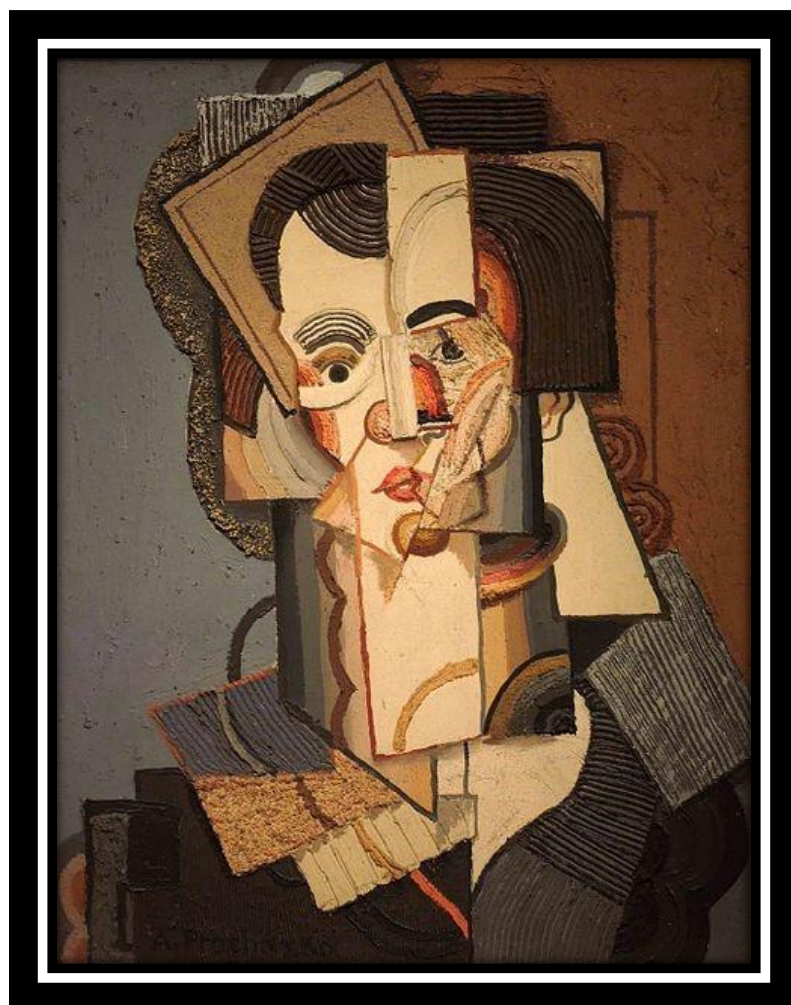


LYDIELLA

By Jerold London

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LYDIELLA

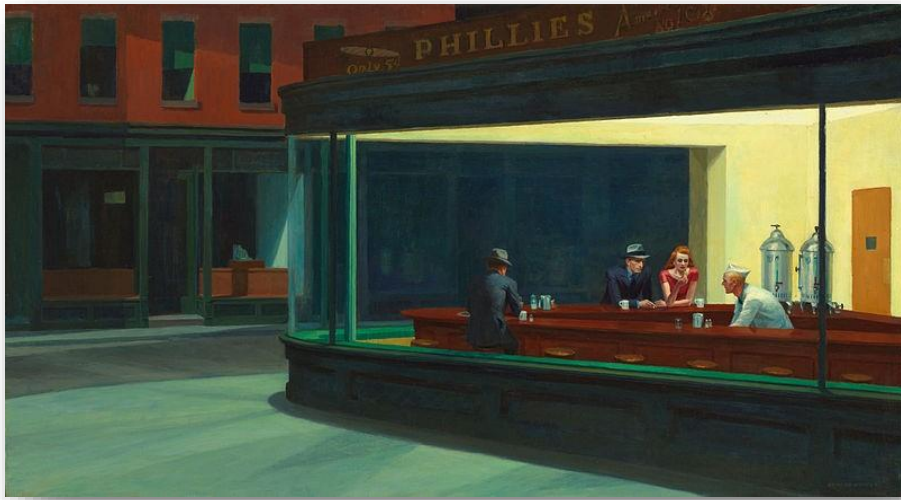


Antonín Procházka - Lady in Sweater (1921)

LYDIELLA

TIME AND PLACES

Spring to winter, essentially the 1940s, preserved in present day New York. Greenwich Village. A diner remarkably like the one in Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* (1942); and in Scenes 3 and 4, a Greenwich Village apartment with an upstairs bedroom akin to Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles* (1889):



CHARACTERS

TOM, 30s, the diner sitting by himself at the counter in Hopper's *Nighthawks*.

LYDIELLA in Scene 1 is a young woman, horribly disfigured (imagine, if you can, a female Elephant Man), wearing a savage mask covering the upper part of her face above her lips. She is also sometimes called Eris, or the Unicorn, or Nighthawk. The actress playing LYDIELLA need not be disfigured in any way.

LYDIELLA in Scenes 2-6 is a most beautiful young woman, played by the same actress playing LYDIELLA in Scene 1, but with no mask. She is also sometimes called Eris, or the Unicorn, or Nighthawk

RJ, waiter/manager of the diner.

WOMAN, in red, sitting in the diner.

MAN, sitting next to her in the diner, with a cigarette.

MARS, Lydiella's husband. Also called Thorin. Large and muscular, with thick black, uncombed hair.

POLICEWOMAN.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

... // signals the starting point of interrupting (but **not** overlapping) text.

God created us in his own image. In the image of God he created us: male and female.

– Genesis 1:27.

The vessel the potter shaped from clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

– Jeremiah 18:4.

It has been the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, from a sense of insupportable loneliness, and a dread of some strange impending doom.

– Edgar Allan Poe.

LYDIELLA

SCENE 1 – THE DINER, LATE NIGHT

Stage left: A spring night. The diner from Hopper’s *Nighthawks* (with its outside door offstage, **stage left**). TOM, RJ, the WOMAN, and the MAN are seated/standing, dressed as in Hopper’s painting. At the rise the scene is frozen for close to half a minute as a homeless woman (LYDIELLA) enters **stage left**, and hunches past the diner, pulling her possessions in a wagon behind her. Her hair is up, held by decorative ivory-colored hair combs. TOM stands to look at her. As he is speaking, LYDIELLA turns at the corner of the diner and proceeds down the street behind it, and out of sight. RJ and the couple move in ways so as not to distract from any of the play’s focal action (but follow with their eyes what TOM first says).

TOM

O my, dear God, would you look? Just look at her!
Who can live like that?
Who would God create to live that way this time of night? And why?

LYDIELLA has passed by and turned the corner.

TOM

I can’t stand it. Not doing a thing. Nobody doing a thing.
No greeting. No smile. Hardly a look.
Some, I’ve heard, call the poor beast “Mug Rat.”
Where she can plainly hear.
How can you ever forgive me, God, for hating what you’ve done to her?

TOM stands, leaves money, and walks out of the diner, still speaking (to himself) –

TOM

She is. A soul forsaken in a body broken. An outcast.
And who am I? Forgive me, God. Again. I think I hate myself.
I’ve been nothing better than graffiti on the wall. Watching her, rummaging through trash, as painfully naked to human kindness as ugly can get.

TOM stands outside for an instant, staring back into the diner and down the street behind it. Then he half runs behind the diner, out of sight, and returns with LYDIELLA walking beside him (still pulling her wagon). As the two of them cross in front of the diner MARS passes them on the street and exits. They proceed to the diner's offstage door and enter, taking seats at the far, stage-left end of the counter.

RJ approaches them.

RJ

What are you about, Tom?

TOM

Nothing.

Mathew 25.

I don't know.

I just can't stand to watch it anymore, RJ.

RJ

That's because it's none of your Goddamn business to watch it.

Do your bean-counting, and let the world take care of themselves.

TOM

Relax, will ya? I'm struggling here.

My conscience is in such a knot I can barely breathe.

RJ

It's not your worry. And it's making customers lose their appetites.

TOM

I only want to get her some decent food tonight. Okay?

Tonight? For once?

Just a little food, please, and a little respect.

I'll pay for it.

You know I will.

I'm good for it.

I've been coming in here, how many years now?

RJ

I want her to leave.

LYDIELLA

No, no, don't ask. There is no place where we can go.
O what could it have been? to make the grey hen flutter so?
And bring disease like this on us? That fills the graves.
Without a place for us, and worse. At Tubber-vanach a woman, they say,
met a man with ears spread out that moved, up and down, like a bat's wings.
And two nights ago, at Carrick-orus churchyard,
a herdsman saw a man who had no mouth, nor eyes, nor ears.
His face, a wall of flesh.
He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

The old worm o' the world is eating its way into what place it pleases.
Hear it? Sucking up the milk of human kindness?
Shut the doors, for who can say what walks the night. Or in what shape?
When those that have read books, and seen the wonders of the world,
fear what's above the ground, it's time that poverty should bolt the door.
'Tis time. 'Tis time.
Bolt the door.

RJ

See? She's looney. Get her outta here.

TOM

Wouldn't you ? ... //

LYDIELLA

There's a wind outside a-comin', and many a one that doesn't make me welcome.
I know whose length I'd measure out.
I know the heads that I would break. My hands have double strength.

RJ

And dangerous, too, I'd guess.

TOM

Cut her some slack, mate.... *Please.*

LYDIELLA

What are we, who wander in the streets at night?
What matter if our face is twisted like half-eaten mops?
Or we've a horse's tail to whip our flank? That's all but nothing now.

RJ

Tom. Dammit. Don't you know?
No, I bet you don't.
I bet you don't have a clue what evil charity drags in with it.

LYDIELLA

Sell your soul for more than charity.
Accept the pity of the world's vulgarity.
Why starve yourself for something that may nothing be?

