

A DRUNK AND A DEMOCRAT WALK INTO A BAR

A Play With Gender

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>Jake</u> (Played by a man):	The realist.
<u>Issi</u> (Played by a man):	The romantic.
<u>Jake</u> (Played by a woman):	The realist.
<u>Issi</u> (Played by a woman):	The romantic.

Scene

A bar.

Time

The present.

for L.

The play is performed by two men and two women. In the first act, two men play the characters. In the second and third acts, two women play the same characters. The characters' wardrobe remains the same in both acts.

Act 1

Scene 1

SETTING:

Two bar stools at a fragment of bar four to five feet long. A drink sits on the bar, already poured. The stage is dimly lit, with each stool spotlighted. A fluorescent Bar sign is partially blocked, so it reads "Ear." Two interior doors are marked Men and Ladies. The style of the décor and the wardrobe is 1950s.

AT RISE:

JAKE, wearing a sport jacket, emerges from the men's room and sits at the bar, next to the already poured drink. ISSI, wearing an overcoat, staggers in from outside, leaving wet footprints on the floor, and sits on the other bar stool, next to Jake.

JAKE

Cheers.

(JAKE holds up the glass.)

ISSI

Cheers.

(ISSI lifts his empty
hand.)

JAKE

Bit nippy.

ISSI

Yeah.

JAKE

You from around here?

ISSI

Naw.

JAKE

Where you from?

ISSI

Originally?

JAKE

Originally.

ISSI

Haddam.

JAKE

Sorry . . . You say Sodom?

ISSI

Haddam—Haddam, Connecticut.

JAKE

My cousin's from there.

ISSI

Really?

JAKE

What are you having? I'll buy you a drink.

ISSI

Milk.

JAKE

Really? Chocolate or regular?

ISSI

Just white.

JAKE

Chilled or warm?

ISSI

So many questions.

JAKE

On the wagon?

ISSI

Momentarily.

JAKE

How come?

ISSI

Things are tough.

JAKE

Sorry, but normally guys go off the wagon in tough times.

ISSI

I suppose so.

JAKE

So . . . what happened? The war?

ISSI

Naw, it's not the war.

JAKE

Lost your job?

ISSI

I'm self-employed—I loose my job, I loose my self.

JAKE

Money problems?

ISSI

Things are okay, considering.

JAKE

Health?

ISSI

Can't complain. Blood pressure's good.

JAKE

Love life? It's gotta be your love life.

ISSI

Look, we just met. This is getting kind of personal, don't you think?

JAKE

We're all friends here.

ISSI

There's no love life if there's no love.

JAKE

So?

ISSI

Cash has fleas.

JAKE

So it is about money.

ISSI

No, it's not about money. Cash is the neighbor's dog.

JAKE

Really? That's a weird name for a dog.

ISSI

Sonia, she's the neighbor, brought Cash over last week. He's a setter, black with white spots, or the other way around—I can't remember. Anyway, he was scratching like crazy. Then he stretched out on the rug by the fire. After Sonia left with Cash, my wife became obsessed with the fleas. They might have migrated into the rug. She didn't see any, but she felt they had to be there. It was simple equation: dog + fleas = rug + fleas. So when I was out, she got out the Hoover. It's got one of those newfangled roller contraptions—stiff bristles that whirl, up in the front.

JAKE

Really . . . I haven't seen one of those. Hoover makes them?

ISSI

The contraption spins and digs out dirt and, one would assume, fleas.

JAKE

Best to be careful. Fleas can be annoying. Believe me. I've had them.

ISSI

I brought the rug—actually a carpet—back from Persia. It's an antique. Tribesmen wove it during Abraham Lincoln's administration.

JAKE

The Republican?

ISSI

I don't think these tribesmen knew who was president of the United States at the time—I am just making a historical comparison. It's an antique. I used to sit on it and pray by the fire, not to anyone specifically, just general deities—especially to the flames. Now all I think about is fuzz, or lack of it. The carpet has lost its nap. I can't seem to get it out of my head. I've become obsessed with the lack of nap under my ass. So I don't pray anymore. As a result, I've become agnostic. I no longer sit on the carpet and pray to flames, or to anyone else, for that matter.

JAKE

You've become agnostic because of a rug?

ISSI

At first she wouldn't admit it. I didn't really catch her in the act. She told me I was hallucinating, that the rug always looked that way, worn down to the threads, to the

ISSI (Cont.)

warp and weft. No longer woolly. So I went to the closet and pulled out the Hoover and opened it up. And there it was, all that ancient fuzz, shorn from sheep that had lived and died before the Emancipation Proclamation. It was all there, in the bowels of the Hoover.

JAKE

So that's why you're melancholy? That's why you came here on this windy and rainy night—to pity yourself and drink your sorrow away with milk?

ISSI

Who said anything about melancholy?

JAKE

Don't get touchy. You certainly seem melancholy.

ISSI

It's 12:00 a.m. Soda fountains are closed. They might as well be gone forever. I am here, in this bar, by default.

JAKE

Didn't you bring an umbrella?

ISSI

It blew away. Where's my drink?

JAKE

You haven't ordered one.

ISSI

Where's the bartender?

JAKE

Don't worry—she'll be here any moment. In the meantime,
have a sip.

ISSI

I hardly know you.

JAKE

It's called Death in the Afternoon. Hemmingway concocted
it. No bacteria could survive in it.

ISSI

(He takes a sip.)

What's in it?

JAKE

You really want to know?

ISSI

(He nods his head.)

JAKE

Well, you pour champagne . . .

ISSI

What kind?

JAKE

I'm having Dom Pérignon.

ISSI

In this joint?

JAKE

You pour champagne in a glass—Hemmingway used a highball. Then you put a lump of sugar into a perforated spoon and pour absinthe over the sugar.

ISSI

Isn't that illegal?

JAKE

What?

ISSI

Absinthe.

JAKE

So that's all you have to show for your melancholy, a rug? They wove carpets to be walked on. Just tell people Betsy Ross wove it during the Revolutionary War. That will justify the additional wear and tear.

ISSI

No one would believe me. She came from Philadelphia, not Persia.

JAKE

You know, this thing you have for milk, you better be careful.

ISSI

Why? It's good. It's wholesome.

JAKE

You know about prohibition?

ISSI

It didn't cover milk, and anyway it's over. You can't stop people from having fun.

JAKE

I know—a bunch of rural Protestants thought it up. I think they called it the Anti-Saloon League or something like that.

ISSI

Really?

JAKE

Anyway, it was repealed with the Twenty-First, but a lot of prohibitionists got angry.

ISSI

I know—there were riots.

JAKE

Scuffles, I would say. But now there is this crackpot anti-

JAKE (Cont.)

prohibitionist walking around town shooting up the
uninebriated.

ISSI

Come on, you're pulling my leg.

JAKE

These are peculiar times. Transitional, I would say. He
calls himself Henry. He walks into a bar. He looks around.
He sees someone drinking vodka or whisky—no problemo. But
if they're drinking Coca-Cola, coffee, fizzy water, or,
worst of all, milk—so easily recognizable—bam! He also
shoots people eating cheeseburgers, but not hamburgers.
Maybe he has something against dairy products in general.

ISSI

How do you know his name is Henry?

