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# Table of Contents

<i>Bike Wreck</i> by Qui Nguyen .....	7
<i>A Bone Close to My Brain</i> by Dan Dietz .....	31
<i>The Grand Design</i> by Susan Miller .....	41
<i>Holier Ground</i> by Jonathan Denn.....	57
<i>Hum of the Arctic</i> by Sarah Hammond.....	81
<i>Light</i> by Jeni Mahoney.....	93
<i>Mr. and Mrs.</i> by Julie Marie Myatt .....	107
<i>Pumpkin Patch</i> by Patrick Gabridge .....	119
<i>Reading List</i> by Susan Miller .....	129
<i>Sorry</i> by Timothy Mason .....	145
Author Biographies.....	169

**BIKE WRECK**  
by Qui Nguyen

## Cast of Characters

DELIVERY BOY

MESSENGER

THE MAN

## Acknowledgments

*Bike Wreck* was originally produced by Metropolitan Playhouse of New York City in January 2005 as part of their series *The East Village Chronicles*, and subsequently by Youngblood/Ensemble Studio Theatre of New York City from February 22—March 10, 2007 in their production of *Thicker Than Water* 2007.

The Metropolitan Playhouse production was directed by Jude Domski with the following cast:

DELIVERY BOY ..... Arthur Acuña  
MESSENGER ..... Kwaku Driskell  
THE MAN ..... Michael Colby Jones

The Youngblood/Ensemble Studio Theatre production was directed by John Gould Rubin along with assistant director Nathan Lemoine and stage manager Mary Kathryn Blaze with the following cast:

DELIVERY BOY ..... Arthur Acuña  
MESSENGER ..... William Jackson Harper  
THE MAN ..... Justin Reinsilber

# BIKE WRECK

by Qui Nguyen

## One

*(Lights come up on the MESSENGER who's straddled on his bike.)*

**THE MAN.** A messenger: One that carries messages or performs errands as: A person employed to carry telegrams, letters, or parcels. An envoy to another person, party, or government. A bearer of news. A forerunner. A harbinger. A prophet.

*(Lights come up on the DELIVERY BOY who's on his bike.)*

**THE MAN.** Delivery: The act of conveying or delivering. A formal act of transference. The act or manner of throwing or discharging. The act of giving birth; parturition. Utterance or enunciation. The act or manner of speaking or singing. The act of releasing or rescuing or giving.

*(DELIVERY BOY rides up next to the MESSENGER.)*

**MESSENGER.** Yo, dawg, whatchoo got?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Egg drop soup and eggroll.

**MESSENGER.** Got a fortune cookie?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Always have fortune cookie.

**MESSENGER.** Can I have it?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Man say he wants his cookie. Very specific.

**MESSENGER.** Come on, man.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What you have?

**MESSENGER.** What do I always have? A fuckin' letter or check or some shit from the same goddamn fuck from midtown. Fuckin' lazy midtown motherfucker. Wants me to bring it down to the financial district where I ain't even gonna make it through the gate, pass the fuckin' desk man, the fuckin' door jockey, that fucker that opens the door.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I never get pass door guy either.

**MESSENGER.** No shit, son. You fuckin' deliver food. This is highly confidential business shit. Fuckin' Wall Street stuff. This is important. That's food.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Man on island with no food dies. Man on island with no mail has to pay no bills.

**MESSENGER.** Where the fuck you come up with that?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Fortune cookie.

**MESSENGER.** Touché, my nigga, touché. Door guys can suck a whole lotta my fuckin' black dick, that's what I'm sayin'. Fuckin' traitoress bitches.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Traitors?

**MESSENGER.** Brothers from fuckin' Crown Heights or the fuckin' Bronx or worse, fuckin' Jersey or some shit, gets paid a piss over minimum wage to dress like a fuckin' monkey to guard a bunch of rich white Connecticut fucks. To protect them from who? From brothers like me, brothers that they haven't re-enslaved by using trickle down economics or some shit.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Your brother work for Wall Street?

**MESSENGER.** Black dudes, man. And those black dudes, those "brothers" they've hired as desk boys or door boys or valet boys or butt boys, do you know how they look at me? Like I'm black.

**DELIVERY BOY.** But you *are* black.

**MESSENGER.** But they see me as black, as in the color scary, as in I'll rape and pillage and rob you kind of scary. Black, like the dark side of yang. Black, like the way their bosses see me.

**DELIVERY BOY.** You have issue.

**MESSENGER.** Thicker than the Sunday New York Times, son. I'm the Encyclopedia Britannica of fucked up bullshit.

**DELIVERY BOY.** We still on tonight?

**MESSENGER.** If you give me the fortune cookie.

**DELIVERY BOY.** No.

**MESSENGER.** I'll give you a dollar. Come on, I can buy like ten for a dollar.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Then you go to Chinese restaurant and buy ten cookie. I have to deliver this one.

**MESSENGER.** Ain't the point. I want that cookie. That cookie you gots right there, son.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Tonight, we have lesson, right?

**MESSENGER.** Hmmm... I don't know.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What? But it Friday, every Friday, you teach me English.

**MESSENGER.** Well, I might be too exhausted. All this riding around today. No food. It can't be good on the system. Too much work. The body needs nourishment. Fuel. To power—

**DELIVERY BOY.** You want fortune cookie this bad?

**MESSENGER.** Hells yeah, I want the fortune cookie this bad.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I can't. I lose job.

**MESSENGER.** Look, son, I tell you what. You give me that cookie right there, and—in return—I'll teach somethin' special.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What special?

**MESSENGER.** Let's just say that after tonight, you won't need a job no more.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Always need job. Need money. American way.

**MESSENGER.** Well, that's all about to change.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Never change.

**MESSENGER.** Tonight, I'm going to teach you more than just English, kid.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What you teach?

**MESSENGER.** How to make money. How to get money. The real American way.

**DELIVERY BOY.** How that?

**MESSENGER.** Worry not. I got it wired. No more of this delivery shit.

**DELIVERY BOY.** No more delivery?

**MESSENGER.** No more messages either. A new life, son. A new role. Whatchoo say?

*(DELIVERY BOY gives MESSENGER the cookie. MESSENGER smashes the cookie and takes out the fortune.)*

**MESSENGER.** Keep your emotions in check. In bed. Ha!

## Two

*(Lights come up on THE MAN. He is on the phone.)*

**THE MAN.** Look, we had a deal. An agreement. You signed papers. This isn't just about you anymore. We—you and I—are in bed. Together. I have, in my possession, legal documents that...hold on. Yes? Who? Yeah, let him in.

Sorry about that, my secretary... What? You don't like the tone I'm using? Would you prefer I use a different tone? How about a different language? Konichiwa, bitch? Qué pasa, ya cunt whore? Look, pardon my fucking French, but you're putting me in an extremely difficult situation.

*(MESSENGER enters.)*

**THE MAN.** Look, I'm going to say this calmly. Cause I'm a calm man. A relaxed man. I do Yoga three times a week. I'm Zen. I'm a Zen motherfucker. Calmly, if you don't find a way to pay me, I'll have you arrested and take your home and your wife and your kids and then...I'll shoot and eat your fuckin' dog for the fun of it. And then, after you spend a good long while contemplating in your gray concrete cell on how low your life has sunk, you'll still have to pay me when you get out. Got it? Are we clear? Good.

*(THE MAN hangs up the phone.)*

**THE MAN.** Sorry for the wait.

**MESSENGER.** I need you to sign...

**THE MAN.** Boy, am I glad to see that!

**MESSENGER.** Boy?

**THE MAN.** Look, man, don't get all militant. It's a figure of speech and I wasn't referring to you. I've been waiting for this all day.

**MESSENGER.** Sorry, I got backed up. Sign here.

**THE MAN.** Wait just a minute. Why does my letter smell like...wonton soup?

**MESSENGER.** Don't know. It's a mystery. Signature, please.

**THE MAN.** This isn't the first time, you know?

**MESSENGER.** Know what?

**THE MAN.** The smell.

**MESSENGER.** Tell your friends not to send their stuff during lunch break.

**THE MAN.** We should talk. You don't mind if we talk, right? You do have the time to converse a bit.

**MESSENGER.** Well, honestly...

**THE MAN.** Good. We're friends, right? I mean, not social friends or drinking buddies or anything, but at least more than acquaintances, right? I mean, hell, I see you at least twice a day. That's more than I even see my wife—my own home—and so, thusly, I can say we have created a relationship of some sort. A certain bond.

**MESSENGER.** I really wouldn't call it that.

**THE MAN.** Perspectives, my friend. Perspectives. And as a friend, not as a person who's been using your company's messenger service for over a number of years or a person who's tipped you very nicely for your expediency and efficiency, but as a friend, I'd like to ask you something...and you can be honest about this...do you think of me as a hard man?

**MESSENGER.** I just need you to sign...

**THE MAN.** I'm not a hard man. I have simple wants. One want is for my customers to be happy. To be satisfied.

**MESSENGER.** You want me to be happy?

**THE MAN.** If you were my customer, I'd strive for your happiness. I'd bend over backwards to make sure you were content with the products I've given you.

**MESSENGER.** Is that what you were doing on the phone?

**THE MAN.** Well, another want is for my customers to be honest with me. If I sold you a fridge, for instance, I'd expect it to work, be clean, to keep your food cold. If it didn't, I'd personally come over and fix it. I'd replace it if it were broken. In return, all I'd want is the payment that you owe. Not too bad of a deal, right? For you to pay the amount that was agreed upon.

**MESSENGER.** That was for a fridge?

**THE MAN.** Would you threaten someone's life over a fridge?

**MESSENGER.** No.

**THE MAN.** It wasn't a fridge.

**MESSENGER.** Cool. So, your signature...

**THE MAN.** Which brings me to you. My only other want. Besides a clean environment, a happy family, and customer satisfaction, is that my letters, checks, and documents don't smell like Chinese food when it gets to me. Not that I have anything against the Chinese or their food. I just don't particularly enjoy their ethnic odor on my documents. You dig, bro?

**MESSENGER.** Bro?

**THE MAN.** I'm just saying...what if when I paid you, tipped you, before I gave you your cash, I dipped it in barbecue sauce. What would you say?

**MESSENGER.** Where's the celery?

**THE MAN.** Funny. Seriously. Or what if I dipped it in vinegar or shit...what if I dipped your money in actual human fecal matter. How would you react? Would that upset you? What would you say to me?

*(MESSENGER pulls out a gun and shoots the THE MAN in the face.)*

*(THE MAN falls to the ground. His body flinches a couple of times before it goes completely calm.)*

**MESSENGER.** That's what I got to say to you, bitch! That's my witty retort—my cunning comeback! You like that? Did that upset you? Wasting my goddamn time. Fuck you. Bro.

*(As MESSENGER begins to exit, THE MAN sits back up and stands back into the same position right before getting shot.)*

**THE MAN.** So you understand? You get my point?

**MESSENGER.** Yeah, I got you.

**THE MAN.** I knew you would. I'm glad we had this conversation.

### Three

*(Lights up on DELIVERY BOY and MESSENGER on a street corner.)*

**DELIVERY BOY.** This not seem right. This not feel like good way to make money.

**MESSENGER.** Keep your eyes open, man. Trust me. I ever steer you wrong?

**DELIVERY BOY.** You do this all the time?

**MESSENGER.** Only when I'm really strapped for cash. It's no big deal. Just keep your shit in check and you'll be fine. Remember, if someone wants to get fucked tonight, make sure it's their ass that's limping, not yours. Got that?

Now smile. Look nice. Nobody's gonna come near us you looking all hard and shit.

**DELIVERY BOY.** How about that girl?

**MESSENGER.** That girl right there? You want to hit up on that girl? That blonde ass white girl?

**DELIVERY BOY.** She look pretty.

**MESSENGER.** Son, we ain't out looking to fall in love.

**DELIVERY BOY.** But you say—

**MESSENGER.** We looking to score, son. To get paid. Now, that girl. That fine ass college girl you just pointed at, that's the type of lady we pay for, not get money from. Got me?

**DELIVERY BOY.** We look for ugly girl?

**MESSENGER.** Ugly girls and rich dudes.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Dudes?

**MESSENGER.** Men.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Man? Oh no, I not go for man. No way.

**MESSENGER.** Men have the money, son. That's where it's at. They rolling with dough.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Too dangerous.

**MESSENGER.** It ain't dangerous.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I want to go for girl. Safer.

**MESSENGER.** Look, son, I know it's your first time and shit, but trust me, men are the way to go. Especially the white dudes roaming the Village. They so fucking scrawny, they like bitches anyhow.

**DELIVERY BOY.** But they not woman.

**MESSENGER.** What you got in your pants?

**DELIVERY BOY.** You know what I have in pants.

**MESSENGER.** Whip it out.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Not here. Everybody see.

**MESSENGER.** I ain't saying wave it around and shit. Just take it out. Hold it in your hand. Feel it. Trust me, bro, it'll kill the nerves.

**DELIVERY BOY.** No one will see?

**MESSENGER.** No one will see.

*(DELIVERY BOY reaches into his pants and pulls out a gun.)*

**DELIVERY BOY.** Here it is.

**MESSENGER.** There it is. Now, look, you point that motherfucka in someone's face, they're not going to fuck with you.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What if they have gun too?

**MESSENGER.** Don't matter. When you point that at someone's skull, they're paralyzed. You like a fuckin' snake charmer. Fuckin' frozen and shit. Even if they got a piece, they ain't going for it. Cause you got them in your sights.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Have you ever shot anyone?

**MESSENGER.** What?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Have you ever shot anyone before?

**MESSENGER.** I've shot at people before. Never actually hit anybody, though.

**DELIVERY BOY.** You miss?

**MESSENGER.** No, I didn't miss.

**DELIVERY BOY.** You scare? You scare to shoot?

**MESSENGER.** Naw, man, I ain't scared. Just never had to do it before.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I think you scare.

**MESSENGER.** I ain't scared.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I think loud bang me you go peeing in your pants. Make you cry like little baby.

**MESSENGER.** Fuck you, nigga. It ain't like you got the balls to do it.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I've shot someone before.

**MESSENGER.** Bullshit.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I have.

**MESSENGER.** When?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Why you think I come to America?

**MESSENGER.** For freedom and shit.

**DELIVERY BOY.** No.

**MESSENGER.** Money?

**DELIVERY BOY.** No.

**MESSENGER.** You just want to be an American. “America: Number One!”

**DELIVERY BOY.** I running away from police.

**MESSENGER.** You’re running from the po-po?

**DELIVERY BOY.** I bad man in home country.

**MESSENGER.** You’re a bad man? You? Then why you so nervous about this shit?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Never point a gun at a man and not kill them.

**MESSENGER.** What?

**DELIVERY BOY.** I killing very many people. I very bad man.

*(Silence as the MESSENGER stares at the DELIVERY BOY.)*

**MESSENGER.** You’re fucking with me, right?

*(Beat.)*

*(Beat.)*

*(Beat.)*

**DELIVERY BOY.** Yes, I fuck with you!

**MESSENGER.** Yo, you almost got me.

**DELIVERY BOY.** No, I got you.

**MESSENGER.** No, you didn’t.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Yes. Yes, I did. You scare.

**MESSENGER.** I ain't scared.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I smell pee-pee.

**MESSENGER.** Fuck you, dawg. You stupid.

(*DELIVERY BOY sees someone pass.*)

**DELIVERY BOY.** Hey. How about him?

**MESSENGER.** The guy with the walker?

**DELIVERY BOY.** He not fight back.

**MESSENGER.** Yo, dawg, you sick. You really fuckin' sick.

#### Four

(*THE MAN on the phone.*)

**THE MAN.** Trust me, baby, it's a safe neighborhood. A good neighborhood. No, it's nothing like *Law and Order*—there's no drug dealers, no gangsters, I'm not tripping over any undiscovered dead bodies. It's a completely liveable environment and it's close—

Baby, you don't understand—this isn't just about owning property. It's about having a life. A real life—not one relegated to train schedules and MTA delays.

Seriously, baby—I can't do it anymore. I feel my soul—the essence of who I am—slowly degenerate every time I board the Metro-North. I'm tired of this shit. I am. I'm tired of always having to justify—to trying to convince myself that this is okay—that I get a lot of work done on the train—it's relaxing—it's no big deal. Because the truth of the matter is, it's a huge fucking deal. How much of my life is wasted waiting for a train? How much of me is forever trapped in that hour and a half ride from Westport to Grand Central? Baby, I'm not trying to be overdramatic here, I swear. But my life—it's decaying in transit. I need this. Please.

Look, baby, I'll bring you down here tomorrow, you can see for yourself. Yes, hon, during the day. I promise—I swear to you—we can make it work here. That was ten years ago. It's really a different place. A better place. Look, I'll prove it—

**HEY, I'M A WHITE GUY AND I HAVE LOTS OF MONEY!**

Do you hear any gunshots? No. Do you hear anyone running over to mug me? No. See? This is a good place.

*(Lights down.)*

### Five

*(Lights come up on MESSENGER and DELIVERY BOY. They are drinking 40s of OE.)*

**DELIVERY BOY.** Five night ago, I deliver food to five chicken wing white boy. They order three beef with broccoli, one sesame chicken, order of small vegetable fried rice, and five eggroll. It raining. It rain hard. Like dogs and cats. I ride ten block in rain to bring food. When I get to dorm room, they all eating hamburger. They say I take too long. They say “No, ching-chong, we no want fly lice today. You go now. Chop-chop.” I ride ten block back to restaurant with bag of wet food. I tell manager that chicken wing white boys not want it. He say it my fault, make me pay for it. I make only twenty dollar tip that night. Food cost me forty dollar.

**MESSENGER.** I fuckin’ hate those kids, man. Fuckin’ hate them. They move into our neighborhood thinking they own us and shit cause their daddy is paying rent. Fuck that.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I tell truth. I like it better ten year ago.

**MESSENGER.** This used to be a place, man. Alphabet city. A fuckin’ scary place, dawg. We were like the fuckin’ Bronx in the day. Or Crown Heights. Or fuckin’ east Harlem or some shit. There weren’t no fuckin’ midwestern kids running around this place. But now...look at it.