TOM

Get her something to eat, won't ya?

RJ

[*beat*] What does she want?

TOM

[*to LYDIELLA*] What do you want to eat?

LYDIELLA

When men pour fish into a pile,
and raise their silver heads,
to sing of gold that evening sheds,
upon a world's forgotten isle.

RJ

We don't have any fish in here this late.

TOM

[*to LYDIELLA*] Roast beef and potatoes?
Would you like that?

LYDIELLA

We shall eat dock, and grass, and dandelions instead.

RJ

Don't have any of those, either.

TOM

[*to LYDIELLA*] What can he fix for you, that you'll eat?

LYDIELLA

Learned men have told us so,
that a starving soul may take whatever's necessary, and yet be blameless.

TOM

[to LYDIELLA] You don't understand. This is from me. *I'm* paying for it. You don't have to pay a cent, or steal a thing. I'm buying your meal for you, gratis. Just choose something RJ has.

LYDIELLA

If none of us are more account than flies on windowpanes, why should we trust ourselves to hands that shake starvation from a bag?

RJ

No flies, either. And I'm not fooling around any longer. Order what we serve, or get the Hell out of here.

LYDIELLA

Don't bid me go where mortal beings, none, but unicorns dabble. Where demons pluck their hair and trees make endless shadows.

RJ

[to TOM] She makes no more sense than one of those demons of hers, with its tail stuck up its buttside. Get. Her. Outta here. Now.

TOM

Bring her chicken and waffles.

LYDIELLA

Catch the old schemer of a hen flying to the thatch as if she were an eagle.

TOM

Just chicken and waffles, RJ. Okay?

RJ leaves them and goes to prepare a plate of chicken and waffles.

TOM

What's your name?... Mine's Tom....

[pause] Where are you from?

[longer pause] What am I?

A controller, of a sort. A numbers guy. Bean counters RJ calls us. I'm comfortable enough, though. Made a few fortuitous investments along the way. But a hopeless lover, destined never to find my true love, I'm afraid.

LYDIELLA

God save the beautiful from the ugly.

It's not right when tall people walk by, without looking.

Laughing pretending they can't see me.

It's not right.

No, it's not right for people like me to vex them.

There was a house, an old grey house with a kitchen garden, a smooth lawn,
a cider orchard, and a plot for summer flowers.

Stars would come so near I could catch them nearly singing.

TOM

A place near here?

LYDIELLA

I wandered the place a blue moon. But now I've lost it.

Yet, I *should know* the way.

The Countess Cathleen lived all her childhood in that house.

TOM

You know a Countess?

LYDIELLA

There was a woman, my nurse. We were happy for a long time there.

TOM

I wish I could help.

LYDIELLA

I met another young man, not long ago, who should have known.

But he's gone a-wandering, and singing out like waves o' the sea,
wrapped up in fears of terrors yet to come.

TOM

Terrors to come.... Here in New York?

LYDIELLA

What evil is there here that can't be everywhere?

In my dreams was a fire.

And in the fire one walked, who had birds about his head.

I've heard that one of the gods walked so, until the evil days of old were done.

But here some terrible, deathly evil is coming, that fables have not dreamt of.

TOM

Perhaps this is the moment I was created for.
Satellites falling from the sky?
The internet crashing?
The Post Office closing up shop for good?... Like that?

LYDIELLA

Let the Creator that made male and female stand the Earth still a day.
And remake me. Intelligently.
For when God labors in vain, it breaks hearts in vain, and brings Heaven down.
I am the fear in Heaven's heart.

TOM

If you want to know the truth, the true fears in Heaven's heart are not ugliness.
They're drugs and alcohol. And man's pitiless disregard of plight and poverty.
And war. Hitler. Tojo. And Nam.
And intelligence is not the thing the world lacks.
It's truth.

LYDIELLA

I can see your hands have touched my tears. They shake.
But you, who wander the world in vain hope of wakening it,
where do you think you're going?
When even the passionate hearts of angels on high
wouldn't dream of being able to rock the Earth to sleep at night in peace.

TOM

What do you mean?

LYDIELLA

Do not hold out faith and hope to me. My voice shall never wake the dead.
I have sworn, by her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
to pray before my altar of separation, until my soul has grown to heaven,
like a tree, rustling its leaves in the clouds.

TOM

Who are you? What's your story?

LYDIELLA

Surely every secret garden has a story, with the smell of wild bee's honey in it.

RJ

Syrup, not honey. We're out of honey. You get what we have, and like it.

TOM

[to LYDIELLA] Who are you anyway? Tell me.

LYDIELLA

In the old tales, queens have wed shepherds, and kings, beggar-maids.

TOM

You're a queen? Or a beggar-maid?

LYDIELLA

I'm but an empty pitcher on an empty stool.

WOMAN

I was afraid of that.

RJ

[to *the* WOMAN] I told him.

Did you hear me?

He's got no idea what problems lurk in empty pitchers.

LYDIELLA

Behind closed minds the world hears no sound of water, nor mute swan sing.
What will it ever surrender for the price of peace?

WOMAN

You rattle on like fishermen's knives thrown into a bucket to be cleaned.

LYDIELLA

There are women that bid men to rob apples on a dragon-guarded hill.
And everything else they can think of, to lay hard tasks on a man.

WOMAN

And there've been men would kill a woman, like fentanyl,
without a thought for her child. So, shut up, will ya?

RJ

I want no talk of killing in here. None. Understand?

LYDIELLA

[to RJ] You must have walked out in the world, Sir.
What news have you? When will this famine end?

RJ

Day copies day. Needs never end. Not in New York. Not today. Not tomorrow.

TOM

To the last syllable of recorded time.

**RJ serves LYDIELLA a plate of chicken
and waffles, and silverware.**

RJ

[to TOM] Are you listening?

People like you just don't know the evils charity brings.

**RJ returns to his normal routines in the
diner. LYDIELLA eats with her fingers.**

LYDIELLA

I would not eat, were it not you bribe me with the safety of your kindness.
As, maybe, the Devil bribes men with money for their souls.

TOM

Why would a man sell his soul for money? that gets pissed away so easily.

LYDIELLA

[*while eating*] Some sell because money gleams.
Some sell because they are in terror of the grave.
Some sell because their neighbors sold before.
Some sell for spite, because there's peculiar joy in casting hope away.
And you. You would sell your soul for love.

MAN

The thing talks like an owl I heard whispering once. Outside closed doors.

LYDIELLA

[*while eating*] God never closes a door unless one opens.

MAN

You've obviously had a few ... doors closed on your face.

LYDIELLA

[*while eating*] Pray, good neighbor, for all poor creatures mad from famine.

MAN

[to TOM] You can hardly understand a word she's saying.

TOM

But you can *feel* what she's saying.

LYDIELLA

[*while eating, directly to TOM*] Your heart belongs to another.
I can see her. Coming.
And the price for her will be your soul....

Oh, if a soul must needs be lost, take mine instead.
As ugly, God-awful, as I am, I have never sinned.
I have never been an unfaithful wife. Take my soul for the price of his.

RJ

She's got a point there.
There's no ugliness as ugly as an unfaithful wife.

LYDIELLA

His love is not unfaithful.
But 'tis certain that a man married to an unfaithful wife knows little or nothing,
of what's hidden in the jar between the hour-glass and the pepper pot.

WOMAN

What the Hell is she babbling on about?... And why are you looking at me?

LYDIELLA

[*eating*] What's a fair price for a woman's soul who was ever an ugly virgin?

TOM

Hush !

RJ

Hush !

WOMAN

Hush !

MAN

Hush !

LYDIELLA

[*eating*] When will I have paid enough?

TOM

I'm paying for the chicken and waffles. I told you.

LYDIELLA

Enough to keep the child in me alive when I am gone.

TOM

A child?! What child?!

LYDIELLA

I was raped. Out of repulsiveness.
Mocked in my ugliness. For sport. Seven of them.

TOM

Jesus Christ! Surely not!

WOMAN

How could?... [*choking or gagging*] How could anyone?... [*beat*] She's lying.

TOM

You think she'd lie about a thing like that?

WOMAN

You trust everybody, don't you?
How can you believe a story like that?
[*pointing*] She's not pregnant. Look at her. I'd bet my breast-size on it.
She might not be a virgin.
Although I sincerely doubt that, too.
But she's not carrying a baby.
And you're crazy if you think so.

LYDIELLA

What woman, save ugly ones, can a man trust past the midnight hour?

WOMAN

What do you know?
And what would you have me do? bitch.
Clip my hair to baldness?
You are making me sick, just looking at you.

MAN

Let's get out of here.

**The MAN stands, and puts money down
on the counter. The WOMAN stands
with him; and they exit.**

TOM

Are you telling me the truth?

LYDIELLA

They ran around her in circles. Like dogs.
Threw her to the ground.
Kicked her in anger.
Covered her head with a bag.
Raped her and then threw her onto a garbage heap.
Naming themselves in pride:
Patrick; Malachi; Mike; John; James; Mathias; and Oedipus.
And she could see the shapes of them to come.
A dog.
A cat.
A rat.
A bat.
A wolf.
A goose.
And a fox, boiling in a pot of broth.

TOM

Oedipus?

LYDIELLA

Oedipus.

TOM

I might have seen him once. Or his eyes.

LYDIELLA

Boiling in a pot of broth?

TOM

It was the name of a donkey I once rode. Down the Grand Canyon.

LYDIELLA

I rode a donkey once, too.

TOM

Where?

LYDIELLA

There was a footway behind the house I used to walk.
Trees, and murmurs of trees, and no one else around.
It crossed a bridal path.
I frighten horses, don't I?

TOM

What?

