

GRAVITATION AND ASCENT

by
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playwright.

TIME

The present.

PLACE

The Southwest. Probably New Mexico.

SET

A fluid playing area that accommodates all the settings with a minimum of adjustment. For example, separate entrances may distinguish Thomas's house from Sam's and Sam's house from Biraj's apartment, but the same sofa is Thomas's, then Sam's, then Biraj's, sometimes in a single scene.

CHARACTERS

SAM, an instructor at a community college. 40s, female.

DANIEL, one of her students. 26, male.

THOMAS, a friend of Sam's. Ph.D. in Linguistics. Now works for a high-tech company. 40s, male.

BIRAJ, works for the same high-tech company. Utterly American guy who happens to be of South Asian ancestry; no accent. Mid-20s, male.

JIMI, a good-looking, well-built, rock star wannabe type. Late 20s, male.

Also, a recorded RADIO ANNOUNCER.

Act I

In black, a choir sings:

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
Comin' for to carry me home?
A band of angels comin' after me— (*Instantly, music out; lights up.*)

SAM

. . . and you were abducted by aliens.

SAM and THOMAS sit together in THOMAS's office. DANIEL sits by himself in SAM's office. SAM speaks to THOMAS, recounting an earlier conversation with DANIEL. THOMAS struggles with his computer, which isn't working.

DANIEL

No!

SAM

Between Monday, when I handed out the assignment, and today, when it was due.

DANIEL

That's not what I'm saying, okay?

THOMAS

Hey, way more imaginative than "The dog ate my homework." (*To the computer.*) Come on.

SAM

It's not creative writing. It's American Lit.

THOMAS

Or "My roommate got drunk and peed on it." Which is what a student I had told me once. Why is this not working?

DANIEL

I'm saying I sat down to do the work. Three times, and like this is all I could—! I mean, for like *hours*. Like I was—. (*This is not helping.*) Cha-channeling.

SAM

It's so not like him.

DANIEL

I'm twenty-six. I mean, our time here is limited. I have had like stern warnings, okay?

THOMAS

(*Gives up; sotto voce.*) Blast.

SAM

There's something here, Thomas.

THOMAS

Drugs? (*SAM crosses to DANIEL.*)

DANIEL

I don't even—a hundred and thirteen pages of, I dunno, Klingon-whatever, Ferengi doodles! I'm saying that's what got expressed. And I don't even like know what it means!

SAM

Well, sorry, guy. Don't ask me. We don't teach Ferengi here. I think you have to go to a Star Trek convention for that.

DANIEL

You don't— [understand]! . . . Just flunk me, okay? Cause— (*Bolts for door.*) This, um. Scares me. Cause I don't— . . . [understand what's happening]

SAM

Daniel.

THOMAS

So you gave him until Monday— (*DANIEL hands papers to SAM. Exits. SAM crosses back to THOMAS.*) —and you brought me a hundred and thirteen pages of Ferengi doodles. (*SAM holds out a sheaf of papers.*) Which sounds like an extraterrestrial junk food.

(Doesn't take them.) Sam, if this guy *is* telling the truth, he needs a shrink, not a linguist. Which I don't even qualify as anymore.

SAM

I thought you thought all shrinks were incompetent morons.

THOMAS

I do. And better that one of them should waste his time on Mr. Graphorrhea than me.

SAM

His name is Daniel.

THOMAS

Daniel Graphorrhea—let me guess—is a pasty-faced, bad-complexioned guy who weighs about 300 pounds because he spent his entire adolescence parked in front of Star Trek reruns filling his face with Ferengi doodles.

SAM

Actually, he's kind of cute in a nerdy sort of way.

THOMAS

Here it comes.

SAM

And you—

SAM

—should meet him.

THOMAS

Should meet him.

THOMAS

Sam—! Isn't there a rule against fixing up one of your students with your best friend?

SAM

I don't think so.

THOMAS

Okay, then there must be one against fixing up your best friend with somebody who's suffering from an obvious obsessive-compulsive disorder. Or worse. *If* he's telling the truth.

SAM

Nope, don't think there's that one either.

THOMAS

Why is it that you always think the perfect guy for me is someone who's more deeply damaged than even I am? It's this movie I keep seeing in my mind where you play a Noah-like figure who leads all the romantically crippled limping two-by-two onto, I don't know, the Love Ark. Or something. I've grown quite fond of my crutches and my seclusion and peeking through tattered lace curtains to watch life pass me by.

SAM

Oh?

THOMAS

Well, accustomed, if not fond. And could we change the subject? (*She answers with a look.*) Sam, come on. This is a seriously wacky idea. A guy who's channeling extraterrestrials?

SAM

Maybe you could use a little wacky in your life.

THOMAS

Yeah, right. It's done so much for your well being. What's this week's grenade?

SAM

Don't ask.

THOMAS

I'm asking.

SAM

Now he's decided he's going to fight me for custody. The reptile.

THOMAS

Based on what?

SAM

His Daddy's capacity to pay the lawyer, if you ask me. But the argument he's making to the judge is that—are you sitting down?—as a nationally recognized authority on child

development—you probably didn't know this, that Barry Stone is a nationally recognized authority on child development, which also came as something of a revelation to me but I guess I need to tune into NPR more often—as such, he is more cognizant of the children's needs and better able to assist them in their growth. What he doesn't seem to be cognizant of is that he acts like a Komodo dragon around them, with the result that they naturally don't want to go near him. That would of course, in his interpretation, be my fault. I'm "demonizing him to the children." Which is untrue. Utterly. As much as I loathe Barry Stone, and my loathing for him extends beyond the orbit of Pluto, I never ever utter an unkind word about him in front of the kids—and believe me, that's no mean feat—because as difficult as it for him to believe this, I would really like for Sally and Ralphie to have a good relationship with their father just as much as I wish they had a father who was capable of having a good relationship with them. So what this boils down to is just more petty vindictiveness and pointless aggravation. And needless expense.

THOMAS

Don't worry about the money.

SAM

I do worry about the money.

THOMAS

You'll pay me back.

SAM

I won't pay you back, I keep telling you!

THOMAS

The polite fiction that we're attempting to maintain here is that this is a loan. So maintain. Okay? *(Beat.)*

SAM

(The paper.) So you gonna give me your opinion on this or not?

THOMAS

Sam—. Do I have a choice?

SAM

For a really cute guy who needs your help?

THOMAS

Now he's *really* cute all of a sudden.

BIRAJ

(Enters. Talking to someone offstage.) Wait up, wait up. This'll just take a sec. *(Sees SAM.)* Oh. Sorry.

THOMAS

That's okay. Sam, this is Biraj. Biraj, Sam.

BIRAJ

SAM

Hey.

Nice to meet you.

BIRAJ

(To THOMAS.) This your chick? *(SAM laughs.)*

THOMAS

No, she's not my chick. Jerk.

BIRAJ

What?

THOMAS

What do you want?

BIRAJ

Wait. So this is just like platonic?

THOMAS

No, it's actually platonic. "Like platonic" would put it one remove further from the Ideal than even Plato would require.

BIRAJ

Hey, I'm a Cartesian, man. *Cogito, ergo est.* I think it, therefore it is.

THOMAS

That would be Bishop Berkeley. [bark-lee]

BIRAJ

I refute thee thus, dude.

THOMAS

And that would be John Locke.

BIRAJ

Samuel Johnson.

THOMAS

(About to respond, realizes BIRAJ is right.) Pedant.

BIRAJ

Ha! One-zip. *(To SAM.)* And let that be a lesson. Don't go getting any ideas. Cause Thomas here's my main man. Okay, lady?

SAM

Deal.

VOICE (JIMI)

(Offstage.) Hey, Biraj!

BIRAJ

Wait up, man.

THOMAS

Before you go. *(Gestures plaintively to his computer.)*

BIRAJ

It'll cost you. *(Hands THOMAS a xeroxed sheet of paper.)* Party, my place, Saturday. You're comin', right? *(During the following, BIRAJ tests the keyboard and the mouse.)*

THOMAS

Gosh, I don't know. It starts at nine. That's past my bedtime.

BIRAJ

You can bring the lady. Wanna come, lady?

SAM

Depends on the music.

BIRAJ

What do you like?

SAM

“Sometimes you can’t write a chord ugly enough to say what you want to say. So you have to rely on a giraffe filled with whipped cream.”

BIRAJ

Hey! You got that poster? I got that poster! *(To THOMAS.)* Frank Zappa, man. *(To SAM.)* You’re my kinda chick. You wanna come hear my band tomorrow? *(Hands her a flyer.)* We’re Eyn. [ain (as in ain’t)]

SAM

Eyn?

BIRAJ

It’s from the Kabbalah. It means nothingness, beyond existence, God. Grandiose, huh?

THOMAS

Blasphemous crossed my mind.

BIRAJ

We’re big. Like cosmic. You gotta hear us. Bring Thomas. He never comes.

THOMAS

I’m a fuddy-duddy. What can I say?

BIRAJ

Yeah. He’s so tight he gives me a hard on.

SAM

I know what you mean—the tight part.

THOMAS

Everything gives you a hard on, Biraj.

BIRAJ

Yeah, just lucky that way. *(Checks back of computer.)* Brain dead.

VOICE (JIMI)

(Offstage.) Hey, man, come on!

BIRAJ

Gotta skate. Rehearsal.

THOMAS

What about the— . . .

BIRAJ

Call I.T. Tell 'em to take it away.

THOMAS

Why? What's—?

BIRAJ

(Overlapping.) Cause you're too stupid to have a computer, dude. *(The problem is the keyboard's unplugged: he places the connector in THOMAS's hand. As he goes.)* Nice lady. *(To SAM.)* Bring him.

BIRAJ

(He's gone. He's back.) Two-zip. *(He's gone again. Beat.)*

SAM

That kid works here?

THOMAS

That "kid" has an I.Q. of about 700. Snot.

SAM

He seems to be quite a fan.

THOMAS

He's straight. He has a girlfriend. And he just says things like that.

SAM

Like you give him a hard on.

THOMAS

Yes.

SAM

Oh.

THOMAS

He means I amuse him. (*SAM replies with a look.*) Look. I don't know why. Straight guys are crazy about me. Young straight guys. Cute young straight guys. With girlfriends. Who knows. Maybe Einstein was right. Maybe God *is* malicious after all.

SAM

Which explains why he calls you his main man. Biraj.

THOMAS

He just says things like that.

SAM

. . . just says things like that.

THOMAS

Yes. The wonderful and appalling thing about Biraj is that whatever pops into his head comes out of his mouth. It doesn't mean anything. (*SAM replies with a look.*) Could we not get into this? I feel a sudden and uncharacteristic urge to do bodily harm to someone I love. Which would seriously set back my schedule for attaining enlightenment.

She gives him a smooch. Lights up on DANIEL elsewhere, writing furiously.

SAM

Getting naked with someone might do just as well.

THOMAS

I think not.

DANIEL

(*Frustration. Sotto voce.*) Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! (*Wads up the paper, throws it.*)

SAM

All things are buddha-things, guy.

DANIEL

Jesus God.

THOMAS

Says who?

SAM

Quentin Tarantino. Gotta skate. Or the kids will think *I've* been abducted by aliens. Which would thrill Ralphie no end. Thanks for your help.

THOMAS

Anytime. Not much on for the weekend anyway.

DANIEL attempts to write. Nothing comes.

SAM

No? I hear there's a kick-ass band at— (*Consults BIRAJ's flyer.*) —Viva Zappa! tomorrow.

THOMAS

That cute, he's not.

SAM

You know, if I were a guy, you'd give me a hard on. (*Exits.*)

DANIEL

(*Frustration.*) Damn it. (*Picks up crumpled paper on floor, studies it.*)

THOMAS

(*Begins to flip through Daniel's paper.*) Certifiable. Just the kind of guy who'd go for me in a big—

Something in Daniel's paper catches THOMAS's eye. Simultaneously, DANIEL drops the paper he holds, alarmed.

Lights change.

THOMAS's house. The "Tuba Mirum" from Verdi's Requiem plays—the loud, brassy part about 50 seconds in. THOMAS studies Daniel's paper. After a moment, pounding at the door. THOMAS opens the door.

THOMAS

(*Annoyed.*) What—? Oh, Biraj. What? What's the crisis?

BIRAJ

Hey, Thomas. Man! You didn't show.

THOMAS

I told you I'm a fuddy-duddy.

BIRAJ

Dude! You gonna invite us in? (*Enters.*) So. You want breakfast?—

BIRAJ

—We're up for waffles.

DANIEL

I'll wait in the car, okay?

THOMAS

Breakfast? It's— . . .

THOMAS

—twenty past one.

BIRAJ

(*To DANIEL.*) No, stay, stay.

THOMAS

—I had *lunch* over an hour ago.

BIRAJ

Thomas. Man, you promised.

THOMAS

What?

BIRAJ

To come.

THOMAS

To breakfast?

BIRAJ

To the gig, man.

THOMAS

No, I didn't.

BIRAJ

With the lady.

THOMAS

No, I didn't.

BIRAJ

You should marry her.

THOMAS

Biraj—

DANIEL

(Overlapping. About to exit.) Um.

BIRAJ

(Takes DANIEL's arm to prevent him.) I'd marry her.

THOMAS

I thought you had a girlfriend.

BIRAJ

Crissy? She don't dig Zappa. But your chick, she digs Zappa.

THOMAS

(Overlapping "she digs Zappa".) She's not my chick!

BIRAJ

Which is—Thomas. Dude. There is something I just don't get. *(A completely alien concept:)* When you see a girl, don't you like get excited?

THOMAS

No.

BIRAJ

Not ever?

THOMAS

Biraj, that's what being gay means.

BIRAJ

(Ponders, then:) God, I'm dying of thirst. D. Dan, you dying of thirst? You got something to drink?

THOMAS

Sure. What do you— [want]?

BIRAJ

Oh, Thomas, this is D. Dan. D. Dan, Thomas.

DANIEL

Daniel.

THOMAS

Hi. Sit down.

BIRAJ

(Notices Daniel's paper.) Hey, what's this?

THOMAS

Biraj. Hey. Come on. That's really rude.

BIRAJ

Whoa. Sorry.

THOMAS

(Takes paper.) Sit. Behave. Or I'll make you stand in the corner. *(Exits.)*

BIRAJ

Don't you love that guy?

DANIEL

He's just not in the car with us. Like I'm just not seeing that happen, okay?

BIRAJ

I'll get him to come.

THOMAS

(Reenters with water.) Here.

BIRAJ

Thanks.

THOMAS

Nothing for you, Dan?

DANIEL

Daniel. No. Um.

(DANIEL and THOMAS notice each other. BIRAJ notices them notice each other. He laughs; they're embarrassed. DANIEL picks up the booklet from the CD Thomas has been listening to. It's something to do. He keeps it through the rest of the scene.)

THOMAS

So, were you cosmic?

