

A play in three acts by
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The Jag

Automatic Moving

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The Jag

Characters

TYLER

A filmmaker

BRIAN

A retired investor

CORI ELIZABETH

A student

NARRATOR

Setting

A house in the Catskill mountains, New York, USA. Autumn.

Act One

Scene One

Curtains are down. Theater is black.

Wagner's Parsifal overture plays.

After a while, a NARRATOR recites an email via an offstage microphone. The NARRATOR can be anyone but not one of the actors. It should be read as if it was a piece of evidence presented in court by a neutral party.

NARRATOR HeatherMaycumber@gmail.com
TylerJenkins12345@gmail.com
Subject: Upstate?

Hey, Tyler, sorry to get back to you so late!
(Been swamped with a million things, it's been a wild month.) To answer your question:
Absolutely! You're always welcome to use my place. I may be in Morocco for the end of October. I'll be back early November. But yes, please use it. There is a guy renting the upstairs. Pretty interesting guy. Made his first million before turning twenty-five. Drives a Jag. Total stock market wizard. (Don't worry, he's rarely there.) He's nice though, and I told him about you and he seems interested in what you're up to. (Did I mention he's an avid supporter of the arts!) Maybe someone who could help you out. We'll see. Anyways, let's plan this out and hopefully I'll get to see you when I return, and get a look at that magnum opus of yours! Best, Heather.

Hammering is heard.

Scene Two

Curtains rise to the interior of a light filled, vaulted, rustic country home. It is stylishly decorated with very nice things: sheepskins, beautiful pottery, Warhol prints, \$200 art books, a lute hanging on the wall. We can tell that this high level of taste and quality is the basic reality of the house. It is a “nice house.”

But there are signs of recent neglect. In the foreground center, a pizza box and other trash—apple cores, rolling tobacco, sheets of a screenplay in progress—sprawl on the surface of a high-end modernist coffee table surrounded by a couch and two seats. Behind this, a very nice dining table with matching chairs. Something vintage, well-designed, well-maintained, perhaps Norwegian—again, covered with an uncharacteristic mess.

On the left wall, a row of windows looking out at a leaf covered lawn and a forest in autumnal blush. Tucked in front of the closest window, a small desk and iMac computer. At the farthest window, another larger desk, strewn with papers, coffee cups and bread. Nearby, an automatic coffee maker. In the back left wall, an open doorway leading to a small kitchen. In the right back wall, a door leading to a vestibule and a small bathroom. Next to right hand wall, stairs to the upstairs loft/balcony, which faces us, and is stacked with antiques and moving boxes. On the back wall of the balcony, a door to an unseen bedroom and bathroom. This balcony space is in the process of being decorated with quaint oil paintings and etchings, items at odds with the fresh and contemporary taste which reigns throughout the house. In the absolute foreground, in front of the coffee table, is space for a fireplace. We do not see it, but we see the tools (lift, poker, shovel) and can assume it is there. In “front” of the fireplace, a pretty rocking chair made of branches. On the floor, someone has set up a makeshift bed of blankets and pillows. An absolute mess: dirty crusty socks, rolling tobacco, books, old orange juice carton, beer bottles, etc.

Birds chirp in the surrounding woods. Maybe a dog barks now and again. Parsifal continues.

A well groomed, handsome-ish (at least not ugly) middle-aged man, BRIAN, stands among the stacks of things on the balcony, hammering a nail against the back wall. When he is done, he unwraps a small oil painting and holds it up: a portrait of an old, white-haired, humble looking tradesman, circa 1940.

After searching around for some screws, he goes into the unseen bedroom and shuts the door. Then we hear another door open and then the slap of a toilet seat. As this goes on, we hear a bicycle approach from outside the house.

The front door slams. A gangly young man, TYLER, enters, carrying a tote bag. He gasps for air, catching his breath, while muttering to himself.

TYLER Bitch, bitch, muthafucka. Bitch bitch, mutha fucka. Appa appa apple head. Applemutha fuckin' head!

He claps.

TYLER *(pulls gallon of milk from the tote.)* Apple head? Apple mutha fuckin' head... Apple head?

He throws the tote bag down on the large desk, pushing aside the jug of milk. He sits and picks up a sheet from a screenplay and reads it quickly. Throwing it down happily, he pours himself a cup of coffee and continues murmuring. He presses a key on his laptop, activating a text-to-speech program, and simultaneously plays a message on his phone. The laptop and phone compete for his attention yet he does not choose between the two for a while.

COMPUTER *(generic computer voice.)* Forest. Night. Sounds of the festival can be heard faintly in the distance. Carl and Fern make their way through quietly. Carl. I'm just gonna go I think.

MESSAGE *(voicemail.)* Hey, Tyler. It's Allison.

TYLER *Fuck, bitch.*

He turns down the computer volume and turns up the message.

MESSAGE Met you at the coffee shop last week? Just wanted to let you know I'm having a party tonight. If you wanna come by... just a dinner potluck thing...

TYLER *opens the milk and pours some into his coffee.*

MESSAGE Um... yeah. So... uh, if you do come, bring some wine... a-a-and... oh, yeah, it's the house down at the end of Maple Lane... actually.

He pushes the milk jug away again while turning the volume on his computer back up, knocking a stack of books and papers off the desk. He barely notices.

MESSAGE You probably don't know the streets yet... I'll just text you the address and if you feel like coming by, come by!

COMPUTER Hey. Smell my fingers? Why? They smell like lemons, man. Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha. Lemon man? Come on, dude. Lemon fingers boy. Meet apple head. Man.

MESSAGE You can Google-map it. Ok... see you maybe tonight- oh! And bring Heather with you. I don't know if she's in town... yo-u-u-u... should ask her. OK. See ya.

TYLER In yo dreams... bitch! Bitch. *Bitch.*

He coughs loudly, still out of breath from the bike ride. Then he starts typing, unconsciously proclaiming and muttering throughout. The computer keeps reciting what we understand to be a screenplay as TYLER types.

TYLER Muthafucka. Bitch bitch, mutha fucka. *(pause.)*
Apple head. Applemutha fuckin' head! *(pause.)*
Lemon man? Lemon fingers boy.

Suddenly, he stops. Parsifal has faded away and voices can be heard. TYLER closes his laptop to silence the computer voice. He looks around in confusion, as if the new voices were spirits fluttering around in the ether. He quickly realizes that Parsifal was not a soundtrack to his inner world, but a fitting prelude to a National Public Radio (NPR) discussion emanating from BRIAN's stereo, which is stationed at the top of the balcony.

TYLER *(mouthing.) Fuck!*

His gaze lands on some the boxes and antiques stacked at the foot of the stairs. He realizes with horror what is going on.

TYLER *(mouthing.) Fuck, fuck...*

Moving as quietly as possible, he tries to clean the coffee table to clean whatever he can before Heather's new roommate appears. As he lifts up his tobacco pouch, pizza box and rotten apple cores, we hear the upstairs toilet flush.

TYLER *(mouthing.) Fuck!*

He rushes to consolidate what's before him. The upstairs door clicks open. TYLER winces. BRIAN appears.

BRIAN Tyler?

TYLER Oh! Hi! *(pause.)* Are you... ?

BRIAN Are you Tyler?

TYLER Yeah. And you're...

BRIAN I'm Brian. Heather's new roommate. I got here this morning.

TYLER Oh. *(pause.)* How'd you... ? Did you take the bus? I didn't see your...

BRIAN No. I drove. Do you know Heather's friends, Tom and Tracy, down the road?

Still breathing heavily, TYLER fumbles with his rolling tobacco. Each time BRIAN turns around, TYLER picks up something else and attempts to hide or organize it.

TYLER No. I... I just got up here about a week ago.

BRIAN *(hanging the painting.)* Well, they're in New Zealand on vacation. They have an empty carport. Heather suggested I keep it there. Apparently that large oak by the bridge drops a lot of debris.

TYLER Yeah. It's... it's... *(deep, phlegmy cough.)* It's ug, uh... old. Probably... *(cough.)* as... o-old...

He breaks into a coughing fit. BRIAN turns and watches with quiet concern.

TYLER *(clears throat.)* ...o-old as this house.

BRIAN *waits patiently.*

TYLER Excuse me. Sorry, I'm a little outta breath. *(pointing out the window.)* I just rode up that hill. *(pause.)* I'm used to riding in Bushwick. It's all flat there. But this is... this is... *(pause, at a loss.)* Hard work.

He breathes a shaky breath. BRIAN waits for a moment.

BRIAN I guess that's why we come to the mountains.

A pause. TYLER is put off.

TYLER (*nodding.*) I guess it is.

BRIAN studies him for a moment, then walks to the right side of the balcony to rifle through a box. TYLER watches for a moment, then snaps out of it and moves to his desk to neaten up. They both attend to their respective tasks. NPR, as always, drones on.

BRIAN (*holding up another painting.*) You know, my father used to say that the most telling paradox of life is that a smooth downhill ride means a hard uphill ride later on. (*looking at TYLER.*) There's no way around it.

TYLER Hmm.

TYLER wonders if this is true.

BRIAN Do you know what a paradox is?

TYLER Ha ha. No, I just... I'm thinking. Is there no way around it?

BRIAN squints. TYLER moves to the center of the room, getting closer to the man who stands an entire level above him.

TYLER No. Say, instead of riding back from town up that hill...

BRIAN There'd be other hills.

TYLER *Smaller hills.*

BRIAN *(hanging the other painting.)* Whose cumulative slope would equal that of the initial hill you tried to avoid.

TYLER *is stumped for a moment.*

TYLER Suppose I never returned. *(pause.)* Stayed in town for a while, and found another town, downhill. And then another one, downhill from that one?

BRIAN *(hanging the painting.)* Hmmm.

TYLER I could start a cult! *(excited.)* “The down-hill people”!

BRIAN *is not amused. Not offended, but not amused.*

BRIAN *(lowering the radio.)* I’m sure you guys would end up getting stuck in some valley somewhere. Eventually.

BRIAN *makes his way down the stairs, locating a pair of pliers and a small bottle of water.*

TYLER *(to himself.)* Yeah, or a drainage ditch or something. I’ll be eaten by my followers. And I’ll be forced to admit your dad was right. *(thinking.)* Maybe I’ll just move to Holland. It’s all flat there. No thrill of downhill cycling, but no torturous uphill climb. Moderate place. Moderate people.

BRIAN Or you could just stay in Bushwick.

BRIAN *smiles a little mischievously, then sips his water. He’s now downstairs.*

TYLER Yeah, but... is prostitution legal in Bushwick?
Or... marijuana?

Pause.

BRIAN Are you a prostitute?

TYLER No! Ha ha. I just... ha ha!

BRIAN Oh. Good.

TYLER No, I was just making a dumb joke. I'm not a
pot-smoking prostitute. I don't smoke at all,
actually... pot. (*pause.*) And I do like it here
in the mountains.

BRIAN *heads back up the stairs and proceeds to pry an errant
nail out of the wall of the upper staircase.*

BRIAN So what do you do, if not a prostitute?

TYLER "If not a prostitute." (*pause.*) For a living?

BRIAN Yes.

TYLER I'm a carpenter, I guess. (*pointing to the rocking
chair.*) I built that rocking chair for Heather.

BRIAN Really. It looks good by the fireplace. Is
that... (*searching.*) Old wood?

TYLER Yeah.

BRIAN *heads over to left of balcony to fetch another painting.
TYLER waits a moment, then proceeds speaking with renewed
energy.*

TYLER But the reason why I'm here: Heather invited
me up here to finish my screenplay.

BRIAN I think she mentioned that. You're a screenwriter.

TYLER A filmmaker. But I'm writing the screenplay. Huge project I've been developing for a long time...

BRIAN Really. Almost finished?

TYLER Mmm hmm. Now I just gotta "get it made"! Ha ha. *(pause.)* That's really half the battle, in film. *(low.)* Financing. Really the hard part.

BRIAN I imagine it is. *(pause.)* Are you planning on seeing any of the films in the film festival?

TYLER Mmm. I dunno.

BRIAN Supposed to be some interesting stuff. I'd like to check it out.

TYLER Yeah. I'll look into it. *(pause, sighs.)* So. You're just here... doing... ?

BRIAN Well. I ran a company for a long time. Worked really hard. Put a lot of energy into it. Now I've taken that... energy... back out. Ha ha. And, uh, putting it into other things.

TYLER Like what?

Finished working for a while, BRIAN comes back downstairs. TYLER looks thoroughly ashamed of the mess he's made.

BRIAN Various, er... projects. Mostly cultural.

TYLER Oh, here? Or... ?

BRIAN Here? Yes. The animal sanctuary. The local playhouse. The Open Space initiative.

TYLER Uh, huh.

BRIAN The domestic violence shelter.

TYLER Oh, there's a domestic violence shelter in town?

BRIAN Yes, there is. Once an old shoe factory. They renovated it a few years back.

TYLER That's great. (*pause.*) A shame there's even a need for it, but... you know...

BRIAN Yes. A very nice place. (*pause.*) And the poet's cafe is one of my other projects. Heather sparked my interest in that one. Have you been ?

TYLER Not yet. Not yet.

BRIAN It's wonderful place. You should check it out.

BRIAN *takes a seat at one of the coffee table chairs.* TYLER *sits at the desk chair and faces BRIAN.*

TYLER's *eyes nervously scan the space as they talk.*

TYLER How do you know Heather?

BRIAN (*picking up an apple core and placing it on the pizza box.*) I spent a lot of time looking for a suitable home up here. Some mutual friends introduced us. I got really excited about the lifestyle she's been cultivating.

TYLER The lifestyle?

BRIAN Well, I think of it as a communal life. Different people, coming together. Exchanging ideas... working, cooking. Sharing experience. And uh... uh... values. You know. Balance. Community.