LYDIELLA

O yes, I frighten them. Horrible, horrible me. Worse than dogs barking....
Close beyond the bridal path was a great fall.
A white, stone cliff, dropping two hundred feet.
I'd a shopping trolley I'd borrowed.
Called it a donkey, and planned to roll it along the path and over the cliff.
With me crouched inside.
But it wouldn't go.
I couldn't get up enough speed to make it up and over the cliff.
Into the rocks and water below. Its wheels resisted me.

TOM

You tried to kill yourself?

LYDIELLA

People fall into darkness when others get sick of them.

**RJ exits under the counter and through
the door in the rear, next to the coffee
machines.**

TOM

[*pause*] We're alone.

LYDIELLA

Moonlight remains, falling on my offensiveness. This crime against nature.

TOM

I dare say, that's not *your doing*.

LYDIELLA

Not my fault? Then are you blaming it on God?
Or an accident? I can see all sorts of accidents in my mind.
Never go where there's a funeral meal. Eat from the streets instead.
Never eat in cemeteries.
Do not eat from serpents' feet.
Do not eat of unclean meat.
Do not eat of gluten wheat.
Do not eat a beetroot beet, unless you want European pink.
And never spend your nights at sea.

TOM

Why?

LYDIELLA

Because, when night falls upon the ocean strange sounds are heard.
The dead, floating in the water, come to life as birds.
They rise up, of a sudden, and call out with voices like our own.
Words like: "Happiness is West, where the sun goes down."
They are Sirens to a land where I am whole, complete, and beautiful.
Where I'm another Lydiella, who might be kissed by men like you.

TOM

You dream of having a different body?

LYDIELLA

A different kind of love.
A lover that is not a man who needs a beautiful woman to please him.

TOM

A lover that's not mortal, you mean.

LYDIELLA

A woman who gets her love from a mortal man lives in a long, deceiving hope,
to find that even the marital bed is no more than a wine-cup in a tasting.

TOM

You don't need to be a woman to discover that.

LYDIELLA

Never have two lovers first kissed, but they believed there was another way.
And almost wept when they found they could not find it.

TOM

Take a kiss for what a kiss is worth. I do.

LYDIELLA

But I see nothing plain. Nothing to worship.
Nothing but mystery. Yet, sometimes
Sometimes, when I stare into the night,
I see row upon row of sunflowers, miles long, back to back to back.
And sometimes there's a sudden light inside my mind that makes things clear.
For an instant. And when it goes out, all I have left is images.

TOM

Is it you?
Or is it the world?
I cannot tell, in truth, whether you're sane, or mad. Like Shakespeare.

LYDIELLA

You, Hamlet, Ophelia, and I, we're all caught in the casting-net of the stars.
And mine are crossed.

TOM

There's so much truth to what you say. And so much in riddles.

LYDIELLA

The time will come when you are one like me.
And Lydiella is the beautiful one, like you.
For the movement of time through space is as mysterious as time itself.

TOM

I'd rather be dead than deformed.
Just so you know.

LYDIELLA

What one may feel one moment has but little might upon the moments yet to come.

TOM

Depends on what you're afraid of.

LYDIELLA

For me, the greatest fear is grief and loss of hope.

LYDIELLA removes the combs in her hair, and lets it fall down.

LYDIELLA

I will spread my hair, wring my hands above, and wail to the stars.
What fears are left to fear when hope and love are gone?

A sudden sound of a flock of crows outside the diner, flying by and cawing.

LYDIELLA

Why are they aflutter this time of night?...
Don't you rail at me, you crows. I know the Gorgon that I am. And so does he.

TOM

[*covering his face for an instant*] I meant nothing by it.
Only compassion, and a touch of personal respect.
[*looking at her*] Never to deceive you.

LYDIELLA

You told me plain enough. Was I began a dream of distilling frailty.
Resolving it into a potion that you might willingly drink.
O, Frailty, thy name's now mine.
No longer Lydiella. No longer Eris. No longer Unicorn. No longer Nighthawk.
My heart is nothing but a burning coal within my chest.

TOM

I can't pretend that I could possibly have any stronger feelings for you.

LYDIELLA

Then I would that the night devoured New York.
That everything would fly to a new country,
where no child can be born deformed.

TOM

Lydiella

LYDIELLA

I'm like an ugly dragon, who loved the world so much she burnt it.
I am Eris who will lap you in my cloudy hair,
and cloak you in my strife and solitude that you may, no longer, see me.

**LYDIELLA swings her hair at (or into)
Tom's face.**

TOM

[*pulls back*] Stop. Get away from me.

LYDIELLA

[*in sudden shame*] O my God, forgive me, I wasn't thinking.
Who am I? What am I doing?
Who am I? What am I doing?
I forgot. I forgot. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'll leave.
I'll go to the ends of the city and stay away from you.

LYDIELLA stands to leave, taking hold of the handle of her wagon. TOM stands, and gently offers her to sit down again.

TOM

Let's go back.
Let's play this scene again. Please....
Please sit down.

She reluctantly sits.

TOM

Hello. I'm Tom....
[beat] And you, are ...?

LYDIELLA

[beat] Lydiella.
Sometimes called Eris. Or Unicorn. Or Nighthawk.

TOM

Pleased to meet you, Lydiella.
I've seen you around, here in the neighborhood, a few times.
Sitting in here, at Phillies.... Me ... siting in here, at the counter. You, walking by.

LYDIELLA

I'm surprised you'd remember.
So many strangers who pass you by every day.

TOM

Strangers are part of what a New York is.

LYDIELLA

Strangers are part of what a disguise is.

TOM

Are you from New York?

LYDIELLA

I wasn't born in here.
And normally I don't talk to strangers.

TOM

I wasn't born here, either.

LYDIELLA

The city has so many a door.
What fox and hen are they all for?

TOM

I have no idea. I suppose to keep strangers out.

LYDIELLA

To keep ugliness out, I can tell you.
No jobs. No friends. No companionship. No protection. Nothing delicate.

TOM

Nothing delicate?

LYDIELLA

There's something brutal in the world that ugliness attracts....
You'll find out when Nietzsche comes.

TOM

Nietzsche? What's a Nietzsche?

LYDIELLA

My executioner. The God of War.

TOM

Why? Why would you have an executioner?

LYDIELLA

Lovers have their lovers. Beasts have their executioners.
I wait outside closed doors for him.
In the heat. In the cold. With buried child. In the emptiness of being alone.

TOM

I know.... I know.... I'll find you a place. Somewhere, I promise.
There's a place in the Village I know of, in a basement. Not exactly legal.
And it has some water problems, when it rains.
Some flooding problems.

LYDIELLA

'Tis where I'll drown.

TOM

You won't drown.
It's not that bad. I promise.

LYDIELLA

You promise?

TOM

I promise.

LYDIELLA

So hungry and miserable, I'd believe anything.
So plagued by rain, and snow, and barefoot, I'd believe anything.
So beset and weary, I'd believe anything.

TOM

I promise. And it's the truth. My word.

LYDIELLA

And what am *I* supposed to do?

TOM

Just for a few months, to get you on your feet.

LYDIELLA

To get my feet wet. And why?
Why would you do that for me?

TOM

Call it a debt unpaid. Something I need to pay forward.
And maybe the time will come you can pay me back.
Who knows?

LYDIELLA

Who knows? Who knows?
But it *will* be you.
That I do know.

Tell me: Do you not despise me because my face is hideous?

TOM

No.

LYDIELLA

Then I pity you.
I pity you for love.
For the love of two women your heart must keep safe.

RJ returns (through the door at the back and under the counter), and silently hands TOM the check. TOM pays; and he and LYDIELLA exit, silently – LYDIELLA pulling her wagon behind her. RJ goes back to work, cleaning up, as the two of them walk together down the street and off stage.

SCENE 2 – THE DINER, A SUDDEN RAIN

Stage left: Summer evening. The diner, as before, with TOM, RJ, the WOMAN, and the MAN seated/standing and as dressed in Hopper’s painting. Again at the rise the scene is frozen for several seconds. TOM takes a drink of coffee, keeping his eyes down. RJ is busying himself cleaning things.

MAN

Hey, RJ. Tell me ... who’s the greatest?
Who was the greatest of all time? do ya think?

RJ

You’re asking me?

MAN

How many RJ’s are there in this place?

WOMAN

If it’s not money with him, it’s games.
What’s with men, anyway? Don’t they ever grow up?

MAN

Why should we? As long as there’s sports and sex, what’s to grow up for?

WOMAN

[*beat*] When I was a kid, we had a Boston terrier. Sweetest dog I ever knew.
But if you wanted to pet him, or scratch his back, or rub his tummy,
he’d wrestle loose, and run over to his box for a tug toy.
That’s how *he* wanted you to share affection,
pulling and tugging, this way and that, on a tug toy.
We called him “Teaser.” Or “Sir Tease.”

MAN

Something around here you're looking to tease?

The WOMAN turns her head away from him, toward the wall of the diner.

MAN

So, RJ, who was the greatest?

TOM

[*eyes down*] Cassius Clay.

MAN

Junior.

RJ

Griffey, nah. Might have been, maybe, if his legs hadn't given out. And if he'd joined the Yankees.

MAN

Cassius Marcellus Clay, *Junior*.

TOM

[*eyes down*] Oh, *that* Junior.

RJ

I'd say it was probably the Babe. Certainly here in New York. Ruth and Gehrig and DiMaggio and Mantle and Berra and A-Rod and Jeter.

MAN

The Babe.... Built the House.

RJ

You know what I heard once?

RJ noticeably looks in the direction of the WOMAN, who is still staring at the wall.

MAN

What?

RJ

Nothin'.

MAN

What? What were you going to say?

RJ

Skip it.

MAN

I said, what did you hear once? Don't be a prick.

RJ

[nodding toward the WOMAN] I wasn't thinkin'.

