.

*(She turns her attention back to the guy in the audience. She asks, almost pleads)*

So you're thinking of asking me to dance? *(Pause)* WELL I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU STICK YOUR PENIS IN ME AND THAT'S FINAL!

*(She breaks off with him and addresses the audience)*

This is pathetic. What is he thinking? I don't even like this music. Why should I want to dance to it? And c'mon, any man who is asking girls here to dance is only after one thing. So sad. Plus look at him. He's such a nerd. (Mockingly) He wants to take me home to his nerd home in nerdistan village where he can introduce me to his nerd mother and we can have nerd children. I mean, I'm pretty, right? (She looks into the audience for confirmation and appears affirmed) Yeah, that's right. And look at him. He can't even walk up to me with confidence. Like I'm giving off bad vibes or something.

Anyway, guys just want to get a few drinks in you, dance a little bit, then take you home and...You know. So I have to look at every guy who comes in here as though he has his thing in...well, you know.

It's so fucking hard these days. You don't know because you're all married and happy and proving yourself. You're proving yourself that you're not a washed up loser like me. 29 and not married! I always thought I would have the perfect home with the perfect children and the husband who would beat me only when he had to.

*(She picks out another man in the audience and focuses on him. She acts non-chalantly)*

You know, you seem like a nice guy, but if you can't fulfill me as a woman, then I can't see any future for us. (Pause) Don't turn away. (With false sincerity) This is REAL. We're REAL people here. I've just given up on being false. I was raped about 6 months ago. That's REAL, you know what I mean? You just can't stand the truth, can you?

*(She breaks off and addresses the audiences.)*

I just don't understand this world anymore. We used to be sincere. Now we can't even talk about anything but the weather without being uncomfortable.

*(She walks over to the first man, shouting at him.)*

I SAID, I DON'T WANT TO FUCKING DANCE WITH YOU! YOU'RE A JERK!

*(To the audience)*

Why do I keep coming here? Why can't I just find a dreamy man who will look me in the eyes and see me for me? (She makes a broad gesture taking in the whole audience) Oh look what's happening now. It's like sharks. They see blood and they circle. Men have such problems. They're totally attracted for the wrong reasons. (She perks up.) Shit! It's a song I like! God, is anyone going to ask me to dance?

*(She looks anticipatorily at the audience. She targets yet another man in the audience.)*

NO! Get away from me!

*(Her search becomes more frantic, then it stops.)*

Crap. Too late now. I never get to dance the good songs. It's always the stupid slow songs. Round and round until I get dizzy. Why can't guys learn to dance so they can learn to sweep girls like us off our feet? I mean, we're pretty for a reason. *(She looks at the guy she targeted just now.)* I can't believe he asked me to dance. And for such a cool song. If I'm seen with a guy like that, all the other guys will think I can be their little bitch. I'd have to go to a completely different club. I never want to give up my membership to panthers. I mean, we all know it's the coolest club in town.

*(She targets the man she told she was raped to)*

RAPED! I was never RAPED you jerk! *(Pause)* I SAID you were a JERK! *(She breaks off him)* What kind of a come on line is that? That's gotta be the lamest one I've ever heard. Up there with, "gee you have pretty eyes." I mean, listen to the kind of material I have to put up with here. It's no wonder my last boyfriend beat me. I wish I didn't have to settle for these losers in this bar.

*(She targets a woman in the audience)*

What're you looking at bitch? I know. You don't like that I'm pretty and I get asked to dance.

*(She's pacing back and forth. She stops at the first man she targeted.)*

You. You are not getting your fingers down my pants or your penis inside of me. DO YOU UNDERSTAND? *(She breaks off)*

You know. I probably shouldn't have broken it off with my last boyfriend. He didn't hit me that much. And only when I told him he was being cruel. I mean, some guys are just that way *(She looks at the first man she targeted briefly)* and you have to accept that.

*(She finds yet another man in the audience to target and gets close to him. She is shy and demure)*

Well, you gonna buy me a drink?

*(She looks down coyly.)*

Sweetest eyes. You don't really hear that. Usually those jerks (She looks around) say pretty eyes. Not that you're a jerk. And you're confident too.

*(Pause)*

No, my breasts are this big for a reason.

*(Pause)*

That's kind of sweet. Romantic. *(Rolling her eyes)* Yeah, I don't come in here much either. This place is filled up with trash. But how do you meet people? You know... of quality? But you probably won't like me.

*(Pause, ashamed)*

You're not going to like this. I was beaten and raped by my boyfriend about 6 months ago. I probably deserved it, though. I called him a jerk.

*(Pause, she brightens)*

No you're right. I didn't call you a jerk. That won't happen between us.

*(Pause)*

Yeah, let's just get out of here. *(With finality)* I don't even know why I come in here.