TYLER nods as if these points go without saying. BRIAN gazes around the house. TYLER watches him silently.

BRIAN It's such a nice house.

TYLER It is. It's really nice.

A long silence. Then TYLER turns to his desk and opens his laptop to resume writing. Meanwhile, BRIAN passes him and walks into the kitchen. The computer voice picks up where it left off.

COMPUTER Smell my fingers. Why? They smell like lemons, man.

TYLER winces. Pressing buttons, he tries to silence it, to no avail. Finally, he shuts the laptop cover, and turns to BRIAN, embarrassed. But BRIAN is not listening. He's standing at the center of the kitchen, looking at the floor, deep in thought.

TYLER looks at his closed laptop, a little dejected.

BRIAN What do you think of this floor, Tyler?

TYLER *(turning.)* It's nice. Is that pine?

BRIAN Yes. It is pine. *(nods, thinks.)* You know, I saw it right after it was installed. I have to say, it was much nicer. You could see all the grain and...

TYLER Well, pine floors are... Well. Supposed to be rustic...

BRIAN Yes? She had talked about getting some wax for it... or something. Never got around to it. It was never sealed and now it's covered with footprints and... I mean, it's just... a shame. Don't you think?

TYLER *rises as if to justify not wanting to do anything about the floor by giving it a good look.*

TYLER I think... a lot of country kitchen floors...

BRIAN *turns to hear what he has to say. This makes TYLER nervous since he has nothing to say.*

TYLER Well, you know. They just kind of even out over time.

BRIAN No. This is not rustic. This is a mistake.

TYLER *scowls to himself as if being teased by a bully.*

BRIAN I think I'm going to scrub it, wash it and seal it before she returns next weekend.

TYLER Seal it?

BRIAN A couple coats of Poly.

TYLER Really. Heather hates VOCs. I mean *hates* VOCs...

BRIAN As do I. I've picked up some VOC-free poly at the hardware store...

TYLER Is there such a thing VO-free... C... Sorry... *(concentrating.)* VOC free p... ?

BRIAN I'll start it this afternoon. Make sure you get everything that you might need out of here by nine in the morning tomorrow. Food...

TYLER I'll just go out and eat.

BRIAN Well, you know. And anything else we might need.

TYLER nods as if eager to do his part in the operation. BRIAN crouches and picks at the floor with his fingers. TYLER watches in awe and disgust.

TYLER Do you need any help?

BRIAN No. With a roller, should be a breeze. The can gives us an eighteen hour drying time between coats. (*rising.*) It think with this being a soft wood... all the foot traffic, I'm going to say two coats.

TYLER Oh, but the can exaggerates...

BRIAN *thinks to himself, muttering.*

TYLER I've done a lot of poly floors.

BRIAN So if I clean it today... and ...
(*checks his watch.*) Eighteen....

A silence. TYLER hangs his head.

BRIAN So, six o'clock Sunday night, it'll be ready for us to walk on. We can move the stuff back in the next day.

BRIAN *passes TYLER and makes his way to the stairs.*

TYLER It could dry faster. This autumn's so dry.

BRIAN It is quite dry, isn't it.

Silence. This does not seem to alter his six o'clock verdict.

BRIAN What are your plans for dinner?

TYLER Hmmm. I think... I think I'm going to meet someone.

BRIAN OK, well... I started a chicken soup in the crock pot. Should be ready by this evening. I may be gone? But... help yourself.

TYLER Thanks. I'm gonna go outside for a couple minutes. *(pause, earnestly.)* I'll clean up when I get back.

BRIAN *(grateful.)* Thank you, Tyler.

TYLER *exits through the side door.*

BRIAN *ascends the stairs and returns to work. Outside the window, we see TYLER smoking and rifling through his pockets. After a while, he peers in, scanning the room. He quickly enters, picks up his cell-phone off the coffee table and exits.*

TYLER *(voice only.)* Hey, Alison. It's Tyler. *(pause.)*
Ye-a-a-ah. Sounds awesome. What time is it at?
No, no, no... Awesome. I'll be there. Heather?
No. Heather's gone. But I'll be there. For sure.

BRIAN *brings up the volume on the stereo. NPR drones on. He goes back to tidying up his area.*

Curtain.

Scene Three

Light from a crescent moon faintly highlights the objects in the dark house. A very dim, warm track light illuminates the painting of the old man in the balcony. Otherwise, it is dark.

Everything is moved out of the kitchen and stacked neatly on the main space floor. Stools, pots, dishes, snacks, tea and coffee etc. A chair with a note taped to it blocks the kitchen entrance. The note reads, "Please wear clean socks". A clock ticks. The wind gusts outside. But otherwise, all is quiet.

A rattling engine. Headlights strafe the interior. Car doors slam. Bottles clink. After a while, sloppy footsteps advance towards the house. Laughter. TYLER and CORI ELIZABETH's voices speak in "old English/Irish" accents. Mock theatrical.

TYLER (voice.) I'm sure there's a route! There has to be! Not around the world, but just long enough to live a comfortable life.

CORI (voice.) I doubt it...

TYLER (voice.) You could be my- my Mary Magdalene.

Front door opens. A bang in the vestibule. Chuckling.

CORI (voice.) What are you doing!?

TYLER (voice.) I figure we could start at the top of Mount Everest. And the-the-the only rule? No pedals!

More banging.

CORI (voice.) What are you... *Fuck!*

The vestibule door opens and CORI enters. She's dressed in jeans and light sweater. TYLER spills in behind her, swinging two beers. They are drunk. As CORI looks around, TYLER keeps talking.

TYLER And then... where is Mount Everest? Tibet?

CORI *(drops the accent.)* Fuck, it's cold in here.

TYLER *flicks on a standing lamp.*

TYLER Mary?

CORI *(resumes accent.)* I don't know.

TYLER Let's say India. We go through Nepal. And...
and I figure we'll end up in New Delhi.

CORI And then what?

TYLER Well, we'll be old by then. *(pause.)* We'll switch
to rafts and follow the ocean currents.
Like turtles.

CORI *(befuddled.)* "Turtles"?

TYLER "The Drifters". That's what we'll call ourselves.

CORI *shivers and looks around herself.*

CORI *(drops the accent.)* Driving a car feels like
drifting.

Offended, TYLER also drops the accent.

TYLER That's not the point. Energy is expended... even
with a car. Especially with a car. What are you
crazy? The oil? The labor? The.. the...

CORI (*mockingly.*) And you have to get a job to get a car.

TYLER (*flicking on another lamp.*) Hmm. And that too.

CORI Well, you do live in the country now.

TYLER What does that mean?

CORI You need a car.

TYLER (*turning on another light.*) I don't "live" here. I'm here to finish my screenplay. I'm an artist in residence.

CORI is hurt that he would not think of living up here but she does not say it. Turning from the light, TYLER sits and cracks open a beer. As he hands it to her, he notices her sullen expression.

TYLER What's your problem?

Silence.

CORI You really didn't know I was up here?

TYLER (*in the jocular, half-serious tone of his first lines in scene one*) I did not follow you up here. (*pause, flicking his wrist*) Bitch!

She rolls her eyes. He opens his own beer, then looks up.

TYLER (*a little confused.*) Sorry. (*pause, with renewed energy.*) How should I know you moved in with your aunt upstate to go to nursing school? I didn't know your aunt lived up here. (*pause, more to the point.*) I didn't know you even had an aunt.

CORI I told you about her many times.

TYLER And I did *not* expect you be friends with someone like Allison.

CORI Why not?

TYLER Cause she's... (*thinking.*) Boring? Uh... uh... in-insufferable?

TYLER *chuckles.* CORI *looks down sadly.*

CORI Well, I'm not friends with her, really. She invited me and... I had nothing to do.

TYLER *nods and chugs his beer.* CORI *studies the nice objects on the house.*

CORI So who's this girl you've been living with?

TYLER She's not a girl. She's a woman. She's more of my benefactress, actually. If such a thing is possible in these shitty times.

CORI Is she pretty?

TYLER It's not like that.

CORI *turns to him and smiles knowingly.*

TYLER She's ugly.

CORI *snorts and spits out her beer.* TYLER *watches with a happy smile. He gives her a second to clean up, then continues in a warm, flirtatious way.*

TYLER How would I know you were up here? You unfriended me. We don't have a single friend in common. You have no internet presenc...

CORI (sadly.) No. We don't.

TYLER *sighs, as if embarrassed, then walks to her and gently holds her.*

TYLER My friends are pretentious. That's a realization I've had this year. Shallow and false. (warm and genuine.) I've never felt so alive as I have been with you.

CORI *takes in this statement with some reservation. A silence.*

CORI Do you still talk to... ?

TYLER No.

CORI Does she hate me?

TYLER Who knows. I don't talk to her. She *also* unfriended me.

CORI *sits on the couch.*

CORI Well. I'm not gonna fuck you.

TYLER I didn't say you were. (pause.) But what does that mean? Ever? Or... ?

CORI I'm just not going to...

TYLER Tonight.

CORI Yes.

Silence. TYLER *kneels before her.*

TYLER Do you hate me?

She considers this for a moment.

CORI Kind of, yeah.

TYLER I'm sorry.

Silence.

CORI It's OK.

TYLER But you hate me.

TYLER *waits patiently while studying her face. She looks down.*

CORI I just don't wanna feel like I was being.... naïve.

TYLER No...

He reaches out and holds her hand.

CORI What do you mean, "no"? I wasn't being naïve?

TYLER It was crazy. It was insane. I mean, you can't...

She looks up a little hopeful. TYLER goes silent.

TYLER You're so beautiful.

She watches him for a while.

CORI I can't what?

TYLER You can't judge yourself. Or me based on what happened. I mean, it was too fast. Too... too... murky. Wasn't it? (*pause.*) I mean, you said it yourself.

CORI It was... sloppy. Is what I said.

TYLER Exactly. How could either of us have seen straight?

She sadly turns her head away from him, thinking. TYLER waits patiently and eagerly.

TYLER And now it's not sloppy. Or murky. I'm *free*. I'm not with anyone. (*pause.*) Wasn't that what this was about? That we could be ourselves?

She nods.

TYLER Well, now I'm free! No more... Natalie. No more... arbitrary social, uh... conventions. Petty... myopic discussions... about things that don't matter. Mindless... mind-numbing, soul sucking... commitment... uh. Obligations. I'm *free*.

CORI is partially offended since she wants a committed relationship. She wants values and commitment.

CORI (*shaking her head for comedic effect.*) And you want me to fuck you.

TYLER (*resuming his old English accent.*)
I'm a mountain man now, Mary.

She smiles, laughs a little and consents to give up on serious discussion. They kiss. She wraps her legs around him, and he kisses her more than feels her up. A few moments, then she pulls his hand away.

CORI Can you make us a fire, mountain man?

TYLER moves to the front of the stage to make a fire in the fireplace. CORI notices the rocking chair.

TYLER You like it?

CORI It's nice.

TYLER You should bring it home and give it to your aunt.

CORI Whose is it?

TYLER It's mine. Well... I made it for Heather.
But I'll make her another one. I'm serious, you should take it.

CORI moves to look closer as TYLER goes to his desk to get a lighter. He fiddles with his laptop. After a minute, we hear Joni Mitchell's "Green" emanating from the tinny speakers.

CORI Hmm...

TYLER What.

CORI Is it finished?

TYLER Yeah.

CORI looks at the arm rests and the dowels that hold them up.

CORI These joints are loose.

TYLER Loose?

TYLER moves to the foreground and watches her, a little protectively.

TYLER It holds, doesn't it?

CORI I guess. *(pause.)* Some of them are fine, but...

She pushes the arm rests and the whole chair squeaks. TYLER looks annoyed.

TYLER They're fine.

CORI Why don't you pull them out and sand them so they fit... ?

TYLER I *know* how to make a joint, Cori. It's just...

CORI It's just what... Tyler?

TYLER The way it is.

TYLER *moves to the fireplace and does the actions of building a fire (arranging logs, paper).*

CORI *gets up and looks at all the books.*

CORI So it's *not* finished.

TYLER Do you ... *not* like it?

CORI All I'm saying...

TYLER I'm not going to waste my time... *obsessing*...

CORI It's not obsessing to put heart into something.

TYLER "Heart"? What do you mean, *heart*?

She thinks for a moment.

CORI My father taught me that you should put heart into everything you do or it's not worth doing at all.

TYLER *considers this statement for a moment. This statement confuses, threatens, and enrages him.*

TYLER You don't think I put heart into it?

She shrugs, taking a seat on the couch by the coffee table.

TYLER Making rocking chairs is not why I was put on
this earth. I'm an...

CORI So don't make rocking chairs.
Make something else.

TYLER That's what I'm *trying* to do. I'm trying to make
a film... but... unfortunately! I need to survive.

*He stares at her. CORI opens a nice looking book set out on the
coffee table.*

TYLER I mean, I...

CORI I don't wanna argue, Tyler.

Silence. TYLER sulks and makes his way to his laptop.

TYLER (*low, to himself.*) Goddamnit. What is it with
people's *dads*?

CORI What?

TYLER Nothing.

CORI Are you ever going to make that fire?

TYLER Yes.

*He suddenly turns. We hear a faint squeak in the wind. TYLER
whispers and CORI copies.*

TYLER What was that! (*turns down the music.*)
Did you hear something?

TYLER *squints through the window.*

TYLER I think it's Brian.

CORI Who's Brian?

TYLER Heather's roommate. Remember I told you about him?

CORI No.

TYLER NPR? Antiques? Cologne?

She shrugs.

TYLER I swear he said he'd be gone tonight.

CORI Is his car here?

TYLER No. He's afraid it's gonna get crushed by a tree... He parks it in a garage down the street. It's a Jaguar.

CORI shivers. TYLER scornfully goes to the front door and calls out softly.

