

Snapshot (1st ed. - 08.09.03)

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## Acknowledgements

*Snapshot* was commissioned by Actors Theatre of Louisville and premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in March 2002. It was directed by Russell Vandenbroucke with the following cast and production staff:

- A Quick Tour of the Monument* by Craig Wright  
GUIDE ..... Joey Belmaggio
- Monument* by Honour Kane  
OPERATOR ONE..... Jake Goodman  
OPERATOR TWO ..... Ellie Clark
- Scene at Mount Rushmore* by Quincy Long  
BOBBY ..... Christopher Illing  
DID ..... Alan Malone
- Tyler Poked Taylor* by Lee Blessing  
LOYAL..... Jake Goodman
- Rock Scissors Paper* by Deb Margolin  
GIRL ..... Melanie Rademaker
- Little Pezidents* by Michael Bigelow Dixon and Val Smith  
DAVE ..... Colin Sullivan  
KAREN ..... Elisa Morrison
- Defacing Patriotic Property* by Tanya Barfield  
MAN ..... Ryan Clardy
- Her First Screen Test* by Dan O'Brien  
GIRL ..... Lindsey White
- Thrift of the Magi* by Annie Weisman  
TREY ..... Anthony Luciano  
TINA ..... Kristi Funk
- Night Out* by Sunil Kuruvilla  
MAN ..... Donovan Sherman  
WOMAN ..... Ellie Clark
- Here and Now* by Chay Yew  
MAN ..... Matt Bridges

*The Great Father* by Victor Lodato

MAN ..... Tom Wooldridge

WOMAN ..... Camilla Busnovetsky

*American Klepto* by Allison Moore

WOMAN ..... Colette Beauvais

*Becoming American* by Lynn Nottage

INSTRUCTOR..... Barbara Lanciers

*History Lesson* by David Lindsay-Abaire

MAGGIE..... Stacy Mayer

*Bomb Squad* by Craig Wright

MAN ..... Dave Secor

RANGER ..... Camilla Busnovetsky

*On Lincoln's Head* by Julie Jensen

BABE..... Amy Gillory

ANNETTE..... Kate Umstatter

Scenic Designer..... Paul Owen

Costume Designer..... John White

Lighting Designer..... Tony Penna

Sound Designer ..... Colbert Davis

Properties Designer..... Doc Manning

Stage Manager ..... Sarah Hodges

Dramaturgs ..... Amy Wegener and

Tanya Palmer

## Developing *Snapshot*

If it's true, as a famous Chinese proverb purportedly claims, that "One picture is worth a thousand words," then why not unleash the enormous artistic potential of that maxim? A brave new Humana Festival experiment was designed to do just that, by using a single image to inspire the creation of multiple dramatic texts. Actors Theatre of Louisville asked seventeen talented playwrights to respond to a remarkable photograph, and the resulting work—a collection of scenes and monologues titled *Snapshot*—turned out to be as diverse as the group of writers we'd asked to lend their considerable imaginations to this project.

A photograph seemed to us to be an evocative starting-point for this challenge—a catalyst that would spark many different reactions to a central question. Photographs capture and document a single moment in time and space; they are snapshots of history, of a reality bounded by the photo's frame. But what, we wondered, lies outside, beyond, behind the photograph? And what stories, memories, or associations does an image of *place* inspire? In this multi-writer venture, many minds encountered and transformed *Mount Rushmore, South Dakota, 1969*, a compelling image of the monument by renowned photographer Lee Friedlander.

There are several reasons why this particular image initially captured our attention. For one thing, it contains the reflection of a famed American monument, and we wondered what monuments mean to us at this point in our history, to the generations that have inherited them. Because we were commissioning these pieces in the late fall of 2001—in the wake of terrible events that radically altered Americans' perspectives in a number of ways—the idea of thinking about American icons and monuments had particular resonance. What is striking about Friedlander's image, also, is that Mount Rushmore is not captured head-on, but is instead reflected in the glass of the visitors' center—so that what the tourists are looking at seems to be looming behind them, facing *us*. Beyond the rich thematic territories suggested by the photograph, there were also wonderful possibilities for dramatic collisions between characters, because the photo depicts a public space where people from many walks of life are constantly arriving and departing.

We shared these thoughts with the playwrights, and then encouraged them to work from their own associations and obsessions—so the scenes and monologues *could* be set at Mount Rushmore, but they didn't have to be. As you'll see, the playwrights have envisioned a thought-provoking array of different scenarios and characters—some existing in relation to the monument, others more metaphorical or inspired by some other facet of the image. The pieces ended up ranging from delightful comedy to utterly serious meditations on recent real-life tragedy, but in their marvelous diversity of approaches, the playwrights seemed to be picking up on some of the same frequencies. What was remarkable about the way in which the project came together was that there were shared thematic threads which, in the hands of each playwright, found very different expression. Some of these threads include ideas about immortality or the inability to change (suggested by the stone visages and the fixedness of the image itself), characters' personal connections with the presidents, and a meditation on the United States' problematic history and global identity that emerges from the play as a whole. The photograph proved to be a great springboard for the creation of a play—for to borrow Craig Wright's description of the monument in *Bomb Squad*, "It's a conceptual land mine, left here to do its thing, and every time people see it, ideas go off in their heads. Boom!"

*Snapshot*, the collection of dramatic perspectives that resulted from this exploration, was performed by the twenty-two members of Actors Theatre's 2001-2002 Apprentice Acting Company, though all or some of the pieces could be produced with a smaller cast. The order here was carefully determined for our production, and was found via many lively dramaturgical discussions—so part of the challenge was to shape the experience by building a progression that would help bring the event together as a whole. This is the third year running that Actors Theatre has created such an event, commissioning pieces specifically for our young company of actors to perform in the Humana Festival, and we think it's a practice very much in the spirit of the festival's celebration of playwrights and new work. With *Snapshot*, we were able to explore a new set of questions with seventeen amazing writers, approaching an ever-evolving experiment through a new lens.

