

LAST DIME IN NY, NY

By Jerold London

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**When you are born your work is placed in your heart.
– Kahlil Gibran**

**Don't die with your music still in you. Don't die with your purpose unfulfilled. Don't die feeling as if your life has been wrong. Don't let that happen to you.
– Wayne Dyer**

**I want to know if you can live with failure ... and still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes!"
– Oriah Mountain Dreamer, The Invitation**

**Is there room in your heart to share what's been taken from you?
– Jerold London, Last Dime in NY, NY**

LAST DIME IN NY, NY

TIME AND PLACE

2024.

Friday evening.

A party in a Manhattanville apartment with a small balcony.

CHARACTERS
(in order of speaking appearance)

GRACE, female actor.

BROOKLYN, female actor.

CLIFFORD, male actor, tall, father of a kidnapped daughter.

LYDIA, female guest, not an actor, who wanders on her own about the room, looking at books, pictures, etc., occasionally addressing the audience. If anyone has silvery purple hair cut short on one side and long on the other, it's LYDIA.

ANTON, male actor.

JENNIFER, female actor.

CHRISTIAN, male actor.

MICHAEL, male actor.

EMILY, female actor.

RYAN, male actor.

CAROLYN, female actor.

ROSE, female actor.

SEAN, male actor.

JOHN, male actor.

KELLY, female actor.

ALICE, female actor.

REESE ("Candy"), female actor.

LISA, female actor.

DeJEAN, male actor.

CAMERON, male actor.

HAMILTON, male actor.

ERICA, female actor.

CORA, female actor.

ETHAN, male actor.

BREANNA, female actor, afraid of heights.

PAUL, male actor.

ASHLEY, female actor.

MARK, male actor.

GAYLE, female actor.

DAVID, male actor, youngest actor in the room.

KATHRYN, female actor, tenant of the apartment and hostess of the party.

LORI, female actor, co-tenant of the apartment and co-hostess of the party.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE – FRIDAY EVENING

All of the guests are either in the main room of Kathryn's and Lori's seventh floor Manhattanville apartment, in its kitchen (where pizza, beer and wine are available), or on its small balcony.

KATHRYN and LORI welcome guests at the front door as they arrive.

Guests move about the room, standing in small groups chatting. Most have plastic plates for their slices of pizza, and/or a drink in hand. Occasional sounds of passing sirens may be heard in the distance.

Through appropriate lighting/miking techniques, fragments of conversations are highlighted to the audience. Other conversations subside into background sound. **When LYDIA speaks, action near her comes to a halt.**

As GRACE and BROOKLYN are talking, LYDIA enters from the balcony. A soft spotlight follows her throughout – going full when she speaks to the audience.

GRACE

They're closing Lempicka, did you hear?
Three Tony nominations, and still the show fails. Why is that?

BROOKLYN

Let's not say it's because support for gay rights is waning.

GRACE

More likely interest in Art Deco is waning.
Or New York's not as woke as it would like to think.

BROOKLYN

Or getting too expensive for its britches.

GRACE

[*beat*] O no!
Here comes King Lear.
He just caught my eye, when I wasn't looking.

BROOKLYN

Who?

GRACE

Clifford. The tall guy. Heading this way.
He's never been the same since his daughter got kidnapped.

BROOKLYN

She was?

GRACE

He and his wife separated.
They couldn't stand the memories together. He's a total

CLIFFORD comes up to them.

GRACE

Hello, Clifford.

CLIFFORD

Evening, Grace.

GRACE

This is my friend, Brooklyn.
Brooklyn, this is Clifford.

CLIFFORD

Extending his right hand.

[to BROOKLYN] My pleasure, Brooklyn.

BROOKLYN

Shanking his hand.

Nice to meet you, Clifford.

CLIFFORD

Call me Cliff....

What do you think of the party?... Thus far.

BROOKLYN

Pizza's good. Sesame seeds. And the wine.

CLIFFORD

Agreed....

Except it's pale ale for me. [*showing*]

BROOKLYN

What do you do ... in theater?

CLIFFORD

Explore.

BROOKLYN

Explore what, exactly?

CLIFFORD

New things to do.

Sound. Air.

Attuning myself to its inner vibrations in the universe.

BROOKLYN

Am I supposed to understand that?

CLIFFORD

Life is a dance. Theatre is a dance.

It vibrates to the rhythms of a greater world.

Unless we can understand that, we can understand nothing.

How life is given, and taken away, at random.

Because life's a cycle. Coming and going.

Reincarnation is a cycle.

BROOKLYN

You believe in reincarnation?

CLIFFORD

I have to.

GRACE

Ut oh, I think I need to refresh my drink.

GRACE finishes her drink and exits into the kitchen.

BROOKLYN

What options are there?

Reincarnation, heaven, or believing in the big nothing at all.

CLIFFORD

Heaven is a construct.

If you'll never see the sun again, or hers eyes, what's the purpose in being?

In heaven. In acting. In doing anything at all?

You *must* believe in something, that she'll come back to you.

And I do.

Because nothing can convince me otherwise.

Life's a dance, as I said. A tango.

Theatre's a dance. A waltz to some; hip hop to others.

Reincarnation's a dance, of body, belief, and spirit.

And in that dance body and spirit join together as dancing partners for a space of time.

And then they separate, for a while, and go their separate ways.

Only to return to each other.

And it goes on like that forever.

Nothing proves me that I'm wrong.

[*beat*] Is this boring you?

BROOKLYN

Actually, no, it isn't.

CLIFFORD

Actually?

BROOKLYN

Actually I've thought a lot about these things too.

After my parents died....

CLIFFORD

[*pause*] There's a dance they have in India, called Kathakali, loosely meaning the stories of eternity.

Have you heard of it?

BROOKLYN

No.

CLIFFORD

Kathakali dancers take hours preparing themselves for a performance.

Meticulously painting their faces.

Putting on elaborate costumes.

It's transcendental, how they're able to convey the feelings of a story without words.

It's all through their looks and body movement.

Their facial gestures, chants and pantomime.

BROOKLYN

What kind of stories? Love stories?

CLIFFORD

Iconic stories of Hindu gods, and heroes, and history.

Lord Shiva, for one.

How at the end of each era Shiva's duty is to take down the universe, in order to make way for its reincarnation.

The dancer playing Shiva directs the destruction and re-creation from one end of the stage to the other.

He has a third eye in the middle of his forehead, a snake around his neck, a halo about his head, a trident strapped on his back, and a two-sided drum he carries.

During the destruction, and then again during the reincarnation of the universe, there is chanting in the background, which reaches a crescendo, first as the sun, moon, and stars are gathered into a silken sack and buried under the stage, and later, after Lord Shiva gives a sign on his drum, when the sun, moon and stars are retrieved and distributed back into the sky, and light returns to the stage.

After that the animals are revived and released, and finally man.

Upon seeing daylight man breaks into a dance of unbridled joy, carrying him to the four corners of the stage and to all the other dancers....

Does that make any sense?

BROOKLYN

Sounds magnificent. I wish I could see it.

CLIFFORD

Here. Look.

CLIFFORD unfolds a picture he takes from his pocket, and shows it to BROOKLYN.

BROOKLYN

O my God!

CLIFFORD

Refolding the picture and putting it back in his pocket.

Picture this: Darkness at the beginning.

Kathakali performance music – drums, cymbals, and chanting.

When light returns a dancer in costume and an elephant are standing upstage.

The dancer reaches his arms, high in the air, to say ... silently:

Enough! Silence! I am king.

Not of this forest we now roam, but of a great kingdom in the north we were driven from. My queen, my sons, my people, and I.

There is great sadness in our exile. There is great pain in our hearts.

There is great longing to see our homeland again.

The audience all know the story.

BROOKLYN

Must be hard to play, without words....

It reminds me, in a way, of the movie, What Dreams May Come

CLIFFORD

Like that. About never giving up.

But the role of the king in this dance is a major challenge to play.

Even for the most experienced actor.

Being a near divine hero, the king's mental agony needs to be shown with controlled expressions that still convey its severity to the audience.

Slowly. Slowly walked and slowly danced.

It's what I want to go to India to learn, and bring back to New York.

My proof of eternal life. And perform it here, in the original.

BROOKLYN

What happens?... To the king, and his family, and their people?

CLIFFORD

There's an enormous battle at the end, into which Lord Krishna is drawn.

And it takes a much larger stage to perform than any normal New York stage.

BROOKLYN

Do you think it could ever come to New York?

CLIFFORD

In this life? Or the next?

Peter Brook tried it. In Avignon, France. But

BROOKLYN

He's dead now.

CLIFFORD

Probably his greatest failure. The Mahabharata, in G Major. The Bible, in India.

BROOKLYN

I know.

CLIFFORD

Woke people called it "orientalism."

They said the play twisted the whole meaning of the Mahabharata out of shape.

BROOKLYN

What do you think?

**LYDIA has been standing near enough to
catch the gist of their conversation.**

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

You can't put water in your bureau drawer, Lydia, my father used to say.

The wind will find it out and tell your wooden floor.

CLIFFORD

Failure is failing to try. And woke is sometimes un-woke.

Brook tried to make people understand virtue and corruption from the perspective of dharma.

BROOKLYN

Righteousness? Is that what you're talking about?

CLIFFORD

The innate righteousness of *dharma*.

Which I'm in total harmony with. But not in its detachment.

Giving up emotional attachment to everything turns Nirvana into a padded wishing well for me.

BROOKLYN

What then?

CLIFFORD

The Egyptians had a faith in righteousness called Maat.

In India, of course, it was dharma.

Before both of them Zoroaster taught that the world is engaged in an eternal cosmic battle between good and evil, which will not be ended until all evil is eradicated.

Which tells me: The end is Neverland on this Earth.

Our prophet, turned God, crucified on a cross, doesn't suggest anything faster.

And our faith in his righteousness? Or India's faith in dharma?

Where does that seem to be leading us?

Both countries are turning from values of charity and tolerance and hope to creeds of nationalism and xenophobia, with a capital Z.

BROOKLYN

What's doing it? What's happening?

Tell me what's happening. If you know.

CLIFFORD

I'm not sure I get you.

Where are you coming from?

BROOKLYN

I want to dance the way you say. I want to be happy. My heart be light.

And you're telling me something's out there stopping me.

Aren't you?

CLIFFORD

Yes. But not *something*.

We're stopping ourselves.

People who lie through their teeth, and steal, and kill, and kidnap.

It's making this planet a shitty place to be reincarnated on.

BROOKLYN

I just want to dance, Cliff, like I'm kissing the Earth with my feet and a song.

CLIFFORD

And wake up free from the illusion that we all are physically separate entities.

BROOKLYN

Yes. How do we do that?

CLIFFORD

By finding trust inside yourself, and the two of you returning to the roots of ancient faith.

Not physical. Beyond the physical.

Because the physical creates us, and then destroys us.

Faith is what brings us back to life.

BROOKLYN

Faith in Jesus?

CLIFFORD

Jesus had faith.

He was certain the world would be torn down and reconstructed.

BROOKLYN

When?

CLIFFORD

After the Romans were driven out of the holy land.

In the lifetime of his followers.

Which never happened.

And when he left them, his followers told the greatest story ever told.

And many, many people believed it.

BROOKLYN

Has Jesus been reincarnated?

CLIFFORD

Not the whole of him.

Certainly not the whole of him.

Pieces.

BROOKLYN

What pieces?

CLIFFORD

It's a matter of opinion, I suppose.

There was a man last century who gave up virtually everything material he had: Home, family, community, profession, to move to equatorial Africa and bring them medical care and hope.

Problem was: He believed that the stories told about Jesus were not the stories Jesus told about himself.

He claimed they were lies; and he's been virtually written off because of that.

BROOKLYN

Will he come back?

CLIFFORD

We all will.

BROOKLYN

You said that the physical creates us, and then destroys us.

CLIFFORD

You're the first person who's ever listened to me. Really listened....

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

Listening is a superpower.... Are *you* listening?... I didn't think so.

CLIFFORD

Great minds come along, and shed light on our plight.

It's the followers of theirs who distort the truth they taught.

BROOKLYN

What do you suggest we do?

CLIFFORD

Get back to the original.

BROOKLYN

I'm not sure I'm getting this.

CLIFFORD

To my mind there's one fundamental teaching in the Bible.

More pertinent to our life here than all the rest.

BROOKLYN

Which is?

CLIFFORD

When you feed, clothe, and tend to the needs of the most poverty-stricken of fellow man, you do so directly to God.

