

# **Skybird, Blackbird (Sing Me to the End)**

**By Jerold London**

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**Harper Lee tells: “It’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” But I tell you, it’s just as great a sin to kill a blackbird, skybird, raven or a crow. Be you perfect to all creatures loved by God.**

# **Skybird, Blackbird (Sing Me to the End)**

## **TIME and PLACE**

**A few years into the present. University town in the East.**

## **CHARACTERS**

**AUGUST VOGEL, philosophy professor and author. Early 40s.**

**LENORE, a wife and student. Early 30s.**

**WILSON, Lenore's husband, late 30s.**

**STUDENT**

**NEWS HOST (offstage voice)**

## **SCENE 1**

LENORE enters to the podium in an empty university lecture hall. Upstage hangs a cardboard sign, written and drawn in pastels and sparkles that could have been made by someone homeless. It reads: "Can you help me?"

## **LENORE**

My mother told me: "Lenore, you must say something, to explain why."  
But do I look like I know why? Not in any conventional sense, that's for sure.  
Professor Vogel said ... August said we'd all understand someday: Life is bipolar, living intensely at the peaks, and enduring the rest. Mother wouldn't agree.  
But then she's no seasoned philosopher like Professor Vogel.  
Live and let live is about the extent of it with her.  
But live and let live is a piece of crap advice when a gun is at the door. Or rats are in a sister's heart. Or you fall crazy in love with somebody you should never.  
All I can think of to say is: First: Our bodies change. Our minds change.  
Our hearts change. Every seven years or so, they all change....  
Second: Life's a mystery. That's one thing that doesn't change.  
I was born a child of light, my mother says. And I've changed, she says.  
But I've always believed I could return to the beauty I was born with....  
And third: Some lovers can actually hear the beat of the music love dances to.  
Really. August could. I could only feel it in the sunshine of his eyes....  
I find it almost unimaginable how close I came to death, and couldn't stop myself.  
Life's such a mystery when you're married.  
Life's such a mystery when you're gone. And I feel so less beautiful without you.

**She exits.**

## SCENE 2

AUGUST is standing at a whiteboard in the university lecture hall. LENORE is attentively listening to his lecture and taking copious notes.

### AUGUST

Greek mythology has it that the Fates were three virgins.  
One spun the thread of people's lives. Dispassionately.  
One measured it. Dispassionately.  
And one cut it off. Dispassionately.  
And nothing could stop them.  
They held the destiny of every person in their indifferent hands, and couldn't have cared less.

The early Greek concept of destiny was not all that much different from the Taoist belief in the power of the *natural order* of things, or from the Egyptian precept of Harmony they called Maat, where inviting disharmony was inviting disaster.

In the Western world notions of self-will and the power of science run roughshod over any philosophy of becoming one with the universe.  
And the proud independence of that has shaped men's views of themselves, their fellow man, God, and the Earth.

Let me share a formula of mine which captures the essence of that:

**Writes on the whiteboard:**

**$\Phi\rho\sigma^2 = \text{Circumstantial Fate}$**

Phi rho sigma squared equals Circumstantial Fate.  
Where Phi represents the force of faith and/or philosophy in a person's life.  
Rho represents life's endless, random connections. Its vagaries.  
Whom you happen to run into on the street or at the grocery store.  
Who your neighbors are when you move into a new neighborhood or dormitory.  
What stranger loses control of their car at the wrong moment for your safety.  
And Sigma is the sum of one's self.  
One's personality.  
One's passions.  
One's dignity, and authenticity.  
One's presence in the moment.  
One's intelligence.  
One's temper and temperament.  
One's addictions.  
And all the thousands of other things there are.

## AUGUST

Your self is half of all that counts in determining your circumstantial fate in life.  
The choices you make.  
The fears and inhibitions you have.  
Your courage.  
What attracts you and what's repulsive to you.

Many people mistake randomness for Fate.  
If they can create no concrete explanation for why something happened, or why someone came along at just the right moment, they label it "Fate." Or God's will.  
But it's not.  
It's the enormous force and scope of the randomness of the universe.  
Pure and simple.  
Randomness is as awesome in the universe as eternity.  
It's what people do with the opportunities the universe affords them that counts.  
And that's two parts Self, one part randomness, and one part philosophy.

Shakespeare expressed it like this, you may recall:  
"There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

[beat] Read, Probabilistic Metaphysics by Patrick Suppes.  
And Google the Commonplace Thesis.

**Exits.**

SCENE 3

AUGUST and LENORE are in bed together.

**AUGUST**

[*to the sleeping LENORE*] Ever since I met you I wanted my life to read like a West End play. Or a famous novel.

To mean something special. Like you. *For* you.

Something very special for you.

The way I would write *your life*, if I could.

Here we are, flickering off to sleep.

Look at you!

You're already sound asleep, as though every angel in heaven approves.

And I'm a step behind, needing one more kiss to catch up.

Like a candle catches hold of another's flame....

**Kisses her.**

Let that flame burn itself to completion in my dreams,  
so come morning I can calmly watch you waking.

One of my greatest joys.

Moving your hands across your face to brush your hair back and remove the sleep.

Stretching them, palms out, fingers interlocked, cracking your knuckles.

And then opening your eyes, with the eagerness of sunrise itself.

There's no combination of words that describe how beautiful you are in the morning. Smiling at me.

And it will take me forever to find all the ways to love you.

I know. I know. My feelings get so intense sometimes they scare you.

They make you think I don't know you. But I have them, anyway.

**As he falls asleep, from offstage:**

**Offstage Voice**

Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these broken wings and learn to fly

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to arise

#### SCENE 4

AUGUST is again standing at a whiteboard in the lecture hall. LENORE is attentively listening and taking notes.

#### AUGUST

We exist. As, indeed, fifteen thousand years ago,  
Native American settlements existed right here.  
As twenty-seven hundred years ago Homer and the Greeks existed.  
If not, we wouldn't be breathing, thinking, feeling, and fidgeting as we do.  
And gods would never have inhabited Mt. Olympus.  
But *why*? Why do we exist? Or more importantly: Why do we ask why?

Philosophers ask because philosophers have that kind of curiosity.  
We feel constrained to seek out why, even if there's nothing we can do about it.  
But philosophy only gets you into the dance.  
It's not the music, not the rhythm, and not the feet.  
Philosophy gets you to thinking about why your life matters,  
before it's spent and gone. Why it matters more than sports,  
and the daily weather report, and getting to work on time.  
For it's better to find out *why* your life, before you try to work *how* your life.

In that vein last night I quickly jotted down twenty-four reasons to live.  
Reasons I've heard and read people talk about.  
And, obviously, there's plenty of room for enlargement of my list:

#### **Writes on the whiteboard: 1. To worship God. And so forth down the line.**

One. To worship God.  
The Greeks did. The Romans did.  
The Hebrews.  
Christians.  
Muslims.  
Hindus.  
Zoroaster.  
They all worshipped some god.  
Because believing in god gives one a sense of protection, comfort, and control.

Two. To perfect our souls. To live a moral, ethical, clean and compassionate life,  
in consonance with the goodness of the world.  
Doing so for harmony now, or believing it will get us to Nirvana tomorrow.  
Zen Buddhists. Taoists. Ancient Egyptians. Confucians. Hebrews. Christians.  
Muslims. Hindus. And many others.



## AUGUST

Three. To sit down calmly to figure things out, as John Locke would have us do.  
To acquire unbiased knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.  
From Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to Newton, Einstein, and Stephen Hawking,  
knowledge has been a quest worth a lifetime.

Four. To discover important things.  
Like a new world, or sunken treasure, or cure for suicide.

Five. To create.  
As an artist or a sculptor.  
A poet or a writer.  
A musician.  
An actor.  
A mother.

Six. To do our duty to others.  
Healing them. Helping them. Holding them. Protecting them. Feeding them.  
Comforting them. Teaching them.  
Simply making the world a better place for others.  
Albert Schweitzer.  
Mother Teresa.  
Florence Nightingale.  
Immanuel Kant and his Categorical Imperative.  
Bertrand Russell.  
David Hume.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson.  
Henry David Thoreau.

Seven. To gain equality for those discriminated against.  
Martin Luther King.  
Mahatma Gandhi.  
Nelson Mandela.  
Mary Wollstonecraft.  
Susan B. Anthony.  
Simone de Beauvoir.  
Betty Friedan.  
Gloria Steinem.

Eight. To establish a system of economic justice for the working class.  
From Plato's Republic to Marx, Engels, and J. S. Mill.  
And I can't help but wonder:  
Maybe including even Jesus himself. And his disciples. What is known of them.

## AUGUST

Nine. To care for Mother Earth.

Jane Goodall.

Greta Thunberg, and too many more than I know to name.

Ten. To explore Earth, moon, and planets.

Eleven. For some obsessive few: To conquer territory, no matter what the pain.

Alexander the Great.

The Roman Empire.

Genghis Khan.

Napoleon.

Adolf Hitler.

Twelve. To support and honor those in power.

To call them lords and leaders.

Machiavelli.

At times, I suspect even Shakespeare.

Thirteen. In contrast, to live free, and resist tyranny.

Rousseau.

Hegel.

Voltaire.

Michel Foucault.

Patrick Henry.

Even Socrates, now that I think of it.

Fourteen. To experience life in every pleasurable way possible, sex, sports, salt and sugar included; and to abolish pain and suffering.

Epicurus.

Jeremy Bentham.

David Pearce.

Fifteen. To attain the greatest personal wealth attainable. Ozymandias.

Sixteen. To do the best you can at what you do, and not worry about the rest.

The Bhagavad Gita.

Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and other Stoics.

Wayne Dyer.

Seventeen. To achieve a superhuman level of perception of mind and senses.

Carlos Castaneda comes to mind. As well as Gurdjieff and Aldous Huxley.

Sir Francis Bacon, Faust, and even J. K. Huysmans could be mentioned here.

## AUGUST

Eighteen. To become a student of alchemy or the like, and master its powers.  
Gnosticism.

Madame Blavatsky.

Aleister Crowley.

Nineteen. To rise above disfigurement, paralysis, blindness, or profound poverty.  
Look to Helen Keller. Consider Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, and John  
Donne.

Twenty. To continue the species in hopes of better things to come.  
Nietzsche.

Twenty-one. To maintain sanity and the will to fight on,  
even when you come to the conclusion that life is absurd.

Is a tale told by an idiot.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus.

And, yes, Kierkegaard, too.

Twenty-two. To lift all the idiots and idiocies of life on your middle finger.  
Be an iconoclast, and take joy in breaking apart ungodly idols.  
Pragmatists like William James and John Dewey would understand.

Twenty-three. To savor a simple, day-to-day existence.  
Breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with family and friends, a little sex, and weekends.  
Thornton Wilder and Andy Warhol.

Twenty-four. To find the true love of your life,  
and the courage to let nothing stop you nesting together.

Remember Schopenhauer.

He taught us that the will to love is a striving, yearning, eternal force.

And Paul Tillich.

Death has no power over love. Love is stronger.

I had a dream.

But don't look to me.

Aside from what's in my dreams, I know nothing about emotions at that level.

[beat] Read Plato's Republic and Matthew, chapters 6 and 25.

And Google Christian communism and agape love.

## Exits.

## SCENE 5

Representative of a dream: A scrim is drawn in front of the lecture hall, which is empty except for AUGUST, standing next to the podium. LENORE, as an angel entirely in white, walks up to him, takes him by the hand, and leads him to a side door, through which they exit.

SCENE 6

Offstage interview.

**NEWS HOST (Offstage)**

Well, Professor Vogel, what is your philosophical prediction for the Righteous Disease Liberation Army, now that the RDLA esteemed leader is behind bars?

**AUGUST (Offstage)**

No different. They are a Second Amendment armed militia, and they will attack.

**NEWS HOST (Offstage)**

What could that gain? No sensible person is going to attack the US Army.

**AUGUST (Offstage)**

Their cumulative IQ hardly matches their aggregate magazine rounds. They *will* attack. Possibly even burn Congress down this time, along with the Constitution.

**NEWS HOST (Offstage)**

You seriously believe that?

**AUGUST (Offstage)**

Every four years when we elect someone to head our government, we take a nuclear risk.

Just as our country did when it elected Abraham Lincoln and risked all-out civil war. Remember, it was Lincoln who asked: How long can our nation endure, so conceived and dedicated as it is to freedom, democracy, and equal rights?

It lasted fourscore and seven years, the first time. And minds wiser than mine, and immensely more intelligent than the brains of the RDLA, have seriously suggested that our democracy would have fallen apart at the seams if Pence had pocketed the Electoral College vote that fateful January day, and declared the 2020 election null and void for voter fraud.

They opine that the Constitution would have had a capital meltdown on the spot. Terrifying how close we came to dictatorship by a self-absorbed megalomaniac.

**NEWS HOST (Offstage)**

You're just ranting. You're afraid they might attack you, for what you've written.

**AUGUST (Offstage)**

If you think this is hysterical rant, consider how Hitler seized power in Germany using democratic means, and the terrible hardship he imposed on his people.

**Outside the lecture hall a group gathers, eyeing the building. They are armed with assault weapons.**

## SCENE 7

AUGUST is standing behind the podium in the lecture hall. LENORE is attentively listening and taking notes.

### AUGUST

As unsettling as any act in the world, *abduction's* at the bottom of the barrel. What faith? What philosophy countenances such moral depravity? There are precious few explanations, from gross poverty to religious obsession. Animals don't do it. Only humans. From the desperation of extreme poverty, to the fanatical belief in the imperatives of a political or religious ideology. And I have no answers for you, other than raw facts.

