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Inhale.

*(It's no use. He exhales.)*

Fuck it — I'm throwing it out.

*(Peels off the Ike jacket.)*

To think this thing actually used to fit. With room to spare. Don't get me wrong — it's not like I pull it out every Veterans Day. Hell, I wouldn't be caught dead marching in one of those parades. I try it on from time to time. What, you never tried on the old high school letter jacket? You never tried on the old wedding dress? Not you, buddy, her! All I'm saying is each time there's less room. Like the thing is inhabited. Haunted. "The Jacket of Dorian Gray." Only it's in perfect shape, and I'm going to pieces!

So I'm not the picture of health. So the doctor says I've got a bit of a weight problem, which goes very nicely with my blood pressure problem, which wouldn't be caught dead without my heart problem. But dying? No such luck. My problem is living. My problem is outliving my secrets. My problem is this fucking jacket!

*(Throws the jacket to the floor.)*

I should've thrown the damn thing out years ago.

HEARTS  
The Forward Observer  
Willy Holtzman

Scene: The years following World War II

Dramatic

Babe (thirties), a WWII vet with a sleeping problem.

*Even though the war is over and he's safe at home, Babe still can't seem to get any sleep.*

BABE: Since the war, my definition of sleep has changed. The shooting stops, but the thinness of it all, the wakefulness . . . With the new baby, and all, I've become aware, I'm reminded of things not so long departed, memory things, Donnie. Things I meant to cast out, banish. Still there. The baby cries in the middle of the night, I'm already awake. The baby smiles, I cry. Some wires got crossed. Some gears, pedals. The brake is the gas, the gas is the clutch. It's hard to get from place to place in my mind, sometimes. I know, I know, life is good. We live in a clean, safe place. We're making healthy babies. We have houses, carports, rathskellars. This is what we fought for. We won! So why is this happening?

*(Donald devours more candy.)*

I can't sleep like a normal person. You can't eat like a normal person.

HEARTS  
The Forward Observer  
Willy Holtzman

Scene: The years following World War II

Dramatic

Donald (fifties), a WWII vet sharing his memories.

*As a forward observer, Donald was first on the scene at the Buchenwald concentration camp. Here, he recalls his grim discovery in chilling detail.*

DONALD: The guard towers are empty. Not a single sentry. The electrified gate is wide open. The driver wants to stay back with the jeep, "Maybe it's already liberated."

But I know better. What tells me? The smell. Good God, the smell. I know it from the battlefield, the bodies rotting in the April sun. There are no words to describe it. If there are POWs here, they are past liberating. I lower my rifle and walk.

Out of nowhere, they start appearing. Not army green. Stripes.

First a few, then a dozen, then hundreds.

I'm pulling Hershey bars from my pack, C-rations. All gone in an instant. Still, they keep coming.

I want to shout, "What are you? What have you become? How could you let them turn you into animals, more dead than alive? The stink of death is on you. How do I liberate the dead? Shame on you. Shame!"

*(The voices stop.)*

I fall between the ticks of a clock. I wander, the Forward Observer, wordless among worn, yellow stars and windowless barracks as silent as coffins. I blink back tears and my eyelids are like shutters, snapping incomprehensible pictures: a bloodstained meathook double-bolted into a reinforced concrete wall; a cast-iron furnace door still hot to the touch; an infinite knot of naked limbs; a windblown spiral of ash. Passover rewritten, undone.

I'm standing outside Barracks #39. A man staggers towards me, a tin of half-eaten C-rations in his hand.

Nothing is revealed. You don't even know who I am!

That you let them reduce you to this just to survive. I'm a fighter, a warrior!

How could you do this to yourself?

I'm one of you. I'm you. How could you do this to me?!

He sinks to the ground. The air hisses out of him like a leaking balloon, and he dies. I look to my left, to my right — they are dying all around me.

Why are you dying? You've been liberated. I risked everything to be here. Lost my way. Lost my best friend. Lost myself. Lost . . . to find you . . . to save you. I have come to Buchenwald! And you won't even save yourselves? Why are you dying? Why?

Got vet shtrofen! God will punish!

# HUNGER

Sheri Wilner

Scene: A beach house in Nantucket

Dramatic

Adam (twenties to thirties), a man struggling to save the woman he loves from her own fears and desires.

*When it seems that Diana prefers the company of a mysterious man who has appeared from the sea, Adam reveals how he used to lose himself as a child watching ships sail by.*

ADAM: I used to sleep on the couch by that window.

*(He points to it.)*

That one. When I was a kid. And I'd watch the ships go by. I'd spot them on the far left and I'd follow them all the way across until I couldn't see them anymore. And I'd forget. I'd forget that I was in a house watching a ship instead of actually being on the ship sailing on the sea. And when I couldn't see it anymore — the ship — I'd feel so . . . disoriented. I wouldn't know where I was or how I got into this body or how I'd ever make it back on board. When another ship came, I'd be OK. But the times when it took forever until another ship passed . . . when I'd wait and not be either here or there . . . that's when I thought I'd never survive.

# IN BERLIN

Jim Grimsley

Scene: Berlin

Dramatic

Walter (forty to fifty), a man trying to discover something new about himself.

*When his younger lover leaves him, Walter travels to Berlin to visit Kurt, a man who arranges S&M scenes for discerning customers. Walter is paying Kurt a small fortune to arrange a powerful scenario for him to observe. Here, Walter remembers a childhood hymn as he prepares to enter Kurt's dark world.*

WALTER: In my head I am singing this song.

*(Sings a verse of I'll Fly Away.)*

We sang it in church when I was a kid.

This little plank church on a country road

in Georgia near the Florida line

we sang it on Sunday morning and I thought it would be true one day

I would fly away

anything seemed possible

in a world where a man could ride a chariot straight into heaven without even dying

and for a long time when I was older I thought sex was like that

like I would fly away

But we also sang this song

*(Sings verse of another song with submission reference.)*

In those days I guess I only sang the words, I never understood

but now I'm older and I can hear the message

and I wonder if maybe I should change the way I think about sex to match that song

This is all in my head, all what I'm thinking, as if I were thinking out loud, but the truth is, I'm scurrying through Berlin like a worm, a frightened man in good shoes looking for a taxi stand and hoping he can pronounce the name of this street, in reality I am this small, scurrying thing

scuffling through the clean streets, mindful to stay out of the bicycle paths,  
looking for a driver to take me to East Berlin, where the boys are wait-  
ing

There's power in the blood  
we sang that too  
but I'm not ready to think about that

When I get to the place it's just a building, just an apartment building,  
and there's nobody on the street, a broad street with a median down the  
middle, and I go into the door of the apartment building into this empty  
carriageway, completely dark, and I can't find the light switch for a while,  
and when I do it's one of those European light switches that gives you  
about five seconds to get where you're supposed to be, and I'm not, I'm  
still in the middle of that carriageway trying to find the stairs, because I  
already know there's no elevator, and the apartment, the studio, is on the  
fifth floor, so I fumble forward and I find it, the newel post of the stair-  
way, and a step, and I begin to climb.

