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## **Cast of Characters**

FUCHSIA DEMORNAY, youngish woman, romance novelist

JADE, youngish woman, painter

VIOLET, youngish woman, community activist

GRAY, youngish man, ESL teacher

JERRY, any age, photographer

## **Time**

A few years ago.

## **Place**

Five tiny studios above an after-hours club in an urban art slum. Between midnight and 4 a.m. on four consecutive nights.

## **Production Note**

The Russian text is spelled phonetically. English translations are provided in brackets, not to be spoken.

# POODLE WITH GUITAR AND DARK GLASSES

A RHAPSODY IN FOUR BRIEF ACTS

by **Liz Duffy Adams**

## ACT I

*(FUCHSIA sitting at a desk with a container of coffee, a tape recorder, cigarettes, in an otherwise bare room. A single bare light bulb over head. She presses the record button.)*

**FUCHSIA.** Carnival Desire by Fuchsia deMornay, chapter three. Deserine walked pensively out onto the dark, deserted pier. In the distance she could hear the gay music of the fairground, and the carefree laughter of happy people, but the sounds only made her feel more lonely. She wrapped her slender, tanned arms around herself, and felt tears welling up in her large almond-shaped emerald-green eyes. “Deserine duPrey,” she thought fiercely, “you just stop feeling sorry for yourself! So what if the only man you’ve ever loved is a no-good, lying, cheating scoundrel who probably never loved you at all... ” Against her will, her heartbroken tears poured down her lovely face, and her slender tanned shoulders shook with—uh, scratch that—her, uh, her delicate, tawny shoulders shook with the sobs she couldn’t hold back any longer. Suddenly she felt a man’s strong hands on her shoulders, and without looking she knew it was him. She’d know his touch anywhere. But she knew she could not surrender to it, not this time. “Go away, Brett! Just leave me alone!” Behind her, he murmured, “Deserine, please tell me what’s wrong. Let me help.” His deep, masculine voice held a note of puzzled concern that sounded so sincere, it sent a stab of doubt through Deserine’s heart. But she pushed it firmly away. She wasn’t going to be made a fool of, not again! She whirled around, auburn curls dancing, and faced him. “Brett Bronco,” she cried, “you can just suck my dick!” A subversive thrill swept through her—

*(FUCHSIA stops the tape. She rewinds, plays back: “Brett Bronco, she cried, you can just suck my dick.” She stops the tape, lights a*

*cigarette. Smokes in silence for a moment, looking into space. She rewinds the tape slightly and plays back the line “‘Brett Bronco,’ she cried.” She stops the tape, then hits record and continues.)*

“I, I never want to see you again! Do you hear me? Never!” She choked back a sob, and stumbled past him towards the safety of the fairground. She knew if he touched her again she would be lost.

*(Lights down on FUCHSIA, up on JADE’s studio. There is a stool or table holding paints and a jar full of brushes, and an easel that holds a small white canvas. She is talking to a polaroid photograph.)*

**JADE.** OK, Blini. Time to be immortalized. You may think you’re just a rich happy poodle, insofar as you do think, just a lap dog in the lap of luxury, but when I get through with you, you’ll be art, baby, A, R, T; art with a capital ARF! *(Bark)*. Yeah, yeah, OK, dog portraiture is a little degrading, but the wolf’s at the door, know what I mean, Blini? Yeah. One dog portrait, two months rent. Bite the dog biscuit, Jade. Wake up and smell the kibble.

*(She clips the Polaroid to the easel.)*

Hey, listen. In times past there was no shame in portraiture for pay. In having a patron you flattered for a fee. Royalty, nobility, the just plain rich. So now it’s dogs. So what’s the difference? Everyone knows dogs are more noble than people anyway. Everyone knows that loyalty, devotion, faithfulness and courage are now exclusively canine virtues. *(Slight pause.)* Good dog.

*(She puts a cassette into a tape player on the floor; we hear Elvis Presley’s “Hound Dog.” She begins painting. Lights down on her, up on VIOLET, sitting at a table in her own bleak cell. There’s a telephone, a notebook, a pen. The phone on the table rings; she picks up.)*

**VIOLET.** Neighborhood Action Help-line, this is Violet... Oh, no, we don’t do AIDS testing here, we’re not a clinic. But I can give a referral... A number. I can give you a number to call. For a clinic. OK, the number is 634-2468. Ask for Sandy, she’ll take care of you. OK. Good luck.

*(She hangs up. Writes in notebook, murmuring:)*

Woman, AIDS test referral, Sandy.

*(The phone rings. She picks up.)*

Neighborhood Action Help-line, this is Violet. Uh, no, we don't do pregnancy tests, we're not a clinic. But I can give you the—hello?

*(She hangs up. Writes in notebook:)*

Pregnancy test, incomplete referral.

*(Phone rings. She picks up.)*

Neighborhood Action Help-line, Violet. Oh, housing, yes, housing's tricky right now, there's a freeze on Section Eights, and there are hardly any low-income units available in the neighborhood except for units being illegally warehoused. But I can give you a number to call. Ready? 899-3579, talk to Naomi, she can tell you where else to call. What? Oh. Oh no. No, I don't have any room in my apartment. I'm sor— Oh, I'm sure your kids are quiet and everything, I just, I'm sorry, I don't have room. It's, it's a studio. I'm sorry but... Where are you now, in the... ? Oh, uh huh, the shelter. I know. I know. It's bad, I know. Look, you talk to Naomi. OK? You hang in there. Call me again if you want to talk about it. OK? OK.