BIRAJ

They saw God, man. I came. On stage. Three times. (*Makes orgasmic sounds.*)

THOMAS

That sounds uplifting.

BIRAJ

When was the last time you came three times in a single night?

THOMAS

I couldn't begin to tell you.

DANIEL

That is like not the thing to say, man.

BIRAJ

What? Like I can't talk about my pecker?

DANIEL

(*To THOMAS.*) Just tune him out, okay?

THOMAS

I do.

BIRAJ

The lady came.

THOMAS

No kidding?

BIRAJ

That chick is acute. One set, she knew we ate the big one. She's no bullshit.

THOMAS

That's Sammy.

BIRAJ

I gotta take a wicked shit.

THOMAS

Second door on the—

BIRAJ

I'll find it. (*Exits.*)

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

Did I get your name right?—

THOMAS

—D. Dan?

DANIEL

Daniel, okay?

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

When I'm unco[m]-uncomfortable— (*Embarrassed; he's just done it.*) —I hesitate. Kids—when I was a [kid]—kids thought I stammered. You know, like “Hi,” like “Hi. I'm D-Dan.” And Biraj would get all like, “That's his name, butt-head—D. Dan”—the like total Percival, totally on his white charger about it when kids would, you know, um Course, then he'd beat me up. We're, um. Friends. (*A near pause.*) I'm in his band. It's like you always seem to be out there in the desert. Lost. And you go, like, this is okay, too. Cause the earth is cities and forests, gardens and deserts. It's the cosmos, too, the desert, part of it. Harsh maybe. But it has meaning. And so you don't call out for rescue, cause there's nothing to be rescued from. It just is, you know what I'm saying? And no one would hear you anyway. And then you're in a like band, and it's completely different. The space. You know, you're thinking, like “shelter.” Eyn.

THOMAS

What?

DANIEL

The name of the band. Eyn.

THOMAS

Oh, right. “Nothingness.”

DANIEL

Yeah. I picked it. Biraj let me. It's from the Kabbalah. If anybody asks, "What is it?", the Kabbalah says, answer him, "Nothing."

THOMAS

"It" being . . .?

DANIEL

God. You know, whatever. Meaning, maybe. Answer him, "Nothing." "Cause it cannot be grasped, nor any part of it comprehended." I mean, don't you feel like, like meaning cannot be comprehended? "Wisdom comes into being out of nothing." That's what the Book of Job says. The book about suffering? So it's like, life is this like incarnation, this vessel in which you're sealed, to which the transforming fire is applied. Which is why it hurts so much. Life. Cause you're like surrounded by this fire that burns but does not consume. Like the burning bush. The fire which is Yahweh. Which must be um Yahweh. (*Beat.*) Do you ever like—I like work at Blockbuster—do you ever think about love?

THOMAS

Love?

DANIEL

Cause there's this guy who comes in. The Guy With No Life. Every Friday, and he rents five or six movies. And I'm thinking, should I say, should I ask him, you know, like, "Are you alone in your life?" Cause he rents all these movies. I mean, I keep wondering if I should ask him.

THOMAS

Maybe he just likes movies.

DANIEL

He's wounded, you can tell. Cause his eyes are like without hopefulness and wishes for tomorrow. And I want to ask, cause I want to heal him. His h—I want to heal his um h-heart. I want that thing that keeps us from loving, that keeps us from being loved, I want—. If I could heal that, whatever it is—that like— (*Can't find the word.*) —if I could if I could bind up that wound, if there was somebody to like, for people, penetrate that

mystery, someone to—I—um...Cause love is something that I cannot grasp, okay? It's on another like plane, another reality, okay? And I cannot reach it.

BIRAJ

(Reenters.) Yeah. Now there's room for food. So, Thomas, you're coming, right?

THOMAS

Thanks, but no. *(Turns music on again, starting at the beginning of the "Tuba mirum.")*

BIRAJ

Dude! I had my heart set on it. Waffles with my man Thomas.

THOMAS

You'll get over it. I hate waffles.

BIRAJ

We could abduct you. The two of us. Right, D. Dan? Do a waffle implant. Probe you with our utensils.

DANIEL

Let's go, okay?

BIRAJ

So tell Thomas you want him to come. D. Dan wants you to come.

DANIEL

Um.

BIRAJ

Tell him.

DANIEL

Yeah. Um, Th-Thomas, Come.

THOMAS

I've got this requiem to finish.

DANIEL

(Realizes he still has the CD booklet, is about to hand it to THOMAS.) Um. *(Reads; without any deep significance.)* “The trumpet casts its wondrous sound / Through sepulchers the world around.” *(Hands the booklet to THOMAS. Exits.)*

BIRAJ

Lazarus, come forth, dude. *(Exits.)*

Lights change. The music continues as needed. BIRAJ's. There's a guitar and amp. BIRAJ and THOMAS enter.

THOMAS

I'm the wrong person.

BIRAJ

Crissy!?

THOMAS

Trust me.

BIRAJ

No you're not. Crissy!? *(Frowns.)*

THOMAS

But I don't really have a—

BIRAJ

(Pushing him into a chair.) Sit.

THOMAS

—an ear for the kind of music you play.

BIRAJ

I want your opinion. *(Takes THOMAS's shoes off.)*

THOMAS

What are you—?

BIRAJ

Relax.

THOMAS

I can relax with my—

BIRAJ

There.

THOMAS

I'm not sure this is going to help.

BIRAJ

Right. *(Exits.)*

JIMI

(Enters.) Hey.

THOMAS

Hello.

BIRAJ

(Off.) Jimi!

JIMI

(To BIRAJ.) 'Tsup? *(To THOMAS.)* You here for the, uh—?

THOMAS

Opus. Yes.

JIMI

(Laughs. THOMAS looks at him quizzically.) Nothing. This would be your first, then.
Opus.

THOMAS

Yes. Somewhat against my better judgment, I have to confess.

JIMI

(Extends hand.) Jimi.

THOMAS

(Takes it.) Thomas. You're in the band?

JIMI

You ever hear them? (*BIRAJ reenters with two beers.*) Total carnage.

BIRAJ

You dissing me again, dude? (*To THOMAS, offering beer.*) Here.

THOMAS

No thanks.

JIMI

I sit in when you ask, I get an opinion.

BIRAJ

Take it.

THOMAS

Biraj— Thanks.

BIRAJ

(*To JIMI.*) Help yourself.

JIMI

Where's Woman of Steel? (*Exits.*)

BIRAJ

Jazzercize, I guess. (*To THOMAS.*) Crissy. She teaches.

JIMI

(*Off.*) She hates his music. Music period.

BIRAJ

I'm working on her!

JIMI

(*Off.*) Give it up.

*BIRAJ picks up the guitar, riffs. His strong suit is enthusiasm, not music.
It's much too loud.*

THOMAS

Biraj!? Biraj!!

BIRAJ

(Stops.) What?

THOMAS

You think you could turn it down? Just a hair.

BIRAJ

Oh. *(He does. Just a hair. Riffs.)*

JIMI

(Returns with a beer.) That was polite understatement, man. *(Adjusts the volume while BIRAJ plays.)*

THOMAS

Don't the neighbors complain?

BIRAJ

(Unperturbed.) Sometimes.

JIMI

Not as much as RoboGirl. *(Picks up a bass and joins BIRAJ.)* What say we get the show on the road?

BIRAJ

Not until—

SAM

(Sticks her head in.) Hello! *(BIRAJ plays a little fanfare. She enters.)* Sorry.

BIRAJ

Did I screw up the directions?

SAM

No. Don't ask. I'm here. It's fine. *(To THOMAS.)* What a pain in the ass that woman is.

BIRAJ

Who?

THOMAS

Marcia would be my guess.

SAM

Don't get me started. Phoning all the time and nudging all the time and leaving her damned kids with me because her husband is such an asshole he won't watch them. *(To JIMI.)* Sorry, I'm venting.

JIMI

No problem. Jimi. You're . . . ?

THOMAS, BIRAJ

Sam.

SAM

I'll stop.

BIRAJ

Go for it.

SAM

No. It's just—she calls me first thing this morning, can I take her kids? So I have to pick them up and take Bryan to school and Natasha to daycare and then pick them up and bring them home and they always make me late and they climb in the car Bryan as surly and rude as he can be, and they ruin the whole day. And if it's not her kids, it's always some other crisis. Yesterday she calls, hysterical. How does she get chocolate out of her white jeans?

BIRAJ

Crissy hates that. *(Phone rings.)*

SAM

How should I know?

BIRAJ

(On phone.) Hello?

SAM

Sorry. I'm finished. Really.

BIRAJ

(On phone.) Hey, sweetie. What's up?

SAM

(Embarrassed. Mainly to JIMI.) Soccer mom stress syndrome, I guess.

JIMI

Happens. Natasha—Kendrick, right?—she's one of my kids. In daycare.

THOMAS

You!?

SAM

Oh.

JIMI

Yeah.

THOMAS

Well.

SAM

Shit.

BIRAJ

(On phone.) Yeah, well, when? I mean, how long? *(Spills beer.)* Shit. *(Looks around for something to mop it up. SAM responds reflexively—Mom Mode. JIMI stops her.)*

JIMI

Let me. *(Exits to kitchen.)*

SAM

Shit. *(THOMAS laughs.)* Shut up. Why didn't you stop me?

THOMAS

I tried.

SAM

You did not.

BIRAJ

(On phone.) No, um, it's okay.

JIMI

(Off.) Paper towels?

SAM

Those shoulders—oh, my God!

JIMI

(Off.) Never mind.

SAM

It's fucking Barry's fault.

JIMI returns with a paper towels.

BIRAJ

(On phone.) Cause, sweetie, I'm like starting to feel like the dog or something.

(Withdraws to bedroom area.)

SAM

(To THOMAS.) Barry's fucking lawyer wants yet *another* adjournment and Rachel insists I have to give in to him so that I don't look like a contentious bitch.

THOMAS

Wouldn't that be Rachel's job—the contentious bitch part? What am I paying her 150 bucks an hour for?

SAM

More to the point, why, just because it was Barry's sperm that fertilized the egg, why does that give him rights in the first place? I mean more rights than them. He cheats them out of child support. And he still has the balls to think that he's going to fight me for custody. They're people, independent human beings. Why do his sperm have more rights than they do?

JIMI

Because we live in a society still dominated by the vestiges of a moribund patriarchy?

(Beat.) Just something I heard a woman say once. *(BIRAJ rejoins them.)* So what was the attraction? In the beginning?

SAM

He wasn't always an asshole.

JIMI

No?

SAM

People change.

BIRAJ

(Meaning Crissy.) Yeah.

JIMI

Not basically.

THOMAS

There's a depressing thought.

JIMI

Yeah, well. That's life, man.

BIRAJ

(Abruptly launches into a riff that segues into a kind of fanfare over which he speaks.)

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight, live on our stage in his first public appearance since his triumphant return from his phenomenal World Tour, singing his Grammy Award winning single from the album that has topped the Billboard chart for a record-setting 263 weeks— *(A low, sexy, DJ voice.)* —a man who needs no introduction . . .

He segues into the intro to the song as he does the roar of the crowd. The song begins with the chorus, BIRAJ's homage to Zappa's do-wap inspired "What's the Ugliest Part of Your Body?"

Oh, oh, oh, girl, where are you leading me?

Oh, oh, oh, girl, why are you bleeding me?

I want to fly us

Up to Osiris.

How can I free us

When you keep pleasing me? Oh, oh, girl!

An abrupt change: BIRAJ's homage to Zappa's "G-Spot Tornado." BIRAJ improvises orchestration when the spirit moves him.

She was climbin' inside me everywhere.

Up my spine, through my heart, to my brain,

So deliberately through my charkras,

And—oh! oh!—undoubtedly elsewhere.

Desire and flesh, soft tissue means ecstasy—

I have this urgency.
Where, oh where, yes where is it leading me?
Hmm?

I was yearnin', burnin' everywhere.
From my skin, to my blood, to my tongue,
So exquisitely in my libido
And—oh! oh!—undoubtedly elsewhere.
Questions and flesh, soft tissue breeds emptiness—
What's the necessity?
Questions occur to me.
Why was this meant to be?
Where, oh where, yes where is this leading me?
Hmm?

Oh, oh, oh, girl, where are you leading me?
Oh, oh, oh, girl, why are you bleeding me?
I want to fly us
Up to Osiris.
How can I free us
When you keep pleasing me?
Oh, oh, girl!!!! Oh, oh, girl!!!!

He ends with one last foray into "G-Spot Tornado." The final chord is sufficiently ugly to preclude any need for a giraffe filled with whipped cream. SAM whoops and applauds wildy. THOMAS is somewhat more restrained. JIMI is cool.

BIRAJ

So? What did you think?

SAM

Guy, that last chord.

BIRAJ

Yeah! That just like came to me. *(Plays it.)*

JIMI

(Deadpan.) Inspired.

BIRAJ

Yeah? Think so?

JIMI

Genius.

BIRAJ

What do you mean?

SAM

“G-Spot Tornado,” right?

BIRAJ

Yeah! Cool! *(To JIMI.)* What do you mean?

THOMAS

I didn’t quite follow the Osiris part. “I want to fly us up to Osiris.”

JIMI

Biraj, it’s—nothing.

THOMAS

Does that mean—what—up to heaven?

BIRAJ

It means the constellation.

THOMAS

Constellation?

BIRAJ

(To JIMI.) No, tell me. You hate it.

THOMAS

What constellation?

JIMI

Nothing. Forget it.

BIRAJ

You think it's shit.

SAM

Nobody could've written that song but you.

BIRAJ

You think so?

JIMI

Actually, somebody else did write that song. Both of them.

THOMAS

Biraj, what constellation?

BIRAJ

Osiris. *(To JIMI.)* What do you mean?

THOMAS

You mean Orion. There's no Osiris.

BIRAJ

There is in my song. I made it up. Cause it's such a cool story. Seth murders Osiris, chops him up, and Isis resurrects him. You know, transformation. How love can raise us up. And people will expect Orion, they'll think that's what I meant, so they'll wonder.

THOMAS

Oh.

BIRAJ

What do you mean, somebody else wrote the song.

JIMI

Zappa.

BIRAJ

It's my homage, dude.

JIMI

Biraj— . . .

BIRAJ

What?

JIMI

Nothing.

BIRAJ

Something.

JIMI

Man! Would you still dance if they nailed your feet to the floor?

BIRAJ

Dude?

JIMI

Would you still dance if they nailed your feet to the floor? *(Beat.)*

BIRAJ

So, what did you think, Thomas?

THOMAS

Oh . . . well, I found it, uh, an interesting melange of hormonal drive and existential angst with an unexpected undercurrent of Augustinian guilt. A heady brew, in short.

BIRAJ

No, Thomas, I mean—come on! What did you really think?

THOMAS

I think that's what I really thought.

