

*LARGE TEXT*

**Creative Writing Portfolio**

Maxim Vinogradov



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**Résumé**

(updated Winter 2020)

**HONORS/AWARDS**

**A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams** *(play)*

* Winner, Partners of the American Theatre Playwriting Award, The Kennedy Center
* Winner, Wilde Award—Best New Script, Encore Michigan
* Winner, Hopwood Award in Drama, University of Michigan
* Winner, Dennis McIntyre Prize—Tier 3 to $7,500, University of Michigan

**Четыре самолета кружат над JFK (Four Planes Circling JFK)** *(play)*

* Semi-Finalist, National Playwrights Conference, O’Neill Theater Center

**Lost in 3 Pines** *(play)*

* Winner, Hopwood Award in Drama, University of Michigan
* Winner, Dennis McIntyre Prize—Tier 1 to $2,500, University of Michigan
* Nominated, Wilde Award—Best New Script, Encore Michigan

**Pippy Doodle’s Ice Cream Party (immediately following The Seagull)** *(play)*

* Winner, Hopwood Award in Drama, University of Michigan
* Winner, Dennis McIntyre Prize—Tier 1 to $2,500, University of Michigan

**Grand River** *(screenplay)*

* Winner, The Arthur Miller Creative Arts Award, Goldstein Honors

**A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams** *(screenplay)*

* Winner, Hopwood Award in Screenplay, University of Michigan
* Winner, Leonard and Eileen Newman Prize in Dramatic Writing, University of Michigan

**A Riot of Flowers** *(screenplay)*

* Winner, Leonard and Eileen Newman Prize in Dramatic Writing, University of Michigan

**THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS**

**Matea:** Production, Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Bailey Boudreau

**Dancing.:** Production, Planet Ant Theatre, Kaitlyn Valor Bourque

**My Dad was Fifteen Feet Tall:** Production, Outvisible Theatre Company, Mycah Artis

**Lost in 3 Pines:** Production, University of Michigan / Basement Arts, Maxim Vinogradov; Production, Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Bailey Boudreau

**A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams:**

Production, The Regular Theatre, Ellie Conniff; Production, Theatre Nova, Mandy Logsdon; Reading, University of Indianapolis/KCACTF, Maxim Vinogradov; Production, Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Vinogradov / Weatherspoon

**RESIDENCIES/PROGRAMS**

**Resident Playwright**

Slipstream Theatre Initiative in Ferndale. MI, 2015—Present.

**Observing Playwright**

National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Waterford, CT. 2018.

**ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Prod. Intern

* Othello / Twelfth Night / Fire in Dreamland / Cyprus Avenue / Girl from the North Country, The Public Theater

Director 1

* A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams, Slipstream Theatre Initiative

Actor 2

* Romeo & Juliet, Slipstream Theatre Initiative

Composer 3

* Please Clap, Lightworks Film Festival

**EDUCATION**

University of Michigan, BA: English (High Honors) & Film (High Honors); concentrations in Creative Writing & Screenwriting.

**Member of the Dramatists Guild of America.**

\* To be produced.

1 Nominated for “Best Play” from Encore Michigan’s Wilde Awards.

2 Receiving “Best Shakespearean Actor” from the Broadway World - Detroit Awards.

3 Receiving “Best Original Score” from the Lightworks Film Festival.

**Artistic Statement**

I don’t create to strike justice into existence. I don’t have the wings to better the world or even the medium. I can coil myself in seeds, coat myself in funny honey, fertilize in bellies, and leave behind an unscratchable rash, but where does that put me? I don’t create to endure time, to be prophetic, or to challenge our reasoning, but because of an urge to make something enchanting. An artist’s ability to dissect us and rearrange our opinions is an occupational hazard; the endgame is pretty. Nothing nobler, neater, or more convenient. I’ve made work that helped people—they’ve told me themselves, people. I’ve championed Queer romance and asserted majority non-male casts and demanded actors of color be half the cast but this wasn’t because I believe I can make a difference. It’s because straight white men have become ugly and that affects my goals. The fact that my work gets a positive social response makes me swell with pride as a human being who can affect change, but as an artist, my eyes are on how that social response makes the art more beautiful.

It’s awful.

I want to find the edges of where the page ends and tap them until they crack. How do you define a spectacle, and to what degree can ninety minutes of circumstances redefine it for an audience? What is at the core of what makes a heart pound, and what are the most incoherent stakes that still elicit that response? I explore scripts that not only entertain, but elicit an earnest questioning as to whether or not anything like this has ever been done before. Theatre is dying, and my goal is not to resuscitate it but dissect it while it still has a body.

Any artist working in the theatre today needs to relieve themselves of their idea that they are any better than any other human being. If I’m the playwright, I’m bringing Insomnia cookies to the table read. If I’m the intern, I’m bringing those cookies. By G-d, if you so much as put me within earshot of a theatre I will fucking fill the place with Insomnia cookies and that’s a threat. I interned for the production team of Fire in Dreamland at The Public Theater and Susan Hilferty would drag me out to a window to explain how every building had a water tower at the top, or would send me home with an assignment to figure out why it’s called Coney Island for no other practical reason than to be doing so delighted me. If you fit through the door, you’re not too big.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for spending time with my writing.

**Even When It Is Not Shining** (One-Act Play)

## CAST: Lena (F, 20s); Jakub (M, 40s).

# Scene One

## SETTING: A messy living room in Warsaw. TIME: early 1940s.

### (At lights: LENA enters, clutching her belly, silently closing the door behind her. JAKUB works at his tiny desk, not seeing her. She waits. After a bit of time, JAKUB reaches into a drawer, noticing LENA and jumping in his seat. JAKUB chuckles and motions for her to sit down. LENA sits and spreads herself out in the chair.)

JAKUB

## Quiet: such a good talent to have now. Every room I go in, everyone knew it was me two flights of stairs away. Shabbat shalom, Lena. Wear a bell.

LENA

#### (Curt but charming.)

## Shabbat shalom.

JAKUB

## Okay. Tell me about your day.

LENA

## Mine’s been hot.

JAKUB

## Then we’ve been having the same day. So, we—

LENA

## What kind of jam you got?

JAKUB

## I… Yes.

#### (Opening a drawer, pulling out a jar and handing it to LENA, who instantly takes it and opens it.)

## Ah-ah-ah! Careful! When was the last time you had extra jam?

LENA

## Since… last time.

### (JAKUB leans over his desk to look into the jar, then waves his arm, “You’re fine then.” LENA sticks a finger in and starts eating.)

JAKUB

## Okay. Now, are you still experiencing dehydr—?

LENA

Mm!

#### (Pointing to belly.)

## I named the lil’ rat, “Zuzanna.”

JAKUB

## I… Okay, Lena, you should… you know…

LENA

## I don’t.

JAKUB

## Don’t name it.

LENA

## Well, that’s confusing. How is she supposed to know when I’m yelling at her?

JAKUB

## Don’t say “she.” Okay? Just… Never mind.

LENA

## You think I’m gonna lose her?

#### (Smiling.)

## G-d, a girl can dream.

JAKUB

## I’m not comfortable talking about—

LENA

## I bet you three jars of jam not only in half a year will I unfortunately launch lil’ Zuzanna out, but she *will* be a girl. I would shake but I got jam fingeys.

JAKUB

## I don’t want you to—

LENA

## Do you agree to my terms?

JAKUB

## Lena, please just—

LENA

## Do you agree to my terms?

JAKUB

## No.

LENA

Ach. Everyone here is no fun. You know, and this might not be a popular opinion, but I liked Warsaw so much more before the Nazis came.

#### (JAKUB, pauses, letting out a giggle and shaking his head.)

## People used to bet on everything! I would make bets on the weather, on what color shirt Mr. Przewalski was gonna wear, whether or not Mr. Przewalski’s kid was gonna throw up that day. And I gotta tell you, I did some really horrible stuff to get that boy to throw up. But I won bets. I mean—

#### (Beat.)

## To answer your doctor questions, everything’s terrible. I’m working in the sun. It’s hot.

JAKUB

## Be careful. Raising your internal temperature even one degree can… be a problem.

LENA

## I’ll figure it out. How’s your own lil’ doctor?—How’s… Julia?

JAKUB

## How’s…? Uh… She’s… I’m only telling you this because… If you really want to give birth, and I’m suggesting very heavily that you shouldn’t, you need more food.

LENA

## Look, I don’t want to, but there really isn’t much else to do around here but—What does that have to with Julia? Are we gonna eat her?

JAKUB

No, she’s…

#### (As much pride as a Jewish parent is allowed.)

## Smuggling salami.

LENA

## Oh, hell yeah!

JAKUB

## I’ll try, okay? But a lot of people would want it. A lot of people would pay a lot.

LENA

## I’ll give those people sexual favors—not like I’ll get double pregnant—is that a thing?

JAKUB

## No, no, hold on—

LENA

## Or would the baby just get bigger? Can I make a super baby?

JAKUB

## Lena. You’re in a… You recognize this is a terrible situation.

LENA

## Everyone recognizes this is a terrible situation.

JAKUB

## Lena, would you actually give out sexual favors for salami?

LENA

## I mean… probably not?

JAKUB

## Right. To nourish the baby, you need food. Food is money. Money is work. Work is hot. Too much hot kills the baby you were trying to nourish. You should… I can…

LENA

## That’s… pretty solid back and forth, yeah.

JAKUB

## Hold on: I can… Can we make this conversation more uncomfortable for a moment?

LENA

## I’m not touching your schmuck.

JAKUB

## No, I mean… This baby—I adore your… *naïve* energy. It’s contagious. It’s wonderful. But—and this is very uncomfortable—but being pregnant is… you know, impossible right now. You made a mistake. I can fix that—I don’t want to spell it out. You know what I’m talking about.

LENA

#### (Grimly.)

## I don’t.

JAKUB

## There’s people saying things about… about the Germans wanting…

LENA

## Schmuck touches?

JAKUB

## No. My friend Adam is on the Jewish Council. The Germans have requested assistance in making a system… so that… if they needed to deport people from Warsaw, it could be done quickly.

LENA

## What do you mean?

JAKUB

## That’s the thing. We don’t know. But they might not have filled up Warsaw just to put us all to work in one, convenient place.

LENA

## Oh, nice. You’re talking about work elsewhere?

JAKUB

## Maybe. That’s what I think. There’s going to be a big migration out of Warsaw, which means different jobs, and there’s no telling what that’s going to look like. It might be easier—it might be a lot harder. You’re early on right now. The toll on your body and the consequences are much—It’s just much easier if…

LENA

## You’re talking about nixing Zuzanna.

JAKUB

## This is really why you shouldn’t name it… Yes. That’s what I’m talking about.

LENA

#### (After a moment of thought.)

## Nah, I’m good. Let’s talk salami. How much for a stick? If you got one, I’ll eat one.

JAKUB

## I… It’s only going to be harder if you do it later.

LENA

#### (Beat.)

#### I know how salamis work.

#### (JAKUB can’t help but cackle, LENA joining.)

## Why don’t people write down what I say?! I’m the funniest person here!

JAKUB

## Okay, okay… Here’s what I can do. I *can*give you an examination, make sure everything’s okay on the surface, but pregnancies are not my specialty. I’m gonna take a lot of notes, meet with a doctor who knows a lot more about—

LENA

## Who? Do you know someone?

JAKUB

## You know I can’t tell you who. If the Germans find you’re pregnant *and* healthy, they’re gonna ask what doctors you know. Trust me, I’m gonna take a surplus of notes on absolutely everything and I’ll find time to meet with him. Okay?

LENA

## Okay… Fine. All right! Let’s check on the little rat.

### (LENA stands. JAKUB gets a stethoscope out of his drawer and stands. Blackout.)

# Scene Two

## SETTING: the same. TIME: a few months later.

### (At lights: a lone JAKUB looks out the window. He’s without his nice jacket, now wearing a much older and bigger one, his yellow badge the fanciest part of it. LENA silently enters, closing the door. Her face is thinner and her coat thicker, harboring a fugitive, growing belly. LENA waits, JAKUB looking out the window still. JAKUB sighs, turning and seeing LENA. He goes rigid, then realizes it’s her and he steadies himself.)

JAKUB

## Shabbat shalom.

LENA

#### (Charging towards him.)

#### Shabbat shalom, you old goof.

#### (LENA hugs JAKUB, who somberly returns the embrace. They release and sit, LENA undoing her coat to reveal her belly’s enlargement. She winces, rubbing.)

## I know… I’m binding it too tight, but… The guards keep looking at me—This Wagner guy—I don’t know. There aren’t enough smoke-shows still around so I’m… I’m a bit… It’s a special situation. I know it’s bad.

JAKUB

## Lena…

LENA

Look, the important thing is salami: you got it?

#### (JAKUB doesn’t respond.)

#### Okay. Jam?

#### (JAKUB looks down.)

## Was that a good “looking down”? Like I’m looking down at a jar of jam? Are you doing one of those?

JAKUB

## No, I’m not doing one of those.

LENA

## You sound like you’ve been having a bad day.

JAKUB

## Bad few days…

LENA

## You sound like you’ve been having a bad German occupation. It’s all right. We’ll get through it. Enjoy *this* occupation. We’ll probably have another before we’re dead. In fact, I’ll bet you a stick of salami Warsaw will have two more before we’re dead.

JAKUB

## Lena…

LENA

And I know what you’re thinking: that I would pull the stuff I used to do with bets and sway more occupations into Warsaw. This is true. The Russians would definitely not need much convincing and I got a weird theory about Scandinavia. I could—

#### (LENA winces, clutching her belly and bending over. JAKUB waits to see if he should act.)

## That was a good one.

JAKUB

## They’ve gotten more frequent?

LENA

## Yeah. Yep. Yep, yep, yep. She… is a fighter. I’m trying to convince her not to fight the ladykeeping her alive—but she just doesn’t listen. She probably got that from me.

JAKUB

## Lena, I found him.

LENA

You…

#### (Realizing.)

#### You found your friend? Oh, snap—

#### (Re: belly.)

## Did you tell him about—?

JAKUB

## No, not *him*. He… I don’t know about *him* still. I found an obstetrician who… I found someone who knows these things well… I gave him my notes, and he talked, and…

### (Beat. JAKUB sighs.)

LENA

How’s Julia?

#### (JAKUB looks down.)

#### I, um… Okay… How is… the weather?

#### (JAKUB looks back up at LENA. Beat.)

## Less hot. That’s kinda nice. Till it gets, y’know… cold.

### (JAKUB brings his notes out of the drawer.)

JAKUB

The baby is going to die.

#### (Beat.)

#### Right now, it’s important that…

#### (Wiping his face with his hand; heading into it.)

## Right now, it’s important that we allow the fetus to… um… that we do not interrupt the process that is currently happening—and by that I mean not trying to speed it up and abort the fetus now. It’s a bit late given the lack of proper, safe tools at our disposal and I… I want to make sure that you live. By intervening now, that may not happen. In fact, it’s looking like, according to my friend, that—

LENA

## He’s sure?

JAKUB

## He’s…? Yes. The heat didn’t—uh… The heat wasn’t the problem—your constant feeling of dehydration wasn’t good for the fetus, but it was never at a level that would cause a fatality. The problem is that you haven’t been getting enough nutrition. Not by half. And I mean, not just so little that it’s not a healthy fetus, but so little that *you* are malnourished, and can in no way survive a fetus. And your body is choosing yourself. It has passed the point of reversal. If you were to suddenly—

LENA

## He got this all just from your notes?

JAKUB

## As soon as I said I knew a pregnant woman, he started talking about this, and *then* I gave him my notes, and… Based on his reading, it has passed the point of reversal, and if you were to suddenly start eating more than enough, it wouldn’t work. At this point, we have to wait for the heartbeat to stop and a few days after before we can… Lena, I’m sorry. But this was going to happen. And I’m sorry you were so optimistic, but… I’m sorry.

### (LENA stares, not revealing any emotion. JAKUB reaches into his desk, pulling out a jar, and placing it in front of LENA. After a moment, LENA picks it up, looking down. She opens it.)

LENA

## Well… Thank G-d.

### (LENA digs into the jam.)

JAKUB

## Yeah?

LENA

## This sucks for sure but this little kickboxer has been a nightmare, man. And—What kind of jam is this?

JAKUB

## I don’t know. Lena, are you—?

LENA

## It’s trash. This is trash jam. I mean—thank you, for sure, and I know how many people would kill for this, but they’re not pregnant. Good for them… I mean… Yeah, it’s sucked. It’s been painful, and… like… I haven’t been having any sex even though I *really* want to, cuz—I mean—somebody’s gonna nick my super fragile fetus in the foot or something. Baby would come out with a broken foot just cuz I had to get laid for a sec. Which would maybe be nice cuz then it’d stop kicking, now that it’s got a schmuck-shaped dent in its foot. And… and, I mean, I get that you can look around and—

JAKUB

#### (Finishing her thought.)

## Who would want to bring a child into all of this?

LENA

… I don’t know, man. Maybe all pregnant people get this sensation but it’s just…

#### (Beat. Looking at the jar in her hand.)

#### Yeah. The world kinda isn’t selling itself very well for me right now. And it wouldn’t be the best thing to have a kid’s first memories be a line-up. Or be a deportation to Treblinka. That’s not a great first memory. Probably in the bottom ten. And they’re deporting girls like me left and right so that’s coming real soon—I didn’t mean anything by that I’m sure your daughter’s fine cuz she’s clever, mine is a little rat that only knows kicking, and I mean… cuz…

#### (Setting the jam down on the desk. Beat.)

## I’ve been having these… dreams, I guess. Where it’s my regular life but I’m so scared that a kid is gonna die all the time. Like, I gotta go to work and the kid is always way in the distance and I gotta make sure she’s at that distance and not near me but still not… being hurt! I’m having these dreams where I’m just scared of this kid dying. And I gotta take this kid everywhere cuz she keeps kickboxing everybody! I’m like, “Zuzanna, Nazis don’t like to be kickboxed!” and she’s yelling, “No! No!” and keeps kickboxing them! I gotta hide her in cupboards and closets and bar them shut so she can’t kickbox right out of ’em! And Germans keep flooding into the rooms and I gotta act natural around them and pretend I don’t know where she went! Not my kid! I am not the mother of the great, feared, kickboxing toddler! That’s Pola! She lives upstairs! Go get her and her insistence on wearing heels in her apartment! The woman either needs to get a rug, a deportation, or slippers! And I gotta keep going on and on to them about Pola to make sure they don’t get my kickboxing toddler! And I can’t explain why I can’t let them get her! It’d be so much easier if they got her! Take this child away! She kicks me too!

### (LENA grabs the jar, shoving a fingerful of jam into her mouth, but letting it rest there. She can’t swallow it or spit it out. Beat. JAKUB pulls a stethoscope out of his drawer, handing it to her. LENA puts the jar down and takes the stethoscope, but still doesn’t swallow the jam.)

JAKUB

I… I’m going to need this back, okay? Listen for a heartbeat. Everyday. From when the fetus dies to when we can get it out of there safely is a *small* window and the day that you don’t hear a heartbeat, come here at the next Shabbas. The *next*. It can’t be longer than a week. Do you understand what I’m asking you to do?

#### (LENA can’t respond, mouth full of jam.)

## My friend says it’ll be less than a month. You’ll be hitting… closing on six months by then? You can keep binding yourself but you’re putting yourself in as much danger as the fetus. And by that I mean… Right. You’re putting yourself in danger. Hide it, make sure no one spots it, keep your work ethic perfect and… healthy… and… Lena, please use your head on this. Don’t see this as another tragedy among everything. It’s not. This is a good thing. This is the best thing that could happen right now. It would’ve been better earlier but it’s much better than next month—Adam on the Jewish Council stepped down so I don’t know what next month looks like but it’s certainly not a good time to miscarry. The sooner the better, but don’t do anything to…! Please come as soon as you can if you start bleeding, or anything else unusual happens. Okay?

### (LENA pauses, pulling a handkerchief out of her pocket and depositing the mouthful of jam into it.)

LENA

## Sorry… Can I take the jar with me this time?

### (JAKUB pauses, then shakes his head. LENA stands and walks to the door. Blackout.)

# Scene Three

## SETTING: the same. TIME: a few months later.

### (At lights: JAKUB, not wearing his jacket, has just cut a salami stick in quarters, putting each quarter onto newspaper and wrapping it. LENA enters the room silently, where JAKUB can’t see her. She’s got on more layers, fully camouflaging her bump. She waits. JAKUB sees her and jumps, holding out the knife. Realizing it’s LENA, he gasps and frowns.)