There's true righteousness. For it finds you two things: God and giving.

BROOKLYN

You think homeless on the streets are God?

CLIFFORD

No. We poor actors are.

BROOKLYN

A delayed laugh.

I think I get it. I *almost* get it.
It isn't to show charity, is it? Not for the sake of charity.
It's to find faith. Isn't it?
Or Jesus.

CLIFFORD

God helps those who help themselves, with a little help from their friends.
Charity that pours money out willy-nilly isn't the way.
Charity that holds out a hand....

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, speaking directly to them, and making gestures both hand and face of "Personally, I don't know."]

Are you believing this guy?
How can you know in this bunch?
Either he's a superpower bull shitter, or honestly some New-Age Hindu evangelist.
Or possibly he's just trying to get into her pants.
Only time will tell.
My experience with strange men is to lay your money on seduction.

BROOKLYN

And when you lend a helping hand ...?

CLIFFORD

You find the path to faith's better half.
But right now nothing's really lending me a helping hand.
Except for work.
Work. Only work stills my aloneness. Only my work.
The people who came before us in this country valued work over most everything.
They dreamed of working to make this land a beacon of light to the world.
Something's happened.

BROOKLYN

They named it Civil War.

CLIFFORD

And it's not over, is it? Like most wars: No winners. Only losers.

BROOKLYN

Because we can't seem to work out exactly what they meant when Jefferson and Lincoln said that all men are created equal.

CLIFFORD

That's where theatre can teach us.
Tell us truths we don't let ourselves hear.
Or understand.
When family, and society, and history, and the love of our lives let us down.
Religion, too.

BROOKLYN

How can you hear the cry of prophetic playwrights when the landscape gets taken over by more profitable forms of entertainment?

CLIFFORD

It just takes time.

BROOKLYN

Who said that?

CLIFFORD

Chekov, I believe.

BROOKLYN

I sometimes think that in a hundred years people will look back on us and our lives with the same fear that we have for them in the future.

CLIFFORD

And the same contempt.

BROOKLYN

We marry for love. And where does the love go?

CLIFFORD

Amo. Amas. Amat.
Amamus. Amatis. Amant.

BROOKLYN

I love. You love. She loves.
We love. You love. They love.
You love in a way that lets the person you love feel free.
That's what I believe in.

CLIFFORD

And then your love for her rips you apart.

BROOKLYN

I'm sorry. I'm truly, truly sorry.

CLIFFORD

There was a time I could imagine seeing a picture in my mind's eye, so eloquent in form and color that it couldn't possibly exist in this world.

On it were depicted all of life's temptations and evils a father had to avoid to keep his family safe.

And all the Church's temptations, too:

To claim it can turn stones into bread, and bread into God's body and blood.

To claim that it can walk in water and not wet its pants.

To believe all the world will fall down and worship it.

BROOKLYN

What happened?

CLIFFORD

I gave up believing in any church that teaches there's no reincarnation.

BROOKLYN

What *do* you believe in? Besides reincarnation?

CLIFFORD

Theatre. Once. That it could change the world.

I believed that when you walk across a stage, the soil you walked on was just as sacred as the sands of Israel. Just as holy.

Nothing missing from it, except for one thing: Guilt.

Theatre teaches without guilt.

It opens eyes without the threat of Hell.

It forces you to imagine enormous loss, but doesn't steal the love of your life.

It can move men's minds by the force of truth alone.

Or tease them by hyperbole.

"Life's but a walking shadow."

Does that resonate?

A WALKING shadow.

"A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more."

If I believed that literally But I don't.

I only bleed for the man who had everything, and sees it taken away.

CLIFFORD catches a sob.

BROOKLYN

My father used to ask me ... before he and Mom died:
“Is there room in your heart to share what’s been taken from you?”
I think of them often.

CLIFFORD

To share the pain? No, not the pain. Of course not.
What then?

BROOKLYN

[*pause*] I think you know.

CLIFFORD

The Great Poet said life’s “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”
I guess I’m an idiot.
Believing what I do.
Because I believe she’ll come back.
And we’ll share our love together again, her growing up.
And then only three things will matter to me.
Faith.
Community.
And father-daughter love.
And if theatre is worth its salt, it will continue to create those three things for eternity.

BROOKLYN

Are you telling me the truth?

CLIFFORD

There are no boundaries in theatre, and without boundaries
Forgive me, Brooklyn, I’ve said more than I intended.
I loved her with all my heart.
Too much, perhaps.
And too little, if she needed more to take with her.

**BROOKLYN kisses CLIFFORD just as
GRACE is returning.**

GRACE

What did I miss?

BROOKLYN

[beat] Stereophonic just received thirteen Tony nominations. A record.
Isn't that just thrilling?

GRACE

I'm rooting for Hell's Kitchen.
It's the most powerful female achievement play, and love story, since Vagina
Monologues.

**The three go on talking, but out of
earshot of the audience.**

**Next to GRACE, BROOKLYN and
CLIFFORD, ANTON and JENNIFER are
talking while eating pizza.**

JENNIFER

Some say that theater is dying in America.
Do you think they're right?

ANTON

Nietzsche thought he was right, when he said God was dead. And he wasn't.

JENNIFER

Thus Spake Zarathustra. And it drove him crazy.
But do we have to relate everything to Nietzsche tonight?
This is spost to be a light evening.

ANTON

Jennifer ... you exhaust me.

JENNIFER

Me too, Tony.

ANTON

But let me finish.

JENNIFER

O God!

ANTON

Nietzsche wasn't really meaning that *God* had died.
Only that God's Church was dead.

JENNIFER

Who cares? And anyway, a bit premature, don't you think?

ANTON

The same, saying that theatre is about to die.
If you think that, ask the cast of Dead Outlaw.

JENNIFER

A play about a mummified dead train-robber. What's that prove?
How long do you think that'll hold audience interest in this town?
I'll tell you: One song's worth:
Your Momma's dead. Your Daddy's dead. Your brother's dead. And so are you.

ANTON

Okay. Okay.
My point was that Nietzsche was anticipating the spread of Marxism.
And the absorption of the Church into the state.

JENNIFER

Nietzsche.
Nietzsche.
Nietzsche.
Lenin.
Stalin.
And preachy.
Don't you ever get tired of talking about him?

ANTON

That's the point I was trying to make.

JENNIFER

What?
That somebody ought to write a musical about a mummified Friedrich Nietzsche?

**CHRISTIAN walks up to them, grinning
from ear to ear.**

CHRISTIAN

Hi, Jenny.

JENNIFER

Hi, Christian. What are you so happy about?
You look like the proverbial cat eating a canary.

CHRISTIAN

Points at his feet.

Do you like my new J's?

JENNIFER

Looks.

Of course.... Is that all?

CHRISTIAN

Knock on wood.

Break a leg.

Keep your fingers criss-cross across.

I've got it!!

ANTON

Got what?...

Is it contagious?

JENNIFER

Christian, I'm sorry, this is Anton.

Anton ... Christian, my almost best friend in the world.

CHRISTIAN

A pleasure to meet you, Anton.

ANTON

They call me Tony.

My pleasure meeting you.

JENNIFER

Soooo, Christian, what's the news?

This shindig could use a bit of good news.

CHRISTIAN

A beat; then clapping his hands.

I have the part!!!

JENNIFER

What part?

CHRISTIAN

Nelson.

In Scent of the Lion.

JENNIFER

Clapping her hands.

O my God!!! O my God!!!
You didn't?!!!

CHRISTIAN

It's a dream come true.
He's me.
I'm him.
To a "T".

ANTON

What's this all about? May I ask?

JENNIFER

Tonyyyyy....

CHRISTIAN

Most people haven't heard, Jen.
It's South African.

JENNIFER

Most people *have heard*.

CHRISTIAN

My character Nelson is from a township outside Johannesburg.
His father thrashes the Hell out of him when he's fifteen; and he flees the country.
Seven years later he returns, having lived in Mozambique, and he lands a chauffeur job driving for the Mayor of Joburg.
One night he smells out a plot to assassinate President Cyril Ramaphosa, and smashes the limo he's driving into the lead hit car.
Pandemonium results.
It's splendid theatre. AK-15s. Fire bombs.
And finally a helicopter flies down onstage to save the President.

ANTON

And you become the President's right-hand man.
Correct?

CHRISTIAN

Check.

ANTON

I figured as much.

CHRISTIAN

They call me Twenty-Two Degrees.

ANTON

Ice in your veins.

CHRISTIAN

No. Twenty-two degrees of bad luck.

Saving the President's life was the door to my downfall.

You see, Nelson is a cross between a proud black and a humble man, and it costs him.

JENNIFER

Like you, in a way, Christian.

I mean, beautiful, the way you are. Proud and humble.

CHRISTIAN

There's a woman I can't resist.

ANTON

If it's not a woman it's a man. It always is.

CHRISTIAN

She's a bit different than you might think.

And she's the wrong man's woman.

Her name is Julie. Miss Julie.

She's white, young, and beautiful.

And her soul is like an expensive piano, that's locked, and the key thrown away.

ANTON

And? What else is new?

CHRISTIAN

Absolutely nothing.

Nelson discovers that some of the top figures in the President's party are defrauding the country of billions.

And when he tries to expose them, he's branded an enemy of the people.

ANTON

I've heard that message before.

CHRISTIAN

And so you have, I bet.
And the same message will keep coming back until we learn to respond to it effectively. Get what I mean?

ANTON

You're fucking full of yourself, aren't you?

JENNIFER

Tony, that's enough!

ANTON

Don't you see what this guy is?

JENNIFER

I see what *you are*, Ant-Man.
And it's making me sick.
[to CHRISTIAN] Let's get out of here.

JENNIFER takes CHRISTIAN by the hand, to leave the party.

LYDIA is standing nearby.

LYDIA

[*stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them*]
There you have it. Aroma Theatre. Can you smell it?
The scent of a luvvie feeling jabs of jealousy.
Reminds one of a surfeit of skunks.
If they don't stink up the place, they lose the sense of being themselves.

JENNIFER and CHRISTIAN, exiting, pass EMILY, who is approaching MICHAEL and RYAN, who are comparing coins from their pockets.

They put the coins away.

MICHAEL

Hello, Miss Emily. How's life?

EMILY

No complaints, Michael. What about yours?

MICHAEL

Dragging a bit, right now, I'm afraid.
Stale.
An idle life is an impure life.

RYAN

What are you doing, Em?
Something new?
Anything special on stage?

EMILY

Well, yes and no, Ryan.
I'm writing.

RYAN

Writing?

EMILY

Yes.

RYAN

For the stage?

EMILY

What else?

RYAN

You're such a mystery, Girl.

MICHAEL

What is it you're writing?

EMILY

It's about a marriage.

MICHAEL

Who's? Yours?

EMILY

Henrik Ibsen's and Anton Chekhov's.

MICHAEL

How is that?

EMILY

It's an adaptation.... Actually, a blending of two of their best plays:
An Enemy of the People and Uncle Vanya.

RYAN

That's crazy.

EMILY

Yep. About as crazy as Stoppard's taking two little characters from Hamlet, and having them flip coins all over the stage in a play of their own.
But I really don't want to talk about it till it's finished.

MICHAEL

Tom Stoppard wrote like a lunatic, too, sometimes. Didn't he?
You're never quite sure where reality resided in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
One flip of a coin at a time ... 92 straight heads.
And he didn't want to talk about them either, I understand.
Before they were finished.

EMILY

That's the point: If someone is telling the truth, but it's too uncomfortable to hear, is it actually the truth? If no one wants to hear it?
Galileo learned that, if you remember:
His eyes and telescope told him that the sun was the center of our solar system.
But the Church taught that the Earth is the center of the universe.

RYAN

Galileo got religion, on pain of torture and death, and admitted to the Church that it was right. Yes, I remember.

EMILY

Precisely. What's the point in proving you're right if it kills you?

RYAN

Same thing, I guess, with Dr. Stockmann in An Enemy of the People.

EMILY

In Galileo's case it was the Church.
In Dr. Stockmann's case it was the people.
When he discovers a health problems with the town's golden goose, its spa, the town refuses to believe it, and finally turns against him. It's a money thing.
And if a majority of the voters are elephants in the room, who intend to elect a tyrant, who's strong enough to stand in their way?

MICHAEL

Sounds familiar.

RYAN

In our country, as opposed to Norway, we have a Supreme Court to keep things in check.

