

The Antique Shop

Chris Annas-Lee

LEO RAINWATER: Of an undefined age. In any other imaginable setting he would look out of place, with his grey suit and blue and pink striped bow-tie, but here his world weary smile seems remarkably at home. He describes himself as a teacher. As much as he would deny it, he is a product of the Shop, and his touches can be seen all around it, as its affect is apparent on him.

MAGGIE GOLDBERG: Early 20s. Shy. Wearing a floral dress and cowboy boots.

SOLDIER/DAVID/GENGHIS: 19. Lost and exhausted, with dirt smeared on his hands and face. Wearing fatigues.

MARC: 30s. He's almost Indiana Jones: khakis, a leather jacket covering a sweater vest and polo, glasses. But there's a desperate need in his eyes.

SETTING: *An antique shop, just like we all imagine. Required is a door, with bells on the handle to announce a customer's arrival, a tall stool, tables covered in black cloth with antiques laid upon them including a stuffed bear, an analog screw gun, a diary, a toaster, a dictionary, a trophy, a lockbox, and a gum-ball machine, among many others. An old bicycle rests nearby. A rug stretches over half the floor. It is old and very well worn. A few clocks line the wall, each ticking a different time. Everything is covered by a fine layer of dust. There is a large sign reading simply "Antiques."*

[As the lights rise a strange chanting fills the air: a woman's voice in the black, muffled by thick radio static, repeating a sequence of numbers. Light's rise as the noise fades from the main speakers to a small radio, which LEO is trying to tune. All he can get is the strange chanting, and a bit of static in between channels, and though he isn't surprised by this, it frustrates him. He is waiting for something, and passing the time until it arrives. He curses gently, under his breath. The lights continue to gradually rise as the scene is thoroughly set. Finally, he coughs, gently. A dull static hum fills the air as the chanting moves from the radio to the main speakers again. The lights get brighter, slightly warmer. LEO sits down. When the noise leaves a girl, holding a script, quietly enters and slates herself]

MAGGIE: Hi, I'm Maggie Goldberg and I'll be performing a monologue from "Nuts" by Tom Topor.

[Waits for acknowledgment from LEO, who does not respond. After a beat proceeds anyway]

When I was a little girl, I used to say to her, "I love you to the moon and down again and around the world and back again." And she used to say to me, "I love you to the sun and down again and around the stars and back again." Do you remember, mama? And I used to think, wow, I love mama, and mama loves me, and what can go wrong? *[Pause]* What went wrong, mama? I love you and you love me, and what went wrong? You see, I know she loves me, and I love her, and--so what? So what? She's over there-

Sorry, do you mind if I start over?

LEO: Not at all

MAGGIE: Oh, um. I'm sorry, I'll just-

LEO: There's no need to apologize.

MAGGIE: Well, that's kind of you.

LEO: I think you're an excellent actor.

MAGGIE: Do you mean it? I worked really hard on it. But every time... "You see, I know she loves me, and I love her, and--so what? So what? She's over there--" And... I'm sorry. This is only my fifth audition, and I really do want the part... I moved out here to make a career for myself and... well... *[Looks to LEO, trusts him]* It's not working. I'll probably be moving back soon. Aw, shucks. This town ain't what I thought at all. I'm not what I thought at all. Not – at – all. I starred in my high school musical. Three hundred people came to see it. I thought it went great. All my friends said to go here, they said there wasn't a future for me where I was. Heck, even my mother was supportive for once. I saved for near a month to buy the ticket and... Not any disrespect to you, sir, but I believe I've made a fool of myself by coming here at all. I'll just go.

LEO: Wait.

MAGGIE: Yes, sir?

LEO: You haven't made a fool of yourself.

MAGGIE: What makes you say that, sir?

LEO: Because I'm afraid you're not at your audition.

MAGGIE: What do you mean?

LEO: Don't be ashamed, it happens to a lot of people.

MAGGIE: If I'm not at the audition, where am I?

LEO: You're in an Antique Shop.

MAGGIE: How... *[She sees the unfamiliarity of her surroundings]* Oh, that's just like me. I must have taken the wrong door. Oh, dear. I'm sorry I... wasted your time. I'll be going. Sorry again, sir.

[She exits through the door, then returns through another door nearby, as if she had just left]

Well, I... the door... it-

LEO: -has lost its function?

MAGGIE: ...doesn't work.

LEO: I know, it's one way, I'm afraid.

MAGGIE: *[Slightly frightened, backing up to the door]* Pardon?

LEO: It's all right, you'll be gone in a minute anyway. Less than that, actually.

MAGGIE: What's your meaning?

LEO: Where were you a moment ago?

MAGGIE: The lobby...

LEO: Then in twenty seconds you'll be in the lobby again. You'll be called in shortly after that, no doubt, and you'll audition, and I'm sure you'll do fine. From my brief time with you, you seem like an honest girl, and I don't want you to give up. Don't give up. Oh, and if you don't mind *[He reaches into his pocket and withdraws a letter. Handing it to her]* Could you put this in the mail for me?

MAGGIE: *[Taking it]* Who are you?

LEO: I'm Leo.

MAGGIE: No, who are you?

LEO: *[Walks to her, touches her hand]* There isn't time to explain, I'm afraid. Just be glad,

everything is going to be alright.

[A flash of light, then blackout arrives with the static hum, and the sound of the woman, chanting numbers. When lights return and the noise leaves, LEO stands where he was but MAGGIE is gone, in her place is her script. LEO picks it up, puts it on the table with the other antiques and, checking his pocket watch, sits back down. He notices that the radio has turned on again, and is still playing the numbers. He turns it off, disappointed]

Forty three thousand, eight hundred and one. I hope she gets the part. *[Looks to his watch]* Ten seconds to the next arrival, as usual... I wonder-

[All at once, a loud gunshot from offstage, red lights flare from behind the door as a soldier bursts into the Antique Shop, out of breath. More gunshots and screams are heard before the door is closed with a resounding thud. SOLDIER points his gun at LEO, then, understanding that he isn't a threat, lowers it:]

SOLDIER: Quick, we have to barricade the door. *[LEO does nothing]* Move!

LEO: You're safe.

SOLDIER: *[Talking over him]* Why are you still here? Evac was days ago.

LEO: You're still here.

SOLDIER: You see the uniform? You see the goddamn gun? Goddamn it. *[Listens]* You're right, the squadron's passed by. Two years of this, and you'd think we'd learned how to get some goddamn RECON DONE. Instead, what? Send us grunts in to what? To WHAT? Fuck.

[He slides to the ground. A pause. As the adrenaline fades:]

I don't want to die, okay? Sanders was right behind me, I- I think he- Fuck...

[He listens again, his hand, holding the gun, is shaking. He steadies it]

Do they bury you, after, do you wonder?

[LEO wonders, but says nothing]

Cause it could be months before we get anyone out to look for bodies.

[Silence]

So, do you think they bury you? Or cremate you? Or fucking piss on you, or something? My dad wanted to be cremated. It was in his will and everything: wanted to be sprinkled into the ocean in fall, in deep November, to be dissolved into the water, float down and up until there wasn't any more of him to float, there was just us, you know? He went in the summer, but I could've kept him in an urn or something for a few months. He was a biologist, and he said we all came from the same stuff, that when we all died we should go back to what we were. The earth. And the earth from something earlier, and back and back to nothing. It was a nice thought... I couldn't do it. I had him buried next to Mom. *[Cries]* I still needed them to be there, even if they weren't, you know, there.

LEO: *[Softly]* What's your name?

SOLDIER: David.

LEO: David.

DAVID: Or Genghis. My platoon calls me Genghis. Called me Genghis.

LEO: Genghis?

DAVID: You know, like Khan... Like Kublai.

LEO: Kublai what?

DAVID: Kublai... Khan.

LEO: Genghis...

GENGHIS: Yeah. For my temper, I guess... My emotion.

LEO: Your emotion.

GENGHIS: Raw emotion.

LEO: ...Your emotion.

GENGHIS: I cry a lot, okay?

LEO: *[Disarmingly]* Okay.

GENGHIS: I haven't heard any gunfire.

LEO: It's always quiet here, except for the clocks. Ironic.

GENGHIS: Why ironic?

LEO: Considering the effects of time.

GENGHIS: The... effects of time.

LEO: Lack of them, really. The clocks are pointless. They just make me feel at home. As if I am in the world.

GENGHIS: And you're not?

LEO: Dear me, no. We're in an Antique Shop.

[He gestures to the sign, GENGHIS acknowledges it]

...The Antique Shop.

GENGHIS: I can't hear the bombs either.

LEO: Beyond the door, they fade away.

GENGHIS: *[Reminded]* The door, yeah.

LEO: Don't bother.

[GENGHIS goes to it anyway, raises his weapon, opens it, exits and instantly enters again from another entrance]

That's not-

LEO: Where you came from.

GENGHIS: -Right. That's not right. Where are we?

LEO: The Antique Shop... *[Remembering his manners]* Would you like an antique? *[Gestures]*

GENGHIS: And there's no way out? *[Begins to look for a way out]*

LEO: Not for another four minutes there isn't.

[GENGHIS finds another door, the Tunnel, gestures to it]

That's the bathroom. I'm afraid we've been out of toilet paper for some time.

GENGHIS: Where did the city go?

[LEO goes to the table, picks up the script]

LEO: See here.

GENGHIS: Paper.

LEO: See what's on it.

GENGHIS: A screenplay.

LEO: See what's in it.

GENGHIS: What?

LEO: A story.

GENGHIS: Written on it?

LEO: No, in it. A girl.

GENGHIS: I don't see "A Girl" in the character descriptions.

LEO: She not in the screenplay, she's in the story.

[GENGHIS looks at him. "They're not the same thing?" he seems to say.]

No, they're not the same thing. She was here only a moment ago, and then she left, just as you will, and I missed her when she was gone. A nice girl. She reminded me of my sister, Elizabeth, after a fashion.

[GENGHIS doesn't understand. LEO checks his watch] We have a little time. Here is what I know: *[He speaks with practiced timing]* In 1862, a farmer's wife in deep Georgia perceived on the horizon Sherman's army, marching to scorch her earth to dust. She ran to the barn, through the door, and when she closed that door she found herself here. In 1929, a construction worker finished screwing in a door on the twelfth floor of the Chrysler building. He watched a man fall from an I-Beam to his left. Rushing to get help he opened his door, entered, and came out here. In 1992, my family was vacationing in Mexico when I was kidnapped. I don't remember my parent's faces, or the faces of my captors, but I do remember a door in the shack they kept me in. When I broke my bonds and ran through the door I arrived here, and I found a man dead on the floor. It was the construction worker, *[Goes to the table, picks up the diary]* and this diary. I keep a diary now, too. It seems fitting.

[GENGHIS looks around, still confused]

I feel like a teacher. No matter how many times I explain it, for every new batch of students I have to say it all over again. *[He chuckles, resignedly]* Alright, then. When do you come from? *[GENGHIS stares blankly]*

Do you have a wallet? Currency's usually the best indicator.

[GENGHIS pulls out a wallet, hands him a twenty]

Issue 2003. It is 2003 when you come from?

GENGHIS: Nothing new has been minted in years. It's 2042.

LEO: So far ahead.

GENGHIS: The mints were in the cities, they were the first to be hit.

LEO: I mean to explain to you... it might be 2042 where you came from, but here there is no date. No night, nor day. There isn't even sunshine. I've grown to miss the sunshine most of all. *[Smiles weakly]* My point is this: from every niche of history you have come. Many of them are long dead by my standards, but they come regardless. And then, just as unexpectedly, they again depart.

GENGHIS: *[Going to the antiques]* Then these are all...

LEO: From the visitors... *[He chuckles]* My customers...

GENGHIS: How do you pass the time?