MAN

Rosy? She don't give a rat's ass what we say.
If it's not *pure*, it's not good enough for her, no matter what she hears.

RJ

[beat] Well, I heard from a friend,
who knew some people who'd played the game,
that one night a dozen young Debbies came to where the Yankees were stayin',
and Ruth said he could take 'em all. That night.
And they watched. And he did.

MAN

Urban legend. No man could do that.

RJ

But it was before he got married.
They say the Babe *never* cheated on his wife.

WOMAN

[turning back in her seat to face RJ] Not like some of the others, huh?

RJ

Dangerous business, that.... Cheating.

MAN

Especially if your wife has a gun.

TOM

[eyes down] Or an iron.

WOMAN

It's a matter of purity. A pure T pissed off woman.

MAN

Not that *purity* stuff again.

WOMAN

If the woman's married, it's adultery, pure and simple.

MAN

Unless there's an agreement.

TOM

[*looking up*] What kind of agreement?

MAN

To have an open marriage. You know: key parties, Craigslist, that kind of stuff.

TOM

If that's marriage, marriage doesn't mean a thing....
Like one or two I've known.

WOMAN

I've known one, too.

MAN

[*looks at the WOMAN for a beat, then at RJ*] I'd say, Michael Jordan's the greatest.

RJ

Unless LeBron beats him out. In basketball, it's all in the numbers in the end.

TOM

[*eyes back down*] What about Jim Brown, then?

WOMAN

Or Tom Brady. What about him?
He's got the healthiest body of them all.

MAN

[*to the WOMAN*] Body? What the Hell?!

WOMAN

Just saying.

MAN

[*to TOM*] Or OJ? What do you think about him?

TOM glares at the MAN.

MAN

I said, what about OJ?
Or don't you want to talk about him?

TOM

[*eyes back down*] No, I don't.

MAN

Why not?

The diner goes quiet.

MAN

Why not? Got a weak stomach, all of a sudden?

TOM

[*eyes down*] It was abominable, what he did.

MAN

Why? He just loved his wife.
And look at you. *Abominable*, you say?!
Look who's talking about abominable.
Remember that Yeti you brought in here?
What? Four or five times.
And that God-awful, mutant baby of hers?
What ever happened to them, anyway?
You still buying her out of debt?

TOM

[*long pause; not looking up*] They're dead.

WOMAN

What?!

TOM

[*still with his eyes down*] Throats slit, in her apartment, in the basement.
Curled up on the floor around her baby. Execution style....

WOMAN

O, my God, no! how awful....
How awful for you.

TOM

[*eyes still down*] Killed without a reason, except the sin of how they looked.

MAN

Jesus H. Christ! I didn't know.

RJ

I warned you, didn't I? Didn't I warn you?
People like you just don't understand the evils of charity.

MAN

It's one of the laws.

TOM

[*eyes still down*] What law?

MAN

Darwin's.

TOM

[*eyes down*] You're full of shit.

MAN

You have a better theory?
Isn't that what the Greeks used to teach?

TOM

[*looking up*] What Greeks?

MAN

Plato, I think.
I've been studying this, some.
That he said that governments ought to let those that can't work, die.
Isn't that right, Rosy girl?

WOMAN

Maybe. If you say so.

MAN

For their own good.

TOM

That's sick. I have friends in Greece.
And Greeks are just the opposite. None of them talks like that.

MAN

Name one.

TOM

[eyes back down] I don't have to.

MAN

Then name me one person who says to love your neighbor's pug ugliness.

TOM

[eyes down; beat] Denise Levertov.

MAN

Doesn't sound Greek to me.

WOMAN

Maybe on her mother's side.

MAN

So what? That doesn't make her any more Greek than I am.

TOM

[eyes down] And that doesn't make Greeks any more crude than you, either.

MAN

You think not? You're just a fool, like RJ keeps telling you....

[beat] So, what's she say?

TOM

[long pause; eyes still down] Who?

MAN

That Levertovski, you said. Whoever.

TOM

[eyes down] How gray and hard the brown feet of the wretched of the earth.

How confidently the crippled from birth
push themselves through the streets, deep in their lives.

How seamed with lines of fate the hands
of women who sit at streetcorners
offering seeds and flowers.

How lively their conversation together.

How much of death they know.

I am tired of 'the fine art of unhappiness.'

WOMAN

[*beat*] You memorized that? The whole thing?

TOM

[*eyes down*] I learned it for her.
And I shall never forget it for her.

MAN

How could you?
How could any red-blooded, American man,
feel anything at all for a monster like that, other than disgust?

TOM

[*eyes down*] I can.

MAN

No. You're right. Commies can.

TOM

[*raising his eyes*] I'm no Communist.

MAN

Then, what are you then?

TOM

[*lowering his eyes*] An American.

MAN

Make American Great Again.

TOM

[*eyes down; pause*] Make America *care* again.

RJ

When? When did America care?

TOM

[*eyes down*] When? In and out of the Depression.

MAN

No. You've got history bass ackwards.
When we plowed Germany and Japan under.
And President Reagan told Gorbachev, "Tear down that wall." That's when.

TOM

[*raising his eyes*] Things can always change. Even ignorance.

WOMAN

Not coyote ugly.
That's a thing that never changes.

MAN

Government doesn't change, either.
I'll tell you what I'd do.
I'd close the government down, for good, until everybody smartens up.

TOM

It's not intelligence, the thing Washington lacks.... It's truth.
I, for one, prefer the English approach to mining truth.

MAN

Which is what?

TOM

Speak well of one another.
Respect different points of view.
Come together on common ground.
Don't lose sight of the bigger picture.
And keep calm and carry on.
Behavior that's timeless.

MAN

You're strange. Un-American.
Who do you think you are ? The Queen?

TOM

[*eyes down*] Not strange.
Sad and sane in the way Lydiella was....
Seeing sorrow, everywhere.
Poverty, everywhere.
Not caring, everywhere. Somehow we must have the stubbornness,
to accept gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world.
Sane that way. Or *insane* that way. Whichever.

[*slight pause*] Memory is all I have left of her.
And memory grows gentler in a sad or gentle breeze.

WOMAN

She was soooo ugly.
There must be someone more right for you.

TOM

[eyes down] I don't want beauty the way I want caring.
I can understand caring.
I'm not sure I can handle beauty.
A woman's beauty is like a white, frail bird.
A sea bird, alone at daybreak, after a blustery night in the water,
battered between mounting waves in the storm.
A kind of beauty no man can understand or unbind.
A kind of beauty no man can possibly live up to.

The WOMAN gets up from her seat, brushing crumbs off and smoothing out her dress, and as she does so, she intentionally bumps her backside against the MAN, who turns to look at her.

WOMAN

Why don't you ever say things like that to me?

MAN

Say what?

WOMAN

What he just said.

MAN

What?
What did he just say?

WOMAN

O, nothing.
Life just doesn't pat me on the tushie like it likes me anymore.
No pinch of passion left, huh?
not for me, at least.

The WOMAN sits back down at the counter and flips her hair.

WOMAN

Hey, I'm not blaming you.
You don't understand what I need, so why even talk about it?
Right?
Waiting for Sunday Goodbar, and nothing fits me right anymore.
Or feels right.
Life's all so *impure*.

MAN

What's *pure* got to do with it?
I give you the best I can, don't I?
I make enough dough for you, don't I?
Enough clothes? Any complaints there?
Hell. You were just a waitress when I met you.
Remember? The day they murdered my brother?
How pure was that?
You call the World Trade Center pure?
I call it barbarism.
Purity?
Purity's a pile of shit.

WOMAN

Have it your way.

TOM raises his eyes to look at them.

MAN

[to TOM] Allahu Akbar.

TOM

Salaam Alaikum.

MAN

What's that supposed to mean, Mohammed?

TOM

Peace be with you.

MAN

Peace be up your ass.

TOM

Not every Muslim's in support of things like 9/11.

MAN

How in Hell do you know?...
What *I know* is that they believe they get all the sex they want in Heaven,
if they die killing some non-Muslim.

TOM

It's a mistranslation.

MAN

A what?

TOM

What the Koran really says is that they get all the white *raisins* of pure clarity
they want, when they're in heaven.

Not a harem of submissive virgins.

MAN

You're kidding me.

TOM

No. Go look it up.

MAN

Well, Goddamn it! That's good news!
And may the ones who killed my brother choke for eternity on their pure white
raisins.

WOMAN

[*beat*] Haven't I seen you someplace else?
In a photo, in a magazine?
In a doctor's office, waiting?
Sipping your coffee like that.
You're a singer, aren't you?
A Jimi Hendrix type. Or Jim Morrison, or Jerry Garcia, or David Bowie,
or Kurt Cobain, aren't you?

TOM

I hope not. They're all dead.

WOMAN

Maybe.
But they were alive when it mattered, to me.

TOM

What are you saying?

WOMAN

Their last songs.

TOM

What about them?

WOMAN

They're still in us today.

TOM

What?

WOMAN

Some molecules of their last breaths are in our lungs right now.
That's the purity I'm talking about.

TOM

Okay. Gotcha. Primal.
They've said the same thing about Caesar's last breath.

WOMAN

And Jesus. And Judas.

MAN

And the dust from 9/11.
What comes around goes around.

TOM

[*musings*] Jesus, in my lungs?...
I've never thought about it, that way before.

MAN

So, what *have you* thought about, *that way*, before?

TOM

That to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the sun.

WOMAN

The Byrds, right? Turn, Turn, Turn.
Told you, you're a singer.

MAN

You're nuttier than he is. If anything, he's a third-rate poet who doesn't know it.

WOMAN

You started it.

MAN

Your ass bump started it.

WOMAN

Whatever.

MAN

I know what you're interested in.

TOM

It starts from where we don't learn from the past.

Like Lydiella.