**DELIVERY BOY.** It very different.

**MESSENGER.** It’s gentrified, son. Sterilized. It’s NYC’s version of apartheid.

We’re fuckin’ infested, son. Getting runned out. Fuckin’ NYU college fucks, fuckin’ kids from Ohio, rich trust fund babies. We got more white kids than an episode of “Saved by the Bell.”

**DELIVERY BOY.** What is Save by Bell?

**MESSENGER.** This used to be a place a brother could be from and get respect. It gave you cred. Now...it’s fuckin’ Woodstock, bro.

They even got a fuckin' musical about this fuckin' place. With puppets. Fuckin' puppets, man. What the fuck happened? This is Alphabet City. Don't you know not to be here after dark?

Don't you?

Shit, son...Alphabet City is Dead. Long live Guiliani-land.

*(MESSENGER takes a drink from his bottle. It's empty.)*

**THE MAN.** *(Offstage:)* HEY, I'M A WHITE GUY AND I HAVE LOTS OF MONEY!

**MESSENGER.** Yo, man. I think we just found ourselves a candidate.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Chicken wing white boy...

**MESSENGER.** Chicken wing white boy, indeed.

*(MESSENGER hands his bottle to the DELIVERY BOY.)*

**MESSENGER.** Hey, dude, can I borrow your phone? It looks nice. Is that a Treo?

#### Four

*(Lights come up on THE MAN.)*

**THE MAN.** Deliverance: The act of delivering or the condition of being delivered. To rescue from bondage or danger. A publicly expressed opinion or judgment, such as a verdict of a jury. To do away.

*(DELIVERY BOY and MESSENGER enter.)*

*(DELIVERY BOY points a gun at THE MAN's head.)*

**DELIVERY BOY.** Give me mother, moneyfucker!

**MESSENGER.** Incorrect.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Give me fucker money, mother!

**MESSENGER.** Incomprehensible.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Give me...fuck!

**MESSENGER.** That's certainly not it.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Why I not just shoot him?

**MESSENGER.** You can't just shoot him. That would be incorrect. Improper.

**THE MAN.** I agree.

**MESSENGER.** Shut up.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I shoot him and take the money. Easy. No need talk. Just... Bang! Then take money. Easy.

**MESSENGER.** This is why your people always get a bad rap. You don't know how to intimidate properly.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I don't what properly?

**MESSENGER.** That's why you're always getting walked over. Ignored. You need to stand up, son. Keep the man from stepping on you.

**DELIVERY BOY.** No one step on me.

**MESSENGER.** Not literally.

**DELIVERY BOY.** And I standing.

**MESSENGER.** Yes, literally, you are standing.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I intimate.

**MESSENGER.** Intimidate.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Intidate.

**MESSENGER.** You need to learn to be scary.

**THE MAN.** Actually, I find him pretty scary right now.

**MESSENGER.** I said...shut up.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Your way...too much talking. It tire brain.

**THE MAN.** Look, man, I know you! Remember me? I'm—

**MESSENGER.** I don't know you, bitch.

**THE MAN.** But I do—

**MESSENGER.** Wait. Let me ask you something. Do you think of me as a hard man? Do you? Cause, ha-ha, I am a hard man, mother-fucker. What do you have to say to that?

**DELIVERY BOY.** What you doing?

**MESSENGER.** Nuthin', dawg. Okay, now point that gun at me.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I don't want to point at you.

**MESSENGER.** It's practice, man. Worry not. We cool.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Okay. I point the gun.

**MESSENGER.** MOTHERFUCKER, DON'T YOU EVER POINT A FUCKIN' GUN AT ME. Are you fucking insane?

**DELIVERY BOY.** But you say—

**MESSENGER.** I don't care if I beg you, bitch. If you ever pull this kinda shit again, I will beat the slant off your eyes and the yellow off your ass, you got me?

**DELIVERY BOY.** Yes. Yes.

**MESSENGER.** See, now that's how you intimidate.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What?

**THE MAN.** He said intimidate.

**MESSENGER.** Anyone talking to you?

**THE MAN.** Sorry.

**MESSENGER.** Look, man, you got a gat and I got shit. English lesson number ninety-nine: learn how to impose threat. Got that, son? Don't take shit from nobody. Now, point that gun at me again and scare me.

**DELIVERY BOY.** But you just say—

**MESSENGER.** I was acting, dawg. As I said... Worry not. We cool.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Yes.

**MESSENGER.** MOTHERFUCKER. I just told you—

**DELIVERY BOY.** So sorry.

**MESSENGER.** Yo, man. Don't just back down. Talk some shit. Tell me "Shut the fuck up! Who's fuckin' packin' and who's just standing there yapping like some cracked out hooka? Huh? I'm asking. Huh? Who got the fuckin' gun, bro? I do. The yellow man does. So shut the fuck up, nigga! Smell me?"

**DELIVERY BOY.** Smell you?

**THE MAN.** It's an expression.

**MESSENGER.** Hello. Would you like to do this?

**THE MAN.** Just trying to help.

**MESSENGER.** Be quiet.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I no understand.

**MESSENGER.** Just hold your shit like you're in a John Woo flick. Got me, son? Try it again. Be strong.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Yes.

*(DELIVERY BOY raises the gun again.)*

**MESSENGER.** Yo, fool. I told you—

**DELIVERY BOY.** Shut fuck up. Who packin', huh? I say "Huh?" Who fuck the gun? I do. I fuck a gun. Smell me?

*(Silence.)*

*(Suddenly, MESSENGER breaks into hysterical laughter.)*

**MESSENGER.** Oh, damn.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What damn?

**MESSENGER.** That was some funny shit, yo.

**DELIVERY BOY.** What funny?

**MESSENGER.** "Who fuck the gun?" Ha!

**THE MAN.** I have to agree, that was pretty funny.

**MESSENGER.** Fuckin' white boy thinks it's funny.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Not funny.

**MESSENGER.** Actually, it kinda was.

**THE MAN.** Who fuck the gun?

**MESSENGER.** Ha!

**DELIVERY BOY.** Stop it.

**MESSENGER.** “Shut fuck up.”

**THE MAN.** Hehehe.

**DELIVERY BOY.** Stop.

**MESSENGER.** I say, “Huh?”

**THE MAN.** Hehehe... “Me rikee the gun. Me shootee you. See. Hi-Ya! Ching-chong, ching-chong, ching...”

**MESSENGER.** Whoa.

*(DELIVERY BOY points the gun at THE MAN.)*

**THE MAN.** I was kidding.

**MESSENGER.** Think you went too far, bro.

**THE MAN.** Hey, man. I was joking.

**MESSENGER.** I don't think my boy sees it that way.

**THE MAN.** Hey. It was a joke.

**MESSENGER.** Yo, dude, I'd suggest you give him your wallet.

**THE MAN.** My what?

**MESSENGER.** “Give fucker money, fucker.”

*(THE MAN finds his wallet and gives it to DELIVERY BOY.)*

**THE MAN.** Here.

**MESSENGER.** And that's how you rob somebody.

**DELIVERY BOY.** I don't want money.

**THE MAN.** What?

**MESSENGER.** Hey, man. He gave you his cash.

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**A BONE CLOSE TO MY BRAIN**  
by Dan Dietz

## **Cast of Characters**

MAN

## **Acknowledgments**

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*A Bone Close To My Brain* received its world premiere in the 2004 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

# A BONE CLOSE TO MY BRAIN

by Dan Dietz

*(A MAN stands beside an easel with a large white pad on it; he uncaps a marker and draws a big tooth on the paper.)*

**MAN.**

today my brother is a dentist  
he knows all about these little bones  
huddling tight inside your mouth  
incisors, bicuspids, wisdoms way in the back  
he knows them all  
their shapes and contours  
their uses and misuses  
the damage they can reasonably take  
from impact or decay  
my brother is a dentist today

i don't mean he just got certified  
i don't mean he opened a practice  
i mean that today my brother is a dentist  
just like yesterday he was a radiologist  
and last month he was a reporter for the new york times  
only two things about him stay the same  
day in, day out  
his address, this tidy little house in new jersey  
which we've shared for the nine years  
since our parents passed away  
and the fact that i am his big brother  
no matter what else he erases and remakes  
inside his mind  
these two facts sit solid and bonehard  
within his head

he can't feed himself  
he doesn't grasp the need to fuel his body  
he can't bathe himself  
left on his own, he'll either starve or stink himself to death  
he doesn't live in his skin, his stomach, his fingernails

he lives here  
in the bulbous gray organ  
just above and behind  
the roof of his mouth  
that's his house

*(MAN draws a roof and windows on the tooth, maybe even a chimney with a curlicue of smoke.)*

the rest of him  
skin, stomach, fingernails  
is like a yard

*(He draws a yard by the house.)*

a yard that needs a full time, round the clock landscaper  
to keep from going to hell  
that's me  
i tend him  
he trusts me  
anyone else comes near the yard  
(skin, stomach, fingernails)  
he screams, hits, bites  
gets arrested, gets bailed out, forgets, etc.  
but not me  
he would never hurt me

except for today  
today he will hurt me  
in about ten minutes  
he will walk in here  
lay me down on the floor  
and tear out of my head  
a single, white, completely healthy  
tooth

*(He flips to a new sheet, draws a new tooth.)*

and i will let him  
i can't get used to the way teeth look  
strange  
spiny

like they belong on the outside  
of some prehistoric fish  
not sprouting from my face  
maybe i should smile more  
but i was always that way  
even as a kid  
i can't find one picture of me  
smiling showing my teeth  
always just a twist of the lips  
to indicate a grin

gerald always smiled with teeth  
he's smiling right now  
in the kitchen, sterilizing his instruments  
which consist of a penlight  
and a pair of pliers

he's brilliant  
he learns this stuff in just hours  
pores over textbooks  
random ones i pick up  
from the public library  
to keep his house

*(He draws a roof on the tooth, draws a yard.)*

occupied

*(Draws a happy stick figure waving from the house.)*

he dives into the volumes  
(the only medication he'll accept)  
and the next time i see him  
he's completely reborn  
he's memorized it all  
he's a dentist  
(radiologist, reporter)  
and he can't remember a day  
when he wasn't a dentist  
(radiologist, reporter)

he was reading tolstoy at age eight  
studying fractals at eleven

those huge numbers  
blooming out infinite all over the place  
numbers that want to be pictures  
he called them

what does a number do  
if it wants to be a picture

he grew into adolescence  
his head devouring everything  
like his eyes were mouths  
awards, acclaim  
the “g” word tossed about  
(and i don’t mean “gerald”)  
by people important enough to believe  
he was slated to graduate high school  
before his sixteenth birthday

then mom and dad died  
when our house  
got broken into

*(Draws a hole on the house and an arrow pointing into the hole.)*

attempted robbery  
became  
attempted rape  
became

i was away at college  
i didn’t have to come downstairs  
didn’t have to try to stop it  
try to save  
but gerald

he was fifteen  
the same age as the boy  
they caught and convicted  
after finding his skin cells  
beneath my mother’s

i moved back home  
took a break from school

gerald however refused to take a break  
so close to graduation  
less than a year  
but the things he started saying  
and doing

it was like his mind had twisted  
to indicate a person

*(Points to the person waving from the house.)*

a person  
that wants to be a picture  
and he'll erase and try again  
until he gets the picture  
right

he's beautiful at night  
he sits in his room  
soft light  
pages blurring by

he was expelled  
for tearing open a substitute's blouse  
he insisted she was in danger  
her beat was irregular  
he could hear it across the room  
he had to press his stethoscope  
to her bare chest  
to be sure

silly  
tragic moments are always  
so fucking silly

like this one  
today

*(Flips to a new sheet, draws a new tooth.)*

today my little brother  
will remove my tooth  
which he is convinced  
upon examination with his penlight

is rife with decay

*(Draws holes on the tooth.)*

little holes

in a bone close to my brain

he will administer anesthetic

a rag steeped in ether

(which he got from god knows where)

and pluck out my tooth

("pluck" is probably not  
the right word)

and smile

believing

he has saved me from danger

i will give him this belief

today

and tomorrow

i will take him to a place

where they will administer

a more sophisticated anesthetic

one which will

maybe

combined with other treatments

over the course of years

help

tomorrow

i will turn him over to people

who will break into his house

*(Draws a roof on the tooth, draws a yard, draws arrows pointing into  
the holes in the tooth.)*

and do their best

as he flails and screams

to clean the damn thing up

i will leave him there

i will erase him and

because i can't i

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**THE GRAND DESIGN**  
by Susan Miller

## **Cast of Characters**

JOSH, 30s, smart, underlying (and not so underlying) angst, governed by his questions—the joy and difficulty of what he searches for and what he finds—and an abiding sense of humor.

FRANCES, Josh's mother, 50s, whatever her son has—trace it back! She is also, like him, in the process of discovery.

*Their rhythms are bantering, intimate, passionate.*

## **Setting**

It is every production's creative choice to present the play in the most exciting, theatrical, minimal design.

## **Time**

The present.

## **Production Notes**

There are three slides shown at the beginning of the play. And one slide near the end. The illustrations from which to make the slides are included at the end of this book.

With a minor adjustment of words in the opening, the play can be done without the use of slides.

## **Acknowledgments**

*The Grand Design* was read at the Canon Theatre in Los Angeles in an evening of original work benefiting *Cure Autism Now*, starring Lily Tomlin and Eric Stoltz, directed by Robert Egan.

It was also performed by Marsha Mason and Scott Cohen at Town Hall in New York for *Brave New World*, a marathon of plays commemorating 9/11, directed by Cynthia Croot.

It was included in Summer Shorts at City Theatre of Miami, and was a finalist for Actors Theatre of Louisville's Heideman Award.

It was produced by Moving Arts Theatre in Los Angeles as part of their 12th Annual One-Act Festival.

It will be released as a short film, directed by Eric Stoltz, starring Eric Stoltz and Frances Conroy.

# THE GRAND DESIGN

## by Susan Miller

*(Lights up. JOSH paces, then leans against a desk for ballast. He relishes talking about what he knows and what he struggles to know. This is not a lecture. It's an inquiry. An expedition. He is working something out as he talks in front of us. With us.)*

**JOSH.** The first page of the Dutil-Dumas message, sent from a transmitter in the Ukraine. To signal other civilizations. The message was encoded using a system called Lincos that starts with simple mathematical ideas and builds to complex information about who we are.

*(Beat.)*

In case there's anyone out there.

*(Beat.)*

April 5th, 1973. Pioneer 11 is launched into deep space, carrying a message in the form of a six by nine inch gold plaque showing human figures, Earth's location in the universe, and a diagram of the hydrogen atom.

*(Beat.)*

In that same year, on the day before Pioneer 11 makes its voyage, the ribbon is cut on the tallest building in the world. 110 stories high on sixteen acres in lower Manhattan. "A living representation," according to the architect, "of man's belief in the cooperation of men...and through this cooperation his ability to find greatness."

*(Beat.)*

November 16th, 1974. The Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico sent this message toward a cluster of stars 25,000 light years away. A string of 1,679 bits, or ones and zeros, it can be assembled into a pictogram showing the figure of a man, a telescope, the numbers, DNA, and the solar system.

*(Beat.)*

My personal favorite: gold plated LPs. Remember phonograph records? LPs in aluminum cases. Launched on board Voyager I and II. With, of course, instructions on how to play the records.

*(He breaks into a dance to a lush arrangement of Sinatra. After a few bars, the music stops. Then, suddenly:)*

Items *missing* from Voyager, Dutil-Dumas, Arecibo—missing and never to be sent in any message that travels through space and time: The Sign over Auschwitz. ARBEIT MACHT FREI: Work makes one free. A slave ship carrying the first of 50 million people Africa will lose to slavery or death en route. The hole in our ozone layer. A woman refusing to move to the back of the bus. Yen. Francs. Euros. Dollars. Money.

*(Beat.)*

2008. What? What the fuck's the message this time?

*(A woman, FRANCES, turns to speak to the audience from another part of the stage, where perhaps she has been sitting with her back to us, listening to him.)*

**FRANCES.** My son is kind of a poet scientist. He's got this grant to come up with a message for alien civilizations. To let them know who we are. The human race. He's hit a wall. And I've left town. On foot.

*(She moves.)*

**JOSH.** *(To audience:)* My mother is walking. She's walking with no clear purpose all across the United States. It's her response to the—situation. To turning a certain age. To my breakup. It's her memorial to the nature of our times.

*(Beat.)*

She calls me from the road.

**FRANCES.** *(Launching into a succession of calls:)* I'm on the Eleanor Roosevelt Trail.

*(Beat.)*

I'm standing outside a church in Ohio where the Underground Railroad connected.

*(Beat.)*

I don't know where I am. But, I see cows.

*(Beat.)*

I'm walking past the things I know.

*(Beat.)*

I met this person who picks the places to stop along the way. You know when you get directions on your computer, what's that called—map something? Well, they actually send people out to find interesting things to do along the routes. I just never thought of that. There are all kinds of jobs I never thought about.

**JOSH.** *(To FRANCES:)* Look, I'm sorry. I'm sorry things didn't work out and I didn't give you grandchildren and—

**FRANCES.** *(To audience:)* He thinks I'm out here because he failed in his marriage. I'm out here because *I* failed. To know what to do next. I was sad. So, I started walking. I was walking in circles all around the house. Finally, I just took it outside. And I'm not the only one out here. There are mothers walking all over the place.

*(Beat.)*

I'm worried he won't find love.

*(The phone rings in JOSH's house. Although they begin talking to each other, as if on the phone, this is dropped shortly and they just address each other directly.)*

**FRANCES.** Hi, Sweetie!

**JOSH.** Mom? Where are you?

**FRANCES.** If I wanted to be located, I would stay home.

**JOSH.** Are you just walking aimlessly or do you have some kind of plan?

**FRANCES.** I do have a plan. To walk aimlessly.

*(Beat.)*

All right, the story so far—I just had pie. With shortening and whole eggs and I don't care. Because while I eat my pie and have

my coffee, I'm not drowning in the facts. There is no true history of the United States. I am not guilty. I am not wanting. I am not disappointed.

