

(DRAFT: 20 Nov 2018)

PRONE
A play in two acts
By Craig Houk

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CHARACTERS

BEN	35 years old
SARAH	40 years old
ALAN	43 years old
ANNE	43 years old
DAVID	47 years old
ED	45 years old

PLACE

Brooklyn Heights

TIME

Present

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(April 2nd. 3:37 AM. Alan's loft apartment. Sarah comes out of her bedroom in a panic. Shaken, she races to Alan's bedroom door and begins to knock quietly, but urgently.)

SARAH

Alan? Alan, are you okay? I thought I heard something. It sounded like a gunshot. But I'm thinking that's ridiculous, right? I mean, not in this neighborhood.

(Sarah tries to open the door, but it's locked.)

Christ, is it essential that you lock your fucking door? What if something happens to you? How do you expect me to help you? You could be lying in there bleeding to death for all I know.

(She continues to knock.)

Alan? Alan! Great. Great. Do you know how incredibly selfish you're being right now? Is this entertaining for you? Fine. Don't answer. I'm going back to bed. So, no more loud noises ok?

(Sarah starts towards her bedroom, but then returns to Alan's door.)

You know, this might not be a suitable time to mention this, but I can honestly say that I'm in no mood to be scrubbing vomit and blood out of the carpeting. Do you hear me? I'll just have it torn up and thrown out. I'll have that entire room stripped bare and there will be nothing left to remind me of you. Is that clear? I knew it was only a matter of time before you'd overdose

on the myriad of fucking drugs you take. I hope you're still breathing. I hope you can hear me, you selfish, son of a b...

(Towards the end of the previous, Alan comes out of his bathroom, crosses to and opens his bedroom door. He wears a robe.)

ALAN

What the fuck's the matter with you?

SARAH

You didn't hear me knocking?

ALAN

I was in the shower.

(He grabs underwear and socks and puts these on. Sarah remains in the doorway, averting her eyes.)

SARAH

Why do you lock your door?

ALAN

For privacy.

SARAH

What if something bad happened to you? I wouldn't be able to get to you.

ALAN

Nothing bad is gonna to happen to me.

SARAH

You're pushing me over the edge with worry, you know that?

ALAN

You're doing it to yourself, Sarah. Everything's fine.

SARAH

I thought I heard a gunshot.

ALAN

What're you talking about? Where?

SARAH

Here. In the apartment. It came from your room.

ALAN

What? When?

SARAH

A few minutes ago. I was asleep in my room...

ALAN

...You had a nightmare.

(He grabs sweat pants and puts these on.)

SARAH

I did not have a nightmare. I was dreaming, but I did not have a nightmare.

ALAN

Well, whatever you were having, you imagined it. Do you honestly think that if a gun went off, the neighbors wouldn't already be scrambling for their phones to call the police? There'd be a crowd out front right now.

(Alan crosses to the window and looks out onto the street.)

There's no one out there, Sarah.

SARAH

There isn't?

ALAN

No. So, that's settled. Okay?

(He puts a t-shirt on.)

SARAH

You look pale. Your color isn't good. Did you eat today?

ALAN

I don't remember.

SARAH

Eat something. I had groceries delivered yesterday.

ALAN

No.

SARAH

I ordered all that low fat, low calorie, low carb, no taste crap that you love.

ALAN

I'm not hungry.

SARAH

I'll make something for you.

ALAN

Enough. I'm not eating.

SARAH

Fine. I'm going back to bed.

ALAN

Sarah, wait...

SARAH

What?

ALAN

Stay up with me.

SARAH

I'm exhausted, Alan.

ALAN

You sleep too much.

SARAH

Did you go out?

ALAN

I did. Got in about an hour ago.

SARAH

Why are you showered and dressed then?

ALAN

I may go out again.

SARAH

Where? It's nearly four in the morning.

ALAN

I don't know. Somewhere. Anywhere. I'll stay in, though, if you stay up with me.

SARAH

Did you take something?

ALAN

No.

(Beat. Without Guilt.)

Yes.

SARAH

Do you think that was a good idea?

ALAN

It's never a good idea. But I did. And it's done. So why should I suffer alone when I have you to share in my regret?

SARAH

I'm going to bed.

ALAN

Sarah, don't. Please.

(Sarah hesitates. Alan sits on the end of his bed and encourages Sarah to sit next to him.)

Come on. Tell me about your dream. Was it the one where you and Mom have a big argument and then you cold-cock her? Or the one where you call your ex-husband to wish him a happy birthday and he tells you to go fuck yourself? Oh, or my favorite. The one where you buy a kitten and it digs its claws into your flesh and burrows into your leg. Come on. Sit next to your big brother and tell him how your unresolved life issues manifest themselves in your whacked-out dreams.

SARAH

Screw you, Alan.

(Sarah starts off, but then stops. She turns to Alan.)

I dreamt I was flying again. Almost the same as usual, except this time, I didn't have any trouble getting off the ground. Usually, I have to struggle a bit. You know, get a running start, and actually move my arms up and down like a bird. But not this time. I just relaxed a little. Closed my eyes. And off

I went. Weaving in and out of trees, pulling leaves from the branches as I went. Over the row of buildings on our street. That fat, old queer, next door, was sunbathing nude on his roof deck again, but even that didn't stop me. Up over the skyscrapers downtown. And I just kept on going. Higher and higher, passing jetliners on the way, until...

ALAN

Until what?

SARAH

Well, the oxygen... The air got thin. And I had a little trouble breathing. But I wasn't afraid. I wasn't worried. I kept flying higher. I remember how cold it was. But I didn't close myself off. I opened my arms wider. I was taking shallow breaths at this point. But I didn't turn back.

ALAN

So, you did have a nightmare.

SARAH

No, it wasn't a nightmare. Nightmares were designed to frighten people, to expose them to their worst fears. I wasn't scared at all. In fact, I felt...

ALAN

Felt what?

SARAH

Well, I have to admit... I felt liberated and, well...a little aroused.

ALAN

Aroused?

SARAH

Well, yeah. My head was so light. I wasn't entirely sure that it was still attached to the rest of me. I was completely aware of every inch of my body. But none of it was connected, you know? From one moment to the next, I was my ankle. And then my arm. And then my little toe. And then my belly button...

ALAN

...Sarah...

SARAH

...And then my breasts. My nipples...

ALAN

...OK, Sarah...

SARAH

But I wasn't my vagina.

ALAN

Enough, Sarah.

SARAH

I wanted to be my vagina. But I wasn't. And do you want to know why?

ALAN

Not really.

SARAH

Because I heard a gunshot. I heard a gunshot, gravity took hold and I was hurled back to earth. To my bed.

ALAN

Well, I'm sorry your dream didn't reach the climax you had hoped for.

SARAH

It came from your room.

ALAN

There was no gunshot, Sarah. There is no gun in this apartment.

(He grabs a pair of sneakers and a hooded sweatshirt.)

SARAH

I know what I heard. I didn't dream it. I can't explain it, but it was real. And it came from your room.

ALAN

Just go... Go back to bed.

SARAH

Oh, so now you wanna get rid of me?

ALAN

You're a fucking lunatic.

SARAH

Now that... That was just mean.

ALAN

The truth is mean.

SARAH

Maybe I'm not interested in the truth.

ALAN

Well, I'm not editing myself for you, Sarah. I'm not some stranger. I'm not some casual acquaintance.

SARAH

You're the strangest, most casual person I've ever known. Goodnight, Alan.

(Sarah goes to her room. Alan sits quietly for a moment, contemplating his next move. He pulls out his mobile device as the lights around him shift. He begins scrolling through a hookup app.)

SCENE 2

(Continuous from Scene 1, images containing text appear on a screen. Alan is focused on his phone, thumbing through profiles. Images of the following messages appear sporadically at first, but then begin to overlap and pick up in speed. These are the men that Alan is messaging with online.)

TEXT IMAGES

What's your fucking deal, man? You too good for me?

You won't have to touch me. I'll take care of you.

I know I just offered to suck your cock and all, but do you think we could get together for lunch sometime, maybe coffee?

I'll give you twenty bucks. Ok thirty. I'll pay for your cab ride over. Come on. Name your price. I fucking need to blow my load.

I want you to cum inside me.

Can I have your number?

You want to come to my place? It's fucking cold out there.

I'm outta cigarettes. Can you pick some up on your way over?

My boyfriend would have my balls if he knew I was on here.

My partner passed away two years ago.

Dude, I've seen you around. You're fucking hot.

Why so shocked? You think you wouldn't run into someone you knew on here?

What's your name?

I know a guy who hooked up with some psychopath and was beaten to death in his own bed and then dismembered in his bathtub.

Hey, Alan.

Nice to meet you.

What's up, Alan?

It's on the tip of my tongue.

I know you from somewhere.

Alan.

(The text images disappear. Alan puts on his shoes and sweatshirt and heads out.)

(Lights down. End of Scene.)

SCENE 3

(April 2nd. 1:00 PM. Alan's loft apartment. Alan has fallen asleep on the sofa. He is out cold. Ben enters through the front door. He doesn't see Alan on the sofa. He moves to Sarah's door and knocks quietly.)

BEN

Sarah? Sarah, it's Ben, sweetheart. I didn't want to startle you. I just wanted to let you know I was here. Sarah?

