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Five Plays: The Recluse and Move Like Ants and Pet Food and Up Here/Down There and Irrational Fear Demonstrations

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Five Plays:
*The Recluse*
and
*Move Like Ants*
and
*Pet Food*
and
*Up Here/Down There*
and
*Irrational Fear Demonstrations*

Stephen Webb

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
Dramatic Writing

School of Drama
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA

May, 2015
Thesis

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ACCEPTED:

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Rob Handel
ADVISOR
____________________

________________________
Peter Cooke PhD OAM
HEAD, SCHOOL OF DRAMA
____________________

DATE

DATE
The Recluse; or
The Rise and Fall of a Makeshift Pal

By Stephen Webb
CHARACTERS
(3m/1f)

Herman
A Reclusive Artist
Male
59

Hightower
Herman’s Makeshift Pal
Male
Young at Heart

Francesca Del Monte
An Esteemed Art Dealer
Female
49

LeRoy
(Luh-ROY)
A Failed Artist
Male
79

WHERE & WHEN
Herman’s art studio in the basement of his childhood home.

Right now.

NOTES
Hightower is a puppet. He should be constructed using existing materials from Herman’s art studio. Though makeshift, Hightower should be animated with lifelike expressions and movements.

In addition to the actor who acts as Hightower’s main puppeteer, the actor who portrays LeRoy should also assist in Hightower’s puppetry.

The scene titles should be projected, recorded as voice over, or displayed as signs.

Dialogue is spaced out for rhythm.
During preshow:

When house opens, HERMAN should already be in his studio. Ideally, with the following title displayed:

The Recluse Exists In His Natural Environment

HERMAN—an awkward, aging artist wearing a sweater vest and thick-rimmed glasses—works on the following at his own steady pace:

He sets up an array of art tools at his canvas—

He slurps on a bowl of soup—

He clips his fingernails—

He attempts to paint—

He dozes off at his easel—

He attempts to paint—

Then, he exits.

The Recluse Returns Home From Braving The Outside World

HERMAN stumbles in with an armful of collapsed cardboard boxes.

He drops the boxes and clicks on a light.

HERMAN

Home sweet…
Hellhole.

HERMAN glances around his basement art studio. A dark, dated, dingy, and sloppy space—stacked full with heaps of his paintings—all of which are on makeshift, cardboard canvases.

HERMAN lets out a long, sad sigh—then bends down, grabs some cardboard, and starts ripping.
He rips and sighs—
Rips and sighs—
Rips and sighs.

The Recluse Expresses Himself

HERMAN stands in front of a rickety easel.
He stretches his bones and cracks his knuckles—then he grabs a scrap of cardboard and places it on the easel.
He takes a seat on a wobbly stool—
Dips his paintbrush into a can of paint—
And paints a giant sad face on the canvas.

HERMAN
Ta-da...

The Recluse Detects a Pattern

HERMAN adds his painting to a stack of other paintings.
Then he sifts through some of his past work.
He picks up a painting and inspects it.
It depicts another sad face.

HERMAN
Hmm…

He moves to a separate stack and picks up a different painting—yet another sad face.

HERMAN
Hmmmmm…
HERMAN picks up another painting—

And another.

And another.

They all depict sad faces.

HERMAN

Ohhhhhhhh…

HERMAN steps back and stares at his entire body of work.

HERMAN

Sad faces.
All I paint is sad faces.

HERMAN holds up a painting—as though he were looking into his own mopey reflection.

HERMAN

Am I…
…Sad?

The Recluse Admits His Harsh Reality

HERMAN plops down—defeated—among the stacks of sad, mopey faces he’s painted over the years.

HERMAN

I am so very—
(He glances over to a stack of sad faces.)
Utterly—
(He glances over to another stack of sad faces.)
Desperately—
(He glances over to another stack of sad faces.)
Alooooooooooone.

HERMAN mopes and sighs—

Mopes and sighs—

Mopes and—
HERMAN

But just because I’m lonely—
Doesn’t mean I have to feel lonely!

HERMAN leaps up.

HERMAN

From now on, from this moment forward—
(Suddenly shouting with elation:)
NO MORE LONELINESS FOR ME!!!

The Recluse Returns To His Studio
Day After Day—
Week After Week—
Month After Month—
Attempting To Not Be Struck by a Devastating Sense of Loneliness

HERMAN enters.

HERMAN

Home sweet…
Nope, not today.

He exits—
Then reenters.

HERMAN

Home sweet…
Still not feeling it.

He exits—
Then reenters.

HERMAN

Home sweet…
Shit.

He exits—
Then reenters.
Home sweet…
God, this is awful.

He exits—

Then reenters.

Home sweet…
Why do I even try?

**The Recluse Ponders Companionship**

HERMAN sits on a stool in front of his rickety easel—staring at a blank cardboard canvas.

HERMAN
I suppose I’ll never have anybody to share my life with.

HERMAN scooches closer to the easel.
He holds his paintbrush to the canvas—
But nothing comes.

HERMAN
Just infinite solitude.
Well—
Not infinite—
Just until I DIE.

HERMAN slams down his paintbrush—

Then he pulls the cardboard canvas off the easel and rips it in half.

HERMAN
Why can’t I have somebody?

*(He rips the cardboard again.)*
A confidant—

*(And again.)*
A buddy—

*(And again.)*
A pal—
(And again.)

HERMAN stares down at the scraps in his hands.

Hmm…

He makes a few of the scraps move a little—

Then walk a little—

Then dance a little—

HERMAN chuckles.

Hmmmmm…

HERMAN jumps up.

The Recluse Has An Epiphany

OF COURSE!

HERMAN quickly moves throughout his studio and gathers all of the empty paint cans and remaining scraps of cardboard.

Then he dashes around, scavenging for every tool he can find.

He piles all the materials into a big heap and begins to work in a fast fury.

SOUNDS of scissors cutting and tape stretching and cardboard ripping and buttons buttoning and paint sloshing and brushes swiping.

Scraps of materials fly and fling through the air.

HERMAN grunts and groans as he feverishly works—occasionally wiping beads of sweat from his forehead.
He works and works and works and works—

Until, finally—

All noises cease and HERMAN—beet-faced and breathless—holds up his creation:

A miniature, MAKESHIFT PAL with paint can and cardboard limbs and painted-on features.

The Recluse Interacts With His Makeshift Pal

HERMAN sits on a stool and props his brand new MAKESHIFT PAL on his knee.

HERMAN

Good evening.

...

I’m Herman.

And you are?

...

Oh, you must be—

Umm—

Maurice?

No, Walter?

No, Petie?

No—

You’re something much more stately.

...

Hightower?

...

Yes, Hightower.

What a lovely name.

Feels nice in the mouth to say, doesn’t it?

Hightower.

Unlike my name.

Herman.

Herrrrrrrrrrman.

Ichhh—

(HERMAN chuckles.)

I’ve never been fond of my name.

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER sit in silence.
HERMAN

Do you like my art studio?
Nothing special, I know, but it suits my needs.
It’s in the basement of my parent’s old house.
They’re dead now.
They were all I had—
And now—
They’re dead.
And I don’t have siblings or anything.
I’m an only child.
...
With dead parents.
...
And no friends.
...
Just me.
...
Until now, that is!
My goodness—
Pardon me!
Where are my manners?
I’m just rambling on and on.
You were saying?

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER sit in silence.

HERMAN

I’ve always admired the quiet.
All that noise in the world—
Out there—
It gets to be quite daunting and overwhelming.
But in here—
It’s peaceful.
It’s safe.
Like a womb.
Don’t you think?
...
Hmm?

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER sit in silence.

HERMAN

Please say something.
...
Please, please say something.
...
I beg you—
I’ve never wanted anything in my life more than I want you to talk right now.

…
I need you to talk.

…
Talk, Hightower.

…
I said talk.

…
Talk!

…
TALK!

…
TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK!

…
(He starts shouting:)
TALK!!!!
TALK!!!!!!!!!
TAAAAAAAAALLLLLK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
TAAAAAAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLKKKKK!!!!!!!!!!!!

HERMAN runs out of breath.

Several moments pass.

He wipes sweat from his forehead—

Then he regains composure.

HERMAN
I didn’t mean to make things weird between us.
That was totally uncalled for.
It’s not fair for me to ask so much of you.

…
Considering what I’m about to have to do—
You’ve helped to make this a night to remember.

HERMAN stands and takes HIGHTOWER tenderly in his arms.

HERMAN
I’m going to say something I’ve never said to anybody before.
Forgive me if this it too forward—
But I feel it—
So I’m just going to spit it out!

…
I love you, Hightower.
Just for being here.
Just for being you.

HERMAN attempts to hug HIGHTOWER—

But he can’t quite figure out how to without damaging him.

So he kisses him softly on the forehead—

And gently places him onto a pile of scrap materials.

The Recluse Hits Bottom

HERMAN awkwardly loops one end of a rope around a dangling light fixture and then fixes a tight knot at the other end.

It’s obvious he doesn’t know what he’s doing.

He steps onto a wobbly stool—

Loops the rope around his neck—

And glances around one last time at his vacant studio.

HERMAN

Whoo—
Getting a bit dizzy up here.
...
Just focus, Herman.
Quick and dirty.
...
Okay—
Here we go!
(He tightens the knot.)
So long…
...
...
...Nobody!

HERMAN shuts his eyes—
Buckles his knees—
And takes a sharp breath.

HIGHTOWER
YOU WOULDN’T DAAAAAAAAARRRE!!!

HIGHTOWER remains unseen.
HERMAN pops open his eyes.

HERMAN
Is someone actually there?!
...
No.
Of course not.

HERMAN shuts his eyes—
And takes another sharp breath.

HIGHTOWER
YOU’VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME!!!

HERMAN pops open his eyes—

HERMAN
Hello?!
...
Pull it together, Herman!

HERMAN shuts his eyes—
And takes another sharp breath.

HIGHTOWER
HAVE MEEEEEEEEERRRRRCYYYYY!!!

HERMAN
Okay—
Who said that?!
Where are you?
Over here.

Here!

Where’s here?

HERE!

How did you get into my studio?

I’ll tell you if you remove that unsightly contraption from around your neck. How tacky! How gruesome!

Who are you?

Don’t concern yourself with that right now.

The repairman? A deliveryman? ... Show yourself!

I will not!

Why not?

If you wanna see me— You will have to step down from there!
HERMAN
I am not stepping down!

HIGHTOWER
But you’ve gotta step down!

HERMAN
Absolutely not!
It’s taken me a long, long time to get to this point. I am doing this for me! I am taking control of my future!

HIGHTOWER
Hate to break it to ya— But there’s not gonna be much of a future if you go this route!

HERMAN
Exactly! So whoever you are— You’re too late! You’re tainting my final moment! So, please, show a little respect— And go away!

HIGHTOWER
How could you possibly expect me to leave at a time like this?

HERMAN
The same way you came in!

HIGHTOWER
I’m not goin’ anywhere!

HERMAN
I’m warning you! If you don’t get out of here right now— This instant— Then— Then— Then— Th—

HIGHTOWER
Watch out or you’re gonna explode!

HERMAN
Okay!
That’s it!
I’m doing this right here, right now—
Whether you leave or not!

No—

Yes—

NO!

YES!

PLEASE DON’T!

IT’S TOO LATE!

BUT I LOVE YOU TOO!!!

A moment passes.

HERMAN calms down.

What did you say?

You told me you loved me.
And I love you too.

HERMAN removes the rope from his neck.

He carefully steps off the stool—
And looks around.

Where are you?

…

Please don’t hide.
HIGHTOWER—in his makeshift splendor—steps forth all by himself from behind a heap of scraps.

HERMAN gasps—

HIGHTOWER ducks down.

HERMAN

No, no—
I’m sorry!
Come back.
Please.

HIGHTOWER cautiously pokes his head out from behind a stack of HERMAN’S paintings.

HERMAN

Hi.

HERMAN waves to HIGHTOWER.

Hi.

HIGHTOWER waves to HERMAN.

They keep some distance.

HERMAN

I can’t believe this.

Can’t believe what?

HIGHTOWER

You’re—

I’m?

HERMAN

You’re—

I’m?

HIGHTOWER
Hightower!!!

I know!!!

And you’re—

I’m?

You’re—

I’m?

Talking!!!

I know!!!

Why?
I mean—
How?!

I thought you wanted me to!

My head hurts.
Maybe it’s the paint fumes.

Paint fumes?

Being down here—
Inhaling paint fumes all day, every day—
For all these years—
I guess it’s finally gotten to me.
HIGHTOWER

I’d say so!

HERMAN

What does that mean?

HIGHTOWER

Well, you just tried to—
You know—

HIGHTOWER gestures to the rope.

HERMAN

No, that’s not what I mean—
I mean—
This.

HIGHTOWER

This?

HERMAN

Yes!
This!
You.
I must be hallucinating.
This cannot be happening.
You cannot really be here, talking to me right now.

HIGHTOWER

I can’t?
(He glances down at his own makeshift body.)
You sure about that?

HERMAN

Positive!
I must just be in some middle ground, you know?
Some purgatory.
Some hyperreality.
Maybe I’m already gone.
…
No—
I know!
…
I just need to finish the job!
Finish the job?

HIGHTOWER

That’s right!

HERMAN

HERMAN reaches for the rope—

HERMAN

Oh no—
Please don’t!

HIGHTOWER

Why not?

HERMAN

Because.

HIGHTOWER

Because why?

HERMAN

Because I’ll be—
No.
Nevermind.

HIGHTOWER

You’ll be what?

HERMAN

I can’t say it.
I’m terribly bashful about sharing my feelings.

HIGHTOWER

Please say it.

HERMAN

If you do that to yourself—
That vicious, nasty thing—
I’ll be—
Well—
Forlorn.

HIGHTOWER

Sad?

HERMAN
You would be sad?
For me?

Mmhmm.

Gosh.

A moment passes.

I didn’t mean to make you feel bad or anything.
By saying that.

No.
It’s just—
Wow.
Someone would actually feel sad if I ended it all.

I sure would.

…How sad?

Super sad.

HERMAN moves a bit closer to HIGHTOWER.

He studies his features.

May I…?

HERMAN nods.

HERMAN gently places his hand on HIGHTOWER’S makeshift face.

I’d just like to say—

Perhaps we could—
HERMAN
Oh, sorry, please just—

HIGHTOWER
Please, you go ahead—

HERMAN
Maybe if we just—

HIGHTOWER
Why don’t we try—

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER burst out laughing.

HERMAN
Can I ask you something, Hightower?

Certainly.

HIGHTOWER

HERMAN
You being here—
Does this mean we’re—

HIGHTOWER
Yep, we’re definitely—

HERMAN/HIGHTOWER
Pals!

The Recluse Bonds With His Makeshift Pal

HERMAN sits behind his easel—working on multiple paintings simultaneously.

HIGHTOWER is stretched out—striking different poses for HERMAN while he paints.

HERMAN
How’s this pose?

Delightful!

HERMAN paints.

HIGHTOWER
And this one?

Splendid!
HERMAN paints.

HIGHTOWER

How bout if I wiggle like this?

HERMAN

Oooooooo!!!
Now you’re sizzlin’!

HERMAN paints.

HIGHTOWER

Or jiggle like this?

HERMAN

Somebody stop him—
He’s on fire!

They crack up as HERMAN continues painting.

HIGHTOWER is a bit out of breath from all the posing.

HIGHTOWER

Hightower?

Yes, Herman?

HERMAN

I just want to thank you.

HIGHTOWER

Thank me?
For what?

HERMAN

For giving me so much confidence in my artwork.
I must say—
I don’t believe I’ve ever felt so good about my paintings.
And it’s all because of you.

HIGHTOWER

It’s an honor to be your muse.
HERMAN paints a final detail on each canvas—
Then he slams down his paintbrush.

HERMAN
All right—
Finished!

HIGHTOWER
Hooray!!!

HERMAN
Would you, perhaps—
Care to see?

HIGHTOWER
I would love nothing more.

HERMAN spins around his cardboard canvas.
It’s a painting of a giant happy face.
He spins around the next canvas—
Another happy face.
And the next canvas—
Yet another happy face.

HIGHTOWER
Oh, Herman!
Your work—
It’s—
It’s—
Breathtaking!

HERMAN
You think?
These are unlike anything else I’ve ever painted before.

HIGHTOWER
And it shows.
Truly innovative!
I believe this calls for a celebration!
HERMAN
A celebration?

HIGHTOWER
Absolutely!

HERMAN
What kind of celebration?

HIGHTOWER
Well, I actually kinda have somethin’ for you.

HERMAN
You know you don’t have to do anything for me.

HIGHTOWER
It’s somethin’ I’ve been working on for a while now.

HERMAN
What is it?

HIGHTOWER
A song I wrote for you.

HERMAN
Hightower, that’s so special.

HIGHTOWER
So you’d like to hear it?

HERMAN
I would be honored!

HIGHTOWER clears his throat—
Warms up his voice—
Then begins to sing:

HIGHTOWER
ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US
NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER MORE OF US
IF THERE’S EVER MORE OF US
YES, IF THERE’S MORE THAN TWO OF US
THEN SOMEONE’S GOTTA GO
(He stops singing.)
So…?
What’d you think?

HERMAN

Hightower.
Gosh.
I’m speechless.

HIGHTOWER

You liked it?

HERMAN

I’m just—
I’m touched.

…
Would you mind too terribly if I gave you a hug?

HIGHTOWER

I thought you’d never ask!

HIGHTOWER stretches open his arms—
And HERMAN reaches in for a big hug.
They hold each other in a tight embrace.

HIGHTOWER

Can’t it always stay like this, Herman?
Just me and you.
In here—
Tucked away from the world.
Forever and ever?

HERMAN

Forever?

HIGHTOWER

Yep.
And ever!
Forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever—
(He runs out of breath—deeply inhales—then keeps going.)
And ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and EVER!

HERMAN nervously laughs.
HIGHTOWER pulls away from him.

HERMAN
You know, Hightower—
I’ve actually been thinking about something—

HIGHTOWER
Oh really?
Bout what?

HERMAN
Well—
It’s just—
With all this newfound confidence you’ve given me in my artwork—

HIGHTOWER
Mmhmm?

HERMAN
I’ve been thinking about—
Perhaps—
Maybe—
Taking some of it—
You know, maybe just a piece or two—
Out there.

HIGHTOWER
Out there?
What do you mean—
Out there?

HERMAN
You know—
Out into the world.

HIGHTOWER
Now, Herman—
Why would you ever want to go and do something like that?

HERMAN
Oh, I don’t know.
Just to see what happens.
See if anybody would even be interested in my paintings.

HIGHTOWER
But I thought you and I didn’t like it—
You know—
Out there.

HERMAN

I know.
We don’t.
It’s just—

HIGHTOWER

I thought you and I like to keep things to ourselves.
You know—
In here.

HERMAN

I just thought, maybe—

HIGHTOWER

It’s far too dangerous out there, Herman.
How could you even think of such a thing?

HERMAN

I guess I’m not sure what the big deal is.

HIGHTOWER

I see.
Well.
My apologies.
I thought we were closer than that.
I thought we were pals.

HERMAN

We are pals!

HIGHTOWER

ARE WE?!!!
Because I always thought pals listen to each other!

HERMAN

What’s the harm in taking some of my artwork out into the world?

HIGHTOWER

It makes me queasy to even consider such a notion!
You being out there—
In that big, scary world—
Like a lost lamb—
Trying to whore out his artwork!
But, whatever!
Fine!
Go!
See if I care!

HIGHTOWER turns his back to HERMAN.

Hightower—
Are you getting upset?

HIGHTOWER
I just need a moment, okay?

HIGHTOWER starts to sniffle a bit.

HERMAN
Are you —
Crying?

No!

HIGHTOWER sniffs some more.

HERMAN
You are crying.

HIGHTOWER
It’s just —
I just don’t want you to be —
You know —
Out there —
Anymore than you absolutely have to be.

HERMAN
It was just an idea.

HIGHTOWER
A terrible idea!

HERMAN
Yes, okay.
A bad, bad idea.

...
I didn’t mean to upset you.

HERMAN puts a hand on HIGHTOWER—

But HIGHTOWER won’t budge.

A moment passes—

Then HERMAN starts singing:

HERMAN
ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US

HIGHTOWER stops sniffling.