*(They move into a more intimate arrangement, something that suggests sitting across from each other at a table, or next to one another on a bench, maybe porch steps, etc.)*

**FRANCES.** So, how are you coming with your memo to alien civilizations?

**JOSH.** See, when you say it like that—

**FRANCES.** Like what?

**JOSH.** Like how you said it.

**FRANCES.** Like how I said memo or how's it coming?

**JOSH.** How you said it like you had no opinion or no opinion you'd be ready to reveal, even though we can be pretty sure that you are always in possession of an opinion. Anyhow, I'm not writing a memo. It's more like an equation. You know? Which lays out the thing to be discovered or proven. It's not necessarily what we are—it's what we could be.

**FRANCES.** *(Struck:)* That's lovely.

**JOSH.** For a lie, you mean.

**FRANCES.** Maybe it's a lie we need.

**JOSH.** Well, *I* do, I guess. I need it.

*(Beat.)*

See, the big discoveries—gravity, particle theory, chaos, DNA—they place us in the physical world. But they're just descriptions. Of our physical properties. Our propensities. What we're capable of—what's possible, I mean how do you explore that?

*(Beat.)*

First, I thought, well, fucking, of course. Sexual congress. For them to see how we do it and how much we like to do it. But, fucking causes so much confusion and anxiety. And what if they interpret

two figures expressing their ardor as some kind of cruel rite? And the truth is fucking doesn't last.

*(Beat.)*

And, then, what about madness, disorders of the mind, bodies that aren't whole?

*(Beat.)*

I should just tell them to be human is to impose yourself on the world. This is how I see it, so this is how it is.

**FRANCES.** Or—you could take this grant money and give it away to actual people. So they could eat, or go to school, and maybe collectively expand and re-define the concept of what it is to be human.

**JOSH.** Okay, sister, didn't I give up my beautiful SUV when you were on your moral imperative not to drive big gas guzzling automobiles thus entrenching us in a relationship with oil producing nations and consequently undermining what we tout to be our own unique position of being free in the world?

**FRANCES.** I was quoting. I didn't come up with that myself, which is disturbing, because I don't always see how things fit, and I'm always completely thrown to learn there's this relationship between a simple thing like buying a car or a carton of milk and the decline of civilization.

**JOSH.** Well, just put your two cents in about this, would you, and help me out here. I mean, is it sentimental to think there's something—anything—we have in common with everyone else on earth?

**FRANCES.** What everyone wants to know is who am I going to be? And then, who am I going to be with who'll make it not so terrible to be me. And if you have children, well, who are *they* going to be and who are they going to be with and will I like who they are and who they're with and how do I keep them safe?

*(Beat, as they move towards their separate spaces.)*

Maybe you're reaching, Josh. Maybe the story of one person is all they need to know about us.

**JOSH.** Where the hell are you?

**FRANCES.** In my tent.

**JOSH.** You are not in any kind of a tent.

**FRANCES.** In my tent outside of my room at the motel. You don't think I'd really pee in the open, do you? You should go outside. It is an alarmingly beautiful night.

**JOSH.** I can't go outside. I can't think outside.

**FRANCES.** Did you open my letter yet?

**JOSH.** (*Avoiding:*) I haven't had a chance—actually.

**FRANCES.** I know you're carrying it around in your pocket and it's getting smushed and I need you to read it.

**JOSH.** I know you want me to read it, Frances. So it must be important. And that, of course, brings up my morbid fear of important letters.

**FRANCES.** Josh—

**JOSH.** And I don't really have the time right now.

**FRANCES.** (*Retreating:*) Okay.

**JOSH.** I'm in over my head with this thing.

**FRANCES.** Look, if the aliens have a sense of humor, they'll see the irony. Or they'll receive it like the French do when you try to speak their language.

*(Beat.)*

Tell me. Tell me what you've got so far.

**JOSH.** Just—you know, I'm still working on it.

**FRANCES.** Just—I know. Tell me.

**JOSH.** That we're—incomplete. That we long for. That we miss our chances. And we're born to repeat: If only. If only!

*(Beat.)*

That we're moved. That we can meet another person's sorrow or subjugation with an answering cry and a wish to make it better. Not because we're thinking, "that could be me," but because that *is* me.

*(Beat.)*

The chemistry of the brain changes with certain events. Once you witness an atrocity—or hear a cruel remark. When you cause the disappointment in someone's eyes. Or see an act of courage. There's a shift. Now your brain's accommodating this new information. You're still pulled to the earth by gravity. And your blood type is still O positive. But what happens to other people is placing itself in your cells. It resides in you now. And you're not the same. It changes you forever.

**FRANCES.** Come outside. Be with me, tonight.

*(After a moment, he walks "outside." They both stand under a starry sky. JOSH looks up toward the heavens, addressing the unknown civilizations.)*

**JOSH.** Okay, I have some questions for *you!* Do you have pets? Do you marry? Is there gender? Does it matter to you if another of your species, group, tribe, community, has different markings? Do you have prisons? Are you kind? Do you sleep? Do you have mothers?

**FRANCES.** *(Joins him in shouting out to the universe:)* This is who we are! Hurling through time, tumbling, stretching, moving through time to what we're meant to be. This is us. Becoming!

*(Beat—to JOSH:)*

Please open the envelope.

**JOSH.** Fine.

*(He retrieves the letter from his pocket and opens it.)*

I see something that looks like a house. And little stick figures in crayon.

**FRANCES.** The other side.

*(He turns it over and starts to read out loud.)*

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**HOLIER GROUND**  
by Jonathan Denn

## **Cast of Characters**

BASHAMETH (Bashie Rose), 19, female, dark, piercing eyes

YAKOV, 18, male

ISRAELI SOLDIER #1 (offstage or recording), male

ISRAELI SOLDIER #2 (offstage/recorded or Yakov/offstage), male

## **Scenery**

One night on the border of Palestine and Israel. A barbed wire chain link fence partitions the stage. The Fence divides the stage at a forty-five degree angle. The Fence should be as formidable as the stage allows, or can be suggested by shadows and ladders. A trap door on the stage would be ideal for Bashie's digging. A brown cloth draping wire mesh can suggest the dirt mound. Or, lighting could suggest the hole, with Bashie crouching behind the rock and pantomiming digging.

## **Props**

Most importantly, the burqa, the white veil, airplane tickets, drawn portrait, and knapsack.

## **Scenes**

Scene 1: Bashie's Side

Scene 2: Yakov's Side

## **Playwright's Note**

As each scene progresses, the audience should begin to question whether or not the supporting character is a fantasy in the mind of the predominant character.

## **Time**

A near future.

## **Acknowledgments**

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

Originally presented by TADA! (Janine Nina Trevens, Executive and Artistic Director), as a winner of the 2004-2005 Annual One-Act Playwriting Contest, and presented in TADA!'s Best of the 15 Years FREE Staged Reading Series in 2006.

# HOLIER GROUND

by Jonathan Denn

## Scene 1

*(The night after the Security Barrier dividing Palestine from Israel is completed. The Fence divides the stage from upstage right to downstage left. The Fence should be as formidable as the stage allows, or may be suggested by ladders and shadow, rope or rigid frame. BASHIE, 19, female, is in front of the Fence, covered head to toe in a burqa, the only skin we see—her hands holding a shovel as she feverishly digs next to the Fence. She is about hip deep. Enter YAKOV, 18, male, dressed in garish beachwear. He is on the opposite side of the fence. Note: In the first scene, YAKOV is a figment of Bashie's imagination. In the second scene, vice versa.)*

**BASHIE.** *(BASHIE's head down. Each sentence marked with an exclamatory shovelful:)* On the bus you brush my knee with yours! Hold my hand on the upside down ride! A kiss at Cape Canaveral! Peace Camp! Was that all I was to you?

*(Looks at YAKOV for the first time, and removes her hood.)*

You and your brooding eyes.

*(BASHIE stops the literal digging.)*

**BASHIE.**

What were my parents thinking? Bringing a new life, me, into this war zone. I would never...

**YAKOV.**

What were my parents thinking? Bringing a new life, me, into this war zone. I would never...

**BASHIE.** I should never...asalamu alAykum...

*(BASHIE starts to rise from the hole.)*

**YAKOV.** ...alechem shalom. Digging again? Where is that going to get you?

*(Israeli searchlight skims the Fence. BASHIE ducks back down.)*

Stay down. They might see you. Stay down.

*(Pause. The threat passes.)*

**BASHIE.** Where you been?

*(BASHIE rises from the hole.)*

**YAKOV.** It's futile you know. The security barrier is here to stay. Israelis have a right to security.

**BASHIE.** Security barrier? Walls and fences are a barrier *to* security. We need to work. How many times should my Israeli boss put up with me not showing up for work? When the crossings close he has to do his work and mine, too.

**YAKOV.** Someone misses you desperately.

*(Beat.)*

Your boss I mean.

**BASHIE.** *(BASHIE circles her side.)* He'll have to fire me. And, I'd understand why.

*(Beat.)*

I never thought the Fence would be completed so fast. The revisionists are calling the Orbit of Graves—

**YAKOV.** The Reaper straddles the barrier and walks his footsteps. Heel, body, toe. Shift weight. Heel, grave, toe. Shift weight. Head, grief, toe. Shift.

**BASHIE.** They say the Orbit of Graves is a calculated attempt to manifest in a monument the commonest denominator between two peoples in an intractable situation. But it was not calculated. I know. It was after a particularly bloody week an Arab and a Jew find they have both lost a loved one. Both women are acquainted, working at the same hotel in Israel, and although in different departments they do take meals together from time to time. The Arab woman has lost a husband, and the Jewish woman her bachelor brother.

*(Beat.)*

It was a spontaneous thing. They decide to bury their loved ones opposite each other along this new barrier. But they had to find a

suitable place. Someone suggests using a compass to find the northernmost point of the Fence.

**YAKOV.** To top the fence.

**BASHIE.** And this room service waiter, an architecture student, stays up all night, and with his computer, designs this mark to be etched into both gravestones, a rose, inside two circles of dotted lines. Orbiting either side of a thick line, atop a thirty-two pointed star, the compass rose—

**YAKOV.** The compass the sailors of old used.

**BASHIE.** And he calls the mark the Orbits of Compassion Rose.

*(Beat.)*

And the next day comes another burial, and the next day another, and another and another on both sides orbiting westward, counter-clockwise along the walls and fences. Sacred ground. Common ground.

*(Points down at the ground offstage, continues to circle, and never takes her eyes off the grave.)*

That is the very first marker—due north on the Palestinian side—zero degrees, the grave that launched the Orbit. He almost died twice before, this sweet proud man, but the third time was the charm. The first time was in World War Two. In the Underground fighting the Nazis. The second time Nineteen-forty-seven amid all the upheaval—run over by a car. But he even survived that.

*(Stops circling, takes YAKOV's hand.)*

Yakov, I never introduced you to my Jadd. My father's father, peace be upon him...

**YAKOV.** Bless-ed be he.

**BASHIE.** *(Absently:)* But where Jadd was to be buried—Jaddah had no grand plan. Just women mourning. Grandma was the first Palestinian wife to bury her husband in orbit. And now Jaddah...

*(Picks up a bundle of fine fabric.)*

This is her wedding veil.

**YAKOV.** For our wedding?

**BASHIE.** You should be so lucky after how you've treated me—untreated me.

*(Beat.)*

Where you been?!

**YAKOV.** I have important things to do.

**BASHIE.** I look for you every day. Not every day. Every day I can. But not today. Today they wouldn't let me cross. I've been profiled. Lost multiple loved ones. Across generations. Under twenty-five years of age. Sporadic jobs. Left the country but returned. Seen unexplained at too many different checkpoints over a short period of time. It will probably be months before they let me through again. I don't have months.

*(Beat.)*

I'm breaking in.

**YAKOV.** Tunneling under the cover of grave digging. Brilliant. You are such a brilliant girl. That is why I picked you. Picked you over all the others.

**BASHIE.** You don't say.

**YAKOV.** At this pace you'll be digging forever.

**BASHIE.** Why don't you come over here and help me then?

**YAKOV.** A Jew breaking *into* Palestine? Now that doesn't make any sense does it, my brilliant girl?

**BASHIE.** Well, then start digging over there. I'll meet you under the Fence. As we break through into each other's tunnels we'll kiss for the longest time.

**YAKOV.** You romantic you. What lengths you won't go to get me alone. I have a better idea. Take off the burqa.

**BASHIE.** Why?

**YAKOV.** Why? Why do you think?

**BASHIE.** I have digging to do.

**YAKOV.** Pull the burqa over your head. I want to see the long stems of my Bashie Rose. That lead to your rose hips. And my rose—

**BASHIE.** (*Defiant.*) You will feel the thorns of your Bashie Rose.

**YAKOV.** I want to feel your thorns on my back.

**BASHIE.** That last night at camp. You made me crazy.

**YAKOV.** How crazy? Show me. Off with the burqa.

**BASHIE.** Come closer to the fence, Yakov. So you can get a good look. Ready?

*(BASHIE takes off her burqa as she would a nightgown for her lover, revealing a mid-term pregnancy straining against modest utilitarian underwear.)*

How crazy you ask? This crazy.

**YAKOV.** I had no idea.

**BASHIE.** That's a good start—considering the alternative.

**YAKOV.** I have to think.

*(YAKOV sits behind the rock and hides an army helmet under his shirt for his pregnancy.)*

**BASHIE.** Where are you? I didn't know what to do. You don't even know how I feel.

**YAKOV.** (*YAKOV rises, his back to the audience.*) I wouldn't be so sure of that.

*(YAKOV turns around and is pregnant himself. He caresses the bulge in a maternal way.)*

I told you I would not want to have been born into a place, a time, like this.

*(The searchlight makes another pass.)*

**ISRAELI SOLDIER #1.** (*Offstage. Yelling.*) Everyone keep your eyes open.

*(BASHIE hides in the hole. YAKOV is unmoved.)*

**ISRALI SOLDIER #1.** Watch each other's backs. That last bomb blast was huge. Stay way back—as far as you can.

**YAKOV.** Stay down. Stay down.

*(Puts helmet on his head. Pause.)*

I think they've gone.

*(BASHIE starts to rise.)*

No stay down.

*(Beat.)*

That way you look just as I remember you.

**BASHIE.** Not pregnant with your child you mean? We could make it work. We could leave here, go somewhere and start over.

*(Pause.)*

Or we could stay here, and not run away like the others.

**YAKOV.** *(YAKOV tosses the helmet and it bounces offstage.)* If you make it into Israel, do you think you'll find me?

**BASHIE.** One day you'll find me standing in front of you.

*(Beat.)*

I'll embarrass you in front of your friends. Consorting with a refugee girl. What *will* they think?

**YAKOV.** *(Anything but wholeheartedly:)* I wouldn't be embarrassed being seen with you.

**BASHIE.** *(Facetious:)* How romantic you are.

*(Beat.)*

Where are you?!

**YAKOV.** Does Jaddah suspect?

**BASHIE.** It no longer matters.

**YAKOV.** Ouch, how did that go?

**BASHIE.** Where are you!

**YAKOV.** I met a nice Jewish girl. Just kidding. Jeez. Say maybe your tunnel could be like an underground railroad. You Palestinians could sneak into work by day and slip back at night to sleep.

*(Pause.)*

What's the paper for?

**BASHIE.** This is a picture my sister drew of herself. Now I won't forget what she looks like.

*(Silence, while BASHIE resumes digging.)*

**YAKOV.** I cry myself to sleep every night thinking of you.

*(Beat.)*

I've stayed true.

*(Beat.)*

We can get married and move away, far away from here.

**BASHIE.** I might. I might move away with you.

**YAKOV.** Come here and stick your toes through the Fence, and I'll lick them clean one petal at a time.

**BASHIE.** You wish. Let me take off my shoes first and get my feet really grimy.

**YAKOV.** Wait a minute. Your grave. It's out of order.

**BASHIE.** An out of order grave. How can a grave be out of order? No more death? The war is over? An out of order grave. I like the image.

*(Pause.)*

The orbit could be aborted...

**YAKOV.** Aborted. No.

*(Pause.)*

The grave. The grave is out of sequence. You've skipped ahead a block or two. Wait a minute. That wasn't so brilliant. Someone

might get suspicious and catch you. What are these other two graves for? You're up to something aren't you. What is it?

**BASHIE.** Guess.

**YAKOV.** You want to dig the grave that completes the first orbit yourself. Or. Or. You're digging for holy relics or dinosaur bones to make your fortune.

**BASHIE.** You are a cr-a-zy boy! Why do I want to be with you?

**YAKOV.** You want to be the first person to breach the barrier for love. That's it, isn't it?

**BASHIE.** Half.

**YAKOV.** Love your chutzpah.

**BASHIE.** You do?

**YAKOV.** What's the other half?

**BASHIE.** How many graveyard orbits do you think it will take before the fighting stops? Spiraling around and around so many times that all of Palestine and Israel will be holy ground. Holier than the ground the barrier is on. Then the fighting would have to stop. Grounds for peace.

**YAKOV.** Measured by graves—Palestine is much holier than Israel.

**BASHIE.** That depends on when you start counting.

*(Beat.)*

Nothing is holier to me than this grave.

**YAKOV.** You're scaring me. What aren't you telling me?

**BASHIE.** I'm not going under the Fence.

*(Beat.)*

I'm going over it.

*(Silence.)*

**YAKOV.** It's too dangerous! You're digging *your* own grave.

*(Beat.)*

It's my fault. I should have stayed in touch.

*(Beat.)*

You should reconsider. What about your family?

**BASHIE.** *(BASHIE continues digging.)* I know what I do.

**YAKOV.** Come over here and give me a kiss.

**BASHIE.** I'm all sweaty.

**YAKOV.** Even better.

**BASHIE.** *(Backs away. Simultaneously with Yakov's lines below:)* Then you will give me a back rub. I pulled a muscle.