(No response. Alan stirs. Ben crosses to Alan's bedroom. He knocks. No answer. He pushes the door open and peers in. Alan's cell phone rings. Ben turns to see Alan on the sofa. Alan stirs again. Ben stands quietly in Alan's bedroom doorway. The cell phone continues to ring. Alan answers it.)

ALAN

Hello...? Yeah... Who is this...? No, no, no, you got the wrong number... Whoa, hold on... Hey, slow down... Look... Look, this is a private number. I don't know how you got it, but... No, I did not give you my number. Maybe you misdialed... Look, just do me a favor and toss it, okay? Shred it. Burn it. And don't call again.

(Alan ends the call.)

Fuck.

(He sits for a moment, trying to rouse and focus. He turns to see Ben.)

Morning.

BEN

It's afternoon.

ALAN

How long have you been here?

BEN

Few minutes.

(Beat.)

ALAN

Well, you look like a Francis Bacon portrait standing there.
Come here.

*(Ben sits next to Alan on the sofa.
They kiss.)*

BEN

Why don't you go to bed...?

ALAN

...You gonna join me...?

BEN

...And get some sleep.

ALAN

So, you won't be joining me?

BEN

No.

ALAN

Okay. Well you let me know when's a good time.

(Alan rises.)

BEN

Alan, I...

ALAN

No worries, Ben. I have some things I need to take care of
anyway.

*(Alan crosses into his bedroom and
drops his cell phone on the bed. Ben
follows him and watches as Alan*

*retrieves a vial of methamphetamine
from the night stand.)*

BEN

Why don't you eat something? I'll make lunch.

ALAN

No.

BEN

You should eat.

ALAN

Jesus Christ. Leave it alone. You and Sarah working in cahoots?

(A moment.)

BEN

Where is Sarah?

ALAN

In her room.

BEN

I knocked. She didn't answer.

ALAN

So?

BEN

So, it's not like her to leave the apartment.

ALAN

Maybe she's finally escaped. She could use some fresh air. To clear her twisted mind.

BEN

You should spend more time with her.

ALAN

What're you talking about? She fuckin' lives with me, doesn't she?

(Alan does a bump of meth and then crosses back into the living room, carrying the vile with him. He sits on the couch and starts going through a mess of paperwork and files on the coffee table, which are scattered around a laptop.)

BEN

You're never here.

ALAN

I'm here now.

BEN

You know what I mean.

ALAN

Oh, come on. This isn't about Sarah. This is about you. Look, I don't have time for your self-pity this morning...

BEN

... Afternoon...

ALAN

... Whatever...

BEN

... And yes, it is about Sarah. And about me. And about us.

ALAN

Please. Not now, Ben. I've had a tough week.

(He struggles with the paperwork.)

BEN

What're you looking for?

ALAN

A client file.

BEN

What's the name on it? I'll help you look.

ALAN

No. I'm fine. I got it.

(He finds the file and starts looking through it.)

BEN

Trouble at work?

ALAN

We don't discuss my work, Ben. I thought I made that clear.

BEN

(He starts for the kitchen.)

What do you want for lunch?

ALAN

You really wanna start that again?

BEN

Well, I'm hungry.

ALAN

So, get something then.

(Ben begins to prepare his lunch. Alan continues with his paperwork. A moment.)

BEN

I have an audition next week.

ALAN

(Distracted.)

Oh yeah? What for?

BEN

What?

ALAN

What for? You have an audition for what?

BEN

Well, it's...

ALAN

... Can you get me some water? The sparkling in the fridge. Not from the tap.

BEN

Sure.

(Ben retrieves the water.)

ALAN

So?

BEN

So... it's a film. An original screenplay.

ALAN

Uh huh. Who's producing?

BEN

You probably never heard of 'em.

ALAN

Probably not.

(Alan does another bump.)

BEN

They're kinda new on the independent film circuit. They've done mostly shorts. This'll be their first feature length effort.

(Ben hands Alan the water.)

ALAN

Supporting role?

BEN

Lead.

ALAN

Lead? Wow. Well, there's some good news. Your agent is finally making some progress.

BEN

Yeah, I guess so.

(Ben returns to the kitchen.)

ALAN

Okay. So, what're you not telling me?

BEN

Well, if I'm offered the role... If I accept the role, I won't necessarily make a whole lot of money.

ALAN

What do you mean?

BEN

I'll get a stipend...

ALAN

...How much?

BEN

Twenty-five hundred.

ALAN

Shit. Ben. That's no money at all. And what about residuals?

BEN

Just under three percent... if there are any.

ALAN

So, if it doesn't go into distribution, you come out of this with a measly twenty-five hundred bucks? Are you fuckin' kidding me?

BEN

It's a fourteen-week shoot starting mid-May. They'll cover my travel and my meals. And I'll get a copy of the film. I'll have to stop temping for a few months, though.

ALAN

What!? No. No way. I'm gonna give your agent a call next week. That's bullshit.

BEN

Alan...

ALAN

...You'd be gone fourteen weeks? And what about your landscaping work?

BEN

I'd risk losing some of my regular clients this year.

ALAN

That's fucking brilliant. I'm sorry, Ben, but there's no way in hell you're gonna waste three and a half months working for some ham-handed production company that knows goddamned well their film won't make a fucking penny.

BEN

Well, when you put it that way, it's not very appealing, is it?

(Alan gets up and goes to him.)

ALAN

Look, Ben... You have real talent. Okay? But you need to find work that'll bring in some real cash. I can't be paying for everything all the time... Your headshots, your resume, improv classes, film classes, your fuckin' clown agent... What am I forgetting...? Your rent. Your clothes...

BEN

I'll pay you back, Alan.

ALAN

I don't want the money, Ben. I want you to be a success so I know that everything I've invested in your career has been worth it.

(Satisfied that he has the paperwork he needs, Alan crosses into his room, removes his shirt and tosses it on to the bed. He then crosses into the bathroom. He rinses his face in the sink and then begins to brush his teeth. Ben follows and sits on the bed.)

BEN

Last night was our anniversary.

ALAN

What?

BEN

Our anniversary... It was yesterday.

ALAN

Oh, shit. I'm sorry, Ben. I forgot.

BEN

It's fine.

ALAN

Of course, it's not fine. Why would you bring it up otherwise? Look, I'll take you out for a really nice dinner tonight. Okay?

BEN

Don't worry about it, Alan.

ALAN

Listen, I'm really sorry. David and I went out for a drink after work yesterday. And then, you know, one thing led to another...

BEN

I said it was fine.

ALAN

We'll have dinner tonight.

(Alan's cell phone rings. Alan continues brushing his teeth.)

BEN

You gonna get that?

ALAN

I'm not expecting any calls.

BEN

You sure? I can answer it.

ALAN

Just leave it. I gotta get a shower.

*(Alan pushes the bathroom door closed.
Ben sits quietly on the bed as the
phone continues to ring.)*

(Lights down. End of Scene.)

SCENE 4

*(April 2nd. 3:51 PM. Alan's loft
apartment. Alan is nearly finished
changing clothes. Ben sits on the
sofa reading the screenplay. The
remainder of his lunch sits on the
coffee table. The door buzzes. Ben
crosses to the front door and
presses the button on the
intercom.)*

BEN

Hello?

ANNE (VOICE)

Ben, it's Anne. Is the asshole home?

BEN

Jesus, Anne. He could hear you.

ANNE (VOICE)

PRONE by Craig Houk

Well, I stopped by your place. And since you weren't there...
Are you buzzing me in or what?

BEN

Only if you promise to behave.

ANNE (VOICE)

You know I can't do that.

(Ben hesitates for a moment.)

I don't hear any happy, welcoming, buzzing noise.

BEN

Fine. But I'm serious. I don't want any trouble.

(Ben buzzes Anne in and leaves the front door ajar. He returns to the sofa.)

ALAN

(In the bedroom doorway.)

Who's that?

BEN

Anne.

ALAN

What's she doing here?

BEN

I have no idea.

ALAN

Jesus Christ. Well, do me a favor and put that shit away.

(Alan points to the vial of meth on the coffee table.)

BEN

She doesn't care.

ALAN

I know that. I don't want her to get her fuckin' hands on it.

(He returns to his room. Ben continues reading the script. Alan continues dressing. At this point he is almost completely dressed except for pants. Alan returns to the bedroom doorway to check on Ben.)

I asked you to put that shit away.

(There is a knock at the door. Anne lets herself in.)

ANNE

Hello?

ALAN

No, thank you. We didn't order clams.

BEN

She's right. You are an asshole.

(He rises and greets Anne with a hug.)

Hi, sweetie. How are you?

ANNE

Never better. And you?

(Alan, still with no pants on, crosses to the coffee table.)

Never mind.

(To Alan.)

Really, Alan?

ALAN

Good to see you Anne.

ANNE

I was hoping to see less of you.

(Alan grabs the vial of meth from the coffee table and starts for his room.)

ANNE

Not in a sharing mood today?

ALAN

Not at all. Not ever.

ANNE

It'd be interesting if, for a change, you tried to tackle life without all that shit in your system.

ALAN

It makes you bearable.

ANNE

Actually, I wonder if it doesn't make you bearable.

ALAN

Look, I'd love to hang around and bitch slap one other all afternoon, but I gotta go.

(Alan crosses into his room to put pants on.)