LEO: It is difficult, sometimes. Recently I've begun writing poetry. And I talk to myself. And to you, all of you. One after another. Three a day, for forty years since I found myself locked in this place. One from the 80s, the 70s, the 1870s, in no particular order, forty three thousand, eight hundred and...two, but never anyone from the future. It's strange.

GENGHIS: I'm different?

LEO: Sorry to disappoint, but no, not in the grand scheme. Maybe this is a ripple of something different, a change in the fabric, something that will later arrive. *[Checks his watch, reaches into his pocket and pulls out another letter. He hands it to GENGHIS]* Do you mind putting this in

the mail for me?

GENGHIS: The civilian mail was suspended months ago, but I'll to get it where it needs to go.

LEO: It's to my family. Maybe my sister is still alive where you're going.

GENGHIS: *[Unfolds it, with permission from LEO, he reads from it]* "To my dear Elizabeth, wherever you might be. You all must think that I am dead, but don't worry, I am quite safe.

There is always food here, and the company is varied. I've been trying to get back, trying with every breath. And one day, I will. I miss you, but you must have hope for me, it's all that keeps me going. I love you with all my heart."

LEO: You have twenty seconds, by the way.

GENGHIS: Where will I go?

LEO: You'll be back in battle, I'm afraid. Nothing will have changed.

GENGHIS: No, not nothing. *[He reaches out for LEO as the dull hum and chanting returns]*
I never got your name.

LEO: It's-

[Blackout. As the lights return GENGHIS has been replaced with his handgun]

Leo...

[LEO goes to the handgun and picks it up. To the Shop]

He needed this! How could you? Intractable as ever, I see.

[He places the weapon down on one of the tables. Sits back down, looking to the door.]

A fisherman, perhaps. Maybe a television producer.

[The red lights flare, as thunder claps from offstage. Something is different: the electric hum returns in earnest, static flashes around the stage, and, quite suddenly, a man stands in the open doorway. He steps forward. There is a long pause as he looks around, a sense of victory in his eyes, his gaze locks on LEO. The silence continues]

Do you have anything to say?

MARC: *[Still in awe]* Should I?

LEO: You don't have to, it's just... usually people say something, when they first come in.

MARC: That's strange, that I never thought of what I would say.

LEO: Hmm?

MARC: That I've spent my life trying... and I never stopped to think what I'd do if I succeeded.

LEO: Succeeded in what?

MARC: *[Withdrawing a letter]* Did you write this? Are you Leo? Is this place...

LEO: *[Standing]* Who are you?

MARC: *[Overcome, speaking quickly]* I've been tracking you're letters since I was twelve.

LEO: What?

MARC: When one of them arrived in the mailbox of my family's new house, the one you sent to your summer home in Cape Cod?

LEO: I sent two hundred to Cape Cod...

MARC: I read it and reread it. "To my dear Elizabeth, wherever you might be. You all must think that I am dead, but don't worry, I am quite safe." Don't you see? I've found you.

LEO: *[Sitting back down]* It can't be true...

MARC: I found a letter that you sent through in 1942. It mentions a construction worker from the Chrysler Building. Was he the first Clerk?

LEO: Clerk?

MARC: You know, of the antique shop.

LEO: Why, no, there were many others, but-

MARC: I went to building's twelfth floor, I tried every single door. When that didn't work I found the barn in Canada, where the salesman came in? The bathroom in Oregon. In a graveyard in Arizona, the mausoleum where the gravedigger entered. That bridal shop in Los Angeles, and the top booth at Fenway Park. Finally, I made the connection: the numbers you talk about hearing when the visitors leave, the woman that repeats them over and over?

LEO: The radio...

[MARC goes to the radio, turns it on. The numbers flood the stage]

MARC: I found them. They exist out in the real world, Leo. They're real. Broadcast by radio stations no one can seem to locate, but I triangulated one, and I followed it all the way to a shack in Mexico. I broke in, and there was this door... I've spent fifteen years searching... and I never thought of what I'd say...

[LEO has frozen, slightly shaking, staring at his watch]

Haven't you ever felt there was something missing from the universe? Something hidden, put away for safe keeping, something that belongs to us all that now, stolen, makes a little empty space inside you? But I...

[MARC turns the radio off, in the deafening silence:]

I found it.

L-Leo?

LEO: Why... why would you spend fifteen years...

MARC: The first letter I found, I kept it just as a souvenir. It never meant anything to me. But the line "I've met such people. From all ages of the world. Just yesterday a woman from 1927 visited. But that can't be right, the year is 2009, it's been 17 years since I was trapped in here and now it is 2009, if time moves the way it should. But if she's here... She'd dead, Elizabeth..."

LEO: ... "The dead visit the antique shop."

MARC: "The dead visit the Antique Shop." That's what you said. There's no other explanation. Thirteen years after you're letter arrived... my partner... he was killed in a train accident.

LEO: I... I'm sorry.

MARC: You can manipulate the Antique Shop.

LEO: What?

MARC: "The dead visit," that's what you said. You can pull them here.

LEO: No! I have no control.

MARC: You must, you can make the dead come here. That's what your letters said!

[LEO checks his watch, sees the time ticking down. His attitude changes]

LEO: Did any of my letters ever get to my family?

MARC: No, Leo. Just after you were declared dead they moved, they didn't leave a forwarding address. When I found your house in New Jersey there were over a hundred letters, some of them forty years old.

LEO: And did you... did you ever find my family? My father, mother... Elizabeth?

MARC: Its 2054, Leo. I'm sorry, but they're all dead. A lot of people are.

LEO: *[Shaking visibly now, still staring at his watch]* You have ten seconds...

MARC: The timer... you're 1983 letter mentioned a timer... but, wait, it can't be over. Fifteen years- you said the dead visited. You said you could make them. *[The hum has begun in earnest. He is shouting]* It's not fair! *[As his voice is drowned out]* I loved him, I need to see him.

LEO: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

[Stands, runs to him. Blackout. When the lights return, LEO is kneeling before the door, silently sobbing. In MARC's place is the letter LEO had just given to GENGHIS, now faded with age. Slowly, LEO raises his head. Quietly, he picks the letter up, and places it down on a table. All of a sudden he grabs the handgun, puts it in his mouth, and pulls the trigger. The silent click of an empty cartridge. LEO places it back down. As the lights fade, the numbers are heard, softly chanting]

CAROUSEL

Louis Loftus

[At rise Dr. Todd Miller, a 60 year-old college professor is sitting at his desk grading papers when a student of his, Elly Bishop walks in. She seems worried about disturbing him.]

ELLY. Uh, Dr. Miller? Sorry to bother you, but could I ask you a question?

MILLER. Oh Elly, so nice to finally hear your voice. I believe your comments today were limited to a “sorry” after I asked you to put your phone away. [Beat] That’s not acceptable.

ELLY. [Apologetic] I know. I wasn’t texting though, I was just checking the time.

MILLER. Not the phone Elly, it’s unacceptable not to participate, or at least not be engaged. There’s been a lot of that happening frankly.

ELLY. I’m sorry. It’s just I . . .

MILLER. [Breaking the awkwardness in a friendly way.] Eh, don’t apologize. Ask your question.

ELLY. Oh, well, we’ve talked a lot about death and futility this week, and I was wondering . . .

MILLER. [His interest peaked] Yes?

ELLY. Will that be on the midterm, because it wasn’t in the syllabus, and I’d like to know going in?

MILLER. [Miller lowers his head disappointed, but quickly recovers, a subtle smile across his face.] Elly, the readings I assign, do you ever think about them outside of this class? Not when you’re writing an essay, but just in a lull between activities, they ever come up?

ELLY. Yeah, sometimes they do. I mean they’re sort of out there, you know? So not all time. But sure, if I’m in one of those moods to be thoughtful, I’ll think about them.

MILLER. Right . . . cause you know, they were written by human beings who live on earth. They’re commentaries on a life not completely dissimilar from your

own. I'm just wondering if you've ever made a connection there. [Beat] I worry this about all my students but, [beat] some more than others. [Elly struggles to speak. Miller breaks the silence.] For example, you asked about death, wonderful example! You're going to die. Easy to relate to. Are all of your concerns about that subject related exclusively to its presence on our midterm?

ELLY. No, but you can't like think about death all the time. People who do that are missing life you know? If you only think about this stuff all day, you're going to go insane.

MILLER. Of course, I agree but . . . well, what do you think about all day? [Beat] I'm sorry don't answer that, it's a rhetorical question. I just see you drifting through a lot. I see so many people just drifting and . . . [There is a brief silence, Elly checks her phone quickly, until a thought comes to Dr. Miller.] Elly, what gives your life meaning?

ELLY. [Looking up from her phone.] What?

MILLER. What gives your life meaning, what makes certain things more important than others? [Searching for the words.] What . . . gives your life meaning? [Laughing] That's the only way I can word it.

ELLY. [Unsure of Miller's direction and still wanting an answer to her question.] My friends and family, I guess,

MILLER. [Rolling his eyes, he speaks sarcastically.] Yeah, church and the fourth of July too. No, honestly, what's something that you really love?

ELLY. [She takes a moment.] I love music.

MILLER. Wonderful, that's perfect. Music is one of man's greatest opiates. It conjures up our most powerful emotions and . . . what exactly do you like about it?

ELLY. Well, kind of what you were saying, I guess. You can get lost in it. You know when you're driving and it's really loud, so like the rear view mirror is shaking with the bass? You don't have to worry or think when it's playing, you can just . . . drive.

MILLER. That's beautiful Elly. But now, consider something. If you're not in the car when that music is blasting, it's not doing much for you is it?

ELLY. [Amused by the obviousness of the question.] No.

MILLER. It's not doing much for anyone. Actually, it's poignant that you should use music as an example, because the official definition of sound, precludes it to what is heard. So, really, when you're not in the car to hear it, that radio's not making a sound. It seems that you are the more integral part of that equation. Your giving something to music, it's not giving something to you. Without music, there's Elly, but without Elly there's no music. See what I'm saying?

ELLY. [She thinks for a moment. Finally, she speaks, but haltingly] Yeah, I give my life meaning. [More fluidly] People give their lives meaning.

MILLER. [Estatic] Exactly! That's brilliant Elly, without thinking and interpreting people there's no difference between random vibrations and Frank Zappa,

ELLY. Who?

MILLER. It's not important, but do you see where we're heading towards?

ELLY. Yeah, existentialism, but I do kind of have to get goi . . .

MILLER. [Cutting her off, desperately trying to hold her attention.] Well, I bring it up because, the other day I was wondering about what might happen if it were possible to get, bare with me, the entire universe, the fabric space and time, to repeat itself, on the same five minute interval over and over again, like a scratched record-a way to loop time infinitely. You see where I'm going with this?

ELLY. [He has lost her.] Um . . . not really.

MILLER. Let's say, hypothetically, a scientist actually built a machine, a particle accelerator or something, that could make this experiment happen. We could pick a five minute time period and live it out again and again, forever. If that were possible, don't you think we should do it?

ELLY. [She takes a second to think, still bewildered by his questioning.] I mean, wouldn't that be horrible, never getting beyond the same five minutes?

MILLER. We wouldn't know we were on repeat, we would just live our five minutes endlessly, oblivious to our immortality.

ELLY. If we didn't know, then what's the point?

MILLER. Well, you know that the Universe has got an expiration date on it right? Eventually you, me, and everything everywhere will be gone. Dust. Nothing.

When that happens there won't be any thinking or interpreting people. So, by your own reasoning there will be no meaning left in anything.

ELLY. [Surprised and taken aback by the use of her paper in Dr. Miller's argument.] I mean, I wouldn't put too much stock on what I . . .

MILLER. [Energetically.] Well this stops that from happening! We would never get to the end of the Universe because we would be on our proverbial time carousel. Going around and around again, avoiding oblivion! Keeping meaning, humor, passion, love all that good stuff alive forever!

