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Zachary Levin

April 12, 2022

Sandcastles by the Shore

by

Zachary Levin

Jim Grimsley
Adviser

Creative Writing

Jim Grimsley
Adviser

Joseph Skibell
Committee Member

Morgan Ward
Committee Member

Sheila T. Cavanagh
Committee Member

2022

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By

Zachary Levin

Jim Grimsley

Adviser

An abstract of
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Abstract

Sandcastles by the Shore

By Zachary Levin

Ross Liran, a struggling playwright in New York, must grapple with his own psyche his anticipated first major premiere of his work saddles him with failure and destitution, all the while, his biographer sist and past as er Lucy seeks to make sense of her present condition as complications in her publication alters her perceptions of her passions.

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Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Cast of Characters	2
Act 1 Scene 1	3
Act 1 Scene 2	4
Act 1 Scene 3	22
Act 1 Scene 4	28
Act 1 Scene 5	31
Act 1 Scene 6	36
Act 2 Scene 1	45
Act 2 Scene 2	54
Act 2 Scene 3	63
Act 2 Scene 4	82
Act 3 Scene 1	84
Act 3 Scene 2	85
Act 3 Scene 3	92
Act 3 Scene 4	97
Act 3 Scene 5	105
Act 3 Scene 6	115
Act 3 Scene 7	122

Sandcastles by the Shore

Cast of Characters

The Primary Players

Ross Liran - 30, a playwright. Desperately seeking approval to become somebody. Willing to delude and deceive himself so as to not feel like a nobody.

Lucy Liran - 26, a biographer. Wants to talk about herself but doesn't know what to say. Outwardly expressive, not inwardly reflexive.

Ethan Rayner - 26, a construction worker. Easy going to a dangerous degree. Beholden to the movements of the wind, Ethan goes wherever the wind blows him.

Cara Tenny - 29, a stalker/aspiring Instagram model/stay-at-home stoner. Doesn't know what she's doing but seemingly content in that unknown to a certain extent.

UNNAMED - ... An existential figure with a physical form. Perpetually silhouetted in the shadows of the mind.

The Secondary Stars

Drunkard- a Drunk stumbling their way through existence, drowning their consciousness at the bottom of a bottle.

Eddie Ellwyn - a down-on-his-luck off-broadway producer. Looking for a next big hit and a way out of the industry.

Betty Albright - a faded Broadway star. Obsessed with staying alive and relevant without excelling at either desire.

David Tenny - Father of Cara Tenny. Wealthy with funds to support but tired of looking after his miscreant daughter.

Mickey the Bartender - The bartender at Dirty Hairy's. Casually content with what he does with little thought of doing anything outside what pleases him.

Harper Bullatts - Owner of Dirty Hairy's. Belligerent and Exhausted, Harper's looking for a sense of power and control.

Non-Speaking Parts

College Scout/Young Ross

Ethan's Father/Liran Father

Ethan's Mother/Liran Mother

Ethan Rayner (High School)/Arthur Liran

Young Lucy

ACT I

SCENE 1-So a Drunkard Walks onto A Stage...

Setting: Location of the Theater, the Year of the Performance. The Curtains are closed, and the house lights are fully lit. Ambient orchestration plays sounding like a formalized and organized rendition of the classic tuning session that precedes orchestrated concert.

(Several loud bangs sound from the auditorium doors. The doors fly open, and THE DRUNKARD stumbles into the theater, fumbling his way to the stage.)

THE DRUNKARD (ranting and slurring)

Cut it! Cut the shit! I'm here! Let's stop this preamble crap and get me paid already. Turn the light off! Jesus, it's been like five minutes. And what's this fucking middle school orchestra shit, is this what you booth fellas think these paying patrons deserve on their night off? (*mumbling*) Fucking amateurs. Can someone open the curtains!?

(THE DRUNKARD reaches the stage, by which point the music has stopped, and forcibly tries to open the curtains. In the throws of battle, the curtains violently burst open, exposing the set and tossing The DRUNKARD onto the ground. The lights are still off above the stage.)

Jeez, you didn't have to be so aggressive, assholes... Can you turn the lights on here, this whole thing doesn't really work if they're off so... (*They put their finger to his ear*) You're not turning them on cause I called you assholes for assaulting me with accouterments? I could sue, ya know. I won't... but I could! (*They put their finger back to his ear.*) Cause I called you amateurs?! How is that worse... frankly, that's what you're acting like now... Fine, if you'll turn these goddamn lights on already, I'm sorry for calling you all amateurs. Can we start? (*The lights over the stage turn on.*) Thank you, now, where was I... (*He turns to the audience*) Hi. How's it going? Hope you're all having a good enough night that this play ain't gonna bug it all up for you to remember it while munching on that \$60 after-show steak. Hell, I can barely remember what this play is and I'm supposed to be talking about it. What's it even called again? (*He goes into his pocket and pulls out a PlayBill.*) "Sandcastles by the Shore?" Heh, more like "Sandcastles by the Bore," amiright?! Haha, Up top. (*He hi-fives himself*) Ah... (*he looks back at the audience*) You'll get that zinger later. Well, I guess now you may be asking: Who is this guy? Why is he talking about the play? Who the fuck is this delirious troglodyte smelling like a Monday morning? Well, I've been known as many things: A wanderer, a titan, a drunk, that guy on West 62nd Street who passes out flyers for 50-cents ass-blast wings at Dirty Hairy's. None of that matters. Sure, it'd be nice to let you all in on the tight-kept secret but, on the other hand, it's not much of a secret to be kept. Like most things, in the grand scheme of things, who cares? I'm just some late-50s nobody talking on a stage before I step down and go back to day-drinking, working 50-plus hours a week just looking for a good meal before turning on the 5 AM news,

half-naked, smelling like shit, thinking over every wrong turn in my train crash life ‘til falling asleep with a heavy artillery pacifier in my mouth before waking up and doing the same routine all the fuck over again! (*They stare out at the audience, understanding they’ve kinda lost it.*) I think I’ve lost the plot a teensy bit. Sorry bout that. They were supposed to give me something to say about this play but I reckon they forgot. Like I said, amateurs. (*He puts his finger to his ear*) What? I’m out of time? I wasted it talking? Doesn’t matter, cause, frankly, there’s only so much I can say that you can’t get from the fact that this play, written by a writer, is about, gasp, a writer! Clever, very clever. But, to be fair, can anyone really talk beyond the confines of their own ego-fueled attempt at making something profound, winning a whole bunch of misplaced clout for a little effort? That’s rhetorical btw... What do you mean I’m getting side-tracked? What do you mean stop shitting on the play? I’m just telling them what they need to hear... Fuck you too! I’m gone. I already got paid for this so you’re only fucking yourself. So thank you, good night, and go fuck yourself! (*To the audience*) I don’t know if you heard any of that but I kinda sorta gotta go. But, you seem like a good and comfortable crowd so I’ll let you in on some sage wisdom from a man who doesn’t know shit. Don’t take this seriously. At the end of the day, it’s just a play. Wow, that rhymed! I didn’t even mean to do that! I’m like, a fuckin’ poet. Maybe I could take a crack at this whole theater thing... yeah, no, I like money too much. (*He walks off the stage towards the entrance.*) I’ll be at the bar if you need me. Which bar? Well, whichever. See y’all on the other side of this “artistic meditation.” Enjoy the show, or don’t. I don’t care. Bye.

(DRUNKARD exits and the lights over the set turn on.)

SCENE 2 - A Hack Before His Time

Setting: 2017, A shabby New York apartment. A poor, wooden and brick overlay hide decades of rot and wear. A sofa stands in the center of the room with an armchair to the right side of the couch. A coffee table, with an empty glass placed on it, is set in front of the sofa. There is a door on the far right side opposite to a liquor cabinet boasting a variety of glasses and liquors. The windows from the previous set remain but only show a brick wall.

(ROSS and LUCY LIRAN enter from stage left.)

ROSS

... and so, with the tragic demise of the young Blackstone, in the face of his incredible trials of hardships and self-corruption, the town of Blackstone Rollings fades from the world, but its name subsists as, though the material world ebbs and flows like the tide, a name remains like a Blackstone Rolling. (*ROSS closes his script.*) So, what’d you think? Pretty fuckin’ good, huh? And I’ve got the perfect name that’d just look perfect in some big lights: *The Ballad of Blackstone Rollings*. Not bad, right? So once *Patriot* goes onto be the talk of the town after the premiere tonight, Lucy, you’re lookin’ at the next Liran hit.

LUCY

Maybe I'm dumb but to have a "next Liran hit," you're gonna need a first one... correct?

ROSS

...That's not funny.

LUCY

Come on Ross, don't be melodramatic.

ROSS

Melodramat- Lucy! I've been working on this for a year! I haven't slept the past week editing it for Ellwyn, you know that. You're the first one I've shown this to, open my soul to and the first thing you do is label me a failure! I thought we were in this together.

LUCY

It was a joke, Ross. Just that, just a joke, not some character assassination of your stupid soul, just a joke. I don't go renouncing you as a brother cause you make fun of the jumble of pages I call a biography. It's just some constructive criticism, for your, like, character development. I'm just pointing out that, usually, you expect things to happen on the off-chance other things happen. There's like, a phrase for it, something about ducks.

ROSS

"Don't count your chickens before they hatch?"

LUCY

No... that has nothing to do with ducks... Anyways, that's not the point. I'm trying to bring you down from the clouds and just give a bit of perspective. You've been in your own head this whole time, anyone can get a tad delusional in that condition, most of all some crazy writer guy who thinks his shit can cure cancer with a song.

ROSS

You're lecturing me about being in my own head? That's fucking gold.

LUCY

I don't even know what that means but we're not analyzing me right now. You're the one who came looking for approval. It's your show & tell moment and it's my turn holding a red pen, so what do you say, let me help you out; a critique here, a little nitpick there, and blamo! You got yourself a cancer-curing western play.

ROSS

That's a nice sentiment but there's only so much time and I'd rather not spend those with someone shredding a work of art. You wouldn't mount a Monet in a fire pit would you? Besides... don't you have to go and interview your subject and, ya know, fulfill your livelihood?

LUCY

My subject?

ROSS

Yeah, your subject, that lady who was famous like 20 years ago. Brittany? Becky-

LUCY

C'mon You and I both know that you worshiped the silk slippers of (*imitating an obsessive fan*) Betty Albright! I'm like your biggest fan ever. I have seen everything you've ever been in, so good. You're, like, an inspiration! Listen to this, I practice every night. (*LUCY singing off-key*) La, La, La, La, La, La, (*Back to her real voice.*) Hahahaha. That's what you sounded like.

ROSS

You done?

LUCY

What? You don't want a walk down memory road? I thought you were a fan?

ROSS

Maybe when she mattered back in the 90s, that's not me now. So can you just stop busting my balls for a minute?

LUCY

Ross, you wanna be a writer, right? Emasculation comes with the territory.

ROSS

Are you going or not?

LUCY

Don't get antsy, I'll be out soon and you can get back to your muse (*mimes guzzling down a bottle.*) Doctor's had to do another brain-scan or something. Meeting's gonna be in a bit, then we hear the decision from the publishers but Betty says it's a done deal. Oh! That reminds me, Ethan's coming over to walk me to the hospital.

ROSS

Ethan's coming here? Ethan Rayner? He's gonna be in this apartment?

LUCY

Yeah Ross, I just said that. Ya know, I knew those pills did something for your brain but I didn't think it fucked with you're hearing too. Then again I guess your 'muses' must get kinda noisy in there.

ROSS

This isn't a joke Lucy. I've told you, I don't know how many times at this point, that I don't like Ethan being in my apartment.

LUCY

Uh, first off, our apartment. Two names on the lease. Second, what's the fucking problem? He's getting some blood work or biopsy, I forget, checked out, and I don't like going to hospitals alone so what's your deal?

ROSS

He's a sadass sack of walking, talking, blah. That's the best thing I can think for him: blah.

LUCY

Descriptive.

ROSS

You know what I'm talking about.

LUCY

Really, I don't know what kinda crack you've been smoking cause Ethan's like, the most positive guy in the city, not that that's saying a whole lot but it counts for something.

ROSS

That's just it, he's too positive, too happy-go-lucky for his own good. For how long he's been a tomato can kicked down the metaphorical street, you'd think he'd finally roll up to the conclusion maybe things aren't so great. It's so painfully obvious he's just overcompensating to make everyone think he's just fine and one of these days, you just know he's gonna crack, be it on himself or someone else. It's just like that saying, "A sinking ship holds no water."

(A beat.)

LUCY

What?

ROSS

What?

LUCY

What did you just say?

ROSS

“A sinking ship holds no water?”

LUCY

Yeah, I don't think that's something people say.

ROSS

No, I'm pretty sure it's a fairly common proverb.

LUCY

I don't mean to burst your bubble but I'm certain, nobody, in the history of somebodies, has ever said, in all seriousness “A sinking ship holds no water.” What the fuck would that even mean? A ship that's sinking into the water, would inherently be holding some water.

ROSS

Listen, it makes perfect sense if you just think about it for a second.

LUCY

No, it doesn't. It's just another one of your pretentious phrases you try and sound smart saying but look like a fucking doofus regergitating. What was the one you said the other day, “one could argue the opposite of ‘up’ is ‘shark?’” What does that mean!? I just expect better from you.

ROSS

Well, it actually does make sense cause, technically speaking, the opposite of ‘up’ is ‘not up,’ and, last I checked, a shark isn't up so... really the opposite of up could be just about anything.

LUCY

Goddammit, I just realized what you're doing.

ROSS

See! I mean, kinda had to spell it out for you but it's really clever.

LUCY

I'm not talking about your stupid shark thing. Just when I backed you into a corner to talk about your vanity project, you did a whole loopdeeloop on the conversation and we lost it in the sauce.

ROSS

I don't have a clue what you're talking about sis. Let's just have a drink and go on with our talks of sharks and water, a whole ocean retreat from real talk.

LUCY

You can't avoid it anymore Ross. I can smell your bullshit from a mile away.

ROSS

More like half an inch away but hey, it's not my fault you've got the attention span of a gopher.

LUCY

Do gophers have short attention spans? Fuck! Focus - We're doing this Ross, give me that script.

(LUCY approaches ROSS, backing him into a corner.)

ROSS

No, I don't wanna.

LUCY

Just give it to me, nerd.

ROSS

Make me.

(LUCY lunges towards ROSS and the pair pathetically squabble over the script. LUCY is able to pry the pages out from ROSS.)

LUCY (out of breath)

There. That wasn't so hard, was it?

ROSS

Can we not do this right now, Lucy. Seriously, not now, today of all days.

LUCY

You showed it to me, today of all days. Why can't I talk about it?

(All throughout this monologue, LUCY is flipping through the *Blackstone* script.)

ROSS

I just can't do criticism now, okay? I wanted to show you just to show you, that's it. Not cause I wanted your oh-so appreciated feedback. Today is the day. Most important one I'll get. When everything goes right, *Patriot's* gonna be a smash success, front page of every paper, top trending event for months, I'll bet. And that- that will be my ticket up. After today, I guarantee that the world'll be clamoring for the next Liran masterpiece. Each show bigger than the last until they physically can't get much bigger. People'll know who I am, Lucy. People'll care. My legacy, my life, all holds in the balance on this one day and I can't take the time to-

LUCY

What's the point?

ROSS

What?

LUCY

What's the point of your play? *Blackstone*, what're you trying to say with it?

ROSS

Sorry, I'm not following.

LUCY

I mean, there's just a lot going on in the thing. There's the whole ghost town aesthetic, family tragedies, fucking biblical firestorms coming outta the ground. That's not even mentioning the clearly fucked up psychology shit of the kid who kills the family and burns it all down. Really dark stuff and I'm wondering if any of that dark crap has any point? Like what's their deal?

ROSS

I mean, dysfunctionality, I think, is a crucial lens through which to analyze the machismo of Old West living and, like, uh... it kinda foreshadows how... okay so the biblical stuff at the beginning is like foreshadowing that everything's going down, like the tragedy and all, with poetic flair. It was, like, always gonna happen that way cause of the family.

LUCY

This ain't some auto-biographical bullshit right?

ROSS

What?! No, its-

LUCY

Cause that'd explain that weird space subplot with the older brother. Like I get having a theme of innovation but building a spaceship in the 1800s? Sounds pretty stupid to me.

ROSS

No it's supposed to be like cyclical trauma or something, like it was always gonna go down a specific way. I wasn't trying to be biographical about it.

LUCY

Sure... so it's like predestination.

ROSS

I guess, more than it being me.

LUCY

That's a dumb copout.

ROSS

Great insight.

LUCY

It is Ross. You're turning your story into a fucking lazy river for tourists to gently float down on the currents of whatever may happen. Like serious, destiny schmestiny. Don't use the whole "destined to happen" schtick cause who does that help? The asshole who doesn't wanna blame himself for his shitty life, the rich fucker sayin' that he deserves it cause it's just what was supposed to happen in life? It's, frankly, kinda lazy as a device.

ROSS

So that's the kinda critique I'm putting out for? Not about the work but your own in-work philosophy. I'm gonna need a drink.

(ROSS walks over to the liquor cabinet to pour himself a drink.)

LUCY

Ya know what I love about you? You're so against cliches and yet, here you are: an actual alcoholic writer. It's adorable.

ROSS

Shut up. Maybe I'd drink less if you turned your volume down a tad.

LUCY

Dude, get a drink, take your meds and let's get on with it.

ROSS

(Looking at the glasses.) Where's my glass?

LUCY

Gonna have to be a bit more specific there.

ROSS

You know, The one that mo- the one with the fishes on it? It's important.

LUCY

Dude, you really don't remember last night then. Cause you fuckin' dropped that thing. Why do you think the floor's so sticky?

ROSS

You're joking right? Tell me you're joking, please! I couldn't've broken it, I wouldn't!

LUCY

What's the big deal, it's just a glass? On my way back I'll get a nice new cup, with kittens and puppies on it if it means so much.

ROSS

You don't understand! The fish glass, it's the last thing she... It was a gift from mom.

(A beat. LUCY picks up the glass on the table and gives it to ROSS.)

LUCY

Let's move along. *(She looks down)* Hey look, ants!

ROSS (terrified)

What?! Where?!

LUCY

Where I'm pointing, on the ground. Fucking swarms really.

ROSS

I thought we took care of the ant problem. We had an exterminator and everything.

LUCY

I mean, they're around where you spilled so, I'm guessing they're attracted to the drink.

ROSS

I didn't think ants were attracted to bourbon.

LUCY

Well clearly they are, but it's no biggie, we'll just call closing and they'll stumble back to their hovel of a hill.

ROSS

This is serious, Lucy! We gotta do something before we're drowning in little buggly legs and tiny crawlers everywhere.

LUCY

Ross, let's just get back to the script at hand.

ROSS

Listen to me, we need to stop them before they overtake us. There's fucking zombie ants out there Lucy! Mindless, no control, whatever these are them and their coming to-

LUCY

Ross! It's a couple of ants, not some harbinger of fucking Satan, it's a common pest. Take a drink, swallow your pills and let's talk about your fucking play!

(LUCY directs ROSS to sit down.)

Fine.

(ROSS sits down on the couch and takes out a pill bottle from a pocket. He pours a couple into his hand and swallows them with a swig of bourbon.)

LUCY

Don't worry, I'll be nice. Just a couple of notes, quick notes, light notes, nothing to worry about. First off, and this is real minor, you use 'fuck' a bit too much. Don't get me wrong, I love a good 'fuck,' but when it's after every single word it just starts to sound like you're a fucking twelve-year old who just found out what the cool kids were saying. Kinda loses all of its meaning after a while, don'tcha think?

(A beat.)

ROSS

Okay, that's actually kinda a good point, I guess.

LUCY

See, I'm not the worst at this. Okay, next one. So, obviously I don't know too much about dramatic shit but, isn't there something like some Russian dude's gun? Like someone has to be shot but only if you show the gun earlier in the play?

ROSS

Chekov?

LUCY

Gesundheit, but anyways, where'd everyone get guns? Like one minute, everyone's pacifist as shit then, when Kingdom Come comes rolling by, everyone's packin' like a Kentucky doomsday prepper? Where'd it come from?

ROSS

I mean, the way I was thinking about it was like, everyone knows the history and legacy of the Old West, bar brawls and shootouts. And everyone already pictures everyone having a gun there so... the knowledge they already have is like the first part and then... they just have a gun.

LUCY

But like, with the main kid guy, even then everyone's a bit confused where his came from. I'm just not seeing too much internal consistency in who's got a gun when, where and why.

ROSS

It's the Old West, everyone and their cactus had a revolver! It's not that big of a leap to think that a bitter kid's gonna have one too with a five-six bullet count. That alright?

LUCY

Sure, maybe just a throwaway line though, early on, about everyone having guns.

ROSS

Fine, I'll have someone come on stage before the play and explain the vast history of violence of the West in the 1800s with an emphasis on revolver carrying cactuses.

LUCY

There, easy fix! Moving on, this might just be a me thing but I'm having a little trouble getting at what you're getting at with this play. Like, what do you want the audience to get outta it?

ROSS

Well, it pretty obviously has larger metaphors about society, capitalism, class, and what we value as people. I really think it'll make people question their own judgments, their familial relationships, and the influence of violence we see everyday. And, hopefully, deep down, it can change their outlook, no, perspective on life itself.

(A beat. LUCY goes towards ROSS and slaps him.)

ROSS

Ow! What the fuck was that for? I answered your question!

LUCY

Sorry, but when you get that fucking pretentious it takes everything I've got to not go ballistic on you with a pair of kindergarten safety scissors.

ROSS

So you slapped me?!

LUCY

Would you've preferred the scissor?

ROSS

No, obviously, but you didn't have to hit me.

LUCY

Fine, it's just that you can have a metaphor, but you kinda also have to have a point too. So, I repeat, what's your point with the play?

ROSS

You know, for someone who's making her name through interviewing with people-

LUCY

Person.

ROSS

What?