—Amy Wegener

**SNAPSHOT**  
**a dramatic anthology by**

Tanya Barfield  
Lee Blessing  
Michael Bigelow Dixon  
Julie Jensen  
Honour Kane  
Sunil Kuruvilla  
David Lindsay-Abaire  
Victor Lodato  
Quincy Long  
Deb Margolin  
Allison Moore  
Lynn Nottage  
Dan O'Brien  
Val Smith  
Annie Weisman  
Craig Wright  
Chay Yew

# A QUICK TOUR OF THE MONUMENT

## by Craig Wright

*(A TOUR GUIDE, dressed as a park ranger, addresses the audience. Note: the same slightly perfunctory, slightly perplexed, vocal tone should be used throughout without variation.)*

**GUIDE.** Welcome. My name is Victor Collins. Now, sit back and relax while I give you a quick tour of the monument. But before I begin, let me remind those of you with pets, no pets are allowed near the monument, with the exception of service dogs. Thank you.

Four U.S. presidents, each remarkable in their own remarkable way, are depicted in the heart of the monument. George Washington, the first U.S. President and commander of the Revolutionary army. Thomas Jefferson, our third President, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and advocate of westward expansion! President Abraham Lincoln, our sixteenth President, whose leadership restored the Union and ended slavery on U.S. soil. And President Theodore Roosevelt, our twenty-sixth President, who promoted construction of the illustrious Panama Canal and ignited progressive causes such as conservation and business reform. Behind the busts of these four great men the monument extends infinitely in each of the four cardinal directions, and in three more, as well; an effort, no doubt, on the artist's part to communicate the scope of the ideals which inspired the monument's development. The so-called "Black Hills," which surround and envelop the mountain out of which the presidential portraits emerge, were formed over a period of billions of years at a cost of life which undoubtedly rivals the one million dollar price tag conventionally associated with the presidential portraits themselves. Below the presidential visages, the monument consists of thousands of miles of rock, magma, and mystery, and above, a matchless construction of vapor arises, upward and upward into starry depths, as unfathomable in their own way as the watery seas which mark the outer edges of the monument's innermost core. What is this monument, and what does it exist to commemorate? Questions like these have dogged humankind since the dawn of recorded time. And what is the meaning of the sparkling circuit of words that rims the ragged edges of the

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# MONUMENT

by Honour Kane

*(Setting: The dispatch room, Office of Emergency Management, New York City.)*

*(Characters: Two telephone operators.)*

*(Time: 08:47:23.)*

*(What do you think makes the loudest explosion? A car backfiring? A volcano erupting? A gun? An atomic bomb?)*

*(An explosion louder than you can imagine is how we begin our story.)*

*(Two OEM dispatch operators sit at computer terminals. They wear headsets that connect them to New York's emergency telephone line, 911. )*

*(It is their job to log incoming calls into their computerized system and verbally relay the information to emergency personnel dispatchers. They type very quickly.)*

**OPERATOR ONE.** Building explosion.

**OPERATOR TWO.** Explosion on top of World Trade.

**OPERATOR ONE.** Plane into top of building?

*(Pause. They look at each other.)*

*(The calls begin again.)*

**OPERATOR ONE.** From floor 47, anonymous female caller states building shaken and smells gas.

**OPERATOR TWO.** Male caller states he is on the 87th floor. States four persons with him. States there is fire.

**OPERATOR ONE.** People screaming in background...states cannot breathe...possible smoke coming through door...floor...103... Call disconnected.

**OPERATOR TWO.** Male caller Caggiano. People trapped on the 104th floor. Check room. 35–40 people.

**OPERATOR ONE.** Female caller states her son and another male is trapped in room 8617.

**OPERATOR TWO.** Female caller states people are trapped on top of building. States need someone top of location.

**OPERATOR ONE.** Male caller wants to know how to get out of building.

**OPERATOR TWO.** Male caller states trapped on floor 22. Hole in hallway. Smoke coming in. Unable to breathe. Male caller states will break window.

*(Our second operator receives a call from a New York City Police Department rescue helicopter.)*

**OPERATOR TWO.** Go ahead Air Sea 14...  
...people falling out of building...

*(Pause. They look at each other.)*

Air Sea 14 unable to land on roof.

*(Pause.)*

*(The calls begin again.)*

**OPERATOR ONE.** Second plane hit the building... Unknown extent of injury. Male caller states 2 World Trade Center, people are jumping out of a large hole. Possible no one is catching them.

**OPERATOR TWO.** On floor 104, male caller states his wife is on the 91st floor. States stairs are all blocked. States worried about his wife.

**OPERATOR ONE.** Female caller states possible female in wheelchair on 86th floor alone.

*(The following lines accelerate, crescendo, and overlap, as the operators grow more panicked.)*

**OPERATOR TWO.** Male caller states on 106th floor. About 100 people in room. Need directions on how to stay alive.

**OPERATOR ONE.** Several jumpers from the window at 1 World Trade Center.

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# SCENE AT MOUNT RUSHMORE

## by Quincy Long

*Cast:* BOBBY  
DID, Bobby's older brother

*Location:* Mount Rushmore

*(BOBBY and his brother DID gaze upwards at Mount Rushmore.)*

**BOBBY.** That sure looks like her, don't it, Did?

**DID.** Looks like who, Bobby?

**BOBBY.** Like Momma.

**DID.** What?

**BOBBY.** Second from the left there. Looks like Momma with her hair down.

**DID.** Them is men, Bobby.

**BOBBY.** Who?

**DID.** All of them up there. They's Presidents. And Presidents is men. So far anyways.

**BOBBY.** Sure look like Momma to me.

**DID.** I ain't paying you no attention, Bobby. I am here to see my Presidents in stone; to contemplate my country how it used to be.

**BOBBY.** Maybe Momma was a man.

**DID.** I'm a pop you one you keep this up.

**BOBBY.** Oh, hey now.

**DID.** You ain't changed a bit, Bobby. Always making fun. Woman dead and in the ground and here you go making fun.

**BOBBY.** I ain't making fun, Did. I see her up there. I see her everywhere I look. Only reason you don't, you didn't grieve her when she died, which is why you can't see it.

**DID.** I grieved our momma.

**BOBBY.** Nah you didn't. You got up and read out of the Book. And you read good, real good. I'd be a liar I didn't own I was jealous the way you stuck out. But you did not grieve our momma, and I think you should, Did, because, my humble opinion, that's the trouble with Janney.

**DID.** Oh, now it's my wife now.

**BOBBY.** No, I admire your wife, Did. She's a good woman. A handsome woman. And a cook in the kitchen too. But how she come to get so fat? You ever ask yourself?