ELLY. That's an interesting idea. I hate doing this though, but my ride is leaving soon and I really just need to know about the midterm so . . .

MILLER. [Ignoring her second statement.] It's not just an interesting idea Elly. It's real! [He goes to his desk then produces a small device, which resembles a garage door opener, from his pocket. It is silver and has a big red button in the middle and a long antenna sticking out of it.] This remote control triggers a particle accelerator deep within this building that can really make this happen! Five minutes after I press this button, you, me, and the whole universe will go back in time and live out that five minutes again and again.

ELLY. [Heading for the door] Ok, I'm not really sure what you're doing now, but I actually have to go. I'll just study death for the midterm, it's ok.

MILLER. [Blocking her from leaving, he is emphatic.] Ok, you don't believe me, that's understandable. I'm not asking you to believe me, I'm just asking you to choose. I'm putting the fate of the Universe in your hands. Do I press the button or not?

ELLY. What? I'm really not into this Dr. Miller,

MILLER. [He approaches her] Quickly, couldn't be easier, yes or no!

ELLY. Why are you making me do this?!

MILLER. All you've got to do is decide. You won't know the difference, I promise you. Now decide!

ELLY. I don't know

MILLER. Answer or I fail you.

ELLY. [Frantic] What!

MILLER. Say yes or no, or I fail you.

ELLY. You can't just . . .

MILLER. I can do what I want, now yes or no?

ELLY. Yes! Whatever, just don't fail please I need to pass this class.

MILLER. Yes what? Yes, irreversibly end the advancement of our lives forever? Once I press the button there's no going back ever! Is that what you actually want Elly, or are you just saying that to get by me?

ELLY. No then!

MILLER. No? Really Elly, or is that just because it's the opposite of yes? [Crowding her] If I don't press this button, everybody dies, maybe not now, maybe not tomorrow, but eventually everybody and everything will die! Anything that ever had meaning to anyone will be gone and you will have made it happen, you made that decision! Are you sure that's what you want?

ELLY. [Nearly in tears] No! I don't know, why are you doing this! None of this real! I just wanted to know about the test. Please stop!

MILLER. [Very close to her now.] A moment ago you made a stance, a thoughtful well-reasoned stance, not about life in some other world, but our lives here and now! Were those just words to you Elly? Was there any real thought there, did what you say have any meaning to you? Does anything really matter to you? Because if it does than now's the time to decide. So decide!

ELLY. [Nearly in tears] Yes! For god sake's just press the stupid button! [Dr. Miller does so.]

MILLER. Oh boy. This is exciting. You just made a very big decision Elly, quite possibly the last decision that was ever made . . . just once that is. [Miller begins to calm down.] I'm sorry to have scared you like that.

ELLY. [Containing her fear and confusion.] Whatever, it's fine I guess. Can I go now please?

MILLER. Yes, in fact I insist you go. You only have a few minutes before we go back in time and you return here so, I implore you to go! You don't want to spend

eternity here in my classroom. Go someplace special! Drive with the music turned up as loud as it can be! Make every second the most importa . . .

ELLY. Please stop Dr. Miller! I really don't want to do this anymore. I can't deal with it right now.

MILLER. [A pause as Miller calms himself.] I would imagine not. [Beat] You can go, I'm sorry to have kept you so long. Just, maybe think about what I said [Beat] some of the things. [She nods quickly while heading for the door.] I still maintain that we won't be having a midterm because [indicating to the remote] we won't make it there, but even if we do, death and futility won't be the focus, so don't worry.

ELLY. [Barely stopping to speak.] Thanks.

MILLER. [Speaking just before she reaches the door.] Oh, and just in case I wasn't lying, whatever you do in the next few minutes [beat] make it count. You never know, it might be the last thing you ever do . . . if not the last time you ever do it. [Forces a laugh]

ELLY. [She stops momentarily, looks at Dr. Miller unsympathetically, speaks and then rushes out.] Whatever.

MILLER. [Dr. Miller sinks back into his chair turning the remote control over in his hand. His head slowly sinks and he sighs.]

The Curator

Jen Diamond

CHARACTERS:

Hugo: About 30 years old. A bit run down. He is not well put together.

May: About 30 years old. Well put together. Is a genuinely good person.

SETTING:

HUGO's apartment—The only piece of furniture in the room is a large armchair in a central position along one wall. Around the perimeter of the room and scattered throughout it are suitcases, mostly black, and stacks of various 'stuff.' There are neat stacks of clothes (both men's and women's), books, pictures and photographs in frames, toys, etc.

LIGHTS UP

[HUGO is sitting in the armchair, folding children's' clothes and placing them gingerly into a box. This action should go on for about seven seconds.]

A knock on the door is heard. HUGO bolts out of the chair and stares at the door.]

HUGO. *[With trepidation]* Who is it?

MAY. It's May.

[HUGO swears under his breath. He begins to rush around, hiding the box, throwing sheets over his piles of stuff.]

HUGO. *[Buying himself time]* Uh... What are you doing here? Is everything alright?

MAY. Yeah, I'm fine... I just was cleaning out the attic the other day and I found some of your things. Can I come in?

HUGO. One second... Sorry, this place is a mess.

MAY. *[Bitter laugh]* Doesn't bother me!

[HUGO glances around the room. Everything except for the chair has basically been covered with sheets. He goes to the door, takes a deep breath, and opens it. MAY stands on the other side, leaning against the frame. She is holding a box. She forces a smile. She pushes past HUGO and walks into the apartment and sets the box down. She looks around slowly.]

MAY. Well... This is quite the place you got here. You weren't kidding about the mess.

HUGO. Nope. You know, being a bachelor again means that you don't have to be so clean.

MAY. Guess not.

[Awkward silence. MAY and HUGO look at each other.]

HUGO. How have you been?

MAY. Good... I joined a book club.

HUGO. Great.

[Awkward silence.]

MAY. How's work? Still working at the airport?

HUGO. Yep. They promoted me. I get one of the desk jobs now. In baggage claim.

MAY. That's great.

[Awkward silence.]

MAY. Well... I guess I should probably get going.

[She makes no indication that she is going to actually leave.]

HUGO. You know, you can stay for a minute if you want. I have coffee... I know that it's somewhere around here.

MAY. No, no I really shouldn't...

HUGO. Come on. Just for a minute.

[A beat. MAY smiles.]

MAY. Well, okay. But no coffee. I just had some.

HUGO. Good. I don't think I actually have any.

[They laugh. MAY goes and sits down in the armchair.]

HUGO. You look great, May. You really do.

MAY. Thanks.

[A moment]

MAY. Hugo... Is everything all right? Do you need anything? You know, I could bring some food over sometime... I don't want you to starve! *[Feebly laughs at her attempt at a joke.]*

HUGO. *[Beat]* I'm really fine.

MAY. You're wearing the sweater. I thought that you hate it.

HUGO. Well, I didn't really have anything else. *[Beat]* I don't really hate it, May. I just said that to annoy you.

MAY. *[Smiles]* Asshole.

HUGO. Well, come on! You returned everything I ever gave you!

MAY. Well you gave me some pretty horrible stuff. Remember all those awful desk trinket things?

HUGO. *[Laughing]* Okay, those were pretty bad.

[They smile at each other comfortably]

MAY. You know, I could help you clean up around here! It looks as if you've barely moved in!

[She starts to look around the apartment and rolls up her sleeves.]

HUGO. *[Quickly]* No, that's really all right—

MAY. Oh, come on! I have so much less cleaning to do since you moved out. For old time's sake. *[She goes towards one of the sheets and tugs it off a pile of boxes and suitcases before HUGO can stop her.]*

HUGO. *[Urgently]* May, please don't—

[MAY unzips one of the suitcases. She tears it open. HUGO winces. MAY pulls out a dress. She looks up at HUGO.]

MAY. *[Confused]* This isn't mine...

[She pulls out more women's clothes, underwear, a bottle of perfume. She slowly picks up a framed photograph.]

MAY. *[Without emotion, slowly]* Are you seeing someone else?... *[She forces herself to smile. This is hard for her.]* Of course. Good for you.

[They look at each other. HUGO waits.]

MAY. *[She is getting more and more upset.]* I guess that I should have known that you'd be seeing someone else... It just seems kind of soon... doesn't it? *[Beat. She regains her composure.]* Is she someone from work? What's her name? *[HUGO does not respond. MAY's composure is deteriorating again]* Come on. What is it?

[HUGO does not answer.]

MAY. Fine. Don't tell me. *[She looks at the dress.]* Well, she dresses well... Did you buy this for her?

HUGO. No.

MAY. *[Looking at the photograph]* Very pretty. You did well, Hugo.

[HUGO is silent.]

MAY. It's pretty hard for a woman to get back to dating... Did you know that?... Every man seems to be married or unmarried, but for a very good reason... I slept with one guy. From work. Didn't mean anything...he was divorced too. He hated relationships. His ex-wife wasn't pretty like your girl friend. Or your fiancé? *[MAY indicates the picture.]* Is she your fiancé?

HUGO. No.

MAY. Oh... Well, maybe you should marry her. Just get it over with.

HUGO. *[Pained]* May—

MAY. You could invite me to the wedding. I would come, I'd be a good sport. I—I would dance, and eat cake, and dress up! I could just reuse my wedding dress and—

HUGO. *[Suddenly, sharply, with force]* I don't know!

MAY. *[She looks up from her rant]* What?

HUGO. I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

MAY. You don't know what?

HUGO. I don't know her name... The woman. In the picture.

MAY. *[Confused]* You don't... Hugo, this isn't funny. I'm trying to be okay with this. Why would you say that?

HUGO. I mean it. I don't know. I don't know whose suitcase this is.

MAY. I don't understand.

[She looks at him. A moment. She looks around the room at all of the piles of stuff that are covered by sheets. The gears start to move. She goes over to a sheet and pulls it off. She opens another suitcase. She pulls out a men's business suit that is far too big for HUGO, a pair of large jeans, shoes. She frantically begins moving from suitcase to suitcase, pulling off sheets as she goes. She throws what she finds, children's clothes, sporting equipment, women's clothes, etc., around the apartment. HUGO just watches her. Finally, she stops.]

MAY. None of this is yours.

HUGO. No.

MAY. Then whose is it?

[HUGO doesn't answer.]

MAY. Where did you get all of this?

HUGO. I just—I just have it.

[A beat. MAY stands up and moves towards HUGO.]

MAY. *[Slowly, seriously]* No, Hugo. That is not how things work. You do not just *have* suitcases full of other people's clothing.

HUGO. I—

MAY. Please. Just tell me. Just tell me where it's from.

HUGO. May, I don't—

MAY. Come on! Why do you have all this shit?

HUGO. Please don't make me—

MAY. This isn't funny, Hugo!

HUGO. I don't know what to say!

MAY. Tell me something!

HUGO. It's from work.

MAY. From work.

HUGO. *[Simply]* Yes.

MAY. *[Strangely calm]* Did you steal it? From baggage claim?

HUGO. Yes.

[A beat]

MAY. You stole it...

[A beat. They look at each other. MAY makes a scoffing noise.]

MAY. What the fuck, Hugo?

HUGO. I don't know what to tell you.

MAY. *[Standing up]* You don't know what to tell me. God, you never know what to say.

HUGO. What do you want to hear?

[A long beat. A change in HUGO. He goes to the armchair.]

HUGO. *[Laughs to himself]* When I moved in here, I tried to pretend like everything was all right. I did everything that I normally would do, that you normally with me. Eat, go to work, I even made my bed every day. It seemed stupid... I didn't unpack. I didn't talk to anyone—all of my friends were your friends anyways. I didn't really have a life... So I guess that I began to take other peoples.

[MAY and HUGO look at each other. HUGO searches for something to say.]

HUGO. It was actually pretty easy. I'd just wait around the baggage claim area. A lot of people carry black suitcases. No one really can tell the difference. I'd just pick one up, look at it like I'm just doing my job. Then I'd leave. People trust you when you wear a uniform.

