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Submissions

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Fate

Mellissa Marlowe

Characters

MADELINE, 27, a middle-school science teacher; PHYLLIS's only daughter

MARGARET, early 50s, a widow

PAUL, 29, a perennial student; MARGARET's only son

PHYLLIS, late 40s, an empty-nester

Setting

The action takes place late in the morning in a hair salon in San Antonio, Texas. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(PHYLLIS enters the salon to find MARGARET already sitting and waiting while reading a magazine.)

PHYLLIS: Good morning.

MARGARET: Good morning to you.

PHYLLIS: *(Looking around.)* Have you seen Jerrilyn this morning?

MARGARET: She just went to the back with a customer.

PHYLLIS: She did? Just now? I have an appointment at 11:30, and she just started someone else?

MARGARET: Yes, and more bad news: I'm her eleven o'clock.

PHYLLIS: You are *kidding* me. What has gotten into her?

MARGARET: I think she's having a bad day. She seems a little upset about something, poor thing.

PHYLLIS: Oh, no. I hope she's okay. I didn't mean to get ugly. Now I feel bad for saying anything!

MARGARET: Oh, don't feel bad. You weren't being ugly.

PHYLLIS: I feel like I was.

MARGARET: Oh, come on. No one likes to wait in the salon all day. It's not like you uttered Lamar Smith's eight banned words and phrases.

PHYLLIS: Uttered what?!

MARGARET: (*Showing PHYLLIS the magazine she has been reading.*) Oh, I've been reading this article about Lamar Smith introducing a bill to ban eight dirty words and phrases from radio. It's funny.

PHYLLIS: Eight? I thought there were seven?

MARGARET: There were, but he wants to make sure that no one uses the "a word" as either one word or as a two-word phrase, so he included it in the bill both ways. (*They laugh.*) Have you been coming to Jerrilyn for long?

PHYLLIS: Yes, I have. Let's see . . . it's been ten years! Oh, my gosh! I hadn't even realized it's been that long, but it has. My daughter was still in high school when we both started coming to Jerrilyn. How about you?

MARGARET: Oh, not that long. Maybe two years now. I found her just after I moved here.

PHYLLIS: You've only been in town for two years? Where are you from?

MARGARET: I moved here from Arizona after my husband passed away.

PHYLLIS: Oh, I'm sorry.

MARGARET: Thank you. I was married for thirty years, and after Tom passed, I just didn't want to live there all alone. My son is going to school here, and my brother and his family live here, so what else could I do?

PHYLLIS: So, how do you like it here?

MARGARET: It's a lot like Arizona—hot as heck year round.

PHYLLIS: Well, it certainly has been this year! You said your son goes to school here?

MARGARET: Yes. He's working on his PhD. Of course, he has been for a long time already. I think he just likes going to school for a living.

PHYLLIS: Oh, but that's wonderful. A PhD. Does he have a family of his own yet?

MARGARET: Oh, heavens, no! Not Paul. I'm afraid he's a hardcore bachelor.

PHYLLIS: That sounds like my daughter. Madeline is a devout spinster. In fact, it's starting to be a family joke since she started teaching school. She's our old-maid schoolmarm. I'm happy that she's found what she loves to do, but I wish she'd settle down and have some grandbabies for me already!

MARGARET: Oh, I would sure love a grandbaby! But right now, I just can't even imagine that. Paul is so involved in school, I don't know if he even dates.

PHYLLIS: Wait. How old is Paul?

MARGARET: He's twenty-nine . . . and going on "old man."

PHYLLIS: Madeline is twenty-seven. What does Paul study?

MARGARET: He's a biology major.

PHYLLIS: Madeline is a middle-school science teacher!

MARGARET: You're kidding! Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

PHYLLIS: I think I am!

MARGARET: Oh, no. Paul will never let me fix him up with anybody. I can just hear him now: "I don't think I have reached the point in life where I need my mother to fix me up on dates!"

PHYLLIS: What if he just happened to meet Madeline by chance?

MARGARET: How would that work?

PHYLLIS: Can you get that boy on the phone and get him down here?

MARGARET: Well, I guess I could make some excuse. Can you get your Madeline here?

PHYLLIS: She's coming here already. She's meeting me here so we can go shopping and have lunch after I get my hair done. She should be here in half an hour.

MARGARET: Okay. What excuse do I give Paul?

PHYLLIS: Just tell him your car won't start and you need a ride.

MARGARET: No. He'll try to fix my car, not give me a ride. I'll just tell him to come meet me for lunch. He'll never turn down a potentially free meal.

PHYLLIS: Now we have to make sure they end up in this waiting room alone together for a good long while.

MARGARET: We'll just fill Jerrilyn in on our little plan, and she'll take us both back at the same time.

(She takes out her cell phone and dials.)

PHYLLIS: Oh, this is fun!

(Lights fade on the ladies.)

Scene 2

(MADELINE enters the salon, looks around, grabs a magazine, and sits. She is carrying a purse and a small shopping bag. Shortly afterward, PAUL enters the salon, looks around, and takes a seat. After a moment, MADELINE and PAUL smile at each other.)

PAUL: Hello.

MADELINE: Hello.

(*Beat.*)

PAUL: Nice day out.

MADELINE: Yes. It *is* very nice today.

(*Beat.*)

PAUL: What are you reading?

MADELINE: “Eight Words and Phrases You Can’t Say on the Radio.”

PAUL: Pardon me?

MADELINE: It’s an article about how Lamar Smith penned a bill to ban eight dirty words and phrases from use on radio.

PAUL: Eight? I thought there were seven.

MADELINE: There are. Old Lamar just dislikes the word *asshole* so much he included it twice.

PAUL: I see.

MADELINE: Are you here to see Jerrilyn?

PAUL: Who? Uh, no. I’m here to pick up my mom for lunch.

MADELINE: Me, too . . . and shopping. I thought she’d be ready by now, but I guess not.

PAUL: Looks like you’ve already been shopping.

MADELINE: Oh, yeah. I just picked up a little trinket for my classroom.

PAUL: Your classroom?

MADELINE: Yes. I’m a teacher.

PAUL: What do you teach?

MADELINE: Middle-school science.

PAUL: Ah, a science teacher. What's the trinket?

MADELINE: (*Taking a nautilus fossil out of the bag.*) It's a cephalopod fossil for my desk. We're covering sea life right now.

PAUL: Nice. Kids ought to like that.

MADELINE: (*Holding out her hand.*) I'm Madeline.

PAUL: (*Taking her hand.*) Madeline, I'm Paul.

(*They drop their hands.*)

MADELINE: So, Paul, what do you do?

PAUL: Well, I'm a grad student at the moment.

MADELINE: Oh? What's your subject?

PAUL: That would be biology.

MADELINE: Really? You're a science guy, too? (*He nods.*) Well, well. It's a small world, isn't it?

PAUL: Yes, it is.

MADELINE: So, what do you want to do when you grow up, Paul?

PAUL: I figure I'll stay in school as a student just as long as I can, and then I'll stay in school as a teacher for the rest of my life.

MADELINE: Really? No research institute for you?

PAUL: Well, I'd like to teach at a university with a decent research program so I can do a little of this and a little of that.

MADELINE: Ah, then you must be working on a PhD.

PAUL: Yes, I am . . . and I have been for quite a while. At this point, my student loans are so great, I need to stay in school forever just to avoid paying them back.

MADELINE: How close are you?

PAUL: To finishing? Oh, about six months or so if all goes well with my research and my committee.

MADELINE: You must stay very busy.

PAUL: Yeah, but never too busy for dear old mom.

MADELINE: That's sweet. Are you the only kid?

PAUL: Yeah, I am. And my dad died a couple of years ago, so it's just the two of us now.

MADELINE: I'm the only kid, too. I love my parents, but they do drive me a little crazy.

PAUL: Now, what are the odds that I would walk into a hair salon to meet my mother and instead meet a pretty middle-school science teacher who is also an only child?

MADELINE: Today, the odds were pretty good.

PAUL: I guess so. (*Beat.*) Listen, I don't mean to be too forward, but if you're taking your mom to lunch, and I'm taking my mom to lunch . . . maybe we can all go together.

MADELINE: Well, I bet they know each other. I mean, they're both Jerrilyn's customers, and they're probably back there together talking up a storm right now.

(*MARGARET and PHYLLIS enter, chatting.*)

PHYLLIS: Well, there's my Madeline!

(*She hugs MADELINE.*)

MADELINE: Hi, Mom!

MARGARET: Hello, Paul.

(She kisses his cheek.)

PHYLLIS: This is your son?

MARGARET: Oh, yes, this is Paul. Paul, this is my new friend Phyllis.

PAUL: *(Holding out a hand to PHYLLIS.)* It's very nice to meet you, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS: So nice to meet you, Paul. This is my daughter Madeline.

MARGARET: What a lovely girl! Good to meet you, Madeline. Paul, this is Madeline.

PAUL: We just met while we were waiting for you.

PHYLLIS: Oh, you kept each other company? Isn't that nice?

MADELINE: Mom, Paul invited us to join him and Margaret for lunch. Would that be okay with you?

PHYLLIS: Well, as long as you'll still take me shopping afterward.

MADELINE: Of course I will. Margaret, do you mind if we join you, or would you like some time to have Paul all to yourself?

MARGARET: I've had Paul all to myself all his life. I think I could stand a little company for lunch.

PAUL: Where shall we go?

MADELINE: Oh, how about the Calico Cat? I love their seafood bisque.

MARGARET: That sounds great. I haven't ever been there. Paul, do you know the place?

PAUL: It's one of my favorite places in this city.

MADELINE: Really? Mine, too. I must go there at least twice a week.

PAUL: I can't believe I've never seen you there.

MADELINE: Yeah. Funny, isn't it?

PAUL: Well, shall we go? I guess we'll meet you there . . . ?

MADELINE: Sure. That sounds great. We'll see you there.

MARGARET: See you in a few minutes.

(MARGARET and PAUL exit.)

PHYLLIS: Oh, honey, he's so handsome!

MADELINE: Yeah. He is. And he's a scientist. Weird that we would meet at your hair salon.

PHYLLIS: Oh, Madeline, this is fate.

MADELINE: Mom, I'm a scientist, too. I don't believe in fate.

PHYLLIS: Of course not, darling . . . but it is weird.

(They exit. Lights fade out.)

A Wake!—A Short Wacky Drama
Rebecca Burroughs

Characters

MADY MENDOZA, 30s, director-in-training of the Morning Glory Funeral Home
PERNIA BATES, 40s, SPENCER's wife
SPENCER BATES III, 40s, PERNIA's husband

Setting

All action takes place in a viewing room in the Morning Glory Funeral Home. The time is the present.

(Eerie blue lighting rises. An open casket rests on a slightly raised bier; nearby is found a large spray of roses. A coffee table covered by floor-length cloth and topped by a coffee maker, coffee supplies, glasses, and a pitcher of water stands near the door to the hall. A trash can hugs one table leg. PERNIA sits in a chair by the casket with her face in her hands. Her bag is in her lap. Muzak plays softly. SPENCER sneezes and sits up.)

SPENCER: Roses, for God's sake!

(PERNIA jolts upright. SPENCER climbs out of the casket and grabs the floral spray. He sneezes.)

You know my allergy.

(SPENCER, dressed in a nice suit but wearing only socks on his feet, takes the spray and, at arm's length, starts to jam it down a trash can by the table. PERNIA watches and then leaps up to stop him.)

PERNIA: I paid two hundred dollars for that!

SPENCER: You what?!

PERNIA: (*Grabbing the spray.*) I love roses! And since you never, in twenty-three years, bought me any, I decided to give myself a treat. (*Muttering.*) I knew it. I knew it. I should have had him cremated.

(*She marches back to the casket and replaces the spray in its stand. SPENCER takes a paper napkin from table and folds it over his nose like a protective mask.*)

There. And you can't do a damn thing about it! You're dead!

SPENCER: Bull! Just a temporary coma. I'd be fine if you'd get rid of those damn roses!

PERNIA: Over *my* dead body!

SPENCER: (*Teasing.*) Yes. I want your blood.

PERNIA: Oh, go bite yourself, Dracula. You're just a figment of my imagination.

(*She laughs. SPENCER throws the roses into the casket and slams the lid closed.*)

SPENCER: And I suppose a dead man did that! Don't you get the picture? (*Deflated, she sits.*) All I had was a minor car wreck. A little brain damage—

PERNIA: Hah! You were born brain dead.

SPENCER: But smart enough to know the difference between a coma and comatose. You had me unplugged!

PERNIA: Wanted to do it myself. But the nurse wouldn't let me.

SPENCER: And now I'm back to even the score.

(*PERNIA leaps to her feet and tries to push SPENCER back into the casket. They struggle.*)

Fighting an illusion, are you? Now who's the basket case?

PERNIA: Vegetable!

(SPENCER gently pushes her back into her chair.)

SPENCER: Face it, Pernia! You're not through with me yet.

PERNIA: Where's my valium? This is just a little panic attack. That's all this is! Be calm. *(Chanting.)* Ohm . . . ohm . . . ohm.

(PERNIA grabs her bag and crosses to the coffee table while doing her chants. She gets a glass of water and swallows a pill. SPENCER, laughing, sits on the casket. She swallows second pill and sits.)

All right. All right. Have it your way. What's it going to cost me to get rid of you?

SPENCER: Good. Down to business.

PERNIA: Isn't it always?

SPENCER: *(Straddles her chair.)* In three more days, I would have had to declare bankruptcy.

PERNIA: Impossible. You've been trading night and day for six months.

SPENCER: Pernia, what planet have you been living on? Wake up, dear girl. At least I saw the crash coming.

PERNIA: Which crash?

SPENCER: So I sold all our investments and bought a number of perfect yellow diamonds.

PERNIA: Diamonds! You gave our money to DeBeers! That . . . that thief. DeBeers!

SPENCER: Oh, here we go again.

PERNIA: His miners see their families only once a year! They've committed genocide in Botswana against the Bushman tribe to take their land for mining. Spence, De Beer's Diamonds is raping Africa—her land, her people!

SPENCER: Oh, my God, Eleanor Roosevelt. Is there no liberal, do-gooder bandwagon you won't jump on? Enough. Let's get on with this! I don't have forever. Now, I put the diamonds in your vase with the marbles in the bottom. Did you bring it?

PERNIA: Why should I help you, you cheat?

SPENCER: Did you bring the vase? In the trunk of your car, remember?

PERNIA: Where are your shoes? You look so ridiculous.

SPENCER: They pinched. (*Looking inside the casket.*) I left them in here. (*Leaning far inside.*) Somewhere near the foot—

(*PERNIA shoves him into the casket. He immediately sits up.*)

SPENCER: That didn't hurt a bit. I didn't feel a thing. Not a thing.

PERNIA: I've known *that* for a long time.

(*A noise sounds in the hallway. PERNIA closes the lid to the casket. MADY MENDOZA, the funeral home's director, enters shyly. He carries a clipboard.*)

MADY: Excuse me, ma'am. I'm the director, Mady Mendoza. Perhaps we should leave the casket open since his friends haven't come yet.

PERNIA: The only mourn . . . visitor stands before you. Greed mattered more to him than friends or reputation.