TYLER Hello? Hello?

Nothing. He returns.

TYLER That's the luxury of being rich. You live the rustic lifestyle of old with all the modern comforts. The Jag. The rotten tree. The money. The fucking... *communal lifestyle.*

CORI Is he rich?

TYLER Yeah. He's a millionaire.

CORI puts down the coffee book and thinks.

CORI Can we stop whispering then?

TYLER Yeah.

CORI Is there any wine?

TYLER No.

CORI Food?

TYLER *is gone.*

CORI wanders down the stairs and looks at some of the books and paintings on the right hand wall. She seems genuinely interested in the beautiful things. But something else is on her mind.

The clock strikes twice. She moves to the kitchen and reads the note on the chair. She takes off her shoes and enters the dark space. Not finding the light switch, she takes out her phone and lights the way, disappearing behind a corner. We hear the fridge open and shut.

After a while, she comes out of the darkness with a box of Honey Nut Cheerios and TYLER's gallon of milk. Running footsteps and the front door slams.

TYLER *(loudly, old English accent.)* He's not here!
God that feels good! He's like a thorn!
(gripping his chest.) A thorn in my heart!
(pause.) Hey! Do you have any weed?

CORI *(pouring a bowl.)* No. What does he do here?

TYLER *(sitting at his desk.)* I have no idea what he does.
He just exists. He just is.

CORI Sounds enlightened.

CORI *eats Cheerios while TYLER sits at his desk, playing dance music on his iTunes. They don't look at each other throughout the following conversation.*

TYLER He's not! He just... *tinkers* all day. I was supposed to have three days to myself. To write. He's in here all day... hammering... and hanging shit... *endless*.

CORI (*with a mouthful*.) You know, if he's rich... maybe he could hire you.

TYLER To do what?

CORI Carpentry?

TYLER Maybe he could hire me to lick his asshole.

CORI Or that.

TYLER *finds the right song, sits back and fiddles with his screenplay.*

CORI You know, Allison was talking to that guy Matt about getting him to weed her yard. I think she pays eighteen an hour. She lives right down the street. You could walk to work... ?

TYLER I hate Allison.

CORI But you're broke.

TYLER What am I gonna do with eighteen dollars?. (*shakes a pile of papers in the air*.) I need to *write* is what I need to do. This is... this is insane.

He rises and walks to the center of the room.

TYLER You know what the most fucked up thing is?
I could do this film on what his car is worth,
Cori. His fucking car. I mean...
(*grabbing the air.*) Does it not terrify you?
I mean, the upper class in this the era?
Have absolutely no... *sense* of cultural
responsibility. You know? All they fucking do,
apparently, is watch HBO. Listen to Ted Talks?
Watch pornography? (*turning to CORI.*)
And buy shitty art. If they even buy art.
I mean, who is manning the ship here? Is what
I wanna know... I mean who's *responsible*... ?
(*noticing her consumption of Cheerios.*)
What are you doing!

CORI I took my shoes off.

TYLER No. What are you *eating*?

CORI Nuttin' honey.

TYLER "Honey"? I can't call you sweetie, sweetie... ?

CORI You *can't* call me sweetie. Nuts and honey,
dickwad.

TYLER Dickwad? Ha ha. (*softly.*) Nuts and... honey
nuts? (*jumping up.*) *Cheerios!*?

CORI (*mouthful.*) Shoes!

TYLER *rushes to the edge of the kitchen.*

TYLER Was that box open?!

CORI No?

TYLER (*taking off his shoes.*) Aw, fuck, Cori, *fuck!*

CORI Chill out.

TYLER Those are his, those are *Brian's*. Means I gotta ride into town tomorrow and get more!

CORI (*shrugging.*) It's a downhill ride. Can I keep eating?

TYLER *sighs.*

TYLER (*sighs.*) Yeah. He's probably in the city anyway-- wait. He's... the floor. Nine a.m. Where the fuck is he?! (*pause.*) Can we go to your place?

CORI You're not sleeping over.

CORI *moves away.*

TYLER I know.

CORI How are you gonna get back?

TYLER Cori, come on.

Ignoring him, she picks up a small object from a little table.

CORI What is this?

TYLER (*taking it to inspect it.*) A wishbone? Oh, yeah. He made chicken soup today.

CORI (*taking it back.*) Tyler. Wanna make a wish?

TYLER (*whispering.*) Can I sleep over?

CORI So shortsighted. (*firmly.*) No. Definitely not. Not now.

TYLER I'm sorry. (*taking the bone.*) OK. Let's wish.

Each holding an end of the bone, they look into each other's eyes.

CORI We could have anything we want. *(pause.)*
 Seriously. We could have anything.

TYLER I know.

They look deep into each other's eyes. They are consumed with intent. About to break the bone, TYLER stops.

TYLER No. Wait. I'm sorry.

CORI What?

TYLER Why did he leave it out here?

CORI Who?

TYLER Brian. He saved it.

CORI What, is he gonna wish... with himself?

TYLER I don't...

CORI Is he gonna wish with you?

TYLER I don't know. But we shouldn't break it.
 He obviously left it here for a reason. I'm sorry.
 (trailing off.) A box of Cheerios is one thing..
 But a whole chicken just for a single bone?

He looks at CORI again, obviously a little embarrassed.

CORI He's gonna wish with you, isn't he?
 (looking at the bone.) Ha ha. That's why this is here. Ha ha. Late one night? Knock on your door... "Tyler?"

TYLER Cori...

CORI “Would you like to make a wish with me?”

She laughs to herself.

TYLER Cori, would you shut up?

CORI What are you gonna wish for?

TYLER I already wished on this wishbone. With you.

CORI But you didn't break it.

TYLER Does that matter?

CORI Of course it matters. You could wish all day and night and...

TYLER Breaking a chicken's collar bone will make it come true? You are naïve. *(pause.)* Sorry. OK. If he demands that I wish with him... I'll wish that...

CORI What?

TYLER *(holding her.)* If I tell you, it won't come true.

CORI Can you... ha ha ha... give me a *hint*.

They fervently kiss.

CORI Go make a fire.

TYLER *pulls away, flushed.*

CORI Where's your bed?

He points to the mess of pillows on the floor.

CORI Jesus. That's your bed? No wonder he hates you.

TYLER Hates me? What makes you think he hates me?

CORI Because you're sleeping on the living room floor of his country home.

TYLER thought that maybe it wasn't obvious to others that his existence in this house might be crossing certain boundaries. Now that he knows it is, he is embarrassed.

TYLER This is Heather's house... and she invited me here, and...

CORI Do you pay rent?

TYLER You think he hates me? Seriously.

CORI I would.

TYLER You *do*, remember.

CORI (*kissing him.*) Let's go to Heather's bed, then.

TYLER No... wait.

She holds out a joint and pulls him along.

TYLER Too fast.

CORI Too fast?

TYLER You're the one who said you wouldn't fuck me.

CORI And now I want to.

TYLER Why?

CORI Because I saw something in your eyes just then... as you held that chicken bone.

TYLER Do you think he sees me as a parasite?

CORI Tyler...

TYLER I'm an... I'm a fucking...

CORI Let's go to Heather's...

Silence. TYLER *looks to BRIAN's room.*

CORI He's not here.

She watches him, looking disappointed.

CORI *(sighs.)* Listen, I'm gonna...

TYLER No, no, no. Don't go.

CORI Then stop thinking about this guy!

TYLER It's just that... he said he was gonna urethane the floor at nine a.m. tomorrow morning, and it's like three o'clock in the morning!

Silence.

CORI Go check his room then.

He nervously looks up at the balcony.

CORI Would that make you feel better? *(pause, softly.)*
Rainman.

Shaking his head, he climbs the stairs, then hovers silently outside of BRIAN's door, listening. He comes back down.

TYLER OK.

TYLER *tears off his clothes and clumsily reaches for CORI. She pulls away.*

CORI This is weird. And it's cold.

TYLER I'll make a fire.

CORI *(gathering her things.)* I got school in the morning. *(sharply.)* Sorry about the Cheerios.

TYLER School?

CORI Yeah.

He slouches, looking disappointed.

TYLER Why do you wanna be a nurse, Cori?

CORI Because I want to *help* people... Tyler. Is that too... "conventional"?

TYLER No. *I'm* sorry about the Cheerios.

CORI So do you live here now?

TYLER *thinks for a second.*

TYLER Yes. I do.

CORI So give me a call. Take me out to dinner. This is a nice house but it's not very comfortable.

TYLER OK. *(pause.)* What's your number?

CORI *rolls her eyes.*

TYLER She made me erase it.

CORI Maybe I'll refriend you.

TYLER When?

CORI You should call Allison. You'll need a job if you're going to live up here.

TYLER Can I get a kiss?

CORI Next time. Things feel murky again.
(looking around the house.) For some reason.

She leaves. Outside, her car starts and chortles away. TYLER thinks for a while. Then he resolutely climbs the stairs and throws open BRIAN's door.

TYLER Motherfucker!!!

He reemerges onto the balcony and loudly sighs. He kicks over an antique can. Then he picks it back up, and looks around.

Curtain.

Scene Four

Theater is black. A single spot falls on CORI ELIZABETH, who stands in front of the curtain to stage left.

Curtain rises.

TYLER, in his underwear, sits on his “bed” by the fireplace, smoking CORI’s donated joint while poking at the fire. Warm light flickers over his skinny, ungroomed form.

On his desk, the laptop is open, silently looping the typical Mac swirling screensaver. A warm light is on in the kitchen. Upstairs, the dim track light over the painting of the old man is still on. The clock ticks. The wind has calmed and everything feels at peace.

Facing us, CORI recites.

CORI Looking into those green eyes, you know fate brought you back together. But when she said it, she suddenly seemed far away. Like every other mute, dumb, sentimental American...

Unconsciously picking at a scab on his elbow, TYLER rises and walks to the kitchen.

CORI “Put heart into everything you make.” *(sigh.)*
Absurd. Absurd. Don’t question what you do.
Only worry how you do it. And do it well.
Slave mentality. Only a CEO could gain from such a moral code. An abusive father.

After grabbing the box of Cheerios and munching a few, TYLER looks to the balcony and thinks for a while.

CORI A stock market wizard.

He lays the Cheerios box on the dining table, then quietly heads up the stairs. As CORI continues reciting, TYLER inspects the antiques crowding the balcony, as if trying to get a sense of what BRIAN is like.

CORI I don't want to build chairs. I don't want to build chairs. I don't want to spackle walls and install IKEA cabinets. I don't want to entertain every dumb conversation that enters my space. I want to do what I need to do. I want to reveal. Reveal the truth behind things.

TYLER finally pulls off his scab and studies it. Then he places it on the banister. His gaze turns to the old man on the wall.

CORI To make the world meaningful. Not this opaque, dull and cynical trap, but a glowing... vibrant song. Blue and green and pink and orange. Vibrations of laughter. And tears. Like her eyes when I told her I loved her. One year ago.

Trying to get a better look, TYLER pulls the painting off the wall and studies it.

CORI I want to share that with the world. And I'd like to share that with her. But... does she know? Or care? Does the world know? Or care? Nursing school? *Nursing school? (sigh.)*

Footsteps, then the front door opens. BRIAN appears, looking tired and dressed in formal evening wear, carrying a bag of take-out. TYLER jolts. He hurries to put the painting back. Meanwhile, BRIAN takes his shoes off and carries his food into the kitchen. The fridge opens. TYLER fails to hang the painting and ends up abandoning it on a chair. Just as TYLER tries to escape down the stairs, BRIAN steps into the main space. TYLER retreats, panickedly looks around, then slides into a nook behind some antique trunks.

BRIAN *climbs the stairs, mounts the landing, and walks to his bedroom.* TYLER *crouches motionless. Just before entering his room, BRIAN stops and listens, as if hearing a mouse. Then he continues on and shuts the bedroom door behind him.*

CORI You are alone, Tyler. Alone. There are people around you. They talk to you. They look at you.

TYLER *slinks down the stairs like a cat. As if by instinct, he heads straight to Heather's room. He sends a sidelong glance to BRIAN's door, then enters her room.*

CORI But no one can see what you see. Or feel what you feel. And that might always be the case. *(pause.)* Is this life, then? This... alone-ness. *(pause.)* Oh. Cori. If only I could hold you. If only I could lie with you tonight.

Curtain.

Act Two

Scene One

Curtain down. Theater is black. Mellow jazz plays. We hear someone working on a little maintenance project outside: screw gun, wood scraping.

NARRATOR HeatherMaycumber@gmail.com to
BrianDaniels@Briandaniels.com
Subject: Fireplace/mice.

Hey Brian. Sorry to hear about the smoke and... fire? (I'm still a little confused. Was there actually a fire?) A log rolled out on another occasion and left some black marks on the floor. Maybe this is what you're talking about. I'll take a look when I get back. But the screen is really inadequate. Maybe we can buy a new one. Or maybe you and Tyler can figure out how to fasten it to the stones. Isn't there a drill that drills into stone? We'll figure it out. And I think you're right about mice getting into the kitchen through that old dryer vent. Maybe you can enlist Tyler's carpentry skills to close it off somehow. I know nothing about that stuff and I appreciate all the handyman work. It puts my mind at ease to know you guys are holding down the fort. Anyways, enjoy your time upstate. And give a big hello to Tyler for me. Best, Heather.

The screwing has stopped and we now hear wood being stacked.

NARRATOR Oh. The landlord's name is Paul. I don't have his number on me, but his office is right in town. You could walk in and sign the lease today if you felt like it. As for paying the twelve months in advance, I'm sure he'll cut you a deal.

Scene Two

As the jazz gives way to NPR's "Morning Edition," the curtain rises to another crisp, light-filled autumn day. The occasional thud and clack of wood being stacked is heard, and we can occasionally see, through the left hand windows, BRIAN stacking wood against the house. NPR continues low throughout the scene.

