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Power

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing Workshop

by

Adam Falik

B.S. Emerson College, 1990

May, 2011

Power

a role play

by

Adam Falik

CAST

Power players

CONRAD STONE	Male, 46 years old.
FLOYD HAYGOOD	Male, 30 years old. White.
WENDY DICKINSON	Floyd's girlfriend. Female, 36 years. African-American.
ANNE ALBRIGHT	Female. 41 years old.
MILTON ALBRIGHT	Male. Anne's husband. 37 years old.

Secondary players

RILEY	Male, 40ish. A large man.
SEAN	Female, late 30s.
RABBI	Male, young 30s.

TIME

The persistent present.

SETTING

The homes and offices of the power players.

ACT 1, SCENE 1 – CONRAD’S OFFICE

The stage is nebulous, it’s perimeter dark, edges undefined. Lights in center find a woman, facing the audience, knelt before a man. The man is dressed entirely in black latex. His wrists are bound behind his back, there is a mask covering his entire head with eye slits and nose holes for him to breathe through, but without a mouth. The pants of his outfit are lowered beneath his knees. His front is angled away from the audience, disguising what occurs before him. His buttocks are partially blocked by a wooden chair, the kind perhaps found in a school or church. Beside the woman kneeled before him is a small table capable of holding only a few items. On it is an open case of piercing needles, a bottle of alcohol, some cotton balls, and a whip. The woman is also dressed in black latex, though her outfit is one of dominance, her neck and face exposed, wrists and arms unencumbered, her raven hair in a ponytail. Her name is ANNE. ANNE is piercing the man’s (CONRAD) genitals with long needles for their mutual pleasure.

ANNE

Fortunate, isn’t it?, to be done with pretensions. To have somewhere void of...*(Looks up.)*...falseness. *(Back down.)* To have this room, this hour where you’re not alone, Conrad. Anywhere else, at a party, in the midst of a board-meeting, making love to your wife. All those places, alone, but not here. *(Looks up.)* I’m here. You’ve got me here. *(Back down, then up.)* Enough? *(No response.)* Enough? *(He nods, grunts.)* More, then. *(Back down.)* Our whole life we don’t say what we want, not really. Don’t behave as we want. Restrain ourselves from smashing all the furniture, from tearing off that woman’s blouse. We: conduct ourselves. *(Touches him gently.)* Offering ourselves like a splay of fruit on a buffet table. Lined up neat. Presentable. *(Hurting him. He reacts.)* A laid-out slab for those who would have us. *(Pause.)* Enough? *(No response.)* Enough? *(Slight nod and grunt.)* More, then.

(From a case on the table she removes a long needle, runs its entirety though an alcohol soaked cotton ball. She pierces the skin of his nutsack, running its length through. CONRAD’s body trembles.)

But once in a while, more like once in a lifetime, we find this room. This place we caught whiff of once, long ago, and then lost. But we never forgot it. We followed it, catching scent when we took that job, when we said: I do. When we held our child’s hand that first time. But if was never quite *enough*, was it? In the end, it all turned out to be a cheat.

(She removes, cleans, puts away needles as she continues speaking, then dabs the area with alcohol, causing pain that he responds to.)

Until being cheated came to have its own rewards. You came to like that prick of disappointment, didn't you? The emptiness in the eyes of the one passing your toast across the breakfast table. Your next promotion. Another lay. What did it mean, Conrad? Any of it.

(She rises, approaches him tenderly, kisses the lips of his masked face.)

Kneel.

(He kneels. She slaps him hard across the face, knocking him over. With his hands handcuffed behind him, it's a struggle to reassume a kneeling position.)

Until suddenly, somehow, we're here. We have it. This room. This hour that shines like no hour ever has, doesn't it? This room that brings order to all the others.

(She touches his mask tenderly. He nods.)

It does for me, too. That's why we're finally, ultimately, unalone here. This room couldn't have been if you hadn't brought me to it. If you hadn't asked me to enter. If you hadn't put on that mask. If you hadn't commanded me to pick up this whip.

(Takes whip from table, cracks it.)

You found me, and showed yourself to me. You told me to pick up this knot of leather and I became a mother, a lover, your partner.

(She puts out her hand, he moves into it like an obedient dog. She pets him, nurturingly.)

It's good, this place. Here at the essence of things. It's good you showed me how to enter it. No one's ever wanted you like I want you here, I promise. You need me. *(He nods.)* You want me. *(He nods.)* I've drawn you from the wilderness. Like the first man you entered. Wet. Filthy from your schoolboy soccer jersey. Your wedding suit. Your businessman's tie. All the armor you tried to shield yourself with. They've clogged your every pore. You couldn't breath, couldn't cry, couldn't say your own name. Nothing could touch you. Not a song, not your wife. It was the same for me. But we've torn all that away. Flayed your skin and discovered your true body here, the shape of your true flesh. In it you can feel me.

(She offers her hand, he puts his face in it.)

Only in your true flesh can you be touched. Feel. Know.

ANNE raises the whip high, about to strike. A ding is heard, indicating that the session is over. She tosses the whip away indifferently, moves behind and uncuffs CONRAD, leaves him to get up on his own. As she moves towards a corner of the stage the lights rise, showing that they are surrounded by the fine furnishings of a corporate office. There is a screen in the corner, which ANNE steps behind to change, exchanging her dominatrix gear for a smart executive-style suit. CONRAD proceeds to change at his desk, openly exchanging his latex suit for the expensive shirt, slacks and tie attire, which is folded neatly over his desk chair. There are bruises about CONRAD's body, on his arms and chest. When he's stepped out of his submissive's outfit, before he has completed changing, he will fold up the outfit and put it away into a desk drawer, which he locks, returning key to pocket.

CONRAD

(After a long pause, during which they both are semi-changed back into business attire)
You're slipping. That mother comment. What was that all about? Do you really think there's something Oedipal going on here? A Brandeis course in third-wave feminism and you think you've got hold of the male psyche. Make no mistake, that was my prick in your hand, not my psyche.

ANNE

(From behind screen.) I went to Dartmouth.

CONRAD

Did you? Cunt. I went to Yale. *(Pause.)* Still, I'm impressed you acknowledge what these...sessions of ours have come to mean. To you, that is. We've never pretended what brought you here, I appreciate that, but you've never been so forthright. I think we can call it progress, yes? I think we can say things are evolving.

ANNE emerges from behind screen, buttoning the sleeves of her blouse, putting on her jacket, making adjustments while not acknowledging CONRAD.

I asked you something.

He steps towards her, still mostly undressed. His bruised nakedness is somewhat menacing.

ANNE

(Playing with sleeve button.) What?

CONRAD

(Exploding.) Know your place!

ANNE

(Facing him.) What was the question, sir?

CONRAD

Don't be coy.

ANNE

What is it you want, Conrad?

CONRAD

I want you to acknowledge that these sessions have come to mean something to you.

ANNE

What can they possibly mean besides my continued place in –

CONRAD

Your continued position in this corporation. The position I put you in, and which I can drop you from like –

ANNE

What do you want, Conrad?

CONRAD

(Pause.) I wonder if you admit it to yourself. *(Pause.)* Something's happened to you. *(Pause.)* You've gotten much better, for instance. You've really made a church of our little laboratory.

ANNE

Your office.

CONRAD

Were you very religious as a child? Or did your parents force God on you. *(Pause.)* Anne, you're behaving as if you weren't having any fun. *(Pause.)* Not that I care either way. I'm just curious. If you were honest – and I think you were – when you said, *It's the same for me...here, at the essence of things.* *(Half-pause.)* How is all this affecting you? How's your sex life these days?

ANNE

How's yours?

CONRAD

(Maybe in response, maybe to something else.) These sessions are good for me. It's a relief not just to surrender control, but to be able to put my trust in you. You've proved more than capable, both here and in your office work. You have no idea how long I've had you spotted. Long before that little indiscretion of yours made it possible to contract you for the position. That one and this one. Overall, I'm quite pleased.

ANNE

Is that what they call blackmail these days? A contracted position?

CONRAD

Does have its financial rewards, though, doesn't it? Your salary has made life...easier? Yes? Maybe even makes the taste of this room: tolerable. You've taken to it, your job. Same as you've taken to here.

ANNE

Don't think if you didn't have that over me –

CONRAD

How's your husband's job search going?

Pause while they stare at each other. CONRAD then goes to desk, gets his shirt, puts it on.

ANNE

Are we done?

CONRAD

We're done when I say. Don't think your place here is sustained by anything but my whim.

ANNE

And what does that do for you?

CONRAD

Makes me quite happy, actually. Puts the tickle in my pickle.

ANNE

That makes me sad.

CONRAD

I would hate for you to be sad, Anne.

ANNE

I'm not sure if I believe it, though. That having me does a thing for you.

CONRAD

(Imitating her during the session.) That's why we're finally, ultimately, unalone. Very poetic. Or was that part of your daily vernacular before we began this game of ours.

ANNE

Is that what this is?

CONRAD

With rules of engagement. The confines, the players, the game. Make no mistake.

ANNE

This is your office, not –

CONRAD

Your lying to yourself if you see any differentiation between the two. Don't lie to yourself.

ANNE

What do you want from me?

CONRAD

Your complete participation. To respect the rules, understand the stakes. Nothing else.

ANNE

I haven't – ?

CONRAD

(Hard.) You've been slipping! *(Softer.)* I have a particular kind of photographic memory, allows total recall of what's spoken to me.

ANNE

Might be a form of autism.

CONRAD

(Imitating.) *This hour that shines like no hour ever has, doesn't it?* *(Hard.)* You will not doubt here. This room is not about questions, but assurances. *(Imitating.)* *What did it mean, Conrad?* It's not for me to imagine. It's for you to give. *(Half-beat.)* The mother reference. That I had *asked* you to enter this room. That really is egregious. I did not request your presence, did I?

ANNE

(Soft.) No, you commanded it.

CONRAD

The mistress is still a schoolgirl. Does she need to be scolded to get things right?

ANNE

(Semi-exhausted.) What is it you want?

CONRAD

I have to be able to trust you.

ANNE

Why, is your prick really so precious?

CONRAD

Stupid bitch. Do you have any idea what we do here? The nature of our world? Why did I promote you? All you can think of is that envelope in my safe. Does it really matter anymore? It's the situation that matters.

ANNE

What are you talking about?

CONRAD

What do you do all day?

ANNE

My job.

CONRAD

The execution of which keeps certain machinery in motion. (*Half-beat.*) Keeps this company in motion. (*Half-beat.*) Keeps people employed.

Pause.

ANNE

What have you done?

CONRAD

(*Pleased.*) That's right.

ANNE

What have you done, Conrad?

CONRAD

What have YOU done? What are WE doing here? What do you think this is? Just a way to get me off?

ANNE

Isn't it?

CONRAD

Is that what it does for you?

ANNE

It does nothing for me. Less than nothing. It's my absolution. My penance.

CONRAD

In our own private little temple.

ANNE

You forced me into this.

CONRAD

Fuck you. You now make 175 thousand a year. Vice-president of a multinational. Walk away from it. What've I got on you? Without my coercion, charges probably wouldn't even be pressed. Just your dismissal. You must have considered that when I made you our proposal.

ANNE

I had no choice. I couldn't walk away. You knew that! My husband. (*Softer.*) My son.

CONRAD

How is the little tyke? Why don't you just let him die and buy yourself a new one. (*Pause.*) *Partners*, you called us.

ANNE

That was –

CONRAD

No, it was not just words. It's what you've made us by proving yourself so adept.

ANNE

You can't put it on me, whatever you've done.

CONRAD

My position in this corporation doesn't allow me to put anything on anyone. This office does not blame, it corrects.

ANNE

The office.

CONRAD

The person is of no consequence. Have you not fucking learned that yet? Only in this room – *at the essence of things* – only here... (*Hard.*) Where you will not slip up! Where you will not portend that what I need is a mother! Where you will not question! Where you will administer to my trust and provide the relief that allows me to perform the daily requirements of my position!

ANNE

What've you done?

CONRAD

(*Beat.*) You'll get the memo in the morning. The Mosley Company in Indiana.

ANNE

It's to fall under my –

CONRAD

The deadline passed before the meeting for signatures could be met. Foreclosure was...unavoidable. The bank'll claim its lien, production stopped, the company closed.

ANNE

How did that –

CONRAD

The detail of dates escaped me.

ANNE

Details don't –

CONRAD

I've been distracted. As were you when you canceled our last session. And if you tell me it was your son I'll –

ANNE

All those jobs.

CONRAD

Yes. 793 of them to be exact. And not just the jobs. Have you been to Rutsberg, Indiana? Dreary town. Anyone who didn't work for Mosley directly still relied on its sustenance.

ANNE

How're they – ?

CONRAD

That's right. How will they? How will your husband when I use all the power of this office to strip you of...And make no mistake! How will your son, whose health really does benefit from our health plan, does it not? Yes? Does make all the difference, doesn't it?

ANNE

You can't put this on me.

CONRAD

Your *partner*? Bolster your husband, the death-watching nanny with such patronizing, sentimental –

ANNE

I left my husband.

Pause.

CONRAD

Liar.

ANNE

I don't lie. I left my husband. And my son. For weeks...I think. Left them without a cent.

Long pause.

CONRAD

Fuck you.

ANNE

Fuck me? No. Too late for that. Much too late. Haven't you wondered how it is I've taken so well to my new... position? All my new roles? Who do you think I was before you came along? Just some accountant with a sickly son who got caught shuffling funds? You think I

didn't know the risks? That you were watching? I could feel your eyes on me, Conrad. Sometimes I'd pretend you weren't. I needed the money, but the risk meant more. The rush of real consequence. Hinging it all on a pinprick. It's the same for you, isn't it, Conrad? Isn't that what we –

CONRAD

You've got two seconds before I –

ANNE

What? You've got nothing on me. Not since we...No, you don't own me, Conrad. Not anymore. And I'm worse off now than when you did because you're right about the rest of it. What I am in this room. What you made me. What I need. This! (*Hits him.*) is what I need. This room is what I am. (*Hits again.*) Is what I've become. All the rest...(*Exhausted, hits him again.*)...All of it...Everything else...

She adjusts her suit. Fixes her hair. Retrieves her purse.

ANNE (Cont.)

I'm gonna have to charge you extra for this session. (*She exits.*)

ACT 1, SCENE 2 – FLOYD AND WENDY'S APARTMENT

FLOYD, WENDY, RILEY and SEAN each occupy a side of the kitchen table in WENDY and FLOYD's apartment. It's a small one-bedroom. The kitchen opens directly into the living room where there is a sofa with blanket and pillows folded on its far side. The four are engaged with a role-playing game. RILEY, a heavy man with a thick beard going gray and wearing a high-collared cape with a Lord of the Rings leaf-clasp, serves as the Game Master, guiding the game. The rest are dressed appropriate to their age and lifestyle, though SEAN wears a long, straight, white-haired wig.

RILEY

You're fairly sure you've eluded the hunt, but you keep running. All three of you are running hard so that neither Prince (*Looks at FLOYD.*) nor Shanna (*Looks at SEAN.*) realize that Erwen (*Looks at WENDY.*) has lagged behind, which you have. As you're running you hear your twin's voice. You hear it in your head. You don't trust it at first, assume it's Dark Vision trying to trick you telekinetically, but when she calls you by your chosen name, you trust her. What do you do?

WENDY

I let the two get ahead, then turn around to go back for my sister.

FLOYD

Why?

WENDY

Could be dangerous. 8th level stuff. I can't trust you not to hold me back.

RILEY

Meanwhile, Prince and Shanna come to a door that is locked.

FLOYD

I look through the door

RILEY

(Rolls dice.) It fails.

SEAN

I try to read what's inside.

RILEY

(Rolls dice.) It fails. You're unsure if it's strong magic, or something else.

WENDY

Something else what?

RILEY

What do you care, you just ditched them to rescue your sister.

SEAN

It could be chaotic evil. Not a person, but the space.

RILEY

How do you proceed?

FLOYD

I cast a spell at the lock.

RILEY

(Rolls dice.) It opens. You proceed first. The room is well lit by high windows filling all with star and moonlight. By the far wall, beneath a stained glass Mandala, is Shanna, which is impossible because she was right behind you. How do you proceed?

FLOYD

I enter the room and cast a disillusioning spell towards Shanna, in case she's a projection.

RILEY

(Ross dice.) Nothing. Either the spell didn't work, or there's no illusion. By all appearances it's her.

FLOYD

But that doesn't explain how she got in the room before me.

RILEY

No.

SEAN

How do I look?

FLOYD

You look great. You always look great.

RILEY

As you step into the room you feel disoriented, but you're unsure of the influence, whether it's a spell or something from within you.

SEAN

Don't be afraid, Paladin.

FLOYD

I'm not afraid.

SEAN

Good. I need you to trust me.

FLOYD

Why?

SEAN

Because we're in trouble. We've been chased through this maze by the hunt and Dark Vision for hours. We've neither found the Gray Beholder nor an exit. And now we're trapped in this room.

RILEY

You look behind you and the door is locked.

FLOYD

(To SEAN.) How do I know you haven't locked us in?

SEAN

Why would I do that?

FLOYD

(Demur.) I don't know.

SEAN

If neither of us can escape on our own, and Arwen's gone to save her twin, we need to combine our strengths. I need you to lend me your powers. You've got to put them inside me.

FLOYD

Why can't you lend me yours?

SEAN

You couldn't handle them. Even my least powers are 9th level. They would only injure you and deplete us both.

FLOYD

But then I'll be left powerless.

SEAN

Only for the time it takes me to cast an escape spell. I'll return what's yours immediately.

FLOYD

(To RILEY.) I try to read her thoughts.

RILEY

(Rolls dice.) It fails. There's a noise approaching, like a great rumbling coming from down the hall.

SEAN

We haven't time. You have to trust me.

FLOYD

I'm not sure.

SEAN

Have you any reason to doubt me?

FLOYD

No, but I'm not sure if I have reason to trust you either.

SEAN

You'll have big reasons if a 12th level mastadon comes crashing through the door to wreck us both.

FLOYD

I need a sec.

RILEY

The rumbling sound increases.

FLOYD

(To Sean.) How would we do it?

SEAN

You have to touch me. If I have to cast the transference that means you're unwilling and we'll have to rely on a dice roll for the outcome. If you touch me then you're willing and the cast is automatic.

FLOYD

I just have to touch you?

SEAN

Well, with your lips. You have to kiss me. It's an intimate transference to transfer your powers.

FLOYD

You want me to kiss you.

SEAN

We need you to kiss me. To really kiss me. I can't just take what's essential to your being. You have to want to give it to me.

FLOYD

But I don't want to give it to you.

SEAN

Are you sure?

FLOYD

I don't trust you.

SEAN

Want. Need. Trust. How can you be so...absolute.

RILEY

The sound is increasing. The whole room is filled with it.

FLOYD

(Pause.) Ok.

SEAN

Good, now come to me. Step towards me. Hold me in your vision as you approach. Take my eyes in yours. See my mouth.

FLOYD

I'm close.

SEAN

Put your hands on me. Take me in your arms. Put your lips...your mouth....

FLOYD

I kiss you. I...kiss you.

(Looks from SEAN to RILEY.)

What happened?

RILEY

(Rolls dice.) I'm afraid...we're going to have to pick this up later. Time to get home to the sitter.