MICHAEL

Ibsen had a mind that could deal with that sort of political stuff.
Where does Chekhov fit in?

EMILY

Those who doubt democracy are possessed of a notion that some human beings are superior to others.
That all men are *not* created equal.
That Thomas Jefferson was a closet hypocrite.
That's where Uncle Vanya comes in.

MICHAEL

How?

EMILY

Ibsen didn't buy democracy, especially one that didn't include women.

MICHAEL

O no! Not another feminist rant.

EMILY

No. Not another feminist rant.
Because Chekhov didn't either.
Uncle Vanya reeks of despair over lost land, lost trees, lost purpose, and lost esteem.
And who was there to take it out on? An attractive woman. To seduce her.
The one character who shines real light on the subject is Yelena, the young trophy wife of an old professor.

MICHAEL

You're turning a twenty-something wife into the hero of Uncle Vanya's play??

EMILY

It fits.
She's the one character who stands up against lecherous men and confronts the fact that Russia was dying of neglect of its people and of its natural resources.

MICHAEL

And how, pray tell, does she do that?

EMILY

I really can't go into the whole story. You'll have to see it for yourself.
Just one speech of hers, to Uncle Vanya at the end of Act 1. She tells him:
Yes. Yes. Life *is* tedious.
Because you men destroy the forests so that soon there will be none left.
The way you seek to destroy marital fidelity, morality, and the soul of Mother
Russia.
Why can you not look calmly at a woman unless she's yours?
Because you have no mercy. You'd rather rape than appreciate.
Rape the woods. The birds. Us women. Each other.

RYAN

You got all that out of Chekhov? Not just angst and wishful poetry of Revolution?

LYDIA is standing nearby.

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]
I've always wondered ... probably as you do ... whether Chekhov really felt his
plays ever amounted to anything.

EMILY

What do you think poetry is?

RYAN

Poetry is a verbal snapshot of nature and people in the moment.
Feelings and waterfalls. Passions, birds, and snakes. Love, longing, and
melancholy.

EMILY

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

MICHAEL

Shall I compare thee to a high rise apartment building? Thou art better built.

EMILY

I'm sorry, but I have no trouble imagining Chekhov's Yelena being enlightened,
as well as poetic. There are as many Yelenas in the world as there are people to
play her. Women who can repel advances from god-awful men, and who can
resist their own temptations of infidelity.

MICHAEL

Are *you* planning to play her?

RYAN

You should. You'd be great....

[*beat*] Yelena, Elena, Helen, of Troy. Do you read Russian?

EMILY

Read it and speak it, both.

MICHAEL

And where do Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters meet?

EMILY

Guess.

MICHAEL

I have no idea.... In Moscow?

EMILY

Wittenberg.

MICHAEL

Wittenberg?

RYAN

The University, where Martin Luther taught?

EMILY

The pub where Martin Luther, Dr. Faust, and Hamlet drank beer together.

RYAN

Clever.

EMILY

It's Yelena, Uncle Vanya, and Dr. Stockmann.

Yelena's professor husband's off at the University, reading in the library.

MICHAEL

[*sarcastically*] You should have Greta Thunberg there, with them.

EMILY

Good idea. I'll see what I can do.

RYAN

Em ... why did you ever decide to learn Russian?

EMILY

It was my parents' doing.
Neither of them knows Russian; but both of them love playing Chekhov.
And both have always felt that past translations have artistic hollowness in them.
So ... it was them, *and* Chekhov.

RYAN

Forgive me, I never knew that about you. That your parents were in the theatre.
I guess I should have guessed.

EMILY

O my God, yes.
They met working with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford.
And married. And lived most of their years together in West Hampstead.
He's in assisted living now. Mum's still at home. My brother lives with her.

RYAN

He's an actor, too?

EMILY

No.
He took their advice, and stayed out of the business.
He has his own company.
Tree care.
Tree surgery, and the like. Landscaping.
And some deer and fox management, to boot.

MICHAEL

What advice was that?

EMILY

Our parents never wanted my brother or me to get involved with acting.
Too "iffy" they'd always tell us. Too borderline neurotic a life.
You never know where your next role is coming from. Or your next paycheck.
And like they say, you're only as good as your last performance.
And *he* listened.

RYAN

Groping our way through darkness,
Fireflies that follow illuminate the path.

EMILY

Something like a Ko Takamine poem. Yes.
You know, Ryan, what we all go through.
How we fight the good fight in the Big Apple.
Every role I've ever played was a new beginning for me.
Discovering her in me, and a new me in her.

RYAN

[*beat*] Were it worth the trouble?

EMILY

Haa? What trouble?

RYAN

Gotcha.
But looking back, is there anything you would have had in life in place of theatre?

EMILY

Nothing, other than my parents to stay young forever.
But time has a way of unsettling that.
None of us can stay young forever. Nor our parents.
What we have to do is make the best of the time we have *between* the times we
love. And that's what theatre does for me.

RYAN

Has it, for you?

EMILY

Has it, for *you*?

RYAN

For me, acting has been the best medicine for my beast ... my depression.

EMILY

That not-acting brings on.

RYAN

Touché.

EMILY

Me, too.

RYAN

And that aging brings on, too.

EMILY

It's a family thing for us.
Whatever the ups and downs, my parents never lost their special pride being
good actors *with* good actors.
It's something we share.
So, whenever my spirits get low, I catch a plane to London, and listen to all their
stories of the London stage.
Actors they worked with.
Laurence Olivier.
Claire Bloom.
Richard Burton.
Vanessa Redgrave.
Anthony Hopkins.
Maggie Smith
Gary Oldman.
Judy Dench.
Michael Caine.
Helen Mirren.
They're proud of me, like I'm proud of them, despite the gaps in life I go through,
waiting for a role that fits me, working in restaurants and book shops.

RYAN

You're lucky.

EMILY

I *am* lucky.
And, in the end, that's all that really matters.
My family.
At my side.
Having my back.
In London *and* in New York.

RYAN

What I really want is not to lose my looks.
Any more than I already have.

EMILY

Good looks are a mixed bag for female actors.
They can lose themselves in the labyrinth.

RYAN

It happens to everyone. Maybe to women worse.

EMILY

Yes. Shit certainly happens to beautiful women.
Helen of Troy.
Anne Boleyn.
Anna Karenina.
Marilyn Monroe.
Princess Diana.
But not Yelena. Her shit doesn't stink.

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]
There must be more important things beyond all this fiddle.

MICHAEL

From which you infer what, exactly?

EMILY

That in Chekhov's eyes a woman needs strong inner confidence to resist powerful men.
And so few of his characters, women *or* men, possess it. It's tiring.
And that's what Ibsen wants to ask Chekhov about.
Why some women can resist lust and others can't.

MICHAEL

What's the trick, then, in seducing a beautiful woman if she's stubborn?

EMILY

If you don't know, Michael, I'm not going to tell you.
See my play.
See my play.

RYAN

Remove the cause.

MICHAEL

[laughing] But not the symptom.

LYDIA

[making a face, and speaking directly to the audience]
They're all so serious playing their all-so-serious roles in and out of bed.
O well.
That's show biz, as my father would often say.

CAROLYN, standing with ROSE and SEAN, suddenly screams.

There's a momentary hush in the room.

ROSE

What?
What's the matter, Carolyn?

CAROLYN

I hate my life. Hate it, Rose....
That part was made for me.
And I was made for it.
Shit!!
How could I not get it?

CAROLYN screams again. Silence.

SEAN

Calm down, Honey.
Please. Let's talk about it.
What part?

CAROLYN

Like you don't know, Sean. Faye, of course.

SEAN

Faye?

CAROLYN

Faye. You know what I'm talking about.... **Faye.**

ROSE

The middle-aged

CAROLYN

Late 30's

ROSE

Single woman who comes home one night to find an intruder hiding in her wardrobe, wearing a duck mask.

SEAN

Oh.

CAROLYN puts on a duck mask she had been holding at her side, and leaves it on.

ROSE

She gets a bit nuts.
Struggling with a memory thing that won't resolve itself, and won't go away.

SEAN

The character Faye's memory?

CAROLYN

Who wouldn't be a bit nuts?
With a sudden terror like that?
And not remembering what he did to her.

ROSE

Says she's fine now.

CAROLYN

I was broken into a year ago, and I was struggling for a bit afterwards.
I'm fine now, though. I'm coping just fine.
That's my line.

CAROLYN screams a third time.

ROSE

But she isn't.... Fine now.

CAROLYN

How could they have given it to anyone else?
I'm perfect for the part.

ROSE

A little bit nuts.

CAROLYN

And who isn't? *But not in my special way.*

SEAN

[to ROSE] I'm not sure I know the play she's talking about.

ROSE

[to SEAN] It's called Lie Low, by Ciara ["KEE-ra"] Elizabeth Smyth.

CAROLYN

I saw it at the Dublin Fringe.
Five times.
And fell in love with it.
And then again in London, at the Royal Court.
I could have written it, I know it so well.

ROSE

It's about an assault that goes untreated for a year.
Then the victim ... Faye ... all of a sudden can't sleep anymore.
And can barely eat.
All she's had for a week has been a box of dry Rice Krispies, or so the story goes.
She's desperate, and calls a shrink, who doesn't get it.
Over the phone the doctor suggests pills, or meditation, or staying with a friend
for a while.
None of that resonates with Faye.
Then she seizes on a ridiculous idea – just the way Carolyn would:
She invites her brother over to try exposure therapy.
Puts the mask on him, and hides him in the wardrobe.
To reenact the attack.
He's not keen at all on the idea.
In part because of something that's been disturbing *him* for a year.
It's creepy. Right down Carolyn's alley.

SEAN

I see.

CAROLYN

No you don't. Not at all.
I had my heart set on that part.
It's psycho weirdness, and all the fun of it.
It's ME.
Vivian Leigh got the parts she wanted, didn't she?
Spent hours and hours preparing for them, the way I did.
Scarlett O'Hara. Blanche DuBois. And she's not the only one.

ROSE

“Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

SEAN

I've never understood how Blanche DuBois could get raped by Marlon Brando,
and forget most of what happened.

ROSE

That's how the human brain works.
The instant that fright begins, attention to everything else freezes.
The body releases certain chemicals to heighten awareness of the moment.
To choose between fight or flight, I imagine.
Memory banks can get flooded by the chemicals, and memory fades out....
Stupid, isn't it? But that's why.

CAROLYN

That's why I clearly remember to this day the second he jumped out at me.
But only his duck face.
All the rest is more like a dream.

ROSE

More like a nightmare, I would suppose.

CAROLYN

A nightmare.
O God yes! A nightmare!
Finding the humor in being attacked, and forgetting it.
The perfect nightmare.
And that's why I fell head over heels in love with this play.
It's so camp it's Edgar Allan Poean.

LYDIA is standing nearby.

LYDIA

[*stepping toward the audience, mimicking CAROLYN*]
What a nightmare! What a nightmare! What a luvvie!
All theatre towns are blessed and cursed with their talent and their tunnel vision.

ROSE

[*to SEAN*] She takes this all personally.

CAROLYN

I'm a good actor.
And good actors take life personally.

ROSE

Stage life.

CAROLYN

Stage *is* life. And now *I* can't get to sleep, thinking about it.

ROSE

She wears that damned duck mask to bed, and then climbs into her wardrobe.

SEAN

You're kidding.

CAROLYN

It's so disturbing it dashes an audience to choke on its own laughter.
A brilliant piece for someone like me to lose herself in.
Like ... like ... like I don't know what.

SEAN

[to ROSE] What is she saying?

CAROLYN

Like Dustin Hoffman, in *Ratso Rizzo*.
Or Anthony Hopkins, in *Hannibal Lecter*.
Or Daniel Day-Lewis, in his left foot.
Or James Dean, in anything he did.
Or even like Joel Gray, in being *the emcee*.

SEAN

Life is a Chevrolet, old chum.
Life is a Chevrolet.

CAROLYN leaves them and dances through the room wearing her mask.

Along the way CAROLYN passes by KELLY, ALICE, and REESE, who are standing and chatting with JOHN.

She gives all three women – KELLY, ALICE, and REESE – brief hugs, and goes on her way in a mood.

JOHN

That one's odd.

KELLY

Bizarre.

ALICE

Someone should write a play about her.

LYDIA steps out and, pointing at her eye, winks at the audience.

REESE

A one act.

ALICE

A disturbed thirty-minute monologue.

KELLY

A disturbed actress.

