

OF LESS PERFECT MATERIAL

A QUASI-PLAY IN TEN MONOLOGUES

By

STUART CALDWELL

160 W. 16th STREET
APT. 3G
NEW YORK, NY 10011
(212) 627-5343

© 2001

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ORDER OF MONOLOGUES AND CHARACTERS

1. **SUNNY AND SEVENTY-EIGHT**
The Father
A Bar stool

2. **CALLING OUT**
The Son
A Telephone Booth

3. **BITNESS**
The Dealer
A Red Velvet Lounge Chair

4. **AID AND DIVERSION**
The Nurse
A Wheelchair

5. **IF YOU CAN'T BE**
The Friend
A Director's Chair

6. **SOMETIMES THE ANSWER IS NO**
The Mother
A Cloud

7. **TO GET TO HERE?**
The Girl
A Pink, Furry Chair

8. **PEACE OFFICER**
The Cop
An Old Office Chair

9. **FOR YOU MOST OF ALL**
The Pastor
A Casket

10. **EPILOGUE**
The Stage Manager

DESCRIPTION OF THE STAGE

There is no direct scenery on the stage. There are only eight items on the stage and the correspond with each of the first eight monologues. They are arranged in a concave semi-circle from the stage out. They re in order: A Bar stool, an old telephone booth, a chaise lounge, a wheelchair, a director's chair, a cloud, and a casket.

The discussion of the third parties which vary from conversation to conversation are represented with "——"

SUNNY AND SEVENTY EIGHT

(the Stage Manager moves the bar stool into place. A well-dressed, obviously affluent man in his fifties is sitting on a stool with his back leaning against the bar. He is wearing a mauve, Ralph Lauren Polo shirt and tan khaki pants with a pair of tortoise shell glasses and receding but mostly still existent, wavy slicked back hair. Though you cannot tell from his outward appearance, when he speaks, it is clear not so much from his slurring as from his effusiveness that he has had several drinks)

THE FATHER

(he is nodding excessively to the music)

Yeah, I like this song, I like this—one of the old time. One of the *old* old time.

(with much effort and to little good effect, he whistles the break from “Sitting on the Dock of the Bay”)

Heh-heh, yeah yeah. That’s it. That’s——Yeah, hm hmmm—mmmnn....I remember when this came out. I’m sorry. Do you—I’m sorry. I don’t mean to—you mind? You mind?——I remember when this came out. That’s how old I am. That’s how *old*. Sixty-seven. Sixty-seven or sixty-eight, I think. I was eighteen. Eighteen or nineteen. At that time I mean. Did you play this?——You did? You got taste. You’ve got——no you do. You’ve got taste. I know. *I* know it.——You come here a lot. I used to come here, but that was a long time ago. Oh god, that was a long time ago.

(he laughs, giddily, excessively)

I’m a Brooklyn boy. A Brooklyn boy. Don’t mess with us. You, you don’t mess with us, us Brooklyn boys. I came here for my son. He’s not a Brooklyn boy. He’s not uh—that’s his problem. That’s his problem!....But I’ve come here for him and everything’s fine. Everything’s fine. Everything’s gonna be—cause you don’t mess with me. You don’t mess with mine. I’m Brooklyn. I’ve moved. I know I moved but nobody moves that far. You can’t move that far. So you mess with mine you get messed with right back. Right back! You get messed with right back!....My son.—I should go. I gotta go.

(he pulls some money out from his wallet, turns and drops it on the bar, but turns back and doesn’t move, thinking)

LA! That’s him. My—that’s what he is. LA! It’s different. *He’s* different.—The weather. You can’t be tough. You can’t be—not really. How can you be tough when it’s sunny and seventy-eight every day? Sunny and seventy-eight. Cold makes you tough. Cold puts you in a bad mood. An angry mood. Gets you ready. Gets you right. Nobody’ll take advantage of you. Nobody’ll uh—in LA the sun, the weather, you’re not ready. You’re not tough. You know?....Mine. Mess with mine, you get messed with cause that was what I was taught in Brooklyn. Aw yeah! Yeah! They’re the best. They are always the—

(singing off key, off verse, just off)

“Try it your way, try to see if we can make it right or wrong. Try to see it my way, try to see if we can tell if our love will soon be gone. We can work it out! We can work it out! La-la-la-la-la and there’s no time ime-ime-ime for fussing and fighting my friends.”....

(he laughs)

Yeah. Fussing and fighting. There’s no time....Yeah.—YEAH YEAH YEAH!

(he turns to talk to the bartender behind him and puts more money on the bar and settles)

All right. All right. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I don’t mean to. I don’t mean—Yeah. ‘Sa big fella. Don’t want to mess with him if I don’t have to....Probably thirty years. Maybe more. Yeah more. More. Definitely. *Forty!* Since I’ve been to this bar. No wait. It can’t be forty. What am I saying. It can’t be—oh well....I left town. Left this coast for that coast. Left for the Left coast. To raise my fortune! Raise my fortune? What the hell’s that? To make my fortune. You make a fortune, right? Not raise it. I don’t....And I did too! I did. I’m wealthy. I’m awful wealthy. *Terribly* wealthy. You notice that. They never say I’m happy wealthy. I’m a good wealthy. It’s always I’m terribly wealthy. Awfully wealthy. There’s something, there’s something in that. There’s—I’ve got more than I know what to do with. More’n three or five people would know what to do with. Real estate! *Real—estate*. Buy property, build property, sell property. Any idiot. Any fucking idiot could do it. Buy land, buy land, build property, sell property. Houses, stores, office buildings. Shit I’ve done it all. All of it. Any idiot can—you just have to apply yourself. I told him that. Just apply yourself. Here! It’s easy! Buy, build, sell! Apply! Just—*work!*....But he can’t. He couldn’t. He—no. No! NO!—He didn’t try! He didn’t even try! It was too easy. It was too easy for him. No challenge. No desperation. It was all too—that’s how smart he is. That’s how, how, how gifted. He’s gifted! You have to understand he was gifted and this was too easy. Too easy for him....I was always so proud. So proud....It’s the weather. It’s the *fucking* weather!

(he listens to the music a moment, then shakes his head, becoming grave)

I gotta, I gotta go. He’s in the uh—my son....

(he’s lost in thought a moment then looks about the place)

Place hasn’t changed that much. This—it hasn’t—still with the, and the lights and the stools. Red. The bar’s the same. Looks the same. More aged. More a-ged. A-ged....And those phone booths. Those phone booths must be fifty years old. Maybe seventy. I don’t know, seventy, eighty. You know the whole—with the shutting doors when the lights come on. That neon white. With the circular—blinding like. Blinding. Interrogation. An interrogation. Fucking Gestapo!....He called me from here. Seven days ago. Right from there. Right from—from one of those booths.

(he chuckles, saying the word excessively slow, sussirating the “th”)

That's tough to say. *Booths*. After a couple, you know. *Booths*. *Booths*.

(he laughs then fades into silence, staring at the telephone booth)

I don't know which one. One of them. I think this one, I think. I think—I don't know. I don't know which one. Doesn't make any difference, does it?—No I guess not, no....He had my calling card number. I gave it to him. I gave him the number, I think. So he could call if he, you know, trouble. If he got—maybe he stole it. I don't, I don't know.

(pause then with an acknowledging nod)

He stole it. He stole it....I don't care! I don't! I'd've given it to him. I would've. I gave him everything. I love my kid. I do! Whatever he wanted, whatever he needed. I had nothing as a kid. We were poor in Brooklyn. Dirt poor. Dirt, dirt—I don't want to be one those, you know. One of those "Thirty miles through the snow," types. "On my hands and knees," that crap. That's crap. But it's true! We were poor. We didn't have, so I gave. I gave! I didn't want him to—why should I? What's wrong with—I had so I give.—I know. I know what you're, what you're thinking, I know and maybe yes, fine. Fine yes. Fine! FINE! FINE!