HERMAN
NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER MORE OF US

HIGHTOWER turns around.

HERMAN
IF THERE’S EVER MORE OF US—
YES, IF THERE’S MORE THAN TWO OF US

HIGHTOWER quietly joins in.

HERMAN/HIGHTOWER
THEN SOMEONE’S GOTTA GO

I don’t have the best singing voice.

HERMAN

HIGHTOWER wipes away his tears.

Sounded angelic to this guy.

HERMAN

Thanks.

HERMAN

HIGHTOWER

So—
I trust you’ve come to your senses?
You’re not going to betray me and take your paintings out into the world?
HERMAN
I would never betray you.

HIGHTOWER
You’ve made me so, so happy.
You’re a great pal, Herman.

HERMAN
You’re a great pal too, Hightower.

The Recluse Stirs the Pot

HIGHTOWER—quite frazzled—waits for HERMAN.

He waits and waits and waits and waits—

Until finally, he hears someone coming—

And he quickly hides.

HERMAN tiptoes inside the studio—with an armful of his paintings.

He cautiously steps inside—careful not to make any noise.

HIGHTOWER steps out from behind a stack of canvases and sneaks up behind him.

Well, well, well—

HIGHTOWER
Hightower!
There you are!
Gosh—
You scared me.

HERMAN
Herman tucks his paintings behind his back.

HIGHTOWER
Look who finally decided to come crawling in.
Whatcha been up to—
Pal?
HERMAN

Oh, nothing much.
Were you hiding from me?

HIGHTOWER

I’ll be the one to ask the questions right now—
Mmk?

HERMAN

Hightower, please don’t do this.
I wasn’t gone for very long.

HIGHTOWER

Oh no?

HERMAN

No.

HIGHTOWER

Then do tell me, Herman.
Please enlighten me—
If you weren’t gone that long—
If you simply stepped out for the blink of an eye—
As you’re implying—
Then why did it feel like an ETERNITY?!

HIGHTOWER breaks down—

HERMAN

Hightower, please calm down.

HIGHTOWER

I just— I just— I just— I just—

HERMAN

You just what?

HIGHTOWER

I just thought— I just thought— I just thought— I just thought—

HERMAN

You just thought what?
That you— That you— That you— That you—

That I what?

ABANDONED ME!!!!!!

HIGHTOWER sobs.

Hightower, buddy—
Pal—

Don’t you dare “pal” me right now you sick—

C’mere—

HERMAN moves toward HIGHTOWER and tries to comfort him.

NO!
GET AWAY FROM ME!
YOU MONSTER!

Why am I a monster?!

I am sick and tired of you leaving me alone ALL THE TIME!

What are you talking about?
I hardly ever leave you!

LIES!!!

What more do you want from me?
I want you to remain faithful!
Faithful to the good thing we’ve got going on here!

I am faithful!

Oh yeah?
You’re faithful?

Of course I am!

Then what is it you’re hiding there—
Behind your back?

Oh, this—?
It’s, uh—
It’s nothing.
Just more scrap materials.

HIGHTOWER closes in on HERMAN.

Just more scraps, huh?

Yes.
They’re canvases—
For my paintings—

Oh, is that all?
Mind if I sneak a peek?

You don’t trust me?

HERMAN backs away from HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER follows HERMAN.
Just show me—
If it’s no big deal.

HIGHTOWER

I’m not going to show you.

HERMAN

C’mon—
Show me, Herman.

HIGHTOWER

I shouldn’t have to show you.

HERMAN

HIGHTOWER chases HERMAN around the studio.

HIGHTOWER

Show me! Show me! Show me! Show me! Show me! Show me! SHOW ME!

HERMAN

FINE!!!
Yes, okay!

HERMAN reveals his paintings to HIGHTOWER.

HERMAN

I took a few of my paintings—
Out there—
Into the world today!
There!
I admit it!
Are you happy now???

HIGHTOWER

You— You—
LIAR!
You—
BETRAYER!
Those are OUR paintings!
The ones that I posed for!

HERMAN

I had to do it, Hightower!
For myself!
And you call yourself faithful!
What bologna!
What hogwash!

I had to see if anything would happen!

Oh, is that so?

Yes!
And you know what?

What?!!

I’m glad I did it!

I suddenly feel unwell—
I feel sick to my tummy—
I think I’m gonna hurl!

Calm down!

Calm down?!
I’m emotionally devastated—
And you tell me to calm down?!
I cannot believe you!
I don’t know what to believe anymore!
You’re just—
Out there—
All day long—
Doing god knows what!

Hightower, enough!
You know I have to go out there sometimes.
HIGHTOWER

What for?

HERMAN

For food!
For supplies!
To get all the things I need to take care of the both of us!

A moment passes.

HIGHTOWER takes a breath.

HIGHTOWER

I’m sorry, Herman.
I don’t know why I get like this.
I just despise it when you leave me in here—
All cooped up and alone.
And I despise it when you go out there—
Making me worry all the time.
It’s exhausting.

HERMAN

But you don’t have anything to worry about—
That’s what I’m saying.

HIGHTOWER

I like it to just be—
Me and you.
You and me.
Nobody else.
And sometimes when you go out there it feels like—
No.
I can’t say it.

HERMAN

What?

HIGHTOWER

It’s too humiliating.

HERMAN

Please say it.

HIGHTOWER

Sometimes when you go out there—
It feels like you’re going to—
Well—
Replace me.

HIGHTOWER won’t make eye contact.

Hightower—
Look at me.

I can’t look at you.

Look at me right now.

Make me!

Please—
Please just look at me.

HIGHTOWER finally looks up at HERMAN.

I will never replace you.

HIGHTOWER huffs.

I mean it.
Never.

Not ever?

HIGHTOWER

Never ever—
Not ever—
Never!

HIGHTOWER laughs.

There is no one in my world but you.
You saved my life.
You gave me and my art purpose again.
Who could replace you?
Nobody.
That’s who.

HIGHTOWER

Nobody?

HERMAN

Nobody.

(HERMAN starts singing:)
ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US
NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER MORE OF US

HIGHTOWER

IF THERE’S EVER MORE OF US
YES, IF THERE’S MORE THAN TWO OF US

HERMAN/HIGHTOWER

THEN SOMEONE’S GOTTA—

FRANCESCA’S VOICE is heard from offstage. She begins her descent into the space during the following:

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Yoooooooooohoooooooo—
Oh, Hermit!

HIGHTOWER

Herman…

HERMAN

Mmhmm?

HIGHTOWER

What was that ruckus I just heard?

HERMAN

Ruckus?
What ruckus?

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Hermiitiitiit, dear?
You down there?!

HERMAN

Oh, that ruckus.

HIGHTOWER

Yes, that’s the one.

HERMAN

Look—
I was going to tell you if you just gave me the chance.
But you got so upset so quickly that—

HIGHTOWER

You were going to tell me what, exactly?

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Come out, come out—
Wherever you are!

HERMAN

Her name’s Francesca—
Francesca Del Monte.
She’s a big, fancy art dealer.
I bumped into her today while I was—

HIGHTOWER

Out there.

HERMAN

That’s right.
She’s got a gallery here in town—

HIGHTOWER

And you invited her into our home?

HERMAN

She wanted to come!
Practically invited herself when she found out I was an artist!
This is a good thing, Hightower—
I promise!

HIGHTOWER

A good thing?
(offstage:)
Peek-a-boo—
I’m lookin’ for youuuuuu!

FRANCESCA

HIGHTOWER
How the fuck could that be a good thing?

HERMAN
She wants to see my artwork—
To see if maybe she could sell it in her gallery!
This could be really great for us and our future!

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Herrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr—
I’m gonna fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiind youuuuuu!

HIGHTOWER
I trust you know what you must do, Herman.

HERMAN
Hightower, don’t be like this.

HIGHTOWER
She’s gotta go.

HERMAN
But—

HIGHTOWER

HERMAN
Hightower—

HIGHTOWER
NOW!

FRANCESCA—a towering woman dressed in a
dated sequined, shoulder-padded pantsuit with
teased hair and shimmering faux gold jewelry—
glides into the studio.

HIGHTOWER quickly masks himself in a pile of
scraps.
FRANCESCA

Hermit—
My stars!
There you are!
Didn’t you hear me hollering your ears off?!

HERMAN

Sorry about that, Francesca.
I get easily distracted—
You know—
Down here.

FRANCESCA glances around the dark, dated,
dingy, and sloppy space.

I can see why.
My gracious—
This place, Hermit!

HERMAN

Herman.

Hmm?

Nevermind.

FRANCESCA

It’s even more gloomy than I had imagined!

HERMAN

I’m not all that used to company.
I apologize—

FRANCESCA

(Suddenly shouting:)
YOU STOP THAT THIS INSTANT!

HERMAN jumps.

Stop what?!
FRANCESCA

Don’t you dare do that ever again.
Don’t you dare apologize for being you.
Do you understand me?

HERMAN doesn’t quite know how to respond.

FRANCESCA

Do you understand me, Hermit?!

HERMAN

I suppose so?

FRANCESCA

Wonderful!
Fabulous!
I can market you brilliantly just the way you are!

HERMAN

Market me?
Really?

FRANCESCA

Really and truly!
You could be the next big exhibit at my gallery!
Here’s my business card—
(She hands it to him.)

HERMAN

(Reading:)
“Got a substantial salary? Swing by Del Monte Art Gallery!”
…
Wow.
Gosh.
How thrilling.

FRANCESCA

Isn’t it?!

FRANCESCA moves around the studio—
inspecting the space.

FRANCESCA

When I saw you today—
Outside that old art supply shop—
Standing awkwardly slumped—
Holding your little paintings—
On their little cardboard cutouts—
I knew it was fate!

HERMAN

You did?

FRANCESCA

Yes I did!
I got one of my tingly inklings about you!

HERMAN

An inkling?

FRANCESCA

Yes, an inkling!
And I always trust my inklings.
Especially the ones that make me tingle.
Regardless of your lackluster appearance—
I could tell you still had that spark—
That gleam—
That magic!

HERMAN

You could?

FRANCESCA

Yes I could!
I knew you possessed the potential to really have—
The stuff.

HERMAN

The stuff?

FRANCESCA

Yes, Hermit.
The stuff.
That rare, extraordinary stuff that genius artists are made from!
The stuff that sets you apart from the rest of us.
The stuff that every artist who displays at Del Monte Art Gallery possesses!

HERMAN

Gosh.
FRANCESCA
So—
Was I right about you, Hermit?
Do you have—
The stuff?

HERMAN
Umm…
I think I do?

FRANCESCA
You think you do?
Or do you absolutely know it way deep down in the depths of your soul?

HERMAN
I know it?

FRANCESCA
Oh, Hermit—

HERMAN
Herman.

FRANCESCA
Hermit, Hermit, Hermit—
That wasn’t very convincing.
Now, was it?

HERMAN
I suppose not.

FRANCESCA
When I invite a new artist to display at my gallery—
I need to know that they truly believe in their art.
Do you understand?

HERMAN seems overwhelmed.

HERMAN
I, uhh—

FRANCESCA
So I want you to gain some of that surefire confidence!
If you really believe you’ve got the stuff—
Then I want to hear you say it with some oomph—
Oomph?

FRANCESCA

Some vigor!
Some vitality!
Now, go on!
Say it!

HERMAN

I’ve got—
The stuff?

FRANCESCA invades his personal space.

HERMAN shrinks down a bit.

FRANCESCA

Say it again!

HERMAN

I’ve got the stuff—

FRANCESCA

AGAIN!

FRANCESCA towers over HERMAN. Light reflects off her faux, shiny jewelry and into HERMAN’S face.

FRANCESCA

I WANT YOU TO MEAN IT, HERMIT!

HERMAN

I’m not very comfortable with people stepping into my personal bubble—

FRANCESCA

PUT SOME FORCE INTO IT!
SOME GET-UP-AND-GO!
DO YOU WANT YOUR ARTWORK IN MY GALLERY OR NOT?!

HERMAN

If you could please just step back a little bit—

FRANCESCA

I WANT YOUR STUDIO WALLS TO ECHO WITH YOUR VOICE!
NOW SAY IT!!!
SAY IT!!!!!
SAAAAAAAAAAAY IIIIIIIIIIIT!!!!!!!

FRANCESCA corners HERMAN—and he finally breaks:

HERMAN

OKAY, FINE!!!!!
I’VE!!!
GOT!!!!!
THE!!!!!!!!!
STUUUUUUUUFF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

LEROY’S FEEBLE, SHAKY VOICE is heard from offstage:

LEROY

(Offstage)
Fran—
Francesca?
Are—
Are you safe?!

FRANCESCA

Down here, LeRoy!

HERMAN regains his breath.

HERMAN

What’s happening?
Who is that?

FRANCESCA

I hope you don’t mind—
Called in some backup!
You never know when you’re stepping into some lunatic’s dwelling.

FRANCESCA backs away from HERMAN.

LEROY

(Offstage)
Fran—
Francesca?!
Why—
Why can’t I see you?!
FRANCESCA
Because you can’t see much of anything, LeRoy dear!
Be careful not to trip, okay?!

LEROY trips.

LEROY

(offstage:)
Oww!!!

FRANCESCA
(Speaks quietly to HERMAN:)
Please pardon LeRoy’s—
State of mind.
Poor dear’s been through the wringer in his old age.
And now he’s a bit—
Oh, what would you call it?
Loopy.

HERMAN
Loopy?

LEROY—an aging artist with wildly disheveled gray hair—stumbles into the studio, balancing on his walking cane.

He hobbles over and joins them.

FRANCESCA
But I scooped you right up under my wing and we’ve been close ever since—
Isn’t that right, LeRoy?

LEROY’S overwhelmed by all the junk that surrounds him.

LEROY
(to FRANCESCA:)
Who—
Who are you?!

FRANCESCA
Oh, LeRoy—
Always a barrel of laughs!
Like the grandpapa I never had!
LEROY

Where—
Where am I?
How’d I get down here?!

FRANCESCA

(to LEROY:)
You’re in an art studio—
Isn’t that exciting?
And you’re here because I asked you to come here.
Everything’s just fine, LeRoy.
(to HERMAN:)
See what I mean?
L-o-o-p-y.

LEROY

I remember how to spell.

FRANCESCA

Of course you do.
There, there—

FRANCESCA pats LEROY gently on his back.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy was once a promising artist.
Just like you, Hermit.
Look at the two of you—
A striking similarity.

HERMAN notices he and LEROY are dressed just alike—sweater vests and thick-rimmed glasses.
Though, LEROY’S outfit is a bit more tattered.

FRANCESCA

Many moons ago, LeRoy even had—
The stuff.

LEROY stares forward, wide-eyed and blank-faced.

Is he okay?

HERMAN

I’m afraid not, Hermit.
You see—
LeRoy kept to himself for far too long.  
He never shared his artwork with the outside world. 
And all those years of loneliness seriously wounded his psyche—

HERMAN and FRANCESCA stare at LEROY’S blank daze.

FRANCESCA

Now he’s just a shell of the artist he once was. 
But lucky for him— 
Francesca came along. 
Just not soon enough, I’m afraid.

FRANCESCA grabs one of HERMAN’S paintbrushes and dangles it in front of LEROY’S face.

LEROY snaps to.

Francesca?!

LEROY

There he is! 
There’s LeRoy!  
Hermit here was just telling me he’s got the stuff!

The stuff?

FRANCESCA

That’s right, LeRoy!  
So go on, Hermit.  
Show us!

HERMAN

Show you—?

FRANCESCA

The rest of your artwork, your paintings— 
Whatever you’ve got that demonstrates—

LEROY

The stuff!  
Of course!  
I used to have the stuff!
Where the hell did my stuff go?!

LEROY almost trips over his cane.

FRANCESCA

Alright, LeRoy.
Calm yourself—
You don’t want to get parched.
Here, sip your juice.
No juicy means LeRoy goes loopy!

(FRANCESCA passes LEROY a juice box.)

Go on, Hermit.

LEROY leans on his cane and sips his juice.

HERMAN

Well—
Actually.
You’re pretty much looking at what I’ve got.

Am I?

FRANCESCA

FRANCESCA turns and looks at the heaps of HERMAN’S paintings.

Tell me, Hermit—
What is it I’m looking at?

This is all of my artwork.

FRANCESCA wanders throughout the studio and studies his work.

Well—
This is certainly an—
Interesting—
Array you’ve got here.

I appreciate it?

HERMAN
FRANCESCA
I see a similar figure in most of your paintings—
Correct me if I'm wrong—
But they all seem to be—
Well—

HERMAN
Sad faces.

LEROY almost chokes on his juice.

FRANCESCA
Careful, LeRoy!
(to HERMAN:)
And you mean to tell me—
That all of your artwork consists of—
Just these—
Sad faces?

HERMAN
Oh, no.
No, no—
Of course not.

FRANCESCA
Thank goodness—

HERMAN
I've recently been inspired to work on a brand new collection.

FRANCESCA
Oh, how marvelous!
What's the collection?

HERMAN
Happy faces.
You know—
Like the paintings I showed you in town.

LEROY
Uh ohhh.

LeRoy—

FRANCESCA
HERMAN

What is it?
Is something wrong?

LEROY

I’d say so.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, just sip your juice!
(LEROY sips.)
Hear me out—
I’ve been on the art scene in this town for a long time.

LEROY

She’s not kidding.

FRANCESCA

Okay, LeRoy—

LEROY

She’s talkin’ years.

FRANCESCA

He gets the picture—

LEROY

Decades, even.

FRANCESCA

ENOUGH!

... I know it’s impossible to believe, Hermit—
But I’m not the youngest of gals anymore.

LEROY

No spring chicken.

FRANCESCA shoots a glare at LEROY.

LEROY sips his juice.

FRANCESCA

If you were to step into any gallery in town—
They'd kill to be in my position.
They'd absolutely slaughter to be on the same level as Francesca Del Monte.
Just ask them!

LEROY

Once upon a time, perhaps.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, bite your tongue—

HERMAN

What are you saying?

FRANCESCA

I’m saying my inkling is never wrong.
It’s a gift I’ve been given.
Isn’t that right, LeRoy?

LEROY

Gifts tend to fade.

FRANCESCA

(Under her breath, to LEROY:)
Do you want supper tonight or not?!

LEROY

I mean—
She’s supernatural!

FRANCESCA

You hear that, Hermit?
I’m supernatural.
So, now—
I’ve gotta know—
Where’s the rest of your artwork?

HERMAN grows a bit uncomfortable.

HERMAN

I told you—
This is it.

FRANCESCA

I see how it’s going to be.

LEROY hobbles forward on his cane.
LEROY
But Francesca—
You said he’s the one—
You said he could save the gallery!

HERMAN
Wait a second—

FRANCESCA
LeRoy, dear—
Can you pardon Hermit and me for just a moment?

LEROY
How are we gonna pay the bills?
How are we gonna squeeze by?!?

HERMAN
What’s LeRoy talking about?

FRANCESCA
Time for your nap, LeRoy!
We don’t want you getting loopy on us again!

LEROY
But this is the last straw!
He’s our last hope!!!

FRANCESCA
BYE, BYE LEROY!

LEROY
Bye… bye…

LEROY glares at HERMAN—and slowly hobbles on his cane toward the door.

FRANCESCA
And no worries, LeRoy dear!
Francesca will take care of everything.
Pwwwwomise!

LEROY stumbles out.
FRANCESCA

Look, Hermit—
I could tell LeRoy’s loopiness was making you a pinch uncomfortable.
LeRoy’s loopiness makes most people uncomfortable.
But no more games, okay?
I want you to tell Francesca the truth.
Now that we’re all alone.

HERMAN

…Alone…?

FRANCESCA

Yes.
We are alone now, aren’t we?
I mean—
You don’t have anybody hiding in here, do you?

FRANCESCA laughs.

HERMAN nervously grins.

FRANCESCA

Hiding somebody?
Why would I be hiding somebody?

Well, good.
If we’re all alone—
Then only you and I will know.
It can be our little secret.

FRANCESCA closes in again on HERMAN’S personal space.

HERMAN tries to keep some distance between them.

HERMAN

Umm…
What exactly can be our little secret?

FRANCESCA

Your secret treasure trove of brilliance.
Your juicy stuff.
Where is it?
C’mon—
You can tell me.
What might pique Francesca’s fancy?