Or wearing Make America Great Again hats.

MAN

You looking for a fight, Buddy?
And I know where you can find one.

RJ

Cool it, you two.

TOM

My point's only that whatever each new administration conjures up,
it's always built on undoing what the administration did before.

It never stops. And where's the purity in that?

WOMAN

Not in *my* lungs.

Or in my mouth. Or my eyes. Or my ears.

MAN

Maybe in your ... //

WOMAN

Watch it, Washington.

MAN

Same to you, Cherry Pie.

RJ

I'll tell you where purity isn't.
And it isn't in the numbers, like it should be.
Pete Rose was baseball's absolute hit king, of all time.
Numbers don't lie.
But he'll never make into the Hall of Fame, will he?

MAN

After what he did to Bud Harrelson?

WOMAN

Let *me* tell you where purity is.
It's in the body.
And who in sports had the greatest body ever created....
[beat] Any ideas?

MAN

[beat] Tom Brady, I suppose you mean.

RJ

The Williams' sisters?

WOMAN

No....
Secretariat.

Lightning (followed in a bit by thunder).

MAN

A horse? A fucking horse? You must be kidding.

WOMAN

Have you ever ridden a horse?
It's the sexiest thing alive.

MAN

I've ridden iron bulls.

WOMAN

I bet you have. And see where it's gotten you.
Try a horse. A stallion.
I loved a horse.
Once.

MAN

What's to love about a horse?

WOMAN

The outlaw on it. Love's an outlaw.
Love's a highwayman, on a horse, breaking every law.

Lightning and thunder.

TOM

I've been robbed on roads like that.

WOMAN

We spend so much time searching for the perfect love,
when we should be looking for a way to make what we have perfect.

TOM

Sadly, there is no perfect love.

Lightning and closer thunder.

WOMAN

I'll give you a piece of advice. Because I like you.
For free.
First, there's no true love, granted,
unless she walks through that door totally unexpected.
And if she does, your heart closes on her like a clam.
And when it does, it won't do you a bit of good to hide.
Or to count out loud her every fault.
Because you'll never escape her.
Or need any miracle to prove it to you.
Because it's the one, love of your life, for life... *And you know it.*
And, being who you are, you couldn't possibly resist.
Or want to.

MAN

Shit!

WOMAN

And another free piece of advice: Don't fly kites in the rain. It's dangerous.
Or fly to bed with half a dozen other women.
It won't work. She's with you, for life.
Soul mates for life, no matter what the rest of the world's crazies do.

RJ

Whoever loves that loves not at first sight?

TOM

You're preaching to the wrong choir.
I'm no candidate for long-term relationships.
The suffering's bad enough when it doesn't last.

WOMAN

You're too cute to shoulder such an attitude.

TOM

Sorry, but the truth's the truth.
I used to be just out-and-about-on-the-town alone.
Now I'm out-and-about-by-myself alone.
And it will stay that way.

MAN

Considering your last girlfriend, I believe it.

WOMAN

Is Phillies on your regular circuit?

TOM

Yeah, pretty much regular. Why?

WOMAN

We might have somebody for you.

TOM

No thanks. Not in the mood.

MAN

Even if she's guaranteed?

Lightning and closer thunder. A gust of wind blows a newspaper down the street outside the diner.

WOMAN

There's a storm blowin' up.

RJ

Looks like a whopper, Dorothy.

Rain. A pause. Then enters LYDIELLA, through the stage-left (offstage) diner door, wearing all white, and soaking wet, no hat and no handbag, carrying her shoes in her hand. She shakes her head, puts her shoes down on the floor, and brushes water off her clothes. TOM jumps to his feet, takes off his suit coat, to put it around her; but before he can –

RJ

[to LYDIELLA] Here, take these.

RJ hands LYDIELLA a couple of dry towels. TOM drops his coat on a stool, takes one of the towels, and starts to help LYDIELLA dry off. LYDIELLA is wearing decorative ivory-colored hair combs, which she removes before continuing to dry her hair. TOM puts his coat back on.

LYDIELLA

Where'd that come from?

RJ

Where'd *you* come from?
I didn't see you out there.

LYDIELLA

Walking....
Looking for my bag.
It got stolen.

LYDIELLA sits next to Tom's stool; and TOM sits back down.

RJ

Who stole it?

LYDIELLA

Some panhandler....
He got a box out of the trash, and was dumping junk on the street.

LYDIELLA

You can't stop them all. Can't keep a place clean, to walk anymore.
They drop crap all around, like animals.
And when they start coming up to you,
you know the lyrics of their song before they even start the first verse.
Needing money for a bus, to somewhere. East Jesus.
No one should trash the streets.
God, that makes me sick.
Thinking of eating half eaten food that's been thrown away.
So, I told him so.
I had to say something. It's our town, too, isn't it?
And I don't go around trashing it for others.
Have respect, I told him. Don't expect everybody else to do all the work.
Do some yourself.
He called me a bitch, and grabbed my bag, and ran.
I chased him; but he ran down an alley and got away.
And I've been searching for where he threw it.

TOM

Why didn't you go to the police?

LYDIELLA

You're not from here, are you?

TOM

I thought I was. A few years, now.

LYDIELLA

Well, that's not going to get my bag back ... or my keys.

WOMAN

We were just talking about you.

LYDIELLA

Who? Me?

WOMAN

In a way.

LYDIELLA stands.

LYDIELLA

I should go.

TOM quickly stands.

TOM

No. Stay. Please.
At least till the rain stops. And I'll help you.
Find your things.

They sit back down.

LYDIELLA

I'm spoiling your party, aren't I?

RJ

You won't be the last coming in, trust me.

TOM

Haven't we seen you somewhere before?
In Trevi Fountain? The woman in white.
Call me Marcello.

WOMAN

Sylvia was wearing black.
But this one will do, fine.
What's your name, Sweetheart?
I'm Rosy.
Really, but not really really.
It's just what my friend here calls me.
When he's in one of his romantic moods.
Right? Darling?

TOM

And I'm not really Marcello. I'm Tom.
And we weren't really talking about *you*.
Not you, you. We were talking about the impossible.

RJ

And I'm RJ.
Hope those towels are helping.
I can get you a couple more.

LYDIELLA

No problem. These are fine.

TOM

I'm known as a man of few words.

Lights begin to dim.

LYDIELLA

My name is ... [*beat*] Lydiella.

Lights dim to darkness.

SCENE 3 – WHAT WOULD BE COULD BE A SET-UP

Stage right: Late evening. Brightly lit upper bedroom of a two-level apartment in Greenwich Village which has all the appearance of Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles*, except that there is a large white towel draped over the end of the bed. In the shadows on the level below is a darkened living room, in which there are a couple of stark, tall, straight-back chairs, a coffee table, a table by the door, and numerous soft items, hanging, like kinetic mobiles, from the ceiling. The door to the living room of the apartment is midway upstage (toward **center stage**).

TOM and LYDIELLA approach her apartment. She reaches under the welcome mat, pulls out a key, and lets the two of them in. Closing and locking the door behind, she puts the key down on the table.

LYDIELLA

Come upstairs. It's okay.

They climb a short flight of stairs, into the brightly lit bedroom.

TOM

I'm a man of few words.

LYDIELLA

What's the problem?

TOM

I bumped my head, I think, on something down there.
Soft. Like a floating mushroom.

LYDIELLA

No problem. They're not alive. Just there for the acoustics.

LYDIELLA begins undressing. Like her dress, her undergarments are pure white and wet; and she hangs her things on a chair, and dries herself off with the large white towel.

TOM

Acoustics? For what?

LYDIELLA

For a life out of tune.

TOM

Oh.

LYDIELLA

What do you do?

TOM

Numbers.... I'm an accountant.

LYDIELLA

Do you want to stay?

TOM

[*beat*] You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

LYDIELLA

Then, take off your clothes.

TOM begins undressing, putting his clothes on a chair.

TOM

You said your name's Lydiella?

LYDIELLA

Yes. But sometimes they call me Eris. Or Unicorn. Or Nighthawk.

TOM

I

LYDIELLA

I bet I'm the first Lydiella you ever met.

The lights begin dimming; and a large, dark figure (MARS) can be seen in the shadows, approaching them.

TOM

Actually

LYDIELLA

Come over here.

TOM

I'd like to look at you like that a moment.

LYDIELLA

Then come closer.

TOM, down to his shorts, walks over to LYDIELLA and takes her in his arms. Her towel falls to the floor. They start kissing.

TOM

[nearly breathless] I've never felt anything like this. It's like a dream.

The shadow of MARS, appearing to the audience as a gorilla, lunges at them, and tackles TOM to the floor. Darkness.

SCENE 4 – THE PROPOSAL

Stage right: The lower room is now partially lit. The bedroom is in darkness. TOM, in his shorts, is tied to one of the straight-back chairs, a pillowcase over his head. MARS, no longer in the guise of a gorilla, is sitting in the other straight-back chair, facing him, holding a knife in his hand.

MARS

O what, under Babylonian skies, is the color of rage in a husband's surprise?
And what, when the dragons of adultery arise, is a husband to do for the sight of his eyes?

TOM

[*muffled voice*] What in Hell?!

MARS

You must be mad, to fool around with *my* wife.

TOM

[*muffled voice*] Your wife?... Where am I?

MARS

Men go mad after her pretty face. And she knows it.
And her kiss is the veritable forbidden fruit of the Garden.
And she knows it.
You're lucky you're still alive. And not gored by the point of a unicorn's horn.

TOM

[*muffled voice*] Your wife?

MARS

How much of her body did you see?
My castration dagger here is asking.

TOM

[*muffled voice*] Her hair. I saw her hair.

MARS

You lie. You saw more than that.
And that was her intention....
[*beat*] You think she didn't intend all this?
Either you're some damn fool.
Or a satyr who doesn't give a fuck.