BIRAJ

Thomas! *(Throws himself on THOMAS.)* Dude! Man! Come on. What was it like inside for you? From from your heart of hearts.

THOMAS

It was quite ugly. But not, I have to admit, uninteresting. I think I kind of got it. Sort of. Musically speaking.

SAM

You're shitting me.

THOMAS

I can't explain it.

BIRAJ

You can't—? Ha! Really?

SAM

Really?

THOMAS

The way you moved from desire not to satiety but to emptiness—

BIRAJ

(Laughing.) Shut up!

THOMAS

—surprised me.—

THOMAS

BIRAJ

—And the, well, pulse of the music—

Shut up, shut up shut up! *(Gets guitar, cranks up amp.)*

THOMAS

—captures somehow the relentless drive of desire that leads nowhere.

BIRAJ

You liked it!

THOMAS

I didn't say that.

BIRAJ

But you felt it. *(Plays the final chord. It's very loud.)*

THOMAS

BIRAJ

Biraj!

You feel that. *(Riffs on the final chord.)*

THOMAS

SAM

Stop!

Biraj! Enough!

JIMI turns the amp down.

THOMAS

Middle ear damage is no joke.

BIRAJ

But you felt something!

THOMAS

I'm a seething cauldron of repressed passion. I feel things all the time.

BIRAJ

Your chest vibrated, didn't it? Your viscera?

THOMAS

(His ears.) Are they bleeding?

BIRAJ

You felt the thrum, Thomas.

THOMAS

The thrum?

BIRAJ

Like in your body, this deep . . . thrum. Like, I made you feel the thrum. *(Exits to kitchen.)*

THOMAS

The thrum?

JIMI

The thrum.

SAM

The thrum, guy.

BIRAJ

(Returns with two beers. Hands one to THOMAS.) Drink this.

THOMAS

Biraj, I don't like beer.

BIRAJ

Come on.

THOMAS

No, thank you.

BIRAJ

It'll help.

THOMAS

Biraj! No!

BIRAJ

Okay. . . . Then let's take our clothes off. *(Starts to unfasten THOMAS's belt.)*

THOMAS

I DON'T THINK SO!

BIRAJ

You guys leave.

SAM

No way. I'm not missing this.

THOMAS

Biraj, stop it.

JIMI

Time for your Ritalin, dude.

THOMAS

JIMI

STOP IT!

Biraj.

BIRAJ

What? (*SAM laughs.*) WHAT?! (*Pause. BIRAJ laughs.*) Oh. Am I like being really rude?
(*To THOMAS.*) Well, you never come over.

THOMAS

And you wonder why? (*Mock indignation.*) Heavens!

BIRAJ

Because, Thomas, dude, you're like so . . . you know what I mean?

THOMAS

I thought that's what you liked about me.

BIRAJ

I never said I liked it. I said it gave me a hard on. (*Grabs THOMAS's hand.*) Come on.

THOMAS

Wait!

BIRAJ

Jimi, what's up tonight?

THOMAS

Can I put my shoes on? (*Struggles to put his shoes on with one hand.*)

JIMI

Vinyl Fetish is at Montana I think, and Chunga Love's at Viva Zappa.

BIRAJ

Chunga Love's in town? Cool beans!

THOMAS

Biraj.

BIRAJ

What?

THOMAS

My hand.

BIRAJ

Nuh-uh. You're coming.

THOMAS

These people don't ingest live rodents, I trust.

JIMI

Only on weekends.

BIRAJ

(To SAM.) You come too.

SAM

Sorry. I've got kids waiting.

BIRAJ

Call what's her name—Chocolate Pants. She owes you bigtime.

SAM

She can't even take care of her own kids.

BIRAJ

Grab her, Jimi. *(He doesn't.)*

THOMAS

(Has been trying to tie his shoes with his one free hand.) Biraj, this is impossible. *(BIRAJ ignores him.)*

SAM

I can't barhop on a school night.

BIRAJ

Says who? You're coming.

THOMAS

If I'm going, you're going.

BIRAJ

Jimi.

JIMI

(Takes her hand.) You heard the man.

BIRAJ

Come on. *(Exits dragging THOMAS behind him.)*

THOMAS

Will this damage my hearing?

BIRAJ

Anybody hungry? Let's stop for burritos.

THOMAS

I hate burritos.

JIMI

(Following with SAM.) That's cause you don't drink beer.

Lights change. Viva Zappa. Very loud rock music. BIRAJ and THOMAS are discovered at a table; two empty places—Sam's and Jimi's—with their half-finished drinks. THOMAS has a bottle of water in front of him and a cocktail napkin stuffed in each ear. (While the music is playing the dialog is almost unintelligible.)

THOMAS

DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO GO SOON?

BIRAJ

WHAT?

THOMAS

CAN WE GO!?

BIRAJ

SAM AND JIMI.

THOMAS

WHERE ARE THEY? *(BIRAJ shrugs. Pause. Music. THOMAS looks at his watch. Sighs.)*

BIRAJ

DUDE! *(Laughs.)* THE THRUM, MAN! *(Indicating THOMAS's water.)* HERE'S YOUR PROBLEM. *(THOMAS takes the bottle and holds it protectively. Pause. Music.)* WANNA DANCE? *(THOMAS indicates he hasn't understood. BIRAJ mimes.)* DANCE.

THOMAS

(Horried.) TO THIS!?

BIRAJ laughs. Pause. Music. DANIEL enters. THOMAS sees him, reacts, takes napkins out of his ears. BIRAJ sees THOMAS react, then sees DANIEL.

BIRAJ

D. DAN! HEY! *(Waves him over. Music ends.)*

THOMAS

What a relief.

BIRAJ

(To DANIEL.) 'Tsup?

DANIEL

Hey. *(To THOMAS.)* Hi.

THOMAS

Hello. Daniel.

BIRAJ

Sit.

DANIEL

No. I, um . . .

THOMAS

Please. Have a drink.

DANIEL

I already have one.

THOMAS

Well, have it with us then. *(DANIEL hesitates.)* One can finally have a conversation.

BIRAJ

Yes, finally. Heavens!

DANIEL

I was just, um, leaving. Early class tomorrow.

THOMAS

Oh.

DANIEL

So. Um. *(To THOMAS.)* Do you like come here? *(BIRAJ laughs.)*

THOMAS

No. Though, uh, No. I don't.

DANIEL

Oh.

THOMAS

This evening was more of an abduction experience.

BIRAJ

(Alien voice.) Praise Klatuu! Our sonic probe of this specimen has succeeded.

DANIEL

I, um . . . *(Backs away from the table.)*

BIRAJ

Later, dude.

DANIEL

Yeah. *(Exits. BIRAJ laughs.)*

BIRAJ

Jeez Louise. *(Takes a pen from THOMAS's pocket, scribbles on a napkin, stuffs it and the pen back in THOMAS's pocket.)* Call him.

SAM

(Reentering with JIMI.) Guys. Really. I have to teach in the morning.

Starts to repair her lipstick. BIRAJ does this next bit for THOMAS's benefit: He takes the napkin out of THOMAS's pocket and offers it to JIMI, indicating a smudge of lipstick. JIMI wipes his face, then hands the napkin back to BIRAJ, who tucks it back into THOMAS's pocket, then drags him off unceremoniously. SAM and JIMI follow.

Lights change. Thomas's house. DANIEL at the door.

THOMAS

Hello. Right on time.

DANIEL

I'm thinking, he's the kind of guy who'd like that. Special effort. I'm just putting that out. Okay? *(Laughs.)*

THOMAS

Welcome. *(Gestures DANIEL in.)* What can I get you?

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

Wine, water? Liquor? Beer? . . . Uh, Coke?

DANIEL

Um. What are you having?

THOMAS

Special occasion and all, I thought I might break out the Glenmorangie. Scotch.

DANIEL

Okay. Yeah. . . . Special occasion? I'm like flattered, okay?

THOMAS

Fine by me. Ice? Neat? . . . Soda?

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

Please don't say soda.

DANIEL

You're out?

THOMAS

No. Sacrilege.

DANIEL

Oh. Ice.

THOMAS

Good choice.

DANIEL

I don't know what neat means, okay?

THOMAS

As God intended it. Have a seat. *(Gets ice.)*

DANIEL

(Sits. Notices book.) I am impressed. Like totally. You read German?

THOMAS

Not very well. At least not that. Anymore. It's Middle High German.

DANIEL

Which is?

THOMAS

From around the twelfth century.

DANIEL

Intense. *Parzifal*.

THOMAS

Something you said the other day made me think of it. *(offers DANIEL his drink—)* Here.
(—and as he does, places his hand on DANIEL's shoulder. A tentative, ambiguous gesture.)

DANIEL

(Pulls away.) Don't. *(Crosses away.)*

THOMAS

Sorry. Uh, here's your drink.

THOMAS

I didn't mean to—

DANIEL

It's okay.

THOMAS

I, uh—

DANIEL

It's okay. *(Takes drink. Gulps it during the following.)* Like *Parzival*, that's Arthur and the Round Table and the quest for the Grail, right? And, um— *(Gulp.)* —all their adventures and everything, which I found totally depressing when I was a kid because like, I mean, um,— *(Laughs. A gulp.)* —who is *that* beautiful and who is *that* perfect and who, no matter what, always does just the right thing and is, um,—

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

—always courageous and like—okay?—like equal to the task? And chosen? And who is like blessed with— . . . who is, um, like *blessed*? I mean, you know, like when you're a kid, a teenager, it's always some sports guy, some jock you're supposed to aspire to be, some, um,—

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

—blond guy. And you're a complete dork, and you keep thinking, like what is inside me, what is inside me that . . . what am I chosen for, what moment of grace—you know?—what moment of grace will there be for me that, um,—

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

—that I will, um,—

THOMAS

Stop.

DANIEL

—that I will fit as perfectly as, um,—

THOMAS

STOP IT!

DANIEL

What?

THOMAS

Drinking. Like that.

DANIEL

Like . . . [what]?

THOMAS

Gulping.

DANIEL

Was I— . . . [gulping]?

THOMAS

A) You're going to get drunk, and B) that's expensive stuff so you're supposed to taste it as it goes down.

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

I'm sorry I . . . made you uncomfortable. I . . .

DANIEL

My tongue is numb.

THOMAS

Yes, well, it would be. . . I'm sorry. I shouldn't've . . . [touched you]

DANIEL

I don't . . . not want to be touched. It's— . . . (*Longish pause.*)

THOMAS

(*Laughs.*) And things were going so swimmingly. For about ninety seconds. Which is about average. (*Trying to change the mood.*) Daniel, how about if we— [start over]

DANIEL

I screw things up. I fuck things up, okay? Like, I was like sent here to do something. Not work at fucking Blockbuster.

THOMAS

Sent here?

DANIEL

Yeah. Like We don't have forever, you know? I'm 26, okay? And by the time I figure it out, like, by the time I am in readiness— Will there ever be that moment of grace for me, or am I the, you know, mutant strain that dies off, defective? I mean, rejection has its function. It's nature's way. Cause I just don't seem in tune, okay? Everywhere I go, it's like disharmonies. Which I am just not able to deal with. (*Bolts for the door.*)

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

Thanks, thanks for the drink.

THOMAS

Daniel!

DANIEL

(*Stops.*) Um.

THOMAS

Would you, would you—stay. Please.

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

Say for five minutes. Till you finish your drink. I'm—.

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

Please? Everybody's moment of grace will come.

DANIEL

But they lived like *lives* of grace. Not like moments.

THOMAS

It's fiction. Metaphor. And they weren't always equal to the task.

DANIEL

Like when?

THOMAS

From the very beginning. That's what the story's about. *Parzival*. He went to the Grail Castle. The kingdom was a wasteland. The king had a wound that wouldn't heal. Parzival could have healed him, saved the kingdom with one simple, obvious question. But he didn't ask.

DANIEL

How come?

THOMAS

He just didn't. He thought asking questions was rude.

DANIEL

So what was the question?

THOMAS

“What ails thee, uncle?” That's all. Simple compassion.

DANIEL

And what ailed him, the king?

THOMAS

Oh, he rode off one day in search of love and came back with a poisoned spear through his testicles.

DANIEL

(Writhes. Visceral.) Oh, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!

THOMAS

Yes. Speaking of metaphors.

DANIEL

Like, no wonder he didn't want to ask.

THOMAS

That's the scary part of compassion, isn't it? If you ask, you have to be willing to listen to the answer. To involve yourself in someone else's pain.

DANIEL

I should've asked him, that guy. Here I'm thinking if I could only be Perceval-like and full of grace, and it turns out that I am being totally Perceval after all in the way I screw things up. Like *The Guy With No Life*? I was like afraid, I guess, of his, of the wasteland he's living in. What ails thee? I could have asked him that. *(Laughs.)* I mean, that's like this, this like major revelation I've never had before. Cause of our talking, our like communion. That I can ask that, anyone, what ails thee. Which is like this blessing, this grace you've given me. *(Impulsively kisses THOMAS on the cheek. THOMAS reacts.)* Oh. Um. Sorry.

THOMAS

No, it's not— . . . it's just— . . .

DANIEL

What?

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

What?

THOMAS

It's just— . . . What could that possibly mean at this point?

DANIEL

It means I like you. Okay? (*THOMAS starts to speak. Stops.*) What?

THOMAS

Nothing. I mean, it's all projection, and it has nothing to do with what I am or am not or might be. Inside.

DANIEL

What doesn't?

THOMAS

Kissing me. Which you can't possibly know at this point. What's inside. Daniel. "Grace," for heaven's sake. You understand?

DANIEL

No.

THOMAS

You didn't kiss me, you kissed some, some expectation in your head, some—

DANIEL

I kissed your cheek.

THOMAS

—some, something that I can't—

DANIEL

And I like the way you smell, smelled when I got close.

THOMAS

I'm not that thing in your head, Daniel, that— (*DANIEL leans in. THOMAS pulls away.*)

DANIEL

I like your smell. (*Pause.*) Um. It's late. Um. (*Laughs.*) Not really. But— . . . (*Crosses to door.*) I, um . . . Like, I enjoy ta-talking with you. You're interesting. And the other thing, that other thing, it just, um, freaks me. Cause— (*Beat. Starts to go.*)

THOMAS

My all-time— . . . uh. . . . My all-time, number one, most very favorite cultural hero in the universe is, uh, is . . . Francis of Assisi. Not St. Francis of the Fluffy Bunnies. But the Francis of Assisi who— He kissed a leper. Because it was the thing that terrified and repelled him most. He kissed it, him, the leper—I mean, think of it as AIDS, Ebola, of inviting infection, inviting that most terrifying condition—he kissed him to, so he could know the leper’s— The leper’s humanity, I was going to say. But maybe it was his own humanity he was trying to touch. Or divinity. Or maybe the leper’s. Because this repellent, rotting . . . outcast must be as close to God as . . . as he was far from love.