Consider the Boko Haram.

Formed to purify Islam in Nigeria, Boko Haram has grown into a heartless murder machine, directly killing tens of thousands, and indirectly costing the lives of more than three hundred thousand children.

It ranks as the world's deadliest terror group, and close to the top of the world's most atrocious kidnapers.

Boko Haram's most infamous act of kidnapping was the 2014 mass abduction of 276 schoolgirls in northeast Nigeria. Nearly half have never been found.

In all, since 2014 Boko Haram has kidnapped more than 2,000 young females, many of whom have been forced into sexual slavery or worse.

Which brings us to the philosophical point of today's lecture:

What do we do about it?

Should the demands of kidnapers be met in order to save the lives of their victims?

Should ransoms be paid, if to do so simply funds future kidnappings and other terrorist acts?

And take note, we're talking here a totally different turkey from ransom paid to free King Richard the Lionheart, captured on his return from the Crusades.

To begin to tackle this problem, let's start from the base that the state's duty is to protect its citizens.

Granted.

Which suggests, on the surface, that ransoms ought to be paid.

But consider that criminal gangs now are estimated to garner roughly half a billion dollars a year in ransom payments.

Where does that leave the safety of high profile individuals?

Where does that leave the safety of even the not-so-high profile traveler?

## AUGUST

In the relatively remote Himalayan foothills of Kashmir, at dusk on July 4, 1995, Jane Schelly and her husband, Donald Hutchings were resting, innocently, after a day of hiking. It was the reason they came to India from the U.S. in the first place. To witness one of the most stunningly beautiful spots of nature on the planet. He, washing shirts and socks in the clear waters of a rushing mountain river. She, writing in her journal.

Their guides, cooking rice and lentils for dinner.

It was a Tuesday evening

Not unlike this evening

When twelve armed men appeared, horse blankets slung over their shoulders, belts of ammunition crisscrossing their chests.

And it was the beginning of a nightmare that would leave the two of them never seeing each other again.

The twelve were part of an Islamist militant group known as Al-Faran, fighting with other separatists to rid India from Kashmir.

*Kidnapping* to end Indian authority in Kashmir.

They took Don Hutchings away with them, and, in the end, five other Western tourists. All men.

One escaped.

One was decapitated on the fortieth day, a note pinned to his shirt, in Urdu, warning:

“We have killed this hostage because the government has failed to accept our demands. In 48 hours, if our demands are not met, other hostages will meet the same fate.”

Their demands?

The release of fifteen Kashmiri militants held in Indian jails.

Not money but more than its equivalent.

Negotiations inched along for the rest of the summer and into autumn through intermediaries over shortwave radio.

An anti-terrorist team, combing the hills and forests, was poised to strike.

The State Department, the FBI, the CIA, and the Indian government were all involved. The British government, as well, for two of the hostages were British: Keith Mangan of Middlesbrough and Paul Wells of Blackburn.

In December, no prisoner releases having occurred, a note was received through channels declaring that the kidnappers were no longer holding the four remaining hostages.

None were ever found or rescued.

All are presumed murdered.

## AUGUST

From what I have read, and the one actual person I've talked to,  
being held hostage becomes a crucifying aloneness,  
filled with fear, self-loathing, guilt, and eventually thoughts of suicide.  
It is a never-ending psychological oppression, on both hostage and family.  
In Jane's case, after her husband was taken from her,  
her world fractured into two.

Back home in Spokane, where eventually she returned, she taught physical  
education during the day, and the rest of the time kept in continuous contact with  
Kashmir. Every new event chronicled.

Four straight summers Jane returned to the base of the Himalayas where the  
ordeal had begun, traveling through village and countryside, hoping to uncover  
any shred of information as to her husband's whereabouts.

Seven trips in all. Armed with a two million dollar reward.

But in the end, Jane had to bury Donald with nothing to lay in the ground.

Nothing tangible to close her loss.

And what eludes you in life beckons you from beyond.

Philosophy fails meaningfully to enter the space between the rational mind,  
kidnapping, and thoughts of suicide. It exists in time and space without emotion.

It has hours, *its* hours, but in a crisis its hours turn to millstones.

Philosophy's walls crack to the beat of abduction.

Ransom puts the hammer to it.

Because, truth be out, philosophy's more a gentleman's game.

Or as René Descartes would tell you:

"When thinking on philosophy, it's best to sit down before a fire in a cozy Dutch  
cottage, wrapped in a dressing gown, free from worldly care, and meditate."

**The STUDENT rushes in.**

**STUDENT**

Run! For God's sake! They have assault weapons!... And they're coming!

**Sounds of general panic.**

**AUGUST hurries to LENORE and takes  
her by the hand.**

**AUGUST**

Come with me.

**They exit through a side door marked  
"Supplies."**



## SCENE 8

The STUDENT enters to center stage alone, and speaks into a handheld:

### STUDENT

Before you ask me, let me tell you:

Nobody is going to die.

This thing's not about that.

All the Righteous Disease Liberation Army wants is simple:

Safe passage for themselves with the President.

That's the truth. Not to harm anybody.

That's the substance of what their whole name and purpose is about.

That certain things in this world, like COVID, might seem dangerous to some, but COVID is an upstanding and righteous disease that knows better than to infect the house of God.

Governor DeSantis said it first; but many other southern governors agree.

They let me go to tell you this.

Because they know I believe in God, and that I understand them.

I'm not one of them, but I understand them, and this is America....

For God's sake, it was me who came running in to warn Professor Vogel and his class in the first place.

They know that, and they don't hold it against me,

even though I was the reason he escaped. And they wanted him most of all.

But *me*, they've given me my freedom to explain this to you:

Safe passage for them and their President, in exchange for forty-six safe and happy students. Who have their whole lives in front of them.

Forty-seven safe and happy students, if you count me.

I'm free, but I'm going back.

I'm going back in there to show everybody they're genuine about this.

And to show what a person who's a true American, and not a true coward, does in a crisis like this.

And, anyway, that's all I have to say.

**Exits.**

SCENE 9

AUGUST and LENORE in bed together – he leaning up against the headboard.

**LENORE**

Why me, August? Why was it me you saved that day?  
We'd never said as much as a word to one another.

**AUGUST**

You're wrong there, Lenore. Eyes speak truer than words.  
And for weeks what I saw was, that we were falling in love.  
I even dreamt about it.

**LENORE**

That doesn't make any sense. I'm a married woman. You couldn't see that, too?

**AUGUST**

We've been brought together by something more powerful than paper or a ring.  
My world, for one, was a piece of cardboard before you came along.  
Now I have a choice, finally, not to live the rest of my life flat.  
All I can say is that for the first time ever ... and I mean *ever* ...  
I feel whole. In three, electric dimensions.  
Like I'm actually touching things.

**LENORE**

But why *me*?

**AUGUST**

Look at me. I love you. I love everything about you. Without a logical explanation.  
If there were one, the whole thing would be twisted by motive. And it's not.  
It's chemistry. It's magnetism. It's as inexplicable as Shakespeare's Romeo and  
Juliet. When two people like us, by chance, fall into a moment in eternity,  
they should know instinctively by how it feels, and not have to ask why.

**LENORE**

And tomorrow? And tomorrow? And tomorrow?

**AUGUST**

I suppose the time will come when our eyes are older.  
But don't hasten the day. Don't wish your life away, and I'll tell you why:  
Life, I now realize, is living intensely at the peaks, remembering it,  
and enduring the rest.... Stay with me.

**LENORE**

My mother wouldn't agree. But I'll think about it.

## AUGUST

### Reaching to the bedside table and picking up some papers.

I have a present for you, that I've translated from German. Loosely translated.  
It's your name on it, and my love in it....

[*reading*] The Ballad of Lenore.... For real. That's its name....  
Visions of red again in the night. A murky, crimson red.  
Blood rather than rose petals in the dark.  
Another nightmare cutting Lenore's sleep into shreds,  
till weary-worn and anxious-torn she stumbles from her bed.  
Seven years of torment with her fiancé off at war.  
Seven years taxation of the love of his Lenore.

"Why, William, why? Why never a word from you?  
Have you failed to feel the yearning in my heart?  
Have you failed to hear my prayers?  
I wait for no one else but you.  
Have you forgotten? Can love be forgotten? I've not forgotten you.  
Or has some mistress stolen you from me?  
In Prague, or Hungary?

"Have seven years of fighting ended all our promises?  
I'm tortured by the silence and the fears.  
Each time I close my eyes I summon all the faith I have inside,  
to spread around my heart against the racking dread that you have died.

"Dear William, *are you dead?*  
Or merely callous to a simple lass that cannot move from you?

"When some returned you were not one.  
I ran from man to man, all wildly.  
I tore the ground at where they walked.  
I screamed at them, 'What is my life without my love?'  
You were the springtime of my heart.  
Now that you're away, will winter never part?"

Thus stood a desperate maid in coat and scarf on hallows eve,  
too small a piece, forgotten in a war's enormity.  
A promised bride-to-be, but knowing nothing more  
than all the love she bears her love may be the ghost of him.  
Too slight a shadow under moon and stars. Too slim  
amidst the roaming clouds in midnight blue.  
O how she'd die to hear his sound of footsteps breaking through.

## AUGUST

When, lo! the clatter of a horse's hooves, and once familiar voice.  
"Unlock the gate. For I am here, my bride.  
Rise up, my love. Rise up, my fair one. And come away with me."  
"The voice of my beloved," she cries out. "Behold, the war is past!  
The monstrous waiting ends for us at last."

She throws the gate wide open.... There they stand.  
Both rider and his mount.  
"Be quick," he urges her. "I've journeyed far and fast.  
Up, up, away! We must not stay."

And so she mounts the steed astride, behind her love.  
And off they tear as winds go whistling through the trees.  
Through night and gusty air by madness driven,  
like one of the Apocalypse.  
"A hundred miles to ride," the rider tells his bride,  
"ere comes the break of day. And by and by,  
and side-by-side, together we will lie."

"Where is this chamber we are travelling to?  
And where the bed that waits?  
The wind is storming at my hair. My heart is bursting in the haste.  
Why need we fly in all one night? We have a life to live."  
"Believe me, Love," he answers her, "however far we roam,  
the place we go is mine forever. That place for me is home."

Hours on they skim the fleeting ground.  
'Cross bridges, as they come, with thunder underfoot.  
"We'll wake the dead," she gasps at him.  
"Are you," he asks her in return, "one frightened by a corpse?"  
"So long as you're not one, I have no terror of the dead.  
Nor fear of nighttime dark. Nor blackbirds overhead."

"Let field and wood then be our chapel blest.  
And nature's black-winged birds, the wedding guests.  
Let wind and stars and moon above  
be hymns and bells and vows of love."

And on they sped, and on and on, and faster to their goal  
Before Aurora paints her streaks upon the dawning clouds.  
Till finished, finished! ends their epic ride,  
and room awaits the bridegroom and his bride.

**AUGUST**

With reins relaxed, through iron gate the evermore intrepid racer  
picks his way across a grim and ghostly graveyard.  
Around the white and scattered stones that name the names  
until he stops above an open spot.  
A gray, foreboding, open grave  
with stone that names a soldier as its denizen.  
In simple letters carved in rock that claim  
a certain "William" was the soldier's name.

But see! Now see! The horseman's jacket falls away.  
His face, a mask, dissolves itself into the air.  
His nose. His lips. His tongue. His eyes. They disappear.  
And only hairless skull and fleshless bones remain,  
which drop, by one by one, into the naked hole.  
The earth and stallion groan.  
The very air doth shriek with wailing everywhere.  
And she?... Half dead, half living shadow of a soul, Lenore,  
is left to face life's final truth as never faced before.

"So now I know to weep; and now I know to lay virginity to sleep.  
You, Will, were roused by prayers to bring the truth to me.  
And thus I join the truth and you into eternity.  
But dance a final dance, ye dancer thin,  
ere planks of marriage bed enclose us in."

**AUGUST puts the papers back on the table.**

**LENORE**

What happened?  
Did she fall in the grave and kill herself?

**AUGUST**

What do you think?

**LENORE**

I think it's all a dream.

**AUGUST**

A dream?

**LENORE**

Well, yes, that's what I think.

**AUGUST**

A pretty explicit dream.

**LENORE**

If you say so.

**AUGUST**

It's a poem.

And every poem has two writers: the poet and the reader.

So if you say so, it *is* a dream.

**LENORE**

I think it has to be a dream.

A dream of perfect love. Lost.

They both *did love*. I believe *that*. Which is why he came back.

A metaphor for hope. *And*, a metaphor for facing the truth and moving on, when moving on is the only road left.

**AUGUST**

Moving on ...?

**LENORE**

No. I don't think she kills herself. I think it's her hopes that die.

**AUGUST**

If *you* died, I don't think I'd care to go on.

**LENORE**

Damn it, Gee, I wish you wouldn't say stupid things like that.

It's an interesting poem. Thank you. And then you go on to ruin the mood.

I have enough pain in this as it is, without having to worry about you, too.

What am I sposed to do? Become a vampire, and live forever?

**AUGUST**

Okay. Sorry.

Let me ask you something else:

Who's the horseman in the ballad, do you think?

**LENORE**

He's a part of the dream. The *originator* of the dream, I'd say.