FLOYD

We've never not finished a game before.

RILEY

We've never had a kid before. *(To WENDY, who gets up and goes to the refrigerator.)* You know, sitters get like \$25 an hour now. I got, what? \$10 for the night and a Jello pudding pop.

WENDY

(From fridge.) You guys need one for the road.

RILEY

I'll take one. Her suckling ladyship will, alas, refrain.

FLOYD

We'll continue this another time, though? Same characters, right?

RILEY

Yes, my padawan.

WENDY

Sean, can I try on your wig?

SEAN

Hell yeah! I actually wore this tonight specifically to see you in it.

(*To FLOYD.*) Wanna try my cape?

RILEY

No, thanks.

FLOYD

You sure, might give you super powers. It's all in the accessories, you know. Green Lantern's ring.

RILEY

Wonder Woman's whip.

SEAN

Clark Kent's glasses.

RILEY

They didn't give him his powers.

FLOYD

The power of disguise.

RILEY

(*Wearing wig.*) How do I look?

WENDY

Like Jada Pinket Smith's hot cousin. Do you wear contacts?

SEAN

I do.

WENDY

You should totally try some color. Maybe white irises. Or better yet, cat's eyes!

SEAN

Can I get you a glitter skirt and a tambourine?

FLOYD

(*To SEAN.*) Ladyship, our chariot!

RILEY

Our subway.

SEAN

Must you be so reality based?

RILEY

SEAN

Thank you for hosting.

RILEY

And for the mutton and grog.

WENDY

Oh, your wig. *(Removing it.)*

SEAN

Hold onto it. Maybe you'll wear it out sometime.

RILEY

(Takes FLOYD's hand in both of his. Dramatic.) Sailors of the ancient did not say Farewell, but Fare Voyage. It was the journey that mattered.

FLOYD

My mother says, Later alligator.

RILEY

The apple falleth not far from the tree. *(Nods and exits.)*

SEAN

Bye. *(Exits.)*

WENDY and FLOYD are silent as they clean up, stack dishes in sink, wash out beer cans for the recycling bin.

FLOYD

Don't you think it strange that Riley's always pushing Sean and I together?

WENDY

What do you mean?

FLOYD

You've noticed. How he always separates you so that me and Sean can....

WENDY

Actually, I haven't.

FLOYD

You think I'm making it up?

WENDY

I don't know.

FLOYD

You don't think they're into anything else, do you?

WENDY

Whadda'ya mean?

FLOYD

You know, other games.

WENDY

They said they do Star Wars scenarios with other couples.

FLOYD

Not that.

WENDY

You haven't been too receptive to his literary scenarios.

FLOYD

That's what I mean. I'd be up for a Lovecraft or a Sherlock Holmes night, but he wants to do the Arabian Nights. Don't you think that's...

WENDY

Maybe we should challenge them to Battleship.

He looks at her, she cracks up laughing.

FLOYD

You were gonna let me flounder for how long?

WENDY

I wanted to hear you say it.

FLOYD

And her too, always wanting to dress you up. Do you think they...?

WENDY

Are you interested? (*Pause.*) Maybe it's why they always insist on our hosting. Maybe their apartment is all kink and medieval dungeon.

FLOYD

Or a gingerbread house and they play Hansel and Gretel.

WENDY

Nice! You're getting better at this.

FLOYD

I'm just saying, what do we know? We met them on an online gaming forum. We don't know anything about them.

WENDY

What do you want to know?

FLOYD

Even their characters you can't rely on. They're always becoming something else.

WENDY

Maybe that's the point, this whole role-playing thing. Our lives, they're pretty settled, right? Inside the game you get to...

FLOYD

Even the game should have some sort of constancy.

WENDY

Why's that?

FLOYD

The idea is to become who you set out to become. If we're...exploring, okay. But they're always switching half-way through.

WENDY

(Imitating him.) You look good. You always look good.

FLOYD

I was just –

WENDY

All I'm saying is that if you want to know if they swing, just ask them.

FLOYD

I keep waiting for them to bring it up.

WENDY

And what if they do?

FLOYD

I dunno, I guess we could give it a try. I've always wanted a wench who'll serve me mutton.

WENDY

Your vegetarian ass! Good, because I've been meaning to fulfill my Henry the 8th fetish.

FLOYD

To ravage and cut off your head?

WENDY

It was an Orson Welles thing before I dropped out of film school. What about for you? If it could be anything?

FLOYD

I dunno, you in that wig, kind of rock n' roll. I've always kinda had a Courtney Love thing.

WENDY

Ew. Needle and skank tracks I don't do!

(Pause. Indicating the couch behind her.)

At least it made me forget about him for a while.

FLOYD

I know. Whadda you think he'd do if he walked in one us?

WENDY

It's our house!

FLOYD

I know, but –

WENDY

How long's he going to...

FLOYD

I don't know.

WENDY

Have you asked him?

FLOYD

Have you?

WENDY

He's your boss!

FLOYD

Not really. Not directly. He's kind of everybody's.

WENDY

The point is –

FLOYD

I don't think it is. I'm just an office runner. I put messages on his desk before, but I don't think he recognized me as anyone before we spoke in the elevator.

WENDY

I wish you hadn't spoken to him. Why did you?

FLOYD

Did I what? Guy's CEO. He sees I'm delivering an envelope to marketing and says, *Ask Mark Russell if he got caught banging any hookers this weekend.* I laugh and say I like questions you only get to ask once. He says how many have I asked and I tell him I once asked my rabbi if that was an Episcopalian I smelled on his breath.

WENDY

You never –

FLOYD

Next thing I know he's asking if I've got a couch he can crash on. I laugh and say, Sure. I didn't think he was serious!

WENDY

The guy's got...he can have a suite at the Plaza. He can probably *buy* the Plaza, but he's sleeping on our couch. There's gotta be something we don't know about.

FLOYD

What if for everything he's got he hasn't got anything. Anybody. His wife threw him out.

WENDY

She didn't throw him out. He moved out after she told him she was sleeping with her tennis pro, or teacher. Whatever.

FLOYD

He told you that?

WENDY

What's he told you?

FLOYD

That's my point, I don't think he's got anyone, any friends he can talk to.

WENDY

Men. Pathetic.

FLOYD

Definitely. But sad, too, right?

WENDY

I don't trust it. (*Shrugs. Pause.*) Are you going to ask him for anything?

FLOYD

Like what? Rent money?

WENDY

How about a job?

FLOYD

As what?

WENDY

There's go to be some advantage of having the head of the company sleeping on our sofa.

FLOYD

I don't think he likes me very much.

WENDY

(*Laughs.*) No, I don't think he likes me much, either. He'll talk, but it's like I'm just...anyone.

FLOYD

Yup.

WENDY

Which makes it even more pathetic, that we're all he's got. I don't trust the whole thing. An office lackey who walked into his hand one day. (*Realizes what she's said.*) I'm sorry, I didn't mean –

FLOYD

No, it's true. (*Pause.*)

WENDY

So you're not going to ask him...anything?

FLOYD

He's my boss. It may not be much of a job, but...

Pause.

FLOYD

Do you really want to...with...

WENDY

Ew. No. Do you with Sean?

FLOYD

She terrifies me. I can't tell you how freaked out I've been by the possibility they'd even suggest it.

WENDY

I think he knows it and is just playing with you.

FLOYD

You think?

WENDY

I don't know. *(Pause.)* Did you ever want...

FLOYD

What?

WENDY

I don't know. To try stuff. A 3-way or something.

FLOYD

I'm still blown away I've managed to hold onto you for as long as I have. I'd be scared of that stuff, you know, threatening that. *(Beat.)* Do you?

WENDY

No.

FLOYD

Good. *(Pause.)* Kind of scares me, though. Thinking that way. I feel like I'm supposed to want...something.

LIGHTS DIM as WENDY leads FLOYD to bedroom..

ACT 1, SCENE 3 – WENDY AND FLOYD'S APARTMENT

CONRAD enters with his own key through the front door. He sets down his briefcase, removes his pants (he is wearing boxer-briefs), which he folds neatly over the back of the couch, opens his shirt a few buttons, spreads blanket, adjusts pillow and lays on couch. After a few moments, FLOYD enters kitchen from bedroom, opens refrigerator, removes a Tupperware of leftover mac & cheese, then turns on kitchen light and sits at table. Stirring behind him makes him realize that CONRAD is on the couch.

FLOYD

I'm sorry, I didn't know you were...I hadn't heard you come in. I would have...I thought I couldn't sleep, but maybe I had.

CONRAD

That happen often? You think you're awake with insomnia but you're sleeping more than you thought?

FLOYD

I don't know. How can I be sure?

CONRAD

No.

FLOYD

If I'd known you were here, I wouldn't have...

CONRAD

Doesn't matter. I was awake.

(Straightens to almost sitting position, makes a sudden flinch, as if in pain.)

How do you know if you've got an infection?

FLOYD

If it hurts, it's probably infected.

CONRAD

Sensible.

(FLOYD tries to eat, but CONRAD watching makes him uncomfortable.)

There's nothing more appalling than watching someone eat, is there? That cliché about stuffing strawberries into a lover's mouth. Ok, but once you put it in there, to watch them chew and swallow. Like cows mashing cud.

FLOYD

I'm sorry, would you rather I don't...

CONRAD

I'd rather you would.

FLOYD

How's...?

CONRAD

What?

FLOYD

I don't know.

CONRAD

Mmm... *(Pause.)* Are you having a difficult time eating?

FLOYD

Kind of.

CONRAD

What are you having a difficult time eating?

FLOYD

Mac & Cheese. Do you want –

CONRAD

No.

(Pause. FLOYD again attempts to eat, can't, finally sets down his fork.)
My older daughter makes a certain sound while she chews. Like her head acts as an echo chamber, some sort of clicking in the jaw that reverberates in her skull. The rest of them sit around the table slurping up their plates and don't seem to notice. I took her to a doctor once to have it examined. My wife was not pleased.

FLOYD

Did they find anything?

CONRAD

Fucking doctors.

CONRAD gets up with a slight moan, and joins FLOYD at table. He buttons up his dress shirt to cover bruises. FLOYD sees something, though he's unsure what. CONRAD pulls out chair to sit, finds white wig on it.

CONRAD

What's this?

FLOYD

A wig.

CONRAD

(Looks at FLOYD like he'll hurt him.) Yours?

FLOYD

No. A friend left it here tonight.

CONRAD

Is your friend in the habit of leaving her hairpiece behind like a forgotten purse?

FLOYD

No. Actually, I don't know. She might. She was wearing it as part of...we were playing a game.

CONRAD

What sort?

FLOYD

A game where...we assume characters.

Sits. He begins to take active interest in FLOYD.

CONRAD

Do you role-play?

FLOYD

We...

CONRAD

What do you get out of that?

FLOYD

It's...fun.

CONRAD

Do you take it into the bedroom? Ever get carried away while giving her a good thrashing?

FLOYD

Well, I'm usually a Paladin. Sometimes a wizard or a ...(Softly.) warrior.

CONRAD's stare makes FLOYD uncomfortable. He'd like to flee.

CONRAD

What's the difference?

FLOYD

What?

CONRAD

Between the game and everything else? Why bother if not to...make something of yourself?

FLOYD

Well, the powers, for one. You can't see through walls.

CONRAD
But you can plant a monitoring device.

FLOYD
You can't...kill someone with a punch.

CONRAD
Hire someone who can.

FLOYD
Wish I had that kind of... Do you play?

CONRAD
No.

FLOYD
Oh.

CONRAD
But I'm interested in those who do. I have a fondness for defying certain limitations. You understand what I mean.

FLOYD
I'm not sure.

CONRAD
You're a messenger in the company, yes? For how long?

FLOYD
It's been like eight months. Jesus, almost a year.

CONRAD
Why haven't you taken another position by now?

FLOYD
You mean found another job? The company's not bad. The benefits and all.

CONRAD
I mean within the company. Why haven't you sought out a position and claimed it?

FLOYD
You can't just...I mean, you have to be promoted.

CONRAD
Don't piss me off.

FLOYD

I'm not, I mean –

CONRAD

Do you think someone promoted me to my position?

FLOYD

Someone had to agree to –

CONRAD

You force them to agree.

FLOYD

How?

CONRAD

That's the first good question you've asked. I've been living on your couch for...*(Waves it off with dismissive hand gesture.)* Why haven't you asked me for a job by now? Or better yet, forced me into giving you one.

FLOYD

How would I do that?

(CONRAD looks annoyed.)

I'm asking... *(Pause.)*

CONRAD

Every night I sleep with my briefcase here on the floor. In the morning, while I shower, it's unattended. There must be something inside you can make use of.

(FLOYD doesn't know what to say to this.)

I inspected your incoming mail. I notice you maintain separate checking accounts. Credit cards and such.

FLOYD

You read my mail? *(CONRAD stares at him.)* We're not married...and I've got debt. I wanted to pay them off before...You think we should have joint accounts?

CONRAD

I noticed a series of charges on your bill listed as Event Entertainment.

FLOYD

My fantasy baseball league. And I bought some...stuff. Their publications and memorabilia. I don't see why you –

CONRAD

You know who else bills innocuous sounding names to your credit cards? Escorts.

FLOYD

I don't –

CONRAD

I say you do. (*Pause.*) Perhaps we can make use of you. I'll tell you what. Despite certain...deficiencies, you're beginning to interest me. Let's say I promote you, an assistantship, with the stipulation that if you do not advance to your boss's position within six months, if you don't claim that office for yourself, I'll tell the little woman about your hooker habit.

FLOYD

I don't have a –

CONRAD

I do. I visited a couple just the other night. A delicious pair, actually. And I billed it to your credit card.

FLOYD

You used my –

CONRAD

Was that inappropriate? (*He gets up and goes to briefcase.*)

FLOYD

You can't just –

CONRAD

No? What's to stop us? What's to stop you from doing the same?

(*Retrieves checkbook, returns to table and writes FLOYD a check.*)

Pay it off with this. There's no turning the offer down. If you refuse I'll tell the little girl about your hooker habit and put a block on the check. It's post-dated a week from now as is.

FLOYD

(*Taking check.*) I appreciate your helping, but –

CONRAD

Is that what I'm doing?

FLOYD

Aren't you?

CONRAD

Six months, or I tell the little girl.

Wendy. FLOYD

What? CONRAD

Wendy. Her name's Wendy. FLOYD

I think you're going to prove me proud. CONRAD

ACT 1, SCENE 4 – ANNE AND MILTON'S KITCHEN

ANNE and MILTON are in their kitchen. ANNE is at the kitchen table going over bills. There is a laptop computer on the table. MILTON is at the stove, pouring himself tea. He will stand distinctly distant, sipping his tea, for the majority of the scene, until their connection permits him to take a seat at the table.

I made tea. MILTON

(Looking up from bill.) What? ANNE

Tea. Want some? MILTON

(Back down to bills.) Thank you, no. ANNE

I got in the habit, after Jeremy goes down. Yerba Maté. I get to feel like a character out of Cortazár, though they drank their Maté from gourds. *(Sips.)* Bitter stuff, but it keeps me going for a while. MILTON

You're not worried about – ANNE

No. It doesn't keep me up that long. Just enough to get a little work done without... MILTON

ANNE

Has he been getting up?

MILTON

Not much. Sylvia sits with him a while after he's fallen asleep just to make sure. She's gotten really good with him... Not that you aren't.

ANNE

You don't have to...How long was she here?

MILTON

Pretty much the whole time. *(Beat.)* She still is.

ANNE

(Stands, panicked.) Your mother's not here now, is she?

MILTON

No. Of course not. I sent her home for the night.

ANNE

Has Jeremy...? Has he had to –

MILTON

He's been fine. Great, actually. The remission's –

ANNE

(Sitting and interrupting.) Ridiculous to have gotten...The gas hasn't been paid since...*(Flips through checkbook.)*

MILTON

I sent them something. Enough to keep the stove on.

ANNE

It's not just the stove, it's –

MILTON

I know.

ANNE

(Looking through checkbook.) Did you record how much you gave them?

MILTON

Might not. I paid it on-line.

ANNE

You've still got to –

MILTON

I know. My bad.

(ANNE continues working. The silence gets to MILTON.)

I wrote something.

ANNE

(Looks up at him.) You finished the article?

MILTON

No...fiction, actually.

ANNE

You wrote a story?

MILTON

I don't know what it is yet. It might be a story. If we were...I thought I might ask you to look at it.

ANNE

What makes me qualified?

MILTON

What makes you not? It may be nothing. I don't know. I didn't even know I was doing it. It was just stuff at first, bits I'd write on bookmarks riding the subway. Then I started scribbling notes in coffee shops between job interviews. Just something to...I was thinking about submitting it to the New Yorker, or one of the university journals. Who knows, maybe they'll take it.

ANNE

That would be something you could put your finger on.

MILTON

Might bring in a few pennies.

ANNE

Have you been taking photos?

MILTON

Not since...

ANNE

I like your pictures.

MILTON

I know.

(Pause.)

Where've you been staying?

ANNE

In a hotel.

MILTON

(Sudden.) If you're paying for a hotel, then you can't....

MILTON moves towards the bills, as if to take them away. ANNE puts her hands on them, preventing him.

ANNE

I got a raise! A whole new job, actually, at work.

MILTON

Congrats. When?

ANNE

I asked for one and they gave it to me. Things can be a little easier.

(MILTON takes a step back towards the stove.)

You haven't finished the article.

MILTON

No. It dried up on me. Who cares about Rodeshenko these days? No one's even heard of him.

ANNE

I thought that was the point. You make them hear of him.

MILTON

The truth is I'm not a writer. I'm not a photographer. I was a decent project manager before those jobs...

ANNE

You've been a producer.

MILTON

Of one short avant garde nothing that was projected onto the wall of a gallery that's since closed. At least being a project manager for these web companies paid the rent. For a while.

ANNE

"When you're a producer there's nothing you can't produce." You used to say that.

MILTON

Back when there was something –

ANNE

“If you can transform your thoughts and emotions to simple sentences, there’s nothing you can’t communicate.” You used to say that, too.

MILTON

The guy who said those things, I don’t know who he is anymore. It’s cruel to throw them back at me.

ANNE

I’m not trying to be.

MILTON

No. (*Beat.*) The economy sucks. It’s shot. The IPs and content providers that were throwing all that money around when we first got out of school, remember? They’re all gone.

ANNE

If you stay true to –

MILTON

What?

ANNE

I don’t know. (*Pause.*) If you can reclaim what’s yours.

MILTON

Is that why you...?

ANNE

(*Shakes her head.*) I don’t know.

MILTON

It doesn’t –

ANNE

Yes, it does. It matters to you.

MILTON

Matters like a paycheck.

ANNE

How have you...?

MILTON

Sylvia, mostly. And I borrowed something from my brother. *(Beat.)* Are you staying with anyone?

ANNE

I told you, I'm at a hotel.

MILTON

I know, but if you're...with someone.

ANNE

It would be better if you just asked.

MILTON

Are you with someone? Is that why you left?

ANNE

No. No one. *(Pause.)* I'm not. *(Pause.)*

MILTON

(Forcefully.) I just want to *be* something again. I don't care if it's...I don't know.

ANNE

You know, a job doesn't –

MILTON

C'mon!

ANNE

You're a good father. *(Beat.)* That'll get you into heaven. *(They laugh a little.)*

MILTON

A father provides.

