

ACT I

1

WAITING FOR THE MAN

1

A desolate neighborhood. Burnt out shells of buildings, empty lots. A quiet, sad streetcorner. Enter Kelly. She drags behind her a suitcase.

KELLY

I'm more than what you see. There's more to me. Isn't there? I have these books here with me. I've been collecting them for a while. They're all I have from my old life. I liked to read. I was a reader. I read so much -- fiction. Always fiction. I don't need real life. I have real life here. Here, no one reads. Everyone's mind is empty, and they live in the present. Well, not empty -- but not full of the stuff that fiction gives you, different lives, different times, different costumes. I haven't read in a long time. But they're still there.

Enter Jewel and Marion.

KELLY

(aside)

This is Jewel. I know her. She knows me. Are we friends? I don't know what we are.

JEWEL

Where the fuck is this motherfucker?

KELLY

(aside)

We just spend time around each other. We happen to be near each other. We get high. We know each other. We're not afraid of each other. Not that afraid.

JEWEL

I am in a bad motherfucking mood today.

KELLY

(aside)

She needs her fix. We all do. We all need our fix.

(to Jewel)

Jewel?

JEWEL

Couldn't get any sleep last night.

KELLY

Jewel?

JEWEL
What.

KELLY
Do you like books?

MARION
There was a girl I knew in my group home. She liked books. I never saw her again.

KELLY
I like books. I've got a lot of books here. I used to read a lot. Now I can't read anymore. It's hard to read out here.

JEWEL
Where is this motherfucker?

KELLY
(to Marion)
You like books?

MARION
No.

JEWEL
I'm gonna chew his ass out when I see him. Hey! You two.

Enter Val and Jean.

JEWEL
Val! Jean! You seen this guy?

VAL
You better calm this bitch down.

JEAN
(to Jewel)
Calm down, cutie. It's all gonna be all right.

JEWEL
Jean, I'm serious! I'm going out of my mind!

JEAN
He'll be here soon.

KELLY
(to Val and Jean)
You guys read books?

VAL
What up, fat Marion? How are you so fat? Bitch, you are homeless and you weight 300 pounds. How much you weigh?

MARION

I don't know.

VAL

You don't know anything, do you?

JEAN

(to Kelly)

Hey.

KELLY

Hey, Jean. How are you?

JEAN

I haven't read a book since junior high. How are you?

VAL

You really carry all of these shits in this bag of yours?

KELLY

Yeah.

VAL

Isn't that heavy?

KELLY

I guess so.

VAL

Why don't you dump it? Why don't you sell it?

KELLY

I tried to sell it to a bookshop, but they said they were all worthless.

VAL

Where is this guy?

JEAN

My mom used to read me bedtime stories. That was a long time ago.

JEWEL

(to Kelly)

What's the matter with you? You are a strange fucking bitch. What with all those books. You're strange. It's like you shouldn't exist. I don't know.

MARION

The average life expectancy of us is low. So she probably won't exist too much longer than any of us.

KELLY

I feel like I shouldn't be here.

VAL

Oh, what, you think you're better than us, sugar plum?

KELLY

Of course not. You guys are my friends.

JEWEL

The pills. It's the motherfucking pills. They suck in anybody. Remember that one girl? Rebecca. She was pretty. She was rich. I mean, she had been. She'd lived high on the hog, and came from the nice neighborhood, and had a nice family and nice tits and a nice smile. And yet, she was down here. Scooting around for pills just like all of us.

KELLY

What happened to her?

JEWEL

She was found in the back seat of a car with no wheels.

KELLY

She was dead?

JEWEL

Bitch, are you stupid?

KELLY

What did she die of?

JEWEL

She died of being in the back seat of a car with no wheels.

JEAN

I liked her. You can tell she was raised right. Not like us. Not like you.

VAL

Bitch, you know you love this. You know you love me. Don't you, my honey? My beautiful Jean.

KELLY

I had a nice life, but now I'm here. It all falls apart so fast and so slow.

JEWEL

Blah-beddy-blah-blah-blah-blah -- here he is! Bout motherfucking time, motherfucker!

Enter Tiger Tim.

TIGER TIM

Yo yo.

JEWEL

Where the fuck were you?

TIGER TIM

Fuck you, that's where I was. When the fuck am I on time?
(to Jean)

S'up.

(to Kelly)

And who the fuck is this?

VAL

You seen her before. That's Kelly.

TIGER TIM

I didn't recognize you. And I am usually so good with faces. All right, bitches, you want your shit. Line up. Today's price is five for twenty five dollars.

JEWEL

What? Fuck you! Why? Fuck you!

TIGER TIM

Price is going up. Prices always go up, they never go back down. When they do it's called stagflation. Hey. I made the bitch smile.

JEWEL

Where the fuck is Sexy? I want to see his ass. I want to ask about these prices.

TIGER TIM

Hey, you don't like the shit, you can go across town, buy your shit there. But don't complain when it fries your brain and makes you go -- nuts. Twenty five.

JEWEL

Fuck you.

After a moment, Jewel gives him the money, Tiger gives her a few pills.

TIGER TIM

And yet she pays.

JEWEL

(to Val)

You paying, too?

VAL

I need my shit.

TIGER TIM

(to Kelly)

You want some of this, too, or no? Oh, shit, look. We got a staring contest going on. Look at this bitch. Thinks she can stare me down. Well, you're on, motherfucker, I am the staring king champion of the world. I ain't ever been outstared. When I look, death looks away. With a stare I scare cancer. With my penetrating glance, I -- what's wrong with this bitch, she's just staring. What, bitch? You got a problem? With a stare like that she either want to kill me or fuck me. Yo, look away, have some respect! I said yo, look away! Have some respect!

Tiger hits Kelly.

TIGER TIM

Have some respect. There is a motherfucking pecking order here and don't you forget it. You all exist for my amusement and you are all my playthings. I toy with you like God toys with every man. But God does not witness you, he does not know you are even alive. Because you are all so close to death even he can't tell the motherfucking difference.

VAL

Man, fuck you.

TIGER TIM

Fuck you she says. I have just revealed a bit of wisdom and these washed-up mermaids only care about the pills.

(to Kelly)

And what say you? You want another pimp slap?

KELLY

I want some pills.

TIGER TIM

Thought so. God, these pills must be some good shit, when they can turn a lady, into this.

Exit Tiger Tim, singing.

VAL

Man, fuck him. Let's get high. I know a place. Found some blankets. We can get warm.

JEWEL

Anything to get out of this shit.

VAL

You coming?

JEAN
In a little while.

VAL
Where you going?

JEAN
Gonna go for a walk.

VAL
Yo.

JEAN
I know, but I'm still gonna do it, 'cause I need some money
and 'cause you don't own me.

VAL
The motherfuckers who pay you, they own you, don't they?

JEAN
Just for a little while.

VAL
Girl, when you love somebody you own them, and they own you.

JEAN
Not all of them.

VAL
Why not all of them?

JEWEL
Man, fuck this romance shit, I'm getting high.
Jewel exits, then Val.

KELLY
What are you looking at?

MARION
Nothing.

KELLY
That's not true. You're looking at this bag of books.

MARION
I don't know how to read.
Exit Marion, into the house.

KELLY

(aside)

See what I mean? Something's wrong. Something's wrong. This isn't right. I'm an addict. I've lost everything. I know that. But there's got to be more to me. Somewhere.

(to Jean)

You going somewhere?

JEAN

Gonna go for a walk. You want to come? You can make a little money.

KELLY

Not enough.

JEAN

Anything is enough.

KELLY

Not for me.

JEAN

You want to be rich?

KELLY

I don't know.

JEAN

You're a hungry girl, aren't you? Well, when you're hungry, you gotta eat.

Jean exits.

KELLY

I'm not like these people. But then I am. I saw a car go by this morning, with some nice people inside. And they looked away. They saw me and they flinched and they looked away. And when I see myself on a window or a piece of mirror on the street, I want to look away, too. But I don't.

She exits.

2

CALICO AND HIS ASSISTANT

2

A crime scene. Police officers mill around in the background. Smokestacks visible in the distance. Enter Det. Calico and his Assistant.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

Hey, chief. The coroner says he wants to talk to you. Says he's done with the body. Chief?

CALICO

There used to be some stacks over there, just beyond that building, when I was a kid. You're not from around here, are you?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

No.

CALICO

Yeah. There were two of them. Two hundred feet high each one. Every now and then they'd let out this nasty brown stuff, the color of custard, smelled like sulfur but tasted like a penny in your mouth. The reduction works. Copper. They take rocks, they melt them, make metal, and some of it goes into the air and into your mouth. And then you swallow it. Maybe that's why I'm not right in the head.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

No one's right in the head around here.

CALICO

Of course, it's all gone now. This is a sorry town, kiddo. We're in somebody's nightmare, but the son of a bitch won't wake up.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

That's exactly how I feel, sir. You put my words exactly right. In college, I had to keep my mouth shut. All these professors, none of them have real world experience, and the ones that did had it twenty years back or were sitting behind a desk. What do you do when there's a problem? You fix it. When there's a mess, you clean it, and when there are criminals and junkies and addicts, human garbage? You come down hard on it. You got to. Now, I'm not saying do anything illegal. Not exactly. But this should be hell for people. We should be mean like a couple of junkyard dogs. Scare people straight.

CALICO

Now, how exactly would you go about doing that?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

I don't know. That's why I'm here to learn from you.

CALICO

There's a simple test, kid, for when you're out here. Whether it makes you feel more dead, or more alive. That's all that matters. Come on. Let's go see what this dead body looks like.

They all exit.

3

THE LADIES HANG OUT

3

A burnt-out shell. Marion eats something. A fire crackles in an old bathtub.

JEWEL

Gather round, gather round, my bitches. Snuggle up. It's gonna be a cold night. It's gonna be a night when the cold air floats down like an angel of death, silently flapping her iceberg wings, and unless you huddle and hide, she makes you meat for the roaches. We got a fire!

VAL

This is nice.

JEWEL

Val, take a look at that bitch. Now that is a hardcore bitch. She looks pretty but she's got a tiger inside her.

KELLY

Why do you say that?

JEWEL

You were looking at Tiger Tim today like you wanted to cut him open and suck on his guts.

KELLY

He slapped me.

JEWEL

I mean before that. That's probably why he slapped you. That's why motherfuckers slap us around: they're scared.

KELLY

I was just looking at him.

JEWEL

You were looking at him like a fat bitch looks at a fat hog dog on a hot day. Your eyes bugged out. You had intentions.

KELLY

I don't like him.

JEWEL

You're not supposed to like him. He's a dealer. We hate him for what he is. He is the giver. He has what we need.

KELLY

I don't understand you.

JEWEL

The point of the pills is that nothing needs to make up any sense. Take another.

KELLY

In a little while.

JEWEL

What? Why you so fidgety?

KELLY

Just the way he looked at us. He looked at us like we were trash.

JEWEL

Bitch, we are trash. Deal with it. Enjoy it. You ever notice how it feels so nice to feel filthy?

KELLY

No.

JEWEL

Bitch, you are in a burnt-out shell getting high. You ain't got a home. You are trash. Learn it. Love it. Live it.

VAL

The only one who doesn't seem to care is Marion.

JEWEL

Fat Marion doesn't care about anything. Yo, Fat Marion -- where'd you get that shit?

MARION

The store around the corner was throwing stuff out. So I got some. You guys want any?

JEWEL

The store around the corner. I swear, bitch, you seem to have all the throwout times memorized, so you can jump around like a flea, and keep getting fat. Bitch, why are you so fat?

VAL

Keep your voice down, Jewel, I'm trying to relax, and stop being mean to Marion.

JEWEL

What? The bitch can take it! She don't care. I known Marion longer than any of you bitches and I fucking abuse her all the time. That's the benefit of having all that blubber. It just absorbs my words. Isn't that right, Marion?

MARION

I guess.

JEWEL

See? See the lack of conviction? She was born into this. I think she was found in a burnt out house and somehow she grew up in one. She wore trash for clothes and used broken dishes to eat and played with dead cats for dolls and the rats and roaches came to her tea parties and homeless people were her relatives and fires were her Christmas lights and fights on the street were her TV shows and gunfire was her Fourth of July. She's the only one who's from around here. Something about you, Marion, is magnificent.

VAL

Magnificent Marion!

JEWEL

People leave us alone. There's so much going on in this world, and people leave us the hell alone. But I just want you to know something, my bitches. You are my bitches. And I don't know what it means, and I don't think anyone will ever know what it means, but it means something to a coupla bitches huddling together on this cold-ass night. The world can leave us the hell alone.

VAL

I wrote a poem for my sexy bitch, y'all wanna hear it?

JEWEL

No!

KELLY

What's it called?

VAL

It's called fuck you and listen up and don't interrupt me. To Jean.

"We are two lovers in a stream

We are two nightmares in a dream

We are two variations on a theme.

We cannot walk alone because

our minds are parasited with each other.

Our internal monologues became eternal dialogues

and now we are composed of one another.

I hate the other one whom I am seeing,

I hate the other one who is my being;

I want to be free and be by myself,

but if I kill her, I will kill myself.

This poem will sound better when you're high,

ideally lying in the gutter, facing toward the sky."

What do you think of that, ladies? Written on the back of a pizza box!

KELLY

Val, that was beautiful.

VAL

'That was beautiful.' Fuck you.

JEWEL

Enough of this bullshit, gimme some more of them pills!

We hear steps. Someone's coming.

VAL

Yo, who's that?

JEWEL

(to 'someone')

Get out of here! This is our place! Gimme my bat.

Enter Det. Calico.

VAL

It's that Calico asshole.

JEWEL

Detective Calico.

CALICO

Ladies. Good evening. What's the good word? Nothing to say, fair ladies?

JEWEL

What do you want, motherfucker?

CALICO

Oh, you know, same old, same old. People get high, people die of whatever. We come by to pick 'em up. We're like the garbagemen, and we come by every week. Scoop up the remains. Investigate the death. Was it natural? What is natural? I don't think I've ever met natural. And it certainly isn't you guys. The way you live. It's a wonder you guys live so long.

JEWEL

Why don't you jump off a bridge and fuck off, copper?

VAL

Val, chill. The man's just doing his job. We haven't seen any bodies today, officer.

CALICO

Well, I can't say the same. You guys know a young woman by the name of Jean? OK. I take it from the silence that you do. Well, she's dead.

VAL

Oh. Where?

CALICO

Next to the river, where all that junk gathers. The dumping ground. I keep telling the city, you guys gotta put some cameras up there, figure out who's doing all the dumping. I think the problem is, nobody wants to know. Anyway: I'm homicide. Here I am.

JEWEL

She get killed?

CALICO

Who's to say? The way you guys live. We could push you over with a feather. Oh, she was scratched, and bruised. But all you need for that around here is to walk down the street, and let the potholes and rusty nails and broken glass and sidewalk from seventy years ago do their thing on human flesh. So we don't know. Will she have chemicals in her system? Of course she will, she'll have half a Mexican drug store. What else? Will she have suffered exposure or frostbite? Will people have punched her and kicked her for no good reason? Will she be half starved, and the other half completely? Each one of these things probably killed her. And now, she's dead. I'm not investigating this. I refuse. I may as well investigate a cat, dead on a curb. All I want to know is were there witnesses? Or did you hear anyone say they'd did it? That's all. And now I'm all ears. Guess not. And now I've done my taxpayer's duty, and now I'm going home before I catch a couple of viruses myself.

VAL

Can I see her?

CALICO

No, of course you can't see her. She died indigent, intestate, so she's state property for sure.

KELLY

(aside)

This can't go on like this.

VAL

Will there be a service?

CALICO
(to Kelly)

Oh hello.

(to Val)
No, of course there won't be a service.

(to Kelly)
Who are you? You from around?

Val runs off.

CALICO
I guess you guys did know her.

JEWEL
Fuck off and fuck you.

CALICO
You know who did it?

JEWEL
Calico, even though you are a bitch, you are not Miss Marple.

CALICO
No, I guess you don't. But, unless one of you ladies are an eyewitness, and when you're on that shit I don't think you can even see straight, let alone see far, well... I guess this means my work here is done.

JEWEL
How did she die?

CALICO
Somebody killed her.

JEWEL
What's gonna happen?

CALICO
With the world? It'll keep on turning. Oh, you mean the murder? We'll put up posters. The posters will fade. The posters will fall off. They'll end up as litter. The wind will blow the litter away. But back to you. What's your story, little rose? Watcha got in the suitcase?

JEWEL
She's with me, she's with us, leave her the fuck alone.

CALICO
Don't think I've seen you before. What's your name? Look at you. So pretty. Like a dirty canary. When did you get here?

JEWEL

Don't talk to him.

CALICO

(to Kelly)

Where are you from? These wildcats have been around here forever. But you don't look wild; you look feral.

KELLY

Leave me alone.