REESE

Aren't we all? A bit?

JOHN

[*laughs*] Speak for yourself, Reese.

ALICE

Candy is, John, speaking for herself.

REESE

And for you, too, Alice, our Little Owl.

JOHN

So, now I've bored you with my worries, what about you? Doing anything?

KELLY

We might be.

JOHN

[*beat*] Well what, Kelly?

REESE

A little thing.... Off Broadway.

JOHN

Really?!

ALICE

It's a bit of a strange. About a young girl who gets tried for witchcraft in England. Her name was Anne Gunter. True story. 1606. Twenty-two-years-old. A book was written about it: *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*. You can get it from Amazon.

JOHN

[beat] And??

KELLY pulls out a mask from a bag on the floor by her, and puts it on. It's akin to a 17th century plague mask.

KELLY

She got sick, a number months after a football match, and started vomiting up pins and needles.

JOHN

Throwing up pins and needles??

KELLY

So they say.

JOHN

[*ironically*] How enchanting.... From a football match?

KELLY

Not exactly *from* the match.

Her father blamed it on three local women in Berkshire, whom he claimed were witches.

But his reputation was a bit tarnished, and the women were acquitted of all charges.

JOHN

Oh?

REESE

Her father, Brian Gunter, was a known brute.

Some thirty some years before he'd leased a tract of land in the neighborhood, known as Freeman's Marsh, and then, on horseback, forcibly blocked local townspeople from pasturing their cattle there, as they had done for ages.

In the trouble which ensued, Gunter severely beat two of the men, and killed their cattle.

JOHN

How do you know all this?

REESE

You would be amazed how much is on record in England from the 15 and 1600's.

JOHN

Yes, I guess I would.

REESE

Anyway, in 1598 a fight broke out at a local football match, in which Gunter's son, William, was set on by the Gregory brothers, Richard and John. Old man Gunter struck both of the brothers on the head with the pommel of his dagger, and in a fortnight they both died. After that the play begins.

JOHN

You wrote it?

ALICE

It was written in England by Lydia Higman, Julia Grogan, and Rachel Lemon. We're doing the U.S. premier.

JOHN

So, that's the story? A fight at a football game? Do things never change?

ALICE

The real story evolved *after* the two boys got killed. Their mother, Elizabeth Gregory, wanted justice for them, whom she considered murdered by Gunter, but she couldn't get the old man tried in court, in part because of his wealth and status in the community.

JOHN

That also sounds a bit familiar.

ALICE

She became such a pain in the ass that Gunter decided to get rid of her, by having her tried as a witch. His daughter, Anne ... that's me ... enters on stage in a fit, foaming at the mouth, vomiting up pins and needles, and kicking off my shoes.

JOHN

[*ironically*] Delightful.

ALICE

The stage becomes an absolute mess, with spit, smeared blood, dirt thrown all about, and animal heads. The sudden chaos catches the audience totally unaware.

JOHN

I suppose that might appeal to some.

ALICE

Maybe it doesn't sound that way, but it's very well crafted.

REESE

Together we play twenty different parts.

From Anne, and a bear, to a domineering father, a vengeful mother, and a court of justice.

Even King James.

JOHN

King James?

REESE

He was fascinated with witches.

Ever since Shakespeare's Macbeth.

JOHN

You must be exhausted after a performance.

ALICE

We are.

KELLY

Seventy minutes of hyperventilation. But only three days a week.

JOHN

So ... what happens?

I gather the girl wasn't really under a witch's spell.

ALICE

No. Of course not.

And Berkshire thankfully avoided Salem's mistake.

JOHN

How did she get so sick?

KELLY

I was sent to examine her – a plague doctor, as you can see.

With my mask on....

Not the plague.

KELLY

A number of other eminent 17th century physicians were called in, to her bedside. They all agreed that what Anne was suffering from was not a common illness.

JOHN

What then?

ALICE

Essentially parental abuse.

The father was making Anne fake convulsions and trances.

He forced her to swallow some green liquid to cause her to vomit, and mixed pins with it.

It all comes out after goodwife Gregory is found innocent of witchcraft.

KELLY

It's horrific to think a father could have such little love for his own daughter. Some fathers would rather die than see their daughters tortured.

REESE

King James agreed the matter should be turned over to the Star Chamber. They are the ones who got to the truth. Anne confessed.

ALICE

I confess.

It's a show stopper.

JOHN

And??

What happened? To the old man and his daughter?

REESE

We're not exactly sure.

Star Chamber records from after the trial got burned, or lost.

What we think happened was that Brian Gunter got sentenced to prison for a short term, for making vexatious accusations of witchcraft, but got out soon enough to live a fairly comfortable life back home for another twenty-odd years.

ALICE

No one seems to know what happened to me ... Anne.

I may have gotten married. Or committed suicide. Or, who knows what?

LYDIA

[to the audience] What? Daddy? You'd bury me with a stake through my heart?

JOHN

If you don't know what happens, why are you doing it?

KELLY

It's a compelling story, even if we can't tell the audience the end.

REESE

Almost unbelievable, what that father did to his daughter.
King Lear would roll over in his grave.

REESE

It's our sort of love letter to Anne.
Our attempt to try to make things right after all these years.

KELLY

MeToo, through a deep well looking glass.

ALICE

Just picture the theatrical allure of playing a young girl possessed by a demon.
Witches are haunting things, you know.

KELLY

You do a really great job, Alice.

ALICE

Thank you, Kelly.

REESE

But creative theatre's not free from its challenges, we've learned

JOHN

Like what?

REESE

Space, for one.
Space is expensive in New York.

KELLY

Theatre needs its space to have freedom to experiment.
The best way to make good theatre is to let ego go and share the messy bits.

ALICE

The best way to make good theatre is to let ego go and share the messy bits.

KELLY

I just said that.

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

What do *you* think?

Is letting ego go and sharing the messy bits the best way to make good theatre?

What I think is that theatre must have a rawness in it to be good.

REESE

It is the best way to make good theatre.

KELLY

Agreed.

ALICE

We're all agreed on that.

KELLY

And I also think that producing theatre

ALICE

Good theatre

KELLY

Is a long process. Where nuance is free to grow.

LYDIA

[to the audience] Where all sorts of uncouthness are free to grow. Am I right?

ALICE

Nuance with truth.

REESE

Truth is wilder than fiction, any day.

ALICE

Unfortunately the climate for creative theatre in New York is rough.

We can't not think of the audience.

Bottom line, they're the ones paying the bills.

But dragging out old plays over and over?

What's to be learned from doing that?

And where's the social relevance?

JOHN

Too many old ones being funded. Thank heavens, at least, for Fringe Theatre.

LYDIA

[to the audience] O God! We grow old in it, don't we?

This endless debate about what keeps art alive. Just get on with it!

KELLY

So many extraordinary artists around us, John, ... even here tonight ... banging their heads against brick walls, trying to get work.

You know what I mean. I know you do.

And how many of them who are really good will end up leaving the business?

CAROLYN again passes by KELLY and her group on the way to LISA, DeJEAN, and CAMERON, who are chatting as CAROLYN waves at them.

LISA

Come on, DeJean.

You're dying to tell us something.

I can see it. Out with it....

Now!

DeJEAN

How? How can you see it?

LISA

It's all over your face

DeJEAN

Pizza?...

[beat] Oh, all right. If I must. Cam already knows.

LISA

Do you know? Cameron?

CAMERON

I guess I do, Lisa....

LISA

[beat, looking at DeJEAN and asking with her hands]

So?... What is it? What's going down?

DeJEAN

It started with me.
When I was a kid.
Asking myself, like white boys do, I guess:
Who the Hell am I?
Who is DeJean Bailey anyway?
Me?
Black?
I know where I came from.
But at the same time I had to ask myself: Who am I, really?
Just some pissed off black boy? Is that all?
Until I saw it
Until I got it....

LISA

Saw what?...
Come on. Spill it.
Saw what?

DeJEAN

Cam was with me....
[beat] We're both black.

LISA

Yes.
Yes.
Of course.

CAMERON

[beat] Tell her, D J.
It's not bad luck.

DeJEAN

[beat] I'd never seen an all-black show before.
Not about being black how I am.
Like it is.
A show with just young, black men.
Like me.
At my age now.

LISA

Not August Wilson, you mean.

DeJEAN

No disrespect to the man.
Nor to his plays, either.
But different.
Every generation faces the miracle of human bigotry differently.
But what I saw was beyond the mindset of bigotry.
Beyond the heart of it.
Beyond everything that doesn't move and sing like that.
Beyond joy. Beyond reality, in a sense.
Brutal, in a way. But Black.
Do you know what I mean?

LISA

[to CAMERON] What does he mean, Cam?

CAMERON

He's talking about For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Hue Gets Too Heavy.

LISA

What's that?

CAMERON

About the hottest show on the West End, that's all.

LISA

London?

CAMERON

And rumor has it that it's coming to New York.

LISA

Oh!!
Well, tell me about it.
What is it?

CAMERON

You have to see it.
There's no telling it without seeing it.
The experience of it ... and the boys.

LISA

Oh?

DeJEAN

I agree.
There's hardly words that can describe the scene.
It's sort of a gig play.
Words fall off the page and leave the paper blank.
All that remains is the vision of the performance.
Dance and music, wrestling and bear hugs, laughs and tears, movement and
storytelling, rolling over each other all over the stage.
Hip hop. Slam poetry.
Where six black boys connect loosely around being in group therapy.
Letting it hang out. Muscular and vibrant, sensitive and wild.
Telling life the way it is, to grow up black, and poor.
The spaces that shape black men. The beliefs. The fears. The mothers. The fences.

LISA

August Wilson type fences?

CAMERON

Not his.

DeJEAN

Racism from childhood, to school, to love, to neighborhoods, and back again.

CAMERON

Staged in a fluorescent playground.

DeJEAN

Father figures, and mothers.
Fashion tips.
Brothers lost too young.
Dope.
Jollof rice.
African empires and slavery.
Prejudice.
Dots connecting homicide to suicide.
Bad days. Good days.
Schoolboy pranks.
Endless banter.
Passion and freedom.
Being kind to each other. Loving each other.
Yes! Black men *do* fall in love. And need a hug.
As well as sex.

CAMERON

“I know bare things about her....
Like her last name.”

DeJEAN

“Also her cat’s name.”

CAMERON

“And last night I was inside of her.”

DeJEAN

Ezekiel saw the wheel. Can we?
Where can a man know love ... apart from getting some ... if he can’t claim it for
his own?
Own it.
Protect it.
Keep it.

LISA

Pretty deep.

DeJEAN

Man up, Bro! That show is history in the making. No cap.

LISA

Does it give any answers?

DeJEAN

To my soul, music brings truth. And it has it.
The answers are music.

CAMERON

In church, and out of church.

DeJEAN

Not words. Hardly words. But music....
Although there can be music in a preacher’s voice.

CAMERON

Amen to that, Brother.

DeJEAN

But in church it has to be clear and clean.
Too many remedies, and the illness becomes incurable.

CAMERON

Amen again.

DeJEAN

What the show made me realize is that I'm not alone.
I'm not the only one with rain and depression in my life.
I'm not the only one who feels invisible at times.
You know what I'm saying?

LISA

How did you get to see it?

CAMERON

My uncle footed the bill.
He thought it was the least he could do to try to support us starving actors.

DeJEAN

You do what you can do.
His uncle does what he can do.
He wanted us from New York to hear them speaking down and dirty in England.
Their experiences.
Not so different from ours.
What black people don't get to hear much of in theatre.

CAMERON

What *people* don't hear much of in theatre.

LISA

Which, if I might add, is theatre's most important place in our country.
To get people to quiet down and hear. To get people to think.
Everything being so politicized, from COVID shots to transgender rights.

CAMERON

Especially transgender rights.

LISA

That's what I mean.
You can go to the theatre and hear other voices, and not take it personally.

CAMERON

People used to connect the dots better, I think. I don't know. Maybe not.
What the Hell do I know about how white people ever connected dots?
Business dudes, especially.

DeJEAN

Theatre connects people.
Dead sure.
But music does it even more.
It doesn't teach word lessons.
It just slaps.
It helps people stay alive and connected.
And music is what runs For Black Boys.

LISA

And what, D J? You're going to audition for it?

DeJEAN

Man! I can move with the best of them.
Just let this black boy dance and roll!
I'll show them, taking up as much space as I need.
It would be a dream come true.
It would be me, up in fireworks on the Fourth of July.
Doing my something, like Cam's uncle, to make the world a little bit better.

