

Piercing Through

by Scott Rettberg

April 1997

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The Cast

PERCY, 22, a student in English and Philosophy. A long-haired but conservative, outspoken young man from New Hampshire prone to periodic fits of rambling. He often speaks before he thinks.

ANNA, 21, is a Theater student, originally from Des Moines. Anna plays Hamlet during the play. Sometimes self-effacing, Anna is brighter than she shows.

DON, 21, is a Philosophy student from Iowa, the child of 2 college professors. He is a dark, brooding, but bright young scholar. He is tall, pale, and charismatic in an odd way. He is obsessed with Nietzsche.

LEXUS, 21, is an English major from Boulder. Lexus has a fiery temper and is outspoken. She has a very domineering exterior, but one defensive of deeper insecurities.

MATT, 21, is a student in English and Philosophy from Chicago. Percy's roommate. More clean-cut than Percy, Matt is liberal, confused, and prone to paroxysms of sanity.

NATASHA, 22, is a History major from Sioux City obsessed with communism and authoritarian regimes. She wants to marry. She has just returned from a semester abroad in Yugoslavia.

LORAN, 23, is the former editor of the school newspaper. He is from Las Vegas, and has a personality every bit as hyperbolic as his hometown. Loran becomes obsessed with vengeance.

TAFT, 47, is a sixties-era professor of communitarian philosophy, engaged with his material and his students, but frightened by their generational complacency.

A **SALESMAN** (could be doublecast with Taft)

Act 1, Scene 1

MATT and PERCY enter, carrying boxes. Grateful Dead's "Bertha" is playing in the background.

MATT

So Loran is downstairs, and we're up here, and Don and Lexus are down next to Loran. In the honors apartments. How did that happen?

PERCY

Bunch of pot smoking anarchists.

MATT

Hard to believe.

PERCY

Gotta love it. Smoke a joint?

MATT

Sure.

(They sit, Percy lights the joint, draws deeply on it. They pass it back and forth.)

PERCY

Hard to believe I'm back in Iowa.

MATT

It happens every year.

PERCY

It's like a black hole in the middle of America.

MATT

How's New Hampshire?

PERCY

Beautiful. Lush green forests. Live free or die. Bought a rifle this summer.

MATT

To go hunting?

PERCY

No, I just wanted to own one. In case.

MATT

In case what?

PERCY

Case I want to fire it.

MATT

I would think that you wouldn't want one, for the same reason.

PERCY

That's because you're a bleeder.

MATT

A bleeder?

PERCY

Bleeding heart liberal. Democrat. Socialist. Weepy pinko idealist.

MATT

You're the deadhead.

PERCY

That don't mean I'm stupid. I don't want anybody taking away my weapons. My constitutional right to bear arms, written in the constitution in case some oppressive federal government does decide to try and take 'em away.

MATT

You're a conundrum, you are. Pot smoking deadhead Pat Buchanan.

PERCY

Garddamnrigh! Mareicka!

MATT

Mareicka! Hey, Don.

(DON enters.)

PERCY

Hit?

DON

Sure.

(Takes a hit)

I read *The Stranger* this summer.

PERCY

That's a fun one.

DON

Sometimes I feel like that.

MATT

Strange?

DON

Numb.

MATT

But if your mother died you'd feel *something*.

DON

I guess.

MATT

Or if you were killing someone.

PERCY

Naw. That's the whole point, man. That hey, he could just kill an Arab, and feel what, zip, nothing. Just blank, just empty. There is no necessary connection between human behavior and morality.

MATT

But I'm sure Don would feel bad, anyway.

DON

I'd probably feel bad, but— but that's just because of the way I've been programmed. Percy's right. There's no necessary connection between my reaction and morality.

MATT

Huh?

DON

It's all determined. I'm plugged into a grid of everything I've ever done, everything I've ever known. It's a heavy weight, really a— a kind of program that controls everything I do.

MATT

I don't follow.

DON

That's the problem, see? Morality, it's not like out there, prior to everything. It's just a part of thrownness.

PERCY

Thrownness?

DON

Heidegger. See the— the big problem I see with— with everything, really— is that I know everything is programmed, that biologically, I can't be anything that I'm not already. I'm just chemical reactions, stimulus response, neurons firing. How can you overcome that, get past your own body, get past your own past?

MATT

What about free will? You aren't who you aren't because you didn't choose to be the person who you aren't.

(Matt, holding joint, looks at it.)

Man, I better lay off this.

DON

Nietzsche would say that you can resist thrownness, that you can choose to be anyone. But

me, I don't know. There's some problems with the idea of free will.

PERCY

I'm looking forward to Nietzsche. Hey good lookin.

(Anna enters. She kisses Percy, then hugs Matt and Don.)

ANNA

I missed you guys. Isn't it great to be back in Oak Creek?

(Everybody else groans.)

Well, it's better than Des Moines. I waited tables at the country club all summer. Getting my ass pinched by a bunch of agriculture executives for fifty-cent tips. Watching my mother fret her life away when she's not working overtime checkout at the Piggly Wiggly. No thanks. I'll take school any day of the week.

PERCY

You got a point there. Iowa's all about relative states of misery.

ANNA

So Percy talked you into it, Matt? Couldn't pay me to room with him.

MATT

It can't be that bad.

DON

No worse than sharing a studio with Mussolini.

PERCY

Hey there now farmer Don – just cause I wasn't raised in a provincial, corn-belt, ass-backwards environment full of inbreeds don't mean I'm a fascist.

ANNA

Fascist? I was talking about your hygiene.

PERCY

Hey now. I bathe.

ANNA

Occasionally. I'll bet you haven't washed a dish in your life.

PERCY

I've dried them.

MATT

Why don't you two just get married and get it over with?

PERCY

I'm still working on her, Matt. Like that Pygmalion. One step at a time.

MATT

Maybe I'd better go for a walk.

ANNA

Don't worry, Matt. It's just our way of saying "I missed you."

PERCY

I missed you too, honey-pie.

ANNA

Sweetcakes.

PERCY

Butterbosom.

ANNA

Sexpot.

PERCY

Lustwench.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 2

ANNA and PERCY are drinking a pitcher of beer in the bar.

ANNA

So I was hoping for the queen, maybe Ophelia– there aren't many great roles for women in *Hamlet*.

PERCY

Yeah, there's not much to Ophelia, is there, a few good lines.

ANNA

And he asks me to read for Hamlet.

PERCY

Hamlet?

ANNA

Hamlet.

PERCY

He wants you to play Hamlet? The role of Hamlet?

ANNA

He said–

PERCY

A cross-dressing Hamlet. Is that how he means to explain his problems?

ANNA

I'm not sure if I'm meant to be Hamlet as an actual woman who dresses like a man or if I'm meant to be Hamlet as a man, whom the audience will think is a man.

PERCY

All that Catholic school fucked that man up.

ANNA

Tell me about it, but can you believe it? *I* might get to play Hamlet. The greatest role. The height of dramatic perform–

PERCY

Shit. I'm out of smokes. You got one?

ANNA

Auditions are Wednesday.

PERCY

Anna – a smoke?

ANNA

Here, Percy, here. Why do you always run out before I do?

PERCY

I bought the pitcher, babe.

ANNA

Sometimes I worry about our lives.

PERCY

About you and me?

ANNA

Don't even get me started. I just meant– us – all of us – our friends.

PERCY

What's to worry?

ANNA

We go to class, we eat, we drink, we smoke, we have sex. We live in Iowa. We don't leave this town. It's like our lives are being played on a looped tape.

PERCY

What's to worry?

ANNA

We live in a four square block area and we never leave. And if we do leave, there's nothing but cornfields for hundreds of miles. It's like there is no other place.

PERCY

That's what I like about Iowa. It's so vacant.

ANNA

I grew up here. This is home, but I want to leave.

PERCY

I wouldn't actually want to *live* here, but what better place to study? Nothing but wide skies and emptiness.

ANNA

You can get tired of wide skies and emptiness.

(MATT enters, sits down.)

MATT

Hey guys. You see the news, Bush's speech?

PERCY

A sound bite. Looking pretty hawkish?

MATT

Like he's pushing us into a war.

ANNA

War? You think it will come to that?

PERCY

Of course there'll be a war. America needs a war. Our economy's in a slump.

MATT

You aren't going to try to justify war as an economic-

PERCY

Wars are good for the economy. Historically the truth. People go to work, building weapons. And Iraq, Kuwait, we're talking oil-rich nations. We're talking lower prices at the pump.

MATT

What about the bodies burning in those fields of oil? Come on, lower prices at the pump. Is it worth all that?

PERCY

Wah, Wah, Wah. Come on, who're you kidding? I mean, for years, for decades, we've been developing all these great weapons, laser beams and guided missiles and planes invisible to radar, and we've been playing over here basically on our lonesome since the end of the Vietnam war.

MATT

Less you count engineering several South American bloodbaths.

PERCY

There's been all of this big news - the Berlin wall falls - students massacred in Tiananmen Square - the Soviet bloc suddenly breaks away from communism. All these dramatic historical events. And how many of them are American?

MATT

None, less you listen to your boy Bush- P.T. Barnum of the screwed world order.

PERCY

Right- zip, zero, nada to do with it. The media's had to send the news anchors over to Beijing, Moscow, Prague, Romania, all over the world, to cover all these tumultuous events. We're getting bored. We're hungry for something American. We need a war, man. Every generation needs at least one.

ANNA

We need a war?

PERCY

America is a big, bad-ass, black-booted superpower just begging for someone to tangle with. And then this little idiot Saddam comes along, thumbing his nose at us, just itching for a fight. The mother of all battles? Come on- who doesn't want to see the mother? You're Bush. The election is right around the corner. What are you gonna do?

MATT

I'm just saying it's an ugly thing, that's all. What if you got drafted?

PERCY

Hell, I'd go. Give me a gun, man, sign me up. I'd go, man, gun blazing. What is the boot made for, if not to *crush*? Give some of them new-fangled gadgets of destruction. Course, that ain't gonna happen.

MATT

No?

PERCY

We got an all-volunteer military. Guys who've spent years with these great weapons, shooting at targets. You think they joined up so they could shoot targets? They want to push a button and watch something real erupt into flames. They want to hear the crack of a rifle and feel its recoil against their shoulder and watch as the bullet hits home and their turbaned enemy falls to the sand, a lifeless lump of tattered flesh.

ANNA

It's not a game, Percy.

PERCY

Yes it is. What do you think it is? You're pretty naive.

ANNA

Wasn't Vietnam a lesson?

PERCY

Yeah. It was a lesson. The lesson was don't tangle with anyone unless you're absolutely sure you can kick their ass, and convincingly.

ANNA

What can I possibly see in you?

PERCY

I'm a realist.

ANNA

I worry about you. You've got a distorted picture of reality.

PERCY

What? Distorted? Because I'm not walking around like some enchanted idiot?

ANNA

My uncle was in Vietnam. He didn't get hurt, physically. But he does strange things, Percy. He has these recurring nightmares. He sleeps naked—

PERCY

Well, well.

ANNA

Sometimes he walks out on the streets, naked. When he's awake, he washes his hands obsessively.

PERCY

So what are you trying to say?

ANNA

I just think war is evil, that's all.

(LORAN enters)

LORAN

Hey, hey, hey, hey brothers – fellow former Cosmonauts – comrades – Whatzup?

MATT

What's shaking, Loran? How's Vegas?

LORAN

Ninety-nine cent breakfasts any restaurant in town twenty-four hours a day. Free drinks in any casino long as you're playing keno. Showgirls, boxers, transvestites, players, mobsters. How's Vegas? Vegas is what I'm all about. Surreal neon flash of transcendent moments, living color à la MTV. Always on, brother, always turned up, always going down. And my summer job was ruthless.

PERCY

What were you doing?

LORAN

Watching baseball, watching fights. That was my job, get?

PERCY

Watching sports?

LORAN

Believe it? Gambino Technologies. They sell these beepers, right, for players. My job was to watch three different televisions simultaneously, three different games. Every inning, every round, type the scores into the keyboard. That was it. Then zap! from my terminal zap! to the mainframe zap! up to an antenna zap! up to a satellite, then zap, zap, zap from the satellite to all of these little beepers, across the globe, providing thousands of high tech high rollers the current status of their Vegas investments. Instantaneous, light speed. Cubs 7 Mets 3. Zap! From my T.V.s to the High Roller's yacht in the Antilles, twenty seconds flat. It was global, baby, real time.

MATT

We were talking about the Persian Gulf.

LORAN

Scary, man, scary, you can see the preparations, see the government priming up the pillows of our minds, priming us for a brainwashing, massaging all the patriot muscles, making back-room deals in smoky rooms. Like it ain't a conspiracy. The long knives coming out, the lies flying around like pimentos shot from the olives of a thousand martinis.

PERCY

Pimentos?

LORAN

Olives, man. Martinis? Ever had one? Can't stand 'em, me, though they come in the coolest glass that there ever was. So now we're back in Iowa. Whew. The dream is over. I need to like, adjust the old circadian rhythms. I need to breath, man, this meat-packing plant scented air. I need to slow back down. I need, like, Hunter S. Thompson to show up and take me for an amphetamine-addled drive in the country to go shoot shotguns at silos.

MATT

To calm down?

(Loran fills his glass)

LORAN

Have you seen what they've done?

(Disgustedly throws a newspaper up on the booth table)

Where they've taken our ship, brothers, our vessel which we forayed into the wilds of postmodern newsgathering and cultural analysis? Right down the creek man, right down shit creek. This guy is a pigeon. Rantz hand-picked 'em as editor. Can't even spell.

PERCY

Bastard Rantz.

