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Sensations of sunshine can't penetrate parchment
Or skin that, like parchment, is callous and hard

-Bertolt Brecht

from "On Exertion"

Manuel of Piety

My hand trembles, but my heart does not.

-Stephen Hopkins,

The Rhode Island delegate

to the Continental Congress,

referring to his cerebral palsy

as he signed the Declaration

of Independence

Cast of Characters

TAM, 32, (F), strong, beautiful, asymmetrical features. Tam is disabled. Her body is constantly open, gaping and shifting; unfinished.

JJ, 29, (F), Tam's former lover, JJ is a butch, Korean-American woman.

RAMON, 9, (M), Tam's friend, Ramon is the son of Jerry. Ramon is gentle and articulate. Tam watches him while his mother works.

GIGI, 27, (M), Tam's younger brother, GiGi is a large, round beautiful drag queen.

JERRY, 35, (M), Tam's boss and current boyfriend. Athletic, well-built.

ELLA HARPER, THE CAMEL GIRL, (F), a young woman exhibited in carnival side shows circa 1886. Her knees are deformed, they are bent backwards, making her back curl up like a hump.

LES, 27, (M), works in an office.

CHANG & ENG BUNKER, (M), the original Siamese Twins.

MARINELLI, THE MAN-SNAKE, (M), a contortionist disguised as a serpent.

ZULEIKA, THE CIRCASSIAN SULTANA, (F), a Victorian looking woman disguised as a sultana.

Setting

Suburban New Jersey. A small diner near an on-ramp to Route-95 North. All other settings should somehow come out of this one unit set.

Time

The Present.

TRAVELING SKIN

by John Belluso

Prologue

(Sounds of a storm. A young woman steps out of the darkness, walking on her hands and feet. She hobbles forward, then stares at the audience, then slowly speaks.)

ELLA HARPER. I am called the Camel Girl because my knees turn backward. I can walk best on my hands and feet as you see me on this stage. I have traveled considerably in the show business for the past four years and now, this is 1886, I now intend to quit the show business and go to school and fit myself for another occupation.

(Pause.)

It was on a night like this that I decided to quit the show business. There was a terrible storm which frightened me greatly and made me wish I were in another place and made me feel as though I was all alone and that the life of a carnival freak was no longer for me.

(Tension building in her voice:)

I was promised great deals of money, but I do not have any. I was promised beautiful dresses, but I am still in cheese cloth, as you see me now.

(Pause.)

But I am not angry. The show business has taken me to many points throughout this country and I am grateful for all the people I have met and their interest in my true story.

(Again, tension, anger:)

But I am still quite excited about the possibilities which may still come for me.

(The sounds of the storm grow louder. Pause. ELLA moves back into the darkness momentarily, then crawls forward again.)

(Speaking loudly, over the growing sounds of wind and rain:) I am called the Camel Girl because my knees turn backward. I can walk best on my hands and feet as you see me on this stage. I have traveled

considerably in the show business for the past four years and now, this is 1886, I intend to quit the show business and go to school and fit myself for another occupation.

(Fade to black as the storm sounds continue, then dissipate.)

End of Prologue

ACT I
I Fall to Pieces, Netless

Scene I
Tabula Rasa

(Lights fade up on The Diner in disarray. The plate glass window is broken, sunlight filtering through grey clouds comes in. Highway sounds are also coming in. Around the diner, tables overturned, ketchup bottles smashed on the floor. Above hangs a rain soaked poster board with the breakfast specials written on it. A clothesline is stretched across the stage. On it, two translucent acrylic night-gowns hang and float in the breeze from the broken window. Off to one corner, RAMON sits, bouncing a rubber ball off the wall.)

RAMON. *(Whispering:)* Why is she here? *(In a normal tone:)* Why is she here?

(TAM slithers in. She crawls with her body close to the floor. Her body twists and contorts with palsy-like spasms. She slithers over and stretches to clean up one of the piles of ketchup and ketchup bottle fragments.)

TAM. She's a friend. An old friend.

RAMON. She kissed you. On the lips.

TAM. Yes she did.

RAMON. Is she your girlfriend?

TAM. No. She's not.

RAMON. She likes you.

TAM. *(Turning away from the scrubbing and cleaning up, smiling at RAMON:)* Nothing's different, honey.

(JJ enters through the front door, pushing a wheelchair filled with crates of salt and sugar. She parks it, then walks away from it.)

JJ. Where do these go?

(RAMON walks over to the wheelchair, then pushes it into the back room.)

TAM. You didn't have to get those.

JJ. I don't mind.

(JJ stares out the broken window.)

TAM. Bad storm.

JJ. Yeah. Wasn't the worst one I ever seen though.

TAM. Oh no?

JJ. Nope. I've seen a fuck of a lot worse. Monsoons. You've never seen a Monsoon, have you?

TAM. *(Stretching, struggling to clean up the ketchup bottles:)* No.

JJ. Monsoons are much worse. So fucking dark, like you're closed in a room without lights, an interrogation room, except that cold water's flying into your eyes, up your nose. Moisture flying into my body. Seeping in. In the openings of my body. *(Looking over to TAM:)* Come kiss my ear.

(TAM stretches and struggles to clean up the bottles.)

JJ. *(Noticing TAM struggling, becoming uncomfortable:)* Should I... help?

(Pause.)

TAM. You can.

JJ. *(Coming over, helping:)* Sorry, I didn't know if I should, like, respect your independence.

TAM. Oh please, screw independence! I got ketchup bottles to clean up! *(Smiling:)* Let's move it here! Gotta get these cleaned up before Jerry comes back.

JJ. *(Cleaning up faster, smiling:)* Hey, c'mere. Did you miss me?

(TAM pauses, then smiles and slithers over to JJ. She crawls up JJ's body as if it were a ladder.)

TAM. *(Looking into JJ's eyes:)* I said I did.

(They kiss.)

Your muscles are harder. Stronger.

JJ. I feel stronger.

TAM. Christ, look at this arm! You go away with one body and you come back with an entirely new one! Where'd ya get these muscles?

JJ. Things ain't that different. You still feel the same right?

TAM. *(Smiling coyly:)* I never feel the same.

JJ. *(Kissing her neck.)* Even about me? Your letter says otherwise.

TAM. I missed you.

JJ. Kiss my ear, like you used to.

TAM. I missed you.

(RAMON reenters pushing the now empty wheelchair. He parks it in back of TAM. TAM and JJ pull away from each other and TAM plops down into the chair.)

TAM. *(Smiling at RAMON:)* Did I introduce you to JJ?

RAMON. *(Looking at the ground, speaking to JJ:)* I saw you come in.

JJ. *(Holding out her hand:)* How ya doin'? Geez, smile kid! You okay?

RAMON. *(Hesitantly shaking her hand:)* I'm okay.

TAM. JJ just got back into the country last night. Flew in from Korea.

RAMON. *(To JJ:)* You're from Korea?

JJ. Lived there for a while. And a bunch of other places. *(Smiling at RAMON:)* But it's good to be back here, kid.

RAMON. *(Looking up from the floor, smiling:)* I'm not a kid.

(Short pause.)

You've been here before?

JJ. Not *here* exactly, but I mean it feels good to be back in the States. After you've been gone for a while it feels like everything's different. Like you can really make a new start.

TAM. *(Smiling at JJ:)* Never thought I'd hear you say you were glad to be back in the States.

(RAMON picks up handfuls of broken ketchup bottle glass.)

RAMON. My dad's gonna be back soon.

(He carries the broken glass into the backroom. JJ gets up and walks over to TAM, rubbing TAM's shoulders. They kiss. JJ kisses TAM's ear.)

JJ. My muscles. Are new.

(Blackout.)

Scene 2 **The Devil's Mouth**

(Lights up on JJ and RAMON giggling, drinking red wine, sitting in a cave.)

JJ. Did she see us?

RAMON. *(Peeking out of the cave:)* No, I don't think so.

JJ. Is this fair? I mean, can she...get in here?

RAMON. She's been in here before.

JJ. Okay. I wasn't sure. I've never seen her crawl into a cave before. Not a lot of caves in New York. Least not the kind you'd *wanna* crawl into. *(Looking around:)* Not sure this one's the kind you'd wanna crawl into either.

RAMON. *(Smiling at her:)* It's safe here.

JJ. You spend a lot of time around here?

RAMON. I like it. *(Lying down on the ground:)* When I look up to the sky, it's clear. No planes ever fly over and block my view. Just sky. And stars.

JJ. And the cave don't scare you? The dark.

RAMON. *(Getting up, going deeper into the cave:)* It's like being in a mouth. A frozen mouth.

JJ. But what if it's not frozen? What if it starts chewing. Swallowing. Digesting.

RAMON. It won't. I don't think it will. Listen!

(TAM's voice is heard, softly singing: "Come out, come out wherever you are...")

RAMON. She really can't find us!

JJ. You said she knows about this cave. She's probably just playing.

RAMON. Yeah.

JJ. *(Smiling at RAMON:)* You like her.

RAMON. *(Turning away:)* Yes.

JJ. *(Sipping her wine:)* It's okay that you like her.

RAMON. My mom says that the time I spend with her is, unnatural.

JJ. Do you think it is?

RAMON. I don't hurt her. I just wait for her to love me. That's all. When I'm older I think she will. *(Taking a sip from his wine:)* I just wait.

JJ. You look at her body. I do too.

RAMON. It's her body that my mother thinks is unnatural. Evil.

JJ. It's a strange body.

RAMON. Yes it is.

JJ. It twists and shifts, protrudes.

RAMON. *(Finishing off his wine:)* Did you miss her?

JJ. Yes. I did.

RAMON. That's why you're back.

JJ. Yes. And cause I'm sick.

RAMON. What's wrong with you?

JJ. I have a lump. Where there's not supposed to be a lump.

RAMON. Cancer?

JJ. Yeah.

RAMON. Does she know about your lump?

JJ. No. Not yet.

RAMON. I won't tell. (*Looking around the cave:*) Do you believe in the power of the Devil?

JJ. (*Startled, smiling:*) Sometimes. Do you?

RAMON. Yes. I try not to. But I do. (*Sipping his wine:*) Sometimes I think he must have power over me because of the things I say. (*Pause.*) And the things I dream about.

JJ. Well, do you like what you dream?

RAMON. Yes.

JJ. Then maybe the Devil's not that bad.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 3 GiGi Becoming

Part I (Just the Road and My Vision)

(*Lights up on GIGI, sitting in a wooden chair. GIGI looks up, straight ahead. Wind begins to blow through GIGI's hair.*)

GIGI. Here I go! WHHHHEEEEE!!!! Racing down the highway! Barely touching the fucking ground! Gliding over the potholes. Currrrling up Route-95 North. Here I come. To California. (*Yelling to a passerby:*) Hey, watch out! You got a death wish, asshole? (*Now quiet:*) I'm comin' thru.

(*Pause.*)

This is *too* real. Dreams usually have a distance, y'know? There's usually a layer of gauze that separates you from what's happening. Reminding you that it's just a construction of desire and thought.

