

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

Stephen Webb

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

School of Drama
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA

May, 2015

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Thesis

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DATE

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HEAD, SCHOOL OF DRAMA

DATE

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

By Stephen Webb

CHARACTERS

(3m/1f)

Herman

A Reclusive Artist

Male

59

Hightower

Herman's Makeshift Pal

Male

Young at Heart

Francesca Del Monte

An Esteemed Art Dealer

Female

49

LeRoy

(Luh-ROY)

A Failed Artist

Male

79

WHERE & WHEN

Herman's art studio in the basement of his childhood home.

Right now.

NOTES

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

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

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

Dialogue is spaced out for rhythm.

During preshow:

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

The Recluse Exists In His Natural Environment

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

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

He slurps on a bowl of soup—

He clips his fingernails—

He attempts to paint—

He dozes off at his easel—

He attempts to paint—

Then, he exits.

The Recluse Returns Home From Braving The Outside World

HERMAN stumbles in with an armful of collapsed cardboard boxes.

He drops the boxes and clicks on a light.

HERMAN

Home sweet...
Hellhole.

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

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

He rips and sighs—

Rips and sighs—

Rips and sighs.

The Recluse Expresses Himself

HERMAN stands in front of a rickety easel.

He stretches his bones and cracks his knuckles—
then he grabs a scrap of cardboard and places it on
the easel.

He takes a seat on a wobbly stool—

Dips his paintbrush into a can of paint—

And paints a giant sad face on the canvas.

HERMAN

Ta-da...

The Recluse Detects a Pattern

HERMAN adds his painting to a stack of other
paintings.

Then he sifts through some of his past work.

He picks up a painting and inspects it.

It depicts another sad face.

HERMAN

Hmm...

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

HERMAN

Hmmmmm...

HERMAN picks up another painting—

And another.

And another.

They all depict sad faces.

HERMAN

Ohhhhhhhhh...

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

HERMAN

Sad faces.

All I paint is sad faces.

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

HERMAN

Am I...

...Sad?

The Recluse Admits His Harsh Reality

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

HERMAN

I am so very—

(He glances over to a stack of sad faces.)

Utterly—

(He glances over to another stack of sad faces.)

Desperately—

(He glances over to another stack of sad faces.)

Alooooooooooone.

HERMAN mopes and sighs—

Mopes and sighs—

Mopes and—

HERMAN

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

HERMAN leaps up.

HERMAN

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

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

HERMAN enters.

HERMAN

Home sweet...
Nope, not today.

He exits —

Then reenters.

HERMAN

Home sweet...
Still not feeling it.

He exits —

Then reenters.

HERMAN

Home sweet...
Shit.

He exits —

Then reenters.

HERMAN

Home sweet...
God, this is awful.

He exits—

Then reenters.

HERMAN

Home sweet...
Why do I even try?

The Recluse Ponders Companionship

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

HERMAN

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

HERMAN scooches closer to the easel.

He holds his paintbrush to the canvas—

But nothing comes.

HERMAN

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

HERMAN slams down his paintbrush—

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

HERMAN

Why can't I have somebody?
(He rips the cardboard again.)
A confidant—
(And again.)
A buddy—
(And again.)
A pal—

(And again.)

HERMAN stares down at the scraps in his hands.

HERMAN

Hmm...

He makes a few of the scraps move a little—

Then walk a little—

Then dance a little—

HERMAN chuckles.

HERMAN

Hmmmmmm...

HERMAN jumps up.

The Recluse Has An Epiphany

HERMAN

OF COURSE!

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

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

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

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

Scraps of materials fly and fling through the air.

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

He works and works and works and works—

Until, finally—

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

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

The Recluse Interacts With His Makeshift Pal

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

HERMAN

Good evening.

...

I'm Herman.

And you are?

...

Oh, you must be—

Umm—

Maurice?

No, Walter?

No, Petie?

No—

You're something much more stately.

...

Hightower?

...

Yes, Hightower.

What a lovely name.

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

Hightower.

Unlike my name.

Herman.

Herrrrrrrrman.

Ichhh—

(HERMAN chuckles.)

I've never been fond of my name.

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER sit in silence.

HERMAN

Do you like my art studio?
Nothing special, I know, but it suits my needs.
It's in the basement of my parent's old house.
They're dead now.
They were all I had —
And now —
They're dead.
And I don't have siblings or anything.
I'm an only child.

...

With dead parents.

...

And no friends.

...

Just me.

...

Until now, that is!

My goodness —

Pardon me!

Where are my manners?

I'm just rambling on and on.

You were saying?

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER sit in silence.

HERMAN

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

...

Hmm?

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER sit in silence.

HERMAN

Please say something.

...

Please, please say something.

...

I beg you—
I've never wanted anything in my life more than I want you to talk right now.
...
I need you to talk.
...
Talk, Hightower.
...
I said talk.
...
Talk!
...
TALK!
...
TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK! TALK!
...
(He starts shouting:)
TALK!!!!
TALK!!!!!!!!
TAAAAAAAALLLLK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
TAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLKKKKK!!!!!!!!!!!!

HERMAN runs out of breath.

Several moments pass.

He wipes sweat from his forehead—

Then he regains composure.

HERMAN

I didn't mean to make things weird between us.

That was totally uncalled for.

It's not fair for me to ask so much of you.

...

Considering what I'm about to have to do—

You've helped to make this a night to remember.

HERMAN stands and takes HIGHTOWER tenderly
in his arms.

HERMAN

I'm going to say something I've never said to anybody before.

Forgive me if this is too forward—

But I feel it—

So I'm just going to spit it out!

...

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

HERMAN attempts to hug HIGHTOWER—

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

So he kisses him softly on the forehead—

And gently places him onto a pile of scrap
materials.

The Recluse Hits Bottom

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

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

He steps onto a wobbly stool—

Loops the rope around his neck—

And glances around one last time at his vacant
studio.

HERMAN

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

HERMAN shuts his eyes—

Buckles his knees—

And takes a sharp breath.

HIGHTOWER

YOU WOULDN'T DAAAAAAAAARRRE!!!

HIGHTOWER remains unseen.

HERMAN pops open his eyes.

HERMAN

Is someone actually there?!

...

No.

Of course not.

HERMAN shuts his eyes—

And takes another sharp breath.

HIGHTOWER

YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME!!!

HERMAN pops open his eyes—

HERMAN

Hello?!

...

Pull it together, Herman!

HERMAN shuts his eyes—

And takes another sharp breath.

HIGHTOWER

HAVE MEEEEEEERRRRRCYYYYYYY!!!

HERMAN

Okay—

Who said that?!

Where are you?

Over here.

HIGHTOWER

Where?

HERMAN

Here!

HIGHTOWER

Where's here?

HERMAN

HERE!

HIGHTOWER

How did you get into my studio?

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

Who are you?

HIGHTOWER

Don't concern yourself with that right now.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

I will not!

HERMAN

Why not?

HIGHTOWER

If you wanna see me—
You will have to step down from there!

HERMAN

I am not stepping down!

HIGHTOWER

But you've gotta step down!

HERMAN

Absolutely not!

It's taken me a long, long time to get to this point.

I am doing this for me!

I am taking control of my future!

HIGHTOWER

Hate to break it to ya—

But there's not gonna be much of a future if you go this route!

HERMAN

Exactly!

So whoever you are—

You're too late!

You're tainting my final moment!

So, please, show a little respect—

And go away!

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

The same way you came in!

HIGHTOWER

I'm not goin' anywhere!

HERMAN

I'm warning you!

If you don't get out of here right now—

This instant—

Then— Then—

Then—

Th—

HIGHTOWER

Watch out or you're gonna explode!

HERMAN

Okay!

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

No—
HIGHTOWER

Yes—
HERMAN

NO!
HIGHTOWER

YES!
HERMAN

PLEASE DON'T!
HIGHTOWER

IT'S TOO LATE!
HERMAN

BUT I LOVE YOU TOO!!!
HIGHTOWER

A moment passes.

HERMAN calms down.

What did you say?
HERMAN

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

HERMAN removes the rope from his neck.

He carefully steps off the stool—

And looks around.

Where are you?
HERMAN
...
Please don't hide.

HIGHTOWER—in his makeshift splendor—steps forth all by himself from behind a heap of scraps.

HERMAN gasps—

HIGHTOWER ducks down.

HERMAN

No, no—
I'm sorry!
Come back.
Please.

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

HERMAN

Hi.

HERMAN waves to HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

Hi.

HIGHTOWER waves to HERMAN.

They keep some distance.

HERMAN

I can't believe this.

HIGHTOWER

Can't believe what?

HERMAN

You're—

HIGHTOWER

I'm?

HERMAN

You're—

HIGHTOWER

I'm?

Hightower!!!	HERMAN
I know!!!	HIGHTOWER
And you're—	HERMAN
I'm?	HIGHTOWER
You're—	HERMAN
I'm?	HIGHTOWER
Talking!!!	HERMAN
I know!!!	HIGHTOWER
Why? I mean— How?!	HERMAN
I thought you wanted me to!	HIGHTOWER
My head hurts. Maybe it's the paint fumes.	HERMAN
Paint fumes?	HIGHTOWER
Being down here— Inhaling paint fumes all day, every day— For all these years— I guess it's finally gotten to me.	HERMAN

HIGHTOWER

I'd say so!

HERMAN

What does that mean?

HIGHTOWER

Well, you just tried to—
You know—

HIGHTOWER gestures to the rope.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

This?

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

Finish the job?

HIGHTOWER

That's right!

HERMAN

HERMAN reaches for the rope—

HIGHTOWER

Oh no—
Please don't!

HERMAN

Why not?

HIGHTOWER

Because.

HERMAN

Because why?

HIGHTOWER

Because I'll be—
No.
Nevermind.

HERMAN

You'll be what?

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

Please say it.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

Sad?

You would be sad?
For me?

HIGHTOWER

Mmhmm.

HERMAN

Gosh.

A moment passes.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

I sure would.

HERMAN

...How sad?

HIGHTOWER

Super sad.

HERMAN moves a bit closer to HIGHTOWER.

He studies his features.

HERMAN

May I...?

HIGHTOWER nods.

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

HERMAN
I'd just like to say—

HIGHTOWER
Perhaps we could—

HERMAN
Oh, sorry, please just—

HIGHTOWER
Please, you go ahead—

HERMAN
Maybe if we just—

HIGHTOWER
Why don't we try—

HERMAN and HIGHTOWER burst out laughing.

HERMAN
Can I ask you something, Hightower?

HIGHTOWER
Certainly.

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

HIGHTOWER
Yep, we're definitely—

HERMAN/HIGHTOWER
Pals!

The Recluse Bonds With His Makeshift Pal

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

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

HIGHTOWER
How's this pose?

HERMAN
Delightful!

HERMAN paints.

HIGHTOWER
And this one?

HERMAN
Splendid!

HERMAN paints.

HIGHTOWER

How bout if I wiggle like this?

HERMAN

Ooooooooo!!!

Now you're sizzlin'!

HERMAN paints.

HIGHTOWER

Or jiggle like this?

HERMAN

Somebody stop him—

He's on fire!

They crack up as HERMAN continues painting.

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

HERMAN

Hightower?

HIGHTOWER

Yes, Herman?

HERMAN

I just want to thank you.

HIGHTOWER

Thank me?

For what?

HERMAN

For giving me so much confidence in my artwork.

I must say—

I don't believe I've ever felt so good about my paintings.

And it's all because of you.

HIGHTOWER

It's an honor to be your muse.

HERMAN paints a final detail on each canvas—

Then he slams down his paintbrush.

HERMAN

All right—
Finished!

HIGHTOWER

Hooray!!!

HERMAN

Would you, perhaps—
Care to see?

HIGHTOWER

I would love nothing more.

HERMAN spins around his cardboard canvas.

It's a painting of a giant happy face.

He spins around the next canvas—

Another happy face.

And the next canvas—

Yet another happy face.

HIGHTOWER

Oh, Herman!
Your work—
It's—
It's—
Breathtaking!

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

And it shows.
Truly innovative!
I believe this calls for a celebration!

HERMAN
A celebration?

HIGHTOWER
Absolutely!

HERMAN
What kind of celebration?

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

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

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

HERMAN
What is it?

HIGHTOWER
A song I wrote for you.

HERMAN
Hightower, that's so special.

HIGHTOWER
So you'd like to hear it?

HERMAN
I would be honored!

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

HIGHTOWER
ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US
NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER MORE OF US
IF THERE'S EVER MORE OF US
YES, IF THERE'S MORE THAN TWO OF US
THEN SOMEONE'S GOTTA GO

(He stops singing.)
So...?
What'd you think?

HERMAN
Hightower.
Gosh.
I'm speechless.

HIGHTOWER
You liked it?

HERMAN
I'm just—
I'm touched.
...
Would you mind too terribly if I gave you a hug?

HIGHTOWER
I thought you'd never ask!

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

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

HERMAN
Forever?

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

HERMAN nervously laughs.

HIGHTOWER pulls away from him.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Oh really?
Bout what?

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Mmhmm?

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Out there?
What do you mean—
Out there?

HERMAN

You know—
Out into the world.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

But I thought you and I didn't like it—

You know—
Out there.

HERMAN

I know.
We don't.
It's just—

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

I just thought, maybe—

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

We are pals!

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

It makes me queasy to even consider such a notion!
You being out there—
In that big, scary world—
Like a lost lamb—

Trying to whore out his artwork!
But, whatever!
Fine!
Go!
See if I care!

HIGHTOWER turns his back to HERMAN.

HERMAN

Hightower—
Are you getting upset?

HIGHTOWER

I just need a moment, okay?

HIGHTOWER starts to sniffle a bit.

HERMAN

Are you—
Crying?

HIGHTOWER

No!

HIGHTOWER sniffles some more.

HERMAN

You are crying.

HIGHTOWER

It's just—
I just don't want you to be—
You know—
Out there—
Any more than you absolutely have to be.

HERMAN

It was just an idea.

HIGHTOWER

A terrible idea!

HERMAN

Yes, okay.
A bad, bad idea.

...

I didn't mean to upset you.

HERMAN puts a hand on HIGHTOWER —

But HIGHTOWER won't budge.

A moment passes —

Then HERMAN starts singing:

HERMAN
ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US

HIGHTOWER stops sniffing.

HERMAN
NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER MORE OF US

HIGHTOWER turns around.

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

HIGHTOWER quietly joins in.

HERMAN/HIGHTOWER
THEN SOMEONE'S GOTTA GO

HERMAN
I don't have the best singing voice.

HIGHTOWER wipes away his tears.

HIGHTOWER
Sounded angelic to this guy.

HERMAN
Thanks.

HIGHTOWER
So —
I trust you've come to your senses?
You're not going to betray me and take your paintings out into the world?

HERMAN

I would never betray you.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

You're a great pal too, Hightower.

The Recluse Stirs the Pot

HIGHTOWER—quite frazzled—waits for
HERMAN.

