

THE STAGE MANAGER'S NIGHTMARE

by Mark Leiren-Young

From a revue of comedy sketches entitled "Watchin'."

HOUSE MANAGER

1:20

Hello, I'm your front-of-house manager and I really must apologize to you for the delay this evening. The show will be beginning shortly ... While we're waiting I may as well tell you a little about the work. As you probably know it's about a king whose wife is raped by two gentlemen—perhaps gentlemen isn't the word I'm looking for—who cut off both her hands and removed her tongue in order that she will not be able to identify them. Eventually, however, the husband discovers the ruffians' identity, bakes them into a pie and serves the boys to their parents. It's a tragedy. A Shakespearean tragedy. That means everybody dies. If it was a comedy everybody would get married, except for the villain. It's not a very good play actually, but I'm sure you'll enjoy it. After all, it is Shakespeare ... And while we're waiting I'll introduce you to some of the people involved in the show. Fred Jenkins, our lighting board operator. Susan Wong, who does our sound. I'd like to introduce you to the author, but he couldn't be with us this evening. That was a joke. You see, the author's dead. Died hundreds of years ago. That's why everybody does his play—no royalties.

Available from Playwrights Union of Canada as a copyscript.

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH PERSONAL GROWTH

by Arthur Milner

Jeff's relationship with his wife is going nowhere and his job has become more boring and more difficult, but then he makes two new friends who change his life forever.

JEFF

1:25

Whatever the problem was, I couldn't talk to Marla about it. Marla and I can talk. We have really good talks sometimes, we can talk for hours about a movie we've seen, or people we know. But Marla always wants to talk about our relationship, and I don't mind, it's not that, it's just—I don't feel like there's very much to say. Marla thought that was a problem. I didn't. I've talked to guys I know, and I've asked women about it and it just seems to be one of those constants about couples. Women want to talk about their relationship, men don't. Women think it's a problem that men don't want to talk. Every night, I'm sure there's a lot of guys out there saying, "I think it's alright. I don't see any serious problem." For me, the problem was something different, it was bigger than that. I remember hearing on the radio one time about a couple who were celebrating their sixtieth wedding anniversary. I started to sweat. I thought, Marla and I have been married for eight years. That leaves fifty-two more years. Is Marla going to want to talk about our relationship for another fifty-two years? I couldn't very well say to her, "I have this problem. I can't imagine us living together for another fifty-two years. Nothing personal." But the thing was, it wasn't personal. It wasn't Marla that depressed me. It was the image that depressed me. I felt stuck. I could see myself in fifty-two years, sitting in an Italian restaurant, spilling over the sides of the chair, and Marla asking me, did I really love her, or why I wasn't as excited about her birthday as I used to be.

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RICK

It took me a while to figure out I was gay. I guess that sounds weird. I suppose it sounds even weirder when I tell you I was already sleeping with guys and still hadn't figured it out. Well, hell! You know, circle jerk with the guys when you're in your early teens and it just progresses from there. When I was fifteen, during a circle jerk session, I ended up giving my best friend a blow job. Ex-best friend after that... but it took til I was twenty before I was finally sure. And no, I'm not slow or anything. It was just that at that age, I was so horny I was sleeping with anything that moved. Guys, girls, whatever -- I wasn't checking to see what gender they were. Pulse? Breathing? Good enough, let's get naked! If I had paid attention, I guess I could have figured it out much earlier. I was always different as a kid. See, I'm the youngest of four boys -- well actually two older brothers and a twin -- but my twin keeps reminding me that he was born first so technically I'm the baby. Major macho Dad and brothers. I was the wimp. Artistic, non-athletic -- I hated gym class. In games, when they picked sides, I was always picked last. Better the guy with the wooden leg and one arm than wimpy Ricky. I guess that's why I work out so much now. When I win the Academy award, my speech will name all the people that were mean to me in school. But I digress.

Having a sex life when you live at home is tough. I lived at home until I was 22. I went to the local university so I didn't get the freedom of dorm life and living in another city like my brothers did. I didn't want my mother to think I was a slut. So when I stayed out all night, in the morning when I got home, I told my mother that I had had too much to drink the night before and was being responsible by staying over rather than driving home. I was gone a lot. I think for years, my mother was thought that I had a major drinking problem.

I'm surprised my mother didn't clue in. My other gay friends tell me that they were sure their mothers knew or suspected even before they were sure of it themselves. And it's not like I didn't leave huge clues. When I was six I asked for "Hairstyle Barbie" for Christmas. I got it too. Mom's surprisingly progressive sometimes. This wasn't one of those normal Barbies. I'm talking -- you know, do you remember the commercials? -- that really big "lifesize" head that came with a bunch of hair curlers set in its base, and she had her own brushes, combs and barettes. And what was really cool was if you held down the button at the base of her skull and yanked on her hair, her hair would "grow" and if you wound the knob in the back you could make it short again. She also came with lipstick, rouge and other stuff -- I forget. Anyway, I just loved my Barbie. I slept with it and dragged that thing everywhere. I'd put her in the back of my wagon and off we'd go. I even took it with us on vacation that summer. Come to think of it. I haven't had a toy I loved that much since. I wonder if she's still in my mom's basement.

This could explain why I enjoy shopping with my female friends. I pick out outfits for them and make them try them on in the dressing rooms. Just like dressing a Barbie doll. I guess it takes me back to my childhood. Or maybe, I'm just weird.

From *Lonely Planet* by Steven Dietz

Carl

Well, things at the paper are crazy. Just *crazy*. No one understands, Jody. They really don't. There are all these so-called "reputable" journalists who walk around bitching and moaning how hard it is to cover the news. How *taxing* it is to look around and put into inverted pyramid form something that happened. I should be so lucky, Jody. Do you think I can get away with just typing up stuff that happened? Please. When you write for a tabloid, you have to *create* the news. And believe me, *that* is taxing.

Many's the day I wished I could walk out my door, see a little fire across the street, go to work and type it up: "A little fire happened yesterday across the street." How sweet, how simple. But that little fire is not a story at my paper unless an elderly woman with a foreign accent was washing dishes, and she looks down at the white plate she is scrubbing, and there, there on the white plate she is holding is the face of Jesus, Jesus himself, all beatific and covered with suds – and the face of Jesus speaks to her. The face of Jesus says: "Drop. The. Plate." And the woman is frozen with fear. And again, Jesus says: "Drop. The. Plate." And the woman speaks. The woman says, "It's part of a *set*." Jesus stands firm. "If you want to be with me in heaven, you will drop. The. Plate." The woman is shaking with fear. She tries to explain that it was a wedding gift some forty years ago from an uncle who suffered from polio and died a pauper – but Jesus doesn't give an inch. It's as though he's gone back and read the Old Testament. "I'll give you one more chance," he says. "Then I'll have the fire of hell consume your soul." The woman, tears streaming down her face, tries to quickly submerge him under the soapy water – but the water is gone. The sink is gone. Only the plate, and the face, remain. She stares at him, trembling. He says: "Well?" She has a realization. This is not Jesus. This is not her Lord and Savior. This is an *imposter*. This is the spirit of Satan entering the world through her dishware. She looks the plate squarely in the face and says: "I renounce you."

Within seconds, she's toast. So is the building.

The firemen do not find the slightest trace of her. But there, in the midst of the smoking rubble, the dinner plate shines white and pristine. And burned into it forever is the image of the woman's final, hideous expression. The last face she made before she became a china pattern.

My paper can run a story like that.

LONE STAR by James McLure

Roy loves to reminisce about his adolescent adventures as the owner of the only 1959 pink Thunderbird convertible in Maynard, Texas.

It is one A.M. on a summer morning behind Angel's Bar. Roy is telling his younger brother, Ray, about his first sexual encounter in the back seat of his beloved car.

ROY: In the spring of nineteen hundred and sixty-one I took Edith Ellen Hyde out in that car a mine. Took her parkin' out to Thompson's road. That was the night I looked up her dress. Up until then I had no idea what life was all about (pause) We kissed and kissed till we got half way good at it. Then she took off her shirt. (pause) That was the first nipple I'd had in my mouth since Mom's. But nipples are like bicycles: once you learn you never forget how. Finally we got the windows all steamed up, and I couldn't wait. Got the car to smell like the smell of a woman and I just had to see it. Edith Ellen didn't want me to see it. Said it was bad enough me touchin' it without wantin' to look at it. She even tried to scare me. Said it looked God awful. But she couldn't talk me out of it. I was a man with a mission. So I scooted over and scrunched down under the steerin' column like this and she lifted up her skirt and I lit a match like that. And I looked at the damn thing. (pause) And y'know, y'wonder what the first explorer felt. The first explorer that climbed over that hill and saw-- stretched out before him, in all its God glory--the grand canyon. Well that's what I felt like when Edith Ellen Hyde lifted her skirt and said, "here it is," I looked, and it was AWE-INSPIRING. I felt like Adam. I felt like the man who discovered the Grand Canyon.

THE RABBIT FOOT

by Leslie Lee

Rural Mississippi - 1920 - Reggie (20's)

Reggie is a young black man whose life has been changed by his experiences in France in World War I. Here, Reggie tells his wife a story about a fellow soldier.

REGGIE: (*Moves away from her, trembling.*) I'd rather be in the ground than to live this way. (*Beat.*) There was this boy over there. His name was David Frames. We called him Little David. He said he was seventeen, but he probably lied 'bout his age. Might've been fifteen. From Arkansas. One night, I'm comin' back from guard duty. And it's cold and dark, and all I can hear is my feet crunchin' on the ice. All a sudden I hear somebody sniffin' and cryin'. And I gets close, and there's Little David, sittin' in the cold on some tree stump, huddled up to keep warm, and cryin' his fool head off. And he sees me, but it's too late to pretend he ain't cryin'. I done caught him! "What's wrong, Little David? You done got bad news from home?" He wouldn't tell me. And I says, "Come on, Little David you's a soldier in the Yew-nited States Army, and you ain't s'posed to be cryin'. S'ppose some German soldier sneak up on you and see you cryin'? They'll swear they done got the war won." And finally he tells me. He's cryin' cause he's happy and sad at the same time. He's happy to be alive for the first time in his life, but he's scared to death a gettin' kilt by some German bullet. Just like ev'rybody else he found out what it is to be a man. And he kept talkin' 'bout goin' over the hill. He's gonna desert. He ain't gonna get kilt just when he knows what livin's 'bout. And I say, "Little David, you can't, man. Ain't no way. You're a colored man. And even if you do get a bullet, least you know what it's like to be treated like you s'posed to." Anyway, he didn't run. He stayed. Well a bullet did get him one day near the end a the war. Blam! He didn't even know what hit 'im. Little David was gone. And that's what it was all about. Wasn't white women, it was Little David and Kansas City Jimmy and New York

THE RABBIT FOOT

Billy. All of 'em—gone! Done tasted a little bit a freedom, but a little bit's better n' nothin'. You all understand what I'm sayin'?

NEBRASKA

by Keith Reddin

SAC base, Omaha, NE - Present - Swift (30's)

Swift has known the military all his life and has limited understanding of events occurring outside his daily Air Force routine. Here, he tells the sad tale of having to kill his dog.

SWIFT: I had to kill my dog today. Gidget was close to seventeen, my wife says it was more like eighteen, that's old for a dog. My folks had taken her for the time we were in Germany, and then we brought her out here. And day by day, you could see she was getting worse. First she got kind of blind, walking into the middle of the street, car horns blasting, trucks whizzing a couple of inches from her, walking into closed doors, knowing the door was there, not seeing it was closed. Then the back legs gave out. She started dragging her body around, limping and huffing, falling down. Finally she could hardly get up. I had to pick her up just to get her outside, into the sun, Gidget sitting on this old blanket not lifting her head, making these sounds, you know, groans and sighs, cause she knew she was going. So today, I lifted her up, put her in the back of the car, drove out Route 24 to this field, lay her down, shot her right behind the ear. I didn't think about it. I just shot her. Smoked a cigarette and waited till I knew her soul had left her. Rolled her up in the blanket, put her in the trunk, drove home. Buried her. Had dinner. We talked about another dog, but I told Julie to wait a while. I'd had Gidget so long. So she's out back now, under the dirt.

OUR OWN KIND

by Roy MacGregor

England - Present - Ollie (40-50)

A kind-hearted bus driver, Ollie seems to have won his battle against loneliness. Here, he prepares for an evening of roller-skating.

(Kirchen, later. Lorna is at the table, studying. Ollie enters, dressed up ready to go out. He gives his shoes a final brush.)

OLLIE: Friday night—magic. A man needs an interest, Lorna. Something more than just an evening slumped in front of the box. When you think of the state I was in after your Mum did a runner ...I was gutted. Should have seen it coming, of course. I'm too trusting. Naive. Then I end up getting walloped. *(He recalls)* Went downhill faster than a snowball, didn't I, eh? Zombie. Sitting around moping, drinking too much...no wonder I ended up with gallstones. Don't know what I'd have done without you and Sylvie, but...

[LORNA: *(Mimics him)* 'It was old Doctor Meadows did it...'
OLLIE: ...it was old Doctor Meadows did it. Telling me to take up an interest, something quiet, relaxing. The Chess Club—took to it like a duck to what'sit. Wonder what your Mum would say if she knew I was the local chess champ. Me, old bonehead Ollie. She used to say I was a slob. She may have had a point. But I'm a slob with an aptitude now. Strange, discovering an aptitude. Like finding money in the pocket of an old coat. *(He finishes brushing his shoes.)* Sometimes you get the feeling that there really is Someone Up There. A fine woman, is Pam. Couldn't fit the bill better if I'd ordered her out of a catalogue.

Allen, Naked

Robert Coles

Scene: Here and now

Serio-Cornic

Irv: a man who likes volleyball, 205

Here, Irv introduces himself to the audience with a slightly obsessive tale of one of his volleyball teammates.

