

# HOPE AND GRAVITY

## CHARACTERS

*The play's nine roles may be performed either by nine actors or by five, with the following doubling:*

ACTOR 1  
*(man, 40s–50s)*  
MARTY, DOUGLAS

ACTOR 2  
*(man, late 30s–early 40s)*  
PETER, HAL

ACTOR 3  
*(woman, 40s)*  
TANYA, NAN

ACTOR 4  
*(man, 20s)*  
STEVE

ACTOR 5  
*(woman, 20s)*  
JILL, BARB

*Please consider all racial/ethnic combinations in casting.*

## TIME

Now. And then. (Not necessarily in that order.)

## SETTING

In and around an American city.

## SCENES

### ACT ONE

6. Out of Order
2. Immaculate Conception
4. Possibility
5. Scout's Honor
8. Spring Remembrance

### ACT TWO

7. Self-Help
1. The Big Picture
9. Small World
3. Leap of Faith

*Act One runs about 55 minutes; Act Two, 45 minutes.*

## NOTES

A *Beat*. is shorter than a *Pause*. *Long pause*. is longer. *Silence.*, longest.

When one character begins speaking before another has finished, the beginning of the overlap is indicated by a slash ( / ). (Thus, an actor with a slash in her or his line should continue speaking without interruption, as it is merely a cue for the next speaker.)

A dash (—) indicates where one speaker is cut off by the next.

An ellipsis (...) indicates where a speaker trails off, or searches for a word, and not an interruption.

When lines end with commas or semicolons, there is no actual overlap; the following character's line is merely inserting a thought that momentarily delays the original speaker's intention, interrupting two halves of the same thought.

A word or phrase spoken in conjunction with air quotes is bracketed by asterisks (e.g., \*creative types\*); air quotes should otherwise not be used.

For Aaron Posner,  
who reminded me about this amazing poem  
(They get stuck in there.):

*"About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters..."*

—W. H. Auden  
"Musée des Beaux Arts"

# HOPE AND GRAVITY

## ACT ONE

### 6. Out of Order

*Lights rise on Jill and Steve, both in their 20s, both bearing messenger bags. Steve holds a pair of stapled pages in front of him, which he reads intently.*

JILL. I don't know where it came from, it just...bubbled up. Like some, I don't know, underground stream or something. Like in the Bible, in the desert? When these streams just, out of nowhere—wait, is that what I'm thinking of?

*She looks over at Steve, who ignores her. Pause.*

Anyway, it's probably crap.

STEVE. Shh.

*Pause. Steve flips to the second page. Beat.*

JILL. God, I hate this elevator...

*Beat.*

Every time I wait for it, I can feel my life *draining* away...

STEVE. (*Looking up.*) Will you shut up?

*Jill backs off. Steve reads on. Long pause.*

JILL. I heard somewhere that, over the course of a lifetime, the average person spends a total of *three years* waiting for elevators. Which, I don't know about you, but I find absolutely...

*Beat.*

Wait—that can't be right...

*She does the math in her head. Finishing the poem, Steve*

lowers the pages, overwhelmed. *Beat.*  
Well? *He flips the first sheet back and stares at the pages in his hands.*

Is it crap?

STEVE. No, it's ... great.

JILL. Say what you really think.

STEVE. It's perfect, Jill. You wrote this last night? JILL.

Most of it.

STEVE. In the *laundry room*?

JILL. You said you and Blacktooth Barb needed space.

*Steve shakes his head in disbelief.*

Besides, my load wasn't done, so I figured I might as well write a poem.

STEVE. *How do you do this?*

JILL. What.

STEVE. Knock them out like this. In the middle of a rinse cycle.

JILL. Wait till Douglas has his way with it; it'll be covered in red, like always.

*She takes the pages back. Noting his silence:*

You finish yours?

STEVE. What do you think.

JILL. *Again?*

STEVE. I know...

JILL. That's like, what, three weeks in a row?

STEVE. I don't know what's happening.

JILL. You used to be the pacer...

STEVE. Yeah...

JILL. ...each week, while the rest of us limped along—and *brilliant* stuff. Even Douglas, who we both know doesn't lavish praise / on—

STEVE. *I just couldn't finish it, all right?*

JILL. All right.

*Pause.*

What's it about?

STEVE. Icarus.

JILL. That's cool. What's it called?

STEVE. "Icarus."

*Beat.*

JILL. Okay...

*Beat.*

How much have you written?

STEVE. The title. (*Off her look.*) Look, it's hard, okay?

JILL. We all get stuck sometimes;

STEVE. (*Indicating her pages as evidence.*) Not you!

JILL. even Douglas—he said so himself.

STEVE. It's just— Every time I sit down to write, I can't help thinking about graduation...

JILL. That's three months away...

STEVE. And after that, this huge *abyss*...

JILL. (*Trying to calm him.*) Hey.

STEVE. Meanwhile, you read these *masterpieces*, like...I don't know, "Dover Beach," or, or "Musée des Beaux Arts," or...or...

JILL. "Spring Remembrance"...

STEVE. "*Spring Remembrance*"! And then you stare at your empty page, your...pathetically empty page, and it's like, I don't know, like it's *mocking* you or something—like every poet from Homer on down is *daring* you to step into the ring. And all you've got is a lame-ass title and a buttload of student loans.

*Beat.*

JILL. I don't know what to say.

STEVE. Yeah, well, obviously neither do I.

*Steve moves away. Jill looks at him, then down at the elevator button. Beat.*

JILL. You did push the down button, didn't you?

*Beat.*

\* Pronounced "MOO zay day BO-ZAR."

STEVE. I thought you pushed it.

*Jill exhales heavily, then pushes the button several times.  
Long pause.*

JILL. You hear about the accident?

STEVE. What accident.

JILL. Elevator crashed last night, across town.

STEVE. Get out.

JILL. Nine stories, no brakes—boom.

STEVE. Anybody hurt?

JILL. Two people were killed.

STEVE. Holy shit.

JILL. I know.

*Steve considers this for several seconds, then:*

STEVE. Want to walk down?

JILL. Six flights? No?

STEVE. It'll take us two seconds.

JILL. The staircase always smells like pee.

*Steve just looks at her.*

It does; you just don't notice because your nasal receptors are, like, dead.

*Steve surrenders, checking his phone for the time.*

STEVE. We're gonna be late...

*Pause.*

JILL. Speaking of odors, what was that you cooked for Blacktooth Barb last night?

STEVE. Will you stop saying that?

JILL. What.

STEVE. You know what.

JILL. "Blacktooth Barb"?

STEVE. She's really self-conscious.

*Beat.*

JILL. How about "Graytooth Barb"?

STEVE. How about you don't say her name at all?

JILL. Fine. How was *Your Girlfriend's* birthday?

STEVE. It wasn't.

*Beat.*

JILL. Wasn't what.

STEVE. I got the date wrong; her birthday's today.

JILL. Well...at least you weren't late again.

STEVE. And she's not my girlfriend anymore.

JILL. You *broke up*?!

STEVE. She's my fiancée now.

JILL. Oh.

STEVE. You don't sound too excited.

JILL. I'm not the one who should sound excited. You're the one who's going to have to look at her every time she smiles...

*Steve glares.*

I didn't say "Blacktooth Barb" oops yes I did.

*Steve just shakes his head. Peter enters, wearing a stylish black blazer and dark sunglasses atop his head, and wheeling a small black suitcase.*

Well...congratulations.

STEVE. Thanks.

JILL. You give her a ring?

STEVE. What do you think? We wouldn't be very engaged if I didn't give her a ring.

*Peter looks at the elevator button.*

PETER. Did somebody push the down button?

STEVE. Yeah, sometimes the light doesn't...

PETER. Right.

*They wait together. Pause.*

STEVE. She wants me to go into advertising.

JILL. Yeah, well, Barb would.

STEVE. Says those big firms always need \*creative types.\*

JILL. Did she really put that in air quotes?

STEVE. What.

JILL. \*Creative types.\*

STEVE. I guess.

JILL. God, I hate when she does that. It's like those people who use apostrophes for plurals...

PETER. You think maybe it's out of order?

STEVE. Um...I don't know.

*Steve puts his ear to the door and listens. Jill notices Peter's suitcase.*

JILL. Going out of town?

PETER. Trying to.

JILL. Where are you headed?

PETER. Greece.

JILL. Nice. Work or play?

PETER. Work.

JILL. Still—Greece...

PETER. Greece...

*They share a smile. Steve pulls away from the door.*

STEVE. I don't hear anything.

JILL. What do you do?

PETER. I'm a spy.

*Beat.*

JILL. Really?

PETER. Yeah.

JILL. Wow.

*Pause.*

STEVE. Are you allowed to just say that?

PETER. No.

*Jill and Steve just stare at him.*

Don't tell anybody.

JILL. Um, okay.

STEVE. Sure, no problem.

MARTY. *(Off.)* 'Scuse me, folks, I'll need to get in there...

*Marty appears, wearing coveralls with a tool belt and walkie-talkie. Seeing him, Peter slides his sunglasses onto his face and turns his head away. Jill and Steve step aside for Marty, who reaches up and slides a screwdriver into a hole in the elevator door.*

JILL. Is it broken?

MARTY. Nope—just out of order.

*Steve and Jill look at each other. Sound of doors opening.*

There we go. *(Into his walkie.)* We're open on six.

STEVE. You mean it was here this whole time?

MARTY. You can go in.

*They all do. Marty follows.*

*(On walkie.)* Clearin' six...

*Sound of doors closing, motor whirring.*

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Vertical Transportation Safety Code requires me to inform you that we are engaged in a Randomized Floor Test, which may add some time to your elevator ride. We apologize for any inconvenience."

JILL. How much time?

MARTY. Difficult to say with an RFT, but I can assure you...that...

*Marty studies Peter more closely.*

Dr. Davison?

PETER. Yes...?

MARTY. I thought so! Wasn't sure at first with the shades. Marty Klesniak.

PETER. Oh!

*He removes his sunglasses.*

MARTY. You did my root canal four years ago.

PETER. Right...

*Steve and Jill exchange a glance.*

MARTY. Prolly didn't recognize me with my mouth shut. Here, how 'bout this:

*He bends back in front of Peter, opening his mouth as wide as possible.*

*(Speaking unintelligibly, mouth open.)* Oo-oo ek-ig-i-ee ow?\*

PETER. Sure!

MARTY. Small world. My wife Nan's got a date with you Monday.

PETER. A what?

MARTY. *(To Jill and Steve.)* Implant. Better her than me. *(To Peter.)* I don't envy you teeth guys, havin' to deal with the blood and saliva and whatnot...

*DING! Whirring stops. Sound of elevator doors opening.*

Second floor? Anybody?

JILL. First.

STEVE. No.

*Peter shakes his head no.*

MARTY. Okay, then. *(Into his walkie.)* Clearin' second floor...

*Sound of doors, then whirring.*

JILL. Does this test have something to do with that crash last night?

STEVE. That's what I was / wonder—

MARTY. Randomized Floor Tests are part of routine maintenance—nothin' to be concerned about.

PETER. They figure out how the cable snapped?

JILL. Cable?

MARTY. *(To Peter.)* Where'd you hear this.

PETER. Internet.

JILL. I heard it was the—

MARTY. Cables don't *snap*. Everybody thinks they do, but they don't. These babies have six cables, *each* of which, accordin' to Code, can support the maximum load of the car *plus* twenty-five percent. It wasn't a cable.

STEVE. What happened, then?

*Beat.*

\* "Do you recognize me now?"

MARTY. I'm not allowed to say.

*Beat. DING! Whirring stops. Sound of elevator doors opening.*

Seventh floor. Anybody?

JILL. First.

STEVE. No.

PETER. Wait—seventh? We're going up again?

MARTY. Momentarily.

JILL. Why?

MARTY. I told you, it's an RFT.

STEVE. So?

MARTY. SO, the car is programmed to stop at every floor—just not in numerical order.

PETER. *What?*

MARTY. That's what "random" means. Now if it had been a CFT—*(Helpfully, to Jill.)* Consecutive Floor Test—

STEVE. You mean, we can't just go down to one?

MARTY. You'll get there eventually.

PETER. This is ridiculous...

MARTY. *(Into walkie.)* Clearin' seven.

*Doors. Whirring.*

JILL. I better text Jeff—let Douglas know we're going to be late.

*She texts. After a moment:*

STEVE. *(To Peter.)* Jill said two people were killed.

PETER. Just one. A woman. And a guy was injured. They're withholding the names till they notify next of kin.

STEVE. She said it was the brakes.

PETER. Nah, this thing I read online—

MARTY. It wasn't the brakes.

*All look at him.*

These babies have electromagnetic brakes that clamp shut during a power outage;

JILL. Oh, was there a / pow—

MARTY. *not to mention* the automatic brakes at each end of the shaft.

PETER. Then what was it?

*Beat.*

MARTY. I'm not allowed to say.

*Jill regards her phone. Beat.*

JILL. This isn't going through...

STEVE. Wait till we stop at the next floor and stand outside.

*Peter unzips a small pocket in his suitcase and removes a flight itinerary, which he now examines. The whirring continues for a few seconds, then: DING! Whirring stops. Doors open.*

MARTY. Twelfth floor?

STEVE. No.

PETER. Twelfth?!

*Jill steps outside the elevator, raises her phone in the air, and presses "send."*

MARTY. *(To Steve.)* It's a little like roulette: "Round and round and round she goes, and where she stops,"—

PETER. Look, I've got a plane to catch.

*Jill looks at her phone.*

MARTY. What time?

STEVE. Did it work?

PETER. *(Looking.)* 10:45.

JILL. I think.

*She reenters the car.*

MARTY. What airline?

PETER. *Why does it matter what*—I just want to get out of here!

MARTY. Then let's give her a spin... *(Into walkie.)* Clearin' twelve.

*Doors. Whirring. Peter looks at his itinerary; Jill glances over.*

JILL. Um...that says "Cleveland"...

PETER. What?

JILL. You said you were going to Greece.

*He stares at her.*

STEVE. *(A warning.)* Jill...

PETER. Layover.

*Beat. Jill nods, unconvinced.*

MARTY. Yeah people think elevators are dangerous, but they're *not*—ask an actuary. *Elevator World* had an article last month—anybody read it?

*They just look at him.*

No? Well, let me summarize: You're as safe in here as you would be sittin' in your own La-Z-Boy.