MADY: How sad. I don't have any friends, either.

PERNIA: Why ever not?

MADY: Think about it. (*In an overly friendly voice.*) "Hey, I'd like ya to meet my pal, Mady, the undertaker, a casket huckster." Face it. I am way not cool.

PERNIA: Call yourself a body snatcher, and they'll love ya. So why do you do this?

MADY: It has dignity. And we help families who grieve. Excuse me. Do you . . . I mean . . . the choice of music. I've never been in charge before. First day and all. Is the music okay, uh, satisfactory, madam?

PERNIA: Muzak? Only the dead should have to listen to this sentimental claptrap. Does that answer your question!?

(MADY backs up and then stops.)

MADY: Completely. Clearly. Yes, madam. Yes, indeed. I'll turn it off immediately. Uh, one more thing. I just got here, you know. Not up on all the bodies. Oh, excuse me! I am not familiar with all of the deceased. Across from here is the bulimic girl. Then Mrs. Bessie Pringle is next door. Poor thing. Died of boredom, her husband said. *(He looks at his clipboard.)* And you're . . . hm. I don't see anyone on the schedule for this room. This would be?

PERNIA: Ms. Mendoza, this is Spencer Aloysius Bates the Third.

MADY: I'm just a first.

PERNIA: Morning Glory. I love the name, but I didn't realize this is a black funeral home.

MADY: Oh? Ah, yes. Of course you would notice. But we're open to all groups. Myself, I'm an Afrino.

PERNIA: An afro?

MADY: No, no, no. Hah, hah. Easy mistake. I'm an African-Latino-American. Afrino. A sorta *nuevo* ethnic.

PERNIA: A double-hyphen American. Very good. Exactly how the world should look. Are you the owner?

MADY: No, no. I'm the director-in-training!

PERNIA: Admirable. But you are in charge?

MADY: Oh, yes. With my very own clipboard.

PERNIA: And keys?

MADY: You want me to lock this room for the night?

PERNIA: Since I'm not familiar with this, uh, territory. Do you by any chance have a *casket* with a lock?

(A loud sneeze erupts from inside the casket. PERNIA pretends she did it.)

MADY: A lock? I don't think so. Don't they usually stay where they're put? But I'll call the owner. Maybe a hardware store could—

PERNIA: Here are my keys. Would you please have someone bring in the vase of lilies out in my car trunk?

(MADY exits shaking his head. SPENCER pushes aside the casket's lid and sits up. The Muzak stops.)

SPENCER: Locked casket. Hah. You don't get rid of me that easily.

PERNIA: Stay where you are! Ohm . . . ohm . . . ohm.

SPENCER: See. *(He climbs out.)* I told you this was all momentary. Even Mady said I'm not on his clipboard list.

(SPENCER gives her a smug cuff on the shoulder. Then he pats her shoulder, as if he's sorry for everything.)

PERNIA: Don't.

SPENCER: What?

PERNIA: Touch me like that.

SPENCER: Like what?

(He strokes her hair.)

PERNIA: That.

(SPENCER rubs her shoulders.)

SPENCER: Huh?

PERNIA: Ten . . . tenderly. I know your game. You're trying to soften me up so I'll get you the diamonds. Well, it's too little, too late.

SPENCER: Now that hurts! Worse than when they stitched up my belly.

PERNIA: An autopsy! I knew it! I knew it! You are *so* dead!

(A noise sounds in the hall. SPENCER jumps back into his casket. MADY enters.)

MADY: Here's the flower vase from your car, madam. And a locksmith's on his way. We aim to please. No request is too bizarre. Oh, so sorry. How insensitive. Anything you need, just holl—uh—press *(He points to the wall.)* this button. I'm only a soft, melodious—but not sentimental—ringing tone away.

(MADY exits. SPENCER climbs out of the casket, picks up the roses, and crosses to PERNIA at the table.)

SPENCER: I wish I'd bought you flowers more often.

PERNIA: You used to bring flowers just to say you loved me. Spence, why have you stayed with me?

(SPENCER sneezes and puts the roses in the trash can.)

SPENCER: Because you're the only woman who enjoyed winter driving with me over Colorado's mountain passes.

PERNIA: The back way from Ouray to Silverton. The most narrow, scariest road in Colorado.

SPENCER: Yeah. The one with all the avalanches.

PERNIA: When you edged around the last one, there wasn't more than an inch between us and a sheer drop of a thousand feet. That was our last close—

SPENCER: Close call. You were so cool. You just laughed.

PERNIA: That's so I wouldn't scream.

(He takes the lilies out of the vase and empties the vase into the trash can. Beads and a mesh bag fall into the can. He pulls out the bag; it contains diamonds.)

PERNIA: So. What's your plan? Take your loot and fly off to some exotic island with a bimbo?

SPENCER: These aren't for me, Pernia. They're for you.

PERNIA: Me?

SPENCER: Get yourself a ticket to an off-shore paradise, and the IRS can't lay a hand on you. *(Handing her the diamonds.)* Here. Enough rocks to keep you in muumuus for the rest of your tropical life.

PERNIA: Paradise, Spence, is what we had and then lost. *(She hands the bag back to him.)* Besides, you know I'm not a crook. So, why?

SPENCER: Nothing else to do. I knew you'd come to hate me. No surprise that you pulled the plug.

PERNIA: Oh, I didn't pull it. Nobody did. I wouldn't let them.

SPENCER: But I heard you.

PERNIA: Sure. I was pissed . . . but out in the hall, I told the doctor to wait a while longer.

SPENCER: Then I did the right thing. But I had to come back to make sure you got the diamonds. Even if you do hate DeBeers.

PERNIA: I hate the company, not you. Not at first. But these last years, Spence . . . you've had no time for me . . . us. Business, business. And where have your adrenaline thrills gotten you? Falling asleep at the wheel. An over-the-edge wreck.

(A noise sounds in the hall. SPENCER jumps into his casket. Blackout. MADY enters.)

MADY: Mrs. Bates, are you all right? Oh, dear. Oh, dear! What can the matter be? I paid the electricity bill. I'm just sure. At least, I think I did. Oh, dear. Oh, dear!

(MADY turns on a white light. PERNIA lies slumped against the casket; a bandage has become visible on her forehead. No vase, lilies, or diamonds are present.)

MADY: Mrs. Bates? Madam, wake up. Your husband's on his way to get you. He said your accident must have confused you because you drove off after calling him. Oh, dear. Oh, dear!

(PERNIA rises and opens the casket.)

PERNIA: He's not here. He's not here.

MADY: I brought you in and gave you first-aid. Then I found your number and called him. I *knew* there wasn't a body scheduled for this room. He's rushing to your side.

PERNIA: I've got to stop him. He's going to have an accident. *(She pulls her cellular phone from her bag and dials.)* Answer, damn it! Answer . . . please.

MADY: While you're waiting, I'd like to show you our deluxe demonstration model.

PERNIA: Spence, damn you, don't fall asleep!

MADY: Our finest mahogany silk-lined—but without a lock—casket. You can sensibly prepay all your funeral expenses now or join our very friendly, pay-by-the-month club *(PERNIA runs from the room; MADY yells after her.)*, and your money back if not completely satisfied! Wait, that can't be right.

(A small sneeze sounds behind him. When MADY turns, the casket lid rises, and a hand reaches out and drops a rose to the floor. The hand hangs limply.)

MADY (CONT.): Aargh!

(He leaps back, dropping his clipboard. He looks around slowly. He lifts the hand and places it back into the casket with obvious distaste. Then he slams the lid and backs away.)

Oh, dear. She's right. We do need locks! Aargh!

(He races to the door and flips out the light as he exits.)

Heatwave: Can You Say, “Hell’s Kitchen”?
Sheila Rinear

Characters

LAURA, 20, RICH and TRINA’s sister and a college sophomore

RICH, 40s, LAURA and TRINA’s brother

TRINA, 30, LAURA and RICH’s sister

Setting

The action takes place in San Antonio, Texas, in the kitchen that belongs to Laura, Rich, and Trina’s mother. The time is the second week of September in 2009.

(Lights rise on TRINA, who sits at a kitchen table drinking coffee and reading her Bible. She pauses and lifts her eyes heavenward.)

TRINA: Lord God, fifty-nine days of one hundred-degree heat? Come on, Lord. Please do not let us go to sixty days. Amen.

(Offstage, LAURA calls.)

LAURA: Trina. Where are you? Trina?

TRINA: In the kitchen.

(LAURA enters, huffing in anger. She carries a snow shovel, which she uses like a fan throughout the next beat.)

LAURA: Oops. Sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt you reading your—

TRINA: My Bible? I’m mostly checking to see how the folks in the Old Testament prayed to be rid of their droughts.

LAURA: Really? Oh . . . you mean like us? Pray for rain, too? Oh, duh. I get it. Can you do that?

TRINA: Now, Laura, stop and think about what you just said, okay?

LAURA: I don't have time. But, listen, I'm glad you have time to do all that kinda stuff.

TRINA: Yeah. I've got more time on my hands now and less money thanks to "corporate restructuring."

LAURA: I thought it was 'cause you got fired.

(TRINA gazes in amazement at her little sister and shakes her head.)

TRINA: Good thing you're cute.

LAURA: Thanks.

TRINA: Don't you have classes to attend this morning, sweetie? Something that'll help you sound a tad more intelligent? *(She notes LAURA's confused look.)* Never mind. What's with the shovel?

LAURA: Richie's here. He says he's taking it.

TRINA: Where?

LAURA: To his apartment. Then to Minnesota. He said he's packing and moving back.

TRINA: What?

LAURA: *(Beginning all over again.)* To his apart— *(TRINA signals her to stop.)* He says he's moving. Isn't that awful?

TRINA: And isn't Mom gonna just be thrilled with that news?

LAURA: No. I don't think she will. Really. It's a really good thing Mom's at yoga class. She's gonna need all that . . . *(She demonstrates a yoga breath.)* breath.

(As they speak, RICH enters. He is soaked with sweat and starved for energy. The sisters do not see him.)

TRINA: Laura. Set the shovel down before you break something.

RICH: I'll take it.

TRINA: I didn't even hear you come in.

RICH: 'Cause when I opened the door, you didn't hear them. They're all dead.

LAURA AND TRINA: Who?

RICH: Birds, crickets, cicadas, animals moving through the brush, camels grunting, galloping castanets. All the creatures that used to chirp in the summer sun? They've been fried.

TRINA: You know, you do that a lot. You rattle off long strange lists of . . . things.

RICH: I've got a knack for humorous elaboration.

TRINA: No. Actually, you don't.

RICH: Really. You really think that I don't? And now you're wondering if that's why Jen divorced me, aren't you? Fine. Let's play "Pick on Richie" again and list all the reasons you think Jen divorced me.

LAURA: You do sound like a computer sometimes.

RICH: I work for Dell. What do you want?

LAURA: I want you to not move. I like having my big brother in town.

RICH: Sweetie, we've had fifty-nine one hundred-degree days. I gotta get outta this kiln.

LAURA: So you can shovel snow and have a heart attack and die just like Dad?

(LAURA and RICH proceed to play tug of war with the shovel. RICH wins.)

Just remember: no one ever died from shoveling heat.

RICH: No, but people do die from heat stroke. Look on the bright side. Next summer when you're melting again, you can come visit me.

TRINA: Wow! Minnesota. Such a lot of . . . of . . . ground to see. Oh, but I'm forgetting to mention the main attractions: you and the Mall of America.

RICH: They've got great theatre in Minneapolis.

LAURA: Is that near Minnesota?

TRINA: Yes, dear. One's a city, and one's a state.

LAURA: I get that stuff confused a lot. What else is up there? States? Cities?

RICH: Lakes. Fresh air. Sweaters. Jackets. Flannel shirts.

LAURA: Flannel . . . ? What?

RICH: I rest my case. (*To TRINA.*) She's been here so long, she doesn't even know what flannel is.

TRINA: Think of all the things you'll miss down here.

LAURA: Fiesta!

TRINA: The Alamo!

LAURA: Dave and Buster's.

TRINA: The River Walk!

LAURA: Fatso's!

TRINA: The Hill Country.

LAURA: Good Time Charlie's.

TRINA: The Majestic.

LAURA: Durty Nelly's. Ripley's Haunted—

RICH: Fine. I'll miss the Spurs, but I already miss Mom's lawn.

LAURA: Why?

RICH: It's gone. Like fifty percent of the lawns in this city. Have you really looked at it? It looks like the moon out there.

TRINA: It'll come back.

RICH: Right . . . and Bernie Madoff's getting out of jail.

LAURA: He is? (*Beat.*) Who's that?

RICH: Neither of you realizes another dust bowl, worse than the first one, is in the making.

LAURA: Another? Really? I must have missed the other one.

(*RICH nods.*)

RICH: I kid you not. This is the hottest summer since 1885.

LAURA: (*She giggles.*) Well, yeah. Pfft! 1885! That was the Ice Age. Am I right? And as for your silly dust ball, I take it you mean something along the lines of little Grenadine's hairballs. Well, people *love* Swiffers, so there you go. No worries about dust.

(*RICH and TRINA both sigh.*)

TRINA: Laura, honey, could you go see if I left the Swiffer utensils in the garage? Thanks for reminding me about them. (*LAURA shrugs and leaves.*) She's got two more years of college, thank God.

RICH: If she doesn't fail out.

TRINA: Oh, no. She's on the Dean's List.

RICH: What? How is that even possible?

TRINA: Oh, settle down and tell me what facts you're putting together to justify moving away.

RICH: Treen, temperature records are not being broken. They're being shattered. The only worse record is thirty-six days of one hundred-degree heat in 1998. It's draining people's energy and leaving record highs of people depressed. And the high heat with no rain? You've seen the wildfires? Crop failures?

TRINA: And this really makes you want to leave Texas? Wait a minute. You want to try to get Jen back.

RICH: Nah. She told me if I ever tried to talk to her again, she'd commit suicide. I take that woman at her word. She would do it, too. To spite me.

TRINA: So, Richie, okay. Try this: water Mom's lawn. Run your feet through the grass, ya know? Relax about all this stuff.

RICH: I can't.

TRINA: Why?

RICH: 'Cause I feel guilty about it being so bad. I'd have watered it more if I hadn't been so worried about losing my job. I missed the water restriction times. When it was Wednesday, I'd think, "Tomorrow, I'll water." Then I'd forget, and by then it was Friday; and I'd hear the guy on TV: "You know you must conserve." But I kept thinking . . . hoping the rain would come. A gentle, nourishing, soaking rain kissing the ground with Mother Nature's love. It gets me—now I'm not kidding, so please don't laugh—it gets me really upset to see the earth look so Godforsaken. When San Antonio was green and beautiful and alive, I felt alive, too. It's like I didn't do anything to help this land, and I don't feel worthy of living on it. (*He looks at the shovel.*) I was over here last week . . . and just picking up the shovel, a cool breath ran through me, calling me back to life. I can't explain it. I love the snow and the lakes up north, and I know when the land feels cursed like it does here. I do.

(*TRINA opens her Bible.*)

TRINA: Richie, you've done nothing wrong. I think, because of this heat and drought, we've all learned a big lesson in conservation and such. Listen. (*She reads.*) "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest." Proverbs.