JAKE

He always leaves a card that says, "Henry the Serial
Killer."

ISSI

How can he tell?

JAKE

Tell what?

ISSI

If it's a hamburger or a cheeseburger? I mean, doesn't the

ISSI (Cont.)

bun cover up the cheese?

JAKE

The cheese oozes out the side.

ISSI

He looks for things like that?

JAKE

Yes, he does.

ISSI

What about onions and tomatoes?

JAKE

They don't count one way or the other. I love tomatoes, the way they squirt on your tongue when you bite. I love onions too, but they have to be sautéed.

ISSI

So what happens if he walks into a saloon such as this one and sees someone drinking milk and eating a hamburger, but not a cheeseburger?

JAKE

How can we know? Better to play it safe.

ISSI

Yes, but this gunslinger who has a bloodlust for milk and cheeseburgers—

JAKE

Where did you say you were from, Sodom?

ISSI

It's Haddam, for God's sake, a town in Connecticut. It's completely different, though I would assume some sodomites do live there. But for the record, I am not drinking anything at the moment. You're the one with the Death in the Afternoon. So you have nothing to worry about. Presently, neither do I. I don't have a drink. What about cashews?

JAKE

What about them?

ISSI

So he walks into a bar. There's a plate of nuts on the bar—almonds, peanuts, cashews mixed with those little orange crackers. Would that be a problem?

JAKE

In what way?

ISSI

Would this guy kill for cashews?

JAKE

I have no clue what his motives are.

ISSI

Yes, but he makes a distinction between cheeseburgers and

ISSI (Cont.)

hamburgers. Why not between cashews and peanuts?

JAKE

I don't see the analogy.

ISSI

Well, there you are . . . There is really no problem, then, if you think about it. I mean as far as this guy—he is a guy, isn't he?— coming into bars, shooting people indiscriminately . . .

JAKE

You can hardly say he is indiscriminate.

ISSI

Yes, but have the detectives come to any conclusions regarding ketchup? I mean, some adults use ketchup, some don't. Children for the most part—

JAKE

I think we should change the subject. Actually, there is no guy, no crackpot. I was just pulling your leg. Have a margarita.

ISSI

Bartender! Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three . . .

JAKE

Be patient, she will come.

ISSI

Once, in Haddam, a cop stopped me. "What's the problem, Officer? I said. "I don't have a clue." "Your left brake light is out," he said. "Really," I replied. "Well, how would I know that unless I backed up to a full-length mirror? The light only goes on when I step on the brakes, and if I get out of the car to check if my brake lights are working, its too long of a stretch to reach the brake with either foot. Sort of an existential dilemma, don't you think?" "Don't use that highfalutin language with me," he said. "Get out of the fucking car." "I'm innocent," I replied, and, in this instance, I really believe I was. "I smell Bloody Mary," he said. Now, between you and me, the honest truth is that, a few days before, I ran over a skunk. His guts spread all over the road. When I got out of the car, I must have stepped on the sack that holds the smell.

JAKE

A sorry smell indeed.

ISSI

I tracked it inside the car. So I stopped at the local grocery store and bought eight gallons of tomato juice and soaked my shoes, then poured it all over the floor and on the driver's seat. That is what he smelled, but it was the nonalcoholic ingredient of the Bloody Mary. There was no vodka. I wasn't drinking alcohol, just soaked in tomato juice. I swear!

JAKE

You don't have to convince me. I'm not a cop. But tonight you stumbled in here and barely made it to the bar. So, what's up with that? You hiding something?

ISSI

(He takes off his shoe,
turns it over, and a stone
falls out and bounces to
the floor.)

I have a pebble in my shoe. Look . . . See?

JAKE

That's quite some pebble.

ISSI

Bartender!

(No bartender appears. He
starts sobbing
uncontrollably.)

JAKE

Look, I know the service here isn't the best. Give him time. She'll come.

ISSI

I can't believe it. It's finally come to this.

JAKE

To this?

ISSI

Look, have your Death in the Afternoon . . . Actually, it's the tallest Death in the Afternoon I've ever seen. Taller, I'm sure, than Deaths in the Afternoon in Cancún or St. Tropez, Portofino or even Havana. And it's still full. Actually, it seems to stay full even after you sip it. What do I have? My glass isn't half-empty or half-full. There is no freaking glass at all. Zilch!

JAKE

Whatever's bothering you, it can't be about the bartender. It's got to be something deeper.

ISSI

Ivy.

JAKE

What?

ISSI

English ivy grows on brick and stone walls. It takes decades, perhaps centuries, to reach the roof of an Ivy League college. That's why they are called Ivy League—their walls have been around for quite some time, and in that time much knowledge has accumulated, like ivy leaves or leaves of books.

JAKE

And how many Ivy League schools are there?

ISSI

Nine.

JAKE

Really?

ISSI

Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale.

JAKE

And what's the other one?

ISSI

I'm a Harvard man myself.

JAKE

I always thought Ivy League was a metaphor.

ISSI

No metaphor—actual leaves. She cut down the ivy, every single leaf. Actually, that's not entirely true. She left a few. Eight, I think. I counted them. The rest are gone.

JAKE

Gone?

ISSI

Forever. They grew on an old stone wall under the veranda. Actually, it isn't really a veranda, just a porch. But I have read *The Wasteland*. I know bits of Latin. The lawn

ISSI (Cont.)

slopes down in the front of the house. That's about it. The wall beneath the porch was covered in ivy. Ivy is dark-green, leafy time. It aspires. It climbs up walls and eventually makes it to the top. She eliminated all that with several well-placed snips. So I am befuddled.

JAKE

Obviously. But aren't you going a little too far with this? Anyway, why did she do it?

ISSI

On impulse. She read that ivy eventually dislodges stones.

JAKE

Yes, that is true, but by the time that happens you probably won't be around. So why should that matter?

ISSI

It's Samson and Delilah, all over again.

JAKE

Look, I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm a dentist. I pull teeth. I fill them too. The occupation is sometimes rewarding. I have a house in a good neighborhood. No one imagines metaphors while sitting in a dentist's chair. They anticipate pain. So I gorge them with Novocain. Sometimes I gas them. They are content. With Samson—no Novocain necessary. There's no pain, just less hair. He could have looked good if he hadn't succumbed to metaphor. So if ivy is just ivy, why make a metaphor? If Samson had waited long

JAKE (Cont.)

enough, instead of tearing down the temple, his hair would have grown back. He might still be alive. What do you do, by the way?

ISSI

"Make a metaphor?" It's true, that's what I do. I make metaphors.

JAKE

No, I mean what do you do for a living?

ISSI

Oh, I 'm a biologist. I specialize in insects and their mating calls.

JAKE

Oh, really . . . Why that?

ISSI

Well, I figure insects mate and birds mate . . .

JAKE

That's not really a big coincidence, is it? Mating is common to a lot of species.

ISSI

Birds often eat insects, particularly while the bugs are preoccupied with mating. I think eagles mate in the air, quite a spectacle if you ever get a chance to see it. Walt Whitman did. But many insects have incredibly short life

ISSI (Cont.)

spans, consisting of songs, as with the cicada, or blinking lights, like lightning bugs. They mate and then plop! Death.

JAKE

So?