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Irv: I'm Irv. Short for Irving. You've got to be a really old Jew to name your kid Irving in the second half of the 20th century. But that was my father, all right. An old Jew. A good Jew. I work for an insurance company. No, I don't sell it. Everyone seems to think an insurance company consists only of agents. I work in the home office, but don't ask what I do because it makes even *my* eyes glaze over to explain it. And I don't do a whole lot for fun, either, except one thing: volleyball. No, not on the beach. Your exposure to the sport might be limited to slapping a ball around underhanded on the sand, or maybe the company picnic where everybody plays with a beer in one fist. But we play indoors. Six-man, USVBA rules. And we're good. Real good. I'm the setter. That means when the ball comes over to our side of the net, someone passes it to me and I toss it in the air so the hitter can hit it. That makes it sound a lot easier than it is. It's not easy. It's intricate, precise, elegant, graceful, lightning-fast, explosive, muscular and yet cerebral. To be a setter, one has to enter a virtual zen-like state of being. Almost a trance, but with total mental control. Complete relaxation, but with the instantaneous ability to react, to decide on a course of action without thinking. From a disaster – a ball passed four feet off course at knee level – one must, unconsciously, not only dig it, but *set* it, a soft but true arc, floating, without rotation, most likely backwards over one's head to the outside hitter, but executed in a manner that makes it clear

to him that he's being set while utterly deceiving your opponents. That's the setter's job. And yet while you're in that zone, that state of grace, while *you* are utterly in command, your work seems effortless to the casual viewer. The warriors, the heroes, the Greek gods, the animals, the great golden beasts of the court are the hitters. They leap, they burst, they fly, they hang suspended above you like panthers about to pounce upon their prey. Then *pow!* They explode, the ball slamming straight down into the floor. The crowd roars – for *them*, not the setter. But they do deserve it, those great leaping animals. And there was no greater, no sleeker, no more golden god than Allen. Yes, a panther, a leopard, a lion, every big cat rolled into one. Now – God's truth – I'm straight. Yeah, I know you don't believe it. But, swear to God, I am. Man, my father's rolling over in his grave right now, I said "God" twice. He always would say to me, "Irving, Jews don't use that word. We don't take his name in vain." I would say, "Dad, God is not his name, it's his occupation. His name is Yahweh." Then he'd *really* go ballistic. Boy, I just said "God" four times and "Yahweh" once, that whole cemetery is probably rockin' right now. Anyway, I never had a gay thought in my life, and I'd seen Allen in gym shorts a hundred times, but that day in the locker room when he stood before me naked for the first time, something took place. In that single moment I found . . . not my sexuality . . . not . . . I don't honestly feel that anything was changed inside of me, just that I found something. I found . . . Allen. And I felt I couldn't give up . . . him. Allen. I couldn't give up the feeling that I had in that moment. And I tried to hold onto that feeling. And I did, as long as I was with Allen. And though we did . . . once . . . do . . . have . . . sex, I guess . . . it wasn't *that*, exactly. The feeling wasn't just that. Because we did . . . that . . . only once. But I had the feeling always with him. And the feeling was more than that. I swear. God's truth.

The House on Lake Desolation

Brian Christopher Williams

Scene: A hospital room, 1969

Dramatic

Dorian: a man in trouble with the wrong people, 30

Dorian's best friend has informed him that the mob wants him dead. Before he takes it on the lam, he pays a final visit to his comatose grandmother in the hospital.

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DORIAN: Grandma? (Beat, a little louder.) Grandma? (He puts the pistol on her swinging meal tray as he gently puts his hand on hers. He stares at her for a while.) I'm here, Grandma. (Beat.) How are you feeling? (Beat.) You look very pretty. (Sighs.) Did you eat anything? (He goes to a blank piece of paper posted on the wall. He shakes his head. He turns back to her. Silence.) Were you awake at all last night? That's alright, Grandma. I'll just sit here with you and hold your hand. (He does.)

You have nice hands. Delicate. Delicate little stitches by delicate little hands. Vibrant red roses on a sea of white lace. The bedspread you made me? Possessions never really meant anything to me. But that bedspread. Sentimental value, that's what Mother says. I wonder if she got that from you. (Beat.)

"Be careful what you wish for, Dorian." Remember that? A million years ago, at your house on Lake Desolation, we sat out on your porch. One of those hot nights. There was lightning in the sky but no rain. Heat lightning. Remember? I wanted to be one of the fireflies we were watching that night. "Oh, Grandma, I want my butt to light up." I thought the world could be mine if only I had a rump that glowed. "Be careful what you wish for, Dorian." And you told me about the curse of Aurora and Tithonus. Aurora was

so afraid of Tithonus dying that she asked Zeus to make Tithonus immortal. Her wish was granted, but Aurora forgot to mention that she wished for Tithonus to be immortally young. So he lived on and on and on and she was cursed to watch as nature shamelessly robbed him, first of his beauty, then of his health, and finally of his mind. Cursed. Curse-ed. (Beat.) I wanted excitement, Grandma. I wanted to know the people in your *Glamour* magazines. (Beat.) Mother has to take care of you, Grandma. I know she will. Don't you worry. Someone will always be here with you. I'll always be here with you; I just won't be around, you know, anyplace that you can see me. Charlie's going to disappear and I guess that's . . .

(He gets up and starts pacing.)

"Think happier thoughts, Michael." Remember? Peter Pan? Will you say goodbye to Mother for me? I don't really have time and I wanted to see you and . . .

(His attention turns distractedly towards the bathroom.)

Everything will be alright, Grandma.

(His attention jolts back to her but then seems to dissipate.)

You were always there for me. I hope you can hear me. I want you to know that I know. You were always there for me. I'm letting you down. Maybe I should have gone to computer school after all, huh? Joined the Navy? Learned a valuable trade. Done something with my life? Maybe.

(His attention again goes back to the bathroom.)

Grandma, I have to . . . um . . . I'll be right back.

(He picks up a hand-held mirror that is beside her bed and enters the bathroom. He leaves the door ajar as he speaks, and we can see him cutting lines of cocaine and snorting. He will return from the bathroom during the following.)

The curse of Tithonus. It always amazes me how you know these things. For Christ's sake, whoever heard of Tithonus? Or Lady Astor's horse? Did you make that one up? "All dressed up like Lady Astor's horse." You always used to say that. Well, I'm sure you still say that . . . when you're not . . . in a coma. (Laughs.) "Life doesn't slow down and it doesn't back up." You always used to say that, too. Jesus, Grandma, when it comes right down to it,

you never really shut up. This is probably the first good rest your jaw has had in years.
(He takes a long look at her.)

So delicate.

(He goes to her and brushes her hair.)

I'll tell you a secret, Grandma. Don't tell anyone now. "Loose lips sink ships." I'm pretty confident you didn't make that one up. I'm going back to Lake Desolation. You know, my hands look like yours. How come I never noticed that? Your hands used to scare me. The veins are so pronounced. They'd be so easy to cut. It used to terrorize me to watch you peel vegetables. One slip of the knife, and . . . I don't want to go away. I want to stay with you.

(He walks to the window in order to scope outside. He turns back to her.)

Have you found the answer, Grandma? I'm too young to die. I know that. It has to be true. I don't even know what the question is yet. Have you found the answer?

(He crawls into the bed with her and holds her.)

I can only stay just a minute. I have to go. I have to go away. I have to find the source. Have you seen it? When you're done peeling away, is there anything at the core? Oh, Grandma, help me.

(The lights fade to Blackout.)

Hysterical Blindness and Other Southern Tragedies That Have Plagued My Life Thus Far

Leslie Jordan

Scene: Here and now
Scrio-Comic

Leslie: a Southerner on his way to Hollywood, 29

Years and sit-coms later, Leslie suddenly finds himself longing to return to the South. His experience as a television star has provided him with the insight that has finally made it possible for him to embrace his homeland along with all of its quirky characters and imperfections.

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STORYTELLER: I'll let you in on a little secret. I was kind'a looking forward to moving back to the South. Who'd a thought! I worked so hard to put all that behind me, but does one ever really forget from whence one came? I miss soft, summer nights. Fireflies in the air. Sitting in the porch swing listening to the latest church gossip . . .

[CHOIR MEMBERS: Bless us! Don't press us!

Take care how you address us!

You'll see though, that we know

How to make you feel at home.

Ever-present, ever-pleasant . . . we shall never wane.

We are Southern, we are special.

Try to shame us, try to tame us . . . it will be in vain,

See, it's Just The Way We're Bred.

Endearing, never fearing,

And forever persevering.

We're gracious, tenacious,

on me again she'd go to the police. They didn't touch me.
They sent me to the Sisters of Mercy in Pawtucket.

DISTANT FIRES by Kevin Heelan

Foos, an African-American construction worker, 30s
The tenth floor of a construction site, Maryland
Dramatic

*When Foos is accused of being involved in the race riots that are
plaguing the community, he tells a bitter tale of a walk he took
on a hot summer night.*

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FOOS: I didn't do nothin' man. 'Cept walk outta my house and up the street. Like I always do. I pick up some ice cream like I do when the heat in my house gets so mean I wanna swing at it. Takin' that walk and stickin' that cool ice cream in my throat is the top part a my night. 'Tween passin' out and suckin' on 'at cream ain't nothin' but Cambridge. I'm walkin' back and I hear a police say "There he is . . . there the muthfucker," and it's lights in my face so fas' my heart can't keep up wid me and 'm the coon stuck in the road, the truck comin' ninety miles an hour and then shit—Jesus God—my side, my ribs. I'm fuckin' dead and the dirt and ants and sand and a ridged heel on the back a my burnin' neck. A police standin' over me . . . "That's him. That him? No. Yes. . . . me . . . me . . . no . . . no . . . I'm Foos, man. I ain't Harris. I ain't Harris. I'm Foos. Please! And then up into the lights. No face on the cocksucker . . . just "Zat him? Izat him?" Then my nigger picture on a card from my wallet and the down voices. No face, just sad voice sayin', "No. Fuck. That ain't him. Just a nigger eatin' ice cream." So my walk comes back to me and I say, from some place I don't know 'cause I'm so jacked, I say, "Gimme back my fuckin' ice cream." To backs I say that. . . . One second a pure balls and their fuckin' backs is all that hear. And I pick up my ice cream 'cause goddamn if it ain't the one thing I look forward to in my Cambridge life . . . and I eat the crunchin' sand and the dirt with oil . . . and I eat maybe even a sliver a glass and I hear my brain talkin' . . . "Fuck 'em up, Foos. Skin 'em up, Foos." But while I listen to my brain, somewhere else

THE SUBSTANCE OF FIRE

MARTIN: They're all just words. And this is life, and besides, I hear the book chains are now selling pre-emptive strike video games, so why bother anyway? I'm out.

[ISAAC: But really, there are limits, sweetheart.]

MARTIN: Yes. That's exactly right. There are limits. I believe I know that. Hey, I spent most of my sixteenth year getting chemotherapy, remember? And it's not that long ago, I can still feel it. I cannot waste my life. I feel you people dragging me into this thing. You want this confrontation, Dad. You want nothing more than your children gathered around you, fighting. Well forget it. You don't know what I feel in my back, in my bones. I wake up some days and I'm crying. I think I'm still at Sloan-Kettering, lying there hairless and white and filling up with glucose from a drip. Hey! I can't get that tide back. I feel all the needles, some days, my lymph nodes, and I'm sweating. And part of my life is spent in fear, waiting. I know none of us has forever, know that very well, and I care very much how I spend my time. And involved in an internecine war over a publishing house, is, by my reckoning, Father, a dead waste. And if I choose to live with plants as an assistant lecturer at an over-rated seven-sisters school, that is my goddamn choice.

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THE SUBSTANCE OF FIRE

by Jon Robin Baitz

New York City - 1987 - Isaac Geldhart (60's)

Isaac Geldhart is blamed by his son Aaron for the declining fortunes of the family publishing house. Aaron threatens to remove Isaac from the presidency with the support of his siblings, Martin and Sarah. However, when Sarah says she will support Isaac, he then has the controlling shares and he speaks to Aaron.

ISAAC: I spent a couple of days, a little boy, wandering around after the liberation. I saw a particular kind of man—a wrath-like figure—who could only have been in the camps. But with a brown pinstripe suit, a fleur-de-lis on his tie and manicured nails, trying to pick up where he left off, as if you could. I never say anything about this. Why talk? Why bother? I wasn't in the camps. I was in a basement. You know? They're busy throwing the Farbers and the Hirsches into the ovens, and I'm happily eating smoked eels in the basement, with my Stendahl and Dumas. What did I know? I was protected, sheltered by my cousins. And then I got out of the basement and into the wretched world. I came to this country. You re-invent yourself. Make it as a bon-vivant in Manhattan. Meet this woman—this extraordinary woman. Marry. Have these kids. Go to so many cocktail parties, host so many more...and they...haunt. (Beat.) I have kept my eyes closed to the world outside the basement for so long. The wrecked world all around us. But I can no longer close my eyes. (HE turns to AARON.) My son. You are fired. I will give you a week to clear your desk, and I will give you letters of recommendation. But I will not speak to you, I will not communicate with you, I will not...(Pause)...give at all. Kiddo. To the victor go the spoils.

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BREAKING UP

by Michael Cristofer

Here and Now - He (20-30)

A modern courtship—complete with all of the prerequisite trials and tribulations—culminates in the following off-handed marriage proposal.

HE: It's not going to work with her. I can see it. I mean it's working. It's working. But it's not going to work. You know?

[SHE: Jesus.]

HE: I'm going backwards.

[SHE: You want to get married to me.]

HE: I'm working at it. I'm trying. I've been trying. Honest to God. And I'm doing okay. I'm doing better than I've ever done. Better than with you. I'm patient, I'm not pushing, I'm not crazy. I'm seeing things the way they are—she is what she is, she's not who I *think* she is, she's not who I *want* her to be. We don't fight, we don't argue, we tell the truth...I think we tell the truth...We *sound* like we're telling the truth. We "share."

You know, "share." All of it. Very understanding. Like that. It's dull. Real dull.

But I'm not complaining. I'm not. If this is the way it has to be then this is what it has to be. I understand all that. I could never make anything work with the ups and downs anyway. So why not try dull? Maybe dull is the answer. Except that the truth is, you see, it's going in the same direction. It's just, when it's this dull, it's a little hard to see that it's going in *any* direction, but all this understanding, this is not going to last. A couple of words here, a couple of words there, a couple of looks, a couple of wrong moves and all of a sudden nobody understands anything anymore and you spend all your time trying to explain what you meant and what you

BREAKING UP

thought she meant and what you thought she thought you meant... It has to happen. The honeymoon is over. And then you break up and you go and you find somebody else and you start all over again.

I can't do it. I did it with you. I can't do it again with somebody else. It could take years. All that time to get someplace with her that I'm already at with you. And then it hit me.

We can't quit. You and me. We have something now. We can't throw it away. It's a failure, okay, but it's ours. And it's not the end. That's too easy. It's the place to start from. It's two, two and a half years of our lives. It's an investment. All that pain to get to zero; well, now we're here, we've got nothing, nothing works, we're finished, total, complete, everything we had is gone, not a hope, not a prayer, not a chance...This is it. *(Pause)* I think we should get married.

The Psychic Life of Savages

Amy Freed

DR. ROBERT STONER: American Poet Laureate, 60s

SCENE: Here and now

After a long drunken weekend, the cantankerous Dr. Stoner turns on his young protégé and debunks his intellectual pretensions in a passionate outburst.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

STONER: Understand the language of the birds? I've woken up to hear them plotting on my life! Miracles! You fool! You don't know the utter horror of miracles! I take 3,000 milligrams of lithium a day to keep me from walking on water, and sometimes I do it anyway!

[TED: I'm sorry—I didn't mean...]

STONER: You think all creation's some big Hindu illusion? You wing-growing bastard. Turn yourself into a goddamn bald eagle. And I hope some teenager pops you with his daddy's shotgun.

[ANNIE: Testy! Testy!]

STONER: Think you're the first man to dream of wings? You've never experienced the horrible freedom of the winged mad. You want a miracle? Try this one! One and one make two! But you won't stop till they make three! Or cat!

[TED: Bob—Father, you're excited. I think you misunderstand what the Zen masters are saying.]