But there's no gauze here, baby! There's not even a car! No car, no truck, no bus, no RV. Just my body, flying down the highway. And my eyes, taking it all in.

(Pause.)

I'm comin' thru.

(Pause.)

I'm comin' for ya, baby! I'll be there soon! Just hold on. Gonna fill your skin with the lovin' you been missin'. Like the firrrst time, baby. You remember the firrrst time? You in the leather bar, talkin' up the muscle queens. Me interruptin' you, "It wasn't the biggest riot I ever seen." All the conversations STOP. *(Pause.)* They all look my way. "I've seen much worse riots than that little shit. I lived through riots." The muscle boys all leave and you come closer. You ain't ever seen a body shaped like mine before. *(Getting hot and butch:)* C'mere. Closer. I'll let you look. You like it? *(Now femme:)* Of course you like it! I LOOK FABULOUS!!! And I feel fabu when I'm with you baby! Light my cigarette. Kiss my teeth. Now kiss the rhinestone tiara, wrapped around my throbbing, swelling brain. And it is throbbing, but don't worry, it won't explode. Not yet anyway. But the night is young, and so are we, baby! So are we! *(Getting out of breath, tired:)* Almost there, baby. Couple more states to go and I'll be back in your arms. You're gonna be waiting for me? Will you?

(Getting angry:)

Will you?

(Pause, now quiet:)

I'm tired, baby. I'm pullin' into a truck stop. *(The wind dies down.)* A truck stop in the middle of nowhere. Somewhere surrounded by woods. Look at the tall trees! But these aren't just any trees. These trees are special. These are the only trees on the planet that are completely devoid of any Jungle Mythopoetic meaning! They signify nothing but a bunch of wood! Oh, I'm so glad to be here, I...AH-HHH!!! OH!!! A BEAR! A bear is chasing me! A truck driver bear! Hmm... He's kinda cute. Long black beard. Leather vest, barley holdin' in that big round beer belly.

(To the bear:)

Hey guy. Where's your rig parked? Oh yeah? Gimme a drag from that Marlborough. (*Taking a drag, butch Southern accent:*) Yeah I heard you. You ain't gay. You ain't gay! You just want me to suck you. That's all. Me sucking you doesn't mean you're gay. No, don't worry. I don't wanna kiss you either, Tex. I got someone. I got someone waitin' for me. He's waiting for me. Even after all this time. He's still waiting for me. Yeah, I gotta go. My baby's waitin'. Don't worry, Tex, I'm sure you'll find someone who'll serve your little purposes. But it ain't gone be me! (*The wind starts back up, now femme, waving:*) Goodbye, Tex! Good-byyye!!! (*Quietly:*) Good-by.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 4 Weird Information

(*TAM and GIGI wait in line in the Social Security office. TAM is in her wheelchair. The people around them are still. The sound of TAM clicking her metal crutch on the floor is heard. The people around them start to move about.*)

TAM. GiGi, you know if I had anything extra, I wouldn't even think twice before giving it to you.

GIGI. I wasn't hinting! That wasn't a hint! I was telling you about my dream. That's all.

TAM. You've almost got it saved up...

GIGI. I know deer¹, two more paychecks to go...

TAM. (*Clicking the metal crutch faster, yelling to the people behind the counter:*) Christ, doesn't this line move at all?

GIGI. ...and I'll have my plane ticket. It's just that with a dream like that, I feel like I'm being...

(*The crutch clicking stops.*)

...summoned.

TAM. And you miss him.

2 Not a misspelling.

GIGI. And I miss him. You think if you asked real nice, they might give you a little extra here?

TAM. Little brother, they *cut* my regular SSI check. I'm not here to try for more. I'm here to try and keep what I've been getting, and you know how shitty little that is.

GIGI. I know, I'm sorry, it's just that...

TAM. (*Kissing her on the cheek:*) ...you miss David. You wanna go see him.

GIGI. Yeah. I do. How's...What's her name again?

TAM. JJ. She's fine. We got drunk by the bicycle path in the woods last night. Her and Ramon fell asleep in a cave.

GIGI. Sounds thrilling.

TAM. Shush, it was nice. I crawled in there with them. It was warm.

GIGI. You gave a nine year-old alcohol?

TAM. It was only a little red wine. They do it all the time in Europe.

GIGI. Look around you deer, this is *not* Europe.

TAM. (*Again, to the people behind the counter:*) Ma'am, I am not exaggerating when I say that this line has not moved once in a half an hour!

GIGI. Just settle down. People are starting to stare.

TAM. Staring's normal. (*Resuming the crutch clicking, calling to the people behind the counter:*) You there, Miss, isn't there a special express line for cripples?

GIGI. Deer, you're in that line.

TAM. (*Settling back down.*) Oh.

GIGI. Did you tell JJ about Bossman?

TAM. No.

GIGI. Well, don't'cha think she might notice what's happening?

TAM. I'm gonna tell her.

GIGI. Didn't she ask why your boss lets you live in the back room of the diner for free?

TAM. No. And he lets me use the room because I *work* there. (*Covering her mouth:*) Oops.

GIGI. Sshhh... (*Looking around:*) Jesus, this is the last place to be talking about your illegal job, deery. If you thought the last cuts they made were bad... (*Pause.*) She doesn't know about you and Jerry?

TAM. (*Clicking her crutch slower, rhythmically.*) She's so happy to be back that...

GIGI. (*Sniffing:*) Oh, what is that pungent, familiar scent I smell?

TAM. Quiet GiGi.

GIGI. Oh, yes, of course! It's the odor of Drama!

TAM. Settle down, tigress. It's not funny.

GIGI. I'm not suggesting that it is.

TAM. Jerry is a nice person.

GIGI. Yes he is.

TAM. JJ just wants to go back to something and I don't and...

GIGI. Jerry has a nice car. Hot rod, cold steel machine.

TAM. She wants some romantic idea of what it was like...

GIGI. He's a landowner! He's got himself some land.

TAM. And I'm tired of that. I'm tired.

GIGI. Big chunk of land. With a diner on it. He's an entrepreneur.

TAM. It's not just his money, Gi, he's nice to me. He *wants* to take care of me. I'm tired of thinking money doesn't matter. I'm sick shitless of waiting in lines.

GIGI. So then tell JJ.

TAM. I'm going to.

GIGI. Tomorrow?

TAM. Yes.

GIGI. And you'll ask the landowner for some extra cash for my plane ticket?

TAM. Maybe, if you play nice.

GIGI. *(Sitting on her lap.)* I'll play, deer, but when have I ever played nice?

(Blackout.)

Scene 5 Invited

(The reception area of an advertising agency. There is a desk, next to it is a coffee maker. JJ enters the reception area from a back office. She is dressed in corporate woman drag. LES walks by, holding a mug of coffee. He refills his mug.)

LES. So? How'd it go?

JJ. *(Smiling:)* Okay. They seemed really nice.

LES. They're good guys. And?

JJ. They offered me the job.

LES. Congratulations! Welcome..., hey I forgot to ask your name before.

JJ. JJ.

LES. JJ?

JJ. Yes.

LES. I'm Les. My cubicle is right around the corner, so we'll be seeing a lot of each other.

JJ. Great.

LES. It's a good place to work. Great benefits.

JJ. Full medical, they said.

LES. Yeah. *(Pause.)* A little more coffee?

JJ. Half a cup. Just sugar.

(He fixes her coffee.)

LES. How much secretarial work have you done?

JJ. Not a lot.

LES. *(Hands her the coffee.)* No big deal. I can show you around. If you take the job, I mean.

JJ. I'm going to take it.

LES. Great. Where else have you been interviewing?

JJ. No where else really. I'm kinda embarrassed to say this, but, my uncle is close friends with Mr. Johnson, and he asked him...

LES. Don't be embarrassed! You have to use any resources you have. You have to find any way in that you can get.

JJ. It's still embarrassing. Nepotism and all. You ain't gonna go around telling people that that's how I got the job, are you?

LES. Well normally secret keeping is not my strong point, but I won't say a word.

JJ. *(Smiling:)* Thank you.

LES. So when do you start?

JJ. Monday.

LES. Excellent seafood place two blocks over. Lunch Monday?

JJ. Sure.

LES. *(Toasting with his mug:)* Welcome.

JJ. *(Clicking her paper cup with his mug:)* Thank you.

(Blackout.)

Scene 6
Floating Through

(Lights up on The Diner. The window has been repaired. GIGI sits at the lunch counter, applying make-up to RAMON's face. RAMON giggles.)

GIGI. Now I assure you madam, these colors are completely hypoallergenic, and are not tested on animals. There, smashing!

(GIGI shows RAMON his face in a mirror. RAMON laughs and contorts his face.)

RAMON. RRRRRRRHHHAAAAAAArrrrrrrrr!!!!

(RAMON runs out the front door.)

GIGI. Use it in good health!

(TAM slithers in from the back room.)

TAM. You know you gotta wash that stuff off his face before his mom comes to get him, right?

GIGI. Oh yes.

TAM. And you gotta get it all off.

GIGI. I'm not sure if it ever *all* comes off.

(JJ enters, scowling, pouting, dressed to kill. She wears a blonde wig, a fake leopard fur coat. She kisses TAM on the cheek.)

TAM. Good morning.

JJ. And who do we have here?

TAM. This is my brother. GiGi.

GIGI. Hello Gorgeous!

TAM. *(To GIGI:)* This is JJ.

JJ. Bon jour, mon ami.

TAM. So, this is the traditional Sunday morning garb for you?

JJ. There will be nothing traditional about today. We are going into the city and we are shopping!

TAM. Oh, are we?

JJ. Why not? *(To GIGI:)* You'll come with me. Won't you?

GIGI. I'm under your spell! I have no free will of my own!

JJ. That's the way I like my men. And my women. *(Losing the diva persona:)* C'mon Tam. It'll be a blast.

TAM. I got a lot of work to do.

JJ. And it can't wait a little while?

GIGI. Now where has Ramon run off to with my beauty products?

(GIGI heads for the front door.)

(Calling out:) Ramon! Auntie GiGi's going out! I need my warpaint honey!

JJ. Tuesday. I haven't seen you since Tuesday.

TAM. You're here. Just stay here.

JJ. I haven't done anything like this in so long. I'll make it fun for you.

TAM. I gotta think about what I need. I'm gonna stay here.

(Pause.)

JJ. Okay.

(JJ kisses TAM. JJ takes TAM's hand and glides it over her breast. She rubs it harder, feeling the lump. Long pause.)

TAM. What, is that?

JJ. It's a lump. I wanted you to know.

TAM. This, is how you tell me?

JJ. *(Tears coming to her eyes:)* I wanted you to know.

TAM. They...can take lumps out.

JJ. It's already floating through. The lymph nodes.

TAM. (*Putting her hands in her pockets:*) There's still treatments and...

JJ. (*Wiping the tears away:*) It starts tomorrow.

(*Pause.*)

TAM. I'll, go with you.

JJ. 9 A.M.

TAM. I'll go with you.

JJ. And today too. C'mon. We'll have lunch in the Park. Like before.

(*GIGI reenters.*)

GIGI. The S.S. GiGi is ready to sail!

