



Virginia Commonwealth University  
VCU Scholars Compass

---

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2009

# New Play Dramaturgy: Finding Sunsets in Nantucket

Ian Tweedie

*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

© The Author

---

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1934>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

© Ian Tweedie 2009

All Rights Reserved

NEW PLAY DRAMATURGY: FINDING SUNSETS IN NANTUCKET

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

IAN TWEEDIE

Bachelors of Fine Arts, Niagara University, 2005

Bachelors of Arts, Niagara University, 2005

Director: DR. NOREEN C. BARNES

DIRECTOR OF DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES, THEATRE

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
August 2009

## Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter	
INTRODUCTION My Journey.....	1
1 There Once was a Man from Nantucket, Silver Creek.....	4
2 The Sun Must Rise Before it can Set.....	6
3 New Play Dramaturgy.....	11
4 Take Two.....	18
5 The Script Nuova.....	25
6 What Does That Mean?.....	37
7 Bringing Life to the Play.....	42
8 Performance.....	50
9 Collaboration.....	55
10 Evaluation.....	60
References.....	63
Appendices.....	66
A Sunsets in Nantucket version 2.....	66
B Sunsets in Nantucket version 3.....	177
C Audio recording of November reading of Sunsets in Nantucket.....	282
D Video of staged reading of La Vita Nuova.....	283

## Abstract

### NEW PLAY DRAMATURGY: FINDING SUNSETS IN NANTUCKET

By IAN JAMES TWEEDIE, M.F.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes  
Director of Graduate Studies, Theatre

This is an outline of the journey of James Campese's *La Vita Nuova*. It began as a raw script entitled *Sunsets in Nantucket*, which I originally encountered during the spring of 2006. After edits, research and meetings it became a successful work which was presented as a staged reading on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009. This thesis describes how I worked with James to transform the script into its final product, managing both the delicacy of the script and the writer. Included is research on New Play Dramaturgy that helped me find the most effective way to work with the script, then taking the final version and preparing it for a reading, inserting actors into the world James and I had created and exposing that world to an

audience. The results were positive as we had a very receptive audience who enjoyed the play.



## INTRODUCTION My Journey

I have been writing creatively as long as I can remember. Before college I concentrated on poetry. While I enjoyed writing poetry after having written hundreds of poems, I found myself struggling to be original. During the summer before my junior year at Niagara University, I reacquainted myself with Jamie Hamilton. Jamie was a local community theatre actor, who also had a few plays produced locally. Jamie was working with a friend of mine, Greg Austin, on a script he had written entitled, *Being Shakespeare: Working Title*. Jamie and Greg were working to revise the script and bring it into production. Noticing my interest Jamie suggested I write a script. I had never attempted this task before for the idea scared me. I did not think I had the ability to write original human beings with their own thoughts and ideas. I decided to put my fears aside and attempt to write my first play.

The following fall Jamie and Greg decided to present *Being Shakespeare* by forming a new company, Barking Fish Productions. The goals of the company were to workshop and produce the plays of young artists who had no other means of displaying their work. I was asked to play Smith Westlake, the lead male for the performance. During the rehearsal period, the script went through monumental changes. It seemed as if every Monday we had

a new script. The production was a disaster due to a lack of organization between Jamie and Greg, but the script still came a long way through the process, just not far enough.

Jamie taught me a lot about playwriting through the work on *Being Shakespeare* and through him encouraging me to write. Jamie and I would work on my first play, *At Last*. Unfortunately, Barking Fish did not live long enough to produce the play. I, however, now had this drive to create new work and needed to see it through. My roommate at the time, Dan Schmidt, was in a similar situation, having written quite a number of plays. Dan and I, paired with our friend Liz Fuller, decided to form our own company, IDL Minds Productions. Our goal was to take those works we were anxious to produce and stage them. We produced five plays during our senior year at Niagara including *The Child* and *She Loves Me, She Loves Me...*, which was the revised title of *At Last*.

My initial excitement for playwriting did not last, however. After a while it became harder and harder for me to enjoy my own work. It became more frustrating than fulfilling and I knew I had to seek other exploits. While I loved to stage a new play, I could not write anything I thought was worth putting on stage.

Through out the process I have described, dramaturgy was a foreign word to me. While dramaturgy was a word which I had heard in my experience, I really had little idea what it meant, or what the duties of a dramaturg were. The closest thing to a dramaturg that I had encountered was while I was working on *Flora, the Red Menace*. During this production, the director invited Dr. Thomas Chambers, the head of the history department at Niagara, to speak for about thirty minutes on The Great Depression and The Federal Theatre Project.

Shortly after arriving at graduate school at VCU, I was asked to work on *Dracula*. During the first rehearsal, I was introduced to my first true dramaturg, John Porter, who gave us an overview of the history of *Dracula*, both as a myth and as art. Having always been fascinated with history, I was captivated by John's work. I jumped into research as well, to help me accomplish my task as the assistant movement coach. It was important for me to understand how people in the period stood and moved, and this was nothing new to me. I had always researched the history of the plays I had been working on. I did whatever I felt necessary to help me do the job in front of me. I did this because I knew I needed to, but also because I loved the excitement of learning about the world I was trying to represent on the stage. I now had a name for the work I was doing, dramaturgy.

I took time in my second semester to explore the world of dramaturgy further through Dr. Noreen Barnes' class. I discovered that I loved this kind of work. Yes it is often thankless, but I felt like my work could seep into the production and if an audience appreciated the play I could share in the satisfaction. If the play was shunned by the audience, I was just the dramaturg. Once I discovered dramaturgy I became an admirer of it due to my deep love of history and examination of why we do things. Throughout this paper I will describe more in depth my involvement with both playwriting and dramaturgy.

## CHAPTER 1 There Once was a Man from Nantucket, Silver Creek

I met James Campese while we were theatre students at Niagara University. James and I worked together for the first time during *Being Shakespeare*. James stage managed this production and was very valuable. When Jamie and Greg dropped the ball, James and I took the reins. We worked hard, designing the entire show and blocking whatever we had. Without his help we would never have been ready to perform.

James was also our company stage manager for IDL Minds. While we did not use any pieces James wrote he was vital to my work, helping to make the necessary changes and alterations as we went along. He was very helpful during *The Child* helping to bring a fresh perspective since I was so close to the piece.

James and I learned a lot about the way each other thinks and works during our time working with both Barking Fish and IDL Minds. Our biggest shared fault was our inability to keep track of small details that lead to inconsistencies in the in the development of the story, which would be something we needed to overcome during our work. We did happen to have a key difference, however. I was often rash and reactionary, while James often over-thinks and takes his time coming to a conclusion. While this led to some disagreements, bringing the opposite perspective to the work helped. James stopped me from making rash decisions, and I helped him to not think too much about any situation.

James and I were in the same playwriting class taught by Larry Smith during my senior year. It was here I first witnessed James' talent as a playwright. Nearly all of the writing done by the students in this class was comical in nature. James' writing was also comical, but it was different. It had an imagination about it that much of the other work was missing. It was original, yet familiar; it had us in stitches and yet made us think. These were short plays, but I knew James' work in whatever length would always appeal to me.

James would go on to attend St. John's University, in New York, in pursuit of a M.A. in English. James explored a number of subjects at St. John's. His assistantship focused on religion and sociology where he spearheaded a number of studies and co-edited a sociology text entitled, *Exploring Unequal Achievement in the Schools: The Social Construction of Failure*. He excelled in fiction writing and also took classes analyzing both contemporary and classical plays. While most of James' writing was short stories, his classmates remarked how some may have been better suited for the stage.

James and I have a clear history working with original scripts. We have shared some interesting experiences featuring disasters and successes. Our theatrical relationship would transform, however, the first time James handed me a new, full-length script entitled *Sunsets in Nantucket*.

## CHAPTER 2 The Sun Must Rise Before it can Set

I first encountered *Sunsets in Nantucket* in the spring of 2006. James asked me to read it over and then tell him what I thought. I began to read it unsure of what to expect, but excited because it was James' script. It did not take me long to become hooked in and I could not put the script down. My neighbor approached me in my backyard, because I was laughing so loudly that he could hear me in his house. I instantly fell in love with the script and I knew that it would be in my life for a while.

That evening, I took out the play again and proceeded to go through the entire script making numerous notes, of routine misspellings, to things that I could not understand, to things I would change if I were to direct it. I also called James that evening to talk to him at length about the script. He was very excited that I enjoyed it. James and I had a long face to face discussion about the script later that week. Unfortunately, as that was now almost three years ago, I do not recall everything we talked about nor do I have a written account of the meeting that James and I had.

The play follows the exploits of Stephen Parker. We learn early that his best friend, Keith Baker, committed suicide twenty years ago. Keith left Parker his entire estate and asked him to look after his mother, Mrs. Mary Baker, who is now dying. For the past twenty years Parker had sent her postcards, but Parker decides to finally visit her after she has a

stroke. Upon visiting Mrs. Baker he meets Stefany, a nurse half his age, who is trying to get her Master's in English. It is clear Mrs. Baker is not in complete control of her faculties, even mistaking Parker for Keith. Parker decided to "pull the plug" after Mrs. Baker enters a comatose state. Parker and Stefany arrange a date at Mrs. Baker's Funeral. For Stefany this is as much about attraction as it is about Parker's resources, as he seems to be highly educated in her field and was also Keith's main editor. Parker's level of education is unknown, but the level of writing in his post cards, his recitation of a number of poems and his familiarity the master's process shows he has a good breadth of poetry and educational experience. Stefany wants to enlist Parker's assistance to help her with her thesis on Weldon Kees. Their relationship blossoms as we meet her parents, the Schumanns, who are the primary comic relief. The age difference between the couple leads to some animosity between Parker and Mr. Schumann. We learn that Stefany is pregnant, which quite angers Mr. Schumann at the end of act two. Mr. Schumann sets out to learn all about Parker which leads to our discovery of Stephan Parker, who is in Mayville Prison. Schumann shows the imprisoned Stephan a picture of Parker which he doesn't recognize at first. After Schumann leaves Stephan figures out that the picture is in fact his former friend Keith Baker, and writes Keith a letter. Parker receives Stephan's letter leading him to visit the convict. This is how we discover that Parker is in fact Keith Baker. Keith faked his own suicide and took on the persona of Stephen Parker. The reunion is cut short by a phone call that Stefany has been in a car accident. Parker rushes to the hospital to discover that Stefany lost the fetus. When Parker tells Stefany the fetus is dead she bans Parker from her hospital room, leading Parker to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge. Perhaps he is committing suicide or perhaps he is

faking once again. Stefany tries to commit suicide which leads to her being committed to an undisclosed location. The play ends with Stefany receiving a postcard and breaking down because of it.

The characters in *Sunsets* are clearly a reflection of James. James' thoughts on the master's process is clearly seen in Stefany's half-hearted pursuit of her master's degree paired with Parker's initial dismissing of Stefany's thesis and then later writing the same thesis. James' father is a state trooper in New York, and while I have not met his parents I am fairly certain that the Schumanns are a reflection of Mr. and Mrs. Campese. James even admits that the argument of the white sweatshirt, which occurs in the script, is based on an argument his parents had. I also believe that both Parker and Stefany are versions of James, and I used this rationale in my development of the script and its characters. However, James was able to step outside of himself to make these characters universal, not just caricatures of his own household.

James' lack of attention to detail is something I learned during my first reading. This fact would become important in my future work with James and the script. James often forgets little things which lead to inconsistencies in details throughout the script. While these were not large problems with the script clearing up these inconsistencies are key for the script to work. During the first version, for example, Parker says in act two scene one, "I hope you brought tuna salad." Stefany replies, "Uh...No...Actually, cold cuts. Sorry." Parker finishes, "I'm kidding. I'm allergic to fish." Later in act two scene six Parker says, "I had a tuna fish sandwich yesterday." This is the biggest inconsistency, and something that James was oblivious to.

There were many things that I loved about this script, despite the glaring errors. My favorite aspect was the way the relationships were formed. I believe Parker and Stefany form a couple the audience wants to see succeed, despite the fact they are not your traditional couple, or one you may expect. In their first scene together they are at each other's throats. This initial argument is a familiar scene for future lovers in popular entertainments. Their relationship is not predictable, however. I feel like they belong together and this allows you to side with them against the Schumanns. You don't want to side against the Schumanns, however. I hated Mr. Schumann at times, but he is also someone I sympathized with. He is not the typical over-protective father, he is just cautious of his daughter. This could be expected looking at his daughter's relationship with a man old enough to be her father.

The twist of Parker's identity is one that is unpredictable. I feel every good script must have a surprise twist, and this one does not disappoint. Jamie Hamilton once told me that even a twist can not come out of left field; you have to drop hints, even if they are subtle. Once you learn about Parker's real identity it makes sense, and when looking back in the script it was evident from the first scene.

The humor inside the script is abundant and very intelligent. There is often one character that uses humor to show his/her superiority to the other character. This type of humor is mainly used by Parker, as seen in the first scene, for example. Parker compares the waitress' former marriage to some of the greatest tragedies in recent history in this scene:

*See Attached, Video Clip 1*

The waitress does not get the irony and tries to play along. It is however, not too intelligent so that we misunderstand it. Therefore the audience is left feeling more intelligent because they are in on the joke.

Finally we reach the ending. I did not see the heartbreaking nature of the end coming. A happy ending to this play would leave me wondering what I gained from this piece. We are so engrossed in these lives we feel for all parties. Do we now hate Parker, a man we have liked from early on? We now see Stefany as the victim her parents saw her as earlier and we feel for her. What happens now? Where and who is Parker? Can Stefany ever regain her mental faculties or is she going to be institutionalized for life? There are many questions and the journey to the end leaves us most engaged after the curtain has fallen.

While I quickly fell in the love with the script I had no outlet to explore it further. I left it in the hands of James and knew that one day I would see it again. At the time I had little clue when or where. However, two years later I was trying to decide what I wanted to cover for my thesis. Then it became clear, *Sunset in Nantucket*. It was perfect because I could combine my new interest in dramaturgy with my long-standing interest in producing new works. I had my answer and *Sunsets* lived again.

## CHAPTER 3 New Play Dramaturgy

When I first attacked James' script I considered myself an editor. Anne Cattaneo says, "In a new play, a production's dramaturg's work most clear resembles the job of an acquisition's editor in publishing" (Cattaneo 11). That was exactly how I attacked the script, even though this was two years before I would read Ms. Cattaneo. I was invigorated and satisfied by this task. I had struggled over the past couple of years to write something I truly thought was good material, which was frustrating with very little fulfillment. Working on James' script, however, produced all of the feelings I had been hoping playwriting would stir, because it was creative, yet instructive. I was invoking my imagination while helping James. Knowing at this point I wanted to be an educator, I found a new way to pursue it.

I thought that this script would be the perfect project for me to work on. I loved the script, which is the first thing I remembered from class, plus I had worked in the editor role with the script, which is the first thing Cattaneo says in her "New Play Dramaturgy" section as demonstrated in the quote above. I also had a relationship with a playwright whom I understood. I had an idea of how James thought and I knew I could communicate with him without too much trouble. This seemed like the perfect project for me.

According to the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) there are many jobs that a dramaturg performs. Some of these include; help bring new plays into

full production, support those writers whose vision captures our minds and hearts, collate, cut, track, edit, rewrite, construct, arrange, seek and present pathways into the world of the play, gather and arrange images, sounds, and ideas for rehearsal, explore and present the world and author of the play, conceive the forms of the script as a script, conceive the forms of the play as it grows, stay on course when all goes well, maintain the calm when all goes ill (as it will) and love the work. (McKay)

While these are only about a quarter of the tasks listed for a dramaturg these are the ones I knew I had to explore while working on *Sunsets in Nantucket*.

- Help Bring New Plays into Full Production.

While this is not the ultimate goal of this project, my thesis is a step to gain this for the play. My goal is to be able to hand the script to a director and tell him/her it is ready for a production after the reading. My confidence in reaching this goal has been clear since last November, when I held an informal reading with James, four actors and myself. After the reading I mentioned to the actors that there was a chance of producing the play next summer, because I expect the script to be ready for this step. The possibility of a full production will be determined by how well the audience receives the play during the planned staged reading.

- Support Those Writers Whose Vision Captures our Minds and Hearts.

James has always captured my mind with the intelligence of his scripts. This script also captures my heart and wrenches it, but in a good way. I am always anxious to hear or

read a new piece by James. James is aware of this and that is one of the main reasons he asked me to read *Sunsets* in the first place.

- Collate, Cut, Track, Edit, Rewrite, Construct, and Arrange.

I began editing the script immediately. While I felt the original script showed promise it was by no means ready for immediate production. We worked to eventually get to the fourth version we are using for the reading. Cattaneo says, “[T]here is always real damage of harming the play” (Cattaneo 13). I was real worried about potentially harming *Sunsets*. I began my work by offering suggestions which led to some broad changes. Near the end I switched to asking James why he did certain things and sometimes he offered eloquent explanations that made certain aspects clear. Other times he realized he couldn’t answer my questions, because he did not know why he did certain things. We would then talk it out together with me explaining my issue with a certain section. These discussions helped us to make the necessary changes that were needed to help improve the script.

- Seek and Present Pathways into the World of the Play.

I jumped full force into finding the world of the play. The world was not hard to understand as I related to the characters, and it was set in a modern setting with a sense of realism. James also did a good job staying true to the world that he created. Finding the world of the play was more important in my direction of the play, in relating this world to the actors and helping them see the play as I did. They altered this world slightly, as to be expected when you have different creative personas collaborating. As a director I want my

actors to alter the world so we could all meet in the same place. Overall, I feel I was mostly able to stay true to the world James created and the play at hand.

- Gather and Arrange Images, Sounds, and Ideas for Rehearsal

Sounds did not play a large part in this play, but images were very important to me, as well as poetry. I use a lot of analogies while directing, as I do in the classroom. I also used poetry to help in rehearsal as James did while writing. Due to the nature of the performance I did not dive as deeply into this as I normally would. However, I did use a lot of images from popular entertainments to help the actors achieve what I was looking for. The play uses a lot of standard conventions which we as a general public will instantly recognize. For instance, the doomed couple fights the first time they meet. This can be seen frequently in popular entertainments. For example, in one of my favorite movies, *It Happened One Night*, Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable fight through nearly their entire journey, and of course, end up together in the end. While this movie is seventy-five years old, it has provided inspiration for many films such as *The Sure Thing*, *Mystic Pizza*, *Bandits*, *Brick*, and *Bottle Shock*. I used a lot of pop culture references throughout the rehearsal process, and they helped lead my actors to the performances I was looking for.

- Explore and Present the World and Author of the Play.

With all of the time and work I put into the script I did plenty of exploration and knew the author well. Dramaturg Mame Hunt said, “New play development doesn’t work. New playwright development works” (Hunt and Mason 425). I agree with this completely.

The plot was only able to bloom because I understood James and catered to his sensibilities. While we already had a relationship, we formed a deeper one on a level where our relationship was not well exposed. Because I spent so much time with James I was able to introduce James' point of view to the cast. My understanding of James allowed me to be fully able to understand and represent the script.

- Conceive the Forms of the Script as a Script; Conceive the Forms of the Play as it Grows.

It is hard to say how much of a play this truly is. At one level it is a play, for one could not call it a novel or a short story. However, on a deeper level it has just transformed from a script to a play. A script to me is just the words on paper with a unified plot. It is not a play until characterization is added with actions to support it. It is going beyond what is written and creating a world that we can live in for a short period of time. I treated *Sunsets* as a script for a long time, and that was what allowed me to alter it as needed. I still have to sometimes view it as a script so I can make sure it is in proper order. If I tried to change it as a play I would completely fracture the world and have to recreate it as a different world. For the actors, especially since it is being read, I have to direct it as a play, not a script. Words on paper are only theatrically interesting up to a point. We have to delve into the actions involved, and explore the motivations behind the words. Walking this line is the trickiest part of my job, but I feel like I have successfully navigated this tightrope.

- Stay On Course When All Goes Well, Maintain the Calm When All Goes Ill (As it Will).

It did. We had a number of problems in the rehearsal process. I thought for a couple weeks I would not have enough actors. I still did not have as many as I would like, but we were able to make it work. My rehearsal process was not as long as I would like, but we were able to make it work. The space and times were not exactly what I wanted, but we were able to make it work. It was a fairly calm process while in rehearsal and my actors worked well together without much frustration. Plus all my actors always showed up on time, which really is quite the accomplishment. I was able to stay calm and trust it would work out, and it did.

- Love the Work

As I have already commented, this was not a problem. While I did tire of the script slightly at the end, I still put everything I had into the script and enjoyed every moment. I am glad to take a break from it, but I will definitely come back to it one day as I can't imagine never returning. I do still love it, I no longer laugh out loud, but I do still quote the script to all my friends.

The play is now far from new to me. I feel like I was born reciting it, and while making notes during the rehearsal process I did not even have to look at the script to know what the character was saying. I feel it is a strong script which has the potential to please a good number of people. *Sunsets in Nantucket* is not earth shattering, or going to alter anyone for ever, but it should make people think about life while entertaining them at the same time. This is how James wrote it and this is what I have sought to uphold.

Now I have a clear understanding of the tasks I need to accomplish, and I enjoy it. If the theatre is to survive we must create new works, and if we create new works we are going to need people to help those new works make it to the stage. I love this work, and it is something I would love to bring to a potential job. As an undergrad I wrote a number of scripts and I was thankful I had a professor, Larry Smith, to give me feedback. However, he was only a fellow playwright, and did not go into as much depth as I would have liked him to. There are many different ambitions among the students in a theatre department. I feel I could help student playwrights become the future playwrights of the world, and this puts a smile on my face.

## CHAPTER 4 Take Two

The second version of the script was filled with a number of improvements that were due to several reasons. James admittedly had not looked at the script for over two years and this may have been one of the best things to happen to the script. James was both a better writer and he was looking at a completed work with fresh eyes.

In the two years between the scripts James had received his Masters in English from St. John's University. While I have only heard a few stories of his time there I know he spent a lot of time working on his writing skills and being forced to break bad habits which is one of the goals of graduate school, when it works. This was clearly evident in the new version of the script, especially in his handling of Parker, a man who uses his intelligence to prove his superiority to other people.

In those two years James had spent some time writing a number of plays. They say practice makes perfect, and while James is not perfect, the improvement of practice was fairly clear. He had a better handle on flow and timing. The jokes were not only funnier, but they came at the right time. He also had a much better handle on character development. The relationships between characters were broader and he spent the time developing these relationships. The script grew some twenty-five pages due to this development and that is one thing the script needed to fill out the story.

The fresh eyes also helped as he was able to transform a good story with likeable characters into likeable characters that form a good story. The bond between characters was a lot stronger adding scenes both between Parker and Stefany and between Mr. and Mrs. Schumann. I really enjoyed the advancement of Mr. and Mrs. Schumann because they went from secondary characters to the comic relief of the script turning *Sunsets* from a slightly funny script to a quite funny script. The Schumanns also contrasted the relationship between Parker and Stefany while adding extra support to the couple. Also the added material between Parker and Stefany helped to better understand the love shared by these two who normally may have been seen as an odd couple because of the age difference. In the original version I enjoyed this relationship because I related well to both people, however I could see how the average play-goer may scoff at this couple as I do not always reflect society's norms. In the second version I could see how the normal American would want to like them, because there is more uniting them. Parker and Stefany seem like they deserve each other, which is what an audience wants from a stage couple. Similarly the Schumanns resemble that bickering couple we all know and love. They are similar to many other couples we have seen both in pop culture, like the Kramdens in *The Honeymooners*, and in many cases our own households. They do, however, have a uniqueness about them, which keeps them fresh, and I think this freshness is echoed throughout the entire script.

I really enjoyed the changes that James made, but I did see a lot of holes which still needed to be filled. I decided I would organize a reading to see if I could find any other issues with the script before giving James my list of issues.

When I was home for Thanksgiving break I gathered four of my friends, James and myself to have a reading of *Sunsets in Nantucket*. I had Justin Garrow read Parker because he had similar personality traits despite not having acted since high school, which was ten years ago for Justin. He did a nice job, but did not have the life experience really needed to portray Parker. This is definitely an issue I will run up against in the staged reading because I don't believe there is anyone available who has the experience to play Parker. Then again, James is younger than I and wrote Parker. This is an interesting dichotomy which I am realizing with James. I don't believe I have ever written a character I did not have the experience to play, yet James has very eloquently written Parker, a man twice his age. A close friend, Renée Speers, played Stefany, and I think she did a very nice job. I originally saw Stefany as a down to earth dry character, but Renée is very bubbly and light, in many ways the opposite. She made me see Stefany in a new light, and her chemistry with Justin was quite nice, especially considering they had never met. My friends, Pat and Casey Moyer, played all of the other parts, which was interesting because they were siblings. This was especially funny when they played husband and wife. The great thing about Pat and Casey is they are like very intellectual children when it comes to humor. They spent a majority of time laughing at all of the appropriate times and were not only great readers but a great audience. I just listened instead of reading along so I could concentrate on hearing the script. I also recorded the reading so I could go back and check my listening instincts while reading along to the recording.

I was very nervous at the start of the reading. While these were my friends I was worried that they would not share the same appreciation I had for the script. My fears were quickly resolved as the first joke presented itself to a hearty laughter from the actors:

*See Attached, Audio Clip 1*

I have produced a number of my own scripts and worked with well-known scripts, but I was more nervous with this reading. I believe this is because I was taking a piece which no other person has ever said is a good script and I am saying this is worth your eyes and ears, and they not only said alright, but agreed. This was quite a relief and the readers went on to enjoy the script much in the way I had hoped they would.

Upon the conclusion of the reading we had a brief discussion among the four actors, James and me. I let the readers speak first to express any concerns they had and the aspects they liked. Much to my excitement they brought up many of the bigger points I had myself. The biggest discussion we all had was about two consecutive scenes, in the then middle act of the three act script. In act two there were two consecutive scenes with just Parker and Stefany. While these scenes were lovely it was a little too long without a real change. We brainstormed a couple different solutions. We thought perhaps the scenes could be combined or a scene could be placed in between. These were two good scenes and both held merit. However, just like anything in theatre, if the audience is held too long in the same state they drop out. This is one of the first things I learned in lighting design class. The same picture gets boring, the action must move forward, whether the audience realizes it or not. There is also one clear repetition in the fact that Stefany speaks of two ex-boyfriends. We thought one could perhaps be cut.

We also all agreed that the Schumanns are a wonderful couple who bring a lot of humor to the script. We all wanted to see more of them. They had us laughing so hard we had to temporarily stop a couple times. We all wanted more, and there was time to add that into the script. I also wondered if the Schumanns could perhaps better mirror the relationship between Parker and Stefany.

Our readers really enjoyed the script and when I mentioned the possibility of working on it in the future they all seemed really excited by this prospect. This really energized me and made me feel like what I was doing was right, and worthwhile. Nearly all of my fears were instantly expelled. I do know, however, that my New York colleagues and my VCU colleagues are very different in their appreciation of theatre as well as their expectations. I still have some of the fear that it won't be accepted in Virginia like it was in New York.

I also had some other notes for James, which I brought up with the group for their feedback. These criticisms seemed to be beyond the cast and their responses to them did not help nor harm my point or the well-being of the script. Because of this I will just state them and not their reactions.

I still felt like some characters were extraneous. James had numerous small parts which did not speak and, depending on the venue in which this script is being done, could be cut. I wondered if they were necessary to the story he is trying to tell. James also had two different doctors in one scene each, which seemed like a waste of time for two different actors. Could these two be the same doctor? I had the same issue with the nurse at the end, could that be the same nurse again? If Dr. Lanning was to appear in both scenes it would

clearly be the same hospital which would mean the same nurse would be logical. Plus, being the same town, the same hospital would make sense. The most obvious point of this change is the ending links the beginning, therefore seeing the same characters again would remind us where we came from and who Parker is, so when we see Parker's repeat performance it makes sense. James wrote a very nice scenario, but didn't quite finish it and this small change did that.

One small problem involves fish. James did a nice job altered the eating tuna salad line by changing it to chicken salad. Parker does still say, however, that he is allergic to fish. James added a scene where Parker and Stefany make their own sushi. So while he solved the problem he recreated the same one.

James also has tempo problems. In some scenes he takes his time and draws out a scene to the point we are yawning. Other times he moves so quickly that the audience has no idea what just happened. One of these two issues was true in almost every scene. Many of the Parker and Stefany scenes moved so slow that we're anxious for the next break. The Schumanns were the break we needed. However, these scenes moved so quickly we were upset they were gone. While this is the standard for scripts and what we expect in our entertainment, I thought James went to the extreme and he could take more or less time depending on what the situation presents. This is clearly one lesson he hasn't learned.

We were able to make a lot of progress during this reading. I could tell James was thinking hard during this process and I could tell he even had some ideas we did not cover.

I also gave him a script in which I marked the many typos and small things, like lines which needed to be re-worded to make complete sense. I was very anxious to see what

direction the script was going to move in. James took all of this information and six weeks later I received the third version of the script which I was very excited to see.

## **CHAPTER 5 The Script Nuova**

James had put a good deal of effort into the third version of the script and I was really pleased with the product. Not only had he successfully navigated through my personal notes, making most of the necessary changes, but one could tell the reading had a profound effect on James, as he made some additional changes, most of which improved the quality of the piece. Some of these changes I thought ruined some small moments and I marked those to bring to James' attention.

There was a difference between this script and the other two. The other two had some rather large errors which stood out and made some smaller issues easy to overlook. With all of the bigger issues resolved I really began to see some smaller things and I knew another meeting had to be arranged between James and me.

The first thing I made sure we discussed was the timeline, and not just with the events of the script, but with the characters' lives. Most audience members wouldn't have picked up on what took me many readings, but I felt I needed to know to ensure consistency. The actual age of the characters is not important, but there are a number of year indications which give ideas. I began asking him how old Parker was, and James had problems discerning an exact age. Seeing him struggle I jumped in saying it seemed he was in his late

forties and James agreed. I then explained the facts of the script. In the jail scene between Parker and Stephan, it is learned that Keith committed suicide twenty years ago after the death of his wife. Parker earlier said his wife died six years ago, but I accepted that this as a lie to not seem so old for Stefany. Stefany says Mr. Baker died twenty-four years earlier, meaning he died four years before Keith committed suicide, giving Keith only four years to write a good number of poems about his father's death. Also, Mrs. Baker says she would not let Keith go to Europe because of her husband's death, but this means Keith would have been an adult when his dad died and it seemed to me that was not right for the character. James and I agreed Keith should have been a young high school student when his dad died; meaning one of the numbers had to change. James and I disagreed on how to change it. I felt Parker should be younger. This is perhaps because I liked Parker and I wanted the relationship to be less awkward. James wanted it to be as awkward as possible and felt he should be in his late forties. We decided on forty-eight. This made Keith twenty-eight when he committed suicide, old enough to have been a young husband and to have had some successes as a poet. We changed Mr. Baker's accidental death to thirty-four years ago, putting Keith at fourteen, the age we wanted. This made him young enough to still be dictated by his mother.

Stefany is the only character whose age is definitely known. During the Sunday turkey dinner scene we learn she is twenty-five, putting her twenty-three years young than Parker. We discussed the parent's age even though there is no tie to it in the script. I thought they should be late fifties and James thought early fifties. I wanted a separation between Parker and the Schumanns, much for the reasons I stated before, and the level of

awkwardness. James, for his same reasons, wanted them as close as possible. We resolved to move on, for as I said it was not important for the writing, but it was good to get inside of James' mindset for this relationship and I now had a time table to work. This timetable was important for anything I had to add or delete as well as for the direction of the reading.

We then moved on to the body of the script. The opening scene had a small redundancy which was a change we quickly agreed on and also presented punctuation questions. Several of Parker's lines ended in question marks. Punctuation would be a recurring problem with Parker. While there is a clear similarity between Parker and James, Parker is twice as old. This age difference was reflected in James' writing. There are many times where James can be quite eloquent and speak as if he were older and more educated like Parker. While it is unmistakable that James is in his twenties, it would not surprise me if James in many ways transforms into Parker as he gets older. Parker, being middle-aged, is very sure of who he is and what makes him different from most people. He is very intelligent and lets you know he is smarter than you. Until the end of the script Parker is always in control and knows what he wants. This is who Parker is and this is what makes the biggest impact when we discover Parker is not who he says he is. Throughout the script James uses a lot of question marks and exclamation points, as well as some phrasing which I felt was typical with someone in their twenties. I began by asking why he used that punctuation and it was clear James didn't exactly understand why I was questioning it, so I decided to rephrase. I would ask if Parker should be sure when there was a question mark and for an exclamation point I would ask what Parker's level of excitement was. In the case of youthful phrases I would change it first and ask if that sounded better. Every single case

James instantly agreed it was better. This pleased me because I felt like I did understand Parker in the way James understood him and I learned a lot about how to talk to James.

PARKER: Can I get a three-egg omelet, onions, pepperoni, green pepper, garlic if you have it, and a small glass of orange juice?

WAITRESS: Living on the edge today, are we? Special occasion?

PARKER: I suppose you could say that. Today is my friend Keith's birthday.

WAITRESS: Is that so? Is he going to be joining you? God knows you haven't had someone share a meal with you here since... you know, I can't honestly think of a single time someone has sat across from you, man, woman, or animal. Why is that?

PARKER: Because it is?