ANNE

We've always managed.

MILTON

We haven't managed.

ANNE

It doesn't have to be *you* that provides. That whole male role, I think it's done more –

MILTON

That's not what I'm talking about. *(Pause.)*

ANNE
It's a decent raise.

MILTON
Is that what's important?

ANNE
It'll pay the bills.

MILTON
Almost gives you something to believe in. A sense of permanence. They'll always be more bills tomorrow.

ANNE
I think that's the most depressing thing we've said all night.

They laugh.

MILTON
He misses you.

ANNE
(*Pause.*) I know. I miss him. I know this is going to sound absurd, but it's better to just say it, right? You might be estranged from who you were, but I have no idea who I am anymore.

MILTON
That sounds bad.

ANNE
It is.

MILTON sits for the first time.

MILTON
Can I help?

ANNE
(*Beat.*) Do you mind if I go look at him?

MILTON
Why would I mind?

ANNE
I don't...know anything.

MILTON

Yes, you do.

ANNE exits to look in on her son. MILTON touches mug of tea, flips through the bills, goes to the sink and sits back down, just to keep himself busy.

ANNE

(Returning.) That hurt.

MILTON

Good.

She sits down. After a moment, MILTON puts his hand on her cheek.

ANNE

(Accepting the touch.) You used to do that.

MILTON

I'm doing it now.

He leans in, slowly, and kisses her. She lets him at first, then pulls back.

ANNE

I'm sorry.

MILTON

Don't be. I just...having you here.

ANNE clears her throat, rips a check from the checkbook, seals it along with its bill in an envelope.

ANNE

I can give you...Whatever you need.

MILTON

Why don't we call it for sex. That way I can feel like I earned it. *(Pause. They look at each other.)* There's gotta be a way for me not to feel like this.

ANNE

I know I've hurt you, but I can't pretend to even feel that pain. I don't even feel sorry for you.

MILTON

You don't.

No. ANNE

I don't feel sorry for me either. MILTON

(*Chuckles.*) You don't. ANNE

No. MILTON

That sounds bad. ANNE

It is. Almost as awful as this whole conversation. MILTON
(*They laugh, cathartically.*)
I'd like to help, if I can.

That helps. ANNE

(*Pause.*) Stay? MILTON

ANNE nods. She goes to write another check. MILTON stops her, placing a hand over hers.

That's enough. MILTON
(*ANNE acquiesces. Gathers stuff up without looking at him.*)
I can sleep on the couch. We don't have to...

(*Nodding.*) That would be helpful. (*Beat.*) ANNE

Why don't you go lay down? Your clothes, it's all still...I'm gonna stay up for a while. MILTON
MILTON opens laptop, as if to get to work.

(*Rising.*) You know how I've always been insomniac? Now I sleep like the dead. ANNE

MILTON

Funny how everything is suddenly new again, isn't it?

ANNE smiles with difficulty, nods, exits. MILTON begins typing into laptop.

MILTON

(Singing to himself) "Everything old is new again."

ACT 1, SCENE 5 – ANNE'S OFFICE

ANNE is at her desk, FLOYD standing before it.

ANNE

Say it again.

FLOYD

Your assistant.

ANNE

I didn't hire you.

FLOYD

No. Mr. Stone did.

ANNE

Conrad?!

FLOYD

He –

ANNE

Hired you from where?

FLOYD

Where?

ANNE

Where did you work previously?

FLOYD

Here.

ANNE

Which department?

The messenger center.

FLOYD

You ran the –

ANNE

No. (*Half-beat.*) I was a messenger.

FLOYD

Pause.

What's your name?

ANNE

(*Touches the piece of paper on her desk.*) Floyd Haygood.

FLOYD

Do you have any idea what this office does, Floyd Haygood?

ANNE

No. (*Pause.*)

FLOYD

What's he up to? I don't want an assistant. I don't need a –

ANNE

Are you sure? Everyone can use someone to...Whatever.

FLOYD

Is your background in finance?

ANNE

No.

FLOYD

International law? Are you a paralegal? Do you understand acquisitions administration?

ANNE

Pause.

I'm good with computers.

FLOYD

(*Smiling, despite herself.*) Can you hack into Conrad...Mr. Stone's personal computer?

ANNE

FLOYD

I don't know. I haven't tried. Maybe. *(Pause.)*

ANNE

Does human resources know about this?

FLOYD

I just came from there.

Again touches paper on ANNE's desk. ANNE crumples it and tosses it away.

ANNE

Does everybody know about this but me? When were you interviewed?

FLOYD

Last... Yesterday I was told to report to human resources. They told me to come here.

ANNE

(Pause. She considers him.) What are you good at, besides computers?

FLOYD

(Trying to be positive.) I guess we'll find out. *(It doesn't reach it's mark.)*
What does this office do?

ANNE

Incite fear.

FLOYD

You're good at that.

ANNE

Yes.

FLOYD

Perhaps I can –

ANNE

You do not incite confidence. *(Beat)* Are you a related to...Mr. Stone?

FLOYD

No.

ANNE

This office – which is me – operates under the assumption that everyone we do business with is incompetent.

FLOYD

Are they?

ANNE

Often. Sometimes it's not their fault. Most companies are comprised of so many departments, and some of the corporations we deal with comprised of so many companies, one is stumbling all over the other. This office tracks contracts and payments, and ensures all contractual obligations of said corporations and companies are fulfilled.

FLOYD

Sounds like Kafka.

ANNE

Your eighth grade reading list won't have prepared you. What's Stone got on you?

(FLOYD doesn't know how to answer.)

There's no room in here for another desk.

FLOYD

They told me there's a cubicle in the wing I'm supposed to –

ANNE

Fine. *(Half-beat.)* I'm not going to teach you shit. You'll pick up what you need on the fly. It's the only way to really learn, anyhow.

FLOYD

Okay.

ANNE

This isn't rocket science. Outside of rudimentary accounting skills there's nothing any numb-nut couldn't learn to execute perfectly efficiently. The truth is most everyone does their job, does what's expected of them. The problem is everyone is too indifferent or scared or lacks the imagination to try to put their pieces into the big picture. This office – you and me, apparently – picks up the pieces and tries to jumblefuck them together. *(Beat.)* Really it's just a bunch of tasks that include chasing money. You are hearing me.

FLOYD

I think so.

ANNE

I'm not really such a bitch. I just have to be, so I became one.

FLOYD

I think I can see that.

ANNE

If you prove inept I'll tear your fucking arms off and beat you to death with them.

FLOYD

I can see that, too.

ANNE

You're not really so stupid, are you?

FLOYD

No. Just intimidated.

ANNE

I'm going to find out what you and Stone are up to.

FLOYD

Fair enough.

ANNE

Come back after lunch and I'll figure out what to do with you.

ACT 1, SCENE 6 – A CAFE

WENDY and MILTON sit having coffee in a café.

WENDY

It makes me kind of sad, actually.

MILTON

What?

WENDY

I know it shouldn't. I'm happy for you, I am. I'm just jealous. A wife and son. You're so settled.

MILTON

I'm unemployed!

WENDY

(Waves it off.) You'll get something. Look at everything else, that's the important stuff. We're the same age, high school and all that, and I'm still...I like my job, but I never really set out to...I'd rather...

MILTON
Where did you go to college?

WENDY
I started at Rutgers...

MILTON
That's right.

WENDY
...but I got lost there, felt even less significant than when I'd started. So I transferred to Emerson, up in Boston. I took some film classes. I ended up a marketing major.

MILTON
And now you're publicist to the stars.

WENDY
I'm a babysitter. A cog. I take celebrities from interview to interview. I hold their lattes while the camera's on.

MILTON
You're in the business.

WENDY
Oh yeah, I'm a player! Cameron Diaz spilt a Diet Coke on me. She felt really bad about it. Sent me a Prada bag. (*Holds up Prada bag.*)

MILTON
C'mon, you were never the self-defeatist. You look great and'll end up clawing your way so high you'll get to dump a mango lasse on Kim Kardashian some day. What about your fiancé?

WENDY
Boyfriend. I just call him that, sometimes. (*Beat.*) He just got a promotion. We're not sure what it means.

MILTON
I don't get it.

WENDY
Ask me about it next time.

MILTON
This must be going well. If this were a date I'd be pumped you've already committed to a next time.

WENDY

You're an idiot. We were friends.

MILTON

Exactly, I like the way you said it: *were*. An acknowledgment of the past, but not its certainty.

WENDY

This is what I'm talking about. You've still got game. Your next job is right around the corner.

MILTON

Don't change the subject. I'm asking you something. Has it ever been that way for you? That suddenly, at some moment, and you're not sure why, all your past is suddenly obliterated? No longer means anything. (*Pause.*)

WENDY

(*After considering*) That makes me sad, your saying that. I was just thinking a couple of days ago that my brother, he's out in California, how he's come to mean so little...I still love him, I mean, if he was ever –

MILTON

You don't have to justify –

WENDY

No, I'm not, it's just....Black people, we're supposed to...

MILTON

Stick together?

WENDY

Yeah, why not? He's my brother....What about you? You email me out of nowhere, out of this past you say is obliterated. You called and I came. Doesn't that disprove your assumption or something?

MILTON

Does it? (*Pause.*) I mean it, don't look at me like that.

WENDY

I can't help it, you're affecting me. I see you and I recognize...You're Milton Albright. We used to do homework and marching band and everything. I know your face, it hasn't changed...even if it has. I don't know, maybe you're right. Maybe I don't know you anymore. Shit, why do you want to do this to me? I was all excited to see you when you...Why'd you get in touch?

MILTON

Because I wanted to. Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...Listen, it's not why I contacted you, but now that you're here and we're getting along so well, right?, I was wondering if you'd let me take some pictures of you.

(WENDY suddenly looks angry, as if he's made an indecent proposal.)

Hey, wait, I didn't mean...

WENDY

I wanna see a picture of your family!

Flustered, MILTON takes out his wallet, opens it to show her a picture.

MILTON

That's Anne, my, you know. And Jeremy. Germy, we call him sometimes, as a joke.

WENDY

(Affected.) See, you're right. The past means nothing. Look how I suspect you. My god, we're 36 years old!

MILTON

I'm 37. *(Smiles.)* I told my mother we were having coffee.

WENDY

Sylvia! Shit, I haven't thought about her, since...

MILTON

She told me to buy you a slice of peach pie.

WENDY

(Softened.) That's right. Her peach pie. I still love peach pie. *(Pause.)* Have you asked Stacey to take pictures?

MILTON

(Laughing.) That's excellent. I have contacted her, you're not the only one. Brian, too. He's in Chicago, working as a museum...something. It's what the unemployed do these days. Social network old....You're the only one I've gotten together with, though. Seriously.

WENDY

Brian, my god, I haven't...You're right. It's all just names now. *(Beat.)* Why do you want to take pictures of me?

MILTON

First of all, they're not...I am a gentleman.

WENDY

(Laughing.) When did that happen?

MILTON

It was my minor in college. *(Half-beat.)* Pictures are just something I do. They help me see a little more than just what's in front of my face. That the world can *be* more.

WENDY

(Considers, then laughs.) I should bring my new wig.

MILTON

(A little too excited.) Definitely, do!

(Wendy looks concerned again.)

I want it to be something new. For both of us. But made of something we used to own. Maybe I'm not making any sense. I'm not a professional or anything. The photos are just something I...But you do hear what I'm saying, right?

WENDY

(Pause.) We're just talking pictures.

MILTON

I'm not a creep.

WENDY

How do you know?

ACT 1, SCENE 7 – WENDY AND FLOYD'S APARTMENT

WENDY enters to find FLOYD placing a second long comic book box onto the kitchen table.

WENDY

How'd it go?

FLOYD

It went.

WENDY

Your boss, what's he –

FLOYD

She. *(Half-beat.)* Scary.

WENDY

Floyd, are you afraid of women?

FLOYD

I always thought it a healthy predisposition to operate from.

WENDY

You weren't afraid of me.

FLOYD

What're you talking about! I'm still terrified of you. Terrified you'll leave me after you find out how scared I am of you.

WENDY

You think it's gonna work out?

FLOYD

I'm hoping to get pregnant and force you to marry me.

WENDY

The job.

FLOYD

(Shrugs.) I dunno. *(Pause.)* How was your day?

WENDY

What's all this?

FLOYD

Getting rid of some stuff.

WENDY

Isn't that your –

FLOYD

Yup.

WENDY

You're giving them away?

FLOYD

You kidding? I should get good money for this. Keep me in high grade crystal meth for a month.

WENDY

Is it the money? Do you need me to loan you –

FLOYD

No, it's not the money. I got a raise and all. (*Sighs.*) "When I was no longer a child I put away childish things."

WENDY

I always liked that you were able to hold onto that part of you.

FLOYD

Not very manly.

WENDY

I don't want you to be something you're not.

FLOYD

You mean manly?

WENDY

Don't turn it on me like that.

FLOYD

Guilt and self-deprecation, they're the only game I got. Don't ask me to give up those, too!

WENDY

What're you gonna do with the money?

FLOYD

I dunno. It's not about that.

WENDY

You do want...stuff, don't you?

FLOYD

Whadda'ya mean?

WENDY

I'm not sure. Maybe I'm not saying it right.

FLOYD

I'm making more money now. The expenses'll be more shared. I can hold up my share better.

WENDY

That's not what I meant. Things have been fine. I mean, you know...You just never struck me as terribly...

FLOYD

Forward thinking? No. I've always been too enamored with what I've got.

WENDY

That's sweet.

FLOYD

It's pathetic. I've gotta step up. I don't want to take you for granted. This new job, I feel like, if I can do it, if things work out, maybe I'll...

WENDY

What?

FLOYD

Be the one to make it happen. If it was up to me, I'd be in the messenger center 'til they forced me into retirement.

WENDY

If it's not up to you...?

FLOYD

It's always taken someone else to light a fire under my ass.

WENDY

I don't want to feel like I –

FLOYD

Why not? It's not that clear cut, anyway. You're not forcing me, you're...inspiring me.

WENDY

Is that true?

FLOYD

If saying it gets you to make out with me it is.

WENDY

(Pause.) What if I bought your comic collection from you?

FLOYD

I was hoping to get something for it.

WENDY

I'll pay. Your taking up more of the expenses will clear up some funds.

FLOYD

Buy yourself something nice with the money.

WENDY

I am.

FLOYD

What're you gonna do, give it back to me for Chanukkah?

WENDY

I haven't decided. I might end up keeping them.

FLOYD

There's something funny about you tonight.

WENDY

Maybe. You think?

FLOYD

I just might have to dig out my Captain America costume.

WENDY

(Grabs white wig from off chair and puts it on.) I'll have to strike a pose that measures up.

FLOYD

Do you really want the comics? *(She nods.)* I'll give them to you.

WENDY

What about the money?

FLOYD

I'll snort catnip for the month.

WENDY

I'll hold onto them for you. Safe keeping.

FLOYD

What if I don't want them back?

WENDY

Then the keepsake'll be mine. It's a nice gift you made me.

FLOYD

It's all I could afford. Pay increase doesn't kick in for a couple weeks.

ACT 1, SCENE 8 – OFFICE ELEVATOR

ANNE enters elevator, presses down button. Just as doors are about to close CONRAD enters. CONRAD looks over, sees someone in there beside him, but it doesn't register who it is. Then he realizes it's ANNE.

CONRAD

I haven't seen the payment plan for the Mack takeover.

ANNE

I've been busy with the Belgium deal. You were just delivered the contract an hour ago.

CONRAD

The Mosley deal needs revisiting.

ANNE

Why? The deal's dead.

CONRAD

There've been inquiries. Where's Mark Russel?

ANNE

In route to Cincinnati. All the Mosley paperwork's been filed.

CONRAD

Pull them. We're not demanding too much of you, are we?

ANNE

Not at all.

CONRAD

You can always transfer some duties over to your new assistant.

Pause while CONRAD enjoys a self-satisfied smile.

ANNE

Is your intention for me to kill you, Mr. Stone?

Silence. CONRAD is taken aback by ANNE's words. He presses the elevator's Emergency Stop button. A series of dings, and the voice of LOBBY SECURITY comes through the panel.

SECURITY

This is Lobby Security. Your emergency stop has been activated.

CONRAD

This is Conrad Stone. I'll release it in a moment. Can you turn off this alarm? (*Alarm goes off.*) Thank you. (*Pause.*)

Perhaps we should consider a different tactic. Our relations do contain enough affinity for the occasional congenial utterance, yes? Our next session is, what?, five days away. Should we consider a drink? How 'bout a nightcap to numb the nightmares?

ANNE

(*Pause.*) Do you want me to kill you, Conrad?

CONRAD, affected, hits the emergency stop button. Elevator progresses, stops, doors opens. CONRAD exits to his right, ANNE to her left.

**ACT 1, SCENE 9 – FLOYD AND WENDY'S APARTMENT/
MILTON AND ANNE'S APARTMENT**

Lights are out in FLOYD and WENDY's apartment. FLOYD exits bedroom into kitchen, pulling on a sweater. He stacks the two boxes of comics, and carries them out the front door. WENDY enters kitchen, finds comics and FLOYD gone, takes a seat. CONRAD enters and finds WENDY sitting alone.

CONRAD

Have I interrupted something?

WENDY

It's just me.

CONRAD

Yet I feel as if –

WENDY

Nope. I was just heading out, though.

CONRAD

Where to?

WENDY

Just out....a walk.

CONRAD

And where's our young executive-in-the-making?

WENDY
I'm not sure. *(Softer.)* I think to sell something.

CONRAD
Something of yours?

WENDY
No. Not really.

CONRAD
Something's amiss.
(CONRAD sets his briefcase onto the couch, removes his jacket and tie. Notes that WENDY hasn't moved from her position.)
Aren't you leaving? *(No response. She is in thought.)* Does it disturb you when I'm in your home alone?

WENDY
You ask a lot of questions.

CONRAD
It is how one assesses.

WENDY
I haven't thought about it. Nothing really here worth stealing.

CONRAD
Perhaps I put on your particulars and prance about. *(Glides into kitchen and stands before her.)* Perhaps you'd like to stay and watch.

WENDY
Thank you, no.

CONRAD
Are you afraid of me?

WENDY
A little. Is that important to you?

CONRAD
I do interest you, though, don't I? Why do you think that is?

WENDY
I dunno. You've seen more of the world than me.

CONRAD

It must seem that way, while in fact you probably speak to more people in a day than I do in a month. Most of my business dealings are through agents and lawyers. I take lunch at my desk and dinner in the same restaurant every night. The wait staff knows what I like and I never consult a menu. Living here with you two has almost doubled my total human interaction. I don't know anything of the world, I just have the courage to demand of it.

WENDY

Tenacity.

CONRAD

Excuse me?

WENDY

It's a better word. I'm not sure if what you have is courage.

CONRAD likes this. He considers her.

CONRAD

What if I offered you a job?

WENDY

I've got one, thanks.

CONRAD

You haven't heard my proposition.

WENDY

Exactly.

CONRAD

I'm not comfortable with a relationship where someone doesn't owe me something.

WENDY

You've been living on our couch for weeks, that doesn't seem to make you uncomfortable.

CONRAD

That's because I didn't recognize you until recently.

WENDY

Recognize me as a human being, you mean.

CONRAD

Does that offend you?