**MARS removes the pillow case from
Tom's head.**

MARS

Either way, which would you rather keep? Your eyes or your balls?

TOM

Who are you?

MARS

I am Lydiella's husband.
And as I see it, fooling around with my wife, this is your hell to pay.

TOM

I had no idea she was married.... *Help.... Help.*

MARS

Calm down, and stay awhile.
You have no idea what you're missing.

TOM

Fuck!

MARS

Now, as I see it, you have a simple choice....
You can stay calm. Or you can make a fuss, and make me slit your throat.
And believe me, this dagger knows well how to slit throats.

TOM

Are you going to kill me?

**MARS brings the knife near to Tom's
throat.**

MARS

How impatient the man is.

TOM

Christ!

MARS

Why don't you hang around a moment and hear what I have to offer.
Maybe an offer you simply can't refuse.

TOM

Christ!

MARS

I'm a man of dreams. Like you, I expect.
And I study wills. Man's will.
Are you a Philistine?

TOM

Man, I had no idea she was married. I swear.

MARS

A Philistine has an empty gut, filled with fear

TOM

I don't fool around with married women.
Ever.

MARS points around the room.

MARS

Do you like the trappings of our place?

TOM

I'm a dead man.

MARS

You're a *trapped* man.
First by desire.
Now by fear....
Am I right?

TOM

I'm in a strange world where I have no concept what to say to you.

MARS

Do you comprehend the meaning of adultery?
And if a husband can't let his dagger express his anger and his pain,
who else can be expected to speak up for his honor?
What do you have to say to that?

TOM

It's a loaded question.

MARS

Do you love her?

TOM

Not if she's yours.

MARS

Did you love her?

TOM

We didn't do a thing.... Just one kiss.

MARS

Do you love her?

TOM

Can it matter now?

MARS

It's a simple question: Do you love her?

TOM

What the Hell?!

Of course I love her, and will take that love to heaven and hell.

MARS

And you want her?

TOM

I wouldn't have done a thing, if I had known she was married.

MARS

Love? or freedom?

How do you feel?

TOM

I'm pounding so hard inside, I'm going to burst from it, I think.

MARS

Well done.

Describe it more for me, please.

TOM

You?

I don't know what more to say.

MARS

Describe me, then.

TOM

Wild. Hair and teeth. An Indian boar.

A Devil. A gorilla king.

MARS

And you owe me, right?

TOM

For my mistake?

Or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time?

MARS

For the touch of her naked skin.
For the press of her nipples against your chest.
For the secret scent of her aroused womanhood....
Yes sir, you owe me, sir.
No one's allowed that much without paying a price.
Without paying with a piece of flesh.

TOM

What are you saying?
Don't kill me. Don't cut me.... Please.

MARS

I'm just saying you have a debt to pay.

TOM

How?

MARS

Well, now, I'd say that's a matter for *you* to decide.

TOM

What choice do I have, if you are bent on cutting me? Or killing me?

MARS

Do I look like a common butcher?
Think about it....

TOM

[*beat*] I can't get your killing me out of my mind.

MARS

Are you so sure I'm going to kill you?
What a joke....
[*beat*] I love you.
Why would I want to hurt you?

TOM

[*beat*] What the Hell?

MARS

I don't want to do anything but love you.
You're the most beautiful man I have ever seen.

TOM

This is way too fucked up.

MARS

Tell me the truth: Have you ever felt more intensely alive than now?

TOM

[*beat*] I'm scared to death.

MARS

You're safe. Relax. You just needed a good lesson.
If you're going to chase another man's wife,
you have to learn to manage the negative voltage as well as the positive.

TOM

If this is not the most insane dream I've ever had, I've gone insane myself.

MARS

This is your moment of truth.
Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.

TOM

I'm sorry. What did you say?

MARS

[*slowly*] Do.You.Want.My.Wife?

TOM

[*beat*] I don't understand a thing you're saying.

MARS

You're a free man.

MARS begins untying TOM.

MARS

There.
This is your lucky night.
You have found the love of your life.
And you have the chance of a lifetime with her.
My wife, if she loves you, is yours.

TOM feels his wrists.

TOM

I don't believe this.

MARS

Do with her what you want.
Upstairs. In bed. Right now.
And there, in that same bed, *whenever* you want.

**The bedroom is lit. TOM takes a look
around the apartment; but LYDIELLA is
nowhere in sight.**

MARS

And when you finish, *I'll* make love with you.

TOM

My wits, or my hearing, is failing me.

MARS

What is it you think you hear?

TOM

Blindness.
Blind fear finds confusion in blind reason.
You say, I think, that I am free.

MARS

[*motioning*] Walk, if you wish.
To fear the worst often cures the worst.
You're free, indeed.

TOM

But at the same time you say Lydiella's mine.
If she wants me.
What kind of freedom is that?

MARS

See?... Nothing's free in this life, when you see it that way.

TOM

When men vow to weep seas, walk through fire, eat rocks, tame wild tigers,
do any task their love might ask of them,
could they ever imagine a situation like this?

MARS

Are you getting this?

TOM

I think I'm beginning to get it.

MARS

Tit for tit, so to speak. My pound of flesh, so to speak.
The more you love her, the more I love you.

TOM

[*pause*] I don't even know your name.

MARS

Mars. Like the planet.
Like the god.
But my real friends call me Thorin....
And you're Tom, I presume.

TOM

O God!!

MARS

Good.

TOM looks up, at the bedroom, and all around. The action freezes. Then TOM walks back up, to the bedroom, pulls off his shorts, and climbs into bed. MARS exits.

SCENE 5 –ALONE

Stage left: The diner. Winter night. A few flakes of snow gently falling outside. TOM and LYDIELLA are seated. He has previously put a gym bag on the floor by his stool. RJ is behind the counter, as usual. The three of them are there alone.

Stage right: The bedroom of Lydiella's apartment is brightly lit.

RJ brings TOM and LYDIELLA coffee and toast.

LYDIELLA

[*pause*] Are you okay?

TOM

No....
I love you.

LYDIELLA

I love you, too; but you're not okay?

TOM

I'm a man of few words.

LYDIELLA

Talk to me.

TOM

It's monstrous what we're doing.

LYDIELLA

Our love is monstrous to you?

TOM

I can't live without you. I think I'd want to die without you.

LYDIELLA

Me, too.

TOM

Each day I ask myself: "Am I happy?"
And my answer?
I'd be miserable any other way.

LYDIELLA

Same with me.

TOM

We're slaves to our need for each other.
But I don't know where to find your heart.

LYDIELLA

What do you mean? I've given you my heart many times over.
It's with you.

TOM

Then why don't you leave him?

LYDIELLA

And have him kill us?... He's killed before, for less.

TOM

I've brought a bag.

LYDIELLA

I noticed....

Are you going to tell me what's in it?

TOM

A towel to dry our feet, and a hand warmer to heat them....
It's time to get barefoot.

TOM gets down from his stool and takes off his shoes and socks and puts them in the gym bag. He then takes off Lydiella's boots, and leads her outside, where they kick up snow piled in front of the diner.

TOM

Come run away in the snow with me, to the ends of the Earth.

They play, carefree, in the snow for a while, and then return inside. TOM wipes Lydiella's feet dry, and warms them with the hand warmer. She puts her boots back on, and TOM does the same to his own feet.

LYDIELLA

God! That felt good....

If only *I* could make you laugh that way.

TOM

At night, when I'm alone, I walk through halls in my mind.
Like snow-capped mountains.
Searching for an answer.
Asking myself, over and over: What can we do?

LYDIELLA

What *can* we do?

TOM

Follow the snow.

LYDIELLA

To where?

TOM

I've got to get away. With you.
I can't take this much longer.
It's making me go mad.
Mars has a hell hold on me.

LYDIELLA

The only way for us to be together is through him.
He'd track us down, wherever we'd try to hide.

TOM

When I think of him, what he does to me, I could kill somebody.

LYDIELLA

I don't like you thinking like that.
Put it away. Somewhere far away.

TOM

Can't you understand? I feel like I'm drinking urine out of my hat.

LYDIELLA

It's in your mind. It's your imagination.
Mars says that imagination is the gatekeeper of being.
Those who can recognize it become sages.
Those who can paint it become artists.

TOM

I can't imagine him ... with you ... in bed.
Does he ...?

LYDIELLA

God no! O please! God no! Don't talk that way. God in Heaven forbid.

TOM

I'm obsessed.

LYDIELLA

[beat] Sometimes, when I stare into the night,
I see row upon row of sunflowers, miles long, back to back to back.

TOM

There was another Lydiella I knew.... She made a prophecy about me.

LYDIELLA

What happened to her?

TOM

She died. She was pregnant, and had a baby, and they both died.

LYDIELLA

I was afraid of that....
I'm pregnant, too.

TOM slaps his forehead.

TOM

O my God!!

LYDIELLA

Yes.

TOM

What are we going to do?

LYDIELLA

Nothing.

TOM

We can't do nothing.

LYDIELLA

We won't have to. When he finds out, there will be an abortion.

TOM

If you ever hear of a man going to Hell and back for the woman he loves,
think of me.

LYDIELLA

I've brought you into a curse, haven't I?
I've given you my sins, haven't I?

TOM

Everyone's sins are his own property. No one else has a right to them.

LYDIELLA

Not even the Devil?

TOM

No. Not even Orpheus.

LYDIELLA

[beat] What are we going to do?

**RJ comes over to refresh their coffees,
and bring them a plate of scones.**

TOM

Lydie, I've been having an insane thought. That seems less insane all of a sudden. In my bag there's something else.

LYDIELLA

What?

TOM

An airplane ticket I got for you.

LYDIELLA

To where?

TOM

I'll follow you. After I do what I have to do.