STONER: I'm saying have the guts to call a spade a spade, recognize the cold hard law of gravity for what it is, which is the grace of God—recognize how many angels are at work each day insuring that Newton's apple continues to fall down; down, down, not up into the ozone with all your Zuni medicine men flapping around as bats and hoot-owls along with me when I forget to take my pills! Have the guts to give glory to the truth!

(Quietly)

If only that, we should have the guts to give glory to what truths we can.

The Psychic Life of Savages

Amy Freed

TED MAGUS: a young English poet, 30s

SCENE: Here and now

Here, the pretentious poet/professor regales his students with his own special insight into the process of creating poetry.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

TED: Yes. The ending was a nightmare. I wrestled with it for weeks, like Jacob wrestling the Angel. Finally, I dreamed it. I saw the slug dying, covered with salt by a vicious housewife. As clear as day, I dreamed him, a big quivering mass of slop and mucus writhing in the rotted mulch...and I found the final lines..."And bubbling there, I'm left alone, a bitter pool of fragrance, shrinking in the sun."

[ALL THE GIRLS: Wow. Oh, that's incredible. I cried when I—]

TED: So. What have we learned? Don't be polite. Don't be small. Poetry is not all rose gardens and my cat with last year's dead leaves, you know. We're talking about the dark side. The unmentionable terrors. The unspeakable joys: What are yours? Show me. I know my fears are...shedding tears in public, showing affection for other men...in a physical way, you know, hugging, wrestling, that sort of thing, and—Ha! Dancing!—I mean why—dancing? It terrifies me. My own twisted ideas of manhood, I suppose, as passed down from one generation of small, cramped men to another, when—my God! The blood of our ancestors thrummed with the dance. A good jig, a leap under the moonlight—the hunt, the rites of mating or of death—oh come! Let's...tango! Who wants to jump in first?

THE PINK STUDIO

getting back at me for being late. I deserve it. When it got to be past midnight, I rang the police. When I showed them the note they laughed and said if they saw her, they'd send her home early. I tried to go to bed but of course I couldn't sleep. Around about dawn, I look out the painting of Nicole. The more I looked at it, the more I wanted to kick it in. Instead, I loaded up my palette and added what I knew had to be there—the wretched tambourine. It had a red stripe around the rim and I thought, "what the hell," and let the color bleed onto the floor. I made it red, everything red. I was all set to take it back and show it to the whore: "Is this passionate enough for you?! LOOK AT THIS! IS THIS PASSIONATE ENOUGH FOR YOU?!"
(A bell rings.)

And then the bell rang. It was the concierge. Claudine was in the lobby.

RACING DEMON

by David Hare

London - Present - Streaky (40-50)

The Rev. Donald "Streaky" Bacon has watched while his church is divided into two camps by the older vicar and an idealistic young priest. After several cocktails, Streaky shares some of his thoughts with God.

STREAKY: Drunk, Lord, drunk.

And blissfully happy. Can't help it. Love this job. Love my work. Look at other people in total bewilderment. I got to drink at the Savoy. It was wonderful. It's all wonderful. Why can't people enjoy what they have?

Is it just a matter of temperament? I mean, I'm a happy priest. Always have been. Ever since I got my first job as curate as St Anselm's, Cheam, because they needed a light tenor for the parochial Gilbert and Sullivan society. Matins, a sung Eucharist, two Evensongs and *Iolanthe* five nights a week.

It was bliss. I loved it. I tried to start it here. But there's something deep in the Jamaican character that can't find its way through *The Pirates of Penzance*. It's still bliss, though. They are blissful people. Once a year we take the coach to the sea. On the way down we have the rum and the curried goat. Lord, there is no end to your goodness. Then we have rum and curried goat on the way back.

Lord, I have no theology. Can't do it. By my bed, there's a pile of paperbacks called *The Meaning of Meaning*, and *How to Ask Why*. They've been there for years. The whole thing's so clear. He's there. In people's happiness. Tonight, in the taste of that drink. Or the love of my friends. The whole thing's so simple. Infinitely loving.

Why do people find it so hard?

A RENDEZVOUS WITH GOD

by Miriam Hoffman
Here and Now - Itsik Manger (50+)

At the end of his life, the poet remembers the moment of his birth.

ITSIK MANGER:

One pair of shoes, one shirt to my name. What more do I need?
I can take off my shoes—I shall take off my shoes
I shall take off my shirt. What else do you want?
Is that how you want me to come back to you?
I'll come back to you as I am—A loser
A loser—A Loser—A Boozer—a chooser
Oh God, I'll never get it right.

I have a rendezvous with God, I shouldn't keep Him waiting.
He comes to me in my dreams and says:
"Enough Itsik, my vagabond poet. It's time you stopped dragging
your restless soul around the world."

So I say to Him:

"Deal God! How right you are! How right you are!
But there's so much I haven't done. There's one more song to be
written, and I haven't truly seen Jerusalem. And above all—
There's a brand new bottle of wine that I haven't finished yet—So
you see God

You'll have to wait awhile."

So He says to me:

"You can finish your song up here, and if you want to see
Jerusalem—From my side, you'll
have a heavenly view. And about that bottle of wine...
Bring it along and we'll both make a L'khayim."

He looks at me and smiles, the One Above.

He talks to me softly and lovingly:

"Come Itsik! Come! I'm waiting for you with open arms.

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A RENDEZVOUS WITH GOD

All of paradise can be yours forever"

Not so fast Gottenyu! Not so fast!
Before I submit to your divine embrace, I want you to know what
it was like to be a

Yiddish poet on this side of Paradise.

You wouldn't believe it

In the first place—Don't forget, Father in Heaven

That it wasn't my idea to be born.

It was my mother all along

Praying and pleading and insisting

That I must be born

I didn't come gently into this world, oh no...

I fought and I struggled and I caused her great pain.

She wept and she shrieked, and cursed my poor father:

"Oy...Murderer! Robber! It's all your fault! Do something!"

My father, pale and frightened, stood in the corner and said:

"Eh...eh...What can I do?"

Shoshe-Dvoshe, the midwife, tried every trick in the trade to
entice me into making an appearance:

"Nu! So come on out Itsik!

I'll buy you a gold watch, a football, anything you 'mamzer'!

Shoshe-Dvoshe realized that I wasn't taking this birth very

seriously, so she turned to

my mother and said:

"Who does he think he is? Call me when he's ready."

And I laughed in her face and refused to be born

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A RENDEZVOUS WITH GOD

It was friday night
My father gave up and went to the synagogue
My mother was left alone exhausted
The sight of her moved me deeply
After all I thought, a mother is a mother
But still, I refused to be born

The Sabbath candles flickered in every Jewish home, but our
house stood dark and dreary
When all at once my mother stood up

"No! The Sabbath cannot be forsaken."

She lit the Sabbath candles, her hands over the flames
She covered her face and she whispered a prayer
This gentle vision touched my heart
Then and there I decided to be born

I stole my way out and hid behind her
I was born so quietly that my mother didn't even hear me
And I waited for her to stop praying
Each second seemed like a whole year
My heart was pounding like a frightened bird
Finally I could no longer contain myself
And I shouted out:
"Gut Shabbes mameh!"

Her eyes lit up, her face all aglow
She took me into her arms, she cuddled and caressed me and
kissed every little bone in
my body
She called me:
"Mayn malekhl! My Angel!

A RENDEZVOUS WITH GOD

Mayn oytser! My treasure!
Mayn likhtiker kadish!"

And I looked into her loving eyes, into her lovely face
And I knew that her love would bind me forever

SALAAM, HUEY NEWTON, SALAAM
by Ed Bullins

Street corner in W. Oakland - Present - Marvin (40-50)

Here, an acquaintance of Dr. Huey Newton describes his descent into the horrific world of crack cocaine.

^{TYPED}
^W^{RE}
MARVIN: In 1984 I became addicted to crack cocaine.... Many people, especially members of my family, found my addiction difficult to understand. "You're so strong," they would say. "How could you become a weak, pitiful dope fiend?" But I did.... My addiction came in my fortieth year, for many people, a time of disillusionment with life, and certainly it was for me. I was burnt out.... Tired of revolution, tired of family life, sex and women, tired of working in the educational system, tired of the black middle class and the grass roots, tired of religious sectarianism, Christian and Muslim alike, tired....

Maybe this is what happens when one lives too fast. You not only get burned out, but you run out of ideas.... What mountain shall I conquer next?.... And a voice came to me and said: "You shall become Sisyphus. You shall roll a rock up a mountain and it shall fall to earth, and you shall begin again each day for eternity, since you can't figure out anything else to do, you big dummy!"

^{STARTS}
^{MOVES}
So I was a sitting duck for an addiction, that is, a new addiction, especially when I became an entrepreneur and had large sums of cash on a daily basis. Yeah, I sold incense and perfume oils and lots of stuff on the street at Market and Powell in San Francisco. I made a lot of quick, easy money.... And money added to my problems because I hated making money. I actually felt guilty about it and had to do something with all that money I had. So my friends, including my so-called Muslim brothers, introduced me to crack.... I didn't like sniffing cocaine. For one reason, my mind is naturally speedy, so I did not want anything to speed it up more. I wanted to slow down, relax. My thing was weed. I admit, I abused weed because I smoked it from morning 'til night for over twenty years.... My thing was weed, wine and women. I always said I

SALAAM, HUEY NEWTON, SALAAM

wanted to die from an overdose of weed, wine and women, but along came crack and soon I had no desire for wine, weed or women. With all my knowledge, I had forgotten the simple rules of life: for every blues, there is a happy song—sing a happy song—it takes the same energy as the blues.... Even before my addiction to crack, why couldn't I think of all the good in my life? Why couldn't I sing songs of praise to Allah, my God, for the beautiful parents He had blessed me with, for my beautiful brothers and sisters, for the beautiful, intelligent women I had had, for the most beautiful children any man could imagine? Why? Why? Why?.... Yes, I know now.... because I thought I was self-sufficient.

^{TYPED}
^{FOR}
I had sat and watched my friends smoking crack, but at first it didn't interest me. I did not like the way they behaved.... I'd come into the room and they wouldn't even look up and acknowledge my presence. They were all staring at whoever had the pipe.... But finally, the devil caught me, only because I forgot Allah.

(HE chants.)

^{CHANT}
I lost my wife behind the pipe
I lost my children
behind the pipe
I lost my money
behind the pipe
I lost my mind
behind the pipe
I lost my life
behind the pipe....

^{END}
^{SMILING}
Yes, crack sent me to the mental hospital four times.... Many times I put crack on my pipe and took that big 747 hit, and I could feel death coming, could feel my body surrounded by the strangest sensation. I would run to the window for air, or run outside for air. But after the moment of death had passed, I returned to my room

SALAAM, HUEY NEWTON, SALAAM

and continued smoking. Once I accidentally cut my wrist, cut an artery. I dropped one of my pipes and grabbed at the broken pieces, cutting me critically, but I was unaware. I thought the bleeding would stop, but it didn't. I found my backup pipe and fired up....A friend tried to get me to go to the hospital, but I thought the blood would stop dripping from my wrist. It didn't. My new pipe became covered with blood. My dope had turned the color of blood. My clothes, the rug, the bed, the curtain, were all covered with blood. But I didn't stop. I kept on smoking....Finally, my friend got the hotel manager and he came in with a baseball bat and forced me out of the room....The paramedics came and took me to the hospital.... Ha ha ha....after the emergency room crew stitched my wound, I got on the bus and returned to my room to finish smoking....Hell, I still had sixty bucks....fuck it!

SOUTHERN CROSS

by Jon Klein

Rural Southern United States - 1850 - Captain (30-60)

Here, a seasoned navigator of the Mississippi spins an unbelievable yarn about alligators.

CAPTAIN: Welcome aboard. (*The Captain stops and scans the audience, as if someone asked him a question.*) What's that? Somebody got a question for the Captain?...Alligators? What you wanna know 'bout them for?...Oh I see. So you heard you might see a few gators on this trip, did ya. (*Pause. He scratches his head.*) Well now. I guess I've seen my share o' gators in my time. Don't think I better tell you bout 'em, though. Cause you'd think I was lyn' to you, and that's somethin' I never do. I kin cheat at cards, drink whiskey or chew terbacker, but I jest can't bring myself to tell a lie. I guess it's a point of pride with certain men. (*Pause.*) You know, one time I counted eleven hundred gators to the mile from Vicksburg clear down to Orleans. And one time I seen three thousand four hundred and fifty-nine of them sittin' on one sandbar. I know it sounds like a lot, but I had a government surveyor aboard, and he checked 'em off as I counted. (*Pause.*) Y'ep. This used to be a reg'lar paradise for alligators. They were so thick that the sternwheel killed an average of forty-nine to the mile. True as the Gospel. Almost felt sorry for the cussed beasts, I killed so many. I sailed with one captain, name o' Captain Tom, always carried a thousand bottles o' liniment just to throw to the wounded ones. And as the gators got to know his boat, they'd swim and rub their tails against the boat, and purr like cats. One day he grounded on a sandbar, and the gators gathered round, got under the stern, and humped her clean over the bar by a grand push. Solemn truth. And when Captain Tom was dead, and the news got along the river, every gator in the river daubed his left ear with black mud as a badge of mournin', and several of 'em pined away and died in the sorrow. Now I know that sounds like a big story, but I never told a lie yet, and never will. I wouldn't lie for all the money you could

Self-Defense

Michael P. Scasserra

AGING HIPPIE: 40-60

SCENE: Here and now

Here, a charter member of the Age of Aquarius takes a moment to lambaste life in the 80's and 90's.

○ ○ ○ ○

(An aging hippie-type wearing a bandanna around his head is poking through an ashtray looking for cigarette butts.)

Everyone today's goin' around being all fuckin' selfish and shit worrying about this self-esteem crap throwin' out all this fuckin' attitude and you know what? People should just shut the fuck up. Some people don't deserve self-esteem. Most people don't deserve self-esteem.

People suck.

Like all you people you people with jobs and houses and cars and all that baggage pretending to be into the environment into saving the planet into patching up the ozone.

So what do you do to take care of all this stuff?

You recycle your Diet Pepsi cans and your paper bags, like as if this isn't a law already.

Then you feel like you done your part to save the Earth...

...which is doomed anyway, as I see it.

See, I already did my part. I tried.

I have been recycling bottles since the late seventies.

Of course, that was my career.

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I used to do it for the deposit money to eat and stuff while I was on the road, but back then, this was like social responsibility, too, the way I see it.

See, I was ahead of my time.

Always have been.

Still am.

I hate my fellow Americans.

You all suck.

See, I choose to stand outside your bullshit.

'Cause I'm secure enough on the inside.

I don't need all of your bourgeois luxuries

like a pair of designer jeans,

a cellular phone,

a mailing address.

The eighties sucked, totally.

I sat 'em out.

One long, Republican-induced pain in my ass.

I still say I'd rather have a lava lamp over track lighting.

Vietnam over Bosnia.

I'd still take Bob Dylan...Dylan!

"How does it feel? To be on your own."

Over Madonna.

Madonna?

See...what the fuck is that all about?

What does that bitch stand for?

Blonde capitalist mother-fucker.

She's a fuckin' yuppie in sheep's clothing.