ISSI

Well, about a week ago a writer friend came over to dinner. He is in his late sixties and healthy by all measures. He told me he had acquired several plots. At first I thought this had something to do with his novels, but he explained that these plots were of the cemetery variety. The price was reasonable, actually cheap by today's standards. He said I should consider acquiring one before it's too late.

JAKE

Too late for what?

ISSI

Rising prices. Word of mouth. You know how things catch on. Look at that graveyard in the Springs. Pollock, Krasner, Reinhardt, Davis, and Frank O'Hara. You can't possibly get a plot there anymore. They're all taken.

JAKE

So you're dead. Someone will find a way.

ISSI

So a few days later as I was driving on Lucas Highway, on my way to a party, I saw a sign for the cemetery in question. "Bolten and Bender," as I remember. I turned and drove down a narrow road, through a wooded area, for about a quarter mile. The path opened to a quaint graveyard founded in 1776, or so the sign said. I thought that maybe this was the place to hang my hat later in life.

JAKE

You mean later in death, don't you?

ISSI

There is no "later" in death. Anyway, a young couple had parked their Buick on the right side of the loop—the dirt road that wound through the cemetery. A young woman wearing a dress, a print of black and white roses, knelt in front of a small stone, which, by the size of the fresh mound of grass, was obviously the grave of a child. She wept inconsolably, and the young man, tears in his eyes, gently put his arm around her. I didn't want to intrude upon their sorrow, so I turned left and wound through a grove of old headstones and trees, then stopped to rest. Several uprooted trees teetered at diagonals. They had succumbed to rain and soggy soil. Thick vines of wisteria spiraled around their trunks and branches. After many years of pulling and tugging, the wisteria, presently beautiful lavender cascades, finally had its way and helped bring about their demise. I sat down on a marble bench. An inscription read . . . Let's see, I noted it here, in this little pad: "Mrs. Mable Muller." So the living could rest,

ISSI (Cont.)

as she was resting—but not for eternity. Quite considerate, don't you think? And then a funny thing happened.

JAKE

What was that?

ISSI

A furry red flying squirrel jumped from an upper branch of a tall tree, spiraled in circles round the tree, bounced on a cluster of forget-me-nots, and scampered into the bushes. As a kid, I once saw a flying squirrel and never forgot it. It was the high point of my prepubescent life. The two sightings were fifty years apart. Of course, after the squirrel takes a leap, it's all downhill. It can't flap its legs and fly back up. It glides down to oblivion.

JAKE

Gee, that's really sad. But, actually, they can scurry back up the tree and have another go at it, like any kid at the parachute jump on Coney Island, and no ticket necessary. I am sure their gliding ability is evolutionarily proficient, enabling them to escape from less talented predators like raccoons or bears. But I bet sometimes they just jump off the top of a tree for the hell of it. It must be fun.

ISSI

I never thought of that.

JAKE

That's because you are immersed in romantic metaphor. You

JAKE (Cont.)

think of everything metaphorically—spiraling squirrels, spiraling wisteria, cuckolded Samsons, hair, and all that rug and ivy shit. You would be a happier man if you stuck to the base facts.

ISSI

Yes, but what's a cemetery without metaphor?

JAKE

Did you finally go to the party?

ISSI

What party?

JAKE

The one you were on your way to before you turned off to the cemetery.

ISSI

You are right . . . I wallow in self-pity. Where's my goddamn drink?

JAKE

There we go. Stiff upper lip.

ISSI

Where the hell is she or he?

JAKE

Have another sip of mine. In the meantime I will recite you

JAKE (Cont.)

a poem. Ready?

ISSI

Ready as I'll ever be.

JAKE

ALONE I STAND IN AUTUMN COLD
ON THE TIP OF ORANGE ISLAND,
THE HSIANG FLOWING NORTHWARD;
I SEE A THOUSAND HILLS CRIMSONED THROUGH
BY THEIR SERIES WOODS DEEP-DYED,
AND A HUNDRED BARGES VYING
OVER CRYSTAL BLUE WATERS.

ISSI

Nice there, the barge and rippling . . .

JAKE

EAGLES CLEAVE THE AIR.
FISH GLIDE IN THE LIMPID DEEP;
UNDER FREEZING SKIES A MILLION CREATURES CONTEND IN
FREEDOM.
BROODING OVER THE IMMENSITY,
I ASK, ON THIS BOUNDLESS LAND
WHO RULES OVER MAN'S DESTINY?

ISSI

Who wrote it?

JAKE

Take a guess.

ISSI

Well, it wasn't Walt Whitman.

JAKE

Certainly not.

ISSI

And definitely not Oscar Wilde.

JAKE

Definitely not.

ISSI

Tennyson or Coleridge.

JAKE

One guess at a time.

ISSI

Certainly not Emily Brontë, she would never . . .

JAKE

It was Mao Tse-tung.

ISSI

I knew it!

ISSI (Cont.)

(He puts his head down on
the bar and quietly sobs.)

JAKE

Yes, he massacred millions. Any of your relatives?

ISSI

I found scraps of paper, torn up and tossed in the garbage.

JAKE

What were you doing rooting around in the garbage? Sappho
said, "Don't stir the trash." You should listen to Sappho.

ISSI

I couldn't sleep. I reached for a sleeping tablet and a
glass of water. I dropped the pill in the garbage can. I
lay in bed all night, wide awake. At dawn I started
searching. I never found the pill, but I found bits of
paper with handwriting on them. I pieced them together. It
took hours. There were two distinct styles, as if two
people had passed a note back and forth, like in high
school.

JAKE

Hold on just a minute, I have to take a piss.

(He get's up and disappears
into the men's room. The
toilet flushes, and then he
returns.)

So, what did they say?

ISSI

You want me to repeat it?

JAKE

Why not?

ISSI

Okay, here goes . . .

(ISSI Begins to recite the
note, Imitating the lover)

Why doest thou resist?

(ISSI as wife)

I do not resist; I simply hesitate.

(ISSI as lover)

Why, my dearest?

(ISSI as wife)

I am betrothed.

(ISSI as lover)

Do not fret, my love, we will destroy all evidence. Meet me
on the morrow. He will be none the wiser.

(ISSI as wife)

You must travel long and far. The carriageways are
treacherous, potholed and rutted.

(ISSI as lover)

Never mind. My transport is equipped with the latest coils.
It is worth the journey just for a whiff of thy fragrance.
Perhaps a tender kiss, my reward shall be.

(ISSI as wife)

Doest thou admire me so?

(ISSI as lover)

I long to embrace thee! Say yes, then. I beg, say yes.

(ISSI as wife)

Until the morrow, then. Adieu.

JAKE

That doesn't make any sense at all.

ISSI

What do you mean?

JAKE

It is obvious they were arranging a tryst.

ISSI

Yes, the parchment was yellowed, but the writing legible. I am certain one script was my wife's. She has a strange way of sloping her R's.

JAKE

Okay, so they exchanged endearments on this piece of paper, which you later found torn to bits and thrown in the garbage.

ISSI

Yes, if they wanted to destroy the evidence they should have thrown it in the fire. But it was the middle of July—no fire. The bits would have just languished there, in the ashes.

JAKE

If it was all the same piece of paper, it means that they were together when they wrote it. If their passion was so strong, why write? Why not take advantage of the moment and act?