LENA

## You gotta stop doing that; Nazis are loud.

JAKUB

## You’re still here! I figured since you hadn’t come you’d been deported or—!

LENA

## Shabbat shalom.

JAKUB

## Shabbat shalom.

### (JAKUB tosses LENA a quarter of salami, which she immediately bites.)

LENA

## Ow… My teeth are dumb.

JAKUB

## Yes, be careful, please. You don’t want to lose any or they’ll think you’ve got anemia. How aren’t you deported?

LENA

## I’m quiet. When’s your turn? Why are you still here?

### (LENA sits, gnawing on the salami.)

JAKUB

## I was found out to be a doctor—ratted out, really—and the mighty Officer Wagner found out he put his salami in something too spicy. As it turns out, my assistance and sworn confidentiality might burden me with a lifetime in Warsaw, but my, am I glad you’re still here. And at the right time! I was just about to make some deliveries. Please tell me you’re here with my stethoscope.

### (LENA pulls out her pockets: empty.)

LENA

## I’m really starting to think I just have two hearts.

JAKUB

## I told you to at least bring it! I need to hear for mys—

LENA

You think I’m carrying a stethoscope in a coat pocket? Are you kidding me? That thing is worse than having a bomb!

#### (Pulling the stethoscope out the inside of her skirt and handing it to JAKUB.)

## She hasn’t been kicking—but there’s definitely still a “*guh-gunk*”in there!

JAKUB

## There’s still…? That’s not… Okay, can you please take off your coat?

LENA

## Cool it for a sec, all right? It’s a long walk. I don’t eat a lot. I’m seven months pregnant with some kind of super baby. We can give me a sec. I get to ask you something: why am I holding salami?

JAKUB

#### (Smiling.)

## Oh! She was never deported or… Julia was fine. She’d been caught by the Gestapo, she got out of it, she went right back to being a clever girl.

LENA

## She got caught and got out of it?

JAKUB

## She’s a clever girl.

LENA

## I… Hold—Wait a second. How?

JAKUB

## It’s not important how! It’s important that she’s—

LENA

It *is* important! The reason I’m not smuggling is cuz they’d boil me alive. Smuggling means eating as much as I want—How’d she get out of it? Was it through the sex?

#### (JAKUB pauses, smile drooping a bit, then continues wrapping the salamis.)

#### Jakub, what’d she do?

#### (JAKUB shakes his head, smile still loosely hanging on his face.)

#### What’d she…?

#### (JAKUB keeps wrapping.)

## Jakub, did she sell out…? Who? What—Like her cohort?

JAKUB

Just…! If she didn’t name people, you wouldn’t be eating that right now.

#### (Holding open hand out.)

## You don’t want it?

LENA

#### (Pulling salami away.)

## No, it’s good.

JAKUB

## Right. There you go. I… I wish it weren’t exactly this way but… Julia’s okay. And I know I’m not supposed to be happy about that because of what it cost but I am.

LENA

## You need to give some of that to—

JAKUB

I know that! And I’m doing that—of course I’m doing that. I… I’m never going to let them go without meat. I’m still a Jew. I’m a Jewish parent.

#### (Beat.)

#### I’m very glad you’re still here. I talked to my friend about… Well, *if* you were still here, not coming to my apartment just meant that the fetus still hadn’t given up… And he says… He said… Well, we have to be sure, so…

#### (JAKUB stands, crossing to LENA and putting the stethoscope into his ears. He waits for LENA to remove her coat. She doesn’t.)

#### I… Can you please remove your coat?

#### (LENA shakes her head.)

## I know this is hard but I don’t have too much time to—

LENA

## Can I finish my salami first? Where’d I put it?

JAKUB

## I believe you ate it. Come on; let me hear the super baby.

LENA

## You can listen next week! Or it might just give up by next week. Jakub, I… Can we please verify that next week? Or, if that’s a bad holy day for you, then the week after?

JAKUB

## There might not be a next week for us to meet and there are steps we need to take if—

LENA

## I figured, but… I…

### (JAKUB waits. LENA slowly touches her coat, unbuttoning. Once it’s off, she reveals another coat, which she unbuttons. Under that is her blouse—belly the same size as last time. JAKUB stares down at it, then kneels, placing the stethoscope under the blouse. They wait. After a moment, JAKUB moves the stethoscope. After another, he moves it again. And again. He stands, returning to his seat. LENA waits.)

LENA

## Just… Just don’t say anything. Don’t tell me anything. Please.

JAKUB

I have to.

#### (Taking a breath.)

#### I’m sorry. You were right. We now must assume you’ll have to give birth in this place.

#### (LENA stares, trying not to reveal anything, then immediately breaks. She covers her mouth as sobs tumble out, bending over to hide herself.)

## I’m so sorry… I’m… I’m so sorry.

LENA

#### (Through sobs.)

## G-d… Oh, my *G-d*.

JAKUB

## I’m… I don’t know what to say to—I—I—I know this feels… Please, just…

LENA

I’m just… I’m sorry, I’m just so… *happy*. Oh, G-d…

#### (JAKUB frowns. LENA can’t stop crying.)

## She’s going to be *alive*…?! Oh, my G-d… *Oh, my G-d*, she’s going to be alive....

JAKUB

## Lena—

LENA

She’s going to *feel things*… She’s going to *feel blankets* and… and she’s going—she’s going to feel the *sun* on her stupid, bald head! And… *Oh, my G-d, I’m so happy.*

#### (LENA can’t talk from crying. JAKUB doesn’t know what to say.)

## Oh, my G-d… Oh, my G-d… *Thank you*… *Thank you*… *Thank you*… She’s gonna have *birthdays*…! Oh, my G-d, she’s gonna have birthdays! She’s gonna be *alive*!

### (LENA cries as JAKUB stares. He stands, going to the door, taking his wrappings for delivery.)

JAKUB

## I’ll… give you a moment. I’ll be back, I just… Lena, don’t… Lena, what if you go to Treblinka?! Don’t get your hopes up just to get them crushed ag—!

LENA

There’s still *sun* there. There are sunrises; G-d still visits Treblinka! She’s gonna see *sunrises*… She’s gonna see—*Oh, my G-d—Thank you*.

#### (JAKUB stares, then nods and exits. LENA stands, pacing around the room. She stops and looks down at her belly.)

#### Oh… Hello, Zuzanna, you little, fighting rat—who is surviving on what I assume is just eating my stomach lining or something—I don’t care—I don’t need it—It’s yours—You can have it—Just… Oh, G-d, you’re gonna see this place… Oh, my G-d, you’re gonna see this place… It’s so beautiful here… Oh, it’s so beautiful here. There’s rain and gray skies and there’s loud women upstairs and so many things you shouldn’t kick. You’re gonna feel the walls with dried, periwinkle paint and feel cold water on a faucet and it’s all so beautiful and you get to touch it. You get to come see the world… and…

#### (Wincing; sitting in JAKUB’s chair.)

#### You’re kicking! You’re kicking! You’re kicking—You’re kicking—You’re kicking! Oh, you’re so good at kicking! I can take it, babe—just keep practicing—Please don’t ever stop doing that again. Promise me, if I never meet you, you’ll kick Nazis. Ohhh, kickbox Nazis all day, and if they say you can’t do that, tell them your mother said you could… Two more things—and you gotta do ’em. One—open a bank. Own a bank. Own *them*. Never let them own you. We’re *so* good at banks; you’ll be a pro… You need to own a bank. That’s a promise and you’re—

#### (Wincing.)

#### Yeah, you’re allowed to kick me! Oh, boy… But more than that—more than anything—you *have* to celebrate your birthdays. You have to celebrate them so loudly. You can *never* in your life be quiet… *Never*… Especially not on your birthday.

#### (Loud footsteps come up the stairs.)

## Jakub will be supplying your birthday cake. Make sure you told him I said that cuz if I’m dead cuz of you then guilt cake out of him. Guilt cake out of people, then share it with them on your birthday.

### (The footsteps arrive at the door. Blackout.)

END

**Forever Boy** (10 Minute Play)

## CAST: Bartender (F, early 20s); Woman (F, early 20s); Man (M, 40s).

SETTING: A dive bar. TIME: the present.

(Nobody but the BARTENDER and a WOMAN at the bar. The BARTENDER never sees the WOMAN. In walks a MAN, his face shrouded by his coat and hat. The WOMAN at the bar never stops staring at the MAN. The MAN sits at the bar and the BARTENDER comes over.)

BARTENDER

## Hello, sir—What can I get for you?

MAN

## A, uh… Uh…

#### (He sees the WOMAN staring, trying to ignore it.)

## A Tom Collins.

BARTENDER

## Great. Can I see your I.D.?

MAN

## What do you mean?

BARTENDER

## Your picture. Little picture. Got your birthday on it.

MAN

## I’m… I’m clearly old enough.

BARTENDER

## Sorry, sir. We gotta I.D. everyone who looks like they’re under forty.

MAN

## I… I look older than forty.

BARTENDER

## Eh… I dunno. Hard to see when you’re hiding it all like that, but you look like you could be somebody in their late thirties who just aged real bad.

MAN

## Then I’m in my late thirties. Can I please just get a drink? I don’t have my I.D. with me.

BARTENDER

## Nah. Sorry. No I.D., no drinking.

MAN

## There’s nobody else in here but you and…! Okay, just…! Just hold on!

(The MAN pulls out his wallet, providing his I.D. The BARTENDER squints at it.)

BARTENDER

## What?

#### (Looking between MAN and I.D.)

## Is this supposed to be funny?

MAN

#### (Extending hand to get I.D. back.)

## I don’t have a driver’s license.

BARTENDER

## “Treated as a legal adult”—The hell? Am I supposed to take this?

MAN

#### (Flailing for I.D. back.)

## I guess not! I’ll just go somewhere else!

BARTENDER

## Hold on… Do I recognize you?

MAN

## Please just give it back!

BARTENDER

#### (Realizing.)

## Oh, my G-d! Hold on! You’re Forever Boy!

(The MAN sighs, retracting his arm.)

MAN

## Can I please have it back?

BARTENDER

## Have it back? Sir, ya drinks are free!

#### (The MAN frowns as the BARTENDER returns the I.D., getting to making a Tom Collins.)

## Oh, my G-d. Oh, my *G-d*—I just… I just have to thank you for everything you’ve done. Honestly. Look, my pop was there in ’09—when Doctor Canine took the Brooklyn Bridge. If you hadn’t’ve showed up… Look, my family owes you everything. My pop actually went to the Times and fought for you to get that Peace Prize last year, y’know?

(The BARTENDER provides the Tom Collins.)

MAN

## Well… Tell your pop I said, “Thank you.”

BARTENDER

## *You* never have to thank that man in your life. G-d, I could kiss ya.

#### (After a moment, the MAN takes the hat off and lowers his collar. He sips the drink.)

## Wow. You were younger in ’09.

MAN

## You know, everyone was.

BARTENDER

## Yea, but… Weren’t you, what, in your late teens?

MAN

## Not—exactly.

BARTENDER

## How old are you right now?

MAN

## … Sixteen.

BARTENDER

#### (Laughs, then abruptly realizes and stops.)

## Oh, you’re not kidding. Is it cuz of your powers?

MAN

## Yes.

BARTENDER

## Really? What’s that all about?

MAN

## … When you… stop time, you keep aging. I was born in two thousand and three. But, I’d spent a lot of my youth stopping time.

BARTENDER

## No kidding… Oh, my G-d, if I could do that shit as a kid—make a second last *forever*—I would’ve robbed Wall Street over ’n’ over.

#### (She chuckles. The MAN joins her.)

## G-d, just—Good for you to use it to save people. My family prays for you every night and we thank G-d that you’re a good guy—Oh, G-d! Did that I.D. say your real name?

MAN

## You can’t have it back.

BARTENDER

## Ha! Yeah, you probably like ya privacy after all that bullshit that happened.

#### (Now the WOMAN chuckles. The MAN winces.)

## Y’know—and I want you to know this for real—nobody in my whole family ever believed a word of it.

MAN

## It’s fine. I’ll just… Thank you.

BARTENDER

## Don’t thank me—Y’know, all we talked about when they were saying you shouldn’t get that Nobel Prize—all everyone in my friend group, my family—was this lady’s worse than fucking Doctor Canine with what she did to you. She’s just a fucking liar the whole time. Spelled it out on her face.

MAN

## I… It’s fine. Thank you. Thank you for the drink.

BARTENDER

## It’s not fine! Who in the world’s an easier target to accuse than you, y’know? “Oh, I just *felt* different when I saw him”? The fuck is—That’s not even a—What? It was cuz you were winning that Prize that she *suddenly*—Fucking it’s been five years and *now*’s a real easy time to—We all think, honest to G-d, everyone in my family—She’s one of Doctor Canine’s minions. And that’s just the fucked up thing. I’m glad the bitch is dead.

#### (The WOMAN chuckles again. The MAN shifts.)

## You should’ve seen my pop’s blood boiling. Said he wished he was the one who shot her. Guy never touched a gun in his life but he’d’ve done it to a Doctor Canine minion, and that’s what she was.

MAN

## Please, I just… I’m sorry, but I came here for some quiet.

BARTENDER

## Oh, yea—You deserve it. I’m right over here when you need anything.

(The BARTENDER takes inventory as the MAN shifts and tries to enjoy his drink. He doesn’t—feeling the WOMAN’s eyes all over him.)

MAN

## Uh…

BARTENDER

## Yea?

MAN

## Uh, what was your dad wearing?

BARTENDER

## Whaddyu mean?

MAN

## Well, when you’re carrying people one-by-one across the Brooklyn Bridge, you tend to get exhaustingly familiar with them.

BARTENDER

## Uh… I dunno what he was wearing—You remember what every person had on?

MAN

## It’s a long bridge. Took me almost a month to get everyone off it as the laser was approaching. You… I don’t know.

BARTENDER

## *Oh*! Y’know what? Brown leather jacket. And, uh, I think also a Nets cap. We got a picture of him off some kind of article.

MAN

## I think… I *think* I remember somebody like that.

BARTENDER

## Shut up. No, you don’t.

MAN

## Yeah, uh…! New shoes? Red Nikes?

BARTENDER

## Oh, my G-d. He’s got an old pair of Red Nikes—wears ’em everywhere—says they’re lucky. You remember my pop!

MAN

## Uh… I do! Yeah!

BARTENDER

## I dunno how ya lifted that guy! Is everyone just weightless when ya stop time?

MAN

## Uh, no—People are still… If they’re heavy, you have to drag them, unfortunately. Some people get scraped up, but…

BARTENDER

## Fucking better than dead! Y’know what—We were saying the *reason* we knew that Angela girl was lying is cuz if time’s stopped, you’re frozen. You can’t move your own parts. So, I mean—not to be crude but, come on, y’know? Nothings going up there. It’s frozen shut. Like a statue.

MAN

#### (Beat. He feels the WOMAN’s stare.)

## Hey! It’s… Let’s please not talk about that. Come on.

BARTENDER

## You’re right. You got enough of that last year with the press and all that. Who the hell does the media think they are claiming anything ’bout how time-freezing works? Only *you* know and that’s who I, for one, will be listening to!

MAN

## I, um… How much do I owe you for this?

BARTENDER

## Not a cent.

MAN

## Right, uh… Ha-ha… Can I get another?

BARTENDER

## You’re Forever Boy—You’re getting top shelf.

(The BARTENDER turns her back to the MAN and reaches for the top shelf. She doesn’t move from there. The MAN breathes heavily. She still doesn’t move. The MAN gazes.)

MAN

## Stop looking at me.

#### (The WOMAN doesn’t.)

## Could you just stop looking at me?

#### (The WOMAN doesn’t. The MAN rises from his seat. The WOMAN still stares. The MAN sits.)

## You don’t know what it’s like to try to give it up. It’s… You get to look at somebody. Not have them stare back. It’s… Being in public is like owning an art gallery. If I’m the only person that’s capable of appreciating that then it’s wasteful to give it up. I’m the only one that really knows what people look like…

#### (Beat.)

## I’m the one who knows people are hideous. Just oily and covered in hair… You were the only person I’d seen in years that I thought looked pretty again and I—I didn’t know how to—I don’t mean like that was a nice thing for me to say…

#### (The MAN rises again, staring at the BARTENDER.)

## Stop staring.

#### (Beat. He sits.)

## Nobody ever asked me to save people and nobody ever *paid* me. I was willing to keep at that forever. You thought you were more important than citizens having a hero and kids having a role model and that you were more—Do you get that? None of the other girls… Because they cared more than you did—*No*—They didn’t think anything happened! That’s the whole point! I would never do that to a person while they knew it was happening and that’s all the difference in the world.

#### (Beat.)

## People I carried off bridges and buildings will never be anything but grateful. Those headlines’ll never be replaced.

#### (The MAN rises; re: BARTENDER.)

## I saved her *dad*… And she *said*, “She could kiss me”… *She*… She… talks… a lot…

#### (The MAN sits. Beat.)

## Keep staring. I don’t care. You’re not better than me, you’re just untested… Nobody ever is who they really are until they’re a hero.

#### (Beat. The WOMAN chuckles.)

## Stop. I won’t… *do* anything—I swear. Just stop looking at me.

(She doesn’t. The MAN gives up. Beat. The BARTENDER unfreezes, bringing down the bottle and making the drink.)

BARTENDER

## Same way?

#### (The MAN nods.)

## Yeaaaa—I like’m with all kinds of lemon in it too.

MAN

#### (Barely audible.)

## You’re very good at it.

BARTENDER

## What’s that?

MAN

## I said, uh… It’s just that you are the first person who’s talked to me… in a while.

BARTENDER

## G-d, that just… You deserve better. I’m sorry for the way people act.

MAN

## It’s not your fault… Do you know that I once met Doctor Canine?

BARTENDER

## Shut up. Really? Like, no mask?

#### (The MAN nods.)

## G-d—What’s he look like?

MAN

## Puzzled, when I saw him. Maybe even disappointed. This was before he’d even been caught. And then once I’d brought him to the station… You’d wanna believe that somebody so capable of annihilation would be… sturdier. Cunning. Venomous. But he was just so nice to me… I’ve faced off against villains and I’ve worked with heroes and all of them looked at me like I was their son.

(The MAN buries his face in his hands as the BARTENDER frowns. Blackout.)

END

**The South Will Rise Again** (One-Act Play)

## SETTING: Local—with local accents unless specified. TIME: the present.

(JANE, F, lies in a hospital bed, her arm slung up and cast. Her NURSE, F, enters.)

NURSE

## Dr. McCorvey is going to be in soon to talk at you.

JANE

## Drugs are making it pretty numb—Wish I could take advantage of that and masturbate so it feels like someone else is doing it but I think that’d upset the whole, y’know, infection.

NURSE

#### (Looking closer; grimacing.)

## You fisted a lawn mower, didn’t you?

JANE

## Guy shot me at a traffic stop last week—I cut him off and at the light and he… I mean, I sped off but dude had a shotgun so it blew half my arm in, y’know?

(DR. McCORVEY, F, enters with a clipboard.)

DR. McCORVEY

## Jane! How’s the arm? Still look like pizza?

JANE

## Drugs are making it pretty numb—Wish I could take advantage of that and mastur—

DR. McCORVEY

## Great. Let’s peek at it—Yep, that’s gross. Okay. I have good news and bad news. Order doesn’t change what they are, but I was trained that it’s good to give you an illusion of choice in your mortality.

JANE

## Uh… Good news first.

DR. McCORVEY

## Okay—

#### (Looking at clipboard.)

## The infection has been spreading.

JANE

## … Sooooo, does that mean—?

DR. McCORVEY

## Yeah, out loud it sounds kinda rough. Then let’s call *that* the bad news. The good news is, “We’re gonna lob off her arm.”

JANE

## That’s…

DR. McCORVEY

## Y’know, out loud, that one didn’t—I was so sure when reading this that I had… Oh well!

#### (Pulling a pocketknife out.)

## The thing’s pretty mangled up so this is probably gonna be along the lines of cutting cooked salmon.

JANE

## Woah! Okay! Great! But we stuff drugs in, like, every single hole first, right?

DR. McCORVEY

## If we don’t hurry, the infection will spread to the rest of you and then you might die of…

#### (Checking notes.)

## —“infection.” I’m just gonna trim some off the top.

JANE

## Great way to lose ten pounds! But give me the procaine first so I know you’re cool!

NURSE

## Oh, I love when patients think they know things! I’ll just make sure…

#### (She readies JANE’s arm, then freezes. She puts two fingers to JANE’s wrist, then gasps.)

## Doctor McCorvey, call the police.

DR. McCORVEY

## I’m cutting the arm first. I’ve kind of got momentum right now.

NURSE

## You can’t cut this arm, Doctor. It’s…

(McCORVEY feels the wrist then looks to JANE in horror.)

DR. McCORVEY

## Jane, you diabolical monster.

#### (Throwing the pocketknife across the room.)

## I almost cut that thing! Nurse, call 9-1-1! No! Call a bigger number!

(The NURSE runs to the room phone, dialing.)