WENDY

You want to offend me.

CONRAD

(Sits across from her.) I feel as if we understand one another. *(Beat.)* I think I interest you, yes? *(WENDY doesn't answer.)* I think you believe you might be able to learn something from me. How to get further along. You don't want to get too close because I might be bad, yet you might assent to a little soiling to come out further ahead. *(Pause.)* It's less complicated than you think, getting what you want. Getting what you need, that might be something else, I'm afraid.

WENDY

You don't have what you need.

CONRAD

How do you figure?

WENDY

You're living on my couch. You, king of the empire.

CONRAD

It would be erroneous to think I'm not getting *exactly* what I need from these circumstance.
(Pause. Conrad rises from table, crosses back to couch and begins to change in front of her while they talk. She looks away, but stays in the conversation.)
Why aren't you and your young prince married?

WENDY

Maybe it's just not time yet, for us.

CONRAD

Why maybe? You should be more definitive. I suspect he hasn't asked you.

WENDY

It's not just a man's role to ask anymore.

CONRAD

You mean you've asked him and he refused?

WENDY

(Laughs a little.) No.

CONRAD

I'll tell you what, if you don't sleep with me right now I'll tell your young *mont-de-piété* that you have.

The offer upsets her, but she is able to answer him calmly.

WENDY

Has that ever worked on anyone before?

CONRAD

I'll admit a threat is best effective when both parties accept it as fact.

WENDY

(Pondering.) I can see that.

CONRAD

For that little tidbit I charge you nothing. And be advised that I don't give much for free.

WENDY

You must be a wonderful father.

CONRAD

Whoever said I was one?

WENDY

Aren't you?

CONRAD

That's my wife's business. *(Beat.)* Well, I for one enjoyed our little causerie. Let's keep the dialogue going, yes? Are you heading out? I can give you a lift somewhere.

WENDY

No, I think I'll stay in after all.

CONRAD

Changed your mind? I like to unwind with a firm massage and hand-release from an Asian woman before bed. Care to join, since you've obviously nothing to do? Nothing indecent between us. You can get finger-slammed in your own room while I in mine. Trust me when I say it's a one-hour vacation the likes of which you've never experienced.

WENDY

Doesn't that sort of thing get tired?

CONRAD

No. *(Pause.)*

WENDY

I don't think so.

CONRAD

Not your thing? (*She shakes her head.*) Forgive me when I say that you have no idea what your sort of thing yet is.

WENDY

Why ask me to forgive if you don't care whether I do or don't?

CONRAD

Hmm. You do interest me a little. If your young –

WENDY

His name is Floyd. And whatever you're up to with –

CONRAD

...doesn't work out –

WENDY

We're fine!

CONRAD

I meant for me. He does work for me now, you know. A sort of probationary period. A task that should he not accomplish...

WENDY

Might be the best thing for him.

CONRAD

To fail? Some react badly to failure. How many failures do you think you can withstand?

WENDY

How many do you?

CONRAD

Should your...Floyd, not prove himself capable...

WENDY

...and what exactly IS the task?

CONRAD

...I hope you'll consider assuming his role.

WENDY

I can't imagine –

CONRAD

No, you can't. But when you're ready, you will let me know, yes? Yes, I think you will. Until then. Ta. (CONRAD Exits.)

Wendy sits there, shaken. She stands quickly, as if to rush off somewhere, then sits back down. A fair pause. She suddenly grabs her purse, finds her cell phone and dials. LIGHTS UP IN MILTON AND ANNE'S KITCHEN finds MILTON on his computer at kitchen table. He answers his cell phone.

WENDY

Why are you answering your phone?

MILTON

You called.

WENDY

Why aren't you with your son?

MILTON

He's asleep.

WENDY

What time is it?

MILTON

I don't know, after ten, I think.

WENDY

Shouldn't you be watching Jon Stewart or something with your wife?

MILTON

Jon Stewart goes on at eleven and my wife's not home.

WENDY

Where is she?

MILTON

She works late. You notice how I'm not questioning this inquisition. (Pause.)

WENDY

Floyd's out, too.

MILTON

The two of them are probably having an affair. (WENDY makes an unamused sound.)
What's up?

WENDY

People have a way of taking ownership just because they think they know you. (*Half-beat.*) I'm not talking about you. (*Half-beat.*) Well, maybe I am. Sorry, I'm not sure why I called.

MILTON

I'm glad you did.

WENDY

Why, don't you have any friends? (*Beat.*) I'm sorry, I –

MILTON

Actually, I was trying to figure how to answer that.

WENDY

Why not? What's with you men, no one to talk to. No wonder you're always intriguing, or'll masturbate into any corner. You winch yourselves into a knot.

MILTON

I feel as if you're having this conversation with someone else.

WENDY

Don't you truth me like that, okay? I'm upset. When women are upset they have girlfriends they curl up and process with. They're not afraid of a little intimacy.

MILTON

I've never been anyone's girlfriend before.

WENDY

You're not going to be mine! I'm bothered that you reached out to me like you have, like you're working your late-thirties crisis out on me just because we smoked hash a couple times in your mother's basement.

MILTON

That was fun. I'd never seen anyone munchies-attack an entire pie before.

WENDY

How dare you remind me of that when...That's what I'm talking about. We have some nice memories and now you wanna spoil them by having a future. You shouldn't have tracked me down like that. This isn't a good time for me to be part of...whatever you're expecting...

MILTON

I wasn't –

WENDY

You were! (*Half-beat.*) Nothing's simple anymore. (*Pause.*)

MILTON

No. You're right. (*Significant pause.*) So you're coming over here and we're taking those pictures on Wednesday, right?

Pause while WENDY processes. She sighs.

WENDY

Yeah.

She hangs up. LIGHTS DIM on WENDY as she sets her head down on the kitchen table. MILTON looks at his cell phone, affirms that the lines is disconnected, sets phone down and returns to whatever he's doing on his laptop. ANNE enters kitchen, surprised to find MILTON there.

ANNE

(*Same time as MILTON*) I was at work.

MILTON

(*Same time as ANNE*) I was on the phone.

Their mutually guilty conscious brings no resolve.

ANNE

How's –

MILTON

Asleep. He went down easy tonight. He's got a little fever, but it just might be excitement, having you back and all. (*Pause.*) Are you hungry? I can make you something.

ANNE

(*Sits at table.*) Do we have any wine?

MILTON

No. I'll get you some tomorrow. We have beer. (*She starts to rise.*) I'll get it.

He pours one into a glass and serves her from the right side like a waiter. She attempts to show amusement. He sits back down.

MILTON (Cont.)

I've been thinking about the past lately. My latest preoccupation, as opposed to an occupation. Not our past...not just. (*Half-beat.*) Nothing's as it was, is it? Our parents have gone frail. Friends...change. We don't look the same. This morning I smelled my father's breath in my own, I swear.

ANNE

(*Considers.*) So if the past's gone, what do we do with it?

MILTON

Cash it in.

ANNE

(Interested.) For what? A future that never fulfills what we plan? And how do we do that, anyway?

MILTON

We cash it in for the present. For the right now. It's all we've got.

ANNE

But we don't even know what we've got. It's never what we...ordered. It's all something else. A life of it's own. Unutterably real, but a lot of good it does us.

MILTON

And the past?

ANNE

Cash it in...? For what? It's the only thing with any sense of reality to it. *(Pause.)* What's going on here, you spending your nights calling old girlfriends?

MILTON

While you were gone, did you miss...us?

ANNE

(Considers.) I miss who I was when we were happy. Even when our lives were centered on whether Jeremy was going to, you know, seems...*(Shakes her head.)*...more real than the present.

MILTON

You know, he's not – *(ANNE starts to rise as if to leave the table.)* All right! *(She sits.)* I'm sorry, but it isn't strange you burnt out on all that. Or that you can look back on it fondly. Or that you almost wanted him –

ANNE

(Biting.) You've become quite the philosopher in all your free time.

MILTON

This look of pleasure when you prick me like that is new.

ANNE

(His words reach her. She takes a long moment.) All this...change you've been seeing. Does anyone ever change for the better?

MILTON

(Shaking his head.) While we were fighting for Jeremy's...*(Just says it.)* Life!...I think we just lost touch. How could we not? It wasn't us that mattered anymore...And I'm sorry that it hurts you to hear, but we might have to again, you know? It's not over! *(Half-beat.)* Are you here for that, because if we've got any sort of chance.... *(Pause.)*

ANNE

You could run a railroad spike through my heart and I wouldn't feel a thing.

He looks at her, not comprehending. She turns away and sips her beer. Eventually MILTON laughs a little to himself.

MILTON

It's funny, earlier today, it felt like the first time in, I don't know, I was kind'a excited.

ANNE

About?

(He doesn't respond, except to shake his head.)

Not about me.

MILTON

All I wanted while you were gone was for you back.

ANNE

And now that I am?

MILTON

Are you? It's like what, after 10:30?

ANNE

You know, my new job...

MILTON

Is that true?

ANNE

Why wouldn't it be?

MILTON

How should I know? It's like everything else.

ANNE

Are you looking to make me pay for what I did to you?

MILTON

I hope not.

(Long pause. MILTON tries to change the mood.)

You know, we haven't made love since you've been back. *(Does a little dance in his seat, maybe a cabbage patch.)* Make-up sex. *(She doesn't respond.)* It's okay. I doubt I could.

ANNE

You could probably fuck through concrete. *(They laugh.)*

MILTON

If we do manage to find our way back, wouldn't that be something?

ANNE smiles difficultly, squeezes his hand, exits the kitchen. MILTON goes back to his computer as LIGHTS DIM in their kitchen and RISE AGAIN in FLOYD and WENDY's as FLOYD enters through front door to find WENDY asleep, her head resting on the kitchen table. He gently wakes and helps her up, though she's never fully awake. They move towards bedroom.

WENDY

Did you sell it?

FLOYD

All of it.

WENDY

Did you get a good price?

FLOYD

(Helping her to the bedroom.) Am I going to have to carry you?

WENDY

(Flinching towards couch.) At least you're not him.

**ACT1, SCENE 10 – FLOYD AND WENDY'S APARTMENT/
CAR/
ANNE'S OFFICE**

FLOYD enters the kitchen from his bedroom dressed for work. CONRAD is exiting the bathroom, also dressed for work in suit and tie. FLOYD appears morning weary while CONRAD is very put together.

FLOYD

(Pouring himself a cup of coffee.) You don't sleep much.

CONRAD

No.

FLOYD

Do you want coffee?

CONRAD

How domestic. My driver will have one waiting.

FLOYD

You've got a car?

CONRAD

A sort of car. Four big black nigs carrying a throne chair. *(Pause.)* Why don't you just say it? *(CONRAD looks at him.)* Sir, may I ride with you to the office?

FLOYD

I'd love a ride.

CONRAD

One up me why don't you.

FLOYD follows CONRAD out. Downstage is a Lincoln Town Car, it's side open so that we can see into it. A Driver opens the backdoor for CONRAD, handing him his coffee and morning paper as he gets in. The two sit across from each other. The car will cross the stage during the following conversation.

FLOYD

I can get used to this.

CONRAD

You can get used to herpes and a wife with bad breath. This you hold onto with a knife to someone's throat.

FLOYD

You ever do that? *(CONRAD drinks his coffee, holds the newspaper before him, blocking himself from FLOYD, ignoring him.)* You want to teach me.

CONRAD

(Folds newspaper.) My father did, once. He ran a textile business out of a building on 34th street. Did well enough making the harsh heavy drab cotton uniforms that workers in food and cosmetic plants wore. This was back when this country still had an industry. Nestlé – the chocolatier – was snatching up the smaller snack industries, turning themselves into a conglomerate. To dress all those companies was a big account, which my father got. To service it he put everything he had into upgrading his production. Took a huge loan to pay

for all the machinery. It was the right move, even if a move like that makes you vulnerable. Just when he got up and running, a newly hired VP at Nestlé said he was breaking contract to give the account to a company out of Chicago. Logistics were cited, though it was insider relations, old chums. My father could have sued for breach of contract, but big companies have powerful lawyers and by the time it settled my father would have been bankrupt. So he tracked the VP to his home, broke in and waited in the big wingback study chair where he wouldn't be seen from the doorway. When the VP entered, my father held his WWII knife to the VP's throat, making him understand that if he didn't honor their agreement my father was going to bleed him all over the burgundy carpet.

FLOYD

That's bad ass.

CONRAD

My father was old school. Big guy. Intimidating stature.

FLOYD

He saved his business.

CONRAD

The VP of course agreed, got my father to lower the knife, and before my father crossed the office threshold, the VP shot him twice through the back with the Beretta he kept in his desk drawer, which my father never checked. Didn't kill him, just punctured his kidney and spleen and pancreas. My father never shit out of his ass again. The system of tubes and bags attached to his side was always getting infected. But yes, he kept the account. The scandal was best settled that way.

FLOYD

Is your father still around?

CONRAD

What for? The point is that the knife is a metaphor. There's no reason to ever pull a trigger anymore, except on yourself. Lawyers, the press, and shareholders are your weapons now. Even the most powerful, impervious to personal scandal, is sustained on the confidence of a board of directors. Shake a board's confidence, make their stock wobble, and you've got vulnerability. A business relationship is no different than any other. Every relationship, romantic, whatever, is built upon a structure of power. Which is why a proper sado/masochistic engagement is the only honest relationship there is. Kneel and I will reward you with my touch. What's essential is to ascertain your power.

FLOYD

What if I haven't got any?

CONRAD

Power is a decision. An assertion. How's your new job going?

FLOYD

I'm learning.

CONRAD

And that's something, right? Knowledge is power, yes? Wrong. Your boss is smarter than you. Do you plan on being promoted over her? Never happen. You should consider slapping her with a sexual harassment suit. Or plant drugs in her office and call in a bust. Or let slip around the water cooler that the new drug they've got her on is really helping her HIV. Untether her.

FLOYD

What if I just ask if I can have her job.

CONRAD

Do you want me to tell the driver to stop the car and throw you under it?

FLOYD

Just wanted to see if I could untether you. If only for a sec.

CONRAD

(Considers) Not bad. *(Car stops before office.)* I'll go in first. Why don't you see if you can get someone to believe the car is yours.

CONRAD exits, followed after a moment by FLOYD, who goes directly into ANNE's office.

ANNE

You're early. *(Looks at watch)* Just. I've left a ton of papers on your desk for filing. And I need you to pull all the files for the Mosley account, the full trail of paperwork. I don't know why it's not in the computer.

(Without looking up, ANNE waves him away. FLOYD doesn't move.)

Yes?

FLOYD

I was wondering if you'd like to come to dinner.

ANNE

(Pause.) You want to have dinner with me.

FLOYD

I live with my girlfriend. We...wanted to have you over.

ANNE

Do people still do that? Invite their...forget it. When?

FLOYD

(Pause.) Tomorrow.

ANNE

(Pause.) Okay.

FLOYD

(Pause.) Is there anything...you don't eat....Allergies to shellfish, or...

ANNE

No, everything's great.

FLOYD

Great.

ANNE

Great.

FLOYD exits office

ACT 1, SCENE 11 – MILTON AND ANNE'S APARTMENT: STUDIO

MILTON's studio is a small second bedroom that serves as an office as well as a photography studio. A pair of c-stands support a roll of white paper that is rolled to the floor to create a white screen. Before it is a camera on a tripod. MILTON stands beside it, awaiting WENDY, who is in the doorway speaking on the phone.

WENDY

(On phone.) For dinner? Do people still do that?...Tomorrow...No, fine...You're going to?...We'll talk about it tonight, I'm walking into a meeting. Bye. *(Hangs up.)*

MILTON

You lied to him.

WENDY

We're meeting.

MILTON

We've already met. Do you want to....

Takes her bag and coat somewhat awkwardly, places them on a chair.

How do we...? WENDY

Well, if you could stand.... MILTON

...Like this? WENDY

Can you just...? MILTON

WENDY attempts to pose before the screen but is uncomfortable and doesn't understand what's expected of her. MILTON is uncertain as to what he wants. He snaps a few pictures, moves the camera and snaps a few more. It increases in discomfort until they mutually give up.

No, it's not working. MILTON

You haven't even looked at what you've taken. WENDY

It doesn't feel right. MILTON

I know what you – WENDY

The truth is we have no idea what portraiture is, not really. We've seen like a billion of them, but what are they? Someone's face? That's not enough. Why do they work? MILTON

Why does someone's face work? WENDY

What makes a picture of someone's face a portrait? MILTON

What else would it be? WENDY

No, what I mean....I have no idea what I mean. MILTON

Pause.

I brought the wig.

WENDY

(*Excited.*) Put it on.

MILTON

(*Puts it on, but still doesn't know how to pose.*) Who am I?

WENDY

That's good, let's figure it out. Look at me as if you were curious about me.

MILTON

I am curious.

WENDY

As strangers. Someone you don't know.

MILTON

But who am I?

WENDY

Well, let's ask ourselves...That mysterious someone we pass on the street, what makes them a mystery? Let's take someone, anyone...

MILTON

Your wife...

WENDY

Okay, fine, her. Though in truth, I have no idea who she is.

MILTON

Really?

WENDY

And she claims not to know who she is either, though I think that's a lie. A lie she tells herself.

MILTON

I think we better...

WENDY

Yeah, I think you're right. So, who do you *want* to be?

MILTON

WENDY

I'd be someone who knows what they want.

MILTON

So what do you want? Money? Sex? To be recognized when you walk down a street?

WENDY

I don't know.

MILTON

(He snaps a picture, looks at image on back of camera) I can see that.

WENDY

It's like some weird sin, not knowing.

MILTON

Let's play at it. You're walking down the street and decide that you want a single piece of chocolate from one of those hoity-toity shops, three and four dollars for a one-bite piece. There's one just a couple blocks away, so that's where you're headed. Now that you've decided, you can almost taste the chocolate on your tongue. You possess it, and as you're walking to claim it, you see me. *(Takes picture, looks at it.)* You see me and you're possessed by a sense of your own life. *(Takes picture)* So you stop. *(Takes picture.)* You touch your hair. *(She touches her hair. He takes picture)* It's not even a decision, it's like your body, your smile, the tips of your fingers are all part of some languid movement. You stop, approach, and smile. *(She smiles. He takes picture and looks at it.)*

MILTON

(Looking at image on back of camera.) I think that's what a portrait might be. *(WENDY comes and looks at it.)*

WENDY

Too bad it's not a real one.

MILTON

What do you mean? Who's to say?

WENDY

(Looking again.) I think I like her.

MILTON

Should we try another?

Pause. Something in WENDY strains. She takes off wig.

WENDY

When I called the other night...

MILTON
You know you don't have to...

WENDY
I'm not sorry. I was upset.

MILTON
Okay.

WENDY
Your wife...you said you don't know her.

MILTON
I did.

WENDY
What exactly is this, then?

MILTON
Kind of easy, isn't it? Being here. Calling at night to yell at me?

WENDY
I'm not going to sleep with you.

It hangs there a moment.

MILTON
It's not about that.

WENDY
What, then?

MILTON
Something else. Something I'm trying to make for myself. I like that it's so easy between us, but it's not what it was, is it? Those two kids in my mother's basement, they're never going to be again, if that part of me is dead, I'd like to know who he's been replaced with.

WENDY
When you say it, it sounds...might be a tall order.