FRANCESCA moves to a stack of paintings.

FRANCESCA

Is it over here?
(\textit{She moves to a different stack.})
Or how about over here?
(\textit{She moves to a different stack.})
Oooohoo, or maybe over here!
…
I just know there’s something else in here for me to get my perky mitts on!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind
FRANCESCA’S back.

FRANCESCA remains totally oblivious.

HERMAN
I, uhh—
I don’t know why you would feel that way.
There’s really nothing else for you to find.

HIGHTOWER gestures for HERMAN to get rid of
her.

FRANCESCA
Don’t play coy with me, Hermit.
Do you really expect me to believe—
That these rudimentary paintings are all you have to offer?

HERMAN
I thought you liked my paintings.
Isn’t that why you’re here?

FRANCESCA
I’m here because of my inkling about you.
I think there’s a lot more to you than meets the eye!
…
What is it you keep looking at—?

FRANCESCA turns to see—

HIGHTOWER quickly ducks back down.
HERMAN

NOTHING!

FRANCESCA

You seem distracted by something—

HERMAN

I’m not!
I’m sorry!
Like I said—
I’m just not used to company.

FRANCESCA peruses through the different stacks of HERMAN’S paintings.

FRANCESCA

C’mon, Hermit—
Don’t keep secrets from Francesca.
I need to see that—
That spark!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind a stack of paint cans.

HERMAN

Spark?

FRANCESCA

Yes!
That gleam!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind a coat rack.

HERMAN

Gleam?

FRANCESCA

Yes!
That magic!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind an easel.

HERMAN

Magic?
FRANCESCA
Absolutely!
I need you to show me some artwork that evokes that feeling you get with—
A fresh ocean breeze!
Or steamy clam chowder on a Sunday morning!!!
Or swigging cough syrup straight from the bottle when nobody’s watching!!!!
( Didn’t mean to let that slip: )
I mean, uhh—
( Regains composure: )
That’s the sort of feeling I seek when I recruit artists to the Del Monte Art Gallery!

HERMAN
I’m not so sure if I’ve got anything like that.
My paintings are all that I have to offer.
What you see is what you get.

FRANCESCA
Do you understand what you’re giving up here, Hermit?

HERMAN
Sort of…?

FRANCESCA
The chance at a life outside of these dark, sad walls!
The chance to not end up like LeRoy!
You could still really be somebody—
We could be somebodies together!
Out there!

HERMAN
Out there?

FRANCESCA
Yes, Hermit.
Out there!
Fame! Fortune! Admiration! Companionship!

HERMAN’S eyes suddenly light up.

HERMAN
Companionship?

FRANCESCA
Oh so many companions and comrades and friendships, Hermit!
Just endless amounts!
HERMAN

Gosh.

FRANCESCA

Now—
I’m going to ask you once more—
And I want you to be totally honest with me.
Do you understand?

HERMAN

Mmhmm.

FRANCESCA

Do you have any other creations tucked away in this studio?

HERMAN

Well…

FRANCESCA

Well…?

HIGHTOWER pops up and offers HERMAN a final warning—then he ducks back down.

HERMAN

No.
I’ve got nothing.

FRANCESCA

So, you mean to tell me—
That my inkling about you—
Was—
Was—

(This is painful for her:)

Wrrr—
Wrrrrrrrrrr—
Wrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr—
Incorrect?

HERMAN

I’m afraid so.

FRANCESCA

But that can’t be!
HERMAN

I’m sorry to disappoint you, Francesca.

FRANCESCA

I see…
Very well, then…

(Suddenly shouting:)
LEROY!
LEROY, CAN YOU HEAR ME??!

FRANCESCA glides toward the doorway.

FRANCESCA

I truly wish things could’ve ended differently for us.

Yeah.
Me too.

LEROY hobbles in on his cane.

LEROY
Did somebody just call for me?

Yes, LeRoy!
I did!

LEROY
Who are you?!

FRANCESCA

Warm up the LeSabre!

(She tosses LEROY the keys.)
We’re getting out of here!

LEROY
Oh, right—
Does this mean no supper tonight?

FRANCESCA

We’ll discuss that later!

(to HERMAN:)
I really would have liked to make you somebody out there in the real world. 
But I suppose it just wasn’t meant to be.
HERMAN’S a bit defeated.

HERMAN

No, I guess not.

FRANCESCA

Alright—
Let’s roll, LeRoy!
We’ve certainly wasted enough time here!
Tata for now, Hermit!

LEROY

So long!

FRANCESCA storms out.

LEROY hobbles behind.

HERMAN watches them leave.

A moment passes—

Then HIGHTOWER—elated and energized—pops out from behind the paintings.

HIGHTOWER

Wow, Herman!
You did it!
You really, really did it!

HERMAN

What’d I do?

HIGHTOWER

You got rid of them!

HERMAN takes a seat at his easel.

HIGHTOWER

I can’t believe you actually held your ground!
I can’t believe you did that!
For me!
For us!
We should celebrate!
Don’t you think?
How should we celebrate?!

HERMAN
I don’t feel like celebrating, Hightower.

HIGHTOWER
You don’t?

HERMAN
Not at all.

HIGHTOWER
Well—
Why the heck not?

HERMAN
I don’t really feel like talking about it.
Okay?

HIGHTOWER
But you should be thrilled right now!
Over the moon!

HERMAN
Should I?

HIGHTOWER
Of course, pal!
Why wouldn’t you be?

HERMAN
Because, Hightower—
There goes my chance!

HIGHTOWER
Your chance?
At what?

HERMAN
Being somebody!

HIGHTOWER
But you already are somebody—
HERMAN

No I’m not!

HIGHTOWER

To me, you are.

HERMAN

Oh, whoopee—
Big deal!
I want to be somebody out there—
In the world—
Where it matters!

HIGHTOWER

So—
This doesn’t really matter to you?
What you and I have.

HERMAN

That’s not what I meant.

HIGHTOWER

Then what exactly did you mean, Herman?

HERMAN

Nothing.
Just—
Forget it.

HERMAN heads for the door.

HIGHTOWER

Don’t you dare walk away from me when I’m talking to you!

HERMAN keeps walking.

HIGHTOWER

Did you hear me?!!

HERMAN ignores HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

Who do you think you’re fooling, Herman?

HERMAN stops.
HIGHTOWER

I mean—
Let’s be honest here for a second.
Do you really think your art is good enough?

HERMAN turns around.

What did you just say?

HIGHTOWER

Do you honestly believe your art is good enough—
To make it—
Out there—
In the real world?

HERMAN moves back over to HIGHTOWER.

I don’t know.
You tell me, Hightower.
You’re the one who’s always blowing smoke—
Telling me my work is—
“Breathtaking”!

HIGHTOWER

Well—
If I had known it was going to turn into all of this commotion—
I never would have said your paintings were any good!

HERMAN looms over HIGHTOWER.

Oh?
And why not?

BECAUSE THEY’RE NOT!

HERMAN slaps HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER gasps—
Then he darts behind a stack of paintings.
HIGHTOWER

HERMAN

Hightower—
Come on.
You know I didn’t mean to do that.
...
Come back out here.
Please!

HIGHTOWER

...I thought we were pals...

HERMAN

We are pals!
Please don’t hide from me.

HIGHTOWER

Pals don’t treat each other this way!

HERMAN

I didn’t mean it!

HIGHTOWER won’t budge.

HERMAN

Okay, fine!
You’re right!
Maybe—
Just maybe—
We’re not pals after all!

HIGHTOWER

Fine—

HERMAN

Fine—

FINE!

HIGHTOWER

FINE!

HERMAN

GOODNIGHT!

HERMAN shuts off the lights and bolts out of the studio.
The Recluse Gets a Surprise Visit

FRANCESCA and LEROY—now dressed in mysterious, sneaky dark garments—creep into the pitch-black studio.

FRANCESCA switches on a flashlight.

Don’t make a peep—
Like little mice, okay LeRoy?

LIKE mice—
Got it.

LEROY immediately trips over his cane and stumbles into a loud, clunky pile of art supplies.

LeRoy!
I said not a peep!

I can’t see anything—
It’s too dark!

You can never see anything!
I should’ve left you in the LeSabre!

I’ll be careful!

FRANCESCA switches on the light—and tucks away her flashlight.

We’re not doing anything naughty—
Okay, LeRoy?
The last thing I ever want to do is taint your saintly image of me.
I just had an inkling about this Hermit fellow—

And you still trust your inklings?
Even after all of the recent misfires?
FRANCESCA
What are you implying, LeRoy?
I mean—
I’m aware that my inklings have, perhaps, not been quite as—
Up to par—
These past few weeks.

LEROY
…Weeks?

FRANCESCA
Okay, months.

LEROY
…Months?

FRANCESCA
Fine, years.

LEROY
…Years?

(Cracking:)
What do you want from me?!
(Regains composure:)
Come on—
Let’s dive in and get to digging!
You start over there—
And I’ll start over here—
And please—
Keep quiet!

FRANCESCA and LEROY separate—and move to different stacks of paintings.

FRANCESCA
Keep digging until you find it.

LEROY
It?

FRANCESCA
Yes, LeRoy—
It.
That singular, shimmering piece.
That piece of art that would make me tingle with delight—
It’s here somewhere—
I just know it—

LEROY bends down and lifts a box.

LEROY
My back’s not really what it used to be—

FRANCESCA
Then try to be fast!

FRANCESCA and LEROY sift and dig—
Hunt and forage—
Rummage and scavenge.

LEROY
Nothing’s popping out at me, Francesca—

FRANCESCA
But there’s gotta be something here worth our time.
I can’t be losing my touch, LeRoy.
Do you know hauntingly tragic that would be?

LEROY
For who?

FRANCESCA
For you!
For me!
For the entire art community!

FRANCESCA plops down.

FRANCESCA
My, my—
My, my, my, my, my, my—
My stars!
Is this really happening to me?

LEROY
I’m afraid so.
FRANCESCA
I guess my glory days are far behind me now.
I just finally need to admit that I have lost my inkling.
No more tingles for this gal.
I must face a world that no longer contains the Del Monte Art Gallery.
This is truly the end of an era.

LEROY
The final bow—
The last hurrah—
The—

FRANCESCA
C’mon, LeRoy!
Let’s get out of here.
Francesca needs a hot toddy and her anxiety meds.

FRANCESCA heads for the door.
LEROY hobbles behind—but then stumbles again
into another stack of art supplies.

LeRoy, be quiet!

LEROY notices an unusual figure lying on the floor.

LEROY
Fran—
Francesca?

You’ll wake up Hermit!
Let’s get out of here—
Fast!

LEROY
But— But—
Francesca—

FRANCESCA
What is it, LeRoy?!

LEROY
It’s— It’s—
FRANCESCA
Please don’t go all loopy on me again, LeRoy!

LEROY bends down and inspects HIGHTOWER.

LEROY
It’s his— His—

FRANCESCA
His what?! Spit it out!

LEROY lifts HIGHTOWER high into the air.

LEROY
HIS MAGNUM OPUS!!!!!!!!!!!

FRANCESCA
LeRoy!
You precious, geriatric poodle you!

FRANCESCA snatches HIGHTOWER out of LEROY’S hands.

FRANCESCA
I knew it, LeRoy!
I just knew I didn’t lose my inkling!
Ooooooooono—!
I’ve got the tingles all over!
(Falling into a deep primal groan:)
Ooooooooonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoono—
Ooooooooonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoo—
Oh. Oh! Oh!! OH!!!
Ooooooooonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoonoono!!!!!
Doesn’t it feel divine, LeRoy?!
To have the tingly inklings!!

LEROY
Feels good to feel something.

FRANCESCA
Francesca’s still got it!

FRANCESCA studies HIGHTOWER.
FRANCESCA

Just look at this craftsmanship, would you?
Made with such tender care.
There’s something so—
Remarkable—
In its homemade, makeshift, made-from-scratch style.

LEROY

Does this mean we get to keep the gallery now?!

FRANCESCA

Shh—!

What?
What is it?

LEROY

Let’s get the hell outta dodge!

FRANCESCA

I think Hermit’s coming down here.

LEROY

C’mon! Let’s scram!

FRANCESCA

It’s too late!

LEROY

Aw, shit!!!!!!

HERMAN stumbles in—wearing his sad, mopey pajamas.

FRANCESCA and LEROY duck down.

HERMAN

Hello?
...
...
Hightower?

(Loudly whispering:)  
Who’s Hightower?

FRANCESCA

Shh—!

HERMAN

Is someone else in here?

LEROY

….Not a soul…

FRANCESCA

LeRoy!  
Whisper!

LEROY

(Not whispering:)  
I thought I was whispering!

HERMAN pulls out his glasses—fogs them off—and slides them on.

He sees FRANCESCA and LEROY hunkered down.

HERMAN

Francesca?  
Is that you?

FRANCESCA

Hermit, hiiiii—  
Good evening!

HERMAN

And LeRoy?

LEROY

My bones ache.

HERMAN

What are you two doing in my studio?
FRANCESCA

What are we doing here?
...
What are we doing here?
What—
Are—
We—
Doing—
Here?
What are we doing here, LeRoy?

LEROY

Uhhhhhhhhhhhh—

FRANCESCA

C’mon, anything?

LEROY

Uhhhhhhhhhhhh—

FRANCESCA

I’m losing you again, aren’t I LeRoy?

LEROY

Paintings?

FRANCESCA

Paintings?
Right—
Yes—
Of course!
Paintings!
I wanted to come back—
Because I think I judged your paintings a bit too harshly earlier.

HERMAN

You did?

FRANCESCA

Yes—
(to LEROY:)
Yes?

LEROY

Sure—
FRANCESCA

Yes!
Even I—
Someone who’s been in the art biz for so long—
Forget to not make snap judgments.

HERMAN

You said my paintings look rudimentary.

FRANCESCA

Did I say that?

LEROY

Sounds like something you’d say.

FRANCESCA

Well—
Oops!
Anyway, I was moseying about town in my LeSabre and I got to thinking—
Didn’t I, LeRoy?

FRANCESCA dangles a paintbrush in front of
LEROY’S face again—trying to help him snap to.

LEROY

Who’s LeRoy?

FRANCESCA

I got to thinking about your paintings, Hermit—

HERMAN

You did?

FRANCESCA

Yes, I did.
And do you know what I realized?
Your paintings are not trite whatsoever.

HERMAN

They’re not?

FRANCESCA

Not at all!
They’re simply a reflection of your—
Your—
(She goes to LEROY, but nothing:)
Your—
Existence!

HERMAN
My existence?

FRANCESCA
Yes.
Your lifestyle.
You know—
Your loneliness.
So that’s why we came back!

HERMAN
Why are you both dressed like that?

FRANCESCA and LEROY glance down at their
dark, ominous attire.

FRANCESCA
Oh.
Uhh—
What can I say?
LeRoy and I—
We’re a mysterious duo.

LEROY
Mystifying!

HERMAN notices FRANCESCA attempting to
hide something.

HERMAN
What do you have there—?

FRANCESCA nervously grins.

HERMAN moves toward her.

FRANCESCA
Nothing!
I’ve got nothing!
...

76.
LeRoy, do something!

HERMAN closes in on her.

He sees what she’s hiding.

HERMAN

YOU’VE GOT HIGHTOWER!!!

FRANCESCA

Hightower?
Is that what you call this piece?

HERMAN

He’s not a piece!
Give him back to me!
RIGHT NOW!

FRANCESCA

LeRoy!

Huh—?

FRANCESCA

Catch!

FRANCESCA tosses HIGHTOWER to LEROY.

LEROY almost loses his balance on his cane—but still manages to catch him—holding him upside down.

FRANCESCA

Go on, LeRoy!
Take it and get out of here!

HERMAN

NO!!!! DON’T!!!

LEROY quickly becomes frazzled.

LEROY

I’m— I’m—
Sorry?
FRANCESCA
You heard me, LeRoy!
Go!

HERMAN
Please don’t!

LEROY
But— But—
Francesca—

FRANCESCA
LeRoy—
Do as I say!

HERMAN
I beg you, no!

LEROY
I’m—
I’m not sure what to do in this situation!

FRANCESCA
Go—

HERMAN
No—

FRANCESCA
Go!

HERMAN
No!

FRANCESCA
GO!!!

HERMAN
NO!!!

LEROY
I’m—
I’m feeling—
Confused!
FRANCESCA
LeRoy, stay calm—

LEROY
I’m—
I’m feeling—
Lost!
(He glances down at HIGHTOWER:)
What is this?
What am I holding?!

FRANCESCA
LeRoy, don’t do it!
Don’t do this to me!
Please—
Hold it together!
Don’t you want to save the gallery?!

LEROY
What gallery?
Who the hell are you?!
Where the hell am I?!
What’s happening?!
I’M GETTING OUTTA HERE!!!

LEROY drops HIGHTOWER and dashes out of the studio—stumbling over his cane.

FRANCESCA
LeRoy! Come back!

FRANCESCA quickly scoops up HIGHTOWER.

FRANCESCA
Well isn’t that just dandy!
Is that how you want to end up, Hermit?!
Do you really want to end up like LeRoy?
All scatterbrained, disturbed, and LOOPY!!!

HERMAN
No, of course not—

FRANCESCA
Then you have got to let me take just this one itsy bitsy piece!
Is that so much to ask?!
HERMAN

Francesca, please—
You can take it all.
All of my paintings—
Absolutely everything—
Just not him!
Not Hightower!

FRANCESCA

I don’t want anything else, Hermit!

(She holds up HIGHTOWER.)

This is what I was hoping you’d have lurking among the heaps and stacks!
This was my inkling—
This is what sets you apart as an artist!

HERMAN

Please—
Please be careful with him!

FRANCESCA

This bewildering, strange creature—
Is the culmination of your artistic journey.
It’s the ideal representation of an artist who has shut himself completely away from the outside world!
This one piece can save my career, Hermit.

HERMAN

Your career?

FRANCESCA

Yes—
It will stoke the coals!
Relight the flame!
People will respect the name Francesca Del Monte once again!
All thanks to you, Hermit—
I’ll no longer be a joke.

HERMAN

A joke?
But I thought you said—

FRANCESCA

I know what I said—
But my star has faded!
...
Don’t you see?
…
We can both be big stars because of this piece.
You—
The off-kilter genius.
Me—
The discoverer of the off-kilter genius!
So whaddya say—
You wanna ride into the stars together—
Or do you wanna stay down here forever—
And rot?

HERMAN stares at HIGHTOWER’S limp body.

HERMAN
I can’t do it.
Please, Francesca.
Don’t take him away from me.

FRANCESCA
Why in the world do you keep referring to this thing like it’s an actual—
(\textit{FRANCESCA has the realization—})
Ohhhhhhh.
Oh my, my, my, my, my, my, my, my—

FRANCESCA holds HIGHTOWER up—and stares into his makeshift eyes.

FRANCESCA
Do you think it’s alive?
…
Have you made friends with it?
…
Is that why you created it, Hermit?
To be your companion?

HERMAN refuses to answer her.

FRANCESCA
Do you actually talk to this thing?
Wait, no—
Do you believe this thing talks to you?

HERMAN
He does talk to me—
He saved my life—
He loves me!
FRANCESCA

Loves you?!  
Oh Hermit—  
You poor, precious dear.  
You’re already on your way to becoming just like LeRoy.

HERMAN continues to stare at HIGHTOWER.

FRANCESCA

Being alone too long plays scary tricks on the mind.  
I thought I got to you in time—  
But I guess I’m too late.  
You’re already loopy—  
Aren’t you?

HERMAN

I’m not loopy.

FRANCESCA

Are you sure about that?

HERMAN

Positive!  
I’M NOT LOOPY!

FRANCESCA

I’ll tell you what—  
If you can make—  
Hightower is what you call it?  
Right?

HERMAN nods.

FRANCESCA

If you can make Hightower speak right now—  
Then I promise I’ll get out of your hair—  
I’ll leave the both of you alone for good!  
But if you can’t make him talk—  
Then I get to take Hightower—  
Out there—  
Into the world.

HERMAN

Francesca—  
You don’t understand.
Hightower is all I have.  
You can’t take him out there.  
I can’t lose him.

FRANCESCA

If you’re both so close—  
Then you should have no problem making him talk.  
Right?

FRANCESCA dangles HIGHTOWER out in front of HERMAN.