ISSI

Good point.

JAKE

And if they were embracing, they couldn't be writing. That would be quite a contortion. And why did they make that silly attempt to write in the style of the Bard?

ISSI

Style is irrelevant. Obviously, they just wanted to fuck.

JAKE

So why didn't they just say it? Is either of them deaf and dumb?

ISSI

My wife is a soprano. She sings at La Scala. I don't know the other person. He or she is a mystery, possibly deaf and even dumb.

JAKE

In that case they might have been corresponding for his sake.

ISSI

By the way, is it a bartender or a barmaid?

JAKE

Who?

ISSI

The person who is supposed to be getting me a drink.

JAKE

That depends.

ISSI

On what?

JAKE

On the day of the week. On Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays, it's a bartender. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, it's Miranda.

ISSI

What about Mondays?

JAKE

Mondays it's closed.

ISSI

What's the bartender's name?

JAKE

That depends on whether it's Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday.

JAKE (Cont.)

There are three old brothers by the name of Fanelli. It's difficult to tell them apart. Miranda is young and beautiful.

ISSI

What's today?

JAKE

It's after midnight, so it must be Thursday.

ISSI

The shift changes at midnight?

JAKE

Yes, they punch a clock precisely at twelve.

ISSI

So, we're waiting for Miranda.

JAKE

She is punctual.

ISSI

Perhaps there was a collision. That would explain it. Can I have another sip.

(He takes a sip.)

JAKE

Any hobbies?

ISSI

You will have to excuse me for a minute.

(He gets up, walks to the Ladies' room, and closes the door. There is the sound of a tinkle, then a flush. He returns to his bar stool.)

JAKE

You used the ladies' room.

ISSI

I eat, sleep, drink—sometimes I sing.

JAKE

Like what?

ISSI

Jigs, rounds, cannons.

JAKE

You need more than one person to sing a round. Are you Irish?

ISSI

What does that have to do with it?

JAKE

Let's hear one.

ISSI

I'm shy in front of an audience.

JAKE

But there's no one here. It's just you and me. Miranda hasn't shown up. Otherwise you would have your drink.

ISSI

Okay.

ISSI (Cont.)

(Jewish folk song or the
song in "The Dead.")

JAKE

That was beautiful.

ISSI

Glad you liked it.

(The clanking of dishes can
be heard along with
periodic claps of thunder
and the crashing of
branches and falling trees
outside. But the speakers
go on speaking, barely
acknowledging the ruckus.)

ISSI (Cont.)

Funny thing, but you're born— What's that?

JAKE

Just Moe, the dishwasher. He's deaf so he doesn't realize how much noise he makes racking the dishes.

ISSI

Yes, but he's dropping them.

JAKE

He's nearsighted. He often misses the rack.

ISSI

Actually, you don't define it as being born, because you don't have a word for "born" when you are born. You don't have a word for "being," either.

(Another crash of breaking
dishes)

JAKE

I hope there are enough plates left. I'm hungry. I need a nibble.

ISSI

And when you finally get a word for "born," it's way too late to remember being born. I imagine they have quite an overhead here—replacement dishes and all.

JAKE

There's a kiln in the back. They make their own plates.

ISSI

So the earth keeps on spinning around, and around the sun, and the sun spins around the galaxy, and as a result you begin to notice wrinkles in the rearview mirror, not the mirror itself, your face. You think, what the hell are those ruts doing in my forehead?

(Loud thunder crashes and
breaking dishes)

ISSI (Cont.)

And the distraction almost runs you off the road. But you recover. You keep driving, and you arrive at the party on time . . .

JAKE

Quite a storm out there, isn't it?

ISSI

Actually, the weight of Michelangelo's slaves should have been able to slow things down a bit. They might have, but just for a moment. And the people at the party think, "Look at those ruts." But perhaps, lo and behold, one of them realizes that you appreciate ivy, even carpet nap, not necessarily in that order, although their appreciation of your appreciation may just be hanging by a thread, a thread for sewing buttons on your pants when the fly, in a flash of ardor, becomes unbuttoned and afterwards you appear at a restaurant embarrassed.

JAKE

I prefer zippers. No fuss. Opening the buttons is a ceremony, each with its own little tug—one, two, three, four, five, from the belt down. Actually, not bad, now that I think of it.

ISSI

You talking about those 501s?

JAKE

In 1873 Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis were given a patent for riveting jeans. There are rivets securing all the pockets and . . .

ISSI

So you contemplate scarves or neckties, as you remember that girl, and you wish you were holding supplies with her. But supplies—ribbons, pastries, cerulean, Chanel, or rose madder—might be too romantic. Who knows? So you stir soup, peas, bits of bacon, and you make an excellent choice of wine. Then every once in a while, you get the hiccups. You go, "hic, hic." And if you are alone, you think, what does it matter? I wasn't a witness. Meanwhile, I was innocently reading War and Peace. She acted nonchalant, as if nothing happened. After War and Peace, I dropped off the dry cleaning. An arm reached out to hand me my suits and sweaters. My testicles needed cleaning, my eggs dispatched. I asked myself, "Is biology the function of eros, or is it the other way around?" And then I went "hic, hic" again, but never at party, although once at a Mondrian. I tried to hold it in, but it proved impossible. So I rushed to the

ISSI (Cont.)

piano lesson. Suddenly my hiccups disappeared. I was, for a moment, without resentment. I loved the boy behind the piano. I would have loved him if he were a girl too. It's all in the eye. It's all triangular.

JAKE

So, do you think your wife actually screwed this guy? What are the odds?

ISSI

Fifty-fifty.

JAKE

How could we find out?

ISSI

Why do you want to know?

(More thunder and a crash.
The lights go out. The bar
is completely dark.
Footsteps produced by high
heels. The lights turn back
on. The two characters are
sitting in the same place.)

JAKE

Actually, I like details, particularly in photographs. We could hire a private dick with a Bolex and a Leica. Then you'd know for sure. Seriously, I'll give him a call—I'll

JAKE (Cont.)

set it up for you.

ISSI

And when the sun rose the next day, I was amazed. And I said to myself, "How can I prove this to anyone? What are my options?"

JAKE

Prove what?

ISSI

Where's the tenderness, the sweet warmth of a supple body, lithe, curled amongst my limbs, nudging my navel? Disheveled hair brushing my lips and tickling them to a smile. Early morning rays slipping through the venetian blinds, and strips of sunlight falling on the curve of her shoulder, her waist, and rippled down her thigh. She was sleeping still, the whole of my vision, a vast landscape so close to my eye, the one not buried in the pillow.

JAKE

You are thirsty.

ISSI

I am. Do your kids still believe in the tooth fairy? I mean, you're a dentist. An expatriated tooth must be a common occurrence.

JAKE

I don't discuss work after hours.

ISSI

May I?

JAKE

May you what?

ISSI

May I believe in the tooth fairy?

JAKE

You don't need my permission. Believe in what you want.

ISSI

Is the tooth fairy a girl or a boy?

JAKE

Androgynous, I suspect.

ISSI

My molars are mature. I have no cavities. I brush. I floss twice a day. Nothing's falling out. I don't have bad breath. The only way for me to acquire a tooth for the tooth fairy is to start a fight. But I have no fight to pick.