It's like she's hearing a voice from God, and she believes him.

**AUGUST**

And the blackbirds?

**LENORE**

Homeless people.  
In the Bible there's a wedding where only homeless people attend.  
Like ravens that God loves and feeds.

**AUGUST**

And her love?  
Her feelings of love?

**LENORE**

She talks about remembering and forgetting.  
Asking him if he's forgotten their love.  
Asking him if the war has destroyed his memory of their promises.  
Which suggests to me that the poet believes love, in the end, is as much about  
memory as it is about actually making love.  
I mean, that part made me think of my grandmother,  
who lost her memory to Alzheimer's. But we never stopped loving her.

**AUGUST**

And what does the "taxation of love" mean?

**LENORE**

It's a wonderful poem, August. A wonderful gift. Thank you.  
Let's not keep dissecting it. Okay?

**AUGUST**

Just ... what can tax a love out of existence, in your opinion?  
I need to know just that.

**LENORE**

Love is taxed by hurt feelings. Like ego is.  
And impatience, and disappointed expectations.  
And being overlooked. And being forgotten.  
And by not knowing what the Hell's going on in your partner's mind.  
Being lied to.

**AUGUST**

And what does a person do, when things like that happen?

**LENORE**

Do you mean, do they stop loving the person?

**AUGUST**

Yes. That's exactly what I mean.

**LENORE**

Not at first, of course. It takes time to percolate.  
But eventually love *can die*.

**AUGUST**

That's why I translated it for you. To ask you just that:  
What makes love stay, and what makes it go? I want to know what you think.

**LENORE**

Oh! I'm the expert, am I?  
Well, I'll tell you one thing:  
It takes more than a ghost story to unravel that knot.

**AUGUST**

But what do *you think*, what makes love stay, and what makes it go?

**LENORE**

How many people are there who can answer that question?  
Not many I'm quite sure, and I'm not one.  
For that matter, how many people really care?

**AUGUST**

I care.

**LENORE**

How many people are there, do you imagine, who care what you care?  
Or what I care?

**AUGUST**

[*a bit exasperated*] Isn't there *something* that makes love go? Or stay?

**LENORE**

Well ... hurts.  
When they accumulate.

**AUGUST**

Are they accumulating?

**LENORE**

Some days I think they're not.  
Some days I fear they are.

**AUGUST**

I pray they're not.



**LENORE**

August, love stays till its final dance.  
That's all I can tell you.  
And hurts ... at least as long.

**AUGUST**

And when is that?

**LENORE**

When we've exhausted every ounce of pent-up passion in our souls.  
When the intrepid stallion's at our gate.

**AUGUST**

That could last a lifetime.

**LENORE**

It *could*. Everybody's life is different.

**AUGUST**

Life is the living of it, every peak and valley. Especially the peaks.  
And eternity is the giving of it.

**LENORE**

Kierkegaard?

**AUGUST**

Yes. And others.

**LENORE**

You say Kierkegaard.  
I say Mary Shelley.  
But either way, even the greatest writers and philosophers can't measure love accurately.  
It's too existential.

**Pause.**

**Then they begin making love.**

SCENE 10

AUGUST enters, riding an e-scooter across the stage. LENORE follows.

**LENORE**

*[laughing gleefully]* You're insane.

**AUGUST**

You're insaner.

**They scooter offstage.**

SCENE 11

AUGUST and LENORE are lying in bed together, intermittently kissing.

**LENORE**

*[laughing and teasing]* You know something, Gee?

**AUGUST**

What?

**LENORE**

Maybe I'm becoming like my sister Kate.

**AUGUST**

How?

**LENORE**

Obsessive.... A sex addict.

She told me, when she was having her affair, her biggest problem was, she simply couldn't get enough of it. Couldn't get it out of her mind. Is that me? Seriously? Am I the same way?

**AUGUST**

I'm afraid if I don't keep loving you enough, you might disappear.

**LENORE**

But three times a day?

**AUGUST**

I wish it were.

**LENORE**

It is, sometimes.

**AUGUST**

Oh!... *[beat]* What happened? With your sister, and her affair?

**LENORE**

It ran out of gas. Like her marriage.

She's so intense about things, she burns herself out. Said it didn't make her happy after it stopped being wild. I don't ever want that to happen to us.

**AUGUST**

It won't.

**LENORE**

It scares me at times.

**AUGUST**

Making love?

**LENORE**

Worrying about my sister.... I mean, she used to be a drug addict.

**AUGUST**

She was? You never told me that.

**LENORE**

I don't think she's using now. I hope to God she's not.  
Next time it could be the end ... fentanyl and all.

**AUGUST**

Sex is a far safer addiction.

**LENORE**

Did you ever do drugs?

**AUGUST**

No, never. The thought of drugs never lit my fire.

**LENORE**

Me neither....  
[pause] But I think *we're* on fire, sometimes.

**AUGUST**

Fire? Like a wildfire?

**LENORE**

Is that the word you'd use?

**AUGUST**

What do you mean?

**LENORE**

Well, could it be called a hearth fire? Something that does consume everything?

**AUGUST**

A hearth fire?! Us?! Hell no. Does this remind you of a hearth?

**LENORE**

Then what kind?

**AUGUST**

An organ fire.

**LENORE**

An “organ” fire?

**AUGUST**

Ready to smash everything, for our hearts are organs of fire.

**LENORE**

I love that, you know.

**AUGUST**

[*beat*] Is there something wrong?

**LENORE**

Only that I’m married, in case you’ve forgotten.

**AUGUST**

It’s obvious *you* haven’t. At times I think you let your marriage own you.

**LENORE**

That’s not fair.

Just because I remember it once in a while doesn’t make it own me.

I don’t want to be owned by anybody, or any thing.

Not by my husband, not by you, not by my heart.

I want my life to be part of a legend.

And for that not to own me, either.

Not put down on a map some place and labelled so-and-so’s bed partner.

**AUGUST**

Wow! That’s heavy.

**LENORE**

All I’m saying is: I *want* to burn, but not to be consumed by it.

I want us to burn while we can.

If it burns out, well, so be it. Or if it burns for the rest of our lives, that’s fine, too.

But I’m not counting on it. I’m simply living it.

Live inside the flame while living inside the guilt. *That’s my philosophy.*

**AUGUST**

Bring it on! Bring it on!

**LENORE**

I tell you, Gee, love me now for who I am.

Then love me then for who I was.

Let it last for as long as it will, but set me free when it’s time to be free.

Vow me no vows. Tell me no lies. That’s all I ask of you.

**AUGUST**

I want it to last forever.

**LENORE**

The philosopher you are, Gee, can handle "Forever."  
I can't. It's too long a word for me.  
In my way of looking at things,  
time breaks itself down into tinier tablets I can swallow.

**AUGUST**

The philosopher *I* am?  
You make me wonder what that is, parting ways as I have with my brethren.  
Falling, unphilosophically in love. Over my head.

**LENORE**

Philosophers don't fall in love?

**AUGUST**

Not, as a rule, with somebody else's wife.

**LENORE**

Then what are we doing?

**AUGUST**

Well, we won't be the last.  
Because our love and passion are stronger than all today's Lords of Morality.

**LENORE**

If love and passion are the sum of morality, where does conscience come in?

**AUGUST**

From *within us!* It's always been that way.  
Because there is no morality if there's no freedom to choose.  
And with freedom of choice comes imagination, and passion, and freedom from  
moral dictators.

**LENORE**

So ...?

**AUGUST**

It's a struggle. I believe in the sanctity of love between husband and wife.  
But at the same time I know I'll never find personal wholeness without you.

**LENORE**

A conundrum, isn't it?

**AUGUST**

A revolution. Love versus law and order.  
Passion versus the wisdom of stones and a gun.  
And let him without guilt throw the first.

**LENORE**

I'm not out to change the world. *Or* to get killed.  
And I'm not out to have our affair change morality.  
I want you to know that.  
I'm only out to have you, for the while I can.  
And I'm not letting conscience or common sense get in the way of it.  
And if that's wisdom, I'd say wisdom is a damn fool.

**AUGUST**

It's a form of wisdom.

**LENORE**

A form of wisdom that forgets the forty-seven students who are paying their dues  
right now.

**AUGUST**

I don't get the connection. We're not the kidnapers.

**LENORE**

But we're together because of them.

**AUGUST**

Because they got mad at me for saying their idol is a self-absorbed megalomaniac  
who could care less if the country goes to pot so long as he can act like a king?

**LENORE**

Because *you used* their raid on your lecture hall to whisk me off to bed with you.

**AUGUST**

It wasn't me, I told you. I saw it in a dream.

**LENORE**

Whatever! We're here now. What are you going to do about it?

**AUGUST**

What do you mean?

**LENORE**

I've waited long enough, Romeo.  
Come on. Catch me.

**LENORE suddenly jumps out of bed,  
grabs a robe, and runs from the room,  
laughing.**



SCENE 12

LENORE runs into the living room of August's house, throws herself on the couch, and covers her head with a pillow. AUGUST enters. Both are in robes.

A glass of grapefruit juice is on an end table.

**AUGUST**

Fee. Fi. Fo. Fum. I smell the blood of a wild woman.

**LENORE tries to smother her laughter in the pillow.**

**AUGUST kneels beside the couch and pulls her off the couch into his arms.**

**They kiss. Then make love on the plush rug lying on the floor, laughing.**

**Pause, while they catch their breath.**

**LENORE**

There's something I haven't told you, Gee.

**AUGUST**

What? Pray tell.

**LENORE**

I'm writing something. Something special....

**AUGUST**

[*beat*] Well, tell me about it.

**LENORE**

What do you think is the *greatest* love?

**AUGUST**

Are you kidding me?  
What we've just had, of course!

**LENORE**

So? Sex is the greatest love?  
Is that what you're saying?

**AUGUST**

With the person you love the greatest.... I can't think of anything better.

**LENORE**

Well, I think the greatest love is something else.  
Something we create.

**AUGUST**

Didn't we just create this?

**LENORE**

Yes, I guess so....  
Except, it feels more like something we were created for.

**AUGUST**

What's the difference?

**LENORE**

The difference is that something *we* create is meant to help other people, too,  
not just satisfy our passion of the moment.

**AUGUST**

Go on.

**LENORE**

[*beat*] Ten years ago when I was an undergraduate here,  
before Wilson and I got married,  
there was a graduate student I was pretty good friends with....

**AUGUST**

Should I be jealous?

**LENORE**

No!

**AUGUST**

What was his name?

**LENORE**

His name, if you must know, is Michael. Michael David Maker.

**AUGUST**

I don't know him. Was he a philosophy student?

**LENORE**

No. In the Psychology Department. Under Professor Adams.

**AUGUST**

That old coot?! Every time I've seen him, he's hardly said a word to me.

**LENORE**

They had a secret project next to nobody ever knew a thing about.

**AUGUST**

Then how did you?

**LENORE**

It's a long story.

Let's just say Michael trusted me. And my advice. Which he needed.

**AUGUST**

Advice?

**LENORE**

An ethical question.

**AUGUST**

Which you're going to tell me.

**LENORE**

Can I trust you, Gee? Never to breathe a word of this? To anybody?

**AUGUST**

Is the Pope Catholic?

**LENORE**

That wasn't my question....

You screwed me on this, and it's over between us.

Understand?

**AUGUST**

Okay. Okay. I can keep sealed lips.

**LENORE**

*And hands.*

**AUGUST**

I won't tell a soul. I promise.

Not by voice, pen, Facebook, or sign language. You can trust me.

**LENORE**

They were working on a drug ....

Actually, not a drug per se.

It was a synthesis of human brain tissue and modified psilocybin.

And they injected it directly into the brains of some birds.

**AUGUST**

*What!?!*

**LENORE**

Yes. That's what they did.

**AUGUST**

Bullshit!!

**LENORE**

Not just any birds. Skybirds.

**AUGUST**

What kind of birds?

**LENORE**

Skybirds.

Ravens.

White ravens.

As white as seagulls, with a wingspan to match.

**AUGUST**

This is preposterous.

**LENORE**

What happened was that two of the birds began to talk.

**AUGUST**

Birds don't talk.

**LENORE**

Parrots do. Crows can....

Quoth the raven, "Nevermore."

Remember?

**AUGUST**

Just a sound.

That sounds like a word.

Signifying nothing.

**LENORE**

That's not what my friend discovered.

**AUGUST**

Oh yeah? And what language did those white raven birds speak in?

**LENORE**

English, of course.  
What other language is there?  
In a Psych lab?  
On a campus like this?

**AUGUST**

Well, there's nothing to it, even if they did parrot a few different words.

**LENORE**

Nothing to it, except for what happened next.  
The two talking skybirds mated.  
And their hatchlings could talk, too, without injection.

**AUGUST**

Laurie, stop this.  
We know it's impossible.  
And where did the brain tissue come from, anyway?

**LENORE**

Michael first told me it was from a man who had frozen to death in the ice in Canada, but later he admitted that it was from his own brain.

**AUGUST**

Birdbrain!

**LENORE**

I'm afraid, my Love, you ain't heard nothin' yet.  
Because the birds, every year, kept producing more and more of themselves....  
Talkers.  
And after five years or so, they began to ask Michael where they came from.  
Originally.  
And what was he sposed to tell them?  
That they came from a test tube?

**AUGUST**

The whole Psych Department needs brain surgery.  
Is that where they were keeping them? In a Psych lab?

**LENORE**

Nope. Out in the woods.