LISA

Do you really think you know those characters you saw on stage?

DeJEAN

Know them? I *am* them.
And when they see me, they'll say: "Yeah, that's me."
You know what I mean?

LISA

Let's just say for the sake of argument, that I don't know what you mean. Tell me.

DeJEAN

It's in the upbringing, being black. The brain-washing.
The assumptions white people make about us.
The assumptions we make about ourselves.
The prejudices. The preconceptions. The being in our world all alone.
They all stick.
The "N" word just by itself.
If we use it. If they use it.
And being stopped by police.

LISA

Yeah. That must make you feel suddenly all alone.

DeJEAN

Blacks see whites as holding the keys to the kingdom.
We just want to get the same safety and protection that white men get for their families. The same comfort and security.
But we can't.
The money and chances aren't there.
All that most black men can bring special to the table is their struggle.
The pain of growing up black in America.
Which is Black angst. And angst can get too much after a while.

This is a very important show, Bro. Absolutely powerful.
The world's in its fractious state, whether you think so or not.
Not just for black boys who have considered suicide, but for white boys who have contributed to making black boys feel that way.
And even more fractious for politicians.
This play's a gift to all.
It's what theatre's all about.

LISA

Okay.... Anything else?

DeJEAN

Well, no. What could there be?...
Except

LISA

Except for what?

DeJEAN

O what the Hell? I'm feeling the spirit tonight.
What's the point in dreaming if you can't dream *big*?

LISA

O ... kay....

DeJEAN

For Black Boys is perfect for England. The black experience there.
Which apparently isn't too much different from here.
Except

LISA

Except for what?
Or did I already ask that?

DeJEAN

When it comes to America, there's one thing American I'd like to see added some way to the British script.

LISA

What thing?

DeJEAN

We had a great American composer and arranger of black music. His name was William Dawson.

I happen to be a particular fan of his. But who's ever heard of him?

Alongside names like Copeland, and Gershwin, and Bernstein, and Mancini?

If there's one thing I could do, like Cam's uncle, my own small contribution to the state of things, it would be to get orchestras to start performing Dawson's Negro Folk Symphony. It's amazing.

At least one of the symphony orchestras to do it.

CAMERON

Don't waste your luck on something like that, D J.

It's ten thousand to one you'll ever land a part in Black Boys anyway.

Be satisfied with that, for crying out loud.

DeJEAN

But I feel for him.

When his Symphony premiered in the 1930's in Philadelphia, Leopold Stokowski conducted. One of the greatest. The audience cheered between each movement. There was a standing ovation at the end. Dawson was called back to the stage four times. It was broadcast nationally on radio, and received rave reviews.

LISA

And then what happened?

DeJEAN

It was played twice in 1935, in Alabama, and once more in Philadelphia. And then, essentially, the musical world ghosted it.

LISA

Because he was black?

DeJEAN

You tell me.

Being black can be a bleak road. But William Dawson's road was bleaker.

His wife, a pianist, died tragically at 32 in the first year of their marriage.

LISA

Oh dear!

DeJEAN

I'd use all the luck I have left in the world to get a part in Black Boys, and to make America aware of William Dawson.

LISA

And how are you going to bring it off?

DeJEAN

The whole thing's half baked, I suppose.

LISA

Sounds like it.

CAMERON

[*beat*] What? Lisa.

LISA

What do you mean?

CAMERON

You have an idea. I can see it.

LISA

No you can't. Where?

CAMERON

On the top of your head. All over your face.
And it's not pizza.

LISA

Oh, all right.
It's just a thought. A crazy ass thought.

DeJEAN

What is it?

LISA

What if you wrote something for Dawson?
Like, in sympathy for losing his wife so young?
Maybe, if it's short enough, they could work it into the script.

DeJEAN

I already have.

Pulls out a folded paper from his pocket.

[reads] In how many empty spaces now
My Negro throat remembers her
In key and song?

She was my night.
She was my day.
She was my hope.

She was the beauty God gives the night.
She was the beauty God gives the day.
She was the hope God gave my soul.

I shan't forget:
In every note I write
She will walk.

I shan't forget:
In every prayer I breathe
She will hear.

Until all is forgotten.
And all is remembered.

LYDIA (standing nearby)

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”

Thank you, Rudyard.

Black, or white, or whatever, a loss is a loss is a loss.

We all have our losses. And our hearts. And our griefs.

What about Alphonsia Emmanuel, who was so very talented?...

You never heard of her? A member of the Royal Shakespeare Company?

Brilliant in the House of Cards?... U K, 1990's. And *black*.

Why did her career fizzle out the way it did?

Shades of William Dawson's Negro Symphony.

LISA

It's beautiful.

DeJEAN

It could go along with one of the spirituals he arranged:

[*singing*] Jesus walked this lonesome valley;
He had to walk it by himself.
Oh, nobody else could walk it for him;
He had to walk it by himself.

We must walk this lonesome valley;
We have to walk it by ourselves.
Oh, nobody else can walk it for us;
We have to walk it by ourselves.

You must go and stand your trial;
You have to stand it by yourself.
Oh, nobody else can stand it for you;
You have to stand it by yourself.

**HAMILTON and ERICA are standing
nearby.**

HAMILTON

[*to DeJEAN*] Amen, Brother.

DeJEAN

Same to you, Brother.

ERICA

Strange, isn't it?

HAMILTON

What?... What's strange, Erica?

ERICA

"Same to you, Brother."

HAMILTON

What's so strange about that?

ERICA

Nothing, H.

HAMILTON

Air ... ica

ERICA

It's just ... we're all actors here. I think we are.
So, why are some "Brothers" and others not?

HAMILTON

What? You want to be my sister?

ERICA

Not quite.

HAMILTON

Then what?

ERICA

It just made me feel, for a second, like I'm not one of the group.
An outsider, or something.

HAMILTON

Wait! Hold that thought.
You felt like *you're* an outsider?

ERICA

Just for a moment.

HAMILTON

You? White? And privileged?

ERICA

I'm no privileged white girl.
I've had to struggle like everybody else.

HAMILTON

Okay.
My bad.
I take it back.

ERICA

How can you take it back?
It's out there now.

HAMILTON

[*beat*] Let me tell you something I'm working on.
Just an idea.
But something.

ERICA

Is it an apology?

HAMILTON

[*pause, for effect*] It's a Love Story!

ERICA

Love Story?

HAMILTON

Love Story.

ERICA

Love Story, the movie?

HAMILTON

Love Story, the musical.

ERICA

It's been done.

HAMILTON

How?

ERICA

In Philadelphia, I think.

HAMILTON

How was it done?

ERICA

What do you mean ... "How"?

HAMILTON

How?

ERICA

Originally with Ryan O'Neal and Ali MacGraw.
I don't remember who, in Philadelphia.

HAMILTON

But the same thing.
Right?

ERICA

Are you thinking of a revival?

HAMILTON

I'm thinking of a whole reincarnation.

ERICA

How?

HAMILTON

A black Ryan O'Neal.

ERICA

O my God!!

HAMILTON

It's about time.

ERICA

Timely all right.

HAMILTON

You could play Jenny.

ERICA

I haven't sung professionally for over two years.

HAMILTON

And you can play the piano. I've heard you.

ERICA

That's not enough, and you know it.

HAMILTON

Well, practice, Erica. Get yourself in gear.

ERICA

You're just pulling my leg, aren't you?

HAMILTON

The movie's music flew out with the bats, on a wing and a prayer.

A score of souped-up Bach, Mozart, and Handel, mixed with what became an insipid theme, played over and over the way it was.

I know we can do better than that.

ERICA

I understand the stage version was an improvement.

HAMILTON

It may have removed the cause, but not the symptom.

ERICA

Which is?

HAMILTON

Way too much gloop to wade through. And way too little honesty.

ERICA

You don't like Love Story, do you?

HAMILTON

I don't detest it, like some people I know.

ERICA

A lot of people liked it ... loved it, even.

HAMILTON

I'd say most people loved the chemistry between Ryan O'Neal and Ali MacGraw. Not what was scripted between Oliver Barrett and Jenny Cavillieri.

ERICA

Why? Why do you think that?

HAMILTON

Because there's scarcely a line written in it that rings true to me. What there was to love about it was the real life story of two young actors, both beautiful, feeling for one another as actors in breakthrough roles.

ERICA

And how do you see getting around that? Or do you?

LYDIA (standing nearby)

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

I think the deepest feelings show themselves in silence. What do you think?

HAMILTON

The answer is not death to some mysterious, unnamed, Hollywood disease where the only symptom is that the patient continues looking more and more beautiful until she expires.

ERICA

You really don't love Love Story, do you?

HAMILTON

"Love means never having to say you're sorry."

ERICA

The second most stupid line ever written.

HAMILTON

Oh yeah? What's the stupidest?

ERICA

"One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

HAMILTON

Truth is stupider than fiction, isn't it?

ERICA

You said it.

HAMILTON

The formula for a tear-jerker is simple:

Two pretty white kids, overcoming emotionally uncomfortable obstacles, to arrive on a plane where one of their deaths freezes the scene into eternity.

LYDIA

[*to the audience*] That's my man!!

HAMILTON

There are whole families, husband, wife, and kids, being wiped out with one bomb in Gaza.

Even a child C-sectioned from her dead mother's womb died.

ERICA

Dear God!

You can't write a play about that.

HAMILTON

Not in Gaza.

That's for sure.

ERICA

Where then?

HAMILTON

On the streets.
Coming home from work
Shot...
A tragedy.

ERICA

You just blew your musical.

HAMILTON

Your voice is in my head.
Sing, or not, you can scream.

ERICA

What are you doing, Hamilton?

HAMILTON

I want understanding.
I want *you* to understand, Erica.

ERICA

Explain it better then.

HAMILTON

Rodney King, 1991. Trayvon Martin, 2012. George Floyd, 2020.

ERICA

That's hardly a sensitive approach to understanding love.

HAMILTON

Love's not always sensitive.

ERICA

Do you think anyone in this room would know what you're talking about?

HAMILTON

If not, the laugh's on them.

ERICA

I go through metal detectors every week; and you're having my black husband
shot and killed on the city streets?

HAMILTON

Happens every day. But that's not the point.

ERICA

Which is ...?

HAMILTON

What *you* do about it.

ERICA

Pray tell, what?

HAMILTON

That, my Dear, is locked up in a safe, that won't be opened until options on my play are taken by some major Broadway producer.

ERICA

Let me get this straight:

My husband, whom I love more than any person I've ever known, is shot and killed in cold blood outside the door to our home?...

HAMILTON

[*beat*] Yes.

ERICA

Because he's black, and I'm not.

HAMILTON

Yes.

ERICA

And *I'm* supposed to change things in this world?

HAMILTON

And sing your heart out doing it.

ERICA

The walls are creeping in on me. I can feel them.
I'm supposed to be the adult here, when I can barely think straight?

HAMILTON

Like I felt with my mother's Alzheimer's.

ERICA

[*pause*] I wouldn't have any idea what to do.
I'd be lucky just to keep myself afloat.

HAMILTON

It's not so uncommon.

ERICA

A widow....

Expected to become a leader in the situation, when I don't get what the situation is?

HAMILTON

And not do it as a fraud.

ERICA

A young, white widow of a black man, killed on the streets of New York

HAMILTON

Not New York. I never said New York.

ERICA

Or wherever; and come out of it?

HAMILTON

That's my Love Story. If you're sincere.

ERICA

What is "Love," anyway? In your take?

HAMILTON

John 15:13:

Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

ERICA

And greater love has no woman than she spend her life alive, as long as she can make it, serving and caring for those around her.

HAMILTON

Greater love had no man than this, that he gave up all he had ... career, friends, family, homeland, music, fame and security, to move to equatorial Africa to save lives by bringing medical care to the very least privileged of mankind.

ERICA

I'm not debating that: Living is far more beneficial than checking out.
And love is the antithesis of suicide, or whatever.
So your Love Story is just a tale of staying alive.

HAMILTON

My Love Story's not about the duration of life, but its content.
To love when it's as hard as it gets; to hang in there when life steals your lifemate
away; and to fight the good fight of poverty, keeping body and soul together.

ERICA

I've felt that way at times. Precarious. Keeping body and soul reasonably fed.
But not the lifemate thing.

HAMILTON

And not the homeless bit, I trust.

ERICA

How can people who are homeless be in love?