LORAN

Sure, new journalism isn't for everyone. Okay, so we did cover the homecoming game from the perspective of a cheerleader hallucinating on acid, so we did create a mild hysteria by analyzing the Armed Services Recruiting Day as a manifestation of our Dean of Student's homoerotic desire to fondle men in uniform. So? We kept things interesting.

MATT

And they shut us down.

LORAN

Rantz. The gangrene infested tripe. That was it, you know, Percy. When you called him a gangrene-infested tripe, that's when he started with the whole censorship campaign.

PERCY

I should have thought of a better disease.

MATT

Syphilis?

LORAN

Syphilis is too good for him. The worm. The tin man. The Nixon in diapers. The steel crank.

(Loran lifts his glass)

To the steel crank, and all the plagues that may befall him.

(They drink a toast)

MATT

So what are you gonna do without the paper?

LORAN

Know how many classes I finished last year, between editing the paper and defending it from the multi-pronged S.S. assault? Three. Three of eight. How's that for pitiful? Now entering my third year as a senior. Gonna burn the midnight oil, man. Gonna graduate. Write papers and curl myself up in a little ball and ignore the steel crank. Gonna avoid reading this rag if it kills me. Stay out of trouble, get my ass out of Dodge.

MATT

So you're done fighting Rantz?

LORAN

Done. Finished. Kaput. Retreat, retreat, Captain. I can go neither forward, nor backward, nor can I go to either side. I've nothing left to do. Although. . . .

PERCY

What you got in mind?

LORAN

No. No. Hold me back, boys. Need to behave. Incentive— leaving Iowa— paper in hand. Degree. Just a few months of quiet contemplation, dedicated scholarship. Arrgh! I need to get him, somehow. Need to make the steel crank pay. Need to do something to that fascist in fraternity sweats. Guerrilla warfare. Make him step repeatedly into flaming bags of shit, see that when he goes to start an engine, it will always be an engine coated with sugar. Be unable to stop myself. Been thinking about it all summer. Retribution. Appealing in a real Ol' Testament type way.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 3

DON, LEXUS, MATT, PERCY, LORAN and ANNA sit at a seminar table as Professor TAFT enters.

ANNA

It throws me, Percy, it really does. I don't think I should be here. Kierkegaard. I have a hard time even pronouncing his name.

PERCY

Even I have a hard time with Kierkegaard. But you'll get over it. Wait and see.

ANNA

I guess so, Percy.

MATT

Don't sweat it, Anna.

(TAFT enters.)

TAFT

Hey, everyone, hey. Hello, hello. How you doing? Something wonderful about the fall in Iowa. The leaves changing. So what did you all think of *Fear and Trembling*? Good way to shake off the last vestiges of summer?

PERCY

I pictured him, writing this, like drinking five pots of coffee a day and smoking an entire pack of cigarettes simultaneously.

DON

He's not– he's not exactly concise.

TAFT

Yeah, I guess. Right. I can relate to that. But you know, very few of the philosophers we'll be studying this semester are what you'd call systematic thinkers. Some of these writers are more guided by obsessions. What is he obsessed with here?

LEXUS

The myth of Abraham. This is a philosophy class. What are we doing studying the bible?

TAFT

Hey, hey. I never said I was advocating it. But you know that, alright, for the purposes of analyzing Kierkegaard, we need to take the bible into account.

LEXUS

I don't care about religion. He could have a more exciting obsession, Professor Taft.

TAFT

Maybe he could, Lexus. What about Abraham and Isaac?

ANNA

I can try. Abraham had Isaac, his only begotten son. Now God, God had promised Abraham that his son would prosper, would, like, people the earth. But then one day, God comes to Abraham. There's a Bob Dylan song like this–

LORAN

Out on Highway 61.

ANNA

God comes to Abraham in a burning bush or whatever and tells Abraham that he has to kill Isaac, and it bothers him. Why wouldn't it? Anyway, he decides to do it. He hates to, but he decides to anyway.

TAFT

Yeah, that's it, so anyway, what's the problem with all that?

LORAN

It's a lousy bet. Abraham, this guy, put everything, all his chips, on this kid Isaac. Particularly stoked about him because of the fact that God has said, you know Abraham, this boy of yours, he's gonna be something else, extremely virile. Abraham, he's psyched. Then God says, oh, by the way, you'll have to kill him, Abe. Completely absurd.

TAFT

It's absurd. This is an important idea, right? The idea of absurdity. In order to follow through on this, isn't he going to have to believe two things simultaneously?

PERCY

He could just waste the kid, and get on with his life. Or he could just say up yours, Yahweh. No way am I doing *that*. He's got those options.

TAFT

But Kierkegaard deals with this, right? Abraham is devout, completely. He doesn't doubt a word God tells him. And, on the other hand, he loves his son completely. Isaac is his future, what he was put on the Earth to produce. And God asks him to destroy Isaac.

PERCY

He needs to make a choice, and the illogical one is the only one that he can possibly make.

LORAN

Needs to go crazy, whacko, nuts. Must be some kinda way outta here, say the joker to the thief. Too much confusion, can't get no relief.

TAFT

Not crazy, really, right? But he needs to reach a certain extreme—

DON

The stage of— he has to reach the stage of infinite resignation.

ANNA

Infinite what?

DON

He— he has to give in completely, infinitely. To give up everything he's got, and trust his god completely. He has to become totally weak, totally subject, and just give up.

TAFT

But is it giving up, Don? You think his choice constitutes giving up?

DON

Isn't it? It is. I'd say so. I think Nietzsche would say so.

TAFT

Right, Don. We'll get to Nietzsche. But Kierkegaard wouldn't call it weak. He'd call it the absurdity of absolute faith.

LORAN

To get to what he needed, he needed to take measures that were just— just extreme. Extreme, radical measures.

TAFT

Abraham doesn't give up. He believes simultaneously in an action and in its contradiction.

That is the leap of faith. His leap into a fundamental, yet irrational, state of faith.

DON

I don't buy that— that fundamental business. We don't— we don't need faith. Faith is just another myth. People have faith in the myths that other people tell them to have faith in.

TAFT

We could apply this to more than just faith in a god. This could be the faith it takes just to get out of bed in the morning.

LEXUS

(To Taft)

Or into a bed at night.

ANNA

It's an awful story.

DON

The bible's an awful book. I don't see why he bothered getting obsessed with it. He was— Kierkegaard was just weak. Nietzsche would crush him.

TAFT

We'll get to Nietzsche, Don, we'll get to Nietzsche.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 4

DON is standing at the kitchen counter, filleting a swordfish, when LEXUS walks in, her clothes sticking wetly to her body, her face and hair oily.

DON

Just in time, Lexus, I was about to make dinner and eat it without– what is that shit?

LEXUS

What shit?

DON

All over you – oil?

LEXUS

Crisco.

DON

Crisco?

LEXUS

Oh, you should have been there, Don. You know Al's away – we're supposed to be watching the house.

DON

So you were– you were watering the plants and– what – you bumped into a bottle of Crisco?

LEXUS

Not exactly. I got bored, so I invited over P.J. and Melissa and Josh and Frank.

DON

Those guys, huh?

LEXUS

Yeah, and P.J. had some killer bud. We got so high, Don. You should have come.

DON

You know I had to do that modeling thing.

LEXUS

Oh yeah, you were doing that naked thing.

DON

Fifty bucks for a half hour in the buck. I kind of liked it, all those St. Mary's art students, taking me in, interpreting my body with oil paint. Like I was an object. It was strange. I'd do it again.

LEXUS

Well, so all of us were there and we got high, and Josh, you know how shy he is. I dared him to take off his clothes.

DON

You did.

LEXUS

I did, of course, he wouldn't.

DON

He wouldn't.

LEXUS

Well he got all macho and said he would if I did too. So I took off my top. He just stood there. So I took off my bra. They stared at my tits, like they'd never seen a good pair before. Melissa looked a little nervous. So I took off my pants. I took off my underwear.

DON

So you were standing there naked.

LEXUS

Yeah. Just like you. P.J. rolled another joint and said come on Josh, pay up. He took off his shirt, then his pants. He wears tidy whiteys Don, you should have seen it. We teased him. So he peeled those off too. Nothing impressive, Don. Not half you.

DON

Yeah. So– so I got some wine, merlot– it was on sale.

LEXUS

So Josh and I were standing there naked, all of us completely stoned. Melissa was like bright red. Josh turned to P.J. and said how about you, studmuffin? P.J. you know how buff he is, well he had nothing to hide, so he stripped right down. We were in the majority then. Finally Frank joined in too. He wears black silk boxers. He's got that sort of swarthy Italian look.

DON

Yeah, Lexus, like a statue.

LEXUS

Melissa was the funniest. She's, you know, kind of petite. She was just sitting there, fully clothed, red as a raspberry, me and these three naked guys standing in front of her. She was, you know, trying to avert her eyes– I said it's okay, Melissa, we understand if you're chicken. I said if you're afraid of your body– She said I'm not afraid, Lexus. You should go, Melissa, I said, if it bothers you.

DON

It sounds like– like you were getting a thrill out of torturing Melissa.

LEXUS

She gave me this *hateful* little look and stood up and took off her sweater, her bra, her little skirt. She did it so *delicately*, Don, you should have seen it. Like she was unveiling a Monet for auction.

(Don and pours himself a glass of wine.)

DON

Well– I think I’ll baste the fish with butter and garlic, maybe a little thyme.

LEXUS

The Crisco was my idea.

DON

That’s a real surprise.

LEXUS

Well, it was like, yep, now we’re all naked. I think even Melissa was getting used to it. So I said we’re naked, we sure are. Let’s do something. Let’s rub each other with oil. You should have seen the shade of red Melissa turned then. I thought she’d grab her clothes, turn tail and run.

DON

She get tired of playing Romper Room?

LEXUS

She looked shocked for a minute, glared at me, then smiled at Frank and said Alright Lexus, get the oil. I would have used the olive oil, but you know how Al is about his olive oil, that would’ve really pissed him off. But I figured – Crisco – I’ll buy him a new one. And I made everyone get in the shower.

DON

The shower? You all got in the fucking shower?

LEXUS

So we wouldn’t make a mess. Right in the shower stall. We poured the whole bottle all over each other.

DON

The whole bottle?

LEXUS

In the shower. Melissa– you’d be surprised. She was laughing. She started rubbing Frank. Frank got hard. I think he was kind of embarrassed. Then she really started rubbing him. She kissed Frank and looked over at me, like she was some kind of queen.

DON

I’m not sure I need to hear–

LEXUS

Yeah, so of course I did. Josh and P.J. Just touching, you know. What, does that bother you? It was nothing really, Don. Nothing serious.

DON

You– what– you jerked off these guys and you tell me it was nothing–

LEXUS

We talked about this, Don. It was nothing. It was kind of exciting, but really nothing. I didn't sleep with anyone. We're allowed. Remember? It's not like I had sex with anyone.

DON

Hey, I didn't say you couldn't, alright? But it was something. Fine. I mean, fine, contemporary morality is fucked. You define your own ethics. You go on, Lexus, make up your own rules. Fine. Just remember, you make 'em, you live by 'em.

LEXUS

I had no idea you'd get so upset.

DON

Fine, Lexus, fine. I'm not upset, alright? Just don't you get pissed off the next time you find me with someone.

LEXUS

Oh, Josh didn't even come.

DON

That's great. That's just great. Hey, Lexus, I don't care, alright? I don't care who did and didn't come. I want to finish making dinner. Why don't you go shower off that gloop? I need to finish the fish.

LEXUS

You don't like the oil?

DON

You should have used the olive oil. You could have sopped it up with some fresh french bread.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 5

MATT and NATASHA enter a large old dormitory room, spartanly decorated with portraits of Lenin, Trotsky and Tito. Matt looks harried. Natasha is wearing heavy white makeup.

MATT

So I don't know what to do. I can't just call up my father and say, hey, pops, could you spot me a couple grand? This Iowa mobster loaned me his Corvette and while en route to Ames I accidentally froze the Vette's engine.

NATASHA

That Flubby Lias is a slime bastard. Are you sure it's your fault?

MATT

Not at all. I mean, true, I had it stuck in second gear, but if the engine was running hot, the tachometer would have red-lined. It never did. It just, like, bam, threw out, and there we were, with a dead engine.

NATASHA

And now he's trying to stick you for the whole thing.

MATT

Trying isn't the word. He has literally threatened me with death. He grabbed me by the throat and said "Come up with a new engine, or I'll crush you like a puppy." I'd love to kill him, but he's got like two hundred pounds on me, he owns firearms, and he knows every goddamn cop on the Oak Creek force. He could have me drawn and quartered on fucking Main Street, and the deputies would just nod and smile.

NATASHA

I won't let him hurt you. He can't get into the women's dorm, can he?

MATT

He can't, can he? Well, there's that. I guess I could just set up shop here, write my papers while secretly cloistered in your bathroom, send notes to my professors – sorry, can't make it to class – for the rest of my life – at the risk of bringing it to an abrupt ending at the paws of a certain neanderthal.

NATASHA

Why don't you not worry about it for now, at least? Have a Sambuca.

MATT

Sambuca? Why not?

(Natasha pours two drinks. Matt hastily downs one. She pours him another.)

MATT

I know I'm dwelling on this, and we barely know each other.

NATASHA

Not at all. There's something attractive about it, Matt, like a whole condemned prisoner/public defender lust dynamic.

MATT

Lust?

NATASHA

Well, I have had my eye on you.

MATT

I'm all yours.

NATASHA

Are you?

MATT

Sure. Why not? I- You were telling me about Yugoslavia- the man you met.

NATASHA

Karkadan. He was the Minister of Culture.

MATT

You were dating the Yugoslavian Minister of Culture?

NATASHA

I met him at a party at my professor's house in Sarajevo. We talked a little about state-sponsored proletarian sculpture. It took off from there - I don't think either of us were ever really serious - I was an American girl for him to play with, sort of a status symbol over there, and for my part, well, it was kind of a thrill. It was mostly just sex, and riding horses, and a few parties.