He waits and waits and waits and waits—

Until finally, he hears someone coming—

And he quickly hides.

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

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

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

HIGHTOWER

Well, well, well—

HERMAN

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

HERMAN tucks his paintings behind his back.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

Oh, nothing much.
Were you hiding from me?

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Oh no?

HERMAN

No.

HIGHTOWER

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

HIGHTOWER breaks down —

HERMAN

Hightower, please calm down.

HIGHTOWER

I just — I just — I just — I just —

HERMAN

You just what?

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

You just thought what?

HIGHTOWER
That you— That you— That you— That you—

HERMAN
That I what?

HIGHTOWER
ABANDONDED ME!!!!!!

HIGHTOWER sobs.

HERMAN
Hightower, buddy—
Pal—

HIGHTOWER
Don't you dare "pal" me right now you sick—

HERMAN
C'mere—

HERMAN moves toward HIGHTOWER and tries
to comfort him.

HIGHTOWER
NO!
GET AWAY FROM ME!
YOU MONSTER!

HERMAN
Why am I a monster?!

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

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

HIGHTOWER
LIES!!!

HERMAN
What more do you want from me?

HIGHTOWER

I want you to remain faithful!
Faithful to the good thing we've got going on here!

HERMAN

I am faithful!

HIGHTOWER

Oh yeah?
You're faithful?

HERMAN

Of course I am!

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER closes in on HERMAN.

HIGHTOWER

Just more scraps, huh?

HERMAN

Yes.
They're canvases—
For my paintings—

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

You don't trust me?

HERMAN backs away from HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER follows HERMAN.

HIGHTOWER

Just show me—
If it's no big deal.

HERMAN

I'm not going to show you.

HIGHTOWER

C'mon—
Show me, Herman.

HERMAN

I shouldn't have to show you.

HIGHTOWER chases HERMAN around the studio.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

FINE!!!
Yes, okay!

HERMAN reveals his paintings to HIGHTOWER.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

I had to do it, Hightower!
For myself!

HIGHTOWER

And you call yourself faithful!
What bologna!
What hogwash!

HERMAN

I had to see if anything would happen!

HIGHTOWER

Oh, is that so?

HERMAN

Yes!
And you know what?

HIGHTOWER

What?!!

HERMAN

I'm glad I did it!

HIGHTOWER leans over a pile of scraps.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

Calm down!

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

What for?

HERMAN

For food!

For supplies!

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

A moment passes.

HIGHTOWER takes a breath.

HIGHTOWER

I'm sorry, Herman.

I don't know why I get like this.

I just despise it when you leave me in here—

All cooped up and alone.

And I despise it when you go out there—

Making me worry all the time.

It's exhausting.

HERMAN

But you don't have anything to worry about—

That's what I'm saying.

HIGHTOWER

I like it to just be—

Me and you.

You and me.

Nobody else.

And sometimes when you go out there it feels like—

No.

I can't say it.

HERMAN

What?

HIGHTOWER

It's too humiliating.

HERMAN

Please say it.

HIGHTOWER

Sometimes when you go out there—

It feels like you're going to—

Well—
Replace me.

HERMAN

Hightower—
Look at me.

HIGHTOWER won't make eye contact.

HIGHTOWER

I can't look at you.

HERMAN

Look at me right now.

HIGHTOWER

Make me!

HERMAN

Please—
Please just look at me.

HIGHTOWER finally looks up at HERMAN.

HERMAN

I will never replace you.

HIGHTOWER huffs.

HERMAN

I mean it.
Never.

HIGHTOWER

Not ever?

HERMAN

Never ever—
Not ever—
Never!

HIGHTOWER laughs.

HERMAN

There is no one in my world but you.
You saved my life.

You gave me and my art purpose again.
Who could replace you?
Nobody.
That's who.

HIGHTOWER

Nobody?

HERMAN

Nobody.

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN/HIGHTOWER

THEN SOMEONE'S GOTTA—

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

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Yooooooooooooohoooooooooooo—
Oh, Hermit!

HIGHTOWER

Herman...

HERMAN

Mmhmm?

HIGHTOWER

What was that ruckus I just heard?

HERMAN

Ruckus?
What ruckus?

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Hermiiiiiiiiit, dear?

You down there?!

HERMAN

Oh, that ruckus.

HIGHTOWER

Yes, that's the one.

HERMAN

Look—

I was going to tell you if you just gave me the chance.

But you got so upset so quickly that—

HIGHTOWER

You were going to tell me what, exactly?

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)

Come out, come out—

Wherever you are!

HERMAN

Her name's Francesca—

Francesca Del Monte.

She's a big, fancy art dealer.

I bumped into her today while I was—

HIGHTOWER

Out there.

HERMAN

That's right.

She's got a gallery here in town—

HIGHTOWER

And you invited her into our home?

HERMAN

She wanted to come!

Practically invited herself when she found out I was an artist!

This is a good thing, Hightower—

I promise!

HIGHTOWER

A good thing?

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Peek-a-boo—
I'm lookin' for youuuuuuu!

HIGHTOWER

How the fuck could that be a good thing?

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

(offstage:)
Herrrrrrmiiiiiiiit—
I'm gonna fiiiiiiiiind youuuuuu!

HIGHTOWER

I trust you know what you must do, Herman.

HERMAN

Hightower, don't be like this.

HIGHTOWER

She's gotta go.

HERMAN

But—

HIGHTOWER

Get. Rid. Of. Her.

HERMAN

Hightower—

HIGHTOWER

NOW!

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

HIGHTOWER quickly masks himself in a pile of scraps.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

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

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

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Herman.

FRANCESCA

Hmm?

HERMAN

Nevermind.

FRANCESCA

It's even more gloomy than I had imagined!

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

(Suddenly shouting:)
YOU STOP THAT THIS INSTANT!

HERMAN jumps.

HERMAN

Stop what?!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN doesn't quite know how to respond.

FRANCESCA

Do you understand me, Hermit?!

HERMAN

I suppose so?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Market me?
Really?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

Isn't it?!

FRANCESCA moves around the studio—
inspecting the space.

FRANCESCA

When I saw you today—
Outside that old art supply shop—

Standing awkwardly slumped—
Holding your little paintings—
On their little cardboard cutouts—
I knew it was fate!

HERMAN

You did?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

An inkling?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

You could?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

The stuff?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Gosh.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Umm...
I think I do?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

I know it?

FRANCESCA

Oh, Hermit—

HERMAN

Herman.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

I suppose not.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN seems overwhelmed.

HERMAN

I, uhh—

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Oomph?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

I've got—
The stuff?

FRANCESCA invades his personal space.

HERMAN shrinks down a bit.

FRANCESCA

Say it again!

HERMAN

I've got the stuff—

FRANCESCA

AGAIN!

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

FRANCESCA

I WANT YOU TO MEAN IT, HERMIT!

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

If you could please just step back a little bit—

FRANCESCA

I WANT YOUR STUDIO WALLS TO ECHO WITH YOUR VOICE!

NOW SAY IT!!!
SAY IT!!!!
SAAAAAAAAAAAY IIIIIIIIIIT!!!!!!

FRANCESCA corners HERMAN—and he finally
breaks:

HERMAN

OKAY, FINE!!!!
I'VE!!!
GOT!!!!
THE!!!!!!!!!!
STUUUUUUUUUFF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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

LEROY

(offstage:)

Fran—
Francesca?
Are—
Are you safe?!

FRANCESCA

Down here, LeRoy!

HERMAN regains his breath.

HERMAN

What's happening?
Who is that?

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA backs away from HERMAN.

LEROY

(offstage:)

Fran—
Francesca?!
Why—
Why can't I see you?!

FRANCESCA

Because you can't see much of anything, LeRoy dear!
Be careful not to trip, okay?!

LEROY trips.

LEROY

(offstage:)

Oww!!!

FRANCESCA

(Speaks quietly to HERMAN:)

Please pardon LeRoy's—

State of mind.

Poor dear's been through the wringer in his old age.

And now he's a bit—

Oh, what would you call it?

Loopy.

HERMAN

Loopy?

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

He hobbles over and joins them.

FRANCESCA

But I scooped you right up under my wing and we've been close ever since—

Isn't that right, LeRoy?

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

LEROY

(to FRANCESCA:)

Who—

Who are you?!

FRANCESCA

Oh, LeRoy—

Always a barrel of laughs!

Like the grandpapa I never had!

LEROY

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

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

I remember how to spell.

FRANCESCA

Of course you do.
There, there—

FRANCESCA pats LEROY gently on his back.

FRANCESCA

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

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

FRANCESCA

Many moons ago, LeRoy even had—
The stuff.

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

HERMAN

Is he okay?

FRANCESCA

I'm afraid not, Hermit.
You see—

LeRoy kept to himself for far too long.
He never shared his artwork with the outside world.
And all those years of loneliness seriously wounded his psyche—

HERMAN and FRANCESCA stare at LEROY'S
blank daze.

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

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

LEROY snaps to.

LEROY
Francesca?!

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

LEROY
The stuff?

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

HERMAN
Show you—?

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

LEROY
The stuff!
Of course!
I used to have the stuff!

Where the hell did my stuff go?!

LEROY almost trips over his cane.

FRANCESCA

Alright, LeRoy.
Calm yourself—
You don't want to get parched.
Here, sip your juice.
No juicy means LeRoy goes loopy!
(*FRANCESCA passes LEROY a juice box.*)
Go on, Hermit.

LEROY leans on his cane and sips his juice.

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

Am I?

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

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

This is all of my artwork.

FRANCESCA wanders throughout the studio and
studies his work.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

I appreciate it?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Sad faces.

LEROY almost chokes on his juice.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Oh, no.
No, no—
Of course not.

FRANCESCA

Thank goodness—

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

Oh, how marvelous!
What's the collection?

HERMAN

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

LEROY

Uh ohhh.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy—

HERMAN

What is it?
Is something wrong?

LEROY

I'd say so.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, just sip your juice!
(*LEROY sips.*)

Hermit—
Hear me out—
I've been on the art scene in this town for a long time.

LEROY

She's not kidding.

FRANCESCA

Okay, LeRoy—

LEROY

She's talkin' years.

FRANCESCA

He gets the picture—

LEROY

Decades, even.

FRANCESCA

ENOUGH!

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

LEROY

No spring chicken.

FRANCESCA shoots a glare at LEROY.

LEROY sips his juice.

FRANCESCA

If you were to step into any gallery in town—

They'd kill to be in my position.
They'd absolutely slaughter to be on the same level as Francesca Del Monte.
Just ask them!

LEROY

Once upon a time, perhaps.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, bite your tongue—

HERMAN

What are you saying?

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

Gifts tend to fade.

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

I mean—
She's supernatural!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN grows a bit uncomfortable.

HERMAN

I told you—
This is it.

FRANCESCA

I see how it's going to be.

LEROY hobbles forward on his cane.

LEROY

But Francesca—
You said he's the one—
You said he could save the gallery!

HERMAN

Wait a second—

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

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

HERMAN

What's LeRoy talking about?

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

But this is the last straw!
He's our last hope!!!

FRANCESCA

BYE, BYE LEROY!

LEROY

Bye... bye...

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

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY stumbles out.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

...Alone...?

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA laughs.

HERMAN nervously grins.

HERMAN

Hiding somebody?
Why would I be hiding somebody?

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA closes in again on HERMAN'S
personal space.

HERMAN tries to keep some distance between
them.

HERMAN

Umm...
What exactly can be our little secret?

FRANCESCA

Your secret treasure trove of brilliance.
Your juicy stuff.
Where is it?
C'mon—

You can tell me.
What might pique Francesca's fancy?

FRANCESCA moves to a stack of paintings.

FRANCESCA

Is it over here?

(She moves to a different stack.)

Or how about over here?

(She moves to a different stack.)

Oooooooo, or maybe over here!

...

I just know there's something else in here for me to get my perky mitts on!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind
FRANCESCA'S back.

FRANCESCA remains totally oblivious.

HERMAN

I, uhh—

I don't know why you would feel that way.

There's really nothing else for you to find.

HIGHTOWER gestures for HERMAN to get rid of
her.

FRANCESCA

Don't play coy with me, Hermit.

Do you really expect me to believe—

That these rudimentary paintings are all you have to offer?

HERMAN

I thought you liked my paintings.

Isn't that why you're here?

FRANCESCA

I'm here because of my inkling about you.

I think there's a lot more to you than meets the eye!

...

What is it you keep looking at—?

FRANCESCA turns to see—

HIGHTOWER quickly ducks back down.

HERMAN
NOTHING!

FRANCESCA
You seem distracted by something —

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

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

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

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind a stack of paint
cans.

HERMAN
Spark?

FRANCESCA
Yes!
That gleam!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind a coat rack.

HERMAN
Gleam?

FRANCESCA
Yes!
That magic!

HIGHTOWER pops up from behind an easel.

HERMAN
Magic?

FRANCESCA

Absolutely!

I need you to show me some artwork that evokes that feeling you get with—

A fresh ocean breeze!

Or steamy clam chowder on a Sunday morning!!!

Or swigging cough syrup straight from the bottle when nobody's watching!!!!

(Didn't mean to let that slip:)

I mean, uhh—

(Regains composure:)

That's the sort of feeling I seek when I recruit artists to the Del Monte Art Gallery!

HERMAN

I'm not so sure if I've got anything like that.

My paintings are all that I have to offer.

What you see is what you get.

FRANCESCA

Do you understand what you're giving up here, Hermit?

HERMAN

Sort of...?

FRANCESCA

The chance at a life outside of these dark, sad walls!

The chance to not end up like LeRoy!

You could still really be somebody—

We could be somebodies together!

Out there!

HERMAN

Out there?

FRANCESCA

Yes, Hermit.

Out there!

Fame! Fortune! Admiration! Companionship!

HERMAN'S eyes suddenly light up.

HERMAN

Companionship?

FRANCESCA

Oh so many companions and comrades and friendships, Hermit!

Just endless amounts!

HERMAN

Gosh.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Mmhmm.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Well...

FRANCESCA

Well...?

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

HERMAN

No.
I've got nothing.

FRANCESCA

So, you mean to tell me —
That my inkling about you —
Was —
Was —
(This is painful for her:)
Wrrr —
Wrrrrrrrrrr —
Wrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr —
Incorrect?

HERMAN

I'm afraid so.

FRANCESCA

But that can't be!

HERMAN

I'm sorry to disappoint you, Francesca.

FRANCESCA

I see...

Very well, then...

(Suddenly shouting:)

LEROY!

LEROY, CAN YOU HEAR ME?!!

FRANCESCA glides toward the doorway.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Yeah.

Me too.

LEROY hobbles in on his cane.

LEROY

Did somebody just call for me?

FRANCESCA

Yes, LeRoy!

I did!

LEROY

Who are you?!

FRANCESCA

Warm up the LeSabre!

(She tosses LEROY the keys.)

We're getting out of here!

LEROY

Oh, right—

Does this mean no supper tonight?

FRANCESCA

We'll discuss that later!