DANIEL

Why did you tell me that?

THOMAS

I—. Don’t know.

DANIEL

Do you want to have sex with me? I just put that out, cause— . . . Okay, like, did I just say that?

THOMAS

Yes. You did.

DANIEL

Um. *(Resolute, but getting panicky.)* Well, do you? *(No response. Crosses, quite panicky. Perhaps unbuttons the top button of Thomas’s shirt; perhaps kisses him.)* Well? *(No response. Almost out of control.)* Why did you like tell me that? *(Exits.)*

Lights change. The desert. The same night.

DANIEL

Hello, Pegasus. Me again. Guess what? As if you needed to.

Like, explain something, would you? I look up and your light, I mean, these photons— maybe a flare, maybe a huge like prominence flicked them off, you know, like something—like, like, um, sweat from a dancer’s hair. Maybe Moses was alive when they were flicked off. Heading straight for here, for now. And Moses lived and died, and

Homer lived and died, and Buddha lived and died. And these very same like photons, like parts of you, your essence, headed straight here. Socrates lived and died, and Plato and Aristotle. And Jesus lived and died and rose again on the third day. But still they headed here. And Rome burned, and Islam rose, and Chartres was built, and Shakespeare wrote, and Newton and Einstein thought, and Hitler shot himself in a bunker, and they bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and millions and millions and millions of people died. But they never stopped. Nothing stopped them. Every second traveling thousands and thousands and thousands of miles. Every hour millions. Every day billions. Every year trillions. Heading straight for me. Like I was the only destination, the only person in the world, the only person in the universe. So that at this exact moment, at this exact spot in the universe, the earth moves into place and turns to catch them and these actual photons arrive. And I am here.

How could that be? Like how could that connection happen? Between you and me across all that space and all that time? I mean, like I don't care if you send out billions of trillions of photons every nanosecond in every direction for millions of years. In this instant that's like unique in all the history of the universe, that never was and never will be again, in this moment, we connect. These actual photons find their way to me, enter my eye now. Enter me now. Your beauty.

But here among my own kind, I am like alone. There's no trajectory that leads to me.

I would've run away even if he'd've said yes. I want, I don't want. I'm all please please please, then all don't don't don't. Which I, I'm—don't understand, okay? Why. I'm in this barren place, this like empty, this um.... And I can't, cannot find my way from here.... I want to believe the desert is beautiful as the garden, has a like purpose. Meaning. A blessing. I want to be a joyful person and not be afraid but full of like hope. But I'm—. Not. Okay?

My voice is crying out in the desert, okay? To be like lifted up, led out of the like wilderness. Cause I'm, I need um.... Um.... Just guide me, okay? Show me the—

His eyes begin to move, following the once-fixed star as it apparently travels across the sky.

No.

He backs away, stumbles, falls backward.

No. Not—

Blackout. Lights up dim on BIRAJ's. The same night. The room is almost black. A humming, the light grows suddenly intensely bright, then goes out. A thud, a crash, then moaning.

BIRAJ

(Off.) Crissy? That you?

Silence. Whimpering. Movement, then a crash. Swearing. A moment, then lights up. BIRAJ stands, t-shirt in hand, massaging whatever part of his body he injured. A form, disheveled, half-naked or worse, huddled, whimpering.

BIRAJ

Cris—? D. Dan? D. Dan? *(Crosses to DANIEL. Touching him.)* What hap—?

DANIEL

Noooooooo!

BIRAJ

Hey, man! D. Dan!

DANIEL

Noooooooo!

BIRAJ

Jesus! *(Notices DANIEL's nose is bleeding.)* Um. *(Looks around, then hands him his t-shirt.)* Here. Your nose. . . . What happened to you, man? *(DANIEL tries to speak, but only whimpers.)* Hold on. *(Exits, returns with a blanket. Starts to put blanket around DANIEL.)*

DANIEL

Don't! Don't! DON'T!

BIRAJ

Okay, okay! *(Puts blanket down. DANIEL wraps it around himself.)* What's up, man? *(Looks around.)* Like how did you even get in here? *(DANIEL whimpers.)* D. Dan? *(Beat.)* I'm calling 911.

DANIEL

No! No! No! NO! NO! NO!

BIRAJ

Okay! What then? . . . D. Dan? Tell me. What happened?

DANIEL

Light. This light? There was this, um, this, um . . . um . . . (*As if BIRAJ didn't believe him.*) There was!

BIRAJ

Okay.

DANIEL

And it came for me. After me. *They* did.

BIRAJ

Who did?

DANIEL

THEY did! They took me!

BIRAJ

Who? Where?

DANIEL

Away. With them. Up?

BIRAJ

D. Dan, we need to get you to the hospital, man.

DANIEL

Noooooo!

BIRAJ

Okay!

DANIEL

NO! NO! NO!

BIRAJ

Okay, okay, okay.

DANIEL

No hospital.

BIRAJ

No hospital.

DANIEL

No hospital!

BIRAJ

Would you at least get up off the floor then?! D. Dan? . . . Okay, don't.

DANIEL

I'm sorry.

BIRAJ

Sorry?

DANIEL

Noise. I made noise. Did I wake Crissy?

BIRAJ

No. She's uh— You didn't wake her. . . . D. Dan, you gotta tell me what happened to you, man, who did this.

DANIEL

Um.

BIRAJ

It's okay.

DANIEL

Um. . . . Aliens.

BIRAJ

(Beat.) Okay. Aliens. So they like, what, took you away in a beat-up Chevy and made you pick lettuce?

DANIEL

They took me! There was a light and they came! Cause they want what's inside me. To take it. They pro—, they pro-probed me. Got in like side me. With their eyes. Black and empty and staring. At me. Like into me. Their evil like, evil, probing, forcing, taking taking evilness in um in um— [inside]. They were inside me. Cause they want my, my like—they want my like—stuff. They can't. Have it. (*Reliving it.*) Don't. Touch—. But I couldn't—. I fought. Tried. But I couldn't—. Move. Cause my like brain was—. Numb. Wake up. Wake up, wake up, wake up. Wake. Up. Don't touch—. Stop. That. Don't. Don't— (*BIRAJ tries to calm him.*) —touch me!

BIRAJ

Okay. All right. Fine. Man!

DANIEL

I'm afraid.

BIRAJ

You're okay now.

DANIEL

Of all this like stuff inside me! Cause I invited them—it did. My voice. Cried out in the desert, which was my stuff like calling down upon me this stern warning, okay? Cause I'm not using, *being* my stuff, okay?

BIRAJ

D. Dan, you are totally making no sense, man. I mean, like less than usual.

DANIEL

People ache—their hearts? For comfort. Cause of the bitter like hidden tears they weep they think no balm can soothe. And I'm not like asking, okay?

BIRAJ

Asking what?

DANIEL

What ails them!

BIRAJ

So ask.

DANIEL

What?

BIRAJ

Say you're in a room with a guy, and his heart is like . . . hurts. His heart right now, um, really, D. Dan, say it really hurts. Cause his bed is empty. Cause she—cause his girl didn't come home. Again.

DANIEL

Yeah? (*BIRAJ waits.*) Like, what? (*But nothing.*)

BIRAJ

Fuck, D. Dan, you're sitting here on my floor with your ass hanging out wrapped in a blanket.

DANIEL

Cause I have been found wanting! Okay?

DANIEL gets up, goes to door, which is locked and which he can't seem to open. He struggles, then stops. BIRAJ goes to door and unlocks it, opens it. Pause. DANIEL starts to exit.

BIRAJ

Dude. Let me get you some clothes at least. (*Gets clothes.*)

DANIEL

I can't get—I don't know how to get to it.

BIRAJ

What, man?

DANIEL

My stuff. Cause it's like bigger than I am. Biraj? And I am not, I am not like ready for this. (*Dresses.*)

BIRAJ

(*Closes and locks door.*) I think you better stay. You can have the sofa. (*Gets pillow.*)

DANIEL

Um. I better go.

BIRAJ

C'mon. Beddy-bye, dude. *(Tucks in blanket.)*

DANIEL

Um.

BIRAJ

Hop in.

DANIEL

I wrote it down.

BIRAJ

Dude. I'm tired. Totally.

DANIEL

They sent, they gave me like, um

BIRAJ

We'll talk about it in the morning.

DANIEL

I turned it in. I need it. To get it back. *(Goes to door, fumbles with locks.)*

BIRAJ

D. Dan! What?

DANIEL

The, um, recipe.

BIRAJ

Recipe? For what?

DANIEL

For me! For like—! For extracting! The stuff!

BIRAJ

In the morning. It can wait.

DANIEL

(Desperation.) Percival like, he didn't ask. And when the morning came it was too late. It was too late. *(Fumbles with locks, gives up. BIRAJ opens the door. DANIEL hesitates.)* Um.

BIRAJ

Dude, you don't even have shoes. *(Closes the door.)* C'mon. *(Reaches for DANIEL. DANIEL pulls away.)* Okay! *(Lifts blanket invitingly. DANIEL lies down. BIRAJ covers him.)* Sweet dreams. *(Kisses him on the forehead. Crosses to exit, is about to turn out the light.)*

DANIEL

Leave it on.

BIRAJ goes to bed. Silence. DANIEL hasn't closed his eyes. He gets up, goes to the door, which opens ever so slightly of its own accord. Hesitates, then exits.

BIRAJ

D. Dan? *(Gets up.)* D. Dan!? Jeez!

BIRAJ, wearing only a t-shirt and boxers, puts on shoes, grabs an extra pair for Daniel. Exits as SAM enters and goes to her respective front door.

Sam's house. The same night. THOMAS at the door. He has Daniel's paper.

SAM

Oh. What? It's—

SAM

—late.

THOMAS

Sorry.

THOMAS

(Enters.) I figured it out. This.

SAM

(Waits, then:) Well?

THOMAS

It's an instruction guide. More or less.

SAM

For what?

THOMAS

In layman's terms, for making a mess.

SAM

That's fairly opaque.

THOMAS

I met him. Daniel.

SAM

Met him?

THOMAS

A friend of Biraj's, it turns out.

SAM

And?

THOMAS

(Considers, then:) I had a date with him. Earlier.

SAM

Way to go, guy.

THOMAS

Yes. Well.

SAM

Bad sex?

THOMAS

Let's not go there.

SAM

No sex.

THOMAS

Could we keep this conversation above the belt?

SAM

I'm sure you'll try.

THOMAS

You asked me to look at his paper. I did. You wanted to know what's here. I do. That's why I came by.

SAM

It wasn't exactly keeping me up at night.

THOMAS

Sorry. I'm compulsive. Shall I proceed?

SAM

Pray do.

THOMAS

My guess is that Daniel has done some fairly arcane reading in his time. What this is, is a jumble of quotes from medieval alchemical texts, very much like, oh, a psychotic in a dissociative state might string together random quotes from the Bible, say. Or Broadway show tunes for that matter. The texts are in Latin. The Ferengi Effect is created by the fact that Daniel, being left handed, wrote them down from right to left, *a la* da Vinci, in a cursive Greek hand, substituting for each Latin letter its nearest Greek equivalent.

SAM

He's going to be so flunked.

THOMAS

Your call, but it's a bit much for a prank, don't you think?

SAM

What then?

THOMAS

Sam, I do language, I don't do mental health. Who knows?

SAM

Aliens?

THOMAS

Cryptomnesia maybe. Supposedly we all know things we don't remember we know. Things we learned as kids and just forgot about.

SAM

Daniel, what, grew up in a family of Latin-speaking medieval alchemists?

THOMAS

He probably took Latin in high school. We're not talking Cicero here. And a lot of kids are fascinated by foreign alphabets. How do you think I got my start? They're cool. They're like codes. Which is exactly how Daniel is using the Greek alphabet here.

SAM

Unconsciously.

THOMAS

Yes. The real question is— . . .

SAM

(Waits.) What?

THOMAS

Nothing. It's late.

SAM

I'm awake.

THOMAS

Why alchemy? Of all the stuff you've ever read and forgotten, why would your psyche want to dredge up alchemy and why in such a histrionic and adolescent—well, that would be the answer—fashion?

SAM

I thought you didn't do mental health.

THOMAS

You know anything about alchemy?

SAM

Probably not.

THOMAS

Futile attempts to turn lead into gold, right?

SAM

Okay.

THOMAS

Wrong.

SAM

My bad. (*Waits.*) Well?

THOMAS

Let's not get into this. Right now, at least. (*SAM waits.*) It's about taking a metaphor for a reality. (*SAM waits.*) It's about making a mess and transforming it into the thing of supreme value. That's the Great Work. (*Reads.*) "This matter lies before the eyes of all. It is glorious and vile, precious and of small account, and is found everywhere. Everybody sees it, touches it. That is why the foolish know it not."

SAM

All things are buddha things.

THOMAS

Precisely. It's about living life. Discovering in the mess we've made—discovering *that* the mess we've made is in essence the thing we value most. (*Beat.*) I hate life. Bloody hate it. I'm sitting in my miserable contentment behind my sturdy oak door and there's a knock. Which I dread. But I say, okay, gird your loins, maybe it's your heart's desire this time, and I open the door. And there's this Unexpected Thing on the other side.

"Rejoice." It says, the Unexpected Thing. "Don't be afraid." Already I know I'm in deep shit. "Guess what?" It says, "You have found favor with God. Such a thing is going to happen! You're going to bring forth a new whatsit and call its name Emanuel."

"Heavens!" I protest. "How can that be? Like Zachariah I am old. Like Elizabeth his wife, I'm advanced in years and am thought to be barren. Like the Virgin Mary, I know not man." "Not to worry," It says. "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the Power of the Most High shall overshadow you. For nothing is impossible to God." I know I'm fucked. Or about to be. It smiles. It waits. It clears its throat. "Even though this has been

ordained from the moment of creation,” It explains kindly, “biblical conventions—and God’s not wanting to look like a big fat bully—requires that you give verbal assent at this time.” What do you say? “Go ahead. Fuck me! Make a mess of my life! Be it done unto me according to thy word”?

SAM

Thomas.

THOMAS

What?

SAM

I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about.

THOMAS

(Daniel’s paper.) This! This is what I’m talking about! How to Make a Mess of Your Life in Seven Easy Lessons!

SAM

How did this get to be about you?

THOMAS

It got to be about me when you brought it to me. You asked me to figure it out. Remember? I protested. You insisted. Several times. Remember? So I have. So, I ask you: how many people are there in the universe who are whatever, *medieval* enough to do that? That’s how it got to be about me. Things like this don’t happen by accident—these . . . alignments. That’s the way life works.

SAM

That’s the way your brain works.

THOMAS

That doesn’t mean it isn’t real.

SAM

I didn’t say it wasn’t real.