JANE

## Woah! What is going on, hospital friends?! Are we out of drugs? Do we order more?!

NURSE

## Hello, is this the government? Please send someone who’s already upset.

JANE

## What did my arm do?!

DR. McCORVEY

## Don’t blame the poor arm, you reckless little minx. I could’ve lost my license!

JANE

## What’s going on? What are you doing?

NURSE

## We’ll be waiting right here. Thank you.

#### (She hangs up.)

## They’re not sending anyone.

DR. McCORVEY

## You got away with it this time, Jane. You come into my hospital with your big dumb eyes and distracting teeth and want me to amputate your arm while it’s still *alive*?

JANE

## … Are you *out* of procaine? I know of some creative solutions.

DR. McCORVEY

## Did you think we wouldn’t notice? I’m so furious I could make out with you!

NURSE

## Thought you could slip that your arm has a *pulse* right by us, huh?

JANE

## Yeah, it has a pulse! It’s an arm! If we don’t have procaine we need WD-40 and a latex glove! Let’s move, people! This thing’s weighing me down!

DR. McCORVEY

## What’s next? I run down the street cutting off *everyone’s* arms?

NURSE

## You’re not taking *my* arms.

JANE

## What? No! Just this—I want this one gone! It looks like it has a final boss track mark!

NURSE

## It has a pulse!

JANE

## *I’m* giving it a pulse—I am not discussing this until I have an anesthesiologist present.

NURSE

## I bet she got shot just so she could get amputated! Were you not wearing body armor?

JANE

## If need be, I can bring my own anesthesiologist, but none of you are allowed to ask McKenna questions! Now, unless I can use this thing as a big, festering dildo, it’s going!

DR. McCORVEY

## How dare you! That arm has a whole future! Anything could happen!

JANE

## So let’s get rid of it if anything could happen! Isn’t that why we pissed all over Cuba?! Nurse, have you called McKenna yet? I know her number starts with a plus sign.

NURSE

## But that means something good could happen! What if this infection is the one we use to learn how to cure infections?

JANE

## Has *any* infection before done that? Out of the *billions* that have already happened?

NURSE

## Doctor?

DR. McCORVEY

## No, best cure we’ve learned so far’s secession. *You*, on the other hand, have perfect eyes!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

(Unseen; Italian accent.)

## Did somebody-a say you were going to-a cut off-a some arms?

(AMERIGO VESPUCCI, M, enters.)

DR. McCORVEY

## Amerigo Vespucci! What are you doing here?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## I like-a the roaming hospitals. They-a make-a me hungry. Now, I see-a this lady has a stupid arm.

JANE

## Aw, man, McKenna—Where’d you get an accent?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## No. I am Amerigo Vespucci. I am-a really famous so you are-a the stupid person to ask that. Tell me-a, lady, how you-a ruin this arm?

JANE

## I got shot. Why is Amerigo Vespucci alive?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Do you-a wear any armor?

JANE

## Ar…? Like, body armor…? No…?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Then it is-a her fault! Ah! We-a burn her, yes?

NURSE

## Agreed.

JANE

## You can’t burn me—!

DR. McCORVEY

## It’ll damage the arm.

#### (To JANE.)

## You sick, smart animal. I could kiss you so hard. I’ll have you know I have had two beautiful arms for years and the thought of cutting them never—Ugh, just the thought!

JANE

## Uh! You never *had* to! It’s *my* arm! It’s literally mine—Okay, I accidentally swallowed the Xanax I’ve been keeping under my tongue, so imagine I’m angrier.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Would you-a please stop interrupting when we are-a talking about you?

NURSE

## I’m Team Burn Her. The arm’ll get hurt but at least *she’ll* know not to get her arm hurt.

DR. McCORVEY

## We need to be unanimous and I am against burning.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Drat! Foiled again by democracy! Lady, you go-a driving-a the car. Why you-a do this?

JANE

## It’s… What?! It’s necess—I can drive a—The other guy’s the one who shot me!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Okay, she emotional which means she is-a the bad person. She is-a the child of Satan—

JANE

## So what would you do if somebody shot your arm and it got infected? Would you—?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Shut up. I don’t-a care what your point was. Okay, we are still not-a unanimous on-a burning the witch?

DR. McCORVEY

## I’m afraid not.

#### (To JANE.)

## Stop smiling or I’ll pounce on you and cry into your hair!

NURSE

## Why did I go through nursing school if we weren’t gonna light up some witches?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## It is-a okay. The important thing is we have-a the democracy.

DR. McCORVEY

## I will protect your right to vote for her burning to my dying day.

JANE

## Okay—I drove without wearing armor—but not because I *wanted* to get shot at!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Okay, I am just going to-a smack-a the witch!

#### (He raises his arm and it flies right off: it was fake. He responds before JANE can ask.)

## No.

JANE

## Did…? Did *you* have an arm amputated?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## Sometimes in-a my exploring days, I get in-a the pickle! Exploring!

NURSE

## G-d bless Amerigo Vespucci.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Unseen; Southern accent.)

## Who said G-d?!?

#### (Enters. M. Assault rifles in both hands.)

## Was it you, you foreign lookin’ cock jacket?!

(DICK forcefully points at VESPUCCI, which fires his rifle and shoots VESPUCCI in his one arm.)

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## My-a mistress!

(VESPUCCI crumbles as DICK accesses the situation.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## What’s goin’ on? Who was that?

DR. McCORVEY

## Congressman Dick! A pleasure to have you! Oxycontin’s in the next room.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## I am-a Amerigo Vespucci! You shot-a my arm!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Pointing at VESPUCCI’s chest; shooting him.)

## I don’t know who that is. Who is that?

NURSE

## I think he discovered America—*That* was Columbus… *He*…

DR. McCORVEY

## Well, neither of them *discovered* America—

#### (DICK slowly raises a rifle at McCORVEY.)

## —because G-d already did.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Lowering arm; to VESPUCCI.)

## Sorry ’bout that. Honor to shootcha. So, you’re from Different? What are you, Russian?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

#### (Gargling through mouthful of blood.)

## Ita—Ital—It—

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Ain’t they cute when they try to speak Normal? Somebody call the government?

NURSE

## We didn’t think you were coming!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Oh, I always come. What’s up?

DR. McCORVEY

## She wanted to amputate her arm while it had a pulse. She deserves to be spanking me.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## You evil—I’ll teach you to get rid of your arms!

(DICK shoots JANE in the arm.)

JANE

## *Ow*!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Try to get rid of your arms—You know where we are?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

#### (Gargling; pumping fist in air.)

## America!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Damn right, Marigold Fishpussy.

NURSE

## That’s why I voted for you, Congressman Dick! You represent my dad!

(DICK shoots the NURSE. The NURSE collapses.)

JANE

## If you get me the Oxycontin in the next room, I won’t tell anybody you did that.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## They know it happens sometimes.

#### (Extending rifle.)

## The name’s Congressman Richard Incest.

JANE

#### (Shaking his rifle.)

## Good to meet you… Mr. Incest.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Aw, please—Mr. Incest was my father. Call me Richard. Look, liddle’ miss.

#### (DICK pulls up a chair by the bed. It’s difficult for him with his rifles so McCORVEY helps. DICK sits and holds JANE’s slung hand in his rifles. JANE winces.)

## I came here not to yell at you or shoot you, but because, in the end, we’re all in this together. Now, we can scream about who’s doin’ this and who’s shootin’ the yada yada yada. I know this ain’t my country. It’s ours. Compromises. That back and forth is what makes us superior to Rome. Now, yes, you’re gonna have to live with that oopsy doopsy arm that’ll probably make it so you can never drive again and you’ll have to once in a while watch somebody get shot, but if you’re willin’ to be a fair American and make those compromises, then I will make the compromise of not burnin’ you alive.

JANE

#### (Beat.)

## Is this because you can’t masturbate while holding the guns?

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Beat.)

## Burn the witch.

(VESPUCCI and the NURSE cheer from the floor as DICK wheels JANE’s bed out. The rifles give him difficulty.)

DR. McCORVEY

## I don’t support this and I voted as such!

(McCORVEY helps DICK with the bed. The two of them exit with JANE.)

JANE

#### (Unseen; voice fading.)

## Hey! Cut it out! Okay, if you keep wheeling me towards that fire I’m gonna vote you out! You better be scared!

NURSE

#### (Gargled.)

## I’m so happy we finally won one. The Founding Fathers would be proud.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

#### (Gargled.)

## I too still have-a the issues with my Papa.

NURSE

#### (Gargled.)

## Do you wanna sleep together?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

#### (Gargled; crying.)

## I haven’t had-a the sex in centuries.

NURSE

#### (Gargled.)

## Mood.

(VESPUCCI struggles to crawl over to the NURSE, laying his bleeding body on top of her. VESPUCCI pulls his penis out as he dies on top of the NURSE. The NURSE wraps her legs around his waist and masturbates with AMERIGO VESPUCCI’s dead body. McCORVEY reenters.)

DR. McCORVEY

## Oh, no! Oh, no, no, no, no—What are you doing?! Hurry!

NURSE

## I’m going as fast as I can!

DR. McCORVEY

## The Buck just came into the hospital!

(The NURSE flings VESPUCCI off and jumps to her feet, grunting in pain.)

NURSE

## But this room doesn’t have a patient in it!

DR. McCORVEY

## If we lose our budget I’m gonna have to move back in with my children!

(The NURSE and McCORVEY see VESPUCCI’s corpse, then heave him into the bed. DICK enters with BUCK, F. BUCK has a trophy deer head with a bullet hole in it for a head, and is covered in blood from head to toe.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Sir Buck! We’re real grateful you’re hauntin’ us! Great hospital here! Needs lots of funding for all the folks coming in in! I make sure myself the beds are filled!

(BUCK moves to the bed, looking down at VESPUCCI. When she speaks, three voices spill from her at once.)

BUCK

## This man is dead.

(McCORVEY and the NURSE feign shock, then rush into action.)

DR. McCORVEY

#### (Preparing a defibrillator.)

## Nurse! Ready the corpse for life! I promise, Sir Buck, we usually don’t have dead people in our beds—But if that happens along the way, you can trust that we’ll finish.

#### (The NURSE collapses in pain.)

## Clear!

#### (McCORVEY shocks VESPUCCI’s corpse. No response. The NURSE moans on the ground.)

## Congressman Dick! Would you please lend a hand?

#### (DICK rushes to replace the NURSE. He shoots VESPUCCI in the chest, spraying blood, as McCORVEY readies another shock.)

## Clear!

(McCORVEY shocks VESPUCCI’s corpse. No response. McCORVEY readies another shock as DICK shoots VESPUCCI again. Blood. Unnoticed, BUCK goes to the NURSE on the ground. McCORVEY and DICK continue shocking and shooting VESPUCCI in rhythm. Beat. They freeze in the background.)

BUCK

## You’re going to die soon.

NURSE

## No, *you’re* gonna die soon.

BUCK

## Do you know who I am?

NURSE

## If you’re a cop, I plead the whole fucking handle.

BUCK

## I am your G-d. I am the Alpha and the Omega.

NURSE

## Sick—I rushed Kappa.

BUCK

## I am responsible for the blood in your veins and the blood on the floor. I am what turns the lights off. I am what burns the earth into earth. I am America’s witness.

#### (Beat.)

## The first murder was not of siblings, but of convenience. Cain could have asked me for a new human he could have murdered, but Abel was already there. Guns were made to be fired and people tend to be in the way. This is not evil. This is congestion.

NURSE

## Do you think if I asked the Congressman to shoot me again right next to this hole, I could get a like big, bullet belly piercing?

BUCK

## When America ran out of places to aim, it aimed at one another. You are victims of an elaborate mass suicide. You are a plethora of ancestors. There will be a day when America is down to its last two citizens. Do you think they will be rivals? Lovers? Or on opposite coasts, both falsely positive they carry the distinction of solitude?

NURSE

#### (Poking at bullet hole.)

## Like Lead Belly… Hey, Mr. G-d, sir, do you wanna have sex with me before I die?

BUCK

## I made you in my image. Of course I do.

(BUCK grabs a folded hospital blanket off of a counter, covering herself and the NURSE. They have sex on the floor.)

NURSE

## Why does your penis feel like mine?

BUCK

## Because it’s a vagina. I bear witness to America’s behavior not to seek eventual justice, or even to ensure future civilizations do not fall to cryptomnesia, but because America *will* be forgotten. Your records are for vanity, not history.

NURSE

## Can you go a little faster?

BUCK

## Sure—No one will sculpt your victories, defeats, and poems. America won’t even have the participation ribbon that is an unmarked grave. America must continue its passionate self-destruction, must continue its mutilation of its environment, slaughtering in your shopping malls, ravaging in your parliament—for this parade America throws now is humanity’s only eulogy. The earth is approaching orgasm, and when it happens, there will be no final year of your life, for none of you will survive to mark it.

(BUCK dies on top of the NURSE as the NURSE lets out a great breath of pain. Simultaneously, VESPUCCI gasps to life and all unfreeze.)

DR. McCORVEY

## Holy Harvey Oswald! It worked!

NURSE

#### (Wheezed.)

## G-d just died on top! He’s super heavy!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## I was just in-a the Hell for a hundred-a years!

DR. McCORVEY

## Did the Buck say we were approved for better funding before dying? I don’t like the color of our walls, floors, or faculty.

NURSE

## His arm is *super* deep inside me—like pickpocketing my uterus.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## I *just* get-a the advice from-a the Satan! She say we must-a do-a certain things now!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## I don’t trust you, Elizabeth Foreign. But even more I don’t trust the Devil. We should do the opposite of what she says! What was first?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## I-a do not-a know. I-a was not-a listening to her. But! I-a now know what-a the Hell-a look like! I can-a work-a the backwards to make-a the perfect society!

NURSE

## Okay… I’m just gonna wriggle around till I have a good ol’ snatch sneeze before dying.

DR. McCORVEY

#### (Readying clipboard and pen.)

## And I’ll write it all down, you sexual intellectuals.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## If you mention your Communist Manifesto one more time, I’m gonna kill everyone I haven’t killed yet.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## The first-a thing: Hell is-a full of-a the water. Every-a-where. You are-a always swimming. It is-a super inconvenient because there are-a no boats! To stop-a this, we must-a drain-a the oceans!

DR. McCORVEY

## Where would we put the water?

(DICK shoots McCORVEY in the chest, struggling to take the clipboard. McCORVEY lurches over to a cabinet, popping it open and grabbing fistfuls of morphine vials. She begins the process of injecting herself with every vial.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Struggling to write with rifles in hands.)

## “Drain… the… oceans…”—Wait, hold on. Where do we put the water? Boston?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## What if-a we-a set-a the oceans on fire? Dry-a them out.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## That’s what I like to hear. Both creative, doable, and maintainin’ a brand.

(The NURSE dies as BUCK gasps back to life. She speaks normally now.)

BUCK

## What and who am I inside right now?!

(BUCK frees herself from the NURSE and deer head, revealing herself to be JANE.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Readying rifle.)

## Hey! You’re not G-d! You’re a lady!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

## G-d *is-a* the lady?

CONGRESSMAN DICK

#### (Beat; flabbergasted.)

## I… I need to redo my personality. Gimme a minute.

JANE

## Everybody I ever loved was there! And those that weren’t, I was told not to love anymore! But… I just didn’t need to! I…! I found a window and out of it there was a vast ocean of people drowning and around that window were thousands of boats rusting and an angel said that that window itself *is* half of Heaven! Half of Hell for them was drowning, and half was their view of the window. But they all swam near it. Even cheered when we walked by… I was told all my life that the righteous go to Heaven, but the other half of what made Heaven, *Heaven*, was building more boats just to—

CONGRESSMAN DICK

## Done! I’ve decided my team!

#### (DICK shoots JANE, who dies.)

## That’s what you get for tryin’ to interfere on my manhood, G-d.

#### (DICK shoots VESPUCCI, who dies.)

## That’s what you get for convincin’ me America was imperfect, you I-talian Commie. And *this* is close as I’m ever gonna get to killin’ my pappy.

(DICK shoots himself and dies. McCORVEY, sedated, smiles to the audience and masturbates.)

DR. McCORVEY

## Oooooaaaaaaaiiii usually numb myself so it feels like someone else is dooooing it, but I’ve known too long that the vocal yyyyyyet complicit are the ooonly ones who will survive Ameeeeeerica till its end… I’m just kidding. Do you wanna know the most horrifying thing about America ending? That it isn’t going to happen.

(Beat. Blackout.)

END

**A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams**

(full-length play)

CAST (*in order of appearance*)

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (M, 30s)

EDWINA (F, older)

FRANK MERLO (M, 20s)

MARLON BRANDO (M, 20s)

GRETA GARBO (F, 20s)

DIANA BARRYMORE (F, teens)

ELIZABETH TAYLOR (F, 20s)

ROSE WILLIAMS (F, 20s)

TRUMAN CAPOTE (M, 40s)

BETTE DAVIS (F, 20s)

KATHARINE HEPBURN (F, 20s)

ANDY WARHOL (M, 20s)

POLICEMAN (M, 20s)

PAUL NEWMAN (M, teens)

All alterations to gender or age are not only permitted but celebrated.

Stage directions are to be entirely ignored. Shred them. Eat them with marinara. Lines should be tailored to suit actors. Improvisations and ad-libs are encouraged. If the lights, set, props, etc., written here are not to your liking, happily explore. These words now belong to you. Flaunt it.

If you produce this play with at least half a cast of non-male actors, at least half a cast of actors of color, and have a seat occupancy of 50 or less, please inquire about having your rights’ fees waived by the playwright.

The set has a chair in the center for anecdotes. On the left side, there’s a dining area with two stools and a telephone. On the right side there’s a functioning window, a bar with a wine rack, and another two stools. Near the window is a drawer, be it in a dresser, nightstand, etc., to be filled with various objects. Behind the center stage is a room covered with a scrim. To the far right is a seat near a “Star Machine”: an old projector to be pointed at the scrim.

At lights TENNESSEE WILLIAMS enters clutching a bottle tightly—as though loosening his grip will make the bottle explode into shrapnel. He’s in his thirties, mustached, his lungs adopting New York but clearly born of a Mississippi drawl.

TENNESSEE

Memory: (*beat*) it’s like youth. Elusive. A luxury that one forfeits when one submits himself to the eroticism that is alcohol. I think I have more memories that have been stolen by the bottle than I have stowed around my attic. And the ones that persist only do so hazily. They’re more dreams than memories. And when you wake up, you haven’t the slightest idea of what they meant. You remember a boy and a girl and… All stars have their final bow and they spread across the cosmos to make our atoms.

EDWINA enters, heading to her seat manning the Star Machine. She’s in her sixties and pleasant as peaches. Turning on the Star Machine, she fills the scrim with connected constellations.

EDWINA

Hello, ladies and gentleman! Welcome to our one night engagement; running only this month! Tonight shall be a tour of the stars with a man that knows the stars better than anybody alive or dead: Tennessee Williams!

TENNESSEE

Hello, hello, hello! Hello. Folks, my name is Thomas “Tennessee” Williams and I’m here to take you on a tour of the stars! This is what happens now. This is what we do. You get to a certain age, and then you have to give people tours of the universe. (*pointing*) This, right here, is the universe! It’s got stars… And we’re gonna look at ‘em… If any of you thought that we would be looking at actual stars tonight, (*drinks instead of finishing the sentence*). Right-o! Lil’ Edwina! Where do we wanna launch off tonight?

EDWINA

With more introduction!

TENNESSEE

More introduction! My name is Thomas “Tennessee” Williams and I am seventy-one years of age. (*referring to his youth*) My secret is wine. Yes, you’re gonna pretty quickly understand that things don’t look how they happen. It’s fantasia… Lil’ Edwina, why do these things happen?

EDWINA

More introduction!

TENNESSEE

More introduction! My name is Thomas “Tennessee” Williams, I write plays, I make people famous, I grew up in Mississippi so I didn’t masturbate till I was twenty-six—

EDWINA

Sufficient introduction!

TENNESSEE

Wonderful! (*pats his pockets*) Where the hell’s my point-point?

EDWINA produces a laser pointer and hands it to him.

TENNESSEE

Thank you. This, right here, is the universe! Now, to begin our tour, we’d like to start—Oh, meet Lil’ Edwina! She…?

EDWINA

I’m a student.

TENNESSEE

A student. She’s a student of astrology.

EDWINA

Astronomy.

TENNESSEE

Forgive her: she’s a Scorpio. Now, I don’t know a whole ton about anything I see in front of me right now, so Lil’ Edwina’s gonna correct me whenever necessary.

EDWINA

It’s gonna be necessary!

TENNESSEE

We’re starting! This, right here, is the universe! The universe is full of stars. There are some you know. There are some only some know. We neglect the ones that no one knows because they’re so g-ddamn boring. We like to begin with one everyone knows. (*laser pointing*) This star here… this is… Polaris. (*off EDWINA’s reaction; different star*) This one’s Polaris… (*different*) Polaris?