JAKE

Shucks, I could sell you one.

ISSI

One what?

JAKE

A tooth.

ISSI

How much?

JAKE

Two bucks.

ISSI

Really?

JAKE

For a molar. A front tooth would be four dollars. A front tooth is a valuable commodity to a tooth fairy.

ISSI

Why buy a tooth for two dollars, then put it under a pillow, wake up in the morning, and find the tooth gone and a quarter under the pillow? Where's the profit?

JAKE

Why a quarter?

ISSI

When I was a kid, it was a quarter.

JAKE

Even so, there would be one significant consolation.

ISSI

What's that?

JAKE

You have a fixation with tooth fairies, right?

ISSI

A passing interest.

JAKE

No one knows about this fixation but us. And I don't know your address or even your name

ISSI

So?

JAKE

So you remain anonymous. Then if you put a tooth under your pillow before you go to sleep, and wake up in the morning, and there, under your pillow, is a quarter or even a dollar bill . . .

ISSI

Yes . . .

JAKE

You will know that it must have been put there by the tooth fairy. She is the only one who could have known it was your bed, and you with a tooth under your pillow. She is the tooth fairy and, of course, knows everything. So, guess what?

ISSI

What?

JAKE

If there is a quarter under your pillow in the morning,
then you'll have something to believe in.

ISSI

What?

JAKE

The magic of a fairy.

ISSI

That would be taking quite a risk..

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT I)

Act II:Scene 1

SETTING: The set is the same, except the men's and ladies' room signs have switched.

AT RISE: Jake, in the same clothes is now played by a female actor instead of a male actor. Issi, in the same clothes is now played by a female actor instead of a male actor. A cheeseburger, a glass of milk, and a Death in the Afternoon are sitting on the otherwise empty bar. Jake comes out of the men's room, sits down, and takes a sip of the Death in the Afternoon. A couple of seconds pass. ISSI comes out of the ladies' room and sits next to the milk and cheeseburger.

ISSI

So, you know that tooth you sold me?

JAKE

Yes. A molar from the upper left side, wasn't it?

ISSI

Right side, left side—how would I know? I wasn't around when you pulled it.

JAKE

It's the wisdom tooth of a girl in her late teens, possibly a virgin, quite attractive.

ISSI

The tooth was still there in the morning when I woke up.

JAKE

You expected it to go somewhere? It doesn't have wings. It doesn't have legs. It doesn't drive a car. Can I buy you a drink?

ISSI

No need.

JAKE

You know, you're kind of cute. How's everything?

ISSI

Misty.

JAKE

Misty?

ISSI

Misty.

JAKE

Your wife?

ISSI

Change of subject.

JAKE

To what?

ISSI

Oh, I don't know. I got my PhD at Harvard, in cicadas. Just think of it, those little buggers . . .

JAKE

Cicadas? Harvard? I didn't know you could get a PhD in cicadas. How do you make a living? They only come out every seventeen years. What do you do in the mean time?

ISSI

Research, research. There's plenty to do. Why just the other day—

JAKE

Look, I'm really not interested in your research. What happened with the detective I hired for you? Did he come through? Any good photos? Did he get any details? I need details.

ISSI

They have orgiastic sex, day and night, for about three weeks, doggy style, then . . .

JAKE

Doggy style? That's all you've got, doggy style? There's got to be more than that. Cunnilingus? Any fellatio?

ISSI

No, just doggy style. That's the way they do it. Actually, it's curious. Why do we call it doggy style? Other species do it that way, not just spaniels, Dalmatians, and humans. How come canines get all the credit? Anyway, they screw their brains out for a fortnight or so . . .

JAKE

I thought you said three weeks.

ISSI

I did say three weeks, but I like the sound of "fortnight." It's got a ring to it.

JAKE

But a fortnight is only two weeks. That's one less week of fornication.

ISSI

As a biologist, I'd rather not call it fornication.

JAKE

Well if you don't call it fornication, you'll have nothing

JAKE (Cont.)

to tell the judge, will you?

ISSI

Why would I tell a judge? Mating is part of life. They have very little time. Life is nothing for them but sex—no art, no poetry. Of course, they can sing.

JAKE

Do you know where all this singing and fornication takes place?

ISSI

In the forest, of course.

JAKE

Really? Not in some sleazy motel room?

ISSI

Of course not. There are no leaves in motel rooms, at least the ones I've been in, and I've been in several.

JAKE

But there are always napkins, sanitary wipes, and paper towels.

ISSI

Perhaps, but leaves must fall on fertile ground. The bedroom floor is carpeted. The bathroom floor is tiled. The cleaning lady would just mop them right up.

JAKE

Some people can't afford cleaning ladies.

ISSI

This isn't a question of class. Cleaning ladies are not necessary in the forest. The forest takes care of itself. So they sleep till one morning, midst the joy of spring, they wake up together—not sure what kind of alarm clock they have—and then they fuck their brains out for a fortnight. No sleep whatsoever. For them, life is fucking, all day and all night.

JAKE

"Midst the joy of spring"?

ISSI

What can I say? I'm a romantic.

JAKE

You do have a case here, though you are putting all this fornication in a somewhat sympathetic light. You'll certainly get the house and the car. So, when they sleep perchance they dream?

ISSI

There haven't been any studies on their sleep that I know of. But for the few weeks they are out and about, they sing the most beautiful melodies. Actually, it's just the males that sing.

JAKE

There's more than one guy?

ISSI

Of course there is more than one—there are billions.

JAKE

That's a gross exaggeration. They'll never believe it. Best to stick to the facts.

(Long silence)

JAKE

You know, silence is okay among friends.

ISSI

I know.

JAKE

Look, why don't you eat your cheeseburger? It's getting cold. Anyway, it's best to get rid of it.

ISSI

I just thought I would savor it, let it settle in. It says here that the beef is imported.

JAKE

Well, aren't we the connoisseur? I'm starting to like you. But let's get down to bare facts. What else did the dick come up with?

ISSI

Who the hell is the dick?

JAKE

The dick, the guy I hired to trail your wife.

ISSI

Oh. He hasn't been reporting anything to me. I haven't received a telephone call from anyone in three weeks. It doesn't ring. How much does this guy cost?

JAKE

An arm and a leg.

ISSI

But why are you doing this? Why do you care? I mean, she's my wife, not yours. Is he cute?

JAKE

What does it matter if he's cute?

ISSI

Well, if he's handsome, maybe they bumped into each other while he was trailing her. Maybe she is having an affair with him.

JAKE

You are jumping to conclusions. He is supposed to be a professional, disinterested.

ISSI

But what's in it for you? What's your motive?

JAKE

I told you. I like details, positions, compositions, and arrangements. I'm a formalist. I like to watch.

ISSI

There's nothing wrong with watching, but what if this fucking dick is fucking my wife? I have enough problems with all the other guys, and you just complicated it with one more.

JAKE

Sorry, but how will we know for sure?

ISSI

Nothing is for sure, only for the moment. We have to get through the moment, don't we?

JAKE

I am extremely happy that you used the first person plural.

ISSI

The first person plural?

JAKE

Yes, the "we."

ISSI

But why?

JAKE

Because I like you, and the "we" makes it all the more

JAKE (Cont.)

intimate.