(*LAURA enters empty-handed.*)

RICH: (*Grinning.*) "Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool."

TRINA: Ouch!

RICH: I'm playing.

LAURA: I want to play. (*She looks through the proverbs.*) Here. "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." What the heck does that mean?

RICH: It means I'm not going to miss my sisters' advice and their turning up the heat on trying to talk me out of leaving hell's kitchen.

TRINA: Maybe we're hoping you'll notice how much we care about you and want to nurture and nourish you. Like rain?

(*Beat.*)

RICH: I've got to pack. I've got to get out of this tinderbox.

(*RICH has almost exited when TRINA calls to him.*)

TRINA: Richie, could you try leaving this "tinderbox" with some love? Wouldn't you rather embrace the wonderful memories about San Antonio that have brought your life meaning and happiness? You've loved it here. You've done good living here. (*He turns to her.*) Can't you walk away from it with appreciation the way you'll walk away from those of us who will love you no matter what you decide to do?

(*Beat. Loud claps of thunder sound. Steady rainfall begins. They listen, stunned.*)

Is that . . . rain?

LAURA: It's raining. It's raining.

(RICH hollers and runs outside. LAURA and TRINA hug each other and run to the window to watch the rain. RICH comes back in all wet and laughing.)

RICH: It's raining like there's no end to it.

(He picks up the shovel.)

LAURA: What're you doing with that shovel?

RICH: Putting it back up so I can use it in one of the Fiesta parades next year.

(The siblings joyfully group hug and look outside as the sound of the falling rain grows louder and louder. Lights fade out.)

A Realization Brought by an Intruding Guest

John McCarthy

Characters

THAN (THANATOS), a confident and calm man with a business-like attitude
TYRELL, a common-looking man of timid nature and awkward stature

Setting

All action takes place in Tyrell's apartment. The time is the present.

(Lights rise on TYRELL's apartment. Lights remain dim. One can make out a nightstand, a couch, a table with two chairs, and some clothes on the floor. TYRELL enters. He appears excited. In his hand, he squeezes a letter. He throws it down on the table with a simultaneous exclamation.)

TYRELL: I finally got accepted! They're actually going to publish me! This is great. *(He takes a seat.)* An accomplishment without a witness requires a cigar.

(He places his feet atop the table in a dignified manner, produces a large cigar, wastes no time lighting it, and let out an over-dramatic sigh. A noise is heard in the hallway.)

That could have been one of two things: the cat being too curious or the cross falling from above my bed. I need a new nail to hang it upon.

(THAN enters.)

THAN: I'm sorry about that. I have a tendency to trip and sometimes fall.

TYRELL: Who the Hell are you?

THAN: Someone in need of . . . conversation.

TYRELL: Or someone in need of exiting my house?

THAN: I'd very much like to talk to you. Please. (*He puts his hands in his hair to show no threat.*) I mean no harm.

TYRELL: I don't know who you are. What do you want? I just want you to get out.

THAN: Please. I just want to talk. I heard you remarking that you just got published. What's that about?

TYRELL: Just sit down. (*Cautiously.*) I've just received publication for the first time, and I would like to boast a bit. If you take a seat and share this cigar with me, I don't see why I should be hostile and unwelcoming.

THAN: Thank you.

TYRELL: (*Hesitantly.*) May I ask why you're here?

THAN: This is what I do.

TYRELL: Trespassing is sure an odd profession.

THAN: So is writing. It seems only fools think their thoughts are original enough to write down.

TYRELL: Hm.

(*He passes the cigar to THAN.*)

THAN: Well, congratulations on getting published. (*In a sly, inconspicuous tone.*) Shall I expect your novel to be on the shelf soon?

TYRELL: (*Chuckling.*) Oh, no, no, no. A single poem of mine was picked up by a small press somewhere on the east coast. Nothing admirable.

THAN: You sure seem excited.

TYRELL: Of course I am . . . but as far as external recognition goes, there is nothing to say.

THAN: You're an existentialist, aren't ya?

TYRELL: A what?

THAN: Are you a writer?

(He hands back the cigar.)

TYRELL: *(Smugly but still hesitantly.)* Obviously.

THAN: Maybe half of one.

TYRELL: Is that an insult? I have half a mind to kick you out of my house. Are you a thief?

THAN: Not yet.

TYRELL: What of mine have you taken?

THAN: *(Quite seriously.)* Nothing. I haven't found anything valuable yet.

TYRELL: What am I thinking? Get out of my house.

THAN: Just hold on. I'm messing with you. I'm a lonely person. I just want to talk.

TYRELL: *(Looking at him cautiously.)* Get out.

THAN: Do you have a copy of the poem that is getting published?

TYRELL: Of course.

THAN: Let me read it.

TYRELL: *(Putting out the cigar.)* Very well.

(He stands up and pulls said poem from his pocket. He extends the poem to THAN, who takes the poem and skims over it.)

THAN: Not bad. It was somewhat good. Halfhearted, mostly.

(TYRELL yanks the poem back.)

TYRELL: I don't take kindly to that kind of abuse!

THAN: It's just criticism. It's a writer's best friend. I thought you would know that. Have you ever had your ass kicked?

TYRELL: Excuse me?

THAN: Have you ever been physically beaten to where you were in pain and spilling blood in a manner considered dangerous?

TYRELL: No. And why should I?

THAN: It teaches one the place of inferiority.

TYRELL: Have you had your face pummeled before? If you don't—

THAN: I have been looked in the face.

TYRELL: That pious tone of yours is going to garner you a nice lifestyle of fists if you don't leave.

THAN: You're not going to hit me. You would have done so already, and you're too indifferent about my presence to act.

TYRELL: *(Angrily, with sarcasm.)* Are you my superior or something? Get out!

THAN: This conversation does clearly define the extraordinary from the subservient.

(TYRELL sits down in a state of extreme agitation.)

TYRELL: Please get out! Is your intrusion here going to take much longer, or are you just going to insult me all night?

THAN: I don't know. Sometimes, I'm quick.

TYRELL: *(As if held back by an unseen force.)* You're lucky I haven't called the cops. I don't understand why I haven't.

THAN: It makes no difference.

TYRELL: Do you want to go to jail?

THAN: That is the most arbitrary question I have ever heard. I find it funny that you're attempting to threaten me with hypotheticals.

TYRELL: You talk like a damn book.

THAN: You talk like an infant and write like an idiot.

TYRELL: Get out!

THAN: I can tell you're not a metaphysician.

TYRELL: Metafiction?

(THAN laughs loudly.)

THAN: You're a stubborn fool.

TYRELL: You're a criminal. I want you out of my house now.

THAN: I'm more of a sophist, really, if not a lifesaver.

(He laughs at the irony.)

TYRELL: You're an asshole. Get out!

THAN: Once I'm in, I can't leave this mansion of many apartments. Unfortunately, I haven't found anything of too much value in this mansion. I'm sticking around in hopes you'll just give me a diamond, if not the whole crystal.

TYRELL: *(Confused.)* So you are a thief.

THAN: Um. Theoretically.

TYRELL: Enough of this talk. (*Pleading.*) What can I do to get you to leave?

THAN: Give me something of value.

TYRELL: Fine. Go to my room. Underneath my bed, there is a little box. In it is one thousand dollars. I keep it for emergency relief. I need to be relieved of you. Take it.

THAN: Dollars?

TYRELL: Yes, dollars. Federal Reserve bank notes. It's all yours.

THAN: I need something of value.

TYRELL: You can do a lot with one thousand dollars.

THAN: Not what I like to do. Besides, money is even more arbitrary than jail.

(*TYRELL places his head in his hands.*)

TYRELL: What can I possibly give you?

(*THAN remains silent for a few beats, staring at TYRELL.*)

THAN: I need—

TYRELL: I'll give you anything. Ask me more questions. Just leave. I want to work on a few more poems and enjoy the small minor success that has somehow miraculously come my way.

THAN: I wouldn't bother. The publication of your poems—rather, poem singular—will be attributed to luck and the editor's ignorance. Your poem is like a molecule of water brushing a whale's skin.

TYRELL: You don't know what you're talking about. My poems are worth publication, and with a little more luck, I'll be associated with the anthologies one day.

THAN: (*Laughing.*) Hardly. Are you familiar with negative capability?

TYRELL: No, but I'm willing to learn if it will get you out of here.

THAN: It's too late for that. Your world view is too narrow to accept the uncertainties that opened the apartments of your Norton idols.

TYRELL: I can make sense. I can talk sense. Tell me! I want to be a better writer! I'll be better for it!

THAN: I'm not capable of telling you. After your youth you were given a chance to enter into a plethora of abilities. Unfortunately, luck hasn't made itself known to you and your environment. It's only showed you the common despair of being negative and not its capabilities. You resemble, at best and under a microscope, a pathetic Schopenhauer . . . if Schopenhauer had average things to say.

TYRELL: (*Pathetically.*) I gave myself to writing, though. It's what I love.

THAN: Many things fail to reciprocate. That's why self-awareness is a good thing. Believing in guidelines and myths produces nothing but what I'm looking at right now.

TYRELL: (*Sounding almost defeated.*) Can I salvage anything?

THAN: That's why I haven't left yet. You shouldn't be so persistent on seeing me go. I can help you, and you can give me something I want. Let me ask you a question. I'm surprised this topic hasn't come up yet, as I am often associated with it. How do you view God, Tyrell?

TYRELL: I was happier with Him.

THAN: Was that because you weren't happy or confident enough to believe in Him yourself?

TYRELL: Uh . . . I know that I feel guilty now.

THAN: Is that because you read a little theory, like Nietzsche, and the exposure of a little reason allowed you to reject the idea of what He could be?

TYRELL: I suppose.

THAN: The trace of guilt that remains seems to be hindering your sense of direction. Your thoughts seem to be orbiting the same guilty fixation. You have rejected the burden but kept the burden.

TYRELL: (*Sadly.*) That makes sense.

THAN: Even now you are letting me define things for you. I'm afraid this conversation will continue, but I should let you know that you should have stuck with God. You don't have the self-assurance to be anything else.

TYRELL: I guess I've never thought of it that way.

THAN: I know. That's why I have stalled with you so long. I don't know why, but I have a tendency to take pity on people like yourself.

TYRELL: Excuse me?

THAN: I'm not insulting you. I'm preparing you.

TYRELL: Okay. (*Nervously.*) What else is there?

THAN: You can't see God, but you can see yourself. Not everyone can see himself wholly. The mass of men aren't aware of their unconscious, and it is this hidden part of yourself that determines who you are and how you live. I think it has been called the superego, among other things. This incognizant state also parallels the idea of God. It makes sense that if humans were able to bring themselves into an understanding of their subconscious they could effectively bring themselves in touch with God. Are you following me?

TYRELL: To the best of my ability.

THAN: It is to the best of your need. (*He clears his throat.*) In effect, those people who choose to believe in God are unable or unwilling to accept themselves wholly. And a man who is unwilling to choose either stance is less than human. (*Long pause.*) But it makes no difference to me either way. No one is right unless he finds something out by himself, for himself.

TYRELL: I appreciate what you have to say, but I still feel guilty.

THAN: I am sorry.

TYRELL: Me, too.

THAN: Ah, well. It doesn't really matter. Even though I can't find any value here, I will still get what I want. (*He checks his fingernails.*) Are you familiar with the Italian proverb about the king and the pawn?

TYRELL: Yes. (*He chuckles nervously.*) Will I see you where the two of them meet?

THAN: I am already there. I'm beyond any sense of what we just made sounds about, and so is what I'm going to take from you, regardless of value. I am the victor over the fort of folly. I have one question, though. What have you learned?

TYRELL: I know when I'm going to die.

THAN: You're a little smarter than I thought . . . but correct your statement.

TYRELL: I know when I'm dead.

THAN: You can do better.

TYRELL: I know I'm dead.

THAN: That is not satisfactory.

TYRELL: I'm dead.

THAN: Right you are! What you feel right now is how you are. How do you feel?

TYRELL: Dead.

THAN: That is the fate of fact and you. I'm only here to reassure.

(*Sporting a protruding grin, he motions as if he's tipping his hat. Blackout.*)

Creatures That Move along the Ground

David Starkey

Characters

CHRISTINA, a nineteen-year-old girl
CHRISTINA'S MOM

Time and Place

The action takes place in a house in Brentwood, California. The time is the present.

(CHRISTINA'S MOM sits in a chair reading Mother Jones magazine and sipping a glass of wine. CHRISTINA is on her cell phone, pacing the room.)

CHRISTINA: Okay. Okay. I'll call you at noon tomorrow, okay? 'Bye. *(Beat.)*
I love you, too.

(She hangs up.)

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Who was that?

CHRISTINA: It was Jack. Who do you think it was?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Oh. I didn't know. *(Beat.)* How's Kentucky or wherever?

CHRISTINA: Kentucky is really cold. It's snowing there.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Hm.

CHRISTINA: What's that supposed to mean? "Hm"?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Nothing. I was just thinking that it never snows in Brentwood.

CHRISTINA: Some people like snow. I liked it when I went out there.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You wouldn't like it if you had to live there all the time. All winter. (*Beat.*) Yuck.

CHRISTINA: Mom, you're always looking for reasons to hate Jack. It doesn't matter what they are.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That's not true.

CHRISTINA: It is true—you don't want me to have a boyfriend.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina! That's *not* true.

CHRISTINA: It seems like it's true.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Well, it's not. (*Beat.*) So what's he doing tonight? Jack.

CHRISTINA: (*Dreamily, thinking of Jack.*) Nothing. He just got back from McDonald's.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *McDonald's*? What was he eating, a *hamburger*?

CHRISTINA: (*Immediately realizing her mistake.*) God, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I thought you said he was a vegan.

CHRISTINA: I didn't say that. Exactly.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Yes, you did. That's exactly what you said: "Jack's a vegan."

CHRISTINA: I just said he'd thought about becoming one. (*Beat.*) A while ago.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Okay, Christina, I'm starting to put all this together now. It's a sham, isn't it? All the positive things you say about Jack . . . you're making them up, aren't you?

CHRISTINA: I'm not, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Like joining in that protest against those goons who threw live hens into a wood-chipping machine just because they were "spent." He didn't really march against egg-farming, did he?

CHRISTINA: He told me he thought that was sick, what those people did.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: But he wasn't out there on the front lines, holding up a sign, like you said?

CHRISTINA: I'm not sure . . .

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I'm stupid, aren't I? Being idealistic must make you stupid.

CHRISTINA: No.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Well, it *seems* like it does. What was I thinking? You told me he was a Republican. What Republican wants to become a vegan?

CHRISTINA: God, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Name one.

CHRISTINA: Jack does, okay? Like, someday . . . maybe. (*Defensively.*) You think that just because someone doesn't live in California, he's a total loser.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: No. I just think you hardly know this guy. This Jack. You've only been around him two times. For a total of, like, six days. I just think you're too young to have a long-distance relationship. Especially with someone you don't even know.

CHRISTINA: He's a nice guy, Mom. I wish you'd just see that. I love him, okay? I really love him, and I want to make this work.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina, you don't know what love is. You're in love with the idea of love, but you don't know what real love is.

CHRISTINA: Like *you* do?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Yes, I think I do. First of all, it involves being with someone who shares your same beliefs. You're a vegetarian, right?