CALICO

You know, this neighborhood may seem like a planet and a universe, but it's not. There's still a world out there, of healthy, good people. People with dayjobs. People who smile, and drink lattes, and dryclean their clothes, and watch the news like it's a movie. Of people who go to the symphony, the opera, and even the theatre even though it's boring as fuck. Of people who read novels, and go to Tulum, and spinning. The side of the world that makes garbage, and not the side where the garbage ends up, like here. Think of the river where your friend ended up, choked with detritus. It's much better in the other world. Why don't you come with me?

KELLY

She wasn't my friend. Not exactly.

CALICO

No one's exactly anything around here. Come on. Come with me.

JEWEL

Leave her alone.

CALICO

Come on. I'll take you someplace.

JEWEL

He'll fuck you and then dump you in the river!

CALICO

It doesn't sound like my services are needed in that department. Let's go.

KELLY

Where?

CALICO

There's a charity for women like you, run by some do gooders. They'll fix you up. Get you off your drugs. Put you back on track. Unlike these people, you still have a chance. Come on. Come on. There's nothing but death here. Come on.

KELLY

I don't want to.

CALICO

Yes you do. You don't know you do, but you do.

KELLY

I used to live in that other world. With the good people. Now I'm here. There's some kind of meaning in that.

CALICO

There's no meaning in a mistake. This place is a nightmare.

KELLY

You have nightmares for a reason.

CALICO

You want to stay in this nightmare?

KELLY

There's something nice about a nightmare.

CALICO

This doesn't last. All of you are going to end up like your not-exactly Jean, sooner or later. You're not coming. Come on, I'm dragging you out of here whether you want to or not.

KELLY

Leave me alone!

Jewel draws a gun.

JEWEL

Back the fuck of off her, fuckface. This is my insurance policy, and it is loaded.

CALICO

You know, it's against the law to pull a gun on an officer.

JEWEL

It's also against the law to murder a prostitute but that doesn't mean you're gonna do shit about it.

CALICO

I've got a gun, too.

JEWEL

You want to have a shootout? I can't think of a worthier way to go out than taking you with me.

CALICO

Can't say the same. My life is worth a thousand of yours.

(MORE)

CALICO (cont'd)

(to Kelly)

All right. So, you stay. I'll tell you one thing. I will see you again. Whether you will see me will depend on whether you still have eyes to see. Ladies.

JEWEL

Walk backwards, motherfucker!

Calico exits, backwards.

JEWEL

Oh, god, goddamn. Jean, goddamn it, Jean.

Val re-enters. She's slashed her arms with something sharp. Blood pours from them.

VAL

Guys. Help me. Please. I don't have anything.

Val exits, again.

JEWEL

Val! Val, come back here, girl! Yo, Val!

Jewel runs after Val.

KELLY

You're just sitting there, eating?

MARION

I don't know. I guess. People live and die out here all the time. I feel bad for Jean, though. I liked her. Do you think she deserved it?

KELLY

Deserve's kind of meaningless. Come on, let's go after Val and Jewel.

They exit.

4

THE PLAN

4

An alleyway. No one is around.

Enter Jewel, alone. Then Kelly and Marion.

KELLY

Jewel, we've been looking everywhere for you.

JEWEL

She was bad. She was... she cut herself. There was blood all over the sidewalk. She said, "look at this, this is what my baby went through, and it don't hurt at all because it's what my baby went through," and shit like that.

KELLY

What did you do?

JEWEL

Somebody called the ambulance, and now she's in the hospital. I told them I was her sister. They said we didn't look alike and I told them we were adopted and that I'd fuck them up if they didn't let me ride with her. I rode with her. She's in the hospital.

KELLY

What's gonna happen?

JEWEL

I don't know. She's not getting out for a while. It's like prison. You try to cut yourself, they put you in prison. Ain't that weird? Tiger Tim killed Jean.

KELLY

How do you know?

JEWEL

Officer Jewel, at your service. I've been walking up and down, putting Qs to the peeps. Word's all over. He's talking. I'm gonna pay him a visit. You wanna come?

KELLY

They'll kill you.

JEWEL

I know.

KELLY

I'm coming with you.

JEWEL

They'll kill you.

KELLY

I know. It's fine.

JEWEL

You know their hangout spot? The abandoned drugstore on the abandoned Main Street? Meet me down there at six.

KELLY

Where are you going?

JEWEL

Mind your business.

Jewel exits.

KELLY

I used to read fiction. Fiction has a story. I always thought I had one. But then the pills happened. The pills break stories. My story is pointless. The second best thing is to end a pointless story fast. The first best thing is to not start it at all.

She runs off, Marion follows.

5

REVENGE ON SEXY

5

The ruins of a former pharmacy. Enter Sexy.

SEXY

My name is Sexy. That's because I'm sexy. I've been doing this so long I don't even remember how I started. Psych, I've been doing this for two years, I remember everything. My memory is so good, it's like my brain is made out of glue. These people -- these people live in a sad world. I just provide them relief, pleasure. That's all I do. I don't know why the world is so mad at people like me. I'm just doing what I do, the only thing I know how to do. Is do what I do. It's so simple! A few years back this pill came on the market. I was in junior college at the time, didn't know what the fuck I wanted to do with my self, also known as a business major, and I said to myself, I said to myself, Bradley, you -- 'cause that's my given name -- I said, Bradley, you too sexy to work like a bitch in this workaday world, you meant for greater things. At first I thought, maybe that means I can be president! Maybe that means I can be a surgeon! Maybe that means I can be the president of the surgeons! They tell little kids you can do anything. But what they don't tell them is that you can only do it as long as it's at arms' reach, just inches away. Otherwise, you fucked. So this pill came out. A friend of mine, pharmacist at the time, told me all about how people were trying to rob and steal these pills cause it made them feel good. I said, word? So I started buying them from him and reselling, just as a side hustle, you know what I mean? 'Cause it was right here, at arms length. Fuck else am I gonna do, coming from the rathole of the world? And lo and behold, it's a hit, and my phone number won't stop, and people line up like it's a rich man's funeral. Arms' length, baby. Arms length.

Enter Tiger Tim.

TIGER TIM

Aren't you worried that you gonna die someday?

SEXY

No, not right now. Maybe later. Maybe I die in ten years, when I'm old, and 30, and got nothing left to do in life anyway. Motherfucker, we are in good shape. We have money. We are young. We can do what we want. Who's got that? Fuck it, if I die, at least I had that. We're all gonna die.

TIGER TIM

I don't want to die.

SEXY

That's cause you not as enlightened as me, that's cause you don't have the capacities I do to think things and see the truth. Who's the boss and who does what I say?

TIGER TIM

You're the boss, and I do what you say.

SEXY

Exactly.

TIGER TIM

Yo, someone's coming.

SEXY

God, those bitches are back for more pills. God, they really don't want to live their lives, huh?

TIGER TIM

(aside)

Now here, I've got to confess. I know what these bitches are here to talk about. But fuck 'em. I ain't scared. They're about to get slapped, or maybe worse, like that tight little girl down by the river.

Enter Kelly, Jewel and Marion.

SEXY

Good evening. What the fuck do you bitches want?

JEWEL

We want to talk.

TIGER TIM

(aside)

It wasn't my intention. Things got a little out of hand. I just asked her if she wanted my protection. And maybe I got a little in her face, and so the bitch scratched me. And you can't scratch a Tiger. Cause they scratch back. I always forget how careful you have to be when you hit a woman.

(MORE)

TIGER TIM (cont'd)

They're fragile. They break easy. You gotta hit 'em so they get the message, but not so hard so that they die. Well, I hit her. And she looked like she was in bad shape. So I decided to finish her off. She died easy. I regret it. But, I did it. Sometimes you do things and then you regret it. I got to own my shit. But I ain't scared of these bitches. These bitches is garbage. This is between me and my conscience. And also God. God understands me and my life.

(to Jewel)

What the fuck you girls want?

JEWEL

What happened to your face?

TIGER TIM

I got scratched.

JEWEL

By who?

TIGER TIM

By my mom's pussy when she was giving birth, what do you want to know?

JEWEL

Why did you do it?

TIGER TIM

It was an accident. Chain of events.

SEXY

What? What the fuck happened?

TIGER TIM

I killed one of these bitches.

SEXY

Why'd you do that? Did I say you could do that?

TIGER TIM

It was an accident. Accidents happen.

JEWEL

She was our friend.

TIGER TIM

Well I'm very fucking sorry for your loss.

JEWEL

That might not be enough.

SEXY

Look. The man expressed his condolences. Now, what's the problem?

JEWEL

I am here for more recompense.

SEXY

What the fuck this bitch talking about. Recompense.

TIGER TIM

Chill. Look at 'em. Ain't got lives. Ain't got nothing. Not even alive. Zombie bitches. You want some more pills, bitches? Is that what you're here for? Tell you what, I'll give you double, and put yourselves out of your misery. No, seriously, for real, what you want? All you want is to get high and lie around. Which makes sense. 'Cause your lives are bullshit. 'Cause life is bullshit.

SEXY

Yeah, that's right. This is bullshit. Life moves on.

TIGER TIM

Only God can judge me.

SEXY

That's right.

Jewel takes out her gun.

JEWEL

Only God can judge you, but I can shoot you.

SEXY

Are you totally fucking crazy? I got my boys all around the block. Bitch, you're gonna die. What do you want? You want money? You want more pills? I can give you more pills.

JEWEL

You're looking at a girl who's really fucking tired.

SEXY

Why don't you go home and take a bath?

JEWEL

I'm nothing, I'm nobody, I never have been.

SEXY

Why you making that my problem?

TIGER TIM

Yo, chill.

Give her the shit. SEXY

What you mean? TIGER TIM

Give her all my shit. Give her all my money, everything I got on me. Give her the pills. She's robbing us, let her rob us. SEXY

We've got a lot of shit. TIGER TIM

It don't matter. Give it to her. She won't get far. SEXY

Tiger Tim gives Jewel pills and money.

Congratulations, now please get the fuck out here. SEXY

Jewel shoots Tiger Tim.

Jewel! KELLY

Oh, bitch, you just killed yourself and all the world. Why you do that for? SEXY

I don't know, I just feel like killing men today. Let's go inside that building. JEWEL

Why? SEXY

One less body to drag in. JEWEL

I ain't going in there. SEXY

Then die here. JEWEL

Wait! OK. SEXY

He tries to run away; Jewel shoots him. He falls, dead with one shot.

KELLY

Jesus Christ, Jewel, what have you done?

JEWEL

I am a world breaker. I break open the world. I end stories and start new ones. Here. I stole a car. It's right over there. Get in. And take this money and these pills. Sell them. Use them. Whatever. Just get out of here. Take her with you. Why not. I'm so used to Marion, I don't want to see her die. All right?

KELLY

Why don't you come with me?

JEWEL

Like I just got through saying, you are looking at one very tired girl. And I need a nap of a thousand years. I love you so much. You are my beautiful girl.

KELLY

What are you going to do?

JEWEL

Stay here, and think, and dream a little while. Go, bitch! People are coming.

Kelly and Marion exit.

JEWEL

I think I'll go inside.

She enters the building.

6

CALICO GOES INTO ACTION

6

A few hours later, in the same place, now a crime scene. Police officers stand around. Enter Calico and his Assistant, and other police.

CALICO

How many dead?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

Four inside the building. A few out on the street. It was her. Looks like she went out on the warpath.

CALICO

And the rest of them?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

Gone, dead, hospital, insane. I love seeing it. I love seeing people get what they got coming.

CALICO

There was another girl. That scary one. The one with the look in her eyes. I want to see her again.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

You will. These people make a mess wherever they go.

They exit.

ACT II

7

A FIELD

7

A beautiful field next to a forest. In the distance, we can see the highway. We are very far away from the City.

Enter Kelly and Marion.

KELLY

Marion, come on.

MARION

I'm hungry.

KELLY

We'll get you something to eat. Just keep walking.

(aside)

Our car broke down. I guess any car you're going to steal in our part of town is going to break down on you pretty soon. But at least we got out of town.

MARION

I'm tired.

KELLY

Me too, but so what. We've got to keep walking.

MARION

Do you think they're even looking for us?

KELLY

I don't know. Probably. The gangsters, the police. Jewel aimed a gun at the Detective.

MARION

Where are your books?

KELLY

They're somewhere on a street corner.

MARION

There's no place to sleep.

KELLY

The ground is softer than the city.

MARION

It's gotta get cold in the winter.

KELLY

Colder.

MARION

And there's bugs and stuff.

KELLY

More of them, but more varieties.

MARION

It's hard to eat.

KELLY

That's true. Maybe we can eat a squirrel. You know, that's the first time I've ever seen you smile.

MARION

We just have money and pills. That's all we have.

KELLY

Not very useful in the forest. Unless you want to end it all out here. Do you want to kill yourself?

MARION

I'm hungry.

KELLY

I guess the answer is no. Hey - look. What is that over there?

They exit.

8

EDGE OF THE ARTS CENTER

8

An arts center, a summer festival. Historic farm buildings have been converted into bougie arts facilities by renowned starchitects.

Dozens of members of the power elite, the wealthy international set, walk around. There's an outdoor buffet with wine and cheese and other goodies.

In comes a very well dressed individual, the Arts Administrator who is at the head of this summer arts festival.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Hi, how are you? Dan, you're looking great. Steve, Tom. How are you? Good to see you, good to see you? And how's Doris? And Doreen? And Shelly and Madison? Fantastic, good to see you. Have you lost weight? My god, it's been forever since Aspen!

(aside)

The summer arts festival has begun -- and I am in my prime! All year long, all winter long I labor in the fundraising trenches just for these four weeks. It's hard to enjoy them because so much has gone into them, but I do the best I can. Everybody likes me, I think. And I let everybody think I like them, and I do, mostly. This is my life. It's finding the money for art. I wanted to become an artist, once, long ago. When I was a youth, gay and carefree. Well, I'm still gay, no longer a youth. I remember the day I finally accepted I didn't have enough talent. Oh, I had talent. But a lot of people have talent. Only a few have monstrous talent. And so, I put down my brushes -- I wanted to be a painter. And that day I realized that artistic talent is a prism, and the colors are all those things that flow from it. Fundraising, administration, criticism, technical, you name it. Artists are very few. The rest of us are just colors coming from them. I'm all right with that. I like my life. I still have my brushes, with the paint still stuck on them from that last painting session, hard as a rock.

(to Patron)

Oh, Roberta, how have you been?

WEALTHY PATRON

Very excited for this year!

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

(aside)

She wrote an exciting check.

(to Patron)

Yes, we've got some very good dancers, performers, actors, you know.

WEALTHY PATRON

Stop bullshitting me, Alex. It's Michael Santoro I'm here to see.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

We are very excited that he is in residence this year.

WEALTHY PATRON

Good job on getting him. It's nice to see my fucking money's being used for something halfway decent for once!

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

John, how are you? Well, it wasn't easy. He's a very busy man. Very in demand. Goes from one project to another.

WEALTHY PATRON

Is it true he's going to premiere a new work?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Yes, he's working with a bunch of very young, very talented actors this year. He held auditions in the spring. It's very exciting.

WEALTHY PATRON

You keep using that word, and it's annoying.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Sorry, I'm just -- excited. We also have Eric in residence this summer.

WEALTHY PATRON

Eric who?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Eric. Eric the critic.

WEALTHY PATRON

Eric?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Eric.

Enter Eric.

ERIC

You say my name enough times and I am made flesh.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Eric! How are you?

ERIC

I'm still here.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Very, very nice. You're looking well. Very tanned.

ERIC

I just got back from the Caribbean. Some bullshit college paid me to teach a criticism course for a month.

WEALTHY PATRON

Who are you?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

How can you now know Eric Ericson?

WEALTHY PATRON

I only know artists, I do not know critics.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Every year we have a residency for a theatre critic. This year, Eric was invited and he graciously accepted.

WEALTHY PATRON

You've never given Michael Santoro a good review, have you?

ERIC

I don't think in terms of good and bad reviews.

WEALTHY PATRON

I think people like you are useless.

ERIC

It's my job to tell people who's useless and who's not.

WEALTHY PATRON

Look in the mirror.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Cathy. Friends.

ERIC

It's all right. I know that when you get to a certain level of wealth, you can lose your social graces. The difference between us is that I didn't marry into my brains.

WEALTHY PATRON

Are you trying to insult me?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Cathy, have some more wine?

WEALTHY PATRON

Ask yourself who's paying you your stipend this year, and then stick it in your ear.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Sorry about that. Charlie, how are you!

*Enter Charlie with the actors:
Tom, Aaron, Pau, Annie, Sarah
and May.*

CHARLIE

All right, actors, come on in. Meet and greet time.

ANNIE

Wow. An outdoor theatre.

TOM

Pretty boss, huh, babe?

MAY

It's beautiful! Look at these woods.

SARAH

This is really picturesque.

*Off to the side, Kelly and
Marion enter, out of sight.*

MARION

What's going on?

KELLY

I don't know. I told you, it looks like some kind of county fair. For rich people. Look, there's food and drinks.

MARION

You want to go down there?

KELLY

Hang on. Let's make sure it's not some kind of sex cult.

ERIC

This place is picturesque and you guys are, too.

TOM

Yeah. Who are you?

ERIC

Theatre critic in residence this year. So what's it like to work with Michael? How many auditioned this year?