ANNE

Where he's off to?

BEN

I don't know. He's meeting David for... something.

ANNE

Those two are way too cozy for my taste.

BEN

I don't want to think about it.

(Alan returns to the Livingroom fully dressed. To Alan.)

So, I'll see you for dinner at seven? At that new Japanese restaurant on Montague?

(Beat.)

ALAN

Oh, shit. I'm sorry, Ben. I'm not gonna be back in time for dinner. David is moving into his new place. His furniture's still in storage because the movers had to reschedule last minute. So of course, he's threatening to take everything straight from the storage unit to the dump unless I help him move it.

BEN

(Quietly.)

Fuck you, Alan.

ALAN

Oh, come on, Ben. It's not really that big of a deal, is it?

ANNE

Go to dinner with Ben, Alan. I mean, it's not going to kill you to spend an evening with your boyfriend, is it? And if it does kill you... Well, I think we all know where I stand on that scintillating little topic.

ALAN

Piss off, Anne.

(To Ben.)

I'll make it up to you.

(Alan kisses Ben and then exits out the front door. Ben sits on the sofa.)

ANNE

What's the matter, sweetheart? What's going on?

BEN

Nothing. Alan is just... one huge... emotional void is all.

ANNE

(She joins Ben on the sofa.)

Listen, Ben... where did you and Alan meet? Seriously. Think about it. I mean, did you really imagine that you'd just stroll into some nightclub, toss back a few drinks, take some mood-altering drug and then find the man of your dreams? Did you really imagine you'd find love in a sea of plastic tank tops and rubber hot pants? We know all too well how rubber and plastic do not breathe. And relationships that are cultivated in bars can be as suffocating as the clothing you wear. Everything that goes on in your relationship with Alan... Every heated discussion, every misunderstanding, every meaningless quarrel... It's hurting you. It's time to put an end to it, Ben. It's over. All you need is closure. You need to take control of your own life. You can't depend on Alan for everything.

BEN

What am I doing? What would you do?

ANNE

We've had this discussion. I can only think of two ways out of this. Either you completely remove yourself from the situation and learn to take care of yourself or...

(The door buzzes.)

You want me to get that?

BEN

Yeah.

ANNE

(Anne crosses to the front door and presses the button on the intercom.)

Hello?

DAVID (VOICE)

Anne?

ANNE

David?

DAVID (VOICE)

How are you?

ANNE

I'm fine. You?

DAVID (VOICE)

Doing all right.

(Awkward beat.)

ANNE

I'm here with Ben. Alan's on his way to meet you. He just left.

DAVID (VOICE)

I told him I'd meet him here.

ANNE

Well, he's not here, David. You must've just missed him.

DAVID (VOICE)

So, you've said. Can you buzz me in? My fucking cell phone just shit the bed. I need to use your phone.

ANNE

Ben?

BEN

He has a key. He can let himself in.

(The door buzzes again. Anne presses the button on the intercom.)

ANNE

Hello?

DAVID (VOICE)

I'm still here.

ANNE

I'm buzzing you in.

(Anne buzzes David in. She leaves the door ajar.)

Are you all right?

BEN

I'm fine.

ANNE

You're not upset with me?

BEN

No. Of course not. It's fine.

ANNE

I'm going to make myself a drink. You want anything?

BEN

No. Thanks.

(Anne crosses to the bar. Ben sits quietly.)

ANNE

Since Alan is such a wanker to me all the time, I think I'll help myself to the good stuff.

BEN

Go for it.

(Anne starts to make a drink. There's a knock at the door. David enters.)

ANNE

Hi, David.

DAVID

Every day if possible.

ANNE

Clever. It's suddenly gotten chilly in here. I almost forgot how uncomfortable it is sharing space with you.

DAVID

How goes it, Ben?

(Ben does not respond. David turns to Anne and extends his hand.)

Your phone?

(Anne doesn't move.)

Come on. Give me your fucking phone.

PRONE by Craig Houk

ANNE

Give me your fucking phone... please.

DAVID

Seriously?

(Anne relents and hands David her cell phone. David takes the phone and dials. Anne returns to the bar.)

Hey, it's David... What do you mean, where the hell am I? Where the hell are you? I told you I'd meet you at your place... No... No... Look, just stay where you are. I'll come to you. You're where...? All right, look... Just have the driver bring you back here... Yeah, I'll wait here... I'll see you in a few.

(David ends the call and hands the phone back to Anne.)

Sounds like he had a rough night.

BEN

You two weren't out together?

DAVID

No. I flew in on a red eye this morning.

ANNE

How's the new place, David?

DAVID

Empty. All my fucking furniture is still in storage. Family owned business and the owner's goddamned mother had to have an aneurysm the same day they were scheduled to move my things into the penthouse.

ANNE

What an inconvenience for you.

PRONE by Craig Houk

DAVID

Anyway, she's dead now. Which has delayed things further. So, now I have to take care of getting my things out of storage myself.

ANNE

Well, you'll be happy to know that Alan has committed his entire day to assisting you with your little ordeal.

DAVID

I don't know what I'd do without him.

(David crosses into Alan's room and removes the vial of meth from the nightstand. He will do a bump or two during this scene. He returns to the Livingroom. To Ben.)

DAVID

So, Ben... Have you booked any work lately?

BEN

No.

ANNE

He has an audition next week.

BEN

It's nothing.

ANNE

Yes, it is something. For a feature film.

DAVID

Really? That's great. You know, you're very lucky to have Alan. He takes pretty good care of you. Safe and sound in your tiny

studio apartment. Where are you now? Still over in the West Village?

BEN

I am.

DAVID

That's right. Your little impenetrable bubble that will always be there as long as Alan's around. Most struggling actors don't have it so good.

ANNE

David, why don't you just wait for Alan on the street. What do you think? Hm?

DAVID

Actually, I could use a drink. Would you mind, Ben? Could you help me out with a drink?

BEN

Sure.

DAVID

A vodka Gibson, up, very dry.

BEN

Sure.

(Ben makes David a drink.)

Anne, do you want another?

ANNE

(She quickly finishes her drink.)

Yes.

DAVID

You know, I hope this film thing works out for you, Ben. Finally, an opportunity for you to contribute. I mean, otherwise, we all know you're at least good for a proper fuck, right?

ANNE

David...!

DAVID

...Or are you? When was the last time you and Alan had a good fuck?

ANNE

What the hell's the matter with you, David...?

DAVID

...This morning? Last week? A month ago? A year? Where was the last place you two really went at it? Huh? Here on the sofa...?

ANNE

...That's enough, David...!

BEN

...It's fine, Anne. Leave it alone...

DAVID

...The least you could do, Ben, is put out once in a while. You're so damned cute, there's no denying that. Fuckable, that's what you are. Hell, I'd even fuck you if you didn't belong to Alan.

BEN

I don't belong to anyone. And Alan manages just fine without me.

(Ben hands David his drink. A car horn sounds outside. Anne goes to the window.)

ANNE

There's a limo out front.

DAVID

(David does not take the drink.)

Look, Ben. Forget what I said, okay? I'm high. And just a little pissed off right now. I mean, it's not every day some old lady has an aneurysm and fucks up your whole week.

(David exits out the front door. Ben stands for a moment, a little distracted, still holding David's drink.)

BEN

Did you say you wanted another?

ANNE

(She takes the drink from Ben.)

This'll do just fine.

BEN

(Ben sits on the sofa.)

Anne...

ANNE

I'm here.

(She joins him on the sofa. A long moment.)

BEN

I'm ready.

ANNE

Really?

BEN

Yes.

ANNE

I need for you to be absolutely certain, Ben. Otherwise, this conversation ends right here and now. And we'll never speak of it again, do you understand?

BEN

I understand.

ANNE

So...?

BEN

So... I am definitely ready.

ANNE

All right... I'm going to ask you one more time and I want you to look directly into my eyes when you answer me. Are you sure this is what you want?

BEN

Yes. I'm sure.

ANNE

Okay... Well... first step. Money. Ten thousand dollars. Do you have it?

BEN

Alan gives me an allowance each month. I've been setting aside some of that for a while.

ANNE

Do you have all ten thousand?

BEN

I have just under eight.

ANNE

That's a start. And the rest?

BEN

Uh... well... Sarah and I are listed as beneficiaries on Alan's life insurance. The portion I get should more than cover the difference. Except I don't know the exact terms of the policy. I mean, it could be months before I see a check.

ANNE

What about his assets? Do you stand to inherit anything?

BEN

I don't know. I only know about the life insurance. I've never seen a will. I assume Sarah gets everything.

ANNE

Life insurance policies can be tricky, Ben. Any ambiguous detail could set off an investigation. And with Sarah involved... I don't know. You need to find out if Alan has a will. And if Sarah is the sole beneficiary, then... Well... maybe we should think about...

BEN

No! What's wrong with you?

ANNE

We need to see a will.

BEN

Alan told me this afternoon that money was tight.

ANNE

He told you that?

BEN

In so many words, yes.

(Anne laughs.)

Why is that funny to you?

ANNE

Alan has a lot of things to worry about, Ben, but believe me, money is not one of them.

BEN

What do you mean?

ANNE

You really don't know?

BEN

No.