*See Attached, Video Clip 2*

We then had to play the name game. In the opening scene Parker makes a big deal about his name. The waitress called him Steve and he corrects her with Stephen. Later in the script he does not care whether people called him Steve or Stephen, and Stefany constantly refers to him as Steve. I asked James why he made the name matter early and then deemphasize it later, and he said it was filler. Of course nothing in a script is truly filler, or at least it should not be. I decided to make it matter. James preferred for people to call him Steve over Stephen so I changed the entire script so that everyone calls him Steve, except the waitress and Schumann. Schumann calls him Stephen to keep the more formal relationship as well as it, unknowingly to Schumann, jabs at Parker stealing the name from Stephan.

Moving onto scene two I addressed an issue which had been bugging me for a while, which I had let slide because of larger issues. I thought James wrote a joke between the nurse

and Stefany which I did not understand. When I asked James about it, he also did not understand it and had no idea what he was trying to do, so I said it had to be changed.

STEFANY: You aren't as dumb as you think you are.

NURSE: And what makes you think I think I'm dumb?

STEFANY: Nothing at all.

NURSE: That's right. Let's see how smart you really are. Three letter word for "seer". First letter "e".

STEFANY: Uh... Eye?

NURSE: That fits. Three letter word for "sweet spud".

STEFANY: Yam. Do you seriously need help with these? You're not exactly proving your point.

NURSE: Just one last one. Five letter word, "antonym for fragrant". Starts with 'm' and ends with 'y'".

STEFANY: What?? Uh... mustiness... Wait a second... Yeah, right.

Originally Stefany said the nurse could not understand Stefany's thesis topic. The nurse tries to jab at Stefany by making her fill out her crossword puzzle. The three words James chose to use are eye, yam, and mustiness. It is a good start to a joke, but the mustiness made no sense to me. At first we brainstormed on how to possibly keep the joke changing the last crossword clue to be an answer which would have proved the nurse's intelligence. We thought for about fifteen minutes and came up with nothing. So I said what if she was reading a romance novel. James instantly came back with *Captain Priapus Rides Again*. I was unaware of the joke in that and James told me to look up Priapus. After seeing a picture of the fertility god I was convinced that this was the proper course of action and I added a

typical romance novel line to alter the scene. I think while not adding a huge joke, a small laugh is apropos before the important moment when Mrs. Baker collapses:

*See Attached, Video Clip 3*

In the third scene I thought perhaps the dialogue when Mrs. Baker awakes should be changed. Originally Parker immediately asked if Mrs. Baker was going senile. I thought that was an admission of guilt right off. Many in the audience would not have realized Parker's secret, but I thought by rearranging the scene to have Stefany trying to explain who Parker was before Parker asks if Mrs. Baker was going senile made Parker's question seem more innocent:

MRS. BAKER: Keith?

PARKER : (Whispering) Was she going senile before-

MRS. BAKER: Keith, where are you?

STEFANY: Among other things she was losing.

*See Attached, Video Clip 4*

Later in the scene I had a similar concern when after Stefany left, Parker says, "Mom...I love you". I thought that might also give away the twist. James, however, disagreed and said he did not really care and never set out to hide Parker's identity, it just so happened that everyone was surprised to find out who Parker was. The fact that everyone who had encountered the script didn't figure out Parker's real identity until he reveals it led to the decision to keep it as is.

Originally the script was in three acts, between thirty and forty pages apiece. I thought that two acts were better for this piece and act one and two were combined. In the

newly called act one scene seven the new ending James had written for that scene was confusing to me, at first. At the end Parker says, “Since we’re at an interesting point in conversation, up for sushi next week. Here?” and Stefany replies “I do not want to know how that segue worked.” Upon reading the line out loud to James I began to laugh as I just discovered the sexual reference. I decided we could clarify this joke by adding a line and a stage direction. James loved this idea and it was instantly changed:

*See Attached, Video Clip 5*

The next scene began with a new argument between Mr. and Mrs. Schumann which we discussed just because I was so pleased with it. James mentioned this was an actual fight his parents had, which made it even funnier. I think this addition, and introduction to the Schumanns gave us a great cross section of life in the Schumann home and sets up the characters superbly:

*See Attached, Video Clip 6*

Scene nine needed a small, but important change for continuity. When Stefany asked Parker to write her thesis, he refuses to take money for it. This leads to her remarking that it would be free and then Parker refuses to do it.

STEFANY: How much would you charge to write the paper for me?

PARKER: I wouldn’t.

STEFANY: So it’d be free?

PARKER: No, I wouldn’t write the paper for you. It’s illegal. And immoral.

STEFANY: Pretend I didn’t ask.

PARKER: I’ll try.

Later in act two when Parker gives Stefany the completed thesis she says that Parker said it would be immoral and he replies that it was immoral to take money for it.

STEFANY: You wrote a thesis on Kees and Hardy?

PARKER: For you.

STEFANY: But you said it was illegal, dishonest.

PARKER: For me to accept money for it, yes.

I felt that these two scenes were inconsistent so we simply cut Stefany's remark about him doing it for free, and focused more on showing disdain from Parker when Stefany asks him:

*See Attached Video Clip 7*

In then last scene of act one major changes needed to occur. In the previous version there was a cafe scene between Parker and Stefany that James cut because there was too much Parker and Stefany on stage. Much of Parker's identity was covered in the cut scene so James added a few pages of this information in the beginning of scene ten without altering what was already on the paper. This led to some problems, the biggest of which is Parker's income. Parker tells all three Schumanns that he inherited everything from Keith. Later Mr. Schumann calls him a starving artist who must be poor because he does not work. So we had to take out the inheritance, and yet the audience needed to know this. We decided to reinsert it into a Parker and Stefany picnic scene. This was not as smooth as it was in the previous version because they still do not know each other very well. However, due to the fact Stefany is invading his home I felt it was alright to ask in this location. I went back to the second version and cut and paste the discussion, making slight changes to facilitate the fact it happens earlier in the relationship. The interesting situation is we had to now mention

Mrs. Baker in both scenes to facilitate the flow we had constructed. Because of this I had to pick and choose what to keep and where. Maybe after hearing the script I won't agree with this change, but it works on paper, just not as smoothly as I would like:

*See Attached, Video Clip 8*

Another issue in this scene is Mr. Schumann uses a derivate of the word "fag" twice to refer to Parker. When I brought it up to James he responded with the rule of three, saying we would have to add one to make it three or take away one so Schumann only says it once. We subtracted one and instead of insulting Parker, I moved Mr. Schumann's lines up to cut Parker off as to show his displeasure. Mr. Schumann also asks where Parker's friend is, as he had in the previous two versions. However, in this new version we have already established in this scene Mr. Schumann knows Keith is dead. So I changed it to Mr. Schumann just remarking that starving artists stick together, not asking where Parker's friend is.

The next large issue did not come until act two scene three. When Dr. Lanning enters and is surprised that someone is in the room James had the good doctor and Parker shorting out the past and then dealing with Dr. Lanning's shock at seeing Parker. This seemed disjointed to me and I suggested rearranging the lines, which James thought was a nice improvement. The rearrangement had Dr. Lanning explaining his shock and then we had the reintroductions.

DR. LANNING: Jesus! I didn't think there'd be anyone in here.

PARKER: Sorry, I didn't realize I wasn't allowed in here. Dr. Lanning?

DR. LANNING: Yes. I thought you looked familiar, but I'm afraid your name isn't coming to me at the moment.

PARKER: Stephen Parker. My friend's mother was here a few months ago.

DR. LANNING: Right, right. I left about five minutes ago and didn't expect anyone in that time. You didn't have any difficulties signing in, did you?

*See Attached, Video Clip 9*

In scene four we had a slight character change. From version two to three the doctor in the final act had been changed from a nameless one to Dr. Lanning who we saw in act one. This was due to my note on the number of bit parts. However, there is a nurse written in at the end of scene four who is clearly a female. Since we have the same doctor, could not we have the same nurse? This seemed practical enough to James, and I reworded the line to cut out the overly effeminate words; such as honey, sweetie, and baby. That is all of the big issues James and I covered. There were also a lot of singular word changes, such as "Yeah" became "Yes" a couple of times for different characters. It was mostly about staying true to the character and their age and intelligence levels. A lot of it was the changed words were colloquialisms of a younger generation or the uneducated, neither of which applies to the characters of the script. I also added in some stage directions, which were mostly character driven, things which may have been more of me looking at it as a director than as a dramaturg. These directions may not have been necessary, but I felt they were necessary to the story as I understood it and in all cases James seemed to agree.

The final discussion we had was about the title. While I quite enjoyed *Sunsets in Nantucket* it had nothing to do with the events of the script. I at first tried to look at some of

the memorable lines to derive a title out of them and nothing came that really stuck out to me. I spent a lot of time before discussing it with James trying to make something work but nothing did and nothing came to me. I then decided to look through Weldon Kees' poems. I came across one which had a Latin title, *La Vita Nuova*. I was not positive what the literal translation was so I looked it up and I discover it was *The New Life*. I also discovered it was the title of a Dante poem. I read the Kees poem. I thought it was mediocre and it did not really pertain to the script, however, just the translation seemed to fit perfectly because life beginning and ending is a theme throughout the script. We have life stolen in the Baker's and through Stephan. We have life beginning in a pregnant Stefany. Also we never truly know what life the character we call "Parker" is living. I discussed it with James and he liked the new title. The title was thus changed to *La Vita Nuova*.

I wish I had the time for James to write another version of the script, but I knew I did not and I knew that James wanted some time away from working on this piece. I respected that and so I sat down and made the necessary changes as James and I had outlined. I cleaned up the spelling errors and I was left with the fourth version of the script, the one I was about to bring into the rehearsal phase.

## **CHAPTER 6 What Does That Mean?**

I knew, dramaturgically, that there was a lot of information in the script which my actors would not fully understand. James wrote a very intelligent script and therefore I needed to have informed actors. Also having a short time for rehearsals I put it all into a small notebook for them to read.

The most important thing was Weldon Kees. Most people are not familiar with Weldon Kees; even I was not before I began looking at the script. When I decided to take on this project the first thing I did was to examine Kees. I only read some of his poetry and I instantly saw how he fit into the theme James was working with. However, when fully researching Kees, I realized how intricately he worked Kees into the script, and how Parker was Kees in many ways. Reading Kees' biography gave me a new level of appreciation for the script.

There are a lot of poetical references throughout the script, and I spent much of my research addressing that. Without full knowledge of these references one could pull off a fine performance, however, I feel knowing these facts allows one to fully live the experience, especially Parker, who is this poetry embodied and rattles them off with ease. Besides Kees, I provided the most information on Thomas Hardy, because his themes on life

and death also embody the play. Hardy quite probably influenced Kees and the comparisons Stefany is trying to make, while are not clear cut, are not huge stretches either. This makes her thesis plausible, but also makes Parker's confusion over her topic choice one we all might make.

As for Tennyson, Arnold and Eliot I only speak of the poems mentioned in the script. *The Wasteland* is a very appropriate to mention as well as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, as they seem to be embodied in Parker, except Parker gets the girl, which I think is as surprising to him as if he were Prufrock. I also had to add the note of "Do I dare eat a peach?", which is added in the script, but would make no sense in its location if you did not know that it was connected to *Prufrock*, and also why that line was chosen. Arnold's poem is interesting, as it deals with the moments before suicide and its argument, and suicide is an important theme, even if that is only realized at the end. The Lotus-Eaters is also interesting, dealing with travelers in search of Utopia. Parker seems to be searching for a Utopia as well, and it seems as if he may have found it by isolating himself. It is when he lets the world back in he realizes he lost that utopia.

I added a note on Priapus so the cast can fully understand the joke I mentioned earlier. I believe it is a funny bit whether you know who Priapus is or not. Knowing leads to a bigger laugh, as it does through a lot of the script.

I also included research on the Chihuahuan Desert, mire poix and La Cosa Nostra, as they are all quickly mentioned and in the November reading the actors seemed clueless. It was important to know them or to not know them depending on the character in the situation.

The interesting question I am drawn to is what I would include in the program. Due to a lack of funds I am unable to produce a full program for the production, which is unfortunate. If I were to include a dramaturgical note I would have to have a mention of Weldon Kees, as he is obscure, and yet very important to the script. I would like to think the script could be enjoyed without any knowledge of these poets; however, knowing these poets, combined with the knowledge I gained in my research makes the script more heightened and intelligent. I will have to see the feedback I receive from the audience to determine the extent one should use to inform the audience. If I had to do a program now, however, I would probably included a short biography of Weldon Kees and also an explanation of the journey the script has gone through in my work with James. I would stop there because I believe a general audience can enjoy it and while the intelligent audience member may just understand more of the jokes, the basic storyline is pretty simple. The people who get all the jokes will just leave secure in their intelligence and the average people I think will leave having still enjoyed the story they witnessed.

While I looked at many sources on these subjects, I knew my actors did not need all the information it took me many hours to collect. I decided to use some of my shorter summarized on-line sources to give my actors a brief overview of the subjects. I also knew I could expand on any information during the rehearsal process. Below is a summary of some of the bigger parts of the notebook I gave to my actors for them to look at and to help them in their examination of the script.

Weldon Kees

I provided a lengthy biography from *Today's Woman Writing Community*. It explained his successes as a writer, musician, and artists all over the Unites States. More importantly to the script it focused his dissatisfaction with life. It expresses how his works attacked life's sensibilities and how his poetry was very abstract and dark. It also details his death; an apparent suicide from the Golden Gate Bridge. Kees' car was found, but his body never was. Friends talk about how Kees wanted to start a new life in Mexico and some think he faked his own suicide to do just that.

Thomas Hardy

Hardy's biography comes from *Pearson Education*. I only included the part on his literary career and the end of his life. It talks about the hard time Hardy had getting published at first and how his married life was often quite difficult. It also does a nice job characterizing his poetry saying it was, "determined to avoid any presentation of life that was not sweet, sentimental, and simplistically optimistic"

Poetry References

*Associated Content* speaks to how Lord Alfred Tennyson's *The Lotus-Eaters*, holds a fascinating theme. It analyzes the poem speaking to the dream-like return to a utopian society. *Literary Kicks* praises T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. It talks about how we really enter the mind set of Prufrock, a middle-aged man looking for love, but scared to put himself out there. Eliot's *The Wasteland* is full of vivid images of death and sadness according to *Associated Content*. Lastly, *PsyArt* talks about Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*. It talks about the poems built up defense against unrequited desire and unsatisfied need that it ultimately rejects ending with suicide.

## **CHAPTER 7 Bringing Life to the Play**

I knew shortly after I decided to tackle this project that it must end with a performance of some kind. My original goal was to present it as a fully staged production. I had not been involved on a project in a long time because I had to work at night while attending classes during the day, and I was anxious to work on a production again. The script would not be an easy one to stage due to the demands of the script combined with the funds at my disposal. I also realized shortly after beginning work that the time it would take to mold the script may take longer than I had anticipated. I quickly realized that a fully staged production may be too much too soon for the script.

So I thought and decided to model my approach after some of my favorite plays from my undergraduate experience. At Niagara we would perform one or two plays a semester in a style we called Reader's Theatre. The title is fairly self explanatory, but to say all performances were similar would be a false statement. Every director did their production a little differently, and having performed in two such productions I not only saw different ways to attack this style of theatre, but the reasons behind it. Some directors would have the actors stand and speak without movement. Others would get as close to a staged production as possible, only letting the actors use their scripts. Many directors lived in between these two extremes. I also knew it was very effective based on the feedback we received after the

plays. My father even said that of all the plays he attended during my time at Niagara, the reader's theatre performances were some of his favorites.

The difference between the scripts used in those performances and *La Vita Nuova* was those scripts were established and were previously produced. Also this performance would just be a step on the full journey that is *La Vita Nuova*. Therefore I decided to simplify as much as possible. The ultimate goal of this project is to test the script; therefore this performance is mostly about the words. I decided to lean more to stand and speak model, to help concentrate on those words. The play is not one filled with bold actions and most of the humor is psychological, not physical.

I sent a department wide e-mail to seek interest parties in the script. Apparently I picked the wrong time of year to look for actors as everyone seemed to be working on something. I received a few people interested, but not enough. I sent out a second e-mail, and luckily a few people had opened up. I ended up with two men and three women, plus I had asked Thomas Cunningham to play Schumann, feeling he could depict the role well. I gathered them for a reading, less than two weeks before I planned to open.

At this reading one female and one male did not show up, adding pressure to the situation. I knew I needed three males to make it work, and while two females could work I would have preferred three. I found out my male was not going to be able to commit because of work issues and my female did not show up because, as she later told me, I did not tell her what to prepare for the first rehearsal, which frankly amazed me. I kept my cool and told her when our second rehearsal would be and she informed me she could not make it and wished me luck. Luckily this was an e-mail conversation which allowed me to respond

how I wanted to, being able to edit my correspondence. Luckily another male contacted me which allowed me to make things work with five actors. This also made me aware I would not only have to direct it, but also serve as the interlocutor for the script, which I was fine with.

My actors all responded well to the first reading of the script. They enjoyed it and were excited to work on it, which made me all the more excited. It is nerve wracking with a new work, which I put a lot of time and energy into. Being the only outside source saying that this work had legs and could be enjoyed by a large group of people put added pressure on me. If everyone hates it then I have put a lot of work into a script that may never see the light of day. However, with a cast to support me, I knew I could get their best performances, which hopefully could lead to a wider audience coming to love the script as I do.

After the first rehearsal I met with all the actors individually to work on characterization. I cast David Zimmerman as Parker, not just for his abilities as an actor, but because he was the only non-cast male I had at the reading. David was older and I think was able to capture the awkward factor well, however, I knew he didn't have the knowledge Parker has. Most Americans do not possess the intelligence Parker has, so it is not a knock on David. I asked him to really examine the poetry, because this is very important for Parker. He understood where I was coming from and our conversation flowed nicely. We spent a good deal of time moving through the scenes, seeing how Parker changed, and I sent him off to take the time to find Parker.

Elyse Jolley was cast as Stefany. This became an easy decision due to the wishes of my two ladies. During the reading I had Elyse and Kelly Murray, my other female, alternate

back and forth between roles. They came with different perspectives to the part, but felt that with molding either of their representations of the role could fit into my vision. When I asked them which they preferred Elyse said Stefany and Kelly said the supporting characters. I like when my actors are happy, and it would have worked for me either way so I cast to their wishes. The main thing I wanted to concentrate on with Elyse was the fact that Elyse brought a grounded sensibility to Stefany. While that was very nice for some scenes, other scenes Stefany needed to be more aloof and bubbly. It was interesting how I came full circle on this. I originally would have pictured some one like Elyse for the role, but Renée's depiction of Stefany during the November reading had changed my opinions on Stefany. I was now looking for a balance between the two. I also stressed the poetry to Elyse. While she did not need to be as knowledgeable as Parker she had to know a good deal about the topics she is studying in the play.

Thomas, I was most confident would capture what I was looking for in his character. This is why I asked him to do the role. Schumann is a caricature for much of the first half of the play. He is the typical father who always yells with/at his wife and is over-protective of his daughter. In the end, however, you see the humanity of Schumann. Schumann is a fantastic character, who must draw a lot of laughs to round out the script. I asked Thomas to do this role because I knew he could embody the Schumann I was in search of.

Kelly had the pleasure of playing all other female roles besides Stefany, the main of which was Mrs. Schumann. Mrs. Schumann is important because she has to cohabitate in the humor that is the Schumanns. I knew I had to prepare her to work with Thomas, who I was confident would nail it. Mrs. Schumann is tricky because she can't top Mr. Schumann

and she cannot fall too far behind him. She has to keep her cool while making him the butt of the joke at all times. Kelly also had the task of playing five other characters. They all had to be unique and yet they all have a similar thread to them. We talked out each character and what their purpose was, for they all support the story at hand.

Bryan Hall was my late addition to play most notably Stephan Parker as well as a few other small male roles. Stephan is tricky because he has an experience which Bryan has not gone through. Stephan, in his day was a good guy, an intelligent guy, although probably not as much as Stephen Parker. However, Stephan has spent the last fifteen years or so in prison, and this changes a man. He has to be rough and yet likeable and relatable. Bryan, much like Kelly, also has to play multiple characters, which seemed to excite him. His characters also had a broader range than Kelly's which should make his transitions easier.

I gave my actors a long weekend to examine their characters further and familiarize themselves more with the script. We came back for a blocking rehearsal. I explained to them that this production was about the words. We were testing the script, not their skills as actors. This did not mean that characterization was not important, it was, but we could not sacrifice the script at the hands of artistic license. The characters had to support and work in the best interest of the script. I explained the set up; five chairs behind five music stands, which would hold the script. It was fairly simple, allowing me to block the whole show in about two and half hours.

I was battling at first with where my actors should deliver line. Despite the impulses of my actors, I stressed that everything had to be delivered out. This was for two reasons. The basic is this is the easiest way to be heard. The second is this helps involve the

audience, drawing them into the play. I remember when I was first presented with this idea of delivering everything as if your scene partner was in the audience. I thought it was silly, but then once I discovered how powerful it could make a script I saw the reason behind it.

Most of the rehearsal was spent stressing the style I had set forth and defeating the impulse to face you scene partner. I was toying with the idea of breaking the convention I had set up, and having certain characters turn at dramatic moments. By about half way through, and having only choreographed that once, I decided blocking these turns killed the convention I had chosen and therefore cut the earlier direction.

I also took time to address lines, when I thought the actor was missing the mark. I knew I had to be more aggressive and directorial than I normally like, but as I said artistic license cannot come into play. I was not a dictator, but I was more controlling. This was a little difficult for me, but after having put so much into the script I wanted to see it carried through in the same vision.

I would learn through the process that I had to bend slightly, and I had no problem doing that. First of all, I had to come to terms with the fact our time for rehearsal was shorter than I would have liked and the relationships could not bloom as much as I normally would want. I could have taken time for some exercises to help this, but I felt the time could be better served addressing the script. We worked a little on characterization and the relationships, but overall I did not have the time I would have liked. I also realized my leads were naturally the opposite of how I imagined the characters. I saw Parker as a very dry, grounded and as a contained individual. David is naturally emotional and very active. Stefany I saw as on the bubbly side, which goes on an emotional rollercoaster. Elyse is very

grounded and down to earth. They were probably better suited to play the other part, which could have been interesting if I was trying to make an artistic statement, but again I was not, I was trying to service the script. As our process grew, and they became more comfortable I not only accepted it but grew to like it.

During the process there were changes made to the script. I discovered a number of redundancies which were altered. I cut out any stage directions which I knew were unnecessary for the audience's understanding of the script. The rest I appointed to be read by the interlocutor, the part I would be filling. The read directions changed and altered as we went through the process. My cast also discovered two large inconsistencies which both James and I had missed. The first was in the second scene when Stefany says her roommate's boyfriend is in town. Later we learn she lives with her parents. This was an easy fix, altering the dialogue in scene two to say that Stefany is glad to be at work to get out of her parents house. The second inconsistency is in act one scene seven when Stefany says her father looked up Parker's address. In act two scene two Mr. Schumann goes to Stephan's cell looking for Parker's address. I altered this to foreshadow to twist with Mr. Schumann saying he is looking for dirt on Parker since he did not seem to exist until twenty years ago.

My actors began to get more and more comfortable with the convention and this made the show begin to flow. We only had three rehearsal runs of the show, but each one improved measurably. By the last run I knew we were ready for an audience. This rehearsal was a little flat. We needed the laugh breaks; we needed the drama to wash over the audience. Yes, the process was short, but we had enough time for what I wanted to do. It

was not perfect, but the script was well served, and I think we created what could be an entertaining piece of theatre that could be easily followed and understood by the audience, as long as they could understand James' humor.

I would have liked to have had another week to work on the relationships, but I would not have had actors then, so I did what I had to do, and it worked out just fine. It seemed the actors enjoyed performing the show, and perfect theatre does not exist for the creator anyway. The process was fairly painless and I feel all of my actors reached the goals I set for them after the first rehearsal. There are a lot of issues in the show that my actors couldn't have possibly related to, if for no other reason that I have only one large character under the age of forty. I was nervous and anxious to get an audience in there, hoping to get the response I was looking for, the one I had when I first encountered the script and the one all of my actors had as well.

## CHAPTER 8 Performance

The performance of this piece was in some ways a triumph and in other ways a disappointment. Our Saturday show had no attendance, and only four people attended on Sunday. I had about twelve people tell me they were coming, but I knew there was another engagement Saturday most of them had been invited to, and on Sunday the snow hit, which I feel kept many away. I had not really experienced snow in Virginia, but I have been told that a snow storm is like Y2K all over again, which while I find amusing, hurt our audience attendance.

The actors were clearly affected by the audience, in positive and negative ways. The life that was sorely missing from the script arrived in Sunday's reading, which improved the script immensely. I knew on Friday they were in need of an audience and I was absolutely right, as they transformed the piece into a different play on Sunday. Despite the laughter they also took three minutes off the show time.

When performing a show in the manner we were performing it, having a flow to the performance is imperative to keep the audience engaged. If the actors seemed bored, which they did on Friday, the audience will fall into boredom as well. If the cast is engaging and full of life they can inspire the audience to follow them through the journey that is the play. The energy that the cast displayed on Sunday clearly invigorated the audience to follow them

through the journey we had created. This would be evident in the talkback, which I will talk about later in this chapter.

There were some bumpy spots on Sunday as well. Any opening night will have a cast over anxious, and this occasion was no different. Unfortunately, opening and closing night coincided so I was unable to see if we could have calmed down for a second performance, although I assume they would have. My actors seemed to turn dyslexic and many lines were magically rewritten. Pauses were observed where there should have been none, and written pauses disappeared or were drastically shortened. I think only one scene was hurt, and overall it did not severely damage the script, as the main points were able to come through. I was able to accept the disservices done, because of all the vigor that was added by the excitement of the moment.

I was worried in the early stages of the show for the first few scenes contain a number of jokes that were not getting laughs or very small laughs occasionally. Being the interlocutor was beneficial because I was able to watch the audience and gauge their reactions. I was hoping the audience was just trying to discern what was happening and were unwilling to give too much of themselves right off the bat. As the script evolved the laughter grew and by the time the Schumanns appeared the audience was in stitches, which was quite a relief. They remained engaged throughout the reading. They weren't yawning or looking at their watches or falling asleep, so I was confident they were enjoying themselves:

*See Attached, Video Clip 10*

Much like I think the life of the actors help engage the audience, the audience being engaged helps the actors be enlivened. The give and take was clearly evident and was very beneficial to both sides, which is the magic of theatre. I was happy with the results of the show and I took the time after to ask for feedback, hoping for the responses to be favorable to the script.

I was quite surprised and quite pleased by the positive nature of the feedback. I was not surprised that they liked it, but it seemed genuine and not a negative thing was said. The audience was made up of two VCU undergraduate students, as well as an actor's father and brother, who was probably in his early twenties. The audience was far from hesitant to respond, which pleased me. All four of them said they really enjoyed what they had seen that evening. The conversation covered the main themes and the script itself, as well as the way in which it was presented. The presentation came second behind the initial response to the play itself.

They all enjoyed the play. They thought it had great moments of humor, but it also had realness to it. One mentioned how he liked the way it stayed true to real life and didn't have a stereotypical happy ending. The cyclical nature of the play was also mentioned. They enjoyed how it began with sadness, had great moments of comedy in the middle and ended with sadness again. One even called it a "tragedy sandwich", which everyone found quite funny. The themes were easily discovered and followed a clear path. They thought the play had a nice flow. When I told James about their response he asked me if I thought they were genuine or if they were blowing smoke. I replied that I really thought they were genuine, and while there was some extra build up, which was to be expected; I felt they truly enjoyed

it. They also answered my biggest question by all feeling they would like to see it fully staged.

The title also came up in our discussions. I took the opportunity here to expose the dramaturg in me, explaining where it came from, who Weldon Kees really was and how he played a part in the formation of the script. One audience member mentioned that through knowledge of Spanish assumed that the translation was *The New Life* and felt the play itself had that idea as a common theme throughout it. This made it clear that the late change was for the better.

They also talked about how we staged it. It was agreed that they were captivated by it, even though they would have preferred to have seen it fully staged. One mentioned it took him awhile to get acquainted with the convention. He tried watching intently, he tried closing his eyes, like I suggested in a pre-show announcement, but eventually felt just trying to watch was easiest and he eventually entered the world. Another mentioned my function as interlocutor really helped him. He was able to fully imagine everything that was happening and this made the world very accessible. They admired the actors focus and the fact they were not speaking to each other made the play more comprehensible. I felt as though he thought my convention would have been distracting and was pleased to discover the opposite. It was clear that none of them had seen a play presented in this fashion, and I was not surprised by this, or the fact they were pleasantly surprised to have enjoy it performed in this manner.

I was very happy after the feedback. The audience had vindicated my efforts and I was pleased with the result. I caught a few more small things in the reading I may change

but they are mostly line phrasings. I may remove a few words here or there or alter a stage direction, but I feel at this point my work on the script is done, at least in this capacity. I hope to one day revisit it to fully produce it for it is clear that is the next step for this script. It will be a difficult play to fully stage with the set demands and some of the stage directions. At times it reads more like a movie. But if I have the time, the space, the money, and the actors available in the future I will definitely revisit it.

## CHAPTER 9 Collaboration

Working with James really was a pleasure on this project. Anne Cattaneo says, “A dramaturg’s new play work should revolve around a strong well established relationship with playwrights” (Cattaneo 12). This was clearly the case between James and me. We had built up a relationship since 2002, and we had spent time working on shows together, both brand new works and well established ones. We had both seen a playwright/dramaturg relationship which failed during *Being Shakespeare: Working Title*, and we saw how drastically that failure could harm a script.

James showed me the script originally because he trusted and valued my input. This relationship is very important to me personally as well as my work, and something I did not take lightly. Just like in all relationships trust is necessary. James knew I was not going to do anything to harm the script, and I knew James was not either. He did not always have as much faith in the script as I did, but his faith did grow with the approval, first with my own and then with that of our actors in the reading we had last November. To hear them responded favorably to the script not only lifted a weight off of my shoulders, but also eased some of James’ concerns about whether the script could hold water.

In our meetings I was truly able to address my concerns, because he knew I was not attacking him, but rather trying to create a unified vision between us. At first we were looking at the script from different sides, but we each took the time to listen to each other's problems and explanations. While at the end of the process we were not in complete agreement on everything, we saw where the other was coming from and James changed things I might have kept, and I changed things James might have kept, but we were comfortable enough to give up that power where necessary.

There was a lot of give and take in the process. I decided to enter our discussion, open and not having already decided to change anything. James' personality is such where he is very flexible, most of the time. This was also very important. James had a reason for most of the things he did, and I listened intently to all of his explanations. Occasionally he completely changed my mind on an issue and I left some issues, which I thought were big issues, alone because they now made sense. James does not always think like most people and understanding the way he thinks is important.

In the end I am glad I was the dramaturg on the process and not someone who did not have the past relationship with James that I had. It was a smooth process because I understood James, knew how he thought and we had an established trust. Our meetings were filled with a lot of laughs, and I was never stressed that the script, or my thesis, was endangered. We were able to get the work done in our own timetable, but still in a timely fashion and to our satisfaction. I would gladly work with James again on any project, and with our past there is a good possibility of that happening. I also do not expect it to be the

last time we look at this script together. I can definitely see a fully staged production of *La Vita Nuova* in the future and that prospect excites me.

Our reading in November was also an enjoyable event. I was happy James not only came out for it, but put the trust in me to conduct it. James had not met two of the four actors before, but knowing I was close to them, he trusted them. The actual reading was a delight filled with a lot of laughter and even some tears at the end. The actors were great, giving their own feedback. I was very worried going into the reading. These were some of my close friends and if they had disliked the script it would have been very painful. By the end of the first scene they were in stitches and it was like a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders, freeing me to intently listen.

The feedback they gave was very intelligent and helpful as well. They felt very strongly that we should see more of Mr. and Mrs. Schumann, and I agreed. The reading, in general, uncovered holes in the script which I could not have found if I were just reading it by myself. I also gained some clues on how to attack the script when directing it. There were a many words which were mispronounced and unknown. Without this reading the script would have taken a much different turn, and while the turn may have been fine, it probably wouldn't have been as productive as the one it took during our reading.

I sensed that I had to do a reading and it was definitely the proper course of action. It helped James and me immensely, not only in the writing process but for me in the directing process. The only problem with the reading is I now had a visual and verbal idea of who these characters were. When I was reading the script I heard Renée, Justin, Pat and Casey, which gave me expectations when I was looking for a cast, expectations which could not be

met by the actors which I was using for the production. This does not mean that they had a problem, but that I had to change my expectations.

I had already mentioned how David and Elyse were the opposite of how I imagined the characters. This stems in many ways from the reading. Justin is very dry and Renée is very bubbly. Now in the case of Parker I feel much of his dryness comes from the writing, where as Stefany being bubbly comes more from Renée's depiction. I still needed Elyse to be less grounded than when she began, and she did get there. I feel like she nailed Stefany's serious scenes, and by the performance I was pleased with the rest of her scenes. She added sensuality to the character in place of being bouncy, which worked in a completely different way. Elyse's Stefany better fit with David's depiction of Parker. I liked them as a couple which is absolutely critical for the play to work.

Working with the cast was a fun experience. They all did grow throughout the process reaching the goals I set for them based on the time we had. If we had a month to work on this I would have expanded the goals, but with less than two weeks I knew they could only get so far. Normally I would be upset by this rushed process, but it was not about directing actors to find award winning performances but rather about presenting a script to the public for their feedback to see if the script would be worthy of a fully staged production.