Inside, the messes have all been cleaned. BRIAN's move-in is nearly complete. All the art is placed. All the boxes put away. A few sentimental objects hang from the balcony: an old-fashioned wooden sled, snowshoes, an antique gun. More things have been removed from the kitchen. Food is now stacked on the dining table. The kitchen floor glistens with polyurethane.

After a while, TYLER emerges from Heather's room, dressed in his boxers and a luxuriant woman's oriental silk nightgown. Sniffing the air, he grimaces. He opens a few windows, then grabs the box of Cheerios from his desk. He munches a handful while staring at the urethaned floor in disgust.

A few moments pass before he notices a large box of things. The name "TYLER" has been written on it in Sharpie marker. He picks it up and examines the contents. Then looks around suspiciously, as if to see if he's being watched. Then he casually drops the box to the floor.

*TYLER opens his computer and checks emails. He clenches his fist like Macaulay Culkin in *Home Alone*.*

TYLER Yes!!! (pushing a key.) Friend...
 (in a "gay" accent.) Request... accepte-e-e-ed!

He types a little, then stands up and continues munching Cheerios. He glances at the glistening kitchen floor and shakes his head. Then a notification sound brings his attention back to the computer.

TYLER Ha ha. O-o-oooh, Cori. Cori, Cori, Cori, *Cori*.
 Never let me down. (*typing.*) Be-cause...
 I-i-i-i... want... to talk to... you.

He presses return. A brief pause. Another notification sound.

TYLER O-oooh. 646. That's what it... 646. Not 718.

He shakes his head with a smile, and picks up his phone to dial.

TYLER (*singing in tune of "Three Blind Mice."*)
 Six four six. Six four six. Ta da da da da...
 da da..dada... six four... s-i-iiiiix.

Enter BRIAN, dressed in a wool flannel, looking flushed from outdoor labor. TYLER stops dialing and hums casually.

BRIAN (*buoyant.*) Hello, Tyler!

TYLER Hi? (*pause.*) Hi.

BRIAN (*smiling.*) That's from Heather.

TYLER Oh. You spoke to her?

BRIAN Yes. She emailed me finally. (*pause.*)
 We should talk about the fireplace.

TYLER Yeah, I didn't expect you back and...
 I thought...

BRIAN Well, you should expect me back at anytime.
 I do live here.

TYLER Of course.

BRIAN Let's just try and keep the screen on when we
 use it from now on. I'll go and get a new one at
 Lowes. This one's is a piece of shit.

TYLER Yeah.

BRIAN Great. Thanks.

BRIAN *disappears into the downstairs bathroom and pees. TYLER listens to the urine stream. Then he suddenly remembers something. In a flash, he removes the oriental bathrobe and searches the box marked "TYLER" for his button-down shirt. BRIAN continues speaking from the bathroom as TYLER frantically put on his shirt.*

BRIAN (voice.) I saw a couple films last night at the festival you may be interested in.

TYLER Oh, really?

BRIAN *opens the door and speaks while drying his hands. TYLER casually buttons his shirt.*

BRIAN Both about musicians. One was a documentary made by the grandson of Charles Ives. The composer. Have you heard of him?

TYLER Yeah... the "Concord Sonata"?

BRIAN *pauses.*

BRIAN Well, I had never heard of him. Pretty interesting figure. He ran a large insurance firm and composed avant-garde music during the summer.

TYLER Was it any good?

BRIAN I can't quite tell. Some of it I liked. Some of it was too dissonant for me.

TYLER No, was the movie any good.

BRIAN Oh, yes. It was *interesting*. And the other was a very low budget French project called: *The DJ's Daughter*. And I didn't like that one as much.

BRIAN *goes to the vestibule to retrieve his drill.* TYLER *focuses on his computer, pretending to work on his screenplay.*

TYLER (*confused and amused.*) *The DJ's Daughter?*
Like a music DJ?

BRIAN Yeah. DJ... uh... DJ. (*walking back in.*) I forget his name. But uh, he was very big in the techno world. Had a lot of problems. Alcoholism. Opiate addiction. Anger issues.

BRIAN *takes a seat at dining table opposite from TYLER's desk.* TYLER *swings around and faces him.*

BRIAN But his *daughter* went on to make... music of her own.... but he... (*yawns.*) He ended up stealing the rights to her songs... a big court battle ensued.

TYLER Weird.

BRIAN I think it was a little overdone. But the Ives picture was good.

TYLER Maybe I'll check it out. Although, I have to confess. I'm not a not big fan of documentaries.

BRIAN Hmm. So you do more, narrative work?

TYLER Well? I... yeah. I guess you could call what I do... "narrative" work? I'd like to think... of my work... as... falling in a space... between...

TYLER *loses focus. It seems to him that BRIAN has glanced at the box of Cheerios that CORI opened. Silence.*

TYLER Sorry about the Cheerios.

BRIAN The Cheerios? What about the Cheerios?

TYLER My girlfriend. Ate some of them. Last night.

BRIAN *considers this with some confusion.*

BRIAN You have a girlfriend?

TYLER Well, not... (*sighs.*) It's complicated.

He pauses and looks to BRIAN. Then as if having nothing else to do, TYLER scoots to the dining table and continues in a very serious manner.

TYLER I was with this girl Natalie. For a long time? Superficially, we were into the same things. Read the same books. Had the same friends. Similar political views. She was pretty and amiable, and my friends and family loved her. But then, I met this girl, Cori Elizabeth, who I was deeply attracted to. Deeply.

BRIAN *nods and seems to comprehend this type of woman.*

TYLER She was different. Wild. And impulsive. Fiery. (*looking directly at BRIAN.*) Undereducated, but unpretentious. Smart... in a very, uh... (*rubbing his fingers together.*) Earthy way.

BRIAN *watches. TYLER feels like he is being judged.*

TYLER To cut a long story short, well, although I'm ashamed to admit it, Brian...we, uh... we had an affair.

BRIAN *raises his eyebrows. Obviously, an affair is not to be taken lightly in his world.*

TYLER It was wonderful. Holding her hand was wonderful. Making love to her was wonderful. (*drifting off.*) Looking into her eyes...

TYLER *briefly gazes into a distant paradise. BRIAN is intrigued. TYLER snaps out of it.*

TYLER We were gonna move away together and live the way we really wanted to. But then I got scared and ended it as swiftly as it began. (*pause.*) Am I being crass?

BRIAN I hope you're being honest.

TYLER Very honest, actually.

TYLER *looks down, wondering why he divulged so much to who is essentially his landlord. BRIAN watches the younger man with some sympathy.*

BRIAN What were you scared of?

TYLER Huh?

BRIAN Well, what prevented you from living up to what you truly wanted? I mean, she was what you wanted, right?

TYLER (*looking up.*) Oh. I dunno. I guess. (*sigh.*) My intuition scared me. You know? (*pause.*) It didn't... uh... (*searching.*) *correlate* to what society wanted from me. What my family wanted. What I thought I should be doing. You know?

BRIAN *(knowingly.)* Sure, yeah.

Silence.

TYLER So after Cori, I got back together with Natalie. And of course, things fizzled out there, too. *(sigh.)* I feel bad... but... she's better off. And I've just been alone since. Working. Thinking. I thought I would never see Cori again, I thought I missed my chance. But as fate would have it, Cori Elizabeth lives up here in the mountains with her aunt, goes to nursing school, and works at a coffee shop. And we've just started to hang out again.

BRIAN That's wonderful, Tyler.

TYLER It is wonderful. I feel blessed. *(looks down at Cheerios.)* And like I said, Cori is a wild and impulsive girl. *(smiling sentimentally.)* And she took your Cheerios, Brian. Nothing I could do about it.

Silence. BRIAN *smiles knowingly.*

TYLER I'll get some more when I go out.

BRIAN *(rising.)* I got those Cheerios for all of us. Same with anything in the fridge. *(firmly places his hand on the box of Cheerios.)* Community is something that both Heather and I see as important. Crucial, even, to fulfillment in life. If I can speak for her in her absence.

TYLER She would echo that statement. And I know her pretty well.

BRIAN *takes a seat on the couch and opens the book that CORI was reading the previous night.*

BRIAN How *do* you know her?

TYLER She's my friend's older sister.

BRIAN Were you... uh... ?

TYLER Was I?

BRIAN Did you and she... ?

TYLER Did we?

Silence.

TYLER Did we date?

BRIAN (*suddenly embarrassed.*) I just... thought that
the two of you might be...

TYLER No. Ha ha ha. No. *No way.*

TYLER's *reaction satisfies* BRIAN.

BRIAN (*pause.*) OK.

Silence.

BRIAN (*rising.*) Well. I should, uh... finish cleaning up
outside.

TYLER Do you need help?

BRIAN No. I think I got it.

BRIAN *exits outside, looking slightly more upbeat than before.*
Still pretending to work on his script, TYLER sneaks glances
through the window for a while.

Then TYLER picks up his cellphone and dials a number while humming “Three Blind Mice.” He waits until CORI answers.

TYLER Hey, honey! (*pause.*) It’s me, yeah. How are you? (*pause.*) You’re at work? And you picked up? Wow! (*pause.*) When do you get off? (*pause, laughs.*) I didn’t say “how do you get off?” I said, “when” ...

Outside, a very loud leaf blower starts.

TYLER Cause I wanna take you out to dinner, that’s why! (*pause.*) No. You fly, I’ll buy. (*pause.*) You drive, I’ll... (*searching for something that rhymes.*) Um... buy. Yeah. Yeah. Hold on...

TYLER gets up and closes the windows to block out the sound of the leaf blower.

TYLER He’s fucking... *blowing* leaves. My roommate. (*pause.*) He came back the other night, after you left. I finally got a fire going. Finally getting some writing done. He comes banging on my door, he’s like... (*pause.*) Heather’s room? (*pause.*) She doesn’t care. Anyway, he’s like, “Tyler did you leave the screen off?! I just put out a fire in the living room!”

TYLER pours himself a bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios.

TYLER A log rolled out. It was like... a *little* smoky. He’s fucking crazy.

Holding the bowl of dry Cheerios and considering milk, TYLER looks to the kitchen, then to the kitchen floor.

TYLER Fuck. (*pause.*) See, this is what I mean: he won’t let us walk on the floor until six o’clock tonight. Because the... “can” said so.

He puts the phone on speaker and set it on the dining table. Then he bends down to feel the kitchen floor.

CORI *(voice, speakerphone.)* Can't you wait?

TYLER I need milk, Cori!

CORI *(voice.)* You're a baby, Tyler.

TYLER *(turns to phone.)* I love you. *(looks into kitchen, almost stoically.)* I can't eat dry Cheerios.

TYLER *glances outside, then pauses. He quietly scampers into the kitchen, leaving the phone behind.*

CORI *(voice, to customer.)* We don't carry ketchup, I'm sorry. There's hot sauce. *(to TYLER.)* Where do you wanna go tonight? *(pause.)* Tyler? *(pause.)* You there? Tyler.

TYLER *reappears with his milk, and slides into his seat.*

TYLER Yeah. I'm back.

CORI Where do you wanna go... ?

TYLER *takes the phone off speaker.*

TYLER Uhh... whatever you want. *(pause, pours the milk.)* Sounds good. *(pause.)* I'm really excited. *(pause.)* Yeah. I'm gonna write for a couple hours. Then go work for Allison. Yeah! Twenty an hour. *(pause.)* Then I'm gonna come back. Take a shower. And take you... *(putting the cap on the milk.)* Out.

The leaf blower stops. NPR is heard again. Phone in one hand, TYLER starts slurping his cereal, then stops. He rises and stares out the window for a while.

TYLER *(coughs.)* Sorry. *(sitting back down.)* No. It's not gonna be like the other night. I was on edge. *(serious, slurping Cheerios again.)* But... Didn't you feel something? Like something... *(pause.)* Yeah. I did, too. And that's why I asked. *(pause.)* It felt good. *(pause.)* Yeah. And tonight... I won't be so... distracted. *(pause)* Oh yeah. *(smiling lasciviously.)* We'll use my bed. *(pause.)* Heather's bed. *(pause, knits his brow.)* Jealous? Of sleeping in somebody's bed? *(pause.)* He should be happy I'm not on his floor, I think...

TYLER *sighs.* Again, he puts the phone on speaker and places it down. The sounds of CORI's busy cafe fill TYLER's space as he slurps BRIAN's Cheerios. Almost as if he's another customer in the cafe. TYLER stares out into space in thought.

CORI *(voice, to customer.)* No. All the highchairs are being used. *(pause.)* Fifteen minutes?

TYLER *walks to the far window to watch BRIAN. CORI doesn't speak for a while. Only customers talking, dishes clanging, NPR droning, the leaf blower blowing—an insane morass of sound.*

CORI *(voice.)* I can put you in a booth if you want. *(pause.)* Let me find out, hold on. Hold on. *(pause, to TYLER.)* Hey. I should go.

TYLER *eagerly walks backs to the table and picks up the phone.*

TYLER I think you're jealous.

CORI *(voice.)* What are you talking about?

TYLER The only reason I'm sleeping in Heather's bed?
Is because he stunk up the house with noxious
chemicals!

CORI *(voice.)* Sorry?

TYLER And now... I have the windows closed because
of the leaf blower. I... *(laughing a little.)* I...

CORI *(voice.)* Sounds dangerous.

TYLER That's what I'm just realizing... I think he may
be shrewdly trying to kill me!

CORI *(voice.)* I told you. He's jealous. *(imitating
quietly psychotic person.)* "All I did was try to
spruce up the house, officer!"

As she goes on with her shtick, TYLER looks worried.

CORI *(voice.)* Is that a crime?

TYLER No, seriously, Cori. I think he may be slowly
murdering me...