(a long moment to calm himself)

Maybe so. Maybe—I...but it doesn't mean you, you don't apply yourself. It doesn't mean you just, you just—*cheat*. You don't just—I have and I didn't cheat. I'm still trying! I'm still fighting! I still fight for what's mine. I don't know no other way. I don't expect it quick. The quick money, the quick buck. The *score*! So he stole my credit card number. I'm his father. *I'm his father!* What's it matter?! That, that isn't a crime. There isn't any crime in that!

(he listens a moment, then drifts back to the topic)

I didn't recognize his voice. Imagine—not recognizing your own child's voice. He was here. He was there, right there, calling me on that....We talk. Maybe not, maybe not that—maybe not every week or so, but, but we *talk!* We would talk. I told him. I would tell him. "Apply yourself! Quit this crap. Quit this—*crap* you're doing and apply yourself. You *must* apply yourself! You *must!*"—Every month or so. We would talk. I knew it was something. I knew—I didn't know what. I swear I didn't. But he wasn't *forthcoming*, you know. He wasn't, he didn't exactly tell me. He didn't exactly keep me—but I knew it was something. I didn't think it was anything real bad. Nothing real....He wanted to act for a bit. For a bit. He wanted to act. And he did too! He did. Had a bit part in some movie. Some, some teenage—one of those teen—Summer Fun, Fun Summer, like that. He knew the um—his friend's father was the producer. Or one of the producers. And he got him the role and a line or something in the uh—*Summer School!* It was *Summer School!* The name of the uh, the film.—No—I never—saw....But he never pursued it! He never pursued it! His mother, my *first* wife, she always said that was his way! He was too fine, too refined for it all. That's bullshit. Motherly bullshit. She didn't—she's not with s still

(he looks towards the phone booths and laughs)

I wanted to come here. You know cause he was—here. If they could talk, huh? If they, what they've heard. What's been said on them. Marriage proposals and tears. Jokes and pleading with girlfriends. And deals.—And deals.

(he shakes his head ruefully almost tearfully finally growing resolute)

I take care of what's mine. Brooklyn's Brooklyn and I take care of what's mine. You have kids? No huh, you're a kid yourself.—No of course, of course. They're always yours. No matter what they do. No matter what they—they're yours. They're always—you've a responsibility. You've a responsibility. And when they call you up, and they need you, they need you because they're scared. They're scared. So scared you can't hear them. You can't recognize—*them*. You can't hear *them* in there. You can't recognize their voice. A voice you know. A voice you've known. When, when he swam the length of the pool the first time. When riding on his moped, when he passed his driver's license. When he's scared! When, when he's scared and you can't do anything because he's far. He's too far. But you're coming. You're coming, buddy. On the next plane. The next plane buddy, I'm on the next plane. The Red Eye buddy. The Red Eye. I'm coming on the Red Eye! I'M COMING ON THE RED EYE! I'M COMING BUDDY! ON THE FUCKING RED EYE! THE FUCKING RED EYE!

(to the bartender behind him)

Okay, shush, shush, okay. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Man I'm—I'm sorry. I am....I gotta go to the hospital. I gotta go. What time....You gonna play another?

(he reaches for his wallet to get singles for the jukebox)

No, here. Here use mine. Use—All right. The next one. The next. I'll get....Play something nice. Play something—something old. Something I'd know....Yeah, yeah that's fine. Real fine.—Yeah, that's it. That's—mmnphh....Reverend Al! Reverend Al.—Sing it Al. Sing it.

(he begins to shake his head, sadly. Then, he looks around for the money)

I gotta go. I gotta....I gotta go.

(turning back around, he exhales heavily and remains on the stool thinking and shaking his head)

CALLING OUT

(the Stage Manager returns the bar stool to its position and moves the telephone booth into place. A young man of twenty-three years sits in an old-style, wooden telephone booth with no door. Throughout he squirms and writhes in the confined space, sometimes putting his feet up on the stool, the telephone, the wall. His behavior would be described as manic, narcotically so)

THE SON

(initially in an artificially high voice, at times pinched, unnerved, desperate)

Dad!—Dad, it's David.—It's David Dad! Your son.—Yes. Yes, I know. I know Dad but it's me. I promise. It must be the noise.—In a bar.—A bar! A bar!—I don't know. Does it matter?

(to outside the telephone booth)

Hey, which bar is this?—McManus? Peter Mc—

(into the phone again)

It's Peter McManus.—Yes Chelsea. Right, right. Dad!—Dad, how are you Dad? Are you all right? How's Ellen? Is she, is she treating you well, making your favorite dishes? Huh? Picking up your shirts, light starch. No hangers, boxed.—Yes, the Kuegel. The Kuegal and the Kasha. You love, you love the uh, the uh Kasha. You've always loved your Kasha. And the potatoes. The potatoes with the stewed beef. The boiled beef.—Right, right. And the derma. The derma.—Of course they can't. They're too WASPy. Even the Jews. Even the Jews are too WASPy out there. With their dock-siders and Polo oxfords. You should move back here.

(he laughs again, but his smile fades)

Oh well, you know. Why? Why anything? Do I have to have a uh—can't I just call to see, you know. Do I have to have to a reason to see how you're uh—to check up on you, make sure you're doing....

(he bows his head, disappointed)

No.—No I don't. I'm good. I got the last one and that's plenty. It'll take care of the whole month.—Yes. Thank you. It's more than I need. Thank you I really—I really....

(he breaks off, growing emotional)

Dad—Dad I'm trouble. I'm in trouble Dad. I'm in trouble. I fucked up. I fucked up—bad.—What? I don't know. I don't know. I can't. I fucked up and I can't. I can't....

(he pauses, barely able to collect himself)

Dad—dad, do you remember when we went white water rafting? Do you Dad? Do you remember? We went to the Deliverance river. I don't remember what it's called but I

remember they said in the brochures it was the river the movie was based on. In South Carolina. Do you remember?—Right, right. You made us watch the movie before we went. Burt. Burt. In his finest role. His finest role, except for the “The Longest Yard.” Burt and Ned Beatty and John Voight. Right right.

(he cries, listening)

I was scared. I was scared. Remember? I was so scared. Scared something would happen to us. That that, that something—you remember? It rained the whole week before we went. It rained and the river was high and Mom didn’t want us to go. Mom didn’t want us—yes yes, right.—I miss Mom. I miss—Dad, I do. I miss Mom.—I know. I know she did. I know she did. It was high. It was so high, the river. It was a four and a half out of five. Remember? That’s how they rank them. One to five. And it’s normally a three point five. That river was normally a three point five. But it rained the week before and the banks, and the river flooding, it was now a four point five. Four point five out of five. Remember? You would call over to the house the whole week before we went and tell me to get ready.

(imitating a sterner voice)

“Get ready. Get ready, it’s gonna be rough. Gonna be—it’s gonna be rough sledding.” And I’d put Mom on the phone and she’d yell at you. She’d yell at you. Tell you nothing better happen. Nothing better happen to me. “Nothing better happen to him.” You remember? I was small then. I was small and I didn’t really like to swim. I didn’t really like—and I wasn’t any good anyway. I could never breathe right when I swan. I could never turn my head on the off stroke so I just kept me head always above the waterline.—I can’t swim now. I still can’t. But I certainly couldn’t then. You remember what you did? Do you remember?