*(Sings, softly, a verse of Power in the Blood.)*

When I get to the door it's just a door, I ring the bell, somebody buzzes  
me inside, and there I am

*(Lights rise on Kurt.)*

But any one of those moments lasts a long time

I walk into a dark passage

a dim orange light is burning at the end

I am thinking, this is a strange place to have come to, a crumbling build-  
ing in East Berlin, a place where people are stingy with the lights

and this man in leather standing in a doorway

waiting for me, I have made an appointment and here I am  
on time.

# IN MY HEART I KNOW I'M RIGHT

Galanty Miller

Scene: The Hereafter

Serio-Comic

The Angel of Death (any age), a supernatural entity suffering from ennui.

*Here, a weary agent of God laments his choice of occupation.*

THE ANGEL: (*Lying in bed.*) Back when I was alive, I very much believed in God. But I only believed in Him because if there was a hell then there had to be a God. And back when I was alive, I thought I would go to heaven. But I only believed in heaven because I figured as long as there was a hell, there had to be a heaven. Still, it was always about hell. It was about punishment and consequences and the whole underrated concept of revenge. I tried so hard in life to do the right thing. It wasn't always easy but I did it — I lived life the way I knew in my heart it was supposed to be lived. And I didn't care if there was an afterlife for myself. I only wanted there to be an afterlife for the millions and millions of other people who didn't live life the way I did — the bad people. I wanted them to die, and then for them to be told exactly why they were going to hell. I wanted them to have a chance to think about it for awhile, to wallow in their regrets. Then they would go to hell and get physically and emotionally tortured. Maybe not a very poetic way to look at things but that's what I believed and that's what I hoped for.

*(The Angel stands up.)*

I guess it's true that you should be careful about what you wish for because it might come true. But this didn't just come true, it was always true. What I always somehow knew in my heart was right. A lot of people feel things to be true in their heart, but usually they're wrong. That's because most people are morons and they're stupid and they're selfish and evil. Fuck them and fuck what they think about anything. Nobody thinks they're going to hell — even murderers rationalize their actions to themselves. Well there has to be justice in this world and every place else. There has to be punishment. There has to be some solace for me because of how I lived. And you're not a bad person if you believe in this punishment or

even if you encourage it. You can even enjoy it if you want. I love when bad things happen to bad people. I love it. No amount of pain they suffer as a consequence to their actions is great enough for me.

*(The Angel sits in a chair near the front of the stage.)*

So as I sit here, and I do my job — this despicable job to which there doesn't seem to be an end — at least I know I'm doing what deserves to be done. And I have no regrets about that. So all the murderers are rotting in hell. And the rapists and the molesters, the thieves and the criminals — all wasting away. The people who lie, the people who cheat. The selfish, the hypocrites, the ignorant. I've sent them all away. People who are mean and cruel and violent, and people who . . .

*(Long pause.)*

*(The Angel stands up.)*

I was never chosen! I worked my way to where I was and to where I am. And I hate it! And the people who are so-called chosen are no better than any of the other losers who I hate. *(Pause.)* Sometimes I almost envy the mediocre. Imagine having no real conscious thought outside doing what you feel like. It must be comforting.

*(Long pause.)*

But who cares. Who cares about any of them. What, did you think this whole thing was about them? It never was about them. It could have been a guy who likes strippers or a guy who ignores his kids or a guy who beats up his wife or drinks and drives. Whatever. It never really mattered who I was gonna judge. They're all the same to me after awhile. No, this was always about me. It was always about righteousness and purity and . . .

*(The Angel falls to the ground. He is lying on the stage.)*

But whatever. I need to get out of here. I need this to end. I'm a prisoner. And even that no longer matters.

*(Long pause.)*

Because when it comes down to it, I could probably be happy if . . . *(Pause.)* there were better shows on TV and I could just find a decent cup of coffee.

# LAST TRAIN TO NIBROC

Arlene Hutton

Scene: Kentucky, Late Summer, 1942

Dramatic

Raleigh (twenties), a young man with epilepsy struggling to find his way in life.

*Raleigh suffers from epilepsy which has cost him a place in the war and on the assembly line. When the young woman he loves, May, reveals that she disdains his father because of his drinking and prefers the company of a pompous young preacher, Raleigh reacts with anger and hurt.*

RALEIGH: You don't know what being ashamed is.

[MAY: I feel very ashamed.]

RALEIGH: Ashamed is when you can't go off to war with your buddies. When you're going to be the only one left in town.

[MAY: *(Almost overlapping.)* I know that.]

RALEIGH: Ashamed is when you have the fits in front of your sergeant.

[MAY: *(Almost overlapping.)* I'm sure it is.]

RALEIGH: Ashamed is when you give up your own dreams to chase after something in a skirt and find out she's not worth running after.

[MAY: You're not talking about me.]

RALEIGH: Ashamed is when your new girl won't come to supper at your house because your daddy is a cripple.

[MAY: I said I was sorry — ]

RALEIGH: Ashamed is when you run into that girl a year and a half later and you realize what a stupid mule-headed old rooster you've been for ever seeing something in her in the first place. Ashamed is having to come home to a dirt-poor farm and feeling guilty about taking care of your mama and your daddy. And instead of going off to war having to go to Detroit to stand fifteen hours a day on the line in a loud, sweaty dark factory. Ashamed is when the factory doctor tells you you got ep'lepsy.

[MAY: You preaching at me?]

*(He is having the very beginnings of very mild convulsions.)*

RALEIGH: You better leave now. Better catch your train.

# MAN MEASURES MAN

David Robson

Scene: Macedonia, near the Kosovo border. The recent past.

Dramatic

Yuli (forties), a Serb fighting to rid Kosovo of ethnic undesirables. A murderer and a rapist.

*Yuli's band has just attacked, raped and killed in a Muslim village in Kosovo. Here, he shares his brutish insights into sex with a younger member of his group.*

YULI: I've had better. These days, though, your choices are limited. (*Lights rise on Agim, center stage. He clutches his journal.*) How did you like her? Older, but not so bad, huh? Let me tell you something, boy — a bit of advice: You will see a lot of punks your age going for the young pussy — pretty common, actually. The young ones have those fine, strong bodies — supple skin. Ah! But when it comes to sinking your stick, the older ones have some things going for them. Give us middle-aged bodies some credit. (*Stops combing.*) Do not tell me she was your first. (*Begins combing again.*) My advice? Get what you can now . . . Where the — How could I forget my fucking toothbrush? Of all the things. Oh well, what is use of brushing your teeth without good close shave to go along with, eh? (*Brief pause.*) Ah! Good bread, warm pussy. And a little money in our pockets to boot. Not a bad day all in all. (*Brief pause.*) If you had not convinced me to let her go we could have kept her for awhile, brought her along with us — good for a few days, you know? I think she would have liked it. But no! Mr. Sentimental. (*Mocking Agim:*) "We have to let her go, Yuli. We have to let her go." (*Brief pause.*) Oh well, I am being hard on you, aren't I? You are good boy, but you need direction. Not all that unusual at your age. What are you now? Seventeen? Eighteen?