*(She leaves.)*

## **RESOLUTIONS**

**SCENE:** *(A teenage BOY walks onto stage. He brings out a large poster board on which is written a list in large capital letters. The list should be legible to the audience. The BOY is at that awkward stage, and he drops a large magic marker on his way out that he has to retrieve. Note: the text in brackets [ ] is not written on the poster board; it is dialogue directly addressed to the audience.)*

### **ACTOR #3**

1. I vow on my honor not to hang out any more with slutty girls like Wendy Dickersheim [you probably don't know her since you don't go to the same school] that just want orgasms all the time and can't have a relationship above the waist. [She's a total loser.] I want to be more with girls like Cindy Ketterling. *(With enthusiasm)* [Yeah!]
2. I'm going to pay more attention to dinosaurs. *(He looks out defiantly at the audience for any objections. He should give a focused look of disapproval if anyone laughs.)*

3. I'm going to get myself into awesome shape this year. 150 pushups every day, 300 situps, 45 minutes of running each and every day. [I'm going to do some weightlifting too, but I don't know much about it, so I gotta get a book. I'm going to add more as I go along, but this should get me at least noticed by Cindy.]
4. I'm going to stand up to Arthur and not let him get on my case anymore. I'm going to go through that door he always says is his. [He can't own a frickin' door.]
5. I'm going to become a helicopter pilot by the time I graduate.[I refuse to do that college crap. That's bogus.]
6. (*Unconvincingly*) I'm going to get closer to Jesus. [This one my mom wanted me to put in, but I guess it's pretty important.]

*(His list is finished, and he addresses the audience.)*

As you can see, I've thought this through pretty good, and gotten most everything in there. The only thing you can argue with, now that I look at it, is the order. (*Guiltily*) I mean I guess Jesus is pretty important.

*(He draws a line from #6 all the way to the top.)*

When you think of it, I've already told that skank Wendy to stop grabbing me in the hall, so it's not like I've got to concentrate on that one.

*(He draws a line from #1 all the way to the bottom. He then pauses to contemplate.)*

I guess that makes dinosaurs right next to Jesus.

*(He looks into the audience with resignation.)*

Yeah, you're right. I suppose it's stupid to be paying attention to dinosaurs when I'm supposed to be like this adult. Yeah, that's kid stuff.

*(He draws a line through #2.)*

I think #3 and #4 are in the right order because I can't be all in Arthur's face unless I'm really buffed out.

*(He pauses again.)*

I really want to be a helicopter pilot by the time I'm 18.

*(He draws a line from #5 to the second place in the list.)*



Yeah, that makes a lot more sense.

*(He's torn now.)*

I don't know, I know I'm going to go to hell for this, but Jesus really hasn't done much for me, and I don't think he knows much about helicopters.

*(He draws another line from the top to the second to last position.)*

If I put him here, he can help me get noticed by Cindy, and that's still good. I mean, he wouldn't even be on the list if my mom hadn't made me feel all guilty. *(With finality)* Well, there's my list. I really, really want to become a helicopter pilot. You know, when you think about it, when I'm a chopper pilot I won't need any of the other things. They've always got the righteous girls as copilots, and if you're in the air you don't need to do pushups and stuff. That's really weird, but good.

*(He crosses everything in his list out except being a helicopter pilot.)*

I should just concentrate what I'm good at. *(With conviction.)* Yeah.

*(He walks off the stage with his poster board.)*

## **WHY SHOULD I BE ALLOWED TO TOUCH THE SKY?**

**SCENE:** *(A WOMAN, lies on her back looking at the sky. Stars are projected onto the ceiling.)*

WOMAN

It starts with the sound of a train in the distance. I know. Who thinks of trains anymore? But it's there. I don't know why. Maybe because so many people have listened to that sound it's imprinted on human existence. If you hear that sound, you know.

Well it starts with me that way, even though I never grew up with trains. Never even seen one, even though I had a dream once that a track ran just up the street and I would listen as I fell asleep at night. But that was just a dream. That's how these things start. You hear a primeval noise, and something basic stirs within you. You don't know where it comes from or where it's going. For me, it's music.

Listen, I don't pretend to be a musician. I can't play a goddammed thing, you know. But it's music. A train drives along and takes me to a place where music exists. Not songs, but music. If you've never heard it, you can't hear. It takes me suddenly to this place, where all the music is perfectly formed and all I have to do is pay attention. And it's not just a melody either. It's fully formed; like I was sitting in front of the fullest orchestra possible. It's different, though. You know

how when you're a kid and you taste something for the first time? It's like you become that taste. You can't believe you haven't tasted it before. How is it possible, with our limited senses, not to have experienced this combination? It brings you in here, and you never stray far from it again. You never capture it again either, but it always lingers like a doubt.

That's how it is with me and music. I'm not a musician, that's the thing. I can only imagine how it is to have your hands translate something into musical substance. It's like a man with no arms who dreams of reaching. How?

So I'm suddenly thrust into music. And I know it comes from me because even though I observe it, I feel it. I can change it. Underneath a harpsichord moves off into its own direction, played by me, even though I had to ask someone what a harpsichord is. It was there, waiting for me. A violin simply flutters at my heart and the vision it sees. Only because it was my heart that wanted it.