EDWINA

Oh, heavens…

TENNESSEE

Well, I don’t know! I know if you draw lines between these ones y’get Aries! I’m an Aries. Typically Aries have tempers, but, (*drinks instead of finishing the sentence*).

EDWINA takes the bottle away.

TENNESSEE

That’s my dancing juice, g-ddamn it!

EDWINA

Language!

TENNESSEE

I…! All right… (*cooling*) This here’s Aries: these four. Aries are born between March 21st and April 20th. They are adventurous, courageous, maybe a bit unable to express their emotions in a conservative manner. We do not punish them for this; they are incapable of change. Let’s start tonight with one of the first stars I made… His name, at the time, was Bud. He was also an Aries. That’s why I’m thinking ‘bout him; ol’ Tenn idn’t just defective in the attention span. Now, I had just written and’d had produced The Glass Menagerie. This was a play about my growing up… I… (*thinking*) Mm…

Lights up in the scrim room, revealing FRANK MERLO, standing where TENN doesn’t notice him. The room is seemingly lit by a sky full of stars. FRANK is in his 20s and disarmingly handsome, his eyes gently exploring every surface of the room.

TENNESSEE

That play went really well. It took me a while to write the next one, surrounding a woman named Blanche. This was A Streetcar Named Desire.

Lights down on FRANK.

TENNESSEE

Now, this—

TENN looks behind himself, confused.

TENNESSEE

Did something just… just—okay, well. Streetcar. I’d wanted John Garfield for the lead male. We could not get this man. Instead, a no-name was referred to me by the great Elia Kazan, hereafter “Gadg,” whom Gadg called one of the best young actors he’d ever seen. Best anybody had… But memory is elusive. Everything I remember, I remember it with a rum-soaked filter. When I remember them all, they’re beautiful. They’re young. Did you ever notice that? As soon as a star dies, all their pictures become young again.

BRANDO

What’s wrong with the lights in here?

Lights up on MARLON BRANDO, young, thin, and playful. He flips a switch to no avail.

TENNESSEE

That young. Hello, sir I’ve never met!

BRANDO

Why don’t your lights work?

TENNESSEE

Because when you flip the switch they don’t turn on.

BRANDO

Mmm… Where’s your box?

TENNESSEE

Excuse yourself.

BRANDO

In here?

BRANDO leaves to locate the electrical box.

TENNESSEE

Now, everyone, this was way before anyone had ever heard the name… Hold on, what was his name…?

Lights turn on.

TENNESSEE

Goodness, the lights work.

BRANDO enters, turning the lights off again.

BRANDO

I liked it like this anyways. (*extending hand*) Bud.

TENNESSEE

Bud? Your name’s—? No, what’s the one on the paper? The one they know.

BRANDO

Marlon?

TENNESSEE

Marlon! Everyone, this is—Marlon, is that you?! Jesus G-d, were you ever this thin…?! Oh! (*putting on an act*) You’re the no-name actor who wants to take on the role of Stanley Kowalski. How reasonable.

TENN opens the drawer, producing audition sides.

TENNESSEE

I’m not interested in a no-name like “Marlon Brando.” That sounds more like a canned tuna company.

BRANDO

I don’t wanna read either! Gadg gave me twenty bucks to do this, and then I’m outta here!

TENNESSEE

(*looking at sides*) Oh my, well—Wait, this is Menagerie…

TENN crumples up the paper and throws it in another drawer. He gets the correct sides.

TENNESSEE

Oh my, well I guess this read’s gonna just smart, isn’t it? You look nothing like Stanley Kowalski! He was a middle-aged man, you know.

BRANDO

Well, I’m not too sure about this part either! I figure I’m a pretty decent guy and this is just… a harsh guy.

TENNESSEE

Then I guess that’s that! Good day to you, Starkist! (*throwing the sides back in a drawer*) Oh, all right! If you insist! (*pulling out sides*) But only because Gadg—Wait, this is Menagerie again. Who put Menagerie in here? Hey, who put…? (*after reading some*) Laurette Taylor read off these sides…

EDWINA

(*after BRANDO doesn’t respond*) Eh-hem.

TENNESSEE

Right, uh. I just—hold on. Laurette Taylor read off these sides… I wanted Greta Garbo, but she denied me flatly.

EDWINA

Finish the Brando memory!

TENNESSEE

Uh…

EDWINA

We’ll get to Garbo later!

TENNESSEE

Brando’s nervous and sweet on the inside but reads so well as a bad man that it redirects both of our histories; really, all of entertainment history. He fixes my plumbing and sleeps on my floor and in the morning we walk up and down the beach in total silence. Wadn’t that fun? I’m sorry, but I remember Garbo and I had this excellent conversation about celebrities; the audience’d love to hear it. We were at this party, or, no it was a bar—

EDWINA

You can’t leave the memory until Brando agrees to read.

TENNESSEE

Oh, right. (*to BRANDO*) Would you like to read?

EDWINA

(*after BRANDO doesn’t respond*) That isn’t what you say to him. Come on.

TENNESSEE

Uh… Toughen up! Be a barrel-chested behemoth and read this! What, you can’t confront the—(*to EDWINA*) Sorry, Charlie; this is no fun to say. He was avoiding becoming his father.

EDWINA

Wow, maybe we should just skip Garbo tonight.

TENNESSEE

(*to BRANDO*) What, you can’t confront your fears? Life needs these ugly things; that’s what makes it so perfect! Be the ugly man and for as long as you have stamina you can run from the later consequences!

BRANDO takes the sides and studies them for a moment.

BRANDO

You Blanche?

Blackout on BRANDO.

TENNESSEE

Wonderful, wonderful! Wadn’t that trivial. Now, I’d always admired Greta Garbo—even as a young boy. She was a Virgo.

GRETA GARBO enters in a huff.

TENNESSEE

Ahh… Greta!

GARBO

Sorry, sir! I’m so sorry: rush!

GARBO blazes past and exits.

TENNESSEE

And that, folks, is how I met Greta Garbo! She was hurrying down the street as I was trying to get her to see a play of mine: Small Craft Warnings, but the Swedish tend to keep their distance. Don’t worry: we’ll see her again… Now… the next… uh… Jesus, what was it… This, right here, is the universe?

EDWINA

(*whispered*) Pisces!

TENNESSEE

Next was a Pisces! Pisces are sweet as caramels but oh so sensitive.

DIANA BARRYMORE enters, permanently clutching her luxurious purse. She’s smaller than the others in every way that one can be—her voice desperate to overcome its squeak.

TENNESSEE

Now, I met Elizabeth Taylor a long—Who the hell are you?

DIANA

Um… I’m sorry. Diana Barrymore.

TENN looks to EDWINA, who looks to the Machine.

DIANA

Are you Mr. Williams? I’ve—I’m sorry, I’ve been meaning to ask you about reading for—

Blackout on DIANA.

EDWINA

There we go.

TENNESSEE

Who the hell was that?

EDWINA

I don’t know. Machine misfired a bit—Wrong Pisces I guess? Just give me a second. Tell a joke or something.

TENNESSEE

Uh… Where do animals go when their tails fall off?

EDWINA

Fixed it!

TENNESSEE

Good; don’t remember the punchline.

ELIZABETH TAYLOR enters, pacing.

TENNESSEE

Ah! Now that looks more like Elizabeth Taylor, doesn’t it? She was pleasant as peaches that day, as we—

TAYLOR shrieks—absolute disarray.

TENNESSEE

No, no, no. Lil’ Edwina?

EDWINA

Yeah, I’m working on it. What is up with this thing tonight?

TENNESSEE

Pardon me for a moment, Liz, we’re having some technical—

TAYLOR

They’re gonna find out… They’re gonna find out about Eddie.

TENNESSEE

Eddie…

TAYLOR

Debbie’s husband. The singer.

TENNESSEE

Debbie…

TAYLOR

Reynolds. The dancer.

TENNESSEE

Eddie Fisher…? What about him?

Taylor

We’re involved. They’re gonna find out. I’m done for, Tenn. I’m finally becoming Maggie.

Tennessee

Oh, I’d recommend that one avoid becoming my female characters. Lil’ Edwina, this is way after she and I met!

Edwina

My favorite part was when I said I was working on it.

Tennessee

What should I do?!

Edwina

Whatever you did right then! I don’t know!

Taylor

First the divorce… then Mike…

Tennessee

Yes, Mike… Divorces… People get divorced to Mike—I don’t know what I’m doing—I don’t remember what I said to her! Should I tell another joke?

Edwina

It’s fascinating how much easier it is to fix the Machine while I also talk to you.

Tennessee

Mike… Mike. Mike? (*remembering*) Helicopter crash, train—plane crash! Mike died in a plane crash. We were discussing you being unable to do Suddenly, Last Summer. I probably have to stay here until you agree to doing it. (*to EDWINA*) Yes? (*off her glare*) Let’s try that. (*to TAYLOR*) I’m sorry about your new dead husband.

Taylor

Ha. G-d, you should write yourself more. I’m sure the rest of us are becoming stale stimulus. Dried up… You’re in a queer mood today. I don’t know what you started taking, but I’m in need. You got anything?

Tennessee

Pills…? I don’t know. I’m not sure if I’m there yet.

Edwina

Shh! The kids don’t need to hear about that!

Taylor

You can just say no. I like that you care about me. You’re a better friend than you need to be… I’m going to do it.

Tennessee

Wow, that was easy! Are we done here?

Taylor

I expected… resistance.

Tennessee

Why? I did want you to do it!

Taylor

Oh, that’s good to hear… I know you care about me. I felt terrible.

Tennessee

Stop worrying about others. Worry about yourself.

Taylor

Thanks for stopping by, you have no idea what you’ve done for me. It’ll be good to see Mike again.

Tennessee

Yes—I’m sorry, what?

TAYLOR gets a gun from the drawer.

Tennessee

Liz, what is that!? What are you doing!?

Taylor

Did you want to leave the room? I can wait; I don’t want to scar you.

Tennessee

Don’t do that!

Edwina

I don’t know how to fix it!

Taylor

I’m doing it. I’m finally doing it. This is for me. I deserve it.

Tennessee

You don’t! Don’t do that! (*after LIZ takes a step away*) Hold on… No, hold on… I don’t think you can actually kill yourself here, ‘cause you don’t kill yourself here, right…? (*to EDWINA*) Right? Liz Taylor doesn’t (*pantomime gunshot*), right? Liz… you don’t kill yourself. I have… nothing to worry about.

After a moment, TAYLOR crumbles to the ground, crying.

Tennessee

Well, I certainly understand remembering this one.

Taylor

You of all people don’t deserve this right now… I’m sorry…

Tennessee

What are you talking about?

Taylor

Bette told… I heard about Frank.

Tennessee

You what?

Taylor

I’m sorry; I heard about Frank and you don’t need more of this than you’ve got; I’m sorry. I’m so sorry…

Lights up on FRANK in the scrim room, smoking and staring up at the stars.

Taylor

I’ll do Summer, just… don’t let this be Liz. Don’t let this be…

TENN moves to the room. Blackout on TAYLOR.

Edwina

Uh, Tenn, I didn’t… He’s not ‘cause of me so… So… Frank. This is Sinatra?

TENN enters the scrim room.

Edwina

Kapra.

Tennessee

Merlo… Have you ever heard such a stupidly pretty name? Frankie Merlo. He was a Capricorn. (*to FRANK*) Anybody ever told you you’re the most gorgeous thing to ever strike upon his life?

Frank

I’m sure you say that to every boy you meet out here.

Tennessee

No, I don’t… If I did, that was stupid; I meant it with you.

Frank

And I’m sure that’s never been the accompanied explanation.

Tennessee

You speak like… somebody who’s good at words.

Frank

You seem like the village idiot.

Tennessee

Yes.

Frank

Which village?

Tennessee

Mississippi. Well, New York now. Now… Look at you… It’s really now again… Oh, I’m Thomas. They like calling me Tennessee. I’m fond on it too.

Frank

Tennessee from Mississippi, now New York? Frank Merlo.

Tennessee

Look how beautiful your skin is.

Frank

Sicilian.

Tennessee

Sicilians make for exciting actors.

Frank

You’re an actor too?

Tennessee

I gave that up a while ago. Writer.

Frank

Ah, life was too banal in the frying pan… As in now you’re in fire. Frying pan, fire.

Tennessee

I don’t remember you being so intellectually stimulating, Frankie Merlo.

Edwina

(*reminding*) Tour.

Tennessee

We were standing on a Massachusetts sand dune, looking up at the stars, and, all I could think was… I really want to sleep with you.

Frank

I thought I was Frank.

Tennessee

(*becoming a puddle*) That is such a stupid pun! Excuse me, why have you not kissed me yet? I’m very sure that at this point you and I should have kissed.

TENN pulls out a nasal spray and takes a sniff.

Tennessee

My nasal spray! Oh, it’s just preventative; I’m not sick. I was real sick when I was a boy. But I’m not now! And it wasn’t contagious. It still isn’t, because I don’t have it anymore. I’m not sick; you won’t get sick.

Frank

Never been a day in my life.

This strikes a nerve in TENN.

Edwina

What have I seen him in?

Tennessee

Uh… What did we talk about?

Frank

Your plays?

Tennessee

No, next topic, if you would.

Frank

Your plays?

Tennessee

We’re skipping that. Let’s let the folks get to know you.

Edwina

If you talked about your plays then…

Frank

Your plays?

Tennessee

I don’t want to talk about my plays.

Frank

Why?

A ghostly spot lights up ROSE WILLIAMS stage right, whom TENN sees over FRANK’s shoulder. She’s a burnt up shell and there’s blood all over her hands. TENN exits the scrim room to look at her.

Tennessee

(*terrified*) Okay! Lil’ Edwina, that’s enough!

Edwina

What do you mean?

Blackout on ROSE.

Tennessee

He’s not a star! We shouldn’t be here; I’m sorry!

Edwina

He just said he was an actor!

Tennessee

He didn’t become a star; we should go!

Edwina

What happened to him?

Tennessee

I said that we should go! I… She’s…

TENN goes back into the scrim room.

Tennessee

April Is The Cruelest Month! That one’s from when I just started college; it’s an odd one! (*no response*) Battle of Angels: first one to actually be staged somewhere: Boston. Critics hated it. (*no response*) Stairs to the Roof: that was back in… (*beat; knowing what the answer has to be*) The Glass Menagerie.

Frank

What’s it about?

Tennessee

It’s a very cruel play…

Frank

It has a plot, doesn’t it?

Tennessee

An abused child and her brother… and… and a gentleman caller.

Blackout in the scrim room. TENN reenters the main stage.

Tennessee

I… I need to… When’s Capote?

Edwina

Why?

Tennessee

Capote always cheered me up! I need to see Truman Capote! He was a Libra!

Edwina

Truman Capote isn’t next on the schedule!

Tennessee

G-ddamn it, Edwina!

Edwina

Language!

Tennessee

I’m sorry, just… please.

Edwina

You’ll be fine! Here, let’s get back on track.

GARBO enters.

Garbo

Let’s go where it isn’t so loud.

Tennessee

Greta! (*hugging her*) We’re… we’re at the party?

Garbo

And I’d love for us to be elsewhere.

Tennessee

Yes. I’d love to talk to you, yes.

Garbo

(*window area*) Up here?

Tennessee

Wait—!

Garbo

What, are we afraid of heights all of a sudden?

GARBO goes to the window and opens it, putting her back to it and enjoying the breeze. She’s in her twenties and looks around the room with a similar absorption as FRANK, but with much more desperation: every room she’s in is her last ever.

Garbo

You remember the first time we met?

Tennessee

You ignored me on the street.

Garbo

I don’t recall that. Well, I’m sorry.

Tennessee

You wouldn’t do a… a play I wrote.

Garbo

I don’t remember that either. My age must be doing its damage, isn’t it? It’s so peculiar what our judges choose to remember; I’m referring to when Streetcar just opened. That parlor at the Ritz. You had a new screenplay and wanted me in it. Five years ago…? My, how time vanishes.

Tennessee

Yes… Yes! You should be in one of my screenplays. They’re excellent.

Garbo

My… the room is stifling.

Tennessee

(*can’t remember*) We had a conversation about… something… (*trying to move back to the tour*) We talked about the nature of celebrity. Who made you interesting rather than what.

Garbo

(*stopping him*) I love the way you talk, Tenn, but I’m going to need you to stop it. I’m interesting because I’m interesting. I don’t want to be… this anymore.

Tennessee

(*agreeing*) Celebrity is a disease!

Garbo

Not celebrity, darling… Acting.

Tennessee

Hah?

Garbo

I love walking into a room, not making a first impression. I love it. I resent acting.

Tennessee

I don’t remember our conversation going like this… You’re an actress.

Garbo

Actress is a disease, my dear. It’s made me unholy.

Tennessee

This isn’t right. This can’t be what we discussed.

Garbo

This breeze is sensational…

Tennessee

What are you talking about?

Garbo

I can’t be in your work, Tenn. I hadn’t felt anything in ages until I resigned as an actress. (*leaning back out the window, looking down*) I love the way the cars all together make a gold and a red stripe, like a Chinese dragon. And then the ones way in the distance… the ones that shine ‘cause they’re separated from the herd, the cars that look like lightning bugs, like birds that don’t fit in the V. Those sweet birds…

Tennessee

(*nerve struck*) Those sweet birds…

Lights up on ROSE. She’s different. Lively. Clean. She has a parakeet.

Garbo

When you die… what do you want to be?

TENN shuffles to ROSE, trying to get a look at her hands.

Garbo

I think I want to be one of those cars…

Lights down on GARBO. ROSE reveals a hand to be clean.

Rose

We were wondering when you were going to show up. Well, I was wondering. Antoine’s incapable of recognizing objects outside his spacial awareness. (*babying parakeet*) Yes! Yes, you are!

Tennessee

How… How old are you?

Rose

Are you drunk?

Tennessee

(*nodding*) How old are you?

Rose

Nineteen.

Tennessee

Oh, my goodness. Rose. (*hugging her*) You haven’t even had the stomachaches.

Rose

I don’t know if I’ve told you this enough, but I don’t like drunk you. You become far too sentimental and even condescending. It’s obstructive to conversation.

Tennessee

Can we have one? At nineteen you were the most wonderful person with which to have a conversation.

Rose

What shall we talk about?

Tennessee

Anything. Anything, anything, anything.

Rose

Let’s talk about mother not being able to accept that my uterus is my own uterus, and any desire she has to lay partial claim to it simply won’t be entertained.

Tennessee

She was an old bat.

Rose

Pretend you don’t adore her.

Tennessee

No, I have never once adored that woman.

Rose

Yes, you’re so rebellious in the shadows. You do everything she says; did you even want to apply for college?

Tennessee

I hate that woman with everything in me.

Rose

Ha! Have you ever said that to her?

Tennessee

Of course not.

Rose

I have. She screamed and scolded then tried to tell me a story about when she was sixteen. Ah, how I loved not listening to it.

Tennessee

I do not enjoy her!

Rose

Well, she enjoys you. Men can be bunny rabbits. Women… women need to be—You’re going to college, what animal am I looking for?

Tennessee

I haven’t the faintest idea.

Rose

Oh! Parakeets! Very pretty and entirely useless. (*babying*) Yes! Yes, you are pretty and useless!

Tennessee

She didn’t take kind to my nature either.

Rose

The woman’s got horse blinders on. She hasn’t an idea.

Tennessee

Not yet, at least.

Rose

She’ll be in the ground before she even has a passing thought about it. Now then, while you’re at college, it’s important that you have sex with as many men as possible. As many. As possible.

Tennessee

I’m not like you are.

Rose

Mm… No, you’re discovering alcohol—a much more rotten habit. At least mine is social.

Tennessee

You’re so full of life.

Rose

Stop being so sentimental; it’s ruining our discussion.

Tennessee

I can’t help it. You’re so beautiful.

Rose

Now, I’ll only tolerate your perversions to a certain level. What I liked most about them was that I was left out of it.

Tennessee

You’re so… full of language.

Rose

You and your obsession with language.

Tennessee

You had one once, too.

Rose

I currently am obsessed with language.

Tennessee

Exactly… (*re: parakeet*) How do you like him?

Rose

You’re typically g-d-awful at gift giving, but he’s a darling. I believe you’ve awoken the maternity in me. I’ll always hate you for it… I just want to squeeze his little cheeks!

Tennessee

(*same nerve struck as earlier*) I… I need to go. I’m sorry.

Rose

I know; don’t miss your train. Go get an education. Become even more pretentious.

Tennessee

I need to go—I have to—I’m not abandoning you.