LYDIELLA

To where?

There's no place we can hide that he won't find us.

TOM

I can't do nothing anymore.

With you pregnant, and our baby. It is ours, isn't it?

LYDIELLA

Of course. Absolutely.

TOM

Then we have to escape. Or kill Mars. Or both.

LYDIELLA

Killing a man would rip my heart out.
And kill our love forever.

TOM

Then, we have to escape.

LYDIELLA

To where?

TOM

Where no one can find us.

LYDIELLA

There is no place, I told you.

TOM

There must be, just as a nighthawk is no sparrow.

LYDIELLA

Do you have masks, too? In that bag?
We'll need masks.

TOM

We'll escape under a lunar eclipse, in the light of a blood moon.

LYDIELLA

I don't understand, what you mean. Where is this is going?

TOM

I wasn't sure before. But now I am.
To the other side of the world, and to the end of all my savings.

LYDIELLA

To where?

TOM

I have friends in the mountains of Greece that no one here knows about.
I'm sure we can stay there, where no one will find us, until we can safely leave.
They'll protect us.

LYDIELLA

In Greece?

TOM

There's a place. High up. Dark, tree-lined streets.
Quiet. A bevy of bridges over a gentle river.
It's safe, and it's right.
It's calm and secure.
And our baby will be out of danger there.

LYDIELLA

Mars is not at all fond of children.

TOM

Let's not talk of him anymore.

LYDIELLA

And what will *I be*, in Greece?

TOM

Not a trophy.
Not a beard.
It's a different world in Greece. A different life.
And you'll be a different wife.

LYDIELLA

That's what you think of me?

TOM

Meals together, every day.
Swimming naked, your hair coming up, out of the water in the Greek air.
Walking side-by-side in paradise.
The seclusion of your body around me.
The smoke of your skin, touched only by me and the Greek sun.

LYDIELLA

[*beat*] Is it possible?

TOM

Yes.

LYDIELLA

He'll find us.

TOM

No. Not in Greece he won't.

LYDIELLA

What about our child?

TOM

Alive. And well in Greece.
Where no one loves children as they love children there.
And we'll name her Eleftheria. Freedom.

LYDIELLA

If she's a girl.

TOM

If she's a girl

TOM pulls LYDIELLA to her feet, and they kiss until the lights go out. Darkness.

SCENE 6 –ESCAPE

Stage left: Evening. The diner. MARS is seated, alone, at the stage left side of the counter. TOM enters, carrying his gym bag which he sets down on the floor by him (out of audience sight) as he takes a seat beside MARS. Tom's shirt sleeves are bloody. The WOMAN and MAN are seated in their usual places; and RJ is behind the counter.

Stage right: The bedroom of Lydiella's apartment is brightly lit, with LYDIELLA lying on the bed. She is dressed (disguised) as a man.

RJ brings TOM and MARS menus.

RJ

Coffee?

TOM

Sure.

MARS

Industrial strength.

RJ goes, pours them cups of coffee, returns with them, and leaves again.

MARS

I don't understand who could have put this letter in my pocket.

TOM

Do you think it has something to do with us? meeting here?

MARS

I figured it must have been Eris. But she says, no. And it's not her handwriting.

TOM

Someone.

MARS

Some nighthawk somewhere.

TOM

A spirit?

**MARS notices (for the first time) the
blood on Tom's sleeves.**

MARS

What in Hell? What have *you* been up to?

TOM

What?

MARS

Got a new job?

TOM

Oh.... I'm bleeding out the sin I'm in.

MARS

The price any red-blooded American man should be willing to pay, right?
for screwing another man's wife.... Right?.

TOM

They say sin can turn men into ugly monsters. Or go blind. Is how I feel.
Like I'm going blind here. My fingers pressed down on the fiery, unrelenting
Braille alphabet of ravishing sex.

MARS

Ugliness can do that.

TOM

She said someday the time would come when I'd be the disfigured one, and Lydiella would be the beautiful one.

MARS

Lydiella said that?

TOM

You could say that.

MARS

[*beat*] I can't understand who could have put this letter in my pocket.

TOM

You'll figure it out, I'm sure.
It's only a matter of time.

MARS

Time?
What's time got to do with it?

TOM

Serving time.... Not a free man.

MARS

Hey, plebe, you're a free man.
You can go any time you want.

TOM

And throw Lydie to the wolves?

MARS

She's been there before, and survived. She's a wolf survivor.

TOM

Do you think I'm crazy to be in this?

MARS

Nyet. You just want what you want; and I just want what I want.
And we're both men enough to take it.

TOM

Or to *bear* it.

MARS

Shit, Buddy, today the world's a place of not taking ownership of what we're after.
Of putting blame on everything else.
You're better than that.
You're not whining, "innocent victim."
And you shouldn't be.
Buy what you want. Pay the price. And smile.
Everyone's responsible for his own choices.

The problem with you is, that you just haven't fallen into the proper rhythm yet.
But you will.
Eris has.
Her best orgasms come while she watches me get it off with you.

TOM

You're inhuman.

MARS

What do you think I am?
How does it feel to you that I am? An ape?

TOM

Not a husband, that's for sure.
You don't know her.

MARS

Lydiella? Of course I know her. She's my wife.

TOM

Not under spiritual law.

MARS

Spiritual law? What the fuck is that?

TOM

God's law.... The law of the heart. What *God* has joined together.

MARS

That's got no more legal standing than the law of the jungle. Less, actually.
She's mine because I have the power and the balls to keep her mine.
Just that simple. The same way that our land is *our land*,
from California to the New York island.
The same way your cheeks are mine.

MARS pinches Tom's cheek.

At the same time, stage right, LYDIELLA gets down from the bed, pulls a small suitcase out from behind it, carries it with her downstairs, puts on her coat and exits. The light on stage right goes dark.

TOM

[*pause*] God! I so fucking hate being with you.

MARS

Then why are we here?
For you to tell me that?
I thought you had something real to tell me.

RJ comes over to them.

MARS

[*to RJ*] I'll have the corned beef hash, on rye.

TOM

[*to RJ*] Just more coffee.
Oh. You can bring me a bowl of your Mexican chili, extra hot.

RJ leaves them to prepare their orders.

MARS

[*to TOM*] So why *are we* here?...
Not for the lousy food, I hope.

TOM

I have a proposition to make.

MARS

Spill it.

TOM

[*pause*] I'll give you all the savings I have.

MARS

Is that what's in that little bag of yours?

TOM

Just to have privacy away from you. Lydiella and I.

MARS

You wouldn't enjoy it half so much.

TOM

Freedom from all the clutter.

MARS

What clutter?

TOM

Besides you, all the mess in your apartment. The books everywhere.
And those incessant balls hanging down in your face.

MARS

They're *your balls*, Sweetheart. Symbolically, of course. Yours and a lot more.
Kinetic Calder surf balls. Live with it.

TOM

Divorce her. Stay away from her. Permanently. And you can have it all.

MARS

What's all the fuss about? She's just a woman. No big deal.

TOM

When you say that, it makes me want to kill you.

MARS

You and what gang of geeks behind you?
No sane man alive would kill for something like that.
Wake up, Mr. America. Just like you, she's nothing special.

TOM

We are to each other.
Hair wet. Eyes bright. She makes me want to scream. Not what she seems.
And you? Hair, ape. Eyes, black.
You make me want to scream, because you're every nightmare's dream.
I tell you, I'm taking her away from you.

MARS

I found her when she was nothing. And I made her a bit more than nothing.
What she is today. A unicorn. And unicorns don't lose their horns.

Or their heads?
TOM

What are you saying, Shithead?
MARS

I have a proposition you *can't* turn down.
TOM

What's in that bag?
MARS

My argument.
TOM

Let me see what's in it.
MARS

It's a head. A decapitated one.
TOM

MARS makes a lunge for the bag; and TOM pulls it away from him. They stand, and a brief wrestling match occurs, before MARS overpowers him and takes the bag. While this is occurring, the MAN gets on his handheld.

MAN
Phillies Diner ...
quick ...
Ninth Street, in the Village.
There's going to be blood....
For sure.
Got to go.

MAN puts his handheld up before MARS notices him.

MARS opens the gym bag and pulls out a gorilla mask.

MARS
Christ. Just an old mask.

MARS puts it on (and continues wearing it).

MARS

It fits.

TOM

It fits because it's you.

MARS

You're so sweet, Darling; and you don't even know it. Like an adorable baby. And you cry like one, too. Cry, and cry, and cry about a little mess, *when the world's a flaming asshole.*

MAN

You can say that again.

MARS

[*to the MAN*] Do you remember where you were on 9/11? That morning when the New York sky turned the color of Osama bin Laden's rectum?

MAN

Goddammit, praying for my brother, that's where. Who died.

MARS

That's where we all should be, every day.
Praying for our dead brothers.

WOMAN

[*beat*] Who *are* you?

MARS

The name's Kong.

WOMAN

Have I seen you in here before?

MARS

No.
Because if you had you wouldn't forget it.
I'm *King Kong*, who climbs tall buildings.

WOMAN

Just so I know.

MARS

[*still to the WOMAN*] Can you tell me?
Does domination turn you on?
You can tell me.
Are you secretly excited by a little violence in your sex life?
[*pause*] No?
Well tell me this:
Why in the world does the world admire weak sisters who screw for safety?
Rather than taking a few dares?
Choose safety over excitement, and you always get what you deserve.
And you don't look like a woman who deserves anything less than a bite or two.

WOMAN

I think we could agree on that.

MARS

Then seal it you two. Right here. Bite him.

The WOMAN and MAN stare at each other.

MARS

And take off your clothes.

MAN

You're an animal.

MARS

[*to the MAN*] I'm a king. From a continent you could never dream of.
And I said, "Take off your clothes."