(he listens a moment and laughs)

Yes yes. Right. And in the first real rapids, the very first real rapids. Not the little ones. Not the small just “ride ‘em out” ones, but the real ones. The first real stormy threatening ones. When I got bounced bit. I got jostled a bit. Lost my balance, you reached for me. You reached out, I saw you. You reached out for my leg. You saw me losing—and you reached out for me....And I remember thinking he’s got me. He’s got me. He’s got my leg. He’ll get my leg.—It was only a flash. Only a second, momentarily—but I—it was enough. It was enough. It was enough time. I knew.—And you did! You got it! Right above my knee. Right by that flank there. Right by that—you got it. Firmly. A firm grip. I felt your hands. I felt the clench. I can remember. I can still remember....And when you got me, when you got hold, when you got a firm hold—you flipped me over. You flipped me overboard. Into the rapids. Into the first real—do you remember? Do you remember? Do you?

(he laughs)

I landed in the water feet first. The surprise, the stunned—I’ll never forget that. I’ll never forget. I was in the water floating down behind the, the—*raft*, with the other

people and the other rafts going by and me in the water rushing by, and I heard you. I heard you so. Everybody did. You screamed it so loud. “TELL THAT TO YOUR MOTHER! MAKE SURE YOU TELL YOUR MOTHER ABOUT THAT”

(he laughs wildly, eventually down breaking into tears)

That was the last time. That was the last time. The last time you did that Dad. Dad—I love, I love that you did that. I understand Dad. I understand. I needed that. I needed—that was the last time. The last—I loved that you did that Dad. I loved that you did. I know why. I know why. I know now.

(he is crying again)

Dad—Dad I’m weak. I’m weak. I’m so weak Dad. I’m a coward Dad. I’m a coward. I am. I always—Dad I never—I’M A COWARD! A COWARD!—I’m so weak.

(a long pause as he cries. He tries to speak)

I’m so weak. I’m so week.....They’re gonna get me. They’re coming to, they’re coming to.—I stole something. It wasn’t mine, but I wanted it. I wanted it so I took it. I wanted it so I took it, Dad. Dad—but I didn’t even, I didn’t even want it. I didn’t even, I just wanted to—Dad I can’t. I can’t.—*I can’t!* It’s gone. It’s gone. No. No.—IT’S GONE! IT’S GONE!

(he calms only relatively)

They don’t care about money. They don’t care. The money isn’t the point. The money isn’t the fucking point. I took it and it’s *gone!* And they’re, they’re coming.—Dad, I’m scared. I’m scared. I’m so....Yes.—Yes, I’ll be here. I’ll be here. Until you come. Until you come. I’ll be here. I’ll stay here till you come....Yes.

(he remains there, scrunching down in the seat, shaking his head rhythmically)

I’ll be here. I’ll be here. I’ll be here.

BITNESS

(the Stage Manager moves the red velvet lounge chair into place. A very large man of the bouncer / former football lineman variety, wearing dark sunglasses, a bathrobe and a goatee sits in the chair and smiles out with what can only be best described as a malevolent, “shit-eating” grin)

THE DEALER

All right, all right. Na na, I'll speak. But I've got anonymity, right? I've got anonymity?—I'm anonymous. Shit, look at me. That's something I ain't never been before.—Na, cool. No problem. I'll speak as long as I got that. I'm one of your sources. I'm a source. We got protection.

(he leans back, arrogantly pleased)

What you want to know?—Na legal. Legal nothing. I ain't afraid. Nobody's got nothing on me. I got distance. I keep distance. That's the thing. That's the thing a man in my position's gotta have. There are levels. There's distance between this and that. Somebody else takes care of that. That's not me. I could do it! Oh yeah yeah, I could do it. And sometimes I'd enjoy it too. I enjoy it. Specially with this guy. Specially.

(he laughs malevolently)

Have you met him?—Yeah, you see. You see. Little weasel, ain't he? Just a little fucking punk-ass weasel. Definitely would've enjoyed doing it with this fucking punk. A lesson taught by the right teacher is a lesson learned well. Heh-heh. That's my father's saying. Just as he got up to get the swatch on me. And he's right cause I learned. I learned what's what. And I mean c'mon. What the fuck's he thinking! I mean what the fuck? Look at me!

(he stands forcefully doing a slow turn)

What? I dunno, you know. What the fuck?

(he shakes his head, bemused as he sits again)

Yeah well, he ought a know. He ought a know, you know. Don't start! Don't start with me! *I* didn't start with. He took *mine*. What he expect me to do, nothing! C'mon! Fuck me! *Fuck me!*—What do *you* do in that situation?! Like I'm some different somebody? Everybody do it! I got to! He must've know I got to. Else everybody be doing it. C'mon. Where's that leave me?!

(he shakes his head disdainfully)

He's just stupid, that what he is. Fucking stupid. Good college, good family. Still fucking stupid.—Na, I don't mind selling him. He's a good customer. I love that type. He pays. He buys, he pays. That's all I want. Being stupid's no excuse to cut him off. Shit I have to cut off everybody if that's the case.

(he laughs again)

The funny thing is, he's got the money. He's got the money plenty. Told me so himself. His old man'll keep sending it. Much as he needs. What the old man thinks's anybody's guess? Kid's got no job and a 2G a week habit. I mean weekly like sunshine. Coke mostly. "n some other shit. Ex. Ecstasy. Maybe Meth too. I don't remember. I got lots of customers.—And right as rain, he keeps sending his kid money. Every month.—And I'm the problem? I'm the bad guy? That's bull, man. That's just plain bull.

(he turns away annoyed, then back forcefully)

HE STOLE FROM ME! Mother fucker! HE STOLE FROM ME! He didn't need to, he just I don't know, I can't explain it. I don't need to. I just can't let it go though. I can't.—I understand. I understand. I got family too. I got kids too. Little ones though. Can't choose 'um. Can't choose either of 'um. Like winning or losing the lottery when they come out. Just some lucky numbers and they're good. Some wrong numbers and you're paying for the rest of your time.—I understand that. I understand. But I can't man. I gotta do.

(nodding slowly, but firmly)

I sent someone. Yes sir, goddamn, I sent someone who sent someone else. There are levels to this. I keep levels. I don't get involved. I got my man and he gets his. He gets and that guy don't know me and I don't know him. I just know it gets done. "No crazy here," I tell them, you know. "No Crazy. Don't over do it." Man's gotta learn, so you learn 'um. Punishment fits the crime. Usually. Usually. More so 'n the police. More so 'n the government. Three years for possession *without* intent! Without! C'mon! Just for keeping a little around the house for yourself and to distribute to friends and loved ones. That's bullshit. My punishment fits. I told 'um not to over do it. Just make it don't happen again with him or with anybody. Make sure a that.—Yeah, I heard it was done right. I got that call.

(he laughs maliciously)

Yeah well, some people enjoy their work too much. *Overactive. Overachievers.* What can you do? He don't mess, he don't get messed. I ain't charity.

(pause, grim)

Yeah well, I heard that too. Well that's fine. That's fine. I'm available. He wants a find me, I'm very findable. But he talks without thinking. Like his son in that. They both got that I guess. Lot a talking, not much planning.—No, I understand. I understand how he feels. God couldn't save you, you mess with mine. But what he don't think, what he don't realize is, it's a long list. The line is long that come gunning for me and I'm still standing. Like that Elton John song.