PAU

Like, thousands.

ERIC

You kids are very impressive. You all must have something special. Oh, don't be so shy, guys. It's OK to be special. Own it. You haven't earned it. You were born special. Not everyone is, you know. It's a talent, a gift. It's not yours to feel proud about, but it is yours to enjoy.

(to May)

Hello there.

MAY

Hello.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Eric. Sorry about that. She's very plain spoken. You know, she gives a lot of money to the Arts Farm.

ERIC

That's fine. People are always lashing out at me. Not always. Often. They're threatened. I guess that means I'm good at what I do. Thank you for having me this year.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

The board selects people, I simply help run the organization. Hello, actors, welcome.

ACTORS

Hello.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Have you seen your accommodations?

PAU

We're staying in tents apparently.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Yes, that's the Arts Farm tradition. It's very exciting.

ERIC

So, Michael Santoro the same year as me, huh?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Yes, it wasn't my decision, and yes, it is a great honor to have him.

ERIC

Let me guess. You were in favor of him and not me. That's fine, I don't bring in donations.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

I didn't say that and I don't want to get into that, Eric. Let's all be friends?

ERIC

I don't take offense. I just think Michael has had better days. I'm not the only one who thinks so. What's the last great work of his? From forty years ago?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

He is a great man and a legend.

ERIC

What is a legend? That means you can't move anymore, that means you're marble, that means no more blood in your veins. Don't worry, kids, you'll still get a memorable experience out of him, he's still plenty brilliant. I guess when you're that good, even when you're bad, you're interestingly bad. Anyway, he still has flashes of brilliance, but his work, it doesn't compare to his first few plays, which changed the world. Now he struggles. What was effortless now requires a

(MORE)

ERIC (cont'd)
 great effort just to make par. He could never make it on his own. Now he jumps from commission to commission, grant to grant.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 Eric, please.

ERIC
 Now he's a subsidized genius--

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 Eric--

Enter Michael's Wife.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 There she is! How are you? How was the trip?

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 Fine, thank you. How have you been, Alex?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 All right, happy to be here today.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 How long has it been?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 It's been forever since last year!

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 You only get a little chunk, don't you? I mean you spend thirty years growing up, thirty years, maybe, of work, and then thirty years of -- well, the rest. Which one of those do you think we're on?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 We're still in the pink. At least, you are. Where is - he?

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 I don't know.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 Oh.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 He has his ways. You know how he is.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 Yes, of course, I didn't mean to--

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 No, of course not.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

But -- did he not come with you?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Said he would drive himself. I'm not joking. He took his old sports car and drove off, said he needed time by himself, he would drive himself.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

All the way from--

MICHAEL'S WIFE

From Boston, yes. Meanwhile, I'm going to my room.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Have you heard from him? Maybe he has a flat tire.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Well, then, he'll change it. After all, he is a genius.

She exits.

WEALTHY PATRON

You didn't tell me naming rights were up this year, did you, you son of a bitch?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

The board is considering it but - who told you?

WEALTHY PATRON

Jesus, Alex, I know more about this place that probably you do.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

I'm sure that's true.

WEALTHY PATRON

So what do I get if I give you a check?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Well, this is not public information yet, but we are doing a renovation of this theatre.

WEALTHY PATRON

What theatre?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

This theatre.

WEALTHY PATRON

I don't see a theatre.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

This outdoor theatre.

WEALTHY PATRON

What? All I see are risers.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

It's an outdoor theatre celebrating our natural--

WEALTHY PATRON

Oh, no. A building. I need a building.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

But this is a--

WEALTHY PATRON

I need a building, goddamn you.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

But we'll put up a sign--

WEALTHY PATRON

Before I die, I need to see my name on the side of a building. It's like a beautiful gravestone.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Everyone - can I have your attention please. Your attention, just for one minute. I just want to say how happy I am to see all of you here today for the start of the summer festival at our beloved Arts Farm. We've had some tough times recently, and many theatres have closed, and many arts organizations have disappeared, and it always seems like the arts themselves are in danger of disappearing in favor of cheap thrills and spandex superheroes and things that don't require your attention, and sports, and things like that. The fact of the matter is that we aren't a very civilized country, when it comes down to it. You know, in Europe, local governments--

WEALTHY PATRON

Get off your fucking soapbox, Alex.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Sorry, I -- I just wanted to say that, despite everything, how happy I am to see each and every one of you today. The arts brought us together. Thank you. That is still special to me. And also a round of applause for those who made it possible.

ERIC

The artists?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

The donors. Thank you. May this year be our best year ever. And the centerpiece will be a workshop performance of a new work by Michael Santoro, which is such an honor for our organization. Now, I am delighted to announce that there are sandwiches -- oh -- almost forgot. The Arts Farm management would also deeply like acknowledge the fact that we are in the ancestral tribal lands, indigenous who were horribly mistreated by our forebears, and we of course completely condemn that historic injustice. Anyway, cocktails and canapes in the reception room by our two star resident chef--

A commotion. Enter Michael.

VARIOUS

It's Michael!

MICHAEL

Charlie. Charlie, goddamn it, where are you?

CHARLIE

Yes, sir.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Michael! How are you? It's Alex!

MICHAEL

Charlie, goddamn it!

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

How are you?

MICHAEL

I feel terrible. Where's my wife? Where's my room?

CHARLIE

This way, sir.

MICHAEL

Probably not in the same place. Let's go.

WEALTHY PATRON

Michael, how are you? Just want to say how much of a fan I am--

MICHAEL

Thank you, please get out of my way. Bye.

Exit Michael.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Well, that was exciting! On that note -- everyone, join me inside. And once again, welcome!

Exit all except the actors and Eric.

KELLY

It's some kind of arts festival.

MARION

What?

KELLY

It's an arts festival.

MARION

What's that?

KELLY

Look, there are cabins over there.

MARION

Maybe we can steal somebody's car. I'm hungry.

KELLY

There's a lot of people down there. No one will notice if we go down and get some of that bread and cheese.

MARION

Yeah.

KELLY

Just try not to say anything or get noticed.

MARION

OK.

They exit.

9

MICHAEL'S WIFE'S CABIN

9

A comfortable artist's residence within the arts facility, tastefully appointed with midcentury furniture. Enter Michael's Wife.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

It's very hard to live with my husband sometimes. There is a side of him that's like one of Picasso's minotaurs, wild eyes and giant muscularity, the rapist, the pure will,

(MORE)

MICHAEL'S WIFE (cont'd)

existing out of all connection with society. But then it passes, like a dream, a bad dream, a dream that haunts you. It's almost a dream that wants to suck away your life, your waking hours. I've been his manager for years, since we met, handling his contracts. I set up his meetings, I manage his calendar. But we started out as equals. We were both writers in the same program. Then, we were a couple. And then one day he dropped out, he left the program, he was all of 23, and he began having his first wild successes and it was like a wind sucked him away and he reached out his hand as if to say come with me and I hesitated, and then I made the decision which defined my life, and I use that in the past tense, because I'm old, I grabbed his hand and I've never been able to let go. And my own life remained far behind me. I mean, of course, my work, my own work as a writer. Far, far behind me. I don't let myself feel sad for things that might have been. I mean, with my own work. That's in the past. Chances are I wouldn't have made it. So few do. On occasion I would write something, but I would never have very much time to develop it, and so it would stay there, hidden away, like a letter you never mail. Anyway. No need to dwell on that. We had a rehearsal up in Boston where his minotaur came out. He abused one of the actors. Not physically; but he can be shockingly cruel without raising his voice or even speaking. I got a little upset. He looked at me like a traitor and I felt like one. He looked hurt and I felt even worse. The solution is simple. I always forget it. It's just a question of managing him. Managing his emotions. Managing myself. Managing, managing.

A knock.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Who is it?

CHARLIE

Charlie.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Come in, Charlie.

Enter Charlie.

CHARLIE

The actors are all in their tents. Everything's good.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Good.

CHARLIE

Can I bring you anything?

What do you mean?
MICHAEL'S WIFE

Food?
CHARLIE

I'm not hungry.
MICHAEL'S WIFE

OK. Well, I'm going to go and make sure everything else is OK. Where is the man?
CHARLIE

I don't know. Charlie?
MICHAEL'S WIFE

Yes.
CHARLIE

You don't have to babysit me. He and I have been in this relationship for longer than you've been alive, I know how to deal with him.
MICHAEL'S WIFE

Sorry. Can I just say something? This last time, it seemed worse.
CHARLIE

It was worse.
MICHAEL'S WIFE

A lot worse.
CHARLIE

It was a lot worse.
MICHAEL'S WIFE

Like, bad enough that...
CHARLIE

Charlie, shh...
MICHAEL'S WIFE

I assume you know that actress quit.
CHARLIE

Some people don't have what it takes. The work is hard.
MICHAEL'S WIFE

You're defending him.
CHARLIE

MICHAEL'S WIFE

The work is the work. There are kind people who are terrible artists and terrible people who are terrible artists, and great people who are great ones, and so on. The work doesn't seem to have a link to the character. The work is the work. The work is difficult. Character is difficult. I need to be alone.

She exits.

CHARLIE

What happened was, when we were in rehearsals back in Boston, an actress screwed up her part and Michael just laid into her, I mean really laid into her. Just hit her with everything he had... it was rough. Granted, she wasn't the greatest actress in the world, but she was only 18 and she was trying. Then Michael's wife got into it, and she laid into Michael, which we never see. It was all pretty crazy, seeing their idol get taken down a notch. Nobody knew what to say, so everyone pretended it didn't happen. This business is so mercenary, everyone is just happy to be here, working with the great Michael Santoro. I'm Michael's assistant. I've been his assistant for over 15 years. Sometimes I wonder what I'm still doing here. I actually went to school for directing, but I got sucked into this and here I am. Maybe one day I'll be able to. Ha! But, you know, I should stop talking, because, as I'm always getting reminded, I'm not one of the main characters.

He leaves.

10

MICHAEL IN HIS ROOM

10

*Another artist residence.
Michael Santoro has thrown his
clothes on his bed. A large
clock is on the wall behind
him. Enter Michael.*

MICHAEL

I am an artist, probably a great one, and certainly a significant one. I am another tile, perhaps larger than most, in the historical arch, where the big names of the past are stuck there, by some magic hand, given the chance -- and it is just chance -- to make something of significance -- something that can last, or have at least a hope of lasting, for generations, centuries, millennia. When I was young, I was so hot. Right out of the gate. I couldn't but make a splash each and every time. With a single play, I decimated the military industrial complex. With another one I made a comprehensive anatomy of the possibilities of language. War, marriage, myths, the history of Europe, all

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

of these got brilliant theatrical treatments by myself, filling up houses across Europe and the coasts and changing the course of theatre history. How big I might be, just how significant, just how great, or if great at all, I don't know. And I don't care, not anymore. There was a time once when I did care but that is what you do when you are a young man, when you are childish, when you have nothing except dreams, dreams that are always, without exception, completely out of proportion to reality. You don't dream like that when you are old. When you are old and established, if you have any sense you stop caring and you just do your work, for among other reasons having dreams is having heartbreak, and dreams don't exist. It's the work that exists. People can't hear your dream, they can't touch it, they can't read it, they can't be moved by it -- but they can by the work. Or at least the hope is there. My name is Michael Santoro and I am an artist, a real artist, because I can see the whole thing, because I am one of the select few who has stared into the abyss, who has looked into the nothing, and come back neither blind nor in despair, but alive, active. I know what that must sound like to the ears of non-artists or semi-artists, but words can't do everything, my friends, and when you hear weak words it is sometimes, though rarely, the words themselves that are weak, and not the thing they are trying to evoke. I'm so confused. I don't even know what I'm saying anymore. I'm ridiculous, ridiculous, so ridiculous.

A knock.

MICHAEL

Goddamn it. Who is it?

CHARLIE

It's Charlie, sir, I just wanted to--

MICHAEL

Charlie, fuck off!

CHARLIE

Yes, sir.

MICHAEL

Charlie!

CHARLIE

Yes, sir?

MICHAEL

Come in here a second.

Charlie enters.

MICHAEL
Where is my wife?

CHARLIE
In her room.

MICHAEL
She asked for a separate room?

CHARLIE
Yes.

MICHAEL
She mad with me?

CHARLIE
No.

MICHAEL
She seemed pretty mad up in Boston.

CHARLIE
She was defending you just now. She was talking about the work, and how the actress didn't have what it--

MICHAEL
OK, whatever.

CHARLIE
Are you all right?

MICHAEL
No.

CHARLIE
Should I--

MICHAEL
I'm like a business that's been racking up debts for years. Every movement is a Herculean effort. When you get old, there's no peace. Things chase you. You are chased, by your memories, by your failures, and as you run from things, you know what is waiting for you.

CHARLIE
Sir, you have had an extraordinary life. You are a living legend.

MICHAEL
I haven't made really good work for thirty years.

CHARLIE
That's just an opinion.

MICHAEL

Look me in the eye and tell me I'm as good now as I was when I first started.

CHARLIE

It's not for me or anybody else to say--

MICHAEL

Ah, you're full of shit.

CHARLIE

The body of work of an artist is analyzed and re-analyzed for years after the death of an artist. Works get appraised and reappraised. Sometimes a little casual thing an artist makes is considered his masterpiece, and the thing he slaved over everyone forgets about. That's what I mean. The play you made last year, about the future of the European Union, I thought that was very interesting. Just on a craft level. Just watching you put together something, with all of your experience, is really amazing. You're a master.

MICHAEL

Masters can make junk. Masterful junk.

CHARLIE

That's not you.

MICHAEL

There is a very thin line between a great artist and a bad one. Did you know that?

CHARLIE

I did not know that.

MICHAEL

The line is much thicker between a good one and a bad one.

CHARLIE

Interesting.

MICHAEL

Charlie, you'll never be a great writer. I think you know that. But you are a great assistant. And without you I couldn't function. In your own way, you've made great work possible.

CHARLIE

Thank you, sir.

MICHAEL

Hopefully, I can have one last good period in my life before...

CHARLIE
Yeah.

MICHAEL
I'm going to go for a walk.

CHARLIE
Yeah, me too.

MICHAEL
You're not going to follow me, are you?

CHARLIE
No, I wasn't going to follow you.

MICHAEL
Good. Good night.

Michael exits, then Charlie.

11

OUTSIDE

11

Back outside at the outdoor buffet. Everyone has gone, except a few caterers in the distance, who are out of earshot. The food is still there. Enter Kelly and Marion.

KELLY
Looks like everybody's inside. Look at all of this food and wine.

MARION
I'm starving.

KELLY
We can pig out, Marion! Oh, this bread is so good. It's like, made really well.

MARION
I think this cheese is rotted.

KELLY
It just smells like that, but it tastes better than it smells. Here, put it on a cracker. You want some wine?

MARION
No, I don't drink.

KELLY

You don't drink, but you take pills? I hear people coming!
Hurry up. Put some in your bag. Let's go.

*Kelly and Marion hide off to
the side.*

*Enter Charlie, pulling a wagon
with folded-up tents.*

CHARLIE

All right, guys. Here you go. Here are the tents.

AARON

That was a long and boring speech.

ANNIE

That's what it takes to succeed in fundraising.

PAU

You've got to give boring speeches to rich people.

AARON

I want to be rich some day.

TOM

How's Michael?

CHARLIE

He's fine. Everybody take a tent.

SARAH

We don't get cabins?

CHARLIE

No. Actors stay in tents. It's part of the Arts Farm
experience! All right, breakfast starts up at 5am, and we'll
want to be ready to go bright and early, at 8. Showers are
down that way.

*Exit Charlie. Everyone checks
their phones.*

AARON

Here we go. You guys are a bunch of addicts.

ANNIE

Oh, hush up.

SARAH

The service here is terrible.

AARON

It's the middle of the fucking woods.

MAITLAND

Don't talk to her like that.

AARON

I'm sorry, but it's nature! It's real! It not your bullshit urban existence. There's such a thing as reality.

TOM

Looking good, May.

MAY

You always look good.

MAITLAND

Look at those fuckbunnies.

ANNIE

Yeah, they're into each other. So what? I think it's nice.

SARAH

I guess when you have their level of hotness you're kind of cosmically obligated to screw. You don't like it?

MAITLAND

I just think they're laying on a bit thick.

PAU

So, anybody book anything recently?

ANNIE

I'm just checking my messages right now. I think I might have gotten something.

SARAH

Cool, what?

ANNIE

A new soap. National.

AARON

Soap opera or soap commercial?

ANNIE

I would never do a soap opera.

AARON

Wait, so you're above a soap opera, but not a soap commercial?

ANNIE

I don't have to explain myself to you!

MAY

A friend of mine, in LA, lived off a national commercial for a year. One day's work. A year.

SARAH

That is disgusting.

MAITLAND

The whole system is so fucked.

AARON

Oh, come on. Like you wouldn't do it.

MAITLAND

A soap commercial? Are you kidding me?

AARON

You're telling me, right now, that you wouldn't do a soap commercial if they paid you \$100,000?

MAITLAND

No!

AARON

What about two hundred?

MAITLAND

No!