MAN

Go to Hell.

MARS

Now *there's* an offer I'd consider. Can she come with me? Or do you want to?

[*beat; back to TOM*] So ... what's up? Kemo sabe?
You, with this gym bag, and Lydiella?
[*beat*] Do you want to call it off?
Walk home on your own?
I can find another. Lydiella and I always have.
Just stew on that, if you want things to think about in bed with yourself.

TOM

You can't keep doing this.

MARS

And who's to stop me?...

Not Lydiella. You don't think she's going to stop me, do you?

Where's she going to go without me?

TOM

The world's not like that.

MARS

My world is. And you're in *my* world now.

There is a long silence, during which RJ brings them their food. MARS removes the mask, eats a little, and puts the mask back on.

MARS

Silence is golden.

It *makes* people look at themselves.

And not at their phones.

TOM

Do you ever talk about anything real?

MARS

Like what?...

Like my life plans?

Sure.

My dream is the simplest of all.

To live on after I've done everything I want to do in this life.

To be remembered a self-made king.

To form a colony of the world's greatest minds.

To fucking solve all the great problems on this planet.

Like sex, and stately pleasure domes,

and an end to a world that thinks like a moron....

You don't think it can't be done?

It just shows how much you know about your lover.

TOM

You *are* crazy.

MARS

I am Mars.
And you're a what? A boy scout?
Look upon tonight as the night you became an Eagle Scout.
You're lucky. You could have fallen in love with a terrorist.

TOM

You don't have a clue about the woman I've fallen in love with.

MARS

I'm talking about myself, Lame Brain.
But anyway, I can tell you Lydiella's no revolutionary.

TOM

So you say.

MARS

I'm the revolutionary soldier here.
Because of me you're living at the dawning of the sex of precarious.
Bold and guilt-free sex.
Gender-free sex.
Sex without borders.
Courageous sex.
Because sex today *is* courageous.

TOM

You're barking at the wrong color moon. Probably on medication.

MARS

I *am* medication, and not on any stinking drugs.
I know what drugs do to people. And *I* hate it.
What we went through with my Mother, before she died.
Pills to fix her clumsy fingers.
Then came muscle tightness, fatigue, and constipation.
And a pill to fix that.
Then aches and pains in every joint.
Change the prescription again.
Heart palpitations and short term memory loss.
Again.
Then weight gain and thoughts of suicide.
And on and on.
The only pill she didn't suffer from was an erection lasting four hours.

TOM

[*beat*] Have you ever seen a psychiatrist?... Or Suddenly Last Summer?

MARS

Gives a lover ideas, doesn't it?

WOMAN

[*to TOM*] Tom. Angel. We know who you are.

We've seen you in here dozens of times.

But who *are* you tonight?

You're not yourself. Are you okay?

TOM

Who am I tonight? That's a damn good question.

A weatherman? Do I look like a weatherman?

Because, tonight, that's what I am.

Forecasting stone rain and cracked skulls.

Down from the sky.

WOMAN

My God!

TOM

I'm a weatherman of few words.

I start by scraping my boots, clean and clear of muck and mire.

Some people never take the time to clean their boots. You notice?

Death never does.

MAN

You're no weatherman. You're some kind of bookkeeper, or something.

TOM

I am a weatherman. Tonight. Turn. Turn. Turn.

Weathermen notice things like that.

Like the morning of 9/11.

The moon was hanging in the sky, quiet and white, like a small, rounded cloud.

Some people think people do all the dying.

But a weatherman knows the moon does, too. Like love.

Just look what's left after love has died.

Wax and melted tears.

Yet always when I lost my hope, her face ... [*beat*] her face....

[*beat*] Her face. I'd always find her face.

TOM slaps his head.

TOM

Has she been here?

She's extraordinary. You couldn't miss her.

Not from this world. Hair blown down from heaven. Like a gentle hurricane.

I'd give my life for her. I'd give my soul for her. I'd give my body for her.

MARS stands and grabs TOM to his feet.

MARS

What the Hell have you done with her?

RJ

Calm down, Buddy. Why don't you just sit down, and catch your breath?

MARS lets go of TOM and they sit back down.

TOM

Heaven walks in her walk.

How she moves. Her hair. Her head. Her eyes.

O, those eyes, to drown inside them...

If I could see those eyes again, and brush away the tears, I'd beg forgiveness.

MARS

Tom, you asshole, I've been patient with you long enough.

What have you done to her?

TOM

You're always there, hiding and watching.

What do you think I've done?

MARS

I think you've lost your mind.

But I can't be sure.

What *have* you done?

You haven't killed her, have you? Hardly the right time for that.

TOM

When is the right time for how much I hate you?

WOMAN

He's gone looney tunes crazy.

MAN

This gorilla fella is doing it. To him.

TOM

What? I'm not crazy. You think me crazy? Just a bit nervous, maybe.
What I've gone through has only sharpened my wits.
And my heart. And especially my hearing.
My God! I can hear his black heart, hanging out of his chest,
banging at the gates of Hell from here.
See? See the blood?
It's his. The gorilla that he was.
I cut his head off.
Choked him with a rope trap I caught him in.
Then, quietly, I cut into his belly. And cut. And cut.
Till I came to his beating heart.

WOMAN

Oh, God, I'm going to be sick.

MAN

It's just a story.
He's playing us.
It's a scene he's rehearsing for some two-bit amateur acting group,
so far off Broadway it's probably in somebody's closet.
The son-of-a-bitch.

TOM

I knew his heart would be black.

**A POLICEWOMAN enters the diner, and
there is quiet, all around.**

POLICEWOMAN

Everything okay in here?
We had a call.

**TOM points to the door at the back of the
diner. After a few moments RJ goes and
opens it, revealing a storage room with
shelves, supplies, a desk, and a chair.**

RJ

Just a closet, I'd call it. No one hiding in it.

POLICEWOMAN

So, what's going on?

TOM

Do you mean the parade?
It hasn't come by here yet.
But I can hear it.
I was telling everybody how keen my sense of hearing has recently gotten to be.

POLICEWOMAN

You know this guy?

MAN

He's an amateur. And this whole thing's made up, to freak us out.
Some new act, or something.
[to TOM] And it's not freaking Halloween, either, Buddy. Not freaking funny.
And he can go to Hell, for all I care.

POLICEWOMAN

[to TOM] Is that true?

TOM

Is what true? That I can go to Hell? And hear it before it gets to me?
Absolutely.

WOMAN

They were fighting over that bag, there.

POLICEWOMAN

Let me see it.

TOM

The coffee's pretty damn good in here. You should try a cup.

The POLICEWOMAN goes to the bag and opens it. Nothing. But feeling a side pocket, opens it and pulls out a handgun.

POLICEWOMAN

[to TOM] Is this yours?

TOM

Yes. It's a deck of cards I keep in my gym bag. Tarot cards.

POLICEWOMAN

Listen, Mister, don't be funny with me. I don't know who you think you are ... //

TOM

Just kidding.

I'm a zookeeper, you see, and there's been an escape.

A gorilla gone rogue. It's his blood ... //

POLICEWOMAN

[to MARS] Take that mask off.

MARS takes off the gorilla mask.

POLICEWOMAN

I don't know what you two are up to ... //

TOM

What sleep is there for someone always walking in their sleep?

A person (not LYDIELLA) walks by, outside the diner; but TOM pretends that he thinks it is LYDIELLA. He points, and stands, and becomes agitated. She's no longer there.

TOM

Jesus Christ be crucified. She's come back. To walk with me tonight.

To the East River and back.

[to the imagined LYDIELLA outside] I promise. I promise.

Our secret is safe. I'll not tell a soul. I promise.

And when I know nothing, I say nothing.

TOM moves toward the door. The officer stands in his way.

POLICEWOMAN

Sorry, Sir, but you'll have to come with me. Down to the station.

Just a few questions, until we can check this gun out.

TOM

It's all legal. Licensed and everything. With my carry permit.

And it's only a gorilla. There aren't any laws protecting gorillas roaming the city, are there? I don't think so. They're fair game.

POLICEWOMAN

Let's go.

TOM

Normally, the only authority I respect is the one that causes wild ducks to fly backwards. But tonight?...
Tonight they have me tied me to a stake. I cannot fly.
But, bearlike, I must fight the course.

The POLICEWOMAN takes TOM by the arm.

TOM

A bond! A bond! A kingdom for my bail!
O my God. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time.
And all of yesterday has but lighted this fool the way to a dusty jail.

Out, out, brief candle

The POLICEWOMAN escorts TOM (with his gym bag) out of the diner, and off stage.

WOMAN

He must read Tom Robbins.
I love Tom Robbins.
There can't be much wrong with a man who reads Tom Robbins.

[specifically to the MAN] He's the one with the beautiful girl....
She must have broken his heart.

MAN

I don't think so.
It's all a farce.
Just playacting.
Just an idiotic farce.

WOMAN

Maybe Shakespearian.

MARS

With all that blood on him?

WOMAN

Macbeth? Do you think?
Or Richard the Third?
Or just an accident.
He'll go home, and clean himself up.
And tomorrow everything will be back to normal.
Everything forgotten.

MARS

Not if he doesn't post bond.
And I'm sure as shit not going to do it for him.
Not right away.
It'll do him some good. To stew a night or two.
I'll find somebody else.

MAN

[*pause*] I don't think she dumped him.
Remember that time when she came in by herself,
and told us she'd always been in love with him?
Even before the night she came in, out of the rain, she said.
From the first moment she ever saw him.
At the theatre. Macbeth it was, I think. Like you said.

WOMAN

Poor dear. I hope he's all right.
He's a sweetheart, underneath it all, even if he has gone a bit looney over her.

**MARS finishes eating his food, while the
rest of the action slows to a halt.**

END