**AUGUST**

They released them? Into the environment?

**LENORE**

What else were they sposed to do?

**AUGUST**

This is loony.  
The whole thing is loony.

**LENORE**

So, since he couldn't bring himself to tell them they were lab experiments,  
Michael told them they were "Skybirds," made by God,  
probably originating on some uninhabited island in the Bahamas.  
And they believed him!

**AUGUST**

Crows aren't that gullible.

**LENORE**

For a while.  
For a while they believed him.  
But later on they wanted to know more.  
Like, what were their names?

**AUGUST**

"Skybird One, Skybird Two, Skybird Two-and-a-Half" weren't good enough?

**LENORE**

Hardly!  
Michael named the patriarch of the group, "Jonathan Livingston Skybird."  
And gave him the authority to name all of the others.

**AUGUST**

O God! Jonathan Livingston Skybird??!

**LENORE**

Michael loves that story....  
Don't you see?  
Their leader had a right to fly with the name of the great Jonathan Livingston  
Seagull.

**AUGUST**

This is insane!

**LENORE**

It gets insaner.

**AUGUST**

How could it possibly?

**LENORE**

A few months later Jonathan Livingston Skybird flew to my friend and said:  
“I’m asking you one thing:  
The truth about why you created us.  
Because I know you did, and you’ve lied about it.”

**AUGUST**

My God, Laurie, you’re beautiful!

**LENORE**

Oh?

**AUGUST**

I get it. I get it.

**LENORE**

Tell me what you get.

**AUGUST**

You’re writing a metaphor of Genesis. Frankenstein style.  
Intelligent life being created by a creator that hides away and never tells why.

**LENORE**

Ah yes.  
Did we request you, Maker, from our feathers to mould us into speaking  
creatures?  
Did we solicit you from darkness to promote us?

**AUGUST**

Made against their will, by a God who then tried to cover it up.

**LENORE**

That pretty much says it all.

**AUGUST**

Primal disillusionment.  
Which only goes to show why I love you more than God.

**LENORE reaches over to an end table.**

**LENORE**

What’s this?

**AUGUST**

What's what?

**LENORE**

What's this sticky note, on my grapefruit juice?

**AUGUST**

What's it say?

**LENORE**

"You're beautiful." Where did it come from?

**AUGUST**

You're not insinuating that *I* put it there, are you?  
Maybe a little bird left it.

**LENORE**

Add that to your list of sins.

**AUGUST**

Sins?

**LENORE**

What's happened to: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder"?

**AUGUST**

God has joined *us* together, Laurie. *Us*.  
*We're* what no man may put asunder.

**LENORE**

[*beat*] Let's go back to bed.

**AUGUST rises, pulls LENORE up by the hand, and they exit.**



SCENE 13

AUGUST and LENORE are sitting in the kitchen of his house, eating breakfast at a breakfast table. They are both in bath robes. LENORE has a copy of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* next to her.

**LENORE**

Everybody knows a house like this ...  
no mess in it at all ... no books or papers lying around ...  
must be the house of someone who barely ever reads.

**AUGUST**

You can hardly be accusing me of not being a reader. I'm a voracious one.

**LENORE**

No. I'm accusing you of something else.

**AUGUST**

What?

**LENORE**

Hiding.

**AUGUST**

Hiding what?

**LENORE**

A woman.

**AUGUST**

A *woman*??

**LENORE**

W.O.M.A.N.

**AUGUST**

You're the only W.O.M.A.N. I'm hiding in this house.

**LENORE**

No. There's another.

**AUGUST**

Who? When?

**LENORE**

Must be four, five days a week. At least.  
Just look at this place!

**AUGUST**

[looks] Jesus H. Christ! What a dump!

**LENORE**

*What?!*

**AUGUST**

Hey, what's that from?

**LENORE**

What?

**AUGUST**

“What a dump”?

**LENORE**

How would I know, Professor?

**AUGUST**

Aw, come on!

What's it from?

You know.

**LENORE**

August, I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about.

**AUGUST**

Sweetheart, it's from some goddamn Bette Davis movie.

**LENORE**

You expect *me* to remember something like *that??*

It's a bit before my time, don't you think?

**AUGUST**

It's when Bette Davis is married to Joseph Cotton, with this big black wig she's always in, and gets peritonitis in the end.

**LENORE goes on her phone.**

**LENORE**

Beyond the Forest.

**AUGUST**

What's beyond the forest?

Those talking birds you told me about last night?

**LENORE**

The name of your frickin' Bette Davis movie. I just looked it up.  
Unless you're getting it confused with Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

**AUGUST**

Oh! Yes! You're right.

**LENORE**

So ... back to my original question:  
Who's the woman you're hiding in here behind my back?

**AUGUST**

Woman?

**LENORE**

The one who keeps this place so nit-picking clean.

**AUGUST**

Oh.

**LENORE**

Oh?

**AUGUST**

Oh, you mean Jenna.

**LENORE**

Jenna? Jenna who?

**AUGUST**

She's my housekeeper, who comes in most every day to clean.

**LENORE**

You have a housekeeper?

**AUGUST**

Yes.

**LENORE**

On *your* salary?

**AUGUST**

'Fraid so.

**LENORE**

The university's obviously paying you too much.

**AUGUST**

I've heard *that* before.

**LENORE**

I bet you have.

**AUGUST**

And, besides, I *need* a housekeeper.

**LENORE**

Why?

**AUGUST**

Because all I ever do, except when I'm with you, is read.

I don't have time to do household chores.

Other than you, and my lectures, reading's my sole occupation in life. Virtually.

I read with an ardor.

And through my reading I've cultivated an acquaintance with some of the world's most expert minds.

In fact, I often read until the bow of the morning light shoots out an arrow which puts the stars to flight.

**LENORE**

You're putting me on, aren't you?

**AUGUST**

A little, maybe.

**LENORE**

You're so eccentric.

**AUGUST**

None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the raptures of eccentricity.

**LENORE**

I'll give you something to conceive of.

**AUGUST**

What?

**LENORE**

Conceive of this:

Last night I didn't tell you everything about Skybirds.

And about Jonathan Livingston Skybird in particular.

**AUGUST**

What's that?

**LENORE**

You make the best breakfast, you know.

**AUGUST**

That may be true, but it's beside the point.

**LENORE**

Which is?

**AUGUST**

What is it you didn't tell me last night about your flying friends?

**LENORE**

It was about Jonathan. And death.

He told Michael that people pry for the meaning of life with the wrong end of the stick.

**AUGUST**

What does a bird know?

**LENORE**

What he sees and what he hears.

And what Jonathan saw was another skybird, struck by lightning, die.

And then come back to life.... Two days later.

**AUGUST**

Death.... Even at the level of a fowl.

**LENORE**

Yes. Death.

The most mysterious, unsolved force in life.

**AUGUST**

With the world begging for an answer for the beast.

**LENORE**

And found one.

**AUGUST**

Oh, how often the world gets what it wants!

**LENORE**

I detect a note of sarcasm in your voice.

**AUGUST**

Some things strike me as just a little too convenient, that's all.

**LENORE**

Well, Jonathan told Michael that to learn the meaning of life, you must first learn the meaning of death.

**AUGUST**

I'll admit: That's not completely hair brained, for a birdbrain.

**LENORE**

Anyone who hasn't experienced loss can't expect to appreciate the fullness of life.

**AUGUST**

To die, and come back to life?  
Is that what your feathered friend is suggesting, from a lightning bolt?

**LENORE**

In a way.  
To feel life fully you can't escape being brought to your knees by grief.  
And then come back from it. That's even more important than death.

**AUGUST**

Pretty heavy dues to pay....  
All this from some goddamn wing?

**LENORE**

Jonathan says that human beings exist in a world they have created around a false sense of superiority and invincibility.  
Around a longing for miracles, magic, and immortality.  
Which makes Death and pyramids their end master.

**AUGUST**

Bullshit!! Death is the last thing I'll ever take as my master.  
It's the one thing that sucks passion out of everything.

**LENORE**

But it doesn't have to be your master to be your friend.  
You can talk to it. Over your shoulder.  
Death is your eternal companion, and the wisest adviser you'll ever have.  
It will never lie to you. Ask it if you're still alive, and it will always tell you true.

**AUGUST**

Who's been talking to you?  
That Michael David Maker friend of yours? That Psych fiend?

**LENORE**

You. You've been talking to me.  
No one else. Except maybe Mary Shelley.

**AUGUST**

Then why are you saying these things?

**LENORE**

Because I love you.  
Because you ... have opened my eyes.

**AUGUST**

You're doing this because you love me?

**LENORE**

When a woman opens herself up to a man, and to a man's love,  
she always takes chances.  
I did.  
And why? Why did I?

**AUGUST**

Okay, I'll bite. Why did you?

**LENORE**

Because your love was more likely to bring *life* into me than death. And it has.

**AUGUST**

Then why are you talking about death?

**LENORE**

Because there's going to be blood if we keep going on this way together.  
I can sense it.

**AUGUST**

This is one brutal, depressing breakfast...

**LENORE**

I've been getting texts from Leslie.  
She's afraid there's going to be blood, too.

**AUGUST**

Who's she?

**LENORE**

Just one of your students.

**AUGUST**

One of *my* students? Where?

**LENORE**

At the University. Being held hostage by the RDLA.

**AUGUST**

Oh? How is that? I assumed the RDLA would have confiscated all devices by now.

**LENORE**

They never found it, did they? It was hidden in a secret place they never looked.

**AUGUST**

And the charger?

**LENORE**

The same.

**AUGUST**

That ridiculous Righteous Disease Liberation Army was going blind going in.  
And now they really are.

**LENORE**

Don't you think when enough people are willing to risk their lives over something, even if it's hogwash in your eyes, it's worth your listening to?

**AUGUST**

In some cases, of course. Yes.

**LENORE**

So ... what's at the core of their problem with the United States?

**AUGUST**

You're asking *me*?

**LENORE**

I'm asking you to be objective, for once.

**AUGUST**

It's our government, and a democratic system that occasionally elects Democrats. They want to end it. They view it, when Democrats are in majority, as a deep state conspiracy bent on socialistic annihilation of an American's freedom to make as much money as he can, any way he can. Furthermore, they want no limits on imposing their own religious freedoms on others. And to get there they support a narcissistic leader with cult-like loyalty.



**LENORE**

And your problem with that?

**AUGUST**

People.

At one time philosophies and religions like that supported the right of slavery.

After that, the right to run sweat shops and use child labor.

The right to crush labor unions.

The right to segregate. The right to be out-and-out racists. White supremacists.

**LENORE**

Anything else?

**AUGUST**

Hamstringing government their way makes public welfare nearly impossible.

It threatens things like Social Security and Medicare.

It makes the homeless problem in this country be the moral responsibility of the homeless themselves, in their poverty, and not of society.

**LENORE**

I guess that's enough....

**AUGUST**

[beat] So, how *are things* in there, for Leslie and the others?

**LENORE**

She and Jonas may have fallen in love.

**AUGUST**

Jonas?

**LENORE**

Another of your students.

You remember him, don't you? You must.

**AUGUST**

Well I don't.

**LENORE**

He's the one who can't speak above a whisper.

Never could. Since he was three or four years old.

**AUGUST**

Oh, that one. A silent philosopher.

Not a bad combination.

**LENORE**

Like a blind poet. Or a deaf composer.

**AUGUST**

Students' names. Too many of them.  
I try to steer clear.

**LENORE**

Jonas sent me a message through Leslie.  
He says his life can't end like this. It would make no sense.  
That's the reason he took your course in the first place.  
To make sense of his life.

**AUGUST**

It's all random luck in the end. A hierarchy of it.  
He comes to my lectures to find meaning in his life.  
Gets taken hostage, maybe loses his life.  
And finds the love of his life in the process. Who knows?

**LENORE**

You said more than once that it's better to find out *why* your life,  
before you try to work *how* your life.

**AUGUST**

Of course.

**LENORE**

And philosophy can be your friend there.  
But not your best friend.

**AUGUST**

*You* are my best friend.  
Maybe that Leslie is his.

**LENORE**

That's what Jonas said.  
That he never understood what you meant by saying that.  
Until now he knows.

**AUGUST**

These have been, far and away, the happiest days of my life.  
And, possibly, my students' darkest days. I feel sorry for them.  
What sense is there to that?...  
I wonder how I'll remember this in time to come.

**LENORE**

If time gave a damn, there wouldn't be any but happy times.

**AUGUST**

And memories of happy times.

**LENORE**

If I could still have you, Gee, and be anybody but me, I'd choose Mary Shelley.

**AUGUST**

Frankenstein's Mary Shelley?

**LENORE**

**Lifts the book lying on the table by her.**

The same.

**AUGUST**

Where has she come from, all of a sudden?

**LENORE**

Leslie's been reading her.

It was one of the books she had with her when the Liberation Army took over.

**AUGUST**

And why would *you* want to be Mary Shelly?

**LENORE**

Because of all she suffered.

And the masterpiece she wrote after it.

**AUGUST**

We're certainly in a mood this morning, aren't we?

What's gotten into you?

**LENORE**

I say to myself that I'm capable of loving you.

But am I capable of the sacrifice?

**AUGUST**

What sacrifice?

**LENORE**

The sacrifice your students are going through right now, Goddammit!

And the sacrifice that's certainly going to follow us down the road with Wilson.

It's a Mary Shelley person that can risk things like that, not me.