She's a yuppie in no clothing.

Like she was the first bitch in the world to take off her clothes?

Man, we took off our clothes.

And we did it for free.

It's like my brain goes into complete lapse.

People talk about the sixties coming back

and everything we stood for and ideals and freedom

and what do we get instead?

Tie-dye.

I didn't march on Washington
and burn my draft card

and live for four-and-a-half fuckin' years in a commune...
so we could have tie-dye.

I did it for the drugs and the sex and the ideals we shared.

Like we fuckin' need tie-dye again?

I didn't get that shit the first time around,

now I go to the mall, I'm hanging out, and I see all these bleach blonde
bitches wearing tie-dye shirts with Gucci shoes?

What the hell is going on here?

Like the Krishnas say...

I forgot what they say.

I was a Krishna, though.

this was Berkeley...circa...I don't know.

Late sixties, early seventies.

It's one big blur.

But I joined, and at first I didn't see how I fit in

but I ended up learning a lot about myself...

but they made me plow fields, too.

I remember that.

And they made me get up at five in the morning

like as if real human beings get up at five in the morning.

Yeah...yeah...I got it now.

The Krishnas said that if you join them

your life would be simplified

and you would get closer to your spiritual self, you know.

I might have, too,

but between plowing those damn fields and gettin' up at five in the morn-
ing, I was entirely too wasted to get in touch with my soul.

But that doesn't matter.

I didn't really need their shit

because I always had self-respect

for myself.

Hey, I got a story for you.

Get this.

I once shook Dylan's hand.

Dylan's hand. I shook.

And he almost fell off the fuckin' stage, man

and he, like, grabbed on to me

for support.

So I like gave him balance, you know.

and with his playing thumb

he gouged a piece of skin right off of my knuckle.

And it bled and got infected

and it got all like purple and shit

and oozy...

man...

it was the greatest fuckin' thing.

Dylan infected me.

I would never let fuckin' Madonna infect me, man.

And something tells me that bitch could do it from thirty paces,

if you know what I'm saying.

See, so, the way I see it,

if I hadn't of been there for Dylan,

he might of fallen off the stage

been impaled on a mike stand or some shit

he'd be dead

and then he wouldn't have been around for Bangladesh,

No Nukes,

Farm Aid.

See, so, I did my part.

But we're all doomed anyway.

"How does it feel?"

"To be on your own?"

(He makes an obscene gesture toward the audience.)

Fuck you.

Feels good.

SOUTHERN CROSS

by Jon Klein

Rural South - 1850 - Captain (30-60)

Here, the Captain tells a tall tale about the biggest steamboat he ever saw.

CAPTAIN: All aboard that's goin' aboard. *(He turns to the audience.)* What's that? Why yes, it is a pretty good sized steamer, thank you. Ain't the biggest I ever seen, though. That honor would have to belong to the Jim Johnson. How big was it? Oh now, I don't think I should be tellin' you about the Jim Johnson. Cause you might take me for a liar, and most folks round here will vouch that I'm not one to profess falsehoods and untruths. No sir. Not me. *(Pause.)* Now I won't say exactly how big she was, but when the Jim Johnson passed by, the people used to stand on the riverbank and watch her from Easter Sunday to high noon on the Fourth of July. Yep, they had to put hinges on her every half mile or so, jest so she could make the turns in the river. The truth, as I live and breathe. And you talk about your big crews. Once the clerk tried to cut down expenses by not dotting the i's or crossing the t's on the pay checks. Saved himself a barrel of ink. Course there weren't any calendars on the Jim Johnson, since you could never pin down a single day we would arrive at any one place. The only way we knew when payday came around was to paint one paddle on the sternwheel white. It came up once a month. *(Pause.)* They had elevators up to the forty-second deck, and on the thirty-ninth deck they had the grand double-rush ballroom. Every pendant of glass in the chandeliers of that room was tipped with a fourteen-carat diamond. All you had to do was light one candle in that ballroom and all those diamonds blazed up like a bonfire. And they say that out on the hurricane deck it was wonderful, too. Young fellows walkin' round with their sweethearts under the magnolias. 'Course those days are gone forever now. *(Pause.)* Oh, I can see that look on your face. Well, if everything I've told you ain't the straight and narrow truth, may my tongue shrivel up and fall out o' my head.

SOUTHERN CROSS

(He waits a moment, testing fate.) All aboard! Gotta push off now. I'll catch up with you later. *(He starts off then turns back to the audience.)* By the way, the Jim Johnson had a one-mile race track round one o' the smokestacks. And a baseball park on top o' the pilot house.

**THE SUMMER THEY STOPPED MAKING LUDES
or How Taking Peyote Turned Me Into A Coyote**

by Steven Tanenbaum
Poolside, suburbia - 1970's - Casey (17-20)

Here, Casey—who is flunking out of college—shares a joint and some sociological observations with his friend, Art.

CASEY: You should stop reading those Castaneda books. They're warping your mind.

[ART: I become a coyote so I can travel through the crack that separates the two worlds.]

CASEY: Art, didn't anybody leave you a wake-up call. This is the seventies not the sixties. And why you'd want to get stuck in that decade, I'll never know. I mean when I was a kid, I couldn't wait to grow up so I could go down to the malt shop, drop a dime in the juke box and slow dance to the Shirelles with Betty and Veronica. But the sixties blew all that shit off the map. Okay, so I adjusted my sights. You know, free love and fighting the good fight looks pretty good, too. Like every night there was some revolutionary on the Walter Cronkite Show saying fuck you to the system. Here's Malcolm X saying fuck you to whitey; and over there, Abbie Hoffman's saying fuck you to Mayor Daley; and look it that, Muhammed Ali is saying fuck you to the draft board; and back on campus all the students are saying fuck you to the war, the pentagon and the president; and everybody, everywhere is saying fuck you to the monolithic, mayonnaise mentality. By now I'm pretty revved up to join the chorus; and so what happens when my time comes—Zap, the sixties disappear. Sorry, no more love-ins but you can't go back to Donna Reed, either, because she's long gone. Which pretty much leaves me with one option...Fuck you Abbie Hoffman; fuck you Richard Nixon; fuck you Martin Luther King; and fuck you Donovan.

TALKING THINGS OVER WITH CHEKHOV

by John Ford Noonan
Riverside Park, NYC - Present - Jeremy (40's)

When Jeremy bumps into Marlene, his ex, in the park, he gives her a copy of his new play to read. When next they meet to discuss his work, Jeremy reveals his fantasy relation-ship with Anton Chekhov and the stabilizing effect it has on his life.

JEREMY: Thank God for Chekhov. He's the only one who can calm me down. After I left you yesterday, I stopped for one drink each at all these different bars. Only works me up more. Get home at 5, flip on *Six Million Dollar Man*. At 6 I switch to 11 for *The Jeffersons* and *Barney Miller*. At 7 back to 5 for *Mash*. I'm exploding. I throw on my sweats. Seventeen times around the block. Up my five flights three and four steps at a time. I swing open my door. Flop to the floor for a set of push-ups. I notice his foot. Stop. Look up. He's sitting in my favorite rocker. Beautiful white linen suit. Felt hat. Walking cane. In his hand a bottle of something Russian. "Like some kvass?" "What's kvass?" He smiles. Pours me half a glass. He toasts, "To you!" "Why me?" "Tomorrow you'll be hearing what people think of your first play." He continues. This visit he's speaking Russian but somehow I hear it in English. "Plays make your life no longer your own. With stories you write it, mail it, good-by. But plays! Rehearsals. Production meetings. Picking the actors." Suddenly he seems about to go on and on. More kvass. He laughs and says, "I don't mind my characters when they go on and on, but I hate to do it myself. How about more kvass?" Another half glass. Now I'm tipsy too. "Close Friend," he mumbles, "you and I are alike in a very big way. We're afraid to let go. We're both way too serious." I smile. He smiles. Now I know why he keeps coming back. He almost drops the bottle and chuckles, "From a tipsy Russian take some silly advice: "ANY NUMBER OF PEOPLE CAN BE LUCKY ENOUGH TO WRITE ONE GOOD PLAY, BUT ONLY A FEW OF US ARE SMART ENOUGH TO DRESS LIKE WE'RE CAPABLE OF WRITING

got their fix through and they toss you out like some piece of shit in the toilet.

(He pauses.)

That's when you feel your basic thing, your basic condition, like all the other fuckin' poets and storytellers...loneliness. It's loneliness.

(Street begins shaking slightly, a tremor from the cocaine. He lowers his voice and his gaze. It is touching, what he has just said, and he seems to know it. A small smile forms on his lips.)

If you're lucky though...if you're fuckin' good enough...if your fuckin' muse is smilin' at you, you'll be off on another one, another story. You'll get another fix for them and they have t'a come back. 'Cause you got the power. You may just be the needle, but they depend on ya. They crave ya in their skin. So they come...and for another little time you'll be in real connection with your people and your maker...you will be redeemed.

Talk/Show

Michael P. Scasserra

MAN: watching television:

SCENE: Here and now

Channel surfing becomes a metaphor for life in the following exaltation of the power of using the remote control.

○ ○ ○ ○

CHANNEL SURFER: *(A man with a remote control.)*

I'm totally into self-programming

making choices

that

in essence

I mean I realize that when I'm clicking

it's like

the instrument of ease

I don't know if it was designed that way

but it seems to dovetail very nicely

with just getting people to just sit around

and be on their own for the next five hours

and that same instrument of ease

which has facilitated

you know

coach-potatoing

at the same time

it creates a kind of

unaware rebellion from programming

I'm a big zapper

I zap like ten

just zillions of times at any given time

but see I refuse to be like the people who

are being herded through television

through these corridors

to

to
to
and it's not a Machiavellian kind of thing
it's more like
you know
a catch-22
part of that whole unconscious thing
where nobody's really taking responsibility
programmers or viewers
everybody's just surfing
on their own
on the flow of the televised text
and what's become very symbolic to me is
people getting very cued-out and fragmented
collectively unconscious
in a weird sort of way
I have the television on all the time
I think I get a lot out of that
but it can be dangerous
because you're sort of staking out this
blind canyon of confusion
again, not in a Machiavellian sense
but by having so much opportunity to
click off
to escape the emotional momentum
that can be a good thing
a very good thing
or bad
if you break away from the whole of
the thing
you might be doing yourself a disservice
but you might, um
see moments out of the whole
which are more clear and enlightening
like if you're watching
"The Amy Fisher Story"
um

I think it might have been
even more interesting to have
the first "Amy Fisher Story" ran on ABC
then a week later CBS and NBC ran theirs
simultaneously
and I think it would have been
a lot of fun
although I did not watch
"The Amy Fisher Story"
in a strict sense
I did spend some time switching back from
channel 2 to channel 4
channel 2 to channel 4
and I think it would have been
a
lot
of
fun
if channel 7 had been running theirs
simultaneously
and in that sense
I have no interest in "The Amy Fisher Story"
I don't find it
very interesting to begin with
but instead of mindlessly watching
"The Amy Fisher Story"
and becoming one of the masses
see
I refuse to just eat what's put before me
I want to pick and choose
I want to find the connections
I don't want some faceless person
doing that for me
because of
the whole idea that
truth is relative
and your programming should be your own.

are too spent. Like an angel, she slowly descended to Earth
ped in swirling clouds of sheets. I said, "Hey baby, you de-
e it," and disappeared. [...] Her name? (*Incredulously*)
Her name? Who cares what her name was? (*Boastingly*) But I bet
she remembers my name 'til she dies. Rip. 'Cause I ripped her to
pieces. Aces. (*Pause*) So what did you do last night? Pull pud?

BODIES

James Saunders
*The present. A suburban living room in London. MERVYN (40s),
an English schoolmaster, "approaching the evening of his life," re-
counts an affair HE had several years before with HELEN, the wife
of his friend DAVID. MERVYN recaptures the start of the affair in
several first act monologues. The thrill of the affair is eventually
compromised when HIS wife, ANNA, discovers it.*

MERVYN: I don't know when it started. I'd always assumed she
was an attractive woman—most women are—but I'd never noticed
she was. I began to remember details about her, the way a painter
would, the shape of the fingernails, the colour of the eyes, the way
she held her head, and the details had a kind of value, as they would
to a painter. I'm not observant, I've always dreaded witnessing a
crime, seeing the robbers leave the bank, being asked by the police:
what exactly happened, what time was it, what did the man look
like, was he wearing a hat, was he clean-shaven, is this him? So it
was unusual, how she came into focus; I could have painted her
from memory—if I could paint. Then I found I enjoyed talking to
her, just me with just her, without the usual worry: am I boring
you, do you really want to be talking to me? She listened, listened
very intently, watching my mouth, letting me talk, hanging on my
lips you might say, it was very pleasing. I found I was flirting with
her; she was an old friend, the others were always there, it was an
unspoken joke between us, no harm in it... One night we were

coming back from the theatre, the four of us, in my car. Anne was
in the back with David, Helen in front with me. I could hear them
talking behind me, about the play, about theatre. Helen was quiet. I
had a feeling I'd had before, of something passing between us;
something was being said. She lit me a cigarette, put it in my
mouth, her fingers touched my lip for a moment. The silence went
on, while the others chattered in the back. I flashed a look at her
face; she was watching my hand on the wheel, very intently. That's
when I realized that she—desired me, and I her, and that we both
knew; that the way was open. The tension was extraordinary. I
changed gear, and left my hand there as if casually, the back of the
hand brushing her skirt.

* * *

MERVYN: Back of the hand barely touching the skirt. God, I
thought, they must feel it back there, the waves of it, like bloody D-
Day! After that it was torment. Of course it was totally impossible:
her best friend, the wife of my best friend; we lived practically in
each other's pockets. It was mad. I tried to rationalize it away. I
said: it's obvious what's happened. She's rather fallen for me for
some reason, after all this time, perhaps they're having trouble;
she's dissatisfied, looking around for something else. But that's her
business. I don't have to follow suit. I'm flattered, that's all it is,
because she wants me at a time when I don't feel particularly want-
ed. Don't be a fool, don't behave like a child. Keep clear. Forget
it. It'll go away. I knew the cost of it, I was no beginner: the sick
excitement, the lurchings, the constant planning, the tearing in two;
a few islands of extraordinary happiness in a waste of messy dis-
comfort. I've wondered since whether I could have stood out
against it. I don't know, I suppose I could, I was a rational human
being, part of me anyway. The letting go is always a conscious de-
cision, whatever they say. What tipped the balance, as before, as
always, was first, an anger. How dare things be this way! That the

OUR OWN KIND

by Roy MacGregor

England - Present - Steve (20)

Following an argument with his girlfriend, Steve gets very drunk and allows his friends to talk him into stabbing a man to death. Here, Steve panics when he realizes what he has done.