So, go on—  
Ask him something.  
Make him talk.

HERMAN stares at HIGHTOWER helplessly.

Do you mind if I hold him?  
Please?

FRANCESCA hesitantly hands him over.

HERMAN holds HIGHTOWER tenderly.

He moves away from FRANCESCA.

HERMAN

You heard her, Hightower.  
Just say something and we’ll be left alone.  
…  
I know we usually like to keep things between ourselves—  
But it’s okay this time.  
I promise.  
…  
(To FRANCESCA:)  
He’s very stubborn.  
…  
Come on, pal—  
Just talk.  
…  

Talk.  
…  

Talk!
FRANCESCA notices HERMAN’S desperation.

FRANCESCA

Hermit—

HERMAN

Talk, Hightower—
Please talk.
...
Please, please, please talk!
...
TALK!
TALK!!!
...
(He starts shouting:)
TAAAAAAALLLLLLK!!!!!!!!!!!!
TAAAAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLLK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

FRANCESCA

Hermit, he’s never going to—

HERMAN

He will talk!
I know he will!
He just needs a little bit longer to come around—

FRANCESCA

He won’t come around—

HERMAN

Don’t say that!

FRANCESCA

He won’t come around because he’s not real, Hermit—

HERMAN

Herman!

FRANCESCA

I’m sorry?

HERMAN

My name is Herman!
Not Hermit!
Herman!
Herman! Herman! Herman! HERMAN!!!
AND THIS IS HIGHTOWER!
AND HE IS REAL!
HE’S MY PAL!
NOT YOURS!
HE’S MINE!
MINE!
MINE!
MINE!

But Herm—

FRANCESCA

And I refuse to let you take him!

HERMAN

But my inkling, Herm—

FRANCESCA

Who cares?!

HERMAN

I care!
I haven’t had the tingles in a long, long time!
And you gave ‘em back to me!
I still feel ‘em shooting down my leg right now, in fact!
You gave me back my tingly inklings!

FRANCESCA

I don’t care about your stupid inklings!
Or your gallery!
Or your career!
NOW GET OUT!
GET OUUUUUUUUUT!!!

A long moment of silence.

FRANCESCA

I’m just a fool, aren’t I?
I’ve become so desperate—
Scavenging this town for any artist I can get my perky mitts on—
That I almost forgot.
Some people are just meant to be left the hell—
Alone.
HERMAN
And I’m one of those people?
Who’s meant to be alone—
Forever?

FRANCESCA
It would certainly seem that way, wouldn’t it?

FRANCESCA heads for the door.

FRANCESCA
I better go see if LeRoy’s waiting on me in the LeSabre.
But you should still know, Hermit—
I mean Herman.
Even after all this—
I truly do believe you’ve got—
The stuff!

FRANCESCA glides out of the studio.

HERMAN looks down at HIGHTOWER—
Who’s completely motionless—
Then he drops him onto a pile of scraps.

The Recluse Says So Long

HERMAN takes a seat at his easel.

He stares at a blank cardboard canvas.

HIGHTOWER springs to life.

He walks over—
And gently taps HERMAN on the shoulder.

HERMAN refuses to turn around.

HIGHTOWER taps again.

HIGHTOWER
Hi, pal.
HERMAN

Oh—
So now you talk.

HIGHTOWER

Hey—
You got a case of the blues or somethin’?

...  
Really, are you mad at me Herman?

HERMAN

No—
I’m not mad at you, Hightower.

HIGHTOWER

Pheww—
That’s a relief!
Because I thought—

HERMAN turns and faces HIGHTOWER.

I’m mad at myself.

HIGHTOWER

What for?

HERMAN

I should’ve never let Francesca in here to begin with.

HIGHTOWER

Well, don’t beat yourself up over it.

HERMAN

I should’ve never imagined myself having a life—
Success—
Anything at all outside of these walls.

HIGHTOWER

We learn from our mistakes.

HERMAN

And I should’ve never befriended you to begin with.
HIGHTOWER

Herman.
That was hurtful.
You don’t mean that, do you?

HERMAN

Why shouldn’t I mean it?

HIGHTOWER

Because I thought we meant something to each other.

HERMAN

You mean the absolute world to me, Hightower.
But you heard Francesca.
Some people are just meant to be alone.

HIGHTOWER

And now we will be alone!
Just you and me—
Together!
Forever!
Just like it’s spose to be!

HERMAN

No.

HIGHTOWER

No?

HERMAN

Just me.

HIGHTOWER

You’re making me uncomfortable, Herman.
This is me we’re talking about here!
Hightower!
Your confidant!
Your buddy!
Your pal!
I thought I made you happy!

HERMAN

You do make me happy!
You’ve made me so, so happy.
But I’ve gotta do this, Hightower.
HIGHTOWER

Do what?

HERMAN

It’s gotta just be me again.
Lonely, sad, pathetic me.
That’s the best thing for everybody.

HIGHTOWER

Not for me, it’s not!

HERMAN stands and shuts the door.

He moves toward HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

Herman—
I don’t like how you’re looking at me.

HIGHTOWER starts singing as a sort of plea:

HIGHTOWER

ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US

HERMAN steps closer to HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, MORE OF US

HERMAN corners HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

IF THERE’S EVER MORE OF US

HERMAN grabs HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

YES, IF THERE’S MORE THAN TWO OF US

HERMAN dismantles HIGHTOWER.

It’s quick and painless.

HERMAN

THEN SOMEONE’S GOTTA GO
The Recluse Achieves The Ultimate Loneliness

HERMAN moves back to his easel.

He picks up a paintbrush—

And paints a giant sad face.

He glances around at his quiet, vacant studio.

It’s never seemed so overwhelmingly full of sad, mopey faces.

He lets out the longest, saddest of sighs.

Blackout.

End of play.
MOVE LIKE ANTS

—

A One-Act Play

By Stephen Webb
THE SURVIVING FIGURES

FIGURE 1
FIGURE 2
FIGURE 3

Any age, Any race, Any gender

WHEN & WHERE

Soon & Here
In darkness, the final moments of
A cataclysmic crash

It’s piercing
And chilling
And muffled
And inevitable

Then, silence

—

THREE SURVIVING FIGURES
Lay slumped and crumpled on the ground
As though they have
Fallen long distances and
Landed in these positions

—

The FIGURES
Rise—
Immensely confused
Covered in dirt and soot
And suffering from staggering headaches

They observe their surroundings—
A vast expanse of rock and debris

They’re not sure where they are
Or how they got here

—

The FIGURES
Look down at their bodies

They don’t recognize who they are
Or what they are

They run their hands across their skin
Feeling the texture—
The hair, the bumps
Inspecting the details—
The pigment, the freckles

They smell their skin
They taste their skin
They listen to their skin
It’s all new and unfamiliar

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Explore the mechanics of their limbs—
How an arm bends
And a leg walks
And a fingernail scrapes
And a toe curls
And a knuckle pops

The FIGURES
Attempt to take steps
This intrigues them
They attempt bigger steps
This intrigues them more

—

FIGURE 1 discovers snapping
FIGURE 2 discovers stomping
FIGURE 3 discovers clapping

This thrills them

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Are hungry
But there’s no food
And thirsty
But there’s no water
And tired
But there’s no shelter

They cautiously prod their way
Through their environments
Stepping over heaps and piles
Of fallen, twisted debris
To search for food and water and shelter

—

The FIGURES
Think they’ve discovered something edible
In their individual environments
They instinctively lunge for it—
But nothing’s actually there

They think they see a body of water

They instinctively run toward it—
But nothing’s actually there

Out of sheer frustration:

FIGURE 1
bababafffffttttkkk!!!

FIGURE 2
warrrrrrnnnnfffffffzzz!!!

FIGURE 3
sskkkkjjjjjjhhhhoooi!!!

Mortified of the noises that just
Fell out of their bodies
The FIGURES
Slap their hands
Over their mouths

—

The FIGURES
Attempt to discover which other
Parts of the their bodies
Might allow these strange sounds to escape

They knock and tap on various
Limbs and bones and muscles and pores

Fearful that more sounds might fall out
The FIGURES attempt to cover
Every orifice on their bodies

They find themselves in
Twisted positions

—

The FIGURES
Notice the
Sun has shifted

It’s growing darker and colder
This concerns them

The FIGURES pile together heaps of debris
In their individual environments
Then they flatten out the rubble
To make it livable

Each FIGURE builds a nest
Atop their individual heap

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Stare out to the endless quiet
And observe the stillness

Tremendous loneliness takes over
And the FIGURES release
Desperate sighs of longing

The FIGURES
Grow weary in their nests

The FIGURES
Grow restless in their nests

The FIGURES
Clack their teeth
And scrunch their faces
And stretch their faces
And stick out their tongues

The FIGURES
Mutter quietly
A bit timid at first—

FIGURE 1 Eh, eh, eh, eh—

FIGURE 2 O, o, o, o—

FIGURE 3 Bb, bb, bb, bb—

Intrigued by the vibrations in their mouths
The FIGURES
Try their best to create longer sounds—

FIGURE 1  FIGURE 2  FIGURE 3
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh   Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh   Bon, bon, bon, bon
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh   Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh   Bon, bon, bon, bon

The FIGURES
Create MINIATURE FIGURES with their fists
And speak to them in
Varying voice pitches

FIGURE 1  FIGURE 2  FIGURE 3
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh   Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh   Bon, bon, bon, bon
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh   Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh   Bon, bon, bon, bon

The FIGURES
Realize the MINIATURE FIGURES
Make for inadequate companionship

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Stand in their nests and—
Not quite grasping the concept of projection—
Very softly
Speak out to the
Vast expanse of quiet—

FIGURE 1  FIGURE 2  FIGURE 3
Hehh   Ohh   Bon
Hehh   Ohh   Bon
Hehh   Ohh   Bon
Hehhhhhhhhoooooo—   Ohhhhhhaaaaaahhh—   Bonjaaaaaaaahhh—

The FIGURES
Push out the sounds
With slightly greater force
But still too quiet for
Anybody else to possibly hear—

FIGURE 1  FIGURE 2  FIGURE 3
Hehthhhhhhhhhoooooo   Ohhhhhhaaaaaaahhhhh   Bonjaaaaaaaahhhhh
Thrilled with these sounds they’ve constructed
The FIGURES
Climb the tallest stacks of debris they can find
And call out, as loudly as they can—

---

The FIGURES
Stop and listen for a response—

For a brief moment,
They think they’ve heard something

But nothing

---

In one final, primal plea—
FIGURE 1 calls out to the vast expanse—

FIGURE 1
Hehhhhhhhooollllll????????????????????????

FIGURE 2 hears FIGURE 1—
S/he responds and calls out to the vast expanse—

FIGURE 2
Ohhhhaaaaahhh????????????????????????

FIGURE 3 hears FIGURE 2
S/he responds and calls out the vast expanse—

FIGURE 3
Bonjaaaaahhhh????????????????????????

FIGURE 1 hears FIGURE 3

---

The FIGURES
Desperately climb, dig, claw, and prod
Their way through the
Massive piles of rubble and debris

Until, finally—
The FIGURES spot each other

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Stop and stare at each other
Intensely, carefully—

They decide to push the sounds
Out of their bodies—

FIGURE 2
Ohhhhaaaahhh…?

FIGURES 1 & 3
…Ohhhhaaaahhhh.

FIGURE 3
Bonjaaaaahhhhh…?

FIGURES 1 & 2
…Bonjaaaaahhhhh.

FIGURE 1
Hehhhhoo…?

FIGURES 2 & 3
…Hehhhhoo.

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Cautiously circle each other
Inspecting the
Foreign details of their bodies

They run their hands across each others’ skin
Feeling the texture—
The hair, the bumps
Inspecting the details—
The pigment, the freckles
FIGURE 1 snaps—
And the other FIGURES imitate

FIGURE 2 stomps—
And the other FIGURES imitate

FIGURE 3 claps—
And the other FIGURES imitate

—

Other familiar movements
Pour out of their bodies

The FIGURES have no idea where this is
All coming from—
Iconic rhythms and gestures from some culture
They can’t quite remember

—

They gesture
They respond

They gesture
They respond

They gesture
They respond

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Find themselves falling into a tribal rhythm—
Snapping, stomping, and clapping

—

The FIGURES
Start competing with each other
Trying to snap the loudest
Or stomp the loudest
Or clap the loudest

—

The competition gets the FIGURES
Fired up

—

The FIGURES
Snap, stomp, clap
Snap, stomp, clap
SNAP, STOMP, CLAP
SNAP! STOMP! CLAP!
SNAP!!!! STOMP!!! CLAP!!!

—

The FIGURES
Desperately try to
Overpower each other
This offends them

—

The FIGURES
Try even harder to
Overpower each other
This offends them more

—

The FIGURES
Get overwhelmed and frustrated
And quickly separate

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Each climb the tallest mound of debris they can find
They stand guard
And glare at each other from atop their mounds

—

Silence as the FIGURES
Guard and glare
Guard and glare
Guard and glare

—

FIGURE 1 sighs
FIGURE 2 sighs louder
FIGURE 3 sighs loudest

—

FIGURE 1 grunts
FIGURE 2 grunts louder
FIGURE 3 grunts loudest

—

FIGURE 1 groans
FIGURE 2 groans louder
FIGURE 3 groans loudest

—

The FIGURES Grunt and groan
Grunt and groan
Grunt and groan

Until, finally—

FIGURE 3 hiccups

—

The hiccup echoes

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Are absolutely mortified of this happening
They take cover atop their mounds of debris

—

FIGURE 3 hiccups again

—

The hiccups sound again

—

The FIGURES burst out into laughter

—

The FIGURES laugh and laugh and laugh Until, finally— They lock eyes And realize what’s happened

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES Cross their arms And turn away from each other

ALL SURVIVING FIGURES
Hmmmnmnmph!!!!

—

Silence as the SURVIVING FIGURES Brood

—

FIGURE 3 notices something moving on the ground S/he stares at it, intently

FIGURE 2 notices FIGURE 3 staring S/he tries to see what it is

FIGURE 1 notices FIGURE 2 staring S/he tries to see what it is

—
FIGURE 3 crawls down the mound of debris
And moves toward the tiny, tiny moving entity

FIGURE 2 follows

FIGURE 1 follows

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Bend their bodies down to the ground
As close as they possibly can
Until they are eye level with the dirt

—

The FIGURES
Watch as this tiny, tiny entity
Moves along

—

Moves along

—

Moves along

—

The FIGURES
Compete with each other
To see who can get closest
To this tiny, tiny moving entity

—

The FIGURES
Notice there’s not just one
But dozens of these tiny, tiny entities
Moving along in a fluid, peaceful line

—

The FIGURES
Stare at each other, in awe
The FIGURES
Fall into a line of their own
Moving just like these tiny, tiny entities

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Move along

—

Move along

—

Move along

—

They imitate the fluid, peaceful line
Until they are no longer in sight…
PET FOOD

By Stephen Webb
CHARACTERS

CAT
Male

DOG
Female

Parakeet
Female

Landlady
Female

WOMAN
Female

WHERE
A suburban apartment on a high floor

WHEN
Now

NOTE
PARAKEET and LANDLADY should be portrayed by the same actor.
WOMAN lies motionless on the floor.

CAT and DOG—utterly adorable and utterly desperate—stare down at WOMAN, intently observing her body with their wide eyes.

They hold empty food bowls in their paws.

Look!

What?

Her left eyebrow—

What about it?

It twitched.

Did it?

...

...

No...
I guess it didn’t.

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.

Look!

What?

Her right pinky finger—
What about it?

DOG

It curled.

CAT

Did it?

DOG

...

CAT

...

DOG

No…
I guess it didn’t.

CAT

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.

Look!

CAT

What?

DOG

Never mind.

CAT

...

...

How long’s it been now?

DOG

I’ve lost track of time.

CAT and DOG simultaneously release adorable animal sighs—

DOG

It isn’t looking too good, is it Ross?

CAT

Sure it is, Rachel.
Everything’s going to be just fine.

But she’s been lying still for so long. Like—Alarmingly long.

She’s just napping. She’ll wake up again soon…

…

…

…

…

…Won’t she?

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.

Try licking her face.

You lick her face.

You’re the dog.

You’re the one who’s so sure she’ll wake up again.

So?

So you should lick her face.

Absolutely not. I’m a cat.
Cats don’t lick faces.

Go on—
Lick her face.
Get her to open her eyes!

I refuse!

Lick her face!

No!

Lick her face!

No!!!

LICK CATHY’S FACE!!!

MAKE ME!!!

CAT and DOG drop their food bowls—
And violently paw at each other.
Their yelling becomes primal hisses and growls—

HISS!

GROWL!

HISS!!!

GROWL!!!
CAT

HISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
Well—
I’m scared of that too, you know!

CAT and DOG settle down.

If we’re both so scared—
Then what do we do?

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.
They let out adorable animal sighs.
Then—
They pick up their empty food bowls.

Who’s gonna feed us now?

Cathy will.
Just give her some time to come around.

You’re in denial.

Well you always jump to the worst-case scenario.

Fine.
Whatever.
Just keep waiting on her forever.
See if I care.

DOG goes and plops down on her pillow.

Why are you so grumpy?

Oh—
I don’t know.
Lemme ponder that for a sec.
Why in the world would I be so grumpy?
Hmm…
Let’s see…
Oh—
I’ve got an idea!
Perhaps I’m grumpy because…
OUR OWNER IS UNRESPONSIVE ON THE FLOOR AND WE’RE GONNA STARVE TO DEATH!!!!!!

We won’t starve.

Keep tellin’ yourself that.

Look—
I’m sorry I growled at you.
I don’t want us to turn on each other like this.

I’m sorry I hissed at you.

It’s okay.
I think we both just got a little hangry.

I think you’re right.

I miss Cathy’s hands.
She has a way of stroking my fur that always makes my spine tingle.
She has magical hands.
I miss Cathy’s voice.
It’s authoritative yet relaxing all at once—

I know what you mean.
I miss her voice too.
And I miss the way her breath smells.

I miss the way her feet smell after slipping out of her sweaty work shoes.

I miss crawling in the warm spot of her pillow when she gets up each morning.

I miss the tasty clumps of human hair she leaves in the bathtub.

You know—
She does shed a lot—
For a human.

Cathy’s an anxious lady.

I miss how she always watches that same TV show with all the humans sipping coffee on that big cozy sofa.

And she always lets us cuddle up and watch too.

What show was that anyway?

I don’t know.
I just know it made her feel safe and less lonely.

Cathy used to make us feel that way.

DOG and CAT let out adorable animal sighs.

Then—
DOG sniffs the air.

DOG

Ross?

CAT

Yeah, Rachel?

DOG

Did you just catch a whiff of something strange?

They sniff.

CAT

What’s it smell like?

DOG

I’m not quite sure.

They sniff.

CAT

Is it food?!

DOG

It’s hard to tell.

They sniff.

CAT

You know—
I kinda smell something too.

DOG

It is your litter box, maybe?
Or some old hairballs?

CAT

Or did you diarrhea in the corner again?

DOG

You know I can’t help that.
No one’s taken me for a walk.
Or maybe it’s your stinky dog vomit?

CAT

Or maybe it’s some trash?

DOG

Or sewage?

CAT

DOG and CAT continue sniffing.

They sniff and sniff and sniff and sniff—

Following the scent all the way back to WOMAN.

DOG/CAT

Ohhhhhhh…

…

…

She’s dead, Ross.

DOG

I know she is, Rachel.

CAT

…

…

…

DOG

I’m not sure what to do in this situation.

CAT

I’m not either.
I’m too sheltered for this shit.

Suddenly there’s a very loud crashing sound from another room—
Followed by a string of violent, pissy CHIRPS.

DOG

What was that—??

CAT

I don’t know!
Sounded like the ceiling caved in Cathy’s bedroom!

DOG

God help us!
Our world is falling apart!!!

A pissed off, frazzled parakeet waddles into the room holding her empty food pail.

PARAKEET

I’m.
Fucking.
Starving!!!

DOG

Phoebe—
We forgot about you!

PARAKEET

(imitating:)
“Phoebe, we forgot about you!”

CAT

Seriously!
It’s the truth!

PARAKEET

(imitating:)
“Seriously, it’s the truth!”

DOG

Stop it!
Stop doing that!