CHRISTINA: You know I am.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Doesn't that put you off? Being with someone who eats meat?

CHRISTINA: We talk about it all the time, Mom. It's not like it never comes up. We joke about it.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You *joke* about it? Eating animals? I don't think that's funny.

CHRISTINA: You have to admit, Mom. You're pretty over the top. Not everybody feels as strongly as you do.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That doesn't mean I'm wrong. I'm wrong because other people are wrong? Is that what you're saying?

CHRISTINA: I'm just saying you can be a decent human being and still eat meat.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: There must be something wrong with my hearing.
(*Tapping her hand against her ear as though the organ is defective.*) Is there something wrong with my hearing? I don't believe this.

CHRISTINA: Believe it, Mom. I want to make up my own mind about things.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Like killing animals? Do you want to go hunting now? Is that what he's telling you, that you have to go hunting to be with him?

CHRISTINA: No, Mom, he's not telling me that.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Do you want me to buy you a gun? A forty ought seven? A double-barrel elephant gun? A machine gun, so you can go out and massacre little squirrels?

(CHRISTINA'S MOM makes machine-gun sounds and mimics mowing down a field of helpless squirrels.)

CHRISTINA: God, Mom, you're impossible.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *I'm* impossible? I'm not the one who wants to go around exterminating cows. Like Jack.

CHRISTINA: Mom, Jack is a nice guy. He had a dog when he was growing up, okay? Flippy. He totally loved it. He likes cats.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That's what he tells you. I'll bet he was one of those teenage boys—on Halloween they shove a firecracker up kitty's ass. *Kaboom!*

CHRISTINA: Okay, Mom, I'm leaving now. You're really making me mad. You're so unfair.

(Short beat. CHRISTINA does not leave.)

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I'm not unfair, Christina. I'm just realistic. You have this "boyfriend" you meet over the Internet. You sleep with him a few times. All of sudden, you're changing. All the values I thought you held are just gone. I can't help but think he's brainwashing you.

CHRISTINA: Mom, I told you, I just want to make up my own mind about things. Everything I believe is because you told me to believe it. You don't care about my opinions. You're just like *your* mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: That's hurtful, Christina. It really is.

CHRISTINA: It's true. Don't you think I have the right to make up my own mind about things?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Yes, I do. *(Short beat.)* To a certain extent. But if you want to go around with some guy who probably spends his time making fun of PETA, I don't agree with that. Is he one of those people who calls it "People Eating Tasty Animals"?

CHRISTINA: He doesn't make fun of PETA, Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: So you mean he doesn't believe in the ethical treatment of animals? Your boyfriend, he, like, hates PETA?

CHRISTINA: Are you even listening to *anything* I'm saying? No, he doesn't. God. He's just not a vegetarian.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: So he eats animals. Their butchered, roasted bodies.

CHRISTINA: Okay, Mom, most *animals* eat animals. Did you ever think about that?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: (*Sarcastically.*) Gee, Christina, I've never heard meat-eaters make *that* argument before. Hopefully, humans have evolved beyond that point. Animals don't have a choice. We do.

CHRISTINA: So anyone who's not a vegetarian is what? Morally bankrupt?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You said it. I didn't.

CHRISTINA: (*Suddenly very upset.*) You just don't want me to be in love! You hate the idea that I'm in love!

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina, you know that's not true.

(*CHRISTINA'S MOM goes over and puts her hand on her daughter's shoulder. CHRISTINA pulls off her mother's hand.*)

CHRISTINA: Get away from me!

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Christina, honey, I just want what's best for you. I want you to marry someone who's not going to make you conform to his twisted beliefs.

CHRISTINA: (*Crying, but not very hard.*) He's not "twisted," Mom.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: (*Conciliatory.*) Okay, maybe he's a nice guy. I don't know. You're right. I've never met him. But listen. Do you know that holding pen for cattle on I-5, on the way up to Grandma's in Sacramento?

CHRISTINA: Yeah. What does that have to do with anything?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Don't you think that's disgusting?

CHRISTINA: Of course I do.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: A bunch of cows all herded together, living in their own shit, waiting to be slaughtered. Do you find that picture appetizing?

CHRISTINA: No.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Well, your boyfriend eats those cows. He eats them.

CHRISTINA: Mom, you're off the map. You really are. You're totally on another planet.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Does he eat at Kentucky Fried Chicken?

CHRISTINA: Probably. God, I don't believe you.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: Live scalding and debeaking. Throats slashed. That's inhuman. Or it's the worst of humanity. Don't you want to be better than those people? Those *carnivores*.

CHRISTINA: Mom . . .

CHRISTINA'S MOM: (*Fed up; she's not the conciliatory type.*) What's your boyfriend doing right now? Eating another hamburger? Is he one of those guys who can't eat just one hamburger, he has to eat two or three? Why don't you call him up, on *my* phone bill, and see which particular animal he's eating right now? A goat? A buffalo? A fox? Maybe he's eating a yak. Does he like yak burgers?

(*CHRISTINA goes to the door.*)

CHRISTINA: Okay, I am truly leaving this time. You've gone so far beyond where *anyone* has a right to go. You're just so *extreme*. I can't take it anymore. Maybe I'll move out there with Jack. Quit college. We'll go hunting every day. Eat yak burgers. Wear mink coats.

(*CHRISTINA waits at the door. CHRISTINA'S MOM sits back down in her chair, takes a sip of her wine, and picks up her magazine. Beat.*)

CHRISTINA (CONT.): Aren't you going to say anything?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: What do you want me to say, Christina? You've made up your mind. You're nineteen years old. What am I going to do?

(CHRISTINA'S MOM flips through her magazine, ignoring her daughter.)

CHRISTINA: Mom, say something. Anything. Tell me about the Canadian seal slaughter . . . or testing chemicals on bunny rabbits . . . or the poor starlings being caught in glue traps. *(CHRISTINA'S MOM continues to ignore her.)* Come on, Mom. Tell me my boyfriend's a beast.

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *(Looking up over her magazine.)* He may be a lot of things, Christina, but he's not a beast. *(Clearing her throat, quoting.)* "In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beast of the field, and with the bird of the heavens, and the creatures that move along the ground, and I will betroth myself unto thee to eternity."

(Beat. CHRISTINA doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.)

CHRISTINA: How many glasses of wine have you had tonight? That's, like, the Bible, isn't it? Since when have *you* started quoting from the Bible?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: I just thought, since you're all right-wing and everything now, that it might make an impression on you.

CHRISTINA: *(With supreme sarcasm.)* Oh, you did, huh? Well, thanks. *(Beat.)* By the way, could you say that quote again?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: *(Self-righteously.)* "In that day will I make a covenant with the beast of the field, and with the bird of the heavens, and the creatures that move along the ground, and I will betroth myself unto thee to eternity."

CHRISTINA: Okay, that totally does not make any sense. First of all, who's talking? It sounds like God's talking. Are you saying God wants to, like, marry the creatures that move along the ground? Or that you do?

CHRISTINA'S MOM: You're the Bible-thumping Republican. You tell me.

CHRISTINA: Whatever, Mom. Okay? I mean, *whatever*. You are so not pulling that “creatures that move along the ground” shit on me. It’s ridiculous. I’m going to my room now. If you want to have a sensible conversation, just let me know, but I don’t want to talk to you until you do.

(CHRISTINA’S MOM shrugs. CHRISTINA exits. CHRISTINA’S MOM goes back to her magazine. She finishes the rest of her wine in one long swallow. Long beat. CHRISTINA pokes her head back into the room.)

CHRISTINA: Mom?

CHRISTINA’S MOM: Yes?

CHRISTINA : *(Beat.)* Good night.

(A slight smile of victory appears on CHRISTINA’S MOM’s face, but she says nothing. Beat. Blackout.)

These Last Words

Gabriel Ruiz

Primary Characters

DEREK, early to mid-20s, a new college graduate
FREA, early 20s, the object of DEREK's affection
KATRINA, mid-20s, DEREK's ex-girlfriend
NATHAN, early to mid-20s, DEREK's best friend
RUDY, mid-20s, a drunk party guest

Secondary Characters

EXTRAS, party guests

Setting

The action takes place after college graduation at a house party. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(DEREK and NATHAN enter through the center of the audience. DEREK is mumbling to himself. The curtain is closed during this scene.)

NATHAN: Here we are. You ready?

DEREK: *(To himself.)* I've known you for a few years. I've always seen you as a good friend, but I have a confession to make. *(Beat.)* No, that's not going to work.

NATHAN: What the hell are you doing?

DEREK: I'm still thinking about what I'm going to say to Frea.

NATHAN: You're still thinking about that? You've been saying the same things over and over again on a loop the whole ride up here. Stop thinking. It's not going to help you.

DEREK: Well, it's making me nervous.

NATHAN: Listen to me, Mister BA in BS. This is what you do, and you better pay attention to this: when you see her, just say whatever comes out of your mouth and let the words flow.

DEREK: I know that, Nathan, but I just have to do this tonight. I'm leaving town tomorrow, and I know if I don't tell her, I'll end up regretting it.

NATHAN: So tell me again. Why are you doing this? Of all the years you've known her—all those times you were alone, snuggled up on a cold, wet winter's night when all you had to do was rub noses—you choose now as the time to profess your love to her.

DEREK: Have you ever loved somebody so much it makes you cry? Have you ever needed someone so bad you can't sleep at night? Have you? Have you?

NATHAN: You're so madly in love that you've resorted to quoting nineties love songs?

DEREK: What do you want me to say? That I fell for her the first time I met her? That if I don't tell her how I feel, I'll be asking myself "If only . . . ?" for the rest of my life and long after I'm dead?

NATHAN: Okay, then. I guess we're not just here to party.

DEREK: I can tell you are. This is my first, last, and only chance. How would I ever know if I—?

NATHAN: Okay. Enough. Who do you think you are? Some lovesick puppy quote machine? Derek, look at me. You can do this. You just need to have the confidence.

DEREK: What do you mean by that?

NATHAN: You know. The confidence.

(He begins to perform a dance that hints at a pelvic thrust.)

DEREK: You're right. I can do this. I'm confident. I'm confident.

(He mimics NATHAN's dance while repeating "I'm confident.")

NATHAN: You're scared, aren't you?

(DEREK stops his dance.)

DEREK: Like a little child.

NATHAN: Good! Let's get in there.

DEREK: *(Taking a deep breath.)* Here goes nothing.

(As NATHAN starts to move towards the closed curtain, DEREK freezes while taking deep breaths. NATHAN grabs him.)

NATHAN: Will you just get in there?

(NATHAN pushes him towards the curtain, and it opens.)

Scene 2

(The set is decorated in the style of a regular college graduation party. There are some guests on one end of the stage playing some type of drinking game, and more guests are gathered around a couch. DEREK starts to look around the room for FREA while NATHAN starts looking for a drink.)

DEREK: Do you think she's here?

NATHAN: Well, I don't know. Seeing that this is her house, I'm guessing . . . maybe she's somewhere in the general vicinity.

(DEREK gives him a look.)

NATHAN: Just a guess.

DEREK: I don't see her anywhere.

NATHAN: Derek, for the love of God! Frea is not going to walk right up to you and leap into your arms.

DEREK: (*Looking USL.*) I think I see her.

NATHAN: Yeah. Trust me, that's her. *Go!*

(*NATHAN hastily pushes him USL while FREA enters from SR. NATHAN looks USL, trying to call DEREK.*)

NATHAN: Der— (*He notices FREA behind him.*) Hey, Frea.

FREA: Nathan. What's up? Glad you could make it. (*They hug.*) Is Derek with you? I thought I heard you say his name.

NATHAN: Oh, I was looking for this guy. (*He grabs a random EXTRA.*) Yeah. This guy. Derek is around here somewhere. I believe he was looking for you.

FREA: Do you know where he went?

NATHAN: I think he went (*He looks USL and then USR.*) that way.

(*FREA looks back SR confused; then she turns back to NATHAN.*)

FREA: Are you sure?

NATHAN: Yes. I'm very sure he did. Besides, if he's not there, he'll find you eventually.

FREA: Cool. Thanks.

(*FREA exits USR.*)

NATHAN: (*To the EXTRA.*) So how are you?

(*They engage in a brief conversation. DEREK enters from USL looking a bit annoyed.*)

DEREK: Nathan. (*No answer.*) Nathan. (*Still no answer.*) Nathan!

NATHAN: What?

DEREK: Dude, she wasn't there.

NATHAN: Well, that's because I saw her—

DEREK: You saw her? Where did she go?

NATHAN: Look at you. I've never seen anyone so nervous before. Remind me never to set you up on any blind dates.

DEREK: All right. Just stop it.

NATHAN: Derek, it's not brain surgery. All you have to do is look her in the eye and speak.

DEREK: I'm just so nervous.

NATHAN: Damn it, Derek! Focus! I've known you for . . . how long? Four-and-a-half years now? I don't think waiting here will hurt you. You have plenty more friends than me and Frea. You're also saying goodbye to this guy here and her and those two dudes over there. Besides, you know she's around here somewhere. It's not like she's going to leave the party and not come back. Here's an idea. *(He finds a drink and hands it to DEREK.)* Drink this. *(DEREK does so.)* Still feel nervous?

(FREA enters SR and crosses towards the couch.)

DEREK: Yes.

NATHAN: Well, you better snap out of it fast because there she is.

DEREK: Who? Frea?

NATHAN: No, the Dalai Lama, you idiot. *(He turns DEREK around.)* Here. Do I need to make it more obvious for you?

DEREK: There she is. *(Beat.)* I can't move my legs. What was I thinking?

NATHAN: (*He lightly slaps DEREK across the face.*) Snap out of it.

DEREK: What was that for? What did I ever do to you?

NATHAN: Do you know what your problem is? You think too much. Stop it. You don't want the last words you might ever say to her to come out as gibberish. Are you finally getting at what I'm saying here?

DEREK: Loud and clear.

NATHAN: Well, go and remember. (*He does his dance from earlier.*) Be confident.

DEREK: (*He takes a deep breath.*) Here I go.

NATHAN: Will you just move your ass?

(*NATHAN pushes DEREK towards FREA. DEREK freezes and turns back towards NATHAN, who threatens to slap him again. DEREK then turns back . . . only to be tackled by RUDY, who is obviously drunk. NATHAN shrugs and begins talking to an EXTRA.*)

RUDY: Woo-hoo! Goodbye, college life! I'm finally out of here! Graduation!

(*RUDY picks up DEREK and gives him a bear hug.*)

Dude, I never would've gotten out of algebra class without you.

DEREK: That wasn't me. It was—

RUDY: Never thought I'd graduate. Sure, it took me eight years, but I did it. I shut 'em up . . . bastards. (*He notices DEREK gasping for air.*) What was that?

DEREK: Can't breathe. Need air.

RUDY: My bad. (*He loosens his grip.*) I got carried away.

DEREK: (*Smelling RUDY's breath.*) That's not all you got carried away with.

(As RUDY tries to help DEREK, FREA crosses in front of them. RUDY drops DEREK and crosses to her. DEREK stands up, seeing that RUDY has blocked his path to FREA. DEREK runs to NATHAN, and they try to formulate a plan to get RUDY away from FREA.)