STEVE: (*Ranting*) Shit. Oh shit. Shit, shit...shit! Must have been mad. Insane! Nah...pissed. Pissed and pilled. Pissed and pilled, out of it. S'what it was. Shit! It's all over. Finito. 'Fore I've even got started. Finished... 'cos of a moment of madness. That's all it was, Your Honour, a moment of fuckin' madness! Insanity on legs! And now I'm binned. Binned. Oh shit oh fuckin' shit. (*He drops to his knees.*) Scared. Bloody scared. Fuckin' bowels dissolving. Don't want to be banged-up. Too young, too pissin' young. Ain't got the nick mentality. Banged-up with a load of psychos and arse-peddlers. Binned. Twenty-three hours a day, no sunlight 'cept what comes through prison bars. Too young, too fuckin' young. It's not fair! (*He makes a decision, leaps to his feet.*) End it. That's the answer. End it. Ain't no prison bird. Not me. Go mad. Mental. End it. Now. (*Daines enters. He is forty-ish. He lingers as if taking the air, but his expression is sour. Steve is unaware of his presence, takes a football scarf from his belt and loops it around his neck like a noose.*) Point of principle. Top 'em. String 'em up. Let 'em dangle. Principle—top the fuckers! I'll be a legend, a fuckin' folk hero! They'll be talking about it for the next fifty years. That old Steve... that Stevie boy... had class, had style, bottle. The man they couldn't bin. A legend! Went out like a champion! England's finest! They'll write songs about me! I'll be immortal! *His face drops.*) I'll be dead. What good's being immortal if you're fuckin' dead?

OUT THE WINDOW

by Neal Bell

A farm by the sea - Present - Jake (30's)

Following a night of revelry, Jake and Andrea find themselves magically transported to a beautiful old farm by the sea from their apartment in New York City. Jake has experienced his first orgasm in years and finds himself filled with emotion. Here, he recalls their lovemaking.

JAKE: I remember how we got here.

[ANDY: How?]

JAKE: You were sitting on me, you were bending over to brush my face with your hair, and I all of a sudden knew, if you moved again, I was going to shoot, for the very first time since I hurt myself, a lot of years in the desert and rain at last, like a gift I'd given up asking for, and you started to move and I grabbed your ass, to hold the moment before I came, know I was going to be released and feel it all about to come down, this wind before a thunderstorm, you were licking my lips, I was holding you still, and holding you still, and just then...right then...we were standing beside each other, *standing*, holding hands, in this milky light getting lighter, in Great Uncle Somebody's yard... Uncle Norbert... god, Uncle Norbert... and we started to run down the hill, that's what we'd do, back then, run down this hill to the water's edge... and the hill was so steep, you'd hit a place where you knew you couldn't stop anymore, if you tried you'd fall, so you'd just keep running, faster and faster, trying to move your legs as fast as the rest of your body was falling, you'd hear this roar in your ears, and the light on the water would blind your eyes, and all you'd want to do was run on forever.

THE COLORADO CATECHISM

by Vincent J. Cardinal

Rehab clinic in Colorado - Present - Ty (30's)

At the rehab center, Ty finds himself growing closer and closer to Donna, a woman with dark secrets. When she finally asks him to tell her about Artie, his former lover, he complies.

TY: It's just...

I keep having this nightmare...about, about those last days in New York with Artie.

[DONNA: You said you were with Julie.]

TY: Yes. Artie's ancient history. I was just a child when we met. Sixteen, sixteen years old. And all alone in the big scary city. Scary, scary and sexy.

I thought I'd live forever.

I used to go to the clubs and get tanked up, you said that. You said "tanked up." I used to dance like a fireball. I don't know where it came from but something in me would happen and I'd just blast out onto the dance floor. They'd all watch, the pretty, the ugly, the lonely, the loved, they'd just watch me burn—a heroic nuclear adolescent meltdown. I'd burn brilliant bright and then wake up in somebody's bed the next morning—burnt out—with no memory of the time between. It was a way to get by, ya know. Men, women, black, white, old, young—I'd go with anyone.

One grey afternoon I woke up at Artie's. He was just a little older than I am now. I figured I'd eat and leave, maybe get a few bucks, just like every other day, but Artie gave me my own bed, bought me paint, even made the back of the loft a studio for me. Artie showed me colors. Colors and light, texture, space, line, vision. Artie gave me vision.

Artie taught me to paint, to be an artist. He kept me in liquor, coke, pills, anything I wanted. He got galleries to show off my stuff and became my manager. He made me rich. Artie made me.

I keep dreaming a new dream here, not the old one, not about the fire. He caused it, smoking and drinking. I couldn't get him out

THE COLORADO CATECHISM

through the smoke and heat so I left him there, out cold from liquor and pills. I ran out into the street, half dressed, barefoot. I left black soot tracks in the new snow. I could see where I had been—he burned.

I used to always dream about that, or about our fights which were cruel and violent, or about sleeping in the street before Artie. But here, I dream about the horrible, heavy sound of his breath late at night before the fire, after he "got sick." I'd hear this guttural sort of scrape in his lungs and I'd be sure he was dying there, sweating and dying there at night and I wouldn't know what to do for him. I'd lie next to him hearing him die and I'd shiver and shiver and pray to God to make him wake up and be alive. It would have killed him if it hadn't been for the fire. I think the fire was good for Artie.

But in the dream here...in the nightmare I keep having here...it isn't Artie breathing, it's me. My lungs are falling apart deep inside me. See, in the nightmare, I am sweating all the life out of me—alone in a cold bed. Anyone who ever loved me, I mean really loved me, is dead. I don't want to die like Artie.

Leo. ACT I. Scene ix.

George is ecstatic after finally making an emotional connection with another woman after his wife's untimely death, but his brother, Leo, is in a deep funk because his marriage is on the verge of collapse. Here, Leo relates his feelings about the suffocating and mundane state of his conjugal situation.

Preceding speech. George: Come on, Leo. You've got a good marriage—I know.

LEO

Really? I'll invite you to sleep in our bedroom one night, you can listen. I'll tell you, George. The trouble with marriage is that it's relentless. Every morning when you wake up, it's still there. If I could just get a leave of absence every once in a while. A two-week leave of absence. I used to get them all the time in the Army, and I always came back . . . I don't know. I think it was different for you and Barbara. I'll tell you the truth, I always thought the two of you were a little crazy. But that's what made it work for you. You had a real bond of lunacy between you . . . Marilyn has no craziness. No fantasies. No uncharted territories to explore. I'm sitting there with maps for places in my mind I've never been, and she won't even pack an overnight bag. In eleven years she never once let me make love to her with the lights on. I said to her, "Marilyn, come on, trust me, I won't tell anybody." So we stop growing, stop changing. And we stagnate . . . in out comfortable little house in the country . . . Oh, well, another thirty, thirty-five years and it'll be over, right? (*He sits back.*) All right, I've told someone. I feel better . . . Now, what the hell is it you feel so wonderful about?

mutual satisfaction, and after a whirlwind romance of two weeks, and over Leo's objections, they decide to marry.

Leo's unheeded warnings that George was not ready for marriage seems prophetic when George and Jennie return from their honeymoon in a state of acrimony. George cannot overcome the deep-seated psychological impediment of accepting happiness because doing so would mean that he would have to let go of Barbara. Rather than facing the problem, George accepts a writing assignment on The Coast as a means of running. But Jennie is committed. She loves George and won't give him up without a fight. Her strength and solidarity make George realize how much he loves and needs her, and gives him the courage to put Barbara behind him and face happiness without fear.

The subplot, which greatly strengthens the message of the main story, involves an affair between the womanizing Leo and married Faye. Here, in diametric contrast to George and Jennie, is a portrait of people floundering, attempting to find happiness without real love and commitment.

THE MIDNIGHT MOONLIGHT WEDDING CHAPEL

by Eric Berlin

Walter, a man witnessing a wedding, 30s
A wedding chapel in Las Vegas
Seriocomic

When a couple whose marriage he has witnessed decides to file for divorce, Walter lectures them on the importance of making a commitment.

○ ○ ○ ○

WALTER: What I want to tell you is this: I saw on Donahue last week these five couples all of whom stay together despite the fact that the guy knocks the shit out of the woman on a daily basis. The women were there on stage, too, toothless wonders all of them. They stayed with these guys because they know deep down that the men really love them. And besides, they didn't get hit unless they did something *really* wrong. Like *breathe* wrong, or I don't know, drop a *plate* or something. And you know what? You know what? I'm beginning to think *they're* sane and that *you* people are the crazy. You've got to be crazy! Here these people are battling it out on a daily basis and you don't want to marry her because she makes things out of wire? *Deal with it!* This is such a drawback? This is enough to make you say, "No"? "There's a more perfect woman out there, just like her except she doesn't use wire as a medium. In a perfect world, my wife uses—" What? Pastels? In *this* world? In *today's* world you're shooting for perfection. No. Sorr-ree, pal, it's not going to happen. Because you'll find something wrong with the perfect match, too. Because you are not strong enough to handle things alone, that you need someone to accompany you. And what is wrong with this? *Nothing* is. I think it happens every day. But we get scared and we say, "I can be alone, I am just as happy then as now." We lie to ourselves all the time. You guys have something everybody wants, my dumb-ass friend there, everyone I

know. Me. Everybody on the goddamn planet wants what you have and you're backing off from it out of fear. And don't give me these excuses about other people because it's fear, I know. If you *think* you're happy, you probably are, don't shoot for the moon. I mean, I mean—You wanna dump this guy because of a *police scanner*. (And, my brother has a police scanner, it's the most annoying device in this galaxy, squawking like that, but *do I disown my brother?* Go out and get a dog instead? *No!*) What kind of . . . do you see what I'm . . . Stay with each other. If it wasn't going to work, you would have known in the course of the goddamn quarter-century you've already *spent* with each other. (Pause. *Wired.*) Have I made myself *clear*??

JAMES.

Sheep . Robert

ment, EMILY, rather confused raises HER hand also. FATHER DONNALLY falls to the ground and does a fairly good—or if not good, at least unabashedly peculiar—imitation of bacon, making sizzling noises and contorting HIS body to represent becoming crisp. Toward the end, HE makes sputtering noises into the air. Then HE stands up again. All present applaud with varying degrees of approval or incredulity.) I also do coffee percolating. (HE does this) Pt. Pt. Ptpptptptptpt. Bacon's better. But things like coffee and bacon are important in a marriage, because they represent things that the wife does to make her husband happy. Or fat. (Laughs) The wife cooks the bacon, and the husband brings home the bacon. This is how St. Paul saw marriage, although they probably didn't really eat port back then, the curing process was not very well worked out in Christ's time, which is why so many of them followed the Jewish dietary laws even though they were Christians. I know I'm glad to be living now when we have cured pork and plumbing and showers rather than back when Christ lived. Many priests say they wish they had lived in Christ's time so they could have met Him; that would, of course, have been very nice, but I'm glad I live now and that I have a shower.

MOTEL CHRONICLES

Sam Shepard

MOTEL CHRONICLES is a collection of short autobiographical writings by SAM SHEPARD. Both of these selections are reminiscences of childhood and require no particular background to perform.

What I saw was this: From a distance. Four of them. Moving like snakes. Dragging their legs toward the black herd. Like their legs were dead. Pulling their brown bellies across stone. I didn't even recognize them as human at first. Least of all Sioux. I thought they might be dark dogs or something. Deep holes in the prairie. Mov-

ing. I couldn't stop watching them move. I wasn't afraid. I knew the wagons were getting farther away. I knew I was being left behind. But I wasn't afraid. I watched them leap. All four of them at once. They dragged the big bull down. Ripped open the neck with their knives. Ripped open the belly. The belly fell out on the prairie. The membrane broke. All the insides rolled out, steaming in the grass. My eyes began to sting. I heard them singing. Not really a song. A kind of screaming as they tore out the tongue and ate it between them. The bull still twitching. Thin columns of dust rose up and I followed the dust with my eyes. The Tetons loomed behind. All blue. And I watched those mountains glow. And I thought about Boston. And I missed my piano. And I couldn't believe my piano was in the same world, living in the same time and I'd never see Boston again.

7/17/80

San Anselmo, Ca.

* * *

My Dad had this habit of picking at a shrapnel scar on the back of his neck every time he heard a plane go over our land. He'd be stooped over in the orchard repairing the irrigation pipes or the tractor and he'd hear a plane then slowly straighten up, peel off his straw Mexican hat, run his hand through his hair, wipe the sweat off on his thigh, hold the hat out in front of his forehead to shade his eyes, squint deep into the sky, fix the plane with one eye and begin picking slowly at the back of his neck. Just stare and pick. The scar was the mark of a World War II mission over Italy. A tiny piece of metal remained embedded just under the surface. What got me was the reflexive nature of this picking gesture. Every time he heard a plane he went for the scar. And he didn't stop picking at it until he'd identified the aircraft to his complete satisfaction. He delighted mostly in prop planes and this was the Fifties so there were quite a few big prop planes still in the air. If a formation of P-51's

MY SIDE OF THE STORY

by Bryan Goluboff

The bathroom of a luxury apartment in NYC, the present
Gil, a seasoned Wall Street player, 40-50

Gil has been drinking tequila in his bathroom all afternoon.
When he is discovered by his son, he explains that he fears that
his wife is having an affair.

GIL: Fuck man, I thought you'd help me...I really did... (*Gil takes a drink.*) I saw him touch her on the street, O.K.? I saw them together. He moved a lock of her hair out of her face in such a way that... Oh, Aaron...I felt... Can I talk to you...? Shit... (*Gil tries to find the right words.*) I started to picture it, I didn't want to, but it just came up - her unwrapped on the bed like a birthday gift, him on top of her, his scrawny fucking ass, doing things, he's got some kind of magic... Then it's black, you know, like murder. The end. They call me "The Killer" downtown, you know that? 'Cause when I snap, things change...

[AARON: Tell me what happened...]

GIL: I found myself outside this restaurant. They're sitting in the window. She's smiling like high school... I'm sweating behind this bush, hiding... Finally, I went inside... (*Gil takes a deep breath.*) I went up to the table. They were shocked to see me. They sounded like the record was on the wrong speed - excuses, excuses. I didn't hear a word. They shut up. I didn't know if I was gonna smash his face or scratch her skin off her... I reached over onto his plate and picked up this huge piece of steak and I - (*He shows Aaron how he tore the steak to pieces right in front of their faces. It is a strangely violent and vicious act, especially with the vigor that Gil pantomimes it.*) Ripped it apart. Blood splattered everywhere, on my shirt, in your mother's face... It was weird, I don't know why I did that... The restaurant was silent. I mean, nothing... And I came to. Just snapped out of it. Regained control. Your mother was crying, wiping that blood off her face. And I ran out of the restaurant, I ran for blocks... Thinking, "Sucker, sucker, sucker, you shoulda known..."

[AARON: Jesus Christ, that's crazy. That's a crazy thing to do.
But you didn't really hurt anybody, right?]

GIL: I'm so stupid -

The Ends of the Earth

Morris Panych

Scene: Here and now

Serio-Comic

Frank: a man on the edge, 40s

Frank is a quiet man who writes a column on gardening for a free newspaper. Following a minor exchange of words with someone who refuses a copy of the paper, Frank is reminded of his early interest in insects.