They all worked hard, came to rehearsal prepared and for the most part did what I asked of them. The hard part for me was not directing them, but changing my directorial approach. Normally I like to rehearse with more of a collaborative spirit, letting my actors run wild and seeing what they bring to me. This still happened in a way, as I did not make any of them completely change the original character they brought to me, instead I worked

with it, changing my view of the script, altering their character slightly to help make my vision and their vision meld. I did have to be more of a stickler on inflections though. Like I have mentioned, this project is about the script, and about finding James' vision. Normally as long as the actor can make the line plausible within the scene they can inflect it how they would like. James wrote a number of lines which are confusing unless they are properly inflected, so I had to give most of my notes in this area. I was happy I stayed true to my motto never to give a line reading. I had to use my intellect to give the note in a way to get the response I wanted. Luckily, since we had the scripts for use during the performance they were able to notate it as I wanted in the script, so rarely a note had to be given twice, which always makes a director happy, myself very much so included.

The relationships developed nicely for the time we had. It is hard when you never look at your scene partner, and only work with them a handful of days to find the level needed for that relationship. I was happy with the relationships I saw by the end of the process. They were three-dimensional and I believed these characters really cared for each other. Yes, I would have liked to have had more time to develop them but, "Had we but world enough and time," Andrew Marvell, don't take it context:

*See Attached, Video Clip 11*

Overall these collaborations were a great experience. Even with time crunches I was never worried we were going to fall flat. I am very happy with everyone involved in the process and would change few things if I was to go back and do it again, and most of the things I would change would have to do with time issues.

## CHAPTER 10 Evaluation

Looking back on this project I learned a lot and I am very happy with the result. It was also a time consuming process which I am glad to be finished with. It was exhausting and nerve-wracking at times, but one I plan to do again and again in the future.

My work on this project was not without failure. I made many mistakes during this journey. Luckily for me, they did not harm the overall project and I was able to learn from them. For instance, I think if I had been more experienced with the art of new play dramaturgy we could have gone through with one less version of the script. If at one time I could have analyzed the second version of the script the way I did the second and the third, I could have had James produce one more rewrite as I wanted. I was caught up on the big problems with the second version and overlooked many of the small ones. However, I wonder if that would have overloaded James and prevented him from making a constructive rewrite or if it would have discouraged James so as to prevent him from wanting to move forward on this project.

Even with the three times I worked on improving the script I still missed a few inconsistencies which my cast had to point out to me, being Stefany's living situation as well as the address problem. Another issue I have yet to mention is something Thomas brought up, but I did not bother with it, thinking it was not a huge issue. Thomas mentioned to me an issue with T.S. Eliot. Stefany says Eliot is not a modern American poet, and Thomas

thought that he was a bad example. Some may consider him that, even though *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was written in England. Eliot is in many ways both American and English, and only wrote a handful of years before Weldon Kees. I think he doesn't fit into the modern American group; however, someone could give me a decent debate on the subject. These as well as a few redundancies I changed during rehearsals could have been caught. Due to my lack of experience in this field, however, my evaluations were not as strong as they could have been, and as they will be in the future.

I still think I did a world of good for the script and James agrees with me. The script was a good story with a lot of holes when I first read it. Thanks to the response by the audience I now feel it is a solid story which is believable and does not have moments which may draw the audience out. It is not predictable, is reflective of real life and is quite entertaining featuring great moments of humor. I worked hard for a long time on this script and I found my reward in the end.

Timing was clearly an issue. This process took more time than I had anticipated and due to the lack of available actors I was not able to accomplish everything with the reading I wanted to. Again this was a learning experience that came out of a bad estimation. Never really having experienced this process it was hard for me to tell how long it would take, and even next time it is hard to say, depending on the script and the playwright. I was not off by much, however. Another week with actors, maybe another two for the playwright and it would have been perfect. While I was a little off, it was not irreconcilable for the script and I made it work without too much trouble.

This project has taught me a lot and has really done a nice job of preparing me for performing this task in the future. It is a very rewarding process, not only for me, but for those involved. I know next time I will do it better, and this is a valuable asset I can bring to a potential job at a school. There will always be students who are interested in writing. We need to foster these students and not ignore them. I remember being that student, having written a script, with no idea if it was any good or if it had the ability to ever be seen by an audience. It is rare that a student with a first time script is going to have a piece so brilliant that it is ready for a performance, but there is a good chance that a student can have a great fresh idea which needs to be fleshed out, and I can help them there.

I have seen the effective ways and the ineffective ways to assist a blossoming playwright and I have confidence now from having succeeded in this project. It gives me another facet to offer a department, which is important for me, trying to be as well rounded as possible as an educator. James may have been a friend and colleague, but he really was as fragile as I would imagine a student to be, for he does not realize how much talent he has in this area. I was the same way as a student, it is a recurring theme and playwriting is not an easy field. If I can help discover some of the playwrights of the theatre's future I can be a great asset to the theatre community and helping it grow into a new existence.

## **Literature Cited**

### Literature Cited

Agar, Katherine E. "PsyArt: An Online Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts."

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences | The University of Florida. 04 Feb. 2009

<[http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal/1998\\_agar01.shtml](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal/1998_agar01.shtml)>.

"Analysis of The Wasteland by T.S. Eliot - Associated Content." Associated Content -

associatedcontent.com. 04 Feb. 2009

<[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/124118/analysis\\_of\\_the\\_wasteland\\_by\\_ts\\_eliot.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/124118/analysis_of_the_wasteland_by_ts_eliot.html)>.

Asher, Levi. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Literary Kicks. 04 Feb. 2009

<<http://www.litkicks.com/Prufrock/>>.

Cattaneo, Annie. "Dramaturgy: An Overview." Dramaturgy in American Theater Source

Book. Ed. Susan Jonas and Geoffrey S. Proehl. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College, 1997. 3-15.

"Drugs in the Elysian Field, based on "The Lotus Eaters" by Lord Tennyson - Associated

Content." Associated Content - associatedcontent.com. 04 Feb. 2009

<[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/96882/drugs\\_in\\_the\\_elysian\\_field\\_based\\_on.html?cat=38](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/96882/drugs_in_the_elysian_field_based_on.html?cat=38)>.

Hunt, Mame, and Susan Mason. "A Conversation with Mame Hunt, Dramaturg-Artistic

Director, and Susan Mason, Dramaturg-Academic, 19 August 1994, Oakland."

Dramaturgy in American Theater Source Book. Ed. Susan Jonas and Geoffrey S.

Proehl. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College, 1997. 421-30.

"Thomas Hardy." Literature. Pearson Longman. 04 Feb. 2009

<[http://wps.ablongman.com/long\\_kennedy\\_lfpd\\_9/0,9130,1489987-,00.html](http://wps.ablongman.com/long_kennedy_lfpd_9/0,9130,1489987-,00.html)>.

"Weldon Kees." Today's Woman Writing Community. 04 Feb. 2009 <[http://www.todays-](http://www.todays-woman.net/article568.htm)

[woman.net/article568.htm](http://www.todays-woman.net/article568.htm)>.

## **APPENDIX A**

*Sunsets in Nantucket version 2*

### **ACT I** **Scene 1 and 2**

*A small home-style restaurant. PARKER is sitting at a table, alone, with a bag containing an old newspaper, various postcards, and random material. WAITRESS approaches.*

WAITRESS

G'morning, sugah. The usual, I guess? Wheat toast, honey, tea?

PARKER

"Sugah"? Are you auditioning for something?

WAITRESS

Sorry, thought I'd spice things up a little bit.

PARKER

Because nothing says "spicy" like a Southern Drawl in a Yankee.

WAITRESS

In any event-

PARKER

Can I get a three-egg omelet, onions, pepperoni, green pepper, garlic if you have it, and a small glass of orange juice?

WAITRESS

Living on the edge today, are we? Special occasion?

PARKER

I suppose you could say that. Today is my friend Keith's birthday.

WAITRESS

Is that so? Is he going to be joining you? God knows you haven't had someone share a meal with you here since... you know, I can't honestly think of a single time someone has sat across from you, man, woman, or animal. Why is that?

PARKER

Because it is?

WAITRESS

Oh. Gotcha. So when is Keith going to get here?

PARKER

Get here? He's... oh, right. He's been dead for years.

WAITRESS

I'm sorry. I didn't mean. That... Um...

PARKER

Relax. Years. You don't need to say anything. Time passed, people heal.

WAITRESS

They do. I remember when I lost my husband.

PARKER

I never realized you were married.

WAITRESS

Best fourteen years of my life... and I'll be damned if those fourteen weren't the worst of his! I remember our honeymoon... it's one of those moments that you remember all of your life. The ones that stick to you, every detail...

PARKER

Like Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassinations, September 11, 2001...

WAITRESS

Exactly like those. A kind of-

PARKER

Trauma on a massive scale.

WAITRESS

Sure, why not? I'll tell you, he was something else, though I'm sure most people say that about their husbands and wives and significant others. There was never a time when I ever thought I could do better, or thought that there was something better out there. I guess those in less than perfect situations say that, too, but Bill really was as close to a saint as a unreligious person could get.

PARKER

Like a bodhisattva.

WAITRESS

Uh...Sure. A bodhishattha.

PARKER

Close enough.

WAITRESS

Anyway, he was the kind of person, who, if you should meet him, you would like him simply by sight. Like Santa Claus, or Jerry Garcia. Kids loved him, and he loved kids. Unfortunately, we never could have them, but it wasn't for lack of trying! My gosh, there were some night when I wouldn't get a wink of sleep and would come into work still- sorry, got a little carried away.

PARKER

It's fine. I don't get conversation often, either.

WAITRESS

I get it all the time. I like to hear myself talk. So, omelet, orange juice... tea?

PARKER

Sure. Irish Breakfast.

WAITRESS

Will English Breakfast work?

PARKER

Are you honestly asking me if English is an acceptable replacement for Irish?

(Pause.)

I'm kidding. Relax. Only to me, and only with tea. I'll have the English Breakfast.

WAITRESS

Can't let go, huh?

PARKER

Let go of what?

WAITRESS

The paper. Significance?

PARKER

A memento. Some people keep rooms unchanged after the loss of a loved one, or keep memorials with candles, flowers or incense. I happen to keep this paper as a memento mori.

WAITRESS

(Looking at the paper.)

Nice car.

(Scans the article.)

So they found his car. Do you have the article from when they found his body?

PARKER

No, he apparently jumped off the bridge. Either that, or he was kidnapped, but there was a suicide note, not a ransom note. More cut and dry than one would hope.

WAITRESS

That's horrible.

PARKER

Yes, but it's what he wanted. It's difficult to think of suicide that way; it's usually considered to be a selfish act, causing pain and suffering for others and not just one's self. The way I see it, now, perhaps the act is more gray than black or white. His letter was... eloquent, to say the least. He claimed to have accomplished enough in this life, and that it was about time he left it for the next. It was better than that, believe me.

WAITRESS

Let me put your order in, and I'll be back in a bit.

*WAITRESS exits. PARKER pulls a manila envelope from under the table that was sent to him from overseas. He opens it up and takes out a stack of postcards from various countries. He picks one out with the Eiffel Tower on the front and begins to write. WAITRESS returns with his juice and tea, and then takes a seat across from him.*

Postcards? You do realize you're supposed to send them from the country you're from, right? Or at least that's how normal people do it. Bill used to like sending them to our house to find out if we would beat them.

PARKER

Interesting. Not as interesting as what I do with them. I send them to Mrs. Baker, Keith's mother. She's been living in a nursing home for the last few years. She collects them. It's... kind of my way of keeping in touch with Keith. Try not to judge.

WAITRESS

That's something else, isn't it?

PARKER

You could say that.

WAITRESS

So the article said he was a writer. Anything I'd have heard of?

PARKER

Well, he wrote a few short stories, plays, poems... He created quite a bit of good work. He never became well-known outside of the Bay area, though. You'd think that someone who was able to become so popular so quickly would gain national attention, but that never really happened. He sent a few of his poems to publishers in England, and for the most part they were well received, but Europeans tend to have difficulty relating to American trials and tribulations. A lot of his works dealt with his childhood, growing up in the country, the death of his father in a farming accident- I'm boring you.

WAITRESS

No, not really. Although I really should get back to work. I'll be by with your omelet in a bit.

PARKER

Thanks, Ann. I appreciate it.

WAITRESS

You're welcome, Mr. Parker.

PARKER

Please, call me Stephen.

WAITRESS

Stephen.

*WAITRESS exits. PARKER picks up the postcard he was writing on and continues to write. Moments later, the WAITRESS returns with the omelet. Lights come up on the opposite side of the stage, beginning the second scene, overlapping with the first. STEFANY is reading a postcard with the Eiffel Tower on its front, the same card PARKER is writing on, to MRS. BAKER who is sitting in a*

*wheel chair. It should be clear that neither side should be aware of the other.*

STEFANY

- and everything here is beautiful. Everything. The people, the architecture, the art... If only you were here to see them with your diamond eyes. In a few weeks, I'll be traveling through the Chunnel to England, where I'll stay for a while. Once again, I hope this card finds you doing well beyond all expectations. With sincerest love, Stephen Parker.

(Beat.)

Now, isn't that wonderful?

MRS. BAKER

Yes, it is.

STEFANY

Should we put this one with the others?

MRS. BAKER

Please. He's doing pretty well, isn't he? It's too bad Keith isn't around to see how well he's been doing. Keith would've loved to go to Europe. He always said he wanted to go-

(Begins to cry.)

-always wanted to go, but couldn't. I couldn't let him, not after his father-

*MRS. BAKER continues to cry, STEFANY attempts to console her.  
WAITRESS returns with the omelet.*

WAITRESS

Here you go, Steve. Can I get you anything else?

PARKER

No thanks. And it's Stephen, not Steve.

WAITRESS

I'm sorry, Steve.

*BLACKOUT on this side.*

STEFANY

Now, now, it's alright. They're serving chocolate pudding with dinner. Would you like some chocolate pudding?

MRS. BAKER

Mm-hmm.

STEFANY

What do you say I try to get you a double helping of pudding? You'd like that, right? Just don't tell anyone.

*STEFANY pushes MRS. BAKER to a table with TWO OLDER WOMEN who are eating dinner without too much difficulty. STEFANY exits and returns with a plate of food, including the promised two helpings of pudding for MRS. BAKER and two extra, one for each of the other WOMEN.*

(To the other TWO WOMEN)

Here's some hush-food for you two. Don't tell anyone I did this for you. You don't want to get into any trouble now, do you?

MRS. BAKER

My juice isn't open.

STEFANY

Well, that's a bit of a problem, isn't it? Here, let me-

*STEFANY takes the carton of juice and opens it, placing the bendable straw in it.*

There we go. Problem solved. Is there anything else I can do for you ladies? If you need me, just yell.

*STEFANY crosses to the Nurses' station where another NURSE is working on a crossword puzzle.*

Oh, hey.

NURSE

Stefany! What are you doing here?

STEFANY

I got called in because Carrie couldn't make it in. Her kid's sick, plus I could use the extra cash to pay back my loans. And then there's the roommate issue. Her boyfriend's in... I'm sure you can imagine.

NURSE

For the most part. My roommate in college had her boyfriend come to visit every once in a while. Pretty loud.

STEFANY

I'm guessing the entire floor knew what was going on?

NURSE

Exactly.

*STEFANY goes to her bookbag on the back of a chair, pulls out a notebook, reads a portion of what she's read, and then begins to write slowly.*

What's that you're working on?

STEFANY

My thesis. Modern Californian poets. It's interesting.

NURSE

Says you.

STEFANY

No, really it is. Well, you're right, you probably wouldn't like it. It's only for intellectuals.

NURSE

Hey, no hitting below the belt.

STEFANY

Yeah, you aren't as dumb as you think you are.

NURSE

And what makes you think I think I'm dumb?

STEFANY

Nothing at all.

NURSE

That's right. Let's see how smart you really are. Three letter word for "seer". First letter "e".

STEFANY

Uh... Eye?

NURSE

That fits. Three letter word for "sweet spud".

STEFANY

Yam. Do you seriously need help with these? You're not exactly proving your point.

NURSE

Just one last one. Ten letter word, "antonym for fragrant". Starts with 'm' and ends with 's'".

STEFANY

What?? Uh... mustiness... Wait a second... Yeah, right.

*STEFANY throws her pen at the NURSE, and both begin to laugh. MRS. BAKER collapses to the floor, taking her tray along with her, creating a loud crash, resulting in STEFANY and the NURSE running to her aid.*

Oh fuck, Beth. Is she..?

NURSE

No, I have a pulse. Go call Dr. Lanning and tell him we've got a patient down.

*STEFANY stands shocked.*

Stefany! Go!

*STEFANY takes off back to the nurses station to the phone, and BLACKOUT.*

### Scene 3

*MRS. BAKER is lying on a hospital bed, asleep. The faint beeps of a heart monitor can be heard, and she is hooked up to an oxygen tank. There are half a dozen Get-Well cards and two bouquets of flowers on the upstage nightstand, one of the bouquets visibly wilted. MALE NURSE is adjusting her I.V. line, writes on her chart, and then leaves the room as STEFANY enters in her work clothes. She adds two more cards to the nightstand, and removes the wilting bouquet, leaving the vase. PARKER walks in.*

PARKER

Excuse me. Are you... *stealing* her flowers?

STEFANY

Of course not! They're starting to wilt. Look, this one has already turned brownish... brown.

PARKER

I see. It was a joke. My apologies. How's she doing?

STEFANY

Well, she had a stroke, and has been in and out of consciousness, apparently.

PARKER

Apparently? You don't know for sure?

STEFANY

Well, that's what the chart said. I'd believe the chart.

PARKER

You... don't actually work here, do you?

STEFANY

Nope. I'm a part-time nurse at St. Jude's Nursing Home where-

PARKER

-where she was a resident. Good to know you aren't going to a costume party in that.

STEFANY

Uh... yeah... How'd you know her? Younger brother?

PARKER

Excuse me? Much younger brother? In any case, no; she was my friend's mother. After he... I tried to keep in touch with her. I sent postcards-

STEFANY

From Europe.

PARKER

Yes! She's been getting them. Fantastic!

STEFANY

I usually read them to her, since her eyesight wasn't what it used to be. So, you're her next of kin?

PARKER

Yes, Stephen. Pleasure to meet you. I'm guessing you know her husband's-

STEFANY

-deceased, 24 years, some sort of accident-

PARKER

Exactly.

MRS. BAKER

Keith?

PARKER

(Whispering)

Was she going senile before-

MRS. BAKER

Keith, where are you?

STEFANY

Among other things she was losing.

PARKER

No, Mrs. Baker, it's Stephen. Stephen Parker. Do you remember me?

MRS. BAKER

How are you, Keith?

STEFANY

No, Mrs. Baker. Stephen. (Enunciating) Steeee-phen.

PARKER

She's old and senile, not deaf.

STEFANY

She was losing her hearing, too.

PARKER

I stand corrected. Sorry.

MRS. BAKER

Why won't you talk to me?

STEFANY

It's probably not a good idea to play along.

PARKER

I didn't plan on it.

(To MRS. BAKER)

Mrs.- Mary? I'm not Keith.

MRS. BAKER

I knew you were still alive. You look so well. I remember... you brought home your first report card. All "A's"... proud...

STEFANY

Report card? Isn't it usually "I remember when you were still in diapers" or "when you were just this tall".

PARKER

You tell me. You're the nurse who's seen this before.

STEFANY

Well, no, she's my first... without the dirty connotations that phrase normally comes with.

PARKER

So you're a part-time nurse who usually has good luck with patients?

STEFANY

Until now. With her episode and all.

PARKER

You mean stroke?

STEFANY

Well, yeah. Stroke, episode... same thing, y'know?

PARKER

No, I don't know. Episode sounds impersonal. Television series have episodes. You're an observer, a kibitzer...

STEFANY

I don't want to sound rude or anything, but it's not like I had the stroke, or had done anything to cause it. I WAS an observer... sort of. I didn't mean to come off as callous.

PARKER

I get your work is difficult. You're forced to take care of people and try not to get too close to them, because they can be taken at any time. It's almost like parenthood, except you don't put too much emotional attachment into the relationship at all!

STEFANY

That's not how it is! I mean, yes, it would be easy if I didn't give a rat's ass about any of the patients, and I could be cold and uncaring to patients who are losing control of their bodily functions on a daily basis, but I'm not! I'm a good person! I do good!

MRS. BAKER

Stop fighting, Keith. Don't yell at the nurse.

PARKER

Stop calling me Keith! I'm not Keith!

STEFANY

Don't yell at her! She's sick!

MRS. BAKER

Stefany is a nice person. She reads to me.

PARKER

Well good for the two of you.

MRS. BAKER

You watch your tone with me, young man. You just wait until your father gets home!

PARKER

Damn it!

(Shoots an angry glance at Stefany.)

Forgive me for this.

(To MRS. BAKER)

Dad's dead. He's been dead, and you're sick.

MRS. BAKER

He brought me those flowers.

STEFANY

Stephen, don't.

PARKER

Look around you! You're in a hospital, Mom!

STEFANY

Stop it! You have no idea what you're doing to her! It can't possibly help.

PARKER

(Angry whisper)

What are you saying. She needs to know this. She can't die not knowing... my God. She's going to die, isn't she?

STEFANY

I'm not a doctor.

PARKER

Yes. No. I know. But you're a nurse. I mean... you would know, right?

STEFANY

We aren't psychic. Everyone dies.

PARKER

You know what I mean.

STEFANY

Yes. But I don't know. You'll have to ask a doctor.

*PARKER and STEFANY look at one another. PARKER goes to the door looking for a doctor. A MALE NURSE happens to walk by, and PARKER pulls him in.*

PARKER

May I ask you a question, doctor?

MALE NURSE

I'm a nurse, actually.

(Sees PARKER's face visibly change.)

But maybe I can help?

PARKER

Do you think you could get a doctor in here? Just for a minute? Not even?

MALE NURSE

I can try, but I can't make any promises.

PARKER

That's fine. I won't take it as a promise then.

*MALE NURSE goes over to MRS. BAKER*

MALE NURSE

You're awake now, Mrs. Baker? How are you feeling?

MRS. BAKER

I'm fine, I think. I'm almost ready to go home.

MALE NURSE

We'll have to ask the doctor about that before we can release you.

MRS. BAKER

Ok, I'll just wait right here then.

*MALE NURSE exits.*

STEFANY

So... When's the last time you've been to Europe?

PARKER

What?

STEFANY

You heard me. When's the last time you've been to Europe?

PARKER

I flew in after I heard the news.

STEFANY

From England?

PARKER

Yes.

STEFANY

Oh.

(Pause.)

You know, I'm not so sure it was a good idea to pretend to be Keith- even if you think it was for her own good. I mean, you aren't even sure if you think she's going to die.

PARKER

You said it yourself. Everyone dies.

STEFANY

That's not what I meant. I was angry.

PARKER

But it's what you said. And it's true.

(Pause.)

I should go.

STEFANY

No, stay. I'm sorry. I should go. It was nice meeting you, Stephen. Goodbye, Mrs. Baker

MRS. BAKER

Do I know you?

STEFANY

No, I guess not. But goodbye all the same.

MRS. BAKER

Goodbye! It was nice meeting you.

(To PARKER)

She seemed very nice. How long have you two been seeing each other?

PARKER

Mom... I love you.

MRS. BAKER

I love you too. Why are you crying? You never used to cry. Even when you fell off your bicycle and broke your... what did you break? Your arm? Yes. And we had to drive you to the hospital. You liked that bicycle.

*BLACKOUT.*

#### Scene 4

*Non-identifiable place/bare corner of a BLACKOUTed stage. PARKER takes the call on his cell phone.*

PARKER

Hello? Speaking. No, friend of the family. It's all right. News? When? Are you sure? How long? Thanks, I'll be right over.

*BLACKOUT.*

#### Scene 5

*MRS. BAKER's hospital room. DR. LANNING is at her bedside as PARKER runs in.*

DR. LANNING

Mr. Parker, I presume?

PARKER

Dr. Lanning?

DR. LANNING

Pleasure to meet you.

PARKER

How is she?

DR. LANNING

Honestly, we don't know for sure. She's been put on a respirator, and she's only been in the coma for about four hours. But in my personal, professional opinion, it doesn't look good.

PARKER

How long do you give her?

DR. LANNING

She'll probably live as long as we keep the respirator running, but without it -

PARKER

I... I understand. I think. Uh. She's not going to... come out of it at all?

DR. LANNING

More than likely not. If you want to make any...decisions... let me know and I'll-

PARKER

Pull the plug.

DR. LANNING

Yes. Exactly.

PARKER

No, I'm telling you. Pull the plug. Shut the machine off. She wouldn't want to live like that. That's not living, not by her standards.

DR. LANNING

Are you sure? We can go into the next room and fill out the paperwork, but only if you're-

PARKER

Yes, I'm sure. May I have a moment alone with her?

DR. LANNING

Of course.

(Starts to exit. Stops.)

On her admittance forms, it didn't say whether or not she was to be given last rites. We have a priest on call if you'd like her to receive them.

PARKER  
He's Roman Catholic?

DR. LANNING  
Yes.

PARKER  
Please call him... if it's not too much trouble.

DR. LANNING  
Consider it done. I'll just be in the next room with the paperwork.

PARKER  
Thanks. I'll be right over.

*DR. LANNING exits. PARKER takes MRS. BAKER's hand into his, and holds it.*  
I'm sorry... I don't know what to say, and it probably doesn't matter since you can't hear me... though they say that people in comas can hear. I don't know if I believe that... I wish I did. I wish I believed in miracles, too. I just don't. I can't. I know this is what you would have wanted. I'm sure of it.

*PARKER kisses MRS. BAKER's hand.*  
I'm going to miss you.

*BLACKOUT.*

## Scene 6

*Cemetery. There is a small number of MOURNERS surrounding the gravesite of Mrs. Baker. There is a PRIEST that is reciting the final lines of a Prayer of Committal. The PRIEST sprinkles some holy water onto the top of the unseen casket, and a few of the MOURNERS throw a small amount of dirt or a few flowers onto the casket as well.. PARKER can be seen standing at a distance from the scene, watching the proceedings. No one seems to be paying attention to him. STEFANY enters from the same direction and stops just behind PARKER. STEFANY puts her hand on PARKER's shoulder, and he turns to face her.*

STEFANY  
Sorry. Hope I didn't scare you.

PARKER  
Slightly. You missed the wake yesterday. And the service today. What was that you were saying about caring for your patients?

STEFANY

Are you serious? Still? I had to work, and I have classes. And maybe you're right, maybe I didn't care as much as I thought I did, but I made it here. Late, yes, but here.

(Pause.)

You were a lot closer to her than most people are to their friends' mothers, weren't you?

PARKER

I thought I told you... her son-

STEFANY

Committed suicide, I know, you said that. But you seem... far more emotionally connected... I don't know what I mean... but you obviously cared a lot about her, and I think that much of your anger stems from losing her... you know, one of the five stages of grief.

PARKER

Studying to be a grief counselor now? You don't have to be a psychic to see I'm grieving-

STEFANY

Fine. I'm sorry for your loss. Goodbye.

*STEFANY walks toward the grave where people are slowly walking away. A few flowers have been thrown in, and the mourners are beginning to dissipate and exit. STEFANY stands by the grave, and is eventually the only one left on stage other than PARKER. PARKER slowly moves closer to the grave, but he is looking at STEFANY.*

PARKER

I think I'm done.

STEFANY

Done?

PARKER

Grieving.

STEFANY

Well, that was fast.

PARKER

I'm sorry.

STEFANY

For what?

PARKER  
Grieving.

STEFANY  
It's alright. It's natural.

PARKER  
Yes. Natural.

STEFANY  
So... what is it you're going to do now?

PARKER  
Probably the same things I've been doing. Moving on...  
*PARKER reaches into his pocket and pulls out a few postcards, and throws them onto the casket.*

"'Courage,' he said, and pointed toward the land... 'this mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon.'"

(Looking at STEFANY)  
Tennyson.

STEFANY  
I thought it sounded familiar. I probably read it in Vic Lit.

PARKER  
Victorian Literature? Really? What is it you're studying?

STEFANY  
I'm getting my Master's in English, with a concentration on Modern American Poetry.

PARKER  
You know that's a worthless degree, right?

STEFANY  
So I've been told.

PARKER  
I skipped the logical first question: how does Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters" work in with Modern American Poetry?

STEFANY

It doesn't. I needed to get my Bachelor's in English first, and Vic Lit was a required course.

PARKER

No kidding... so the job as a part-time nurse-

STEFANY

Is just for cash to get through another two years of college.

PARKER

And what do you expect to do with your Master's? Teach?

STEFANY

Honestly, I don't know. It's just two more years of education hoping to figure out what I want to do along the way.

PARKER

Whatever works.

STEFANY

What about you?

PARKER

What about me?

STEFANY

What do you do, job-wise? You don't exactly look like an English professor yourself, and you introduced yourself once as "Mister"...

PARKER

True, I'm not a professor, although I used to be something of the sort. I used to edit stuff for Keith. He was creative, but he lacked the vocabulary.

STEFANY

So you're pretty well read, then?

PARKER

I like to think so, though American really isn't my strong suit. I've always been a fan of the British myself. It's the rhyme scheme.

STEFANY

The rhyme scheme? That's what does it for you?

PARKER

That was supposed to be a joke.

STEFANY

You're joking.

PARKER

Now I am, yes.

STEFANY

Wait, what?

PARKER

Forget about it. I think it might be over your head.

STEFANY

Yeah, it might be. Do you think you'd be up for a cup of coffee sometime?

PARKER

Are you asking me out?

STEFANY

What? No! You're old enough to be my father! No offense.

PARKER

Right.

STEFANY

Besides, we're at the burial of your friend's mother. Don't you think that's a little...disrespectful?

PARKER

No. I think it's *very* disrespectful.

STEFANY

Right. Well... I should be going.

PARKER

Myself as well.

STEFANY

Goodbye.

PARKER  
Was a pleasure.

STEFANY  
Yes.

*PARKER exits one direction, STEFANY exits the other.*

STEFANY  
(From Off-stage)  
WAIT!

PARKER  
(From Off-stage)  
WAIT!

*STEFANY and PARKER re-enter from their respective sides and meet center stage. STEFANY opens up her purse and takes out a shopping receipt, PARKER pulls out a small notebook and pen. PARKER scribbles onto the pad and hands it to STEFANY.*

PARKER  
My number.

STEFANY  
Thanks. Can I-?

PARKER  
Oh, here.

*PARKER hands the pen over to STEFANY. STEFANY scribbles onto her shopping receipt and hands it to PARKER.*

STEFANY  
My number.

PARKER  
(Looking at opposite side of receipts.)  
That's a lot of tampons.

*A look of horror crosses STEFANY's face, and she rips the receipt away from PARKER to look at it.*

STEFANY

OfficeMax, you asshole.

PARKER

Oops.

*BLACKOUT*

**ACT 2**  
**Scene 1**

*PARKER is at home, painting a bridge from memory. In the background there is classical music being played. PARKER is humming along. The record player begins to skip. PARKER walks over to the player, turns it off, then walks back to his painting and continues, while still humming. Eventually he walks away from the painting and moves into the kitchen where he removes his smock and washes his hands. He opens the oven to check the Cornish hen he's baking, closes it, and pours himself a cup of black tea from the kettle that has been on the burner. The doorbell rings. STEFANY is at the front door carrying a picnic basket.*

PARKER

Hello! This is a pleasant surprise. What's the occasion?

STEFANY

I was in the neighborhood.

PARKER

You're going to have to work on your lying.

STEFANY

I was in the neighborhood.

PARKER

I almost believed you that time.

STEFANY

(On her knees, over-dramatically)

Help me! I'm injured, and I've been lost in the woods for days without food.

PARKER

See that's much better. If it wasn't for the basket, I might have believed you. Come on in.

STEFANY

Thanks. Your place wasn't as difficult to find as I thought it would be.

PARKER

What made you think it was difficult?

STEFANY

You had an unlisted number, so I snuck a peek into the files at the home.

PARKER

And here I was thinking it was fortune that led you to my door. Instead, it was your creepy stalker tendencies.

STEFANY

Cute.

PARKER

Not as cute as you.

STEFANY

Excuse me?

PARKER

Sorry, pretend I didn't say a thing.

STEFANY

That was sweet. And it's going to be difficult to forget that.

PARKER

I'm that memorable?

STEFANY

You'd like to think so, wouldn't you?

PARKER

Of course! And I love this bantering, by the way. It's been a while since I've done it with someone. I feel it rolling off my tongue...

STEFANY

Uh... thank you?

PARKER

I'm not sure it was a compliment, but it wasn't an insult.

STEFANY

What's that smell?

PARKER

Which one? I've got a Cornish Hen in the kitchen, a kiln running in the living room, and incense burning in the bathroom.

STEFANY

Incense in the bathroom?

PARKER

It's not what you think. I took a shower earlier, and I like the smell of lavender-

STEFANY

That's either the most romantic or the most effeminate thing I've ever heard.

PARKER

Do I get to pick?

STEFANY

This time. Y'know, I'm sorry I didn't call before I stopped by.

PARKER

It's fine. It's just that usually when people make plans with me, I'm in on the plan... not to mention I had thought we were going to do coffee first. Did I already say how creepy I thought this was, with you randomly stopping by and all?

STEFANY

You said cute earlier, too.

PARKER

Touche.

STEFANY

Hey!

*STEFANY picks up vase.*

This is nice! Where'd you find this.

PARKER

I made that one, about two months ago, maybe three. Here.

*PARKER takes the vase and flips it over to look at the bottom.*

Two months ago. That's when I ran out of this sky blue glaze.