MATT

So you went abroad for a year, and just slipped into the heights of power, a kind of Marilyn Monroe for Slavs, a Princess Grace in Sarajevo.

NATASHA

Hardly. He was just a middle aged man with money, looking for a thrill.

MATT

I've never met anyone like you.

NATASHA

Am I strange?

MATT

No, just, I don't know. You've got some terrific stories. And this (**pointing to pictures on the walls**) what's all this? What about Lenin?

NATASHA

What about Lenin?

MATT

Are you a communist?

NATASHA

Kind of. Not completely. But I'm enthralled by totalitarian socialist regimes. Does that bother you?

MATT

Well, no, of course not. Who's this?

NATASHA

Tito.

MATT

Toto?

NATASHA

Tito.

MATT

Wasn't he one of the Jackson Five?

NATASHA

Marshal Tito. A hero in the Red Army during the Russian Revolution. He went back to Sarajevo and led the Resistance during World War II. After the war he unified Yugoslavia and wrested control of the country away from the Soviet Union, establishing Yugoslavia as the premier independent communist nation on the European continent.

MATT

You're kind of sexy when you talk communism.

NATASHA

(Pause. She moves to the couch.)

Do you want to have sex?

MATT

Well, I, sure, why, yes I do.

NATASHA

You find me attractive?

MATT

Of course I do. You're beautiful.

(Matt kisses Natasha.)

NATASHA

You think so? I wear a lot of make-up.

MATT

Doesn't bother me.

NATASHA

I'll be right back, Matt. Have another drink.

(She goes into the bathroom. We hear her washing her face)

Could you press play on the tape-deck, Matt?

MATT

Yeah, sure.

(He does. Some Vivaldi played softly)

(Natasha comes out of the bathroom wearing a kimono, her hair back, and her face washed, revealing a large strawberry birthmark covering 40% of her face.)

(Matt looks up, a little stunned.)

NATASHA

So do you still? Find me attractive? I know– I know it's ugly. If you don't want to– I mean, if you think I'm ugly, I won't hold it against–

MATT

No, Natasha, No. I don't– you're beautiful.

NATASHA

I'm not. That's not what I am. You don't need to pretend.

MATT

I'm not pretending.

NATASHA

People have left before when they saw it. I hide it so that people won't be repulsed. I know– I know its ugly, but I was born like this. I can't help it. You'll stay?

MATT

I'll stay, Natasha. I'll stay.

(Matt reaches out, caresses her birthmark, draws her face to his, they kiss.)

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 6

DON, LEXUS, PERCY and ANNA are crammed onto a futon in Don and Lexus' apartment, in various states of half-dress, all four light cigarettes.

ANNA

Where's my bra?

DON

That was really something.

LEXUS

I'm ready to do it again.

PERCY

With who?

LEXUS

Well, you, I guess, or Don. Don?

DON

Not a chance, Lexus.

LEXUS

Well, Percy?

PERCY

Not quite ready myself.

LEXUS

Anna? We could try–

ANNA

Can we push one extreme at a time, please? Where is that bra?

LEXUS

Spoilsport. You had your fun, I guess.

PERCY

Hey, I tried, didn't I? We can't all run a marathon.

DON

It's concentration, Percy, concentration.

PERCY

Well, it was hard, I mean, to concentrate. Anna over there in the thrall of your gargantuan member – making faces I never seen her make before–

ANNA

Oh, Percy, please.

PERCY

–and Lexus–well, Lexus, you do bring a sheer athleticism to the fore. I'll admit a certain feeling of confusion, of abandon, of lusty abandoned confusion.

DON

(Pulling a bra from between his toes.)

Here you are, Anna. Well, waffles?

PERCY

It was something, though. It's the kind of thing you can't do in your forties.

LEXUS

Why not?

PERCY

Well, you could, I guess. I mean, you just don't picture people, older people, doing this.

LEXUS

I would.

ANNA

I don't think I would. Don't think I'll ever do it again. It was just, don't get me wrong, it was fun, Don was impressive— sorry Percy – but I mean, he was – but, I don't know, aren't you guys – don't you feel a little strange?

(Don pulls on his jeans, moves over to the kitchen counter.)

DON

Who likes bananas?

PERCY

Sounds good.

LEXUS

Don't we have any strawberries?

ANNA

You must have felt strange, Percy. I know you must have, Don on top of me like that, just brutal passion, and Lexus riding you – and I mean, it took Don a lot longer than you. It was, well, I don't know, it was a little uncomfortable, wasn't it?

DON

(Checking refrigerator)

No strawberries. How about Kiwi? Banana Kiwi wheat waffles?

LEXUS

Not in waffles, Don. Banana's alright, I guess.

PERCY

Maybe strange, Anna. But not uncomfortable.

LEXUS

Very comfortable. I don't see what you're complaining about, Anna. You got the better end of the deal.

PERCY

You're shattering my ego here.

ANNA

You didn't exactly look bored, Lexus.

LEXUS

It was nice. I loved the look on Percy's face. I just thought, in terms of endurance, at least, you got the best. It works out though. I mean it's obvious why we're with who we're with.

ANNA

What is that supposed to mean?

LEXUS

Well, what do you think? Don and I are just more, you know, sexually compatible, with each other, and you two are more, you know, easy going – in bed.

ANNA

Why do you have to turn everything into a competition?

LEXUS

I was just making an observation.

PERCY

(Getting dressed.)

Who wants coffee?

LEXUS

I'll take a cup.

(Percy joins Don in the kitchen, makes coffee.)

ANNA

I thought this was supposed to be about friendship, about sharing, about intimacy.

LEXUS

And it was, wasn't it? I mean, we just shared something special, didn't we?

ANNA

But you make it all one-upmanship. You make it ugly.

LEXUS

You're the one who's trying to turn it into some big psychological deal. I mean – I always wondered about Percy, you always wondered about Don. So we swapped – big deal. You don't need to make it so dramatic. So Don and I are better in bed than you and Percy. So what?

ANNA

You are not – better – Lexus. You can't make generalizations about my sex life from fucking my boyfriend once, okay? Percy and I have it better than you know.

LEXUS

Maybe I should fuck him again, to verify that.

ANNA

Sometimes I'd like to tear your hair out.

LEXUS

I'm sorry, maybe you weren't ready for this. Maybe you aren't mature enough to deal with it.

ANNA

Your attitude is so—

LEXUS

I don't want to fight, Anna. I don't want to kick your ass. Sorry if I hurt your feelings.

(She kisses Anna on the cheek.)

You and Percy are *cute* together.

ANNA

All this— arrgh! Bullshit. Look, forget it, alright?

LEXUS

Forgotten. Don, is my waffle ready?

DON

Nearly, sweetheart.

(Percy returns with two cups of coffee. Hands one to Lexus, sips from the other.)

ANNA

What about me, Percy?

PERCY

Huh?

ANNA

Didn't you make a cup for me?

PERCY

You didn't ask for one. Here.

(Hands her his coffee).

I'll get another.

(A knock on the door.)

LEXUS

Come on in.

(Matt enters, looking a bit ruffled.)

MATT

Could I bum a smoke?

ANNA

Yeah, sure.

(She tosses him one.)

So where have you been all weekend?

MATT

Natasha's.

LEXUS

Natasha's, eh? You should have been here. We had group sex.

MATT

Did you?

PERCY

Oh yeah, it was great. A sweaty mass of bodies, moving in unison.

MATT

Yeah? I'm not sure I could handle all that.

ANNA

How's it going with Natasha?

MATT

Oh, pretty good. Well, great, it's just—

ANNA

What— is she weird?

MATT

Not really, but, I don't know, we have sex, and she starts asking me about my poetry. Then she launches into this long story about how her father was a poet and he left when she was little, disappeared. And her name — her name used to be Jane — until she started studying communist sculpture — and she insists that I call her Jane when we're in bed, and Natasha when we're not. I don't know. I guess everybody's got their thing. She's great though, really.

ANNA

So you and her are an item?

MATT

I don't know. She — maybe this is normal, I mean, I don't know, but after she got done talking about her father, she started talking about we could have beautiful kids together — three of them — all boys. She started talking about what she'd maybe like in a wedding — a polka band, a pig roast, red dresses on the bridesmaids — I don't know, maybe she was just playing — but she seemed to move pretty quick.

ANNA

Sounds to me like **(she hums the theme from the Twilight Zone.)**

PERCY

Flubby's been looking for you.

MATT

Great. Just great. What does he expect me to do? Maybe I should just let him kill me, get it over with.

DON

(Passing out plates.)

I'm sure you'll work it out. Want a waffle?

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 7

MATT and LORAN are in the classroom as PERCY enters.

LORAN

But he doesn't stop, see? You keep saying to let it go, right? He got us kicked off the newspaper last year, so what, we've got lives of our own, right? But now he's going after the literary magazine – for dirty words, Matt – Rantz is out to shut down every damn good thing we've ever done. If he doesn't stop, why should we? This is a man who should be injured. He is pure undiluted evil.

MATT

I'm just saying you're pushing it too far, is all.

(PERCY enters.)

LORAN

You get it?

PERCY

Did I get it? Yes, indeed. We've unearthed a bit of Rantz's private life.
(Percy hands Matt a manila envelope. Matt opens it, examines a photograph inside.)

MATT

Is that really a–

PERCY

Yep. Baaaaaaah. Baaaaaaah.

MATT

I thought that was a myth, about the Delta Nu's initiation ritual.

LORAN

Gets me is that they're stupid enough to document it and leave a copy laying around in an unlocked drawer in the chapter room of their frat house, easily accessible, available for publication and dissemination.

PERCY

(Looking at the photo)
Definitely some kind of semination going on there.

MATT

Put that away. Be careful, Loran–

LORAN

We're talking about fighting fucking fascist censorship. You hate his guts as much as I do. Pure evil. Guerilla warfare time, man.

MATT

Yeah, but I got problems of my own right now. Flubby Lias. Remember? I'm fucking going

around campus, picking up aluminum cans to cash in for grocery money.

(LEXUS, DON, ANNA, and TAFT enter and sit at the seminar table.)

TAFT

Have you been watching the news? Can you believe the man's blatant militant electoral maneuvers?

MATT

Bush?

TAFT

It's frightening. It's transparent. And no one is calling him on it. The saccharine sham of the Reagan-Bush eighties has produced an electoral herd of media zombies. Playing politics with human lives.

PERCY

Realpolitik. If I recall our Machiavelli last semester—

TAFT

Percy, we probably shouldn't even get into it. We live in a dangerous time. That's all I can say. It's a frightening time. Well, we're finally into Don's territory. We left off at the *Birth of Tragedy*, and now we're into the *Genealogy of Morals*. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, we saw how Nietzsche splits the consciousness into two separate elements, the Appolonian and the Dionysian. Who can refresh us?

PERCY

Kind of a type A, type B personality. The Appolonian: anal, ordered, rational, tight. Dionysian, though, that's got more going on. Bacchanalian disorder, chaos, id run amuck.

LEXUS

The Dionysian spirit is what lets people really cut loose, have fun with their lives.

TAFT

Right, yeah, so what are the costs and benefits of each element?

LEXUS

The Appolonian is your ordered, rational half. What holds people back, what like, say, keeps the older, married man from acting out on his desires, keeps him from the younger, more attractive woman who wants him. Those Appolonian rules keep him back. If he were more Dionysian, he'd jump right in and make passionate love to her.

TAFT

Well, I guess, maybe, interesting analogy, Lexus, but— but what about the Dionysian? Aren't there some drawbacks?

ANNA

I don't think rationality is always so bad. Sure, everybody wants to party sometimes, but if we do it without any sense of control, things just fall apart. If everybody imagined themselves Dionysian whatever, the world would just be crazy.

LEXUS

Come on– right now everybody goes around imagining themselves Appolonian whatever, and the world *is* crazy.

DON

And it's not– it's not as if he's talking about one overtaking the other, necessarily. He says that we should sacrifice in the temple of both gods. That's what tragedy's all about. The ubermensch would look at these distinctions and say that they are petty, insignificant. He's got an equilib– a balance of both, overcoming the petty humans.

PERCY

I don't know that you could call it a balance. The whole act of overcoming is Dionysian.

TAFT

Okay, I think this a good point to segue into the *Genealogy*. And remember, this is titled *The Genealogy of Morals: an Attack*. Nietzsche is definitely posing himself against a set of ideas here, right?

LORAN

Oh yeah he is. Big one too. Judeo-Christian theology. The Western mind. The whole taco, baby. Taking it on, in a big way. Like "God is dead, you little pipsqueaks. Get a grip." He's ranting, foaming at the maw.

LEXUS

This is what I mean, about the Dionysian really getting it on, parting ways with petty morality.

ANNA

Why do you say *petty*? You think all morality is petty?

TAFT

Okay, yeah. Let's slow down here. How does he go about reaching his conclusions?

DON

Well, there's this idea of "good." Nietzsche, he realizes that "good" only means good when it means "good for somebody other than the fool." The fool who believes that the meek shall inherit the earth. Listen to that. The meek shall inherit the earth. Like Donald Trump is fucking meek. All that theological bullshit comes down to one thing: you're good if you do what you're told. You're good if you feel the lash, and beg for more. It's all based on guilt.

ANNA

Whose guilt?

DON

Your guilt, Anna. My guilt. Percy's guilt. Everybody's guilt. You come into this world marked. Because some damn fool–some idiot–ate an apple or a pear or whatever in the garden of Eden. You're guilty because you were born naked, and you'll die naked, and as much as you love that soul of yours, you gotta face the fact that it's attached to an ugly

human body, this thing that– that eats and drinks and pisses and shits and feels guilty cause it breathes. And Jesus. Jesus. Jesus died for us, right? This guy, lived two thousand years ago in some desert, got nailed to a cross he had to carry on his back, and then died up there in the hot stinking sun. For who? For you.