*(Beat.)*

We'll raise six children, four girls and two boys.

*(Beat.)*

Make sure my story is told.

*(Beat.)*

I'll write the truth for a major magazine, you will work for an agency that helps refugees. We'll be the first space tourists and orbit the earth a Palestinian happily married to a Jew.

*(Beat.)*

But we'll die tragically upon reentry.

*(Beat.)*

We'll live in a big white house by a live sea.

*(Starts to put the white veil on.)*

Save papers with my obituary in them. You can watch *them* turn old and grey.

*(Beat.)*

Make it snow white rose petals on my grave a year from today.

*(Veiled BASHIE climbs out of the hole. She takes an empty backpack from behind the rock and gathers up her belongings. But doesn't conceal her face.)*

**YAKOV.** *(Simultaneously with Bashie's lines above:)* You'll make it. The two of you will make it. I know you will.

*(Beat.)*

I'm sorry.

*(Beat.)*

I should have called.

*(Beat.)*

But you should have looked harder and found me.

*(Beat.)*

I want to know.

*(Beat.)*

You'll find me and tell me.

*(Beat.)*

Promise you will find me and tell me.

**BASHIE.** Yakov. This grave—it may not be for me.

*(Pause.)*

Before I left I wrote them this. Wrote us this. Will you listen?

**YAKOV.** Will I listen?

*(BASHIE and YAKOV kneel facing each other.)*

**BASHIE.**

Ten. Nine.

Eight: Cold Jadd went forth, zero degrees,

An honor buried at due north.

Seven: The first link in a chain.

Dying for the same homes and hearth.

*(She stands.)*

Six: Now that the Fence is complete.

Five: Jaddah, too, was in the wrong place and  
Sis', the wrong time. Now alone, I must dare.

Four: To join Yakov with what we bear.

*(She walks to graves and points.)*

Three: By my shovel Jaddah rejoins Jadd.

Two: This marker marks my sister's grave.

One: This empty grave may welcome me yet.

But with this climb, Yakov, I thee wed.

*(BASHIE dons her hood. YAKOV watches. BASHIE blasts-off  
climbing the Fence.)*

**YAKOV.** Your whole family is dead—gone? Bashie, no. I'm so sorry. Come to me Bashie. I might be your family now. I might. I do.

*(The spotlight catches BASHIE full on her hooded face, she freezes,  
and we see her mostly in silhouette. Fast.)*

We were afraid to go out of the house. I was grounded by my parents. We moved. I built a space ship and flew around the Sun and Mars. I went to America so I wouldn't have to join the Army.

*(Beat. Slow. YAKOV, this Yakov in Bashie's mind, drifts off stage.)*

When you finally do find me Bashie, tell me, which reality do you most hope is true?

**ISRAELI SOLDIER #2.** *(Offstage/recorded or YAKOV/offstage. To others:)* Breach! *(To BASHIE:)* Get down off the Fence...get back on your side and you will not be hurt.

*(BASHIE resumes climbing.)*

I can see the bombs under your robes. I repeat, get down off the Fence—now!

*(A whistle blows.)*

Breach!

*(BASHIE continues to rise.)*

This is your final warning before I shoot. I don't want to shoot you. Get down. *Now!* Please get down on your own side of the Fence.

*(BASHIE, her feet still in Palestine, hangs over the top of the Fence, just her fetus inside Israel. Rifle shot.)*

*(Crash. Blackout.)*

## Scene 2

*(Night. Now YAKOV is in front of the Fence, sans grave, dressed in an Israeli soldier's uniform, and a small bandage over the bridge of his nose. He is armed, and patrols the Fence but with a slightly more casual manner than one might expect. He sits and looks at the airplane tickets. BASHIE sneaks up behind him, through the fence, with her unpregnant figure in shorts and a pretty little top. She covers his eyes from behind with her hands.)*

**YAKOV.** What are you doing here? You can't be here. I'll get in trouble again.

**BASHIE.** There's no one around. I saw the lot of them drive away. Aren't you happy to see me?

**YAKOV.** I'm always happy to see you, but I'll see you tomorrow when I get home.

**BASHIE.** But it's time.

**YAKOV.** It was time this morning. Twice.

**BASHIE.** You're tired of me?

**YAKOV.** I'm not tired but—

**BASHIE.** Remember what you called it in Florida?

**YAKOV.** Erecting bridges.

**BASHIE.** *(BASHIE tries to pull him behind the boulder. YAKOV resists.)* I just read that the position we use can influence whether we have a boy or a girl. Do you want a boy or a girl?

**YAKOV.** Are you sure you want to have a child?

**BASHIE.** I want our child.

*(Beat.)*

What happened to your nose?

*(She grabs his face rather abruptly for a closer look.)*

**YAKOV.** Nothing. It's nothing.

**BASHIE.** Then tell me what happened.

**YAKOV.** I dropped a rifle.

**BASHIE.** Nice going, clumsy. How did you manage that?

**YAKOV.** I had to stand with three rifles over my head for an hour. And I dropped one. And it cut my nose.

**BASHIE.** Why did they make you do that?

**YAKOV.** I spoke out of turn.

*(Beat.)*

There is another heightened state of alert and we were told err on the side of caution. Which really means err on the side of offense. The last time things got out of control, and I, well, I snorted, and the commanding officer asks me if I have something to add. So I say—not everyone is a suicide bomber. And that's what I get.

**BASHIE.** I can't believe you joined the army. You promised. You said we would leave the country first. You had hope. You gave me hope.

**YAKOV.** I'll give you some hope. Come here. I have a surprise for you.

**BASHIE.** That wouldn't be a surprise.

**YAKOV.** Something else. Something you haven't seen before.

**BASHIE.** I'm not in the mood anymore. Warm me up a bit.

*(YAKOV kisses BASHIE's neck.)*

**BASHIE.** Why didn't you take us away?

**YAKOV.** *(YAKOV circles the stage clockwise throughout this speech.)* Just after I got home from peace camp Natan was killed. And his parents, my aunt and uncle, decided to have The Orbit assign the next grave. We had a compass, and ten cars in a caravan. They said

the plot was located at the nineteenth point on the compass rose. Southwest by south, two-hundred thirteen degrees forty-five minutes and twenty-three seconds, between Tzufin and Jayyus. So I look it up on the map and choose a route. But, there are detours, and checkpoints. We get lost for hours. My mother is livid. The Fence gerrymanders three times in the vicinity, and we still can't find Natan. We stop to ask directions for like the tenth time. Follow the crowds. Follow the crowds? We can't believe it. There must be eight hundred people on both sides of the Fence. Natan was a quiet boy—he only had a few friends.

*(Pause. YAKOV stops his circling.)*

When we get home I call the Orbit's office and tell them how hard it is to find Natan. Now they also give out GPS coordinates for the departed.

**BASHIE.** What does GPS mean?

**YAKOV.** Global positioning system.

*(BASHIE and YAKOV banter as they did at peace camp.)*

**BASHIE.** I don't think Allah needs a system. The globe is positioned pretty well as it is.

*(Beat.)*

Okay—so how does GPS work?

**YAKOV.** *(He picks her up and spins her.)* It's a series of satellites in synchronous orbit above the planet. It looks kinda like an atom. The earth the nucleus. The satellites the electrons. They form this grid of transmitters, and with a hand held device, you can tell where on the planet you are—exactly.

*(He puts her down.)*

**BASHIE.** *(Not playfully:)* I know where I am. *Where are you?* Exactly!

**YAKOV.** *(Ignores his guilt:)* Where Natan is exactly. My parents aren't so liberal anymore. They wouldn't let me leave Israel. They know exactly where they want me to be.

**BASHIE.** *(Sincere:)* Let's go visit Natan.

**YAKOV.** On the anniversary we'll go. We'll light a yahrzeit.

*(BASHIE nods, and sits on the rock. YAKOV begins to circle counter clockwise this time. He does not look at BASHIE unless noted.)*

**YAKOV.** I don't want to kill anyone.

**BASHIE.** You may not have to.

**YAKOV.** I may have to.

**BASHIE.** You *may* have to kill someone before your tour is up.

**YAKOV.** I ask my Rabbi, will I go to hell if I kill a Palestinian?

**BASHIE.** And what did he say?

**YAKOV.** What did he say?

**BASHIE.** *(In the voice of a male rabbi:)* There. Is. No. Hell.

*(YAKOV steals a glance at the rabbi.)*

**YAKOV.** No hell? So I say to him.

**BASHIE.** *(In her own voice:)* What did you say to him?

**YAKOV.** I think *this* might be hell.

**BASHIE.** *(Male rabbi's voice:)* You should not be rude to your rabbi.

**YAKOV.** I ask him...if our tradition is so grand?

**BASHIE.** *(Male rabbi's voice:)* Our traditions are wise.

**YAKOV.** If our traditions are so wise, and the Muslim traditions are—

**BASHIE.** *(In her own voice:)* Our traditions are equally grand.

**YAKOV.** The war is long since over. *Everyone has lost.* Why can't we put an end to this madness?

**BASHIE.** *(In the voice of a very proper school matron:)* Now that is a quality question.

**YAKOV.** My favorite teacher, Ms. Cohen, used to say that.

**BASHIE.** (*School matron's voice:*) Now that is a quality question, Yakov. An inspiration. Why can't we put an end to this madness? Indeed. All you have to do is work. Really work hard, and you'll find a solution.

**YAKOV.** Yes, Ms. Cohen. That's all I have to do.

**BASHIE.** (*In her own voice:*) How did the rabbi answer your quality question?

**YAKOV.** He says—

**BASHIE.** (*Male rabbi's voice:*) If I prod the sore in front of the congregation, then less people come pray the next time.

**YAKOV.** But if you don't speak the truth who will?

**BASHIE.** (*Male rabbi's voice:*) And if I do it again, fewer come the time after that. And soon no one will be there but the elderly. And then the temple won't be able to pay its bills. Then they will fire me. And then they will have to find a new rabbi.

**YAKOV.** It is important to pay your bills.

**BASHIE.** (*School matron's voice:*) You have to work to prevent a shortage of funds.

**YAKOV.** But Ms. Cohen, how can the Jews and the Muslims each claim their ground is holier?

**BASHIE.** (*School matron's voice:*) There is no shortage of real estate in heaven, Yakov.

**YAKOV.** I really don't want to kill anyone. Does that make me a coward?

**BASHIE.** (*Male rabbi's voice:*) If someone were going to kill you, you would kill them first—right?

**YAKOV.** I don't want to die. Yes. I probably would. But I might hesitate.

*(BASHIE speaks in her normal voice from here on out.)*

**BASHIE.** You have to live. For me, Yakov. You have to live. You cannot hesitate. You have to do what's necessary.

**YAKOV.** For you Bashie Rose.

**BASHIE.** You have to stay alive for me, Yakov.

**YAKOV.** Yes, for my Rose.

*(The spell is broken. BASHIE bites him, playfully, maybe even punches his arm.)*

Ouch. Stop that.

*(BASHIE exits impossibly through the fence to change into the burqa.)*

**BASHIE.** *(Offstage:)* You're tough. You can take it. Maybe I'll see you later.

**YAKOV.** You're never out of my mind. You're not mad?

**BASHIE.** *(Offstage:)* Let's have a huge family.

**YAKOV.** *(YAKOV gets far away from the Fence and starts writing a letter. Simultaneously with Bashie's lines below:)*

Dear Bashie,

It seems like an eternity since I saw your pretty face last. I hope you won't stay mad at me...

*(Beat.)*

These last five months have been the worst in my life.

*(Beat.)*

I wish I had stood up to my parents.

*(Beat.)*

But today I did it. I finally did it. I have two airplane tickets out of here.

*(YAKOV notices something suspicious over his shoulder.)*

**BASHIE.** *(Offstage. Simultaneously with Yakov's lines above. The real Bashie, not of Yakov's imagination. Exact reenactment:)*

Five: Jaddah, too, was in the wrong place and

Sis', the wrong time. Now alone, I must dare.

Four: To join Yakov with what we bear.

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.  
THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

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**HUM OF THE ARCTIC**  
by Sarah Hammond

## Cast of Characters

CLAIRE, a young woman, in her mid-twenties

SHELLY, her mother in flashback, in her early-twenties

RIGEL, a painter, in his mid-thirties

*Pronunciation note: Rigel rhymes with Nigel.*

## Setting

Shelly and Rigel's next-door apartments.

## Acknowledgments

*Hum of the Arctic* was first performed at the Actors Theatre of Louisville's *Four by Four in Four* evening of ten-minute plays, January 10 & 12, 2006. The cast and staff was as follows:

CLAIRE.....	Lauren Bauer
SHELLY .....	Robin Grace Thompson
RIGEL.....	Michael C. Schantz
Director .....	Brian Balcom
Dramaturg.....	Joanna K. Donehower
Scenic Designer.....	Brenda Ellis
Costume Designer.....	Stacy Squires
Lighting Designer .....	Lauren Scattolini
Sound Designer .....	Adam Smith
Properties Designer.....	Joe Cunningham
Stage Manager .....	Melissa Miller
Assistant Stage Manager .....	Marisa Morton

The play was subsequently produced by City Theatre as part of the Summer Shorts Festival 2006. It was directed by J. Barry Lewis with Elizabeth Dimon, Ivonne Azurdia, and Antonio Amadeo.

# HUM OF THE ARCTIC

by Sarah Hammond

*(Two pools of light: two apartments. In one, there is a bathtub with a radio perched precariously on the edge. A pair of feet dangle over the edge of the bathtub. The owner of the feet is submerged. A Queen song plays from the radio.)*

*(In the second pool of light stands an easel with a canvas that hides the painter behind it.)*

*(Elsewhere, CLAIRE pages through a scrapbook.)*

**CLAIRE.** That's my mother in the bathtub. Don't worry, she's not dead. See her toes twirling? No, she's listening. She loved baths. Her first apartment had a clawfoot tub. There's a picture of it here somewhere...

*(SHELLY's head pops up from the tub for air. She turns up the volume on the radio, and dunks again.)*

Mom believed that she could hear underwater. She was deaf her whole life, but she found a way to cheat it.

*(On the edge of the tub, SHELLY's hand taps in time with the music. In the next apartment, the painter's head pokes out from behind his canvas.)*

All our vacations were at the beach, lakes, water parks. She took a membership at the Y so that she and I could go to the pool and have excellent private talks underwater.

*(SHELLY's hand grapples about, turns up the volume again. At this, the bass begins to resound. It is very, very loud. Next door...)*

**RIGEL.** *(With the music:)*  
Bicycle bicycle bicycle.  
I want to ride my bicycle bicycle bicycle.  
*Nuts.*

**CLAIRE.** These pictures are from her early twenties. Younger than I am now. She couldn't afford a membership at a pool, so she spent a lot of time in the bath listening.

*(SHELLY's legs do a dance in the air. RIGEL, the painter, yells at the wall.)*

**RIGEL.** BICYCLE, TURN IT DOWN.

**CLAIRE.** There is nothing scientific to her bathtub theory. I don't know if I actually believe it myself, but I loved our chats underwater, and that's enough.

*(RIGEL tries to paint, but cannot. He storms off, still holding the paintbrush.)*

We never went skiing because Mom said the cold air froze the sounds. It froze the water and it froze her ears and she would not have a thing to do with it. I've been skiing a lot since she died. Sometimes you just don't want to hear a thing, you know? You just want everything to stand still.

*(RIGEL enters Shelly's apartment, plugs his ears against the volume of the radio.)*

**RIGEL.** HELLO? HELLO IS ANYBODY—*JESUS CHRIST!*

*(He catches her in the bathtub—she screams, he screams, she flails, he whirls around to cover his eyes. Then he can't decide between covering his eyes and covering his ears.)*

**RIGEL.** WHAT THE HELL.

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO FRY YOURSELF SORRY GOD.

*(She yells something unintelligible, he turns to her.)*

What? Sorrysorrysorry!

*(She yells, he shuts his eyes. He feels for a blanket at his feet, tosses it to her. She wraps herself and stands in the tub.)*

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D BE IN THE TUB. I MEAN. THE MUSIC'S SO LOUD AND I—THE GUY WANTS TO RIDE HIS BICYCLE, OKAY, I GET IT. ARE YOU DECENT YET?

ARE YOU COVERED?

*(He peers through his fingers.)*

**SHELLY.** *(Mouths voicelessly:)* What are you doing here?

**RIGEL.** I CAN'T HEAR YOU.

I can't hear you, turn the radio down, WOULD YOU TURN THE—

*(She does. Sudden silence. He sways a little with the impact.)*

**CLAIRE.** She used to grind her teeth when she couldn't make her point with someone.

**RIGEL.** You didn't have to turn it off, I meant, just—

*(SHELLY thrusts the radio into his arms fiercely and proceeds to comb out her hair while staring at him. He is stuck holding the radio.)*

**RIGEL.** —down a little, I meant, uh...

**CLAIRE.** She'd received a letter from my father that week that made her feel very alone, and so she wrapped up in the yellow blanket with the stitches unraveling, because yellow made her feel better, but not this week, so then she went to the bathtub, to Queen, to the solace of Freddie Mercury's jilted tones. But there they stood in the silence. Wet and yellow. The silence thin as tissue.

**RIGEL.** I'll just, then, um, I'll tune this to something nicer. I don't barge into people's apartments, but your radio was really inappropriately loud, bicycle bicycle, and I was trying to work—uh, I work at home—and frankly, that music is, besides unappealing, rather distracting... There is no proper *music* in this radio, I'll just turn it off.

*(She looks at him. He frowns.)*

All I've had to eat today is coffee. I shouldn't be in your bathroom. Funny, that I don't know anybody in the building, actually, and I've been here six months, but you're the first person I've met, and you are...totally...bare under that bicycle—ow!--blanket—oh *man*, I should go, I'm going. Here's your, here's your—

*(She won't take the radio back.)*

**CLAIRE.** His name was Rigel. He lived next door in 4C. He had a view of the alley where the Korean waitresses smoked foreign cigarettes between lunch and dinner.