Rose

You don’t think I know that? Of course you’ll be back; you’re obsessed with me. You’d never leave me alone with the Wicked Witch longer than I can handle her. And I can handle her for a long time. (*off his reaction*) Go to your train, you big crybaby. I’ll always be here.

TENN hugs her.

Rose

Yes, yes, you’re so very blubbery.

Tennessee

I don’t remember if this is the last time I saw you like this…

Rose

Dearest, you’re drunk. (*hugging him back for a few moments*) I believe we’re suffocating Antoine. (*they release*) Don’t worry. I’ll be here, Tomcat.

TENN taps his temple in agreement. Blackout on ROSE.

Edwina

What happened to her?

Tennessee

I need to see Capote.

Edwina

He isn’t next on the—

Tennessee

I don’t give a damn about the schedule! Take me to Capote!

Edwina

Just hold on… Look, the Machine’s—!

DIANA BARRYMORE enters.

Diana

Are you Mr. Williams? Diana Barrymore… I was… I…

Edwina

I don’t know how to fix it; just figure out who this is and get rid of her!

Tennessee

(*to DIANA*) What do you want?

Diana

To read. Sweet Bird of Youth. West End production. If you’ll have me.

Tennessee

You need sides?

Diana

If you have ‘em.

TENN fishes through the drawer and pauses, pulling out a bottle of pills.

Tennessee

The sleeping pills... Now that’s why I can’t remember anything... Why in the world would I remember you? (*no response*) I’ve auditioned a million actors... One fixed my plumbing and became my friend. You did neither. Why do I remember this? (*no response*) Sides.

TENN produces them and hands them to her.

Diana

(*re: sides*) No, sorry… No, it’s fine… No, it isn’t—I was reading for Princess.

Tennessee

And?

Diana

I don’t… These aren’t…

Tennessee

Read whatever I gave you. You were probably too old for Princess. How old are you?

Diana

Thirty-eight.

Tennessee

Thirty-eight?! You’re so young! Princess is, what—?

Diana

I’m well old enough in actress years. This is the right time for me. I… relate to her, Mr. Williams.

Tennessee

Don’t relate to my female characters; please can this stop being a thing?

Diana

Oh, certainly!

Tennessee

Don’t agree with me.

Diana

Right!

Tennessee

You want to read for Princess? (*getting new sides*) Blow me out of the water.

TENN sits on a stool as DIANA reads, trying to keep the script steady in her hands. She’s horrible:

Diana

“The face of Franz Albertzart, a face that tomorrow’s sun will touch without mercy. Of course, you were—” (*readjusting; retrying*) “The face of Franz Albertzart, a face that tomorrow’s sun will touch without mercy. Of course, you were crowned with laurel in the beginning, your gold hair was wreathed with laurel, but the gold is thinning and the laurel has withered—”

Tennessee

Stop… (*to EDWINA*) Tell me I can leave now.

Edwina

Nope… Guess she’s reading more!

Tennessee

(*to DIANA*) How long did you say you’ve been doing this? Acting?

Diana

I’ve had my heydays. But I’ve got another one coming up.

Tennessee

Yes. Look, Princess Kos is dried jerky. She doesn’t have the energy to be nervous. Do exhausted.

Diana

Exhausted? No, I’m… Yes, I think I’m exhausted but what true daughter of the stage sleeps?

Tennessee

Sure! Now we’re talking! Use that drive and just read it.

Diana

Oh, with pleasure…! Am I driven or am I exhausted?

Tennessee

Surprise me!

Diana

(*terrified*) “Face it—pitiful monster... Of course, I know I’m one too. But one with a difference. Do you know what the different is? No, you don’t know. I’ll tell you. We are two monsters”… “We are two monsters”… “We”… “But with this difference between us. Out of the passion and torment of my existence… I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic, that I can unveil, which is true. But you? You’ve come back to the town you were born in, to a girl that won’t see you because you put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and hung on a butcher’s hook, like a chicken dressed for Sunday.” (*off his reaction*) I can do it again.

Tennessee

(*to EDWINA*) Please tell me she doesn’t do it again.

Edwina

No, you need to… give her something. I don’t know what.

Tennessee

There’s no way it’s the part.

Edwina

I don’t know what.

Tennessee

I am not giving you the part.

Diana

Right…

Tennessee

(*to DIANA*) Oh… I’m sorry, you’re a phenomenal actress; this is not the part for you.

Diana

(*beat*) Thank you, Mr. Williams. This was an absolute honor that I’m glad I did. I… I’d love for you know… that I wanted this role—Oh! I didn’t mean it like that!

Tennessee

The role doesn’t go to who wants it the most—

Diana

Yes! Right! I know that. I know—I’m… I’m very, very good at… Believe me, this is just… Stupid. I’m stupid—I’m so sorry.

Tennessee

You’ll be fine. It’s all right. Get some sleep.

Diana

My father’s John—! I… Yes. I will. I’ll go. Thank you for being so… (*beat*) I can read it again. I would like to do that.

Tennessee

I’m in a rush.

Diana

I can rush! I’m a daughter of the… I’m…

TENN looks around, producing the sleeping pills and handing them to her.

Tennessee

Darling, you need sleep. I have helped you. Mm?

Diana

Mr. Williams.

Tennessee

Mrs. Barry…? Barry…? You did your read. This isn’t your part. You’ve been in this business long enough to understand that you’ll just have to deal with booking the next one.

Diana

(*beat*) Oh, certainly! I’ll get the next one, just you…! You’ll see me in the next one! Don’t you come knocking once I’ve…! Because I’ll be…!

Tennessee

You will. You’re an excellent actress and an absolute darling. You’ll break their hearts next time. Thank you for coming in, Mrs…

Diana

“Darling…” That was just my favorite word for the longest time… I don’t know why I had to say that aloud—my apologies.

Tennessee

Queer thing to say. That why I remember you?

Diana

I just don’t think anybody knew that about me… What my favorite word used to be…

DIANA puts the pill bottle in her purse and moves away.

Tennessee

Bless her dainty heart.

Edwina

(*looking through Machine*) Huh… I’m not seeing her again. I think you got rid of her!

Tennessee

Okay. Sorry, folks. Small detours; not gonna happen again. Who’s next on the schedule?

TENN puts the sides back in the drawer. DIANA pulls the pill bottle out of her purse, opens it, and peeks at its contents. Looking to TENN, she exhales and lets all the pills tumble down her throat.

Tennessee

(*re: EDWINA’s reaction*) What? What are you—?

TENN sees what DIANA’s doing and gasps.

Tennessee

What?! No… no, no, no…

DIANA exits, stumbling.

Tennessee

Oh, no… We gotta go back.

Edwina

I…

Tennessee

We’re doing that one again.

Edwina

What did she…?! Oh, Tenn, no matter! Don’t—You can’t change what—

Tennessee

I don’t give a shit!

Edwina

What happened to—?!

Tennessee

I don’t rem—no, I…! I get a call a week later from her manager saying—apparently—she really wanted to be the Princess! And that isn’t my g-ddamn fault! I auditioned a thousand actors and one kills herself; that isn’t my fault! Plenty of them took it great! Took it professionally…! I was not too hard on her; this is a hard business… And it wasn’t like I killed Audrey fucking Hepburn! It was Diane Barry… Diane Baritone… Bari…

TENN lets what he just said sink in.

Tennessee

Again…

Edwina

What?

Tennessee

Please, just try to find her again.

Edwina

I’m sorry about the Machine.

Tennessee

Find her again! Just… Put her back!

Edwina

We’re gonna—here. (*before TENN can interrupt*) It’s all right. It’s all right…

TRUMAN CAPOTE enters holding a pair of wingtips. He’s in his forties and pompously dismissive of any and all things in sight.

Capote

You know, I was thinking that I was going to be on this big boat with not a single interesting soul and my goodness gracious here’s the great Tennessee Williams.

TENN hugs CAPOTE, who doesn’t respond to it at all.

Tennessee

Truman Capote. Why, I don’t remember you being young and beautiful at all.

Capote

And you’re porcelain swamp trash, but it’s only polite to keep certain observations to ourselves.

Tennessee

You and I still get along, don’t we?

Capote

We get along famously. You’re by far the silliest person I’ve ever known. Now, the captain ordered that until we reach New York I’m not to be served one more drop of liquor, so it’d be wonderful for you to find somewhere in your black heart to sneak me a bottle of something ancient. Something that rotted.

Tennessee

I forgot you used to be charming.

Capote

I’m the most exciting thing on the Atlantic.

Tennessee

Whose shoes?

Capote

Well, I found them outside a gentleman’s room, so I assumed he was sick of them. It’s not like they smell or anything.

Tennessee

And he didn’t want them shined?

Capote

Well, of course he wanted them shined, you goof, why on Earth are you trying to derail my act? I’ve spent the whole morning taking people’s shoes and putting them elsewhere. It’s just a malicious activity and I think it might replace alcohol.

Tennessee

When did you stop being funny?

Capote

I’m hilarious. I’m also dry as a fingernail and want something rotten.

Tennessee

(*remembering*) Bleached wine.

Capote

Oh, I know what that is—but you should still describe it.

Tennessee

Winemakers bleach their corks cause it looks better. Sometimes, bleach filling in the cork holes doesn’t allow necessary aeration, and the wine is tainted. Smells like soil.

Capote

Stop it. We’re searching this entire boat—

CAPOTE drops the shoes and leaves, halting at the nearby wine rack.

Capote

Oh, my goodness—how convenient. *(inspecting bottles)* This here is a Burgundy bottle. It’s got these shoulders ‘cause this wine throws sediment like it’s paint. It’s a horrid vintage. I would not once put this inside me.

Tennessee

This is a Bordeaux bottle.

Capote

Please stop this slander. I know that I’m a fraud. You’re a writer; you should find the adventure in playing along. I’m going to see your play as soon as I get the chance, by the way. I hear you’ve found some kind of acting demig-d. Is he a homosexual?

Tennessee

He isn’t opposed. (*off his reaction*) We haven’t. He would never do it for a role.

Capote

That’s such a pity.

Tennessee

You’ve got roles to give out now?

Capote

Well, they’re certainly making Other Voices, Other Rooms into a film someday. I’m not sure if I’m in need of a brute, but if I’m doing the adaptation, I’ll write one.

Tennessee

He isn’t a brute.

Capote

More pities. None of these corks are—I feel so betrayed! If I have to drink regular wine now I’m going to throw myself into the Atlantic, and I want you to speak at my funeral and explain to them that it’s all your fault.

Tennessee

That’s fine.

Capote

(*beat*) How’s your friend doing?

Tennessee

I’m sorry?

Capote

You’re right. “I’m sorry for asking, but” how’s your friend doing?

Tennessee

Which?

Capote

Am I wrong? Was it not you? Who’s the one with the…?

Lights up on FRANK in the scrim room, smoking.

Tennessee

(*going cold*) Someone else.

Capote

Oh, well that’s good. I’m wretched at grief. If I ever get cancer, the thing that’s gonna kill me is all the people crying. People are so oily when they cry. I’m going to my cabin. (*grabbing a bottle from the rack*) This is going to have to do, but I promise you that I’m hysterical.

CAPOTE exits.

Frank

Tommy Williams…? Long time no see. What are you doing in Cape Town?

Tennessee

(*going to scrim room*) You recognized me after years. After only seeing me one time on a sand dune, my face only lit by starlight. And you recognized it. Why would you do that? (*no response*) Why didn’t you try to reach me?

Frank

Streetcar made you golden, and I’m not one for hopping on bandwagons.

TENN kisses FRANK with force, surprising him.

Frank

Wow… I’ve been thinking about you since as well. Glad that’s settled.

Tennessee

This… I can’t do it to you again. (*no response*) It’d be very polite of you to stop looking at me like that; it’s intoxicating and unfair. (*no response*) Do you want to see a show with Bette Davis in it?

Frank

You know Bette Davis?

TENN grabs FRANK’s hand and the scrim room goes black. TENN reenters the stage not holding anybody anymore.

Tennessee

What? Where did he—?

BETTE DAVIS enters, drunk. She’s visually in her twenties but behaviorally senile.

Tennessee

Bette! Where’s Frank?

Davis

Ugh. I hate his name, Tenn. Don’t even whisper him around me.

Tennessee

What!? What are you talking about?! (*taking bottle*) Where’s Frank?!

Davis

Hopefully New York, back to that Actor’s Studio he crawled out of.

Tennessee

What…? Frank Corsaro! Right, he’s directing Night of the Iguana, uh-huh?

Davis

And I’m not starring.

Tennessee

Yes, you are—‘cause I brought Frankie to opening night!

Davis

Not a whisper!

Tennessee

Frank Merlo. That’s why I’m here. It was before anything bad happened and I think I deserve to relive one good memory from my wretched personal life!

Davis

I’m not going on while that fucker claims to be a director!

Tennessee

You can’t switch director night of—that defeats the purpose!

Davis

No.

Tennessee

G-d fucking damn it, Bette!

Edwina

Language!

Tennessee

She just said the fuck word too! Bette, what’s his problem?

Davis

The problem is that you told me Gadg was directing, not this Method creep!

Tennessee

Tell me what you want. Whatever gets you onstage.

Davis

I want him gone!

Tennessee

He’s not going!

Davis

I want to have sex with Jimmy!

Tennessee

Farentino? Who doesn’t?!

Davis

Put in a good word—I want you to do one mean thing to Tallulah Bankhead.

Tennessee

Gladly.

Davis

I should’ve been your Blanche. Oh! I want to play Amanda Wingfield.

Tennessee

What? How old are you?

Davis

People have been playing her as sixty!—Fifty!—I’m thirty-seven!

Tennessee

Why does Amanda keep getting older?

Davis

Next Menagerie; West End, Hollywood, nickelodeon smut; I’m your girl.

KATHARINE HEPBURN enters, vibrantly twenty but dressed for her seventies.

Katharine

Bette! Marvelous work!

Davis

Kat! You’re still alive!

Katharine

Mr. Williams, I would like to ask you for something.

Tennessee

Katharine, I’m not giving you anything, I’m not waiting till you agree to anything; you get the hell out of this room.

Katharine

I would like your blessing to play Amanda Wingfield.

Davis

Uh-huh.

Tennessee

G-d. Damn it. (*to EDWINA*) How do I get Frank in here?

Edwina

Bette Davis just needs to go onstage and you need to watch your language.

Tennessee

I am not giving her to Katharine Hepburn! (*to KATHARINE*) No!

Katharine

You didn’t like my work in Suddenly?

Tennessee

Everything about it was terrible. Especially you. You spit in Mankie’s face.

Katharine

You never sent me a thank you note for that one.

Tennessee

You’re not Amanda Wingfield. Congrats, Bette!

Katharine

Mankiewitz bullied Montgomery Clift, and I don’t take kind to watching the abuse of others artists.

Tennessee

You being Amanda would abuse me.

Katharine

You hated Mankiewitz.

Tennessee

Mrs. Hepburn—

Katharine

Ms.

Tennessee

I’m gay.

Katharine

I’m widowed. The studio won’t have me if you don’t want me. It’s a television movie; it’s beneath me.

Davis

Wait, so they’re already planning one? Tenn!

Katharine

The only reason I would have to do it would be because… to have your script—and especially your blessing.

Tennessee

The script can be acquired with a library card.

Katharine

What other reasons do you have to detest me?

Tennessee

I promised it to Bette.

Davis

He did.

Katharine

You hate Bette.

Davis

You hate Bette?

Tennessee

Bette’s my favorite. I hate your acting.

Katharine

Four Oscars.

Tennessee

You hate my favorite people.

Katharine

Who? Bette? You like her because you hate her—I’ve read your work.

Tennessee

Why can’t you just die already?! G-d! I’m in a rush! It’s yours!

Katharine

You surprise me.

KATHARINE exits.

Davis

In my presence you give Amanda to Katharine Hep—?

Tennessee

I’m writing a play called Sweet Bird of Youth. (*using hand signals*) Jimmy Farentino’s got the part if he rides the D-Train right into Broadway.

Davis

I can perform tonight.

Tennessee

A thousand blessings.

FRANK enters.

Frank

That was really something incredib—

TENN jumps and kisses FRANK passionately.

Tennessee

Hi.

Frank

Hi. Wonderful work again, Bette.

Davis

Mm. (*pretending to see something offstage*) Would you look at that? Oh, it’s so interesting.

DAVIS exits coyly.

Tennessee

We go to my place now. (*smiling*) No, wait! We have to play through it, don’t we? Frank Merlo, would you like to see my apartment? (*no response*) What? No, wait… what did I say? I know I said something adorable and he went to my apartment. It was…

Edwina

I don’t think this is your first date…

Tennessee

Yes, it is! What? (*to FRANK*) How’d you like Bette?

Frank

Two’s Company was better. She’s gotta stick to the screen, honestly. Never tell her I said that. But tell Tally I said that, if you could.

Tennessee

You know Tallulah Bankhead?

Edwina

I went to your next memory with Frank!

Tennessee

No, no. Frank. Capricorn.

Edwina

Yeah… This is the next thing you remember with him.

Tennessee

What are you talking about? I wouldn’t have introduced him to Tally until… G-d, years in.

Edwina

This is… well, I don’t know. This is just the next thing you remember.

Tennessee

There’s… that… no.

Lights up on dining area. CAPOTE stands with WARHOL and a POLICEMAN.

Capote

Tenn, please explain to this man that you know who we are.

Tennessee

No… no, no, no.

Capote

(*to POLICEMAN*) That doesn’t bode well for my claim, but he knows me.

Frank

We know him! It’s fine!

Tennessee

What are you doing here?!

Capote

I couldn’t get in the front door so me and my painter friend climbed up the balcony. This policeman thought it was appropriate to intervene on our visit. I think it’s improper to allow yourself in uninvited like that, but I’m being funny right now and no one is laughing.

Policeman

Do I have reason to believe there are narcotics in this apartment?

Frank

There are no narcotics in this apartment.

Capote

Of course there aren’t…

WARHOL

Of course, no…

Policeman

(*exiting*) I’m searching the toilet tank.

Tennessee

No…

Frank

(*once he’s out of earshot, whispered*) You brought narcotics?!

Capote

Well, I know you don’t keep any in your apartment and my friend here brought enough to ruin our careers twice.

Frank

Where are they?!

WARHOL

(*fidgeting*) A safe place.

Policeman

(*entering with the sleeping pill bottle*) What are these?

Tennessee

Oh, Christ… It’s fine!

Policeman

Why were they in the bathroom?

Capote

Bathroom pills are a delicacy that is our right as Americans to enjoy.

Policeman

I’m sorry; did you want to say something?

WARHOL

Don’t say anything, they have long memories.

Tennessee

Christ, just please get them out of here. (*no response*) Take the sleeping pills away from here, could you just…

TENN nervously takes a sniff of the nasal spray. The POLICEMAN snatches it.

Tennessee

It’s nasal spray! It can’t get you high! Believe me, by this point I’ve tried.

The POLICEMAN smacks the pill bottle and spray around in his hands then hands them to TENN. Unable to use anything, the POLICEMAN exits with a huff.

Capote

(*beat; re: spray*) A friend of mine once inhaled the cap from one of those things. Got caught in his glottal. Took him hours to totally asphyxiate. I’m almost positive he cried the whole time and I’m being funny again because these silences do things to me and no one is laughing again and let’s please get settled.

WARHOL

(*patting pants*) I have it, and soundly too.

All but TENN go to sit.

Tennessee

Go to a different memory with Frank. A good one. Just us.

Edwina

Okay, let me look… (*frowning at Machine*) Uh… I only have one more memory with just you two.

Tennessee

That’s bullshit.

Edwina

Hey…! Now look here: there’s still one with just you two.

Tennessee

One…?

Edwina

You wanna go?

Tennessee

No! Have you not figured out that the random bits I’m remembering was ‘cause it was too fucked up to forget!?

Edwina

Language! We’ll skip through the sniff-sniff—‘cause the kids don’t need to see that—and just jump an hour! Frank’s still here and we get our stars in! Who wins? Everybody wins!

Tennessee

You don’t get it! This isn’t a good memory. This is where… I am not meeting him.

Edwina

Who?

Capote

Oh! Tenn, have you met my friend, Angel? Of course his real name isn’t Angel, that’s just what I’ve been calling him out of spite. Andy Warhol, Tennessee Williams; Tennessee Williams, Andy Warhol.

Lights go dark on all but TENN. Beat. TENN walks towards the table and sits, relighting it. An hour has passed and they’re in a drunken conversation. WARHOL is, as always, seemingly dead sober. He observes TENN as a casual predator, his eyes cold and uncaring in who discovers them staring.

Capote

And I hate this cat with every precious fiber in me! I want it dead. I can’t write because I spend all day fantasizing about shoving it in a freezer or burning it alive and the two are very mutually exclusive, so every time I get home I can’t do a thing but seethe at it in indecision!

Frank

What’s its name?

Capote

It doesn’t deserve one.