ANNA

You don't need to make it so personal.

PERCY

But he does, doesn't he? I mean, we all feel it. It's drilled into our heads from the time we're in diapers. Do what you're told. Do what you're told or else. God won't love you if you don't do what you're told. The world is rotten and it's all your fault.

TAFT

Alright, easy, easy. I think you've established the concept of guilt. Now how does it fit into the larger structure of morality as Nietzsche conceives it?

DON

Right in the middle. You're guilty. You've got original sin, you've got this Nazarean who died for you. You're in debt, sucker. You owe him your life. You've got a contractual obligation.

TAFT

And so how do you pay it off?

DON

You pay it– you pay it with your flesh. You pay it by suffering. You pay it by living as a peasant. You pay it with your back. You pay it by accepting the fact that there is a grand scheme of things, and in that grand scheme, you're nothing, a flyspeck, a runt.

MATT

This goes deeper than calling religion the opiate of the masses.

DON

It goes– it goes into every little action every little automaton performs on this wasted ball of dirt. The meek shall inherit the earth. Why do you think the slaves sung up all those beautiful spirituals? Get me to the river Jordan. Oh, the man up in the big white house, he don't got nothing on me. I'm suffering out here in my chains, but when you get me to that river Jordan, I'm gonna wade right on through.

PERCY

Justification for atheism if I ever heard one.

DON

It's a bedtime story for fools. Religion is all based on the idea that you owe some God you've never even met for some sin you can't even remember. Meanwhile, who's up there preaching at you? Making sure you get to church on Sunday? The oppressor, that's who. The master, counting up coins and passing out prayer books. Nietzsche is saying, "God, you fools, is dead as a doornail. That guy passing out the prayer books in the seersucker suit, he's the one to look out for. He's the one whose sticking it to ya."

ANNA

But it's not so black and white, Don. I mean, I'm not religious, but there have been times – like when my grandmother died – when I felt pretty religious, when I felt that there was some kind of spirit. Maybe not God, maybe not heaven, but something.

DON

Well, that's when it gets you, Anna. When you're weak. That's why the churches are filled with old people, begging God for forgiveness and a tee-time at the big country club in the sky.

TAFT

Yeah. Alright. What does he call for to replace what he envisions as the corrupt morality of Judeo-Christianity?

PERCY

The ubermensch. The superman.

LORAN

No kryptonite for me, Lois, I'm driving.

DON

The truthful man. The honest man. The man who can look at the world–

LEXUS

Or woman. It could be a woman.

DON

–the world around him and see what a heap of manure it really is. The man who can unite the split consciousness of his Dionysian and Apollonian urges and overcome the dictates of petty morality. The man who can look at the system of ethics put upon him by the outside world and spit on it, look beyond and rise over it.

LEXUS

A superwoman. An uber-femme.

PERCY

No cutting corners. No bullshit. You have a foot. It is made to crush.

ANNA

You guys are scaring me.

TAFT

I think you're right. There is a point at which the idea of the superman becomes frightening. Nietzsche is saying that the Western system of morality is bankrupt, right? Fine. But then what are we replace it with?

DON

Nothing. No system. The ubermensch creates his own ethics, his own morality.

TAFT

Hitler adopted this idea. Where did Hitler get humanity?

DON

Hitler twisted it around. Hitler used it falsely. Nietzsche wouldn't call Hitler a superman.

MATT

We need something, don't we? I mean, if we just abandon all morality, what are we left with? What do you say about the guy who walks into a McDonald's with an automatic rifle and starts killing people at random? Don't we need some agreed-upon standards of behavior?

DON

Shoot back – shoot back at him. Hitler never would have come to power if there weren't so many potty-trained herd-mentality weaklings there to sieg hiel his every move. Hitler would have never come into power in a country full of supermen.

TAFT

Yeah. Yeah. But what about community? Isn't the idea that the ubermensch is and can be a man unto-himself, without a community, a little flawed? Isn't it true that without a general system of consensual ethics, we're left without any room to work with each other. Don't we need to work together, as communities, toward common goals?

DON

But you can't – I don't view that as a flaw. Univocal systems of ethics are at the heart of most acts of terror, of violence, of inhumanity.

MATT

But what about the guy slaughtering people in the McDonald's? Can't you call that wrong?

DON

You can call it wrong all you want. You can't *make* it wrong. If that's what he did, it is what it is.

MATT

I can't make it wrong? It is wrong, man, and everybody knows it.

DON

Doesn't change the fact that's the way he chose to define himself. Maybe that guy, maybe that psycho is better off–

MATT

Than the people that he shot?

DON

Than the people who just follow the herd. Than the people who just do what they're told, like automatons.

ANNA

Most people aren't automatons. They do what they can, that's all. They live under circumstances, and they try–

DON

Under. Under. That's exactly it. Under and buried by their circumstances. That's what the

superman is resisting. You're nothing if you just let yourself get buried under the weight of this bullshit humanity. You're nothing if you don't define your own reality, and live it out as you see fit.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 1, Scene 8

ANNA and PERCY enter Percy and Matt's apartment.

PERCY

You're off your nut, that's what I think.

ANNA

Why not? Why shouldn't I?

PERCY

I'm not saying you shouldn't. You can pierce your belly, nose, lips, tongue, whatever, I'm just saying I wouldn't, personally. Never pierce an inch of my own flesh.

ANNA

Why not?

PERCY

I just don't have a perverse attraction to pain. I don't feel the need to go out and offer my body up to some stranger to poke, pierce, tattoo, whatever.

ANNA

I thought you liked my tattoo.

(Anna lifts her shirt, exposing a small tattoo of a butterfly between the top of her right hip and belly button.)

I like it, the colors, the way it flaps its wings when I breathe.

PERCY

Hey, I like it too— on you. But that's your trip. Me, it's like the idea of some guy, probably some ex-con pervert, dipping his needle in ink and making his mark all over my flesh. What if the guy doesn't like me? They get off on it, those guys, watching people squirm, inflicting pain on a human canvas.

ANNA

Are you afraid of the pain?

PERCY

Not afraid so much as not stupid, Anna. I just don't go out of my way to get hurt.

ANNA

You don't think a pierced belly button would be erotic?

PERCY

Might be better than belly lint, but I bet it would get nasty with puss, and all that bleeding. Couldn't pay me to do it.

ANNA

Maybe it is the pain.

PERCY

That draws you to it?

ANNA

I let you tie me up.

PERCY

Well that's different. I mean that's a game, and the degree of pain is completely incomparable. I don't hurt you, do I?

ANNA

You've come pretty close, Percy. I can tell you want to.

PERCY

Do you like to feel hurt?

ANNA

Of course not. Not really. Not much. Maybe a little. And you do hurt me. A little.

PERCY

Do you ever want to hurt me?

ANNA

Course I do, Percy. All the time.

PERCY

Do you?

ANNA

Oh, just a little. I mean – nothing permanent. But every once and a while I look over at you and I think– look at Percy, his ears are so cute – wouldn't it be fun to grab one of those cute little ears and twist it, real hard? Or maybe you're talking at the bar and I think – listen to Percy, he's so witty. His jokes are so witty, his lips are so sharp. Wouldn't it be fun to slap him in the face a few times, smack him sharp and hard so the corner of his lip would break just a little cut, just a drop of blood, trickling out the side of his mouth?

PERCY

I see now. It's about marking.

ANNA

Marking?

PERCY

A fucking frightening kind of marking. Mutilation is a sign of enslavement, of bondage. You want to mark yourself as a belonging. To who, to what, I don't know. And you'd like to mark me too.

ANNA

To prove that I own you?

PERCY

That's what hickeys are all about. That's why I can't stand them.

(Anna picks up a hairband from the endtable.)

ANNA

I guess some of that goes on – when people get possessive. Percy?

PERCY

Yes?

ANNA

Do you think that I'm possessive?

PERCY

You've got no reason to be.

ANNA

Good. Cause I wouldn't want you think I'm possessive.

PERCY

You're generally well behaved, side from the occasional act of gross stupidity.

ANNA

Don't be so generous, Percy.

(Anna picks hairs out of the band while talking.)

You know, I can never use these things. It hurts to do anything with my hair.

PERCY

Yeah. You got any pot?

ANNA

It's your turn.

PERCY

I will next time. You should get some. I met a guy at the Drite who has some choice–

ANNA

Natasha has blond hair, doesn't she?

PERCY

Bleach blond. This guy I met at the Drite, his name, believe it or not, is Tree. I asked him if he had a last name but he said no just Tree, first and last name Tree so I said Tree Tree? and he said no just Tree, anyway Tree said he could get kind buds for forty–

ANNA

Matt and Natasha stopped seeing each other, didn't they?

PERCY

I guess. He's a little preoccupied with Flubby.

ANNA

So why's her hairband sitting here?

PERCY

Who said it's hers anyway? Who cares?

ANNA

I guess I shouldn't care – about other women leaving things around here.

PERCY

You want me to tell Matt to make sure his dates don't leave their hair implements lying around? Sometimes, Anna—they're just *things*.

ANNA

But things can mean a lot. Things can be signs. Sometimes people leave things around to send messages.

PERCY

Messages? Like what kind of message?

ANNA

Well, like, "Hi, Anna, did you know I fucked your boyfriend?"

PERCY

You aren't going to imply—did I say *occasional* acts of stupidity?

ANNA

I should trust you, Percy?

PERCY

Of course you should.

ANNA

Like I did last time – with Debbie?

PERCY

I was drunk. You were in Des Moines all week. She practically attacked me. I had very few options.

ANNA

But you narrowed them down to one.

PERCY

I said I was sorry, didn't I?

ANNA

Whatever, Percy. You lie.

PERCY

I'd rather not fight over nothing.

ANNA

Would you rather fight about something? We could talk about where you were while I was at rehearsal last night.

Why?
PERCY

Where were you?
ANNA

The bar, then Al's house.
PERCY

So you left with Al?
ANNA

I went to Al's.
PERCY

You went over to Heevor Hall.
ANNA

I what?
PERCY

With Natasha.
ANNA

I didn't.
PERCY

Someone saw you go into her room, Percy.
ANNA

Someone lied, alright? I don't need to hear about your little spies.
PERCY

You're the liar, Percy, I can see it on your face.
ANNA

What do you want? You want to call it quits? You can leave now if you want.
PERCY

Why can't you ever admit that you're wrong?
ANNA

I've done nothing wrong.
PERCY

Not an ounce of honesty in you, Percy. You just assume that you can get away with any—
ANNA

Then leave. What do you want from me?
PERCY

ANNA

I want you to admit that you're wrong, Percy, for once in your life. I want you to admit that your wrong and get on your knees and beg me for forgiveness, that's what I want.

PERCY

That sounds like a production.

ANNA

I do want to hurt you, Percy. I really feel like I should.

PERCY

You want to hurt me? Fine. You want fucking dramatics?

(Percy rummages through a dresser drawer and retrieves a jack-knife, flips it open, and hands it to Anna. Percy unbuttons his shirt and bares his chest.)

Go ahead, you might as well. Stab me right there, in the heart. Do it quick. Pierce me right through. Better do it hard, Anna, get it over with. I don't want to just stand here for hours like an idiot, slowly bleeding to death.

(Anna keeps looking back and forth from Percy to the knife in her hand.)

ANNA

Now that's what I call stupid, Percy, handing me this here knife.

PERCY

Do it already.

(Anna walks up close to Percy, holding the knife close to his face.)

ANNA

I'm tempted, Percy, I am.

PERCY

You'd get out your feelings. Isn't that what you actresses do?

(Anna tips the blade of the knife to Percy's face and pricks his cheek with it.)

PERCY

You— I don't fucking believe you. That hurt.

ANNA

You don't like it?

**(BLACKOUT.)
(END OF ACT I.)**

Act Two

Act 2, Scene 1

MATT and ANNA are in the apartment, wearing protective fencing shirts and goggles, holding rapiers. Matt is holding a small paperback *Hamlet* with his free hand. They are preparing to fence.

You, the judges, bear a wary eye. MATT

Come on, sir. ANNA

Come, my lord. MATT

(They begin to fence.)

One. ANNA

No. MATT

Judgment. ANNA

Drum. Flourish. MATT
(They pause.)
Well, again. Blah, blah, blah. Give me the cup.

I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile. Come— ANNA
(They begin again.)
Another hit! What say you?

(Touching his ribs) MATT
I do confess't.

Let's jump to the switch. ANNA

MATT

Okay. Have at you now.

(He lunges. They scuffle, drop rapiers, switch)

ANNA

Nay, come again.

(They resume. She connects.)

MATT

Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Orsic. I am justly killed with mine own treachery.

ANNA

How does the queen?

MATT

Blah, blah, blah. I am poisoned.

ANNA

Oh villainy! Ho! let the door be locked. Treachery. Seek it out.

(Lunges in for the "killing" blow. Matt falls.)

MATT

("Dying.")

I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

ANNA

(Helping him up.)

Thanks, Matt. How's it looking?

MATT

Thou dost parry thine spine in a method most fine, Hamlet.

(They sit, remove goggles, wipe sweat from their brows.)

ANNA

So how about you, how are you doing, Matt?

MATT

Things are, well, alright, I guess. Christmas was good, getting away– I didn't really want to come back. Bastard Flubby Lias has got me working at his nursing home, cleaning bed pans.

ANNA

He owns a nursing home?

MATT

Several, his father-in-law actually, but he runs them, and a funeral parlor too.

ANNA

Is he paying you?

MATT

Oh yeah. Big bucks. Six an hour. Right back to him, towards his engine.