○ ○ ○ ○

FRANK: How can you not want it?! It's free, you idiot! What could be more desirable than a free thing?! The whole concept here is that you want it because it doesn't cost anything. Or have you missed the entire point of this, you great, pompous -- tit! (By himself.) Good God. What's happening to me? I've never lost control like that before. It's the stress of this -- this -- the pressure of this -- thing following me -- this -- but really, it's just hard to believe that a free newspaper could have circulation problems. I suppose people are overloaded with information now. And you begin to discover that life is like a big rock. You don't necessarily want to turn it over and see what's underneath. Unless you're an entomologist, that is. Did I mention that I studied insects once? In college. It seemed like the natural field for me. There are a few exceptions, of course, but generally I like insects. If nothing else for their sheer numbers. With insects, there's always a crowd. But I gave up the study when I realized that most people in the field of entomology seemed to end up in the extermination business. It felt rather self-defeating. So I began to write poetry on the subject, which proved vastly unpopular but did give me a feeling for literary composition. I turned to writing fiction next. But that never really worked out. My style is rather -- lifeless. I can't even tell a joke, without everybody becoming -- sort of -- concerned. So I began writing about gardens. I can't imagine there being anything so perfect as those. To look at a garden you wouldn't know

what's really going on. So much quiet dignity concealing so much seething underground insect activity. And after all, my name is Gardener. Well, what else would it be? For so long I tried to avoid becoming one. If I didn't know better I'd say my whole life had been plotted out for me, like carrot seeds. In neat little rows. "Say. Whatever happened to Frank Gardener?" "Gosh, I wonder." There I was. At *The Free Advertiser Weekly*. A gardening columnist. It wasn't much, but I suppose it was something.

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE

by Terrence McNally

New York City - Present - Johnny (30-40)

On their first date, Frankie and Johnny return to Frankie's apartment for a round of passionate lovemaking. Johnny is clearly smitten with Frankie, who can't seem to overcome her fear of becoming emotionally connected. When he finally declares his love for her, she orders him to leave. Instead of leaving, Johnny phones the radio station that they've been listening to and makes the following request.

JOHNNY: *(Into phone.)* May I speak to your disc jockey?... Well excuse me! *(He covers phone, to Frankie.)* They don't have a disc jockey. They have someone called Midnight With Marlon. *(Into phone.)* Hello, Marlon? My name is Johnny. My friend and I were making love and in the afterglow, which I sometimes think is the most beautiful part of making love, she noticed that you were playing some really beautiful music, piano. She was right. I don't know much about quality music, which I could gather that was, so I would like to know the name of that particular piece and the artist performing it so I can buy the record and present it to my lady love, whose name is Frankie and is that a beautiful coincidence or is it not? *(Short pause.)* Bach. Johann Sebastian, right? I heard of him. The Goldberg Variations. Glenn Gould. Columbia Records. *(To Frankie.)* You gonna remember this? *(Frankie smacks him hard across the cheek. Johnny takes the phone from his ear and holds it against his chest. He just looks at her. She smacks him again. This time he catches her hand while it is still against his cheek, holds it a beat, then brings it to his lips and kisses it. Then, into phone, he continues but what he says is really for Frankie, his eyes never leaving her.)* Do you take requests, Marlon? Then make an exception! There's a man and a woman. Not young, not old. No great beauties, either one. They meet where they work: a restaurant and it's not the Ritz. She's a waitress. He's a cook. They meet but they don't connect. "I got two medium burgers working" and "Pick

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE

up, side of fries" is pretty much the extent of it. But she's noticed him, he can feel it. And he's noticed her. Right off. They both knew tonight was going to happen. So why did it take him six weeks for him to ask her if she wanted to see a movie that neither one of them could tell you the name of right now? Why did they eat ice cream sundaes before she asked him if he wanted to come up since they were in the neighborhood? And then they were making love and for maybe an hour they forgot the ten million things that made them think "I don't love this person. I don't even like them" and instead all they knew was that they were together and it was perfect and they were perfect and that's all there was to know about it and as they lay there, they both began the million reasons not to love one another like a familiar rosary. Only this time he stopped himself. Maybe it was the music you were playing. They both heard it. Only now they're both beginning to forget they did. So would you play something for Frankie and Johnny on the eve of something that ought to last, not self-destruct. I guess I want you to play the most beautiful music ever written and dedicate it to us. *(He hangs up.)*

Floating Rhoda and the Glue Man

Eve Ensler

Scene: Here and now
Dramatic

Barn: an artist searching for love and healing, 30s

Barn's mother was killed by a wing that had fallen off a statue of an angel. Since that day, wings have become the central theme of his art. Here, Barn does his best to explain his obsession to the woman he loves.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

BARN: (Pointing to his painting with a pointer stick like a teacher.) What is a wing Rhoda? Please, think about it. I need you to think about it. I need you to think about wings. A wing is not a muscle per se or a bone. It's a collection of feathers, a mass of feathers glued together, well merged together, inseparably working, blending, flapping to make flight. To make take off. Feathers like waves washing over one another, washing over and over and up and up. Wings are for rising. They carry you. And yet, I was standing next to her on the sidewalk, my mother. It was Valentine's Day and she was wearing bubble gum colored lipstick and hippie heart shell earrings and she was laughing. She was definitely laughing. I was walking funny, five year old funny, trying to make her laugh because her laughing was like a window opening. We were laughing together and then just like that she was falling and it was falling, the cement wing, all broken off, all falling through the sidewalk, through my mother. Mommy. Mommy. I kept looking up Rhoda. Wondering where it had come from, who sent it, praying they would take it back. Secretly hoping another would land on me so I could go with her. Wings Rhoda. We're all missing our wings. It's this invisible hunger for wings that makes us behave like this.

(He notices a shaft of sunlight; he holds his hand inside it.)

Beam of light. . .

(Notices another, steps underneath it.)

Hello, sun. Ray of warmth. (Steps under another.) Ray of hope.

(And another.) Light for the lost.

(Just as it's becoming like a dance, the sunlight goes away.)

Damn. (Beat.) I'm on that beach again. Why doesn't my father just swoop down and scoop me up onto his shoulders? Where is he? I babble something in Spanish and I start to cry. To run. I'm on fire. A burning boy, burning with fear, with shame, surrounded by a sea of strange faces. Lost, begging to be found. (Beat.) Fit in. Change the way you dress, walk, talk. Honor society, debate team, student government. I wasn't any of those people I pretended to be. But the really scary part was that if I wasn't any of those people, then who was I? (Beat.) I haven't mentioned that I came back to Columbia once before. A few years back. My Spanish sucked, I was instantly branded the Gringo. My own relatives took great delight in pointing out all my North Americanism's. They didn't know how right they were. The flip side is that I looked around and I saw families who looked like mine. Who acted like mine. My upbringing hadn't been so strange after all. But I'd already spent my first twenty-odd years blaming myself for feeling out of place, for being different. I was my own worst racist.

(Long pause. As he prepares to wash his hands and face in the stream.)

I keep expecting the ground to open up and swallow me whole.

Makes it tough to be optimistic, you know?

(He washes.)

I ask/permission of this place. . . this place of emerald shadows. . .

(He washes.)

Water. Give my dreams life . . . give my life dreams. (Pause.) The day has passed. I anticipate the coming darkness. No one will protect me.

A GIRL'S GUIDE TO CHAOS

by Cynthia Heimel

New York City - Present - Jake (20-30)

Here, Jake speaks to the audience of his experience with relationships and offers insight into the sometimes befuddling realm of romance in the 1980's.

JAKE: Now I was monogamous. Faithful old Jake. Cynthia was more than enough for me to handle. We lived together for three years. I think I scared her away. I came on too strong. I knew what I wanted, and I took it. Tried to take it. You know what she used to love? Going to the supermarkets at three in the morning. She was always looking for the plums with the red meat inside them. She'd get this excited look in her eye as she stuck her thumbnail into each plum.

Women! There's someone else I have my eye on now. It's a little complicated. Don't even ask. And you know, I'm trying to do it just right. I don't call every day. I call maybe every fourth day. And I try for nonchalance. (*WHISTLES, TWIDDLES FINGER.*) So, like, wanna go to a movie maybe?

I've gotten nowhere. She doesn't even know I exist. I think. I don't know. I'm confused.

Here's my theory: You live in New York of all places, in 1988 of all times, and you can't help it, you're totally self-involved.

We all not only think we're the center of the universe and about to become famous in a second, but we're completely self-conscious. Like me being nonchalant. Like me searching my soul for the proper place to take her for cappuccino to make a good impression. Is Zabar's too yuppie? Is Lanciani too bright? I edit what I say—I remember in the sixties when you could just say, "Come here, woman," and then in the seventies you just got a look in your eye like your puppy died and said, "I know I shouldn't be telling you this, but I cry sometimes, late at night." Now I don't know. So I just say what comes into my mind. That doesn't work either.

I mean, what's the big deal? Why is searching for a mate

A GIRL'S GUIDE TO CHAOS

suddenly on the scale of the Crusades? Why can't we just be with someone, say, "Okay, I have fun with you, I like to sleep with you, you're the one for me, I'm going to stop looking now."

Hah! Wake me when we get things figured out.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF LUCK

by Marlane Meyer

Las Vegas - Present - Dixie (30's)

When Dixie returns to his home in Las Vegas after having served a prison term for strangling his wife, he discovers that his mother, once a beautiful Vegas showgirl, has died. Dixie struggles to come to terms with his past and his feelings for his parents.

DIXIE: I thought I saw my mother in a bar the other day but she ignored me when I tried to say hello. She was sitting with a man, and I was watching them and they were silent with each other, you know the way couples are. And I watched that man till I could see through his eyes, my father's eyes, and this woman, she made a joke to him, and he turned away. Cold. And I could feel myself becoming afraid, I could feel his fear. Of her intimacy. 'Cause I was not worthy, *he* was not worthy.

And I could feel him become angry with her and it moved me. I went up to him, and asked him, where did he learn to be worthless? Where did he learn to be unworthy of love?

And he stood up, and he stared at me, at my arms and my fists and he turned to the woman, and he jerked her up and accused her of flirting with me by making herself congenial to him. And then he slapped her. Hard. And I felt that slap sting my cheek, and my father's cheek, and my father's father's cheek, all the way down the line, I saw dead men reel under the weight of that blow, 'cause jealousy, Dutchy, is a curse.

GROTESQUE LOVESONGS

by Don Nigro

Terre Haute, IN - 1980's - Pete (27)

Pete has just learned that his younger brother, John, is not his father's son. Romy, John's fiancée, whom Pete secretly desires, offers some unsolicited advice. Pete snaps back.

PETE: I hate it when people who are not where I am, who have never been where I am and who will never be where I am try and tell me it isn't really as bad where I am as I think it is. You are not where I am, so don't talk to me about it, and you were certainly not on my honeymoon, and I don't want to hear a bunch of stupid shit from somebody who wasn't there about what it was or wasn't like or how I should feel about it. In fact, I don't want to hear anything you've got to say, so why don't you just get the hell out of here and leave me alone?

GOOSE AND TOMTOM

by David Rabe

Underworld apartment - Recently - Goose (20-30)

Goose and Tomtom are jewel thieves whose souls struggle for survival in a purgatory-like setting where they seem condemned to committing acts of violence. During his journey from life to this surrealistic place, Goose has been given insight into his true nature as he here reveals to Tomtom.

GOOSE: I mean, it was before I lived around here. I don't know where it was, but I was in this room, and I couldn't get out. But I don't give a fuck. It's happened before. And then, all of a sudden, there's all this dark behind me that's different than all the other dark, and in this different dark, there is the reason that it's different, and the reason is it's a ghost behind me, and when I turn to look he just moves so he stays behind me, and then he says like into the back of my head, "Don't you wanna know the secret?" And I say, "No, I don't." An' he says, "It's a secret about you, don't you wanna know it?" And I say, "No," an' I'm wishin' he would go away, and he hears my thinkin', so he's angry.

(Tomtom spasms, getting sicker, and Goose goes to the downstage crates from which Tomtom got the aspirins. Goose gets a stethoscope, aspirin, perhaps something for the pins. Going back to Tomtom, he tends him.)

GOOSE: All of a sudden in his anger I can't move anymore, and then I can, but I can't stand up, or talk. And all of a sudden I know why all the other little kids in the neighborhood hate me, 'cause they do, and tease me, 'cause they do, and it's 'cause I'm a frog. 'At's the secret about me. And now he's brought it up outa the secret places in me and into my body; this ghost with these eyes has looked at me an' turned me into a frog in me. *(Pause.)* Well, I'm cryin'—I'm not afraid to tell you, Tomtom, I'm cryin' an' beggin', I'll do anything he wants—I don't know what it is—but I can't move or speak, all green and spotty. So the night is on and on, and it's truer than anything else. I belong on my belly. Out of doors an' wet and

GOOSE AND TOMTOM

cold. Out by green scummy ponds unable to talk all my feelin's or thoughts but burstin' with 'em. Layin' inna wet slimy grass, hopin' to lick some fly outa the air. Worms around me an' spiders. The night seems so long. As years an' years. And then there's light, an' I see my body's a person again, 'cause I made the ghost a promise I don't know what it was. *(Slight pause.)* An' sometimes, I still get feelings of a frog an' I gotta look around and check everything real good an' make sure I'm not layin' in green wet grass wantin' to eat flies, 'cause I'm cold in my heart sometimes. I'm all spotty an' green in my heart. In my heart I know where I belong, an' I got big buggy eyes. *(Pause.)* That fuckin' promise to a ghost, I made it—I don't know what it was, but I know I'm keepin' it. He said I would be a frog as long as he was a ghost, and blood was red and mud wet an' secrets secrets. You ever made a promise to a ghost? Tom... tom?

that's my business and I'll handle it my own way. I never expected anything from you or your brother. Outside this house, you can call me any goddamn thing you want to call me. But under this roof is my domain, and if you talk to me, you show me some respect.

Herb. ACT I. Scene ii.

Driven by a mix of contrition and caring, Herb has retrieved Libby after she ran from the house during a bitter exchange between them. He offers her lodging and understanding and does his best to explain his reasons for leaving home in the following speech

HERB

The truth is, I didn't like her very much . . . Oh, she was a good woman. Worked hard, never complained when we didn't have enough money . . . The trouble was, she wasn't any fun. She had no humor at all. I could never make her laugh. That's what hurt me more than anything. We'd go to a party, I'd have a couple of drinks, in an hour, I swear, I'd have them all rolling on the floor. And I'd look over at her and she's just be staring at me. A blank look on her face. Not angry, not upset, just not understanding. As if she walked into a foreign movie that didn't have any subtitles. She just didn't know how to enjoy herself. Oh, I know where it all came from. You're poor, you grow up in the Depression, life means struggle, hard work, responsibilities. I came from the same background, but we always laughed in my house. Didn't have meat too often, but we had fun. Her father never went to a movie, never went to a play. He only danced *once* in his entire life, at his wedding—and he did *that* because it was custom, tradition, not joy, not happiness. I give him a book to read and if he found in the middle he was enjoying it, he would put it down. Education, yes. Entertainment, no . . . Anyway, we were married about four years, and one day I was just sitting

there eating her mushroom and barley soup, which happened to be delicious, and I decided I didn't want any more. Not the soup—my life. So I went inside, packed my bags and said, "Blanche, I think I got to get out of here. And I don't think I'm ever coming back" . . . And I swear to you, Libby, if she had laughed I would have stayed. If she saw the craziness of what I was doing, the absurdity of it, I would have unpacked my bags and finished my soup. But she looked at me, cold as ice, and said, "If that's how you feel, who wants you?" So I put on my hat, left her whatever cash I had in my pocket, walked down the stairs and I never came back . . . And that's it. As simple as that.