LUCY

Well, it's just one person right now and I'm not even done with her yet. I sure hope it turns into more people but-

ROSS

It'll be people, Luce. They'll all be clamoring for you to tell their life stories, I guarantee it.

LUCY

Aw shucks Rossy, that really tickles my heart a' plenty.

ROSS

Seriously, I mean it. You're gonna blow them all away.

LUCY

...Thanks. What were you saying?

ROSS

Oh, right. I was just gonna say that you don't respect people's boundaries, like at all.

LUCY

What can I say, I'm nosy! Now, back to the play.

ROSS

I won't answer that question.

LUCY

You won't answer or you can't? There's no harm in not knowing, I mean, it's literally constructive criticism.

ROSS

Can I decide when we're moving past for once? I don't want to answer it.

LUCY

What's the problem? It's not like I'm asking you about the meaning of life or anything. I just want to know what you want people to get out of it?

ROSS

I don't wanna say it. There's so much other shit in this mess you can pick apart. I mean, there's a torrential fucking downpour but there's a fire raging too, how does that work. Where's the logic in that. It's so stupid, where'd he get a gun? Where'd he get a gun, huh?

LUCY

Don't be so hard on yourself, I'm just trying to help you with this play, and I can't really do that without knowing what you're trying to do with it.

ROSS

We can talk about anything else about this stupid fucking Western concept. Nobody even watches those anymore, it's just for middle-aged, lonely dudes looking for cathartic glory. I shouldn't've even written this jumble of meaningless letters.

LUCY

I'm just trying to help you. It just needs some touchups, that's all. You don't have to be so unreasonable.

ROSS

Unreasonable? I'm being unreasonable? You're ripping up every little piece of this literal shit show. Just tearing out the pages and throwing them in a furnace where at least they can be used for warmth or anything other than a waste. I put time, blood, sweat, everything I've got into this thing and you come along looking for a way to rip it to shreds shrouded as 'wanting to help.' It's just "that sucks, that's stupid, why can't you make that any better." How can you live up to those expectations?! This is some great fucking work and it still reeks of amateur and, I can tell you, I'm not! I'm not an amateur! I am a professional writer. I have a Youtube channel with over 500 subscribers but, apparently, I still can't even impress my own sister! Fucking impossible.

LUCY

Don't spout this shit again, Ross. I've been right next to you writing along with you so I understand your oh-so unique struggle to the world. Now let's get on with it.

ROSS

Just drop it, please. If you can't do that, I'm better off dropping off like Arthur.

(A beat.)

LUCY

Don't say that?

ROSS

What?

LUCY

You're not Arthur, Ross. You're here, I'm not leaving either... Are you okay? You seem-

ROSS

It's nothing, I just haven't slept in a bit. Don't worry.

(LUCY sits down on the couch next to ROSS.)

LUCY

This isn't about us, right? Your play's not about us... right?

ROSS

No, it's - I'm fine. Just, a lot's hanging on tonight. Stress all-around.

LUCY

You're not gonna fucking kill yourself if the play doesn't go well, right?

(There's a knock at the door.)

ROSS

You'd better get that. Wouldn't want to keep the crowned prince of mediocrity waiting.

LUCY

Ross-

(ROSS gestures to the door and LUCY goes to open it. ETHAN RAYNER enters, holding a bagel and a cup of coffee.)

ETHAN

Hey guys, Hi Lucy. I wasn't sure if you'd had breakfast yet and I was passing by Marmen's anyway so, I thought I'd pick you up something nice.

(ETHAN offers the bagel and coffee to LUCY. She takes it.)

LUCY

Thanks, man, I mean, I'm always in the mood for a bit of a free meal so this is much appreciated. Wait, what time is it now? *(She checks her phone.)* Oh, we've got time, what time's your thing?

ETHAN

I gotta be there in about forty-five so whenever you wanna leave's fine with me.

LUCY

Great! So, how're things with you? Still on that apartment assignment? Didn't you say it's supposed to be like the third-largest apartment complex in the city?

ETHAN

Second biggest, but I'm not on that anymore. *(He chuckles)* Apparently, even for a job that big they can hire a few too many workers. But it's all good. I'm doing a really interesting job now.

LUCY

Well, don't keep us in suspense, what's up?

ETHAN

It's an addition to... one of those museums. Sorry, I can never remember its name but it sounded German, I think, but the exhibit's really cool. It's like a tour of the cosmos and there's gonna be a room where you can literally walk around a dynamic display of the solar system and the positions of the planets are actually where they are at that precise time. I've only seen the concept art so far but it sounds awesome and I really hope it's gonna boost tickets. The owner was really nice so I hope the attendance picks up. But who cares about that. *(to ROSS)* What about you? Lucy told me you're getting one of your plays performed tonight? That's amazing!

ROSS

Yeah, it's a really big moment for me.

ETHAN

Couldn't've happened to a better person. So what's the play? What's it about?

LUCY

You'd better tread lightly in this territory. He tends to burst into flames when he's asked a question he doesn't like.

ETHAN

I'll watch my step. So Ross, what's it about?

ROSS

It's a 1960's set, Cold War-critique of the espionage genre dissecting with a careful analysis of the masculine erosion and regurgitation ever present in a capitalist system.

LUCY

Sounds fun.

ETHAN

That's really interesting, so I'm guessing it's like a Russian and American thing?

ROSS

Yeah, it's the Cold War. What else would it be?

ETHAN

That sounds great! I've always loved a good spy story. I remember marathoning all the *James Bonds* with my dad as a kid, loved those movies.

(LUCY's phone starts ringing. She looks at the ID.)

LUCY

Shit, I need to take this.

(She answers the phone, moving behind the sofa and pacing. Her conversation is inaudible.)

ROSS

It's a bit more complicated than a standard action movie. This one has stakes, themes, something meaningful to say. It's realistic. It doesn't have a rocket-shooting invisible car.

ETHAN

I thought the invisible car one was a lot of fun. Little cheesy yeah but who doesn't like cheese?

ROSS

It's mindless, there's no substance to it. It's as transparent as that invisible car.

ETHAN

You're probably right, but I still have fun with them.

(LUCY gets off the phone.)

LUCY

That was Betty. She needs me there asap. We'd better head out Ethan.

ETHAN

Okay, I'll grab an elevator. *(To ROSS)* Can't wait to see your play. I'm sure it'll be great.

ROSS

It will be. Bye.

(ETHAN exits. LUCY starts grabbing her things.)

Ya know, Lucy. It's been, what, ten months since you started working for Albright and yet, you still haven't introduced me. She might be a has-been, but it could be a great networking opportunity, for her and myself.

LUCY

She hates when people get introduced to her. Gets it in her head that other people have lives outside her's. You'd do much better by standing outside her window chanting "We love Betty Albright," cause at least then she'd think there was a crowd for her.

ROSS

But one day?

LUCY

Sure, one day.

ROSS

Alright, have fun at the hospital.

(LUCY has finished collecting her items. She makes for the door.)

LUCY

Haha. Bye dickhead.

(She stops in the doorway.)

Hey Ross, keep looking up will ya. One of these days I'll be writing a book about THE Ross Liran. I even have the perfect title that'll make it sell like a blank canvas at a modern art museum, *The Ballad of Asshole Rantings*. Pretty good, huh?

ROSS (begrudgingly laughing)

Fuck you. See you at the premiere.

LUCY

Bye, Broseph Stalin.

(LUCY exits.)

SCENE 3- Big Bright Lights

(ROSS walks over to his liquor cabinet and refills his glass to the brim. ROSS fixates on the area where the ants were swarming. After a moment, ROSS begins to stomp in the area, squashing the ants beneath his foot. A knock sounds from the door. ROSS continues his stomping until the same knock repeats but louder, knocking ROSS from his trance.)

ROSS

Oh shit. Coming!

(ROSS rushes to the door and opens it. EDDIE ELLWYN enters, holding a bag.)

EDDIE

How's this year's favorite starving artist doing on his big day? Excited? Tonight's the night! All your dreams coming true all at once. All the money, all the fame, all the hot ass you've ever wanted, it's all about to hit like a fucking train, kid, and all thanks to me!

ROSS

Yeah, It feels like I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I can't tell you just how thankful I am for giving me the platform to show my value, Eddie.

EDDIE

Please, Mr. Ellwyn's fine?

ROSS

I'm sorry?

EDDIE

Ya know, this place kinda reminds me of my old apartment. *(He sniffs the air.)* Ah, kinda nostalgic for that corpse-in-the-wall smell. Thank god I got out that dump, but how do you afford this place, I'm not paying for the rent for this kinda place.

ROSS

I get by enough on my own. Do a lot of freelancing for a variety of reputable magazines and I have a very lucrative and successful content creation career.

EDDIE

Oh, didn't realize we hired such an illustrious artist. We got you cheap! *(Spotting ROSS's glass)* Drinking like a big boy these days?

ROSS

Oh, I'm not- That's- I just overpoured a bit.

EDDIE

Kid, I ain't one to judge. Frankly, I'm a bit shitfaced right now, past week's just been a nice stupor to steep in.

ROSS

Listen, Edd- Mr. Ellwyn, not to sound rude but why exactly are you in my apartment?

EDDIE (holding out the bag he came in with)

I come bearing gifts.

(ROSS takes the bag and opens it. It's a bottle of bourbon.)

Nice huh? Most expensive shit on the block. *Fendlebach's 1884*. I'd tell you the price but I'd rather your head not explode before your big night.

ROSS

Wow! You really didn't have to shell out that much for me. Thanks!

EDDIE

Don't mention it, it'll class up your place and I counting on your play to make up the difference with some big bucks, or as big as producing theater can do but, fuck it, that's show biz.

ROSS

Well I appreciate it. You do this with all your talents or are you a bit more particular with passin' out *Fendlebach's*?

EDDIE

Lookin' for approval, eh? Well you've got not much to worry, kid, this ain't the run of the mill kinda visit. I see promise in you and I'm hoping to juice you for every fucking drop.

ROSS

Well then just call me an orange cause orange you glad I got a lotta juice to squeeze.

EDDIE

...Don't ever say anything like that to anyone again. I know you're all hopped up on dreams and shit but, that was weird.

ROSS

Right, yeah! I can do better than that, totally.

EDDIE

Listen kid, me and the investors, we think we have something with you. Some long term relationship if all goes well tonight, and here's hoping all goes well tonight. I don't wanna inflate expectations more than they can already be for you, first chance Off-Broadway, first chance at a chance at the big shots. But I do think, if all goes well, if your *Patriot* thing is a hit and you keep putting in that work, you could maybe be the next big thing.

ROSS

You think I could be the next big thing?

EDDIE

Maybe, hopefully. I mean, your play fits with the mainstream bullshit self-aggrandizing critics eat up. I mean, a pseudo-intellectual, anti-American Cold-War critique? They love that crap, one of the few constants in this landslide industry. Things change but it stays the same, right? Success is success no matter how cynical it is. In the grand scheme of trend capitalization, your play's a hand in the glove.

ROSS

Well, it's a little deeper than that. It's more of a complex critique about society, capitalism, class, and what we value as people. It'll make people question their familial relationships and-

EDDIE

I'm gonna stop you there, kid. I like the play, good amount of "what is it supposed to mean" for the intellectual crowds, but don't try to apply a real message for your vanity wank-job.

ROSS

Wank-job?! It's so much more than that! It's real art.

EDDIE

So's a toilet if framed right. That's what I love about you writer types. Y'all'll hype yourselves up to high hell, thinking the world's beneath your shoes, but at the first sign of bashing, your mountains of self-importance just crumble under all the weight. The world's biggest bubble begging to be popped.

ROSS

I really don't think you're on the right ground with this take.

EDDIE

And that's my problem with y'all going around saying intent. There's not a single moral, message, fucking thought in existence, that's gonna hold up under the microscope. Fucking fallible all of them. "Just follow your dreams and everything'll be just dandy" well ya know who followed his dream... Hitler. "Don't judge a book by its cover?" What about a book with the title "The Nazis Were Right" in big bold letters on the front cover? Hell, even the message that all messages are fallible is fallible because I'm pretty sure the message "Don't be a fucking Nazi" is pretty fucking infallible.

(EDDIE looks down at his watch.)

Shit, clock's running out, I gotta go.

ROSS

Darn.

EDDIE

Hey, before I go, why not a drink? In commemoration of what hopefully can be a long, long relationship.

ROSS

Sure, bar's right over there. *(He gestures to the bar.)*

EDDIE

I know where it is, kid. It's a small apartment. But I had something better in mind. Big day deserves a big drink and I'm looking at the one in your hand and you've got quite the drink.

ROSS

The *Fendlebach*? The one you got me... as a gift... for me?

EDDIE

That's the spirit, kid. Now open it up and we'll take a swig for the soon-to-be good old days.

ROSS

Oh, of course, yeah. I'll- pour some glasses.

(ROSS walks over to the cabinet and opens the bottle, pouring two glasses.)

EDDIE (Pointing out the ants area)

Shit, you got yourself one helluva infestation, don't you?

ROSS

Yeah, it's been a real problem but we can't even afford another exterminator right now. Guess it's kinda like a "no shoes, no basket" situation, huh.

EDDIE

What does that- it doesn't matter. Anyways, I wouldn't worry about them, you'll be out of this shithole within the month. I guarantee it.

(ROSS walks back from the cabinet towards EDDIE, stopping at the table and picking up his *The Ballad of Blackstone Rollings* script.)

ROSS

Ya know if you happen to be looking for some more scripts right now, I have another one here if you want to read it. I think it's really something. It's a western about a patriarch who-

(EDDIE grabs the script, looks at it for a second, then tosses it across the room.)

EDDIE

Let's just focus on the now for now, eh kid? The spy shit, don't wanna get our hopes up now. Just in case.

ROSS

In case what?

EDDIE

Just... in case. Can't be counting chickens now, right? But let's not worry about that. Frankly, I think I can see it now. Lines stretched back for blocks. Big bright lights shining like stars, with only three words: "A Liran Play." The doors are wide open but no one's gone in 'cause they're all waiting for you, THE Ross Liran.

ROSS

I think I can see it too.

EDDIE

Of course you can, now let's cheers this shit. (*Lifting his glass*) Here's to good night.

ROSS (*lifting his glass the same*)

And here's to the rest of my life.

EDDIE

Sure.

(The pair clink and drink.)

Well, I'd best be going. Gotta make sure everything's up to snuff for tonight. Ross, remember, if you make, everything changes. You better be able to catch up.

ROSS

Don't worry, I think I'm ahead of the crowd on this one.

(EDDIE makes for the exit.)

EDDIE

Hey, can I ask you a quick question?

ROSS

Shoot away.

EDDIE

"Liran." That's not the most common name. The only other one I've heard of was- well, you don't happen to be a Liran as in Arthur Liran, are you?

ROSS (Begrudgingly)

Yes. Same Liran. Older Brother.

EDDIE

Now there's an American fuckin' hero. Crazy what happened. I mean, how many people end up blown up in a fucking rocket ship?! Maybe after you're done tearing the balls off America, maybe you could write something about that. The True Story of an American Icon, told by the little brother. People'll line up for that.

ROSS

I'll keep that in mind.

EDDIE

Remember kid, you're on the verge of something big. Here's hoping for a fucking freight train of success coming to hit.

(EDDIE exits, but leaves the door open.)

SCENE 4 - UNNAMED

(ROSS shuts the door. When the door closes, the lights go out on stage, except for a spotlight over ROSS. Sounds of heavy shoes grow louder.)

UNNAMED

So how does it feel, to feel like you have hope?

ROSS

You're not here. You can go away, you're not here. You're not real.

UNNAMED

Since when did my being real matter? Especially for what you're chasing, you really care about the thin line of reality?

ROSS

I'm real, my career's real, it matters. You're just a thing in my head that needs to go away.

UNNAMED

How many times must we play this song? I can't, I won't, and more importantly you can't and you won't. I'm with you til the end. Besides, I thought now would be a nice time to talk. Congrats, by the way, on your very own play on stage... It won't change anything.

(The Silhouette of UNNAMED is now visible. When ROSS sees the figure, he grabs a book from the shelf and throws it at UNNAMED. It doesn't really do anything.)

You didn't seriously try to throw a book at me.

ROSS

Just go away already! I really don't need to hear from you today.

UNNAMED

But I've only just arrived and we haven't talked in quite a while. You've been too busy with *Blackstone* and boozing. So, as I asked, how does it feel to hope, thinking you're special?

ROSS

It's not that I think I'm special, I am. I've got a play that's going all the way, fucking stratosphere, and everyone'll see just how much I matter. You can't take that away from me.

UNNAMED

And you truly believe that?

ROSS

I know it.

UNNAMED

Tell me, buddy, when was the last time you've taken a stroll outside? Take in the scenery, walk shoulder-to-shoulder with people you've never seen before and will never see again, the folk who won't mean a damn thing waking up in the morning and going away in the end.

ROSS

I don't see how me preferring to stay inside is relevant to you intruding on my me time.

UNNAMED

Take a dive, why don't you, swim in the anonymity, billions of fish in the same pond, why's everyone else out there and not you?

ROSS

I don't have to answer that. I'm not on trial.

UNNAMED

Don't worry, I have my answer. (*UNNAMED walks over to where EDDIE had thrown the "Blackstone" script, picks it up, and approaches ROSS.*) I read your scripts, by the way.

ROSS

Great, so what?

UNNAMED

I noticed something about how your heroes finish their stories. You enjoy their deaths, don't you? And not even as simple as that, you're perverse in just how they end, specifically.

ROSS

They're tragedies. That's what happens in a tragedy, people die, it's kinda they're whole thing, trust me, this is kinda my area of expertise.

UNNAMED

But it's the way that they die I'm hung up on, hanging and swinging on. Either implied, ambiguous, or anything else, turns out, you write them as lemmings, running towards the cliff, eager to do the deed themselves. All deaths by their own hands.

ROSS

It's dramatic. Raw, compelling drama. It's real and can spark meaningful discourse about... stuff and... why am I still talking? You're not even real and you're still annoying! I'd rather have brunch with Ethan than listen to you! At least then there'd be forks for me to gouge my eyes out!

UNNAMED

Why do you carry such a strong disdain for that Ethan fellow? In my experience, he's quite the delightful figure, very accepting.

ROSS

You know who Ethan is?

UNNAMED

Kiddo, I know most. Everyone sees me, few will talk, fewer keep me around, and almost none can accept me. It's a sad existence, but it's the one we've got. Right, Ross?

ROSS

If you like Ethan that much, then why don't you just go bother him?

UNNAMED

I don't need to.

ROSS

Listen, if you don't leave right now, I'll-

UNNAMED

Throw another book at me?

ROSS

Fuck you. Fine! You want to know why I have such "a fine disdain for that Ethan fellow?" I'll tell you, okay? But you gotta leave when I'm finished, that's a deal you can work with?

UNNAMED

I know why, but I'll listen to your story, let you acknowledge it. I'll accept your deal, because I'm here to help you, Ross. You may not like it, but that's real.

ROSS

If you were really here to help... you'd just go fuck off back to whatever void you came from. You're like a bicycle in my bush, and that there's a Liran classic. Let's just get on with it. My "disdain," as you say, for Ethan started in 2008, at Lucy's old high school.

(The stage morphs between the pre-existing New York apartment and a football field as a goal post moves on stage between the two windows. Sounds of the general bustle and cheer from a high school football game reverberate throughout the auditorium. ROSS takes out a script from his bookshelf he'll be reading from for his story in the next scene.)

SCENE 5 - A Reminiscence on the Future

Setting: Still in the apartment, 2017, but the apartment is now dressed as the Silver Creek Highschool Football Field, circa. 2008.

ROSS

I didn't know him, but I knew of him. Just about everyone did. When the leaves started falling and wind got chillin' the only thing on anybody's mind was Rayner football. He was a legend.

(ETHAN RAYNER (HIGH SCHOOL), enters, dressed in football gear and miming football plays, acknowledging the cheers from the sounds of crowds.)

He made varsity his first year, captain his second, and by his third, he had broken the record for lifetime touchdowns by a highschooler in the state. When recruiting time came rolling by, it was obvious to anyone with a pulse that Rayner was going straight to the top. A full rider wherever he wanted with a future chiseled in stone. Well, that was gonna be the story. At the time, I was working a lot on some important shit, but I was at one game, the one that changed it all. I was gonna have to pick Lucy up cause she was a cheerleader at the time, like, she said she did it cause it'd be ironic but I know she had fun. Lucy was the one who was actually friends with Ethan, I was a bit too old at the time to really care about the game... I digress. So this game was a big one, the one that'd change it all, a scout even came, just for Ethan.

(A COLLEGE SCOUT walks on stage with a notepad, attention squarely on ETHAN.)

All the world watching the player, I can't fathom how much pressure must've been building under that helmet with the whole future at stake. And honestly, for the first three quarters, he was better than he'd ever been. First half alone, he made four touchdowns, three interceptions, and, at least, eight completions. A glowing god for the world to marvel... then came quarter four.

(ETHAN's actions correspond with the following description.)

He was running, full charge. Fifty yards from a player. He could've walked it into the endzone if he wanted. The ball, spiraling towards the rush. This was it, this was gonna be his moment, here's when his life, his everything, began... then he tripped.

(ETHAN falls over face first, his ankles twisting in angles feet were not meant to travel. A visceral *CRACK* echoes. The cheering comes to an abrupt silence. After a moment, a football falls right next to Ethan. The SCOUT walks away.)

Apparently, some dipshit from the groundskeeping crew forgot to retract some of the sprinklers, so one of them snagged Ethan's foot. Fucking amateurs. I think he tore his ACL, broke his ankle in like 4 places, just brutal. All these kids coming to see THE Ethan Rayner win another for Silver Creek got front row tickets to see his world crumble. After about five or so minutes of him lying on the ground, unconscious, not moving or feeling, he woke up.

(ETHAN wakes up, lifting his torso up slowly and painfully. He tries moving his foot but recoils with pain. ETHAN starts looking around, with a look of fright as if he couldn't tell where or who he was. He looks like a child lost in a supermarket. ETHAN's FATHER, and ETHAN's MOTHER enter kneel down next to ETHAN.)