TAM. I have to stay here. And work. I have to.

JJ. Why? Just make today the one day you fuck up.

TAM. My boss is coming by in a little while. I need the money...

JJ. I'll meet you here tomorrow morning. 8:30.

GIGI. Shall I drive, mistress?

JJ. We're taking the train.

GIGI. Oh.

JJ. (*Smiling at GIGI:*) You got any Tylenol?

GIGI. (*Opening her purse:*) I have some Ginseng.

JJ. Let's roll.

(*They exit. A long pause. RAMON reenters, his make-up now smeared.*)

TAM. C'mere sweetie.

(*TAM takes a napkin, dips it in some water and scrubs the make-up off RAMON's face.*)

RAMON. GiGi's funny.

TAM. Yes she is.

RAMON. I chased her around and she almost fell and she said: *(Taking on GIGI's voice:)* "GiGi mustn't fall! We don't want to cause an earthquake! No earthquakes!"

TAM. That's right. No earth. Quakes.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7 Plateauisms

(JERRY and TAM clean up the diner. TAM is in her wheelchair.)

JERRY. It wasn't that long ago. It was an inheritance. They called me to tell me it was mine, so I came up here to look. And there was allllll this space. And I remember thinking: "It's too big. It's too much. This plot of land is too big to cover."

TAM. But you did cover it.

JERRY. I just looked around, and the highway was here and I thought about it, what do people need? They need a place to stop. An in-between place. A rest-stop. So I hired the workers and made a diner.

(TAM wheels over and scratches JERRY's back with a fork.)

TAM. You made a diner.

JERRY. And because it is mine, you don't have to ask for the morning off. Of course you can be with your friend. Gina?

TAM. JJ.

JERRY. JJ. What does it stand for?

TAM. Nothing. That I know of.

JERRY. She's just...JJ?

TAM. Yeah.

JERRY. So, she popped out of the womb, and her parents took a look and said, "This baby does not merit a name! Perhaps a letter. Oh hell, we're feeling generous, we'll give her two letters! J and J."

TAM. I think it's a name she chose for herself.

JERRY. Oh. Well, that's good. I guess. Everyone's got more than one name nowadays. It's all about hyphens!

TAM. I'll be back in the afternoon.

JERRY. She's going in for chemotherapy?

TAM. First day.

(JERRY puts his arms around TAM.)

JERRY. That's tough. You said she's from Korea? She's a Korean?

TAM. She lived there for the past few years.

(TAM slithers out of the chair and over to the window.)

Her mom was Korean.

JERRY. I've been to Thailand.

TAM. Oh really?

JERRY. Yeah, aren't those countries right near each other?

TAM. Well...

JERRY. Isn't one just a stone's throw away from the other?

TAM. If you had a really really strong throwing arm, maybe.

JERRY. But there is a difference? I mean, they're not, like, connected into some sort of union or something, right?

TAM. No unions. There's a difference.

JERRY. Yeah, but aren't those countries right near each other?

TAM. No. They're not.

JERRY. So her mom was from Korea, and her dad was from...

TAM. (*Interrupting:*) The Everglades. His were a swamp loving people.

JERRY. So then he wasn't Oriental?

TAM. (*Getting impatient:*) No Jerry...

JERRY. I'm just trying to learn over here. Is that bad?

TAM. No it's not bad. It's just that anything I could teach you would be coming from my mouth, not hers. Besides, I'm not much of a teacher.

JERRY. You've taught me stuff.

TAM. Like what?

JERRY. "Get rid of that big, hard high concrete step," you said. "It's too high, it's too hard." So I got rid of it. And put a ramp in. Changed the landscape. Remember?

TAM. Yeah.

JERRY. Now every time I pass a high hard step I think about how they need to change 'cause you wouldn't be able to get in.

TAM. I can crawl in.

(He walks over to her, brushes the hair away from her face.)

JERRY. (*Wrapping his arms around her:*) Nobody wants to crawl.

TAM. I don't mind.

(Blackout.)

Scene 8 **Travel Cash**

(A bench in Central Park. JJ and GIGI wander in. JJ sits, her hand is wrapped in GiGi's scarf to try and stop the bleeding.)

JJ. Well, that's the thing, I *didn't* trip. That tourist pushed me. (*Pointing:*) There he is! He's got his back to me! I'm going for him!

GIGI. (*Restraining her:*) I'm sure it was accidental. You tripped and fell, that's all.

JJ. No. I did not trip. I was pushed.

GIGI. (*Positioning her arm:*) Hold it over your head, that's right. The bleeding stops quicker.

JJ. Are you a nurse too?

GIGI. No deer, but occasionally I've been known to dress like one. (*Sitting:*) Y'know, you really can't go around assailing tourists. He may have been staring at you, but that doesn't mean...

JJ. (*Fixing GIGI's disheveled hair:*) What makes you so sure he was staring at me?

(*Short pause.*)

Christ, this is my aunt's coat, if I get blood on this thing...

GIGI. (*Standing up, in mock horror:*) It's not *real* is it?

JJ. No, but still...

GIGI. (*Sitting back down:*) Is that where you're staying, with your aunt?

JJ. No. They said they didn't have room. They're pretty much pigs. So I'm renting a cheap place. Had a little bit of money saved up. A little.

GIGI. You're living off that?

JJ. Yeah. Runnin' out quick too. But my uncle did get me a secretary job. Medical benefits even.

GIGI. Oooh. Appealing.

JJ. Very. There's this one guy there, he keeps flirting with me.

GIGI. So, maybe...?

JJ. (*Smiling:*) No. He's nice. But, no. (*Pause.*) What about you? Where do you work?

GIGI. (*Showing off her jewelry:*) A little jewelry factory. I'm a shift manager! It sucks, but look at the baubles I can steal.

JJ. (*Examining the necklace:*) I like. (*Smiling:*) It's so weird talking to you, Tam told me all these stories about you when we lived here in the city. Together. Like the first time you showed up at your mom's house in drag, on Thanksgiving.

GIGI. Even the cranberry sauce curdled. But what excitement!

JJ. Did Tam tell you anything about me?

GIGI. Yes she did.

JJ. Good things?

GIGI. Good things.

JJ. And you wouldn't want to get specific about...

GIGI. I hate specificity. Distance is so much more fashionable.

JJ. Gotcha.

GIGI. But they were good things. (*Pause.*) She was a train wreck when you left.

JJ. I know. I was in pretty bad shape too.

GIGI. But you're better now?

JJ. Sort of. More focused.

GIGI. Good.

JJ. I wish she was here with us.

GIGI. Yeah.

JJ. She doesn't feel the same about me.

GIGI. I don't know, I mean...

JJ. I didn't just show up out of nowhere. She asked me to come back.

GIGI. I know. I remember when she sent the letter. It was last year.

JJ. I was going to come sooner, but I didn't have the travel cash.

(*Pause.*)

GIGI. (*Carefully, meticulously unwrapping JJ's hand, checking the cut:*) Does it sting?

JJ. A little.

GIGI. Your shoe lace is untied.

JJ. (*Tying it:*) I did not trip. I was pushed. (*Yelling to the tourist:*) Tourist fucker!

GIGI. (*Smiling:*) Yes deer.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 9
The Question
(The Institution)

(The Diner. TAM and RAMON flip through a very old, ornately decorated family album. TAM sits in her wheelchair.)

RAMON. (*Pointing to a photo, smiling:*) What was the year?

TAM. These are the oldest. The Eighteen Hundreds.

RAMON. He's in your family?

TAM. No. They kept photos of famous people in here, too. Stars.

(TAM turns the page. RAMON explodes in giggles.)

RAMON. What is that??

TAM. A famous person.

RAMON. (*Examining the photo:*) No, it's...*two* people.

TAM. Siamese Twins. The first Siamese Twins.

RAMON. (*Pauses, no longer giggling.*) They're real?

TAM. Yes. The most popular Freak Show attraction. Chang and Eng Bunker. Stars.

RAMON. And they lived? Together?

TAM. Yes.

RAMON. Could they ever be...separated?

TAM. That's the Question. That everyone asked.

(RAMON walks away. TAM closes the photo album.)

RAMON. *(Looking out the window:)* JJ, likes you.

TAM. I know she does.

RAMON. Do you?

TAM. Like her?

RAMON. *(Smiling coyly:)* Yes.

TAM. I like your father. Love. Your father.

RAMON. You used to love JJ.

TAM. I saw her when she walked through that door.

That one.

And put her duffle bag on one of the tables,

and walked up

and kissed me.

So I kissed her.

And I wasn't sure how to tell her that
things really do change.

(Enter CHANG AND ENG BUNKER. They are dressed in a conjoined, well-tailored business suit. They sit at the lunch counter. TAM wheels her wheelchair behind the counter.)

TAM. *(To CHANG AND ENG:)* Coffee?

CHANG. Yes...

ENG. ...please.

(TAM pours them one cup of coffee and hands them one menu.)

TAM. You boys just get off the highway? Driving far?

CHANG. Yes, North.

ENG. From South. Carolina.

TAM. Let me know when you decide what you want.

(CHANG AND ENG look over the menu. TAM wheels back to the photo album, flips through it.)

RAMON. Things just change? By themselves?

TAM. No. Not by themselves. Realities make them change.

RAMON. JJ doesn't know reality.

TAM. No. She doesn't. Not my reality.

CHANG. What shall we eat?

ENG. I am starving.

CHANG. I know you are. *(Pause.)* You complain quite loudly.

TAM. She doesn't know the reality that nothing good comes from being a victim. From complaining.

RAMON. What does she complain...

TAM. *(Interrupting him:)* Injustice. Politics.

(TAM closes the photo album.)

ENG. So what will we eat?

CHANG. That is the question.

ENG. *(Glaring at CHANG:)* No, that is a question. It is not *The Question*.

TAM. She's stuck in the past. She can't see that there are new ways of approaching problems. Middle Ground.

CHANG. Please move over, you are hogging the chair.

RAMON. New ways?

TAM. Yes. New ways.

(TAM tosses the photo album onto the floor.)

ENG. *(Noticing TAM, whispering to CHANG:)* She looks a little...

CHANG. ...tense.

(CHANG AND ENG *walk over to TAM, they massage her neck and shoulders.*)

RAMON. Will the new ways work?

TAM. That's The Question.

CHANG. And The Question is always with us.

ENG. The Question always follows.

CHANG. The Question.

ENG. The Question:

CHANG. Can we separate our bodies?

ENG. *Should* we separate our bodies?

CHANG. Should we relinquish the power...

ENG. ...which comes with our deviation...

CHANG. (*Glaring at ENG:*) ...for the sake of a little privacy?

ENG. The Question.

CHANG. And behind The Question.

ENG. Always behind the Question:

CHANG. The Institution...

ENG. ...constructing The Question...

CHANG. ...constructing The Image.

TAM. (*Enjoying her massage.*) You just have to watch the news. To see. People who just live off the system. Parasites. Fleas. (*Pause.*) And I was one of them. That's what I was told I was supposed to be. But not any more. Now I make my own money. (*Pause.*) I make my own money.