MILTON
I'm unemployed. What else've I got to do? (*Checks his watch.*) Actually, I've gotta pick up my son. Sylvia's got him.

WENDY

It's okay, I've got to get home. *(Beat)* I'd like to meet your son. Would that be weird?

MILTON

Things aren't weird for kids, just for adults.

WENDY

Until they remember stuff *as* adults.

MILTON

A good question, right? How much we design our lives to ensure our kids don't have weird memories.

WENDY

How should I know? Floyd, he's always been kid enough. I think I was getting tired of carrying him. Till now that... *(Pause.)* I dunno. I think something might have happened. Or is happening. Everything's.... *(Pause.)*

MILTON

I'm tired of being the one carried.

WENDY

Are you? Carried?

MILTON

Financially.

WENDY

That's not everything.

MILTON

Apparently you should know. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry.

WENDY

That's the problem with easy, makes it far too easy to insult.

MILTON

Can we try the pictures again, next time? If you're into it.

WENDY

Keep pretending?

MILTON

Trying things out.

WENDY

(Laughs.) All right. Next time I'll bring the dice.

MILTON

What does that mean?

WENDY

Just don't dress me up as Princess Lea, ok?

SCENE 12 – FLOYD AND WENDY'S APARTMENT

It is the next evening. WENDY enters apartment to find FLOYD bustling about, putting the final touches on diner, lighting candles, arranging the silverware, etc. The kitchen table has been replaced with a larger table than previously, and has been elaborately set.

WENDY

Where am I?

FLOYD

I know, right!

WENDY

All this to impress your boss?

FLOYD

I don't know if *impress* is the right word.

WENDY

What then?

FLOYD

Just shaking things up.

WENDY

Sounds like something Conrad would say. Did you give our kitchen steroids?

FLOYD

Rented, all of it. Turns out there's nothing you can't rent in this city, for a price. The salt and pepper in the salt and pepper shakers, billed separately.

WENDY

This must have set you back.

Yeah, well.

FLOYD

I don't know what to think.

WENDY

Who asked you to think.

FLOYD

Floyd!

WENDY

(Slides over and kisses her cheek several times.) You know I'm playing.

FLOYD

Do I? This new you you're playing at...

WENDY

Do we not like him?

FLOYD

I'm not sure I like being asked.

WENDY

(A moment of doubt.) No, I'm not sure either. (Switching back.) He does dress snazzy, though.
(Turns around so that she can appreciate his new slacks and designer dress shirt.)
Something, right?

FLOYD

Definitely something. (Acknowledging table.) There are four settings.

WENDY

Boss's husband. She asked this morning if she could bring him along. Gotta admit, I kind of liked her asking my permission.

FLOYD

What happened to your healthy fear of women?

WENDY

As my social worker mother says: Fake it till you make it.

FLOYD

How long you think you can fake it?

WENDY

FLOYD

(Matter of fact.) Till I make it.

WENDY

It's strange to see you so determined.

FLOYD

Play along. Let's see where it goes. Might turn out to be important.

WENDY

Just try not to forget who I moved in with in the first place.

FLOYD

Is that what you're going to wear?

WENDY

It was good enough for Sandra Bullock.

FLOYD

Have you seen her last movie? C'mon, what about your Versace blouse?

WENDY

That's not really appropriate for... Your boss is a woman, what's she gonna care if –

FLOYD

Predatory bitch. Maybe just to distract her.

WENDY

From what?

FLOYD

That's what we're gonna find out. C'mon, they're gonna be here in a minute.

(He claps his hands, chasing her from the kitchen and into the bedroom.)

And wear that skirt, you know the one. I want them to see you breathing.

There's a knock at the door. FLOYD first touches the ipod stereo he's set on the kitchen counter, playing something a little hip without being intrusive. He answers door. Enter ANNE, followed by MILTON, snickering.

ANNE

Hello, Floyd. This is Milton.

FLOYD

(Shaking his hand.) Hi. Welcome.

MILTON

Good to meet you. Sorry, we were just laughing that it's our first time out in...a while. We've got a son who, you know, kids. Anyway it's our first official date in, how long?

ANNE

Actually we were laughing because our first date is to have dinner with you.

FLOYD

You saying I'm not numero uno on your social agenda?

ANNE

Worse. I'm saying that the state of our social agenda, you are.

A slightly strained moment, still at the door, as if: what next?

FLOYD

C'mon in. I've got wine or –

MILTON

I'd love a beer.

FLOYD

Got that, too. *(Gets MILTON a beer.)*

ANNE

Your home is –

FLOYD

Just what you were expecting?

ANNE

I hadn't thought about it enough to expect. But it's lovely, the table. You obviously put yourself out. Nice of you.

FLOYD

(To ANNE, holding bottles of wine.) Red or white?

ANNE

As long as it's in a big glass. *(She settles into the couch.)*

FLOYD

I've got vodka. We can do shots.

MILTON

Now you're talking, let's start this night off right. *(To ANNE.)* Why not, a sitter and cabbing it home tonight. Get me drunk enough and you might see some action.

ANNE

You get drunk enough I'll leave you here and really see some action.

MILTON

Look at you, boozing it up and cracking jokes. I suspect we're entering upon a memorable evening.

ANNE

I'm surrounded by... (*Doesn't finish.*)

FLOYD

Yes?

ANNE

Men. Speaking of, isn't there supposed to be a girlfriend round here?

MILTON

(*To ANNE.*) That was a ruse you threw a wrench in when you asked me along. Floyd here was going to seduce you for your job.

ANNE

How would that get him it?

FLOYD

I sue for sexual harassment.

MILTON

Nice! This guy's got vision. I might ask you to mentor me.

FLOYD

You'd be the first person who ever asked that.

MILTON

No, no, you probably underestimate yourself. You worked in the messenger center I heard, right? Worked your way up. Now you're asking the boss over for a home-cooked meal. I didn't know people still did that. You've got moves. I'll bet you can dance, too, can'cha?

ANNE

I'll bet he can't.

FLOYD

No, I can't dance.

MILTON

Take a lesson. I took a month's worth of swing classes just to impress her.

ANNE

I'd forgotten you did that.

MILTON

A different lifetime ago. But admit it, you were impressed.

ANNE

I was impressed.

MILTON

(To FLOYD.) And that's the secret, right? Not what you know or can do. It's can you keep them dazzled? Or dazzle 'em even once!

FLOYD

I doubt I've ever dazzled anyone.

ANNE

That's not how Floyd worked his way up.

MILTON

How'd you do it?

ANNE

(Before FLOYD can answer.) That's what we're here to find out.

MILTON

Ah, I'll bet he's got moves you don't know about. He's got good taste in beer. How's your wine? *(ANNE gives a thumbs up.)* Music. I dig this song. *(Holds up empty beer bottle.)* You mind if I have another? Don't bother, I'll help myself. *(As MILTON dances over to the refrigerator, he turns up music.)* Maybe your little woman hears there's a party out here, she'll come out to investigate.

As MILTON is hidden by the refrigerator door, leaning in to grab another beer, WENDY enters from bedroom. She is dressed notably sexier than the rest. This will come to bother her through the rest of the scene.

WENDY

I'm so sorry, I'm....

FLOYD

(Introducing to ANNE.) This is –

ANNE

(Rising from couch.) Don't worry, though I think these guys were getting ready to do beer bongs and ask each other out. I'm Anne.

I'm – WENDY

(From refrigerator.) Wendy! MILTON

WENDY
(Sees him. Almost annoyed.) What're you doing here?
(All three look at her. Realizing how she's sounded, she looks back and forth at ANNE and FLOYD to explain.)

We know each other.
(Goes and hugs MILTON, as if it's been years and not days since they've seen one another.)

How are you?

MILTON
So this is where you...(To ANNE and FLOYD.) We went to, Jesus, high school together.
And before that.

Our whole lives! WENDY

Our whole lives. And now this is – MILTON

Coincidence. WENDY

Crazy. MILTON

When's the last time you – FLOYD

Forever! WENDY

Seems that way. MILTON

Hmm... ANNE

(To MILTON.) What're you.... WENDY

Well... MILTON

You're married! WENDY

To your boyfriend's boss. MILTON

That's... WENDY

Crazy. MILTON

Well, this should give us lots to talk about. ANNE

No, I'm embarrassed, we're not going to hijack... WENDY

Don't sweat yourself, you two catching up is how we'll all learn about each other. ANNE

(*To FLOYD.*) We're not going to steal... WENDY

(*Laughs and rubs her back.*) Don't worry. You look like we just caught you having an affair or something. You guys aren't, are you? FLOYD

No! WENDY

I was kidding. FLOYD

FLOYD goes to kitchen, opens stove and takes out a tray of appetizers, which he serves around.

Actually, we once – MILTON

We never! WENDY

MILTON

Not even that drunken –

WENDY

Never.

MILTON

No, I'm just playing. I figure all our pasts are open to revision. *(Takes appetizer from tray.)*

ANNE

Not just our pasts.

MILTON

Ah! *(Appetizer is hot, and he's reacting to ANNE.)* You see what she just did there? That was a threat.

FLOYD

She once threatened to tear off my arms and beat me to death with them.

ANNE

(Taking appetizer.) I was being polite when I said your arms.

MILTON

Ouch!

WENDY

Anything else I'm not sure if it would have been to death.

They all laugh, even WENDY, strained but pleased she was able to pull off a joke.

FLOYD

You see what *she* did there?

MILTON

Floyd, I might be going home with you tonight.

FLOYD

I'm already home.

WENDY

And our couch is already taken.

FLOYD

Which means I guess that's where I'm sleeping tonight.

ANNE
Is that true, Wendy?

WENDY
Which part?

ANNE
(Coughs, washing down her appetizer with wine.) That's funny. Exactly, which part? I don't remember.

*The door opens suddenly. CONRAD enters, key in hand, and all freeze.
ANNE and CONRAD stare at each other with inquiry, though neither speak.*

CONRAD
(Still looking at ANNE.) Floyd.

FLOYD
Yes?

CONRAD
Let this be a lesson to you.

FLOYD
Okay.

CONRAD
You notice how neither of us *(Indicating he and ANNE with a flick of fingers.)* speak, or get caught looking like fish gaping out of water?

FLOYD
I see that.

CONRAD
Good. *(Half-beat.)* Good.

CONRAD takes it all in, including WENDY's attire, making her squirm a little. He walks towards MILTON, who is the only one he doesn't know.

CONRAD
(Offering his hand) And you are?

MILTON
Milton.

CONRAD

I don't know what that is.

MILTON

In certain rooms in certain cities of certain cultures, it means: Husband.

CONRAD

Hers? (*Indicating ANNE. MILTON nods.*) I'm catching on. Give me the rest in shortcut.

MILTON

(*Pointing to self.*) Guest. (*To ANNE.*) Guest. (*To table.*) Dinner. (*Holds up beer.*) Drink.

CONRAD

Exceptional. Do people still do that? Invite their boss home to dine?

MILTON

Apparently.

CONRAD

How's your beer?

MILTON

Imported.

CONRAD

Excellent.

MILTON

Are you a guest?

CONRAD

Of sorts.

FLOYD

I'm sorry, we didn't think to...

WENDY

(*To FLOYD.*) I thought you would have –

FLOYD

He never comes home before...(*To CONRAD.*) We have plenty of food.

CONRAD

I accept.

WENDY

(Annoyed.) Wonderful.

CONRAD

(Still looking at MILTON, but addressing FLOYD.) Do you see, Floyd, how Anne sits silently awaiting a vital piece of information?

FLOYD

Yes.

MILTON

Would you like a beer?

CONRAD

I prefer wine.

MILTON

Allow me.

CONRAD

Thank you. *(Turns towards FLOYD.)* Do you think that trait developed or inherent?

FLOYD

I don't know.

CONRAD

No, some dispositions are difficult to surmise. They are only to be admired.

(MILTON attempts to hand CONRAD a glass of red wine.)

I prefer white.

(MILTON leaves full glass of red wine on counter, takes new glass and fills it with white from refrigerator. CONRAD plucks an appetizer from the tray, which has been left on kitchen table, and sits next to ANNE.)

Anne, you've never invited me to dinner.

ANNE

I didn't know you ate.

CONRAD

(Handed glass of wine by MILTON.) Thank you. I am Conrad, by the way.

MILTON

You seem familiar here. Are you a relative?

CONRAD

Not quite. Just the boss. The boss boss. But this young couple has been kind enough to lend me their hospitality during a particularly trying time. Though I believe I'm going to extend that hospitality beyond endurance tonight.

MILTON

Why would you do that?

CONRAD

Well you should ask.

WENDY

Now that we all have something to look forward to, perhaps we should eat.

WENDY directs MILTON and ANNE into seats, while FLOYD runs into other room and returns with what is probably a desk chair, which CONRAD takes from him. CONRAD places the chair between ANNE and MILTON.

CONRAD

May I come between you two?

ANNE

Funny, I was almost having a nice time.

CONRAD

Were you? Isn't that nice.

ANNE

You mentioned a trying time.

CONRAD

I did. My wife and I are getting divorced.

ANNE

I'm sorry.

CONRAD

Thank you for saying so.

MILTON

Any kids in the mix?

CONRAD

Daughters. Two of them. I suspect their mention seems grievous, broken home and all that, but the bond between them and my wife, they're virtually inseparable. Had I not found

myself removed from the equation, a perhaps envious outsider, I could only describe their union as something quite heartening.

All, including CONRAD, are silenced by the disclosure.

ANNE

If you don't cut yourself off completely, you might find yourself integral later on. When your daughters are older. When a mother or...boyfriend isn't council enough.

CONRAD

Kind of you to say.

(FLOYD has been serving salad. He offers CONRAD, who accepts some on his plate. To ANNE.)

Shows real initiative, does it not? Inviting you for dinner. Bet you didn't think he had it in him when you first met. He has changed since, hasn't he? Sharpened a bit. Haircut. Some mid-range designer shirts. More hard lines in general. I wouldn't be surprised if he joined a gym. I thought nothing of him at all until one night I discovered that he *role-plays*. I doubt it anything insidious, but it interested me right away. Must be something from my own childhood, that I wasn't allowed to dress up as Peter Pan for Halloween or something that made me think it the recourse of an adventurous spirit. Or at least an imaginative one. Or at least Floyd.

ANNE

He's working out well.

CONRAD

This isn't a review. I couldn't care less how he performs, not directly. I suppose one should be courteous, though, when dining at one's table.

WENDY

Hasn't seem to struck you.

CONRAD

(To MILTON.) Now this one interests me. Again, admittedly, not right off the bat. No more than the raised eyebrow of curiosity you lend any mixed breed couple. But repetition, like it or not, breeds familiarity. I offered her a position in the firm if she'd sleep with me. *(To FLOYD.)* Yours, actually, and had she accepted I would have dismissed you on the spot. Did you think your place in my graces more secure than that?

FLOYD

No. I have some idea –

CONRAD

You have NO idea.

MILTON

Actually, you're offending me.

CONRAD

Gallant of you. You're unemployed if I'm not mistaken, yes? What's it like being kept by a woman? Must be emasculating, at best. But your function isn't solely as kept, is it? You care for an unwell child, if I'm not mistaken.

MILTON

How would you know that?

CONRAD

Your much better half serves a fiscally delicate position in the company. Has her hands deep in our...pockets. To not know the particulars of her particulars would be negligent. *(Pause.)*

FLOYD

What's wrong with your...?

MILTON

Son. He has leukemia.

CONRAD

And the bone marrow transplant our company health plan paid for, was it a success?

MILTON

For now, but...they're watching it close.

WENDY

(Upset.) I didn't know.

ANNE

How could you have?

CONRAD looks back and forth between MILTON and WENDY.

CONRAD

Is there something we need to know about here?

FLOYD

They know one another, turns out. Friends from high school.

CONRAD

Friendship, that's nice. And you've kept in touch since?

MILTON

No, we haven't seen each other in...it's a coincidence, our...

CONRAD

Nothing since? Never? No phone calls, or social networking?

WENDY

No.

CONRAD

And why'd you lose touch?

WENDY

It happens.

CONRAD

Just as it does that people retain their sacred friendships.

MILTON

Do you have many of those?

CONRAD

You make me feel as if you and I will never serve those roles for one another.

MILTON

Actually, I'd like to knock your teeth out.

CONRAD

I'm not sure if that would adequately distract us from the mystery of you and our little Wendy. Trust me when I tell you, though, you had better make sure I never get up, can never communicate with so much as a blink, because when I'm finished you won't have so much as a pubic hair left to pawn.

ANNE, who has been eating her salad seemingly unaffected, rises and goes to the stove, opens it, peels back the foil and serves herself.

ANNE

Hope you don't mind. I'm starving.

CONRAD

Your wife, Milton, can be terribly impressive. Are you taking note, Floyd, or are you too distracted by certain other...matters?

FLOYD

I...noticed.

CONRAD

As you should. Our home-lives must not distract us from the business at hand.

ANNE

What business is that?

CONRAD

I've given Floyd six months to take your position from you by whatever means necessary. Personally, I hope he fails. Not only would your absence from the company be a loss, but, improbable as it seems, I do believe I've developed actual personal need for you.

ANNE

(Eating.) That's nice.

CONRAD

Not at all. It's the truth. Do you believe me?

(ANNE continues to eat, doesn't answer.)

Milton, for which reason do you believe she withholds response?

MILTON

I think she believes you.

CONRAD

And how does that make you feel?

MILTON

You're not really concerned with that.

CONRAD

No, quite right. Though that food....

(Takes a bite off of ANNE's plate. ANNE continues to eat, undaunted.)

Floyd, is that Bathazar's salmon? *(FLOYD nods.)* Oh my.

(CONRAD rises and serves himself, just as ANNE did.)

Can I serve anyone? No? Anne, I think our boy might be learning. Yes, I think he is. You had better watch your back.

ANNE

May the best man win.

CONRAD

(Back at his seat.) No better words. A toast! Floyd, a refill, *sil vous plait*.

FLOYD takes CONRAD's glass to refrigerator to refill it.

WENDY

(Stands.) Floyd, if you refill that glass I'm leaving tonight and you'll never see me again.

FLOYD refills glass, sets it before CONRAD, who eats his fish without looking up. FLOYD sits.

FLOYD

(Calm.) Wendy, I love you and don't want you to leave. And you look beautiful, by the way. I'm sorry if I don't tell you that often enough. I'll be more attentive in the future. I know...Conrad has stirred things up, but we're breaking bread together. *(Raises his glass.)* We should toast. As my grandfather used to say: *La Chiem!* To life!

ANNE, WENDY and MILTON raise their glasses half-heartedly. CONRAD with more enthusiasm.

CONRAD

(Slightly quietly, to ANNE) A formidable maneuver.

ANNE

Noted.

WENDY

(Standing suddenly. To CONRAD.) I'll tell you this, if you think you're spending one more night under my roof, I'll slit your throat in your sleep.

MILTON

Wendy....

WENDY

(To MILTON.) Why're you...? *(She sits.)* I think I'm losing my mind.

CONRAD

(Rising.) No cause for alarm, little one, you'll not discover whether you're capable of such deeds tonight. So, I think we each know our roles from this point forward, yes? Floyd, you're on offence; Anne, the defender; while I decide which I might want to assist by tipping the scales. As for you two, hold onto your little secrets and see if anyone cares.