ANNA

That whole thing sucks.

MATT

Tell me about it. Work five hours a night after school, for nothing, come home exhausted and try to scrape the bedpan shit out from under my nails.

ANNA

And you and Natasha are?

MATT

Finished. Done. I couldn't– I liked her, but she was all over the place, talking about marriage and–

ANNA

And she had sex with Percy the minute it was clear you and her wouldn't be getting hitched.

MATT

I didn't know you knew.

ANNA

Well, I found out. Did it piss you off?

MATT

At who? Her? Why should I be? Percy? Not really. I haven't got the energy. My fantasies of gutting Flubby take up most of that. What about you? How are you and Percy?

ANNA

I don't know why I put up with him, Matt. First there was the group sex thing, fine, I guess, but of all of us, I think I enjoyed it the least. And now Natasha. Things have gotten so fucked up. He lies. He just lies so much. Any sense of trust I had with him has just – evaporated.

MATT

Well, I suppose you could always–

ANNA

What – break up with him?

MATT

Well–

ANNA

I have, like fifteen times, for about ten minutes each time. We break up, we fight, we go to bed, and then we're right back where we started.

MATT

Do you need him?

ANNA

I do, Matt, I do. That's the whole problem. I mean– it's not like he's the only boyfriend I ever had, but, I don't know– I came here as a freshman, I was just this ditzy pothead from Des Moines–

MATT

That's not true–

ANNA

I was, really I was. You didn't know me then. God knows how I even decided to go to college. Then I moved here and met this little guy from the East coast. Sure, he was a pothead, but the potheads I know in Des Moines, they talk about, like, cars, and engines, and Iron Maiden. Then Percy came along. A guy who read books for fun. That was a totally new concept. He'd roll up a joint and talk to me about battles in Ancient Greece. We'd get drunk and he'd try to seduce me in French. He taught me things.

MATT

So you owe him for that?

ANNA

No. I don't owe him anything, nothing at all, or if I did, I've paid it in full. My problem is that I just can't stop loving him. He's got this face he can make that just makes everything seem – I don't know – it just seems like when he makes that face, everything melts away to nothing and I just want to hold him.

MATT

Even after he cheats on you.

ANNA

Yeah. Even after he cheats on me. Isn't that fucked up?

MATT

I don't know– I guess every kind of love is a little fucked up – giving in to something.

ANNA

Then I think, well maybe I should just, you know, cheat on him, just have sex with someone different, try someone else out, give *him* something to obsess about.

MATT

But?

ANNA

But I don't want to fuck somebody else, you know? What would be the point of having sex just to even a score? I wouldn't enjoy that. And who would I find to sign up for that anyway? You know . . . ?

MATT

What–

ANNA

You remember last year, when I first met you, when we were in the play together, when we

were in my room together, smoking pot after rehearsal?

MATT

Yeah?

ANNA

Why didn't you?

MATT

I didn't – know, that is, but – thanks, I mean, thanks for–

ANNA

And now, well now we're too close now, aren't we?

MATT

Guess we are.

ANNA

It's weird how things change when people get close. I mean if we did – it would just mess things up worse.

MATT

It would, wouldn't it?

ANNA

Shame, though.

MATT

Yeah, it's– you're gonna make a great Hamlet, you know that, Anna?

ANNA

You really think so?

MATT

I do.

ANNA

You know something?

MATT

What?

ANNA

I wouldn't mind if you–

MATT

We can't.

ANNA

Not for revenge. We could just–

(She moves in towards him. They kiss, then break.)

Well. **MATT**

That wasn't so bad. **ANNA**

Just a kiss. **MATT**

Just the once.
(Percy opens door, enters.) **ANNA**

Oh, excellent **(grabbing rapier.)** **PERCY**
Swords! Who wants to fight?

Not now, Percy, not now. **ANNA**

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 2

LEXUS and ANNA are drinking in the bar one stormy night, where they are joined LORAN, and then MATT and PERCY.

LEXUS

And then there's Taft, if you get bored. I'd love to have a real office hour appointment with him.

ANNA

Are you serious?

LEXUS

Oh yeah. I'd love to just take him during office hours, right on his desk, push off all that Plato and Aristotle and Kierkegaard and those carefully marked papers and just tear off his clothes and get hold of that ponytail-

ANNA

We've all got our fantasies, I guess.

LEXUS

I know I do. But the class - you don't like it?

ANNA

No, I do. Of course I do. But some of it depresses me.

LEXUS

Hell, we're talking about life. How do you make it not depressing? There is something about the class pisses me off, though.

ANNA

What?

LEXUS

Guys, guys, guys. It's all fucking guys. I mean Nietzsche, I love a lot of things he has to say, but he hates women. It's all fucking *superman*, he this, he that. He's misogynist as shit. And Kierkegaard, pining over the same woman all his life. Stalker if you ask me, and then Kafka, same deal, whining and pining. I would have dated Kafka if I'd been alive at the time but-

ANNA

How are you and Don?

LEXUS

What do you mean how are Don and I?

ANNA

How you guys doing?

LEXUS

Why?

ANNA

Just wondering.

LEXUS

You still freaked out over our little group adventure?

ANNA

No. Just wondering.

LEXUS

Well, we're fine. Don and I, we don't sweat it. We don't fight over every little thing.

ANNA

Has he ever cheated on you?

LEXUS

Cheated? No, I mean, we don't have too many limits, but he hasn't, outside of the group, at least, and we can't really count *that* as cheating. You don't, do you?

ANNA

No. Of course not. It's just Percy. Well, you know he fucked Natasha. Everybody knows he fucked Natasha.

LEXUS

Just once, from what I've heard. Then she asked him to marry her.

ANNA

Did she?

LEXUS

I guess that's her thing.

ANNA

So he just fucked her *once*. Just once. So – so how do I put up with that?

LEXUS

We could kill her. Cute little Bolshevik, isn't she? I'd help you.

ANNA

It's not really that slut, it's Percy. He's the one who fucked up. What would you do?

LEXUS

I don't know. I mean, it could happen. I'd probably be fine with it. I don't know. He wouldn't though. I take care of him. I'd kill the bitch though, you can be sure of that. I'd leave some scars.

ANNA

Do you and Don ever fight?

LEXUS

What, like you and Percy?

ANNA

I guess.

LEXUS

Yeah, we fight. I mean, of course we fight. Nothing physical. Not that I couldn't kick his ass. But you know me anyway, I like a good fight. I have a hard time even getting him to raise his voice.

ANNA

You like to fight?

LEXUS

I've been fighting all my life. I don't like to get kicked around, so I fight.

ANNA

Still, you like it?

LEXUS

People fight because they have something to fight about. If they're fighting, it means that they're fighting over something, something they care enough to argue about. If they care enough to argue about it, there was something there to begin with. That's usually what ends up being important about the whole fight: what was there to begin with.

(MATT approaches with pitcher.)

MATT

Sometimes I feel that we are all just fools, fumbling in the dark.

ANNA

Are you drunk, Matt?

MATT

I'm working on it.

LEXUS

Was that T.S. Eliot?

MATT

Fools fumbling in the dark?

LEXUS

Yeah.

MATT

No. Me, I think. This storm. I nearly had my Conrad paper done. The whole Marlow/Kurtz father/son projected identity son is the child is the father of the man thing. Ten pages worth, at least. Lightning strike. Blackout. And of course, no backup. A fool, fumbling in the dark.

ANNA

I hate that. That's the worst. Fucking computers.

LEXUS

Fucking machines. You're taking it better than I would.

MATT

It's me. Same story, different tune. Every fucking thing. It's me. I fall into the shit, every time.

LEXUS

I'm amazed you can stay so calm about it.

MATT

Calm? Compared to who?

LEXUS

Compared to everyone, Matt – you're the calmest guy we know.

MATT

If I seem calm, it's because I'm in shock, really. I don't seek these things out. I don't have that kind of capacity for events.

ANNA

Capacity for events?

MATT

Sometimes I think I suffer from an extreme form of sanity.

LEXUS

I don't follow–

MATT

Your lives move in these hyperactive patterns. You want it that way. You're always doing something, trying something, building something, destroying something, wreaking havoc on each other's emotions. You've all got an immense capacity for events. You're all crazy, but you're really living.

ANNA

Same as you are, Matt.

MATT

Not the same. I don't make things happen. Life just happens to me. That's what I mean about sanity. Love is dangerous. Stay away from love. Doing anything in life means not doing something else. Trying to make any kind of movement constitutes real risk.

ANNA

You do things. The kind of things we do.

MATT

Well, I don't know about–

ANNA

Okay. *Most* of the kinds of things we do.

MATT

I feel thrown into the world. I didn't throw myself.

(LORAN enters, dripping wet, concealing something in his trench coat.)

LORAN

Hello, hello, hello.

(Pointing to pitcher.)

May I?

MATT

Grab a glass.

LORAN

Crazy storm, huh? Knocked out the lights all across campus.

ANNA

Matt was just saying we're all just fools, fumbling in the dark.

LORAN

In the dark, alright. But that don't mean we're fools. The dark—not necessarily bad. Darkness offers freedom of movement, good for prowling.

LEXUS

What's that in your coat?

(Loran glances about warily)

LORAN

Just a little something I found in the dark.

(He hands Lexus a framed certificate.)

LEXUS

(Reading.)

On this 18th day of May, 1990, Stephen Rantz did receive the Froehlich Prize in the study of Economics.

MATT

Where did you get that, Loran?

LORAN

Just found it, in the dark.

MATT

You getting in trouble?

LORAN

It was just too perfect. Completely dark. Took a stroll, just incidentally, by the old student senate offices, home of der fuhrer. Got an office of his own, like his own little private bunker,

and I was passing by, on my way outta there, but there's a firehose, right there, Matt, readily accessible, begging, you know, and I thought, well, would look a little better wet, his office, you know, just in passing and lo and behold, when I tried the door it was unlocked and there I see this thing, up in a shrine over his floor length mirror. So I confiscated it.

MATT

Instead of flooding the office.

LORAN

Oh no, I did that, too.

MATT

What are you thinking? That's serious, Loran. You can't just—

(PERCY and DON enter, arguing.)

DON

You can't — you can't believe that, Percy. It's all lies. I hate the fact these dogs need to disguise everything in these patriotic terms. Like restoring the oligarchical government of one oil-rich nation is somehow making the world safer for democracy. Desert Shield. Come on, who's he protecting?

PERCY

Of course he's producing propaganda. You need propaganda to fight a proper war.

DON

It's a fucking— a fucking shameless deception. Any idiot can see through the rhetoric. This war is economic, pure brute capitalism, and Bush doesn't even have the balls to admit it.

PERCY

Hey, I'm tired of the rhetoric too. I'm ready for the bombs.

DON

All that grandstanding in Congress, all those emotional speeches. It's like they're sending the Marines in to rescue an emirate of orphans from a burning building.

PERCY

What do you want? They've already sent the camera crews over there. They want to get it started. There's only so long you can stand out in the desert, waiting for SCUDs. Let's blow some shit up!

DON

It's sick. Everybody eating it up like sheep.

PERCY

Hey, guys. What's this **(the frame.)** —hey—ah **(chuckles)**. You've been busy in the dark, Loran?

LORAN

Fitting confiscation from a future captain of fascist industry.

MATT

Put that away, Loran. What are you thinking?

LORAN

What?

MATT

You're pushing things too far.

LORAN

They cried to the intrepid adventurer as he lowered himself into the barrel and launched his vessel towards the mouth of magnificent Niagara Falls, the ever-popular Canadian-American honeymoon destination.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 3

DON and LEXUS' apartment. Lexus and NATASHA are fighting . Don gets between them, breaks it up.

LEXUS

Stay the fuck away from Don, or I will kill you. Understand, Natasha? I will fucking kill you.

NATASHA

I didn't see a ring, Lexus. You seem a little insecure. Maybe Don doesn't want to live in your little universe.

LEXUS

Don is mine.

NATASHA

You don't own him, Lexus. He's not your property. I never thought you, of all people, would be a brute capitalist.

(Lexus lunges at her. She runs out the door.)

LEXUS

Better not come back, whore. Better stay away, or you're fucking dead.

(Don slumps into an easy chair.)

DON

I don't fucking – I don't believe you.

LEXUS

(Lighting a cigarette.)

You don't fucking believe me? You don't fucking believe *me*?

(Approaching him.)

You piece of shit.

DON

Look, Lexus, you – what happened to free love? You've got no room to–

LEXUS

Fucking Natasha, huh? How original. Right out Percy's book. Matt's scraps, Don? Couldn't even find a whore of your own?

DON

She's not a whore.

LEXUS

Well then what was she doing, Don? Getting a good close-up look at your dick for her art class?

DON

You – what we were doing is no concern of yours–

LEXUS

I live here, bastard, I pay half the rent.

DON

You were hurting her. You destroy things, Lexus. You make up these – these fairy tales about how we ought to live our fucking lives and then you don't follow through. You're inauthentic, Lexus, you're not fucking real.

LEXUS

I live here, Don. You need to respect– I'm good to you, Don, you know I am.

DON

I think we've said enough.

LEXUS

You can't ever do that again.

DON

You can't tell me that, Lexus. Remember the rules?

LEXUS

Don't ever do that!

DON

I will– I will if I want. We just live together, Lexus. We're not married, and you can't tell me who to– why don't you run off and rub some more cocks, then tell me what I can't do?

(Lexus slaps Don.)

DON

That's it. We're over, Lexus. We're history. I'm moving out.

LEXUS

You can't do that, Don.

DON

(Getting up.)

Watch me.

LEXUS

(Caresses him, now, as if romantically.)

You can't say you haven't got it good, Don.

(Kisses him as he turns away.)

You know I do things for you, Don. Things no one else can.