[AGIM: Almost twenty.]

YULI: Twenty? You have got a young face. That is what it is — a young face. Anybody ever tell you that?

[AGIM: you have.]

YULI: I have. Sure. Be thankful, because when you start getting the creases — jowls too — you might as well kiss sweet youth goodbye. People used to tell me I had young face, but look at me now.

# THE MEMORY OF WATER

Shelag Stephenson

Scene: Here & Now

Dramatic

Mike (forties), a TV doctor who's just received some shocking news.

*When Mike's mistress, Mary, announces that she thinks she may be pregnant, Mike unhappily informs her that he had a vasectomy before he ever met her.*

MIKE: Look. I know you want a child, I accept that. I know you're furious with me for having a vasectomy —

[MARY: Five years and you never mentioned it, that's what I can't —]

MIKE: I don't want a child, Mary! I don't want a child. I can't want one just because you do. Love and paternity aren't indivisible in my mind. When I say I love you it means I like you, I want to be with you, I want to go to bed with you, it means all sorts of things but it doesn't necessarily mean three children and Sainsbury's every Saturday for the next thirty years —

[MARY: No, you've already got that —]

MIKE: I can't help what happened before I met you! You might not like what I'm telling you, but I can't lie to make you feel better. I never wanted kids in the first place. They happened and now I love them but I don't want any more. It's not because I'm cold or selfish — at least no more than anyone else is — it's that I feel sucked dry by what people need from me — patients, Chrissie, the children. You're where I come to be equal, I come to you because you're not asking to be healed. Some people aren't paternal. It's not a crime, I'm one of them. If you're a woman and you take care of your own fertility, nobody argues. Well, I've taken care of mine. I didn't have a vasectomy because Chrissie's ill, I had it for me. (*Silence.*) But obviously, you know, if you *are* pregnant, I'll stick by you.

# THE NEGRO OF PETER THE GREAT

Carlyle Brown

Scene: The Court of Peter the Great of Russia

Dramatic

Ibrahim (thirties), the adopted son of Peter the Great. African.

*Ibrahim has been recalled to St. Petersburg from Paris by the Czar. As he makes the long journey, Ibrahim recalls the happiness he found in Paris as well as his love for Mother Russia.*

IBRAHIM: Please. This is difficult enough. I can't stand good-byes. Usually I just go away. I was going to write. I hadn't the courage to tell you all until now. But I wanted to thank the Countess for her pure, spontaneous soul. Her passionate devotion and her boundless tenderness towards me, I shall never forget. When I first came to Paris, Korsakov and I only slept in carriages, going from one ball to the other. You see, I was born in Abyssinia, a land where the night air is too sweet to sleep in, and my brother Korsakov and I, we are Russians, and we Russians can dance forever. But it's difficult being a foreigner. You stand out. Everyone immediately thinks they know who you are. And once they see you, they will never accept anything else about you other than what they think they see. It was only in Countess Leonora's salon, that I found friendship, and a place to be myself, and not Le Negre de Czar. I will not dishonor my self with tears. These memories must last me for a long time. Perhaps forever. Memories to carry me on the long journey ahead. Memories to carry me through memories. Through France, the Austrian Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire, Saxony, Poland, and from Prussia, to the Russian frontier. And then on to St. Petersburg, a journey as long as it took to cross nearly all of Europe. It's just turning autumn now. The thick woods of birch trees along the river Neva are wearing their winter shadows, and in the orchards at Oranienbaum, the apples are falling to the ground. St. Petersburg. In the heart of my homeland, holy mother Russia, where they will welcome me like a prodigal son. Bring me the rest of my baggage footman.

## NO. 11 (BLUE AND WHITE)

Alexandra Cunningham

Scene: Suburban Connecticut

Dramatic

Brian (sixteen to eighteen), callous and sardonic.

*Here, an emotionally bereft young man reveals his secrets for wowing the young ladies.*

BRIAN: No, you couldn't, you bone, who would do that? The point is to establish that it's *her* and *you* against everyone else, all right? It's called divide and conquer, heard of it? If you don't want to know then don't fucking *ask* me, okay? She'll say, I thought the lax players just partied all the time. You say, Well, I come to these things because my friends throw them and it is kind of a team spirit issue and also I do occasionally enjoy partaking of the Brotherhood of the Grape, but after a certain point the scene grows old and I'd really rather just be home. *Writing.* And she'll go, Wow, really, what do you write? And you go, oh, just some *poetry*, it's really nothing. And she'll say it's not nothing, can I hear one, you're totally wowing her with the killer one-two of simultaneously being really sensitive to literature and also fucking built like a *warrior*, and so you lean in real close and probably take her hand and hold it to your heaving chest so she can see what it would have been like to have been in a clinch with an actual *Viking*, and you let her have it.

No! With a poem. What the hell is the matter with you? You let her have it with a *poem*.

Wanna hear the one I've been using lately? Listen up, scrote.

Oh terrible darling,

How have you sought me,

Enchanted and caught me.

See now where you've brought me —

I sleep by the roadside and dress out in rags.

Think how you found me;

Dreams wash around me —

The dew of my childhood, and life's morning beam;

My heart that sang merrily while I was young  
Swells up like a billow and bursts in despair.  
And the wreck of my hopes on sweet memory flung  
Are all that is left of the dream.  
You'll burn in my heart till these thin pulses stop;  
Your fragrance I'll drain  
To the last brilliant drop.  
The dream of my longing and wreck of my soul  
Dancing, inspiring  
My wild blood to firing  
Oh terrible glory  
Oh beautiful siren  
Come tell the old story again.

. . . I'm telling you, they hear that and like my Dad says about his old Camaro, "She starts right up!"  
Love and death. They're the keys, pal. They make it a whole new ballgame out there, and I do mean *ballgame*.  
No, I didn't write it. But who the fuck's gonna know that? Nobody knows anything anymore anyway, and even if they did, what are the odds that some dippy gash you meet at Eric Hanford's wake-and-bake is gonna be the one who does.

# SHERIDAN

David Grimm

Scene: The city of London, the end of the eighteenth century

Serio-Comic

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (forty to fifty), a playwright.

*Sheridan has given up writing to pursue pleasures of the flesh and philosophical indolence. When the idealistic young poet, Lord Byron, takes him to task for having abandoned his art, the older man makes the following reply.*

SHERIDAN: Oh, how all you eager aspiring writers love to spout ideals — How this is wrong and that is wrong and this is how it should be. But tell me, lad, what happens when you reach your summit — When you get what you wish for? All these hopes and ideals — What then? What happens when you wake one day and it's all there in your hand — be it a successful play, or a seat in government, or even love? What happens when you see the awfulness of the fact that reality can never live up to your dreams — That every striving leads to disappointment — That the world is a lump of shite. You see, I once believed as you do. Oh yes, I was full of the hope and anger of youth. Looking at you reminds me too much of what I once had. Looking at me, you're seeing your future. So look carefully, George, and tell me — What's the fucking point?