RUDY: Hey, Frea, this is one kick . . . hell . . . ass . . . ass kick . . . yeah. The kegs in the back are awesome.

FREA: What kegs? I don't know what you're talking about.

RUDY: Yeah. Those are mine. *(He laughs at himself.)* Man, I'm so wasted. *(He looks at FREA in a seductive manner.)* Damn! Look at you in them jeans. So hot! So . . . can I see you in those jeans?

FREA: What?

RUDY: What I meant was "Can I be your jeans?"

FREA: What are you talking about?

RUDY: I want to cover you in feathers and make you my own personal chicken.

FREA: You're not making any sense.

RUDY: I love you.

FREA: Now you're scaring me.

(As FREA tries to escape from RUDY, DEREK casts about for any nearby bottle or cup. He finds a bottle.)

DEREK: Here, Rudy. Have another beer.

RUDY: Beer. My favorite science experiment.

(RUDY chugs down his drink as DEREK guides him to the couch.)

DEREK: All right then. Now let's just remember: thinking and speaking are two different things.

(RUDY falls on the couch hugging his bottle.)

FREA: Now that was awkward.

DEREK: From him, I've seen worse

(They laugh. Then they share a moment of uncomfortable silence. RUDY rises from the couch and stumbles offstage.)

FREA: So . . . you're leaving town tomorrow?

DEREK: Yeah. I'm heading out to Houston.

FREA: Are you excited?

DEREK: Very. Going out there, molding young children's minds . . . I just don't know what to expect.

FREA: I know you, Derek. You'll do fine.

DEREK: You think so?

FREA: Trust me. *(She puts her hand on his shoulder.)* You will.

(Beat.)

DEREK: Frea?

FREA: Yes?

DEREK: I've got something I need to tell you.

FREA: Well, what is it?

(As DEREK tries to find the words, KATRINA enters from DSR.)

DEREK: Well, I've known you for about three years, and, uh, I have a bit of a confession to make. I . . . I . . .

(KATRINA screams as she finally spots DEREK.)

KATRINA: Derek? Is that you?

(DEREK turns around and sees KATRINA. Looking scared, he turns back around. KATRINA pulls out a bottle of hairspray from her purse and makes herself ready to confront DEREK.)

DEREK: Please tell me there's someone else here named Derek.

FREA: I doubt it.

(KATRINA puts away her hairspray. Then she runs across the room and jumps on DEREK.)

KATRINA: Oh, my God! I can't believe it. I never thought I'd see you again.

DEREK: Uh, yeah. Well, here I am.

KATRINA: I knew you wouldn't leave without me. I mean, I knew you wouldn't leave without saying goodbye to me.

DEREK: Yeah. How could I not?

NATHAN: *(Looking offstage.)* Hey, Rudy. What are you doing talking to the stove?

(NATHAN exits.)

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Yo, Nathan. Meet my new drinking buddy. His name's Steve.

NATHAN: *(From offstage.)* Dude. Seriously. There's nobody here, and you have a six pack in the oven.

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Yeah, but he listens to me.

FREA: I've got to stop that before it gets weird. *(Hesitantly.)* I guess I'll just give you two some time alone.

(She exits.)

DEREK: Frea, wait. Don't leave me here with Kat—

(He starts to follow FREA, but KATRINA blocks his path. She puts her arms around him.)

So, uh, how are you?

(KATRINA's hands are all over him as she seats him on the couch.)

KATRINA: Oh, don't worry about her. She's always butting into other people's business. Is it true that you're moving to Boston?

DEREK: Well, actually I'm moving to Houston, but you're kinda close.

KATRINA: You're still going to be a preacher?

DEREK: No. I'm going to be a teacher.

KATRINA: *(She giggles.)* Silly me . . . but listen, Derek. I want to talk to you about something.

DEREK: About what?

KATRINA: About us, silly! Where we stand. Our . . . future!

DEREK: Future?

(KATRINA giggles as she plays with her hair. She notices that something is wrong.)

KATRINA: Hold that thought. *(She straddles him.)* I need to go freshen up. *(She places her knee on his crotch.)* I'll be back.

(She jumps off of DEREK, kneeling him cruelly, and she exits SR. DEREK, writhing in pain, falls off the couch.)

DEREK: I've got to get out of here.

(NATHAN enters holding a six pack of beer. He notices DEREK.)

NATHAN: I know that love hurts, but . . . damn!

DEREK: Dude, you need to help me.

NATHAN: What do you need my help for?

DEREK: Dude! Kat—

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Nate! It's your turn for the beer bong.

NATHAN: Gotta go.

(NATHAN turns to exit.)

DEREK: Wait. Katrina is here!

NATHAN: Who shot a deer?

DEREK: No! I mean—

(DEREK tries to reclaim NATHAN's attention, but NATHAN exits. Chants of "Chug! Chug!" are heard from offstage. DEREK looks SR, trying to spot KATRINA. FREA enters from SL and crosses behind DEREK.)

FREA: Do you have to go that badly?

(DEREK screams and hides behind the couch. He jostles a cup perched on the back of the couch, and the cup's contents spill down his back.)

DEREK: Stay away, you Jezebel! *(He notices FREA.)* Oh. It's you.

FREA: Are you alright?

DEREK: *(Climbing out from behind the couch.)* Suddenly, I feel a cold breeze down my back.

FREA: That's because your back is all wet.

(She takes off his shirt, leaving him wearing only an undershirt. They sit down on the couch.)

DEREK: Yeah, and it's my good shirt, too.

FREA: I always thought you looked kinda dorky in that shirt.

DEREK: Dorky? Just dorky? I thought you said I looked good . . . almost good enough for the cover of *GQ*.

FREA: Maybe I did, but I take it back.

DEREK: Ouch.

(They laugh. NATHAN enters and playfully sneaks behind DEREK.)

What I was trying to say earlier . . . There's something I need to say. I . . . I . . . I'm . . .

NATHAN: I'm so in need of a hug.

(He hugs DEREK from behind.)

DEREK: *(Jumping.)* Stay away! *(He notices NATHAN.)* Damn it! Again?

(DEREK sits down. NATHAN positions himself between DEREK and FREA.)

NATHAN: Now these are good times. The three of us out on the high seas, causing trouble.

FREA: We're nowhere near the ocean.

DEREK: Let him figure it out.

NATHAN: What I mean is this is the last time the three of us will be together being young and carefree before going off to that place called *(Beat.)* . . . called *(Beat.)* . . . what is it called again? The place with the thing and the short people?

FREA: How much have you had to drink?

DEREK: I'm guessing one or one and a half.

NATHAN: But seriously, I would like to propose a toast. Raise a glass.

DEREK: I don't have a drink.

NATHAN: Well, get one then. *(Beat.)* I'll get you one.

(NATHAN grabs a shot glass and hands it to DEREK.)

NATHAN: A toast to best friends on the last night we'll be together as college students.

DEREK: Uh, actually, I'm the only one who graduated.

FREA: And I still have another year to go.

NATHAN: I'm trying to be sentimental here. Can't you just let me have this moment, please? Now where was I? I remember. To friends, love, and whiskey, the fuel of life. May our glasses never be empty.

(They raise their glasses and drink. Both FREA and DEREK give NATHAN a look, which creates an awkward moment. NATHAN takes the hint and exits.)

FREA: So, Derek, what are you going to miss the most about college?

DEREK: So many things. I don't know what to choose from.

(Beat. He looks into FREA's eyes. KATRINA enters, and looks around the room.)

Of all the things I'll miss, what I'll miss the most is—

(KATRINA finally spots DEREK and runs to him.)

KATRINA: There you are!

DEREK: Not her.

KATRINA: For a second, I thought I lost you.

DEREK: Why? Did you leave?

(KATRINA gives a loud and annoying laugh.)

KATRINA: Oh, Derek, you're funny. You're just the funniest guy I know.

DEREK: And you . . . are you. Oh, you.

(KATRINA laughs again, this time in FREA's face. FREA stands and covers her nose. KATRINA moves onto the couch seductively.)

KATRINA: So where were we?

DEREK: *(Covering his nose.)* Maybe getting a mint?

KATRINA: Now I know where we were. So, Derek, considering our past, I know the last few months were kind of uncomfortable between you and me.

DEREK: What are you getting at here?

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Condom fight!

(Several EXTRAS run offstage.)

KATRINA: I know our relationship didn't exactly work out the way we wanted it to be.

DEREK: It depends on your definition of *exactly*.

KATRINA: What I exactly mean is that I know I never was the best meaning of the word *girlfriend*.

DEREK: What in the hell are you talking about?

KATRINA: I was wondering, do you think that maybe, just maybe in some other time, another place, or perhaps *(She points to her ring finger.)* in the near future, there could be another chance?

DEREK: (*Jumping up.*) Hold up, Katrina. Another chance? Listen to yourself. Our past? What past is there?

KATRINA: It's what wakes me up in the morning.

DEREK: That past you keep talking about consists of going on three dates two years ago. That barely constitutes a relationship.

KATRINA: It still feels like it was yesterday.

(*RUDY enters and stumbles through the room.*)

DEREK: That's what I mean. You're making a huge deal out of a distorted thought in your head.

KATRINA: You *do* care about what I think!

DEREK: You're not listening. I told you a long time ago, and I'll tell you again: there was no connection at all; it would never ever *ever* work.

KATRINA: You're being modest.

(*RUDY stumbles between them and falls to the floor.*)

DEREK: There is no modesty. I'm just telling you the truth.

KATRINA: Don't lie to yourself, Derek. I know you still want me.

DEREK: What is it going to take for you to realize that I'm not into you? And another thing, I—

(*KATRINA grabs and kisses him. FREA enters and notices them. She gags and runs offstage. DEREK pushes KATRINA away.*)

DEREK: Why did you do that?

KATRINA: Why shouldn't I?

DEREK: You . . . I . . .

KATRINA: I *do* love me! I mean, you *do* love me!

DEREK: No! No! No! A million times no! (*Beat.*) Oh, crap!

(*DEREK exits in a hurry, and KATRINA runs after him.*)

KATRINA: Derek, wait! Don't leave me!

(*NATHAN enters and spots a couple of attractive female EXTRAS who are talking about what just happened. He sneaks up behind them and joins their conversation. They both give him a look.*)

NATHAN: I've been waiting all night to find someone like you. Beautiful, charming . . . how your blue dress shines in this dim lighting. (*One of the EXTRAS giggles.*) I've got a secret that I haven't told anyone. I only have twenty-four hours to live. The doctor told me this morning. I came here to party and celebrate life, but the moment I walked into the room, I knew I would want nothing more than to spend my final moments on this earth with you.

(*FREA enters and crosses to NATHAN.*)

FREA: Nathan, I need to talk to you.

NATHAN: Excuse me. (*To FREA.*) Not now. I'm busy. (*He turns back to the EXTRA.*) So . . . where were we? If you can grant me this wish, I can try to pull some strings to put you on the fast track to heaven.

(*FREA interrupts him.*)

FREA: Are you doing that twenty-four-hours-to-live line again?

NATHAN: Excuse me. (*Whispering to FREA.*) Don't ruin this for me. I've got a shot. (*He turns back to the EXTRA.*) Pay no attention to her. As I was saying—

FREA: (*To the EXTRA.*) He does this bit a lot. That's how I met him. If I were you, I would just run.

(*Laughing, the EXTRA leaves with her friend.*)

NATHAN: Uncool. That is so uncool.

FREA: Nathan, I really need to talk to you.

NATHAN: Well, you couldn't have done this about five minutes ago?

FREA: Relax. You weren't going to get any.

NATHAN: You don't know that, do you?

FREA: Maybe not, but I guess you'll never know.

NATHAN: Besides, I think she could go for me. *(Beat.)* Well, at least for one night.

FREA: *(Frustrated.)* Oh, forget it!

NATHAN: Frea, is something wrong?

FREA: Everything is fine. Everything is just fine.

(She turns away from him. Then she sniffs around the general area of the couch.)

I can still smell the sardines and glitter hairspray.

NATHAN: What are you talking about?

FREA: How could someone with that . . . *(She can't find the word.)* Do that to . . . *(Beat.)* Ew!

NATHAN: Do what to who in where?

FREA: Have you seen Derek?

NATHAN: Not for a while. What does he have to do with this?

FREA: You don't know? *(NATHAN shakes his head.)* Katrina was here, and—

NATHAN: Katrina? (*He sniffs.*) I thought I detected a hint of Aqua Net in the air. So what's the problem?

FREA: The problem is they were here, and then I left them alone because Rudy was too drunk to tell the difference between an appliance and a woman. Was he about to hump the toaster?

NATHAN: Never mind about that. Let me get this straight: you left them alone, so the problem is . . . wait. Is there even a problem at all here?

FREA: The problem is that when I walked in here, I saw Katrina making out with Derek.

NATHAN: You're joking, aren't you?

FREA: I'm totally serious.

NATHAN: So Katrina appears from out of nowhere to give a proper sendoff—in her own mind—to someone who . . . uh . . . well, I can't think of anything else.

FREA: She still thinks they're dating.

NATHAN: That still doesn't get to the point about why you're angry.

FREA: I think I'm going to be sick.

NATHAN: Frea, am I detecting a hint of jealousy here?

FREA: What?

NATHAN: You're jealous!

FREA: You're crazy.

NATHAN: There's no use hiding it, Frea. I can tell.

FREA: You're wrong.

NATHAN: Whatever.

FREA: For the last time, I'm not jealous.

NATHAN: You're turning red in the face.

FREA: No! I'm not! I . . . Oh, hell! I don't want to see him leave.

NATHAN: *(With a silly smirk.)* Now this explains something.

FREA: What's so funny?

NATHAN: Man, I'm good at reading people.

FREA: Do you know something I should know?

(NATHAN doesn't answer her.)

FREA: You do. You know something. *(No answer.)* It's about Derek, isn't it?

NATHAN: You know what, Frea? I feel like getting some fresh air. You should join me.

(They exit. DEREK enters. He is trying to hide from KATRINA. He discovers that the coast is clear, and he collapses on the couch. KATRINA enters and playfully hides behind the couch. She comes out from behind the couch and covers DEREK's eyes.)

KATRINA: You can't hide from me now. *(DEREK jumps off the couch.)* Why are you hiding from me?

DEREK: Why are you still here?

KATRINA: Because I can't stand to see you go.

(She gives him a hug. He pulls away.)

DEREK: Listen, Katrina. For the last time: any highly glorified image you have about me is just plain wrong. Get that through your head. There isn't any type of relationship, connection, or link between us at all.

(KATRINA stands speechless while EXTRAS gather around to watch the spectacle.)

DEREK: You've been eyeing me like a vulture. Let me ask you something. What are you trying to get out of me?

(Beat. KATRINA doesn't answer.)

Nothing. Just like I thought. I don't mean to come off like the bad guy here, but you need to move on and realize I never want to see you again.

(Silence. KATRINA looks like she is about to have a nervous breakdown. She clenches her fists and is about to take a swing at DEREK . . . but she stops herself.)