STEFANY

How much does something like this cost?

PARKER

Twelve dollars in parts, two-hundred in labor.

STEFANY

Two-hundred!?! What does it sell for?

PARKER  
Forty dollars even.

STEFANY  
You're joking.

PARKER  
Not at all. I make them on my free time, out of boredom. The flawed ones I sell to the woman who owns the ceramic shop in town, who in turn sells them to out-of-towners or people who are just passing through and see her "antiques" sign. I honestly don't think there's anything antique in the whole place.

STEFANY  
Other than herself.

PARKER  
What?

STEFANY  
The rest of the joke. "I don't think there's anything antique in the whole place" *comma*, "other than herself."

PARKER  
Ha, I get it. But she's younger than I am.

STEFANY  
That's not the point.

PARKER  
I get it.  
(Pause)  
So are you going to continue holding your basket, Goldilocks?

STEFANY  
Goldilocks? You mean Little Red Riding Hood, right?

PARKER  
That's not the point.

STEFANY  
Right. I came this way, from the woods, to see if you'd be interested in having a picnic... with me.

PARKER

I inferred you wanted to have a picnic, and will admit, I assumed it was going to be with you. Is the porch fine? The grass is a bit moist from the rain earlier.

STEFANY

I brought a blanket, if that's okay with you.

PARKER

Grass it is, then.

*PARKER and STEFANY walk outside, down off the porch, and into the front yard. STEFANY opens the basket, and pulls out a solid yellow blanket. Setting the basket down, she throws open the blanket, letting it fall to the ground, and takes a seat in the center. PARKER remains standing.*

STEFANY

It's O.K. to sit down, you know.

PARKER

I'm sure it is. I was just thinking.

STEFANY

Of what?

PARKER

(Sitting down.)

I hope you brought tuna salad.

STEFANY

Cold cuts. Sorry.

PARKER

It's fine. I'm allergic to fish.

STEFANY

(Taking out hard rolls, a small jar of mustard, mayonnaise, and about three different types of deli meats.)

Cooked ham, turkey, salami.

PARKER

Sounds almost as good as Cornish hen.

STEFANY

You don't have to eat any if you don't want to.

PARKER

I'm teasing you. Relax.

STEFANY

Sorry.

PARKER

Don't apologize. It's fine. I don't think I've ever had an honest to God picnic before.

STEFANY

(Making herself a sandwich.)

Really? You put incense in the bathroom and yet a picnic is foreign to you?

PARKER

You're hung up on the incense thing, aren't you?

STEFANY

I can understand air fresheners, but not incense.

PARKER

Incense *is* an air freshener.

STEFANY

Yes, but it's usually used to cover up the smell of something else.

PARKER

Isn't that one of the reasons it's in the bathroom?

STEFANY

No, I mean pot.

PARKER

Does it look like I smoke marijuana?

STEFANY

No, but not because you don't look like a hippie. You haven't eaten anything yet. That means you don't have the munchies. Start eating.

PARKER

A regular detective. And here I thought you were a nurse.

STEFANY

Since you're getting semantic, a nurse's aide...practically a candy striper.

PARKER

Candy striper? Isn't that a bit before your time?

STEFANY

Maybe a bit, but I have an old soul.

PARKER

Are you saying I'm old?

STEFANY

Nope, just educated.

PARKER

You know, I just realized... the home didn't have my address... how exactly did you find me?

STEFANY

I got your last name from the home.

PARKER

And my number is unlisted, so...

STEFANY

My father looked up the address.

PARKER

Techie?

STEFANY

Trooper.

PARKER

Oh.

STEFANY

Is that a problem? I mean, I'm sorry for intruding on your privacy and all.

PARKER

Don't worry about it. I just didn't think your father would be a Trooper is all.

STEFANY

Why's that?

PARKER

You don't seem... what's the word... regimented?

STEFANY

Not growing up with my mother, no.

PARKER

Divorced?

STEFANY

Far from it. They're usually happily married. Other times, they're just married.

PARKER

That sounds nice.

STEFANY

Were you- sorry, you don't have to answer if you don't want to, but... were you ever married?

PARKER

Yes. Once. To an amazing woman.

STEFANY

And then you two had a falling out, or she cheated on you, and then you two separated-

PARKER

Uh... no. She passed away from breast cancer about six years ago.

STEFANY

Oh my God. I'm sorry. I... I meant it as a joke.

PARKER

It's fine. Don't apologize. I'm... not over it, but I've accepted it. She was such a-

STEFANY

You don't have to explain unless you want to.

*PARKER and STEFANY continue to eat their sandwiches in awkward silence. PARKER is concentrating on his sandwich, while STEFANY steals glances at him.*

PARKER

Is yours turkey and mustard?

STEFANY

Yes, why?

PARKER

That was her favorite kind of sandwich.

STEFANY

Really?

PARKER

No, just trying to lighten the mood.

STEFANY

Gotcha. It's probably a bit late for me to be bringing this up now, but I hope you don't feel as though I'm intruding. You said earlier you were expecting coffee... and I don't want you to think that during the burial I was even thinking about having a romantic relationship with you, and I don't want you to think that now. Not that I don't want you to, but that you should probably know, right now, that I might be interested in one... with you.

PARKER

How did you go from coffee to a serious relationship? This is our first social engagement!

STEFANY

I don't know... I don't meet as many educated men as you'd think, and it just kind of spilled out. Let's change the subject. I'm writing a paper on Weldon Kees. Have you heard of him?

PARKER

Can't say I have. Thesis?

STEFANY

Yeah. I'm trying to draw comparisons to a few of his works and the works of Thomas Hardy, and how both wrote poetry with very similar themes.

PARKER

Similar themes... Sounds good far, but why are you comparing Kees with Hardy? Has someone previously stated that the two of them have similarities beyond just theme? Consider how many poets have written about love and how easily it's lost-

STEFANY  
Ever emo band ever.

PARKER  
Emu?

STEFANY  
Emo.

PARKER  
Elmo?

STEFANY  
EMO.

PARKER  
Phillips?

STEFANY  
You're just being an ass, aren't you?

PARKER  
...Maybe.

STEFANY  
Continue.

PARKER  
You could take all of them and write a paper on their similarities, maybe throwing in Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" for a different view, about the pain and suffering one could go through before even feeling "love"... and what's to keep you from comparing "The Waste Land" with some of Hardy's works?

STEFANY  
Well, the fact that I'm looking at Modern American Poetry.

PARKER  
Sorry, I forgot about that.

STEFANY

That's fine. I mean, this is why I wanted to have the picnic with you too. I wanted to throw a few ideas out to you, since you were an editor and all, and have a background in that sort of thing. I hope you don't mind.

PARKER

Not at all, although I might be a bit rusty. It's been a while since I've had intelligent conversations.

STEFANY

You don't necessarily have to do it now; I could leave a copy of my work here, you could look it over, and maybe next week, or the week after, we could get together and work on it.

PARKER

Another excuse to see me.

STEFANY

What makes you think I need excuses?

PARKER

My mistake.

STEFANY

You know... you kind of remind me of a friend I knew in high school. He was artsy, too.

PARKER

Was he as charming and handsome?

STEFANY

He had your sense of humor, too, yes.

PARKER

Ouch.

STEFANY

It'll only sting for a second.

PARKER

Cute.

STEFANY

Like you.

(Pause.)

You know... he was my first love. Mark was his name. He was kind of tall, taller than me anyway, had short, dark hair, a little chubby, but the attractive kind, because you could tell he had muscle underneath his bulk. In high school, we went to a dance together. I can still remember the cologne he was wearing... his father's Brut. And we danced all of the slow dances, and... I don't remember the song... it was slow, soft...

(Hums a few bars.)

I don't remember exactly... But he whispered in my ear, "This song always reminded me of you." And then he leaned down and...

*During this, STEFANY is moving closer to PARKER, and at "he leaned down and" she kisses him softly on the lips, and then slowly pulls back, waiting for his reaction.*

PARKER

Nice segue.

*PARKER leans in this time, and the two kiss as the lights fade to BLACKOUT. After a few seconds, a lighter is lit and we hear rummaging through the picnic basket.*

You need a cigarette already? We haven't gotten anywhere.

STEFANY

A mosquito bit my ass. I'm looking for a citronella candle.

PARKER

You know those things don't work, right?

STEFANY

Should we do this in the house?

PARKER

The bathroom still smells like lavender.

STEFANY

Romantic.

## Scene 2

*A small coffee house. PARKER is sitting at a table sipping tea with a half-eaten scone in front of him. He's reading a book on Weldon Kees. STEFANY enters.*

STEFANY

Sorry I'm late.

PARKER

Not a problem. You aren't that late, only twenty-two minutes. So I guess you were pretty late.

STEFANY

That's nice to hear. I have about half an hour left in my lunch. What did you order?

PARKER

Green tea with jasmine and a scone. You can finish the scone if you want; it's not up to my standards.

STEFANY

I'm guessing that very few things are up to your standards anymore.

PARKER

I wouldn't say that. I'd say...

STEFANY

Something witty and funny.

PARKER

"Standards are what keep us from getting weird diseases."

STEFANY

Nice.

PARKER

I know, though I can't take credit for that one. In college, a friend of mine, Will, actually said that. Sober, too, if you can believe it.

STEFANY

If he was a friend of yours, I wouldn't doubt it.

PARKER

You're catching on quickly.

STEFANY

We'll, I'd say I learned from the best if you were any good at it.

PARKER

And now you aren't pulling any punches! I've been quite the influence on you these last few weeks, haven't I?

STEFANY

Well, there are worse influences.

PARKER

Mugabe comes to mind.

STEFANY

Who *says* that?

PARKER

People like me. And me. Anyway, why did you want to meet me here.

STEFANY

It's, uh, about my paper. Did you bring it with you?

PARKER

No, you didn't tell me to on the phone. You said, "Meet me at Twin's at 12:30." There wasn't a "with my paper" in the sentence. I thought it was about...

STEFANY

No, it was about the paper. I don't know how to say this.

PARKER

Try speaking.

STEFANY

I want to pay you to write my paper.

PARKER

Was that your question.

STEFANY

Yes.

PARKER

Then my answer is "no." I can't do that.

STEFANY

All right. It was worth a try. Where's the server?

PARKER

She went on break about ten minutes ago. She should be back in a bit.

STEFANY

I'll just go up to the counter and order something, then. What do you recommend?

PARKER

Something other than the scones.

STEFANY

A muffin sounds like a healthy lunch.

PARKER

Get a green tea and it'll at least be a semi-healthy lunch.

STEFANY

Will do.

*STEFANY exits. PARKER picks up the book and continues from where he left off, occasionally highlighting passages and writing in the margin. STEFANY reenters.*

It's surprisingly unbusy today. I wonder why.

PARKER

Is that so?

STEFANY

Yeah. Usually there are more people here.

PARKER

One would assume that if someone else says "it's surprisingly unbusy today," don't you think?

STEFANY

Here's an honest question for you: do you ever not correct people when they're speaking to you, or is it just one of those nasty habits that you picked up somewhere along the line and have no control over?

PARKER

Yes, there are times I don't correct people... I didn't correct "unbusy," did I?

STEFANY

Touche.

PARKER

Point for me.

STEFANY

Yeah, yeah... Try this muffin, and tell me what you think.

PARKER

It's overcooked is what I think.

STEFANY

My thought exactly.

PARKER

Yet you're going to continue eating it.

STEFANY

Well yeah. I paid for it. Most people would, don't you think? Feel obligated to eat it?

PARKER

But you could always bring it back to the counter and return it politely, or not so politely, asking for your money back.

STEFANY

Did you look around this place? Do you honestly think people come here for the food? They come here because it's quiet, has an alright atmosphere, and the weekly open mic night that bring in performers who can't get a real gig playing at some dive late on a Friday night.

PARKER

I sense a bit of hostility. And yes, that's sarcasm I'm using.

STEFANY

I used to date a musician.

PARKER

So that wasn't a non-sequitur. You don't strike me as a person who would fall in love with a musician. Was it a common interest in the arts, or was he just cute?

STEFANY

Yes on both counts, but I don't think it was ever love. He was intelligent, too. Perfect 2400 on the SATs.

PARKER

The SATs are only out of 1600.

STEFANY

WERE only out of 1600. They added a writing portion worth 800.

PARKER

No kidding?

STEFANY

No kidding.

PARKER

And yet he wasn't smart enough to see what kind of catch you were?

STEFANY

I was the one who left him. He was too involved with his so-called "band" that he began to cancel dates when he got a booking that was "just one step away from the big gig." It got old fast, so I dropped him like a power chord.

PARKER

Hmm... I like that. I'll have to use it sometime.

STEFANY

Just be sure to cite your source.

PARKER

I'll be sure to.

STEFANY

Random question, although I think I already know the answer... What is it exactly that you do to make the majority of your income. I mean, I saw the pottery you were making, but I really don't think it's enough to afford you the house you have, as tiny as it is.

PARKER

You're asking about my income? Don't you think that's a little...well, rude?

STEFANY

Yes it is. But I'm also curious.

PARKER

Well, far be it from me to punish someone for their curiosity.

STEFANY

Don't think that I go around asking random people what they make, because I don't.

PARKER

Uh... well... when Keith passed, he left most of what he had to me. One of the stipulations was that I'd keep an eye on his mother. It was harder on her than one could have imagined... she started to lose her mind. At one point, she panicked when one of her friends stopped by the house to check on her... She called 9-1-1 thinking that she was trying to break into the house... at that point, I had to get her put into a home where she could get the care she needed... that's how she ended up at your nursing home. Most of the money Keith left went to the care of his mother... You know the place wasn't that cheap, but they had a decent enough staff...

STEFANY

Cute.

PARKER

Yes, that was one of the staff requirements, too. Anyway, back to the original question. Most of what I have is either from Keith, or from working as his editor when he was producing. I still get the occasional check in the mail from the publisher when some college professor decides to make his fifty students buy one of his books, or when an anthology wants to use a few of his better pieces. And you know about the pottery.

STEFANY

Wait... You're telling me Keith left his entire estate to you?

PARKER

Yes.

STEFANY

That must have been worth... what? A million or two?

PARKER

Not exactly. Look, I told you where the money was coming from... well, *came* from... but I'm not going to tell you how much it was... Let's just say that what wasn't used on Mrs. Baker was collecting interest, and I used the interest collected to do what I wanted to do... which was pretty much produce art that pleased myself. What I don't like, I sell.

STEFANY

Fair enough.

PARKER

More than fair enough... although I sometimes regret not visiting Mrs. Baker as often as I could have. She was like family, and I left her there. I could've stopped by at least once a month, but waited until...well, you know... "We do not what we ought, what we ought not we do".

STEFANY

Matthew Arnold... but I forget which poem.

PARKER

"Empedocles on Etna."

STEFANY

Wow... it's been a while since I heard that one, too...Let me think... Uh... "Is it so small a thing, to have enjoyed the sun, to have lived light in the Spring, to have loved, to have thought, to have done" -

PARKER

(joins in)

- "To have advanced true friends, and beat down baffling foes."

*STEFANY and PARKER look into each other's eyes.*

STEFANY

Yeah... I don't know about you.

PARKER

Well, I have time, and you've still got a bit, too. What do you want to know? You've asked about income...what is it now?

STEFANY

I don't know... I've met a lot of guys, but there's something about you I just don't get. It's like you don't care what other people think about you.

PARKER

What gives you that idea?

STEFANY

Well, you tend to keep to yourself, but you're still a people-person... if that makes sense.

PARKER

So far it does. Is there more?

STEFANY

Well... no.

PARKER

I have to admit, if that was your explanation to say that I'm different from other guys, it needs more...well, support. Try saying, "you live in a cabin without neighbors" or "you seem to keep to yourself more than other people would."

STEFANY

Those all work as evidence, too, I suppose.

PARKER

Is that so? Well, I'm not going to do this paper for you, either. You think that I keep to myself just because you haven't heard me talk about anyone else except my dead friend and his mother. It's O.K., you can say that. But I do have other friends, there are people I can go to when I need a hand, and yes, there will be people who will find my dead body when my time expires, long before the coyotes in the woods get to it.

STEFANY

Well... that was... interesting.

PARKER

I try.

STEFANY

And succeed, regularly.

PARKER

That sounds about right... I can accept that.

STEFANY

Good. Do you know what time it is?

PARKER

Yeah, it's almost quarter to one.

STEFANY

Ok.

PARKER

Are you in a hurry or something?

STEFANY

Not really, I was just thinking about something and I wasn't sure if I had time to think about it.

PARKER

Now that's a new one on me. Not being sure you have time to think about something?

STEFANY

Yeah, you know. Like, say you're planning something big...

PARKER

Are you planning something big?

STEFANY

No, it's just an example. Try to follow me.

PARKER

To the end of the earth.

STEFANY

What?

PARKER

Follow me to the end of the earth.

STEFANY

I haven't heard that before.

PARKER

I just happened to think about it. My band teacher in high school used to say it. Well, he'd say "Follow me," and then the band would finish with "to the end of the earth." Sorry, you were talking about having time to think.

STEFANY

Yeah. Say you're planning something, and you need to sit down to write everything that you're brainstorming so you don't forget anything. That's time to think.

PARKER

No, I'd say that's more time to plan than time to think. Besides, when you're thinking, you can be doing other things. It's the great thing about thinking. No one can stop you from doing it.

STEFANY

Of course. No one ever said that anyone could stop you from thinking. They could, however, tell you what to think, and try to give you their own opinion, but when it comes down to it, practically everyone can think for themselves.

PARKER

Operative word, "can." It doesn't necessarily mean they will think.

STEFANY

I guess that's true. Muffin must be affecting my brain.

PARKER

Before you leave, make sure you grab a few to go.

STEFANY

Smart ass.

PARKER

That about sums me up.

STEFANY

So why don't people like to think for themselves?

PARKER

You tell me.

STEFANY

It's easier. Or they feel as though as long as they don't care, nothing can happen, or they can't be blamed for anything.

PARKER

Or maybe it's more noble than that. Nescience. Not having enough information to formulate an opinion would be noble, or at least the intelligent move.

STEFANY

That works. Especially if it's too time consuming to do the research on one's own for every topic one wants to have an opinion about.

PARKER

Exactly. And if we did want to have an opinion about everything without the need to do our own research into it, we'd want to find someone we could trust to tell us which is the best idea... assuming there's someone we can trust with that kind of power, which pretty much means that elected officials are out-

STEFANY

-because we elect them based on what our opinions are, and how they relate to the officials' opinions.

PARKER

But do we not also accept what they tell us is true, based on the presumption that they will have more information on a topic being in a certain authoritative position?

STEFANY

I suppose. So it's more of a "which came first, the elected politician with the opinion I agree with, or the opinion I have and the politician who was elected"?

PARKER

I really just wanted to see how outside the box you could think. I like where you went with it.

STEFANY

Sure, you get all Socratic, then stop once I start to get somewhere. Where's the fun in that?

PARKER

I get to drive you a little crazy.

STEFANY

You would. Anyway, since we've reached a decent stopping point in our conversation, I suppose I should get going. I wanted to read a bit more Hardy and get a better feel for him if I want to do justice to my paper.

PARKER

I'd definitely recommend it. Not that your paper isn't decent, but the more you understand him and where he's coming from, the better, I would think.

STEFANY

And I would think, too. (Pause) Are you busy Sunday?

PARKER

Which one? This coming Sunday?

STEFANY

Yes.

PARKER

I had made a few small plans, but nothing that can't be changed. What did you have in mind?

STEFANY

I was wondering if you'd like to join me at my parents' place for dinner. It should be good. I think we're having a turkey.

PARKER

A turkey? What's the occasion?

STEFANY

No occasion. My father is just one of those people that likes to have a decent Sunday dinner every once in a while... and he knows that I would never miss a turkey dinner.

PARKER

Fan of Tryptophan. I'll have to remember that, won't I?

STEFANY

You tell me.

*STEFANY leans over the table and gives PARKER a peck on the lips. PARKER stands up.*

PARKER

I hope you don't mind me saying this, but that wasn't very persuasive.

*PARKER steps over to STEFANY, leans over, and kisses her. STEFANY stands.*

STEFANY

Well, I've never been a fan of PDA, but I suppose if we're going to do it, we may as well do it right, don't you think?

PARKER

I won't say no.

*PARKER and STEFANY kiss.*

STEFANY

Alright, enough of this, kiddo. 6 P.M. at my parents' place. I'll text you the directions later tonight. Cool?

PARKER

Certainly. What are you doing tonight?

STEFANY  
I should be out by five at the latest. Why?

PARKER  
Do you like sushi?

STEFANY  
uh, love it!

PARKER  
Perfect. We'll do dinner later tonight, then. Half past five sound good to you?

STEFANY  
If you can make it half past six, that'd be wonderful.

PARKER  
Done.

STEFANY  
It's a date!

PARKER  
Indeed it is. Enjoy the rest of work, hun.

STEFANY  
Thanks, I'll try. You have fun with your...not working.

PARKER  
I always do.

*After a quick peck on PARKER's cheek, STEFANY exits. Blackout.*

### Scene 3

*The Schumann home. STEFANY enters from a doorway in uniform. MRS. SCHUMANN is cleaning dishes.*

STEFANY  
Hey Mom, I'm here.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Hello! How was work?

STEFANY  
It was alright, I suppose. Same shit, different day.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Excuse me?

STEFANY  
Sorry. "Another day, another dollar"?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Better, thank you.

STEFANY  
You're welcome. What's cooking?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Something your father threw together. Don't open the oven, he said it was "imperative" for it to work.

STEFANY  
He used the word "imperative"?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
I thought the same thing. He bought a "Word of the Day" calendar.

STEFANY  
Interesting.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
He's in the living room watching TV. Dinner should be reading in a few minutes, I think.

STEFANY  
I'm not going to be able to stay for dinner. I have a date.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Is that so? Do we know this young gentleman?

STEFANY  
Uh... no.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Alright. Let your father know you aren't going to be around. He's sure to be disappointed.

STEFANY

He'll get over it.

*MR. SCHUMANN nonchalantly wanders into the kitchen and looks into the oven through the window.*

MR. SCHUMANN

I wish I would've known the oven light was out. I can't see a damned thing in there!

STEFANY

Hi Dad.

MR. SCHUMANN

Hey, can you see anything in there?

STEFANY

Love you too.

MR. SCHUMANN

Sorry. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes... maybe.

STEFANY

I'm not going to be able to stay; I've got a date.

MR. SCHUMANN

You're going to miss out on the chocolate ice cream with hot sauce for dinner.

STEFANY

He's kidding, right?

*MRS. SCHUMANN shrugs and continues to clean dishes.*

MR. SCHUMANN

So, who're you going out with? Anyone we know?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Apparently not.

STEFANY

No, I met him two months ago at a funeral.

MRS. SCHUMANN

You met him at a funeral?

MR. SCHUMANN

There are worse places to meet people. And I met you at a wake.

STEFANY

Almost sounds as bad as meeting someone at a family reunion.

MR. SCHUMANN

That was your Uncle Aaron.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Don't say that!

MR. SCHUMANN

What? It's true, isn't it?

STEFANY

Uncle Aaron and Aunt Jamie are related?

MRS. SCHUMANN

No, they aren't. They did meet at a family reunion though. Your Uncle was married at the time, and Jamie was dating your Uncle Matt. Divorce was involved. Not incest.

STEFANY

That's a relief.

MR. SCHUMANN

You wouldn't know incest was involved if you saw the kids.

MRS. SCHUMANN

MICHAEL!

STEFANY

Mom, they are pretty... uh... unique looking.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Well, it's certainly not from our side of the family.

*MR. SCHUMANN opens up the oven.*

STEFANY

That actually smells pretty good. What is it?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Meatloaf?

MR. SCHUMANN

Something I saw earlier. Ground beef, bread, eggs.

STEFANY

So it is meatloaf.

MR. SCHUMANN

It's not a meatloaf. It also has ground pork, ground chicken... basil.

STEFANY

Glorified meatloaf.

MRS. SCHUMANN

I would've made mashed potatoes had I known.

MR. SCHUMANN

There are sweet potatoes in the oven.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Nevermind, then.

STEFANY

I'm going to run upstairs and get changed.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Alright. Are you going to be out late? Should we leave the light on?

MR. SCHUMANN

Be back by 9.

MRS. SCHUMANN

He'll be asleep by 8.

MR. SCHUMANN

I'll sleep better knowing she's in.

MRS. SCHUMANN

You'll be asleep.

MR. SCHUMANN  
I'll have coffee after dinner.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Decaf won't keep you awake.

MR. SCHUMANN  
Tea then.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Also decaf. Remember who does the shopping.

MR. SCHUMANN  
Then I'll eat chocolate chips. We DO have chocolate chips.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Go get changed, and have a good night. We'll save you some meatloaf.

#### Scene 4

*PARKER's kitchen. There's a table with a rice cooker, bamboo mats, a short stack of nori, sliced avocado, and fish slices. There is a knock at the door.*

PARKER  
The door is open!

STEFANY  
No it's not!

PARKER  
Jiggle the handle.

STEFANY  
I did. It's locked.

PARKER  
Jiggle harder.

*PARKER walks to the door, looks at the knob, realizes it's locked, and unlocks it.*  
Told you it was open.

STEFANY

You seriously need to get a new doorknob.

PARKER

You just need to do a few more push-ups every day.

STEFANY

Are you really going to make your own sushi?

PARKER

No, wash your hands. WE are going to make OUR own sushi.

STEFANY

This is kinda cool. Show me how this works.

PARKER

Put some rice on your seaweed.

STEFANY

Like this?

PARKER

Close enough. Try to spread it out to cover most of the nori.

STEFANY

Looks like a bit much... better?

PARKER

Yes. Now add some fish. What kind of roll do you want?

STEFANY

Is that crab stick? California roll!

PARKER

Alright. Those are julienne cucumber, and the avocado is right there.

STEFANY

What, didn't have the time to cut it?

PARKER

No, just didn't feel like it. Besides, why should I have to do all of the work?

STEFANY

Fair enough.

PARKER

While you're doing that, I'll go get the Saki.

STEFANY

Someone pulled out all of the stops. Either that, or someone wants to get me drunk and take advantage of me.

PARKER

Very funny. Because I took advantage of you the last couple dozen times.

STEFANY

Right. I'm glad things didn't get awkward after the picnic. Or before the picnic for that matter.

PARKER

The joy of consenting adults.

STEFANY

If you play your cards right, there might be more consenting tonight.

PARKER

Looks like you have the gist of it down.

STEFANY

Of persuasion?

PARKER

That too. You're ready to roll!

STEFANY

We're talking about sushi still?

PARKER

I have to play my cards right? Roll it like this.

*PARKER rolls it and picks up a successfully completed roll. STEFANY lifts hers and shows something resembling a funnel.*

STEFANY

I think I need remedial rolling classes.

PARKER

I think you might be right. Either that or stick to nigiri.

STEFANY

Or I can just order it from here on out. Do this often?

PARKER

Not really. Just one of those things I always said I'd try, then after trying and succeeding, only doing it about once a year.

STEFANY

What's in yours?

PARKER

Yellowtail, salmon, and tuna. Try it.

*STEFANY grabs the roll in its entirety and takes a bite out of it.*

How ladylike.

STEFANY

Here, have some.

PARKER

You know, they aren't half bad this way. They're like sandwiches, completely portable.

STEFANY

If you make a few more rolls, I'll set the table.

PARKER

No table tonight. Let's eat outside again. There's supposed to be a meteor shower tonight, and I figured we could have dinner and dessert outside, then just watch the stars.

STEFANY

Are you really this romantic, or is it a game you like to play.

PARKER

I'm really this romantic. I used to be a hopeless romantic.

STEFANY

Used to?

PARKER

I got better. Now I'm a hopeful one.

STEFANY  
That's sweet.

PARKER  
Thank you.

STEFANY  
I brought something for you. Us. Later. It's in the car.

PARKER  
Sounds a bit naughty.

STEFANY  
Get your mind out of the gutter. I brought a pie.

PARKER  
What kind?

STEFANY  
Strawberry-rhubarb.

PARKER  
I've never had it before.

STEFANY  
Well, you will later.

PARKER  
I can't wait.

STEFANY  
How about drinks?

PARKER  
Well, there's the Saki, bottled water in the fridge, white wine, red wine, orange juice, and whatever is in the liquor cabinet.

STEFANY  
I'll go with the Saki and water. What would you like?

PARKER

Saki and water sounds good to me. If you want to bring those outside and then come back in to help me with the soy sauce and ginger, that'd be great.

STEFANY

I'll be back.

*STEFANY grabs the bottle of Saki and three water bottles and brings them outside, returns, grabs two glasses and brings those outside, then once again returns.*

*STEFANY walks behind PARKER and puts her arms around him as he finishes up rolling the last of the sushi.*

Looks yummy.

PARKER

It will be. Ready?

STEFANY

Not quite yet.

*STEFANY begins to kiss the side of PARKER's neck, who seems to be enjoying this immensely. PARKER turns around to meet her gaze, and STEFANY smiles fixedly at him.*

PARKER

The fish won't last... we should eat.

*STEFANY is slightly taken aback.*

STEFANY

You're right. Dinner first, dessert later.

## Scene 5

*The Schumann's dining room, typical middle class dining room.*

SCHUMANN

Mr. Parker, would you mind passing the potatoes, please?

PARKER

Certainly. Here you are.

SCHUMANN

Thanks

PARKER

So... what exactly is it you do for a living, Mr. Schumann?

SCHUMANN

Stef never brought it up? Well, I guess I can't be all that surprised. I'm a State Trooper. Have been for almost nineteen years.

PARKER

Well, she did. I'm just trying to make conversation.

STEFANY

Steve is a bit of a jokester. You'll have to forgive him.

SCHUMANN

You don't say... We could start off with another topic if you'd like, unless this one suits you.

PARKER

No, it's quite alright. I'm just a bit surprised is all. It's that Stefany is into the arts, and policing tends to be more strict and literal... not so artistic, I guess.

SCHUMANN

Was that supposed to be an insult, Mr. Parker? Because it sounded like one.

PARKER

No, sir. Just a statement.

SCHUMANN

Statements can be insulting...

STEFANY

Dad, please. Not during dinner. And not after it, either.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Please...

SCHUMANN

Fine. Tell me, Mr. Parker... What is it you do for a living?

PARKER

You can call me Steve, Mr. Schumann. And I guess I'm what you would call a "Renaissance man."

SCHUMANN

And what exactly does a Renaissance man do to make a living? Work at Renaissance fairs? Make beaded necklaces, or shovels out of leather?

PARKER

Shovels out of... No, I don't work at Renaissance fairs, although I probably could and make a decent living. I suppose you could just call me an artist.

SCHUMANN

A starving artist?

STEFANY

Dad! That's not nice!

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael! Pardon him, Steve. He's just being bullish.

SCHUMANN

My daughter is seeing a starving artist and you're blaming me for being bullish? You have to be joking. I'm looking out for her best interests, just as I always have.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yes, like the time you took her bathing suit shopping when she was seventeen and refused to buy her a two-piece suit.

SCHUMANN

It was a TWO-PIECE!

MRS. SCHUMANN

And it looked good, which is why I let her buy it.

SCHUMANN

You bought it for her?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael, she was seventeen. Everyone else was wearing them at her age.

SCHUMANN

Maybe so, but does that make it right?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Perhaps not, but because you didn't grow up with it, does it make it wrong?

SCHUMANN

Yes!

MRS. SCHUMANN

Fine! You're not allowed to use the remote control anymore.

SCHUMANN

What?

MRS. SCHUMANN

You heard me. No more remote control. You didn't have one growing up.

SCHUMANN

You're taking my words out of context.

MRS. SCHUMANN

And we're arguing over something that happened how many years ago?

STEFANY

Eight.

(To PARKER)

Don't worry about them. They do this all the time.

SCHUMANN

No we don't. Don't lie, Stef.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yes we do, but it's all in good fun. Mike doesn't have a very good memory.

SCHUMANN

I certainly do have a good memory! The last time we argued we were deciding what restaurant to eat at. Last month.

MRS. SCHUMANN

I stand corrected. He does have a decent memory; he just remembers the ones he's won. What about two days ago when you argued against buying a fish tank?

SCHUMANN

I thought it was a good idea.

MRS. SCHUMANN

You thought it was a terrible idea, because we'd need to keep the air pump running. You were worried about electricity!

STEFANY

Mom, Dad, we have company.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Oh, I'm sorry honey... you know how your father-

STEFANY

Mom-

MRS. SCHUMANN

Right, sorry. You were saying, Steve. You're an artist?

PARKER

I do a number of things: throw pots that I sell to a local shop, paint, write poetry.

SCHUMANN

You write poetry?

PARKER

Yes, I used to have readings that led to-

SCHUMANN

-You becoming a faggot?

STEFANY

Dad!

SCHUMANN

I'm just teasing him, Stef. I like poetry myself. I wrote your mother a poem once for Valentine's Day-

MRS. SCHUMANN

You called that poetry? "You didn't want flowers, I thought that was great. Here's a card, I'll be home at eight." That was hardly romantic!

SCHUMANN

But it was memorable!

PARKER

And, shockingly, had a working meter and rhyme scheme.

MRS. SCHUMANN

If it wasn't so funny, I probably would've thrown him out!

SCHUMANN

Of my own house?

STEFANY

Anyway...

PARKER

If it makes you feel any better, I used to be an editor for a friend of mine and made great money from it.

SCHUMANN

So starving artists tend to stick together. Where is he now? Living out of a box in San Francisco?

STEFANY

Dad, that's enough.