(to HERMAN:)

I really would have liked to make you somebody out there in the real world.

But I suppose it just wasn't meant to be.

HERMAN'S a bit defeated.

HERMAN

No, I guess not.

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

So long!

FRANCESCA storms out.

LEROY hobbles behind.

HERMAN watches them leave.

A moment passes—

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

What'd I do?

HIGHTOWER

You got rid of them!

HERMAN takes a seat at his easel.

HIGHTOWER

I can't believe you actually held your ground!
I can't believe you did that!
For me!
For us!
We should celebrate!

Don't you think?
How should we celebrate?!

HERMAN
I don't feel like celebrating, Hightower.

HIGHTOWER
You don't?

HERMAN
Not at all.

HIGHTOWER
Well—
Why the heck not?

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

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

HERMAN
Should I?

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

HERMAN
Because, Hightower—
There goes my chance!

HIGHTOWER
Your chance?
At what?

HERMAN
Being somebody!

HIGHTOWER
But you already are somebody—

HERMAN

No I'm not!

HIGHTOWER

To me, you are.

HERMAN

Oh, whoopee—

Big deal!

I want to be somebody out there—

In the world—

Where it matters!

HIGHTOWER

So—

This doesn't really matter to you?

What you and I have.

HERMAN

That's not what I meant.

HIGHTOWER

Then what exactly did you mean, Herman?

HERMAN

Nothing.

Just—

Forget it.

HERMAN heads for the door.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN keeps walking.

HIGHTOWER

Did you hear me?!!

HERMAN ignores HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

Who do you think you're fooling, Herman?

HERMAN stops.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN turns around.

HERMAN

What did you just say?

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN moves back over to HIGHTOWER.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN looms over HIGHTOWER.

HERMAN

Oh?
And why not?

HIGHTOWER

BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT!

HERMAN slaps HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER gasps—

Then he darts behind a stack of paintings.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

...I thought we were pals...

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Pals don't treat each other this way!

HERMAN

I didn't mean it!

HIGHTOWER won't budge.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Fine—

HERMAN

Fine—

HIGHTOWER

FINE!

HERMAN

FINE!
GOODNIGHT!

HERMAN shuts off the lights and bolts out of the studio.

The Recluse Gets a Surprise Visit

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

FRANCESCA switches on a flashlight.

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

Like mice —
Got it.

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

FRANCESCA

LeRoy!
I said not a peep!

LEROY

I can't see anything —
It's too dark!

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

I'll be careful!

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

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

And you still trust your inklings?
Even after all of the recent misfires?

FRANCESCA

What are you implying, LeRoy?
I mean—
I'm aware that my inklings have, perhaps, not been quite as —
Up to par—
These past few weeks.

LEROY

...Weeks?

FRANCESCA

Okay, months.

LEROY

...Months?

FRANCESCA

Fine, years.

LEROY

...Years?

FRANCESCA

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

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

FRANCESCA

Keep digging until you find it.

LEROY

It?

FRANCESCA

Yes, LeRoy—
It.

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

LEROY bends down and lifts a box.

LEROY

My back's not really what it used to be—

FRANCESCA

Then try to be fast!

FRANCESCA and LEROY sift and dig—

Hunt and forage—

Rummage and scavenge.

LEROY

Nothing's popping out at me, Francesca—

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

For who?

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA plops down.

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

I'm afraid so.

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

The final bow—
The last hurrah—
The—

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA heads for the door.

LEROY hobbles behind—but then stumbles again
into another stack of art supplies.

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, be quiet!

LEROY notices an unusual figure lying on the
floor.

LEROY

Fran—
Francesca?

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

But— But—
Francesca—

FRANCESCA

What is it, LeRoy?!

LEROY

It's— It's—

FRANCESCA
Please don't go all loopy on me again, LeRoy!

LEROY bends down and inspects HIGHTOWER.

LEROY
It's his— His—

FRANCESCA
His what?!
Spit it out!

LEROY lifts HIGHTOWER high into the air.

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

FRANCESCA
LeRoy!
You precious, geriatric poodle you!

FRANCESCA snatches HIGHTOWER out of
LEROY'S hands.

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

LEROY
Feels good to feel something.

FRANCESCA
Francesca's still got it!

FRANCESCA studies HIGHTOWER.

FRANCESCA

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

LEROY

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

FRANCESCA

Shh—!

LEROY

What?
What is it?

FRANCESCA moves closer to the door.

FRANCESCA

I hear something.

LEROY

Let's get the hell outta dodge!

FRANCESCA

I think Hermit's coming down here.

LEROY

C'mon! Let's scam!

FRANCESCA

It's too late!

LEROY

Aw, shit!!!!

HERMAN stumbles in—wearing his sad, mopey
pajamas.

FRANCESCA and LEROY duck down.

HERMAN

Hello?

...
...

Hightower?

LEROY

(Loudly whispering:)
Who's Hightower?

FRANCESCA

Shh—!

HERMAN

Is someone else in here?

LEROY

...Not a soul...

FRANCESCA

LeRoy!
Whisper!

LEROY

(Not whispering:)
I thought I was whispering!

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

He sees FRANCESCA and LEROY hunkered
down.

HERMAN

Francesca?
Is that you?

FRANCESCA

Hermit, hiiii—
Good evening!

HERMAN

And LeRoy?

LEROY

My bones ache.

HERMAN

What are you two doing in my studio?

FRANCESCA

What are we doing here?

...

What are we doing here?

What—

Are—

We—

Doing—

Here?

What are we doing here, LeRoy?

LEROY

Uhhhhhhhhhhhh—

FRANCESCA

C'mon, anything?

LEROY

Uhhhhhhhhhhhh—

FRANCESCA

I'm losing you again, aren't I LeRoy?

LEROY

Paintings?

FRANCESCA

Paintings?

Right—

Yes—

Of course!

Paintings!

I wanted to come back—

Because I think I judged your paintings a bit too harshly earlier.

HERMAN

You did?

FRANCESCA

Yes—

(to LEROY:)

Yes?

LEROY

Sure—

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

You said my paintings look rudimentary.

FRANCESCA

Did I say that?

LEROY

Sounds like something you'd say.

FRANCESCA

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

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

LEROY

Who's LeRoy?

FRANCESCA

I got to thinking about your paintings, Hermit—

HERMAN

You did?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

They're not?

FRANCESCA

Not at all!
They're simply a reflection of your—

Your—

(She goes to LEROY, but nothing:)

Your—

Existence!

HERMAN

My existence?

FRANCESCA

Yes.

Your lifestyle.

You know—

Your loneliness.

So that's why we came back!

HERMAN

Why are you both dressed like that?

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

FRANCESCA

Oh.

Uhh—

What can I say?

LeRoy and I—

We're a mysterious duo.

LEROY

Mystifying!

HERMAN notices FRANCESCA attempting to hide something.

HERMAN

What do you have there—?

FRANCESCA nervously grins.

HERMAN moves toward her.

FRANCESCA

Nothing!

I've got nothing!

...

LeRoy, do something!

HERMAN closes in on her.

He sees what she's hiding.

HERMAN

YOU'VE GOT HIGHTOWER!!!

FRANCESCA

Hightower?

Is that what you call this piece?

HERMAN

He's not a piece!

Give him back to me!

RIGHT NOW!

FRANCESCA

LeRoy!

LEROY

Huh—?

FRANCESCA

Catch!

FRANCESCA tosses HIGHTOWER to LEROY.

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

FRANCESCA

Go on, LeRoy!

Take it and get out of here!

HERMAN

NO!!!! DON'T!!!

LEROY quickly becomes frazzled.

LEROY

I'm— I'm—

Sorry?

FRANCESCA
You heard me, LeRoy!
Go!

HERMAN
Please don't!

LEROY
But— But—
Francesca—

FRANCESCA
LeRoy—
Do as I say!

HERMAN
I beg you, no!

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

FRANCESCA
Go—

HERMAN
No—

FRANCESCA
Go!

HERMAN
No!

FRANCESCA
GO!!!

HERMAN
NO!!!

LEROY
I'm—
I'm feeling—
Confused!

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, stay calm—

LEROY

I'm—

I'm feeling—

Lost!

(He glances down at HIGHTOWER:)

What is this?

What am I holding?!

FRANCESCA

LeRoy, don't do it!

Don't do this to me!

Please—

Hold it together!

Don't you want to save the gallery?!

LEROY

What gallery?

Who the hell are you?!

Where the hell am I?!

What's happening?!

I'M GETTING OUTTA HERE!!!

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

FRANCESCA

LeRoy! Come back!

FRANCESCA quickly scoops up HIGHTOWER.

FRANCESCA

Well isn't that just dandy!

Is that how you want to end up, Hermit?!

Do you really want to end up like LeRoy?

All scatterbrained, disturbed, and LOOPY!!!

HERMAN

No, of course not—

FRANCESCA

Then you have got to let me take just this one itsy bitsy piece!

Is that so much to ask?!

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

I don't want anything else, Hermit!
(She holds up HIGHTOWER.)
This is what I was hoping you'd have lurking among the heaps and stacks!
This was my inkling—
This is what sets you apart as an artist!

HERMAN

Please—
Please be careful with him!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Your career?

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

A joke?
But I thought you said—

FRANCESCA

I know what I said—
But my star has faded!
...
Don't you see?

...

We can both be big stars because of this piece.

You—

The off-kilter genius.

Me—

The discoverer of the off-kilter genius!

So whaddya say—

You wanna ride into the stars together—

Or do you wanna stay down here forever—

And rot?

HERMAN stares at HIGHTOWER'S limp body.

HERMAN

I can't do it.

Please, Francesca.

Don't take him away from me.

FRANCESCA

Why in the world do you keep referring to this thing like it's an actual—

(FRANCESCA has the realization—)

Ohhhhhhhh.

Oh my, my, my, my, my, my, my, my—

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

FRANCESCA

Do you think it's alive?

...

Have you made friends with it?

...

Is that why you created it, Hermit?

To be your companion?

HERMAN refuses to answer her.

FRANCESCA

Do you actually talk to this thing?

Wait, no—

Do you believe this thing talks to you?

HERMAN

He does talk to me—

He saved my life—

He loves me!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN continues to stare at HIGHTOWER.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

I'm not loopy.

FRANCESCA

Are you sure about that?

HERMAN

Positive!
I'M NOT LOOPY!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN nods.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Francesca—
You don't understand.

Hightower is all I have.
You can't take him out there.
I can't lose him.

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA dangles HIGHTOWER out in front
of HERMAN.

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN stares at HIGHTOWER helplessly.

HERMAN

Do you mind if I hold him?
Please?

FRANCESCA hesitantly hands him over.

HERMAN holds HIGHTOWER tenderly.

He moves away from FRANCESCA.

HERMAN

You heard her, Hightower.
Just say something and we'll be left alone.

...

I know we usually like to keep things between ourselves—
But it's okay this time.
I promise.

...

(*To FRANCESCA:*)
He's very stubborn.

...

Come on, pal—
Just talk.

...

Talk.

...

Talk!

FRANCESCA notices HERMAN'S desperation.

FRANCESCA

Hermit—

HERMAN

Talk, Hightower—
Please talk.

...

Please, please, please talk!

...

TALK!

TALK!!!

...

(He starts shouting:)

TAAAAAAAALLLLLLLK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

TAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLLK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

FRANCESCA

Hermit, he's never going to—

HERMAN

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

FRANCESCA

He won't come around—

HERMAN

Don't say that!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

Herman!

FRANCESCA

I'm sorry?

HERMAN

My name is Herman!
Not Hermit!

Herman!
Herman! Herman! Herman! HERMAN!!!
AND THIS IS HIGHTOWER!
AND HE IS REAL!
HE'S MY PAL!
NOT YOURS!
HE'S MINE!
MINE!
MINE!
MINE!

FRANCESCA

But Herm—

HERMAN

And I refuse to let you take him!

FRANCESCA

But my inkling, Herm—

HERMAN

Who cares?!

FRANCESCA

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

HERMAN

I don't care about your stupid inklings!
Or your gallery!
Or your career!
NOW GET OUT!
GET OUUUUUUUUT!!!

A long moment of silence.

FRANCESCA

I'm just a fool, aren't I?
I've become so desperate—
Scavenging this town for any artist I can get my perky mitts on—
That I almost forgot.
Some people are just meant to be left the hell—
Alone.

HERMAN

And I'm one of those people?
Who's meant to be alone—
Forever?

FRANCESCA

It would certainly seem that way, wouldn't it?

FRANCESCA heads for the door.

FRANCESCA

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

FRANCESCA glides out of the studio.

HERMAN looks down at HIGHTOWER—

Who's completely motionless—

Then he drops him onto a pile of scraps.

The Recluse Says So Long

HERMAN takes a seat at his easel.

He stares at a blank cardboard canvas.

HIGHTOWER springs to life.

He walks over—

And gently taps HERMAN on the shoulder.

HERMAN refuses to turn around.

HIGHTOWER taps again.

HIGHTOWER

Hi, pal.

HERMAN

Oh—
So now you talk.

HIGHTOWER

Hey—
You got a case of the blues or somethin'?
...
Really, are you mad at me Herman?

HERMAN

No—
I'm not mad at you, Hightower.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN turns and faces HIGHTOWER.

HERMAN

I'm mad at myself.

HIGHTOWER

What for?

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Well, don't beat yourself up over it.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

We learn from our mistakes.

HERMAN

And I should've never befriended you to begin with.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

Why shouldn't I mean it?

HIGHTOWER

Because I thought we meant something to each other.

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

No.

HIGHTOWER

No?

HERMAN

Just me.

HIGHTOWER

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

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Do what?

HERMAN

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

HIGHTOWER

Not for me, it's not!

HERMAN stands and shuts the door.

He moves toward HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

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

HIGHTOWER starts singing as a sort of plea:

HIGHTOWER

ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS TWO OF US

HERMAN steps closer to HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, MORE OF US

HERMAN corners HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

IF THERE'S EVER MORE OF US

HERMAN grabs HIGHTOWER.

HIGHTOWER

YES, IF THERE'S MORE THAN TWO OF US

HERMAN dismantles HIGHTOWER.

It's quick and painless.

HERMAN

THEN SOMEONE'S GOTTA GO

The Recluse Achieves The Ultimate Loneliness

HERMAN moves back to his easel.

He picks up a paintbrush—

And paints a giant sad face.

He glances around at his quiet, vacant studio.

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

He lets out the longest, saddest of sighs.

Blackout.

End of play.

MOVE LIKE ANTS

—

A One-Act Play

By Stephen Webb

THE SURVIVING FIGURES

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

Any age, Any race, Any gender

WHEN & WHERE

Soon & Here

In darkness, the final moments of
A cataclysmic crash

It's piercing
And chilling
And muffled
And inevitable

Then, silence

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

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

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

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

The FIGURES
Look down at their bodies

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

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

They smell their skin
They taste their skin

They listen to their skin
It's all new and unfamiliar

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

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

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

This thrills them

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

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

The FIGURES
Think they've discovered something edible
In their individual environments

They instinctively lunge for it—
But nothing's actually there

They think they see a body of water

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

Out of sheer frustration:

FIGURE 1
bababafffffftttkkk!!!