(singing briefly)

"*Don't you know I'm still Standing. Better than I ever did*" Hmm mmm, yeah. It's been a long, long time and I'm still standing.—He wants me, he can have. I ain't hiding from nobody. I don't hide. Where'm I gonna hide anyway? I'm six-four, two-eighty-five! Can't hide if I wanted to.—Yeah, two seasons. The Seahawks. Seattle. I hated it.

Always raining in that town. Especially the winter. Spent both years on the taxi squad. Never played a down. Was good money *though*. Base salary even for scrubs and rooks. Good fucking money. ‘N I got a four-year college degree. I do. U. of Maine. In six years. I ain’t dumb. I ain’t dumb. There’s a lot who didn’t get nothing out of it. But I got some. I got what I needed. So if that old man wants a come on, he better do some real thinking first.—No I understand. I understand, but that’s not my problem. Maybe he should know his punk-ass weasel son before he comes messing with me!

(pauses, shaking his head)

You wanna know the great thing, the great thing. The funny thing.—If he survives, the kid. *If!*—I’ll get him again. I’ll get him again. He’ll come back. I seen it all the time. He’ll be back. They all come back. It’s a “scene of the crime” type thing. Hitting it harder than before. Taking. *Using*. More-bigger-better. Moving the chains!

(he chuckles)

Moving the chains. It’s a football—yeah. I seen it all the time.—‘N I’ll feed ‘em too! I’ll feed ‘em! He can play with me again. No hard feelings. Life’s too short for that. He can play with me again.—*Cash!* Gonna be all cash this time. Ain’t gonna be no credit like I gave him before. Ain’t a fucking fool. But he can play with me. And who knows? Who knows? Maybe I get the father too! Maybe. I ain’t saying yes, I’m only saying maybe. He’s the one with the cash, anyway. Right? Right? He’s the *ennabler*, right? Ain’t I right? Ain’t I?....Shit, yeah.

(he leans back self-satisfied)

AID AND DIVERSION

(the Stage Manager moves the lounge chair back into place and moves the wheelchair to the center. A women in her mid-thirties, dressed in hospital whites moves to the wheelchair slowly. At first she unlocks the wheels then moves the chair a bit forward then lock the wheels again. She has had this conversation before, on many other difficult occasions. The ease of her manner, the alternation of her tone between kindness and firmness has been developed from years of practice)

THE NURSE

Yes, hi.—Of course. He looks like you. No, he does. Around the eyes and the mouth. I can see the resemblance. I can see where he gets his looks.—No, it's true, he does. I can always tell those things.—Of course. Yes, of course, in a minute. He's resting now. Why don't we talk a moment?

(she looks down and pats the wheelchair)

No, I'm okay. I like sitting in them. They're playful. I've become surprisingly quite good in them. They're always around. But thank you though.—Yes of course, of course. Like I said he's sleeping now. You can see him in a minute.—No, the Doctor isn't here now but he's been several times since his was brought in. And he won't be on rounds for several hours, but he's left very specific instructions and we're following them very closely. I assure you.

(she pauses, watching someone getting emotional)

Yes.—No, it's all right. I'm sure this is very hard. It's been a rough night and it followed a very difficult day. Now I'm not going to lie to you, he's in very serious condition. He was brought in very bad shape. There were minor emergencies. We were able to set his ribs and the arm, but there had already been considerable blood loss. And the brain trauma, the contusion in the right-hemisphere was very severe. The surgeon had to drill three burr holes in the right occipital lobe to relieve the pressure that was building in his brain.

(she stops a moment and reaches to take hold of an imaginary forearm and squeezes tightly. Then she pulls a tissue from her pocket and holds it out)

Yes, of course. Of course. Would you like me to—all right. Yes.

(she watches someone in dire pain)

I have something very difficulty to tell you.—The police were here originally. They had to be called in after the ambulance brought him here. There were disturbing—yes. In his blood screening throughout his system. I'm not exactly sure which. I can look at the analysis if you want. But I assume given from what I saw, his responses, they were some sort of methamphetimene or heroine.—Does it really matter? They're aware it was a

drug-related and have pursued leads in that direction. And they'll probably want to talk to you. There maybe other ramifications, I'm not qualified to say.

(a long pause again, she watches someone inconsolable)

I want to tell you a story. Will you listen to me? Yes?—I had a younger brother. We grew up together in the same household, he and I, though we had different fathers. We both lived with our mother who was the same. Now I'm twelve years older, so I was always like another mother to him. Are you listening? Are you following me?—He was a beautiful boy. Dark olive skin like mine but with blue eyes. His father's sky blue eyes. And when he smiled, the world smiled. It was that handsome and joyous to behold. You couldn't help it in his presence. He just had that way with him. Even as a small boy. But there are some people who resent it. So I called him "Happy." Not cause he always was, mind you, cause he wasn't. And certainly not cause he made *me* so cause he rarely did.—But just cause he had the look of someone who should be, who ought to be. Some people have the look like they're gonna be happy no matter what comes.

(she smiles ruefully)

When he was five and I was seventeen, I would see the boys he was already hanging around with and I knew then, they were no good. My brother, he had a trouble streak. His smile, that smile, I always knew there was good and bad to it. Good and bad, but the bad would outweigh the good if he wasn't careful.—And I could see my crowd, I was seventeen and I could see my large crowd. There are all kinds in a large crowd, and you could see which is which. You can see the futures written over them like postage stamps. Destinations for the future. This one gets out, this one doesn't. This one becomes part of the problem. This one doesn't live *long* enough to be the problem. Are you listening carefully?

(she pauses to view the listener's reaction)

And his smile was an attraction. A magnet. It draws you in and people respond to it, both ways, either way, but they respond to it. It's a power. You know you can make them respond to you.—When you learn that, even when you're young, it's dangerous thing. A very dangerous thing....My Mother couldn't see. Her view, from her age and her life. She couldn't see it cause she was caught in it too. But I could. But I could see.—My brother didn't have a good stamp on him. It was a bad destination.—And I was on him. As he grew older, always on him. Nagging. Nagging so.

(she laughs sadly)

She was blind to him, my Mother. He was a gift later in life. Unexpected. And she was just so pleased to have a boy, she loved him so. She was blind to his charms. "Leave that boy alone," she'd say. "He ain't done nothing."—She was always telling to me.

(she smiles ruefully again)

She saw what she wanted to see when it came to him. And she was too busy with herself to know. Getting all up and going out herself. She still had life, you see. That runs in

my family too.—Oh thank you. You're kind.—There's never a reason to be alone. At least not a good enough of one as compared to being with somebody. In the long run.

(she smiles pleasantly)

Sí, I was at him too. “Where's your homework? What're your grades at? Why are you hanging round with them trash for?” Cause I knew and he was like my own. With the years, I've always thought of Happy as my first born....As he grew older I knew. Deaf ears. As late going out came and the not coming home—when the midnight call saying he's all right became no call, and the days became days at a time....

(pause, somber)

I enjoy reading Greek mythology, do you?—I don't know there's something about those lives those fanciful lives, with Gods and Goddesses directing our actions and emotions that fascinates me.—There is this one Greek character, Cassandra, she angered the Gods somehow, so to punish her they gave her the gift of being able to see the future. She knew what was going to happen before it happened.—I know, right? Doesn't seem like much of a punishment. But here's the thing.—The punishment part was that she was to know the future and to never have anyone believe her when she told them what would happen. Imagine knowing for sure what's going to happen and not being able to do anything or convince anyone about preventing it....Just having to sit by and watch as it happens just like has been prophesied. As you knew all along and couldn't do a damn thing about.

(pause, firm)

Do what you can do something about. Talking at the past's a waste of time. It happened. It already happened. Pick up the pieces. It's better working at that, focusing hard on that, so when the time comes—yes?