*(She hangs up. Starts to write in notebook but phone rings again.)*

Neighborhood Action Help-line, Violet. Oh, uh, por favor, slowly, señora, mi español es no muy bueno. ¿Que? No comprendo. ¿Que? Oh, oh, OK. Necesitas llamar ocho nueve nueve, tres cinco siete nueve, hablas a Naomi. Sí. Sí. ¿Que? Oh, no. No. No, mi casa es muy, um, poquita, yo no tengo...uh, lo siento, hablas a Naomi, ¿sí? Sí. No problema. Buen, buenas noches.

*(Hangs up. Phone rings. She picks up.)*

Neighborhood Action Help-line, Violet... Hello?... Hello?... Is someone there?... Hello?... Can I help you?... Can I help you?

*(The lights down on her, up on GRAY facing the audience. He speaks slowly and clearly, with emphasis on the "to be" verbs.)*

**GRAY.** My name is Gray. What is your name? *(Pause.)* Hello. My name is Gray. What is your name? What is your name? Hello. My name is Gray. What is your name? Is your name Ivan? Listen. His name is Ivan. What is his name? His name is Ivan. Good. What is your name? My name is Gray. What is your name? Good. My name

is Gray. I am a teacher. Are you a student? Yes, you are a student. Listen. You are a student. Am I a teacher? Yes. I am a teacher. Good. Is my name Gray? Yes, my name is Gray. Listen. My name is Gray. I am in despair. Are you in despair? Is he in despair? Am I in despair? Good. Good. Class dismissed.

*(The lights cross-fade back to VIOLET. The phone rings; she answers.)*

**VIOLET.** Neighborhood Action Help Line, Violet... What? The birds are flying south? What do you mean? I don't understand. Hello?

*(She hangs up. Writes in notebook:)*

Unidentifiable person, reporting bird migration. No referral.

*(Phone rings. She answers.)*

Neighborhood Action, the birds are flying south... I'm sorry, what?... Oh. I'm sorry, I can't help you. I have no number for you to call. I can't help you.

*(She hangs up. Writes in notebook:)*

Man, asking about my underwear. No referral.

*(Phone rings. She picks up.)*

Neighborhood, Violet, time to fly south. Don't call for help. Stock up on grubs. Fluff up and jettison your bone marrow.

*(She hangs up. Phone rings. She picks up.)*

A feather lands at my feet. I think about my mother. Long ago there was a fire and I became an orphan just like everybody else. Trajectory! Know your vector!

*(She hangs up. The phone rings. She whistles a bird call in response. Phone rings repeatedly, she answering each ring with a bird call. Lights down on her, up on GRAY in his cubicle, with JERRY. He pours a glass of bourbon, hands it to JERRY, who doesn't drink, pours himself a glass.)*

**GRAY.** I have a secret sorrow. *(Slight pause.)* What time is it? We really only have until about four a.m. That's when Rescue the

Android opens up downstairs. The after-hours club. And the music starts. Around four. It's very loud. I really can't complain. That's why this place is so cheap. It's supposed to be a studio. Commercial. I'm not supposed to live here. Well, I don't exactly live here. I sleep here. I keep my stuff in a box here. All my stuff. I don't have any stuff anywhere else. So I guess this is home. Home is where your stuff is. The super told me you're setting up a darkroom. I guess you're a photographer then. *(He doesn't seem to expect a response.)* I guess he's the super. Or something. We pay the rent to him. Maybe he's the landlord. Probably he's nobody and it's some kind of a racket and we're all trespassing and could be thrown out anytime right into the street. I teach English as a Second Language. Does that sound interesting? It's not. After a day in there, everywhere I go these horrible sentences are running through my mind. Where are you from? Are you from Russia? Are you in America now? What is your name? And over and over again I hear "my name Galina." Or "I from Russia." They don't have the "to be" verb in Russian. That's what I'm told. I don't actually speak Russian. But do you believe that? I don't understand it. I guess they've got some kind of a way of thinking about it, but no direct equivalent. It drives them nuts. They say, "English *stupid* language." Which, oddly enough, infuriates me. I mean, it's kind of ludicrous. What do I care? *(Slight pause.)* So, the secret. I don't know. Why should I tell you? I don't really know you. I don't know you at all. There's no reason to think you'd be interested. Why should you be interested? Who the hell are you anyway? Some low-life photographer. Renting a darkroom on Avenue B, you're probably some pornographer or something. Not that I'd object to that. I like the idea of pornography. It means people care about something, somebody cares about something somewhere, even if it's just sex or money. Which is pornography? Sex or money? Who knows, right? I think I used to care about sex and money, stuff like that, but now all I care about is getting a bunch of stupid fucking Russians to say I am. You are. He fucking is.