Herb. ACT II. Scene iii.

Libby has moved in with Herb and has done wonders for the household. She has cleaned, painted, and spruced up the place in general. She is a whiz. She is also upbeat and positive—not a defeatist like Herb.

During the past few evenings, Libby has been returning home at all hours. Herb, displaying the tendencies of a normal father, is deeply concerned for her well-being. Upon questioning, he learns that she has taken a job as a parking attendant, and that she is using the position as a means of advertising her acting talent to influential people on the Hollywood scene—she writes her message on the back of their parking tickets. Unable to see that she is showing the tenacity and grit that he lacks, Herb derides her enterprising idea as a foolish waste of time.

HERB

YOU HAVE NO CHANCE! NONE! There are five thousand qualified agents in this town who can't get their clients a meeting with these people, but *you* think they're going to call *you* because *you* left

The thirty-three-year-old marriage between Kate and Jack is strained because Kate is harboring the fact that she knows Jack had been intimate with another woman. But she has said nothing, hoping that the affair would prove transitory. But when she discovers that Jack has renewed the relationship, she can no longer remain silent and confronts him with the facts. Jack reluctantly admits to the affair. But his confession is self-satisfying. Kate is hurt and left with feelings of inadequacy and anger. Their domestic relationship degenerates into one of either referring to each other in the third person or not speaking. In the meantime, Eugene and Stan have gotten an assignment writing for a new comedy show on CBS radio. They are elated, but their elation is short-lived when Jack interprets their humor as a direct reflection upon family and friends and, more specifically, upon his act of infidelity. The boys try to reason with Jack, but his guilt renders him irrational, and when he attempts to defend his mistress, Stan stands up for his mother in a noble but relationship-fracturing outburst.

Jack moves out of the house, and when Eugene and Stan score as writers for Phil Silvers, they decide to move to New York City. They have outgrown Brighton Beach and it is time to move on. Jack eventually remarries, Ben finally succumbs to the sunny beaches of Miami, and Kate remains in her home, basking in the glory of her sons' success.

Jack. ACT I.

After thirty-three years, the marriage of Kate and Jack Jerome has become sub-Platonic. Jack is listless, uncommunicative, and no longer affectionate. Kate, suspecting infidelity, has confronted Jack with this proposition. After an embarrassing interlude of denial, Jack finally opens up regarding his feelings and admits to having had an affair.

JACK

I've stopped feeling for everything. Getting up in the morning, going to bed at night . . . Why do I do it? Maybe it was the war. The war came along and after that, nothing was the same. I hated poverty, but I knew how to deal with it. I don't know my place anymore. When I was a boy in temple, I looked at the old men and thought, "They're so wise. They must know all the secrets of the world." . . . I'm a middle-aged man and I don't know a damned thing. Wisdom doesn't come with age. It comes with wisdom . . . I'm not wise, and I never will be . . . I don't even lie very well . . . There was a woman. (*Kate stares at him.*) About a year ago. I met her in a restaurant on Seventh Avenue. She worked in a bank, a widow. Not all that attractive, but refined woman, spoke very well, better educated than I was . . . It was a year ago, Kate. It didn't last long. I never thought it would . . . and it's over now. If I've hurt you, and God knows you have every right to be, then I apologize. I'm sorry. But I'll be truthful with you. I didn't tell it to you just now out of a great sense of honesty. I told you because I couldn't carry the weight of all that guilt on my back anymore. (*Jack waits quietly for her reaction.*)

Jack. ACT I.

After Jack admits to an affair, Kate probes him regarding the other woman. He pleads with her not to do so. But she is understandably hurt and angry and is adamant that he tell her why he chose this woman in particular. Jack reluctantly does so.

JACK

This is a mistake, Kate. A mistake we'll both regret, as God is my judge . . . Why this woman? Because she had an interest in life besides working in a bank or taking care of her house. To her, the world was bigger than that. She read books I never heard of, talked about places I never knew existed. When she talked, I just listened. And when I talked, I suddenly heard myself say things I never knew I felt. Because she asked questions that I had to answer . . . Learning about yourself can be a very dangerous thing, Kate. Some people, like me, should leave well enough alone . . . The things you were afraid to hear, I won't tell you, because they're true. It lasted less time than you think, but once was enough to hurt, I realize that . . . I never ate in that restaurant again, and I have never once seen her again . . . if either one of us feels better now that I've told you all that, then shame on both of us. *(Jack sits at the table, opposite Kate. She turns away from him.)* If I killed a man on the street, you would probably stand by me. Maybe even understand it. So why is this the greatest sin that can happen to a man and wife?

Kate. ACT I.

Jack's revelations have been truly hurtful. He has not only broken the trust between them, he has also made Kate feel unappreciated and intellectually inadequate. When he asks her what she wants to do, this is her response:

KATE

What do I want to do? Is that how it works? You have an affair, and I get the choice of forgetting about it or living alone for the rest of my life? . . . It's so simple for you, isn't it? I am so angry. I am so hurt by your selfishness. You break what was good between us and leave me to pick up the pieces . . . and *still* you continue to lie to me.

Intervening speech. Jack: I told you everything.

KATE (cont'd.)

(Sitting in US dining chair.) I knew about that woman a year ago. I got a phone call from a friend. I won't even tell you who . . . "What's going on with you and Jack?" she asks me. "Are you two still together? Who's this woman he's having lunch with every day?" she asks me . . . I said, "Did you see them together?" . . . She said, "No, but I heard." . . . I said, "Don't believe what you hear. Believe what you see!" and I hung up on her . . . Did I do good, Jack? Did I defend my husband like a good wife? . . . A year I lived with that, hoping to God it wasn't true and if it was, praying it would go away . . . And God was good to me. No more phone calls, no more stories about Jack and his lunch partner . . . No more wondering why you were coming home late from work even when it wasn't busy season . . . Until this morning. Guess who calls me? . . . Guess who Jack was having lunch with in the same restaurant twice last week? . . . Last year's lies don't hold up this year, Jack . . . This year you have to deal with it. *(Jack looks at her, remains silent for a moment.)*

Stan. ACT II.

A month has passed, and the tension between Kate and Jack is evident. They are not speaking and are addressing each other in the

ADVICE FROM A CATERPILLAR
by Douglas Carter Beane
Upstate New York - Present - Suit (30's)

Suit's plans for a fun-filled weekend go awry when he finds himself playing host to Spaz, a decadent performance artist whose homosexuality makes the conservative Suit very uncomfortable. The two play Candyland while they wait for the other guests, and Suit reveals that he was somewhat less together in his youth.

SUIT: I don't really like it when she cheats. You know? She—uhm...I would like her to be above that. Not like—I don't mean to make it sound like I want her to be better than me. I mean my life is fine. Secure. I'm proud of my solidness. Not that I'm insensitive to others when they're unsolid. I mean, I've had my moments of fragility, I guess. Back in my—God, must have been sophomore year of college—Jesus, I was out there. Very erratic. Met this girl, her name was...don't even remember. Beautiful. Looked like Cheryl Tiegs. I was a mess. Just, as I said, out there. Couldn't think of anything but being with her and drinking thick red wine and making love and writing awful poems that rhymed and...what was her name? My grades were in the basement. My Dad—oh God—embarrassing memory—My Dad had to come down and give me one of those your-mother-and-I lectures. "Your mother and I" (*HE laughs*) God. I used to get those speeches semi-annually like reports. But this time my old man seemed—I don't know—pretty fragile himself. Couldn't look me in the eye. And Dad was big on eye contact. I could make eye contact before I could walk. So I broke up with the girl whose name I can't remember but who apparently was so important at the time. What can I tell you? I'm not one of those people who carry on like a French singer, right? "Life is to be lived on the edge, ho ho."

[SPAZ: Hate them.]

WALKING THE DEAD

by Keith Curran

Boston - Present - Chess (30's)

Here, a troubled man shares the story of his parents' double suicide and his subsequent struggle to cope with the loss.

CHES: My parents committed suicide. I found them. I was 10 years old. I've put together the story, and here it is. Three months before they killed themselves my parents went on diets. There was quite a lot of nervousness in my family, and they went on diets. My father was thin and his diet was to eat bread and pancakes and butter and milkshakes. My mother was heavy and her diet was to eat carrots. I ate what my father ate, but halfway through a meal he'd look at my plate and say: "You done with that, son?" This was the happiest time of my childhood because my parents were calm and loved each other a whole lot. Then one day I came home from school and the house was empty. I decided to get my racquet and hit a few balls. I found them in the garage hanging from a support beam. They were hanging from either end of the same rope, and near their dangling feet were the chairs they'd kicked away. I realise now that my parents went on their diets so they'd weigh the same. I don't remember what I did after I found them, but I ended up living with my Aunt Peg and going to a psychiatrist twice a week. My Aunt Peg bought me a dog to make up for my loss, and I tied a rope around the dog's neck, threw the rope up over a beam in the downstairs family room, stood on a chair, and tied the other end around my neck. I guess it's good I didn't have a younger brother or sister. So I kicked the chair away and something cracked and I hit the floor and something landed on the dog's head. It was a fake beam just glued to the ceiling. I sprained my ankle and the dog got a cut on its nose. I washed out the cut and put a bandaid on it and hugged the dog until Uncle Hank found us and called my psychiatrist. —He told him what I did—and that I'd named the dog "Mom and Dad"—and my psychiatrist thought that was interesting. But I just liked it when my Aunt Peg said: "go feed Mom and Dad."

WALKING THE DEAD

I never cried about my parents committing suicide. I figured that if their decision to be dead was the reason we had those happy three months together, it wasn't up to me to get upset about it, and that really got on my psychiatrist's nerves. He kept saying that it was perfectly normal to cry—but I think he just wanted me to break down in his office and make him feel effective. Six months after my parents committed suicide, Mom and Dad was hit by a car. He died three hours later. I cried and cried. I couldn't stop. My psychiatrist thought all the crying was wonderful and explained that I was using Mom and Dad's death as an excuse to mourn my parents. But he was wrong. It was just for Mom and Dad. I loved that dog. Thank you.

THE LINE THAT PICKED UP 1000 BABES (AND HOW IT CAN WORK FOR YOU)

by Eric Berlin

Alan, a man trying to pick up a woman in a bar
A singles bar
Seriocomic

When Alan approaches Diane with the intention of getting to know her, her chilly response brings out the worst in him.

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AN: (*His frustration and anger build gradually as he delivers this.*) I'm a nice guy. I'm a goddamn nice guy. I say that not because I think it's true but because that's what everybody says. If you ask any girl who's known me for more than a week, that's how they'll describe me. "Alan? He's a nice guy." They say that because, you know, hell, you know nice guys, right? Don't try to hurt people, try to be a gentleman. Treat people right, especially girls. Because that's what we learned girls are attracted to, they want to be treated right. Right? You get a bunch of girls together and get them talking about guys, and they'll dream you up the perfect gentleman. But when it comes to real life, oh man!, that's very different. Because you get those girls together and get them talking about real men, not figments of their imagination but real people, and what do you get? (*Mimicking.*) "Ohhh, men are scum! Men are slime! Men are shits!" (*You notice how all those words begin with "S"?*) I think there's something to that.) So men are all these "S" words, all these and more, but who do the girls date? Who comes on to them at the bars and who do they go home with? The *slime!* The *shits!* And then after they get hurt, and they always do, they call me up to confide in me, because long ago we decided that we were "just going to be friends." (*I swear, you girls need to get a whole new vocabulary; you girls have started so many goddamn clichés it's not even funny.*) So these girls call me up and they say, "Alan, all guys are *sliiiiime!*" and then they realize that they're talking to a guy, and they say, "Oh, except you, Alan, you're a Nice

guy, which you know is guaranteed, since you're so much of a lucky girl. But it can't be me because, well, I'm attracted to guys that are going to shit all over me." So great. So now I've got all the friends I need, so why should I be a nice guy anymore? Huh? I think I'll be a shit now. Yeah! I think I'll learn some stupid pick-up lines and use them on girls who are dressed to get laid. I think I'll be proud of how loud I can belch. I think I'll use women like they're Black and Decker screwdrivers! Sure! That's what girls really want to hear! So great! Life begins now, okay? Okay? Come on, babe, let's go home and fuck!

under the tree. Maybe Santa's left you a Black and Decker vibrator!" That was my Christmas in Vermont I didn't go skin'. I didn't go tobogganin', or talk with colorful old guys spinnin' yarns. Mona an' me did not look for a house to rent or jobs to get. That plan was abandoned instantly. It was just a stupid pipe dream. I was lookin' to make a miracle happen and they don't come that easy.

THE LINE THAT PICKED UP 1000 BABES (AND HOW IT CAN WORK FOR YOU) by Eric Berlin

Charlie, a man getting drunk in a bar, 20-30
A singles bar
Seriocomic

When Charlie is approached by a woman claiming to know him, he feels compelled to deliver the following diatribe.

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CHARLIE: It's a very small world. Very small. I ran into some girl before, she comes up to me like we're the oldest of friends. Her name's Joan, Jane, John, something like that. You know who she turns out to be? She's my . . . wait, wait, I want to get this straight. She's my ex-girlfriend's sister's friend's *older brother's* ex-girlfriend. Is that stretching it or what? And here I am talking to her like I may have at one time saved her life. "Hi, how you doing, been a long time, yeah." I can't believe I recognized her. What, did I see her *once*, maybe twice. Maybe said five words to her. And two of them were "Gesundheit." And the damn thing is, it happens all the time. Makes me feel like I'm losing my mind sometime. I pass people out on the street, they say hello to me, say hello to them, I walk away saying, who the fuck was that? It gets to the point that I say hello to every person I make eye contact with. I mean, I don't know why I babble when I get drunk, it's just something I do, I babble. My friends say "You babble when you get drunk," and they're right, it's something I do, I babble. Because I don't care too much when it's a guy says hello to me and I don't know who he is. I mean, it bothers me a little, but I'm not going to spend the day agonizing over it. But the girls, I get these pretty girls who are just so happy to see me, and I'm happy to see them too, and I'd be even happier if I knew who they fucking were! But, you know, you can't ask, right? You can't tell some girl you don't know who she is, she'll be insulted. Right? Right?

[DIANE: I don't know . . .]

CHARLIE: See, I'll prove it, who the fuck are you?

JEFFREY
by Paul Rudnick

Jeffrey, a gay man determined to give up sex, 20-30
NYC, the Present
Seriocomic

Here, Jeffrey bravely renounces sex.