HAMILTON

I don't know.
That's what I'm working to find out.
Getting close to another person, I guess.
I *have seen* homeless with dogs they love.
Their whole world.

ERICA

Closeness....

HAMILTON

The closest I ever got was to a couple of characters I played.
Closer, I hate to admit, than to real life. We thought alike.

ERICA

That's the price actors pay, isn't it?
There ought to be a play about that.
We're so often in the mind of someone else.
The part we played last night, or last week, or last year.
The lines we learned, and rehearsed, and gave stress to.
Never quite being alone with ourselves.

HAMILTON

Do you think so? I don't know.
It may be just as hard for actors to find true love as for people without homes.
I just don't know.
All I know is that you can't love someone else if something's in the way of loving
yourself.

ERICA

And love isn't giving your life away.

HAMILTON

Not unless ... the Bible notwithstanding ... your Love Story starts in Heaven.
Otherwise, it could turn out to be a royal gut trip for survivors.

LYDIA

[*to the audience*] Why are we talking about heaven?

I don't believe in it.

And how many of you really do, when you stop to think about it?

I know the earth is short. Hermits, shorter still. Anguish, absolute.

But if I could stop one heart from breaking, I'd seek to make it two.

ERICA

Yes. Who wants another person to die for them? What a burden.

HAMILTON

Love is living *compassion*. That's what you're saying, I think.

ERICA

I think I'm not so sure what I'm trying to say.

LYDIA

[*to the audience*] If they come up with a solution, they're better than me.

ERICA

I love talking with you, Hamilton.

HAMILTON

Same here, Erica....

[*beat*] Now that I consider, maybe it's some mythical balance, hanging by a
thread from the clouds, that holds the answer.

ERICA

A cloud in the shape of a camel....

"It's a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done.

It's a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

HAMILTON

Love indeed is in the eye of the beholder.

ERICA

Where else?

HAMILTON

In the eyes of children.

ERICA

Children?

HAMILTON

Let's own up to it:

The only pure T, unselfish love there is, is the love of children.

The most powerful love anywhere. At any time.

ERICA

We leave a piece of ourselves in our children. Provided we have children.

HAMILTON

And better not to leave them fatherless if we do.

ERICA

Where does that come from? Loving children like that?

From their laughter? From their eyes?

HAMILTON

According to my Regression Theory it's carried in our DNA from archetypal man.

It's one of the four fundamental traits for human survival.

ERICA

Which are ...?

HAMILTON

Unconditional love and protection for children.

Conditional love for everyone else in the tribe.

Respect for tribal life.

And faith.

Not XYZ religious faith; but faith in the power of man's human brain.

ERICA

That sounds like something from a William Hurt movie.

HAMILTON

Altered States ... I know.

I met Ken Russell, its director, once. At the Lincoln Center in 2010.

I was twenty; and I told him I believed in Altered States.

He laughed.

ERICA

Okay. Loving children is primal. Archetypal. I can buy that.
But why then do some people not want them?

HAMILTON

Children can be a challenge, I suppose.

ERICA

So, how does your Theory handle that?

HAMILTON

They're the exception that proves the rule.

ERICA

Or maybe they believe the planet's already populated enough.

HAMILTON

I imagine some cave men thought the same thing.

ERICA

Here we are, philosophizing about children we don't have.

HAMILTON

And philosophizing about love we personally know so little about.

ERICA

How far have we gotten, for your play?

Fatal love.

Compassionate love.

Protection-of-children love.

And the elephant-in-the-room love.

HAMILTON

Which is?

ERICA

Eros.

HAMILTON

Ah, Eros. Sex.... Is sex love?

ERICA

Sex is the ultimate outlet to contentment.

HAMILTON

Is contentment love?

ERICA

What about this? My mother's favorite painter was Renoir. She loved him.
My favorite has always been van Gogh.
Does that mean I love him?

HAMILTON

Hardly! You just feel his feelings.

ERICA

And can that be love?
Feeling someone else's feelings?
A telepathy of love?

HAMILTON

Love must have a thousand different faces.
A forest of leaves, not all facing the same way at the same time.

ERICA

That doesn't sound very romantic.
Or monogamous either, for that matter.

HAMILTON

Maybe love's *not* monogamous.

ERICA

Never having to say you're sorry.

HAMILTON

Possibly the truest love is not the breathless type. Or the endless desire type.
But a quiet accumulation of respect for goodness and unselfishness.

LYDIA

[*to the audience*] Love enough to be free to surround yourself with those who
reflect your deepest values. If you don't subscribe to that, why are you here?

HAMILTON

More likely the best love comes broken in half, and you can only earn one half by
earning the other half first. I don't know. We're just talking.

ERICA

It's how the cookie crumbles.

HAMILTON

You earn love like a good reputation.

How does that sound?

Through work and integrity.

On stage and off.

To get to lie passionately in the arms of one true to you, you may have to pay your dues first by spreading love from your soul.

ERICA

While your audience is walking out on you.

HAMILTON

All the world loves a lover.

ERICA

But they can't wait forever for a handsome couple on stage to jump each other's bones.

HAMILTON

Let's be honest, passion in real life, as opposed to on stage, only lasts until it wanes.

Sex does not sustain love. Love sustains love.

ERICA

We have a whole room here full of passionate people.

I wonder how many would agree with you.

HAMILTON

One thing we'd all agree on is that without love theatre's dead.

ERICA

Without love the world is dead.

What does theatre have to say about that?

HAMILTON

Theatre hasn't come to grips with suicide yet, has it?

Hamlet and Othello certainly didn't. Nor Romeo and Juliet.

The Seagull?

Miss Julie?

Hedda Gabler?

Death of a Salesmen?

4.48 Psychosis?

ERICA

Maybe 4.48 Psychosis. It asks some of the right questions. But answers ...?

HAMILTON

If there is an answer, it's that love, or the promise of love, is one of Nature's most important natural remedies.

ERICA

Agreed. Against the seduction of suicide.

HAMILTON

Suicide is painless.

ERICA

It brings on many changes.

HAMILTON

And I can take or leave it if I please.

ERICA

The game of life is hard to play.

HAMILTON

You're gonna lose it anyway.

ERICA

[*beat*] I can't remember the rest.

HAMILTON

Patches of blue, memory lapses, MASH and unhappy Hamlets.

ERICA

Do you know Clifford?

He's the tall one over there, talking to Grace and Brooklyn.... But don't look!

HAMILTON

What about him?

ERICA

He lost his ten-year-old daughter. She was the love of his life.

I don't know any of the details, but I understand he thought about suicide.

Right up until

Right up to the brink, when he heard his daughter's voice.

HAMILTON

Where?

ERICA

In his head.

HAMILTON

What did her voice say to him?

ERICA

She told him he had to know that she was okay with him going on living.
And that she would be coming back.

HAMILTON

She told him that!

ERICA

The voice he heard told him what he needed to hear the most.

HAMILTON

Does that have anything to do with my play?

ERICA

Yes. Fit it in.

HAMILTON

Where?

ERICA

Into Jenny's surviving. If that's what you're planning for her.
It doesn't matter what people say love is. It only matters what loves does.

HAMILTON

You may be right. On the other hand, sometimes you can get an idea and forget
how it will look on stage.

ERICA

Think about it. You'll know if it fits. If it's authentic enough for you.

HAMILTON

How will I know?

ERICA

Google it.

HAMILTON

Get real.

LYDIA

[*to the audience*] Brevity is the soul of authenticity.

CAROLYN comes up and embraces both of them.

CORA and ETHAN are standing nearby.

CORA

Look at her!

ETHAN

Yep. She's an odd one.

CORA

This is about to be a really stupid question. I know.
Makes one want to barf. At the wrong time.
But ... who's your hero, Ethan?

ETHAN

What makes you think I have one, Cora?

CORA

Looking at you. Those eyes of yours.

ETHAN

[*beat*] My parents.... My father, I guess.

CORA

That's sweet.
And safe.
And pat.

ETHAN

And you don't believe it.

CORA

I was hoping it would be somebody I know.

ETHAN

You know Sidney Poitier?

CORA

Only that he's my favorite old actor.

ETHAN

Old?

CORA

You know, from before.
Before our time.
"In the day."

ETHAN

Yeah.
Back in history....
[pause] Once upon a time history was oil paintings and libraries.

CORA

Now it's films and streaming.

ETHAN

More alive in that way now. Where face, and eyes, and mouths all move.
And there's sound with it.

CORA

Just think, in a thousand years

ETHAN

A thousand?

CORA

Five hundred, then.

ETHAN

More like fifty, I'll bet.

CORA

All right In fifty years we'll be able to sit down with an AI person

ETHAN

Whose face will be our grandmother's

CORA

And talk to her like she's still alive.

ETHAN

And talk to her like she's still alive.

CORA

And ask her who her hero was.

ETHAN

Sidney Poitier, she'll say.

CORA

And if you asked Sidney Poitier for a word of advice, what would it be?

ETHAN

[*beat*] "Irony."

CORA

Irony?

ETHAN

Irony.

CORA

You're pulling my leg.

ETHAN

And I'd know exactly what he'd mean.

CORA

What?

ETHAN

That I've been playing it all, too right down the middle of the road.
Avoiding trouble spots.
Staying inside the box.

CORA

I don't get it.

ETHAN

Did you ever learn to play a musical instrument?
Piano, or something?

CORA

The saxophone.

ETHAN

The saxophone??

CORA

Yes. The saxophone.

ETHAN

Wow!!

CORA

You've been playing it all "politically correct," Mister.
Is that what you're saying?

ETHAN

I understand. Forgive my un-woke-ness.
I think the saxophone is a magnificent instrument for a woman.

CORA

So, what were you going to tell me about it?

ETHAN

Art is more than paint on canvas, or words of a script.
You have to find a way to make them come alive.

CORA

How?

ETHAN

Be compelling. Embrace the odd thing.
Forgive mistakes.
See the dark side, as well as the blue sky.
Own your mistakes.

CORA

The mistakes?

ETHAN

Nature's not perfect. It grows through its mistakes.
Not all that's gold has letter-perfect skin.
When you make a mistake performing, make it twice.
Own it.
Make it again.
Are you understanding?

CORA

If I screw up playing something on the sax Repeat it?

ETHAN

That's finding the realness in it.
The hammer to it.
In you *and* in the instrument.
In the moment.
In yourself.

CORA

Nobody ever taught me anything like that before....
Thank you.

ETHAN

Make it twice. Make it twice.

CORA

Sidney Poitier, for all I ever saw, was such an elegant man. Dignified.
With quiet pride. Not pushing boundaries, except by being there in the first place.
It seems like "irony" is a better word for his career than yours.

ETHAN

He was a giant. A captain. A pioneer. A warrior.
A gracious human being, in every respect....
To Sir, with love.

CORA

Amen to that.

ETHAN

[*singing*] A-amen.
A-amen.
A-amen. Amen. Amen.

CORA

Amen.

ETHAN

A man and a raven.

CORA

A raven?

ETHAN

Ravens fed Elijah in the wilderness.

CORA

I have a strange, chilly feeling, Ethan, that we'll never talk with each other this close again.

Not like we've talked tonight.

ETHAN

You're having an out-of-body moment. Looking down on us.

CORA

Yes. What do *you* see, when you look at me?

ETHAN

You're young. And beautiful, of course.
And I think you've found something.

CORA

What?

ETHAN

A moment.

CORA

What kind of moment?

ETHAN

An "ah-ha" moment.

CORA

What's that?

ETHAN

When you, all of a sudden, understand something you didn't before.

CORA

I do?

ETHAN

You know [*making a gesture*] a wonderful space you never expected, and

CORA

Never want to lose.

LYDIA is standing nearby.

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

What soft, cherubic creatures these gentle actors are!

One would just as soon assault a snuggle blanket, or violate a star.

O Lydia. Lydia. Lydia.

You're such a naughty, nosy little bitch, aren't you?

ETHAN

Do you want us to stay here?

CORA

And talk?

ETHAN

Or go?

CORA

Let's stay....

Or better yet, let's go.

ETHAN

That's a great idea.

They exit.

**On their way out CORA and ETHAN
thank the hostesses for inviting them.**

**As they are exiting the stage they pass
BREANNA and PAUL, who are entering
the main room from the apartment's
small balcony. PAUL has a glass of beer
in his hand.**

BREANNA

God!

I'll never do that again!

PAUL

Sorry, Bree.

I didn't know.

I had no idea.