AARON

What about three-

MAITLAND

No, I don't care. It's such a betrayal of my artistic journey as an artist.

ANNIE

I'm actually kind of thinking of doing it.

AARON

Betray your artistic journey for \$300,000? Shit, I'll betray it for half that.

MAITLAND

I think it's artistic self-harm. But you do have the right to make your own mind up.

ANNIE

Thank you.

AARON

She definitely needs your permission.

MAITLAND

I just think that you have to try to do good work, work that changes things, work that matters.

SARAH

Guys, can you please stop fighting for ten seconds?

Tom and May are leaving.

PAU

Where are you guys going?

TOM

I'm going to help her set up her tent.

PAU

Ok. Watch out for snakes.

TOM

We will.

They exit.

AARON

Especially one-eyed snakes.

SARAH

Is 'set up her tent' slang for 'put the D in the V?'

PAU

They're gonna fuck. There's no stopping them.

ANNIE

I think I'll say yes to that commercial.

Enter Eric.

ERIC

Evening, kids.

ACTORS

Hello, etc.

ERIC

Did I hear you guys talking about sex?

ACTORS

No.

ERIC

That's too bad.

ACTORS

Thanks. Who are you again?

ERIC

Weren't we already introduced? I'm the theatre critic in residence this year. Eric Ericson. How are you this evening?

SARAH

You already asked us that, but we're still good.

ERIC

Oh, yeah, I did. Sorry. I sometimes shut off my listening. When I was inside there in the cocktail party, I had to defend myself against a lot of angry people. Lots of people don't like a critic. Chances are, I've given some play you like a bad review. I give out lots of bad reviews.

ANNIE

Why don't you try giving out some good ones instead?

ERIC

Oh, I'd like to, kids, I really would. It's every critic's dream to give out good reviews. Critics have two sources of pleasure: giving out really great reviews, and giving out really bad ones. Giving out really bad ones is more pleasurable, but the price is you have to sit through some godawful show. Oh, I'd like to give out more good reviews, but I know too much. I see too many shows. My standards are too high. But I'll tell you this: you need me. You need critics. Criticism makes meaning clear, or at least, clear enough. Criticism casts a light down the center of a work of art, like a hallway, letting you travel through it. Giving you a guide, yet leaving mystery. Sorry, I started pontificating. That's what I do. So, what's it like working with the great Michael Santoro?

SARAH

He's a legend.

ANNIE

He's tough.

AARON

You better be on your A-game, because if you're not, he'll chew your face off.

PAU

We've seen it happen.

ERIC

Good experience, though.

ANNIE

Oh, the best. Real resume-builder.

ERIC

What about you? You're quiet.

MAITLAND

I'm quiet. I'm happy to be here.

ERIC

Just remember they don't make him like that anymore. I haven't given him a good review for thirty years, but that doesn't mean he's not a legend. I'm a little bit of a legend, too, as far as critics go. But we don't get the same kind of love, even though a great critic is as important as a great artist, you know? Anyway. You all look like a great group of kids, I think you're all going to go far.

ACTORS

Thanks.

ERIC

You've all got the goods. You've got talent. You guys are all attractive. You guys are a bunch of Adonises with tight bodies and fresh faces. You should have fun. At your age. Nice night. I'm going to go and get another drink. I'll see you kids around.

Exit Eric.

SARAH

What the hell? What the fuck?

ANNIE

He seemed depressed and sexually frustrated.

AARON

I guess when you're old, and you can't have sex anymore, you get depressed and yet you're still horny.

SARAH

Old people can have sex.

AARON

But should they?

ANNIE

Fifty's pretty old. My parents are fifty.

PAU

Guys, guess what?.

AARON

Pau, fuck. Yet another script.

SARAH

Have you even learned your part?

PAU

Of course. I have my lines memorized by heart. But as I said before. I don't want to be an actor my whole life. You're just a part of someone else's imagination. What I want to do is write. Here, look at these.

Pau hands out scripts.

ANNIE

You know, some people say that you only have time to get good at one thing in life.

SARAH

What's this one about?

PAU

It's about gender identity and racism. If you want, you can be Fidel Castro. It's gender-blind.

ANNIE

Why is it so long?

PAU

There's a lot to say!

SARAH

Pau, I have to rehearse for the show you know, the one written by a certain Michael Santoro?, Greek god?

PAU

I know; I'm just saying; during our downtime, we can go over this. Annie?

ANNIE

Sure.

PAU

You're nice. You're so nice. Why are you so nice?

SARAH

She's nice because she's nice. It's like May. May is beautiful because she's beautiful. Maitland is passionate because she is.

And what are you? PAU

I would be: intelligent. SARAH

Hey, bitch. ANNIE

They roughhouse.

Marion. Marion? KELLY

Yeah? MARION

You want to go down there? KELLY

I don't know. They'll catch us. MARION

How will they know who we are? We can be anything. We can give false names. KELLY

I think they'll know. MARION

There's lots of people down there. How will they know? KELLY

I don't know. MARION

I'm going down there. KELLY

I don't know. MARION

Stop saying that! Take a chance! This is something -- this is something -- this is a total chance. KELLY

*Enter Tom, without a shirt,
and May.*

Did you guys get robbed by the notorious shirt bandits? SARAH

MAY

He was just helping me put my tent up.

MAITLAND

I didn't know that required the loss of a shirt.

TOM

I decided to get some reps in before the evening.

AARON

All right, kids. Gather round. The moment has arrived.

ANNIE

Ooh, what you got there?

AARON

Only the finest.

SARAH

I'm down. I could use a little relaxation.

AARON

It'll help you forget the mosquitoes.

SARAH

I thought mosquitoes were part of it.

MAY

I've never had any of that stuff. I'd be scared.

TOM

Don't worry, May - I'm here for you.

SARAH

(to Tom)

Can you please put your fucking shirt back on? Maitland, you down?

MAITLAND

Sure, why not.

MAY

What if we're all high for the rehearsal tomorrow?

AARON

I think we'll be fine.

ANNIE

(to May)

You all right?

MAY

Kind of scared.

ANNIE
 Massage.

AARON
 Now, if you'll just give me a moment, I will show you some high-end rolling skills -- watch and be amazed.

KELLY
 Let's join.

MARION
 I don't know.

KELLY
 I don't know, I don't know, I don't know! Marion, that's all you say. Don't you have anything to say?

MARION
 I don't know.

KELLY
 God, I can't take this.

MARION
 What's wrong?

KELLY
 Where are we going? What are we doing?

MARION
 I thought we were going to Canada.

KELLY
 And do what? Hide?

MARION
 We're gonna sell the pills, and then split the money.

KELLY
 And then what, Marion?

MARION
 And then buy more pills?

KELLY
 (aside)
 If I go down there, there's no going back.
 (to Marion)
 Come on.

*Kelly approaches the actors,
 followed by Marion.*

AARON
OK, here it is. Look at the size of that alien turd. It could knock out a horse.

SARAH
That's a lot.

ANNIE
Is it safe?

AARON
Of course it is. I will take the first bite of the apple, for your safety. Whoa. Hi. Who are you?

KELLY
Hi. My name is Kelly, this is -- uh, Angela. My name is Angela.

AARON
Which one?

TOM
You said like, three names.

PAU
Maybe it's an alias.

MAITLAND
Shut up. Welcome. Hi, Angela.

KELLY
Hi.

ANNIE
I'm Annie!

KELLY
Nice to meet you.

ANNIE
Nice to meet you, too.

SARAH
Who are you guys?

KELLY
We are interns.

ANNIE
Oh, cool.

KELLY

Sorry, we're dirty, but we've been running around in the forest. Um, we're not actors, though. Not like you guys. I mean, we'd like to be. But we're not.

ANNIE

How do you know you're not? Maybe you are.

TOM

Yeah, just because you're not an actor, doesn't mean you aren't not one. Wait.

SARAH

If only you had as many brain cells as muscle cells.

TOM

You know what I mean.

MAITLAND

So where are you guys from, or?

KELLY

Oh, we're from a big -- small town somewhere. A few miles south. You've never heard of it. It's called -- Green Valley.

ACTORS

Green Valley? Yep, never heard of it, etc.

KELLY

It's not well known.

SARAH

Does your friend talk?

(to Marion)

Hi.

KELLY

She's shy.

ANNIE

What's your name?

MARION

Mary.

ANNIE

Nice to meet you, Mary.

MARION

Nice to meet you.

ANNIE
I'm Annie.

MARION
Hi.

AARON
Speaking of Green Valley, you guys wanna join? We're about to get zooted.

KELLY
Sure.

MARION
No.

AARON
Come on. It's hand on the brain time.

MARION
No, I don't drink.

AARON
Who said anything about drinking?

MARION
I don't drink, I don't do drugs, except pills.

SARAH
Uh, what?

AARON
You got pills? What kind of pills?

SARAH
Wait a minute. Brakes.

MAY
I'm not doing pills.

TOM
I won't let them give you pills, babe.

KELLY
She's just joking, we don't do fucking pills.

AARON
Oh. OK, 'cause we wouldn't be averse to it, if they are interesting pills.

SARAH
She said she doesn't have pills and nobody wants to do them except you, so shut up.

AARON
Just leaving the door open.

Marion exits.

AARON
Where did she go?

MAITLAND
You asshole. You absolute asshole. You scared her off.

AARON
All I asked was questions, what the fuck. Why are people so sensitive?

ANNIE
I'm going after her.

Annie exits after Marion.

MAITLAND
Ass. Hole. Asshole!

Maitland exits.

TOM
Hey, babe, let's go finish putting up that tent of yours.

MAY
Um, I think I want to go for a walk.

TOM
Cool, let's go.

MAY
Alone.

TOM
Oh. OK. I know when I'm not wanted.

Tom exits, then May.

AARON
Tom! May! Pau, you're staying, right?

PAU
Actually, I better go revise my play. I want to show it to Michael.

AARON
Oh, come on, Pau.

PAU

Later.

Pau exits.

AARON

You. Strange person. You want to blaze, right?

KELLY

I need to go see about my friend.

Kelly exits.

AARON

Well, now I guess I'm by my fucking self. Let's see, what do I want to talk about? Suddenly, for one brief moment, I now own everyone's attention and I can give any speech I want. Let's see. Oh, I know. Bullshit. It's my favorite topic. Bullshit: that one word encompasses so much of everything. Once you realize, once you see how much stuff in the world is bullshit, it threatens to take over your mind. If you're not careful, you'll start to see the whole planet as one spinning mass of excrement. It's terrible. The way that our political leaders act. Those people in power. Bullshit! But also the people out of power! We're no better, either. The only difference is we don't have power. It's enough to make you want to kill yourself. I think I was going to kill myself at one point. Back when there was only bullshit, and nonsense, and nothingness all around me. Then I got into this. Which is basically playing pretend. I'm a wannabee professional pretend player. What does that tell you about me and the world, that the only way that I can deal with it, is by playing pretend? As an adult? For a living? Aspiring to? If you think about it, art is an embarrassment. It's pointless -- but everything else is worse. I don't care about anything. I laugh at all these people. I laugh at you. I laugh at the world. Ha, ha, ha, I say. OK, now I'm feeling bad. Well, I always have this. This helps for some reason. When you're young, you're growing up, you think there's something there. Motherfuckers, there's nothing there. But this. This helps. There is no God, no nothing. There's only stuffing yourself, and having bullshit experiences to take you far away from yourself, distract yourself if only for an hour. I don't know why any of us are here. Thank you for coming to my TED talk. We'll all be right back, with some more bullshit.

Aaron exits.

ACT III

12

MAITLAND'S MONOLOGUE

12

Maitland enters.

MAITLAND

Hello audience. Welcome back. My name is Maitland. My pronouns are they / them / theirs. I'm afraid I don't have a lot to do in this story. So I took it upon myself to interrupt. That's right. I'm an interrupter. I have a lot to say. And you are going to hear it. But, since persuasive extemporization is a logocentric construct of the patriarchy, I have a written statement to read. Here it is. Ahem. "The arts have a responsibility to help society. We must all do our part to make the world a juster place, a place that welcomes and gives equity to all persons. In the wake of recent events, artists must use their voices to speak for the powerless, tell stories about those whom stories traditionally have not been told, and continue the process of critiquing systemic and historic injustices, a process long overdue. We cannot be complicit as creators, and silence is an accomplice." That's as far as I've gotten. But, as I said: I am a disruptor. I interrupt. I will continue working. But I am unfortunately, a small fish in this establishment. I am young, and the powerful are old. Every day, I witness new power abuses within the arts establishment, and let me tell you every day I am so close to quitting this whole scene, and dedicating myself full-time to activist work. Except that I think it would be better to do it from the inside. Gain power and a position for myself, and then use that to promote the causes which I have just enumerated. But it's not easy. Every day I argue with myself about quitting..

She exits.

13

MARION AND ANNIE

13

The woods near the arts center. No one's around. Enter Marion, followed by Annie.

ANNIE

Oh, here you are. Gosh, you're good at hiding.

MARION

I got hungry.

ANNIE

I can see that.

MARION

You want some?

ANNIE

I'm fine, thanks. Already ate. Also, my agent... well, I'm not hungry. Can I sit down?

She sits.

ANNIE

Can I tell you something? Now, I'm gonna tell you something but I don't want you to be scared of me or anything. You can trust me. I give you my word. I'm going to guess that you guys aren't actually actors or interns or anything, and that you actually snuck into the Farm from somewhere. They say it happens every so often. There are little towns around here. Kids come in. It's fine, nobody cares.

MARION

Are you gonna tell?

ANNIE

Of course not. That would be awful. Do you want to tell me about yourself?

MARION

I don't know.

ANNIE

Well, where do you come from?

MARION

I don't know.

ANNIE

Who are your parents?

MARION

I don't know.

ANNIE

You don't know who your parents are?

MARION

No. I grew up in a home. I left. I actually live on the street.

ANNIE

Holy moly, that's terrible.

MARION

You're really pretty. Sorry.

ANNIE

Don't be sorry. I liked it. I know. Here's what we can do. One time, a long time ago, I was in acting class. This was back when I was a teenager, like, five years ago. Anyway, can I tell you something? I never really knew my mother either. I mean, she was around, but she never paid attention to me. Years later, a therapist told me that she was a narcissist. You know what that is?

MARION

No.

ANNIE

It's someone who only knows how to think about themselves. Like, they only worry about themselves. And my mom never paid attention to me. Even when I was in plays, and I was the lead, she didn't care. My therapist says that maybe that's why I became an actress, so that people would pay attention to me. But one day, I was in acting school, and we had to do an exercise where we had to pretend we were someone from our real lives, and for some reason, I don't know why, I chose my mother. And so, I got her jewels, and I got her clothes, I got her makeup, and I walked around like her, and thought about her day. And there's a lot I didn't know so I had to use my imagination. And I walked around, for a whole day, even, just like my mom, thinking her thoughts, being her. And then, all of a sudden, I was her. It was like I suddenly understood her, and I could see the world from her eyes. And I realized then, I understood her, why she couldn't spend time with me.

MARION

Why?

ANNIE

It's hard to explain, but I felt like I had my own life, and I just didn't have time. I wanted to, but I just didn't have time. It's hard to explain. But, it was a great exercise. I recommend it to you! Do you want to do it?

MARION

I don't know.

ANNIE

It's easy! I mean, it's not. But you can do it if you try.

MARION

I don't know. I don't know anything about her.

ANNIE

You do know one thing: she didn't want you. That's your starting point. The rest you make up. It has benefits. It'll help you. Like for me. I understood my mom, after all those

(MORE)

ANNIE (cont'd)

years. And I guess I forgave her. Actually, I didn't. But I didn't need to. Because I understood her. You probably have trauma. From your mom not being around. Well, if you do this exercise it can help you deal with that trauma. Don't you want to deal with that trauma?

MARION

I don't know.

ANNIE

Come on. I'll help you.

MARION

OK.

ANNIE

Let's go someplace quiet.

MARION

OK.

Marion exits.

ANNIE

I'm helping her. I'm helping this traumatized person grow. I'm a good person, aren't I? I was always this way. I was always good. I don't know why. I was always a good actress, and a good person. Maybe that's why everyone likes me.

Annie follows Marion.

14

KELLY, AARON, SARAH, ANNIE

14

Another part of the woods near the arts facility. Enter Pau, Aaron, Sarah, and Kelly.

AARON

I don't understand how you don't know who Michael Santoro is.

KELLY

Where did my friend she go?

SARAH

She can't go far. After all, we're surrounded by woods. How do you two know each other?

KELLY

We're just friends.

SARAH
You seem very different. From each other.

KELLY
We are.

SARAH
Where did you meet?

KELLY
Tell me about Michael.

SARAH
You're a theatre intern and you've never heard of him.

AARON
He's a legend.

PAU
He's one of the top directors of the latter half of the twentieth century. He practically created a whole genre of theatre.

KELLY
Actually, I think I have heard of him.

PAU
You must have.

AARON
He's a legend. He had his first success when he was like, twenty three, right out of school. Had a huge show in New York that blew everyone's minds. He's been big since then.