ANNE

Alan's father left him a massive amount of cash when he died. Ben, the man owned apartment complexes and commercial property all over New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. He was essentially a slum lord. Alan was barely a teenager at the time, so his father's business partners bought him out, leaving Alan with a huge fortune. Everything he had went directly to Alan when he turned eighteen.

BEN

What about Sarah?

ANNE

He had no interest in Sarah.

BEN

How do you know all this, Anne?

ANNE

His death was all over the news, Ben. The trial, the verdict... Anyway and in the meantime, we'll have to work with what we have. Eight thousand should be more than enough to secure a hit. How soon can you get it to me?

BEN

I, uh... I can get it to you in the next day or two.

ANNE

Perfect.

(A moment. Anne drinks.)

BEN

What's going on between you and David?

ANNE

What're you talking about? Nothing's going on between me and David. He repulses me.

BEN

Really? That's the truth?

ANNE

The man nauseates me, Ben.

BEN

I've known you a long time, Anne...

ANNE

...I'm sorry, Ben, but the notion that David and I have had any kind of intimate relationship is ridiculous.

BEN

I said nothing about an intimate relationship.

ANNE

Why are you asking me this?

(Ben stares intently at Anne.)

Well, what difference would it make anyway?

(Ben does not relent.)

Okay fine! David and I had an affair... about fifteen years ago.

BEN

(Ben rises and moves away from Anne.)

I knew it. I knew it! Unbelievable.

ANNE

Look, Ben... It's long over. And that's why I don't talk about it.

BEN

Does Alan know?

ANNE

I don't know. It was a long time ago.

BEN

(Nearly beside himself, he tries to sort it out.)

Okay. Okay. Now explain to me the fuckery of this situation. Alan and David knew each other before I met Alan. And you and I have been friends longer than Alan and I have been together. So what are the odds that you, my closest friend, were, almost fifteen years ago, fucking a man that I now loathe who also happens to be my partner's best friend?

ANNE

Ben, there's no need to get upset.

BEN

Upset!? Upset doesn't even begin to describe how I'm feeling right now!

ANNE

I need you to relax.

BEN

What a fantastic idea, Anne. Relax. Sure. No problem. Maybe a little fucking yoga will clear my mind right now. A little downward fucking dog. Perfect position for a man who's just been dry fucked up the ass by his best friend.

ANNE

David and I met under extreme circumstances...

BEN

...Anne, you were married fifteen years ago.

ANNE

I was.

BEN

And apparently having an affair as well.

ANNE

That's right. Now I need for you to listen to me.

BEN

Anne...

ANNE

...Are you listening!? Now, not a word until I'm through talking, all right?

BEN

Fine.

ANNE

Yes, I was married fifteen years ago. What you don't know is that I was also widowed fifteen years ago...

BEN

...Divorced. You were divorced. You told me you left your husband...

ANNE

...I thought we had an agreement here. I talk. You listen. Tom... my husband... died...

BEN

...Anne...

ANNE

... Died unexpectedly one night. I was on a buying trip in Europe. One additional trip not originally on my schedule for the year. My only regret was the expense. I came back with a second line of women's fashions for the spring that we did not need. I was up to my tits in cotton twills. I nearly lost my job...

BEN

...Anne, I've seen Tom. I've talked to him.

ANNE

That's impossible, Ben. He's dead.

BEN

You pointed him out to me one night at dinner several years back. He was sitting alone about five tables over. I remember distinctly.

(A moment.)

ANNE

Ben, I casually selected a man and told you he was my ex-husband.

BEN

You casually selected a man?

ANNE

I never meant to tell you that I was married in the first place. It slipped out. And then I panicked. I thought if I told you I was divorced, you'd be less curious about the details than if I told you my husband had died.

BEN

Why would you then point out a complete stranger to me at dinner and tell me he was your ex-husband?

ANNE

I was drunk. And feeling a little ballsy. And anyway, the real Tom was unattractive and insipid. The guy at the other table was handsome and... Well, he looked interesting.

BEN

There's something seriously wrong with you.

ANNE

Ben, listen to me... Tom died - ok? - during a break-in at our home. Someone tried to burgle the place. Tom intervened... and he was shot. Like I said, though, I was away in Europe. There was nothing I could do. And absolutely no way I could've been involved.

(A Moment.)

BEN

You failed to mention to me that you had firsthand experience when you initially recommended that I have Alan... exterminated.

ANNE

You rejected the suggestion immediately, Ben. So, I didn't feel compelled to share the particulars with you. But... Well, now that we've gotten this far... There's one more thing you should know. I hired David to do it.

BEN

Oh, my God. Oh, my God. I can't hear anymore.

ANNE

Ben...

BEN

...Am I the only sane person left?

ANNE

If you are, it speaks volumes about everyone else's mental health.

BEN

Get out.

ANNE

I'm not going anywhere. Listen, Ben... Everything I've just told you, you cannot repeat to anyone. Everything we've discussed stays between you and me. I asked you if you were sure. You looked me in the eye, Ben. You gave me your word.

BEN

I said I was ready. I never gave you my word. And you've done nothing but lie to me since the day we met. So, guess what, Anne. This little agreement of yours...? It's now null and void.

ANNE

Ben, I have always been and will always be there for you.

BEN

Fuck you. You lied to me.

ANNE

It's all out in the open now. No more lies. We can't just ignore what's happened here.

BEN

I'm not sure I can trust you, Anne. I'm not sure I can even see you again.

ANNE

We move forward as discussed, Ben.

BEN

No. We don't. I mean, do you honestly believe that David would actually agree to... This is too fucking crazy. I never imagined, for a minute, for as much as I hate that man, I never expected that David could... And certainly not his best friend. He would never hurt Alan.

ANNE

Of course David would never hurt Alan. But he would hire someone else to do it.

(A moment.)

BEN

Anne, this is over. All of it. So... Please go.

ANNE

You can't back out now, Ben.

BEN

Are you threatening me?

ANNE

I'm the least of your worries.

(Beat.)

BEN

What do you have to gain from any of this, Anne? I have been trapped in this relationship for five years. Too broke to leave, too scared to walk away. And once in a great while, I take a long look into Alan's eyes and I almost believe that I'm in love with him. And then I remember how frightened and alone I feel. And now I discover that you, my closest friend, who I've never questioned once in all the years I've known you... Well, imagine my comfort level at this point. Who's to stop me from walking away from all of this? What could you possibly do to me that I haven't already done to myself?

(Beat.)

ANNE

I'll have you killed.

BEN

You'd be saving me the trouble.

(Ben and Anne stare intently at one another. Anne finally relents and then exits out the front door. Ben stands alone for a moment. The door to Sarah's bedroom opens. Sarah crosses into the living room.)

SARAH

Ben...

BEN

Sarah. I, uh...

SARAH

I heard everything.

BEN

I don't know what to say.

SARAH

You don't have to say anything. Sounds like you need two thousand dollars. I think I have at least that much cash wrapped in tin foil in the freezer. Alan thinks it's frozen ground beef. He should eat more.

(Lights to black.)

END OF ACT

ACT 2

SCENE 1

(April 14th. 7:09 PM. A rooftop garden. Alan stands in the moonlight. Ed stands nearby.)

ALAN

This wasn't a good idea.

(A moment.)

ED

You want me to leave?

ALAN

No. No. That's not what I meant.

ED

Are you sure? Because it sounded like that's what you meant.

ALAN

No. I don't want you to go.

ED

Okay.

(Another moment.)

Come here.

ALAN

What?

ED

Come here.

(He signals Alan closer.)

I would like it very much if you would stand a little closer to me.

(Alan hesitates.)

Come on. I won't touch you. I promise. Not unless you want me to.

ALAN

I don't see the...

ED

...Come on. Don't think about it.

ALAN

Okay.

(Alan moves closer to Ed.)

ED

Look at me.

(Alan does. They stand facing one another for a moment.)

Do you feel that?

ALAN

Yes.

ED

And does it feel good?

ALAN

It does.

(Ed moves in tighter. Alan steps back, nearly losing his footing at the roof's edge. Ed grabs a hold of Alan's arm to steady him.)

ED

Oh, shit. I'm sorry. Are you all right?

ALAN

(Flummoxed.)

Yeah. I, uh... I'm fine... Fuck. No. No, I'm not fine. I just nearly fell eight stories to my death.

ED

I came on too strong...

ALAN

No. No, it's not your fault.

(Alan moves away from the roof's edge.)

I just... I just need a little space here.

(Alan takes a deep breath.)

ED

Of course.

(A beat.)

ALAN

What are you looking for?

ED

What do you mean?

ALAN

What do you want from me? You've been... persistent.

ED

Yeah... Well look... I fucked up the other day. I shouldn't have called. I just wanted to explain myself. And I wanted to do it in person.

ALAN

(Still trying to catch his breath.)

Listen, do you want a drink? I need a drink.

ED

No. Thanks.

ALAN

You sure? It's no trouble.

ED

I'm in recovery.

ALAN

Really?

ED

Eighteen years.

ALAN

Well, I guess I can wait.

ED

You don't have to.

ALAN

I think if you can commit to eighteen years, I can commit to thirty minutes.

ED

Right. I almost forgot. I have thirty minutes.

(He checks his watch.)

Look, if you want a drink, I'm around it all the time. It's not a problem.

ALAN

So am I. And it is a problem.

(A moment.)

ED

It's cool tonight.