THOMAS

It's this Francis of Assisi thing. Which I really don't want to get into. Not at this hour.
(*Crosses to the door. She looks at him. He looks at her.*) What? (*She waits.*) You know, I hate when you do that. (*She waits.*) Oh, all right! It's he's so utterly weird. But there's something in him, I don't know, this something— . . . grace . . . in him. But it's all . . . mired . . . in this stuff. In this weird, surreal . . . muck. (*Beat.*) And I want to save him. It. Fuck. (*Beat.*) Myself. (*Beat.*) Is that a recipe for disaster or what? (*Opens the door.*) So. Be it done unto me according to thy word, I guess. (*Turns to go.*)

DANIEL

(*Appears at door.*) Um. (*Enters past THOMAS.*) Um where's—? (*Sees paper. Gets it.*)

SAM

Where are your shoes?

DANIEL

You two like know each other?

SAM

Yeah.

THOMAS

Yes.

DANIEL

Oh. (*Starts to exit. Stops. To THOMAS.*) I have grace in me and like, stuff. Brightness. A lumin-, luminosity of my being.

THOMAS

I know.

DANIEL

I'm not like this reject or something.

THOMAS

I know that.

DANIEL

Well, so . . . um . . . (*Exits just as BIRAJ appears at the door.*)

BIRAJ

THOMAS

Dude—

Daniel—

BIRAJ

Like what is up with that guy?

SAM

Where are your pants?

THOMAS

(Notices shoes BIRAJ is carrying. Grabs them.) Come on. *(They exit.)*

JIMI

(Enters from bedroom.) What's up?

Blackout. End of Act I.

Act II

Thomas's. DANIEL has his paper. He hasn't slept since the end of the previous act.

DANIEL

(Angry.) I never write backwards.

THOMAS

You're left handed. Maybe it's more natural—

DANIEL

It doesn't like feel natural. I tried it. And I know like zero about alchemy. Less than zero. You told her I know all about it, that I read about it in Latin. I never studied Latin.

THOMAS

Never?

DANIEL

Never ever.

THOMAS

What about your brother or—?

DANIEL

I'm an only child.

THOMAS

One of your parents.

DANIEL

No! And I'm not Catholic and I don't know any priests and I've never even like seen *Ben Hur*.

THOMAS

Okay.

DANIEL

So how come I can't like read this? I don't understand, okay? I don't understand how I could like write down the recipe for my, for my life, and not be able to understand it. I don't, like, I cannot grasp my inadequateness, my—*this*. (*Meaning the paper.*) And the, the other stuff. That happens. And I—, it—, how can I bring healing when I'm, when I have—, when—

THOMAS

Daniel— (*Touches him.*)

DANIEL

LIKE WHEN I CAN'T EVEN BE TOUCHED!? LIKE BY ANOTHER HU-HUMAN BEING!?

THOMAS

Daniel—

DANIEL

LIKE WHEN I AM SO DEFECTIVE!? A REJECT!?

THOMAS

That's not what you said last night.

DANIEL

That's when I had light, thought I had like lu-luminosity. When what I have is, is— . . .
(*Starts to exit.*)

THOMAS

Would you, would you not run off.

DANIEL

(*Overlapping "off."*) I'm not running away.

THOMAS

I didn't say you— [were running away]

DANIEL

I am not like running away.

THOMAS

What are you doing then?

DANIEL

I'm leaving cause I have to like go to work, okay? Like fucking Blockbuster. Okay?

THOMAS

Blockbuster.

DANIEL

I'm of noble birth. I'm like "O one nobly born, do not be afraid. O my son, whatever you see, however terrifying, recognize it as the luminosity of your own being, and you will become a buddha in that instant, there is no doubt." I'm not like fucking running. Away.

THOMAS

Okay. *(Beat.)*

DANIEL

Touch me. *(No response.)* TOUCH ME.

THOMAS

No.

DANIEL

Cause I'm this like oozing sore. Cause I'm this like deformed like abortion or something. *(No response.)* Cause I'm, cause I'm—. We are like trapped. In flesh? Okay? The word became flesh and got lost inside us. Got like all knotted, twisted up. Inside us. And I am blessed cause I can see that. Cause I can see that this can't be me. This incarnation. This cannot be me. *(No response. Pause.)* I'm going to be late for fucking Blockbuster. *(Starts to exit.)*

THOMAS

You want to know the truth?

DANIEL

What? What is the like truth?

THOMAS

Never mind. You'll be late.

DANIEL

Yeah. The Lord said, Come follow me and I will make you a renter of videos. (*Starts to exit.*)

THOMAS

I'm sorry about last night. I didn't mean to make you feel bad.

DANIEL

You didn't.

THOMAS

Truth is, I find you quite attractive. And I'd, uh, enjoy, you know, uh—

DANIEL

Then like, what!?

THOMAS

You terrify me, what's going on inside you!

DANIEL

Which is what I mean! Like D. Dan the psycho abortion!

THOMAS

Oh, for God's sake.

DANIEL

That's what you think.

THOMAS

Right.

DANIEL

I've been abducted, okay? By aliens, okay?

THOMAS

You have not.

DANIEL

Oh? And like how do you know that, Mr. Psychic Hotline?

THOMAS

You have, then. It doesn't matter.

DANIEL

It matters to me. I mean like denying that is like denying me. My existence, my essence. What are you like attracted to? I mean, what do you mean by that? Attracted. To what? Like you want to fuck me? My body? Is that what you want? Cause I have like a soul, an innerness. Which experiences things. And that's like what, what, *who* I am. And denying *that*, that *experience* is like this fundamental rejection. Of like fucking everything. I don't want just sex.

THOMAS

I don't want just sex either.

DANIEL

Then I don't like understand! Why you won't! Like sleep with me!

THOMAS

Because I don't know. You think you're the only one who's written down the meaning of his life and can't understand it? You've just done literally what the rest of us do figuratively. Every word you say, every thought you think, every choice you make, every bloody thing is just another confounding entry in the bloody book of life. It's like some massive bloody Joycean Zen koan. You write it, but the language is impenetrable, the meaning behind it all. Why did I do it, why did I think it, why did I say it, why did I not do it, what could I have been thinking, why didn't I keep my mouth shut? Why, why, why? Why don't we hop into bed and fuck our brains out? Because I can't see if it's good. Because I want to be aware, not make some thoughtless hurtful mess.

DANIEL

It's our task. And you will become a like buddha. (*Stands in front of THOMAS insistent.*)

THOMAS

Look at you. Go home and get some sleep. (*DANIEL won't be dismissed. Tries to kiss THOMAS.*) Stop. . . . Stop it. . . . Daniel! (*DANIEL is relentless. His arms become a windmill. THOMAS restrains him with a bearhug. DANIEL loses control, breaks away.*)

DANIEL

You fuck.

THOMAS

You can't force this, Daniel.

DANIEL

You fuck.

THOMAS

It's not right.

DANIEL

YOU FUCK!

THOMAS

It isn't right, Daniel!

DANIEL

Words and talk is just like stuff. It's not like being. It's not like doing. IT'S LIKE FUCKING BLOCKBUSTER, THOMAS! If you can't, if you like won't—. Me, Thomas! If you can't like touch me, like *touch me*, Thomas, like find my, here, what's here, then I may as well—, like fucking, I mean like fucking Blockbuster. Just another fucking waste of time. Cause I'm like 26. I just need to like, I'm just going to like shut up.

(Exits. Lights change. Sam's house. SAM; THOMAS at the door. From offstage, the sound of television, a boy about 11 laughing, a dog barking. The phone rings.)

SAM

The bastard! The motherfucker! *(Goes to the phone.)*

THOMAS

Oh. This wouldn't be a good time then.

SAM

(To the boy offstage.) Ralphie! *(To THOMAS.)* For what? *(Offstage sounds continue.)*

THOMAS

Nothing.

SAM

That fuckhead has been having me followed.

THOMAS

Wait. What?

SAM

Barry, that piece of excrement, hired a detective to follow me.

THOMAS

Oh, you're not serious!

SAM

Ralphie! Stop teasing that dog.

THOMAS

Real people don't do that.

(Phone rings. Offstage sounds continue.)

SAM

We're not talking real people here. We're not even talking higher life form. *(Into phone.)*

Hello? . . . I thought Bryan's mom was picking you guys up. . . . Well, check. *(Covers phone.)* So Rachel calls, rips me a new asshole. This is the worst possible thing I could have done in a custody case! I'll look like a predatory female sleeping with a man fifteen years younger than me! And on and on and on, the upshot being that I'm supposed to drop Jimi like a hot rock. And I'm listening to this wondering if I've stumbled into the only episode of *Leave It To Beaver* directed by Rod Serling. This is Rachel the Big Feminist Lawyer— *(Into phone.)* Yeah? Okay. Ten minutes, Sally. *(Hangs up. During the following, she get keys, purse, coat, etc. Offstage sounds continue.)* I mean, how many 28-year-old women has Barry slept with since we separated, I ask her. Forget about the ones he slept with before we separated. That's different, she says. *(At door.)*

RALPHIE! TAKE LUCKY OUTSIDE! He settled down with one, she says. The dental assistant. *(To Ralphie.)* **AND TURN OFF THE—!** *(Door slams offstage. Sound of TV continues.)* The dental technician represents stability, she says, a feminine influence. What, a masculine influence is less important in raising kids? Sally and Ralphie are crazy about Jimi. He plays those Nintendo things with Ralphie, which Barry never did. He wrote a little song for Sally. She was ecstatic. He's a musician, Rachel says. He works in daycare, I say. That merely makes him a potential pedophile, she says. Why is he

dangerous because he's young and sexy? Which is really the issue here. And the fact that I had the temerity not just to notice—a middle-aged woman! a mother!—but to hop into bed with him and have great sex.

THOMAS

And what did Rachel have to say to that?

SAM

She said if I wanted to risk my kids making a political statment, that was fine with her, but she didn't recommend it. The fact that I love Jimi and that this might be about my right to live my life as I choose didn't seem to enter her mind. Fucking lawyers. *(Beat.)* It gets worse. So I tell Jimi— *(JIMI enters. Has backpack.)* —who has been incredibly moody and self-absorbed the past couple days—and he says—

JIMI

(Moody.) My fault. I'm chaos.

THOMAS

He's what?

SAM

You're what?

JIMI

I'm chaos.

SAM

Like I need anymore chaos in my life.

THOMAS

By which he meant?

JIMI

Nothing.

SAM

(To JIMI.) Guy, I'm not exactly in a mood for existential riddles. You want to be a little less opaque? *(No answer.)* Your choice. *(Exits. Sound of TV goes off. Reenters. Goes to door.)*

JIMI

You remember the first time you heard music?

SAM

(*Impatient.*) No.

JIMI

I was watching the Three Stooges. (*In the background, the orchestral introduction to “Chi mi frena in tal momento” from Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermore.*)

THOMAS

The Three—?

SAM

Stooges.

THOMAS

Curly, Larry—?

SAM

—and Moe.

JIMI

I was, I don’t know, six maybe, and one day after school I was sitting in front of the TV watching the Three Stooges. Weird episode. They had a set left over from *Romeo and Juliet* or something, and a bunch of nobody contract actors I guess they had to cast in something. So appropos of absolutely nothing Curley, Larry, and Moe are doing, suddenly this dork with a lute is singing to a girl on a balcony. (*Sings. “Chi mi frena” continues in background.*) “Oh, Elaine, come down, Elaine.—”

JIMI

THOMAS

“—Oh, Elaine, Elaine, come down, Elaine.”

Donizetti? On The Three—?

SAM

Stooges.

JIMI

I’d never heard anything so . . . I mean, I was six. I sat there on the floor, man, transfixed. I—, I—, it was like for the first time I *heard* music. I felt this, this guy’s longing—I mean, six!—a feeling I didn’t even have a name for. And it wasn’t for the babe on the

balcony, not the longing in the music, but for something you could never ever reach or touch or hold the warmth of it in your arms. Or be held by it. I learned sorrow. (*Fade out "Chi mi frena."*) Then when I was about thirteen, one day they let us out of school if you wanted to go to this special program for schoolkids the symphony did. I told my friends I was going to accidentally on purpose miss the bus so I could cut class. Which was a lie. Because I really wanted to know what that music sounded like. But it was like this, like this girl thing. I mean, I was sweating I was gay or something. But I went. And it was totally boring, all this, God, terminally Caucasian elevator music. So I was probably thinking about sex or something, probably, come to think of it, about fucking Gina Luchesi, who was incredibly hot and out of my league and sitting right in front of me, and, I mean, even those little wispy hairs on the back of her neck alone—when—(*The first pizzicato measure from the intro to "Chi mi frena."*) —which I knew I knew, but couldn't quite remember. (*Music starts the same place continues into the first part of the duet, then, as the speech continues, segues into the trio, then into the full sextet.*) Then it came back. And I sat up. Cause it was the same, but different. It wasn't just a song. It was something I'd never heard before. Two, then three, then six melodies. Two, then three, then six of these hefty white folks up on stage heaving and bellowing, I mean, they made you want to laugh with their jowly faces chewing the air, emoting all over the place like, I don't know, these huge operatic rhinos. But the sound—I mean, can you imagine six people in real life all spilling their guts at the same time?—but the music was like a, Jesus, dance, every note choreographed, perfect, knowing the shape of the whole as it came into being. I was, I just saw there was some sort of transcendent something. Fuck. Beauty. And it just got to me. Fucking grabbed me by the shirt, kneed me in the balls, threw me down on the floor, and sat on my chest. I—I panicked, practically crawled over every kid in the row to get out, practically crawled up the aisle, into the lobby, into the little boy's room, wedged myself in next to the toilet in the back of one of the stalls. And fucking cried. Sobbed my fucking little heart out. Cause I just—I mean, I saw—knew—that no sorrow was real sorrow, no sadness real sadness if you could get behind it, see beyond it. There was just whatever beauty is. The dance of all things. Perfect and intended. (*Beat.*) One of the teachers finally came and dragged me back. And just as I got back to my seat, was standing there, well, half-standing, my butt kind of poised over the seat, the conductor turned around, and looked like right at me, I thought, with this like

“fuck you kid we’re going to make your brain bleed this time” look on his face. (*Ligeti’s Requiem, about 2:00 in.*) Man. Ligeti’s *Requiem*. Like nothing I ever conceived of as possible. Not melody, just the sound, the what, lamentation of all those voices. So like raw and from the gut. I was like, I couldn’t, Jesus, breathe. Like some huge spike had gone through me. Nailed me through my chest to my seat. I mean, beyond tears. Beyond any thought of escape or refuge in the toilet. Falling with the sound away from myself, feeling my life, consciousness slip. Plummeting, no parachute, terrified, into disolution. The cry ripped out of your lungs as you think, I am no more. But being in awe of the sound, like getting, like getting in that stupid adolescent way a hard-on from its power. Filling you. Wanting that, fuck, that, Jesus fucking God, wanting that inside you. To not stop doing what it was doing. Ever. (*Beat.*) Yeah. Well. Be careful what you wish for, as they say. (*Beat.*) You know genius?