CORI *(voice.)* "What do you think of the floor,
Heather?" *(laughing.)* "See how clean and shiny
it is?"

TYLER I don't even know him. *(walking back to the
window.)* Heather doesn't even know him!

CORI *(voice.)* "It's a shame that young filmmaker had
to die for it."

TYLER Cori! Come on!

She goes silent. TYLER is at the far window, watching Brian.

TYLER I mean, you brought up a good point. If he's so rich? *(pause.)* Why is he sharing a house with us?

CORI *(voice.)* Tyler.

TYLER What if he just stole that Jaguar from... from his dad or, I dunno... a college buddy... ?

CORI *(voice.)* He's not sharing a house with you. He's sharing a house with Heather.

TYLER *turns away from the window, focusing.* CORI's words are a revelation that make him nervous.

CORI *(voice.)* And he thinks that by taking good care of the house while she's gone, she'll want to sleep with him when she gets back. I mean, she's not ugly. She's... lemme guess, like a fit, trim, spunky thirty-six year old?

TYLER *is having trouble breathing.*

TYLER *(slamming phone on table.)* Oh my god!

CORI *(voice.)* I feel bad for him, actually. It's pathetic.

TYLER *runs to the window and throws it open, desperately sucking in the fresh air.*

CORI *(voice, pause.)* Tyler? Tyler? I gotta go. Are you there? *(pause.)* Tyler?

TYLER Oh my god, I seriously just got dizzy just now. VOC-free? My ass! *(turning to phone.)* Sorry, what were you saying?

CORI *(voice.)* Gotta finish my shift, then I got class.

TYLER *(picking up phone.)* OK.

The leaf blower cuts out. NPR becomes audible again.

CORI *(voice.)* Bye.

TYLER *turns and notices BRIAN at the back door.*

TYLER Wait. Don't be mad at me.

CORI *(voice.)* I'll see you tonight?

TYLER Definitely.

Speaker cuts out. TYLER looks thoroughly dejected. He takes a seat at his laptop and continues tinkering on his screenplay.

BRIAN *enters. He wipes his shoes and hangs up his jacket. Taking his sweet time, he walks to the dining table and rummages for a bagel and a jar of margarine. Twisting off the lid, he pauses.*

BRIAN Ugh. I hate using this... soy-based margarine, but the butter's all melted.

TYLER Have some Honey Nut Cheerios.

BRIAN Dry?

TYLER Here... this is my milk, help yourself.

BRIAN Thanks.

BRIAN *picks up the jug. As he's about to pour it, he stops.*

BRIAN Tyler. *(pause.)* Correct me if I'm wrong, but weren't you sleeping all morning?

TYLER Yeah. I stayed up late working.

BRIAN So, you didn't go out and buy milk this morning.

TYLER No. I've had this milk.

BRIAN (*inspecting the milk.*) This gallon of whole milk was in the fridge when I sealed the floor.
(*turning to TYLER.*) How did... Did you... ?

TYLER No. No. (*turning to face BRIAN.*) I didn't walk on the wet floor. I told you. I've had that milk.

BRIAN Where?

TYLER *thinks very quickly.*

TYLER I've kept it in Heather's room by the window. It's been so chilly... hasn't gone bad. Has it?

BRIAN *sniffs it. He looks at TYLER. BRIAN coldly walks to the edge of the kitchen, studying the floor and the fridge.*

TYLER The other milk is still in the fridge. I'm sure of it. I'm sure of it.

BRIAN *doesn't respond.*

TYLER Wanna walk over there and check?

BRIAN You know I can't do that, Tyler.

TYLER You could.

BRIAN Not without damaging the floor.

TYLER Well, is the floor damaged?

BRIAN (*pause.*) Not that I can see.

TYLER Then I haven't gone in there.

Silence. BRIAN turns to look at TYLER. As he does, TYLER turns to his laptop and resumes his fake typing. BRIAN sighs.

BRIAN Well. I'm going to the store to pick up a few things. Let me know if you need anything.

TYLER I got to go to work anyways. So I think I'm fine.

BRIAN Oh, really. Where are you working?

TYLER My friend Allison's.

BRIAN Carpentry?

TYLER Gardening.

BRIAN (*sarcastically cheerful.*) Great.

TYLER *scowls and goes back to typing.*

BRIAN *walks out. Just as he does, TYLER stops and turns.*

TYLER The floor looks great, Brian.

BRIAN exits outside without a word. After a while, we hear very faint hammering. TYLER rises quietly and looks out the window. Then he takes the milk and moves to the kitchen. BRIAN suddenly reenters. TYLER swivels, acting as if he was checking something by the kitchen entrance. Then he quickly puts the milk back on the table, and takes his bowl of cereal into Heather's room.

BRIAN walks over and stands at the kitchen threshold for a while. Then he pours himself a bowl of cereal and takes it to the coffee table. Sitting, he eats slowly while browsing a book.

After a while, TYLER re-enters and fetches his computer, which he, in his fear of BRIAN, forgot. On his way back, he looks down at BRIAN as if nothing ever happened.

TYLER What are you reading?

BRIAN This book of poetry. Pablo Neruda.
It's Heather's.

TYLER Oh, yeah. She left that there for me.

BRIAN Do you mind if... ?

TYLER No. I don't have the time.

BRIAN That's too bad.

TYLER watches him for a while as he leafs through the book. Then he disappears into Heather's bedroom, closing the door. A few moments pass, then music is heard from within (Kendrick Lamar's "Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe"). Obviously bothered, BRIAN starts fiddling with a small object. As the music gets louder and louder, commingling with the NPR, BRIAN finally rises and knocks on Heather's door.

BRIAN Tyler.

TYLER (voice.) Uh, huh?

BRIAN Could we talk for a moment?

TYLER (voice.) What's up?

BRIAN The music.

TYLER Too loud?

BRIAN A bit, yes. And a bit offensive.

Heather's door opens and TYLER appears, the music loud behind him.

TYLER Offensive? What makes it offensive?

BRIAN *(coughs.)* B... I... T... C... H... ?

TYLER Bitch.

BRIAN Is a *thoroughly* offensive word.

TYLER Why? Are you a bitch?

BRIAN No?

TYLER *wonders why he said that. He is genuinely regretful.*

TYLER Sorry.

BRIAN *(sighs.)* I am a man that does not condone or tolerate misogyny.

TYLER Hmm. Even in the context of a work of art?

BRIAN Art?

TYLER You know. Music. Poetry. Painting. Sculpture. Drama. Film. Dance...

BRIAN *(laughing slightly, walking back to couch)*
Look, we obviously have very different value structures...

TYLER On NPR the other day, um... Tom Ashbrook did a segment on prisoners in Michigan staging a version of *The Tempest*.

TYLER *moves towards the coffee table. BRIAN sits on the couch and continues eating.*

BRIAN I heard that.

TYLER What did you think?

BRIAN (*sighs.*) It was interesting.

TYLER “I’ll warrant him for drowning, though the ship
were no stronger than a nutshell, and as leaky as
an unstanch’d wench.”

TYLER *stares directly at BRIAN, his breath quickened, his
adrenaline pumping.*

TYLER I’m sure Tom Ashbrook chuckled with glee.
But not offensive to the sensitive, modern man?
What’s goin’ on here, Bri?

BRIAN That is a character in a drama. He’s crude...
and so was written as crude. What I’m hearing
now is sheer propaganda for a lifestyle which
repulses me.

TYLER A lifestyle which re... (*laughing.*) Repulses you.
And your lifestyle repulses... no one?

BRIAN Look. You and I share a point in space and time,
Tyler. You may not agree with me, but let’s be
respectful.

TYLER A point in... ? Ha ha. Yes. And the sound of
your leaf blower. The smell of your urethane...

BRIAN Keeping the leaves off the lawn is a necessity.

TYLER Is it?

BRIAN *nods.*

TYLER Why?

BRIAN Leaves kill grass.

TYLER What's so great about grass?

BRIAN Grass is soft.

TYLER Leaves are soft.

BRIAN (*angry.*) And what about in the spring? When they rot away? (*pause.*) Mud? (*pause.*) I want to walk on grass this spring.

TYLER Well, I want to listen to music.

BRIAN I thought you had to go to work.

TYLER I thought you had to go to the store.

BRIAN (*rising, angrily.*) I'm having a snack!
And *frankly*... if you can't stand the smell of the urethane! Or the sound of the leaf blower!
Or my hammering a plank over a hole which was allowing *mice* to sneak into our kitchen and poop all over our food, you can *leave*. Because I will *defend* my rights and responsibilities to this house as a member of this household!
Is! That! Clear!

TYLER *goes quiet.*

TYLER You... don't have to defend anything.
I understand.

TYLER *retreats to Heather's room like a sad puppy. The music is cut after a few moments, and NPR is all that's heard again.*
BRIAN *sighs, looking a little remorseful. He walks to the kitchen and thinks for a while.*

Then he picks up something from the little table next to the door. He returns to Heather's door and knocks.

BRIAN Tyler. Tyler?

TYLER *opens the door.* BRIAN *takes a deep breath.*

BRIAN Do you see this... this *object* in my hand?

TYLER Yes?

BRIAN It came from the chicken carcass after I stewed it. It's a...

TYLER I... I know what it is. Yeah.

BRIAN Would you like to try?

TYLER (*shocked.*) Wh... *what?!*

He gasps in amusement and horror.

TYLER You're asking me if I wanna *wish* with you.

BRIAN Why not?

TYLER "Why not"? (*pause.*) Why. (*pause, laughing.*)
At all?

A silence.

BRIAN Well. I don't necessarily want it in the house.
But I don't want to throw it out. (*pause.*)
I certainly couldn't wish with myself.

TYLER *rolls his eyes.*

TYLER I'm not going to wish with you. This is weird.

BRIAN Why?

TYLER “Why?” Well. Well... (*feeling attacked.*)
Well... because... (*more confident.*) OK.
Because I don’t believe in magic. It would be a
waste of time.

BRIAN It’ll just take a fraction of a second.

TYLER No. I’m sorry.

BRIAN We’ve spent a hundred times longer talking
about it than it would take to do it...

TYLER Well, you started this discussion.

TYLER *moves to go inside the bedroom.*

BRIAN I only brought it up because I thought it would
be good for you.

TYLER (*stopping.*) What do you mean, “good for me”?

BRIAN *sighs, as if he has to divulge some important but
potentially upsetting news.*

BRIAN You know, I’ve been watching you, Tyler.

TYLER *hangs his head as BRIAN begins his pontificating.*

BRIAN You seem to have big ideas... and very big
goals... but sometimes it seems as though
you’re spinning.

TYLER I’m spinning.

BRIAN Yes.

With his eyes shut, BRIAN formulates his argument while putting the wishbone to his closed lips.

BRIAN I think that if you could just take a moment and *give in*. (*pause*.) Give into to something small and insignificant. A detail. A little artifact. In this case, let it be a wishbone. And clear your busy mind... and focus on it. And ask yourself, “What do I want? Do I want to finish my script? Do I want financing to make my movie?” And really put your mind into a state to where you *believe* that cracking off the bigger piece will fulfill that deep-seated desire... I think that will have a very positive effect on your... (*searching*.) Goal-fulfillment.

A silence.

TYLER Is this... is this... like something they teach you in business school or something... ? Ha ha! “The wishbone... method?” What the fuck? This is crazy. No. Yeah, I do wanna finish my script. You know how I can make that happen? By going in there, and *doing it*.

He moves to leave.

BRIAN And what about when you do finish it. Are you going to get the financing?

TYLER You think that if I could actually access my truest desire? It would be for financing? No. If I wished for something, it would be deep. It would be universal. (*pause*.) I’m not going to pretend to believe in something, Brian. Can you comprehend how cynical that is? Unnecessarily... pretending... *tricking* yourself into thinking you’re superstitious... for what? For *what*?

BRIAN Everyone needs to believe in something, Tyler.

TYLER No, you don't. This is pointless. It's like you valuing a chair based on whether or not it's made of "old wood". Or that sled you have up there... it's not beautiful. It's not... useful. It's just... an artifact that connects you to... to... you don't even know what it is. "Regular... folk?"

BRIAN That was my childhood sled, Tyler. I spent many winter days behind my dad's chicken farm in Minnesota on that little sled. I happen to like having it around. (*seriously.*) Is that a problem?

TYLER *is surprised yet not dissuaded.* BRIAN *looks at him sternly.*

BRIAN I don't think asking for financing is superficial. I think it would vastly improve your life.

TYLER *shakes his head.*

BRIAN OK. What *do* you want?

BRIAN *holds out the wishbone.* TYLER *thinks for a moment.*

TYLER I want to write. Please. Let me go.
I need to write.

BRIAN (*defensive.*) No one's keeping you here.

TYLER *nods, and goes back into Heather's room.* BRIAN *stands there, faintly embarrassed.* An NPR discussion about "green" products comes to a close, and transitions into music: Joni Mitchell's "Green." Suddenly, TYLER *reappears, looking flushed. He is overtaken by "belief."*

TYLER Actually. Let's do it.

BRIAN *turns, confused.*

TYLER Let's wish. Come on.

BRIAN *holds out the bone. They each take an end. Joni Mitchell's lilting voice provides the soundtrack. Giving into BRIAN's ritual, TYLER focuses and focuses and focuses. The tendons of his hands tighten as he prepares to shape fate itself.*

Suddenly, NPR switches to a host talking about something completely unrelated (artisanal ham, perhaps). As if jostled, TYLER snaps the wishbone. A heavy silence.

BRIAN You won, Tyler.

TYLER *looks at the bone in shock. He slowly nods.*

BRIAN What did you wish for?

TYLER Huh?

BRIAN What did you wish for?

TYLER I can't tell you.

BRIAN Well. I wished for love.