(Claps hands once, wipes mouth on napkin, which he drops onto plate.

Rises.)

Now that we all know our roles, who wants coffee? I'll make it.

CONRAD turns up music at ipod, begins rummaging through the cabinets looking for the coffee maker. Finds it and sets out to make coffee. LIGHTS DIM.

END of FIRST ACT

ACT 2, SCENE 1 – CONRAD’S OFFICE

One of ANNE and CONRAD’s sessions. During this speech ANNE is strapping CONRAD to a chair, preparing to inflict physical punishment.

ANNE

Our little secret. Even as kids we knew to keep it to ourselves, didn’t we? All our playthings and friends were just set pieces for what was really going on. We couldn’t stop from pissing our pants but we knew enough not to spill the beans, not to let them know we already had everything we needed. But if we said so, mom might put her tit away, so we kept it to ourselves, this awareness. Keeps us children, our secrets.

Because when I look at you I see a child, a child who opens his mouth, demands feeling, and is admired for it. Why’s that? Because this world was specifically made for him. Made to order. Baby reaches out his hand, takes what he wants and discards the rest. No one stops him, so he figures it his right, that that’s what the world is made of, those unafraid to pluck what they want. But then some brittle bitch sees him grabbing and says *Ruthless*. And his shame is a form of punishment. And that makes sense to him. That there should be ramifications for such *awareness*. For knowing the way the world really is. That he should be punished.

(ANNE takes his masked face between her hands.)

You say I’m not your mother, but I am. We all are. It’s what you made us. It’s the mother’s role to inflict punishment. The child assigns the mother that role. This child, the first child, makes mothers of the world. You lead us here, where it’s finally safe, where we have all we need. Where we finally get to pay for what came oh so easily.

ANNE snaps the strap in her hand, steps towards CONRAD. LIGHTS OUT.

ACT 2, SCENE 2 – ANNE’S OFFICE/ BOARDROOM/ ANNE’S OFFICE

FLOYD is in the process of assembling contracts on ANNE’s office floor. He is dressed crisply in dark slacks and a colored shirt with a tie of similar color. He looks good, perhaps stiffer, as if intent to attain greater height. Once the stacks have been assembled, he looks towards office door and takes some pages he’s hidden from a shelf, replacing key pages in three of the copies, tucking the original pages somewhere safe. ANNE enters buttoning the bottom button of her blouse, as she has just come from the session with CONRAD. She sees that FLOYD notices her buttoning up, but ignores his look as she makes final adjustments.

ANNE
Done?

FLOYD
Finished.

ANNE
Good. Now this is where I ask which one's you fucked with.

FLOYD
This is where I play dumb and innocent.

ANNE
These past few weeks you've proved yourself neither.

FLOYD
(Exaggerated.) Thanks!

Pause. ANNE checks her watch. It has risen up her wrist and is facing the wrong direction. She adjusts it while speaking.

ANNE
In seventeen minutes the shareholders will enter the boardroom. Do you know what happens if a contract is not waiting before each of their places?

FLOYD
They buy you a pony.

ANNE
Your every attempt to sabotage this office has flubbed. Know why? I'll demonstrate.
(From the top drawer of her desk ANNE retrieves a figurine which she places on the edge of the desk.)

Knock it over.
(FLOYD touches the toy, which teeters. ANNE knock the toy from the desk onto the floor. It straightens itself there.)

Pick it up.
FLOYD picks up toy, replaces it on desk. Plays with the toy on desk, which never completely falls over.

FLOYD
"Weebles wobble but they don't fall down." I didn't know they still made these.

ANNE
They don't. Ebay.

FLOYD

Which you bought just for this?

ANNE

Don't flatter yourself. For my son.

FLOYD

I've made you wobble.

ANNE

You've made us look like idiots. You hack my email and send company-wide bogus messages. You fuck up the Mack contracts, and now plan to botch a shareholders meeting? The antics are...embarrassing for me, for us, but I'm apparently protected. Shall I demonstrate again? (*She touches Weeble Wobble.*)

FLOYD

You tried to have me fired.

ANNE

Yup.

FLOYD

Didn't work. Know what that makes me? (*He touches Weeble Wobble.*)

ANNE

Just because Conrad's got not-so-invisible threads on both of us doesn't change anything. You're still mine.

FLOYD

How do you figure?

ANNE

I'm resourceful. (*Half-beat.*) I set up a small corporate account in your name and moved a nominal but certainly questionable amount into it. I can see your little rat brain trying to figure how you can fix this, but you can't. You'll never locate the account. Luckily for you neither will anyone else, until I want them to.

FLOYD

(*Pause.*) How come you haven't made use of it yet?

ANNE

I'm about to, I just wanted the pleasure of seeing your face when I told you about it. (*Pause.*) If you have any hope in my not using it, why don't you tell me what it is you want?

Your job.

FLOYD

You can't do it.

ANNE

I'm learning. Fast.

FLOYD

You are that.

ANNE

A few more months, a year at most...

FLOYD

Maybe, if I sit back and let you have it. Why would I?

ANNE

I'll make your life miserable. I'll botch every task that comes out of this office. I have access to everything you have –

FLOYD

Not everything. And I'm about done tolerating your little games. One more re-directed deposit should be enough to catch corporate accounting's eye. Not a good way to start off the career you suddenly seem so intent on. Tell me what you're really after.

ANNE

I told you, your –

FLOYD

...job. I got it, but why that?

ANNE

The money, for one.

FLOYD

You never had it before, why d'you suddenly need it? You getting married?

ANNE

(Pause.) It's not the money. *(But he won't say what it is.)*

FLOYD

It disturbs me that you don't mind appearing the fool.

ANNE

FLOYD

This is the part where I pretend to care about the sanctity of this office.

ANNE

I don't think you own it yet, this attitude. You're still rehearsing.

FLOYD

I'm beginning to understand things. (*Pause.*) What is it *you* want? (*She doesn't answer.*) Maybe I can help you get it.

ANNE

You're gonna help me get you fired?

FLOYD

You're not really satisfied with all you've got, are you?

ANNE?

What d'you think I've got? (*Slightly softer.*) I haven't got anything.

FLOYD

Exactly. I've been paying attention...to you both. You haven't got any real power.

ANNE

And what exactly is that?

FLOYD

Telling someone to do something and having it done.

ANNE

Is that what power is?

FLOYD

I can help you get it.

ANNE

How, exactly?

FLOYD

I hacked into your account. I can get into his. I already have. Problem is I don't know what I'm looking for. What we can use against him.

ANNE

And what happens when you find it?

FLOYD

We make use of it.

ANNE

To what end?

FLOYD

To put you in a position where you can't be touched.

ANNE

What makes you think I've been touched?

FLOYD

(Doesn't quite know what she means.) It's a matter of position, right? If we reach him then he hasn't really protected himself. He's not as untouchable as he seems.

ANNE

The only way you'll ever hurt Conrad is if he wants to be hurt.

FLOYD

You respect him more than I do.

ANNE

You should respect him more. Who he is.

FLOYD

Who is he to you?

Pause.

ANNE

Assuming we...hurt Conrad and I take this mystical position of untouchability, what stops my firing your ass knowing it's only a matter of time before you stab me in the back for my seat at the table.

FLOYD

You give me a seat of my own. Someday. After I've proven myself capable. So there's no need.

ANNE

And what does that get you?

FLOYD

(Losing control.) A place where no bitch ever has me by the balls again.

(FLOYD realizes he's lost control. ANNE smiles at this fact.)

Are you in or not?

Pause.

ANNE

Fix the contracts.

(FLOYD brings out the hidden pages and fixes the contracts while ANNE watches.)

Now set them in the boardroom. *(FLOYD starts to leave.)* You know there are other ways to climb the corporate ladder.

FLOYD

How did you do it?

Anne doesn't respond. FLOYD leaves ANNE's office and enters boardroom carrying stacks of contracts. He finds CONRAD in room with his feet up on boardroom table.

CONRAD

What're those?

FLOYD

The Mack agreements, for signature.

CONRAD

Shred them.

FLOYD

Has the deal been cancelled?

CONRAD

(Taking feet from table.) It'll happen. When the board is finished re-examining the terms.

FLOYD

What does that mean?

CONRAD

That there's a scent of blood in the air. Teeth are gnashing. There's to be a feeding.

(Pause while FLOYD stands silent, awaiting further information, which CONRAD decides to give.)

The Mosley deal. It was supposed to happen and didn't and the numbers the shareholders were fed didn't satisfy. Makes no difference to the corporation, of course. No great profits were expected, just an expansion of our umbrella in the Midwestern market. But something didn't happen, you see.

FLOYD

Sounds...

CONRAD

What? (*No answer.*) Petty? (*Still no answer.*) It's exquisite. Where else do such grand ceremonies take place anymore? Corporations are the temple of man, now. Churches demand, what? Nothing. You have to bind a feedbag of bricks around someone's neck for them to know to bow their heads. Here (*Indicating the room.*) sacrifice is still on the menu.

FLOYD

Cannibals.

CONRAD

There you have it. To enter you either bite or be bitten. What're you going to do? Offer up your pound of flesh, or fill your mouth with blood? (*FLOYD doesn't answer, but looks about room.*) Looks just like four walls, doesn't it?

FLOYD

It's your blood they want.

CONRAD

That's right.

FLOYD

Will they get it?

CONRAD

(*Shrugs.*) From me they don't want so very much. My head, for now, they can do without. Not that they have the guts to take it. A little toe will suffice.

FLOYD

You'll give it to 'em?

CONRAD

Remove even the toenail and you'll never stand so straight again. No, they get none of what's mine. Which means I've got to give them someone else. (*CONRAD looks at FLOYD with meaning; FLOYD attempts to stand firm.*) Mmmm...you don't get off that easy. Nor would you satisfy anyone's appetite.

FLOYD

Who, then?

CONRAD

(*Hard.*) Whoever I decide. (*Easing, a little.*) And should the position you've been assigned to vie for suddenly becomes vacated in the carnage, you'll not assume its seat by default. She assured her position by service the likes of which you're not yet equipped to imagine.

FLOYD

I want to be.

CONRAD

Do you? *(Beat.)* What pound of flesh do you lay upon the alter? What've you got to offer? Your prick? Your mouth after we take out your teeth?

(FLOYD opens his mouth, but no sound issues.)

Go way. You've got to own something before you're ready to trade it in.

(But FLOYD doesn't leave.)

FLOYD

I can hurt her...for you. You don't want to do it yourself.

CONRAD

What makes you think so?

FLOYD

Something in your delivery.

CONRAD

And how would you do it?

FLOYD

If she got caught going after someone. If she got caught going after you.

CONRAD

Why would she do that?

FLOYD

You tell me.

CONRAD

(Pause while he considers.) The Mosley deal. All eyes are turned towards it. Something in the files might prove...useful.

(FLOYD goes to leave. CONRAD speaks, stopping him.)

The mystics say that we own nothing, that the heart of this life is an illusion. Borrowed flesh. Borrowed time. Do you agree with that?

FLOYD

If there's...nothing...there's nothing to...lose.

CONRAD

Not even ourselves? *(Pause.)* Should we bow our heads, you and I? Together? Now?

(CONRAD bows his head, FLOYD only looks on. CONRAD raises his head, looks at FLOYD mischievously.)

No? Let's help each other discover just what we can lose, you and me, yes? *(Pause.)* You may go.

FLOYD exits.

ACT 2, SCENE 3 – FLOYD and WENDY’s apartment

Wendy in a hurry, nervous, running about preparing to leave. She is dressed as if going out on a date. Same sexy skirt as end of Act 1, with a different blouse. She seems as if trying to gather her things before FLOYD gets home. FLOYD enters. It is as if each has entered upon an embarrassing moment.

Hey.

FLOYD

Hi.

WENDY

You looks nice.

FLOYD

Thanks. You said you were gonna be more attentive to my looks. Thanks for upholding.

WENDY

(Pause.) You going out?

FLOYD

I am. I didn’t know if you were coming back, you know, at what hour. It’s Friday, I figured...Are you going out again?

WENDY

I guess. Yeah. Probably.

FLOYD

You always look so sharp these days I can’t tell...if you’re dressing for someone or....

WENDY

Who would I be dressing for?

FLOYD

Not my place to ask.

WENDY

You don’t think I’m –

FLOYD

WENDY

How would I know? How would you know if I was?

FLOYD

(Pause. Considers) You're not...?

WENDY

I'm not.

FLOYD

Are you going out with...? I don't want to intrude.

WENDY

Meaning you don't want me to intrude on what's kept you out and away so much lately.

FLOYD

Whoa. I'm sorry. I've been working, you know, a lot. I guess we haven't been seeing enough of each other lately. *(Half-beat.)* Thanks for not changing the locks on me.

WENDY

(Laughs, despite herself.) Hope I don't have to.

FLOYD

Wendy, the hours I've been –

WENDY

Don't say it if it's not true. Whatever you've been...whatever. I'll trust you've got your reasons. That you've traded us for...But don't start lying about it. To me or yourself.

FLOYD

I'm not trying to... *(Doesn't finish. Pause. Maybe gets a little angry.)* I feel like I've got so much to tell you, but...

WENDY

What? Can't? Won't? Because you think I wouldn't approve? Or is it because you've gotten a taste for secrets?

FLOYD

(Considers.) Probably a bit of each.

WENDY

And you think there's going to be a place for US in this?

FLOYD

I've never considered it any other way. Except as us.

WENDY

(Soft pause.) I hear you but I don't feel you. Your words, your manner, they seem...empty to me. I've never not felt you before.

FLOYD

(Hurt.) Funny thing to say when you're dressed ready-to-be-fucked by someone else.

WENDY

(Pause.) You never hurt me on purpose before.

FLOYD

You once called me an elevator lackey. I blew that off. Don't start taking every word like it's seared into flesh. *(Trying to hurt her.)* Unless you need to.

WENDY

I should go.

FLOYD

Don't want to keep him waiting.

(WENDY grabs her bag to leave, opens the door then slams it, coming back at FLOYD. He speaks before she can, though.)

I've always been a doormat to you. A loveable idiot. Now that I'm about to change that, to be the one to do something FOR US!, you're threatened. You'd hate to see me succeed.

WENDY

Succeed at what? I've never seen you as anything but –

FLOYD

A bottom. *(She looks at him questioningly.)* The one who lays down to take it in the ass.

WENDY

You were never crude. *(Half-beat.)* I'm not sure what you're trying to make me pay for.

FLOYD

Then I'll be sure to itemize the bill. *(Pause.)* Not used to not having the last word, huh? Go on, don't keep him waiting. You can make me pay for growing a set later.

(WENDY makes to leave, again comes back, and again FLOYD speaks first.)

You are going out with him again, aren't you? *(WENDY nods.)*

WENDY

He's a friend. We've been there for one another lately.

FLOYD

Must be nice.

WENDY

You know, their son might –

FLOYD

(Interrupting.) That fucking bitch.

WENDY

I'm sorry it turned out he's your boss' husband, but my relationship with Milton's got nothing to do with –

FLOYD

It's got everything to do with! He's an old woman.

WENDY

What does that even mean?

FLOYD

Everything I am she's got her fingers on.

WENDY

Do you have any sense of yourself at all these days?

FLOYD

That's all I've got sense of. *(Soft.)* It's enough. Believe me.

There is nothing left to be said. WENDY looks at him, beseeching. FLOYD stands firm. WENDY exits.

ACT 2, SCENE 4 – NIGHTCLUB

Wendy enters nightclub, looking around for MILTON. House music is pounding, strobe lights flashing. It is disorienting enough for her to pass MILTON, who is dressed elaborately, with great flourish in a woman's dress, and WENDY's white wig. Safely unrecognized, MILTON passes her then, from behind, puts his hands on her shoulders.

MILTON

Hi.

(WENDY tries to turn to face him, but he prevents her from turning.)

Don't turn around.

He guides her into a set of booths that share a back, so that if they were each facing forward, their backs would be towards one another. He adjusts

WENDY so that she's facing forward, while he sits sideways so that they can speak to one another without her seeing him. He maintains a hand on her shoulder to prevent her turning.

WENDY

As if this place wasn't disorienting enough.

MILTON

Do you like it?

WENDY

I don't know. It's been a while since I've gone clubbing. After college, you know, with a few girlfriends. But since I've been with Floyd...not really his scene.

MILTON

More of an action movie and bar with a pool table sort of guy.

WENDY

(Laughs.) He used to be. Now he's....

MILTON

What?

WENDY

I don't know. *(A bit agitated.)* What are we doing here?

MILTON

I thought we needed a date.

WENDY

(Smiling.) That's nice. It's been a while since someone's asked me on one.

MILTON

You sound lonely.

WENDY

Takes one to know one.

She tries to turn around. He prevents her with a firm grip on her shoulder. She exhibits a bit of discomfort.

MILTON

You never were one for mysteries. I remember that.

WENDY

I thought you said the past didn't exist.

MILTON

When I realized the present doesn't either, I decided to resurrect it. (*Half-beat.*) I remember you telling me 'bout the time you and your brother got lost on a camping trip. How terrified you were. Do you think there's some integral lack of adventure in you?

WENDY

(*Not sure where this is going.*) I don't know. What do you think?

MILTON

I think we're neck deep in it no matter how much we hide.

(*She again tries to turn and he again prevents her.*)

Just a bit longer. (*Pause.*) You know my wife is making 175 thousand a year.

WENDY

Good for her? I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say to that.

MILTON

We were separated. She left us. Jeremy and me. I haven't worked in like...Jeremy's doctor bills, even after insurance and every assistance program I got us on, they're staggering. I borrowed from everyone and all the while she's....

WENDY

When were you separated?

MILTON

Recently. Now we're back. That is until she told me how much she's been making. Now we're separated again. Sort of. I'm sleeping in the living room. Actually we've never been back. Not like that.

WENDY

(*Confused. Annoyed.*) I'm sorry.

MILTON

You don't sound it.

WENDY

I feel bad for her.

MILTON

Why? As a woman?

WENDY

I don't know. Maybe. To cut herself off like that. It had to cost her.

Apparently she could afford it.

MILTON

You're just hurt.

WENDY

Is that what I am?

MILTON

He releases his grip. She turns to face him and his face, in full glory, meets hers head-on. Long pause, which he breaks by giving her a quick kiss on the lips. She slaps him.

You didn't tell me you were having marital problems.

WENDY

(Touching his face.) Ow.

MILTON

Is that why you're wearing a dress?

WENDY

Don't you think I look –

MILTON

You're wearing a fucking dress!

WENDY

I know. I was there when I put it on, and plucked my eyebrows and shaved my chest.

MILTON

You shaved your...?

WENDY

Well, I couldn't –

MILTON

(She pulls his dress front forward and looks down.)

Be careful, you're going to....

As he re-adjusts the dress she slaps him again, this time not in the face, and perhaps with less anger.

Why can't anything just...

WENDY

What! It's still me. MILTON

Is it? I have no idea who you are. WENDY

You know who I am. MILTON

Do I? WENDY

Look at me. (*She does.*) MILTON

I'd think this at the least...multiplies you, or something. If I was your wife I'd be jealous. WENDY

That's nice of you to say. MILTON

Does she know? WENDY

I can't imagine she'd have the slightest interest. MILTON

You sound angry? WENDY

Do I? I should be careful. Not good for the face. MILTON

She touches his face.