KELLY
Wow. Twenty three.

AARON
Yeah.

KELLY
Younger than me.

AARON
How old are you?

KELLY
Twenty five.

AARON
You're the oldest one here.

PAU

You don't look 25.

SARAH

Of course, it's not like Michael didn't have a little bit of a leg up.

PAU

A definite arts background. His father was a filmmaker in Hollywood. His mother was on Broadway.

AARON

His grandfather was in the biz, too.

SARAH

And his grandmother was an actress in France, I think?

AARON

No, like Germany or one of those weird countries.

SARAH

In short, it helps to be born into it.

PAU

He still has talent, don't get me wrong. A mountain of talent.

SARAH

That's true. Although, he's not what he used to be. He's not that good anymore.

AARON

Not by a fucking mile.

PAU

You guys are haters.

SARAH

I've seen, like, every play he's put on in the last few years and, I'm sorry, but they don't hold a candle to his early work. The scope, the ambition, it's all gone.

AARON

It's true.

PAU

You know what, become a legend, and then you can get to criticize a genius like that. Everybody thinks it's so fucking easy. Critics are like flies on an ice cream cone.

SARAH

I really don't get that metaphor at all.

AARON

Objectively speaking, his best work is behind him.

SARAH

Yeah, I mean, honestly, come on. This play we're doing, it's kind of...

PAU

What? Say it.

SARAH

It's OK. I mean, it's minor.

AARON

You read his old plays, his first three, those are classics. Mind-blowing.

SARAH

That's all I'm saying.

AARON

And we're not the only ones who think so. Annie thinks so, Tom thinks so.

PAU

Tom doesn't have the capacity to think, and Annie will just go along with whatever you tell her because she likes to be liked.

AARON

You're the odd man out, Pau. I mean, I know he's you're hero.

PAU

I just think you think it's easy. You climb the mountain, and then people make fun of you for not climbing another one the next day. There's such a thing as respecting somebody forever.

SARAH

That's not what we're saying!

Pau exits.

AARON

Jesus Christ.

SARAH

He adores Michael.

KELLY

I can see.

AARON

But honestly, it's a career thing. We're all happy to be here because of the exposure. But the play itself, it's interesting, but it's not groundbreaking or anything. It's kind of old fashioned. It's got all of Michael's pet interests.

SARAH

It's like if you took all of his old plays in a blender, and put it in the microwave, you'd get this play.

AARON

Speaking of microwaves, I wonder if they still have food inside.

SARAH

Good idea. I'm starving. You coming?

KELLY

I'm not hungry. And I should find my friend. She's a little bit peculiar and I don't want her to get in trouble.

SARAH

OK.

Sarah and Aaron exit.

KELLY

All about the family that you're born into. And unless there's a little bit of luck, something over which you have no control -- then that's it. That really is it. That makes me so fucking mad. It's a level of anger I can't even put into words. It's a level of anger bigger than the world itself, and it's all inside of me.

Enter Annie.

ANNIE

Are you all right?

KELLY

Hey. I'm sorry, I was just. Thinking about something.

ANNIE

What were you thinking about?

KELLY

Can I tell you something? About me and my friend.

ANNIE

You're homeless drug addicts from the city. Your friend told me. "Mary." Marion.

KELLY

Why did she tell you?

ANNIE

It's fine, it's totally fine. You're welcome here. I think it's cool. It's interesting. You guys are different. You guys have traumas and interesting lives. I actually was sitting with your friend just now, helping her with her traumas.

KELLY

Where is she?

ANNIE

Right over there, next to that tree. Wait, don't go. Leave her alone. I gave her an acting exercise to deal with her trauma.

KELLY

You what?

ANNIE

Yeah. She's sitting there, right now, by herself. Grappling with her difficult childhood.

KELLY

We should go. We're not from here, we shouldn't be here.

ANNIE

Oh, come on, we love you. Everyone thinks you're interesting. I just had an idea. Why don't you join our next rehearsal? Michael basically makes up the play with the actors he has, and a few years ago he made headlines when he cast a bunch of criminals in a show. I mean, for real. He went to a prison and he made a show with nothing but criminals. Afterwards, they went back to prison. So, my point is--

KELLY

Wait, can you explain that? Michael made a show with criminals?

ANNIE

Yeah. It was Julius Caesar. And the cast was all inmates. He went to some prison somewhere and he cast only prisoners. And then they went on a tour. It was under armed guard. The press said it the idea was unoriginal and played out. But my point is, he sometimes finds space for nontraditional performers such as yourself. People from the other world. And you come from a world very much like the prisoners. I mean, you're not a criminal, but that's close to your world, right?

KELLY

I guess so.

ANNIE

Hey, why are you crying?

KELLY

I've just always wanted to do something with myself. I've got a lot inside me. I always wanted to be an actress, before I got hooked on the pills and went to live out on the street. I've never told anyone.

ANNIE

I'm glad you told me. God -- you're so real and authentic and beautiful. I think he's going to love you.

They exit.

15

MICHAEL AND ERIC

15

The forest. In the distance is a building used for cocktail receptions, currently buzzing with life. The silhouettes of the wealthy are visible in the windows.

Eric and Michael almost walk into each other.

ERIC

Michael! What are you doing wandering around?

MICHAEL

I needed some air.

ERIC

I thought you got plenty on Mount Olympus.

MICHAEL

Stay away from me, Eric. If you recall we don't like each other.

ERIC

Just paying my respects. Bowing to the great master. They say I'm a master, too, of criticism. Great fun that they gave us both residencies on the same season, isn't it?

MICHAEL

No. I'm an artist, you're a critic. Ask yourself: which is easier? Artists don't need critics, critics need artists.

ERIC

Artists need critics plenty. Who else would shape the discourse?

MICHAEL

I don't know what the hell that means.

ERIC

I admired your work, long ago. I can only say what I feel. What I think. What I see, what I perceive. You are not the artist you once were.

MICHAEL

And you are more and more of a critic, which is a worse and worse thing to be.

ERIC

Apparently not, because you don't make anymore. You recycle. You use old tricks, you do what's worse in an artist, which is you quote yourself, which is an act as disgusting as a kind of self-cannibalism. You know, there is such a thing as impostor syndrome, but in your case, it's warranted.

MICHAEL

Eric, you've been hostile to me for 30 years. It's a very old song.

ERIC

I just care about the work. I'll tell anybody what I think about them if I think there's good work behind it. My job as a critic is to chop off, cut away, slash and beat back until I can get back at the fire. Yes, I don't create, but I do something better: I attack. You're old. So am I. Our generation decided that getting old was in poor taste. Which makes us both rude just by existing. One day they'll hide us both away, out of public view: a pair of grotesqueries. I, however, am able to continue: the critic's knives get sharper and more agile with age; the artist's knife gets duller. I plan a very pleasant final act for myself. How about you?

Eric leaves.

MICHAEL

He's a negative guy: if this were to come from me, I don't think I'd make it. But when people attack me, especially human-sized worms, a hard shell forms around me that not even God himself could get through. But then they leave - and there's silence. Oh, god. What am I going to do?

Enter the Arts Administrator.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Michael. We're missing you at the cocktail reception. People want to hear you speak.

MICHAEL

Tell them to fuck off.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

I'm not sure that would sound right coming from me.

MICHAEL

Why did you invite that son of a bitch?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Which one?

MICHAEL

Eric.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

I told you, that was not me, it was--

MICHAEL

Don't give me that nonsense, you've been doing this long enough to know how to change things without leaving a mark. It's one of the most basic skills of your kind of cultural management, hiding behind words (that don't mean anything) to do things, while I spend my entire days and nights finding words that get a reaction, that are authentic and true. I guess both of those worlds are equally hard.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

I did not invite Eric.

MICHAEL

I know you're lying but I'm not angry, because that's what you do, isn't it? You lie. You are a profound liar.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

What I do? What I do? Michael, I will tell you what I do. I spend my entire life, forty years now, going around the planet, begging in five thousand dollar suits to get people like you the money you need to live in glory and be famous and live in the spotlight and that, Michael, is what I do. Without me, without people like me, people like you are nothing. I am like one of those birds that regurgitates worms inside your mouth; you are helpless with out me, you son of a bitch. Yet somehow, I am beneath you, I am the scum on your feet, but I really should be called the ground on which you walk, because without me and people like me you fall into a hole and are never seen again. Art needs money. It does not need artists. Artists are part of the human condition, rich people are an anomaly.

MICHAEL

All right, nothing more uncomfortable than seeing a professional poseur have an actual emotion.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Michael. I love you and I respect you and your work has inspired a generation of creators. And I am sorry that you are going through whatever it is that you--

MICHAEL

I'm not good anymore. I'm not that good. I'm imitating myself. Hmm? And I'm old. I don't have that much time.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Michael, you are not--

MICHAEL

Stop trying to cheer me up. We both live in worlds of illusions, but this one's got a little bit of reality in it. You brought me here because of my name, because my name gets you money, and for a lot of years I could deal with that, but each year it gets harder and I am old and I am losing my strength to carry all these lies anymore. That Eric son of a bitch. He is right.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Eric has his point of view but he is just one perspective--

MICHAEL

He's very very smart and honest and... that's his way, isn't it? He's angry, he uses honesty as a weapon.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Critics have it easier in the sense that they don't have to make things. He's one of the best.

MICHAEL

I'm at my breaking point. Get rid of him. Send him home. Otherwise I am going home. Although, since I never stop moving, I don't know where that is.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Michael.

MICHAEL

Please. Please. You are right. You are much better than someone like me. It's true. That's another lie I go around telling. Either Eric leaves or I leave.

Michael exits.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

He's right. He's not what he once was. Pretty much everyone agrees. But his name looks so beautiful. And you remember what it was. You have to feel sorry for these guys, these artists. They live on nothing. On make-believe. I guess I could do him a favor. Fair enough. Let me go make a call.

He exits.

16

MAY'S SCENE

16

The forest. Enter May, taking selfies on her phone.

MAY

I've always been very pretty. Incredibly beautiful. When I was young, people would stare. Sometimes they'd touch. Like I was public property. When people see something phenomenal, they just want to reach out and touch it. Like it's too precious to just be by itself. Precious things shouldn't be by themselves. I kind of hated it. It's powerful. People are so nice. But people are evil in their niceness, there's anger there, they hate you for the effect you have on them. They want revenge somehow. That's why I've always tried to be better. Someone who adores you, and someone who's a predator, they have a very similar look in their eyes. I want to use what I have but I want to be better than that, more than that. Being beautiful is a bad habit. You still use it, you use it to get what you want. You catch yourself. But then you realize that hate is still there, it's never very far away. I've tried. I poured myself into college, and studying. I tried to study engineering. But it was hard, and I kept getting distracted. Someone said, be a model, and I was, and they paid me really well. And now I'm an actor. Sarah's better; Maitland, Annie - they're all better. But they don't look as good as me. Michael wanted someone stunning for his play. I here I am. When we were in Boston, however, something happened. I got a letter, sent to my dressing room. The letter was from--

Tom comes in.

TOM

Babe?

MAY

Tom. I told you - I want to be alone.

TOM

Sorry, I was just, feeling lonely.

MAY
Please wait for me. In the tent.

TOM
All right. You OK?

MAY
I just want to be alone.

TOM
I love you, May.

MAY
We're starting this again?

TOM
Don't you know how to love?

MAY
Don't you remember what I told you before?

TOM
No.

MAY
It's more complicated than that. One day you'll get old, and so will I, and it will all be different. People just give us a place because of our bodies, because of our faces. That's all.

TOM
Yeah, but I still feel something in here for you. Something that's called love. If it doesn't matter to you, then that's too bad, and I feel sorry for you. Cause that's sad.

MAY
It does matter to me. Wait for me in the tent. We'll spend a little more time together.

TOM
I wrote you a poem.

MAY
Not now, Tom.

TOM
It's called Love Poem. By Tom. Me.
"Dear May: I love you, May.
Please hear me say, I love my May.
Dear May, the dead might lay,
the little kids might play,
my hair might turn to gray,
the Mets might lose at Shea,

(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)

but I will stay, here, waiting for my May.
As long as all the crops can grow on clay,
as long as the sun's bright during the day,
as long as stars shine in the Milky Way,
I know that I'm a man who is not gay,
because I am a man, who loves a girl named May.
As long as goats within the fields will bray--"

MAY

Tom, please, stop. Go. Please.

TOM

Look, I know everyone's always saying I'm not bright. Well, maybe I'm not the smartest guy who ever lived, that's fine. But you don't need to be smart, to be in love. And my love for you is a whole world for me, big enough as the planet but only room enough for you and me. We'll have beautiful babies. They'll have your face and my body. Marry me? You're making the biggest mistake of your life.

Exit Tom.

MAY

Love like that is for idiots. But it's not bad to be an idiot, because you're so happy. But he is beautiful, isn't he? But then again, so am I.

ERIC

May...

Enter Eric.

MAY

(aside)

As I was saying before I got interrupted, up in Boston I got a letter. After a preview performance. The letter was from... come in.

ERIC

May.

MAY

What do you want?

ERIC

Did you think more about my offer?

MAY

What do you see when you look at me?

ERIC

I told you before, but you didn't listen: beauty is a gift, it's a talent. Talent is something you don't earn, it's

(MORE)

ERIC (cont'd)

given to you. So is beauty. I have intelligence. I've paid my rent with it for years. I know everyone in this world. It's true, some don't like me. Many don't; but many do, and I know them. I can help you. You think this is it? You think you've made it? Sweetie, you've hardly done a thing. This is nothing. Michael is a spent force, everyone knows it. He's an echo of a very loud noise made a very long time ago. He lives off of his own resonance. The world lives off of memories, legacies, and legends. But it's nothing, it's fluff. What's good is in the future. The future's nice because is it's invisible, so therefore you can see what you want. The past is crystal clear, therefore terrible, accusatory, exhibit A. I can help you. I can manage you, guide you, use my extreme taste to shape your career in ways that you are far too young and ignorant to ever know. Maybe when you're an old lady, and you're invisible to the world, you'll understand what I am getting at. But by then it is too late. Right now, your beauty is like a piece of polished metal capturing the sun. People look at you and it marks their retinas. I want some of that.

MAY

Why do you want it?

ERIC

My body wants it.

MAY

Don't disgust me.

ERIC

I won't touch you. I won't get near you. But my body still influences my mind. It always has, and it makes me feel alive when it does.

MAY

Do something for me?

ERIC

Anything you want.

MAY

Will you crawl for me?

ERIC

What?

MAY

Crawl. Get down and crawl. For me.

ERIC

What? Why?

MAY

Crawl. Crawl, goddamnit.

Eric crawls.

MAY

Pretend you're an insect. You're sub-sub-sub human. Nothing but desires and automatic impulses, no conscience at all. You crawl around, you eat, you shit, you kill, but nothing makes a mark. How does it feel?

ERIC

I could do anything for you.

MAY

What happened to your dignity?

ERIC

I want to give you everything, if you'll let me.

MAY

Get out.

ERIC

May, I am obsessed with you.

MAY

You'll know if you'll know.

ERIC

I've been kicked out of the arts festival. I'm leaving tonight.

MAY

You'll know if you'll know.

ERIC

May--

MAY

You'll know, if you'll know.

Eric exits.

MAY

So much control. It's erotic, auto-erotic. If I could cut off my face and pull my dreams out from under it, I would in a heartbeat. I'm a monster inside, inside of this flesh. Beautiful skin is like the ocean. Pretty people are supposed to hold still, but I can't stop moving. Maybe that's all there is. Will you, May? Will you sell yourself? No, I won't sell myself. I'll exchange myself. Not all of me. Some of

(MORE)

MAY (cont'd)
 me. It may seem like most of me will be gone. But I'm still here. The monster's still here.

May exits.

17

OUTSIDE

17

*Outside, in front of the
 artist bungalows.*

Enter Michael.

Enter his Wife.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Here you are.

MICHAEL

I'm not hard to find. I'm old, and fat, and slow, and people know where I am. I am done, you know. I will only ever be able to recycle things I did in the past.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I want to apologize to you. What happened back in Boston.

MICHAEL

That was my work. I get so mean when I work, something comes out of me, like a monster.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Michael, you have to be strong. I have to be strong. We both have to be strong.

MICHAEL

My career is over.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

We just have each other. It's us against the world. Remember the old days? When it was us against the world? It still is.

MICHAEL

I'm a ghost, I'm a laughing stock.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You've made such a mark and I gave up my own career to manage yours.

MICHAEL

This again? I never asked you to, goddamn it.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm not angry. Not anymore. I never was. At times -- we think different things, but. It's been worth it. You're still my little boy, even though you're old.

MICHAEL

And fat.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

A few extra pounds here and there.

MICHAEL

How many years left do I have of this?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Not as many as you once did. It's true.

MICHAEL

Can you imagine, if we had children, what they'd be doing right now?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

No. You're kind of my son. And I'm kind of your mother.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, I've done the best I can. Please forgive me, whatever I've done.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

When I was sitting in my room, I had a terrible feeling I was losing you. I never want to feel that way again.

MICHAEL

You were so angry up in Boston.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Don't worry about that.