He walks to the other side of the room. TYLER watches him.

BRIAN What's wrong?

TYLER *(having an epiphany.) This is awkward. It's too awkward. Sorry. I'm gonna try and get some writing done. I'll be quiet.*

BRIAN Thank you.

TYLER's phone rings. *He heads into Heather's room and shuts the door, leaving BRIAN staring vacantly out the window.*

TYLER (voice.) Hi. What? What time is it? Fuck... yeah, I'll be there in five minutes. OK.

TYLER *emerges with his cereal bowl and a pair of work pants. He puts them by his desk, getting everything together: wallet, keys, phone. As he does, BRIAN picks up the gallon of milk and pours what's left of it into his bowl of Cheerios. He raises the gallon high so that a thick stream pours down and nearly spills over the brim. Then he proceeds to devour the entire bowl of cereal while still standing. Slurping every last drop of milk until all the milk is gone. TYLER watches in horror.*

BRIAN I'm gonna run to the store.

BRIAN *exits out the front door. TYLER stands perfectly still, like an innocent bystander during a bank robbery. A long moment passes. When he is sure BRIAN is gone, he clamors for his phone and dials.*

TYLER Hey, sweetie? Listen... I'm late for Allison, but I need you to do me a huge... and strange... favor... and I will love you forever. I need you to go to Cumbies and pick up a gallon of whole milk. *(pause.)* Yeah, Boice Brothers. Pour out half of it, and put it on the second shelf of my fridge by six p.m. tonight. And make sure that Brian does *not* see you. Like, park your car somewhere else, OK? Yeah. It's complicated but... but... it's very... *very* important, OK? *(pause.)* The guy's a psycho. Yeah. He's insane. *(pause.)* I'll meet you here at six-thirty. You promise? OK. Thanks... hey, hey, hey, I wished. Yeah. He asked me to wish with him! Yeah. It was fucking *crazy*. But anyways... I-I wished... and I won! Yes! And I wished for *us*... I'm just gonna say it... cause you know

how I feel. I wished for us to be together...
and happy... and... fulfilled and... *everything*.
(*pause*.) Remember the trailer out in Montana?
We could do that, ha ha! (*pause*.) Like we can
do it! (*pause*.) I love you. Remember, *before* six.

He hangs up, and scurries out the door.

Curtain.

Scene Three

The space is even tidier now. A couple bouquets in vases have been placed on the coffee table and the bookshelf. Aside from the sound of an occasional falling leaf, the stream, and a wood thrush singing, everything is quiet. The doors are open and BRIAN stands in front of the big window at front left, holding his iPhone and wearing earbuds. He gazes out at the view.

BRIAN A two story... Woodstock-craftsman... nestled in a forest on *fire*, Scott. Intense. Inviting. Heartwarming. Saffron, deep rose, burgundy, lemon-yellow...

BRIAN *knits his brow while developing another poetic thought.*

BRIAN The constant sound of the little mountain stream, chattering under the nearby stone bridge. Gorgeous. You go into town, and there's little shops and bakeries. Local artists and great meat and everyone knows everyone's name. The sun is out and the air... is so... *crisp*. Inspiring and melancholic at the same time. (*pause.*) Yeah, I just signed the lease today. (*listening.*) Mmm hmm. Heather.

He goes to the door by TYLER's desk and picks up a floor mat.

BRIAN You met her at Brad's sister's place in Tribeca. Suede heals. Heather. Heather, Scott. Yes. Blue seersucker miniskirt? White blouse? (*banging the mat out the door.*) Mismatched buttons. (*going outside.*) Hold on, Scott.

He stops talking and bangs out the mat in the open door.

BRIAN (*walking back in.*) Mismatched buttons. (*pause.*) Scott? (*pause.*) Mismatched butt...

He coughs a phlegmy cough from the dust. Then makes his way to the coffee table to get some water.

BRIAN Mismatched buttons. Hello? You're breaking up again, Scott. Scott. Scott? You're breaking... Scott? Sco-o-ott?

BRIAN hangs up with a sigh. He picks up his cereal bowl from the coffee table and makes his way to the kitchen entrance. He puts the dish in a bin and studies the floor. Turning to TYLER's desk, he picks up a random page of a screenplay and reads it. He looks confused and annoyed. He puts it down with a sigh. Something else catches his eye. From the box marked, "TYLER", BRIAN pulls out Heather's oriental silk robe. He shakes his head in disbelief. This is a line that should not have been crossed. He folds it, preparing to make his way to her room (in his mind, he'll lay it gently at her doorstep). His phone rings.

BRIAN *(answering.)* Yeah? *(pause.)* That's better, yeah. *(confused.)* But... ? Butt... ? Oh! Mismatched buttons, Scott. You get that. No, it was chestnut. No, you're thinking of Cassie, Denis's intern.

He walks to Heather's door, but gets sidetracked.

BRIAN Uh huh? Uh huh?

He gently runs his hand over the robe, taking a seat in TYLER's rocking chair.

BRIAN Think of Mojitos. Mojitos. I said *mojitos*, Scott. She made you one. Knocked your socks off. *(pause, mock-sternly.)* Because wore sunglasses at brunch the next day. And it was snowing. *(chuckles, wistfully.)* And she was on a plane to Columbia. *(confused, softly.)* The school? *(pause, annoyed.)* No, the *country*. Central America. *(pause.)* Right.

A silence. BRIAN lustfully puts the robe to his nose and inhales deeply.

BRIAN Yeah, she is a bit... haughty. *(pause.)* “Avant-garde?” Sure. *(pause.)* “Uber-liberal?” *(sniffs.)* I guess. Lovely? Absolutely. *(sniffs.)* “Single?” Ha ha.

He chuckles and grins, then looks around.

BRIAN She rides a motorcycle, Scott. A Ducati. So she tells me. *(low, with a smile.)* I have yet to see it. *(pause.)* She’s coming back tomorrow. Mmm hmm. Yeah...

Suddenly, the arms snaps off the chair and BRIAN topples over.

BRIAN *Jesus fuck!*

He lands on his hands and legs.

BRIAN Son of a bitch!

A heavy silence.

BRIAN *(retrieving phone.)* Not you, Scott. No... I-I... stubbed my toe. *(pause.)* Yeah. I should go.

BRIAN stares with wrath at the broken chair.

BRIAN Yeah. Well, shoot me an email. I’ll take a look at it if you want. Dennis as well. He’s a good numbers guy. Yeah. OK. Bye.

He hangs up, staring at the chair. Then he picks up Heather’s robe from the floor. He folds it, then places it on the shelf beside her door without so much as taking one whiff.

Curtain.

Scene Four

Theater is black. A single spot falls on TYLER, who stands in front of the curtain to stage left.

Curtain rises.

Late afternoon. The broken rocking chair is turned on its side. BRIAN is seated on the floor, sanding one of the chair's dowels. Beside him is his brand new toolbox, overflowing with shiny tools. A few dowels, presumably the ones which snapped, lean against the coffee table, glued and with blue tape.

TYLER The sound of your leaf blower bothers him. But you need to blow the leaves. Why? What's wrong with walking on dead leaves? For now, nothing. But come spring, the dead leaves would suffocate the grass. So? This *is* the forest, after all. There would be dirt under the leaves. So? When it rains in April, it would become a muddy mess. But why isn't the forest a muddy mess? Because other things live there. Oak and maple saplings. Ferns. Moss. Roots from bigger trees, all sucking up the water that would otherwise make it a muddy situation. Like the grass roots used to. So let that happen. Let the seeds fall and germinate in the rich soil. Grow into saplings. They would grow taller and taller and shade certain parts. Ferns and mosses would follow. So what? Massive roots collecting water. Salamanders. Frogs, newts, mosquitos would breed. So what? This house would be at the mercy of rotting fallen branches and moisture and varmints. So what? He'll still live here. Roots would make their way under the foundation, shifting the footings, and cracking the walls. Mice would creep in. Moisture and mold will flourish. Rot. So what? This house will collapse. And now the mice will leave.

Mosquitos salamanders and spiders will make their home in the damp decaying mess of old lumber. So what. He'll go to the neighbors. Will they let him in? Maybe his girlfriend. Maybe she'll say no. Welfare? Could he even get to the social services office and submit an application? It's in Kingston. On a bike? So what. He'll die. So what? Who will bury him? Who will pay? Are there free, government graves? There have to be. Where are homeless people buried? Who takes care of this stuff? So what? (*pause.*) So what. (*pause.*) So what.

BRIAN *finishes sanding and fits the dowel into the armrest. Then he fits the other dowels, one by one.*

TYLER It's as if you think my blowing the leaves is a frivolous and arbitrary decision. Like I just want to *hear* that sound. No. As I just argued, pretty succinctly, I think, this household... actually, your ability to sit in this household and type away and argue with me, depends in some very real way, on my blowing the leaves, and the sound it makes. Conversely, the noise you make, i.e., your profanity-laden, crass, misogynistic music, is in no way responsible for our ability to exist.

Silence. Once BRIAN is sure the dowels fit tight, he pulls them out and places a single drop of glue on each end.

TYLER The sound of the leaf blower takes precedence. This is not an argument of one side vs. the other. Each with their own complimentary colors, each separate but equal. No. This is a hierarchy. It clearly is. Someone on top. Someone underneath. The one underneath may trick themselves into thinking its a dichotomy...

BRIAN *reinserts the glue-dipped dowels into their holes.*

TYLER But the one on top, the one “in power,” just like the leaf blower, takes precedence. What I do and what I want takes precedence. Because, my actions are responsible for our situation. What is strange is that it is so easy to become powerful.

BRIAN *reattaches the armrest to the chair.*

TYLER Powerful people don't build chairs that fall apart. And if the chair does fall apart, the powerful person will make sure it gets fixed so that it doesn't happen again.

Satisfied, BRIAN taps the chair, and lets it rock.

Curtain.

Act Three

Scene One

Curtains are down. Theater is black.

NARRATOR HeatherMaycumber@gmail.com to
BrianDaniels@briandaniels.com
Subject: Silk Robe

I don't know how to respond to this. I'm gonna go out on a limb here and go on the assumption that you have feelings for me. If this is true, this bothers for a number of reasons. Don't get me wrong, I like you, Brian. But in no way do I want to pursue any kind of relationship beyond the mutual respect we already have. I conceded, in fact, wanted, you to share the house with me because we share interests, and because you are (according to Dave and Karen) conscientious and financially responsible. But not because I have feelings for you. This, in my opinion would be a terrible direction to go in, especially as we are now financially entangled.

I hope I'm wrong, and if I am I'm really sorry because I must be coming off as arrogant. I just don't know what other way I can decipher your email. If I'm not wrong, we can chalk it up to you having a little too much wine, or the thin mountain air. Ha ha. But in any case I think the situation needs some ironing out.

As I said before, I'll be arriving in the city tomorrow and had hoped to drive straight up to make it to my friend's baby shower on Tuesday. If you can manage it, I would appreciate it if you could be out of the house by then. I'll be exhausted and would just like a little time to

myself. And again, I think certain things need to be discussed in a neutral zone. Let me know so I can plan accordingly. - Heather.

We hear the outside door creak open.

Scene Two

House interior, late day. Other than the rocking chair being reassembled, everything is the same. NPR softly murmurs from the balcony. The coffee maker is on. Over the course of this scene, the light outside fades to dusk.

Wearing her pale green nursing uniform, CORI quietly enters through the front door, looking around herself. She hears the radio, and looks up, and waits. After a while, she tiptoes through the main space to the kitchen. After carefully checking the kitchen floor, she enters, placing the milk in the fridge.

BRIAN comes out onto the balcony without noticing CORI. Wearing dress pants without a shirt, he stares out vacantly. He notices that his painting has been taken down. Re-hanging it with a sigh, he stops, looking at the banister. After a closer look at something, and a long pause, he goes into his bedroom.

BRIAN (to himself.) Absurd!

Below, CORI stops, listening.

BRIAN Un-fucking believable!

CORI steps out into the main space. BRIAN returns with a tissue and carefully plucks something from the banister with the tissue. He begins making his way down the stairs. CORI cringes and tries to move to the door, but realizes he will hear her and know she was inside the whole time. CORI steps into view and sheepishly announces herself.

CORI Hi.

BRIAN stops, startled.

CORI I'm ... so sorry, I...

BRIAN Can I help you?

CORI I-I'm... I'm... (*sigh.*) Is... is Tyler here?

BRIAN No. He's at work. (*pause.*) Are you his girlfriend?

CORI *nods. She looks at the floor.*

CORI I was... supposed to meet him here. I was just looking for the bathroom.

BRIAN The bathroom is by the front door.

He stands there stone-faced, apparently a little annoyed and suspicious.

CORI Oh. Right.

CORI *glances towards the bathroom, then at BRIAN, who studies her. He makes his way to the kitchen.*

CORI Did you just redo the floor?

BRIAN Yes, I did.

CORI Oh. OK. Cool. I wasn't sure. I stepped on it a little but... I thought the sign was old? But then I smelled it and... (*pause, genuinely.*) I'm sorry. (*pause.*) I hope I didn't damage it.

BRIAN *studies her for a long moment.*

BRIAN I'm sure its fine. (*pause.*) I appreciate your honesty.

Silence.

CORI It looks good.

BRIAN *stares at the floor.*

CORI Well, it was nice to meet you...?

BRIAN Brian. Cori?

CORI Brian. Cori, yeah. U-u-u-um. Cool. Just tell Tyler I stopped by. I'll catch him later.

He nods. She walks to the door.

BRIAN Aren't you... *forgetting* something?

She looks around nervously.

BRIAN The bathroom?

CORI The bathroom?

BRIAN *casts a suspicious glance, vaguely suspecting her of being up to something in the kitchen.*

CORI Oh. Ha ha. Yeah. I-I... I don't want to bother...