I hate the fact that you look beautiful. WENDY

If you're taking pity on me you'd do better turning it on yourself. (*Half-beat.*) I'm sorry. MILTON

No worries. I don't think I can *be* insulted anymore. Not today, anyway. WENDY

Don't dare it. Might be a long night. MILTON

Pause. She is getting used to him as a woman.

WENDY

How's your son?

MILTON turns away and shakes his head as if not wanting to talk about it, then faces her, smiling sadly but with perseverance, as if to say that life is sustaining itself.

WENDY (Cont.)

Is that why you're doing this? Or is it because you want to? Or are you just out to... punish yourself?

MILTON

Why would I do that?

WENDY

We all do.

MILTON

Are you a secret cutter?

WENDY

I don't have secrets. Not like that. Your makeup...you know what you're doing.

MILTON

I used to go with a woman who liked to "tart me up". Her words for it. The time she'd put into it, the clothes and accessories. It was seducing. She'd take me to the Mermaid's Lounge where everyone seemed to be playing a part, acting something out. Putting away who they were for...something, someone, else.

WENDY

You liked it.

MILTON

I don't think I ever appreciated it. I was always too busy...observing. Outside of it. Lately I've felt the need to be inside.

WENDY

Is there something I can do to help?

(He kisses her on the lips. It is a decent kiss.)

Are you trying to make a lesbian of me?

MILTON

I thought all women were a little gay. One more thing you've got on us. Maybe I'm trying to cheat my way onto the winning team.

WENDY

You're cracked.

MILTON

I'm in a club dressed as a woman, of course I'm cracked.

WENDY

At least you wear it well.

(She kisses him.)

I don't know why it feels...permissible to kiss you like this.

(She does so again.)

Are you angry that I won't sleep with you as a man?

MILTON

You'll sleep with me as a woman?

(She touches his face, somewhat sadly)

It's okay. Use me as you will. I'm determined to be melancholy. Elegant and melancholy.

WENDY

Too bad, I could have used a good time. If not a date, a girl's night out.

MILTON

Should have gone out with someone else.

WENDY

For a moment there it looked like I did.

MILTON

That's the problem, we're never exactly someone else. Best we can do is rift off what we've got. And look where *that* gets us. *(Touches and drops the hem of his dress.)*

WENDY

I'd like that. To be someone else while still...being me.

MILTON

Who would you be?

WENDY

Someone who has the gumption to talk to someone like you.

MILTON

But we are talking. What did you say your name was?

WENDY

(Playing along.) Matilda. I was just over there with my girlfriends. I saw you and thought, there's a man who knows what he wants.

MILTON

As every man dressed as a woman does.

WENDY

You're funny.

MILTON

It comes with the shoes. Matilda sounds like a grandmother's name.

WENDY

My grandmother had three daughters and a son by the time she was my age.

MILTON

Prodigious of her.

WENDY

She left her drunken lout husband in Okalahoma, packed her brood into a Grayhound and headed for Harlem. Harlem was like a black Mecca back then. But she only had enough money to make it to Trenton, New Jersey, and that's where she arrived, penniless, jobless, not knowing a soul.

MILTON

What happened to her?

WENDY

Life. Got a job, met a man, lost one of her daughters

MILTON

The extraordinary ordinariness of it.

WENDY

(Proudly.) Yes. *(Then, a little sad.)* There always seemed something hurt about her. *(Stronger.)* Exuberant and hurt at once.

MILTON

Losing a daughter.

WENDY

I think that was only part of it. It means something to me to think about her.

MILTON

And talk about her.

WENDY

Good of you to listen. One of the most generous things we can do for one another. Listen.

MILTON

As only a girlfriend can. (*Beat.*) I've got a son.

WENDY

You gave life. Just like my grandmother. Shouldn't you be home with him.

MILTON

He's fine. Truth is I think he's getting sick of me.

WENDY

You don't believe that.

MILTON

No. But it's good to take a break, to step out, step outside yourself once in a while. Nothing more empowering than seeing how far you can walk in high-heels.

(MILTON stands and walks back and forth. They laugh.)

Don't you just feel...more of yourself crossing a room like that?

WENDY

Just seeing you makes me feel more of myself.

MILTON

Are you insulting me?

WENDY

No. I like that you go out and do what you want.

MILTON

You know what I want right now?

WENDY

Tell me.

MILTON

To dance.

WENDY

You do?

MILTON

To dance with you.

He stands before her regally, offering his hand. She takes it.

WENDY

That would be...extraordinary.

They exit towards the dance floor.

ACT 2, SCENE 5 – A TEMPLE

FLOYD wanders into a temple on a Friday night. Services have already ended. There is only one man, wearing a yarmulke, sitting quietly, if a little agitated, in the congregation. FLOYD sits near him, facing forward. He brings his hands together and releases them, unsure of what he's supposed to do.

RABBI

Are you waiting to speak with me?

FLOYD

No. I'm just sitting here.

RABBI

Are you part of the congregation?

FLOYD

No, I just wandered in. I was gonna...attend...but I got here late.

RABBI

Strange.

FLOYD

Why's that?

RABBI

I'm sorry, but we're closing up.

FLOYD

Oh.

RABBI

I agree, we should be more churchy, open to visitors, confessional booths, light a candle for a dollar slipped into a wooden box. Perhaps you'd like to say Kaddish for someone who's departed.

FLOYD

I don't have anyone dead.

RABBI

No? (*FLOYD shakes his head.*) (*Almost to himself.*) Imagine that. (*To FLOYD.*) Care to pray, then? We can do it together.

FLOYD

How would we do that?

RABBI

You prayed as a child, didn't you? Spoke to God in your head? Pretty much the same thing now. Maybe your lips move a little more.

FLOYD

I can't remember the last time I thought about it, in a real way.

RABBI

Until tonight.

FLOYD

That wasn't what...brought me here. Can I ask you something? I don't mean to be rude.

RABBI

Why would you mean to be?

FLOYD

Do you mind if I ask how old you are?

RABBI

A little.

FLOYD

Oh. We look the same age is all. Seems strange to me.

RABBI

Rabbis are supposed to be older.

FLOYD

Something like that.

RABBI

Maybe the next one will. (*Sighs.*) Wonderful intimacy between strangers, prayer. We bow our heads, sit quiet a minute, and rise (*A hand gesture.*) a little closer.

FLOYD

Someone told me I had to make a sacrifice.

RABBI

(*Alarmed.*) Who told you that?

FLOYD

A sort of...initiation.

RABBI

You don't look the gang type. Little old for a fraternity hazing. Who, then?

FLOYD

Does it matter?

RABBI

As long as it's not God asking. It's not God, is it?

(*FLOYD shakes his head, RABBI smiles a little to show he was kidding.*)

Abraham, kill me a son! What the...fuck...right? Does sound ugly when a rabbi curses.

FLOYD

A little jarring.

RABBI

Who dares ask for sacrifice these days? Everyone, right? And they don't just ask, they demand. That you earn a living, and it better be a good one. Your girlfriend's womb crying out for a baby. Only thing worse is when it's God, which is why no one pays attention these days. What's God got over a disapproving mother, anyhow, am I right?

FLOYD

That's funny.

RABBI

God exists.

FLOYD

(*Soft.*) How do you know?

RABBI

Horrible word: sacrifice. It can only belong to God. We're not talking about counting calories or buying a slightly cheaper pair of sunglasses, are we? No. Like dragging a dead limb, all the room turning to look, that's what they want of you.

FLOYD

I've been having nightmares.

RABBI

(Nodding.) Well you should. *(Suddenly laughs.)* And you came here for spiritual comfort.

FLOYD

(Laughing.) It was either here or a strip club.

(RABBI looks at him, not understanding. FLOYD, uncomfortable, decides to speak truth.)

I thought I'd go to one or the other. I walked by here first.

RABBI

You made the less comforting choice. A couple dollars slipped into a g-string and you win, what? A smile, a rub, that feeling you're the one and only? God demands...much more. Like that bastard who wants his pound of flesh. So what do you give this Herod? *(FLOYD shakes his head.)* What if I said you'll never make love again? Or that every night, nightmares and insomnia. Impotence. Ulcers. Eczema and rotting teeth.

FLOYD

(Rising.) Maybe I should –

RABBI

You don't like me much, do you?

FLOYD

I don't know you.

RABBI

Still, there's something...unlikable about me.

FLOYD makes a gesture, acquiescing.

RABBI

My congregation agrees. As does the board. They're rethinking my appointment. I don't set people at ease. Can you imagine? Too much fire and brimstone in my sermons for their taste. These are Reformed Jews, I'm reminded. Reformed of what? But fewer bodies in the hall means less income. It's been suggested I make a sacrifice, for the good of the congregation, to resign before I'm – *(Makes a neck-slashing gesture.)*

FLOYD

Sorry.

RABBI

Yeah. *(Pause.)* What do you get for your sacrifice? Money. A position. Am I right?

FLOYD

Life happens to me. I want to be the one to make it happen.

RABBI

And make it happen to others. (*Half-beat.*) Sacrifice is the only gesture that's not...pretension. (*Resigned.*) Maybe it's what God wants of us.

FLOYD

Stop with the God already! You're getting squeezed out. You should try to stop them. Take them to court. Or better yet, blackmail the board's two key players. The rest will follow.

RABBI

Interesting advice.

FLOYD

Your God come up with anything better?

Pause.

RABBI

Be the one to make it happen. Like at a stripclub. \$20 for the song and she'll tickle your earlobe with her tongue, right? (*Half-beat.*) So what's your sacrifice going to be?

FLOYD

You've made yours, huh?

RABBI

Mine was put upon me.

FLOYD

Lucky you.

FLOYD rises and gathers his coat to leave.

RABBI

Not quite the sanguine spiritual guidance you'd hoped for.

FLOYD

Actually, if I wasn't sure before I walked in here, I am now.

RABBI

So where are you off to? Your stripclub, for affirmation?

FLOYD

You should come with me. You could use the certainty.

Pause.

RABBI

It would confirm something for you, my coming along. Our being similar age, it does something for you. My fall compared to your...

FLOYD

My what?

RABBI

(Dismissive.) How should I know?

FLOYD

You should come. Not for me. For yourself. Aren't you sick of being done to? Try something else, step out, if just for the night.

(Long pause.)

I'm buying.

RABBI

(Beat) I'll get my coat.

They exit.

**ACT 2, SCENE 6 – CONRAD'S OFFICE/
ANNE'S OFFICE/
HOSPITAL LOBBY**

CONRAD sits behind his desk. ANNE enters with papers and adds to the stacks accumulating on the floor. She exits again and CONRAD rises to stand over papers. When ANNE enters back in, he steps in front to block her way. When she tries to maneuver around him he steps that way. She sighs. He lets her pass and she adds pages to stacks.

CONRAD

Is that all of them?

ANNE

Wait!

She rushes out and returns with one more sheet, which she adds to pile.

CONRAD

Is that –

ANNE

(Interrupting.) Yes.

CONRAD

Are you sure?

(ANNE looks at him, not answering.)

A single correspondence they manifest without our corroborating can be construed as coercion.

ANNE

It's everything.

CONRAD

(Disgusted.) With which I have to defend... *(Back to business.)* Walk me through it.

ANNE

(Indicating each stack) Reports on Mosely's standing. Proposal for acquisition. Inter- and intra-office correspondence. Request for bank transfers, and the contracts. Unsigned.

CONRAD

(With a sweep of the arm.) All of which paints the picture of, what?

ANNE

An incomplete merger.

CONRAD

Why incomplete?

ANNE

The contracts. Because you didn't –

CONRAD

(Interrupting.) What I'm suggesting is a closer examination. It's a matter of point of view, yes? One person claims blackmail, the other explains motivated compliance. You say these documents portray a deal not completed. I say a disaster averted.

ANNE

On what evidence?

CONRAD

On the one integral component missing, though you assure me it is not. *(Shifting.)* Do you detest me?

ANNE

If I didn't, I'd pity you. That would be worse.

CONRAD

Disaster might have been too strong, but I do say these papers suggest a misuse of time and personnel. That the meager gains of the Mosley merger would not have outweighed the efforts put in.

ANNE

Your word is strong enough to declare this?

CONRAD

There are times when it is, others when it is not. This particular moment is the other.

ANNE

So?

CONRAD

(Touching at the stacks of paper with this shoe.) Something's missing.

ANNE

What?

CONRAD

The addendum to your financial assessment where you state that though your office would be happy to manage the Mosley transfer – as your office was poised to do – you feel it your place to question whether it's worth the corporation's while.

ANNE

The letter doesn't exist.

CONRAD

I've taken the liberty of preparing a draft for your files.

ANNE

The document would need my signature to be officially submitted.

CONRAD

No, the document would need both our signatures.

(CONRAD takes a sheet of paper from his own desk, signs it with great flourish, hands pen and paper to ANNE.)

The pen's a Montblanc, by the way. You may keep it following your signature. *(No response.)* Pass it on as an inheritance.

ANNE

No.

CONRAD

Because you expect to outlive the inheritor?

(No answer.)

What if I said please?

ANNE

You don't know the word.

CONRAD

You know I do. *(Half-beat.)* This is not another note in my safe, Anne. This is my way of bringing you in. When I produce your name before the shareholders they'll ask: Who is this?, to which I tout: Anne Albright, and your name is entered into their collective bargaining tools. So that at the next merger someone asks: What does Anne Albright think?, and you will be consulted, and your position elevated to an office which legitimizes your opinion.

ANNE

(Pause.) No.

CONRAD

I fear that you and I have resolved ourselves to a state of unhealthily heightened tension. How do you propose we break this pattern?

ANNE

Stop having me –

CONRAD

No! *(Pause. Calmer.)* Do you see yourself rising the corporate ladder on your own initiative?

ANNE

(Demure.) I don't know.

CONRAD

I think you do. Don't pretend the slight distaste of our...relations, has disaffected you for the work. This job is who you are.

ANNE

You don't know anything about that.

CONRAD

No? How's your home-life these days? All merry and bright on the marriage front?

ANNE

This is supposed to earn my signature?

CONRAD

(A step towards her.) Throw your lot with mine, Anne.

ANNE

I'll live not to regret it?

CONRAD

You'll live...very well.

(Long pause. Anne looks away.)

No matter. I foresaw your lack of initiative. Simple enough to replace your financial projections with ones that appear not quite so sunny. No need for you to fear reprisal, you've already filed your projections. Should they be replaced without your signature, you could never be convicted of complicity.

He takes stack from floor, tears off back sheet, hands it to her, replaces it and staples the package with his own.

ANNE

Why are you showing me this?

CONRAD

Oh, yes. How inappropriate. Disclosure would be embarrassing for me, so I must rely on your discretion. Sort of gives you the upper-hand, doesn't it? Here's a copy for your files.
(Hands her a sheet.)

ANNE

You're not...

CONRAD

What's that?

ANNE

Reaching me.

CONRAD

I think I am.

ANNE exits, folding the page of the Mosley financial forecast into the pocket of her blazer. Entering her own office she takes out her cell phone and calls MILTON. She does not know that MILTON is in the hospital with Jeremy.

MILTON

(From hospital waiting room. Looks at his phone, decides to take call. Pointedly cold.)
Hello.

ANNE

Hi. How're things?

MILTON

No change. Fever. Still throwing up.

ANNE

I'm sorry. Have you tried ginger ale?

MILTON

What do you mean, ginger ale? They're administering fluids to stabilize the temperature.

ANNE

What are you talking about?

MILTON

What do you think I'm talking about? His body is totally rejecting the medicine. They're talking transfusion, but then we're talking possible infection.

ANNE

I thought we were talking about...yourself.

MILTON

Why would we be talking about me?

Sound of hospital p.a. system.

ANNE

Where are you?

MILTON

I'm at the hospital, where else would I be? (*Pause.*) Did you not get my message?

ANNE

No, I've been...

MILTON

Then why are you calling?

ANNE

Just to...

MILTON

I've been sole caregiver for the better part of six months now. I don't need you checking up on me.

ANNE

I know. I didn't. I wasn't. *(Pause, while gathers herself.)* What's wrong?

MILTON

I said, his body is rejecting the medicine. They don't know why, and they're afraid to try anything new.

ANNE pulls phone from head, she would like to escape this news, but decides to face it.

ANNE

Is that bad?

MILTON

How does it sound?

ANNE

(Pleading.) I'm asking.

MILTON

(Perhaps he hears her need.) It could be. It could also just be a matter of adjusting his meds.

ANNE

Ok. Thank you. Will you call me if anything changes?

MILTON

(Shaking his head in exasperation.) Yeah. *(Pause.)* If you didn't get my message, why'd you call?

FLOYD enters office.

ANNE

I saw that you had called. I've got to go. *(About to hang up.)*

MILTON

Wait! *(They each hold the line, saying nothing.)* You've got to go.

ANNE

I've got to.

MILTON

Okay. *(He waits until ANNE hangs up. Then he does so.)*

ANNE

(To FLOYD, closing cell phone.) What?

FLOYD

You met with Stone. How'd it go?

ANNE

Listen you little bitch, I don't need you sniffing at my heels.

FLOYD

(Calmly.) How did that feel, calling me that? You can keep it up if you want.

ANNE

(Not quite taken aback, but his retort calms her.) What is it you want, Floyd?

FLOYD

It's not some great mystery. I've never hidden it, have I? I want what you've got.

ANNE

(Almost laughing.) What've I got?

FLOYD

How much you make. Your ability to call me a bitch. Should I be above such petty gains? Setting you in his place'll get me that.

ANNE

What if your greatest fear proves true and it turns out Conrad's just a man?

FLOYD

You mean like your husband? Or like me?

ANNE

He's setting you up, Floyd. He's setting both of us. Why won't you acknowledge it, because you're playing at him?

FLOYD

Fine, let's say he is. I still say you've got something on him that'll shake things up. Let's see how the pieces fall.

ANNE

Why? Why do you think that?

FLOYD

I've been watching you two. It's not all...business as usual.

(Pause.)

Why wouldn't you help yourself? Or am I reading things wrong and everything's just peachy-keen?

Long pause, after which ANNE hands FLOYD the paper from her blazer pocket.

FLOYD

What is it?

ANNE

It's important.

He examines it as he exits the room.

ACT 2, SCENE 7 – ANNE AND MILTON'S HOME

There is a knock on the door. MILTON rushes in from other room, changing into a fresh shirt, answers the door to find CONRAD. Though MILTON is not surprised by his visitor, there is a silent charge between them.

MILTON

I haven't got a lot of time.

MILTON hurries back into other room, presumably the bedroom, perhaps to finish dressing. CONRAD shows himself in, looking around. He takes a seat at the kitchen table. MILTON again enters, goes to the refrigerator.

MILTON

(Searching refrigerator.) Not sure what I've got to offer. *(He finds a beer.)* Thank god.

MILTON opens it and drinks deeply, then retrieves another for CONRAD. CONRAD accepts beer, takes a small sip, is impressed by the taste.

CONRAD

Not bad.

MILTON

An indulgence. *(Pause.)* I haven't got a lot of time. *(No response.)* I've got to get back to the hospital. *(Pause.)*

CONRAD

Your son.

MILTON

That's right.

(CONRAD nods without inquiry, takes another sip of beer. MILTON watches him, interested.)

Are you waiting for me to serve you dinner?