PARKER

No, Stef. Let your father go. Honestly, I couldn't care less about what he thinks.

STEFANY

Steve, you don't mean that.

PARKER

Of course I do! If he wants to be belligerent and insult not only me, but his wife, your mother, over what was nothing more than badinage, then I think that his irascibility and inability to comport himself is cause enough to-

SCHUMANN

What the Hell did he just say?

STEFANY

Nothing. Just... Steve, apologize to my father. Please. For me.

PARKER

Mr. Schumann, I apologize for what I just said. I was invited into your house as a guest, and I am very grateful to be able to share this meal with you and your wonderful family.

SCHUMANN  
Apology accepted, and you're welcome. Now let's try to have dinner.

PARKER  
(To SCHUMANN)  
Could you please pass the pepper?

SCHUMANN  
Yes. Here.

PARKER  
Thank you, kindly.

SCHUMANN  
You're welcome, kindly.

*There is silence as the foursome continue to eat. PARKER attempts to break said silence.*

PARKER  
Mrs. Schumann, this turkey is fantastic.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Oh, don't thank me. Michael's the one who cooked it. Everything except the iced tea.

PARKER  
You don't say? Mr. Schumann, I have a question for you, then. How do you keep the white meat so moist? Usually mine ends up drier than the Chihuahuan.

STEFANY  
What the heck is the Chihuahuan?

SCHUMANN  
It's the largest desert in North America. I bake the turkey with the breast downwards, so it soaks in its own juices. That way you don't have to take it out of the oven as often to baste it, though it still helps.

PARKER  
That's a fantastic idea! I might have to steal that from you.

SCHUMANN  
As long as that's the only thing you steal.

PARKER

I'm sure it will be. So tell me, if you weren't a State Trooper, what is it that you would be? If I may be so bold to ask, I'd say that it was probably a geography teacher in high school.

SCHUMANN

Did Stefany tell you that?

PARKER

Lucky guess. I figured with the map of the world on the wall, the globe-shaped salt and pepper shakers, and the glass etching on the vase in the shape of the Americas that you were at least interested in the subject.

SCHUMANN

Are you sure you aren't a detective? I've had friends over who noticed the map and shakers, but would miss the etching and certainly wouldn't make the connection.

MRS. SCHUMANN

It's a funny thing, too. Some of his friends *are* detectives.

SCHUMANN

I guess we'd better start training those guys better, then.

PARKER

At the least.

SCHUMANN

So what else can you tell about me?

PARKER

Well, you're better than a good cook, so you probably enjoy it, as it wouldn't make sense to excel in something you dislike. I could taste the French onion dip in the mashed potatoes, so you probably like to change things up a little bit that you might think are bland... either that or you just hate plain mashed potatoes. And judging from the mire poix inside the turkey, you like cooking shows.

SCHUMANN

My mother was French and taught me the mire poix, but you were right about the mashed potatoes. I used buttermilk, too, and added some extra chives. I'm impressed. I really am Steve. Stephen. Mr. Parker.

*MRS. SCHUMANN picks up her plate and nudges SCHUMANN, nodding over towards Parker. SCHUMANN catches her meaning.*

MRS. SCHUMANN

Steffy, can you help me clear off the table so we can bring the pies and coffee out?

STEFANY

Sure, Mom. Dad, do you think you two can get along in the living room?

SCHUMANN

I suppose I could try. Come on, Mr. Parker.

*PARKER follows SCHUMANN into the living room, while STEFANY and MRS. SCHUMANN lazily clear off the dinner table, removing everything and bringing them into the kitchen off-stage. There is a nice, dark green sofa positioned in front of an obscenely large television set.*

Mr. Parker.

PARKER

Please, Mr. Schumann. Call me Steve. Stephen, even.

SCHUMANN

Stephen. I'm going to be blunt. I'm not entirely happy with my daughter having a relationship with someone so...

PARKER

Old.

SCHUMANN

Yes! Sorry. I'm just glad I didn't have to say it myself.

PARKER

No, it's understandable. I'm old enough to be her...well, you k now.

SCHUMANN

Exactly.

PARKER

I know what you're probably thinking. You're thinking that I

SCHUMANN

-am almost fifty and don't have a legitimate job.

PARKER

Not what I was going to say, but we'll work with that.

SCHUMANN

Sorry.

PARKER

But that's what the hostility is about?

SCHUMANN

I wouldn't call it hostility. It's concern for her well-being.

PARKER

Her emotional well-being?

SCHUMANN

Financial well being.

PARKER

I don't mean to sound, well, high and mighty, but finances aren't everything.

SCHUMANN

Maybe not, but look around this room. Stefany grew up in this house, and she's used to a certain way of life. My one wish for her is that she should be able to continue to live like this, and I'm not so sure it's within your means as an artist.

PARKER

I think you'd be pleasantly surprised to find out about my income.

SCHUMANN

Is that so?

PARKER

I should say so. You and the missus should stop by my cabin sometime. We should do dinner there.

SCHUMANN

Your cabin? In the woods?

PARKER

Not exactly in the woods. There is woods in the backyard, but the highway runs right in front of my house. And yes, I have neighbors within shouting distance.

SCHUMANN

Shouting distance?

PARKER

I figured that when I said I owned a cabin, and you assumed woods, you also thought of me as some sort of Ted Kaczynski character.

SCHUMANN

And we were getting along so well.

PARKER

I could smell your resentment. Forgive me. But honestly, and I really would like to be honest with you, I like your daughter. I enjoy her company, and I'm quite sure if you'd sit down and speak with her, she'd tell you how much she enjoys mine as well. Both she and I are adults, and I realize she is your only child, and you want what's best for her. I understand that. But what you need to understand is that there are certain things that you can't control, like friendship, and attraction.

SCHUMANN

I never said I wanted to control-

PARKER

You didn't need to say it. It's understood in your actions. You did say that you wanted her to live in a comfortable financial setting. Believe it or not, and I'm guessing you don't want to, but I live extremely well.

SCHUMANN

Off art and the editing thing?

PARKER

Among other things, yes.

SCHUMANN

Well... I'll consider the dinner offer. We'll just have to see how things work out until then. Agreed?

PARKER

Agreed.

*A scream, closely followed by a breaking dish. Both men rush into the kitchen to see MRS. SCHUMANN with a hand on her chest, sitting in a chair.*

SCHUMANN

What happened? Are you ok?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yeah. Yes. I'm fine.

*STEFANY begins picking up pieces of the dish.*

STEFANY  
She'll be fine. She was just startled is all.

SCHUMANN  
Startled by what?

*STEFANY and MRS. SCHUMANN exchange glances, and MRS. SCHUMANN makes a gesture with her head, as though trying to encourage STEFANY to say something.*

STEFANY  
Dad... Steve...

PARKER  
Oh shit. You're kidding.

SCHUMANN  
Kidding about what?

STEFANY  
I'm

PARKER  
Pregnant!

SCHUMANN  
What?

STEFANY  
Daddy, wait...

SCHUMANN  
PREGNANT?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Michael, remember your blood pressure.

SCHUMANN

PREGNANT?

STEFANY  
Daddy, I can explain.

PARKER  
Not to be Mister Obvious here, but it looks like he's succeeded causing that before.  
Unless of course-

SCHUMANN  
I don't exactly think this requires an explanation. My baby is pregnant, and the man responsible is a

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Michael Robert Schumann! Don't you dare say anything derogatory about our grandchild's father!

SCHUMANN  
Jobless, sleazy... I'm so pissed off I can't even think of an insult!

PARKER  
Masturbatory artist. Throw that in there somewhere.

STEFANY  
Stephen! You're not helping!

PARKER  
Sorry, really.

STEFANY  
Totally uncalled for.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Michael-

SCHUMANN  
Parker... Get... OUT.

PARKER  
Mr. Schumann, really, I'm sorry. It wasn't-

SCHUMANN

OUT.

PARKER  
Mrs. Schumann, thank you for-

SCHUMANN  
OUT!

PARKER  
-for your hospitality. And thank you for the invitation into your lovely home. I apologize for this. Stefany-

SCHUMANN  
DON'T YOU DARE TALK TO MY DAUGHTER. GET OUT.

PARKER  
I'll call you.

SCHUMANN  
Like Hell you will! GO!

*PARKER looks at STEFANY, takes a step towards her, stops, and looks at SCHUMANN who glares back at him. PARKER quickly turns around and leaves.*

*BLACKOUT.*

**ACT 3**  
**Scene 1**

*PARKER and STEFANY are seated at a table in an Italian restaurant. They are not dressed to kill, but still look as though they put some thought into their dress.*

PARKER

Again, I'm really sorry about what happened last week. I have no idea what got into me.

STEFANY

It's fine.

PARKER

Is your father still-

STEFANY

Yes. Very.

PARKER

God... I'm sorry.

STEFANY

Not your fault. (Pause) I initiated it. (Pause) Two consenting adults.

PARKER

Of course.

STEFANY

What're you thinking?

PARKER

About what?

STEFANY

This situation.

PARKER

I don't know.

STEFANY

No?

PARKER  
No. You?

STEFANY  
Wondering how you are.

PARKER  
How I am?

STEFANY  
Yeah.

PARKER  
I'm fine.

STEFANY  
Good.

PARKER  
You?

STEFANY  
Good.

PARKER  
No, "well."

STEFANY  
Well.

PARKER  
Good.

STEFANY  
Yeah.

PARKER  
Are you OK?

STEFANY  
Yeah.

PARKER  
You seem a little...

STEFANY  
What?

PARKER  
Detached.

STEFANY  
From what?

PARKER  
You're joking.

STEFANY  
No.

PARKER  
The present circumstances.

STEFANY  
What about them?

PARKER  
You can't be serious.

STEFANY  
Explain.

PARKER  
You're pregnant. With our child. And you honestly aren't concerned about anything at all.

STEFANY  
Should I be?

PARKER  
Are you on something?

STEFANY  
No.

*Silence.*

PARKER

So, what do you think we should do?

STEFANY

Are you afraid of the silence?

PARKER

No. You're really starting to scare me, Stef.

STEFANY

Sorry.

PARKER

You're detached from reality. Something is obviously wrong.

STEFANY

Mm-hmm.

PARKER

Stef, look at me. Please. It's your father isn't it? Stefany... What did he say?

STEFANY

Nothing.

PARKER

I doubt he said "nothing."

STEFANY

He didn't say anything.

PARKER

You're lying. You're trembling. What did he say? Was it about the baby?

*STEFANY nods.*

STEFANY

He wants it put up for adoption, as long as I'm living under his roof.

PARKER

Move in with me.

STEFANY

What?

PARKER  
Move in, with me.

STEFANY  
I can't do that?

PARKER  
Why not?

STEFANY  
My father will...

PARKER  
Stef, your father won't do anything. You're an adult; you can move out now. I have guest rooms.

STEFANY  
But-

PARKER  
You don't have to give me an answer now. Consider it, at least.

STEFANY  
OK.

PARKER  
I have something for you?

STEFANY  
What is it?

*PARKER reaches under the table.*

PARKER  
Here. Take it.

*STEFANY takes the package and opens it, removing a hand-made car*

STEFANY  
"Nowhere can be perfect without you." It sounds like something you'd read in a Hallmark card.

PARKER

Yes, except I mean it.

*STEFANY places the card on the table, then removes forty pages of paper, fastened together with a binder clip.*

STEFANY

Is this what I think it is?

PARKER

Depends what you think it is.

STEFANY

You wrote a thesis on Kees and Hardy?

PARKER

For you.

STEFANY

But you said it was illegal, dishonest.

PARKER

For me to accept money for it, yes.

STEFANY

It's still illegal.

PARKER

Do you not want it?

STEFANY

I... I do, but it's not my work.

PARKER

Sure it is. Just professionally edited. Look at the thesis statement. Those are your words. The examples you used? I used those too. It's all yours, just organized better.

STEFANY

Yes.

PARKER

You're welcome.

STEFANY  
Thank... Thank you. (Pause) Yes, I'll move in with you.

PARKER  
Are you sure?

STEFANY  
Yes, I'm sure.

PARKER  
I love you.

*PARKER leans in and kisses STEFANY. STEFANY smiles, leans in, and kisses PARKER.  
BLACKOUT.*

## Scene 2

*A hallway within a prison. There is an inmate, STEPHAN, sitting at a desk, reading a novel. SCHUMANN is led in by a CORRECTIONS OFFICER.*

CORRECTIONS OFFICER  
Right here. Stephan Parker. Yell if ya need anything.

SCHUMANN  
Thanks, I appreciate it.  
(To STEPHAN)  
Don't let me bother you.

STEPHAN  
I have to shit with people looking. You think people watching me read bothers me?

SCHUMANN  
A smart ass.

STEPHAN  
Better than a dumb ass.

SCHUMANN  
That mouth of yours get you into here?

STEPHAN

If it got me here, I should hope it would've gotten me out.

SCHUMANN

Should I introduce myself or would you rather I just get to the point?

STEPHAN

Whatever gets me back to my reading faster.

SCHUMANN

Anything good?

STEPHAN

Small talk wasn't one of your options.

SCHUMANN

Fine. I've a picture I want you to look at.

STEPHAN

Rorschach test? It's a couple fucking. Or two dogs fucking. Or two flowers getting pollinated by a bee...fucking.

SCHUMANN

Do you recognize this man?

STEPHAN

That's an awful photo.

SCHUMANN

So you recognize him?

STEPHAN

Nope. Just an awful photo. DMV?

SCHUMANN

God dammit.

STEPHAN

Honestly, he looks remotely familiar, but I can't say where I would've seen him before. What's his name?

SCHUMANN

Stephen Parker.

STEPHAN

You bring me a photo of a guy with my name and you want to know if I've ever seen him before? What kind of nutcase does that?

SCHUMANN

Someone with a problem on his hands.

STEPHAN

la Cosa Nostra? I'm not interested. I wasn't to begin with.

SCHUMANN

Fuck you.

STEPHAN

Still don't recognize him.

SCHUMANN

I didn't expect you to. I don't know why I thought you might know where he lived.

STEPHAN

You tracked me down to find out if I knew where someone with my name lived? That wasn't me?

SCHUMANN

It's more complicated than that!

*SCHUMANN crinkles up the photo and throws it at STEPHAN, who jumps up and runs to the bars.*

STEPHAN

Help. Help. I'm being assaulted with a wad of paper. Ah. Paper cut. I'm bleeding.

SCHUMANN

I hope you rot in here.

*SCHUMANN exits. STEPHAN picks up the photo and unwrinkles it, examining it more closely. He places the photo on his desk, picks up his book, reads a bit, puts it down, looks back at the photo, pulls out a notepad, and begins to write. Lights come up on the opposite side of the stage, in PARKER's cabin. PARKER is glazing a pot while STEFANY is sorting the mail.*

STEFANY

For someone who doesn't get any bills, you certainly do get a lot of credit card offers.

PARKER

Ever notice how someone who doesn't need credit can get all he wants, but people who need it have difficulty getting it?

STEFANY

Like fat people and food.

PARKER

Where did that come from?

STEFANY

My Id.

PARKER

No kidding. I must be rubbing off on you.

STEFANY

Is that a bad thing?

PARKER

It depends. I'm my favorite person, but I don't know if I could handle fucking myself.

STEFANY

I can't believe you just said that!

PARKER

It was my Id.

STEFANY

Cute.

PARKER

Like you.

STEFANY

Like you.

*STEFANY blows him a kiss, and he catches it, folds it up, and puts it in his pocket.*

PARKER

I'm going to save that for later.

STEFANY

Sounds good to me, but there'll always be more where that came from. Hey, this is odd. A letter addressed to Keith Baker. From Mayville Prison.

PARKER

You're kidding.

STEFANY

Look.

PARKER

Just throw it out, then.

STEFANY

That's illegal!

PARKER

Do I need to remind you he's dead?

STEFANY

How do you know it's for that Keith?

PARKER

What are the odds it's for a different one in the area?

STEFANY

A million to one?

PARKER

I don't exactly think that there are fifty Keith Bakers living in the U.S., and I'm not so sure that there are that many living in California.

STEFANY

Fine. We'll throw it out. (Pause) Are you sure you don't want to open it?

PARKER

Why would I want to open it?

STEFANY

Maybe someone needs help.

PARKER

When's the last time you wrote a letter to a dead person for help?

STEFANY

When's the last time you went to church?

PARKER

When you're good, you're good. I think Kees and Hardy really soaked into you.

STEFANY

Why? Because I'm cynical and don't exactly trust organized religion?

PARKER

Yes.

STEFANY

Fair enough.

*STEFANY throws the letter into the trash. PARKER seems to make a mistake with the glazing.*

PARKER

Job it!

STEFANY

Did you say "Job it"?

PARKER

I figured since you were Bible bashing I could get in on the fun.

STEFANY

We can have a party later, then. You finished the leftover chicken?

PARKER

I had a chicken salad sandwich yesterday.

STEFANY

How many? We had four breasts left!

PARKER

We had two. Four sandwiches worth.

STEFANY

That's healthy! Where the Hell do you hide the weight?

PARKER

As if you didn't know. What did you need it for?

STEFANY

I had my heart set on chicken noodle soup tonight.

PARKER

We could always run to the store to pick some up. Give me a chance to wash my hands and we'll-

STEFANY

-No, you can stay. I'll go myself. There's some other stuff I needed anyway.

PARKER

Alrighty. I'll be here waiting, Love.

STEFANY

I believe you.

*STEFANY walks over to PARKER and gives him a peck on the lips, then exits. PARKER stands up and wanders over to the window to watch her leave, and waves. Moments later, he walks over to the trash bin and pulls out the letter that was thrown away earlier. PARKER turns it over in his hand, opens it, and reads it as the lights go down and he moves back to the other side of the stage that is still set up as Mayville Prison. STEPHAN is reading a different book.*

PARKER

Thanks, I appreciate it.

(To STEPHAN)

Well, you don't look half bad.

STEPHAN

Holy fuck...

PARKER

Try to keep it down.

STEPHAN

You're-

PARKER

Old. I know.

STEPHAN  
Alive? How?

PARKER  
Long story. Here, I brought you these.  
*PARKER hands over a carton of cigarettes.*  
I don't remember you being a smoker, but times change.

STEPHAN  
Times change, people change... You should know that by now.

PARKER  
I do. So tell me about this cop that-

STEPHAN  
I don't remember his name, but he was tall, had short, dark hair with some graying-

PARKER  
Mustache?

STEPHAN  
Neatly trimmed.

PARKER  
Well, I don't expect to have too many state police out looking for me.

STEPHAN  
And he was an asshole, if that helps.

PARKER  
It does. Did you tell him anything?

STEPHAN  
Not a thing. I didn't recognize you in the photo at first. It had been years since you died, and to expect to see an aging, not a decomposing corpse-

PARKER  
True.

STEPHAN  
I pissed him off so much he threw the photo in here, and I looked at it for a while, trying to figure out why it looked so damn familiar. After a while it just kinda struck me, but I was like, "No, this can't be Keith. He's been dead for years." And then I got to thinking, you

know, they never found your body. Maybe someone had saved you and you had amnesia or something-

PARKER

That has to be the most unlikely scenario I've ever heard.

STEPHAN

And successfully staging your own death wasn't up there?

PARKER

I think that's number two.

STEPHAN

Either way, you're full of shit!

PARKER

Nice. But try to keep it down.

STEPHAN

Right, sorry. So I was just swimming in these thoughts. What have you been up to? How's your mom? Is she still cooking those home-made cinnamon rolls? Man, I love those. It's been so long since I've had a cinnamon roll, let alone hers. They don't serve great desserts here. Yesterday it was canned pears.

PARKER

If I had known that, I would've made some for you. You probably could've traded it for something good.

STEPHAN

I'd never give one of those up. Are you crazy?

*STEPHAN looks into PARKER's eyes, and PARKER quickly breaks eye-contact.*

Hey. Look at me. Hey. Look

*STEPHAN snaps his fingers, and PARKER looks up.*

I've seen that face before. Everything all right?

PARKER

My mother...

STEPHAN

Shit, man. I'm sorry. How'd it happen?

PARKER

Aneurysm.

STEPHAN

Oh no... She go fast?

PARKER

I made it to the hospital. She recognized me. But this was after the stroke...

STEPHAN

That's no good. I can't believe she... well, maybe I can believe she recognized you. Only twenty years.

PARKER

Only. It was tough.

STEPHAN

I can't imagine.

PARKER

And I refused to acknowledge it at first. It was...painful. But then I gave in.

STEPHAN

I don't know what to say.

PARKER

There isn't much to say.

STEPHAN

I suppose not.

*PARKER shuffles his feet, looks down, and sighs.*

PARKER

So... The officer at the gate said you were in here for assault with a deadly weapon.

STEPHAN

I'd rather not talk about it.

PARKER

I understand.

STEPHAN

You were supposed to say, "Are you sure?" and then I launch into it.

PARKER

Sorry.

STEPHAN

It's fine. I was at a bar - Penumbra - we've gone there before. You know, the one with the cute Russian waitress-

PARKER

-with the French name-

PARKER

Camille.

STEPHAN

Camille.

*BOTH laugh.*

STEPHAN

I got completely ripped on whiskey sours and thought I saw a former flame... I know I don't have to tell you which one.

PARKER

You were always a fan of Faust.

STEPHAN

I thought she'd be the one to save me.

PARKER

You have to admit, you went a little overboard with it, celebrating her birthday without her. What was it? September 22nd?

STEPHAN

HA! She was no Virgo, smartass. Aries. Anyway, this woman walks in, and I'm thinking, "Wow, there she is, after five years," and I look, and I see she isn't wearing a wedding ring, or an engagement ring, so my mind is flying all over the place. Do I ask her how she is? Do I buy her a drink? Do we talk about the weather? Auld Lang Syne stuff.

PARKER

"Should I eat a peach?" stuff.

STEPHAN

Exactly like that. The entire time I'm Prufrocking I completely miss that she's come in with someone about a foot shorter than I am, kind of on the heavy side, but not muscular at all, and when I do notice him, after I bought her a drink, he gets defensive, tells me not to do

anything stupid with his girl. "I'm just being a nice guy buying her a drink. No strings." I said to him. "That's right no strings," he said, and then pushed me out of his way.

PARKER  
-and then you hit him.

STEPHAN  
At first with my fist. Fell fast. Then with a bottle. I completely blacked out. Next thing I know, I'm in jail, covered in blood that isn't mine facing charges of assault with a deadly weapon.

PARKER  
I'm sorry.

STEPHAN  
Don't be, it's not your fault. It was my obsession with her. You knew it would eventually get me into trouble, and it did. Here's some advice I learned too late to do anything with. Never have sex with your muse. It'll never be as good as it is in your head. And what are you left with? Something... base... and used. If a miracle happens often enough, it's no longer a miracle. It's just not worth it.

PARKER  
I'll have to remember that.  
*PARKER looks around for something to sit on, finds nothing, and leans on the bars.*  
I bet you're still wondering what happened with me.

STEPHAN  
No, I wonder what happened to Amelia Earhart. I thought we'd never come back around to it.

PARKER  
Sorry about that.

STEPHAN  
Stop the fucking apologizing and talk! You had everything- everything!- going for you. Ten grand contracts, plural.

PARKER  
You don't remember.

STEPHAN  
What?

PARKER

My wife.

STEPHAN

Oh my God. I forgot. I guess you did have a reason, didn't you?

PARKER

Yeah.

STEPHAN

I'm sorry. I completely forgot.

PARKER

It's all right. I'm over it. I needed time. Space. I couldn't find it with everyone always checking up on me, the publishers wanting more work from me, thinking a month was sufficient for mourning... I couldn't do it.

STEPHAN

So you faked your death.

PARKER

And eventually healed. And began again.

STEPHAN

Un-fucking-believable. You know that's unbelievable, right?

PARKER

Of course, and now things are going well.

STEPHAN

How so?

PARKER

There's this girl I've been seeing

STEPHAN

-wait, let me guess. Brown hair, dark eyes, glasses, kind of petite-

PARKER

Twenty years and you still know my poison.

STEPHAN

How could I forget? Katharine, Marie, Jodi-

PARKER  
I know you know.

STEPHAN  
Meghan, Samantha-

PARKER  
-you know nothing ever happened between Samantha and I.

STEPHAN  
Yeah, yeah. So, tell me about her already.

PARKER  
Where to begin? She's getting her Masters in English, works as a Nurse's Aide in a nursing home, her father was that Trooper you met-

STEPHAN  
Wow, I already met half the parents. I feel privileged.

PARKER  
Well, you didn't meet the better half.

STEPHAN  
Not surprised at all. How serious is it?

PARKER  
Well, she moved in, and she's... I'm thinking about proposing to her.

STEPHAN  
Congratulations! I'll be sure to send you a card. The gift will have to wait, I'm afraid.

PARKER  
It's fine, really. I hate to do this to you, but I'm supposed to be meeting her at a coffeehouse in about half an hour.

STEPHAN  
Do what you have to do. I'm not going anywhere.

PARKER  
Prison humor?

STEPHAN

It wouldn't be funny if it wasn't true.

*STEPHAN extends his hand through the bars.*

Take care, Keith.

*PARKER shakes STEPHAN's hand.*

PARKER

You too, Stephan. I'll send you another carton of smokes when I get the chance.

STEPHAN

You're too good to me.

PARKER

You deserve better. Quick question before I go. How'd you find me?

STEPHAN

The trooper mentioned something about a cabin, and I remembered that one you and I stayed at a few times back in the day.

PARKER

I'll be damned.

*PARKER's cell phone rings.*

Hello? Speaking. What happened? She's where?

*As PARKER crosses to the opposite side of the stage.*

Stefany was in a car accident, Steve. I need to go.

### Scene 3

*PARKER's cross brings him into a sparse waiting room with a security officer sitting behind a desk.*

PARKER

(Out of breath)

I'm here to see a patient. She was in an accident.

SECURITY OFFICER

Name? We've had a few accidents.

PARKER

Stefany Schumann. S-T-E-F

SECURITY OFFICER  
How about spelling "Schumann" first?

PARKER  
Sorry. S-C-H-U-M-A

SECURITY OFFICER  
N-N. "Stefany" with an "F". Room 312, East wing.

PARKER  
Thanks!

SECURITY OFFICER  
You can't go back there yet!

PARKER  
Why?

SECURITY OFFICER  
Put this on-  
*SECURITY OFFICER hands PARKER a guest I.D. tag to attach to his shirt.*  
-and sign here. No, here.

PARKER  
Great. Thanks.  
*PARKER crosses the stage and enters a room with a hospital bed occupied by STEFANY and various machines. PARKER knocks.*

He-hello?

*A NURSE enters.*

NURSE  
Sorry, are you looking for Miss Schumann?

PARKER  
Yes. Is she in there?

NURSE  
Yup, but she's sleeping. Try to be quiet.

*PARKER walks in to see STEFANY on the bed, her face badly bruised with a sutured cut above her left eye, and her nose has a bandage over it, likely because it had been broken. There is a small empty vase on the table, along with a pitcher of water and two glasses.*

PARKER  
(Whispering)

Oh... you poor thing...

*PARKER sees a chair next to the window and pulls it over to the bed. He sits down and reaches over to hold her hand. A DOCTOR walks in.*

DOCTOR  
Jesus! I didn't think there'd be anyone in here.

PARKER  
Sorry, I didn't realize I wasn't allowed in here.

DOCTOR  
No, that's not it. I just left about five minutes ago and didn't expect anyone in that time. You didn't have any difficulties signing in, did you?

PARKER  
No, none at all.

DOCTOR  
Good. There've been problems lately.

PARKER  
Is she going to be all right?

DOCTOR  
Well, for the most part, yes.

PARKER  
For the most part?

DOCTOR  
Can you step outside with me for a minute?

PARKER  
But she can't hear us here, can she?

DOCTOR

She's sedated, but I'd rather do this outside. Don't want to disturb her rest.

PARKER

She's going to be fine?

DOCTOR

Yes, she'll be fine. Now please, outside.

*DOCTOR walks outside of the room, and is followed by PARKER.*

Stefany should be fine, just a few small lacerations from glass on her face. They'll fade with Retin-A treatment which can be started once they've healed.

PARKER

Thank God.

DOCTOR

The best thing for her right now is rest.

PARKER

Is that it?

DOCTOR

No. There's no light way to... she lost the fetus.

PARKER

Lost-what?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid the baby was aborted.

PARKER

No.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry.

PARKER

Yeah. I mean, no, no, it's not your fault.

DOCTOR

She doesn't know yet. We sedated her because of the injuries, and wanted to check with her father to see if he wanted to tell her or if a hospital psychiatrist would.

PARKER

Actually, I'm not her father. I'm her significant other.

DOCTOR

Oh, my apologies. Do you happen to know if you'd rather a hospital employee or-

PARKER

I think it would be best if I told her.

DOCTOR

As long as you think so. If you change your mind-

*DOCTOR reaches into a pocket and fishes out a card.*

-here we go. Give Dr. Ferguson a call. Tell him Dr. Matthews gave you his card.

PARKER

Thanks.

DOCTOR

It's the least I can do, really. I hate to do this, but you're not going to be able to stay around much longer. I'll put a note on the door, but you have about ten minutes at most before visiting hours end in this wing.

PARKER

Thank you. I appreciate it.

DOCTOR

You're more than welcome. And again, my sympathy.

*DOCTOR exits. PARKER re-enters and moves the chair to her bedside. He picks up STEFANY's hand and gives it a squeeze. It noticeably squeezes back.*

PARKER

Steffie? Steffie, can you hear me?

*STEFANY moans softly.*

STEFANY

Hi.

PARKER

Hi.

STEFANY

My... thing on top of my... neck hurts.

PARKER

You were in an accident. You're in a hospital.

STEFANY

How's the car?

PARKER

I haven't the slightest idea. Rest. Relax.

STEFANY

Mm-hmm.

*STEFANY falls back asleep. A few seconds pass. SCHUMANN enters in uniform, without PARKER noticing.*

SCHUMANN

(After a moment and clearing his throat.)

Ahem. How is she?

PARKER

She'll be fine.

SCHUMANN

Just fine?

PARKER

Mostly fine. Almost great.

SCHUMANN

That so?

PARKER

That's so.

SCHUMANN

Huh.

PARKER

Do you mind stepping outside with me for a moment?

SCHUMANN

Yeah, I do.

PARKER

I'd just like to talk to you for a moment. It won't take long.

SCHUMANN

I came here to see my daughter, not you.

PARKER

I realize that. Please.

SCHUMANN

Only if you can give me a few moments alone with her afterwards.

PARKER

Done.

*SCHUMANN and PARKER step through the door and close it.*  
Mr. Schumann, she... lost the baby.

SCHUMANN

What?

PARKER

Yes.

SCHUMANN

You're lying.

PARKER

I can get a doctor if you'd like me to.

*SCHUMANN stares at PARKER.*

SCHUMANN

Are you an actor too, Mr. Renaissance Man?

PARKER

No, I'm not.

SCHUMANN

(Shuffling his feet)

I believe you.

PARKER

You do?

SCHUMANN

Shouldn't I?

PARKER

Well, yes.

SCHUMANN

So.

PARKER

Yes?

SCHUMANN

You're going to end your relationship with her now.

PARKER

Of course I'm not! I would never think of such a thing.

SCHUMANN

You misunderstand me. It wasn't a question.

PARKER

What?

SCHUMANN

She lost the baby. She doesn't need your support anymore.

PARKER

I wouldn't do that.

SCHUMANN

Why not?

PARKER

I love her.

SCHUMANN

Then stop. Look what it's done to her.

PARKER

What are you talking about?

SCHUMANN

When she finds out she lost it, she'll be a wreck.

PARKER

You're implying I had something to do with this?

SCHUMANN

No.

PARKER

But your logic-

SCHUMANN

I'm stating it plainly.

PARKER

I'm not responsible for anything! Your daughter's condition is no worse with me, and can't possibly be any better without me. My existence in your daughter's life has no bearing on where she is right now.

SCHUMANN

She was going to meet you! She shouldn't have been driving in her condition!

PARKER

Millions of pregnant women have driven, are driving, and will drive!

SCHUMANN

My daughter is not millions of women. One death is a tragedy. A thousand is a statistic.

PARKER

Do you just realize you quoted Josef Stalin?!

SCHUMANN

Is that so?

PARKER

Yes! And to be perfectly honest, this conversation you and I are having now has solidified my conviction.

SCHUMANN  
And what's that?

PARKER  
I want to ask your daughter to marry me.

SCHUMANN  
You're just saying that to piss me off more than I already am.

PARKER  
I'm not an actor, remember?

SCHUMANN  
Liar! Now let me see my daughter in peace!

PARKER  
Go ahead.

*SCHUMANN opens the door and enters the room. His radio goes off.*

RADIO  
Base to Car 12.

SCHUMANN  
Shit.  
(Into the radio)  
Car 12. Go ahead.

RADIO  
We have a possible 10-72 at the intersection of Turlane and East Whiting.

SCHUMANN  
You're kidding me.  
(Into the radio)  
Car 12 to Base. Is no one else available?

RADIO  
Negative, Car 12.

SCHUMANN  
FUCK!  
(Into the radio)  
Car 12... Responding. 10-49.

RADIO

10-4.

*SCHUMANN leaves the room, glares at PARKER, and exits. PARKER enters the room and sits back down at the bedside.*

STEFANY

I heard my dad. Was he here?

PARKER

He was. he had to leave. A call, I think.

STEFANY

He didn't say goodbye or kiss me.

PARKER

I'm sure he'll come by later.

STEFANY

I'm his little snowflake.

PARKER

Snowflake?