SAM

Do I—what?

JIMI

You know, “He’s a genius,” people say, or “She has a genius for poetry.” Which is it, huh?—something you are or something you have?

SAM

I don’t know.

JIMI

Because if it’s something you have, something inside you, something different from you, who says it can’t be a jealous lover, or abusive, or homicidal. I mean, hey, poor old Vincent cut off his ear, shot himself, died insane. And who says just because it’s genius it has to be appreciated? Poor old Vincent was a nobody, now he’s big time, but he could just as easily not have been. There’s no guarantee, cause people don’t know shit about genius until somebody tells them. And what if it won’t rest, and you’re not sure if you’re big enough for it, and it wants your life, fucking makes you poor old Vincent, painting your own portrait, your own face, painting everything, surrounded by swirly, swirling— . . . things. Chaos. Makes you fucking nuts. Fucking unfit for human consumption. So you keep it hidden. (*Takes CD from backpack.*) Your work. Cause every fucking adolescent in the fucking Western World thinks he can fucking write music. Like fucking Biraj.

BIRAJ

(Enters.) Crissy? (Sees Envelope. Opens it. Reads.)

JIMI

Because you aspire to higher things. To art. Sweet art, that pierced you through. To be taken seriously. Which is a totally uncool thing to say. Or even think. But you do.

SAM

Let me hear.

JIMI

And you ask yourself, You want people to make love to your shit? All that shit in your soul?

BIRAJ

Ah, man. Crissy!

JIMI

Is that what you're asking?

SAM

Yes.

JIMI

(To SAM.) Like you don't have enough chaos in your life.

SAM

(To Thomas.) Like you don't have enough chaos in your life, he says.

SAM

And leaves. *(JIMI crosses to BIRAJ.)* And I'm pretty frantic, because I can't reach him.

BIRAJ

(To JIMI. Distracted.) T'sup?

SAM

I have to pick up Sally.

JIMI

The airport. You said you'd drop me.

SAM

(At door.) Ralphie!

THOMAS

I'll keep an eye on him.

SAM

Thanks.

JIMI

Biraj?

SAM

Think he'll come back?

BIRAJ

Right.

THOMAS

Sure. *(BIRAJ and JIMI exit.)* I don't know.

SAM

I mean, am I unfit because I like great sex?

THOMAS

Hey.

*Lights change. Daniel's. THOMAS sits at Daniel's desk waiting. Pause.
DANIEL enters with his hand over his eye. Stops on seeing THOMAS.*

THOMAS

The door was open. *(No response.)* What's the matter with your eye?

DANIEL

Nothing. . . . I need like ice. *(Exits. Reenters.)* Would you like get away from my stuff?

THOMAS

Sorry.

DANIEL

(His back to THOMAS.) Like nothing happened! Okay?

THOMAS

You want me to go?

DANIEL

I didn't—. Invite you. (*Exits. Returns with Kleenex, rubbing alcohol.*)

THOMAS

(*Sincere.*) I'm sorry. I shouldn't have presumed. (*Starts to go.*)

DANIEL

Why did you—? Come.

THOMAS

To explain.

DANIEL

More like words?

THOMAS

Afraid so. Want to hear them? (*DANIEL shrugs.*) I—. Had a speech prepared. When the truth is I envy you. I envy you Blockbuster—the whatever, nothingness of it, the utter, galling wrongness of it. I covet it, Daniel. That void. The chance. Your life. Which I can taste in my mouth like blood, it's so strong, the life that runs so deep in you. That's too dark for you to see into and that wounds you and blooms in you like a wild garden. Which is why it would be a sin, sleeping with you. Not because I don't like you or don't want to. But because it's still a sin sometimes, sleeping with someone. When it's about taking.

DANIEL

(*Sweeps the books and papers on his desk to the floor.*) Words and talk and stuff is just like Thomas stuff. Thinking. Life, Thomas, like calls us. To like act. Calls to our like hearts. Calls to us deep deep deep in our—calls us like forth from our tombs. From our slumber. Cause if we don't like act, if we let ourselves think, let ourselves, if we like turn inward and let the gnawing like things, like vermin, of self-doubt and like self-punishment, self like flagellation eat away, gnaw away at our, at our like purpose just cause, just cause something happened, cause you work at fucking Blockbuster, and you went there, and the like fucking Guy With No Life punched you cause he didn't—

couldn't—what you were [trying to do]—cause—. Your purpose. Cause he couldn't see that. So he punches you. Thinking doesn't help, Thomas, about it. Doing—you got to keep like doing. What's in your heart. Is all. What's coming from deep—from deep in—my head, my head like hurts.

THOMAS

He hit you?

DANIEL

No. *No*. . . . Yes.

THOMAS

Why?

DANIEL

Why do you think, why do you like think? So don't say stupid—. Words. Covet.

THOMAS

It's true. (*Starts to pick up the scattered papers.*)

DANIEL

Leave it. (*THOMAS continues.*) IT'S MY MESS. AND I LIKE WANT IT! THAT WAY!

THOMAS

(*Stops.*) Daniel—. . . . Fine. (*Finishes. Puts papers on desk. DANIEL sweeps them off again.*) This isn't one of your more attractive moments.

DANIEL

And you think it's one of yours? Saint like fucking Francis. Self like abnegating yourself, o Thomas, full of guilt? Cause you're like fucking me—either way you like fuck me. So what's it matter? (*THOMAS turns to go.*) I'm not blind. I can like see myself. How I, how I—. Am.

THOMAS

Daniel, if you want to believe you're a, a whatever—reject—I can't stop you. I've told you what I think.

DANIEL

You're not hearing! Me! What I'm saying!

THOMAS

Go ahead, then.

DANIEL

(Start to talk. Stops. Silence.) I, um—. Never, never mind.

THOMAS

Get some sleep. *(Turns to go.)*

DANIEL

Biraj just like knows, okay?

THOMAS

Knows what?

DANIEL

How to, how to make things better. Touch you. He doesn't know he knows. He's just this like dog with a stick in its mouth sitting in front of you wagging its tail. Dogs just want to play, just do dog things, but they make comfort. Bring comfort. Without trying. Without like thinking about it. If I was a dog, I bet, with a stick, I bet the Guy With No Life would've accepted um like—. Comfort. But instead I'm like this creature, this weird, this weird thinking impenetrable human entity. I'm just this, I just get called this like faggot, and I get fired cause I'm, cause no one can figure out, cause—. I'm not a like comforting presence, okay? People flee my presence. Cause a dog just is a dog, what it is, but I'm, I'm not penetrable, my mind, what I, what I'm—. My action. Cause I have to do my like action, Thomas. You know?

THOMAS

They fired you?

DANIEL

Why is it so hard? Why is it like so, so fucking like hard, Thomas? Being human.

THOMAS

I—I don't know. *(Referring to his eye.)* Let me take a look at that. *(DANIEL resists.)*
Come on. *(Relents; likes the attention.)* You've got a cut.

DANIEL

I like know. *(Starts to touch wound.)*

THOMAS

(Stops him.) Ah, ah! I'm sure you've got quite enough pathogens partying in there already. *(Picks up Kleenex and bottle of alcohol.)* This is it?

DANIEL

(Takes out a box of bandages. THOMAS looks at them.) It's not a like apendectomy.

THOMAS sterilizes hands with a little alcohol. He's finicky, almost surgeon-like. DANIEL finds his ministrations, his closeness both exquisite and excruciating.

THOMAS

(After a silence.) What did you say to him? The Guy With No Life.

DANIEL

Oh, um—. Nothing.

THOMAS

This in going to sting. *(Applies alcohol directly to wound.)*

DANIEL

Ow, ow—*(protest)*—ow!

THOMAS

(Pronounces it “woos”.) Don't be such a wuss.

DANIEL

A what? *(Laughs; correcting.)* Wuss.

THOMAS

What?

DANIEL

Wuss. Don't be such a wuss, you mean. Not like *(mocking)* “woooo.” *(Thomas dabs unnecessary alcohol.)* Ow!

THOMAS

Smarty Pants.

DANIEL

(Laughs.) That hurt, you fuck.

THOMAS

Oh, there, now. Not like an apendectomy. Hold still. *(Applies bandage.)* There you go. Good as new. *(DANIEL touches bandage.)* Get some Neosporin.

DANIEL

Some—?

THOMAS

Antibiotic. *(Starts to clean up.)* Can I tell you something? *(Silence.)*

DANIEL

Yeah?

THOMAS

(Continues cleaning. Silence.) Once—, I had a friend once who used to say there were only 6000 real people in the world and all the rest were filler. He was being a bit harsh, I think, about the vast majority of humankind, but let's say for sake of argument that he was right—. . . . You're not, you're not filler, Daniel. *(DANIEL cries. A moment.)* Stop beating yourself up. Okay? *(DANIEL nods.)* I'm going to go now.

DANIEL

Thomas? You are like a seduction. Cause I don't want to be just dirt and like spit. You're a fearful temptation to me cause you like lift me up with your words.

THOMAS

I don't mean to. Tempt you.

DANIEL

Thomas? I give you permission to har-harm me. *(Before THOMAS can protest.)* Cause you're so like afraid! Cause you think I'm so fragile.

THOMAS

I'm just not what you see in me. Honest.

DANIEL

Where you walk, flowers bloom. Could, I mean. *(Touches bandage.)* Do.

THOMAS

(A tad of wonder.) Where do you get this stuff?

DANIEL

Out of my depths, my heart.

THOMAS

Yes. Well. Don't forget the Neosporin. *(Turns to go.)*

DANIEL

Thomas, hear me. Not my words. Which are the words of this like flesh, are the only words it knows. I don't make sense cause there are no words my mouth can shape for the things in my heart. Which are like impenetrable. Dark and deep and which I am trying, Thomas, to get to. To tell you. Cause no one ever called me that before—a garden. Saw that in me. And it's my necessary thing to ask you. To like kiss me. Now. On my mouth. Cause, Thomas—cause who can like see into it?

(THOMAS kisses him. Then more kissing. THOMAS embraces him. DANIEL panics.)

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

It's okay, it's okay it's okay.

THOMAS

This isn't going to work.

DANIEL

It's okay! It's okay! It's okay!

DANIEL

You can't, Thomas! See into it. Can you? Cause it's dark and deep and full of grace.

(Leads THOMAS off.)

Immediately, lights up. BIRAJ's. BIRAJ enters from bedroom dressed very nice, very preppy.

BIRAJ

Tie, tie, tie, tie, tie. *(Calls out.)* Tie! What would I've done with it? Who knows? *(Mom voice, as he searches.)* Hang up your clothes, young man! How many times have I—Jeez Louise, who even remembers what it looks like? Okay—sorry, Mom—no tie. *(Checks himself.)* Okay. Need belt. *(Exits. Returns with belt. Checks himself again.)* Close enough. I hope. Okay— *(Finds something on the seat of his pants.)* Jeez Louise, what is that? What did I sit in? *(Mom voice.)* Biraj, what did you sit in? Shit! Gum! I can't—with

gum! How do you get gum out? Is that one of those vinegar things or one of those baking soda things? Acid, base? Base, acid? Moooooom! Why didn't you teach me how to take care of myself!? *(Mom.)* I tried, dear. Lord knows, I tried. Fuck it. My coat'll cover it. Okay. Okay, dude. Don't think. Just do. The element of surprise. Okay. Let's see. First Rule of the Uninvited Guest: Bring loot. *(Gets bottle of wine.)* Is a bottle of wine enough? I mean, you drink half. *(Mom, as he gets second bottle.)* Flowers are always welcome, dear. Naw, I don't— . . . Flowers. Yeah! *(Puts second bottle back.)* Cool beans! *(At the door.)* You can do this, dude. You can do it. *(Deep breath. Opens door. Closes door.)* You can't do this! Are you out of your mind?!? *(Beat.)* You can do it. You can, dude. *(Deep breath. Opens door. Mom.)* Don't forget to have fun, dear!

Daniel's.

DANIEL

(Off.) Thomas! *(THOMAS enters, half-dressed, carrying most of his clothes.)* Wait! *(Enters. THOMAS dresses.)* Um. It's like o— [okay]

THOMAS

I'd really rather not discuss it, if you don't mind.

DANIEL

I mean, it like happens. It's not import—

THOMAS

You're discussing it, Daniel. I'd really rather not. If you don't mind. *(Dresses.)*

DANIEL

Um.

THOMAS

Conversation isn't required. Honestly.

DANIEL

Don't you see?

THOMAS

That this was a bloody stupid mistake.

DANIEL

It wasn't!

THOMAS

Why I let you talk me into it, I can't imagine.

DANIEL

It wasn't a mistake. It was wonderful.

THOMAS

Wonderful. There's no conceivable definition of wonderful that would apply.

DANIEL

Full of wonder. I'm filled with wonder.

THOMAS

Fine. You're filled with wonder. I'm not.

DANIEL

Which you would be if you could like see—into it.

THOMAS

See precisely what? Never mind. Don't answer that.

DANIEL

Why you came. Why you waited. Which I don't want to like say.

THOMAS

Don't then.

DANIEL

For me to heal you. Comfort your affliction.

THOMAS

Daniel, that's—didn't happen.

DANIEL

Even if you won't admit it.

THOMAS

This conversation is going nowhere. *(Starts to go.)*

DANIEL

Cause you're the guy with the like wound through his testicles.

THOMAS

Oh, for heaven's sake.

DANIEL

Which will not heal.

THOMAS

Healing is not required!

DANIEL

You are.

THOMAS

Who could perform with a ticking timebomb—ticking away.

DANIEL

You are. (*THOMAS tries not to respond.*) You are.

THOMAS

I— [am not]

DANIEL

You are! This moment is like given—the place you cannot find if you seek it out. Cause it's grace and a blessing. Which is what fills me with wonder. Cause I'm seeing, Thomas, you're the like why of me. Not The Guy With No Life, or anybody. But you, Thomas, alone. Are the like why of the stuff I have. The giving of myself, Thomas. Which I feel. Let me.

THOMAS

I don't think you realize quite how offensive you're being. I'm not some pathetic— . . . lying on a pallet, some cripple, some . . . —fodder for your—Jesus, Daniel— [delusions]

DANIEL

You're not fodder. You're a hu-human heart. Pierced, afflicted in the flesh—

THOMAS

Daniel, please don't start. Rhapsodizing. Which is what got us into this mess in the first place. We just had bad sex. There's no mythic significance.

DANIEL

There is.

THOMAS

There isn't. There's just us. And no two people on earth could possibly be more wrong for each other. I mean, for heaven's sake. Nothing but turmoil since the moment we met.

DANIEL

Which is like part of it. Supposed to be.