*(Lights up on FUCHSIA. She's lying on her back on the desk, cigarette in her mouth, tape recorder on her stomach.)*

**FUCHSIA.** Chapter six. Deserine whirled around in front of the big mirror, admiring herself in her wedding dress, her tiny waist

snugly encased in white satin. “It’s perfect!” she cried to the fitter. “I’m so happy! It’s like a dream!” As the fitter began to undo the dozens of tiny satin buttons down her back, she fell into a happy reverie. Who would have dreamed that she, Deserine duPrey, a nobody, an orphan without any family, would end up marrying Brett Bronco, the most eligible bachelor in the state! Handsome, dashing, rich and ambitious, desired by every woman he met! And he was all hers! Or would be, in only a few days, when the minister would say, “I now pronounce you...” Deserine felt an inexplicable twinge of nausea. *(FUCHSIA moves the tape recorder off her stomach and rolls up onto one elbow as she continues:)* As the fitter bore away the gleaming cloud of satin, Deserine stood musing in her slip. What was this gnawing little feeling of doubt? Suddenly, as if summoned by her thoughts, Brett stood in the doorway. “Brett!” she gasped, a pretty pink blush rising in her cheeks, “You shouldn’t be in here!” Brett strode forward and enveloped her in his arms, a cocky grin on his lips. “Don’t I have the right to be with the woman who’s about to become Mrs. Brett Bronco?” “That’s Ms. duPrey to you, buddy!” Deserine was startled. Had that come out of her mouth? She knew perfectly well that this was where she was supposed to melt into Brett’s arms. What was the matter with her? Brett was clearly shaken, but made a manly attempt to get them back on track. With a deep chuckle, he nuzzled her neck and said, “Well now, you can call yourself anything you want to, as long as you remember that you’re my girl!” Deserine pushed him away. Amazed, she heard herself say, “Jeez, Brett, do you ever listen to yourself?” Brett was stunned: “What are you talking about?” “Well, come on. Do we always have to stay with the script? Does everything have to be so formulaic?” Brett was getting a little pissed off. “Hey, Deserine, the formula works. Girl meets boy, girl hates boy although feeling physically attracted to him, there is a major obstacle that is revealed to be based on a complete misunderstanding, girl gets boy, meaning there is a proposal of marriage or an implicit understanding of one, girl is thrilled to the marrow by boy’s kiss, or by his sexual technique, depending on the market. What more do you need?” *(Slight pause.)* Deserine was impressed by the clarity of his vision.

*(FUCHSIA stops the tape. Lights up on VIOLET. The phone rings. She picks up.)*

**VIOLET.** Rock. Sky. Conflagration. Rescue. Shelter. Sanctuary. Eat. Drink. Hover. Land. Water. Multitudes. Flap. Flap. Flap. Fish. Bugs. Bones. Salt. Blood. Brine. Aerodynamics. Wind. Wet. Fellows. Magnetic Poles. Rise. Rise. Currents. Streams. Navigation. Night. Moon. Sleep. Warm. Soar. Light. Heat. Direction. Up. Up. Arc. Vector. Vector. Vector.

*(She hangs up. Lights up on JADE looking at her canvas with brush in hand. The half-finished painting is of a poodle wearing a flashy white jumpsuit.)*

**JADE.** Uh oh.

*(Suddenly, very loud music starts pumping up from the after-hours club downstairs. The four of them stop what they're doing and leave. A red light comes up on JERRY who is developing pictures in his darkroom. Projected large we see photographs of FUCHSIA, JADE, VIOLET and GRAY, obviously taken recently and surreptitiously. In the red glow JERRY dances in place to the music, dips photos in trays, hangs them on a clothesline. This goes on for a minute. Then simultaneously: the music stops abruptly, JERRY's light goes out and lights go up on the next night.)*

## ACT II

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine dropped the turbo into third gear and took another slug of Colt 45. “I know this is wrong, oh so wrong,” she mused, one of her pearly perfect teeth pressing into her full lower lip. “But it feels so good.” Tying and gagging Brett and dumping him in the back seat of his own Corvette was wrong too, she knew that. She coaxed the speedometer past ninety-five, cracked the window and let the sharp night air fill her lungs. “I don’t know, Brett. I thought I believed in the formula. After all, it was what I knew. But lately, I can’t say why, I’ve been having doubts. I mean, gee, if you think about it, what is romance but a biological scam? It’s nature’s little way of tricking a girl into letting a guy get close enough to impregnate her. Really. If it weren’t for love, who’d ever get pregnant? It’s not exactly its own reward. I mean, it’s disfiguring, painful, and potentially fatal. Yikes. So, you can understand, the way I’m feeling about all this, well, I just have to think this through before I take any chances. OK, Brett, honey?” A muffled curse from the back seat was her only answer. Deserine sighed, tossed back the last of the malt liquor, and eased the ’vette onto the exit ramp. It was time to hit the back roads.

*(FUCHSIA hits the stop button on her tape recorder, reaches for her coffee and cigarettes. Lights up on GRAY in his classroom.)*

**GRAY.** Hello. My name is Gray. What is your name? What is your name? Is your name Sergei? My name Gray. Your name Sergei? Good. I from New York. Where you from? You from Moscow? Good. You from Moscow. I teacher. You teacher? No? You student? Yes, you student. Where Yelena from? Yelena from Minsk? Good. Yelena, Yelena from Minsk. You married? Yes, you married. Good. Good. She married? No, she not married. She, she single. Vladimir married? Yes, Vladimir, uh, Vladimir...married... Good. I, I, uh, I not married. I, single. You...uh, he...uh, she...I, I, I...