ENG. (*Smiling brightly:*) The Institution!

CHANG. The Institution.

ENG. The Institution was good for us...

CHANG. ...because we were good for it.

ENG. We were among the few...

CHANG. ...who became famous enough...

ENG. ...to take control of our Image.

CHANG. No longer "Savages From Siam"...

ENG. ...we began to drink tea...

CHANG. ...and wear suits...

ENG. ...we recited poetry...

CHANG. ...and played tennis.

ENG. Like all Americans do.

(TAM pulls away from CHANG AND ENG, moves closer to the window.)

TAM. I make my own money.

CHANG. But still...

ENG. ...even then...

CHANG. The Question:

ENG. Should we separate our bodies?

RAMON. And you're happy? Now?

(ELLA HARPER crawls outside the glass window, staring inside.)

CHANG. The Question.

ENG. The Question.

(Pause.)

TAM. The Question.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 10
Disinvited

(*The advertising agency. JJ works behind her desk. LES enters.*)

LES. Is everything okay?

JJ. Everything's fine. I went through those files on the hard drive and moved the inactive ones. To make more room.

LES. Good. They need more room. This company's growin'. They need more space. (*Pause.*) But you didn't trash any of the files, did you?

JJ. Of course not. (*Pause.*) I saved them all in a new folder. Put them on a different hard drive.

LES. Good.

JJ. Why?

LES. No reason. Just don't fuck up.

JJ. Okay. I won't.

LES. Wanna know a secret?

JJ. Of course.

LES. I fell in love last night.

JJ. Really?

LES. Swept her off her feet. Slow dancin'. Made her heart beat fast. Ella singin' "Angel Eyes."

JJ. And that was *the* moment?

LES. Yeah.

JJ. You weren't in love, and then, a few minutes later, you were?

LES. Oh yes.

JJ. You can just mark the moment, like a mark on a map?

LES. Sometimes you can. She said she likes everything about me *(Pause.)* That I take risks. *(Pause.)* That I can't keep a secret. *(Pause.)* Are you in love?

JJ. No.

LES. Why not?

JJ. Your woman, she needs you?

LES. *(Thinking about it.)* Yes, she does.

JJ. That's important, don't you think?

LES. Yeah.

JJ. That's why I'm not in love. But I am trying to find my way in.

LES. Do you like it here? In this office?

JJ. *(Short pause.)* Why did you tell me not to fuck up?

LES. They *are* looking for a reason.

JJ. To fire me?

LES. Yeah.

JJ. I've only been here for five days.

LES. I heard them talking.

JJ. This is too important. I need this job.

LES. I know.

JJ. You know. *(Pause.)* You told them I'm sick. *(Pause.)* Suck-up points.

LES. It's not that simple. Even if it seems little, casual, a mention, of something you heard, it can change everything. *(Pause.)* You have to find any way in you can get.

JJ. Still shit.

LES. They had a right to know. Insurance costs go up from cancer treatments. I know.

JJ. Should've never told you my business.

LES. You should've told *them* your business, flat out, cards on the table.

JJ. And they would've still hired me?

LES. They're a group of people, not a corporation. They deserved to know if an employee is going to cost them more than another employee. There is loyalty.

JJ. There is.

LES. Nobody's saying that it's not a terrible thing.

JJ. Thank you for not saying that.

LES. My mother had cancer.

JJ. (*Quietly gathering up her things from her desk:*) I feel a kinship with you now.

LES. She almost died. There was a moment. One exact moment. When she *did* die. Everyone thought it was over, but they brought her back.

JJ. That's good.

LES. Doctor Leighton, he's our private doctor, he brought her back, from the dead practically. It's amazing really.

JJ. (*Putting on her coat:*) What is?

LES. Science. The things they can do to save people.

JJ. Yeah. My private doctor feels the same way.

(*About to exit, she stops.*)

You are so lucky. To have found someone who doesn't mind. The fact that you can't keep a secret.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 11
GiGi Becoming

Part II
(Re-Member Me)

(Lights up on GIGI sitting in the chair. Wind begins to blow through GIGI's hair.)

GIGI. Back on the highway. Still so dark. I can barely see the white lines.

(Pauses, smiles brightly.)

But I'm almost there. All this space I've crossed. All I can do is think. Think. Think about what we're gonna do when I get there baby. The love we're gonna make. Bodies slappin' and slitherin'. Slappin' so hard that my pinky finger falls off. Just falls to the ground. Plop! But we look down and see that pinky is still movin'. Movin' and squirmin' twitchin' and shakin'. And we watch as it sprouts little appendages. Its own little arms and legs. And we look down at other parts of our bodies, and the passion's makin' them break off too. Our toes, our lips, our assholes...breaking off, movin' away, crawlin' hatchin' slitherin' together. Towards the front door. An army of us. And they crawl to the highway, and stop the traffic. They pull the drivers out of the cars, crawlin' up their bodies, liberating their fellow body parts. And they celebrate the disorder, baby. Noses dance with dicks. Hairy assholes drink wine. Lips fucking fingers. Giving birth to new fingers, while old fingers die. All moving together. Filling up the highway with their bodies. And it'll be beautiful, baby. It'll be everything our bodies want to become. *(Pause.)* And it's going to happen. If you want it to happen. Do you? You'll remember me, once you see me. My face. My body. *(Pause.)* You'll re-member me. *(Pause.)* I'm getting ready to pull down your street now, baby. Into your driveway.

(Pause, the wind dies down.)

The moment is now. I can't wait any longer. This is our moment. *(Looking up, straight ahead.)* I'm almost at your doorstep. *(Smiling.)* I'm almost in your home.

(Blackout.)

Scene 12
"Alive and Inside!"²

(Split Scene: ELLA HARPER on a carnival stage; The Diner, late at night. ELLA silently mouths the opening words from the Prologue, [from "I am called the Camel Girl..." to "...fit myself for another occupation"] over and over again, progressively faster as the scene goes on. JJ has been drinking. She is dripping wet from the rainstorm outside. She sits at one of the tables. TAM stares out the window, in her wheelchair.)

JJ. *(Smiling:)* Now kiss my ear.

TAM. No, you can't stay here.

JJ. That's not what I asked for.

TAM. Yes you did. Earlier. And the answer is no.

JJ. All the more reason to come kiss my ear. A consolation prize. Won't you?

TAM. No. My boss is in the other room.

JJ. Well, don't be ashamed.

TAM. I'm not.

JJ. Then we'll go somewhere else. We'll go back to that cave. Drink even more wine. More.

TAM. I'm staying right here. Right here.

JJ. Of course you are. You never leave this place. You're like a shut-in or something.

TAM. *(Wheeling over to the counter, picking up some dirty dishes, getting angry:)* That's not true.

JJ. It's very safe here. No reason to go outside.

TAM. I work here. I live here.

JJ. Food, TV, and a telephone. Safe. Right here.

² A slogan often used on posters advertising early 19th and early 20th century Freak Shows.

TAM. I work. I'm becoming self-sufficient.

JJ. What is his name again?

TAM. (*Putting the dishes in a bin behind the corner.*) Jerry. His name is Jerry.

JJ. He's your boss.

TAM. He owns the diner.

JJ. A powerful man.

TAM. We love each other. Jerry and I.

JJ. Somewhere *unsafe*. We'll go back to that cave. We'll talk there.

TAM. Here. Jerry and I are together. Here.

JJ. I went back there last night. By myself. Went in as deep as I could go. The smallest, tightest part I could squeeze my body into.

TAM. There are other factors. That you just ignore.

JJ. The air was thin in there. Almost thin enough to stop the breathing. To make you die.

TAM. I think you're selfish.

JJ. I started to die. So I moved back, into the good air. What do you think you would have done, if I hadn't moved into the good air? Cried?

TAM. Are you threatening to do something? Is that what you're doing?

JJ. I'm not hiding. I'm not using distance.

TAM. It sounds, poetic.

JJ. I'm telling you my thoughts. What I'm thinking of doing.

TAM. All I hear are stories of last breaths, life-robbing air, deep inside dark mythical caves.

JJ. I'm gonna fucking kill myself.

TAM. (*Wiping off the lunch counter:*) Really?

JJ. Gonna die anyway.

TAM. (*Pause.*) Well it's all very tragic, isn't it. A tragic ending. A tragic heroine.

JJ. Fuck you.

TAM. I'm an honest person.

JJ. It was a few years ago, for Christ's sake. You were there with me. Marching.

TAM. Things change now, even within a few years, a few months. America has changed.

JJ. Yes.

TAM. My thoughts are private, my needs are private.

JJ. Because your boss can afford privacy.

TAM. (*Putting more dishes in the bin, raising her voice:*) I look and look and look but I seem to have lost my ability to find the romance in victimhood and indignities. Waiting in line, hoping they don't cut off my Medicaid is not romantic.

JJ. And Jerry is?

TAM. (*Quietly:*) He is.

JJ. You go for walks together?

TAM. Yes.

JJ. He sends you flowers. Lots of them.

TAM. He's not a demon. (*Softly:*) He tries to learn new things. He wasn't taught about other kinds of people.

JJ. Well then now it's clear, *he's* the real victim here. Lack of education! And in the great traditions of altruism, you are going to reeducate him using your vast knowledge of Otherness. Exhibit A: My ex-girlfriend JJ!

TAM. Stop it.

JJ. It'll be like a Neo-New Deal, to replace the dismantled old one. Mission number one: Reeducation for all the victims of "Reverse Discrimination"!

TAM. Can't you just be jealous? Would it be that horrible if this wasn't a clash of ideology, just plain basic jealousy?

JJ. Doesn't exist.

TAM. You'll go stay with your aunt and uncle.

JJ. There's no room for me there. They said so. No space.

TAM. The savings.

JJ. Are just about gone.

TAM. You'll find a way. You'll learn to be stronger. Independent.

JJ. Like you.

TAM. And the blame is, of course, mine?

JJ. Your letter.

TAM. Was mailed over a year ago.

JJ. Didn't realize it had an expiration date on it.

TAM. Well you should've.

JJ. I'm getting sicker. It's growing.

TAM. I fucking hate you. Selfish bitch. You want me to take care of you. I'm sick too.

JJ. You're everything you hated.

(TAM jams her wheelchair forward. It gets caught on the lunch counter, it tips over. TAM falls to the floor, knocking over a table. JJ approaches her. ELLA mouths the words faster. JERRY enters.)

JERRY. What's going on?

TAM. She hit me. Hit her.

JERRY. (To JJ:) Why would you do this?

JJ. (*Staring TAM in the eye:*) She deserved it.

JERRY. Fucking cunt.

(*JERRY punches JJ, knocking her to the floor. A long pause.*)

ELLA HARPER. (*Softly, her lips are quivering:*) I am called the Camel Girl because my knees turn backward, but my name is Ella Harper. I was told not to say my name, but I will: it is Ella Harper.