BRIAN Not at all. Make yourself at home. You can wait for him here.

CORI is suddenly impressed by his genuine hospitality. This is different from what TYLER has been describing.

CORI Thanks. Ha ha. Thank you.

CORI walks to the bathroom with her bag looking a bit embarrassed. BRIAN waits at the kitchen doorway, still holding the tissue. An alarm beep goes off. BRIAN pulls out his iPhone and silences it. Then he throws the tissue in the trash next to TYLER's desk.

BRIAN Would you like some coffee? I just brewed it.

CORI *(from bathroom.)* That sounds nice. Yes.
I will have some.

BRIAN *studies the floor. Then walks into the kitchen. We hear the fridge open and close and he returns with the milk.*

BRIAN Do you take milk?

CORI *(from bathroom.)* No!

BRIAN *is confused by her frantic response. A silence.*

BRIAN Sugar?

We hear a buzz and a ding. No response from CORI. BRIAN notices TYLER's cellphone vibrating under some papers on the table. He looks at it briefly, then the bathroom door clicks open. CORI walks out, changed into a nice dress and midway through putting on mascara. She looks embarrassed.

CORI I mean... yes. I *do* take milk. No sugar.
Thanks, thanks.

BRIAN *studies her for a moment, cocks his head, then continues with the coffee. CORI gathers her things and takes a seat in the rocking chair. BRIAN brings everything on a tray. CORI continues putting on mascara while he serves her.*

CORI Thank you.

Then BRIAN sits across from her on the couch, looking amused while she does her make up. After a while, she looks to him.

CORI I'm sorry. I'm... we're going on a date tonight.
I didn't have time earlier...

BRIAN I was gonna say, that's quite a wardrobe change.
Although the nurse's uniform was also
interesting. Here's his... phone. He left it here.

CORI What do you mean?

BRIAN Well, I heard it buzz just now. I'm assuming you
 texted him?

CORI *rolls her eyes. A little embarrassed. Silence. She looks
around. Obviously awkward for both, although easier for
BRIAN.*

BRIAN So. How's... nursing school.

CORI *is silent, studying the phone in her hand.*

CORI *(looking up.)* I'm sorry. Did he call me his
 girlfriend? *(pause.)* You referred to me as...

BRIAN Oh. Ha ha. Well. *(pause.)* He told me about you
 and your... history together. I guess I assumed.
 (pause.) I'm... sorry.

CORI *laughs softly.*

CORI Hmm. It's OK. Nursing school. Ha ha.

BRIAN Just... "OK?"

CORI *(putting down her makeup.)* Well...
 (thinking.) Yeah. Actually. Just OK.

BRIAN *(pouring milk into his coffee.)* OK. Compared to
 what?

CORI To what?

BRIAN What did you do before?

*He stops pouring and casually inspects the milk jug. CORI
grows tense.*

CORI Um. I was a stylist off and on? Um. A little modeling when I was younger... uh...

She watches in terror as he looks closer at the milk jug. BRIAN looks up, wondering why she's stopped talking.

BRIAN That's an odd career switch.

CORI Um. Not really? If you...

He looks at milk again as she continues. She watches him closely.

CORI If you knew me you... you wouldn't be surprised. Cause when I say stylist, I don't mean that as a consistent career. More of helping friends out here and there, you know, I was... I was lucky I guess. I had friends in...

BRIAN High places?

CORI Well. Something like that. I guess looking back, I lived a pretty carefree, privileged life.

BRIAN So nursing is your first career.

CORI Yeah. My first... legit, stable career.

Silence. He stares at the milk again.

BRIAN But why nursing? Why up here?

CORI Well, actually-

BRIAN Your aunt's here, I forgot.

CORI Yeah, and uh, actually... My mom died? Two years ago?

BRIAN Really.

CORI Yeah. Of cancer.

BRIAN I'm sorry.

CORI And... the whole time, I really admired what the nurses did for her. I admired them for... you know... the way their lives seemed. So simple and straightforward. Compared to Mine, which suddenly seemed so... frivolous.

BRIAN puts down the jug of milk and watches her with intrigue. CORI peripherally notices that this monologue is throwing him off course.

CORI What they did was so invaluable and... I don't know. I wanted to do the same for someone else.

She gulps a bit, looking sad. Then she looks out the window. Renaissance music plays on NPR: William Byrd's "Pavane and Galliard a 6."

CORI So that's why... that's why nursing. *(pause.)* This music is very beautiful.

BRIAN listens for a good twenty seconds so as to not make a prejudiced statement.

BRIAN *(softly, earnestly.)* Yes it is. *(pause.)* I think that's wonderful, Cori.

She looks at him, apparently a little confused.

BRIAN I think that's a wonderful career choice. And an honorable... *(searching.)* Justification.

CORI *faintly shrugs and seems a little melancholic. She looks down at the coffee table.*

BRIAN And do you see yourself working in a hospital?

CORI That's the plan.

BRIAN Around here?

CORI I don't know... I guess I'm... I've never even thought of that. I guess I always thought I'd go back to the city, but now that just seems... crazy.

BRIAN It does, doesn't it.

She picks something up from the table.

BRIAN There are a number of quality hospitals around here. I think...

He stops, noticing that CORI is holding his half of the wishbone.

BRIAN Oh. Ha ha. That's the smaller half of a... wishbone. I made a wish with Tyler, actually. Earlier this afternoon.

CORI looks at him, a little amused and intrigued.

CORI Really?

He nods.

CORI Looks like you lost.

BRIAN *(sentimentally.)* Unfortunately.

CORI What did you wish for?

BRIAN Well, no point in saying now.

CORI What did... he wish for?

BRIAN I have no idea.

CORI *smiles faintly to herself.*

BRIAN It was quite a moving experience.

CORI *chuckles.*

BRIAN What?

CORI Nothing.

Silence.

CORI Why are *you* all dressed up?

BRIAN I'm going to the city actually.

CORI Tyler tells me you're into... art? You're a collector?

BRIAN One of my passions, yes.

CORI Has he told you about his film?

BRIAN A little. He told me he's almost finished with the script and is entering the financing phase.

CORI It's really incredible. I've read a couple scenes. And he's told me so much about it. It's really beautiful.

BRIAN Hmm. It would be interesting to see what becomes of it. (*pause.*) You know, it's funny

with film. So much depends on whether or not you get the funding. (*rising.*) I mean, there must be hundreds of thousands of un-produced screenplays, just sitting there. *No* one has any idea about. It could cause a significant amount of frustration in someone...

He stops to look down at the wishbone.

BRIAN It's funny because when we wished.
I suggested... that he focus on finance.

CORI And how did he respond?

BRIAN He laughed at me.

CORI *thinks about this.*

BRIAN But I think it would benefit him, greatly, if he made that a priority in his life.

CORI What? Financing?

BRIAN His ideas. Materializing his dreams.

CORI You think he's not trying?

BRIAN I just don't think that's on his agenda... from what I know of him. I mean, in this day and age, you have to know how to market yourself. Or at least, what you produce. It's not like... it was. You know that's true with everything. Artists are small-scale entrepreneurs. You can't only think about the ideas. You know, there was a great article in *The New Yorker* in which a filmmaker was talking about how today you have to write the play, and build the playhouse. *And* sell the tickets..

Silence. CORI thinks about this.

BRIAN It's just... my... unsolicited input is all.
(*pause.*) Do you know what time he's getting
home, actually? I...

CORI Oh, not till 6:30. (*checking her phone.*)
We have a while.

She looks down at the wishbone.

CORI Yeah. Tyler's really about the purity of his
ideas. I think that's what makes him different
though... (*pause.*) Sometimes I feel like
people talk nonsense all day. Like there's not
truth. Like secretly, what he's really trying to
do is get at... I know this sounds so cheesy,
but something... *true*...

BRIAN I'm sorry, I... (*pause.*) Six-thirty?

CORI Yeah.

BRIAN Well. (*turns and thinks.*) He's meeting you
here at six-thirty?

CORI Y-e-es?

BRIAN Then why were you here at... 5:55?

CORI What? (*pause.*) I was early.

BRIAN Yeah. So why were you looking for him?

CORI stops and studies BRIAN. It is clear that he now suspects her of something, most likely the milk. She treads very carefully here, thinking quick but acting offended and put off.

CORI Well, because... initially we had said... six.

Silence.

BRIAN Well, when was that time changed.
Because... ha ha... (*he points to TYLER's cellphone.*) His phone's in your hand.

CORI I don't understand what you're saying.

BRIAN I don't understand what *you're* saying. I would like some clarification is all.

CORI Initially, we said six. Then he texted me. I didn't get the text until after I got her when I checked my texts. And it said six-thirty. And I texted him saying, "OK."

Silence.

CORI Is something wrong?

BRIAN *shakes his head slowly.*

CORI Do you not want me in this house right now.

BRIAN Not at all. Make yourself at home. I would like to talk to Tyler before I leave.

He makes his way upstairs. CORI thinks for a moment, then looks up and talks to him.

CORI You know, I used to think like you.

BRIAN About what?

CORI About Tyler. You know, this whole nursing thing. It's not really about my mom. (*pause.*) It's about him.

BRIAN *stops to listen.*

CORI I mean, on the surface it's about her. But... did he tell you that him and I had an affair?

BRIAN Yes.

CORI Did he tell you that we were in love.

BRIAN Yes. He did.

CORI During those two weeks, all my friends were telling me that I was crazy. And then when he ended it and got back together with his girlfriend, it was confirmed. What I thought was deep and profound had been arbitrary. I completely embarrassed myself. And I was left... I don't know. I was left alone. (*pause.*) And so choosing a career had been equally arbitrary. You can't trust your intuition. What you need to do is protect yourself. Protect yourself. You know, like an animal or something. And so I moved up here and that's what I did. Like a nun or something. I don't know how to explain it. I enrolled in a school with people I didn't get. Wore clothes that looked bad. Went to boring parties. And I held it all so deep in me. I was like an impostor. Like I had been participating in some weird, perverted, personal game with the universe. (*pause, declarative.*) I don't want to be a nurse. I've never wanted to be a nurse.

Silence. BRIAN watches her, very intrigued, almost embarrassed for her. On NPR, a falsetto sings a very beautiful troubadour poem set to guitar.

CORI The moment Tyler looked into my eyes, in this house, as we held... this very wishbone. I suddenly realized that contrary to what almost everyone had told me, there was nothing stable about what I had been doing. I'd been lost at sea. The only comfort I've ever had was love. And for whatever reason, the only person I've ever loved was Tyler.

Silence.

CORI That's what he wished for. And I really think every good will come of that.

Silence. She looks up to BRIAN as if for a response.

BRIAN That's fine. I'm not arguing with you.

CORI But you think I'm... dumb.

He cocks his head, as if confused.

CORI Naïve.

Silence.

CORI Under any other circumstances, I would say that I was a fucking idiot.

BRIAN Are these circumstances different?

CORI Yes, they are.

BRIAN Because he's not in a relationship.

CORI I think something's shifted.

BRIAN You do.

CORI Yes. I think that after he broke that wishbone, something shifted.

BRIAN *laughs.*

CORI Why are you laughing. You're the one who asked him to wish in the first place.

BRIAN No. If something shifted I don't believe it had anything to do with the breaking of that bone.

CORI You don't get it.

BRIAN What don't I get.

CORI Look at this chair. When I was over here, the other night, he offered it to me, "Give it to your aunt." "I don't wanna give it to my aunt. These joints are lose." She'll fucking break it. Break her back. Or fucking squeak hours on end. And we got in this big argument... but *look.*

She jiggles the armrest, now firm. BRIAN does not say anything.

CORI The fact that he wished. The fact that he stooped to some trivial little custom, and did so with someone he doesn't like... no offense. The fact that... that he's at work right now, making a little bit of money specifically to take me out to dinner... that's...

BRIAN Makes you think he's changed.

CORI The fact that he's a few corrections away from finishing the screenplay he started twelve years ago. It's that last little detail. That last one percent he always stubbornly refused to

deal with. He's dealing with it now. And yes. The fact that he's single and not entrapped by a relationship of convenience.

Silence. BRIAN begins down the stairs.

BRIAN Do you see those tools over there?

She turns and looks at the tool box.

BRIAN They're my tools. I fixed the chair.

CORI What do you mean? Why would you fix... the... ?

BRIAN Because I sat in it, and it broke. Nearly impaled me. (*pause.*) I don't think you should drop out of nursing school.

Silence.

CORI Who said I was thinking of dropping out of nursing school?

BRIAN I don't think he will ever finish his film. Even if he finishes writing it. It will never get made and I also believe that you snuck in here and surreptitiously snuck this gallon of milk into without my knowing.

CORI stares at him.

CORI You're cynical. You're just a cynical creep.

BRIAN Why?

CORI Why don't *you* fund his film. (*holding up the wishbone.*) If you don't believe in this.

BRIAN What are you talking about?

CORI You're cynical.

BRIAN Why would *I* fund his film?

CORI You're a fucking millionaire!

BRIAN A millionaire? Who said I was a millionaire?

CORI Was Heather lying?

BRIAN What did Heather say?

CORI She told Tyler that you're a millionaire.
(*pause.*) A stock market wizard. (*advancing.*)
A patron of the arts. And that him getting to
know you might be beneficial to his career.

BRIAN *sniffs in surprise and disgust.*

CORI What do you think? I think he only needs...
like... fifty grand to make it. I mean, what's
your car worth?

BRIAN Which car?

CORI "Which car." Ha ha. Your Jag. Out in the
garage.

BRIAN You're asking me if I'll sell my car?
To make your boyfriend's film?

BRIAN *goes to the coffee table and starts putting everything on
the coffee tray.*

CORI I'm asking you if you'll give up... uh... point zero five of your net worth to facilitate the creation of a beautiful, meaningful... work of *art* which might benefit humankind.