*(He stands with his mouth open, searching. Lights up on JADE. The unfinished Poodle in Jumpsuit has been joined by a somewhat larger unfinished Poodle with Guitar and Dark Glasses. There is a fresh, even larger canvas on the easel.)*

**JADE.** OK, Blini, my friend. No more kidding around. Mama needs a shitload of art supplies. OK? This is it. I mean it. We’re gonna

paint your goddamn portrait just like we're supposed to. You're just a poodle. Right? Not the incarnation of some dead and buried rock star. You got that? I mean it this time. Just. A. Poodle.

*(She raises her paintbrush, advances on the canvas. Lights up on VIOLET. She is standing on her desk, arms outstretched as if soaring. Occasionally she flaps leisurely. She is very high up, migrating. Lights up on FUCHSIA, talking to JERRY.)*

**FUCHSIA.** I'm very confused, it's out of my hands, she's completely out of my control and where does that leave me? and you know romance used to be so simple to me, just a meal ticket but suddenly everything's being called into question, like can anyone explain to me the difference or boundary or link or dichotomy or what-have-you of love and sex, you know, romance vs. lust, I mean is there an issue there or is it just semantics or, you know, a matter of lighting: sharp focus is sex, soft focus is romance? not useful distinctions maybe but you know what do I know? haven't had sex in, Christ, years, mainly I suppose because I'm JUST TERRIFIED, naturally; who are all these people who are fucking as if it's HARMLESS, are they not paying attention? and anyway I never can decide who it is, you know, who it is that I desire, it feels like all or nothing, I mean like I could want ABSOLUTELY EVERYBODY, male, female, young, old, just be utterly pansexual and have a carnal experience with every creature I encounter or else shut it down and forget where I left the key, you know, not even get started, because it's that middle ground where all those distinctions have to be made, all those evaluations and choices, that I personally find just TOO MUCH. I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I don't really know you. I don't know you at all. I hear you're a photojournalist or something. I bet that's interesting. Snatch yourself a hunk of what's happening and turn it into a paycheck. Or art. Which is photojournalism, money or art? I'm an orphan. I was separated from my family at a traveling fun fair and raised by kindly carneys. It was a good life. I have no regrets. I do sometimes wonder how I got here from there, you know what I mean? Like tonight. I was walking over here, around dusk. And I pass a couple screaming at each other on the sidewalk, just screaming in front of strangers and everything, and I'm kicking aside a discarded needle just as a couple of little kids run past me, playing, and it's all very comfortable

and familiar in a way, the broken glass, the rubble-filled lots, the smell of sour wine as I pass a bar, and an ice cream truck comes cruising down the street, playing that little tune, you know? (*Imitates it.*) And I flashed on when I was a kid, in the carnival. Once in a while, if it started to rain, and there weren't any customers, the merry-go-round guys would keep it going for a while, and carneys who'd gotten caught in the rain away from their booths or trailers would jump on, you know, get out of the rain? And I'd be hanging onto my favorite horse, a really fierce black-maned stallion, and we'd be going around with the colored lights sparkling off the rain and the tinny old merry-go-round music playing and all those tough old carneys grinning and whooping except for the guys who were starting a card game in the swan-bench. (*Slight pause.*) I know there were a lot of steps in my life between then and now but for a moment I saw then and now side by side and it just did not make any sense at all.

*(Lights up on GRAY in his room, holding the bottle of bourbon. He shuts his eyes and struggles.)*

**GRAY.** I, I, I Gray. No. I, Gray. I, Gray! My name... Gray! NO, oh, no, something missing, something, lost. What, who, what, I? I? Iiii? (*Slumps exhausted against the desk, takes a slug of bourbon. Tries again.*) You, you, you... We, we... They... Ohhh. (*Moans, drinks.*) I! I! I!!! She, oh, she... She... (*Weeping.*) She. She. Nothing. Gone. I. Nothing. Gone. Lost. (*Collapses into fetal position on the desk, sobbing. After a moment he says through his sobs:*) OH, yatak neshohslif. Shtota pater-yana, shtota tak nushnaya minya... (*He stops crying, sits up and listens to himself.*) Padeshdi minutu. [OH, I am so miserable. Something is missing, something so necessary to me... (*He stops crying, sits up and listens to himself.*) Wait a minute.]

*(Lights on VIOLET who is perched on her desk, singing:)*

**VIOLET.** The sky is blue  
The sky is pink  
The sky is violet I think  
The world is gray  
The world is green  
The world is something to be seen  
I'd like to tell you all, my dears

All of my hopes, all of my fears  
 And about all the joy that hollow bones can give  
 But I hope you won't take offense  
 You see, it's simply too immense  
 The sense I've only just begun to live  
 Now that I've turned to flight  
 I am the queen of night  
 I navigate by starlight and by moon  
 There is no greater glee  
 Than mocking gravity  
 I only hope that dawn won't come too soon  
 When I look back at those  
 Bipedal days of old  
 Why did I take so long to take to wing?  
 Stumping around on earth  
 Was all I'd known since birth  
 I never realized that I could fling... !

*(Speaking:)* Feathers keep you warm, bird thoughts are simple and few, that's the way to be happy. Bird eyes see good colors, air flow takes you up, there's science involved but you don't really have to think about it. I've got a flock, of course, we flock together, we roost together in a tree. Heads tucked under wings, tiny bird hearts racing, racing, pumping warm and fast. It's time to head south. We're all flying south. We're all flying south together. Time to go. Let's go. Here we go. We're going. South. South. South.