STEFANY

Because I'm perfect and unique.

PARKER

Well, your father was right.

STEFANY

Uh-uh. The world's not perfect.

PARKER

If it were, there'd certainly be more unicorns.

STEFANY

You think so?

PARKER

I know so.

*PARKER stands up and leans over STEFANY, and kisses her forehead. The SECURITY OFFICER enters.*

SECURITY OFFICER

Mr. Parker, I'll have to ask you to leave now. I'm sorry.

PARKER

No, it's fine.

(To STEFANY)

Sleep well, Love. O.K.?

STEFANY

I love you.

PARKER

I love you more.

*PARKER leaves the room, followed by the SECURITY OFFICER. DR. MATTHEWS walks past.*

DOCTOR

I can assume you told her?

PARKER

Not tonight. Tomorrow. Definitely tomorrow.

DOCTOR

Are you sure? As I said, I can have a-

PARKER

No. Definitely tomorrow.

*BLACKOUT.*

#### Scene 4

*STEFANY's hospital room the following day. Little has changed, except there is now a bouquet of flowers. STEFANY is dozing. PARKER enters and sits in the chair, still as it was at the end of the previous scene. STEFANY opens her eyes.*

PARKER

Sorry, Stef... Did I wake you?

STEFANY

No, no...I was just... thinking.

PARKER

With your eyes closed?

STEFANY

With my eyes closed.

PARKER

Anything interesting?

STEFANY

Not particularly... no.

PARKER

Do you want to share it?

STEFANY

Not right now. Maybe later.

*PARKER stands up and goes to the new bouquet.*

PARKER

(Reading the card)

So your father came by earlier.

STEFANY

Yeah. He brought me breakfast in bed.

PARKER

Must've been before visiting hours.

STEFANY

Nine-thirty. After he got out of work.

PARKER

Anything good?

STEFANY

Huh?

PARKER

The food. Was it anything good?

STEFANY

Not really. Runny eggs, toast, grape jam.

PARKER

Grape?

STEFANY

They were out of raspberry.

PARKER

From the cafeteria.

STEFANY

Yeah. I was afraid to ask how much it came to.

PARKER

I'm sure whatever it was, it's nothing compared to what all of this is costing.

STEFANY

I know. They said I might be able to go home later today. They want to run another X-ray on my head, just to be sure...

PARKER

Sure of what?

STEFANY

Just that nothing is wrong.

PARKER

Was anything wrong to begin with? Or from the accident?

STEFANY

No.

PARKER

So it's just-

STEFANY

-protocol?

PARKER

I was going to say "standard procedure," but yes, protocol.

STEFANY

Steve?

PARKER

Yes?

STEFANY

I can't.

PARKER

Can't what?

STEFANY

Marry you.

PARKER

Your father told you?

STEFANY

Yes. And I've been thinking about it.

PARKER

But why? I was supposed to-

STEFANY

Please, don't be angry with me.

PARKER

How could I be angry with you? I'm angry with your father.

STEFANY

Don't. You were going to ask eventually. At least this way I had time to think about it.

PARKER

Are you sure your answer is-

STEFANY

For now. We've only been seeing each other...five months. The baby isn't any reason to rush into things.

PARKER

The baby?

STEFANY

I know you think what you're trying to do is the right thing, that you don't want him or her to be born out of wedlock... and I know it's for my family's sake, and my father's reputation... but I think we should take things more slowly... put marriage off for a while.

PARKER

We can do that. Your father didn't tell you about...

STEFANY

About what?

PARKER

The baby.

STEFANY

What about it?

PARKER

It... didn't make it.

STEFANY

Didn't... No.

PARKER

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

*PARKER goes to STEFANY and hugs her in the bed as she begins to sob.*

STEFANY

Why didn't you tell me?

PARKER

It wasn't the right time.

STEFANY

Why? Why?

PARKER

I'm sorry, hun. I really am.

STEFANY

Go...

PARKER

What?

STEFANY

Go. I need to be alone.

PARKER

Are you sure?

STEFANY

Yes... Please... Go.

PARKER

I'll be right outside if you-

STEFANY

No. I need... No.

PARKER

Stefany, I...

STEFANY

Please! Go! I can't do this! Go!

PARKER

I love you.

*STEFANY continues to cry as PARKER leaves the room and exits the stage. STEFANY continues to cry and looks about the room. In a fit of anger, she throws her right arm into the glass pitcher on the night table that shatters against the wall. STEFANY stops her sobbing momentarily, and bends down off the bed to pick up a piece of the glass. She examines it for a moment, then puts it to her wrist. A NURSE walks in.*

NURSE

Hey, Sugar. I heard a crash. I hope you don't mind my barg- what are you doing honey? No! No, don't do that!

*STEFANY cuts her wrist.*

No, baby, no! Doctor! We need a doctor here!

*BLACKOUT*

### **Scene 5**

*PARKER is sitting silently inside of his car, parked on the side of a bridge. PARKER slowly gets out of the car, leaving the door open. He climbs up onto the ledge and looks off into the distance. he jumps.*

*BLACKOUT.*

### **Scene 6**

*A Police Barrack's locker room. SCHUMANN and another OFFICER are at their lockers, undressing from their uniforms. The OFFICER is hesitant.*

OFFICER

Mike, I hope you don't mind me asking, but...someone mentioned your daughter earlier... how has she been doing?

*SCHUMANN's face visibly softens, and is almost in tears when he turns to face the OFFICER, and quickly turns away and slams his fist into a neighboring locker.*

SCHUMANN

Not well, Dennis. She's not well at all.

*BLACKOUT.*

### **Scene 7**

*A non-descript area with a small round table. STEFANY is seated in a chair in a white gown. MRS. SCHUMANN enters with a tray of food, everything pre-cut that would require such for consumption, plastic eating utensils, and a plastic cup full of juice.*

MRS. SCHUMANN

Here you go, Steffie. It's your favorite: turkey and mashed potatoes, green beans, and apple juice.

STEFANY

I don't like apple juice.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yes you do. You had it earlier, remember? You had it with breakfast, and dinner last night... In fact, I can't remember a time when you didn't have apple juice.

*STEFANY stares blankly at the food for a moment, then picks up the plastic fork and begins to move the food around into a single large pile in the center of her plate. Pausing a moment, she begins to attempt to separate the food back into its original positions on the plate. MRS. SCHUMANN removes a postcard from her pocket.*

I forgot to tell you. You got another postcard today. Would you like me to read it to you?

*STEFANY's eyes well up with tears and she tries more furiously to separate the food with her fork. She gives up and begins to use her hands.*

STEFANY

No. No. NO!

*STEFANY continues to scream and eventually breaks down into tears as the lights fade to BLACKOUT.*

## **APPENDIX B**

*Sunsets in Nantucket* version 3

### **ACT I** **Scene 1 and 2**

*A small home-style restaurant. PARKER is sitting at a table, alone, with a bag containing an old newspaper, various postcards, and random material. WAITRESS approaches.*

WAITRESS

G'morning, sugah. The usual, I guess? Wheat toast, honey, tea?

PARKER

"Sugah"? Are you auditioning for something?

WAITRESS

Sorry, thought I'd spice things up a little bit.

PARKER

Because nothing says "spicy" like a Southern Drawl in a Yankee.

WAITRESS

In any event-

PARKER

Can I get a three-egg omelet, onions, pepperoni, green pepper, garlic if you have it, and a small glass of orange juice?

WAITRESS

Living on the edge today, are we? Special occasion?

PARKER

I suppose you could say that. Today is my friend Keith's birthday.

WAITRESS

Is that so? Is he going to be joining you? God knows you haven't had someone share a meal with you here since... you know, I can't honestly think of a single time someone has sat across from you, man, woman, or animal. Why is that?

PARKER

Because it is?

WAITRESS

Oh. Gotcha. So when is Keith going to get here?

PARKER

Get here? He's been dead for years.

WAITRESS

I'm sorry. I didn't mean. That... Um...

PARKER

Relax. Years. You don't need to say anything. Time passed, people heal.

WAITRESS

They do. I remember when I lost my husband.

PARKER

I never realized you were married.

WAITRESS

Best twenty-nine years of my life... Y'know, our honeymoon... it's one of those moments that you remember all of your life. The ones that stick to you, every detail...

PARKER

Like Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassinations, September 11, 2001...

WAITRESS

Exactly like those. A kind of-

PARKER

Trauma on a massive scale.

WAITRESS

Sure, why not? I'll tell you, he was something else, though I'm sure most people say that about their husbands and wives and significant others. There was never a time when I ever thought I could do better, or thought that there was something better out there. I

guess those in less than perfect situations say that, too, but Bill really was as close to a saint as a unreligious person could get.

PARKER

Like a bodhisattva.

WAITRESS

Uh...Sure. A bodhishattha.

PARKER

Close enough.

WAITRESS

Omelet, orange juice... tea?

PARKER

Sure. Irish Breakfast.

WAITRESS

Will English Breakfast work?

PARKER

Are you honestly asking me if English is an acceptable replacement for Irish? After everything the English had done to them over the years, murdering women and children, stealing their land.

(Pause.)

I'm kidding. Relax. English Breakfast works.

WAITRESS

Can't let go, huh?

PARKER

Let go of what?

WAITRESS

The paper. Significant?

PARKER

A memento. Some people keep rooms unchanged after the loss of a loved one, or keep memorials with candles, flowers or incense. I happen to keep this paper as a memento mori.

WAITRESS

(Looking at the paper.)

Nice car.

(Scans the article.)

So they found his car. Do you have the article from when they found his body?

PARKER

No, he apparently jumped off the bridge. Either that, or he was kidnapped, but there was a suicide note, not a ransom note. More cut and dry than one would hope.

WAITRESS

That's horrible.

PARKER

Yes, but it's what he wanted. It's difficult to think of suicide that way; it's usually considered to be a selfish act, causing pain and suffering for others and not just one's self. The way I see it, now, perhaps the act is more gray than black or white. His letter was... eloquent, to say the least.

WAITRESS

Let me put your order in, and I'll be back in a bit.

*WAITRESS exits. PARKER pulls a manila envelope from under the table that was sent to him from overseas. He opens it up and takes out a stack of postcards from various countries. He picks one out with the Eiffel Tower on the front and begins to write. WAITRESS returns with his juice and tea, and then takes a seat across from him.*

You do realize you're supposed to send those from the country you're from, right? Or at least that's how normal people do it. My husband used to like sending them to our house to find out if we would beat them home.

PARKER

Interesting. Not as interesting as what I do with them. I send them to Mrs. Baker, Keith's mother. She's been living in a nursing home for the last few years. She collects them. It's... kind of my way of keeping in touch with Keith. Try not to judge.

WAITRESS

That's something else, isn't it?

PARKER

You could say that.

WAITRESS

The article said he was a writer. Anything I'd have heard of?

PARKER

Well, he wrote a few short stories, plays, poems...he created quite a bit of good work. He never became well-known outside of the Bay area, though. You'd think that someone who was able to become so popular so quickly would gain national attention, but that never really happened. He sent a few of his poems to publishers in England, and for the most part they were well received, but Europeans tend to have difficulty relating to American trials and tribulations. A lot of his works dealt with his childhood, growing up in the country, the death of his father in a farming accident-I'm boring you.

WAITRESS

No, not really. Although I really should get back to work. I'll be by with your omelet in a bit.

PARKER

Thanks, Ann. I appreciate it.

WAITRESS

You're welcome.

*WAITRESS exits. PARKER picks up the postcard he was writing on and continues to write. Moments later, the WAITRESS returns with the omelet. Lights come up on the opposite side of the stage, beginning the second scene, overlapping with the first. STEFANY is reading a postcard with the Eiffel Tower on its front, the same card PARKER is writing on, to MRS. BAKER who is sitting in a wheel chair. It should be clear that neither side should be aware of the other.*

STEFANY

- and everything here is beautiful. The people, the architecture, the art... If only you were here to see them with your diamond eyes. In a few weeks, I'll be traveling through the Channel to England, where I'll stay with an acquaintance from my university days for a while. Once again, I hope this card finds you doing well beyond all expectations. With sincerest love, Stephen Parker.

(Beat.)

Now, isn't that wonderful?

MRS. BAKER

Yes, it is.

STEFANY

Should we put this one with the others?

MRS. BAKER

Please. He's doing well, isn't he? It's too bad Keith isn't around to see how well he's been doing. Keith would've loved to go to Europe. He always said he wanted to go-

(Begins to cry.)

-always wanted to go, but couldn't. I wouldn't let him, not after his father-

*MRS. BAKER continues to cry, STEFANY attempts to console her.*

*WAITRESS returns with the omelet.*

WAITRESS

Here you go, Steve. Can I get you anything else?

PARKER

No thanks. And it's Stephen, not Steve.

WAITRESS

I'm sorry, Steve.

*BLACKOUT on this side.*

STEFANY

Now, now, it's all right. They're serving chocolate pudding with dinner. Would you like some chocolate pudding?

MRS. BAKER

Mm-hmm.

STEFANY

What do you say I try to get you a double helping of pudding? You'd like that, right? Just don't tell anyone.

*STEFANY pushes MRS. BAKER to a table with TWO OLDER WOMEN who are eating dinner without too much difficulty. STEFANY exits and returns with a plate of food, including the promised two helpings of pudding for MRS. BAKER and two extra, one for each of the other WOMEN.*

(To the other TWO WOMEN)

Here's some hush-food for you two. Don't tell anyone I did this for you. You don't want to get into any trouble now, do you?

MRS. BAKER

My juice isn't open.

STEFANY

Well, that's a bit of a problem, isn't it? Here, let me-

*STEFANY takes the carton of juice and opens it, placing the bendable straw in it.*

There we go. Problem solved. Is there anything else I can do for you ladies? If you need me, just yell.

*STEFANY crosses to the Nurses' station where another NURSE is working on a crossword puzzle.*

Oh, hey.

NURSE

Stefany! What are you doing here?

STEFANY

I got called in because Carrie couldn't make it in. Her kid's sick, plus I could use the extra cash to pay back my loans. And then there's the roommate issue. Her boyfriend's in... I'm sure you can imagine.

NURSE

For the most part. My roommate in college had her boyfriend come to visit every once in a while. Pretty loud.

STEFANY

I'm guessing the entire floor knew what was going on?

NURSE

Exactly.

*STEFANY goes to her book bag on the back of a chair, pulls out a notebook, reads a portion of what she's already written, and then begins to write slowly.*

What's that you're working on?

STEFANY

My thesis. Modern Californian poets. It's interesting.

NURSE

Says you.

STEFANY

No, really it is. Well, you're right, you probably wouldn't like it. It's only for intellectuals.

NURSE

Hey, no hitting below the belt.

STEFANY

You aren't as dumb as you think you are.

NURSE

And what makes you think I think I'm dumb?

STEFANY

Nothing at all.

NURSE

That's right. Let's see how smart you really are. Three letter word for "seer". First letter "e".

STEFANY

Uh... Eye?

NURSE

That fits. Three letter word for "sweet spud".

STEFANY

Yam. Do you seriously need help with these? You're not exactly proving your point.

NURSE

Just one last one. Five letter word, "antonym for fragrant". Starts with 'm' and ends with 'y'".

STEFANY

What?? Uh... mustiness... Wait a second... Yeah, right.

*STEFANY throws her pen at the NURSE, and both begin to laugh. MRS. BAKER collapses to the floor, taking her tray along with her, creating a loud crash, resulting in STEFANY and the NURSE running to her aid.*

Oh fuck, Beth. Is she..?

NURSE

No, I have a pulse. Go call Dr. Lanning and tell him we've got a medical emergency.

*STEFANY stands shocked.*

Stefany! Go!

*STEFANY takes off to the nurses station to the phone, and BLACKOUT.*

### Scene 3

*MRS. BAKER is lying on a hospital bed, asleep. The faint beeps of a heart monitor can be heard, and she is hooked up to an oxygen tank. There are half a dozen Get-Well cards and two bouquets of flowers on the upstage nightstand, one of the bouquets visibly wilted. MALE NURSE is adjusting her I.V. line, writes on her chart, and then leaves the room as STEFANY enters in her work clothes.*

*She adds two more cards to the nightstand, and removes the wilting bouquet, leaving the vase. PARKER walks in.*

PARKER

Excuse me. Are you *stealing* her flowers?

STEFANY

Of course not! They're starting to wilt. Look, this one has already turned brownish... brown.

PARKER

It was a joke. My apologies. How's she doing?

STEFANY

Well, she had a stroke, and has been in and out of consciousness, apparently.

PARKER

Apparently? You don't know for sure?

STEFANY

That's what the chart said. I'd believe the chart.

PARKER

You... don't actually work here, do you?

STEFANY

Nope. I'm a part-time nurse at St. Jude's Nursing Home where-

PARKER

-she was a resident. Good to know you aren't going to a costume party in that.

STEFANY

Uh... yeah... How'd you know her? Younger brother?

PARKER

Excuse me? Much younger brother? In any case, no; she was my friend's mother. After he... I tried to keep in touch with her. I sent postcards-

STEFANY

From Europe.

PARKER

Yes! She's been getting them. Fantastic!

STEFANY

I usually read them to her, since her eyesight wasn't what it used to be. So, you're her next of kin?

PARKER

Yes, Stephen. Pleasure to meet you. I'm guessing you know her husband's-

STEFANY

-deceased, 24 years, some sort of accident<sup>10</sup>.

PARKER

Exactly.

MRS. BAKER

Keith?

PARKER

(Whispering)

Was she going senile before-

MRS. BAKER

Keith, where are you?

STEFANY

Among other things she was losing.

PARKER

No, Mrs. Baker, it's Stephen. Stephen Parker. Do you remember me?

MRS. BAKER

How are you, Keith?

STEFANY

No, Mrs. Baker. Stephen. (Enunciating) Steeee-phen.

PARKER

She's old and senile, not deaf.

STEFANY

She was losing her hearing, too.

PARKER

I stand corrected. Sorry.

MRS. BAKER

Why won't you talk to me?

STEFANY

It's probably not a good idea to play along.

PARKER

I didn't plan on it.

(To MRS. BAKER)

Mrs.- Mary? I'm not Keith.

MRS. BAKER

I knew you were still alive. You look so well. I remember... you brought home your first report card. All "A's" ... proud...

STEFANY

Report card? Isn't it usually "I remember when you were still in diapers" or "when you were just this tall".

PARKER

You tell me. You're the nurse who's seen this before.

STEFANY

Well, no, she's my first... without the dirty connotations that phrase normally comes with.

PARKER

So you're a part-time nurse who usually has good luck with patients?

STEFANY

Until now. With her episode and all.

PARKER

You mean stroke?

STEFANY

Well, yeah. Stroke, episode... same thing, y'know?

PARKER

No, I don't know. Episode sounds impersonal. Television series have episodes. You're an observer, a kibitzer...

STEFANY

I don't want to sound rude or anything, but it's not like I had the stroke, or had done anything to cause it. I WAS an observer... sort of. I didn't mean to come off as callous.

PARKER

I get your work is difficult. You're forced to take care of people and try not to get too close to them, because they can be taken at any time. It's almost like parenthood, except you don't put too much emotional attachment into the relationship at all!

STEFANY

That's not how it is! I mean, yes, it would be easy if I didn't give a rat's ass about any of the patients, and I could be cold and uncaring to patients who are losing control of their bodily functions on a daily basis, but I'm not! I'm a good person! I do good!

MRS. BAKER

Stop fighting, Keith. Don't yell at the nurse.

PARKER

Stop calling me Keith! I'm not Keith!

STEFANY

Don't yell at her! She's sick!

MRS. BAKER

Stefany is a nice person. She reads to me.

PARKER

Well good for the two of you.

MRS. BAKER

You watch your tone with me, young man. You just wait until your father gets home!

PARKER

Damn it!

(Shoots an angry glance at Stefany.)

Forgive me for this.

(To MRS. BAKER)

Dad's dead. He's been dead, and you're sick.

MRS. BAKER

He brought me those flowers this morning when he got home from work.

STEFANY

Stephen, don't.

PARKER

Look around you! You're in a hospital, Mom!

STEFANY

Stop it! You have no idea what you're doing to her! It can't possibly help.

PARKER

(Angry whisper)

What are you saying? She needs to know this. She can't die not knowing... my God. She's going to die, isn't she?

STEFANY

I'm not a doctor.

PARKER

Yes. No. I know. But you're a nurse. I mean... you would know, right?

STEFANY

We aren't psychic. Everyone dies.

PARKER

You know what I mean.

STEFANY

Yes. But I don't know. You'll have to ask a doctor.

*PARKER and STEFANY look at one another. PARKER goes to the door looking for a doctor. A MALE NURSE happens to walk by, and PARKER pulls him in.*

PARKER

May I ask you a question, doctor?

MALE NURSE

I'm a nurse, actually.

(Sees PARKER's face visibly change.)

But maybe I can help.

PARKER

Do you think you could get a doctor in here? Just for a minute? Not even?

MALE NURSE

I can try, but I can't make any promises.

PARKER

That's fine. I won't take it as a promise then.

*MALE NURSE goes over to MRS. BAKER*

MALE NURSE

You're awake now, Mrs. Baker? How are you feeling?

MRS. BAKER

I'm fine, I think. I'm almost ready to go home.

MALE NURSE

We'll have to ask the doctor about that before we can release you.

MRS. BAKER

Ok, I'll just wait right here then.

*MALE NURSE exits.*

STEFANY

So... When's the last time you've been to Europe?

PARKER

What?

STEFANY

You heard me. When's the last time you've been to Europe?

PARKER

I flew in after I heard the news.

STEFANY

From England?

PARKER

Yes.

STEFANY

Oh.

(Pause.)

You know, I'm not so sure it was a good idea to pretend to be Keith- even if you think it was for her own good. I mean, you aren't even sure if you think she's going to die.

PARKER

You said it yourself. Everyone dies.

STEFANY

That's not what I meant. I was angry.

PARKER

But it's what you said. And it's true.

(Pause.)

I should go.

STEFANY

No, stay. I'm sorry. I should go. It was nice meeting you, Stephen. Goodbye, Mrs. Baker

MRS. BAKER

Do I know you?

STEFANY

No, I guess not. But goodbye all the same.

MRS. BAKER

Goodbye! It was nice meeting you.

(To PARKER)

She seemed very nice. How long have you two been seeing each other?

PARKER

Mom... I love you.

MRS. BAKER

I love you too. Why are you crying? You never used to cry. Even when you fell off your bicycle and broke your... what did you break? Your arm? Yes. And we had to drive you to the hospital. You liked that bicycle.

*BLACKOUT.*

#### Scene 4

*Non-identifiable place/bare corner of a BLACKOUTed stage. PARKER takes the call on his cell phone.*

PARKER

Hello? Speaking. No, friend of the family. It's all right. News? When? Are you sure? How long? Thanks, I'll be right over.

*BLACKOUT.*

### Scene 5

*MRS. BAKER's hospital room. DR. LANNING is at her bedside as PARKER runs in.*

DR. LANNING

Mr. Parker, I presume?

PARKER

Dr. Lanning?

DR. LANNING

Pleasure to meet you.

PARKER

How is she?

DR. LANNING

We don't know for sure. She's been put on a respirator, and she's only been in the coma for about four hours. But in my opinion, it doesn't look good.

PARKER

How long do you give her?

DR. LANNING

She'll probably live as long as we keep the respirator running, but without it -

PARKER

I... I understand. I think. Uh. She's not going to... come out of it at all?

DR. LANNING

More than likely not. If you want to make any...decisions... let me know and I'll-

PARKER

Pull the plug.

DR. LANNING

Yes. Exactly.

PARKER

No, I'm telling you. Pull the plug. Shut the machine off. She wouldn't want to live like that. That's not living, not by her standards.

DR. LANNING

Are you sure? We can go into the next room and fill out the paperwork, but only if you're-

PARKER

Yes, I'm sure. May I have a moment alone with her?

DR. LANNING

Of course.

(Starts to exit. Stops.)

On her admittance forms, it didn't say whether or not she was to be given last rites. We have a priest on call if you'd like her to receive them.

PARKER

He's Roman Catholic?

DR. LANNING

Yes.

PARKER

Please call him... if it's not too much trouble.

DR. LANNING

Consider it done. I'll just be in the next room with the paperwork.

PARKER

Thanks. I'll be right over.

*DR. LANNING exits. PARKER takes MRS. BAKER's hand into his, and holds it.*

I'm sorry... I don't know what to say, and it probably doesn't matter since you can't hear me... though they say that people in comas can hear. I don't know if I believe that... I wish I did. I wish I believed in miracles, too. I just don't. I can't. I know this is what you would have wanted. I'm sure of it.

*PARKER kisses MRS. BAKER's hand.*

I'm going to miss you.

*BLACKOUT.*

## Scene 6

*Cemetery. There is a PRIEST that is reciting the final lines of a Prayer of Committal. The PRIEST sprinkles some holy water onto the top of the unseen casket. PARKER off to the side. STEFANY enters from the same direction and stops just behind PARKER. STEFANY puts her hand on PARKER's shoulder, and he turns to face her.*

STEFANY

Sorry. Hope I didn't scare you.

PARKER

Slightly. You missed the wake yesterday. And the service today. What was that you were saying about caring for your patients?

STEFANY

Are you serious? I had to work, and I have classes. And maybe you're right, maybe I didn't care as much as I thought I did, but I made it here. Late, yes, but here.

(Pause.)

You were a lot closer to her than most people are to their friends' mothers, weren't you?

PARKER

I thought I told you... her son-

STEFANY

Committed suicide, I know, you said that. But you seem... far more emotionally connected... I don't know what I mean... but you obviously cared a lot about her, and I think that much of your anger stems from losing her... you know, one of the five stages of grief.

PARKER

Studying to be a grief counselor now? You don't have to be a psychic to see I'm grieving-

STEFANY

Fine. I'm sorry for your loss. Goodbye.

*STEFANY walks toward the grave where people are slowly walking away. A few flowers have been thrown in, and the mourners are beginning to dissipate and*

*exit. STEFANY stands by the grave, and is eventually the only one left on stage other than PARKER. PARKER slowly moves closer to the grave, but he is looking at STEFANY.*

PARKER  
I think I'm done.

STEFANY  
Done?

PARKER  
Grieving.

STEFANY  
Well, that was fast.

PARKER  
I'm sorry.

STEFANY  
For what?

PARKER  
Grieving.

STEFANY  
It's alright. It's natural.

PARKER  
Yes. Natural.

STEFANY  
So... what is it you're going to do now?

PARKER  
Probably the same things I've been doing. Moving on...  
*PARKER reaches into his pocket and pulls out a few postcards, and throws the*

*onto the casket.*  
"Courage," he said, and pointed toward the land... 'this mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."

(Looking at STEFANY)  
Tennyson.

(Beat.)  
Don't take it in context.

STEFANY  
I thought it sounded familiar. I probably read it in Vic Lit.

PARKER  
Victorian Literature? Really? What is it you're studying?

STEFANY  
I'm getting my Master's in English, with a concentration on Modern American Poetry.

PARKER  
You know that's a worthless degree, right?

STEFANY  
So I've been told.

PARKER  
I skipped the logical first question: how does Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters" work in with Modern American Poetry?

STEFANY  
It doesn't. I got a Bachelor's in English first, and Vic Lit was a required course.

PARKER  
No kidding... so the job as a part-time nurse-

STEFANY  
Is just for cash to get through another two years of college.

PARKER  
And what do you expect to do with your Master's? Teach?

STEFANY  
Honestly, I don't know. It's just two more years of education hoping to figure out what I want to do along the way.

PARKER  
Whatever works.

STEFANY  
What about you?

PARKER

What about me?

STEFANY

What do you do, job-wise? You don't exactly look like an English professor yourself, and you introduced yourself once as "Mister"...

PARKER

True, I'm not a professor. I used to edit stuff for Keith. He was creative, but he lacked the vocabulary.

STEFANY

So you're pretty well read.

PARKER

I like to think so, though American really isn't my strong suit. I've always been a fan of the British myself. It's the rhyme scheme.

STEFANY

The rhyme scheme? That's what does it for you?

PARKER

That was supposed to be a joke.

STEFANY

You're joking.

PARKER

Now I am, yes.

STEFANY

Wait, what?

PARKER

Forget about it. I think it might be over your head.

STEFANY

Yeah, it might be. Do you think you'd be up for a cup of coffee sometime?

PARKER

Are you asking me out?

STEFANY

What? No! You're old enough to be my father! No offense.

PARKER

Right.

STEFANY

Besides, we're at the burial of your friend's mother. Don't you think that's a little...disrespectful?

PARKER

No. I think it's *very* disrespectful.

STEFANY

Right. Well... I should be going.

PARKER

Myself as well.

STEFANY

Goodbye.

PARKER

Was a pleasure.

STEFANY

Yes.

*PARKER exits one direction, STEFANY exit's the other.*

STEFANY  
(From Off-stage)  
WAIT!

PARKER  
(From Off-stage)  
WAIT!

*STEFANY and PARKER re-enter from their respective sides and meet center stage. STEFANY opens up her purse and takes out a shopping receipt, PARKER pulls out a small notebook and pen. PARKER scribbles onto the pad and hands it to STEFANY.*

PARKER

My number.

STEFANY  
Thanks. Can I-?

PARKER  
Oh, here.

*PARKER hands the pen over to STEFANY. STEFANY scribbles onto her shopping receipt and hands it to PARKER.*

STEFANY  
My number.

PARKER  
(Looking at opposite side of receipts.)  
That's a lot of tampons.

*A look of horror crosses STEFANY's face, and she rips the receipt away from PARKER to look at it.*

STEFANY  
OfficeMax, you asshole.

PARKER  
Oops.

*BLACKOUT*

**ACT 2**  
**Scene 1**

*PARKER is at home, painting a bridge from memory. In the background there is classical music being played. PARKER is humming along. The record player begins to skip. PARKER walks over to the player, turns it off, then walks back to his painting and continues, while still humming. Eventually he walks away from the painting and moves into the kitchen where he removes his smock and washes his hands. He opens the oven to check the Cornish hen he's baking, closes it, and pours himself a cup of black tea from the kettle that has been on the burner. The doorbell rings. STEFANY is at the front door carrying a picnic basket.*

PARKER

Hello! This is a pleasant surprise. What's the occasion?

STEFANY

I was in the neighborhood.

PARKER

You're going to have to work on your lying.

STEFANY

I was in the neighborhood.

PARKER

I almost believed you that time.

STEFANY

(On her knees, over-dramatically)

Help me! I'm injured, and I've been lost in the woods for days without food.

PARKER

See that's much better. If it wasn't for the basket, I might have believed you. Come on in.

STEFANY

Thanks. Your place wasn't as difficult to find as I thought it would be.

PARKER

What made you think it was difficult?

STEFANY

You had an unlisted number, so I snuck a peek into the files at the home.

PARKER

And here I was thinking it was fortune that led you to my door. Instead, it was your creepy stalker tendencies.

STEFANY

Cute.

PARKER

Not as cute as you.

STEFANY

Excuse me?

PARKER

Sorry, pretend I didn't say a thing.

STEFANY

That was sweet. And it's going to be difficult to forget that.

PARKER

I'm that memorable?

STEFANY

You'd like to think so, wouldn't you?

PARKER

Of course! And I love this bantering, by the way. It's been a while since I've done it with someone. I feel it rolling off my tongue...

STEFANY

Uh... thank you?

PARKER

I'm not sure it was a compliment, but it wasn't an insult.

STEFANY

What's that smell?

PARKER

Which one? I've got a Cornish Hen in the kitchen, a kiln running in the living room, and incense burning in the bathroom.

STEFANY

Incense in the bathroom?

PARKER

It's not what you think. I took a shower earlier, and I like the smell of lavender-

STEFANY

That's either the most romantic or the most effeminate thing I've ever heard.

PARKER

Do I get to pick?

STEFANY

This time. I'm sorry I didn't call before I stopped by.

PARKER

It's fine. It's just that usually when people make plans with me, I'm in on the plan... not to mention I had thought we were going to do coffee first. Did I already say how creepy I thought this was, with you randomly stopping by and all?

STEFANY

You said cute earlier, too.

PARKER

Touché.

STEFANY

Hey!

*STEFANY picks up vase.*

This is nice! Where'd you find this.

PARKER

I made that one, about two months ago, maybe three. Here.

*PARKER takes the vase and flips it over to look at the bottom.*

Two months ago. That's when I ran out of this sky blue glaze.

STEFANY

How much does something like this cost?

PARKER

Twelve dollars in parts, two-hundred in labor.

STEFANY

Two-hundred!? What does it sell for?

PARKER

Forty dollars even.

STEFANY

You're joking.

PARKER

Not at all. I make them on my free time, out of boredom. The flawed ones I sell to the woman who owns the ceramic shop in town, who in turn sells them to out-of-towners or people who are just passing through and see her "antiques" sign. I honestly don't think there's anything antique in the whole place.

STEFANY

Other than herself.

PARKER

What?

STEFANY

The rest of the joke. "I don't think there's anything antique in the whole place" *comma*, "other than herself."

PARKER

Ha, I get it. But she's younger than I am.

STEFANY

That still doesn't say much about her.

PARKER

I get it.

(Pause)

So are you going to continue holding your basket, Goldilocks?

STEFANY

Goldilocks? You mean Little Red Riding Hood, right?

PARKER

Lost in the woods? Lost in allusions.

STEFANY

Right. I came this way, from the woods, to see if you'd be interested in having a picnic... with me.

PARKER

I inferred you wanted to have a picnic, and assumed it was going to be with you. Is the porch fine? The grass is a bit moist from the rain earlier.