ISSI

Really?

JAKE

Sort of.

ISSI

Actually, I don't like "sort ofs" Either you're attracted or you're not.

JAKE

I am.

ISSI

Well, there we are, then. Aren't we?

JAKE

I suppose so. Will you buy a plot with me?

ISSI

A plot?

JAKE

Yes, at that cemetery you mentioned. What is it called?

ISSI

Wait a minute. Isn't this moving a bit too fast? I mean, we

ISSI (Cont.)

haven't even fucked. Actually, now that I think of it, we haven't even held hands. Shouldn't we at least start by holding hands?

JAKE

What happens after that?

ISSI

I don't know.

JAKE

A kiss?

ISSI

Isn't that a bit forward?

JAKE

Okay, then, just a kiss on the hand.

ISSI

Who does that anymore?

JAKE

I don't know, people kiss queens on the hand.

ISSI

Just the privileged few.

JAKE

Look, I don't really give a fuck about kissing the hand of

JAKE (Cont.)

the queen. No matter how privileged you are, it's not sexy. I'd rather just suck on a biologist.

ISSI

Now, let's not get personal here. Biology is my profession, not my orientation.

JAKE

Are we having an argument?

ISSI

I suppose so. Anyway, we are just two people sitting at a bar in the middle of nowhere.

JAKE

It's not nowhere. Where the fuck do you think we are? Get out your compass.

ISSI

Look, you don't have to use those kind of words with me.

JAKE

What kind of words? "Compass"? "Nowhere"? Anyway, I'm tired.

ISSI

Where are you going to sleep, on a bar stool? On the bar? On the floor? There is no place to sleep except the floor, and it's all sawdust and peanut shells.

JAKE

I have more dignity than that. I have class. I have a sports car. I have several Brooks Brothers suits. I have . . . I love you.

ISSI

What kind of come-on is that? The Brooks Brothers come-on?

JAKE

It's not a come-on, it's the . . .

ISSI

Is it pin striped?

JAKE

Yes, it is pin striped. They all are. It's . . .

ISSI

Okay, look, if you really want to know, your dick actually did get a hold of me. He had pictures and a tape recordings.

JAKE

Really? What did they talk about?

ISSI

They discussed trivial matters—the weather and the punctuality of Mr. Kant. But I don't think there was really that much conversation. In many of the photos she had a red ball strapped in her mouth.

JAKE

Really . . . Now, there's a detail for you. Sure it was red, not yellow or blue? What about taupe? How did he get the photos?

ISSI

A slat on the venetian blinds was askew. I don't think they make them in taupe. It was candy-apple red. It glittered.

JAKE

I used to have a pair of candy-apple red shoes. I was an acolyte. I lit the candles on the alter. After the service, I snuffed them. Was it in a motel?

ISSI

Look, I don't think we should get into such intimate details. We shouldn't go too far with this. I don't really care anymore. I'm in love, but not with you.

JAKE

Really, so what's she like?

ISSI

Dirty blond, pony tail, slapdash breasts . . .

JAKE

Slapdash breasts? What the hell are those?

ISSI

Casual. No big deal, like saying, "Here I am. I'm a standard breast. Here's my nipple. Want to suck? Maybe

ISSI (Cont.)

someday this body will get pregnant, and then I'll be a plump breast full of luscious white milk, but meanwhile I'll just rest here and be a casual breast, relaxed and lovely.

JAKE

That's a mouthful for a breast. Do both her breasts pontificate or just the one?

ISSI

You should take breasts more seriously.

JAKE

How seriously?

ISSI

Don't know where I'd be without them. But we both know that's not what life's all about. Not even half of it. Not even a third or one-fourth, as long as we are speaking in fractions. It's like Zeno's paradox—as close as we get there's still a distance. Two bodies cannot come together completely because first they have to travel half the distance, then half of that, then half of that . . . They never really touch. There will always be this self-autonomous, relentless, not giving in. No surrender. At first she forbade the L word, banned it from our discourse. But she finally gave in, at least to that. We fuck our brains out, just like the cicadas, and every once in a while we sing.

JAKE

Finally some details. You sing during copulation? During fellatio, during cunnilingus? Obviously, you did go all the way.

ISSI

Yes, at some point Zeno becomes irrelevant. Time stands still. We are happy. Of course, it all depends on who is doing what to whom—multitasking and all that—but, yes, we sing, like cicadas.

JAKE

L'Orfeo? The Marriage of Figaro? The Magic Flute?

ISSI

Naw, not that stuff, just some Sinatra, maybe Billie Holiday.

JAKE

Like what?

ISSI

Well, at the top of the list is "An Affair to Remember." Then, down the list, "After You've Gone," "Ain't Cha Never Comin' Back?" "All Alone," "All the Way," "As Time Goes By," "Autumn Leaves." And that's just the A's. Then for the B's we have "Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)."

JAKE

Okay, okay—that's enough. That's plenty for a start. But,

JAKE (Cont.)

anyway, I told you so.

ISSI

Told me so, what?

JAKE

From the sound of it you seem completely enchanted. The tooth fairy did come, she just forgot to take the tooth. I'm jealous. I'm jealous as hell. What's her name?

ISSI

I am not sure that is any of your business.

JAKE

I insist.

ISSI

Well, in that case let me formally introduce you. Jake, this is Suzie. Suzie, this is Jake.

(ISSI gestures and in both cases points to JAKE.)

JAKE

But there's no one here but you and me.

ISSI

I know. We met in a bar. Didn't we, Suze? We had a few drinks, nothing special. We just hit it off, right from the start. Time passed. First a little, then a lot. I was attracted to your toes and to your chipped cerulean

ISSI (Cont.)

toenails . Then gradually my attraction moved up to your ankles, your calves, your knees. Then up from there. All the while we had wonderful conversations, about Isaiah Berlin in particular but about other philosophers as well. We avoided politics. Didn't we? I mean, who knows?

JAKE

You can usually tell.

ISSI

I am sorry. I am enamored, enchanted, and ridiculous. I am head over heels. I am silly. I embarrass even myself.

JAKE

How?

ISSI

For one thing, I wear mismatched socks. See?
(Pulls up pants legs.)

JAKE

No shit!

ISSI

Yes, really. Red on the left, yellow on the right. Sometimes vice versa.

JAKE

I hadn't noticed. You have to do something about that.

ISSI

And that afternoon in the garden, we kissed for the first time. You remember? Someone in a third-story window was typing. We could hear the plonks—plonkity, plonk, plonk—very precise, scattering our kisses. And then a freight train passed by, very near. We hadn't noticed the railroad tracks. They were hidden under grass and ivy. A close call, wouldn't you say? But here we are, still around, not flattened by freight, at least not yet, still conquering heaven and hell, if that is at all possible.

JAKE

I'll miss you when you're gone.

ISSI

I can't imagine that. You have so much going for you. You are beautiful, young. You will be very successful. And with all the new medications . . .

JAKE

I bet you can't guess what kind of underwear I have on.

ISSI

Is it frilly?

JAKE

Could be.

ISSI

Black.

JAKE

Possibly.

ISSI

Where did you get it?

JAKE

That's my secret. But I'll give you a hint. It was from a dark place.

ISSI

Really?