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JEFFREY: Okay. Confession time. You know those articles, the ones all those right wingers use? The ones that talk about gay men who've had over 5000 sexual partners? Well, compared to me, they're shut-ins. Wallflowers. But I'm not promiscuous. That is such an ugly word. I'm cheap. I love sex. I don't know how else to say it. I always have, I always thought that sex was the reason to grow up. I couldn't wait! I didn't! I mean—sex! It's just one of the truly great ideas. I mean, the fact that our bodies have this built-in capacity for joy—it just makes me love God. Yes!

But I want to be politically correct about this. I know it's wrong to say that all gay men are obsessed with sex. Because that's not true. All *human beings* are obsessed with sex. All gay men are obsessed with opera. And it's not the same thing. Because you can have good sex.

Except—what's going on? I mean, you saw. Things are just—not what they should be. Sex is too sacred to be treated this way. Sex wasn't meant to be safe, or negotiated, or fatal. But you know what really did it? This guy. I'm in bed with him, and he starts crying. And he says, "I'm sorry, it's just—this used to be so much fun."

So. Enough. Facts of life. No more sex. Not for me. Done! And you know what? It's going to be fine. Because I am a naturally cheerful person. And I will find a substitute for sex. Sex lite. Sex helper. I Can't Believe It's Not Sex. I will find a great new way to live, and a way to be happy. So—no more. The sexual revolution is over! England won. No sex! No sex. I'm ready! I'm willing! Let's go!

KEELY AND DU
by Jane Martin

Cole, an abusive alcoholic, 30s
A basement in Rhode Island, the Present
Dramatic

Cole has brutally raped his ex-wife, Keely, who was subsequently kidnapped by a militant anti-abortion group. It is the group's intent to keep Keely a prisoner until the child she carries is at term. In the meantime, they have sought out Cole and cleaned him up in hopes that Keely will forgive him and want to become a family again. Here, the newly "saved" Cole begs Keely for forgiveness.

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COLE: Take me back. Forgive me. I loved you in a bad way, a terrible way, and I sinned against your flesh and spirit. God forgive me. I'm an alcoholic but I don't drink now. I don't know . . . I was . . . lived like . . . didn't know right from wrong, but I'm with Jesus now. I accept him as my Lord and he leads me in his path. I will stay on the path. I will stay on the path. We were married, Keely, you are carrying my baby, let's start from there. I put you on a pedestal, Keely, I do, I wouldn't say it, and I am in the mud, I'm drowning and I ask you to lift me up and then we minister to this child. Jeez, Keely, our child. You know in my house, in my father's house, Jeez, what were those kids, they were nuthin', they were disposable. In your house, right, you know what a time you had. You know. But it can be different for him. I'm different, look in my eyes, you know that. Hey, my temper, you know, I don't do that, it's over. (*Indicating Waiter.*) Ask him is it over. I think about you every minute, everyday. I want to dedicate my life to you, because it's owed, it's owed to you. You got my baby. I hurt you so bad you would kill a baby! That's not you, who would describe you, you would do that? Jeez, Keely, don't kill the baby. I brought a book we could look up names, we could do that tonight. You pick the name, I would be proud. I'm going to wait on you. You're the boss. They got me a job. I'm employed. Five o'clock, I'm coming home. Boom. No arguments. I

WALKING THE DEAD

by Keith Curran

Boston - Present - Bobby (30's)

Bobby is angry that his homosexuality is monitored by society's stereotypes, and says so.

BOBBY: Bobby. Why am I Bobby. Why is Veronica Homer? I was Robert most of my life. Then for a while I became "Max". "Max" had a certain masculine brevity that proved effective in the clone-popular "I'll lean against this brick and look at you like I hate you, now fuck me, Mary!" late 1970's. Then came safe sex and I became "Bobby!" A younger name. A less anally-entered name. Do you have anything? Any Wine-thing?

[CHESS: I think so.]

(Chess gets wine from the fridge.)

BOBBY: I am, in case you are paying due attention, embodying a classic homosexual stereotype for you at this time. The "Self-loathing Alcoholic Queen". Stereotypes are true, Chester! I mean, where do the "compassionately encumbered" think stereotypes come from, for God's sake? Some kind of far-right think-tank at a trailer park in Oklahoma City? Do they think all the "Joe-Bobs" and "Slims" and "Jim-Bos" sit around *brainstorming*? "Uh...I know! Why don't we say that homosexual men...*lisp!* Yeah, Joe-Bob, let's say they *lisp* and worship over-emotional, victimised, yet unattractive girl singers!" I mean, *homo*—*do*—*lisp!* Not *all* but *enough*. And black men *will* wear almost anything on their heads. Jewish mothers do smother their beloved male offspring. And heterosexual men *do* spend most of their post-pubescence fantasizing about getting repeated blow-jobs from lesbian twin sisters in the back seat of a '57 Buick! Not *ALL*—but *ENOUGH!* Just enough. The first emotion I felt upon reaching the age of reason was the feeling that I was

WALKING THE DEAD

"different". I did not throw footballs appropriately. I went to college and had sex with people who threw footballs appropriately—by getting them very drunk—or so they *said*. The resultant guilt, however, encouraged my last attempt at heterosexuality, which upon *FAILING*, allowed me to "resign myself to my fate" and move to a major American urban center where I found many fellows who were into show tunes, and who, when looking at an attractive man with an attitude, said things like: "Now whom does she think *she* is?" Next came working out and wearing hardhats, followed by working out and wearing polo shirts, followed by staying *in* and wearing condoms. Now I am old—in gay years—I am clever, superior and acerbic—and I serve as a rite of passage for younger homosexuals who warm my hardened heart with their simplicity, kindness, *lack* of cynicism and wrinkle-free, worshipful eyes. Bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, and I can't *stand* it! I have been, and continue to be, every stereotype I loathe. I can't get *away* from it! What began with the terrifying realisation that I was "different" has been replaced by the even *more* terrifying realisation that I am the *same*.

LARGO DESOLATO

by Vaclav Havel

English version by Tom Stoppard

Leopold's living room - Present - Leopold (40's)

Professor Leopold Nettles has written a book which contains a paragraph considered offensive by the repressive government under which he lives. As menacing, shadowy figures begin appearing at his door to pressure him to sign a document which disavows his work, Nettles feels as though he has lost control of his life. Here, he confesses his despair to his lover.

LEOPOLD: I feel sorry for you, Lucy—

[LUCY: Why?]

LEOPOLD: You deserve someone better. I'm just worthless—

[LUCY: I don't like you talking about yourself like that—]

LEOPOLD: It's true, Lucy. I can't get rid of the awful feeling that lately something has begun to collapse inside me—as if some axis which was holding me together has broken, the ground collapsing under my feet, as if I'd gone lame inside—I sometimes have the feeling that I'm acting the part of myself instead of being myself. I'm lacking a fixed point out of which I can grow and develop. I'm erratic—I'm letting myself be tossed about by chance currents—I'm sinking deeper and deeper into a void and I can no longer get a grip on things. In truth I'm just waiting for this thing that's going to happen and am no longer the self-aware subject of my own life but becoming merely its passive object—I have a feeling sometimes that all I am doing is listening helplessly to the passing of the time. What happened to my perspective on things? My humour? My industry and persistence? The pointedness of my observations? My irony and self-irony? My capacity for enthusiasm, for emotional involvement, for commitment, even for sacrifice? The oppressive atmosphere in which I have been forced to live for so long is bound to have left its mark! Outwardly I go on acting my role as if nothing has happened but inside I'm no longer the person you all take me for. It's hard to admit it to myself, but if I can all the more reason

LARGO DESOLATO

for you to! It's a touching and beautiful thing that you don't lose hope of making me into someone better than I am but—don't be angry—it's an illusion. I've fallen apart, I'm paralysed, I won't change and it would be best if they came for me and took me where I would no longer be the cause of unhappiness and disillusion—

Kept Men

Richard Lay

DAVE: an unemployed advertising executive, 30s
SCENE: New York City, present

Here, Dave tells the story of the day he and his wife first met.

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DAVE: Love at first sight. We got stuck in an elevator. The lights went out...just the two of us. Well, can you imagine...we tried all the emergency buttons. Nothing happened. We were on the 35th floor. For 45 minutes we made small talk and prayed that the elevator wouldn't plummet and kill us. Then suddenly she was silent. I said "Are you OK Marcia" because we had exchanged names after 10 minutes. There was a pause and she said "No, I have to pee." ...it could have been worse and I said something like... "Go ahead I won't look," it was pitch dark anyway. She was embarrassed about doing it on the floor and it was winter and I was wearing a...hat. So I did what any gentleman would do—let's just say she borrowed my hat.

[CINDY: (Lights a cigarette.) A match made in heaven.]

DAVE: Anyway, she sent back the dry-cleaned hat with a bunch of sweet-smelling roses and a note. In the dark I had given her my address and her lawyer's mind had remembered it. The note said "We must do that again sometime." Five months later we were married. She's not a bad woman, she just has this attitude. She can't have kids, so she takes it out on me. I don't mind, I love her. She hurts inside and I hurt for her. So as you can see...we have a perfect marriage.

Kept Men

Richard Lay

PHIL: an unemployed mob hitman, 30-40
SCENE: New York City, present

Here, Phil describes the pleasure he finds in the act of killing someone he doesn't know.

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PHIL: There is nothing as beautiful as killing somebody you don't know. You know they done something wrong and deserve to be put down but they never tell the hit man what his victim did to offend. It's important to me that the person doesn't look me in the eye. He might plead for his life...and if I ever thought twice about it he might kill me. Don't get me wrong. When I'm not working I'm a nice person. I give to panhandlers and help blind people cross the road. After a whack I like to go to Joey's Diner and have a plate of eggs and hash smothered with ketchup. I always leave the gun at the scene. It shows disrespect for the guys in homicide...cos when they check out the gun it's one of their own. They don't investigate too hard after that. Paulie says I have a sense of humor. I wouldn't say that but anyone who is the best at what they do has a little pride and an ego that needs to be fed by a little self-induced jocularity.

ANDREW: Nothing wrong with jokes. A good joke is truth without pain. "Why is a blow-job like lobster thermidor?" "You don't get either at home." The sexual impoverishment of ten million marriages is contained within that joke. Far more penetrating than any sociological survey, and certainly more succinct.

IT'S RALPH

by Hugh Whitmore

A country cottage, England, the present
Dave, a carpenter, 20

When a tragic accident claims the life of Andrew's old friend, he calls his wife, only to discover that she is in bed with another man. He turns to Dave for sympathy, and instead is treated to the following story from Dave's childhood.

DAVE: Poor old Ralph. I'd never seen anyone dead before. (Pause.) Actually that's not true. There was someone. When I was a kid. My Dad's auntie. She was funny in the head. She thought she could flap her arms up and down and fly like a bird. They had her put away. But then, when she got older, Dad thought she should come and live with us. We had a house out in the country, in Essex. Dad thought she should end her days with the family and not in a loony bin. The house was very unusual. Tall and thin. And there was trees all 'round it. There was a gap in the trees, and through that gap you could see the Colchester to London railway line. My old aunt loved to watch the trains go by. They gave her a room on the top floor so she could see the trains clearly. They kept the window locked, just in case. One day she managed to prise the window open. She crawled onto the window sill, flapped her arms up and down, and jumped. Poor old darling. Mum rushed out and found her. "Don't look," she said, but of course I did. Wasn't nasty or frightening. Just a funny bundle of clothes with legs and arms sticking out of it. Mum said it was a blessed release. She often said that about people dying. (Pause.) I suppose some people thought she killed herself because we kept her locked up and were cruel to her. Perhaps some people thought she was trying to escape and killed herself accidentally. Some people knew the truth, of course. And perhaps there was someone in a train going from Colchester to London. And perhaps he looked out of the window, and perhaps, through that gap in the trees, he saw an old lady in mid-air, flapping her arms up and down. Just for a split-second, as the train rushed on, past our house. And he'd look through the window, that man, and he'd be amazed. He'd tell his friends, "I saw an old lady flying," he'd say. So, in a way, it actually happened. What she wanted. Perhaps she died happy. What do you think?

THE INTERVIEW by Amy Hersh

Colin Bradshaw, an English actor, 40s
London, 4 years ago
Seriocomic

When a pretty young reporter from the Washington Post interviews this well-known Shakespearean actor, he breaks his own rule and speaks of his divorce.

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COLIN: What a fiasco "Henry" was. The unhappiest time of my life, between the show, and the divorce.

[INTERVIEWER: I've been instructed not to talk to you about that.]

COLIN: No, it's all right. It's about time. It was all over the tabloids, anyway, and neither of us said anything publicly. Only thing Jane and I ever agreed on. I'm ready to talk about it.

[INTERVIEWER: Are you sure?]

COLIN: [Yeah.] See, when I got into "Henry," my marriage was almost over, and I was still in love. There was nothing to do but stay drunk. It was over. So, I tried to stay drunk every possible minute I wasn't on stage or rehearsing. I never once was drunk during a performance—I'm very proud of that. But somehow (*He laughs.*) I thought nobody would notice what was happening to me. I thought it was all invisible. I also thought the 30 pounds I'd put on was invisible to everyone. Madness.

[INTERVIEWER: Did you have any friends who talked to you about it, or said anything?]

COLIN: [I don't have friends like that. I've got an agent and a manager. Not the same.] I guess my friends were too scared to tell me. So anyway. Arrogance, really. "Oh, I'm such a great actor, I'll fool everyone." You see, I'm still learning about my craft. The whole point about acting is: You're not fooling anyone. And every single review had the same line: "His Henry

was a disappointment, but he certainly is a bloat king."

Oh Christ. And every time I opened my mouth to say "Where is my gracious Lord of Canterbury?" all I could think was "The Bloat King." You imposter. And now they've found you out.

"Despite a valiant attempt by Colin Bradshaw, his Henry lumbers about the stage, draped in nondescript medieval rags apparently designed to hide a good deal of excess weight." *The Times.*

"Watching Colin Bradshaw's Henry is like watching the world through dark gauze: nothing is ever in focus, and everything begins to look the same after a few minutes. An honest evaluation can't be rendered without mentioning how frankly shocking it is to see Bradshaw's pronounced weight gain. Perhaps the actor has reached his peak and is now in sad decline." *The Sunday Times.*

"He was cast as Henry V because his name is Colin Bradshaw. More appropriately, he should have played Falstaff." *The Manchester Guardian.*

Variety's review was the best. "Bradshaw's Hank Sank." (*He laughs for a moment.*)

It was devastating. Worse than the divorce. So I dropped out of the play, rented a house in Barbados for four months. And I ran on the beach every day, and stayed on a liquid protein diet. Lost 30 pounds, plus. It was a turning point in my career.

See, I never drank before that, so I don't consider myself an alcoholic. It was something available to abuse myself with, but it wasn't anything personal, if you see what I meant. I could have wrecked my car, or gotten an ulcer. Alcohol was simpler. It was so funny, when I got back. Someone said to me, "Oh did you do the 12 Steps?" I didn't even know what that was. I thought it was some kind of exercise. So I said, "No I didn't do the 12 Steps, but I did a good deal of swimming."

Here I am now, 30 pounds thinner. I've gotten all that self-destructiveness out of my system. And I think I'm a much better actor. I'm very proud of it all.

(*Leaning into the mike.*) Did I mention that I lost 30 pounds?