*(The lights up on JADE. On the easel is a painting of a poodle in a sports car with Ann-Margaret next to him, her blonde hair flying. JADE is laying on the last brush strokes. She turns away to wipe her brush on a rag, humming "Hound Dog" to herself. The first two paintings are still in plain sight. She turns back, looks at the painting. Stops humming. Stares. Softly:)*

**JADE.** Fuck me. *(Slight pause.)* Well, OK. OK, Blini. You can just wipe that curly-lipped smirk off that little muzzle of yours, because it ain't over yet. This ain't no heartbreak hotel. I want money, I need money, I love money, and no hard headed poodle's gonna get in my way. You may as well just surrender. Oh, man. This is too much. I'm all shook up. Listen, Blini, don't be cruel. Won't you be my teddy-pooch? Huh? *(She moves the painting off the easel and puts a*

*larger-yet blank canvas in its place, picks up her brush.)* It's now or never. My bills won't wait. And just a big-a big-a big-a hunk o' art will do.

*(Lights up on FUCHSIA.)*

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine stood naked by the motel window, watching the dawn come up over the desert. It was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen. She felt something in her soul reach out and become one with the glow of sunlight at the horizon, with the desert and the flowering cacti. She even thought she might be having a spiritual epiphany. She wasn't sure. It was something she'd read about somewhere, maybe in Cosmo. She heard a faint snore behind her and turned around. Brett lay sprawled across the bed, fast asleep with his mouth slightly open. She contemplated him. Taken as a natural phenomenon, she had to admit he was easily as impressive as a desert sunrise. Not only that, as she'd just discovered, his sexual technique *was* thrilling to the marrow. It wasn't a spiritual epiphany, but it was pretty damned good. But where did all that leave her? Her entire existence had been in the service and pursuit of romance, and now she was forced to admit she really didn't know what love was. And she wasn't going to find out in this motel room. Deserine put her clothes on, left the car keys on the dresser and slipped quietly out the door. At the motel gift shop she bought bottled water and sun block, SPF 35. The desert was calling her. She had to go.

*(Lights up on VIOLET and JERRY. She's roosting on the edge of her desk. JERRY speaks in bird calls [translation provided, not spoken].)*

**JERRY.** >>>>? [where you headed?]

**VIOLET.** South.

**JERRY.** >>>>? [How come?]

**VIOLET.** It's a migratory thing. You wouldn't understand.

**JERRY.** >>>>. >>>>. >>>>>>? [But I'm interested. Explain it to me. What gets you going?]

**VIOLET.** Well. You get a feeling. It's hard to explain. You get restless. How it starts, you can't shut up. You chatter compulsively, chatter, chatter, chatter. Everybody else is feeling the same,

everybody crowds together, chattering away: “what’s happening—what’s up-whaddaya wanna do-I dunno-I’m feelin’ jumpy-how you feel-hey hey hey hey hey” and the noise of everybody chattering at once gets louder and louder and louder—this part can take days.

**JERRY.** >>>>> ! [Sounds nerve-wracking!]

**VIOLET.** Oh, you bet. Next thing, you can’t sit still. You start diving off your branch and swooping around and you don’t know why. You feel like you’re losing control, like there’s this huge force that’s pulling at you and you don’t know what and you don’t know where but you can’t stay still. It’s kind of exciting. Your heart’s going bip-bip-bip-bip-bip, and you can’t think at all, your mind’s completely absent, you’re just a single focused burning sensation of I GOTTA MOVE. And you’re all feeling it together, you’re all diving and swooping and chattering and with every dive and swoop you’re getting more in sync, beginning more and more to move as one, drawing together from a ragged cloud of individuals into The Flock and it all comes together on an instant as you dive and instead of returning to the branches the swoop takes you back up and higher, higher, everyone finding their place in the formation—oh, you can’t imagine what a feeling that is, to know your place in the formation—and you’re off.

**JERRY.** >>>>>>>>>>? [Would you say you experience, oh, a certain clarity of purpose?]

**VIOLET.** Mmm. Yes. A clarity of purpose. Yes, I think that’s part of it. There’s no doubt, there are no questions. You don’t have to think. It’s really nice.

**JERRY.** >>>>>>? [But at the expense of the individual soul?]

**VIOLET.** The individual soul? What do you mean? I don’t miss my sense of self, if that’s what you mean. I don’t have to make a lot of decisions. I don’t have to fend for myself. I’m not out there struggling, anxious, lonely and confused like certain mammals I could name. You can keep your sense of self. I’ll take the migrating flock. The flock takes care of its own. The flock sticks together. The flock is everything I need.

*(JERRY leaves as she continues.)*

It's good to be in the flock. To be a part of a large and complex whole. A perfectly placed detail of a beautiful pattern. Blissful communion. Exquisite mindlessness. Surrender the will. Drift with the wind. Soar with the flock. *(She looks upwards. The flock is gone. With increasing anxiety:)* Hey...guys? Hey, guys? Hey, guys!