BRIAN (*walking to the kitchen.*) Says *who?*

CORI Well, what if it did?

BRIAN “What if it did?” Is this your pitch? This is absurd! *No.*

He brusquely passes her, deposits the tray in the kitchen, and heads back to the coffee table, grabbing the gallon of milk. CORI habitually jumps away a little, as if threatened. BRIAN does not notice and continues to the kitchen. CORI resumes her line of questioning, a little more in earnest now.

CORI Why not?

BRIAN Because I don't want to.

CORI But why don't you want t...

BRIAN Because I do... not... want... to.

CORI But *why not??*

BRIAN *Because I have a CHOICE!!!*

With the last word, BRIAN throws the gallon of milk to the ground. It crumples against the newly urethaned floor, and milk sprays everywhere.

BRIAN *Because I can do what ever I want! Because I am in a position of power!!*

CORI backs away in fright.

A heavy silence.

CORI I'm sorry.

BRIAN *I'm* sorry.

CORI I'm just... going through something... I...

BRIAN That was an inappropriate response. I'd just like to be alone.

CORI It's OK. (*gathering her things.*) If Tyler comes back, tell him that I'm waiting in my car. (*pause.*) It's parked on... Maple Lane, by the little barn...

She quickly exits. If we have been watching closely, we'd know that she forgot her iPhone on TYLER's desk. BRIAN stares at the milk all over the floor. It's dusk now. NPR has switched to a TED Talk program. After a while, he takes a mop and begins cleaning the mess.

Curtain.

Scene Three

The floor is mopped. NPR continues to softly drone. It's dark except for the kitchen light, and light from the fireplace. BRIAN is sitting in silence on the couch.

The front door slams. BRIAN flinches with disgust. TYLER enters, covered in dirt and mud from head to foot. He backtracks, taking off his shoes. Then heading to the kitchen, he sees BRIAN in the dark, and gasps.

TYLER (pause.) Hey.

BRIAN *turns to him silently.*

TYLER It's past six, right?

BRIAN (murmur.) Yeah?

TYLER gulps, then brazenly steps into the kitchen. We hear him open the fridge door, pause, then close it. As he steps back into view, he silently punches the air and grimaces. After a moment, he walks back into the main space, passing the smashed milk jug which BRIAN has left on the table. TYLER picks it up for a moment, his eyes wide with fear.

Then keeping his eyes on the ground, TYLER hurriedly rifles through his jeans, looking for his phone.

TYLER Motherfucker.

He finally locates the phone under the pile of paper. He briskly walks towards Heather's room, dialing, and making sure to avoid eye contact with BRIAN. CORI's phone lights up and buzzes, but TYLER doesn't notice.

BRIAN Tyler.

TYLER Hey, sweetie, it's me. Allison kept me longer but I'm home. I left my fucking phone here. Um... where are you? I just need to jump in the shower, but I'll be ready in like... 10 minutes. Bye.

BRIAN Tyler, I'd...

TYLER (*disappearing behind Heather's door.*) I'm taking a shower... can we talk later?

BRIAN *coldly states at the door. We hear a shower in Heather's private bathroom. BRIAN rises, and knocks. Again, louder.*

TYLER (*voice.*) What?

BRIAN I spoke to Cori.

Silence.

TYLER *appears, half undressed.*

TYLER OK, Brian. I took your milk. I *took* your milk. I'm sorry. I'll get more tomorrow. But right now I need to shower. Wait a minute. That was actually my milk. I took my *own* milk.

BRIAN It isn't...

TYLER What was the problem again?

BRIAN It isn't the milk that bothers me.

TYLER Oh, right. The floor. OK. Did you go out and inspect your floor? Is it damaged? No. Because it was dry long before your stupid can said it would be...

BRIAN I think you should leave.

TYLER *I should leave?*

BRIAN Yes.

TYLER Leave... what? This house?

BRIAN Yes.

TYLER For good?

BRIAN Yes. Tonight. Pack your things right now. Get someone to drive you to the bus, but I want you out of this house.

TYLER *is quiet for a while.*

TYLER Fuck it. You suck, man.

TYLER *goes back into the bedroom and we hear him get into the shower. A long moment passes. Then he suddenly storms out, wrapped in a towel, dripping with mud and water.*

TYLER You know what? This is Heather's house, and I am Heather's guest. I was invited up here, to finish something... *very* important. If you don't like me... you can fucking talk to Heather. Otherwise... you're going to have to deal with me... and my fucking *quirks* because I don't have to put up with this anymore!

BRIAN I don't have to deal with anything. I am a legal tenant. Heather is gone...

TYLER You're the legal tenant. Really.

BRIAN *pulls out a document and hands it to him. TYLER reads it, flustered.*

TYLER What is this.

BRIAN It's the lease. I just signed it today.

TYLER "The lease."

BRIAN I want you out.

TYLER *mutters as he scans the document, then throws it on the ground.*

TYLER Get the... *(pause.)* So much for fucking *community*. Fucking Cheerios. Fucking... !

BRIAN This is absolutely repulsive to me.

TYLER No. So *what*. I don't care anymore. You know what I realized, Brian?

BRIAN *walks to the kitchen trash as TYLER follows in his towel, looking increasingly irate and maniacal.*

BRIAN *Out.*

TYLER No, do you know what I realized? As I was pulling roots out of the cold ground for someone else today? What separates me? From *you*? Is I have a fucking purpose, Brian!

Silence. BRIAN is surprised to hear TYLER become aggressive.

TYLER A fucking purpose! A reason for being.

BRIAN A reason for being.

TYLER Yes! A valued role within this shit-eating, fucked-up society!

BRIAN A valued role.

TYLER Yes, *Brian*. You think it's a coincidence that the world looks up to people like Buddha and Mozart and... and... fucking *Oscar Wilde* and *Whitman*... ? They were mooches! Going door to door with a bowl... racking up debt... and... stinking up their houses. Ask a five year-old who the Medicis or the Rothschilds are, and they have no *clue*. You ask them who Van Gogh is, and they can see it burning in their mind's eye! That's what's fucking important! That's what's fucking important!

BRIAN How is this relevant?

TYLER Because! *I* am one of those people! Or the closest thing you'll ever know to it! And all you can do... is *worry*... and *complain* and fucking *sulk*. About little, insignificant fucking details!

BRIAN *grabs the tissue wad from the trash.*

BRIAN You see this, Tyler? You *see* this?

TYLER (*dismissive.*) What? What is it?

Meanwhile, CORI *appears in side door and listens. No one notices her.*

BRIAN It's a fucking *scab*, Tyler. A scab that was sitting on the railing of my balcony up there. Right beside the painting of my great-grandfather that had been *knocked*...

TYLER So fucking what, Brian! That painting is a piece of fucking shit! And so are all the paintings you have on your wall!

BRIAN That's *your* opinion...

TYLER *Not* my opinion! I fucking know! I fucking
know, OK?

Silence.

TYLER Where is your fucking sense of responsibility?!
Huh? Your fucking sense of cultural
responsibility? You think you can have your
cake and eat it, too? You think you can run the
world and have bad taste? Huh? Where the fuck
do you get off?!

BRIAN What are you talking about? You're insane.
You're insane...

TYLER No. (*confused.*) I'm not insane.

BRIAN Heather has misinformed you, Tyler.
Completely. I...

TYLER You're not rich.

BRIAN I am rich. I'm extremely rich. I don't see why
she felt the need to tell you that. But it doesn't
mean that I owe anyone anything, *you* least of
all. You are disgusting. And if you don't stop
this line of attack...

TYLER "Line of attack?"? HA HA HA!

BRIAN I'll have no choice but to call the police.

TYLER The police!? The fucking police! Ha ha!
What am I doing? Sharing my feelings with
another human being, and you're going to call
the police?!

BRIAN You're telling me that unless I give you my money, I'm doing something wrong. And you're screaming at me in the process. This feels like robbery to me.

BRIAN *heads up the stairs.*

TYLER This feels like *bullshit* to me!!!

BRIAN I agree.

TYLER You think I give a shit about your money? That was Heather's suggestion..

BRIAN Heather.

TYLER Yes. *Heather*. And every fucking other retard out there. Maybe so-and-so can give you some money. You could make it. Pitch it to them, sell it to them... get them excited. Facebook them. Fuck them. Yeah, but every fucking artist knows, deep in their gut... that people like you. People with power and the time, would not get or care about, really *get*... what we are trying to do! That's the fucking paradox! You ask me if I know what a paradox is? *That's* the paradox. The people with the power. The people that can actually make things happen... *don't get what actually needs to happen.*

Silence. BRIAN *moves into his bedroom.*

TYLER And you fucking sit there. And grin... and wait for us to come with our pitches... and grant proposals and... and... ! So, what's the point. It's a charade for your entertainment. I don't need you, or want you, or anyone like you. So when you fucking grin your bleached

teeth at me, and pull me into some dark corner of your house... *your* house, not mine, *your* house... and ask me to wish... with your little wishbone? Ask me to actually... *believe* in it. To give it my energy. I couldn't think of world peace or success or... or... or love! I could not think about any of those things! All I could see was your stupid face and smell your nasty cologne and urethane and hear the chattering of... of...

BRIAN *shuts his bedroom door.*

BRIAN Goodbye, Tyler.

TYLER *mounts the stairs, building in fervor.*

TYLER Of... *Kai Rysdall* in my ear, and all I could wish for was that you were gone! *Not* your financial patronage, *not* your advice, *not* your food or shelter... just that you fucking... Brian! I don't know what your last name is... !
Fucking *VANISHED!*

Silence.

TYLER *Gone!* You hear me! I don't pay rent! I eat your food! I sleep in your living room! And I still have the dignity to wish you were *gone!* (*pause.*)
Brian!

He dashes up the stairs in a rage. CORI looks on, sadly, then quietly picks up her phone and leaves.

TYLER *Brian!* Answer me, you pussy!!

He throws open the bedroom door.

TYLER *Brian!!!*

Silence.

TYLER Brian.

Silence.

TYLER Brian! What the fuck!

Silence. TYLER disappears into room. We hear the sound of closet doors opening and closing.

TYLER Brian? *Brian.*

Things being turned over. TYLER comes out with a big antique trunk and empties it, as if BRIAN could be inside. He throws the contents down onto the first floor.

TYLER Brian!

*TYLER goes to the radio to shut it off. By mistake, he cranks up the volume, blaring *Marketplace*.*

TYLER Ahh!!! Fuck! Mother... *fucker!*

He finally unplugs the thing, then listens carefully, looking terrified.

TYLER Brian?!

Silence.

TYLER Brian!

TYLER starts gasping. He rushes downstairs and locates his phone. He dials, hands shaking the whole time.

TYLER Cori! Where the fuck are you?! Something just happened... I'm... I'm... !

He puts the phone down and listens.

TYLER *Brian!?*

His phone rings.

TYLER *(answering.) He's fuc... he's fuck.... he's gone!*
(pause.) My roommate!!!

Silence.

TYLER BRIAN!

Holding the phone, TYLER rushes up the stairs and rifles through the room.

TYLER I looked everywhere. In the closets... in
the bathroom... in the... ? He walked right up
here. And then... he vanished, Cori! He fucking
vanished... Wait. No, they're locked! *(pause.)*
The windows are... is he an actual wizard?!
(pause.) I'm not joking, he... he fucking...
vanished!

Silence.

TYLER *Cori! Where are you... ! (pause.) I need you.*
What do you mean?

We hear a car start in the distance.

TYLER Is that your car? No... don't leave! I-I...
Because... no! Cori! *(calling out.)* BRIAN!!
(into phone.) Cori!!!

Silence. He kicks aside a trunk. Then he runs downstairs and out the door.

Curtain.

Scene Four

Theater is black. A single spot falls on BRIAN, who stands in front of the curtain to stage left.

Curtain rises.

Darkness. No one is seen. The rocking chair still slightly rocks, and the fire crackles away in the otherwise silent house.

BRIAN If I had asked you back then, while you were bawling your eyes out. After you emailed his mother, asking her what he was up to because he wouldn't tell you (because he was with me). If I had asked you while you groaned as you held a random sock in your hands. A random cellphone bill. A random page from a random screenplay. While you ignored your friend's pleas to come to parties. While you ignored food that was put in front of you. While your gentle heart hardened and turned your future dark. If somehow we could have had a civil discussion. If you would have had treated me as an equal and not some dumb slut whose only skill was giving head and having adventures. If I had asked you where I was headed, and you cared enough to share what you knew then and not before, you would have told me what none was willing to tell me: Look inward, Cori Elizabeth. They teach us that life is about other people. But that is not the bottom line. They tell us that life is about community. But that's just elementary school propaganda to make it easier for the teachers. Life, from its beginning to its end, is about ourselves. Oh, I've seen this look in your eyes when I Googled you, Natalie. This inward, self-interested, self-preserving look, and it beguiled me.

But now I know. You do not dream anymore,
like you once did. And you do not make wishes.
You do not bank on intuition or romance or love.
Your look is sad to the unindoctrinated, but to me, now,
your look is one of a clear future. (*sigh.*) I have started
my road long before I knew I was starting one.
I was exploring a forest and not quite getting that I was
carving a path. A trail. A road that after a certain amount
of time, I could not leave. But it's fine. But it's fine.
I get it now. I don't need to wish. To dream, because my
future is also clear. It's too late for grad school and that
kind of success. I suddenly feel so old. Too old to move
back to the city. I'll be a nurse. In a hospital in a shitty
town. And that's just what I'll be. And people will think
it is sad. Tragic, even. But it will be fine. There is no
mystery anymore, but also no fear. Because I know what
I want. I know what I'll get. I don't know which came
first, but the two are finally the same.

Curtain.

Theater goes black.

End.