PARAKEET

(imitating:)
“Stop it, stop doing that!”
Y’know—
I’ve been in there chirpin’ my beak off for who knows how long!
And did anybody drop in to check on me?

NOPE!

**DOG**

Phoebe—

**PARAKEET**

But really—
I’m fine!
I’m just thrilled the two of you had each other this whole time while I was in there all by myself!

**DOG**

I’m sorry we didn’t come check on you.
We’ve just been—

**CAT**

Distracted—

**DOG**

Right.
Yes.
We’ve been very distracted out here.

**PARAKEET**

Y’know—
I sat in my cage in Cathy’s bedroom for an awful long time—
Until finally I thought—
My goodness—
It sure has been a while since Cathy came in to check on me.
That’s not like her.
I mean—
Usually, she’ll come in and stroke my feathers—
Or refill my water.
Or clean out my bird turds.
But I kept cool.
I remained patient.
I mean—
If spending your entire life in a cage teaches you one thing—
It’s patience.
And I actually talked myself into believing maybe she just went on a little trip or somethin’.
I mean—
That makes sense, right?
That’s a logical conclusion to make, isn’t it?
CAT

Pheebs—

PARAKEET

Cathy just went on a little trip and she forgot to give me enough seed to hold me over. But as I took my thirty thousandth spin on the little Ferris wheel she got me—I got to thinkin’.
Wait a second.
Cathy doesn’t go on any trips.
Cathy hardly goes anywhere, ever!
Cathy is the shining example of a homebody!
I mean—
If somebody’s gonna stay home,
It’s Cathy!!!!
And in the very rare circumstance that Cathy ever were to go away—
She sure as hell wouldn’t forget to give her beloved pet parakeet enough seed to live on!
Am I right?!!
AM I RIGHT?!!!

DOG

Look—
We’re starving too.
But we need to tell you something.

PARAKEET

I waited and I waited and I waited—
But Cathy never came back!
And I was still trapped in my cage!
So do you know what I had to do?
Huh—?
Do you?
I had to slam and bang my delicate bird body against the cold metal until my cage fell into the floor!
Do you think I enjoyed having to do that?
I COULD’VE DIED!!!
Do you understand that?!
So someone needs to tell me—
And they need to tell me right now—
What the hell is going on?!
Where’d she go?
Where do we possibly think she could be?
Where is Ca—

PARAKEET spots WOMAN on the floor.

PARAKEET
Oh damn.

Pheebs…

PARAKEET waddles over to WOMAN and stares down at her body.

She bends down and nudges WOMAN with her beak.

PARAKEET

Oh damn.
That’s grim right there.

DOG

Pheebs, we’re so sorry.

PARAKEET

How long have you known about this?

DOG

Not long.
We weren’t certain if she was really gone or not.

PARAKEET

But now—
We’re absolutely positive she’s…?

DOG

Yeah.
She’s gone.
Cathy’s gone.

PARAKEET

…

DOG

…

CAT

…

PARAKEET

Well, then.
Okay.
All right.
We can get past this.
We can survive this.

DOG

Can we?

PARAKEET

Sure we can—
Absolutely!
Cathy took great care of us—
And now—
It’s time we take care of ourselves!
So—
Let’s see—
How do we take care of ourselves?
Let’s see—
Let’s see—
Let’s see, let’s see, let’s see, let’s see, let’s see, let’s see—

CAT

Are you okay, Phoebe?

PARAKEET

No!
Of course I’m not okay!
I can’t even concentrate!
I’m just so, so starving.

DOG

Me too.

CAT

Me too.

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET plop down.

PARAKEET

…I’m so hungry I could eat a horse…

DOG

…

CAT

…
…I’m so hungry I could eat a cow…

CAT

…

PARAKEET

…

CAT

…I’m so hungry I could eat a…
Eat a…

CAT stares at PARAKEET.

Eat a what?

DOG

…

Ross?
Are you okay?

PARAKEET

What’s the matter with this guy?

DOG

I’m not sure.

PARAKEET

Why’re you lookin’ at me that way?

CAT stands.

CAT

You know—
It’s not unheard of for a cat to eat a bird.
I mean—
That’s like a thing, you know.

PARAKEET

Uhh—
Not in this apartment it’s not.

CAT creeps toward PARAKEET.

DOG
Ross, stop it—
What are you doing?

PARAKEET
Yeah, Ross.
What the hell are you pullin’ here?

CAT’s eyes glaze over.

CAT
C’mere little birdie…

PARAKEET waddles away from CAT.

PARAKEET
I don’t like this!

DOG tries to block CAT.

DOG
Ross!
Snap out of it!
What’re you doing?!

CAT
I’m gonna eat that bird.
That’s what I’m gonna do.

PARAKEET
Get away from me!
Rachel—
Make him stop!

DOG
I’m trying!
Ross!!!

CAT
I’m gonna eat that bird!

PARAKEET
Please! Don’t!

DOG
Ross, will you cut it out!
CAT
I'M GONNA FEEL ITS LITTLE HEAD CRUNCH BETWEEN MY TEETH!!!

CAT lunges for PARAKEET.

PARAKEET fights him off with her wings.

DOG tries her best to get in between them.

Their yelling becomes primal growls, hisses, and chirps.

HISS!

GROWL!

CHIRP!

HISS!!!

GROWL!!!

CHIRP!!!

HISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS!!

GROWWWWWWWWWWWWWL!!!

PARAKEET
CHIRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRP!!!
CHIRP! CHIRP! CHIRP!
CHIRP! CHIRP!
CHIRP!
PLEASE!!!
STOP
TRYING
TO
EAT
ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

CAT snaps out of it.

I—
I’m sorry.
I don’t know what just happened.

PARAKEET
You just tried to sink your teeth into my feathers!
That’s what just happened!

DOG
Can we please just calm down!

I don’t know what came over me.
Please, Pheebs—
You’ve gotta forgive me.
The hunger—
It just got to my head—
I don’t know what’s happening to me.
I don’t recognize myself anymore.
Can you—
Can you please forgive me?

PARAKEET
(imitating:)
“Can you, can you please forgive me?”

Please, I beg you.

PARAKEET
(imitating:)
“Please, I beg you.”

Phoebe!

Whatever—
Fine.
I forgive you.
Just stay on that side of the room.

CAT

Thank you.
Thank you so much.

PARAKEET

Does it really matter, anyways?
I mean—
We’re all going to starve with Cathy being all…

They all stare down at WOMAN.

PARAKEET

…That.

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET let out adorable animal sighs.

DOG

I miss Cathy’s sense of humor.

CAT

I miss how Cathy would always look on the bright side.

PARAKEET

I miss the way Cathy would always sing that same song.

DOG

That’s right—
How did that song go again?

PARAKEET tenderly sings the first line of the *Friends* theme song.

PARAKEET

*I’ll be there for you…*

DOG

Yeah, that’s it!
That’s the one.

PARAKEET
I’ll be there for you…

CAT and DOG join in.

When the rain starts to pour…

CAT/DOG

I’ll be there for you…

PARAKEET

Like I’ve been there before…

CAT/DOG

I’ll be there for you…

PARAKEET

Cause you’re there for me too
Oooooo

CAT/DOG/PARAKEET

Oh, Cathy.

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET let out adorable animal sighs.

CAT

That was nice.

…

It’s always nice to have a tender moment when you’re on the brink of death.

DOG

…

PARAKEET

…

CAT

…

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET let out adorable animal sighs.

DOG

…
PARAKEET

*Cats, Dogs, and Parakeet let out adorable animal sighs.*

DOG

*Parakeet jumps up and waddles to the bathroom—*

She returns holding a fishbowl with *three dead fish* floating at the top of the water.

PARAKEET

*God—*

I can’t take this anymore!

DOG

What?

PARAKEET

*I mean—* Are we just gonna sit around here and wait to die?
CAT
That was kind of the unspoken plan, yes.

PARAKEET
Well not anymore!
I’ve gotta at least try to save us!

DOG
How?

PARAKEET
By getting the hell outta here!

DOG
But we’re trapped.
We don’t know how to open doors.

PARAKEET
True…
But we’ve also got an open window…

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET stare at the window.

DOG
You better not be thinking…

PARAKEET
Oh, I’m thinkin’ it all right.

DOG
But you can’t fly!

PARAKEET
Sure I can!
Cathy never clipped my wings!

PARAKEET shows off her majestic unclipped wings.

CAT
But you’ve never actually flown anywhere.

PARAKEET
Well—
Now’s my chance!

DOG

Phoebe—
It’s far too dangerous!
We’re seven stories high!

PARAKEET

I’ll be fine—
Besides—
What’ve we got to lose?

DOG

You’ll never make it out there!
We’re indoor pets!

PARAKEET

Look—
I can either make a go for it—
Or we can just sit here forever and decompose with our pal Cathy.
So what’s it gonna be?

DOG

…

CAT

…

PARAKEET

C’mon!
We’re friends!
We’re survivors!
I mean—
Sure—
You just tried to eat me.

CAT

Yeah, sorry about that.

PARAKEET

And sure—
If I never broke out of my cage, you probably would’ve let me stay in there forever to rot to death—

DOG

Oops.
PARAKEET
But I’m willing to do this.
I’m willing to go out there and find some food for us!

CAT
Are you positive this is what you want to do?

PARAKEET
Absolutely.

PARAKEET bravely waddles over to the window.
She lifts it open.
Then she glances out to see how high up they truly are.

PARAKEET
Yikes that’s high.

CAT
You don’t have to do this, Phoebe.

PARAKEET
Yes.
Yes I do.

PARAKEET crawls onto the windowsill.

DOG
Careful, Phoebe!
Please!

PARAKEET waddles out to the ledge of the building and looks down.

PARAKEET
Okay—
Wish me luck!

CAT
Good luck!

DOG
You’ve got this!

PARAKEET
Here I go—
On three.
One, two—

PARAKEET takes a breath—

CAT and DOG tense up and hold each other.

But PARAKEET can’t bring herself to do it.

CAT and DOG relax.

DOG

Pheobe—
Just come back inside.
Please!

PARAKEET

Okay—
For real this time—
On three!
One, two—

PARAKEET takes a breath—

CAT and DOG tense up and hold each other.

PARAKEET

Threeeeeeeerreeeeeeeeeeee!!

PARAKEET dives off the ledge.

She dips out of sight—

But then we see her balance in the air just outside the window.

PARAKEET

Would you look at this?!
I’m flying!
I’m really flying!
Okay—
All right—
Okydoky—
I don’t really know what I’m doin’ here!
Yes I do—
No I don’t—
Yes I do—
No I really don’t—

DOG

Are you okay out there?!

PARAKEET

I think so!
I’m gonna go get us some food now!
Isn’t this exciting?!
Like—
How crazy is this?!
I’m tappin’ into my instincts, y’all!
I’m like—
So unbelievably ALIVE right now!
It’s as though I’m experiencing life for the very first time!
We won’t starve to death now, you guys!
Can you believe this?!
If only Cathy could see me!
She’d be so proud of me!
I’m flying!
I’m flying!
I’m actually fly—

PARAKEET suddenly falls out of sight.

DOG

Pheobe?

CAT

Pheebs?

A moment passes.

CAT

Rachel…

DOG

Yes, Ross?

CAT

What just happened to Phoebe?

DOG

I’m sure she’s fine.
…Right?

DOG darts over to the window and pokes her head out to see.

After a moment—

She pops her head back in.

CAT

Is she…?

DOG nods her head.

Just a splattering of feathers now.

CAT

Oh god!!!!!!!!!!!!
Why is all of this happening to us?
What did we do to deserve this?!

DOG

Calm down!

CAT

Calm down?!
Our friend is roadkill now and you want me to calm down?!!

DOG

You just tried to eat her!

CAT

Exactly!
Look at what’s happening to us!
Everything is falling apart!
What are we supposed to do?!

DOG

I don’t know!

CAT

Well neither do I!
And do you know why?!
Because we don’t have Cathy here to tell us!
If Cathy were here—
She could tell us exactly what to do!
If Cathy were here—
Everything would be okay!
But guess what?!
Cathy’s not here!
And she’s never ever EVER coming back!!!
So if you’ll please excuse me—
I’m feeling a bit OVER IT!

CAT goes and plops on his bed.

... 

CAT 

...

DOG  

... 

CAT  

...

DOG  

... 

CAT  

I didn’t mean to lose it on you.

DOG  

I know you didn’t.

CAT  

...

DOG  

...

CAT  

...

DOG  

What’s the last thing you can remember Cathy telling us?

CAT  

I don’t remember.

(He yawns.)

It’s been so long.

(He yawns.)
It’s all a haze now.

DOG

I know—
Everything’s just a haze.

CAT yawns then dozes off.

DOG
I’d do anything to hear Cathy just one last time.
In her authoritative yet relaxing voice.

DOG’s eyes glaze over.

Is she falling asleep?

Is she hallucinating from her malnourishment?

Who knows.

Regardless—

WOMAN slowly rises from the floor.

DOG

Ross?

…
Ross, are you seeing this?

…
Ross, are you awake??!

WOMAN bends down and sweetly scratches behind
DOG’s ears and under DOG’s chin.

Then—

In her authoritative yet relaxing voice, she says:

WOMAN

…you’ve gotta fulfill your animalistic duty…

WOMAN lies back down and dies.

DOG hesitantly moves over and carefully paws at
WOMAN a few times to see if she’ll wake back up—but then it all becomes clear.
Of course.

... OF COURSE!

... Ross?

... ROSS?!!

(waking up:)
What is it, Rachel?

Get up!
C’mere!

I’m too tired, Rachel.

But I know what to do now!
I know what Cathy would want us to do!

CAT stands and quickly stumbles over to DOG.

Well?
C’mon—
Spit it out!

Cathy would want us to eat her!
For sustenance!

Are you feeling okay, Rachel?

Of course I am!

I think the starvation’s getting to your head.
Just like it got to mine when I tried to eat Phoebe!

DOG

No, it’s not—
This is our animalistic duty.

CAT

Our what…?

DOG

Our animalistic duty!
We’ve got to do this!
We’ve got to eat her!

CAT

You’re gonna make me hurl speaking this way—

DOG

It’s our only option!

CAT

Says who?

DOG

Says Cathy!

CAT

Wait, what?

DOG

Will you just trust me!

CAT

Stop it!
Right now!
I could never eat her!
This is Cathy we’re talking about!

DOG

Don’t think of her like she’s Cathy.
Think of her like she’s—
Like she’s—

CAT

Like she’s what?
Think of her like she’s dinner!
She’s just a big hunk of meat now!

CAT

Cathy will never be just a hunk of meat!

DOG

You can do this, Ross!
You’re an animal!

CAT

I’m an indoor cat!

DOG

But you’ve got the instincts!

CAT

Oh—
And tapping into those instincts really worked out for Phoebe, didn’t they?!
I have absolutely no desire to tap into my natural instincts!

DOG

Get over yourself!
Do you want to die?!

CAT

Of course not!

DOG

Don’t you think we owe it to Phoebe after she sacrificed herself trying to save us?!
And don’t you think we owe it to Cathy—
After all she did to keep us happy and healthy all these years—
Don’t you think we owe it to her to do everything we possibly can to keep on living?
C’mon Ross—
Don’t you think we owe it to Cathy—
To eat her?

CAT

I just—
I just don’t know.

DOG

This will buy us the time we need to come up with a plan to get saved.
I know you can do this.

…

CAT

…

DOG

…

CAT

…

DOG

…

CAT

…Can you at least cover her face or something?

DOG reaches down and uses part of WOMAN’s shirt to cover her face.

DOG

Which is the most nutritious part, do you think?

CAT

I don’t know, Rachel!
You tell me—
I’m used to kibble and catnip!

DOG

Any suggestions?

CAT

I guess let’s just start with her leg…?
It seems to be the least intrusive.

DOG rolls up WOMAN’s pant leg.

CAT

Okay—
You first.

DOG

Why me?

CAT

This was your idea.
DOG
Okay, whatever.
Fine.
It’s not her anymore.
It’s not Cathy.
It’s just meat.

DOG bends down closer to WOMAN—

It’s not Cathy anymore.
It’s just meat—
It’s not Cathy anymore.
It’s just meat—

DOG sniffs WOMAN’s leg.

CAT
Wait!!!

What’s the matter?

DOG

CAT
Are we absolutely positive it’s not the starvation that’s making us do this?

DOG
It doesn’t matter, Ross.
It’s not Cathy anymore.
It’s just meat.

DOG stretches open her mouth—
And puts teeth to skin—
But she doesn’t bite down.

CAT
What’s the matter?

DOG
I can’t—
I can’t do it.
Why not?

DOG

Maybe I am just delirious.
Maybe I was just hallucinating.
Maybe she doesn’t really want us to eat her.
I keep picturing Cathy—
When she was alive.
Smiling and laughing.

Cathy had the best laugh.

DOG

I miss her.
I miss her so much.

I miss her too.

DOG

Do you want to just snuggle up with her?
Like we did when she watched that TV show with all the humans sipping coffee on that big cozy sofa.
That’s when Cathy was happiest.

That’s when we were happiest too.

CAT and DOG snuggle up next to WOMAN’s corpse.

They quietly start to sing…

CAT

I’ll be there for you…

CAT/DOG

Cause you’re there for me too
Oooooo

DOG

Goodnight, Ross.

CAT
Goodnight, Rachel.

They close their eyes.

Then—

After several moments—

There’s a knock—

And then sounds of keys unlocking a door.

LANDLADY

Cathy?

…

Cathy—

You home?

LANDLADY enters the apartment.

She holds a small dead parakeet in her hands.

LANDLADY

Cathy?

I think I found your pet parakeet outside dead on the street.

Pitiful thing.

I guess it tried to fly out the window or somethin’.

She holds up the parakeet.

LANDLADY

But I’ve gotta say—

It has a look of bravery in its eyes.

…

Cathy—

You missed payin’ rent last month so I thought I’d come by to check on ya, hon.

…

God—

What is that odor?

Smells like a zoo of dead animals in here.

LANDLADY spots WOMAN.

…

LANDLADY

Oh, Cathy.
She rushes over to inspect her body.

**LANDLADY**

You poor, poor lonely dear.

...  
Well I guess you weren’t too lonely—
Were ya?
At least you had your sweet pets by your side.

**CAT and DOG** stand up.

**DOG** wags her tail.

**LANDLADY**

C’mon, you two.
Let’s go get some help.
And we’ll get you somethin’ to eat.

**CAT and DOG** follow **LANDLADY** out of the apartment.

**END OF PLAY**
Up Here/Down There;
or
Jerry Frances Frickman Represents The Common Man

By Stephen Webb
CHARACTERS
(2m)

Jerry Frances Frickman
Male
50s
An everyman
A Stilt Walking Novice

Trainer Lewis
Male
30s
Jerry’s Trainer
A Stilt Walking Master

When & Where
Right Now
Up High in the Sky

NOTES

Stilts:
This play can be performed without any literal stilts. Still, the actors should always carry
themselves in such a way that would help them maintain balance on the tallest stilts ever
constructed.

Setting the Atmosphere:
There are specified moments when objects float/zoom/fly by the characters: an airplane,
helicopter, hot air balloon, parachute, clouds, the sun, flocks of birds. This could all be
purposefully and playfully makeshift, perhaps crafted from cardboard or string.

Dialogue:
Spacing is all for rhythm.
Fluffy clouds, bright sunshine, chirping birds.

Perhaps a VOICE speaks:

“Up Here/Down There; or Jerry Frances Frickman Represents the Common Man”.

JERRY FRANCES FRICKMAN has towering stilts protruding from his legs.

He is way up high in the atmosphere.

He’s never felt so alive.

He desperately attempts to escape TRAINER LEWIS.

LEWIS

Mr. Frickman—

(JERRY shuffles fast in the opposite direction.)

Jerry Frances Frickman—!
Don’t act like you can’t hear me!

(JERRY cups his ears, pretending not to hear.)

Damn it, Jerry!

(JERRY shuffles faster.)

Stop this!
Right now!
This is not how I trained you!

(JERRY slows down—
But he won’t make eye contact with LEWIS.)

Aren’t you going to say anything?
I’ve gotta be honest, Jerry—
I didn’t see this coming.
I didn’t take you for this type of person.
We need to head back, now, okay?

(JERRY still refuses to look at him.
He readies himself to bolt.)