[MAY is still silent, thinking. HUGO, feeling that something should be said, goes to a bottle of cologne that has been thrown to the ground by MAY. He holds it up to show here.]

HUGO. Look—look at this. *[He squirts some into the air.]* It's like the man who this belongs to is in the room with us. Do you feel that? *[He goes to another pile of clothing and pulls out a locket. He opens it and reads the inscription out loud.]* Or—or this. "It is impossible to love and be wise." Now think of the story behind that! Who gave it to this woman, why was it in her suitcase? Why inscribe that? Someone loved her enough to give her that. And now it's mine.

[He places it gently on top of one of the suitcases. He looks at MAY expectantly, waiting for her to share his excitement.]

MAY. *[Still putting the information together]* You take things from the airport and bring everything here?

HUGO. Yes.

MAY. And you—you set it all up around here like some sort of shrine to humanity—some sort of museum.

HUGO. *[Realizing that she is still upset]* Well...

MAY. Oh my God.

HUGO. May—

MAY. Hugo, this didn't need to happen.

HUGO. I know...

MAY. Then why did it?

HUGO. I just showed you...

MAY. Well, I don't get it.

HUGO. Look. I'm sorry, I'm really sorry—

MAY. *[Finally showing her anger]* Don't tell me you're sorry! This is fucked up, Hugo.

HUGO. Jesus, May— *[He goes to reach out for her. She jerks away.]*

MAY. Don't touch me... What happened to you?

HUGO. *[Becoming desperate and a little scary]* Don't you get it? This is it. This is all I have now.

MAY. All you have now? You ruined all of it yourself!

HUGO. Don't do that.

MAY. You know exactly why. Don't put this all on me. You made me leave.

HUGO. May—

MAY. No, Hugo. You absolutely did. Do you think I'm so thrilled with the fact that my marriage failed? Do you think it's easy for me to go back to how things were? No. But guess what? I'm not stealing baggage from airports.

HUGO. I know, I know. It seems stupid. I just—I just... I can't help myself... You let me go, May. All I'm trying to do is hang onto something. *You* let me go—I don't want to lose everything.

MAY. *[Trying to pull herself together]* I can't... I—I need to leave. *[She starts to leave.]*

HUGO. May—May, please don't. *[He goes to her, tries to block her from leaving.]*

MAY. Get out of my way.

HUGO. No.

[MAY tries to move around HUGO. He tries to block her. She struggles with him. He grabs her. A moment. He comes to his senses, and then lets her go. He walks to the other side of the room. MAY stares at him.]

HUGO. *[Losing his composure]* I shouldn't have... I'm sorry... I don't know what to say.

MAY. You keep saying that, but it isn't making anyone feel better.

[HUGO is sitting with his head in his hands on the middle of the floor. MAY looks at him.]

MAY. *[Still bitter]* I didn't want to leave you, Hugo.

HUGO. Yeah, well. I didn't want to start stealing things from a baggage claim. What can you do? *[Beat. He looks at her.]* Did I do something wrong?

[A beat. MAY shrugs.]

MAY. I'm sorry that you're unhappy. I'm sorry that I'm unhappy.

[HUGO laughs weakly.]

MAY. *[Gently]* Here. You can have this back. *[She twists a wedding ring off her right hand and places it next to HUGO. She bends down to him.]* You'll be okay... You're not sick, Hugo... I'm just... I'm sorry that things turned out this way.

[HUGO looks up at her. She kisses him, then pulls away. He tries to kiss her again but she stands up and goes to the door. She looks back at him and then exits. A moment. HUGO gets off the floor. He dusts himself off. He holds the wedding ring up to the light and looks at it. He laughs a bit. He straightens up some of the things that May had flung around. She clears a space for the ring and sets it down. He takes a step back, looks at it and smiles. He sits in the chair.]

LIGHTS DOWN

Home

Nathan Harris

ANA: A Polish woman, about twenty, from a poor farming family.

WILLIAM: An American man, about twenty-five, who served in World War II. Ana's husband.

SETTING. Fall 1946. The deck of an ocean liner, on its way across the Atlantic to New York City.

[At rise. ANA stands at the railing of the ship, her eyes are fixed on the water below. She wears an old, somewhat oversized coat. The ship is surrounded by a thick fog. After a moment, WILLIAM appears]

WILLIAM. Ana! I was looking for you. I put all our things in the cabin.

ANA. Oh?

WILLIAM. It's small, but...you don't mind, do you?

ANA. No, of course not.

[He smiles and takes her hand. He peers into the fog.]

WILLIAM. I've never seen a fog like this. We've hardly left the harbor and already I can't make out a single bit of land. *[Pause]* Are you excited?

[He flashes a nervous smile, but her eyes are still down]

ANA. Yes, I am.

WILLIAM. That's good. Sometimes I can't tell with you, the way you stay so quiet. Do you feel all right?

ANA. Yes, I'm fine. Talk to me about New York City again.

WILLIAM. Gosh, where do I start? It's like nothing you've ever seen. The buildings are incredible. Just stretching up and up, like you wouldn't believe. And you should see the city at night, the way it lights up. It's like magic.

ANA. Right. No, it sounds beautiful. I meant tell me about the people.

WILLIAM. The people? Well, there's millions of them. From all over the world.

ANA. I mean the people you know -- your mother and your father. They'll be waiting for us when we come in?

WILLIAM. That's what Mother told me in her last letter. She's dying to meet you.

[ANA looks up for the first time.]

ANA. She's not mad at me? For keeping you from coming home sooner?

WILLIAM. *[Gently.]* Ana, please. Don't worry about that. She knew that the war was over and I was safe. I think that was enough.

[ANA looks back down. WILLIAM looks at her, concerned. He tries to cheer her up.]

WILLIAM. You'll love New York City. You can't help it. The land of opportunity, that's what we call it. Everything ripe and ready and right there within your reach, hanging there like a perfect shining apple, and all you have to do is pick it off the tree, and it's yours. You can have it all if you want. Imagine you and me living in a place like that. You'll love it as soon as you step out onto that gangplank, with the crowds below you, the skyscrapers above you. And Mother waiting there for us – I'll bet she still has that same coat she always wore – and she'll cry when she sees me. *[He takes one of her hands from the railing and she reluctantly looks up.]* She'll say, "And *this* must be Ana!"

[He beams at her, pretending he is meeting her for the first time. She smiles faintly and looks away.]

WILLIAM. Are you sure you're all right? Are you seasick?

ANA. No. I... it's nothing. It doesn't matter.

WILLIAM. What is it?

[She is silent. WILLIAM realizes that she is fighting back tears.]

WILLIAM. Ana?

[She finally looks at him. Her voice is fragile and quiet.]

ANA. My diary.

WILLIAM. Your diary? Is it...

ANA. I left it. Back home.

WILLIAM. Oh. Ana, I'm sorry.

ANA. [*Becoming gradually more upset*] I remember it. We left the house and I had it in my pocket. [*She motions to a pocket.*] Right here. But I was wearing my old coat. We got to the dock – you remember – and my father gave me this coat. He said he heard it was cold in New York City. He gave me the coat, and I gave my old coat to him, and then all of a sudden the boat was about to leave and I had to get on.

WILLIAM. Ana--

ANA. I remember it! I remember him waving to me when I was at the railing, and he had my old coat in his hand, and the diary still in the pocket! He was standing right down there...

WILLIAM. I'm sorry. I know had that diary for a long time.

ANA. [*Regaining some composure.*] As long as I can remember.

WILLIAM. [*Hopefully*] We could get you a new one.

ANA. I had the past fifteen years in that book.

WILLIAM. I know. I'm sorry. But there's nothing we can do right now. Maybe they can send it over. [*Trying to cheer her up again.*] You'll want to have a diary in New York. There'll be so much to write about. Things are always happening.

ANA. [*Not angrily.*] I always had things to write about back home.

WILLIAM. Oh, of course! And your home was a fine place. Really. But things don't happen there. It's hard working on a farm, and God knows someone has to do it, but there's nothing *new*. It's the same thing every year. Plant the crops. Milk the cows. But a city like New York is always *changing*. The city you fall asleep in isn't the city you wake up in. It moves and breathes and evolves, and everyone's a part of it, moving and breathing together. Once you've been there, it's impossible to leave for good. You'll see.

ANA. Impossible. I'm sure.

[*Pause*]

ANA [*Softly*]. It's hard.

WILLIAM. I know it's hard for you to picture. I'll bet you've never even—

ANA. No, William, I mean it's hard to say how I feel about this.

WILLIAM. Well, you're excited, right? You and me, getting married, moving here... you know it's a dream come true for us.

ANA. I know.

WILLIAM. And you've never had second thoughts about leaving home to come with me, have you?

ANA [*sharply*]. I know.

[*He draws back*]

ANA. I know. That's what bothers me. No second thoughts, no looking back, just a few words and a boat ticket and then here we are, lost in the fog.

WILLIAM. I'm not lost. We'll be there any minute now, and I've got all kinds of friends in New York, all kinds of people I know.

ANA. *You're* not lost, I know that. But what do *I* do there?

WILLIAM [*genuinely confused*]. I... I don't know what this is about. You've never said this before.

ANA. [*Only half listening to him.*] Everything was in that diary. I remember the first time I wrote in there was when Fryderyk was born. I was six and I barely knew how to spell. My father had to help me with every word.

WILLIAM. Please, Ana, just tell what you're talking about.

ANA. I wrote in it three years ago, too, when Daniel joined the army. And then two years later, when the news came from Germany about Daniel, I wrote in it again. For a few months, until I met you, that diary was all I had.

WILLIAM. Ana, listen, please.

ANA. I wrote in it every night for those few months. Every night I asked why Daniel went off to fight. People were dying – neighbors, friends, people we knew – and he still wanted to go.

WILLIAM. He loved his country.

ANA. His country killed him. The guns of his own country. “Stray bullets.” That’s what they told us. As if they just... wandered off and found him.

[Pause]

ANA. Then I saw you, the brave American soldier with the big American smile. I felt like that smile could get us anything we wanted. You’d tell me those stories about New York and all the people and money and dreams, and I always believed you. I still believe you. I just couldn’t see how much I’d have to lose.

[He grabs her hand]

WILLIAM. Lose? What did you have to lose? Everything you own is in that suitcase, and anything more you could ever want is right in front of us.

ANA. Not everything fits into a suitcase. Maybe the town I grew up wasn’t different every time I woke up, but it’s where my family’s lived and died for a hundred years. I had a history there. I *was* someone. Who am I in New York City?

WILLIAM. That’s just the thing – you can be whoever you want to be there! Be someone new! Get a new life, a new job, new friends!

ANA. I will, I know. All I’m trying to do is hold on to something that I had.

WILLIAM. You’re homesick.

ANA. No. More than that. I love you. I’m going to America with you. But I just want you to see that America isn’t the only place that means something.

WILLIAM. But we can be happy there.

ANA. Weren’t we happy before?

WILLIAM. Of course. But... *[He is struggling.]* Ana, I need to go home. With you, to New York City. Four thousand miles from all the battlefields, the landmines, the trenches...

ANA. Why did you leave home? You, Daniel, everyone. Why did you all go off to fight?

[Pause.]

WILLIAM. Did I ever tell you about Henry?

ANA. I think so.

WILLIAM. My friend from the army?

ANA. The one who died?

WILLIAM. Yes.

ANA. You said once that he got you into the army.

WILLIAM. Yes. We were friends growing up. Lived on the same street. I remember going over to his house for dinner and his uncle would show us his war medals and tell us stories about fighting over in Europe. You should have seen Henry's face. Like there was nothing else in the world. By the time this war started, he was talking to me every day about signing up. I was patriotic, believe me, but he was unbelievable. All he talked about was fighting for his country.

ANA. A good American.