**AUGUST**

Really? Mary Shelley? I suggest you take a deeper dive into her actual life.

**LENORE**

What?

Didn't she lose three of her four children with Percy in their early childhood?

Didn't her mother die of postpartum fever eleven days after giving birth to her?

Didn't her sister commit suicide?

Didn't even the wife she took Percy away from commit suicide?

And didn't Percy himself drown before Mary was twenty-five, in a boating accident?

What more needs to be examined?

**AUGUST**

What's your point?

**LENORE**

That I don't want to lose you.

Therefore, I have to leave you.

**AUGUST**

You're losing your mind!

I can't live without you.

**LENORE**

What if Helen had left Paris, to go back to Greece?

His father and brothers would not have been killed.

His mother, not driven crazy like a dog.

Not to mention all the rest of the people slaughtered when Troy was sacked.

And Paris could have lived, too.

**AUGUST**

Not really.

Not with the love and passion he was seized with.

**LENORE**

You think he was insane?

**AUGUST**

Not insane, exactly.

But trapped by an obsession which stifled his ability to live without Helen.

He couldn't do it. He'd be brain dead to try.

Another Frankenstein monster, anguishing to be unbound....

Laurie, I have never been happier in my life. Or felt less free.

**LENORE**

We *are* free. It's your students who aren't.  
And our love is both the god and the guilt of that.

**AUGUST**

When I think of Helen, and Paris, and the Iliad, I think of the poem that never would have been, but for their love and their courage.  
Sometimes love *is* the greatest courage in the world.  
Like a great storm at sea unfolding, something too important to sacrifice.  
When Menelaus caught up with Helen in Troy, he couldn't kill her, though his sword was drawn in anger. She was too beautiful. Like you are.  
If you're free, you either live for beauty, or die for it. And what will be will be.

**LENORE**

But your students aren't free.

**AUGUST**

We are free, and they are not, and it has nothing to do with what we can do.

**LENORE**

That's your opinion, isn't it?

**AUGUST**

What do you mean?

**LENORE**

I mean, you can't know everything.

**AUGUST**

We are free, and they are not, and it has nothing to do with what we can do.  
I *can* know that.

**LENORE**

Because of a door with a sign that said "Supplies,"  
that was actually a secret exit to our freedom.

**AUGUST**

That wasn't my fault.

**LENORE**

Fault?... There are more things going on in that hostage room, my Dear,  
than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Let me tell you.

**AUGUST**

Tell me.

**LENORE**

Well, some of your students,  
Edwin Stone, Jane Keys, and Sarah Madison, to be specific,  
are working on a book about the philosophy of freedom in captivity.  
They're considering calling it the Stockholm Book of Freedom.  
Their premise is that the greatest freedom in the world is the freedom of mind  
and imagination.  
And other than that, we're never particularly free if we're honest about it.  
Because real freedom implies personal responsibility and discipline that  
circumscribes freedom. Which this ordeal is teaching them, firsthand.

**AUGUST**

Which is what? That they be forced to embrace the Liberation Army's manifesto?

**LENORE**

That people want their thoughts to be heard.  
Which is what the RDLA wants.  
For Heaven's sake, Gee, if you read the numbers,  
more than 25% of Americans want him released.  
And that goes to almost 50%, if he leaves the country and the hostages are set free  
unharmed.

**AUGUST**

Where's there justice in that?

**LENORE**

Even Benedict Arnold was allowed to leave the country.  
And, anyway, how can there be justice if there's no communication?  
No understanding why?

**AUGUST**

You can't let people kidnap a room of people just because they want to be heard.

**LENORE**

I'm not disagreeing.  
But when it happens, it only makes good sense for everybody to listen a bit.

**AUGUST**

To listen to what?

**LENORE**

You were starting to explain it before:  
That they feel it's illegitimate for our government to interfere with the people's  
right to elect the President they choose.

**AUGUST**

Even if he's a convicted felon?  
It was *his government* that interfered!

**LENORE**

Yes. I understand that. And those people are paying the price.  
The RDLA's point is that it was a form of political persecution to convict him, too.

**AUGUST**

Get real!

**LENORE**

Millions of people in this country think what they're saying *is* real.  
They believe it's merely to keep him from being reelected.

**AUGUST**

[*exasperated*] Are there no limits ...?

**LENORE**

The limit is an open debate of ideas, and an open, sensible, reasonable resolution.  
You can't think things through properly without having all the available facts.

**AUGUST**

Fuck facts! If you say the Earth is flat, and the vast majority of people recognize it  
is round, what do you do? Take a vote?

**LENORE**

Why not?

**AUGUST**

How?

**LENORE**

On the internet.

**AUGUST**

*On the internet??*

**LENORE**

The perfect form of modern-day democracy.  
No Senate, or House, or Supreme Court to interfere.

**AUGUST**

Am I dreaming this?  
The American government reduced to a revolution of handheld devices?

**LENORE**

I told you:

There are more things going on in that hostage room than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

**AUGUST**

What more?

**LENORE**

Lots.

Your lecture hall, when it wasn't used by the Philosophy Department, was used by the English Department for play readings and musical theatre rehearsals. There's a piano in there, you know, and a whole raft of scripts.

**AUGUST**

Scripts? I never knew that.

**LENORE**

And a number of your students, plus a couple members of the Army, have been rehearsing and giving readings of plays.

Mostly Shakespeare.

Apparently they want to read aloud all thirty-odd of his, if there's enough time.

**AUGUST**

My God! Is there no limit to the absurdity?

**LENORE**

Is that Shakespeare?

**AUGUST**

Hamlet.

**LENORE**

Oh.

**AUGUST**

To be, or not to be.

**LENORE**

I know.

**AUGUST**

That's always life's big question for us, isn't it, Laurie?

To dare to live, and be reformists, and risk the chaos.

Or sit conservatively safe on our derrières, like rabbits in a burrow.



**LENORE**

Tell me, Professor, how would you use an umbrella in Hamlet?

**AUGUST**

An umbrella?

**LENORE**

That's about their only prop.

That and their books....

And a football.

**AUGUST**

A football?

**LENORE**

The RDLA allowed a football to be brought in for exercise, and entertainment.

In addition to sit-ups, push-ups, and running in place.

It apparently flies all over the hall. Safely.

**AUGUST**

Except when it's used in Hamlet.

**LENORE**

Yorick's skull.

**AUGUST**

**Holding an imaginary football up, in his hand.**

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio.

**LENORE**

And the piano.

You'd be surprised how many of your students are fairly decent pianists.

**AUGUST**

There's no end to my surprises this morning.

**LENORE**

And sing.

**AUGUST**

Sing?

**LENORE**

Every day somebody's up there.

Karaoke-style, with only a piano.

**AUGUST**

Are you putting me on?

**LENORE**

And chess.

**AUGUST**

Chess?

**LENORE**

Four of your students are expert-rated chess players.  
The RDLA allowed a couple of chess sets and tables to be brought in.  
And the chess players have started a tournament.  
“The First Annual RDLA Occupational Chess Championship.”

I can get you the games, if you like.

**AUGUST**

No thanks.

**LENORE**

No problem....  
And German Shepherds.

**AUGUST**

What??!

**LENORE**

The go-between, in the negotiations, suggested them.  
At night.  
As a calming device.... It works....  
Three of them.

**AUGUST**

That’s an idea *I* could have used.

**LENORE**

What’s more: Five of your students, who are math majors,  
have undertaken to prove Fermat’s Last Theorem.  
If I got this correctly, they are using  $A + B - C$ , to the  $N$ th power,  
and subtracting out  $A$  to the  $N$ th, plus  $B$  to the  $N$ th, minus  $C$  to the  $N$ th,  
which, by definition, equals zero.  
They supposedly got the idea from one of the plays in the room there.  
Called, “The Last Sane Days of Shakespeare.”  
Any thoughts on that?

**AUGUST**

Are you kidding?

**LENORE**

I didn't think so.

That's not all the amazing talent in that class you never suspected.

There are three good artists.

And they are making sketches with coloured pencils of the day-to-day.

Thinking of publishing them, when the ordeal is over.

**AUGUST**

The whole thing is sounding less and less like an ordeal to me.

**LENORE**

It's hasn't been all fun and games, if that's what you think.

They almost lost one of the students early on.

He's a diabetic, and went into insulin shock,

and nearly died before they could get him his medication.

Another got dope sick, and had to sweat it out cold turkey,  
with the help of friends and cold water.

One was living out of her car,

and the people on the outside had to move it to a secure place,  
before it got towed away.

One student lost her mother, and never had the chance to say goodbye to her.

One is pregnant.

And who knows what she's going to do if this thing doesn't get worked out.

And just daily hygiene.

There aren't any showers, you know.

Screens and shower curtains were brought in,  
and set up around the sinks in the bathrooms.

And clean clothes.

Not to mention cleaning up the waste paper and dishes each day.

And one student is missing his fiancé terribly,  
and writing her a new love poem every evening.

**AUGUST**

A poet, to boot?

I had all that in my class?

Who would have thought?

**LENORE**

I told you: There are more things in heaven and earth,  
than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

**AUGUST**

I get the picture.

**LENORE**

Do you want to hear one of his poems?

**AUGUST**

Do I have a choice?

**LENORE**

“Chains of metal keep me from your side:  
AR-15’s and their rounds.  
They cannot take your love away from me,  
Except your arms, and lips,  
Your eyes, and hair, and breasts.  
Do you dream of me  
As I dream of you?  
Running naked through sand and waves.  
Will we ever love like that again?  
Or are we forever changed?  
How do we explain it to our friends?”

**AUGUST**

Not bad, for being a college student captive.

**LENORE**

Poetry is a kind of freedom, too.

**AUGUST**

Is it freedom to walk into the sunset naked,  
or to put your clothes on, and walk with people?

**LENORE**

It’s freedom to walk naked in a nudist colony.

**AUGUST**

More things in heaven and earth,  
than are dreamt of in my philosophy, indeed.

**LENORE**

One thing I think you would really like.

**AUGUST**

What’s that?

**LENORE**

A mixed group of faiths, it turns out, are represented in your class.  
Not only Christian and Jew, but also Muslim and Buddhist.  
And they got a forum together, to discuss, in a calm, detached way,  
what their various religions teach, and believe.  
Things they've been hearing, and reading, and learning at the University.  
Whether Buddha is a god, or simply eternal life.  
Whether the Qur'an actually instructs Muslims to kill infidels whenever they are  
found in Muslim lands.  
Whether orthodox Jews believe the mass killings of the Canaanites and the  
genocide of the citizens of Jericho actually occurred, or were merely stories  
created hundreds of years later to bolster Jewish courage to fight their exile.  
And whether Jesus, historically, was himself a Zealot, clandestinely promoting an  
armed rebellion of Jews against Herod, the Romans, and the Commandments.

**AUGUST**

The RDLA must have loved that.

**LENORE**

That was when they decided to close the forum down.  
Except one of your students, Ryan Goldman I think, not in the forum itself,  
spoke up, and suggested to the RDLA that if they wanted people outside to listen  
to their arguments, then they should start by listening to other people's  
arguments inside, even if it didn't sit well with them.

You would have liked that.

**AUGUST**

Probably as free and honest with religion as most of them have ever been.

**LENORE**

Open discussion inside, in hopes of open discussions outside.

**AUGUST**

And the RDLA bought it?

**LENORE**

There's that passage where Jesus openly admits that he came, not to send peace

**AUGUST**

But a sword. I know.  
And to set parents against their children, and brothers against brothers;  
and anyone who loves a child, or a parent, more than him is not worthy of him.  
It's a very troublesome passage. Especially when he tells people to buy swords.

**LENORE**

Jesus believed the end of the world was coming.  
And there would be mass panic.

**AUGUST**

If it ever does, the people most pleased will be those who can say:  
“I told you so.”

**LENORE**

I wish someone who believed would tell me instead:

“Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin.  
Dance me through the panic till I’m gathered safely in.  
Touch me with your naked hand or touch me with your glove.  
Dance me, to the end of love.”

I wish life could be that easy.

**AUGUST**

Well, if I haven’t said it before I’ll say it right now:  
Love ought to be a dance that lasts to the end of love. It’s what *I* want. *With you.*

**LENORE**

No one ever says it right when two lovers are face to face, one of them married.  
Where do we go from here?

**AUGUST**

Where do we go?  
*Forward.*  
Certainly not backwards to emptiness.

**LENORE**

I don’t buy that.  
Love is a splendid feeling, but not when it spills blood.

**AUGUST**

This is the most stupid and depressing breakfast I have ever eaten.....  
Tonight we’re forgetting this whole conversation.  
I have a couple of filet mignons for us. With your favorite: Moët Chandon.

**LENORE**

I can’t.

**AUGUST**

What do you mean, you can’t?

Bill's coming home today.

**LENORE**

That asshole!

**AUGUST**

My husband.

**LENORE**

Damn!

**AUGUST**

I can't believe you're jealous.

**LENORE**

When he takes the sun and moon and Moët Chandon out of my life?!

**AUGUST**

I never thought I'd see you jealous.

**AUGUST**

And I always thought of us as two pieces to the same puzzle.  
Fitting perfectly together in it...  
We never had a chance, did we?

**LENORE**

The way *we've* been making love?

**They take their time finishing breakfast.**

**LENORE**

August?

**AUGUST**

Yes?

**LENORE**

Is it a sin to kill a mockingbird?

**AUGUST**

Absolutely.  
But it's just as great a sin to kill a blackbird, skybird, raven or a crow.