KATRINA: Okay. I guess that since you won't be here, you don't want to see me anymore. Okay . . . but before I go, I just want you to know in front of everyone else here exactly what you're walking out on. I gave you the best four weeks of my life. Take one last good look because when you're all alone at night, and you realize that you want me back, don't expect to pick up the phone and have me run to you. Have a good life, Derek.

(She reaches for a drink to throw at DEREK, but she grabs an empty glass. She throws the glass aside. She grabs a male EXTRA and begins making out with him. They slowly exit.)

DEREK: Uh, okay then, I guess.

(NATHAN enters from SL.)

NATHAN: Wow! I never thought she'd be here.

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Everybody, stay away from the microwave. It bites back.

DEREK: I think I let her down gently.

NATHAN: Dude, not even a shrink could fix her.

DEREK: I know. I know. I was there. (*Beat.*) I had Frea right here, and then that hurricane blew in. (*He looks around for FREA.*) I don't even know where Frea went.

NATHAN: I know where she went . . . but before I tell you where she is and you try to play out that romantic scene you've been dreaming about, hear me out. I just talked to Frea outside, and we spoke about a few things: the weather, the economy, that lip-lock Katrina gave you—

DEREK: The what?

NATHAN: The economy?

DEREK: No. The other thing.

NATHAN: I'm getting to that.

DEREK: (*He grabs NATHAN by the shirt.*) What did she say?

NATHAN: Dude, let go of me and I'll tell you. (*DEREK lets go.*) Whatever Katrina did to you almost made Frea throw up on my shoes, but mostly she talked about how much she'll really be missing you.

DEREK: Are you serious?

NATHAN: Maybe.

(*RUDY runs in scared and leans on DEREK.*)

RUDY: Help me! The Ewoks are humping my legs.

(*DEREK panics, and RUDY falls to the floor.*)

NATHAN: Wow! That guy is wasted. Anyway, Frea is right outside waiting for you to talk to her. Why don't you be a good little boy and talk to her like you intended to?

DEREK: What did you tell her?

(NATHAN gestures for DEREK to leave. DEREK does so, but he quickly runs back to NATHAN.)

DEREK: I don't think I can do this.

NATHAN: Go out there and do it!

(DEREK looks around the room. He takes a deep breath and exits DS as the curtain closes behind him.)

Scene 3

(FREA enters and sits on the apron, looking out in the distance. DEREK takes a deep breath and walks up to her.)

DEREK: Hell of a night, huh?

(FREA looks at him; then she turns away.)

FREA: I guess you could say that.

DEREK: What are you doing out here?

FREA: I just need some air after all that craziness in there.

DEREK: I see.

FREA: I've also had a lot on my mind lately.

DEREK: Like what?

(DEREK sits next to her.)

FREA: I've been thinking about . . . you leaving. I mean, you're a great . . .
(Beat.) I don't know what I'm trying to say here.

DEREK: I think I know what you mean. I've been wondering what life will be like without all of this. I don't know what exactly I'm getting into, but I can't wait to find out.

(They share a brief moment of silence.)

FREA: I usually feel comfortable telling everything to you. I don't know if I'll ever have that type of friendship with anyone again.

DEREK: Frea, look. I have to say something in case I never see you again. *(Beat.)* I think I'm in love with you.

FREA: You think you're in love with me?

DEREK: No. *I know* I'm in love with you. To be honest, I had a bit of a crush on you when we first met. *(He stands up and starts to pace.)* I wanted to tell you a long time ago, but I was scared. I tried to block out any kind of romantic feelings I had for you, and it actually worked. As time went on, I saw you more and more as a friend, and I didn't want to screw that up. But lately, I've been thinking about those times when you needed someone to talk to. Both of us would complain about the people we dated, but when you'd talk about looking for that special someone to make you happy . . . I wished that someone was me.

FREA: Well, I wished that—

DEREK: You might think that I'm some guy with bad timing, but everything I just said is coming from the deepest trenches of my heart. I don't know if or when I'll ever see you again, but if I'd never told you this, I know I would have regretted it. No matter what happens, I will always care for you and love you.

(Beat. FREA stands up)

FREA: Wow! I mean . . . wow. I never knew how much you really felt about me.

DEREK: Yeah. I don't know if there's anything else I can say.

FREA: Don't. *(She crosses to him.)* Just being out here alone with you says enough. I only wish you could've told me how you felt a long time ago.

DEREK: I know. I don't know what—

(She puts her hand on his mouth.)

FREA: That doesn't matter now. *(She leans in to kiss him. Beat.)* I can't. I can't do this.

DEREK: Yes, you can. You just put your lips on mine and—

FREA: *(Pulling away.)* No, Derek. I can't.

DEREK: What just happened?

FREA: Did it ever occur to you that whenever I had those talks with you that I was dropping hints that I maybe I wanted to be with you?

DEREK: Hints?

FREA: Remember how I said I wanted to find a guy just like you? That was a hint.

DEREK: I didn't read that.

FREA: I guess you were too afraid to do anything. I practically laid it out for you a long time ago, but you weren't thinking.

DEREK: I don't believe this.

FREA: I remember when you chased after anyone in a skirt who smiled at you, hoping that she was the one. After all those romances failed, you came running to me. You didn't see what that meant?

DEREK: You did the same thing.

FREA: That was different. I knew I wanted to be with you back then. It took almost four years for you to open up . . . or was it because someone as easy as Katrina wasn't giving you enough goodnight kisses?

DEREK: She has nothing to do with this.

FREA: Right. I saw it right from the moment she wrapped her arms around you.

DEREK: Frea, listen to me.

FREA: No, Derek. You listen to *me*. All those things you said to me . . . did you really feel that way, or were you saying that just to get laid? Tell me.

DEREK: It's nothing like that. I—

FREA: Enough already! I gave you a window a long time ago. I don't know how it would've been if we'd gotten together, but I guess you'll never know. I'm sorry, but it's too late. I have to go.

(She starts to exit.)

DEREK: But Frea—

FREA: Derek, I just don't feel that way about you anymore.

DEREK: Frea!

FREA: Leave me alone, Derek. *(Crying.)* I hate to see it end like this, but—

(She exits.)

DEREK: Frea, wait! Frea! Damn it!

(Frustrated, DEREK sits down. NATHAN enters.)

NATHAN: Hey, Romeo. How did it go?

(DEREK doesn't answer.)

NATHAN: Derek, are you still alive? Is everything okay?

DEREK: I told her.

NATHAN: You did?

DEREK: Yeah.

NATHAN: So what happened?

DEREK: I told her everything, and she just threw it in my face. She gave me some crap about how I wasted some window of opportunity she gave me a long time ago.

NATHAN: Seriously?

DEREK: Yeah. She could've been mine a long time ago, but I didn't do anything.

NATHAN: Dude, that really sucks. What else happened?

DEREK: Nothing. She ran away crying.

NATHAN: That's it?

DEREK: That's it.

NATHAN: Derek, I don't know what exactly you said to her or what she told you, but what were you expecting? Did you actually think she was going to fall in love with you like that (*He snaps his fingers.*), and ride off into the sunset with you on some galloping horse?

DEREK: I don't know.

NATHAN: You kind of knew what was going to happen. Nothing good was going to come out of this.

DEREK: But I didn't think being told to practically get out of her life was an option.

NATHAN: I don't know what else to say . . . but you did what you set out to do. You spilled your heart out to Frea, and now you have no regrets.

DEREK: You know what? You're right.

NATHAN: I'm always right. Look. You're going to be a teacher. Learn from what just happened. *(He looks at his watch.)* Look at that. It's getting kinda late. Don't you have to leave early in the morning?

DEREK: Yeah. It's late. Let's go. I'll drive.

NATHAN: Not with your broken heart.

DEREK: How much did you have to drink?

NATHAN: Just enough to let you drive.

(As they exit, DEREK's cell phone goes off as he receives a text message. He reads the message while NATHAN tries to look over his shoulder.)

NATHAN: What's up? *(DEREK shows him the message)* Who sent that? *(DEREK points at the phone.)* So what are you going to do?

(DEREK looks at his phone. Then he looks back and forth between the curtain, and the phone a few times. Beat.)

DEREK: Goodbye.

(He puts his phone in his pocket. He and NATHAN exit through the audience. The lights fade to black.)

Darfur Calls

Michael Hardy

Kathleen Kardon

Rachelle Neuman

Characters

AFRICAN DANCERS

AFRICAN DRUMMERS

JERRY ALLMON/JEREMIAH

TRACY ALLMON

DR. MELVIN BOOKLEY, a psychologist

BILL (OR ALICE) GLIB, a reporter

INTERVIEWED MAN

INTERVIEWED WOMAN

BOBBY NABOR, an elementary-school student

OMISSIONER 1

OMISSIONER 2, an elementary-school student

OMISSIONER 3

PAT (PATRICIA OR PATRICK) POWERS, a politician

SILENT VILLAGER

VILLAGER 1

VILLAGER 2

WITNESSES

NIFISA ABBOD, a Darfur victim

MOLLY GIVEN, a middle-school student

AL TRUITT, an aid worker

SARAH (OR SOL) WISENBERG, a Holocaust survivor

Z

Time and Place

The action first takes place during the recent past in a village in Darfur and a refugee camp in Chad; the action then takes place during the present in a kitchen and a courtroom in San Antonio, Texas.

Pre-show

Before the house opens (as well as after the show), the following exhibits are suggested: (1) photos depicting Darfur victims and refugees in Chad; (2) videos such as *The Devil Came on Horseback*; and (3) tables staffed by volunteers knowledgeable about Darfur who can readily answer questions and provide information about how people can assist the crisis in Darfur by purchasing fundraising items (such as Darfur dolls, T-shirts, photos, and artwork) or by making cash or check donations exclusively to Darfur relief.

By the time the house opens, all of the trial witnesses should be camouflaged among the rest of the audience.

At least five minutes before the dance begins, dancers and musicians (preferably two percussionists using hand-held African drums [*djembes*]) must take their places.

Scene 1

(Lights rise to reveal a village in Darfur. Recorded African music plays—not boisterously or loudly—as dancers go about the business of everyday life. Women fetch water; men work in the fields; children play; and villagers converse. These actions are mimed; no props should be used. The set goes dark, and the music stops. Lights shine on the AFRICAN DANCERS only. As the dance begins, the sound of live drums fills the theater. The tone begins with a cheerful feel and gradually turns ominous and horrific. The volume and pace of the drumbeats reflect impending danger. The AFRICAN DANCERS dramatize the destruction of the village and the raping and killing of villagers by Janjaweed men. The dance should last about ten minutes. One female dancer, SILENT VILLAGER, lies in anguish downstage. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights rise on a refugee camp in Chad. Drums play softly. VILLAGER 1 and VILLAGER 2 walk together, surveying a multitude of sufferers. They approach SILENT VILLAGER, who cradles an imaginary baby in grief. The drums fade out. VILLAGER 1 gestures at SILENT VILLAGER and speaks to VILLAGER 2.)

VILLAGER 1: Can't we do something?

VILLAGER 2: What? She does not speak to anyone. She barely eats, and when she weeps, there are no tears. She is as silent as her child.

VILLAGER 1: It's been days since you got to the camp, and she still can't let go. What else is she holding?

VILLAGER 2: She carries a piece of his shirt.

VILLAGER 1: Whose shirt?

VILLAGER 2: Jero, her husband. He was young, strong—beautiful. A leader in our village. A good man.

VILLAGER 1: What happened?

VILLAGER 2: Janjaweed killed him. Then they threw his torn body in a well to spoil the water. She saw it all.

VILLAGER 1: There are many like her here.

VILLAGER 2: Even in sleep, there's—

VILLAGER 1: But can she sleep?

VILLAGER 2: Hardly at all. There's no escape. No rest from nightmares. *(Drums play a steady heartbeat rhythm.)* Nightmares of Janjaweed. Nightmares of a wolf devouring a lamb. Nightmares of lost lives.

(Resolve enters the drumbeat. Lights fade out as the VILLAGERS exit.)

Scene 3

(Lights rise slowly on the Allmon family's kitchen, only revealing the family's members at first. TRACY sits at the table, gulping breakfast cereal from a bowl and clanking the bowl's bottom with a spoon while she reads her homework paper. MIRIAM stands at the table, finishing a bagged lunch for TRACY. JERRY sits spread-eagled staring at a television [a very small portable model placed on the table's edge]. This household is busy; the action moves quickly.)

JERRY: (*Shaking his head disapprovingly.*) I can't believe this.

(*TRACY quickly finishes the cereal. She takes a half-swipe of her mouth with a napkin, which she tosses on the table. She rushes toward MIRIAM with the homework paper. She holds up the paper and reads from it.*)

TRACY: What important person has a name beginning with the letter Z?

MIRIAM: I still don't know, honey. I have to keep thinking about Z names.

(*She gives TRACY the bagged lunch along with a kiss on the cheek.*)

TRACY: (*Disappointed.*) Aw, Mom. (*She starts to exit, but she suddenly turns back.*) Mom, is it okay if I go to Bobby's house after school?

MIRIAM: All right, Tracy, but call me as soon as you get there.

TRACY: (*Hurriedly.*) 'Bye, Dad.

(*TRACY begins to exit, jogging. JERRY looks toward the departing TRACY and clears his throat to catch her attention; he points to his cheek. TRACY gives JERRY a quick kiss on his cheek, and she rushes out as JERRY smiles.*)

JERRY: 'Bye, Trace. Have a great day! (*He turns back to the television, occasionally looking toward MIRIAM.*) Can't you get news in the morning? Before my dad went to work, he turned on the TV. He got news. Now what ya get? Part reality show, part freak show. A contest where the winning couple gets an all-expenses-paid wedding. Ten minutes on what it's like to live in a house with twenty kids. An expert on interpreting dreams. Warmth and fluff and, if you're lucky, a few sound bites on world events. (*JERRY finishes his rant and looks at MIRIAM.*) Hey, you're awfully quiet. (*No answer.*) Is something wrong? (*No answer.*) It's my fault, and I apologize.

(*He smiles. Beat.*)

MIRIAM: I read an article last night that's got me turned inside out.

JERRY: And?

MIRIAM: It's about what's been happening in Africa.

JERRY: Yeah?

MIRIAM: Jerry, I was upset. After a long while, I finally closed my eyes, and drifted off to sleep.

(Lights gradually dim as she speaks, and dream-chimes sound. MIRIAM then speaks darkly; her voice should reverberate like it's coming from inside a tunnel.)

I heard drumbeats.

(Drumbeats rise and increase in volume and pace.)

They got louder and louder. In rhythm with the drums, my heart beat faster and faster. And then came the slaughter.

(The drums take on a periodic high pitch, echoing the Janjaweed dance.)

Killing after killing . . . in slow motion, like a never-ending dance of death. And when that horror was over *(The drums abruptly stop.)*, there was no relief. As if my heart had burst, I felt myself tumbling into oblivion, and—

(Lights fade down completely, and the sounds—including the drumbeats—convey that the dream has become more intense.)

Scene 4

(Lights rise until a courtroom set for a pretrial is lit dimly. Z joins MIRIAM at the defense counsel's table [preferably MIRIAM's kitchen table sans tablecloth]. Throughout the trial sequence, actors will stand from their places in the audience, loudly deliver their lines, and sit.)

MOLLY: *Tikkun olam*. Repair the world.