(*Her voice gradually getting louder, quicker:*)

I'm tired of being here. On this stage. I'm tired of being stared at. I'm so fucking tired of being stared at. I was going to leave the show business, but my manager tells me to stay. "Just a little longer," he says. Just a little longer and the money will come. The dresses and the money. I'll be a star. I try to be patient, but I am angry. (*Clenching her fists:*) I hate my manager for promising me things that I've never received. I hate him for putting me on this stage. I hate him. (*Clenching her fists tighter:*) I want to rip his skin. I want to rip his fucking skin.

JJ. (*To TAM, getting up off the floor:*) More? Or are you done?

TAM. I'm done.

JJ. I am too.

(*JJ exits out the front door. ELLA's fists unclench.*)

ELLA HARPER. I feel, very alone.

TAM. (*Crying:*) Fucking bitch...

(*TAM pounds her fist on the floor. JERRY holds her.*)

ELLA HARPER. And I wish... I were in...

JERRY. It's okay. I'm here.

ELLA HARPER. Another place.

JERRY. Here.

(*Blackout.*)

End of Act I

ACT II
The Built World

Scene I
Dear Deer

(Lights up on a section of the woods, lit up by moonlight. Two towels and some crumpled clothes sit on the ground. GIGI enters, dripping wet and naked. GIGI picks up a towel off the ground and starts to dry off.)

GIGI. Are you coming, deer?

(JJ enters, also dripping wet and naked.)

JJ. Yes, "dear."

(JJ dries off with the other towel.)

Everyone is "dear" to you.

GIGI. GiGi calls everyone deer, but not dear as in d-e-a-r, deer as in that dainty little woodland creature which often finds itself splattered across the front grill of a pick-up truck. It's just a little joke GiGi plays on people who take the context of her words for granted.

JJ. *(Wrapping the towel around her body and sitting down on the ground.)* The context is important to you?

GIGI. *(Also wrapping the towel around and sitting down.)* It's small, really. A small battle. But a battle which GiGi wins, nonetheless.

(JJ smiles. GIGI puts her arms around JJ. Their bodies are relaxed.)

GIGI. The new place. You like it?

JJ. Yeah. I'm all moved in.

GIGI. And you're having me over for dinner... When?

JJ. Thank you so much GiGi.

GIGI. It's okay. What's a little travel cash really mean, anyway. Travel cash goes and it comes.

JJ. But when it goes, you have to cancel your travel plans.

GIGI. Postpone, deer.

JJ. Postpone. I will pay you back.

GIGI. (*A shade of the dominatrix:*) I know you will.

JJ. Was David mad?

GIGI. Barking mad. But he's waited this long for me to come out there. A couple more months will make his heart grow even fonder, if that's possible.

(*JJ nestles herself further into her arms.*)

JJ. How long?

GIGI. Four years, this February.

JJ. Wowie.

GIGI. We've been friends even longer. High school. Back then it was all about experiments. "Why is he funnier than every other boy?" "Why is he more mystical? He understands Jim Morrison's lyrics perfectly!"

JJ. He sounds *very* otherworldly. And sexy.

GIGI. Oh yes. He had this whole...*Satanist-wannabe* thing working.

JJ. Cool. But did he grow out of it?

GIGI. As far as I know. (*Thinking about it:*) Then again, who knows, he might be John Cassevettes in "Rosemary's Baby," just waiting to impregnate my pre-Woody Allen innocence with the devil's spawn! Even as we speak, the Devil could be growing within my body!

(*JJ gets up, walks off to the side, takes in the view.*)

JJ. Maybe. (*Pause.*) But it was gradual. You fell in love with him gradually?

GIGI. The questions started to change from, "Why is he so mystical" to "Why do I get such a charge from quietly jacking off in his waterbed while he's lying next to me, pretending to be asleep?"

(*JJ smiles.*)

GIGI. Then finally one night I just reached over.

JJ. Under the covers.

GIGI. And he was asking himself the same questions.

JJ. And it's been wonderful ever since.

GIGI. *(Smiling at her:)* I think not. There are always bumpy times, deer.

(GIGI begins to put on her clothes.)

Temporary amnesia can happen to the best of us.

JJ. People forgetting who they are.

GIGI. And then coming back.

JJ. Sometimes coming back. *(Pause.)* And you wore the make-up, even back then?

GIGI. Oh no, this is a fairly recent phenomenon.

JJ. What does David think of it?

GIGI. *(Softly:)* He hasn't seen it.

JJ. You never sent him a picture or anything?

GIGI. No. He's so butch, I wasn't sure how he'd feel. About me, this way. *(Pauses, smiles.)* He's in for a helluva jolt when I step off that plane.

JJ. You could always just, take it off. If you had to.

GIGI. I don't want to take it off.

JJ. Then you shouldn't. *(Pause.)* Why didn't you go with him when he moved away?

GIGI. Tam. She was alone, wasn't sure if she'd be okay.

JJ. So you stayed behind. To take care of her.

GIGI. Not to take care of her. Just to be with her.

JJ. I didn't mean to say that she needed to be taken care of. I didn't.

GIGI. I know. Growing up I was always unsure. What can she do, when does she need help?

JJ. She gets angry if you offer help when she doesn't need it. She used to.

GIGI. She still does. Sometimes.

JJ. We'd be walking down the city street together, and, just out of force of habit, I'd start pushing the wheelchair.

GIGI. Uh-oh.

JJ. And she'd say, "You wouldn't just walk up to someone and start to help them *walk* without asking first, would you?"

GIGI. Oh boy.

(GIGI is having trouble untwisting her shirt collar.)

JJ. And she was right. Absolutely right. But my intentions were not bad.

(JJ comes over and helps GIGI untwist her shirt.)

JJ. My intentions were good.

GIGI. *(Smiling:)* Context, deer, context.

(Blackout.)

Scene 2 **You'll Never Walk (Alone)**

(The Diner is closed. TAM and JERRY enjoy a romantic dinner.)

JERRY. It all depends on the look of the artichoke.

TAM. Oh really?

JERRY. Oh yes. You can tell just by looking at them.

TAM. *(Eating her artichoke, making a mess:)* Well these are delicious.

JERRY. And they have to be simmered for just the right amount of time. Too long and the leaves get mushy.

TAM. (*Looking around at her end of the table:*) Geez, I'm making a royal mess over here.

JERRY. I'll get more napkins.

(He gets a handful of them, presents them to TAM.)

TAM. Thank you.

JERRY. Artichokes are a messy beast. Don't be self-conscious.

TAM. (*Flashing him a sexy smile:*) I'm not. (*Looking at his face:*) C'mere honey. You have artichoke goop on your cheek.

(He reaches over, she wipes it away. She kisses him. He kisses her. He sits back in his chair.)

JERRY. (*Going back to his artichoke:*) So you were not going to tell me.

TAM. Tell you?

JERRY. Your lunatic friend. JJ.

TAM. She's not a lunatic. Close maybe. (*Pause.*) You hit her pretty hard.

JERRY. You told me to hit her.

TAM. I didn't tell you to call her a cunt.

JERRY. You called her a bitch.

TAM. I was angry.

JERRY. So was I.

(Pause.)

I didn't even know she existed..., what she was to you. I just supposed...

TAM. (*Smiling, sitting up in her wheelchair:*) Did you think you were the first person I had sex with? Asexual till you *awakened* me?

JERRY. (*Agitated:*) Hey. No. But, I mean...I just never really thought of people...

TAM. Disabled people.

JERRY. In a sexual way.

TAM. Why not?

JERRY. Just, I didn't see it.

TAM. Or learned not to see it.

JERRY. Well, yeah, learned not to see it. *(Pauses, smiles.)* But now I see it.

TAM. Yes.

JERRY. You still should have told me. Everything.

TAM. I know. I got scared.

JERRY. It's okay. *(Pause.)* You haven't explained why she hit you.

TAM. Nostalgia.

JERRY. She's hit you before?

TAM. No. No, never. That's not what I meant. We were together for a few years.

JERRY. And she wanted to go back to those days.

TAM. Her idea of those days. *(Pauses, smiles at him.)* You never suspected? I mean, I am kinda butch.

JERRY. *(Smiling at her:)* You're not butch.

TAM. I am too. *(Butch:)* The salt. Pass it.

(He passes the salt.)

JERRY. Will she move away now?

TAM. I have no idea what she'll do.

JERRY. GiGi's moving away, maybe she'll go with him.

TAM. Gi postponed the move.

JERRY. *(Putting down the knife and fork:)* Really?

TAM. (*Mouthful of artichoke:*) Yeah. She loaned all her money to JJ. (*Noticing the look on his face:*) Surprised?

JERRY. You said how excited he was to get out there. With his, lover.

TAM. She didn't want to leave JJ with nothing.

JERRY. Is JJ gonna get a job?

TAM. (*Tense:*) I wouldn't know.

JERRY. Okay. It's just that it'll be much better for her, psychologically, if she doesn't get sucked into the Welfare system.

TAM. It's really not my concern anymore.

JERRY. You got out of the system. How does it feel?

TAM. It feels better.

JERRY. It is better, for all of us.

TAM. (*Smiling at him:*) I know.

JERRY. I'm really proud of you. What you're doing.

TAM. Thank you.

JERRY. You do feel better. I can tell just by looking at you. You look, dignified.

TAM. (*Wiping her mouth and hands, cleaning up her mess:*) Thank you.

JERRY. I can tell just by looking at you.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 3
GiGi Becoming

Part III
(I Wanna See What's Never Been Seen)

(Lights up on GIGI, sitting in a chair. Sitting in two chairs right behind GIGI are CHANG AND ENG. Wind begins to blow through GIGI, CHANG AND ENG's hair. "Love is a Rose" by Linda Ronstadt plays loudly. GIGI sings along. During the chorus, CHANG AND ENG join in.)

GIGI. *(Interrupting, yelling over the music:)* YEEEEHAAAAY!!! My Mama always said "Never pick up hitchhikers," but I just couldn't resist these guys! *(To CHANG AND ENG:)* How you boys doin' back there?

CHANG. *(Both are flustered.)* We are...

ENG. ...fine.

GIGI. Hope you don't mind a little music. Linda Ronstadt's *Greatest Hits* is the only tape I own!

ENG. It is...

CHANG. ...fine.

GIGI. Did your car break down or something?

CHANG. Yes...

(They sway as GIGI takes a sharp turn.)

ENG. ...it did.

GIGI. Ssshhhh! This is my favorite part! *(Again singing along, for a few bars. To CHANG AND ENG:)* So where you boys headed?

CHANG. West...

ENG. ...from East.

GIGI. Going cross country. Like me. Vacationing?

CHANG. Yes.

ENG. We are Site-seeing.

GIGI. Can't hear you! The music, it's too loud?

CHANG. Perhaps...

ENG. ...a little.

(GIGI raises her hands in the air. The music dissipates as she lowers her hands.)

GIGI. Better?

CHANG. Yes...

ENG. ...thank you.

GIGI. So where you goin'?

CHANG. To see...

ENG. ...the Sites. Site-Seeing.

CHANG. We want to see...

ENG. ...the Washington Monument...

CHANG. ...the Grand Canyon...

ENG. ...the Mississippi River.

CHANG. We want to see them for ourselves.

ENG. We hear that they might not really exist.

CHANG. We hear that they might just be stories.