WILLIAM. But you know what? After a couple of months, I was the same way he was. We all were. You have to be like that when you're fighting in a war. There isn't a choice. You have to believe that you're fighting for something good, and that it's the only good, or else you start having doubts, and those will kill you. I know it's hard for you to understand but that's how it is.

[ANA is silent, considering this.]

WILLIAM. Yes. I remember I saw him that morning. We talked about home for a little while. When he left, he gave me this smile, and it was the same look that he used to get when his uncle would show us his war medals. It was...

ANA. Horrible?

WILLIAM. *[Surprised.]* Maybe it was. *[Pause]* I was going to say "beautiful." Maybe it was both.

ANA. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything.

WILLIAM. I'm just surprised. If you don't want to live in America—

ANA. I'll live here, William. I'll see the buildings and the lights, I'll find a new job that earns me five times as much as anything I ever did before. I'll live in America. Just don't make me call it home.

[William stares helplessly. Finally he looks out into the fog.]

WILLIAM *[faltering]*. Ana... look out there. Do you know what's going to come out of that fog?

ANA. I can't see anything.

WILLIAM. The Statue of Liberty, Ana. A few more days and we'll see it.

[She looks up slowly]

WILLIAM *[begging]*. Liberty, right?

[She looks away as the lights go down]

Kármán Line

a preemptive eulogy

Seth Simons

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"

Characters:

LEDA. Female. Inconsistent. Pregnant.

SWAN. Male. Wants to be consistent.

DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUAL. Carved of pure pomp.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Sees things.

LIBRARIAN. Reads things.

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. Takes care of business.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. Business.

GATEKEEPER. Directs the flow.

MIKE. The flow.

Setting:

The Planet Earth, or thereabouts.

At rise:

All is well.

I.

LEDA. It was decided that mankind is altogether too dependent on the sun.

SWAN. Attachment is dangerous.

LEDA. Sooner or later the sun will go out. What then?

SWAN. No one wanted to wait and see.

LEDA. Something ought to be done, it was said, and someone ought to do it.

SWAN. I said that.

LEDA. He did. He's my husband.

SWAN. She's my wife.

LEDA/SWAN. We're scientists.

LEDA. It was put to a vote.

SWAN. Everyone agreed.

LEDA. All the logic in the world could not refute that someday there will be no sun.

SWAN. Our progeny left sunless by their own parents' non-doing.

LEDA. Unless we prepare them.

SWAN. It was put to a vote.

LEDA. Everyone agreed:

LEDA/SWAN. *Away with the sun.*

II.

DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUAL. We shall go below the ground into hermetically-sealed, self-sustaining habitats. There we shall wait as all of creation freezes over and all color vanishes from the earth. A generation or two shall pass before we release populations back to the surface. Those strong enough to survive shall survive, and procreate. Their children shall be stronger. Their children, stronger yet. In so doing a new man shall evolve – one free from dependence on infernally unreliable and ultimately doomed stars.

III.

PHOTOGRAPHER. I was hired to take pictures.

LIBRARIAN. I was hired to save books.

PHOTOGRAPHER. The sun, from various angles.

LIBRARIAN. Mostly poetry.

PHOTOGRAPHER. A sort of tombstone, but also a warning – this is what we were.

LIBRARIAN. This is what we became.

We see a sunset.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Look at that – an entire conception of beauty dictated and dominated by a ball of gas.

LIBRARIAN. Thousands of lines of verse written about a summer's day, a bowl of roses, light reflecting off a pond –

PHOTOGRAPHER. A notion of beauty that can never be permanent.

LIBRARIAN. Poetry that will eventually become unappreciable.

A field of flowers.

PHOTOGRAPHER/LIBRARIAN. Meaningless.

IV.

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. Naturally, it's not viable to bring everyone underground.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. Yes, yes, I understand.

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. The effort involved in transport alone is impractical, to say nothing of the spacial economy of each subterranean habitat.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. I'm going to die soon anyway, so what's the point?

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. No need to waste resources.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. I always told my kids, turn off the lights when you leave a room.

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. We're offering you two options. Every Sunday from now until the move is complete, there will be worldwide suicide clinics - here's a brochure.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. I don't like needles.

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. The second option is that you wait.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. Wait.

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. Just keep on doing what you're doing until - you're done.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL. How quickly will I die, once it's gone?

QUASI-EXECUTIONER. That's all in the brochure.

V.

SWAN. We get to press the button.

LEDA. It's a great honor.

SWAN. We earned it.

LEDA. Yes. One thing, though -

SWAN. We have to go to the sun to do it.

LEDA. With the weapon we've designed, it's not practical to activate remotely.

SWAN. In case of malfunction.

LEDA. Too many factors.

SWAN. It's pretty complicated.

LEDA. So we must take Mohammed to the mountain.

SWAN. One thing, though -

LEDA. The baby.

SWAN. It's a needless loss.

LEDA. So either he goes alone -

SWAN. Or we find someone else.

LEDA. Trust someone else.

SWAN. With our baby.

LEDA. The device, he means.

SWAN. It's not a huge deal.

LEDA. He can do it alone.

SWAN. I'm a scientist.

LEDA. We both are.

SWAN. But, my baby -

VI.

DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUAL. Here is the ultimate sacrifice. Here is a mother forsaking everything not just for her child, but for her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren - here is a mother with no thought for herself, prostrate before King Solomon, resolute, with not a tear in her eye.

VII.

Stonehenge.

PHOTOGRAPHER. They asked for photographs, but no cameras.

LIBRARIAN. Books, but no paper.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Something about remembering without repeating.

LIBRARIAN. This is Rilke in the original German.

PHOTOGRAPHER. That's Stonehenge. I'm not sure why I chose it.

LIBRARIAN. There were too many versions of the English.

PHOTOGRAPHER. It just has that look, you know.

LIBRARIAN. But I suppose they all mean the same thing.

PHOTOGRAPHER/LIBRARIAN. "People were here."

VIII.

Tension.

LEDA. Sometimes we do things we don't want to do.

SWAN. Sometimes we don't.

LEDA. He's nervous.

SWAN. I'm not nervous. I don't want to leave my kid.

LEDA. It's a great honor.

SWAN. I don't want to leave you.

LEDA. He's a bit selfish.

SWAN. Sometimes we're allowed to be selfish.

LEDA. *We're* not. *We're* scientists.

SWAN. Anyone else could do it.

LEDA. I want it to be us. I can't, so -

SWAN. So neither can I.

LEDA. He doesn't understand commitment.

IX.

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL carefully sets out a lawn chair, seats himself, and waits, armed with a tall glass of iced lemonade and a twisty straw.

X.

GATEKEEPER. Welcome to US-16, sir. A trolley will be along for your bags shortly.
Name?

MIKE. Underhill.

GATEKEEPER. Underhill...Underhill...Jason?

MIKE. No, Mike. Mike Underhill.

GATEKEEPER. Are you with the other Underhills?

MIKE. Others?

GATEKEEPER. Underhill, Jason; Underhill, Maggie; Underhill, David; Underhill-Levesque, Anna; Underhill-Levesque, Joel. Pod D-19. You with them?

Silence.

MIKE. Yes.

GATEKEEPER. This way, sir.

XI.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Here's a waterfall.

A waterfall.

LIBRARIAN. They say we'll evolve past the need to see.

PHOTOGRAPHER. That we'll evolve past the need for beauty.

LIBRARIAN. For words.

PHOTOGRAPHER. That all of language and perception will be redefined.

LIBRARIAN. Absolutely.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Here's the same waterfall, at night.

Blackness.

XII.

Outrage.

SWAN. You slattern.

LEDA. He found out I cheated on him.

SWAN. You're still cheating on me.

LEDA. In any case, he knows.

SWAN. She wanted to get rid of me.

LEDA. Well, yeah.

SWAN. She wanted to steal my baby.

LEDA. Well, not quite - *your* baby.

Silence.

Whoops.

SWAN. Strumpet.

LEDA. See? No reason to stay. Go secure the future and all that.

SWAN. Whose future?

LEDA. Quick. Impregnate someone else while there's still time.

SWAN. Come with me.

LEDA. He wants me to go with him!

SWAN. I want you to be responsible for your own creation.

LEDA. And I will.

SWAN. You're a scientist.

LEDA. I'm a mother. Goodbye.

XIII.

MIKE walks down a corridor, searching. A group of 3-4 people appear, clad in sunglasses, moving in the opposite direction. He stops to watch them walk past. He drops his bag. He turns around. He follows.

XIV.

The surface of the sun.

PHOTOGRAPHER. There it is.

LIBRARIAN. Beautiful. Or something.

PHOTOGRAPHER. You think?

LIBRARIAN. I guess I see the appeal.

PHOTOGRAPHER. It's a bit too bright for my taste.

XV.

SWAN appears.

DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUAL. We shall suffer. Like the infant sea turtle that claws its way to the surface to find it must yet surpass an entire beach, we shall suffer. Like Job, like Priam, we shall suffer. We shall grope in the dark like a bat with broken wings until our hands are raw and bloodied. We shall be blind, indeed, that our children may not know what blindness is.

XVI.

LIBRARIAN. Rilke said, "Du mußt dein Leben ändern."

ELDERLY INDIVIDUAL *sucks through his straw at an empty glass.*

Whatever that means.

XVII.

SWAN. I loved her.

Dons sunglasses.

I don't anymore.

Blackout.

Salvation

Derek Butterson

JOHN: Forties. Energetic, gestures often.

ELLA: Late teens. Speaks flatly, without emotion.

SETTING: A room. There is a chair and table. On the table is a black corded phone. There is one door.

[Lights up. ELLA sits alone, a suitcase open on the table in front of her. After a moment, she closes the suitcase. The black phone rings. She pushes a button, putting the caller on speakerphone.]

ELLA. Headquarters.

SPEAKER 1. This is Mike Weathers, Deputy Manager, Paris Station. I need to speak to the director.

ELLA. He's not available right now.

SPEAKER 1. Listen, the barricades aren't working. We're being overrun. Please, you have to stop them.

ELLA. What species?

SPEAKER 1. Ferrets. God, they're in the building. Please, do something.

ELLA. I'm sorry, but we never put recall chips in the ferrets. You're on your own.

SPEAKER. Please! Please! *[He is cut off. There is the sound of a dial tone. ELLA presses the button and the noise stops. She sits for several moments more, then stands and picks up the suitcase.]*

ELLA. Dad!

[A moment. JOHN enters through the door.]

JOHN. Yes, darling? *[He notices the suitcase.]* Are you taking a day trip to the slopes? You know, I love skiing this time of year. The snow is just right: not too powdery, but not that awful crunchy ice, either. I'd come with you, but I'm all tied up right now. Work, you understand.

ELLA. No, dad. I'm not taking a day trip.

JOHN. An overnight, then? To Trout Brook? Lord, that one beast must have been twenty pounds. Ha, we had fish for weeks after that. Grilled fish, smoked fish, fish with chips. *[Pause.]* Of course, I'm not sure if the valley is still safe. But if you took the armored car, it would probably be all right.

ELLA. I'm going to Berlin.

JOHN. Berlin? *[Pause.]* Honey, I know you love the city, what with the culture, and the shopping, and all that, but I really have to protest. It's just not safe, you see. If you want to go shopping, I'll fly you to Zürich, and you can pick out absolutely whatever you like. How does that sound?

ELLA. I don't want to be safe, dad. I want to fight.

JOHN. Fight? Ella, honey, there's nothing you can do. I promise, I've got all our employees out there trying to clean this up, but right now it's best if you just stay here with me and we wait it out. *[Pause.]* What about checkers? I know you absolutely love a good game of checkers.

[The black phone rings. ELLA moves for it.]

No, no honey, I'll get it.

[JOHN presses the button and puts the speaker on intercom.]

JOHN. Hello?