# SHERIDAN

David Grimm

Scene: The city of London, the end of the eighteenth century

Dramatic

William Pitt (fifty to sixty), Prime Minister of England.

*The king of France has just been arrested and Europe is on the verge of revolution. Here, Pitt awakes from a nightmare and endeavors to calm himself as he dresses.*

PITT: You step into the sun and at first the glare is enough to blind you — Committees, depositions, legislation, policies foreign and domestic, constituencies demanding to be heard. All around, the savage buzz of history unfolding in your blood. It is overwhelming — Like a fever. Avoiding history is avoiding one's own breath. In my nightmares, the world is cold steel awash in a sea of red. I fight. I fight. Ours is a country of infinite symbols — Stonehenge — The Magna Carta — The Chair of Kings sat in by William the Conqueror. These are the bindings of our national spirit. They must be upheld. My administration, like history, is built on strength. On the symbols that have shaped and conquered. Strength is a simple beast. It lives on a diet of other people's fear. History is infinite but fickle. My government is definite and driven. History doesn't give a damn what choice you make so long as you make it.

# SHERIDAN

David Grimm

Scene: The city of London, the end of the eighteenth century

Dramatic

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (forty to fifty), a playwright.

*Here, the melancholy playwright laments the happiness in his past with his young friend, Lord Byron.*

SHERIDAN: Sadness? (*Laughing.*) It's happiness one must forget. Memories of pleasures past have more venom in their sting than any deep inflicted wound. My youth was near delirious! A fairy book of charm and light and certainty. (*Silence.*) Have you ever experienced beauty, George? A beauty so intense and so unbearable it pains the heart to look upon? There are no words for it. No words that I could ever pen. I see her, you know. Eliza. Usually, it's just the train of a gown turning a corner. Or the tilt of a hat, just so, from behind. I'll think I've forgotten and be walking down a street and there she is in the folds and flutters of a lady's fan. My breath catches. I run up. I look. It's never her. And then I'll know once more that she is buried in the damp cold ground. She was my gem and I tossed her in the mud and there's no forgiveness in the world for that. Oh, what a mawkish parody of man I have become. I will confess, I've thought of putting pen to paper once again. I find myself wondering what it would be like to stand in Parliament and speak with deep conviction as I once did. But could my small and hollow words make any difference when I've lost what I believe? Now all that's left are the motions and gestures. What if there is nothing beyond them? What if there never was? What if it's all been emptiness behind a fancy show — A wicked play of words with no meaning and no heart?

# SHERIDAN

David Grimm

Scene: The city of London, the end of the eighteenth century

Dramatic

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (forty to fifty), a playwright.

*After half a carafe of wine, Sheridan remembers the quiet moments in the theater he shared with the woman he loved.*

SHERIDAN: Every Saturday night, after final curtain, we'd collect the candle ends — The hardened pools of wax on floors — The long and stiffened streams on curtains would be scraped off in a bucket — And then laughing, giddy, young, and thinking we knew better than the best of them, we'd run the buckets down the mills and have them melted into new ones. Always at four in the morning when the dew came — Always when the long and lonely shadows played across the empty cobbled streets — Always waking the candlemakers from sleep or lovemaking. Now the seat-cushions — the curtains — the creaking old wardrobes — Corsets and bonnets and mirrors and papers — A floor-board in the hall David Garrick carved his name on — The last time I ever made love to you was on a stairway which is now burning. The candles are melted, Eliza. All the wax is scattered.

# SIDE MAN

Warren Leight

Scene: Here and now

Dramatic

Clifford (thirties), a man remembering his father.

*Clifford's father was one of the last great jazz sidemen. Here, he remembers watching his dad play and mourns the loss of a great era in American music.*

CLIFFORD: When he's up there, blowing, he's totally in touch with everything that's going on around him. Ziggy bends a note, he echoes it instantly. A car horn sounds outside, he puts it into his solo, or harmonizes under it, a second later. I used to wonder how he could sense everything while he was blowing, and almost nothing when he wasn't. Now I just wonder how many more chances will I have to hear him blow. If I have kids . . . These guys are not even an endangered species anymore. It's too late. There are no more big hands, no more territory bands. No more nonets, or tenets. No more sixty weeks a year on the road. No more jam sessions 'til dawn in the Cincinatti Zoo. When they go, that'll be it. No one will even understand what they were doing. A fifty-year blip on the screen. Men who mastered their obsession, who ignored, or didn't even notice, anything else. They played not for fame, and certainly not for money. They played for each other. To swing. To blow. Night after night, they were just burning brass. Oblivious.

# SLOE GIN FIZZ

David-Matthew Barnes

Scene: Here and now

Dramatic

Marco (twenties), Latino. Sensual, desirable and never intimidating.

*Marco has spent his life in denial of his attraction to men. When he meets Christopher, all bets are off. Here, he bravely confronts Christopher with his feelings in a declaration of freedom.*

MARCO: I hate my life — and I've hated it for as long as I can remember. But I was getting by — I was good at pretending that I was happy. I was playing the role perfectly. And then, one day — two months ago to be exact — I'm at work — a job that I have to force myself to go to everyday — and I thought it would be like any other day. Bullshit with the guys, flirt with a couple of girls — keep everything safe. But then in walks Christopher — the new guy — all smiling and smelling good and showing interest in me and my feelings. And all of a sudden, it all made sense to me — the lies and the covering up and the denying — the fucking denying — for all of my life. Can you understand that? I have been lying for my *entire* life — but in you walked with the truth and the challenge — I saw it in you the first time that you spoke to me — you had what I had always wanted — freedom. Then I realized that I was attracted to you. I had to accept the fact that I wanted another man, that I desired him. Every second of every fucking day, I think about you — *constantly*. I think about what it would be like to hold you and touch you and kiss you and make love to you. I think about what it would be like to spend the rest of my life with you. Christopher, I came here tonight — because this is my last chance. I want my freedom — and I want it with you.

# SLOE GIN FIZZ

David-Matthew Barnes

Scene: Here and now

Dramatic

Christopher (twenties), eccentric, quirky. Slightly effeminate and always graceful.

*Marco has just come out to Christopher and declares his feelings. Here, Christopher expresses his sadness for the fact that we live in a society when men feel as though they have to pretend to be something they're not just to get along.*

CHRISTOPHER: Gay men are the worst when it comes to this whole theory of “acting straight.” It makes me sick.

[MARCO: But you don't care what people think. It's easy for you. I mean, with you, almost everyone can tell that you're gay.]