(A drum—preferably a tympani—sounds like loud gavel.)

PAT: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

BOBBY: Stop the hate.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

NIFISA: If one is enslaved, we are all enslaved.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

AL: Am I my brother's keeper?

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

MELVIN: Justice. Justice shall you pursue.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

SARAH: *(With increasing volume.)* Never again. *(The gavel-drum sounds.)*
Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

ALL: Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds. Lights gradually brighten to illuminate the courtroom fully.)

Scene 5

(MIRIAM and Z sit alone in the courtroom. Beside Z on the defense table is a short stack of papers; on the floor is a tattered briefcase. MIRIAM looks around in bewilderment.)

MIRIAM: Where am I? What's going on?

Z: I'm your advocate. *(Warmly extending a hand.)* Call me Z. I know a good deal about omissions' law—just about everything from A to Z. *(Shrugging.)* By the time I got my advocacy commission, Z was the only letter left. At the very end, though, you'll find you can count on Z.

(JEREMIAH enters confidently with a fancy briefcase. When he reaches the prosecution table, he opens the briefcase. MIRIAM looks in disbelief at JEREMIAH; she calls out to him.)

MIRIAM: Jerry? *(No reaction.)* Jerry! *(Still no reaction. She turns to Z.)* What is he doing?

Z: Jeremiah?

(JEREMIAH glances at Z, who flashes a greeting in the form of a salute. JEREMIAH, with eyebrows slightly raised, smiles softly and confidently; he takes a file out of his briefcase and begins arranging papers. The stack of papers is much larger than Z's stack.)

For years, he's been one of the top prosecutors. This is my first case with him, but don't worry. You're in good hands. Some say, "Stick with Z, and you'll be scot-free."

MIRIAM: What in the world?

(Three loud drumbeats like bone-rattling thunderclaps announce the OMISSIONERS' entrance. JEREMIAH adopts an official voice.)

JEREMIAH: All rise.

(House lights come up. JEREMIAH gestures with uplifted hands for the audience members to rise. If the audience members do not stand, JEREMIAH says, "The gallery will rise." If the audience members still do not stand, he adds, "The audience shall rise." Three OMISSIONERS wearing white choir robes walk through the audience in single file to their elevated places on the stage. They represent different generations, genders, and ethnicities. OMISSIONER 2 is TRACY. OMISSIONER 1 should be the age of a grandparent. OMISSIONER 3 should be the age of a parent. When MIRIAM first sees OMISSIONER 2, she lurches toward TRACY, but Z restrains MIRIAM.)

OMISSIONER 1: Please be seated. *(He waits for the room to settle down.)* The Omission Review Board will come to order. We sit to consider alleged offenses of omission. As you know, this panel of Omissioners does not make the final

OMISSIONER 1 (CONT.): decision. At the appropriate time, we provide our findings in the form of a recommendation to a higher authority.

(The three OMISSIONERS look skyward in unison and then resume gazing straight ahead.)

Miriam Allmon, you are charged by the prosecution with responsibility by omission for the atrocities in Darfur. How do you plead?

(Z lifts the dumbfounded MIRIAM to her feet. She does not know what to say. She can only stare at OMISSIONER 2.)

Z: *(Confidently.)* Not responsible, Your Omissioners.

(Z helps MIRIAM sit down.)

OMISSIONER 3: Witnesses for both parties will rise.

(Sitting scattered throughout the audience, they stand. If possible, these people should be bathed in spotlights.)

Raise your right hands. *(They do.)* Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

WITNESSES: I do.

(They sit. Lights lower on the audience and focus upon the courtroom. OMISSIONER 3 looks at JEREMIAH.)

OMISSIONER 3: Call your first witness.

JEREMIAH: If it please Your Omissioners, we call Nifisa Abboud.

(Covering each movement to and from the lectern are drumbeats, perhaps a variations of a heartbeat. NIFISA stands at the lectern.)

JEREMIAH (CONT.): Good evening. Your name is . . . ?

NIFISA: Nifisa Abboud.

JEREMIAH: Where do you live?

NIFISA: For the last six months, in the United States. Before that, in Darfur—in Sudan . . . in Africa.

JEREMIAH: Please tell us why you no longer reside in Darfur.

NIFISA: One year ago, my people were forced from our village by Janjaweed to a camp in the land of Chad.

JEREMIAH: Who are the Janjaweed?

NIFISA: Murderers. Men with guns who ride horses.

JEREMIAH: Tell us what happened on the day the Janjaweed came into your village.

NIFISA: Horses rumbled from the hills behind. (*A soft drumroll sounds.*) Suddenly, Janjaweed were upon us. (*The drums stop.*) We ran. People I've known all my life—friends, family—scattered in every direction like a stampede of terrified cattle. Janjaweed burned our homes. I saw many people fall dead on the grass. I grabbed my baby and hurried to my eight year-old son. "Come! Come!" I cried. I ran as fast as I could with my baby in my arms and my son running close to me. One Janjaweed grasped my arm. (*A loud drumroll sounds.*) As I struggled to get away, he yelled, "We will exterminate you. Nothing can save you." Then he grabbed my son and took him away. (*She screams.*) Stop! (*A loud drumbeat punctuates her cry; the drums go silent for several beats.*) One of them forced my child from my arms. I tried to stop him, but he was strong. He dropped her under a tree. Her cries echoed in my ears, but I could do nothing. He dragged me into the bushes. I felt his dirty hands on me—his breath on my face. No, no! I kicked and clawed at his arms, but he—he laughed and threw me to the ground. I wanted to die right there. (*Screaming and crying.*) Allah! Why, why, why? (*Beat.*) He NIFISA (CONT.): hit me over and over, but I felt nothing. His filthy body on mine. (*Long beat.*) My son was gone. I never saw him again. I never saw my husband again . . . and if I had, it would not matter. After what Janjaweed did, I could no longer be his wife. (*Beat.*) I have no village. My way of life is gone forever. (*Beat.*) Left to die, I heard a distant sound. (*She strains as if hearing the noise.*) My baby. My only reason for living, for being here today.

(She sobs. JEREMIAH approaches her. He takes a handkerchief from his upper jacket pocket and presses it lightly on NIFISA's arm. She wipes tears from her face with the handkerchief, which she keeps. JEREMIAH is moved.)

JEREMIAH: Can you go on? *(NIFISA nods.)* How did you get to the United States?

NIFISA: There was a British doctor at the refugee camp. My baby was very sick. She needed help he could not give her. He called an American friend of his—also a doctor. The doctor spoke to the people of his church. They raised money to bring me and my baby here. *(Several beats pass.)* I am shattered, yet I am also grateful.

(JEREMIAH gestures to Z with an outstretched arm.)

JEREMIAH: Your witness.

(He sits.)

Z: Hello, ma'am. Have you ever seen this woman before?

(He points toward MIRIAM.)

NIFISA: No.

Z: Has she ever done you any harm?

NIFISA: No, not that I know of.

Z: Thank you.

(Z sits. JEREMIAH rises quickly.)

JEREMIAH: Well, has she ever given you any help?

NIFISA: Not that I know of.

JEREMIAH: *(Mocking Z.)* Thank you.

(Z rises and points at JEREMIAH.)

Z: Has *this* man ever helped you?

(NIFISA shakes her head and is about to speak, but JEREMIAH appeals to the OMISSIONERS.)

JEREMIAH: Objection!

(Z raises a hand and sits down.)

Z: No further questions.

(OMISSIONER 1 turns to NIFISA.)

OMISSIONER 1: Please step down.

(OMISSIONER 1 nods at JEREMIAH.)

JEREMIAH: Call Al Truitt. *(AL takes the witness stand.)* Mr. Truitt, what is your occupation?

AL: I'm an aid worker funded by various organizations. For the last two years, I've spent almost all of my time in Chad, where we assist Darfur victims.

JEREMIAH: Is that where you met Nifisa Abboud?

AL: Yes, we were at the same camp. Not long ago, the same magazine reporter interviewed us.

JEREMIAH: What have you seen?

AL: Sheer devastation, and on a magnitude I never thought possible. Over 400,000, dead Darfurians—men, women, and children. Countless villages eradicated. Millions displaced and overcrowding our refugee camps. Disease is rampant, claiming hundreds of lives every day. To help those in need, we simply don't have enough of anything—water, food, clothing, shelter, medical supplies. You name it. We're so overextended, we've got folks living under trees. *(Beat.)* And we have critical security problems.

JEREMIAH: What do you mean?

AL: When the displaced leave our camps for water or firewood, Janjaweed attack them. Men are castrated and left to die. Women are raped—a dishonor so grave in their culture that their own husbands no longer accept them. Darfurians are sometimes repeatedly victimized by the same culprits.

JEREMIAH: How have some people helped your efforts?

AL: There are mighty generous people out there. Of course, there are a few people who come to where the action is full time and work directly with victims. Others—many thousands—donate supplies or money. We're thrilled with anything we get—small, medium, or large. Those of us on the front line know that this kind of assistance alleviates pain.

(JEREMIAH crosses to MIRIAM.)

JEREMIAH: Before today, I asked you to check organizational lists of persons donating any assistance to Darfur victims. *(He points at MIRIAM.)* Did the name Miriam Allmon appear on any of those lists?

AL: I don't believe so.

(JEREMIAH looks grimly at MIRIAM. Then he gestures at Z with an outstretched arm to show that he is through with this witness.)

Z: What's the cause of the killing in Darfur?

AL: It's complicated. The problems have gotten worse over time. It involves hatred between two Muslim groups. One group, the people of Darfur for the most part, are farmers. The other group, which includes the Janjaweed, are nomadic AL (CONT.): herders. Several years ago, the bottom fell out. Some Darfur farmers couldn't stand living in poverty in an oil-rich country. They armed themselves with guns and challenged Sudan's government. Sudan's president AL (CONT.): reacted with extreme force. He paid local tribal militias—now known as Janjaweed, or “devils on horses”—who burned the villages of Darfur, raping and killing as they went. The Sudanese government even used airplanes painted white—a color reserved by law to indicate humanitarian aid—to attack Darfur farmers and anyone trying to help them.

Z: So the people harming Darfur farmers are the Janjaweed and the Sudanese government?

AL: That's correct.

Z: Miriam Allmon isn't a Janjaweed, is she?

AL: I suspect not.

Z: And, to your knowledge, Miriam Allmon isn't an agent of the Sudanese government. Isn't that true, Mr. Truitt?

AL: Yes, that's true.

Z: Thank you. That's all.

(AL sits. JEREMIAH calls the next witness.)

JEREMIAH: Molly Given.

(She takes the witness stand. She smiles at OMISSIONER 2, who is self-absorbed. Then she smiles at MIRIAM, who returns the smile.)

Hello. What is your name, and how old are you?

MOLLY: My name is Molly Given. I just turned fourteen.

JEREMIAH: Were you part of a school project to help Darfur victims?

MOLLY: Yes, sir.

JEREMIAH: Please tell us about it.

MOLLY: In eighth-grade English class, we learned about the Holocaust. Our teacher told us it was important to study the mistakes of mankind so that we don't repeat them. She showed us an article about genocide in the world today, and that's when I found out about the people of Darfur. After talking about it in class, we decided we couldn't just sit back and do nothing.

JEREMIAH: So what did you do?

MOLLY: Our teacher found a project through her synagogue called “Dolls for Darfur,” and we all voted to participate. We sold these doll pins. *(She holds one up.)* We earned almost five thousand dollars that went into a fund for Darfur.

(JEREMIAH points at the pin.)

JEREMIAH: May I have that?

MOLLY: Sure.

(She removes the pin from her blouse and hands it to JEREMIAH, who contentedly looks at it. He hands it to OMISSIONER 1, who gives a warm smile to MOLLY. JEREMIAH sits.)

Z: Have you ever met this lady?

(Z points at MIRIAM.)

MOLLY: Sure. The Allmons are friends with my family. I always see Mrs. Allmon at PTA meetings. She makes the best chocolate chip cookies—super chewy.

Z: Has she always been nice to you? And helpful?

MOLLY: Sure has. Almost like a second mom.

(Z smiles broadly at MOLLY. MOLLY and MIRIAM exchange smiles. Z looks at JEREMIAH, who nods and makes a sweeping gesture that indicates he has no further questions.)

Z: Thank you.
(MOLLY sits.)

JEREMIAH: We call Sarah Wisenberg.

(SARAH takes the witness stand. MIRIAM turns to Z.)

MIRIAM: How can this be?

(SARAH and MIRIAM survey each other. JEREMIAH addresses SARAH.)

JEREMIAH: Ma'am, please tell us who you are. *(SARAH continues to look at MIRIAM.)* Ma'am. *(No response.)* Ma'am! *(She looks at JEREMIAH.)* Your name?

SARAH: I am Sarah Wisenberg.

JEREMIAH: Where do you live?

SARAH: I live no longer.

(WITNESSES in the audience intone the following words in a stage whisper: "Never again. Never again. Never again.")

JEREMIAH: Where and when did you grow up?

SARAH: I was born in Vienna around 1910.

JEREMIAH: Why are you here?

SARAH: I am here to testify because I have experienced hate. I know how hate can swell in the heart of a man until it spreads through an entire country. I have lived—and died—in a concentration camp, and—

Z: Objection! With all due respect, this hearing has nothing to do with omissions relating to the Holocaust. This testimony is irrelevant.

JEREMIAH: If Your Omissioners will allow me some latitude, I will show a connection with these proceedings.

OMISSIONER 1: Proceed, but connect it up quickly.

JEREMIAH: Please continue.

SARAH: I would like to say that genocide is not a disaster that is natural. It is man-made and can be stopped. It can be stopped if people care enough about

SARAH (CONT.): others. Elie Wiesel . . . Elie Wiesel taught us that the greatest evil in the world is our indifference. I know this to be true. It comes down to the actions of individual human beings. Everyone can do something. *(Beat. She listens.)* Did you hear that?

JEREMIAH: Pardon me?

(SARAH gestures broadly with her arms and hands as she cranes her head and neck to hear.)

SARAH: Sh. *(Beat.)* Listen. *(Beat.)* Don't you hear the moans? Moans and weeping from the people of Darfur. Echoes of the Holocaust. *(Beat.)* I thought we swore, "Never again."

(WITNESSES repeat, "Never again. Never again. Never again.")

JEREMIAH: One last question. *(He crosses toward MIRIAM.)* Do you know Miriam Allmon?

(He turns back to SARAH while gesturing at MIRIAM.)

SARAH: She is my granddaughter—the granddaughter I never met . . . until this night.

(WITNESSES repeat, "Never again. Never again. Never again." JEREMIAH looks piercingly at MIRIAM and then at Z, who indicates he has no questions. SARAH and MIRIAM continue to look at each other until the scene ends.)

JEREMIAH: Your Omissioners, the prosecution rests.

OMISSIONER 3: We are in recess.

(Blackout.)

Scene 6

(Lights rise to reveal the hallway outside the courtroom. BILL stands with INTERVIEWED MAN and INTERVIEWED WOMAN. A spotlight is brought to bear on each interview session.)

BILL: Sir, I'm with Channel Four Early Morning TV. May I speak with you?

INTERVIEWED MAN: I guess so.

BILL: What do you think about the killing in Darfur?