*DING! Whirring stops. Doors open.*

Sixteen?

*Steve and Peter shake their heads; Jill steps outside the elevator again and checks her phone.*

STEVE. What are you doing?

JILL. Seeing if Jeff got my text.

PETER. Aw, *come on*...

*She holds her phone in the air, as before.*

MARTY. Miss...

JILL. Just a second...

STEVE. Jill...

PETER. I'm late as it is.

*Her phone chimes. She reenters the elevator, checking her text.*

MARTY. *(Into walkie.)* Clearin' sixteen...

*Doors. Whirring.*

JILL. Huh.

STEVE. What.

JILL. He says class is canceled.

STEVE. Why?

JILL. I don't know.

*She begins texting again. Beat.*

PETER. If it wasn't the cable or brakes, what was it?

MARTY. I told you, I'm / not allowed—

PETER. "...not allowed to say"—shoulda known.

JILL. *(As she texts.)* I heard it got stuck first.

PETER. Oh, yeah?  
JILL. And the passengers jumped up and down to dislodge it.  
STEVE. Holy shit.  
MARTY. It wasn't the / jump—  
PETER. How do they know that?  
JILL. Security video.  
MARTY. Jumpin' doesn't make cars fall—watch:  
*He starts jumping up and down.*  
PETER. *What are you doing?*  
MARTY. I could jump up and down all / day and (*Continuing without interruption below.*)  
STEVE. Please don't.  
MARTY. (*Continuing from above.*) this wouldn't budge.  
JILL. Then how do you explain the fact that—  
*Marty stops jumping.*  
MARTY. *Listen:* Accordin' to actuarial science, the odds of dyin' in an / elevator—  
PETER. Here we go again...  
MARTY. All right...okay...  
*Marty finds a key on his tool belt and inserts it in the panel.*  
STEVE. Can we just / get—  
MARTY. This'll just take a second.  
*He turns the key; the whirring stops.*  
PETER. Hey!  
JILL. What's going on?  
MARTY. (*Into walkie.*) Maintenance hold.  
PETER. If I miss my flight...  
MARTY. Let me just set the record straight: We went through that shaft for *five hours* last night. It wasn't the cables. It wasn't the brakes. It wasn't the governor, counterweights, pulleys—we checked *everything*...  
STEVE. Then what was it?

*Pause.*  
MARTY. (*At a loss.*) It was a miracle.  
*Beat.*  
JILL. A "*miracle*"?  
MARTY. Only...tragic.  
*Beat.*  
STEVE. What's that supposed to mean?  
PETER. You're saying this was an Act of God?  
MARTY. I'm not gonna argue theology with you. I'm just sayin' this one defied the laws of physics.  
JILL. Sounds to me like physics was working just fine.  
MARTY. What I mean to say is *it couldn't happen*. Can't. Actuarially speakin', it didn't.  
PETER. Except a woman's dead and a guy's in critical condition.  
*Beat.*  
MARTY. Except for that.  
*Pause. All become aware of the dark abyss beneath them.*  
*Pause.*  
STEVE. I don't know about you all, but I'd kinda like to get off this thing?  
MARTY. Right. (*Into walkie.*) Maintenance resume.  
*He turns and removes his key. Whirring. They ride in silence for perhaps ten seconds, watching the numbers go by. Then:*  
Well whaddya know:  
*DING! The whirring stops.*  
Terra firma.  
PETER. Thank god...  
*Doors open. Peter exits quickly. Jill follows.*  
MARTY. Hope you have a little fun this weekend, Doc—Cleveland, Greece, wherever.  
PETER. (*As he disappears.*) Thanks.  
MARTY. (*Calling after him.*) You teeth guys deserve a break!

*Jill holds her phone in the air, as before.*

(*To Steve.*) I mean it, you couldn't pay me enough to deal with the blood and saliva and whatnot. (*Noticing Steve is not moving.*) You gettin' out?

STEVE. Not if our class is canceled. (*To Jill.*) You coming back up?

JILL. Just a second.

*Pause.*

MARTY. So, you kids in college?

STEVE. Grad school.

MARTY. (*Impressed.*) Really? Grad school. What for?

STEVE. Creative Writing.

MARTY. Wow.

STEVE. (*Momentarily proud.*) Yeah.

*Pause.*

MARTY. Who's payin' for *that*?

*Beat.*

STEVE. Huh?

MARTY. That can't be cheap. What is it, two years?

STEVE. Three.

MARTY. Three *years*, with tuition, books, livin' expenses...

STEVE. Yeah...

MARTY. And then, when you're done, with the debt and everything, what can you do with it?

STEVE. Well...

MARTY. I mean, maybe go into advertising. Is that what you want to do?

STEVE. Not really.

MARTY. 'Cause those guys who write the slogans—I mean the Big Time ones—"Just Do It," "got milk?"—Those are the guys who make out like *bandits*.

STEVE. We're not doing this to get rich.

MARTY. Well—good to keep your expectations low.

*Jill's phone chimes. She looks at it.*

Whatever you wind up doin', it still beats havin' to deal with bodily fluids. Miss, you comin' back in or what?

JILL. (*Quietly, to herself.*) Oh, God...

STEVE. Jill?

MARTY. 'Cause I got a lot more floors to get to.

*Beat.*

STEVE. Everything okay?

*Steve approaches her as the phone slips from Jill's hand and clatters to the floor. Steve looks at it, then back at Jill, as she turns to him, dismayed. Blackout.*

## 2. Immaculate Conception

*An administrative office with a desk and a chair or two. If there is a wall, perhaps a large, school-issue clock or inspirational poster. As lights rise, we discover Tanya pacing, a handbag over her shoulder, holding a small jar in one hand and talking into a cell phone in the other.*

TANYA. Sorry, I don't want to *make* an appointment, I *have* an appointment, this afternoon. In...

*She checks her wristwatch.*

...well, technically now. But I'm not there, as you probably noticed, and I just want to make sure that when I get there, Doctor...sorry, the one with the long name that starts with a W...

*Beat.*

Right, that she'll still be able to see me.

*Pause.*

Well, I just need to pick something up from my husband...

*She looks at the jar in her hand.*

Right, that. And he should be here any minute, ready to...produce.

*Pause.*

Well, I'm probably half an hour away, so...

*She checks her watch.*

...maybe a quarter to four?

*Pause.*

Oh, I really appreciate it.

*Beat.*

Right, see you then.

*She disconnects the call, then exhales heavily, shutting her eyes for a moment. She opens them again, locates another number, and calls it. After a moment:*

Hi, I'm calling to confirm a table for two at 5:30?

*Beat.*

The last name is Bauer—B-A-U...

*Barb appears, professionally dressed in a skirt and blouse. She looks a little thrown.*

Oh—can you hold on a second?

*Putting the phone to her chest, Tanya looks to Barb.*

BARB. I found him.

TANYA. Great!

BARB. In the nurse's office.

*Beat.*

TANYA. Is he okay?

BARB. Um, he's...\*finishing up\*?

TANYA. Oh—okay. Thanks, Barb.

*Barb exits. Tanya returns to her call.*

Sorry, did you find the reservation?

*Beat.*

That's what I was afraid of. Then I'll need to make one: Bauer—B-A...

*Pause.*

Perfect—thanks so much.

*She disconnects the call, drops the phone and jar into her*

*handbag, and exhales heavily. Then she looks down and takes hold of a small medal hanging from a light chain around her neck. She considers it for a moment, then shuts her eyes and begins rubbing it. After a moment, Hal appears in a button-down shirt and tie, and carrying a blazer. Perhaps he's a little untucked.*

HAL. Tanya!

TANYA. There you are...

HAL. What are you—

TANYA. When you didn't come home, I thought maybe you forgot.

HAL. Forgot?

TANYA. It's okay—I can go in later. Where is it?

HAL. What.

TANYA. Your sample.

HAL. Sample?

TANYA. Barb said you were \*finishing up,\* in the nurse's office.

HAL. *What did she say she saw?*

TANYA. Nothing! But I do need to get to the doctors' now, so they have time to test it.

*Beat.*

HAL. *Oh...*

TANYA. So, where is it?

HAL. You mean the *sample*.

TANYA. Yes! Isn't that what you were doing in the nurse's office?

HAL. Um...no.

TANYA. Well, why not?

HAL. I got distracted. By something else.

TANYA. Oh, Hal...

HAL. Something very important.

TANYA. What's more important than making a baby?

HAL. I know, I just—I've had a lot on my chest.

TANYA. "Chest"?

HAL. *Mind*—a lot on my mind.

TANYA. Of course you do, honey; we both do. But if I miss this appointment, that's another month down the drain, and time is not our friend.

*She reaches into her bag.*

HAL. Okay, but what if we're just not meant to—

*Tanya sets the jar down on the desk with a thunk. Pause.*

What's that?

TANYA. An empty jelly jar.

HAL. What do you want me to do with it?

TANYA. Make it not-empty?

*Beat.*

HAL. *Here?*

TANYA. Well, you were *supposed* to stop at home, but—

HAL. *(A shouted whisper.) I can't do that at school!*

TANYA. Oh c'mon—I'll bet dozens of eighth-graders do it every day.

HAL. Well I'm not an eighth-grader; I'm an assistant principal. We have more distractions.

TANYA. Okay, then I'll help you focus...

*She moves toward him.*

HAL. Help me?

TANYA. Just shut your eyes and think of England.

*She begins to undo his belt; he retreats.*

HAL. Waitwaitwaitwaitwait—is this really necessary?

TANYA. Hal, they need to test both of us, so they can find out where the problem is.

HAL. Well I don't think I can do it today.

TANYA. Why not?

*Beat.*

HAL. I'd rather not say.

*He turns away and discreetly tucks in his shirt. Observing him, Tanya considers the possibilities and, hard as it is to*

*imagine, settles on one.*

TANYA. Did...something just happen between you and Nan?

HAL. What do you mean?

TANYA. *Did you just have sex with the school nurse?*

HAL. *What?* No! God, no; I'd never—Absolutely not.

TANYA. Then why can't you...you know... "Put out."

*Pause.*

Well?

*Beat.*

HAL. I've had a sign.

*Beat.*

TANYA. A sign.

HAL. Sort of.

TANYA. I don't know what that means.

HAL. I don't either, actually; but I know I will, in a day or two, or week, or—

TANYA. Hal:

HAL. That's what I was doing in the nurse's office—asking Nan for a little advice.

TANYA. Have you been taking your meds?

HAL. Why do you always say that...?

TANYA. Because, the *last* time you saw a sign,—

HAL. I'll admit I was wrong about the cat...

TANYA. So have you been taking them?

HAL. *This is real.*

*Beat.*

I haven't figured it out—*yet*—but I will soon, I'm sure of it.

*She nods, looking at him. Pause.*

TANYA. And in the meantime, my eggs get older...

HAL. I want a baby as much as you do...

TANYA. Do you? Really?

HAL. Yes!

*Beat.*  
TANYA. Then I'm going to need you to pony up.  
*She picks up the jar and holds it out to him. He stares at the jar. Pause.*  
I know you're not an eighth-grader anymore, but you've always been open to persuasion...  
*She moves in and kisses him, sensually. He goes with it for a few moments, then gently disengages from her.*  
HAL. I can't.  
*Beat.*  
TANYA. Can't? Or won't.  
HAL. Not today.  
*Beat.*  
I'm sorry.  
*Long pause.*  
TANYA. Okay.  
*Pause.*  
Okay, I'll call and cancel.  
*She drops the jar back into her bag.*  
Again. And we'll keep on trying, the "natural" way. Even though I feel like I've got an *expiration date* stamped on my ovaries...  
*She pulls out her phone.*  
HAL. Tanya...  
TANYA. It takes two to tango, Hal—you know? This isn't gonna happen by immaculate conception.  
*This lands with Hal, who looks up, eyes wide, as Tanya places the call.*  
HAL. Wait—what did you say?  
TANYA. Though that would certainly make things simpler...  
HAL. You said "immaculate—"  
TANYA. *(On phone.)* Hi, Tanya Bauer again; I—  
HAL. Hold on.

TANYA. *(On phone.)* Sure, I can wait; if there's one thing I've gotten good at, it's waiting...  
HAL. *This is it.*  
TANYA. What.  
HAL. *This is the sign!*  
TANYA. What are you—  
HAL. Give me the jar.  
TANYA. Hal...  
HAL. I'm ready to make it not-empty.  
TANYA. You just said you couldn't, or wouldn't.  
HAL. I know what I said, I was wrong, but now I understand:  
TANYA. *(On phone.)* Yes, hi, I called a few minutes ago?  
HAL. *This is what I'm supposed to do.*  
TANYA. *(On phone.)* Right. But now I think—  
HAL. *Please. Believe me.*  
*Tanya takes him in. Long pause.*  
TANYA. *(On phone.)* Um, yes, I... I just...  
*Pause.*  
*(Still looking at Hal.)* I wanted to say I'll be a few minutes later than I thought.  
*Hal smiles, relieved. Beat.*  
Okay—great. See you soon.  
*She disconnects the call.*  
HAL. You won't be sorry.  
*She drops her phone back in her bag.*  
TANYA. You're sure about this?  
HAL. I've never been surer of anything.  
TANYA. Because I'm not sure I could take another sign...  
HAL. And *no more signs*. I promise.  
*She smiles cautiously, retrieves the jar, hands it to him.*  
TANYA. I made the reservation. For dinner.  
HAL. Oh!

TANYA. 5:30.

HAL. Sorry.

TANYA. It's fine. You've had a lot on your...chest.

*She puts her hand on his chest, then starts out.*

I'll chat up Barb until you're done.

HAL. Okay.

TANYA. Take your time. But not too much. Just...whatever you need.

*He nods. She exits. Hal just stands there for a few moments. He places his hand on his chest, then looks down at it. He begins to unbutton his shirt, button by button, all the way to the navel. Having done so, he opens the shirt wide to reveal a drawing of some sort on his chest, in marker—could it be a face? He stares at it for a few moments, then looks upward, smiling. Lights fade to black.*

#### 4. Possibility

*Lights rise on the dining area of a modest apartment. A small table with tablecloth is set for two. At rise, Steve stands on one side of it, wearing a frilly apron; Barb stands on the other, having just entered, wearing the skirt and blouse she wore in the previous scene, but now with a light jacket and a purse.*

STEVE. A face?