**DID.** That ain't fat, that's wholesome looking.

**BOBBY.** When the floor groans underneath of your weight, Did, that is fat. And Janney is fat because of she eats too much. I seen it. And she eats too much because of how you run her down. I hear it. And you run her down because you ain't grieved your momma. I know it.

**DID.** Oh boy oh boy oh boy. You is and always was the pure momma's boy wasn't you?

**BOBBY.** You can't hurt me with that.

**DID.** Always the little helper at the grocery. Picking up the basket. Toting it to the house. Wiping down the milk. Momma's regular little chore girl.

**BOBBY.** Can't nobody hurt me no more with that old slam. I come to peace with who I am. I traced it and faced it, brother.

**DID.** Well, goody for you.

**BOBBY.** Remember the time you and Daddy was back of the barn with that axle to lift, and I come to help you, and you shooed me out of there?

**DID.** Hell, I don't know.

**BOBBY.** Groaning and sweating in your undershirts. I remember it like tomorrow.

**DID.** Yesterday, Bobby.

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# TYLER POKED TAYLOR

by Lee Blessing

*(LOYAL, a young man about eighteen, stares up from the observation deck at Mount Rushmore. He's alone, muttering quietly, swiftly to himself—a kind of mantra.)*

**LOYAL.** Tyler poked Taylor Fillmore pierced Buchanan Tyler poked Taylor Fillmore pierced Buchanan—

*(With sudden aggressiveness to someone on his right, unseen:)*

What are you looking at? Back off. *Now.* There's plenty of room out here.

*(Watching as the unseen person retreats, returning to his mantra:)*

Tyler poked Taylor Fillmore pierced Buchanan Tyler poked Taylor—

*(Suddenly to someone unseen on his left:)*

Mom, can I have a little privacy? You and Dad just...find somewhere else, ok?

*(Watching them move off, returning to his mantra:)*

Fillmore pierced Buchanan Tyler poked Taylor Fillmore pierced—

*(The mantra is transferred to house speakers and continues, very soft. As LOYAL speaks live, it's as though we now hear his thoughts under the chanting.)*

God, I wish I didn't live in Rapid City. Dad makes us come up here every year. "Someday you'll be President, Loyal." That's what Dad says, every damn year. "You'll be one of them. You'll be up on that mountain."

*(With a furtive look at his parents, then staring up again:)*

Washington was first. First in war, first in peace and first in my bedroom late at night. I dreamed of him deep in the woods, holding the dying General Braddock in his arms. He knew from that

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# ROCK SCISSORS PAPER

by Deb Margolin

*(A GIRL of 18 is sitting in a chair, facing an unseen therapist, whose back is to the audience. She speaks even the most revealing lines without a hint of self-consciousness.)*

**GIRL.** Whatever my mother's looking for is always *behind* her. I've noticed that. It never fucking fails. Whatever she can't find is always where her ass is. I'm upstairs, and she's screaming where the hell is *whatever it is*, and I'm just like, Mom, turn around! Just turn around, Mom! They say mothers have eyes in the back of their heads—well, yeah, right! My mom has trouble with the two in front! Once she was like, I smell fire, and she's looking around sniffing, and the garbage can was on fire right where her butt was but she just never turned around.

We took this family vacation recently to Rapid City, South Dakota, which even the name Rapid City is pretty funny, and we tried to act like a family, only we all just based it on shows on TV. Trouble was, we all used different shows. For my mom it was like, Bill Cosby show, where the wife is some dignified Doctor, for my dad it was *Home Improvement*, and for me it was like, *Roseanne*. So it was like three shows playing at once. Pretty bad. I wish my brother were still alive. We fought like dogs but when he died it was like when a kid gets off the seesaw real fast without telling you and you're the one who's up in the air on the other side. I hate that he died, I just hate it. He once gave me this dirty picture, he said he got it from Joey diFlorio, this tough kid at school. It was really small, this picture, it was like, black and white and all, and my brother said it was a real picture of people doing it that Joey took himself, even though it was printed on like newspaper or something. Anyhow, I still have that picture, and it's like my brother whispering in my ear, laughing.

So there we are in Rapid City and my parents want to see Mt. Rushmore, you know, that's that big rock or mountain or something with those men's heads carved into them. Movie stars, or whatnot. They had pictures of it all over the little dump we were staying in, and it just reminded me of those Siamese twins with one

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# LITTLE PEZIDENTS

by Michael Bigelow Dixon and Val Smith

*(Somewhere near South Dakota, in a very remote gas station, DAVE sits...stewing. KAREN enters carrying something.)*

**KAREN.** Hey, you'll never guess what I found at the place next door. *(DAVE glares.)* What? Here.

*(She drops a Pez dispenser, which features Abe Lincoln's head, on the table in front of DAVE, who glares.)*

**DAVE.** Gee thanks.

**KAREN.** It's a Pez dispenser. That's Abraham Lincoln's little dome. Isn't he cute? Tilt him back and have a Pez. You'll feel much better about everything.

**DAVE.** *(To Abe:)* What do you think, Abe? *(As Abe, à la Pez puppet:)* "Pez makes me want to go see a play."

**KAREN.** Ooooh, that's not good. *(As George Washington, with George Washington Pez dispenser:)* "But, as father of our country, I cannot tell a lie, I think Pez is great. Mmmmm. And look at you! You're looking very Abe-alicious today."

**DAVE.** *(As Abe:)* "Fuck off, George. And as I meant to say in my Gettysburg address, fuck off Karen."

*(KAREN holds George Washington Pez dispenser out in front of her.)*

**KAREN.** Talk to the Pezident.

*(DAVE glares.)*

**DAVE.** In case you haven't noticed, we got ourselves a little problem here. While you were out, I got the bill. That tow truck cost four hundred bucks, that was a hundred miles, each way, and the guy insisted on cash, so I'm completely broke, and on top of that I just called, I don't have collision insurance, 'cause I couldn't afford it, and now the car is totaled, which means I still owe money but I have to get a new one, and we definitely don't have the money for

that. But it's nice to know we've got enough money for Pez dispensers. They'll be a real comfort.

**KAREN.** It's a comfort...and a collectible.

**DAVE.** If we actually got to see Mount Rushmore, maybe.

**KAREN.** You'da been disappointed. It's smaller than you think. And you'd take a picture, everybody does. They line up and add their face to the row so, hey look, there are five famous people on the mountain. They think it's clever, but it's really pretty stupid when you get back home.