ENG. Or that they may have existed once...

CHANG. ...but since then, they are constantly being torn down...

ENG. ...and re-built...

CHANG. ...torn down...

ENG. ...and re-built...

CHANG. ...torn down...

ENG. ...and re-built.

CHANG. But either way...

ENG. ...we want to see The Process.

GIGI. Well I'll get you boys there. Don't you worry none!

(They sway as GIGI takes another sharp corner.)

CHANG. You must know your way around very well.

GIGI. Yes I do.

ENG. You have been traveling long?

GIGI. Oh yes, my deers.

CHANG. Traveling can get quite boring...

ENG. *(Glaring at CHANG:)* ...depending on the company.

CHANG. One must be able to pass the time.

ENG. How do you pass the time?

GIGI. Wondering. Questioning. Even in travel dreams, you're never sure if you've made the right move.

CHANG. Qu'est-ce que...

ENG. ...c'est?

CHANG. "The right move"?

GIGI. My lover moved away. Cross the country. California. West.

ENG. And you stayed behind?

GIGI. Yeah.

CHANG. And now you don't know...

ENG. ...if it was right...

CHANG. ...for you two to separate.

GIGI. I wonder. Will he feel the same? Will I have crossed all this distance, all this space, just to find out he doesn't feel like before? To find out that...

ENG. ...things...

CHANG. ...have...

GIGI. ...changed?

(Pause, as the wind continues blowing.)

Or that he never felt that way in the first place. What I thought I was seein', I wasn't really seein'.

(Pause, the wind dies down.)

I don't think I wanna go out there. I don't think I wanna see him. I think I'm gonna turn around, head back on the road I came from.

ENG. No.

CHANG. You mustn't.

ENG. You have to find out...

CHANG. ...one way or the other.

ENG. ...you have to take part...

CHANG. ...in the Process.

(Pause. The wind begins to blow again.)

ENG. It is very easy...

CHANG. ...and very safe...

ENG. ...sometimes profitable...

CHANG. *(Glaring at ENG:)* ...and sometimes pleasurable...

ENG. *(Glaring back at him:)* ...to cut yourself off...

CHANG. *(Fuming:)* ...from the rest of the world.

(Pause. The anger between CHANG AND ENG grows, then dissipates.)

ENG. But the loneliness...

CHANG. ...truly...

ENG. ...can kill.

CHANG. And you don't want to die...

ENG. ...do you?

(Pause.)

GIGI. No. I don't.

CHANG. Then you'll put the fear aside...

ENG. ...and you'll keep moving...

CHANG. ...towards your lover's body.

GIGI. And I will see his body. I will see it.

(The wind continues blowing. Blackout.)

Scene 4 **Early, Not Too Late**

(The cave. Night. TAM and RAMON eat sandwiches. TAM is sitting on the ground, distant. RAMON stares up at the sky. The only light comes from a flashlight.)

RAMON. But here the highway's gone.

TAM. Yeah.

RAMON. You said I can't play outside anymore, cause it's near the highway.

TAM. That's right.

RAMON. "Crazies on the highway."

TAM. Crazies.

RAMON. Well it's different here. You go down a street, take two lefts, a right, go straight, another right and you're here. And the highway is gone.

TAM. Gone.

RAMON. So it's safe here.

TAM. Somewhat.

RAMON. Somewhat safe.

TAM. There are still Crazyes, even here.

RAMON. If it's somewhat safe, why should we leave?

TAM. Sleep. Don't you want to go home and go to sleep? It's late.

RAMON. No. *(Pause.)* No. *(Pause.)* It's nice here. We haven't been here in a long time. *(Pause, sitting down:)* I like it here.

TAM. I do too, but it's late.

RAMON. You like it here?

TAM. I always have.

RAMON. Then how come you didn't want to come.

TAM. I'm tired Ramon.

RAMON. You're always tired.

TAM. Not always.

RAMON. You don't leave the diner. You just stay in there.

TAM. It's my home.

RAMON. You stay in your home.

TAM. Ramon.

RAMON. This is the first time in a long time.

TAM. I like the way things are now.

RAMON. With my dad.

TAM. With your dad.

RAMON. *(Flashing the flashlight in her direction:)* Are you going to get married?

TAM. *(Smiling:)* I don't know.

RAMON. If he asked you, would you?

TAM. Probably.

RAMON. It's be nice. There'd be a giant cake.

TAM. Chocolate.

(RAMON *smiles.*)

RAMON. You'd look really pretty in the dress.

TAM. You think?

RAMON. Yeah. And I'd be there.

TAM. Of course.

RAMON. And GiGi...

TAM. (*Lying down on the ground:*) ...my maid of honor.

RAMON. (*Giggling:*) GiGi's really a boy.

TAM. No, GiGi is a maid, although the honor part is questionable.

RAMON. Dad says, "GiGi's really a boy. Don't forget that."

TAM. Your dad says that to you?

RAMON. Yeah. He doesn't want me playing with GiGi anymore.

TAM. (*Sitting up:*) Why not?

RAMON. GiGi's not the kind of person I should be playing with. It's not right.

TAM. GiGi is a good person.

RAMON. I like GiGi. He is my friend.

TAM. I know he is honey.

RAMON. I'm not saying anything bad.

TAM. I know.

RAMON. Was it bad for Dad to say that?

TAM. Not bad for him to say it, just wrong.

RAMON. Wrong.

TAM. Wrong.

(RAMON puts the flashlight under his chin and makes a scary face. He jumps at TAM.)

RAMON. WRRRong!!!

TAM. *(Grabbing the flashlight from him, flickering it in his face:)* WRRRRRRong!!!

(He giggles.)

RAMON. That didn't scare you.

TAM. Nope.

RAMON. Nothing scares you?

TAM. A lot of things scare me.

RAMON. Being wrong scares you.

(Long pause.)

TAM. Being wrong scares me.

(Blackout.)

Scene 5 **Pieces of Relations,** **Components, Pockets**

(The jewelry factory GIGI works at. GIGI and JJ are there, assembling jewelry. A crumpled up newspaper sits next to JJ.)

GIGI. *(Helping JJ with a piece of jewelry:)* Deer, that needs to be screwed in tighter.

JJ. *(Screwing it in tighter:)* Oh. Sorry.

GIGI. It's okay. You're doing fine. Jewelry creation is a tricky business. *(Twiddling her fingers:)* You must be nimble! You must move nimbly.

JJ. Nimble.

GIGI. That's right. Are you tired? You wanna take a rest?

JJ. I'm fine.

GIGI. (*Feeling her forehead:*) You don't look fine.

JJ. I feel okay.

GIGI. Let's take a break.

JJ. GiGi, I don't want to take a break.

GIGI. Okay.

(Pause.)

Maybe you're nervous.

JJ. GiGi.

GIGI. Maybe that's it.

JJ. I'm not nervous. I have nothing to be nervous about.

GIGI. I know, it's just, with the next phase starting tomorrow. The chemo.

JJ. Radical chemo. Adjuvant chemotherapy.

GIGI. Radical. Just the word, "radical." It's frightening.

JJ. You think?

GIGI. But I'm here.

JJ. I know you're here. You're standing there.

GIGI. I meant...

JJ. I know what you meant. Are there any more of the gold beads over there? I'm out.

(GIGI hands her a bag of gold beads.)

JJ. Thanks. Even when bad things are happening...

GIGI. *Terrible things, deer.*

JJ. *(Pauses, looks at GIGI.)* Terrible things. There are always other things to worry about.

GIGI. Well if it helps you take your mind off...

JJ. *(Interrupting:)* GiGi, I don't think you understand. I don't want my mind to be taken off. I wanna stay angry. I wanna grow big. I wanna get big as a nightmare. Plow through the city. Tip things over. I wanna become "the final culmination of a drug-addicted underclass with no sense of humanity, no sense of civilization and no sense of the rules of life in which human beings respect each other." I wanna tip things over.

GIGI. *(Staring at her:)* Okay. I see now, you *are* feeling fine.

JJ. I wanna say those words. Over and over. *Be* those words.

GIGI. You can't right now, we have jewelry to make. Keep it rolling, deer!

JJ. I wanna build an ugly, burning shit-smelling exclamation point monument for the end of the century.

GIGI. Sit still, you're shaking my beads.

JJ. I wanna build it.

GIGI. *(Scared:)* Please sit still.

JJ. I wanna build it.

GIGI. Well, we go on lunch break if an hour and a half. If you still want to by then, we'll go and build the burning shit-smelling exclamation point monument during the break.

JJ. *(Smiling:)* Promise?

GIGI. Promise.

JJ. They said if they had caught it earlier, they could have taken it all out.

GIGI. You didn't notice the lump earlier?

JJ. I did, but I kept thinkin' it was nothing. That I was imagining it. And then it felt like it went away. I couldn't find it anymore.

GIGI. So you didn't go to the doctor.

JJ. I was away. In another country. I didn't know if they'd even be any good, y'know?

GIGI. Well they might not have had the same exact technology, but they still...

JJ. They might've fucked me up, made it worse.

GIGI. Just because they're...

JJ. (*Interrupting:*) I didn't have the money for doctor's appointments. That's not the kinda life I was living.

GIGI. We'll push through it. (*Taking JJ's jewelry and tools, putting them down:*) C'mon. Let's go on break.

JJ. (*Taking back the tools, continuing working:*) No. I'm fine. Let's just finish off this shift.

(Pause. They work.)

GIGI. I didn't mean to suggest. By asking why you didn't go to the doctor sooner. I didn't mean, that you're, guilty or something.

JJ. Okay.

GIGI. I really didn't.

JJ. (*Looking at GIGI:*) Okay.

(Pause, they continue working.)

GIGI. (*Looking at JJ's work:*) Tighter, deer.

JJ. Sorry. Nimble.

GIGI. (*Smiling:*) Yes deer. Yes.

(Pause.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 6
Phantasies and Distractions

Part I
(Learning Contortion)

(The Diner, crowded with lunch customers. TAM is in her wheelchair, she is busy serving the customers.)

TRUCK DRIVER. *(Stopping TAM:)* Excuse me, ma'am? I just wanted to say; I think you're inspirational.

TAM. *(Imitating his Southern accent:)* And I think your eggs are done. Let me go check.

(She wheels away. She wheels over to JERRY.)

JERRY. Hey there.

TAM. Hey. I'm going to take off a little early tonight.

JERRY. Where you headed?

TAM. Nowhere, GiGi's coming over. We're gonna spend some time.

JERRY. Here?

TAM. Yes. Why?

JERRY. You've been spending a lot of time here lately.

TAM. I live here.

JERRY. Yes, but even so. Maybe there's a movie?

TAM. Nothing's playing. We're just going to sit here. And have some coffee.

JERRY. It's crowded today.

TAM. Yeah. We'll find a table.

JERRY. Well the crowd will have thinned out by then.

TAM. Yes, but then there's the dinner crowd.

JERRY. Tam.

TAM. What?

JERRY. It's not a good idea for you and GiGi to hang out here.

TAM. Why not? Ramon's with his mom. He's not here, so GiGi can't further corrupt him.