*(SHELLY steps out of the tub gingerly. Finds a shell tosses it to him.)*

**RIGEL.** What?

*(She points to the shell, points to herself.)*

**RIGEL.** This is you? Shell? That's your name. Smart. Is this—um—I never understood performance art, really, never got the whole—

**SHELLY.** *(Shakes head no:)* Mm.

*(Covers her ears.)*

**RIGEL.** Deaf. Oh. Sorry! Of course! Hi. Hi. Shell, you're in a blanket.

*(She shimmies.)*

**CLAIRE.** Her name was Shelly. Shel-ly.

**RIGEL.** So, Shell, you can't hear...uh...can you hear anything? If I called you a... *(Smiles)*. I won't call you that. Just because I can think of an insult doesn't mean I should say it. There's no reason why you should be a free pass for my filthy mouth.

**CLAIRE.** He was funny, she told me. Too old for her, but it was one of her happier days there in that building, his sudden appearance: all sticky knuckles and paint in his ears, calling her the wrong name.

**RIGEL.** Here's the thing, it's just Queen really turns me into kind of a monster. I've been trying to capture the bricks outside the window and that music is just too...er...transcendent for me to get any real work done. I listen to a lot of blues. Small music, you know? With small sounds. That doesn't mean anything to you. Jesus. Anyway, I need to choose music that brings me down or I don't sleep at night. The way you look at me, I think I could sleep. Can you hear any of this? I can't stop talking. Look at me. Can't stop. Stop! Can't do it. See, and you can't hear a word so what's the point of all this useless...

I'm afraid of small spaces.

When I was eight I hurt my cat.

Sometimes I want to push people into the subway tracks.

I've always hated my sister. She hates me, too, and so she puts banana peels in my toilet, and I can't ever flush the toilet, and I have to go in the unisex restroom in the lobby that the bums use. We don't say these things to each other, she and I.

**CLAIRE.** He told her everything that he had never thought to say out loud before.

**RIGEL.** I never eat Chinese because the fortune cookies will tell me I'm in for a fall or life is a bad dream until you wake up, and then it's worse.

I love you.

Marry me. Will you marry me. I can't love you. I don't love you. I don't love. There. There it is.

*(He covers his eyes, lets out a nervous bark.)*

Whoa! You are better than a priest!

**SHELLY.** *(The beginning of a word:)* Oov—

*(He looks at her, exhales.)*

**RIGEL.** But you didn't hear a word of that, so I am safe. You look at me so thoroughly, in your wet blanket, Shell.

**CLAIRE.** Shelly.

**RIGEL.** You have... You are... You shouldn't put the radio so close to the bathtub. It could fry you. Excuse me, I mean: *(He mimes and points:)* Radio. Bathtub. No. *(Shudders his hand:)* Fzzzz. Fried.

*(She withholds a laugh. Winks at him. He tries to return the shell, but she won't let him.)*

**CLAIRE.** At that moment: a construction crew began to jackhammer in the street below, and my mother mistook that tremor for a seismic shift in her heart. And she thought she loved him, but couldn't say so.

*(SHELLY takes his paintbrush, brushes her fingertips with it.)*

**RIGEL.** Paint—I'm a painter. That's what I was, uh...

*(SHELLY signs the word blue.)*

**CLAIRE.** Blue.

**RIGEL.** ...working on. What does that mean?

*(SHELLY runs her thumb across his lips, coloring them blue.)*

**CLAIRE.** She forgot my father. She forgot the boy she first kissed. Her mother had made her promise never to look strangers directly in the eye, but she forgot that, too. She forgot the date and she forgot the color of the building they lived in. She forgot how many feet were in a mile. She forgot her favorite number and her worst fear and the flavor of chicken. She forgot she was deaf.

*(Carefully, RIGEL lifts SHELLY's thumb away from his face.)*

**RIGEL.** Please don't do that.

*(SHELLY's face falls, and she returns his paintbrush. He exits. SHELLY sits on the edge of the bathtub, she holds onto the quiet radio.)*

**CLAIRE.** When I ski, I ride the lift to the top to find a deserted spot in the trees where I sit until it's so cold that I can't hear my own heartbeat. And I wonder if that's what it was like for her. A life that sounded like frozen tundra.

*(RIGEL reenters his own apartment, stands near his canvas. SHELLY mouths the sounds of "bicycle, bicycle" silently. CLAIRE traces her fingers across photos in the scrapbook.)*

The postcard from his show.

A few years ago, we were in a gallery and there were his paintings, all thumbs. At least twenty of them, her thumbs, one after another. She kept wanting to touch the canvasses. Couldn't keep her hands away. The lady who ran the gallery had to ask us to leave. I kept this postcard to remember his name. We sat on the sidewalk outside, and Mom told me about that afternoon in between blowing her nose and fixing her hair. How he discovered her in the bathtub. His paintbrush and her blanket. How she understood every word he said.

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**LIGHT**  
**by Jeni Mahoney**

## **Cast of Characters**

ABBY

HELENA

## **Acknowledgments**

*Light* received its world premiere as a part of “Secret Lives” at the Moving Arts Theater Company 10th Annual Festival of Premiere One-Act Plays at the L.A. Theater Center in 2003. It was directed by Laura Stribling with the following cast:

HELENA ..... Amy Theil  
ABBY.....Dana Schwartz

# LIGHT

by Jeni Mahoney

*(At Rise: Two women sit facing each other. One is “giving light” to the other. HELENA [giving light] is intensely involved; eyes closed and hands poised, palms out. ABBY [getting light] stares strangely at HELENA, not sure what to make of it. They sit this way for about fifteen seconds. There is an open beer can near each woman, and four full beers remain in the plastic rings. A stack of booklets sits near HELENA’s feet. They aren’t drunk, but are enjoying a slight buzz.)*

**ABBY.** Is it working?

**HELENA.** Shhhhh...

*(Ten more seconds of silent light-giving.)*

**ABBY.** I don’t feel anything...

**HELENA.** Shhhhhh!

**ABBY.** Helena—

*(HELENA drops her hand in disgust.)*

**HELENA.** Geez! Of course you can’t feel it. You’re thinking about it too much. You’re blocking the light with your negative, doubting attitude.

**ABBY.** I was just checking in.

**HELENA.** You don’t need to check in.

**ABBY.** I mean I was sitting there for a good five...six minutes and I was just wondering if everything was okay. I mean, maybe you could feel if it wasn’t going right.

**HELENA.** I can only give the light. I can’t tell if you’re receiving it.

**ABBY.** Oh.

*(ABBY considers this.)*

How do I know if I’m getting the light?

**HELENA.** You have to be ready for the light to penetrate you. Otherwise it just bounces right off you—

**ABBY.** Uh-huh.

**HELENA.** In fact, I probably shouldn't even be giving you light. It can be dangerous if you're not ready for it. That's what happens when someone spontaneously combusts.

**ABBY.** (*Amused.*) Spontaneously combusts?

**HELENA.** It happens more than you think.

**ABBY.** Spontaneous combustion?

**HELENA.** Sure. They try to explain everything like it's something else—like it's all so easy. Like it's science. There are forces—in the government and politics and stuff—that want to take away all the mysteries of the world. Like in Sunday school they tell you to “dwell on the mystery,” but at the same time they try to explain it all with logic and rationalizations. They present evidence as if evidence creates truth. But evidence—empirical evidence—is a trap. Like Dac says: a demon in sheep clothing.

**ABBY.** Oh.

**HELENA.** I know it sounds weird, and I don't say too well yet, but when I'm there and Dac is talking—it all makes sense. When you hear him talking, it's all so common-sense it makes you feel stupid that you never thought of it before.

**ABBY.** Hel, you know I support you in whatever you do...

**HELENA.** I know, I know— (*Indicating the beers.*) —Do you want another?

**ABBY.** Sure—

*(They don't miss a beat as they open their beers.)*

—And I know you've been searching...

**HELENA.** Everyone is searching.

**ABBY.** Yeah, but some more than others.

**HELENA.** —It's the best thing in my life.

**ABBY.** (*Cautiously:*) It's the only thing in your life...

**HELENA.** Dac says that when you commit to God it's all or nothing. Like marriage. You give everything—your heart, your soul, your emotions, your labor and the fruit of your labor—or it's worthless. It's hard, but it's supposed to be hard. If it were easy then everybody would do it. You have to give up something—sacrifice something—in order to be chosen.

**ABBY.** Yeah, but who decides when you're chosen?

**HELENA.** God.

**ABBY.** But then how do you know...? When you're chosen, I mean...

**HELENA.** You just do—Dac says it's like re-emerging from the womb. You have to breathe a whole new way. Everything is different, but it's also suddenly the most natural thing in the world.

**ABBY.** Dac. What is that? Is that a name? It sounds like an email address, or a Pez candy or something.

**HELENA.** They're initials. Dac says the Judeo-Christian names that we use are tying us to worn-out mythology—superstitions that we no longer need—that are holding us back and imposing these fascist personae on us—and we put that out into the universe without even knowing it. Like Abby...Abigail. Like the "Scarlet Letter."

**ABBY.** What?

**HELENA.** A marked woman, Abby, an adulteress...and now it's forced its agenda on your life.

**ABBY.** You didn't even read the "Scarlet Letter"—

**HELENA.** But I don't HAVE to—that's the point. We all know what happens in the story. And I know what happened with you and Jake—

**ABBY.** The situations are so totally different—

**HELENA.** I'm not judging you. I'm just saying that when your identity is controlled by your name then you're fucked by destiny.

**ABBY.** I'm sure there are plenty of women named Mary who get divorced and—I don't know—people named for saints—they screw up too you know...

**HELENA.** Oh, sure. Lots of Biblical characters fucked around. Check it out. I'm not making it up.

**ABBY.** I'm sure you're not, but with all due respect—which is probably more respect than it deserves—I don't buy it. I'm not being controlled by a very boring work of fiction.

**HELENA.** It's as real as anything else, you know, by association. It's a cultural myth—it's all fiction really and we collectively—not you Abigail the smart individual—control that. It's like a wave—you know—you can't outrun it.

**ABBY.** I can't believe we're even having this conversation.

**HELENA.** I'm just trying to answer your question.

**ABBY.** Really? Geez, I don't even remember what the question was.

**HELENA.** The name thing. Dac. He encourages us to create new identities that express our new lives—free from “oppressive cultural fictions”—open to change, rebirth, divine intervention. Dac means everything and no-thing. Whatever you can create: Delicate...Angelic...Creator.

**ABBY.** Deadly...Amoral...Con-Artist...

**HELENA.** Dreamlike, Alternative, Captain...

**ABBY.** Deceitful. Arrogant. Cash-man.

**HELENA.** Divine, Alien, Communicator...

**ABBY.** Divine Alien Communicator?

**HELENA.** Just an example.

**ABBY.** And who are you?

**HELENA.** I'm Hep.

**ABBY.** Hep?

**HELENA.** I took it from my initials—Helena Elaine Preston.

**ABBY.** Who the heck is Preston?

**HELENA.** It's my grandmother's maiden name. I was named for her and Dac believes that I may be partially reincarnated from her because usually we are our own relatives. Which makes sense, if you think about it—the whole thing about the family dynamic and the working out of these repeating patterns. Besides, Dac thought “P” was better than “S:” the serpent's letter. The P offers more...possibilities. Peace, progress, prophetsess...

**ABBY.** *(Under her breath:)* Painfully Preyed upon...Perishing...

**HELENA.** *(Somewhat hurt:)* Whatever...you're just not giving this a chance, and that's fine. One thing Dac warned us about was preaching to our friends...I just thought you'd be more open-minded.

**ABBY.** Come on Hel, we used to laugh at shit like this! Remember those weirdos from science class—cutting themselves and baying at the moon—

**HELENA.** They were Satin Worshipers, Abby!

*(ABBY shrugs as if it's all the same.)*

Dac is about freedom, about joy—about letting go of all the shit that is weighing us down and sucking the happiness right out of us. It's killing us. It's killing you—look at you.

**ABBY.** What about me?

**HELENA.** You know in the Bible people lived to be 120! Shit. I can't believe you're even comparing this to a Satanic cult...it's called giving LIGHT, not giving DARK...geez Louise.

**ABBY.** Okay okay—let's try it again. You can light me up until I catch fire. I won't say anything. Promise.

*(ABBY offers herself again to get the light.)*

**HELENA.** Forget it.

**ABBY.** Why?

**HELENA.** Forget about it. You aren't taking this seriously. You're fucking with me.

*(ABBY briefly considers arguing, but she's been caught.)*

**ABBY.** I'm sorry, you're right.

*(Silence.)*

Sorry. Okay.

**HELENA.** It's just that I've found something so good and meaningful and right and I want to share it. Is that okay?

**ABBY.** Of course it's okay.

**HELENA.** You can't imagine how wonderful it is for me there. I've never felt so wanted and like I belong and full of spirit. Really full. Like they told us it would be but it never was. It's like I'm Mary every day. The woman of God, His beloved. The beloved of God. And I can feel it inside me...more than...more than sex is inside. Not like sex, but sensual. A buzzing. A caress. Inside caress, all buzzy warm and pulsing. Like a wave of love and breathlessness. Like a new love all over again every time and everyday it gets stronger. *(Pause.)* I know you think I'm out of my mind. You think it's in my mind. That he's in my mind: Dac. But He...the big He...is the one. Inside me. In—side. Be still and He is. Inside me...

*(They sit in awkwardly for a bit. ABBY cannot find a response.)*

**ABBY.** It sounds nice. It does. So...they let you...drink beer?

**HELENA.** Yeah, sure. They aren't Nazis you know. Dac drinks whiskey, says it's more pure, but he doesn't mind beer. He'll have a beer chaser sometimes.

*(Another awkward silence.)*

Abby...?

**ABBY.** Yeah.

**HELENA.** Do you ever think of me?

**ABBY.** Yeah, sure. If I didn't think about you then I wouldn't have recognized you when you called, right?

**HELENA.** That's just remembering me, not really thinking about me.

**ABBY.** I guess. I don't know. Why?

**HELENA.** Just curious...

**ABBY.** Yeah?

**HELENA.** It's funny, you know, the past is a dream to me now. Like my whole life up until now happened to another person.

**ABBY.** I know what you mean. It's like remembering in black and white.

**HELENA.** Dac says that the more we break free of our past personae, the more we forget the world of our past.

**ABBY.** You mean, like, you'd forget me?

**HELENA.** ...And that's kind of okay...'cause there's lots of stuff that I want to forget, right? But to let go of everything—even the good—and it was good, don't you think?

**ABBY.** It was more...simple.

**HELENA.** Safe.

**ABBY.** So that's what this is all about?

**HELENA.** What?

**ABBY.** It's like a good-bye. Am I right?

**HELENA.** Not so much a good-bye as a stroll down memory lane...

**ABBY.** Before the memory of me disappears completely. Great. That's just great. You know—ten years—nothing. No phone call. Nothing. Then at my darkest moment here's my bestest, oldest friend and I think—great, a sign. Life goes on. But no, it's all just another big *hasta la vista* Abby.

**HELENA.** The phone works both ways you know.

**ABBY.** (*Lamely joking:*) Maybe my dialing finger was broken.

**HELENA.** Maybe my entire hand was crushed in freak circus accident.

**ABBY.** I was deaf.

**HELENA.** I was dumb.

**ABBY.** Oh yeah? Well I was in a sucky, controlling mind-fuck marriage.

**HELENA.** Okay. You win.

**ABBY.** Yes! *(A pause.)* Stay Hel. You can stay with me.

**HELENA.** Abby—

**ABBY.** Don't decide—just think about it. It's an option.

**HELENA.** You don't understand, Abbs. With Dac, I'm divine...

**ABBY.** Yeah, but are you happy?

**HELENA.** Don't I seem happy?

**ABBY.** I don't know, kind of...but an unreal happy...

**HELENA.** Jealous?

**ABBY.** Yeah, right.

**HELENA.** Are you?

**ABBY.** Jealous?

**HELENA.** Happy.

**ABBY.** Hel—

**HELENA.** Are—You—Happy?

**ABBY.** No. Okay. Life's a roller coaster. You go up, you go down—maybe you learn something and then maybe you're not such a screaming asshole the next time.

*(HELENA shrugs. It may be so.)*

So maybe I have no business grilling you about being happy—heaven knows I haven't got all the answers. But I have been happy, I will be happy. And I'm not willing to give up everything—forget everyone—everything that came before. That doesn't even make sense. I mean what is left? Right? If you don't have...remembering. Remembering is as close to happy as I can get some days.

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**MR. AND MRS.**  
**by Julie Marie Myatt**

## Cast of Characters

DEBRA

STEVEN

## Acknowledgments

*Mr. and Mrs.* premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in March 2007. It was directed by Jessica Burgess with the following cast and staff:

DEBRA.....	Maurine Evans
STEVEN.....	Mark Stringham
Scenic Designer.....	Paul Owen
Costume Designer.....	Susan Neason
Lighting Designer .....	Paul Werner
Sound Designer .....	Benjamin Marcum
Properties Designer.....	Doc Manning
Fight Director.....	Lee Look
Stage Managers.....	Michael D. Domue, Debra Anne Gasper
Production Assistant.....	Melissa Miller
Dramaturg.....	Joanna K. Donehower
Assistant Dramaturg.....	Diana Grisanti

# MR. AND MRS.

by Julie Marie Myatt

**MALE VOICE.** (*Off-stage:*) Ladies and gentlemen, I proudly present you, Mr. and Mrs.—

*(Crowd claps and cheers off-stage.)*

*(A band plays, “At Last,” off-stage.)*

*(DEBRA and STEVEN enter holding hands and begin to dance. She is at least a foot taller than him. They both have had more than a few wedding toasts / drinks. They smile and a flashbulb goes off to capture the smile.)*

*(Flashbulbs will continue to go off throughout the play, and they will stop to smile just at the right moment for the picture, and continue dancing until the end.)*

**DEBRA.** I need to tell you something, Steven—oh, you’ve got something in your teeth, sweetheart. Right there. To the left. Yeah. There, you got it. I think it was a poppy seed from that hideous dressing. I was a little disappointed by the salad. I couldn’t taste one bit of lemon. Could you?