ALAN

Are you cold?

ED

No.

ALAN

Are you sure? I could get you a sweater or a jacket...

ED

No. No, I'm fine. I like the cool weather. Keeps me in check. In control. Heat just confuses things. I tend to misbehave when I'm hot. Sweat pouring down my forehead, streaming into my eyes, the salt and the dirt stinging. Puts me in a mood.

ALAN

The heat just makes me horny.

(A beat.)

ED

It was hot that night. At the club. I couldn't shake it.

ALAN

It was packed, I remember that.

ED

I should've gone home. But then I saw you... up on the mezzanine, leaning over the railing.

ALAN

Surveying my kingdom no doubt.

ED

You were wearing a nicely fitted pair of black leather pants, a tight dark blue button down and a pair of sexy calf-high army boots. And at one point you bent forward - pointing to something or someone on the dance floor - and your shirt came up a little. Just a hint of skin. Your friend asked me if I wanted to meet you.

ALAN

David.

ED

Yeah. So, he introduced us. You didn't say much. You just hung there, sort of teetering back and forth, with this adorable smile on your face. And then suddenly you leaned into me. You buried your face into my chest and then put both your hands firmly on my ass.

ALAN

I did not.

ED

You did. You fuckin' did, man.

(Ed laughs.)

ALAN

I'm sorry.

ED

No. No. I'm not complaining. I'm just telling you what happened.

ALAN

Oh, Christ. I must've been in a K hole. I, uh... I rarely do K, but my regular guy wasn't there that night. I managed to buy a

vial off some kid I'd never seen before... So, what else did I do to totally humiliate myself?

ED

Well... Then you took one hand off my ass and put it on my dick...

ALAN

...Sounds about right...

ED

...And then you kissed me...

ALAN

Tongue of course.

ED

Of course.

ALAN

And then?

ED

That was it. You backed away, turned around and then sort of melted into the crowd.

ALAN

Look... Ed... I don't remember any of that. I was fucked up. I'm sorry.

ED

It's fine. I didn't come here for an apology.

ALAN

I guess the thing that doesn't make sense to me, though, is... I mean, how did you get my number? David's my closest friend. I know he didn't give it to you.

ED

He didn't. You did.

ALAN

No. No. As twisted as I was and as hot as you are, there's no way I'd give you my number.

ED

I'm telling you, you did. I was waiting in line at the coat check - more than ready to get the fuck out of there - when you showed up out of nowhere... you asked me for my number and then you texted me yours.

ALAN

Come on.

ED

It's true.

ALAN

Okay, look... I get that you didn't come here for an apology. But I am sorry. I had no idea how out of it I was. I mean, I managed to get home at some point that night, I know that. And then, somehow, I was able to get into the shower to clear my head a bit. And then my sister kept yammering on about guns and food and... her vagina. Don't ask. And then I went out again. Over to Park Slope.

ED

Don't you hate that?

ALAN

Anonymous cock sucking?

ED

No.

PRONE by Craig Houk

(He laughs.)

No. I mean, when a man gives you his number, how long are you supposed to wait until you give him a call? A month says you finally saw his text, but you can't remember what he looks like. Two weeks says the last guy you called didn't work out. One week says you didn't get laid that weekend. Three days says you're interested but cautious. And one day says you're desperate. So, I guess I was desperate. I couldn't wait to see you again.

ALAN

I'm involved with someone.

ED

I know. Are you in love with him?

ALAN

I love him.

ED

What's his name?

ALAN

Ben.

ED

Cute. I like it. Names with one syllable. Very appealing. I bet he's cute. He'd have to be, wouldn't he?

(Beat.)

You been together a while?

ALAN

Five years.

ED

You live together?

ALAN

No.

ED

No home to wreck. Bodes well for me.

(Beat.)

ALAN

Is this really what you want? Am I really what you want?

ED

I think I've been pretty clear about what I want. What do you want?

ALAN

I don't have much say in what I want anymore.

ED

I'm still here. I haven't left. What next?

ALAN

You should kiss me, especially considering I don't remember the first one.

ED

With a kiss come expectations.

ALAN

No. No expectations.

ED

Although a seemingly innocuous gesture, a kiss is key in determining the direction of a relationship.

ALAN

How so?

(Ed kisses Alan.)

ALAN

I'd like to test your theory again.

(They kiss again.)

ALAN

I see what you mean.

ED

(Ed is out of breath, a little changed somehow.)

Fuck. What am I doing? This is crazy.

ALAN

What?

ED

This. You and me. Me coming here. All of it.

ALAN

Well, there are consequences to getting involved with me.

ED

What do you mean?

ALAN

My life is complicated.

ED

Everyone's life is complicated. So... simplify. Get rid of the baggage.

ALAN

That baggage is my sister and my... Ben. It's a part of me. Whether I want to carry it or not.

(A moment.)

ED

It's beautiful up here. A small garden paradise in the middle of Brooklyn Heights. It's incredible.

ALAN

Ben is actually responsible for all of this. These plants and flowers. That tree.

ED

It's amazing. He's very talented.

ALAN

In some ways.

(Beat.)

Anyway, it's my design.

ED

What do you mean?

ALAN

I told Ben what I wanted. Every flower and its location. Every plant and its position. Every stone, every shrub. I don't have the skills, so I asked him to do it. I wanted to recreate something beautiful from my childhood.

ED

And what's that?

(A beat.)

ALAN

My mother raised two children. Three if you count my father. And my father got what he wanted when he wanted it. With no regard for my mother. She did everything for that man. She did

everything for me and my sister. But she never got anything in return. When my father finally decided that there was nothing more my mother could give him... when he decided that he was bored with their marriage, he started to beat her. I'll never forget the first time he did it. It wasn't severe, but you could tell by the look on his face, by the pleasure it brought him, that it'd get worse as time went on. And it did. But something remarkable happened on the day it all started. My mother went out, bought a flower and planted it in the back yard. And each time my father beat her, she'd go out and buy another flower or a plant or a bulb of some sort. Something different each time. Morning Glory, Angel's Trumpet, Hemlock, Oleander... And as the years passed, our back yard transformed into the most beautiful garden you'd ever see. And at the far edge of it, my mother planted a tree. I watched it grow. It watched me grow. And one day it blossomed with these beautiful white flowers. And when those fell to the ground...

ED

...Apples.

ALAN

Can you believe I had no idea, until then, where apples came from?

ED

How is that beautiful, Alan?

ALAN

Sometimes, my father would come home late at night... Drunk and smelling like some hooker he'd just fucked. And he'd go out into the backyard, drop his pants to his ankles, and piss all over anything within reach. Then he'd stumble out to that tree, pull an apple from it and bring it into the house. He'd take my

mother by her neck and force her to the kitchen floor on all fours. And then he'd shove the apple into her mouth and then he'd...

(He can't say it.)

I thought she might choke to death on her own spit. I hoped she would.

ED

Jesus, Alan.

ALAN

Oh, it didn't stop there. Then he'd take the apple from her mouth, turn her over and shove it between her legs. Her screams penetrated the walls. She begged him to take it out. And when he finally did, he polished it with his shirt tail and then he ate it. And after he finished the apple, he demanded that my mother clean his ejaculate off the floor while he took a nap on the couch.

ED

I don't know what to say...

ALAN

Bear with me. Because this is where it becomes beautiful. One night, in preparation for my father's drunken homecoming, my mother placed an apple on the kitchen table. She pulled it from the tree herself. I was terrified this might really piss him off. But it didn't. He was more aroused than ever. And so the ritual began. It was more ferocious than ever, but my mother didn't waver. Even with that apple wedged firmly in her teeth, it almost looked as if she had a smile on her face. She almost seemed pleased. And for a brief moment, I was furious with her, thinking she might actually be enjoying this. And then I

thought... Maybe... Maybe she'd finally lost it. Maybe she found a safe haven somewhere deep in the recesses of her mind where she was finally able to close herself off to her nightmare... And then my father pulled the apple from her mouth. And shoved it between her legs. Then he took it out and he ate it. After that, he laid down for a nap. About an hour later, as my mother fixed dinner, my father, still passed out on the couch, began to convulse. A few minutes later, his bowels let loose... And then he died.

ED

I don't understand.

ALAN

My mother took a sewing needle and stabbed a small hole in the fruit. And then she soaked it in strychnine. I think the idea that she might die as well put that smile on her face. Asshole never tasted the bitterness. Greedy shit just ate the whole thing. She tolerated a lot from that man. And she'd had enough.

(A moment.)

ED

Alan, I, uh... That's fucked up.

ALAN

I know.

ED

I've seen some fucked up shit in my lifetime - I've participated in some pretty fucked up shit - But that... That was a tough thing for me to hear.

ALAN

It was a tough thing to watch. I'm sorry.

ED

You know, you should really stop apologizing. There's too much of that going on. People apologizing for things they can't control. It's a waste of time.

ALAN

Why are you here, Ed? And before you say anything else... That whole story about you and me at the club... That was pure fucking bullshit.

ED

Alan...

ALAN

David sent you here. Didn't he?

ED

He did.

ALAN

Why?

ED

He asked me to take you out.

ALAN

Take me out? In what way?

ED

In whatever way appropriate.

ALAN

And if I refuse?

ED

I think I can handle you.

ALAN

Wow. That's amazing. A fucking hitman. And you're my type, no question. Are you even gay?