THOMAS

No, it isn't. That's just romantic prattle. Come on, Daniel. We've had our little whirl at the Spastics Ball. Let's just leave it at that. *(Starts to go.)*

DANIEL

(Blocks THOMAS.) No. Thomas. I say no.

THOMAS

(Gets paper.) You want to know the message in this? That you've been trying so hard to understand? Give! Up! It's tommyrot! These lamebrain alchemists, what did they accomplish? They wrote tract after tract after incomprehensible tract, century after century of vain experimentation, poisoning themselves with mercury half the time. For what? Never once did they end up—never once!—with anything but a smelly, noxious mess! No gold. No transformation.

DANIEL

You said the mess *was* the gold, the like thing we want most.

THOMAS

What does that mean?

DANIEL

The words of your mouth have spoken it.

THOMAS

Yes, well, so? I can't save you, Daniel; you can't heal me. I'm not Francis of Assisi and you haven't been abducted by aliens. Here. (*Hands him paper.*)

DANIEL

(*Doesn't take it.*) I can heal.

THOMAS

You can't, Daniel. (*DANIEL takes paper; flings it.*) Okay, you can. You can heal.

DANIEL

You don't like mean that. (*THOMAS is silent.*) You don't like believe that. In me.

THOMAS

Daniel.

DANIEL

Doesn't it matter that I like, Thomas, love you. Doesn't it? That my heart like— . . .
(*Affect.*)

THOMAS

It matters. Deeply. It does. But it doesn't make any difference.

DANIEL

Go fuck yourself. If you can like get it up. (*Exits.*)

Thomas exits. Lights change.

Thomas's house. BIRAJ at the door, with flowers and wine. Pause.

BIRAJ

Hey. . . . I mean, hi. Hello. (*THOMAS is speechless.*) These are— Uh, here. (*Hands him flowers.*) And this. (*Hands him wine. Pause.*) Uh. . . . (*Enters.*)

THOMAS

Biraj?

BIRAJ

Yeah. Hi.

THOMAS

What's going on?

BIRAJ

I just stopped by. You know, say hey, uh, hello. Just in the neighborhood. You know.

THOMAS

With flowers.

BIRAJ

Yeah.

THOMAS

And a bottle of wine.

BIRAJ

Yeah.

THOMAS

You're wearing clothes.

BIRAJ

Yeah?

THOMAS

I mean adult clothes. Grown-up clothes.

BIRAJ

I do sometimes.

THOMAS

Since when?

BIRAJ

I couldn't find a tie. Do I look okay?

THOMAS

You look— Yes. . . . Are you going to a prom or something?

BIRAJ

No. I, uh, I just thought I should dress up.

THOMAS

Why?

BIRAJ

You know.

THOMAS

No.

BIRAJ

I wanted to, you know, look nice. For you.

THOMAS

(Referring to flowers and wine.) These are for me?

BIRAJ

Yeah.

THOMAS

Biraj, your girlfriend, uh— . . . what's her name? Kelly?

BIRAJ

Crissy. She's not— . . . she, uh . . . Crissy.

THOMAS

Crissy. *(Hands flowers and wine to BIRAJ.)* Take these home to Crissy— *(Ushers BIRAJ to the door.)* —get drunk, tell her you love her, and . . . you know.

BIRAJ

What?

THOMAS

Let nature take its course. Thanks for stopping by. I'll see you at work tomorrow.

Closes door. Pause. Door bell rings. He ignores it. Door bell rings. Door bell rings longer. Door bell rings accompanied by knocking, then by pounding.

BIRAJ

(Off.) Thomas! THOMAS! THOOOMAAAAAAS!

THOMAS

(Opens door.) What is with you? Would you stop? Would you go away? What is there, a full moon tonight or something?

BIRAJ

This sucks, man. This really sucks. I bought these for you, man. I picked them out for you. Are you going to take them?

BIRAJ

ARE YOU? *(Slaps flowers against THOMAS's chest. On the verge of tears.)* You suck. I mean you really suck. I picked them out for you. I mean like Crissy hates yellow. Which is why I got 'em. And I thought you'd like 'em. And the wine. Then you won't even take 'em. Like what kind of shit is *that*? Do you know how hard this was for me? I mean like the first time, like I stood out there for like half an hour trying to work up the courage just to ring the bell. And you treat me like a piece of shit or something. After all that. Like, man, that— Like that— Like, you really . . . suck. *(Cries. Pause.)* You probably haven't noticed, but I'm crying.

THOMAS

You want a kleenex?

BIRAJ

I want a hug, man!

THOMAS

I'll get you a kleenex.

BIRAJ

What is your problem?!

THOMAS

I don't have a problem, thank you.

BIRAJ

What are you like saving it for?

THOMAS

"It" what?

BIRAJ

Your, I don't know,—. Heart. *(Pause.)* I need a kleenex like really bad. Before I snot all over the place. *(THOMAS hands BIRAJ a box of kleenex. As he blows his nose.)* So, how about it?

THOMAS

What?

BIRAJ

A hug.

THOMAS

I don't think so. Not tonight. *(At door.)* Go. Please.

BIRAJ

Thomas! Man!

THOMAS

It's my house. Out.

BIRAJ

Fuck, dude, I'm like dying here. It's just a hug.

THOMAS

It's not just a hug. It's flowers. It's wine.

BIRAJ

I thought you'd like 'em. I mean, like flowers. I mean, you gay guys like stuff like that. Girl stuff. Don't you?

THOMAS

I—yes.

BIRAJ

Well.

THOMAS

Well?

BIRAJ

Well, you know. I want you to like me.

THOMAS

I do. You know that.

BIRAJ

I want you to like me, you know, special. *(Pause.)* What did you think? I like wanted a blow job or something? *(No response.)* I need you, man. I mean, you're so far above stuff. And I'm kinda stuck right now. And I need you to make me feel special.

THOMAS

Fulfillment of adolescent fantasies would be the video store. Two blocks down, take a right. You can't miss it. Or try a 976 number. Come on. Out.

BIRAJ

Why are you being such a fuck?

THOMAS

Because I'm not in a very good mood, okay? Because I didn't invite you over. Because—Biraj! For chrissake! You're a nice-looking, sweet, engaging, intelligent, normal guy!

BIRAJ

Me?

THOMAS

Yes, you! Hasn't it ever occurred to you that I might be attracted to you?

BIRAJ

But—you're old enough to be like my mother's age.

THOMAS

Yes, I'm aware of that, thank you very much.

BIRAJ

But—I'm straight.

THOMAS

And I'm not! You bring me flowers, you bring me wine. Straight men don't do that!

BIRAJ

Why not?

THOMAS

Because—because we live in a fuck-up, repressive, homophobic society! I don't know! All I know is that you're the only guy in the Western World who wouldn't think that if you brought me flowers and wine I might misconstrue what you meant. All I know is that for a guy with an I.Q. of 700, it astounds me that it's never occurred to you that I might actually like the blow-job option.

BIRAJ

(Slight pause, then laughs.) Dude! That image is like totally surreal.

THOMAS

Why?

BIRAJ

Cause, like—dude! *(Laughs again.)* I mean, Thomas, it's like body stuff.

THOMAS

And?

BIRAJ

You're photons in space, not grunting and sweating. I mean, dude, why do you think you give me a hard-on?

THOMAS

I wish you'd stop using that expression.

BIRAJ

You and D. Dan, you're like so perfect for each other. You have this, I mean, both of you, this . . . ethereal dorkiness. I mean, I like wonder if you guys can find your peckers when you have to pee.

THOMAS

Get out.

BIRAJ

I mean, even the way you talk. "Heavens!" Real people don't talk like that, earth people.

THOMAS

I live on this earth just like [everybody else]—. Forget it.

BIRAJ

(Over lapping “Forget it.”) No, you don’t. Dude. *(Laughs.)* You don’t. I’d love to be there when you two are in bed together, you and D. Dan. Jeez Louise, it must be like Etude for Twenty Thumbs.

THOMAS

(Stung.) Would you just get the fuck out of here? Would you take your fucking wine—
(Lobs the wine.)

BIRAJ

Hey!

THOMAS

—and your fucking flowers— *(Throws them at him.)* —and go the fuck home and fuck your girlfriend and leave me alone?

BIRAJ

Yeah, sure, I’ll do that. I just thought the two of us, we could like be together for awhile. Guess not. So. Go fuck yourself.

BIRAJ’s. BIRAJ enters, disheveled, dejected, somewhat drunk. The bottle of wine is half empty. He crosses to bedroom. Undresses. Pulls down covers. Stops. Stares. Can’t get in. Sits on bed. Beat. A loud thump at the front door, followed by a mixture of sobbing, banging, thumping, inarticulate cries and moans. BIRAJ crosses to the door, realizes it’s Daniel, stops. Picks up guitar, turns up amp, riffs for some seconds. Stops abruptly. Opens door. DANIEL is curled up just outside, most of his clothes missing, his nose bleeding.

BIRAJ

Hey. So. Fetal position time again, huh? *(DANIEL responds inarticulately.)* Crawl in.

As DANIEL does, BIRAJ gets blanket, drops it next to DANIEL, exits, returns with roll of toilet paper, drops it beside DANIEL, crosses away. Beat. DANIEL wraps himself in blanket, begins to sob as he wips blood from his nose. Beat.

BIRAJ

What’s up?

DANIEL

(Regains control.) Nobody wants to hear this again, okay? *(Beat. BIRAJ exits. Returns with two beers. Sets one beside DANIEL. Crosses to guitar.)* Do you ever think like you invented it? Everything. That you spend so much like energy making sense of it cause you're this like luminosity trying to teach itself, to bring, like bring itself to consciousness. And if you could just like shut, shut up in your head, you'd see that you're everything and everything is you. And all the all the stuff that comes in the night, in the dark, for you would vanish, all the fearful um evil like—things would vanish, cause all there would be would be like the light the light *knowing*? You um think?

BIRAJ

No.

DANIEL

Cause I need some like refuge. Some, a like different thought, cause I need a thuh—thought to cling to right now for solace, cause I um can't face, cause I—cause I'm—can't—I'm, I can't, really really really can't um can't um can't um— *(BIRAJ riffs. Stops. Pause.)* Okay. *(Pause.)* Cause, cause the only um, the only other explanation is like—.Um. *(A truly terrifying thought.)* Demon-demonic possession. *(No response.)* I'm um. I am.

BIRAJ

(Gathers bedclothes.) You can have the bed. I'll take the sofa.

DANIEL

You think I do this to myself!? Rip my rip my like clothes off, lacerate my flesh? Smite—smite myself!?

BIRAJ

Yes, D. Dan! If you want to know the truth. You're fucking crazy! So would you just shut up for once?

DANIEL

The man born blind! The man born dumb! The man who spewed! Out words! Cause he couldn't shut up in his head. Cause of the demons that entered him—who were called Legion—entered his thoughts like the swine so that they ran about violently and could

not be stopped. Ane he could not, o my son, recognize it and could not become a like buddha. So he sinned and failed and—(*BIRAJ riffs.*)—I have!—(*BIRAJ riffs.*)—hurt him! Thomas. Harmed—! (*BIRAJ launches into a long, loud riff.*)—And they took him and kept chains upon him lest he should—LEST HE SHOULD HARM—(*DANIEL stops, frustrated, drown out by BIRAJ; a moment, then—*)

VOICE

(*Pounding. Off. Muffled.*) HEY, KNOCK IT OFF! YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS!? SHUT THE FUCK UP! SHUT THE FUCK UP OR I'M CALLING—(*BIRAJ stops.*)—THE POLICE! (*BIRAJ plays one last defiant riff. Pounding.*) ASSHOLE!

BIRAJ

(*Pause.*) I can't deal tonight, okay, D. Dan? Really and truly. Would you just stop?

DANIEL

Um. It's um. It's just—. I'm in hell, Biraj. This is like everything all the time is like hell. (*No response.*) Can I, can I just talk? (*No response.*) People shuh-shuh—um. Shut you out.

BIRAJ

I'm giving you my bed!

DANIEL

You shut out my cries!... You did!... Which is—I understand. Cause of— [the way I am]. But you just are. And change is like not within your power. And you wait for some, for like Jesus to come, to lay h-hands upon—. To um. Touch—. Um. But he doesn't. Come. Ever. Even though you like, fucking beg. But so maybe it's like he comes to you all um hidden if you could just wake up and see. Maybe he comes in like this very incarnation. Cause it's, there's like no escape. From—cause—. You just are. And, I mean, if you like asked your father for an egg, would he give you a scorpion!? Jesus said. But um. But um. It's, it feels like a scorpion.

BIRAJ

Yeah.

DANIEL

So I have to believe that, than like God, like God, he like hates me so much. Cause um cause he called me a garden. Thomas. And I felt lifted up. And I don't like understand, okay? Why he won't, Thomas won't—

BIRAJ

D.Dan, shut up.

DANIEL

Okay. *(Pause.)* Cause I just want comfort. In my heart. Him to love me. I just do.

BIRAJ

(Pause.) Crissy left.

DANIEL

Crissy?

BIRAJ

Yeah.

DANIEL

She left?

BIRAJ

Don't see her, do you? Didn't even like her all that much, I don't think. Cause she was pretty mean to me. And then Thomas—. *(Cries.)*

DANIEL

Um. Biraj? Like stop. *(He doesn't. He sobs.)* Um.

Not knowing what else to do, DANIEL puts his arms around him. BIRAJ returns the embrace. DANIEL nearly panics, nearly cries out, but doesn't.

BIRAJ

Hate an empty bed, dude.

They fall into it. Beat. On the other side of the stage, Daniel's phone rings. THOMAS enters, on cordless phone, listening to the phone ring. The

ringing of the phone cross-fades to the ringing tone the caller hears. A moment, then THOMAS hangs up.

A beat. He frets. Starts to dial again, stops, checks his watch, considers, grabs jacket. Exits. Blackout.

BIRAJ's. In black. (Effects suggesting Daniel's nightmare.)

DANIEL

No. No. *(Cries out.)*

Lights up dim. BIRAJ and THOMAS at the door, backlit.

BIRAJ

D. Dan? Dude? *(Goes to DANIEL.)*

THOMAS

(Seeing DANIEL in BIRAJ's bed; afflicted.) Oh. Um. Sorry.

BIRAJ

(Overlapping. To DANIEL.) Hey.

DANIEL

BIRAJ

No! No! No!

It's okay, man. It's me.

DANIEL screams.

BIRAJ

D. Dan. . . . Man. . . . Dude. *(Holds him.)*

THOMAS

I, um shouldn't've— . . .

BIRAJ

Hey. It's me. *(DANIEL grows calmer.)* Everything's cool, man.

THOMAS

Um. *(Flees.)*

BIRAJ

Hey, Thomas, wait! *(Effects. DANIEL reacts, struggles with BIRAJ.)* C'mon. C'mon.
(Effects become more intense.)

DANIEL

(Breaking free of BIRAJ.) No. No. No.