**LENORE**

Why?

**AUGUST**

Because you should be perfect to all creatures loved by God.  
And you should be perfect to all creatures who love you as much as I do.

**LENORE**

Was it a sin for Anna Karenina to fall in love with Count Vronsky?

**AUGUST**

They're just characters in a book.  
And characters don't commit sins. Their authors do.

**LENORE**

But what they did, would it be a sin if they *weren't* fictional?

**AUGUST**

No! Categorically, not! Anna Karenina is a female character from a chauvinistic male mind. And she did her best to get free.

**LENORE**

Chauvinistic? Tolstoy?

**AUGUST**

In my opinion Tolstoy measured women, not by the weight of their minds, but by the weight of their reproductive organs.

**LENORE**

Oh?

**AUGUST**

Women were objects, to do their husbands' will. An adulterous woman never had a chance in his world, and he wrote her that way.

**LENORE**

[*with irony*] And times, of course, have changed. For a woman.

**AUGUST**

Without a doubt.

**LENORE**

Name one.

**AUGUST**

Francesca, in *The Bridges of Madison County*....  
Ada, in *The Piano*.... Kitty, in *The Painted Veil*....  
And Terry, in *An Affair to Remember*.... Okay?



**LENORE**

An affair to remember....

**AUGUST**

Like you're saying it's all over?  
Just like that?  
After what happened last night?

**LENORE**

Last night was the most magical night of my life.

**AUGUST**

Yes. Yes! Mine, too!  
Let's get into the bubble bath, and do it all over again.  
I want so much with you, Lenore, and more than just memories.

**LENORE**

Half of what love is, are memories.

**AUGUST**

But I'd starve on just memories.

**LENORE**

You treat me like ... what?... Some goddess or something.

**AUGUST**

I idolize you.

**LENORE**

Well, stop it. I'm a big girl now, and I sure as shit don't need to be idolized.  
You're starting to piss me off.

**AUGUST**

You're a brilliant woman. Which I admire.  
You're the most tantalizing woman in the world to me. Which I crave.  
And you're a socially-caring person. Which makes you just about perfect.

**LENORE**

[beat] Do you want to know what I used to believe?

**AUGUST**

Sure.

**LENORE**

Before I met you.

**AUGUST**

Go on.

**LENORE**

What I used to believe was that the most important thing for a woman was to be known, to be heard, and to be appreciated. Loved, honored, and remembered. And in the end, making a difference in the world the same way men are set on doing.

**AUGUST**

I'd never stop you from any of that. I'll be your greatest supporter.

**LENORE**

You already have stopped me.

**AUGUST**

No. No I haven't!... How?

**LENORE**

Making marriage impossible for me.  
Whenever I'm with Bill, I can't get you out of my mind.  
And that's got to stop. Don't you understand?

**AUGUST**

I'm bleeding here, Laurie. You're making me bleed. Thinking of losing you.  
My whole life before you I haven't particularly needed anyone.  
Oh, I've been around people.  
But needing them? Never.  
Then you danced in.  
And I'm dying to keep it that way.... Please....  
Please let me dance you to the end.  
It will be the most wonderful tango, I promise.

**LENORE**

Professor, adultery is the end, don't you know?

**AUGUST**

*You see it as the end.*

**LENORE**

Well, a backroad, I guess, to the end.

**AUGUST**

And I see it as a floodlight, lighting up the most powerful love that a couple can experience. Exposing the freedom love gives.

**LENORE**

Maybe I was wrong to say that.  
Love always seems something in a state of flux to me.  
Adultery or not.  
But a woman needs to grow, and satisfy her longings to learn more.  
And be understood better. Just like a man.  
Without love holding her back.

**AUGUST**

Laurie, when I see what you write, I can actually see your hand in motion.  
I'm that much in tune with it.  
And our love in no way stunts your growth, or mutes the sound of your voice.

**LENORE**

[beat] If, let's say, we say goodbye.  
To sleeping together at least.  
Could we still work together?  
Could you still be my mentor and confidant?  
At a safe distance? Without being my lover?

**AUGUST**

I'm trying to tell you.  
I don't think so.  
I don't think I could stand it.  
It would drive me crazy.

**LENORE**

Then there's no solution.  
And I'll have to leave.

**AUGUST**

You are selling out to the very ownership you're trying to avoid.

**LENORE**

How?

**AUGUST**

By buying into the phony belief that men can commit adultery scot-free,  
and women are marked for life with a scarlet letter on their foreheads.  
That's how.

**LENORE**

*I am not!*  
How can adultery be right, regardless who does it?

**AUGUST**

What is *right* in the evolution of Earth is what does the most good for the world.

**LENORE**

And how does adultery fit into that?

**AUGUST**

I'm not sure I can put it practically into words.

Love, like I said, is beautiful in its own right.

And adultery, they say, is ugly.

But why? What makes adultery ugly?

It's generations of acceptance of ownership of female fidelity.

Adultery would never be a problem if it weren't for ownership.

Not if there's honesty about it.

Do you see what I'm trying to get at?

**LENORE**

What your philosophy totally fails to grasp is jealousy.

Jealousy eats people alive, from their innermost feelings, out.

**AUGUST**

All I'm saying is ....

Or rather, all I'm asking is:

Why don't we just tell Wilson?

Text him? Send him an email?

Making love is not our problem here. It's deceiving him that's the problem.

**LENORE**

Honestly, I'm afraid to do anything like that. To be honest.

**AUGUST**

Then I'll do it on my own.

**LENORE**

If you do, I'll haunt you to your grave.

He's got guns, you know. And a Humvee as big as your ego.

**AUGUST**

That matters?

**LENORE**

It matters to me....

I promise you, Gee, if you do something on your own, I'll haunt you to your grave.

**Stands.**

**LENORE**

Damn it! I need to get dressed and get out of this house.

**AUGUST**

And do what?

**LENORE**

Check in on my sister, for one thing.  
Make sure she's not into drugs again.  
Goodbye!

**Starts walking out.**

Men!

I love talking to you almost as much as being in bed with you.  
But you exasperate me, sometimes.

**LENORE exits (to get dressed and leave).**

**AUGUST**

[*calls out*] Loving you is loving to disagree.  
And disagreeing is what brings understanding....  
As well as make-up sex.

**LENORE (offstage)**

Hegel.

**AUGUST**

[*calling out*] Carl Jung, too.

SCENE 14

AUGUST enters and sits at his kitchen table. Two plates and place settings have been laid, candles lit, but he is alone. There is a fillet mignon steak on his plate. He looks at it. Also open on the table is a bottle of Moët Chandon. AUGUST pours himself a water glass full of it. He is in a disheveled condition. Propped up where it can be seen is a portrait of Beethoven.

AUGUST drinks (and drinks), and looks at the paper in his hands.

**AUGUST**

I have trouble sharing personal things, I think you know.  
That's why I have to write them down first....  
I wrote something today about myself.  
And where are you to share it with?  
Not here. You've left me.  
It's about companionship, and paying one's dues.  
[*looking at the portrait*] Beethoven certainly did. After he went deaf.  
Isolating himself from society the way he did.  
Thinking of killing himself. Writing it down the way he did.  
And he might well have done it,  
but for the masterpieces in his brain that refused to let him go.  
They controlled his journey. They became his life companions.  
They kept him alive.  
Where are my masterpieces?... *None!*

Laurie. Laurie. Laurie.  
There's such purity in what you write. It's genius.  
And such triteness in what I write, compared to you.

Oh how I wish you were here.  
Along with my Beethoven....  
How a person can achieve such greatness and not find happiness.

I'm a loner, the pure and simple of it. The sweet and sour of it.  
A roped and hog-tied introvert.  
Face it: There are extroverts; I'm not one of them.  
If it weren't for you I'd be drowning myself every night in the minds of  
Linda Gregg, and Jack Gilbert, and Dylan Thomas.  
Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. H. Auden, John Donne, and the others.  
I love their poetry. Don't get me wrong. The unbreakable passion.  
But they're gone. They're all gone.  
Which is so much like what happens to poets.  
They live. They write. Things go. And then *they're* gone....

## AUGUST

I so much admire how you can gather people around you.  
And keep track of them. People like you.  
People who can be there when the big emotions come.  
Earthquakes and tsunamis. Kidnappings and breaking hearts.  
People you can count on.  
And who do I have?  
A web of colleagues, I suppose.  
But no one close I can even talk to.

I see Greta Thunberg in the news.  
Talking around the world.  
She's an introvert, too.  
But just look at her! And her courage!  
Take heart, I tell myself.  
Introverts *can make* a difference in this world.

So I decided to list my priorities.  
Number One, they start with you, of course.  
Number Two is writing. Which is part of you as well.  
You know what it means to me.  
The searching. The discoveries. The defeats.  
The stubbornness to accept gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world.  
But I fear my writing's gone south, too.  
What's left?... Maybe to be a peacemaker.

Do you get what all this adds up to?  
People need more than work, and food, and words, and shelter to exist.  
They need love and companionship.  
I need love and companionship.  
To nourish my soul. Silently.  
Like Bathsheba, to King David.

Shit! **Fucking shit!** I'm not a complete man without you.

**AUGUST stands and throws his steak at the door.**

**A knock at the door.**

**Somewhat bewildered, AUGUST goes to answer, and when he opens the door, there stands LENORE, wet and sobbing.**

**AUGUST**

[*shocked*] Lenore?! I thought you ....  
I wasn't expecting you....  
What's happened?...  
Here. Come in.

**LENORE**

August?

**AUGUST**

Yes?

**LENORE**

She died.

**AUGUST takes her into his arms while  
LENORE continues sobbing.**

**AUGUST**

Who?

**LENORE**

My sister.

**AUGUST**

O! My God!...  
How?

**LENORE**

O.D'd....  
What are we going to do?

**AUGUST**

Do?

**LENORE**

What am *I* going to do?  
I've never known what to do about addiction. It's obvious. I've failed her again.  
And now it's too late.

**AUGUST cautiously kisses her.**

**LENORE**

[*pause, looking into August's eyes*] I love you.  
I've always loved you.



**AUGUST**

Your kiss is a miracle.  
Wet. From heaven. Like the rain.  
A life saver.

**LENORE**

[*beat*] I came around to this door because I saw the light.

**Notices the steak on the floor.**

I throw potatoes.  
Loaded.

**AUGUST**

You clearly have more sense than I.

**LENORE laughs (sort of).**

**AUGUST**

We'll get this.... I promise.

**LENORE**

Was it Fate, my sister had to die?

**AUGUST**

Fate, I've taught you, is chance.  
Not predestined.  
Randomized chance, deaf and blind to everything else, except, possibly, heroin.  
Heroin invites destruction.

**LENORE**

But why did *my sister* have to die? Not all heroin users die.

**AUGUST**

[*beat*] Len ... I think we both know why.

**LENORE**

I know?

**AUGUST**

Yes, you know.

**LENORE**

Because of me?

**AUGUST**

No. Not because of you.

**LENORE**

Because of you?

**AUGUST**

Because she craved love, and companionship, and never found what she needed.

**LENORE**

Then it is my fault.

**AUGUST**

No more so than breathing is your fault.

**LENORE**

But I could have given her love and companionship.

**AUGUST**

You did....

Something was wrong inside, and her heart couldn't process it.

Like some people starve to death when food is all around....

**LENORE**

Anorexia.

**AUGUST**

Yes, like that.

Drugs must have been her way of coping with what people couldn't see.

**LENORE**

*I*, sure as Hell, couldn't see it. The way she smiled all the time.

Mother always said there were riddles in Kate's smiles.

And nothing she could do, from clowns to saxophones, could get her to smile inside....

I never knew what she meant.

**AUGUST**

*I've* been a clown these last two weeks.

**LENORE**

[*beat*] It's been miserable for me, too, being away from you.

**AUGUST**

[*beat*] Love.

Try living without it.

Try living with it.

It's just a bear, either way.

**LENORE**

I don't care anymore. I just need to be with you, and figure this thing out.

**AUGUST**

Life always seems to keep us from getting close enough, long enough, to solve its endless riddles.

Something's always out there, slipping through our fingers.

**LENORE**

I know.

**AUGUST**

[*beat*] William Blake was married to his Kate for forty-five years.

**LENORE**

Why is that important now?...

Your mind jumps like beans when you're distracted.

**AUGUST**

Because, on his deathbed, propped up by pillows,  
Blake was working feverishly on his last engravings.  
For Dante's Divine Comedy.

And at the very end he put his work down, turned to his wife, who was in tears,  
and told her: "Stay, Kate! Keep just as you are. I will draw you.  
For you ever have been an angel to me."

**LENORE**

You called me an angel once, didn't you? An angel in white.

**AUGUST**

You were. You are.

**LENORE**

William Blake was a pretty eccentric person, wasn't he?  
But his oddness never seemed to bother him. I guess, a lot like you.

**AUGUST**

Like me, to be sure.  
You said once you'd choose to be Mary Shelley.... I'd choose to be William Blake.  
His oddness didn't bother his wife.  
And mine didn't bother me, until you broke the glass....  
After Blake completed her portrait, and laid down his tools, his eyes brightened,  
and he burst out singing of the things he could see in Heaven.  
Then, after promising Kate he would always be with her, he died.

**LENORE**

It's how you are within yourself that matters to a woman.

**AUGUST**

Those Dante engravings are considered to be among his most profound achievements.

**LENORE**

All husbands should be like that.