Jerry, don’t you dare.
Don’t you dare make me chase you again!
I’m much, much more experienced than you.
You know this.

JERRY tries to dart away again—

But TRAINER LEWIS masterfully halts him.

JERRY

But I’m big now!!!

LEWIS

You’re what?
JERRY

Big.
Tall.
Towering.
WORTHY.

LEWIS

You’re not short, Jerry!
You’re actually a pretty good size!

JERRY

I don’t mean I’m short—
Per se—
I mean—
I mean—  
(JERRY loses his balance on the STILTS.)
I mean—
I mean—

LEWIS

Jerry, careful!
Nice and steady—
Dig and plant yourself.
Just like I taught you.
Your stilts need to remain shoulder-width apart at all times!

JERRY

I mean—
I mean—

LEWIS

C’mon!
Spit it out!

JERRY

I mean—
I’m a somebody now!
These stilts give me something
That I didn’t realize they would
They make me feel like
Like—
Like—
Like a real
Honest to goodness
Somebody!

JERRY almost dashes away again—

LEWIS

Damn it, Jerry!
What did I say!

But I’m free!
I’m free up here!

Everyone is!
You hear me, Jerry?!
Everyone feels that way the first time up!
We talked about this in the training
You read the manual
You watched the tutorials
I warned you about this

No, no, no—
You didn’t say it’d feel like this!

Of course I did!
We are very, very selective with who we let up, Jerry
You seemed like you’d be able to handle it
You seemed like you could get past the—
The—

The what?!!

The adrenaline rush
The falsity of emotions
The illusion of power

None of this is an illusion!
I feel alive for the first time in a
Long, long, long time!

We need to go back, Jerry
This is not how it works
This was just a trial run
You and me this time
You alone next time

JERRY hobbles backwards to be next to LEWIS.

Me alone?
LEWIS
Well—
That was the next step—
But—

JERRY
But what?

LEWIS
But. Nothing.

JERRY
Say it—

LEWIS
I thought I knew you better than this
I’ve trained you for months
I thought we were becoming—
Well—
You’re just not doing what you said you’d do!
You’re not following your training!

JERRY
So, wait—
I can’t come back up here?
I can’t do this again after today?!?

LEWIS
That’s not what I said.

JERRY
That’s what you implied—
You can’t take this away from me!

JERRY launches himself to zoom again…

LEWIS
Jerry!
Wait!
Please—
The art of Stilt Walking is a delicate balance already
But these stilts aren’t like other stilts
You know this
These are the Colossal Stilts!
And you’re really taking a big risk by not cooperating with me!

JERRY
You don’t know what I’m feeling!
You don’t get it!
LEWIS
We need to go back.
Now.

JERRY
But I’m
So, so high
No one else
Just me
So, so high
I feel power now, I feel
Enlightened, I feel
Special, I feel
CHosen, I feel
I feel— I feel—

LEWIS
I’m going to move a little closer to you now.
Okay Jerry?
Does that sound okay to you?
(JERRY stays planted.)
I’m going to just move towards you
And we’re going to head back down together
Just like we planned in the training
Here I come…
(TRAINER LEWIS takes a step.
JERRY doesn’t flinch.
LEWIS takes another step.
JERRY zooms.)

Jerry!
Where are you going?!!
(JERRY zooms faster.
LEWIS chases.)

Come back here!
Right now!
(They move in rapid zigzags.
This goes on for a bit.
An AIRPLANE zooms by in the sky—
JERRY screams, but they manage to dodge it.)

Damn it, Jerry!
We’re out of the practice zone now!
There’s danger here!
Aircraft and the unknown down below!
You’re breaking the rules!
You should never, ever leave the safety zone!
You hear me, Jerry?!!

JERRY finally stops, steadies, and plants himself.

JERRY
I need to do this!

LEWIS

Do what?!!

JERRY

I need to find the people who made me feel
Small, Inadequate
Jerry Frances Frickman, The Lesser than
I’m not short
I know
But these people
They still made me feel small
And now I’m taller than them!
I’m taller than everybody!
And everything!

LEWIS

It’s too risky to be around other people
Wearing the Colossal Stilts!
They’re too dangerous!
Taller than skyscrapers — !
Unlike anything anyone’s ever seen!
The world is not ready, Jerry!

JERRY

But I’ve gotta show them —

LEWIS

Show them what — ?

JERRY

That I’m not nothing!

LEWIS

And then what?!!

JERRY

You know!

LEWIS

Say it!

JERRY

You know!!

LEWIS

Say it!!!

JERRY

Make them feel small!
Make them feel like I felt for so long!

LEWIS

SAY WHAT YOU WANT TO DO TO THOSE PEOPLE DOWN THERE, JERRY FRANCES FRICKMAN!!!!

JERRY

(As though he’s screaming to the people down below:)
I WANNA SQUUUAAAAAAASSSSSHHH THEM!
Make them suffer!
Like they made me suffer!

JERRY and LEWIS duck and dodge more hazardous objects in the sky.

LEWIS

Why didn’t I see this coming?

(A cluster of CLOUDS floats by, JERRY gasps—)
Our team just wanted to develop
The tallest, most towering stilts ever built
The Colossal Stilts
New heights
A new era
In the form of stilt walking
Potential means of survival for the
Great floods to come
And a means to
Give people the chance to be out in the open air on their way
To wherever they’re going

(A FLOCK OF BIRDS flies by, JERRY shrieks—)
A chance to see
The tops of buildings
And birds
And clouds
And distances
Years of world-class studies in physics and mechanics and safety and the capabilities of the human body
But you get in our way!
You tricked us!
Seeped through the cracks
We did background checks
We asked you question after question after question
Do you have resentment?
Do you feel inadequate?
Do you have enemies?
Do you hate yourself?

(A PARACHUTE glides by, JERRY squeals—)
We thought you seemed like an everyday, stable person who we could test this venture on!
To see if others could go this high!
Protrude this tall into the atmosphere!
It’s never been done before!
We wanted to see if the world was ready for it
And you seemed like
The perfect candidate
The perfect guinea pig
Someone middle-of-the-road enough who
Represents the larger whole

(A HELICOPTER zooms by,
JERRY yelps—)

Jerry Frances Frickman represents
The Common Man
And you showed us
You showed us all right, Jerry.
If you are, in fact, the representation of the larger whole
You showed us the world is not ready for such
Miraculous things to be put into their hands
Or on their feet

(A HOT AIR BALLOON soars by,
JERRY moans—)

Because look at what they’d do with it!
Look at what they’d do with the power!
You give them a little
And they take it all!

JERRY

Maybe it’s the lack of oxygen!
It’s like a rush of
Cool, cool energy
Through the fire in my head
All of the self loathing
Self-denial
Self-hatred
Is extinguished
Up here
I can see exactly what I want now
Up here
It’s all so clear
Up here
And bright
Up here
And quiet
Up here
Down there
It’s bad
It’s scary
I’m not good enough
Down there
It’s grimy
And no good
And no one looks at me
Down there
They look past me
Down there

LEWIS

I can take you down, Jerry—
Don’t make me do it
Because I will
You know I can
I’m better equipped than you
I’ve been up here before
Many times
You’re the guinea pig
I’m the master

JERRY

Down there
It’s miserable
It’s sad
It’s awful
And yeah
I took advantage of this
Maybe deep down I knew I’d
Act bad
Go bad
For once!
I never have before—
And this was my chance
To feel like this
To feel like I’m something
But I don’t want to go back down there
Where no one cares
I want to stay up here
Where I’m tall
Down there
They’ll all just keep looking past me
Make me feel small

LEWIS

I won’t.

(JERRY pivots toward LEWIS.)
I won’t make you feel small.

JERRY

You won’t?

LEWIS

No
You took a chance
To get trained
And walk on the tallest stilts
Ever conceived
The Colossal Stilts!
We’re up in the clouds
High in the atmosphere
Who would do this?
Not many
I can tell you that
None of those who made you feel small would do this
This takes real guts, Jerry
And I want to be friends with that person

JERRY

Friends?
You want to be—
Friends?

LEWIS

Yeah.
I do.
(The SUN shimmers brightly across the sky,
JERRY smiles — )

And you know what else
Jerry Frances Frickman?
You were already tall
You’re tall no matter what
Not just on those stilts
Not just up here but —

JERRY

Down there?

LEWIS

Yes
So let’s go back down together
Okay?

JERRY

Yes
Yes—
Okay.

JERRY hobbles closer to TRAINER LEWIS—
But then promptly attempts to dash away
one final time.

LEWIS has no choice but to trip him—
And JERRY plummets.

We hear JERRY scream as he falls, falls, falls.
It’s a very long drop.

And a very long scream.

His screaming becomes more and more distanced.

Until, finally—

SPLAT.

LEWIS

(In mourning:)
I bet you feel small now, don’t you Jerry?

And JERRY FRANCES FRICKMAN has finally fallen back down to earth. | **End of play.**
Irrational Fear Demonstrations

By Stephen Webb
CHARACTERS

RUBY
Female
61

CRYSTAL
Female
29

NATHANIEL
Male
34

LEONA
Female
40

WHERE & WHEN
A mundane community college classroom in a small American town
After school hours
A dimly lit cinderblock classroom. The space is empty except for a few clunky metal folding chairs scattered throughout.

RUBY, wearing a cheery floral-print dress and clutching a massive purse, sits in one of the chairs.

She readjusts her position in her chair several times—but can’t seem to get comfortable.

She rummages inside her purse, pulls out a wad of tissue, and wipes beads of sweat off her forehead.

CRYSTAL enters—wearing a long black trench coat. She quickly takes a seat without acknowledging RUBY and stares at the floor.

The two women sit quietly for several moments.

RUBY can’t help but glance over at CRYSTAL a few times. CRYSTAL notices her staring.

RUBY

You’re not…?

What?

Her?

No.

Didn’t think so.

…

I’m not her either.

I didn’t think you were.

…
…

RUBY
Do you happen to know when she…?

CRYSTAL
I don’t know. No.

…

RUBY
…

…

CRYSTAL
But you’re here for the Conquer Your Fears workshop?

Obviously.

RUBY
Oh, good.
I just wasn’t sure if—

CRYSTAL
Well, now you know.

RUBY nervously taps her feet on the floor.

RUBY
We didn’t miss it, did we?

CRYSTAL
10:30, I thought.

RUBY
That’s what I thought too.

CRYSTAL
What time is it now?

RUBY
Let’s see…

RUBY reaches inside her purse.
Several moments pass as she digs.

CRYSTAL

Nevermind.

RUBY

No, no.
I’ve got it here somewhere.

RUBY continues to dig inside her purse.

Several more moments pass.

She pulls out a wristwatch.

10:33.

RUBY

You keep your watch in your purse?

CRYSTAL

I keep everything in my purse.

RUBY

Why don’t you keep it on your wrist?

CRYSTAL

Because I keep it in my purse.

RUBY

Gotcha.

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

This is kind of late for a workshop, right?

RUBY

Depends on the workshop.

CRYSTAL

I guess.
RUBY glances around the room.

RUBY

Feels like I’m a schoolgirl again.
Being in this classroom.
Have you been here before?

CRYSTAL

No.

RUBY

Same here.
...
First timer.

RUBY wipes more sweat off her forehead with the tissue.

RUBY

Sorry. I tend to perspire when I’m out of my element.

CRYSTAL

All right.

RUBY

Or when I’m nervous.
Which seems to be increasing more and more these days.

CRYSTAL

All right.

RUBY

Aging brings much more worry.
Much, much more.

CRYSTAL

I thought aging brings wisdom.

RUBY

Lies. All lies.

CRYSTAL

Great. Something else to look forward to.

RUBY

...
CRYSTAL

... 

RUBY

I like your coat.

CRYSTAL

Look, I didn’t come here to make any—

RUBY

Reminds me of nighttime or something. What color’s that? Midnight blue? Twilight?

CRYSTAL

Black.

RUBY

Black. Right.

... 

People who gravitate toward black things tend to have mysterious souls. Do you?

RUBY

Gravitate toward black things? Have a mysterious soul?

CRYSTAL

Oh. I don’t know.

RUBY

Seems like you do.

CRYSTAL

Does it?

RUBY

Yes. I like colorful things. Life, vivacity— You know?

CRYSTAL

And I like dead things?

RUBY

Oh, no.
No, no, no, no—
No, no, no, no, no, no, no—
Please don’t think that’s what I—
I’m sorry.
I’m so, so sorry.

It’s fine.

I hurt your feelings.

No hurt feelings.

Promise? Do you promise?

Okay. Yeah.

Yeah, what?

Yeah. I promise.

Good.

…

…

…

CRYSTAL slides her metal chair slightly away from RUBY.

RUBY slides her chair closer to CRYSTAL.

You okay?
Of course.
Why do you ask?

CRYSTAL slides her chair a little further away.
RUBY slides her chair a little bit closer.

Why are you doing that?

CRYSTAL

Doing what?

RUBY

CRYSTAL slides her chair away once more.
RUBY slides her chair closer to her.

Please don’t do that again.

CRYSTAL

What am I doing, dear?

RUBY

Every time I move, you move.

CRYSTAL

I didn’t even realize.

RUBY

I can’t stand it when people get in my space!
It makes me feel trapped!
It makes me cringe inside!

CRYSTAL takes off her coat and drapes it over her chair. She’s wearing a black sweater.

Look at that.

CRYSTAL

What?
RUBY

More black.

NATHANIEL’S VOICE is heard from outside the classroom.

NATHANIEL

(from off)

Hello?

RUBY and CRYSTAL lock eyes.

An awkward pause.

NATHANIEL

(from off)

Hello…?

RUBY and CRYSTAL speak quietly to each other.

CRYSTAL

I thought it was a woman who runs this thing.

Me too.

CRYSTAL

I’m not comfortable if it’s some guy who’s running it.

Me neither.

NATHANIEL

(from off)

Someone…?

Say something.

CRYSTAL

I don’t want to.

RUBY

One of us has to!

CRYSTAL

(calling to him)
Um…
Yeah?

(from off)
Who said that?

CRYSTAL
Shit.
What do we do?

RUBY
I don’t know!
You’re making me nervous!

CRYSTAL
You’re making me nervous!

(from off)
You still there?

CRYSTAL stands and moves to the door.

CRYSTAL
We’re right here.
I mean—
We’re in here.

NATHANIEL enters—wearing a polite sweater vest.

RUBY clutches her purse.

NATHANIEL
There you are.
Hello, hi.

CRYSTAL
Yeah, hi.

RUBY
Good evening, sir.

NATHANIEL
It’s dark out there.
Couldn’t see any room numbers.
A light went out in the hallway.
Oh, please don’t say that.
I hate the dark.

I do too.

Me too.

Luckily I have a flashlight in my purse.
Since we’re all afraid.

Did I say I was afraid?

Well, no—

I’m not afraid.

I just assumed—

I hate the dark.
Who doesn’t?
But I’m not afraid!

Okay, all right.
I apologize.

...
NATHANIEL
So, you’re both here for the session?

CRYSTAL
We are. Yeah.

NATHANIEL
Did I miss anything?

CRYSTAL observes the empty room.

CRYSTAL
Can’t say you have.

RUBY
Just getting to know each other.

NATHANIEL
Oh.
She isn’t here yet?

CRYSTAL
Not yet.

NATHANIEL
But it’s past time.

CRYSTAL
We know.

NATHANIEL
Oh, well—
I guess she’ll be here soon?

CRYSTAL
Let’s hope so.

A long awkward pause.

They sit in their chairs, waiting.

The metal chairs snap and crackle as they readjust positions.

RUBY reaches in her purse and pulls out a bottle of hand lotion. It makes a loud squirting sound as she squeezes some into her palm.
RUBY
When I’m flustered, my palms get clammy and then they dry out.
Clammy and dry—
Clammy and dry—
Never ending battle I face.
Clammy and dry—
Clammy and dry—

NATHANIEL
Right, yeah.
So how’d you guys find out about this?

RUBY and CRYSTAL glance at each other.

NATHANIEL
I saw some flyers posted at my bus stop.
Said this experience has changed people’s lives.

RUBY
I actually read about it on an online community I’m a part of.
One of those forum things.
A few people posted about it.
Said this is what healed them once and for all.
Said the woman who runs it is a tormented genius.

CRYSTAL
A tormented genius?
Really?

NATHANIEL
Yeah.
I heard the same thing.
She’s apparently like insanely good at this sort of thing.
(to CRYSTAL:)
How about you?
How’d you hear about this?

CRYSTAL
I’d rather not say.

NATHANIEL
Okay.

NATHANIEL glances over at RUBY.

CRYSTAL
What was that?
What was what?

I saw that.

He didn’t do anything, dear.

So, what, I’m just seeing things?

No. I didn’t mean to imply—

I don’t have to share if I don’t want to.

Of course you don’t.

I’m just not all that excited about this. Okay?

That’s totally fine.

I’m just not very comfortable.
I’m not here to make any friends.

That’s totally understandable.

Where is this woman?
JESUS!

...
RUBY

RUBY rummages inside her purse.

RUBY
Would either of you like a peppermint stick?

CRYSTAL
No.

NATHANIEL
That’s okay.

RUBY pulls a peppermint stick out of her purse and unwraps it from its loud plastic packaging.

RUBY
Calms my nerves.

RUBY rhythmically licks the stick.

NATHANIEL and CRYSTAL watch her.

This goes on for a while.

CRYSTAL
Could you maybe not—
Be so loud with that?

RUBY keeps licking.

CRYSTAL
Please.

RUBY
Who? Me?

CRYSTAL
Who else?

RUBY attempts to lick the stick quietly.

NATHANIEL and CRYSTAL watch her.
This goes on for a while.

CRYSTAL

It was on a toilet paper dispenser.

NATHANIEL

Sorry?

CRYSTAL

I read about this on the toilet paper dispenser in a bathroom of a bar that I go to. I don’t go out very often. Hardly ever, actually. Just sneak out when places are quiet and empty. And there it was, written out in yellow marker. “Kill your fears once and for all.” And it had her name and this address. Just seemed— I don’t know—

RUBY

Like it was meant to be.

CRYSTAL

Yeah, I guess so.

RUBY wraps up her peppermint stick and crams it back into her purse.

NATHANIEL

You got a lot of stuff in that purse?

RUBY

You have no idea.

NATHANIEL

Got a magazine or anything?

RUBY

Let’s see…

NATHANIEL

Nothing too graphic, though.

RUBY

Okay…

RUBY digs inside her purse.
She’s not coming.

Don’t say that.

What time is it?

RUBY pulls the wristwatch out of her purse.

A quarter till.

Who’s late to their own workshop?

She’s still coming.

How do you know?

Because. She’s got to.

Does she?

I don’t know what I’ll do if she doesn’t show up.

Well, it looks like you’ll have to figure that out. This has been a total waste of our time.

Do you really think we’re screwed?

It’s certainly looking that way.

…
RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY pulls out a deck of cards from her purse.

RUBY
Well…
Who’s up for a friendly game of cards?

CRYSTAL
Are you serious?

RUBY
Why not?
We’re already here.
Might as well give her a bit longer to show up.

NATHANIEL
I’m in.
It’ll help take my mind off things.

RUBY
What things?

NATHANIEL
Just things.

RUBY
Bad things?

NATHANIEL
All things are bad things.

(to CRYSTAL:)
Come on.
Just a round or two.
It’ll help pass the time.

RUBY and NATHANIEL stare at CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL
All right, fine.
Deal me in.
RUBY

Wonderful!
It might be easier if we spread out on the floor.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL push back their chairs and sit across from each other on the floor.

RUBY

I’ll deal…
(She shuffles the cards.)
…If that’s okay?

CRYSTAL

Yeah. Fine.

RUBY passes out the cards.

RUBY

One for you,
One for you,
And one for me.
Two for you,
Two for you,
And two for me.
Three for you…

CRYSTAL

We can count.

RUBY

Almost there…
Three for you,
Three for you,
And three for me.
Four for you,
Four for you,
And four for me.

CRYSTAL

Really, there’s no reason to count out loud.

RUBY

Five for you,
Five for you,
And five for—
Oh, shoot.
I think I was supposed to deal to the left of the dealer. Let me start over.

CRYSTAL

JESUS!

RUBY piles up the cards.

LEONA—wearing an artsy shawl and vibrant spandex pants—bursts through the door.