*(The house music from Rescue the Android comes up very loud. All four continue what they're doing despite the noise: VIOLET searches the sky, JADE paints furiously, FUCHSIA paces and smokes, GRAY lies in a drunken stupor on his desk. JERRY's red darkroom light comes up on him, dancing and developing as before. The projected photographs are again of the other four, but this time as small children. The lights fade to black, then the projections; music continues for a moment then stops abruptly; lights up sharply on the next night:)*

### ACT III

*(Lights up on JADE's cubicle. She is on the floor in a posture of exhaustion and defeat. On the easel is a large painting of an empty dog collar floating on a sky-blue background with rays of golden light shooting out from it, suggesting a religious icon. JADE gets to her knees before the painting.)*

**JADE.** Forgive me, Blini. I was wrong to fight you. I was wrong to struggle. Struggle is useless, I see that now. This is something much, much bigger than a dog portrait. Bigger than my cash commission. Even bigger than art. This has to do with some kind of, uh, mystical transcendent zeitgeist kind of thing. I don't know; this isn't my usual gig. But it's clear that I have been...chosen to, uh, herald the arrival of, um, something. A new religion? The Cult of the Poodle? The Sacrament of the Divine Poodle? Blini, Poodle of God? Maybe we should leave the poodle part out. That could be for, like, initiates. The final, inner-most secret, the highest wisdom. "God is a light-gray miniature poodle named Blini." Yeah, that could work. Meanwhile, what should I do? Go door to door and spread the word? Ooh, I don't think so. Everybody hates those proselytizing creeps. I don't think I could do that. So, uh, what, get a P.A. system and stand on a street corner? Shave my head poodle-style and dance in front of pet stores? Come on, speak to me. Speak! *(Barking:)* Ruff! Ru-ru-ru-ru-ruff! *(Revelation:)* Ohh. Of course. Of course. I've been chasing my tail here. And the answer's right in front of me. I've got to keep painting. That's how You speak. Through me, through my brush, onto the canvas. I am the conduit, the path, the channel. Yeah. I have been touched by the Paw of Dog. I must paint. My art will show the way.

*(Lights cross to GRAY, euphoric, with bottle of Stolichnaya; during the following he may occasionally sing the text in the style of a Russian folk song.)*

**GRAY.** Ya chusvuyu namnoga luchey. Yuminya vasneeckla chusva zaquonchinetsi, yasnayu k'toh ya! YA GRAY! Hey! Ya Gray! Oh, yatak shesliv! Shtozha obligchenya! Tolka f'cheera ya chuvstvaval shtomaya zheezn koenčinah, shtouminya nyet budushiva, evdruck, vcyo ismenylos! Shto yeshi ya cirota? Nyeh vashno! Zheezhen prekrasna! Ya nyamagu dazshdatsa uveditz me studentuf snova. Ya chuvstruya vdruck shto nam yestch shto

skazatch druck drugh. Nashi rasgarory beeli tak ograneechenee, tak skuchnee. K'chorto! Me vseer brachea y sostri. Me dukshnee deleetza druck drugan. Y, oh, eta Galina. Moshit beet tiper. Ya smaya uhazshevat zanyey ana takaya interestnaya. Da! Da! Da! Da! Da! [I feel so much better. I am feeling a sense of completeness, of being whole again, of knowing who I am! I AM GRAY! Hey! I am Gray! Oh, I am so happy! What a relief! Only yesterday I was feeling so miserable, as if my life was over, as if I had no future, and now, so quickly, everything has changed! So what if I'm an orphan? I don't care! Life is beautiful! I can't wait to see my students again. I feel suddenly that we have so much to say to each other. Our conversations have been so limited, so boring, so repetitive. To hell with that! We are all brothers and sisters. We must bare our souls to each other. And, oh, that Galina. Maybe now I could ask her out. She's so, I don't know, so interesting. Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!]

*(Lights up on VIOLET.)*

**VIOLET.** Flock? Flock? Ohh, this is terrible. How did this happen? How could I let this happen? How could I lose my flock? Didn't they even notice? Will they come back for me? No, no, they can't, they have to keep going, they can't turn back. Oh, no. Oh, no. Should I try to catch up? I could, I could try, I know my vector, I know which way is south. But, but, but, but, but I, but I'm, but what if I get lost, what if I can't catch up, what if I'm flying out over the ocean and get tired and lose altitude and fall and fall and fall into the sea and sink and sink and sink until I drown?... Flock? Flock?

*(Lights up on GRAY, shouting down-stage out his window:)*

**GRAY.** Kamu nuzchen Angleeski? Uminya Ruskaya dushah! Oh, zheezen prekrasna! [Who needs English? I have a Russian soul! Oh, life is beautiful!]

**VIOLET.** *(Hearing GRAY; leaning out of window:)* Flock? Flock! *(Sees GRAY; startled scream:)* Aah!

**GRAY.** AAAH! Borgia! Ti eespogal minya! [Jesus! You scared me!]

**VIOLET.** What?!

**GRAY.** Shto?

*(She starts to go.)*

Padashdi! [What? Wait!]

**VIOLET.** What do you want?!

**GRAY.** K'toh tee? Shtoa tee hochish? [Who are you? What do *you* want?]

**VIOLET.** What? I can't understand you! I'm sorry—I thought I heard my flock. *(A little slower and louder:)* My. Flock. *(Normally:)* But, but they're not—

**GRAY.** Tee Stiya? [Your flock?]

**VIOLET.** *(Overlapping:)* —not here, you're not— Look, I'm sorry—

**GRAY.** Padashdi! [Wait!]

*(The lights up on FUCHSIA.)*

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine lay in the shadow of a boulder. Soon the sun would rise higher and rob her of even this meager refuge. She had finished her last sip of bottled water. The last of the sun block had been used up the day before. Already the sand was hot. She watched the heat shimmering up off it. It was an effect she'd seen before, in the movies maybe, or in car commercials. It was prettier live. So was she, she couldn't help thinking. It had been days since she'd eaten anything. For the first time in her life she kind of wished she'd allowed herself a little more body fat. In case of emergencies. But she felt sure her story wasn't over yet. "After all," she thought in the far-off part of her brain that was still thinking, "I'm Deserine duPrey! I am absolutely guaranteed a happy ending." Suddenly she heard a voice.