BARB. A face.

STEVE. On his chest.

BARB. Right there.

STEVE. I'm trying to picture it...

BARB. It was weird.

STEVE. You mean like a tattoo?

BARB. No, I know what tattoos look—I've got a tattoo! This was like she drew it. With a Sharpie.

STEVE. Who.

BARB. Nan! The nurse.

STEVE. Damn.

BARB. I know.

*Pause.*

STEVE. Your boss is whacked.

BARB. What have I been saying?

STEVE. You've been saying he's whacked.

BARB. So the next time I say \*Hal's whacked\* you have to agree with me.

*She hangs her purse on a chair and removes her jacket, then turns back to him, finally registering:*

You're wearing an apron.

STEVE. Yes!

BARB. A really girly apron...

STEVE. It's my sister's.

*Beat.*

BARB. Are you trying to tell me something?

STEVE. I'm making dinner!

BARB. Get out.

STEVE. You don't smell it?

BARB. I smelled something, but I thought maybe your sink backed up again.

STEVE. Thanks.

BARB. I'm kidding, you know I'm kidding. You're *cooking*, that's so...*domestic* of you.

STEVE. Yeah, well...

BARB. What's the occasion?

STEVE. *(It should be obvious.)* Your birthday!

*Beat.*

BARB. My birthday's tomorrow.

*Beat.*

STEVE. No it isn't;

BARB. Yeah it is.  
STEVE. it's / March—  
BARB. March first, which is tomorrow. This is Leap Day.  
*Beat.*  
STEVE. Aw, *man*...  
BARB. Sorry.  
STEVE. I *hate* that.  
BARB. I know.  
STEVE. Why do they *do* that?  
BARB. I don't know.  
STEVE. Randomly throw in an extra day...  
BARB. I don't think it's random.  
STEVE. Like February isn't too long already.  
BARB. It's okay—you didn't miss it.  
STEVE. Yeah, I did; I was off by one day.  
BARB. So we'll celebrate again tomorrow.  
*Beat. He is unsure.*  
STEVE. Okay.  
BARB. I'll cook.  
STEVE. You don't have to.  
BARB. No, I want to. Which is not to say whatever's making that clogged drain smell won't be delicious.  
*Beat.*  
Where's your roommate?  
STEVE. Oh—she's... I asked Jill to give us some space tonight, 'cause it's your birth— Well, was. Should've been. Sorry.  
BARB. It's fine.  
STEVE. I know, I just...I wanted to...  
BARB. Wanted to what.  
*Beat.*  
STEVE. Never mind.  
*He turns away. Barb nods vaguely. Pause.*

BARB. Is she still calling me Blacktooth Barb?  
STEVE. Jill never called you Blacktooth Barb...  
BARB. Uh-huh.  
STEVE. She's just...you know.  
BARB. A bitch?  
STEVE. If you two got to know each other, you'd see you're actually a lot alike.  
*Barb is visibly offended by the comparison.*  
She just gets a little, you know, sometimes.  
BARB. Jealous?  
*Beat.*  
STEVE. Jealous?  
BARB. Come on—Jill's the poster child for jealous.  
STEVE. We're just roommates.  
BARB. Sure, for now.  
STEVE. And she's 'got a boyfriend.  
BARB. Please.  
STEVE. Jeff's cool.  
BARB. Jeff's got \*placeholder\* written all over him. She's just waiting for an opening.  
*Steve considers this possibility for the first time.*  
So, are we gonna eat this thing you made, or what?  
*She starts for the kitchen; Steve decides to go for it.*  
STEVE. Wait.  
*Barb stops, turns. Steve reaches into a pocket of the apron and removes a ring box, then holds it out to her. She stares at it, then looks at him. He smiles. She looks back at the box in his hand.*  
Happy almost birthday.  
BARB. Steve...?  
STEVE. Oh:  
*He gets down on one knee.*  
BARB. Is this what I think it is?

STEVE. If you mean, am I asking you to marry me, yeah—I am.

BARB. (*Thrilled.*) Oh my God...!

*She reaches out and takes the box.*

You are such a romantic.

*She begins to open it.*

STEVE. Don't open it.

*Beat.*

BARB. What?

STEVE. Just...leave it closed.

BARB. Why?

STEVE. Because...it's empty.

*Beat.*

BARB. Empty?

STEVE. The ring isn't actually in it.

*Beat.*

BARB. Is it being engraved?

STEVE. There isn't a ring. Not yet.

BARB. I don't understand.

STEVE. I couldn't afford an actual—*can't*...afford, not while I'm still a student...

BARB. So this is what, a practical joke?

STEVE. *No!*

BARB. Some / kind of a—

STEVE. This is a, no, of course not. It's a symbol, a...a token...

BARB. Steve...

STEVE. ...*a promissory note*. For a ring to come.

BARB. I know you're a poet...

STEVE. There *will* be a ring;

BARB. But this just sounds like bullshit.

STEVE. There will be. Someday. When I'm out of school. And pay off my loans. And make some money. There will be. I promise. Until then...

BARB. I get an empty box.

STEVE. It's not really empty; not if you think of it as a metaphor.

BARB. Here we go...

STEVE. Don't you see? It holds the future.

BARB. Steve...

STEVE. It does. It's in there.

BARB. If I open this up,

STEVE. Don't open it!

BARB. there'll be nothing in it.

STEVE. Here—shut your eyes...

BARB. No.

STEVE. Please.

BARB. Why.

STEVE. Just for a minute.

BARB. I don't want / to shut—

STEVE. I need you to picture something.

*She looks at him with skepticism.*

Please.

*After a beat, she shuts her eyes.*

Now—imagine our future's in this box.

BARB. Pretty small future.

STEVE. It's *vast*. Limitless. This little box can hold a lifetime—*two* lifetimes—whatever you want to put in it. What do you want to put in it?

BARB. Well...for starters, a *ring*...

STEVE. It's in there.

*She opens her eyes.*

In your imagination.

*Disgruntled, she shuts her eyes again. Pause.*

BARB. Describe it.

STEVE. What.

BARB. The *ring*.

STEVE. Oh. Well...it's gold...

BARB. Platinum.

STEVE. Okay, platinum...

BARB. And the diamond?

STEVE. Enormous. Fourteen karats.

BARB. That's *gold*.

STEVE. Then however many karats you want.

BARB. Two.

STEVE. What else is in there?

*Pause.*

BARB. Well...a house...

STEVE. You got it.

BARB. Not like enormous, but you know,

STEVE. Sizeable.

BARB. new.

STEVE. Okay, new.

BARB. With a big yard.

STEVE. Yep.

BARB. And a nice couch.

STEVE. Perfect. What else?

BARB. I want to quit my job...

*Beat.*

STEVE. Okay...

BARB. Is that in there?

STEVE. Of course. What job do you want?

BARB. I don't want a job.

*Beat.*

STEVE. Oh.

*She opens her eyes.*

BARB. Is that in there or what?

STEVE. *It's in there*—shut your eyes.

*She does. Pause.*

We're in there, too, you and me—see us?

*He shuts his eyes as he continues.*

There, in our new and sizeable, not-enormous house; maybe sitting on the nice couch.

*Beat. She opens her eyes and looks at the ring box.*

Maybe kissing on the nice couch...

*She opens the box; it's empty.*

Maybe, you know, gettin' naked on the nice couch. If it's got like a slipcover...

*He opens his eyes, sees her and the open box.*

*(Dismayed.) Barb!* I told you not to open it...

BARB. Why.

STEVE. Because now it's empty.

BARB. It always was.

STEVE. No it wasn't.

BARB. You said yourself / it—

STEVE. *It held the future. Our future.* Everything.

BARB. Steve...

STEVE. *(Standing, now in a downward spiral.) I don't have anything!*

BARB. Hey...

STEVE. No money, no job, no car, no *talent*...

BARB. You'll get a car...

STEVE. I'm up to my ass in student loans...

BARB. So you'll pay them off.

STEVE. *With what?*

BARB. I don't know...

STEVE. My "big hit poem"?

BARB. Listen,—

STEVE. *All I had was possibility!* Potential. And it was in that box.

*Beat.*

And you opened it. And proved that I was just full of shit.

*Beat.*  
BARB. Then I'll shut it again.  
*She does.*  
STEVE. That doesn't change—  
BARB. Yes it does. It's all back in there.  
STEVE. Barb...  
BARB. The money, the job, the car...  
STEVE. Forget it.  
BARB. The *talent*...  
STEVE. It's okay, just...  
*Beat.*  
Let's drop it.  
*He slumps into a chair, head in his hands, elbows on the table.*  
*Pause.*  
BARB. Okay.  
*Beat. She sits in the other chair. Pause.*  
It was nice of you to make dinner. Whatever it was. Is.  
STEVE. I wanted this to be romantic.  
BARB. And it is: Light some candles...  
STEVE. Shit.  
BARB. Little wine...  
STEVE. I forgot the candles.  
BARB. That's okay.  
STEVE. And the wine.  
BARB. *That's* gonna be a problem...  
STEVE. (*Getting up.*) I'll run out and—  
BARB. (*Lying.*) No, I'm kidding, you know I'm kidding. (*Easing him back down.*) We'll just turn the lights out, put some music on—that's romantic enough.  
*She gives his back a reassuring rub, then looks around.*  
What time is Jill due back?  
STEVE. I don't know. She's doing her laundry.

BARB. You tell her I'm going away this weekend?  
STEVE. Yeah...?  
BARB. You tell her why?  
STEVE. I just said a seminar, in Cleveland.  
BARB. Did you say "self-help" seminar?  
STEVE. No! I wouldn't—I know you feel embarrassed about it.  
BARB. Because it's embarrassing.  
STEVE. I didn't say anything.  
BARB. Good boy. Just remember who's wearing your...  
*She considers the box.*  
...box.  
*He lets his head drop onto the table. Long pause.*  
You know, you could have just used a cigar band...  
STEVE. What?  
BARB. Like they did in the old days.  
STEVE. What are you talking about?  
BARB. A cigar band—you know, the...band. That goes around a cigar.  
STEVE. What about it?  
BARB. You could have just given me that.  
*Beat.*  
STEVE. Why?  
BARB. *Because it's a ring.* Sort of. It can go on your finger.  
STEVE. I don't even smoke.  
BARB. *You don't have to smoke the cigar,* you just—Never mind; forget it.  
*Pause.*  
STEVE. Would you have worn a cigar band?  
*Beat.*  
BARB. I don't know.  
*Beat.*  
At least it would have been something.

*Pause.*

To put in the box.

*Pause.*

Instead of—you know...

*Beat.*

STEVE. Nothing.

*Beat.*

BARB. Nothing.

*Lights fade.*

### 5. Scout's Honor

*Lights rise on a couch and coffee table, which bears a few magazines. In front of these stand Nan, wearing scrubs with a colorful top, and Peter, who holds a gift-wrapped box.*

NAN. You came...

PETER. You said we needed to talk.

NAN. And you said you needed to work.

PETER. Yeah, well...my bicuspid extraction canceled.

NAN. Really?

PETER. Nan: I'm here now—isn't that what matters?

*He drops the box on the table and moves to her.*

NAN. Well, I can never be sure if—

PETER. When's Marty due back?

NAN. Not before nine at the earliest.

PETER. Perfect.

*He moves in, starts kissing her neck.*

NAN. Hold on—

*She steps back.*

We hardly said hello.

*Beat.*

PETER. (*Wryly.*) Hello, Mrs. Klesniak.

NAN. (*Smiling.*) Hi, Dr. Davison.

PETER. Here—I picked this up on the way over.

*He picks up the box and hands it to her.*

NAN. For me?

PETER. I didn't buy it for Marty.

NAN. What is it?

PETER. Something you can put on after I've taken everything off.

*He kisses her, taking the box and dropping it back on the coffee table. After a moment, she breaks it off.*

NAN. You said you had an apicoectomy.

PETER. What?

NAN. When I called you from school. You said you couldn't come over because you had to do an apicoectomy. Whatever the hell that is.

PETER. Why the third degree tonight?

NAN. I just want you to be straight with me.

PETER. You're cheating on your husband and lecturing *me* about telling the truth?

NAN. No, you're right, I—

*She moves away from him.*

That's actually why I wanted to talk to you.

PETER. I had to work late, and then I didn't. And where did I come when I was done? Directly to you.

*He moves toward her.*

With a little stop on the way to pick up a token of my affection.

*He gently lifts her chin.*

NAN. Token of your erection, more like...

*She smiles. He leans in to kiss her; she stops him.*

So as I was saying, the reason I called you is—

*She is interrupted by the ring of Peter's cell phone.*

PETER. Shit.  
NAN. Just let it go.  
*He checks the phone; it rings again.*  
PETER. Sorry—I need to take this...  
*He answers it. Nan sits on the couch.*  
Dr. Davison.  
*Pause.*  
Uh huh.  
*Pause.*  
Uh huh.  
*Pause.*  
I'm afraid I can't right now, I'm... *(For Nan's benefit.)* ...just about to fill a cavity.  
*Nan smiles in spite of herself. He continues:*  
Well, I'm leaving town tomorrow; why don't we touch base early next week?  
*Pause.*  
Looking forward to it.  
*He disconnects and re-pockets the phone.*  
Sorry 'bout that.  
NAN. You didn't tell me you were goin' outta town.  
PETER. Just for the weekend.  
NAN. Where to?  
PETER. L.A.; conference on Hydraulic Sinus Condensing.  
NAN. Really?  
PETER. Scout's honor.  
NAN. Now I know you're lying...  
PETER. You think I'd make up a conference on Hydraulic Sinus Condensing?  
NAN. Of course you would. Where you goin' really.  
*Pause.*  
Peter?