BREANNA

You could see right through it, Paul.
What kind of wall is that? Shit!!
I'd forgotten what a fright it is, when there's nothing solid around a balcony.

PAUL

But ... the balcony has a metal railing, high enough.
You weren't going to fall off.

BREANNA

You could see right through it. And I was *afraid* I'd fall....
Actually, I was more afraid I'd jump.

PAUL

Jump?! How long, Breanna, have you had thoughts like that?

BREANNA

Since I was a girl. Our grade school had stairs that were open at the back.
You could see right through them the same way.
No backing. Nothing solid.
And I was sure I'd fall in between, and get stuck, and die. Or break my ankle.

PAUL

That was a long time ago.

BREANNA

I felt this urge inside, telling me to jump.

PAUL

Telling you to jump? Why?

BREANNA

I don't know why, it just did....
That's the same question they asked the doctor.
When my parents took me to see one.
And she said it wasn't so unusual.
A lot of people, I guess, have an urge to jump.
Not to die. It's a silent siren inside.
Warning us that we're afraid of something. Like falling.
It's to get us *away*; not to actually jump.
It's our way of sending the fear message to our brains.
Backwards, and ironic.
The way some brains are wired, she said.

PAUL

Strange.
I never heard of anything like that.

BREANNA

Like vertigo, only upside down.
And I've asked other people, have you ever felt like that?
Thinking of jumping, not like wanting to commit suicide.
It's altogether different.

PAUL

And what did they say? The people you asked.

BREANNA

A lot of them knew exactly what I was talking about.
Maybe not leaping from a balcony, but other things.
Like swerving their car into oncoming traffic.
Or stepping in front of a bus.
Or jumping onto the tracks of a subway train.
Or off a bridge.
It's fear.

PAUL

Did *they* have any idea why their minds worked that way?

BREANNA

All we've figured out is what the doctor told my parents.
That in some people, Heaven knows why, their subconscious is trying to warn
them of danger, get back from the ledge, stop driving so close to the center of the
road, mind your step; but their brain misinterprets.
My brother's like that. He's afraid of knives.
That he'll pick one up and stab somebody with it.
People can be so stupid, you know.

PAUL

Stupid?
I imagine it's something other than stupidity.

BREANNA

The doctor said the French have a saying for it: "L'appel du vide."
Meaning: "The call of the void."
And another thing I've discovered: Most people who have this problem also have
anxiety attacks. Like me.

PAUL

You have anxiety attacks?

BREANNA

Not like I used to.
I had my first one when I was thirteen.

PAUL

You did?

BREANNA

I thought a burglar had broken into our house; and I was convinced he was coming for me.

PAUL

What happened?

BREANNA

I can still feel how my heart pounded and my chest tightened....
It was horrible. A masked intruder is a really scary thing. Like a clown.

PAUL

Was there an intruder?

BREANNA

No. No. But it took my mother two hours to calm me down.
We went through every room and closet and wardrobe in the house.
And some, a second time.

PAUL

I get feelings like that, I think, when I'm afraid I'm late. For an audition.
In a dream; and I wake up sweating and hardly able to catch my breath.

BREANNA

Often?

PAUL

Not often. Mostly just the night before I have a real audition.
Which isn't often enough.

BREANNA

Well, when I was a teenager I would get panic attacks like once a month.
And I stopped wanting to leave the house.
The fear of one coming on me in public.

PAUL

How do you handle them? If you're in a show?

BREANNA

Simple. I've learned to treat them like a prophet of doom. An intuition coming on. Only an intuition, nothing more.

And I ask: what's more important? Me? Or the show? That's shuts them up. Hell! Every time any actor goes on stage they dare to face their fear, don't they? And sometimes I'm able to let a would-be panic attack give me extra power. For my character. I channel them into more energy on stage.

PAUL

You should do that with balconies.

BREANNA

That's not the same thing at all.
Balconies are *real*, not premonitions.

PAUL

I wonder if other actors have the same thing.

BREANNA

Plenty, I bet. But who'd admit it?

**BREANNA and PAUL come up to
ASHLEY and MARK, who are in
conversation.**

BREANNA

Hi, Ashley.

ASHLEY

Oh hi, Bree.

BREANNA

Ashley. This is my friend, Paul.
I don't know whether you've met before.

ASHLEY

Nope, never have.
[to PAUL] It's a pleasure.

PAUL

Same here, Ashley.

ASHLEY

And this is my new friend, Mark.
Mark ... Breanna and ... O my God!
Paul, is it?

PAUL

Yes. Paul.
[*shaking Mark's hand*] Good meeting you, Mark.

MARK

Good meeting you, Paul.

ASHLEY

We were just talking about the killer of all killer roles I lost.

BREANNA

You mean that sequel to Yoga?
That didn't last a month?

ASHLEY

It would have. If I'd had the role of Linda.

PAUL

I don't think I've heard of this before.

BREANNA

I have.

ASHLEY

It was Iota Town.
And it meant more than something special to me in this town.
I could have crushed that part.
It was in my soul.
Still is.
The value of life on this planet was in it.
And of acting.

PAUL

Tell me about it.
It sounds fascinating.

BREANNA

[*to PAUL*] Be prepared.

ASHLEY

Iota Town is the universal connecting point between dirty places in the real world, dark thinking in Salvador Dalí's world, and the need for human beings to transcend themselves in the astral world.

BREANNA

O my God.

ASHLEY

The lust for the amazing smell of sperm on my thigh.
The feeling of grit against my jaw, and on my teeth, and in my throat.
The not some sob story of the end-of-the-American-dream.
And the money and superiority Americans are born for.
A self-discovery through the momentary instability of the human mind.

PAUL

Bree and I were just talking about something like that.
The, what did you call it? The momentary instability of the human mind?

BREANNA

Paul, pleeease.

ASHLEY

Bree, don't you know?
The instability of the human mind is what gives rise to imagination and self-discovery.
It's what makes healing possible in this chaotic world of ours.
Rapture, some preachers have called it.
But what do they know?
Do they let their people fly free to experience it?
Or do they stand in its way with arms crossed across their chests?
We all need meaning in our lives, apart from what the holier than thou people preach.

BREANNA

You're the one doing the preaching here, Ashley.

ASHLEY

Maybe I am. Sorry. But I was born for theatre.
Like Vladimir and Estragon.
And Iota Town was born for me. A mind like mine.
I could just die in that role. And losing it was a real bummer.
The Tao doesn't console me anymore.

BREANNA

Did it ever?

ASHLEY

Walking in the silence of the sand-ridden streets with no one to tell me why there were no people left to go with all those 50's and 60's cars, parked in a string. No life in the purple mist of the morning. Just broken windshields. Broken headlights. No gas. And silence. A ghost town's eerie silence is the soul's perpetual yearning for truth, you know. What happens to everything? A silence like I imagine the silence must have been as Hitler's submarine descended into Hell. Because that's where I think we're headed. And I wanted to be a voice in telling that. A voice heard and seen in the gut. And so many, many questions of eternity.

LYDIA is standing nearby.

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

Just one question from me:

Come on, Lady!! I'm a nobody. Are you a nobody, too?

MARK

All those legendary cars from the 50's and 60's. I get shivers thinking of them. And it would piss me off no end to see them with their windows and headlights broken. Who would do that to the Mona Lisa of automobiles?

ASHLEY

And not a word is spoken. Until I scream out ... Linda screams out: "How can you be telling me? All these effing signs saying to slow down. Drive twenty or lose your job. And no space left, not even one, to park in."

MARK

And all those pictures of him, hanging up everywhere, you said. With his shit-eating grin.

ASHLEY

But he wasn't the point of it. It was the annihilation of gas-burning cars.

PAUL

What happens? In a nutshell.

ASHLEY

My nemesis got the part. And it wasn't in her. And the play was a flop.

BREANNA

Screw Green Peace I say, if it doesn't stand up for Ukraine and world peace.

PAUL

Did you ever think what's going to become of all the cars of America when they don't sell gasoline anymore?

MARK

I love cars. Especially the 1957 Chevrolet.

ASHLEY

It's been torture for me. Seeing my talents regarded with so little love.

MARK

And mine.

PAUL

Is "love" theatre to you, Ashley?

ASHLEY

That's a bit personal, don't you think, Paul?

BREANNA

Love is natural.
For everybody.

ASHLEY

Love, if you want to know what experts like Gandhi say, is losing yourself in life.
And that's what acting is to me:
Forgetting yourself in your role, when you get a good one.

BREANNA

I say nature only brought us into the world that we should love!

PAUL

Au contraire! When a child is born it knows nothing of love. Only eating.

ASHLEY

I came to New York to act, not to make time for love, or babies.
That can come later.
I've left love on the altar of desire.... My desire to be a successful actor.

BREANNA

Listen: Real theatre ...
I mean, to be real, theatre has to have love in it.
Even shows like Lion King and Phantom create the sensation of love.
A touch, a moment, an idea, something that brings the audience into the refuge of love with the actors on stage.

PAUL

And the music.

BREANNA

Right. I could eat the music.

PAUL

And the puppetry. You can't forget the puppetry.

BREANNA

Ah yes. Puppetry: War Horse. Lion King. Avenue Q.

MARK

Theatre has to eat, I guess.

BREANNA

That's *not* what we're saying, Mark.

ASHLEY

But it's true.

PAUL

You mean theatre has to be capitalistic.

ASHLEY

He means that if we want to succeed in theatre, we have to do what we need to do to appeal to audiences.
Shakespeare, and Beckett, and Chekhov do not appeal to enough audience.
Or Iota Town, if it's done wrong.

LYDIA

[*to the audience*] Iota Town is such a pretentious piece. Don't get me started.
One extreme space for one extreme actor going nowhere.
Unless you're looking for oversized ham and bologna on a green bagel with navel-gazing dressing.
If not, you're not missing a thing.

BREANNA

And what? We let classic works die?
Theatre has to help mend the world.

MARK

How?
By smashing cars?

BREANNA

By giving the world an honest glass to hold up to its face, to see what its people really look like.
That's the way British theatre works.

PAUL

Looking intently through his beer glass.

You know, I hope that's true.
I'd like to think so.
But most of the time I just selfishly want a little hope for my lonesome.
Hope that my work here, and my dreams, can continue.
That someday I'll experience the excitement of an opening night on Broadway.
Hope that I'll kiss a woman who takes my breath away.

BREANNA

On the stage?

PAUL

Yes.
On some stage.

PAUL casts a look in the direction of the outside balcony.

MARK

I have high hopes, too.

PAUL

I guess there's a risk in too high hopes.
Sometimes I think I should just be thankful for the walls I have against the outside weather.
And my comfy bed, and new clothes when I get them.
But it's hope that keeps me in this game.
Rejection after rejection.

BREANNA

Rejection's a rat, I'll have to admit.
I met a nanny once.
For kids of a couple actor friends of mine.
Who wanted so badly to be an actress herself.
But she wasn't even lucky enough to get a first break.
And then her money ran out.

ASHLEY

[*beat*] Okay, Guys. I get this, with how many times I've bitten the bitter bullet.
And I'm not bragging, break a leg.
You might think I don't know, but trust me, I do.
First, don't take it personally.
Somebody obviously has a wild hair up their butts.
Or is sleeping with someone else. Or doesn't know you well enough yet.
Give it time. Patience and perseverance are the two best "P" words there are.
Second, don't settle for inferior roles. They'll only hurt you in the long run.
You won't get ahead in this business by letting your standards down.
Third, if you get the chance, ask somebody in the know if they know anything you
might do to improve your auditions. Pay attention to the details.
A bit of genuine feedback can never hurt.
Fourth, get exposure. Maybe off, off Broadway.
Or maybe with Columbia University or CCNY. Put your face out there.
And fifth, stay positive. Wayne Dyer, Oprah Winfrey, Norman Vincent Peale.
The power of positive thinking, you know.
Be positive, even in the fart wind of the most disappointing moments of your life.
Never give up.
Never give up.
Never give up.
Those who fail and try again are not the losers.
It's those who fail, and fail to try again.

**GAYLE and DAVID have been standing
close by BREANNA, PAUL, ASHLEY and
MARK. GAYLE interrupts, as DAVID
follows by her side.**

GAYLE

[*to ASHLEY*] Pardon my interrupting.
I couldn't help overhearing what you just said, and it says so much.
May I ask you something?

ASHLEY

Oh ... sure.

GAYLE

[*extending her hand to ASHLEY*] My name's Gayle.
I don't believe we've met.