**DAVE.** You mean we came all this way, you wrecked the car, we nearly died, we're fuckin' in debt for life, and it wasn't even worth it? Whose idea was this roadtrip anyway? "Let's get out on the open road, see America..."

**KAREN.** Don't be a monumental asshole, Dave. Think about it, when did getting turned into stone become such a great thing?

**DAVE.** Ex-squeeze me?

**KAREN.** I mean, somebody looked at Medusa and turned into stone, right? All those snakes. Who was that? And who was it on TV... oh yeah, Carol Kane as Lot's wife in Sodom and Gomorrah... she turns around, wants one more look and blammo, she's a chunk of salt. Big chunk o' rock salt.

**DAVE.** *(As Abe:)* "Uh...George? Come in, George..."

**KAREN.** Then there's the ossified man in that old horror flick about freaks in a side show, at the circus, right, and he's all calcified and scaly and gross, and of course he loves the woman equestrian, but...

**DAVE.** What's your friggin' point?

**KAREN.** The ossified man and the female equestrian don't live happily ever after. *(As George:)* "Hey, I cannot tell a lie. I chopped down the cherry tree, but the people forgave me and elected me President." So how hard is it, Dave? I'm sorry I hit the deer. *(DAVE's glare softens, but only momentarily.)* At least we didn't get hurt.

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# DEFACING PATRIOTIC PROPERTY

by Tanya Barfield

*(A MAN, alone. He wears a suit and tie. He is somewhat disheveled due to lack of sleep; he is somewhat hyper too. At first, it may appear as if he is speaking to a psychiatrist.)*

**MAN.** You know, death, dying, decomposition, decay, *decidedly* not subjects I take lightly. I just want to tell you that. Let you know. Make that clear from the start. I mean, even this, even this act you and I are about to engage in is a relationship of sorts, right?

Doc, I was thinking...death, well, that's something that could benefit from a certain rehearsal process, even in the best of circumstances. Just as even the most lively conversation is only a replica of communication. But it's all a precursor to, well, you know, the big D. That little hang-nail, little nagging, little voice, little miniature rat scratching apart my thoughts: someday it's gonna happen. To you.

But for your part, it's not philosophical, right? You make a little cut, a tuck, an incision, vandalize eyes, ratify a new me.

*(The doctor doesn't understand.)*

You *are* a surgeon, aren't you?

*(The MAN becomes a little miffed by the doctor's ineptitude. He becomes a little defensive but tries to explain things as clearly as possible.)*

Look, I got the idea in South Dakota. Drove all the way to Beverly Hills. It took hours. Do you understand? Okay, maybe, I haven't been clear.

*(Suddenly serious.)*

I'd like to replace my face.

To look more...immortal. More stately. That's what you do, right? Anti-death, stave off time and uncertainty. But I'm a different case. I'd like to look more like the past.

*(The doctor clearly still doesn't understand. The MAN excitedly takes out a brochure.)*

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# HER FIRST SCREEN TEST

by Dan O'Brien

*Cast:* GIRL, a young woman.

*Setting:* Dressing room, the Depression.

*(A GIRL enters a dressing room, begins taking off her clothes.)*

**GIRL.** We don't have much time. I'm the next act on stage. I was the vixen librarian, and now I'll be something new.

You'll see.

Just for you, first.

And then for them out there.

Are you shooting me already?

Okay, here goes: *(She starts to undress.)*

Fuck!

—What?

Sorry, it's stuck!

I said, the God damned button—!

—stuck on a God damned—!

—See?

I've got this mouth on me. I'm sorry.

It's like a sewer, my father said...

...

Hmm?

Of course it's a silent film!

What other kind of film is there? I can say whatever I God damn please! *(Her button comes undone.)*

—Praise Jesus! *(Taking off her blouse.)*

I'm really a funny girl at heart.

A funny, religious girl.

A funny religious girl who happens to be burdened with a splendid body.

It's not easy being splendid: *(Taking off her skirt.)*

You've got more to lose that way.

And no one wants a funny girl to be pretty, anyway, it's an obstacle to ambition.

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# THRIFT OF THE MAGI

by Annie Weisman

*(TINA [mid-20s], in a snugly-fitting baseball cap, thumbing numbly through a rack of clothes at a thrift shop. TREY [mid-20s] thumbs through a rack, his back to her. At the same pace, they rhythmically, expertly, look at each t-shirt, then slide it to the back. They get to the end of their racks, then turn to new racks, this time facing each other. Looking, sliding. TINA stops, looks at a t-shirt, holds it up to TREY.)*

**TREY.** *(Considers it for a beat, then crisply, definitively.)* No.

*(She puts it back. They go back to looking, sliding. TINA stops, holds up another t-shirt, more confidently this time.)*

**TREY.** *(Dismisses it totally:)* Uh, no!

**TINA.** *(She turns it around, shows him the back, points to the logo.)*  
But—

**TREY.** Trust me. No.

*(She puts it back. They go back to looking, sliding. TINA stops, very tentatively holds up another shirt.)*

**TREY.** Yes! Oh my God, that's hilarious. Yes, yes.

**TINA.** *(Checking price:)* \$24.99 for a used t-shirt! Oh my God! Honey, these are so expensive, maybe we should just go to Goodwill. I don't even care that much about our outfits for the stupid party, maybe we can just—

**TREY.** It's tonight! We don't have time to dig through Goodwill! They charge more here, because they buy everything at a premium, they shop on eBay and they get important stuff, quality shit. This isn't THRIFT, it's VINTAGE, there's a big...Oh my God, this is genius! *(Holds up a windbreaker.)*

**TINA.** I don't get it.

**TREY.** What?

**TINA.** I'm sorry, but to me that just looks, GAP. Which isn't WRONG, it's just not, you know, particularly...

**TREY.** GAP? Have you totally...See this pocket? This was a thing, in the seventies! You could stuff the whole windbreaker into its own pocket and put it in your travel bag. How fucking seventies is that? It's so, Arab Oil Embargo! It's so, "Is this trip necessary?" It's so genius! It's Middle Americana on a wire coat hanger. It couldn't be better.

**TINA.** I think my dad still wears that...

**TREY.** I can't explain this stuff to you...I can't just EXPLAIN to you what it is I see in a piece, you have to just trust that I have the eye.