FIGURE 2
warrrrrrnnnnfffffzzz!!!

FIGURE 3
ssskkkjjjjhhhhooooiii!!!

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

—

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

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

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

They find themselves in
Twisted positions

—

The FIGURES
Notice the
Sun has shifted

It's growing darker and colder
This concerns them

The FIGURES pile together heaps of debris
In their individual environments

Then they flatten out the rubble
To make it livable

Each FIGURE builds a nest
Atop their individual heap

—

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

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

—

The FIGURES
Grow weary in their nests

—

The FIGURES
Grow restless in their nests

—

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

—

The FIGURES
Mutter quietly
A bit timid at first—

FIGURE 1
Eh, eh, eh, eh—

FIGURE 2
O, o, o, o—

FIGURE 3
Bb, bb, bb, bb—

—

Intrigued by the vibrations in their mouths
The FIGURES

Try their best to create longer sounds—

FIGURE 1
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh

FIGURE 2
Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh
Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh

FIGURE 3
Bon, bon, bon, bon
Bon, bon, bon, bon

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

FIGURE 1
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh
Hehh, hehh, hehh, hehh

FIGURE 2
Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh
Ohh, ohh, ohh, ohh

FIGURE 3
Bon, bon, bon, bon
Bon, bon, bon, bon

—
The FIGURES
Realize the MINIATURE FIGURES
Make for inadequate companionship

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

FIGURE 1
Hehh
Hehh
Hehh
Hehhhhhhhhhoooooo—

FIGURE 2
Ohh
Ohh
Ohh
Ohhhhhhhaaaaaaahhhh—

FIGURE 3
Bon
Bon
Bon
Bonjaaaaaaaaaaahhhh—

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

FIGURE 1
Hehhhhhhhhhhooooo

FIGURE 2
Ohhhhhhhaaaaaaahhhhh

FIGURE 3
Bonjaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh

Hehhhhhhhhhhoooooo
Hehhhhhhhhhhoooooo

Ohhhhhhaaaaaaahhhhh
Ohhhhhhaaaaaaahhhhh

Bonjaaaaaaaaahhhhh
Bonjaaaaaaaaahhhhh

—

Thrilled with these sounds they've constructed
The FIGURES
Climb the tallest stacks of debris they can find
And call out, as loudly as they can—

FIGURE 1
Hehhhhooh?!!!!

FIGURE 2
Ohhhhaaaahhh?!!!!

FIGURE 3
Bonjaaaaahhh?!!!!

—

The FIGURES
Stop and listen for a response—

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

But nothing

—

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

FIGURE 1
Hehhhhhhhhooh?!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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

FIGURE 2
Ohhhhaaaahhh?!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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

FIGURE 3
Bonjaaaaahhh?!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

FIGURE 1 hears FIGURE 3

—

The FIGURES

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

Until, finally—
The FIGURES spot each other

—

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

They decide to push the sounds
Out of their bodies—

FIGURE 2

Ohhhhaaaahhhh...?

FIGURES 1 & 3

...Ohhhhaaaahhhh.

FIGURE 3

Bonjaaaaahhhh...?

FIGURES 1 & 2

...Bonjaaaaahhhh.

FIGURE 1

Hehhhhooo...?

FIGURES 2 & 3

...Hehhhhooo.

—

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

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

—

FIGURE 1 snaps—
And the other FIGURES imitate

FIGURE 2 stomps—
And the other FIGURES imitate

FIGURE 3 claps—
And the other FIGURES imitate

—

Other familiar movements
Pour out of their bodies

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

—

They gesture
They respond

They gesture
They respond

They gesture
They respond

—

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

—

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

—

The competition gets the FIGURES

Fired up

—

The FIGURES
Snap, stomp, clap

Snap, stomp, clap

SNAP, STOMP, CLAP

SNAP! STOMP! CLAP!

SNAP!!!! STOMP!!! CLAP!!!

—

The FIGURES
Desperately try to
Overpower each other

This offends them

—

The FIGURES
Try even harder to
Overpower each other

This offends them more

—

The FIGURES
Get overwhelmed and frustrated
And quickly separate

—

The SURIVING FIGURES
Each climb the tallest mound of debris they can find

They stand guard
And glare at each other from atop their mounds

—

Silence as the FIGURES
Guard and glare

Guard and glare
Guard and glare

—

FIGURE 1 sighs

FIGURE 2 sighs louder

FIGURE 3 sighs loudest

—

FIGURE 1 grunts

FIGURE 2 grunts louder

FIGURE 3 grunts loudest

—

FIGURE 1 groans

FIGURE 2 groans louder

FIGURE 3 groans loudest

—

The FIGURES
Grunt and groan
Grunt and groan
Grunt and groan

Until, finally—

FIGURE 3 hiccups

—

The hiccup echoes

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Are absolutely mortified of this happening

They take cover atop their mounds of debris

—

FIGURE 3 hiccups again

—

The hiccup echoes

—

The FIGURES burst out into laughter

—

The FIGURES laugh and laugh and laugh

Until, finally—

They lock eyes

And realize what's happened

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES

Cross their arms

And turn away from each other

ALL SURVIVING FIGURES

Hmmmmmmph!!!!

—

Silence as the SURVIVING FIGURES

Brood

—

FIGURE 3 notices something moving on the ground

S/he stares at it, intently

FIGURE 2 notices FIGURE 3 staring

S/he tries to see what it is

FIGURE 1 notices FIGURE 2 staring

S/he tries to see what it is

—

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

FIGURE 2 follows

FIGURE 1 follows

—

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

—

The FIGURES
Watch as this tiny, tiny entity
Moves along

—

Moves along

—

Moves along

—

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

—

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

—

The FIGURES
Stare at each other, in awe

—

The FIGURES
Fall into a line of their own
Moving just like these tiny, tiny entities

—

The SURVIVING FIGURES
Move along

—

Move along

—

Move along

—

They imitate the fluid, peaceful line
Until they are no longer in sight...

PET FOOD

By Stephen Webb

CHARACTERS

CAT

Male

DOG

Female

Parakeet

Female

Landlady

Female

WOMAN

Female

WHERE

A suburban apartment on a high floor

WHEN

Now

NOTE

PARAKEET and LANDLADY should be portrayed by the same actor.

WOMAN lies motionless on the floor.

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

They hold empty food bowls in their paws.

CAT

Look!

DOG

What?

CAT

Her left eyebrow—

DOG

What about it?

CAT

It twitched.

DOG

Did it?

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

No...

I guess it didn't.

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.

CAT

Look!

DOG

What?

CAT

Her right pinky finger—

What about it?	DOG
It curled.	CAT
Did it?	DOG
...	CAT
...	DOG
No...	CAT
I guess it didn't.	
	CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.
Look!	CAT
What?	DOG
Never mind.	CAT
...	
...	
How long's it been now?	
I've lost track of time.	DOG
	CAT and DOG simultaneously release adorable animal sighs—
It isn't looking too good, is it Ross?	DOG
Sure it is, Rachel.	CAT

Everything's going to be just fine.

DOG

But she's been lying still for so long.

Like—

Alarmingly long.

CAT

She's just napping.

She'll wake up again soon...

DOG

...

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

...Won't she?

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.

CAT

Try licking her face.

DOG

You lick her face.

CAT

You're the dog.

DOG

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

CAT

So?

DOG

So you should lick her face.

CAT

Absolutely not.

I'm a cat.

Cats don't lick faces.

DOG

Go on—

Lick her face.

Get her to open her eyes!

CAT

I refuse!

DOG

Lick her face!

CAT

No!

DOG

Lick her face!

CAT

No!!!

DOG

LICK CATHY'S FACE!!!

CAT

MAKE ME!!!

CAT and DOG drop their food bowls—

And violently paw at each other.

Their yelling becomes primal hisses and growls—

CAT

HISS!

DOG

GROWL!

CAT

HISS!!!

DOG

GROWL!!!

CAT

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

CAT and DOG settle down.

DOG

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

CAT and DOG stare down at WOMAN.

They let out adorable animal sighs.

Then—

They pick up their empty food bowls.

DOG

Who's gonna feed us now?

CAT

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

DOG

You're in denial.

CAT

Well you always jump to the worst-case scenario.

DOG

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

DOG goes and plops down on her pillow.

CAT

Why are you so grumpy?

DOG

Oh—
I don't know.
Lemme ponder that for a sec.

Why in the world would I be so grumpy?

Hmm...

Let's see...

Oh—

I've got an idea!

Perhaps I'm grumpy because...

OUR OWNER IS UNRESPONSIVE ON THE FLOOR AND WE'RE GONNA
STARVE TO DEATH!!!!

CAT

We won't starve.

DOG

Keep tellin' yourself that.

DOG cleans her paws.

CAT climbs on a chair and licks his fur.

DOG keeps glancing over at CAT.

DOG

Look—

I'm sorry I growled at you.

I don't want us to turn on each other like this.

CAT

I'm sorry I hissed at you.

DOG

It's okay.

I think we both just got a little hangry.

CAT

I think you're right.

CAT strokes his fur.

CAT

I miss Cathy's hands.

She has a way of stroking my fur that always makes my spine tingle.

She has magical hands.

DOG

I miss Cathy's voice.
It's authoritative yet relaxing all at once—

CAT

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

DOG

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

CAT

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

DOG

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

CAT

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

DOG

Cathy's an anxious lady.

CAT

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

DOG

And she always lets us cuddle up and watch too.

CAT

What show was that anyway?

DOG

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

CAT

Cathy used to make us feel that way.

DOG and CAT let out adorable animal sighs.

Then—

DOG sniffs the air.

DOG

Ross?

CAT

Yeah, Rachel?

DOG

Did you just catch a whiff of something strange?

They sniff.

CAT

What's it smell like?

DOG

I'm not quite sure.

They sniff.

CAT

Is it food?!

DOG

It's hard to tell.

They sniff.

CAT

You know—

I kinda smell something too.

DOG

It is your litter box, maybe?

Or some old hairballs?

CAT

Or did you diarrhea in the corner again?

DOG

You know I cant' help that.

No one's taken me for a walk.

CAT
Or maybe it's your stinky dog vomit?

DOG
Or maybe it's some trash?

CAT
Or sewage?

DOG and CAT continue sniffing.

They sniff and sniff and sniff and sniff—

Following the scent all the way back to WOMAN.

DOG/CAT
Ohhhhhhh...

DOG
...

CAT
...

DOG
She's dead, Ross.

CAT
I know she is, Rachel.

DOG
...

CAT
...

DOG
I'm not sure what to do in this situation.

CAT
I'm not either.
I'm too sheltered for this shit.

Suddenly there's a very loud crashing sound from
another room—

Followed by a string of violent, pissy CHIRPS.

DOG

What was that—?!

CAT

I don't know!

Sounded like the ceiling caved in Cathy's bedroom!

DOG

God help us!

Our world is falling apart!!!

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

PARAKEET

I'm.

Fucking.

Starving!!!

DOG

Phoebe—

We forgot about you!

PARAKEET

(imitating:)

“Phoebe, we forgot about you!”

CAT

Seriously!

It's the truth!

PARAKEET

(imitating:)

“Seriously, it's the truth!”

DOG

Stop it!

Stop doing that!

PARAKEET

(imitating:)

“Stop it, stop doing that!”

Y'know—

I've been in there chirpin' my beak off for who knows how long!

And did anybody drop in to check on me?
NOPE!

DOG

Phoebe—

PARAKEET

But really—
I'm fine!

I'm just thrilled the two of you had each other this whole time while I was in there all by myself!

DOG

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

CAT

Distracted—

DOG

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

PARAKEET

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

CAT

Pheeb—

PARAKEET

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

DOG

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

PARAKEET

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

PARAKEET spots WOMAN on the floor.

PARAKEET

Oh damn.

CAT

Pheeb...

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

She bends down and nudges WOMAN with her beak.

PARAKEET

Oh damn.
Damn. Damn. Damn.
That's grim right there.

DOG

Pheeb, we're so sorry.

PARAKEET

How long have you known about this?

DOG

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

PARAKEET

But now —
We're absolutely positive she's...?

DOG

Yeah.
She's gone.
Cathy's gone.

PARAKEET

...

DOG

...

CAT

...

PARAKEET

Well, then.

Okay.
All right.
We can get past this.
We can survive this.

DOG

Can we?

PARAKEET

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

CAT

Are you okay, Phoebe?

PARAKEET

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

DOG

Me too.

CAT

Me too.

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET plop down.

PARAKET

...I'm so hungry I could eat a horse...

DOG

...

CAT

...

DOG

...I'm so hungry I could eat a cow...

CAT

...

PARAKEET

...

CAT

...I'm so hungry I could eat a...
Eat a...

CAT stares at PARAKEET.

DOG

Eat a what?
...
Ross?
Are you okay?

PARAKEET

What's the matter with this guy?

DOG

I'm not sure.

PARAKEET

Why're you lookin' at me that way?

CAT stands.

CAT

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

PARAKEET

Uhh—
Not in this apartment it's not.

CAT creeps toward PARAKEET.

DOG

Ross, stop it—
What are you doing?

PARAKEET

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

CAT's eyes glaze over.

CAT

C'mere little birdie...

PARAKEET waddles away from CAT.

PARAKEET

I don't like this!

DOG tries to block CAT.

DOG

Ross!
Snap out of it!
What're you doing?!

CAT

I'm gonna eat that bird.
That's what I'm gonna do.

PARAKEET

Get away from me!
Rachel—
Make him stop!

DOG

I'm trying!
Ross!!!

CAT

I'm gonna eat that bird!

PARAKEET

Please! Don't!

DOG

Ross, will you cut it out!

EAT
ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

CAT snaps out of it.

CAT

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

PARAKEET

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

DOG

Can we please just calm down!

CAT

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

PARAKEET

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

CAT

Please, I beg you.

PARAKEET

(imitating:)
“Please, I beg you.”

DOG

Phoebe!

PARAKEET

Whatever—
Fine.

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

CAT

Thank you.
Thank you so much.

PARAKEET

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

They all stare down at WOMAN.

PARAKEET

...That.

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

DOG

I miss Cathy's sense of humor.

CAT

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

PARAKEET

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

DOG

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

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

PARAKEET

I'll be there for you...

DOG

Yeah, that's it!
That's the one.

PARAKEET

I'll be there for you...

CAT and DOG join in.

CAT/DOG

When the rain starts to pour...

PARAKEET

I'll be there for you...

CAT/DOG

Like I've been there before...

PARAKEET

I'll be there for you...

CAT/DOG

Cause you're there for me too
Oooooo

CAT/DOG/PARAKEET

Oh, Cathy.

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

CAT

That was nice.

...

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

DOG

...

PARAKEET

...

CAT

...

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

DOG

...

PARAKEET

...

CAT

...

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

DOG

...

PARAKEET

...

CAT

...