(she smiles pleasantly)

You're lucky. You're gonna have a recovery to work on. I've seen this a lot. I've seen how they come in here and I see how they are when they leave. People have to decide where they're gonna put their efforts. Talking at past or doing for the future. You're so very lucky. There's a future for you to work on.—Not for everybody.

(pause, the look should finish her story)

Well. We have to turn him now. The Doctor said every two hours. It's good for the circulation. Limits bed sores. A physical therapist comes every eight hours to stretch the limbs. It will offset any muscle atrophy that might occur. That's something we must be on the look-out for.

(she smile fortifyingly)

Of course, of course. I think it's a perfect time. He won't be able to—No, not at all. But you can talk! I always think they can hear. Somewhere down in the deep, I always think they can. And hopefully soon. Soon, okay?

(she smiles broadly and pats the arm of the listener)

And you'll be ready. You'll be ready. I can tell. Yes, I can always tell those things too.

IF YOU CAN'T BE

(the Stage Manager moves the wheelchair back into place and moves the Director's chair to center. A young man in his early twenties is laughing, silently, getting hysterical, growing to an apoplectic state. He laughs. And he laughs. And he continues to laugh a very long time with occasional pointing with occasional snorting sounds and sibilance. The laughing continues for almost about as long as the audience can take to realize that the young man is very high)

THE FRIEND

The frog! *The fucking frog!*

(he laughs again)

I swear to god it jumps on the fucking table. The fucking frog on the fucking table! With the foie gras and petite fours! Leaping! Leaping!

(off he goes again)

Oh. Oh. Oh that hurts. That hurts. Stop. I gotta—Oh. Here gimme.

(he reaches out and takes the spleeph and drags, occasionally preparing to start, laughter again)

Goddamn. The frog.

(he breaks up again, coughing out all that's in his lungs)

Goddamn, that was the funniest fucking thing I've ever seen. The funniest fucking thing. You got anything to eat? Any carbs? I need some carbs. Maybe some potassium-enriched shit too.—Yeah, that's great.

(to someone who is no longer in the same room. Some is loud to the other room, some is only to himself)

And fucking Embeth was there screaming her fucking head off. That girl's a cunt man. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I said it but I'm telling you, she's a fucking cunt. The way she hosed Charlie over that Korean hooch. A little slant trim! *C'mon!* That's not right. Can't blame a man for that. Hundred pounds of nothing, legs like pixie sticks. No hair. No *hair*, man! Sheen! A dude's *gotta* do when that's offered. It doesn't mean loves involved! Doesn't mean anything's been compromised. Nothing's been besmirched. — It's an occasion. A memory you tell the boys about over Calvados. Between the sashimi and the green tea ice. But it's venal man. Venality. Pardonable. I mean *c'mon*. Me love you long time, you know.

(the person returns)

Aw, awesome man. Awesome. I love these fucking things.—*Mmn mmmnph*, yes. I love these fucking things. Especially when they're stale like this. These are what, like ten years old.—Fuck you, they are too! At least ten. Fucking twenty.—I hate the Crunchy kind. All hard 'n shit when you bite down. There's no joy in them. No joy.

You bite down and its chewing nails. Cheese nails and the sound is fucking deafening. Crunch, crunch. Shush shuss man, too fucking loud. Puffed is king. PUFFED IS KING!

(he calms a moment, smirking)

Do you hear what the fuck I'm saying? This's some good shit, man. What the fuck am I talking about. Do you even understand what I'm saying.—He's a fucking prick man, but he's got some good shit. Fuckin' A, he is! Fucking douche bag. All big and big and, and douchey. Fucking douche bag. Somebody's gotta take him down a peg. Two or three fucking pegs. Clip his wings. Trim his sail. Wax his joint. No wait.—I think that means something else. That means....

(he breaks up again)

Yeah, I know. I know, I know. But I don't need his fucking attitude, you know. Buddy, you're a fucking drug dealer, man. You're just Casey Jones, you're just the fucking Doodah Candy Man. Don't get all "I'm important, I'm intelligent," on me. You got something I want. Something I need. But let's remember your usefulness end at that man. Talking down to me. I double majored at UMass. The dumb fucking shit. Dumb, dumb fucking shit. Too stupid to make playing football. Man you're that fucking big and you can't make it in football. How stupid must you be? Fucking lineman make fucking hockey players look intelligent. "Hike" and you hit the body in front of you. I mean c'mon, you know.

(he gets up and get into a three point position, giggling)

Hut one. Hut two. Hike.

(he blows off the line as if he had some resistance)

I mean, you know. How, how fucking stupid you gotta be to do *that*? There are tards in the playground that manage *that*.—He never got on the field! He never dressed for the fucking game! Two years! In two years! Sunday was the only day he could sleep late!—I know! I know! I don't need that fucking attitude. Fucking uppity. That's what he is. That's what.—Yeah, Huck Finn. Good 'ol Huck fucking Finn. Uppity Jim.—That's great. That's fucking great.—Fuck yeah. Fuck him. Trim his sails. Spit in his eye. Wind his clock.—Wha? Drink his beer? *Drink his beer?* What the fuck is that?! What the hell, *drink his beer?* Nobody says that. Nobody says—you're an idiot, man. You're a fucking idiot.

(he listens taking another hit on the spleeph)

What'da you care?! You don't give a shit! You got the *cache*. Just hit Daddy up for a little more. The fuck do you care?! You got the pad. You got the cash. Sweet train running. Shit if I had half of these, I'd be fucking models.—Regularly. Ring ring, you know. "Poppers, can't cut on three. Better make it four. Don't want sonny going hungry." Indulge the grief. Sublimate. Repress, repress. Deep, deep undercover. "Don't want me thinking about Mummy. Been thinking too much about Mummy."

(fake crying)

“Mom’s gone! Mom’s gone! Boo hoo hoo. Send me the extra K.”—All right, all right. Dude, chill. Chill man. I’m kidding. I’m only kidding. You know that. You know I’m only kidding.—It’s just the dope. It’s just the fucking dope!—The fucking dope! It fucks me up....And that fucking douche bag dealer raising his prices and putting that fucking attitude on. Somebody ought take his fucking ass down a peg. Fucking lift his stash on him. Haul it out when he ain’t looking. Just to, you know. Just to teach his ass. Teach his uppity ass. Yeah.

(he nods enthusiastically at the idea)

When he goes to the bathroom or to the bedroom and leaves that pearl box. You know that, the pearl box. He closes it. He always fucking makes a show of closing it before he leaves the room. As if it’s Pandora’s Box. As if the secrets of the Cosmos, you know, captured in that fucking box.—With that look, with that tight sphincter smile and that proud fucking Cosby head shake you know man. Fucking daring us, you know. Fucking questioning *our* integrity. Fuck him. Fuck him!

(he grows serious)

I hate when he fucking does that. Closes that fucking box. So slow you can hear that creak. That little, “eek eek eek,” you know. Then solemnly, sanctimoniously, he goes and takes his fucking whiz or jacks or whatever. Right then man. Right—right fucking then. When he goes for that minute, for those few moments and time is standing stock still and you don’t know what to do, to look at the view or play with yourself or both and it’s quiet. Drug deal quiet. You could get it and grab it and close it and take it and he’d never know. And get away clean without him ever knowing. Without him ever suspecting, you know.—He’d never, never—fucking douche bag.

(a pause as he looks around)

What time is it? What time is it? I gotta go, man. I gotta go.—Hey man, thanks. Thanks for it.—Right, right. I’ll catch you man. I’ll catch you.