CONRAD

I've already eaten. Baked lobster tails at Pescatore. They were exquisite.

MILTON

I had a tunafish sandwich from the hospital cafeteria about seven hours ago.

CONRAD

Mine sounds better.

MILTON, almost amused, takes the seat across from CONRAD.

MILTON

What do you want?

CONRAD

I believe I made that clear. Have I not?

Pause.

MILTON

I'm not the least bit curious about you.

CONRAD

Indeed.

Pause.

MILTON

What do you expect of me?

CONRAD

I've long ago stopped expecting anything from anyone.

MILTON

(Less sure of himself.) Your email.

CONRAD

Yes?

Pause. CONRAD is not giving him anything. MILTON laughs, rises, steps back from table, positioning himself by the stove.

MILTON

Okay, let me ask you. What about my son? (*He receives no answer.*) Is he part of your...I don't know...Do you plan to make room for him in your...(Laughs at the word)...heart?

CONRAD

I have ample means of providing for Anne's children.

MILTON

There's only one. That I know of. I wasn't talking about that. What if he dies?

CONRAD

What of it?

MILTON

(*Repressing a desire to insult or attack.*) Anne will be damaged by the loss. She's already...Have you not noticed?! How will you deal with that?

CONRAD

My dealings don't concern you.

MILTON

Then what the fuck are you doing here? Your fucking email and now I have to host you in my kitchen, serve you a beer while my son...(Doesn't finish.)

CONRAD

(*As if condescending to speak.*) In business I flex my muscles with the strength of a thousand lawyers, a force capable of toppling governments. The means to feed or starve is unholy, quite frankly. I considered this situation deserving of a gesture more...humane.

MILTON

No, that's not why you're here. Anyway, you're not that man. Not here.

CONRAD

You have no idea what I'm capable of. I can –

MILTON

What? Damage my credit rating? I haven't worked in...my wife's (*Makes a pfffft sound and gesture.*) My son might...DIE. What do you think you could possibly take from me?

CONRAD

There's always something more to lose. (*Beat.*) It doesn't all have to be a loss.

MILTON

You want to buy her from me?

CONRAD

I was considering your employment situation. Our corporation has long arms, reaches into many industries. Anne need never know.

MILTON

Don't insult me.

CONRAD

You'll prefer it to the alternative.

MILTON

No, wrong tone. That's not why you're here either. You're not...generous.

CONRAD

No.

MILTON

A man of your...why do you want to put yourself in my shoes? You might think yourself so different from me, an entirely other species, but is this really what you want? An ice queen mistress. A dead son. You might ask yourself why.

CONRAD

I might, but you don't get to.

MILTON

I haven't. So why are you here? You expect me to pack my wife's bags and carry them to your car?

CONRAD

No, I have a driver for that.

Pause while MILTON considers the offence. ANNE enters.

MILTON

Hiya, honey.

(ANNE sees CONRAD, doesn't react, takes a seat at the table.)

You're home early. By which I mean: you're home!

ANNE

Yes.

MILTON

Was this coordinated?

ANNE

I had no idea he'd be here.

CONRAD

Thus the lackluster greeting.

MILTON

But you're not surprised.

ANNE

I wish I was.

MILTON

Maybe you even helped draft the email. I can almost catch your tone. *I'm in love with your wife. I'll be at your place at seven o'clock to discuss.*

ANNE

(Pause.) No.

MILTON

So, let's have it then. Tell me this is what you want.

ANNE

I don't deserve what I want.

MILTON

No, you really are shit, aren't you?

ANNE

That's exactly what I am.

MILTON

I would say this prick is exactly what you deserve.

ANNE

Not even that.

MILTON

Yet I can't help but think you two might be perfect together. This tag-team self-laceration thing you've got going on. Maybe smearing a little shit on each other's upper lips. Is that how you get each other off?

CONRAD

Perhaps you should try defecating on your pretty black mistress. Might develop a taste for it.

MILTON

(Stepping towards him.) Are you *trying* to make me hit you? Is that what this is all about? Your sleeping on that kid's couch, an affair with land of the living dead? Your coming here?

ANNE

We're not having an affair.

MILTON

He says he's in love with you.

ANNE

He's not.

CONRAD

The fact is, I've been blackmailing your wife into participating in a sad-masochistic relationship. Twice a week, in my office, we strap ourselves in latex and leather and you wife, Anne, punishes me. She attaches clamps to my nipples. Shoves needles through my genitals. Asphyxiates me to the point of –

MILTON

Why are you telling me this?

CONRAD

I want her to understand that affections have developed. I want her to meet those affections.

MILTON

And you make me part of it. You want me to watch you declare these affections to my wife.

CONRAD

I would think your unmitigated loss would, if nothing else, have given you sense of the way things are.

MILTON

How are they?

CONRAD

Not yours.

MILTON

(Pause.) So what, am I supposed to stick needles in your prick now?

CONRAD

You don't quite look up for it. Takes a sort of steadiness you don't engender. Your wife, on the other hand. Not even a twitch. I can assure you my prick has always been perfectly –

MILTON, unable to stop himself, charges at CONRAD and punches him in the face, knocking him from the chair. MILTON did not want to hit CONRAD, and screams, half for having lost control. Yet caught in the momentum he steps forward and kicks CONRAD as he lays on the floor, then kicks him

again. He finally stops himself, backs away, looks down at CONRAD, then at ANNE.

MILTON

Do anything for you?

(ANNE shakes her head.)

Doesn't get you off? *(Pause.)* I don't want you coming near our son again.

ANNE

(As MILTON exits.) I'm sorry.

*MILTON pauses, for just a beat, on the door's threshold, then exits.
CONRAD rises, shakily, from the floor. Returns to his seat.*

CONRAD

He ever hit you?

ANNE

No.

CONRAD

You should try it. A strong right hook. *(Pause.)* I admire him. A little.

ANNE

He's a good man. Better than you.

Pause. CONRAD looks around the kitchen.

CONRAD

This is a good room.

ANNE

I always liked it here. Especially in the mornings. Alone. Before I was...needed.

CONRAD

I need you.

ANNE

Becomes that much more precious when it's just a window, a compartmentalized slot of time. A sacred hour. Or when it's lost.

CONRAD

It doesn't have to be just an hour.

ANNE

You and me? It wasn't even that. You should go. I have nothing for you.

CONRAD

You do.

ANNE

Do I? I don't even want to hurt you anymore, Conrad.

CONRAD

No more consensual humiliation?

ANNE

(Beat.) There must have been a choice, right? When you made your proposal. I could have said no. Would it've been any different? Aren't there any other choices?

CONRAD

My proposal.

ANNE

Which one? The one that put me here, or the one that's supposed to deliver me from it?

CONRAD

You know which.

ANNE

What I know. I know you expected me to make use of that paper you gave me.

CONRAD

Do you?

ANNER

No other explanation.

CONRAD

None.

ANNE

I was supposed to give it to the kid. Same as your coming here. Getting Milton to do that. Your punishment. Simulated injury. For you it's just...I don't even know.

CONRAD

Don't you?

ANNE

The disclosure of Mosley, it might tarnish your standing, but not enough to usurp you completely.

CONRAD

Remains to be seen. Your insight is not unappreciated, but my coming here isn't simply self-abjection.

ANNE

Do you really believe I might have feelings for you?

CONRAD

I do.

ANNE

I told you, pity, at best.

CONRAD

Empires have been built on less.

Pause.

ANNE

Did you really ask my husband for my hand?

CONRAD

I didn't precisely ask.

They laugh, though ANNE's laughter is more from exhaustion, and quickly becomes tears, which she wipes hard away, but never completely stops.

ANNE

I have no idea what's happened to me. Is that even possible?

CONRAD

You could let me help you.

ANNE

You're too much a part of it. You can't even help yourself. Can't even properly hurt yourself.

CONRAD

As said, that remains to be seen. Besides, that's what the rest of you are for.

ANNE

Is that what we're for?

MILTON

I sometimes think so.

ANNE begins crying now for real. She can't stop herself.

ANNE

My son....My son he's....so sick.

(She extends her hand for CONRAD to take. He looks at it, then takes it.)

He could die.

CONRAD

Yes.

ANNE

What kind of fucking world is this?

CONRAD

I don't know.

Pause, while ANNE continues to cry.

ANNE

Your wife, she took up with someone else.

(CONRAD nods.)

You deserved it?

CONRAD

(Soft.) I don't know.

ANNE

I'm sorry.

CONRAD

Thank you.

ANNE

What're you gonna do?

CONRAD

(Pause.) Get a divorce.

ANNE

(Exasperated) Of course. What else would you do? What else could you? Get a divorce!

ANNE continues to cry while CONRAD holds her hand.

ACT 2, SCENE 8 – CONRAD’S OFFICE

CONRAD enters his office to find FLOYD seated in the chair across from CONRAD’s desk, awaiting him. CONRAD sees him but pays him no mind. Instead he rummages through a drawer, finds a bottle of aspirin, takes two pills with some water from his bar, rubs his temples as he sits. Only when he collects himself, straightens himself and becomes recognizably CONRAD, does he deem to look at FLOYD.

CONRAD

Come to deliver your pound of flesh?

FLOYD

You got hit. (*CONRAD doesn’t respond.*) You don’t lock your office.

CONRAD

You’ll find it ubiquitous amongst the rich and powerful. There’s no need to lock their possessions because for the most part no one would dare take them.

FLOYD

Is that true?

CONRAD

If I say it is.

FLOYD

I can see that.

CONRAD

Can you?

FLOYD

(*A bit aggressive.*) You think I’ve learned nothing? (*Beat.*) Living in your office now?

CONRAD

Admittedly it would be healthier to get a hotel room? (*Beat.*) How’s your love-life these days? Don’t wear real spurs if you’re riding her around the apartment is my advice.

FLOYD

That’s not what I’ve been playing at.

CONRAD

Letting her take a strap-on to you, then? Or am I supposed to be granting you the opportunity to spill your heart? Boy, I can assure you I’m interested only in what you can do

for me. How you spill your seed along the way is between you and the tissue you wipe your hands with.

FLOYD

Not what I can do to you?

(Pause. CONRAD smiles cruelly, waiting.)

My father wasn't –

(CONRAD blows a raspberry, interrupting. FLOYD leaps to his feet.)

You'll respect...! *(He stops himself.)*

CONRAD

Yes?

FLOYD

(Sitting. Softer.) What it's taken to get me here. *(Pause.)*

CONRAD

What did it cost you? Your girlfriend?

FLOYD

Letting her go felt...right. To prove that I could. Become... *(Trails off.)*

CONRAD

You have my attention, if not my interest.

FLOYD

To become the person who could hurt you.

Pause.

CONRAD

Show me.

From his inside right blazer pocket, FLOYD takes a copy of the paper ANNE had given him in Scene 6, which he now hands to CONRAD.

FLOYD

I've scanned the original and emailed it to the board of shareholders, along with the page it replaced. It makes nice evidence of fraud. *(Beat.)* Your position's been compromised.

Pause.

CONRAD

I've placed you every step of the way, what makes you think I haven't put you here?

FLOYD

That's what everyone said, all along. It wasn't that I didn't believe them. I was just happy to be part of it.

Pause.

CONRAD

Fucking pathetic.

FLOYD

That you would give yourself away like that?

CONRAD

That you would bleed yourself all over my carpet. All over my shoes.

FLOYD

I took from you.

CONRAD

(Shaking his head.) No. Nothing.

FLOYD

I'm not finished.

CONRAD

You had better not be.

From his left inside pocket FLOYD removes a folded photograph, which he hands to CONRAD.

CONRAD

(Glances at it, then up.) I'm interested.

FLOYD

Sorry there's no color. And the image is a bit pixilated. Webcams.

(Betraying himself, CONRAD glances around the room, trying to find the camera.)

Still, it's unmistakably this room, isn't it? Your office. And you. And Anne. Even if the outfits aren't exactly...uniform. *(Beat.)* If fraud wasn't enough to tap your armor, a sexual harassment suit will. Even in the mailroom we had to sit through employee sensitivity training. What not to say to fellow workers. How not to touch. That touch there looks...inappropriate. Relations between employees of unequal position is – I know, but – illegal.

Pause.

CONRAD
This will injure her, not me.

FLOYD
And that hurts you, right?

CONRAD
Both her position and her marriage.

FLOYD
(*Scoffing.*) Her marriage. Maybe that part's not so bad for you, either.

CONRAD
I do not want her touched in this way.

FLOYD
Cost *you* something to admit that, didn't it?

Pause.

CONRAD
What do you want for...(*Touches photo.*)...this?

FLOYD
Her job.

CONRAD
You couldn't handle it.

FLOYD
What do you care?

CONRAD
Fair enough, but having me so effectively removed from this office, what makes you think I can get it for you?

FLOYD
You're sure to have enough on someone who can make that call.

CONRAD
(*Pause.*) Yes.

FLOYD
You'll take care of it?

CONRAD nods. What follows is a stand-off. They stare at one another while FLOYD feels he has the upper-hand. Finally, CONRAD makes a sound as if he's long been holding back a guffaw he can no longer retain. He laughs in FLOYD's face.

CONRAD

I just came from Anne's, by the way. Told her husband all about my and Anne's...*(Touches photo on desk)*...engagements. Wasn't fazed in the least. Seems he's been engaged in an indiscretion of his own. In fact, you know the young lady. Almost makes the two of you – you and he – related. *(Beat.)* And I am, thank you, familiar with all the points of employee relations. Sexual harassment is much like incest. The lesser employee is never culpable.

(Pause.)

Got anything else?

After a beat FLOYD takes what can only be described as a menacing knife from his pocket, sets it on edge of the desk close to him.

FLOYD

Kind of returns the score in my favor.

CONRAD

Does it?

FLOYD

Yeah, I think so.

CONRAD

Peculiar scorecard. I'm curious of your point system. You've been rewarded, what?, for being a corporate snitch? The thing about a snitch is that he's already shown the maximum of what he's capable of. Unless you set your terms ahead of time, which, since you've asked me to obtain you Anne's position, we'll assume you failed to secure. The board will have no reward for your allegiance. You let your girl go, though it seems more as if someone else took her. You're loveless, jobless, even homeless. I took a peek at your lease during my stay. It's in her name. You are less...everything.

FLOYD

I take from you.

CONRAD

What? I've already made my move, boy. Another position in another corporation much like this one. *(Indicating the window behind him.)* Just down the street, actually. Perhaps we can do lunch.

FLOYD

I win.

CONRAD

The term of our wager is expired. You failed to acquire the position. (*Beat.*) To be fair, you never had a chance. But we did have fun, yes? Maybe you even learned something along the way. Some life-lesson you can tell the unemployment agent about over a beer.

FLOYD

(*Standing.*) And if I take your life, is that nothing?

Pause.

CONRAD

The fact is I've just this night discovered I want to live.

FLOYD

Would be awful if some lowly snail took it all away.

CONRAD

It would be...completely in keeping.

FLOYD approaches, the knife before him. CONRAD does his best to remain firm but can't help himself and his feet move the chair back, if only an inch or so.

FLOYD

I want you to cower.

CONRAD

(*Flatly.*) Fuck you.

(FLOYD takes the bottle of aspirin and smashes it over CONRAD's head. Pills fly about.)

You...men!

FLOYD pulls CONRAD by the hair onto the floor. He straddles CONRAD, holding the knife directly above CONRAD's chest.

FLOYD

I take it all. Say it!

CONRAD

You take.

FLOYD

You're left with nothing!

CONRAD

Nothing.

FLOYD
Less than nothing!

CONRAD
Nothing.

FLOYD
Yell it!

CONRAD
(Laughing more than yelling.) Fuck you, you...nothing.

FLOYD
I'm shit and you had it all and pissed it all away. You're nothing but fucking dead. Scream it! I take everything.

CONRAD
(Screaming.) Fuck you.

FLOYD
MY FATHER –
(FLOYD plunges the knife into CONRAD's chest. They remain there, FLOYD more or less laying atop, until FLOYD rolls off, taking the knife with him, which was spring loaded. A stage knife.)
My father...sold novelties. Sells novelties. Still. He's...*(Rising.)*...good. Likes comics and stuff. He'll be disappointed I...sold my collection.

FLOYD exits.

CONRAD
(Slowly struggling up from floor) I do nothing but rise from floors these days.
(CONRAD pushes his chair back to desk, rubbing the spot on his head where he was hit, finding another aspirin and swallowing it dry. At desk, he reaches for the phone, opens the phonebook before him, finds a number and dials.)
St. Regis? I'd like to book a room...Tonight...Is the Hamilton Suite available? I'd like it for a month.

LIGHTS FADE.

ACT 2, SCENE 10 – CONRAD'S OFFICE

LIGHTS RISE to find ANNE seated in desk chair, precisely where CONRAD had sat at the end of scene 9, phone in hand.

ANNE sets phone down and rises to greet WENDY, who enters office.

ANNE

Hello.

WENDY

(Entering.) Hi. Nice to see you...again.

ANNE

Have a seat.

WENDY

(Looking about.) Was this...his office?

ANNE

It was.

WENDY

Huh. Did you have it painted?

ANNE

Have you been in here?

WENDY

Not even the building. When Floyd was in the mailroom he'd never let me inside. Was kind of ashamed, I think. A messenger. Afterwards it never...

ANNE

How is Floyd?

WENDY

I'm not sure. I haven't...Milton sent me, actually.

ANNE

Did he?

WENDY

It was my idea. He agreed.

ANNE

Are you two...?

WENDY

What? No. God, that's funny. When we first, after you and Floyd each moved out, he asked me to marry him. When I said no he asked if I'd at least sleep with him. When I told him never he said I might prove to be a good friend.

ANNE

(Pause.) And are you? A good friend?

WENDY

I am, yeah, I think so. Something's happened that let me be.

ANNE

I'd like to hear about it.

WENDY

Would you?

ANNE

I think so.

WENDY

Good, 'cause I'd like to tell you about it. It's why I'm here.

ANNE

Why?

WENDY

To be your friend. *(Pause.)* It would be good for you, wouldn't it? To have one?

(Pause. ANNE is unsure just how much she can let in.)

After Floyd and Conrad and, you know, everything, I felt...I don't know, like an entirely new species. Like something...new. I know, stupid, right?, but that's how I felt. You ever feel that way?

ANNE

I think so. Maybe not like that, more like something that should never have been. But I hear you. *(Pause.)*

WENDY

Your son, he's doing alright. *(Beat.)* You've got this new position...

ANNE

...it's temporary, while they...

WENDY

...and Milton, he'd like you to see Jeremy. I think he kind of wants to –

ANNE

(ANNE clears her throat.) So, you wanted to tell me.

WENDY

Yeah, I did. Can we get out of here, though, get some coffee or something? This place isn't quite, you know?

ANNE

I do, know, but do you mind if we stay? Here? It's...better for me that way. I can get us coffee sent up.

WENDY

Okay. Sure. You sure you wanna hear all this? I just thought I'd sneak out of work early and come and...tell you about myself. I thought it would be good for...us. People can still do this, can't they? Be something new?

ANNE

(Pause.) It sounds perfect.

LIGHTS DIM

END OF PLAY

VITA

Adam Falik was born in Neptune, New Jersey. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from Emerson College in 1990. he joined the University of New Orleans to pursue his MFA in Creative Writing (with a focus in Playwriting) in 2009.