**TINA.** I trust you, I just think, I don't see why that's the be-all...I mean, my dad wears that, that very thing for real, and I don't really feel comfortable making fun of it, just because some vintage clothing store deems it valuable.

**TREY.** If you don't want to go to this party, you can say so.

**TINA.** Of course I want to go! I'm the one who...you said you didn't like Leo, you called him "scurrilous" and I'm the one who said I really thought it was important for both of us to be there.

**TREY.** I said it was a good idea for a party, though. I said I didn't like him, but I liked his idea! I think a retro-tourist Americana party is kind of brilliant and I think we should go and if we do we should fucking look great!

**TINA.** You said we are our ideas! You said if I kept liking Woody Allen then I was condoning his behavior!

**TREY.** You make the world's least logical leaps, you know that? The worst. If we go, I at least want to give a full effort to the idea.

**TINA.** Then maybe we shouldn't go at all! I mean if I don't have the EYE! Then maybe you don't want to be SEEN with me!

**TREY.** Jesus, Tina, can you keep it down, this isn't the Salvation Army, for christ's sake. Of course I want to be seen with you, who else would I want to be seen with?

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# NIGHT OUT

by Sunil Kuruvilla

*(Scene: 2 a.m. A small town in upstate New York. A MAN, 24, and a WOMAN, 28, search in the snow beside her house, looking for his keys. She uses a flashlight while he struggles in the dark, bending low so he can see the ground.)*

**WOMAN.** They're gone.

**MAN.** Don't say that.

**WOMAN.** There's too much snow.

*(They continue searching.)*

**WOMAN.** How many did you lose?

**MAN.** Thirty. I told you.

**WOMAN.** Why so many?

**MAN.** My school keys are on that ring.

**WOMAN.** It would leave a big mark.

**MAN.** I need your light.

**WOMAN.** Be nice.

*(The WOMAN comes close to share her flashlight.)*

**MAN.** Stay there.

*(The WOMAN goes back to her area and continues looking.)*

**WOMAN.** Stop moving around. We're not going to find your keys if you mess up the snow.

**MAN.** What time is it?

**WOMAN.** We still have a few hours.

**MAN.** More than that!

**WOMAN.** It's getting light out.

**MAN.** No it's not.

**WOMAN.** You want me to check the time?

**MAN.** What if he leaves work early?

**WOMAN.** He won't.

**MAN.** He could get sick and come home.

**WOMAN.** Don't say that.

**MAN.** Where are they?

**WOMAN.** My fingers are cold.

**MAN.** You didn't put them somewhere?

**WOMAN.** Why did you come outside?

**MAN.** To put my kleenex in the garbage.

**WOMAN.** You couldn't do it when you left?

**MAN.** I'm always afraid you'll forget and leave it under your bed. I hate having that smell in the room. You have Triple A?

**WOMAN.** No.

**MAN.** You're sure?

**WOMAN.** We don't.

**MAN.** Why not? Everyone does.

**WOMAN.** Do you?

**MAN.** You're sure you didn't hide them?

**WOMAN.** No I said.

*(MAN drops to his knees feeling the snow with his hands.)*

**MAN.** I have to get my car out of your driveway.

**WOMAN.** We can call a tow truck.

**MAN.** You know how expensive that is?

**WOMAN.** Don't worry about the money.

**MAN.** Where do I tow it? Three hours back to the Catskills? You have no idea.

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# HERE AND NOW

by Chay Yew

*(Middle-aged MAN and WOMAN at the base of Mount Rushmore. They stand apart, both looking into their binoculars ahead at the monument.)*

**MAN.**

Here  
we are again,  
after all these years,  
through sun,  
through rain,  
you standing near,  
your hand in mine,  
armed with supersized Cokes,  
double XL-sized Kmart matching shirts,  
two pairs of rented binoculars  
staring into our nation's past.

*(Man puts his binoculars down.)*

Here  
we are again,  
like days of old,  
us,  
young;  
us,  
alone;  
us,  
lying idle on sweet grass,  
your head touching mine,  
a clearing of birch,  
off the seven highway.

Us,  
after making love,  
drowning in the sky above,  
filling our minds  
with cumulous possibilities

and dreams infinite,  
when we felt  
infinite.

Did I ever tell you  
my dreams,  
dreams bursting with grandeur,  
of flying high,  
racing to ends of the earth?

Dreams  
of being an explorer of countless stars countless worlds,  
an astronaut;  
an author  
breathing words of heroic fire;  
a builder  
of buildings to kiss the endless skies;  
a president  
uniting disunited peoples of these united states.

Did I ever tell you  
I still dream these dreams,  
even now,  
here,  
standing next to you,  
with a stony face so worn, so wan,  
with a body too heavy, too cumbersome,  
I can't believe I am me?

Me,  
white shirt and tie,  
bathed in a dull wash of office fluorescent,  
making ends meet,  
chasing Dream American.

Me,  
pushing papers pushing campaigns,  
pushing Americans to supersize  
to double XL,  
to Kmart,  
to buy Dream American.

Me,  
white shirt and tie,  
at life's end,  
made obsolete  
by younger versions of me  
in white shirts and ties.

Me,  
made redundant  
by machines invented  
by younger versions of me,  
their faces brown yellow black,  
dreaming dreams of grandeur.

Did I ever tell you  
you were my second love  
second choice?

The first  
was Alice,  
the first,  
whom I always compared you to,  
the way her hair danced to slightest wind,  
you;  
the way the curve of her body pressed tight to dresses,  
yours;  
the way she baked peach cobbler,  
you.

You,  
my template Alice.

This Alice of my youth  
swam but once  
in the summer blue of my eyes.  
This hot Alice now cool  
swims in the circle of our friends,  
married to our best friend,  
lives a life of grandeur,  
she laughing I laughing you laughing,  
three lukewarm martinis in hand,  
our eyes never swimming.

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# THE GREAT FATHER

by Victor Lodato

*Cast:* WOMAN: Nervous, a nervous smile; late twenties.  
MAN: Precise; late twenties.

*(A MAN is staring out, into the sky. A WOMAN watches the MAN from a distance, then approaches him.)*

**WOMAN.** Excuse me?

**MAN.** *(Not turning to look at the WOMAN:)* Yes.

**WOMAN.** Hi, I was...I'm sorry to bother you, I just—saw you looking. Up there.

**MAN.** Looking—yes. Oh yes.

**WOMAN.** *(Looking out, into the sky:)* At the...

**MAN.** Yes.

**WOMAN.** *(Relieved:)* Thank god. I was worried maybe I was... *(She turns toward the MAN; short pause, then confidentially:)* I—see things sometimes.