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

PARAKEET

Hey—
Has anyone checked on Monica, Chandler, and Joey?

CAT

We forgot about them too.

PARAKEET jumps up and waddles to the bathroom—

She returns holding a fishbowl with THREE DEAD FISH floating at the top of the water.

PARAKEET

God—
I can't take this anymore!

DOG

What?

PARAKEET

I mean—
Are we just gonna sit around here and wait to die?

CAT

That was kind of the unspoken plan, yes.

PARAKEET

Well not anymore!

I've gotta at least try to save us!

DOG

How?

PARAKEET

By getting the hell outta here!

DOG

But we're trapped.

We don't know how to open doors.

PARAKEET

True...

But we've also got an open window...

CAT, DOG, and PARAKEET stare at the window.

DOG

You better not be thinking...

PARAKEET

Oh, I'm thinkin' it all right.

DOG

But you can't fly!

PARAKEET

Sure I can!

Cathy never clipped my wings!

PARAKEET shows off her majestic unclipped wings.

CAT

But you've never actually flown anywhere.

PARAKEET

Well—

Now's my chance!

DOG

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

PARAKEET

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

DOG

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

PARAKEET

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

DOG

...

CAT

...

PARAKEET

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

CAT

Yeah, sorry about that.

PARAKEET

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

DOG

Oops.

PARAKEET

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

CAT

Are you positive this is what you want to do?

PARAKEET

Absolutely.

PARAKEET bravely waddles over to the window.

She lifts it open.

Then she glances out to see how high up they truly are.

PARAKEET

Yikes that's high.

CAT

You don't have to do this, Phoebe.

PARAKEET

Yes.
Yes I do.

PARAKEET crawls onto the windowsill.

DOG

Careful, Phoebe!
Please!

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

PARAKEET

Okay—
Wish me luck!

CAT
Good luck!

DOG
You've got this!

PARAKEET

Here I go—
On three.
One, two—

PARAKEET takes a breath—

CAT and DOG tense up and hold each other.

But PARAKEET can't bring herself to do it.

CAT and DOG relax.

DOG

Pheobe—
Just come back inside.
Please!

PARAKEET

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

PARAKEET takes a breath—

CAT and DOG tense up and hold each other.

PARAKEET

Threeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!!!!

PARAKEET dives off the ledge.

She dips out of sight—

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

PARAKEET

Would you look at this?!
I'm flying!
I'm really flying!
Okay—
All right—
Okydoky—
I don't really know what I'm doin' here!
Yes I do—

No I don't—
Yes I do—
No I really don't—

DOG

Are you okay out there?!

PARAKEET

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

PARAKEET suddenly falls out of sight.

DOG

Pheobe?

CAT

Pheeb's?

A moment passes.

CAT

Rachel...

DOG

Yes, Ross?

CAT

What just happened to Phoebe?

DOG

I'm sure she's fine.

...Right?

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

After a moment—

She pops her head back in.

CAT

Is she...?

DOG nods her head.

DOG

Just a splattering of feathers now.

CAT

Oh god!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Why is all of this happening to us?

What did we do to deserve this?!

DOG

Calm down!

CAT

Calm down?!

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

DOG

You just tried to eat her!

CAT

Exactly!

Look at what's happening to us!

Everything is falling apart!

What are we supposed to do?!

DOG

I don't know!

CAT

Well neither do I!

And do you know why?!

Because we don't have Cathy here to tell us!

If Cathy were here—

She could tell us exactly what to do!
If Cathy were here—
Everything would be okay!
But guess what?!
Cathy's not here!
And she's never ever EVER coming back!!!
So if you'll please excuse me—
I'm feeling a bit OVER IT!

CAT goes and plops on his bed.

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

I didn't mean to lose it on you.

DOG

I know you didn't.

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

...

DOG

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

CAT

I don't remember.

(He yawns.)

It's been so long.

(He yawns.)

It's all a haze now.

DOG

I know—
Everything's just a haze.

CAT yawns then dozes off.

DOG

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

DOG's eyes glaze over.

Is she falling asleep?

Is she hallucinating from her malnourishment?

Who knows.

Regardless—

WOMAN slowly rises from the floor.

DOG

Ross?
...
Ross, are you seeing this?
...
Ross, are you awake?!!

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

Then—

In her authoritative yet relaxing voice, she says:

WOMAN

...you've gotta fulfill your animalistic duty...

WOMAN lies back down and dies.

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

Of course.
...
OF COURSE!
...
Ross?
...
ROSS?!!

DOG

(waking up:)
What is it, Rachel?

CAT

Get up!
C'mere!

DOG

I'm too tired, Rachel.

CAT

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

DOG

CAT stands and quickly stumbles over to DOG.

Well?
C'mon—
Spit it out!

CAT

Cathy would want us to eat her!
For sustenance!

DOG

Are you feeling okay, Rachel?

CAT

Of course I am!

DOG

I think the starvation's getting to your head.

CAT

Just like it got to mine when I tried to eat Phoebe!

DOG

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

CAT

Our what...?

DOG

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

CAT

You're gonna make me hurl speaking this way—

DOG

It's our only option!

CAT

Says who?

DOG

Says Cathy!

CAT

Wait, what?

DOG

Will you just trust me!

CAT

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

DOG

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

CAT

Like she's what?

DOG

Think of her like she's dinner!
She's just a big hunk of meat now!

CAT

Cathy will never be just a hunk of meat!

DOG

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

CAT

I'm an indoor cat!

DOG

But you've got the instincts!

CAT

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

DOG

Get over yourself!
Do you want to die?!

CAT

Of course not!

DOG

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

CAT

I just—
I just don't know.

DOG

This will buy us the time we need to come up with a plan to get saved.

I know you can do this.

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

...

DOG

...

CAT

...Can you at least cover her face or something?

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

DOG

Which is the most nutritious part, do you think?

CAT

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

DOG

Any suggestions?

CAT

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

DOG rolls up WOMAN's pant leg.

CAT

Okay—
You first.

DOG

Why me?

CAT

This was your idea.

DOG

Okay, whatever.
Fine.
It's not her anymore.
It's not Cathy.
It's just meat.

DOG bends down closer to WOMAN—

DOG

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

DOG sniffs WOMAN's leg.

CAT

Wait!!!

DOG

What's the matter?

CAT

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

DOG

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

DOG stretches open her mouth—

And puts teeth to skin—

But she doesn't bite down.

CAT

What's the matter?

DOG

I can't—
I can't do it.

CAT

Why not?

DOG

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

CAT

Cathy had the best laugh.

DOG

I miss her.
I miss her so much.

CAT

I miss her too.

DOG

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

CAT

That's when we were happiest too.

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

They quietly start to sing...

CAT

I'll be there for you...

CAT/DOG

Cause you're there for me too
Oooooo

DOG

Goodnight, Ross.

CAT

Goodnight, Rachel.

They close their eyes.

Then—

After several moments—

There's a knock—

And then sounds of keys unlocking a door.

LANDLADY

Cathy?

...

Cathy—

You home?

LANDLADY enters the apartment.

She holds a small dead parakeet in her hands.

LANDLADY

Cathy?

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

Pitiful thing.

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

She holds up the parakeet.

LANDLADY

But I've gotta say—

It has a look of bravery in its eyes.

...

Cathy—

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

...

God—

What is that odor?

Smells like a zoo of dead animals in here.

LANDLADY spots WOMAN.

LANDLADY

Oh, Cathy.

She rushes over to inspect her body.

LANDLADY

You poor, poor lonely dear.

...

Well I guess you weren't too lonely—

Were ya?

At least you had your sweet pets by your side.

CAT and DOG stand up.

DOG wags her tail.

LANDLADY

C'mon, you two.

Let's go get some help.

And we'll get you somethin' to eat.

CAT and DOG follow LANDLADY out of the apartment.

END OF PLAY

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

By Stephen Webb

CHARACTERS

(2m)

Jerry Frances Frickman

Male

50s

An everyman

A Stilt Walking Novice

Trainer Lewis

Male

30s

Jerry's Trainer

A Stilt Walking Master

When & Where

Right Now

Up High in the Sky

NOTES

Stilts:

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

Setting the Atmosphere:

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

Dialogue:

Spacing is all for rhythm.

Fluffy clouds, bright sunshine, chirping birds.

Perhaps a VOICE speaks:

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

JERRY FRANCES FRICKMAN has towering stilts
protruding from his legs.

He is way up high in the atmosphere.

He’s never felt so alive.

He desperately attempts to escape TRAINER LEWIS.

LEWIS

Mr. Frickman—

(JERRY shuffles fast in the opposite direction.)

Jerry Frances Frickman—!

Don’t act like you can’t hear me!

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

Damn it, Jerry!

(JERRY shuffles faster.)

Stop this!

Right now!

This is not how I trained you!

(JERRY slows down—

But he won’t make eye contact with LEWIS.)

Aren’t you going to say anything?

I’ve gotta be honest, Jerry—

I didn’t see this coming.

I didn’t take you for this type of person.

We need to head back, now, okay?

(JERRY still refuses to look at him.

He readies himself to bolt.)

Jerry, don’t you dare.

Don’t you dare make me chase you again!

I’m much, much more experienced than you.

You know this.

JERRY tries to dart away again—

But TRAINER LEWIS masterfully halts him.

JERRY

But I’m big now!!!

LEWIS

You’re what?

JERRY

Big.
Tall.
Towering.
WORTHY.

LEWIS

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

JERRY

I don't mean I'm short—
Per se—
I mean—
I mean—

(JERRY loses his balance on the STILTS.)

I mean—
I mean—

LEWIS

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

JERRY

I mean—
I mean—

LEWIS

C'mon!
Spit it out!

JERRY

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

JERRY almost dashes away again—

LEWIS

Damn it, Jerry!

What did I say!

JERRY

But I'm free!
I'm free up here!

LEWIS

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

JERRY

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

LEWIS

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

JERRY

The what?!!

LEWIS

The adrenaline rush
The falsity of emotions
The illusion of power

JERRY

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

LEWIS

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

JERRY hobbles backwards to be next to LEWIS.

JERRY

Me alone?

LEWIS

Well—
That was the next step—
But—

JERRY

But what?

LEWIS

But. Nothing.

JERRY

Say it—

LEWIS

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

JERRY

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

LEWIS

That's not what I said.

JERRY

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

JERRY launches himself to zoom again...

LEWIS

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

JERRY

You don't know what I'm feeling!
You don't get it!

LEWIS

We need to go back.
Now.

JERRY

But I'm
So, so high
No one else
Just me
So, so high
I feel power now, I feel
Enlightened, I feel
Special, I feel
CHOSEN, I feel
I feel — I feel —

LEWIS

I'm going to move a little closer to you now.
Okay Jerry?
Does that sound okay to you?
I'm going to just move towards you
And we're going to head back down together
Just like we planned in the training
Here I come...

*(TRAINER LEWIS takes a step.
JERRY doesn't flinch.
LEWIS takes another step.
JERRY zooms.)*

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

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

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

JERRY finally stops, steadies, and plants himself.

JERRY

I need to do this!

LEWIS

Do what?!!

JERRY

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

LEWIS

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

JERRY

But I've gotta show them—

LEWIS

Show them what—?

JERRY

That I'm not nothing!

LEWIS

And then what?!!

JERRY

You know!

LEWIS

Say it!

JERRY

You know!!!

LEWIS

Say it!!!

JERRY

Make them feel small!

Make them feel like I felt for so long!

LEWIS

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

JERRY

(As though he's screaming to the people down below:)

I WANNA SQUUUAAAAAAAASSSSSHHH THEM!

Make them suffer!

Like they made me suffer!

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

LEWIS

Why didn't I see this coming?

*(A cluster of CLOUDS floats by,
JERRY gasps—)*

Our team just wanted to develop

The tallest, most towering stilts ever built

The Colossal Stilts

New heights

A new era

In the form of stilt walking

Potential means of survival for the

Great floods to come

And a means to

Give people the chance to be out in the open air on their way

To wherever they're going

*(A FLOCK OF BIRDS flies by,
JERRY shrieks—)*

A chance to see

The tops of buildings

And birds

And clouds

And distances

Years of world-class studies in physics and mechanics and safety and the capabilities of the
human body

But you get in our way!

You tricked us!

Seeped through the cracks

We did background checks

We asked you question after question after question

Do you have resentment?

Do you feel inadequate?

Do you have enemies?

Do you hate yourself?

*(A PARACHUTE glides by,
JERRY squeals—)*

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

*(A HELICOPTER zooms by,
JERRY yelps—)*

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

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

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

JERRY

Maybe it's the lack of oxygen!
It's like a rush of
Cool, cool energy
Through the fire in my head
All of the self loathing
Self-denial
Self-hatred
Is extinguished
Up here
I can see exactly what I want now
Up here
It's all so clear
Up here
And bright
Up here
And quiet
Up here
Down there
It's bad
It's scary
I'm not good enough
Down there
It's grimy

And no good
And no one looks at me
Down there
They look past me
Down there

LEWIS

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

JERRY

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

LEWIS

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

JERRY

You won't?

LEWIS

No
You took a chance

To get trained
And walk on the tallest stilts
Ever conceived
The Colossal Stilts!
We're up in the clouds
High in the atmosphere
Who would do this?
Not many
I can tell you that
None of those who made you feel small would do this
This takes real guts, Jerry
And I want to be friends with that person

JERRY

Friends?
You want to be—
Friends?

LEWIS

Yeah.
I do.

*(The SUN shimmers brightly across the sky,
JERRY smiles—)*

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

JERRY

Down there?

LEWIS

Yes
So let's go back down together
Okay?

JERRY

Yes
Yes—
Okay.

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

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

We hear JERRY scream as he falls, falls, falls.

It's a very long drop.

And a very long scream.

His screaming becomes more and more distanced.

Until, finally—

SPLAT.

LEWIS

(In mourning:)

I bet you feel small now, don't you Jerry?

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

**Irrational
Fear
Demonstrations**

By Stephen Webb

CHARACTERS

RUBY

Female

61

CRYSTAL

Female

29

NATHANIEL

Male

34

LEONA

Female

40

WHERE & WHEN

A mundane community college classroom in a small American town

After school hours

A dimly lit cinderblock classroom. The space is empty except for a few clunky metal folding chairs scattered throughout.

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

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

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

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

The two women sit quietly for several moments.

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

RUBY

You're not...?

CRYSTAL

What?

RUBY

Her?

CRYSTAL

No.

RUBY

Didn't think so.

CRYSYAL

...

RUBY

I'm not her either.

CRYSTAL

I didn't think you were.

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

Do you happen to know when she...?

CRYSTAL

I don't know. No.

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

But you're here for the Conquer Your Fears workshop?

CRYSTAL

Obviously.

RUBY

Oh, good.

I just wasn't sure if—

CRYSTAL

Well, now you know.

RUBY nervously taps her feet on the floor.

RUBY

We didn't miss it, did we?

CRYSTAL

10:30, I thought.

RUBY

That's what I thought too.

CRYSTAL

What time is it now?