His parents, you could see in their eyes, even from the stands. Their son, their legacy, their everything, had just lost everything. Everything he built for himself, his castle Rayner, imploded. and in that moment of despair, of absolute desolation, you know what he did? You know what that asshole does? His life: over, caput, thrown in the trash before being outta the box and you know what he does? He fucking laughs.

(ETHAN lets out a hearty chuckle.)

He laughs. Fucking chortling! This dumb, psychotic smile plastered on his stupid meathead face. Laughing at anyone who cared, laughing at himself, his parents, thinking it was a joke! A joke! His life was ruined, done, and he giggles like kid playing fucking peekaboo! Ha! Ha! HAHAHA!

(ROSS takes a breather, calming himself down, as ETHAN stands up and takes off his uniform and gear, now just wearing jeans and a white t-shirt.)

After all that, he went into construction. The once Ethan Rayner hoisting steel beams for a fourth floor corporate office. Couple years later, his parents got divorced or something, I don't know.

(ETHAN's FATHER and MOTHER exit on different sides of the stage.)

I think maybe one of them got into a car accident, or a fire, something bad like that. Either way, neither are around anymore. But, even after all that, parents, the accident, future and dreams crumbling in on top of each other, and he keeps this stupid smile. Why? Why's he still smiling? What's he gotta be happy about? His life is a literal trainwreck, freight train right into the face, but he keeps just standing there, all positive and shit. He had the potential to be anything, and

now he's nothing but a laugh. And that's why I carry such disdain for that Ethan goddamn Rayner. Any more questions?

(ETHAN exits.)

UNNAMED

I understand.

ROSS

Great, there's the door. Bye.

UNNAMED

But I still don't think you do.

ROSS

How? I just went step by step, a fucking dissertation on why I'm not a fan anymore.

UNNAMED

Yes, you talked a lot, about a lot, but missed the mark, unfortunately, and I'd like to remedy your slight. Let me tell you a story, Ross, a story not dissimilar to the one you recounted. It stars a boy, same age as Ethan in yours as it turns, who also saw a bright future.

(YOUNG MAN, dressed in early 2000s clothes, enters.)

This boy, like Ethan seemingly, had a nice life. Family, Friends, not much money but enough for everything else to feel like enough.

(YOUNG ROSS LIRAN's family enter, standing with YOUNG ROSS, a happy family.)

And then, one day, a conflict entered his happy existence. His mommy gets sick, very sick.

(LIRAN MOTHER collapses and a hospital bed rolls on stage. She is hurriedly laid down in the bed. A beeping noise begins and slowly quicken during UNNAMED's speech.)

Her brain, body, soul if you will, were deteriorating, painfully. Her mind whispering away into the ether, and there was little anyone could do to help, except make things comfortable. Maybe you could help with the tale, Ross, What happens next? Oh yes, daddy enters the scene, or more accurately, leaves. Daddy got very scared, didn't he? Left in the night, not even a goodbye.

(LIRAN FATHER leaves the stage, with the sound of tires screeching.)

The young boy wished, begged, for his daddy to come back. Lucky for the kid, he had an older brother to fill that void for him, his young sister, and the mother they were slowly losing. He would protect, he would take care of them and keep the family together... or, he would find his first exit and escape, making a name for himself. If I'm remembering correctly, and, of course, you could jog my memory, but I believe he became an astronaut, flying amongst the cosmos.

(ARTHUR LIRAN exits the stage with the sound of a rocket blasting off.)

Yes, this was oh-so very tragic, and clearly a unique occurrence. A boy, not yet a man, forced to care for a sister and an ailing mother, who simply could not tell that he was her son, or even if she loved him.

(The bed and LIRAN MOTHER are moved to the side of the stage, as YOUNG LUCY and YOUNG ROSS move to opposite sides of the stage. LUCY, reading a book, and YOUNG ROSS, putting on a red shirt with a blank name tag. A shelf is rolled out with a bunch of cans. YOUNG ROSS stacks the cans, over and over again.)

Alone. The boy felt alone. Came to the point where he needed jobs, money really, to keep the family together. Took one, then two, more and more piled on top? Those jobs weren't what he wanted, denied a burning passion for a wet mop. Trapped in so-called "Faceless professions." A fate not unique, and not so inspiring. Months securing medicine for mommy, sister's schooling, trying to climb outta that dark, cold hole, all for naught. The inevitable arrived as it always does.

(MOTHER's bed is rolled to the center. YOUNG LUCY & ROSS go to her bedside.)

And on that bed, what was laid? But everything the boy had feared, utter blankness. Everything he had tried to do, to save the family, ended in emptiness. Even the sister, whom the boy tried so desperately to keep reality from, could not keep the pain from creeping through his fruitless venture. He had failed, he was no one in the eyes of the one he cared for most. And in that room, as the three of them kept in empty company, the mother spoke her final words. (*MOTHER mouths as UNNAMED speaks*): "Arthur, baby, is that you?"... And then, that awful echo.

(The beeping becomes a long, pronounced, buzz.)

ROSS

Why are you doing this to me?

UNNAMED

Since then, the boy has done everything, made it his purpose, to be significant, to be something.

(The bed is rolled out, (Y) LUCY goes back to reading and (Y) ROSS stacks cans.)

The boy buys what was sold, that he had a singular right, a destiny to be a singular, to stand amongst his similars and stand on top. Who would want to hear a story of sadness when they could buy a tale of greatness. He fills his mind with a fairy tale destiny. He would be a famous writer, of course he would. But would he? And so the boy continued with a dead-end occupation, still dreaming of his escape. Like a princess locked in a castle. Fanciful.

(YOUNG LUCY exits and YOUNG ROSS takes off his uniform.)

The rocky road of notoriety was a crowded field, with walls all along. The walls were just that, walls, made of bricks, made of dust, nigh impenetrable. Headstrong, the boy charged head first to knock them down, because he would be the one to do it. To tear it down as only he could. Head bust open, nail down to nubs, just pain, but he wouldn't let himself know the hurt. Because, he knew, deep down, where he lets it on the page, that pain was truth, and nobody wants to accept the truth of their own nothingness. The story of the boy has not reached its ending, but it is clear to everyone and himself, how it will end.

(YOUNG ROSS puts a gun to his head. Total Blackout.)

Ross, please tell me, when did you last think about this?

(The set returns to normal, but the only light is over ROSS. Pounding sounds from the door. The knocking progressively gets louder.)

ROSS

Shut up.

UNNAMED

Last time you thought about your brother, who left you to be better? When was it?

ROSS

Go away! Go the fuck away!

UNNAMED

Famous for being blown up in a rocket. How bout that? Famous from the death of the blaze of glory, patriotic really. Always amongst the stars, while you're way down here, in the filth.

ROSS

You're wrong! Get out of my head! You're not real! Stop it!

UNNAMED

Weak. Worthless. Pathetic. Not even alive, the bare minimum of being... nobody.

ROSS

LEAVE ME ALONE!

(ROSS rushes to the table and downs his drink, smashing it on the floor. Silence.)

UNNAMED

You know I'm right. Escaping the pain'll only make it worse for you. I'll be seeing you, Ross.

(UNNAMED creeps back into the shadows as the lights come back on. ROSS composes himself and goes to the door.)

ROSS

I'm coming. You don't have to knock so loud, we get the point. What do- *(He opens the door.)*

(CARA TENNY falls into the apartment, limp. ROSS catches her before she lands.)

Holy shit! Are you okay? Do you need water or-

CARA

Hey Ross. Funny seeing you here. Please, don't call anyone.

(CARA passes out. A Beat.)

ROSS

Who the fuck're you?!

(Lights go down along with the curtain.)

SCENE 6 - Curtain Call

Setting: A Hospital Room. The Curtain rises to BETTY ALBRIGHT, lying in a hospital bed. An IV is in BETTY's arm with a heart monitor next to the bed.

(There is a knock on the door.)

BETTY

Who's there? I expressly stated I was to be left alone.

LUCY

Betty, it's me. It's-

BETTY

Are you that bloaty nurse who made eyes at me? I'll say it again darling, I'm dying not desperate.

LUCY

What? No- it's Lucy, Lucy Liran. Ya know, the idiot who signed up to write your life story?

BETTY

Oh, of course, Liran. Well don't keep me waiting, Liran, come in.

(LUCY enters.)

Liran, Lucy Liran. Good name, memorable. Nice and Alliterative, of course, how could you forget a name like that. You know, I used to go by Betty Johnson, but there were so many Johnsons in all the audition rooms, I just had to change for something distinct. Betty Albright has quite the ring does it not? That should be in the book, my book. Why not write a little diddy in a chapter three or four. People would like to hear it.

LUCY

Oh yeah, story of you stuck in a room of Johnsons, definitely compelling in all the right ways.

BETTY

Don't be facetious darling, it's my story and I dictate what is and is not the center point in the tale, and my name should most definitely be center and front, embolden on the page.

LUCY

I know that Betts, and it is in the book. It's the introduction.

BETTY

Yes... yes, of course it is, because I dictated that it'd be so.

LUCY

Hey, just wondering, why's your family out in the waiting room? I thought you said they never really get together for you.

BETTY

Don't pay them any mind, darling. An ancillary detail in the crowds of fans everlastingly standing at my doors.

LUCY

Crowds? Like those scourges of bloaty nurses giving you eyes? Those crowds these days?

BETTY

I understand that you think that's funny, absurdism really, but I don't pay you to be a comedian. Certainly not at my expense. I pay you to put my stories in complete sentences, then to paragraphs and onto chapters. Your personality should be that of a reflection of me, that's what your book is, of course, mine.

LUCY

Sorry Betts, I didn't mean for you to take it the wrong way, it was just a joke.

BETTY

Well it's unbecoming, especially in front of your boss, need I remind you. Lord, sometimes I don't understand why I picked someone so young to promote my legacy.

LUCY

Cause I was cheap, convinient, and, of course, the best choice by far.

BETTY

Right- wait, no! What? I could've gotten anyone, le creme de la creme to write the cream of the crop. But my agents, bless their dirty hearts, believed a younger voice, much to my malady, would've been preferred. Attract a potential youth audience to my chagrin.

LUCY

Sure, I buy that Betts.

BETTY

That's not my name, Lucy Goose-y. There's no room for pet names. Say it full, "Betty Albright."

LUCY

Seriously?

BETTY

Repeat, please, I'm paying you after all. "Betty Albright."

LUCY

(Under her breath) Should be paid a fuck better. *(Normal Volume)* “Betty Albright.”

BETTY

Doesn't that sound much better. “Betty Albright.” Rolls off the tongue, dazzles the ears. “Betts Albright?” Well, that just sounds like a detergent brand, don't you find?

LUCY

Okay, Betty Albright, why'd you call me in so early?

BETTY

Yes... yes, of course. Well, the book, how is it? It's done, isn't it? It should be? The publishers... it's with the publishers today, right?

LUCY

Yep, all done, 'sides some little edits for grammar and the whatnot but that's what editors are for.

BETTY

And the publishers, the ones I specifically told you to send it to, have they seen it, do they like it?

LUCY

I sent it over a few days ago and they're supposed to be sending their thoughts later today.

BETTY

But it seemed like they liked it? That they want it?

LUCY

I mean, you can never say for sure but, I did the best with what you gave me and I think it's good. Great, even. Some of my best writing, in my opinion.

BETTY

Honey, it's your only writing.

LUCY

Thanks for the confidence.

BETTY

You added everything I said? The Pomeranian? My torrid affair with Frank Tolemire? All of it?

LUCY

Every offhand slur you've ever said, it's in the book. Same as last time you read it.

BETTY

Then it doesn't matter how you wrote it. The content will carry it far enough.

LUCY

Was that it? Wanted an update on the book? That was the rush?

BETTY

Are you complaining? Miss an hour of beauty sleep? I'm sorry if I was the cause of all this, cause, woof.

LUCY

You're really gonna make a great role model for hundreds of young girls around the world.

BETTY

Hundred? Think a little bigger. Try millions, billions! All looking up to me like a shooting star in the sky. Shining brighter and brighter as the years blaze by.

LUCY

Betty, why am I here this early.

(A Beat.)

BETTY

The doctors, they say such silly things. Horribly untrue and plainly hurtful. They say- they say I'm nearing my curtain call, rapidly, and that I must take my bow lest I be left from the spotlight.

LUCY

Betty, you're not... how rapidly.

BETTY

How fast is fast. They say it could come in the night or a minute as the treatments are not working effectively. Apparently these doctors can't do the one thing we pay them for.

LUCY

Do you have any idea when? Like, you can't be dying soon. You can't.

BETTY

Stop saying “dying.” It’s a dirty word, a bad word. “Dying, dead,” that means you’re no longer living, alive. I will be alive. A different kind of life, and this’ll just be my journey to it, a new role and you, Lucy, you’ll be my shepherd into it.

LUCY

Listen, I know you think this is funny but, if I’m being honest, comedy was never your strong suit, I should know I’ve watched everything you’ve done so you can just quit the bit.

BETTY

Oh don’t be thick-headed, girl. Unlike you, if I was joking, it’d be funny.

LUCY

How fast are we talking, cause, like, I’m not gonna be in the room when-

BETTY

I don’t want to be thinking about this, darling. Please, let’s change the subject. Have I ever told you the story of my torrid affair with Melvin Tolemire, Frank’s twin?

(LUCY goes for the door.)

LUCY

Listen, I’d love to stay and chat but I’m pretty sure I’d rather literally feed myself to the fucking sewer gators than stay and chat so-

BETTY

You’re not going anywhere, young lady. I have you under contract. In a sense, and I don’t wish to be rude but I do, in fact, own you. So come, sit down, calm down, and stay... with me.

LUCY

But why am I here? Why’s your family out in the waiting room? I shouldn’t be in here, I’m just the fucking biographer!

BETTY

Lucy, you’re being a stupid girl. I already told you, you’re my shepherd.

LUCY

Stop calling me a shepherd! I’m not a shepherd, I don’t have a weird cane or a long fucking beard with a bunch of sheep. What does that even mean?

BETTY

It's a gift, a true privilege and you should count yourself privileged, darling. You have the most important role of anyone in my life. Do I wish it could've been anyone but you? Certainly, but here we are. You wrote my book. You're my ticket to the life of everlasting consciousness. People'll remember me. They'll know me, love me, adore me, forever, because of you.

LUCY

Who cares?! I don't even really know you! Be with your family. They should be here, not me.

BETTY

Lucy, pay attention, that's your job. You're my biographer. You know me more than anybody.

LUCY

Your family knows you. I wrote a book about you, who cares? I could write a book about the Titanic, that doesn't mean I have to play violin on the starboard bow. I'm just writing what you want people to think about you. A picture of a picture.

BETTY

But that's exactly what I want. Here's a little lesson in permanence. My dear Grace Harlowe said before she-...she said "Family is sand, but legacy...legacy is a brick." At this moment, my final ones, you're my brick, hard-headed and occasionally aesthetically pleasing. You are my legacy.

LUCY

I didn't sign up for that.

BETTY

Don't say that. It's unbecoming, being that ungrateful.

LUCY

"Ungrateful." I'm being fucking "ungrateful."

BETTY

Precisely. You agreed to write my book. My story, my life. Sold worldwide for all my adoring fans. You're responsible for keeping me alive, that's why I need you here, to keep me alive.

LUCY

Dude, I already wrote your book. I don't want to sit here and watch someone die again.

BETTY

Do you know what my greatest fear is, Lucy?

LUCY

I don't know, felt pants?

BETTY

Do you watch award shows? Glitz and glamor praising the glitz and glamor of the rich and notable. Near the end of the show, they break it out. A five minute segment. An "in memoriam." That damn clip show. Reducing a whole person, all their glory, to a five second showcase in a crowd of five second showcases. Suffocating, just dead faces, in a forgettable five minute package. A whole life, blink and you miss it.

LUCY

I'm really uncomfortable. Why do I have to sit here and watch you die instead of your family?

BETTY

I need you. More than doctors, medicine or air, I need to know I'll be alive after I'm gone. This is the least you could do for me after all I've done for you.

LUCY

Done for me? What have you actually done for me? You pay me nothing, treat me like nothing, and my name isn't even going on the fucking book cause you wanted it to be an auto- fucking -biography! And now you think you're entitled for me to watch you die? You're sick.

BETTY

(The heart monitor increases in pace throughout this speech.) You know full well I've given you a golden opportunity, a goddamn ticket to the top. It's a horrible world out there, full of grubby little fingers of no-name freaks thinking they deserve something. I'm giving you a bubble from the freaks, Lucy. Fame is an island away from it all and I'm giving you a taste. The least you could do is be fucking gracious! I didn't have to give you the job. There are millions of more qualified writers who would've been just happy taking your place, but I took pity on Lucy Liran. So sad, so lonely. Working for tips at a dirty bar. What better way to cement my legacy than performing a final act of charity. You don't know what I've done, what I've been through to get where I am and no one, and I mean no one, should speak to me how you've just done you squandering, squallerious, sycophantic nobody!

(BETTY's heart monitor reaches a peak. A beat.)

LUCY

Betty?

BETTY

I think... I think I can feel it.

LUCY

Betty, I don't want to be here.

BETTY

Lucy, yes, is that you, of course it is. Lucy, do you think you know how it feels?

LUCY

I- no. I don't want to.

BETTY

Cold... dark... serene... like a night at the beach, washing away, washing away. Keep me alive Lucy. Promise me that. You'll keep me alive... forever.

(BETTY release from life, and the machine sounds a familiar buzz. BETTY's bed and monitor are carted out and LUCY immediately pulls out her phone.)

LUCY

Please be done, please answer... Fucking voicemail. Uh.. hey Ethan, I hope your appointment is going good. I, uh, I need to go. I just, I'm sorry, but I really need to leave. Nothing's wrong, nothing...nothing. Something happened, and I just need, something, anything, and I can't do it here, not again. I'll see you at the premiere, or not, I don't know I just- I can't.

(LUCY hangs up, then ETHAN walks on stage.)

ETHAN

Hey Luce, how'd the meeting go?

LUCY

Oh, I just- nothing. I was, ya know, the usual. Ramble, ramble. Lots of "back in my day" and "Kids these days," routine visit, really, yeah... how bout you?

ETHAN

Oh, I'll tell you about it later. But she liked the book? Give it her seal of approval?

LUCY

Sure. Hey, let's get out of here. I don't know about you but I could use a liquid lunch about now.

ETHAN

Don't you think it's a bit early for that?

LUCY

I mean, as the ancients say "It's five o'clock somewhere." Let's just blow this hellhole.

ETHAN

Can't argue with that.

(LUCY and ETHAN exit.)

ACT II

SCENE 1 - Hello, Stranger

Setting: Back to the same Liran Apartment. CARA TENNY lies unconscious on the couch. The bag she brought in is on the table next to the Fendlebach liquor bottle.

(ROSS paces back and forth around the room, freaking out.)

ROSS

I'm fucked, right? Can I get arrested, like harboring an unconscious person, or something, that's a thing, I think? Fuck! This would happen, of course today of all days. "Oh, Ross, congrats on the play. By the way, your cell's third door on the left." (*He goes over to CARA.*) Listen, can you just wake up? You're not dead, so can you just wake up and go, please? I'll get you tickets to my show. Just wake up please. (*He pokes her, doesn't work. He gently shakes her, does not work. He claps.*) Just wake up! (*He claps louder.*) This is my couch! Fucking wake up!

(CARA groans and adjusts her position on the couch.)

How bout... (*ROSS grabs the Fendlebach and opens it. He holds it under CARA's nose.*)

(CARA jolts up with a coughing fit, pushing the bottle away from her face.)

CARA

Fucking Christ man, what're trying to do, kill me with that cheap crap? That shit's lighter fluid. Ugh, I probably smell like that too now, thanks a lot.

ROSS

Uh... first off, who are you and what were you doing at my door? Second, you know, you're welcome for waking you up with this very expensive *Fendlebach* that is not definitely not cheap.

CARA (realizing who she's talking to)

Ross, I mean, hi, I mean, uh, hello, stranger, thanks for letting me in. You don't know how gross it was sitting outside all day. Almost as gross as that drink you've got there.

ROSS

Who are you and why do you know my name? And, for that matter, stop calling this cheap. I'm known as something of a sommelier, and I can guarantee that this is the good stuff.

CARA

I don't know, my dad's got quite the stock himself and this would probably go right next to the cabinet into a drawer called trash. Where's my bag, I need something uppity for that downer you just threw at me.

ROSS

You're not on an upper now?

CARA (rummaging through her bag.)

I'm high on life... but I also wanna be "high" high and life's been a bit of a blank hit about now so... (*CARA sticks her head in her bag and snorts vigorously, then throws her head back.*)

Woooo, now that's the life I wanna live! Hey! You wanna do something? There's a goose pond around here, like five blocks east. I wanna feed a goose, or like, we could just talk, that's fun too.

ROSS

Listen, I'm sure that would be... profound, but, cause just looking at the time and the fact that you're, no offense, some rando druggie who just collapsed on my couch, I think I'm good. You seem like a nice person, but I don't really, ya know, want a stranger here.

CARA

C'mon, Ross, live a little, when's the last time you left this place. Let's do something, like drugs!

ROSS

See, there you go again acting like you know who I am. How do you even know my name, cause I definitely haven't said it.

CARA

Well all you had to do was ask, silly. Name's Cara, Cara Tenny. Or, if you're one of my one-hundred and twelve followers, it's Care-a-Ton-y, cause I care, a ton-y... it's a play on words.

ROSS

Yeah, I get it.

CARA

Well there you go, You're Ross and I'm Cara, two of a kind, two against time.

ROSS

Okay, Cara, but we're really veering onto a whole other "Bridge over Quicksand" kind of scenario cause sure, I know your name, but I don't know you, and frankly, I can't care-a-ton today. Sorry, but can you please leave.

CARA

But... I really don't wanna go back... I mean, really? Cara Tenny doesn't ring a bell?