LEONA

Would ya get a look at that!!!
You’re already playing together so swimmingly!!!

You’re her?
I mean—
You’re who we’ve been waiting on.
You’re Leona?

LEONA

Someone give the gal a prize!

LEONA shuts the door.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL stand and return to their chairs.

LEONA

Three of you, huh?
That’s kind of a lot.

NATHANIEL

Three is a lot?

LEONA

Oh yeah.
I’ve done this with just one before.
It’s usually with two, which is a nice balanced number.
You know—
A pair.
A team.
One completes the other.
But three—
WHOA!

LEONA leans against the door.
LEONA
I see both genders represented tonight.
Fabulous.
Looks like you’re all different ages too.
Some diversity—
I like it.
Makes things more interesting.
Any of you have trouble finding the place?

RUBY
Not really.

NATHANIEL
Just a little bit.

LEONA
It’s so great that they let me use these rooms.
Or do they?
I’m kidding, of course they do.
Or do they?
Can you believe this weather?

CRYSTAL
What about it?

LEONA
Really, though.
I love using these classrooms.

RUBY
Do you also teach or something?

LEONA
Me?
Oh, god no.
I mean I’d love to.
But I’d also kind of hate it.
I’m just not a big people person, you know?
Why, you got any leads?
Woun‘t matter.
They wouldn’t let me teach anyway.
Kidding.
But honestly, no.
They wouldn’t.
I’m a pretty damaged person.
Whoa! Slow down, girl!
Leave something to the imagination!
Right?
(She laughs.)
Sorry I’m so frazzled.
I’m just me, me, me, me, me, me, me!
Take a breath, Leona.
(She takes a breath.)
There really is something nostalgic about these rooms.
And it’s so symbolic for what we’re about to embark on.
Don’t you think, you guys?

NATHANIEL
Symbolic?

LEONA
Oh, yeah.
Yeah, yeah.
Yeah, totally.
Like reaching into our past.
Reaching back into our childhood selves and retuning, redefining.
That’s why I like to conduct the workshop in spaces like this.
It’s more than just a space.
It’s a vessel.
You know?
How’s all this sound so far, you guys?

NATHANIEL
You’re asking us?

LEONA
Why not?

NATHANIEL
It sounds okay, I guess?

LEONA
Great, great.

CRYSTAL
You know—
You’re kind of late.
We’ve been here for a while.

LEONA
Yeah, I know.
What can I say?
Oops.
I’ve kind of got some stuff going on.

RUBY
Some stuff?
Yeah.
But no reason to worry yourselves…
…Yet.

Sorry?

Nothing!

Should we maybe get started?

Patience, please.
My head is bobbing and throbbing.
Let me just…
    (She takes a breath.)
…Arrive in the space.
And…
    (She takes a breath.)
…Collect my thoughts.
Long day.
You have no idea, you guys.
My god.

LEONA closes her eyes.

A long, long pause.

I feel like I forgot something.

What is it, dear?
I might have it in my purse.

You won’t have what I need in your purse.

I don’t know…
She’s got some interesting things in there.

Shh!
Please.
My head.
How soon we forget.

Another long, long pause.

Are you feeling all right?

LEONA

Just need to catch my breath.

LEONA stays by the door, thinking.

The group stares at her.

LEONA glances around the room.

LEONA

That’s right!

LEONA quickly exits through the door—and slams it shut behind her.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL sit in their chairs—unsure of what just happened.

NATHANIEL

Umm…

CRYSTAL

What was that?

NATHANIEL

I have no idea.

CRYSTAL

That’s supposed to be the woman who changes our lives forever?

NATHANIEL

Yes. That was the tormented genius.

CRYSTAL

I’m not sure I see what’s so genius about her.

RUBY

Me either.
Me either.

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

...

NATHANIEL

...

RUBY

Well…
I brought snacks.

NATHANIEL

Snacks?

RUBY

Yeah, snacks.
I wasn’t sure how long this thing would last.
So I thought some snacks would be a good idea.
You know, in case any of us have low blood sugar.
Or a case of the munchies.
I’m a nervous snacker myself.
Either of you want some?
Snacks?

NATHANIEL

What kinds of snacks?

RUBY

Real good snacks.
Cheese cubes and saltine crackers.

RUBY rummages inside her purse.

NATHANIEL

Oh, no thanks.
I don’t trust crackers.
The sharp edges cut the roof of my mouth.

RUBY

Okay.
Just the cheese, then?

RUBY pulls baggies of snacks out of her purse.
NATHANIEL

Dairy products upset me.

RUBY

Upset your stomach?

NATHANIEL

No.

RUBY

I see.
Well, I’ll set them over here just in case…

RUBY sets the snacks down on another chair.

LEONA bursts back through the door—holding a bucket full of workshop materials under her arm.

When she slams the door shut, she drops the bucket and the items scatter all over.

She bends down to pick everything up—without acknowledging RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL.

LEONA

JustwhatIneedistodropallofthisstuffallovertheplacewhenI’mhavingthedayfromhell…

NATHANIEL

Do you need a hand?

LEONA

No, no—
I’ve got it.
Talk amongst yourselves.

LEONA continues to gather the fallen items and scoop them back into the bucket.

LEONA

They’reprobablygoingtofigureoutthat’somethinhterribleishappeningandthere’snothingIcan
dotostopit—

RUBY

Are you sure you’ve got it?
LEONA

Yes, I’m sure…
But I can just feel in my bones that a total catastrophe is going to consume all of us in the very near future—

RUBY

Are you positive?

LEONA

Positive!
Now would you please not ask me that again?

RUBY

I didn’t mean to—

CRYSTAL

Don’t talk to her like that.

LEONA

Excuse me?

CRYSTAL

She was just trying to help.

LEONA glances over at RUBY—who’s nervously clinging to her purse.

LEONA

You’re right.
Sorry.
I’m sorry.
I’m just a bit vulnerable right now.

NATHANIEL

You’re vulnerable?

LEONA

Yes.
I’m going through some personal struggles.

NATHANIEL

Isn’t that…
Kind of…

LEONA

What?
NATHANIEL

Kind of a problem?

LEONA

Why’s it a problem?
Am I not allowed to be human?
Am I not allowed to be going through stuff?

NATHANIEL

No, of course you are—
But, I just mean.
Considering you’re in charge of this thing.

LEONA

Oh, come on.
Really, you guys?
Don’t put that kind of pressure on me.
I really don’t need that right now.

CRYSTAL

This is ridiculous.

LEONA

What’s ridiculous?

CRYSTAL

We’ve come here for help.
We’ve come to you for help.
And look at you.
You’re a mess.
You’re a wreck!

LEONA

I see.
And do all of you feel this way?

No one speaks.

LEONA

What can I say?
You’re right.
You’re right, you’re right.
You’re absolutely right.
We have obviously started off on the wrong foot.
Can we start over?
Please?
NATHANIEL

That’s okay with me.

RUBY

Yes, dear. Of course.

The group stares at CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL

I guess. Whatever.

LEONA

Great.
Fabulous.
Thank you.
We’ll start over then.
A fresh beginning.
Now—
I assume each of you brought along cash and or check.

CRYSTAL

Really?
You’re talking about payment options right now?

LEONA

Well, yeah.

CRYSTAL

That’s your way of starting fresh?

LEONA

What’s the problem?
This is a service I’m offering.
I’ve had way too many folks walk outta here without paying.

CRYSTAL

I’m not surprised.

LEONA

What is it you’re needing from me?

CRYSTAL

I don’t know.
Shouldn’t you be making us feel at ease?
Like we’ve made the right decision by coming here?

LEONA

We’re all adults here.
I’m not going to baby you.

CRYSTAL

I don’t expect you to coddle us.  
But I do expect for you to—
You know—

LEONA

What?

CRYSTAL

Nothing. Nevermind.

LEONA

Go on, say it.

CRYSTAL

No. I don’t want to say it.

LEONA

Say it!

CRYSTAL

I’m not going to say it!

LEONA

Do you want me to say it?

CRYSTAL

I don’t care!  
Say what you want!

LEONA

You expect me to fix you.  
All of you expect that. 
Right?

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL remain silent.

LEONA

That’s what I thought.

NATHANIEL

So, are you?  
Going to fix us?
LEONA

What do you think?

NATHANIEL

I’m not sure.

CRYSTAL

I took a leap—
To come here, to do this.
Which isn’t like me.
But I thought that might be a good sign.
You know—
To do something that’s not at all like me.
But I just don’t have a good feeling about this anymore.

LEONA

Then go.

CRYSTAL

Sorry?

LEONA

Leave.

CRYSTAL

…

NATHANIEL

…

RUBY

…

LEONA

All of you can leave right now.
I have no right to keep you here beyond your will.
I’m not an expert.
I’m not a licensed practitioner.
I have no power over you whatsoever.
I’m just somebody who has overcome their own chronic, crippling, disgusting fear and I wanted to help you do the same.
This treatment has saved the lives of many others in your exact same positions.
So, if you have an issue with how I handle things—
Then, there’s the door.
But just know that you might be the only one who leaves here tonight without conquering their fear.
So—
Are you going to stay here and conquer your fear?
Or are you going to give up?
It’s totally up to you.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL stay planted.

NATHANIEL
I can’t go back out there.
I can’t face all that again without learning how to cope.
It’s become too much to handle.

RUBY
This is it for me.
The last straw.
If this doesn’t work—
I’m done, I’m out.

CRYSTAL
I came here to get help.
And I can’t leave until I get it.

LEONA
That’s what I like to hear.
Now, tell me—
Are you here to conquer your fear?

CRYSTAL
Yeah.

RUBY
We are.

NATHANIEL
Mhmm.

LEONA
I can’t hear you—
Are you here to conquer your fear?!

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
Yes!

LEONA
Then let me hear you say it!
“I’m here to conquer my fear!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
I’m here to conquer my fear.

LEONA
Louder!
“I’m here to conquer my fear!”
RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
I’m here to conquer my fear!!!

LEONA
Oh, come on!
Say it like you mean it!
“I’m here to conquer my fear!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
I’M HERE TO CONQUER MY FEAR!!!!

LEONA
That’s what I’m talking about!
Now—
(POINTS TO NATHANIEL:)
You—
How are you paying?

NATHANIEL
Oh.
Um, cash?

LEONA
(POINTS TO RUBY:)
And you?

RUBY
Check.

LEONA
(POINTS TO CRYSTAL:)
And you?

CRYSTAL
Cash. I guess.

LEONA
Fantastic.
Now, pay up.

CRYSTAL
Right now?

LEONA
That’s right.
The sooner you get to payin’—
The sooner we’ll get to conquerin’.
RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL each pull out their wallets and checkbooks.

CRYSTAL and NATHANIEL hand their cash to LEONA.

RUBY writes a check then hands it over.

LEONA

Spectacular!
Now, let’s wiggle these chairs out of the way.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL slide the metal chairs against the walls.

LEONA

Sweetheart, I’m afraid you have to set your purse down now.

I’m sorry?

RUBY

Your purse.
It will be in your way.

LEONA

My purse never gets in my way.

RUBY

This is a physical workshop.
You need to set it down before we begin.

RUBY desperately clings to her purse.

But I don’t want to do that…

RUBY

It will be fine, I promise.
Just set it in a chair.
Or on the floor.

LEONA

Really.
I don’t know if I can do that—

LEONA
Here. Do you want me to just—
*(LEONA reaches for the purse.)*

RUBY

NO!!!
*(LEONA jumps back.)*

I’ll do it.
I’ll set it down.

RUBY walks over and hesitantly sets her purse down in a chair.

She stares at it for several moments.

The group watches her.

LEONA

That wasn’t so hard, was it?

RUBY glares at LEONA and rejoins the group.

LEONA reaches into her bucket and pulls out three blindfolds.

LEONA

Okay, let’s get going!
Here, everybody take one.

LEONA passes out the blindfolds.

CRSYSTAL

Really?
You’re going to blindfold a group of anxious people?

LEONA

No.
I’m not going to.

NATHANIEL

Thank god.

LEONA

You are.
You’re going to blindfold yourselves.
This is step two of a three-step process.

RUBY

What happened to step one?
LEONA

You showed up.
You’re here.
You have all taken such a vital step by agreeing to do this.
Today is the day.
Today is your day.
Today you will all overcome years of struggle and torment.
You’re at your wit’s end with letting fear take over your life.
And you’re finally doing something about it.
Everyone got a blindfold?

(The group nods.)

Good.
All right, now—
Before you slide those on—
I want each of you to choose a name.
Try not to use your real name.
Just what you want us to call you for today.

RUBY

Any name whatsoever?

LEONA

That’s right.
Whatever name pops into your head.

(to RUBY:)
You first.

RUBY

Me?

LEONA

Yes, you.

RUBY

Why me?

LEONA

Why not you?

RUBY

Maybe start with someone else?

LEONA

Come on—
This is the easy part.
Okay, okay.
All right.
How about…
Ruby?

Ruby.
Great!
See how easy that was?
(to NATHANIEL:)
Now, you.

Whatever I want?

Whatever you want.

Brad. No.
Lester.

Lester.
Okay.

What? Too fake sounding?

No. Not at all.

Just call me Nathaniel.

But that’s not your real name, is it?

Call me Nathaniel, please.

Nathaniel it is.
(to CRYSTAL:)
And now, you—
Crystal.

CRYSTAL

Crystal.

LEONA

All right, fabulous.

All right, fabulous.

Now let’s kick off our shoes.

Now let’s kick off our shoes.

RUBY

What for?

What for?

LEONA

You’ll see.

You’ll see.

RUBY reaches for her purse.

The group removes their shoes and piles them up

next to the chairs.

next to the chairs.

RUBY reaches for her purse.

Ruby?

Ruby?

LEONA

I just—

I just—

RUBY

Come on.

Come on.

You’ll be fine.

You’ll be fine.

LEONA

It’s time to get started.

It’s time to get started.

NATHANIEL

Now?

Now?

LEONA

Yes, now.

Yes, now.

NATHANIEL

I don’t know if I’m ready.

I don’t know if I’m ready.

LEONA

Of course you are.

Of course you are.

Let’s slide on the blindfolds.

Let’s slide on the blindfolds.

CRYSTAL slips on her blindfold.
RUBY

Mine’s all tangled.

LEONA moves to help RUBY.

NATHANIEL stares down at his blindfold.

LEONA

Is everything all right, Nathaniel?

Yeah.

You sure?

LEONA

Mmhmm.

NATHANIEL

He’s afraid of the dark.

I’m not afraid.

RUBY

It’s okay to be afraid.
We all are.
That’s why we’re here.

CRYSTAL

When you put it on—
Don’t think of it like it’s dark.
Think of it like it’s black.
Like you’re just staring at a black wall.

LEONA

Yeah, what she said.

NATHANIEL

Thanks.

NATHANIEL ties on his blindfold.

LEONA

Make sure they’re tied on good and tight.
Everyone got it?
Got it.

RUBY

Fantastic.
Now—
I want all of you to move through the space.

LEONA

How?

RUBY

Just start walking.

LEONA

But we can’t see anything.

NATHANIEL

Exactly.

LEONA

I don’t want to break anything.

RUBY

There’s nothing in here to break.

CRYSTAL

I mean on me.
I don’t want to break a bone.

RUBY

You won’t.
I’m watching you.
I’m here for you.
You all can trust me.
Now—
Just slowly move—
Get a good feel for it.

LEONA

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL slowly move throughout the space.

They extend their arms—careful not to bump into any of the chairs or walls or each other.

They gradually become more and more comfortable with the exercise.
LEONA
There you go—
You’re all doing beautifully.

CRYSTAL
What’s the point of this exactly?

LEONA
Trust me.

LEONA pulls out her cell phone and glances at the screen.

Oh no…

CRYSTAL
What?

LEONA
Nothing.
It’s nothing.
Just keep doing what you’re doing.

LEONA reads a message on the screen.

No…
It can’t be.

RUBY
What’s the matter?

LEONA
Just, please—
Focus on the exercise.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL keep moving through the space.

LEONA
This is a nightmare.

NATHANIEL
What is?
LEONA
I need you guys to really stay focused for me, okay?
I’ll be right back.

RUBY
Wait.
You’re leaving?

LEONA
For just a second.
Promise.

NATHANIEL
But, we don’t know what we’re doing.

LEONA
Sure you do!
You’ve got a feel for the space now.
Trust the process.

LEONA exits.

The group keeps moving without any purpose or
direction.

Several moments pass.

CRYSTAL
What is happening?

NATHANIEL
I don’t know.

They hear LEONA’S VOICE from outside the door.

LEONA
(from off:)
How many times do I have to tell you to leave me alone?
How many times do I have to change my phone number?
How do you keep finding me?
I am in the middle of doing what I’m passionate about and you keep bombarding me.
And suffocating me.
Is that what you want?
Huh?
No, I really do want you to leave me alone.
Yes, I’m serious.
Totally serious.
What is wrong with you?
Who does this?

CRYSTAL stops walking.
She pokes an eye out from the blindfold.

Who’s she talking to out there?

CRYSTAL

Who knows.
Just keep moving like she said.

RUBY and NATHANIEL continue walking.

CRYSTAL moves closer to the door and listens.

(From off:)
I’ve warned you.
You need to back off!
What else do you need from me?
No.
You wouldn’t—
You wouldn’t dare!

(Suddenly screaming:)
I WILL NOT LET YOU COME HERE AND MURDER THESE INNOCENT PEOPLE!

CRYSTAL

Umm…

RUBY

What is it?

CRYSTAL

Did she just say something about murder?

RUBY

I didn’t hear that.

NATHANIEL

I didn’t either.

CRYSTAL

Are you sure?
Somebody’s paranoid…

CRystal

We’re all paranoid!
That’s why we’re here!

CRYSTAL lowers her blindfold and continues walking.

LEONA reenters.

Sorry about that you guys.
Just some pesky personal stuff again.
But it looks like you’re still doing splendidly.

The group, still wearing blindfolds, continues moving throughout the space—crisscrossing past each other.

LEONA

Now, then—
Where were we?
Ah, yes—
I want you to imagine something for me.
You’re in a space where you can unwind and unleash all that’s pent up inside you.
You can release your emotional burdens here.
These walls can now be representative of any place you need them to be.
The place where each of you might have first developed your fear to begin with.
A living room.
A bedroom.
An airport.
An airplane.
A garage.
A hospital.
A jungle.
It can be anywhere.
And you can do whatever you need to do here.
Be loud.
Scream.
Laugh.
Cry.
You can unleash the demon and let it run wild.
All right—
Have all of you imagined a place?
Can you all see it clearly in your minds?
RUBY

Yes—

NATHANIEL

Yeah—

CRYSTAL

I actually can, yeah.

LEONA

Great!
Now, come to a stop.

The group stops walking.

LEONA

I want you to tell me what you see.
Where did you walk to?
What did you find there?
Who did you find there?
Tell me—
What is it you’re afraid of?

NATHANIEL

We just say it?
Speak it out loud?

LEONA

That’s right—
As you see it, I want you to say it.
What are you afraid of?

RUBY

My kids.

CRYSTAL

My ex.

NATHANIEL

My cat.

CRYSTAL

My parents.

NATHANIEL

My job.
My neighborhood.

Think bigger.

Bigger?

Broader.

I’m afraid of—
Falling over the edge.
Heights.

Death.
I’m terrified of death.

Fighting.
War.

Good, really good.
Keep going.
Use each other as a springboard.

Growing old.

Aging.

Age spots.

Freckles.

Moles.

Cancer.
Go on…

LEONA

The stock market.

CRYSTAL

Crashing.

RUBY

Bankruptcy.

NATHANIEL

Stumbling.

RUBY

Fainting.

NATHANIEL

Collapsing.

CRYSTAL

Loneliness.

RUBY

Drowning.

CRYSTAL

Traveling.

NATHANIEL

Foreign objects.

CRYSTAL

Foreign places.

RUBY

Foreign people.

CRYSTAL

Dust storms.

RUBY

Ice storms.

CRYSTAL

Any storm.

NATHANIEL
CRYSTAL

Hot weather.

RUBY

Cold weather.

NATHANIEL

Any weather.

CRYSTAL

Doing anything I don’t want to do.

NATHANIEL

Going anywhere I don’t want to go.

RUBY

Being anybody I don’t want to be.

LEONA

What else are you afraid of?

RUBY

My family.