**MAN.** Hard not to.

**WOMAN.** Why's that?

**MAN.** Unless you were blind.

**WOMAN.** *(A small laugh.)* No no no—when I said I *see* things, I meant...

**MAN.** Oh.

**WOMAN.** Things that—aren't there. *(Looking out again:)* Out of the blue, you know. Out of nowhere. *(Short pause.)* Disconcerting.

**MAN.** Would be.

*(Beat. The WOMAN takes a pack of gum from her pocket.)*

**WOMAN.** Piece of gum?

**MAN.** No thank you.

**WOMAN.** *(Unwrapping, then putting a piece of gum in her mouth:)* I find it very soothing to chew gum, I don't know why that is. I think it has something to do with the... *(Chews a bit loudly, demonstrating:)* With the rhythm.

*(The MAN turns to look at the WOMAN for the first time.)*

**MAN.** Do I know you?

**WOMAN.** *(A few chews.)* Spearmint. No, I—I don't think so. *(Holding out gum:)* Please, have a stick.

*(The MAN takes a piece.)*

**MAN.** You're very...what's the word?

**WOMAN.** Annoying?

**MAN.** *Attractive.*

**WOMAN.** *(Laughs.)* Oh. No.

**MAN.** No?

**WOMAN.** People often say that but it's not...I'm not...

**MAN.** You're not attractive?

**WOMAN.** Common mistake.

*(He stares at her; she smiles.)*

**WOMAN.** The whole thing's rather complicated.

**MAN.** Yes, well...I think I'll save this for later.

*(He puts the piece of gum in his pocket, and turns to look at the sky again.)*

*(The WOMAN looks out, in the same direction.)*

**WOMAN.** My father used to say I was pretty. But...he's dead now. And he was a drunk.

**MAN.** I didn't mean to offend you.

**WOMAN.** Not at all.

---

*(Beat. She chews loudly. He looks at her. She smiles nervously. He turns away. Both are looking out, into the sky.)*

**MAN.** *(Turning toward the WOMAN:)* What kind of medication are you on?

**WOMAN.** Excuse me?

**MAN.** Don't be shy. What?

**WOMAN.** *(Pause; takes the gum out of mouth.)* Avatar. You?

**MAN.** Primordial.

**WOMAN.** *(Wrapping the gum:)* Oh, they had me on that for a while. Made me feel like I was living under a wet blanket.

**MAN.** Avatar's no joy ride. Nasty side effects.

**WOMAN.** I've developed a twitch. Around the lips.

*(Beat. The WOMAN puts the gum in her pocket.)*

**MAN.** I don't remember ever seeing you before. Been here long?

**WOMAN.** A few months now.

**MAN.** Really. What ward?

**WOMAN.** Nineteen.

**MAN.** East wing?

**WOMAN.** *(Nodding:)* I used to be in the west wing—but I'm...*improving*, as they say. Now I'm an east wing girl. *(Short pause.)* Why are you looking at me like that?

**MAN.** You have a...nice-shaped head.

**WOMAN.** No—now what did I say? Because that's going to lead us right back to attractive—and we don't want to go there.

**MAN.** Sorry, it's just—

**WOMAN.** Listen, what I would really like is—I would really appreciate it if you would tell me—exactly what you see. Up there. Because that's what I need to know.

*(The MAN looks up.)*

**WOMAN.** You do still see it?

**MAN.** Yes.

**WOMAN.** Good. Tell me what you see.

**MAN.** Okay. I see clouds.

**WOMAN.** *(A sudden desperation:)* Clouds—*no*. Is that what you were looking at, oh my god—*clouds?*

**MAN.** Wait, wait—calm down—clouds...and then behind the clouds—

**WOMAN.** Yes, behind the clouds, that's what I'm talking about. That's always the issue—*behind, what's behind, what's underneath*. Go on. Behind the clouds...

**MAN.** It almost looks like...

**WOMAN.** What?

**MAN.** Faces.

**WOMAN.** Yes. Oh, thank god. Faces, right? How many?

**MAN.** Four.

**WOMAN.** Huge, right?

**MAN.** And white.

**WOMAN.** Like tombstones.

**MAN.** Yes.

**WOMAN.** Awful.

**MAN.** Quite.

*(Beat.)*

**WOMAN.** One looks just like my father. The bastard.

**MAN.** Really? One looks like my father.

*(They turn and look at each other, then back to the sky.)*

**WOMAN.** What else?

**MAN.** Blood.

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# AMERICAN KLEPTO

by Allison Moore

*(A young woman and a piece of petrified wood.)*

**WOMAN.** I don't know how it got here. It's just a piece of wood. Okay, petrified wood. Don't do that. This entire trip you've been judging me, 700 miles and now you judge my moisturizer, my hiking boots, my cell phone—which, I might add, you were very happy to use yesterday when the tire blew and you remembered you never replaced the freakin spare. Who I am is suddenly wrong out here. I mean, why does it matter if I want to buy some moccasins or a leather hairclip? Why does it matter if the stitching isn't authentic to the tribes of the area? Why does it matter if I'll never wear them when we get home? Did it ever occur to you that I am trying to connect? That this might be a profound expression of engagement? But everything I touch, you say Don't touch that! Don't buy that! If you buy that hairclip, you're supporting the rape of a culture all so that white middle class tourists can go home with a souvenir—and yes I know “white” is a construct!

I am a good person. I am not an exploiter, or a thief, or. I mean, where did you get that pen? Do you know? When was the last time you actually went out and bought a shitty disposable pen? But here it is, on your dashboard. How did it get there? I'll tell you: *You took it.* Junk drawers across the country are filled with pens like this because we take them. That's what Americans do, we take pens, from everywhere. From grocery stores, from gas stations, from work. If you took a computer that would be theft, but no one cares if you take a pen, or some paperclips, they order in bulk. But technically, you're stealing. You are a thief. You have stolen pens. That's what we're talking about here.

I know there was a sign, I know it's Federally protected land, but. When I was a kid I found a ton of fossils at Canyon Lake—I'm talking close to a hundred of them, little snails and water plants. No one ever said You're decontextualizing our geological history. They said Wow! These are heavy! And let me tell you something, if I hadn't found them, someone else would have. They'd probably be selling them right now in a gift shop somewhere.