RUBY

Let's see...

RUBY reaches inside her purse.

Several moments pass as she digs.

CRYSTAL

Nevermind.

RUBY

No, no.

I've got it here somewhere.

RUBY continues to dig inside her purse.

Several more moments pass.

She pulls out a wristwatch.

RUBY

10:33.

CRYSTAL

You keep your watch in your purse?

RUBY

I keep everything in my purse.

CRYSTAL

Why don't you keep it on your wrist?

RUBY

Because I keep it in my purse.

CRYSTAL

Gotcha.

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

This is kind of late for a workshop, right?

CRYSTAL

Depends on the workshop.

RUBY

I guess.

RUBY glances around the room.

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

No.

RUBY

Same here.
...
First timer.

RUBY wipes more sweat off her forehead with the
tissue.

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

All right.

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

All right.

RUBY

Aging brings much more worry.
Much, much more.

CRYSTAL

I thought aging brings wisdom.

RUBY

Lies. All lies.

CRYSTAL

Great. Something else to look forward to.

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

I like your coat.

CRYSTAL

Look, I didn't come here to make any—

RUBY

Reminds me of nighttime or something.

What color's that?

Midnight blue?

Twilight?

CRYSTAL

Black.

RUBY

Black.

Right.

...

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

Do you?

RUBY

Gravitate toward black things?

CRYSTAL

Have a mysterious soul?

CRYSTAL

Oh. I don't know.

RUBY

Seems like you do.

CRYSTAL

Does it?

RUBY

Yes.

I like colorful things.

Life, vivacity—

You know?

CRYSTAL

And I like dead things?

RUBY

Oh, no.

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

CRYSTAL

It's fine.

RUBY

I hurt your feelings.

CRYSTAL

No hurt feelings.

RUBY

Promise? Do you promise?

CRYSTAL

Okay. Yeah.

RUBY

Yeah, what?

CRYSTAL

Yeah. I promise.

RUBY

Good.

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

CRYSTAL slides her metal chair slightly away
from RUBY.

RUBY slides her chair closer to CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL

You okay?

Of course.
Why do you ask?

RUBY

CRYSTAL slides her chair a little further away.

RUBY slides her chair a little bit closer.

CRYSTAL

Why are you doing that?

RUBY

Doing what?

CRYSTAL slides her chair away once more.

RUBY slides her chair closer to her.

CRYSTAL

Please don't do that again.

RUBY

What am I doing, dear?

CRYSTAL

Every time I move, you move.

RUBY

I didn't even realize.

CRYSTAL

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

RUBY

It's just my nerves taking over.
But no worries!
I'll stay put from now on.

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

RUBY

Look at that.

CRYSTAL

What?

More black.

RUBY

NATHANIEL'S VOICE is heard from outside the classroom.

NATHANIEL

(from off)
Hello?

RUBY and CRYSTAL lock eyes.

An awkward pause.

NATHANIEL

(from off)
Hello...?

RUBY and CRYSTAL speak quietly to each other.

CRYSTAL

I thought it was a woman who runs this thing.

RUBY

Me too.

CRYSTAL

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

RUBY

Me neither.

NATHANIEL

(from off)
Someone...?

RUBY

Say something.

CRYSTAL

I don't want to.

RUBY

One of us has to!

CRYSTAL

(calling to him)

Um...
Yeah?

NATHANIEL

(from off)
Who said that?

CRYSTAL

Shit.
What do we do?

RUBY

I don't know!
You're making me nervous!

CRYSTAL

You're making *me* nervous!

NATHANIEL

(from off)
You still there?

CRYSTAL stands and moves to the door.

CRYSTAL

We're right here.
I mean—
We're in here.

NATHANIEL enters—wearing a polite sweater vest.

RUBY clutches her purse.

NATHANIEL

There you are.
Hello, hi.

CRYSTAL

Yeah, hi.

RUBY

Good evening, sir.

NATHANIEL

It's dark out there.
Couldn't see any room numbers.
A light went out in the hallway.

RUBY

Oh, please don't say that.
I hate the dark.

CRYSTAL

I do too.

NATHANIEL

Me too.

RUBY

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

NATHANIEL

Did I say I was afraid?

RUBY

Well, no—

NATHANIEL

I'm not afraid.

RUBY

I just assumed—

NATHANIEL

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

RUBY

Okay, all right.
I apologize.

NATHANIEL

...

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

CRYSTAL and NATHANIEL take a seat.

NATHANIEL
So, you're both here for the session?

CRYSTAL
We are. Yeah.

NATHANIEL
Did I miss anything?

CRYSTAL observes the empty room.

CRYSTAL
Can't say you have.

RUBY
Just getting to know each other.

NATHANIEL
Oh.
She isn't here yet?

CRYSTAL
Not yet.

NATHANIEL
But it's past time.

CRYSTAL
We know.

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

CRYSTAL
Let's hope so.

A long awkward pause.

They sit in their chairs, waiting.

The metal chairs snap and crackle as they readjust positions.

RUBY reaches in her purse and pulls out a bottle of hand lotion. It makes a loud squirting sound as she squeezes some into her palm.

RUBY

When I'm flustered, my palms get clammy and then they dry out.
Clammy and dry —
Clammy and dry —
Never ending battle I face.
Clammy and dry —
Clammy and dry —

NATHANIEL

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

RUBY and CRYSTAL glance at each other.

NATHANIEL

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

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

A tormented genius?
Really?

NATHANIEL

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

CRYSTAL

I'd rather not say.

NATHANIEL

Okay.

NATHANIEL glances over at RUBY.

CRYSTAL

What was that?

What was what?
NATHANIEL

I saw that.
CRYSTAL

He didn't do anything, dear.
RUBY

So, what, I'm just seeing things?
CRYSTAL

No. I didn't mean to imply —
RUBY

I don't have to share if I don't want to.
CRYSTAL

Of course you don't.
NATHANIEL

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

That's totally fine.
NATHANIEL

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

That's totally understandable.
NATHANIEL

Where is this woman?
JESUS!
CRYSTAL

...
RUBY

...
NATHANIEL

...
CRYSTAL

RUBY

...

NATHANIEL

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY rummages inside her purse.

RUBY

Would either of you like a peppermint stick?

CRYSTAL

No.

NATHANIEL

That's okay.

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

RUBY

Calms my nerves.

RUBY rhythmically licks the stick.

NATHANIEL and CRYSTAL watch her.

This goes on for a while.

CRYSTAL

Could you maybe not—
Be so loud with that?

RUBY keeps licking.

CRYSTAL

Please.

RUBY

Who? Me?

CRYSTAL

Who else?

RUBY attempts to lick the stick quietly.

NATHANIEL and CRYSTAL watch her.

This goes on for a while.

CRYSTAL

It was on a toilet paper dispenser.

NATHANIEL

Sorry?

CRYSTAL

I read about this on the toilet paper dispenser in a bathroom of a bar that I go to.

I don't go out very often.

Hardly ever, actually.

Just sneak out when places are quiet and empty.

And there it was, written out in yellow marker.

"Kill your fears once and for all."

And it had her name and this address.

Just seemed—

I don't know—

RUBY

Like it was meant to be.

CRYSTAL

Yeah, I guess so.

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

NATHANIEL

You got a lot of stuff in that purse?

RUBY

You have no idea.

NATHANIEL

Got a magazine or anything?

RUBY

Let's see...

NATHANIEL

Nothing too graphic, though.

RUBY

Okay...

RUBY digs inside her purse.

CRYSTAL
She's not coming.

NATHANIEL
Don't say that.

CRYSTAL
What time is it?

RUBY pulls the wristwatch out of her purse.

RUBY
A quarter till.

CRYSTAL
Who's late to their own workshop?

NATHANIEL
She's still coming.

CRYSTAL
How do you know?

NATHANIEL
Because.
She's got to.

CRYSTAL
Does she?

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

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

NATHANIEL
Do you really think we're screwed?

CRYSTAL
It's certainly looking that way.

NATHANIEL
...

RUBY

...

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY pulls out a deck of cards from her purse.

RUBY

Well...

Who's up for a friendly game of cards?

CRYSTAL

Are you serious?

RUBY

Why not?

We're already here.

Might as well give her a bit longer to show up.

NATHANIEL

I'm in.

It'll help take my mind off things.

RUBY

What things?

NATHANIEL

Just things.

RUBY

Bad things?

NATHANIEL

All things are bad things.

RUBY

(to CRYSTAL:)

Come on.

Just a round or two.

It'll help pass the time.

RUBY and NATHANIEL stare at CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL

All right, fine.

Deal me in.

RUBY

Wonderful!

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

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

RUBY

I'll deal...

(She shuffles the cards.)

...If that's okay?

CRYSTAL

Yeah. Fine.

RUBY passes out the cards.

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

We can count.

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

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

RUBY

Five for you,
Five for you,
And five for—
Oh, shoot.

I think I was supposed to deal to the left of the dealer.
Let me start over.

CRYSTAL

JESUS!

RUBY piles up the cards.

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

LEONA

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

RUBY

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

LEONA

Someone give the gal a prize!

LEONA shuts the door.

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

LEONA

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

NATHANIEL

Three is a lot?

LEONA

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

LEONA leans against the door.

LEONA

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

RUBY
Not really.

NATHANIEL
Just a little bit.

LEONA

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

CRYSTAL

What about it?

LEONA

Really, though.
I love using these classrooms.

RUBY

Do you also teach or something?

LEONA

Me?
Oh, god no.
I mean I'd love to.
But I'd also kind of hate it.
I'm just not a big people person, you know?
Why, you got any leads?
Wouldn't matter.
They wouldn't let me teach anyway.
Kidding.
But honestly, no.
They wouldn't.
I'm a pretty damaged person.
Whoa! Slow down, girl!
Leave something to the imagination!
Right?

(She laughs.)
Sorry I'm so frazzled.

I'm just me, me, me, me, me, me, me!

Take a breath, Leona.

(She takes a breath.)

There really is something nostalgic about these rooms.

And it's so symbolic for what we're about to embark on.

Don't you think, you guys?

NATHANIEL

Symbolic?

LEONA

Oh, yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, totally.

Like reaching into our past.

Reaching back into our childhood selves and retuning, redefining.

That's why I like to conduct the workshop in spaces like this.

It's more than just a space.

It's a vessel.

You know?

How's all this sound so far, you guys?

NATHANIEL

You're asking us?

LEONA

Why not?

NATHANIEL

It sounds okay, I guess?

LEONA

Great, great.

CRYSTAL

You know—

You're kind of late.

We've been here for a while.

LEONA

Yeah, I know.

What can I say?

Oops.

I've kind of got some stuff going on.

RUBY

Some stuff?

LEONA

Yeah.
But no reason to worry yourselves...
...Yet.

NATHANIEL

Sorry?

LEONA

Nothing!

CRYSTAL

Should we maybe get started?

LEONA

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

LEONA closes her eyes.

A long, long pause.

LEONA

I feel like I forgot something.

RUBY

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

LEONA

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

NATHANIEL

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

LEONA

Shh!
Please.

My head.
How soon we forget.

Another long, long pause.

RUBY

Are you feeling all right?

LEONA

Just need to catch my breath.

LEONA stays by the door, thinking.

The group stares at her.

LEONA glances around the room.

LEONA

That's right!

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

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

NATHANIEL

Umm...

CRYSTAL

What was that?

NATHANIEL

I have no idea.

CRYSTAL

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

NATHANIEL

Yes. That was the tormented genius.

CRYSTAL

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

RUBY

Me either.

NATHANIEL

Me either.

CRYSTAL

...

RUBY

...

NATHANIEL

...

RUBY

Well...

I brought snacks.

NATHANIEL

Snacks?

RUBY

Yeah, snacks.

I wasn't sure how long this thing would last.

So I thought some snacks would be a good idea.

You know, in case any of us have low blood sugar.

Or a case of the munchies.

I'm a nervous snacker myself.

Either of you want some?

Snacks?

NATHANIEL

What kinds of snacks?

RUBY

Real good snacks.

Cheese cubes and saltine crackers.

RUBY rummages inside her purse.

NATHANIEL

Oh, no thanks.

I don't trust crackers.

The sharp edges cut the roof of my mouth.

RUBY

Okay.

Just the cheese, then?

RUBY pulls baggies of snacks out of her purse.

NATHANIEL

Dairy products upset me.

RUBY

Upset your stomach?

NATHANIEL

No.

RUBY

I see.

Well, I'll set them over here just in case...

RUBY sets the snacks down on another chair.

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

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

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

LEONA

Just what I need is to drop all of this stuff all over the place when I'm having the day from hell...

NATHANIEL

Do you need a hand?

LEONA

No, no—

I've got it.

Talk amongst yourselves.

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

LEONA

They're probably going to figure out that something terrible is happening and there's nothing I can do to stop it—

RUBY

Are you sure you've got it?

LEONA

Yes, I'm sure...

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

RUBY

Are you positive?

LEONA

Positive!

Now would you please not ask me that again?

RUBY

I didn't mean to—

CRYSTAL

Don't talk to her like that.

LEONA

Excuse me?

CRYSTAL

She was just trying to help.

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

LEONA

You're right.

Sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm just a bit vulnerable right now.

NATHANIEL

You're vulnerable?

LEONA

Yes.

I'm going through some personal struggles.

NATHANIEL

Isn't that...

Kind of...

LEONA

What?

NATHANIEL

Kind of a problem?

LEONA

Why's it a problem?

Am I not allowed to be human?

Am I not allowed to be going through stuff?

NATHANIEL

No, of course you are—

But, I just mean.

Considering you're in charge of this thing.

LEONA

Oh, come on.

Really, you guys?

Don't put that kind of pressure on me.

I really don't need that right now.

CRYSTAL

This is ridiculous.

LEONA

What's ridiculous?

CRYSTAL

We've come here for help.

We've come to you for help.

And look at you.

You're a mess.

You're a wreck!

LEONA

I see.

And do all of you feel this way?

No one speaks.

LEONA

What can I say?

You're right.

You're right, you're right.

You're absolutely right.

We have obviously started off on the wrong foot.

Can we start over?

Please?

NATHANIEL

That's okay with me.

RUBY

Yes, dear. Of course.

The group stares at CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL

I guess. Whatever.

LEONA

Great.

Fabulous.

Thank you.

We'll start over then.

A fresh beginning.

Now —

I assume each of you brought along cash and or check.

CRYSTAL

Really?

You're talking about payment options right now?

LEONA

Well, yeah.

CRYSTAL

That's your way of starting fresh?

LEONA

What's the problem?

This is a service I'm offering.

I've had way too many folks walk outta here without paying.

CRYSTAL

I'm not surprised.

LEONA

What is it you're needing from me?

CRYSTAL

I don't know.

Shouldn't you be making us feel at ease?

Like we've made the right decision by coming here?

LEONA

We're all adults here.

I'm not going to baby you.

CRYSTAL

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

LEONA

What?

CRYSTAL

Nothing. Nevermind.

LEONA

Go on, say it.