ED

I am actually.

ALAN

A homosexual hitman. That's... well that just made my day.

(Lights to black. End of Scene.)

SCENE 2

(April 25th. 8:23 AM. A rooftop garden. Sarah sits alone and sings.)

SARAH

I can see

You're slipping away from me

And you're so afraid

That I'll plead with you to stay

But I'm gonna be strong

I'll let you go your way

Love is gone

There's no sense in holding on

And your pity now

Would be more than I could bare

So I'm gonna be strong

I'll pretend I don't care

(Ben enters.)

BEN

Sarah.

SARAH

Hey, handsome.

BEN

Hi, sweetheart. Were you just singing?

SARAH

No. I don't think so. Except there's this song that I can't get out of my head. Maybe it finally slipped out through my lips without me knowing.

BEN

Maybe it did. So, listen. I have great news. I got the part.

SARAH

You got the part?

BEN

The film. Well, they offered the role to someone else, but he turned it down.

SARAH

That is great news.

BEN

Second choice. Sometimes in life, you just have to settle I guess.

SARAH

I'd be euphoric if I was second choice. I always got picked last for kick ball.

(Beat.)

So, how's that ground beef working out for you?

PRONE by Craig Houk

BEN

I've been meaning to talk to you about that. I tucked it back in the freezer. I think you should hang onto it. Maybe one day you'll need it to make yourself a big, fat, juicy hamburger. You deserve it.

SARAH

What about Anne?

BEN

I haven't decided yet. She can be relentless. I should talk to Alan. I should let him know.

SARAH

Ben?

BEN

Yeah.

SARAH

Do I look normal?

BEN

What do you mean?

SARAH

I mean, if you didn't know anything about me and you saw me on the street, would you think I was normal?

BEN

I guess so. Except I'm not an expert on what's normal.

SARAH

True. Okay, well, how about if we never met before and we just happened to be standing next to one another in the checkout line at, let's say, Wiley's discount store. And the stupid man ahead

of us had to write a check, but he didn't have any identification on him. And while we waited for a manager to show up, we both noticed that we were buying the same exact picture frame. And we concurrently decided that that was enough of a coincidence to demonstrate sufficient cause for us to speak to one another. Would you think I was normal?

BEN

I don't think what you just said is normal.

SARAH

You're right.

BEN

You're unique. You're incredibly interesting. And you have a big heart. So sometimes you and I think about killing people. Is that normal? I'm not sure there's a person out there who hasn't wondered what their lives would be like if someone close to them was gone. Either someone they cherished immensely or someone they hated with every fiber of their being. People obsess about death daily, in one way or another. So, in that sense, I think you're perfectly normal. I think we're both perfectly normal.

SARAH

Do you obsess about death?

BEN

Of course I do.

(A beat.)

My mother passed away when I was twelve years old. I had no idea there was anything wrong until my father ushered the three of us into the car one morning to drive her to the hospital. She was running a high fever at that point and had been feeling tired for weeks. You'd think my father was driving us to Lake Wissota

State Park for a camping trip the way he and my mother were carrying on in the front seat. Making jokes, teasing one another, singing songs. I was convinced that everything would be okay. When we got there, a nurse took my mother down this long hallway, through a set of doors, and into a room where she disappeared for what seemed like an eternity. My father took me out for an ice cream and a movie while they ran tests. But by that time, the cancer had spread throughout most of her body. My mother wasn't keen on suffering. So, after a brief and courteous review with the doctor of all the medications and therapies available, she and my father respectfully declined treatment. It would only prolong the inevitable. And then my parents politely thanked what appeared to be the entire hospital staff and off we went home. Laughing and singing the entire way.

(A beat.)

My mother died on a Saturday. Two days after, my father dropped me off at school on his way to work. My teacher, Mrs. Halverson, asked me why I was in class that day. I told her my mother's funeral wasn't until Thursday and apologized to her for having to miss a half day so that I could attend. She urged me to go home immediately, but I refused. It just wasn't an option. My father never grieved, so I would never grieve. My mother was gone and we would simply move on without her. It was as if, without any thought or effort, my father and I had both expanded to fill the empty space that my mother left behind.

(A moment.)

SARAH

I'm sad most of the time. If it weren't for those pills I take, I think I'd be sad all of the time.

BEN

Mostly, I sit home alone at night thinking hard on my twisted life. Wondering how I ended up here. Sometimes, I think if I just give in, I could find a way to be happy with Alan. I'm not comfortable saying this, but maybe David is right. I do have a good life. Alan has given me a pretty good life. I just wish there weren't so many strings attached to it.

SARAH

Marionettes are funny.

(Lights to black. End of Scene.)

SCENE 3

(May 20th. 12:29 AM. A rooftop garden. Alan stands alone staring out at the city. He removes a vial of meth from his pocket and does a bump. Ben enters.)

BEN

Alan...

ALAN

What are you doing?

BEN

I can't sleep.

ALAN

Go back to bed. I'll check on you later.

(Ben starts off.)

Wait. Did Sarah do what I asked her to do?

BEN

She took a Klonopin and went to her room.

ALAN

Good.

BEN

She washed it down with a double whiskey.

ALAN

Wow. I'm impressed.

BEN

Today was my last day at the office.

ALAN

I know.

BEN

Filming starts next week. Did you look over my contract?

ALAN

I did. It's okay to sign. You should know, though, you may walk away from this with nothing to show for it.

BEN

I'll have a film. That's something, isn't it?

ALAN

Yeah. I guess so.

BEN

I worry, Alan. I worry that you think I'll be a failure for the rest of my life. I worry that I'll never have anything to offer this relationship. Mostly, though, I just worry.

ALAN

Ben, you need to understand that there's a fine line between giving up and giving in. And when you give up, you might as well die. But when you give in, you can still hang onto your pride. And giving in doesn't mean you have to sacrifice everything you believe in. If you play the game right, you'll get whatever you want.

BEN

It's like your entire life is in print somewhere, Alan. And you bought the book, read it through, and decided that's the way it'll have to be.

(A moment.)

I called the Hartford Correctional Center today.

ALAN

What?

BEN

It took some work, but I managed to convince them to let me speak with her.

ALAN

Why would you do that, Ben?

BEN

Because I knew you wouldn't.

ALAN

That was my decision to make.

BEN

Well, it's done.

ALAN

Fuck, Ben. She must've been confused.

BEN

A little at first.

ALAN

I wanted to call her...

BEN

...It's all right. I didn't mind. We didn't have much time to talk, but we got along fine.

ALAN

I miss her.

BEN

It's been a long time. She misses you, too. She misses Sarah.

ALAN

Almost twenty years. How did she sound?

BEN

She sounded tired, but, I don't know, peaceful I guess. When I told her you wanted to see her, she cried. I didn't know what to say, so I just let her cry.

ALAN

She stopped crying the day my father died. So she's probably due.

BEN

She called you her sunflower. She said, no matter what, you were the one who'd rise above it all.

ALAN

You tell her about us?

BEN

I wasn't sure what to say. And not because I was afraid to tell her. But because I don't know what I am to you exactly.

(A beat.)

She'll go in front of a review board this fall. She could be released as early as next summer.

ALAN

Jesus, she's 68 years old. Where the hell is she supposed to go?

BEN

What do you mean where's she supposed to go? She'll come here.

ALAN

No.

BEN

Alan, you'd be able to see her more often and I could visit her regularly to make sure she's comfortable and safe. And having her here would be good for Sarah. I'm sure your mother would much prefer living here to living alone in some halfway house or a shelter.

ALAN

There's no room for her here.

BEN

Ok, well, I was thinking... Maybe your mother and Sarah could move in together...

ALAN

...Have you lost your mind? I can't afford rent on two apartments and the mortgage on this place...

BEN

...And I could move in with you.

ALAN

No. I don't know. I'm not sure it's a good idea, you and me living together. And I'm not entirely convinced my mother would want to be here.

BEN

Of course she would. She'd be closer to you and Sarah. And besides, if she was here, she'd have other things to focus on. New things. Twenty years, Alan. Too much time has passed.

(A moment.)

ALAN

I never stopped it. I just sat there in the doorway of my room, watching... helpless. Too petrified to say anything, too weak to stop him. And I didn't protect my sister either. I could hear Sarah in her room. She would pull the sheets and blankets from her bed, wrap herself in them and then squeeze herself into the toy-box in her closet. And she'd sing. To try and block out my mother's screams I guess. But instead of leaving her there, safe in her cocoon, I pulled her out of that box and dragged her into the hallway. And do you know why?

BEN

No.

ALAN

Because I was furious at her for leaving me out there alone. I refused to be the only witness to my mother's undoing. And even though I knew there was nothing I could do to stop my father, I was convinced that Sarah and I owed it to her to be there and to watch it unfold each and every time. I thought maybe she would be in less pain if her children were there to share it with her. I thought maybe she'd hate us less if we watched from the

shadows in the hall instead of hiding away in boxes in our rooms.

(Beat.)

I'm done evolving, Ben. I'm as good as I'm going to get. And I need space to myself where I don't have to answer to anyone.

(Beat.)

Go back to bed.

BEN

I can't sleep.

ALAN

Go.

BEN

Maybe I should take something too.

ALAN

Just close your eyes and try to relax. I need you to stay focused.