**STEVEN.** I don’t know.

**DEBRA.** It was all lettuce, seeds and oil. Please. No one ate it.

**STEVEN.** I did.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** Boy, your mother sure can put them away, huh?

**STEVEN.** Yeah.

**DEBRA.** No wonder she insisted on the open bar. My father really wasn’t happy about that, you know. He doesn’t drink.

**STEVEN.** Or smile.

**DEBRA.** This was a great expense for him. This wedding. It was all extremely extravagant for him.

**STEVEN.** Napkins are extravagant?

**DEBRA.** They don't grow on trees.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** I thought the ceremony was nice, didn't you?

**STEVEN.** Uh huh.

**DEBRA.** Your vows were lovely. Thank you.

**STEVEN.** You're welcome. So were yours.

**DEBRA.** Really? I wanted to surprise you—

*(Smile / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** Though I think it's pronounced "eternity," not "entirety."

**DEBRA.** Really?

**STEVEN.** Yes.

**DEBRA.** Are you sure?

**STEVEN.** Positive.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** Steven, I need to tell you—

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** Of course this is very difficult for me, but I can't go another minute without being completely honest with you—

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** This day has been so emotional and meaningful—

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** And you look so nice in your tux.

**STEVEN.** Thank you.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** I married you for your money.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** Steven?

**STEVEN.** Yes.

**DEBRA.** Did you hear me?

**STEVEN.** You married me for my money.

**DEBRA.** Well, what do you think, sweetheart? Are you devastated?

*(Smile / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** I married you for your looks.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** What?

**STEVEN.** What?

**DEBRA.** I thought you married me because you loved me.

**STEVEN.** Really?

**DEBRA.** Yes.

**STEVEN.** What gave you that impression?

**DEBRA.** The engagement ring, I suppose.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** Do you love me?

**STEVEN.** Do you love me?

**DEBRA.** I don't hate you.

**STEVEN.** That's a relief.

**DEBRA.** But I just assumed. I guess I assumed—

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** I thought you were infatuated with me.

**STEVEN.** Infatuated?

**DEBRA.** Yes.

**STEVEN.** That's an awfully strong word.

**DEBRA.** What word would you use?

**STEVEN.** I don't know—

**DEBRA.** Head over heels?

**STEVEN.** No.

**DEBRA.** Enamored?

*(Smile / dip / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** No.

**DEBRA.** Smitten?

**STEVEN.** The sex is terrific.

**DEBRA.** Thank you.

**STEVEN.** But beyond that—

*(Smile / flash.)*

*(Silence.)*

**DEBRA.** Beyond that...?

**STEVEN.** What?

**DEBRA.** Beyond the sex?

*(Silence.)*

**DEBRA.** Am I that hard to describe?... Is it because I'm mysterious? Intimidating—

**STEVEN.** You're a little dull.

**DEBRA.** Dull?

*(Smile / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** You're a little limited in the things you like to talk about.

**DEBRA.** I beg your pardon. I like to talk about a lot of things.

**STEVEN.** Like what?

**DEBRA.** The world.

**STEVEN.** What about it?

**DEBRA.** I have a lot of interests. And I am passionate about issues, Steven. Issues are very important to me.

**STEVEN.** Dieting is not an issue.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** Many people struggle with dietary issues, Steven. Food is a major issue. Major.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** Sudan is a major issue, Debra. George W. Bush driving this country into the ground and leaving it bankrupt for future generations, is a major issue. Solving world hunger is a major issue. You starving yourself, is a hobby.

**DEBRA.** It is not.

**STEVEN.** It is the speck of dust on the lice that rides the flea who rides the dog who sniffs the bone to find some purpose in life. Or a fire hydrant. Which ever comes first.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** You don't seem to mind f-u-c-king this starved body.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** I didn't say I didn't like it.

**DEBRA.** Good—

**STEVEN.** I didn't say I didn't like doing ridiculously dirty, lewd things to it.

**DEBRA.** OK—

**STEVEN.** Or seeing it do amazingly athletic and illegal things to me—

**DEBRA.** Thank you—

**STEVEN.** I just don't want to hear you jabber on about it like it's Watergate or Perestroika.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** You think I like listening to the things you jabber on about?

**STEVEN.** Do you understand them?

**DEBRA.** Steven.

**STEVEN.** What?

**DEBRA.** You're really not as smart as you think you are.

**STEVEN.** Do you know what I do for a living, Debra?

**DEBRA.** For heaven's sake.

**STEVEN.** What?

**DEBRA.** You're a lawyer.

**STEVEN.** What kind?

**DEBRA.** Expensive.

**STEVEN.** What kind?

**DEBRA.** Does it matter?

*(Smile / flash.)*

**STEVEN.** I'm a litigator.

**DEBRA.** OK.

**STEVEN.** Do you know what I do?

**DEBRA.** Litigate, I would imagine.

**STEVEN.** What does that mean?

**DEBRA.** Jesus, Steven. What is this, the 3rd degree on our wedding day?

**STEVEN.** You brought it up.

**DEBRA.** This day is supposed to be special.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** I have waited 31 years for this day, Steven. 31 years. I won't have you ruin it with insults.

**STEVEN.** They aren't insults.

**DEBRA.** What do you call them?

**STEVEN.** Facts.

**DEBRA.** Same thing.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** I mean, look at me. Did you even notice my dress?

**STEVEN.** Your father is pouring that shit back into the bottles. Classic.

**DEBRA.** And my hair? Did you notice I have it up?

**STEVEN.** What are those things stuck in it?

**DEBRA.** Flowers.

**STEVEN.** Oh.

**DEBRA.** And my make-up?

**STEVEN.** A little thick, but you know, fine.

*(Smile / flash.)*

**DEBRA.** You married me for my looks, and yet you haven't ever *really* looked at me.

**STEVEN.** I'm only human, Debra.

**DEBRA.** Look at me.

**STEVEN.** I'm looking.

**DEBRA.** Look into my eyes.

**STEVEN.** I'm trying.

*(She stoops down so he can see better.)*

**DEBRA.** Look into my eyes, Steven.

**STEVEN.** I'm a lawyer, not an optometrist.

**DEBRA.** Look into my eyes. What do you see?

*(Smile / flash.)*

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**PUMPKIN PATCH**  
by Patrick Gabridge

## **Cast of Characters**

LATOYA, a black woman, 30s–40s

SASHA, a white woman, 30s–40s

## **Setting**

A community garden in an urban neighborhood, rich with tall plants, pumpkin vines, and three pumpkins.

## **Acknowledgments**

*Pumpkin Patch* received its premiere in the New York City Fifteen-Minute Play Festival, produced by the American Globe Theatre and Turnip Theatre Company, (John Basil, Gloria Falzer, and Liz Keefe, producers) at the American Globe Theatre on May 28, 2007, with the following cast and staff:

LATOYA.....Keisha Zollar  
SASHA.....Helen McElwain  
Director.....Halina Ujda

*For my fellow gardeners and neighbors at the Cooper and Crite gardens.*

# PUMPKIN PATCH

by Patrick Gabridge

*(A community garden, rich with tall plants and pumpkin vines and three pumpkins. A black woman in her 30s–40s, LATOYA, stands up, with a plastic shopping bag of vegetables dangling from her wrist and hefts up a large pumpkin. A white woman in a garden hat, SASHA, also in her 30s–40s, walks up the path towards LATOYA, carrying a shovel.)*

**SASHA.** Hi.

**LATOYA.** Hello.

**SASHA.** Beautiful day.

**LATOYA.** Gorgeous.

**SASHA.** This is my favorite time of year in the garden. Everything is so ripe.

**LATOYA.** Gem of the neighborhood.

**SASHA.** I'm glad you think so. *(Beat.)* Can I help you?

**LATOYA.** I've got it, thanks.

**SASHA.** I didn't actually mean it like that.

**LATOYA.** If you could just move out of my way.

**SASHA.** What I meant was: who are you and what are you doing?

**LATOYA.** I'm just taking my pumpkin.

**SASHA.** It's a beauty.

**LATOYA.** Finest pumpkin I've ever seen.

**SASHA.** I think so, too. But that's not your pumpkin.

**LATOYA.** Sure it is. See, look, it's in my arms. And it's heavy, so if you'll excuse me.

*(LATOYA tries to get past SASHA, but she won't budge.)*

**SASHA.** Put it down please.

**LATOYA.** Look, lady, get the hell out of my way.

**SASHA.** I'm the coordinator for this community garden. I know all the gardeners, and I don't know you.

**LATOYA.** I'm just picking some stuff for my cousin. He's out of town.

**SASHA.** Right. Of course. What's your cousin's name?

**LATOYA.** Uh. William.

**SASHA.** William doesn't have a plot here this year. Jerry planted the pumpkin patch.

**LATOYA.** That's who I meant. Cousin Jerry.

**SASHA.** We've been having a problem with people stealing produce out of the gardens.

*(LATOYA's arms are getting tired. She sets down the pumpkin.)*

**LATOYA.** It's a community garden. I'm part of the community. I've been part of the community a lot longer than you. You all move in and think you own the neighborhood.

**SASHA.** I've been here long enough.

**LATOYA.** Yeah, well, I used to have a plot here, years ago, after it used to be just rubble from a building somebody torched. My aunt helped make this place.

**SASHA.** But you don't have a plot here now.

**LATOYA.** Look, it's just one pumpkin.

**SASHA.** Plus a bag full of...

**LATOYA.** A couple tomatoes. Look at those plots. There's fruit all over the ground, just going to waste. They're not taking care of them either, look at all those weeds. I thought maybe they were abandoned.

**SASHA.** And the eggplant?

**LATOYA.** Nobody needs that much eggplant. And they're beauties.

**SASHA.** They're Lester's beauties. Not yours. We work hard to grow these vegetables. We dig, weed, water. You've done nothing.

**LATOYA.** I'd like a plot, but money's tight.

**SASHA.** The plot fee is only twenty-five dollars, but we can work something out. Sign up for a plot next year, and you can grow whatever you want.

**LATOYA.** I don't have time.

**SASHA.** Put the vegetables back.

**LATOYA.** They're picked now anyway. If I put them down, they're just gonna rot.

**SASHA.** You can't have them.

**LATOYA.** You want them?

**SASHA.** I grew my own.

**LATOYA.** No sense wasting these. I'll just take them with me.

*(SASHA pulls a cell phone out of her pocket.)*

**SASHA.** Look, either you leave without the vegetables, or I'll call the police.

**LATOYA.** For what?

**SASHA.** Theft. It's against the law to take something that doesn't belong to you.

**LATOYA.** You'd have me go to jail for picking a couple tomatoes?

**SASHA.** And an eggplant. And a pumpkin. Which you did not grow, or even ask permission to take. It's not just the tomatoes and pumpkins. Someone dug up my echinacea right out of my plot. Someone else took Tanya's rudbeckia. The gardens get raided every season, and I've had enough.

**LATOYA.** You want to make an example of me, so you call your attack dogs.

**SASHA.** The police.

**LATOYA.** What do you care? I'm just an ignorant black woman. Plenty of us in jail already. What's one more, right?

**SASHA.** Just don't take the vegetables.

**LATOYA.** And if I do, you think the right solution is to lock me up, make me lose my job, my apartment, get kicked out on the street? For a couple tomatoes that were gonna fall on the ground and rot?

**SASHA.** I am not the person doing the wrong thing here. Look, you can have some tomatoes. I'll give you some from my own plot. But you have to leave the pumpkin.

**LATOYA.** Hell no. Go ahead. Call the police. You can't prove it's not my pumpkin. There's no receipts out here. I say it's mine, you say it's not.

**SASHA.** Who do you think the cops will believe?

**LATOYA.** Oh, I know who they'll believe. You got all the race cards right in your pocket, don't you?

**SASHA.** It's not your pumpkin. Don't you get it? Jerry planted that abandoned plot, watered the vines, fertilized them, picked off the beetles. All summer long. There used to be a dozen. And now we've only got three left. I told him he'd get his heart broken. Every year, I tell the gardeners, don't grow watermelons, don't grow pumpkins, or don't grow anything that will disappear. But he planted them anyway.

**LATOYA.** He should have listened to you. 'Cause you know what it's like around here. You know what we're like, what I'm like. You've got us pegged. All us black folks is thieves. Make sure you lock your house up tight at night, missy. You tell Jerry to lock up against those Negroes.

**SASHA.** Jerry's black.

**LATOYA.** Then you tell Jerry that a sister needed one of his pumpkins to make a little pie.

**SASHA.** Tell you what. I'll call him and ask him to come down here, so you can request permission to take his pumpkin.

**LATOYA.** I don't think so.

*(LATOYA picks up the pumpkin again.)*

I need to go. Get out of my way.

**SASHA.** Put the pumpkin down.

**LATOYA.** It's my pumpkin now.

**SASHA.** It's not your pumpkin.

*(LATOYA approaches SASHA, who grabs her shovel tighter.)*

**LATOYA.** Don't even think about raising that shovel at me.

**SASHA.** Put down the pumpkin.

**LATOYA.** Touch me with that shovel, and you'll be looking for your teeth all over this garden.

**SASHA.** Thief.

**LATOYA.** Move.

**SASHA.** Thief!

*(LATOYA pushes past SASHA, who drops the shovel and grabs the pumpkin.)*

**LATOYA.** Don't touch me.

**SASHA.** Give me that.

**LATOYA.** Let go.

**SASHA.** That is not your pumpkin.

*(They tussle. SASHA ends up with the pumpkin.)*

**SASHA.** Get out of my garden.

**LATOYA.** Give me my pumpkin.

**SASHA.** You want your pumpkin. Here's your pumpkin.

*(SASHA raises the pumpkin high overhead and smashes it down on the ground. She tramples the broken pieces into the earth.)*

You. Can't. Have. It.

**LATOYA.** Crazy bitch.

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.  
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**READING LIST**  
**by Susan Miller**

## **Cast of Characters**

BERNIE, a woman over 40. A Librarian. Engaging, modern. She loves her work. She could be anything, but she's this.

SNOW, a man of indeterminate age. An Astronomer. Experience and history show on him.

EAGAN, a man in his 40s. Filled with contemporary angst.

SONIA, a woman in her 30s. A teacher. Urban.

MILO and JACOB, played by the same actor. Milo is a man in his late 20s, an FBI agent, earnest but unsure. Jacob is a trucker, with good intentions.

JANEL, a young woman, late teens. Original. Optimistic.

*All ages above are just suggestions.*

## **Setting**

Minimal. Suggestion of a public library.

## **Time**

Present.

## **Acknowledgments**

*Reading List* was produced in Vital Theatre Company's Vital Signs New Works Festival, in New York City in December of 2005. It was directed by Cynthia Croot, with the following cast:

Kathryn Grody  
Bridgit Evans  
Maha Chelaoui  
Jay Smith  
Michael Rudko  
Happy Anderson

# READING LIST

## by Susan Miller

*(Minimal setting to suggest a public library. Lush music [Sinatra's "One For My Baby" perhaps] accompanies the librarian, as she shreds pink sheets of paper. After a few moments, the music fades and she speaks directly to the audience.)*

**BERNIE.** It used to be at the end of a day, I'd lock up and take myself out for a cocktail. Vodka straight up, three olives. I loved the olives. Well, and the word—*cocktail*.

*(Beat.)*

My new ritual—I shred.

*(Beat.)*

What it is, see, the powers of the Patriot Act give the government the right to review the records of people under suspicion of being suspicious. Which has been heinously interpreted to include the borrowing of books at libraries. So, I shred. Lists of things people want us to locate for them. A day's worth of requests. Like one I got yesterday asking where a woman might go if she needed shelter. And someone tracing the origin of a certain inflammatory phrase. Two queries regarding unpopular Supreme Court rulings. And even the sacred hunt for some rapturous, quotidian, now too vulnerable detail.

*(Referring to a pink sheet:)*

Okay, here's someone asking for a volume on puppetry, which had a footnote containing an excerpt from "The Pink Code." *Pink. Code.* Words to alarm any vigilant homophobe. Actually, "Pink Code," a book by a lovely man living in Maine, I've since learned—we're in correspondence—is a manual for the use of color and hue in animation. Who knew? Puppets are apparently staging a comeback.

*(She shreds it. Then:)*

It keeps me going. What people have on their minds.

*(A hesitant man walks up to her desk.)*

**JACOB.** Hello.

**BERNIE.** (*Taken with his shy formality:*) Hello.

**JACOB.** I was wondering...there are so many...you know, well, books...in here. I was thinking if you could maybe narrow it down for me, recommend one. Your personal pick.

**BERNIE.** (*To audience:*) This fellow, he glowed. As if it were his first time in a library. Excited by information but embarrassed by it, too.

**JACOB.** Something to keep me in place. Something I could—come back to. See, I'm on the road. I'm miles from anything. Whatever you got.

**BERNIE.** (*To audience:*) It thrilled me. I mean, a long haul truck driver, taking the time, wanting to know. But then, I project a scenario. They'd go to his house—this is what I imagined—they'd go to his house, the FBI or whoever they send. They'd already know he pays his taxes. I mean, they'd probably know a fair amount about him, right? Then they look into things and see his wife has a Middle Eastern name. He drives a truck. He could be carrying materials. See where this goes? He's obviously a threat, this man who glows in the library and drives to the point of collapse to reach his destination. A man who's gotten himself some books so he doesn't get into trouble on route. He stops for the night. Coffee.

**JACOB.** No hookers.

**BERNIE.** And he reads. So he can answer his kids' school questions.

**JACOB.** And stay honest regarding my vows.

(*BERNIE hands him a book.*)

**BERNIE.** He reads to keep the stark, abstract fatigue from bearing loneliness. He doesn't want another sexually transmitted disease, either. He's taken out three hard cover volumes. He likes the look of them. The heft. The pages against his rough hands. He's working over a passage in Steinbeck. It just sneaks up on him.

**JACOB.** (*Looking at pages in awe:*) I didn't know. How it could—I just didn't know this. I didn't know a person could think of this.