CRYSTAL

No. I don't want to say it.

LEONA

Say it!

CRYSTAL

I'm not going to say it!

LEONA

Do you want me to say it?

CRYSTAL

I don't care!
Say what you want!

LEONA

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

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL remain
silent.

LEONA

That's what I thought.

NATHANIEL

So, are you?
Going to fix us?

LEONA

What do you think?

NATHANIEL

I'm not sure.

CRYSTAL

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

LEONA

Then go.

CRYSTAL

Sorry?

LEONA

Leave.

CRYSTAL

...

NATHANIEL

...

RUBY

...

LEONA

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

Are you going to stay here and conquer your fear?
Or are you going to give up?
It's totally up to you.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL stay
planted.

NATHANIEL

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

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

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

LEONA

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

CRYSTAL
Yeah.

RUBY
We are.

NATHANIEL
Mmhmm.

LEONA

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

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

Yes!

LEONA

Then let me hear you say it!
"I'm here to conquer my fear!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

I'm here to conquer my fear.

LEONA

Louder!
"I'm here to conquer my fear!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

I'm here to conquer my fear!!!

LEONA

Oh, come on!

Say it like you mean it!

"I'm here to conquer my fear!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

I'M HERE TO CONQUER MY FEAR!!!!

LEONA

That's what I'm talking about!

Now —

(points to NATHANIEL:)

You —

How are you paying?

NATHANIEL

Oh.

Um, cash?

LEONA

(points to RUBY:)

And you?

RUBY

Check.

LEONA

(points to CRYSTAL:)

And you?

CRYSTAL

Cash. I guess.

LEONA

Fantastic.

Now, pay up.

CRYSTAL

Right now?

LEONA

That's right.

The sooner you get to payin' —

The sooner we'll get to conquerin'.

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL each pull out their wallets and checkbooks.

CRYSTAL and NATHANIEL hand their cash to LEONA.

RUBY writes a check then hands it over.

LEONA

Spectacular!

Now, let's wiggle these chairs out of the way.

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

LEONA

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

RUBY

I'm sorry?

LEONA

Your purse.

It will be in your way.

RUBY

My purse never gets in my way.

LEONA

This is a physical workshop.

You need to set it down before we begin.

RUBY desperately clings to her purse.

RUBY

But I don't want to do that...

LEONA

It will be fine, I promise.

Just set it in a chair.

Or on the floor.

RUBY

Really.

I don't know if I can do that—

LEONA

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

RUBY

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

I'll do it.
I'll set it down.

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

She stares at it for several moments.

The group watches her.

LEONA

That wasn't so hard, was it?

RUBY glares at LEONA and rejoins the group.

LEONA reaches into her bucket and pulls out three
blindfolds.

LEONA

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

LEONA passes out the blindfolds.

CRSYSTAL

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

LEONA

No.
I'm not going to.

NATHANIEL

Thank god.

LEONA

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

RUBY

What happened to step one?

LEONA

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

(The group nods.)

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

RUBY

Any name whatsoever?

LEONA

That's right.
Whatever name pops into your head.
(to RUBY:)
You first.

RUBY

Me?

LEONA

Yes, you.

RUBY

Why me?

LEONA

Why not you?

RUBY

Maybe start with someone else?

LEONA

Come on—
This is the easy part.

RUBY

Okay, okay.
All right.
How about...
Ruby?

LEONA

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

NATHANIEL

Whatever I want?

LEONA

Whatever you want.

NATHANIEL

Brad. No.
Lester.

LEONA

Lester.
Okay.

NATHANIEL

What? Too fake sounding?

LEONA

No. Not at all.

NATHANIEL

Just call me Nathaniel.

LEONA

But that's not your real name, is it?

NATHANIEL

Call me Nathaniel, please.

LEONA

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

Crystal.

CRYSTAL

Crystal.
All right, fabulous.
Now let's kick off our shoes.

LEONA

What for?

RUBY

You'll see.

LEONA

The group removes their shoes and piles them up
next to the chairs.

RUBY reaches for her purse.

Ruby?

LEONA

I just—

RUBY

Come on.
You'll be fine.
It's time to get started.

LEONA

Now?

NATHANIEL

Yes, now.

LEONA

I don't know if I'm ready.

NATHANIEL

Of course you are.
Let's slide on the blindfolds.

LEONA

CRYSTAL slips on her blindfold.

RUBY

Mine's all tangled.

LEONA moves to help RUBY.

NATHANIEL stares down at his blindfold.

LEONA

Is everything all right, Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL

Yeah.

LEONA

You sure?

NATHANIEL

Mmhmm.

RUBY

He's afraid of the dark.

NATHANIEL

I'm not afraid.

RUBY

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

CRYSTAL

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

LEONA

Yeah, what she said.

NATHANIEL

Thanks.

NATHANIEL ties on his blindfold.

LEONA

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

RUBY

Got it.

LEONA

Fantastic.

Now—

I want all of you to move through the space.

RUBY

How?

LEONA

Just start walking.

NATHANIEL

But we can't see anything.

LEONA

Exactly.

RUBY

I don't want to break anything.

CRYSTAL

There's nothing in here to break.

RUBY

I mean on me.

I don't want to break a bone.

LEONA

You won't.

I'm watching you.

I'm here for you.

You all can trust me.

Now—

Just slowly move—

Get a good feel for it.

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

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

They gradually become more and more comfortable
with the exercise.

LEONA

There you go—
You're all doing beautifully.

CRYSTAL

What's the point of this exactly?

LEONA

Trust me.

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

LEONA

Oh no...

CRYSTAL

What?

LEONA

Nothing.
It's nothing.
Just keep doing what you're doing.

LEONA reads a message on the screen.

LEONA

No...
It can't be.

RUBY

What's the matter?

LEONA

Just, please—
Focus on the exercise.

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

LEONA

This is a nightmare.

NATHANIEL

What is?

LEONA

I need you guys to really stay focused for me, okay?
I'll be right back.

RUBY

Wait.
You're leaving?

LEONA

For just a second.
Promise.

NATHANIEL

But, we don't know what we're doing.

LEONA

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

LEONA exits.

The group keeps moving without any purpose or
direction.

Several moments pass.

CRYSTAL

What is happening?

NATHANIEL

I don't know.

They hear LEONA'S VOICE from outside the door.

LEONA

(from off:)

How many times do I have to tell you to leave me alone?
How many times do I have to change my phone number?
How do you keep finding me?
I am in the middle of doing what I'm passionate about and you keep bombarding me.
And suffocating me.
Is that what you want?
Huh?
No, I really do want you to leave me alone.
Yes, I'm serious.
Totally serious.

What is wrong with you?
Who does this?

CRYSTAL stops walking.

She pokes an eye out from the blindfold.

CRYSTAL

Who's she talking to out there?

NATHANIEL

Who knows.
Just keep moving like she said.

RUBY and NATHANIEL continue walking.

CRYSTAL moves closer to the door and listens.

LEONA

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

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

CRYSTAL

Umm...

RUBY

What is it?

CRYSTAL

Did she just say something about murder?

RUBY

I didn't hear that.

NATHANIEL

I didn't either.

CRYSTAL

Are you sure?

RUBY

Somebody's paranoid...

CRYSTAL

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

CRYSTAL lowers her blindfold and continues walking.

LEONA reenters.

LEONA

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

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

LEONA

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

RUBY
Yes—

NATHANIEL
Yeah—

CRYSTAL
I actually can, yeah.

LEONA
Great!
Now, come to a stop.

The group stops walking.

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

NATHANIEL
We just say it?
Speak it out loud?

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

RUBY
My kids.

CRYSTAL
My ex.

NATHANIEL
My cat.

CRYSTAL
My parents.

NATHANIEL
My job.

My neighborhood.	RUBY
Think bigger.	LEONA
Bigger?	RUBY
Broader.	LEONA
I'm afraid of— Falling over the edge. Heights.	CRYSTAL
Death. I'm terrified of death.	NATHANIEL
Fighting. War.	RUBY
Good, really good. Keep going. Use each other as a springboard.	LEONA
Growing old.	NATHANIEL
Aging.	CRYSTAL
Age spots.	RUBY
Freckles.	NATHANIEL
Moles.	RUBY
Cancer.	CRYSTAL

Go on...	LEONA
The stock market.	CRYSTAL
Crashing.	RUBY
Bankruptcy.	NATHANIEL
Stumbling.	RUBY
Fainting.	NATHANIEL
Collapsing.	CRYSTAL
Loneliness.	RUBY
Drowning.	CRYSTAL
Traveling.	NATHANIEL
Foreign objects.	CRYSTAL
Foreign places.	RUBY
Foreign people.	CRYSTAL
Dust storms.	RUBY
Ice storms.	CRYSTAL
Any storm.	NATHANIEL

Hot weather.	CRYSTAL
Cold weather.	RUBY
Any weather.	NATHANIEL
Doing anything I don't want to do.	CRYSTAL
Going anywhere I don't want to go.	NATHANIEL
Being anybody I don't want to be.	RUBY
What else are you afraid of?	LEONA
My family.	RUBY
My friends.	CRYSTAL
Myself.	NATHANIEL
Perfect, you guys. That was really, really perfect.	LEONA
Oh, I'm not done yet.	CRYSTAL
Me either.	RUBY
Me either.	NATHANIEL
You're not?	LEONA

Not even close.	RUBY
Okay— Then keep going, I guess. What else are you afraid of?	LEONA
Fire.	RUBY
Matches.	NATHANIEL
Burns.	CRYSTAL
Cuts.	NATHANIEL
Scrapes.	CRYSTAL
Bruises.	RUBY
Ulcers.	CRYSTAL
Murmurs.	NATHANIEL
Organs.	CRYSTAL
Orphans.	NATHANIEL
Orgasms.	RUBY
Deadlines.	NATHANIEL
Finish lines.	RUBY

End times.	CRYSTAL
Okay, great— Let's bring this to a close.	LEONA
Still not done.	RUBY
You're not?	LEONA
Not yet.	NATHANIEL
All right. What else are you afraid of?	LEONA
Cats.	RUBY
Dogs.	CRYSTAL
Fish.	NATHANIEL
Babies.	CRYSTAL
Babies crying.	RUBY
Baby wipes.	NATHANIEL
Canned beets.	CRYSTAL
Canned corn.	NATHANIEL
Cantaloupe.	RUBY

Trampolines.

NATHANIEL

Hula hoops.

RUBY

Exercise.

CRYSTAL

Eye lids.

RUBY

Ash trays.

CRYSTAL

Walnuts.

NATHANIEL

Okay!
And let's call this done now.
Shall we?

LEONA

But...

NATHANIEL

Really.
It's time.
God, is it time.

LEONA

A pause.

Now what?

RUBY

You've listed your fears.
Your many, many, many fears.
How did that feel?

LEONA

Incredible, actually.
That was a big release for me.

NATHANIEL

Yeah.
That was pretty amazing.

CRYSTAL

RUBY

I feel so rejuvenated.
I haven't felt this way in years.

LEONA

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

NATHANIEL

Now what?

LEONA

Now—
I want you to visualize the fear itself.

RUBY

Just one of the fears?

LEONA

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

RUBY

And then visualize it?

LEONA

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

NATHANIEL

How do we do that?

LEONA

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

RUBY
No.

NATHANIEL
Not yet.

LEONA

Come on, focus.
Ask yourself—
What color is your fear?

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

NATHANIEL

I think I'm starting to see it.

RUBY

Me too...

NATHANIEL

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

RUBY

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

RUBY and NATHANIEL begin to panic.

LEONA

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

NATHANIEL

And that will keep it away?

LEONA

It will, yes!

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

LEONA

Excellent job!

LEONA notices that CRYSTAL is quiet.

...Crystal?	LEONA
I've got a lot of fear. It's kinda hard to see it all at once.	CRYSTAL
Well, have you tried?	LEONA
I think so. I think I've tried.	CRYSTAL
You really have to believe it's there.	LEONA
Oh, it's there!!!	RUBY
Yes, it's there!!!	NATHANIEL
	LEONA moves closer to CRYSTAL.
Come on, Crystal. Focus. Try your best to see it.	LEONA
I'm trying...	CRYSTAL
What does your fear look like? Describe it to me.	LEONA
It's... It's... Uh...	CRYSTAL
Yes? Come on. You can do this.	LEONA

CRYSTAL
It's bulbous...

LEONA
It is?

CRYSTAL
It is.
And grimy.

LEONA
It is?

CRYSTAL
It is.
And it smells like ash.
Shit!
(She throws her hands up.)
I see it now!
What do I do?!!

LEONA
Don't be scared!
You're in control of the fear!
You just have to block it!
Keep it away!

CRYSTAL
All right, okay...

RUBY, NATHANIEL, and CRYSTAL work hard
at physically blocking their fears.

LEONA
All of you, right now!
I want you to scream out,
"You're not in control of me!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
You're not in control of me!

LEONA
"I'm in control of you!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL
I'm in control of you!

LEONA

Again! Louder!
“You’re not in control of me!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

You’re not in control of me!!!

LEONA

“I’m in control of you!”

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

I’m in control of you!!!

LEONA

Fantastic!
Now —
I want you all to attack your fear!

NATHANIEL

...Attack it?

LEONA

Absolutely.
You can see it right there in front of you.
This terrible thing that’s made you suffer.
And now you can make *it* suffer!
So, go!
Right now!
Fight those fears!
Make those fears feel all of the
Pain —
And loathing —
And hatred —
That you’ve felt for so long!

The group hesitates.

NATHANIEL

I can’t —
I can’t do it!

LEONA

Why not?

NATHANIEL

I’m too scared!

CRYSTAL

I am too!

RUBY

Me too!

LEONA

Nonsense!
You're in control.
You have the power!

RUBY

Do we really, though?

LEONA

Of course you do!
Say it again!
"You're not in control of me!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

You're not in control of me!

LEONA

"I'm in control of you!"

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

I'm in control of you!

LEONA

Do you want your fear to control you for the rest of your life?

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

NO!!!

LEONA

Do you want to walk out of here as sad, pathetic victims?

RUBY/CRYSTAL/NATHANIEL

NO!!!

LEONA

Then go on!
Go for it!
Grab your fear!
Smack your fear!
Clobber your fear!
Smother your fear!
Just go to town on your pesky fear!

I want you to wrestle your fear to the ground and overpower it!
The time has come to finally—
Once and for all—
CONQUER YOUR FEARS!!!

RUBY, CRYSTAL, and NATHANIEL release
loud, primal groans as they lunge and attack their
imagined fears.

They kick out their arms and legs.

They punch.

And scream.

And grunt.

And swear.

They look totally ridiculous.

While this is happening—LEONA notices the
snacks that RUBY brought.

LEONA moves over to examine the food a bit
closer.

LEONA

There you go!
That's it!
Keep going!
Keep attacking!

LEONA reaches for a cracker and pops it in her
mouth.

She tries to crunch down quietly but it ends up
being quite loud.

NATHANIEL peeks at LEONA from under his
blindfold.