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# BECOMING AMERICAN

by Lynn Nottage

*Place:* Accra, Ghana.

*(Dial tone.)*

**TAPE-RECORDED VOICE.** *(Heavy Texas drawl:) Hello, this is John Barksdale. I'm down here on vacation in the Florida Keys, and listen buddy I'm in a bit of a spot. It seems the wife left her bag with my wallet and our personal items on the beach unattended. We took a dip and some joker wandered off with our things. It's all gone, damn it, credit cards, cash, everything. Gone. We've been saving for this trip for two years, all I know is it's ruined.*

*(The INSTRUCTOR clicks the off button. The tape stops.)*

**INSTRUCTOR.** Why am I stopping? Anyone?

*(A moment.)*

The call comes in. It's John Barksdale from San Antonio. He needs your help people. You are his angel for the two-three minutes that it takes to guide him successfully through his problem. You are the 1-800 answer to his crisis. The operator.

*(Clicks the on button. Tape resumes.)*

**TAPE-RECORDED VOICE.** *(Heavy Texas drawl:) I'm in trouble here, ain't a thing I can do unless I sort this little thing out.*

*(Clicks button. Tape stops.)*

**INSTRUCTOR.** What can I do? You ask. I know that you're a thousand miles away in this office space in downtown Accra...Ghana. But it doesn't matter to John Barksdale From San Antonio, Texas, not while he's standing on one leg leaning against a pay phone wondering what he's going to do about his vacation. He doesn't need to know, nor does he want to know that you live across the Atlantic Ocean in some small city with a two-syllable name. Or that your name is Kwame, Kakuna, Hamid or Saidiya. No, he wants Brad or Tom, Julia or Meg Anderson from Des Moines.

*(Checks notes.)*

He wants you to be American. That's what it comes down to. It's why I've been brought here, today, to give you folks a few pointers on becoming American for the two to three minutes that it takes to solve John's problem. Don't get nervous, don't over think, over thinking is uniquely un-American. You know everything you need to know already. That's right.

*(“America the Beautiful” plays.)*

So John Barksdale from San Antonio calls, a touch of panic in his rum-tinged voice, his desperation palpable, his hard work, a knot in his throat, anger rising. He's shouting!

*(Clicks button. Tape recording resumes.)*

**TAPE-RECORDED VOICE.** *(Texas drawl:) I've lost my credit card, buddy, I'm on vacation in the Florida Keys, listen I'm in a bit of spot!*

*(Tape stops. A moment.)*

**INSTRUCTOR.** Your moment has arrived. You speak.

“Hi John, I'm Meg don't worry we're going to take care of everything for you. Just a moment, while I check your account, John.” Say his name. Americans like to hear their names spoken aloud, they like recognition, they respond to familiarity. “John, could I have your credit card numbers please.” He'll give them to you, he'll give you anything as long as he believes you're sitting behind a desk at the corporate headquarters in Dallas. He'll give anything to Brad or Tom, Julia or Meg. Which brings us to your first step, selecting a name. Make it simple. I like movie stars, they've already put time and thought into their names. But don't be alarmed if John wants to know a little more about you, to put himself at ease, to feel connected to you, his savior.

**TAPE-RECORDED VOICE.** *(Texas drawl:) Where are you from Meg? I detect a little accent.*

*(Click. Tape stops.)*

**INSTRUCTOR.** Don't panic. Do you say I'm from Accra, Ghana to John from San Antonio? John who thinks Africa is a country and India a small reservation in New Mexico that he drove through

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# HISTORY LESSON

by David Lindsay-Abaire

*(Lights up on MAGGIE, a park ranger. She's in the middle of giving a speech to a bunch of tourists [the audience].)*

**MAGGIE.** And what's interesting about George Washington, and most people don't know this about him, he wasn't just the father of our country, he was also the father of the first septuplets born in the United States. Martha gave birth to seven children on October 5th, 1762. Five of the children were very badly behaved, so they were sold into white-slavery, while the two remaining, Maxwell and Hortense, drowned tragically in the Potomac while trying to retrieve their father's wooden teeth, which had fallen out of his mouth while he was beating a seagull with a canoe paddle.

*(Beat.)*

For those of you just joining the group, my name is Maggie, and today's my last day here at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. There have been some cutbacks at the National Park Service, so I've been let go, which in my opinion is a huge loss to tourists like yourselves who are hungry for history, because I happen to be what we in the industry call "A font of knowledge."

*(Back to the speech.)*

Now if you look to the right, you'll notice that the next head belongs to Thomas Jefferson, who, and this may come as a surprise to you, was actually born without skin from the neck down. In fact, he spent most of his childhood in and out of hospitals because of his susceptibility to disease, what with the exposed muscle and sinew and whatnot. But in 1772, his good friend Benjamin Franklin fashioned a crude epidermis out of sheep bladders and carpenter's glue, held together by pewter hooks that Paul Revere forged in his silver shop. Paul Revere, you may have heard, was a Smithy, which is one of my favorite words. He was also a eunuch, which was not very common in the 1700s, though there were a few. I believe Sam Adams was also a eunuch, and...Nathan Hale, who I've been told had

a wonderful singing voice. So, that's probably something you haven't heard on any other tour today. It's interesting, isn't it?

*(Suddenly.)*

Oh, by the way, if any of you happen to have a question, feel free to raise your hand and stick it up your ass. That's just the kind of mood I'm in. I see I'm losing some of you. Well that's alright. It's more intimate this way, isn't it? And I happen to be very comfortable with intimacy, unlike a certain Victor Collins, my direct supervisor here at the National Park Service, and my former lover. He's the man responsible for my layoff, as well as my monthly herpes outbreak.

*(Back to the speech.)*

Moving on, we have the esteemed Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, our twenty-sixth president, and a well-documented pederast. He spent much of his presidency traipsing through Cuba and Panama in search of little boys to induct into his Rough Rider Club, whether they liked it or not. Bully, indeed. He appeared briefly in a burlesque-house comedy titled "Tally-Ho, Kathleen!" He enjoyed playing chess, and long walks on the beach.