SOMETIMES THE ANSWER IS NO

(the Stage Manger moves the Director's Chair back into place and moves the cloud to its center place. A middle-aged woman sits on the cloud. She is elegantly dressed in a plain but well-manufactured dress with a high neckline, pearls and matching ear rings)

THE MOTHER

No. No I can't.—I still can't, no. Wait—wait, gray. Very gray.—Lighter. Yes I can.—Movement. There's something—and forms. What is it?—Like “A Wonderful Life,” when the angel without his wings can't see and he needs Gabriel to help. Does this mean I'm an angel? What are the odds of that?—No that is a rhetorical question, excuse me. Does this mean Frank Capra got the after-life correct? That's even more frightening.—Wait. What is—I think I hear....

(grave, upon realizing what she hears)

Yes. I know what it is. It is all too familiar.—It's a sound you never quite recover from when first you realize it's attached to you. That it *is* you. The most elemental you. A pulse. The sound of the life force.—I spent many months there. No, it was a private room. We were not poor. My husband was not poor, financially that is. Emotionally—
—Yes, I can see now. Too perfectly. Is he all right?—Will he be?

(as she looks down, pained)

Why do you do this? I don't want to see this. What good will come.—I don't want to!

(she turns away, but is eventually drawn back)

Why did you do this? He didn't deserve this. Hasn't he paid enough?—Then what good are you?! What good?! Limits! Limited! It doesn't seem that way. It doesn't seem limited. It seems selective! It seems choosy! Inconsistent! Some are lifted. Some breeze through. Some seem touched by you. Touched by your protective fingers. While others are left to fend for themselves. All have purposefully strained, have obstacles to overcome. And it doesn't seem so random. So without planning, without framework. I don't understand. *I don't understand!* That is callous! That is merciless! That is so—unkind.

(she turns away, tearfully)

What difference does it make? What difference?—Causes. Reasons.—What are reasons but better dressed excuses. What are excuses against this? Lies and self-denial cloaked in logic and common sense to make us feel better about ourselves, our actions.

(pause as she collects herself)

It was very hard on him. I was young. Relatively, I was young.—He was very young always.—Yes. Yes, pain. Great, great pain. And he would sit with me. He would sit and watch—a child seeing pain. Seeing with child's eyes. Thinking in a child's way.—You watched! You saw!—*No?! Not all?! Not everything? Not everything like me is*

perhaps the better way of putting it....He would sit with me. There was little we could do together but sit. He'd watch. He listened to me as I suffered. As I became this whimpering, tormented mess.—He'd change my head towel when it got dry. Running back and forth to the bathroom, the rinsed towel, cool now, relieving. If for a moment. Not really relieving, merely diverting.—He would place it on my head so soft, so gentle—I couldn't, in my state, I couldn't even—I wouldn't even know. But the attack, it would come. I believe he thought it would heal me. In his mind, in his child's mind, he saw the relief, my comforted reflection—and I think in his mind's eye he believed he could heal me. If only he ran fast enough. If only the towel was cold and full and didn't drip.

(she looks down on the scene, fondly)

He wanted to believe it so. I wanted to believe.—He was always very sensitive.—No! I said *sensitive!* He was fragile! Always!—He was very fragile.—When he was four or five. I bought him some chocolate, a heart for Valentine's Day. One of those—*hearts*. Wrapped in red cellophane, it was a black box with a bow and it said on the box, "To my Valentine," in this cursive script. We opened it together—and he was happy. Plainly, so clearly very happy—he cried. Tears of wonder, of joy. He was a child of four and he, he—he cried receiving this gift from his mother. An ordinary box of chocolates on Valentine's Day.

(she wells up again)

I don't know. It meant so much to him. His whole life, his whole—*life*, he had this sense of impermanence. Temporary. Strung moments. At such a young age, so young. That is not normal. That, that is not—why is that? Why are some constructed like that. Of weaker stock. Of less perfect material. Unable to survive. Unable to defend themselves. When the world is as it is. Harsh and cruel and evil. Why would there be that? Why would you have that? Why would you allow it?—No. No. *No!* That's not good enough! That's not good enough! LOOK AT HIM! He's helpless! He's lying there helpless. Does none of this matter?! Does none of this?! Do you care? Do you even care?

(pause, then with a low ferocity)

I do not accept that. I do not accept.—It's meaningless! Hollow! Then why?! Why? If it doesn't matter! Why do we struggle? Why do we *try*?! In that light, in that perspective, where all becomes mindless ambitions, honor and peace and morality, how do you expect us to continue? How do you expect us to try? We all try! WE ALL TRY! All of is! Does it mean nothing to you? Does it count for nothing? Your *scheme*. Your master plan. In the vast and unbound universe, this gift, this bequest, it's a curse! Life is a curse without! You give it purpose! You give it meaning! Without you, without belief and faith that you plan, that you reason and comprehend and that you have aims and causes and goals, we cannot. We cannot! BRING HIM TO ME! BRING HIM TO ME! BRING ME MY SON! BRING MY SON TO ME!

(she looks away in pain)

I don't want to. Please. Please I don't. I don't.

(after shaking her head vehemently, still she is drawn to the scene and slowly her gaze moves back to it)

It isn't fair....It isn't fair.

(she continues shaking her head remonstratively, remorsefully)

MOMENTS IN TIME

(The Stage Manager returns the — to its place in the circle and moves the standard issue precinct office chair with a hard back and pronged legs into place. A middle aged man dressed in a shabby blue blazer and tan pants, a gray shirt and wide tie combo and bad brown leather shoes. In a bygone day, he is dressed as what would be called a gumshoe. He is gruff, a day unshaven and his tie is loosened)

THE COP

That's okay. We'll see as we're going along. There are questions pertaining to this case and this case only I can answer. Further there are questions pertaining to this case that I can't answer at this time due to it being an on-going investigation and without all the facts of course things remain conjecture and hearsay, thereby off limits. Got me? So as long as we understand the ground rules we can begin.—No I'll tell ya never, and I mean never, have I seen something so strange as these two knuckleheads. And I've been on the force twenty-three years July.—Eight years, uniform beat on the Lower East Side, passed my detective exam. Worked for narc for ten years making lieutenant in the process then the last whatever many years that is, five or six or so, here in homicide. In all that time, I tell ya—

(he laughs)

Fucking Abbott and Costello, the two of them. I'm not amazed they didn't kill each other—that's what they planned to do. Nothing either of these two assholes were gonna do was gonna work out, but that they didn't hurt nobody else! *Unintentionally!* I'd a bet dollars to doughnuts somebody else get it through their stupidity.

(he laughs again)

We don't know if we should charge one of them, both of them or neither. And what to charge 'em with! Fucking douche bags.—Nah, I think the scare may be enough. They were both pretty shaken by the experience. You could tell, the urine smell all over the place. And listen, if anything happens to the other we immediately know where to look. And I told 'em that. "Take out an insurance policy, hire a security force, do whatever cause if the other guy so much as gets a paper cut, we're gonna arrest you, we're gonna charge, and we're gonna make it fucking stick! And you two blowhards ain't OJ and Johnny Cock ain't gonna take your case."

(he shakes his head disdainfully)

I don't know what he was thinking. From the sounds of it, he came in with four barrels out and aimed like out of a movie. Fucking Baretta kicking in doors, throwing over tables. Least that's the story the big one's telling. But the reality, the moment of truth, staring at a man, staring in the eyes of a man whose life you're about to end. It's a thing you know. A real big thing. When you can smell his fear and he can see yours. This

stink, this special stink when it's not the "bang bang" type thing, but you're looking at 'em clear.—Isn't television I can tell you. It isn't Clint Eastwood or Tom Clancy. They'll be blood. Much blood. *Lot's* of blood. On you. On the carpet and the couch and the window and the Formica. On the dog if you got one.