ROSS

God, I feel like I'm juggling marbles in a trash compactor. For the last time, I don't have even an assumption of who Cara Tenny is!

CARA

Really, Ross? You really don't recognize me?

ROSS

Listen, I'm not good with faces, anyway. Most people standing on the street, they all have the same face so even if I have seen you, bumped into you on the street, sorry, I don't know you.

CARA

What about Silver Creek Shoppery? That ring any bells for you?

ROSS

Yeah, I worked there... a long time ago. What about it?

CARA

Well, hold on to your hats folk, cause I'm about to take you on the ride of your life. I... worked there too!

(A beat.)

ROSS

Okay. By the way, the door's that way, just cause you probably didn't see it on your way in.

CARA

No, like, I worked there with you. Right besides Ross Liran, on the front lines of retail. Well, not frontlines really cause it was mostly in the back room we were side-by-side, but, ya know, pears and cream and that sorta thing.

ROSS

Oh, wow. Crazy seeing you here, in my apartment, after you blacked out... some coincidence.

CARA

I know, right? It's like the universe or something's kinda sorta saying something, who knows about what. So how've you been? How're you doing? Still wowing the crowds with wit? You know what, we should do something, no offense but it's kinda stuffy in here and it's always-

ROSS

Cara, what's going on.

CARA

What'd you mean, like you said, it's definitely a weird coincidence but why not take a minute to reminisce, reconnect, look back on the good ole days. Do you remember the manager? The old guy, I think Joe or John or something, he was a weirdo, right? One time, I caught him in the breakroom rubbing butter on his face. I mean, I say weird but, I guess you can't knock it til-

ROSS

What are you doing here!? You pop up outta the blue, literally crash on my couch, and, like, what're you trying to get me to do? Steal from me?

CARA

Absolutely not. I would never steal anything, I'm not that kinda girl, I've got morals and shit. I can't be going to hell for stealing a pillow. That's what the drugs are for. By the way, want some?

ROSS

From what I remember, not that it's that much, but we weren't even close. At most the ancillary, arbitrary "Hi" and "Bye" at opening and closing, not much beyond that. Why're you here really?

CARA

It really was just a coincidence.

ROSS

But why do you remember me, why'd you burst in here acting like we're two drinks short of a party. We weren't even close back then.

CARA

I felt we were.

ROSS

How? We haven't even talked since I left.

CARA

That's just it. It was how you left. You made a whole big spectacle outta it and I guess, it like, hit me a little, like deep down or something, I don't know.

ROSS

What did I do that was apparently so memorable and affecting, I don't remember it?

CARA

Well, like, obviously you were kinda the moody, intense, kinda guy most of the time, brooding in the corner, mumbling to yourself, like seriously, you really seemed like every other minute you were about to punch a baby in the face. I mean, you were-

ROSS

I get it. Okay, just get on with it.

CARA

So, one day, your last day, obviously, you were the same and stuff until, at like 9 PM when there was, maybe four people there, and outta the fucking nowhere you just get up on on of the checkout lines, I think you like stepped on someone's egg carton, and just screamed something like "Fuck this place! Fuck these hours, fuck my fucking nametag and fuck you Margaret," cause I think someone named Margaret worked there too. Then you went on and on about how you were better than this place and then swore that "In three years, I'm gonna be famous. In three years, everyone's gonna know my name!" Man, can you believe it's been four years already?

ROSS

I don't remember it going exactly like that.

CARA

I do! I mean it was, like, inspirational or whatever. Here's this guy, who absolutely no one liked at the time, like, he wasn't even invited to the Christmas party no one liked him but then, he gets on a platform and speaks his mind, says what he wants and how he wants to get it. Who does that?! I thought it was cool you did that, going out, leaving it all behind to find your dream.

ROSS

Not much of a dream, really. I know where I'm going and how I'm getting there. More of a long road trip to the stratosphere than prancing along in the clouds.

CARA

Sure, but like, when you did all that, I was like, why can't I do that too? Live my own life. So I quit my job and now, not to brag, but I'm a very successful influencer, independent, at that.

ROSS

Didn't you say you only had a hundred-and-twelve influencers? That's over four years?

CARA

Maybe it doesn't sound like much, maybe, but, last I checked, even five people listening to you is more than zero people caring, so one-twelve's pretty successful. People see me at the least.

ROSS

Good for you, I guess. Not to brag but I also run a pretty successful content creation channel.

CARA

What? I didn't know that, that's so cool, I'd love to hear more about this thing I've never heard of. First, though, you wanna see some of my stuff Ross?

ROSS

Fine, but then you're leaving. I've got a lot of big things going on and don't have that much time.

CARA

I'm sure, give me a second.

(CARA rummages through her bag. ROSS goes to refill his glass, going first to the *Fendlebach* but hesitates. ROSS ends up pouring from a bottle on the cabinet. ROSS takes out his pill bottle and swallows a pill with his glass. He sits down next to CARA who has found her phone. ROSS places the pill bottle on the table.)

So here's one I just took, it's one of my favorites in a while.

(A beat as ROSS squints at the phone.)

ROSS

What is that?

CARA

It's great is what it is. Hell, some would call it artistic.

ROSS

Maybe in like a Russian gulag performance piece kinda art. It just looks like a grainy, outta-focus picture of a dumpster with a corpse in it.

CARA

Ha, that's not a corpse, silly. That's me! I'm Oscar... the Grouch. Like the Muppet.

ROSS

How?

CARA

Well... I'm in a dumpster, like Oscar, and, if you read the caption, it's about Muppets, so the connection's essentially screaming at that point.

ROSS

"Are you a puppet or are you a Muppet?"

CARA

Yeah.

ROSS

What does that mean?

CARA

It's the age-old question: "Are you gonna be a puppet, or are you gonna be a fucking Muppet!?" Yeah, things can get pretty philosophical on the Care-a-Ton-y page.

ROSS

Listen, you've been... interesting but, I'm really busy and you did barge in so, not to be rude, but I've got a lot of stress right now and hosting a crazy person probably only adds to the total.

CARA

C'mon Ross, don't be such a grouch. We're having fun, right? I mean, if stress is your issue, I've gotta whole bag of the medicine. *(CARA starts pouring the contents of her bag onto the table. It's a lot of drugs. A LOT. There's also some broken glass mixed throughout.)* What do you need? I've got uppies, downies, shit that'll make you go loop-de-loop, anything!

ROSS

How do you have so much?

CARA

Well, not to be that person, but my dad has money and he's really controlling so there's only one way that was ever gonna turn out.

(ROSS sees something in the pile.)

ROSS

What's that? *(He grabs something from the pile.)*

CARA

What? You're gonna have to be a bit specific, considering-

ROSS

This. *(He pulls out a large piece of broken glass with an image on it.)*

CARA

A piece of broken glass, I dunno. Anything can fall in a bag if it's on the floor too long, so what-

ROSS

This was mine. I broke a glass last night and, lo and behold, the same one's right here.

CARA

It was in the trash. I mean, you say the picture. It could've been-

ROSS

Cara! Cut it out! For the last time, who are you and why are you in my apartment?!

(A beat.)

CARA

A fan.

ROSS

What?

CARA

Listen, I know it might sound weird but, like, when you left, like I said, you were inspirational. So like, I kinda sorta got in the habit of stalking you... on socials first. Like, watching everything

you posted, your Youtube videos, all of that, just to, ya know, get to know you a little more. Then you just stopped posting and I was stuck with the backlog content. I watched your 48-hour writing live stream four times, but I needed a look into the current real life, like, I was a fan. So, I started, like, seeing what you are up to in real life. I did a bit of sleuthing, found your address and just, kept tabs on what you were doing, nothing weird, I just, followed you around the city a bit but, this past week, you just haven't left your apartment and I was getting worried, so to calm down, I partook, just a little. Started feeling a little woozy, touch of tipsy, and god knows I can't be alone when I'm like that... I went to the one place that I knew around here, yours.

(A beat.)

You're weirded out. I knew it. Stupid Cara. Stupid, stupid! That's what you get, "there goes Cara, crazy idiot, who doesn't know what's good for her, she should probably just go back to the resort upstate where she belongs, that way she can't sabotage anything else she loves." Did I say that? I didn't mean it, Ross. Are you even listening to me? Can you say something?!

ROSS

You're a fan?

CARA

Yeah.

ROSS

You watch what I make?

CARA

Every single minute of it.

ROSS

And you think it's good?

CARA

I think it's amazing, Ross.

ROSS

Is this love?

(CARA lunges towards ROSS and kisses him. She immediately recoils in shock.)

CARA

Oh my god. I'm so sorry, that was- way too forward of me. I'm just... really excited and-

(ROSS places his hand on CARA's. The pair embrace again.)

ROSS

You wanna read one of my plays?

CARA

Only if you do all the voices.

(They got at it, passionately. The lights go down along with the curtain.)

SCENE 2 - A Drink to Forget

Setting: Dirty Hairy's Pub, constructed into the apartment set. A bar table with two chairs on either side. LUCY and ETHAN are sitting across from each other.

LUCY

So... you still haven't said much about your little visit. You weren't getting prostates or something in there, were you?

ETHAN

Nah, I wasn't getting too personal, but me and Doctor Hector are on a first name basis.

LUCY

Seriously, everything alright with the complex inner workings of one Ethan Rayner?

ETHAN

Nothing I didn't suspect before. Pretty routine.

LUCY

Yeah... "Routine." Completely average like a normal day at the psych ward, unremarkable.

ETHAN

I was wondering, with it being a routine visit, why'd you have to go in so earlier for this one.

LUCY

With Albright, who knows. It's like a hostage scenario, comply or die, ya know.

ETHAN

So it really wasn't anything? Not the urgent importance she said it was.

LUCY

Look, if you really wanna know the soul-searching, profoundly interesting story of a twenty-minute meeting with a past-her-prime minor actress, I'm gonna need something strong.

(LUCY gestures to someone off-stage.)

Hey, what's a girl gotta do to get some service! People still drink around noon, ya know.

(MICKEY THE BARTENDER enters.)

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Well, fuck me silly and call my Charlotte, if it isn't the queen of Hairy's 'erhelp. How's it, Luce?

LUCY

Be doin' a lot better with a fucking glass in my hand, Mick, service been this bad since I left?

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Hey, not everyone can go off and be a freakin' hotshot writer or some shit. Some of us stick with the noble profession of helping those in need get shitfaced and forget their fucking woes. So, what'll it be for today, to forget those woes?

LUCY

Whatever's on tap's fine with me, it's early enough to drink, not enough for effort.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

That it is, Lucy Goosey. So what about you fella?

ETHAN

I'm good with just a cranberry juice.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Ah, cranberry, the thinking man's apple juice. I'll be right back with your beverages.

(MICKEY THE BARTENDER exits.)

ETHAN

Seems like a nice guy.

LUCY

Oh he's a sweetheart. Always split some of his tips with us. But I'm pretty sure he's in some other, back alley dealings so he's well-off. Probably works in this shit hole for fun.

ETHAN

Good for him. If he loves what he's doing, why stop?

LUCY

Cause it's Dirty Hairy's. It's like a septic tank vampire, smells terrible and sucks the life outta ya.

ETHAN

But, like, if this is what he likes, serving drinks, talking to strangers, the whole bartender rack, I don't see why there's a problem.

LUCY

All I know is that I'm glad I'm not here anymore and most would agree that it's good I'm free.

(MICKEY THE BARTENDER enters, holding the drinks.)

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Here we are. One fine cup of joe for the lovely Lucy, (*He puts down the beer*) and an equally fine cran for her little friend. *He puts down the cranberry juice.*) Sorry for the wait, service's been crazy today... Obviously not but hey, thing's get pretty wild in a few hours. You know, Luce, might wanna stick around a bit could be a party on either side of the staff.

LUCY

Thanks, but we're just passing through. I'm hearing back from publishers later so, I'm just dulling the anticipation a bit.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Oh yeah, that Albright shit you quit for, about to be some hot stuff. Bit of a lateral move in my book, Harper to Albright but, hey, here's to you, kid, hopin' it all works out.

LUCY

Cheers to that. (*She clinks ETHAN's drink with her glass and takes a swig.*)

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Ya know, though. If your writer thing don't work out the way you want it, I dunno, Dirty Hairy's always got a position open for our once top-earner.

LUCY

No offense, but at this point I'd rather choke on a hot dog than work another day in hospitality.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Can't say I can't blame ya. But if you're ever strapped for cash or just need something to do for a bit, you're always free to come on over, welcomed with open arms.

LUCY

Well let's hope it never comes to that.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

You kids enjoy yourself, and don't worry about the bill, I got it.

LUCY

You don't have to do that, Mick.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Please, it's payment enough to have the "Lucy Liran" back through these doors. Now drink up.

LUCY

Thanks, Mickey.

(MICKEY THE BARTENDER exits.)

I've always liked that guy.

ETHAN

I can see what you mean.

LUCY

I mean any of them, bartenders that is. Like you said, most of their job's just chatting up people at the table. Lonely people without anyone else to really listen. I don't know, I guess you could try to find something meaningful about that.

ETHAN

No I get it, I mean, it's only human. Wanting people to know that you just exist beyond who you are to them or even just acknowledging that you're a person with your own stuff happening.

LUCY

But it's like, not out on the street ya know. You walk by a thousand people every day and it's fine that they don't know you, right? I don't care if Tommy Two-Shoes on the subway wants to have an hour-long convo about our innermost shit but, I think I just hang out with the wrong people.

ETHAN

Well that's not offensive.

LUCY

Obviously I'm not talking about you Ethan, you know that.

ETHAN

I'm just teasing.

LUCY

Take Ross. Everytime we talk, so pretty much 24-7, we just end up talking about him. I try to get a say in what he's doing but that's as far as we ever really get. The conversation's about me only when I want to say something critical about him. You get what I'm saying?

ETHAN

Yeah, I mean, you're brother's a nice guy and all but he can be a little full of himself.

LUCY

He's a pretentious douchebag! One time, he wrote a play that about, like, the Internet age or something so, in the script, no one fucking talked! Literally it was just a bunch of tweens texting on stage for two hours. He thinks he's got all these brilliant ideas but whenever someone challenges it, he shuts down, self-destructs and makes you feel bad about being critical.

ETHAN

Writers, amiright?

LUCY

Yeah... I just wish he listened to me. I'm worried about him. He's so inflated, he's really just about to burst. Even his pills aren't doing much at this point and they're supposed to be driving the ship. I don't know, I hope I'm delusional but he's a sinking ship holding no real water at this point and if his play doesn't work out...

(A beat.)

ETHAN

Well what about you?

LUCY

What about me?

ETHAN

I mean, you said you spend so much time listening to Ross' ramblings about what he wants, well, what about you? What do you want out of all of this?

LUCY

Ya know, I don't think I've really ever thought about that... I mean, money, right? That's why you do anything, to make the means to keep on living. If I have to sell my soul to the ghoul of Albright to do it, at least I'm alive, right? Living even half an existence I guess is better than wasting away on a hospital bed but, really, I don't know what I'd do with it all.

ETHAN

Then what else? Say you could cover all the costs, everything already paid for and it was up to you and you alone to contribute something, put out anything into the universe that was solely brought into by "Lucy Liran." And if there's nothing there, that's cool also, but what would it be?

LUCY

I guess... long term goal? After the grind, when I'm at a point in my career after all the books about people most people think matter, celebrities, politicians, assholes, maybe, my own story.

ETHAN

Like a fiction? Doing something like what Ross does?

LUCY

Oh fuck no. Kill me if I end up 50-years old drinking wine, writing erotic crime thrillers. I guess I'm talking about literally me. Put myself in the spotlight. I mean, Arthur, you know, blew up in a spaceship. Hard to top that in notoriety and with Ross, who knows if he'll actually make it but if he does, who'd I be. The sister? The background character again? I don't wanna do that, I wanna be me, for once, me for myself for the world. Talk about my life, or whatever life I have when I get to write it, maybe talk about my mom, what she went through. Even if no one reads it, as long as one person reads my life, what's been me, it'd feel like I'd matter a little. Like, one person took the time to read 200 pages about Lucy Liran, whoever that is.

ETHAN

Well, I'd be first in line to pick it up from the shop, even if I was the only one in line.

LUCY

Aw shucks.

(A beat. LUCY takes a long drink from her beer.)

And you?

ETHAN

Yeah?

LUCY

What are you all about? You asked me the same thing so what's the MO for one Ethan Rayner? What does the man who laughs in the face of injury want from this whole shebang?

ETHAN

Nothing big. I'm content with what I've got. At this point, there's not much else there is to do.

LUCY

Boo! Boring. Have a little fun! Like you said, if you could do anything at all, what would it be?

ETHAN

There was one thing I guess I kinda wanted. Nothing crazy but quaint. Remember when we were kids, that Medieval mini-golf course near town. Something like "Putts of the Round Table?" I think I'd like to do something like that, ya know. Open a mini-golf course. That'd be fun.

LUCY

That's it?

ETHAN

I know, it's probably unrealistic what with the property costs of it all but, I think I'd like it. I've made good memories, maybe I could've been able to do the same for others. It's probably dumb.

LUCY

It is not fucking dumb. I mean, who the hell doesn't like mini-golf? It's better than actual golf!

ETHAN

Amen to that.

LUCY (*raising her glass.*)

Cheers to Ethan Rayner. Construction extraordinaire and future crotchety old mini-golf owner.

ETHAN (*raising his glass.*)

To Lucy Liran. May her life story be worthwhile for one person to read.

(They clink their glasses and drink.)

This was nice. This was a nice time. Definitely took me out of what happened at my biopsy.

LUCY

Did you have a bad time?

ETHAN

I mean, it was a biopsy so it can only be so good.

LUCY

What are you talking about, it's just like a check-up. They weigh you, take blood pressure, give you a lollipop and send you on your way.

ETHAN

It's a little more than that, they take a sample of some tissue and then diagnose what you got after that. They took a sample a couple days ago and I got it back when we went.

LUCY

You never told me about any of this.

ETHAN

You never asked. I didn't wanna burden you with more stuff, what with Ross' play and your Albright situation. It would've been too much and I'm fine keeping it to me.

LUCY

Well are you okay? Like this isn't anything serious or anything, right? Ethan... right?

(A beat.)

ETHAN

It's cancer... pancreatic... so it's kinda bad.

LUCY

Jesus, Ethan. That's horrible.

ETHAN

Yeah, it's not great. But, ya know, despite the pain and stuff, what else can you do except keep on living for as long left as you can ya know.

LUCY

But you can get treated, right? I mean, I'm no cancerologist but, chemo's a thing. You can do treatments, get help. Sure you get a little bald but your hair's never been your strongest feature anyway, no offense. You'll be fine, you'll get through it like you did with your ACL.

ETHAN

I guess but... I don't know.

LUCY

You don't know? This is your life we're talking about! This isn't like whether you want waffles for breakfasts. It's live or give up! It's an easy choice. Just choose the "not give up" one. There's no room for "I'm not sure."

(A beat.)

ETHAN

Okay... I am sure then. I'm not gonna fight it.

LUCY

You piece of shit.

ETHAN

C'mon Lucy, don't be like that.

LUCY

You're just gonna throw everything away, throw yourself away just like that? For no reason?!

ETHAN

It isn't like that.

LUCY

Then what is it, cause all it seems to me is you giving up, today of all days, are you kidding me!

ETHAN

Listen, so much of my life has been down to chance, uncontrollable. Some random guy forgets to retract a sprinkler, I ruin my foot and lose a future. Parents divorce and die, I'm alone. I'm not bitter, I'm not resentful because that's just how it is. That's how the wind blew, I'm fine with

that. This is just another instance. Sure, I could spend what I've got left worrying about whether or not the treatments work, whether it will be worth it, or spend what I've got knowing it's precious and living contently. Making myself content in what matters and what's left. Can you understand that, Lucy? I don't wanna upset you but can you see where I'm coming from?

(A beat.)

LUCY (*getting up.*)

I can't with this.

ETHAN

Lucy-

LUCY

I'm not doing this! I'm not having another person fucking give up on me! Every single time, everyone keeps loading on me! I don't want you to go and I'm not gonna hear this shit! Ross was right. You really do suck. I thought you were different. (*LUCY kills her drink.*) Mini-golf would've been fun. I hope you change your mind and not give up but I can't do this. Say hi when you make sense, Ethan.

(LUCY storms out of the bar. ETHAN sighs and stares at his drink.)

SCENE 3 - A Light At the End of the Tunnel...

Setting: Curtains rise back to the Liran apartment. CARA is lying on the couch while ROSS is standing, holding the script to "The Ballad of Blackstone Rollings."

ROSS

...and so, with the tragic demise of the young Niko Blackstone, in the face of his incredible trials of hardships and self-corruption, the town of Blackstone fades from the world, but the name subsists as, though the material world ebbs and flows from tangibility to existentialism, a name remains like a Blackstone Rolling. (*ROSS closes his script.*) So, Cara, what'd you think?

(A beat.)

CARA

Do you think Finland's a real place?

ROSS

What?

CARA

Finland, the country, supposedly, near the Nor-weeges and Swedes. Do you think it's real?

ROSS

What does that have to do with my play?

CARA

I dunno, just been on my mind. Was binging some of those theory videos, do that a lot. That's just one I've been thinking about, like, have you ever known anyone who's been to Finland?

ROSS

No but, what would be the point in faking? it's not even that important of a country, no offense to the Finnish.

CARA

That's why I'm trying to figure out why it might be fake. My dad thinks it's a waste of time but, hey, he thinks everything I do is so how can I know the difference.

ROSS

You don't still live with your parents, do you? We're like, the same age-ish, I thought?

CARA

It's crazier that you don't! A testament to your success, like real fucking American Dream of you, having your own furnished apartment at thirty.

ROSS

There's more to it than just an apartment. It's about persevering, succeeding, getting to the fucking stratosphere of imporance. Not an apartment in a building but a building with your name on it.