MICHAEL

You took the side of the actress; it was like you were her mother for a moment. I felt as if I didn't know you.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm sorry. That's all I can say. Can you forgive me?

MICHAEL

Yes, of course, but what next?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

It's time for our last act, you know. These next years. You're a circus act compared to what you once were - in their eyes.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, it's just impossible to stay consistent for fifty years, no one can do it, no one ever has. Why is it shameful to get old?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

We've got to do something. Work harder than ever before.

MICHAEL

I just keep reworking the same ideas, the same old material. There's nothing new.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Then make something new up. Out of thin air. Whole cloth. Use your actors.

MICHAEL

I always make up the characters. My actors are children.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

There's still something in them. You can get it out of them.

MICHAEL

I don't know what it means.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Doesn't it make you angry to hear how they're talking about you?

MICHAEL

I'm too tired to be angry.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Then you're surrendering.

MICHAEL

I'm accepting.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I gave up my life to support you, make you possible, you know. Without me you wouldn't have happened. Without me you would be nothing. You are mine. I do not give you permission to accept.

MICHAEL

Come on, it's my work, my talent that's made me.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Picture yourself alone. Can you imagine what that would feel like?

MICHAEL

I would be fine.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

If you want to be alone then I will leave you alone.

MICHAEL

No, no please.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

What would you do without me? What would you do, alone?

MICHAEL

I couldn't survive.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

They're trying to take me away from you.

MICHAEL

No!

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Find them, bring them together. Make something new, with them. Get angry.

MICHAEL

Yes, yes. Anger is the only thing I've got left. Rage is the only thing holding me up. Get the actors together!

They exit.

18

THEATRE

18

An outdoor theatre. It's dark, with only a few lights, because nobody's supposed to be using it tonight.

The ground in the center of it is muddy. A recent rainshower is in the distance.

Michael enters, followed by his wife.

MICHAEL

All right, actors! Everyone, get out here, now! I want to see everybody! I want to see my entire company, right now!

(aside)

OK, you sons of bitches. Everybody thinks I'm done, that it's game over for me? I'll show everybody what being done means. God, everybody thinks I'm shit, they've written me off. It makes me mad. Does my fifty year career mean nothing anymore?

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

(out loud)

Actors! Get over here! Right now!

(aside)

It's so easy to write people off. It's so easy to fall in love with the latest fads. It's ageism mixed with cultural amnesia.

(out loud)

Actors! Get over here! Now! Why am I standing here by myself?

(aside)

I've gotten too complacent. I shield myself from criticism, I protect myself with denial. But what I should do is let it make me furious. There's nothing like some anger, some righteous, productive anger to kill your enemies.

(out loud)

Actors! Where are you? Come out here! Now! Rehearsal time!

(aside)

They think they can write me off. I'm just a name to them. Something for the marquee, something for the donors. Fuck the donors, fuck everything. It's just me.

(out loud)

Actors! Charlie! Come out, now!

(aside)

This will be my best play. It'll be my best play or I'll retire, I'll walk into the woods with a knife in my hand and cut off my genitals and bleed to death.

(out loud)

Actors, goddammit!

The actors stumble out, along with Charlie and Kelly.

CHARLIE

Here's everybody, sorry it look a little while to--

MICHAEL

Goddammit, Charlie, did you go deaf?

CHARLIE

No sir, here they are, I've been running around and finding--

MICHAEL

Running around and finding, sometimes you are so fucking useless. Actors!

ACTORS

Yes, sir.

MICHAEL

It's time to rehearse!

TOM

Right now?

May runs in.

MICHAEL

Quiet! What do you think? Use your head - I know you don't have one, but whatever you do have, use it!

(aside)

God, why do I talk to people that way?

(to May)

Come on, you, hurry!

MAY

Sorry I'm late.

MICHAEL

You think you can do anything because you're so good-looking, don't you? That doesn't mean anything to me. I've had more beautiful women than you can imagine. I've had women so beautiful they make you look like a car accident victim! When I say come here, I mean come here now!

(aside)

God, I'm awful. I'm so awful.

MAY

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

Quiet. What are you grinning at?

AARON

Nothing, sir. I think you're amazing.

MICHAEL

Aaron. And Pau. And Sarah. And Annie. You're all children. I could squash you all with my thumb. I could destroy all of you, I could break all of you and make you never act again. But I won't. Instead, I have some news for all of you. Now everybody thinks my work is shit, right? Everybody thinks I'm past my prime. For years now I've heard people whispering about it, that I'm just living out past glories and riding on my name, that I was a legend forty years ago and that I'm like Miller or Williams, putting out little pieces of shit in their later years that doesn't compare with their first few masterpieces. Well, you know what, it's right. I have. I am!

(aside)

Why am I telling them this? Just follow it, follow the instinct.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

(to actors)

So I have some news. That news is that the play we've been rehearsing is over, it's out, it's in the garbage, it's in the trash.

PAU

No, sir--

AARON

We've been learning our lines for weeks.

MICHAEL

Be quiet. This thing that we're going to do, is going to be the best thing that I've ever done. It's a new thing, it's something from scratch. I have some ideas, I have lots of ideas.

(aside)

I don't have any ideas at all. God, what is happening to me?

(to actors)

It's going to be based on this, on us, on chance and on improvisation. But first, we're going to do something we should have done before. We're going to do some exercises. Here, right now. What?

SARAH

Can I change my shoes?

MICHAEL

What?

SARAH

It'll take me 30 seconds.

ANNIE

Yeah, me too.

MICHAEL

What on earth is wrong with you? Are you not listening to me?

SARAH

It's just, it's muddy.

MICHAEL

Mud. Muddy?

(aside)

Mud. Mud mud mud. Mud. Mud. Yes, mud. Mud is interesting.

AARON

(to Pau)

Is he losing his shit or is it just me?

PAU

Quiet, this is Michael Santoro you're watching. Trust him.

MICHAEL

Mud. Mud is very interesting. Take off all your shoes. Do it! Now! Feel that? Feel that substance beneath your feet?

(aside)

God, I hope I'm going somewhere with this.

(to actors)

Feel it, feel the mud. Feel the mud. There is no ground! It's all just mud in varying states of hardness and firmness. It all comes from that, we all come from that. It's the primordial soup of creation. And you must all become like that. There was a philosopher who said there is no such thing as the individual, that there's only primordial muck, that we're all made of it, and that when someone becomes a person or something it is only a temporary thing, and it's actually a kind of insult to the gods, it's an insult to exist. So what we're going to do is tonight we're going to do exercises where you'll all become like each other. We're going to create a character without a name, we'll call it the Character, and we will each be him/her/it. Do you understand?

(aside)

Yes, that's good, that's good, that's interesting, that's something.

(to actors)

Nevermind, it doesn't matter whether you understand or not. You're all children. But trust in me, trust in me, and I will make you - wait a minute - who are you?

ANNIE

Oh, this is my friend. Her name is--

MICHAEL

I didn't ask you. Who are you?

KELLY

Hello, sir, I'm a really big fan of yours and my name is Kelly.

CHARLIE

Who?

KELLY

I am an aspiring actor.

MICHAEL

Who is this?

CHARLIE

I have no idea.

MICHAEL

What are you doing here?

KELLY

I was told that--

MICHAEL

How did you get in here? This is not open to the public. Who are you?

KELLY

I was told that I could maybe participate.

MICHAEL

Who told you that?

KELLY

Someone. I don't want to get anyone in trouble.

MICHAEL

I'm confused. Why are you here?

KELLY

I want to be an actor. I snuck in. I used to live in the city and then I was -- I moved away, and I came -- I got here the other day, and I made friends with some of these actors, and somebody told me that maybe I could join--

MICHAEL

What is this person doing here?

CHARLIE

I don't know, sir. Should I call security? Is there security?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Call the police.

MICHAEL

I don't understand this. I've never seen this kind of thing before, somebody crashing one of my rehearsals.

KELLY

Please don't call the police.

MICHAEL

Do you understand where you are and what you're doing? This isn't a place for beginners! These actors have been to the finest acting programs in the world and they are all professional actors! This is the most prestigious summer arts festival in the nation. This isn't a place for amateurs.

ANNIE

Wait, Michael. This is my--

MICHAEL

What are you thinking? How dare you come in here and try to invade a rehearsal of a professional work of art? Are you crazy? Yes, call the police, call someone.

ANNIE

No, don't call the police--

KELLY

No, don't call them, please. I'll leave.

MICHAEL

Get out of there. Go. Jesus Christ, what a nutcase. Why do they allow people like this to wander around?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm going to have a serious talk with Alex, this is outrageous to have an intruder like this just wandering around the grounds!

KELLY

Please. I was just trying to participate. That's all. I'm leaving. There's no need to--

MICHAEL

What are you still doing here? Go! Get out of here.

CHARLIE

Time to go, miss.

KELLY

Stay away from me. I was just trying to participate. That's all. I'm leaving, there's no need to make this into something it doesn't need to be. I just want you to know something. There are thousands of people, maybe millions of people who want to do this kind of thing, and I'm just one of them. I would have liked to have been an actor but it didn't work out for me, I didn't have the opportunities, I wasn't born in the right place to pursue that kind of--

MICHAEL

I think you're going to need to get someone.

CHARLIE

Let me see if I can get some help.

KELLY

I'm leaving. I'm leaving, I'm going. I'm going. Look at you, so fucking entitled. Well, your father was a director and
(MORE)

KELLY (cont'd)
you come from a family of artists and actors and directors,
I didn't.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Please get out of here, right now.

KELLY
Well, everyone hates you and they hate your play! And all of
these actors have told me that they hate you, and that
they're only doing this because they think it's going to be
good for their career, and that everyone thinks that you're
a phony and a piece of shit! Everybody!

CHARLIE
All right, time to go.

KELLY
I'm leaving, I'm leaving. Get your hands off me, you touch
me again and I'm going to keep that hand.

CHARLIE
I'll take her to the--

Kelly runs away.

CHARLIE
Whoa.

Charlie runs after her.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
We should call the police or someone.

ANNIE
No, please don't. She's harmless. I spent some time with
her.

MICHAEL
This is strange.

PAU
Wow, this blew up.

SARAH
This is so sad.

ANNIE
Poor girl.

MICHAEL
Let's not call the police, let's not cause a... Charlie will
see to it, he'll get rid of her. He'll escort her from the
property.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Michael--

MICHAEL

It's fine. We don't want to cause a ruckus.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Should we resume rehearsal? Are you all right?

MICHAEL

In a bit. The whole thing was so surprising, it kind of took the wind out of my sails. I'm going to go and get some water in my room.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

What she said wasn't true, everyone loves you and they love your play.

MICHAEL

Yes, of course.

ANNIE

It's just that, there was that one production where you used non-professionals in the cast, and that's what I told her, and that's why she's here.

MICHAEL

I did do that, didn't I? That a few years ago. The critics said it was not an original idea.

ANNIE

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

I'm going to go get some water.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'll come with you.

MICHAEL

Stay away from me, please.

Exit Michael.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

All right, everyone, back to your tents. We'll call you when we're ready.

Exit all.

ACT IV

19

OUTSIDE

19

Enter Charlie.

CHARLIE

Fun stuff, right? I don't know, it's exciting to me. You realize you've been working with a guy for 15 years, and then one day it's all gonna end. It has to. Look at him. He's old. He's fat. His toenails are yellow like the way that old people get them. He's just a man. He treats me like I'm shit, and I take it. It's fine. It's all going to end. I have a feeling that it's gonna end pretty soon, too. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't going to enjoy it when it does.

Exit Charlie.

20

IN THE FOREST

20

In the forest to the arts center, Kelly runs down a path.

KELLY

The perfect situation to show me what I am. And what I am not. When you fall out of society, that's it, you are fallen. Even in a place like this. They still look at you differently, you are not one of them. How did I think I could go and be accepted? Our past is not what we've done; I see that now. Our past is not our sins and our crimes. Our sins and our crimes are little things, secrets, and invisible. Our past is what we haven't done. What we haven't been, who we haven't been. What we've done is a couple of little facts, a single story; what we haven't done is infinite, as wide as all the world. I'm not anything. But it was all luck, wasn't it? I didn't decide to be born where I was, I didn't decide anything. All my decisions, when I was a girl, when I was a teenager, when I first took those pills -- all of it feels like a dream, like something that happened before I was alive, and I'm alive now, I wasn't alive back then. That was all some preamble, that was all something that somebody wrote for me, some sadistic author who created me to suffer. Well, fuck him. And for some reason I know it was a him.

She takes out some pills.

KELLY

Look at these. They're like jewels. I want to eat all of them. Should I, right now? I don't want to be myself

(MORE)

KELLY (cont'd)

anymore. Maybe I take some of these, I'll feel better. But then I'll wake up and I'll still be me. Maybe take all of them? That should kill me. But maybe I'll live since my tolerance for everything is so high. Then maybe I'll shoot myself, with this gun I still have. That'll cause a mark. That'll ruin this thing. They'll hear a gunshot out in the dark, and that'll break their spell. They'll hear my pain. But then: they'll forget me. They'll be scared and shocked, but then, they'll go on. In a week or in a month or in a day or in an hour, they'll say, gosh, who was that? Some criminal, unstable, addict, poor her. And they'll go on. I need to bring my pain to them. I need to bring my pain to him.

Marion enters.

KELLY

Where have you been?

MARION

I've been sitting by myself. Over there. Under that cherry tree.

KELLY

What are you talking about?

MARION

That tree over there. It's a cherry tree. There's a sign that says that it was the tree that was planted by the daughter of the guy who made this farm a long time ago. His daughter died, and he planted the tree for her. And now it's huge. It says it's a cherry tree.

KELLY

I thought you couldn't read.

MARION

That girl read it to me, you know, that pretty one?

KELLY

They're all pretty and beautiful.

MARION

I've been sitting, there, thinking, and making stuff up.

KELLY

Are you high? Did you take too many of these?

MARION

No. Are you hungry?

KELLY

No. Marion, where are we going?

MARION

I don't know.

KELLY

Of course not. We're not going to Canada, you know.

MARION

We're not? Why not?

KELLY

What is the point?

MARION

What is the point of Canada?

KELLY

Why don't we try something else? Why don't we go out with a bang?

MARION

What do you mean?

KELLY

You ever think you might as well go out with a bang? No? I guess not. You're easy, Marion. There's something beautiful about you. I think. It's hard to tell. Magnificent Marion. Holy shit.

MARION

What?

KELLY

Look who's coming. He's about to get a surprise.

Enter Michael.

KELLY

Hello again. It's me again. The one you kicked out of your rehearsal. I'd like to tell you something, and then I want to do something. Is that all right with you?

MICHAEL

You're that girl.

KELLY

Did you hear me?

MICHAEL

Do people really -- do my actors really hate me that much? And my play?

KELLY

Yes, and yes. Why do you ask that?

MICHAEL

I'm someone who is not a stranger to criticism. Thousands, millions of eyes are on you. Scattered all over you. Some of them hate you. I'm used to it. But I am running out of power somehow.

KELLY

I don't care. I have something to tell you.

MICHAEL

I'm old, and I'm OK with dying.

KELLY

What?

MICHAEL

My life is pointless. What you said was true, I was born into my world, and yes, I have a little talent, but clearly not enough to have made good work for the last thirty years of my career, just OK work. I'm done with OK. I threw out my play for the festival, the festival that's happening in a week, and I wanted to make another work tonight, but I've got nothing, no ideas, just desperation. I have a house in the woods up in Maine. It's next to some others, by a lake. They're all full of old people. It's a nice way to get old, and then to die. I have a feeling I will get very old very fast.

KELLY

I am a drug addict. I live on the street. I sleep in abandoned houses, the rats sometimes crawl through my hair. I eat what I can, and I steal so I can buy these pills of mine. Do you have any idea what I would give for a day of your life? My life is a living nightmare. I'm on the run from the police, not that I did anything wrong, but I saw a murder, not that they care. My life is nothing but suffering; so when I hear you say that your life is in any way hard, it makes me want to make you suffer for real.

MICHAEL

Why did you come here?

KELLY

It was an accident. Our car, which we stole, broke down on the highway. And then I saw what was going on: artists, an arts festival, actors. A beautiful world that I've always wanted to be in, since I was a girl. It's been a long, hard life since then. I thought I could join in somehow. It was stupid. You talk about desperate. It was desperate.

MICHAEL

You want to be an actor.

KELLY

I want to do something.

MICHAEL

I wonder if there would be some kind of way of telling your story.

KELLY

I'm not a writer.

MICHAEL

No, but I am. I wonder if I could show your psychology. I wonder if I could comment on your socioeconomic background, and history. I have sometimes thought there is something very artistic in the criminal in that they stand outside society and act on it, only they destroy and steal, rather than make, that's the difference. A crucial difference but minor somehow. That's what we'll do.

KELLY

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

How would you like to write a theatre piece with me?

KELLY

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

I mean you and me, we will collaborate on a piece together. We'll go into my bungalow and not come out until we have something to show the world.

KELLY

Please don't be joking.

MICHAEL

I am not, I am perfectly serious.