SPEAKER 2. Director? Thank God. This is Agent Sanders, Rome Station. Listen, you have to help us. The capybaras are coming in. We just don't have enough firepower.

JOHN. Don't worry, we'll send soldiers right away. It's going to be just fine.

SPEAKER 2. Jesus, look at those teeth. God, God, no, please—*[A dial tone. After a moment ELLA pushes the button and the tone stops.]*

ELLA. Why'd you say we were gonna send soldiers? We don't have any more soldiers.

JOHN. Yes, dear, I know, but there's no reason to bring the poor fellow down. He's got enough to deal with as it is.

ELLA. He's dead.

JOHN. Ella, maybe it's best if I take care of the control room from now on. I don't like you having to listen to these calls.

ELLA. Used to be you wanted me right here, to see just how much you'd worked to build this organization, just for me. So I could see how much you loved your daughter. So much for that, huh? *[She starts for the door, then turns back.]* Is there fuel in the AH-64?

JOHN. Actually, Ella, dear, I've, ah, taken the liberty of destroying the aircraft. I figured it might be more sensible if we just stayed here until the whole thing blows over.

ELLA. Until everyone's dead, you mean.

JOHN. Ella, I have lost my patience. Go to your room.

ELLA. That worked when I was seven, dad. When all I wanted in the whole world was to see lots of fuzzy, happy animals. When I thought the coolest thing in the world was going to your mountain fortress for the weekend.

JOHN. Ella, do you think I don't feel bad about this? Of course I feel bad. I feel positively awful. I wish the whole thing had never happened. But now it has and this is just the world we have to live in.

ELLA. Goodbye, dad. *[Pause.]* I guess I'll just walk down. *[She starts to leave.]*

JOHN. Ella, honey, please don't do this. *[Pause.]* This was what you wanted, Ella! *[She stops.]* That day in the pet store, you looked at me and said you wanted a chinchilla. Well, I've given you five hundred thousand chinchillas, Ella! All the cuteness and the fuzziness that you could possibly ask for.

ELLA. I don't want that anymore.

JOHN. When your mother tried to be compassionate and got you a meercat, it had that funny sort of limp. Well, look, Ella: now you have two million meercats, and each and every one is genetically enhanced! That's a pretty good birthday present, right?

ELLA. I don't want meercats.

JOHN. You loved this fortress so much that you asked to spend all your time here, with me. And what did I do, Ella? Why, I let you stay in the fortress with me. Did I make you live with your mother and go to school and spend time with your defective meercat? Of course not. Because I want you to be happy, dear. That's all I want.

ELLA. Stop talking! Stop! *[A long silence.]* I was a child, dad. When a little girl asks for a pony, her father is supposed to say “no.” Not engineer six-legged, metabolically enhanced monsters and turn North America into their playground! But you couldn’t say no, so now I’m going to go down there and try to make things right.

JOHN. Ella, honey. *[He pauses, finally at a loss for words.]* Do you know why I built this fortress? It wasn’t just for the world class skiing. It was so that I could be alone, away from all the people who looked at me like I was silly, like I was some sort of garbage that they couldn’t wait to be rid of. In the beginning, of course, I thought it was just because I was a low level employee. But then I went up and up, and all of a sudden I was the President of Mammalian Genetics International. But you know what? They still looked at me like I was ridiculous. They were still laughing at me. Of course your mother married me: I was rich, what choice did she have? But even she looked at me like a joke. So I decided I was going to get out of the system. I got divorced and I moved to the mountains. But there was one person that didn’t laugh at me. You, Ella. Was I supposed to give that up? I don’t think so. So I put all the resources of the company into making you happy. *[Pause.]* Don’t laugh at me now, Ella. Please don’t—

[The black phone rings. JOHN presses the speakerphone button.]

Hello?

SPEAKER 3. Headquarters? You gotta help, please. There’s not a lot of time.

JOHN. Listen, tell me, where are you calling from?

SPEAKER 3. Berlin. It’s the rats. They’re everywhere. They’re coming. Hundreds. You have to do something! Call them off.

ELLA. We can’t.

SPEAKER 3. What? Jesus, they’ve got giant claws. No! No—God! GOD! *[A dial tone. JOHN pushes the button.]*

JOHN. Honey, I love you. All this was because I loved you. Surely you can forgive me for loving my daughter.

ELLA. I want to see my mom.

JOHN. Ella, please, dear, listen to me—

ELLA. Go to hell.

JOHN. Ella, you’re all I have!

ELLA. I hate you! I hate you!

[She runs for the exit. Just before she reaches it, the lights go red and an abrasive siren begins to blare, and a loudspeaker repeats "HOSTILES SIGHTED. LOCKDOWN IN PROGRESS." ELLA realizes that she cannot leave. She collapses, putting her face in her hands. A moment passes. JOHN walks to the table and presses a button. The siren and message stop. The lights return to normal. A long, long silence.]

JOHN *[Almost inaudible]*. I'm sorry.

[Silence. Eventually, ELLA looks up.]

ELLA. Do you still have the walk-in fridge?

JOHN *[Confused]*. Of course.

ELLA. Can I have a chocolate éclair?

JOHN. Anything you like, dear. You know that.

[He starts towards the far wall, stopping when ELLA speaks.]

ELLA. What species do you think it'll be?

[A pause.]

JOHN. I'd put my money on ferrets.

ELLA *[Giggling quietly]*. Ferrets are silly animals.

JOHN. Yes, honey. They certainly are.

[Blackout.]

The Good News / Pastoral

Jordan Ascher

*I know, I know, but here beside the water
while the locusts chitter and sparkle,
although they are waiting, I want to wait for myself.
I too want to watch myself.
I want to discover at last my own feelings.
And when I reach the place where I am waiting,
I expect to fall asleep, dying of laughter.*
-Pablo Neruda, Pastoral

Oliver Clay - 30s. Melancholy, cynical, and witty. Wise for his age, and just a bit disheveled.

Laura Clay - 60s. Sharp but kind - she shares her son's wit. She smokes fairly constantly throughout.

Lt. Joseph Roth - Very, very old. Commanding and cool. Tall and confident, despite his age. He uses a cane.

At rise. A city bench at dusk. A mellow blue is projected onto the back wall of the theater - and the image of a great city at dusk. It illuminates the space, but barely. Music thrums ethereally. LAURA is sitting, smoking, waiting. She wears sunglasses - not because it is bright, but to disguise her identity. OLIVER enters - he clearly is a little morose. He sits down next to LAURA.

LAURA. Hello, Oliver.

OLIVER. Hello?

LAURA. How are you?

OLIVER. Oh, I'm fine.

Beat.

LAURA. You know, you look just like your father.

OLIVER. Yeah, I've been told.

LAURA. Where is your father?

OLIVER. I'm sorry. Do I know you?

LAURA. Yes, you do. Now where is your father?

OLIVER. He died.

LAURA. I'm sorry to hear that. How?

OLIVER. He drowned last month.

LAURA. Hmm.

OLIVER. I'm sorry, how do I know you?

LAURA. I'm your mother.

OLIVER. Oh.

He stands and begins to leave. She grabs his arm and sits him down.

LAURA. Not so fast.

OLIVER. My mother's dead!

LAURA. Yes, I know. Do you think I don't know that?

OLIVER. She died in childbirth.

LAURA. Listen. Give me your wallet

OLIVER. What?

She reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out his wallet. She sifts through and finds a picture of herself.

LAURA. Here. Proof.

OLIVER. No. That's just impossible.

LAURA. Son! Don't say that. Obviously it is.

OLIVER. Seems a little hard to believe.

LAURA. No kidding! That I should walk through the streets of Brooklyn again. A miracle.

OLIVER. Still seems hard to believe.

LAURA. Listen, I'm here because you need me. Because you're feeling lost.

OLIVER. Maybe I am, but right now I'm just waiting for a bus.

LAURA. Do you believe me?

Beat.

OLIVER. Yes.

LAURA. Why?

OLIVER. You look like her.

LAURA. That's not why.

OLIVER. Because I am feeling lost, and I think this might be a sign.

LAURA. You just might be right.

OLIVER. It's nice to meet you.

LAURA. Is that all you can think to say, my son?

OLIVER. I suppose it is.

LAURA. Oh, but there's so much to say. So much to discuss.

OLIVER. You look older.

LAURA [*with mock seriousness*]. Excuse me.

OLIVER. Than in the picture. It was taken just before I was born.

LAURA. Well, you don't suppose people stop aging once they die, do you?

OLIVER. Are they up there?

LAURA. Who?

OLIVER. Everyone else.

LAURA. Oh yes, I'm sure.

OLIVER. What are they like?

LAURA. Oh, they're quite wrinkly.

OLIVER. What?

LAURA. Once someone turns 500, they're mostly wrinkle.

OLIVER. I see.

LAURA. But you can only see them occasionally, and only in special places - auspicious locales.

OLIVER. I'm afraid this locale is hardly auspicious.

LAURA. Perhaps. But it's home. For you. And for me.

OLIVER. I suppose.

LAURA. Are you married?

OLIVER. No.

LAURA. Have you ever been?

OLIVER. Yes.

LAURA. Oh, Ollie. You need a good woman.

Beat.

OLIVER. Mom, what should I do?

LAURA. Pardon?

OLIVER. I don't know. Like you said; maybe I'm lost - aren't you going to tell me what to do?

LAURA. I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, honey.

OLIVER. I should have guessed.

LAURA. I don't think you'll like the direction I have to point you.

OLIVER. What do you mean?

LAURA. I'm not supposed to be here. It's very unorthodox, you know; very risky. Strictly speaking, we're supposed to stay dead.

OLIVER. Well, I appreciate the visit.

LAURA. Oh Ollie, there are such terrible rumors.

OLIVER. Rumors?

LAURA. Ollie, look out over that city. Look at night fall.

OLIVER. I can see it.

LAURA. But what do you really see, when you look at those buildings?

OLIVER. Not much. Seems like a big, empty monument.

LAURA. But they forgot why they were building it halfway through.

OLIVER. It feels hollow.

LAURA. Filled with vanity, decline.

OLIVER. It seems like the heart is dripping out of the world.

LAURA. And that's the most important part.

OLIVER. Yeah, it's the tenderest part.

LAURA. You are a philosopher, Ollie.

OLIVER. I have a degree in it.

Beat.

LAURA. The night sky is beautiful.

OLIVER. Clogged with light and smog. You can't see any stars from here.

LAURA. But imagine this spot before.

OLIVER. A forest.

LAURA. It was vicious.

OLIVER. Yeah, probably better than this.

LAURA. Don't count on it.

OLIVER. You're the ghost.

Beat.

LAURA. It's always been like this.

OLIVER. Like what?

LAURA. It's always been empty, and decrepit. Even when it was forest.

OLIVER. That's sad.

Beat.

LAURA. You won't like what I have to tell you.

OLIVER. It sounds like I already know it.

LAURA. Maybe you do, maybe you don't. Let's get out of here. Would you like to go to the beach?

OLIVER. I suppose I would.

LAURA. Good. Then let's go.

The projected image shifts to a tropical beach.

OLIVER. I must admit, I didn't think you were serious.

LAURA. This is an auspicious locale as well.

OLIVER. Why?

LAURA. You will see, my son. Wait.

OLIVER. That breeze is refreshing.

LAURA. It's so pure. Fresh and salty.

OLIVER. Where are we?

LAURA. We are on a small island in the Pacific ocean. And if my watch is correct, we'll be meeting someone soon.

OLIVER. Who?

LAURA. That man. Joe! Over here.

Lt. JOSEPH ROTH enters and walks toward the pair.

ROTH. Hello.

LAURA. Ollie, this is Lt. Joseph Roth, my father. Your grandfather.

OLIVER. Hello. I never imagined I'd meet you.

ROTH. Likewise, my boy. It is a pleasure.

LAURA. I haven't told him yet, dad.

ROTH. This will be difficult.