**VIOLET.** "Ah, but that was before you rejected the formula."

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine focused her eyes with a tremendous effort. Directly in front of her, standing on one foot on the sand, was a bird. It appeared to be some kind of migratory sea bird. This seemed unlikely. Maybe she was hallucinating. But what the hell. "Yes, that's true. But I don't care. I have no regrets. Even if I die here in this desert. I regret nothing!" The bird shrugged. A kind of bird shrug. I mean, birds don't have shoulders, but it managed a kind of birdy equivalent.

**VIOLET.** “Yeah, whatever. Listen, a little ways past that rock formation there’s a desert spa resort. Pull yourself together, you can be there in time for water aerobics.”

**FUCHSIA.** “Oh! But, why? If I’m not entitled to a happy ending anymore.” The bird began to open its wings.

**VIOLET.** “Don’t be so self-centered, they didn’t put it there for you. ‘Scuse me, gotta migrate.”

**FUCHSIA.** The bird took off, and Deserine began to crawl again. “I could really go for a mud wrap,” she mused. But an hour later, she was only half way to the rock formation, and her strength was gone. She lay face down on the sand and felt the sun pounding her, flattening her out, baking her into a tortilla. She thought about a frozen margarita, no salt. Pale, limey green. Beads of condensation on the frosty glass. She’d lost all sense of time. Maybe she’d been lying here for hours. Maybe she was already dead. Maybe the voice she now heard was another hallucination.

**GRAY.** “Hey. Hochish veepeet?” [Want a drink?]

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine cracked open her crusty eyelids and saw a wavery figure of a man. He was offering her a bottle. It looked like some kind of liquor bottle. She shook her head weakly. The man tipped the bottle and poured the clear liquid over Deserine’s face. It was water. She reached out, took the bottle and drank deeply.

**GRAY.** “Harasho. Da?” [Good. Yes?]

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine squinted at the man. He appeared to be some kind of a hermit, or pilgrim. He looked complicated and interesting. Deserine felt her heart lurch. Was *this* love? Or dehydration? “What language are you speaking?”

**GRAY.** “Nyeh sprashee vi.” [Don’t ask.]

**FUCHSIA.** “And yet somehow I can understand you. Do you believe in love?”

**GRAY.** “Da, da. Knezshna. K’stati ya v’por eshya.” [Yes, yes. Of course. In fact, I’m on this quest.]

**FUCHSIA.** “A quest”?

**GRAY.** “Da, ya eshu etu p’tetsu. Tee neyah veedela yeeyo?” [Yes, I’m looking for this bird. Have you seen her?]

**FUCHSIA.** A bird? Uh...well, yes. I, I did see a bird. She, um, I guess she flew that way.

**GRAY.** Spaseeba. [Thanks.]

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine watched him waver away through the heat rays, and, refreshed and inspired, began to crawl again. “Des duPrey,” she reflected, “your life’s a real page-turner!” Giggling weakly, she crawled into the shade of the big weird rock formation. To her surprise, there was someone else there. A woman, painting onto the side of the rock. Deserine was seized by a strange and powerful feeling, a feeling that her adventures were just beginning.

*(Lights up on JADE. The canvas on the easel is blank and white. She is talking to JERRY.)*

**JADE.** I was abandoned in a museum and raised by kindly museum guards. So you see I’m pretty much at home with art. We used to make the rounds at night and I’d look at the art by flashlight. I have a fierce grasp of detail. It’s the bigger picture I have trouble with. My earliest art memories are of the bottoms of paintings, the lower edges. Because I was little, you know. I didn’t understand what the signatures were for a long time. I couldn’t read yet. I thought they were art too. I didn’t quite get that people make art. I think I thought art was a natural phenomenon. Like I thought that the statues of gods in the classical wing were petrified people, people who were under a witch’s spell or something. There was one I had a wicked crush on. One of those beautiful young curly-haired athletes, lean marble body, sad empty eyes staring into the distance. Once at night I snuck out by myself with a flashlight, and climbed up onto his plinth, twining my tiny limbs around him, under the influence of some idiotic fairy tale. I kissed his cold, cold lips. No magical transformation. *(Slight pause.)* Life is so fucking disappointing. *(Slight pause.)* I don’t know why I’m even talking to you. What does a photographer know about anything? Running around plagiarizing life and calling it art. Aaagh. Don’t mind me. I’m just in a nasty funk ’cause I’ve been abandoned by my god. There’s no reason for it, is there? You can see this paint brush in my hand, can’t you? But there’s the blank canvas. Blini has stopped speaking

to me. Why? Why? I don't know. I don't know anything anymore. I surrendered to the will of god or something and now it's left me twisting in the wind. I look at this object in my hand and it's a stranger to me. I can't use it and it's stopped using me. It's 3 a.m.; do you know where your *raison d'être* is? Yeah, yeah, yeah. What it boils down to, *je suis fucked*.