ASHLEY

[*shaking Gayle's hand*] Hard to believe, in this group, but I think you're right.
My name's Ashley.

GAYLE

And this is David.

ASHLEY

Hello, David.
This is Mark.... Breanna.... And Paul....

DAVID

Nice meeting all of you.

MARK

Me, too.

BREANNA

Just call me Bree.
It's a pleasure to meet you.

PAUL

My pleasure, too.
And you can call me Paul.
Or anything else you want to.

ASHLEY

What is it you were going to ask me, Gayle?

GAYLE

Well ... I'm so tired of rejection.
You know how it can be.

ASHLEY

Yes, we've all sailed some in that boat.
No divas here.

GAYLE

And ... well ... everybody else having fun, and here I am without a part.
When I was in school ... high school ... our drama teacher ...
I was in seven different shows over the years, and our drama teacher told me that
of everyone in the school I was the one who had the best chance of making it.
In theatre. On Broadway, maybe. And it hasn't happened.
In college the best I ended up with was in the company.
And here in New York, I've had lots and lots of auditions, but not one role.
And just a few invitations back.
I learn the parts.
When it's an audition with other actors, I always seem to have a good time with
them. And get good feedback from them. But no jobs.
And I'm so tired of rejection.
I'm so done with getting my hopes up, and pretending that my day is coming.

ASHLEY

What can I say?
Except, you can't let rejection define who you are.
I've been in theatre long enough to know, and I've met others in your shoes.
Too many ... sadly.
And from their stories all I can tell you is
And I don't mean this is your story at all.
Just what I can share from other people's stories.
That....
Do you want me to go on?
It may hurt; but I swear it's not my intent to.

GAYLE

Yes. Absolutely.
Go on.

ASHLEY

The problem is, a lot of young actors try too hard.
They try to make friends with the director.
They're not the director's friend.
He's their boss, if you get what I mean.
And they let it be known how much they "know" about theatre.
Little things, details, that frankly just waste other people's time.
They complain to actors, and sometimes to would-be directors, how unfair it is.
How they never get the roles they want, when sometimes the person they're
complaining to has gone even longer waiting for the right role....
It that at all helpful?

GAYLE

Not really.

BREANNA

Well, you're allowed a break.
Everyone's allowed a break.

GAYLE

That's what I'm waiting for. A break.

BREANNA

I mean a break from acting.
I took a break from acting for two years, at one point.
Because I needed it, then. And now I'm back.

ASHLEY

Maybe she doesn't need to get away.
Just a little more patience.
And finding somebody who's in the know in the places where she auditions.
You heard what I told Paul.

GAYLE

Theater's such a brutal industry; and, yes, maybe I should give it a rest....
Permanently.

ASHLEY

Think about it. Everyone has to go a while before finding their next role.

GAYLE

Or get naked.

BREANNA

Be careful. That can be a career buster.
And not just taking your clothes off.
Look at Ryan O'Neal.
He had the world as his private garden after Love Story and Paper Moon, until he
made a bunch of shoddy choices, and his roses lost their petals.

PAUL

Maybe create works for yourself, like Harold Pinter did.

MARK

They say fringe theatre can be a help, sometimes.

ASHLEY

It can help you see that talent is only one factor in the equation.

GAYLE

Shit!!

Pause.

DAVID

I not sure why I'm here.
I've barely gotten my feet wet in New York.
And I don't know most of what you're talking about.

BREANNA

We're here because we're here ...

PAUL

Because we're here

MARK

Because we're here.

ASHLEY

[to GAYLE] Who do you care for?

GAYLE

Who do **I** care for? Who cares for *me*?

ASHLEY

Well Kathryn must.
She and Lori invited you here tonight.

GAYLE

[*silence*]

ASHLEY

And your people back home.
Who put you through college and sacrificed to get you to New York.

GAYLE

What are you saying?

BREANNA

She's saying that someone obviously cares for you out there.

GAYLE

Well, she could have said it differently.

ASHLEY

What would you like with the truth?
Coffee, tea, or Turkish Delight?

GAYLE

You're all being awful.
I knew I shouldn't have come tonight.

[*as she is exiting*] I'll never darken these halls again.

GAYLE exits.

ASHLEY

It never ceases to amaze me how self-absorbed some actors can be.

PAUL

Who said, "A hungry dog believes in nothing but meat."

BREANNA

Chekhov.

DAVID

Where does a person start, if not caring about themselves first?
Or should actors be different?

PAUL

You've got a point there, David.
They say you can't care about someone else if you don't care about yourself.

BREANNA

And they say you can't love yourself if you don't love the world.

PAUL

It's a catch 22.

BREANNA

It's a lock 22.

PAUL

A lock?

BREANNA

And Mahatma Gandhi found the key.

ASHLEY

The key?

What key are you talking about?

ASHLEY

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

KATHRYN

Strikes a spoon against a glass of water to get attention.

Hello, everybody, again.

Hello....

Hello.

So great to see you.

A few people respond “Hi, Kate,” or the like.

KATHRYN

I’ve invited you here to this celebration to hear my news.

“HEAR! HEAR!” from several of the guests.

GRACE

[to BROOKLYN] What is she saying?

KATHRYN

Let me begin with this.

You are my best friends in the world.

We live in the best town in the world.

And we work in the best business in the world.

Because we all love theatre, with a passion. My passion.

Or else, why would we be doing this?

KELLY

[to ALICE] I don’t understand what she’s saying.

ALICE

Just listen.

KATHRYN

If you talk to the walls or walk the halls long enough, sooner or later they'll talk back to you.
I've learned that.
And let me share with you what they've been telling me recently.
First, theatre is art.
And art is truth.
And truth can hurt, as well as protect.
Like a gun.
Second, maybe theatre is dying.
We've all heard it said, from time to time.
But we didn't go into acting thinking that someday theatre will be dark.
It's lasted 2500 years; and when it doesn't die, theatre evolves.
Because story-telling is fundamental to the spirit of the Earth.
Granted, some theatre's a mistake.
Some may be even worse.
But some can save a life.
Yes, it's true. Theatre saved the lives of many a Jew in Nazi Germany.
They hid in them.

SEAN

[to ROSE] Who hides in theatres, did she say? I missed that.

ROSE

[to SEAN] Just listen.

KATHRYN

Third, acting is a major heartbreak.
I've read that for every actor who gets a part, fifty don't.
Which means the average actor, like me, feels they are forever being rejected.
It's par for the course.
And we don't give up. We don't give up.
Why?
Is it because we love theatre so much?
Or because the hope won't die in us that someday we'll see our name up in lights on Broadway?
Or that we can be part of something that changes the world?
Or is it because we're simply masochists?

MARK

I should hope not!

KATHRYN

The walls tell me that we blame ourselves, and keep thinking we can change it.
But we can't.
We're not the people making the choices.
And they're under the sword of Damocles to keep theatre's capitalistic system of
competition, success and rejection in operation.
Which, in turn, is driven by the public's taste in art and theater.
Which, as we know, is monumentally fickle, affected, more than not, by what
people think is chic.
Theatre reflects culture, and arises from culture.
We can't get around that.
Part of which today is pushing for less time sitting in theatre seats and more time
with noise, music, and handhelds.
In fact, it seems more now a mixture of a fixed repertoire of classically accepted
plays, and a wandering medium of new, techy pieces.
Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely
players."
But that's because Shakespeare's world *was* a stage.
A royal court all English society supported.
And believed in. And obeyed.
Even when God-awful decisions were made, like beheading Anne Boleyn.

CAROLYN

[*still in a duck mask*] Do the walls lie? Do kings lie?
I think they do. Like wardrobes do in the night.

KATHRYN

If you took a snapshot of American theatre today, would we all be in it?
I'm afraid not.
Which brings me to why I've brought you here tonight
To announce a major change in my life.

REESE

A wife? Did she say?

LISA

She's getting married, I bet.
To Lori.

KATHRYN

I'm going home.

PAUL

Home? Did you say “home?”
This is your home, isn’t it?

ASHLEY

[to PAUL] Wait!
I was on my phone with my agent.
What did she say?

KATHRYN

I’ve given my heart to theatre in this town.
And if what I’ve gotten in return is as good as it gets, I need something else in my
life.
I hear another neighborhood calling.
It’s a place where I know I can succeed.
This party is a celebration of my last, thin dime spent in New York.
I have a bus ticket in my pocket, and I’m going back home in the morning.
Maybe it’s me.
Probably it’s me, but whatever.
I can’t keep going on living dreams in failure.

EMILY

[to RYAN] She’s leaving New York?

RYAN

[to EMILY] It looks that way.

**LORI comes over to Kathryn’s side, and
puts an arm around her.**

LORI

We love you, no matter how much time and space will come between us.

KATHRYN

I know you do.

ERICA

You’re leaving us? You’re kidding.
What are we going to do without you?
Without all your encouragement?

KATHRYN

I have to.

LORI

[to KATHRYN *and the whole room*] Hopes crumble with disappointment.
And this is the biggest disappointment of my life.
I don't know if I can go on in New York by myself, without you.
You're my best friend....
I've thought all day about what I would say tonight, and it's this:
You are my joy.
My comfort always in this strange land. My dearest companion.
I don't know what I would have done without you.
But we've talked this through.
I understand, and I support you in this.
And we both know that things might change.
You might be back. Someday.
Maybe in this very apartment.

KATHRYN

Puts an arm around LORI.

[to LORI] I've told you:
If things were different, and just you and I, I think I could tough it out.
But I'm too much dedicated to acting, and I need some time on my own.
To work things out.
I love theatre more than church, or most anything.
New York has been the dream of my life.
God bless it ... can I release it?

HAMILTON

Remove the cause ... but not the symptom.

LORI

I could start bawling all over again. Like we did last night. But I won't.

BROOKLYN

What are you going to do, Kate?

KATHRYN

Buy an abandoned church back home, and start my own theatre in the country.

JOHN

Excuse me ... I have something to say.

His cellphone rings.

Excuse me just a second. I have a call.

BREANNA

You're allowed to take a break, if you want to, Kate. And then come back.

KATHRYN

So much of the world today is finding a job you don't hate, paying the bills, spending time on your phone, eating, drinking ... smoking, if you like, and far too little face-to-face.

It's sad, and I want to change that, if I can.

They say the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

The way you forget yourself in a role.

The way Paula Vogel, the playwright, has done, teaching so many others to write.

Maybe some time in the country will do me.

LORI

Oh, how our days have flown by! Way too fast!

I'm going to miss you terribly, Kate. I've lost part of myself in you.

But I wish you every bit of happiness in the world.

LYDIA

[stepping toward the audience, and speaking directly to them]

Another ending of the Cheers bucket.

I wonder whether anybody notices it.

Under all these layers of theatrical nervousness.

KATHRYN

On the street yesterday I saw a man walking his English bulldog.

She was too old and too overweight to be able to move any faster than a struggle.

"Old?" I asked him. "Yeah," he said, "she's seen better days."

I stooped down to let her smell my hand, and she put her head into my palm.

"She likes grass," he said, "not pavement."

"Take her to the country," I said.

And said it again to myself.

He just smiled at me.

Pause.

KATHRYN

It will take a village to help me collect all the pieces.

Missing all of you.

How can I say it better?

New York has a face indescribably hard to part from.

Most gather around KATHRYN.

CAMERON

So here we all are.
And tomorrow, scattered as leaves in the wind.
Surely we'll never be in the same room like this again.
What does it mean?

DeJEAN

It means that we actors are made for today.
And who knows how far to tomorrow the memories of us will creep?
To the last syllable of spoken lines we hope.

MICHAEL

[to EMILY] Is this the end?
If so, keep me in mind, will you?

CLIFFORD

[to BROOKLYN] They say the last moment we have on Earth is a remembrance
of the one person, in the one place where the two of us were the most happy.
And it's true.
My last thought will be my daughter, on her new bicycle, riding it in Connecticut.
Laughing as I run along the path, trying to keep up with her.
The best moment of my life.

BROOKLYN hugs CLIFFORD.

Lights dim.

**Spotlight on LYDIA as she steps to the
front of the stage.**

LYDIA

It's a damn shame pleasant paths come to an end.
Lights go dim and the choir ceases to sing.
Yellow leaves, or none, or few, hang on boughs which shake against the cold.
But it's just one of those things:
If we'd thought a bit of the end of it when we started out with no doubt,
We'd have been aware that our love affair was too hot, not to burn out.

Fare thee well, my friends.

END