KELLY

I have a lot to say.

MICHAEL

I'm not interested in your life story. I'm interested in your psychology. Maybe I am interested in your story a little: the part of you that's dangerous. You see, you've lived. You've smelled blood and shit and asphalt and huddled in the cold next to the rats and eaten god knows what for months at a time, and you're still here. That's something. Something us artists don't have! At least, not anymore. Time was an artist would live a little before creating. Time was when artists were soldiers and doctors and sailors, not anymore. Now they're graduate students, the whole way

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)
through, and it shows in their work: it's graduate school art. But no: not you: there's something raw within you. You don't know anything but you have something valuable.

KELLY
I just want to be something.

MICHAEL
It's not that easy!

KELLY
Art is really meaning, isn't it? When you make art you make meaning, without it life has no meaning.

MICHAEL
Don't use the word art. Real artists don't use it. Ask any painter, he'll tell you he's a painter, nothing more, nothing less. A writer is a writer. A dancer is a dancer -- and so on. Anyone who calls himself an artist in a roomful of other real ones instantly reveals himself. Don't think of art. Think of work. Think of creating: putting one thing in front of another, and then presenting them to an audience, and then hoping for the best. And then running away. It's like telling a joke: hoping somebody laughs.

KELLY
I don't joke a lot.

MICHAEL
You don't come from a very funny world.

KELLY
No.

MICHAEL
Tonight I think wanted to kill my actors somehow. Turn them into corpses, let them rot, become the mud. I can do anything. It's fairly easy. They are young, and I am a legend, a significant artist, probably a great one, although that will only be known when I am dead.

KELLY
You think about your life after you're dead?

MICHAEL
I have to. It's a weight around my neck. When you are as significant as I am, it's something that you find yourself imagining. It's vanity, I guess, what do I care? I'll be dead. It's difficult for women, isn't it?

KELLY
What do you mean?

MICHAEL

I mean -- somehow -- I'm not sure how, but if I sit here long enough, I can imagine it -- somehow if you're born a woman, along the way there are more snags that stop you. From this. From doing this. From being this.

KELLY

I don't know. I guess it's more about where you're born. You were born into this; I wasn't born anywhere near here.

MICHAEL

Let's make something. Take my hand.

KELLY

OK. Somebody said making something great is the best drug there is.

MICHAEL

I don't know. I had some pretty good drugs when I was your age.

KELLY

I have too.

MICHAEL

Come on, let's get to work.

KELLY

OK.

She throws the gun away.

MICHAEL

What was that?

KELLY

Just something I needed to throw away.

They exit.

21

OUTSIDE MICHAEL'S CABIN

21

Early morning. Outside Michael's artist's bungalow, Charlie smokes a cigarette. He stands guard. Michael's Wife comes in.

CHARLIE

Ma'am, ma'am--

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Get out of my way, I want to--

CHARLIE

I can't let you in. He said absolutely no one can come in.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Except me.

CHARLIE

He actually pointed you out specifically.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

What!

CHARLIE

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

And he's just in there with this girl who could be his granddaughter?

CHARLIE

It's not like that. I don't think anything untoward is going on.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Untoward?

CHARLIE

They've been in there talking and laughing, talking and laughing. I don't know.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

All night?

CHARLIE

Yes.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You sure it was talking? You sure it was laughing?

CHARLIE

He sounds happy. You know, like in rehearsal, when things are going really well, and there's just joy and play and nothing can go wrong?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I find that pretty hard to believe! Let me through.

CHARLIE

Ma'am, ma'am--

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Let me through, goddamnit, or I'll have you fired.

CHARLIE

Oh come on, now, Mrs Santoro. You know we both have the same job.

Door opens, enter Michael and Kelly.

KELLY

And then, that's the last image you see?

MICHAEL

That would be wonderful, a sort of strange note to end it on, a kind of gallows humor. Oh, hello, honey. Charlie. Have you all had breakfast?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Michael, what is going on?

MICHAEL

Oh, we, uh -- had a bit of fun last night. Kelly and I had an incredible writing session. We came up with a new play.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You came up with a new play?

MICHAEL

That's it. It's inspired by her life. It's hard to describe but it's kind of an anatomy of her life, populated by all sort of crazy characters who will be great fun for the actors to improvise with. It's kind of a comedia piece, it's hard to describe. When can we have our first rehearsal?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Can I read it?

MICHAEL

Not quite yet. I have to fix my notes. When's the first rehearsal?

CHARLIE

Whenever you want.

MICHAEL

Make it ten. I'm eager to work!

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Michael, get a hold of yourself, this is insane, the festival starts in a few days. How are the actors going to learn a new piece?

MICHAEL

I don't know. They will. They always do. Plus it's partly comedia, as I said. It's great fun. I don't know if it's my best work, but it's brought back the fun into the process. I haven't had this much fun since -- I don't remember. No more questions. I'm starving. Breakfast this way?

CHARLIE

Up the path, in the restaurant.

MICHAEL

I am starving!

Exit Michael.

CHARLIE

Congratulations.

KELLY

We created and created all night and into the morning. We only stopped an hour ago, to make coffee. It was a blur. He says I have a talent for it, for creating. I was right there with him, tit for tat, making things up--

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Did you fuck him? You fucked him, didn't you? You wouldn't be the first little thing he's fucked.

KELLY

Is that what you think happened? Do you smile that much after he fucks you? When's the last time he fucked you? You probably don't have that good a memory.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm going to call the police on you, you shouldn't be here.

KELLY

He wants me here. So do what you want. I think we should get along with one another because--

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Don't talk to me. Don't get near me. Take a shower.

She leaves.

CHARLIE

Like I said. Congratulations. People work for years and years to get into your situation, and you did it in -- 24 hours? You know, I kind of agree with the missus that you ought to take a shower.

He leaves.

KELLY

Sometimes it's hard to tell who's less happy, an addict or an artist.

Exit Kelly.

22

MAITLAND, AGAIN

22

Enter Maitland.

MAITLAND

I've had enough. I've had enough. I've had enough. Do you know what happened? Remember that written statement that I read? I emailed it to the arts management, and do you know what they said? They said, "We thank you for your message and we will share your thoughtful comments with the leadership." "Share your thoughtful comments with the leadership"? Fuck the leadership. What about actions? What tangible steps? My email had a list of 27 specific steps they could take right now to foreground diversity and inclusion! Do they even care? I'm leaving. I've had enough. I'm going to email my agent, and I want you to know that I am repped by WME, the biggest agents in the game – and I am going to tell them that's it, I am out, I cannot be complicit in this world of abuse on top of more abuse. I am going to email them. I am going to email them very soon.

She exits.

23

EDGE OF THE ARTS CENTER

23

Enter Marion.

MARION

I've been thinking for the last bunch of hours about my mom. At first I thought she might be short. Then I thought she might be tall. She's gotta be fat. Like me. But I'm not tall. Who ever heard of someone who was fat and tall? So that's my ma. She dresses like this. I got these from the costume room. Look, this is how she dresses like. She's actually kind of elegant. A classy lady. She wears heels. She wears a blouse. She's got big, beautiful, blonde hair, not like me. She wears makeup and it makes her look even prettier. She doesn't care about that, and neither does anybody else. She works in an office. In fact, she runs the office. She hires and fires people just like that, no questions asked. She owns things, lots of things. Cars, houses, even an airplane somewhere. She has lots of boyfriends, boyfriends by the dozen. She does what she wants, when she wants, how she wants. I wish it was her who was me. Then, one day, she meets my dad. Now, my dad's not

(MORE)

MARION (cont'd)

high class. In fact, quite the opposite. He's low. Not the lowest of the low. That's me. I'm the lowest. But he's from a kind of neighborhood like mine. But he's a slick guy. He's good looking, like slick guys always are. He lives by his brains. He's got nothing. He comes from nothing. But the ideas he gets are all he lives by. And it's like magic. One day her car breaks down on the street and she's in the wrong side of town. There are some nogoodniks hanging around waiting to have their way with them, and he bursts into the scene, and since they respect him, they run away. And then he fixes her car for her, fixes it just like that, because like I said, he has ideas, and he had an idea about what was wrong with it. And as soon as she tries to thank him, he knocks her down, rapes her right then and there on the street, has his way with her for hours. They're lying there and suddenly in her eyes he sees something so dark, and a mile deep, even though her head's only so big, and he realizes what she is, and he gets the heck out of there. And then he runs off into the night and disappears, disappears like people from the neighborhood disappear, like one day they disappear and no one knows where and no one ever sees them again and no one cares. And she lies there and gets back up and goes home, and thinks about things. And she gets pregnant. But here's the thing, she never wanted to have kids. Because, all her life she's used these.

She takes out pills.

MARION

These little pebbles keep the dam in place. These have given her everything. These make her happy. They make her get up in the morning. They make her shower and look like a million bucks. They make her conquer the world. They patch up the little tiny holes she has inside her head. But she doesn't want a child. She doesn't want that for me. But still, she has me. Why does she let me see the light of day? Maybe she thinks that I won't be like her, that instead I'll be like my dad, always using my brains, getting what I want. But when she has me, instead, she sees the same thing in my eyes she saw in hers. And she can't take it. So she wants to kill me. But she can't. So she leaves me in a baby hatch even though she loves me, so, so much, she can't really bear it. It's gonna tear a hole open in her so wide there aren't enough pills in a bottle to cover it up. I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to do this exercise anymore. Is this what actors do? They make themselves feel bad?

Enter Calico and his Assistant.

MARION

I don't want to feel bad anymore.

CALICO

How's it going, kiddo? You did the right thing calling us here. You want to come back. We can take you back. This doesn't look like your scene.

MARION

I just want to go home.

CALICO

We'll take you home. But first, I need your friend. Where is your friend?

MARION

She's not my friend. She never was my friend.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

It'll be nice to finally clear a murder in the ghetto.

CALICO

Whatever you call her, where is she? She's wanted by people, by me.

MARION

I don't know.

CALICO

Come on, where is she?

MARION

I don't know.

CALICO

Yes, you do. Talk.

MARION

I don't know.

CALICO

She's around here, right?

MARION

I don't know.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

The fuck's a matter with her? Hey. Yo. Answer a question.

CALICO

Leave her be. I think we just saw the last of her sanity go kaput. All because of these pills. Get this piece of trash out of here, out of my sight.

Assistant exits with Marion.

Enter the Arts Administrator.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Are you Det Calico? Your men were just telling me the situation.

CALICO

Yep. We've got someone of interest here.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Is she dangerous?

CALICO

No. But she's desperate, so who knows.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Officer--

CALICO

Detective.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Detective, we have a lot of very high profile guests here tonight for a special preview performance of a new work by the great Michael Santoro.

CALICO

Who?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

A very great -- well, an artist. It's my responsibility to ensure the safety of our donors, and everyone else, too.

CALICO

Chances are, she's drugged out somewhere.

They exit.

24

OUTSIDE THE THEATRE

24

Outside one the Arts Farm's indoor theatres, enter Kelly and Charlie, smoking. Inside, we can hear a performance going on.

KELLY

Is it ending soon?

CHARLIE

Should be over any minute now, according to the program.

KELLY

Thank you. I just want you to know something - this wasn't my idea. I just came here by accident.

CHARLIE

I know.

KELLY

Do you think we could be friends?

CHARLIE

That'll never happen.

KELLY

Why not?

CHARLIE

We're on different levels.

KELLY

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

I work for Michael. You work with him. I've been in this business for 15 years. You've been in it for a little less. We're on different levels.

KELLY

You don't like me.

CHARLIE

But I guess I - don't really like anyone.

KELLY

Tell me about yourself.

CHARLIE

Who the fuck are you to ask me such a question?

KELLY

Why is it so easy for you to not like people?

CHARLIE

It's like putting a hand on someone. You can feel them, when you don't like them. When you do, when you really do, you rely on them, and you let them free, and run around and do what they want. And one day, they might bring a weapon down on you. Perhaps a stiletto, so soft you don't feel it until you realize it was someone you weren't armed against. I'm tough against everybody. I live in the world; I have to be. Do you like me?

KELLY

I'm trying to.

CHARLIE

Don't worry. I think we're both going to end up in a bad place.

We hear noises of celebration.

CHARLIE

And there you have it. Celebration. Success. Sounds like it went well.

KELLY

Could they have liked it?

CHARLIE

That's a sound I haven't heard with Michael in a while. In ever. I think he just had his hit, his rebirth.

KELLY

Oh my god -- could it actually be? They say everything is so awful, but this means that things can happen!

CHARLIE

Miss Kelly, listen to me very closely: you make me sick.

Michael's Wife comes out with the Wealthy Donor.

WEALTHY DONOR

Fantastic, absolutely amazing. This is the best thing of his I've seen. It was incredible. It was like a thriller! The whole play went by like that!

MICHAEL'S WIFE

It's very, very good, isn't it?

Arts Administrator enters.

WEALTHY DONOR

Alex, that was wonderful!

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Stunning. I'm still speechless.

WEALTHY DONOR

Alex, this is what I give you money for, you stupid piece of shit! Work like this. Work that matters. I don't know what you did, or what happened behind the scenes, but this is good. Expect a big check next year too!

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
Thank you! Your support means so much to us.

WEALTHY DONOR
Oh, fuck off.

*Exit the Donor and the Arts
Administrator.*

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Good evening, kids. Charlie, que haces, mijito?

CHARLIE
We're just taking in the breeze.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
It's a filthy habit. Give me one. There's something beautiful about an addiction, isn't there?

CHARLIE
Means we're not as in control of our flesh as we think we are.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Means our flesh has ideas of its own. Well, well. If it isn't one of the muses. What are you doing with your clothes on?

KELLY
Mrs Santoro -

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Everyone calls me that. Do you know my name?

KELLY
No.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Why?

KELLY
Nobody's given it to me.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Why do you think that is?

KELLY
What is your name?

MICHAEL'S WIFE
Why should I tell you what my name is?

KELLY

You have my name.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

All you have is a name. I have so much more. Your trouble is you give everything away, and I mean everything.

KELLY

Mrs Santoro, I don't want to fight. I don't want to be enemies with you or with Charlie.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

We're all friends here. This is a community of artists. Artists are full of peace, and love, and light.

KELLY

You guys want me to feel awful and uncomfortable, but I don't care. You listen to how it went in there and you shove it down your throats.

*Enter Michael, the Actors, and
the Arts Administrator.*

MICHAEL

Thank you, thank you.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Michael, everyone is raving! Cocktails in the big building!

MICHAEL

Yes, yes, of course. Let me just get changed. Charlie!

CHARLIE

Right here, sir! Your clothes are in your bungalow.

MICHAEL

Come with me, goddamn it!

*Michael, Charlie, the Actors
and the Arts Administrator
exit.*

MICHAEL'S WIFE

What are you looking at?

KELLY

I'm looking at the celebration. It's nice seeing Michael that happy. I guess he hasn't been that happy for -- What are you doing?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I just wanted to hold your head the way a man holds it when he kisses you.

KELLY

Please let me go.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I just like knowing what my husband experiences when he experiences it. Of course, I can never quite get there. He'll always have secrets from me. But I am a great guesser. It's because I am a great psychologist. And I am a great psychologist because I am a great writer. That's wrong. I was a great writer. Many years ago, before all this. Oh, yes, I wrote. And I also came from nothing. Like you. Michael told me about you. Where you come from. Well. Not everything. Enough things. You and I are the same, in many ways, except I found a man my own age, and fucked him, or should I say he fucked me, and this is what is left. Do you know, it's funny, I still love him.

KELLY

Will you excuse me?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

The real question is, will you excuse Michael?

KELLY

I don't know what that means, I think you're drunk.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I use my bottle like you use your bottle.

KELLY

I've stopped using my pills.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You can never stop. They're always being made. Numberless, millions, gallons of alcohol, billions of pills, numberless as stars, raining all around you. They're around, at arms length, inches from your mouth.

KELLY

Never again for me.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm sorry to say, addiction ends when you die.

*More sounds of Michael being
celebrated.*

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Isn't that funny? He thinks that it's a gift. That surprises me. I guess that means I'm not as great a writer as he is. Or even great at all. Maybe I'm just a very good one. I guess I'll never know; you never know how good you are until you actually do it, wouldn't you say? And when I met

(MORE)

MICHAEL'S WIFE (cont'd)

Michael, I put my writing aside. I come from nothing, like you, and he took it. I married my way in to this world. I thought I could keep up my writing. But he needed too much of my attention, and so I gave it to him. He needs too much; he's so horribly needy that you can't help but give him what he wants. That's how he controls people. Actors need to please him. Everyone needs to do something for him. Even you. You gave yourself to him, didn't you, you little cunt... I'm not upset.

KELLY

I'm going to get some help, I think you're having a breakdown.

Michael's Wife produces a playbill.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

And here is what you got.

KELLY

What is that? Why are you laughing?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Read it.

KELLY

No. What is that?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Read it.

KELLY

No.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Read it.

Kelly takes it.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

It's the playbill that was printed for this evening's performance. It is the same one that will be used for the festival. Interesting, huh?

KELLY

Here.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You're not reading.