(he laughs, nodding amazed)

I threw up the first time! Threw up right there. On him, on me. On my fucking shoes!. Not these here but like 'em. I had got him in the stomach. Man, it bleeds like a mother fucker when you get it in the stomach. You wouldn't think you got so much blood there. But it just comes pouring out. And you can smell things. Bile, his lunch, the shit in his intestines. It's the smell that gets you. And he's just lying there, playing with the blood in his hands and his body's moving in these, these jerking movements.—His legs were squirming like he was riding a bicycle or something. Going—just going. In this endless cycle.—And he's crying tears. They're coming fast, dripping off his chin on either side. And all he's saying is no. "No, no, no," as he feels it leaving him. As if it's something he can keep away, that he's trying to keep away like an alien's chasing him. "No, no, no." His legs going, his hands wringing it the hole in his belly....

(pause, emotional about it)

I just threw up, you know. I watched till he stopped. I stared as slowly his legs and his hands and his tears—they all stopped....It all just rose up in me. And I didn't even move. I couldn't. I don't think I even really thought to.—Yeah well, you all pay us to do what you can't. We're paid to do that. Not solely. Not only.—But when the time comes, when it needs to be done—we do it. It's best left to people who've done it before.—I guess he's learned that. I guess he's figured that out.

(he sits back in the chair)

Somebody called us. Someone down the hall. They heard the ruckus, the door being kicked or the tables flying. You gotta imagine the scene. Something out of Pulp Fiction or True Romance. I love those Tarantino films. Drugs on the table, the big fucker naked with an open robe around his shoulders. The one screaming, "It wasn't me! It wasn't me!" The other screaming, "I'm gonna fucking kill you. I'm gonna fucking kill you!" Took an hour to talk the gun out of his hand. To convince him that this ain't no way. No way to go, no way to win. That moment's gone. This moment's here and you can adjust to it or we can adjust you to it.

(he smiles almost fondly, shaking his head)

He wasn't ready just yet. It took him time to understand that. Some people get it quick, others don't.—Well, you know, a moment in time. Things seem right. In the fucked-up way your mind gets when it's had too much time to think. To mull and plan your next move. It all seems to make sense but that's only cause you can't see. Not the time or the moment or the long view.

TO GET TO HERE?

(the Stage moves and moves the pink fur-backed desk chair into place into place. A young, pretty but not beautiful girl in her early to mid twenties that is well-dressed in a preppy moneyed way that suggests her affluence takes the seat)

THE GIRL

No it's okay. I don't mind. If I can help in any way, I will. I would really like to, I just don't know if I know anything that would. Cause I really didn't know him all that well.—We just had sex occasionally but it wasn't like anything really you know. He always had....He always had good drugs. Whatever you know, like a candy store. I would come, we all would come over to his place and party you know. There were a lot of us and when we were done, you know, when we would finish what he had, one of us, us girls we would you know. Just one. We didn't mind really. It was a nice party. But we're not like whores or anything, you know. It's not like, like that or anything. It's just kind of a thing you know. A thing you do. He'd deserved it, you know.—He's a weird guy though. He never like fit in you know. Never quite. He would sit there at parties and things at clubs and just you know like stare, just stare at us girls.

(she imitates with a bug-eyed look)

And when you talked to him, if you tried to make contact or something, he would just like say these most random things. Like these eerie random shit. Like one time, this one time, we were at Dilated, it's this after hours club on Chambers and W. Broad, it's a Mafia run thing from what I understand and you can tell cause there's always these guys, like the big fucking guys you know, with those ties and the shinning suits always wanting to kiss you cheeks you know.—Nah, I don't give a shot. If it makes them happy, what'd I care. They always buy us drinks and whatever. So this one time, he's there and we're talking you know. I'm trying to you know talk to him make some conversation for the hell of it you know. And he tells me about this recurring dream he's always having. I'm like talking about the weather and stuff and he just starts telling me about this dream, this really fucked-up dream. He was always doing things like that. Like trying to get to you or get under your skin or freak you out. He says it's almost every night, but who knows, you know. You could never believe a word that comes out of his mouth. Or like any guys for that matter, you know. Right, right, you know.

(she smiles, nods and winks provocatively)

Oh yeah right. So he tells me about this dream and he starts off like everybody's usual dream he's naked walking in through this mall, this crowded mall in the suburbs, you know. Past the Gap and the Limited and the food court. And at first the people are talking and he can hear them, what they're saying as he passes them. And each one as he passes them, they like are talking about him, not about his being naked or anything like

that but about all these deep dark thoughts, these deep dark secrets that only he knows he thinks, you know. Like who he hates and who he wants to sleep with. And as he walks through this like gauntlet or processions and as he passes they are calling out his secrets, it's like the words they cut him. Actually cut his skin.

(she nods and smiles)

You know, right, I know. And like not deep or anything, but slits, he said, these quick little slits. But they draw blood. Each one's drawing blood. And as he moves through the mall, all the people come out of the sores, out of the Thom McCanns and The Record Towns and the TCBYs and it forms into this like procession, this procession of people calling out his dark secrets. Things nobody knows about him, you know. And he keeps walking down this marble floor between the fountain and that, that Rotunda area all malls have where it's like raised and shit for like concerts and performances for you know like Tiffany and whatever. And each calling out is a secret and each secret is a cut. And he's telling me this like, "And you masturbate. Cut! And you've tried to kill yourself. Cut! You wet you bed as a child. *Cut!* And with each cut, a slice and the blood and his response, his reflex to the uh, the pain, it's growing. And he shows me as he's telling me this, he's like you know, *jolted*, or shocked each time.

(she snaps back as if shocked)

And the pain, it's growing in intensity and he's jumping more as he's telling me and he says in the dream he's getting weak, he's weakening frame the blood loss, but he's moving forward. Something is moving him forward to the Rotunda, but the crowds, the masses of people are like growing too, you know. The people are now reaching, stretching to be heard, to have their secret heard. To have their secret cut him. "You've wanted to maim. Cut! You've wanted to mutilate. Cut!" And he's moving, tumbling lurching forward and their screams, they had become screams he said, shrill and piercing as he moved, he stepped up these steps to the raised platform and he's climbing the stairs and they'll all still screaming at him. "You killed your Mother. You killed your Mother." And when he reached the top step, the top of the platform onto this circular or oval shaped, you know—space, he turned to the crowd to face them, to face all of them with what was left after all the cuts and the blood and he begins to sing. And he's singing some gibberish something he doesn't know the words or even if they're words or some spoken tongue or whatever. In this chanting incantation thing and there's a beam of light coming from the, the roof, the sky light or whatever in the mall and its growing on him, the light. It's growing and the screams from the people are growing with it and it's like coming down on him, the light and the screams and he's shrinking him. As it's getting closer to him the light, blinding and shrinking and the piercing sound, it's deafening him and just then, just when its about to touch him....He says he wakes up.—I guess he always wakes up after that, I don't know.

(she laughs derisively)

I mean c'mon. How fucking random is that shit, you know. Who would tell a girl that kind of shit. What kind of little sick fucker would tell a girl a story like that.

(she shakes her head disdainfully)

I mean I'm just with him for his drugs you know.....I'm mean I'll fuck him cause that's the deal, right. You know one of us has to. But don't fucking share with me, you know. At least not like that. Don't fucking share that shit. Am I right? I'm right, aren't I, you know?....Sick little fucker.