CHRISTOPHER: That's because confronting is better than conforming, Marco. I don't care about ridiculous expectations put on me by men. I am who I am and if someone doesn't like the fact that I cry at sad movies or that I like to slow dance or that I empathize with the emotional suffering of women, then fuck 'em. This is who I am. I like being a guy and I've never worn a dress in my life. If I want to be flamboyant — it's my right. If I want to be dramatic — then allow me to shine. It doesn't make me any less of a man. If I don't want to spend my life in a gym, pumping iron and popping steroids, hoping that I'll be thin enough or tan enough or big enough to capture the attention of some sleaze fuck barfly on a Saturday night in a dimly lit shit hole dance club — that's my decision. If someone meets me and because of the way I walk or talk or the way that I enter a room — they assume that I sleep with men — that's their own damn assumptions — not mine. I'd rather be me — imperfections and all — than to become something that other people want me to be. Just because a man is masculine doesn't make him any more desirable or attractive — if he's an idiot, he's still an idiot — usually it just means he has a bigger ego and a lot less intelligence. The fact that you feel that you have to act a certain way to survive in this world, it's the saddest thing I have ever heard. You are who you are, Marco. And I think you are beautiful, just the way you are.

# STANDARD TIME

Naomi Wallace

Scene: A holding cell

Dramatic

Working-class Man (nineteen), a young man who has just murdered his girlfriend.

*Here, a troubled young man does his best to explain why he shot his girlfriend.*

WORKING-CLASS MAN: I wanted her car because I needed to steal because I wanted (*Flips the coin, catches it.*) money because money is — yeah, they say — power and power is a garden, is a tree that never stops, is a field you can't get to the end of and I never had anything beautiful in my life. (*Flips the coin, catches it.*) But her. Flip a nickel. Catch it on your tongue. (*He does so.*) It's got a tang; that was her mouth.

*(He spits the coin out into his hand, studies it a moment.)*

And Tally's mouth made me think on money. Always there but not there. You could touch it but you just couldn't keep it. Every time I opened my hand it was gone. The money. The money I didn't have and her mouth, well, it was hers and it went where she went.

*(Lets the coin drop.)*

I couldn't keep track of it.

We were seventeen. Tally's car was the only thing that could stop and go in our town, and when Tally was mine it was our car together. It was a wreck but we rode it. Didn't have a backseat so we didn't need one. We threw down a sheet of plastic and piled it with dirt to keep the rear low so we could floor it. And the wind from the open windows took ahold of our throats and made us gag with the thrust of it. In through our mouths and out through our ass, at 85 miles per hour, blasting us clean.

*(Uncovers the saddle, sits astride it.)*

And one night Tally stole a saddle from a saddlery barn on the Pop-side of town and we strapped it to the roof of her car and while she drove, I rode, with the wind brushing my teeth into the kind of smile I couldn't make on my own. I was the Marlboro Man and I swept over that highway like I was sweeping plains while the other cars scattered like cattle in front of my wheels.

We were just kids. Kids. You know what that means? But we still couldn't stop being junk. That's what they called us in our hometown: J-town junk. And we didn't have a future cause we didn't have a dime but when we were driving we were nothing if not cold, hard cash, banking on the next turn to give us a spin and send us into America. Because that's where we wanted to be. Inside America. Where the sky is red and the heart is blue with the boast of it. And where your pockets are full. Yeah, where your pockets are full.

But that's where we couldn't get.

*(Gets off the saddle.)*

And then one day, it could have been any day just riding around wasn't enough because even the Marlboro Man needs some spare change. And my ass was getting sore from the speed of it all and down below me Tally was rolling up the windows 'cause it had started to rain and then one, two, three, the colors just washed out of me and I was an idiot on a wet saddle, tied to the top of a wreck and the grass was starting to grow up through the dirt in the backseat of the car.

And then. Well. And then that's how the story goes if it goes at all. I took a breath or two. Tally must have done the same and then we weren't. Girlfriend and boyfriend. She turned around. Took a step. I missed one and it was over. And we passed the way days pass and it was another season by then, somewhere between August and waking up alone and that was it: She was gone. Her mouth was gone. The money none of us had was gone.

Time passed. That's what they say. Time passed. And I got to thinking that maybe it wasn't time passing but me, and I didn't even know it.

Days and months and pieces of things, they kept on passing. And every time I looked in the mirror it was her mouth I saw on my face, instead of my own. But when I touched it, touched myself, she was gone.

And so one night, it could of been any night, I needed her car. These are the facts: I went to her house. I hadn't been there in months. I said: Give me your car. She wouldn't let me have it at first. Then. Well, then she did.

The order. Of how it happened. Well, that was out. That's been out ever since, but when I said give me the car she just said: *You used to say my name like whiskey, like a light switch. Like a key.*

I said: I need the car. Tally said: *You would cover me in leaves up to my*

*neck; you would never leave me.*

I said: This isn't about you and me. This is about ignition. This is about contact and speed and I need the car to get there by midnight. It's a lot of miles to drive but it's just up the road and the map's between my eyes and I know I can get there.

Tally kissed me then. Her mouth was cold like a piece of the river. And for a second I remembered: the books we'd opened at school, what we'd wanted for our lives, how a door swings open before it swings shut. And then she said. Tally said: We're already dead when I showed her the gun. And she was right.

I never got to the Five Star — You're going the wrong way! — Never got to the steal. She wouldn't let me. She wouldn't let me drive — You're going the wrong way! — She drove the car out into a field. (*Quietly.*) You're going the wrong way.

We were parked now just a few feet from the river. It had started to snow. It was August and there's no such thing as snow in August in our town and there never has been. But it started to snow. Tally got out of the car. I stayed inside. I watched through the windshield. She threw the keys into the river. And they were gone. I remember. I remember thinking. How big that car was when I sat inside it without her. How it would never move again. And all I needed was a little piece of cut metal, a thing that small was all I needed to turn the whole thing over, to start it up again. These are the facts: I got out of the car. Tally was standing there looking at the river like it was going to look back. She was covered in snow. I came up behind her. The snow all around us. The snow passing all around us like time and we stood still. I wiped the snow from my mouth but I couldn't feel my mouth. I touched my face but I couldn't feel my face. And I kept touching my face, trying to get the feel back into it. Tally, she said: *Yes.* Tally, with her back to me, she couldn't even see me behind her. She said: *Yes.* I wasn't touching her. I was touching myself. But she said: *Don't stop touching me.*

And then I didn't know anymore. I just had no idea. I stood there. Stood there in that spot like I'd been standing there all my life. In front of me the snow covered her hair. She raised her hand to brush the snow off her hair and I felt her hand on the back of my head. She wasn't near enough to touch me but I felt her hand on the back of my head. And I just didn't know anymore. I said I love you and I pulled the trigger.

I didn't want her dead. I didn't want. Her dead. How many times do I have to say it? I wanted to get there. I wanted to get there and lay down and rest with a big, hot sun inside my chest and never be wanting again.

*(Beat.)* I didn't want her dead. I just. Wanted the car.