*He shuts his eyes and exhales heavily.*  
PETER. All right.  
*He sits on the couch and faces her.*  
I decided to take that self-help seminar. The one you told me about—in Cleveland?  
NAN. You actually signed up?  
PETER. That's what I'm saying.  
NAN. I'm—wow—floored. I mean, I never thought you'd actually go...  
PETER. Well I'm going.  
NAN. Just because I asked you to.  
PETER. You see what you mean to me?  
*She softens. He smiles, then moves in to kiss her on the mouth. But Nan stops him, suddenly alert.*  
NAN. Wait.  
PETER. What now.  
*She listens intently for a moment. Then, the sound of an offstage door shutting. Suddenly:*  
NAN. Holy crap—it's Marty!  
*The following occurs as rapidly and frantically as possible.*  
PETER. *What?!*  
NAN. Hide!  
PETER. Where?  
NAN. *(Pointing off.)* Bedroom!  
*He starts off.*  
No—bathroom!  
*She points the other way; he reverses direction.*  
Wait—kitchen!  
*She points. Peter looks off.*  
PETER. Shit!  
*He hurls himself behind the couch.*  
NAN. Not behind the...  
*But there's no time to lose. She grabs a magazine from the*

*coffee table and holds it in front of her, as if casually reading. It's Elevator World. Marty enters, agitated, wearing a bowling shirt, slacks, and shoes, and carrying his bowling ball in a bag.*

MARTY. Hey.

NAN. Hi! You're home early—somethin' happen?

MARTY. I gotta go back to work.

NAN. How come?

MARTY. There's been an accident, downtown.

NAN. What kind of accident?

MARTY. Elevator fell—nine stories.

NAN. Oh my God... Is that even possible?

MARTY. No! That's what's so...

*He tries to find the words. Fails.*

They said a couple was in it, about our age. The woman was killed.

NAN. Oh, honey...

*Beat.*

MARTY. I gotta change...

*He exits. After a few moments, Peter's head emerges from behind the couch.*

PETER. That was close.

NAN. You gotta get outta here.

PETER. Why? He's going to go right back out.

NAN. Somethin's not right.

PETER. He doesn't know;

NAN. Not that.

PETER. I parked at the end of the street.

NAN. You just better go.

MARTY. *(Off.)* Nan...

NAN. Yeah?

MARTY. *(Off.)* Where's my hard hat?

NAN. Uh...top of the closet.

PETER. You didn't even try on your present...

NAN. Oh, Jesus...

*She grabs the box from the table and thrusts it under the couch.*

MARTY. *(Off.)* Found it!

NAN. Son of a— *Get down!*

*She pushes Peter's head behind the couch again. Marty returns, dressed in his coveralls and carrying a hard hat and reflective vest.*

MARTY. *(Passing through.)* Don't wait up—this may take a while.

NAN. Be careful.

*Marty stops before exiting. Beat. He turns back to her.*

What's the matter?

MARTY. Was that a present?

*Beat.*

NAN. What?

MARTY. The box, on the table. When I came in.

NAN. Oh—yeah.

MARTY. I thought it looked like a present.

NAN. It is! I was— I just— I figured I'd give it to you next week. You know, on our anniversary.

MARTY. I thought we agreed no presents.

NAN. We did. But I... I don't know. I saw this and I thought I'd, you know...

*She reaches below the couch and pulls out the box. Marty looks at it. Pause.*

MARTY. I didn't get you anything.

NAN. That's okay.

MARTY. I still can, though, if you want.

NAN. This is really for both of us.

MARTY. Oh—okay.

*Beat.*

NAN. Want to open it when you get back?

*Beat.*  
MARTY. No, I'll open it now.  
*Marty reaches for the box, takes it, and sits next to Nan on the couch. Nan is in agony. Marty slips off the bow, lifts off the top, and looks inside. Beat.*  
Wow.  
NAN. What do you think?  
*Marty sets the box on the table and stands, lifting out a sexy teddy. He looks at it.*  
You like it?  
*Beat.*  
MARTY. I think it's a little small for me...  
*He holds it up to himself; she smiles.*  
NAN. Then I guess I'll have to wear it.  
*She takes it from him.*  
Maybe tonight—if you're not back too late?  
MARTY. *(Checking his watch.)* Jeez, I gotta go...  
*He starts off.*  
NAN. Call me when you're leavin'?  
MARTY. I will.  
*He stops, turns back, considers her for a few moments, then:*  
I love you, Nan.  
NAN. You too, Marty.  
*Marty smiles and exits. When he is gone, Nan exhales heavily and sinks back into the couch. Pause. Then, the sound of clapping. Peter emerges again, applauding slowly.*  
PETER. That was Oscar-worthy.  
NAN. I can't do this anymore.  
PETER. "It's really for both of us."  
NAN. I mean it, Peter.  
PETER. What.  
NAN. This has to stop.

PETER. Oh, come on...  
NAN. That's why I needed to see you.  
PETER. He was completely in the dark!  
NAN. And that's not good for anybody. The lies, the excuses—here, at work. I can't keep it up.  
PETER. You're pretty good at it.  
NAN. I don't want to be good at it; I want to be good.  
PETER. You're good.  
*He sits beside her.*  
NAN. No I'm not. Marty's good. Maybe not perfect, but better than me.  
PETER. Better than me?  
*He leans in; she pulls back.*  
NAN. All I know is, he'd never lie to me.  
PETER. *I'm going to Cleveland*—what more do you want from me?  
NAN. That self-help seminar is the best thing for you right now; and the best thing for me is endin' this crazy thing we been doin' the last four months.  
*She takes up the gift box and replaces the teddy as she speaks.*  
You caught me at a vulnerable time, with Patty away at school, and Marty—well...  
*She puts the lid on the box and faces Peter. Beat.*  
Thanks for the teddy.  
PETER. I'm glad Marty likes it.  
NAN. Don't be like that.  
PETER. Like what.  
NAN. Mean.  
PETER. I'm not, I'm just disappointed. Thought we had a good thing going here.  
NAN. I'll see you Monday.  
PETER. Monday?  
NAN. You're doing my implant?

PETER. Right. Romantic.  
*Nan sets the box back on the table and sits beside him.*  
 NAN. I'm sorry, Peter; really I am. You been a whole lotta fun to be with. But now we gotta come back to earth and live in reality.  
*She kisses him on the side of the head. Beat.*  
 PETER. Yeah. Okay.  
*She smiles. Pause.*  
 Will you do something for me before I go?  
 NAN. What.  
 PETER. *(Indicating the box.)* Try it on?  
 NAN. Oh, Peter...  
 PETER. I just want to see you wear it.  
 NAN. I don't know...  
 PETER. Pwease?  
 NAN. If we're done, we're done.  
 PETER. We're done! It's just... I pictured you when I bought it. Imagined how it would hug your curves...caress your waist...tickle your thighs...  
*Pause. She can't resist:*  
 NAN. How did I look?  
 PETER. Fantastic. Like a fertility goddess.  
 NAN. I'm not so sure that's a compliment...  
 PETER. Oh, believe me, it is.  
*Pause.*  
 NAN. You just want me to try it on...  
 PETER. Just try it on.  
 NAN. And then you'll go.  
 PETER. And then I'll go.  
*Long pause.*  
 NAN. Okay.  
*She picks up the box and starts off.*  
 PETER. Here?

NAN. *(Turning.)* What?  
 PETER. *(Lightly.)* Put it on here.  
 NAN. In front of you?  
 PETER. I'll keep my distance.  
*He sits back.*  
 See? Hands off.  
*Pause.*  
 NAN. And then you're gone.  
 PETER. And then I'm gone.  
 NAN. *For good.*  
 PETER. For good.  
 NAN. Because this is over.  
 PETER. Completely over.  
 NAN. I mean it, Peter.  
 PETER. Scout's Honor.  
*She smiles. He smiles. She reaches down to pull off her scrub top. Blackout.*

## 8. Spring Remembrance

*A small urban park or campus green. Early afternoon, late April. Birdsong. A few exterior chairs and/or benches, upon one of which sits Jill, messenger bag at her side. Steve stands nearby with his own bag, deflated.*

STEVE. Sorry...  
 JILL. Where have you been?  
 STEVE. On the phone.  
 JILL. I said I didn't want to do this alone.  
 STEVE. I know.  
 JILL. It's been really awkward.  
 STEVE. I was—We were in the middle of something.

JILL. Not another *screamer* with Blacktooth Barb...

STEVE. Will you please stop / calling—

JILL. Sorry. Not another screamer with \*your fiancée\*...

*Beat.*

STEVE. She's not my fiancée anymore.

*Beat.*

JILL. What?

*He collapses on a chair, exhaling.*

What happened?

STEVE. She says she met a guy. Two months ago, at that...self-help thing in Cleveland.

JILL. "Met a guy"?

STEVE. You know—hooked up, whatever.

JILL. Oh, no...

STEVE. Turns out he actually lives here, so they've been seeing each other.

JILL. Jeez Louise...

STEVE. And now she says she'd rather be with him than me. He's a \*professional.\*

JILL. Did she really put that in air quotes?

STEVE. No, that was me.

*Jill nods. Pause.*

JILL. I'm so sorry, Steve.

STEVE. Thanks.

JILL. Did she at least give back the ring?

STEVE. *I don't want to talk about it!*

JILL. (*Backing off.*) Okay...

*Pause.*

STEVE. So, where's Douglas?

JILL. Um, he went back up to his office to get something.

STEVE. How does he seem?

JILL. Well...he's got a cane...

STEVE. We knew about that. What about his...

*He points to his head.*

You know. Is he all there?

JILL. Um...not really?

STEVE. What do you mean not—? Is he or isn't he?

*Beat.*

Jill?

JILL. He called me Tanya.

STEVE. "Tanya"?

JILL. More than once.

STEVE. Who's Tanya?

JILL. How should I know! I didn't have the heart to correct him.

STEVE. Wow.

JILL. He seemed so sure of it.

*Beat.*

STEVE. Well—people forget names all the time.

JILL. He couldn't remember the word for pencil.

STEVE. Get out.

JILL. He was tapping one on his knee, then stopped, looked at it, and said, "What's this called?"

STEVE. Maybe he was joking.

JILL. No, it was really weird. Awful, actually.

STEVE. *Damn...*

*They ponder the awfulness for a few moments. Then:*

To think the mind that came up with "Spring Remembrance"...

JILL. God, I love that poem...

STEVE. If *he* can be at a loss for words...

JILL. That poem's the reason I came here.

STEVE. Me too.

JILL. I could've gone to Brown. I got in. But I wanted to sit at the feet of the man who wrote *those words*:

*(Shutting her eyes.) "Beneath the brown lawn, grizzled,"*

STEVE and JILL.  
*"Winter-worn,"*  
 STEVE. Great line.  
 JILL.  
*"Beneath the naked dogwood,  
 Under the birdhouse (vacant  
 since November)"* STEVE.  
*"Under the birdhouse (vacant  
 since September)"*  
 STEVE. It's "September."  
 JILL. I'm pretty sure it's "No/vem—"  
 STEVE. It's alliterative: "Since September"?  
*(Continuing, as before.) "Lies a bulb,"*  
 JILL. STEVE.  
*"Tulipa tarda Tulipa tarda  
 Hidden, like a promissory note, Hidden, like a promissory..."*  
*A spring remembrance, waiting  
 for—*  
 STEVE. *God, I'm such a loser...!*  
*He drops his head in his hands again.*  
 JILL. What? No...  
 STEVE. I'll never write anything people remember.  
 JILL. Of course you will! You just—  
 STEVE. Barb always said I should quit the program and—  
 JILL. *Barb is the devil. (Taking his face in her hands.)* You hear me?  
*The devil.* She only ever wanted to bring you down, to stick you with  
 a *house*, and *car*, and *kids*, so you'd have to be a \*creative type.\* Well  
 you are *not* a \*creative type;\* you're a Poet, and Barb is a \**fucking*  
*receptionist*\*!  
*Beat.*  
 STEVE. *(Quietly, overwhelmed by the realization.)* Holy shit, I love  
 you...  
*He kisses her impulsively. She reciprocates. After several  
 seconds:*  
 DOUGLAS. *(Off.)* Sorry, took a little longer than I—oh!  
*Jill and Steve disengage as Douglas enters, a cane in one*

*hand and legal pad in the other. Steve rises, flustered.*  
 STEVE. Hi, Douglas.  
 DOUGLAS. Steve! Good to see you.  
*He drops the pad on a chair and extends his hand.*  
 STEVE. You too.  
*They shake.*  
 DOUGLAS. It is "Steve"...?  
 STEVE. Yes!  
 DOUGLAS. *(Relieved.)* Good! Sometimes it comes out right—god  
 knows why.  
*He picks up his pad and sits, as does Steve.*  
 As I was telling Tanya, ever since the elevator crash, my memory's  
 been...well, capricious. Like my brain's this fabulous library—millions  
 of volumes, a rare book room—but an earthquake's knocked it all out  
 of order, so there's no telling what you'll find. Sometimes the thing  
 is right in front of you, other times nowhere to be found. And every  
 now and then, you run across something you never knew you had  
 to begin with, like... William Demarest.  
*Beat.*  
 JILL. William Demarest?  
 DOUGLAS. Uncle Charley on *My Three Sons*.  
*They stare blankly.*  
 It's an old TV show.  
*They nod vaguely.*  
 Or maybe not! I might've just made that up. That's the thing: What  
 I make up and what I remember, it all feels the same. I've just got to  
 get it all back on the...  
*He searches for the word.*  
 You know, the...  
*He mimes shelving a book.*  
 STEVE. "Shelves"?  
 DOUGLAS. 'That's it, "shelves"—one book at a time.  
 JILL. That's a great metaphor.

DOUGLAS. Well—Metaphors R Us, right? Once the metaphors go, you pack up your *pencils*...

*He waves his in the air for Jill's benefit.*

and go into advertising. SO: You writing?

STEVE. A little.

DOUGLAS. *A little?* Tanya's finished three poems this week.

STEVE. I'm still more in the thinking stage.

DOUGLAS. Good god, man, this is the prime of your life! Keats was *dead* by the time he was your age. (*Then, second-guessing himself.*) Is that right? Did Keats die young?

JILL. Yeah.

STEVE. Twenty-five.

DOUGLAS. Good! I mean, not good, but, you know—properly shelved. You'd think twenty years of Intro to Poetry would hardwire this stuff, but...

*Beat.*

(*Momentarily reflective.*) Well.

*Beat.*

Anyway—sorry this took me so long...

*He lifts the pad.*

I only take the stairs these days.

STEVE. Understandable.

*Beat. Douglas suddenly turns to Jill.*

DOUGLAS. *Jill.*

JILL. Yes?

DOUGLAS. Your name is Jill; I called you Tessa.

JILL. Tanya.

DOUGLAS. Tanya? Sorry, I thought it was Jill.