STEFANY

I brought a blanket, if that's okay with you.

PARKER

Grass it is, then.

*PARKER and STEFANY walk outside, down off the porch, and into the front yard. STEFANY opens the basket, and pulls out a solid yellow blanket. Setting the basket down, she throws open the blanket, letting it fall to the ground, and takes a seat in the center. PARKER remains standing.*

STEFANY

It's O.K. to sit down, you know.

PARKER

I'm sure it is. I was just thinking.

STEFANY

Of what?

PARKER

(Sitting down.)

I hope you brought rye.

STEFANY

White and wheat. Sorry.

PARKER

It's fine.

STEFANY

(Taking out hard rolls, a small jar of mustard, mayonnaise, and about three different types of deli meats.)

Cooked ham, turkey, salami.

PARKER

Sounds almost as good as Cornish hen.

STEFANY

You don't have to eat any if you don't want to.

PARKER

I'm teasing you. Relax.

STEFANY

Sorry.

PARKER

Don't apologize. It's fine. I don't think I've ever had an honest to God picnic before.

STEFANY

(Making herself a sandwich.)

Really? You put incense in the bathroom and yet a picnic is foreign to you?

PARKER

You're hung up on the incense thing, aren't you?

STEFANY

I can understand air fresheners, but not incense.

PARKER

Incense *is* an air freshener.

STEFANY

Yes, but it's usually used to cover up the smell of something else.

PARKER

Isn't that one of the reasons it's in the bathroom?

STEFANY

No, I mean pot.

PARKER

Does it look like I smoke marijuana?

STEFANY

No, but not because you don't look like a hippie. You haven't eaten anything yet. That means you don't have the munchies. Start eating.

PARKER

A regular detective. And here I thought you were a nurse.

STEFANY

Since you're getting semantic, a nurse's aide...practically a candy striper.

PARKER

Candy striper? Isn't that a bit before your time?

STEFANY

Maybe a bit, but I have an old soul.

PARKER

Are you saying I'm old?

STEFANY

Nope, just educated.

PARKER

You know, I just realized... the home didn't have my address... how exactly did you find me?

STEFANY

I got your last name from the home.

PARKER

And my number is unlisted, so...

STEFANY

My father looked up the address.

PARKER

Techie?

STEFANY

Trooper.

PARKER

Oh.

STEFANY

Is that a problem? I mean, I'm sorry for intruding on your privacy and all.

PARKER

Don't worry about it. I just didn't think your father would be a Trooper is all.

STEFANY

Why's that?

PARKER

You don't seem... what's the word... regimented?

STEFANY

Not growing up with my mother, no.

PARKER

Divorced?

STEFANY

Far from it. They're usually happily married. Other times, they're just married.

PARKER

That sounds nice.

STEFANY

Were you- sorry, you don't have to answer if you don't want to, but... were you ever married?

PARKER

Yes. Once. To an amazing woman.

STEFANY

And then you two had a falling out, or she cheated on you, and then you two separated-

PARKER

Uh... no. She passed away from breast cancer about six years ago.

STEFANY

Oh my God. I'm sorry. I... I meant it as a joke.

PARKER

It's fine. Don't apologize. I'm... not over it, but I've accepted it. She was such a-

STEFANY

You don't have to explain unless you want to.

*PARKER and STEFANY continue to eat their sandwiches in awkward silence. PARKER is concentrating on his sandwich, while STEFANY steals glances at him.*

PARKER  
Is yours turkey and mustard?

STEFANY  
Yes, why?

PARKER  
That was her favorite kind of sandwich.

STEFANY  
Really?

PARKER  
No, just trying to lighten the mood.

STEFANY  
Gotcha. It's probably a bit late for me to be bringing this up now, but I hope you don't feel as though I'm intruding. You said earlier you were expecting coffee... and I don't want you to think that during the burial I was even thinking about having a romantic relationship with you, and I don't want you to think that now. Not that I don't want you to, but that you should probably know, right now, that I might be interested in one... with you.

PARKER  
How did you go from coffee to a serious relationship? This is our first social engagement!

STEFANY  
I don't know... I don't meet as many educated men as you'd think, and it just kind of spilled out. I'll go back to the turkey before I fill up on my foot.

(Beat.)  
Let's change the subject. I'm writing a paper on Weldon Kees. Have you heard of him?

PARKER  
Can't say I have. Thesis?

STEFANY  
Yeah. I'm trying to draw comparisons to a few of his works and the works of Thomas Hardy, and how both wrote poetry with very similar themes.

PARKER

Similar themes... Sounds good so far, but why are you comparing Kees with Hardy? Has someone previously stated that the two of them have similarities beyond just theme? Consider how many poets have written about love and how easily it's lost-

STEFANY

Every emo band ever.

PARKER

Emu?

STEFANY

Emo.

PARKER

Elmo?

STEFANY

EMO.

PARKER

Phillips?

STEFANY

You're just being an ass, aren't you?

PARKER

...Maybe.

STEFANY

Continue.

PARKER

You could take all of them and write a paper on their similarities, maybe throwing in Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" for a different view, about the pain and suffering one could go through before even feeling "love"... and what's to keep you from comparing "The Waste Land" with some of Hardy's works?

STEFANY

Well, the fact that I'm looking at Modern American Poetry.

PARKER

Sorry, I forgot about that.

STEFANY

That's fine. I mean, this is why I wanted to have the picnic with you too. I wanted to throw a few ideas out to you, since you were an editor and all, and have a background in that sort of thing. I hope you don't mind.

PARKER

Not at all, although I might be a bit rusty. It's been a while since I've had intelligent conversation.

STEFANY

You don't necessarily have to do it now; I could leave a copy of my work here, you could look it over, and maybe next week, or the week after, we could get together and work on it.

PARKER

Another excuse to see me.

STEFANY

What makes you think I need excuses?

PARKER

My mistake.

STEFANY

You know... you kind of remind me of a friend I knew in high school. He was artsy, too.

PARKER

Was he as charming and handsome?

STEFANY

He had your sense of humor, too, yes.

PARKER

Ouch.

STEFANY

It'll only sting for a second.

PARKER

Cute.

STEFANY

Like you.

(Pause.)

You know... he was my first love. Mark was his name. He was kind of tall, taller than me anyway, had short, dark hair, a little chubby, but the attractive kind, because you could tell he had muscle underneath his bulk. In high school, we went to a dance together. I can still remember the cologne he was wearing... his father's Brut. And we danced all of the slow dances, and... I don't remember the song... it was slow, soft...

(Hums a few bars.)

I don't remember exactly... But he whispered in my ear, "This song always reminded me of you." And then he leaned down and...

*During this, STEFANY is moving closer to PARKER, and at "he leaned down and" she kisses him softly on the lips, and then slowly pulls back, waiting for his reaction.*

PARKER

Nice segue.

*PARKER leans in this time, and the two kiss as the lights fade to BLACKOUT. After a few seconds, a lighter is lit and we hear rummaging through the picnic basket.*

You need a cigarette already? We haven't gotten anywhere.

STEFANY

A mosquito bit my ass. I'm looking for a citronella candle.

PARKER

You know those things don't work, right?

STEFANY

Should we do this in the house?

PARKER

The bathroom still smells like lavender.

STEFANY

Romantic.

PARKER

Since we're at an interesting point in conversation, up for sushi next week. Here?

STEFANY

I do not want to know how that segue worked.

*BLACKOUT.*

## Scene 2

*The Schumann home. MRS. SCHUMANN is cleaning dishes, SCHUMANN is watching television.*

SCHUMANN  
Honey?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Yes?

SCHUMANN  
Love?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
What?

SCHUMANN  
Maria?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
How is it I can hear you but you can't hear me?

SCHUMANN  
Sorry. TV must be too loud. Where's my white sweatshirt?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
What white sweatshirt?

SCHUMANN  
The white one?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Can you be more specific?

SCHUMANN  
The one I can't find.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
The one I threw out because it had a hole in the armpit?

SCHUMANN  
Yeah, that one. Where is it?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
I threw it out... it had a hole in it.

SCHUMANN  
I know, but I pulled it out of the trash and tried to bleach it.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
After I tried to bleach it and threw it out?

SCHUMANN  
It was still spotty.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
And had a hole in it.

SCHUMANN  
So where is it?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
In the trash.

SCHUMANN  
You threw it out a second time?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
It was still spotty. And had a hole in it.

SCHUMANN  
I liked that sweater.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
I'll buy you a new one.

SCHUMANN  
It was so well broken-in.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
You can break in the new one.

SCHUMANN  
It won't feel right right away.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
So wear it a while until it does.

SCHUMANN  
It won't look right, either.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
So wear it around the house.

SCHUMANN  
But it'll be new, and why would I want to lounge around in -

*STEFANY enters.*

STEFANY  
Anyone home?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
(To SCHUMANN)  
We are not discussing this further.  
(To STEFANY)  
In here!

STEFANY  
Hey Mom, I'm home.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
How was work?

STEFANY  
It was alright, I suppose. Same shit, different day.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Excuse me?

STEFANY  
Sorry. "Another day, another dollar."

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Better, thank you.

STEFANY  
You're welcome. What's cooking?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Something your father threw together. Don't open the oven, he said it was "imperative" for it to work.

STEFANY

He used the word "imperative"?

MRS. SCHUMANN

I thought the same thing. He bought a "Word of the Day" calendar.

STEFANY

Interesting.

MRS. SCHUMANN

He's in the living room watching TV. Dinner should be reading in a few minutes, I think.

STEFANY

I'm not going to be able to stay for dinner. I have a date.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Is that so? Do we know this young gentleman?

STEFANY

Uh... no.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Alright. Let your father know you aren't going to be around. He's sure to be disappointed.

STEFANY

He'll get over it.

*MR. SCHUMANN nonchalantly wanders into the kitchen and looks into the oven through the window.*

MR. SCHUMANN

I wish I would've known the oven light was out. I can't see a damned thing in there!

STEFANY

Hi Dad.

MR. SCHUMANN

Hey, can you see anything in there?

STEFANY

Love you too.

MR. SCHUMANN

Sorry. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes... maybe.

STEFANY

I'm not going to be able to stay; I've got a date.

MR. SCHUMANN

You're going to miss out on the chocolate ice cream with hot sauce for dinner.

STEFANY

He's kidding, right?

*MRS. SCHUMANN shrugs and continues to clean dishes.*

MR. SCHUMANN

So, who're you going out with? Anyone we know?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Apparently not.

STEFANY

No, I met him two months ago at a funeral.

MRS. SCHUMANN

You met him at a funeral?

MR. SCHUMANN

There are worse places to meet people. And I met you at a wake.

STEFANY

Almost sounds as bad as meeting someone at a family reunion.

MR. SCHUMANN

That was your Uncle Aaron.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Don't say that!

MR. SCHUMANN  
What? It's true, isn't it?

STEFANY  
Uncle Aaron and Aunt Jamie are related?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
No, they aren't. They did meet at a family reunion though. Your Uncle was married at the time, and Jamie was dating your Uncle Matt. Divorce was involved. Not incest.

STEFANY  
That's a relief.

MR. SCHUMANN  
You wouldn't know incest was involved if you saw the kids.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
MICHAEL!

STEFANY  
Mom, they are pretty... uh... unique looking.

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Well, it's certainly not from our side of the family.  
When do we get to meet this... man?

STEFANY  
I'm not sure.

MR. SCHUMANN  
We're having turkey on Sunday if you'd like to invite him over for that.

STEFANY  
I just might.  
*MR. SCHUMANN opens up the oven.*  
That actually smells pretty good. What is it?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Meatloaf.

MR. SCHUMANN  
Something I saw earlier. Ground beef, bread, eggs.

STEFANY

So it is meatloaf.

MR. SCHUMANN

It's not a meatloaf. It also has ground pork, ground chicken... basil.

STEFANY

Glorified meatloaf.

MRS. SCHUMANN

I would've made mashed potatoes had I known.

MR. SCHUMANN

There are sweet potatoes in the oven.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Never mind, then.

STEFANY

I'm going to run upstairs and get changed.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Alright. Are you going to be out late? Should we leave the light on?

MR. SCHUMANN

Be back by 9.

MRS. SCHUMANN

He'll be asleep by 8.

MR. SCHUMANN

I'll sleep better knowing she's in.

MRS. SCHUMANN

You'll be asleep.

MR. SCHUMANN

I'll have coffee after dinner.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Decaf won't keep you awake.

MR. SCHUMANN

Tea then.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Also decaf. Remember who does the shopping.

MR. SCHUMANN

Then I'll eat chocolate chips. We DO have chocolate chips.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Go get changed, and have a good night. We'll save you some meatloaf.

### Scene 3

*PARKER's kitchen. There's a table with a rice cooker, bamboo mats, a short stack of nori, sliced avocado, and fish slices. There is a knock at the door.*

PARKER

The door is open!

STEFANY

No it's not!

PARKER

Jiggle the handle.

STEFANY

I did. It's locked.

PARKER

Jiggle harder.

*PARKER walks to the door, looks at the knob, realizes it's locked, unlocks it, and steps away.*

Told you it was open.

STEFANY

You seriously need to get a new doorknob.

PARKER

You just need to do a few more push-ups every day. Go wash your hands.

STEFANY

Are you really going to make your own sushi?

PARKER

No. WE are going to make OUR own sushi.

STEFANY

That's kinda cool. You'll have to show me how this works.

PARKER

Would it be cheesy if I stood behind you with my hands on yours showing you how to do this?

STEFANY

Like in *Ghost*?

PARKER

Yes.

STEFANY

Yes.

PARKER

Alright, never mind. I'll save it for when I'm teaching you how to throw pots.

STEFANY

That would make it even more cheesy.

PARKER

Golfing?

STEFANY

Creepy.

PARKER

Forget it. Put some rice on your seaweed.

STEFANY

Like this?

PARKER

Close enough. Try to spread it out to cover most of the nori.

STEFANY

Looks like a bit much... better?

PARKER

Yes. Now add some fish. What kind of roll do you want?

STEFANY

Is that crab stick? California roll!

PARKER

Alright. Those are julienne cucumber, and the avocado is right there.

STEFANY

What, didn't have the time to cut it?

PARKER

No, just didn't feel like it. Besides, why should I have to do all of the work?

STEFANY

Fair enough.

PARKER

While you're doing that, I'll go get the Saki.

STEFANY

Someone pulled out all of the stops. Either that, or someone wants to get me drunk and take advantage of me.

PARKER

Very funny. Because I took advantage of you the last couple dozen times.

STEFANY

Right. I'm glad things didn't get awkward after the picnic. Or before the picnic for that matter.

PARKER

The joy of consenting adults.

STEFANY

If you play your cards right, there might be more consenting tonight.

PARKER

Looks like you have the gist of it down.

STEFANY  
Of persuasion?

PARKER  
That too. You're ready to roll!

STEFANY  
We're talking about sushi still?

PARKER  
*I have to play my cards right? Roll it like this.*

*PARKER rolls it and picks up a successfully completed roll. STEFANY lifts hers and shows something resembling a funnel.*

STEFANY  
I think I need remedial rolling classes.

PARKER  
I think you might be right. Either that or stick to nigiri.

STEFANY  
Or I can just order it from here on out. Do this often?

PARKER  
Not really. Just one of those things I always said I'd try, then after trying and succeeding, only doing it about once a year.

STEFANY  
What's in yours?

PARKER  
Yellowtail, salmon, and tuna. Try it.  
*STEFANY grabs the roll in its entirety and takes a bite out of it.*  
How ladylike.

STEFANY  
Here, have some.

PARKER  
You know, they aren't half bad this way. They're like sandwiches, completely portable.

STEFANY

If you make a few more rolls, I'll set the table.

PARKER

No table tonight. Let's eat outside again. There's supposed to be a meteor shower tonight, and I figured we could have dinner and dessert outside, then just watch the stars.

STEFANY

Are you really this romantic, or is it a game you like to play?

PARKER

I'm really this romantic. I used to be a hopeless romantic.

STEFANY

Used to?

PARKER

I got better. Now I'm a hopeful one.

STEFANY

That's sweet.

PARKER

Thank you.

STEFANY

I brought something for you. Us. Later. It's in the car.

PARKER

Sounds a bit naughty.

STEFANY

Get your mind out of the gutter. I brought a pie.

PARKER

What kind?

STEFANY

Strawberry-rhubarb.

PARKER

I've never had it before.

STEFANY  
Well you will later.

PARKER  
I can't wait.

STEFANY  
How about drinks?

PARKER  
Well, there's the Saki, bottled water in the fridge, white wine, red wine, orange juice, and whatever is in the liquor cabinet.

STEFANY  
I'll go with the Saki and water. What would you like?

PARKER  
Saki and water sounds good to me. If you want to bring those outside and then come back in to help me with the soy sauce and ginger, that'd be great.

STEFANY  
I'll be back.  
*STEFANY grabs the bottle of Saki and three water bottles and brings them outside, returns, grabs two glasses and brings those outside, then once again returns.*  
*STEFANY walks behind PARKER and puts her arms around him as he finishes up rolling the last of the sushi.*  
Looks yummy.

PARKER  
It will be. Ready?

STEFANY  
Not quite yet.

*STEFANY begins to kiss the side of PARKER's neck, who seems to be enjoying this immensely. PARKER turns around to meet her gaze, and STEFANY smiles fixedly at him.*

PARKER  
The fish won't last... we should eat.

*STEFANY is slightly taken aback.*

STEFANY  
You're right. Dinner first, dessert later.

PARKER  
Euphemism?

STEFANY  
Lecher.

PARKER  
Sorry, did you think that was sexual harassment?

STEFANY  
By definition? Absolutely not. It wasn't unwanted.

PARKER  
Good. I hate lawsuits.

STEFANY  
Speaking of the law and suits, my father is making a turkey on Sunday if you're interested.

PARKER  
What's the occasion?

STEFANY  
My father loves me.

PARKER  
Favorite daughter.

STEFANY  
Only sibling.

PARKER  
That works.  
(Beat.)  
How's the paper coming?

STEFANY  
Well... I was wondering...

PARKER  
Yes?

STEFANY  
How much would you charge to write the paper for me?

PARKER  
I wouldn't.

STEFANY  
So it'd be free?

PARKER  
No, I wouldn't write the paper for you. It's illegal. And immoral.

STEFANY  
Pretend I didn't ask.

PARKER  
I'll try.

STEFANY  
I hope that doesn't spread a pall over the rest of the evening.

PARKER  
We'll can always lighten spirits by lightening the bottle of its spirits.

STEFANY  
Very punny.

*BLACKOUT.*

#### **Scene 4**

*The Schumann's dining room, typical middle class dining room.*

SCHUMANN  
We discussed it a bit a few days ago, but maybe you can explain it a bit further. How did you two end up meeting, Mr. Parker?

PARKER  
My friend's mother had a stroke in the nursing home that Stef works at, and we actually met at the hospital.

SCHUMANN

The hospital? Stefany said it was the funeral.

PARKER

Well, technically we met at the hospital, but we didn't hit it off until the funeral.

SCHUMANN

Quite the place to hit it off.

PARKER

I figured, if someone can make me smile at a funeral, that person must be special.

SCHUMANN

Or a sadist.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael, that's your daughter you're talking about.

STEFANY

No, it's O.K., Mom. I am a sadist. I own lots of leather and whips, and shackles.

SCHUMANN

Stefany?

PARKER

This is news to me, too.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Oh hush. She's pulling your leg.

STEFANY

With a shackle and chain-

MRS. SCHUMANN

Enough!

STEFANY

Done.

PARKER

Thank God.

SCHUMANN

So you kept close to your friend's mother, how nice. What about your mother?

PARKER

Deceased.

SCHUMANN

Sorry, forgive me.

PARKER

It's fine. I was close with Mrs. Baker, though. When Keith passed, he left most of what he had to me under the stipulation was that I'd keep an eye on his mother... not that we weren't close to begin with, she *was* like a mother to me. His passing was hard on her, as one would expect. Deaths are never easy. She started to lose her mental facilities. This one time, and it's funny to think of it now, she called 9-1-1 after a close friend of hers dropped by to see how she was doing. Mrs. Baker thought she was breaking into the house! I had to put her into a nursing home. I didn't want to, but she couldn't possibly care for herself. It was all downhill from there. I regret not visiting her as often as I could have. I could've stopped by at least once a month, but waited until... well, you know... "We do not what we ought, what we ought not we do."

STEFANY

Matthew Arnold.

PARKER

"Empedocles on Etna."

STEFANY

"Is it so small a thing, to have enjoyed the sun, to have lived light in the Spring, to have loved, to have thought, to have done -"

PARKER

-"To have advanced true friends"-

STEFANY

-"To have advanced true friends"-

*MRS. SCHUMANN joins in*

MRS. SCHUMANN, STEFANY, AND PARKER

-"and beat down baffling foes."

*All three look at one another smiling.*

SCHUMANN

Beans, beans the magical fruit-

*MRS. SCHUMANN playfully pushes SCHUMANN.*

PARKER

I didn't realize you were a poetry fan.

MRS. SCHUMANN

I'm not, really. The tea I drink has different things on their boxes, a poem, a short story, a painting...

PARKER

What kind of tea?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Just black. Orange pekoe.

PARKER

Do you drink green at all?

MRS. SCHUMANN

I've never had it.

PARKER

You should try green tea with jasmine. Absolutely delightful! The aroma-

SCHUMANN

The faggotry...

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael-

SCHUMANN

Mr. Parker, would you mind passing the potatoes, please?

PARKER

Certainly. Here you are.

SCHUMANN

Thanks

PARKER

So... what exactly is it you do for a living, Mr. Schumann?

SCHUMANN

Stef never brought it up? Well, I guess I can't be all that surprised. I'm a State Trooper. Have been for almost nineteen years.

PARKER

Well, she did. I'm just trying to make conversation.

STEFANY

Steve is a bit of a jokester. You'll have to forgive him.

SCHUMANN

You don't say... We could start off with another topic if you'd like, unless this one suits you.

PARKER

No, it's quite alright. I'm just a bit surprised is all. It's that Stefany is into the arts, and policing tends to be more strict and literal... not so artistic, I guess.

SCHUMANN

Was that supposed to be an insult, Mr. Parker? Because it sounded like one.

PARKER

No, sir. Just a statement.

SCHUMANN

Statements can be insulting...

STEFANY

Dad, please. Not during dinner. And not after it, either.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Please...

SCHUMANN

Fine. Tell me, Mr. Parker... What is it you do for a living?

PARKER

You can call me Steve, Mr. Schumann. And I guess I'm what you would call a "Renaissance man."

SCHUMANN

And what exactly does a Renaissance man do to make a living? Work at Renaissance fairs? Make beaded necklaces, or shovels out of leather?

PARKER

Shovels out of... No, I don't work at Renaissance fairs, although I probably could and make a decent living. I suppose you could just call me an artist.

SCHUMANN

A starving artist?

STEFANY

Dad! That's not nice!

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael! Pardon him, Steve. He's just being bullish.

SCHUMANN

My daughter is seeing a starving artist and you're blaming me for being bullish? You have to be joking. I'm looking out for her best interests, just as I always have.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yes, like the time you took her bathing suit shopping when she was seventeen and refused to buy her a two-piece suit.

SCHUMANN

It was a TWO-PIECE!

MRS. SCHUMANN

And it looked good, which is why I let her buy it.

SCHUMANN

You bought it for her?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael, she was seventeen. Everyone else was wearing them at her age.

SCHUMANN

Maybe so, but does that make it right?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Perhaps not, but because you didn't grow up with it, does it make it wrong?

SCHUMANN

Yes!

MRS. SCHUMANN

Fine! You're not allowed to use the remote control anymore.

SCHUMANN

What?

MRS. SCHUMANN

You heard me. No more remote control. You didn't have one growing up.

SCHUMANN

You're taking my words out of context.

MRS. SCHUMANN

And we're arguing over something that happened how many years ago?

STEFANY

Eight.

(To PARKER)

Don't worry about them. They do this all the time.

SCHUMANN

No we don't. Don't lie, Stef.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yes we do, but it's all in good fun. Mike doesn't have a very good memory.

SCHUMANN

I certainly do have a good memory! The last time we argued we were deciding what restaurant to eat at. Last month.

MRS. SCHUMANN

I stand corrected. He does have a decent memory; he just remembers the ones he's won. What about two days ago when you argued against buying a fish tank?

SCHUMANN

I thought it was a good idea.

MRS. SCHUMANN

You thought it was a terrible idea, because we'd need to keep the air pump running. You were worried about electricity!

STEFANY

Mom, Dad, we have company.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Oh, I'm sorry honey... you know how your father-

STEFANY

Mom-

MRS. SCHUMANN

Right, sorry. You were saying, Steve. You're an artist?

PARKER

I do a number of things: throw pots that I sell to a local shop, paint, write poetry.

SCHUMANN

You write poetry?

PARKER

Yes, I used to have readings that led to-

SCHUMANN

-You becoming a faggot?

STEFANY

Dad!

SCHUMANN

I'm just teasing him, Stef. I like poetry myself. I wrote your mother a poem once for Valentine's Day-

MRS. SCHUMANN

You called that poetry? "You didn't want flowers, I thought that was great. Here's a card, I'll be home at eight." That was hardly romantic!

SCHUMANN

But it was memorable!

PARKER

And, shockingly, had a working meter and rhyme scheme.

MRS. SCHUMANN

If it wasn't so funny, I probably would've thrown him out!

SCHUMANN

Of my own house?

STEFANY

Anyway...

PARKER

If it makes you feel any better, I used to be an editor for a friend of mine and made great money from it.

SCHUMANN

So starving artists tend to stick together. Where is he now? Living out of a box in San Francisco?

STEFANY

Dad, that's enough.

PARKER

No, Stef. Let your father go. Honestly, I couldn't care less about what he thinks.

STEFANY

Steve, you don't mean that.

PARKER

Of course I do! If he wants to be belligerent and insult not only me, but his wife, your mother, over what was nothing more than badinage, then I think that his irascibility and inability to comport himself is cause enough to-

SCHUMANN

What the Hell did he just say?

STEFANY

Nothing. Just... Steve, apologize to my father. Please. For me.

PARKER

Mr. Schumann, I apologize for what I just said. I was invited into your house as a guest, and I am very grateful to be able to share this meal with you and your wonderful family.

SCHUMANN

Apology accepted, and you're welcome. Now let's try to have dinner.

PARKER

(To SCHUMANN)

Could you please pass the pepper?

SCHUMANN

Yes. Here.

PARKER

Thank you, kindly.

SCHUMANN

You're welcome, kindly.

*There is silence as the foursome continue to eat. PARKER attempts to break said silence.*

PARKER

Mrs. Schumann, this turkey is fantastic.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Oh, don't thank me. Michael's the one who cooked it. Everything except the iced tea.

PARKER

You don't say? Mr. Schumann, I have a question for you, then. How do you keep the white meat so moist? Usually mine ends up drier than the Chihuahuan.

STEFANY

What the heck is the Chihuahuan?

SCHUMANN

It's the largest desert in North America. I bake the turkey with the breast downwards, so it soaks in its own juices. That way you don't have to take it out of the oven as often to baste it, though it still helps.

PARKER

That's a fantastic idea! I might have to steal that from you.

SCHUMANN

As long as that's the only thing you steal.

PARKER

I'm sure it will be. So tell me, if you weren't a State Trooper, what is it that you would be? If I may be so bold to ask, I'd say that it was probably a geography teacher in high school.

SCHUMANN

Did Stefany tell you that?

PARKER

Lucky guess. I figured with the map of the world on the wall, the globe-shaped salt and pepper shakers, and the glass etching on the vase in the shape of the Americas that you were at least interested in the subject.

SCHUMANN

Are you sure you aren't a detective? I've had friends over who noticed the map and shakers, but would miss the etching and certainly wouldn't make the connection.

MRS. SCHUMANN

It's a funny thing, too. Some of his friends *are* detectives.

SCHUMANN

I guess we'd better start training those guys better, then.

PARKER

At the least.

SCHUMANN

So what else can you tell about me?

PARKER

Well, you're better than a good cook, so you probably enjoy it, as it wouldn't make sense to excel in something you dislike. I could taste the French onion dip in the mashed potatoes, so you probably like to change things up a little bit that you might think are bland... either that or you just hate plain mashed potatoes. And judging from the mire poix inside the turkey, you like cooking shows.

SCHUMANN

My mother was French and taught me the mire poix, but you were right about the mashed potatoes. I used buttermilk, too, and added some extra chives. I'm impressed. I really am Steve. Stephen. Mr. Parker.

*MRS. SCHUMANN picks up her plate and nudges SCHUMANN, nodding over towards Parker. SCHUMANN catches her meaning.*

MRS. SCHUMANN

Steffy, can you help me clear off the table so we can bring the pies and coffee out?

STEFANY

Sure, Mom. Dad, do you think you two can get along in the living room?

SCHUMANN

I suppose I could try. Come on, Mr. Parker.

*PARKER follows SCHUMANN into the living room, while STEFANY and MRS. SCHUMANN lazily clear off the dinner table, removing everything and bringing them into the kitchen off-stage. There is a nice, dark green sofa positioned in front of an obscenely large television set.*

Mr. Parker.

PARKER

Please, Mr. Schumann. Call me Steve. Stephen, even.

SCHUMANN

Stephen. I'm going to be blunt. I'm not entirely happy with my daughter having a relationship with someone so...

PARKER

Old.

SCHUMANN

Yes! Sorry. I'm just glad I didn't have to say it myself.

PARKER

No, it's understandable. I'm old enough to be her...well, you know.

SCHUMANN

Exactly.

PARKER

I know what you're probably thinking. You're thinking that I

SCHUMANN

-am almost fifty and don't have a legitimate job.

PARKER

Not what I was going to say, but we'll work with that.

SCHUMANN

Sorry.

PARKER

But that's what the hostility is about?

SCHUMANN

I wouldn't call it hostility. It's concern for her well-being.

PARKER

Her emotional well-being?

SCHUMANN

Financial well being.

PARKER

I don't mean to sound, well, high and mighty, but finances aren't everything.

SCHUMANN

Maybe not, but look around this room. Stefany grew up in this house, and she's used to a certain way of life. My one wish for her is that she should be able to continue to live like this, and I'm not so sure it's within your means as an artist.

PARKER

I think you'd be pleasantly surprised to find out about my income.

SCHUMANN

Is that so?

PARKER

I should say so. You and the missus should stop by my cabin sometime. We should do dinner there.

SCHUMANN

Your cabin? In the woods?

PARKER

Not exactly in the woods. There is woods in the backyard, but the highway runs right in front of my house. And yes, I have neighbors within shouting distance.

SCHUMANN

Shouting distance?

PARKER

I figured that when I said I owned a cabin, and you assumed woods, you also thought of me as some sort of Ted Kaczynski character.

SCHUMANN

And we were getting along so well.

PARKER

I could smell your resentment. Forgive me. But honestly, and I really would like to be honest with you, I like your daughter. I enjoy her company, and I'm quite sure if you'd sit down and speak with her, she'd tell you how much she enjoys mine as well. Both she and I are adults, and I realize she is your only child, and you want what's best for her. I understand that. But what you need to understand is that there are certain things that you can't control, like friendship, and attraction.

SCHUMANN

I never said I wanted to control-

PARKER

You didn't need to. It's understood in your actions. You did say that you wanted her to live in a comfortable financial setting. Believe it or not, and I'm guessing you don't want to, but I live extremely well.

SCHUMANN

Off art and the editing thing?

PARKER

Among other things, yes.

SCHUMANN

Well... I'll consider the dinner offer. We'll just have to see how things work out until then. Agreed?

PARKER

Agreed.

*A scream, closely followed by a breaking dish.*

Well, that's more foreboding than a breaking string.

*Both men rush into the kitchen to see MRS. SCHUMANN with a hand on her chest, sitting in a chair.*

SCHUMANN

What happened? Are you ok?

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yeah. Yes. I'm fine.

*STEFANY begins picking up pieces of the dish.*

STEFANY  
She'll be fine. She was just startled is all.

SCHUMANN  
Startled by what?

*STEFANY and MRS. SCHUMANN exchange glances, and MRS. SCHUMANN makes a gesture with her head, as though trying to encourage STEFANY to say something.*

STEFANY  
Dad... Steve...

PARKER  
Oh shit. You're kidding.

SCHUMANN  
Kidding about what?

STEFANY  
I'm -

PARKER  
Pregnant!

SCHUMANN  
What?

STEFANY  
Daddy, wait...

SCHUMANN  
PREGNANT?

MRS. SCHUMANN  
Michael, remember your blood pressure.

SCHUMANN  
PREGNANT?

STEFANY  
Daddy, I can explain.

PARKER

Not to be Mister Obvious here, but it looks like he's succeeded causing that before. Unless of course-

SCHUMANN

I don't exactly think this requires an explanation. My baby is pregnant, and the man responsible is a

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael Robert Schumann! Don't you dare say anything derogatory about our grandchild's father!

SCHUMANN

Jobless, sleazy... I'm so pissed off I can't even think of an insult!

PARKER

Masturbatory artist. Throw that in there somewhere.

STEFANY

Stephen! You're not helping!

PARKER

Sorry, really.

STEFANY

Totally uncalled for.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Michael-

SCHUMANN

Parker... Get... OUT.

PARKER

Mr. Schumann, really, I'm sorry. It wasn't-

SCHUMANN

OUT.

PARKER

Mrs. Schumann, thank you for-

SCHUMANN  
OUT!

PARKER  
-for your hospitality. And thank you for the invitation into your lovely home. I apologize for this. Stefany-

SCHUMANN  
DON'T YOU DARE TALK TO MY DAUGHTER. GET OUT.