*(He slowly, gently turns the saddle onto its back so that it lies upside down. He moves away from it and turns away. Then he turns back to look at the saddle, lying on its back on the empty stage.)*

Those are the facts. Those are the facts of love.

# SYNCOPTION

Allan Knee

Scene: New York City, 1911

Dramatic

Henry (forties), a meat packer who dreams of becoming a ballroom dancer.

*When his dance partner asks if he's Jewish, Henry makes the following reply in which he reveals a familiar immigrant's story.*

HENRY: Catholic? No. No, I'm not.

I'm a Jew.

[ANNA: I thought so. You seem like a wanderer.]

HENRY: Forty-two years. I'm not very religious though. I oughta be. I think of it sometimes. I work for a kosher butcher. We've gotta wear yamulkas — even in the ice houses, where the meat is stored.

I came to America when I was eleven. I worked first in a glass factory. I cleaned out the ovens. It killed the spirit. The last few years I've been involved with the radicals of Rivington St. Very vocal men. They too kill the spirit . . . The first time I truly came alive I heard Adeline Patti sing at the Academy of Music. It was an unbelievable experience. She had a voice that only angels could have matched. I didn't sleep that night. I couldn't get her out of my mind. Something touched me here. Sometimes even an organ grinder's music fills me with joy.

# THE THREE GREAT LOVES OF CHRISTOPHER J. TOMASKI

Patrick Gabridge

Scene: Here and now

Dramatic

Chris (twenties), a young man mourning the death of his sister.

*Here, Chris contemplates joining his sister in death, hoping to find the freedom he imagines she's found.*

CHRIS: And suddenly it's not such a big step. It requires only a small motion. Slight pressure. The glass is very sharp. Press a little harder and the skin breaks, but it's not enough to cut the vessel. The vein lurks, beneath, waiting. In case you ever make up your mind. Push a little deeper.

*(He presses the glass into his wrist, and holds it still.)*

Probe. Find it. For a second, it rolls, a last tease, avoiding. But it's clumsy, not fast enough to avoid the glass. It takes only an instant, and you're in. In. In. Now is not the time for second thoughts. Once the action has begun, it must be completed. What you have now is a pinprick. The blood stays blue, until you find the strength to draw downwards. Strength of will. Now is the moment to wish for a razor. A razor is the right tool, but a shard of glass will serve. Draw along the wrist, then wait.

[CHARLOTTE: You'll be happy.]

CHRIS: I can almost not comprehend the wait. The wait. How did she stand it? Thirty years, of preservation, of making sure that my skin stays intact, and now I have the power to undo. I am the one. The responsible party. The one.

[CHARLOTTE: Join me.]

CHRIS: I'll have my own secrets. But first there is an act of will. A final act of will.

[CHARLOTTE: To open and close a door. It's simple.]

CHRIS: It's simple. It is not as hard as it should be.

# THE TIME OF THE CUCKOO

Arthur Laurents

Scene: Venice

Dramatic

Di Rossi (forty to fifty), a man searching for love.

*When he encounters Leona, Di Rossi becomes attracted to her. Here, he makes his feelings known.*

DI ROSSI: You will never never find romance by being romantic. Never! Yes, I am using the right words. In English! I now very well what you wish. You come here, you ride in gondola, and you sigh: Ah Venice! So beautiful, so romantic! Ah, these Italians! So lyrical, so romantic, such children! And you dream: he is young, handsome, rich, witty, brilliant. A gondola of his own. A duke, or a count at the very least. And — unmarried. Well, I am a shopkeeper. Not handsome. Not rich, not young, not witty, not brilliant. No title: no gondola. And not unmarried. But, Miss Samish, I am a man, and I want you. But you? “It’s wrong, it’s wicked, it’s this, it’s that.” You are a hungry child to whom someone brings — ravioli. “But I don’t want ravioli, I want beefsteak!” You are hungry, Miss Samish! Eat the ravioli!

[LEONA: I’m not that hungry.]

DI ROSSI: We are *all* that hungry! For what do we live? Believe me, when there comes a moment out of time, something *sympatico* between two people — big small, middle-sized but *something* — you must take a chance on it. (*A moment.*) The noise in your head is so loud, Miss Samish. Be quiet. Let it happen. I want it to happen.

# TOO DIRECT

Jeff Goode

Scene: an audition

Serio-Comic

Kris (twenties), an awkward auditioner.

*Here, Kris enters the audition and becomes a bit too direct with the director.*

KRIS: Hi.

You probably don't remember me.

I mean, of course you don't, why would you?

But I was at a show you did, like, jeez, a year ago.

A friend of mine — Do you know Casey?

*(Tiny pause, no response, move on.)*

Right anyway. It was her idea.

I think she worked on it maybe, or she works here?

*(Tiny pause.)*

Never mind, doesn't matter. But so that's why I was here.

And they had that thing afterwards where everybody was just hanging out, and so that's where it was.

*(Looks uncomfortable.)*

Can I just — ?

*(Climbs down off the stage.)*

I hate being onstage.

But I heard you were having auditions and my friends were like "Go, go, you have to do this."

And so I don't know if this is weird or . . .

No, it is. It's weird, I know. It is, it's weird.

But the thing is — Can I just say one thing?

*(Moving a little closer to the director.)*

I don't know if you remember this, but there was this guy, the lead guy, you were taking to, big guy, I don't know his name.

And I don't know what he said or what you guys were talking about . . .

But you just went off on him.

You were just “And this, and this, and this, and this!”

And he was like, completely, had no idea.

And everyone was like, . . . wow.

You were just so . . . Confident.

You were like . . . on fire with it. It was amazing.

And I was just “Who IS that?!”

And I know this is stupid, and I know this isn't what you want to hear right now while you're doing all this, I know you're busy. But I'm not an actor, so I don't know how I'm ever going to even get a chance to even BE here just to say . . .

*(Looking the director in the eye.)*

I would give anything. To be here.

Right now.

Like this.

With you.

# TOUCH

Toni Press-Coffman

Scene: Here and now

Dramatic

Kyle (thirties), a man in terrible pain.