INTERVIEWED MAN: I think it's a damn shame.

BILL: Have you personally done anything to stop it?

INTERVIEWED MAN: What can I do? I'm one person. This is much bigger than me.

BILL: May I ask you another question?

INTERVIEWED MAN: No, I don't think so.

(He leaves. BILL crosses to INTERVIEWED WOMAN.)

BILL: Let me ask you a question, miss.

INTERVIEWED WOMAN: Yes?

(She fiddles with her hair and pushes it out of her face.)

BILL: What do you think about what's happening in Darfur?

INTERVIEWED WOMAN: It's a terrible thing. I've tried to keep up with the news, and I'm glad that some attention is being brought to the situation.

BILL: Would you say you share responsibility for not doing enough?

INTERVIEWED WOMAN: I have to admit that I'm often too wrapped up in my own life to even think about the people in a country so far away. I'm a bit embarrassed to say that my children seem to know more about what's going on than I do . . . but I did bring refreshments to a school assembly that addressed the subject, and then I helped my kids write letters to Congress.

(BILL mouths "Thank you." He turns to the audience.)

BILL: We'll keep you posted as developments warrant. Covering the Miriam Allmon trial, this is Bill Glib for your Channel Four Early Morning TV.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7

(Lights rise on the courtroom.)

OMISSIONER 1: The defense may proceed.

Z: We call Pat Powers. *(PAT takes the witness stand.)* Mr. Powers, what office do you hold?

PAT: My name is Pat Powers, and I'm proud to represent the great state of Texas in the United States Senate.

(NOTE: The state PAT represents may be changed according to where this show is performed.)

Z: Have you served on a committee studying the Darfur crisis for the last few years?

PAT: Yes, I have.

Z: What are some of the main obstacles to achieving peace in that troubled part of the world?

PAT: The United States is interested in doing all that we can as part of the world community. However, the United Nations is an entirely different story. The UN

PAT (CONT.): has been unwilling to step up to the plate. For instance, countries like China, who have veto power over UN decisions, have large financial interests in Sudanese oil, and they don't want to do anything to offend the Sudanese government. Diplomats from the European Union and Canada have been expelled from Sudan for "interfering with domestic affairs." The EU was invited back only after offering an apology, but this sort of thing goes on all the time.

Z: Despite pressure exerted by the United States and other powerful countries, do you believe that a peaceful resolution is close at hand?

PAT: For reasons I've already noted, I'm afraid not.

(Z turns to JEREMIAH.)

Z: Your witness.

JEREMIAH: Of course, you can't predict the future with certainty, can you?

POWERS: Of course not.

JEREMIAH: So the future actions of governments, groups, and individuals could suddenly change the course of events in Darfur for the better?

PAT: Ah, I suppose that's true.

JEREMIAH: It certainly is.

(JEREMIAH sits. Z gestures for PAT to leave the stand.)

Z: Dr. Melvin Bookley, please. *(MELVIN takes the stand.)* What kind of work do you do?

MELVIN: For the past thirty years, I've been a professor of psychology at the University of Texas. My specialization is the study of human response to traumatic events.

Z: Have you testified previously as an expert in human psychology?

MELVIN: Hundreds of times, including before this tribunal. I've written extensively on the subject in textbooks and professional journals; I'm regarded as authoritative in the academic community.

Z: Please tell the Omissioners about your most recent work.

MELVIN: I've been researching how Americans respond to genocide.

Z: What did you learn?

MELVIN: To put it in a nutshell, most people don't focus on what's happening outside of their own circles. It's the way the human being is wired. There's a process those in my field call psychic numbing that causes us to deflect our attention from genocides—it is a natural brain response, a self-protective device to keep us from being debilitated by grief and depression.

Z: So you're saying, when faced with genocide, it's not our fault that most people don't tend to act.

MELVIN: True enough. In a way, our brains do too good a job of protecting us from being overwhelmed.

Z: Can you give us an example of how this principle works?

MELVIN: Well, as humans, we're far more likely to identify with a single victim. Statistics from research show that. For example, who doesn't remember the outpouring of sympathy for baby Jessica, who was trapped in a well in west Texas? The tidal-wave of responses from others occurred because most everyone could easily identify with harm to a single child.

Z: Doesn't it make sense that the greater the number of lives affected, the greater our response would be?

MELVIN: You would think so, but research indicates otherwise. We seem to become immobile in the face of immense man-made disasters.

Z: By the way, did you teach Miriam Allmon at UT?

MELVIN: Why, yes. She was one of my best students.

(Z sits.)

JEREMIAH: Perhaps you taught her too well. How do you account for the fact that thousands and thousands of people—who probably didn't read your books—have found a way to do *something* to help those suffering in Darfur?

MELVIN: Certainly *some* people are capable of acting in response to genocide, but they're relatively few. The odds are against it—like actually overcoming a drug addiction.

JEREMIAH: So if some act and others don't, it really boils down to each individual person's strength of will, doesn't it?

MELVIN: That's an oversimplification. You can't ignore the science. The inner workings of the human brain help explain why the overwhelming majority of people are repelled by, rather than drawn to, acting when confronted with a genocide.

JEREMIAH: You've got to be kidding. We might as well trash the whole idea of personal responsibility.

(Z stands to object, but before he can, JEREMIAH waves at MELVIN with contempt.)

That's all.

(Z gestures to MELVIN to leave the stand, and he does.)

Z: Bobby Nabor, please come forward.

(BOBBY takes the witness stand; he smiles at OMISSIONER 2, but she is self-possessed. He smiles at MIRIAM, who returns the smile.)

Bobby, how old are you?

BOBBY: Ten.

Z: Where do you live?

BOBBY: Right next door to the Allmons.

Z: You mean right next to the house where Miriam Allmon lives?

BOBBY: Yeah.

Z: How often do you spend time with the Allmons?

BOBBY: Almost every day. Tracy (*He looks toward OMISSIONER 2.*) and I ride the school bus together. Then, after school, we take turns going to each other's house to do homework.

Z: Bobby, have you found Ms. Allmon to be a kind and giving person?

BOBBY: You bet. She bakes awesome cookies for our Cub-Scout troop. She stays up late sometimes to help me with my advanced math; my parents don't know how to do it. She's always kissing Tracy—and me. Sometimes she takes me and Tracy when she drops off food for the homeless people.

Z: Thank you, Bobby.

(*Z sits.*)

JEREMIAH: Bobby, you've heard of Darfur, haven't you?

BOBBY: Yeah.

JEREMIAH: Have you done something to help?

BOBBY: My whole family joined in a walk for Darfur. We had sponsors who promised to give money for every mile we walked.

JEREMIAH: Did you tell Ms. Allmon about the walk?

(*He begins walking gradually toward MIRIAM.*)

BOBBY: I think so.

JEREMIAH: Did she walk with you?

BOBBY: Um. I don't think so.

JEREMIAH: Was she one of your sponsors?

BOBBY: Not that I can remember.

(JEREMIAH looks grimly at MIRIAM and then at Z, who shakes his head.)

JEREMIAH: Very well, Bobby. Please step down.

(BOBBY and JEREMIAH sit.)

Z: May I have a moment, Your Omissioners?

(OMISSIONER 1 and OMISSIONER 3 nod. Z sits next to MIRIAM.)

Looks like we're about done.

MIRIAM: Maybe I should testify. If I could just speak to that little judge, then maybe—

Z: Probably not a good idea. I don't think the prosecution has made its case, and with you off the stand, we avoid Jeremiah's cross-examination.

(MIRIAM, unconvinced, is about to speak, but Z continues.)

You know, it's a timing thing. This hearing's really about what actions you took before, not what you say now. With Omissioners, sometimes less is more.

(MIRIAM relents. Z stands and addresses the OMISSIONERS.)

Your Omissioners, the defense rests.

OMISSIONER 3: Argument for the defendant?

Z: Miriam Allmon is wrongly accused. She is *not* responsible by acts of commission or omission for causing the tragedy in Darfur. She has never been to Sudan—let alone committed a murder, rape, or village-burning there. She has never had any association with those who are directly responsible: the Janjaweed

Z (CONT.): and the Sudanese government. Nor has she ever interfered with any relief effort, as have China and France. Her offense, according to the prosecution, is that she has failed to do anything to alleviate harm she had no part in causing. The prosecution's condemnation goes too far. What cannot be relieved by countries like the United States and organizations like the UN cannot be laid at the feet of Miriam Allmon. On account of the way we're built, you can't single out Miriam Allmon for guilt. Forces responsible for the ongoing Darfur tragedy are much bigger than any single person. Because of human nature, genocides will be repeated in the future, as they have repeatedly occurred in the past: Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, Serbian Bosnia, Rwanda's Hutus, Iraq's Hussein regime.

(After each name, a sharp, high-pitched drumbeat sounds.)

Because of the way we're made, the vast majority of people are paralyzed by horror on such a grand scale. For what she has in common with most of humanity, Miriam Allmon should not be condemned. Miriam Allmon is no more responsible for the Darfur suffering than for high interest rates, prison overcrowding, or global warming. Of all people. Of *all* people, why would this body brand Miriam Allmon? *(He places his hand on her shoulder.)* She is kind and loving. She cares for her family and her community. She nourishes the minds and bodies of those people like Bobby who participate in the Darfur relief effort. Restore her to her family. Humanity's mission has not been hindered by Miriam's omission.

OMISSIONER 1: What says the prosecution?

(JEREMIAH remains seated. He is engrossed in thought.)

JEREMIAH: The defendant must be held responsible, or humanity is doomed. *(He stands.)* After all, what is the response of humanity if not the response of each individual added together? *(He moves forward and stops at the lectern.)* You heard the evidence about what the defendant did to lessen the suffering in Darfur. She was aware of the genocide. *(Sharp, high-pitched drumbeats sound a cadence.)* She was capable of doing *something* to help, but she did . . .

(He gestures; the movement is punctuated by a final drumbeat.)

. . . nothing. *(He walks toward MIRIAM.)* The defense holds up the defendant as a model for human behavior, but inaction in the face of genocide cannot be an

JEREMIAH (CONT.): acceptable standard. It is instead a recipe for failure. If everyone imitated the defendant, none of the genocides mentioned by the defense would have ever ended. The defendant's approach mocks the cry of "Never again."

(WITNESSES whisper, "Never again. Never again. Never again." JEREMIAH moves closer to the audience.)

The defendant's obligation to act flowed not only to the Allmon family but also to the family of humanity, of which the Darfurians are a part. She has failed to meet that obligation. Although she has many fine qualities, we urge that you find the defendant responsible in this case and, in so doing, save us all.

(OMISSIONER 1 and OMISSIONER 3 exchange words the audience cannot hear. OMISSIONER 2 listens intently. Z reassures MIRIAM.)

Z: It'll be over soon.

(OMISSIONER 2 nods, agreeing with her colleagues. They turn to MIRIAM. OMISSIONER 2 gestures for MIRIAM to stand.)

OMISSIONER 2: Please rise.

(Z helps MIRIAM up, and then he sits down. MIRIAM is very much alone. She awaits the judgment with great trepidation. OMISSIONER 2 stands and addresses MIRIAM.)

We find the defendant, Miriam Allmon—

(Chimes sound. Blackout.)

Scene 8

(Lights rise on the Allmons' kitchen. JERRY and MIRIAM sit facing each other at the kitchen table.)

MIRIAM: And, then—at that very moment, all of a sudden—it was over. But I can't get it out of my head.

JERRY: Wow! That's a lot to digest. Where's a dream expert when you need one? Tell you what. We'll talk about it tonight when I get home, okay?

(He kisses her quickly on the lips and then walks backwards away from her.)

I've got to get to work. *(He looks at his watch.)* It's getting late.

(He exits quickly.)

MIRIAM: Yes, it is getting late, so here's what I'll do

(Blackout.)

Scene 9

(Lights rise to reveal the cast members standing in a semicircle.)

MOLLY: *Tikkun olam.*

AFRICAN DANCERS AND DRUMMERS: Repair the world.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

PAT: Do unto others . . .

OMMISSIONER 1 AND OMISSIONER 3: . . . as you would have them do unto you.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

BOBBY: Stop the hate.

NIFISA: If one is enslaved, . . .

AFRICAN DANCERS AND DRUMMERS: We are all enslaved.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

AL: Am I my brother's keeper?

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

MELVIN: Justice. Justice shall you pursue.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

SARAH: Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

JERRY, MIRIAM, AND TRACY: Never again.

(The gavel-drum sounds.)

ALL: Never again.

(The cast members turn as one and exit through the audience in dignified single file as African drums cover the exit. Blackout.)

About the Contributors

Rebecca Burroughs is a playwright and poet currently living in San Antonio, Texas. Her scripts have been given numerous public readings, and she has won awards in several juried writing contests.

Michael Hardy is an Assistant United States Attorney and a member of the Beth-El Players, a community theatre group in San Antonio, Texas.

Kathleen Kardon is a retired teacher and a long-time member of the Beth-El Players, a community theatre group in San Antonio, Texas.

Mellissa Marlowe is a director, a playwright, and an actor in San Antonio, Texas. She is an assistant professor of drama at Northwest Vista College, and she directs shows for the Witte Museum and San Antonio's Shakespeare in the Park.

John McCarthy presently resides in Springfield, Illinois. Slaving as an undergraduate, he also competes as a runner in collegiate cross-country events and interns with the magazine *Quiddity International Literary Journal and Public-Radio Program*. This is his first publication of a play. *Paradise Floats*, his latest chapbook, will be published soon.

Rachelle Neuman graduated from the University of Incarnate Word with a bachelor's degree in drama. Some of her scripts include *Brown Pigs and Burgers*, *The Three Faces of Yitzhak* (performed in Akko, Israel), *Hattitude*, and the timely *Darfur Calls*. Several of Rachelle's original short plays have been performed in San Antonio, Texas, by the Renaissance Theater Guild and Steven Stoli's Theater. She has also directed original folk plays at San Antonio's Temple Beth-El for children of all ages. She enjoys working with her friend and musical partner, Linda Kaufman, who has a million tunes bubbling in her head. She thanks her husband, Sterling, who always encourages her to challenge herself.

Sheila Rinear is an award-winning, published playwright and screenwriter. Over two dozen of her plays have been produced. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, and she earned her master's degree in drama from the University of Oklahoma. Formerly a theatre-arts teacher at the public-school level, she currently teaches playwriting at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

Gabriel Ruiz is an actor, a poet, and a writer. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University-Kingsville with a bachelor's degree in theatre arts. He currently resides in San Antonio, Texas.

David Starkey had his first full-length play (*Soccer Moms*) produced in 2002 in North Hollywood at the Secret Rose Theatre. His *Julianne Caesar* premiered in June 2004 at *Teatro La Tea* in New York, and Lovecreek Productions staged *The Recovery Room* in New York in 2005. Starkey's most recent full-length script (a play about Emily Dickinson entitled *How Red the Fire*) received a staged reading at North Coast Rep in San Diego in the summer of 2005; the show was given a full production at Santa Barbara City College in February and March of 2007. In addition to being a playwright, Starkey has authored several collections of poems and more than 400 poems for literary magazines. He currently directs the new Creative Writing Program at Santa Barbara City College and hosts a local television program (*The Creative Community*).