BEN

I'm scared.

ALAN

I'll be close by.

BEN

Alan...

ALAN

Ben... Tonight is just a rehearsal. You understand?

BEN

Yeah.

ALAN

That's all it is. When the show finally opens, though, believe me, you're gonna knock 'em dead.

(Ben exits the rooftop. Alan does another bump. A moment. Ed enters.)

ALAN

It's good to see you.

ED

Likewise. You packed?

ALAN

I am. Looking forward to it.

ED

Ben looks terrified.

ALAN

He is.

ED

I'm not sure this is gonna work, Alan. Ben has to trust me. We're taking a huge risk here.

ALAN

He just needs to come to terms with it. He'll come through.

ED

I don't have to spend the night, you know. I just need an hour or so with Ben and Sarah. I'll show them exactly what to do. We'll go over it a few times until they're comfortable, and then I'll head home. I'll pick you up in the morning.

ALAN

So, what's the plan? When do we leave?

ED

There's no rush. I rented a one bedroom on Ocean Beach for the week. We'll get there when we get there.

(A beat.)

The weather's supposed to be nice, but you can never be sure. It's like the island has its own climate, you know?

(A beat.)

You're in love with him.

ALAN

I love him.

ED

I'm okay with it. You know that, don't you?

ALAN

I don't want Ben to leave. But I know that if he did leave, he'd be better off without me. So, I'm afraid that if I tell him how I really feel, he'll stay for sure. And for what? Even if he knew how much I actually loved him, it doesn't mean that I'd be willing to change who I am for him. I'd still need... I'd still want... other things.

ED

Tell him the truth. Tell him that you're in love with him. Or if you can't tell him the truth, then lie to him and tell him it's over. Either way, give him the chance to make his own decision about where he needs to be. How can you not see that he's a fucking mess?

ALAN

He came to me that way. I'm not responsible for that.

ED

You're responsible for not being straight with him.

ALAN

I don't know how to be straight.

ED

Funny guy. Handsome guy. Well, I can certainly understand the attraction.

ALAN

Really? I thought maybe you were smarter than that.

ED

I know what I'm getting myself in to.

ALAN

You do, huh? Well, just try and get out of it, smart guy.

(They kiss.)

(Lights to black. End of Scene.)

SCENE 4

(June 6th. 12:43 AM. A rooftop garden. Ben stands alone for a moment. He holds a drink in his hand. Anne enters.)

ANNE

There you are. I've been trying to reach you for days now. Why are you not returning my calls?

BEN

What're you doing here?

ANNE

I came to check on you. I've been worried sick.

PRONE by Craig Houk

BEN

How'd you get in?

ANNE

Sarah. I feel terrible. I think I woke her.

BEN

All she does is sleep anyway. She'll go right back to bed.

ANNE

And you? How are you sleeping?

BEN

Not good.

ANNE

I'm sorry to hear that.

(Anne goes through her purse.)

Well, look, I just happen to have something here that'll help you out.

(Anne pulls a prescription bottle from her purse and offers it to Ben.)

BEN

No. Thanks. I'm already on two kinds of medication. Sarah and I are competing for 'most heavily sedated'. She's winning, if anyone's keeping tabs.

ANNE

It's all in the dosage, sweetheart.

(Anne opens the bottle, dumps a few pills into her hand and offers them to Ben.)

Come on. Take it.

(Ben reluctantly takes the pills from her but does not ingest them. He moves away from her, looking at the pills in his hand. He takes a drink.)

ANNE

Any word on Alan?

BEN

(He moves away from her.)

Now is not the time, Anne.

ANNE

I'm sorry. I just feel helpless. You've been avoiding me. And that makes things awkward for me because all I want to do is be there for you.

BEN

Well, I'm beside myself that I haven't been available to satisfy your need to nurture. Which is ironic considering you don't actually give a shit about anyone but yourself?

ANNE

Ben, I...

BEN

And when did you ever give a shit about what happens with Alan?

ANNE

I understand that you're upset with me, but...

BEN

Do you really want to know what upsets me? I'm upset that the blinds in my windows don't hang straight. I'm upset that, no matter how careful I am, I always spill the coffee grounds on the countertop when I try to spoon them into the filter. I'm

upset that I still have to drag myself to my therapist once a week, even though I always feel better afterwards. I'm upset that I'm good at a lot of things, but great at nothing. But mostly I'm upset that I'll never be enough... not for anyone or anything. Everything upsets me, Anne. So don't flatter yourself.

ANNE

I'm sorry, Ben. I fucked up.

BEN

When are you going to figure it out, Anne? It's not about you. It's never been about you.

(A moment.)

They're flying Alan's body in tomorrow afternoon.

(Sometime during the previous, Ben has dropped the pills in to his drink.)

ANNE

Do you need me to take you to the airport?

BEN

No. I've hired a service to collect him and bring him to a crematorium.

ANNE

You're having him cremated?

BEN

It's what he wanted.

(He laughs.)

ANNE

You okay?

BEN

I know I shouldn't be laughing, but I can't help but think how ridiculous all of this is. So many times over the course of my relationship with Alan, I've fantasized about his death. And twice now, you and I have actually talked about having him killed. And what happens? The asshole runs off to Fire Island with another man and dies while cruising in the Meat Rack. Knifed to death by a stranger.

ANNE

Do the police have any leads?

BEN

No. No knife. No witnesses. Which makes no sense to me at all, considering the number of men who go in and out of that area at night. All of them either too drunk to see past the cock they were sucking or too twisted to know what the fuck was real or not real. Or too damned mortified to admit they were there. Too scared to report what they saw. I don't know.

ANNE

Something'll turn up. I'm sure of it.

BEN

I'm not holding my breath.

(Beat.)

I'm going to bed, Anne. You can let yourself out.

ANNE

It's a beautiful night. And a beautiful view. I promise I won't stay long. Get some rest. And call me tomorrow if you need anything. Goodnight, Ben.

(Ben exits. Anne stands alone for a moment. She removes her cell phone from

her purse and dials. After a few rings, she hangs up. She then takes Ben's drink, which he's left behind, and begins to drink it. Moments later, David enters.)

DAVID

What are you doing up so late, little girl?

ANNE

Oh God, no. I am not in the mood for games, David.

(David moves towards Anne. She retreats slightly but then suddenly grabs David by his shirt, pulls him towards her and kisses him hard. They embrace and kiss for a few moments. Anne then pushes David off.)

ANNE

All right. That's enough.

DAVID

Come on. Ben just went in. Sarah's in bed. No one else has access to this roof but you and me.

(David tries to kiss Anne again, but she pushes him away.)

DAVID

Don't push me like that again, do you understand? What's the matter with you?

ANNE

What's the matter with me? What's the matter with you? Have you forgotten why we're here? I don't think a quick fuck is appropriate.

DAVID

You need to relax. You're always so fucking uptight. It's a wonder Tom didn't divorce you when he had the chance. Sometimes, I think killing him spared him a lot of misery.

ANNE

You're a pig. It hasn't been difficult hiding our relationship from everyone considering that, most of the time, you nauseate me.

DAVID

And yet you keep coming back for more.

ANNE

What are we waiting for? I want this to be over with.

DAVID

It would've been over by now if that fucking prick did what I asked him to do sooner.

ANNE

Ed likes to take his time. He's thorough. And he's the best man we have. You're just too bloody impatient.

DAVID

If we delayed things further, Alan might've caught on.

ANNE

What difference does it make now? He's dead and out of the way. Ed came through as anticipated and without complications. Now it's your turn. So, try not to fuck it up. The only thing left standing between us and Alan's money is Ben.

DAVID

And Sarah.

ANNE

What do you mean? Why Sarah?

DAVID

Alan left everything to Ben with one provision. That Ben move in with and continue to take care of Sarah after his death.

ANNE

But with Ben out of the way, everything goes to you.

DAVID

That's right. Everything. All of Alan's possessions. Including Sarah. And I'll be goddamned if I'm taking care of that wing nut for the rest of her life.

ANNE

David, I don't know if that's a good idea. Alan, Ben and Sarah dead. And you stand to inherit everything.

DAVID

It's pretty straightforward, actually. Sarah's already a loose cannon. The only consistent person she's had in her life is her brother. And he's been taken away from her. She's desperate, alone and scared. So, tonight - the night before Alan's body is supposed to arrive - she freaks out. She loses it, goes to Alan's room, finds the gun he keeps hidden in the closet and turns it on herself. But before she can pull the trigger, Ben, who's been staying with her to keep her company, pleads with Sarah to put the gun down. She refuses. Desperate to get the gun away from her, Ben reaches for it, they struggle a bit and then the gun goes off. And... with Ben out of the way, Sarah finishes what she started.

PRONE by Craig Houk

ANNE

I'm not convinced.

DAVID

There's no way anyone'll be able to trace this back to me.

ANNE

And what about me? What if something goes wrong? Who covers for me?

DAVID

I've always taken care of you, haven't I? If there was ever anything you needed, I've always provided for you. I mean, I may not be the most conventional lover, but I've never let you down.

ANNE

David, I...

(David grabs Anne by both arms.)

DAVID

When you chose to be with me, you chose to live life the way I tell you to live it. You know, I take a lot of bullshit from you, but you will not question me on this, do you understand?

ANNE

David, you're hurting me.