*Kyle's wife, Zoe, has been murdered by street thugs. Here, Kyle describes Zoe's last agonizing moments as they were told to him by her killers.*

KYLE: I talked to each one of them separately. Each one could have said no, but each one agreed to speak to me. Which I didn't understand at first, but now I think it was Zoe. Zoe was smiling. Zoe was telling me I am dying, Kyle. It's what my life is now. I'm dying. *(Kyle stops, and closes his eyes and breathes. He opens his eyes.)* The first one said no, he didn't notice she was smiling. He was young, still a teenager. *(Beat.)* She said if one of them would stay there with her until she died, she would like that. *(Beat, he can hardly say this.)* She would be grateful. *(Beat.)* Zoe hated to be alone. This kid was spooked by that. He told me he didn't know why, but he grabbed her purse and ran with it. He had killed before, but he didn't want to be there when Zoe died. So the other one stayed with her. He was closer to her age — mid-twenties. *(Kyle closes his eyes and breathes. His measured breath becomes more shallow, becomes panting. He opens his eyes.)* When he came into the visiting room, he sat down, rigid, and fixed his gaze on me. He didn't speak. *(He takes a deep breath, like he did then.)* I asked him if he noticed she was smiling and he said yes. *(Pause, like he's waiting for more, like he did then.)* I asked him was she scared and he said yes. *(Beat.)* But as she faded, she seemed less and less so. He leaned toward me, and said her smiling made him furious and he asked her what the hell was so funny. She said, "Funny?" *(Beat.)* He sat back again, straight in his chair. And he stared. He looked — right — through — me. *(Pause.)* I asked if she spoke my name. He said no. He said he didn't want to piss me off but she was "one weird chick." Because as she lay dying, she mumbled something about the stars. *(Kyle closes his eyes and breathes. He opens them abruptly.)* GODDAMMIT, KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN. KEEP THEM OPEN. *(Beat.)* She died. *(He breathes, but his eyes are open. He*

*becomes frenetic.*) I spoke to her murderer. I said to her murderer, whether or not there is life in some other galaxy, Zoe's huge heart notwithstanding, regardless of Triton's beauty, no goddamn matter how much she loved me or what shape Sagittarius is, she fucking died. He said you're crazy too, buddy. I banged the telephone on the Plexiglass separating me from him. I said did you touch her? *(He closes his eyes, opens them.)* Keep them open, Kyle. *(Beat.)* Did you touch her while she was dying? And there it was. He flinched. He looked at me. DID YOU FUCKING TOUCH HER? *(Beat.)* She — uh — she reached her hand out to me, he said. She reached for me. *(Beat.)* Yeah. I let her touch me. *(Kyle stops, cries, breathes, waits.)* I said —. I said —. We met in my physics class.

# THE TRESTLE AT POPE LICK CREEK

Naomi Wallace

Scene: A town outside an American city. A jail cell.

Dramatic

Chas (fifties), a jailer obsessed with his son's tragic death. Well-meaning but lost in the past.

*Fifteen-year-old Dalton has been arrested for the murder of Pace, a complex young woman who at one time was Chas's son's girlfriend. Here, Chas approaches Dalton in his jail cell in a first effort to break the boy's silence about the alleged crime.*

CHAS: On break. Thought I'd sit it out with you. The other guy, across the hall. He's looking for grass in his cell. Thinks he's a moose. Could be some other herbivore but every now and then he lets out this call but it sounds close enough to a moose. Yesterday, a bug. Some kind of beetle, I think, with huge claws. He used his arms like pinchers. Opening and closing them. Opening and closing. For hours. Wayne was leaning in to give him some grub and the next minute he caught Wayne around the neck. Almost choked him to death. While I was prying him off he's making this sound. A beetle sound, I guess. Sort of like . . .

*(Chas makes a "beetle sound.")*

Self respect: gone. Was the manager of the Plate Glass Company. A real Roosevelt man. Good to his men, though he laid them off. Then his head went pop one day and he started breaking up the plant. Glass everywhere. Wrecked half the place. Even the WPA says close it down. No one needs glass these days. Might want glass but they don't need it. Mr. Roosevelt, I say, want to buy some glass? Them up high's got the money to want. They don't have to go by need. What kind of a beetle was it, you think? Big pinchers. Opening and closing. How'd the visit go? I know your folks. Nice people. Sorry to hear your Daddy's still out of work. But who isn't? Well, I'm not. I'm still here. Could be somewheres else, like Spain shooting some whatyoucallem, but I might get killed and then bein' here looks better. I had a boy like you. You must have known my Brett at school. Big fellow. Fast runner? Moose's easier to identify. Distinctive. My break's

about up. So what do you think, kid? How many years do you think you'll get? Or will they hang you? When they hang you the last thing you hear is your own neck break. And if you got a real thick neck bone, a strong one, a young one, then it takes a while to break clean through, sometimes hours, and all the while you're dying you're hearing it snappin' and crackling and poppin', just like a stick on a fire. So what do you think?

# THE TRESTLE AT POPE LICK CREEK

Naomi Wallace

Scene: A town outside an American city, 1936. A jail cell.

Dramatic

Chas (fifties), a jailer obsessed with his son's tragic death. Well-meaning but lost in the past.

*By spending time with Dalton in his cell, Chas has become consumed with unhappy memories of his son, Brett, which he here shares with the nearly catatonic Dalton.*

CHAS: Now him over there, he doesn't know who his mother is. A turtle doesn't consider those things. Want to know how I know he's a turtle? (*He demonstrates, impressively, a turtle, moving its neck in and out of its shell.*) I know what you're thinking: could be a goose. I thought of that. But a goose doesn't do this — (*He moves his head slowly from side to side, then cocks his head to one side, opens his mouth and eats.*) A goose doesn't eat like a turtle. How you feelin, boy? What're you thinking? Still won't talk. Still won't talk. But they got it on record when they brought you in: Yeah, I killed her. That's what you said. Why didn't you lie? They don't have a witness. Four words. Just four words: Yeah, I killed her. But won't say why. Won't say how. What kind of a game are you playing? Well, they'll find out. They know about kids. I had a boy your age. Couple of years older than you. (*Beat.*) To think. He was just a kid like you. Scared of nothing. Yeah. Scared of nothing cause you are nothing. Half of you kids wanting to kill, the rest wanting to die. Ordering death likes it's a nice, cold drink and you're going to suck it down in one gulp and then get up and walk away from it. Right. Kids. Just want to eat, fuck and tear the ornaments off the tree. But only if you don't have to get out of bed in the morning to do it. The whole damn country's going to hell cause of your kind. (*Beat.*) You should have killed your own self instead. That's what they say. (*Beat.*) I loved my boy Brett. But I never could figure what he was. Something kinda small. Like a wheel, maybe. Something that spins in place in the dark. He had a gap in his heart. He was empty. I know; I was his father. Sometimes he'd ask me to embrace him. (*Shrugs.*) He

was my son. *(Beat.)* So he'd be here, in my arms, sniffing like a baby. But there was nothing. I was holding him. He was in my arms. But it was like holding onto. Nothing. *(Beat.)* What's it feel like to be that empty? *(Begins to take off his shirt.)* I'm going to have to hate you, I guess. There's not much choice.

*(Chas stands over Dalton. Dalton is shivering and does not respond. Chas puts his shirt around Dalton.)*

CHAS: I'll bring you home some dinner. You've lost weight. Hard not to in here.

# THE UN-XMAS STORY

Jeff Goode

Scene: A hillside

Comic

Shepherd (twenty to sixty), a man who has been visited by an angel of the Lord.