KELLY

I read it.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Well, not very closely. What do you notice? Or better yet, what do you not notice?

KELLY

Nothing. It shows the actors, it talks about the plot, it shows the crew, and...

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Ha ha ha...

KELLY

My name. I'm not... where am I? I'm not in here. I'm not credited. I'm not credited at all. Where am I?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Ha ha ha ha...

KELLY

What does it mean?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Do you know why you weren't invited to that performance just now?

KELLY

They said it was for the donors.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

And why would your name not be in the program?

KELLY

I don't know.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Yes you do.

KELLY

I don't understand.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Oh, sweetie, lessons are floating by your head but you're not learning.

KELLY

He said he'd help me. He'll help me.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You're not in the program because he is taking all the credit for the work. You are going to get no credit, none, nothing. He even changed the character's first name so that it's not yours. I may be a stupid old woman, but you are just a child.

KELLY

No...

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You have been eliminated.

KELLY

Wait, why?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

You know deep down what's going on. You come from a world of transparent interactions. When somebody wants something, they take it. Here, we are more effete about such things. But we have the same level of brutality. In fact, having cover, we are more bloody.

KELLY

Why would he do that?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Because I, my sweetie, convinced him to. Remember. I am his manager. He does what I say. You thought you were going to hitch yourself to a thing like that, a leviathan, to drag yourself out of your life? Well, it's not that easy and I am here to make sure of it. Oh, my child. Don't cry. Just like a child, she cries when she's unfortunate. People cry when they think their parents might see them, but I am not your mother, and you learn that in life, no one is really watching. So why cry? Why? I understand what you're going through, you know.

KELLY

You people are all so fucked in the soul.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I love some authentic gutter poetry. Oh, sweetie, he is a terrible man, isn't he? I despise him too. Oh god, I've had a lot to drink. Do you know, sometimes, I think that if Michael were to die, it would be the worst and first day of my life?

KELLY

People die all the time in my world. You wouldn't last a second in my world! You wouldn't last a second.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

What are you going to do? I dare you to do anything. I dare you to make your mark. On Michael.

Kelly exits.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I think she's going to do something. I feel strangely excited. Something's going to happen. She'll kill him. He'll be dead and I'll be free. I'll have his estate. His money. I'll just wander around. I'll work on my writing. Maybe I can have a comeback. I'm going to be sick.

Calico and his Assistant run in.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

What did you think of the show?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

What?

CALICO

Ma'am, have you seen this girl?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm sorry, headshots all look the same to me.

CALICO

All right, she's plastered.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

No, officer, it's simply the effects of long-term love. Are you married?

CALICO

How'd you know I was a cop?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I can smell the Old Spice.

CALICO

I've been married twenty years, lady, why do you ask?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

How are you so complete?

CALICO

My wife knows her place; I know mine.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Can you tell me my place, officer?

CALICO

You need to be in bed.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Can you come with me, sir?

CALICO

Get this hag off me.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

This lady's drunk as fuck. She's falling over!

CALICO

The girl's gotta be around here somewhere. Let's circle around. Leave her alone; when people get like that, it's best to leave them alone.

They exit.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I've always been alone. I have characters inside of me, wanting to come out. But they'll never come out. I threw my writing career away. For this man. And he's all I have. Without him, where am I? Oh, god, what have I done? What can I do?

She exits.

25

OUTSIDE

25

Enter Maitland, by herself.

MAITLAND

We have to fight, we have to fight! We have to fight. There is so much that's wrong in this world.

She starts to weep.

MAITLAND

I was going to leave. I was going to leave! I was writing my email to my agent, I had my phone in my hand, I promise you. And then you know what happened? Just then my agent emailed me. I auditioned for a part a few weeks ago. I went in there, I played the good girl, the good actress, twenty five men looked at me perform, my hair was feminine, they made me pretty. I hated it. And now, I've just learned I've got the part. It's one of those gigantic summer movies. They are going to pay me so much money. I need this money, I can't turn away this kind of money. Money is gravity, I can no sooner say no than I can walk across the water. I haven't said yes yet but I can't say no, I could never say no to this much money. Please forgive me. Please, please forgive me. I will still be a part of the struggle. I promise you that. I will use this opportunity to get into the system. And once I'm there, once I've gotten power - I will help change things. I won't forget, I won't forget. I promise you, I won't forget. Yes, this can work. Just because you're powerful doesn't mean you can't fight for change. Yes, yes,

(MORE)

MAITLAND (cont'd)

yes. My agent says I have to leave right now. I have to go to a costume fitting, and the studio thinks I'll probably need a personal trainer. It's been nice knowing you! Goodbye, everyone. I never knew anybody here.

She runs off.

26

MICHAEL'S BUNGALOW

26

Michael's bungalow, now beautifully organized by Charlie.

Enter Michael and Charlie.

CHARLIE

I laid out your clothes here, sir.

MICHAEL

Thank you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Heard it went really well.

MICHAEL

It went OK. A bit rough with scripts in hand.

CHARLIE

The donors seemed to like it.

MICHAEL

They're easy to please. You go a bit over the bar and they clap like seals. They're idiots.

CHARLIE

Of course.

MICHAEL

What's wrong?

CHARLIE

Nothing. Do you like me, sir?

MICHAEL

What? What the hell are you talking about? You work for me, don't you? I would fire you if I didn't think you -- Charlie, please, get lost.

CHARLIE

OK. It just feels like a very important night. One of the most important of your great career.

MICHAEL

Go. And don't let anybody in. Especially that girl. She might be emotional.

CHARLIE

Why would she be emotional?

MICHAEL

I don't know. She seems a bit unstable. Better work with Alex to get rid of her quietly. Go.

Pau enters.

PAU

Sir?

MICHAEL

Goddamn it. Pau, get lost.

PAU

I just wanted to see you real quick.

MICHAEL

There's a donor thing I have to get to. What is it? Charlie, I told you to go.

CHARLIE

Consider me gone.

Charlie exits.

PAU

It's just, we'll be so busy during the week... here. I wanted to show you this. It's a copy of my latest play. I just wanted to give it to you.

MICHAEL

Pau, this is not the time.

PAU

I know, I just -- once the rehearsals start, and then the show gets going, and before you know it the festival will be over, and then they say you leave all of a sudden, you don't say goodbye--

MICHAEL

I'm very busy.

PAU

I know, and so I thought, if I don't get this to him soon, he won't read it.

MICHAEL

I've seen your material already, Pau. You've given me two samples of it.

PAU

I know, but this is a full length play.

MICHAEL

Pau, you're a good actor. You know that, right?

PAU

Yes.

MICHAEL

You auditioned for me, and I chose you.

PAU

Yes.

MICHAEL

But you do not have talent as a writer. I'm sorry, you don't.

PAU

But if you'll just read that, sir.

MICHAEL

No, I won't, it'll tell me what I already know. That you do not have the talent, Pau, that's all.

PAU

If you'll just read it, sir.

MICHAEL

No.

PAU

But, sir.

MICHAEL

No, I will not read it.

PAU

Sir, please.

MICHAEL

No.

PAU

Sir, please, please, read it.

MICHAEL

Pau, Jesus Christ, what's the matter with you? You're crying? Get a hold of yourself.

PAU

I really admire you, sir.

MICHAEL

There's something kind of sad about, you, you know. Get up. Clean yourself off. Come on. Get out of here, go. Pau, do the best you can. That's it. That's all I can say.

PAU

OK, sir.

Pau exits.

Then, footsteps.

MICHAEL

Charlie? What are you saying? Who are you talking to? Who's there? Charlie?

Enter Kelly.

MICHAEL

Where is Charlie?

KELLY

I don't know.

MICHAEL

I told him that I wasn't supposed to be bothered. I have a thing with the donors.

KELLY

A thing with the donors. That's too bad.

MICHAEL

What do you want? I'm a little busy right now.

KELLY

How did the play go?

MICHAEL

Fine, it's promising. It's rough, but the rehearsal should smooth things out.

KELLY

It's funny, because the playbill doesn't list my name anywhere.

MICHAEL

What? Oh. No, I guess not.

KELLY

But it's my life.

MICHAEL

It's inspired by your life, it's not your life.

KELLY

Shouldn't I be a writer? I'm the one who lived it.

MICHAEL

I'm the one who wrote it. Listen, I hate to be rude but will you please leave?

KELLY

You know, a lot of people don't like you.

MICHAEL

Well, welcome to being an artist with a public profile.

KELLY

No, I mean, personally.

MICHAEL

Well, that can't be helped. People are jealous. They get intertwined. They get codependent. You know what that word means?

KELLY

Charlie especially. He doesn't like you.

MICHAEL

Ha! He's like a son that never turned out right. He's only got himself to blame. I honestly should get rid of him, but he knows my ways. He knows how much sugar I like in my coffee. He's broken in. He's like a good pair of boots.

KELLY

I came up to the door and he was there, and I said if I could come in, and he said, do you know what he said? "He's right in there."

MICHAEL

Charlie! Charlie, goddamn it, come here!

KELLY

He's gone. He said he was going for a cocktail. Cat got your tongue?

MICHAEL

What's going on here?

KELLY

You're the great Michael Santoro. Aren't you the one who always knows what's going on?

MICHAEL

You need to get out. As for Charlie, I think this time I may be through with him.

KELLY

You know, when I first got here, I was a different person. I came from a different place. I had pills. I still have pills. But I had a gun. And I kept that gun with me. At first, no one knew what to say, but then the truth got out as to who I was and suddenly I was interesting. I was interesting to the actors, interesting to you. And I threw my gun away, because it seemed like things were changing, finally. When I first saw this place and understood what it was, it was like the forest was a big green table and the buildings were a dicethrow thrown by God, as if you say, "randomness is your salvation. Randomness can set you free." For a moment I believed in a world of change, and I threw my gun away because what did I need a gun for in a world that's always changing? But now I see the world just stays the same. Whoops, God, sorry to mistake you for old buildings. I have a gun again.

She takes out a gun.

KELLY

Are you scared?

MICHAEL

No, of course not. I'm shocked... shocked that I worked with someone like you...

KELLY

If it wasn't for me that play would not exist.

MICHAEL

But don't you understand, this is how work is made. There is a subject; an artist, using his skill, makes a shape out of it and that shape is it. There is no other "it"; reality itself is formless, incomprehensible in itself. Only perspectives on it can bring something into being. You are the subject of this play; I am the artist. You are a sculpture, I am the artist; you wanting to be an artist is like a sculpture trying to be a sculptor, it doesn't make sense. The process is messy, but at the end of it all, there is the work, and it does something positive to an incalculable number of people before it fades away, like everything...

KELLY

I contributed something.

MICHAEL

There are people like you everywhere, and there is only one of me.

KELLY

In ten seconds, there will be zero of you.

MICHAEL

No, please.

KELLY

Are you scared of dying, old man? Are you scared of dying?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

KELLY

Let me see your face, let me see your face be pathetic. I need to see the great man be pathetic.

MICHAEL

Please, let me go.

KELLY

Look at this and look at you. You are nothing, you are a weakling. You wouldn't last a second in my world.

MICHAEL

I don't feel good.

KELLY

Look at this, look at this gun, what do you think when I hold it up against your face, Mister History Man?

MICHAEL

Please, help.

KELLY

Look, you stupid son of a bitch! It's a fake gun! I got it from the prop shop next to the theatre! Look! Ha, I wanted to see you be pathetic. You wouldn't last a second in my world. You wouldn't last a second. You are nothing.

MICHAEL

Help.

Michael's wife comes in.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Michael, Michael..

KELLY
 What the hell?
 MICHAEL'S WIFE
 Help! Michael! Help!
 KELLY
 What are you doing? You told me to come in here!

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 He's my precious baby boy! Help! Help!

KELLY
 What are you doing?

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 Help!

People shouting, headed in.

KELLY
 You people are all crazy!

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 Michael, Michael.

Kelly runs out.

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 My beautiful, beautiful, Michael.

*The Arts Administrator,
 Calico, his Assistant, and
 some Actors come in.*

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR
 What's happened? Oh, my god. Get an ambulance.

AARON
 Is he all right?

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 That girl, she attacked him.

SARAH
 Kelly?

MICHAEL'S WIFE
 I think he's had a stroke.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO
 Which way did she go?

She had a gun.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Which way did she go?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

That way.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

Chief?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

Go, go.

CALICO

Calico's Assistant runs after Kelly.

Don't worry, we'll find her. Didn't know she had a gun.

CALICO

Who is this person?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Who is this person?

CALICO

She's an addict, from the city. Lives on pills. They usually rob and steal, usually. Once in a while they get violent.

We hear gunshots.

Jesus Christ.

CALICO

Are those fireworks?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

They're the invisible kind.

CALICO

We have fireworks planned for later this evening.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Something tells me you're going to have to call it off.

CALICO

What should we do?

AARON

Call 911.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Hang on, someone's coming. Stay down.

CALICO

Enter Calico's Assistant.

Hey, chief. ASSISTANT TO CALICO

What happened? CALICO

I got her. ASSISTANT TO CALICO

You shot her? Where is she? CALICO

ASSISTANT TO CALICO
She's outside. She's lying down. I think she's probably dead. I got her right through the face and it came out the top of her head. That's probably gonna kill her, right?

Oh god, oh god, oh god. ANNIE

She had a gun? CALICO

Yeah. She didn't use it. ASSISTANT TO CALICO

It was a prop gun. MICHAEL

What did he say? CALICO

It was a prop gun. MICHAEL

I can't understand him. What is he saying? CALICO

Michael, what was it? ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

CALICO
All right. He's not talking. Everybody stay calm. Get him guy to the front entrance so the ambulance can take him quick. Meanwhile I'll call for some help. Go.

Tom and Aaron carry Michael away. His wife follows, as does the Arts Administrator.

CALICO

You. Let's see her.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

You mind if I don't go?

CALICO

What are you talking about?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

I don't want to look at her.

CALICO

What the hell's the matter with you? Go.

They exit.

27

THE FOREST

27

The night forest. It's very windy. Kelly runs in.

KELLY

I think I've lost them. I guess I should keep running. I'm not very tired. I feel like I can keep running and running forever.

Enter Jewel.

KELLY

Jewel?

Exit Jewel.

KELLY

Jewel, wait up! Wait for me, Jewel! Wait!

She runs after Jewel.

28

ARTS FARM ENTRANCE

28

The entrance to the Arts Farm complex. In the distance, people are leaving, driving away. Enter the Arts Administrator, Charlie.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Charlie.

CHARLIE

Sir.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

This is one of those days that makes you get older.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

How are you?

CHARLIE

I'm fine. I'm scared. I'm free. I'm leaving. Mrs Santoro has finally fired me, and--

Enter Michael's Wife.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Mrs Santoro. Come here. How are you?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I'm fine, Alex, thank you for asking.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

There are no words.

CALICO

OK, listen up, everybody, I need you to leave the premises, this entire facility is now an active crime scene and we need to get our work done. Everybody come with me.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Do what you need to do. The arts festival has been called off this year.

CALICO

Oh, that's too bad.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Are you a fan?

CALICO

Doesn't everyone like the arts?

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Thank you for saying that. It's a terrible blow. It's the first time it's happened to me. And financially it's not good. And Michael... I'm sorry, I need a moment to myself.

Enter Eric.

ERIC

Hello, everyone.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

Eric, please, not now.

ERIC

I'm just here to gawk, and to assess, and judge. And pay some respects. To the great man. He is a great man. Some say I am too. This is guaranteed to go into my memoirs. I was at the airport when I heard. This was after my residency was mysteriously cancelled. It's all right. I don't feel bad. I feel just fine, actually. You know, it's funny. Everyone hates a critic, but the artists are the ones who actually get shot. I once had a Manhattan thrown at me in the Oak Room after a bad review, but never bullets. Oh well. I guess that's the difference between artists and critics. Anyway, I have a companion waiting for me in the car. I'll see you all around. Sooner or later. Our world is very small.

Exit Eric.

CALICO

Hey. How you feeling?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

I'm all right.

CALICO

You sure? Seemed a little unsteady on your feet a while back. You all right?

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

It was, uh -- it was growing pains, sir. I feel fine now.

CALICO

OK. 'Cause I seen guys go a little batty after they do something like that.

ASSISTANT TO CALICO

Not me, sir. I was a little worried there for a bit. I had a rough few minutes. But, suddenly, just like that, it vanished. And I didn't feel shaky anymore. I'm fine.

CALICO

Let's go back to the city. This work never ends. Everybody, follow me!

He exits.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

I'm going home. Can I help you somehow?

MICHAEL'S WIFE

No, I'm going to the hospital, to check on my Michael.

ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

No, of course. Mrs Santoro, whatever you need. You just call. My assistant.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I will. I am very well, Alex. I am very well.

Arts Administrator leaves.

MICHAEL'S WIFE

I am going to go to the hospital, to see my husband. They say there's a good chance he'll never be the same. They say there's a good chance he'll need help for the rest of his life. So I'm going, and I'm taking him home with me. And it'll just be me and him. And for the first time in my life, I'll have him just to myself. All to myself. I finally have my Michael.

THE END