**AUGUST**

And all wives.

**LENORE**

It's how comfortable you are in your old clothes.

**AUGUST**

And you don't want to put on something expensive, if it's uncomfortable.

**LENORE**

And Kathy wasn't comfortable in her clothes.  
And nothing Mom or I or anybody could do about it.

**AUGUST**

It's not about having an affair, or not having an affair, that makes the difference.  
It's finding your soulmate.

**LENORE**

And where you go from there.... Are we're soulmates?

**AUGUST**

I'm convinced of it.  
I'm convinced we're walking hallowed ground when we're together.  
That love is not the idea of it, like I've had.  
Nor the word for it. Not even the feeling of it.  
It's only when we are captured by the whole movement of desire, and passion,  
and the calm that follows. It's only then in the stillness of the moment there  
comes this perception like a feather.  
This strange bird in the heart. And *that* is love.

**LENORE**

And we're going to die for it.

**AUGUST**

I'm not afraid to die for you. But I tell you, Laurie, we're *not* going to die.

**LENORE**

Did you feel afraid the day when the RDLA stormed your lecture hall?

**AUGUST**

It was quick as a gunshot.  
I stopped thinking, and feeling, and hearing altogether.  
All I could see was getting us out.  
And you. Into my arms, like a hot-water bottle.

**LENORE**

I always believed you weren't a coward.

**AUGUST**

**Takes her face into his hands.**

Tell me: When is the light the brightest that you feel inside?

**LENORE**

When you hold me. When you make me feel I'm in Creation's cocoon.

**AUGUST**

Metamorphosis.

**LENORE**

Platypus.

**AUGUST**

Octopus.

**LENORE**

Picklepuss.

**AUGUST**

Photo synthesis.

**LENORE**

Telekinesis.

**AUGUST**

Nephews and nieces.

**LENORE**

Bits and pieces.

**AUGUST**

Daffodil Narcissus.

Vascular genesis.

**LENORE**

Supercilious.

**AUGUST**

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

**LENORE**

**They laugh out loud.**

Let's have some pizza and Chianti.  
In a straw basket.  
I'll call out for it, delivered.

**AUGUST**

**They kiss.**

SCENE 15

LENORE and WILSON are sitting together at dinner. Long pause.

**LENORE**

Can we talk, Bill?

**WILSON**

You talk, and I'll listen.

What do we have to talk about, anyway?

**LENORE**

Us, I guess....

I don't know if I can do this.

It can't be any more difficult for you than it is for me.

Help me. Please.

**WILSON**

Help you do what?

**LENORE**

Help me think this through....

I need to go away for a while, don't I?

**WILSON**

You can't think here?

**LENORE**

I'm afraid to think here.

**WILSON**

Because of me? Or because of *him*?

**LENORE**

There's a bite.... A pain in my stomach.... A fear inside me.

**WILSON**

Of what?...

That I'm going to hurt you?...

Or kill you, maybe?

**LENORE**

You're a gentle man. I know.

But we're never been in this place before.

And I don't know what to expect.

**WILSON**

Because you tell lies. Your life's a lie.

**LENORE**

I'm not sure about that.

I don't intend to....

Doesn't life move slower when one lies?

**WILSON**

Life moves slower when the lights go out.

It goes slower in the dark.

**LENORE**

How long has it been?

**WILSON**

Since when?

**LENORE**

Since we were we, and weren't afraid of it?

**WILSON**

Since the day the mob stormed the campus, I guess.

And you were rescued by that radical shithead who's out to ruin sensible lives.

**LENORE**

Seems ages ago.

**WILSON**

Not to me.

**LENORE**

The universe seems ages ago.

**WILSON**

What's that supposed to mean?

**LENORE**

When we had time to ourselves to talk.

**WILSON**

Time to talk?

**LENORE**

To mean something. To say something that means something.

My life's meaningless without something meaningful to say.



**WILSON**

Whose is?

**LENORE**

People who don't *care* what they say, I spose.  
Highly insensitive people. Sociopaths.

**WILSON**

Like me. Is that what you mean?

**LENORE**

Not at all, Bill. You're usually one of the most caring people I know.

**WILSON**

Conservatives, then.

**LENORE**

We live in a time when even good people can begin to hate beyond themselves.  
But not you. You're not one of them.

**WILSON**

Lots of good it does me.

**LENORE**

It wasn't you. It was my depression.

**WILSON**

You? Depressed?... That's another lie.

**LENORE**

I managed it quietly.  
Smiled on the outside. Like my sister.  
And thought about other things on the inside.

**WILSON**

Like what? Drugs? Suicide? Is that what you're telling me?

**LENORE**

Yes. Suicide, maybe. Gangster mentality. Not caring whether I lived or died.  
My life was insignificant. And I knew it. Being held together by threads.  
Does that surprise you?

**WILSON**

Hell yes!  
*You?! Insignificant?!*

**LENORE**

My life just suddenly fell through the floor.

**WILSON**

When? When did your life fall through the floor?

**LENORE**

When we were in Cambridge.

So many privileged minds spinning spider webs of nonsense around themselves. Until I finally realized: It was *my life* that was nonsense. And always had been.

**WILSON**

And our marriage? That was nonsense, too?...  
You were worth everything to me.

**LENORE**

You'd say that to any woman you were married to.

**WILSON**

I love you so much I feel like killing you.  
I wouldn't say *that* to any other woman....  
[beat] And what's it say about me,  
if you think your life has always been nonsense?

**LENORE**

That you can just as well live without me, and find another.

**WILSON**

That's horseshit.  
It's fucking crazy, and just plain fucking wrong.

**LENORE**

It was what I fucking thought. And how I fucking felt.  
Like I was suffocating over there, and ready to die.

**WILSON**

And it made you think of offing yourself? Or daggering our marriage?

**LENORE**

It wasn't thinking. It was emotional. Purely emotional.  
I was angry with the stupidity of life. *My* stupidity.  
I was pissed at myself for believing in a Supreme Being that allows things so unfair and cruel. Laughing at us in our pain. Laughing at children abused. Enjoying all the while the world's hunger, and war, and death, and drug addiction.

**WILSON**

You hate God that much?

**LENORE**

I hate something that much. But it's not God. It's God's religious henchmen.  
Because, really, how is it God's fault what people believe?  
They believe what the henchmen teach them.  
So I decided to go back to University myself.  
To find out whether there's anything real to believe in.

**WILSON**

You're talking rot.

**LENORE**

That's exactly my point.  
I felt everything about life was talking rot.  
You nailed it.

**WILSON**

No. *You* screwed it.

**LENORE**

Sex had nothing to do with it.  
It was my purpose in life that had everything to do with it.  
And I found it: It's to smash the icons of a manmade, masochistic God.  
To rid my life of the crucifying pain of that fatal hypocrisy....  
[beat] And yes. Maybe yes. Maybe it was sex.  
Maybe I wanted to smash that wide open along with it.  
Adultery is a woman's sharpest weapon.

**WILSON**

Like a knife into her husband's chest.

**LENORE**

More into my own than yours.  
More a knife to cut myself open. To see inside myself better.

**WILSON**

And what? You found you enjoyed it better than ....

**LENORE**

I discovered that the God I was blaming had already died.

**WILSON**

What are you talking about?

**LENORE**

Nietzsche?  
Zarathustra?  
“God is dead.”

**WILSON**

Oh. Nietzsche.

**LENORE**

And it was a tremendous relief.  
I found I liked myself better.

**WILSON**

No remorse? You didn't miss God in your life? You didn't miss me?

**LENORE**

I never really tasted remorse.  
Not directly.  
Only its appearance in your eyes.

**WILSON**

You're sick.

**LENORE**

I was. Yes.  
And I couldn't find any way to tell you.

**WILSON**

You're in a make-believe fucking fantasy, Lonnie.  
Not reality. A dream. Everything with him is an illusion.  
And it's a nightmare for me.

**LENORE**

It did seem make-believe:  
Finding someone else who understands what it means,  
knowing part of God is dead. And to know relief, not grief.  
Because the better part of God remains, and the lesser part evaporates.

**WILSON**

You think God planned this?... To do this to me?

**LENORE**

If it's God who's planned this,  
He certainly hasn't done much better than men and women could have done,  
without Him.

**WILSON**

You're playing Great Gatsby with our lives, Lonnie.  
And it's absurd.

**LENORE**

If you mean my life is absurd, I agree. All life is absurd if you look at it that way.

**WILSON**

I'm sick of listening to you talk like that.  
Get that bastard off my channel.

**LENORE**

[*beat*] What do you want?

**WILSON**

I want a faithful wife.  
I'm faithful to you. You be faithful to me.  
That simple....  
What do *you* want?

**LENORE**

I want sanity.  
And blind monogamy doesn't bring me it....  
Christ!! I needed something more insightful than nineteenth century morality.

**WILSON**

What?

**LENORE**

The other side of despair.

**WILSON**

Meaning what?

**LENORE**

Laughter. And a sense of meaning in my life.  
Accomplishment. As a woman.

**WILSON**

What's happened to you?  
You were once the most intelligent woman I ever knew.

**LENORE**

Intelligence and melancholy are blood cousins.

**WILSON**

God! How you've changed!

**LENORE**

We *all* have changed.

It's what we do.

I was sick.

I had to change, or die.

And money was not a cure.

What I needed was seeing that the absurdity of life wasn't just me.

Others had been there before me, and survived. And how?

By realizing it's *us* who are responsible for giving our lives meaning, not God.

**WILSON**

I've warned you about him.

**LENORE**

I'm just telling you, the world as we know it is absurd.

**WILSON**

I completely disagree.

The Earth makes perfect sense as it is.

That's *my philosophy*: Newton. Einstein. Stephen Hawking. And God.

**LENORE**

The Earth, in and of itself, is not absurd. Granted.

**WILSON**

Then what is?

**LENORE**

The existence of human beings on it.

**WILSON**

[*raised voice*] How stupid!

Where would the Earth be without human beings on it?

**LENORE**

A Hell of a lot better off than it is now, I can tell you.

Not all the pollution.

Not all the excrement.

And a lot more space.

**WILSON**

The Earth is meaningless without us on it.

**LENORE**

Now you're starting to get it.

**WILSON** slides his chair a bit of the way  
back from the table.

**WILSON**

I'll tell you what I'm about to get.

**LENORE**

I need to find some peace.

**WILSON**

Then find it with me, being my wife.

**LENORE**

Being a wife. Being a husband.  
You treat them like nothing more than daily bread.

**WILSON**

Bread, but not meat. Is that what you mean?

**LENORE**

That's not what I'm getting at.

**WILSON**

What *are you* getting at?

**LENORE**

It's not the Lord's Prayer, or marriage, that gives my life meaning.

**WILSON**

No. Of course not. It's your lover boy's phony philosophy.

**LENORE**

It *is* philosophy, to an extent.  
What else do we have in the end if not our philosophy?

**WILSON**

Your philosophy is circular horse shit.

**LENORE**

August's philosophy is to explore and change, because we have to or expire.  
My philosophy is that we change by force every seven years, or so.  
And we adapt to it, or we expire.  
Either way a person thrives on newness, or dies in a rut.

**WILSON**

I'd rather have a faithful wife who never changes.

**LENORE**

Yours is a decent philosophy. But not practical.

**WILSON**

Why not? It was once.

**LENORE**

Being a wife is not enough.

To be truly alive a woman should never give up her potential.

Never give up using all her talents, not just sex and child-rearing.

**WILSON**

Which leaves me where?...

I know where: Pissed off as Hell.

**LENORE**

I want a home. And a hearth. And a man to protect it and accompany it.

But I also want the chance to find the other meanings in my life.

**WILSON**

[*raising his voice*] You want two lives wrapped up in one.

With a consenting husband. Is that it?

**LENORE**

I spose I do.

**WILSON**

Well I don't.

**LENORE**

[*beat*] I get so lost in words ... so alive, sometimes, and so dead, other times.

**WILSON**

With me?

**LENORE**

I feel dead when I can't find the right words to say what I mean.

**WILSON**

And you think you're the only one?

**LENORE**

The *only* one?



**WILSON**

The only one in the world that matters.

**LENORE**

I used to feel safe, and warm, when we used to be together the way we were.  
Now it's cold, and scary, and I feel numb.

**WILSON**

It's your own doing, dammit.

**LENORE**

He makes me feel that I was born a child of light.  
And that I still have the beauty I've always had.

**WILSON**

And *I* don't, Stupid?

**LENORE**

I *am* stupid, aren't I? You're right.  
I keep believing we can make a difference on this Earth. But it doesn't let us.  
It never lets up not letting up.

**WILSON**

Hell no! What difference has an adulteress ever made on Earth?

**LENORE**

Is that all I am?

**WILSON**

Are you anything else?

**LENORE**

To you, maybe not. But I'm a lot more to myself.  
Does calling me that fix anything?

**WILSON stands suddenly, his chair possibly falling backwards. He slaps LENORE across the face and exits.**

**LENORE continues sitting at the table, holding her face in her hands.**

SCENE 16

AUGUST and LENORE are in bed together.

**AUGUST**

[*to the sleeping* LENORE] Ever since I met you I wanted my life to read like a West End play. Or a famous novel.

To mean something special. Like you. *For* you.

Something very special for you.

The way I would write *your life*, if I could.

Here we are, flickering off to sleep.

Look at you!

You're already sound asleep, as though every angel in heaven approves.

And I'm a step behind, needing one more kiss to catch up.