**BERNIE.** So, what could it be about a man crying under a moonlit sky in the cab of his Freightliner Classic XL that sends out a warning to the government?

*(A man, EAGAN, seated at a table, looks up from his book and speaks, his rapid delivery makes his ruminations almost comic, were it not for real turmoil:)*

**EAGAN.** The stars. I was looking up anything I could find on the stars. There was this article about dark matter that scared the shit out of me, and I was putting my whole family through hell about it. Just the way my daughter has pushed me to my limits with her inquiries into the absurdity of language and meaning. Meaning there is none. No meaning. Which I take as bleak and troublesome coming like that from a young person. And, I guess, it challenged something deep and confronted me on a personal level. Like my fatherhood, my being a parent was all of a sudden a pointless and sorry thing. I like talking at the dinner table. It's time well spent if you put aside other concerns. But, I was depressing everyone, and I thought maybe there's another way, you know, with more information, to look at things. To look at this dark matter and my daughter's questions and turn it all into a metaphor of well being instead of what it clearly represented to me now as a crushing void with the power to cancel the present, past and future. Life, albeit the sad and confusing thing though it is, still, it is what we know. And what we want our children to know. Well, apparently in my investigations of the universe there were more than a couple of references to a certain gay astronomer. He kept turning up in the materials I happened to look through. And they wanted to know—*they* being the messengers of secrecy and harbingers of silence—what I had to do with him. What interest did I have in a gay astronomer who was fired from his post in the fifties, and what business did I have with footnotes that referred to the incident in the park, and did I know him.

*(Beat.)*

Well, no, but I want to fucking know him now.

*(The astronomer, SNOW, comes out from the stacks.)*

**SNOW.** So, what do you want to know?

**EAGAN.** What happened?

**SNOW.** What happened was what happens.

*(Beat.)*

I was reading maps with the US Army Map Service. Something I loved doing. Ever since I was a boy. The whole idea of—I don't know, pinpointing a place you can find again and again. Well, this one night—it was late. I was on my way home, and I stopped for awhile to see the moonlight in Lafayette Park across from the White House. The light fell on two men. Kissing. And I was thinking how beautiful they were. How just—well, that. When the cops descended.

**EAGAN.** And what? They arrested you for just being there?

**SNOW.** You're in the vicinity, you must be gay. You're gay—you're implicated. I was taken in for investigation of a morals charge. It was dropped, but I was fired from my job. And—I don't know how to say this without coming off as some kind of fallen protagonist in post war B movie America—I was banned from all future employment with the federal government.

**EAGAN.** But you have a Ph.D. from goddam Harvard. You were a World War Two combat veteran, for Chrissakes.

**SNOW.** Yeah. And I was a Jewish queer in a blue state.

**EAGAN.** Well, there are plenty of other things to be afraid of. Like, for fucking example, the void in the universe.

**SNOW.** Not as terrifying as gays having their kiss or marrying, though.

**EAGAN.** Your name in a footnote putting people in my business is what scares me. Well, and our finite time on the planet.

**SNOW.** I have a bad feeling everyone's going to know more than they want to about what it's like to get comfortable with hiding. Living in code. It makes for an anxious world.

**EAGAN.** Just—I don't get how people with no virtue other than they're straight or white or claim god's on their side, have the power to ruin lives.

**SNOW.** And the crazy thing is, if our ideas, our acts could be seen, we'd be able to see ourselves. And wouldn't it be better to be judged in full view? Because we all bear scrutiny.

**EAGAN.** I think my daughter is gay. I want to tell her something. About you. About the earth from a distance.

**SNOW.** We're grand and possible from a distance. But, we live here.

*(Lights on another area. MILO, an FBI Agent, approaches SONIA's door.)*

**MILO.** Sonia Federman?

**SONIA.** Yes?

**MILO.** Are you in possession of library books, the titles of which are—

**SONIA.** *(Overlapping:)* They send people now? They send actual people to come to your house and collect fines? God, I know they're overdue. I was meaning to bring them back ages ago. Well, anyhow, what do I owe?

**MILO.** *(Showing his badge:)* Can you tell me where were your parents were born?

**SONIA.** What?

**MILO.** What country are your parents from?

**SONIA.** Do *they* have books overdue?

**MILO.** *(Thrown by her:)* I really don't know. Federman—it sounds foreign.

**SONIA.** We're pretty much all foreign, aren't we?

**MILO.** Meaning?

**SONIA.** We all come from somewhere else. If you trace it back. You know, give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

**MILO.** Huddled masses.

*(Beat.)*

Lenin?

**SONIA.** Emma Lazarus. Statue of Liberty.

**MILO.** *(Embarrassed not to have known:)* Right. Right. So, just to verify. You're a teacher in the public school system?

**SONIA.** Senior English and drama. I taught ninth grade for a while but they were all about turning into the next thing not the thing they were, and it was pretty much totally *bogus* totally all of the time.

**MILO.** Drama. That's putting on plays. You put on plays?

**SONIA.** We read plays.

**MILO.** You don't put them on? I thought you had to put plays on.

**SONIA.** Well, you can put them on. Some people put them on. But this is a literature class. We read them.

**MILO.** And these plays, you took them out of the public library.

**SONIA.** They didn't have them in the school library.

**MILO.** So, the school didn't authorize them.

**SONIA.** They didn't *not* authorize them. I do this all the time. We all do. Supplementary materials. Oil for education, not so much left for books. We all do this.

**MILO.** *(Reading titles from his notepad:)* *There's A Dead Mule in the Street. Silverstein & Company. It's Our Town, Too. My Burka, Your Bris.* Do these play titles sound familiar to you?

**SONIA.** You want them back. I'll get them.

**MILO.** I tried out for one in school. A play. I mainly wanted to get next to a girl named Cheryl. I wanted to touch her sweater. She was in all the plays. She was in the halls. She was everywhere. I wanted to get her pregnant.

**SONIA.** You wanted to get her pregnant?

**MILO.** In the play. The guy in the play.

**SONIA.** Your character.

**MILO.** My character. *He* wanted to. I would've—I mean, me myself, who *I* am, I would've pulled out.

**SONIA.** Do you remember what play this was?

**MILO.** I kissed her. And I said something. I don't know if it was even in the play the words I used. And then I got an erection and I didn't get the part, and Cheryl, she sees it. She sees I'm hard and says to the drama coach I think he'd be good in the part.

**SONIA.** Maybe he didn't want her to get pregnant. You know? It was the dramatic event. It was messy. It complicated things. That's why it was in the play, probably. I mean, *you* would have been careful. But then your life isn't literature.

**MILO.** I have to do this, you know. I'm in the world of undercover. I'm looking for inconsistencies and subtexts. Subtexts of peril. I don't just wait for it to unravel. I'm supposed to recognize a warning.

**SONIA.** We're the same then. Always looking for something. Except, I don't report people for their thoughts. Or their questions. Or their boners.

**MILO.** I'm sorry I let that slip. I didn't mean anything towards you. I'm not—

**SONIA.** I know the moment of taking someone else's words, of thinking them, of being in a play and interpreting someone else's idea of things. Because we *can*. We can kiss and not actually get pregnant. We can subvert ideas and reconstruct history and express ourselves with our cocks and our breasts and our intellect and our hands all over each other. We can say what we mean and don't mean and might do and would never do and get hard and wet and thankful. That's why I took those plays out of the library. That's what you can do in a play.

**MILO.** I have to make a report. I have to write something down. I have to say something.

**SONIA.** “It is difficult to get the news from poems but men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there.” William Carlos Williams. Say that.

*(Lights up on BERNIE.)*

**BERNIE.** *(To audience:)* When I was a girl, I wanted to be a choreographer. I didn’t know what a choreographer was. It just sounded good. So, my father sent me to the dictionary. Go look it up, he said. Go to the library and look it up. And I looked up as many words as I could just so I could stay there all afternoon. I went to the shelves and opened books to passages that were exciting even though I didn’t understand most of what I read. There was always something I found wherever the books fell open that kept me coming back. And keeps me. To this day.

*(JANEL, approaches the desk and hands BERNIE a piece of paper.)*

**JANEL.** I know I shouldn’t be asking, Miss Bernie, but I was sleepless over that novel you got me started on, and I have a paper due on something not anywhere near as compelling, so if you could just find this one fact I need, or tell me where *I* could, you’d be my hero.

**BERNIE.** You didn’t try the internet?

**JANEL.** That’s just a thing that leads me astray. And it doesn’t have the same good smell as in here. Whiff of pencils and eraser. The dusty stirring paper thing.

**BERNIE.** *(Pleased, enjoying her:)* So, did you get to that passage where I put the post-it?

**JANEL.** It was wicked original. And sad, a little bit.

**BERNIE.** I’ve got something else I want to show you—but not until after you turn in your paper. Deal?

**JANEL.** I can’t totally make that promise.

*(BERNIE takes the paper from JANEL and walks to stacks.)*

**JANEL.** *(To audience:)* My librarian. She’s always got a list of things for me to read. I do that thing with people. Make them mine. Anyhow, sometimes she just sends me to the stacks and says, just take any book. Read the first sentence. Tells me, Janel, one thing leads to

another. You go to a place you didn't think was where you needed to go, and it maybe takes you to the place you were meant to find.

*(EAGAN, sitting nearby, responds to her.)*

**EAGAN.** But what if on our way to the thing we were meant to find, we come across a—paragraph, a footnote, something irreverent, something ardent and unpopular. Does that make you part of a conspiracy? Or are you just part of the fabric of things, part of the mystery, searching for some place to land.

*(BERNIE re-enters.)*

**BERNIE.** *(To audience:)* An older person came up to me very distressed one day. She said, “There is a giant—well—*organ*,” she said. “On the screen. And I can't get it off.” New way to flash someone, I guess. Well, no, we don't want to encourage people in the library to surf pornography on the internet. We don't want that. But what becomes of us when a place that gives you permission to get lost in a book is turned into a place where you can be found. What do you call that?

*(Then echoing her father:)*

Go. Look it up!

*(MILO walks in.)*

**MILO.** Excuse me, I need a poem.

**BERNIE.** You need a poem.

**MILO.** I'm looking for a poem. Can you get me a poem?

**BERNIE.** Which one?

**MILO.** I don't know.

**BERNIE.** Well, can you give me a line or something to go on. The name of the poet.

**MILO.** A poem about a poem.

**BERNIE.** You'd think that would narrow the field.

**MILO.** How about a play, then?

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**SORRY**  
by **Timothy Mason**

## **Cast of Characters**

PAT, good-looking, in her 20s

WAYNE, good-looking, in his 20s

## **Setting**

A small one-bedroom apartment in New York's East Village. The door to the hall, left, has a splintered hole in it, about three feet from the floor. The door on the right leads to the bathroom and the bedroom. The kitchen area is upstage, and features two tall windows in the upstage wall which look out over a courtyard to the back of the building beyond: fire escapes, lighted windows, a rooftop. Center-stage is a small dining room table, littered with newspapers, trade periodicals, notebooks, a can of Tab. There's a chest of drawers against the right wall and a television set somewhere.

## **Time**

The Present

# SORRY

by Timothy Mason

*(August night, New York City, an apartment in the East Village. WAYNE sits in a chair, bleeding. PAT stands above him with a pistol. WAYNE wears black chinos, black high-topped tennis shoes, and a black T-shirt. His right thigh is wrapped in a dark red towel. PAT wears something for a hot night at home.)*

**PAT.** Honest to God, I am really sorry. *(Beat.)* Can I get you anything? *(Beat.)* Shouldn't I be calling someone? I mean, really. *(Beat.)* Tea? Toast? Have you eaten? *(Beat.)* You look like someone.

**WAYNE.** You aren't real, you can't be.

**PAT.** How's that chair? You could stretch out on the sofa, I wouldn't mind, I'll put down newspapers. *(Beat.)* This is just like me, you know that? This is exactly like me. God. What an idiot. I'm a waitress. Actress really, but. *(Beat.)* I could make some tea, it'd be no problem whatsoever. *(Beat.)* Earl Grey? Chamomile?

**WAYNE.** You just don't exist!

**PAT.** Mint?

**WAYNE.** Jesus.

**PAT.** Look, I was alone, I was scared. *(Beat.)* How do you feel now? Are you feeling any better? You look a little better.

**WAYNE.** I feel like shit.

**PAT.** I know the feeling. Some days it's all I can do to get out of bed and through that door.

**WAYNE.** Put the gun down.

**PAT.** Oh, my God, I didn't realize! Of course. Oh. I feel like such a fool. You sure you don't want me to call an ambulance?

**WAYNE.** Yes! No! Do not. Call. Anyone.

**PAT.** So what's your name?

**WAYNE.** You're unreal.

**PAT.** I'm Pat. Aspirin! *(She starts for the bathroom door.)*

**WAYNE.** Put down the goddamned gun!

**PAT.** Just make yourself comfortable.

*(PAT exits, still carrying the pistol.)*

**WAYNE.** Oh, boy. *(He explores his leg, tenderly.)* Ohhh, boy. *(He tries to stand.)* Agggh! *(He falls back into the chair.)*

**PAT.** *(Calling from off:)* Two aspirin, coming right up!

**WAYNE.** Shit. Oh, shit.

*(PAT enters with a glass of water and a couple of aspirin.)*

**PAT.** I have the worst time swallowing these things, you wouldn't believe. Here you go.

*(WAYNE turns his head away.)*

**PAT.** Go on, there's nothing to worry about, they're buffered.

**WAYNE.** Where's the gun?

**PAT.** Ah. I don't know, around here somewhere. Here's looking at you.

*(He takes the aspirin and the glass.)*

**WAYNE.** Aspirin, wow. *(He swallows the aspirin.)*

**PAT.** I grind them into powder and stir them into a glass of Tab. Tastes awful, but. *(She takes the glass from him.)* How are you feeling now?

**WAYNE.** I just took them, for Chrissake!

**PAT.** Hey, there, Mister, I *said* I was sorry.

**WAYNE.** You shot me!

**PAT.** What am I supposed to do, kill myself?

**WAYNE.** It's an idea.

**PAT.** You don't mean that and you know it.

**WAYNE.** I've got to get out of here.

**PAT.** So how long have you been with the Little Brothers of Charity? *(Beat.)* They really call you that?

**WAYNE.** You're weird. You are so weird.

**PAT.** Talk about weird, you won't even go to the hospital.

**WAYNE.** It's a flesh wound.

**PAT.** Most wounds are. What's your name?

**WAYNE.** I just want to go home.

**PAT.** You can't even walk, for heaven's sake. What's your name?

*(Beat.)*

**WAYNE.** Wayne.

**PAT.** You have got to be kidding.

**WAYNE.** Okay, that's it, I'm going. *(He tries to stand and falls back into the chair with a moan.)*

**PAT.** Take it easy.

**WAYNE.** What's wrong with Wayne?

**PAT.** Nothing, nothing. Nothing.

**WAYNE.** You know, you don't really *grow* on a person.

**PAT.** Okay, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything.

**WAYNE.** Damn right!

**PAT.** Sorry!

**WAYNE.** Yeah, right.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** It's just always struck me as a very wimpy sort of name.

**WAYNE.** Oh, you're making me feel great, you know that? You got a real knack for making a guy feel at home. You should put it down in a book. How to Meet Men.

**PAT.** What was I supposed to do? It's dark, I hear this noise outside my door...

WAYNE. First date: get yourself a .45.

PAT. Oh, come on—it's just a little .22.

WAYNE. God, get me out of here.

PAT. Anytime you want. Wayne.

WAYNE. Believe me, lady, if I *could*.

*(Beat.)*

PAT. How's that leg doing?

WAYNE. How do you think?

PAT. Let's see.

WAYNE. You keep away from me.

PAT. Attitude is going to get us nowhere. Now let's have a look at that leg.

*(She begins to gently unwrap the towel from his thigh.)*

WAYNE. Ow!

PAT. What do you Little Brothers do, exactly?

*(WAYNE whimpers softly.)*

PAT. You bring food to people, something like that? Meals On Wheels sort of thing? Oh, God, your leg is a mess.

WAYNE. Tell me about it.

PAT. I am so terribly sorry.

WAYNE. If you apologize one more time I swear I'll kill you.

PAT. I think the bleeding's stopped anyway, but it's hard to tell. Those pants are going to have to come off.

*(Beat.)*

WAYNE. Not. On. Your. Life.

PAT. Look at you, dressed in black from head to toe, what was I supposed to think.

WAYNE. You didn't even see me, you shot right through the door!

PAT. I was holding it, it went off.

WAYNE. People like you should not have guns. People like you should not have anything! Forks!

PAT. Okay, *you* try living in this city.

WAYNE. I am, I am.

PAT. It's terrifying out there.

WAYNE. If you ask me, it's kind of scary right here.

PAT. The sound of a footstep behind you. A cough in the dark.

WAYNE. Bam! Another chest-cold victim bites the dust.

PAT. Look. Wayne. I am a woman alone.

WAYNE. It's no wonder. (*Beat.*)

PAT. This apartment has been broken into twice in the past six months. In the past two years I've had my purse snatched on the F train, the double R, the Lexington Avenue line, and the cross-town bus. And for the past month there's been some jerk on the roof across the courtyard, *staring*. With *binoculars*. At *me*. So if I'm just the little bit jumpy, *pardon me!*

WAYNE. Okay, okay. I'm sorry. You've had some bad breaks.

PAT. What I've had is a crime wave.

WAYNE. So you got yourself a gun.

PAT. My mother sent it. All the way from Seattle. That's where I'm from.

WAYNE. In the mail? That's illegal.

PAT. What other people do to me is illegal, what my mother does is blameless. What were you doing out in the hall, anyway?

WAYNE. I was trying to read the number on the door, lady—that's all.

PAT. The light out there's burned out.

WAYNE. I noticed.

PAT. So who were you looking for?

WAYNE. Not you.

PAT. Mr. Fischer? He used to get charity people. Someone came from the Synagogue twice a week, but he's dead now.

WAYNE. You plugged him, right?