JILL. It is Jill. You called me Tanya.

DOUGLAS. (*Chuckling at his own expense.*) God, I must seem pathetic...

JILL. Not at all.

STEVE. No!

DOUGLAS. I must; I can hear myself:

*He grabs his nose.*

“What's this thing on my face? Hold on—it'll come to me.”

*Pause.*

The weird thing is...

*Beat. He leans in toward them.*

It doesn't really bother me. The memory loss.

STEVE. Well...good.

DOUGLAS. I mean, it's annoying, sure—forgetting the word for coffee in line at the deli... But in the big picture, I actually feel kind of... It's going to sound strange, I know, but...

*Beat.*

Grateful, in a way.

*Beat.*

JILL. “Grateful”?

DOUGLAS. Weird, I know.

STEVE. Why would you feel grateful?

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. (*As if confiding a delicious secret.*) I've been writing again.

*Beat.*

For the first time in...god, I don't know how long. Since I got tenure? Every morning, for the last three weeks, it's been *pouring* out of me, like a, a, a...

*He mimes turning a faucet.*

STEVE. Faucet?

DOUGLAS. A *faucet* I can't turn off, I don't *want* to turn it off, it feels so...

*He tries to find the word, then lets it go.*

And the thing is, I owe it all to the accident. Like, all those years of teaching Poetry's Greatest Hits—fall, spring, spring, fall—*clogged* my creativity, made it impossible to write my own. The...the *burden* of carrying The Canon around up here—you know?

STEVE. God yeah.

DOUGLAS. SO, (*Paging through his pad as he speaks.*) what a relief to sit down in front of a blank sheet of paper and really feel it's blank. Empty, waiting to be filled. And not have... *Venison* running through your head.

*He looks up, notes their perplexity.*

He was a poet, right? Venison?

*Beat.*

STEVE. Uh...

JILL. I think you mean Tennyson.

DOUGLAS. "Tennyson"?

*She nods. He tries it on again.*

"Tennyson." Doesn't sound right.

JILL. He was a poet, though.

STEVE. Good one.

DOUGLAS. Who's Venison?

JILL. I...I'm not sure.

STEVE. It's deer meat.

*Beat. Douglas looks at Steve. Beat.*

When you eat a deer, it's called venison.

*Douglas nods slowly, taking this in.*

DOUGLAS. Wow.

*Pause. He starts chuckling at the absurdity of it. Slightly relieved, the others join in.*

Well—at least they rhyme, right? Tennyson...Venison...?

JILL. Right.

STEVE. Sure.

*Beat. Douglas turns a few more pages as Jill and Steve sneak a concerned glance at each other. Douglas stops at a particular page and looks at it for a moment. Then:*

DOUGLAS. Would you like to hear one?

*Beat.*

JILL. Really?

STEVE. Yeah, totally.

DOUGLAS. Just a first draft, of course—still plenty of polishing to do—but I think there may be something there.

*He pauses for a moment, finding the proper tone, then begins, expressively.*

*"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast."*

*Jill and Steve look at each other in consternation.*

*"The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs."*

*(Looking up.)* I've actually never done that—I just like the way it sounds...

*Then back.*

*"The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there."*

JILL. Um...Douglas?

DOUGLAS. Yeah?

JILL. I...don't know how to say this...

DOUGLAS. Look, I know it's rough, as I said, it's a first draft, it's a start, it's...

STEVE. It's Frost.

*Long pause.*

DOUGLAS. What?

STEVE. It's "Mending Wall," by Robert Frost.

*Pause.*

DOUGLAS. You're kidding.

*He looks at Jill, who shakes her head no. Steve continues,*

*from memory.*

STEVE.

*"I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;"*

*Douglas looks down at the page, reading along.*

*"And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again...?"*

*After a moment, Douglas looks up.*

DOUGLAS. Well, that would explain the yelping dogs...

JILL. Yeah.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. My god... How embarrassing.

STEVE. Sorry.

DOUGLAS. It felt so *new* coming out—that bit about "the frozen-ground-swell"...?

STEVE. Great line.

DOUGLAS. Yeah, I thought so, too.

*He yanks the pages off his pad.*

Unfortunately, so did Frost...

*He crumples the pages, letting them drop on the ground.  
Pause.*

JILL. Well...read us a different one.

STEVE. Yeah, that was just—Read something else.

DOUGLAS. No, let's hear one of yours...

JILL. No...

STEVE. We want to hear yours.

DOUGLAS. You two are the future of poetry; I'm just part of its past.

JILL. Don't say that...

STEVE. I want to hear something else.

JILL. Me too.

STEVE. Then we'll read something.

JILL. Both of us.

*Douglas regards them for a long time, then:*

DOUGLAS. Well...okay.

*Douglas flips forward or back a few pages until he settles on another poem.*

This one's called "Epiphany."

STEVE. Good title.

DOUGLAS. Thanks.

*He takes a moment, then reads aloud, as before.*

*"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."*

*Steve and Jill look at each other, speechless. Douglas looks up. Seeing them:*

"As well belongs to you"?

JILL. Uh...no.

STEVE. No, "good" is...

JILL. good.

DOUGLAS. It just came out that way.

*He continues reading.*

*"I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass."*

JILL. Um...

DOUGLAS.

*"My tongue, every atom—"*

STEVE. Douglas?

*Douglas looks up. Pause.*

DOUGLAS. Don't tell me.

JILL. I'm sorry.

DOUGLAS. Oh, god...

*He turns away.*

JILL. I'm so sorry.

*Long pause.*

DOUGLAS. Whose is it?

JILL and STEVE. Walt Whitman.  
 DOUGLAS. (*Slapping his thigh.*) *Whitman!*  
*Beat.*  
 Damn it! Damn you, Whitman!  
*Beat.*  
 What's it called?  
 STEVE and JILL. "Song of Myself."  
 DOUGLAS. Huh. I like "Epiphany" better.  
 JILL. Me too.  
*Beat.*  
 DOUGLAS. Wow. That's just...freaky.  
 STEVE. Yeah.  
*Douglas picks up his pad, tears out and crumples the pages, then sees the poem revealed beneath. He looks up at Steve and Jill, then back at the pad, deciding to go for it:*  
 DOUGLAS.  
*"The fog comes on little cat feet—"*  
 STEVE. Carl Sandburg!  
 DOUGLAS. Christ!  
*He tosses the pad aside and stands abruptly, stepping away from his seat.*  
 JILL. Steve...  
 STEVE. What.  
 JILL. This isn't *Name That Tune!*  
 STEVE. I'm sorry!  
*Douglas looks off, hands in his jacket pockets.*  
 I'm sorry, Douglas, I just—  
 DOUGLAS. It's okay.  
 STEVE. It just...popped out.  
*Douglas nods, still looking out. Jill mouths, "What were you thinking?" Steve mouths, "I didn't mean to!" Long pause.*  
 DOUGLAS. I should've known I couldn't fight it.

JILL. Fight what?  
 DOUGLAS. Gravity. The tendency for even the lightest things—hope, joy, love—to come crashing back to earth.  
*He removes a hand from his jacket pocket, now holding a light chain with a small medal attached. He considers it for a few moments. Then:*  
 JILL. You'll put them all back; I know you will.  
 DOUGLAS. Hmm?  
 JILL. The books in your head.  
 DOUGLAS. Oh.  
 JILL. You'll get them on the right shelf.  
 DOUGLAS. Maybe. Whether I like it or not. I was kind of enjoying the forgetting...  
*He regards the medal again for a while, then closes his hand around it.*  
 I started a new one just this morning—well, seemed new, anyway.  
*He replaces the medal in his jacket pocket.*  
 Only finished the first few stanzas; I have no idea where it's going. But the sun was starting to come through the trees, and the day felt like... Well—possibility. And there before me was a clean white page, the most seductive thing in the world, so...empty.  
*He turns back to them.*  
 It was a good couple of hours.  
*Beat.*  
 JILL. Can we hear it?  
 DOUGLAS. It's not finished yet.  
 STEVE. That's okay.  
 DOUGLAS. Besides, it's probably Whitman...  
 JILL. You don't know that.  
 DOUGLAS. Or Keats, or Plath, or...Ginsberg. (*Suddenly doubtful.*) Is there a poet named Ginsberg?  
 JILL. Yeah!  
 STEVE. Absolutely.

DOUGLAS. Betty Ginsberg.  
 JILL. Actually, Allen.  
 DOUGLAS. Right! (*Mentally reshelving it.*) "Allen. Ginsberg." Any good?  
 STEVE. Yeah. Really good.  
 DOUGLAS. They're all good. And they wrote so much.  
*He looks down at the ground, now littered with crumpled pages.*  
 Apparently everything...  
*Pause.*  
 JILL. Read your poem.  
*He looks up at her. Before he can object:*  
 Please? The one you started this morning? Then I'll read one of mine, and Steve one of his, and we'll take turns, the three of us—okay?  
*Pause.*  
 DOUGLAS. You read it; I'll listen.  
*He pages ahead to find it, then hands the pad to her.*  
 It doesn't have a title yet, but it'll come. They always do.  
*He leans back, shutting his eyes. Jill looks at the page, astonished. She looks at Steve, then down again.*  
 JILL. (*Reading.*)  
*"Beneath the brown lawn, grizzled, winter-worn,"*  
*Steve looks over her shoulder, shocked.*  
*"Beneath the naked dogwood,*  
*Under the birdhouse (vacant since November)"...*  
*Steve and Jill look at each other; Douglas opens his eyes, sees their amazed faces.*  
 DOUGLAS. Oh, god. Whose is it—Tennyson?  
 STEVE. Um...no.  
 DOUGLAS. Dickinson, Cummings? Tell me.  
 JILL. No, it's yours.  
 DOUGLAS. The truth.  
 STEVE. It is. It's really yours.

JILL. And...it's beautiful.  
*Pause. He decides to believe them.*  
 DOUGLAS. Thank god. At least they left me one... Please—continue.  
*He shuts his eyes again.*  
 JILL.  
*"Under the birdhouse (vacant since November),"*  
 DOUGLAS. (*Opening his eyes.*) Maybe "September" instead?  
 JILL. Yeah.  
 STEVE. September's better.  
 JILL. (*Looking at Steve.*) Alliterative.  
*Douglas smiles.*  
 DOUGLAS. Go on.  
*He shuts his eyes again. Lights begin to fade. Perhaps music rises softly. Jill takes Steve's hand and they look at each other as they resume the poem, from memory now—reverently, like a wedding vow.*  
 JILL.  
*"Lies a bulb,"*  
 STEVE and JILL.  
*"Tulipa tarda,*  
*Hidden, like a promissory note,*  
*A spring remembrance, waiting for redemption."*  
*Lights fade entirely.*

### End of Act One

## ACT TWO

### 7. Self-Help

*A dark hotel room. Barely audible voices outside, laughter, then the door opens. Peter and Barb in silhouette.*

BARB. I really shouldn't, Peter...

PETER. One glass...

BARB. You already bought me two...

PETER. That stuff downstairs was grape Kool-Aid compared to the bottle I found today.

*Peter hits the light switch. He indicates for Barb to enter.*

After you...

BARB. I don't know...

PETER. Come on, Beth...

BARB. Barb...

PETER. Barb... One glass of hundred-buck-a-bottle Bordeaux won't kill you. And if by chance it does, what better way to go?

*She laughs, perhaps discreetly covering her mouth with her hand, then relents, entering the room. He shuts the door behind her.*

BARB. You're not just trying to get me \*sloshed\*...?

PETER. Of course not.

*He winces.*

It's just a miracle to meet someone halfway normal here.

*He goes for the bottle.*

BARB. What do you mean?

PETER. Don't tell me you haven't noticed! The hotel's packed with whacko self-help seminars.

BARB. Ah.

PETER. The titles alone: "Bulimia and the Hungry Inner Child"? "Better Sex Through Past-Life Regression"?

BARB. Yikes.

PETER. Primal Scream for, I don't know, Left-handed Necrophiliacs...

*Barb laughs, as before.*

Now there's my idea of a fun weekend: being trapped in a room with a bunch of screaming perverts.

BARB. What brought you here?

PETER. Business.

*He winces audibly—a sharp intake of air.*

BARB. Are you okay?

PETER. Yeah! So:

*He picks up the corkscrew.*

Can I open it?

*She hesitates for a few seconds.*

Pwease?

BARB. My head says yes, but my bladder says no.

PETER. Then have your head escort your bladder into that little room with the Jacuzzi. I'll let the Bordeaux breathe.

*She smiles, then exits. He opens the bottle and pours two glasses, humming a recognizable tune. When he's finished, he looks off, checks his watch, deliberates. Then he pulls out a cell phone, touches the screen a few times and waits. After a couple of rings:*

Martha, Dr. Davison, Sunday night. Listen, I'm still here with my mom in Dallas—ow—and don't think I'll make it back in time to do Nan's... uh, Mrs. Klesniak's implant tomorrow. Ask her if she can come in Thursday morning? Thanks.

*He starts to disconnect; then, as an afterthought:*

I'm sorry to call you at home. Ow!

*He disconnects, pocketing the phone again. Sound of a flush offstage. Barb reenters.*

So—head bring your bladder on board?

BARB. The bladder's fine, now the head's saying no.

PETER. I have just the cure for that.  
*He picks up the glasses and holds one out to her. She hesitates.*  
 You can't refuse; it's already breathing.  
*He swirls the wine in her glass. Beat.*  
 BARB. One glass.  
*She takes it. He lifts his own.*  
 PETER. To chance encounters.  
 BARB. Chance encounters.  
*They clink and drink.*  
 Oh my god, that's good.  
 PETER. And the head says yes! Let's sit down before the bladder backs out...  
*He offers her a seat. Charmed, she sits; he follows suit. They get comfortable.*  
 SO: Why are you here?  
 BARB. Um...you invited me...?  
 PETER. I meant in Cleveland.  
 BARB. Oh, I told you, I'd rather not say.  
 PETER. That was in the bar. Now you know I'm not just trying to pick you up.  
*She studies him. Pause.*  
 BARB. I'm taking one of the self-help seminars.  
*Beat.*  
 PETER. You?  
*She nods. Beat.*  
 You're not a left-handed necrophiliac, are you?  
*Barb chuckles, then gets serious again:*  
 BARB. No, actually, I'm...phobic.  
 PETER. Phobic?  
*She takes a deep breath and continues.*  
 BARB. The seminar's called \*Facing Your Fear.\* There are people with all different kinds of phobias: bridges, spiders, heights, otters...