JAKE

Yes, a very dark place, up on Twenty-Fourth Street, in the shadow of the Flatiron Building.

ISSI

Where they sell typewriters?

JAKE

Yes, the same place. There are a couple of nice old guys there, really sweet. They can fix anything, even melancholy.

ISSI

I didn't know they sold panties there. I thought it was just ribbons, black and red.

JAKE

Yes, they do sell typewriter ribbons.

ISSI

Good to know. I'm running out.

JAKE

Of what.

ISSI

Of everything. It's almost over. I can feel it in my bones.

JAKE

I'll pick up a ribbon next time I stop by. What kind of typewriter is it?

ISSI

It's a Royal Aristocrat with "shift freedom" tabs.

JAKE

I know the model. Came out in '46.

ISSI

Look, are you hungry? Did you have dinner? Here, have a bite of my cheeseburger. Wash it down with some milk.

JAKE

I never touch the stuff. You know it's dangerous, all that animal fat, those dairy products. Cheese is not good for you either, especially that kind, oozing all over the place. You think the chef could be a bit more discreet. You want to live a little longer? Just ignore it. Leave it on the plate. Actually, get rid of it entirely. There must be

JAKE (Cont.)

a garbage can around here someplace.

ISSI

But, why play it safe? It feels good biting into a juicy piece of meat.

JAKE

You won't miss me when I'm gone. The world is full of beautiful girls. Another will come along when you least expect it.

ISSI

That is absolutely no consolation.

JAKE

We have to stop meeting in these sleazy places. I mean, isn't there a hotel? What about the Carlyle? Or just a motel?

(The sound of rain
drizzling lightly.)

ISSI

I suppose there is something down Gramercy Road. Would you like to come?

JAKE

Of course I would like to come.

ISSI

What about an umbrella, some rubbers?

JAKE

We can get those in the men's room.

ISSI

Really?

JAKE

Sure. They're only a quarter. I'll go look. You have a quarter?

ISSI

Yes, I think I do. I've been saving it for a rainy day.

(Issi hands Jake the
quarter. Jake walks into
the men's room and comes
out the ladies' room.)

JAKE

Got 'em.

ISSI

Where's the umbrella? We are definitely going to need an umbrella. We'll be thoroughly soaked.

JAKE

Look, who cares if we are soaked? We can take off our clothes and drape them over the radiator. They'll be dry by morning.

ISSI

Morning seems an eternity away. I can't believe this is actually happening. I would have never dreamed . . .

JAKE

What do you mean? It's already 1:00 a.m. Eat your cheeseburger and drink your milk. Let's blow this joint.

(The lights start flickering. A faint flash of lightning.)

ISSI

Not so fast, buster. I want to enjoy this. Maybe the rain will taper.

JAKE

I'm no buster. Rethink your nomenclature.

ISSI

When I was a kid, I always thought I would dissolve in the rain. Once I caught a frog and put it in a jar with a little bit of water. The next day I went down into the basement where I kept it, and it was gone, totally gone. My parents told me it dissolved. I looked again and I thought, would the bones dissolve too? Would everything dissolve—the eyeballs, etcetera? I think they let it go.

JAKE

You know, when I was a kid I wanted to be an engineer. I

JAKE (Cont.)

wanted to ride freight trains into oblivion, chug a chug, chug, chug. I still do.

ISSI

I just want to stay out of the rain. We can hail a cab.

JAKE

It's going to be difficult at this time of night.

ISSI

Why do we need a motel anyway?

JAKE

What do you want, a forest? I mean, if you are worried about dissolving, this really isn't the night to lie down in a bed of leaves.

ISSI

We can do it standing up.

(Lightning flash, and
thunder.)

JAKE

Yeah, and what about that? We'd be lightning rods.

ISSI

Okay, so let's use the men's room, or the ladies', whichever you prefer.

JAKE

I am not going to lie down on the bathroom floor. It's seedy and unsanitary. When does this joint close? I need some time, not just "wham, bam, thank you, Mam."

ISSI

I'm no mam, buster.

JAKE

You are right. I am sorry. I do apologize.

ISSI

So I called a hooker the other day. Got her number from the back page of the Daily Rag. Actually, maybe it's a bit excessive to call her a hooker, because on the phone she said, "No sex, just a back rub." I wasn't sure if she meant it. Maybe she was afraid her phone was tapped.

JAKE

Why are you telling me this? Why would you want me to know?

ISSI

The president was in town. The police were all over the place. She lived on the East Side, near the United Nations. But they weren't casing her joint. Nevertheless, I walked around the block a few times, to get up my courage, then gave her doorbell a significant nudge. She was raven haired, attractive, but not my fantasy. She instructed me to take off my clothes and poured whale oil all over my back—at least that's what she called it. I was glad she was a nonsmoker. Then she asked if she could stick her finger

ISSI (Cont.)

up my ass. Of course I said yes. Why not? So I closed my eyes and pretty soon mine was up hers too. Evidently she didn't classify this activity as sex. She used her right hand. I used my left. And I thought, "We are two strangers with entirely different motives for being here, and yet within minutes of saying hello, we have fingers stuck up our mutual assholes. I thought, "This is ridiculous but somehow rather poignant." Of course, I can't speak for everyone. After several minutes I opened my eyes and saw that the hand not stuck up my ass was holding a book, and I know you won't believe this—she was actually reading *Dubliners*, the last story, "The Dead." After she finished, she offered me a shower, and soon I was down the stairs and out on the street in what was still broad daylight. What can I say? I felt ridiculous.

JAKE

So why did you do it in the first place? Why did you go there if you already had me?

ISSI

Funny, she asked me the same question. But I didn't already have you, still don't.

JAKE

But you told her about me?

ISSI

If you can't tell a hooker about a girlfriend, who can you tell? I had only paid her for an hour, but she gave me a

ISSI (Cont.)

little bonus time in the shower stall. That's where I
confessed, in the shower stall. Poetic, isn't it?

JAKE

So, what will it be, then, the men's room or the ladies'?

ISSI

We can flip a coin. That would resolve everything.

(The lights flicker again,
faint lightning.)

JAKE

Hey, wait a minute, how come you are afraid of the rain
dissolving you, but you are so eager to take a shower?

ISSI

Heads!

JAKE

Heads?

ISSI

Yes, heads, it's the ladies' room.

JAKE

Okay, then.

(They kiss passionately
then walk toward separate

restrooms. Jake enters the
ladies' room and Issi
enters the men's room.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT 2)

Act 3

Scene 1

SETTING: Same circumstances and place,
different night.

AT RISE: Complete silence for about five
minutes, except for the sound of
rain beating on the roof, then
Jake and Issi emerge, same
clothes, but disheveled, from
their respective bathrooms.

JAKE

Did you jerk off?

ISSI

Maybe a little.

JAKE

A little? Either you did or you didn't.

ISSI

What about you?

JAKE

Of course. Who were you fantasizing about?

ISSI

He's handsome, but you did have a bit part to play.

JAKE

Ah, a ménage à trois. How come just a bit part? Why not the starring roll? I mean, what the fuck? I don't have a six-pack or even a three-pack, but my muscles are taut. I swim fifty laps a day. I do chin-ups. Sometimes I even sing. I guess there will always be competition . . . Maybe I should just get used to it.