(she continues shaking her head, pissed at the thought)

FOR YOU MOST OF ALL

(the Stage Manager moves the office chair back into place and moves the casket into the center place. A clumsily dressed man in a dark suit with a white shirt and dark tie moves to the casket, views it with great enmity, then turns to the stage center, speaking directly to the audience)

THE MOURNER

I am angry today. I am angry and I have come here to tell you this. To impress upon you the hurt, the pain and consequence. To express the weight, the dimension of the waste, the utter discard over which I am asked to preside. And I am angry and no will be spared! None of the congregated, none of the assembled, none of the so-called mourners who have deigned to shame this chapel with their presence. For it is at each of you that my anger is focused. Each here bears their part of the responsibility for our presence here. Each of you shares in the blame. The blame! The culpability! Not apparent! Not blatant! But real. *Factual*. And eminently so.

(pause, calm yet vehement)

It is your fault. And do not sit there and blaspheme the sanctity of these halls with selfish thought, with forgiving thoughts, with merciful thoughts of yourselves, for your conscience, for your psyche and social well-being, for none of you are innocent. None are blameless of this travesty and disgrace. For if each of you knew enough to be here today, to get word, to be contacted, to be in reach and part of the network, then none of you are innocent and blameless and none of you are untainted and I am here to let you know that you are not absolved. You are not off the hook. You are not pardoned. No one gets off easy, no one gets a free ride because this did not need to happen. This did not need to happen. This did not!

(pause, calming)

And you know this. You know this. In your core, in the sinews of your muscles, in the shards of your depths. In the concealed inert place you keep for yourselves, you know this. So let me say it again, this did not have to happen and you are accountable....I know you are. I know you are—because I am. Because I am most of all...I have failed. I failed this young man when the need was most great. When the emergency was most clear and present. When exigency and the happenstance collided and colluded to affect damage where there before had been none.—And each of us is most of all. Keep our brothers. Our brother's keeper.

(pause, with almost violently head shaking)

We are accountable and expiation, *atonement*, is not available. Not for this. Not for any of us. And not even admission, not even full and complete acknowledgment and recognition and acceptance of our complicity will grant our absolution. For if you think

that by mere declaration of your role, the avowal of your faults, the guilty, blameworthy beast inside will be set free, then let me be your councilor, your father confessor, let me be your defiler and abaser and abuser and inform you that “No! *NO!* Not now!” No tears awash in the river’s flow and no lamentations and mournfully-sung elegies and no confessions and protestations and ablutions shall cleanse. For I am telling you, that right now, today, I have it. Today I have the mortal power. The wraithlike puissance, the Saintly conceit. The Universal edict, the Divine mandate and the omniscient, omnipotent potency to remind you, to affect you, to change and alter, to deconstruct and rebuild again in a better form, in an advanced form, closer to *IT*. The unattainable, unapproachable perfect essence and if nothing else comes from this transformation, this transubstantiation of inferior into superior, of mortal into sacrosanct then you will know that it is too precious! It is too rare and obscure! It is simple and fundamental!

(he calms)

And it is too pure. It is too pure....And nothing can efface the scar—blot this abasement from our ledger....What would it have taken?—I am struck by that thought. What would it have taken? Talking? Merely that. Conversation, frank and unjaded. Listening. *Hearing*. Concerted action perhaps. Compassionate intervention and forthright effort. How little was asked and how even less we responded. How very small our movement and marshaling to the call. Our brother’s keeper.

(he turns to the casket with vitriol)

Goddamn you.—Goddamn you, most of all. The obscenity. The vulgarity and the repulsion. How dare you do this? How dare you live a life so unworthy of the majesty of life. So disrespectful and disparaging of all you have been given. Of all you could be, all any of us can be with the passage of time. With the gilding waves of maturity and experience and wisdom washing you, shaping you into what you will become. For you most of all, I feel such anger and rage and FURY! I AM FURIOUS!....From you most of all, I feel such betrayal.

(he turns back from the casket, long pause)

I see a child again. I see a tuft of hair from under a cap and a nose blanketed in freckles.—I see a child running, smiling broadly as the sun descends behind trees and dusk filters through the scrim of day. I see tree-lined streets and unlocked doors. And dogs, I see dogs.—A noon-day’s clarion heralds that all is right in the land. All is safe, all is alive, all is well.—I see America and I see the child—but it fades. I tell you, it fades too fast for memory to grasp, too quick for the heart to fully feel, too briefly for the mind to be sure, it ever truly existed at all.

(he turns back to the casket)

For you most of all....For you most of all.

EPILOGUE

(after moving the casket back into the semi-circle, the Stage Manager moves center stage, looks around at the semi-circle then turns to the audience, speaking directly to them)

THE STAGE MANAGER / PLAYWRIGHT

I represent the playwright.—Not in any legal sense, as a manager or agent. But in the truest sense of the word: A representation of him. A symbolic illustration of his being for you all to see....I can't honestly say what the play is about. I don't really know if it has a meaning or some profound truth it's trying to impart.—I met a man in bar. That sentence could be the setting for a quarter of all plays written and three-quarters of all of mine.—He was drunk. Something had happened to his son. That was all I figured out from our time together. Frankly, more than I even wanted. It was one of those one-sided conversations you're trying to avoid from the moment you sit down on the stool. Instantly *after* you take the seat, you see he's drunk. You see he's chatty. What you *don't* see is an escape.

(he smiles reflexively)

I'm usually very good at avoiding these. Or after they begin, cutting them off quick. It's a skill learned from spending too much time in bars, I guess. You wouldn't think I'd want to be, given my chosen vocation—doing this. But I am. I prefer relying on my imagination to having to deal with these ambushes. This is what comes of writing in bars. Even as I was writing this last monologue, another drunk leaned across the bar, called out over three stools and asked me what I was writing.—I lied. Said it was a journal, figuring the personal nature of this would fend off any further inquiry.—This is my way. The silly, solipsistic existence I've sculpted into a life.

(pause)

Originally, it was to be just that first monologue. The father, besotted and bellowing about his boy in a bar. A one-act. An *effulgent* flare. I had recently re-read "the Zoo Story" by Edward Albee and I guess felt inspired by that and imbued with thoughts of grandeur thought I'd take my shot. It was going to be called "A Bar Story."—Titles are not as easy as they look....The second one came in order as shown here as I wondered what the son's call to his father must've been like. And the rest came pretty quickly after that, without much planning but I'd like to think, not without some inspiration. The title didn't come until the Mother just said it in her discussion with God. And the climax, the Mourner venting for all of those who wish they could but don't, came to me only after a several beers at McManus. Some sort of faucet opening. The juxtaposition of a deeply religious man pouring out the venom in his heart.

(he looks at the chairs)

Pieces come. They fall into place. Sometimes better than if I planned them. Often I try to plan and do. But the work of mine that I have liked most have come this way. All slap-dash and impromptu. There are other of my plays that I like. “The ABC’s of Selling,” was my first produced and “The Last Block Letter,” was to be my *masterwork*.—Others didn’t see it that way. At this point those are my favorite of mine. To those, I add this compilation. It was begun just before and the bulk of it was written in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks.—Plays have a time and place that nurtured them. Where in your life and your world you are and I’m sure this was affected by that. But beyond that, I offer no explanation here and don’t know if I could, if forced to come up with one. I hope it makes you think. I hope it makes you feel. That’s what theater’s supposed to do.—I hope you enjoyed yourself....The old desk sergeant at the beginning of a Hill Street Blues episode before we heard the piano and saw the cop car rolling would end each run down meeting with, “Hey—be careful out there.”....To this I’ll only add, Please—get home safely.”

(he walks off)

Fade to Black