*(The music from *Rescue the Android* comes up very loud. Lights fade to black on the cubicles. Projections show photographs of a poodle, a southwestern desert, Russian architecture, and a flock of birds. In the red light of his dark-room, JERRY puts photographs into a suitcase. Projections disappear and the music stops abruptly. Lights up simultaneously on the next night:)*

## ACT IV

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine lost all interest in reaching the spa resort. She really wished she could stay in this moment forever, lying on the rough sand in a spot of relative coolness, with the pale blue sky above, and the faint scritch sound of the paint brush against the rock. Perhaps an hour passed in this way. Then the artist put down her brush. She picked up a canteen, drank from it, then came over to Deserine, hunkered down and offered it to her. Deserine drank. “Thank you.” Deserine felt suddenly confused, even disoriented.

**JADE.** “What are you doing out here in the desert?”

**FUCHSIA.** “I’m, well, I guess I’m on a quest. Yes. That’s right. A quest.”

**JADE.** “A quest for what?”

**FUCHSIA.** “For, for romance. What’s funny?”

**JADE.** “Romance isn’t a destination. It’s a window into the infinite. A glimpse of the transcendent. A crack in the wall of cruel logic that we call reality, our one fragile link with the heavenly spheres... What’s funny?”

**FUCHSIA.** “I don’t know... Can I look at what you’ve been painting?”

**JADE.** “Sure.”

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine got to her feet. She walked a few steps. She looked at the painting. The world tilted, spun, and shuddered. She staggered back. She looked at the woman.

**JADE.** “Cool, huh.”

*(Lights cross to JADE. The canvas is still blank.)*

**JADE.** I wonder how long this could last. Will they find me here in 60 years covered in cobwebs, my paints dried to dust, clutching a paint brush in one wizened claw? Or will I hang myself tomorrow with tied-together strips of canvas? Or maybe in a couple of months I’ll wash my hands, comb my hair, go out and get a real job. Lots of people do that. Get a real job with benefits and shit. Open a bank account. Buy some furniture at Ikea. Walk half a mile out of my

way to avoid passing a museum the rest of my life. *(Slight pause.)*  
Help.

*(Lights cross back to VIOLET, now hunched under her desk.)*

**VIOLET.** It's getting colder. It's colder every day. Soon it will be winter. And what will I do? Without a flock. It will be a long, cold winter, without a flock. Very long. Long and cold. The snow will drift up. The wind will bite through my feathers. I won't be able to find food, there will be no food, no body warmth, no warm bird bodies around me, the flock will come back in the spring and all they'll find will be my lifeless cold frozen little dried-up skeletal skinny dead old carcass.

*(GRAY appears in her cell.)*

**GRAY.** Minya nuzshna pogovoreet stoboi. [I have to talk to you.]

**VIOLET.** Aah! What?

**GRAY.** Pajalista nyeh boysia, ya toilka hachu pogovoreet stoboi! [Please don't be afraid, I just want to talk to you!]

**VIOLET.** What? I don't understand you!

**GRAY.** Ya znayu! Borgia! Minya nuzshnu shtobey tee ponila! [I know! God! I have to make you understand!]

**VIOLET.** What?

**GRAY.** F'so beloh harasho, ya dumul shtoya sheshliv, y vdruck ya uveedel teebeh! [Everything was fine, I thought I was happy and then I saw you!]

**VIOLET.** I'm sorry, I—

**GRAY.** Ya uveedel teebeh! [I saw you!]

**VIOLET.** I can't understand you!

**GRAY.** AAAGH!!

*(Lights cross-fade to FUCHSIA.)*

**FUCHSIA.** Deserine lay on her back and looked up at the stars. They seemed unusually sharp and clear. It seemed to her that she could see them moving, very slowly moving in a vast and gorgeous

pattern. The artist put another log on the little open fire, came back and lay down next to her again. Deserine slipped her arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. Her hair smelled like wood smoke. Somewhere in the distance a coyote yapped.

*(Pause. She has no idea what's next. JADE enters FUCHSIA's room suddenly speaking without a pause:)*

**JADE.** Look you don't know me I have the studio next door and I know you'll think I'm crazy or disturbed or some kind of mentally ill and maybe I am maybe I am but please I don't know you but I'll listen to anyone I have a feeling a single word will make everything fall into place a single word will make everything make sense the right word will illuminate me entirely and I'll be able to affect my life again I'll be able to work again my hands will once again receive instructions from that place in my brain where the good stuff comes from the stuff you can't choose the stuff that chooses you who is this talking I can't recognize my own voice you wouldn't know about that you don't know me but you're a person you're another human person in the world and I trust you implicitly or explicitly I trust you and I know you can help me I know you know I know you can tell me where the art is.

**FUCHSIA.** Oh!

**JADE.** What?

**FUCHSIA.** Art isn't a destination. It's a window into the infinite. *(Slight pause.)* Maybe.

**JADE.** Oh. *(Slight pause.)* Same boat, huh?

*(Lights up on VIOLET's cell.)*

**VIOLET.** I used to dream about Star Trek all the time. The original series. And I would have my own bridge station over next to Scotty's, you know, across from Mr. Spock's, and it wasn't the most crucial or the most important station but I had my job to do and I knew what to do and I was good at it, and we all had our stations and we all knew what to do. And over and over we saved a world or even the universe, and then we'd all have a little laugh together, and on we'd go.

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