RUBY and CRYSTAL continue battling their fears.

LEONA swallows down the cracker.

LEONA

Keep going!

That's the stuff!
You're doing perfectly!

LEONA pops another cracker in her mouth.

NATHANIEL pulls off his blindfold.

NATHANIEL

...You're eating.

LEONA stops chewing.

LEONA

(with a mouthful:)
No I'm not.

RUBY and CRYSTAL stop clobbering their fears
and pull off their blindfolds.

They're sweaty and winded.

NATHANIEL

Why are you eating?

LEONA

So I didn't eat dinner before I came.
Why does it matter?

CRYSTAL

Are you serious?
Aren't you supposed to—
Oh, I don't know—
Pay attention?

LEONA

I am paying attention!

RUBY

You said you'd watch to make sure I didn't break any bones.

LEONA

I've done this a thousand times.
I can do it in my sleep!

CRYSTAL

God.

I feel like such an idiot.

LEONA

Oh, come on.

A pause.

LEONA realizes she's losing them.

LEONA

Okay, okay!

Fine.

Do you want the honest truth?

The group stares at LEONA.

LEONA

You guys are a lot farther along than most of the people who come through here.
So I was thinking we could just speed this up a bit and jump right into step three.

CRYSTAL

Bullshit.

LEONA

Excuse me?

CRYSTAL

That's bullshit.

You've got our money.

And now you just want to get us out of here as soon as possible.

LEONA

Do you really believe that?

CRYSTAL

Yeah. I do.

LEONA

Do you all think that's true?

RUBY

I don't know what to believe anymore.

RUBY grabs her purse and clutches it tight.

LEONA

I mean it, you guys.

You're all so much closer than you realize.

NATHANIEL

Why should we believe you?

LEONA

I want to help you.

CRYSTAL

Do you?

LEONA

Of course I do.

RUBY

Why do you want to help us?

LEONA

Because—

NATHANIEL

Because why?

LEONA

I'm one of you.

CRYSTAL

You're not one of us.

LEONA

Of course I am.

CRYSTAL

I want to believe it.

I want to believe you can do what you say you can do.

I want to believe you understand what it's like to have crippling, chronic fear sneak up on you all the time.

But I don't believe you've overcome anything in your life.

I mean—

Is your name really Leona?

LEONA

Is yours really Crystal?

CRYSTAL

Of course it is!

Why would I *choose* the name Crystal?

LEONA

(to NATHANIEL:)
Is yours really Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL

Yes, actually.

LEONA

(to RUBY:)
Is yours really Ruby?

RUBY

Am I the only one who made up a name?!
You said it doesn't matter what name we choose for this!

LEONA

It doesn't!
That's precisely my point.

CRYSTAL

I'm sorry—
But I can't do this if we're being lied to.

LEONA

No one is lying to you!

CRYSTAL

I just don't trust this anymore.
I feel too vulnerable.
I'm too much in my head now.
I don't know about them—
But, to me—
None of this feels right.

CRYSTAL reaches for her trench coat.

NATHANIEL

Yeah, I—

LEONA

Wait a second...
Nobody move...

A pause.

Everyone waits.

What?
NATHANIEL

Did you guys hear that?
LEONA

A pause.
Everyone listens.

I didn't hear anything.
RUBY

Shh!
LEONA

LEONA moves to the door and listens.

Maybe it was nothing.
LEONA

She moves away from the door.

No. There it was again!
LEONA

Are you sure you heard something?
RUBY

It's getting pretty late...
NATHANIEL
Is there onsite security or anything?

I don't think so, actually.
LEONA

Does someone wanna go check it out?
RUBY

The group looks to NATHANIEL.

Don't look at me.
NATHANIEL

I was afraid this might happen.
LEONA

CRYSTAL

Afraid what might happen?

LEONA

It's nothing.

CRYSTAL

What is it?

Are we going to get hurt?

LEONA

Don't worry.

You guys are safe in here with me.

RUBY

You promise?

LEONA

Of course.

Now, please—

Let's not let this ruin our workshop.

We're so, so close.

Do we want to move into the final step or not?

RUBY and NATHANIEL look to CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL

All right, fine.

Let's finish what we came here for.

LEONA

Wonderful.

I'm proud of you guys.

Truly proud.

You've shown up—

That's step one.

You've identified and battled your fears—

That's step two.

And now—

You're all going to be reborn as fearless warriors.

A pause.

NATHANIEL

Reborn?

LEONA

This is exactly how I finally overcame my own fears.

This is how I became a brand new, stronger person.
This is what sets this workshop apart.

RUBY

What do we have to do?

LEONA

You need to rid yourselves of the extra bulk that you carry around all the time.

NATHANIEL

And what does that mean exactly?

LEONA

Most of us have been carrying around these fears since childhood.
And that's a lot of extra weight to hold onto all the time.
Day in, day out.
Day out, day in.
It's exhausting, isn't it?

NATHANIEL

So...?

LEONA

So you need to remove all the extra layers that bog you down.

The group stares at each other, confused.

LEONA

So, go on.
Do it.

RUBY

Do what exactly?

LEONA

Strip down to your raw, natural selves.

NATHANIEL

Our natural selves?

LEONA

Yes.
Ride yourselves of the bulk.
Remove the extra layers.

CRYSTAL

Wait.
You want us to take off our clothes?

RUBY

Oh.
I can't do that.

LEONA

Just as much as you feel comfortable shedding.

RUBY

But it's so chilly in here.

NATHANIEL

Yeah and I'm kind of bashful about this sort of thing.

LEONA

Do you want to walk out of here as brand new, healed, fearless individuals?
Or do you want to leave as the same weak, fearful people you were when you arrived?
It's totally up to you.
Do you want to be reborn today or not?

A long pause.

The group stares at each other, hesitant.

CRYSTAL makes the first move. She steps forth
and removes her black sweater.

NATHANIEL takes a deep breath— then sheds his
sweater vest and trousers.

RUBY unzips her floral-print dress and lets it drop
to the ground—revealing her slip underneath.

Each of them has removed the top layer of their
clothing—and they're now stripped down to their
undergarments.

CRYSTAL

Okay.
There.
Now what?

LEONA

There's that noise again...

LEONA moves back to the door and listens.

RUBY

What does it sound like?

LEONA

I don't want to say.
But I think we might be in serious danger.

NATHANIEL

Should we get dressed?

LEONA

No, no—
But I better go check it out.

CRYSTAL

Right now?
Really?

LEONA

Yes—
I think it's for the best.

NATHANIEL

But we're in our underwear.

LEONA

Yes.
Yes you are.
And I want you to stay just as you are.

LEONA exits.

A very long, awkward pause as the group stands
there—cold and vulnerable—in their
undergarments.

CRYSTAL

This is awful.

NATHANIEL

And lonely.

RUBY

And cold.

A pause.

RUBY

Maybe we should go check on her?

NATHANIEL

We'd have to get dressed.

CRYSTAL

And she said to stay just as we are.

A pause.

NATHANIEL

I wonder what's keeping her.
Do you think she's all right?

RUBY

I hope so.

CRYSTAL

I'm sure she is.
...Right?

A pause.

NATHANIEL

I'm not entirely confident she's coming back.

RUBY

It's not looking too good, is it?

CRYSTAL

I can't believe this.

NATHANIEL

What?

CRYSTAL

I really can't believe this.

RUBY

Believe what?

CRYSTAL

That we fell for this.
I cannot believe we actually fell for this!
I'm done.
With all of it.
This is insane.

She left us in here to rot.
She humiliated us.

RUBY

She heard a noise.

CRYSTAL

Look at us!
What is wrong with us?
She's got us stripped down to our underwear!
How pathetic can we be?!

NATHANIEL

It's the final step.
We'll be stronger!
We'll be reborn!

CRYSTAL

I don't care what step it is!
I don't care about any of it anymore!

CRYSTAL bends down for her clothes and redresses.

NATHANIEL and RUBY also bend down for their clothes.

LEONA returns.

LEONA

Wait, wait, WAIT!
What's going on here, you guys?
Why are you putting on your clothes?
I thought we agreed to complete the process?

The group continues to dress.

CRYSTAL

We're getting the hell out of here!

LEONA

But we're not finished yet.

CRYSTAL

Yes, we are!

NATHANIEL

You left us.

I went to check on things. To keep us safe.	LEONA
What things?	CRYSTAL
The noise we heard.	LEONA
We didn't hear a noise. <i>You</i> heard a noise.	CRYSTAL
You're right, I did.	LEONA
But did you really hear a noise?	CRYSTAL
Of course I did!	LEONA
There was no noise! There is no danger! Except for you! You're the danger! Just admit it!	CRYSTAL
	A pause.
How long have you known?	LEONA
Known what?	RUBY
The truth.	LEONA
So wait— There really wasn't a noise?	NATHANIEL
No.	LEONA

She's right.
There was no noise.

CRYSTAL

I knew it!
I knew I never should've trusted you.

NATHANIEL

I'm so confused.

CRYSTAL

How could you do this?
How could you take advantage of us?

LEONA

I wouldn't put it that way, exactly.

CRYSTAL

Then how would you put it?

LEONA

It's complicated.

CRYSTAL

What's complicated about it?
Is all of this bogus or not?

LEONA

I don't know what to say.

CRYSTAL

Just admit it.
You're trying to make money off of us.
And you're purposefully humiliating us!
Say it—
You don't know what you're doing!
SAY IT!

LEONA

Fine!
Okay.
I don't know what I'm doing.

RUBY

You mean—
She's right?
None of this was real?

LEONA

I'm afraid so.

RUBY

Oh, no.

No, no, no—

NATHANIEL

Ruby—

RUBY

No, no, no, no, no!

LEONA

Stay calm—

RUBY

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!

NATHANIEL

She's flipping out!

CRYSTAL

Can you blame her?!

RUBY

NO!

NO!

NO!

NO!

NO!

NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!

NATHANIEL

She's gonna explode!

RUBY

This is not good!

This is bad!

This is not good!

This is bad!

This is not good!

This is *very* bad!

RUBY grabs her purse and frantically digs inside.

Wait—
What's happening?
What are you doing?

LEONA

I've—
 (She digs.)
I've—
 (She digs.)
I've—
 (She digs.)

RUBY

I've got something in here for you!

LEONA

I don't think I want it.

RUBY pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

Cigarettes?

NATHANIEL

No, not that!

RUBY

RUBY pulls out a bottle opener.

A bottle opener?

CRYSTAL

Not that either!

RUBY

RUBY pulls out a sequined onesie.

A sequined onesie?

LEONA

No!

RUBY

RUBY pulls out another purse.

This!
This is what I was looking for!

RUBY

LEONA

A smaller purse from inside your purse?

RUBY

No!

Not the purse!

CRYSTAL

Why do you need a smaller purse?

RUBY

For reasons far too numerous to list right now!

But what I really need is what's inside the smaller purse!

NATHANIEL

What's inside the smaller purse?

RUBY unzips the smaller purse and pulls out a handgun.

RUBY

THIS!!!

NATHANIEL, CRYSTAL, and LEONA gasp.

She holds up the gun and points it toward LEONA.

RUBY

We came here tonight looking to get healed—

And what did you do?

You tricked us!

Do you know how sick that is?

Huh?!

Do you?!!

Why do people like you always think you can get away with this sort of thing?

(Before LEONA can answer:)

WELL NOT ANYMORE!

Because, you know what?

Even with all of the nonsense you've put us through tonight—

We're still not the losers, lady!

You are!

LEONA

You're right.

I don't know why I still do this.

NATHANIEL

But these workshops have worked for other people, right?

LEONA

No.

NATHANIEL

Never?

LEONA

Never.

I've never really helped anybody.

I just make things worse for people.

NATHANIEL

But the flyers.

And the online forum.

And the toilet paper dispenser.

LEONA

I did all of that.

I planted every bit of it.

I called myself a tormented genius.

RUBY

Why do you do this to people?

Why'd you want to trick us?

LEONA

I don't know.

To make a quick buck?

RUBY

I think it's a lot deeper than that.

LEONA

Maybe so.

My entire life—

I was always the follower, never the leader.

No one ever even noticed me before I started doing this.

I guess that's why conning people feels so good.

I want people to see me as that tormented genius—

Even if I have to craft it all myself.

Surrounding myself with sad, sick, vulnerable creatures like you all makes me feel—

I don't know—

Special?

NATHANIEL

Thanks?

LEONA

But I see now that you all aren't the sick ones.
I am.

RUBY

I thought I was walking out of here fixed tonight.
I told myself if I didn't conquer my fears—
Once and for all—
Then I'd use this gun to end it.
And I meant it!
I just didn't realize I'd be ending it for somebody else too.

NATHANIEL

Don't do this, Ruby!

RUBY points the gun at the entire group.

RUBY

MY NAME IS NOT RUBY!
MY NAME IS GERALDINE!

CRYSTAL

Isn't there another way?
How can I make it up to you?

RUBY holds tight to the handgun.

LEONA

Please.
Geraldine.
Don't do this.
I beg you.
I'll never do this to anyone else as long as I live.
Please—
There's got to be a way I can make it up to you—

A pause.

RUBY

Take off your clothes.

LEONA

What?

RUBY

You humiliated us.
So, now, we get to humiliate you.

Are you serious?
LEONA

As a heart attack.
Now, go on—
Do it.
Take off your clothes.
RUBY

And if I do it—
You won't shoot?
LEONA

Hurry up before I change my mind!
RUBY

LEONA quickly removes her artsy shawl and then attempts to wiggle her way out of her spandex pants.

It takes a while—but she manages to remove the top layers of her clothes.

A very long, awkward pause.

How does it feel?
RUBY

Is it awful?
CRYSTAL

It's awful.
LEONA

Is it lonely?
NATHANIEL

So lonely.
LEONA

Is it cold?
RUBY

I'm shivering.
LEONA

RUBY

Now hand ‘em over.

RUBY gestures for LEONA’S clothes.

LEONA hands her clothes to CRYSTAL.

CRYSTAL hands them to NATHANIEL.

NATHANIEL hands them to RUBY.

RUBY shoves the clothes inside her purse.

RUBY

Wow...

I actually feel much better now.

Like I can go out and do anything.

Don’t you guys?

A pause.

CRYSTAL

I do too, actually.

After all this—

Who would’ve thought?

NATHANIEL

It’s like a weight’s been lifted.

RUBY

You know what?

CRYSTAL
What?

NATHANIEL
What is it?

RUBY

I’m not afraid anymore.

CRYSTAL and NATHANIEL smile.

CRYSTAL

You know what?

I’m not either.

NATHANIEL

Me either.

Wow.

RUBY slips the handgun back into the smaller purse—and then she slides the smaller purse into her purse.

RUBY

(to LEONA:)
Maybe you're a tormented genius after all.

RUBY walks toward the door.

NATHANIEL and CRYSTAL follow behind.

They glance back one last time at LEONA—then exit.

LEONA is left alone in the classroom—shivering in her undergarments.

One last long, awkward pause.

Then lights fall to black.

End of play.