WARHOL

So. Tennessee, you write plays? That’s riveting.

Capote

We don’t need to hear about that. We need to hear about this novel I’m almost done writing—novella. Novella and three short stories. It’s about a prostitute who doesn’t have sex with the men—maybe—they call these girls “call girls”—and that’s how I know its going to make a dapper film as soon as it’s published—and the woman, this woman’s name is Holly—I’ll tell you who’s playing her, fantastic actress if I get my way: Monroe. Have you met her?

WARHOL

Tell me about your Sweet Bird of Youth. Right? That’s such a nice name.

Tennessee

How ‘bout I don’t talk to you. (*no response*) We just sit here and don’t go past this point and (*to FRANK*) why aren’t you holding my hand back? Or did I not even grab yours that night? ‘Cause that blond kept looking at me with his hungry eyes. (*no response*) Did you even once look at me that night? Or were you drooling at meeting another star…?

Edwina

Tenn, is ev—

Tennessee

Sweet Bird of Youth is a play.

Frank

It’s an amazing play; my favorite so far.

WARHOL

What’s it about?

Tennessee

No! G-d…! It was that g-ddamn painter I go to Key West with, then… then that dinner where you leap across the table, and I call the police… It’s a play about a man heading to Hollywood to pursue his glossy-eyed dreams, but romance obstructs.

Capote

Stories about Hollywood are the next big thing. Good on you.

Frank

Regular people can’t help but get starstruck.

Tennessee

There’s you admitting it! Maybe that’s why I don’t have good memories of just us together? ‘Cause you just wanted to go stargazing. Oh, shut up!

WARHOL

Oh, finally some photogénie.

Capote

I want Holly Golightly to sweep people off their feet.

Tennessee

I am choosing to blaze through these great memories with these fabulous people to try to spend them with you, and you don’t look at me during them. You always look at them. You’re right, Angelboy: photo-gentry.

Capote

Breakfast is going to be on my tombstone. I adore it.

TENN grabs a bottle off the table and leaves, blacking the dining area. After a bit, WARHOL follows him.

Edwina

Where are you going?

Tennessee

What if we only remember past loves as being magical ‘cause our brains pick the most self-sabotaging things to remember? He always wanted to see the stars and I always obliged. Like I do everything. And now I gotta renegotiate that… he only kept me around as a magnet… and then I kept him around to keep me warm. To give me a home base in every starlet-studded evening. To tell me my life had some purity in it.

WARHOL

Excuse me, mustache man, have you ever been to Florida? I think you’d like it; it’s hot.

TENN grabs WARHOL’s hand and leads him. WARHOL gets ahead of TENN, letting go and exiting, smiling back.

Edwina

You ran?

Tennessee

I… Look, I…

Newman

So I’m in the running?

PAUL NEWMAN enters, trying to stay charming through his nervousness.

Newman

Look, that’s all I’m asking… I… I know I’m nobody; but you specialize in nobodies! Look at Brando and Tandy and just… give me a shot.

Tennessee

How many random actors off the street only came to me for parts?

Newman

This is different! I’m perfect for it!

Tennessee

And that was always the accompanied explanation.

Newman

Just… I just want to work with you.

Tennessee

Oh, was that ever true?

Newman

No, I want to work with Liz Taylor. But I know that you can’t have good acting without good writing! Ask anyone; I have always said that!

Tennessee

I don’t care. I don’t care about any of it.

Newman

I’m a failure, I’ve certainly recognized that other men can be attractive, I’m not the most keen on the bottle but I’m willing to make further inquiries; I’m Brick! I’m perfect for this! I know it wasn’t written for me—

Tennessee

I don’t care!

Newman

(*full stop*) You… I… I’m sorry I wasted your time.

TENN shakes his head and goes still, finding the bottle of sleeping pills still in his pocket. He looks to NEWMAN, hiding the pills.

Tennessee

What do you even want out here? Why do you want to be in this place? You’re a failed actor? Great! Save up and go buy an ice cream shop; sell ice cream. You know who gets betrayed in the ice cream business? Fucking nobody.

Edwina

Language.

Tennessee

(*to EDWINA*) I—! I’m sorry… (*after cooling*) Where are you from?

Newman

Nowhere. Ohio.

Tennessee

Go home to Nowhere, Ohio. Nobody wants to hurt you in Ohio.

Newman

Look! Okay, yes, that’s what everyone’s told me, but when you were in my shoes, and if somebody like Tennessee Williams told you not to chase it—told you to keep your distance—would you have listened to him?

Tennessee

(*beat*) No… But I wasn’t after the chase.

Newman

(*agreeing*) I ran away for as long as I—

Tennessee

I didn’t run! I left! There’s a difference! You’re too young to know what you’re talking about.

Newman

Maybe I’m always gonna be a failure, that’s… I can’t go back there… I don’t even remember what my mom looks like and my… There’s just some things I can’t face yet.

Lights up on ROSE. We can’t see her hands.

Newman

Maybe someday, if I’m ever able to be you.

TENN moves to ROSE.

Tennessee

Yes, you’re in the running, Mr. Newman.

Newman

(*smiling; exiting*) Call me Paul.

Before TENN can reach her, blackout on ROSE.

WARHOL

(*in darkness*) I was getting worried.

Lights up on WARHOL, who goes to kiss TENN. TENN averts.

WARHOL

Don’t worry, I won’t do it when Frank’s here. I’m a simple monster; we both are, you know. Now, I’m not one for things being healthy, but this seems like a very healthy thing for everyone. Get the stink out in the open. Ease Frank into it, the poor boy.

Capote

(*entering with a very sick FRANK*) My goodness, I thought I’d be spending this whole evening bored to tears, but look who arrived. I’m going to get the wine.

CAPOTE exits. FRANK immediately goes to sit, the occasional cough curling him like a pill bug.

WARHOL

How are you feeling, sweetie?

WARHOL sits, TENN staring only at FRANK. CAPOTE enters with wine and a corkscrew.

Capote

Angel, this cork is milk white. How did you know?

WARHOL

Because you don’t shut up.

Capote

This bottle’s only for me. And maybe a sip for Tenn: pallet royalties.

Tennessee

No. (*no response*) No, of course I’m drinking.

WARHOL

Frankie, would you like some soup?

Capote

Soup?! It’s a thousand degrees outside!

WARHOL

The Arabs drink hot tea on hot days. Eases the blood.

Capote

(*popping cork out*) I’ll keep mine cold, thank you.

WARHOL

I know you will—I was asking Frankie. (*to FRANK*) You like it hot, don’t you?

Capote

Oh, speak of the fucking devil! Guess who’s Holly Golightly, my call girl: Audrey fucking Hepburn.

WARHOL

Yes, congrats.

Capote

I’m beside myself! I ask for Marilyn and they give me the least Southern, least gritty actress on the entire market! They all want me to overdose! Imagine that woman as Holly; it’s going to spoil the entire thing! (*beat; to FRANK*) I noticed you weren’t smoking, Frankie. How’s your lung?

WARHOL

Oh, gosh!

Capote

What! When it’s quiet too long I play “I Spy” with the room’s elephants!

Frank

My lung isn’t good.

Capote

I’m sorry to hear that. I… (*beat*) I love my lungs. I don’t know what I’d do without them.

WARHOL

This is becoming divine.

Frank

(*filling with rage*) You think this is funny?

WARHOL

Not funny, but the photogénie is delicious.

Tennessee

Frankie…

Capote

This is fine soil. Just my kind. Mazel tov, Angel.

WARHOL

I’m an artist; I notice beautiful things. And all I was saying is this is simply a moment, albeit heartbreaking.

Tennessee

I’m sorry.

WARHOL

I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be talking. I’ve done enough to you.

Frank

What? What did you do?

WARHOL

(*looking to TENN*) He doesn’t know?

FRANK looks to TENN, who can’t look away. FRANK turns back to WARHOL, leaps, and strangles WARHOL. CAPOTE jumps out of his seat, crying out “Stop! Stop it!” again and again as TENN watches.

Tennessee

Frankie, stop… Please just… (*shaking his head*) STOP!

EDWINA slams the machine and the scene freezes.

Tennessee

This is the last time I saw my boyfriend Frank when he was strong enough to leap across a table. Look at those arms. I remember when they were still that thick… G-d, just one more—just of us lying around on a beach together, but I don’t have it. I poisoned all of them. I’ll never feel ‘em again… Frankie, we went together like two jagged edges… I hoped you loved it like I did. (*hugging FRANK*) When you see me next, say something sweet to me.

TENN goes to the phone and dials.

Tennessee

(*struggling to put on the act*) A man I don’t know… A man I don’t know is strangling my boyfriend. Take him far away from here.

FRANK lets go, succumbing to a coughing fit. WARHOL falls to the ground, gasping. Blackout on the dining scene. Lights up on ROSE, hands still unseen. TENN begins to hurry to her, then cautiously slows. Upon reaching ROSE, TENN discovers her hands to be clean.

Rose

And here I was believing you’d never return.

Tennessee

Oh, my G-d… (*hugging her*) Oh, my G-d; you’re still in there.

Rose

Ah. You’re drunk again.

Tennessee

I didn’t think I had anything left of you. You’re still in there.

ROSE’s “ghostly spot” flashes.

Tennessee

What was that?

Rose

(*to EDWINA*) Is everything all right?

Edwina

It’s acting up again! I don’t know how much longer we’re gonna be staying here.

Tennessee

(*to ROSE*) Look here, if you and I were to have only—

Rose

(*rapid*) I would get the point quicker. Have you had sex with men?

Tennessee

Yes. You?

Rose

More. Have you been drinking?

Tennessee

Too much.

Rose

Ask me about Antoine.

Tennessee

How’s Antoine?

Rose

He’s beautiful. The parakeet heartbreaker. How was the play?

Tennessee

G-d, I don’t want to talk about the play; it was cruel.

Rose

Despite its title, it wasn’t at all.

Tennessee

What? Menagerie should be given to folks on death row!

Rose

Menagerie…?

Tennessee

Which play did you read?

Rose

April Is The Cruelest Month.

Tennessee

April… What year is it?

Rose

I’m gradually understanding that you’ve climbed the booze ladder since we last spoke. Is this absinthe?

Tennessee

Do… do you have stomachaches?

Rose

Who told you?

Tennessee

So this is the last one then… I don’t suppose it would do me any good to tell you to run away from home, would it?

Rose

It would be a marvelous idea.

Tennessee

You don’t though… And to never let mother discover your promiscuity.

Rose

I’m sure she’d throw me in the loony bin for it.

Tennessee

That she would… That she would. And should there ever be a discussion about solving your promiscuity with a lobotomy, you stick a hot iron in her face and run away from here… You’re the most perfect thing there ever—

Blackout on ROSE. Immediate lights up on WARHOL screen-printing.

WARHOL

Oh, why didn’t you tell me you were coming down?

WARHOL goes to kiss TENN, who averts.

Tennessee

No… No, no, no.

WARHOL

(*still trying to kiss*) Yes, yes, yes!

Tennessee

(*throwing WARHOL off*) NO…! No, that wasn’t the end. There was more!

WARHOL

Sounds like you’re on something fun.

Tennessee

There was more… I had her; I know I have more of her…

WARHOL

Switching teams again? I don’t think they’ll take you back.

Tennessee

Get away! Get away; I don’t want to see you!

WARHOL stands, staring at TENN thinking.

WARHOL

Well, ouch, Tommy; that wasn’t very kind.

Tennessee

Shut up! (*to EDWINA*) That wasn’t the last of her. I remember more when she was… When she was…

WARHOL wraps himself around TENN from behind; gently, romantically.

WARHOL

That wasn’t very kind… I’ll excuse you on account of… whatever you’re on. Do you know where we are?

TENN doesn’t shove him away, ashamedly soaking in WARHOL on him.

Tennessee

Don’t… We’re… warm… I came down here because it was warm…

WARHOL

Warm’s a cute word for it; I’m sweltering down here. I wasn’t meant for Florida humidity—probably why I love it so much.

WARHOL leaves TENN, who doesn’t move. WARHOL takes notice.

WARHOL

You don’t like me asking, so I won’t… Yes, I will: is this about Frankie?

Tennessee

About…?

WARHOL

I won’t ask… Bedroom?

Tennessee

No.

WARHOL

All right, but let me get out a visqueen—

Tennessee

No! I don’t…!

WARHOL

It sounds like you’re gonna need convincing and my head’s in my print—so just take the Yellow Snakes. (*re: TENN’s confusion*) Drawer.

TENN goes to the drawer, finding pills. WARHOL holds his hand out. TENN doesn’t move. WARHOL looks back up to TENN.

WARHOL

If you take them, I can pretend to be Frankie.

TENN doesn’t move.

Tennessee

Why was I here?

WARHOL

Frankie’s just about gone… You don’t deserve that; you deserve me.

Tennessee

No, I don’t.

WARHOL

You deserve someone who cares about you. I can be Frankie for you. We can do it right here—I hated this print anyways; Truman wouldn’t shut up about her. Let’s ruin her right here.

Tennessee

I don’t want to ruin anyone… not her…

WARHOL

(*pulling TENN*) Come on!

Tennessee

(*throwing him off*) NO! G-d, no!

WARHOL

(*pulling again*) Tommy! Just do it!

Tennessee

(*throwing*) You didn’t love me! You just pretended!

WARHOL

(*grabbing TENN*) What’s the fucking difference to you, huh? What’s the difference? Who actually loves you and can get it hard—‘cause Frankie barely fits half that bill. You wanna feel whole again? You want love. I’m the best thing you have… (*softening grip*) Stop blaming yourself for Frankie being sick. You blame yourself for everything.

Tennessee

I… I do blame myself for everything.

TENN stops resisting.

WARHOL

You deserve this.

Tennessee

I deserve this.

WARHOL kisses TENN, then stops, TENN limp in his arms. WARHOL takes the pill bottle from TENN, popping a pill, then handing one to TENN. TENN slowly puts it in his mouth.

WARHOL

(*smiling*) If you left me, where else could you even go?

Tennessee

Nowhere.

WARHOL

Right. You’d just run till you’re back the starting line. And you don’t want that, right?

Tennessee

The starting line.

WARHOL

Back in Mrs. Mississippi’s arms.

Tennessee

The starting line…

Edwina

(*looking at Machine*) Tenn, I’m gonna try to get us out of here!

WARHOL

You still think I’m a monster, don’t you? No, you think I’m an even bigger monster than you?

Tennessee

I guess I’m just used to you…

WARHOL goes for a love bite as DIANA enters, clutching her purse.

Diana

Are you Mr. Williams? Diana Barrymore… I was… I…

EDWINA gasps. TENN squirms in WARHOL’s arms, who stops.

WARHOL

Why do you always look away?

Tennessee

Edwina, make this stop!

Edwina

(*looking through Machine*) I… I…!

Diana

To read. Sweet Bird of Youth. West End production. If you’ll have me.

WARHOL

I’m exhausting everything that usually works. Can you just for once not need this bullshit moral foreplay?

Diana

If you have ‘em.

WARHOL

(*holding out pills*) Just take another.

Tennessee

(*to WARHOL*) Get those away! (*running to DIANA*) Run away from me, sweet child!

DIANA takes the pills from TENN, who snatches them back.

Tennessee

No!

Diana

This is the right time for me. I relate to her, Mr. Williams.

Tennessee

(*to EDWINA*) Edwina, get her out of here!

Edwina

I’m sorry about the machine! It isn’t me!

WARHOL

Are you kidding me? What disease do I need to get for you to just fuck me?

Tennessee

(*to EDWINA*) Edwina! Please!

Diana

The face of Franz Albertzart—

DIANA pulls another pill bottle out of her purse, to which TENN runs and grabs.

Tennessee

No!

Diana

—a face that tomorrow’s sun will touch without mercy—

WARHOL

Why do you always look away?!

Diana

Of course, you were crowned with laurel in the beginning, your gold hair was wreathed with laurel—

DIANA pulls another pill bottle out of her purse; TENN grabs it. WARHOL hisses into TENN’s ear, driving him the opposite way from DIANA.

Tennessee

STOP! Frankie—help me!

WARHOL

I don’t need to look like him—I look like me!

Diana

(*another pill bottle*)—but the gold is thinning and the laurel has withered—

Tennessee

(*running to her; grabbing it*) STOP! FRANKIE! HELP!

Diana

Out of the passion and torment of my existence—

WARHOL

And I paint him—How many times do I need to paint him?

Diana

I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic—

TENN falls to his knees, arms filled with pill bottles.

Tennessee

Stop… Frank… Frankie…

EDWINA

(*getting up*) It wasn’t me! (*exiting*) I didn’t do this! I’m sorry!

WARHOL

Why can’t you just write me, Tenn?! The wicked need to find holes too!

Diana

(*another pill bottle*)—you put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and hung on a butcher’s hook, like a chicken dressed for Sunday.

TENNESSEE

FRANK!

DIANA empties the pill bottle down her throat. BRANDO runs in, clutching a trembling TENN, as DIANA and WARHOL slither away.

Brando

Can you tell me your name?

Tennessee

Frankie…

Brando

Tell me your name.

Tennessee

Thomas “Tennessee” Williams.

Brando

Birthday.

Tennessee

No.

Brando

What’s your birthday…? Hey! Hey!

Tennessee

Aries! And we have that in common, Bud. Let me go.

Brando

You’re quitting these pills. (*re: TENN crying*) Hey… stop doing that. Where’s your barrel-chest?

Tennessee

Dead… He’s dead.

Brando

You’re still crying about that? G-d, it’s been years.

BRANDO picks TENN up and sits him on a stool. This older BRANDO is no playful Stanley—bearing the black weight of some aging trauma in every movement and facial expression. TENN indecipherably cries some words into BRANDO’s shirt.

Brando

Hah?

Tennessee

I did it to you too. You… You raped someone… You raped a girl, Bud…

Beat. BRANDO tries to say something but doesn’t.

Tennessee

Do you remember when we first met? We walked on the beach and talked and talked and talked about how your father raped your mother and she wasn’t able to stop drinking and he let her because it meant she wasn’t able to stop him… And you’d never put yourself somewhere where you could become your father and Stanley was that… I gave him to you. I took you here and you raped a woman with a stick of butter… I gave him to you.

Brando

No… No, I took him… And when we didn’t talk on that beach, you wouldn’t ever become your mother. And look at you.

Tennessee

I can’t remember what she looks like… I can’t remember the face that my muse away from me.

Brando

(*feeling his face*) Lucky you… (*aggressive*) I can’t sleep either, but you know why I don’t take these g-ddamn sleeping pills?! You know why!?

Tennessee

I can’t—

Brando

Your boyfriend is dead! You did not kill him but you tortured him because you’re an ugly man! Accept it! We’re ugly men! What, you can’t confront your fears? Life needs these ugly things; that’s what—!

Tennessee

That was bullshit, Bud! I just wanted you to be Stanley!

Brando

Stop dismissing everything that scares you as bullshit! Your mother ruined your sister after you ran; you ruined Frank and ran!

Tennessee

Why did I do that?

Brando

Stop crying! Face what happened! You’re not gonna stomach you—your skin won’t even fit—until you accept what you did and separate it from Tom!

Tennessee

That’s all I was though! That was me running! Tom ran!

Brando

(*gripping TENN’s collar and tugging him in*) You are not what you’ve done, but what you do!

TENN stares into BRANDO’s wrathful eyes, revealing unrestrained fear of them. BRANDO sees this and closes his eyes, placing his forehead against TENN’s.

Brando

G-d, I hope that’s right.

BRANDO releases TENN and exits. Lights up on a bar, where GARBO sits with a glass of milk. TENN crawls to her with CAPOTE’s bottle of wine and sits.

Tennessee

Greta…

Garbo

I’ve been waiting for you. The great Tennessee Williams…

Tennessee

I don’t know… You’re still beautiful.

Garbo

Ah, who cares? How’s life been treating you?

Tennessee

Like I killed its puppy with a lawnmower.

Garbo

(*choking on her milk*) Goodness, you never liked subtlety.

Tennessee

You never looked so dapper. What did you need?

Garbo

What?

Tennessee

A role? Spoiled booze? What did you need?

Garbo

I wanted to say hello… It’s all right. You never were very good with people.

Tennessee

This is an absolute lie. I’m practically a savant.

Garbo

You’re fantastic with… celebrities. Not people.

Tennessee

(*remembering*) This is where we have that conversation; I really need to stop with these.

Garbo

You do. Switch. (*replacing his bottle with her milk*) Try this.

Tennessee

(*sipping milk*) What is this? Virgin eggnog?

Garbo

Yeah, people call it “milk.”

Tennessee

Ugh, G-d… (*“go on”*) I was good with celebrities.

Garbo

You look at the shiniest nickel and dismiss the others as somehow being worth less.

Tennessee

Did I do that?