CARA

Is it though? Maybe it's just me, but I'm in the thinking that the American Dream is getting high in your parent's guest room, before they end up kicking you out, then it's just back to reality.

(A beat.)

ROSS

Can we get back to the script? What'd you think about it? Pretty great if I do say so myself.

CARA

I mean, what is there to say, it's amazing. Fucking stupendous, a triumph of the soul and whatever else critics say. I couldn't do something like that if I had a billion years to write a page.

ROSS

You don't have any notes or anything? It makes sense why the kid has a gun near the end, right?

CARA

It's the Old West. What's he supposed to do, not have a gun? Wouldn't exactly be a western, would it?

ROSS

That's what I've been saying! And you got the overall metaphors and allegories of the piece, right? Interrogation of society, capitalism, class, and what we value as people? You got all that?

CARA

The play was practically screaming all that, pretty fucking clear on just about all angles. It's great, you're great. You'll be good.

ROSS

Thank you! You see it! Most just can't comprehend what I'm doing. They just like to criticize for the sake of criticizing without understanding the real, honest meaning of it. Like those assholes who don't wanna talk about dreams, it might not matter to you but fucking matters to me.

CARA

So how'd you come up with yours?

ROSS

My what?

CARA

Dream. Like, the whole writing thing as an end-game. How'd you come up with that?

ROSS

Oh, I was more talking about REM dreams, not that.

CARA

Well too bad, I asked a question and, if you're gonna end up being a world-renowned superstar, you're gonna have to talk about it a lot. So, what got you into all of this?

ROSS

It's a fast-track to recognition. You write something and your name's just on it. It's not just *Blackstone Rollings* but *Blackstone Rollings* by Ross Liran. Name gets out and the more success accumulated, the bigger it gets til it can't get bigger. People know, and most of all, remember.

CARA

But why a writer? Most other things get that kinda reputation but seem a little more high-profile. Like, you never see a fucking novelist on the tabloids or Extra. Like an actor, or like I do, influence, those kinda things seem more in line with actually getting a name out and stuck.

ROSS

Let me ask you this: know any actors from the 1800s?

CARA

Uhh... John Wilkes Booth?

ROSS

Exact- What? No. That doesn't- people don't know him cause he was an actor.

CARA

You only asked if I knew an actor from the 1800s. You didn't specify beyond that.

ROSS

Fine. Can you name another actor from the 1800s? One that's known for acting and not treason?

CARA

Then I don't know.

ROSS

Exactly. Actors may be famous now, but just looking at history'll tell you that their shelf-life's pretty contained to that one life. No one from the 1800s now, in a hundred years, no one from the 1900s and so on and so.

CARA

So, if not an actor, what about, anything else. I guess what I'm getting at is that, no offense, but not a whole lotta people are going to plays these days. Not exactly Saturday morning cartoons.

ROSS

But that's exactly it! They're not cartoons. They're tangible spectacles that people pay big bucks to go to and there's eight shows a week maximum. A big movie in a theater will show, what, ten

times a day? And sharing those screens with about twenty other projects gasping for air to an audience overwhelmed with stuff. Everything overcrowding everything else, right?

CARA

I still don't get what you're saying. Maybe I'm just a little too high, or not high enough?

ROSS

But that's just it, there's too much. Overpopulated, bunch of nothing that'll mean even less ten years, fifty, hundred years down the line. Millions of songs come out each year, maybe ten or twenty survive the decade. Movies? Only successful ones are brands, otherwise you're just dealing in self-aggrandizing auteurs churning out the same brand just with a pseudo intellectual indie pastiche. Most of it just fades a week after it opens anyway. How many people hoping for a big break audition get turned away in the first round, not even fucking televised. I can tell you this, I won't be one of those, Cara. When you get a play, your play, on stage, and you keep getting your work on a stage, where it's at the center of it all. All feet in the building specifically there just for your work, that's how you know what you do matters, to a lot of people.

CARA

So... like, that's all it's for then? Maybe I'm a little fucked up a little but... it's just for that? Isn't there something more?

ROSS

What do you mean more?

CARA

I don't know. Like, beyond all that, beyond just mattering, is that it?

ROSS

That's just step one. The end goal is a hyper-magnification and delineation of it, like a fishpond swept up by a tornado. Securing who "Ross Liran" is for years to come.

CARA

I get that, I do. But, this is your passion, right? Doing it for the sake of doing it. That's something that can drive you to finding something worth doing.

ROSS

Most people don't want to be things for the sake of doing something. Everything's a means to an end. You cook to eat, you paint to sell the painting. The thing you wanna be is what you wanna get out of it, I want my name on the page, so I'll write it.

CARA

I guess, but like, you're just writing all this stuff for a means to an end?

ROSS

Where's this coming from? I thought you liked what I wrote?

CARA

I don't know. I guess I just see you, with a full goal, fucking mission statement about you life... and I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing at any given point at any given time.

ROSS

Well what do you want?

CARA

Usually... drugs.

ROSS

No, I mean grand-scale. In thousands of years, what will "Cara Tenny" be remembered for?

CARA

... drugs?

ROSS

Seriously.

CARA

I told you, I don't know. I don't really think much about down the line, like after I'm fucking and dead shit cause why the hell would I wanna think about that. I have a hard enough time with the now.

ROSS

Then short term. If you could have anything happen to you right now, what'd it be?

CARA

I mean, I guess I've always loved reality tv. That's something I've always wanted to do, compete and be my real self on a national stage and stuff. Could be fun.

ROSS

You know that's all fake, right? Everything that happens, conflicts and scandals, all scripted.

CARA

C'mon Ross. Don't be a goose honking that silly stuff. Of course it's all read. It's literally called reality television. Reality, real. Why would they make it all up?

ROSS

That's besides the point. With the turnover of those shows, there's no sticking around. What else, something that'll stick forever?

CARA

Ross, I don't get how you're not getting any of this. I don't know what I want, who I am, even what I'm doing at any given point in time or space and frankly, I'm chill with that.

ROSS

So you just don't care about your legacy? What about you "Care-a-Ton-y" thing, you don't want more people to care a ton about you?

CARA

Yeah, if people want to care, if they want it to be important or worth anything other than what I could sell on the black market, sure, raise the price of my kidneys. But, when it comes down to it, I come around to the fact that I'd rather have a good time than a long time.

ROSS

Why do you even do the pictures then? It's worth it to you to go dumpster diving for a photo op?

CARA

Yeah, it's fun and that's what matters.

ROSS

But there's so much more that matters! Having a legacy for generations. Securing your name in stone. An impenetrable castle that even time can't destroy! Built to last, that doesn't matter?

CARA

I'd like to help people. Give away some of my money or drugs to people who'll need it. Make them comfortable. Really "Care-a-ton-y" about them, ya know, show them that they matter.

ROSS

Sure, that too. But like I was saying, your legacy, you, the person Cara Tenny, don't you wanna matter when it all comes down to it, be the definitive "Tenny?"

CARA

But Ross, you know what you like. You know what you wanna be. I don't. Hell, every night, I go down Youtube fucking rabbit holes about whether or not Finland exists and like, what's the point of that? Of course it doesn't exist but I still keep diving deeper and deeper into it. I don't have something to not give up on cause I don't know what I'm doing and no one'll give me the time to help, it's always just "Cara you vacuous slime, get a job and get out of my apartment" and "Stop spending your allowance on drugs, it's making the place disgusting." All my dad says about me is that I waste my time but what is there to waste?

ROSS

Why don't you get a job, get your independence?

CARA

How?

ROSS

Get up, start doing what you have to do and just keep building on what you got. Look at me. Four years ago, I was nobody stocking shelves at a discount grocery store. But now, tonight, I'm someone, someone who matters. I'm having a play, a play that I wrote, premiering in New York. That's what matters and you can do the same thing.

CARA

But I don't think I can and I don't think it'd change anything anyway.

ROSS

And I think you're thinking too small a picture.

CARA

Were you popular in high school?

ROSS

What's that gotta do with anything?

CARA

Maybe not popular but, notable, would be the word.

ROSS

I wouldn't say I was popular in the normative term of it but, once again, what's your point?

CARA

I'll get to it, I think, like I'm pretty sure where I'm aiming but bear with me.

ROSS

Fine.

CARA

So, I was pretty popular in high school, nothing crazy but I knew people, invited to parties, threw parties, got fucked up on the weekends, hell, I played lacrosse, I was popular. And, when you're popular, you're on top of it all and it feels like it's gonna stay, for those four years, that's it, that's the purpose, to just exist in popularity. Then I graduated, got into the real world, and just existing didn't matter much. No one was hiring, I couldn't make money, 2008 shit, and worse of all, no one cared. Everyone was busy working on themselves to see me drowning in a kiddie pool. I mean, I took an odd-job as a teacher's assistant at my old school and no one there remembered me and who can blame 'em, they've got their own shit to handle but, I don't know, would've been nice to talk to someone, a little acknowledgement. The only one I really got is... was my dad, but with me doing nothing but live my life and have a bit of fun with whatever I could do... I don't think he likes me much. No wonder he gave up on me. Can't blame him, but also, kinda unfair, right? I didn't get all angry when he bought a corvette when he started balding. I'm just in my mid-life crisis halfway to getting to mid-life. I don't know if I'm getting to a point at this point but... I guess what I come back is, you know how they say some people peaked in high school? I think about that cause that's how anyone I've heard from back then talk about me, my dad too. "She peaked in high school." I mean, they wouldn't be wrong but they say it like it's my fault. I don't know... it kinda bothers me.

(A beat.)

ROSS

So about *Blackstone Rollings*, what else'd you like about it?

CARA

Oh, uh, a lot. It was pretty fun, a lot of talking going on. The backgrounds were pretty cool.

ROSS

Ya think? I'm kinda worried that the "western"-ness isn't pronounced enough. It needs to be a statement on the pastiche of the 1800s Americana as a critique of modern-day social structures and capitalistic analyses.

CARA

Nope... it was all pretty clear on that.

ROSS

Good, good, I was worried about that.

CARA

It's good, people'll like it.

ROSS

Ya know, I have to leave for my premiere pretty soon but, I'm always allowed a guest.

CARA

Really? Like, an actual premiere for an actual show? You'd take me? But you barely even know me. Really?

ROSS

Sure, we more or less just met and sure, you may have been "stalking" me for a couple years but I feel something, like between us. Stop me if I'm being crazy. I haven't had a lot of support, recognition really. My dad left, my brother fucked off and blew up, most people have just generally reduced me to a bare minimum. Not you, our short time together, you've already exceeded every fucking expectation I've had before. You love my work! You haven't given up on me and know, just as well as I do, I'm going places, straight to the fucking top and I want you there right next to me. My first fan, Cara Tenny. What'd you say, you wanna come?

(Loud knocks boom from the door, it's DAVID TENNY.)

DAVID

Cara, I know you're in there. Open this door now!

CARA

Oh crap.

ROSS

Are you expecting someone? How'd they know where you were anyway?

DAVID

Open this door, Cara! I'm not fucking around!

CARA

Oh shit, I don't think he's fucking around this time?

ROSS

Who's "he?"

DAVID

I'm breaking this door open, Cara! This is the last straw and I'm busting this door.

CARA

That's... that's my dad.

ROSS

Why... How is your dad here?

DAVID

Fuck it! Goddamn micreantic bloodsucker. You wanna play games? Fine, I'm playing goddamn battering ram cause I'm breaking down this door, Cara!

CARA

He has this app, he can see where my phone is.

ROSS (to the door)

Look, guy. Uh, first off, I don't think that's a game and also, there's no one by the name of Cara here so, you don't have to break down my door, I kinda wanna keep my deposit.

DAVID

Hey asshole, I can hear both of you damn clear through this door. It's cheap, I could breathe on it and it'd go down like the two cocksure piggies.

CARA

Jesus, dad, calm down, take a long, dark drink on a long walk home. There's a goose pond you could pass by and honk at instead, you just don't understand what's going on.

DAVID

I know exactly what's happening kiddo, you stole from me and you're now hiding from the consequences, you lecherous moocher.

CARA

It was just a few thousand or so, nothing you never spent on car just to get dust-fucked in the garage. From where I'm standing, I think I'm providing a valuable lesson in financial literacy.

DAVID

From where I'm standing, I'm hoping you step back cause I'm making a prompt entrance into this two-dollar a month shit-stained nightmare.

(A nicely dressed foot breaks through the door, creating a large hole.)

ROSS

What the hell guy, that's my door!

DAVID

You can get another one... *(He fits his hand through the door and unlocks the door.)*

(DAVID TENNY enters, dusting off his pants.)

Now was that so hard?

ROSS

Yes! You broke my door, you literally broke and entered. Fuck, now any lowlife can just wander in like fly meandering through a fucking minefield ready to blow me up!

DAVID

Does that mean you know her? This some kind of fucking trap house, money laundering scheme?

CARA

What makes you think this is a trap house? You know I'm clean as chlorine.

(At beat. DAVID looks at the table covered in drugs and back at CARA.)

Okay, maybe some light, purely prescriptive kinda-narcotics. But it really isn't a big deal.

DAVID

It is a big deal, Cara. Every single time we try to get you clean, what happens? You end up right back on the floor, drowning in your own shit. Every time, Cara.

CARA

I am though, but it's a gradual thing. It's not like one minute everything sucks and then, outta the blue, it all gets wrapped up honky-dory, end of fairy-tale, blah blah blah.

DAVID

How much time is there? How many trips to a "resort upstate" do we need before you can just exist without swerving into traffic? Seriously, I'm asking, I'm begging for an answer, Cara.

CARA

What do you want me to say? I'm trying, I really am but-

DAVID

But what? What, Cara? What exactly have you been doing? You haven't had a real job in years. It's like every six months, it's the same thing. You leave and I find you passed out in a dumpster.

CARA

You don't understand, dad. It's like, so- I don't know. You don't know how hard it's been to-

DAVID

Hard to get a job? You had that gig at the store but just quit! You were doing good, Cara, but, like every other time, you fucking imploded. You're like a grenade with a renewable warranty.

ROSS

Hey, why don't you lay off her for a minute. I'll have you know she's going to a highly illustrious premiere tonight, she's going pretty far, hopefully far enough to get away from you.

DAVID

Who the fuck're you?

ROSS

I'm Ross Liran, and you're in my apartment, so I think I deserve a speaking part in all this.

DAVID

Look kid, this isn't about you. You literally could not mean less to the grand scheme of my life. You don't have anything to say to me, what even is there to say frankly, Cara?

CARA

I am getting better. Like Ross said, I'm going places but, it takes time, a lot's been going on and, I don't know, I really don't, but I can get better. Please, you have to trust me.

DAVID

How can I? Every time there's a chance to be given, you swipe it from my hands and charge the cards for more shit in the system and you end up right back where you started. You're not getting better, you just keep getting back on the junkie's hamster wheel.

CARA

You just don't understand!

DAVID

What don't I understand? You've wasted yours and my lives getting high in the guest room. You don't want anything, you don't do anything, you don't even try.

CARA

It's just the past few years, I don't know what there is to do and, like, you just don't listen to me. You're not hearing anything I'm saying.

DAVID

I am listening.

CARA

No you're not! You just keep going on about how stupid I am and how much a waste of space me being me is.

DAVID

So maybe I don't. Maybe, after hearing the same excuses over and over; maybe it's time to cut you loose.

CARA

What?

ROSS

You can't do that.

DAVID

Cara, I love you, but I can't keep doing this. You're not getting better, simple as that and, worse of all, you don't want to. You're content sinking deeper and deeper into a numb ocean of nothing. If that's what you want, fine. I would stop you, but I can't help you do it anymore.

CARA

Daddy, I can get better, you just have to understand what I'm going through. You just have to-

DAVID

No. We're done, Cara, sweetie. I can't live like this anymore. Maybe this can be a wake-up call. I can't keep driving you to rehab every nine months, I can't. I'm canceling your cards and I'm changing the locks. You get to start a new life, and if you wanna sink... do it.

CARA

You can't do this! I'm your daughter, you can't just... abandon me.

DAVID

I'm not, I'm letting you go live. Most parents do, be self-sufficient, your own person, do your own things. But I'm done letting you consume me to just self-destruct again and again and again.

(DAVID makes for the door but stops and turns around.)

CARA

Change your mind, please. I promise, I'll get better, I'll get a job, a good one. Just don't leave.

DAVID

I forgot my stuff. *(He goes to the table, picks up the bag, and starts shoveling the narcotics back in.)* Might as well reclaim my investments, huh? Maybe get some of my money back.

CARA

Dad, you're being a real dick right now. I'm sorry I haven't been the best person to live with but still, I deserve some respect right? Just give me a little bit to hold on to, I'm your daughter.

(DAVID finishes shoveling most of the drugs. He goes to pick up the ROSS' pill bottle.)

ROSS

Hey! That one's mine, they actually are prescription.

DAVID

For what?

ROSS

They keep me level, avoid bad thoughts, but that doesn't matter. They're mine.

(DAVID tosses the bottle to ROSS.)

DAVID

Knock yourself out kid, please, I'm begging you.

(DAVID walks to the door.)

CARA

I'm trying. I really am, but you have to understand where I'm coming from, please.

DAVID

Cara, we can't do this anymore. I love you, and I hope you really do get better, but I'm done. Turn of the page, really. I hope you make it, but I can't watch you fail again. I'll see you around, Cara, I hope you can make me proud.

(DAVID exits. A long silence persists. ROSS checks his phone for the time.)

ROSS

Oh shit, look at the time. We gotta get going to the premiere.

CARA

He just left.

ROSS

Cara, we have to leave. We don't wanna be late now, do we?

CARA

Just like that. He just, he's gone.

ROSS

C'mon, let's get some good seats, even though they should be reserving some for the writer of the thing.

CARA

I can't.

ROSS

Huh?

CARA

I can't go. I'm... I'm... I think I'm kinda freaking out right now... He left me... I don't think I can... Can we just, like, stay here for tonight? I don't think I can go.

ROSS

It's gonna be fine. Hell, better than fine, absolutely glorious is what it'll be. Sure, what just happened, kinda dramatic, but tonight? Tonight things are changing, we're being brought up to hyper-space so you've got nothing to freak out over. You can laugh down at your dad from a top-floor penthouse. Now let's get going.

CARA

I'm serious. I... I don't know what to do... I feel like I'm falling and I can't go... I can't make it all real that that just happened.

ROSS

Cara, we're going. I've been working for this my whole life and I'm not gonna give it up because you're freaking out. I'm sorry your dad left, I know it's rough, but like you said, focus on the now, get through this and then, he won't even matter to you. Come with me.

CARA

I know, I know but, I can't, I'm sorry. Please, the show'll go on if you're there or not just... stay.

ROSS

I'm sorry, but this is what everything's been leading to. My make-it-or-break-it moment. The first brick in the castle "Liran." I'm sorry, but I'm seeing my show.

(ROSS goes to the door.)

I'll be back soon. It's a pretty short show. *(He goes to open the door and remembers the pill bottle still in his hand.)* Won't be needing these anymore. *(He tosses them on the couch.)* I love you Cara, and after tonight, I'll bring you to new worlds of meaning. We'll be worth it. Bye.

(ROSS exits.)

CARA

Fine! Fuck you, Ross! You're not even, like, that good at writing. *(She starts pacing.)* Why is all of this happening? Okay, calm down. Just be calm and fucking balanced. We are fine. So what you're dad abandoned you and now you're in the cosmic back-alley dumpster. So what the guy you've wanted for years just up and left you with your thoughts. You still have the one constant through all of this: drugs. *(She turns to the table, there are no drugs.)* Shit, okay, we're freaking out but, that doesn't matter, right? Just be calm, calm down, maybe he missed something. Just stop feeling this right now. Maybe he missed something, please.

(CARA goes to the area between the couch and the table and scours. CARA finds the bottle of pills.)

"Bad Thought?" That'll do.

(CARA goes over to the liquor and opens a bottle.)

Goodbye, bad feelings.

(CARA pours the entire pill bottle into her mouth and drowns them in dark brown liquor.)

Ah... I don't feel anything. Is that supposed to happen? Is it working? I feel a little funny.

(The lights begin to dim.)

Hey, what's going on? Did Ross forget to pay the electric bill?

(UNNAMED appears, next to the entrance.)

UNNAMED

Hello, Cara.

CARA

Are you a ghost? What did I take to see a ghost? That's cool.

UNNAMED

I'm not exactly a ghost.

CARA

Then what are you? A ghoul?

UNNAMED

Does it matter?

CARA

I guess not. So what's going on? What's a not-ghost, not-ghoul doing here? You crashing here too?

UNNAMED

No, I'm just passing by. As are you, correct? A wanderer, drifting through existence?

CARA

I don't know what you're talking about bud but I guess it couldn't not be the case, I think. Where am I, again?

UNNAMED

You were at Ross Liran's apartment. But now... you still are, but not. You're nowhere and everywhere but, mostly, you're sinking into yourself.

CARA

What does that mean?

UNNAMED

I think you know, Cara. Those pills... and now you're in the room, alone. What do you think?

(A beat.)

CARA

Yeah... I think I know. That kinda sucks.

UNNAMED

Are you okay?

CARA

I think so. I just... I wish I really had a life ya know. One worth losing. I wish I did something.

UNNAMED

Cara, you were alive. Most things don't matter, when it comes to the end. But, you... you found the only thing for you that meant anything.

CARA

What was that?

UNNAMED

You said it yourself: You had a good time, not a long time.

CARA

Yeah... I guess I wish I had more time to have more of a good time then.

UNNAMED

Everyone does, but at least you existed, for the time you had. Everything gets washed away into shore eventually, no matter how high you build, how long you can swim, you drown in the water. But the water's nothing, Cara. You understood that and so, what you had... was simply you.

CARA

Hey if this is it and you're some like angel or something, could I ask you a question?

UNNAMED

What is it?

(A beat.)

CARA

Finland? That a real place?

UNNAMED

Yeah. It's real.

CARA

I knew it. Well, thanks for that.

UNNAMED

It's my pleasure, Cara. I do hope you take care. It's been a long day but it's almost over.