PETER. *Otters?*  
 BARB. Elevators...  
 PETER. Hold on—somebody's scared of *otters?*  
 BARB. He's from Sweden.  
*He nods vaguely, considering this.*  
 Nobody likes to admit they're phobic. But here we're encouraged to be up front—to help us move from shame to acceptance.  
 PETER. So...what are you afraid of?  
 BARB. Oh, I'd...rather not say.  
 PETER. Come on—it can't be weirder than *otters*...  
 BARB. (*Dead serious now.*) I'd rather not.  
*Pause.*  
 PETER. Fine.  
*In an effort to lighten the mood, he picks up the wine bottle.*  
 As long as it's not a 1990 Ducru-Beaucaillou,<sup>\*</sup> we're all right.  
*He tops off her glass and refreshes his own.*  
 BARB. Are you a wine dealer?  
 PETER. Y—No. No, just a snob, and a bit of a souse.  
 BARB. What kind of business are you here on?  
 PETER. I'm a novelist. *Ow!*  
 BARB. What is it?  
 PETER. I'm okay.  
 BARB. You sounded like you were in pain.  
 PETER. Sciatica. *OW!*  
 BARB. Is there anything I can do?  
 PETER. It'll pass—there, see, all gone.  
 BARB. My goodness...  
 PETER. Nothing to be concerned about.  
 BARB. It must be awful when you're trying to write.  
 PETER. Yeah. *OW! No, no, it's not so...*

\* Pronounced "dew-CREW beau kai-YOU!"

*He trails off. Pause.*

BARB. Not so what?

*Pause. Now he takes a deep breath.*

PETER. Listen...I need to be up front, too.

BARB. About...?

PETER. About *my* self-help seminar.

*Beat.*

BARB. (*Warily.*) Okay...?

*Beat.*

PETER. I'm a pathological liar.

*Beat.*

BARB. A pathological...?

*He stands, lifting his shirt to reveal electrodes attached to his nipples, wires disappearing down his pants. Barb gasps.*

PETER. It's aversion therapy. Everyone in the workshop is wired with electrodes and a titanium battery.

*He reveals his, attached just above the belt line.*

If the gizmo senses you're lying, it delivers an immediate, high-voltage shock.

BARB. Oh my—

PETER. Sort of a combination polygraph–cattle prod.

BARB. That must be terribly painful.

PETER. Not really. Aah! Yes, yes it is.

BARB. Where do those wires go?

PETER. The feet—*Aah!* Knees—*Aah!* It's...a sensitive area.

BARB. (*Understanding.*) *Ohhh...*

PETER. And because the voltage increases with each falsehood, the subject is increasingly discouraged to lie.

BARB. Wow. And people say the truth hurts.

PETER. It beats ten thousand volts to the crotch.

*Barb laughs, as before. Peter pulls his shirt back down.*

You know, you could have somebody take care of that.

BARB. What.

PETER. Your left lateral incisor.

*Barb gasps, her eyes widening with horror. She jumps up, stepping back and covering her mouth.*

BARB. Why did you say that?

PETER. I'm sorry, I just—

BARB. *Why did you say that?*

PETER. I didn't mean to make you self-conscious.

BARB. *Is this some kind of cruel joke?*

PETER. No, I swear, I just—noticed, that's all. Thought you should get it checked out.

*Barb collects herself.*

Really.

*Beat.*

BARB. I'm sorry.

PETER. That's okay.

BARB. You must think I'm a lunatic.

PETER. No. ●w!

BARB. It's just so embarrassing...

PETER. Look, a minor discoloration is nothing to be embarrassed about.

BARB. I mean my phobia.

*Beat.*

PETER. Your phobia...?

*She wrestles with herself; then, in a leap of faith:*

BARB. I have an irrational fear of dentists. There, I said it.

*Beat.*

PETER. (*Recalibrating.*) Okay...

BARB. That's why I haven't taken care of it. I know it might just be cosmetic, it doesn't matter. Whenever I see a dentist I just...freak out.

*He just stares at her, nodding warily.*

(*Defensively.*) It's actually not uncommon—a lot of people are scared of dentists.

PETER. Yeah, I've heard that.

BARB. I'm just more terrified than most.

PETER. (*Encouragingly.*) Well...it's still not weirder than otters...

*Beat.*

BARB. I better go...

*She grabs her purse.*

PETER. Don't go.

BARB. You think I'm a screaming pervert...

PETER. No, I don't.

BARB. You must.

PETER. (*Deliberately.*) No. I don't.

*He indicates his body—no shock.*

Honest.

*Barb relaxes a little.*

And if either of us *were* crazy, it'd be the one who's wired like a model train set.

*She laughs, covering her mouth. He gently lowers her hand.*

So: shame to acceptance?

*Beat.*

BARB. Shame to acceptance.

*Beat. He holds on to her hand. Pause.*

PETER. Listen, I know we've only known each other for... (*Checking his watch.*) Well, an embarrassingly short time, but...I like you. A lot. And if that weren't the truth, I'd be the one screaming. So...will you consider spending the night with me?

*Beat.*

BARB. You're not married?

PETER. God, no.

BARB. Or engaged?

PETER. Scout's honor. You?

*She hesitates a moment, then holds up her ringless left hand.*

BARB. Not even a cigar band.

*She smiles; he smiles back.*

PETER. If it makes a difference, they let us take off the hardware when we go to bed, so your chance of electrocution is small.

BARB. You don't have to work tomorrow morning?

PETER. I'm off till Tuesday.

BARB. Then that makes two of us.

*She holds up her glass, he raises his. They toast. He drinks, but she just watches him until he finishes. Then:*

You're not a novelist, are you.

PETER. Um, no.

BARB. You were just saying that to impress me?

PETER. Yeah, I guess. I'm sorry.

BARB. I'm flattered.

PETER. Hey:

*He puts down his glass.*

How 'bout I start that Jacuzzi?

*He starts off.*

BARB. So, what do you do?

*He stops.*

PETER. Do?

BARB. When you're not attending self-help seminars.

PETER. Oh. I'm a...professional.

BARB. Professional what?

PETER. Uh...

BARB. You're not a professional liar, are you?

PETER. What do you mean?

BARB. Politician, car dealer, *actor*...

PETER. Oh; no. Listen:

BARB. So what are you?

PETER. I'm just gonna take off these wires so—

BARB. Why won't you tell me?  
 PETER. It's not important. *Aah.*  
 BARB. If it's not important, then why did—  
     *Beat. The penny drops.*  
 Oh no...  
 PETER. What.  
 BARB. Oh my God...  
 PETER. What is it?  
 BARB. You can't say it, can you.  
 PETER. Say what?  
 BARB. What you do.  
 PETER. Sure I can. *Aah!*  
 BARB. Why not?  
 PETER. What do you want me to say?  
     *Beat.*  
 BARB. Tell me you're not a dentist.  
     *He does not reply. She realizes it can mean only one thing.*  
*Aah!*  
 PETER. Hold on...  
 BARB. Ohmygod...  
 PETER. It's not what you think. *Aah!*  
 BARB. You are, you're a—  
 PETER. No. *Aah!!*  
 BARB. Yes you are!  
 PETER. All right, I am!  
 BARB. *Aah!!*  
 PETER. I mean I have been!  
 BARB. *Aah!!*  
 PETER. But not anymore! *Aah!!*  
 BARB. *Aah!!*  
 PETER. AAH!!

BARB. AAH!!  
 PETER. AAH!!  
 BARB. AAH!!  
     *They look at each other for one second. Then, realizing they are trapped in a circle of Hell:*  
 BARB and PETER. AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!!  
     *Blackout.*

## 1. The Big Picture

*Lights rise on the office of a school nurse. A child-sized chair sits beside a desk, upon which lie various forms, a telephone, mug full of pens and markers, etc. Nan, dressed in scrubs, as we saw her earlier, is discovered on the desk phone.*

NAN. Peter, we need to talk.  
     *Beat.*  
 No we don't; not really. Whenever we get together, my clothes start to come off and that's where the talkin' stops.  
     *Beat.*  
 I love it—*have* loved it—but that's not the point; there's things I need to say to you. With my bra on.  
     *Beat.*  
 Not now—some kid could walk in any minute.  
     *Beat.*  
 I can't leave school again! Not after what happened last time.  
     *Beat.*  
 Can you come over tonight? Marty's got bowling till nine, nine-thirty...  
     *Pause.*  
 You've got a what?  
     *Beat.*  
 What the hell is an apicoectomy?

*Pause.*

Well, can't you reschedule? He's in a different league now—only meets twice a month.

*Pause.*

Well, I guess I could talk to you Monday, but your hands are gonna be in my mouth...

HAL. (*Sticking his head in the room.*) Knock knock.

NAN. (*Quickly changing gears.*) Uhhh, that's right, Mrs...Dorchus; just...put a cold pack on it, and all that swellin' should go right down.

*She indicates for Hal to come in.*

You bet—tell Danny I hope he feels better.

*She hangs up.*

Her son had a sandbox incident.

HAL. I see. Do you have a minute?

NAN. Um, sure. If you're wonderin' about those athletic forms,—

HAL. No; actually, I had a—*have*—a question.

NAN. Okay...

HAL. Of a...personal nature.

NAN. Well, I can't promise I'll know the answer, but I'll do my best. What's your question?

*Pause.*

Hal?

*Beat.*

HAL. Can people get birthmarks later in life?

*Beat.*

NAN. Birthmarks?

HAL. Yeah.

*Beat.*

NAN. What do you mean by "later in life"?

HAL. My age.

*Beat.*

NAN. I'm pretty sure they show up when you're born. That's why they're called "birthmarks."

*Beat.*

HAL. Oh.

*Beat.*

Okay.

*He starts out. Before he can exit:*

NAN. Hal?

HAL. Yes?

*Beat.*

NAN. Are you concerned about somethin'?

HAL. No. Yes.

*Beat.*

A little.

NAN. (*Indicating the little chair.*) Why don't you tell me?

*Beat. He moves to the chair and sits. Pause.*

HAL. I've developed, sometime over the past three days, a kind of birthmark.

*Beat.*

NAN. Okay...

HAL. On my chest.

NAN. Could it be a rash?

HAL. I don't think so.

NAN. Why not?

HAL. This is...unusual.

NAN. How so?

HAL. Out of the ordinary.

NAN. Rashes are actually much more common—

HAL. Miraculous, really.

*Beat.*

NAN. "Miraculous"?

HAL. I'm not a religious man—I mean, I go to church, but I'm—I

grew up Presbyterian. We don't go in for all that...

*He gestures vaguely offstage.*

NAN. All that what.

HAL. That...

*He quickly mimes a full-hand priestly blessing, perhaps chanting something unintelligible, then throwing holy water. She nods.*

So imagine my surprise when *this*...shows up.

*He indicates his chest. Beat.*

NAN. On your chest.

HAL. Right there.

*Pause.*

NAN. Would you... like me to look at it for you?

HAL. If you don't mind.

NAN. Of course not.

*He removes his jacket and his tie while speaking.*

HAL. This is extremely embarrassing...

NAN. Nonsense.

HAL. And not really part of your job.

NAN. You'd be surprised what's part of my job. Last week, I pulled a Lego out of a kindergartner's nose. Not a little one, either; this thing was the size of a tape dispenser.

HAL. *(Opening his shirt wide.)* There.

*She stares at his chest for a moment, then peers closer.*

Do you see it?

NAN. This looks like a rash.

HAL. Not the rash.

*Beat.*

NAN. What do you mean not / the—

HAL. The *pattern*, the...shape, the outline. *It*.

NAN. "It"?

HAL. Look again.

*Beat. She peers closer.*

NAN. I see an area of reddened skin, with raised spots, covering most of the chest / and—

HAL. You're missing it.

NAN. What.

HAL. The big picture.

NAN. I don't know what—

HAL. You see the brush strokes, but not the painting.

*Beat.*

NAN. Okay. What do you see?

*Pause.*

HAL. It's the Virgin.

*Beat.*

NAN. "The Virgin"?

HAL. Mary. ♪

NAN. I know what her name is, I just don't see—

HAL. Look again.

NAN. Hal...

HAL. Wait...

*He jumps up, goes through the mug on her desk.*

NAN. I think you should see your doctor about this.

HAL. He'll just think I'm crazy.

NAN. No he won't.

HAL. He already thinks I'm crazy.

NAN. I'm sure he doesn't.

HAL. He does. He writes me prescriptions for special pills, but I don't take them.

*Beat.*

NAN. Maybe you should.

HAL. That's just what he *wants* me to do. But I keep giving them to my cat.

*He finds a marker.*

Here we go...

NAN. (*Concerned.*) How's your cat?

HAL. A little twitchy, but otherwise fine. Now look: Do you see her eyes?

*He draws circles around his nipples.*

NAN. Well...

HAL. Hold on...

*He adds eyelashes.*

Now?

NAN. Okay...

HAL. And the nose...

*He draws it, midway between the eyes and navel.*

NAN. Right...

HAL. The mouth's down here...

*He draws lips that meet at the belly button.*

NAN. That's certainly where it would be.

HAL. You have to imagine the veil...

NAN. Sure.

*He gently waves the sides of his open shirt, framing the face like a curtain.*

HAL. Now do you see it?

*Beat.*

NAN. Hal...

HAL. I know I'm not much of an artist...

NAN. Have you shown this to Tanya?

HAL. Why?

NAN. Well...she is your wife.

HAL. Of course, I just... Tanya can be so *literal* sometimes.

NAN. Literal might not be such a bad thing—especially when you got Biblical figures makin' appearances on your chest...

HAL. What I mean is—

*The phone rings. Nan makes no move to answer it.*

Don't you have to get that?

*It rings again.*

NAN. It's fine. Probably just Marty.

*It rings again.*

Remindin' me about his bowlin' night.

*It rings again.*

New league.

*He nods. It rings a few more times; they wait it out in awkward silence. Then:*

So—about this rash...

HAL. This sort of thing happens.

NAN. I know.

HAL. All the time.

NAN. I'm sure.

HAL. Last year, that Mexican lady with the baked potato...

NAN. Tortilla.

HAL. Whatever.