DON

Lexus, this isn't gonna make anything–

LEXUS

Just shut up, Don. Just shut up, okay? You feel it, you know you feel it. I feel it, Don. You know what I do to you. It doesn't matter. What happened. I can let it go. We've got too much to just throw it away. Let's just get back to-

DON

We can't go back, Lexus. There's no going backwards. It's already done.

LEXUS

(Moves in on him, kissing him fiercely, groping all over him.)

You say one thing. I feel another.

DON

We can't do this now.

LEXUS

We can, Don, we can.

DON

Not.

(We see him about to push her away, and then giving in to her)

LEXUS

Now.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 4

MATT, ANNA, PERCY, LEXUS, DON, LORAN, and TAFT are seated around the seminar table. Anna, Lexus, and Percy are reading aloud from their books (of Sartre plays). Anna acts as if she is stabbing Lexus with a ball point pen.

LEXUS

But, you crazy creature, what do you think you're doing? You know quite well I'm dead.

ANNA

Dead?

LEXUS

Dead! Dead! Dead! Knives, poison, ropes—all useless. It has happened *already*, do you understand? Once and for all. So here we are, forever. (Laughs).

ANNA

(Laughing.)

Forever. My god, how funny! Forever.

PERCY

For ever, and ever, and ever.

(They all laugh, then all three slump in their chairs. A long silence.)

Well, well, let's get on with it.

TAFT

Cool, beautiful, thanks everyone for reading. Now let's think about it like philosophers. What does Sartre dramatize in *No Exit*?

LORAN

An alternative afterlife. Quelle nightmare! Man, that's worse than dying, spending an eternity locked in a room with two people you can't stand. With my luck it would be Howard Cossell and Dan Quayle.

DON

Hell is—hell is other people.

TAFT

Elaborate?

ANNA

Their punishment, their hell, is having to live with these other people.

DON

And with themselves. They can't escape from themselves.

TAFT

What about themselves, Don?

DON

They can't escape themselves. The idea—goes back to Sartre's idea of the formation of the

self, whatever you want to call the essence.

TAFT

And that first basic rule is?

MATT

Existence precedes essence.

LORAN

His stench exceeds my stench.

LEXUS

Whoever you are, you are what you do.

TAFT

How does this impact the situation of poor Inez, Garcin and Estelle?

DON

They're flawed. They, all of them, have character flaws that make them repugnant to the people they're forced to live with.

LEXUS

Garcin is a coward. He ran away from his responsibility, but he wasn't able to escape death. Instead of staying, like a man, like he should have, he ran away, like a coward. He mistreated his wife, never really loved her, never did anything authentic in his miserable life.

DON

And his punishment— his punishment is to be locked into a situation he can't possibly run away from with not one, but two women he can't stand. Estelle, the vain baby-killer, and Inez, the cold-blooded lesbian murderer. He asks them to shut up, to just shut up, but neither of them are capable of it. He's condemned to their presence.

PERCY

They'll never just shut up.

TAFT

And yet Garcin has the opportunity to leave the room. Why doesn't he take it?

MATT

Because he fears the alternative.

TAFT

What is the alternative?

MATT

The alternative is unknown. A hot passageway to somewhere unknown.

LEXUS

He's a coward. He could never stand by anyone in his life. Why would he start now?

ANNA

But he says he stays for Inez.

TAFT

That's funny, isn't it? Inez, the cruel one who taunts him, and not Estelle, the pretty one who flatters him. What do you make of that?

ANNA

Well, maybe he feels like he needs it, for some perverse reason, like he needs for someone to be cruel to him. At least he knows the cruelty is real. Estelle, she fawns on him, but she's just using him as a crutch, because she needs someone to fawn on.

PERCY

At least Inez is authentic.

ANNA

And we all know how important honesty is, don't we? It's all you can base trust on.

PERCY

I wouldn't say it's *all* you could base trust on. And anyway, all he trusts is that Inez is distrustful, cruel. He knows that. So you call it honesty, maybe, I call it something else. Maybe consistency.

DON

They're already condemned. Their life stories have already been written. Everything from there on out is just dessert.

MATT

They're all ultimately responsible.

TAFT

Responsible to who? To God?

DON

Only to themselves. They let themselves down.

ANNA

And other people. Say whatever you want. But you can't lose that responsibility. You have to be responsible for the things that you do to other people.

PERCY

But other people who? The government? Your parents? The church?

ANNA

You should be responsible to the people you care about. Maybe your parents. Maybe your lover. You should be responsible to the people who care about you.

LEXUS

That sounds all idealistic and Pollyanna and all, Anna, but the fact is nobody's really always responsible to the people they care about. People lie to each other. Our whole civilization is based on lying. You lie. You've never lied to Percy? You've never lied to me? Come on. I don't

even think it's necessarily bad. Life would be boring if we didn't lie a little.

ANNA

But there's a difference between white lies and big lies, isn't there, between little lies and total violations of trust?

LEXUS

You know what I mean. People do nasty things, they do, but the relations between them, the love, or whatever, I think it goes deeper than trust.

DON

How can you? How can you go deeper than trust?

LEXUS

People fracture. They break things. They hurt each other. But they keep hold of things, sometimes, even when – sometimes two people hurt each other, but hurt just enough that they can still call it love.

DON

Why don't they just stop? Stop hurting each other and leave each other alone?

LEXUS

They can't leave each other alone. That's why Garcin couldn't leave. Can't you see that?

DON

He would have left if he wasn't a coward.

MATT

I'm not sure the play's ultimately lacking in hope.

DON

Hope? What do you mean hope? They're in hell.

TAFT

Hold on. Where do you see the hope in this play, Matt?

MATT

I know the picture is pretty bleak. The only attempt that any of them have at physical or emotional intimacy is frustrated by the third, but in not leaving, Garcin is at least facing these people. At least they're getting on with it.

DON

Getting on with doing the same thing they were doing ten minutes before.

LORAN

It's all the same day, man, it's all the same fucking day.

ANNA

I'd like to think at least, well, maybe they'll eventually get along.

PERCY

At least we know they can't stab each other to death.

ANNA

They've got that going for them.

DON

They've got what? What have they got? I love the way you guys stick a Hollywood ending onto everything. This isn't a cartoon. Real heads don't spring back into shape after they've been crushed by real anvils. These people are already what they did. Like Inez says, when you die your— your life is complete, ready for the summing up, whether you're ready or not.

LEXUS

But I think what Anna means is that even after all that, they could come to each other, wounded creatures, and still maybe help each—

DON

Yeah, wounded creatures – mortally wounded, Lexus. They can't do anything for each other. They can't do anything for themselves. They're dead and they've wasted their lives. The point is you can't take things back. They won't ever get along, they just won't. They aren't the three people who would get along. They could have been different when they were alive, but they didn't choose to be, so they're over, that's it, end of story. Let's not paint smilely faces on it just because it's ugly. It's life. Deal with it.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 5

MATT and NATASHA are having a conversation, drinking a bottle of wine at Matt and Percy's apartment.

MATT

The bombardment will be starting soon. Sometime this weekend, they'll begin the invasion.

NATASHA

They will. Capitalist swine.

MATT

Nobody really gives a shit. There were some people at the candlelight vigil, but all that, it's just for show. Really everybody's excited for the bombs to go off. It's like the night before the Fourth of July.

NATASHA

I suppose everyone gets caught up in their lives.

MATT

Or some G.I. Joe romance of war.

NATASHA

Would you say I'm cold?

MATT

No.

NATASHA

But you could never love me.

MATT

(Pouring.)
More wine?

NATASHA

You won't answer?

MATT

There's this war.

NATASHA

You never once told me that you loved me.

MATT

Natasha, I like you, but— Natasha, I'm doing school and I'm working at this horrible place, this old folks home, where— some of these people, they're great people and it makes me feel like shit how this guy makes them live and I'm giving him every dollar and the world's just so fucked up, you know—

NATASHA

You never felt the kind of love that burns your soul.

MATT

Burns my soul? No. I guess not.

NATASHA

We've been good friends.

MATT

Yes.

NATASHA

Good lovers.

MATT

For a time.

NATASHA

But you don't love me.

MATT

I-

NATASHA

Don't bother. You aren't ever going to want to marry me.

MATT

Natasha, we hardly know each other, and you, you aren't asking *me* anyway.

NATASHA

I think-

(She advances towards him as if to kiss, he edges away.)

I think maybe we shouldn't bother.

MATT

You think?

NATASHA

I do. You can't give me what I want anymore. You can't become who I need.

MATT

I guess I can't. That doesn't mean that-

NATASHA

We can't be friends? Oh yeah, well, Matt, I don't know. I guess. I don't know. Maybe we need a rupture, just break it clean, totalitarian style. It's a shame, Matt.

MATT

Sorry, Natasha.

NATASHA

Don't bother. Let's not cry on each other's shoulders. Let's just— well, we knew each other once, and it was not so bad.

(PERCY and ANNA enter.)

PERCY

Did they start it yet? Have they started the war? Oh.

NATASHA

You.

ANNA

What the fuck are *you* doing here?

MATT

Hey, no, hey, she's here with me, alright?

NATASHA

To visit you, not *with* you, and **(to Percy)** you—

MATT

(Off the couch, to Natasha)

I think it would be best if you—

NATASHA

Never loved me.

ANNA

You psycho-bitch.

MATT

She means me—she means me **(accompanies her to the door, urges her out)**.

ANNA

I can't believe her. I can't believe you—

MATT

(Returning from the door.)

Yeah, the war. I spent like three hours sitting here like a drone, watching the news. Nothing's happened yet, far as I know. Where were you guys?

(He sees Anna is holding a bouquet of flowers.)

—oh God— that's right. Opening night. Sorry, Anna. I'll go tomorrow. How'd it go?

ANNA

I— pretty well, I think. I think it went pretty well. I stumbled a little on the soliloquy—

PERCY

She was great man, she was fucking great. It was like a whole different person up there. I could hardly believe it. Frighteningly like a man.

ANNA

Do you really think so?

PERCY

Yeah. You were great. Hey, guess what. I bought—
(He reaches into the fridge and grabs a bottle.)
—some champagne. A toast.

ANNA

(Hugging him.)

Sometimes, Percy, you're so great. Sometimes you really seem worth it.

PERCY

But of course, my love.
(Opening bottle.)

ANNA

So really, Percy, I mean. You can be honest. I made some mistakes.

PERCY

Oh a few, sure. But that was a fine, and I mean fine, performance. You gotta see it, Matt.
(He pours three glasses and they raise a toast.)
To Hamlet – in drag!
(They drink.)

ANNA

So what did you notice, I mean, when you say a few mistakes?

PERCY

Nothing big. Mostly Robert's decisions as a director.

ANNA

Like what?

PERCY

Like the ghost at the start. What was that – a mylar balloon under a sheet? I mean, come on—

ANNA

Robert said he wanted there to be a visible presence, but not of human form.

PERCY

And Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – where'd he get those goons? No chemistry there whatsoever – not that you didn't do a good job – but who could act with those bozos?

ANNA

Yeah, we're not the best together.

PERCY

And the Yorick speech.

ANNA

I screwed it up, didn't I?

PERCY

Not really. I mean you said Alas poor Yorick, I knew him – Romeo.

ANNA

I meant Horatio.

PERCY

Everybody knew that's what you meant. What bugged me was the lighting. The way they blacked out to just a spot on the skull – and what the hell was that on your face?

ANNA

It was glow-in-dark makeup. I was supposed to look like a skeleton.

PERCY

That's what I mean. Shakespeare's been dead and buried for three hundred some years – why do these directors need to keep fucking with him?

ANNA

Anything else?

PERCY

I wasn't sure about you and Ophelia.

ANNA

You weren't?

PERCY

No– I mean you did a great job, but I don't know, I think the whole cross-dressing thing made those scenes a little less effective.

ANNA

You do?

PERCY

Don't get me wrong. I mean, when you rejected her, it was completely believable. I mean when you said that–

ANNA

I did love you – once.

PERCY

Yeah, that made me squirm in my seat. You could see real harshness, real cruelty, real emotion. Like you were really capable of that kind of cruelty–

ANNA

Robert tells us to harness our real experiences, our real emotions.

PERCY

But how could I ever believe that you and her ever loved each other to begin with? I mean

that stiffness between you. It's probably what's-her-name.

ANNA

Melissa. Yeah. I think she has a hard time with the cross-gender thing.

PERCY

Yeah.

ANNA

I guess it wasn't very good.

PERCY

Well, *you* were good.

MATT

It's all subjective anyway, Anna.

ANNA

(Pours herself another glass.)

No, it just wasn't very good. You heard Percy.

PERCY

I never said that.

ANNA

Practically.

PERCY

Why are you always like this? Why?

ANNA

Like what?

PERCY

You ask me for my honest opinion, and I tell you, and you look at me like I shot your dog. I liked the play, Anna. I thought you were great. Isn't that enough?

ANNA

It's not that, Percy. It's just—

PERCY

What? Tell me what it is.

ANNA

It's me. It's something wrong with me. It's like I set up my whole life to seek your approval, and I always set myself up—

PERCY

Come on, Anna, you can't say— can you believe this, Matt — can you?

ANNA

I do. I do. I always have this little voice in my head saying “Well, what would Percy think?” Like I have to be hanging on your every word, even when you’re not there. And what do I expect, you to just suddenly stand up and start applauding, telling me that I’m doing everything right?

MATT

Maybe I should go.

ANNA

No, stay. You see, Matt, you know how we are.

MATT

Look, I’m not some kind of interpersonal relations counselor, alright? I mean I can barely manage to keep my own life together.