ISSI

So, do you sing when you swim or just when you're doing chin-ups?

JAKE

Just the chin-ups. Otherwise it's gurgles.

ISSI

Sinatra?

JAKE

I do a little Sinatra.

ISSI

I wonder if it's the "sin" syllable that gave him his lift.

JAKE

I think it was the voice and the eyes, but maybe hanging out with the Rat Pack helped. Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Peter Lawford . . . Who is the other guy?

ISSI

Joey Bishop, I believe.

JAKE

You're right. It's Joey. The Rat Pack gave Sinatra quite an edge, but anyway . . .

ISSI

Look, you know how I feel about you. I even fantasize about you when we are together. Like now. You are the terrain of my earth and the very core. You are its hemispheres, all its rivers, the Nile, the Rhine, the Danube, the Mississippi. I know I'm missing a few, but this isn't a geography lesson, is it? Nor is it a history lesson, but still, you are my Great War, my Trojan War, my Revolutionary War, my War of the Seven Seas.

JAKE

War of the Seven Seas? When was that?

ISSI

Way before our time.

JAKE

Even before the Trojan War? I believe that began around—

ISSI

You are the rancid bodies rotting in its glory fields, their vacant eyes, and their open mouths muddled with saliva still wet and oozing. You are the maggots squatting in the nostrils of the fallen. You are all the orifices homeward bound, family orifices useful at dinnertime, and nonfamily orifices that expel all confusion. You are the little pores too numerous to know, reeking of sweat and

ISSI (Cont.)

sex. I want to know you after the wisteria in the cemetery topples its trees and torrents, and mudslide and February ice erode the face of its stones obliterating the names and the dates. So do you know what happens next?

JAKE

What?

ISSI

We will be no "we" anymore. We will be two letters fewer than "we." We will be dirt in the typewriter garden down by the railroad tracks. But what will become of our antlers, those hilarious horns sprouting from our skulls? Presently it's difficult to try on a top hat or a beret, certainly not an Apache headdress. Umbrellas are problematic. But we will make do. These strange and pointy protrusions will be all that remains of us. Perhaps our horns will make it into a museum. That would be grand, even though too late for us to know. The Museum of Like and Lust. Our relics and the rest shadowed, obscure, until a summer day—reminiscent of a summer day under a prickly tree, you know the one I mean, the one in the park—until the late summer sun brightens its dusty rooms. A day will come . . .

JAKE

Well, thanks for including me in that. Just for the record, I'm all for a ménage à trois.

ISSI

Oh, don't mention it.

JAKE

Eat your goddamn cheeseburger. It's getting cold. Nothing worse than a chilly cheeseburger. Drink you milk.

ISSI

I'll eat it when I'm good and ready.

(Issi lifts the bun,
squirts some ketchup, takes
a bite, and then begins to
cry.)

JAKE

Why are you crying?

ISSI

I didn't ask for onions. But, anyway, that's not the reason.

JAKE

You know, the blunter the knife, the wetter the tears.

ISSI

Why is that?

ISSI (Cont.)

(Whimpering.)

JAKE

A clean cut releases fewer of the onion's enzymes.

ISSI

What about enzymes and us? Maybe we should just make a clean cut of it. Then no more tears.

JAKE

I warned you about metaphors. Stick to the facts and you will change the story.

ISSI

But I'm on the verge of Suzieside. Perhaps you were always just a beautiful fiction, far too good to be true.

JAKE

I'm here aren't I? What more do you want?

ISSI

And the ivy?

JAKE

It will grow back sooner than you think.

(The lights in the bar
flicker. Sounds of a
drizzle.)

ISSI

Must be the storm.

JAKE

Strange, no lightning or thunder.

ISSI

It will pass.

(The lights flicker again,
and then go out.)

ISSI

Kind of dark in here isn't it?

JAKE

I can't hear a thing.

(Footsteps are heard in the
distance, the slam of a
door, then footsteps across
the wooden floor of the
bar. They stop.)

ISSI

Did you hear that?

JAKE

Yes, I did.

ISSI

Who do you think it is?

JAKE

I have no idea. Maybe it's Miranda, or even Henry.

(A flashlight scans the floor left and right, moves up the bar to the cheeseburger, and then to the tall glass of milk. It lingers on the glass of milk.)

ISSI

Shush, don't make a sound.

JAKE

Duck behind the bar.

ISSI

Look, if we get out of this, you want to go to the movies next week?

JAKE

I'd love to. What's playing?

ISSI

Casablanca.

JAKE

The one about the friends?

ISSI

Well, that's part of it. In the end, they do become . . .

JAKE

Oh, please don't tell me the ending. What's the use, then?

(The click of a gun's
hammer being cocked.)

JAKE (Cont.)

He's cocking his gun.

ISSI

What makes you think he's a guy?

JAKE

I don't know—gun, cock. Just like the movies. Guys are always cocking their guns in the movies. I mean, look at High Noon. Gary Cooper. He cocked his gun. You never see Grace Kelly cocking her gun.

ISSI

Yes, but this isn't High Noon. It's after midnight.

JAKE

It doesn't matter if it's Grace Kelly or Gary Copper. There's a gun in this room and its cocked.

ISSI

You are always so literal. Perhaps if we thought metaphorically, we would be better off.

JAKE

No one has ever been saved by metaphor. A bullet's a

JAKE (Cont.)

bullet. It blasts right through metaphor—wham, splat, right to the heart.

ISSI

I know, I know. The pain is unbearable. I thought falling in love was going to be so happy-go-lucky, so Shangri-La, so hunky-dory. But it's a lot of pain and melancholy. That's what kills me—the melancholy. I am doomed. What I need is a literal bullet—a smidgeon of physical pain, and it's all over. No more carpets to worry about. Or English ivy. No more "we." It's the "we" that's the problem, isn't it?

(A shot is heard. The glass of milk drops and smashes to the floor, resulting in a huge pool of milk. More than the milk in the glass—as if a whole person was liquefied. The flashlight focuses on the pool of milk. Everything else is dark. Sound of a gun put back in a holster. Footsteps heard walking toward the door. The door opens then shuts. All is silent.)

JAKE

Look, I don't know what will become of us. We are lost in the dark.

ISSI

He shot the milk.

JAKE

But he did not shoot the cheeseburger.

ISSI

Shit, it's all over my shoes. It's all over my pants. I just bought these pants. I'm really fucking soaked.

JAKE

Here, I'll dab it up with this.

(A white handkerchief appears in the pitch dark. Jake kneels. The white handkerchief is all that can be seen, dabbing shoes.)

ISSI

It's on my pants too.

(The white handkerchief moves upward to calf level, then knee. Issi is sitting on the bar stool.)

JAKE

There?

ISSI

Yes, sure, okay, yes. It's all over the place. Further up, please.

(The handkerchief moves up
to the groin.)

JAKE

Here?

ISSI

Yes, there. Yes, that's good. That's okay. Let's get rid of these.

(Pulls down pants.)

Careful of teeth. I'm very sensitive.

JAKE

What if someone comes?

ISSI

Comes? These are existential circumstances—there is nobody here but us.

(A couple of seconds of
silence, then sighs and
licks. Oral sex is
performed, bringing the
actor to climax as the

light gradually brightens.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT 3)

(END OF PLAY)