CARA

Bye ghost.

(UNNAMED vanishes. The stage is almost entirely pitch-black, except for a spotlight over CARA.)

I wish I had something to say. Something to sum up my everything. Who Cara is, who I am, who I was, what I did? But I'm not profound. I'm nothing meaningful. But that's fine... I think. I think I'm okay with that... yeah. I existed, that's pretty dope. I'm okay.

(The lights slowly brighten to a cacophony of colors and orchestrals that envelop the stage and auditorium as a whole. CARA takes it all in, consuming the comforting glow of the rainbow. An excitement spurred by the peace knowing that everything will be alright. She stares towards the ceiling, knowing there's nothing there, but feeling, deep down, that the light comes from somewhere... so why not from there?)

Alright.

(The music swells and the curtains slowly close. CARA stands in acceptance as the curtain reaches the floor.)

SCENE 4 - ...and That Light Was a Fucking Freight Train

(The curtains remain closed. For a moment, the stage indulges in a silent somberness, digesting the event of the previous scene as a pregnant pause to the drama and despair.)

After a prolonged beat, a loud crash explodes from behind the curtain. Screams erupt as audible chaos rages unseen on stage. Stomps echo through the floors as the lights around the theater begin to misfire, with the sound of an electric surge emanating through the auditorium. Another loud crash smashes behind the stage. The screams die down and an actor, wearing a KGB uniform, emerges from under the curtain storms off, exiting through the main theater doors. The stage returns to steady silence.)

(The curtains rise to a dark Liran apartment. ROSS enters, shaken, slowly walking towards the liquor cabinet.)

ROSS

...It's over. It's all... nothing. My play, my everything... how the fuck does a play go that bad? What the fuck was that, a personalized atom bomb? Fucking wastelands of my career? Lights falling from the ceiling, actors who couldn't fucking remember their simple, fucking moronic lines? Ellwyn, that fucker. He fucked me! Tied me down, shit in my mouth, Fuck! My shot! MY shot at the stratosphere! Eddie "fuck you" Ellwyn. This can't be happening. This is fake, not real, imaginary meaningless. Like... like, Finland, right? You're still gonna be big, this can still be your big moment, tonight was like Finland... right, Cara?

(ROSS, with a full glass, finally notices CARA on the ground. ROSS freezes for a beat then picks up the bottle of *Fendlebach's 1884*, and begins to guzzle it. LUCY enters.)

LUCY

What happened to the door? Sorry, I didn't go to your play, I'm sure it was great but... something came up. So, you think you're some kinda theater legend or- (*She notices Cara.*) Uh... who the fuck is that? Is she okay?

(A beat.)

ROSS

I don't know. She was there when I got here. I don't... my play though, it- I'm-

LUCY

Ross, forget your play! She isn't moving! She's lying face down in her own- oh my god, we gotta call someone, get some help! (*LUCY's phone rings*) Of fucking course now the publishers call. Of all fucking times. Ross, do something about her, now!

(LUCY exits the room.)

ROSS (to CARA)

Why didn't you just come? I just wanted someone to see me! You saw me... It was a great play... I wrote a great play and there was sabotage. My life is ruined, all because someone decided they could just treat me like an ant. A fucking ant to be crushed!

(ROSS goes back to the corner where the ants were and begins stomping ferociously, LUCY reenters.)

LUCY

Just please, reconsider. I'm begging you! She's already gone, it could be a legacy piece, just don't drop it. This is all I've got at this point. Please recon- *(They hang up.)*

(ROSS stops stomping and looks over to LUCY, who slumps over in a chair.)

They said- they said it just wasn't very interesting. Albright's life... just kinda standard. Threw it out... You haven't called yet. Just give me a minute and I'll do it.

ROSS (back to stomping)

The swarms just keep coming and coming, tiny greedy fucking bugs suffocating each other. This is it. I'll burn it down. I'll burn it all down and put a fucking plack where it stood: The Ballad of Ross Liran: "The Only Giant Left Standing." I know it. They'll know it. They'll fucking remember.

(ROSS continues crushing and LUCY wallows in her chair. The stage grows dimmer as the silhouette of UNNAMED becomes more pronounced. Blackout, the curtains drop.)

ACT III

SCENE 1- s by the Shore

Setting: Location of the Theater, the Year of the Performance. The Curtains are closed. The lights in the auditorium dim slightly over a silent stage.

(The curtains begin to ruffle, as if affected by a draft coming from an ajar backstage door. Suddenly, THE DRUNKARD from ACT I bursts through, rolling under the curtain.)

THE DRUNKARD

(To the Curtain) Round Two, asshole, look who just lost a rumble with the drunkle. *(They spit on the curtain.)* Fuck you too. *(Back to the audience.)* It's the small things, keeps you going. It's like, I dunno, building a sandcastle or getting a graduate degree, great in the moment, then you're on to the next thing to keep on moving cause, let's be honest, in the long run, none of that's gonna last... just letting the time, us, standby before washing away in the great yadda yadda.

(A beat.)

Listen, I'm not usually the one to say this, cause usually, I'm not the one who needs saying this kinda crap but... look, I might've been a little hissy there earlier, just a bit. It's hard to say what could've gotten me, a well-adjusted misanthrope acting all outta sorts. Could be the booze, could be the drugs, could be the nothing... probably the nothing. It always comes back to that, don't it? Nothing, the endless so and so that never really meant much before but so much when looking straight on. Everything built on a bed of sand, casually withering, washing away to the gentle monotony of the time. Did that sound like a poem? I really fucking hope not, I do not wanna be a poet of anything. I don't got shit figured out but I do know that... I'd hate to be a poet. If I'm drinking, it sure as hell won't be for inspiration, it'd be cause bourbon tastes good and feels better than the alternate. Then again, if I'm being honest, I don't think I really know what a poet is. Best I can guess, it's just the job of looking for an ocean in a puddle. Writing, willing it to be so as much as words can put into song, but at the end of the long, fucking day, it's still just a puddle, slowly evaporating into vapor before the guy's any done with his third stanza. Maybe I'm dumb... I am dumb, but I don't see how that's any different from the everyman. One pant leg at a time, trapped in the mundane cycle of the humdrum bumblefuck blah blah that everyone's got just tryin' to make sense of whether they've got any point in all this... Maybe some people are happier than that, don't need to focus on all that. Maybe I am a poet after all... I'm sorry I said all that stuff back then, but what was said there isn't here, so I'm hoping we're square. We're good right?

(A beat.)

Eh... if you're not, bring it up with me. I'll be where I always am, the corner booth of any place open enough for just one more drunkie. See you all around, hopefully.

(THE DRUNKARD walks off stage. The curtains rise and the lights dim.)

SCENE 2- Full Stop

Setting: The Liran apartment, One Week later. It's in a state of dishevelment, with empty bottles, opened mail, and wrappers littering the ground. The hole in the door has been haphazardly patched up with duct tape. Motionless on the couch, ROSS is curled up, cuddling the empty bottle of Feldebach's. The "Blackstone" script sits on the messy liquor cabinet.

(A ringing cell phone sounds from the couch. After it rings for a bit, ROSS takes the phone out of his pocket, turns off the phone, then chucks the phone onto one of the chairs. LUCY, in relatively formal clothes, enters from a door on the opposite side from the entrance. She quietly goes over to the liquor cabinet, picking up the script. LUCY walks up behind ROSS' motionless body and slams the pages on ROSS' face.)

LUCY

Wake up and get up, Broseph!

ROSS

Why? If I get up, I'll just be knocked down again.

LUCY

(The tune of "Tubthumping" by Chumbawamba) "And you ain't ever gonna keep me down."

ROSS

What?

LUCY

What? Never heard of Dickens?

ROSS

That's not- That's besides the point.

LUCY

Then what is your point? Researching your next story about the urban hermit, living in the middle of nowhere comma New York? Getting a bit too immersed, if you're taking comments.

ROSS

For your information, I'm not taking comments nor am I moving on. What I've got right now works! They're exactly as they should be! I just need the saboteurs to get what they deserve.

LUCY

Sounds exciting, but, and I'm sure you've got a reason, you've been on your ass all week since your play went balls up so why not get up and do something about it.

ROSS

Why're you so bubbly and uppity right now? You're in the same boat I'm in. Your book went nowhere, you threw it to the publishers and it fuckin' boomerang'd.

LUCY

I'm just not letting it keep me down. I won't let it so it won't. What's your excuse for doing nothing?

ROSS

Listen, I'm just not doing anything til the universe starts righting some wrongs and I start getting those rights. Til that happens I'm acting like some greater power when shit goes bad... sit on my ass and wait for someone else to take care of it.

LUCY

Great plan but where does paying bills, paying rent, buying groceries and overall not crumbling under a mountain of debt factor into your whole "divine intervention" strategy?

(ROSS' phone starts ringing.)

ROSS (getting up to get his phone)

(to Phone) Shut up already. You know what I want and calling ain't gonna change it. (*Hangs up.*)

(to LUCY) You were saying?

LUCY

Who keeps calling you?

ROSS

Exactly who I need to get some well-deserved comeuppance like a waterhole in a cornfield.

LUCY

Okay... and who would that be?

ROSS

Since Eddie fucking kamikazed *Patriot* last week, I've been trying to get ahold of him to, ya know, air some grievances. But he's been avoiding me so, I went ahead and added just a sprinkle of the *dramatique* for some slight blackmail.

(A beat.)

LUCY

Jesus, Ross. Don't tell me-

ROSS

"*Ring-Ring*, Hello the decomposing integrity of one Eddie Ellwyn, killer of dreams, puppies, and the future of artistic revolutions, this is your greatest victim. I'd just like to let you know that, since you ruined my life, and are all around a pretty fucked guy, you're gonna be first in line to the Ross Liran suicide note extravaganza! Call your friends and loved ones cause I'm naming names and your's is on top. Happy Holidays and go fuck yourself!"

LUCY

You can't threaten to kill yourself every time something doesn't go your way, Ross. I mean, c'mon. You did this three months ago when the delivery guy forgot your soup. I thought you were supposed to be creative but you go back to the same bluff every single time you wanna feel entitled.

ROSS

Who said it was a bluff?

LUCY

Ross-

ROSS

Besides, it's working. Never picked up once all week. But once my life's on the line, well, the line won't stop ringing! If that's how I get to matter to anyone, then that's how I'm gonna get it.

LUCY

You matter, you're fine. Just get through this melancholic self-suck-off marathon, take your pills and just write something else. It's impressively uncomplicated.

ROSS

But I can't.

LUCY

Can't what? You got the energy for blackmail suicide but not something actually productive.

ROSS

No, my pills, Car- That girl OD'd on them.

LUCY

Is that what this is about? Guilt? Ross, it was rough, I get that. But some rando breaking into our apartment and taking your medication, your prescribed medication at that, is not your fucking fault. Was it weird? Yeah. But it really doesn't matter, the cops didn't blame you, hell, they put the door back on the wall so it was a net positive. Don't beat yourself over her, you didn't even know her name, right?

ROSS

Yeah... I didn't. But that's not the point. I just, like, literally don't have the pills. Like, she took all of them.

LUCY

Oh... then I'll refill your prescription. Since when'd that stop you? You always complained they "inhibited the muses," or some other wanky bullshit. Well, until I'm back, you're gonna be uninhibited so just do something! Write something, get a job, do your Youtube thing, anything.

ROSS

No.

LUCY

No? You're going that route with this convo?

ROSS

I'm not doing anything else. What I had is what I needed. I had exactly what was gonna get me to the top but Eddie fucked me. I put so much time into it, I'm not just gonna drop it like a worn baby blanket.

LUCY

You're giving yourself too much credit.

ROSS

Maybe I am, but absolutely not. I know what I deserve, what my work is worth and it will not be squandered. The plays'll get a second chance at life and I'm not moving on until they're alive.

(A beat.)

LUCY

What about rent?

ROSS

What about it?

LUCY

Ross, how are you not getting this. We need cash, moola, the old-aged cheddar, whatever you wanna call it. We need to pay rent, pay for utilities, we need to get exterminators for the ants, we need to pay for your fucking prescriptions and I need to pay off my student debt. Money.

ROSS

I know we need to pay rent but, you know what, at a certain point it comes down to integrity.

LUCY

Integrity?

ROSS

Yeah, integrity. We have dreams, We have a thing inside us that we need out. I'm aiming to be important and so are you. We can't waste the time we've got on bullshit things like rent and bills.

LUCY

I don't even know how to respond to that. Fucking Integrity?

ROSS

You still wanna write biographies, right?

LUCY

Yeah.

ROSS

Well you can't let the fact that Betty Albright didn't pan out. Keep hitting the pavement, keep writing and eventually, you'll be right on top, most prolific biographer this side of the century.

LUCY

I'm not changing, Ross. But practically speaking, we have to start thinking, well, practically. You can worry about being the next Shakespeare when we know we can pay for food next week.

ROSS

You're not changing your goal?

LUCY

Is that supposed to mean something?

ROSS

Why're you dressed like a duck at prom?

LUCY

I don't know what a duck at prom is supposed to look like but if it really means that much for you to know I've got an interview... at Dirty Hairy's.

ROSS

You're going back?! You were done with the place! You fucking blew outta it in the blaze of glory know you're walking back into the fire? Luce-

LUCY

We need the money Ross and I can't sit around alone, wallowing in my own pity. I need a job and Hairy's, the pay's not great but it's enough and those patron tend to be kinda generous so-

ROSS

So what? You're just moving on like that? What about your ambition? What about writing? What about being a fucking person who mattered?

LUCY

When was that, Ross? I need a job, plain as that, and I need to move on and get one, fine.

ROSS

But-

LUCY

I can't go on thinking about it. I can't. If I let myself feel, get washed away into it, then I'm just gonna be feeling all of it and I don't wanna feel any of it. I need to be healthy for me and you do for you. I'm not stopping anything, just looking at a priority. Stop drinking, do something productive, and when I come back, take the pills, please.

ROSS

You're just giving up? Is that what you want for me too? You want me to melt into a puddle, just to be splashed and stomped through by mild fucking pedestrians? Is that what you want?

(A beat.)

LUCY

I'm not doing this right now?

ROSS

Why not?

LUCY

Cause you're acting crazy.

ROSS

I'm crazy?

LUCY

Uh... doy. You literally sent some guy a suicide call.

ROSS

It's for a good cause.

LUCY (walking to the exit)

Listen, you're in an emotional state and need someone to talk to. I get it. But I need to get to my interview if we want any hope of living in a room with four walls, even if those walls do leak.

ROSS

But-

LUCY (at the door)

I'll be back soon, with your prescription. If you take what you need to take, I'll let you complain all you want about Eddie Ellwyn, Arthur, random druggos, and how we should matter a whole heck of a lot more than we do, no matter how futile and annoying that conversation'll go. Okay?

ROSS

Fine, fine. Have fun being swallowed back into the festering bile of Dirty Hairy management.

LUCY

Oh, I'll be having a blast with Harper, the sewage queen of New York.

(She opens the door to leave.)

Hey Ross.

ROSS

What?

LUCY

Don't threaten to kill yourself again while I'm gone. I'm not attacking the meaning behind it but, frankly, it's played out and you can do better. I'll see you soon.

(LUCY exits.)

SCENE 3- Prime-Cut

(ROSS grabs a half-empty bottle and goes to drink it, before being interrupted by his ringing phone. ROSS takes a long guzzle from his drink, staring at his phone. After a moment, ROSS gets up and answers his phone.)

ROSS

Sorry, but the person you're trying to reach no longer exists and has since transcended above. So please, Eddie, kindly fuck off to the tiny little playhouse you call a hoot cause really it's a fine mesh network of inconsolable idiots, if you even know what that means, or if I know... do I? I mean, Fuck off Eddie! (*He hangs up and throws the phone across the room.*) That went well. Riled up like a bear in a batcave. Maybe he'll actually take some fucking notice.

(Loud bangs sound from the door.)

EDDIE

Open up, Ross. I know you're not dead, so just open up, kid. Let's talk.

ROSS

Eddie, what a coincidence? I was just thinking about you, what with all my note taking.

EDDIE

I don't wanna get confrontational, just wanna talk. Not even down a ledge, fuck knows I can't change your mind about anything... Can I come in?

ROSS

I don't know, did you bend me over and fuck me in front of a live, primetime studio audience?

(EDDIE enters.)

EDDIE

Listen, I know, I get that shit didn't go great last week but you can't keep blaming me for everything that happened. I don't have control over the casual mishaps happenstance of the theater world.

ROSS

It's your theater! Lights were falling from the ceiling! The fucking mics were out for half the play. Hell, you hired actors who I don't think could read a tonal shift if it was literally going from night to day. You took a fucking steamroller, flattened me out, and paraded me like a cartoon character, like a two-dimensional farce. It's. Your. Fault.

EDDIE

Look kid, you really gotta understand I didn't mean for it to go like that.

ROSS

Then how? How was it supposed to, how did you not treat me like a crumbly little mound of loose clay. Mold the expectations and create a fake imitation of hope. I'm real, asshole!

EDDIE

What are you saying?

ROSS

What needs to be said! You fucked me to protect your so precious egotarian overlord of the Off-Broadway lords. Sabotage from day numero uno. Cheap drinks, cheap seats, hell, you probably just rent your suits!

EDDIE

Kid, you're really talking fucking wacky. How much you drinking?

ROSS

You don't care. You're only here to save your soul cause of my little-wittle threat-y wetty.

EDDIE

I mean... I'm here aren't I? I know you're not gonna do anything but I'm still here.

ROSS

So why's that? Planning on just draining more of the life from me before I do it myself? (*ROSS picks up a bottle off the ground and sticks it out at Eddie.*) Here. Smash this then cut me up with the shards, get every last drop, get what you came here for.

EDDIE

That's not it, kid. Maybe I wanna explain myself. Maybe you're not much in a boat of your own in terms of being fucked.

ROSS

That's a joke right? You can see there's a difference.

EDDIE

Macro, micro, it all ends up in that fucking philosophical minefield of pure fucked-ness. You're shit falls off in the beginning, mine's crumbling in the end. Frankly, at least you don't have to feel the fucking downfall, you're big failure's right before you start.

ROSS

What're you talking about?

EDDIE

Kid, it's done. It's going down. What I built, ya know, it's been going under for a while, but that premiere, I think that's the nail. We were a dying breed anyway in this business, let's be honest, investors've been pulling out for years now. It's only a matter of time before I was gonna gut the place and sell chairs on the street. By my count, after last week, there's no shame in hanging up before it sinks anyway.

ROSS

So that's it? I was, what? A last ditch-effort?

EDDIE

Yeah, more or less. Don't take it hard though, I understand wanting something out of all of this. Wanting your work to mean something. Wanting fucking anything only for it to not come back. Unrequited bullshit's what I call it.

ROSS

But you did fuck me. You pumped me with a promise of being something. I could've gone with someone else but you promised I was gonna make it!

(A beat.)

EDDIE

I am sorry. It wasn't personal. Honestly, I hoped it would work out. That outta some miracle, even with the cheap crews, cheap sets, bottom of the barrel just about anything, you'd have something special... I'm sorry.

ROSS

Okay, but, given what you've done, can't you do something for me? Put in a good word with another producer, pay me something for my work. I deserve some compensation!

EDDIE

What can I give you? I sold the theater for debts, investors're gone, I'm still trying to get some pure cash to pay off my second house. I got nothing except retirement.

ROSS

Please, Eddie. I'm not asking for a mansion or a fucking street hot dog. Just, I don't know, a word. A good word with another producer. They could help, right? It'd be something, please, you can give me that, Eddie. I'm begging.

EDDIE

What can I do? I'm a failure. That's all they'll see, especially after *Patriot*. Kerfunkt businessman hoisted on his own petard right outta the theater. I've got a tainted name now, can't go back in, I'll only hurt you more than it's already been fucked.

ROSS

But... but... you did this to me. You can't help me? Anything? Anything? I'll be your slave, I'll be a man-servant in a fucking hula skirt. I just- Please, help me, Eddie. This is everything I've ever wanted. The only thing I've ever wanted. I've sacrificed- I've lost so much to get here, to get to my fucking premiere. This can't be how it ends, Eddie. Please... please.

EDDIE

I get that, kid. I'm sorry, but what this life is, you can't never end up with your happy ending, getting what you want, it's too easy. Life doesn't wanna give you what you want, we don't deserve it, sucks to say but that's that. I wanted to be something, something for my dad, never could. Growing up, my dad was a butcher, small-time. Nothing much going for him and yet, wouldn't give me the time of day working in his shop. Head down, rarely ever home, just cutting away at those fucking meats. Time comes by that I'm looking to start a theater company, right outta school, he finally gets to giving me some attention, helps me out in financing the property. Not much but, it was New York in the 70's, literally a landfill. Success finally hits and I decide, ya know what, why not let dad in on a little of what I got. He's still plowing away in the shop, getting sicker everyday, just cutting up that meat. Only got so much time left so I took him to Japan. Man's spent all his life with beef but he's never gone big. Never had the expensive shit, grade-A wagyu. All expenses paid, nine-courses, all on the best you can buy. Most expensive steak in the world without crossing into six-figures. When the whole thing's done and over, on the flight back, he thanks me for the trip, for spending some time with him in his old age. You know what he never does? The old man never, not once, thanks me for the steak. Prime Cut, avant-garde shit, he never once said thank you. I do all that for my dad, and he never thanks me, never gave me the simple pleasure of a fucking thank you. I get where you're at, kid, and I'm sorry you're there.

(A beat.)

ROSS

You're a fucking fraud, Eddie.

EDDIE

Yeah. maybe. But, then again, what does that make you? Not much of anything I'd say. Buying into a nothing promise, only to be nothing himself. But, I guess that's showbiz, huh?

(ROSS lunges at EDDIE, but EDDIE easily pushes ROSS, knocking ROSS on the floor.)

ROSS

Did you even like my play?

EDDIE

Kinda. I thought it was entertaining. My advice, Ross, find something stable, get something real. Cook a good steak, something people can use. That's all there really is.