NAN. I know it happens, or seems to happen, but—

HAL. "Seems"?

NAN. I just meant—

HAL. "Seems"?

*He gestures to his chest as proof positive.*

NAN. Okay, but—

HAL. *There are forces we can't see or understand.*

NAN. *I'm sure there are.*

*Pause.*

But I still think you should show your wife. And your doctor. And, if you want, your pastor.

HAL. Oh, I couldn't show him.

NAN. Why not?

HAL. Like I said, I'm Presbyterian; we don't make a big fuss over Mary. That's why I came to you. Because you're Catholic.

NAN. Not a very good one.

HAL. But you believe in the Virgin, don't you?

NAN. Well...we were all virgins once.

*She smiles wistfully. Hal looks down at his chest for a moment, then:*

HAL. I've been staring at this in the mirror for three days, thinking there must be a reason—it must *mean* something. Otherwise... *why?*

*He looks at her.*

NAN. Just because we don't understand somethin' doesn't make it a miracle.

*She gently takes the marker from his hand.*

Sometimes, shit just happens.

*Beat.*

BARB. (*Off.*) Hal, your wife is—

*Barb appears, takes in the scene.*

Oh!

*Hal looks down at his chest.*

Sorry!

*She quickly turns her head and shields her eyes. Hal hastily buttons up.*

HAL. That's all right.

BARB. I should have knocked.

NAN. We were just...finishin' up.

*She pops the marker back into its mug.*

BARB. I called down, but nobody answered.

HAL. What were you saying about Tanya?

BARB. She's here.

HAL. Here?

BARB. In your office.

HAL. Why?

BARB. I don't know. She's holding a jar.

*He puzzles over this for a second. Then:*

NAN. Tell her he'll be right there.

BARB. Okay.

*Hal grabs his tie, slipping it back on. While his back is turned, Barb lowers her hand and gives Nan a "What the hell?" look. Nan shrugs helplessly. Barb rushes out. Hal picks up his jacket and turns back to Nan.*

HAL. I'm sorry to have bothered you.

NAN. It was no bother at all.

HAL. That's very kind of you to say...

NAN. And beats pullin' Legos outta little kids' noses.

HAL. Well...thanks.

NAN. You're welcome.

HAL. You won't...say anything about this, will you?

NAN. Of course not.

HAL. Good.

NAN. Neither will Barb; she's very discreet.

*He nods. Pause.*

HAL. Well.

*He starts out.*

NAN. You might try a hydrocortisone cream.

*He stops.*

On the rash. They sell it over the counter.

HAL. Okay.

*He starts out again.*

NAN. And Hal?

*He stops, turns.*

Stop givin' the cat your meds. I think you'll both feel better.

*Lights fade.*

## 9. Small World

*One year later. Lights up on the living room we saw earlier, though all furniture is gone. In the middle stands Steve, now dressed in khakis and a button-down shirt, looking out a downstage window. A few moments later Marty appears, in his coveralls. Seeing Steve:*

MARTY. Nice to have a yard.

STEVE. Huh?

MARTY. (*Moving to join him at the window.*) Your own little patch of green.

STEVE. Oh—right.

MARTY. Well, not green yet. But it will be, in a few weeks.

STEVE. Sure.

MARTY. You need to play hardball with the weeds, though. Those babies are tough. Some people try to knock 'em out with so-called “natural herbicides”—honey mustard, or some such voodoo. Might as well try to kill a bear with a *spork*. No, I say rely on your chemical compounds and leave the condiments in the kitchen.

*Steve nods, staring at Marty, trying to place him.*

Everything look okay?

STEVE. Huh?

MARTY. In the house.

STEVE. Oh—yeah.

MARTY. That washer and dryer are practically new.

STEVE. Great.

MARTY. All new grout in the shower—both showers.

STEVE. We appreciate it.

MARTY. Well, we wanted to leave things in order for the new owners—whoever they may be. You know, so they can mess it up for themselves.

STEVE. Right.

*Beat.*

Have we met before?

MARTY. Well, at the open house...

STEVE. Not that; you just look familiar.

MARTY. Prolly the uniform. I'm told it gives me a military bearing. Well, in my younger days.

STEVE. I don't think that's it.

MARTY. Huh. I don't know, then.

*Steve lets go of it.*

STEVE. Where's your new house?

MARTY. Oh, we didn't—

*Beat.*

Nan and I got an apartment downtown;

STEVE. Oh...

MARTY. like when we first married.

STEVE. Okay.

MARTY. Tryin' to get back to basics—you know, fresh start.

STEVE. Sure.

MARTY. Yeah, different time of life...

*Steve nods.*

We put some furniture in storage, if you're interested...

STEVE. Oh, yeah?

MARTY. Couch, coffee table, coupla chairs...

STEVE. Thanks.

MARTY. That is, if you and—I'm sorry, your wife's name again?

STEVE. Jill.

MARTY. Right; if you and her decide to buy.

STEVE. Well, we'll certainly think about it.

MARTY. Because we're what you call “motivated sellers.”

STEVE. Good to know.

JILL. (*Off.*) There you are...  
*Jill enters, very pregnant.*  
I was talking to you upstairs and wondered why you were being so quiet.  
STEVE. I was down here.  
JILL. So I see. (*To Marty.*) Thank you for leaving everything so clean.  
MARTY. Oh sure.  
JILL. Lets you really see the possibilities. (*To Steve.*) Did you check out the basement?  
STEVE. Yeah—all good.  
JILL. Well, then, I guess we've seen all we have to see.  
*She smiles at Marty.*  
MARTY. What do you kids do?  
JILL. We're writers.  
MARTY. Really?  
STEVE. Well...copywriters.  
JILL. In advertising.  
MARTY. I'll bet that's a pretty paycheck. Written anything I might know?  
JILL. Funny you should ask... (*To Steve.*) Do you want to tell him?  
STEVE. (*Embarrassed.*) That's okay.  
JILL. (*To Marty.*) You know the new slogan for OvenFresh Party Puffs?  
STEVE. Jill...  
MARTY. Um...not off the top of my—  
JILL. "Always Puffy, Never Stuffy"?  
MARTY. (*Lying.*) *Oh*—yeah! Now that you mention it.  
JILL. Well, Steve wrote that.  
*She proudly rubs Steve's back.*  
MARTY. Huh. Well, I'm not really much of a party planner, but if I ever do,—

*The sound of an offstage door slamming.*  
NAN. (*Off.*) Hello...?  
*Steve and Jill look at each other. Nan enters, carrying an old diaper box taped shut.*  
Oh, good—you're still here.  
JILL. Hi.  
NAN. We didn't really get to talk at the open house—so many people!  
STEVE. Right.  
NAN. Most of 'em neighbors who just want to peek in your medicine chest.  
MARTY. I said you didn't need to come today.  
NAN. Well, I wanted to give them this. (*Turning to Jill and Steve.*) I came across these when we were packin'.  
*She extends the box toward Steve, who takes it.*  
JILL. Oh—thanks.  
NAN. Baby clothes, from when our daughter was little.  
JILL. That's so nice of you.  
NAN. Why I hung onto 'em twenty years, I'll never know.  
STEVE. Well—thanks.  
NAN. I guess not wantin' to let go of the past, when everything seemed possible.  
MARTY. (*Gently.*) Honey.  
*Nan nods. Jill and Steve steal a glance at each other. Nan turns her attention to Jill's belly.*  
NAN. And who is this little one?  
JILL. Oh—Auden.  
NAN. "Auden"... What an interesting name.  
JILL. Thank you.  
NAN. Is that a boy or a girl?  
JILL and STEVE. Either.  
*Nan, Jill, and Steve share a chuckle.*  
MARTY. Well—if you've seen everything you need...

NAN. Our Patty's a sophomore in college.  
STEVE. Really.  
NAN. Communication major, whatever the hell that means.  
MARTY. They don't want to hear this...  
JILL. Sure we do.  
NAN. I guess I'm just sayin' the time really goes.  
STEVE. I'll bet.  
NAN. So enjoy.  
JILL. We will.  
NAN. One minute you're makin' a home, havin' a baby, buildin' a life; the next...  
*Unexpectedly overcome, Nan breaks down and begins sobbing.*  
MARTY. Hey...  
*He places a hand on her shoulder.*  
JILL. Are you okay?  
NAN. Sorry...sorry! I don't know what—Um... I hope you liked the house.  
JILL. We do.  
NAN. I gotta get back to work...  
*She rushes off. Beat.*  
STEVE. *(Lamely calling after her.)* Thanks for the baby clothes!  
*Pause.*  
MARTY. I apologize for my wife, she...  
JILL. No.  
STEVE. Not at all.  
MARTY. She gets a little, you know, sometimes. 'Specially around the move.  
JILL. She seems lovely.  
MARTY. Yes. Yes she is.  
STEVE. *(Indicating the box.)* And generous.  
MARTY. That too.

*Pause.*  
JILL. Well. I think we're ready to make a decision. *(To Steve.)* Aren't we?  
STEVE. What?  
JILL. Ready to buy.  
STEVE. Oh—  
MARTY. If you want to talk it over...  
JILL. We did. Ever since the open house. We love it. *(To Steve.)* Don't we.  
STEVE. Yeah; sure.  
MARTY. Well...great. I'll get the papers over to you right away.  
JILL. *(Taking Steve's arm.)* We're so happy.  
*Marty smiles. Jill checks her watch.*  
Oh, gosh—we've got to get to work, too. *(To Steve.)* I just need to stop in the powder room.  
STEVE. Okay.  
*Jill exits. Both men watch her go. After a moment:*  
MARTY. You take good care of her.  
STEVE. I will.  
MARTY. Stay close. Easy to take things for granted.  
STEVE. I'm sure.  
MARTY. Sometimes, I won't say *all* the time, but sometimes, once you get the house, the yard, you know, the whole deal, you can lose sight of what's essential.  
STEVE. Right.  
MARTY. Whatever you had, when you were first in love.  
STEVE. I can see how that might—  
MARTY. Then one day you stop home for lunch to find your dentist makin' a house call.  
*He looks at him meaningfully. Beat.*  
STEVE. House call?  
MARTY. Like I said—stay close.

*Steve contemplates this.*  
 Well. I'm just gonna make sure the lights are off upstairs.  
*He exits.*  
 STEVE. The elevator!  
 MARTY. (*Off.*) Huh?  
 STEVE. We met in the elevator, in my building.  
 MARTY. (*Reappearing.*) Oh?  
 STEVE. You were doing some *random* test, where we had to go to all these floors...  
 MARTY. (*Recognizing him.*) An RFT...  
 STEVE. Right!  
 MARTY. Of course!  
 STEVE. I knew I'd seen you somewhere.  
 MARTY. How 'bout that.  
 STEVE. Weird, huh?  
 MARTY. Small world.  
 STEVE. Small world.  
*Gradually, the events of that day now return for both of them, darkening the mood. Long pause.*  
 MARTY. That woulda been the morning after the...  
 STEVE. Right.  
 MARTY. When you found out your professor...  
 STEVE. Yeah.  
*Marty nods. Pause.*  
 MARTY. Rough day.  
 STEVE. Pretty rough.  
*Long pause.*  
 MARTY. How'd he make out?  
 STEVE. Oh—fine. Better than fine: He just published a new book of poems.  
 MARTY. Really.  
 STEVE. Even won an award.

MARTY. No kiddin'.  
 STEVE. Yeah.  
 MARTY. Good for him.  
*Steve nods; Marty nods. Pause.*  
 I'll be he's awful proud of you.  
 STEVE. Me?  
 MARTY. That "Puffy/Stuffy" bit?  
 STEVE. Oh.  
 MARTY. I mean, that's Big Time, right?  
 STEVE. Right. Right...  
*Marty smiles and exits. Steve watches him go for a moment, then turns to look out the window again. He sighs heavily, taking in his new yard. After a few moments, he begins to speak, quietly.*  
*"Beneath the brown lawn, grizzled, winter-worn..."*  
 JILL. (*Off.*) Steve?  
*Steve shuts his eyes. Pause.*  
 STEVE.  
*"Beneath the naked dogwood,  
 Under the birdhouse—"*  
 JILL. (*Off.*) You coming, or what?  
*Steve just stands there, eyes closed, holding the diaper box, as the lights fade.*

### 3. Leap of Faith

*In darkness, we hear a loud bang/screech/thunk. Lights up immediately to reveal Tanya and Douglas, regaining their balance.*

TANYA. What was that?  
 DOUGLAS. We stopped.

TANYA. I know that, I mean those sounds, that...

DOUGLAS. I don't know.

TANYA. *Bang*, and *screech* and—

DOUGLAS. Yeah, I don't know.

*Pause. Both listen intently.*

But we're not moving, so I guess we're—

TANYA. Great.

*Tanya begins nervously fingering the medal on the chain around her neck. After a moment:*

DOUGLAS. It sounded like something mechanical. Like something hitting something and then...scraping against something else until it—

TANYA. You can stop now.

DOUGLAS. Sorry.

*He observes her.*

Are you all right?

*She nods, but continues as before.*

*(Still observing her.)* You don't look all right, you look—

TANYA. *(Opening her eyes.)* I'm not good at elevators, okay?

DOUGLAS. Okay.

TANYA. Even when they aren't *bumping* and *screeching* and—

DOUGLAS. I'm sure it's only temporary. Probably just mechanical.

TANYA. You keep saying that.

DOUGLAS. What.

TANYA. That it's mechanical. Like that should be a comfort somehow.

DOUGLAS. I just—

TANYA. I mean, a mechanical failure in a little box nine stories off the ground is hardly a comfort.

DOUGLAS. No, you're right.

*Beat.*

Here, let's... They probably already know about it, but let's just hit the alarm, to be sure.

*She watches him as he presses the alarm. It rings loudly*

*somewhere outside the elevator. After about eight seconds, he releases it.*

There, I'm sure they—

TANYA. Do it again.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. Okay.

*He does it again, perhaps twice as long this time. Then, releasing it:*

Well, that ought to do it. It probably takes a while for them to—

*Tanya moves in, pushes the alarm button and continues holding it. It rings and rings. As it does:*

You think that'll help?

TANYA. It can't hurt.

*It continues to ring.*

DOUGLAS. Your finger's going to get tired.

TANYA. I'll switch hands.

*She continues pressing. After a few moments:*

I'm Tanya.

DOUGLAS. Doug.