PAT. You know, you're beginning to annoy me? I *liked* Mr. Fischer.

WAYNE. God. I feel weak.

PAT. Well, of course you do, you've lost a lot of blood.

WAYNE. How do you know it's stopped bleeding?

PAT. It's not dripping like it was before.

WAYNE. If I die here, lady, so help me...

PAT. The name is Pat and nobody's going to die, for goodness sake. And if you're so worried about it, why won't you go to the hospital?

WAYNE. Well, for one thing, what do you think would happen to you if I did? You got a permit for that thing?

PAT. It was Mother's.

WAYNE. Tell it to the judge, Annie Oakley.

PAT. So you're saying you're doing me a favor?

WAYNE. Damn right I am.

PAT. An act of charity.

WAYNE. Yes, as a matter of fact.

PAT. Well I can't tell you how grateful I am. (*Beat.*) You look pale.

WAYNE. I *feel* pale. How do you know he's looking at *you*?

PAT. Who?

WAYNE. The guy on the roof.

PAT. Every now and then he waves.

WAYNE. Maybe he's lonely.

PAT. Maybe *I'm* lonely, I don't take it to the rooftops.

WAYNE. Maybe he's just trying to get to know you.

PAT. Maybe it should occur to him to send flowers.

WAYNE. You sure the bleeding's stopped?

PAT. There's only one way to tell.

WAYNE. Oh, Lord.

PAT. Come on, come on. (*She starts to take off his tennis shoes.*) Do you really think I could be, like, arrested? For this?

WAYNE. If there is a God, yes.

PAT. I was protecting myself!

WAYNE. From what?

PAT. And you'd press charges against me?

WAYNE. This is why I'm here instead of there, because I wouldn't—get it?

PAT. Charity.

WAYNE. Why not?

PAT. I like your sneakers.

WAYNE. Thanks.

PAT. Can you stand?

WAYNE. I think so.

*(He does so, slowly. She begins to take off his trousers.)*

WAYNE. This is making me very uncomfortable.

PAT. So pretend I'm a nurse. Where'd you get them?

WAYNE. What?

PAT. Those hightops.

**WAYNE.** I don't know. That shop on First Avenue and St. Marks, right across from Spillacci's.

*(Beat.)*

**PAT.** You live around here, don't you. *(Beat.)* Don't you.

**WAYNE.** Ow!

**PAT.** Don't try to change the subject.

**WAYNE.** It hurts!

**PAT.** Of course it hurts, you've been shot. So where do you live? *(She eases the trousers out from under him.)* I knew I'd seen you before. You live right here in the neighborhood, don't you.

**WAYNE.** So what?

**PAT.** So nothing. Your pants are finished, there's no getting out these stains.

**WAYNE.** Right.

**PAT.** Besides, there's a hole in them.

**WAYNE.** Right.

*(She looks at his bloody thigh.)*

**PAT.** Can't see a thing. You wait right there, I'll go get the alcohol.

*(She exits into the bathroom. WAYNE sits and examines his thigh. PAT re-enters with a bottle of rubbing alcohol and a cotton swab.)*

**WAYNE.** You know, I really don't think it's so bad?

**PAT.** Really?

**WAYNE.** Yeah, I think maybe you just grazed me.

**PAT.** Oh, good!

**WAYNE.** Anyway, it hardly hurts at all anymore.

**PAT.** Great. Let me see. *(She daubs the thigh tenderly with the alcohol-soaked cotton.)*

**WAYNE.** Aaaaagggghhh!

PAT. You've got to expect a little sting.

WAYNE. *Oh! Oh! Oh!*

PAT. Big baby.

WAYNE. Oh! Oh, God! Do you have any salt? Maybe you could rub some salt in it!

PAT. We're killing germs here, mister.

WAYNE. You're killing *me* here, lady.

PAT. Look at that. It's nothing. It's nothing. It's a scratch!

WAYNE. It's my body!

PAT. You have ruined two towels and a carpet for a *scratch!*

WAYNE. *Sorry!*

PAT. Where did all that blood come from?

WAYNE. Me!

PAT. What are you, some kind of bleeder?

WAYNE. Okay, I'm going. Now.

PAT. What do you plan to wear?

WAYNE. Oh, Lord.

PAT. You'd look great out there in your Fruit of the Looms.

WAYNE. They're not Fruit of the Looms.

PAT. What are they then?

WAYNE. Will you stop looking at my underwear!

PAT. I am not looking at your underwear!

WAYNE. You were too!

PAT. So big deal! You think this was all a plot in order to get a peek at your skivvies?

WAYNE. Just...let me have something to wear out of here and we can forget about the whole thing.

**PAT.** Would you like a jumper or a plain cotton skirt?

**WAYNE.** You're not even funny.

**PAT.** You're not even civil.

**WAYNE.** Jeans, slacks...

**PAT.** I'll take care of you, don't worry. *(She goes through his trousers pockets.)* Anything in here you want to keep?

**WAYNE.** Hey, get out of there!

**PAT.** Relax.

**WAYNE.** Give me those!

**PAT.** Keys; five-dollar bill, soggy; your cigarettes have had it; snapshot, also soggy. What a mess.

**WAYNE.** Give me that stuff.

**PAT.** I'm just going to dry it all out. *(She spreads the contents of his pockets on the table.)*

**WAYNE.** I want my things!

**PAT.** *(Looking at the snapshot:)* Who is this?

**WAYNE.** Give it here!

*(Beat.)*

**PAT.** What is going on here? What the hell is going on?

**WAYNE.** Please, just...

**PAT.** This is me. This is a picture of me.

**WAYNE.** *(Weary:)* Oh, shit.

*(PAT begins to back slowly into the bathroom.)*

**WAYNE.** What are you doing? Look—calm down, it's no big deal.

*(PAT exits into the bathroom.)*

**WAYNE.** Are you getting me more aspirin?

*(She enters with the pistol.)*

WAYNE. I didn't think so.

PAT. Don't move.

WAYNE. I won't.

PAT. What the hell are you doing with a picture of me in your pocket!

WAYNE. Most girls would be flattered.

PAT. Little Brothers of Charity, God!

WAYNE. What are you going to do?

PAT. For starters, I am going to demand an explanation.

WAYNE. What are you going to do if I don't have one?

*(Beat.)*

PAT. I don't know. *(Beat.)* What do you mean? You've got to have one!

WAYNE. I really don't feel very well.

PAT. Neither do I!

WAYNE. I'm sorry!

PAT. Don't be!

WAYNE. Do you think you could put the gun down?

PAT. I doubt it.

WAYNE. I figured. *(Beat.)* What's wrong with Wayne?

PAT. What?

WAYNE. You called me a wimp.

PAT. Brother. You really take the cake.

WAYNE. The one thing in my life I *wasn't* worried about, and you ruin it forever.

PAT. I want to know what you're doing here, understand?

WAYNE. I suppose you think John Wayne was a wimp.

**PAT.** Wayne was not his first name. *John* was not his first name, *Duke* was his first name.

**WAYNE.** I don't see what difference that makes.

**PAT.** I'll give it to you in two words: Wayne Newton.

**WAYNE.** Well thanks a lot. You think it's nice to wreck a man's name for him? You think that's an act of kindness?

**PAT.** Sorry.

**WAYNE.** I'm afraid it's a little late for that.

**PAT.** Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Oh, boy. Oh, boy.

**WAYNE.** What?

**PAT.** Shut up, you! Stay right where you are! *(She moves to a bureau.)*

**WAYNE.** How did you get to be such a hostile person?

*(She rummages through the top drawer with one hand, the pistol in the other still pointed at WAYNE.)*

**WAYNE.** Is that what they taught you back in Seattle? Or did you let the city do this to you?

**PAT.** Just shut up!

**WAYNE.** Charming. Winning. You've got a winning way about you.

**PAT.** *(She slams one drawer and opens another.)* I mean it!

**WAYNE.** You let the city do this to you, didn't you. You gave in. You let the violence of the city infect you. You're an infected person, Pat.

**PAT.** Wayne? Don't call me Pat.

**WAYNE.** So you had some bad breaks. The violence of the city touched you, and how did you respond? With more violence. It *is* possible to fight violence with compassion, you know. It is possible to live as a sensitive person in an insensitive environment.

**PAT.** *(Rummaging violently through a drawer:)* Where the fuck is it!

**WAYNE.** But no. You've given up your humanity and now you're playing by the city's rules. Congratulations.

*(PAT pulls a pair of binoculars from a drawer.)*

**PAT.** Gotcha!

**WAYNE.** Pat? What are you doing, Pat?

**PAT.** Shut up. *(She goes to him.)*

**WAYNE.** I don't understand, Pat. What's happened to us?

**PAT.** Hold them. *(She gives him the binoculars.)* Look through them.

**WAYNE.** Pat.

**PAT.** Do it!

*(He does.)*

**PAT.** Now wave, sucker.

**WAYNE.** *(A little wave.)* Hi. Remember me?

**PAT.** *(Holding the gun out in both hands:)* Bang! Bang, bang, bang, bang!

**WAYNE.** You're verbalizing your anger, this is good.

**PAT.** Bang!

**WAYNE.** Excuse me. Pat? Suggestion.

**PAT.** Bang!

**WAYNE.** Better you don't have a loaded gun in your hands when you're working through hostilities.

**PAT.** Bang!

**WAYNE.** I'm sorry you feel this way, Pat.

**PAT.** Oh, how I hate you.

**WAYNE.** Hate is an ugly word.

**PAT.** You terrified me!

**WAYNE.** We're all scared, every one of us. That's what this city does to people.

**PAT.** You're sick!

**WAYNE.** You want to spend some time in my moccasins before you say such a thing.

**PAT.** I wouldn't touch your creepy moccasins!

**WAYNE.** I can see we're not communicating.

**PAT.** You give me the creeps!

**WAYNE.** There's no point in continuing this, you're not listening.

**PAT.** Peeping Tom! Voyeur!

**WAYNE.** Name-caller!

**PAT.** Sickness!

*(Silence.)*

**WAYNE.** That was unkind and uncalled for. May I please have a pair of trousers?

**PAT.** *(Mimicking:)* May I please have a pair of trousers? Sorry, Wayne. Fresh out.

**WAYNE.** Oh, boy. You know, Socrates really hit it on the head.

**PAT.** *What?*

**WAYNE.** It's fascinating. How little a person's exterior reveals of her true self.

**PAT.** *Socrates?*

**WAYNE.** He also had a few words on the subject of the shrew.

**PAT.** You're going to Bellevue. Now.

*(She goes to the telephone, still covering WAYNE with the pistol.)*

**WAYNE.** God, how I fantasized about you. So pretty, so sexy, and yet I thought, so shy, so lonely. Ha! I thought maybe, just maybe, I had found someone special.

**PAT.** *(On the phone:)* Yes, please, the listing for Bellevue Hospital.

**WAYNE.** Someone wonderful.

**PAT.** *(On the phone:)* Outpatient, inpatient, how should I know? The number for lunatics. *(Beat.)* Yeah, well you have a real nice day yourself! *(She slams down the phone.)* All you get in this city is attitude.

**WAYNE.** Why don't you just call the police?

**PAT.** Good idea.

**WAYNE.** Nine-one-one.

**PAT.** Nine-one-one, right. *(She dials.)*

**WAYNE.** When you're done, I'd like to talk to them, too.

**PAT.** *(On the phone:)* Hello?

**WAYNE.** You see, I was shot by a neighbor with an unlicensed gun.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** *(On the phone:)* Yes, I'm here. Oh, just... Keep up the good work. *(Beat.)* Well I'm sorry! *(She hangs up. She droops.)* God, it's hot.

*(She wilts into a chair. WAYNE and PAT look at each other. Long pause.)*

**WAYNE.** *(Finally:)* You should get out of the city in August.

**PAT.** I work.

**WAYNE.** Oh, yeah.

**PAT.** Although I don't know why, it's so slow this time of year you get nothing in tips.

**WAYNE.** I know.

**PAT.** Oh, yeah? You're a waiter?

**WAYNE.** Actor. But, yeah. When I'm between things.

**PAT.** What exactly are you between?

**WAYNE.** Well, nothing lately.

**PAT.** Right. Do you think one of those cigarettes would light?

**WAYNE.** Help yourself.

*(She fishes out a pink, damp cigarette from the pack.)*

**PAT.** I quit smoking two weeks ago.

**WAYNE.** I know.

**PAT.** God!

**WAYNE.** Sorry, sorry. I just...couldn't help noticing. I admired you for that.

**PAT.** Thanks.

**WAYNE.** This isn't going to make you start up again, is it?

**PAT.** We'll see. No. I don't think so. Want one?

**WAYNE.** See if yours lights first.

*(She lights the cigarette.)*

**PAT.** Gotcha. *(She savors an inhalation.)* Why? Why?

**WAYNE.** I guess...I guess I was lonely, it was hot, I started going up to the roof to cool off...

**PAT.** No, no, no. *(Taking another drag of the cigarette:)* Why does *this* have to be bad for your health? Why can't it be good for you?

**WAYNE.** Life's like that.

**PAT.** You're right, if I smoke this one I'll just light up another. You want it?

**WAYNE.** Actually, when I saw that you'd quit smoking, I did too.

**PAT.** So why do you carry cigarettes?

**WAYNE.** Willpower. That pack's two weeks old.

**PAT.** You quit because of me?

**WAYNE.** I thought if we ever got together, you'd prefer a non-smoker.

**PAT.** Amazing.

**WAYNE.** I really don't do this, you know.

**PAT.** What?

**WAYNE.** *You know.*

**PAT.** Peek at girls through binoculars?

**WAYNE.** Honest to God, you're the only one.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** How can I know if you're telling the truth?

**WAYNE.** I swear.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** Geez, Wayne. Why didn't you just come over and knock on my door?

**WAYNE.** I did. You shot me.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** You mean that's what you were...

**WAYNE.** Tonight was the night.

**PAT.** Oh, God.

*(Pause.)*

**WAYNE.** You can take day trips to Jones Beach, it's great, we both have Mondays off...

**PAT.** How did you know Monday was my... Forget I asked.

**WAYNE.** What do you say?

**PAT.** Let's just hold our horses here, shall we, mister?

**WAYNE.** Right. Sorry. *(Pause.)* I love Seattle.

**PAT.** You've been there?

**WAYNE.** Two months, Seattle Rep. I loved it.

**PAT.** They never cast me.

*(Beat.)*

**WAYNE.** The pay wasn't so hot.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** Where are you from, originally?

**WAYNE.** Shawnee Mission.

**PAT.** Where the hell is that?

**WAYNE.** Kansas.

**PAT.** Oh. Never heard of it.

**WAYNE.** Nobody has.

**PAT.** Kansas, huh?

**WAYNE.** Landlocked. First time I saw the Atlantic Ocean I fell in love with it. If I could live in the ocean, I would.

**PAT.** I grew up by the other one.

**WAYNE.** Do you swim?

**PAT.** Too cold around Seattle.

**WAYNE.** Oh, yeah. But you do?

**PAT.** Swim? From time to time.

**WAYNE.** Good.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** Sexy?

**WAYNE.** What? Oh. Wow. Yes.

**PAT.** You're out of your mind.

**WAYNE.** You're not seeing anyone, are you.

**PAT.** You noticed.

**WAYNE.** Why aren't you?

**PAT.** Don't push it, Wayne.

**WAYNE.** Right.

*(Beat.)*

**PAT.** I might have killed you.

**WAYNE.** Forget it.

**PAT.** I will not forget it! You could be dead right now! Or hideously... Oh, God. One thing's for damn sure... *(Picking up the pistol:)* ...the gun goes straight back to Mother.

**WAYNE.** You're not telling me you're going to put it in the mail?

**PAT.** Oh. No. I suppose not. *(She goes into the kitchen, steps on a pedal and the wastebasket opens.)*

**WAYNE.** You can't put a pistol down the chute.

**PAT.** Why not?

**WAYNE.** Might be a little rough on your super when he turns on the compactor.

**PAT.** Well what the hell am I supposed to... *(She goes to the upstage windows and opens one.)*

**WAYNE.** You're going to let some little kid find it in the courtyard?

*(She wheels on him.)*

**PAT.** *So make a suggestion!*

**WAYNE.** Looks like you're stuck with it.

**PAT.** I never want to see it again!

**WAYNE.** Once you let violence into your life it's hard to get it out.

**PAT.** You! You don't think what you've been doing to me is violent? With your binoculars? That's breaking and entering, Wayne!

**WAYNE.** I know, I know.

**PAT.** It's worse!

**WAYNE.** If I could possibly undo it all, start over, go out that door and come in again... I like you.

**PAT.** *(Hollering:)* Well I like you, too, goddammit!

**WAYNE.** Honest?

**PAT.** Oh, shut up!

**WAYNE.** Right.

**PAT.** Now what am I going to do with this lousy gun?

**WAYNE.** The traditional thing for this neighborhood would be to throw it in the East River.

**PAT.** I could do that. I could do that.

**WAYNE.** Although it would be unfortunate if a cop saw you.

**PAT.** God. Oh, God.

**WAYNE.** Pat?

**PAT.** Wayne?

**WAYNE.** All those nights. Why didn't you just pull the shade?

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** What are you suggesting is obnoxious, totally. Obnoxious. I'll go get you a pair of pants. *(PAT exits into the bedroom. A moment later she re-enters, goes to the upstage windows and pulls the shades down violently. She exits again. She re-enters, carrying a pair of baggy painter's pants.)* It's not going to happen, we're not going to overcome a grotesque beginning and end up in each other's arms, okay? *(Beat.)* Just so that's clear.

**WAYNE.** Right.

*(She gives him the trousers, he turns his back to put them on.)*

**WAYNE.** It's about time for your rum and Tab.

**PAT.** What?

**WAYNE.** Every night about this time you pour a shot of rum into a glass of Tab, you turn on the TV, you watch the news, you turn off the TV, you write a letter or something, maybe it's a diary, I could never tell for sure, you wash the glass and then you turn off the lights and go to bed.

*(Pause.)*

**PAT.** Are you *trying* to depress me?

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