Garbo

I was surprised at you not dating a star. Figured the boy would be neglected.

Tennessee

Oh, I didn’t neglect him.

Garbo

Of course you did. He tells me about it—all the time.

Tennessee

Frank talked to you?

Garbo

He talks to me—all the time. I feel as though he always resents being in those rooms, but thinks I’m nice. I’m not sure.

Tennessee

I didn’t neglect him; I was helping him do everything for the last month. He’s already lying in the bed he never walks out of… This is the last month… I stopped seeing Angel, but Frank doesn’t care. Like always.

Garbo

Ha! I’m sorry… Like always? That boy’s been your secretary, accountant, arranges meetings and calls, makes sure you get to see all your stars.

Tennessee

What? No, I don’t—Well, I don’t remember it like that.

Garbo

Oh my; I never would’ve guessed. Drink more milk. (*as TENN does*) No bias here: Frank takes care of you. Practically raises you. He’s allowed to die first because of it.

Tennessee

That isn’t how I recall it.

Garbo

You couldn’t. Every time he takes care of you, you’re filled with everything behind a bathroom mirror.

Tennessee

No… No, well, it’s his word against mine.

Garbo

He’s much better at words.

TENN stops and thinks, looking to GARBO.

Tennessee

I’m the one who wanted to see the stars?

Garbo

I don’t know if you realized it, but that’s all you ever care about: words and stars. He’s like a charity you keep close; he owes you everything for spending time with a no-name.

Tennessee

No… No, I’ve always said that his name alone—

Garbo

‘Cause it’s a pretty word. His name isn’t what makes him. Yes, you were what made him interesting, but you didn’t make him. Drink the milk.

Tennessee

(*after drinking*) The only thing I can remember is his deathbed… We fight, then he says, “I guess I’m just used to you.” Then I leave and he dies. That was the last thing he said. “I guess I’m just used to you.” Like I’m no more or less than a disease… (*re: milk*) This is disgusting, by the way.

TENN places the milk down. Then gives it a little push out of reach.

Tennessee

Why are you drinking that?

Garbo

(*deciding*) No one in my family went to primary school and we worked all day. We couldn’t afford anything so my mother bought milk. It was the cheapest thing and it “lasted the longest.” My father got sick and died when I was fourteen… When I came here and learned how quickly milk spoils, I grew this rage at my mother, at how she killed my father because she didn’t know anything. (*shivering memory away; smiling*) I hate telling stories. Do you understand why I’m saying this to you?

Tennessee

It doesn’t pertain. My mother lobotomized my sister out of wrath, not ignorance.

Garbo

The devil never had a more loyal advocate.

Tennessee

I, never a more respectable critic.

Garbo

A role I’ll gladly accept.

GARBO uses the bottle to go to clink glasses, remembers TENN pushed his away, and clinks with that resting glass.

Garbo

I’m saying visit your mother.

Tennessee

Oh, absolutely not.

Garbo

You might find something resembling yourself.

Tennessee

You don’t think that’s what I’m afraid of?

Garbo

Can you remember her?

Tennessee

No.

Garbo

Wishful thinking?

Tennessee

(*re: milk*) If this is what caused you all the hardship, why are you drinking it?

Garbo

What are you talking about?

Tennessee

I would’ve sworn off milk forever… How can you drink that?

Garbo

Mm… Because I know that milk’s very good for you.

Blackout on the bar. Lights up on ROSE sitting on the floor, her hands hidden.

Tennessee

Rose?

She’s a zombie. Completely incapable of speech or a fully conscious facial expression.

Tennessee

Where are we then? The asylum? (*no response*) The old bat did it… Well, I remember you had a garden here. Pleasant for walks. Are you at the point where you can walk? (*no response*) I remember you still being fond on Antoine. Always giddy whenever I visited and you dragging me to his cage. I know you’d want me to ask how he’s doing.

After a moment, ROSE reveals her hands to be soaked in blood.

Tennessee

Rose… What did you do?

She presses them together and squeezes.

Tennessee

Christ… Why did you do that to the poor fellow?

She starts blubbering up as she shrugs. TENN hugs her.

Tennessee

You beautiful star, why would you do that? (*as she cries*) Why would you do that…? Why would you… Hug me back, Rose.

She cries and keeps her arms at her sides.

Tennessee

Hug me—Please, just hug me…

EDWINA enters. TENN lets go of ROSE, taking in EDWINA.

Tennessee

And here I was thinking I’d forgotten what you looked like… Couldn’t handle the fact that your daughter was fucking boys so you scrubbed her brain clean?! You lunatic! Look at her: is this better? This is what you wanted? This doesn’t stain your reputation like your gay, alcoholic son, huh?

Edwina

Your alcoholism can be fixed—

Tennessee

You shut your mouth… You know what would’ve happened if you weren’t the way you were? None of it. I wouldn’t have met any of them because I wouldn’t have run. Rose wouldn’t have spent her life in a fucking monkey cage. It’s you.

Edwina

Are you finished?

Rose

(*terrified*) Yes!

Both freeze and look to ROSE. It’s clear that random speaking spells have occurred, but are infrequent enough for EDWINA to cover her mouth with her hand.

Tennessee

(*fuming*) Leave. Go. You’re supposed to be a coward. You always ran away from arguments.

Edwina

I’ve gotten too old to run. You’d know that if you visited more often than once or twice a lifetime. Thomas, Rose had a train ticket. She has neither the intellectual capacity nor the access to a telephone that would find her with a train ticket. Did you give it to her?

Tennessee

I don’t remember.

Edwina

Who was going to take care of her in New York? You were…? Do you remember me taking care of you when you were sick, Thomas? Did you never appreciate that I took care of you all those years?

Tennessee

You didn’t take care of me.

Edwina

I did. I didn’t know how to but I did it. Your father couldn’t handle the fact that you’d never be a strong, capable boy—if the diphtheria didn’t take you, he was going to. How many times did I take your beatings so he couldn’t kill you…? And all I could think was… if I had let him do that, you never would’ve had the chance to grow up and be a sinner. The Lord would smite me for standing idly by but you would spend eternity in paradise. That’s all I ever wanted for you. But you were stubborn and all you ever wanted to do was hate me… And I suppose I didn’t help… I just wanted you and Rose to be safe during your time on this earth. Rose was running away with boys—

Tennessee

So you clipped her wings—

Edwina

I made her safe! Will I go to hell because of it? Yes and I carry that! The important thing is that she won’t! Am I paranoid? Am I a lunatic…? But are my children safe?

Tennessee

I… I don’t remember you saying any of this.

Edwina

Every single day I wonder if I did the right thing. You know how highly I hold your opinion, so I need you to tell me I did.

Tennessee

You didn’t!

Edwina

(*nodding*) The things you choose to remember… When you have children, you’ll understand why I’m so terrible. I know you will… You just need to find a nice girl first.

Tennessee

(*almost ready to chuckle*) Did you ever love anybody?

Edwina

My children.

Tennessee

No… No. Romantically.

Edwina

Romance is sin.

Tennessee

Of course it isn’t.

Edwina

When it wasn’t with your father, it is.

Tennessee

Well, you never did that in your life.

EDWINA sits in the chair TENN uses for anecdotes, ROSE looking her in the eye. EDWINA doesn’t hide from it.

Edwina

It was before I met your father… Women weren’t supposed to go on trips alone in those days… I wanted to see a college that was a few days away, told my parents I was visiting my mother’s sister, when a boy knocked on my hotel room door. Told me there was no vacancy and he’d pay for mine twice over. I told him that if there were no vacant rooms I obviously wasn’t leaving. He agreed that was reasonable… I was just a girl. I was sixteen and every boy was terrified of my father’s sermons. But this town and this boy didn’t know my father; I couldn’t dare let him leave… I wouldn’t let him sleep in the same bed as me, which he understood, but we talked all night. Just about everything. The night sky. The cattails growing on the road. How much we hated horse apples—

Rose

(*as if trying to finish story*) Goodnight, dreamer… (*beat*) Goodbye.

Edwina

(*staring at ROSE*) When I woke up midday all my things were gone. My money, my bags, my ticket home: gone. Took me forever to get home, and even longer to recover from my father’s wrath. (*beat*) If I knew what I know now, would I have let that boy sleep in my room again? (*beat; holding back*) *Yes*…

EDWINA rises from the chair.

Edwina

I don’t know how much time I have left; be gentle when you remember me. (*goes to exit, stopping herself*) But more than anything, I wished I never knew what I know now.

EDWINA goes to exit again, but TENN stops her and hugs her. She nods and exits. TENN goes to ROSE.

Tennessee

My G-d… You know what’s the difference between a plastic and a glass figurine? A glass one is pretty because of how easy it is to break the g-ddamn thing. (*kissing ROSE’s head*) I’ll write you so they name every constellation after you. You’ll look up and point and say “Rose” and no matter which you point to, you’ll only be right always.

ROSE points to the scrim room.

Tennessee

(*correcting her finger to the sky*) “Rose.”

She shakes her head. ROSE points to the room again, lighting it full of its stars—revealing FRANK on his deathbed. TENN hugs ROSE a final time.

Tennessee

Thank you for fueling my adventurous heart. I’m sorry for the sentiment.

She points again. TENN backs away to the scrim.

Tennessee

I won’t be far. Just right here.

ROSE points to her temple, tapping it twice, as her spotlight goes out. TENN arrives at FRANK and caresses his arms. He scans around the room, settling indefinitely on FRANK’s closed eyes.

Tennessee

This right here is the universe…

TENN wraps himself around FRANK. The stars fade to black.

**Onto Mockeries** (short story)

The silly creatures always moved as a tribe, crushing along the soggy snow and whisking through pine trees to avoid detection. It was a plum, clouded sky—the bright ground illuminating the starless nighttime as the creatures crept from backyard to backyard, clumsily collapsing onto one another and shushing all things that peeped. They reached their goal locale and routinely stacked themselves against the crimson-brick house so that their ambassador could reach its bedroom window. With some shoves, the window came open, and this creature flailed about, tumbling into the home. The remaining tower of creatures then fell upon itself and they shoved one another up, scrambling to find their own entrance.

Simon woke with a yelp as he glanced all around his bedroom, recognizing it piece by piece. It’d been another nightmare, and Simon would make sure this time he wouldn’t cry. His parents didn’t come for him anymore and contemplated that babying him was the source of his lack of development. While other kids at his daycare were able to have full, albeit simple, conversations about an item in the room, Simon knew only about eighty words. The adults once wouldn’t give him his train unless he was able to articulate “train,” and that day, Simon didn’t play with any trains.

Instead of being able to say “train,” Simon had constant nightmares and a vilified habit of sucking his thumb. Removing it now, Simon watched the saliva bridge his lips and fingernail then collapse upon itself, leaving a darkened streak on the front of his T-Rex pajamas. Simon slid back onto the bed and wiped his glazed chin on the pillow, which matched the comforter with its cartoons of assorted sports equipment.

On the wall near the foot of his bed was a decal of a beanstalk, upon which his parents would annually measure his height, this new notch being significantly higher than its two predecessors. Close to this was a plush Big Bird, hanging its head alongside a handful of smaller stuffed animals. Outside the window, pine needles accumulated on the snowy ledge. A sharp breeze tickled the pine trees, making them twirl their skirts at Simon, who then faced away from the window, afraid their dominating presence would trigger new nightmares and leave him no other alternative but to cry. Instead, Simon focused on the slits of his closet door. His parents had told him time and again that his closet was the last place a monster would be, as monsters are chic and closets are too obvious. The same argument was used about underneath his bed. The real monsters, they explained, exist in taxes and liberals, and Simon should’ve been much more goddamn satisfied that he didn’t have to pay rent to live here and could at least return the favor by learning some English.

One boy at his daycare, Antoine, was exceptional at language. His communications about episodes of *Dragon Tales*, which even included using the characters’ names, garnered much admiration among the adults. Simon felt as though he’d never be capable of such precise diction. This envy of Antoine had bittersweetly concluded that week, following an incident of accidental arson. Antoine tried to use his command of the vernacular to acquit himself, but was instead deemed both a juvenile arsonist *and* a poor sport who’d resort to lying about it.

As Simon was trying to remember the word “lie,” a ruffle rumbled out of his closet. A rigid Simon peered into the closet’s dark crack, where two eyes met his; they were milky-white with black dots that appeared to jiggle as they dove out of Simon’s sight. Simon maintained his focus as a blue, fuzzy hand wrapped itself around the closet door and creaked it ajar. The eyes reemerged, perfectly spherical and resting atop the creature’s head, as the creature brought itself into the bedroom.

It was covered in blue, yarn-like fur, and stood at roughly six feet tall. The googly eyes looked down at Simon, who sat up in bed in delight, recognizing this creature.

“Key!” Simon bellowed.

The creature muzzled the boy with its fuzzy paw, placing the forefinger of its free hand to its lipless mouth, a non-verbal command Simon recognized. Removing both hands, the creature focused on Simon and whispered in its gravelly baritone, “*See*…”

It preyed around the room, opening drawers and looking under Simon’s bed. Unsatisfied, it placed a paw on Simon’s ankle. “*Seeeeee*…” it reaffirmed. Simon giggled. The creature fully wrapped the paw around Simon and tugged softly. Simon giggled again. Using its free hand to shush Simon, the creature gave a more forceful pull.

Coming out of bed, Simon waddled over to Big Bird and brought it to the creature in offering. The creature shoved the plush toy into his mouth, but it wouldn’t go in. Simon could see now from the light of plum sky that its mouth seemed to not have an opening like the boy’s own, and therefore the creature couldn’t insert anything down it.

Frustrated, the creature dropped Big Bird and skulked to Simon’s door, twisting the knob and putting Simon on red-alert; Simon was not supposed to leave his bedroom until eight-thirty in the morning. Panicking, Simon flew over to door, only to be halted by the creature’s bushy, blue arm. The creature opened the door fully, then indicated for Simon to exit the room.

Nervously obeying, Simon went out and found another one of the creatures at the end of the hallway, anticipating him. It was identical in every way to the bedroom creature, and upon this visual contact, it signaled to what must have been more of them at the foot of the stairs.

Simon and the bedroom creature tiptoed through the hall, passing each room with tripwire caution. Arriving at the end, Simon’s suspicions were confirmed when he saw two more creatures standing slouched below, both gazing up at him in the stalled light of the front door’s opaque window.

“*Seeeeee*…” the bedroom creature whispered into Simon’s ear.

The two creatures at the bottom stacked atop one another and fell forward, laying themselves across the entirety of the wooden staircase, allowing Simon to descend without making a single creak, his tiny, bare feet pushing into their soft, furry bodies.

Turning to the main hall, Simon squinted at the light of the kitchen, through which he could see five of the creatures seated at the dinner table. Advancing with his regrouped entourage, Simon discovered there were nearly fifteen in the kitchen total, some patiently awaiting Simon’s arrival and others playing patty-cake, among other games, their paws making muffled thumps as they collided.

“*Seeeeee*…” the bedroom creature announced as it entered the room.

“*Isss*…” a creature at the table answered, its pale eyes lighting up at the sight of Simon in the doorway.

“*Forrr*…” Two standing near the oven patted each other in excitement at the entrance. At this point, the entire room was both aware and exhilarated at this knowledge.

“*Cooooookieeeeee*…” a scattered few answered in harmony.

“*THAT’S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME!*” the whole room sang in gaiety, a random trio producing a cymbal, trumpet, and tambourine. They played as this chant repeated and grew in strength, to which the frantic Simon threw his hands in the air and shushed the room with trembling passion.

The kitchen celebration fell silent, a couple creatures echoing Simon’s shushing.

Finally, the bedroom creature pushed Simon forward and pointed to the oven. “*Seeeeeee*…” it explained.

Another creature was about to answer the call as it was shushed by its neighbors.

Simon looked up at the bedroom creature and frowned.

“*Seeeeee*…” it repeated in its gravelly baritone.

Simon pointed to the oven in confirmation, to which a handful of creatures opened it and removed all its trays, pots, and pans, and set them on top of the kitchen island. The bedroom creature nodded as the others awaited further instruction. Still confused and under pressure, Simon pointed to the cabinets, to which creatures raided them for the ingredients, assembling them on the counter.

The kitchen was lined with creatures glaring at Simon in anticipation, a few holding eggs, one anxious to preheat the oven, another with chocolate chips, others with sugar, salt, vanilla extract, flour, all of them drooling for Simon’s next point.

Nervous, Simon extended a finger to a flour-bearer, which poured it into a bowl. Then, the salt-bearer, which joined in. Finally, Simon whirled around the room, pointing to all and freeing himself of responsibility.

The kitchen was aflutter with creatures maneuvering around one another, pulling out rolling pins and baking sheets and mashing ingredients together in the bowl. Creatures climbed atop counters and contributed fuzzy pokes at the mixture until it was thick and doughy, then smacked dollops of it onto a sheet-covered pan, spacing them with precision and vigor. A crowd of jobless creatures formed behind them, watching every placement with wrecked nerves.

Once the pan was ready, they all looked to Simon with ferocity, who pointed to the oven.

Thrilled, the creatures bounded to the oven with their pan, only to discover the creature with oven responsibilities gloomily pressing its face against the oven’s dim window.

“*Seeeeee*…?” the creature holding the tray asked.

Grim, the oven creature shook its head.

Simon frowned over the change in the room. It was as if a shared, tragic knowledge relaxed upon all of them at once. There was a bowing of heads and a murmur of “*Seeeeee*”—a murmur of a shared promise and reaffirmation of their goals here.

A few creatures broke from the group to act upon this, including one that took the batteries out of the smoke detector above the stairs. Others went about the landlines and ripped their wires free from the walls. One shuffled through drawers until it was found: a butcher knife. One gathered some of the leftover dough to gum around in its dry, furry mouth as it knelt on the floor and closed its googly eyes. The butcher creature looked down with sorrow as a dishtowel was shoved into the kneeling creature’s mouth, inciting a minor whimper.

The bedroom creature turned Simon away as the kneeling creature’s throat was slit, spilling a flurry of cotton. This creature kicked its legs and tried to bellow through its gag as its insides flowed onto the kitchen floor, which were then scooped up and tossed into the oven.

As this mound of cotton caught fire, the tray creature placed its contribution into the oven and shut the door, smoke seeping out its crevices. Another creature creaked open a bi-fold window and used assorted rags to redirect the smoke outside as efficiently as it could manage.

Simon watched as the popping dots of dough inside the oven vanished in a cloud of black, the tribe of creatures turning lustfully to the obscurity. The kneeling creature had been reassigned the lying creature, and its once thick leg had finally stopped its tremors. Its skin lay there on the floor with its googly eyes aimed nowhere, lifeless as they ever were.

A ball of fire grew inside the oven, prompting a creature to pry the door oven and remove the burnt contents. Each creature scrambled to get its treat as the blaze trickled out the oven and up the counter. Simon watched as the flames licked the cabinets dry and made their pilgrimage both down onto the floor and up onto the curtain, taking with them the blue-furred, lifeless skin.

The bedroom creature was the last out the sliding door when Simon noticed his abandonment and hurried to follow them outside.

Not long after Simon’s exit, the entire kitchen was engulfed in flame, which had moved onto curling the paint outside and rising up to the second floor. Backing away from the house, Simon stared as the creatures took time between worship of the growing inferno to enjoy their coal-black treats, which wouldn’t go down their necks, but crumbled against their mouths and fell in pieces onto the mixed mush of snow and grass.

Once a corner of the roof caved in, the creatures cheered and danced around the house, hopping and skipping and bellowing, “*Seee isss forrr coookieee, that’s good enough for me!*” again and again, followed by a “*Oooh! Cookieee, cookieee, cookieee starts with seeeeee!*”

They remained chanting and dancing until the house collapsed entirely, at which point they stopped and stared in fascination. After a few moments of observation, they shushed one another and rejoined as a group, crossing Simon’s street over to a neighboring house, where a girl from his daycare, Tabbey, lived. Simon watched from a distance as the silly creatures stacked themselves on top of one another, the bedroom creature shoving open Tabbey’s bedroom window, flailing about and tumbling into her home.

**Seabeer** (short story)

Jacey and Alex were splitting a pair of flip-flops—Alex on his right foot and Jacey on her left. They were Alex’s, but Jacey stepped on a glass bottle last week when they were building sandcastles and couldn’t go barefoot for a bit. They didn’t have any other kids around to ridicule them about it or claim they were in a relationship for sharing shoes; all the kids their age had moved away in the past few months to start the first grade. Neither of them were old enough to dislike the discomfort of wearing only one flip-flop, more enthused by the prospect of doing it than by analyzing whether it was a practical solution. It was a black flip-flop with a raised, yellow stripe along its strapping. Jacey didn’t like its look, and wouldn’t have worn them both as that would’ve implied that she liked it, but again, couldn’t contain her excitement at her and Alex walking down the street, splitting a pair of flip-flops, squishing over sunbaked cigarette butts. They’d arrived at the liquor store.