*She continues pressing. After a few seconds.*

I'm sure they've heard it by now...

*Still holding the button down, she pulls out a cell phone with her other hand and makes a call.*

I doubt that's going to work in here.

TANYA. Worth a try.

*She puts the phone to her ear.*

DOUGLAS. Some elevators actually have a phone inside. At least, a little box with the word "phone" on it. I never actually looked.

*Pause.*

Is it going through?

*As if in response, she disconnects the call.*

Here, let me ring for a—

TANYA. (*Removing her finger.*) No—you're right. They probably heard it already.

*She checks her watch, then exhales heavily.*

DOUGLAS. You have to be somewhere?

TANYA. A restaurant.

DOUGLAS. Meeting somebody?

TANYA. My husband, Hal. So we can...have a discussion.

*Douglas nods. Then:*

DOUGLAS. When are you supposed to be there?

TANYA. Five minutes ago.

DOUGLAS. You're gonna be late.

TANYA. Yeah. And he'll probably think it *means* something.

DOUGLAS. Means something?

TANYA. Like it happened to *him*, on purpose, for some...cosmic reason.

*Douglas chuckles.*

DOUGLAS. I had a Chair like that once.

*Beat.*

TANYA. A chair?

DOUGLAS. Took everything personally.

*She nods vaguely.*

Like the world and everyone in it was constantly thinking up ways to—

TANYA. (*Noticing something past his head.*) Hey, is that a—

*She peers into an upper front corner of the car.*

I think that's a camera.

*He looks.*

DOUGLAS. That?

TANYA. This must be part of a security system. Which means there's a guy downstairs somewhere who can see us.

*She starts waving at the camera.*

DOUGLAS. I wouldn't bet on it.

TANYA. Why not?

*She begins waving both arms.*

*Hey! We're stuck!*

DOUGLAS. Because that's probably not a real camera.

TANYA. Of course it is. (*Waving more vigorously.*) *Get us out of here!*

DOUGLAS. I seriously doubt it.

TANYA. Why would they go to the trouble of putting a fake camera inside an elevator?

DOUGLAS. To discourage vandals.

*Tanya just looks at him for a few moments, then faces the camera again and waves her arms, shouting:*

TANYA. Hey, look here! This is out of the ordinary!

DOUGLAS. Listen,—

TANYA. (*Turning to Douglas.*) The least you could do is help.

DOUGLAS. I really don't think / it—

TANYA. *I don't care if it's fake*; it comforts me to *do* something. So wave your arms and yell for help.

*He does, though in a rather perfunctory way:*

DOUGLAS. Help...help...

help...please help...help...

help...help us...help...oh

help...help... (*Continues*

*until she tells him to stop.*)

TANYA. Hey! Security guy!

We're stuck! Get off your ass

and get us *out of here*. Look—

we're waving our arms and

everything!

TANYA. Okay, you can stop now.

DOUGLAS. You sure?

TANYA. Yeah.

DOUGLAS. 'Cause I can keep going...

TANYA. No, you're right; it's probably pointless, and nobody knows we're up here, so we'd better conserve our strength and bodily fluids and simply try to relax.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. Okay.

*Beat. Tanya sits on the floor and begins fingering her medal*

*again. Douglas regards her for a moment, then sits as well.  
Beat.*

TANYA. So. You work here?

DOUGLAS. Oh—no. I was...meeting with my agent.

TANYA. Oh, you're an actor?

DOUGLAS. I'm a poet; *was a*—I...teach poetry.

TANYA. Poets have agents?

DOUGLAS. Some of us.

TANYA. Huh. I don't think I've ever met a poet.

DOUGLAS. Well, most of us are posthumous. The famous ones anyway. Though there are still plenty of *pre*-humous ones, plugging away.

TANYA. But not you?

DOUGLAS. No, I'm *pre*-humous, too.

TANYA. You said "*was a poet*."

DOUGLAS. Oh. Right. Not me anymore.

TANYA. Then why do you have an agent?

DOUGLAS. I don't. Not since...

*He checks his watch.*

Twenty minutes ago.

TANYA. He fired you?

DOUGLAS. She.

TANYA. That's awful.

DOUGLAS. Actually, the term is "dropped." She dropped me. Like a...cold potato.

TANYA. Because you're not writing anymore.

DOUGLAS. Pretty much.

TANYA. But you will again.

*He looks at her. Beat.*

DOUGLAS. I wouldn't bet on it.

*She takes this in, then looks away again. Long pause.*

TANYA. I should read more poetry.

DOUGLAS. Everybody says that.

TANYA. Do they?

DOUGLAS. Sure. It's like saying "I should eat more kale."

TANYA. In fact, off the top of my head, I can't think of a single—No, that's not true; there's the one I had to memorize in fourth grade.

DOUGLAS. What's it called?

TANYA. I don't remember.

DOUGLAS. A lot of kids studied that one.

TANYA. It was about Paul Revere.

DOUGLAS. Ah:

*"Listen my children and you shall hear / of the" (Continuing without interruption below.)*

TANYA. That's it!

DOUGLAS.

*"midnight ride of Paul Revere"*

TANYA.

*"On the nineteenth of April in—"*

DOUGLAS. "Eighteenth."

TANYA. "Eighteenth"?

DOUGLAS. One day back.

TANYA. Sorry.

DOUGLAS. Don't be; it's only history.

TANYA. Okay.

DOUGLAS. And scans the same, which is all that matters. *(Resuming the recitation.)*

*"...the eighteenth of April in Seventy-Five,"*

DOUGLAS and TANYA.

*"Hardly a man is now alive*

*Who remembers that famous day and year."*

TANYA. I can't believe I still know it.

DOUGLAS. Well, they get stuck in there.

TANYA.

*"He said to his friend, if the British march*

*By land or sea from the town tonight..."*

*She pauses, searching for the next line.*

I think that's all I—

DOUGLAS.

*"Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch  
Of the / North Church Tower as a—"*

TANYA.

*"...North Church Tower as a signal light..."*

DOUGLAS. There you go.

TANYA.

*"One if by land / and two if by sea"*

DOUGLAS.

*"and two if by sea  
And I on the opposite shore will be,"*

TANYA.

*"Ready to ride and spread the alarm"*

DOUGLAS.

*"Through every Middlesex village and farm"*

DOUGLAS and TANYA.

*"For the country folk to be up and to arm."*

DOUGLAS. You get an A.

TANYA. Thanks.

DOUGLAS. Want to go on?

TANYA. That's all I learned.

DOUGLAS. C minus, then.

TANYA. No, that's all I had to learn. I don't think we even read the rest of the poem.

DOUGLAS. Well, it all works out.

TANYA. I figured.

DOUGLAS. I mean, we're not British subjects anymore.

*She smiles. Long pause.*

TANYA. I used to think it was a bad word.

DOUGLAS. What.

TANYA. "Middlesex."

DOUGLAS. Oh...

TANYA. You know.

DOUGLAS. Right. Fourth grade...

TANYA. I didn't know what it could mean.

DOUGLAS. Well obviously, something between bad sex and really great sex.

*She laughs. Eventually, it fades to a smile. Then this, too  
fades. Pause. She checks her watch again.*

Will your husband be worried when you don't show up?

TANYA. He might have forgotten to go there himself. Sometimes Hal gets distracted.

*Douglas nods. Pause.*

Are you married?

DOUGLAS. No.

*Beat.*

Almost, but no.

*Beat.*

TANYA. "Almost"?

DOUGLAS. (*Thumb and forefinger.*) Came this close, years ago—she asked me.

TANYA. Why didn't you say yes?

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. I don't know...

TANYA. Yes you do.

*Long pause.*

DOUGLAS. I didn't think it suited the life of a poet.

TANYA. *Wow.*

DOUGLAS. Yeah.

TANYA. What did she do?

DOUGLAS. She went and married another poet. Funny, huh?

*Tanya nods.*

Even funnier, one of my grad students came to me last week—most gifted writer I've ever taught—and asked me if I thought he should propose to his girlfriend. *Me*—like I'm some expert on—

TANYA. *Oh, your Chair!*

DOUGLAS. What?

TANYA. You're a *professor*...

DOUGLAS. Yeah?

TANYA. When you said you had a chair that took everything personally, I thought you meant—

DOUGLAS. Furniture.

TANYA. Right!

DOUGLAS. Like a, what, some cranky, self-absorbed La-Z-Boy...?

TANYA. Yes!

DOUGLAS. (*In his best put-upon chair voice.*) "Oh great, here comes that *ass* again..."

*She laughs for a few moments. As it diminishes:*

What do you do? When you're not reciting old poems in elevators.

TANYA. I'm an actuary.

DOUGLAS. I should probably know what that means.

TANYA. Basically, I use statistical methods to calculate your chances of dying.

DOUGLAS. My guess would be close to a hundred percent.

TANYA. Your guess would be right.

DOUGLAS. Maybe *I* should be an actuary.

*She smiles.*

Do you work in this building?

TANYA. Oh—no, I was...seeing a doctor. Supposedly something of a miracle worker.

DOUGLAS. I certainly hope you don't need a miracle...

TANYA. It's not life or death, if that's what you mean. I had a consultation. About insemination. Hey, that rhymes...

DOUGLAS. Yes it does.

TANYA. Maybe *I* should be a poet.

DOUGLAS. I hear there's an opening.

*They share a smile. Beat.*

What did he say?

TANYA. Who.

DOUGLAS. The doctor. I'm sorry, I shouldn't—

TANYA. No, that's okay. She said my eggs are fine—not like seventeen-year-old cheerleader fine, but all things considered, ready to roll.

DOUGLAS. That's good.

TANYA. It's Hal; he's...his sperm's...abnormal. Which means our odds just got a lot longer. Maybe long enough to make it not worth trying at all.

DOUGLAS. I'm sorry.

TANYA. Thanks.

*Long pause. Finally, Tanya stands and pushes the alarm button again. After several seconds:*

DOUGLAS. I really don't think anyone's listening.

TANYA. I know. I just want to make some noise.

DOUGLAS. Fair enough.

*She keeps ringing for perhaps eight more seconds. Then he gets an idea.*

You know what I think...

TANYA. What.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. I think we should try to dislodge the elevator.

*She takes her hand from the button. Beat.*

TANYA. "Dislodge it"?

DOUGLAS. (*Standing.*) We're stuck, right? Maybe if we just...jump up and down, we'll get unstuck.

TANYA. That doesn't sound safe.

DOUGLAS. No, elevators are *extremely* safe—redundant cables, automatic brakes... Backup systems to backup systems...

TANYA. How do you know this?

DOUGLAS. I met a guy who repairs them, in my dentist's office.  
Talked my ear off.

*Beat.*

So?

TANYA. (*Uncertain.*) So... what, you want me to jump?

DOUGLAS. We'll do it together—see what happens.

*Beat.*

TANYA. I can't.

DOUGLAS. Just once, to see if / it—

TANYA. (*With finality.*) I can't.

*Pause.*

DOUGLAS. Okay.

*Tanya sits back down and resumes fingering her medal.  
Douglas watches her for a few moments.*

That a good luck charm?

TANYA. This? My Miraculous Medal.

DOUGLAS. Sounds like a good luck charm.

TANYA. Well it's not. It's a sacred item of devotion, honoring the Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception.

DOUGLAS. I take it you're Catholic.

TANYA. Actually, Jewish. But then, so was Mary.

*She looks down at the medal.*

I picked it up in a second-hand store, three days ago. I'm not sure why—leap of faith, I guess. Thinking about the baby, the...hypothetical baby. And feeling I could use all the help I could get.

*Pause.*

DOUGLAS. You should keep trying.

TANYA. Why?

DOUGLAS. Because there might be a new person out there, waiting to be born.

*She considers this. Pause.*

TANYA. Then you should try writing poems again.

*Douglas scoffs.*

DOUGLAS. That really would take a miracle.

*He looks away. She studies him, then, in a moment of decision, removes the chain from around her neck and hands the medal up to Douglas. He stares at her, then holds out his hand and accepts it, speechless. As he looks at it in his hand, Tanya shuts her eyes and exhales audibly, then opens them again.*

TANYA. Okay.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. Okay what.

TANYA. Let's do it.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. "It"?

TANYA. Try and dislodge the elevator.

*She stands again. Beat.*

DOUGLAS. You sure?

TANYA. Yeah.

DOUGLAS. 'Cause I don't mind waiting for the—

TANYA. No, I'm sure. Let's jump.

*Beat.*

DOUGLAS. Okay.

*He puts the chain in his jacket pocket.*

Um...how 'bout we do it on three. Ready?

TANYA. Ready.

*Both plant their feet and squat slightly.*

DOUGLAS. One... Two... *Three!*

*Douglas jumps up and lands again. Tanya stands straight again.*

TANYA. I'm sorry...

DOUGLAS. That's okay. Let's try again.

TANYA. I just panicked at the last—

DOUGLAS. Here we go:

*They squat slightly.*

One... Two... *Three!*

*This time both jump.*

Did you feel that?

TANYA. No.

DOUGLAS. I think it moved.

TANYA. Really?

DOUGLAS. Let's try again.

TANYA. Oh my god...

DOUGLAS. Big one this time.

TANYA. Okay.

*They both squat down. Beat. Tanya waits for him to count.  
Instead:*

DOUGLAS. Hey.

*He straightens up.*

TANYA. What.

DOUGLAS. You know what today is?

TANYA. Uh... Thursday.

DOUGLAS. I meant the date.

*She straightens up.*

TANYA. March first?

DOUGLAS. February twenty-ninth.

TANYA. Right—one day back.

DOUGLAS. Get it?

TANYA. No.

*He mimes leaping. She shakes her head. He does it again.*

Oh!

DOUGLAS. Funny, huh?

TANYA. Leap Day!

DOUGLAS. I just thought of it.

TANYA. Because we're jumping.

DOUGLAS. Right.

TANYA. Like a / leap of faith.

DOUGLAS. Leap of faith.

TANYA. Huh.

*They look at each other, breathing together—an intimate  
moment. Then:*

DOUGLAS. So—try again?

TANYA. Try again.

DOUGLAS. Last time.

TANYA. Leap of faith.

DOUGLAS. Leap of faith.

*Beat. He holds out his hand. She takes it. Looking out  
together, they bend their knees at the same time, then  
push off, as lights black out.*

**End of Play**