BIRAJ

What's up, man? (*DANIEL eludes BIRAJ, exits.*) D. Dan! Shit. (*At door. Realizes he's no dressed.*) Fuck! (*As he gets clothes.*) D. DAN?! (*Struggles into clothes as he exits.*)

Sam's. SAM and JIMI. Same night. Very, very late.

JIMI

They told me my work sucks, okay? That I eat shit, all right? That's what happened!

SAM

That was after you disappeared!

JIMI

Sorry, for like the fifteenth fucking time!

SAM

You ever disappear like that again, guy, and you'll be auditioning for boy soprano.

JIMI

Yeah, like what? I'm supposed to go around announcing it? Just cause I'm stupid enough to try to get into Julliard doesn't mean I'm stupid enough to think everybody has to know.

SAM

I'm not everybody.

JIMI

Sorry! Sixteen.

SAM

All you had to do was tell me you'd be gone. Not why.

JIMI

(*"Sorry."*) Seventeen.

SAM

I've had enough to deal with, with Barry and his fucking lawyer and my fucking lawyer.

JIMI

Cocksucking academics, anyway.

SAM

Which you no doubt told them.

JIMI

Which happens to be true and which somebody needed to. I mean, they fucking think it's about their words! They fucking think, I mean they actually fucking think that music is *about* something, that it can be translated, reduced. Like it can't be heard without being processed with words, packaged into some like fast food, like it's something you can put into a fucking plastic bag at the grocery store with handles so it's easy to carry. Why is it people want art safe and convenient and knowable? Containable. Fuck! I mean, when did they forget it's a sacred fucking act, the blood from the side of Christ crucified pouring out for the salvation of all mankind, a sacred meal where you eat the flesh and blood of God made man? You eat it, *taste* it, blood and flesh in your mouth. Jesus! Jesus God! It's dying and rising up. Doing it. Not fucking talking about it. Doing it. Am I fucking crazy, or is that not like fucking obvious?

SAM

Not.

JIMI

Fuck! I can't live in a world where that's not obvious. I mean, fuck. I mean, why are they taking up space on the planet if that's not obvious to them?

SAM

Couldn't say.

JIMI

I mean, like—. Shit. (*Beat. Ejects a CD. Quietly.*) Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. . . . Fuck. (*Pause.*) Come on. Be straight with me. You don't like it either.

SAM

That's not a yes or no question.

JIMI

(*Explodes.*) What kind of a question is it!? Just the sweat of my brow, the blood—! Just open a vein, it won't hurt much, just bleed for us! You can't love me if you don't, like, if you can't like hear my music! (*Beat.*)

SAM

Get out.

JIMI

Fine. Fuck. (*Doesn't go.*)

SAM

Get out!

JIMI

I'm— Okay, that was a stupid thing to say.

SAM

You don't know the half of it.

JIMI

Okay, I'm listening.

SAM

A little late.

JIMI

I'm listening. Okay!? Late maybe, but I am. (*Beat.*)

SAM

Barry's fucking lawyer called my fucking lawyer. Barry's fucking lawyer, who's been dragging his feet for months, suddenly can't wait to get me into court. Why do you think that might be so? . . . And I can't love you because—Jesus! Just get out. (*Opens door.*)

THOMAS enters, agitated.

THOMAS

Tell me to shut up. Seriously.

SAM

Thomas, this is not the moment.

JIMI

We're like in the middle of something.

SAM

Jimi, I asked you to leave.

JIMI

Look, I shouldn't've said that. Okay?

SAM

Apology accepted. I still want you to go.

THOMAS

This is detestable.

JIMI

Wait a minute.

SAM

Thomas, not tonight! I'm exhausted.

THOMAS

Make me go.

SAM

Both of you, out! I'm not kidding.

THOMAS

Tell me to shut up. Really.

JIMI

Shut up, for chrissake.

SAM

Both of you shut up. Get out. (*THOMAS crosses away from the door.*) Thomas!

THOMAS

All desire is desire for God. Ultimately.

SAM

God damn it, Thomas. Fuck.

THOMAS

How else do you explain it!?

JIMI

Hey! Take your problems someplace else.

SAM

I'm not in the mood to discuss why you can't get laid!

THOMAS

It's not— . . . ! It's beyond just— It's this void, this emptiness, this gaping, aching— (*Gestures.*) —abyss inside me.

SAM

If I explain this to you will you leave?

JIMI

We were in the middle of something.

SAM

Jimi. Thomas?

THOMAS

You can't.

SAM

You're lonely.

THOMAS

No! I mean, yes, but no, not in a more fundamental sense. I mean, yes, even in a more fundamental sense, but that's the point.

SAM

Thomas!

JIMI

Hey! Would you go?

THOMAS

Look. It's like this. Thomas Mann said—

SAM

Oh, Thomas!

THOMAS

—he said that our fate is an expression of our innermost selves, that something, some *will* inside us brings about what seems to be happening to us.

SAM

Fuck Thomas Mann.

JIMI

Fuck Thomas Mann.

THOMAS

You see what I'm saying?

SAM

Yes.

JIMI

No.

THOMAS

All I ever really really really wanted is a direct experience of the godhead. That's all! That's it! Is that too much to ask from a relationship?

JIMI

Yes.

SAM

Jimi.

THOMAS

It's absurd, I know. But that doesn't matter. That's what I want. I want romance to be a mystical experience of the godhead, an ecstatic, transcendent communion with God In All His Glory. Why is that too much to ask?

SAM

I don't have an answer.

THOMAS

Ah! I do. Surprisingly the godhead has obliged. Unfortunately—in its impish, unpredictable, and godlike way—revealing itself to me in its true non-form, the nothingness beyond existence. Eyn. That about which nothing can be said.

SAM

Thomas. You're behaving abominably.

THOMAS

I know. But how else do you explain it!?

SAM

Stop it.

JIMI

You're leaving. *(Takes THOMAS's arm.)*

THOMAS

Let go. *(To SAM.)* I'm not finished.

JIMI

You are really out of line.

SAM

Good night, Thomas. Good night, Jimi. *(Starts to exit.)*

THOMAS

JIMI

Wait!

Wait!

THOMAS

You have to listen.

JIMI

Yeah.

SAM

Why?!

JIMI

Because—!

THOMAS

(Overlapping. Overpowering.) Because I'm expressing a human need, all right!? A big messy stinky smelly gross unattractive human need. That I don't really understand and that I don't much like and that's causing me to make a complete ass of myself, shame myself, and that I can't believe I'm doing even as I watch myself do it and I am completely out of control but I need you to listen because that's what you do.

SAM

(To JIMI.) And you?

JIMI

(Taken aback.) Him first.

SAM

(To THOMAS.) Not tonight. Good night.

THOMAS

Yes! Tonight and every night and always. Because that's what you do! Because my need is the biggest thing in the universe right now, which is completely infantile, but it just is! And I hate this but I can't stop and it's totally about me and I have no excuse. And no right. To demand this. Except, except, damn it, it's that bloody paper Daniel wrote, the voice of it in my head, it's accusing finger jabbing me in the chest. So here it is, the moment we've all been waiting for: The Mystery of the One Thing. Of why we're in each other's lives. To lift each other up. To drag each other down. And I submit. I prostrate myself before the powers of the universe manifested in you. Because when things are big and messy and stinking and smelly and gross and . . . messy . . . and real, you're in it up to your elbows. Because you're some kind of bodhisattva. Or something. And no matter how much you don't want to, you'll listen. Which is kind of a mystery. Or miracle.

SAM

(Long pause.) I'm listening.

THOMAS

(Pause.) Do you have to look at me?

SAM

Yes.

THOMAS

Does he have to be here?

JIMI

Yeah.

SAM

Yes.

THOMAS

All right. *(Starts. Stops.)* All right. *(Starts. Stops.)* This is— *(Stops. Almost flees. Doesn't.)* Okay. I saw Daniel this evening. I went over. *(Stops.)* And one thing led to another, and we ended up in bed. *(Stops.)* And, uh . . . I couldn't, I couldn't get an erection because— . . . I couldn't get an erection. *(Period.)*

JIMI

Jeez. That's not like the end of the world.

THOMAS

I know that. I don't know why it's such, why it seems like such a big thing. I mean, it's not. But it is, and I don't know why. *(Considers.)* I do know why. *(Pause.)* Anyway, I couldn't get—, and we had harsh words. Daniel and I. And then Biraj came over, and we had harsh words. And then later I called Daniel to apologize, and he wasn't in, so I went over to Biraj's to apologize to *him*, and I walked in— *(Stops.)* And this is the big thing. This is the emptiness inside me. That I feel. *(Stops.)* They were in bed. Together. *(Stops.)* And I don't understand. How people do that.

JIMI

What?

THOMAS

Fall! They do it all the time. People. They fall. Into bed, in love, into sin. Into each other's arms. Effortlessly. It's the most natural thing in the world. Except for me. I'm so fucking above it all.

SAM

Thomas, I have to be up in three hours, and I don't have an answer for you.

THOMAS

You do.

SAM

I don't.

THOMAS

You do. You and him. I mean, what are you doing with this guy? You see what I'm saying?

JIMI

I think you better explain that one. Slowly.

THOMAS

If you'd tried, you couldn't conceivably have come up with a worse choice at this juncture in your life. You're going through this horrific divorce with this meglomaniac psychotic. You take up with a musician fifteen years younger than you, without a steady job, who's probably a cokehead if not a heroin addict or syphilitic or worse—

JIMI

You are so outta here. *(Grabs THOMAS.)*

THOMAS

—I'm exaggerating—let go! *(Pulls away.)* You're risking your kids. . . . Sam, you're risking the two beings you treasure above all else. About everything. Above life itself. How could you possibly have done anything more stupid? *(JIMI grabs THOMAS. Shakes him.)*

SAM

Hey! Jimi!

JIMI

Asshole. *(Glares at THOMAS. Anger. Frustration. Doesn't know what to do, but know he needs to do something. Pause. Tension builds.)*

SAM

Knock it off. *(JIMI shakes THOMAS again.)* Hey! Hey! Hey!

JIMI

(JIMI stops. Pulls THOMAS to him, nose to nose.) Scared?

SAM

That's enough!

THOMAS

Yes.

JIMI

Don't know what I'm going to do.

SAM

I know what I'm going to do.

THOMAS

No.

SAM

Jimi!

JIMI

Know what your problem is?

THOMAS

I want to get laid. Man cannot live by godhead alone. *(A long moment.)*

SAM

Last warning, guy.

JIMI

(Beat. Releases THOMAS. Pause. Crosses to stereo. Kneels in front of is.) That's what music should do. Does. And so they make words about it. Like a fence. Chainlink. To keep out the— To keep it out of their face. So it won't touch them. *(THOMAS is straightening his clothes.)* Muss them.

THOMAS

You misunderstand me. I think it's—. It brings tears to my eyes that you can be so intelligent and perceptive and down to earth and, I don't know, splendid—and yet so bloody stupid. It's so goddamn fucking glorious.

SAM

Thomas, you can be such a fool.

THOMAS

I know that. But it's glorious anyway.

BIRAJ

(Enters, carrying clothes for Daniel.) Where's D. Dan?

THOMAS

With—

BIRAJ

Not anymore. You freaked. He freaked. You split. He split. I'm standing there bare-assed. And by the way, dickhead, we weren't fucking. You think I'd fuck your boyfriend? Jeez Louise.

THOMAS

What are you doing here?

BIRAJ

Tried his place. Not there. So, where is he?

THOMAS

We'll find him. *(Goes to door.)*

BIRAJ

God knows where he's curled up whimpering when he freaks like this. *(Nobody moves.)*

THOMAS

Hey, troops. Battlestations! *(THOMAS, BIRAJ exit.)*

JIMI

(Goes to door.) So, um—

SAM

Go. But come back this time, Jimi. *(Big kiss.)*

Lights change. Thomas's house. Dawn. A moment. THOMAS enters. Crosses to the sofa, sits exhausted. Pause. The stereo comes on.

ANNOUNCER

. . . your station for the classics. The time is six AM.

The bass recitative that precedes the aria "The Trumpet Shall Sound" from Messiah begins. THOMAS listens.

RECITATIVE

Behold, I tell you a mystery:

We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed,

In a moment—

DANIEL enters from the bedroom, rubbing sleep from his eyes. THOMAS starts.

—in the twinkling of an eye—

THOMAS

Daniel. *(Attempts to turn music off; accidentally turns it up loud.)*

RECITATIVE

At the last trumpet.

THOMAS

(Turns music off.) We were frantic! Are you all right?

DANIEL

They came, I thought. And I needed refuge. Comfort—cause I, um. Cause like, Thomas, in the whole world I just want one thing. I just do. *(DANIEL takes THOMAS'S hand. THOMAS pulls his hand away, turns music on.)*

ARIA

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised— *(THOMAS abruptly turns music off.)*

DANIEL

What, um, what ails thee, Thomas?

THOMAS

There was, he was, uh—. Fourteen. When I was in, when I was sixteen, there was a girl I used to hang out with after school. You know, go to her house, listen to music up in her room—Handel mostly. *Messiah*. She had a, Ricky, a brother. Very sweet. Very shy. He'd always—after a few minutes—he'd just be there in the doorway. Just stand there, silent, like some sort of, some wordless—some visitation. Then he'd, he'd sit next to me on the bed and, uh, . . . Take my hand. *(Affect perhaps.)* The terrifying moment of grace. Of being. . . . And all I had to do was fall. . . . Which, uh,— [didn't happen]. . . . I've

actually, I've prayed. I've *asked*. But God has denied me. That's what hurts. . . . Which is stupid. My own fault. This, this—whatever—infantile notion that there's Something Out There that cares enough to—, should care enough about—, to waste its time on something so, so— Bah. When the truth is—, when the truth is— *(Full stop.)* I don't know. *(Full stop.)* Just, I—, I just want—. I just— . . . dunno.

DANIEL

Thomas, like, behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not be changed. Cause it's, it's got to be like everything we need, what we are. Which is not a like place of comfort—being isn't. But he wouldn't, I mean, God wouldn't give us a scorpion. Thomas. The universe just wouldn't do that, throw us away, what's in our hearts. Their abundance. I mean, *why?* So we just got to say— *(Puts his hand on the sofa where THOMAS can take it.)* — Fear not, o my heart. Just be. *(Bargaining.)* For a minute?

CHOIR

If you get there before I do,
Comin' for to carry me home—

DANIEL

(Moves his hand closer to THOMAS, maybe touching him.) Just like be. With me.

CHOIR

Tell all my friends I'm coming too,
Comin' for to carry me home.

THOMAS takes his hand. DANIEL curls up next to THOMAS. THOMAS puts his arm around DANIEL, who prepares to panic, realizes he isn't going to, then relaxes into the embrace—on the word “home” in the following.

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home. *(Immediate blackout.)*
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.

End of play.