PARKER  
I'll call you.

SCHUMANN  
Like Hell you will! GO!

*PARKER looks at STEFANY, takes a step towards her, stops, and looks at SCHUMANN who glares back at him. PARKER quickly turns around and leaves.*

*BLACKOUT.*

**ACT 3**  
**Scene 1**

*PARKER and STEFANY are seated at a table in an Italian restaurant. They are not dressed to kill, but still look as though they put some thought into their dress.*

PARKER

Again, I'm really sorry about what happened last week. I have no idea what got into me.

STEFANY

It's fine.

PARKER

Is your father still-

STEFANY

Yes. Very.

PARKER

God... I'm sorry.

STEFANY

Not your fault. (Pause) I initiated it. (Pause) Two consenting adults.

PARKER

Of course.

STEFANY

What're you thinking?

PARKER

About what?

STEFANY

This situation.

PARKER

I don't know.

STEFANY

No?

PARKER  
No. You?

STEFANY  
Wondering how you are.

PARKER  
How I am?

STEFANY  
Yeah.

PARKER  
I'm fine.

STEFANY  
Good.

PARKER  
You?

STEFANY  
Good.

PARKER  
No, "well."

STEFANY  
Well.

PARKER  
Good.

STEFANY  
Yeah.

PARKER  
Are you OK?

STEFANY  
Yeah.

PARKER  
You seem a little...

STEFANY  
What?

PARKER  
Detached.

STEFANY  
From what?

PARKER  
You're joking.

STEFANY  
No.

PARKER  
The present circumstances.

STEFANY  
What about them?

PARKER  
You can't be serious.

STEFANY  
Explain.

PARKER  
You're pregnant. With our child. And you honestly aren't concerned about anything at all.

STEFANY  
Should I be?

PARKER  
Are you on something?

STEFANY  
No.

*Twenty-seconds of silence.*

PARKER

So, what do you think we should do?

STEFANY

Are you afraid of the silence?

PARKER

No. You're really starting to scare me, Stef.

STEFANY

Sorry.

PARKER

You're detached from reality. Something is obviously wrong.

STEFANY

Mm-hmm.

PARKER

Stef, look at me. Please. It's your father isn't it? Stefany... What did he say?

STEFANY

Nothing.

PARKER

I doubt he said "nothing."

STEFANY

He didn't say anything.

PARKER

You're lying. You're trembling. What did he say? Was it about the baby?

*STEFANY nods.*

STEFANY

He wants it put up for adoption, as long as I'm living under his roof.

PARKER

Move in with me.

STEFANY  
What?

PARKER  
Move in, with me.

STEFANY  
I can't do that?

PARKER  
Why not?

STEFANY  
My father will...

PARKER  
Stef, your father won't do anything. You're an adult; you can move out now. I have guest rooms.

STEFANY  
But-

PARKER  
You don't have to give me an answer now. Consider it, at least.

STEFANY  
OK.

PARKER  
I have something for you?

STEFANY  
What is it?

*PARKER reaches under the table.*

PARKER  
Here. Take it.

*STEFANY takes the package and opens it, removing a hand-made card.*

STEFANY

"Nowhere can be perfect without you." It sounds like something you'd read in a Hallmark card.

PARKER

Yes, except I mean it.

*STEFANY places the card on the table, then removes forty pages of paper, fastened together with a binder clip.*

STEFANY

Is this what I think it is?

PARKER

Depends what you think it is.

STEFANY

You wrote a thesis on Kees and Hardy?

PARKER

For you.

STEFANY

But you said it was illegal, dishonest.

PARKER

For me to accept money for it, yes.

STEFANY

It's still illegal.

PARKER

Do you not want it?

STEFANY

I... I do, but it's not my work.

PARKER

Sure it is. Just professionally edited. Look at the thesis statement. Those are your words. The examples you used? I used those too. It's all yours, just organized better.

STEFANY

Yes.

PARKER  
You're welcome.

STEFANY  
Thank... Thank you. (Pause) Yes, I'll move in with you.

PARKER  
Are you sure?

STEFANY  
Yes, I'm sure.

PARKER  
I love you.

*PARKER leans in and kisses STEFANY. STEFANY smiles, leans in, and kisses PARKER.*

*BLACKOUT.*

## Scene 2

*A hallway within a prison. There is an inmate, STEPHAN, sitting at a desk, reading a novel. SCHUMANN is led in by a CORRECTIONS OFFICER.*

CORRECTIONS OFFICER  
Right here. Stephan Parker. Yell if ya need anything.

SCHUMANN  
Thanks, I appreciate it.  
(To STEPHAN)  
Don't let me bother you.

STEPHAN  
I have to shit with people looking. You think people watching me read bothers me?

SCHUMANN  
A smart ass.

STEPHAN

Better than a dumb ass.

SCHUMANN

That mouth of yours get you into here?

STEPHAN

If it got me here, I should hope it would've gotten me out.

SCHUMANN

Should I introduce myself or would you rather I just get to the point?

STEPHAN

Whatever gets me back to my reading faster.

SCHUMANN

Anything good?

STEPHAN

Small talk wasn't one of your options.

SCHUMANN

Fine. I've a picture I want you to look at.

STEPHAN

Rorschach test? It's a couple fucking. Or two dogs fucking. Or two flowers getting pollinated by a bee...fucking.

SCHUMANN

Do you recognize this man?

STEPHAN

That's an awful photo.

SCHUMANN

So you recognize him?

STEPHAN

Nope. Just an awful photo. DMV?

SCHUMANN

God dammit.

STEPHAN

Honestly, he looks remotely familiar, but I can't say where I would've seen him before. What's his name?

SCHUMANN

Stephen Parker.

STEPHAN

You bring me a photo of a guy with my name and you want to know if I've ever seen him before? What kind of nutcase does that?

SCHUMANN

Someone with a problem on his hands.

STEPHAN

La Cosa Nostra? I'm not interested. I wasn't to begin with.

SCHUMANN

Fuck you.

STEPHAN

Still don't recognize him.

SCHUMANN

I didn't expect you to. I don't know why I thought you might know where he lived.

STEPHAN

You tracked me down to find out if I knew where someone with my name lived? That wasn't me?

SCHUMANN

It's more complicated than that!

*SCHUMANN crinkles up the photo and throws it at STEPHAN, who jumps up and runs to the bars.*

STEPHAN

Help. Help. I'm being assaulted with a wad of paper. Ah. Paper cut. I'm bleeding.

SCHUMANN

I hope you rot in here.

*SCHUMANN exits. STEPHAN picks up the photo and unwrinkles it, examining it more closely. He places the photo on his desk, picks up his book, reads a bit, puts it down, looks back at the photo, pulls out a notepad, and begins to write. Lights come up on the opposite side of the stage, in PARKER's cabin. PARKER is glazing a pot while STEFANY is sorting the mail.*

STEFANY

For someone who doesn't get any bills, you certainly do get a lot of credit card offers.

PARKER

Ever notice how someone who doesn't need credit can get all he wants, but people who need it have difficulty getting it?

STEFANY

Like fat people and food.

PARKER

Where did that come from?

STEFANY

My Id.

PARKER

No kidding. I must be rubbing off on you.

STEFANY

Is that a bad thing?

PARKER

It depends. I'm my favorite person, but I don't know if I could handle fucking myself.

STEFANY

I can't believe you just said that!

PARKER

It was my Id.

STEFANY

Cute.

PARKER

Like you.

STEFANY

Like you.

*STEFANY blows him a kiss, and he catches it, folds it up, and puts it in his pocket.*

PARKER

I'm going to save that for later.

STEFANY

Sounds good to me, but there'll always be more where that came from. Hey, this is odd. A letter addressed to Keith Baker. From Mayville Prison.

PARKER

You're kidding.

STEFANY

Look.

PARKER

Just throw it out, then.

STEFANY

That's illegal!

PARKER

Do I need to remind you he's dead?

STEFANY

How do you know it's for that Keith?

PARKER

What are the odds it's for a different one in the area?

STEFANY

A million to one?

PARKER

I don't exactly think that there are fifty Keith Bakers living in the U.S., and I'm not so sure that there are that many living in California.

STEFANY

Fine. We'll throw it out. (Pause) Are you sure you don't want to open it?

PARKER

Why would I want to open it?

STEFANY

Maybe someone needs help.

PARKER

When's the last time you wrote a letter to a dead person for help?

STEFANY

When's the last time you went to church?

PARKER

When you're good, you're good. I think Kees and Hardy really soaked into you.

STEFANY

Why? Because I'm cynical and don't exactly trust organized religion?

PARKER

Yes.

STEFANY

Fair enough.

*STEFANY throws the letter into the trash. PARKER seems to make a mistake with the glazing.*

PARKER

Job it!

STEFANY

Did you say "Job it"?

PARKER

I figured since you were Bible bashing I could get in on the fun.

STEFANY

We can have a party later, then. You finished the leftover chicken?

PARKER

I had a chicken salad sandwich yesterday.

STEFANY

How many? We had four breasts left!

PARKER

We had two. Four sandwiches worth.

STEFANY

That's healthy! Where the Hell do you hide the weight?

PARKER

As if you didn't know. What did you need it for?

STEFANY

I had my heart set on chicken noodle soup tonight.

PARKER

We could always run to the store to pick some up. Give me a chance to wash my hands and we'll-

STEFANY

-No, you can stay. I'll go myself. There's some other stuff I needed anyway.

PARKER

Alrighty. I'll be here waiting, Love.

STEFANY

I believe you.

*STEFANY walks over to PARKER and gives him a peck on the lips, then exits. PARKER stands up and wanders over to the window to watch her leave, and waves. Moments later, he walks over to the trash bin and pulls out the letter that was thrown away earlier. PARKER turns it over in his hand, opens it, and reads it as the lights go down and he moves back to the other side of the stage that is still set up as Mayville Prison. STEPHAN is reading a different book.*

PARKER

(To Offstage)

Thanks, I appreciate it.

(To STEPHAN)

Well, you don't look half bad.

STEPHAN

Holy fuck...

PARKER  
Try to keep it down.

STEPHAN  
You're-

PARKER  
Old. I know.

STEPHAN  
Alive? How?

PARKER  
Long story. Here, I brought you these.  
*PARKER hands over a carton of cigarettes.*  
I don't remember you being a smoker, but times change.

STEPHAN  
Times change, people change... You should know that by now.

PARKER  
I do. So tell me about this cop that-

STEPHAN  
I don't remember his name, but he was tall, had short, dark hair with some graying-

PARKER  
Mustache?

STEPHAN  
Neatly trimmed.

PARKER  
Well, I don't expect to have too many state police out looking for me.

STEPHAN  
And he was an asshole, if that helps.

PARKER  
It does. Did you tell him anything?

STEPHAN

Not a thing. I didn't recognize you in the photo at first. It had been years since you died, and to expect to see an aging, not a decomposing corpse-

PARKER

True.

STEPHAN

I pissed him off so much he threw the photo in here, and I looked at it for a while, trying to figure out why it looked so damn familiar. After a while it just kinda struck me, but I was like, "No, this can't be Keith. He's been dead for years." And then I got to thinking, you know, they never found your body. Maybe someone had saved you and you had amnesia or something-

PARKER

That has to be the most unlikely scenario I've ever heard.

STEPHAN

And successfully staging your own death wasn't up there?

PARKER

I think that's number two.

STEPHAN

Either way, you're full of shit!

PARKER

Nice. But try to keep it down.

STEPHAN

Right, sorry. So I was just swimming in these thoughts. What have you been up to? How's your mom? Is she still cooking those home-made cinnamon rolls? Man, I love those. It's been so long since I've had a cinnamon roll, let alone hers. They don't serve great desserts here. Yesterday it was canned pears.

PARKER

If I had known that, I would've made some for you. You probably could've traded it for something good.

STEPHAN

I'd never give one of those up. Are you crazy?

*STEPHAN looks into PARKER's eyes, and PARKER quickly breaks eye-contact.*

Hey. Look at me. Hey. Look

*STEPHAN snaps his fingers, and PARKER looks up.*  
I've seen that face before. Everything all right?

PARKER  
My mother...

STEPHAN  
Shit, man. I'm sorry. How'd it happen?

PARKER  
Aneurysm.

STEPHAN  
Oh no... She go fast?

PARKER  
I made it to the hospital. She recognized me. But this was after the stroke...

STEPHAN  
That's no good. I can't believe she... well, maybe I can believe she recognized you. Only twenty years.

PARKER  
Only. It was tough.

STEPHAN  
I can't imagine.

PARKER  
And I refused to acknowledge it at first. It was...painful. But then I gave in.

STEPHAN  
I don't know what to say.

PARKER  
There isn't much to say.

STEPHAN  
I suppose not.

*PARKER shuffles his feet, looks down, and sighs.*

PARKER

So... The officer at the gate said you were in here for assault with a deadly weapon.

STEPHAN

I'd rather not talk about it.

PARKER

I understand.

STEPHAN

You were supposed to say, "Are you sure?" and then I launch into it.

PARKER

Sorry.

STEPHAN

It's fine. I was at a bar - Penumbra - we've gone there before. You know, the one with the cute Russian waitress-

PARKER

-with the French name-

STEPHAN

Camille

PARKER

Camille.

*BOTH laugh.*

STEPHAN

I got completely ripped on whiskey sours and thought I saw a former flame... I know I don't have to tell you which one.

PARKER

You were always a fan of Faust.

STEPHAN

I thought she'd be the one to save me.

PARKER

You have to admit, you went a little overboard with it, celebrating her birthday without her. What was it? September 22nd?

STEPHAN

HA! She was no Virgo, smartass. Aries. Anyway, this woman walks in, and I'm thinking, "Wow, there she is, after five years," and I look, and I see she isn't wearing a wedding ring, or an engagement ring, so my mind is flying all over the place. Do I ask her how she is? Do I buy her a drink? Do we talk about the weather? Auld Lang Syne stuff.

PARKER

"Should I eat a peach?" stuff.

STEPHAN

Exactly like that. The entire time I'm Prufrocking I completely miss that she's come in with someone about a foot shorter than I am, kind of on the heavy side, but not muscular at all, and when I do notice him, after I bought her a drink, he gets defensive, tells me not to do anything stupid with his girl. "I'm just being a nice guy buying her a drink. No strings." I said to him. "That's right no strings," he said, and then pushed me out of his way.

PARKER

-and then you hit him.

STEPHAN

At first with my fist. Fell fast. Then with a bottle. I completely blacked out. Next thing I know, I'm in jail, covered in blood that isn't mine facing charges of assault with a deadly weapon.

PARKER

I'm sorry.

STEPHAN

Don't be, it's not your fault. It was my obsession with her. You knew it would eventually get me into trouble, and it did. Here's some advice I learned too late to do anything with. Never have sex with your muse. It'll never be as good as it is in your head. And what are you left with? Something... base... and used. If a miracle happens often enough, it's no longer a miracle. It's just not worth it.

PARKER

I'll have to remember that.

*PARKER looks around for something to sit on, finds nothing, and leans on the bars.*

I bet you're still wondering what happened with me.

STEPHAN

No, I wonder what happened to Amelia Earhart. I thought we'd never come back around to it.

PARKER  
Sorry about that.

STEPHAN  
Stop the fucking apologizing and talk! You had everything- everything!- going for you. Ten grand contracts, plural.

PARKER  
You don't remember.

STEPHAN  
What?

PARKER  
My wife.

STEPHAN  
Oh my God. I forgot. I guess you did have a reason, didn't you?

PARKER  
Yeah.

STEPHAN  
I'm sorry. I completely forgot.

PARKER  
It's all right. I'm over it. I needed time. Space. I couldn't find it with everyone always checking up on me, the publishers wanting more work from me, thinking a month was sufficient for mourning... I couldn't do it.

STEPHAN  
So you faked your death.

PARKER  
And eventually healed. And began again.

STEPHAN  
Un-fucking-believable. You know that's unbelievable, right?

PARKER  
Of course, and now things are going well.

STEPHAN  
How so?

PARKER  
There's this girl I've been seeing<sup>79</sup>.

STEPHAN  
-wait, let me guess. Brown hair, dark eyes, glasses, kind of petite-

PARKER  
Twenty years and you still know my poison.

STEPHAN  
How could I forget? Katharine, Marie, Jodi-

PARKER  
I know you know.

STEPHAN  
Meghan, Samantha-

PARKER  
-you know nothing ever happened between Samantha and I.

STEPHAN  
Yeah, yeah. So, tell me about her already.

PARKER  
Where to begin? She's getting her Masters in English, works as a Nurse's Aide in a nursing home, her father was that Trooper you met-

STEPHAN  
Wow, I already met half the parents. I feel privileged.

PARKER  
Well, you didn't meet the better half.

STEPHAN  
Not surprised at all. How serious is it?

PARKER  
Well, she moved in, and she's... I'm thinking about proposing to her.

STEPHAN

Congratulations! I'll be sure to send you a card. The gift will have to wait, I'm afraid.

PARKER

It's fine, really. I hate to do this to you, but I'm supposed to be meeting her at a coffeehouse in about half an hour.

STEPHAN

Do what you have to do. I'm not going anywhere.

PARKER

Prison humor?

STEPHAN

It wouldn't be funny if it wasn't true.

*STEPHAN extends his hand through the bars.*

Take care, Keith.

*PARKER shakes STEPHAN's hand.*

PARKER

You too, Stephan. I'll send you another carton of smokes when I get the chance.

STEPHAN

You're too good to me.

PARKER

You deserve better. Quick question before I go. How'd you find me?

STEPHAN

The trooper mentioned something about a cabin, and I remembered that one you and I stayed at a few times back in the day.

PARKER

I'll be damned.

*PARKER's cell phone rings.*

Hello? Speaking. What happened? She's where?

*As PARKER crosses to the opposite side of the stage.*

Stefany was in a car accident, Steve. I need to go.

*BLACKOUT*

### Scene 3

*PARKER's cross brings him into a sparse waiting room with a security officer sitting behind a desk.*

PARKER

(Out of breath)

I'm here to see a patient. She was in an accident.

SECURITY OFFICER

Name? We've had a few accidents.

PARKER

Stefany Schumann. S-T-E-F

SECURITY OFFICER

How about spelling "Schumann" first?

PARKER

Sorry. S-C-H-U-M-A

SECURITY OFFICER

N-N. "Stefany" with an "F". Room 312, East wing.

PARKER

Thanks!

SECURITY OFFICER

You can't go back there yet!

PARKER

Why?

SECURITY OFFICER

Put this on-

*SECURITY OFFICER hands PARKER a guest I.D. tag to attach to his shirt.*  
-and sign here. No, here.

PARKER

Great. Thanks.

*PARKER crosses the stage and enters a room with a hospital bed occupied by STEFANY and various machines. PARKER knocks.*

He-hello?

*A NURSE enters.*

NURSE  
Sorry, are you looking for Miss Schumann?

PARKER  
Yes. Is she in there?

NURSE  
Yup, but she's sleeping. Try to be quiet.

*PARKER walks in to see STEFANY on the bed, her face badly bruised with a sutured cut above her left eye, and her nose has a bandage over it, likely because it had been broken. There is a small empty vase on the table, along with a pitcher of water and two glasses.*

PARKER  
(Whispering)  
Oh... you poor thing...

*PARKER sees a chair next to the window and pulls it over to the bed. He sits down and reaches over to hold her hand. DR. LANNING walks in.*

DR. LANNING  
Jesus! I didn't think there'd be anyone in here.

PARKER  
Sorry, I didn't realize I wasn't allowed in here. Dr. Lanning?

DR. LANNING  
Yes. I thought you looked familiar, but I'm afraid your name isn't coming to me at the moment.

PARKER  
Stephen Parker. My friend's mother was here a few months ago.

DR. LANNING  
Right, right. I left about five minutes ago and didn't expect anyone in that time. You didn't have any difficulties signing in, did you?

PARKER  
No, none at all.

DR. LANNING

Good. There've been problems lately.

PARKER

Is she going to be all right?

DR. LANNING

Well, for the most part, yes.

PARKER

For the most part?

DR. LANNING

Can you step outside with me for a minute?

PARKER

But she can't hear us here, can she?

DR. LANNING

She's sedated, but I'd rather do this outside. Don't want to disturb her rest.

PARKER

She's going to be fine?

DR. LANNING

Yes, she'll be fine. Now please, outside.

*DR. LANNING walks outside of the room, and is followed by PARKER.*

Stefany should be fine, just a few small lacerations from glass on her face. They'll fade with Retin-A treatment which can be started once they've healed.

PARKER

Thank God.

DR. LANNING

The best thing for her right now is rest.

PARKER

Is that it?

DR. LANNING

No. There's no light way to... she lost the fetus.

PARKER

Lost-what?

DR. LANNING

I'm afraid the baby was aborted.

PARKER

No.

DR. LANNING

I'm sorry.

PARKER

Yeah. I mean, no, no, it's not your fault.

DR. LANNING

She doesn't know yet. We sedated her because of the injuries, and wanted to check with her father to see if he wanted to tell her or if a hospital psychiatrist would.

PARKER

Actually, I'm not her father. I'm her significant other.

DR. LANNING

Oh, my apologies. Do you happen to know if you'd rather a hospital employee or-

PARKER

I think it would be best if I told her.

DR. LANNING

As long as you think so. If you change your mind-

*DR. LANNING reaches into a pocket and fishes out a card.*

-here we go. Give Dr. Ferguson a call. Tell him I gave you his card.

PARKER

Thanks.

DR. LANNING

It's the least I can do, really. I hate to do this, but you're not going to be able to stay around much longer. I'll put a note on the door, but you have about ten minutes at most before visiting hours end in this wing.

PARKER

Thank you. I appreciate it.

DR. LANNING

You're more than welcome. And again, my sympathy.

*DOCTOR exits. PARKER picks up STEFANY's hand and gives it a squeeze. It noticeably squeezes back.*

PARKER

Steffie? Steffie, can you hear me?

*STEFANY moans softly.*

STEFANY

Hi.

PARKER

Hi.

STEFANY

My... thing on top of my... neck hurts.

PARKER

You were in an accident. You're in a hospital.

STEFANY

How's the car?

PARKER

I haven't the slightest idea. Rest. Relax.

STEFANY

Mm-hmm.

*STEFANY falls back asleep. A few seconds pass. SCHUMANN enters in uniform, without PARKER noticing.*

SCHUMANN

(After a moment and clearing his throat.)

Ahem. How is she?

PARKER

She'll be fine.

SCHUMANN  
Just fine?

PARKER  
Mostly fine. Almost great.

SCHUMANN  
That so?

PARKER  
That's so.

SCHUMANN  
Huh.

PARKER  
Do you mind stepping outside with me for a moment?

SCHUMANN  
Yeah, I do.

PARKER  
I'd just like to talk to you for a moment. It won't take long.

SCHUMANN  
I came here to see my daughter, not you.

PARKER  
I realize that. Please.

SCHUMANN  
Only if you can give me a few moments alone with her afterwards.

PARKER  
Done.  
*SCHUMANN and PARKER step through the door and close it.*  
Mr. Schumann, she... lost the baby.

SCHUMANN  
What?

PARKER  
Yes.

SCHUMANN  
You're lying.

PARKER  
I can get a doctor if you'd like me to.  
*SCHUMANN stares at PARKER.* SCHUMANN  
Are you an actor too, Mr. Renaissance Man?

PARKER  
No, I'm not.

SCHUMANN  
(Shuffling his feet)  
I believe you.

PARKER  
You do?

SCHUMANN  
Shouldn't I?

PARKER  
Well, yes.

SCHUMANN  
So.

PARKER  
Yes?

SCHUMANN  
You're going to end your relationship with her now.

PARKER  
Of course I'm not! I would never think of such a thing.

SCHUMANN  
You misunderstand me. It wasn't a question.

PARKER  
What?

SCHUMANN

She lost the baby. She doesn't need your support anymore.

PARKER

I wouldn't do that.

SCHUMANN

Why not?

PARKER

I love her.

SCHUMANN

Then stop. Look what it's done to her.

PARKER

What are you talking about?

SCHUMANN

When she finds out she lost it, she'll be a wreck.

PARKER

You're implying I had something to do with this?

SCHUMANN

No.

PARKER

But your logic-

SCHUMANN

I'm stating it plainly.

PARKER

I'm not responsible for anything! Your daughter's condition is no worse with me, and can't possibly be any better without me. My existence in your daughter's life has no bearing on where she is right now.

SCHUMANN

She was going to meet you! She shouldn't have been driving in her condition!

PARKER

Millions of pregnant women have driven, are driving, and will drive!

SCHUMANN

My daughter is not millions of women. One death is a tragedy. A thousand is a statistic.

PARKER

Do you just realize you quoted Josef Stalin?!

SCHUMANN

Is that so?

PARKER

Yes! And to be perfectly honest, this conversation has solidified my conviction.

SCHUMANN

And what's that?

PARKER

I want to ask your daughter to marry me.

SCHUMANN

You're just saying that to piss me off more than I already am.

PARKER

I'm not an actor, remember?

SCHUMANN

Liar! Now let me see my daughter in peace!

PARKER

Go ahead.

*SCHUMANN opens the door and enters the room. His radio goes off.*

RADIO

Base to Car 12.

SCHUMANN

Shit.

(Into the radio)

Car 12. Go ahead.

RADIO

We have a possible 10-72 at the intersection of Turlane and East Whiting.

SCHUMANN  
You're kidding me.  
(Into the radio)  
Car 12 to Base. Is no one else available?

RADIO  
Negative, Car 12.

SCHUMANN  
FUCK!  
(Into the radio)  
Car 12... Responding. 10-49.

RADIO  
10-4.

*SCHUMANN leaves the room, glares at PARKER, and exits. PARKER enters the room and sits back down at the bedside.*

STEFANY  
I heard my dad. Was he here?

PARKER  
He was. he had to leave. A call, I think.

STEFANY  
He didn't say goodbye or kiss me.

PARKER  
I'm sure he'll come by later.

STEFANY  
I'm his little snowflake.

PARKER  
Snowflake?

STEFANY  
Because I'm perfect and unique.

PARKER  
Well, your father was right.

STEFANY

Uh-uh. The world's not perfect.

PARKER

If it were, there'd certainly be more unicorns.

STEFANY

You think so?

PARKER

I know so.

*PARKER stands up and leans over STEFANY, and kisses her forehead. The SECURITY OFFICER enters.*

SECURITY OFFICER

Mr. Parker, I'll have to ask you to leave now. I'm sorry.

PARKER

No, it's fine.

(To STEFANY)

Sleep well, Love. O.K.?

STEFANY

I love you.

PARKER

I love you more.

*PARKER leaves the room, followed by the SECURITY OFFICER. DR. LANNING walks past.*

DR. LANNING

I can assume you told her?

PARKER

Not tonight. Tomorrow. Definitely tomorrow.

DR. LANNING

Are you sure? As I said, I can have a-

PARKER

No. Definitely tomorrow.

*BLACKOUT.*

#### Scene 4

*STEFANY's hospital room the following day. Little has changed, except there is now a bouquet of flowers. STEFANY is dozing. PARKER enters and sits in the chair, still as it was at the end of the previous scene. STEFANY opens her eyes.*

PARKER

Sorry, Stef... Did I wake you?

STEFANY

No, no...I was just... thinking.

PARKER

With your eyes closed?

STEFANY

With my eyes closed.

PARKER

Anything interesting?

STEFANY

Not particularly... no.

PARKER

Do you want to share it?

STEFANY

Not right now. Maybe later.

*PARKER stands up and goes to the new bouquet.*

PARKER

(Reading the card)

So your father came by earlier.

STEFANY

Yeah. He brought me breakfast in bed.

PARKER  
Must've been before visiting hours.

STEFANY  
Nine-thirty. After he got out of work.

PARKER  
Anything good?

STEFANY  
Huh?

PARKER  
The food. Was it anything good?

STEFANY  
Not really. Runny eggs, toast, grape jam.

PARKER  
Grape?

STEFANY  
They were out of raspberry.

PARKER  
From the cafeteria.

STEFANY  
Yeah. I was afraid to ask how much it came to.

PARKER  
I'm sure whatever it was, it's nothing compared to what all of this is costing.

STEFANY  
I know. They said I might be able to go home later today. They want to run another X-ray on my head, just to be sure...

PARKER  
Sure of what?

STEFANY  
Just that nothing is wrong.

PARKER

Was anything wrong to begin with? Or from the accident?

STEFANY

No.

PARKER

So it's just-

STEFANY

-protocol?

PARKER

I was going to say "standard procedure," but yes, protocol.

STEFANY

Steve?

PARKER

Yes?

STEFANY

I can't.

PARKER

Can't what?

STEFANY

Marry you.

PARKER

Your father told you?

STEFANY

Yes. And I've been thinking about it.

PARKER

But why? I was supposed to-

STEFANY

Please, don't be angry with me.

PARKER

How could I be angry with you? I'm angry with your father.

STEFANY

Don't. You were going to ask eventually. At least this way I had time to think about it.

PARKER

Are you sure your answer is-

STEFANY

For now. We've only been seeing each other...five months. The baby isn't any reason to rush into things.

PARKER

The baby...

STEFANY

I know you think you're doing the right thing... and I know you love me... but I think we should take things more slowly... put marriage off for a while.

PARKER

We can do that. Absolutely. But... your father didn't tell you about...

STEFANY

About what?

PARKER

The baby.

STEFANY

What about it?

PARKER

It... didn't make it.

STEFANY

Didn't... No.

PARKER

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

*PARKER goes to STEFANY and hugs her in the bed as she begins to sob.*

STEFANY  
Why didn't you tell me?

PARKER  
It... wasn't the right time.

STEFANY  
Why? Why?

PARKER  
I'm sorry, hun. I really am.

STEFANY  
Go...

PARKER  
What?

STEFANY  
Go. I need to be alone.

PARKER  
Are you sure?

STEFANY  
Yes... Please... Go.

PARKER  
I'll be right outside if you-

STEFANY  
No. I need... No.

PARKER  
Stefany, I...

STEFANY  
Please! Go! I can't do this! Go!

PARKER  
I love you.

*STEFANY continues to cry as PARKER leaves the room and exits the stage. STEFANY continues to cry and looks about the room. In a fit of anger, she throws her right arm into the glass pitcher on the night table that shatters against the wall. STEFANY stops her sobbing momentarily, and bends down off the bed to pick up a piece of the glass. She examines it for a moment, then puts it to her wrist. A NURSE walks in.*

NURSE

Hey, girlie. I heard a crash. I hope you don't mind my barg- what are you doing honey? No! No, don't do that!

*STEFANY cuts her wrist.*

No, baby, no! Doctor! We need a doctor here!

*BLACKOUT*

### Scene 5

*PARKER is sitting silently inside of his car, parked on the side of a bridge. PARKER slowly gets out of the car, leaving the door open. He climbs up onto the ledge and looks off into the distance. Parker jumps.*

*BLACKOUT.*

### Scene 6

*A Police Barrack's locker room. SCHUMANN and another OFFICER are at their lockers, undressing from their uniforms. The OFFICER is hesitant.*

OFFICER

Mike, I hope you don't mind me asking, but...someone mentioned your daughter earlier... how has she been doing?

*SCHUMANN's face visibly softens, and is almost in tears when he turns to face the OFFICER, and quickly turns away and slams his fist into a neighboring locker.*

SCHUMANN

Not well, Dennis. She's not well at all.

*BLACKOUT.*

### Scene 7

*An non-descript area with a small round table. STEFANY is seated in a chair in a white gown. MRS. SCHUMANN enters with a tray of food, everything pre-cut that would require such for consumption, plastic eating utensils, and a plastic cup full of juice.*

MRS. SCHUMANN

Here you go, Steffie. It's your favorite: turkey and mashed potatoes, green beans, and apple juice.

STEFANY

I don't like apple juice.

MRS. SCHUMANN

Yes you do. You had it earlier, remember? You had it with breakfast, and dinner last night... In fact, I can't remember a time when you didn't have apple juice.

*STEFANY stares blankly at the food for a moment, then picks up the plastic fork and begins to move the food around into a single large pile in the center of her plate. Pausing a moment, she begins to attempt to separate the food back into its original positions on the plate. MRS. SCHUMANN removes a postcard from her pocket.*

I forgot to tell you. You got another postcard today. Would you like me to read it to you?

*STEFANY's eyes well up with tears and she tries more furiously to separate the food with her fork. She gives up and begins to use her hands.*

STEFANY

No. No. NO!

*STEFANY continues to scream and eventually breaks down into tears as the lights fade to BLACKOUT.*

## **APPENDIX C**

*See Attached, Full Audio Recording*

Attached is the audio recording of the reading I held in November of 2008. The script used for this reading was version two, the same script which can be found in Appendix A.

## **APPENDIX D**

*See Attached, Full Video Recording 1-11*

Attached is the video from the stage reading which I held on March 1, 2009. Included with the full production is the talkback session that followed afterwards. Due to size, the recording is in contained in eleven different files.

## VITA

Ian Tweedie is an American citizen, born July 14, 1983 in Niagara Falls, New York. In 2005 he graduated with his Bachelors of Fine Arts in Theatre and Bachelors of Art in English from Niagara University in New York. In Western New York Ian has worked professionally as an actor, director, choreographer, fight director, stage manager, lighting designer and sound designer. Ian also has four writing credits, *The Child* and *She Loves Me, She Loves Me...*, co-wrote *Sugar Babies in Darkness*, and *The Christmas Spirits*. In 2004 Ian founded his own theatre company, IDL Minds Productions which produced five plays through 2005.