ROSS

Shut up.

EDDIE

I am sorry... I wish you could've gotten what you wanted. Good Luck, Ross, out there. Be smart.

(EDDIE exits. ROSS lies on the ground, whimpering.)

SCENE 4- Useless, Pointless, and Everything In Between

Setting: The disheveled backroom office of Dirty Hairy's. A desk with a chair on either side stands in the center of the room with random documents strewed around the desk.

(HARPER BULLATTS sits in the swivel chair talking on the phone.)

HARPER (on the phone)

Listen, I don't care what kinda 1984-state you think we're in, but if I don't see some fucking maranchino cherries at my bar before opening, well, you've got the wonder of imagination, I'll leave it ambiguous. 7 o'clock, got it? Great. Talk to you later, bye bye. *(She hangs up the phone.)*

(HARPER picks up a bottle from under the desk and pours a glass. A knock on the door.)

What is it!? I'm on break!

LUCY (behind the door)

It's Lucy, Harper. We've got an interview.

HARPER

Fine, come in.

(LUCY enters. HARPER takes a quick shot from her glass.)

LUCY

Long time no see. How've you been? Still riding Mickey's ass for a bigger cut of the tip jar?

HARPER

Cut the chit-chat, Lucy. Let's just get through this fast so I can go back to the wonders of day-drinking and you can go back to, I don't know, what've you been doing lately? Not your biography thing, otherwise you wouldn't be in this room.

LUCY

Yeah... okay, no chit-chat. In that case, can I have my job back?

HARPER

This is an interview, right? Tell me your qualifications?

LUCY

Seriously?

HARPER

I'm serious. You've gotta be vetted. Frankly, you of anyone should understand I need someone reliable. It's a tough job, seemingly not for the faint of heart, huh? Prove that you're reliable.

LUCY

It's a waitressing gig. Not exactly welding parts to a live rocket. You get just a bit of tolerance, a way of gritting through a smile and you're done with 5% tips to spare.

HARPER

I asked you your qualifications, that's what I want. Listening's very important in hospitality.

LUCY

You know my strengths. I can make someone feel important, like their's is the only story worth remembering while upcharging them on wings and beer. "Oh my god, your bachelor party sounds wild. You know what'd make it even wilder? These \$20 European IPA's. Take your crazy night to eleven." Simple as that. I've done it with hospitality, socially, and creatively. I've done it for years, worked here for years, and I think that qualifies me for a job I've already had.

HARPER

If you're so good at it, why'd you quit?

LUCY

I had an opportunity, okay? Glowing opportunity and I took it-

HARPER

And now you're crawling back cause you think this is just some hospice. Not a real run business, just a layover for you for "glowing opportunities" to come rolling by.

LUCY

Can we not do this? I'm good at the position, that's all that should matter.

HARPER

But are you good for the position? There's a certain character you need in the fast-paced, down and out bar brawl of New York bars. I can't put my faith in some schloozy, wannabe writer.

LUCY

Harper, I was good when I worked and nothing's changed since. The situation's not too complicated. I need a little help picking myself back up. I've got bills, debt-

HARPER

Who doesn't. Do a fucking census outside and you'll get debt bigger than the GDP of Lithuania.

LUCY

This is cause I quit? I'm not the first person in the universe to jump at a better chance, Harper.

HARPER

It's not that you quit. It's the entitlement. You, your whole yuppy generation really. It's not about you. I'd be fine giving you back your job, fuck, pain's me to say but you weren't half bad. But you quit to follow some antiquated old lady off a cliff and when that, in the shock of all time, didn't go your way, you come back like we're a fucking seat warmer.

LUCY

It's a job. I know this is supposedly an interview but, given the mood in the room, honestly, this is, and always has been, a stepping stone. For anyone hoping to get anywhere. Some people get a chance to be something, others don't. When you get a chance to have a chance to see the possibility of doing something meaningful-

HARPER

What's meaningful?

LUCY

Excuse me?

HARPER

What's meaningful about what you do? You quit to chase a failed singer, someone absolutely nobody knows no more. How's that meaningful to anyone 'cept that lady?

LUCY

How's this relevant to what we're-

HARPER

You said you wanted to do something meaningful. Purpose of some high-falutin thing like that. What's there in writing a book for some diva no one remembers? Who benefits asides an ego trip and your small payday? Here, every day is the most meaningful task of 'em all, helping people move on from one day to the next. You want meaning, that there's the best you'll get this life.

LUCY

What do you want from me? You knew I was coming and you still said yes. You just wanted to pontificate at me, shame me for leaving the chapel of Dirty fucking Hairy's? Is that a joke?

HARPER

Kinda.

LUCY

So this has all been a waste of time.

HARPER

No, not yet. I just had a few things to say before a proposition.

LUCY

What's the deal now?

HARPER

Two years, exclusive.

LUCY

Here, for two years. Really?

HARPER

No side-gigs, no hustling down that whole writer's club, with options for an extended contract.

LUCY

That's ridiculous. Two years of just this? Do you want me to say yes?

HARPER

Higher salary than before and you keep your tips. That's above minimum wage which is more than you're in any position to ask. More than nothing. I'm a woman of my word.

LUCY

Two years is a long time, Harper. I can't just stop everything I'm working towards just to work towards a fucking waitressing job. Start over after leaving, that's crazy.

HARPER

We're short-staffed as is and, though most of you tire fast, you're good for the long-haul. I need someone reliable, exclusivity breeds reliability. You're exclusive, you can make yourself reliable unlike most kids looking for work.

(LUCY gets up.)

LUCY

I'm twenty-six, I've got a bachelor's in English and History, and I'm not a fucking kid. If this really was just to fuck me you could've at least let me put on something more comfortable.

(LUCY goes to leave.)

HARPER

What about your brother?

(LUCY stops.)

LUCY

What about him?

HARPER

Well I know you've got a brother, Ross, who does plays and shit. I was reading the paper a couple nights ago, lo and behold, a Liran play of a failure. Abysmal all-around. I'm guessing someone that far down needs something to stay floating.

LUCY

And?

HARPER

We always need someone to write the posters. You accept, there's a nice comfortable spot for that Rossy boy to earn some cash, fund his next work if he works out. You interested? Doing it for good ol' Rossy?

LUCY

Two years?

HARPER

Two years.

(A beat.)

LUCY

I'll think about it.

HARPER

Clock's ticking. Reliable workers give reliable answers.

LUCY

I said I'll think about it.

HARPER

Fine, just hurry up.

(LUCY leaves and HARPER gets back to her day-drinking.)

Fucking Millenials.

(HARPE, her desk and the chairs are wheeled off and replaced with a barback and a stool. MICKEY THE BARTENDER tends to the bar, cleaning some glasses. LUCY enters.)

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Looks like someone could use a bit of a pick-me-up?

LUCY

Trust me, Mick, unless you got some fucking horse tranquilizers behind there, then the best you can do is to punch me in the face to pick me up.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Yeah, but a quick pint ain't gonna hurt and frankly, after a fucking Harper talk, I mean I love the lady but, belligerence needs a bit of a chaser, right?

LUCY

Listen, I wish I could stay and chat but... look, I've got a lot of shit to handle right now, clear out, and I think I just wanna go home and just deflate, fucking drift off into a thoughtless nothing where I can have a bit of quiet for once.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

I'm guessing Harper gave you her deal huh?

LUCY

Two years in a maximum-security penitentiary, but at least she's letting me bring a guest.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

She's just being a hardass. It's a show, Luce, a play on toughness. If you let me talk to her, I'm sure she'll draw her teeth a bit less. She can be a real ice cube in July.

LUCY

Yeah, I know, just Harper being Harper.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

And you know what, there's about 40 quadrillion bars in the city, who says you don't just go to one of those. I've got an in with the manager over at Tolito's, I could talk to him for ya.

LUCY

Sure...you know, I don't think Harper'd change her mind, she seemed pretty hung up about me leaving. I mean, she said I couldn't write or do anything with that world. That's stupid, right?

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Don't worry about it. Like I said, I'll talk to her. It'd be nice to have a friendly face around here, too bad I'd have to settle for you.

(A beat.)

LUCY

Do you think I should take it?

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

The deal? I don't know, probably not. I mean, you wanna do your writing full time, gotta get a foot in the door sometime and do you really wanna take off a couple years just to work here?

LUCY

It'd be secure though. I could make some money, she said I could get a job for Ross, he could use a bit of stability. He'd come kicking and screaming, but I think just giving him some outlet could be helpful if he can't do what he wants.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Who cares about your brother, Luce? This is about you. You're the one who'd be sacrificing something in all this hubbub, so what do you want? Don't you wanna keep that writing game going?

(A beat.)

LUCY

Ya know, on the way over here, there was a guy selling his art on the street. Landscapes, portraits, anything someone could make on some paper, he was selling. Whole collection on a stand in the middle of winter. I didn't talk to him, barely stopped, but if I had to guess, he'd done everything he could to get those paints, those canvases, so much time thrown into doing what he loves. Clothes were tatters, looked like he hadn't shaved in years, hollow-looking, gaunt if that's the right word. But he seemed happy. Selling his art, fucking starving with nothing but a brush. I think I've been thinking about that for a while. If I could do that.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

What? You wanna start painting now? No offense, Luce, but the business is out on that physical stuff, the real money's in that digital snuff.

LUCY

Fuck no, I can barely draw a stick. No, I think what I've been thinking is, this guy's out there with nothing but his work, right? Literally a starving artist. Living on a passion. Could I do that? Yeah, I love writing, I love doing biographies, but would I wanna starve for it? Versus living in a dead-end job, doing nothing for myself but secure. Would I rather be starving or sedated? Honestly, I think, right now, I'm leaning a certain way in terms of things.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Well, I hope you do what's best. Can't lie and say I wouldn't be happy to have you back here but hey, I've been thinking of moving on too, so who's me to say anything?

LUCY

Really? What're you planning?

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Thinking of buying an RV and just driving, see where I go. The world's the limit. But, honestly speaking, I'll probably just end up in a bar in Idaho. That's the place with potatoes, right? Could get a decent vodka tonic.

LUCY

Sounds nice... I've always wanted to travel a little.

(A beat.)

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Let me talk to Harper, see what I can help with for you.

LUCY

Thanks... I should head back. I gotta grab Ross' prescription. Who knows what he's gotten into. Probably harassing some pigeons for encroaching on his artistic sanctuary or something dumb.

MICKEY THE BARTENDER

Well don't be a stranger. I hope I'll be seeing you soon again.

LUCY

Yeah, sure. See you around, Mick.

(The lights dim and the curtains drop. The sound of broken glass shattering plays over the dormant stage.)

Scene 5- Just Burn it to the Ground Already

Setting: Back to the Liran apartment, in an even sorer state than before. Dim-Lit, the apartment's littered with bottles and broken glass. The liquor cabinet is now next to the couch.

(ROSS sits hunched over on the couch, staring off into the audience while nursing a glass on the table. He takes a swig, downing the glass in one gulp, then smashes the glass on the ground.)

ETHAN (knocking from behind the door)

Hey Lucy. I just wanna talk. It's fine if you don't, but I just wanna explain things a little, even if it's a week after the point. I didn't mean to hurt you, I just need to tell you where my mind's at.

(ROSS gets up and opens the door.)

ROSS

What?

ETHAN

Oh... hey Ross. Where's Lucy, I just needed to-

ROSS

Explain yourself? She's not here. No one's here. Not that it'd matter anyway.

ETHAN

Okay. Uh, do you know when she'll be back?

ROSS

Nope.

ETHAN

Okay... how've you been doing?

ROSS

How do you think I'm doing? Seriously, look at me? I'm a testament to the shambles of hope.

ETHAN

I'm not one to look at someone and call them what it is, cause I don't know. I'm just- I heard about your play and-

ROSS

Jesus Christ, Ethan! Keep on flapping those lips, fucking smackin' 'em all around looking for a fucking point to be all nice about! Cause you're a nice guy? Just a sweetheart? Ethan Rayner, human, soon-to-be furless, teddy bear.

ETHAN

I'm really sorry about what happened with your play. It sounded like a great concept and I'm sure it had nothing to do with your actual writing.

ROSS

Ha! Not my writing? You think I was worried that it was me, Ross fucking Liran, who fucked me back to square one? Yeah, my dreams were just a fun little way to tease a bit of self-castration in front of the world.

ETHAN

I'm just trying to be nice, Ross. Why're you taking all this bad?

ROSS

You? Nice? Pish-fucking-posh. You're not nice, you're a leech. You have nothing to go for so you just try to psych people out to think that they're gonna be someone, but in the background, you pray for it all to go tits up like a cow in a swimming pool. I'm not a cow, Ethan.

ETHAN

I just wanna be supportive. I wanna help. You're clearly in a rough place, you don't mean what you say, you're-

ROSS

What do I mean then? Can I not trust what comes out through my throat cause I don't know the meaning of it? Is that how you support me, by lambasting my own compression of reality. I know what I am. You come at me with support? Would you trust a ladder that couldn't support itself? You want me to trust a ladder, Ethan? I don't trust shambly ladders.

ETHAN

What're you talking about?

ROSS

It's your character, Ethan. Chosen fucking nature. You say nothing affects you, that you're a chill, flow-riding fellow, but that's just code for being an invertebrate.

ETHAN

Is that like some kinda bug? I'm sorry if you're saying I'm annoying-

ROSS

No, dummy! It means you don't got a fucking spine. Flap, flap. Floppity, flap. Ethan Rayner flopping around town like sentient Jello looking for another way to disappoint the world and himself. You used to be someone, man.

ETHAN (going to leave)

Fine, I can see when I'm not welcome. I'll go if that means so much to you, Ross.

ROSS

Lucy told me what you told her, about what you're doing to yourself. Pancreas was it? I wish I could be surprised but... you tend to give up easily.

ETHAN

You don't know what you're talking about Ross. It's complicated and I really just need to explain it to Lucy. I know I hurt her, but it's my choice.

ROSS

Sure, it's a choice. I'm dangling off the side of a cliff and it's my choice just to just drop. Really exercising that free will there, real somebody standing in my room.

ETHAN

You know what, I really don't have to listen to this, you're really being a jerk.

ROSS

Wow! Ethan Rayner called me a jerk, everyone! How deep, how much of a skin-tightening, fucking existential crisis of a fucking insult. Ethan Rayner saying a mean word? By my stars!

ETHAN

Honestly, fuck you, Ross. I get that your play didn't go how you wanted it but how on earth does that give you the right to go all scorched-earth on me, Ross. I thought we were friends.

ROSS

You think we're friends? Really? I tolerated you, Ethan. You were friends with my sister who seemed to like you and that's about as far as it's ever gone.

ETHAN

Get over yourself Ross, I don't need to prove myself to you. You think you're so above it all, so artistic, that everyone wants to be you, that I'm some puppy dog looking for approval from you. I was being nice. I don't care about theater, I'm sorry, but at least I give the courtesy of acting like it. When you're excited about something, I'm happy to be along, but if you can't even respect me as a person, I don't know why I try.

ROSS

You don't try. You've chosen to be no one, just a background, ancillary person who keeps bursting into my world of someones.

ETHAN

I'm someone, Ross, just cause I'm not slamming my head against a wall since my football days, wallowing in self-pity doesn't mean I'm nobody.

ROSS

No, you used to be someone, used to be Ethan fucking Rayner, prodical son of Silver Creek. Now you're not, a nobody lying on his stomach letting the train crush ya. A blade of grass, folding to whatever boot come up to crush you, screaming "Please, daddy, show me I'm no one." You could've built the castle "Rayner," timeless, impervious. But you aren't. You just lay down and take it, fine, just get out of my sight cause I can only have so much self-pity right now.

ETHAN

You need help Ross. Sincerely, you need to find someone to help you. I hope you get that.

ROSS

Whatever.

ETHAN (approaching the door)

Can you please tell Lucy I wanna talk? Just to explain things a little, please?

(ROSS is silent. ETHAN exits.)

ROSS

Fucking people. Too many frankly, if we're being honest. One in a million? Too many in that million. Suffocating in an imbalance of importance. My plays are great. *Blackstone* can still work, there's still time, and people'll watch a western, right? It's good enough, right? I am-

(LUCY enters.)

LUCY

Sorry that took so long. Some guy in line was looking for some kinda lubricating ointment. I do not wanna get in an elevator with that guy.

ROSS

Have you hitched your wagon to the S.S. Hairy, or do you still have a bit of self-respect?

LUCY

Mixing a few metaphors there but that's actually something I had to talk to you about.

ROSS

What? You give her the ol' Liran "fuck you" and realize you should've just fucked away before wasting the time?

LUCY

Ross, we've been over this. Hell yeah, I want it to be different but the world's the world's, and we need money if we don't wanna be factual, actual, starving artists. That'd just be cliché.

ROSS

So what? It'd be something, anything, purposeful. That's what we want, right? To be something other than some assholes everyone left? Come on Lucy, this has been the plan.

LUCY

I got you a job.

ROSS

I'm sorry?

LUCY

Harper gave me a two-year exclusive deal, meaning I work for her and only her and you get to come along writing posters and whatnot. Pretty much a branding expert without the expert part.

ROSS

That's not funny.

LUCY

It shouldn't be, it's not a joke.

ROSS

You sure? You must be, it's just process of elimination. You know that's a dumb idea, you know I would never take that kinda job, so the only possible option is you're practicing your tight-five.

LUCY

Ross, I don't wanna get into this. I want this just as much as you do, believe me, I don't wanna lay down what I want for financial stability but sometimes that's what you have to do.

ROSS

Okay, but think about it this way... what if we didn't have to do that?

LUCY

Ross-

ROSS

No seriously. I know the value of what I got and I'm sure what you've written's at least pretty good. We're not out of the game, far fucking from it.

LUCY

Can we not-

ROSS

Because, if we're being honest, and when are we not honest, there's just about a zero-sum chance we don't end up riding high on a cloud, floating above it all on our own merits. Remember, when it all comes down to it, it's just you and me, Lucy. We're stuck in it together and we got the privilege of showing the fucking world what we got. Show all those grubby fuckers doubting if we could even stand up straight that we're the apex predators of the art-

(LUCY takes out a prescription bottle from her pocket and throws it at ROSS.)

LUCY

Quit it, Ross!

ROSS

Quit what?

LUCY

This! All of this! All the "this" here. Can we just quit it?

ROSS

I don't see why we'd think of quitting when we're this close. You still got your manuscript? It'd be below me to do an adaptation but I could write one for it and make us a penny on the work.

LUCY

Who would watch that? If publishers handpicked by the crow wouldn't do it, what changed?

ROSS

Well, first off, do you really know who those publishers were? I don't know if this is some concocted conspiracy someone wrote online but some of these older stars think they have an in when they didn't and usually write off the whole book thing as a tax expense. For all you know, you might've not even talked to a real publisher, but her neighbor with a photocopier instead.

LUCY

What the fuck are you talking about? Everything you just said, literally amounted to just noise.

ROSS

It's a real thing, look it up.

LUCY

What's real?

ROSS

Second, who'd watch it? Once again, Lucy with the jokes! Seriously, who wouldn't watch, it'll be a Liran production. "Liran" lit brighter than "Albright" cause they'll go for me- us, not her.

LUCY

No one would watch that, Ross. No one cares about any Liran not named Arthur.

ROSS

They don't care about him, and they would care about us.

LUCY

No they wouldn't, they barely care about Arthur, Ross. He was the big shot and that was like ten years ago. It doesn't matter anymore, it's a Snapple fact at best.

ROSS

Yes they would care.

LUCY

No they won't.

ROSS

Yes they would.

LUCY

No they...No. No. I'm not doing this again. I'm not gonna let you get us right back into a fucking carousel conversation just to waste time and distract from the point.

ROSS

Carousel conversation?

LUCY

You say a billion nothing phrases everyday and you're caught on "Carousel conversation?" It's self-explanatory. We talk and talk and go round and round, up and down, spinning in an audible circle basking in the same self-pity as always.

ROSS

We're not trapped on a theme park ride, I don't know what you're getting at but we talk about-

LUCY

What do we talk about? What substance do we have when we sit down, walk around, ramble on and on for hours? You go on about your plays, I try to add any input to make your stuff a bit more digestible, you resist, I resist back, with self-doubt all-around til we land on contempt for our dead brother then we're right back on a destiny of greatness or how everything we've done was for some grand universal purpose just so it seems like it meant something. A fucking universal roundabout with the idea of an exit.

ROSS

I'm sorry, maybe I'm not hearing you right-

LUCY

Or maybe you're too drunk to listen.

ROSS

This is how you're talking to me? This is how you talk to the brother who got you through college? Got you a chance? I'm so sorry I wanted you to feel like you could do something. I'm so sorry that I wanted you to follow your dreams after living through a fucking nightmare.

LUCY

You're twisting what I'm saying. You're deflecting.

ROSS

I don't think so cause, if I remember right, I'm pretty sure I didn't do the things I wanted to, everything that would've made Ross Liran known worldwide, to work a nobody job at a fucking supermarket, and guess who knows me from then. Nobody. There's nobody left who knows me.

LUCY

Why does that matter, Ross!?! I appreciate what you did but sometimes you just gotta let go and acknowledge reality that maybe it was never gonna happen. Sometimes you just gotta say that falling face-first into a pile of manure isn't the first step of planting a fucking tree.

ROSS

We're all we have left. We're in this together! Why are you just giving up?

LUCY

Because I'm tired. I'm tired of living in a dump, writing and listening to people who wouldn't give a shit if I just dropped dead in the middle of the street. I'm fucking tired of hoping someone

would care. Everytime you say we're gonna make it, that we might finally mean something... diminishing returns. I can't keep going on and on, slamming my face into a brick wall trying to break rock with skull... it hurts, Ross. It hurts so much and I don't wanna hurt. I don't wanna feel bad anymore, or disappointed that something that could've gone my way was just gonna blow up in my face, but that's how this whole thing works, and I get that. But right now, I'd rather live numb than thinking I have a chance. Can't you at least see what I'm saying?