*(Off-topic.)*

Coincidentally, so does my Ex-Lover slash Boss, Victor Collins. Any complaints about today's tour can be directed to him. His office is located just past the gift shop, behind the glass doors. He'll be the fat fuck in the stupid hat and chinos. He's hard of hearing, so I encourage you to yell whenever speaking to him, and use as much profanity as possible. He's more responsive when berated and under pressure.

*(Back to the speech.)*

Next up, we have Abraham Lincoln, our first Jewish president, and the inventor of dirt. He was, of course, our tallest president, standing ten feet, two inches tall, he spoke fluent Mandarin and walked with a peg leg. A thrice-convicted arson, Abraham Lincoln grew up in an adobe hut and had X-ray vision. He was one of our greatest presidents and his wife was mentally unhinged. Speaking of mentally unhinged, let's pretend I'm Victor and you're me.

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# BOMB SQUAD

## by Craig Wright

*(The scene is a lookout balcony, facing Mount Rushmore. A serious MAN enters with an official-looking case. He opens it, and then begins to undress, placing his clothes carefully into the case. As the MAN is about half-undressed, a RANGER enters. Note: this could be the same Park Ranger from “A Quick Tour of the Monument.”)*

**RANGER.** Sir, can I...may I ask what you're doing?

**MAN.** I'm with the Bomb Squad.

**RANGER.** But I wasn't notified—

**MAN.** I was called in to defuse a bomb, little lady, and it's a very delicate situation, so please step away.

**RANGER.** But my superiors—

**MAN.** Your superiors are the ones who called.

*(The MAN is still undressing.)*

Now, please step away, unless you want to be...

*(He removes his pants, revealing his colorful, Speedo-style briefs.)*

...changed forever.

**RANGER.** *(Stepping back:)* So...are you saying...there's a bomb in the monument?

**MAN.** No. I'm saying the bomb *is* the monument.

*(The MAN pulls a small vial of fragrant oil from the case and begins anointing himself with it.)*

**RANGER.** *(Nervously suspicious:)* That doesn't make any sense. This is... You're undressed.

**MAN.** I'm not as undressed as I could be, little lady. I have a veritable arsenal of nudity at my disposal; and if you continue to be obstructive, I just might use it; and then what will you have on your hands? Hm?

**RANGER.** I'm...sorry...

**MAN.** It wouldn't be pretty, that's for sure.

*(The MAN hands her a boombox from the case.)*

**MAN.** Here, hold this.

**RANGER.** I'm going to go get my manager.

**MAN.** *(Waving a finger hypnotically in the air:)* No, you're not. You know why? Because you want to be a hero. And this, little lady, is the only chance you'll ever get. Ok?

**RANGER.** *(Cowed and convinced:)* Ok.

*(The MAN starts dancing, without music, in a style that's half-stripper, half-tribal ceremony. As he dances, he scatters flower petals around himself in a circle.)*

**MAN.** This monument...this so-called monument was placed here years ago by who? Was he an artist? A criminal? Does it matter? It's a conceptual land mine, left here to do its thing, and every time people see it, ideas go off in their heads. Boom! Ideas like, preserving one specific way of life at any cost is more important than the global flow of values and lifestyles over the nearly infinite span of time? Boom! Ideas like, men? Boom! Ideas like, human progress equals divine progress and human ideals are God's ideals, excuse me? Boom! Now it's all very well and good—get ready to start the music—it's all very well and good to carve these things as little memorials because there isn't anything that happens that doesn't have a little glimmer of divinity about it, you know, it's nice to keep track of where the snake was last seen before it shed its skin, you know? But when they become so powerful that all people see when they look at them is their own poisonous vanity staring back, then that is an explosive situation, even though it might take hundreds of years for the slow-motion explosion to happen, it's massive and it does serious damage to the fabric of consciousness and something, you know, something has got to be done! Start the music!

*(The RANGER starts the CD. The MAN sings.)*

**MAN.**

ALL THE LITTLE FLOWERS ON ALL THE LITTLE BRANCHES

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# ON LINCOLN'S HEAD

by Julie Jensen

*(A young woman, BABE, an adolescent, tough, irreverent, is standing on the top of Lincoln's head, throwing fire crackers off. It is night.*

*Boom!*

*Boom!)*

**BABE.** All's I gotta say is—I HATE YOU!

*(Boom!)*

**AND I'M GONNA HATE YOU FOR AS LONG AS I LIVE!**

*(Boom!)*

*(ANNETTE appears above her. They can't see one another, really. ANNETTE is a park ranger in her mid-twenties, precise, officious.)*

**ANNETTE.** Excuse me.

**BABE.** *(She freezes.)* Yeah.

**ANNETTE.** We do not allow that kind of activity off the top of Lincoln's head.

**BABE.** What kinda "activity"?

**ANNETTE.** Standing. Or blowing fire crackers.

**BABE.** They're cherry bombs.

**ANNETTE.** Do not allow either one.

**BABE.** Why not?

**ANNETTE.** Deface the face.

**BABE.** I won't do it no more.

**ANNETTE.** Appreciate it.

**BABE.** I ain't got no more.

**ANNETTE.** That's good.

*(Pause. Boom!)*

**ANNETTE.** Listen, I can have you arrested. Is that what you want?

**BABE.** What I want is you to shut up. Just shut the hell up!

**ANNETTE.** Quiet. Good idea. You first.

*(Long, eerie pause.)*

**BABE.** We come up here one Fourth of July. Me and my old man. He was drunk on his ass. He swore to god he was gonna sit on Lincoln's head. And he did. I watched him do it.

**ANNETTE.** Then you laughed your foolish head off.

**BABE.** Yeah, I did.

**ANNETTE.** I thought it was you.

**BABE.** I mean, that was like him. He got something in his head, he did it.

**ANNETTE.** A real go-getter, you might say?

**BABE.** No. A real drunk.

*(Pause.)*

He had a thing for Abraham Lincoln. The reading-by-the-fire thing. The low-down-log-cabin thing.

**ANNETTE.** The penny-in-the-shoe thing?

**BABE.** Yeah. All that kinda thing. But I am very pissed at him now.

**ANNETTE.** You still need to get off his head.

**BABE.** I don't know how to do stuff without him.

**ANNETTE.** You'll figure it out.

**BABE.** Horse shit!

**ANNETTE.** Pardon...

**BABE.** He is the only one that knows what he knows. Like how tall a mile is straight up. Who knows stuff like that? No one!

*(She starts to cry, in spite of herself.)*

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