CRYSTAL

My friends.

NATHANIEL

Myself.

LEONA

Perfect, you guys.
That was really, really perfect.

CRYSTAL

Oh, I’m not done yet.

RUBY

Me either.

NATHANIEL

Me either.

LEONA

You’re not?
Not even close.

Okay—
Then keep going, I guess. What else are you afraid of?

Fire.

Matches.

Burns.

Cuts.

Scrapes.

Bruises.

Ulcers.

Murmurs.

Organs.

Orphans.

Orgasms.

Deadlines.

Finish lines.
CRYSTAL
End times.

LEONA
Okay, great—
Let’s bring this to a close.

RUBY
Still not done.

LEONA
You’re not?

NATHANIEL
Not yet.

LEONA
All right.
What else are you afraid of?

RUBY
Cats.

CRYSTAL
Dogs.

NATHANIEL
Fish.

CRYSTAL
Babies.

RUBY
Babies crying.

NATHANIEL
Baby wipes.

CRYSTAL
Canned beets.

NATHANIEL
Canned corn.

RUBY
Cantaloupe.
Trampolines.  
NATHANIEL

Hula hoops.  
RUBY

Exercise.  
CRYSTAL

Eye lids.  
RUBY

Ash trays.  
CRYSTAL

Walnuts.  
NATHANIEL

Okay!  
LEONA

And let’s call this done now.  
Shall we?

But…  
NATHANIEL

Really.  
LEONA

It’s time.  
God, is it time.

A pause.

Now what?  
RUBY

You’ve listed your fears.  
LEONA

Your many, many, many fears.  
How did that feel?

Incredible, actually.  
NATHANIEL

That was a big release for me.

Yeah.  
CRYSTAL

That was pretty amazing.
I feel so rejuvenated.  
I haven’t felt this way in years.

Wonderful.  
That’s what I was hoping for.  
See what happens when you trust the process?

Now what?

Now—  
I want you to visualize the fear itself.

Just one of the fears?

Actually—  
Try to compile all of the fear.  
If you can.

And then visualize it?

Yes.  
I want you to see the fear right in front of you.  
As though it were an actual living, breathing entity.

How do we do that?

You’ve really got to concentrate.  
...  
Can you see it yet?

No.  
Not yet.

Come on, focus.  
Ask yourself—  
What color is your fear?
What does your fear smell like?
Can you taste your fear?
How tall is it?
Or is it short?
How wide is it?
Or is it slim?
Is it fast and slick?
Or slow and creeping?
Concentrate, you guys.
You can do this.

I think I’m starting to see it.

Me too…

Yeah, I can!
I actually see it!
Oh, god—

I can see my fear too!
It’s coming toward me!

RUBY and NATHANIEL begin to panic.

It’s okay!
You’re all okay.
Just hold up your arms and block it!

And that will keep it away?

It will, yes!

RUBY and NATHANIEL hold up their arms and
desperately attempt to block their imagined fears.

Excellent job!

LEONA notices that CRYSTAL is quiet.
...Crystal?

I’ve got a lot of fear.
It’s kinda hard to see it all at once.

Well, have you tried?

I think so.
I think I’ve tried.

You really have to believe it’s there.

Oh, it’s there!!!

Yes, it’s there!!!

LEONA moves closer to CRYSTAL.

Come on, Crystal.
Focus.
Try your best to see it.

I’m trying…

What does your fear look like?
Describe it to me.

It’s…
It’s…
Uh…

Yes?
Come on.
You can do this.
It’s bulbous…

It is?

It is.
And grimy.

It is?

It is.
And it smells like ash.
Shit!

(She throws her hands up.)
I see it now!
What do I do?!!

Don’t be scared!
You’re in control of the fear!
You just have to block it!
Keep it away!

All right, okay…

RUBY, NATHANIEL, and CRYSTAL work hard at physically blocking their fears.

All of you, right now!
I want you to scream out,
“You’re not in control of me!”

You’re not in control of me!

“I’m in control of you!”

I’m in control of you!
LEONA
Again! Louder!
“You’re not in control of me!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
You’re not in control of me!!!

LEONA
“I’m in control of you!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
I’m in control of you!!!

LEONA
Fantastic!
Now—
I want you all to attack your fear!

NATHANIEL
…Attack it?

LEONA
Absolutely.
You can see it right there in front of you.
This terrible thing that’s made you suffer.
And now you can make it suffer!
So, go!
Right now!
Fight those fears!
Make those fears feel all of the
Pain—
And loathing—
And hatred—
That you’ve felt for so long!

The group hesitates.

NATHANIEL
I can’t—
I can’t do it!

LEONA
Why not?

NATHANIEL
I’m too scared!
CRYSTAL

I am too!

Me too!

RUBY

Nonsense!
You’re in control.
You have the power!

LEONA

Do we really, though?

RUBY

Of course you do!
Say it again!
“You’re not in control of me!”

LEONA

“ Piper control of you!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

I’m in control of you!

LEONA

Do you want your fear to control you for the rest of your life?

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

NO!!!

LEONA

Do you want to walk out of here as sad, pathetic victims?

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

NO!!!

LEONA

Then go on!
Go for it!
Grab your fear!
Smack your fear!
Clobber your fear!
Smother your fear!
Just go to town on your pesky fear!
I want you to wrestle your fear to the ground and overpower it!
The time has come to finally—
Once and for all—
CONQUER YOUR FEARS!!

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL release loud, primal groans as they lunge and attack their imagined fears.

They kick out their arms and legs.

They punch.

And scream.

And grunt.

And swear.

They look totally ridiculous.

While this is happening—LEONA notices the snacks that RUBY brought.

LEONA moves over to examine the food a bit closer.

LEONA

There you go!
That’s it!
Keep going!
Keep attacking!

LEONA reaches for a cracker and pops it in her mouth.

She tries to crunch down quietly but it ends up being quite loud.

NATHANIEL peeks at LEONA from under his blindfold.

RUBY and CRYSTAL continue battling their fears.

LEONA swallows down the cracker.

LEONA

Keep going!
That’s the stuff!
You’re doing perfectly!

LEONA pops another cracker in her mouth.

NATHANIEL pulls off his blindfold.

NATHANIEL

…You’re eating.

LEONA stops chewing.

LEONA

(with a mouthful:)
No I’m not.

RUBY and CRYSTAL stop clobbering their fears and pull off their blindfolds.

They’re sweaty and winded.

Why are you eating?

NATHANIEL

LEONA

So I didn’t eat dinner before I came.
Why does it matter?

CRYSTAL

Are you serious?
Aren’t you supposed to—
Oh, I don’t know—
Pay attention?

LEONA

I am paying attention!

RUBY

You said you’d watch to make sure I didn’t break any bones.

LEONA

I’ve done this a thousand times.
I can do it in my sleep!

CRYSTAL

God.
I feel like such an idiot.

LEONA

Oh, come on.

A pause.

LEONA realizes she’s losing them.

LEONA

Okay, okay!
Fine.
Do you want the honest truth?

The group stares at LEONA.

LEONA

You guys are a lot farther along than most of the people who come through here. So I was thinking we could just speed this up a bit and jump right into step three.

CRYSTAL

Bullshit.

LEONA

Excuse me?

CRYSTAL

That’s bullshit. You’ve got our money. And now you just want to get us out of here as soon as possible.

LEONA

Do you really believe that?

CRYSTAL

Yeah. I do.

LEONA

Do you all think that’s true?

RUBY

I don’t know what to believe anymore.

RUBY grabs her purse and clutches it tight.

LEONA

I mean it, you guys.
You’re all so much closer than you realize.

Why should we believe you?

I want to help you.

Do you?

Of course I do.

Why do you want to help us?

Because—

Because why?

I’m one of you.

You’re not one of us.

Of course I am.

I want to believe it.
I want to believe you can do what you say you can do.
I want to believe you understand what it’s like to have crippling, chronic fear sneak up on you all the time.
But I don’t believe you’ve overcome anything in your life.
I mean—
Is your name really Leona?

Is yours really Crystal?

Of course it is!
Why would I choose the name Crystal?
(to NATHANIEL:)  
Is yours really Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL  
Yes, actually.

(to RUBY:)  
Is yours really Ruby?

RUBY  
Am I the only one who made up a name?!
You said it doesn’t matter what name we choose for this!

LEONA  
It doesn’t!
That’s precisely my point.

CRYSTAL  
I’m sorry—
But I can’t do this if we’re being lied to.

LEONA  
No one is lying to you!

CRYSTAL  
I just don’t trust this anymore.
I feel too vulnerable.
I’m too much in my head now.
I don’t know about them—
But, to me—
None of this feels right.

CRYSTAL reaches for her trench coat.

NATHANIEL

Yeah, I—

LEONA  
Wait a second…
Nobody move…

A pause.

Everyone waits.
What?  

NATHANIEL

Did you guys hear that?

LEONA

A pause.

Everyone listens.

I didn’t hear anything.

RUBY

Shh!

LEONA

LEONA moves to the door and listens.

Maybe it was nothing.

LEONA

She moves away from the door.

No. There it was again!

LEONA

Are you sure you heard something?

RUBY

It’s getting pretty late…
Is there onsite security or anything?

NATHANIEL

I don’t think so, actually.

LEONA

Does someone wanna go check it out?

RUBY

The group looks to NATHANIEL.

Don’t look at me.

NATHANIEL

I was afraid this might happen.

LEONA

CRYSTAL
Afraid what might happen?

LEONA

It’s nothing.

CRYSTAL

What is it?
Are we going to get hurt?

LEONA

Don’t worry.
You guys are safe in here with me.

RUBY

You promise?

LEONA

Of course.
Now, please—
Let’s not let this ruin our workshop.
We’re so, so close.
Do we want to move into the final step or not?

RUBY and NATHANIEL look to CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL

All right, fine.
Let’s finish what we came here for.

LEONA

Wonderful.
I’m proud of you guys.
Truly proud.
You’ve shown up—
That’s step one.
You’ve identified and battled your fears—
That’s step two.
And now—
You’re all going to be reborn as fearless warriors.

A pause.

NATHANIEL

Reborn?

LEONA

This is exactly how I finally overcame my own fears.
This is how I became a brand new, stronger person. This is what sets this workshop apart.

RUBY
What do we have to do?

LEONA
You need to rid yourselves of the extra bulk that you carry around all the time.

NATHANIEL
And what does that mean exactly?

LEONA
Most of us have been carrying around these fears since childhood. And that’s a lot of extra weight to hold onto all the time. Day in, day out. Day out, day in. It’s exhausting, isn’t it?

NATHANIEL
So…?

LEONA
So you need to remove all the extra layers that bog you down.

The group stares at each other, confused.

LEONA
So, go on. Do it.

RUBY
Do what exactly?

LEONA
Strip down to your raw, natural selves.

NATHANIEL
Our natural selves?

LEONA
Yes. Ride yourselves of the bulk. Remove the extra layers.

CRYSTAL
Wait. You want us to take off our clothes?
RUBY
Oh.
I can’t do that.

LEONA
Just as much as you feel comfortable shedding.

RUBY
But it’s so chilly in here.

NATHANIEL
Yeah and I’m kind of bashful about this sort of thing.

LEONA
Do you want to walk out of here as brand new, healed, fearless individuals? Or do you want to leave as the same weak, fearful people you were when you arrived? It’s totally up to you. Do you want to be reborn today or not?

A long pause.

The group stares at each other, hesitant.

CRYSTAL makes the first move. She steps forth and removes her black sweater.

NATHANIEL takes a deep breath—then sheds his sweater vest and trousers.

RUBY unzips her floral-print dress and lets it drop to the ground—revealing her slip underneath.

Each of them has removed the top layer of their clothing—and they’re now stripped down to their undergarments.

CRYSTAL
Okay.
There.
Now what?

LEONA
There’s that noise again…

LEONA moves back to the door and listens.
RUBY
What does it sound like?

LEONA
I don’t want to say.
But I think we might be in serious danger.

NATHANIEL
Should we get dressed?

LEONA
No, no—
But I better go check it out.

CRYSTAL
Right now?
Really?

LEONA
Yes—
I think it’s for the best.

NATHANIEL
But we’re in our underwear.

LEONA
Yes.
Yes you are.
And I want you to stay just as you are.

LEONA exits.

A very long, awkward pause as the group stands there—cold and vulnerable—in their undergarments.

CRYSTAL
This is awful.

NATHANIEL
And lonely.

RUBY
And cold.

A pause.
Maybe we should go check on her?

We’d have to get dressed.

And she said to stay just as we are.

A pause.

I wonder what’s keeping her.
Do you think she’s all right?

I hope so.

I’m sure she is.
...Right?

A pause.

I’m not entirely confident she’s coming back.

It’s not looking too good, is it?

I can’t believe this.

What?

I really can’t believe this.

Believe what?

That we fell for this.
I cannot believe we actually fell for this!
I’m done.
With all of it.
This is insane.
She left us in here to rot.
She humiliated us.

RUBY

She heard a noise.

CRYSTAL

Look at us!
What is wrong with us?
She’s got us stripped down to our underwear!
How pathetic can we be?!

NATHANIEL

It’s the final step.
We’ll be stronger!
We’ll be reborn!

CRYSTAL

I don’t care what step it is!
I don’t care about any of it anymore!

CRYSTAL bends down for her clothes and redresses.

NATHANIEL and RUBY also bend down for their clothes.

LEONA returns.

LEONA

Wait, wait, WAIT!
What’s going on here, you guys?
Why are you putting on your clothes?
I thought we agreed to complete the process?

The group continues to dress.

CRYSTAL

We’re getting the hell out of here!

LEONA

But we’re not finished yet.

CRYSTAL

Yes, we are!

NATHANIEL

You left us.
I went to check on things.
To keep us safe.

What things?

The noise we heard.

We didn’t hear a noise.
You heard a noise.

You’re right, I did.

But did you really hear a noise?

Of course I did!

There was no noise!
There is no danger!
Except for you!
You’re the danger!
Just admit it!

A pause.

How long have you known?

Known what?

The truth.

So wait—
There really wasn’t a noise?

No.
She’s right.
There was no noise.

CRYSTAL

I knew it!
I knew I never should’ve trusted you.

NATHANIEL

I’m so confused.

CRYSTAL

How could you do this?
How could you take advantage of us?

LEONA

I wouldn’t put it that way, exactly.

CRYSTAL

Then how would you put it?

LEONA

It’s complicated.

CRYSTAL

What’s complicated about it?
Is all of this bogus or not?

LEONA

I don’t know what to say.

CRYSTAL

Just admit it.
You’re trying to make money off of us.
And you’re purposefully humiliating us!
Say it—
You don’t know what you’re doing!
SAY IT!

LEONA

Fine!
Okay.
I don’t know what I’m doing.

RUBY

You mean—
She’s right?
None of this was real?
LEONA
I’m afraid so.

RUBY
Oh, no.
No, no, no—

NATHANIEL
Ruby—

RUBY
No, no, no, no, no!

LEONA
Stay calm—

RUBY
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!

NATHANIEL
She’s flipping out!

CRYSTAL
Can you blame her?!

RUBY
NO!
NO!
NO!
NO!
NO!
NO!
NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!

NATHANIEL
She’s gonna explode!

RUBY
This is not good!
This is bad!
This is not good!
This is bad!
This is not good!
This is very bad!

RUBY grabs her purse and frantically digs inside.
LEONA

Wait—
What’s happening?
What are you doing?

RUBY

I’ve—
(She digs.)
I’ve—
(She digs.)
I’ve—
(She digs.)
I’ve got something in here for you!

LEONA

I don’t think I want it.

RUBY pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

NATHANIEL

Cigarettes?

RUBY

No, not that!

RUBY pulls out a bottle opener.

CRYSTAL

A bottle opener?

RUBY

Not that either!

RUBY pulls out a sequined onesie.

LEONA

A sequined onesie?

RUBY

No!

RUBY pulls out another purse.

RUBY

This!
This is what I was looking for!
LEONA
A smaller purse from inside your purse?

RUBY
No!
Not the purse!

CRYSTAL
Why do you need a smaller purse?

RUBY
For reasons far too numerous to list right now!
But what I really need is what’s inside the smaller purse!

NATHANIEL
What’s inside the smaller purse?

RUBY unzips the smaller purse and pulls out a handgun.

RUBY
THIS!!!

NATHANIEL, CRYSTAL, and LEONA gasp.

She holds up the gun and points it toward LEONA.

RUBY
We came here tonight looking to get healed—
And what did you do?
You tricked us!
Do you know how sick that is?
Huh?!
Do you?!!
Why do people like you always think you can get away with this sort of thing?

(Before LEONA can answer:)

WELL NOT ANYMORE!
Because, you know what?
Even with all of the nonsense you’ve put us through tonight—
We’re still not the losers, lady!
You are!

LEONA
You’re right.
I don’t know why I still do this.

NATHANIEL
But these workshops have worked for other people, right?
LEONA

No.

NATHANIEL

Never?

LEONA

Never.
I’ve never really helped anybody.
I just make things worse for people.

NATHANIEL

But the flyers.
And the online forum.
And the toilet paper dispenser.

LEONA

I did all of that.
I planted every bit of it.
I called myself a tormented genius.

RUBY

Why do you do this to people?
Why’d you want to trick us?

LEONA

I don’t know.
To make a quick buck?

RUBY

I think it’s a lot deeper than that.

LEONA

Maybe so.
My entire life—
I was always the follower, never the leader.
No one ever even noticed me before I started doing this.
I guess that’s why conning people feels so good.
I want people to see me as that tormented genius—
Even if I have to craft it all myself.
Surrounding myself with sad, sick, vulnerable creatures like you all makes me feel—
I don’t know—
Special?

NATHANIEL

Thanks?
LEONA
But I see now that you all aren’t the sick ones. I am.

RUBY
I thought I was walking out of here fixed tonight. I told myself if I didn’t conquer my fears— Once and for all— Then I’d use this gun to end it. And I meant it! I just didn’t realize I’d be ending it for somebody else too.

NATHANIEL
Don’t do this, Ruby!

RUBY points the gun at the entire group.

RUBY
MY NAME IS NOT RUBY! MY NAME IS GERALDINE!

CRYSTAL
Isn’t there another way? How can I make it up to you?

RUBY holds tight to the handgun.

LEONA
Please. Geraldine. Don’t do this. I beg you. I’ll never do this to anyone else as long as I live. Please— There’s got to be a way I can make it up to you—

A pause.

RUBY
Take off your clothes.

LEONA
What?

RUBY
You humiliated us. So, now, we get to humiliate you.
LEONA
Are you serious?

RUBY
As a heart attack.
Now, go on—
Do it.
Take off your clothes.

LEONA
And if I do it—
You won’t shoot?

RUBY
Hurry up before I change my mind!

LEONA quickly removes her artsy shawl and then attempts to wiggle her way out of her spandex pants.

It takes a while—but she manages to remove the top layers of her clothes.

A very long, awkward pause.

RUBY
How does it feel?

CRYSTAL
Is it awful?

LEONA
It’s awful.

NATHANIEL
Is it lonely?

LEONA
So lonely.

RUBY
Is it cold?

LEONA
I’m shivering.
Now hand ‘em over.

RUBY

Now hand ‘em over.

RUBY gestures for LEONA’S clothes.

LEONA hands her clothes to CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL hands them to NATHANIEL.

NATHANIEL hands them to RUBY.

RUBY shoves the clothes inside her purse.

RUBY

Wow…
I actually feel much better now.
Like I can go out and do anything.
Don’t you guys?

A pause.

CRYSTAL

I do too, actually.
After all this—
Who would’ve thought?

NATHANIEL

It’s like a weight’s been lifted.

RUBY

You know what?

CRYSTAL

What?

NATHANIEL

What is it?

RUBY

I’m not afraid anymore.

CRYSTAL and NATHANIEL smile.

CRYSTAL

You know what?
I’m not either.

NATHANIEL

Me either.
Wow.
RUBY slips the handgun back into the smaller purse—and then she slides the smaller purse into her purse.

RUBY

(to LEONA:)
Maybe you’re a tormented genius after all.

RUBY walks toward the door.

NATHANIEL and CRYSTAL follow behind.

They glance back one last time at LEONA—then exit.

LEONA is left alone in the classroom—shivering in her undergarments.

One last long, awkward pause.

Then lights fall to black.

End of play.