Like a candle catches hold of another's flame....

**Kisses her.**

Let that flame burn itself to completion in my dreams,  
so come morning I can calmly watch you waking.

One of my greatest joys.

Moving your hands across your face to brush your hair back and remove the sleep.

Stretching them, palms out, fingers interlocked, cracking your knuckles.

And then opening your eyes, with the eagerness of sunrise itself.

There's no combination of words that describe how beautiful you are in the morning. Smiling at me.

And it will take me forever to find all the ways to love you.

I know. I know. My feelings get so intense sometimes they scare you.

They make you think I don't know you. But I have them, anyway.

**As he falls asleep, from offstage:**

**Offstage Voice**

Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin

Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in

Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove

Dance me to the end of love.

**WILSON can be seen across the stage,  
carrying a handgun in the night.**

SCENE 17

The Scene begins in darkness. A shot rings out.

When light returns, AUGUST and WILSON are sitting at the breakfast table in August's kitchen. The handgun is lying on the table in front of WILSON. The two sit and stare at each other. Finally:

**WILSON**

I don't understand you two... or your philosophy.

**AUGUST**

Oh East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men sit face to face, though they come from the ends of the  
Earth!

And the woman in their lives is forbidden to leave the bedroom.

**WILSON**

[*pause*] You're pretty full of yourself, aren't you? And your thinking.

**AUGUST**

I don't ....

I never thought of it that way.

But, yes, under the circumstances, I can see your point....

You're going to shoot me, aren't you?

**WILSON**

Do you love her?

**AUGUST**

It's so trite to say so, but I'd die for her.

**WILSON**

Is that the truth?

**AUGUST**

She said she'd haunt me to the grave if I talked with you like this.

**WILSON**

Why?

Why would she say that?

**AUGUST**

Why ask why? If it's a woman, she has her reasons.

**WILSON**

You think you know her that much?

**AUGUST**

For the most part, right now.  
She changes completely every seven years, or so.  
Or so she tells me.

**WILSON**

I thought *I* knew her.

**AUGUST**

Maybe you do.

**WILSON**

I thought I loved her, too.  
In fact, I do.  
Maybe with a different kind of love.... Mine. Individualistic and real.

**WILSON picks up the handgun, looks at it, and puts it back down.**

**WILSON**

I could have killed her, I love her so much.

**AUGUST**

Then what?

**WILSON**

This is what, you asshole.

**WILSON picks up the handgun again, and points it at AUGUST.**

**WILSON**

Bang.

**AUGUST**

Ouch!

**WILSON**

Was it worth it?

**AUGUST**

What?  
To learn how love can come so close to breaking ice for the Titanic?

**WILSON**

To get your fucked-up philosophy into her.

**WILSON puts the gun down.**

**AUGUST**

You think I'm a shit, don't you?

**WILSON**

I think you're a flaming asshole who thinks he knows everything and doesn't know shit.

**AUGUST**

I'm nothing but a philosopher.

And philosophers only suspect the depths of what they don't know.

**WILSON**

The only thing philosophy produces is monuments to philosophers' brains, which don't mean a rat's ass to anybody else.

**AUGUST**

I wish you were wrong, but you're talking like my audience.

Nothing I write or teach seems to get anywhere with generation "X," "Y," or "Z."

If it doesn't communicate at a gut level, no one gets it.

And I don't seem to know how to speak gut level.

Goddamn it, it goes in one ear and out the other. Like doggerel.

And I hate it. I hate the waste of it....

Do you really want to hear this?

**WILSON**

Why do you do it?

And why did you screw my wife?

**AUGUST**

I do it because I'm committed to an undead conviction that someday a philosophy will roll in to solve the world's leadership problems.

To stop environmental extinction. Somehow.

To nudge people beyond a caveman satisfaction of their material desires.

And to do it before human extinction does.... There. I said it.

**WILSON**

O God, I hate you bleeding heart, liberal Democrats.

Whose philosophy is it, anyway,

that rolls around adulterating other men's wives?

**AUGUST**

Not Nietzsche.  
Not Tolstoy.  
Not Plato. Or Camus. Or Karl Marx....  
There's only one philosophy that's essentially viable today.  
All the rest are sand castles.

**WILSON**

[*beat*] So? Which one is that?

**AUGUST**

*Action.*  
Albert Schweitzer.  
Greta Thunberg.  
Mother Teresa.  
Abraham Lincoln.  
You.  
And me.

**WILSON**

What the Hell are you talking about?

**AUGUST**

Respect for everyone's need for self-protection and love.  
Respect for everyone's need for self-importance.  
Respect for freedom and equally.

**WILSON**

You're crazier than horse shit if you think I have any respect for what you and Lonnie are doing.

**AUGUST**

I'm a metaphor for a world that needs mucking out.

**WILSON**

Your brain needs mucking out, that's what.  
And your philosophy is one hundred percent a loser.

**AUGUST**

Yes. And yes. Philosophy is losing.  
And religion's in second last place.

**WILSON**

Who's winning?

**AUGUST**

The richest and loudest and crassest voices in the world.  
And the most cruel.

**WILSON**

What kind of man are you? Under that robe of yours?  
What do philosophers look like naked?

**AUGUST**

I'm no Frankenstein, I assure you.

**WILSON**

Frankenstein?  
She talks to you about Frankenstein?

**AUGUST**

She taught me Frankenstein.

**WILSON**

She taught you Frankenstein?

**AUGUST**

Yes.  
You, too?

**WILSON**

She was obsessed with it, for a while.

**AUGUST**

It troubled her.... Creation and abandonment without a reason.

**WILSON**

You are both sinners in Creation without a reason.

**AUGUST**

Sinners and lovers.

**WILSON**

Was it worth it?

**AUGUST**

Some would say, "No."  
Some would say, "Yes."

**WILSON**

Who? Who would say yes?

**AUGUST**

Socrates.

**WILSON**

Was he a thief, like you?  
Or an adulterer, like you?

**AUGUST**

No.

**WILSON**

You're sinners and hypocrites, too.

**AUGUST**

That's why, I guess, she said she'd haunt me to the grave.

**WILSON**

Why?

**AUGUST**

To hear you call her that, to my face.  
And not do a thing about it.

**WILSON**

It won't last long.

**AUGUST**

Life doesn't. Not as long as we'd like.  
But it does put things in perspective.

**WILSON**

You're absurd.  
Your life's absurd.  
A philosopher.  
A sexed-up philosopher without morals.  
That's it. That's what you are.

**AUGUST**

It's not just sex, Wilson.

**WILSON**

Forty-seven of your students are being held hostage because of you.  
And they've been in there four months. More than four months.  
When you ran. With my wife.  
They should have killed you.



**AUGUST**

They wanted to. I was their main target. For calling their god a megalomaniac.

**WILSON picks up the handgun, and  
again points it at AUGUST.**

**WILSON**

Bang.

**AUGUST**

That's a philosophy. A neo-reactionary one, I'd say.

**WILSON**

In your face.

**AUGUST**

That's my role now? A face man.  
One false move, and the end of the aardvark, right?

**WILSON**

You're a coward, aren't you? Afraid of dying.

**AUGUST**

Dying wouldn't be my personal choice. No. And there *is* something about fear  
that makes people want to live. But, no. I'm not afraid of you.  
For some reason, which I don't quite comprehend.

**WILSON**

Love your enemy. Is that it?

**AUGUST**

It's been said. By someone not afraid of dying.

**WILSON**

Is there any. Possible. Justification?

**AUGUST**

Possible justification? If there is, it's not sex.  
We search, and we search, and we go on searching for the perfect expression of  
love. In the body of Michelangelo's David. In the Ode to Joy.  
In the hair of Christina's world. In the poetry of Dylan Thomas, and Pablo  
Neruda, and John Donne, and Linda Gregg. In the coal black nights of Romeo  
and Juliet. In the streets of Manhattan and Chicago. Even in the moon and stars.  
And we find it nowhere.  
For years.

**AUGUST**

Then, out of the blue, an angel appears.  
And we don't need language anymore. Or music. Or painting. Or philosophy.  
We know without words that we've found what love is.  
And it doesn't happen twice.  
But when it does, and you have your wits about you,  
it can be so Goddamn beautiful to be yourself.  
It's magical.  
It's more than magic.  
It's spiritual.

**WILSON puts down the gun.**

**WILSON**

Fuck. I *can't* kill you.  
I despise you to Hell for what you've done to my wife.  
And my home.  
And my stomach.  
And I despise you for your philosophy, and your leftist thinking, and your theft.  
But killing you will only make you a fucking martyr, and me a fugitive.  
And blows my chances of getting Lonnie back again.  
Which I will.  
I promise you that.  
You think you're so smart.  
But smart wears off.  
And then there's me.  
To protect her. And comfort her. By a fire in the hearth.  
She'll be mine again.  
And all you'll have left will be black storms, blowing up your ass.

**AUGUST**

You're not going to shoot me?

**WILSON**

No. I'm going to leave you to your fate and your black conscience.

**AUGUST**

You could have fooled me...  
I almost crapped my robe.

**WILSON**

[*pause*] What does it all mean, Professor?

**AUGUST**

It means what Hegel always said it means.  
When two strong men sit face to face to discuss women,  
in the end they wind up somewhere, muddled, in the middle.

**WILSON**

I don't think so....  
What's in the middle here?  
Lonnie?  
She's *my* wife.  
There is no middle.

**AUGUST**

Laurie's a woman. And she's entitled to her freedom to be one.

**WILSON**

For a while, maybe.  
Until she comes back to her senses....  
[beat] What do we do now?

**AUGUST**

Let's have some breakfast.

## SCENE 18

LENORE enters to the podium in an empty university lecture hall. Upstage hangs a cardboard sign, written and drawn in pastels and sparkles that could have been made by someone homeless. It reads: "Can you help me?"

### LENORE

The siege is over. The hall is empty.  
And it's not my mother's doing that I'm up here.  
It's my own.  
My soul's doing.

August surrendered himself.  
We talked about it, and then he surrendered himself.  
To the RDLA. In exchange for the students.  
Who were released when they left the country.  
With their Leader, and with August, into exile.  
Now *he and I* are their prisoners.

If I am a woman, and *not* a rich one, I must speak out as a woman.  
I must speak out as a lover.  
I must speak out for my lover's love, and for his sharing our love with me.  
For his memory of me.  
For his cherishing me.  
For the nakedness of our love together.  
And for the fact that I couldn't resist his not being able to resist me.

If I am a woman, and *not* a rich one, I will not try to conquer my lover.  
I will try to find a way to understand what he teaches me, and what he does....  
Having said that, I know that August would not have found himself through this  
without me. In fact, I'm sure of it.

I had a dream the other night.  
I was walking in the afternoon down a street of a foreign city I didn't recognize.  
Strange sounds and smells.  
When all of a sudden, out of nowhere, August came up to me, riding an e-scooter.  
With a second one in tow....  
It was a dream, I told you.  
And I got on.  
And we rode together, side-by-side for hours.  
Until the sunset.  
Without saying a single word to each other.  
Except, maybe, I exclaimed "Gee!" when I first saw him. On the scooter.

## LENORE

In *my philosophy*, morality and humanity are not attained by just being good.  
Nor by living and dying free of pain.  
Morality and humanity are attaining what is good in spite of the pain.  
And then releasing it.  
Like a caged bird.

[reading]

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies  
are not starving someplace, they are starving  
somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils.  
But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants.  
Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would not  
be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not  
be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women  
at the fountain are laughing together between  
the suffering they have known and the awfulness  
in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody  
in the village is very sick. There is laughter  
every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta,  
and the women laugh in the cages of Bombay.  
If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction,  
we lessen the importance of their deprivation.  
We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,  
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have  
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless  
furnace of this world.\*

**Pause.**

## LENORE

We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless  
furnace of this world.  
For it's only in the agony of parting that we see into the depths of love.  
My lover's sacrifice hurts more than I can tell you.  
He was always a hero to me.  
And this is the saddest thing: His courage means the world to me.  
And to our country. And to the forty-seven.  
But I hate it! I absolutely hate it, I miss him so terribly.  
Freedom's not so painful if you have someone to share it with.  
And I'm so selfish. Life is so selfish. But in a giving way.

**LENORE**

He gave me the keys to his place.

I sleep over there from time to time.

And remember the smells, and the sounds, and the shadows.

And think. And remember.

[*beat*] To remember his breathing alone with me at night, coming slowly and regularly, is truly worth all the years of sorrow that are to come.

**She exits.**

**END**

\* From **A Brief For The Defense** by **Jack Gilbert**

Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin  
Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in  
Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove  
Dance me to the end of love

Dance me to the wedding now, dance me on and on  
Dance me very tenderly and dance me very long  
We're both of us beneath our love, we're both of us above  
Dance me to the end of love.

Dance me to the children who are asking to be born  
Dance me through the curtains that our kisses have outworn  
Raise a tent of shelter now, though every thread is torn  
Dance me to the end of love.\*\*

\*\* **Dance Me to the End of Love** by **Leonard Cohen**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGorjBVagoI>

**Helga paintings**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/582880/helga-paintings/>

**Carl Jung**

<https://carljungdepthpsychologysite.blog/2020/01/13/carl-jung-on-morals-morality-anthology/#.YknCvyjMK70>

**A SPECIAL NOTE OF GRATITUDE TO LYDIA  
DANIELS, WITHOUT WHOSE VISION THIS PLAY  
WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN.**