DAVID

(He releases her.)

I'm heading down. It'll take less than five minutes. Keep your eye on the street. If you see anyone come in to this building, you call me on my cell. Is that clear?

ANNE

Yes.

(David kisses Anne and starts off.)

Do you have the key?

(David produces the key, shows it to Anne and then exits. Anne moves to the roof's edge and begins her look out. She finishes the drink. After a moment, Alan appears.)

ALAN

Anne...

ANNE

Jesus Christ! Alan!

(She is startled and nearly loses her footing at the roof's edge.)

ALAN

Careful.

ANNE

Alan, I thought you were...

ALAN

Thought I was what?

ANNE

(Agitated.)

Ben told me you were...

ALAN

What are you doing here?

ANNE

I, uh... I was on my way downtown, so I, uh... I stopped by to check in on Ben. I wanted to make sure he was all right. I

hadn't heard from him in several days, so I, uh... I don't understand what's happening here.

(She's nearly in tears.)

ALAN

How'd you get in?

ANNE

Sarah. Ben and I were just... He was exhausted, so he went to bed. And I was just leaving.

(Anne is frozen.)

ALAN

What are you waiting for?

ANNE

I need to call a cab.

(She doesn't move.)

ALAN

Go ahead then. Make the call.

(Anne cautiously takes her cell phone out and dials. After a few rings, she hangs up.)

ALAN

No luck?

ANNE

The line was busy. I'll call again when I get down to the street.

ALAN

Do you think I'm an idiot?

ANNE

PRONE by Craig Houk

That's a loaded question.

(There is a gunshot. Anne screams.)

ANNE

What's happening?

ALAN

What's happening? Well, it seems perhaps that David went down to my apartment, attempted to get in with his key, but discovered that the lock had been changed. Not a problem for David, though. Because as you and I both know very well, he's extremely skilled at picking locks. Asleep inside, Ben awoke to hear a stranger entering the apartment. Concerned for Sarah's safety, Ben took the loaded gun, which was conveniently placed in the top drawer of the night stand by his lover, yours truly, and moved into the next room to confront the intruder. Surprised and infuriated that things weren't going according to plan, David lunged at Ben, but fell short as the bullet entered his cranium.

(Beat.)

Or something like that.

(A moment.)

ANNE

Alan, I swear to you... if you let me walk out of here right now, you will never see me again. And I won't say a word. Not to anyone.

ALAN

I'm not entirely convinced I can trust you, Anne. I mean, what with you plotting my death and all.

ANNE

What happens to me?

ALAN

What happens to Anne? That's all it's ever about with you, isn't it? Well, eventually, you'll have to explain to the police why you phoned David just moments before he was shot.

(Ed appears unseen by Anne. He carries a wrench in his hand.)

ALAN

But first, you'll need to explain why you were found unconscious in my apartment.

ANNE

What do you mean? What're you talking a...?

(Ed strikes Anne over the head with the wrench. She falls to the ground.)

ED

That went smoothly.

ALAN

Mostly. Are Ben and Sarah okay?

ED

They're fine.

ALAN

Ben's never handled a gun before.

ED

I explained everything to him. How to hold it. How to aim it. How to keep it steady when he fired it. He did fine.

ALAN

We don't have a lot of time. We need to get Anne into the apartment before the police arrive. And I need to get Sarah's finger prints on that wrench.

(Alan and Ed begin to pull Anne off the ground. Sarah enters.)

ALAN

Christ, Sarah, what the hell are you doing up here? I told you to wait in the apartment.

(Sarah doesn't respond.)

Jesus. Never mind. Listen, I need you to take that wrench and go back downstairs. We'll be right behind you.

(Ed hands the wrench to Sarah, but she allows it to fall through her fingers to the ground.)

ALAN

Sarah, what're you doing? Pick it up and go back downstairs.

(Sarah doesn't move.)

Now!

(Sirens can be heard in the distance.)

What the fuck is the matter with you?

(Alan moves towards Sarah and retrieves the wrench from the ground. As he rises to meet Sarah, she aims a gun in his face.)

ALAN

Sarah? Where's Ben?

(He drops the wrench and backs off a little. Ed moves towards Sarah, but she

turns the gun in his direction. Alan puts an arm up to stop Ed.)

Don't even think about touching her.

ED

Are you fucking kidding me?

(Sarah moves the gun back and forth between the two of them.)

ALAN

Sarah... Sweetheart. Why are you doing this?

SARAH

Why should Ben have all the fun? I want to kill someone too.

ALAN

Come on Sarah. You don't really want to kill anyone.

SARAH

You can bet your ass I do. I've dreamt about doing this.

ALAN

Okay... Okay, fine, Sarah. Let's say you actually want to kill someone. But not me. Right? I'm your brother. And, I think I'd be a little remiss if I didn't ask you to not kill my friend here.

ED

I appreciate your consideration.

ALAN

So, why don't we talk about killing someone else, okay? Maybe... Maybe you could start with Anne, here. What about that, huh? She's a pretty easy target. Look, we could prop her up against

the wall over there and you could fire a couple of shots into her chest. You know, to get it out of your system.

(A beat.)

SARAH

Okay.

ED

Oh, come on! Are you serious?

ALAN

And do you remember, Sarah? Do you remember? Ed here is an expert with guns. He can show you how to do it properly. But listen, sweetheart, we don't have a lot of time. So, we need to do this quickly. Because the police are close by.

SARAH

I understand.

(Alan grabs Anne and begins to drag her to the ledge.)

ALAN

So, Ed... If you wouldn't mind. Maybe you could get behind Sarah there and help her steady the gun.

ED

I could do that. Although, she's doing a pretty good job already.

ALAN

Ed, please.

ED

All right.

(Alan continues to drag Anne. Ed moves towards Sarah. Ben enters in a frenzy.

BEN

Sarah, no!

(As Sarah turns, the gun goes off. Ed falls to the ground. Alan drops Anne and races towards Sarah. The gun goes off again. Alan falls to the ground. Ed and Alan are dead. Sirens can be heard below as cruiser lights flash over the roof top. Sarah stands silently. Ben pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and approaches Sarah.)

Give me the gun, Sarah.

(Sarah holds out the gun but does not take her eyes off Alan. Ben carefully takes the gun into the handkerchief.)

SARAH

It all happened too fast. Way too fast. I want a do over.

BEN:

It's over, Sarah.

SARAH

They're gonna to take me away from you, aren't they?

BEN

Probably.

SARAH

I'll fly away. I've done it so many times before in my dreams.

BEN

You're a bird best caged, Sarah.

SARAH

Why?

BEN

Because you're beautiful. Inside and out. Everyone needs to see that. And how can everyone see that if you fly away?

SARAH

Maybe they'll put me with my mother.

BEN

I hope not. She's dead.

SARAH

She is?

BEN

She's been dead for a long time, Sarah.

SARAH

How?

BEN

She passed away in her sleep. Alone in her cell.

SARAH

But how did she die?

BEN

She just stopped breathing.

(There are noises in the apartment below. Police breaking in, shouting, etc. Sarah presses her ear to the rooftop door.)

SARAH

I hear them.

(Ben places the gun on the ground near Alan's body. He crosses to Anne who still lies unconscious. He covers his hand with the handkerchief and checks for a pulse. She's alive.)

BEN

Shit. You are one tenacious bitch.

SARAH

They're coming. They're gonna find me.

BEN

(Sarah stands leaning against the door. Ben surveys the scene. Satisfied that everything is in order, he speaks, maybe to Sarah maybe out. Maybe both.)

There's a man who I see every day on the Q Train as I go back and forth to and from work. He's always there. Without fail. What are the chances do you think? That in a city of 8.3 million people, I would wind up sitting across from the same guy every single day. No matter what train I get on and no matter what seat I sit in, there he is. In his left hand, a cup of coffee that he never drinks but just continually blows on to cool it off and, in his lap, a copy of the New York Daily News. And he just sits there, his eyes blinking like hazard lights on a car, scanning every page and every word of that ridiculous publication. And as he reads the paper, he maneuvers his coffee out of harm's way while he quickly turns the pages with his right hand. And he turns those pages so abruptly that it makes

the most aggravating sound I've ever heard. Like a flock of pigeons taking off. And no matter how often he turns those pages, I'm always startled. I can never get used to it.

(Beat.)

I imagine killing that man. I imagine shredding that newspaper and shoving the pieces down his throat. And, as he suffocates, I imagine pouring the hot coffee into his crotch. I imagine him trying to scream with the bits of paper jammed in his throat as the hot liquid burns away at his balls.

(Beat.)

Some people believe that when life is done with you, that's when you die. I believe, when you're done with life, that's when you live longest.

(The roof door handle turns rapidly. After a few tries, there is a loud and persistent knocking at the door.)

SGT BIANCHI

Open the door! This is Sergeant Bianchi with the NYPD!

(Ben turns and crosses to Alan.)

I know you're all out there! And if you don't open this door right now, we're gonna break it down! Do you understand?

(Ben kneels next to Alan's body and, as if he is preparing for an audition or a scene, begins to sob.)

I can hear you, so I know you can hear me! Now listen up! This is your last chance!

(A moment.)

All right, boys! We're going through! Stand clear of the door!

(Sarah does not move. After a moment, there is a series of three loud strikes against the door. Lights to black.)

END OF PLAY