PERCY

But you need to admit that I’m right here, right? I mean she asked me an honest question and I gave her—

MATT

Why are you guys asking me about it? It’s not my problem, I don’t want to get in the middle—

ANNA

But you live here. You see us. You know how—

MATT

Look, I wish you guys the best, really. I think you’re destined to live out your natural lives together. I think you’ve got a fucked-up relationship, but that all relationships are fucked up, so so much the better for you. I think you guys argue practically all the time, and you argue in circles about the same things, and there’s never any resolution, and I get tired of it. And I’m not your referee. Remember me, me with the goon harassing me, with the fucking mobster on my ass? So if you’ll just excuse me—

PERCY

Mobster?

MATT

Flubby. Flubby fucking Lias. Remember?

PERCY

You didn’t hear?

MATT

Hear what?

PERCY

Flubby Lias is dead.

MATT

Dead?

PERCY

He was with his mistress of the moment – Missy – I guess she’s like the towel girl at the gym – anyway, Flubby, well you know he’s got a few dozen extra pounds he’s always talking about working off – got like an 8ball of coke and she and him did it all up last night. They were at Adriana’s that Italian place – discreet I guess, in a booth in back – he started choking on a meatball. She gave him the Heimlich and popped it right out but the thing was, I guess, it wasn’t the choking, it was the shock, the meatball suddenly jammed down his throat when his ticker was already going full tilt. It just burst, I guess. By the time the paramedics got there, he was already gone.

MATT

Dead?

PERCY

Real dead.

ANNA

Completely dead.

MATT

(Sits down.)

I’m not sure how I should feel about this.

PERCY

Elated, amigo. Have some champagne. You’re off the hook.

MATT

Yeah. I mean, I’m glad in a way. I really hated him.

ANNA

He was bad.

MATT

But I feel bad that I’m glad. It feels wrong to feel glad. It’s – real. He’s dead. That’s serious.

(The phone rings. Matt picks it up, listens.)

Yeah.

(He hangs it up.)

Well, they started it. CNN is broadcasting from Baghdad. They’re using cruise missiles and heavy bombardment. They’ve started the war.

PERCY

Cool. Let’s head on over to the Drite. Let’s go watch the war.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 6

MATT, PERCY, and ANNA join DON at the bar. The bar's large screen television is tuned to CNN. The atmosphere in the bar is frantic; NBA playoffs, World Series, and Superbowl all rolled into one. All four of them begin the scene silent, rapt in the glow of the anchors' expressive faces, the bits of bombing video, and the correspondents' harried reports. The television should be going the whole scene. At the beginning of the scene, dialogue should seem scattered, as if they are talking to themselves as much as they are talking to each other.

ANNA

I'm worried about what they're not telling us. How many people have already died?

MATT

I'm worried about what they *are* telling us.

DON

Dogs of war.

PERCY

Did you see that? A cruise missile. Damn, we got fine technology. Did you just watch that? It went in the *front door*.

MATT

Look at the graphics. They turn war into Monday Night Football.

DON

Fucking ugly.

ANNA

I'm not sure I want to watch this.

PERCY

Oh come on, you do so. I mean this, now this is something. This is real excitement. This is quality television.

ANNA

But people are dying.

PERCY

Don't worry, they won't show any corpses on TV.

MATT

Why won't they?

PERCY

Because they're not idiots.

MATT

What's idiotic about dealing honestly with the consequences of war?

PERCY

Vietnam, bro, all they showed was fucking body bags, children burning from napalm, torn-off legs.

MATT

And?

PERCY

And we lost the war. They don't want to *repulse* people. They want to excite them. Bombs from a distance. Massive explosions. Planes in flight.

MATT

They glamorize it.

DON

Can't show it. Can't show the burning flesh, little kids with their limbs blown off, people dying up close. That's what's fucking happening right now.

PERCY

The explosions make for better video.

ANNA

Isn't there something sick about it, Percy?

PERCY

Of course there is. It's war. They play dirty. But you think they want a bunch of bleeding heart liberals whining about how gruesome it all is? Hell no. They're gonna do this war clean, from the air, surgical strikes.

MATT

Surgical. Like they're fixing anything.

PERCY

They're putting on a good show, aren't they? You're mesmerized, admit it.

MATT

I just want to know what's going on.

PERCY

You're just like everybody else. You want to see some killer explosions. We're all in on it. It's a killer show.

DON

Killer show? You fucking—right, Percy. You've convinced me. I'm not gonna watch it anymore.

(Don downs his beer, gets up.)

I'm not fucking in on it. You're sick, Percy. I used to respect you. Fucking sick.

(Don leaves.)

PERCY

What about you, Matt? Anna?

MATT

I never said I wasn't addicted to information.

ANNA

I need a drink.

(LORAN enters, wearing a suit and looking a little bit dazed, walks up to the bar.)

LORAN

Double scotch, on the rocks.

(Matt approaches Loran.)

MATT

Hey Loran. You dress up for the war?

LORAN

For what? Oh, this. You didn't hear?

MATT

About what?

LORAN

I'm on my way to my fate.

MATT

Fate?

LORAN

My comeuppance. The final chewing. Practical destruction of my existence.

MATT

What's wrong?

LORAN

Woke up this morning, walk out to take a shower, there's a note on my door directing me to appear at 8 P.M. in the Judicial Board chambers to face charges.

MATT

What, this morning? Can they do that?

LORAN

Guess they can. Didn't even know what the charges were until this morning. But the Dean's already told me what they're going to do. Banished, brother. Historical figure, me.

MATT

So what-

LORAN

One guess.

MATT

Rantz?

LORAN

Bingo. Brought me up on harassment charges.

MATT

And?

LORAN

Banned from campus. Exiled. Never to return.

MATT

What? Isn't there anything you can do? What's their evidence?

LORAN

Evidence? Only evidence I saw was a twelve page letter from Rantz, detailing every bad thing happened to him over the last two years. Blaming me for all of it. He didn't pop a zit the last two years that wasn't my fault.

MATT

So how's he going to prove it?

LORAN

Prove it? He won't prove anything. Doesn't need to. J-board consists of his advisor, three of his cronies, and the dean of students. Aren't even asking to hear my arguments. Don't get to call any witnesses. They just judge me, that's all. Judge and sentence.

MATT

There must be something we can do.

LORAN

Don't think so. They got me over a barrel.

MATT

Why not fight it? There must be some way.

LORAN

Leave quietly, they let me finish my courses through the mail and graduate. Make trouble, they expel me. Dean Holstein was pretty direct. Make a bleep about it and six years of college go down the drain.

MATT

Bastards.

LORAN

Fuck it. Tried here, I did, tried to stand up for the shit I believed in. How I could, I did, and—fuck it.

(Matt orders shots, pays for them.)

MATT

I don't know what to say, Loran. I just wish you could have–

LORAN

What? Been more rational? Used proper channels? Fuck it, man. I'm not rational. This isn't a fucking rational place. **(Pointing to television.)** Isn't a rational world. Rationality is for the bastards running the show, dropping the bombs, dividing up the world. Rantz's of the world. **(They raise shots.)**

Fuck it.

(They drink them.)

I don't belong here. Fuck Iowa. Leave it for Rantz. I'm going to Vegas.

MATT

Well, hell. It won't be the same without you.

LORAN

Fuck it, brother. Another drink? I've got a half hour left. Let's get loaded.

MATT

And watch the war.

LORAN

And watch the war.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 7

ANNA, MATT, PERCY, DON, LEXUS, and TAFT are at the seminar table. Class is already in progress.

TAFT

So we're in the middle of this madness. We're in the middle of this war. I assume some of you have a problem with it, am I right? This whole thing brings back some memories for me. Burning my draft card. Sit-ins. Protest.

PERCY

Well, the circumstances are a little different here.

TAFT

Maybe they are, Percy, maybe they are. Maybe they're the same in some ways and different in others. Maybe the wrong people have already won.

PERCY

The Iraqis?

TAFT

No, Percy. Hah, hah. Right. Anyway, we're straying from our topic. So what is Sartre saying about freedom and responsibility?

MATT

That you're always essentially free, even in prison. As long as you're making choices, you're free.

TAFT

So what does this have to do with the idea of responsibility?

LEXUS

You're responsible for the choices you make. For the things you do to other people.

PERCY

The choices you make of your own free will.

DON

But free is— free is relative. What if you are in a prison? You can be stuck in a place. Society can force certain things on you. Maybe there is a kind of limited choice, in that you choose to say alive, but—

TAFT

Is there an option there?

DON

You can choose to die. You've always got that option.

TAFT

What about responsibility, Don, who are you responsible to? How would you contrast Sartre's idea of responsibility to that of, say, Nietzsche?

DON

Well it's the same, I guess, but Sartre says that your choices are your choices for everyone, that as long as you make choices, you make them for everyone.

TAFT

Okay, let's say, like his example of the war. We've got a war, now, right? You experience something of it, right?

MATT

Television.

TAFT

But you feel something about it, right? You're part of a state, right, that is conducting the war, right? You vote. So don't you make a choice for everyone when you decide where you stand on the war?

PERCY

Hell, yeah. It's our war as much as anybody else's. And why not? It's not a bad war, high entertainment value, tax dollars at work.

DON

Entertainment? It's not entertainment, Percy. It's real death.

TAFT

This isn't a joke, Percy. I think you'd feel a little different if you were in the cross-hairs, if you were standing in that desert, if your friends were dying around you.

PERCY

Maybe I would. But I'm not. And I'm not gonna be. So what? I just choose to support the war because I can see why it's being fought. We've got national interests.

ANNA

I don't choose the war. But I can't stop it.

PERCY

But you choose to be alive at a time when our country is staging a war.

ANNA

So?

PERCY

So you choose it.

TAFT

No, Percy. Anna is responsible for that which she chooses, for the actions that she does take. In choosing against the war, she is making a choice that she believes everyone should choose. So she is choosing in good faith.

DON

Good faith— good faith, bad faith, that whole thing bothers me. I mean, can you ever choose

not to have chosen something? Everything that defines you has already been chosen by you, and is therefore the only choice you could have made. All choices are authentic. They're the only ones you ever really made.

LEXUS

And you're responsible for them.

DON

So what? It won't change what they are. You're responsible because you could always be dead, and in the end you will be. It's all determined anyway, not by any outside force, but by the choices you've always already made. There's no way out.

MATT

But in the present. You can always make choices in the present.

TAFT

He's got a point, Don. How determined can the present be?

DON

The present is as determined as the people that are living in it. Every moment we ever lived before this one determines how we will act right now in this room. Anna can't help but being a woman from Des Moines who recently played Hamlet. Percy can't help but be a schizoid mix of blue blood conservatism and Grateful Dead lyrics. Lexus can't separate herself from her fucked-up childhood. None of us can escape from who we've been up until now.

MATT

But now – we can choose now.

DON

You can choose, but you can't choose to be somebody else choosing. You're trapped in the identity you've constructed. You are determined by the person who you've already been. You can't back away from that. You are who you've been, and that's all you'll ever be.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 8

In the Drite, "That's Life" by Sinatra is playing on the jukebox. ANNA, MATT, and PERCY are seated at a table, and DON and NATASHA are at the bar. The BARTENDER sits myopically watching the war from a stool behind the bar, and a middle-aged drunk SALESMAN well into his fifth cocktail stares blankly at the television, the sound turned down. The scene will begin with A/M/P dialogue, D/N miming conversation, and then shift to D/N dialogue, A/M/P then miming, until LEXUS' entrance, when all will focus on her and Don. Matt is reading Percy and Anna a letter from Loran.

MATT

Dear amigos, my beloved children of the corn – Only a week in this town and I feel better already. Outside the balloon. Been through the desert on the horse with no name. Feels cleansing, Vegas. I've been eating exotic fruits of late, cassava and guava melons, starfruit and kiwi, mango and coconut and sweet tangerines. Saw an Elvis impersonator set fire to his own hair. And oh yeah baby I been playing the slots and yeah I won a thousand dollars last night.

ANNA

Wow.

MATT

Lost eight hundred immediately afterwards playing blackjack, but, hey, that's life. Saw an old man stumble drunkenly out of a casino right in front of a taxicab and die. It was tragic and gruesome. Saw an imitation of a bullfight using llamas. There have been many free drinks. I'm making the adjustment. The astral realignment. The cosmic reconvergence. We are all part of Americana. Miss all, my regards and oh yeah a pipebomb to Rantz.

(ANNA, PERCY and MATT laugh)

PERCY

I wish someone would exile me to Vegas.

ANNA

He's definitely home.

**(SHIFT TO DON AND NATASHA)
(Talking, close to each other, flirty)**

NATASHA

And it is all relative, it is. There are places in the world like– like Albania, which are completely cut off, as much as possible, from the influence of the outside world. Complete isolation. Your world is always whatever your particular corner of it happens to be.

DON

So you'd say Iowa is a state of being.

NATASHA

Sort of like Albania.

(LEXUS enters. Conversation stops.)

LEXUS

We should go home now, Don. I need to talk to you.

NATASHA

You've got some nerve, Lexus. Get some help. You need psychotherapy.

LEXUS

Just shut up, you, just shut up. I need to talk to Don. We need to talk about something serious.

DON

Look, Lexus. No. We're done. Our relationship is over. Broken. Let's just give each other some room—

LEXUS

I already gave you some room. I gave you some room inside of me, bastard.

DON

Right, we've got memories, and that will have to be enough—

LEXUS

No it won't.

DON

Why the fuck not?

LEXUS

Because I'm pregnant, Don. I'm pregnant.

NATASHA

Are you really?

DON

What? You— you lie, Lexus, you lie. The pill—

LEXUS

I stopped taking the pill.

DON

When?

LEXUS

About a month ago.

NATASHA

(Getting up off stool)

Don, I can't be in the middle of — I guess — I guess you belong to her, after all.

DON

Wait—

NATASHA

Goodbye.
(She leaves.)