JERRY. That's not the reason. Last time GiGi was here, people complained.

TAM. Complained about what?

JERRY. Him. There were families here.

(TAM wheels off. She picks up an order, brings it to the Truck Driver's table.)

TAM. Here you go.

TRUCK DRIVER. *(Staring at the table:)* I meant that. What I said about you being an inspiration.

TAM. *(Parking herself at the table:)* Oh yeah?

TRUCK DRIVER. Yeah. If that happened to me, I don't know what I'd do.

TAM. Probably put a bullet in your head, huh?

TRUCK DRIVER. Probably. I couldn't handle it. I just couldn't. but you're great. Makin' somethin' of yourself.

TAM. Listen Tex... *(Pauses, stops herself.)* Can I have a sip of your orange juice?

TRUCK DRIVER. Sure thing.

TAM. *(Takes a sip.)* Thanks.

TRUCK DRIVER. *(Smiles.)* I mean it, you're doin' great. Bet you're makin' some money.

TAM. Makin' some money. *(Looking at his eggs:)* You gotta be careful. That slimy shit is bad for you. Gives you fucked up dreams.

TRUCK DRIVER. *(Eating his eggs:)* Yeah?

TAM. Yeah. I had fucked up dreams last night.

(The front door opens. MARINELLI, THE MAN-SNAKE slithers in. The front door closes behind him. He looks around. The crowd barely notices him, occasionally glancing in his direction, then turning away.)

TRUCK DRIVER. Like what?

TAM. *(Drifting away:)* I was a contortionist. I learned how to be a contortionist. Twist my body.

(MARINELLI slithers over to the middle of the diner. He contorts his body, twisting his head between his legs.)

TAM. I made it twist into new shapes. Different shapes. My skin was moving, changing. I was in a freak's body now. I bent my head and neck down low, between my legs.

JERRY. *(Yelling to TAM:)* You have an order ready for pick-up.

(MARINELLI buries his head farther between his legs.)

TAM. *(Ignoring him:)* Down towards my asshole. The muscles got stretched and looser and looser. I slid my head down there. I slid my head right inside. Deep. Dark and warm.

(The TRUCK DRIVER puts his eggs down. MARINELLI's arms and legs undulate.)

TAM. My head was deep inside. I wasn't even able to hear the outside world. I wasn't able to hear any claims that any lover or any government could make on me. Sound only goes out of my private ass pocket, it doesn't come in.

TRUCK DRIVER. And, you just stayed like that? With your head tucked in?

TAM. Yup. Nobody minded. People would stare occasionally, a glance in my direction, then quickly turn away, embarrassed for having stared. *(Smiles.)* I think they were just jealous of my new ability.

(Pause, MARINELLI continues contorting among the crowded diner.)

JERRY. Tam.

TAM. *(To JERRY:)* I'm coming. *(To the TRUCK DRIVER:)* It was good talking to you. Safe travels.

TRUCK DRIVER. You too. Hope you're feelin' good.

(The door to the back room opens. MARINELLI stops contorting. He slithers into the back room, disappears. The door closes behind him. TAM crawls out of her wheelchair. She slithers over to JERRY. People stare at her crawling across the diner floor.)

JERRY. I thought we agreed you'd use the wheelchair while customers were around.

TAM. Sometimes I use it, sometimes I don't.

JERRY. It's just that it looks kinda strange. You...

TAM. *(Interrupting:)* If GiGi isn't allowed in this place then I'm quitting. Moving out.

JERRY. Hey. Slow down.

TAM. Don't wanna slow down. That's the way it is. No in between.

JERRY. *(Angry:)* I got a kid to feed. This isn't just about business. It isn't just about money. *(Lowering his voice:)* It's not because he's your brother, for Christ's sake.

TAM. I know it's not. I know what it's about.

(Pause.)

JERRY. I got it.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7 Phantasies and Distractions

Part II (Forgetting Turbulence)

(The bedroom of JJ's apartment. JJ sits up in bed, sick from the chemo. GIGI hovers over her.)

JJ. I shouldn't have eaten that soup. I'm gonna puke it up.

GIGI. I'll get the bowl.

(GIGI brings the bowl over. JJ pukes in it.)

GIGI. *(Looking in the bowl:)* Yup, that's the soup.

JJ. I'm sorry.

GIGI. Nothing to be sorry about.

(JJ lies down.)

JJ. Have you talked to Tam?

GIGI. Last night. I went over there for some coffee.

JJ. How's she doing?

GIGI. I thought you hated her.

JJ. I never said I hated her. She said she hated *me*.

GIGI. She doesn't hate you.

(GIGI goes into the other room to get a wet towel.)

JJ. I don't care if she does. I wasn't asking you if she was going to come running back to me. I just wanted to know how she was doing.

GIGI. *(Returning with the towel, wiping JJ's mouth:)* She's doing okay.

JJ. Cool.

GIGI. You don't love her anymore?

JJ. No. I don't.

(GIGI crawls into bed, wraps her arms around JJ.)

GIGI. It's okay if you do. I mean, you never know what's gonna happen.

JJ. What's gonna happen is that I'm going to die. The rest is just outside stuff now.

GIGI. "Adjuvant chemotherapy offers encouraging chances for recurrence-free, overall survival."

JJ. Stop quoting doctors and rub my belly.

GIGI. (*Rubbing her belly:*) Yes, mistress. (*Pause.*) Why did you leave her in the first place? Why did you move away?

JJ. It sounds stupid, but I felt, like, incomplete or something. Even with her. I don't know how to explain it, but, I needed to go look for something.

GIGI. So you went to Korea.

JJ. That's where my mom was from. I met a woman on the plane ride there. She was a tourist, like me. We became friends. She was traveling through the East.

GIGI. What was her name?

JJ. Zuleika.

(Lights up on ZULEIKA, THE CIRCASSIAN SULTANA, sitting on a raised platform. ZULEIKA has a giant puff of dark, frizzed out hair. She holds a staff with a half moon and a shiny silver star on it. She wears a "Middle Eastern"-style flowing dress. A veil covers the lower half of her face. A small group of Onlookers stare at her up on the platform.)

GIGI. And she was your travel companion?

JJ. Yeah. It was good to travel with her, cause she took all of the attention away from me. I liked that.

ZULEIKA. (*Addressing the Onlookers:*) Attention! Attention! Come! Hear the amazing story of my life! I am Zuleika! The Circassian Sultana! Favorite of the Harem!

JJ. She was like a bossy older sister. Always taking the spotlight. But it was okay, cause her stories took my mind off the bumpy plane ride. She told all kinds of stories.

(The Onlookers gasp in awe as ZULEIKA slowly lifts the veil from her face.)

ZULEIKA. I am the purest of all human beings! The purest of all Caucasians! I am from a mystic, mountainous area of Russia where scientists have proven the human animal was born! During the Crimean War, I was kidnapped from my village and taken to Con-

stantinople, where I was sold into the harem of the most powerful and brutal of all the Sultans of Persia!

JJ. She was a hoot. She was like my tour guide. She seemed to know her way around, even though she wasn't from around there.

ZULEIKA. I lived most of my life as a slave to the Sultan, until an explorer rescued me and brought me here to the American Museum Hall of Human Curiosities so that I may tell you my tale!

GIGI. She was a good friend?

JJ. Sort of. I got the feeling she was holding back. That she was never telling me the whole truth.

(An old man ONLOOKER perks up.)

ONLOOKER. *(Talking in an Irish accent, pointing at ZULEIKA:)* By Jesus, I recognize that girl! That's no Sultana, that's little Kathleen O'Malley! She's from Jersey City!

ZULEIKA. *(Falling into an Irish accent, whispering to the ONLOOKER:)* You'll be shuttin' yer mouth now Shamus O'Grady, or I'll bop ya in the head with this staff!

(Losing the Irish accent, pulling the veil back over her face:)

Gaze! Gaze! Gaze at my beauty! My purity! Gaze.

JJ. So we drifted apart.

(Lights down on ZULEIKA.)

JJ. And I was by myself.

GIGI. And you didn't like it there.

JJ. No. I didn't. Nothing that I expected to happen happened. I never felt what I expected to feel by going there. It never felt like my home. Then I started thinking, maybe I made it up. Maybe I dreamed up what I was expecting to see, and feel. Maybe I built it.

GIGI. Maybe.

JJ. And if so, then now what? Now where? *(Pause.)* So I came here. To Tam.

GIGI. (*Holding her closer:*) But you really don't want her back, anymore?

JJ. No, I really don't. (*Pause.*) You stopped rubbing my belly.

GIGI. (*Resuming the rubbing:*) Oh sorry. (*Pause.*) Does it feel any better?

JJ. (*Tears coming to her eyes, she smiles.*) A little bit. Yeah. It really does.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 8 **Lineation**

(*JERRY driving in his car. RAMON sits in the passenger seat, quietly staring out the window.*)

JERRY. Hey birthday boy, you excited?

RAMON. Yeah.

JERRY. You don't seem too excited.

RAMON. I am.

JERRY. Did you have a good week in school?

RAMON. Yes.

JERRY. We're gonna have fun this weekend. (*Pause.*) Sorry I was late picking you up.

RAMON. It's okay. Mom said she didn't think you were coming.

JERRY. Your mom was wrong. I came.

(*Pause.*)

RAMON. Yeah. (*Pause.*) Do you miss her? Living with her?

JERRY. Sometimes.

RAMON. She said it's the anniversary. Of your divorce.

JERRY. Yeah. It is. Five years. She loves reminding me how much I screwed things up with her.

RAMON. You did?

JERRY. Yeah. I did. (*Looking at RAMON:*) But after it was over, it felt okay. It was like we were both gonna start over. I was gonna change myself.

RAMON. Did you?

JERRY. I don't know.

(*Pause.*)

RAMON. Where's Tam?

JERRY. She's at the diner.

RAMON. Is that where we're going?

JERRY. No. I figured we'd go hang out at my place for a while. Watch some TV.

RAMON. Okay. Tam can come too.

JERRY. She's busy.

RAMON. (*Looking at JERRY:*) You guys are fighting?

JERRY. (*Smiling:*) Good guess.

RAMON. (*Looking back out the window:*) Because of GiGi.

JERRY. Yeah. You think I'm wrong?

RAMON. I don't know.

JERRY. I should have a choice about what kinds of people influence my kid.

RAMON. Me.

JERRY. Yeah, you. I shouldn't have to lose my beliefs because other people disagree with them. I mean, he can wear all the make-up and dresses and shit he wants, I really don't care. But if it starts to affect my business and my kid...

RAMON. Me.

JERRY. Yes, you. (*Looking at RAMON:*) You're the reason. I don't want you to just follow what a group of other people think is right. You might as well be dead without your own individual beliefs.

RAMON. Yeah.

JERRY. You might as well be dead. I want you to make up your own mind. Use your own values. I want you to learn how to do that.

RAMON. I will. (*Pauses, looks at JERRY:*) Okay?

JERRY. Yeah.

(*Pause.*)

RAMON. Tam's really mad?