*Here, a disgruntled shepherd describes his fateful encounter with an angel.*

SHEPHERD: Okay, stop me if you've heard this one. Angel walks into a bar. Angel of the Lord. Glory shone round about, the whole deal. Walks into a bar. Bartender goes, "You just fly in from the coast?" Angel goes, "Yeah, how'd you know that?" Bartender goes, "Your arms look tired." But seriously, so this Angel — Angel of the Lord, right? — looks around this bar. Little dive bar, 'bout a mile out of town. You take the south road, you can't miss it. Looks around the bar, the Angel. Looks around. What do you think? Table in the corner. *Shepherd*. Just sittin' there. Minding his own business. Isn't hurtin' nobody. Angel walks up to him. Angel of the Lord. Walks up to the table. Glory all around. Shepherd is like, "Now what?" Angel turns around, motions toward the door. Boom! Heavenly host. Praisin' God in the highest, peace on earth. You know the drill. Bartender goes, "Hey! Let's see some I.D." Angel goes, "Aw, c'mon!" Bartender goes, "Lets *see* some *I.D.*" So the host is all over at the bar going through their wallets. And it's all, like, out-of-state and "this doesn't look like you" and "left mine at home" juvenile kind of shit.

[ANGRY VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Hey!]

SHEPHERD: So the Bartender's thinking, "Sorry I asked." And the Angel is like, to the shepherd, "Whaddaya say we get outta here?" And the Shepherd is like, "What?? I just got here. I got a table. You know how hard it is to get a table in this place?" And the Angel is like, "Yeah, but . . . I gotta talk to you a minute." And the Shepherd is like, "So talk." And the Bartender goes, "Hey! This one's under age." And there's this host — one of the host — can't be more than 15, swear to God. Busted, totally. And the Angel's like, "No, wait, no wait." And the Bartender's like, "You think I'm playin'?" So the Angel, to the Shepherd, is like, "You wanna step out-

side?” And the Shepherd is like, “Oh, so now you’re gonna kick *my* ass?” And the Angel is like, “No, no, it’s not like that.” And the Bartender is like, “Out! Out!” And he’s chasin’ this little host around the bar. Got a broom. Chasin’ the little guy around. And he’s running into tables, knocking over chairs. Complete mess. And then he ducks behind the bar. Which you *do not do*. Bartender is like, last straw, goes ballistic, “That’s it! Everybody out!” (*Shepherd looks irritated.*) . . . So now I lost my table.

[ANGRY VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Get on with it!]

SHEPHERD: I’m just sayin’.

[ANGRY VOICE: (*Offstage.*) All right, already!]

SHEPHERD: So this Angel — Angel of the Lord — goes to the Shepherd. Shepherd still a little pissed.

[ANGRY VOICE: (*Offstage.*) All right!]

SHEPHERD: Goes to the Shepherd. “Fear not.” (*Shepherd rolls his eyes.*) Goes, “I bring you good tidings of great joy.” Shepherd is like, “Yeah, it better be good.” Angel goes. “For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord,” right? And the Shepherd is like, “Yeah? So?” And the Angel is like, “Whaddaya mean, ‘So?’” And the Shepherd is like, “What do you want me to do about it?” And the Angel is like, “The Savior, man! You gotta check it out.” And the Shepherd goes, “I’m on my break.” “You’re on your break?” “I’m on my break. I stopped by for a quick drink. I get a table at the bar. I *had* a table at the bar. Now I don’t got a table at the bar. I got 20 minutes before I gotta be back at the herd because I picked up a double from Joab because he needed off to take care of his taxes. So now I’m gonna be up all night with the sheep.” And the Angel goes. “Don’t worry, I’ll watch the sheep.”

# THE UN-XMAS STORY

Jeff Goode

Scene: A hillside

Comic

King (forty to sixty), a Wise man from the east.

*This king's been on the road a while as he here relates to Joseph.*

KING: You know how hard I worked for this?

[JOSEPH: Nuh uh.]

KING: Three years! For three years I've charted stars, planets, phases of the moon. Went through decks and decks of tarot cards. Sacrificed God knows how many perfectly good goats, just to crosscheck my findings with the entrails. Oh and God, the tea leaves! *There's* six months of my life I wish I could have back.

[JOSEPH: What can you tell from tea leaves?]

KING: Nothing! The whole field is complete horseshit. I don't know what I was thinking. The stars are cosmologically linked to the four elements. There's a basis in science, at least. But what does a cup of tea know? But it just goes to show how badly I wanted this. How desperately I wanted to be the first. Or one of the first. The top five at least. To be at the first to meet Him. To welcome Him into this world. This God-forsaken desert world.

[JOSEPH: Yeah. World kinda sucks.]

KING: But now, after coming thousands of miles out of my way . . . Because, could he be born in the East and save me a trip? Nooooo! It's gotta be Bethlehem. City of David, house of David, line of David. *And* it's in the middle of winter! So after tracking this stupid star across mountains and deserts. And more mountains and more deserts. And then this last desert which is the one that really pissed me off.

[JOSEPH: Yeah, you don't want to come in from the East. You gotta take the first exit around to the South.]

KING: I go through all that, just to be the first. Not even the first, because Gaspar figured it out, too. And he told Balthasar. And whoever that other guy is. (*Confidentially.*) But I don't think he knows. I think he just saw

us packing and was like, “Dude! Road trip!” So he came along. So, okay, maybe I’m third if I’m lucky. So we’re almost here after three years and 3000 miles, right? And the *day* before we get here, this fucking Angel just goes and tells everybody! Everybody in town knows. The place is a madhouse. There’s Shepherds running around looking for him who don’t know shit. They didn’t have to do trig equations. They didn’t have to design and construct their own primitive telescope out of bamboo. They didn’t have to translate vague Jewish prophecies from the original ancient Hebrew. And I think they stole my camel. Or maybe not. I shouldn’t accuse. But I got down for one minute to take another reading on this stupid star and I can’t because the town is packed, and everyone’s bumping into me, because they’re all running around looking for him, and I can’t get a good read. So he could be anywhere. He could be in any one of these barns. And I turn around . . . Gone. My camel’s gone. And Gaspar and the guys are gone. And I got Shepherds rubbing into me. And I *know* some of ‘em are doing it on purpose. Because anything’s gotta look sweet after you’ve been doing the menage á flock for three months. And now my agoraphobia is starting to kick in. And I just had to get out of there.

# WHEN THEY SPEAK OF RITA

Daisy Foote

Scene: Tremont, New Hampshire

Dramatic

Jimmy Reeves (nineteen), a young man in love with his best friend's mother.

*Here, Jimmy awkwardly declares his love to Rita.*

JIMMY: Don't you say that. Why do you think I come over here all the time?

I can't stop thinking about you. When I'm at work with my Dad, when I'm at my house, when I'm in my truck. When I'm sleeping, when I'm sleeping I'm dreaming about you. And you're a star in my dreams, Mrs. Potter, just like you're a star when I'm awake, a bright, shining star.

*(A beat.)*

It's your family, they're the ones making you feel this way. They don't appreciate you. I see the way Warren yells at you, I see it and I can't stand it. It's all I can do not to punch him out.

*(A beat.)*

I love you, Rita — I love you.

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