ROSS

I'm not chaining the rest of my life to behind-the-scenes. I'm sorry, but I have something. We have something, something meaningful. I can't trade that for designing fucking posters. You're throwing it away to be no one, a face in the crowd, wasting who you could be. You're letting them win, abandoning everything when it gets tough. You're just like dad and Arthur.

(A beat.)

LUCY

I'm done.

ROSS

What?

LUCY

We're not doing this anymore. I'm done, I can't do this with you anymore.

ROSS

So you're abandoning me? Giving up on everything?

LUCY

You don't care. You don't care if I leave. You don't care about me, you just wanted someone that'd listen to you, make you heard. You won't listen to me, for me, so what's the point?

(LUCY goes for the door.)

ROSS

That's not true, Lucy. Don't leave. You're not an audience, you're my sister. You can't leave. I love you more than anything but we need to stick together. I've just been focused on building our castle "Liran," you're a part of that too. Don't go. Please, Lucy, don't leave, I need you.

LUCY

Ross, Who was that girl on the couch? I know you were at the apartment, who was she?

ROSS

...A fan.

(A beat.)

LUCY

If you change your mind, that position's open. I can't go through this again, Ross, please, it's not worth it, it doesn't matter.

(LUCY exits.)

Scene 6 - UNTITLED

ROSS (Running at the door, screaming)

No! Lucy, come back! Please, don't go! Don't go! Okay, you're going, but... don't leave me here alone... Fine! Fuck you, Lucy! You weren't even that good of a writer. Why does everyone just have to leave me?! Dad, Arthur, fucking Cara, and now you? It doesn't matter, but it does! It matters so much. How could she, anybody, do this to me?! Throw everything away to spite me. She... No one. She's no one. I don't need no one. I am someone. I am someone. I am not no one.

(ROSS goes to pick the pill bottle off the ground but recoils.)

They're still here. Ants. I am not one of you! You're not supposed to be here. I crush ants. I'm not small. I'm not an ant. Leave me alone! I don't want you here, just get out. Get out! Why did she leave? They don't care. But why can't you leave for fuck's sake. Leave me alone!

(ROSS manically crushes the ground. Eventually, in his random stomping, he smashes the pill bottle. ROSS paces frantically, looking for stable ground. ROSS punches himself repeatedly, trying to snap out of it. He falls to the ground, rolling around in the dirt and glass, generally acting erratic and out of control. He gets back up. ROSS trips over the table, knocking the *Blackstone* script to the ground. ROSS freezes, eyes locked on the script, and scrambles to pick it up. Throughout ROSS' next monologue, the lights dim.)

It's gonna work. It's gotta work. Everything's fine, we're gonna be fine, great, we'll be fantastic. We're not alone. We are not alone. It's- we're on a mountain, standing over it all, right? I'm worth it, I'm not nothing, I'm not alone.

(UNNAMED emerges from the dark. Throughout the ensuing conversation, the stage only grows darker and the set and dressing fades away.)

UNNAMED

You are alone, kiddo. Darkly, Lonely.

ROSS

Go away.

UNNAMED

Not stay? Surely you'd like some companionship, given your surly state. Go away, please stay, I can't stay, I must go. Wouldn't you like someone to stay, comfort in closing?

ROSS

What's closing? There's nothing closing, my future's ocean wide. Not even, not even that wide. Wider, brighter. Fucking space-wide, yeah. Yeah, Definitely. I've got solar systems in my hand, infinity and forever, right? Tell me I'm right.

UNNAMED

Ross... you know what I'll say.

ROSS

Please... just this once. Tell me everything's gonna be okay. Please.

(A beat.)

UNNAMED

Does it matter? Truthfully, if the expanse was space, ocean, or the dirt on your feet, would it matter?

ROSS

I think so. People care when you matter.

UNNAMED

Or do you only matter when people care? Who cares now?

ROSS

If I do something great, if I- If I'm like Arthur and fucking explode into consciousness, then everyone.

UNNAMED

Kiddo, that won't do anything, plain and simple. Even Arthur, in perceived glory, A tidbit on a footnote, not even an acknowledgement in the book of life, despite the weight you give him.

ROSS

But I'm supposed to be something, it's my destiny, my destination. Sure, Arthur had to ride a spaceship to reach it, but that just means my journey's longer than his, that's all.

UNNAMED

You don't understand what you're saying.

ROSS

If Arthur could do it, then I need to do it too.

UNNAMED

And what did Arthur do?

ROSS

He became someone. I could be that, right? Emblazon in the stars, forever and for always.

UNNAMED

Rossy boy, you're sorely mistaken. If that's been your mission, why you've pushed them all away, why you're so alone, then, my boy, you're something of a fool.

ROSS

Thanks, but I disagree. They couldn't see my vision, what it's been leading to.

UNNAMED

Would you like to see?

ROSS

See what, another one of your ramblings about my pointlessness.

UNNAMED

In a sense, show your brother as an emulation. What you want. An image for the ages but all too little. You think of him in the stars, but he's far, far below. Even below you in the dirt, kiddo. Would you like to see?

(The lights flash on, a blinding brightness. The back wall of the stage displays a rocket on a launchpad.. A countdown begins starting from TEN. Smoke bellows from the base of the rocket, fire spews out and the ground begins to tremble. All effects intensify before

the countdown reaches one... we have liftoff. The rocket hurdles towards space, the rumble almost deafening throughout the auditorium. Epic orchestrals bombard in a cacophony of human ambition as the rocket breaches the stratosphere, charging headstrong into the great unknown. The auditorium shakes and rattles, knocking ROSS to the ground as he holds on for dear life, crushed by the G-Force. The sky darkens, the rocket approaches the great crest of the atmosphere. Hurling, catapulting to a great expanse of infinite brightness in infinite darkness, rocketing towards history and destiny. Then everything stops. A moment of stillness as ROSS gazes upon the cosmos. Potential upon Potential upon a Greatness Promised. And then it all collapses. A thundering, reverberating boom echoes as the ship shatters into a million pieces. The explosion and pieces fall out of frame, leaving only the vast image of space. After a pause, the projection slowly transitions to an image of a tranquil, restless ocean. Randomly and loudly, rocket parts splash into the water, buoying for a few seconds before sinking into the deep. Diving deep into the water, passing small schools of fish and luminescent algae, the sound of rushing water grows deeper and internal, the crushing pressure of the deep suffocating and crushing both the shuttle and ROSS as they both reach the seafloor. The tears of time and water setting the shuttle to ruin as it slowly succumbs to the enveloping of the seafloor.)

And that's it, Ross. None of it's worth nothing. Your brother is dead. You believe he died in the stars, shining above the world, haunting your very existence as a nobody. That's false. In these hyperbolic poetics, Arthur is dead, blown up in the stars but crashed deep, deep, into a trench. So high, and so very deep. They never fished them out, too deep for reasonable recovery. As we speak, erosion breaks away at the fuselage. The so-called American hero was not a man emblazoned in the sky, eternal in the stars, but a rotting corpse, washing away in the deep. Fading away. If only that were enough. The brilliant simplicity of it all is that all that's there is the story, the tragedy. Hubris and Defeat, wrapped into one. Like your little story you clutch so tight. So desperate to prove your worth, everything just fades, burns to the dirt to be washed away in the rain.

(UNNAMED takes the script from ROSS' hands. ROSS doesn't resist.)

Because that's all that's there. Creation for Destruction. Hubris for Downfall. Love for Pain. You write stories to escape your reality, but those fictions are more real to you than anything else. You believe so strongly you should be noticed, yet you balk at intimacy staring right in your face. Still, you feel like a forward momentum will arise, one fateful gust of wind in your sails to reach your Island of Infinite Possibilities. It's not coming. Even if it did, would it matter? All comes back to what it was, fades from the world, fades from the memory. Sooner or later, there will be a new tragedy, Ross, and Arthur won't exist, relegated back to a whisper of a thought under the roaring waves until there's nothing left but a speck. Fading, fading, fading.

(UNNAMED takes out a lighter and sets the script ablaze, dropping it in the waste bin. The stage grows darker and darker until the only light is the burning script and ROSS and UNNAMED are shrouded in nothingness.)

Do you understand? Finally, ultimately, do you understand.

ROSS

Yes.

UNNAMED

It was never going to happen. It's a shame, but it wouldn't have done any good. All in all, all goes back, all fades back to the wretches of the dark. Nothing's there. Nothing wants. Nothing remains. In the grand vastitudes of it all, who are you? Ross... or someone else? Someone or No one? The answer is neither, always shifting in between the purpose when it was never truly there.

ROSS

Why couldn't I just be what I wanted? I just wanted someone to care. Just to not be alone.

UNNAMED

Did you?

(A beat.)

I was never here to hurt you. I just wanted to help you see. See what it was all about and would amount to. A crashed shuttle, eaten away by the bottom of the sea. I'm sorry it took so long... but now it's all for you to do.

ROSS

Are you leaving? Please... I don't want to be alone.

UNNAMED

Don't worry, Ross. You have a friend wanting to see you. She's quite nice, she should care. Goodbye, Ross. I'm sorry it couldn't've worked out better.

(UNNAMED walks off into the darkness. ROSS stays motionless, knelt on the ground, staring off into that darkness. A faint spotlight shines on the side of the stage, introducing CARA in an electrical, warm light.)

CARA

What's up, Ross. I've been meaning to ask, how was the premiere?

ROSS

Cara? I thought... I thought you were-

CARA

The baddest bitch you'd've ever done saw?

ROSS

Dead.

CARA

Oh, that makes more sense... probably, I'm not really sure what's going on, probably another drug trip, your's or mine, who know? So how was the premiere, you know, I wouldn't know, cause, obviously, I wasn't there.

ROSS

It was... Why didn't you come with me... it would've been different.

CARA

Why couldn't you stay? I needed you, I needed someone.

(A beat.)

ROSS

I think I'm no one. I'm nothing. Just a heap of sand and dust, eroding to the fucking winds of time and stupidity. I'm sorry you wasted your time on nothing.

CARA

I didn't waste anything. What's there to waste? Time? Life? Be pretty dumb if you could waste that I think. Looking back, I think I did what I wanted to do: nothing. And I found out Finland's a thing so I think that's time well spent, don't you?

(A beat.)

ROSS

I'm sorry I didn't stay. I just... I wanted to do something that mattered. But I don't... I don't fucking matter.

CARA

Do you want to?

(A beat.)

ROSS

Please stay here, with me. I can't be alone. Just for a little bit.

CARA

Nope, this time you do something for me, make it up for me. Come with me.

ROSS

Where?

CARA

I dunno, somewhere, anywhere, fuck, maybe nowhere at all.

(A beat.)

ROSS

My brother died in an explosion, astroided down to the Earth in an inferno. People cared about him. My mother wasted away to nothing in a third floor hospital bed, only two people were at the funeral. I've felt dead for as long as I've lived, missing a piece of whatever it was that kept me going. A faint stain on some page in a book left in a forgotten shelf of the library. Irrelevant waste, product of ever expansion. Write to create, write to destroy, to find that recognition of whatever was left of me, mine it for meaning. Mine it deep, deep, into the ground, into the waters, fostering it to fester, ever and for always, drowning in my own drink. Apart from the world. But everyone left, my own sister, my own mind, wanting me to forget my needs in the hope of sedation. Fucking pills everywhere. Can I make something that matters, where it doesn't matter? Cara, where you're going, will it count what I do?

CARA

I don't know, you've said a lot of stuff so let's just go with a good ol' fashion "maybe." I like to think I'd care about you, and you'd care about me, is that enough?

ROSS

What's the opposite of loneliness, Cara?

CARA

Not caring about being alone, probably.

(A beat.)

ROSS

Okay... Okay. I think... let's go.

(The lights go out. The curtains fall.)

Scene 7 - ()

Setting: The curtains slowly lift to an unremarkably lit stage covered in a natural layer of dust.

(LUCY walks onstage from a side door. She is carrying a ceramic urn.)

LUCY

You really did it. I don't know why I'm surprised, I guess I thought the dramatic depression was just, well, dramatic. I hope you don't mind the canister, not that you get any say in any of it. I mean, if you don't like ceramics I would just say too bad, I don't like you being dead, so I guess we'll both be unhappy for a little bit... a lot a bit. I don't know if you've got attachment to this kinda place, hell, you probably wish you weren't just a pile of dust right now, want a monument or something instead, but ya know, monuments, mausoleums, they cost a bit of money and, in keeping with the your spirit, we're go with the cheap, cheap, cheap. That's the most you deserve, right? Don't worry, I'm not trying to place some kind of existential crisis-ish meaning on what I'm doing, god knows I don't know what I'm doing. All I know is that there's little meaning to it. Yeah? You dropped everything for nothing, dropped me for the idea of a potential of something when I was standing right here. I don't even know what I'm explaining anything, talking even, you're not here, you're just inanimate dust I'm dumping here. Loose sand in a bag.

(A beat.)

I think you'd like this spot. It's being decommissioned so there's nothing here but legacy and wasted investments, perfect for you. Mix in with the rest of the dust and maybe you'll actually be a part of this whole theater thing. Meaningful? Probably not. If it was, well, you'd wanna be around to see it. But you're not so that's that. A pointless gesture to no one but some clumps of dust... fun way to spend a Saturday night. It's not like I was gonna do anything better.

(A beat. LUCY looks down at her phone.)

He's not gonna show up is he?

(LUCY sits down on the floor, placing the urn next to her.)

I'm not surprised. Really is your last wish fulfilled, right? "If that nincompoop Ethan Rayner shows up to my funeral, I'll kill myself again." Then you'd say just the dumbest fucking metaphor or idiom that in no way could ever be seen as anything but a stretch like "It's a wheelbarrel on a Tuesday shipping sofas to the fish," something with some real chutzpah of substance. Then we'd have some back-and-forth of mild squabbling and end up right back where we came from, another pointless conversation with a couple of small people. Then we get right back up and get on with what we always did, slam our head against a wall 'til we started bleeding, thinking it was progress. But now you're not here. You're not here and no one's here. Everyone's gone. Just me and some cheap dust. Me and dust. And that's it. That's all there is.

(The lights around LUCY dims. UNNAMED walks in, standing in the shadows.)

UNNAMED

Hello.

LUCY

Who the fuck're you supposed to be? And do not say my subconscious cause if the deepest parts of my brain are some middle-aged dweeb larping as a norwegian art film, fucking slash my wrists before I get the chance.

UNNAMED

No, nothing like that.

LUCY

Okay... so you are?

UNNAMED

I'm not.

LUCY

Awesome. Well, if you're not here to do anything, can you kindly fuck off back to whatever shadow realm you were summoned from.

UNNAMED

I'm here for this. Your brother knew me well.

LUCY

Makes sense, a bunch of grim dispositions hanging out. Probably cried about the universe over a slice of pizza.

UNNAMED

Lucy, do you understand why I'm here? It took your brother forever to understand, and then he threw my offerings away. I don't want you to follow the same path.

LUCY

You can't tell me anything that I don't already know. He was an idiot with a thick skull. I get it, dude. You'd be wasting your breath and all the oh-so worthless time I've got.

UNNAMED

Lucy... that's not the point. Do you understand what's happening? What happened to-

LUCY

I fucking get it! Okay?! My brother's dead. Arthur's dead. Mom's dead. Dad, who fucking knows what happened to him? They're all gone, Everyone's gone, and all that's here is me. Is that enough for you? I'm alone. They're dead for nothing and I'm here for nothing. No point, no hope, no dreams. I'll take a dead-end job at a place called Dirty Hairy's, okay? If your point is about the utter nothingness of it all, I fucking get it. Can you please go away? If you're who kept bothering him with your musing, no wonder he's not here.

UNNAMED

I'm sorry, Lucy. I don't mean to be a bother, to spread pain like a plague, I'm just here for a truth, to pull you back from the path before you walk off the cliff, falling into the rapids. I don't want you to hurt.

LUCY

Yeah, well, you're doing a real shit job at that.

(A beat.)

UNNAMED

I understand. It does hurt. Right now, I know it hurts. But the tide always comes back to wash it all away.

LUCY

I just... I feel so alone.

UNNAMED

I know... but I'm still here. I'll always be. No one is ever truly alone. I hope I see you around.

(UNNAMED exits as the lights turn on. LUCY sits in silence. ETHAN enters.)

ETHAN

Hey.

LUCY

Hey.

ETHAN

I'm sorry I'm late but... thanks for inviting me.

LUCY

It's nothing, literally. I'm still pissed at you but I-

ETHAN

Don't like being alone for this sort of thing.

LUCY

Yeah.

(A beat.)

ETHAN

How're you feeling? Ya know, considering all of this.

LUCY

I don't know. I'm trying not to feel anything frankly. Just counting down the days til I'm here again given how everything's going. Me, trying not to mourn again, working a dead-end job, again. I'll be better than Sisyphus at least. At least I'll know what I'm doing's pointless.

ETHAN

Come on, Lucy. You know that's not true. It's gonna work out eventually. Sure, you're taking a hit but that's it, just a bump in the road.

LUCY

But that's all there is. Bumps in the road hoping, begging there's an actual destination. If all the bumps are just heading for a cliffside, why not just swerve and stop it all now.

ETHAN

I mean, cliffs have some pretty views. The ones I've seen at least.

LUCY

That's not the point.

ETHAN

Then what's your point?

LUCY

The point? The point is... there is no point in all of this. You, me, everything anyone's ever wanted, it's all fucking pointless.

ETHAN

...Yeah... What's your point?

LUCY

I just said there is no point in all of this. You're gonna die, I'm gonna be alone, everything's just pointless, no use in trying for one.

ETHAN

Yeah it's pointless but what's the point in proclaiming the pointlessness of it all?

LUCY

I don't know, does it matter?

ETHAN

I think so. Ya know, I've spent my whole life feeling like I had no control, feeling so deep down that I couldn't affect anything on my life cause, at the end of the day, it was gonna end up the same way, so no use in trying to change it cause what would it change? I could cry at a broken foot, but then I'd be crying, so why not laugh at it all. But then, I was talking to your brother, I was looking for you. I wanted to explain why I didn't wanna go through with the chemo. Get you in my headspace. But, like he always did, your brother was talking, aggressively, pretty coarsely, but he made a couple points. I mean, it all comes down to our experiences, and you don't get any more of those giving up. He'd always talked about a castle: the castle "Liran," impenetrable to time. Ramming head against wall trying to break it. Leaving yourself broken, bleeding and bruised trying to make a crack. I guess I'd always seen that as pain, useless pain at that. Going at something for no other reason than to break something then sticking on it, resenting the failures and doing it again. But that wall's just a bunch of brick, and those bricks are just compacted dust, And if all that dust can make a brick, well a helluva lot more of 'em can make a castle. Ram the wall enough, you get enough dust to make a castle. And sure, it might just be some dust, or sand, or something knocked down by just some wind, but it's your castle, for as long as you can keep it, it's yours. Dust with all the fucking blood and brains it took to build it. I don't know. I'm not a

poet, not a writer, just a construction guy, but I've been thinking about that. I could give it all up, but then I couldn't admire the castle I built, and who I built it with.

LUCY

What are you talking about, Ethan? I can't have another person blasting me with random proverbs while I'm already down. What are you saying?

ETHAN

Lucy... I'm getting help.

LUCY

What?

ETHAN

Chemo. I'm starting Monday.

(A beat. LUCY stands up and hugs ETHAN. He hugs back.)

LUCY

I've just been so alone-

ETHAN

So have I.

(They take a moment, holding one another, then they let go.)

So... I heard you were going back to the ol' waitressing gig.

LUCY

I don't know. Gotta balance the practicality. I need the money and Harper's offering good money considering the job. But I'll be miserable. I've been miserable and do I wanna do that again, for two years?

ETHAN

It's only miserable if you're alone. Penting it all up... why don't you write about that?

LUCY

Write about what?

ETHAN

“*Lucy Liran: Washed-Up Waitress Working for a Win.*” Book about you and how much it sucks to work in hospitality.

LUCY

“*Washed-Up Waitress?*”

ETHAN

I thought you writer types liked alliteration?

LUCY

Sure, it’s a defining trait, posing as poetry... I like that, we can workshop the title a bit, or a lot, but yeah. Use misery practically, hell, maybe even corner that depressed waitress market that’s been clamoring for their story to be told but... ya know, my story. I like that. Thanks.

ETHAN

Don’t mention it. I’ll be first in line to pick it up when you’re published.

(A beat.)

LUCY

So what now?

ETHAN

I guess just spread the ashes and then we could get something to eat?

LUCY

Okay, sounds like a plan.

(LUCY picks up the urn and takes a minute to hold it in her arms, feeling for any warmth that could still be lingering. LUCY, quickly, gives a slight hug to the ceramic container before opening the urn and dumping the loose contents all over the floor.)

See ya Broseph Stalin. Maybe, if things go well, I’ll write that “Ballad of Asshole Rantings” after all.

(A beat.)

(*Looking into the urn.*) Did I get all of it?

ETHAN

I think so.

LUCY

I'm not sure. I think there's still some clumps.

ETHAN

Hit the side a couple times, knock them out.

(LUCY hits the side of the urn a couple times, some dust clumps fall out.)

LUCY

There we go... so that's it. That's it.

ETHAN

So... where do you wanna eat?

LUCY

I don't know. Somewhere casual.

ETHAN

How bout Marmen's? Who doesn't like bagels at 10:30 at night.

LUCY

I can't think of a better meal for some mourning.

(ETHAN goes to leave but LUCY stands still, staring down at the floor.)

ETHAN

You okay?

LUCY

I don't think so, but I think it's okay. It'll wash, at least a little... but I think I'm okay with that. I mean, what'd be the point in feeling anything if it wasn't gonna stick for just a bit, most go away but everyone leaves a little something, even just dust. A little pointless in the grand scheme but what's the point in that?

(A beat.)

Okay, I'm ready.

(The lights go out. In the darkness, THE DRUNKARD, silhouetted, comes out with a broom and sweeps away the dust and ashes from the stage. The curtains close.)

END OF PLAY.