JERRY. Yeah she is. This just really set her off. Things were gonna be different with her, y'know? I was gonna be flexible, learn things. It was gonna be a new start. Another one. (*Pause.*) Your dad makes a lot of new starts, huh?

RAMON. (*Shaking his head "Yes":*) Yeah.

JERRY. I make a lot of new starts.

(*Pause.*)

RAMON. Mom gave my friends the directions to the diner. Like you told her to.

JERRY. Good. You sure you don't mind having your party at the diner?

RAMON. No, I don't mind.

JERRY. It's just that your mom's place has so many stairs, Tam would have trouble.

RAMON. I know. It's okay. But, you think everyone'll be able to find their way there okay?

JERRY. Sure. It's easy, right off the highway, right by the exit.

RAMON. Yeah. It's just that, if they get lost, they might not show up. Maybe no one'll show up.

JERRY. Of course they're gonna show up. You're not gonna be alone on your birthday, for Christ's sake.

RAMON. I know.

(Long pause.)

JERRY. You're not gonna be alone.

(Blackout.)

Scene 9

Factories; Quiet and Unkept

(The Jewelry Factory, late at night. It is closed and dark. TAM crawls across the dusty floor.)

GIGI. *(Calling from offstage.)* The words are wrong. They go.

(GIGI enters, not wearing drag.)

They just go. They leave me. I think of something to say, something that'll really make her feel better. Something inspirational. And then the words just go.

TAM. Inspirational words ain't gonna make her feel better. That's not what she needs. *(Pause.)* She's really sick.

GIGI. Yes. She is. *(Pause.)* You care?

TAM. Of course I care. I'm not a monster.

GIGI. You sure as hell acted like one.

TAM. I know I did.

GIGI. *(Smiling.)* So she doesn't need inspirational words?

TAM. God no. I had this customer yesterday, he said that he thought I was inspirational. I mean, what can you say to that? *Thank you?*

GIGI. So did you tear him to pieces or what?

TAM. No. I was gonna, but then I stopped. I decided to just watch him.

GIGI. What did he do?

TAM. He just stared at the table while he talked to me. And then when he did look, he stayed focused on my head. It's okay to look at the head. Sometimes that's what I feel like I am. A head. A head that floats through the air. Unattached. It thinks, it talks, sometimes it smiles and occasionally, not very often mind you, it lands on the body. But you can't look at the body, cause it's rotting. There's worms. It's a corpse. And if you look at it, you'll become a corpse too. So you gotta stay focused. On the head.

GIGI. Why didn't you just tell him off?

TAM. I don't know. I should've at least talked to him about it, huh? But I just let him go on. Obeying the Laws of The Healthy. I left him feeling even more vital than he felt before he met me. By comparison. I should've at least talked to him about it. (*Pauses, smiles.*) You up for a party?

GIGI. Always.

TAM. This weekend. We're having a birthday party for Ramon. He's been asking for you.

GIGI. I thought I wasn't welcome there.

TAM. That's not true. You're welcome.

GIGI. Then I'll be there.

TAM. Good. (*Pause.*) Ramon's been asking about JJ too. He wants her to come.

GIGI. Do you want her to come?

TAM. Yes. I do.

GIGI. Does Jerry want her to come?

TAM. Well, I haven't exactly asked him yet.

GIGI. Gee, what do we think he'll say?

TAM. I don't care. It's Ramon's party. He can invite whoever he wants.

GIGI. Oooh. Rebellion! I like.

TAM. I'm leaving Jerry.

GIGI. Really?

TAM. Yeah. I'm gonna move back to New York.

GIGI. By yourself?

TAM. Maybe.

(Long pause.)

GIGI. Tammy, JJ is moving to California. With me. *(Pause.)* She's gonna live with David and me. We're gonna take care of her.

TAM. Oh. Okay. I just thought that maybe, she might...

GIGI. But that doesn't mean that, I mean, maybe she'll want to try things with you again. Move back to New York.

TAM. Maybe.

GIGI. You'll have to ask her.

TAM. Yeah. I will. *(Pauses, rubbing her shoulders:)* Kinda chilly in here.

GIGI. They turned off the heat after the last shift. I can turn it back on.

TAM. That's okay. It feels kinda nice.

GIGI. *(Jingling her keys:)* They should never have trusted me with the keys to this place.

TAM. Well you are a shift manager. They just never suspected you'd use the place for a late night powwow.

GIGI. It's spooky in here. With everything shut down.

TAM. It's not spooky. Just, unproductive. *(Pause.)* That's all.

(Blackout.)

Scene 10
Soft Inventions
(Come Woo Me)

(The Diner. It is decorated with a "Happy Birthday" banner and other party favors. TAM sets some place settings. RAMON sits by the window.)

RAMON. You look pretty.

TAM. Thank you honey. *(Pause.)* Are you excited?

RAMON. Yes, GiGi's coming?

TAM. Yes she is.

RAMON. And JJ?

TAM. I don't know. Maybe. *(Pause.)* She's been pretty sick lately.

RAMON. She has cancer.

TAM. Yes. She does. How did you know that?

RAMON. She told me. A while ago.

TAM. She told you before she told me?

RAMON. Yeah. In the cave. It was a secret.

TAM. *(Smiling at him:)* Well, you're a good secret keeper.

RAMON. I know I am.

(Pause.)

TAM. Hope your father's in a better mood by now.

RAMON. Does he know that GiGi and JJ are coming over?

TAM. Yes.

RAMON. *(Smiling:)* Was he mad?

TAM. Yes.

RAMON. You don't love him anymore.

TAM. No. I don't.

RAMON. *(Looking out the window:)* Where are you gonna live?

TAM. I have a friend in New York. I'm gonna stay with him. Till I can find my own place.

(Pauses, smiles at RAMON.)

It's not that far away. I'll be in to visit.

RAMON. Yeah.

(JERRY enters through the front door, carrying three boxes of pizza.)

TAM. You need help?

JERRY. I got it. Thank you.

RAMON. Pepperoni?

JERRY. Yeah. *(To TAM:)* What time are they coming?

TAM. Soon. *(Pause.)* You okay?

JERRY. I'm fine. *(Pause.)* Did you decide which day, you'll be moving?

TAM. Tuesday.

JERRY. Are you gonna need help moving your things?

TAM. Probably.

JERRY. We'll use my truck.

TAM. Thank you.

(Pause. GIGI is at the front door, in drag. JERRY goes into the back room. GIGI enters, holding presents. JJ is with her. JJ wears a baseball cap.)

GIGI. Hello my little deers!

TAM. Hey there.

RAMON. *(Smiling:)* Hi GiGi.

GIGI. *(Kissing him on the cheek:)* Hey birthday boy!

RAMON. Hi JJ.

JJ. *(Kissing him:)* Hey kid.

RAMON. I'm not a kid.

TAM. You guys are early. I'm still decorating.

GIGI. We're not gonna stay. We just wanted to drop of the presents and say hello.

TAM. You're not staying for the party?

GIGI. No, I thought it was better this way.

TAM. It's not a problem. We want you both to stay.

JJ. *(Looking at GIGI:)* Then we'll stay.

(Pause.)

GIGI. *(Smiling at RAMON, holding the presents high:)* Are you ready to open the booty?

RAMON. Yeah!

TAM. Hey hey, he can't open those yet!

GIGI. Oh why not?

TAM. The party hasn't even started yet!

GIGI. *(Sitting next to RAMON, near the window:)* So, these are the appetizers. Let's dig in, deer.

(RAMON starts opening his presents. JJ sits on the lunch counter near TAM.)

TAM. Hi.

JJ. Hi.

TAM. So, you feelin' okay?

JJ. Good days and bad days.

TAM. I'm...I just wanted you... I've been really scared for a while. And I'm just so sorry for what I said. And did. To you.

JJ. Okay.

TAM. I'm goin' back to New York.

JJ. Gi told me you were moving out of here.

TAM. It's hard around here. No way to get around unless you drive a car.

JJ. Yeah.

TAM. In New York I can take the bus. Get out more.

JJ. Like before.

TAM. Yeah. *(Pause.)* I want you to come with me. If you will. If you want to. We could try it. Like when you first came back. We'll start over.

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY. Sorry to interrupt.

(JERRY starts to hang streamers.)

TAM. *(To JJ:)* This is Jerry.

JJ. We've met.

(Pause.)

JERRY. I don't want any trouble on my son's birthday.

TAM. Then don't start any Jerry.

JJ. I'm not here to cause trouble.

JERRY. Okay. Neither am I.

(GIGI comes over and sits next to JJ.)

GIGI. (To JERRY:) You need some help with the streamers?

JERRY. Sure.

(They hang streamers together. RAMON examines his gifts: model airplanes. He begins to construct them.)

TAM. (To JJ:) So you feel okay on some days?

JJ. Yeah. The chemo only zaps me temporarily. "Low toxicity time" my doctor calls it. But when it does zap me...

GIGI. She gets fucked up.

JJ. To say to the least.

JERRY. Makes you sick to your stomach?

JJ. Yeah. Really bad.

JERRY. You got good doctors?

JJ. They seem okay.

JERRY. Good cause that's gonna make all the difference. And your attitude.

GIGI. Well she's got attitude.

JERRY. (Glancing at TAM, who is smiling at JJ:) You gotta fight it psychologically as much as anything else. (Pause.) Do you have health insurance?

(TAM rubs off spots from the forks and knives in the place settings.)

TAM. Dishwasher's not working very well lately Jerry.

JERRY. I'll check it.

JJ. I got insurance.

GIGI. She works with me at the jewelry factory.

JERRY. What, do they have you on an HMO program there?

GIGI. No. Not yet. They're switching over to one.

JERRY. That's good.

TAM. (*Looking up from the knives and forks:*) I don't know, I read an article the other day that talked about how doctors in HMOs get bonus money for keeping patients out of the system.

JERRY. It's to keep people from clogging up the system, so that people like JJ here, who really need help, can get it.

JJ. (*Softly:*) Oh great, I'm Exhibit "A" again.

TAM. (*Her eyes on JJ:*) But what ends up happening is that the doctor gets paid for *not* referring the patient for tests. Preventative tests. Mammograms. (*Looking away from JJ:*) And things.

JERRY. (*To JJ:*) My point is, to beat this, you have to have confidence in your own abilities. Your own strength. And it's hard to do that if you're depending on a government to solve your problems.

TAM. I thought you didn't want trouble.

JERRY. It's not trouble, it's my point of view.

TAM. (*Speaking to JERRY, smiling clumsily at JJ:*) So then it's impossible to have confidence in your own abilities if you're on government assistance?

GIGI. (*Whispering to JJ:*) Oh, look how cute! She's wooing you!

JJ. (*Staring at the floor:*) Yeah. Cute.

JERRY. Common sense would say so. It strips you of your worth, your value. It humiliates you.

GIGI. A battle royale! For your honor!

JJ. (*Still staring at the floor:*) Quiet GiGi.

TAM. (*Glaring at JERRY:*) It takes away your *dignity*, huh?

JERRY. Yes. It does.

JJ. Well, I'll find out soon enough. I'm going on Medicaid, when I get to California.

JERRY. You're moving to California?

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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