DON

Christ, you're a piece of work. Need to meddle in every damn— What the hell were you— I don't believe you, Lexus. You can't be that stupid—

LEXUS

I got one of those EPT things. Look if you don't believe me.
(She hands it to him)
(To Bartender) A shot of Jack Daniels.

DON

You — I can't fucking believe, you — bitch. What were you thinking, Lexus, what were you trying to do? Did you think this would change everything?

LEXUS

I wasn't really thinking, I mean I didn't *try*, I just—

DON

You live in warped little universe, Lexus. Makes me sick. Fucking nauseous. This isn't some kind of game, Lexus. This is life. You can't play at that.

LEXUS

I wasn't trying to—

DON

Did you think this would fucking make me *love* you, Lexus?

LEXUS

I wasn't trying to get pregnant, I just thought, oh well, we probably wouldn't be? doing it and if we did well, then maybe — what about now, Don? What about now Can't you? Can't you make it?

DON

Can't I make what?

LEXUS

A leap of faith.

DON

You have gone over the edge. You have. You have lost all sense. Are you going to get rid of it?

LEXUS

(She glares.)
You hateful bastard.

DON

I didn't say— look, I didn't mean— well you did it before, didn't you?

LEXUS

I was fucking sixteen, Don. I was a sixteen year-old cheerleader. There was nothing else I could do. I still have nightmares, Don. I didn't have any choice. You don't even think our baby is worth having. You'd rather kill it before it breathes. You're the one who fucking destroys things, Don. You're the one who kills love.

DON

Look, I didn't- I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I'll do whatever, but this isn't going to change things. This isn't going to make me love you after everything.

LEXUS

I didn't expect this. But you know, when I actually went and got the test, and while I was waiting for it to work, it takes like three minutes, I was thinking - you know, why would it have to be so bad? We're both smart, we've both got good genes, we love-don't laugh-I thought we loved each other. Thank you.

(She grabs the shot and downs it. Puts some money on the bar.)

Hang on, I can use another.

DON

This is not an act of love, Lexus. There's nothing in this that can bring us together.

LEXUS

Let me finish. I thought- I thought it could be. I didn't realize how low you had sunk. What we could have, Don. A love child. Doesn't it mean anything? Doesn't anybody believe in that anymore?

DON

Believe in what?

LEXUS

In children coming out of love.

DON

Sure they do. But you got it all twisted up, Lexus. Just because children come out of love doesn't mean that love comes out of children, out of unwanted-

LEXUS

You never loved me.

DON

I loved you, Lexus, of course I loved you - once. But things change, Lexus, I just can't live that life with you.

(Pounds his shot, orders another.)

So what's your plan, Lexus, what are you going to do?

LEXUS

How the hell am I supposed to know?

DON

It was your idea, wasn't it?

LEXUS

You're supposed to fucking love me. That's what we're supposed to do. You're supposed to say you fucking love me and you want to share a life with me and you're proud to be the father of my fucking baby and you're supposed to fucking take me to fucking Lamaze classes and tell me to fucking breathe.

DON

I'll- I'll go to the Lamaze classes if you need me to, but we're not getting married, understand, we're not getting married now or any time in the future, because in one fell swoop you've completely fucked both of our lives, and there's no way you can ever expect me to forgive you for that.

LEXUS

Fucked our lives? You pig. You fucking pig.

(Drinks her second shot.)

Give me another. You piece of shit, Don, you won't even- you dumped me for a fucking red whore, Don, a fucking inauthentic slut.

DON

Don't bring her into-

LEXUS

You like putting it up her doggie-style, Donnie? She fuck you better'n I do?

DON

Just shut up, Lexus, she doesn't have anything to do with this.

LEXUS

She must have really given great head. Did she give great head, Don?

DON

You have to bring everything down to-

LEXUS

Did you like the way she sucked your dick? Did she swallow?

DON

Just leave her out of it, Lexus.

LEXUS

I give a pretty good blow job, Don. Don't I? Didn't I give you the best blow jobs of your life?

DON

Lexus, we had some good times, let's just act like mature adults-

LEXUS

I know I did. I know you liked it.

(Pounds third shot.)

DON

Maybe we better leave.

LEXUS

Cause I give a great blow job.
(To SALESMAN who is watching with great interest.)
Hey guy, I give the best blow job in the universe.

DON

Jesus, Lexus, Jesus. This isn't about blow jobs.

LEXUS

Fuck you. Hey, guy, I tell you I'm the best. I can get you off real quick.

(The salesman pretends to ignore her.)

DON

Come on, Lexus, lets get out of-

LEXUS

Fuck you. Hey, you. Bet you twenty bucks I can get you off in ten minutes.

DON

Christ Lexus, you fucking-

(ANNA approaching LEXUS)

ANNA

Lexus, why don't we go-

LEXUS

Stay out of this. How about it, guy?

SALESMAN

(Pulls a twenty from his wallet.)
Well, shit. You're on, honey. Come and get it.

DON

Lexus, don't-
(Reaches for her.)
Don't do this.

LEXUS

(She shrugs him off)
Gotta prove it, don't I?

(Lexus walks across the bar to the salesman's stool as Don stares on in disbelief. Lexus walks over to the salesman, takes him by the arm, and accompanies him out the back door.)

(Don takes beer bottle and smashes it against the bar.)

DON

No fucking sense in the whole fucking world.

BARTENDER

Hey. You better leave now.

(MATT approaching DON)

MATT

Hey, Don, you better–

DON

Leave me alone, alright? Would everyone just leave me alone?

(He storms out.)

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 9

This scene is all in blackout. ANNA, MATT and PERCY are returning from the bar.

PERCY

(Singing)

Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree–

MATT

Don't quit your day job.

ANNA

Just once, I wish we could all get drunk together the old fashioned way, without any trauma.

PERCY

Sheer idiocy, the whole thing.

MATT

The door's open. Maybe we should check.

ANNA

I don't see her.

PERCY

She's fucking nuts. Just leave him alone. You heard him back there. He wants to be alone. I'm going to bed.

MATT

We should check. Don?

ANNA

Where is he?

MATT

Don? Holy shit. Go call 911, Anna, call 911! He cut himself. Call 911! Go. He slashed his wrists. Get an ambulance.

(Pause, Sirens, Lights.)

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 10

In the morning, MATT and ANNA are in Don and Lexus' apartment. Both are wearing rubber gloves. They've been cleaning the place up. Matt is putting bloody towels into a garbage bag.

MATT

It looks a little better, but I don't think they'll ever really get rid of those stains. The tub's still pink.

ANNA

God, what a mess.

(LEXUS enters, look disheveled, worn out, hung over.)

LEXUS

Hey, guys, what's going—what the hell happened here?

MATT

(Lugging trash bag.)

Lexus, I – I gotta go. I'll give you guys a call later.

(Matt exits)

LEXUS

What happened, Anna? Did Don tear this place up? Where the fuck is he?

ANNA

(Taking off gloves.)

Sit down a sec, Lexus.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 11

LEXUS is in her and Don's apartment, pacing. She picks up the phone.

LEXUS

Yes, I'm calling for Don Angsturm. I don't know. He was admitted last night. He is, okay, can I talk to him? This is his girlfriend. Yes, yes. When can I visit? I- what? You can't be serious. Specific instructions? Bad for his psychological state? Listen, I'm his girlfriend. You need to let me- I don't understand- yes- yes- but I- I see.

(She hangs up the phone, breaking down.)

He hates me.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 12

ANNA, PERCY and MATT are sitting at the seminar table. They look tired. TAFT enters. He looks out the window.

TAFT

It's cold out there. Ten below zero, they said on the news. Well, today– today we're supposed to talk about *The Plague*, right? Camus. Did anyone finish the novel?

(Everyone shakes their heads.)

Let's not talk about it then. We– what would be the point of talking about it? Let's talk about – let's talk about the semester. Maybe we can – sum things up.

PERCY

Existentialism? Do. Be. Do. Be. Do.

TAFT

No. No. Let's talk about this semester. Let's– I think it would be a good idea to– let's talk about what happened. We're– on the day we're discussing *The Plague*– we've dwindled in number. How did that happen? What does it mean?

ANNA

Lexus wasn't feeling up to class.

TAFT

I don't blame her. No one is feeling up to it. How is she? How is everyone?

ANNA

I think she'll be alright. She's– strong.

TAFT

Yes. Well. That's good.

MATT

It's just rough. They'll both be fine. We'll all be fine.

PERCY

Some people are assholes. Some people just can't handle their Nietzsche.

ANNA

Percy, that doesn't help.

PERCY

Well, we may as well talk about it. We may as well be honest. This is our last class, right? We may as well talk about Existentialism. You are what you do. People make choices. The reason it's ten degrees below zero outside is the weather. We live in Northwest Iowa. The weather in Iowa sucks in January. We know that. That's why it's so fucking cold. The reason we all feel cold in here is that Don is an asshole. He's what you call weak. He'll talk up a storm, but in the end he is weak. He is pitiful, and he'll get no pity from me.

TAFT

Blaming him doesn't accomplish anything.

PERCY

Bullshit. Now who wants to talk about freedom and responsibility? Am I the only one who learned anything here? This whole class you guys learned nothing? We *can* blame him. It's his fault. He did it to himself. He's not dead. Maybe he should be. He makes his own damn choices.

ANNA

Percy, I know you don't mean that.

PERCY

Look—Loran's gone because he got caught. I can respect that. He did something, he took a risk, he got caught. Don's gone because he slashed his wrists. Everybody's got a story. Everybody got their own hard luck. But for Christ's sake, if you're gonna off yourself, at least do it right. Get a gun and stick it down your throat and do it right. Don't hand me this wishy washy slit your wrists bullshit.

TAFT

Look, I know you're under a lot of stress, and this is difficult, but Percy, listen to yourself. Listen. If we've got one thing to be thankful for, it's that he didn't do that.

PERCY

Would have been messier, but more efficient.

TAFT

Percy, you know—I knew this guy, I knew this guy named Tommy Johnson, when I was a kid. We were best friends in highschool. We grew up together. Did everything together. Hung out in his father's garage, rebuilt three engines. Drank a lot of cheap beer from cans. I went to college, met a whole new crowd. He stayed home, working in his father's garage. When I got there I grew my hair long, you know, and all that. Got involved in the protest movement. Christmas break, I came home, I was talking to him. We were playing cards. He got a straight flush to my full house. Then he told me he'd *enlisted*. He volunteered to go to Vietnam. I couldn't believe it. The same war I was fighting against. I called him an idiot. I called him a butcher. He called me a commie. We got into a fist fight on his front lawn. New Year's Day, he left. I didn't see him off at the station. In March, he was out on patrol, recon, I guess, and he stepped on a land mine. Blew off both his legs. He died two days later. They shipped him home in a body bag, *all his parts*. You know what, Percy?

PERCY

What?

TAFT

He's gone. The last thing I did was call him a murderer. And he's dead now. I didn't go to his funeral. But two days afterwards, you know, I went—I went to his grave. They didn't even have the headstone up. It was just a mound of dirt. I— I stood out there and I talked. I talked to the dirt for two hours. I tried to make sense of things. I tried to apologize. No one answered me. Tommy, he didn't say a word.

(BLACKOUT.)

Act 2, Scene 13

ANNA enters Don and Lexus apartment. LEXUS looks a mess. She is sorting things into piles, putting things into boxes.

ANNA

Hey, Lexus. How are you doing?

LEXUS

Oh, I'm fine, Anna, I'm fine. Just getting everything ready, you know, getting everything packed. Still gotta move out, you know. Just because Don slashed his wrists doesn't mean the world stops. The lease still runs out at the end of the week.

ANNA

I guess you're right. I thought maybe you might want to go to lunch.

LEXUS

I'm not hungry, Anna. I don't feel like eating, you know?

ANNA

You should eat. You need to eat.

LEXUS

Do I? I don't know. There's all this sorting to do. There's all these books, you know? Most of them are his.

(She picks one up).

Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Definitely his. Don likes his Nietzsche.

(She throws it against the wall.)

He likes all his fucking books. He just doesn't like people. He doesn't like himself. He doesn't love me.

ANNA

Maybe we should just get a cup of coffee and—

LEXUS

And the fucking game, the fucking game is over. Don made the big move, didn't he? Fucking masochist, fucking sadist, fucking self-obsessed asshole.

ANNA

Maybe you should just take some time to—

LEXUS

And you know what? I love him. I love him, that's the problem. I love him, Anna, and he wouldn't stay with me. He'd rather fuck that little whore and he—

ANNA

Give it time, Lexus. Give it time, and—

LEXUS

I feel dirty.

ANNA

It's not your fault.

LEXUS

What am I gonna do? That – fuck. That fucking fuck. He fucking ruined everything.

ANNA

I know it's hard to understand–

LEXUS

Sometimes I just want out of this body, out of this place, out of this everything.

ANNA

Don't start on that, we've had enough–

LEXUS

Oh, I'd never do that. That's one thing that I would never fucking do. He's a coward. I'm a tough bitch, Anna. Fucking Don – I mean I know I'm just as fucking guilty– but Don he isn't tough enough. I wish I could start over, but I'm not gonna just throw up my hands now. It's so–

ANNA

It's hard.

LEXUS

I don't know what I was thinking or he– this, all of this. I thought– I thought that we could all– I don't know Anna. I thought we could live together, like a group, and, and take risks, and it would be different – that we could build something, something that– that would be better – and then I just wanted– I just want things to be real. I just want things to mean something.

ANNA

Come on, come upstairs. This room is– this place is too much. Let it be for a while, huh? Let's– let's get out of here for a while. Let's go to Chicago, Lexus, huh? I've got some friends there. We can go and just– just get away from this for a while. Let's get out of here, Lexus. Let's get the fuck out of Iowa.

–FIN–