LAURA. He knows, I think.

OLIVER. Apparently I do.

ROTH. Sit down, Oliver.

Beat.

LAURA. There are rumors.

OLIVER. How have you heard them?

LAURA. Intuition is strong; word travels fast.

ROTH. My god, would you look at that view.

OLIVER. It's beautiful.

ROTH. Look a bit to your left, so that tree is just in your line of sight - so that key is just visible on the horizon.

OLIVER. Yes?

Beat.

ROTH. This is the last view I ever saw. It is perfectly emblazoned on my mind.

OLIVER. You died here?

ROTH. In June, 1945. The sand was red. The air reeked of shit and blood. The bay was dotted with landing craft.

OLIVER. It's awfully peaceful.

ROTH. It is. The tanks are still here, back in the jungle - covered by sixty years of growth. Right now, this is the most pure place in the world.

LAURA. The sky is so clear.

ROTH. As far as you're concerned, Oliver, this is the last clean place on Earth.

OLIVER. It may as well be.

ROTH. But it's not, Oliver. You see that haze? You see how the sun seems to shine with a distant quality?

OLIVER. Yes.

ROTH. That haze comes from a city a thousand miles from here. It is choking this island. All the cities are.

LAURA. It's such a shame. I never thought I'd be alive to see this.

OLIVER. Good thing you're not.

LAURA. Yes, I keep forgetting.

Beat.

ROTH. Oliver, we're here because they are going to end it, and you need to know.

OLIVER. Who?

ROTH. Hard to say. The ones who bring us off the earth, and the ones who have allowed us to return.

OLIVER. The end of the world?

ROTH. It's not that simple.

LAURA. There isn't a word for it.

ROTH. It can't be articulated. It's just the end.

OLIVER. When?

LAURA. That's also hard to say.

OLIVER. How?

LAURA. What do you imagine?

OLIVER. I imagine fire, famine, flood.

ROTH. All of that - and so much more. It has begun already.

LAURA. That faint stench of decay.

ROTH. The vanity.

LAURA. The sorrow.

ROTH. The starless night sky.

LAURA. They are all a part of it.

Beat.

OLIVER. Those things have always existed.

LAURA. But now there's nothing to stop these impulses from spreading.

ROTH. There's no check. No balance.

LAURA. Soon the haze will smother this island.

ROTH. You need to take action, Ollie.

OLIVER. I don't really imagine there's much I can do about it.

ROTH. True. You cannot stop it - you cannot even slow it - but you can save yourself. You can rise above it.

OLIVER. We can't all be ghosts.

LAURA. Honey, there is a way.

Beat.

ROTH. What a day for a swim, eh?

OLIVER. Yeah.

LAURA. Look out at that glistening, pure ocean. Let it smother you. Let it envelop you and take you away.

ROTH. Leave that nauseating scent behind.

OLIVER. That's your solution?

LAURA. It's simple and elegant.

OLIVER. Your asking me to die.

ROTH. We're asking you to create yourself anew - to become part of a world that transcends this one.

LAURA. An unthinking place.

ROTH. A world of unity; A world where individual consciousness is subservient to a greater whole.

LAURA. There is nothing tying you to this planet.

ROTH. It is a skeleton - it has been overrun.

Beat.

LAURA. What are you thinking, son?

OLIVER. I'm surprised.

LAURA. Why?

OLIVER. Other than my mother asking me to kill myself?

LAURA. Mother's intuition, Ollie. Trust it.

OLIVER. But your solution is such an escape. It's so final.

ROTH. Exactly. Escape from the drives and desires that will destroy this world, and you with it.

OLIVER. There must be hope.

ROTH. There is none. If you choose to live, you will watch everything you love crumble. You will see cities collapse. You will be consumed by the waters.

LAURA. Let them consume you on your own terms, on this gorgeous day.

ROTH. Imagine the clarity and profundity of nothing.

LAURA. And the diversity and color of everything.

ROTH. Instead of this land of shadows.

OLIVER. No.

ROTH. What?

OLIVER. I will not.

LAURA. We have risked much coming here.

ROTH. This is a message you are privileged to receive.

OLIVER. There must be something.

ROTH. We have brought with us the collective wisdom of something far greater than you!

LAURA. It is not something to cast aside!

OLIVER. The world has always been in decay. You said that.

LAURA. But not like it is today - more powerful forces are at work.

OLIVER. There must be hope.

ROTH. There is none!

OLIVER. You are here for a reason, and so am I.

LAURA. What do you mean?

OLIVER. The world you describe is impossible.

LAURA. Don't think that way.

OLIVER. Because to want it - to really want to get there - would require greed.

ROTH. No.

OLIVER. I wouldn't deserve the world you promise.

ROTH. It is inevitable.

OLIVER. Then I will accept my fate when I have to.

LAURA. But how can you go back to the city?

OLIVER. I'll carry on.

LAURA. But, Ollie - what do you have?

OLIVER. Very little - that's for sure.

ROTH. That's right. And you hate it there.

OLIVER. I do.

LAURA. And you don't have anything!

OLIVER. I don't.

ROTH. So, why?

OLIVER. I'm incredibly cynical. But I'm not an egoist.

ROTH. Then how dare you believe you can change it?

OLIVER. How dare I leave it behind?

ROTH. It would be pointless.

OLIVER. Why do I get to be privy to this information?

LAURA. Because we love you.

OLIVER. And I appreciate it. But I am going back.

LAURA. Don't go back, Ollie - please!

OLIVER. And I'm going to find the part in myself that can tolerate it. Maybe I'll grow plants.

LAURA. Oh, Ollie, it's too late for you, isn't it.

OLIVER. That's right, mother. You should have realized that.

LAURA. I hope you understand in time. I love you, Ollie.

OLIVER. Which way to the city?

LAURA. That way.

ROTH. You'll die back there.

OLIVER. Of course I will.

ROTH. There's no good news where you're going.

OLIVER. No, there has to be good news.

OLIVER exits. Lights down slowly.

the incident with the margarine

Skylar Fox

Joanna- mid-late 30's. Mother of Jason.

Patrice- early-mid 40's. Mother of Claire and Nick.

Claire- a 14 year-old girl, and therefore her mother's worst enemy.

Nick- Shy, 10 year old kid.

(Lights up on the living room of an upper-middle class suburban home. This may be represented by a couch, a chair, a coffee table, and a side table. Sitting at the center of the couch is Patrice. She seems just a little too dressed up and a little too anxious for 3:00 in the afternoon. She is waiting. Beat. She checks her watch. Another beat. And another. She starts to straighten her skirt. Suddenly, she notices a stain. She whispers "Shit" under her breath. She starts to go to the kitchen to get seltzer water, and the doorbell rings, startling her. She is a deer caught in the headlights. She makes a decision: checks herself in a wall mirror and goes to answer the door. When she does so, Joanna is standing there with a whole foods bag.)

Joanna: Hi. I'm Joanna, Jason's mom. I.....

Patrice: Oh, yeah yeah yeah. Of course. I remember you from Back-to-School night. You know, Joanna, I completely forgot you were coming over. It just slipped my mind somehow....

Joanna: Oh, I'm so sorry, should I come back later, or....

Patrice: No. No, this fine. You caught me at a free moment. Come in, come in. May I take your coat?

Joanna: Oh, no thank you. I'm fine. I'll just keep it on 'til I warm up. It getting chilly out.

Patrice: Well, then can I at least get you a drink or something, at least? We have coffee and tea, and hot cocoa, but that might be stale...

Joanna: No, no. I'm alright. *(Pause)* Listen, I just came over to let you know I'm really sorry about what happened with Nick. I really didn't mean to. It was just Jason's birthday, and you know how kids are, he wanted me to bring something in. I'm just....really sorry. He's alright now?

Patrice: Oh, don't worry about it. He's upstairs sleeping. He still has some rash and swelling in his cheeks, but that'll go down in no time. Really, it's basically nothing. I mean, there's no way you could've known that....

Joanna: No, see, but the thing is I *did* know. We all got the email with the allergy listings. And I checked it. So, I find a recipe with no nuts. Or eggs. I guess one of the girls in their class is allergic to eggs. Anyway, I even checked the ingredients in everything I bought, and nothing explicitly said it had nuts in it. But, the margarine I got said it was “produced in a facility that manufactures products containing nuts.” And I thought, you know, if it’s just the same facility, how bad can it be? Right? But now I feel like a complete idiot, and I’m really sorry, and if there’s anything I can do to make it up to you...

Patrice: *(puts her hand on Joanna’s arm)* Listen. Don’t worry about it. It’s hard. I know, it took me a while to get used to it. I was like, “How do you make five lunches a week without a PB&J?” You know? *(They both laugh)* Thank you so much for coming over, though. I really appreciate your concern.

Joanne: Please. It’s the least I could do. Oh, and I almost forgot, I brought you something.

*(Reaches into Whole Foods bag and pulls out a tin foil wrapped tray. Lifts the tin foil revealing home-made cupcakes. The following two lines overlap, with Joanna joining at the *.)*

Patrice: *(Suddenly frantic)* Cover those up! Cover them up! I can’t believe you*...had the nerve to bring those after what happened. Is this a joke to you? These could kill my son. I....

Joanna: No! Don’t worry, I... Just calm down. Please, they’re just....*(loudly, cutting Patrice off)* Patrice! *(Now calm)* I made these with a different margarine. I checked the company website, and I’m pretty sure it isn’t made within miles of any nut products. I just figured, since Nick obviously didn’t get to enjoy the first batch, maybe this would help cheer him up.

Patrice: Oh. *(Pause.)* That’s very nice of you. *(Longer pause)* I’m sorry for shouting.

Joanna: It’s fine. I understand. The mama lion’s got to protect her cubs. I should have explained about the cupcakes first. I wasn’t thinking...I didn’t realize it would startle you. Anyway, I’ll leave those for you to enjoy, or not, I don’t know how they came out. I don’t want to take any more of your time...*(turns to leave. Patrice stops her by saying...)*

Patrice: Wait! *(Pause. Joanna turns around)* You came all the way over here. Are you sure you wouldn’t like something to drink, or a snack or, something?

Joanna: Oh, no. I don’t want to bother you any more than I have. Thank you for being so understanding.... *(Turns to go again, Patrice stops her again.)*

Patrice: Did you hear about what the school’s doing about this? *(Joanna turns and walks back)*

Joanna: No, what?

Patrice: They are banning bringing in birthday treats. *(Joanna looks surprised. She sits down next to Patrice.)* I know, right? Even I think that's ridiculous. I called the school, and I told them "That's ridiculous," you know? But they said it was too much of a liability or something, and "thanked me for my concern." *(Pause)* The kids have been IMing Nick and giving him a hard time. They say it's his fault for "wrecking birthdays" or something to that effect. Even his best friends. Kids are tough.

Joanna: Yeah, I'm really sorry about that. Jason hasn't been messaging him, has he?

Patrice: Oh no. I mean, he might be, but Nick hasn't said anything. *(pause)* But you know what would be great? No, this is too much.

Joanna: It's fine.

Patrice: No really it's....

Joanna: I'm sure it's fine.

Patrice: I just can't ask you to...

Joanna: Whatever it is, I'll do it.

Patrice: *(pause)* Well, ok then. *(pause)* You're sure this is ok?

Joanna: Whatever you ask.

Patrice: Ok, well, I was wondering if maybe, just maybe, you'd consider going in to talk to the class. You know? Explain that the whole thing was, well, not Jason? That it was an issue with the cupcakes that he couldn't control? I mean, I know that they know that he couldn't really control it, but if you come in and explain then it's more like you're the bad guy and not...*(pause)* I'm sorry, I really shouldn't have...

Joanna: No, yeah. Yeah. Sure. I can do that definitely. I understand. Yeah, I'll just call up the school and find out when a good time would be.