Orbin was the cashier and had moved to Tampa after housing costs plummeted in the late 2020s, midtown now beachfront property and the stench from the red algae adding to the mold of the wasting away condos where the sand used to be. If you were born in it, like Jacey and Alex, it smelled like air. Alex visited relatives in Georgia and told them Georgian water tasted like blood. His relatives visited once and told him the air tasted like rotting shrimp. Orbin was used to it by means of fluid standards of living; if it weren’t for the smell, the Florida coastline could’ve been the new Venice. If the water hadn’t gotten so much hotter over the years, the red algae couldn’t have exploded all over the coast like it did and killed everything swimming—made the canal aesthetic lose its touch. But folks tried to have fun with it. There used to be a law thrown together saying you couldn’t ride anything aquatic with a motor outside people’s apartments, but that fell out of enforcement when just about everybody moved out of those apartments. The people left, people like Orbin, at first got a certain high jet skiing through dead traffic lights on his way to the liquor store, like wearing one flip-flop. But the adults lost their pragmatic gloss.

Jacey and Alex used Alex’s shirt to collect as many beer bottles as they could from the liquor store’s fridge. They’d wanted to get green bottles to make them easier for people to see and not step on, but all that were left at the store were clear ones. It was a real moral sacrifice for the two, real personal for Jacey, but it’d be worth a couple bloody feet. They were able to hold an even ten bottles in Alex’s shirt, Jacey having only four dollars stuffed in the belly of her one-piece swimsuit as they approached Orbin at the counter.

Orbin asked how many beers they were buying.

Jacey said six.

Orbin told them it’d be eight dollars.

Jacey said four, take it or leave it.

Orbin said six; four if they wanted to buy three beers instead.

Jacey agreed, pulling three beers out of Alex’s shirt bundle and placing them on the counter. Jacey gave Orbin the money and the two departed, Orbin popping one of the countered beers after he was nice and alone.

Jacey and Alex trudged back towards the water, which puddled up around Flores St. and got up to their knees at DeLappe. Where the beach used to be was just about at their chests, around adults’ thighs. It’d been a celebrated project between the pair of them to pull sand from under the water and onto floating pallets, letting it dry in the sun for a few days, then carrying that to an old, beachfront balcony where they’d been collecting it and building castles out of it. A mini bottle had snuck through their inspection of their last load, and the sand they’d played with since still had blood on it, but no glass—it took a few afternoons of sifting without playing before they were confident enough in that.

Jacey and Alex reached the ocean—the real ocean. The one their moms played by. “Where it was before. Over there.” The whole trip, Alex had been groping at the beers to ensure they were still cold. They were. Alex’s mom was lying on their balcony when the two of them arrived. She was having her noontime nap, but she usually liked seeing what the kids were up to. If she were awake, she’d call out and see if they needed anything to drink. Make sure Jacey’s foot was doing better. But she took up on that morning to slurp up the last of the Bloody Mary Mix. Barely enough for half a drink. Had to pour vodka right into the Mix bottle to make sure none of it got wasted.

Jacey and Alex had seawater up to their chests, the red algae in a concentrated clump a bit ahead of themselves. It’d been another one of the hottest summers on record, making Jacey and Alex have to shower whenever they got home to not get itchy. Alex opened his shirt fold, taking four bottles for himself and giving three to Jacey.

Alex threw the first bottle, splashing in the middle of the algae and bobbing around. The bottle wasn’t cold as much as it was in the fridge, but the two could see a clear hole forming around it. Jacey threw another bottle, hitting Alex’s, causing his to dip under for a moment. Alex threw another. Jacey threw another. Alex threw another. Jacey reared to throw her last, then saw Alex’s first bottle not come back up. They frowned as the rest of the bottles sank. They waited, and, sure enough, the Florida sun baked away. The algae refilled the holes.

Jacey and Alex wadded back to town with their two beer bottles.

Jacey and Alex re-arrived at the liquor store, asking Orbin if they could have a refund on the last two bottles of beer.

Orbin was about to open the third bottle on the counter when he explained that all sales were final, and that he already spent their money on two lottery tickets.

Alex asked if they could trade each bottle for something in the store.

Orbin said that was fine, as long as it wasn’t any of the upper end porn magazines, and that if they wanted one of the lower ones then they couldn’t tell people they got it from him.

Alex was quick, going right up to Orbin and asking for one of his lottery tickets, to which Orbin agreed. Jacey walked around the store for a few minutes before deciding on a pair of flip-flops, which Orbin refused, saying two flip-flops meant two beers. Alex wouldn’t give up his ticket, so Jacey ripped one flip-flop from the pair and gave Orbin her beer.

Jacey and Alex were outside the store when Jacey realized she’d taken a left flip-flop, and she already had one of those.

It was the first time Amanda had sex that she had Alex. She was fourteen when a razor-jawed boy with light eyes and a car stopped to talk to her while she was drinking an Arizona Iced Tea and eating sour candy shaped like sharks. He was quick with words, knowing everything he had to say to get her in the car. He was quick in bed, getting off of Amanda before it even stopped hurting. She tried to stick around his motel room, but he started calling her names and she left, crying on the walk and crying when she got home. Nine months later, there was Alex. All the restaurants packed up shop when all the people left, taking all the jobs with them, so she “moved” into one of the old beachfront condos. A nice one. No rent in a ghost town. She picked up a boyfriend once in a while who worked online and he’d make sure Alex ate a ton. All of them were darlings to her. They spoiled her and adored her and ended up leaving because they couldn’t stand the smell from the red tide and Amanda couldn’t leave Tampa. Tampa had always been home.

It was a cool night as she sat in a Tommy Bahama chair on the balcony, a gibbous moon rippling through the ocean. She’d been vaping more. Funny enough, once she stopped with the flavored oils, sick of how fast Alex would blow through them, she’d picked up the pace herself. It was nothing: no flavor, not even smoke in lungs. It was just warm in there. And for the moments that she breathed it in, she wasn’t swallowing up an air full of fish. Before this, she’d forgotten what nothing smelled like. It smelled so clean. Like tomorrow was gonna be the first page in a notebook. When she turned twenty-one, she’d have no tattoos, no kid, and it’d smell like nothing.

When she took Alex to Georgia, she was happy that Alex didn’t like it. She was worried she’d have to defend living in Tampa when they got back. But Alex hated Georgia. He said it smelled cold and that his cousins were making fun of his skin to his face. That was the only time Amanda told Alex to be proud of his skin, advice which she now couldn’t tell if she regretted. She barked at Alex to shower when he got home, but the boy always “forgot.” Amanda showered as much as she could, but the liquor store had been holding less and less water jugs when she went. She knew the day was coming where she’d show up and it’d be closed.

She exhaled, watching the dark air cloud up the moon. Alex picked Tampa over Georgia. If he had the call, he’d never leave Tampa. Amanda leaned forward, sticking her face in between the balcony railing’s bars. She spat. After a moment, she heard the *plip*.

**You Better Watch Out**

(opening excerpt of novel)

The star on top is dimmer than all the lights below it. They designed the Workshop’s windows to look like a tree from a distance, all coming up to the star on top: the singular, dim window for the one room on the twelfth floor. Below it are luxurious, flashing lights to display to the rest of us sitting over here—outside those windows—that the folks who live over here are nothing like the folks who live over there.

A garbage elf grumbles something at me from across the counter. His eyes are pitch black, skin grayed and bald like the rest of the ugly fucks, ears drooping in thin haired points. I pretend I didn’t hear him.

The garbage elf growls, holding a hand out. I’m not even done eating and he’s already expecting me to bolt. I don’t speak his language and I don’t want to. There are too many languages in Kringleton and that’s half the reason these folks can’t stop burning each others’ apartments down.

“This was shit,” I tell him, showing off the burger. I pull a full roach leg out of the patty, waving it in his face. “I could’a choked.”

He scowls and carps on. His gums look slippery, like they couldn’t even be holding his teeth, like he’s got a symbiotic relationship with slugs. Spit slides through them like an instant tide, towards and away from his brown tongue. In the red, neon lighting adorning his stall, he looks like a wrinkled chili come to life, his long, cracked, chili fingernails flailing about as he demands I pay before I finish eating his awful roach burger.

I can’t look at him anymore. I tug at my coat, its black suede water-stained and crusted, as I fish around for cash. The garbage elf thinks he’s slick, arm reaching under the stall, as if I can’t tell there’s a flare gun bolted to the inside. I can see the goddamn hole in the stall right at my crotch. I’m not assuming it’s the world’s slimiest glory hole.

I pull three deer from my wallet and lay them flat on the counter, one by one, their edges crumbling or ripped in half and taped back together. He can see I’ve got plenty more and the garbage elf scowls.

“Feev,” he hisses, clacking his fingernail twice beside my three.

I stare. I put one thumb on the first deer, other thumb on the third deer, and pull them both back to me. Garbage elf gasps and throws both hands over mine, letting go of the flare gun. His hands feel like hard, wet sand as I can now drive the top of my skull into his long, drooping nose, launching him back against his grill. He shrieks as his greasy forearms catch fire like cotton kindling. He flings his arms around, collapsing his body over them to smother them.

I leave the three deer.

The problem everyone has when they get to the eleventh floor is that there’s that twelfth. Only ever been one inhabitant on the twelfth floor. And nobody replaces Him. Nobody goes in there but Him. Nobody else looks up and sees absolutely nothing. Though maybe the twelfth has a ceiling. It’d be cute if it was styrofoam. Maybe one of the elves could pop in through its tiles and peep down at Him in His chair, if He’s got one. Look down from a height even He’s never seen.

Only light in there’s orange and faint, like a single lamp, probably still gas. Not like He could hire somebody to fix it up without them seeing what goes on up there. When I look at the window of the twelfth, I see the reflection of a hundred neon signs in a hundred languages each screaming the exact same thing: I’m not like you at all.

I arrive at the Naulist. When you’re looking around the Atrium, you can see the shiny, beautiful Workshop, and can see the Naulist on the opposite wall. Used to be the prison for Kringleton before Permission came about. Now that it’s been abandoned, place is free real estate. Nobody in Kringleton comes here since they think it’s full of serial killers, spirit addicts, all that jazz. Fact is it’s full of nobody. When I got here about five months ago, I found the highest cell up. Got accents carved along the ceiling, a counter with a sink, a freshly broken door, and most importantly, a balcony.

There’s a toilet but I covered it up; no plumbing. Gotta use the bathroom down the hall, one that was for the regular prisoners: just a hole going down all eight floors of the Naulist. The good thing is nobody lives on my floor. Nobody lives on the floor below. Pretty sure an elf lives a few floors below me, maybe the fourth floor, but he barricaded the doors from the stairwell. Once in a while I hear a crash from different spots below. Figure it’s a wire exploding in the walls.

Looking at the Workshop from my balcony, I’m not sorry for the sucker that flew. An elf thrown off the eleventh floor is an elf born on the ninth at the absolute lowest, more likely the tenth. Elves in the Workshop are just about all “tolk” elves—tall, pale, light but thick hair. Tolks are the type of elves spending all their lives thinking they’re gonna make the next red wagon. For one to fall down the whole atrium is for one to pass by the fourth floor for the first time in his life, see where he gets his wood, his plastic, where he get his complaints that there’s half a finger and half a pint of blood in this bucket of uncut Lincoln Logs. I’m told that he hit about half a dozen signs on his way down and only one Kringleton elf’s complaining. Most signs in Kringleton are for dead businesses that the city keeps running—trying to keep the Atrium lighting up pretty. That one complainer’s sign was level with the ninth floor; apparently they’ve got Workshop-front visibility.

First thing tomorrow, I’ll take the train to the eleventh floor and get to ask a lot of fat elves why they didn’t know anything. Way I figure the eleventh floor to be, all of them grabbed the elf at once, all of them threw the elf at once, all of them are planning on another sacrifice. They’re being blackmailed by the highest performer on the tenth, or on the ninth who wants to be on the tenth. Things tend to slide up nice and linear on that side of town. Long as you’re tolk.

I found a lawn chair a few weeks back that just fits the balcony. I found a wheel of eggnog cheese this morning at a stall down in Kringleton. I stare down at the neon-riddled city, chewing. Kringleton is the place where you work hard in order to leave as soon as possible. Problem is, you go in one direction, you hit the Workshop Wall, and they’re not taking you in. Turn left, you’re hitting the Mayoral Wall. Turn left again, you got my Naulist Wall. Turn left a last time, you’re hitting the Maintenance Wall, or the Brokes, where the garbage elves live. Underneath you’s the sewers and ruins of the old garbage elf civilizations. Above you’s the ceiling, featureless in its darkness. ’Bout a hundred years ago now, some lady tried flying a hot air balloon up to the ceiling to prove it wasn’t even there. She hit it. Balloon went up in flames. She fell down to Kringleton, Lady Icarus landing in an ornament store and sending the whole thing up in flames. Good thing about the Atrium being a closed space is fires in Kringleton tend not to spread with the limited oxygen. Worst that’ll happen is a few buildings catch and die out and you avoid going outside for a couple days as more air’s pumped in from the Workshop.

No, you can’t escape this place. I can only be thankful for the rumors about the Naulist, giving me room to breathe from all of them. I make sure never to have a flashlight or anything. Keep myself invisible. Soon as I’m at the Workshop tomorrow, I gotta ask how they found out where I was. Half the reason I agreed to helping them is ’cause I figured it’d be easier than disappearing even further. Nothing but the ceiling’s darker than the Naulist.

Spent two hundred and five years living in the Workshop. Spent the last six months living outside of it, five of ’em on this balcony.

Silly how we build our lives on Jenga towers; one reckless moment and your life’s done—leaving you with maybe a quarter of what you had. Not even the decency of falling into ashes or better yet, nothing. You still got a quarter left and it’s the part you never wanted to touch. Nobody keeps playing the game with the wreckage; takes one time for your life to fall apart for you to stop.

Now I’m living in a prison. Least, where they had prisons before Permission came about. I chew the cheese and look way left to the mayor’s office. The forest green Capitol dome rests proud among pillars and arches and all kinds of hullabaloo on that wall. Nicest part of Kringleton are the blocks closest to that wall. But living there’s its own kind of dangerous—headbutt the wrong burger vendor and wake up with a mayor’s office flag impaled through your esophagus.

Coming close to fifty years ago, back when the Workshop had open doors and was on its worst behavior, soon-to-be Mayor Grenshaw ran on fighting wealth inequality, arguing that incarceration was encouraging poverty and criminality: prison was a system run by tolks to keep it so no outsiders could climb floors. Grenshaw won by some unclear majority and went rogue, decriminalizing *every*thing. Everybody expected Him to come out and reverse Grenshaw—first time He’d shown His face since anybody here had been alive, and we’d been alive a long time. He didn’t come out. Everybody had Permission to do anything and for a while, nobody left their homes. Took a while for the Atrium to calm down and ease into the idea. That was the last time tolks interacted with Kringleton elves. Soon as Kringleton criminals had no punishment, tolks made their windows harder—really put their own society up in the Workshop. All the more impressive that they managed to break an elf through one.

Grenshaw tossed out limitations on term limits and now he’s serving his third, no-contesting into a fourth soon. Rumors are that he was killed and his son took his place, keeping the facade alive. Doesn’t matter: campaign still paints Permission like it’s the nectar that keeps Kringleton going. It’s hard to decide if Permission was good or bad for Kringleton. I don’t think it’s fair to pick good and bad. It was a change. For Kringleton to go back is another change. After thirty years, you got whispers of that being preferred.

I get to a green spot in the eggnog cheese and stop, eating around. Ends up being a solid fourth of the wheel. I toss it off the balcony. It won’t hit anything but concrete.



It smells terrible on the train. The only Kringleton elves allowed to visit the Workshop are Kringleton elves delivering Kringleton food. The exotic kinds you can’t get in the Workshop. Tolks typically have cookies with ribbons of chocolate over ’em, rice fried up so it makes all kinds of sounds when you pour milk on it, bread that doesn’t go bad but tastes like you’re eating a brick of dried paint, and that’s just about it. It’s simple but it’s clean.

Kringleton has deep-fried goldfish, mulled wine with spiced honey, ground cockroach burgers, hot cinnamon bourbon, curried guinea pig with mistletoe, cuttlefish cooked in its own ink, cookies covered in green and red sugar and shaped erotically, rats on sticks, roaches on sticks, elf ears on sticks, baked and peppered eggnog cheese, marijuana-infused fruit cake bites, and ground up reindeer antlers—lotta tolks have been swindled into believing that last one can replace medicine. They’ve also been swindled into believing that last one is actual ground up reindeer antlers.

So, it smells terrible on this train.

Elf in front of me has a big order. Tolk who ordered it paid extra for it to be gift-wrapped. Tolks in the Workshop love that shit; still feel like life has *good* surprises.

That big order’s ribbon moved again. You can tell from ribbons: they don’t bounce at all from the bumps on the train, but always jiggle from internal vibrations. There’s an elf hiding in the package. Probably a kid. If you can sneak a kid into one of the lower floors, they might just go unnoticed as an unsocialized factory worker. And making that happen’s just about impossible: security’ll X-ray incoming food packages to the point of cooking it again. Most tolks even order things a little rawer just to prepare for it. Most kids you try to sneak in fry like that.

There are better ways to sneak ’em in but nobody should be doing it. Life isn’t good on the lower floors, especially if you’re small and can reach into harder places. You don’t want a job recalibrating Rubik’s Cube factory lines—those things get back to work fast enough to swallow a kid by their fist and dice them in less than eight seconds. Best you’re gonna get is dyeing Play-Doh, and that’ll give you cerebral hypoxia in sufficient doses in the short run, full on pneumoconiosis by the end of your first decade working there. Like you’ve been huffing coal. You’re better off dying in a box in an X-ray machine. Casket and cremation.

The train stops at the first checkpoint. It’s a bullshit one. Guard walks through each car. Okays the whole train. Nobody gets a random inspection—least not tolks, keebs, or krisps. Garage elf might. It’s really just for the tolk guard who was promised he’d die on the eighth someday, and here he is, three hundred years old and living on the sixth still. They need to rough up garbage elves once in awhile to keep themselves from grabbing an air rifle, walking into a factory, and shooting everyone’s eyes out.

Keebs are your Kringleton natives. Short. Real short. They got myths that they used to live in trees. Interbreeding with tolks gave you krisps—heights varying, hair and eye color varying. Who knows where the hell the garbage elves fit into that. For a lotta centuries there, garbage elves worked pest control. Only time you ever let a garbage elf in your apartment was to kill roaches and rats and the garbage elves did it without a single chirp. Now that everybody’s pockets have gotten a littler draftier, garbage elves have been making bank whipping up roach burgers. A garbage elf kid’ll never even make it on the fourth floor. Real easy to look at and figure that they deserve a bit of a busted lip.

Guard walks through. No trouble.

Next checkpoint is the same. If they’re actually looking for something, they don’t want us knowing what it is. One of these days, six hundred elves armed with twelve hundred firecrackers are gonna be on this train, ready to slaughter every tolk from the eighth floor up. Seventh if they’re ambitious. You ever seen anybody shove a firecracker up somebody else’s nasal cavity? Makes you really recognize how we’re all built too. We’re cutesy, meaty toys.

Till that fun day, two checkpoints is security theater.

We get out at the station on the Workshop’s fifth and form a line, saying where we’re delivering packages to. I gotta explain that I’m going to the eleventh and I don’t have any packages and they gotta explain that that’s impossible. They ask for my ID. I know I gotta do it. I still give them a hard time.

They look at it. First tolk to see it doesn’t recognize my name. That’s good.

Second does. He keeps quiet.

Third does too and just runs his fucking mouth:

“Cedar Gingerflakes?” he gawks, this shit-eating smile blossoming, framed by acne scars and a patchy goatee. “You’re…? Oh, my… Nahhh…!”

The second tolk squeezes his arm.

“No,” the third tolk continues. “I didn’t mean any—” He turns back to me, chuckling now. “There was this krisp with that name who used to—”

The third tolk then yelps, grabbing at his hand, which is currently wrapped under the crushing fist of the first tolk. The first tolk tries to take as even a breath as he can and hands me back my ID.

“We’ll call the eleventh for some double-checking, Mr. Gingerflakes,” the first tolk says, fingers trembling from how tight he’s squeezing. “We apologize if anything derogatory was communicated.”

I take the ID back. So, he recognized me. He’s just not a dick.

“Come the fuc—” the third tolk tries to pry his hand free. “He’s not…! Can you let go?!”

The first tolk nods me over to a bench I can wait at. I go. Soon as I sit, I can hear the third tolk gasping in relief.

“That’s not…!” he cries, humming in distress. “That’s… That’s… *That’s*…?”

Fucking yes.

That’s.