Mostly I want to hang on. I don't want to leave this place, and I want to hold what it's telling me. It's usually close to sleep, and those skeptics among you will say that it's simply a dream. It's like those ideas that seem so good when you sleep. You feel them, but when you wake up, their cleverness fades into silliness. It's not like that. It's like stepping from a concert hall to the quiet of a library. As the door closes, you can still hear something. Then it's gone. What you remember promises of something more. Fragments of heaven.

I guess that's a vision, isn't it? But why would creation, in all its wisdom and divinity, waste it on me? Even if I wanted to, I couldn't play it. I could spend the rest of my life weaving its delicate tapestry and not hear that door opening. Why does it waste it on me?

I can hardly explain it to you. Believe me, if I thought you didn't at least try to understand, I wouldn't even be telling you this.

All I can think of is that I've stumbled onto this door, and it's not even meant for my dirty hands. I enter and hear. You know, I remember reading a story about Thomas Edison. He used to sleep only 20 minutes at a time. I don't do that, so it's kind of strange. But whenever he had a problem he couldn't solve, he would take a short nap, and go into this state. It must be something like mine, because he would be walking in this great room where everything that could be invented existed already. All he had to do was turn and choose what to look at. There it was; invented and everything. When he woke, he dragged it with him.

But I can't hold onto anything. I can look. I can hear. I even remember bits and pieces, but even if I sat at a piano, the keys would drive away every connection I had to the music. I'm just a person. Why should I be allowed to touch the sky?

*(The lights of the stars go out.)*

## A TURNING POINT IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP

*(A WOMAN comes out, sits uncomfortable down in a chair, as if she is sore. She addresses the audience.)*

WOMAN  
*(Pissed off)*

Well?

*(Pause)*

Where were you?

*(Pause)*

Oh yeah I bet.

*(She bursts into tears.)*

I waited for you. I felt like a fool. Everyone else had someone with them except me. I didn't know what to answer to any of the questions. You said we were going to go through this together you asshole!

*(Composing herself.)*

Don't even give me your lame bullshit now. I don't even want to hear it. Not now. Yeah I guess I can't blame you. You know it's not that you didn't want the responsibility but that you said you'd be there. You ran away! I never thought you'd run away...What?

*(Pause)*

So what? You're here now. Big deal. It's all over now.

*(Pause)*

I know you could've stayed away. Why didn't you? Yeah right. Sure you do. Just look at me! Everything is changed now! Nothing can be the same. Yeah you could've stayed away. But that doesn't change anything now.

*(Pause)*

It hurt. It hurt bad. (Shouts) It hurt like a motherfucker! Want to see?! Why not? WHY NOT? (Cries) You said you'd go through it with me. You promised me...

*(She stops crying, incredulous.)*

What do you mean it's no big deal? It's a life commitment asshole! It's something that doesn't ever go away!

*(Pause)*

Just get out of here. Leave me alone. Yeah I know you came back but I want you to go now. I want to be alone with myself. I'm sore and I've got a headache. Yes it hurts! What do you think asshole!? No don't touch me. Don't come near me...

*(She fends off an imaginary someone trying to put arms around her, but she doesn't struggle too much before acceding.)*

Let me go you fuck. LET ME GO! (Cries) Oh Jesus what have I done? What have I done? Don't go okay? Just stay with me okay? Promise?

*(She punches him in the arm, outraged)*

Yeah that's what your fucking promises are worth! (Cries) Oh God...

*(She calms down.)*

What? *(Gently)* I know you do. But why did you say you'd do it if you really didn't want to?

*(Pause)*

Well I was scared too. But I trusted you. I waited for you. I believed...No. No I don't forgive you.

*(But she does.)*

What? No. No you can't see. Because. Because you should have been holding my hand and...

*(She stops; her mouth hangs open her eyes fill with tears.)*

What?

*(She cries.)*

I love you too. You really want to see?

*(She stands up and pulls down her sweat pants. On her thigh is a fresh tattoo of a baby angry red and smeared with ointment.)*

Ouch! Don't touch it! Asshole!

## **GOODNIGHT**

**SCENE:** *(A MAN strides up to a podium. He may or may not be a preacher. He does NOT speak in thunderous tones, but the reverential tones of prayer.)*

I want to urge all of you to pray hard or it won't come true.

Will you stand and repeat this prayer with me?

Oh God who I heartily love and fear please hear my humble prayer.

Please protect me from harm and make sure all my enemies will die.

Please make me lucky in all that I do while my competitors fail and destroy themselves.

Please give me all the things that I want so that I will be happy.

Please make sure I am rich with wealth so that I can afford all the things that will make me happy.

Grant unto me all of my desires no matter how stupid, selfish or crude.

Please make every person; man or woman, fall madly in love with me.

Please hurt all of those who have hurt me.

Please give me the strength and wisdom to manipulate people so that they will do what I want them to do.

Help me oh God to understand why some people are just so useless they don't even deserve to live.

Help me oh God to tolerate the people who will not do what I want them to do.

I offer you this prayer oh Lord because I fear you and I fear the feeling I have that we are all alone and that all we really have is each other.

Which is why I believe in you with all my heart.

Amen and Goodnight.

## **END**

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