Patrice: It's just that they have been calling him awful things. "The Cupcake Crusher," "The Grinch who Stole Birthdays," "The Asthma Attacker..."

Joanna: Wait, I thought Nick was allergic.

Patrice: He is. The kids are just stupid. I told Nick to explain to them that he didn't have asthma and that what he had was an acute anaphylactic reaction to the proteins contained in select tree nuts, but he said that wouldn't help. *(pause)* So, you're willing...?

Joanna: Yeah, sure. Look, I've got to run but I'll call the school and let them know that....*(starts to leave)*

Patrice: Wait! *(Joanna turns around.)* You know what would be great? Just really great?

Joanna: What?

Patrice: Nick's been through a lot, and it would probably mean a lot to him if you apologized in person. You know? After all you, your cupcakes, put him through?

Joanna: *(Uncomfortable, but willing to go along)* Ok. Sure. But didn't you say he was asleep?

Patrice: Well, I'll go wake him.

Joanna: He ought to get his sleep after what....

Patrice: Oh he's slept plenty. This will really mean a lot to him.

Joanna: But...

Patrice: I'll just be one second.

Joanna: *(Resigning)* Ok. *(sits around alone a while. Then the front door opens and Claire enters, a little out of breath, carrying a huge backpack and a bag of soccer equipment, and listening to her ipod. She does all of this very out of breath.)* Hi, I'm Joanna, Jason's....

Claire: Oh, yeah, the one who brought in the cupcakes with the nuts. I'm Claire. My mom said you were coming over.

Joanna: Oh. I'm really sorry about your brother. I promise it was a mistake and....

Claire: Really, don't worry about it. Nick probably deserved it. *(pause)* I'm just kidding, of course. About him deserving it. But it really isn't that big a deal. Where's my mom?

Joanna: She's upstairs getting Nick so I can tell him how sorry I am.

Claire: Oh, ok. Mind if I sit down?

Joanna: Of course not. No. I mean, go ahead. You seem really out of breath. Have you been running?

Claire: No, just walking quickly. I had to walk home from my game.

Joanna: Where was that?

Claire: We were away vs. Springfield. They kinda suck, so it was a pretty easy game...

Joanna: Wait, you walked all the way from Springfield? That's, like, five miles at least.

Claire: Yeah, I had to. Mom had you coming over and couldn't pick me up, and all of the other players kind of live out there, you know. It really wasn't that bad. That's what legs are for.

Joanna: But couldn't someone else, like, your Dad drive you or something?

Claire: Um. *(pause)* My Dad was kinda unavailable.

Joanna: Oh, what does he do?

Claire: *(Pause)* Nothing.

Joanna: Well, he must have been doing something or else....

Claire: Ok, I don't want to make you uncomfortable or anything, or feel weird and stuff, but.....ummm....my Dad passed. Away. *(Third longest pause in the play)*

Joanna: Oh. Oh my god. Oh my god. I'm so, so sorry. I didn't have any idea. I asked if it was a bad time and....

Claire: See, now you're uncomfortable. Don't be sorry. It's really ok. It happened when I was like five, so that's ancient history, pretty much. *(pause.)*

Joanna: Oh, well I'm still sorry. I must have made you feel like...

Claire: Nope. I'm over it. It was really a while ago. Oh my god I could use a coffee.

Joanna: You're tired?

Claire: Yeah. My mom woke me up an hour early to clean my room because you were coming. I was, like, still half asleep, and was like, "She's not coming into my room, why do I have to clean?" You know? Isn't that weird? I mean, I was pretty sure no matter what happened you would have no reason to go into my room. But she started screaming and stuff, so I did. She was, like, cleaning the whole house from 4:00 in the morning or something. Febreezing away. Probably cause she had work and stuff later. So yeah, that was weird. *(pause)* But at least the house is clean, right? I can finally see the floor again.

Joanna: Yeah, yeah, that's good. *(pause)*

Claire: I was joking. About the floor.

Joanna: Oh, yeah. I figured. I mean, your house seems pretty clean. *(pause)*

Claire: Yeah, well anyway, I'm going to go do my homework, but when my mom comes down, will you tell her I'm home?

Joanna: Yeah, sure.

Claire: It was nice to meet you.

Joanna: You too.

Claire: I'll see you around.

Joanna: Yeah. *(Claire exits.)*

(From offstage:)

Patrice: Nick honey, come on now....

Nick: No mom, this is weird.

Patrice: It's important. She wants to apologize to you.

Nick: I don't care. It was a mistake. Whatever. I wanna go back to sleep.

Patrice: Well, that's not an option. Now let's go.

Nick: I look funny and I'm tired and you can't make me!

Patrice: Quiet down! Do you want her to hear you?

Nick: I already said I don't....

Patrice: *(Whisper-scream)* Nicholas M. Schriver. If you don't march your behind down those stairs when I ask you to there will be hell to pay. Understand?

Nick: *(whimper)* Mmhmm.

(Patrice enters. Suddenly very congenial.)

Patrice: Hi! Sorry I kept you waiting. But he's finally up and he's really glad you're here. Nick! Come down pumpkin! *(pause. With a hint of severity)* Nick.

(Nick appears, walking slowly and hesitantly. He is dressed in PJ's, but is wearing a fanny-pack. He has a great deal of facial swelling and a bright red facial rash.)

Nick: *(Through swollen cheeks)* Hi.

Patrice: Nick, this is Jason's mom, and she has something she would like to say to you.

Joanna: Yes, I do. Nick, I'm very sorry about the cupcakes I brought in. It was careless of me to have let nuts into the recipe, and I hope you can forgive me.

Nick: That's alright.

Joanna: Thank you. How are you doing? Are you feeling better?

Nick: I'm ok.

Joanna: Yeah? It looks pretty icky.

Nick: See mom I told you!

Joanna: No Nick! I didn't mean it like that. It just looks like it...used to be icky and might still feel bad.

Nick: Oh ok. *(pause)* They were really good.

Joanna: What?

Nick: The cupcakes, they were really good. Before my reaction started, I remember them being really good.

Joanna: Thank you so much. *(Suddenly remembering)* Oh, you just reminded me! I brought something for you. *(Reaches and grabs the tray. Lifts up the foil revealing the cupcakes. Nick stares a moment in utter terror and then...)*

Nick: AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! *(he tears through his fanny-pack in search of an EpiPen)*

Patrice: No Nick! Don't! They're not....

Joanna: Nick, these don't have...

(It's too late. He finds the EpiPen, uncaps it, and slams it into his thigh. He pauses for a moment, then screams like a wild beast. He pulls it out, throws it into the air and starts running around in circles, grabbing his thigh and throat at the same time as Patrice and Joanna yell over his screams)

Patrice: Oh shit.

Joanna: *(Frantic)* What's going on? What did I do?

Patrice: The epinephrin gives people huge adrenaline rush. His heart is racing.

Joanna: Oh my god is he going to be ok?

Patrice: Probably. It'll wear off in a few seconds and....

(Just as she says this, Nick hits a wall of sleepiness. He settles very suddenly. Turns to Joanna)

Nick: Sorry about that.

Joanna: No, it's ok.

Patrice: It's ok, honey.

Nick: *(pause)* I'm tired.

Patrice: Yeah, hon. Why don't you run upstairs and go back to sleep.

Nick: Ok. *(walks away. Right before he exits, he turns back.)* It was nice to meet you. *(He exits. Pause. Patrice is sitting on the couch looking distant. Joanna goes to her.)*

Joanna: Patrice, I am so, so sorry. Really. I've just messed everything up. I....I don't know what to say. *(pause)* I guess I'm going to go then and.....

Patrice: *(looking up. Matter of factly)* I didn't realize how bad it was. I thought it would just be a one-time thing, but look at him. My son has a cupcake phobia. He can't go to a bakery. He can't even go to a grocery store. He will need therapy.

Joanna: I don't think it's that bad. He just....

Patrice: Oh yeah? How would you know? How would you know what it's like to be so allergic to something that even the smallest amount could kill you? It will haunt him his whole life! You

know what he described the reaction as? When he woke up at the doctor? He said it felt like the sides of his throat were caving in. Can you imagine? Caving in?

Joanna: *(A little frustrated, but keeping her cool)* Actually, I can. I have anaphylactic reactions to strawberries. Have my whole life. But I am not scared every time I see them in the produce section or at a salad bar.

Patrice: Strawberries? I don't think that counts. I don't even think that counts as a real allergy. Not a dangerous one anyway. Because, you know what, I don't think there is anything that has strawberries in it that doesn't have the word "strawberry" in the name. Strawberry shortcake, strawberry ice cream, strawberry jam, strawberry, I don't know, strawberry anything. I don't care. The only exception I can think of is mixed-berry pie. But that has the word "berry" in it, so you'd have to be an idiot not to check. Nuts hide everywhere. And they will poison my son. YOU POISONED MY SON! And you have the nerve to stand here and tell me it's not a big deal? It's not a big deal?

Joanna: That's not what I said. I....

Patrice: Who do you think you are? Who in hell do you think you are to come into my house and taunt my son with your cupcakes? Did you think it would be humorous? Is that what you thought? "I'm gonna watch the deathly allergic kid scream like a banshee and then his mom and I will have a good laugh"? Well, it's not hilarious. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Your apologies are worthless. You can never apologize for what you did to Nick! And don't pretend to understand 'cause you can never understand. So just.....just.....accept it. No amount of apologizing or extra-nut-free deserts will ever be enough!

(Second longest pause in the play.)

Joanna: *(completely matter of fact, but with an underlying sadness)* You're right. You're right. You have made that perfectly clear. Nothing will ever be enough. I've tried everything I can, and none of it was enough. Some of it even made things worse. I really tried. I really, really tried. I hope you know that. I really, really, really tried. I don't know what I can do now to make things better, and that's probably because there's nothing I can do. So, I'm just, sorry for all this. Yeah. *(Pause)* Thank you for having me over. I'm headed out now. *(She is about to leave)* Oh, your daughter is home by the way. She seems like a nice girl. *(Goes to leave.)*

Patrice: Joanna, wait!

(The longest pause in the play. Patrice looks desperately around for something to delay Joanna one last time. Joanna looks at her wearily, and almost understands her, but almost is only good in horseshoes and hand-grenades.)

Patrice: The tray. *(pause. Sweetly.)* Don't you want your cupcake tray? I'll take the cupcakes out and you can take it. *(Starts to get up to do so)*

Joanna: That's alright.

Patrice: It will just take a moment. Hang on.

Joanna: You can just send Nick with it when he's better.

Patrice: But what if you want it before then?

Joanna: What?

Patrice: What if you want to make cupcakes before then? What will you do then?

Joanna: *(pause)* Goodbye Patrice.

(She exits. Patrice looks after her. She pushes back tears as she sits down and places the cupcakes on the coffee table in front of her. She looks at the cupcakes. She picks one up, unwraps it, and takes a bite. She can't enjoy it. It only makes it harder for her to keep the floodgates closed. Claire enters.)

Claire: Mom? Is everything ok?

(Hearing Claire gives Patrice the strength to push the tears away. She regains her composure. Mostly.)

Patrice: Yeah, of course honey. *(pause. Looks at Claire.)* How was your day?

Claire: Good, I guess.

Patrice: Good. *(Pause)* Look what Joanna brought.

Claire: What?

Patrice: Joanna, Jason's mom. She brought cupcakes.

Claire: Aren't they the ones that...

Patrice: No. She made them special. Extra nut-free. Isn't that sweet?

(Patrice forces a smile at Claire with all of her strength.)

Claire: Uh-huh.

Patrice: You should have one. *(Pause.)* They're good.

(Claire comes and sits next to her mother. She picks up a cupcake. She unwraps it and looks at her mother. She tries to understand her, and realizes she can't. Patrice is staring distantly at the door, holding her partially-eaten cupcake gently in her hands. Claire looks away and takes a bite as the lights slowly fade to black.)